

The Modernized Open Ruy Lopez

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Milos Pavlovic

Thinkers Publishing 2021



Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
☉	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
△	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

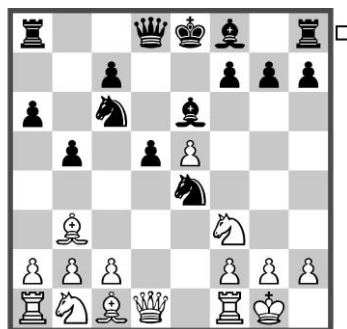
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Preface

The positions arising from the Open Spanish contain ideas so different from the usual Ruy Lopez that I sometimes wonder whether it should really be considered part of it at all. It is an open game with unbalanced structures and sharp play but compared to the Sicilian, for instance, for which the previous description would also apply, there is an important difference; there is a certain degree of stability and solidity in the Open Spanish which distinguishes it from the sharper realms of the Sicilian and puts this line in its own unique category of opening ideas.

The popularity of this line increased significantly after the famous 1978 Karpov-Korchnoi match where Korchnoi played it and demonstrated many interesting ideas. Still, the line never became fully mainstream until quite recently when I noticed an increased level of attention towards it. It is a practical line as it comes at a very early stage of the opening; White can't avoid it once they have committed to the Ruy Lopez. That is quite a large advantage of the Open Variation compared to others. For example in the the Marshall Attack, another response to the Spanish about which I have previously written a book, White has numerous ways to avoid the line entirely and so there is a whole other branch of Anti-Marshall theory which Black must study too. Here this is not the case. While writing this book I also noticed that many lines are simply underrated from Black's perspective for no clear reason. Black remains very solid and retains the possibility for counterchances. I am of the opinion that this line simply awaits more analysis and attention and will inevitably become more theoretically relevant in the future, perhaps after the catalyst of an elite player taking it up seriously, similar to Korchnoi in the past.



Position after: 8... ♗e6

We can consider this as the starting position of the line. As we can see, Black is

much more actively placed compared to other lines in the Ruy Lopez. The entire strategy here is about the pawn structure - Black would like to clear the way to play ...c7-c5, while White hopes to really push forward with their f-pawn. Both sides are fundamentally trying to do the same thing - create a strong central pawn structure. White will try to apply pressure on the d5-pawn from an early stage and can use the d4-square for a knight to create additional pressure.

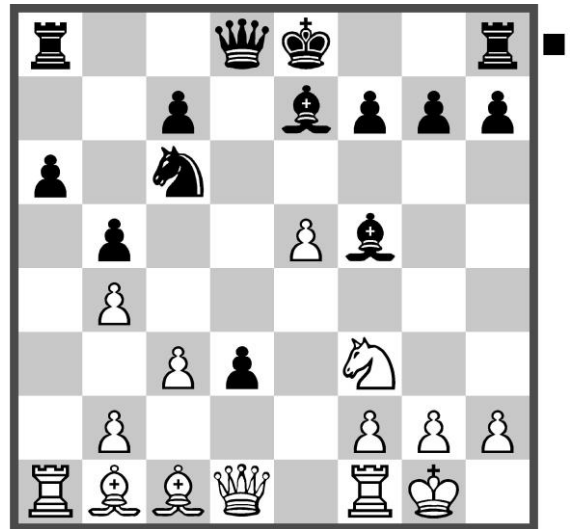
On the other hand Black will utilize the active knight on e4 and can go for ...c5 and ...f6 or ...f5 pawn breaks for additional play in the center, sometimes using f-file. We are fortunate to have this interesting and under-analyzed opening at our disposal, just waiting to be reinvestigated!

Milos Pavlovic
Belgrade 2021
























9.c3 ♖e7 10.♘bd2 ♘c5 with 15.b4




- 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6
4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5
7.♙b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♙e6 9.c3 ♙e7
10.♘bd2 ♘c5 11.♙c2 d4
12.♘b3 d3 13.♙b1 ♘xb3
14.axb3 ♙f5 15.b4



Chapter Guide

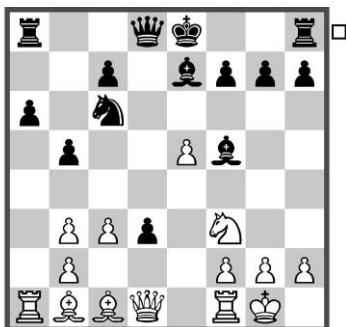
Chapter 5 – 9.c3 e7 10. bd2 c5 with 15.b4

1.e4 e5 2. f3 c6 3. b5 a6 4. a4 f6 5.0-0 xe4 6.d4 b5 7. b3 d5 8.dxe5
e6 9.c3 e7 10. bd2 c5 11. c2 d4 12. b3 d3 13. b1 xb3 14.axb3
f5 15.b4 0-0 16. e1 d7 17.h3 fd8 18.g4 g6 19. a2

a) 16.  f4 alternative	3
b) 19...  c8	8
c) 19...  h8	11

a) 16. ♖f4 alternative

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♖a4
 ♗f6 5. 0-0 ♗xe4 6. d4 b5 7. ♖b3 d5
 8. dxe5 ♖e6 9. c3 ♖e7 10. ♗bd2 ♗c5
 11. ♖c2 d4 12. ♗b3 d3 13. ♖b1 ♗xb3
 14. axb3 ♖f5



Position after: 14... ♖f5

The starting position of this line. White has many ideas, so I will try to analyze each of them in detail.

Basically White wants to attack the d3-pawn, and at the same time create pressure in the center. The way to achieve this is by playing b3-b4 which opens the diagonal for the bishop to go to a2 with good scope.

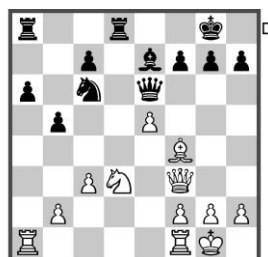
15. b4

15. ♖f4 I should include this and explain that the direct attempt to win the pawn doesn't work very well. 15... 0-0



Position after: 15... 0-0

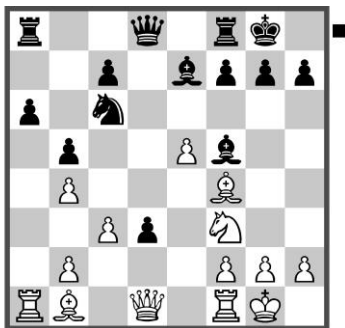
16. ♗e1 This is an attempt win the d3-pawn directly, but as we will see, it is not especially promising. [16. h3 ♖d7 17. b4 transposes.] 16... ♖d5! 17. ♖xd3 ♖xd3 18. ♖xd3 ♖xb3 19. ♖f3 ♖e6 20. ♗d3 ♖fd8



Position after: 20... ♖fd8

Black's pieces are more harmonious and we can consider doubling rooks on the d-file or offering an exchange of queens with ...Qd5. 0-1 (43) Sengupta, D (2567) – Wei, Y (2706) Tsaghkadzor 2015.

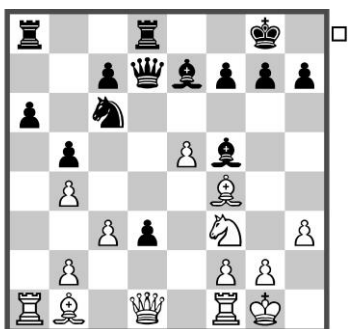
15... 0-0 16. ♖f4



Position after: 16. ♖f4

The idea behind this move is to develop the other pieces first before relocating the bishop from b1. Now the rook coming to e3 to round up the d3-pawn is a serious option. Furthermore, ideas of playing Bg3 followed by a potential h2-h4 advance should also be kept in mind.

16... ♕d7 17. h3 ♖fd8



Position after: 17... ♖fd8

18. g4

This aggressive kingside expansion could be delayed by playing a central waiting move instead: 18. ♖e1 a5 19. bxa5 [19. g4 ♖g6 transposes to the

note 19...a5 in the main variation.] 19... ♖xa5 20. ♖xa5 ♘xa5



Position after: 20... ♘xa5

Now we have a bunch of ideas here:

A) 21. e6

A1) 21... ♖xe6 22. ♘d4! [22. ♘e5 ♕d5 23. ♖xd3 ♖xd3 24. ♖xd3 b4 allowed Black to equalize. ½-½ (36) Mammadzada, G (2426) – Muzychuk, M (2521) Ankara 2018.] 22... c5 23. ♖xd3 g6 24. ♘xe6 ♖xd3 25. ♖xd3 ♖xd3 26. ♘c7 ♖d7 27. ♘xb5 g5 28. ♖c1

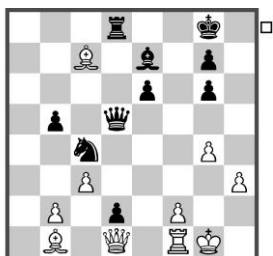


Position after: 28. ♖c1

White is a pawn up and pressing quite firmly in this endgame.

A2) 21... fxe6! Best. Now play follows a rather forcing line. 22. g4

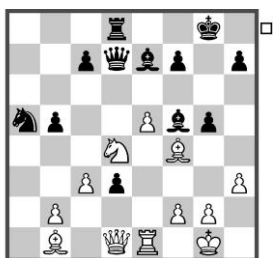
♙g6 23. ♜e5 ♚d5 24. ♜xg6 hxg6
25. ♙xc7 d2 26. ♜f1 ♜c4



Position after: 26... ♜c4

27. ♙xd8 ♜xb2 28. ♚c2 ♙xd8 29.
♚xb2 d1=♚ 30. ♜xd1 ♚xd1+ 31.
♚g2 ♚d5+ with a likely draw by
repetition.

B) 21. ♜d4 g5!? An unusual reaction
but it has been played a few times al-
ready! [A more logical looking ap-
proach is 21... c5 22. e6 fxe6 23.
♜xf5 exf5 24. ♚xd3 ♚xd3 25. ♙xd3
♜xd3 26. ♜xe7 ♜c4 27. ♜b7 alt-
hough White keeps a tiny bit of pres-
sure in this endgame.]

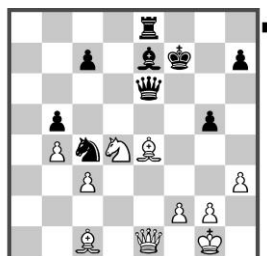


Position after: 21... g5!?

B1) 22. ♙g3 ♜c4 23. b4 c5 24.
bxc5 ♙xc5 25. ♚h5 ♙e7 Black can
be relatively satisfied with this cha-

otic position. Pushing the pawn to
d2 will provide strong counterplay.

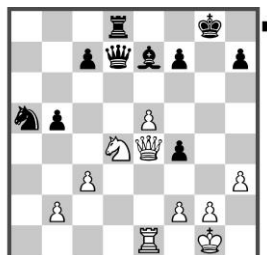
B2) 22. b4 ♜c4 23. ♙c1 d2 24.
♙xf5 dxe1=♚+ 25. ♚xe1 ♚d5 26.
e6 ♚e5 27. exf7+ ♚xf7 28. ♙e4
♜e8 29. ♜f3 ♚e6 30. ♜d4 ♚e5
31. ♜f3 ♚e6 32. ♜d4



Position after: 32. ♜d4

With a draw by repetition. ½-½
Svidler, P (2745) – Mamedyarov, S
(2743) Reykjavik 2015.

B3) 22. ♙xd3!? ♙xd3 23. ♚xd3
gxf4 24. ♚e4

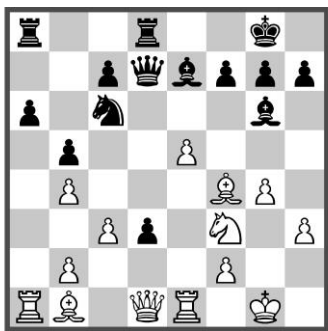


Position after: 24. ♚e4

24... ♙c5! [24... ♜e8 25. ♚xf4
♙f8 26. ♜e3 ♙g7? 27. ♜g3 ♜e6
28. ♚g4 White is winning. 1-0 (37)
Svidler, P (2723) – Yilmaz, M (2630)

chess24.com 2020.] 25. ♔xf4 [25. ♘f5 ♘c6 26. ♔xf4 ♔e6 Black is fine.] 25... ♙xd4 26. ♔g5+ ♚h8 27. ♔f6+ ♚g8 28. ♔g5+ leads to a draw.

18... ♙g6 19. ♖e1



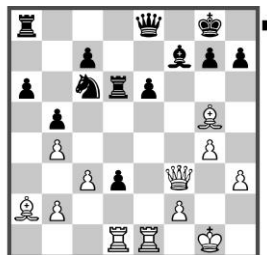
Position after: 19. ♖e1

A slightly different move order, Black has various options now and has to be careful to choose wisely.

19... ♚h8!?

A) 19... ♔c8 20. e6!? [20. ♙a2 a5 21. e6 f6 22. bxa5 ♘xa5 23. b4 ♘c4 24. ♙xc4 bxc4 Black's strong pawns give him a good game. 1-0 (41) Harikrishna, P (2755) – Ding, L (2778) Danzhou 2016.] 20... fxe6 [After 20... f6 21. ♖e3 White is better.] 21. ♙a2 ♙f7 22. ♘g5 ♙xg5 23. ♙xg5 ♖d6 24. ♔f3 ♔e8 25. ♖ad1

(see analysis diagram next column)



Position after: 25. ♖ad1

White has some initiative.

B) 19... a5 20. bxa5 ♖xa5 [20... ♘xa5 21. e6! fxe6 22. ♘e5 ♔d5 23. ♘xg6 hxg6 24. ♙xc7 White is clearly better. 1-0 (57) Clarke, B (2445) – Mason, D (2070) South Normanton 2019.] 21. ♙a2!?



Position after: 21. ♙a2!?

A subtle finesse. Now that it is the rook on a5 instead of the knight, there is no longer a possible blockade on the c4-square. Instead Black must hope that simply keeping some pressure on our bishop is enough.

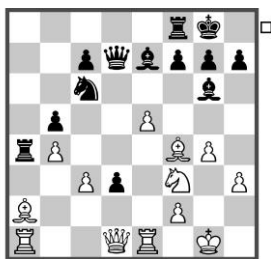
B1) 21... ♖da8 22. e6 ♔d8 23. exf7+ ♚h8 24. ♘g5



Position after: 24. ♗g5

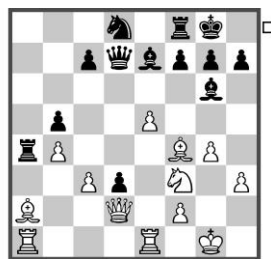
24... ♖f8 [24... ♖xa2 25. ♖xa2 ♖xa2 26. ♖f3 White has the initiative.] 25. ♖f3 ♖xg5 26. ♖xg5 Again it seems like White has the better chances.

B2) 21... ♖f8 22. b4 [22. e6 ♖d8 23. exf7+ ♖xf7 24. ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 Black seems to be doing fine.] 22... ♖a4



Position after: 22... ♖a4

23. ♖d2 [23. e6 ♖d8 24. exf7+ ♖h8 25. ♖d2 h6 26. ♖e6 ♖xa1 27. ♖xa1 ♖xf7 28. ♖xf7 ♖xf7 29. ♖e3 ♖d5 Black can create counterplay.] 23... ♗d8! An important move as otherwise e6 is always a threat. If Black can blockade the e6-square it will be a big relief.



Position after: 23... ♗d8!

24. ♖g5 [24. e6 ♗xe6 25. ♗e5 ♖d8 doesn't give White anything.] 24... c5 25. ♖xe7 ♖xe7 26. bxc5 ♖xc5 27. ♗h4 ♗e6 Black is fine. ½-½ (43) Caruana, F (2805) – Giri, A (2773) Stavanger 2015.

Back to 19... ♖h8.



Position after: 19... ♖h8!?

20. ♖e3

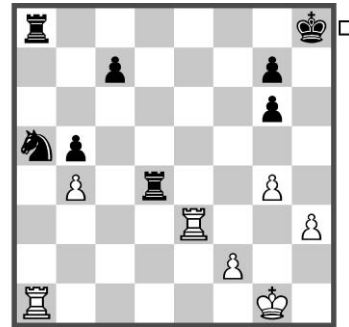
20. ♖a2 ♖f8 transposes to subchapter C.

20... a5 21. bxa5 ♗xa5 22. e6 ♖d5 23. exf7 ♖c5 24. ♗d4 ♖xf7 25. ♖f3

♙xd4 26. cxd4 ♖f8 27. b4 ♚xf4 28.
 ♚xf4 ♖xf4 29. ♙xd3 ♖xd4 30. ♙xg6
 hxg6=

(see diagram on the right)

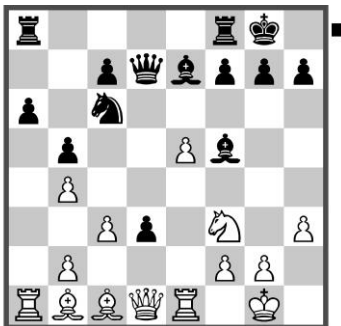
After White recaptures the piece we will reach an equal rook endgame which should end in a draw.



Position after: 30... hxg6

b) 19... ♚c8

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4
 ♘f6 5. 0-0 ♘xe4 6. d4 b5 7. ♙b3 d5
 8. dxe5 ♙e6 9. c3 ♙e7 10. ♘bd2 ♘c5
 11. ♙c2 d4 12. ♘b3 d3 13. ♙b1 ♘xb3
 14. axb3 ♙f5 15. b4 0-0 16. ♖e1 ♚d7
 17. h3



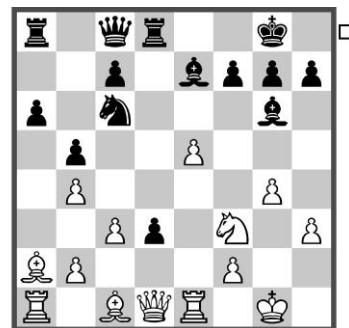
Position after: 17. h3

The main advantage of expanding on the kingside with g4 is that after the bishop retreats to g6 then White gains lots of various e6-pawn sacrifice possibilities.

17... ♖fd8 18. g4 ♙g6 19. ♙a2

We now see the realization of White's desired setup. On the other hand, our d3-pawn is an asset which makes the entire line very interesting and double-edged.

19... ♚c8



Position after: 19... ♚c8

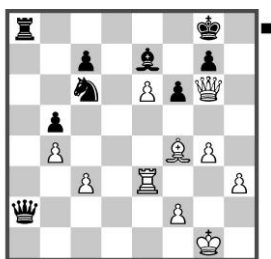
This is an important prophylactic retreat. Black intends to meet e6 with

...f6. Meanwhile Black can gain activity of their own with the typical ...a5 break, while having a rook on d8 also supports ...d2 ideas.

20. ♖g5

The main move to consider, but not the only one.

20. e6 is interesting as well. f6 21. ♘h4 a5 22. bxa5 ♖xa5 23. b4 ♖a6 24. ♕f4 ♗a8 25. ♗d2 ♗a7 26. ♖e3 ♖a8 27. ♘xg6 hxg6 28. ♗xd3 ♖xa2 29. ♖xa2 ♗xa2 30. ♗xg6



Position after: 30. ♗xg6

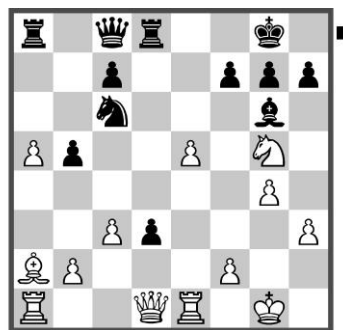
White has some compensation for the piece but it's not really enough. 0-1 (98) Shirov, A (2689) – Mamedyarov, S (2743) Reykjavik 2015.

20... a5 21. bxa5

21. ♖xe7 ♘xe7 22. bxa5 c5 Black is better because of ...c4 coming next.

21... ♖xg5 22. ♘xg6

(see diagram next column)



Position after: 22. ♘xg6

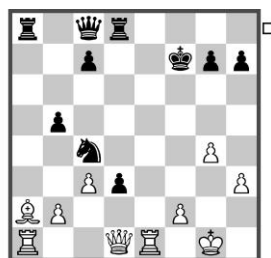
22... ♘xa5!

A crucial move for Black, after which we are entering rather sharp positions where we will see that the d3-pawn is paramount in creating counterplay.

The alternative is not good enough: 22... d2 23. ♖e2 ♖xa5 24. b4± 1-0 (46) Ponomarev, R (2667) – Meskovs, N (2568) Skopje 2019.

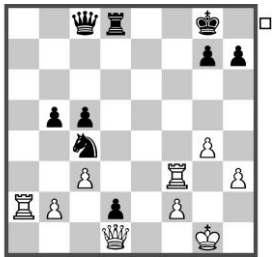
23. ♖xf7+

Not the only option to consider. We must also check the main alternative: 23. e6 ♘c4! 24. exf7+ ♖xf7 25. ♘xf7 ♗xf7 reaching another crossroad.



Position after: 25... ♗xf7

26. ♖e4 [26. ♕f3+ ♔g8 27. ♜ed1 ♔h8 28. ♜xd3 ♜f8 White finally managed to round up our d3-pawn but Black has good play overall. 29. ♕e4 ♜e8 30. ♕g2 ♜a6 31. b3 ♘d6 32. f3 ♕a8 Black is doing fine. ½-½ (41) Lehnberger, K – Boehme, S corr. 2015.] 26... c5 Preventing the rook from coming to d4. 27. ♜e3 [27. ♜xc4!? bxc4 28. ♙xc4+ ♔e7 29. ♕e1+ ♔f8 30. ♜xa8 ♕xa8 31. ♕e6 ♕f3! Black is in time to defend everything and the d3-pawn is still alive.] 27... ♜xa2! 28. ♜f3+ ♔g8 29. ♜xa2 d2

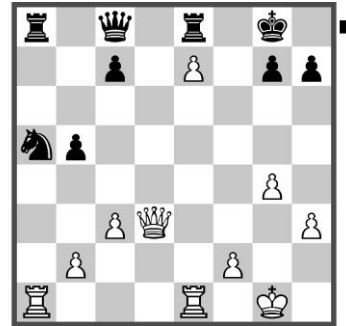


Position after: 29... d2

This is a typical idea. Now the d2-pawn is our primary asset. 30. b3 ♕e6 31.

♜a1 ♘a5 Black has enough play to compensate for the exchange sacrifice.

23... ♙xf7 24. ♘xf7 ♔xf7 25. e6+ ♔g8 26. e7 ♜e8 27. ♕xd3



Position after: 27. ♕xd3

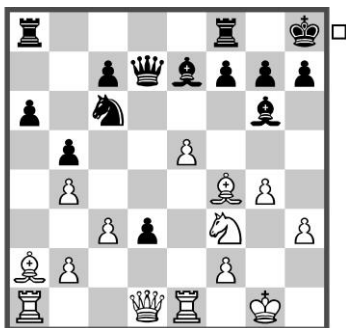
White has sacrificed a piece in order to create a dangerous pawn on e7.

27... ♘b7 28. ♜xa8 ♕xa8 29. ♕xb5 ♘d6

White has sufficient compensation but not more than that. ½-½ (38) Robson, N – Hartl, H corr. 2010.

c) 19... ♔h8

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♖b5 a6 4. ♙a4
 ♘f6 5. 0-0 ♘xe4 6. d4 b5 7. ♙b3 d5
 8. dxe5 ♙e6 9. c3 ♙e7 10. ♘bd2 ♘c5
 11. ♙c2 d4 12. ♘b3 d3 13. ♙b1 ♘xb3
 14. axb3 ♙f5 15. b4 0-0 16. ♖e1 ♚d7
 17. h3 ♖fd8 18. g4 ♙g6 19. ♙a2 ♔h8
 20. ♙f4 ♖f8



Position after: 20... ♖f8

Now that the d3-pawn is in no immediate danger, Black can afford the time to anticipate the threat of e6 and prophylactically prepare for counterplay on the f-file.

It is important to be careful before executing the main idea, the ...a5 break.

21. e6

A) 21. ♚d2 a5 22. e6 fxe6 23. ♙xe6 ♚d8 transposes to the main line.

B) 21. ♙g3!? a5 [21... f5 22. exf6 ♙xf6 23. ♙e6 ♚d8 24. ♖e3 a5 25. h4↑ White has an initiative. 1-0 (35) Saric, I

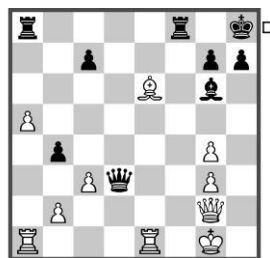
(2660) – Al Sayed, M (2524) Biel 2016.]
 22. e6 fxe6 23. ♙xe6 ♚d8



Position after: 23... ♚d8

B1) 24. bxa5 ♖xa5 25. ♖xa5 ♘xa5
 26. ♘e5 ♙g5 with balanced play.

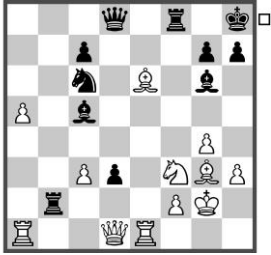
B2) 24. h4 d2 25. ♚xd2 [25. ♖e3
 axb4 26. ♖xa8 ♚xa8 27. ♙d5 ♖d8
 28. ♚xd2 ♚c8 with approximately
 equal chances for both sides.] 25...
 ♖xf3 26. ♚d5 ♖f8 27. ♚xc6 ♙xh4
 28. bxa5 ♙xg3 29. fxg3 ♚d3 30.
 ♚g2 b4



Position after: 30... b4

In theory the passed a-pawn is an asset for White, but I think the position is simplified enough that the evaluation is equal.

B3) 24. ♖e3 ♜b8!? This seems like an unusual reaction, but we will see it has a very good point. 25. bxa5 ♙c5 26. ♖e1 b4 27. ♚g2 bxc3 28. bxc3 ♜b2⇝



Position after: 28... ♜b2⇝

With combined pressure along the b, d, and f-files. Black has good counterplay.

21... fxe6 22. ♙xe6 ♚d8



Position after: 22... ♚d8

We have arrived at one of the main positions in this line. White has a few choices here, although some of them may be transpositional in nature.

23. ♙d2

23. ♙g3 ♙d6!? [23... a5!? can transpose to the sideline with 21. ♙g3.] 24. ♙h4 ♙e7 25. ♙xe7 ♞xe7



Position after: 25... ♞xe7

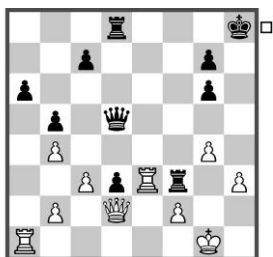
26. ♞e5 [26. ♖e3 ♞d5 27. ♙xd5 ♜xd5 28. ♞e5 d2 29. ♞xg6+ hxg6 30. ♜e2 ♜ad8 31. ♖d1 ♜f6= ½-½ Millstone, D – Reinhart, K corr. 2014.] 26... ♙d6 27. ♙b3 ♞d5



Position after: 27... ♞d5

28. ♙xd5 [28. ♞xg6+ hxg6 29. ♜xd3 ♜xf2!→ and Black picks up the full point!] 28... ♜xd5 29. ♞xg6+ hxg6 30. ♖e3 ♜ad8 31. ♜d2 ♜f3

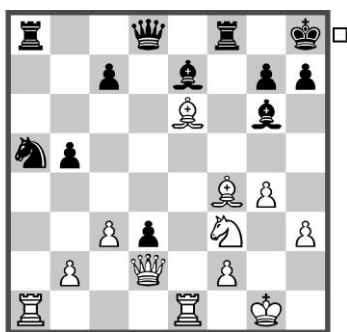
(see analysis diagram next page)



Position after: 31... ♖f3

The cramping effect of the d3-pawn means Black is more comfortable here. ½-½ (34) Jones, I – Norman, N corr. 2016.

23... a5 24. bxa5 ♘xa5



Position after: 24... ♘xa5

25. ♘e5

Centralizing a knight like this is usually a good idea. It is now White's best-placed piece.

25. ♘d4 c5! 26. ♘f5 [Accepting the offered pawn leads to unclear play: 26. ♘xb5 ♖a6 27. ♖c7 ♗a8∞] 26... ♖xf5 27. ♖xf5 c4 28. ♗e3 ♖d6∞ ½-½ (33) Anokhin, Y – Armani, G corr. 2016.

25... ♖h4!?

Eyeing up f2 and removing the bishop from any potential ♖xa5 and ♘c6 forking ideas.

26. ♖f5

Other moves aren't dangerous.

A) 26. ♘f3 ♖e7 offers a repetition.

B) 26. b3 c5! gives Black very satisfactory play.

26... ♖xf5 27. gxf5 ♖xf5 28. ♘xd3 ♘c4 29. ♖xa8 ♗xa8



Position after: 29... ♗xa8

30. ♗e2

30. ♗c2 h6 31. b3 ♘d6 32. ♘e5 ♗e8 leads to unclear play.

30... g6

Black's active pieces ensure full equality.