

CHESS DEVELOPMENTS

Semi-Slav 5 Bg5

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About the Author

Bryan Paulsen is a National Master in the US. He has 10 years of experience coaching scholastic players and adults alike. He's also worked as an openings analyst for several titled players.

Dedicated in loving memory to William James Kaucky (05/28/1972-10/02/2011)

This book is dedicated to the greatest man I will ever know, William James Kaucky (05/28/1972-10/02/2011), the man who became the father and family I never had growing up in our short time together. My memories with you will always be my most cherished, and words cannot express my gratitude for everything you did for me. None of this was possible without you.

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Introduction

1 d4

One of the two classical methods of taking control of the centre and preparing rapid development. Unlike its cousin, 1 e4, White stakes out queenside space and looks to accrue positional advantages in place of kingside attacks and open positions.

1...d5

Following the dictates of classical chess – to control the centre with pawns – the logic of White's first move also applies to Black's possible first moves. Black prevents White from establishing the central pawn pair on d4 and e4, and takes his share of the space.

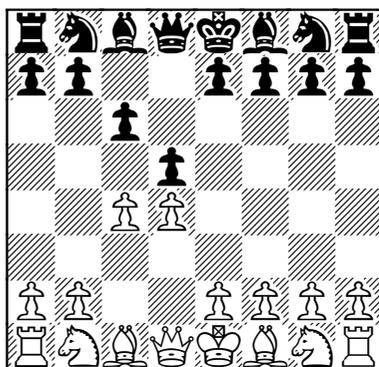
1...♘f6 is the most popular alternative, and can even reach the topic of this book after a bit of fencing 2 c4 e6 sees Black 'threaten' the Nimzo-Indian in response to 3 ♘c3, so White often plays 3 ♘f3 in order to reduce the effectiveness of ...♗b4+. Black can now switch track from the Indian Defences (3...♗b4+ is the Bogó-Indian Defence, and 3...b6 the Queen's Indian Defence) with 3...d5 when White often continues in classical vein with 4 ♘c3, after which

4...c6 brings about the Semi-Slav Defence, and 5 ♗g5 is what this book is all about.

2 c4

This move introduces the Queen's Gambit. White hopes that by distracting the d-pawn from the centre he will have a useful central majority, and after recovery of the pawn, the better position as a result.

2...c6



The 'short' advance of Black's c-pawn introduces the Slav Defence to the Queen's Gambit. He refuses to trap his light-squared bishop behind his pawns, such as with 2...e6, and preserves maximum flexibility. One prom-

prominent aspect of the c-pawn is that it can easily become a future defender of his b-pawn after ...dxc4, and then a further ...b5 to keep the extra pawn.

2...dxc4 3 e4 represents the whole idea behind White's gambit; the c-pawn will prove too hot to hold on to, and the central pair restrict Black's mobility. Of course this is a topical position in its own right, but some people prefer to deny White any fun.

2...e6 is typically thought of as being the Queen's Gambit Declined, although it is sometimes used as a way to reach the Semi-Slav. Black defends the pawn in a simple manner, and opens up the potential development of the bishop on f8, and quick kingside development. The downside is that the bishop on c8 is trapped behind pawns, although this isn't fatal by any means. However, White has some additional options in contrast to 2...c6. One example is 3 ♖c3 ♗f6 4 ♖g5 c6 5 e3 with a position from which the Semi-Slav cannot truly be reached due to the lack of a threat to White's c-pawn.

3 ♖c3

White continues to place pressure on Black's central strongpoint, and prepares a quick e4.

3 ♗f3 is another popular move order quite likely to transpose into the Semi-Slav Defence after 3...♗f6 as White often sees nothing better than 4 ♖c3. This is the move order I have chosen for the chapter introductions, because it is the most common one used

to reach the subject of this book. There are other independent, important paths, but they are outside the scope of this book.

3...♗f6

Much like White's previous had two purposes, so does Black's response: d5 receives further support, and e4 is further controlled.

3...e6 is typically thought of as the Noteboom Semi-Slav due to some independent possibilities, but White can also play 4 e4 which is the Marshall Gambit. This is more relevant to adherents of the Noteboom, but for those desiring the Semi-Slav it is an unnecessary allowance.

4 ♗f3

As White has no concrete threats as yet, he places his other knight on its most centrally active square. Now Black can use this opportunity to play as in the standard Slav Defence with 4...dxc4, or he can play 4...e6.

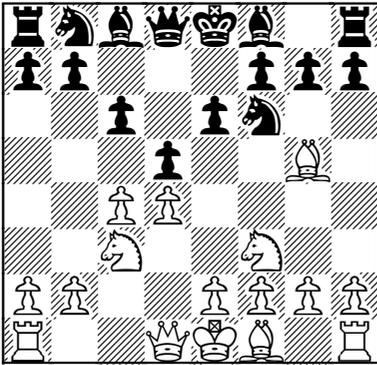
Instead, 4 cxd5 cxd5 brings about the Exchange Variation of the Slav Defence. Sadly, for Semi-Slav players, there is no perfect route to their beloved defence. White can always opt for something that takes the fun out of the game, but this is true of any opening.

4...e6

At long last the Semi-Slav Defence has appeared. At first sight the mixture of the moves ...c6 (typically played to develop the light-squared bishop outside of the pawn chain), and ...e6

(which usually relies on ...c5 in one move as a freeing break) leaves a strange impression, but there are other trumps in the position that benefit the move. Black has shored up his centre, and is now in a position to not just capture ...dxc4, but to make an earnest attempt to *hold* on to the gambit pawn with ...b5, while ...e6 has made any dynamic d4-d5 break much less effective. Now, at long last, White should set about a concrete decision. The 'safe' path is 5 e3, providing immediate protection to c4, but blocking in the bishop on c1. The classical, and optically most ambitious choice, however, is:

5 ♖g5



This brings us, at long last, to the subject of this book. White has developed his pieces to active squares as fast as he possibly can. Black, for his part, has what I regard to be four important options from this point.

a) He can play 5...♗e7, a quiet and

solid move with a reputation for being passive. I call this the 'Queen's Gambit Declined Hybrid' due to the inclusion of a move commonly associated with that opening, and it is covered in Games 1-5.

b) He can play 5...♘bd7, a move whose apparently quiet nature only masks the potential complications stemming from future rapid pressure on the a5-e1 diagonal. This is typically called the Cambridge Springs Defence, and is covered in Games 6-12.

c) He can play 5...dxc4, introducing very sharp play right from the outset should White take up the gauntlet. The famed Botvinnik Variation is covered in Games 13-27.

d) Finally, he can play 5...h6, the Moscow Variation, a move that gives White the option of the solid and positional 6 ♗xf6, covered in Games 28-39, or the razor-sharp Anti-Moscow Gambit beginning with 6 ♗h4, seen in Games 40-50.

Thank you too to all of the people that wished me good fortune in this endeavour. There have been more than I can possibly list here, and I hope this effort does not disappoint them. This has been a learning experience, and I hope I greatly improve in my future attempts at writing.

Bryan S. Williams Paulsen

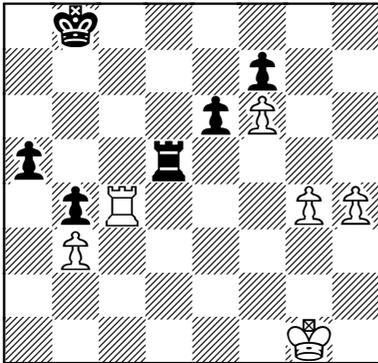
October 2013

ther 34...exd5 35 h5 ♖c1 36 ♗xd5 ♗f1+ 37 ♔g4 ♗xf6 does not look inspiring for the first player.

30 ♗e2 ♗c5 31 ♖xc5 ♗xc4 a5 33 g4

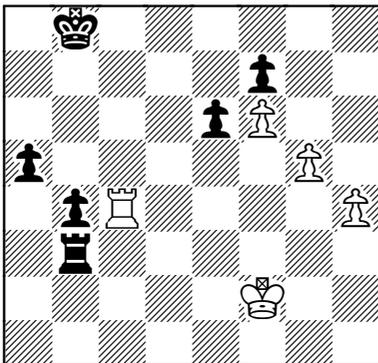
Giving White just this single tempo will prove to be Black's undoing.

33...♗xc4 34 ♖xc4 ♗d5 35 h4!



Suddenly the h-pawn is a headache, and Black's pawns strangely impotent.

35...♗d3 36 g5 ♖xb3 37 ♔f2



Keeping the rook out of g3, and paving the way for more advances.

37...♖b2+ 38 ♔e3 ♖b3+ 39 ♔d2 ♗g3 40

♗c5

Dual-purpose: Black's pawns cannot advance, and now g5 will be defended in the event of h4-h5.

40...♗g2+

40...♗h3 41 ♖b5+ ♔c7 42 ♗xa5 ♗xh4 43 ♗a7+ ♔d6 44 ♖xf7 is a trivial win.

41 ♔e3 ♗g3+ 42 ♔f2 ♗g4 43 h5 ♔b7 44 h6 1-0

When I first saw this game I found it bizarre Black could so quickly lose such a seemingly harmless endgame, but the wayward ...♗h5 made it all possible. This game probably only serves to demonstrate that Black must exercise caution, but he does have the much superior 29...♗d6, after which it is unclear how White can make headway.

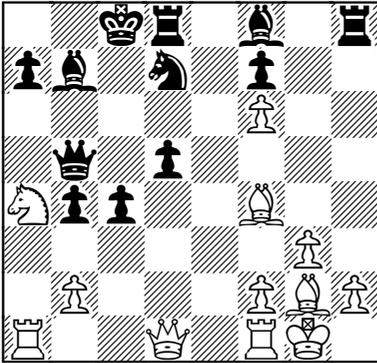
Summary:

Given the very forced nature of many of the continuations after 17...♗b8, it has begun to resemble something of a theoretical dead-end, one in which black players satisfied with a draw can seek safe shelter in correspondence, and play where his chances are not worse over the board. The ball is in White's court, and surprising resources will have to be found if there is to be any hope for an advantage.

Game 25
H.Nakamura-J.Smeets
Wijk aan Zee 2011

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖f3 ♗f6 4 ♔c3 e6 5

♙g5 dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♙h4 g5 9 ♘xg5 hxg5 10 ♙xg5 ♘bd7 11 g3 ♙b7 12 ♙g2 ♚b6 13 exf6 c5 14 d5 0-0-0 15 0-0 b4 16 ♘a4 ♚b5 17 a3 exd5 18 axb4 cxb4 19 ♙f4



A more ambiguous posting of the bishop than 19 ♙e3, but one with a good deal of sting.

19...♙h6

Eliminating the piece that cuts across Black's queenside is prudent. The reader should make note of the fact that Black is only playing ...♙h6 *after* the centre has been seen to.

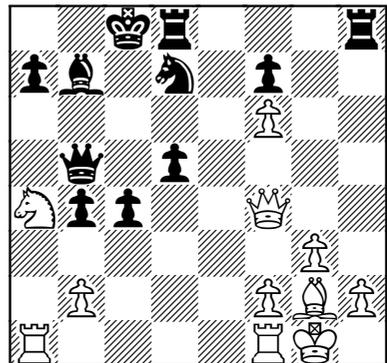
Instead, 19...♘c5 only serves to demonstrate why the bishop is best eliminated. After 20 ♘xc5 ♙xc5 21 ♚e1 a6 22 ♚e7! ♙xe7 23 fxe7 ♗dg8 24 ♚d4 ♙d7 25 ♚e5 ♚c5 26 ♙f3 ♙e8 27 ♗d1 White's compensation was overwhelming in A.Strangmueller-K.Sakai, correspondence 2005.

20 ♚d2

A quiet, natural continuation, but not one that will trouble Black outside of this game.

20 ♙d6 ♙f8 is part draw offer, and part invitation to play 21 ♙e7. At this point the calm 21...♚e8 22 ♚e1 ♙xe7 23 fxe7 ♗h7 puts Black on the verge of equalizing after the intended ...f6 and ...♗hxe7. White can try 24 b3 c3 25 h4 f6 26 ♚e6 ♗hxe7 (26...d4!? almost works, but 27 ♙xb7+ ♚xb7 28 ♚xd4 ♗hxe7 29 ♘c5 ♘xc5 30 ♚xc5+ ♙b8 31 ♚xe7 ♚xe7 32 ♗d1 gives White enough of an initiative to claim an edge) 27 ♙f1 and now 27...♚xf1+!? has been successfully tested in two correspondence games, but it's incredibly complex, and needs more testing to reach any definitive conclusion. L.Fric-T.Kukla, correspondence 2010, went 28 ♙xf1 ♚xe6 29 ♚d4 ♚c6 30 ♗d1 a5 31 ♚c1 ♙a6+ 32 ♙g2 ♙b5 and Black held on to secure half a point. My impression is that Black seems to have just enough for the queen.

20...♙xf4 21 ♚xf4



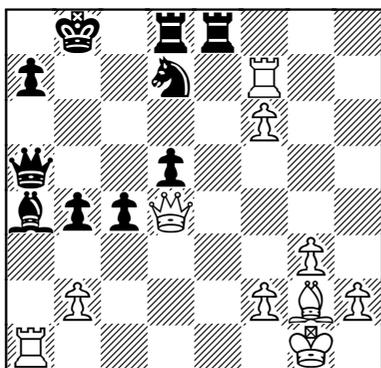
21...♙c6?!

Rarely does this attempt to pressure the knight on a4 show gold in the pan,

and it's no different here.

21...d4! is definitely Black's best, liquidating the pressure on the long diagonal: 22 ♖xd4 (22 ♘c3!? ♗e5 23 ♙xb7+ ♘xb7 24 ♗f3+ ♘b8 25 ♘d5 ♗h5 26 ♗xh5 ♗xh5 27 ♘xb4 is basically equal, since f6 will fall, establishing a material balance) 22...♙xg2 23 ♘xg2 ♗c6+ 24 f3 ♘xf6 25 ♗xa7 ♗d2+ 26 ♗f2 ♗xf2+ 27 ♘xf2 ♗xh2+ 28 ♙g1 ♗h1+! 29 ♘xh1. Black's draw by repetition is assured, and V.Sutkus-S.Sergiev, correspondence 2011, was agreed drawn here. The simple 29...♗xf3+ 30 ♙g1 ♗xg3+ leaves White without a safe haven.

22 ♗d4 ♘b8 23 ♗fe1 ♗he8 24 ♗e7 ♗a5
25 ♗xf7 ♙xa4



Black has picked up the errant knight, but now other problems crop up.

26 ♙xd5

The natural, human move.

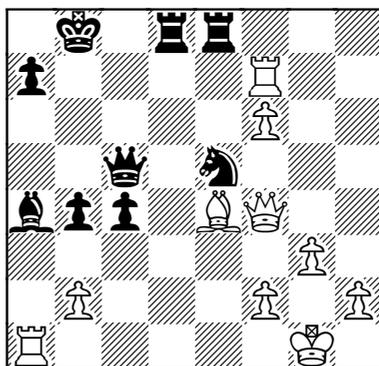
Houdini is in love with 26 h4, but for no reason readily apparent to me. It seems content to sit on the pinned a4-

bishop, and not rush the position at all. After a continuation such as 26...♗e5 27 ♗f4 ♘a8 28 ♗e7 ♘g6 29 ♗c7 ♗xc7 30 ♗xc7 ♗d7 31 ♗c5 ♙b3 32 ♗xd5 ♗xd5 33 ♙xd5+ ♘b8 34 ♙f7 Black can, indeed, resign, so maybe this was better than the text move chosen in the game. However, is there any human out there that would have paused in such a fashion when they have the initiative?

26...♗c5

Black makes good use of White's previous, breaking the pin and forcing a reshuffling of White's pieces.

27 ♗f4+ ♗e5 28 ♙e4



28...♗d7

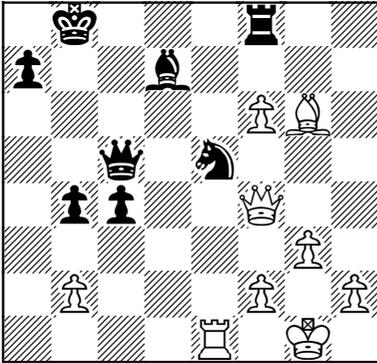
28...♙d7 isn't much better. After 29 ♗g7 ♘c8 30 f7 ♗e6 31 ♗g5 Black is teetering on the brink of disaster.

29 ♗g7 ♙b5

Black has finally removed his bishop from harm's way, but White still has substantial compensation and the initiative.

30 ♗xd7

30 ♖a5!? is possible and messy. One line I looked at went 30...♔c7 31 f7 ♖f8 32 ♖g5 ♖e7 33 ♖xa7+ ♔xa7 34 ♖xe5 ♖xf7 35 ♖e7+ ♔d8 36 ♖xa7 ♖xf4 37 gxf4 ♖xf4 38 f3 when White's split pawns make the win far from trivial.
30...♔xd7 31 ♖g6 ♖f8 32 ♖e1



The piece will be regained, and Black will only get a pawn for it.
32...♔d6 33 ♖xe5 ♖xf6 34 ♖xd6+ ♖xd6
 The endgame has been established, and now White sets about making effective use of his extra pawn.
35 ♖f7 ♖d2 36 ♖xc4 ♖xb2

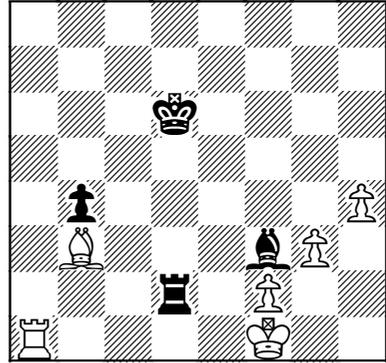
Three connected passed pawns against two, and Black hopes his advanced b-pawn will make it possible to do some damage. Unfortunately, it's just not enough.

37 h4 ♖g4 38 ♖g2 a5 39 ♖e5 ♖c2 40 ♖b5+ ♔c7 41 ♖d5 ♖d2 42 ♖f7

The bishop stays on the a2-g8 diagonal to discourage ...b3 after ♖xa5.
42...♖d7 43 ♖xa5 ♖c6+ 44 ♔f1 ♖f3

Black hopes that the harried white monarch and the b-pawn will be

enough to secure a draw. Alas, the bishops aren't on opposite colours.
45 ♖a1 ♔d6 46 ♖b3



Step one. All White needs to do is break the hold of the bishop on f3, and his pawns will become decisive.
46...♖d3 47 ♖b1 ♔c5 48 ♔e1 ♔b5 49 ♖d1

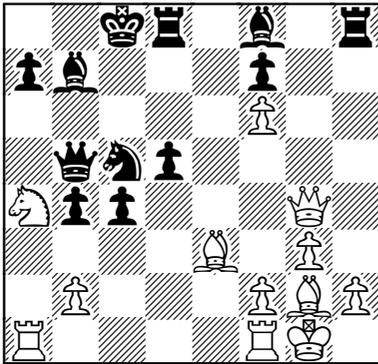
The siege has been broken, and now the pair of extra pawns prove decisive.
49...♖xd1 50 ♖xd1 ♖c3 51 h5 b3 52 ♔d2 ♖c8 53 ♖c1 ♖f8 54 f4 ♔b4 55 ♖h1 ♔a3 56 ♔e3 b2 57 g4 ♖c8 58 ♖b1 ♔a2 59 ♖xb2+ ♔xb2 60 h6 ♔c3 61 g5 1-0

The rook cannot possibly stop the pawns by itself, while the white king body-checks his adversary. A testament to Nakamura's tactical wizardry.

Summary:
 19 ♖f4 is a good practical try for an advantage, but correspondence play, as is almost always the case with the Botvinnik Variation, has highlighted the variation in which Black has good chances of equalizing.

Game 26
J.Mroczek-S.Zemlyanov
 Correspondence 2008

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘c3 ♗f6 4 ♗f3 e6 5 ♕g5 dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♖h4 g5 9 ♗xg5 hxg5 10 ♕xg5 ♗bd7 11 exf6 ♖b7 12 g3 c5 13 d5 ♗b6 14 ♕g2 0-0-0 15 0-0 b4 16 ♗a4 ♗b5 17 a3 exd5 18 axb4 cxb4 19 ♖e3 ♗c5 20 ♗g4+



The approaches involving ♗g4+ are a try unto themselves, but they are less flexible than the continuation seen in Game 27.

20...♗c7

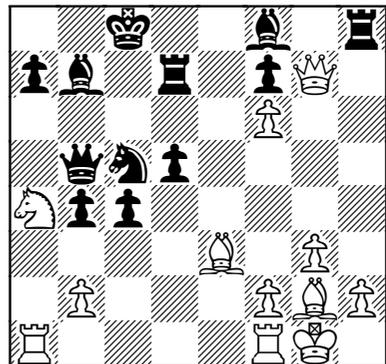
The only way to reward White's behaviour, by making it easy. Black can do better:

a) 20...♗d7 and now:

a1) 21 ♗xc5 ♕xc5 22 ♕xc5 (22 ♗g7 ♗hd8 23 ♕xc5 ♗xc5 24 ♕h3 ♗c7 25 ♕xd7 ♗xd7 is a testament to how much people will trust an engine's evaluation; White's score from this position is miserable, even in correspondence, but he

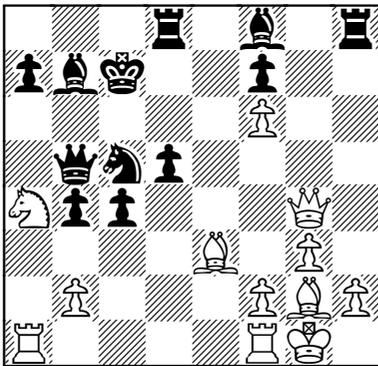
persisted with it for awhile – instead of focusing on the various ways for White to get steam-rolled by the queenside pawns, I'll just mention his own try to draw, which is the limit of his ambitions: 26 ♗g5 ♖b6 27 ♗fe1 d4 28 ♗xc5+ ♕xc5 29 ♗e7 ♕c6 30 ♗xd7 ♕xd7 31 ♗xa7 ♕e6 32 ♗a5+ saw White resort to a perpetual check to save the game in D.Garcia Roman-S.Savchenko, Palma de Mallorca 2008) 22...♗xc5 23 ♗fe1 ♗hd8 (23...♗c7 transposes to our main game after 24 h4) 24 ♗f4! (cutting across Black's plan of playing ...♗c7; after 24 ♗e7 ♕c7 25 ♗ae1 ♕c6 Black has once again achieved his set-up for preparing a queenside advance, and you are left wondering what exactly the queen on g4 has accomplished aside from facilitating it) 24...♗d6 25 ♗d4 ♗b6 26 ♗xb6 axb6 27 ♕h3 ♕c6 28 ♗e7 c3 29 ♗d1 with a substantial edge due to the vulnerability of Black's queenside pawns and the pinned rook in A.Nekhaev-K.Stepanov, correspondence 2010.

a2) 21 ♗g7.



A Botvinnik Variation text would not be complete without the mention of this nutty idea. White sacrifices his queen for a powerful g-pawn, some minors, and an attack. Unfortunately, the engines have basically worked it out: 21...♙xc5 22 ♖fxg7 ♗g8 23 ♘xc5 ♗xg7 24 ♙h3 f5 25 ♙xf5 ♗gf7 26 ♙h3 ♗h7 was soon drawn by repetition in G.Caprio-M.Parpinel, Verona 2009. Black has other options, but this one shows that he has no problems at all.

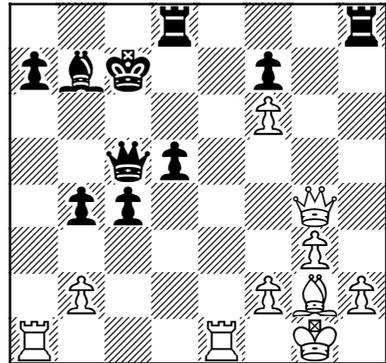
b) 20...♚d7 might be the best solution available. After 21 ♚xd7+ ♘xd7 22 ♗fd1 ♗h5 23 ♙xa7 ♙c7 24 ♙e3 ♙d6 the vulnerability of f6 and the sidelined a4-knight gave Black sufficient play in L.Introini-F.Kroes, correspondence 2011.



21 ♘xc5

21 ♙f4+! is best, and it's not even close. With the king on c6 after 21...♙c6 22 ♘xc5 ♙xc5 23 ♗g7 ♗hf8 24 ♗ae1 Black cannot hope to achieve his ideal coordination and advance his queenside. White went on to win in D.Lybin-Y.Igoshchev, correspondence 1994.

21...♙xc5 22 ♙xc5 ♗xc5 23 ♗fe1



23...♗d7

23...♗he8 seems to be an appreciable improvement compared to the game. After 24 ♗h5 ♗xe1+ 25 ♗xe1 ♗f8 26 ♗e7+ ♙b6 (now this is a good square) 27 ♗h6 ♗c8 28 ♗h7 a5 29 ♗xf7 ♙c6 30 ♗e6 ♗f8! Black's queenside pawns soon rolled up White in J.Johnston-A.Walczak, correspondence 2007.

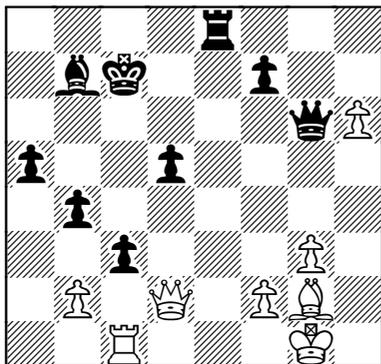
24 h4 a5

24...♗hd8 should probably be met with 25 h5, because if White's h-pawn doesn't become a threat, then Black's queenside will take over.

25 ♗e7 ♗xe7 26 ♗xe7 ♗e8 27 h5! ♙b6

After 27...f5 28 ♗f4+ ♙b6 29 ♗e1 ♗xe7 30 ♗xe7 ♗xe7 31 h6 c3 32 bxc3 bxc3 33 ♗xf5 ♗c7 34 ♗c2, with Black's pawns effectively stalemated and White's free to advance, White had a decisive advantage in A.Nekhaev-V.Napalkov, correspondence 2010.

28 h6 ♗xe7 29 ♗d4+ ♗c5 30 ♗f6+ ♗c6 31 ♗g7 c3 32 ♗c1 ♗g6 33 ♗d4+ ♙c7 34 ♗d2



White's queen has danced around in such a way as to keep h6 covered while attacking c3. His better coordinated position and safer king grants him an edge that will turn decisive in the next few moves.

34...♖e6 35 bxc3 b3 36 c4 ♕xh6 37 ♕xa5+ ♖b8 38 ♖b1 dxc4 39 ♗xb7 ♖xb7 40 ♕b5+ ♖c7 41 ♕xc4+ 1-0

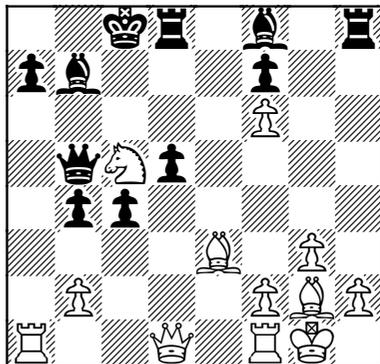
Summary:

I am sceptical of 20 ♕g4's ultimate worth, and question exactly what White gains from the immediate excursion. Invasions of g7 only seem to take up valuable time that allows Black to organize his queenside play.

Game 27
M.Mantovanelli-
W.Lautenbach
Correspondence 2004

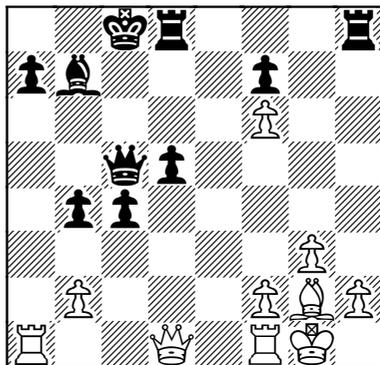
1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♖f3 ♗f6 4 ♗c3 e6 5 ♗g5 dxc4 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♗h4 g5 9

♗xg5 hxg5 10 ♗xg5 ♗bd7 11 g3 ♗b7 12 ♗g2 ♕b6 13 exf6 0-0-0 14 0-0 c5 15 d5 b4 16 ♗a4 ♕b5 17 a3 exd5 18 axb4 cxb4 19 ♗e3 ♗c5 20 ♗xc5



White simply eliminates his problem piece, and is prepared to make the argument that Black's king is sufficiently weak to develop an edge.

20...♗xc5 21 ♗xc5 ♕xc5



22 ♖e1!

A more desirable move than immediately placing the queen on g4. This difference allows for some additional flexibility.

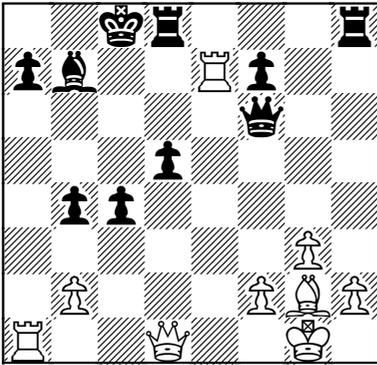
22 ♖g4+ is poorly timed, because Black can play 22...♔b8 23 ♜fe1 ♜he8 and his king will be much less of a problem than usual.

22...♜b6

An attempt to keep an independent flavour to the position, but it doesn't work out. Instead, 22...♜he8 can be met by 23 ♜h5!, threatening f7 and causing Black some discomfort. This represents one more reason to delay the development of the queen.

22...♜d7!? might be best, inviting a transposition to the 20 ♖g4 lines after 23 ♖g4. However, there too White seemed to be on top of things.

23 ♜e7 ♜xf6



24 ♜e1!

Hitting b4 and covering e7.

24...♜b6 25 ♜e5

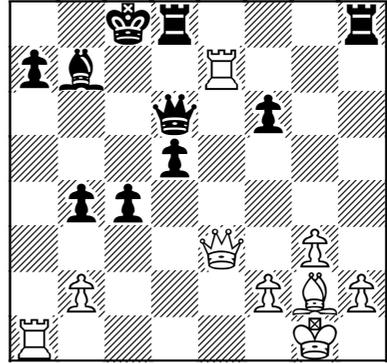
There is a certain geometric quality to White's ♜e1-e5 manoeuvre. He continually highlights the weakness of Black's dark squares.

25...f6 26 ♜f4 ♜d6

Hoping for an exchange of queens,

but Black was already under significant pressure.

27 ♜e3



The a-pawn is now White's national sport, and Black finds himself struggling to keep his weaknesses defended.

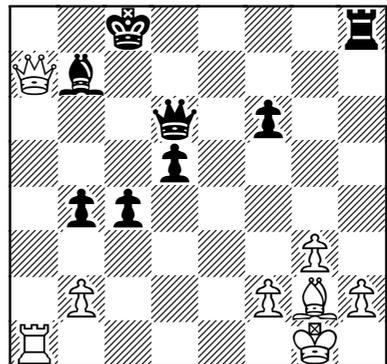
27...♜d7

27...a6 28 ♜a5 ♜h5 29 ♜e6 ♜d7 30 ♜b6 gives White a winning attack.

28 ♜e6 ♜c7 29 ♜xa7

White has regained his pawn, and now Black's king proves to be quite shaky.

29...♜d6 30 ♜xd6 ♜xd6



31 ♖a5

Now ♖c5 is threatened, and there is little Black can do about it.

31...♗h5

Solving potential problems on d5, but now...

32 h4

...opens up the uncomfortable possibility of ♟h3+.

32...♙c7 33 f4 ♔d7 34 ♟f3 ♗h7 35 ♟xd5 1-0

The ending 35...♟xd5 36 ♖xd5+ ♔e6 37 ♙d4 cannot be salvaged. White's attack is on-going, and he will likely pick up at least one queenside pawn.

A very linear game, but one that demonstrates White can profitably delay ♙g4, only playing it in the case of 22...♖d7.

Summary:

16...♙b5 should be combined with 17...♟b8, as only there can Black hope

for equal chances as far as I can tell, based on the evidence of the simplicity with which White obtains an advantage here.

Conclusion

The early deviations in the Botvinnik continue to offer nothing significant for either side that elects them (White equalizes, Black ends up worse). Although they all have interest for practical play, they cannot be recommended for correspondence usage.

The position in the main line after 16 ♟a4 continues to be the critical test for the entire opening concept, and I don't believe Black has adequately solved all his problems in the traditionally popular continuations. Of course, White must contend with 17...♟b8, and I do not believe the first player can be happy with the current state of theory only granting him equality there.