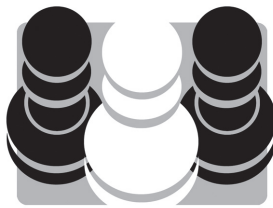


Grandmaster Repertoire 16

The French Defence 3

By

Emanuel Berg



Quality Chess
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Preface

This is the third and final volume of my series on the French Defence, which has been one of the cornerstones of my repertoire throughout my chess career. In the preface to the first volume I talked about my background with the French, but will avoid repeating the same story here, and instead focus on the subject matter of the present book, namely the Advance, Tarrasch and the various other alternatives to 3...c3, which was examined thoroughly in the previous two volumes.

Just as before, the choice of lines for Black has been heavily based on my own repertoire, which has been honed by decades of competitive experience. These days, every decent opening book should be checked for accuracy using recent databases and analysis engines, and this one is no exception. However, you will also find some personal touches and creative solutions – true to my style of chess. I have always thought of the French as a fighting opening. In certain places, when my main line leads to particularly risky, messy and obscure positions, I have presented a secondary, more solid alternative. I have also made every effort to avoid forced drawing lines, instead, where possible, searching for balanced yet fighting positions where an ambitious player can strive to outplay his opponent.

Although the book is written from Black's perspective, my research uncovered many interesting and testing novelties for White, which have also been included in the finished work. In extreme cases, I even had to abandon certain moves and plans that have brought me memorable victories, due to some untested yet troublesome new idea. Throughout the process, I have endeavoured to remain objective in my attempts to discover the ultimate truth of a given position.

The first part of the book is devoted to the **Advance Variation**. Here I have chosen a set-up with ...b6 and ...c6, immediately putting pressure on the d4-pawn. In many lines, the combative ...h6 will feature in our plans, intending to deploy the knight on f5, without obstructing the f8-bishop, as would occur after ...ge7. White may respond with xh6 in some lines, leading to complex positions where Black's bishop pair and dynamic potential make up for his damaged pawn structure.

The largest part of the book is devoted to the **Tarrasch Variation**. Here I will recommend 3...f6, which I have favoured for more than two decades. After the usual 4.e5 fd7, we reach the characteristic French central structure with pawns on e5 and d4 for White versus e6 and d5 for Black. The ensuing positions tend to be strategically rich, requiring a healthy mix of positional and tactical awareness. Black begins with slightly less space, but he can often generate surprisingly potent counterplay, including piece sacrifices in the centre, which may turn the tables completely.

The final part of the book contains an assortment of minor lines, from the **Exchange Variation** to the **King's Indian Attack** to a variety of gambits and other offbeat lines. Here too, I have kept to the strategy of playing as ambitiously as possible without compromising on objective soundness.

I would like to express my gratitude to Quality Chess for extending the deadline for this last volume on more than one occasion. I have put a great deal of time and energy into this work, and I sincerely hope the readers will consider the wait to have been worthwhile.

Emanuel Berg
Arvika, February 2015

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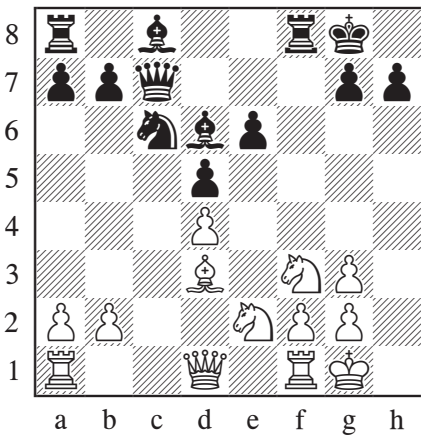
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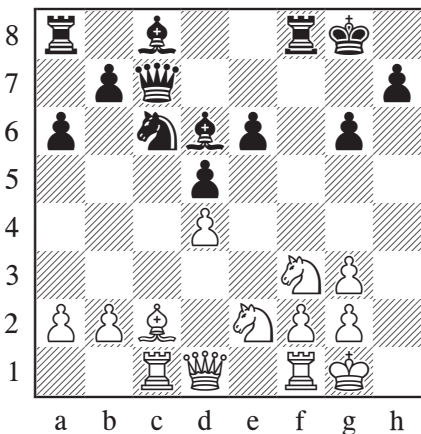
15...a6!

Black has other decent moves available, but I like the idea of preventing ♔b5, which is essentially the only plan that can trouble Black. From here, our main plan is to play ...g6 and place the queen on g7, followed by developing the remaining pieces. Eventually a kingside expansion with ...g5 may be considered.

16.♖c1 g6 17.♕c2!?

17.♗d2 ♖g7 18.♕b1 ♕d7 19.♘c3 h6 20.♞f1 ♞f7 21.♞cd1 ♞af8 22.♗e3 g5 favoured Black in Garbett – Ganguly, Queenstown 2012.

The text move intends ♕a4, but Black can counter this plan with:



17...♕d7N

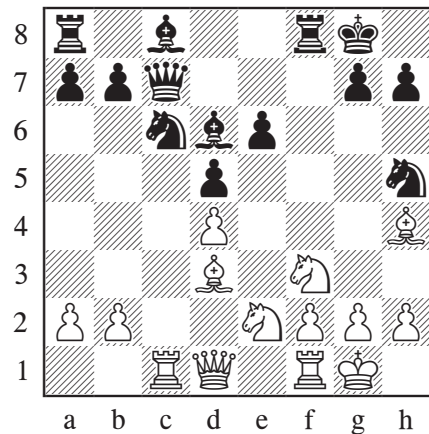
Rather than 17...♗g7 18.♕a4 ♘e7? (18...♘a5N still looks okay for Black, who can continue with ...b5 and ...♘c4), as played in Luther – Floor, Maastricht 2008, when 19.♘f4!N± would have given White some initiative. Black can hardly accept the pawn sacrifice, as his dark squares would be terribly weakened.

Now Black has a comfortable position, and White's bishop manoeuvre has been nullified, as the following brief line illustrates.

18.♕a4?! b5! 19.♕b3 ♗d8

Intending ...♗f6.

B2) 14.♞c1



This rook activation is more often played on move 13, and not in combination with ♕h4. This way White has avoided the knight jump to g4, but Black has something just as effective up his sleeve.

14...♞xf3!?

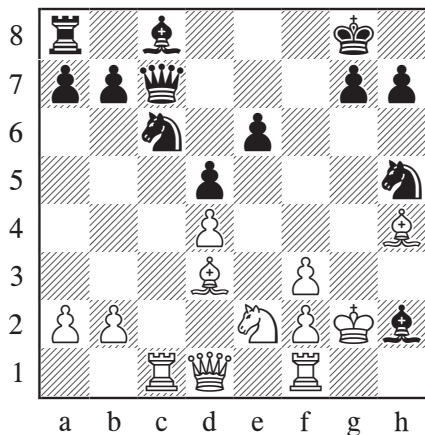
I see no reason not to go for this straightforward continuation, although there are some other playable options.

The main continuation is 14...g6, protecting the kingside and giving the queen the g7-square.

14...h6!? transposes to the popular line 13.♖c1 h6 14.♕h4 ♘h5, having avoided the more troublesome 14.♕d2! which was discussed earlier on page 351. The game Kotronias – Berg, Heraklio 2007, is a good illustration of Black's chances. Nevertheless, from the current move order, the main line seems like the easiest solution.

15.gxf3 ♕xh2† 16.♖g2

16.♖h1N is still untried, but after 16...♕f4 Black has excellent compensation and can continue in much the same way as shown below. It seems to me that White's king is slightly less secure on h1 than on g2.



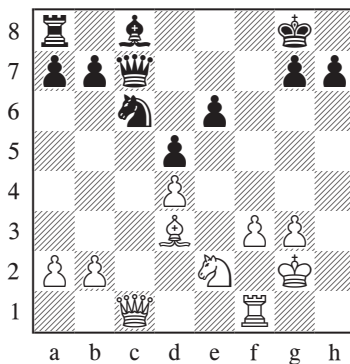
16...♕f4!

An important intermediate move, making use of the exposed position of White's rook on c1.

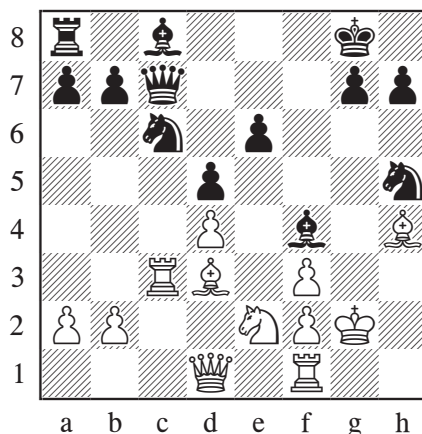
17.♖c3

17.♖c5 can be met by 17...♕d6 (17...♗f7!?N followed by ...♕d7 also offers Black full compensation) 18.♖c3 (18.♖c1 ♕f4=) 18...e5 19.dxe5 ♕xe5 20.♖c5 ♕e6 21.♕g3 ♖f8 when Black had a strong initiative and full compensation in Ausan – Zhang Xiaowen, Manila 2007.

17.♕g3!? gives back the exchange: 17...♘xg3 18.fxg3 (18.♘xf4 ♘xf1+) 18...♕xc1 19.♗xc1 This was Savic – Todorovic, Herceg Novi 2006. White is a pawn down but he has some positional compensation as well as some attacking chances. Nevertheless, Black should be better after:



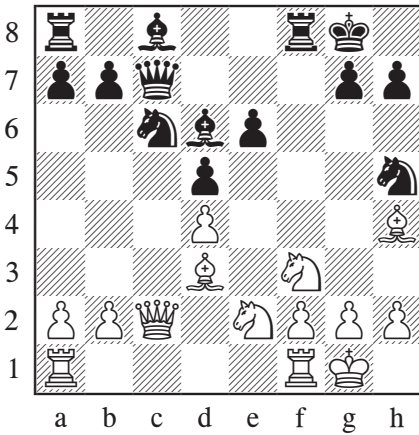
19...♕d7N 20.♖h1 h6 21.♕b1 ♗b6! 22.♗c2 ♘f8 23.♖h4 ♘e7 Black holds the kingside together and White will struggle to prove his compensation.



17...♗f7! 18.♕g3 ♕g5 19.♖h1 g6

Black's extra pawn and better structure provided full compensation for the exchange in Biryukov – R. Popov, Saratov 2009.

B3) 14.♙c2



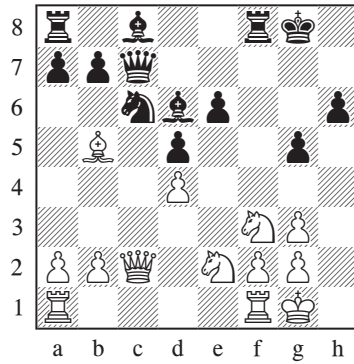
This is the big main line, provoking a weakening of the light squares.

14...h6

Black has no real choice, as 14...g6? allows 15.♘xc7.

Now there is an important division between **B31) 15.♘g6** and **B32) 15.♘h7†**. In the latter case White intends to put the bishop on g6 on the next turn, having forced Black's king to move. I will discuss some of the specific pros and cons of each move as we go along. However, I would like to clarify one important point before starting out. Whether or not White inserts the check on h7, Black intends to meet ♘g6 with ...♞xf3. **When White plays 15.♘g6, leaving the king on g8, it makes more sense for him to take the rook on f3. If, on the other hand, White plays 15.♘h7† ♜h8 before 16.♘g6, then he should ignore the rook on f3 and capture the knight on h5 instead.** I will discuss the reasons when we get to the variations in question, but for now it is worth getting that rule into your head.

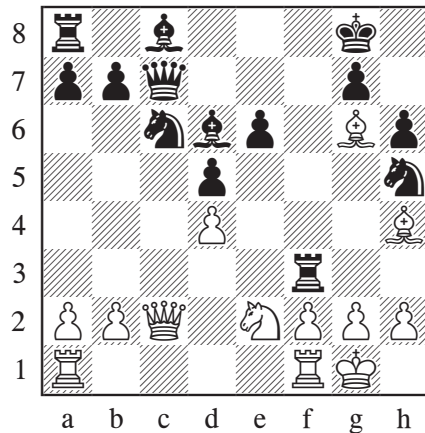
15.♘g3 ♘xc3 16.hxc3 can be compared with the earlier variation B1. The slight weakening of Black's light squares is of no concern. A recent game continued: 16...g5 17.♘b5



17...♜e5! 18.♙xc7 ♘xf3† 19.gxf3 ♘xc7 20.♞ac1 ♘d6 21.♞c3 a6 22.♘a4 b5 23.♘b3 ♘d7 Black had the better endgame in Alonso Rosell – Gonzalez Perez, Catalonia 2014.

B31) 15.♘g6 ♞xf3!

This is the obvious choice, regardless of whether the king is on g8 or h8. Black will always have compensation for the exchange, although there are some concrete moves and ideas to remember.



16.gxf3

16.♘xh5?!

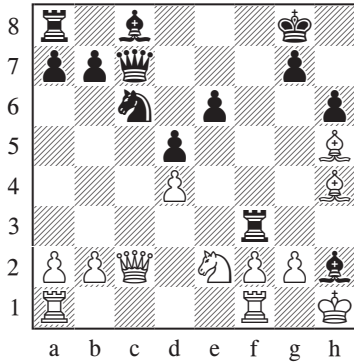
As mentioned earlier, this move makes less sense here, as the king is better on g8, which could end up saving Black a full tempo.

Black's most ambitious reply is:

16...♘h2†!

The solid 16...♙f8 is fine and can be compared with variation B322 on page 372. However, the text move is even more appealing.

17.♙h1

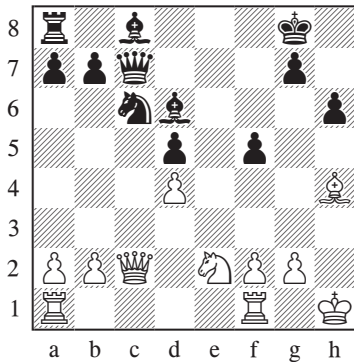


17...♙f5!

Williams gives 17...♙f8 which, remarkably, is not possible with Black's king on h8, as shown later in the note to Black's 17th move in variation B322 on page 373. However, Black is still walking a fine line; one critical continuation is 18.g3 g5 19.♙xg5 hxg5 20.♙xh2 with a roughly balanced position.

18.♙g6 ♙d6 19.♙xf5 exf5

A similar position is discussed later with the king on h8. This version is a clear improvement for Black, as the following short line demonstrates.

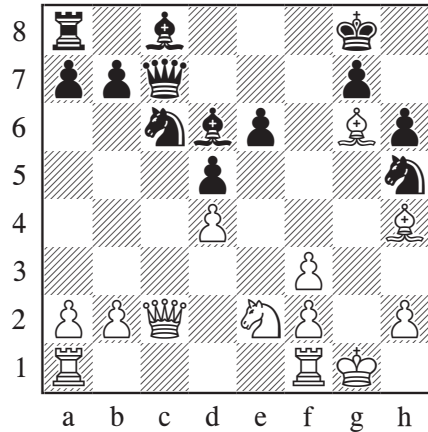


20.♙ae1?!

20.f4 is necessary. In that case it would be too much for Black to claim an advantage, but he certainly has full compensation.

20...♙f7! 21.♙g3 f4

Black is obviously better. In the analogous position with the king on h8, his last move could be refuted by ♙xf4!



16...♙xh2†

Here **B311)** 17.♙g2 has been played, but **B312)** 17.♙h1 has been more popular.

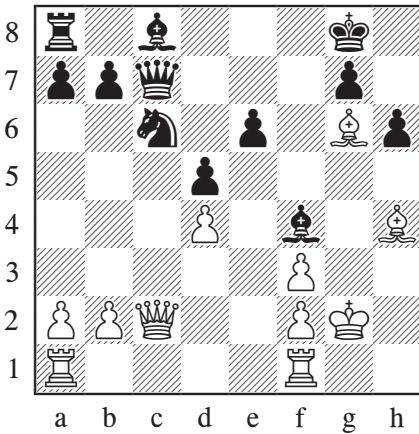
B311) 17.♙g2

This has been comparatively rare, but it is not necessarily a bad choice.

17...♙f4† 18.♙xf4 ♙xf4!

The exclamation mark is an expression of my personal preference for this move, which avoids improving White's pawn structure. Black simply intends to complete development and strengthen his position, relying on his extra pawn and better structure to provide long-term compensation for the exchange.

18...♙xf4 19.♙g3 ♙xg3 20.fxg3 ♙xd4 is a fully playable alternative. White has an advantage in mobility, with some attacking ideas based on f4-f5. On the other hand, Black has two pawns for the exchange and with correct play he should not be worse. Nevertheless, I find the main continuation more appealing.



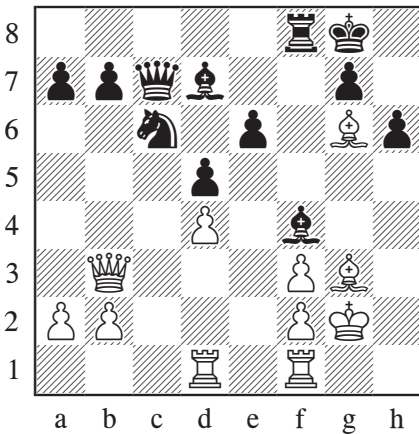
19.♔g3 20.♔d7 20...♖ad1

20.♖h1 intending ♖h4 is a worthy alternative. In this case it looks sensible to switch plans with 20...♔xg3! 21.fxg3 ♗b6, when Black picks up the d4-pawn in slightly safer circumstances than in the above note.

20...♗f8 21.♗b3?!

White simply runs out of good ideas.

21.♔h7+ ♔h8 22.♗c5 ♖f6 23.♔b1 is a creative solution, intending ♗c2, but Black retains full compensation after 23...♔e8.

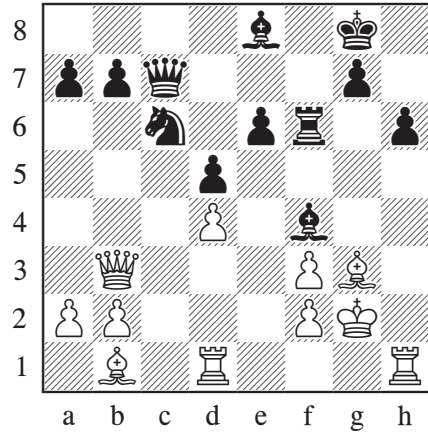


21...♖f6 22.♔b1 23.♔e8!

This is the ideal square for the bishop. Now ♗c2 will be met by ...♔g6, and the bishop also has plans to go to h5 and hit f3.

23.♖h1

Stopping ...♔h5 and preparing ♖h4, but White is just too late.



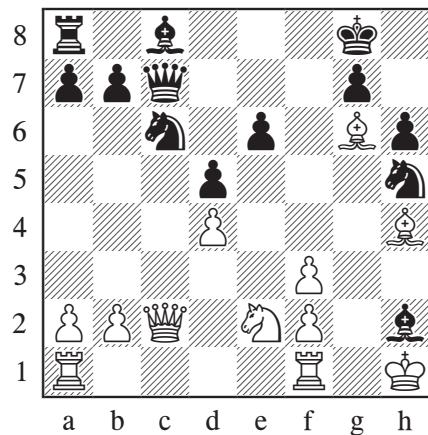
23...g5!

Preventing ♖h4 and preparing to advance the h-pawn.

24.♔xf4 25.♗e3 h5!

Black had a great initiative and went on to win in Norberg – Berg, Norrköping 2005.

B312) 17.♔h1

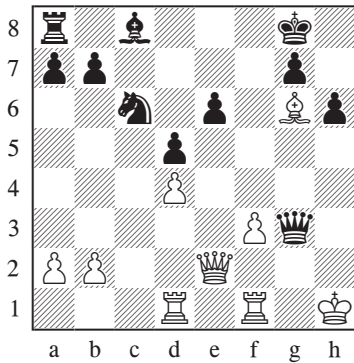


Although this has been a popular line over the years, I personally think it has seen its best days for White.

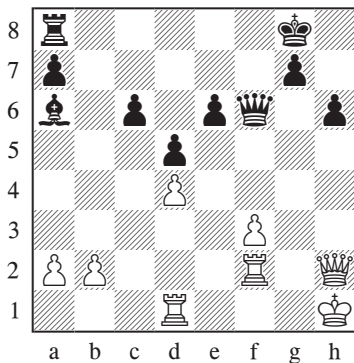
17...♘f4 18.♘g3

This has been the overwhelmingly most common choice, and it is understandable that White should try to trap the bishop and provoke an exchange on g3. However, it turns out that Black can seize the initiative by simple tactical means.

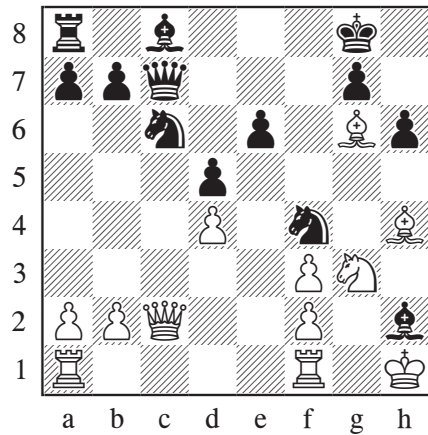
18.♖ad1!? has hardly ever been played, but it seems to be at least no worse than the main line. The following continuation is more or less forced: 18...♘xe2 19.♗xe2 ♖f4 (19...♙d7N 20.♙g2 ♗f4 21.♙g3 ♙xg3 22.fxg3 ♗f6 23.♗d3 ♘xd4 24.♗xd4 ♗xg6 gives Black two pawns for the exchange, but White controls the dark squares and has the more comfortable game.) 20.♙g3 ♙xg3 21.fxg3 ♗xg3



So far Black has won both games from this position, but the improvement 22.♙e8!N forces him to worry about his development. I suggest: 22...♗h4† 23.♗h2 ♗f6 24.♙xc6 bxc6 25.♗f2 ♙a6



With roughly equal chances, but plenty of play remaining.



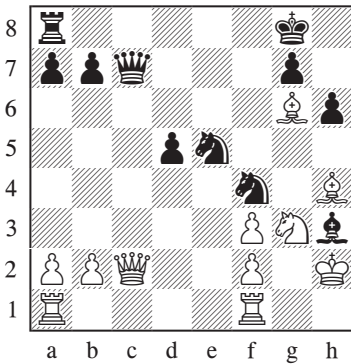
18...e5!

This straightforward move works amazingly well for Black. Although I was the first to play it, I must give credit to my countryman Pontus Carlsson, who found the idea considerably earlier but did not get the chance to play it himself. After having played it a few times and analysed it deeply, I see no reason for Black to even consider playing anything else.

At the first sight it might seem hard to believe in Black's position. He is already an exchange down, and now leaves his bishop hanging on h2 without any clear threats in return. I would therefore like to take a moment and explain what's really going on. Forgetting about the material deficit for a moment, Black has a harmonious position with a healthy pawn formation and active pieces. The f4-knight is extremely strong, and can support a direct attack against White's vulnerable king. Although White is material up, the bishop on h4 might be trapped by ...g5 at some point. More importantly, his pieces are poorly coordinated, and if he fails to address this problem he may suffer a quick defeat – material advantage or not.

We will analyse three main moves: **B3121) 19.♙ad1?**, **B3122) 19.♞fe1** and **B3123) 19.♞xh2!**.

19.dxe5? is clearly inferior due to 19...♙h3. Black's idea is not to take the rook on f1, but rather to play ...♞d4 (or ...♞xe5), sacrificing the queen in order to deliver mate on the kingside. Play might continue: 20.♞xh2N ♞xe5

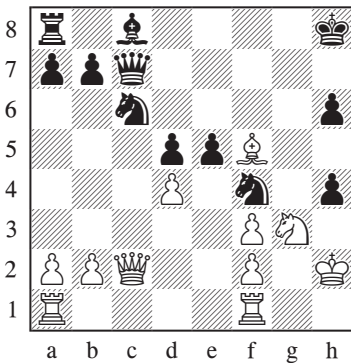


21.♞f5 (21.♞g1 ♞xc2 22.♙xc2 ♞xf3† 23.♞h1 ♞xh4†) 21...♞xf3† 22.♞g3 ♞e5 23.♞e7† ♞h8 24.♞xf3 ♞f8 With a devastating attack.

19.♙h7?

This check should only be played when absolutely necessary. Here it just opens the path for the g-pawn.

19...♞h8 20.♞xh2 g5! 21.♙f5 gxh4



22.♙xc8?

Going down quickly.

22.dxe5 ♞xe5 23.♞ae1 hxg3† 24.fxg3 ♙xf5 25.♞d2 ♞d6 26.♞xf4 ♞xf4 27.gxf4 d4 gives Black a winning endgame.

22.♙g4 is the best try, but 22...exd4 should win for Black with correct play.

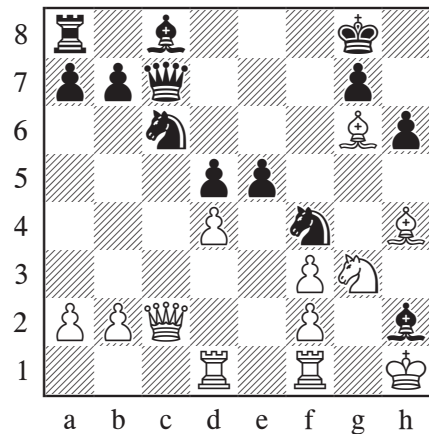
22...♞xc8 23.♞f5 ♞d7 24.♞h1

24.dxe5 ♞d4! 25.e6 ♞xe6 26.♞ae1 ♞g8 27.♞g1 ♞xc2 28.♞xg8† ♞xg8 with an easy win for Black.

24...♞xd4

0–1 Can – Berg, Kusadasi 2006.

B3121) 19.♙ad1?



This move was first played by Kotronias, who was able to hold a draw with it against Mikhail Gurevich.

19...e4!

19...♞d6? allowed White to get off the hook with 20.♙h7† ♞h8 21.dxe5 ♞xe5 22.♙e4, when the complications led to equality in Kotronias – M. Gurevich, Kusadasi 2006.

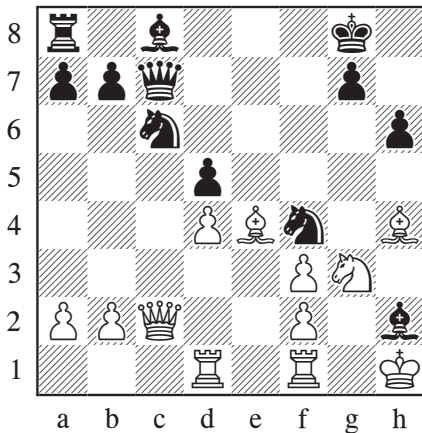
Having studied the above game myself, I found the text move with the help of the computer. In 2009, I was rewarded with the chance to play it over the board, when my opponent, Groetz, attempted to prepare his way to a draw. The game continued:

20.♔xe4?

In a difficult position, and clearly shaken by the unpleasant surprise, my opponent loses the thread.

20.♔h5?N ♖xh5 21.♗xh5 ♜f7 22.♗f6† gxf6
23.♗xh2 ♜h5+ is hardly an improvement.

20.♔e8!N is White's only chance to stay in the game, although Black has more than one good answer: 20...♔h3! (20...♔d7 is also promising: 21.♔h5 ♜f8 22.fxe4 ♗xh5 23.♗xh5 ♔g4 24.f3 ♔xh5 25.♜xh2 ♜f7 Followed by ...♔xf3†, winning back material and keeping the advantage.) 21.♔xc6 bxc6 22.fxe4 ♜d7 23.♗f5 dxe4 24.♗xh6† gxh6 25.♗xh2 ♔xf1 26.♜b3† ♗h7 27.♜xf1 ♜g8 White is under heavy pressure.

**20...dxe4 21.fxe4**

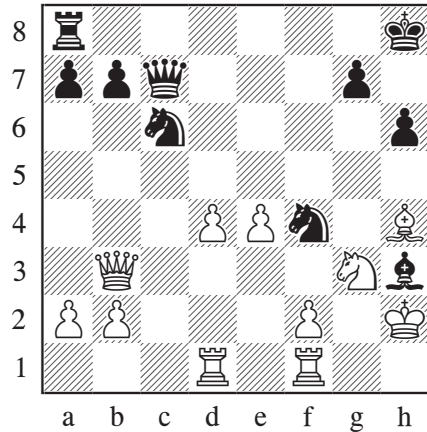
21.♜xe4 ♜d7! 22.♜f5 ♜xf5 23.♗xf5
♔xf5 24.♗xh2 g5 25.♔g3 ♗d5 gives Black a winning endgame.

21.♗xe4 ♜d7 is also pretty hopeless, for instance: 22.♗f6† gxf6 23.♜g1† ♔xg1 24.♜xg1† ♗f8+

21...♔h3 22.♜b3†

22.♗xh2? ♗xd4! 23.♜xc7 ♗f3† 24.♗h1
♔g2# is a typical mating net for this line.

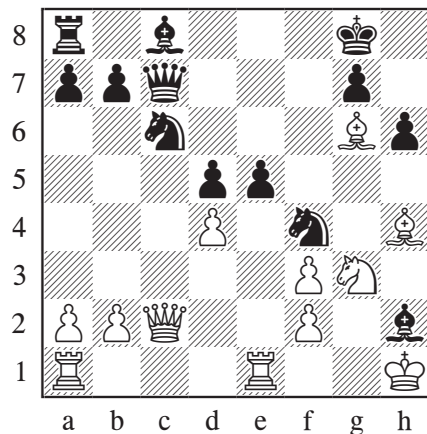
22.♜c4† ♗h8 23.♗xh2 ♗e5! 24.♜b3 ♗g4†
25.♗h1 g5 also wins easily.

22...♗h8 23.♗xh2**23...g5! 24.♜g1 gxh4 25.e5?**

25.♜e3 is a better try, although 25...♔g4!
leads to the same final outcome.

25...♔e6 26.♜f3 hxg3†

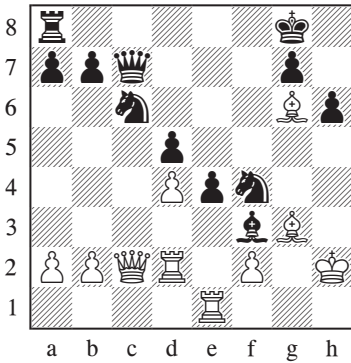
With three minor pieces against a rook,
I won easily in Groetz – Berg, Tromsø 2009.

B3122) 19.♜f1**19...♔h3!**

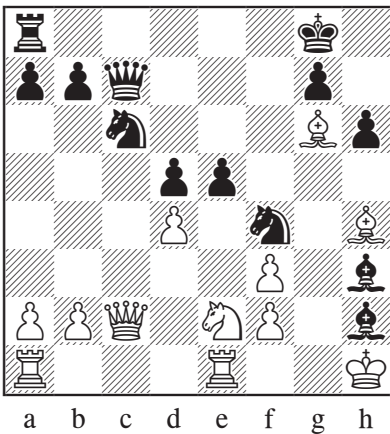
Threatening the now familiar ...♗xd4.
White only has one decent response.

20. ♖e2!N

20.♞ad1? ♙xg3 21.♙xg3 ♙g2† 22.♔h2 ♙xf3 23.♞d2 e4 leaves White defenceless, for instance:



24.♙xe4 dxe4 25.♞xe4 ♙xe4 26.♞xe4 ♞f8 27.d5 ♞e5 0–1 Biti – Gleizerov, Zadar 2005.

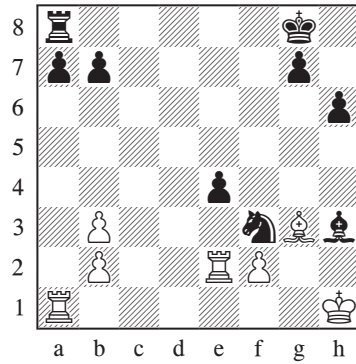


20...e4!

Watson gives 20...♖e2 leading to an equal game, but Black has excellent chances in the complications that follow.

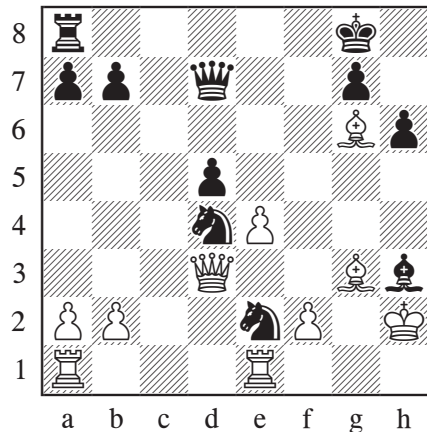
21. ♔xh2 ♖xe2† 22. ♙g3 ♞d7! 23. fxe4

Another interesting line is: 23.♞xe2 ♖xd4 24.♞d1 ♖xf3† 25.♔h1 ♞e6! 26.♙xe4 (26.♙h5?? ♞f5→) 26...dxe4 27.♞b3 ♞xb3 28.axb3



28...♞e8! Black has all the chances in the endgame. An important tactical point is that 29.♞xa7 loses the exchange back following: 29...♞d8! 30.♞a1 ♞d5 31.♞xe4 ♞h5 32.♞f4 ♙f1† 33.♞h4 ♖hx4 34.♞xf1 ♖g6†

23... ♖cxd4 24. ♞d3



24... ♙g4! 25. ♙f5

25.♞xe2 dxe4! 26.♞c4† (26.♞xe4? ♖f3† 27.♔h1 ♞xd3 28.♞e8† ♞xe8 29.♙xd3 ♖f7†) 26...♙e6 27.♞c7 ♖xe2†

25... ♖xf5 26. exf5 ♞f7 27. ♞xe2 ♞h5† 28. ♔g2 ♙xe2 29. ♞xd5† ♔h7↑

White has survived the worst, but his king remains unsafe, which at least enables Black to press for a while.