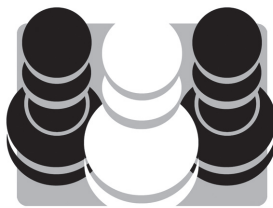


Grandmaster Repertoire

**1.e4 vs
The French, Caro-Kann & Philidor**

By

Parimarjan Negi



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Series Introduction

Several years ago, Nigel Short once gifted me an opening book with the wry comment, “I expect this doubles your chess library.” While that was a slight exaggeration, it is true that I never depended much on opening books for my theoretical knowledge. This scepticism for written material is often rooted in the fact that the modern openings are so fluid, constantly changing, with variations evolving every week. How can a static book keep pace with ideas that are developed, replaced, and forgotten on a weekly basis?

In this series, I aim to provide a foundation and structure around which you can develop a lifelong repertoire with 1.e4. I hope a good number of my recommendations will withstand the relentless assaults of time, but I am realistic enough to know that many of the bright novelties and variations will eventually wither away. However, even if some of the finer details will eventually have to be revised in the future, I believe that the core selection of recommended lines will remain valid for a long time to come.

There is a process by which I have developed my own repertoire, as laid out in this series. In several critical positions I have discussed the pros and cons of different options, and explained why I eventually chose one over the other. Apart from remembering the moves themselves, I hope you will also absorb something of this process, so that you will be able to find your own ideas to react to whatever new developments may come along.

The selection of recommended systems against Black’s various defences has followed a logical pattern, taking into account the structure of the whole repertoire. Throughout the process, I have aimed for active, fluid positions, sometimes sacrificing material but always remaining fundamentally sound. There are a number of long, forcing lines, which are necessary to justify any suggestion these days, but I have endeavoured to show that even seemingly abstract moves are still based on strategic, human principles. To make the best possible use of this book, I encourage you to pay attention to all such explanations, with the aim of building a framework of inter-connected ideas in your own mind.

Parimarjan Negi
New Delhi, July 2014

Contents

Series Introduction	3
Symbols & Bibliography	6
Preface	7
French Defence	
1 Rare 3rd Moves	9
2 3...dxe4 – Rare 4th Moves	24
French Rubinstein	
3 Introduction	35
4 6...c5	55
French Steinitz	
5 Rare Lines	70
6 7...♖b6	81
7 Sidelines with ...♙e7	101
8 7...♙e7 8.♖d2 0–0	112
9 7...a6	139
10 7...cxd4 – Introduction and 8...♖b6	153
11 8...♙c5	172
French Winawer	
12 4...b6	195
13 5...cxd4 and 5...♙a5	212
14 6...♖c7	225
15 6...♖a5	240
16 Rare 7th Moves	257
17 7...0–0 and 8...f5	268
18 8...♖a5 and 8...♗bc6	285
19 13...♙d7 and 13...♖f7	303
20 Poisoned Pawn – 7...♗bc6 and 7...cxd4	325
21 Poisoned Pawn – 7...♖c7	338

Caro-Kann

22	3rd & 4th Move Alternatives	360
23	4...♘d7 – Introduction	375
24	4...♘d7 – Main Line	391
25	4...♙f5 – Introduction	409
26	7...e6	418
27	11...♙b4†	431
28	7...♘d7	449
29	13...♚b6	459
30	13...0–0	470
31	14...♘xe4 – Introduction	485
32	17...♘g4	496
33	11...♚c7 – Introduction	508
34	14...♘xe4 – Introduction	524
35	15...♘f6	533

Philidor

36	Minor Lines	548
37	Hanham Variation	563
	Variation Index	589

Preface

In this, the first volume of my 1.e4 series, we will be dealing with three important defences. More than half of the book is devoted to the French Defence, the amount of space partially being due to the wide variety of systems available to Black. Next we will deal with the ever-reliable Caro-Kann, before finishing with the Philidor, which has become rather fashionable in recent years.

Although this book contains some complex analysis in places, I have tried to emphasize the importance of themes and ideas, as I explain my understanding behind seemingly obscure variations and moves. For most readers, grasping these key ideas will be more important than learning the precise variations, as you will still need to understand how to play the ensuing positions over the board, as well as to mould and expand your repertoire according to the changing times.

The French Defence

In the French Winawer, our repertoire constantly emphasizes the dark-square weaknesses that Black incurs after posting his central pawns on light squares and swapping off his dark-squared bishop. As you work your way through the chapters, you will notice my attempts to apply this basic concept to virtually every modern theoretical line.

In the Steinitz, most of our play is based on White's piece outpost on d4 in conjunction with Black's inactive light-squared bishop. This is most obvious in favourable endgames and simplified middlegames, but even those sharper variations involving attacks on the enemy king will often be rooted in this positional foundation.

The Caro-Kann

The Caro-Kann often leads to opposite-sided castling after both 4...♘d7 and especially 4...♙f5. Such positions tend to feature a constant struggle between White's desire to launch an attack with g4-g5, and Black's attempts to obstruct this, either by exchanging queens or by generating counterplay of some kind.

In the 4...♙f5 lines where both sides castle on the queenside, you may encounter seemingly odd moves such as ♖c1 (removing the rook from an open file), ♞b3 (retreating the knight from the centre) and the funny-looking ♜h4. However, when you understand the underlying plan of pushing the c-pawn to c5 and c6 to threaten Black's king, the above moves seem like the most natural in the world.

The Philidor

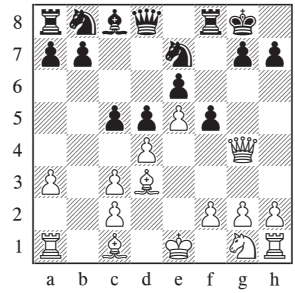
In the Hanham Variation, as discussed in the final chapter, it is vital to pay attention to move-order subtleties. Though it may seem as if moves such as a2-a4, 0-0, h2-h3 and ♖e1 can be played in almost any order, a closer study will enable you to see each move as an individual avatar with subtle but significant nuances.

Writing this book has been a new experience for me, and it has been a learning journey from the start. I would like to thank Jacob Aagaard for his guidance throughout the process, and Nikos Ntirlis and Andrew Greet for painstakingly going through my variations, editing them, suggesting important changes, and invariably pointing out the many shortcomings.

Parimarjan Negi
New Delhi, July 2014

Chapter 17

French Winawer



7...0-0 and 8...f5

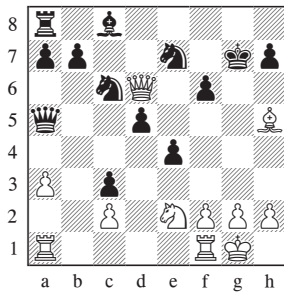
Variation Index

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♙b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3 ♙xc3† 6.bxc3 ♘e7
7.♗g4 0-0 8.♙d3 f5 9.exf6 ♞xf6

10.♙g5

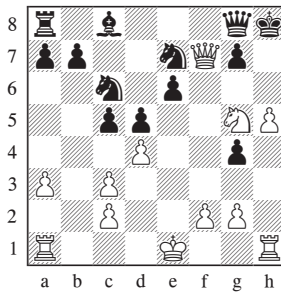
A) 10...e5	269
B) 10...♘d7	270
C) 10...♞f7 11.♗h5	272
C1) 11...h6?!	272
C2) 11...g6 12.♗d1	274
C21) 12...♘bc6	274
C22) 12...♗a5 13.♘f3!?	278
C221) 13...♞xf3	279
C222) 13...c4N	280
C223) 13...♘bc6	282

A) after 18...♙g7



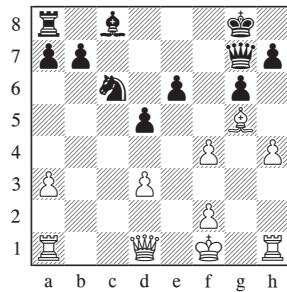
19.♘d4!N

C1) after 17...♙h8



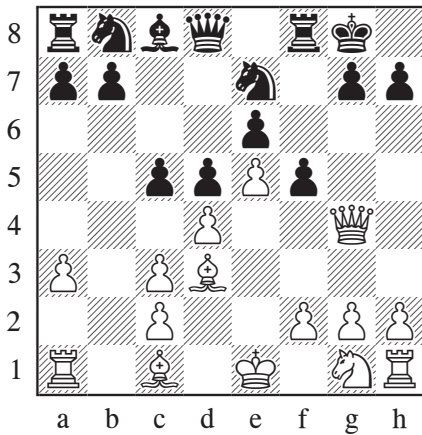
18.♗g6!!N

C221) after 20...♗g7



21.f5!N

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♖c3 ♘b4 4.e5 c5 5.a3
 ♙xc3† 6.bxc3 ♗e7 7.♗g4 0–0 8.♙d3 f5

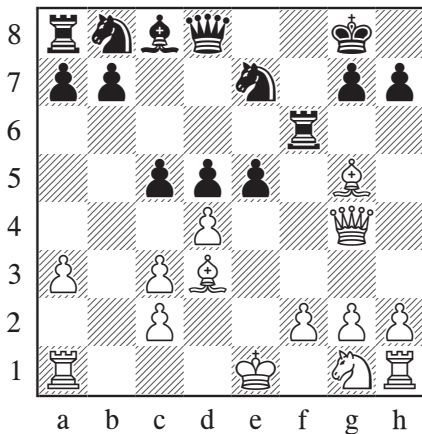


It is natural that some players will prefer to gain some breathing room on the kingside and avoid facing an attack after ♗h5. However, this once-popular variation has fallen on hard times in recent years.

9.exf6 ♗xf6 10.♙g5

We will briefly look at a couple of exchange sacrifices that Black can make here with A) 10...e5 and B) 10...♗d7, before examining the most popular C) 10...♗f7.

A) 10...e5



With the moves ...♗bc6 and ♗f3 included, this would be strong for Black, for the obvious reason that ...e4 would lead to a fork. Here it just loses an exchange, but Black hopes to get some activity in return. Ian Nepomniachtchi has used this line and drawn with a couple of strong opponents, but it appears to me that he was relying on the surprise value more than the objective strength of the last move.

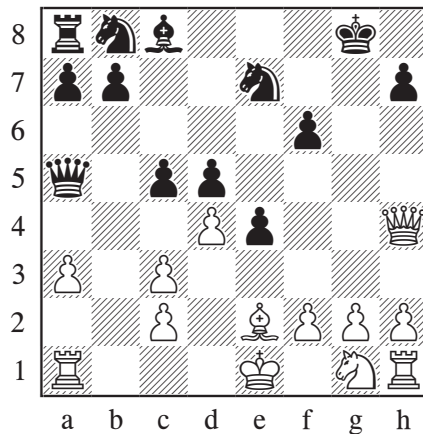
11.♗h4 e4 12.♙xf6 gxf6 13.♙e2

13.♙f1 is preferred by the engine, but I can believe that Black may obtain nasty compensation here.

13...♗a5

13...♗f5 was later played by Nepo in a blitz game against Leko. This move is only suitable for blitz, as White just needs to figure out the correct route for his queen: 14.♗h3! Intending ♙g4. 14...♗g7 15.♗e3 ♗f5 16.♗d2± The queen returns to safety and defends everything.

After the text move White's main problem is of development, and Dominguez solves it elegantly.



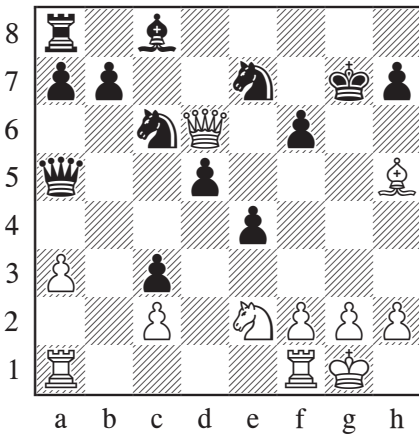
14.♗g3† ♗h8 15.♙h5!

An important move. Now White easily completes his development and remains an exchange ahead.

15...♖bc6

It is important to mention that 15...♖f5 can be met by 16.♙h3 when the queen is perfectly safe, despite the impending discovered attack. 16...♗c6 17.♗e2 ♗fxd4 18.♙h4 These are 'only moves' for White, but they are enough. 18...♗g7 19.♙g3† A queen triangulation! 19...♗h8 20.0-0± White is safely an exchange ahead.

16.♗e2 cxd4 17.0-0 dxc3 18.♙d6 ♗g7



19.♗d4!N

This improves over 19.f3 e3 20.♗g4 ♙d8 when Black was back in the fight in Dominguez Perez – Nepomniachtchi, Eilat 2012.

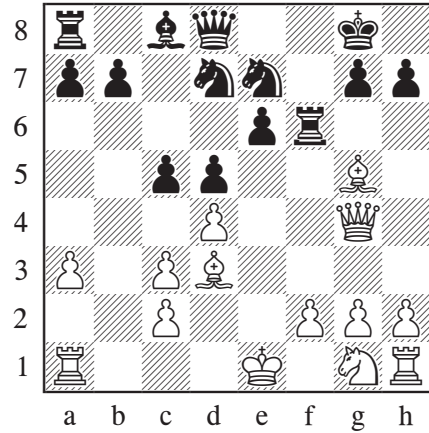
19...♙d8

This is the only way for Black to complete development, but it allows White to pick up an important pawn.

20.♙g3† ♗h8 21.♙xc3±

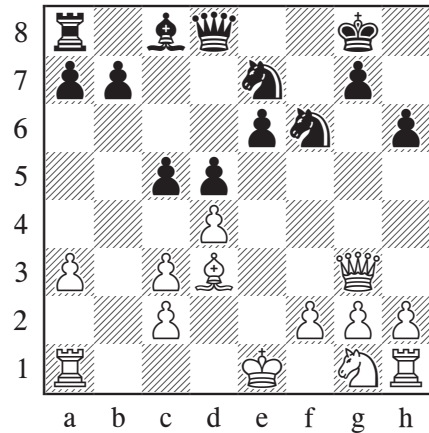
Black does not have full compensation for the exchange.

B) 10...♗d7



This has been played many times, including in GM games, but an accurate set-up, helped partly by modern computers, has successfully dismantled it.

11.♙h4 h6 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♙g3!



An impressive move, despite not being the most popular, or indeed the most natural. It is not too hard to understand that White provoked the ...h6 move in order to make the g6-square available to the bishop. However, the really interesting point is that it is better to give away both the c3- and d4-pawns, rather than capture the c5-pawn and give Black activity in the centre.

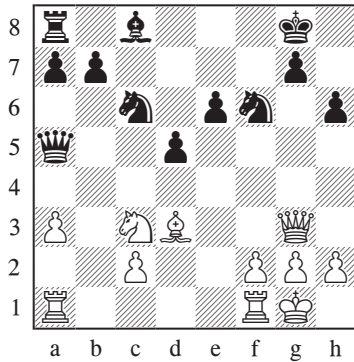
13...cxd4

No better is:

13...♖a5 14.♘e2 cxd4

14...c4? 15.♙g6 highlights the value of the queen on g3.

15.0–0 dxc3 16.♘xc3 ♘c6



17.♘b5!N

17.f4 ♖c5† 18.♙h1 ♙d7 19.♘d1!?

intending ♘f2-g4 gave White an edge in Korneev – Dgebuadze, Le Touquet 2004, but the text move is stronger.

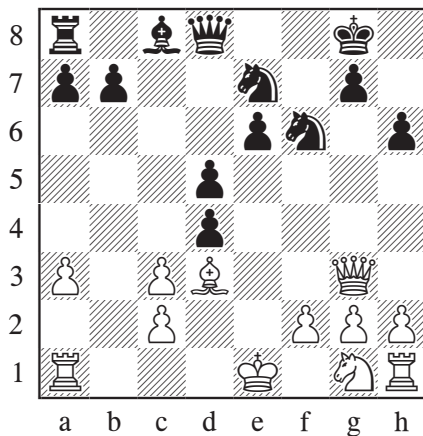
17...e5

The natural reply, but it should not be of any concern to us.

18.♞ab1

Black's centre is unstable and the inevitable ♘d6 jump will create even more targets.

18...a6 19.♘d6 ♖c7 20.♘xc8 ♞xc8 21.c4±

**14.♘e2**

14.cxd4 has done well in correspondence games, but it is safer to develop and castle. I don't see the need to be a maximalist here.

14...dxc3 15.0–0N

White has a safe king and an extra exchange. It is obvious that he stands slightly better, but it is useful to check a few more moves.

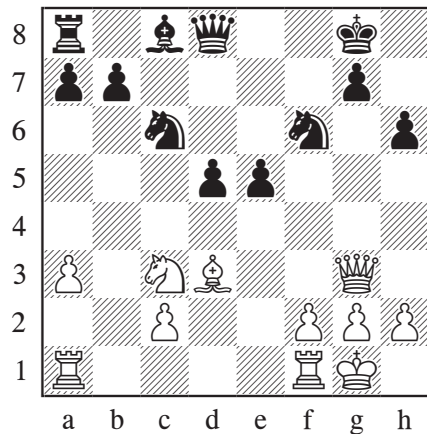
By the way, 15.♘xc3 is an equally valid move order which occurred in the game that will soon be quoted. However, I prefer the immediate castling, if only to tempt a careless opponent into making a fatal error – see the next note.

15...♘c6

15...d4? does nothing but gift White another pawn: 16.♞ad1 ♘c6 17.♙b5+–

16.♘xc3 e5

Without this Black will have no counterplay. Here I found an improvement over the game I. Smirnov – Polivanov, Lvov 2007.



17.♞fe1!N a6

17...♖c7? 18.♙b5±

In the event of 17...e4 18.♙b5 the pawns will be easily blocked.

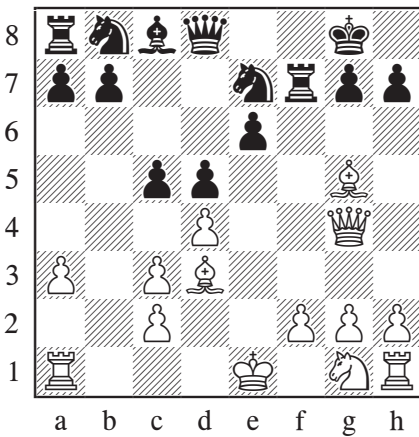
18. ♖xe5!?

The simplest way to continue. Trying too hard to stay ahead on material is never a great strategy.

18... ♜xe5 19. ♖xe5±

White has relinquished his extra material, but his superior pieces and better structure promise him a far easier game.

C) 10... ♖f7



11. ♖h5

Provoking a weakening of the enemy kingside. We will consider two replies. C1) 11...h6?! has been more or less refuted, but it needs to be covered all the same. The correct reply is C2) 11...g6.

C1) 11...h6!?

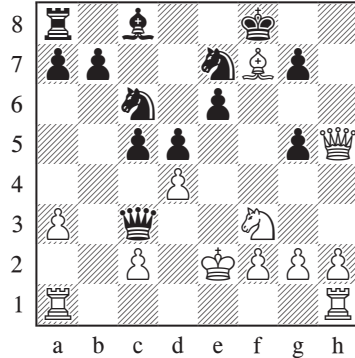
Even though this line has a justifiably bad reputation, White needs to know exactly how to punish it.

12. ♜f3!

The immediate 12. ♜h7† gives Black an extra option: 12... ♜f8!?. 13. ♜g6 (13. ♜xe7† is possible, but I wouldn't want to give my dark-squared bishop away so easily. 13... ♖xe7 14. ♜f3 ♜d7⇒) 13... ♖a5! It is not easy to prove anything for White.

12... ♜bc6 13. ♜h7† ♜xh7

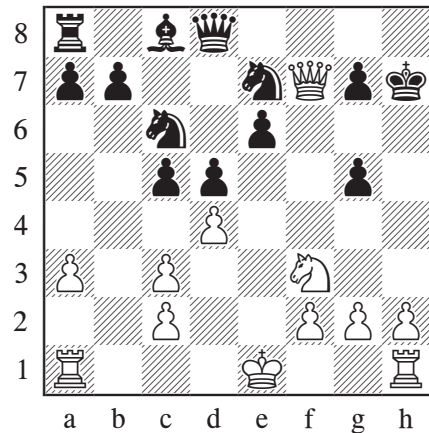
13... ♜f8 is no problem here. 14. ♜g6 White is not obliged to enter this forced variation, but on this occasion it ends well for him. 14... ♖a5 15. ♜xf7 ♖xc3† 16. ♜e2 hxg5



17. ♖hd1! The simplest, bringing the king to safety via f1. 17... ♜xd4† 18. ♖xd4 cxd4 19. ♖e1± Van Delft – Wempe, Hoogeveen 2008. The king goes to f1 next, and Black is in deep trouble.

14. ♖xf7 hxg5

At this point I found a nice way to improve over existing theory.



15. h4!

Most games have continued 15. ♜xg5† ♜h6 16. ♜xe6 (or 16.0–0–0). It must be said that White has the better chances, with rook

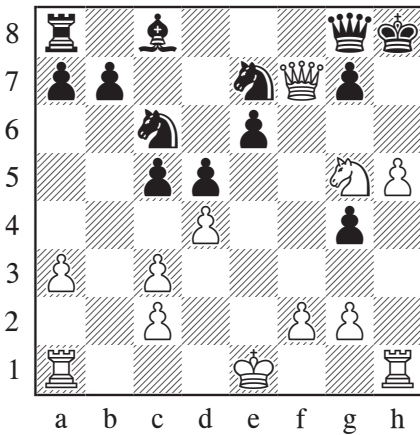
and two pawns versus Black's two knights. Nevertheless, Black has a fighting chance. The text move is a bit more complicated, but the reward is a forced win for White after correct play.

15...g4 16.h5!

16.♘g5† has been played, but after 16...♖h6! 17.♙f4 ♘g6 Black saves the day.

16...♙g8 17.♘g5† ♖h8

Now 17...♖h6? 18.♙f4 just loses for Black, as the knight does not have the g6-square.



18.♙g6!!N

18.h6 gave White no advantage in BlackPanther – ETC_Chess, Internet 2005.

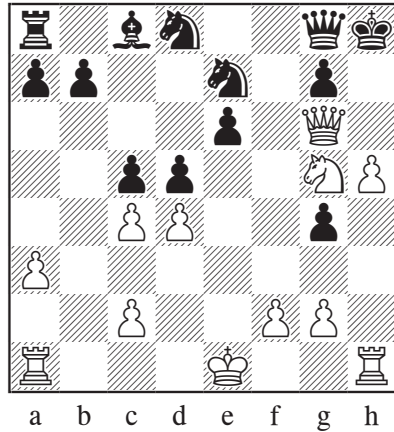
Placing the queen en prise is aesthetically pleasing, but the real question is whether White can break through afterwards. The immediate threat is a check on f7, so Black's reply is forced.

18...♘d8

Initially, even the computer fails to find a way forward for White. However, the key is to realize that Black finds it virtually impossible to remove the queen from g6; even after ...♘d7-e8, White can just leave it hanging. In the meanwhile, White has enough time to bring

his a1-rook into battle. The most important thing is to open files, which explains the next amazing move.

19.c4!!

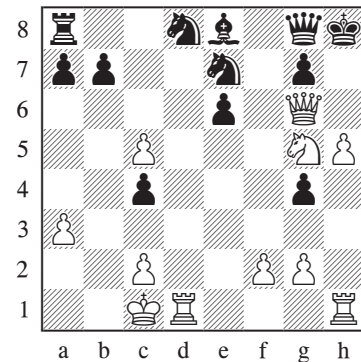


19...♘d7

Other moves are no better:

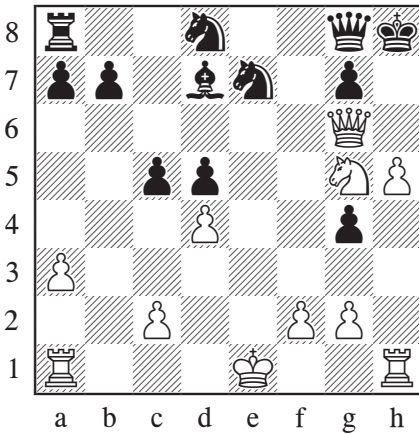
19...cxd4 20.♞d1 ♘d7 (20...e5 21.cxd5 ♘f5 22.d6+-) 21.cxd5 exd5 22.♞xd4+- followed by ♞f4-f8.

19...dxc4 Now that the d-file is opened, White can go after the d8-knight with: 20.0–0–0 ♘d7 21.dxc5 ♘e8



22.♞xd8! ♞xd8 23.♘xe6+- Intending a beautiful finish with h5-h6!

20.cxd5 exd5



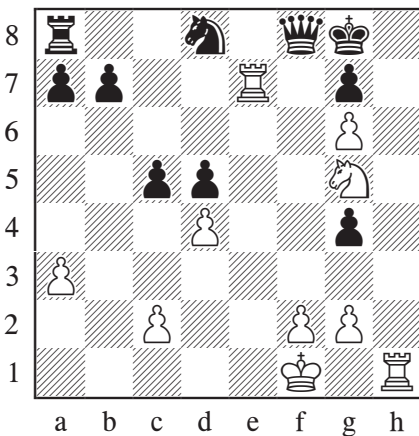
21. ♔f1!!

The white rook is coming to the e-file. That much is obvious, but the crucial thing is to anticipate Black's defence and choose the right square for the king.

Let's see the problem with the alternative: 21. ♔d2 (21.0-0-0 is similar.) 21... ♗f5 22. ♖ae1 ♜f8! The key defensive move. 23. ♖xe7 ♗xg6 24. hxg6 ♕g8 25. ♖f7 ♖xf7 26. gxf7 † ♜xf7 27. ♖xf7 ♔xf7 28. dxc5 The endgame is drawish, although some play remains.

21... ♗f5 22. ♖e1 ♜f8 23. ♖xe7 ♗xg6 24. hxg6 † ♕g8

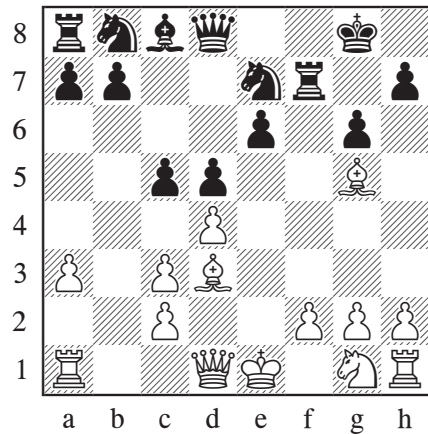
Black uses the same defensive approach as in the above note, but with the king on f1 White has a beautiful way to end the game.



25. ♖e1!+-

Black is powerless against the simple threat of ♖h7, trapping the queen due to the potential mate on the back rank. If the knight leaves d8 then White has ♖f7. Either way, White will win the queen and be left with an extra exchange.

C2) 11...g6 12. ♖d1



Having provoked some weaknesses, the queen returns home to regroup. Here there are two main lines to consider: C21) 12... ♖bc6 and C22) 12... ♜a5.

C21) 12... ♖bc6 13. ♖f3 ♜f8

13... ♜a5 transposes to the later variation C223.

14. h4!?

Black's set-up has been tested in a huge number of games. The almost universal reaction has been 14.0-0 c4 15. ♗e2 h6 16. ♗c1, with White looking to activate the bishop on a3, while Black tries to do something on the kingside or in the centre. Although White has decent chances for an edge here, it would seem a pity if he had to beat such a hasty retreat with his pieces, especially as his plan in no way utilizes the gaping dark-square holes in Black's kingside.