

Matthieu Cornette

The Complete Ragozin



Chess
Evolution

Cover designer
Piotr Pielach

Typesetting
i-Press <www.i-press.pl>

First edition 2017 by Chess Evolution

The complete Ragozin
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ISBN 978-615-80713-0-7

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Printed in Hungary

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KEY TO SYMBOLS

=	Equality or equal chances
±	White has a slight advantage
∓	Black has a slight advantage
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
∞	unclear
∞̄	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
↑	with initiative
→	with an attack
Δ	with the idea
□	only move
N	novelty
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
+	check
#	mate

PREFACE

The Ragozin opening is named after one of its first contributors, Viacheslav Vasilyevich Ragozin (1908–1962). He was a Soviet grandmaster and became the World Correspondence Chess Champion in 1959.

I started to play this opening back in 2007 and I have used it ever since. It's a perfect complement to my main opening against 1.d4, the Nimzo-Indian. Over the last decade this line has become highly fashionable at the top level, with Magnus Carlsen, Vishy Anand, Anish Giri, and Levon Aronian, to mention only a few of the elite grandmasters, playing it regularly.

The theory surrounding the Ragozin has developed very fast, but I have never stopped updating my files, and I am still amazed by how good this opening is.

I thought it was time for me to share with you all the secrets of my favourite and most-solid line; relatively easy to play, with a good positional background, but somehow almost always forgotten by the chess literature.

I apologize in advance if sometimes I push certain lines a bit too far, but I always have a desire to find the truth even if it's not really possible. In any case, everybody can decide by themselves where to stop.

Do not worry, I am myself far from remembering everything from this book, and I doubt anyone can learn all the lines.

Have a good read and I hope you will enjoy this book.

Cornette Matthieu
Bordeaux, January 17th, 2017.

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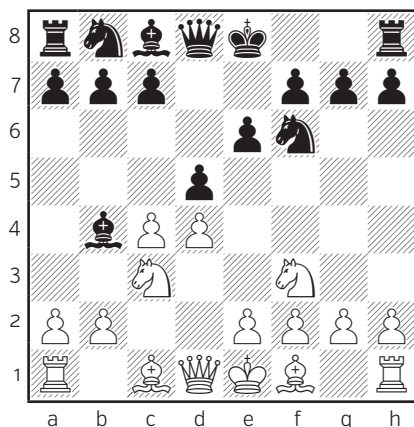
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INTRODUCTION

When I started to write this book, one of the first problems I encountered was to find the right way to order it or to divide it. As you will notice, there is often more than one way to get to a certain position and I have tried to make it as clear as possible via which move-orders the line can be reached.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 d5 4.♖c3 ♕b4



This is the basic position of the Ragozin opening. White now has a wide choice of moves. I decided to divide this book into seven parts.

The first part is about the ♖a4+ system. It can start with 5. ♖a4+ directly or with 5. ♗g5 first, then 5...h6 6. ♗xf6 ♕xf6 7. ♖a4+. White's idea behind this check is to drive the black knight from b8 to c6, blocking the c-pawn which otherwise often counterattacks White's centre with a ...c7-c5 push. Instead, Black often reacts with ...dxc4 and ...e6-e5 at the right moment.

Part 2 introduces the ♖b3 system. As in the first case, it can start either with 5. ♖b3 directly or after 5. ♗g5 h6 6. ♗xf6 ♕xf6 7. ♖b3. Black reacts with ...c7-c5 in both cases.

Part 3 is about the 5.cxd5 exd5 line, where I analyse not only 6.Bg5, the main line, but also other 6th moves.

In Part 4 I cover the 5. ♖g5 h6 line. If the bishop retreats to h4, Black can take on c4 and play a good version of the Vienna variation, and if 6. ♖xf6, it brings us to a fashionable line.

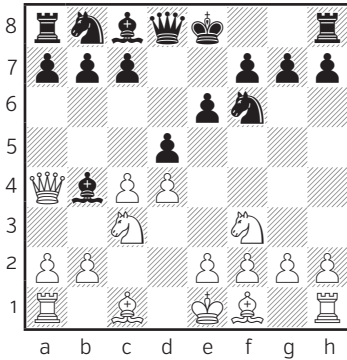
In Part 5 I analyze all the different White 5th moves which transpose to the Nimzo-Indian. 5.e3 is of course the main move, but for example 5.g3 is also a decent possibility. And finally, the last part of this book is about what I call the 'Accelerated Ragozin': 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3. ♘c3 ♖b4. It's a move-order I have used quite often myself and most of the time it reaches the 'normal' Ragozin, even if White has different options. Black's main idea behind this move-order can be to avoid the Nimzo-Indian with 4. ♙c2 or the line with 4.e3 followed by 5. ♘ge2. If White tries to play these continuations in the accelerated Ragozin, Black has a strong ...dxc4 response.

Part 1.

System with ♔a4+

In this first section we will study every system where White plays ♔a4.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 d5 4.♖c3
5.♕b4 5.♕g5
5.♔a4+

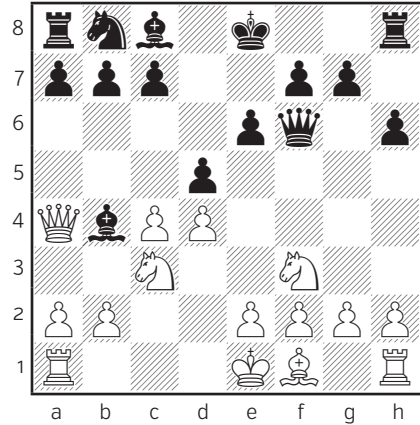


This move is the start of one of the main branches of Ragozin. The idea is to drive the ♘b8 to c6. It's not the most natural square for the knight because it's in front of the c7-pawn. On the other hand, the ♔a4 is also not ideally placed and Black will have an advantage in development. 5...♖c6 6.e3 (6.♗e5 will be studied in Chapter 4. 6.a3 will be studied in Chapter 4. 6.♕g5 h6 7.♕xf6 ♔xf6 is another move-order to reach Chapters 1 and 2, but also Chapter 3 if White delays taking on d5. 6.cxd5 exd5 is the start-

ing position of Chapter 3.) 6...o-o will be studied in Chapter 5.

5.cxd5 exd5 6.♕g5 h6 7.♕xf6 ♔xf6
8.♔a4+ ♗c6 is another path to reach Chapter 3.

5...h6 6.♕xf6 ♔xf6 7.♔a4+



This is a fashionable move-order.

7...♖c6 8.e3

8.♗e5 will be studied in Chapter 1.

8.a3 will be studied in Chapter 1.

8...o-o 9.♕e2

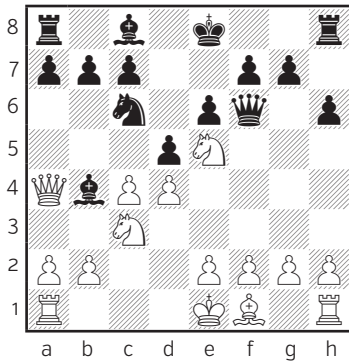
The most fashionable line nowadays, which will be carefully analyzed in Chapter 2. 9.♖c1 will be studied in Chapter 1.

9.a3 will be studied in Chapter 1.

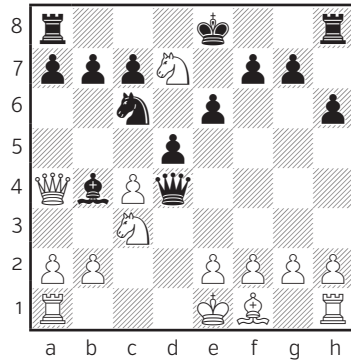
■ Chapter 1.

5. ♖g5 h6 6. ♖xf6 –
7. ♔a4+ 8. XXX 9. XXX

1. d4 ♘f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♘f3 d5 4. ♘c3
♙b4 5. ♖g5 h6 6. ♖xf6 ♚xf6 7. ♔a4+
♘c6 8. e3
8. ♘e5?



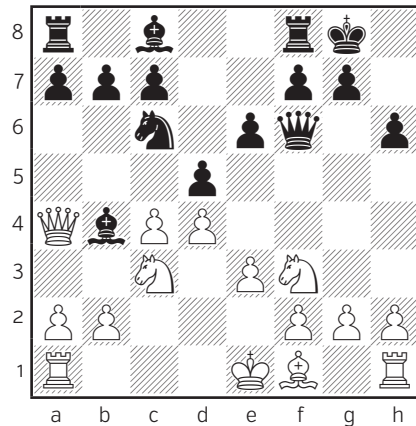
This move looks tempting, but it's just a mistake giving Black a good advantage. 8... ♘d7! 9. ♘xd7 (9. ♘xc6 ♘xc3+ 10. bxc3 ♘xc6 11. ♔b4 dxc4 Opening up lines for the bishop. 12. ♚xc4 (12. e3 0-0-0 and Black was simply better, as White could not develop easily due to the pressure on the g2-pawn: Van der Stricht, G (2468)-Atalik, S (2570) Plovdiv 2003) 12... 0-0-0 and Black had a very big advantage in development: Rmus, A (2398)-Delchev, A (2669) Bijelo Polje 2005) 9... ♚xd4! The kind of move which is easy to miss!



10. ♚c2 (10. ♚c1 ♚xc4! Threatening ... ♘xc3 winning the queen. 11. ♚c2 ♘xd7-+ and Black simply had two pawns up for nothing in the game Teixeira, R (2353)-Mitkov, N (2547) Rio de Janeiro 2000) 10... ♚xc4! as the white knight is trapped on d7 Black continues to collect the pawns 11. e3 ♚g4 and Black won quite easily in the game: Abhishek, A (2123)-Vishnu, P (2467) Dharamshala 2014. White is not even able to grab a pawn with his knight!

8. a3 ♘xc3+ 9. bxc3 0-0 10. e3 transposes to 8. e3 then 9. a3

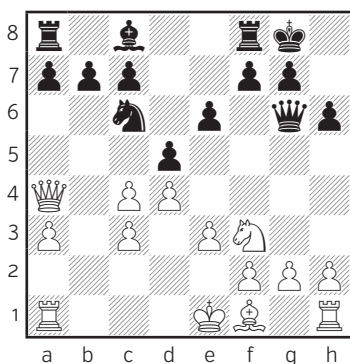
8... 0-0



9. ♖c1!?

Quite a fashionable move. Kramnik used it against Aronian in 2015, and in 2016 Wang Hao and Krasenkow played it. The idea behind this move is to be able to take on c3 with a rook and also delay the bishop development, which might be able to recapture the pawn on c4 in one move without losing an important tempo.

9.a3 ♗xc3+ 10.bxc3 ♖g6!?



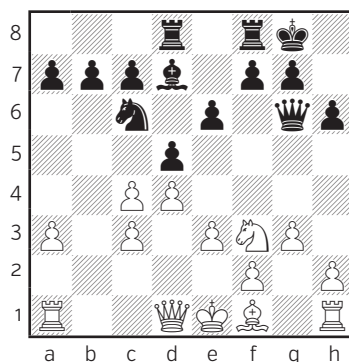
Black paralyzes White's kingside as the f1-bishop cannot move (10... ♗d7 is also a decent alternative. Black wants to play ... ♖e8 next followed by ... dxc4 and ... e5.) 11. ♖c1

a) 11. ♗e2 I was surprised to see that this move had been already played several times. 11... ♖xg2 12. ♖g1 ♖h3 13. ♖g3 ♖f5 14. 0-0-0!N dxc4 15. ♗xc4 ♖a5∞ Obviously, White has some compensation here, but pawn is a pawn and I believe that Black is fine.

b) 11.h4 with the obvious idea of h4-h5, getting rid of the annoying black queen. 11... ♗d7 12.h5 (12. ♖d1 dxc4 13. ♗xc4 e5!∞ Black had good play in: Miladinovic,I (2603)-Mitkov,N (2528)

Heraklio 2007) 12... ♖f6 13.cxd5 exd5 14. ♗d3 White has finally succeeded in developing his bishop, but his kingside is weakened now, and Black was totally fine after 14... ♗g4∞ in the game Van Wely,L (2695)-Pokorna,R (2348) Vlissingen 2001;

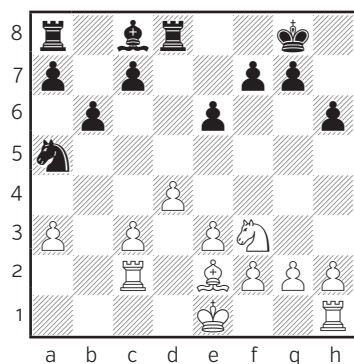
c) 11.g3 ♗d7 12. ♖d1 ♖ad8!N



With the idea of taking on c4 and playing ... e5. (12... dxc4!N is a good alternative 13. ♗xc4 e5! Exploiting the weakened light-squares on the kingside. 14. 0-0 ♖ad8= with a decent position) 13. ♗d3 (13.cxd5 exd5 14. ♗g2 ♖fe8 15. 0-0 b6=) 13... ♖f6 14. 0-0 (14. ♗d2 ♗a5=) 14... dxc4 15. ♗xc4 e5∞ and I like Black's position;

d) 11. ♗h4N can lead to a move repetition 11... ♖e4 12. ♗f3 ♖g6=;

11... ♖d8 12. ♖c2 has been played twice with a score of 2/2 for White which is quite surprising, as Black has a good position here: 12... ♖xc2 13. ♖xc2 dxc4 14. ♗xc4 b6 15. ♗e2 was played in the game Popov,V (2545)-Taimanov, M (2454) St Petersburg 2001, but here I suggest an improvement over the game: 15... ♗a5!N

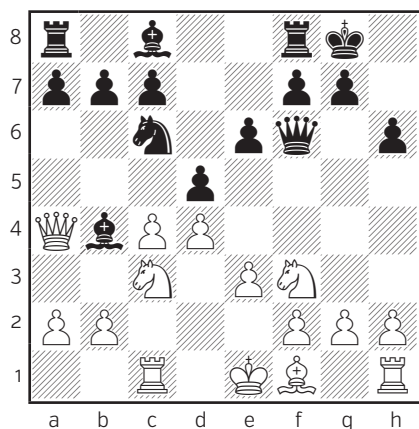


Black's plan is simple: ...♗b7 and ...c7-c5 16.♘e5 (After 16.c4?! c5♣ is even stronger than with a pawn still on c3; 16.♘d2 ♗b7 17.♙f3 ♗xf3 18.♘xf3 ♖ac8∞ followed by ...c7-c5) 16...♗b7 17.f3 (17.0-0 c5♣ and ...♖ac8 is coming next, with a pleasant position for Black) 17...♖ac8 18.♘c4 ♘xc4 19.♗xc4 c5= with at least equality.

9.♗d3 will transpose to Chapter 2, but it's actually less precise than 9.♗e2 because after 9...dxc4 the bishop is attacked and White has no choice but to take back the pawn directly;

9.♗e2 is the main move. It will be deeply analyzed in Chapter 2.

9.cxd5 exd5 See Chapter 3.



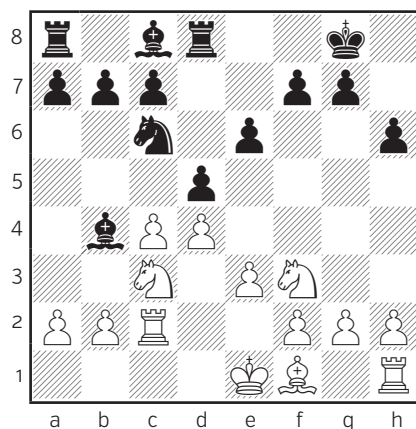
9...♗g6!?

Putting pressure on the g2-pawn leaves White with a lack of coordination. 9...♗d8 I played this move back in 2011 against the Spanish grandmaster Rivas Pastor. It's an interesting alternative but I prefer the text move.

10.♗c2

10.h4 has been played three times but it looks superficial to me. 10...a6!?N is a good move. Black is threatening to take on c4. 11.h5 (11.♗c2 ♗xc2 12.♖xc2 dxc4 13.♗xc4 ♗d6= followed by ...e6-e5) 11...♗f5 12.cxd5 (12.♗e2? is a mistake due to 12...dxc4!♣ simply winning the pawn, followed by ... b7-b5; 12.♗b3 dxc4 13.♗xc4 b5 14.♗e2 ♗b7∞ with complex play) 12...exd5 13.♗d1 (13.♗e2 ♗d6!? with the idea being to play ...♘e7 14.♘b5 leads to a forced draw: 14...axb5!? 15.♗xa8 ♗d7 16.♗xb7 ♖b8 17.♗a6 ♖b6 18.♗a8+ ♖b8=) 13...♘e7 14.♗d3 ♗e6 15.♙f1 ♗d6= with a balanced position

10...♗xc2 11.♖xc2 ♖d8



This is the move chosen by the elite players. Aronian has already played this position three times and recently Hammer and Movsesian have both tried it. 11... ♖d6!?N has never been played but I believe it is a good alternative to the main move.

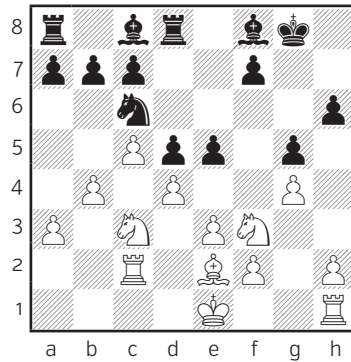
12.a3

12.c5 doesn't promise anything after the thematic 12...e5 13.a3 ♖f5!?N (13... ♖xc3+ has been played in one existing game in the database but it looks rather strange to me not to insert ... ♖f5 first 14. ♖xc3 exd4 15. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 16. exd4 ♖e8+ 17. ♖e3 ♖d7= Shen,Y (2459)-Zhao,X (2527) China 2015) 14. ♖c1 ♖xc3+ 15. ♖xc3 (15.bxc3 f6∞) 15...exd4 16. ♖xd4 ♖xd4 17. exd4 ♖e8+=

12... ♖f8 13. ♖b5

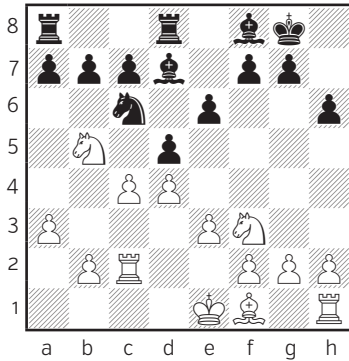
With the idea of forcing the ♖d8 to an awkward square. 13. ♖e2 ♖a5 has been played in the most recent game by Hammer (13... ♖e7!? was Aronian's choice 14.0-0 c6 might look passive but is okay for Black 15.b4 (15. ♖e5 f6 16. ♖f3 b6= followed by ... ♖b7) 15...dxc4 16. ♖xc4 ♖d5= and Black had a good position in the game Radjabov,T (2713)-Aronian,L (2803) Beijing 2013) 14.c5 (14.cxd5 exd5=) 14... ♖c6 If such a theoretician as Hammer chose to play this way, I can be assured that my idea with 11... ♖d6!?N 12.c5 ♖e7 is correct. 15.b4 g5 I am not entirely sure that it's the best way to play for Black but nevertheless I want to keep this game in the book because

Black played a real masterpiece. (15... a6= looks quite logical) 16.g4 e5!



When holding the two bishops it's always important to open the position 17. ♖xe5 (17. ♖b5 exd4 18. ♖fxd4 (18. ♖xc7 d3! 19. ♖xd3 ♖xg4 20. ♖d4 ♖xd4 21. exd4 ♖ac8 22. ♖b5 a6 23. ♖g1 f5 24. ♖c3 ♖g7∞ with a sharp and very unclear position. However, Black's play looks easier.) 18... ♖xd4 19. ♖xd4 c6= with equality.) 17... ♖xe5 18.dxe5 a5! Black has sacrificed a pawn for the initiative and now has to continue playing actively to keep up the pressure. 19.0-0 (19.b5 ♖e6∞ followed by ...d5-d4 gives Black an edge) 19...axb4 20.axb4 c6 21. ♖d1 ♖g7 22.f4 ♖e8 23. ♖f2 gxf4 24. exf4 f6! Once again Black tries to open as many lines as possible. 25. exf6 ♖xf6 26.h3 ♖a3 27. ♖d3 ♖g7 28. ♖f3 ♖e6 29. ♖d1 ♖a4 30. ♖b3 d4 31. ♖c4 ♖a2! A very nice tactical blow. 32. ♖xa2 (32. ♖c1 ♖xc4 33. ♖xc4 ♖h2∞) 32... ♖xc4 33.g5 ♖xb3 34.gxf6+ ♖xf6 35. ♖d2 ♖xd1+ 36. ♖xd1 ♖e3+-+ and Black easily won the rook endgame in Krasenkow,M (2610)-Hammer,J (2695) Stockholm 2016.

13... ♖d7
13... ♙d7!?N



I'm quite surprised to see that even this move is possible.

a) 14. ♖xc7 this tempting move turns out to be not so good: 14... ♜ac8 15. ♖b5 dxc4! 16. ♙e2 (16. ♙xc4? ♖a5!-+ and White cannot protect all the pieces; 16. ♜xc4? a6 17. ♖c3 b5-+ trapping the rook) 16...a6 17. ♖c3 b5♣ and Black is better.

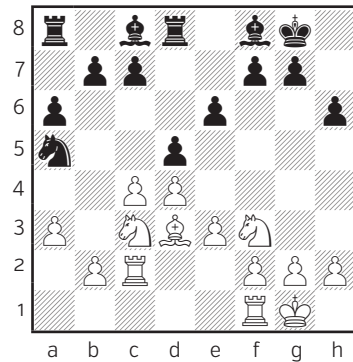
b) 14. ♙e2 is harmless 14...a6 15. ♖c3 dxc4 16. ♙xc4 b5 17. ♙e2 b4 18. axb4 ♖xb4 19. ♜c1 c5∞ Black is fine.

c) 14. cxd5! is a bit smarter 14...exd5 15. ♙d3! (15. ♖xc7 is still not dangerous for Black: 15... ♜ac8 16. ♖b5 (16. ♖xd5? ♙f5-+) 16... ♖a5! 17. ♜xc8 (17. ♜d2 a6 18. ♖c3 ♙xa3 19. ♖xd5 ♙f8 20. ♖c3 ♖b3 21. ♜d1 ♙b4♣ and Black will at least win back the pawn; 17. ♙d2 ♙f5! and here White's best chance is to give up an exchange: 18. ♖c3 ♙xc2 19. ♙xc2 a6♣) 17... ♜xc8 18. ♙d1 a6 19. ♖c3 ♙xa3 20. ♙c2 ♙b4 21. ♙d3= with a balanced position) 15... ♜ac8 16. o-o a6 17. ♖c3 ♖e7= and

I don't believe White has anything here.

14. cxd5

14. ♙d3 a6 15. ♖c3 ♜d8 (15... ♖e7 even if Aronian played this move against Kramnik, V (2783)-Aronian, L (2777) Zürich 2015) 16. o-o was played in Meissner, R (2065)-Klim, A (2009) LSS email 2012, and here I suggest 16... ♖a5!?N

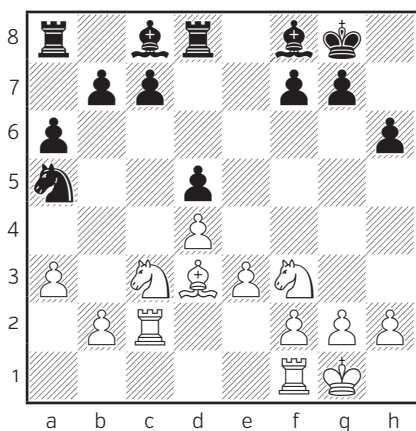


17. c5 (17. cxd5 exd5 see 14. exd5) 17... ♖c6 18. b4 (18. ♜d1 g5 19. ♙e2 ♙d7 20. b4 f6 21. g4 ♖e7= with an equal position) 18...g5 19. h3 ♙g7= followed by ...e6-e5 with equality.

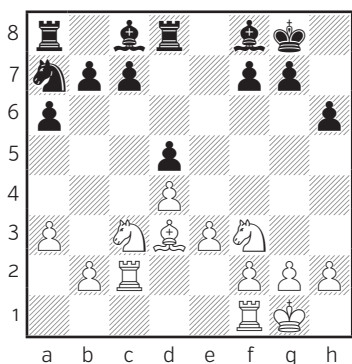
14...exd5 15. ♙d3 a6 16. ♖c3 ♜d8

16... ♖a7 is also fine 17. ♙f5 (17. o-o ♜d8 see 16... ♜d8 then 17... ♖a7) 17... ♜d8 18. ♙xc8 ♖xc8 19. ♖e5 c6 20. ♖a4 ♜e8= with equality in Wang, H (2717)-Movsesian, S (2653) Huaian 2016.

17. o-o ♖a5!?N



I like this move. Black can stop the advance of White's queenside by playing ...b7-b5 or ...♖b3. The move ...♗c4 is also a good option. See 14.exd5 17...♗a7N

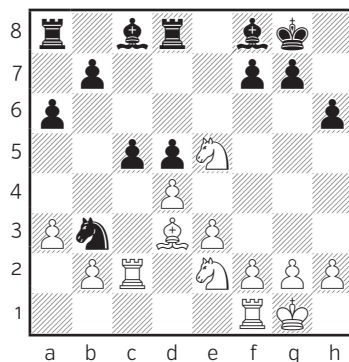


is a safe option (see 16...♗d8 then 17...♗a7) 18. ♖fc1 c6 19. ♗a4 (19. ♗e5 ♗b5 20. ♗a4 ♖d6 21. ♗b6 ♖b8=) 19... ♖d6 20. ♗b6 ♖b8 21. h3 (21. ♗xc8 ♗xc8 with an equal position) 21... ♖e8 22. b4 g6 23. ♖b2 ♖g7 24. a4 ♖e6= and I don't see any plan for White;

17...♗b8 has been played twice in this position. It is of course possible, but I prefer another square for the knight.

18. ♖b1!?

Quite a smart move. White wants to play b3 to take away the squares from the knight on a5. The a3-pawn will not be hanging due to b4 threats trapping the bishop. 18. ♗e5 ♗b3 19. ♗e2 (19. ♗a4 b5 20. ♗c6 ♖d6 21. ♗c5 ♖xc6 22. ♗xb3 ♖xc2 23. ♖xc2 a5=) 19...c5!?



This gives Black good play for the isolated pawn. (19...c6 is also fine 20. ♖d1 Taking control of the d2-square with the idea of playing ♖c3 (20. ♖c3 ♗d2 21. ♖d1 ♗e4∞) 20...♖e8! with the idea of ...♗c5 21. ♗f3 (21. ♖c3 ♗c5!∞) 21...♗a5=) 20.dxc5 (20. ♖c3 c4 21. ♖c2 ♗a5∞) 20...♗xc5 21. ♖d2 (21. ♖c3 ♗a4=) 21...♖d6 22. ♗f3 ♗xd3 (22...♗b3 23. ♖c2 ♗c5=) 23. ♖xd3 ♖f5=;

18.h3 b5 19. ♖b1 ♗c4 This is more logical, *although* 19...♗b3 is also possible 20. ♗e2 c5 21.dxc5 ♗xc5 22. ♗e1 g6 23. ♖d1 ♖b7 24. ♗d4 ♖dc8= even if Black has an isolated pawn, I believe his good pieces compensate for it. 20.a4 c6=;

18.b4?! is not a good idea because after 18...♗c4! Black has the initiative. 19. ♖xc4 (19. ♖a2 b5∞) 19...dxc4 20. ♗e5 ♖e6∞;

18.e4?! is premature: 18...dxe4 19. ♖xe4 (19. ♗xe4? ♗c6⚡ followed by ... ♗g4 and the d4-pawn will fall.) 19...c6∞ and only Black can be better here.

18...b5

18... ♗b3 19. ♖d1 ♗e6 20. ♗e2 c6 21. ♖c3 ♗a5 22. ♗f4 ♗g4 23. h3 (23. b4 ♗c4 24. ♗xc4 dxc4 25. ♖xc4 a5!↑ and Black has a good initiative for the pawn) 23... ♗xf3 24. gxf3 ♗d6 25. ♗e2 b5∞ with an unclear position.

19.b3

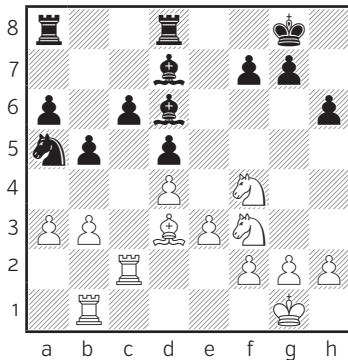
19.a4 ♗b3!∞

19...c6

19... ♗xa3?! 20. b4±

20.a4

20. ♗e2 ♗d6 21. ♗f4 ♗d7



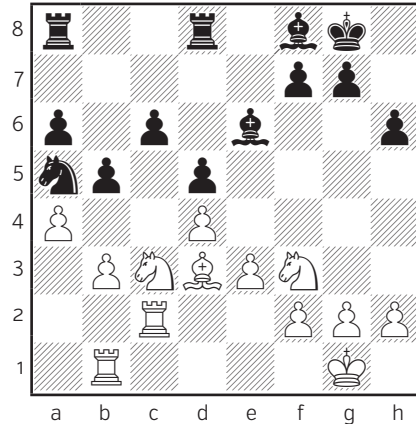
This position looks totally fine to me. 22.g3 ♗b7 23.a4

a) 23.b4 is always met by 23...a5∞;

b) 23. ♖a2 g5 24. ♗e2 (24. ♗h5 ♖f8 25. ♖g2 c5!?) 24...f6=;

c) 23. ♗e5?! ♗xe5 24. dxe5 ♖e8⚡; 23... ♖db8 24. ♖g2 f6 25. ♗h4 bxa4 26. bxa4 ♗a5= with an equal position

20... ♗e6



This position is quite complicated. I tried to play logical human moves aiming to guess how the game might continue, and I found no problems for Black. I provide the following lines just to illustrate how play might develop, but there is no need to try to remember them!

21.g3

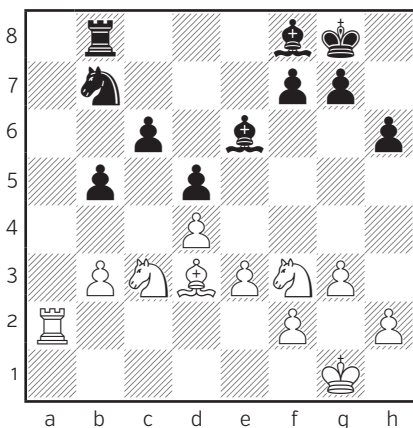
21. ♖cb2 ♗d6 22. ♖a1 ♗b7 It's not easy to see how White can play for an advantage here. 23. axb5 (23. b4 leads to simplifications after: 23...a5! Thematic 24. axb5 ♗xb4 25. ♗a2 cxb5 26. ♗xb4 axb4 27. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 28. ♗e1 ♗d6= and Black has no problems; 23. h3 b4 24. ♗e2 c5∞ and I like Black) 23...axb5 24. ♖ba2 ♖xa2 25. ♖xa2 b4 26. ♗e2 (26. ♗a4 ♖a8∞) 26...c5!? 27. ♖a7 (27. dxc5 ♗xc5 28. ♗c2 ♖c8 29. ♗fd4 g6 with a balanced position) 27... ♖b8 28. ♗d2 ♗d8 29. dxc5 (29. ♖a6 ♗f8=)

29... ♗xc5 30. ♖a1 ♗c8 transferring the bishop to b7 31. ♖f3 ♗b7 32. ♖ed4 ♖e6= with equality.

21... ♖db8 22. axb5

22. ♖g2 bxa4 We can delay this move, but the simplification is also fine. 23. ♖xa4 (23. bxa4 ♖xb1 24. ♖xb1 ♖b8∞) 23... ♖xb3 24. ♖e5! ♖b4! 25. ♖a2 c5! 26. dxc5 (26. ♖xc5 ♖xc5! It is important to have this move. 27. ♖xb4 ♖xd3 28. ♖xd3 ♗xb4 29. ♖xb4 a5 30. ♖c6 a4=) 26... a5 27. ♖b6 ♖e8 28. ♖c6 ♖xc5 29. ♖xb4 axb4 30. ♗e2 b3= with enough compensation.

22... axb5 23. ♖a2 ♖b7 24. ♖ba1 ♖xa2 25. ♖xa2



25... ♖d8!? 26. ♖a7 ♗b4 27. ♖e2 ♗d6 28. ♖f4 ♗c8=

Black's position is solid.

CONCLUSION

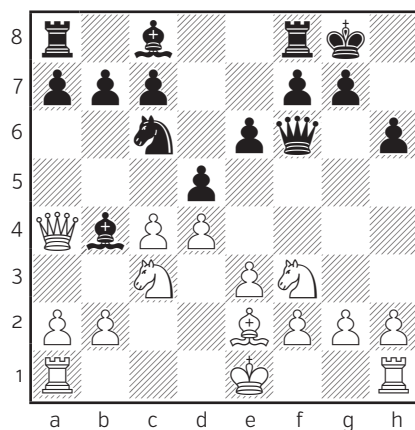
In this chapter we studied the lines where White delays the development

of the light-squared bishop. In general, Black benefits from it by playing ... ♖g6. In the 11. ♖c1 line, I like my novelty 11... ♗d6!?N, but the regular 11... ♖d8 is also totally fine. I suggest two ways to improve on the most recent games, with 15... ♖a5 or 15... ♖a7.

Chapter 2.

5. ♖g5 h6 6. ♗xf6 – 7. ♖a4+ 9. ♗e2!?

1. d4 ♖f6 2. c4 e6 3. ♖f3 d5 4. ♖c3 ♗b4 5. ♖g5 h6 6. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 7. ♖a4+ ♖c6 8. e3 o-o 9. ♗e2!?

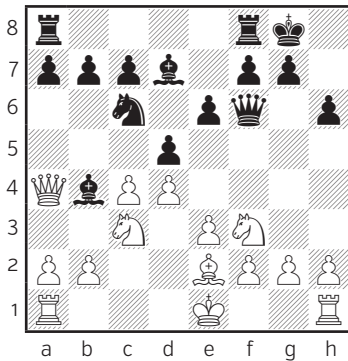


This set-up became very fashionable in 2010 after Ding Liren played it with success against Hou Yifan, and has been widely used since. I started to work on this line back then and have constantly kept my file up-to-date. I played this position myself twice with Black, against Markus Ragger and Laurent Fressinet, with varying success. In this line White is aiming

for a slight edge due to the passive black bishop on c8. After some considerations I decided to suggest two different ways of playing for Black. The first one is more solid and has been recently played by the elite players, whereas the second line I offer is the one I personally prefer.

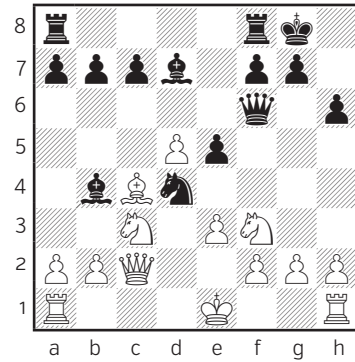
9...dxc4

The fashionable reply and quite a logical continuation considering the fact that White has already spent time on developing the bishop, and now will have to lose one tempo more recapturing the c4-pawn. 9...♙d7

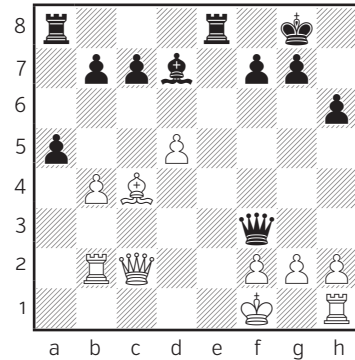


This is my personal preference. Black is threatening to move the knight with a discovery so White has to do something about his queen. 10.♙b3 gives the opportunity to take back on c4 with the queen after ...dxc4 (10.♙c2 dxc4 11.0-0 is the best and transposes to 9...dxc4 10.0-0 ♙d7 11.♙c2. (11.♙xc4 makes Black's life easier, as after 11...e5! 12.a3 (recently played by Sargissian but not very impressive):

a) 12.d5?! is not that good due to: 12...♘d4!



13.exd4 exd4 14.a3 ♖fe8+ 15.♙f1 dxc3 16.axb4 cxb2 17.♙b1 was played in Marchand,F (2259)-Inkirov,V (2440) Paris 2002, and here Black's play can be improved with: 17...a5! Black is a piece down, but White's weak king and undeveloped rook on h1 offer us more than enough compensation: 18.♙xb2 (18.♙xb2? fails due to a very nice trap: 18...♙xf3!



19.gxf3 ♙h3+ 20.♙g1 ♖e1+ 21.♙f1 ♖xf1#) 18...♙xb2 19.♙xb2 axb4 20.♙b1 ♖a3 preventing g2-g3 and making it difficult for White to finish the development 21.♘d4 ♖e4 22.♙b5 ♖xd4 23.♙xd7 ♖xd5 ♞ Black now has three pawns for the bishop, and active rooks, while White still needs time to finish his development;