

# Publisher's Foreword

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Creating the Grandmaster Repertoire series seemed a natural idea. There is a glut of opening books at the *Starting Out* level. These books have certainly been refreshing, but they have almost completely replaced high-level opening books.

As chess fans, we felt we were missing out, and because we can, we decided to do something about it.

The books in the Grandmaster Repertoire series are written by grandmasters, edited by grandmasters, and will certainly be read by grandmasters. **This does not mean that players who are not grandmasters cannot read them.** We have worked hard to make our books clear in their presentation and to make it possible for the readers to decide the depth to which they want to study them.

When we were young and trying to be up-and-coming, we understood that you do not have to remember everything in an opening book in order to use it. It is our hope that those readers who find this repertoire too extensive and detailed, will ignore many of the details. Even now that we are grandmasters, we see the bolded moves as what we want to memorize, and the notes as explanations and illustrations.

It is our conviction that you will eventually be more successful by playing the main lines, simply because they are based on better moves. Instinctively most players know this, but they fear losing to a prepared line and thus turn to unambitious systems, or unhealthy surprises. The opponent will not be able to use his preparation but, sadly, will not need it. These sidelines generally end in uninspiring positions almost automatically.

Possibly the main reason why high-level opening books have disappeared is the rise of databases. It has been assumed that there is no point in having traditional opening books anymore, as you can look it all up in the database. Some rather lazy authors have a system: collect a few hundred games from the database, give Fritz a few moments, then hit Print. Such books add nothing to chess literature. We have seen enough of them and have never wanted to add to that pile.

In these days of multi-million game databases, we all have access to information, what is lacking is understanding. In the Grandmaster Repertoire series, very strong players will share their understanding and suggest strong new moves that are in no one else's database.

We are excited about this new series and hope that the reader will share some of that excitement.

John Shaw & Jacob Aagaard

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# Key to symbols used

±	White is slightly better
∓	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
∞	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
∞	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
#	mate

## Bibliography

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*ChessBase Magazine*  
*Chess Informant*  
*Secrets of Opening Surprises*  
*TWIC*  
*Chess Today*

# Foreword

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**By Grandmaster Boris Gelfand**

Every chessplayer, from club level to World Champion, comes up against the problem of choosing an opening repertoire. How are you to keep your bearings amid the ocean of information – when hundreds of thousands of games are played worldwide every year, and the standard databases contain millions of them? Where are you to find the compass enabling you to obtain a position that suits your taste?

Should you perhaps do what some renowned specialists advise, and abandon all thoughtful study of the opening phase – or put all your trust in analysis by computer programs?

The readers of this book have hit upon the best way out of the dilemma: the brilliant theoretician and profound analyst Boris Avrukh is sharing his recommendations with them, in all the closed openings. Mikhail Botvinnik and Viktor Korchnoi used to divide chessplayers into those who create opening theory and those who utilize the results of these labours.

Boris Avrukh belongs to the small number in the former category. I have played in the Israeli team together with Boris on several occasions, and could personally observe what encyclopaedic knowledge this exceptional player possesses. Grandmasters of the highest rank have fallen victim to his opening preparation.

I am convinced that this will become a constant reference book for a great many readers.

Boris Gelfand  
World Championship Runner-Up 2007

# Foreword

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## By the Author

Years ago, when people were inquiring about my first move, or even looking at my games, they used to frown, because I always played 1.d4. It was not uncommon to be met with comments such as “Well, of course, this is pretty solid, but...” or “1.e4 will give you more chances to fight for an advantage,” and “Study 1.e4 and your results are sure to improve.”

Time has moved on, and it is not only because I am a grandmaster that these comments have stopped. Over the last few years the trend has changed and players such as Leko, Morozevich, Svidler, Grischuk and Ponomarev, who used to almost exclusively play 1.e4 (except for an occasional 1.♘c3 from Morozevich, of course) are all now relying on 1.d4 more and more for important games.

The most recent indicator of this trend was the match between Kramnik and Anand, where it was expected that Kramnik would rely on 1.d4, but a surprise that Anand, who otherwise exclusively plays 1.e4, also decided to open with the queen’s pawn. Actually you will have to go all the way back to 1995 before you find a World Championship match where 1.e4 won a game!

Alexei Shirov expressed the sentiment behind this slide in his usual ironic tone in *New In Chess Magazine* 5/2008, when he said that 1.d4 was “quite a popular weapon against the Petroff, Marshall and so on.” As White struggles to find an advantage against these defences and the Berlin Wall, many have found that life on the other side is indeed greener.

The reason for this is quite simple. The openings after 1.d4 are for good reason called closed, as it is harder to launch an immediate attack on the opponent when you have not opened up the development of the kingside pieces, as you do when you play 1.e4. Among other things, this leads to less forcing positions. For this reason, it is less likely that the opponent will manage to analyse the opening all the way to a position where there is not much play left, where the draw is close; the opportunity to outplay your opponent is kept alive.

Obviously there are still many 1.e4 games played at the top level, but increasingly 1.e4 is only employed against the more bloodthirsty grandmasters, who will not try to vacuum the pieces off the board from move 1.

So for this reason I am happy to be writing the Quality Chess repertoire book with 1.d4, while I feel a bit sorry for whoever will write the 1.e4 manual!

It was a big decision for me to begin writing an opening book. I have always liked annotating my own games and those of others, but at some level I had bought into the idea that, with the emergence of computers, opening books belong in the past, as it is now easy to get a reasonable overview of the theory of a specific line. Some authors write books that save the reader from doing this job, which is fine, but there are others, Sakaev and Marin spring to mind, who write books that go far beyond general knowledge. It was such a book I wanted to write. However, I do not have the literary skills of Mihail Marin and my way of thinking about chess is more concrete than his beautiful conceptual point of view. What I can do well is analyse, and I have spent the better part of a year analysing the repertoire I will present to the reader. I think it would be almost impossible for the readers to find as many new ideas as I have found in my work for this project. It is my sincere hope that these will be put to use and cause great frustration for those who face them. I have not willingly held anything back, but this experience has shown me that there are always new paths and that the scope for creativity in the opening is far from being exhausted.

Having finished the first volume of what was intended to be only one book, but turned out to be a double volume, I have to admit that I think I have succeeded in creating something special. This book might not flow like a novel, but I am hoping that the chess will be engaging.

As a player, the opening is one of my main strengths, but this does not mean that my memory resembles those of various fictional characters from colourful literature or from chess literature. The mind of a grandmaster is not much different from that of an amateur: the grandmaster has simply learned to apply certain skills, which give him an edge over the amateur. It is natural for the grandmaster to know more about openings than the amateur, just as it is normal for an Israeli to know more about Israel than, say, an American. However, this does not mean that an American cannot outperform an Israeli on a test about Israel. In a test, as in a game of chess, there are usually only twenty to forty questions to answer, and most of the extra knowledge of an Israeli or a grandmaster might be superfluous.

As anyone who has ever had to sit a tough exam will know, you remember the things you have seen recently better, and you remember them better if you have seen them often. For this reason top players will continuously revise their preparation before important games, which, by the way, is one of the reasons for the blunders you see in top tournaments: for the players the games start much earlier than for the audience!

By utilizing the preparation in this book you will be able to eliminate one of the grandmaster's advantages. Only a few players in the world will have better preparation as White. However, the point I am making is far more important than separating fact and fiction: I want to draw the reader's attention to the things that a well-prepared grandmaster does remember. Take the current World Champion, Vishy Anand, as an example. In an important game in the 2005 World Championship in San Luis he introduced a stunning novelty, 23. ♖d2!?, against Michael Adams, which it turned out he had prepared for his matches against Gata Kamsky back in the mid 1990s. When he was asked if he remembered

his analysis, his answer was that he remembered some key points and conclusions, but of course not the analysis. This is still very impressive of course, but Anand's brain does not work differently from the rest of us, even if it seems to be running on a new generation of processors!

What I would like the average reader to take away from this book is the general structure of an opening repertoire, which can be revisited again and again, which will not be refuted, even if it needs a bit of updating over the years. Grandmasters using this repertoire would probably be overjoyed if they could recall just the main lines, but because they work on their openings, they will often find for themselves the moves they have forgotten, because the understanding of the opening lasts longer.

There is another difference between grandmasters and amateurs that I did not consciously think about until I worked on this project. While I often play the Catalan and the Slav, it is very rare that I play against the Tarrasch, the Albin Counter Gambit, or other openings with lesser reputations. For the amateur these minor lines are more the norm than the exception. So while I might spend fifty pages on the main line of the Catalan, this does not mean that this line is three or four times more important than the Tarrasch, just that there are three to four times more topical games with it. For the amateur it is likely that the smaller chapters are more important than the bigger ones and I would ask the reader to think about which chapters he reads, and not just read the book from the first page to the last. This is not a novel and the book's structure is less important than each chapter's structure. And I promise, the villain in black will, if not die, then at least suffer horribly in every chapter!

This book is very detailed for several reasons. First of all, I think about chess in a very concrete way and the book expresses how I think. Secondly, chess is played by moves, and I found it acceptable to explain many of my ideas with moves, which also covers the third reason, which is my already stated limitation as a writer. I hope this level of detail will assist the reader in forming a deeper understanding of the opening, and maybe also leave a few traces of actual knowledge in his mind that can assist him at the board.

Before I explain why I chose the lines I did for this book, I would like to say that it has been an honour for me to cooperate with Quality Chess on this project, especially with Jacob Aagaard, who has helped me a lot with the practical side of writing my first book.

## **The Repertoire**

These two books are essentially based on my own repertoire. I have used more than ninety percent of the lines already, and the remaining ten I plan to use quickly before everyone knows that I have prepared them. The reason there is not a total overlap is a practical one. The theory in the Slav is advancing with such breathtaking speed that it does not make sense to recommend the most critical lines of the Meran or Moscow Gambit. Instead I have chosen an interesting new system with 4.e3, which has only become popular in recent years,



but has already won games at World Championship level.

With some obvious exceptions, the repertoire is based on putting the king's bishop on g2. This will be especially true in the second volume, but is already the case in this book, which spends more space on the Catalan than all the other openings combined.

This is a serious repertoire intended to trouble strong opposition. The lines are threatening enough to force Black to make a concession, but this concession will be minor rather than mate or major loss of material. In modern chess, these minor concessions are often space and exchanging a bishop for a knight, so in many variations you will read versions of "White is a little better because of his space advantage and bishop pair." Generally, the bishop Black surrenders will be the light-squared one.

## The Catalan

I introduced the Catalan to my repertoire about 8 years ago and it has brought me a lot of success. First and foremost, I started playing the Catalan because it limits the opponent's choice. There is no need to think about such openings as the Ragozin Defence, the Nimzo and Queen's Indian or the Queen's Gambit Declined. Also, there is something reassuring about playing the same five or six moves in the opening as White against almost everything, without feeling that you are letting go of an advantage; you certainly get the pieces on squares where you know what they are doing.

It is a common misconception that the Catalan is an opening where White is trying to achieve a slight edge and squeeze the life out of his opponent. This is no more true than it is for the Spanish Opening. In both cases Black has the possibility of taking a defensive stand and exchanging his chances of counterplay for the passive hope of equalizing. However, if Black is ready for a fight, so is White! The sharp lines in Chapters 6 and 7 only differ from the sharp lines of, say, the Marshall Attack by being less likely to end in a draw by force.

Besides the move order used in this book, 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3, the Catalan is also used against the Queen's/Nimzo-Indian set-up after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3, when 3...d5 4.♘f3 transposes to our book, while 3...c5 leads to Benoni positions and 3...♙b4† to the Bogo-Indian: openings that will be covered in the second volume.

## The Slav

As I mentioned, the choice to play 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 against the Slav was mainly a practical one. But it is also a line that fits in with the rest of the repertoire rather well. White is not seeking an immediate tactical confrontation, but the position is rich in positional ideas and it is quite likely that White will gain the advantage of the two bishops: something I always enjoy.

## The Queen's Gambit

When you play the Catalan you do not have to worry about the Queen's Gambit in the same way, as after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 we are right where we want to be. However, there are some sidelines White needs to know about. The most important of these was, to my surprise, the Tarrasch variation. This variation was deemed almost unplayable two decades ago, when Karpov created textbook examples as he outplayed the contender to his World Championship title, Garry Kasparov. However, in the lines with 9.♙g5 c4! I could find no advantage, as explained in Chapter 24. For this reason I chose an idea that was previously unknown to me.

## The Queen's Gambit Accepted

In this line there are two significant ways to play for an advantage. Either White plays the aggressive 3.e4, which I was thinking about employing in this book, or he plays 3.e3 and later on 7.♙b3!, as I eventually decided. The reason for this was that Quality Chess will publish a book by the Danish Grandmaster and well-known theoretician, Lars Schandorff, called *Playing the Queen's Gambit*. Lars will recommend 3.e4 in a repertoire that is based mainly on gaining space. I thought it would be a disappointment for those who decide to purchase both books if we covered the same ground, so I chose 3.e3. This choice was a fortuitous one, as I am very pleased with the lines I ended up covering against this opening, not least because I managed to mate the leading manual for Black, *The Queen's Gambit Accepted*, by the Chess Stars authors Sakaev and Semkov.

## Volume Two

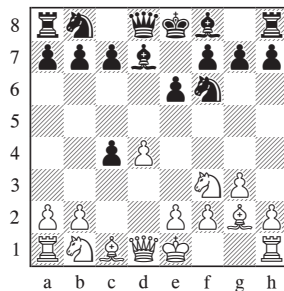
Volume Two should be published in the early spring of 2009. It will cover all the obvious Indian defences, such as the King's Indian, the Gruenfeld, the Benko Gambit and so on. We will also be looking at two lines that could equally well have been in this volume. They arise after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3, and now both 3...♙b4† and 3...c5 lead to positions which could either be classified under the Catalan, or under the Bogo-Indian and the Benoni. For aesthetic reasons I decided to leave them for the next volume. First of all, they do not arise after 1.d4 d5 and, secondly, I expect this will make the books closer to equal in length. If the latter of these observations will turn out to be true, only time will tell. Now it is time for me to get back to work on the second volume. I wish the reader all the best, and hope that he or she enjoys the book.

Boris Avrukh  
Beersheba, October 28th 2008

# Chapter 1

## The Catalan

### 4...dxc4 and 5...♘d7



### Variation Index

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7

6.♘e5 ♙c6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.0-0

A) 8...♙e7

B) 8...♘d5

C) 8...♙d7 9.e3 ♖b8 10.♙e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3

C1) 12...♙b4

C2) 12...♖b6

p 15

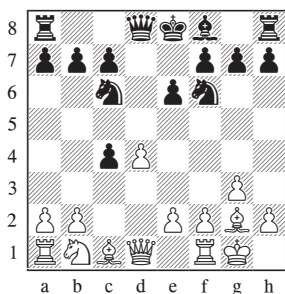
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p 20

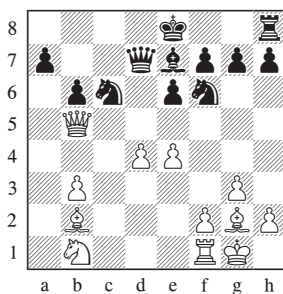
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Main line after 8.0-0



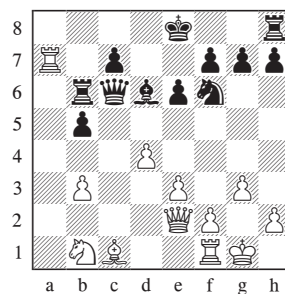
Three options; A, B and C

C1) after 17...♙e7



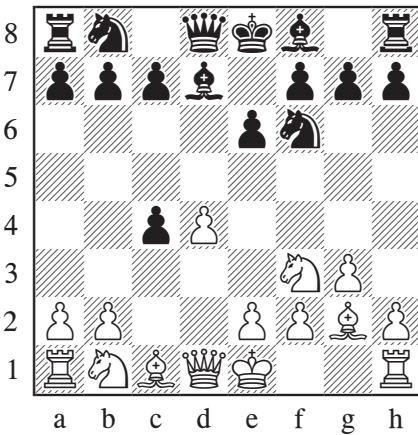
18.♖c1!N

C2) after 14...♙d6



15.♙d2!N

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7



Recently this has been a rare continuation, but in the late 1980s it was regularly employed by the chess elite. In general Black's idea is to play ...♙c6, but Black can react differently with ...c5 and ...♙c6, or even ...♙b5: everything depends on White's next move.

### 6.♘e5

This move is supposed to be the reason 5...♙d7 went out of fashion. White has tried other options as well, such as 6.♗c2 and 6.♘bd2, but Black was quite OK.

### 6...♙c6

This is a natural reaction.

Putting the other piece on c6 looks rather dubious:

6...♘c6 7.♘xc4

After this Black's light-squared bishop remains passive on d7.

7...♘d5

7...♙b4† 8.♘c3 ♘d5 9.♗d3 (Razuvaev's recommendation in *Chess Informant 57* was 9.0–0 ♘xc3 [Much worse is 9...♙xc3 10.bxc3 ♘xc3 11.♗d3 and White dominates with his pair of bishops, as Black cannot play 11...♘xd4 12.♞e1! ♘dxe2† 13.♞xe2

♘xe2† 14.♗xe2 0–0 15.♙a3 ♞e8 16.♞d1 ♗c8 17.♘a5 c6 18.♘c4!+– with total domination.] 10.bxc3 ♙xc3 11.♞b1∞ This is worthy of consideration.) 9...♗f6 10.e3 (There is no point in entering into the complications of 10.a3?! ♘xd4 11.axb4 ♘xb4 12.♗b1 ♘bc2† 13.♘f1 ♘xa1 14.♗xa1 ♘b3∞ with mutual chances.) 10...♗g6 11.♙e4 (11.e4 would also lead to an advantage for White) 11...♗h5 Razuvaev – Klovans, Bern 1993, and now simplest would have been 12.0–0 0–0 13.a3 ♙e7 14.♙g2 with a pleasant edge for White.

8.0–0 ♘b6

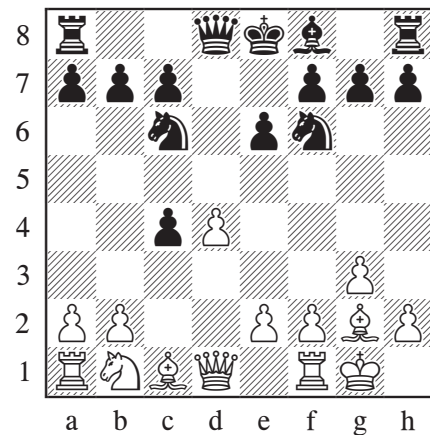
This position occurred in Babik – Husson, Stockerau 1991. I believe almost every knight's move should give White an advantage, but I prefer logical play:

9.♘ba3 ♙e7 10.e3 0–0 11.♙d2

White has stable Catalan pressure.

### 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.0–0

This move is stronger than 8.♗a4 ♗d7 when Black is alright after 9.♗xc4 ♘xd4 10.♙xb7 ♞b8 11.♙g2 ♙b4† as Black's dynamic play fully compensates for his weaknesses on the queenside and White's pair of bishops.



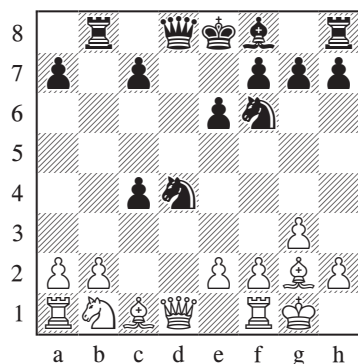
We have reached the first branching point. In this position Black has experimented with **A) 8...♙e7** and **B) 8...♘d5!?**, but the main

line continues to be C) 8...♙d7. In addition to these, we should also have a quick look at:

8...♘xd4?!

This has only occurred twice in practice, as Black quickly understood that after:

9.♙xb7 ♖b8 10.♙g2



Black's position is rather dubious.

10...♙d7

10...♙c5 11.♘d2 (11.e3 looks good as well) 11...c3 (after 11...0–0 12.♘xc4 White has a long-term advantage, thanks to his bishop pair and better pawn structure) 12.bxc3 ♘b5 13.♙c2± Black faced serious problems in Gulko – Korchnoi, Amsterdam 1989.

11.e3 ♘f5

11...♘b5 12.♙a4 regains the pawn with an advantage.

12.♙c2 ♙b5 13.♘d2 ♘d6 14.b3 cxb3?

This happened in Tratar – Plesec, Slovenia 1994.

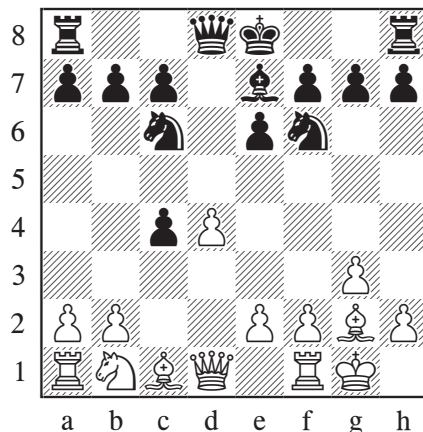
The lesser evil would be 14...♙e7, though White is clearly better after 15.bxc4 ♙a6 16.c5 ♘f5 17.♘b3 0–0 18.♖d1.

White could now grab a decisive advantage with:

15.♙c6† ♔d8 16.axb3

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7 6.♘e5 ♙c6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.0–0)

A) 8...♙e7



Once again White has a tough choice. Finally I decided to go with a new move.

9.♙a4

9.e3 seemed unclear to me after 9...e5! 10.♙xc6† (the endgame arising after 10.dxe5 ♙xd1 11.♖xd1 ♘xe5 12.♙xb7 ♖b8 13.♙g2 0–0 is fine for Black due to his activity, as in Gyorkos – Farago, Zalakaros 1994) 10...bxc6 11.dxe5 ♙xd1 12.♖xd1 ♘g4 (12...♘d7 13.♙d2! is better for White) 13.f4 ♙c5 with sharp play in Kallai – Anka, Balatonbereny 1995.

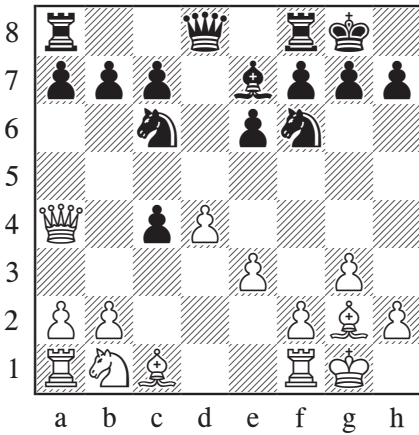
9...0–0

White is comfortably better after 9...♙d7 10.♖d1 0–0 11.♘c3 ♖fd8 12.♙xc4 With an obvious edge, Johnson – Stracy, Dunedin 1999.

Unfortunately Black's try to complicate the game falls short: 10...0–0 (instead of 10...0-0) 11.♘c3 ♘d5 12.♙xc4 ♘b6 13.♙b5! with a nice refutation if Black takes the central pawn: 13...♘xd4 14.♙a5 ♘b8 15.e3 ♘e2† 16.♘f1 ♘d5 17.♘xd5 ♘xc1 18.♖axc1 exd5 19.♖xd5 ♙d6 20.♖b5 b6 21.♙a6 ♙c8 22.♖xb6† and mate in two.

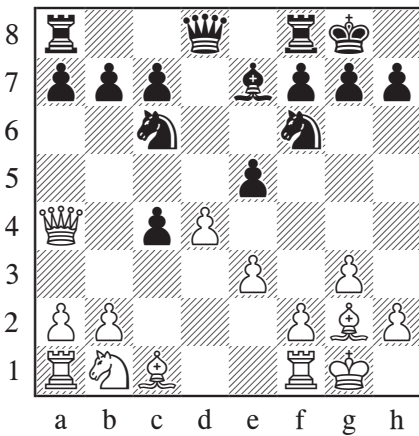
Or 10...♘b4 11.♙xd7† ♘xd7 12.♘a3± regaining the pawn with advantage.

## 10.e3



## 10...e5!N

This move has never occurred in tournament practice, nevertheless it is critical. White is obviously better after 10...d4 11.a3 d5 12.♖xc4± C. Horvath – Lukacs, Budapest 1994, or 10...a6 11.♖xc4± J. Horvath – Bokros, Szekszard 1996.



## 11.♞d1!

Other options are worse: 11.dxe5 ♞xe5 12.♙xb7 ♞b8 13.♙g2 ♖d7 with counterplay, or 11.♙xc6 bxc6 12.dxe5 ♞g4 with mutual chances.

## 11...exd4

After 11...♖c8 12.♖xc4 (There is no point in White giving up his light-squared bishop: 12.♙xc6?! bxc6 13.dxe5 ♞g4 14.f4 ♖e6 and Black will always have plenty of counterplay against White's king.) 12...exd4 13.exd4 ♙d6 14.♞c3 White is better, thanks to his strong light-squared bishop.

## 12.♙xc6

Black gets a pretty solid position after 12.♖xc4 ♞d7 13.exd4 ♞b6 14.♖f1 ♞b4! (14...♙f6 15.♞c3 ♖e7 16.♙e3± is better for White) 15.♞c3 c6 16.a3 ♞4d5 17.♖d3 ♞e8 18.♙d2 ♖d7 and Black is close to equality.

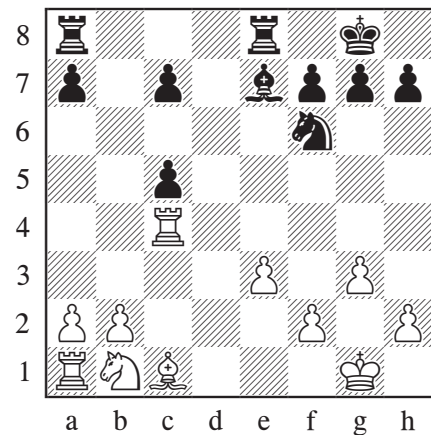
## 12...bxc6 13.♞xd4 ♖e8

White looks better in every line:

13...♞d7 14.♖xc6 ♞e5 15.♖e4 ♙d6 16.♞d2 ♞e8 17.♖g2 ♖f6 18.f4 ♞g4 19.♞e4 ♖g6 20.h3 ♞f6 21.♞xf6† ♖xf6 22.♞xc4± with a healthy extra pawn.

13...♙d6 14.♖xc6 ♖e7 15.♞d2 and White wins a pawn for nothing.

## 14.♞xc4 c5 15.♖xe8 ♞fxe8



## 16.♙f1

Less clear is 16.♞c3 ♞e8 17.b3 ♞d7 with counterplay.

16...♞ed8 17.♚e2 ♘d7 18.♞c2

This endgame is quite unpleasant for Black:

18...♗e5

18...♗f8 19.♗a3 ♗e6 20.♗c4 with a clear advantage.

19.♗a3 ♞ab8 20.♙d2

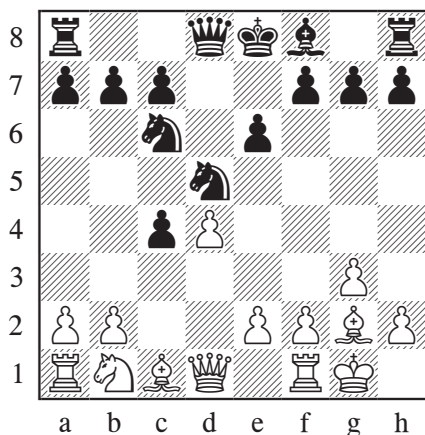
Black is going to suffer for the rest of the game.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7 6.♗e5 ♙c6 7.♗xc6 ♗xc6 8.0–0)

### B) 8...♗d5!?

This is a quite playable alternative though it has only occurred twice in tournament practice.

In my opinion White should continue with the same new move as in variation A:



9.♞a4N

I cannot see another way to fight successfully for an advantage.

In both games White opted for 9.e3, but after the most natural 9...♙e7 I cannot find anything special for White. (Less accurate is 9...♞b8 as in Konopka – Huber, Marbach 1994, when

White should simply continue 10.♞e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3 with fine compensation.) 10.♞c2 This position happened in Kilgus – Brehovsky, Aschach 2004, and Black could have simply held onto his extra pawn with 10...b5 and if 11.b3 ♗cb4 12.♞e2 c5! Black easily equalizes.

9...♞d6

9...♞d7 10.♞xc4 ♗b6 11.♞d3 0–0–0 12.♞f3!± and White's light-squared bishop should secure him an advantage.

9...♗b6 10.♙xc6† bxc6 11.♞xc6† ♞d7 and now White has a pleasant choice between: 12.♞xd7† (and 12.♞f3 ♙e7 13.♗c3 0–0 14.♞d1± and White is slightly better, due to Black's damaged pawn structure on the queenside) 12...♗xd7 13.e4± White's chances are slightly preferable in this endgame, thanks to his better pawn structure.

10.♞xc4

10.e3 ♗b6 11.♞c2 e5 leads to double-edged play.

10...♞b4

This is the point of Black's idea.

11.♞xb4

If 11.♙xd5 exd5 12.♞xd5 ♞xd4 13.♞f3 Black obtains reasonable play with 13...♙b4!.

11...♗dxb4 12.♗c3 ♗xd4

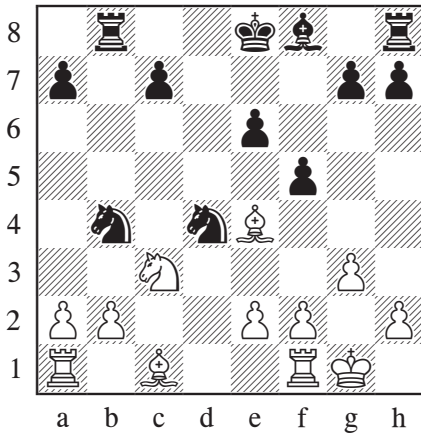
After 12...♗c2 13.d5! exd5 14.♞b1 (less clear is 14.♗xd5 0–0–0) 14...0–0–0 (Black cannot play 14...d4?! 15.♗b5 0–0–0 16.♙f4 ♙d6 17.♗xd6† cxd6 18.♞fd1 and White will regain the d4-pawn with a clear advantage) 15.♙xd5± White is better thanks to his pair of bishops.

13.♙xb7 ♞b8 14.♙e4

14.♙g2 ♗bc2 15.♞b1 ♙b4 with counterplay.



14...f5



15.♙e3!

Only in this way can White fight for the advantage: 15.♙b1 ♙d6 allows Black good counterplay. And now Black has a choice:

15...♜xe2†

This looks like Black's best option.

15...fxe4 16.♙xd4 ♜c6 17.♙e3 ♞xb2 18.♞ab1 White will regain the e4-pawn, keeping an obvious advantage in the endgame due to his better pawn structure.

15...♙c5 16.♙b1! (16.♞ad1 ♜xe2† 17.♜xe2 ♙xe3 is equal) 16...0-0 (White is clearly better after 16...♜d5 17.♜xd5 exd5 18.♙g2! ♞xb2 19.♞d1 ♞b4 20.♙xf5±) 17.♞d1 ♞fd8 18.♙g2 ♜bc6 19.♙d3 and White is better thanks to his bishops.

16.♜xe2 fxe4 17.♜c3

Less convincing is 17.♙xa7 ♞b7 18.♙d4 ♙f7.

17...♜d5 18.♙d4!

Black comfortably equalizes after 18.♙xa7 ♞xb2 19.♜xe4 ♞b4 followed by 20...♞a4.

18...♜f6

Or 18...♞b4 19.♞ad1 c5 20.♙e5 ♜b6 21.b3±.

19.♞fe1 ♙b4 20.♞e3!

White has the better prospects.

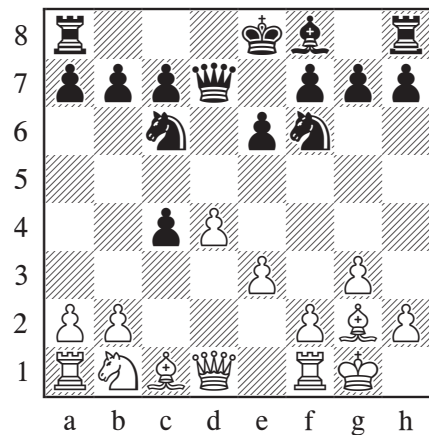
(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♜f3 ♜f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♙g2 ♙d7 6.♜e5 ♙c6 7.♜xc6 ♜xc6 8.0-0)

C) 8...♞d7

This is Black's main continuation.

9.e3

According to the old theory Black equalizes after 9.♜c3 ♜xd4 10.♙xb7 ♞b8 11.♙g2 ♙e7 12.e3 ♜b5 13.♞c2 ♜xc3 14.♞xc3 ♞b5! as in Yusupov – Karpov, Belfort 1988.



9...♞b8

Quite principled is

9...e5

but White is better after

10.dxe5 ♜xe5 11.♙xb7

In my opinion this move order is stronger than 11.♞xd7† ♜fxd7 12.♙xb7 ♞b8 13.♙g2 Skodvin – Tallaksen, Norway 2006, when after 13...♙c5 14.♜c3 0-0 15.♞d1 ♞fd8 Black has reasonable play.

11...♞b8 12.♙g2 ♞xd1

If Black continues 12...♙c5 White has



another interesting idea: 13.b3! 0–0 14.♙b2 ♜fd8 15.♞xd7 ♜fxd7 16.♜d2 cxb3 17.axb3 ♜d3 18.♙c3 and White is clearly better.

13.♞xd1 ♙d6

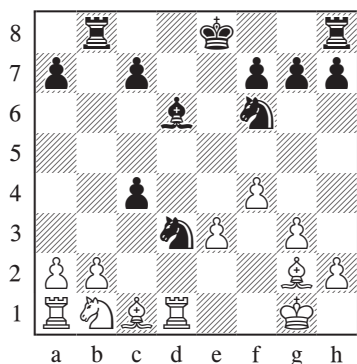
I also analysed 13...♙b4 then White has to play very energetically: 14.f4! ♜d3 15.♜d2 c3 16.bxc3 ♙xc3 17.♞b1 0–0 18.♞xb8 ♞xb8 19.♜e4 ♞b1 20.♜xc3 ♞xc1 21.♞xc1 ♜xc1 22.e4 and this endgame is very dangerous for Black. White's king will quickly move towards the centre, and Black's weak pawns on the queenside are an important factor.

14.f4N

In Cvitan – Vaganian, Neum 2000, White played 14.♜d2 and also achieved an advantage, but the text looks even more convincing:

14...♜d3

14...♜ed7 15.♙f3! (with the idea of 16.e4) 15...♜c5 16.♜d2 and White wins a pawn.



15.♜d2! ♜xb2 16.♙xb2 ♞xb2 17.♜xc4 ♞c2 18.♜xd6† cxd6 19.♞xd6 ♖e7 20.♞a6

With a technically winning position.

9...♜d5

This is not so interesting as on move 8, as Black has wasted time on ...♞d7.

10.♞e2 ♜b6

Certainly Black cannot play 10...b5 11.a4! and White regains the pawn with dividends.

11.♜d2 ♜a5 12.♜f3

Also interesting is 12.♜e4 ♜c6 13.♞d1 ♙e7

14.♙d2 0–0 15.♙c3 followed by ♜d2–c4. 12...♙d6 13.♙d2 ♜c6 14.♙c3 ♜e7

Or 14...0–0 15.♜d2 and White gets back the pawn with a clear advantage, thanks to his powerful light-squared bishop.

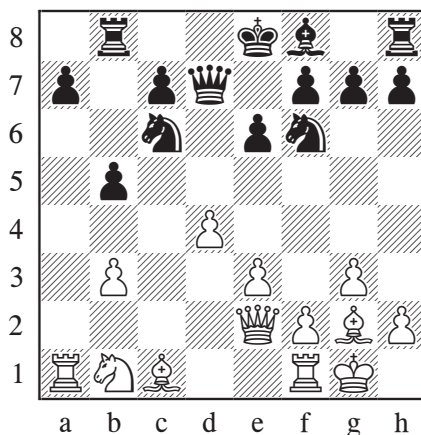
15.e4!

White had powerful compensation for the pawn in Slipak – Adla, Buenos Aires 1990.

10.♞e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3

Certainly not 11...♜a5?! which runs into 12.♙d2 b4 13.bxc4 with advantage to White.

12.axb3



At this point we have the final branching point of this chapter. Black has two main options: **C1) 12...♙b4** and **C2) 12...♞b6**.

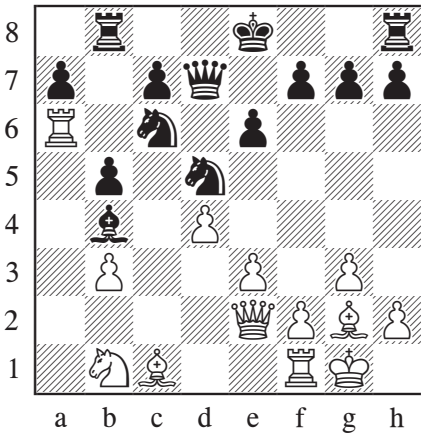
Simply bad is 12...♙e7? 13.♜c3 0–0 (Black can also play 13...b4, but after 14.♞c4! ♜d8 15.♜e2 c6 16.e4 Black is doomed to passive defence) 14.♜xb5 White has regained the pawn, and he maintained a clear positional advantage in Moutousis – Rozentalis, Athens 2007.

Once again there is 12...♜d5, but this is probably the worst moment for this move, as after 13.♙b2 White is threatening the unpleasant 14.e4 followed by 15.d5 when the

g7-pawn will be under attack. 13...b4 This position occurred in Orlov – Mijailovic, Novi Sad 1989. Now White could have effectively decided the game with 14.♖c4!N ♕e7 15.♞c1 ♜b6 16.e4 ♘c3 (otherwise 17.d5 comes with great effect) 17.♗xc3 bxc3 18.♕xc3 and Black most probably will lose the a7-pawn.

(1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♗f3 ♗f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♕g2 ♕d7 6.♗e5 ♕c6 7.♗xc6 ♗xc6 8.0-0 ♖d7 9.e3 ♜b8 10.♞e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3)

C1) 12...♕b4 13.♞a6 ♗d5



In this position I want to play:

14.♕b2!

White has tried to develop his bishop differently with 14.♕d2, but after 14...♕xd2 15.♗xd2 ♜b6 16.♞xb6 (16.♞fa1 0-0 17.♞xb6 cxb6 18.♞xb5 ♞c8 and Black should also be able to hold) 16...cxb6 17.♞xb5 ♗cb4 18.♞xd7† ♗xd7 19.♗c4 ♜b8 Black easily held this slightly worse endgame in Janjgava – Abramovic, New York 1990.

14...♞b6

14...0-0 15.♞c1 ♗a5 16.♞d1 and Black faces serious problems. For example, 16...c6 17.e4 ♗f6 18.♕c3 ♕xc3 19.♗xc3 b4 20.♗a4

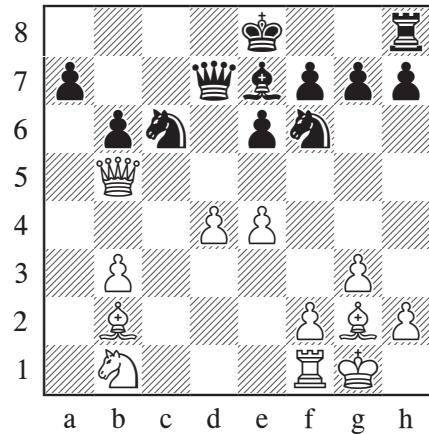
♞c7 21.♞d3!± and Black is helpless against White's idea of 22.♞c5.

15.♞xb6 cxb6!?

The wrong recapture. 15...axb6 was preferable, though White is better after 16.♞xb5 ♗a5 17.♞d3 0-0 18.e4 ♗f6 19.♞d1. Although Black's position looks solid, White has a pleasant edge thanks to his space advantage and bishop pair.

16.e4 ♗f6 17.♞xb5 ♕e7

White was threatening 18.d5. This position occurred in Hofland – Westerman, corr. 1990.



18.♞c1!N

This would have been very strong:

18...♗a5 19.♞c8† ♕d8 20.♞xd7† ♗xd7 21.♞a8! ♗xb3 22.♞xa7† ♕c7 23.d5!±

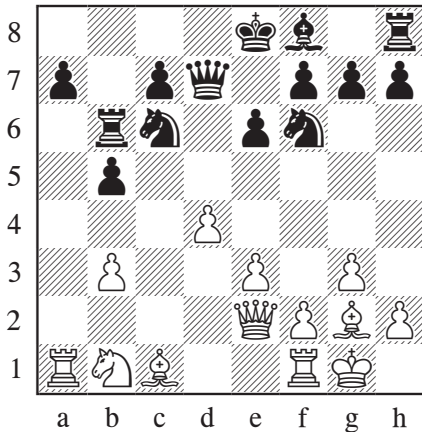
Black faces a serious attack.

(1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♕g2 dxc4 5.♗f3 ♕d7 6.♗e5 ♕c6 7.♗xc6 ♗xc6 8.0-0 ♖d7 9.e3 ♜b8 10.♞e2 b5 11.b3 cxb3 12.axb3)

C2) 12...♞b6

This is definitely Black's main choice, although other options have occasionally been tried. In

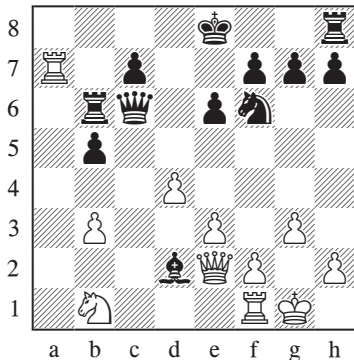
reply to 12...♞b6 I prefer the rather concrete approach of the text to the more popular 13.♙b2, where White definitely keeps good compensation, thanks to his powerful light-squared bishop and the half-open a- and c-files, but Black's defensive resources should not be underestimated.



13.♙xc6! ♞xc6 14.♞xa7 ♙d6

Black has two important alternatives at this point:

14...♙b4 15.♙d2 ♙xd2



And now I believe

16.♙xd2!N

is a serious improvement over 16.♞xd2 which was played in both the games where Black played 14...♙b4. Then I dislike White's prospects after 16...♙e4!. Only this move

promises Black decent play (clearly inferior is 16...0-0?! 17.♞c1 ♞f3 18.♞axc7 ♙e4 19.♞e1 and Black does not have compensation for the pawn, Berkes – Savanovic, Vogosca 2007). 17.♞c1 ♙d7! 18.f3 ♙d6 Black successfully defended this position in Krasenkow – Sanchez Guirado, Ponferrada 1991.

16...0-0 17.♙f3 ♙d7

Covering the e5-square. White is clearly better after 17...♞a6 18.♙e5 ♞b6 19.♞xa6 ♞xa6 20.♞c1±.

18.♞fa1 h6 19.b4 ♞b7 20.♞7a2±

White keeps a long-term advantage, thanks to the weakness of Black's c7-pawn.

14...♞a6 15.♞xa6 ♞xa6 16.♙b2 At this point it makes sense to look at a few options:

Not so good is 16...c6?! 17.♞c1 ♙d6 18.♞c2 and Black has difficulties defending his c6-pawn.

16...♞b7

Now White can break through with the nice:

17.♙c3 c6

17...b4?! 18.♙a4 would certainly lead to a strategically difficult position for Black, due to his permanently weak pawn on c7.

18.d5!

Seizing the initiative. For example:

18...exd5

18...♙xd5 19.♙xd5 cxd5 20.♞a1 threatening the unpleasant 21.♙d4 following by 22.♞a7. Black's position is very dangerous.

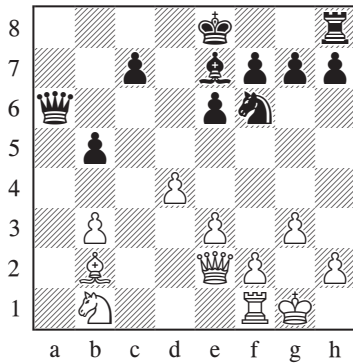
19.e4 ♙e7

Or 19...d4 20.e5 ♙d7 21.♙e4 ♙c5 (otherwise ♙d6† would be very unpleasant) 22.♙xd4 ♙e6 23.♙e3 ♙e7 24.f4 g6 25.♞a1 with a clear advantage.

20.exd5 cxd5 21.♞e1±

Black cannot castle without losing material.

16...♙e7



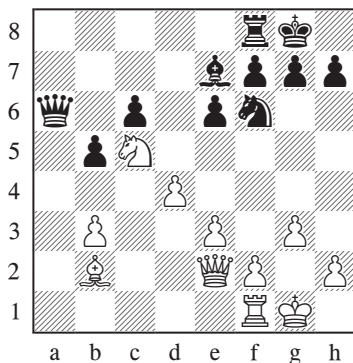
17.♘c3!N

This is my improvement over 17.♖c1 ♗b7 18.♗a3 as was played in Krasenkow – Kelecevic, Wattens 1989. In this game Black overlooked a neat defensive idea: 18...0-0 19.♗xb5 (19.♗xb5 c6 followed by 20...♗xb3 is just equal) 19...♖b8!, which would have allowed him to equalize without any serious difficulty.

17...c6 18.♗a4! 0-0

18...♗d7 19.d5 (White can also try another type of position: 19.♗c5 ♗xc5 20.dxc5 0-0 21.♖a1 ♗c8 22.b4 ♗d8 23.♗g4 ♗f8 24.♔g2 White is playing without risk, but the position looks defensible for Black.) 19...0-0 (if 19...cxd5 20.♗xg7 ♗g8 21.♗b2 ♗b7 22.♗c3 b4 23.♗a4 White is clearly better, as his opponent's king is stuck in the centre) 20.dxe6 fxe6 21.♗d1! ♗f6 22.♗xf6 ♖xf6 (of course not 22...♗xf6? 23.♗c5 ♗c8 24.♗g4 with a clear advantage) 23.♗c3± White has a pleasant edge with his strong knight on e4.

19.♗c5



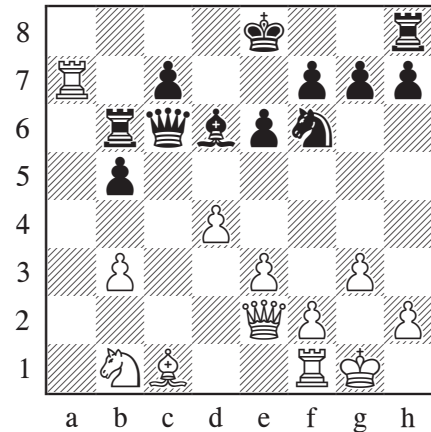
19...♗b6

Opening lines for White's dark-squared bishop would be dangerous for Black:

19...♗xc5 20.dxc5±

20.♖c1±

With a typical Catalan advantage, thanks to Black's weak c6-pawn, as well as the c5-square.



15.♗d2!N

A natural novelty that poses Black definite problems. White's idea is to seize the initiative along the c-file, while White's dark-squared bishop might be useful on a5.

The only move White has tried in practice is:

15.♗a3

Here I noticed the following pretty forced line:

15...♖a6!

After 15...♗xa3?! White gained a nice edge with 16.♗xa3 0-0 17.♗c2! ♗xc2 18.♗xc2± in Stohl – Zsu. Polgar, Rimavska Sobota 1991.

16.♖c1

16.♖xa6 ♗xa6 17.♗xd6 cxd6 18.♗c3 ♖e7! should be an easy draw for Black.

16...♗xc1† 17.♗xc1 ♖xa7 18.♗xb5† ♖e7

I think Black should hold this quite easily with two rooks against the queen.

I also tried 15.♙b2 0–0 16.♖c1 ♗d5 17.♗c2 (17.♘d2 ♖c6 and Black is close to equality) 17...♘e4 18.♘c3 ♘xc3 19.♗xc3 f5= but after the exchange of knights, I cannot imagine how White can seize the initiative.

### 15...♖b8

Another line is:

15...0–0 16.♖c1 ♗d5

Too passive is 16...♗d7 17.e4 e5 18.d5± with a clear advantage.

17.♙a5 ♖c6

Here White has an interesting pawn sacrifice at his disposal:

18.♘c3! ♗xb3

Black should accept the challenge as 18...♗f5 19.♖b7! ♖a8 20.♖xb5 ♗g6 21.♙b4± leaves Black a pawn down.

19.♖b1 ♗c4

19...♗xc3?! 20.♖xb3 ♖xb3 21.♙xc7 should be winning for White.

20.♗xc4 ♖xc4

20...bxc4 21.e4! e5 (White wins after 21...♘e8 22.d5 exd5 23.exd5 ♙c5 24.dxc6 ♙xa7 25.♙b4!+–) 22.d5 ♙c5 23.dxc6 ♙xa7 24.♙xc7 The c-pawn decides the issue. The tactical justification is 24...♖c8 25.♙xe5 ♖xc6 26.♙d4!! and White wins.

21.♘xb5 e5

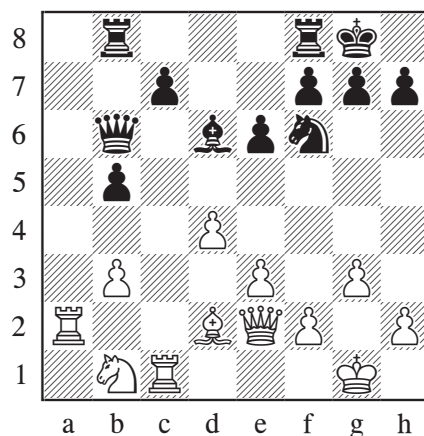
Black obviously loses after 21...♖b8? 22.♘xd6 ♖xb1† 23.♙g2 and the weakness of the 8th rank decides.

22.♙xc7 ♙xc7 23.♖xc7 ♖xc7 24.♘xc7 exd4 25.exd4

White has a healthy extra pawn, but Black has some hopes of survival.

### 16.♖c1 ♗b6 17.♖a2 0–0

And now White has two options:



Either White can play 18.♗f3 ♖fc8 19.♗c6± or:

### 18.♙a5 ♗b7 19.♖ac2 ♖fc8 20.♘d2 ♖a8 21.b4±

In both cases White maintains typical Catalan pressure, as Black has failed to achieve the desired ...c7-c5 advance.

### Conclusion:

Objectively White's chances are slightly preferable in this line. In the main line my novelty 15.♙d2! is very important and poses Black definite problems. In this 5...♙d7 line it is very hard to imagine how Black could possibly seize the initiative, and this is probably the main reason why this system is out of fashion.