

opening repertoire

1 d4 with 2 c4

Cyrus Lakdawala

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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

Also by the Author:

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A Ferocious Opening Repertoire

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The Caro-Kann: Move by Move

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The Nimzo-Larsen Attack: Move by Move

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Opening Repertoire: ...c6

First Steps: the Modern

Caruana: Move by Move

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Introduction

Tony's Guinea Pig: The Experiment

This is my 40th chess book and, like other people who turn 40, I'm going through a mid-life (chess) crisis, where the guy who has been married for 15 years suddenly buys a Porsche and dumps his loving wife to run off with a new girlfriend, 19 years his junior. It came about when my buddy IM Tony Saidy sent an admonishing email about my opening choices. He politely opined that I was a disgrace to the white pieces with my choices of the London and Colle Systems and Ulf Andersson's ultra-safe $1 \text{ d}4$ instant endgame repertoire. I long ago abandoned the root of all evil, a craving for complications, but Tony claimed that my opening choices lacked arable land in which to be creative. Tony argued that, for decades, my opening choices have been kissing simplicity's butt, in a naked display of sycophancy which hasn't been seen in the world since Henry VIII's wives (or at least that is how I interpreted his email!). He insisted that this trend must end and that I take up an aggressive $1 \text{ d}4$ and $2 \text{ c}4!$ repertoire.

Tony's suggestion sounded to me like something from the Island of Dr. Moreau, where the mad scientist breeds lizards and gorillas with humans to produce a new, more powerful race. When it comes to sharp opening lines your writer is a chess Napoleon: in retreat from my many Moscows, since I tend to operate on the very reasonable assumption that in complex positions all my opponents see more than I do. Our unique style is the barrier which separates us from the rest of chess humanity and I argued to Tony that a realization of our own limitations is a form of wisdom which keeps us safe from tempting yet foolhardy decisions.

But he insisted that I switch to $1 \text{ d}4$ and $2 \text{ c}4$, adding: "Always attack! Never overextend!" (Tony should seriously consider switching to decaf!) He argued that it is foolish to live a simple life of Londons, Colles, et al. for a person who is theoretically competent. I admit that my opening choices remind people of unimaginative dog owners who name their pets Spot, Fido, Rover, and Shep. And my openings do provide a wide scope for the imagination, just as long as you don't have much imagination! My problem is underextending, not overextending. Now, at an age when senior moments arrive uninvited and without warning, I'm suddenly supposed to turn into a brawler! Fine. I agreed to try a far sharper $1 \text{ d}4$ and $2 \text{ c}4!$ repertoire for the next few months – although Tony's vast ambition may far exceed my ability to implement it, and if I end up as the first 1300-rated IM in history, my blood will be on his hands.

Chess books are filled with ideas we believe we understand, yet don't. This sometimes applies to the author as well. Can the exciting past be a remedy to our boring present? I haven't played a sharp 1 d4 and 2 c4 system regularly since the early 1980s, so you can say I'm a bit rusty. With old age comes a loss of our former confidence and an increase in caution, and my philosophy has been that the more distrusting of sharp lines I am, the longer I will survive. With this book I'm working on an attempt to reverse the process. So there won't be any lines for White for those with a puritanical streak, who object to any form of fun or happiness. Tell me something and I forget; let me experience it and I learn. So I plan on taking Tony's advice and trying out this rather scary repertoire – and so far it has far exceeded expectations.

That is why I wrote this book. Not in my wildest imaginings did I foresee the immensity of Black's responses to 1 d4 and 2 c4. The museum of memory (mine at least) has limited storage space. The only way to learn such a wide-ranging repertoire is through a mixture of memorization and – more importantly – a conceptual understanding of the underlying concepts. I have tried my best to incorporate both for the club player in this book.

When it comes to our opening choices, we sometimes tend to gravitate toward the trendy, without contemplating whether we have the aptitude and stylistic capacity to pull them off or not. But there is no "best" when it comes to our opening repertoire, only the "best fitting" counts. If you choose to play the one in this book, you should possess the following qualifications:

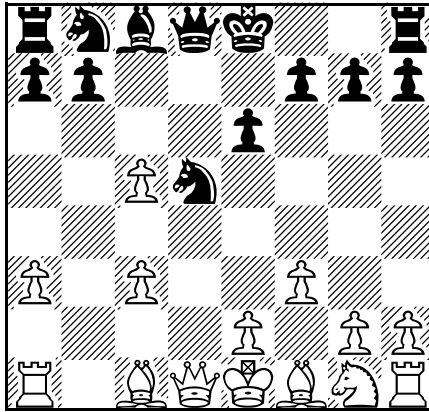
1. If you are a theory hater, this repertoire may not be right for you. The lines tend to be high-maintenance intricate dances, whose steps you need to commit to memory. So the player suited for this book must be unafraid to study lengthy theory and, just as importantly, update it for improvements and alterations for both sides.

2. You must be prepared to take on the part of the class bully – and enjoy it! You are an aggressively-minded player, who craves confrontation, both strategic and tactical.

If you qualify for both, then the repertoire in this book may be well suited for you.

Mapping out lines is the cartographer's toughest task and a good general is wise to memorize the potential battlefield first before engaging the enemy. I set up this repertoire via reversed engineering, placing myself as Black and asking the question: "Which White line do I fear most?" Here are the lines I advocate in the book:

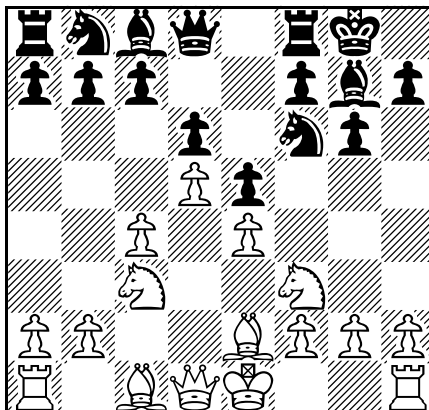
Nimzo-Indian Defence: 4 f3



Our side deliberately takes on three isolanis, two of them doubled. Okay, I can see from the look on your faces that I am going to have to sell this with the fervour of a carnival pitch man. I would usually launch into a lengthy and pious homily on the evils of an unclean structure. Not this time though, as I'm beginning to see the light and realize that White's activity and bishops clearly compensate. It was Nimzowitsch who taught that a move's power is derived not from its outer beauty but from its inner efficiency, and our last move 8 dxc5 fully qualifies.

The position above arose after 7 cxd5 ♘xd5, by the way. If Black recaptures instead with 7...exd5, we get to own a central preponderance of pawns to go with our bishop pair. After Black castles short, we normally set up with ♗d3, ♖e2, 0-0, ♗g3 and play for an e3-e4 break, usually followed by a kingside attack.

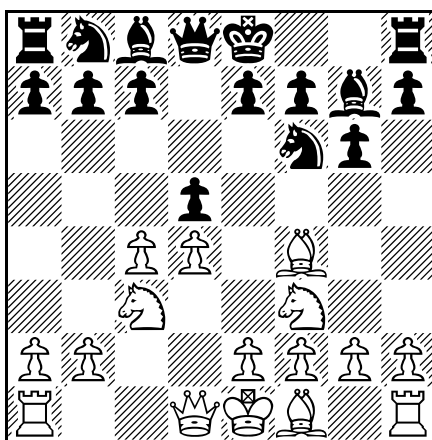
King's Indian Defence: Petrosian System



Our associations tend to alter with time. I bet more people associate the name “Tiberius” with Captain James Kirk than they do with the ancient Roman Emperor. One which never seems to change in chess is the association of Tigran Petrosian with mastery of closed positions. For the King’s Indian I advocate his line which is easy to learn and greatly cuts down on your study.

In the diagram we arrive at an irreconcilable dichotomy of belief systems, reminiscent of Marlon Brando’s speech from *On the Waterfront*: “My philosophy in life: Do it to him before he does it to you!” Black believes White will get mated, whereas we as White believe we will infiltrate and plunder Black’s queenside, all the while keeping our king matelessly safe. Black can easily end up feeling like someone in a crowded and stalled lift stuck between floors.

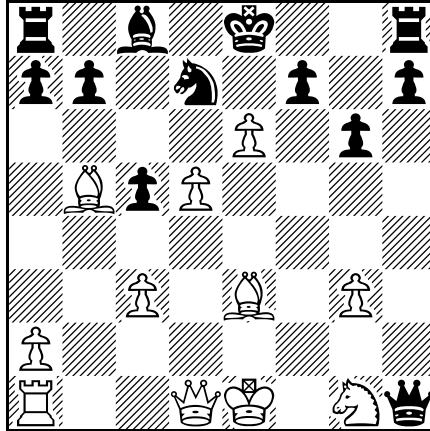
Grünfeld Defence: Pseudo-London



Welcome to the not-quite-London-System. Just remember: the best mob hitmen don’t look like hitmen. They come with bland, anonymous faces that easily blend into a crowd. This line is just such a mob enforcer, with a quiet exterior and ruthless interior.

Modern Benoni: Flick Knife Variation

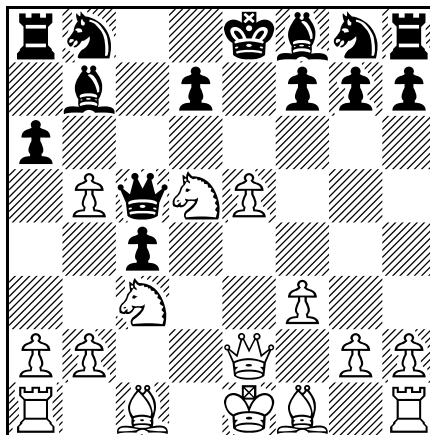
I have always believed that people who embrace the black side of a Benoni have a subconscious desire to die young. So let’s help them out and make their wish come true by challenging them with the ruthless Flick Knife line, which to my mind is a grave danger to Black in the Benoni. The word “primitive” tends to come with negative connotations. Yet we have all seen refined players go down in flames against a barbarian’s vicious attack, which is exactly the route we plan to take to our opponents.



Have you ever been inside a carnival house of mirrors, where you become so disoriented that you aren't sure which of the images is the real you? The above diagram is a book position from this variation. It may seem incomprehensible at first, yet the comp's help and repeated study, mixed with over-the-board application, gives rise to confidence. White is heavily favoured, as long as you thoroughly know around 24 moves of theory!

Benko Gambit Declined: 5 f3

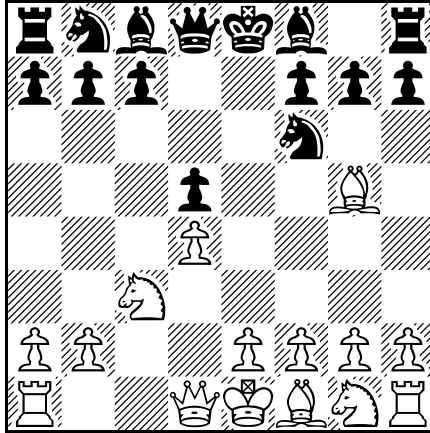
Black's ...b7-b5 sacrifice, the insignnia of the Benko Gambit's office, fails to measure up to normal heroic standards because it's 100% sound. In this book I advocate initiative over material, so we turn down most of our opponents' gambits like a bedspread. Since accepting the Benko pawn would indenture us to servile defence for the next 30 moves or so, the best way to gain the initiative here is to decline it.



If you decide to enter this line of the Benko, then expect a lifespan of less than 50 years,

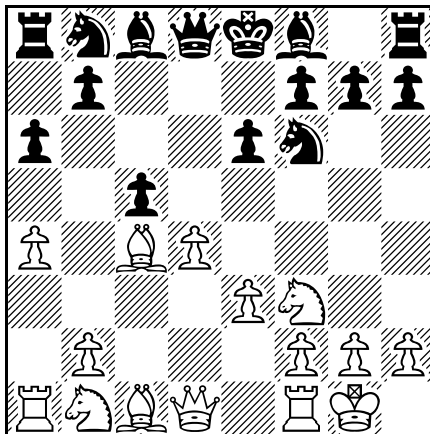
as the stress from playing (and studying!) ages you prematurely. Are you confused yet? I am. There is very little – if anything at all – which can be defined in this position as “normal”. For the sacrificed piece White gets wicked compensation.

Queen’s Gambit Declined: Exchange Variation



Don't think for a moment that the old-school Exchange against the Queen's Gambit Declined is a shrine to obsolescence, since it is the common choice of top players even today. Unlike other Exchange Variations, such as in the French or Slav, when we play the Exchange against the Queen's Gambit Declined, we are actually choosing a rather sharp line. Our plan: e2-e3, ♙d3 , ♖c2 , ♞ge2 , 0-0 and then aim for an f2-f3 and e3-e4 central break.

Queen's Gambit Accepted: Botvinnik System

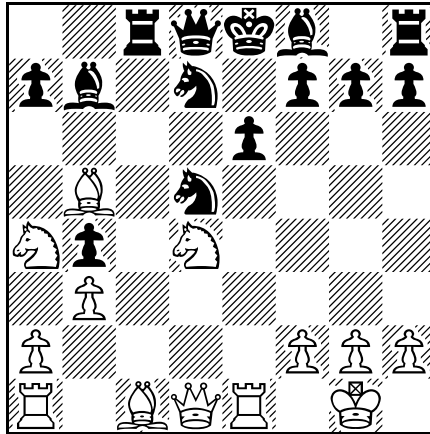


Black will soon play ...c5xd4, giving us a d4-isolani when we recapture with our e-pawn,

which is both a source of strategic concern and attacking hope. Tony sent me a brilliant attacking game by Pal Benko (the first one in Chapter Eight) and told me this is how chess should be played. So I will try not to look at that gaping hole on b4 and get on with attacking Black with my soon-to-be isolated queen's pawn.

Slav and Semi-Slav: Meran System

Against the ultra-solid Semi-Slav, let's go for the sharp lines of the Meran with e2-e3. We may soon reach the position below:

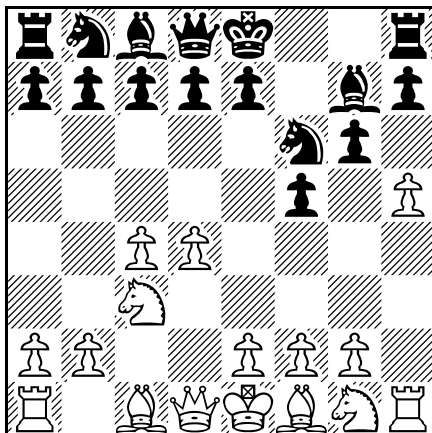


I used to believe that Black stood slightly better in the above variation. That changed when I noticed a relatively new idea for White: the just played b2-b3, which poses Black new problems, and if ...♙e7 we have ♖xe6!

Note that we also play an early e2-e3 against the Slav, forestalling attempts by Black to grab the c4-pawn and defend it with ...b7-b5.

Dutch Defence

I have a nicotine-addicted friend who has been a smoker for over four decades. Every time we meet he announces that he will quit "someday". We both know he is lying. I have a few students too who have told me they want to kick the Dutch Defence habit, yet they always return.



The above position arises in the Leningrad Dutch, where we get rough and treat it with great disrespect by pushing our h-pawn. If Black plays ... $\text{N} \times \text{h}5$, we are happy to sacrifice the exchange.

Those are just some of the main variations we will meet in this book. As we will see, Black has numerous other options too. In all cases may we deliver mate and send our opponents home early with our 1 d4 and 2 c4! repertoire.

Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
March 2019.

Chapter One

The Nimzo-Indian Defence

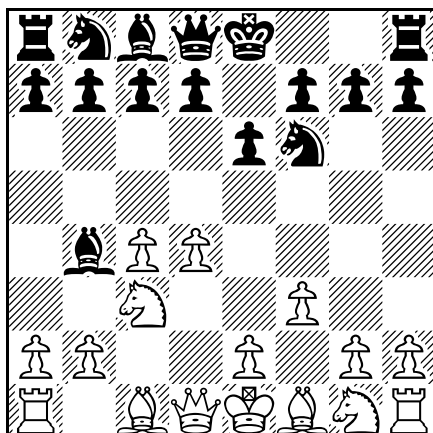
Fear of the Nimzo-Indian kept me away from playing 1 d4 and 2 c4 for about 35 years. Now with the emergence of the 4 f3! Pseudo-Sämisch (4 a3 is the Sämisch proper), I'm back on board (talk about a late bloomer!). It is a more dynamic alternative to the overanalysed 4 ♖c2 (Capablanca) and 4 e3 (Rubinstein); it recently moved into theoretical prominence when Magnus Carlsen landed in difficulties as Black against Anand and Nakamura. These two games are featured in the chapter, even though Carlsen, either through witchcraft or a pact with the devil, miraculously won both.

Game 1 **V.Anand-Wang Hao** Wijk aan Zee 2011

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4

This pin is the characteristic move of the Nimzo-Indian. Note that Black can also play 3...d5, transposing to the Queen's Gambit Declined (see Chapter Six); or 3...c5, where we push past with 4 d5, transposing to the Modern Benoni (see Chapter Four).

4 f3



Bob Dylan was right, I suppose – the times they really are a-changin’. Nobody played 4 f3 against the Nimzo back in the early 1980s, whereas in 2011 GM Alex Baburin called this move White’s new main line. I actually think it’s White’s only way to try and play for an advantage, since both 4 ♖c2 and 4 e3, the Capablanca and Rubinstein variations, have been worked out to kingdom come, with Black achieving equality at the end. The popularity of 4 f3 is relatively recent, so I’m guessing your Nimzo-Indian opponents won’t be as prepared as they would be for the others. My proof? I tested White in this position against several of my students who play Nimzo-Indian as Black. All of them are competent against 4 ♖c2 and 4 e3. When I hit them with 4 f3, the lot of them demonstrated they didn’t have a strong grasp on the key ideas and all went under in the practice games shockingly easily, without putting up much of a fight. Most had even studied the theory but just lacked experience against the line and played it without true understanding. So I’m predicting that, at club level, most of your opponents may do the same.

The intentions of our last move are as follows:

1. White prepares to seize total control over the centre with e2-e4.
2. White prevents ...♗e4 ideas.
3. If Black fianchettoes with ...b7-b6, as in many other Nimzo-Indians, the b7-bishop hits a white pawn wall on e4 or f3.
4. If Black castles kingside, which is the case nearly 100% of the time, then White’s f2-f3 can be useful preparation for an attack/expansion with g2-g4.

4...d5

Black’s main alternatives, 4...c5 and 4...0-0, are covered in Games 6-10.

Others:

a) 4...♗c6 5 e4 d5 6 cxd5 exd5 7 e5 ♖g8 (the knight re-routes to e7) 8 ♗e3 ♗ge7 9 f4 0-0 10 ♗f3 ♗xc3+!? (10...♗a5 11 ♗d3 ♗c4 12 ♖e2 also looks good for White) 11 bxc3 f5 (11...♗f5 12 ♗e2 ♖d7 13 ♗d2! and g2-g4 should make Black nervous) 12 ♗c1!, F.Berkes-Z.Medvegy, Hungarian Championship, Heviz 2012. Black found himself short on space and

may have trouble dealing with White's now unopposed dark-squared bishop, which is headed for a3.

b) 4...♟xc3+ (White often encourages this with a2-a3, so we should be delighted when Black captures unprovoked) 5 bxc3 d6 6 e4 ♞fd7 7 ♟d3 b6 8 f4! ♞c6 9 ♞f3 ♞a5 10 0-0 ♟a6 11 ♞e2 ♞e7 12 ♟e3, S.Arkipov-B.Gurgenidze, Tbilisi 1986. White's space and bishop pair easily outweigh Black's slight pressure on c4.

c) 4...♞h5 (threatening ...♞h4+, which White easily covers) 5 ♞h3 f5 6 e3 0-0 7 ♟d2 ♞c6 8 a3 ♟e7 9 ♟e2 d6, E.Gasanov-I.Turova, Dubai 2009. White's fluid centre and extra space offer our side a comfortable edge.

d) 4...b6 5 e4 ♟xc3+ 6 bxc3 d6 7 ♟d3 e5 8 ♞e2 0-0 9 ♟g5 ♞c6 10 0-0 h6 11 ♟e3 ♞e8 12 ♞g3 ♞a5 13 ♞e2 (covering the c4-pawn against ...♟a6 ideas) 13...♞e7, D.Khismatullin-H.Simonian, Minsk 2008. White's position looks promising with the plan ♞ae1, h2-h3 and then either an f2-f4 break or attacking Black's king by moving our knight on g3 and playing for g2-g4.

5 a3

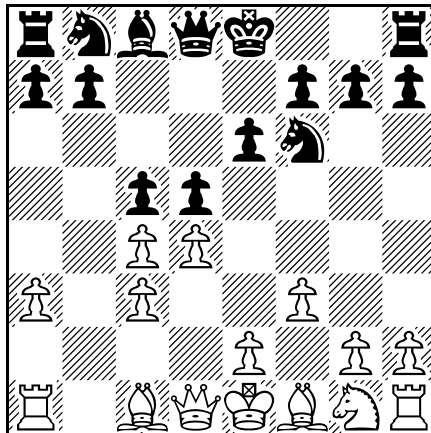
We want the bishop pair and are willing to expend resources to get it.

5...♟xc3+

Later in the chapter we look at Carlsen's introverted choice 5...♟e7.

6 bxc3 c5

The usual move. 6...0-0 7 cxd5 exd5 8 e3 c5 transposes to Game 4, whereas 6...dxc4 7 e4 b5 is a bit greedy. I played White against a master in a casual blitz game recently and I was shocked at how easily my position improved after 8 a4 c6 9 ♟a3. White's bishop pair, dark square control, strong centre and the fact that Black is unable to castle are far more meaningful than the not-so-great extra pawn.



7 cxd5

We arrive at a collision of world views. I prefer this move which violates one principle: *Don't open the game when behind in development*, while following another: *Open the posi-*

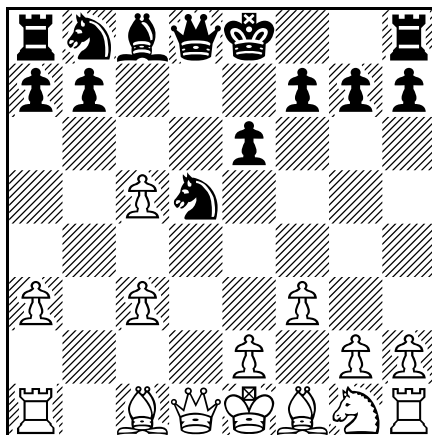
tion when you own the bishop pair.

White can also play 7 e3 first, after which 7...0-0 8 cxd5 exd5 is Game 4 again. Naturally, 8...xd5 is possible here too. C.Holst-Cu.Andersson, correspondence 1977, continued 9 d2 f5 10 d3 c6 11 f4! (discouraging ...e6-e5) 11...b6 12 f3 b7 13 0-0 c8, when White looks a shade better after 14 e2 d6 15 c4 f6 16 c3 cxd4 17 exd4.

7...xd5

Black's other critical choice, 7...exd5, is examined in Games 3 and 4.

8 dxc5!



I know what you're thinking: "Man, those are a pair of ugly babies on c3 and c5!" Believe it or not, this structure-busting pawn grab is White's main line. If taking on a structural weakness is a burden, then why are we inviting more? The answer is the more open our position gets, the more powerful our bishops become. So we *don't* interpret our wonky structure as some flaw in need of correction. 8 dxc5 represents a definitional alteration on how the white side of the Nimzo-Indian is normally played. We won't consider other moves, such as 8 d3 or 8 d2, in this book.

8...a5

Next game we look at 8...f5. Because the line is still slightly under the radar, our Pseudo-Sämisch can even throw masters off: 8...0-0? 9 e4 xc3? 10 b3 d4? (10...xe4 11 fx4 d4 was necessary; even there Black doesn't get enough for the piece) 11 b2 e3+ 12 e2 d5 was C.Lakdawala-B.Baker, San Diego (rapid) 2008, and now the simple 13 xe3! (I moved my queen to c4, which is still winning) 13...xe3 14 f2 wins a piece for only one pawn, since 14...c2 is met by 15 c1 and the knight has no place to go.

9 e4!

We are happy to give away our c3-pawn. Indeed, it is unwise for Black to take it, as after 9...xc3?! 10 d2 c6 11 b2 a4 12 xa5 xa5 13 xg7 g8 14 f6 xc5 15 h3, K.Honfi-A.Gunsberger, European Team Championship, Bucharest 1960, White's bishop pair and strength on the dark squares offer our side a clear advantage in the ending.

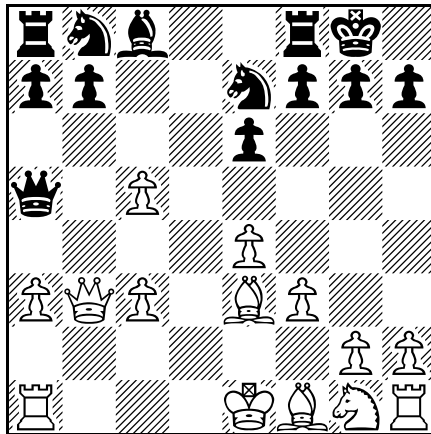
9...♞e7

If 9...♞f6 10 ♠e3! 0-0 (after 10...♞xc3+?! 11 ♚f2 Black lost time and didn't hurt our position a bit) 11 ♞b3 ♞fd7, we play 12 a4! ♞c7 (12...♞xc5? 13 ♞b4 ♞xb4 14 cxb4 is an awful ending for Black, who must suffer against White's bishop pair and space) 13 ♞a3 b6 14 a5! (forcing Black to recapture on c5 with the b-pawn) 14...bxc5 15 a6! c4 16 ♞a5 ♞xa6 17 ♞xc7 ♞xc7 18 ♠xc4 a5 19 ♠e2 f5 20 exf5 exf5 21 ♞h3, as in Ding Liren-P.Leko, Beijing (rapid) 2012, where White milked his bishop pair to a win.

10 ♠e3 0-0

Once again we are happy to give away our c3-pawn. After 10...♞xc3+ 11 ♚f2 ♞bc6 12 ♠d3 ♞f6 13 ♞e2 ♠d7 14 h4! h6 15 ♞f4 ♞d8 16 g4!, M.Noble-L.Wellen, correspondence 2011, Black's position looks uncomfortable as it may be too scary to castle kingside.

11 ♞b3



We finally protect the loose pawn.

11...♞c7 12 ♠b5

Now the g1-knight can go to e2 without blocking the bishop.

12...♞ec6

12...♞d7 13 ♠xd7! secures the extra pawn, and if 13...♠xd7 14 ♞e2 e5 15 c4, Black must worry about ♞c3 and ♞d5.

13 ♞e2 ♞a5

A critical position in this variation, where White must decide where to place his queen.

14 ♞b4

The idea of this move is simply to reinforce c5 and make Black work to win it back. I prefer it to either 14 ♞a4 or 14 ♞c2.

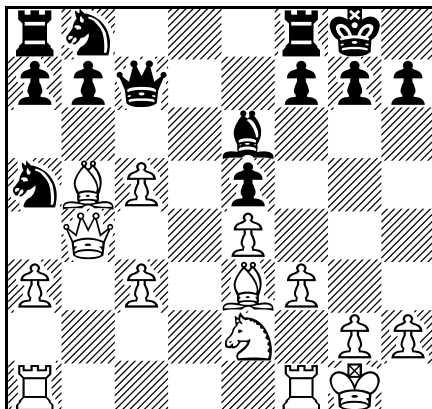
14...e5

White doesn't mind 14...♞bc6 15 ♞a4 ♠d7 16 ♞d1 a6 17 ♠xc6 ♠xc6 18 ♞b4, when his cramping c5-pawn is extra and it intends to remain that way.

15 0-0 ♠e6?

Opening Repertoire: 1 d4 with 2 c4

Wang is unable to adapt to the exotic customs of this strange land. Correct is 15...♘a6 16 ♙xa6 bxa6 17 c4! (offering our queen air) 17...♙e6 18 ♖fd1 ♗ab8 19 ♚e1 ♘xc4 20 ♙f2 ♘b2 21 ♗d6 ♗fd8 22 ♗xd8+ ♚xd8, as in N.Papenin-F.Finocchiaro, correspondence 2013. Black has regained his pawn, but I still think White has the advantage after 23 ♚c3, since the passed c5-pawn is obviously more valuable than Black's doubled pawn on a6.



Exercise (planning): Anand found a startling idea here which pushed his position from simply better to strategically won. What would you play as White?

Answer: Piece sacrifice.

16 ♘d4!!

Some ideas come into the world with a violent birth; in this case White's knight chooses a martyr's death. As it turns out, White's centre isn't quite as dormant as we originally believed. Anand's move is a clear improvement over the routine 16 ♗fd1 from M.Cebalo-S.Marinkovic, European Championship, Budva 2009.

16...exd4

Black agrees to the deal, not by inclination but by compulsion. Now the white structure's former inelasticity expands into absolute flexibility and the central pawns turn into a conglomeration of bullies, looking to make life miserable for their enemies.

White also holds a clear advantage if the piece is declined; for example, 16...♙d7 17 ♘f5 ♘bc6 (or 17...♙xf5 18 exf5 ♘bc6 19 ♚e4 and White dominates) 18 ♚a4 a6 19 ♙d3! and Black has no useful discovered attack on White's queen, since 19...♘d4? is met by 20 ♘e7+ ♙h8 21 ♘d5 ♚d8 22 ♚b4 ♘dc6 23 ♚b2 with a strategically won game.

17 cxd4

These creatures hunt in a pack. Just look at the transformation of those central pawns. White's profit margin for the piece:

1. Two powerful, central pawns, which threaten to napalm their way through Black's position.

2. By the structural alteration, White's bishops just got 100% more potent.
3. Worse still, Black has no available counterplay and can only wait.

Conclusion: Black is fighting for his life, despite the extra piece.

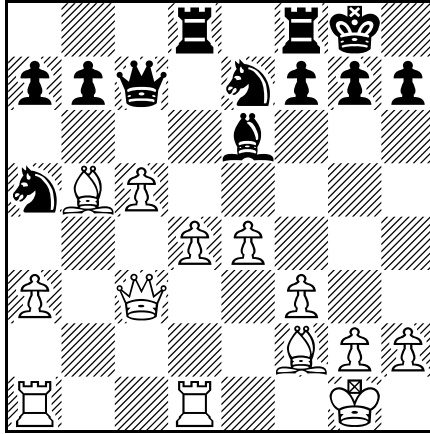
17...♘bc6 18 ♚c3

Threatening swift dismemberment with d4-d5.

18...♘e7

Black's defenders try to give the white pawns a wide berth.

19 ♖fd1 ♜ad8 20 ♙f2!



Transferring to the more effective h2-b8 diagonal.

20...a6

Weakening b6 only makes matters worse. Black may have been better off with 20...b6, although 21 a4 ♙d7 22 ♙g3 ♚c8 23 ♜ac1 ♙c6 24 ♚b4 applies intense pressure.

21 ♙g3 ♚c8 22 ♙f1

It tugs at my heart strings when I see some poor soul dressed as a hot dog, twirling a sign in front of a burger joint. Black's a5-knight, which just ran out of safe havens, reminds us of that forlorn guy with the sign, who life has left behind.

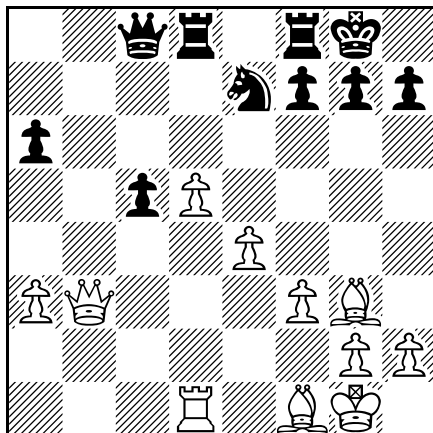
22...b6

Or 22...♘ac6 23 ♙d6, threatening d4-d5, and Black's game collapses no matter how he responds.

23 ♜ab1 ♘b3

Returning some of the material fails to ease Black's pain.

24 ♜xb3 ♙xb3 25 ♚xb3 bxc5 26 d5!



Black is the exchange up for a pawn, yet his position is hopeless since White's central pawns are monsters and Black's a6- and c5-pawns are weaklings, waiting to be picked off.

26...♘g6 27 ♖b6

There goes a6.

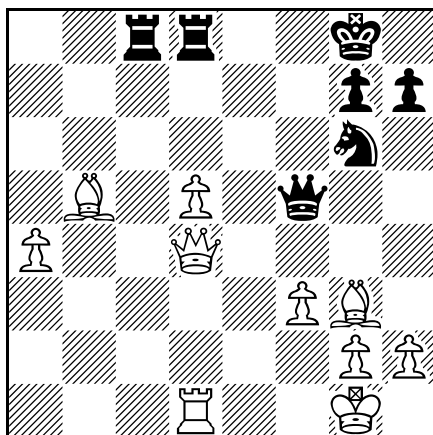
27...f5 28 ♙xa6 ♚d7 29 ♙b5 ♚f7 30 exf5

There was nothing wrong with the immediate 30 ♚xc5 either.

30...♚xf5 31 ♚xc5

Now White has three pawns for the exchange, not to mention a completely dominating position.

31...♖c8 32 ♚d4 ♖fd8 33 a4 1-0



Black will be trampled by White's passed pawns. Wang Hao didn't want to stick around to witness the end.