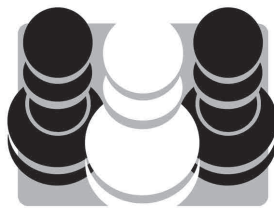


Playing the Petroff

By

Swapnil Dhopade



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Preface

Welcome, dear readers, to my first opening book – on the Petroff Defence. The idea for this book first occurred during the 2018 Olympiad in Batumi, Georgia, an event which marked a turning point in my career. Having become a grandmaster in 2016, I had been coaching talented youngsters (including GM Raunak Sadhwani, who became a GM at just 13 years of age!) for quite a while and preparing opening files for them. In 2018, I was given the opportunity to work as part of a team of seconds, headed by GM Jacob Aagaard, helping the Indian Women's team at the Olympiad. Performing this work at a world-class competition required me not only to prepare opening ideas at a more intricate level, but also to supplement my ChessBase analysis with brief but lucid comments at critical moments, to help the players retain the most important information.

Sometime towards the end of the event, encouraged by the positive reception my opening preparation had received from the players, I proposed to Jacob the idea that I might write a book for Quality Chess on the Caro-Kann, my lifelong favourite response to 1.e4. Jacob replied that it would be great if I could join the Quality Chess team and write an opening book... but a future Caro-Kann book had already been planned with another author. To my great surprise, Jacob then suggested that I write a book on the Petroff Defence! My instant reaction was of disbelief: how could I write a book on an opening that I never played in my entire chess career? Jacob replied, "You are a researcher. If you research this opening well, I am sure you can present a top-class repertoire for Black in the Petroff Defence."

These words, coupled with the success of my opening preparation in the Olympiad, gave me confidence that I could face this new challenge. Jacob also mentioned that it had been many years since an in-depth book had been published on the Petroff; moreover, Quality Chess had never published such a book, so it was a great opportunity to fill this gap for readers. All this gave me added motivation to write the best Petroff book I possibly could. In addition to the Petroff itself, we also decided to include a slightly less detailed section on 1.e4 e5 lines where White avoids 2.♘f3, to give the reader all the essential information needed to meet 1.e4 with 1...e5.

The Writing Process

I started, as usual, from scratch! The much-needed inspiration was provided by Fabiano Caruana, who employed the Petroff Defence in his World Championship match against Carlsen. The world number two was already a renowned Petroff expert, so there was no doubt that Carlsen and his team of seconds would make the Petroff a focal point of their preparation. In such a situation, many players would adopt a new opening for the match in order to surprise the opponent and avoid preparation, but Caruana stayed true to the Petroff, believing in his home analysis and the inherent soundness of the opening itself. Carlsen only played 1.e4 in two of the twelve

classical games of the match, and both times Caruana drew quite comfortably with the Petroff. I was especially attracted by Game 11, where Caruana embraced opposite-sides castling and was clearly ready for a fight. I analysed the whole system in great detail (you can find it in Chapters 11 and 12) and was amazed at the dynamic potential this opening has to offer. In the game, Carlsen avoided Black's attacking ideas and went for an early queen exchange, which enabled the challenger to make a relatively easy draw. In a way, this change in the character of the play reflects the instructive value of the Petroff: aside from being a top-tier opening, it enables you to switch from sharp tactics and brutal attacks in one game to dry positions and equal endgames in the next.

Repertoire Choices

Even though the Petroff has a solid reputation and this book is expected to give a bulletproof repertoire, I have not shied away from recommending complicated lines when the position demands such an approach – there are many such instances where Black has excellent chances to gain the initiative or an outright advantage.

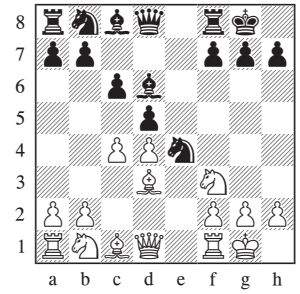
Compared to a lot of opening books, the volume and complexity of analysis is not too daunting. With that being said, there are certain critical lines where the play becomes rather sharp, perhaps involving sacrificial shenanigans leading to an eventual perpetual check. Such variations are not too frequent; and when they had to be included, I have added as many comments as possible along the slippery paths, which should ease the process of memorizing the most important points. I assure you that if you study this book well, you will have every reason to be confident of getting a comfortable position out of the opening against 1.e4.

I have analysed the recommended repertoire using the strongest cloud engines possible, but they were as much of a hurdle as a boon for me, as “0.00” seldom tells the full story. There were several lines which I analysed through to a 0.00 evaluation, but which I rejected as unsuitable due to my own feeling that the positions would be slightly uncomfortable for Black in a practical game. Retaining one's sense of how pleasant a position would be in a practical game, in spite of what the engine may say, is a major challenge for all authors and players nowadays. At all times, I have endeavoured only to recommend lines that are relatively easy to understand and play in a practical game.

Having done so much work preparing this repertoire, I could not resist giving it a try in a tournament game, and you can find my win over IM Konguvel in the appendix on page 317. The process of researching and writing this book lasted from October 2018 (when the Olympiad ended) up until the time of publication, with a few late updates even taking place during the editing/proofreading stage. I am sure you will enjoy the benefits of my painstaking research, and face 1.e4 with a smile and confidence in your future games!

GM Swapnil Dhopade
Amravati, India
April 2020

Chapter 8



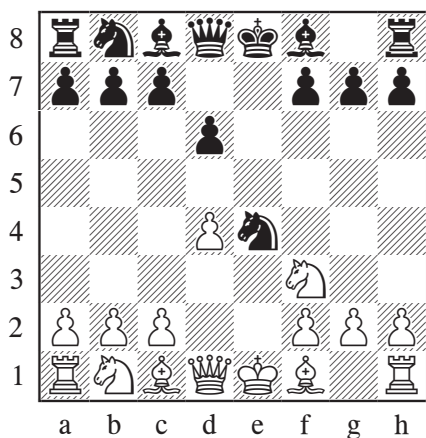
5.d4

Variation Index

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4 5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♙d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4 c6

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1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.d4



This move is the clear main line in terms of the overall number of games played with it.

5...d5

Sometimes Black prefers to play with a 'small centre' but I prefer the traditional approach of gaining space and supporting the knight on e4.

6.♗d3

This is clearly the most active and logical way of developing the bishop in preparation for castling followed by c2-c4, undermining the knight on e4. Other moves exist of course, but none of them require any special preparation. The entire point of 5.d4, leaving the knight on e4 – as opposed to 5.d3 ♘f6 6.d4, as covered in Chapter 6 – is to treat Black's 'active' knight as a target to be undermined, and putting the bishop on d3 is the only effective way of pursuing that goal.

I will mention briefly that 6.c4?! ♗c6 transposes to variation B2 of Chapter 5 on page 112, but 6...♗b4†! is more accurate, when Black is already fighting for the advantage.

6.♗bd2 can be met by 6...♗f5 when White hardly has anything better than 7.♗d3 ♗d6, transposing to 7.♗bd2 ♗f5 in the notes below.

6...♗d6

6...♗e7, 6...♗c6 and even 6...♗f5!? are all serious alternatives, but the text move is the one I have chosen to recommend.

7.0–0

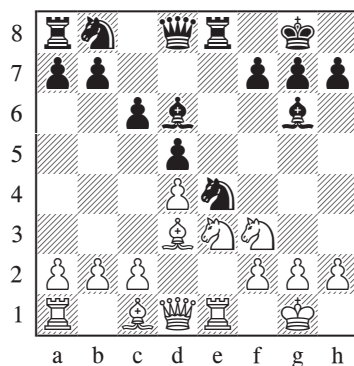
7.c4 c6 is bound to transpose to one of the lines below, as both sides will surely castle in the near future.

7.♗bd2 ♗f5 8.0–0 0–0 transposes to the note on 8.♗bd2 below.

7...0–0 8.c4

This is the most popular and principled move. I checked three sidelines:

8.♗bd2 should be met by 8...♗f5, developing while supporting the knight on e4. 9.♖e1 ♖e8 10.♗f1 ♗g6 The bishop retreats to a safer square. 11.♗e3 c6



12.c4 White tries to shake the stability of the central knight but 12...♗f6 is a convenient reply, and after 13.♗xg6 hxg6 14.♗b3 ♗b6= Black had no problems in Anand – Caruana, Saint Louis 2018.

8.♖e1 ♗f5

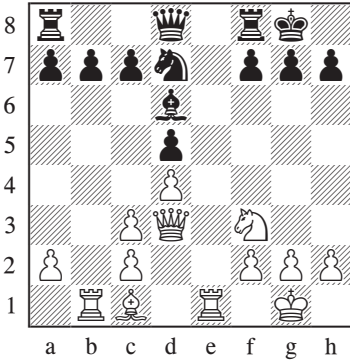
This is our typical reaction whenever the e4-knight is attacked.

9.♗c3!?

9.♗bd2 transposes to the 8.♗bd2 line above.

9.c4 c6 transposes to variation B.

- 9...♖xc3 10.bxc3 ♘xd3
 10...♔d7 and 10...♙g6 seem playable as well.
 11.♗xd3
 11.cxd3 ♞e8=
 11...♗d7 12.♞b1

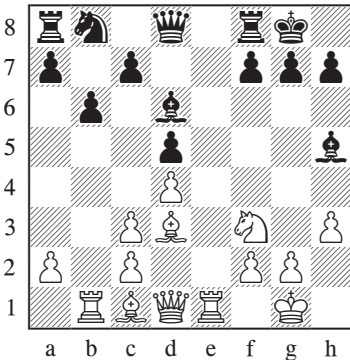


In Carlsen – Shirov, Moscow 2006, the simplest continuation would have been:

- 12...♞e8!N=
 White cannot really justify taking on b7 as his rook will be cut off after ...♗b6, so Black has no problems.

- 8.♗c3
 This move has also been tried by some strong players but it is not at all challenging for Black.

- 8...♖xc3 9.bxc3 ♘g4
 This pin can be annoying for White.
 10.h3 ♘h5 11.♞b1 b6 12.♞e1
 12.c4 is met by 12...c6 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.c4 dxc4 15.♙xc4 ♗c6= followed by ...♞c8 and Black was doing well in Obregon – Proleiko, Internet 2018.

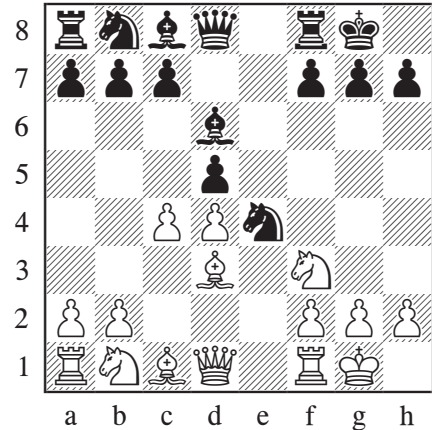


- 12...c6
 Black intends to complete development with ...♗d7 followed by ...♗c7.

- 13.c4
 White has to go for this break sooner or later. If he delays it, Black may consider ...b5 at some point, eliminating the possibility of c3-c4 once and for all.

- 13...dxc4 14.♙xc4 ♗d7 15.♙d3 ♞e8=
 Black is fine and the players soon agreed a draw after:

- 16.♙g5 ♗xg5 17.♗xg5 ♙xd1 18.♞bxd1 ♗f6
 19.♗e4
 ½–½ Fedoseev – So, Tbilisi 2017.



- 8...c6
 White has tried several moves from here; the remainder of the current chapter will focus on **A) 9.cxd5** and **B) 9.♞e1**.

The two most popular and challenging options are 9.♗c2 and 9.♗c3, which will be covered in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively.

- I also considered:
 9.♗b3 dxc4
 This seems like the simplest reply.
 10.♙xc4 ♗d7
 Intending ...♗b6 or ...♗f6.
 11.♞e1 ♗df6
 11...♗ef6!?N is also possible, and if 12.♗g5 ♗d5 13.♙xd5 cxd5 14.♗xd5 ♗f6 15.♗b3 h6

16. ♖f3 ♕e6 17. ♖d3 ♖d7= Black has good compensation for the pawn.

12. ♖bd2

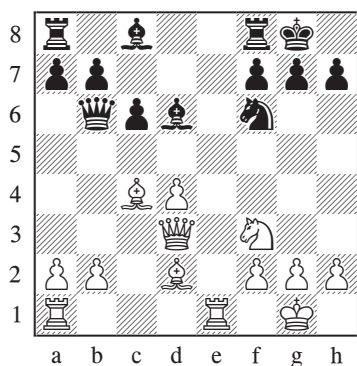
12. ♖c3 can be met by 12... ♖xc3 13. bxc3 b5! 14. ♕d3 ♕e6 15. ♖c2 (or 15. ♖xe6!? fxe6 16. ♖xe6† ♖h8= when White has enough compensation to maintain the balance, but nothing more) 15... h6= and Black is fine.

12... ♖xd2 13. ♕xd2 ♖b6!

Breaking the battery on the a2-g8 diagonal.

14. ♖d3

Now an important improvement is:



14... ♕g4!N

Completing development as quickly as possible.

14... ♖xb2? allows White to gain a strong initiative, and he went on to win a spectacular attacking game in Paravyan – Golubov, St Petersburg 2018.

15. ♖e5 ♖ad8! =

Black is doing fine in this IQP position.

A) 9. cxd5 cxd5

I find it hard to believe that releasing the tension so soon can offer White real chances for an advantage.

10. ♖c3

10. ♖b3 ♖c6 11. ♖c3 gives Black a choice between 11... ♖e8, transposing to the 11. ♖b3 line in the notes below, and 11... ♖xc3, which is also perfectly playable.

10... ♖e8!?

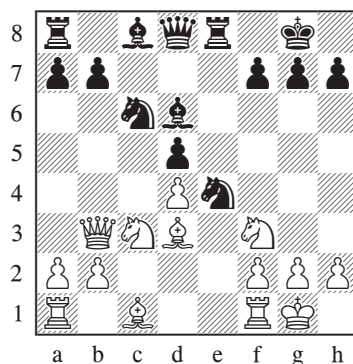
10... ♖xc3 has been more popular but I prefer to support the knight rather than exchange it, for the moment at least.

11. ♖c2

11. ♖xd5?! ♕xh2† 12. ♖xh2 ♖xd5 13. ♖e1 ♖c6 gave Black the easier game due to his safer king and pressure against the d4-pawn in Van Tricht – Hofer, corr. 2014.

11. ♖e1 invites simplifications with 11... ♖xc3 12. bxc3 ♖xe1† 13. ♖xe1 ♖c6= when Black was fine in Lagno – Koneru, Doha 2016.

11. ♖b3 ♖c6! is an important detail, when White should try:



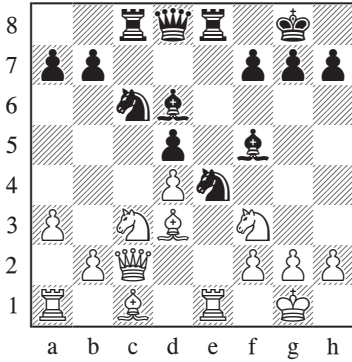
12. ♖e1N (12. ♖xd5?! is bad due to 12... ♕g4!N and Black seizes the initiative, Sandaogo – Oppermann, corr. 2005) The text move puts pressure on the e4-knight and forces Black to take a decision, but the cool 12... ♕e6! makes it impossible for White to take on e4, and after 13. ♖xb7 ♖b4 the game is likely to end in a repetition after: 14. ♕xe4 ♖b8 15. ♖xa7 ♖a8=

11... ♕f5

Black defends his knight in the usual way and intends ... ♖c6 next.

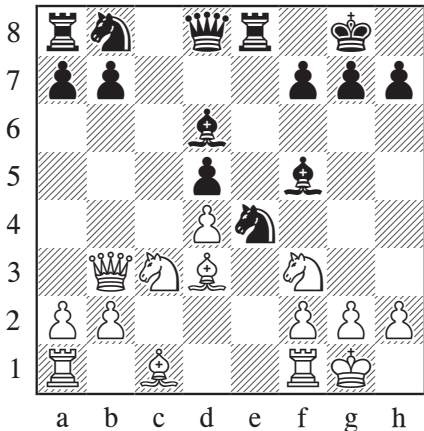
12. ♖b3

12. ♖e1?! is met by 12... ♖c6! threatening ... ♖b4. 13. a3 ♖c8



14.♞e3N (14.♞b1?? ran into the crushing 14...♞xd4!-+ in Kunschek – R. Fritz, Vienna 2012) 14...♟g6 All the black pieces are well placed, especially the knight on e4.

The text move hits both d5 and b7, but Black can calmly ignore both attacks with:



12...♞c6! 13.♞xd5!:

This seems like the most principled follow-up to White's previous move, but the whole concept is flawed.

13.♞xb7?! would also be a mistake due to 13...♞b4!, threatening not just the d3-bishop, but also ...♞e7 trapping the queen. 14.♞xe4 dxe4 15.♞e5 ♟xe5 16.dxe5 ♞d3 Black's pieces are too active.

13.♞e3 is the best that White can do, although 13...♞d2! 14.♞xd2 ♟xd3 still reached a position where Black had the slightly more comfortable side of equality due to his bishop pair in Dunn – Shchepetnev, email 2002.

13...♟g6

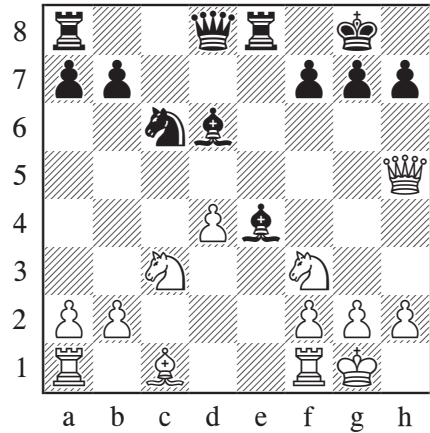
There are too many threats for White to handle comfortably.

14.♞xe4

14.♞b3? does not work due to 14...♞xd4! 15.♞xd4 ♞c5.

14...♟xe4 15.♞h5

Now we have a chance to improve Black's play with:



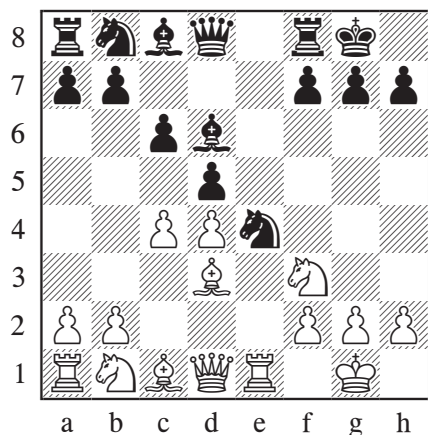
15...g6!N

Black took on f3 immediately in Rosch – Portune, email 1997, but it is worth making a slight improvement to the kingside structure first.

16.♞h3 ♟xf3 17.♞xf3 ♞xd4

Black has a nice initiative as White still needs to develop his queenside.

B) 9.♞e1

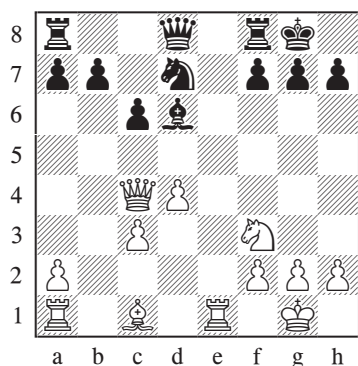


This move is consistent with White's aim of targeting the e4-knight. Over the next few moves, he will continue to put pressure on this piece, and possibly the black queenside as well.

9...♙f5

White's two main options are **B1) 10.♞c2** and **B2) 10.♞b3**.

10.♘c3 is a harmless move which leads to nothing but piece exchanges: 10...♘c3 11.bxc3 ♙xd3 12.♞xd3 dxc4 13.♞xc4 ♘d7



Black's position is fine, and after the further 14.♞b1 ♞c7 15.♞b3 b5 16.c4 bxc4 17.♞xc4 c5 18.dxc5 a draw was agreed in Anand – Caruana, Saint Louis 2016.

10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♘c3

White has tried this in a few top-level games. Black is of course happy to trade some pieces with:

11...♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♙xd3 13.♞xd3

It is important to note that White only has one truly threatening idea, which is to play ♘g5, intending to meet ...g6 with ♞h3, forcing a further weakening of Black's kingside with ...h5. The simplest way to prevent this is:

13...♞e8!

Challenging White along the e-file.

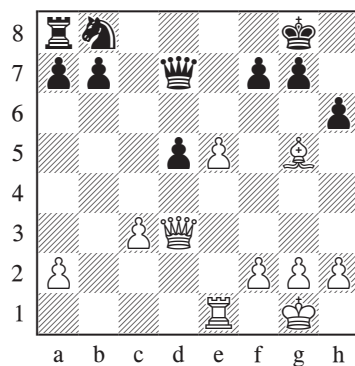
14.♙g5

14.♞xe8† ♞xe8 15.♞b1 is simply met by 15...b6 16.♞b5 ♞e6. It is worth adding that 17.♙f4!? is a creative attempt to get the rook to the e-file with gain of tempo, but 17...♙f8!= keeps things solid, with a fine position for Black.

14...♞xe1† 15.♞e1 ♞d7 16.♘e5

White has to create some imbalance before Black can catch up in development and exploit the weaknesses on White's queenside.

16...♙xe5 17.dxe5 h6



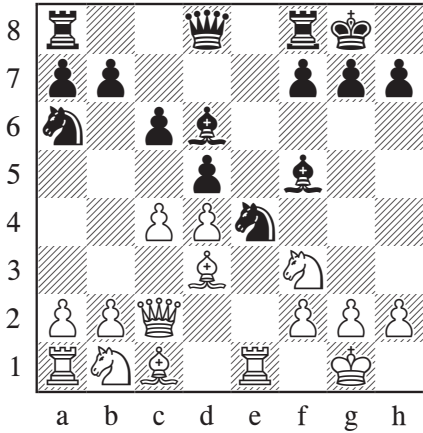
18.e6!?

A clever tactic, but it does not give White any advantage.

18...fxe6 19.♙xh6 ♘c6=

The players soon agreed a draw in Blanco Gramajo – Straka, corr. 2014.

B1) 10. ♖c2 ♘a6



We have seen the knight being developed to a6 to good effect in a number of the earlier chapters, and here it has the additional benefit of winning a tempo thanks to the threat of ...♗b4.

11. a3 ♕g6

The bishop moves to a safe square, ensuring that ♗c3 will not be a problem.

12. c5

12. ♗c3?! simply offers to exchange two minor pieces in a way that cannot possibly benefit White: 12... ♗xc3 13. ♕xg6 hxg6 followed by ...dxc4 and White was positionally worse in Galliamova – Kosteniuk, Kazan 2004.

12... ♕b8

Black should choose this square for the bishop in order to keep c7 free for the knight.

13. ♗c3

The other way to challenge the e4-knight is: 13. ♗bd2

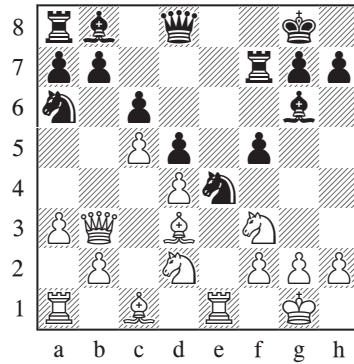
I find this less logical than the main line, as the bishop will be blocked on c1. Black of course responds with:

13... f5

Cementing the knight on e4.

14. ♖b3 ♖f7

Black has other possible ways to continue but I would prefer this solid move.



15. ♕xa6

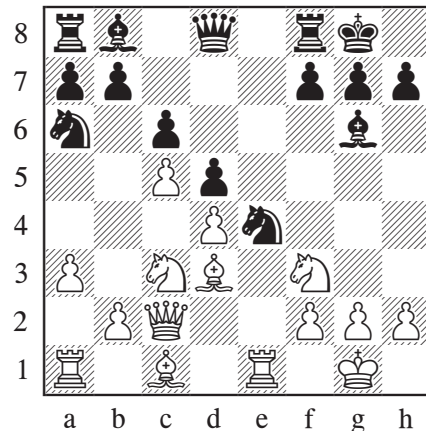
15. ♖a4 was played in a blitz game between two strong engines. White forces the a6-knight to go back to c7 which will allow ♗e5. However, after 15... ♗c7 16. ♗e5 ♖f8 17. ♗xg6 hxg6 Black has good attacking prospects on the kingside, as shown after 18. ♕e2 ♗e6 19. ♗xe4 fxe4 → in Rybka 4.1 – Boot 6.2, engine game 2017.

15... bxa6

Black's damaged queenside structure is of little concern, as he has two bishops and nice play on the kingside.

16. ♖a4 ♖c8 17. b4 f4 →

Black's play on the kingside more than compensates for the weakened queenside pawn structure, Williamson – Straka, corr. 2017.



13...f5

Black provides full support to his centralized knight. The critical reply is:

14.♖b3

14.b4? was a mistake in Holemar – Bartos, Brno 2007, when 14...♖c7!N intending ...♗e6 and ...♕h5 would have given Black great play.

14.♗e2 ♕h5↗ gives Black nice prospects on the kingside, especially after 15.♕f4? ♕xf3 16.gxf3 ♗xf2!♠ as seen in Aguero Jimenez – Ippolito, Barcelona 2018.

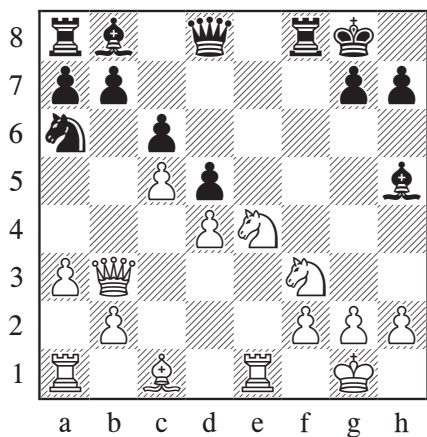
14...♕h5!

Black sacrifices a pawn and goes for a direct assault on the kingside.

White has to accept the challenge by capturing e4 twice, which he can do by means of **B11) 15.♕xe4** or **B12) 15.♗xe4**.

15.♖xb7?? just loses to 15...♕xf3, and if 16.gxf3 ♖h4+ Black will crush on the kingside.

B11) 15.♕xe4 fxe4 16.♗xe4



Black should weaken the white king's defences with:

16...♕xf3 17.gxf3 ♖d7

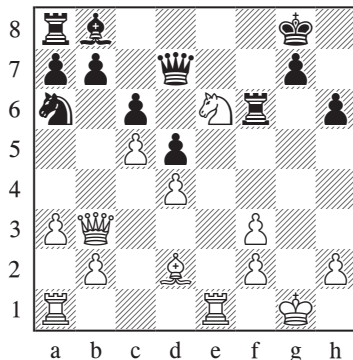
The queen is well placed here, supporting the b7-pawn while being ready to shift to the kingside.

18.♗g3

White settles his knight on an excellent defensive square. White is a pawn up but the doubled pawns on the f-file do not add much value to his position.

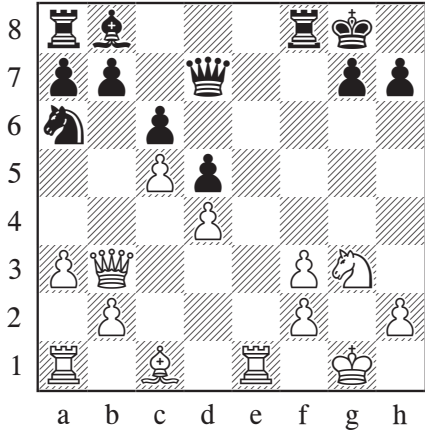
18.♗d6? would be a misguided attempt to provoke the exchange of Black's strong bishop. 18...b6! is a strong reply, and after 19.♕e3 ♖xf3♠ Black wins back the pawn while White's kingside is too weak.

18.♗g5? with the idea to place the knight actively on e6 is also bad. Play continues 18...h6 19.♗e6 ♖f6 20.♕d2 and now a strong move is:



20...♕c7!♠ Black is ready to bring the a8-rook into action, and the b7-pawn is untouchable due to ...♕xh2♠.

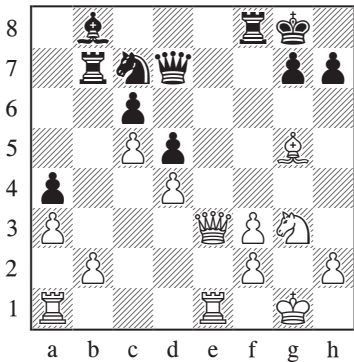
Now Black has two ways to continue, my favourite being:



18...♙f4!

Black offers the exchange of bishops, but the main purpose of the text move is to bring the a8-rook into action.

18...♞c7!? is an interesting dynamic possibility, whereby Black sacrifices another pawn in order to bring the knight to e6. 19.♞xb7 White should accept the challenge, otherwise the knight comes into action free of charge. 19...a5! Black wants to play ...♞a7, driving the enemy queen away in order to facilitate ...♞e6. 20.♙g5 ♞a7 21.♞b3 a4 Fixing White's queenside pawns. (The immediate 21...♞e6 is not fully convincing after 22.♞e3.) 22.♞e3 White stops ...♞e6 for now. 22...♞b7



Even though Black is two pawns down for the moment, he has strong compensation. The b2-pawn is weak, Black has pressure

down the b-file and ...♞b3 is on the cards as well, hitting the queen and the f3-pawn. My illustrative line continues 23.♞e2 h6 24.♙e7 ♞b3 25.♞d2 ♞xf3 26.♙d6 ♞e6 27.♞ae1 ♞f6 and Black still has full compensation.

19.♞e2

19.♙e3?! is inferior as it allows Black to bring his knight into play: 19...♞c7! 20.♙xf4 ♞xf4 21.♞xb7 ♞ff8 Threatening to trap the queen with ...♞fb8. 22.♞b3 ♞e6 The knight is ready to wreak havoc on White's kingside.

19...g5!?

In Kratz – Rennert, email 2006, Black was ready to bring the a8-rook into play, either by bringing it to e8 or by doubling along the f-file.

Abridged Variation Index

The Variation Index in the book is 7 pages long. Below is an abridged version giving just the main variations, not the sub-variations.

Chapter 1

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6

- A) 3.♗c4?! 8
- B) 3.♗c3 ♗b4!? 10

Chapter 2

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.d4 ♗xe4

- A) 4.dxe5 22
- B) 4.♗d3 d5 31
 - B1) 5.dxe5 31
 - B2) 5.♗xe5 40

Chapter 3

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.d4 ♗xe4 4.♗d3 d5
5.♗xe5 ♗d7 6.♗xd7 ♗xd7 7.0-0 ♗d6

- A) 8.♗h5 57
- B) 8.♗c3!? 61
- C) 8.c4 c6 9.cxd5 cxd5 67
 - C1) 10.♗h5 68
 - C2) 10.♗c3 71

Chapter 4

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.♗xe5 d6

- A) 4.♗xf7?! 76
- B) 4.♗d3 82
- C) 4.♗c4 90

Chapter 5

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♖f3 ♗xe4

- A) 5.♗d3 103
- B) 5.c4 111

Chapter 6

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♖f3 ♗xe4
5.d3 ♗f6 6.d4 d5

- A) 7.♗c3 124
- B) 7.c4 126
- C) 7.♗d3 128

Chapter 7

1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♖f3 ♗xe4
5.♖e2 ♖e7

- A) 6.♗c3 140
- B) 6.d3 ♗f6 142
 - B1) 7.♗c3 143
 - B2) 7.♗g5 144

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1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♖f3 ♗xe4
5.d4 d5 6.♗d3 ♗d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4 c6

- A) 9.cxd5 157
- B) 9.♖e1 159

Chapter 9

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.d4 d5 6.♙d3 ♙d6 7.0-0 0-0 8.c4 c6
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9.♗c3 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 dxc4 11.♙xc4 ♙f5

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C) 12.♗g5 190

D) 12.♙g5 194

Chapter 11

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♗xe4
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7

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B) 7.♙e3 209

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♗d7 9.0-0-0 ♗f6 10.♙d3 c5

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B) 3.♗f3 246

C) 3.♖xd4 252

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B) 4.♙c4?! 266

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E) 4.♗f3 271

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B) 3.f4 290

C) 3.♙c4 295

Chapter 16

1.e4 e5 2.♙c4 ♗f6 3.d3 c6

A) 4.♖e2 302

B) 4.♗f3 d5 5.♙b3 ♙b4† 305

B1) 6.c3 305

B2) 6.♙d2 308