Parimarjan Negi

1.e4 vs
The Sicilian III

Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!

QUALITY CHESS
Grandmaster Repertoire

1.e4 vs
The Sicilian III

By

Parimarjan Negi

Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk
## Contents

Introduction 4  
Symbols & Bibliography 6

### Taimanov
1. Introduction and 5...a6 7  
2. 6...\&f6 29  
3. Various 7th and 8th Moves 51  
4. Introduction to 8...\&c7 68  
5. New Main Line 93  
6. 8...\&b4 – Old Lines 120  
7. 8...\&b4 – Modern Lines 150

### Kan
8. Various 5th Moves 177  
9. Introduction to 5...\&f6 201  
10. 6...\&c7 217  
11. 5...\&c5 – Introduction to 6.\&b3 \&a7 241  
12. 6.\&b3 \&a7 with 7...\&e7 254  
13. Introduction to 6...\&c7 267  
14. Main Line 283

### Scheveningen
15. 4...\&c6 and 5...d6 312  
17. Various 7th Moves 359  
18. 7...\&c6 375

### Sidelines
19. 2...d6 402  
20. 2...\&c6 412  
21. 2...e6 430  
22. Move 2 Alternatives 449

Appendix – A Missing Line from the Dragon 477  
Variation Index 479
Introduction

The variations in this book mostly revolve around the 2...e6 Sicilians. There was a time when systems such as the Kan and Taimanov were considered relative sidelines compared to the mighty Najdorf, but over the years they have grown immensely in popularity. One reason is that they tend not to involve too many long theoretical lines ending in forced draws; I myself have often played the black side of the systems covered in this book for similar reasons.

Despite the relatively non-forcing nature of the Taimanov, Kan and Scheveningen, I have strived to maintain the spirit of the previous two Sicilian volumes by recommending active, aggressive set-ups for White. So, for instance, even though I have enjoyed many successes with the classical $e2 line (on both sides of the board!) – a set-up which, by the way, can be used against all three of the aforementioned Sicilian variations – I eventually decided it was not quite right for this repertoire series. One reason is that I feel that some of the slower positional variations often boil down to subjective assessments and individual playing styles, rather than the quality of your opening preparation.

The Taimanov

The Taimanov is solid and reliable, yet also active and flexible, making it one of the most popular Sicilians today. Nevertheless, the theory is still not so well developed in some lines. See, for instance, variation B of Chapter 5, featuring a ...$xd4 move order which only became popular about three years ago. Since then, it has gained a huge following – yet the line I recommend against it has barely been tested at all, which highlights the vast potential for new discoveries.

Besides this, there are dozens more possible set-ups and sub-variations that Black may choose. Some of them are a little dubious, but proving that is not always an easy task. When studying these first seven chapters, I would advise the reader to check the lines rather carefully, without trying to memorize them. One of the difficulties you will face in this section is that lots of the lines look rather similar, and it's easy to get them confused. I have done my best to highlight the differences and explain why I have recommended different moves in different situations, but it's up to the reader to internalize this information.
The Kan (Paulsen)

Against this most flexible of systems I have recommended the traditional main line of 5...d3. Generally, the positions are tough to analyse in detail – the flexibility of Black's set-up enables him, in many variations, to deviate at various points of a line without affecting the position or its assessment a great deal. Obviously I have tried to play actively and aggressively where appropriate – but most of the time I have tried to emphasize ideas and plans, and I recommend that the reader does the same.

The Scheveningen

My repertoire choice here is the Keres Attack. This aggressive option is the reason why the Scheveningen is less popular than it used to be – and yet, I was surprised at how difficult it was to find an advantage in many of the lines. Once again, a solid understanding of the main ideas, backed up by some precise knowledge of certain key lines, should serve the reader well.

Various Sidelines

The final four chapters cover an assortment of other Sicilian variations. There are too many for me to generalize about them, but I will say once again that several of them proved to be surprisingly resilient. In general, I have tried to be pragmatic about things: when dealing with a rare line that you may not encounter for several years, it is better to know a simple route to a solid edge than attempt to remember an ultra-complicated attempt at outright refutation. Even then, there are quite a lot of lines to consider, so I would advise you not to try and memorize any more than the basic details, and only study these lines in depth if preparing for a specific opponent.

***

This is the fourth book in my 1.e4 series, and it was by far the most difficult for me to write. I think the reason was not so much that I have played these systems as Black, but rather because Black has so many interesting sub-variations available in each of the three main systems. Every one of them seemed to pose unique strategic problems, none of which can be solved by simply switching on the analysis engine. This is in stark contrast to the 6....g5 Najdorf, where the variations tend to be much more concrete, or the French and Caro-Kann, where the strategic battles tend to take on similar contours from one line to the next. Despite the challenges, I believe that the finished book contains some of my best work of the entire series, and I hope that the readers will agree.

Parimarjan Negi
Stanford, June 2016
Key to symbols used

± White is slightly better

?± Black is slightly better

± White is better

?? Black is better

!! Black is better

?± White has a decisive advantage

??± Black has a decisive advantage

= equality

?± with compensation

?? with counterplay

?± unclear

?? with an attack

!± with the initiative

?? a weak move

?? a blunder

! a good move

!! an excellent move

!? a move worth considering

?! a move of doubtful value

# mate

Bibliography

Aagaard & Shaw: Experts vs. the Sicilian (2nd edition), Quality Chess 2006


De la Villa: Dismantling the Sicilian, New In Chess 2009


Delchev & Šemkov: The Most Flexible Sicilian, Chess Stars 2014

Emms: The Sicilian Taimanov Move by Move, Everyman Chess 2012


Hellsten: Play The Sicilian Kan, Everyman Chess 2008

Khalifman: Opening for White According to Anand 1.e4 8, Chess Stars 2006

Khalifman: Opening for White According to Anand 1.e4 9, Chess Stars 2007

Negi: Grandmaster Repertoire – 1.e4 vs The Sicilian I, Quality Chess 2015

Negi: Grandmaster Repertoire – 1.e4 vs The Sicilian II, Quality Chess 2015

Pavlovic: The Cutting Edge – The Open Sicilian I, Quality Chess 2010

Rizzitano: Chess Explained: The Taimanov Sicilian, Gambit 2006

Periodicals

New in Chess Yearbooks

Electronic/Internet resources

ChessBase Magazine

ChessPublishing.com
Chapter I

Taimanov

Introduction and 5...a6

Variation Index

1. e4 c5 2. d3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. cxd4 c6 5. c3 a6

6. a6 bxc6 7. d3

A) 7... e5
B) 7... d7 8.0–0 9. e1
   B1) 9... d6
   B2) 9... d6!
C) 7... d5 8.0–0
   C1) 8... d7
   C2) 8... d6 9. e1
      C21) 9... d7
      C22) 9... b7
      C23) 9... e7 10. e5 d7 11. d4
         C231) 11... g6 12. b6 g8 13. d1! b4 14. c4!
         C2311) 14... a5
         C2312) 14... c4
         C232) 11... f8?

B2) after 10... b8

C1) after 13... e7

C2312) after 14... c4

11. a4!N

14. cxd5!N

15. f1!N
The Taimanov has a reputation as one of the most promising Sicilian variations, as it combines flexibility with solidity and fast development.

5...\textit{a}6

This is by far the most important alternative to 5...\textit{c}7. Black keeps a flexible position while avoiding committing his queen for the time being.

5...\textit{d}6 is covered in Chapter 15.

5...\textit{f}6 is the Sicilian Four Knights – see variation C3 of Chapter 21 on page 440.

5...\textit{b}6 gives White two options: 6...\textit{b}3 transpose to a variation of the Grivas System covered on page 416, but 6...\textit{b}5!? may well be even stronger.

5...\textit{c}5 6...\textit{b}5 \textit{f}6. (6...\textit{a}6!? 7...\textit{d}6\textsuperscript{+}) 7...\textit{d}6\textsuperscript{+} will be covered under the Sicilian Four Knights – see variation C31 of Chapter 21 on page 440.

5...\textit{b}4 6...\textit{b}5 \textit{a}6!? (Once again, Black does better to accept a transposition with 6...\textit{f}6 – see page 442 for the variation in question.)

6...\textit{a}6 7...\textit{d}6\textsuperscript{+} \textit{xd}6 8...\textit{x}d6 \textit{e}7 9...\textit{g}3\textsuperscript{+}

5...\textit{e}7

This may look awkward, but it must not be underestimated; White should respond vigorously with:

6...\textit{d}5!

If White blindly plays for an English Attack he may be in for a rude surprise: 6...\textit{e}3 \textit{f}6 7...\textit{f}3 (or 7...\textit{d}2 \textit{g}4) 7...\textit{d}5! and Black is fine.

6...\textit{d}6

It may look as though Black is on his way towards an improved version of the Sveshnikov, having avoided having the \textit{f}6-knight being pinned by \textit{g}5. However, White can expose the drawback of his set-up with:

7...\textit{f}4...\textit{e}5

7...\textit{e}5 8...\textit{d}2 \textit{a}6 9...0–0–0! gives White a huge attack: 9...\textit{a}xb5 10...\textit{x}e5 \textit{b}4 (10...\textit{d}xe5?! 11...\textit{a}xb5\textsuperscript{+} – 11...\textit{x}g7 \textit{bxc}3 12...\textit{w}xc3 \textit{f}6 13...\textit{b}5\textsuperscript{+} \textit{e}7 14...\textit{xf}6\textsuperscript{+} \textit{xf}6 15...\textit{e}5\textsuperscript{±} Black's king is too exposed.

8...\textit{d}5!
Chapter 1 – Introduction and 5...a6

An important move, without which Black would have an improved version of a Sveshnikov.

8...exf4

8...Bxf8 9.Bc3± gave White a great version of the Sveshnikov in Fleuch – Biliriz, Bad Wildungen 2000. Not only is Black’s king misplaced, but White also benefits from not having to retreat his knight to a3.


Wagner-Michel – Beltz, Halle 1978. The a8-knight will easily return to safety via c7, leaving Black with no compensation for the exchange.

6.Bxc6

White would be ill-advised to continue in the spirit of the English Attack with 6.Bc3 and f2-f3, as Black would get an improved version of Chapter 6 with the simple plan of ...Bf6, ...b4 and ...d5. The text move is a more suitable reply to Black’s last, as White heads for a different type of position in which ...a6 is completely useless.

6...bxc6 7.Bd3

White develops another piece and will almost always castle on the next move. Black will generally commit to ...d5, ...d6 or ...e5 in the near future, allowing us to tailor our plan according to whichever central structure Black chooses. If Black avoids moving any pawns, we can either prepare e4-e5 or play Bb4 and c2-c4. In the majority of games Black has played ...d5 sooner or later, and this certainly seems to me to be the most natural continuation of his opening play.

We will analyse A) 7...e5, B) 7...Cc7 and C) 7...d5.

7...d6

This move is a rare sight nowadays. Black tends to find himself in a rather passive position without any clear gain from his chosen move order.

8.0-0 Cc6 9.f4 Be7

9...e5 loses a tempo and gives White the easy plan of fxe5 followed by exploiting Black’s weak queenside structure. For a nice example, see Navara’s win over Vyskocil in 2009, where the same position occurred with Black to move! 10.h3!? seems like a logical novelty to me, and after something like 10...Bc7 11.fxe5 dxe5 12.Bc3 Be6 13.Bc2 0-0 14.b3 Bd7 15.Ba4± White has a pleasant advantage.

10.Be2 d5

10...e5 11.fxe5 dxe5 12.h3± is similar to 9...e5 and may transpose in the near future. 10...Cd7 11.e5 gives Black nothing better than 10...d5 with an immediate transposition.
11.e5 \( \Box d7 \)
Black’s argument for losing a tempo is that f2-f4 has taken away the plan of \( \Box g4 \) followed by \( \Box h6 \). Nevertheless, it’s still a free move with certain value, and White can easily adapt his strategy by switching to the queenside. My suggestion would be:
12.\( \Box a4 \)N±
Followed by c2-c4, \( \Box d2 \) and \( \Box ac1 \). Black might end up playing ...c5 and ...d4, but then our f2-f4 will definitely be useful, and White will typically reroute his knight to d3, similar to some of the lines examined later.

A) 7...e5

This may transpose to 9...e5 in the notes to 7...d6 above, but Black can also try to develop his bishop actively to c5 or even d6, as in the main line below.

8.0–0 \( \Box f6 \)
8...\( \Box c5?! \) is not a good choice; an eventual exchange of the dark-squared bishops may well favour White, but we can also try to gain time with \( \Box a4 \) intending c4-c5. 9.\( \Box g4?! \) Why not? 9...\( \Box f6 \) This avoids weakening the kingside, but now Black’s queen is awkwardly placed. 10.\( \Box g3 \) h6 (10...\( \Box e7 \) 11.\( \Box e3 \) \( \Box xe3 \) 12.fxe3 \( \Box g6 \) 13.\( \Box xe5\)±)
The text move was Bologan’s choice; evidently, he wanted to postpone castling in order to keep his king away from the danger zone after f4-f5. However, the weird placement of the d6-bishop slows down the development of Black’s queenside pieces. That is why we can get away with the following ultra-ambitious move.

11.g4!N
11.f5 c5† 12.h1 h6 13.d2 b7 14.ae1 f5† gave Black a reasonable position in Predojevic – Bologan, Sarajevo 2004.

11...c5†
11...exf4 12.g5 g8 13.c4?! is dangerous for Black, for instance:

13...a7?! 14.xe5 dxe5 15.g5 g4
The only practical chance, as 15...g8 would be a horrible move to make.

16.c4?!†
This seems like the simplest way to shut down Black’s play, intending h2-h3 after Black defends the f7-pawn. (The immediate 16.h3 can be met by 16...h6 when Black has some tricks at least.)

B) 7...c7 8.0–0 d6
The point of this rather unusual set-up is to delay ...d5 until a more opportune moment. For example, if White plays e2, he will not be able to meet ...d5 with e4-e5 followed by f3 (or g4) as in the main lines.
9.\(\text{e}1\)

The obvious answer, preparing \(e4\)-\(e5\) without committing the queen. I considered two main replies: \(\text{B1})\ 9...\text{d}6\) and \(\text{B2})\ 9...\text{d}6?\).

9...\(\text{d}5\) transposes to the later variation C21 on page 16.

I also checked:

9...\(\text{e}5\) 10.\(\text{a}4!\)

10.\(\text{f}3\) \(\text{e}7\) 11.\(\text{g}3\) 0–0 doesn't help White.

10...\(\text{d}6\) N

10...\(\text{d}6\) 11.\(\text{c}4\) \(\text{e}6\) (11...\(\text{c}5\)N 12.\(\text{g}5\)±)

Rosen – Forintos, Bad Liebenzell 1996.

12.\(\text{c}5\)N \(\text{dx}5\) (12.\(\text{d}5\) 13.\(\text{ex}d5\) is risky for Black) 13.\(\text{w}c2\) \(\text{d}7\) 14.\(\text{e}3\)±

10...\(\text{b}8\)N can be met by 11.\(\text{c}4\) \(\text{b}4\) 12.\(\text{e}2\)± intending \(c4\)-\(c5\).

The text move is the computer’s first choice, but it is a serious commitment.

11.\(\text{w}e2\) \(\text{d}6\) 12.\(\text{g}5\) \(\text{g}4\)

12...\(\text{d}7\)

13.\(\text{ex}d5\) \(\text{c}xd5\) 14.\(\text{c}4!\) \(\text{d}4\)

15.\(\text{c}5\) \(\text{e}c5\)

16.\(\text{f}1\)±

13.\(\text{d}2\) \(\text{e}6\) 14.\(\text{f}6\) \(\text{g}6\) 15.\(\text{a}1\) \(\text{e}7\)

16.\(\text{b}3\)±

Black’s bishops are nice, but his position contains a lot of targets.

\(\text{B1})\ 9...\text{d}6\)

10.\(\text{f}3!?\)

Not the most common move, but \(\text{g}3\) is a useful option to have.

10...\(\text{e}5\)

10...\(\text{d}7\) 11.\(\text{g}3\)N looks good for White.

10...\(\text{e}7\)N 11.\(\text{g}3!\)

11.e5!? is interesting but does not lead to an advantage: 11...\(\text{dxe}5\) 12.\(\text{g}3\) (12.\(\text{xe}5\) \(\text{d}6\)

13.\(\text{f}4\) \(\text{b}7!\) 14.\(\text{ae}1\) \(\text{c}5\) 15.\(\text{g}3\) 0–0–0! is messy) 12...\(\text{b}7!\) (12...0–0 transposes to 11.\(\text{g}3\) 0–0 12.\(\text{e}5\) \(\text{dxe}5\) 13.\(\text{xe}5\) \(\text{xe}5\) 14.\(\text{xe}5\) 0–0–0

11...0–0 12.e5 \(\text{dxe}5\) 13.\(\text{xe}5!\)

This way White gets a favourable pawn structure as Black is unable to capitalize on the seemingly vulnerable rook.
Black’s last move prevents the annoying plan of f3 and e4-e5, but we should be happy to have provoked this fixing of Black’s pawn formation. As we have seen in some of the lines above, the plan of c4 and c4-c5 can be quite annoying for Black. A likely scenario is that Black will play ...c5 himself, but the ensuing structure generally gives White a comfortable edge because of the d5-square, bearing in mind that the black knight is a long way from d4.

11...e3N

11.c4 has been played, but this does not fit in with the plan outlined above.

Please note that the immediate 11.a4 runs into 11...a5! when the knight must go back.

11.b3?N is a viable alternative which leads to similar positions as the main line.

11...c7 12.a4 c6 13.c4 0–0?

Black’s last move avoids ...c5 for the time being, based on the fact that c4-c5 can be met by ...d5. However, he will have to take the possibility of c4-c5 into account on every move, whereas White can bide his time and choose the right moment for it.

14.acl ab8 15.b3±

White can continue improving his position with moves like h2-h3 and transferring the queen to the queenside. Meanwhile Black remains with a slightly worse structure and no easy access to counterplay.

B2) 9...d6?

10.h3 b8

10...e5 is conveniently met by 11.a4.

10...0–0 11.e2 c5 occurred in Salgado Duarte – Pindado Campos, Madrid 2014. I would like to draw your attention to an interesting manoeuvre:
Although other good moves exist, I like the plan or rerouting the knight to target Black's bold bishop. A logical continuation is:

12...\texttt{h}b8 13.\texttt{c}d2 \texttt{\&}xb2 14.\texttt{\&}xb2 \texttt{\&}xb2 15.e5 \texttt{\&}d5 16.\texttt{c}4 Black is in considerable danger, for instance:

I don't think White should get distracted by the a6-pawn, which is what happened in the following GM encounter: 11.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{\&}h2† 12.\texttt{\&}h1 \texttt{\&}e5 13.\texttt{\&}xa6 (13.\texttt{\&}a4 \texttt{\&}a5†; 13.f4 \texttt{\&}xf4 14.e5 \texttt{\&}xc1 15.\texttt{\&}xc1 \texttt{\&}d5 gives White decent compensation but objectively no advantage) 13...\texttt{\&}xa6 14.\texttt{\&}xa6 0–0 15.\texttt{\&}d3 d5 16.exd5 exd5 17.\texttt{\&}e2 \texttt{\&}d7 Eliseev – I. Popov, Moscow 2014. Maybe White could find an edge somewhere in this line, but I would generally prefer to strengthen the position rather than try to get away with grabbing a pawn.
Chapter 1 – Introduction and 5...a6

Placing the pawn on d5 is Black’s most logical attempt to justify his opening play. His central pawns are certainly impressive, but I intend to show that White’s lead in development is more important.

8.0-0

Black’s two most important options are C1) 8...c7 and C2) 8...f6. Other moves exist but are rarely played, for good reason.

8...d4?! 9.e2 c5 (9...e5 10.c3) 10.c3 e5 11.cxd4 cxd4 12.f4+ Badmatsyrenov – Zoltoev, Ulan Ude 2013.

8...d5 9.g4 forces some sort of concession from Black on the kingside.

8...d6 can be met in a few ways; one of the most logical is 9.e1 d7 10.e5 xe5 11.a4 a7 12.b3 c5 13.e4, which was at least slightly better for White in V. Popov – Krutous, corr. 2010.

C1) 8...c7

10.f3 d6 11.e5!

11.g4?! led to crazy stuff in one engine game, but there is no need for us to play this way.

11...f8

11...xe5 12.h5! d6 13.xe6f e8 14.e2 h6 15.b3 f6 16.h4 c5 17.d2 c6 18.a1 Black’s king was awkwardly placed and White eventually prevailed in Bucur – Riemer, email 2012.

The engines might not see any problem with playing like this as Black, but his set-up looks a bit ridiculous to me. White has the easy plan
of Qa4 and c2-c4, giving Black an unpleasant choice between allowing an opening of the queenside or blocking the centre to reach a slightly worse position with virtually no prospects for counterplay.

12.Qa4

12.Qe2 was the choice of both Topalov and Anand against Svidler, but I like the knight on a4, as you can see in several other lines of this chapter.

12...c5 13.c4 Qe7

13...d4 14.Qe4 Qxe4 15.Qxe4 Qb8 16.b3 Qe7 17.Qb2+ gives White a typical long-term edge. After bringing the knight to d3, he should be able to torture Black for eternity.

14.cxd5!

14...Qxd5 15.exd5 is too dangerous for Black, while 14...Qxd5 15.Qe4 is obviously pleasant for White.

15.Qe4±

White has the better structure as well as a lead in development.

C2) 8.Qe6 9.Qe1

From here I analysed C21) 9...Qc7, C22) 9...Qb7 and C23) 9...Qe7. The last move has been by far the most popular choice, but you never know when fashion might change.

C21) 9...Qc7 10.Qf3

With the bishop still on f8, the plan of e4-e5 followed by Qg4 lacks punch. Fortunately, the queen is well placed on f3.

10...Qe7

Now e4-e5 and Qg4 would lose a tempo, but White has another easy plan available.
Chapter 1 - Introduction and 5...a6

11.\textbf{\textit{\textbf{a}g5 \textit{\textbf{b}7}}}

11...0-0 12.e5 \textit{d}8 is an unfortunate route for the black knight. After 13.exd7 \textit{\textbf{xe}7 14.a4\pm} White had a solid positional edge in Baroin – Kobryn, email 2013. As usual in such positions, there is an easy plan of playing on the queenside with moves like c2-c4, \textit{\textbf{e}c1, \textit{\textbf{e}3 and so on.}}

11...\textit{\textbf{B}b8 seems pointless after 12.a4!N, as it turns out that 12...\textit{\textbf{B}xb2 isn't actually a threat: 13.exd5! \textit{\textbf{xd}5 (13...cxd5? 14.xf6 gxf6 15.xd5! exd5 16.xf6+- with a decisive forking of Black's rooks) 12.exd5? 13.xf6 gxf6 13...xf6 14.xd5 \textit{\textbf{xd}5 15.xd5 simply leaves Black a pawn down.}}}

12.e5 is a reasonable alternative, but it is hard to resist opening the centre and damaging Black's kingside.

12...cxd5 13.xf6 gxf6

13...xf6 14.xd5 \textit{\textbf{xd}5 15.xd5 simply leaves Black a pawn down.}

14.\textbf{\textit{\textbf{h}5}}

Black's king is stuck awkwardly in the centre.

14...\textbf{b}6

14...e5 15.f5\pm and White dominates the light squares.
We have been following Chitescu – Săvănea, corr. 2011. At this point I would bring the last of the pieces into play with:

15.\texttt{Rd1}N \texttt{d8} 16.\texttt{e2}↑

Black’s king is unlikely to find a safe shelter for quite some time.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{chess_diagram.png}
\end{center}

10.\texttt{wf3}

Just as in the previous variation, this is the natural square for the queen when we are unable to hit the g7-pawn with e4-e5 followed by \texttt{wg4}.

I briefly considered 10.\texttt{f4} e7 11.e5 \texttt{d7} 12.\texttt{wg4} but found 12...g5! 13.\texttt{d2} h5 to be rather worrying; Black has promising counterplay, with ...c5 coming next.

10...\texttt{e7}

10...d4 has been played in a bunch of computer games but it looks dubious to me, as White can quickly get the knight to c4. A good example continued: 11.\texttt{b1} c5 12.\texttt{a3} \texttt{d6} 13.\texttt{xc4} 0–0 14.\texttt{h3} e5 15.\texttt{g5} \texttt{c7} 16.\texttt{f4}± DeepSatos – BlackMamba, engine game 2014.

11.\texttt{wg3} 0–0

11...\texttt{f8} has been played, but it seems risky to misplace the king when the centre has not been closed. A game of mine continued: 12.b3 (if I reached this position again I might consider 12.\texttt{d2}± intending \texttt{Rd1} and eventually preparing c2-c4) 12...h5 13.h3 h4 14.\texttt{f3} \texttt{b4} 15.\texttt{d2} d4 16.\texttt{b1} \texttt{xd2} 17.\texttt{xd2}± Negi – Kovalyov, Leon 2012.

12.\texttt{h6}

White takes the opportunity to drive Black’s knight to a poor square.

12...\texttt{e8} 13.\texttt{f4} \texttt{f6}

13...\texttt{c8}±N is playable and prevents an immediate repetition, but White remains on top after: 14.\texttt{a4} c5 15.exd5 c4 (15...exd5 16.c4± or 15...\texttt{xd5} 16.\texttt{ad1}±) 16.\texttt{e2} exd5 17.\texttt{ad1}±

14.\texttt{c7}!

Black’s coordination is not so good, while White has easy play and can prepare an eventual c2-c4.

14...\texttt{e8} 15.\texttt{Rd1}N

I found an engine game in which 15.\texttt{ab1} was played, but the text move makes more sense to me.

15...\texttt{c8} 16.\texttt{e5} g6 17.\texttt{f1} \texttt{d8} 18.\texttt{a4}±

White can start thinking about c2-c4, and Black must also watch out for the annoying
idea of b3. It is worth mentioning a small tactical point:

We will consider C231) 11...g6 and C232) 11...f8?.

11...f8 resembles the earlier variation C1, and White can continue in a similar fashion with 12.a4± intending c2-c4.

C231) 11...g6

This has been the most popular choice.

12.h6 b8

13.d1!

This move has been causing severe problems for Black recently. White defends the b2-pawn and prepares the typical c2-c4 advance, anticipating the annoying ...b4. As in some other lines, we will welcome a dark-squared-bishop swap, as this will emphasize the weaknesses in Black's kingside. Note that White's knight is only a few moves away from taking up a menacing post on g4.

13..b4

This is the critical line of course.

13...c5 has been tried a couple of times at correspondence level, but after 14.f1??N it is not clear what Black is going to do. Here are a few sample lines:
14...\text{\textit{a}}5 (14...\textit{a}5 15.\textit{h}3! \textit{g}8 16.\textit{b}3 \textit{g}5
17.\textit{e}3; 14...\textit{g}8 15.\textit{b}3 \textit{g}5 16.\textit{e}3 \textit{a}5
17.\textit{h}3\pm) 15.\textit{e}2?! \textit{g}8 (15...\textit{b}4 16.\textit{g}3\pm)
16.\textit{a}3 \textit{c}7 17.\textit{h}4\pm

13...\textit{f}8 14.\textit{h}3!
Taking on \textit{f}8 would allow the black king
to get to \textit{g}7, where it seems relatively
comfortable.

14...\textit{e}7
Black has scored a win and a draw in the two
games from this position, but White did not
find the best continuation in either of them.

14.c4!
White has scored overwhelmingly from
this position, even though the best lines are
not always obvious. Black's main options are
\textbf{C2311) 14...\textit{a}5} and \textbf{C2312) 14...\textit{d}x\textit{c}4}.

14...\textit{c}5 15.\textit{f}1 \textit{a}5 16.\textit{h}3! threatens \textit{g}7,
so 16...\textit{f}8 is virtually forced. In Schmidt –
Philippe, Germany 2015, White exchanged
on \textit{f}8, but 17.\textit{e}3N is a clear improvement,
maintaining the tension and preparing \textit{g}4.
Our knight has completed the ideal transfer
to the kingside, and Black's weak dark squares
should cause him serious concern.

\textbf{C2311) 14...\textit{a}5 15.\textit{e}2}
Defending the rook on e1 and removing the queen from the glare of the b4-rook.

15...dxc4!?

The alternative is:

15...c5

This has been played a bunch of times, but giving away a useful defender of the dark squares for the light-squared bishop plus a measly b2-pawn doesn’t seem worth it.

16...e3 dxe3 17...xd3 dxe2 18...c1

18...c1 is also worth mentioning, and 18...g4 also offer White great compensation.

15...dxc4!?

The alternative is:

15...c5

This has been played a bunch of times, but giving away a useful defender of the dark squares for the light-squared bishop plus a measly b2-pawn doesn’t seem worth it.

16...e3 dxe3 17...xd3 dxe2 18...c1

18...c1 is also worth mentioning, and 18...g4 also offer White great compensation.

18...xb7

Also after 18...b4 19...e1 d2 20...g4! dxe1 21...xel+ White was dominating in Naiditsch – Grachev, Bol 2014.

19...g4

This was the main line of my analysis, although 19.cxd5 cxd5 20...g4 led to success for White in V. Szabo – Fages, Internet 2011, so take your pick.

19...c5 20.cxd5 dxd5 21...e1 d7 22...e3 e2 23...xd5 exd5 24...d3 Black has a powerful attack.

The text move has yielded Black two draws and a loss from three correspondence games – but I am actually surprised that Black has done as well as that, as White seems to have a pleasant position after a few different continuations. That said, I think the most accurate is:

16...e4!

16...c2 c7 also seems somewhat favourable for White, but the problem is that it’s still not easy to improve the knight. The text move is designed to solve that problem.

16...c7

This gives White a better version of the previous note.

16...xe5? 17...g7 leads to a fatal loss of material for Black.

16...xe5 is the computer’s top choice and it may be Black’s best try, but after 17...d2 0–0 18...xb4 cxb4 19...c3 Black does not have full compensation for the exchange.

17...c3! c3?

In the event of 17...xe5 18.a3 b5 19...c4 dxc4 20...xc4+ Black’s extra pawn is irrelevant. The bishop on h6 dominates the kingside, and Black’s king will remain stuck in the centre for a long time.

18...xb2 19...ab1

Once again, Black’s extra pawns barely matter at all.

19...b6 20...d6† d6 21.exd6 d6 22...b2†
Black has no way to challenge the dark-squared bishop. White has a long-term initiative and can combine threats against Black's king with taking back pawns when they become available.

C2312) 14...dxc4

15...\text{f}1!N

Even though recapturing the pawn has scored heavily for White, I prefer the text move. It doesn't lead to as many forcing lines, and the increased tension makes Black's task unpleasant with his awkward pieces and uncastled king.

It is worth showing the problem with the alternative: 15...\text{xc}4 16...\text{e}3 \text{xe}5 17...d4 \text{c}5! (17...f6 was played in Caruana - Svidler, Dubai 2014, when 18.a3!N \text{b}8 19...g4! \text{xg}4 20...xg4 would have been clearly better for White) 18...xc5 \text{xc}5 19...g7 \text{xe}3 Black went on to hold the draw in Cintins - Seelig, corr. 2014. I tried to improve White's play with 20...xe5N, but after 20...xf2 21...xf2 f6 22.b3 fxe5 23...xe5 \text{f}8\text{f} I am sceptical about the computer's claim of an edge - the endgame is undoubtedly a draw with accurate play.

15...c3

Black may as well play with an extra pawn.

15...\text{c}7? 16.a3\text{f} drives the rook away.

15...\text{g}8 can be met by 16...\text{c}1??, avoiding any trouble after ...g5.

16...\text{e}2

16...f3?! has the idea of meeting 16...\text{h}4 with 17...f4!, but I don't know if we really need such theatrics, so I will just mention 16...\text{xb}2 17...b1 as a position that could be explored further.

16...\text{h}4

In the event of 16...\text{xb}2 17...\text{xb}2 \text{h}4 18...d2 0--0 19...c4 Black's rook is awful, as are most of his other pieces. White intends a5 with a serious initiative.

17...c1 \text{xb}2 18...\text{xb}2 0--0 19...c4

White's position is not yet winning and both of his bishops could be doing more. Nevertheless, he has excellent positional compensation for the pawn, and Black's position seems awkward. A possible continuation is:

19...\text{f}6 20...g3 \text{b}5 21...xf6 \text{xf}6 22...c3\text{f}5

White's king is safer and Black has several weak pawns.
Nowadays this can be regarded as the critical response. Unlike the previous line, Black avoids weakening any kingside squares and puts the onus on White to exploit the misplaced king—not an easy task while the centre is closed and Black's position is otherwise solid. White's plan generally revolves around playing $\text{d4}$ and c2-c4, which often leads to a blocked centre after ...c5 and ...d4. This results in a complex manoeuvring game, and I would like to say a bit more about how I intend to handle it.

At first White's prospects seem great—there is a well-known plan of $\text{d4}$, trading off the better of Black's bishops, followed by rerouting the knight to the perfect d3-square. Blade's position remains solid though, and he can create counterplay on the queenside with ...a5-a4. So far White has struggled to prove anything in this type of position, so merely getting the knight to d3 isn't going to cut it.

Despite the challenges described above, I recently saw an interesting game in which a strong Polish GM, Jan Duda, decided to avoid the $\text{d4}$ bishop exchange, which almost everyone else has played without a second thought. Even though he eventually lost the game to Boris Grachev, the most prominent defender of Black's cause, Duda's plan seemed like a promising concept to explore. I eventually found a way to tweak the move order in order to get an optimized version of the same idea.

12.b3

This is a typical precaution before $\text{d4}$, stopping any funny business involving ...a5.

The game by Duda that inspired my recommended set-up went:

12.\text{h5} 13.\text{d2}

One reason why I wasn't satisfied by this move order was that the bishop seems pointless on d2, and it goes to f4 just a few moves later. At the very least, we can conclude that it is too early to commit the bishop.

13...\text{b7} 14.\text{a4} c5 15.b3 $\text{c7}$ 16.c4 d4 17.\text{f4} a5

18.\text{c2}?

The start of a new plan, which I will explain in more detail in my main line.

18...\text{c6}?

Evidently Black believed f2-f3 to be a weakening move which was worth provoking, but it doesn't look that way to me.

19.\text{f3} g6 20.\text{h6} 21.\text{h4} 22.\text{b2} h6 23.\text{g3} g7 24.\text{d3} \text{c7} 25.\text{d2}!

Freoing the f4-square for the knight, though it can also go places from f2.
24...£ag8 26.£e2 £f8 27.£e1 £d8 28.a3
White switches flanks in a most instructive way, making it clear that he controls both sides of the board.
28...£h5 29.£b1 £h4 30.£h3 £g7 31.£f2 £h5 32.£g4 £e8 33.£h1±
Even though Black eventually managed to win in Duda – Grachev, Jerusalem 2015, White was clearly in control at this stage.

12...£c5
Black had better play this in the next move or two. If he allows us to play c2-c4 with the pawn still on c6, he will have serious problems activating the light-squared bishop, as a subsequent ...£c5 will allow us to open the position with cxd5, which will be bad news for the king on f8.

13.£a4 £b7 14.c4 £d4 15.£h5!

I like the idea of avoiding any plans involving a sudden ...£h5. Now Black will be forced to shuffle around uncomfortably for a few moves while we decide on our set-up.

15.£d2 £c7 16.£f4 £g5 17.£g3 £h5 occurred in Karjakin – Ivanchuk, Loo 2013, with Black obtaining exactly the kind of counterplay I wish to avoid.

Here is an instructive example to illustrate Black’s chances when the light-squared bishops are exchanged:

15.£b2
15.£e2 followed by £e4 is essentially the same thing, as the knight will go to b2 in the near future anyway.
15...£h5 16.£e2 £c7 17.£e4 £b8
Another high-level game continued: 17...£g6 18.£d3 £g7 19.£f3 £xe4 20.£xe4 £c6 21.£h4 £a5 22.£b2 £c7 23.£g3 £c6 24.£e2 £h8 25.£g5 £xg5 26.£xg5 £c7 27.£d1 £d8 28.£f4 £e7 29.£e4 £b6
The manoeuvring has been interesting, but White didn’t get close to causing any damage in Leko – Svidler, Tashkent 2012.

18.£d3 £xe4 19.£xe4 £b7 20.£e2 £g6 21.£d2!? £g7 22.£a5?
Holding up the ...£a5 counterplay temporarily. Black’s kingside is reasonably solid, but White is actually in control there, and in the long run he has chances to mass
his pieces for an attack. Once again though, Black manages to create enough problems on the other flank.

22...\textit{h}4 23.\textit{f}f4 \textit{g}5 24.\textit{h}3 \textit{e}7 25.\textit{f}f4 \textit{g}5 26.\textit{h}3 \textit{d}8!?

Black spurns the repetition and plays for the full point. Once again the lesson is that White's attacking potential on the kingside isn't as strong as it might appear at first sight, so we need to find a way to deal with the queenside as well.

27.\textit{xd}8 \textit{bxd}8 28.\textit{f}f4 \textit{a}5 29.\textit{ad}1 \textit{a}4 30.\textit{d}3 \textit{axb}3 31.\textit{axb}3 \textit{a}8!+


\textbf{16.\textit{b}2!}

As mentioned earlier, I want to play an improved version of Duda's plan involving \textit{c}2 instead of \textit{e}4.

Here is yet another example to show why I find the bishop exchange unsatisfactory:

16.\textit{e}4 \textit{g}6 17.\textit{h}6 \textit{xe}4 18.\textit{xe}4 \textit{f}8 19.\textit{h}3 \textit{h}5 We have reached a familiar situation where it is hard for White to make progress on the kingside as Black's counterplay with \ldots\textit{a}5-\textit{a}4 is so fast: 20.\textit{d}2 \textit{a}5 21.\textit{ae}1 \textit{c}7 22.\textit{g}3 \textit{b}6 23.\textit{b}2 \textit{a}4\texttt{f} Motylev – Grachev, Ekaterinburg 2013.

\textbf{16...\textit{g}6 17.\textit{h}6?!N}

17.\textit{h}3N \textit{h}5 18.\textit{c}2 is essentially the same thing. Going to \textit{h}6 first seems more natural to me, but I am not sure if there is any strong reason to prefer either move over the other.

The only example on my database continued 17.\textit{e}2 \textit{h}5 18.\textit{e}4 and a draw was soon agreed in Rooze – Farago, Edinburgh 2015; obviously White's 18th move is at odds with the plan I am advocating.

\textbf{15...\textit{g}8}

15...\textit{g}6 16.\textit{h}6\texttt{f} \textit{g}8 17.\textit{b}2 transposes. On the previous move, 16.\textit{h}6\texttt{f} might seem like a nice idea to exchange bishops, but we will actually see later that it is worth keeping the bishop on \textit{d}2 where, like the \textit{c}2-bishop, it will serve the purpose of playing on both flanks.
17...\f8

17...\f8 18.\h3 leaves Black’s queen slightly misplaced.

18.\h3 h5

\[ 
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
\text{a} & \text{b} & \text{c} & \text{d} & \text{e} & \text{f} & \text{g} & \text{h} \\
\hline
\end{array} 
\]

19.\c2!

Preserving this bishop is the big idea which I have adapted from the Duda game. Almost every White player has handled this pawn structure by trading off the b7-bishop but, in reality, this piece will not cause us any great problems. Even if Black manages to threaten something on the long diagonal, we can just play f2-f3 to shut it down. The c2-bishop, on the other hand, serves many purposes. For one thing, it might enable us to react to a future ...a4 by capturing the black pawn. White also has the option of meeting ...a5 with a2-a4, now that the b3-pawn is securely protected. Moreover, even if Black is allowed to play ...a4 and ...axb3, White’s b3-pawn (after axb3) will be better protected.

Even more importantly, the c2-bishop is useful in an attacking context. It points directly at g6, so I guess some of you can already envisage the tactical threats that may arise if White’s knight lands on f4. The knight might also jump via f2 to e4 or even h3. As long as the queenside is blocked, which it probably will be, White has a lot of potential for manoeuvring on the kingside.

Apart from the points described above, a more general advantage of the \c2 set-up is that White does not have to be in a hurry to create a crushing kingside attack. In several of the games mentioned in the notes, the quickness of the ...a5-a4 plan has put pressure on White to prove something quickly. And finally, as we saw in the Duda – Grachev game, if Black just plays solidly and waits for White to go berserk on the kingside, then White can also plan a pawn break on the queenside! For instance, after \d3, \d2, and a2-a3, the b-pawn will be ready to advance at any moment, especially if at least one black rook is stuck on the kingside.

Before we look any further, I would like to mention that it is virtually impossible to analyse this position in great depth, due to the sheer number of options available. The computer helpfully lists everything as 0.00, but of course they are all different moves which would require individual consideration from Black over the board. White, on the other hand, can arrange his pieces fairly effortlessly while following the plans discussed above. The only really challenging moments will arise if and when the game becomes tactical.

19...\h6?!

This move has the advantage of forcing White to make a committal decision.
Another logical continuation is:
19...a5 20.a2 a6
20...c6 allows 21.xg6!, so Black has to place his rook on an awkward-looking square to prepare the bishop move.
21.d3 c6
21...a4? is premature due to 22.bxa4 c6 23.a5+.

22.a3!
There is no point in hurrying with 22.d4 as the sacrifice on g6 is not easy to arrange right now. Besides, the knight move leaves White open to ...h6 at some point, which might prove annoying.
22.a4 is playable, but there is no point in committing ourselves to a rigid queenside formation if we can avoid it. I also prefer not to give away an outpost on b4, which can be used by Black's knight to exchange one of our attacking pieces.
The text move keeps the option of opening the queenside with b3-b4 at some point, which might be especially useful with the h8-rook being so disconnected. Black has a solid position but he is essentially stuck without a plan. This is confirmed by the engine suggestions, which basically involve shuffling pieces back and forth, along with other aimless moves like ...h7.
22.e7 23.f3±
White continues to make small improvements. Perhaps b3-b4 will happen soon, or maybe we'll improve the queen next. Black doesn't really have anything useful to do.

I would also like to mention 23.g3+. The exact moves don't really matter, so I am just showing the plans. The idea is to provoke 23...h4, when 24.h3! leaves the excellent g4-square available for the knight, enabling White to follow up with f2-f3 and d2-g4.

20.f4!
It's possible to try something after 20.xh6 xh6, but our knight is too far away to exploit Black's dark-square weaknesses. The bishop exchange also gives Black options like ...g5. More importantly, now it will be tougher for us to deal with the ...a5-a4 plan, as it is not so easy to prepare the response b3-b4 without the bishop on d2.

As we have seen in some of the earlier lines, the white bishop will be great on d2, where it supports the potential plan of a2-a3 and b3-b4. Besides, it's not like we could crush Black on the dark squares right away, so exchanging bishops isn't especially useful for us. True, we would ideally prefer to keep the option of f2-f3 to block the b7-bishop, but this isn't the end of the world – it's a pretty piece, but Black can't do much with it. The bishop on h6 is useless as well.
20...\textit{a}5 21.\textit{\texttt{d}}2 \textit{\texttt{e}}7

Not for the first time, 21...\textit{c}6? would allow 22.\textit{x}g6!.

22.\textit{d}3 \textit{g}7

22...\textit{a}4? 23.\textit{b}4± shows the value of the bishop on \textit{d}2.

22...\textit{c}6 23.\textit{a}3± sees White maintaining control. It is also worth mentioning that, because of the way Black has arranged his pieces, White can switch plans completely with 23.\textit{f}2! a4 24.\textit{c}e4±. It is worth keeping in mind that the !c2 plan does not mean White will necessarily keep the bishops on the board forever.

23.\textit{f}2 \textit{c}6 24.\textit{a}3±

24.\textit{d}e4 \textit{xe}4 25.\textit{xe}4 \textit{a}7 26.\textit{a}3± is a good alternative; Black's king is stuck and his rooks are disconnected, so White can prepare b3-b4 or even f4-f5 if the opportunity presents itself. Nevertheless, I like the text move even more – Black has no constructive moves, so he is essentially just dying of waiting.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the Taimanov, one of the most popular and reliable Sicilian variations nowadays. After dealing with a few rare lines after 5.\textit{c}3, we spent the rest of the chapter looking at 5...\textit{a}6 6.\textit{xc}6 \textit{bxc}6 7.\textit{d}3, which leads to a complex strategic fight.

7...\textit{e}5 and 7...\textit{c}7 8.0–0 \textit{f}6 are playable sidelines, but refraining from ...\textit{d}5 gives White plenty of freedom. Depending on how Black places his pieces, White will either play on the kingside with f2-f4 or on the queenside with \textit{a}4 and c2-c4.

7...\textit{d}5 8.0–0 is the normal continuation, when Black can develop in a few different ways. If he leaves his knight on g8, or plays ...\textit{f}6 and leaves the bishop on f8, then White should develop with \textit{e}1 and \textit{f}3. Depending on circumstances, he can either revert to a plan with e4-e5 or continue his active piece play with \textit{g}5 or \textit{g}3, maintaining unpleasant pressure.

8...\textit{f}6 9.\textit{e}1 \textit{e}7 10.e5 \textit{d}7 11.\textit{g}4 is the big main line. Then 11...\textit{g}6 12.\textit{h}6 \textit{b}8 13.\textit{d}1\! \textit{b}4 14.\textit{c}4! is quite complicated, but Black's inability to castle makes his position much harder to play, as evidenced by his lousy practical score from this position. 11...\textit{f}8!? is more stubborn, in which case I am a big fan of Duda's plan of preserving the light-squared bishop in the c2-c4...d4 structure. I managed to refine the play of the Polish GM, and have given 12.b3 \textit{c}5 13.\textit{a}4 \textit{b}7 14.\textit{c}4 \textit{d}4 15.\textit{h}5! as my recommended move order. After following up with \textit{b}2 and \textit{c}2 – as opposed to the much more popular plan of exchanging bishops with \textit{e}4 – we will maintain control over both sides of the board. Keeping the bishop on c2 has many advantages, and I expect this to take over as the preferred method of handling such positions among strong players.
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6 5.Qc3 Qc7 6.Qe3 Qf6

7.f4

A) 7...d6 8.Qf3
   A1) 8...a6
   A2) 8...Qe7

B) 7...Qxd4

C) 7...Qb4 8.Qdb5 Qa5 9.e5
   C1) 9...Qe4 10.Qd3
       C11) 10...f5
       C12) 10...Qxc3
   C2) 9...Qd5 10.Qd2 Qxc3 11.bxc3
       C21) 11...Qe7
       C22) 11...c5 12.c4 Qd8 13.Qd3
           C221) 13...b6
           C222) 13...Qe0 14.Qh5
               C2221) 14...h6?!N
               C2222) 14...g6 15.Qh6
                   C22221) 15...d5
                   C22222) 15...f5

A1) after 18...Qxd8

C21) after 18...Qd7?

C222) note to 15.Qh6

A1) after 18...Qxd8

C21) after 18...Qd7?

C222) note to 15.Qh6

19.Qb1!N

19.Qb1!N

19.f5!N
1.e4 c5 2.\textit{\textbf{d}}3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\textit{\textbf{a}}xd4 \textit{\textbf{c}}6 5.\textit{\textbf{c}}3 \textit{\textbf{c}}7 6.\textit{\textbf{e}}3 \textit{\textbf{e}}6

This is one of the most important deviations from the main line. Now if White continues along the lines of the English Attack, Black will exploit the tempo saved by omitting \ldots a6 to obtain counterplay. Instead White should adapt his plan to highlight the drawbacks of Black's last move.

7.f4

7.\textit{\textbf{d}}2 \textit{\textbf{b}}4 8.f3 \textit{\textbf{d}}xd4 9.\textit{\textbf{c}}xd4 (or 9.\textit{\textbf{a}}xd4 e5) 9..\textit{\textbf{x}}xc3\# is one of the most direct ways in which Black can meet the English Attack set-up.

The text move makes a lot of sense with the knight on f6, as e4-e5 is an immediate threat. Black's main replies are A) 7...d6, B) 7...\textit{\textbf{d}}xd4 and C) 7...\textit{\textbf{b}}4.

7...\textit{\textbf{b}}6 breaks so many fundamental rules for the sake of grabbing a pawn on b2, and in the following game it was appropriately punished: 8.e5! \textit{\textbf{g}}4 9.\textit{\textbf{g}}1 \textit{\textbf{e}}5 (or 9...\textit{\textbf{x}}xb2, Inarkiev – Khairullin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013, 10.\textit{\textbf{c}}b5!N \textit{\textbf{b}}4\# 11.\textit{\textbf{e}}2 0–0 12.\textit{\textbf{c}}xc6 bxc6 13.\textit{\textbf{d}}4\#)

After this obvious move Black generally chooses between A1) 8...\textit{\textbf{a}}6 and A2) 8...\textit{\textbf{e}}7. The second move is critical and it turns out that White has to be more accurate against it than previously thought.
8...\textit{\textcolor{black}{\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d7} \textit{9.0-0-0 \textit{\texttt{c8} (9...a6 transposes to variation A1) 10.g4!} b1}}}}) 11.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d4! \textit{\texttt{xd4}}}} \textit{\texttt{d5}}}} 12.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{exd5 \textit{\texttt{xd5}}} \textit{\texttt{dxc6}}} \textit{\texttt{g4! \textit{\texttt{xd4}}} \textit{\texttt{e7}}} is covered on page 33 under the move order 8...\textit{\texttt{e7}} 9.0-0-0 a6.

10.g4 \textit{\texttt{xd4}} 11.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{xd4}}} \textit{\texttt{c6}} 12.g5 \textit{\texttt{d7}}

White has made excellent progress on the kingside and has a choice of promising continuations.

A1) 8...a6

11.g4! \textit{\texttt{xd4}} 12.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{xd4}}} d5 This is the only really challenging idea, but Black is playing with fire. 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{exd5 \textit{\texttt{xd5}}} \textit{\texttt{dxc6}}} in Kanovsky – Stoeck, Pardubice 2011, 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d4!N}}} would have given White a huge initiative for the sacrificed exchange.

13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{h3}}}

13.h4 is also interesting, but hurrying with f4-f5 is even more efficient.

13...b5

13...g6

This is a sensible alternative, but White has more than one tempting reply.

14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d5!N}}}

An interesting novelty, though it is hard to say if it is best. 14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{hxd1 \textit{\texttt{h6?N}}} (14...b5 is met by 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{g3}}} with the idea of f4-f5. 15...\texttt{g7}} \textit{\texttt{16.\texttt{xd6+}}} \texttt{Timman – Larsen, London 1980.)}} 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{g5 \textit{\texttt{exf5}}} \textit{\texttt{xf5}}} \texttt{h5!? This needs to be checked in more detail, but it certainly appears dangerous.}

14...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{a5}}}

14...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{exd5?}}} 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{exd5 \textit{\texttt{b5}}} \textit{\texttt{16.\texttt{e4}}} \texttt{is horrible for Black.}}
14...\textit{d}d8 15.\textit{b}b4±

15.\textit{d}d2! \textit{x}xa2 16.\textit{c}c3

Black is under pressure. A possible continuation is:
16...\textit{g}g7 17.\textit{b}b4 \textit{a}a4 18.\textit{b}b3 \textit{a}a3† 19.\textit{b}xb2
\textit{xb}2† 20.\textit{xb}2 \textit{xd}4† 21.\textit{c}c3 \textit{e}e5 22.\textit{xc}x6
\textit{bxc}6

Black has approximate material equality for the queen, but White will obviously be the one pressing for the win.

19.\textit{b}b1!\textit{N}

Swapping off the strong knight is the wrong idea: 19.\textit{d}d4 0–0 20.\textit{xe}x5 \textit{g}6! 21.\textit{xd}6
\textit{xe}x6 22.\textit{f}f6 \textit{e}e7= Black was off the hook in Vokarev – Benza, Kazan 2008.

19...0–0 20.\textit{f}f2

Threatening \textit{b}b6.

20...\textit{c}c4 21.\textit{d}d4 \textit{b}4 22.\textit{f}f1 \textit{a}5 23.\textit{h}4 \textit{a}4
24.\textit{h}5→

White's attack is a lot faster.

A2) 8...\textit{e}e7

14.\textit{hd}1 \textit{e}e7 15.\textit{f}5 \textit{exf}5 16.\textit{x}xf5 \textit{e}e5
17.\textit{d}d5 \textit{xd}5 18.\textit{xd}5 \textit{d}d8

White has a pleasant edge, with two bishops and more active pieces. The best way forward is to limit Black's counterplay and then start pushing the kingside pawns.

As I mentioned earlier, this is the trickier continuation for us to deal with.
9.0-0 0-0

9...a6

This position has occurred in quite a lot of games, but it seems slightly odd to combine kingside and queenside development like this.

10.g4!

10.g1 could be played as well, but it turns out that White can launch the g-pawn without additional preparation. Black’s only real hope is to try and go after the g4-pawn, but White can easily deal with this plan using some well-known motifs.

10...\text{x}d4 11.xd4

11.xd4?!

11...e5 12.fxe5 dxe5

13.g3 d6 14.e3 e6

14...xg4 15.h3! was horrible for Black in Ady – Savereide, Lewisham 1984.

15.g5?!

15.g5 is also strong but the text move seems simpler.

15...\text{f}8 16.e4+

White was clearly better in Lanko – Plachetka, Trnava 1984, and a few subsequent games. White will follow up with \text{b}3 to block any counterplay, while the black king remains in an unpleasant limbo. Grabbing the g4-pawn is inadvisable, as White will just get another open file along which to attack.

We have reached a critical moment, where White has often failed to find the best way forward.

10.db5!

10.g4\text{xd}4 11.xd4 e5 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.g3 e6? gives Black decent compensation for the pawn, as first seen in Bryson – Holmes, Troon 1986. Compared with the note to Black’s 9th move, it is obvious that castling helps him a lot more than ...a6 in such a scenario.

10.g1 is the natural way to prepare g2-g4, but Black has a key improvement in a critical position: 10...\text{xd}4 11.xd4 e5 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.g3 d8 14.e2\text{xd}4! 15.xd4

15...e6! Intending ...c8 and ...a5. I won’t go into further analytical details, other than to say that Black has excellent compensation and

10...b8 11.g4 a6
11...d7 12.g5 a6 13.d4 Qxd4 14.Qxd4 b5 transposes to the next note.

14.g5!Bg4
14...exd4 15.gxf6 looks horrid for Black: 15...Bxf6 (15...Bx3 16.fxe7 cxb2± 17.Bxb2 Bb8 18.f5±) 16.Bd5 Bb8 In Geenen – Mohandes, Belgium 1997, the simple 17.Bxd4N would have preserved a big advantage for White.

15.Bg3 exd4 16.gxf6
16.Bxd4 Bb6 17.f5 is interesting bur unnecessarily messy.

16...dxc3

17.h3!
Another key move, leading to a wonderful opposite-coloured-bishops middlegame where White has the more powerful attack.
17...\texttt{xf6} 18.hxg4 \texttt{c7} 
18...g6 19.\texttt{h3} \texttt{c8} 20.g5 \texttt{g7} 21.\texttt{hxh7+} \texttt{f8} 22.f5 is crushing.

19.g5 cxb2+ 
19...\texttt{f6} 20.\texttt{h2}N+ is strong. (20.\texttt{d3} \texttt{d4} 21.\texttt{df1} is less accurate, although the game still serves as a great illustration of White's attacking concept: 20...cxb2+ 22.\texttt{b1} b5? 23.e5 dxe5 24.\texttt{xh7+} \texttt{f8} 25.fx e5 White had a winning attack in Borocz - Adorjan, Hungary 1997.)

21...\texttt{fcs} 22.\texttt{b3} 
White won the exchange while keeping the attack along the h-file in Pranjic - Sheretyuk, email 2008.

B) 7.\texttt{xd4} 8.\texttt{xd4}?

8.\texttt{xd4} might lead to a better position as well, but there are lots of subtleties involved.

I don't know why this natural recapture hasn't been played more often. The idea of sacrificing the f4-pawn is quite common in a lot of Sicilians, and here White's development advantage is more than enough to justify it.

8.\texttt{xf4} 
8...\texttt{b4?!} 9.\texttt{f3} d6 10.0-0-0± was great for White in Kokkila - Volodin, Finland 2013.

9.g3

This move seems good enough to reach a more pleasant position without too much difficulty.

I would also like to mention a more ambitious alternative:

9.e5??

This leads to a dangerous initiative but the objective evaluation is not altogether clear, so I will just mention a few lines as a starting point for further study. The critical continuation is:

9...\texttt{d5}N

After 9...\texttt{g4??} 10.\texttt{g3} \texttt{g5} 11.h4 Black resigned in Zeller - Severin, Deizisau 2007, as he was about to lose a piece.

9...\texttt{e4}N is not as bad as the above game, but 10.\texttt{b5}! still leads to serious trouble for Black: 10...\texttt{h4??} 11.g3 \texttt{xg3} 12.hxg3 \texttt{xh1} 13.\texttt{c7}+ (13.\texttt{g4}?? \texttt{c6} 14.0-0-0± is also extremely dangerous) 13...\texttt{d8} 14.\texttt{xa8} b6 (14...b5 15.\texttt{g4} \texttt{xa8} 16.0-0-0?) 15.\texttt{xb6} \texttt{e4}+ 16.\texttt{e2} axb6 17.\texttt{xb6}+ \texttt{e8} 18.\texttt{d4}+ 
10.\texttt{xd5 exd5} 11.\texttt{c2} d6! 
11...\texttt{e7} 12.\texttt{f3} 0-0 13.0-0 \texttt{h6} 14.\texttt{xd5}
gives White a great position at no material cost.

12...\textit{f1} \textit{xh2}

12...\textit{e4} 13.\textit{f3}! gives White a powerful initiative.

13.b5\textit{ f8}

Both 14.\textit{d2} and 14.\textit{xf7} lead to interesting complications, and you can have fun analysing these continuations in more detail. Ultimately though, since the main line leads to a pleasant position with less effort, I decided to focus on that.

9...\textit{c7} 10.e5 \textit{d5} 11.\textit{xd5 exd5} 12.\textit{g2 c5}

12...\textit{c7} 13.\textit{xd5 0-0} 14.0-0\textit{e} was uncomfortable for Black in Khairullin – Bryzgalin, Taganrog 2011.

The text move is Black’s best chance to equalize by trading bishops and playing a quick ...d6. Nevertheless, White has more than one route to a pleasant edge.

13.\textit{g4N}

13.\textit{xd5} is too simplistic and after 13...0-0, intending ...d6, Black was okay in Melia – Vasilevich, Mardin 2011.

13.\textit{d3\textit{N}} is less forcing but it should lead to a risk-free edge: 13...0-0 14.\textit{xc5 \textit{xc5}} 15.0-0-0 \textit{d6} 16.\textit{exd6 \textit{xd6} 17.\textit{xd5 \textit{c7}} 18.\textit{f3} Black’s position is solid but he still has no easy way to equalize. The computer’s top choice is 18...\textit{e6} but, after 19.\textit{xe6 fxe6} 20.\textit{e4}, White can press for as long as he wants to, thanks to his superior structure.

13...0-0

13...\textit{xd4?} 14.\textit{xd4 0-0} 15.\textit{xd5\textit{+}}
14.e6 f6
14...fxd4 15.exf7+ Kxf7 16.Wxd4 Ke7† 17.Œd2 d6 18.Œae1† White will regain his pawn and keep a long-term edge due to his better structure.

15.e7! Œxe7 16.Œxd5† Œh8 17.0–0–0
White has plenty of compensation and is likely to regain the pawn in the near future. A possible continuation is:

17...d6 18.Œe4 Œd7 19.Œxb7 Œab8 20.Œd5†

C) 7...Œb4

This is obviously the most critical move, trying to exploit the slight loosening of White’s centre. However, the fact that Black hasn’t played ...a6 allows us to fight for the initiative with:

8.Œdb5 Œa5 9.e5
We will analyse the somewhat rare C1) 9...Œe4 followed by the usual C2) 9...Œd5.

9...a6 is not a great solution for Black: 10.Œd6† Œxd6 11.Œxd6 Œe4 12.Œd3 Œxc3 13.Œxc3 (if White prefers to keep the queens on then 13.bxc3 is also good) 13...Œxc3† 14.bxc3 Œf6 15.exf6 gxf6 16.Œe2 White’s strong bishops were more relevant than his damaged queenside in Studer – Safarli, Doha 2014.

C1) 9...Œe4 10.Œd3
Black can either preserve the knight with C11) 10...f5 or exchange it with C12) 10...Œxc3.

C11) 10...f5 11.exf6 Œxf6
A few strong players have tested this position with Black, but without much success. White has a few pleasant options, the simplest being:

12.Œe2†
Intending short castling.
12.0–0–0 0–0 13.a3 led to success for White in Svidler – Timofeev, Russia 2012, but 13...a6?!N 14.Œd6 Œxc3 15.Œxc3 Œxc3
16.bxc3 \( \text{d5} \) would have kept Black in the game, even though the position remains more pleasant for White.

12...0-0
12...a6?! loses valuable time. In Tseitlin – Kupreichik, Dresden 2013, White should have played 13.\( \text{d6} \)N \( \text{xd6} \) 14.\( \text{xd6} \) \( \text{e4} \) 15.\( \text{d3} \) \( \text{xc3} \) 16.\( \text{d2} \) with an obvious advantage thanks to the fantastic bishops.

13.0-0 d5
13...a6 14.\( \text{d6} \) \( \text{xc3} \) 15.\( \text{xc3} \) \( \text{xc3} \) 16.bxc3 reaches an endgame where Black has no easy way to untangle.

14.a3 \( \text{c7} \)
We have been following Shmuter – Saltaev, Volgograd 1994. White obviously has a pleasant version of a French structure, and it is just a question of how to increase his advantage. My suggestion is:

15.\( \text{h1} \)N
Tucking the king away is always useful, although the aggressive 15.g4?!N is also promising.

15...\( \text{d7} \) 16.\( \text{ae1} \)
16.f5?! also leads to an edge, but I would prefer to build up the position before taking direct action.

16...\( \text{ac8} \) 17.\( \text{f3} \)N
White will continue playing against the e6-pawn.

C12) 10...\( \text{xc3} \) 11.bxc3 \( \text{e7} \)

This has been tried by some strong GMs and certainly deserves attention, but the drawback is that Black's scope for counterplay remains limited.

12.g3!
The bishop will have great prospects on g2.

12...0-0
12...a6 13.\( \text{d6} \)\( \text{d6} \) 14.exd6 b5

15.\( \text{g2} \) gave White a considerable advantage in Inarkiev – Khalifman, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005.
13.\textit{g}2 f6 14.\textit{exf}6 \textit{xf}6 15.0–0 d5 16.\textit{ab}1

Apart from activating the rook, this move has the specific intention of facilitating c3-c4.

16...a6

This seems to be Black's best, but it leads to a difficult endgame for him.

16...\textit{d}8

This was played in Brkic – Hracek, Sibenik 2011, where White missed a nice way to go after Black's queen:

17.\textit{b}3N \textit{xa}2

17...a6 18.\textit{a}3± is the idea of course.

17...\textit{e}7 18.f5! a6 (18...\textit{exf}5 19.\textit{f}4±)

19.\textit{d}4 e5 20.f6! A thematic Sicilian motif, even though it looks unusual here.

20...\textit{gx}f6 (20...\textit{xf}6 21.\textit{xc}6 \textit{bxc}6 22.\textit{b}6+–) 21.\textit{f}5±

18.f5! \textit{exf}5

18...\textit{d}e5 19.\textit{e}2 a6 20.\textit{fxe}6 \textit{xe}6 21.\textit{d}4 \textit{g}4 22.\textit{a}3 \textit{xd}4+ 23.cxd4 \textit{b}6 24.\textit{c}7! leads to decisive material gains.

19.\textit{f}4!

19.\textit{xd}5 \textit{h}8 is far from clear.

White has a surprisingly strong threat of \textit{c}7, and Black's queen remains severely out of play.

19...\textit{d}h8

19...\textit{e}7? 20.\textit{d}6! wins.

19...a6 20.\textit{c}7 \textit{xd}3 21.cxd3±

20.\textit{e}1±

Black is virtually paralysed.

17.\textit{d}6 \textit{xc}3 18.\textit{h}3

18.\textit{b}6? \textit{xd}3 19.cxd3\textit{b} deserves attention as well.
After 18...\textit{xe}d3 19.cxd3 \textit{d}d4 20.xd4 \textit{xd}4\texttt{f1} 21.xg2 \textit{h}h8 22.xf1 b6 23.xc7 White agreed a draw against his much higher rated opponent in Arnaudov – Jovanic, Zadar 2007. If the game were to continue, 23...c5 24.xf7\texttt{g}8 25.xe5 would put Black under heavy pressure.

19.wxc3 \textit{xc}3 20.xd1

20...b5?!N

This seems like the best defensive try. 20...\textit{f}6 was played in Gallagher – Pelletier, Lenzerbeide 2006, when 21.b6\texttt{f} would have been the simplest way to maintain White's bind.

21.xd3 \textit{f}6 22.xc8 \textit{xc}8 23.xd5 \textit{xc}2 24.xd6

10.xd2 \textit{xc}3 11.bxc3!? 11...\textit{xc}3 is a simple alternative which give White an easier game in a French-like structure. A good example continued: 11...0–0 12.xd2 f6 13.exf6 \textit{xf}6 14.g3 d5 15.xb4 \textit{xb}4 16.d4\texttt{f} Giri – Bauer, Spain 2012. Black can try to improve, for instance with 12...\textit{xc}3, with the idea of luring White's knight away from d4, but I think White can fight for an edge there too.

Although the above alternative has a certain appeal, I have decided to focus on the more ambitious continuation. Black's position seems to be close to collapsing in many lines, so I think this justifies the additional effort required to study it. We will consider C21) 11...\textit{e}7 and C22) 11...\textit{c}5.
This is similar to the main line but less flexible. Black normally follows up with ...d6, but this could be done just as easily with the bishop on c5.

12.c4 \[\text{d}8\]

12...\[\text{b}4\] has not been tested; after 13.\[\text{x}b4\] \[\text{xb}4\] 14.\[\text{c}3\] \[\text{a}5\] 15.\[\text{d}6\] \[\text{e}7\] 16.\[\text{d}2\] White's weak c-pawns are outweighed by the d6-knight and Black's vulnerable king.

12...\[\text{b}6\]

This has been played a few times but it doesn't make much sense, as the queen will soon have to move again.

13.\[\text{b}1\]

13.\[\text{d}3\] \[\text{a}6\] 14.\[\text{d}6\] \[\text{xd}6\] 15.\[\text{ex}d6\] \[\text{d}4\] wins a pawn; White will obtain some compensation, but it's not clear how best to activate his pieces.

13...0-0 14.\[\text{d}3\] \[f5\]

14...\[\text{d}8\] 15.\[\text{h}5\] \[g6\] 16.\[\text{h}6\] \[f5\] occurred in A. Vovk - Manea, Arad 2014.

The straightforward 17.h4!N would have been strong. Unlike the later variation C2222, Black does not have ...\[\text{e}7\] available. A possible continuation is 17...\[\text{e}8\] 18.\[\text{d}6\] \[\text{f}8\] 19.\[\text{g}5\] \[\text{x}g5\] 20.\[\text{h}xg5\] \[\text{xd}6\] 21.\[\text{ex}d6\] and Black's dark-square weaknesses will continue to cause him problems well into the endgame.

15.\[\text{xf}6\] \[\text{xf}6\] 16.\[\text{d}6\]

In Meszaros - Radovanovic, Zalakaros 2012, White should have played:

16.\[\text{d}6\] \[\text{d}4\]

16...\[\text{c}7!\] 17.\[\text{h}5\] \[g6\] 18.\[\text{x}g6\] \[hxg6\] 19.\[\text{x}g6\] \[\text{g}7\] 20.\[\text{e}8\] is crushing.

17.\[\text{e}4\] \[d5\] 18.\[\text{xf}6\] \[\text{xf}6\] 19.\[\text{ex}d5\] \[\text{ex}d5\] 20.0-0–

Intending f4-f5.
13.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}}d3 d6
13...0–0? Black needs the bishop on c5 if he is to play this way: 14.0–0±

14.exd6N
14.0–0 has been played a couple of times, when 14...0–0 may lead to our main line after White takes on d6, but 14...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}}xe5?!N is an extra option that we don’t need to allow.

14...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xd6} 15.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}xd6} 16.0–0 0–0
17.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}c3} f5 18.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{h}}}1} \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}7}?

This seems like a better try than 18...e5
19.fxe5 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}3} (19...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xe5}N 20.\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}2 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xd1} 21.\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xd1 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}c6} 22.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}f3} 20.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}c6} 21.\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}b1 b6 22.g4+- as in Radjabov – Grachev, Dagomys 2008.

19.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}bl}!N
19.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}xf5} looks tempting, but after 19...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xd1} 20.\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xd1 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}xf5} 21.\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xd7 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}f7} 22.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}xf7} \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}xf7} 23.\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}b1 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}d8} Black was able to hold in Shirov – Rublevsky, Poikovsky 2009.

Instead of grabbing a pawn, White can keep the more pleasant position by utilizing his excellent bishops to create play on the kingside.

19...b6
19...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}c7} 20.\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}e1± is similar.

20.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}e1} \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}ad8} 21.\textit{\textit{\textit{g}}}g3 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}f7} 22.\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}fd1±

This is the main line – Black keeps the bishop on a more active diagonal.

12.c4 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}d8}
12...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}b6} is hardly an improvement: 13.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}b1} \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}2}† (13...0–0 14.\textit{\textit{d}}}d3 was excellent for White in Sjugirov – Matlakov, St Petersburg 2008) 14.\textit{\textit{e}}e2 0–0 15.\textit{\textit{d}}}d6 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}c5} 16.\textit{\textit{b}}}b5! This well-judged sacrifice leads to a clear advantage:
By delaying castling, Black seems to be trying to create some confusion as to how White should continue the attack. It doesn’t seem like a big problem though.

14.\texttt{c3} 0–0

14...\texttt{b7}N is similar to the line below after 15.\texttt{g4}, for instance: 15...0–0 16.\texttt{d6} \texttt{xd6} 17.\texttt{exd6} f6 18.0–0 \texttt{f7} 19.\texttt{f3} f5 20.\texttt{h5}↑

14...\texttt{a6} 15.\texttt{g4} 0–0

15...\texttt{f8} looks ugly: 16.0–0–0 (White has other options such as 16.\texttt{d6}N and 16.f5?N, and he seems to be doing well whichever one he chooses! 16...h5 17.\texttt{f3} \texttt{e8} 18.\texttt{f5} \texttt{xb5} 19.\texttt{xb5} \texttt{d4} 20.\texttt{g4} \texttt{xf5} 21.\texttt{xf5} \texttt{exf5} 22.\texttt{xf5} \texttt{a3}↑ 23.\texttt{b2} \texttt{xb2}↑ 24.\texttt{xb2} g6 25.\texttt{xd7}± Degraeve – A. Sokolov, Nimes 2009.

15.\texttt{h5}

15.\texttt{g4} is also possible, and was the actual move order of the aforementioned Delchev – Ivanov game, but Black can try to improve on 15...\texttt{a6}. The text move is more forcing.

15...\texttt{g6}?N

This seems like the most resilient defence.
15...h6 led to success for Black in K. Szabo – Khairullin, St Petersbur... would leave White in a mess.

18...\texttt{\texttt{f8}} 19.\texttt{g5} \texttt{\texttt{b4}}

The game is still competitive, but White can stay on top by pressing ahead on the kingside:

16.\texttt{h6}

Planning to launch the h-pawn.

16...f5 17.exf6

16...f5 17.exf6

17.h4 e7 18.h5 g5

17...\texttt{xf6} 18.h4!
So far this has yet to be tested, even though the ensuing position is ripe with possibilities. One explanation is that Black’s practical results with the alternative have been good up to now, so perhaps nobody felt the need to deviate. Whatever the reason, White certainly doesn’t have an easy way to prove an advantage, so it is worth being ready for this move.

15.\(f1\!

My idea is to build up on the kingside with \(f3-g3\), since Black has no immediate way to launch a counterattack.

15.\(b1\) d5 16.exd6 f5 seems complicated but reasonable for Black.

15.\(c3\) is playable, but 15...\(b4\)! is slightly annoying.

15.g4 is the most tempting alternative, but Black can generate counterplay in the centre with 15...d5! Other moves would give White a strong attack. 16.g5 (16.exd6 e5 17.0-0-0 a6 18.\(c7\) \(xd6\) 19.\(xa8\) b5! leads to insane complications) 16...\(b4\)! With the idea that gxh6 can be met by ...\(xd3\) and ...\(g6\), blocking the attack for now.

15...d5? 15...\(b4\) 16.\(f3\) gives White good attacking chances.

15...f5 16.\(f3\)! (16.exf6 \(xf6\) 17.\(b1\) [17.\(c3\) \(b4\)!] also deserves attention, but opening the centre gives Black a lot of options) 16...\(h7\)

17.\(g3\) \(e7\) 18.\(c3\)± There is no immediate breakthrough, but White certainly has a lot of firepower aimed at the kingside.

15...a6 16.\(d6\) (16.f5 f6! isn’t easy to break) 16...\(xd6\) 17.exd6 \(xf6\) 18.\(c3\)± As usual, Black’s development is less than impressive; even though White cannot make use of the dark-squared bishop immediately, his chances are clearly preferable.

16.\(xd5\!\) 16.exd6 f5! 17.\(c3\) \(f7\)\(+=\) leads to messy complications due to the open centre.

16...\(xd5\)

16...a6?! is interesting, but White gets a fine game with simple play: 17.\(c3\) exd5 18.\(f3\) \(b4\) 19.\(f1\) White’s king is safe enough, and he has excellent prospects of building an attack.

16...exd5 17.\(f3\) \(b4\)

18.\(xb4\) (18.\(f1\)! could be considered here too) 18...\(xb4\) 19.\(f1\) a6 20.\(d4\)± I like White’s attacking prospects, and there is no need to worry about ...\(c3\) due to the \(h7\) trick, which will give White a positional advantage due to the superior minor piece.
17.\texttt{\textit{f3}} \texttt{\textit{b4}}

This seems like Black's best chance for counterplay. We have reached a critical position where White has to resort to quite sophisticated measures in order to prove anything.

18.\texttt{\textit{c1}}!

18.\texttt{\textit{c7}} \texttt{\textit{d4}} doesn't work, and immediately shows one of the benefits of having the rook on c1.

Initially I thought about exchanging the knight on b4, but later I realized that the dark-squared bishop can play a vital role in White's attack, for instance after f4-f5 and \texttt{\textit{xh6}}. By placing the rook on c1, we take the sting out of a possible ...\texttt{\textit{d4}} and thus prepare to improve our knight. And of course, if Black exchanges on d3 then the rook will be perfectly placed after cxd3.

18...\texttt{\textit{b6}}

18...\texttt{\textit{xa2}}? 19.\texttt{\textit{b1}} leaves Black facing a multitude of threats while his knight is stranded.

18...\texttt{\textit{xd3}}? 19.\texttt{\textit{cx}}d3 \texttt{\textit{e3}}? (19...\texttt{\textit{d7}} runs into 20.\texttt{\textit{c3}} \texttt{\textit{d4}} 21.\texttt{\textit{e2}} and the rook is perfectly placed on c1) Black's last move looks like an interesting try, but it soon leads to trouble for him:

20.\texttt{\textit{xe3}} \texttt{\textit{xb5}} 21.\texttt{\textit{g3}} \texttt{\textit{h8}} 22.\texttt{\textit{f1}}. Black's position may seem solid but White's attack is about to get started, and the opposite-coloured bishops will prove especially useful in this regard.

19.\texttt{\textit{c3l}} \texttt{\textit{d4}}

19...\texttt{\textit{d8}} 20.\texttt{\textit{g3}} \texttt{\textit{h8}} 21.\texttt{\textit{e4}}+ shows the perfect arrangement of White's pieces, and his attack will soon decide the game.

20.\texttt{\textit{e2}} \texttt{\textit{d7}}

20...\texttt{\textit{b2}} 21.\texttt{\textit{g3}} \texttt{\textit{xd3}}? (21...\texttt{\textit{h8}} 22.\texttt{\textit{e4}} \texttt{\textit{b8}} 23.\texttt{f5}+) 22.\texttt{\textit{cxd3}} \texttt{\textit{h8}} 23.\texttt{f5} \texttt{\textit{b4}} 24.\texttt{\textit{c3}} is winning for White.

21.\texttt{f5}!

As mentioned earlier, the d2-bishop will play a crucial role in the attack.
21...exf5 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}}h6}↑

White has a vicious attack. (22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}3} is also good.)

\textbf{C2222) 14...g6 15.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}}6}}

Black must be mindful of the attacking plans of h4-h5 and \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}3} followed by \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}6}. His main options are \textbf{C22221) 15...d5} and \textbf{C22222) 15...f5}. 15...a6 forces Black to give up the dark-squared bishop, which leads to a grim situation for him as usual. 16.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}6} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}}d6} 17.exd6 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}}6} 18.0-0 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}}5} (18...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}4}↑\textbf{N} 19.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}}1} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}}5} [19...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}}d6}? 20.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}3}↓] 20.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{ad}}}1±) In Zhou – Volodin, Chotowa 2010, White could have caused serious problems with:

\textbf{16.exd6}

I briefly looked at 16.h4, but Black has a good reply in 16...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}8}? 17.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}6} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}}d6} 18.exd6 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}}6} intending ...e5.

\textbf{16...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}}6}}

16...e5N gives White a pleasant choice between 17.h4 and 17.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}3}, with the better game in both cases.

\textbf{17.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}}1}}

17.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}3} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}}4} 18.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}2} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}}c3}↑\textbf{N} 19.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}3} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}4} would be messy.

\textbf{17...e5}

17...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}4}? 18.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}3}±

\textbf{18.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}}4}!}

18.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}5} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}}g5} 19.fxg5 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}8} was good for Black in Sjugirov – Khalifman, Dagomys 2009. I analysed the text move as a novelty, but then found it had occurred in a computer game in 2014.

\textbf{18...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}4}?\textbf{N}}
It's hard to say exactly how Black should proceed, but this seems like the most challenging way.

18...exf4 19.h5 Be8† 20.d1 g4† 21.c1 a6 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.c3† is the key line which justifies White's 18th move.

I also analysed: 18..d4 19.xd4 (19.c3?N) 19...xd4 (19...e4? 20.e2! exd3 21.c3--; 19..exd4 20.h5†)

20.h5 e4 21.e2N (This was my main line before and I will leave it that way, although 21.hxg6 xg6 22.e2 was similarly favourable for White in Skypilot – Stockfish, engine game 2014.) 21..b6 22.hxg6 xg6 23.b3†

19.e2
19.c3? d4† is good for Black.

19..d4 20.c3!
20.h5 d5 21.g5 g7 22.h6 h8? is rather double-edged. I would prefer not to block up the kingside unless there is a really compelling reason.

20..d8
20..xc2† 21.d2 d4 sees Black wasting time for the sake of capturing an irrelevant pawn: 22.h5 e3† 23.e1 f5 24.d1±

21.f1??

This is not the computer's top choice, but it brings a human touch to the position.

Black's idea is to block White's attack. The only way to break through is with h4-h5, and Black is ready to meet it with ...g5! and a queen exchange.

16.h4 g7 17.d6
17.g5?N was my first idea, intending to meet 17..b6 with 18.g3† intending h4-h5.
However, Black can do better with 17...\(\text{N}\)xg5! 18.hxg5 b6 19.h3 \(\text{b}7\) when White’s spoilt queenside structure makes it hard for him to do anything too ambitious.

17...\(\text{b}6\)

After 17...\(\text{ax}d6?\) 18.exd6 Black will, sooner or later, pay the price for the severe weakening of his dark squares.

17...\(\text{g}7\) is the most natural move, but the endgame after 18.\(\text{x}g7\) is tough for Black:

18...\(\text{g}7\)

19...\(\text{g}5\) 19.\(\text{g}4!\)

19.0–0–0 \(\text{g}4!\) would thwart our kingside ambitions.

19...\(\text{gx}f4\)

A crucial variation is 19...\(\text{fx}g4\) 20.0–0–0 \(\text{g}7\) (20...\(\text{d}4\) 21.\(\text{f}xg5\) \(\text{g}7\) 22.\(\text{g}6\) 21.\(\text{g}7\) \(\text{g}7\) and now the beautiful continuation:

22.\(\text{g}5\) \(\text{a}6\) 23.0–0–0 \(\text{a}6\) 24.\(\text{g}5\)

17...\(\text{d}8\)N 18.\(\text{h}5\) also puts Black under pressure, for instance:

22.\(\text{d}8\)N! \(\text{a}6\) 23.\(\text{h}6\) 24.\(\text{x}g7\) \(\text{a}6\) 25.\(\text{g}7\) \(\text{g}7\) Black is absolutely paralysed by the knight on d6, and White’s rook will make its way up the g-file with deadly effect.

20.\(\text{xf}4\) \(\text{xe}5\)
This is Black's best chance, as 20...fxg4 21.0-0-0 gives White an easy attack.

21.\textcolor{red}{\textbf{\textit{x}}\textit{xe5}} 22.\textit{xd6} 23.\textit{gxf5} 24.0-0-0

24.\textit{df1} is equally good: 24...\textit{f7} 25.0-0-0 \textit{a3}† (25...\textit{b7} 26.\textit{df1}† simplifies White's task) 26.\textit{d2} \textit{b7} We have transposed to the main line.

[Diagram]

24...\textit{b7} 25.\textit{g1} \textit{a3}† 26.\textit{d2} \textit{f7} 27.\textit{xe6}

27.\textit{f6}!\textit{N} \textit{f8} 28.\textit{g6} e5 29.\textit{f5} also gives White some advantage, but the text move is easier for humans to understand.

27...\textit{b4}† 28.\textit{c3} \textit{b2}† 29.\textit{c2} \textit{f2}† 30.\textit{e1} \textit{xc3}† 31.\textit{xf2} \textit{xc2}†

32.\textbf{\textit{d3}}!

32.\textit{xd2} brought White victories in a couple of engine games, but I find the text move more straightforward. The dancing king may look worrying, but it's not too difficult to escape the checks.

32...\textit{e4}† 33.\textit{d2} \textit{d4}† 34.\textit{c2} \textit{e4}† 35.\textit{e3} \textit{xc4}† 36.\textit{d3} \textit{xa2}† 37.\textit{d2} \textit{xe6} 38.\textit{xe6} \textit{dxe6} 39.\textit{e7} \textit{c6}

39...\textit{e4} 40.\textit{e3} \textit{f5} 41.\textit{f6} is similar. It's hard to say for sure if White is winning, but Black is clearly suffering.

40.\textit{e7} \textit{e8} 41.\textit{h6}†

Black was unable to hold in Ma. Adams – Fagerstrom, email 2013.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter has introduced the 5...\textit{e7} branch of the Taimanov by covering 6.\textit{e3} \textit{f6}, a secondary but still rather important variation. After my recommendation of 7.\textit{f4}, we started by analysing 7...d6. White gets a good game with the active 8.\textit{f3}, intending 0-0-0 and g2-g4, although it is important to know some specific details, especially after 8...\textit{e4} in the critical line starting with 10.\textit{d6}.

We then looked at 7...\textit{xd4}, when 8.\textit{xd4}? is a rare but promising pawn sacrifice.

The most important branch of the chapter occurs after 7...\textit{b4} 8.\textit{d5} \textit{a5} 9.e5, which produces a sharp game. 9...\textit{e4} 10.\textit{d3} normally leads to some version of a French structure with good prospects for White, so 9...\textit{d5} should be regarded as critical. The main line continues 10.\textit{d2} \textit{xc3} 11.\textit{xc3} \textit{c5} 12.c4 \textit{d8} 13.\textit{d3}, when White intends to use his space advantage and active pieces to launch an attack. The position is extremely complicated and rather challenging for both players, but I think my analysis has shown that Black faces the greater dangers, without any clear path to equality in sight.
Taimanov

Various 7th and 8th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 dxc6 5.e3 c7 6.e3 a6

7.Wd2

A) 7...xd4?! 52
B) 7...d6 53
C) 7...d6 8.0–0–0 54

C1) 8...d6 9.e2? e7 10.f4 55
C11) 10...d7 59
C12) 10...0–0 60

C2) 8...xd4 9.xd4 g4 10.b6 d6 61
11.d4 e5 12.e3 e7 13.d5 d8 14.b3 63
C21) 14...xe3 64
C22) 14...d6?! 65

A) after 9...b7

B) after 8...d7?

C11) after 13...b7

10.e5?N

9.g4N

14.b5!N
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 d6 5.e3 c7 6.e3 a6

This is Black’s most popular and flexible move, whose only drawback is that it fails to develop a piece.

7.d2

White develops his queen and prepares to castle. There is no need to commit any of the kingside pawns until Black has defined his set-up more clearly. In this chapter we will analyse A) 7...d4, B) 7...d6 and a few sidelines after the most popular C) 7...f6.

7...b4 has no great significance, as after 8.0-0-0 Black’s only logical choice is 8...f6, leading straight to Chapters 6 and 7. Of course, White could also consider 8.a3?, so I don’t see much point in this move order for Black.

7...b5 has been played in quite a lot of games, but the most likely outcome is a transposition to one of the later chapters after a subsequent ...f6, as I don’t see how Black can benefit from leaving the knight on g8. For example, after 8.xc6 xc6 (or 8.xc6 9.f3) 9.0-0-0 I think Black should try to transpose to Chapter 5 with 9...f6 followed by ...e7. However, White may be tempted to try for more with 10.f4? or 10.e5?. In any case, the 7...b5 move order is not something we should be worried about.

A) 7...d4?

This move makes some sense when compared to the new main line from Chapter 5. In that variation, Black plays 7...f6 followed by ...e7 and ...b5, keeping the option of a timely ...d4, but allowing us to play a disruptive xc6. This way he deprives us of that possibility, but exchanging on d4 so early has some drawbacks as well; for instance, White should be able to do without f2-f3.

8.xd4

8.xd4 b5 9.0-0-0 b7 10.f3 f6 11.g4 c8 gives Black his ideal scenario: an improved version of the set-up examined in Chapter 5.

8...b5 9.0-0-0 b7


The present position occurred in Gonzalez Garcia – Ivanisevic, Bled (ol) 2002, and several other games, but so far nobody has tried:

10.e5?N

An interesting way to challenge Black’s unusual move order. Now he will struggle to develop because ...e7 will allow xb5!
10...\texttt{h}6
10...\texttt{c}6 11.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{e}7 12.\texttt{h}e1\texttt{t}
10...\texttt{b}8 11.\texttt{b}1 \texttt{c}6 is slow, and we can increase our lead in development even further by giving up a bit of material: 12.\texttt{d}3! \texttt{x}g2 13.\texttt{h}g1 \texttt{f}3

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
  & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
1 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
2 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
3 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
4 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
5 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
6 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
7 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
8 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

14.\texttt{e}4! \texttt{x}d1 15.\texttt{x}d1\texttt{t} White is completely dominating.

11.\texttt{d}3?!
11.f3 is certainly playable, but I have no qualms about offering the g2-pawn. Black is not forced to take it, but I like White's chances in any case.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
  & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
1 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
2 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
3 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
4 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
5 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
6 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
7 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
8 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

11...\texttt{x}g2
11...\texttt{b}4 12.\texttt{e}2 (12.\texttt{e}4 \texttt{f}5!) 12...\texttt{x}g2 (12...\texttt{e}7 13.\texttt{h}g1) 13.\texttt{h}g1\texttt{t} is similar to the main line.

11...\texttt{c}8 12.\texttt{e}4 \texttt{f}5 13.\texttt{c}3\texttt{t}
11...\texttt{e}7 12.\texttt{h}g1 \texttt{f}5 (12...0–0 13.g4\texttt{t}) 13.\texttt{x}f5 \texttt{e}x5 14.\texttt{b}1 0–0 15.g4 f4 16.\texttt{xf}4\texttt{t}

12.\texttt{h}g1 \texttt{f}3 13.\texttt{e}2
13.\texttt{d}e1 could also be considered in order to keep the option of \texttt{e}4.

13...\texttt{g}6 14.\texttt{e}3\texttt{t}
Black's extra pawn will not be of much use in the middlegame. The position remains complicated, but I like White's chances based on his active pieces and the open g-file.

B) 7...\texttt{d}6 8.0–0–0 \texttt{d}7??
8...\texttt{f}6 transposes to variation C1, but we should also consider this rather sophisticated move order. Despite the text move's odd appearance, neither GM Ganguly nor Yu Yangyi managed to achieve anything special against it. By delaying ...\texttt{f}6, Black hopes to confuse White's plans - which kingside pawn(s) should we advance, and in what order?

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
  & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
1 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
2 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
3 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
4 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
5 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
6 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
7 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
8 &   &   &   &   &   &   &   &   \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

9.\texttt{g}4!N
This has not yet been tried but it seems like the obvious move to me - what better way to exploit Black's delay in putting the knight on f6?
It is worth mentioning the natural alternative: 9.f4 \( \text{h6} \)!

This can be compared with the later variation C1. Since Black has avoided ...\( \text{e7} \) here, he is better equipped to meet the plan of \( \text{e2} \) and \( g2-g4 \), as he can use the spare tempo to do something more productive on the queenside.

10.\( \text{e2} \) \( \text{c8} \)

10...\( \text{b5} \)? also looks fine and has score well for Black.

11.\( \text{g4} \)

11.\( \text{b3} \) is hardly critical, for instance:

11...\( \text{b5} \)N (11...\( \text{a5} \) was also okay for Black in Ganguly – Wang Chen, Sharjah 2014)

12.\( \text{f3} \) \( \text{b4} \) 13.\( \text{a4} \) \( \text{a5} \) 14.\( \text{b6} \) \( \text{c4} \) 15.\( \text{xc4} \) \( \text{xc4} \)∞

11...\( \text{xd4} \) 12.\( \text{xd4} \)N

After 12.\( \text{xd4} \) \( \text{d5} \)? Black was doing fine in Schmaus – Wawra, Sharjah 2014.

\[ \]

12...\( \text{e5} \) 13.\( \text{e3} \) \( \text{g4} \) 14.\( \text{d5} \) \( \text{e6} \)∞

White has some attacking chances for the pawn and this could certainly be analysed more, but it doesn’t seem easy for White, despite the impressive knight on d5. Black has some ideas for counterplay such as ...\( \text{a4} \), and the bishop can be developed to g7 rather than the pointless e7, where it would always be a target.

9...\( \text{b5} \)

9...\( \text{e5} \) 10.\( \text{g5} \) (10.\( \text{h3} \)? is a good alternative)

10.\( \text{g4} \) 11.\( \text{f4} \) leaves the knight out of place, and 11...\( \text{e5} \)? only makes matters worse:

12.\( \text{d5} \) \( \text{d8} \) 13.\( \text{h3} \) Black has a terrible position.

10.\( \text{g5} \) \( \text{h6} \)

10...\( \text{ge7} \)? 11.\( \text{xb5} \) is a typical trick, and 10...\( \text{b4} \) 11.\( \text{ce2} \) does not really help Black either.

10...\( \text{xd4} \) 11.\( \text{xd4} \) is also unsatisfactory for Black as the pressure against the d6-pawn makes it hard for him to arrange ...\( \text{e7} \).

\[ \]

\[ \]

\[ \]

\[ \]

\[ \]

\[ \]

\[ \]
This takes us a step closer to the main lines of the Taimanov English Attack. In this chapter we will consider C1) 8...d6 and C2) 8...\( \texttt{\textit{d}} \)xd4.

8...b5 is covered in variation A of Chapter 5.

8...\( \texttt{\textit{e}} \)e7 is an important move which will discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

8...\( \texttt{\textit{b}} \)b4 is the traditional main line and can be found in Chapters 6 and 7.

The only other option worth mentioning is:

8...\( \texttt{\textit{g}} \)g4

We will see a similar idea in variation C2 below, and this is certainly not an improved version for Black.

9.\( \texttt{\textit{f}} \)f4 \( \texttt{\textit{g}} \)ge5

9...\( \texttt{\textit{e}} \)e5? is suicidal: 10.\( \texttt{\textit{d}} \)d5 \( \texttt{\textit{d}} \)d8 11.h3 \( \texttt{\textit{f}} \)f6 (11...\( \texttt{\textit{f}} \)xf2 12.\( \texttt{\textit{w}} \)xf2 exf4 13.\( \texttt{\textit{w}} \)xf4 \( \texttt{\textit{d}} \)d6 14.\( \texttt{\textit{c}} \)c4+ Arizmendi – Collutius, Saint Vincent 2003) In Meera – Kavitha, Calicut 2003, White could have got a big advantage with 12.\( \texttt{\textit{d}} \)xf6\( \texttt{\textit{g}} \)xf6 13.\( \texttt{\textit{g}} \)g5+ followed by \( \texttt{\textit{f}} \)f5.

10.\( \texttt{\textit{g}} \)g3

This gives White easy play. The game could continue in various ways, but the following game was quite logical:

10...\( \texttt{\textit{d}} \)xd4 11.\( \texttt{\textit{w}} \)xd4 f6 12.f4 \( \texttt{\textit{c}} \)c5 13.\( \texttt{\textit{w}} \)d2 \( \texttt{\textit{f}} \)f7 14.e5 f5 15.\( \texttt{\textit{f}} \)f2 \( \texttt{\textit{f}} \)xf2 16.\( \texttt{\textit{w}} \)xf2 b5 17.g4!

17.\( \texttt{\textit{g}} \)g1 \( \texttt{\textit{a}} \)a7! was annoying for White in Nepomniachtchi – Macieja, Internet (blitz) 2006.

C1) 8...d6

9.\( \texttt{\textit{c}} \)c2?

9.f4 \( \texttt{\textit{d}} \)d7! transposes to Ganguly – Wang Chen, as referenced earlier under the 7...d6 move order. Of course it's possible to search for an improvement there, but I would prefer to avoid it altogether.

9.f3 is a decent alternative which gives White quite a good version of the English Attack.
However, considering that I have recommended different systems against the Najdorf and Scheveningen variations, I don’t think it is worth spending time on a completely different line just to be ready for a relatively unusual transposition by Black.

The text move has hardly ever been played in this position, but it immediately transposes to several other games. I like this move a lot; the ensuing positions are easy for White to play, thanks to the natural attacking ideas of f2-f4, g4-g5, and sacrificial ideas such as \( \text{\textit{f5}} \). The bishop on e2 helps to restrict Black’s queenside play, as \( \text{...b5} \) runs into the plan of \( \text{\textit{xc6}} \), e4-e5 and \( \text{\textit{f3}} \). Also, as we will see in several of the variations below, the plan of \( \text{...\textit{xd4}} \) and \( \text{...e5} \) tends not to work well for Black.

9...\( \text{\textit{e7}} \)

9...\( \text{b5?} \) 10.\( \text{\textit{xc6}} \) \( \text{\textit{xc6}} \) 11.e5! is the simplest version of the aforementioned trick.

Black can stay in the game with 11...b4, but after 12.\( \text{\textit{f3}} \) d5 13.exf6 bxc3 14.\( \text{\textit{xc3}} \) (14.\( \text{\textit{d4}} \) is also good but the text move is simpler) 14...\( \text{\textit{xc3}} \) 15.bxc3 \( \text{\textit{xa3}} \) 16.\( \text{\textit{d2}} \) gxf6 17.c4 White had a considerable advantage in Zanaty – Voros, Hungary 2004.

9...\( \text{\textit{d7}} \) 10.g4!N is a strong novelty: 10...\( \text{\textit{xd4}} \) 11.\( \text{\textit{xd4}} \) e5 (after 11...\( \text{c6} \) 12.g5 \( \text{\textit{d7}} \) 13.f4\# it is hard for Black to even continue developing) 12.\( \text{\textit{xd2}} \) \( \text{\textit{g4}} \) 13.\( \text{\textit{d5}} \) \( \text{\textit{c6}} \)

12.\( \text{\textit{d3}} \) b4 13.\( \text{\textit{a4}} \) \( \text{\textit{xb4}} \) The loss of the g-pawn is not something White should ever worry about in these positions, as it costs Black time and opens additional lines for us. 14.\( \text{\textit{b6}} \) \( \text{\textit{b8}} \) 15.\( \text{\textit{d5}} \) \( \text{\textit{c6}} \) 16.\( \text{\textit{b1}} \)

10.f4

This seems like the most consistent continuation, considering that the main point of the 9.\( \text{\textit{e2}} \) move order was to avoid 9.f4 \( \text{\textit{d7}} \). White is actually spoilt for choice though, as there is a second promising continuation:
10.g4!?  

We will see in the main line that White often plays this at some point, so it makes sense to consider it immediately. This way Black gets the extra options of 10...e5 and 10...b5, but White has good prospects against both of them.

10...b5  
10...e5!? 11...h6 g4! (11.g5 d4g4 12.f4 dexe3 13.dxe3 could be an interesting line to check further, but I have some reservations about giving away my dark-squared bishop. At the same time, White is well ahead in development so he might be better here too.) 11...b5?!N (11...c4 has been played a few times, but if I was playing Black I would prefer to hold the knight back for a little longer) 12.g5 d7f7 13.f4 b4 14.d4 c4 15.dxc4 dxc4 16.b1+  

11.g5 d7  

Black has a surprisingly tough life here. If he castles then White will hurl his g- and f-pawns up the kingside, while if Black tries to be too sophisticated he will have to watch out for sacrificial ideas like d5f5.

The two main continuations are C11) 10...d7 and C12) 10...0–0.
10...b5?! runs into 11.e5 dxe5 (11...\texttt{\textbackslash d}xe5 \texttt{\textbackslash d}xe5) 12.\texttt{\textbackslash d}xe6 \texttt{\textbackslash w}xe6 13.fxe5 \texttt{\textbackslash d}d5 14.\texttt{\textbackslash d}xe5 exd5 15.\texttt{\textbackslash f}3 and White won a pawn in Szumilas – Motak, Legnica 2008.

10...\texttt{\textbackslash a}5 11.g4 b5 Black avoids the e4-e5 trick, but allows something else: 12.g5 \texttt{\textbackslash d}7 (12...b4 13.\texttt{\textbackslash a}5 \texttt{\textbackslash d}c5) 13.\texttt{\textbackslash a}4!

Spoiling Black's plans.

13.\texttt{\textbackslash f}5! exf5 14.\texttt{\textbackslash d}5 \texttt{\textbackslash w}d8 15.exf5 (15.\texttt{\textbackslash d}xe4\texttt{\textbackslash N} is even stronger, but I want to show that White gets good positional compensation whatever he does) 15...b7 16.\texttt{\textbackslash x}e7 \texttt{\textbackslash w}xe7 17.\texttt{\textbackslash h}e1 0-0 18.\texttt{\textbackslash g}1 \texttt{\textbackslash w}d8 19.\texttt{\textbackslash x}d6 \texttt{\textbackslash c}6 20.f6\texttt{\textbackslash f} White had a strong initiative in Bok – Spelman, Amsterdam 2014.

10...\texttt{\textbackslash d}xd4 11.\texttt{\textbackslash w}xd4 e5

This plan should always be considered, but White is perfectly placed to meet it.

12.fxe5 dxe5 13.\texttt{\textbackslash a}4! Spoiling Black's plans.

13...\texttt{\textbackslash f}8

13...\texttt{\textbackslash d}7 runs into: 14.\texttt{\textbackslash x}d7! \texttt{\textbackslash d}xd7 (14...\texttt{\textbackslash w}xd7 15.\texttt{\textbackslash b}5+++) 15.\texttt{\textbackslash d}5 \texttt{\textbackslash w}d6 16.\texttt{\textbackslash f}d1 \texttt{\textbackslash w}d8 17.\texttt{\textbackslash g}4 0-0 18.\texttt{\textbackslash c}3±

13...\texttt{\textbackslash c}6 is the least of the evils, but 14.\texttt{\textbackslash x}c6\texttt{\textbackslash f} (14.\texttt{\textbackslash b}5 is playable but unnecessarily materialistic) 14...bxc6 15.b3± gives White a pleasant endgame edge.

14.\texttt{\textbackslash h}f1 \texttt{\textbackslash d}7 15.\texttt{\textbackslash b}3 \texttt{\textbackslash c}8 16.\texttt{\textbackslash b}1 \texttt{\textbackslash e}6 17.\texttt{\textbackslash d}5±


A final alternative is:

10...\texttt{\textbackslash d}7 11.g4

This position has occurred in quite a lot of games but it seems to me that Black is heading for trouble, so I will not spend too much time on it.

11...\texttt{\textbackslash x}d4

11...b5 12.g5 b4 13.\texttt{\textbackslash c}b5! axb5 14.\texttt{\textbackslash b}5 \texttt{\textbackslash b}8 (14...\texttt{\textbackslash a}5 15.\texttt{\textbackslash x}d6+++) 15.gxf6 gxf6 16.\texttt{\textbackslash x}d6\texttt{\textbackslash f} Valhondo Morales – Royset, Gibraltar 2010.

12.\texttt{\textbackslash w}xd4!

Best, as the queen guards the e4-pawn while the pressure on g7 forces Black to play...e5. After 12.\texttt{\textbackslash x}d4 \texttt{\textbackslash c}6 Black would gain a tempo by attacking e4 and would thus have time to play...0-0 and...\texttt{\textbackslash d}7, minimizing his disadvantage.

12...\texttt{\textbackslash c}6

12...e5 is met by 13.\texttt{\textbackslash d}2 when taking on g4 looks suicidal, while 13...\texttt{\textbackslash c}6 14.\texttt{\textbackslash f}3± gives
White a dominating position from which he has scored heavily.
13.g5 e5 14.\texttt{W}d3 \texttt{O}d7 15.f5±
Naiditsch – Grachev, Moscow 2009.

\textbf{C11) 10...\texttt{O}d7 11.g4 b5}

This is an interesting way for Black to advance his b-pawn without allowing the e4-e5 trick, but White can benefit from not having needed to play g4-g5.

\textbf{12.\texttt{O}xc6}

12.\texttt{O}f5? is not required, but it's tempting all the same: 12...\texttt{W}f5 13.\texttt{O}d5 \texttt{W}b7N (13...\texttt{W}d8 14.\texttt{W}c3! [14.\texttt{gx}f5\texttt{W}] enabled White to pick up the crucial g7-pawn in Salinnikov – Bocharov, Tomsk 2002)

14.\texttt{f}5!N

14.g5 would justify Black's decision to retreat the knight from f6 voluntarily: 14...\texttt{O}c5 15.\texttt{W}f1 \texttt{W}c7 16.\texttt{W}d4 (16.\texttt{W}f3N a5! is an important resource – compare the main line below) 16...0–0 17.f5 \texttt{O}xe4 18.\texttt{W}xe4 \texttt{W}xe4 19.f6 \texttt{W}f8! 20.c3 \texttt{W}d8∞

14...\texttt{O}c5 15.\texttt{W}f1 \texttt{W}c7 16.\texttt{W}f3 a5!?

16...0–0 allows 17.g5± with a straightforward attack on the kingside. The text move is a tricky resource, based on the potential fork on b3. However, compared with the note to move 16 in Caruana – Movsesian, the fact that White has played f4-f5 instead of g4-g5 makes a big difference.

14.exf5 \texttt{O}f6 (14...0–0 15.g5→) 15.\texttt{O}b6 \texttt{W}b8
16.\texttt{O}f3 0–0 17.g5 \texttt{O}e8 18.f6†
17.\textit{b}1! \textit{c}6
17...\textit{b}4? 18.\textit{b}5 is hopeless for Black.

18.e5! \textit{dxe}5
18...d5 is a good move in the analogous position after 14.g5, but here we have 19.f6!\textit{gxf}6 20.\textit{exf}6 \textit{d}8 21.\textit{e}2 with a huge initiative.

19.\textit{xc}5 \textit{xc}5 20.\textit{fxe}6 \textit{fxe}6

11.\textit{g}4 \textit{b}5
11...d5 has been played a few times, but after 12.\textit{exd}5 \textit{d}xd5 13.\textit{exd}5 \textit{exd}5 14.\textit{xf}3\pm Black had no real compensation for the weakness of the d5-pawn in Fossan – Alexandru, Gausdal 1986.

11...\textit{xd}4 12.\textit{xd}4
This has scored heavily, although 12.\textit{xd}4 should also be nice for White.

12.e5
After 12...\textit{b}5 13.g5 \textit{d}7 14.f5\pm Black's counterplay seems far too slow compared to any reputable Sicilian line. The simplest way for White to advance his attack from here will be with \textit{h}f1 followed by f5-f6.

12...\textit{xc}6\dagger 13.\textit{xd}4 14.\textit{xc}6 15.\textit{e}2\dagger
Black's position is collapsing.

C12) 10...0–0

This time Black waits for g4-g5 before playing ...\textit{b}5, as White will no longer be able to win material on the long diagonal with \textit{f}3. The obvious drawback of his last move is that it gives us a clear target on the kingside.

13.\textit{d}3 \textit{xf}4
13...\textit{g}4 14.\textit{yg}4 \textit{yg}4 15.\textit{d}5 was horrible for Black in Shirov – Ljubojevic, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 1999.
14.\textit{xf}4 \textit{e}6 15.g5 \textit{d}7 16.\textit{xd}6 \textit{xd}6 17.\textit{xd}6 \textit{a}5 18.h4 \textit{ac}8 19.\textit{d}4
Black had no real compensation for the pawn in Nijboer – Van Kooten, Groningen 2008.

12.g5 \textit{d}7
12...\textit{xd}4 makes no difference: White simply chooses his preferred way of recapturing, as discussed at move 13 below, and then meets 13...\textit{d}7 with 14.f5\dagger, transposing immediately.
13.f5! \( \text{dxd4} \)

13...\( \text{dxe5} \), 14.f6+ opened the kingside immediately in Veld - Akkerboom, Hengelo 2002.

13...b4 14.f6!
Blasting open the kingside. Surprisingly, Black has achieved a healthy plus score from this position, but White only needs a modest amount of accuracy to obtain a clear advantage.

14...gx6
14...\( \text{dxc3} \) 15.\( \text{exxc3} \) \( \text{b7} \) (15...\( \text{dxe5} \) 16.\( \text{fxe7} \) \( \text{a6} \) 17.\( \text{dxc6} \) \( \text{bxc6} \) 18.\( \text{h4} \) \( \text{exf7} \) 19.\( \text{h5+} \) White controls the dark squares and eventually even the d6-pawn will fall.) 16.\( \text{fxe7} \) \( \text{bxc8} \) 17.\( \text{dxc6} \) \( \text{dxc6} \) Konguvel - Thipsay, India 1992. 18.\( \text{b4} \) N d5 19.\( \text{hfl+} \)

The text move has been Black's most popular choice, but it leads to serious problems for him.

15.gxf6 \( \text{xf6} \) 16.\( \text{dxc6} \) \( \text{xc6} \)

17.\( \text{d4!} \) \( \text{dxd4} \)

17...\( \text{bxc3} \)? 18.\( \text{hgl+} \) \( \text{h8} \) 19.\( \text{fxf6} \) \( \text{fxf6} \) 20.\( \text{d6} \) leads to a quick mate.
18.\( \text{dxd4} \) \( \text{e5} \) 19.\( \text{xb4} \)

White went on to win in a Houdini vs. Houdini game from 2012.

14.\( \text{dxd4} \)?

14.\( \text{dxd4} \) prevents ...b4, and thus can be regarded as the safer way to maintain a better position. 14...\( \text{b7} \) In Tseitlin - Sturua, Daugavpils 1978, 15.\( \text{hfl+} \) N would have been the best way to prepare either f5-f6 or fxe6 according to circumstances.

14...b4 15.f6!
This leads to fantastic complications. It is not required of course, as \(14.\textcolor{red}{\text{axd4}}\) is perfectly adequate, but this way is so much more fun!

15...\textcolor{red}{\text{bxc3}} 16.\textcolor{red}{\text{bxc3}} \textcolor{red}{\text{d8}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\text{fxg7}} \textcolor{red}{\text{e8}} 18.\textcolor{red}{\text{hff1}}

If you think this is all the product of modern computer analysis, you will be pleasantly surprised to learn that White's attacking scheme was first played in 1969 by the Latvian GM Klovans, and has been repeated in two subsequent games. I won't analyse the position exhaustively as it's not the most important theoretical variation, but it is worth showing a few lines as there are some spectacular possibilities.

18.\textcolor{red}{\text{d6f1?!N}} deserves attention as well. The critical continuation is 18...\textcolor{red}{\text{d5e5!}} (after 18...\textcolor{red}{\text{d5c5}}? White can exploit the change of rook to break through with 19.g6! \textcolor{red}{\text{fxg6}} 20.\textcolor{red}{\text{wxd6}} \textcolor{red}{\text{d7}} 21.\textcolor{red}{\text{h5g1}}!\textcolor{red}{\text{+}}) 19.h4?!\textcolor{red}{\text{N}} which could be analysed further.

18...\textcolor{red}{\text{d5c5}}

In the stem game Black erred with 18...\textcolor{red}{\text{d5b7}} and was quickly crushed: 19.\textcolor{red}{\text{h5e7}} 20.\textcolor{red}{\text{gd6}} \textcolor{red}{\text{f6}} 21.\textcolor{red}{\text{gxh7}}\textcolor{red}{\text{t}} \textcolor{red}{\text{d7h7}} 22.\textcolor{red}{\text{h6g1}}!\textcolor{red}{\text{+}} 1–0 Klovans – Zilberstein, USSR 1969.

19.g6! \textcolor{red}{\text{fxg6}} 20.\textcolor{red}{\text{c4!}}

20.\textcolor{red}{\text{h6c7?}} enables Black to defend, either by trading queens with ...\textcolor{red}{\text{gg5+}} or by shutting White's bishop out of the game with ...\textcolor{red}{\text{e5}}.

20...\textcolor{red}{\text{a7}}

20...\textcolor{red}{\text{b8}}? allows 21.\textcolor{red}{\text{d4!}} threatening the deadly \textcolor{red}{\text{h8+}}.

20...\textcolor{red}{\text{d7}} 21.\textcolor{red}{\text{f4!}} is also dangerous, for instance 21...\textcolor{red}{\text{b7?!}} 22.\textcolor{red}{\text{d6f1}} and Black has no good defence.

21.\textcolor{red}{\text{h4 d7}}
ultimately he seems to survive here too.)

23.\( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{d}xe4 \) 24.\( \text{W}f4 \) \( \text{d}f6 \) 25.\( \text{W}xf6 \) \( \text{xf6} \)

26.\( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 27.\( \text{xd}6 \) \( \text{xf6} \) 28.\( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{g}7 \) 29.\( \text{h}1 \) Black managed to hold this slightly worse endgame in Enkalo – Kayser, email 2013.

22.\( \text{d}4?N \) is also tempting, but after 22...\( \text{W}xh4 \) 23.\( \text{f}8+ \text{xf8} \) 24.\( \text{g}xh6 \) \( \text{xf8} \) Black survives.

22...g5

22...\( \text{a}4 \) 23.\( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{b}6 \) 24.\( \text{f}6 \) \( \text{c}7 \) 25.b3 maintains White's initiative.

23.hxg5 \( \text{hxg5} \) 24.\( \text{W}b1 \)

White keeps a dangerous attack. His last move prevents ...\( \text{d}7 \) while setting up various threats such as \( \text{h}1, \text{h}5, \text{d}4 \) and so on. Fascinating stuff, although some players would no doubt prefer 14.\( \text{W}xd4 \) as an easier route to an advantage.

C2) 8...\( \text{d}4 \) 9.\( \text{W}xd4! \)

9.\( \text{d}4 \) \( e5 \) 10.\( \text{d}3 \) (10.\( \text{d}xe5! \) \( \text{xe}5 \) 11.\( \text{f}4 \) is a useful attacking motif to be aware of, but unfortunately Black has 11...\( \text{c}5! \) 12.e5 \( \text{g}4 \) when the threat of ...\( \text{e}3 \) slows down White's initiative.) 10...\( \text{b}4 \) 11.\( \text{f}3 \) \( d6 \) 12.a3 \( \text{xc}3 \) 13.\( \text{xc}3 \) \( \text{xc}3 \) 14.\( \text{xc}3 \) \( e7 \) is pretty solid for Black.

9...\( \text{g}4 \)

9...\( \text{d}6 \) 10.\( \text{e}2 \) has been covered via the move order 8...\( \text{d}6 \) 9.\( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{xd}4 \) 10.\( \text{xd}4 \) – see the note to Black's 9th move in variation C1 on page 56.

Black can hardly hope to equalize with 9...\( \text{e}5 \) 10.\( \text{b}6 \) \( \text{xb}6 \) 11.\( \text{xb}6 \) \( \text{d}6 \). From this position the sophisticated 12.\( \text{c}7?N \) \( \text{h}7 \) 13.\( \text{a}5 \) gave White the better chances in Cabrera – Bellon Lopez, Palma de Mallorca 2009, but the simple 12.\( \text{f}3N \) \( \text{e}6 \) 13.\( \text{g}4\pm \) would also have been perfectly adequate.

10.\( \text{b}6 \)

You may also wish to consider:

10.\( \text{g}5? \)

This has some surprise value and leads to much less explored territory. I will not attempt to analyse it in depth, but will mention a few lines to serve as a basis for your further investigation.

10...\( \text{f}6 \)

10...\( \text{c}5 \) 11.\( \text{d}2 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 12.\( \text{f}4 \) (12.\( \text{h}4?N \) 12...\( \text{b}5 \) 13.\( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{e}5 \) led to another double-edged middlegame in Navarro Cia – Vila Gazquez, Andorra 2007.

11.\( \text{h}4 \) \( \text{c}5 \) 12.\( \text{d}2 \)
12...0-0?\n12...b5 was played in M. Popovic – Poluljahov, Cetinje 1996, when 13.e2!N
\( \text{dxe}5 14.h5+ \text{e7} (14...g6 15.xf6 0-0
16.xe5 \text{xe5 17.f3+}) 15.a1! would have set up \( \text{d}5+\) ideas.\n
13.a3 \nWe have reached an interesting position with many possibilities for both sides, but it's hard to say if White is really better.\n
12...e5 13.dxe5 \n13.e2 is a popular alternative, but I prefer to provoke a weakening of Black's structure rather than to strengthen it.\n
10...\text{c6} 11.d4 \n11.xc6 bxc6 12.b6 is a popular alternative, but I prefer to provoke a weakening of Black's structure rather than to strengthen it.\n
14.e2! is possible too, but I don't think we need to resort to anything overly sophisticated.\n
Black may proceed with C21) 14.xe3 or the more stubborn C22) 14.d6?.

C21) 14.xe3 15.xe3 0-0

This enables us to get a better version of the 14...d6 variation by placing the bishop on d3, rather than e2, after f2-f4.\n
16.f4?\nIt seems to me that the upcoming structure after ...exf4 is often underestimated from White's point of view. Even though Black's position seems rather solid, White's play is a lot easier, particularly since he has the blunt plan of advancing his pawns on the kingside. The lack of a strong knight on e5 also favours White.\n
16...exf4 17.xf4 d6 18.e1!\n18.xd3 \text{e6} 19.h4 \text{a4! would be annoying.}\n
18...e6 19.d3?\nBlack cannot put up with the knight on d5 indefinitely, so he will have to exchange it sooner or later. Meanwhile White continues with his kingside expansion to get a rather one-sided game. The following analysis is by no means forced, but it shows how White will keep the better chances after logical play from both sides.
21. ... f6?! is met by 22.h5± when Black's bishop has nothing to do.

22.h5

22.e4? g6 23.h5 eae8 24. eB g7 25.g4± also keeps an edge for White.

22... e5

22... efe8? 23.h6! e5 24. xh7! wins.

23. eB eae8

23... b5 24. edel g6 25. e4 eae8 26. h4→

24.e3!

White could equally start with 24.g4, but the exclamation mark is for the concept of preventing Black from playing ...b5-b4, which would fix White's queenside structure and give Black excellent counterattacking chances on the dark squares.

Here is an illustrative line to show what can happen if White elects not to touch his queenside pawns: 24. df1 g6 (24... a4 25.c3) 25.g4 b5 26. h3 (26.g5 a5 27. h4 b4 28. fh1 e7∞) 26... b4! 27. h4 (27. xa6 a7) 27... a7! With the idea of ... d4. 28.g5 a5∞

24... b5 25.g4 g6 26. h3

There is no clear breakthrough as yet, but White clearly has the initiative.

C22) 14... d6?

I believe this to be slightly more accurate, although it does give White a choice between two quite promising lines.

15.e4?!N

This is the simplest continuation, leading to something similar to the previous variation.

We can also consider:
15.\( \text{xe}2 \ \text{dxe}3 \) 16.\( \text{xe}3?! \)

16.\( \text{xe}3 \) followed by \( f2-f4 \) is likely to transpose to our main line.

16...0-0

16...\( \text{xe}6? \) 17.\( \text{c}4 \)
16...\( \text{b}5 \) 17.\( \text{d}3 \ ) \( \text{xe}7 \) 18.\( \text{d}5 \) (18.\( \text{f}4?! \))
18...\( \text{e}6 \) 19.\( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{exf}4 \) 20.\( \text{d}4?! \)

I am not sure how much better White will be in the ...\( \text{xd}5 \) endgames, but at least it will be a one-sided affair.

15...\( \text{xe}6! \)

15...\( \text{dxe}3 \) 16.\( \text{xe}3 \) transposes to the previous variation with 14...\( \text{dxe}3 \). By delaying the exchange for one more move, Black forces us to develop the bishop to a slightly worse square.

16.\( \text{e}2 \ ) \( \text{dxe}3 \) 17.\( \text{xe}3 \) \( \text{exf}4 \) 18.\( \text{xf}4 \) 0-0

19.\( \text{b}1 \)

Although I would have preferred the version with the bishop on \( \text{d}3 \), in which I could just keep pushing on the kingside as in
variation C21, it is still not easy for Black to equalize. The most likely scenario is that Black will exchange on d5 at some point, leaving White with a long-term edge due to his better bishop. Black may even consider sacrificing his d6-pawn to liberate his bishop, but White will not have much to worry about in either case.

19...\textit{\texttt{xd5}}

19...\textit{\texttt{c8}} 20.c3 doesn’t change much. Black can continue to try and play around the knight, but I don’t see a convincing plan for him.

19...f5 20.f3± only creates weaknesses in Black’s position.

20.\textit{\texttt{xd5}} \textit{\texttt{c7}}

20...\textit{\texttt{f6}} 21.\textit{\texttt{xd6}}± and 20...\textit{\texttt{e7}} 21.g4± also favour White.

21.c3!

21.h4 \textit{\texttt{ae8}} 22.g4 \textit{\texttt{e5}} enables Black to relieve the pressure by trading rooks.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\textbf{\texttt{c3!}}
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

8...\textit{\texttt{ae8}} 22.\textit{\texttt{d4}}! \textit{\texttt{e5}} 23.\textit{\texttt{b3}}±

The bishop is ready to replace the rook on d5, and White keeps a lasting advantage due to his better bishop and pressure against f7.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\textbf{\texttt{ae8}} 22.\textit{\texttt{d4!}} \textit{\texttt{e5}} 23.\textit{\texttt{b3}}±
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter dealt with a selection of Black’s alternatives on moves 7 and 8.

7...\textit{\texttt{xd4}}? is not without purpose, but it allows us to save time by omitting f2-f3, leading to a promising lead in development.

We then looked at 7...d6 8.0–0–0 \textit{\texttt{d7}}?, when my new idea of 9.g4! gives White great prospects.

7...\textit{\texttt{f6}} is the main line by far; after the automatic 8.0–0–0 we considered two respectable sidelines.

8...d6 is not a bad move, but 9.\textit{\texttt{e2}}!? \textit{\texttt{e7}} 10.f4 makes it hard for Black to carry out ...b5, and White generally gets a promising attacking position by ramming the g-pawn up the board.

Finally, 8...\textit{\texttt{xd4}} 9.\textit{\texttt{xd4}} \textit{\texttt{g4}} is an interesting attempt to go after our bishop, but 10.\textit{\texttt{b6}} \textit{\texttt{c6}} 11.\textit{\texttt{d4}} e5 12.\textit{\texttt{e3}} leaves an inviting hole on d5. After the normal continuation of 12...\textit{\texttt{e7}} 13.\textit{\texttt{d5}} \textit{\texttt{d8}} 14.\textit{\texttt{b3}} Black has a couple of options, but the most important thing to realize is that the structure after f2-f4 and ...exf4 is more problematic for Black than it may first appear. The most likely outcome is some kind of opposite-coloured-bishop scenario where White enjoys some initiative, while Black’s prospects for counterplay are limited.
Taimanov

Introduction to 8...e7

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.e3 d5 5.d3 c6 6.e3 a6 7.b4 f6 8.0-0-0 e7

9.f3

A) 9...0-0 10.g4 b5 11.g5
   A1) 11...e8?!
   A2) 11...h5 12.c2e2
       A21) 12...x d4 13.x d4
       A211) 13...xd8
       A212) 13...f6? 73
       A22) 12...xd8 76

B) 9...h5 10.xc6
   B1) 10...dxc6 72
   B2) 10...bxc6 11.f4 e5 12.g5
       B21) 12...d6 85
       B22) 12...a5 86
       B23) 12...0-0!? 88

A212) after 15...b4

B1) after 13...e5

B23) after 13...Bd8

16.xg4?N

14.xd6!N

14.xxf6!N
Chapter 4 – Introduction to 8...\textit{\textbf{e}}7

1.e4 c5 2.\textit{\textbf{d}}3 e6 3.d4 \textit{\textbf{cxd}}4 4.\textit{\textbf{d}}4 \textit{\textbf{d}}6 5.\textit{\textbf{c}}3 \textit{\textbf{w}}c7 6.\textit{\textbf{e}}e3 a6 7.\textit{\textbf{d}}2 \textit{\textbf{f}}6 8.0–0–0 \textit{\textbf{e}}7

Superficially this may seem less active than developing the bishop to \textit{\textbf{b}}4, but it also has certain advantages, as the bishop stays closer to the kingside and avoids blocking Black’s b-pawn.

9.\textit{\textbf{f}}3

Preparing \textit{\textbf{g}}2–\textit{\textbf{g}}4. We have reached an important branching point; in this chapter we will cover A) 9...0–0 and B) 9...\textit{\textbf{h}}5.

9...\textit{\textbf{b}}5 will receive dedicated coverage in the next chapter.

A) 9...0–0 10.\textit{\textbf{g}}4 \textit{\textbf{b}}5

10...\textit{\textbf{d}}6 does nothing to challenge \textit{\textbf{W}}hite’s attack: 11.g5 \textit{\textbf{d}}d7 12.\textit{\textbf{h}}4 \textit{\textbf{b}}5 13.g6 \textit{\textbf{d}}6 14.\textit{\textbf{x}}h7† \textit{\textbf{x}}h7 15.\textit{\textbf{d}}xc6 \textit{\textbf{x}}xc6 16.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3± Adams – Sheldon, Hove 1997.

10...\textit{\textbf{d}}d8 11.g5 \textit{\textbf{h}}5 has scored decently for Black but it doesn’t make a lot of sense to me. 12.\textit{\textbf{f}}2† is a logical continuation, when the potential \textit{\textbf{b}}b6 makes Black’s rook placement appear questionable.

12...\textit{\textbf{d}}xd4 was played in Legemaat – Goormachtigh, Geraardsbergen 2011, and now 13.\textit{\textbf{x}}xd4\textit{\textbf{N}} \textit{\textbf{x}}g5† 14.\textit{\textbf{b}}1 would have been excellent for \textit{\textbf{W}}hite. The main idea is simply to attack with \textit{\textbf{g}}1, although winning the exchange with \textit{\textbf{b}}6 can also be considered as a back-up plan.

11.\textit{\textbf{g}}5

Black can choose between A1) 11...\textit{\textbf{e}}d8?! and A2) 11...\textit{\textbf{h}}5. There are certain similarities with the 8...\textit{\textbf{b}}4 set-up analysed in variation B of Chapter 7, so you may find it useful to study both sections in parallel.

A1) 11...\textit{\textbf{e}}d8?!

This used to be a favourite of Morozevich, and it has been used by many other strong GMs. Recently though, its popularity has
plummeted for multiple reasons; I would summarize the situation by saying that once White figures out where to place his pieces to avoid any tactical tricks, Black’s set-up will prove to be too passive. It is worth mentioning that retreating the knight to e8 makes more sense in the 8...b4 variation as Black will be better placed to create counterplay, either by exploiting the pin or after provoking a2-a3, but here we have no such worries.

12.\textit{\&xc6}

This is the simplest route to an edge, although another perfectly natural way to get a better game is: 12.h4\textit{\&e5} (12...\&b7 is well met by 13.\textit{\&xc6}, since ...\textit{\&xc6} makes less sense with the bishop on b7, and after 13...\textit{\&xc6} 14.\textit{\&e2=} Black’s play is too slow.) 13.\textit{\&b1} \&b7 14.h5 \textit{\&c8}

15.\textit{\&g2=}! The queen is perfectly placed here, while Black has trouble creating any real counterplay on the queenside. 15...b4 16.\textit{\&a4} f5 17.gxf6 \textit{\&xf6} 18.\textit{\&d3} \textit{\&f7} 19.b3 \textit{\&c8} 20.\textit{\&d1} \textit{\&e8} 21.\textit{\&h3=} Karjakin – Morozevich, Wijk aan Zee 2009. This game was one of the nails in the coffin of Black’s set-up.

12...\textit{\&xc6}

In the early days of this line, White often struggled to find an advantage. The nuances of the ...\textit{\&xc6} structure weren’t understood so well, and White often fumbled around trying to find the correct way to prepare a kingside advance. One potential pitfall is that trying to play in the centre with f3-f4 usually gives Black enough counterplay against the e4-pawn. In general, Black’s next few moves tend to follow a familiar pattern, whereas White has more choices available, so this also makes Black’s position easier to play. However, with the benefit of time and further analysis, the correct methods for White are now much better understood.

It is also worth mentioning that the ...\textit{\&xc6} structures have generally been getting more attention in recent years. For instance, if you compare the new main line of 9...b5 10.\textit{\&xc6} \textit{\&xc6} (see pages 97-98), you will see that White has a considerably better version here, as the earlier ...\textit{\&e8} has left Black with no way of holding up White’s kingside play.

13.h4!

13.f4 has been tried by some strong players, but 13.\textit{\&d6} 14.\textit{\&d3} c5 is unclear.

13...e5

13...a5 with the idea of ...a4 followed by ...b4 makes sense, but it’s also slow. White can get an improved version of the previous note with: 14.f4! Intending e4-e5 and \textit{\&e4}. 14...\textit{\&d6} (14...a4 is too slow: 15.e5 b4 16.\textit{\&e4} b3 17.\textit{\&b1=}) 15.\textit{\&d3} I found a Rybka vs. Rybka game from 2010 where Black went on to draw,
but White's position is clearly preferable at this point. The inclusion of ...a5 makes ...c5 impossible, so White can continue building his position with moves like \( \text{Wf2}, \text{h4-h5} \) and possibly \( \text{e4-e5} \) if the circumstances are right.

14.h5
14.\( \text{Wf2} \)? Although I don't see any need to commit the queen just yet, the following game provides another nice example of White's chances: 14...\( \text{b4} \) 15.\( \text{b1} \) Taking on c3 is hardly ever a real threat in these positions. 15...a5 16.\( \text{e2} \) a4 17.h5 a3 18.b3 \( \text{e7} \) 19.\( \text{c1} \) f5 20.gxf6 \( \text{xf6} \) 21.\( \text{g1} \)± Rada – Moes Joaquim, corr. 2012.

14...\( \text{e6} \)

15.\( \text{h2} \)?
15.g6 isn't required yet; even so, after 15...\( \text{d8} \) 16.gxh7\( \text{f8} \) 17.\( \text{d3} \) a5 18.\( \text{f2} \) \( \text{b8} \) 19.\( \text{c5} \)± White was doing well in Balogh – D. Mastrovasilis, Novi Sad 2009.

As you will see in some other variations, the h2-square is an ideal spot for the white queen in these structures. This is especially true with the black knight on e8, as the attack on the e5-pawn prevents ...\( \text{d6} \), while also keeping the black queen tied to the pawn on e5. Finally, \( \text{h3} \) becomes an annoying idea for Black to worry about.

15...a5?!N
15...\( \text{b4} \) 16.a3?! A good move, although White could also have considered ignoring the bishop. 16.\( \text{d6} \) (16...\( \text{x3} \) 17.\( \text{c3} \) c5 18.\( \text{h3} \)) Nijboer – Giri, Groningen 2008. 17.\( \text{h3} \)N±

15...\( \text{b1} \)
16.g6 h6 17.\( \text{h3} \) is also good. Actually there are many possible ways to continue, but I like the simple, unhurried approach. A possible continuation is:

16...a4 17.\( \text{e2} \) b4 18.\( \text{h3} \) \( \text{xh3} \) 19.\( \text{xh3} \) \( \text{d6} \) 20.g6 h6 21.gxh7\( \text{f7} \) 22.\( \text{e6} \)±

A2) 11...\( \text{h5} \)
This makes a lot more sense than retreating the knight to e8. The knight on h5 is excellently placed to hold up White's attack, but the drawback is that it can be targeted, particularly by bringing a knight to g3. This makes the game a lot more concrete – if White can force Black to take on g3, he will get a powerful attack along the h-file. However, in the time it takes White to carry out the knight manoeuvre, Black will be able to generate counterplay in the centre, or perhaps rely on the plan of meeting d\text{g}3 with ...d\text{x}d4 followed by ...f4 after White recaptures on d4. In certain rare cases Black can even consider ...g6 and ...gxh5, but that is only likely to work if he has a lot of activity to compensate for the major structural weakening.

This variation has been dubbed the Brazilian Taimanov due to the efforts of players like Fier, Mekhitarian and others. I also regard it as the first of the many modern interpretations of the Taimanov (other examples being the current main line of 9...b5, as covered in Chapter 5, and the similar version with the bishop on b4, as discussed in Chapter 7), although its popularity has waned recently.

12.d\text{c}e2

12.b1 e5 leads to a different kind of fight; it's an interesting game, but this is not the reason why Taimanov players have shifted towards other set-ups these days.

The intention behind White's last move is obvious. Black can attempt to counter the threat of d\text{g}3 with A21) 12...d\text{x}d4 or A22) 12...d8.

A21) 12...d\text{x}d4 13.d\text{x}d4

A211) 13...d8 14.b1!

I think Black's most challenging options are A211) 13...d8 and A212) 13...f6!?

13...f5 has been played several times, but it gives White a host of pleasant options.

The simplest is to follow the quite forcing example of Shirov: 14.g3 f4 15.exf5 d\text{x}g5 16.d4 e5 17.d6

17...d2† Pretty, but it does not solve Black's problems. 18.xe2 d\text{x}e3† 19.b1 xd6 20.xd6 c5

21.d3! xd6 22.e4 b8 23.xd6± Black was unable to hold the endgame in Shirov – Munoz Santana, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

A211) 13...d8 14.b1!

For reasons that will soon become clear, this move prepares d\text{g}3 under the best possible circumstances.

14.b7 15.g3 f4

15.xg3 h5xg3 is too dangerous for Black: 17.h3 c7 18.d2 d5 19.e5!→ Ter Sahakyan – Kursova, Yerevan 2014.
could fill a few pages with my analysis of it, but ultimately I believe the text move to be stronger.

14...a5

It is surprisingly hard to prove an advantage from here. White has a possible plan of \( \texttt{h3} \) followed by \( \texttt{g1} \) and \( \texttt{g4} \) to target the knight, but Black can counter it with the annoying \( \texttt{a6-d6} \) manoeuvre. We also have to be ready for the more orthodox attacking plan of \( \ldots \texttt{a4} \) followed by \( \ldots \texttt{b3} \).

15.\( \texttt{h3} \)

15.\( \texttt{b1} \) \( \texttt{b4} \) 16.\( \texttt{h3} \) was the move order of one correspondence game, but I believe we can save time by leaving the king on c1 for the time being. I will say a bit more about this line in the comments to 16.\( \texttt{b1} \) in the note to White's next move.

15.\( \texttt{b4} \)

15.\( \texttt{a6} \)

This is the obvious alternative, but White is well placed to meet it with:

16.\( \texttt{d2!} \) \( \texttt{d6} \) 17.\( \texttt{d4} \) \( \texttt{c4} \)

17.\( \texttt{e5?} \) allows 18.\( \texttt{xb5} \) of course.

17.\( \texttt{b4} \) 18.\( \texttt{h2} \) clearly favours White as well.

18.\( \texttt{xa5!} \)

18.\( \texttt{b3} \) \( \texttt{c5} \) is not so convincing.
The text move is a pretty safe pawn grab, as Black will not be able to avoid a queen exchange for long.

18...\texttt{d}3
18...\texttt{d}6 19.\texttt{a}3 \texttt{a}6 20.\texttt{b}3 \texttt{xa}2 21.\texttt{b}1 \texttt{a}6 22.\texttt{x}b5 \texttt{xb}3 23.\texttt{c}xb3±
After 18...\texttt{a}6 19.\texttt{x}b5 \texttt{xa}2 20.\texttt{g}4 \texttt{g}3 21.\texttt{h}g1 Black doesn’t have any real threats on the queenside. 21...\texttt{f}5 22.\texttt{e}5 \texttt{xf}5 23.\texttt{xf}5 \texttt{xf}5 24.\texttt{b}3±
19.b3!
But not 19.\texttt{h}g1? \texttt{x}d4! 20.\texttt{xd}4 \texttt{e}2† 21.\texttt{b}1 \texttt{xd}4 when Black wins.
19...\texttt{e}2† 20.\texttt{b}2 \texttt{c}5 21.\texttt{d}2 \texttt{xd}4 22.\texttt{xd}4†

16.\texttt{g}4?N
This is my recommendation, forcing the play on the kingside without delay.

I also considered 16.\texttt{d}2, but found that 16...\texttt{b}3! (16...\texttt{a}4? 17.\texttt{g}4†) 17.\texttt{x}b3 \texttt{a}4 gives Black a promising attack.

16.\texttt{b}1
This position occurred in two correspondence games, one of which featured the 15.\texttt{b}1 \texttt{b}4 16.\texttt{d}3 move order.

16...\texttt{a}4
16...\texttt{x}a6?! 17.\texttt{d}2 \texttt{fxg}5 18.\texttt{hxg}5 \texttt{d}6 19.\texttt{d}4 \texttt{g}6 20.e5 \texttt{d}5 21.\texttt{g}7 occurred in Schlenther – Offenborn, email 2011, and now after 22.\texttt{f}4± \texttt{xd}4 23.\texttt{xd}4 \texttt{gx}g5 24.\texttt{d}3 Black does not have full compensation for the exchange.

17.\texttt{g}4
17.\texttt{d}2 \texttt{b}3 gives Black enough counterplay.

17...\texttt{b}3
17...\texttt{g}3 18.\texttt{x}g3 \texttt{gx}g3 19.\texttt{h}g1 \texttt{b}8 may also be playable.

18.\texttt{c}xb3
18.\texttt{d}2?N \texttt{bxc}2† 19.\texttt{xc}2 \texttt{xc}2† 20.\texttt{xc}2 \texttt{g}6 could be an interesting endgame to analyse further. I would certainly take White’s position if given the choice, but it is hard to say how meaningful his advantage is; and I like the idea of avoiding \texttt{b}1 even more.

18...\texttt{g}3 19.\texttt{x}g3 \texttt{axb}3 20.\texttt{xb}3 \texttt{gx}g3 21.\texttt{b}4 \texttt{a}4?N
A slight improvement over 21...\texttt{b}8, as played in Giesemann – Vodicka, corr. 2014.
Chapter 4 – Introduction to 8...\( \text{c7} \)

16...\( \text{g3} \) 17...\( \text{xg3} \) \( \text{wxc3} \) 18...\( \text{d2} \)

By luring Black’s queen to g3, I want to slow down his queenside play and annoy him with \( \text{f4} \) before opening the kingside with gxf6.

18...\( \text{c7} \) 19...f4

19...\( \text{b1} \)! a4 20...f4 would be pretty similar. The main point is that the bishop should go to f4 before we exchange on f6, as otherwise Black could just recapture with the bishop and then meet \( \text{f4} \) with ...\( \text{g5} \). With the bishop already on f4, the gxf6 move will gain in strength, as ...\( \text{xf6} \) will be strongly met by \( \text{d6} \), and ...\( \text{xf6} \) will allow White to gain additional time by attacking the rook.

19...\( \text{c5} \)

19...\( \text{c4} \) 20...\( \text{b1} \) a4 21...f6 \( \text{xf6} \) 22...g5 b3 23...xb3 axb3 24...a3±

19...\( \text{c6}?! \) enables White to make serious progress on the kingside: 20...g6 \( \text{xf6} \) 21...g5 \( \text{xf7} \) 22...h5 g6

23...g6! hxg6 24...xc7 \( \text{xc7} \) 25...g5! \( \text{g7} \) 26...h5 The attack is crushing. 26...g6 27...xh5 \( \text{a6} \) 28...d1=

20...\( \text{b1}! \)

20...\( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 21...g5 (21...g3 is better, but I slightly prefer to put the king on b1 first) is not so clear after 21...a4?! Before this bishop goes to g5, we should send it on a small detour to c3 in order to drive the black queen to an inferior square.
20...a4
The only logical way to continue for Black.

21.gxf6 exf6 22.\textit{e}e3!
The black queen does not have a really good square available. Next we will play \textit{g}g5 and exchange the dark-squared bishops, after which neither ...\textit{b}3 nor ...a3 seems too dangerous. Meanwhile, we still have good chances to build an attack on the kingside, perhaps assisted by the queen using a dark-square outpost in the centre.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\t\node at (0,0) {$\textbf{A22)}$};
\t\node at (0,0.5) {12...\textit{e}d8};
\t\draw (0,0) rectangle (2,2);
\t\draw (0.5,0.5) rectangle (1.5,1.5);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

This has been by far the most popular choice. Black is waiting for the knight to arrive on g3 before taking on d4.

13.\textit{g}g3
13.\textit{b}b1?! is another idea, hoping for 13...\textit{b}7 14.\textit{g}g3 \textit{xd}4 15.\textit{xd}4 with a transposition to variation A211 above. However, Black has a better option in 13...e5! 14.\textit{f}5 d5 15.\textit{xe}7\textit{h} 16.\textit{g}g3 \textit{f}4 17.\textit{xf}4 \textit{xf}4 18.\textit{h}5 \textit{g}4! 19.\textit{fxg}4 \textit{dxe}4, when practice has shown that he has enough compensation for the piece.

13...\textit{xd}4 14.\textit{h}h5?!
This hadn’t really been considered seriously until my game against Quesada Perez at the Istanbul Olympiad. The critical position arises after move 16, so we will discuss the merits of White’s plan then.

14.\textit{c}3
14...\textit{c}6?! is too passive: 15.\textit{f}b8 16.\textit{g}1 (even 16.\textit{g}3?!N \textit{g}3 17.hxg3 gives White a nice edge, but the kingside attack is too inviting) 16...\textit{h}8 17.\textit{h}4 (17.f4??N is also good) 17...\textit{b}4 18.\textit{d}3 \textit{b}7 19.\textit{f}6 White had a dangerous attack in S. Das – Dhulipala, Pune 2014.
Chapter 4 – Introduction to 8...\textit{d}e7

15.\textit{d}f2 \textit{d}e5 16.\textit{b}b6 \textit{b}b8
16...\textit{c}6? is disastrous due to 17.\textit{d}d4! \textit{x}g5+ 18.\textit{h}b1+ and Black loses material, Markgraf – Stachowiak, Germany 2013.

![Chessboard Diagram]

We have reached a critical position for the assessment of White’s 14th move. White can win an exchange but, as people had rightly realized, Black’s material disadvantage would be of little consequence due to his solid structure and the powerful knight on e5.

However, my idea was actually not to win the exchange – I just wanted to use the excellent knight on h5 to launch a kingside attack with \textit{g}1-\textit{g}3, \textit{f}6+ and so on. In such a scenario, my dark-squared bishop is worth a lot more than his rook!

Once you realize this, the position looks horrifyingly dangerous for Black, so I can’t imagine many people lining up to defend it, but things are actually not so simple for White either. He needs to appreciate that immediate attempts to bluntly sacrifice something tend not to work well, so he should be ready to build his attack more patiently.

17.\textit{g}f1!!
17.\textit{f}6+ \textit{h}8 18.\textit{x}d8 \textit{x}d8 19.\textit{c}5 \textit{g}6 was played in Francisco – Zapata, Arlington 2010, but grabbing the exchange does not fit with my interpretation of the position.

The text move was a novelty when I played it against Quesada in 2012.

17...\textit{b}7
17...\textit{h}8 18.\textit{g}3 \textit{b}7 19.\textit{d}3 transposes to our main line, and was the move order of the Kargin – Stachowiak game quoted later.

17...\textit{g}6
This was played in a game that took place within a month of Negi – Quesada. White should have answered with:

18.h4!
18.\textit{d}d3 \textit{f}8 19.e5 was too hurried play by White. 19...\textit{x}e5 20.\textit{d}4 \textit{x}g5+ 21.\textit{b}1 \textit{e}3! 22.\textit{x}e3 \textit{x}h5 and Black survived in Deepan Chakkravarthy – Vidit, Kolkata 2012.

18.\textit{f}8 19.\textit{b}1!
White can take his time before deciding how to attack. It’s hard to imagine how Black can cope with the pressure.
19...\textit{e}5
19...d6 20.\textit{d}4 e5 21.\textit{e}3\texttt{t} is great for White too.
20.\textit{f}6\texttt{t} \textit{h}8 21.\textit{d}4 \textit{c}6 22.\textit{e}5\texttt{t}

18.\textit{d}3
This seems the most logical move. As I said before, White doesn’t need to hurry with the attack – he can just build it up slowly, bringing in one piece after another with moves like \textit{g}3, \textit{d}g1, \textit{d}4 and h2-h4. The possibility of \textit{f}6(\texttt{t}) constantly hangs over Black, but we can hold this move back until the rest of the pieces have been improved, or until Black looks to be threatening real counterplay.

Of course, it is not easy to convince the computer of Black’s problems. Perhaps, in amongst its many suggestions, there exists some strangely forcing defence, but even then it hardly seems a wise practical choice for Black. In any case, I’ll mention a few interesting alternatives for White here, just in case a better defence can be found for Black later.

18.\textit{g}3 is a concrete approach which deserves attention. 18...\textit{x}e4 (18...\textit{c}8 19.\textit{g}2\texttt{e}; 18...\textit{h}8 19.\textit{d}4\texttt{t}) 19.\textit{f}6\texttt{t} \textit{xf}6 20.\textit{xf}6 \textit{g}6 21.\textit{h}4 (21.\textit{xd}8 \textit{xd}8 22.\textit{fg}7 \textit{c}8 23.\textit{d}2 \textit{d}5\texttt{e}) 21...\textit{c}8 22.\textit{c}5 \textit{c}7 23.b4 \textit{h}5
The position is extremely unclear.

18.\textit{b}1?! aims for an improved version of the line above. 18...\textit{x}e4 (18...\textit{h}8 19.\textit{d}4\texttt{?} \textit{c}7 20.\textit{g}3 \textit{ac}8 [20...b4 21.\textit{f}6\texttt{t}] 21.\textit{c}3 \textit{b}8 22.\textit{f}4 d6 23.\textit{h}3\texttt{e}) 19.\textit{f}6\texttt{t} \textit{xf}6 20.\textit{xf}6 \textit{g}6 21.\textit{xd}8 \textit{xd}8

22.\textit{h}4 \textit{h}5 23.\textit{fx}g7 \textit{xc}8 24.\textit{xd}3 \textit{xd}3 25.\textit{xd}3 \textit{fg}7 Black seems to be okay.

18.\textit{f}6\texttt{t} \textit{h}8 19.\textit{d}3?!?

This is my favourite idea, just for its sheer audacity. A part of me regrets not playing it in my game, but I couldn’t remember the lines well, whereas 18.\textit{d}3 was just a natural way to continue, which did not require any further memorization. Please note that 18.\textit{d}3 wasn’t possible because of 18...\textit{xe}4, which is why the knight check was needed.

19...\textit{gf}6
19...\textit{xd}3\texttt{t} 20.\textit{xd}3 gives White a powerful initiative; it is worth giving up the exchange just to eliminate the strong knight.
20.gxf6
The attack is dangerous, but Black can draw with accurate defence.

20...\&f8!
This makes the most sense to me, although 20...\&xd3?! 21.\&xd3 \&g8! (21...\&f8 22.\&h4\rightarrow) is another hair-raising way to keep the balance. 22.fxe7 \&xg1\rightarrow 23.\&xg1 \&xf4\rightarrow 24.\&b1 \&f6 25.\&d8! \&xd8 26.\&d4! is a fun way to make a draw.

18...\&c8 is rather pointless. After 19.\&b1\&b\b
Black’s rook is not really doing anything and we are ready to proceed with \&g3 etc.

19.\&g3
19.\&f6?! gxf6 20.gxf6 \&f8 21.\&e3 can be analysed further, although we are nearing the point where it becomes futile for a practical player to go much deeper with a computer. White will continue with a methodical plan, piling up on the g-file to force ...\&g6 before playing h4-h5.

19...d5?!N
This is Black’s most obvious attempt to relieve the pressure. I will mention five alternatives to give you an idea of how White’s position should be handled.

a) Once again, 19...\&c8?! does not achieve anything: 20.\&b1\pm

b) 19...\&f8 prepares to advance the f-pawn, so it’s time to dive in with the knight: 20.\&f6 gxf6 21.gxf6 \&d8 22.\&d4\rightarrow

c) My game continued: 19...d6 20.\&d1! Just following the plan. My opponent came up with 20...d5?! 21.\&f6 dxe4, and here I should have played:

18...\&h8

An amazing series of only moves.

21.\&h3 \&xe4!
21...\&g6 22.\&g4\rightarrow
22.\&xd8 \&f5!
We are heading for a messy endgame, which is objectively about equal.
22...\texttt{h3}!N (I went for the overambitious 22...\texttt{hxh7}! but after 22...\texttt{xd8}! the tables were turned. Fortunately, my opponent had invested a lot of time dealing with my opening preparation and I was able to exploit this to swindle him later in Negi – Quesada Perez, Istanbul [ol] 2012.) 22...\texttt{h6} 23.\texttt{xe4} \texttt{xe4} 24.\texttt{xe4} \texttt{b7} 25.\texttt{e1} This would have promised White a big advantage (I could have also have just taken the rook and been a bit better).

d) 19...\texttt{d6}N is the nearly incomprehensible engine suggestion:

I understand that after \texttt{xb5} and \texttt{xd8} Black might be okay but, since our plan wasn’t to take on d8 anyway, I’m not too impressed by the last move. White can consider any of the following three ideas:

d1) 20.\texttt{xb5} \texttt{b4} 21.\texttt{d3}?! is a valid option, just leaving the exchange. I’m not sure how meaningful Black’s counterplay along the b-file will be.

d2) 20.\texttt{f6}?! \texttt{gxf6} (20...\texttt{g6} 21.\texttt{e3}!) 21.\texttt{xf6} \texttt{f8} 22.\texttt{e3} gives White definite attacking chances, but I don’t feel like debating it at length with the computer.

d3) 20.\texttt{dg1}?! seems like the simplest idea to me, intending \texttt{f6}.

e) Finally, the only other practical example continued:

19...\texttt{g8}

Kargin – Stachowiak, Marianske Lazne 2015. I suggest improving White’s play with:

20.\texttt{b1}N

Avoiding any ideas involving \texttt{xd3}† followed by a check along the c-file.

20...\texttt{d6}

Again we will check this weird computer move. I don’t see what else Black is supposed to be doing:

20...\texttt{a5} 21.\texttt{dg1}†

20...\texttt{xd3} 21.\texttt{xd3} \texttt{d6} 22.\texttt{e5}?! \texttt{xe5} 23.\texttt{e1}→

20...\texttt{d5} 21.\texttt{exd5} \texttt{xd5} 22.\texttt{xd3} \texttt{xd5} 23.\texttt{xd5}! \texttt{exd5} 24.\texttt{d4}†→

21.\texttt{e2}

21.\texttt{dg1} is another idea.

21...\texttt{c6} 22.\texttt{d4} \texttt{ac8}
This leads to a slightly favourable endgame with two minor pieces against a rook.

23...\texttt{Wxe4} 24.\texttt{Qg3} \texttt{Wd5} 25.\texttt{We3} d6 26.\texttt{xe5 Wxe5} 27.\texttt{Wxe5} dxe5 28.\texttt{Wd7} \texttt{xb4} 29.\texttt{xb7 xc3} 30.\texttt{bxc3}\texttt{+}

White has stabilized the position with his extra material and his chances are slightly higher.

B) 9...h5

The popularity of this move amazes and perplexes me. When it first took off, the ...h5 motif was already well known in certain Najdorf lines, but here it seemed even more provocative. Nevertheless, all attempts to crush it have come up short, and Black's results were generally good. A few years ago, however, it started to become clear that White could get an advantage with:

10.\texttt{xc6}!

Despite White's excellent practical results, this move has not caught on as much as I would have expected, probably because players are generally hesitant about improving Black's pawn structure and opening the b-file. Indeed, even I didn't play this way at the 2014 Tromso Olympiad; despite having played it once before and knowing of its strengths, I hadn't studied it in a long time, and I guessed that maybe the Taimanov aficionados had discovered a new way to generate counterplay for Black. As it turns out, they hadn't then and they still haven't now!
We will analyse B1) 10...dxc6 followed by the more critical B2) 10...bxc6.

B1) 10...dxc6

As you will see in various other lines, these ...dxc6 positions aren't as easy for Black as they may first appear. This time Black has an even worse version due to his slow development and the weakening ...h5, and he will struggle to reach a normal position after White's accurate follow-up:

11.\(\textit{w}f2\) b5 12.\(\textit{b}b6!\)

The queen has trouble finding a good square while dealing with ideas like \(\textit{c}c5\) and e4-e5.

12...\(\textit{w}b7\)

12...\(\textit{w}b8\) has not been tried, and indeed 13.\(\textit{c}c5!\) \(\textit{w}c7\) 14.\(\textit{xe}c7\) \(\textit{xc7}\) 15.e5 \(\textit{d}d5\) 16.\(\textit{e}e4\)± gives White an easy advantage.

12...\(\textit{w}f4\)†

This exposes the queen to the tempo-gaining g2-g3, which is a useful move in any case.

13.\(\textit{b}b1\) \(\textit{d}d7\)

13...0–0 14.g3 \(\textit{w}b8\) 15.\(\textit{c}c5\) \(\textit{c}c7\) 16.\(\textit{xe}c7\) \(\textit{xe7}\) 17.e5 \(\textit{d}d5\) 18.\(\textit{e}e4\)± seems horrifyingly ugly for Black, Naroditsky – Franco Ocampos, Benasque 2011.

14.\(\textit{e}e3\) followed by f3-f4 is also possible, but it seems useful to push the queen back to b8 rather than c7. Besides, the last move fits in nicely with White's plans; he can follow up with \(\textit{g}g2, f3-f4, e4-e5\) and \(\textit{e}e4\), and Black doesn't seem to have the means to create any counterplay.

14...\(\textit{w}b8\) 15.\(\textit{e}e3\) c5 16.\(\textit{g}g2\) \(\textit{b}b7\) 17.f4

17...\(\textit{f}f4\)?? \(\textit{e}e5\) 18.\(\textit{d}d2\) \(\textit{f}f8\) 19.\(\textit{f}f2\)± is also good.

17...b4

17...\(\textit{c}c7\) 18.e5±

18.\(\textit{a}a4\) \(\textit{c}c7\)

19.e5±

White had a comfortable advantage in Kriebel – Matsenko, Legnica 2013. (19.b3N± is also promising.)

13.\(\textit{c}c5\)

13.e5N \(\textit{d}d7\) 14.\(\textit{e}e3\)?? is an interesting sacrifice, but there is no need for it.
13...e5
13...\(\text{c7}\) 14.\(\text{xe7}\) \(\text{xc7}\) 15.e5 \(\text{d5}\) 16.\(\text{e4}\)
leaves Black with an ugly position.

In Sylvan – Akesson, Pardubice 2014, White traded bishops on e7 and failed to get anywhere. Fortunately there is a major improvement.

14.\(\text{d6}\)!

This nifty little move threatens \(\text{xe5}\) while preparing \(\text{c5}\). Black must either jettison a pawn or seriously compromise his position in some other way.

14...\(\text{xd6}\)
14...\(0-0\) 15.\(\text{xe5}\) \(\text{e6}\) 16.\(\text{d6}\) \(\text{xd6}\)
17.\(\text{xd6}\) \(\text{c7}\) 18.\(\text{c5}\) \(\text{fc8}\) 19.\(\text{d2}\)

15.\(\text{xd6}\) \(\text{e6}\)

Black’s best chance is to seek salvation in an endgame.

15...\(\text{d7}\) avoids an immediate loss of material, but 16.\(\text{g3}\) \(\text{f8}\) (16...\(0-0\) 17.\(\text{h6}\)) 17.\(\text{e2}\) leaves him with serious issues concerning his development.

16.\(\text{c5}\) \(\text{d7}\) 17.\(\text{xc6}\) \(\text{xc6}\) 18.\(\text{xc6}\) \(\text{e7}\) 19.\(\text{a4}\)

The rook doesn’t have too many squares, but it can’t be effectively attacked either.

19...\(\text{b8}\) 20.\(\text{b6}\) \(\text{d7}\) 21.\(\text{b7}\)

White has good chances to convert his extra pawn.

B2) 10...\(\text{xc6}\)

This is of course the critical move.

11.\(\text{f4}\)

Given the opportunity, Black would play ...\(d5\) and then turn his attention to the queenside. The text move provokes ...\(e5\), making ...\(d5\) practically impossible to carry out. Black’s centre will be permanently restricted, and we will also get an excellent diagonal for our lightsquared bishop: after \(\text{c4-b3}\) it will bear down on the f7-pawn while usefully blocking the
b-file. Furthermore, Black will find it difficult to continue playing solidly because the ...h5 weakening makes castling too dangerous.

11. \(\text{N}a4\)?

Although it is not required, I will mention this as a second promising continuation.

11...\(\text{N}b8\)

11...c5 was played in Tennert – Heinemann, Hannover 2013, when 12.\(\text{N}f4\)N e5 (12...\(\text{Nb6}\) 13.\(\text{N}c3\)) 13.\(\text{g}5\) would have been good for White.

11...d5?!N 12.exd5 (there is also 12.\(\text{b}6\)? \(\text{N}b7\) 13.\(\text{c}5\) \(\text{N}b8\) 14.\(\text{c}3\) with a pretty good blockade) 12...cxd5 13.\(\text{b}6\) \(\text{N}b8\) 14.\(\text{xc}8\) \(\text{xc}8\) 15.\(\text{d}4\) White is waiting for Black to castle, when a timely g2-g4 will lead to a dangerous attack. This could be checked in more detail, but I don’t see much need for lengthy analysis since there are other good options on moves 11 and 12.

After the text move I found an improvement over Macak – Macieja, Kallithea 2008.

12.\(\text{c}5\)!N \(\text{xc}5\)

12...d5 13.\(\text{g}5\) \(\text{f}8\) 14.\(\text{c}3\) \(\text{xc}5\) 15.\(\text{xc}5\) transposes to 14...\(\text{f}8\) 15.\(\text{e}3\) in the notes below.

13.\(\text{xc}5\) d5

13...\(\text{b}6\) 14.\(\text{d}4\)±

13...\(\text{e}5\) 14.\(\text{d}4\) \(\text{xd}4\) 15.\(\text{xd}4\)±

14.\(\text{g}5\)

14.\(\text{c}3\) could also be considered.

Black’s main problem is a lack of prospects for counterplay. Now that ...e5 has been played, it’s virtually impossible to arrange ...d5, especially with \(\text{c}4\) on the way. A simple attack along the b-file can easily be parried by \(\text{c}4\)-b3. If Black plays ...a5-a4 and then doubles on the b-file, White will usually be able to play \(\text{xa}4\), and even in the worse case he can play b2-b3 to hold things together. If only Black’s pawn was still on h7, he could simply play ...0-0, ...\(\text{d}8\), ...d6 and ...\(\text{e}6\), with a solid position and chances for an eventual ...d5. With the pawn on h5 though, castling will allow a quick g2-g4, leading to
a potentially deadly opening of the kingside.

To see how these ideas may play out over the board, we will analyse B21) 12...d6, B22) 12...a5 and B23) 12...0–0?.

A rare alternative is:
12...b8 13...c4

13...a5?!N
13...0–0 14...b3† followed by g2–g4 gave White an easy attack in Kapnisis – Kourkoulos Arditis, Nikaia 2013. (The immediate 14.g4?! would have allowed 14...hxg4 15.fxg4 0xe4! 16.0xe4 d5 with a mess.)
14...b3 c4 15...h6i!
15...d3 0xc3 16.bxc3 0a3† 17.0d2 is a simpler route to an edge.

13...c4
13...xf6 gxf6 is a little premature from White's perspective. I briefly considered 14.f4? exf4 15...xf4 0e6 but concluded that Black's chances are not bad at all, as his bishops work well together.
13...\textit{e}6 14.\textit{b}3
I don't feel the need to alter the structure by exchanging on e6 or f6. Unlike the 14...d6?!N line given in the notes to variation B22 below, Black has not created any additional weaknesses with ...a5-a4, and he would have more chances for counterplay. By contrast, after the text move I can't see how Black will create any play.

14...\textit{d}8 15.\textit{b}1!
15.\textit{e}2 gave me a slight advantage in Negi–Vachier-Lagrave, Biel 2010, but the drawback was that it made g2-g4 harder to arrange after Black castled. That's why I now consider the text move to be more accurate.

15...\textit{b}7 was played in Von Meijenfeldt – Van der Poel, Amsterdam 2013. The general evaluation remains the same, but the text move is at least a bit more purposeful.

16.h4?!±
This feels logical to me, although any other sensible move could be played. The main point is that ...0–0 will always allow g2-g4, and I don't see what else Black is doing.

B22) 12...a5

This has been the most popular move, but advancing the pawn to a4 hardly helps Black's cause, while his underlying problems remain.

13.\textit{c}4 a4 14.a3 \textit{b}6
14...0–0?! would run into the usual 15.g4! hxg4 16.fxg4 when Black is in trouble.

14.d6?!N
This untested move deserves attention. Black would like to be able to play ...\textit{e}6 now that White does not have the convenient \textit{b}3 available in response. I suggest changing the structure in a different way.

15.\textit{xf}6 gxf6 16.f4 exf4
16.\textit{e}6 is met by 17.\textit{xe}6 fxe6 18.fxe5 dxe5 19.\textit{e}2± and Black's position is too open.

17.\textit{xf}4 \textit{e}6

15...a5N
15...0–0 16.g4 hxg4 17.fxg4 gives White a strong attack.

15.\textit{b}7 was played in Von Meijenfeldt – Van der Poel, Amsterdam 2013. The general evaluation remains the same, but the text move is at least a bit more purposeful.

16.h4?!±
This feels logical to me, although any other sensible move could be played. The main point is that ...0–0 will always allow g2-g4, and I don't see what else Black is doing.
Chapter 4 – Introduction to 8...dxe7

18...d4!
18...dxe6 fxe6 improves Black’s position considerably. However, 18...a3 is a valid alternative which looks quite annoying for Black as well.
18...db6 19.hd1
White brings his last piece into play. Another point of his 18th move is that the a4-pawn can be targeted. A sample continuation is:
18...db5 20.xe6 fxe6 21.xa4 bxa4 22.xa4
Let’s return to 14...db6, which has been Black’s most popular continuation. The idea is to play ...b8 and sacrifice the a4-pawn to get counterplay, but the plan does not work due to concrete reasons:

15.f4!
15.e3 db7 is quite okay for Black, since the bishop is misplaced on e3.

15...b8?N
Objectively this does not quite work, but it sets up some tricks which we need to be ready for.

15...c5 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.e6! fxe6 18.xe6 gave White a huge advantage in Pikula – Rajkovic, Vrnjacka Banja 2010.

15...d6N enables White to force a favourable change in the structure: 16.xf6 gxf6

17.f5! Preventing ...e6, which would have been Black’s only source of counterplay. He can never really play ...b8 because of dxa4, and it will not be possible for him to castle either. 17...d7 18.e2+ – White can continue improving his pieces; for instance, with h1-f1-h3.

15...c5 has been played a few times, but White has a choice of promising replies:

a) 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.e6! fxe6 18.xe7 (18...dxe5 19.e2+ is also good; White picks up the a4-pawn and maintains control over the dark squares) 17...xe7 18.e6 dxe6 19.d4 0-0 20.h3+ Robson – Hughes, Saint Louis 2010.

b) 16.a2N is possibly even simpler: 16...0-0 (16...xf4 17.xf4+; 16...b8 17.e1+) 17.hf1

16.xa4 b7 17.fxe5!
17.xf6 xf6 18.b3 0-0 19.hf1 (or 19.f5 d5) 19...d5? might be better for White, but there is no need to open the game for Black’s bishops.

17...xa4 18.d4!
It is vital to be on the lookout for tricks involving ...xa3. The text move defends
while threatening $\mathcal{A}x f 7 \dagger$, so Black’s reply is forced.

18...$\mathcal{W}a5!$ 19.$\mathcal{H}hf1!$

19.$\mathcal{W}d2$ $\mathcal{W}xa3!$ 20.$\mathcal{A}c3$ $\mathcal{O}xe4$ gives Black enough play. A crucial detail arises after 21.$bxa3$ $\mathcal{O}xa3\dagger$ 22.$\mathcal{B}b2$ $\mathcal{A}xb2\dagger$ 23.$\mathcal{W}xb2$ $\mathcal{H}xb2$ 24.$\mathcal{H}xb2$ and now 24...$\mathcal{D}f2\dagger$ assures Black of a better endgame.

The text move effectively refutes Black’s concept. The knight still can’t move and we will soon win it back.

19...0–0 20.$\mathcal{A}d2!$ $\mathcal{W}xa3$

Blade’s play has been based around this trick, but on this occasion it doesn’t work.

21.$\mathcal{A}c3$ $\mathcal{O}xe4$ 22.$bxa3$ $\mathcal{O}xa3\dagger$ 23.$\mathcal{B}b2\dagger$

This time there will be no ...$\mathcal{D}f2$ fork, so White will have a winning endgame.

B23) 12...0–0?

This has only been played a few times, but it was recently used by Iturrizaga, whose success may attract more followers. We have already seen that castling invites an attack with g2-g4, but Black is hoping to get fast counterplay with ...d5.

13.$\mathcal{A}c4!$

13.h3 is too slow. Every tempo is important when conducting an attack, and here it’s especially clear. 13...$\mathcal{E}d8!$ 14.$g4$ $\mathcal{B}b7$

15...g5 d5 led to a messy game in Alsina Leal – Iturrizaga, Moscow 2012.
13...\textit{\$d8}

Another game continued:

13...a5 14.g4!

Threatening \textit{\$xf6} followed by g5-g6.

14...hxg4 15.fgx4 \textit{\$xe4}? 

15...a4? 16.\textit{\$xf6} \textit{\$xf6} 17.g5 is winning for White.

15...\textit{\$a6} 16.\textit{\$xf6} \textit{\$xf6} 17.\textit{\$xd7}+

16.\textit{\$xe4} d5

17.\textit{\$hf1!N}

A simple computer novelty.

17.\textit{\$g2} was unclear in Van Kampen – Zawadzka, Skopje 2013.

17...dxe4

17...\textit{\$e6} 18.\textit{\$f6}+-- and 17...dxc4 18.\textit{\$f6}+! gxf6 19.\textit{\$xf6} \textit{\$xf6} 20.\textit{\$xf6}+-

show White's key attacking idea.

18.\textit{\$xe7} \textit{\$xe7}

19.\textit{\$xf7}! \textit{\$xf7} 20.\textit{\$d8}+ \textit{\$h7} 21.\textit{\$xf7} \textit{\$xd8} 21...\textit{\$xf7} 22.\textit{\$h4}+ wins immediately.

22.\textit{\$xd8}

White should win the endgame easily enough.

14.\textit{\$xf6}!N

This might seem like a surprising choice at first, but it's an easy move to understand. We saw in the previous note that the attacking plan of g2-g4, \textit{\$xf6} and g4-g5 could be difficult for Black to meet. Here we are just switching the move order to prevent any counterplay with ...d5.

14.\textit{\$b3} was played in HeviaAlejandro – Miranda Mesa, Havana 2013. White may well slightly better here too, but the text move saves time and is more energetic.

The immediate 14.g4 allows: 14...d5! (14...hxg4 15.\textit{\$xf6}! \textit{\$xf6} 16.fgx4 would transpose to our main line) 15.exd5 cxd5 16.\textit{\$xf6} dxc4 17.\textit{\$d5} \textit{\$xd5} 18.\textit{\$xd5} \textit{\$b7}! 19.\textit{\$d7} (19.\textit{\$xe5} \textit{\$xd5} 20.\textit{\$xc7} \textit{\$xf3=} 19...\textit{\$xd7} 20.\textit{\$xd7} \textit{\$xf3} 21.\textit{\$f1} \textit{\$xf6} 22.\textit{\$xf3} hgx4 23.\textit{\$c3} At first White seems to be better thanks to his extra exchange, but 23...\textit{\$g5}! 24.\textit{\$d1} f5 25.\textit{\$xc4} \textit{\$f6} actually gives Black pretty good compensation.
14...\textit{\texttt{axf6}} 15.g4 \texttt{hxg4} 15...\textit{\texttt{xe7}} 16.gxh5 leaves Black too vulnerable on the kingside.

15...d6 16.g5 (16.gxh5 looks pretty good too) 16...\textit{\texttt{xe7}} 17.g6 \textit{\texttt{xe6}} 18.\textit{\texttt{xe6}} fxe6 19.\textit{\texttt{g2}}±

16.fxg4

16...d5

16...\textit{\texttt{xe7}} 17.g5 g6 18.h4± is certainly no fun for Black.

17.exd5 \textit{\texttt{xd4}}

17...\texttt{cxd5}? 18.\textit{\texttt{xd5}} is hopeless for Black.

18.d6! \textit{\texttt{xd7}}!

18...\texttt{xd1} 19.\texttt{xd1}! (19.\textit{\texttt{xc7}} \texttt{xd2} 20.\textit{\texttt{xd2}} \textit{\texttt{g4}} 21.\textit{\texttt{xe4}} gives White a better endgame, but the text move is even stronger) 19...\textit{\texttt{d7}} (19...\textit{\texttt{a5}} 20.\textit{\texttt{g2}} e4 21.\textit{\texttt{xe4}} \texttt{e5} 22.c3 \textit{\texttt{f8}} 23.\textit{\texttt{b1}} \textit{\texttt{h5}} 24.\textit{\texttt{b3}}±)

20.\textit{\texttt{g2}} \textit{\texttt{f5}} 21.\textit{\texttt{e4}} White’s pieces dominate completely. 20...\textit{\texttt{f8}} 22.\textit{\texttt{b1}} \textit{\texttt{h5}} 23.\textit{\texttt{f1}}± White obviously has superb play for the exchange; crucially, Black has no easy way to simplify or get any counterplay.

19.\textit{\texttt{g2}}!

Aiming for the same type of exchange sacrifice as in the notes above. Black can get a slightly improved version of that line, but the overall character of the position will be similar.

19.\textit{\texttt{df1}} is a much safer continuation, but it is hard to prove an advantage in the following endgame: 19...\textit{\texttt{xd6}} 20.\textit{\texttt{xd6}} (20.\textit{\texttt{g2}} \textit{\texttt{d4}}! 21.\textit{\texttt{e4}} \texttt{xc4} 22.\textit{\texttt{xc4}} \textit{\texttt{g5}}± 23.\textit{\texttt{b1}} \textit{\texttt{d4}} 24.\textit{\texttt{xe4}} \texttt{xe4} and it’s close to equal again) 20...\texttt{xd6} 21.\textit{\texttt{e4}} \textit{\texttt{d4}} 22.\textit{\texttt{f6}}± gxf6

23.b3 \textit{\texttt{f8}} 24.\textit{\texttt{xf6}} \textit{\texttt{xf4}} 25.\textit{\texttt{xf4}} exf4 White is
obviously better, but it is hard to estimate by how much. The trouble is that the computer often overestimates White’s advantage in certain endgames – especially rook endgames where White may have an extra pawn but in reality it’s only a draw. That is why I have kept the more ambitious continuation as the main line.

19...\textit{g5}!

19...\textit{xdl} 20.\textit{xdl} transposes to the 18...\textit{xdl} line above. Instead Black should take the opportunity to improve his bishop.

20.\textit{b1} \textit{xdl} 21.\textit{xdl}

21.\textit{wxc6} is met by 21...\textit{g4}! and Black survives.

21...\textit{xf5}

Compared with the 18...\textit{xdl} line mentioned above, Black’s bishop is much more active on g5. This means we can no longer get a clear advantage by plonking the knight on e4, and we should instead try to capture the c6-pawn before centralizing the knight. However, it takes some precise play to achieve all this without allowing too much counterplay.

22.\textit{d3}!

Forcing the black queen to go to an unfavourable square.

22.\textit{we4} \textit{f4} is unclear.

22.\textit{xc6} is possible but after 22...\textit{g4}! there is no easy way to restrict Black’s counterplay. The engine suggests 23.\textit{xal}, but this seems a little extreme to me.

22...\textit{f4}
huge difference, as we will simply move the knight to d5 or e4, with excellent long-term compensation.

24...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d4  
24...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{ac}}$}b8?! 25.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}f5 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{f}}$}4 26.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}e4+  
24...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{a}}$}7 25.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}e4 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}3 26.a3∞  
24...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{g}}$}f4 gives White a pleasant choice: 25.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}e4∞ looks normal but 25.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d5?!∞ is also tempting.

25.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{g}}$}g2 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{h}}$}h6 26.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d1 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{a}}$}7  
26...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{h}}$}h4 27.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d5 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{f}}$}4 28.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}e4∞ does not change much.

27.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d5 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{f}}$}4 28.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{c}}$}c4 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{ac}}$}8 29.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{b}}$}b3 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d7  
The exchange sacrifice leads nowhere with the bishop on b3 to shield the king: 29...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{xc}}$}c3? 30.bxc3 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d7 31.c4+-  
30.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}e4∞  
Once again, we get our ideal set-up. Black has no counterplay and will have to suffer for a long time.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we looked at two important options after 8...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}e7 9.f3. Beginning with 9...0-0 10.g4 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{b}}$}5 11.g5, we saw that 11...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}e8?! does not combine well with the bishop on e7, and White has more than one route to an advantage. 11...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{h}}$}h5 is more challenging. After 12.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{cc2}}$} there are some fascinating possibilities; in particular, 12...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{xd}}$}4 13.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{xd}}$}4 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{f}}$}6?! has barely been tested, while after 12...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{d}}$}d8 White gets a venomous, though not necessarily winning, attack using the idea from my game against Quesada Perez.

The remainder of the chapter was devoted to 9...h5, a move which I do not rate too highly. 10.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{cc6}}$} is best, when 10...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{dxc}}$}6 gives a favourable version of one of the thematic Taimanov structures dealt with extensively in the next chapter. 10...\textit{$\mathbf{\text{bxc}}$}6 is a better try, but the simple 11.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{f}}$}f4 \textit{$\mathbf{\text{e}}$}5 12.\textit{$\mathbf{\text{g}}$}5 leads to a structure where Black struggles to find counterplay and White gets automatic attacking chances thanks to the weakening ...h5 move.
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.e4 c6 5.d5 c7 6.d3 a6 7.c3 d4

8.0-0-0

A) 8...b5
B) 8...e7 9.f3 b5?! 10.xc6?! dxc6 11.g4

B1) 11...b7
B2) 11...e5 12.h4 e6 13.wf2!
B21) 13...a5
B22) 13...b4
B23) 13...d8
B3) 11...0-0 12.wf2 e5 13.h4
B31) 13...e6
B32) 13...d8! 14.d3?!N b8 15.h5
B321) 15...h6
B322) 15...e6 16.g5
B3221) 16...e8
B3222) 16...d7

B1) note to 12...0-0
B31) after 13...e6
B32) after 13...d8!

I have referred to the system with ...Qc7 and ...b5 as the New Main Line because it is currently the trendiest set-up among strong players. The reasons for this will be discussed shortly, but first I want to show why the ‘accelerated’ version where Black delays ...Qc7 is not such a good plan. Once I have dealt with A) 8...b5, I will discuss the more important topic of B) 8...Qe7 9.f3 b5.

A) 8...b5 9.Bxc6!

This is the simplest continuation. For reasons that will be explained later, the ...Bxc6 structure tends to present the most challenges, but we are well placed to meet it here.

9.f3 would justify Black’s set-up.

9.f4?!

This is a lot more fancy, and probably quite dangerous for Black. A few possible lines are:


10.Bxc6 10.Bb3 Qc7 11.f3 0-0 12.g4 is a decent alternative.

10...Bxc6 10...dxc6 11.Nd6±

11.f3

White has good prospects. Still, I prefer the immediate exchange on c6 as it fits in perfectly with the rest of the proposed repertoire, without requiring you to remember any additional sophisticated details.

9...Bxc6

9...dxc6 can be conveniently met by 10.Bf4! (10.f3 is playable but less challenging) 10...Qb6 (obviously 10...e5?? is impossible due to 11.Qxe5 – that is why Black is better off playing ...Qc7 before ...b5) and now White has more than one promising continuation, with 11.Nd6± being the simplest.

Another reason for exchanging on c6 is that it gives us a perfect opportunity to explore the positions where Black recaptures with a piece. As you will see in both this and some other Taimanov variations, I often dismiss as better for White those lines where Black recaptures on c6 with a piece – especially the queen.
I would like to explain this principle in more detail before presenting some lines to reinforce my opinion.

Unless Black has a specific reason, such as a pin on the c3-knight, recapturing on c6 with a piece instead of the d-pawn is a concession for more than one reason. Having a piece on c6 allows White to gain a tempo with the typical regrouping manoeuvre e2-d4. The knight exchange has also reduced Black's prospects of counterplay to only a queenside pawn march, whereas with the knight on c6 he had the option of ...e5. If White is going to rob Black of that possibility by exchanging on c6, then Black should generally be looking to get something in return, that is, improving his structure with ...dxc6.

10.e5 b4! would be annoying, so instead we should defend the e4-pawn. The text move is useful anyway to prepare g2-g4. White will continue with his natural plan of kingside expansion, while at the same time keeping in check Black's ideas on the queenside. It is important not to mix up the plans and allow Black immediate counterplay with a quick ...d5 or ...b4. See the note to White's next move for more about this.

10...b7
10...b4 is conveniently met by 11.d4. 

We have reached a critical position. Despite my generally favourable assessment of the positions where Black recaptures on c6 with a piece, it is important to be precise at this point.

11.b1!

It is worth checking the other natural moves to see where the problems lie.

11.e2 c8 12.d4 is slightly premature as the knight may become a target. 12...c7 13.g4 e5 14.b3 occurred in Van der Wiel – Zapata, Amsterdam 1987, when 14...h6N followed by ...d5 would have given Black good counterplay.

11.g4 b4! (11...b4 12.d4+) 12.e2d5 leaves White without an easy way to block the centre; ...a4 is a key resource for Black, which is why I advocate putting the king on b1. Here are a few brief lines: 13.e5 (13.g5 d7∞; 13.d4N a4?! leads to insane complications) 13...d7 Kobalia – Stefansson, Varadero 2000. White can consider 14.d4?N a4 15.b1 cxe5 16.f4 with definite compensation, but overall this seems like too much effort for such a sideline.
11.\&d3
This would be great if we could follow up with \&e2, as Dominguez did in the note below, but Black has the annoying option of:
11.b4!
11...b4? 12.\&e2! gives White an ideal set-up.
12.h5 13.\&b1 \&c7 14.\&he1 \&e7 15.\&f4+

12.\&d4
12.\&he1 can be safely met by 12...\&xc3
13.\&xc3 \&xc3 14.\&xc3 d5 when the dark-squared bishop is not too troublesome.
In Molner - Omvedt, Reykjavik 2014, Black should have played:

12...d6!N
Most unexpected – but it works!

13.\&e2
13.\&f2?! e5 is good for Black, and 13.\&xf6 gxf6 also gives him a pleasant version of the ...
gxf6 structure.
13...e5 14.\&e3 \&c6=
Followed by ...\&xc3 and Black has no problems.

11.\&c8 12.g4!
12.\&e2 and 12.\&d4 have been tried by strong players, but the text move poses more immediate problems.

12...\&b4
This the only serious attempt to justify Black's play.
12...d5? runs into 13.g5 of course.

12...b4 13.\&c2 d5 no longer makes any sense when Black does not have the tempo-gaining ...
\&a4 up his sleeve, and 14.\&d4 \&c7 15.e5 \&d7 16.f4 gives White fine prospects.

13.\&d4 0-0
13...d6 14.g5 \&h5 15.\&h3=

In Costa Trillo - C. Gilbert, corr. 2015, White kicked the bishop with 14.a3, but I would prefer:

14.\&d3N\&
Forcing Black to deal with the threat of $\text{fxf6}$ followed by a mating attack.

B) 8...$\text{e7}$ 9.$\text{f3}$ $\text{b5}$

This is the latest trend in the Taimanov English Attack, which has been adopted rather successfully by several strong grandmasters (including me). Black's idea is to get his queenside counterplay underway while postponing castling until a more appropriate time. The theory of this variation has been developing rather quickly, and so far White has not been able to pose too many problems.

10.$\text{dxc6}$?

This has only been played in a small number of games, but I believe it has been underestimated.

Before discussing my recommendation, let me give a brief summary of the more popular continuation:

10.$\text{g4}$ $\text{Qxd4}$!

In the original game, Potkin played 10...$\text{b7}$ 11.$\text{g5}$ $\text{Qxd4}$ and Dominguez replied with 12.$\text{dxc6}$. Later, however, people realized that 11.$\text{f4}$? and 12.$\text{gxf6}$? were serious and dangerous alternatives against this move order, so it makes more sense for Black to trade knights immediately.

11.$\text{xd4}$

11.$\text{xd4}$ gives White a couple of extra options, but nothing that seems likely to hurt Black.

11...$\text{b7}$!

In Opening for White According to Anand 9, Khalifman only covered this variation in a note and mentioned 11...$\text{e5}$ and 11...$\text{d6}$. Times change though, and the text move – which was, amazingly, not tested over the board until 2013 – presents a much sterner challenge.

12.$\text{g5}$ $\text{h5}$

We have reached a critical position. White's most popular continuation has been 13.$\text{e5}$, leading to simplifications, and he has also attempted to go after the $h5$-knight in various ways, but so far Black has been able to keep the balance with clever play.

10...$\text{dxc6}$

10...$\text{xc6}$ has only occurred once, although it immediately transposes to some games where the exchange took place a little earlier. In any case, taking with the queen makes little sense: 11.$\text{g4}$! Compared with variation A, where Black had played ...$\text{b7}$ instead of ...$\text{e7}$, White does not even have to spend time moving his king to $b1$. 
The point is that after 11...b4 12.Qe2 d5?!,
as in Beltz – Helm, Germany 2008, White
gets a clear advantage with the simple 13.g5N
followed by exd5. Black can do better than this
of course, but White’s play flows easily – his
kingside pawns are mobile and he will regroup
with Qe2-d4 at some point.

I started focusing on the present position
after finding that White seemed to be running
into roadblocks in all the main lines. Of course
there is still a lot to explore there, but I think
the present line is a promising new direction.
It seems to me that the ...dxc6 structure has
been misunderstood for a long time. Therefore,
before we go any further, I would like to share
my thoughts about the plans for both sides
in the ...dxc6 structure. The positions can be
categorized according to whether or not Black
continues with ...e5 at some point.

Black usually plays this move at some point.
It gains space in the centre and improves the
light-squared bishop, while discouraging
f3-f4 and stopping White from forcing a queen
exchange with g3. Black will generally follow
up with ...e6 and ...d7, before deciding
how to advance his queenside play; the main
options are ...a5 or ...a5-a4 followed by ...b4.

White has a lot of plans, but it’s not obvious
which one should be chosen. This makes it easy
for unprepared White players to mix up their
ideas, choosing ineffective plans and spending
more time on the clock. White’s main focus
should be expanding on the kingside. If he can
advance his pawns to g5 and h5, the rest of the
attack should flow freely. Black usually tries to
obstruct this by meeting g4-g5 with ...h5.
White can stop this by playing h4-h5 first,
but this takes more time and may give Black a
chance to create counterplay on the queenside;
alternatively, he may be able to meet h4-h5
with ...h6 and try to withstand the attack.
White should also keep in mind the possibility
of a timely f3-f4, particularly if Black’s pieces
are stuck passively and he can’t establish his
knight on e5 after ...exf4.

As for the pieces, the queen is usually excellent
on f2, where it avoids being attacked by ...d8
and sets up ideas like c5 or b6. The queen
might also go to h2 to put pressure on the e5-pawn, especially if ...\texttt{e}e8 has been played. The light-squared bishop should generally go to h3 to target Black's bishop which will almost always have gone to e6. After g2-g4, h2-h4 and \texttt{h}h3, White will be ready for g4-g5, forcing the knight to move, followed by \texttt{x}xe6 and ...fxe6. In the resulting structure, White should generally be able to maintain control while exerting pressure against the numerous targets in Black's position. If Black moves the knight immediately after \texttt{h}h3, so that g4-g5 will not come with tempo, he will avoid the doubled e-pawns but will lose the option of putting the knight on h5 to block our advancing pawns. Another major advantage of the \texttt{h}h3 plan is that it takes the sting out of Black's potential counterplay involving ...\texttt{a}a5 and ...\texttt{b}4, as the a2-pawn will be easier to defend once the e6-bishop has been eliminated.

When it comes to Black's counterattacking ideas on the queenside, one of the crucial factors is that White doesn't have to be too afraid. Black's play might seem easy, but it's also easy for White to contain. If Black plays ...\texttt{b}4 too early, White will just block the queenside with \texttt{a}a4. Black can avoid this by playing ...\texttt{a}5-a4 first, but this takes some time. Another idea is to target the a2-pawn with ...\texttt{a}a5 and ...\texttt{b}4, but Black will have to watch out for \texttt{b}b6 ideas. Even if he manages to win the a2-pawn, it will take several more moves to generate serious threats against the king, so in some lines White only has to keep the queenside from falling apart for long enough to break through on the kingside. It is also worth pointing out that the typical prophylactic move \texttt{b}b1 is often not worth playing: it costs a valuable tempo and, more importantly, makes the plan of ...\texttt{e}e6, ...\texttt{b}b8, ...\texttt{a}a5 and ...\texttt{b}4 much more powerful.

If Black elects not to play ...\texttt{e}5, he will often post his bishop on b7 and play ...\texttt{c}5. He can also try ...\texttt{a}5-a4 but that seems rather slow. One obvious plan for White is to advance on the kingside with g4-g5. If Black reacts with ...\texttt{h}h5 then we have the option of \texttt{f}3-f4. Under the right conditions this can be extremely strong as it provokes ...\texttt{e}5, which can in turn be met by f4-f5 with an impressive pawn roller.

White also has a more nuanced approach involving g2-g4 and \texttt{f}2-g3, aiming to simplify to a slightly better endgame with a superior structure and more space in the centre. If Black exchanges on g3 then White will double on the h-file with \texttt{h}d2-h2 (or \texttt{h}h2 and \texttt{h}dh1), with long-term pressure. If Black has already played ...\texttt{c}5, then a2-a4 can be used as a lever to create additional outposts on the queenside.

On a more general note, I would like to emphasize that the ensuing positions are largely unexplored. Hardly any of the analysis in the remainder of the chapter is based on critical games, so there's clearly a great deal of room for discovery on both sides. I have focused on finding ideas against Black's most logical plans, and I hope that the following analysis will develop your understanding to a point where you can deal confidently with any unexpected ideas you might encounter.
11.\textit{g4}

White can also play 11.\textit{Wh2} and follow up with g2-g4. At the moment I don’t see a compelling reason to prefer one move over the other, but this might change in the future. A small advantage of the text move is that White keeps the option of playing \textit{Wh2} in one move, but I’m not sure how likely this is to occur. On the other hand, 11.\textit{Wh2} gives White the option of playing \textit{Wg3} without g2-g4. Again, it doesn’t seem too relevant right now, but it’s good to keep these things in mind.

11...c5 is similar to variation B1 and may transpose, but having the pawn on c5 doesn’t seem terribly useful for Black right now. In the endgame it may weaken Black’s queenside, so there is no value in playing it so soon.

\textbf{B1) 11...\textit{b7}}

This move signifies that Black intends to play without ...\textit{e5}, which should enable him to obtain faster counterplay on the queenside. If White goes for g4-g5 and h4-h5, he will have to reckon on ideas like ...\textit{Qd7-b6}, ...\textit{b4}, ...\textit{c5-c4} and so on. That is why I am recommending something different.

12.\textit{Wh2}!

This move has been played a couple of times, but I am advocating a new plan of \textit{Wg3}, when the queen exchange will lead to a favourable endgame. Black can avoid the exchange of course, but in that case his queen will have to move to a worse square and White will be well placed to press ahead on the kingside.

12...0–0

12...\textit{e5}? 13.\textit{h4} gives White an improved version of variation B2, as the bishop belongs on e6 rather than b7.

12...\textit{c5} occurred in Dalakian – Howe, Norderstedt 2005, when 13.\textit{Wg3}N would have been good: 13...\textit{Wxg3} (13...\textit{Wa5} 14.\textit{d}b1 and 13...\textit{c6} 14.h4 both give White the better chances as Black’s queen is misplaced) 14.hxg3 White is obviously superior on the kingside, and he might also chip away at the black queenside with a2-a4 at some point.

14...\textit{c6} 15.g5 \textit{Qd7} 16.\textit{h2}! So that ...\textit{e5} will not prevent us from doubling on the h-file. (16.\textit{f2} \textit{e5}! would be annoying) 16...0–0 (now 16...\textit{e5} 17.\textit{f2} keeps everything under control) 17.\textit{f4} White intends \textit{g2} and \textit{h1} with fine prospects. 17...\textit{b4} 18.\textit{b1} does not change anything, as Black cannot take on e4 due to the hanging knight on d7.

12...\textit{Qd7} was played in Martin Tarrio – Fluvia
Chapter 5 – New Main Line

Poyatos, Spain 2000. In this case I suggest a tiny modification of White's plan:

Opening the h-file is a positional concession from Black's point of view, so it is important to see why the alternatives also fail to equalize for him.

14...e5 is almost always a dubious idea when the bishop has already gone to b7. 15.g4!?? The most ambitious approach, preventing ...c5. (15.h4 c5 16.d2? is also decent) 15...f6d8 16.h4 White has good attacking chances. One especially nice idea is: 16.b4

17.c4! bxc3 18.g6!

14...f6c8 is a logical idea, but White can just improve his position with 15.d2 and ask Black what he intends to do. An illustrative line is: 15...c5 16.xc7 xxc7

17.h4! Provoking a weakening. 17...e5 18.c3 b6 19.h4±

15.xg3 fd8
Black's position is fairly solid but the h7-weakness is critical.

16.\textit{\textbf{d}d2}!

16.\textit{\textbf{h}h2} \textit{\textbf{e}e5} allows Black to exchange a pair of rooks. White still has a modest edge, but doubling on the h-file is a lot more impressive.

16...\textit{\textbf{f}f8} 17.\textit{\textbf{d}d}h2

The rooks might appear to be hitting a dead end, but they tie up Black's kingside pieces and restrict his active prospects. White also has the simple but dangerous plan of \textit{\textbf{g}g2}, \textit{\textbf{f}3-f4}, \textit{\textbf{e}4-e5} and \textit{\textbf{e}e4}. If we can achieve all this, then the subsequent plan of \textit{\textbf{g}3-g4} and \textit{\textbf{f}4-f5}, or even a \textit{\textbf{d}f6} sacrifice, will push the defence to breaking point. In the meantime, Black does not have many prospects for counterplay.

17...\textit{\textbf{c}c5} 18.\textit{\textbf{g}g2} \textit{\textbf{c}c6}

Doubling on the open file achieves nothing: 18...\textit{\textbf{d}d7} 19.\textit{\textbf{f}f4} \textit{\textbf{a}ad8} 20.e5 \textit{\textbf{d}xd2} 21.\textit{\textbf{d}d}x\textit{\textbf{g}g2+} and White is ready for \textit{\textbf{e}e4}.

19.\textit{\textbf{f}f4} \textit{\textbf{b}b4} 20.\textit{\textbf{c}c}b1?!

20.\textit{\textbf{d}d1} intending \textit{\textbf{f}f2-g4} is also interesting.

20...c4 21.\textit{\textbf{d}d}d2?!

21.e5 \textit{\textbf{d}xd2} 22.\textit{\textbf{d}d}x\textit{\textbf{g}g2+} is a good alternative.

21...\textit{\textbf{c}c3} 22.\textit{\textbf{c}c}4±

B2) 11...\textit{\textbf{e}e5}

This has been Black's most popular choice and it has scored pretty well so far, but I like White's prospects.

12.\textit{\textbf{h}h4} \textit{\textbf{e}e6} 13.\textit{\textbf{f}f2}

White has also tried:

13.\textit{\textbf{h}h3}?

This has certain points in its favour, but also some slight drawbacks. The critical reply is:

13...\textit{\textbf{d}d7}!N

13...\textit{\textbf{d}d8} 14.\textit{\textbf{h}h2}! is nice for White, as the queen has saved time by avoiding a stop on \textit{\textbf{f}2}. 14...\textit{\textbf{a}xd1}† 15.\textit{\textbf{f}f2} 0–0 (15...\textit{\textbf{d}d7} 16.\textit{\textbf{d}d5} 16.g5 \textit{\textbf{h}h5} 17.\textit{\textbf{c}c}xe6 \textit{\textbf{f}xe6} 18.\textit{\textbf{h}h3} \textit{\textbf{c}c8} 19.\textit{\textbf{e}e2} \textit{\textbf{g}6} 20.\textit{\textbf{g}g4} \textit{\textbf{g}g7} 21.\textit{\textbf{f}f4}± Motylev – Fominyh, Ubeda 2001.

14.\textit{\textbf{d}d5}?

14.\textit{\textbf{h}h2} \textit{\textbf{a}a5}! gives Black fast counterplay.

14...\textit{\textbf{c}cxd5} 15.\textit{\textbf{exd5} \textit{\textbf{d}xd5} 16.\textit{\textbf{h}h3} \textit{\textbf{d}d8}

This could be analysed further, but the bishop is clearly not ideal on \textit{\textbf{h}3}, and I'd rather not have my queen exposed on \textit{\textbf{d}5}.

13.\textit{\textbf{h}h2}!N is a new idea which has some similarities to 13.\textit{\textbf{h}h3}. I will not devote any more space to it though, as I am happy with White's prospects in the main line. Besides, Black can dodge this possibility with the 11...0–0 move order featured in variation B3, as shown on page 106.
13...0-0 has not been played according to my database, but it immediately transposes to the later variation B31 on page 107.

13...a5?? allows 14.b6 and the queen will be trapped. Black can prepare the queen move with 13...b8?! , but the whole plan proves to be too slow after 14.h3 a5 15.g5±.

13...b4 is premature due to 14.a4 d7 15.b3 and Black's queenside play is blocked: 15...c5 16.b1 0-0 17.g5 c4 18.h3±

13...d7 steps away from g4-g5 while preparing ...a5, but it runs into:

14.d5! An important motif to remember. 14...cxd5N (14...xd5 15.exd5 c5?! was played in Hemmerling - Zakrzewski, Poznan 2014, when 16.g5N would have been excellent for White) 15.exd5 d5 16.b5 0-0 With the bishop pair, the open d-file and the possibility of a kingside pawn advance, White has the more pleasant game. 17.b1 c6 18.d1 c5 19.d3 xe3 20.xe3±

B21) 13...a5

14.h5 h6! Black wants to play ...a4 followed by ...b4 to prevent the blockading a4, but the plan is rather slow.

14.h3!

We will see a lot more of this plan in the upcoming lines.

14.h5 h6! gives Black equal chances.

14.c5 mixes up two different plans, and after 14...0-0 15.h5 xc5 16.xc5 d7 17.d6 xd6 18.xd6 fc8 Black was comfortable in Eliseev – Potkin, Moscow 2014.

14...a4 15.g5 h5 16.xe6 fxe6
17.\texttt{g2}
This is the simplest continuation, targeting e6 immediately.
17.\texttt{b6}\texttt{??} \texttt{b7} 18.\texttt{c2} is an interesting alternative. Black will have to spend a tempo chasing the annoying bishop away, and in the meantime White intends \texttt{d2} and \texttt{hd1}.

17...\texttt{g6} 18.\texttt{g4} \texttt{f7} 19.\texttt{e2}\texttt{±}

B22) 13...\texttt{b4}

16.\texttt{c5}! \texttt{xc5} 17.\texttt{xc5} White’s position remains preferable, but I am not sure how big his advantage is. I will focus on the more ambitious and complicated continuation, but you could certainly consider this as a risk-free alternative.

14.\texttt{xc3} 15.\texttt{g5}!
15.\texttt{bxc3}! \texttt{a5}! is best avoided.

15.\texttt{b6}\texttt{?!} is an interesting option, but it doesn’t seem necessary.

15...\texttt{d7}
Black has two ways to grab a pawn, neither of which end well for him:

15...\texttt{xb2}\texttt{†} 16.\texttt{xb2} \texttt{d7} 17.\texttt{xe6} \texttt{fxe6} 18.\texttt{c5} with a strong initiative.
Chapter 5 – New Main Line

15...\(\text{\&}xe4\) 16.fxe4 \(\text{\&}xh3\) 17.bxc3 \(\text{\&}e6\) 18.\(\text{\&}b6\) followed by \(\text{\&}c5\) and Black's king remains stuck in the centre.

16.\(\text{\&}xe6\) fxe6 17.bxc3

Trying to prove an edge against the doubled e-pawns has become an obsession for me in this chapter.

17...c5!

The critical continuation, stopping \(\text{\&}c5\) and enabling the knight to go to b6 at the right moment.

17...0–0 allows us to get a fine game with 18.\(\text{\&}d3\) or even 18.g6? h6 19.\(\text{\&}c5\).

17...0–0–0 18.\(\text{\&}c5\) \(\text{\&}xc5\) 19.\(\text{\&}xc5\)t is also pleasant for White.

18.f4!?

18.\(\text{\&}d3\) is met by 18...0–0–0! 19.\(\text{\&}h1\) \(\text{\&}b6\) when the active knight gives Black enough counterplay.

18.g6? h6 (18...hxg6 19.\(\text{\&}g3\) 0–0–0 20.\(\text{\&}xg6\) wins a pawn) 19.\(\text{\&}d3\) is interesting; having the pawn on g6 with Black's pawns fixed on dark squares will certainly make future endgames dangerous for Black, but it's still not easy to prove anything against the machine.

18...0–0

19.f5 exf5 20.exf5 \(\text{\&}ac8\)

20...\(\text{\&}b6\) 21.\(\text{\&}xc5\) favours White.

21.f6!?

The position looks dangerous for Black, but it deserves to be explored further. One interesting continuation is:

21...\(\text{\&}b6\) 22.h5!?

With the idea of \(\text{\&}h4\) and sacrificing an exchange on c4. I am not sure if White is really better, but clearly he is the one trying. I have mentioned several alternatives along the way, so I will let you make up your own mind about which you prefer.

B23) 13...\(\text{\&}d8\)
Trading off a pair of rooks is another natural idea.

14...\textit{xd8}+ \textit{xd8} 15...\textit{h3}!

Once again this typical move works well.

15...\textit{d7}

15...\textit{c8}N can be met by 16.g5! \textit{xh3} 17.gxf6 \textit{xf6} 18.g5 \textit{g5}† 19.hxg5 \textit{d7} 20.\textit{c5} and Black is vulnerable on the dark squares.

16.g5 \textit{h3} 17.xh3

White is making steady progress on the kingside. Black’s king seems safe in the centre, but how is he supposed to get any counterplay?

17...\textit{f8} 18.h1 \textit{e6}

19.g3N

White chose the sophisticated 19.h2 in Pasko – Pezzica, corr. 2014, but the text move seems more natural to me.

19.\textit{e2}N is a decent alternative, when I don’t see an easy way for Black to create counterplay. White will either play f3-f4 or improve his position further with moves like \textit{b1}, \textit{g3-g4}, \textit{g3} and so on.

19...\textit{d6} 20.\textit{d1}±

The knight is heading for f2 and later d3 or g4. I slightly prefer this over \textit{e2-g3}, but both options should enable White to exert pressure without much risk.

B3) 11...0–0

Black usually follows this up with ...e5, but the present move order is marginally more precise than the previous variation B2. The point is that White now has to take into account the possibility of a quick ...\textit{xd8}, which discourages ideas such as h2-h4 followed by \textit{h2}.

12.\textit{f2}

Despite the previous comment, 12.h4 \textit{d8} 13.\textit{h2} can still be considered if White wants to aim for a minimal edge, but I am far too ambitious for this.

12...e5

If Black does not play this he will have to worry about g4-g5, when ...\textit{h5} can be met by f3-f4.

12...\textit{d8}N 13.\textit{xd8}+ \textit{xd8} 14.g5 \textit{h5} 15.f4! e5 16.f5 \textit{f4} 17.h4± nicely illustrates the above point.

12...\textit{b7} leads straight to the earlier variation B1.
13.h4

We have reached an important crossroads. Black can continue developing naturally with B31) 13...\textit{\texttt{e}6}, but I believe the critical continuation to be B32) 13...\textit{\texttt{d}8}!, intending to avoid my favourite plan of \textit{\texttt{h}3} and g4-g5.

13...\textit{\texttt{d}7} is not so impressive. 14.g5 \textit{\texttt{a}5} 15.\textit{\texttt{b}1} In the comments on page 99 I cautioned against this king move, but in this particular instance it works fine, as Black will not be able to cause trouble with ...\textit{\texttt{e}6}.

\textbf{B31) 13...\textit{\texttt{e}6}}

This move occurred in Sava – Schiendorfer, email 2007, when 14.h5 led to interesting play. By now, of course, you will have guessed that I prefer a different plan:

14.\textit{\texttt{h}3!N \texttt{d}7}

In the event of 14...\textit{\texttt{e}8} I like 15.\textit{\texttt{g}3?!}, preventing ...\textit{\texttt{d}6}. 15..\textit{\texttt{a}5} 16.g5 \textit{\texttt{x}h3} 17.\textit{\texttt{x}h3}±

Keeping the knight on the kingside also fails to equalize, for instance: 14...\textit{\texttt{a}d}8 15.\textit{\texttt{x}d}8 \textit{\texttt{w}x}d8 16.g5 \textit{\texttt{h}5} 17.\textit{\texttt{x}e}6 (17.\textit{\texttt{g}4}? is perhaps a bit too clever: 17...\textit{\texttt{x}g}4 18.\textit{\texttt{x}g}4 \textit{\texttt{f}4} 19.\textit{\texttt{x}f}4 \textit{\texttt{ex}f}4 20.\textit{\texttt{x}f}4 \textit{\texttt{f}6} 17...\textit{\texttt{f}6} 18.\textit{\texttt{d}1} \textit{\texttt{w}e}8 19.\textit{\texttt{b}1})

The position is rather unpleasant for Black. Although it might appear that he can target f3, this pawn is not too difficult to defend, whereas Black’s queenside pawns may become seriously weak. Black’s knight may go to f4 at some point, but in that case White might just swap it off and play with an excellent knight against a bad bishop with \textit{\texttt{e}2-c1-d3} etc. The doubled e-pawns are also a serious hindrance for Black. 19...\textit{\texttt{f}7} is a natural continuation when the simple 20.\textit{\texttt{f}1} maintains White’s advantage, but he can also play more dynamically with 20.\textit{\texttt{c}5}? \textit{\texttt{f}4} 21.a4±.

14...\textit{\texttt{a}b}8 is similar to the line above, but Black hopes to obtain some counterplay by
avoiding the rook exchange. Still, after 15.g5
\(\text{\texttt{\#h5}}\) 16.\texttt{\texttt{\#e6}} fxe6 White has the superior
structure and will just play to restrict Black’s
activity. 17.\texttt{\texttt{\#g2}} \texttt{\texttt{\#b4}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{\#e2}} \texttt{\texttt{\#f7}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{\#f1}}
\texttt{\texttt{\#f4}} 20.\texttt{\texttt{\#xf4}} exf4 21.\texttt{\texttt{\#b1}}

15.g5
15.\texttt{\texttt{\#d5}} is always worth checking, but it is
not so effective here due to 15...\texttt{\texttt{\#cxd5}} 16.\texttt{\texttt{\#xd5}}
\texttt{\texttt{\#xd5}} 17.\texttt{\texttt{\#xd5}} \texttt{\texttt{\#f6}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{\#d2}} \texttt{\texttt{\#c6}}= intending
...\texttt{\texttt{\#d5}}.

15...\texttt{\texttt{\#xb3}}
15...\texttt{\texttt{\#ab8}} only gives White the extra
possibility of exchanging on e6, while 16.f4
will transpose to the main line.

16.\texttt{\texttt{\#xb3}} \texttt{\texttt{\#ab8}} 17.f4!
17.\texttt{\texttt{\#e2}} \texttt{\texttt{\#b6}}! gives Black enough
counterplay, so it is better to keep the pawns
rolling on the kingside.

17...\texttt{\texttt{\#xf4}}
17...\texttt{\texttt{\#b4}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{\#e2}}±

18.\texttt{\texttt{\#f4}} \texttt{\texttt{\#e5}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{\#g3}} f6 20.\texttt{\texttt{\#e2}}±

14.\texttt{\texttt{\#d3}}\texttt{\texttt{\#N}}
The most ambitious move. Since Black’s
move order is directed against our \texttt{\texttt{\#h3}} plan,
we will abandon it in favour of a blunt attack
with h4-h5, g4-g5, f3-f4, \texttt{\texttt{\#dg1}} and so on.
Now of course Black gets to put his bishop
on e6 and hit back on the queenside, so it’s a
double-edged sword, but it appears to me that
Black’s life is quite a bit tougher.

We could also play in a more constrained
manner and aim for a slight edge with:
14.\texttt{\texttt{\#xd8}}\texttt{\texttt{\#f8}} 15.\texttt{\texttt{\#h3}}
Preventing ...\texttt{\texttt{\#e6}}.
15.h5 h6! (15...\texttt{\texttt{\#e6}} 16.g5 \texttt{\texttt{\#d7}} 17.g6 fxg6
18.hxg6 h6 19.\texttt{\texttt{\#g3}}+) Black intends ...\texttt{\texttt{\#h7}}
to block the kingside, and if 16.g5 hxg5
17.\texttt{\texttt{\#xg5}} \texttt{\texttt{\#xe4}}! Black wins a pawn.
15...\texttt{\texttt{\#c7}}\texttt{\texttt{\#N}}
Both 15...\texttt{\texttt{\#d7}} 16.g5± and 15...\texttt{\texttt{\#a5}} 16.g5
\texttt{\texttt{\#h5}} 17.\texttt{\texttt{\#g4}} \texttt{\texttt{\#f4}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{\#xf4}} exf4 19.\texttt{\texttt{\#d1}}
\texttt{\texttt{\#c7}} 20.\texttt{\texttt{\#g1}}± are promising for White.
15...\texttt{\texttt{\#e8}} occurred in Komodo – Stockfish,
Internet 2015. I think a logical continuation
would have been: 16.\texttt{\texttt{\#g3}}\texttt{\texttt{\#N}} (after 16.g5
\[ \text{\textbackslash\texttt{xh3 17.xh3 d6 Black is at least equal) 16...c7 (16...d6 17.f1=) 17.d1!? Intending } f2 \text{ and } g4-g5, \text{ with an interesting position to analyse further.} \]

16.h5

16.g5 (or 16.e2?) 16...h5 17.xc8 (17.g4 xg4 18.fxe4 xf4=) 17.xc8 could also be explored.

16...le8

16...h6 17.g5 hxg5 18.xc8 xc8 19.xg5 b4 20.wh4! bxc3 21.h6 g7 22.xe7 cxb2† 23.xb1 g6 24.xd1 is better for White.

17.xc8!!

17.xh3 18.xh3 d6! favours Black, so White should stop the knight from going that way.

17...h6 18.g5 xh3 19.xh3 xg5 20.xg5 hxg5 21.xg5

The computer only sees it as a tiny plus, but to a human it is obvious that Black is under some pressure.

14...eb8

After 14...d7 15.g5 the knight is misplaced.

15.h5!

15.xb1 is the wrong plan because Black’s threats against the a2-pawn will become much more serious.

Black can either attempt to disrupt our kingside advance with B321) 15...h6 or ignore it with B322) 15...e6.

\[ 15...a5 16.h6 g6 (16...b4?! does not help: 17.b1 g6 18.h4±) 17.a5± is good for White. \]

B321) 15...h6 16.g5

16.xb1! deserves attention. Black can hold up g4-g5 with 16...h7 17.f6 f6 but it’s not the most pleasant sequence of moves, and White can try to build an attack by preparing g4-g5. At the same time Black has counterplay on the queenside as well, so it’s hard to assess the position.

16...hxg5

17.h6!

17.xg5 allows the typical 17...b4!, intending ...xe4 if White’s knight moves away. In such situations it is worth checking if White can sacrifice the knight, but in this instance 18.h6? bxc3 19.xh8 xe4! refutes the attack.

17...g6 18.h7†?

18.xg5 h7 (18...b4? 19.h4++; 18...e8 19.xd7+) enables Black to block the kingside for the time being. It’s still an interesting position to explore further, but I prefer the idea of advancing the pawn all the way to h7.
18...\texttt{Nh8} 19.\texttt{Nxg5}
Threatening \texttt{Nh4}, so Black's reply is forced.

19...\texttt{Ne8}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{chess_board_1.png}
\caption{Position after 19...\texttt{Ne8}}
\end{figure}

20.\texttt{Nh6!}
There are other interesting moves, but I like this one as it prevents ...\texttt{Nd6}, which would now be met by the crushing f3-f4.

20...\texttt{Nd6}
20...\texttt{b4} 21.\texttt{Qa4} c5 22.b3 \pm gets nowhere for Black.

20...\texttt{Qe6} 21.f4 \texttt{exf4} 22.\texttt{Qxf4} \texttt{Nd6} 23.\texttt{Qxd6} \texttt{Nxd6} 24.e5 \pm

20...\texttt{g5?!} is the computer's top choice, but White can answer with the human pawn sacrifice: 21.f4?! \texttt{exf4} (21...\texttt{gxf4}? 22.\texttt{Qg2+-}) 22.e5\texttt{Qe5}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{chess_board_2.png}
\caption{Position after 21.f4! exf4 22.e5! \texttt{Qxe5} 23.\texttt{Qd1} \pm} 
\end{figure}

Black has a lot of pawns, but the open files ensure that White has all sorts of threats against the weak dark squares, beginning with the simple \texttt{Qxe5}.

B322) 15...\texttt{Ne6}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{chess_board_3.png}
\caption{Position after 15...\texttt{Ne6}}
\end{figure}

This way Black avoids weakening himself on the kingside and hopes to use his bishop to support a counterattack.
16.g5
We have reached a final split. At first I had B3221) 16...\(\text{Qe}8\) as my main line, but eventually I concluded that B3222) 16...\(\text{Qd}7\!\) was more challenging.

**B3221) 16...\(\text{Qe}8\) 17.f4?!**

This seems logical now that the knight has moved away from the blockading e5-square.

17...\(\text{exf}4\)
17...\(\text{xa}5\) runs into 18.f5! \(\text{xa}2\) 19.f6+ and White is well ahead in the attacking race.

18.\(\text{xf}4\) \(\text{xa}5\)!
Offering an exchange sacrifice is Black’s only real chance to create counterplay.

18...\(\text{d}6\) 19.\(\text{xd}6\) \(\text{xd}6\) (19...\(\text{xd}6\) 20.g6→) 20.e5+ would be one-way traffic.

19.g6!
19.\(\text{xb}8\) is objectively good for White, but it is not without risks. The critical line continues: 19...b4! 20.\(\text{xa}4\)! \(\text{xb}8\) (20...\(\text{xa}4\) 21.\(\text{g}3\) \(\text{xb}8\) 22.\(\text{xa}8\) \(\text{xe}5\)† 23.\(\text{d}2\)†) 21.\(\text{b}3\) \(\text{xe}5\)† (21...\(\text{c}7\) 22.\(\text{g}6\)†) 22.\(\text{b}1\) \(\text{c}1\) I would be a bit worried about Black’s compensation, although the computer assures me that White should be able to consolidate. In a practical game, however, I would prefer to keep the initiative.

**B3222) 16...\(\text{Qd}7\)!**

21.e5†
This seems like an appropriate moment to end the present line. It would be possible to analyse further of course, but we are already deep into uncharted territory, so I am happy to leave it here and state that White has the more threatening attack.
This is perhaps the most critical line of the entire chapter. Although it is not easy to prove an ultimate advantage, we do have some choices and the positions in general seem more dangerous for Black.

17.g6 fxg6
17...b4? 18.Qa4± does not help Black at all.

17...a5? 18.Edgl b4 is nicely refuted by:

18.hxg6 h6
19.d5! cxd5 20.gxh7+ Nh8 21.g3 f6 (21...f8 22.h6<+-) 22.g5+-

18.hxg6 h6
This is the only move but it looks extremely scary for Black. However, the Qxh6 breakthrough still requires preparation, and Black is also poised to launch his own attack with ...a5 and ...b4. At the same time, Black has to play incredibly precisely in the next few moves, even against our most obvious ideas. This should be a big red flag for anyone intending to play such positions. As you will see, it remains quite hard to prove an advantage against perfect defence, but I think my analysis will convince you that the whole line is more dangerous to play for Black.

19.b1
I like this move because it seems really natural. It also causes Black a lot of problems, even if he manages to wriggle out to an endgame at the end of my main line. The main idea is to prepare Qe2-c1, after which Black's play on the queenside would come to an end, so he has to respond immediately.

19.Qh2 Qc5! seems decent for Black, as 20.Qxh6?! gxh6 21.Qxh6 Qf6 does not give White enough of an attack.

19.f4 is another direct attempt, but 19...Qf6! is good enough. I won't present any more moves here, but if you check it you will find that Black ends up fine after some forcing lines.

The most interesting alternative is:
19.Qe2!?
White in a great position as Black's queenside counterplay would have come to a complete halt. However, switching the order gives each side some additional options. I will start by analysing a) 19...\textit{\textit{W}a}5, when White's idea works well. However, Black can also switch gears with b) 19...c5!, when it is hard to understand what is going on.

\textbf{a) 19...\textit{\textit{W}a}5}

This can lead to some brilliant variations.

\textit{\textit{\textit{W}h}2! \textit{\textit{f}f}8!}

Unlike our main line, 20...\textit{\textit{f}f}6\textit{\textit{g}x}3! \textit{\textit{W}xa}2 would be an unfortunate choice due to 21.\textit{\textit{g}x}f3! \textit{\textit{W}xa}2 \textit{\textit{f}f}6\textit{\textit{g}x}3! with a decisive attack.

20...\textit{\textit{W}xa}2 leads to the same thing: 21.\textit{\textit{W}x}f3! \textit{\textit{g}x}f6 22.\textit{\textit{W}x}f6 \textit{\textit{f}f}6 23.\textit{\textit{W}g}3+

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{a} & \textbf{b} & \textbf{c} & \textbf{d} & \textbf{e} & \textbf{f} & \textbf{g} & \textbf{h} \\
\hline
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textit{\textit{\textit{W}x}f6! \textit{\textit{g}x}f6 22.\textit{\textit{W}g}7! \textit{\textit{f}g}7}

22...\textit{\textit{c}c}5 23.\textit{\textit{W}x}h6 \textit{\textit{f}f}7 24.\textit{\textit{W}h}5+ \textit{\textit{f}f}6 is incredibly dangerous for Black. 25.a3! is best, and if 25...\textit{\textit{W}xa}3 26.f4! White is winning.

Now we have an amazing sequence to bring White's attack alive:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{a} & \textbf{b} & \textbf{c} & \textbf{d} & \textbf{e} & \textbf{f} & \textbf{g} & \textbf{h} \\
\hline
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

23.\textit{\textit{W}d}g1 \textit{\textit{f}f}7 24.\textit{\textit{W}h}5+

24.\textit{\textit{W}d}4 is another attempt to open a path for the bishop, but 24...\textit{\textit{e}x}d4 25.\textit{\textit{W}h}5+ \textit{\textit{f}f}8 26.\textit{\textit{W}g}6 \textit{\textit{e}e}7 27.\textit{\textit{W}x}g7+ \textit{\textit{f}f}7! 28.\textit{\textit{W}x}h6 \textit{\textit{W}xa}2 keeps things messy.

24...\textit{\textit{f}f}8 25.\textit{\textit{W}x}g7 \textit{\textit{g}x}g7

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{a} & \textbf{b} & \textbf{c} & \textbf{d} & \textbf{e} & \textbf{f} & \textbf{g} & \textbf{h} \\
\hline
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

26.\textit{\textit{W}f}4!! \textit{\textit{e}x}f4

26...\textit{\textit{e}x}f4? 27.\textit{\textit{W}x}h6\textit{\textit{f}f}7! wins easily.

26...\textit{\textit{W}f}8 27.\textit{\textit{W}x}e5+ \textit{\textit{f}f}7 28.\textit{\textit{W}g}1+-

27.\textit{\textit{W}c}5 \textit{\textit{f}f}8

27...\textit{\textit{W}xa}2?? 28.\textit{\textit{W}x}h6+ \textit{\textit{f}f}7 29.\textit{\textit{W}g}6+ \textit{\textit{e}e}7 30.\textit{\textit{W}h}7+ is a forced mate.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{a} & \textbf{b} & \textbf{c} & \textbf{d} & \textbf{e} & \textbf{f} & \textbf{g} & \textbf{h} \\
\hline
 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

28.\textit{\textit{W}g}6+ \textit{\textit{f}f}8 29.\textit{\textit{W}x}e6 \textit{\textit{W}b}6 30.\textit{\textit{W}x}h6+ \textit{\textit{f}f}8

30...\textit{\textit{W}e}7 31.\textit{\textit{W}h}7+ \textit{\textit{f}f}8 32.\textit{\textit{W}f}5+ forces 32...\textit{\textit{W}e}8, when 33.\textit{\textit{W}e}6\textit{\textit{f}f}7 transposes to our main line.

31.\textit{\textit{W}e}6+ \textit{\textit{f}f}8 32.\textit{\textit{W}d}6+ \textit{\textit{e}e}8

Surprisingly, there is no immediate way to catch the black king. However, despite all the earlier fireworks, White can now win...
back the sacrificed material and play for long-term pressure.

Finally we will have equal material, but White keeps an excellent bishop and the safer king. Black will also have to keep an eye on the slightly weak f4-pawn.

b) 19...c5!

This is a better attempt to exploit the early knight retreat.
intending to push the f-pawn. However, I doubt that he can get more than a draw if Black plays accurately; and Black had a decent alternative on move 21 as well.

Although 19...d2?! can lead to some fascinating lines, I have a feeling that 19...b1 is the stronger move, so we will return to it now.

19...a5!

In the previous note this move led to a strong attack for White, but here it seems to be Black's best.

19...f8 20.f4! gives White a strong attack.

19...f6 20.e2! shows White's ideal regrouping. 20...c5 (after 20...a5 21.c1± our king is perfectly safe and we can start preparing d6) 21.c3!± Now ...b6 would drop the c5-pawn, which is why it was useful to wait for the bishop to go to f6 before regrouping the knight.

20.h2!?

This subtle move maintains maximum tension while setting some nasty traps.

White can also go for the immediate breakthrough with:

20.xh6!? This could be an excellent practical weapon, as there are many pitfalls for Black – and even after perfect defence, we will have the better side of a drawn endgame, which is pretty good for a worst-case scenario.

20...b4!

20...gxh6? 21.xh6 b4 22.h2! bxc3 23.h8+ g7 24.h6+ f6 25.h4+ wins for White.

21.a4 gxh6 22.xh6 g5!

This vital intermediate move prevents any h8 ideas, as the black king will now have enough room to escape.

22...xa2? 23.xa2 xxa4 24.b1 b3 25.h8+ shows why the f6-square is needed. 25...g7 26.h7+ f8 27.cx3 xb3 28.e2! f6 29.g7+ e8 30.h8+ g8 31.d2± Black has no good defence against c4.

23.h5

23.h2?! is playable but 23...f6! is good enough to draw.

23...xa2 24.xa2 xxa4 25.b1 b3 26.xg5

26.h8?? loses to 26...g7! 27.h7+ xg6. 26.cx3 xb3 27.h8+ (also after 27.c4+ xc4 28.h8+ g7 29.d8 f8! White has no more than a draw) 27...g7 28.cx d8 x2t! 29.xb2 (29.xb2? xxd1t 30.a2 xd8--) 29...b4t 30.a2 a4 forces a draw.
26...a2?! 27.c1 bxc2
27...a1?? 28.d2 xb2 29.g7! b6
30.e1 c3† 31.g1 bxc2 32.xc2 xc2
33.xc2 xd1† 34.xd1 is probably also a
draw with best play, but Black still has to
work to prove it.

28.xc2 g7
This position should be drawn with best
play, but White can keep some practical
winning chances with:

29.h5!
29.c4 a1† 30.b1 a5=
29.h1 a1† 30.b1 a4 31.h7† g8
32.c2 a1†=
29...a1† 30.d2 xb2 31.xb2 xb2†
32.c1 c2 33.c2

33.f6!
If it were not for this resource, Black would
be in serious trouble.
34.xe5 xd1† 35.xd1 f3 36.e7† xg6
37.e5† h5 38.e6 f6†
White should have little trouble picking
up the a- and c-pawns, and can go on to test
his opponent’s defensive technique with rook
against rook and bishop for as long as he likes.

20...f6!
20...f8? loses to 21.dg1! with the deadly
threat of xh6 followed by g6-g7.

20..b4 21.a4! xa2† (after 21..xa4?
22.b3 a5 23.xh6 White smashes through
on the kingside) 22.xa2 xa4† 23.b1 b3
24.cxb3 xb3 25.c1 White’s strong bishops
give him a solid plus; the immediate plan will
be c2 followed by c4(†).
21.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{d}}f1!}

Intending \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{h}}3}. If we can trade the light-squared bishops, we will ease the pressure on the queenside while weakening the black king's protection.

21.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}h6} g\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}h6} gets nowhere after 22.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}xh6} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{g}}7} or 22.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{g}}7} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{g}}5}.

21.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{d}}g1?} is too slow because \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}h6} isn't really a threat with the bishop on f6:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

21...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}4} 22.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{a}}a4} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}xa4} 23.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}3} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}a5} 24.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}h6} gxh6 25.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{g}}7} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{d}}f7}++

21...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{f}}8}

21...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}4} can be ignored: 22.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{h}}3!} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}h3} (22...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}4} 23.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{a}}a4!} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}xa4} 24.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}3} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}a5} 25.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}d7}+-- 23.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}h3} bxc3? (Black has to try 23...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{d}}f8}, but after 24.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{e}}e2} it is clear that there was no need to rush with ...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}4})

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

24.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{e}}6}! \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{h}}8} 25.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}d7!} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}b2}+ (25...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}d7} 26.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}d7} does not help Black) 26.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}1+- Black does not have time to threaten anything on the queenside, as \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}h6}+ will kill him.

22.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}d8!}

22.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{h}}3} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}d1}+ 23.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}d1} gives Black a slightly easier version of the same type of position: 23...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}4}! 24.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{f}}5} (24.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}1}b4 25.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{a}}a4} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}a2}+! 26.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}a2} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}a4}+ 27.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}1}b3 28.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}xb3} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}b3} 29.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}2} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}2}+ 30.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}c2} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}g6} shows a clear difference from the main line, in which we have a rook on g1)

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
& & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

24...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}4} 25.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{a}}a4} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}xa4} (25...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{a}}a2}+ 26.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{x}}a2} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}xa4}+ 27.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}1}b3 28.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{c}}xb3} is complicated but I wouldn't mind being White) 26.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}3} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}5} 27.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{b}}c4} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{d}}xc4} This should be compared with 26...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textsf{w}}xa4} in the notes to the main line below. Here Black seems to be okay as he can threaten...
us with ...\textit{Eb}5, which would not have been possible if our bishop had stayed on h3 instead of going to f5.

22...\textbf{Wxd}8

22...\textit{Exd}8 23.\textit{Eh}3 \textit{Ec}4? (Black should settle for 23...\textit{Exh}3 24.\textit{Wxh}3\textit{g}5! although, without any meaningful queenside threats, he is definitely worse) This plan worked well for Black in the previous note, but this time he has a nasty surprise in store:

After 23.\textit{Eh}1 \textit{Wxa}5 24.\textit{Ec}3 \textit{Wxc}5 Black seems to be safe.

I also considered 23.\textit{Ec}2 \textit{g}5 24.f4 \textit{Exf}4 25.gxf4, but after 25...\textit{Wd}6! White risks falling into trouble as his knight is stuck.

23...\textbf{Wa}5

This is the only way for Black to create threats on the queenside.

23...a5 24.d3 a4 25.e2 b4 26.c1\textit{d}±

24.\textit{Eh}3 \textit{Ec}4!

Black has to keep the bishop alive.

24...\textit{Exh}3? 25.\textit{Exh}3\textit{g}5! 26.\textit{Eg}5\textit{a}5 leaves Black with no counterplay whatsoever.

25.\textbf{Cc}1

Preparing for Black’s next move.

25...\textit{b}4 26.\textit{Da}4 \textit{xa}2\textit{†}

26...\textit{Wxa}4 27.b3 \textit{Wb}5 28.bxc4 \textit{Wxc}4 29.\textit{Wf}2 gives White plenty of compensation for the pawn. Compared with the 22.\textit{Eh}3 line mentioned above, the crucial difference is that Black does not have the ...\textit{Eb}5-a5 plan available here. There is not much else he can do to continue his attack, and the extra pawn doesn’t help him too much. If White can
transfer his light-squared bishop to the a2-g8 diagonal, life could become extremely tough for Black. Even in endgames, the white bishops may prove to be the dominant force – but for the time being, Black has to worry about the kingside threats as well.

27.\textcolor{red}{\textit{b1}}a2 \textcolor{red}{\textit{xa4}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{xa4}} 28.\textcolor{red}{\textit{c1}}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\
\hline
1 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
2 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
3 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
4 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
5 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
6 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
7 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
8 & & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

28...b3 29.cx\textcolor{red}{\textit{b3}} x\textcolor{red}{\textit{b3}} 30.\textcolor{red}{\textit{c2}}

Black is probably objectively okay here, but the game is far from over. White’s bishops will annoy Black for a long time, especially in an endgame. If, on the other hand, Black decides to keep the queens on, then he will have to watch out for \textit{exh6} ideas all the time.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this chapter, after 7.\textcolor{red}{\textit{d2}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{f6}} 8.0–0–0, we started by considering 8...b5 in order to see why the positions after 9.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}} favour White. With that out of the way, we moved on to one of the most cutting-edge branches of modern Taimanov theory, which occurs after 8...\textcolor{red}{\textit{e7}} 9.f3 b5?. My recommendation of 10.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}}! d\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}} has not been tested in too many games, making it an especially potent practical choice.

After discussing the plans available to both sides in the ...d\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}} structure, I recommended 11.g4 for White. If Black tries 11...\textit{b7} then White has an excellent plan of \textcolor{red}{\textit{f2}}, \textcolor{red}{\textit{g4}}–\textcolor{red}{\textit{g5}} and \textcolor{red}{\textit{g3}}, when Black must either move his queen to an inferior square or give us a favourable endgame with a space advantage and pressure along the h-file after hxg3.

Black’s most natural and promising approach is to play ...e5 at some point. The immediate 11...e5 can be met by 12.h4 \textit{e6} 13.\textcolor{red}{\textit{f2}}!, when I favour the plan of 13.\textit{h3} followed by \textcolor{red}{\textit{g4}}–\textcolor{red}{\textit{g5}}. I have talked at length about the benefits of this approach, and I was unable to find full equality for Black in any of the main lines I analysed from this point.

I regard 11...0–0 12.\textcolor{red}{\textit{f2}} e5 as a slightly more accurate move order, the point being that 13.h4 \textit{d8}! is slightly annoying. Allowing a rook exchange would diminish White’s attacking chances, so on this occasion I decided to abandon the \textcolor{red}{\textit{h3}} plan in favour of 14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{d3}}\?N followed by h4–h5 (so that Black will not be able to block the kingside with ...\textit{h5}) and \textcolor{red}{\textit{g4}}–\textcolor{red}{\textit{g5}}. Many complex variations can arise from here and I analysed rather deeply in an attempt to discover what was really going on. For most players, there is no point in trying to memorize everything; rather, by playing through the lines, you should get a feel for the different plans available, which should enable you to create serious problems for any opponent who chooses to walk this path.
Taimanov

8...\texttt{b4} – Old Lines

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\texttt{f3} e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\texttt{x}xd4 \texttt{c6} 5.\texttt{c3} \texttt{c7} 6.\texttt{e3} a6 7.\texttt{d}d2 \texttt{f6} 8.0–0–0 \texttt{b4}

9.f3

A) 9...\texttt{e7} 10.\texttt{de2}
   A1) 10...d5?!
   A2) 10...b5
B) 9...\texttt{e5} 10.\texttt{b3}
   B1) 10...d5
   B2) 10...b5 11.\texttt{b1}
      B21) 11...\texttt{c4}
      B22) 11...\texttt{e7}?! 12.\texttt{f2}
         B221) 12...\texttt{b7}?! 
         B222) 12...\texttt{d6}
            B2221) 13.\texttt{b6}
            B2222) 13.g4! \texttt{fd7}! 14.\texttt{g1}!
               B22221) 14...\texttt{b7}
               B22222) 14...\texttt{b4}
               B22223) 14...g5?!
A2) note to 19...\texttt{c5}?! 
B22221) after 15...b4 
B22222) after 16...\texttt{e4} 

23.\texttt{a5}N 
16.\texttt{d5}N 
17.\texttt{a7}N
I.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 c6 5.e3 w7 6.e3 a6 7.d2 d6 8.0-0-0 d4

Although the system from the previous chapter is currently more fashionable, the present position remains quite popular. Black develops his bishop to its most active square and puts pressure on White's centre. The drawback is that the bishop sometimes turns out to be exposed on b4, which may enable White to swap it off and exploit the weakened dark squares.

9.f3

In this chapter we will focus on A) 9...d7 and B) 9...e5, which used to be regarded as Black's two most challenging options. The latter, in particular, is by far the leading move in terms of overall frequency in the database.

The next chapter will focus on the modern preference of 9...0-0, along with the minor alternatives 9...h5 and 9...b5. Other moves are not so impressive:

9...d5

Black would love to play this of course - but if things were that simple, the Taimanov English Attack would have died out a long time ago. White gets a fine position by hitting the dark-squared bishop.
this move on the database, and White has scored almost 100% so far.

10...0-0
The immediate 10...\textit{xc3} 11.\textit{xc3} has been more popular but this makes no sense at all – Black may as well wait for a2-a3 before exchanging.

10...d6 11.a3 \textit{xc3} 12.\textit{xc3} \textit{xc3} 13.\textit{xc3} Black faces an unpleasant endgame. His knight is misplaced on a5 and \textit{b3} is a useful resource for White. 13...\textit{e7} 14.c4 \textit{d7} 15.\textit{b3} \textit{xb3}+ 16.\textit{xb3} b5 17.c5± Kryvoruchko – Cvek, Novi Sad 2009.

11.\textit{g3} \textit{c5} 12.a3 \textit{xc3} 13.\textit{xc3} \textit{xc3} 14.\textit{xc3} d5

15.\textit{c7}! \textit{e4} 16.\textit{xc4} dxc4 17.g4±
White had a pleasant endgame advantage in A. Muzychuk – M. Socko, Warsaw 2012. (17.\textit{xc2}N± also looks promising.)

A) 9...\textit{e7}

This is an older set-up but it is still seen from time to time.

10.\textit{de2}
The standard reply, reinforcing the c3-knight. Black may proceed with A1) 10...d5?! or A2) 10...b5.

10...h6?! is a funny idea to prepare ...d5, but it looks awfully slow. White has a few options, such as \textit{d4}-b6 as played by Wang Hao, but the simplest seems to be 11.\textit{b1}!, intending 11...d5 12.\textit{b5}!

A1) 10...d5?!
This used to be the main line, but eventually it was established that White can obtain excellent chances with the following pawn sacrifice:

11.\( \text{g5} \) dxe4 12.\( \text{xf6} \) gxf6

White has achieved excellent practical results from this position, although some precision is needed to prove a definite advantage.

16.\( \text{fhe1!} \) 0–0

16...\( \text{xf2} \) is risky to say the least; 17.\( \text{d4} \) gives White a strong initiative for the two pawns.

16...e5 has not been tried. At the very least, White can restore material equality while keeping a structural advantage with: 17.\( \text{a4} \) d7 18.\( \text{b5} \) 0–0–0 19.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{d7} \) 20.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xf2} \) 21.\( \text{xe5} \)

A few games have continued:

16...d7 17.\( \text{h5!} \)

Black's king is completely tied down.

17...\( \text{g8} \) 18.\( \text{g3!} \)

18.g4 has been played but it isn't required. Instead we can play more patiently, as it's not at all easy for Black to coordinate his pieces.

18...\( \text{e8} \)

18...b5? allows 19.\( \text{xe7} \) 20.\( \text{d5} \) and White will soon pick up the f7- and e6-pawns.

That explains why Black tried 18...\( \text{f8} \) 19.\( \text{e2} \) b5 in one game, but after 20.\( \text{g4} \) \( \text{c4} \) 21.\( \text{d6} \) \( \text{c6} \) 22.\( \text{d5} \) \( \text{xd6} \) 23.\( \text{f6} \) \( \text{d8} \) 24.\( \text{xd6} \) he found himself in another dismal endgame in Kokkila – Borwell, corr. 2006.

Finally, 18...\( \text{g5} \) 19.\( \text{d4!} \) (19.g4 \( \text{h6} \) 19...0–0–0 20.\( \text{xf7} \) is also great for White.

19.\( \text{d2!} \) \( \text{f8} \)

Black would like to move his bishop without allowing \( \text{xe6} \), but the text move gives us another tactical opportunity.

20.\( \text{d5!} \) \( \text{c5} \) 21.\( \text{xc5} \) \( \text{xc5} \) 22.\( \text{f6} \) \( \text{c6} \) 23.\( \text{xg8} \) \( \text{xg8} \) 24.\( \text{e2} \)
17.\text{g}4 \text{e}5\text{N}

This seems like the best try to involve Black's bishop in the defence.

The one game from this position continued: 17...\text{fxg}4 18.\text{W}xg4\text{f} 19.\text{W}g1 \text{h}8 20.\text{W}b1

20...\text{W}f4 (20...\text{e}5 21.\text{W}h5 \text{f}e6 22.\text{\text{\text{\text{d}3\text{c}}}} \text{\text{\text{\text{\text{d}}}}\text{a}d8 23.\text{\text{\text{\text{h}}h}6\text{\text{\text{\text{b}}}}}) 21.\text{\text{\text{\text{h}}h}5 \text{\text{\text{\text{h}}}h4 22.\text{\text{\text{\text{c}}}c}5 \text{c}e7 23.\text{\text{\text{\text{b}}}b6\text{\text{\text{\text{d}}}}}) White maintained a good deal of pressure for the pawn in Najer - Panarin, Moscow 2010.

17...\text{f}4?! is worse: 18.\text{W}e4 \text{e}5 19.\text{W}f6\text{a} 19.\text{g}7 20.\text{g}5 \text{f}5 21.\text{d}3\text{d}+

17...\text{a}5 18.\text{W}a4 does not change much: 18...\text{e}5 19.\text{gxf}5 (19.\text{W}a3?!\text{f}f) 19...\text{xf}5 20.\text{g}4 \text{g}6 21.h4

This move is more solid. It should be studied carefully, as it can lead to positions with a weirdly unbalanced pawn structure, requiring sophisticated handling from both sides.

A2) 10...\text{b}5

21.\text{h}4 \text{h}5 22.\text{d}5 \text{d}8

22...\text{a}5? runs into 23.\text{\text{\text{\text{h}}}h}5\text{\text{\text{\text{b}}}}.

23.\text{\text{\text{\text{h}}}h3!}

White keeps a powerful initiative for the pawn.

11.\text{\text{\text{\text{h}}}b1}

Threatening \text{\text{\text{\text{a}}}xb}5.
11.\textit{f}4 is a logical idea to provoke \ldots e5, which will create all sorts of weaknesses, but I would prefer to postpone it until the next move. Here Black has extra options such as 11...e5 12.\textit{g}5 \textit{c}6?! – compare 13...\textit{c}6 in the notes below to see why it benefits White to have the king on \textit{b}1.

11.\textit{a}5 12.\textit{f}4 e5 13.\textit{g}5 \textit{h}5?!

This is the latest trend in this line. Black prevents the plan of \textit{xf}6 followed by \textit{h}6, and intends to continue developing with \ldots \textit{b}7.

13...\textit{b}7?! transposes to a game which resulted in a high-profile defeat for Black: 14.\textit{xf}6 gxf6 15.\textit{h}6 \textit{b}6

14.\textit{h}4!

I want to transpose to the Caruana game quoted below, while discouraging \ldots \textit{b}4.

The game in question continued 14.\textit{d}3 \textit{c}6 15.\textit{h}4, but Black can deviate with 14...\textit{b}7, intending 15.\textit{xf}6 \textit{xc}3 as in Inarkiev – Maletin, Khanty-Mansiysk 2012. White may be able to fight for an edge with 15.\textit{a}4, but my recommended line gives us an even better version.

14.\textit{b}4?!N is a bizarre engine suggestion that almost turns out brilliantly. The critical line continues 14...\textit{xb}4 (14...\textit{b}6? 15.\textit{f}4\textdagger) 15.\textit{xb}5 \textit{c}5! (15...\textit{axb}5? 16.\textit{xb}4\textdagger) 16.c3 \textit{a}5 17.\textit{d}6\textdagger \textit{f}8 when White might be better somehow, but it’s a weird position and I much prefer the more human continuation seen in the main line.
14...\textit{b}7

14...b4 is of no concern here, as 15.\textit{a}4 \textit{b}7 (15...b3?! 16.\textit{ec}3 enables White to bring additional pieces into play) 16.b3\texttt{±} gives White a pleasant advantage; the bishop on a5 is severely misplaced.

15.\textit{d}3!

Reaching the desired transposition to the Caruana game.

In the stem game from this position, Black failed to equalize after: 15...\textit{c}4 16.\textit{xc}4 bxc4

15...0-0-0

This has been Black's most popular choice and has held up well so far, including in some correspondence games.

In the stem game from this position, Black failed to equalize after: 15...\textit{c}4 16.\textit{xc}4 bxc4

18...\textit{dg}8

This natural move has achieved a solid score for Black so far.

18...d6? would be too slow: 19.g4! hxg4 (19...\textit{b}8 20.\textit{g}3 hxg4 21.\textit{fxg}4 is the same) 20.\textit{fg}4 \textit{b}8 21.\textit{d}3 \textit{dg}8 22.\textit{e}2\texttt{±} White has complete control over the kingside.
In the event of 18...b8 I propose: 19.d6!
(The most ambitious, although 19.Qg3 d6 20.Qf5 Qc8 21.Qe4 was slightly more pleasant for White in M. Muzychuk – Navara, Legnica 2013.)

![Chess Diagram]

Black may try a) 19...Qc4 or b) 19...Qc5??N.

a) 19...Qc4 20.Qxc4 bxc4 21.Qg3 c3 22.b3 Qd8 23.Qf5
White has the more pleasant position, mainly because of the excellent knight. Black has no easy way to untangle himself, while White has a natural plan of exchanging the light-squared bishops, which will accentuate the power of the knight, as shown by the following correspondence game.

b) 19...Qc5??N
This seems like a reasonable deviation.
20.Qg3 Qc8 21.Qb3 Qb6
After 21...Qd8 22.c3± White is in control.

![Chess Diagram]

23...Qb4
23...e4 24.fxe4 Qxe4 25.Qe7±
24.Qe7
The immediate 24.Qh2±N should lead to the same thing, but there is no harm in repeating moves as in the game.
24...Qg3 25.Qh2 Qc5 26.Qf5 Qgg8 27.Qd3 Qa7 28.Qe4 Qxe4 29.fxe4

![Chess Diagram]

29...Qg4 30.Qh3 Qb7 31.Qxc3 Qb6 32.g3 Qxe4 33.Qc7±
Black eventually managed to hold the endgame in Petrigin – J. Fernandez, corr. 2014, but he was under pressure the whole time, and the defensive task would be much more difficult over the board.

b) 19...Qc5??N
This seems like a reasonable deviation.
20.Qg3 Qc8 21.Qb3 Qb6
After 21...Qd8 22.c3± White is in control.
problems, as capturing the bishop would allow a back-rank mate.
The text move gives the white king an escape square, thereby preparing $\text{d}f5$ without allowing the tactical solution shown above.

22...$\text{c}3$ 23.$\text{d}d3$±
White maintains a positional advantage.

19.$\text{d}6$!
Just like in the 18...$\text{b}8$ line given above, the pawn on $\text{d}6$ can make Black's life rather unpleasant. Even if he manages to exchange the queens – a goal which he is still some way from achieving – the pawn will continue to divides Black's camp into two segments in the endgame.

19.$\text{h}3$ is a reasonable move, but so far White has not managed to cause any serious problems with it. 19...$\text{c}4$ (Black also went on to draw with 19...$\text{b}8$ in Anikeev – Rozhnev, corr. 2015) 20.$\text{xc}4$† (White could consider 20.$\text{a}3$?N $\text{b}4$ 21.$\text{e}3$ $\text{c}5$ 22.$\text{d}2$ to keep the queens on, but I prefer my main recommendation) 20...$\text{xc}4$ 21.$\text{g}3$ $\text{c}3$ 22.$\text{f}5$ $\text{c}7$ 23.$\text{d}6$† $\text{b}6$ 24.$\text{e}7$ $\text{g}7$ 25.$\text{f}5$ $\text{gg}8$ 26.$\text{e}7$ $\text{v}2$–$\text{v}4$ Van Kampen – Bai Jinshi, Pune 2014. Another game, Xu Yi – Bai Jinshi, China 2015, was drawn in exactly the same way.

19...$\text{c}5$±N
This seems like a logical attempt to improve Black's play.

19...$\text{c}6$ can be met by the same plan of 20.$\text{h}3$ followed by $\text{g}3$-$\text{f}5$, just as in our main line. The only real differences are that the queen has less influence over the dark squares and is more prone to a potential $\text{e}7$ fork.

A correspondence game continued:
19...$\text{c}4$ 20.$\text{e}3$! $\text{b}4$
This seems rather awkward, which is reason enough for Black not to put the queen on $\text{c}4$ in the first place.

20...$\text{c}6$ 21.$\text{h}3$ $\text{b}6$ 22.$\text{d}3$± is similar to the 20...$\text{b}6$ line in the notes to the main line below, and could transpose exactly if Black plays 22...$\text{c}5$ now. Other moves do little to change the evaluation; for instance, if 22...$\text{b}8$ 23.$\text{g}3$ we will soon get our ideal set-up with the knight on $\text{f}5$ followed by getting the bishop out.

21.$\text{c}1$ $\text{c}6$ 22.$\text{b}3$ $\text{xd}6$

23.$\text{a}5$±N
In the resulting opposite-coloured-bishops position, White will have a long-term initiative due to his safer king.
In the correspondence game, White tried to maximize his advantage by forcing means, but was unable to break Black's defence. It is worth taking a quick look: 23.$\text{c}4$? $\text{b}4$ 24.$\text{d}2
Chapter 6 – 8...b4 – Old Lines

\( \text{\texttt{a7}} 25.\text{\texttt{c5 w4}} 26.\text{\texttt{c4 \texttt{b8}} 27.\text{\texttt{d5 \texttt{c6}} 28.\text{\texttt{xc6 dxc6}} 29.\text{\texttt{d7 e8}} \text{Black's position looks a bit unpleasant, but he managed to simplify into a worse but drawish endgame, which he easily held.} 30.\text{\texttt{he1 a5}} 31.g4 hgx4 32.fxg4 \text{\texttt{b5}} 33.\text{\texttt{d4 exd4}} 34.\text{\texttt{xe7 e7}} 35.\text{\texttt{xe7 xh4}} 36.\text{\texttt{xf6 h7}} 37.\text{\texttt{xd4 f6}} 38.\text{\texttt{xf6 xc5}} 39.\text{\texttt{g6 ec7}} = \text{Hegoburu – Runting, corr. 2013.}} 23...\text{\texttt{c5}} 24.\text{\texttt{b3 c7}} 25.\text{\texttt{xb7 wb7}} 25...\text{\texttt{xb7?}} 26.\text{\texttt{xf7 f8}} 27.\text{\texttt{b3 d6}} 28.a4+ 20.\text{\texttt{h3?!}} \text{This method of preparing \texttt{g3-f5} is typical for this structure, and it's even more effective when d5-d6 has been played.} 20.\text{\texttt{c1}} \text{is a much less useful route for the knight:} 20...\text{\texttt{b6}} 21.\text{\texttt{b3 e3=}} 20.\text{\texttt{f5?!}} \text{is worth considering. I believe 20...\texttt{d5!} should be okay for Black, but this could certainly be analysed further.} 20.a3?! \text{is a tricky move, when Black must decide how to meet the threat of b2-b4.} a) 20...\texttt{b6} \text{This seems almost like an automatic choice, but it allows White to steer the position into a favourable endgame.} 21.\text{\texttt{c3 d4}} 21...\text{\texttt{e3}} 22.\text{\texttt{d5! xd5}} 23.\text{\texttt{xd5}} 21...\text{\texttt{b8}} 22.\text{\texttt{f5}} 22.\text{\texttt{f5!}} 22.\text{\texttt{e2 e3=}} \text{would let Black off the hook.} 22...\text{\texttt{e4}} 23.\text{\texttt{xf4 exf4}} 24.a4! \text{White's main plan is to convert to an endgame with opposite-coloured bishops with \texttt{d5} at some point, but it is useful to soften up the queenside first.} 24...\text{\texttt{xa4}} \text{No better is} 24...\text{\texttt{b4}} 25.\text{\texttt{d5 xd5}} 26.\text{\texttt{xd5 a5}} 27.\text{\texttt{d3 xg2}} 28.\text{\texttt{e1+ intending e7.}}\)
25.\( \mathcal{Q} a4 \) \( \mathcal{Q} e3 \) 26.\( \mathcal{Q} c3 \) \( \mathcal{Q} b8 \) 27.\( \mathcal{Q} d5 \) \( \mathcal{Q} x d5 \) 28.\( \mathcal{E} x d5 \) \( \mathcal{Q} b7 \)

The endgame is anything but drawish. White is practically a pawn up and, more importantly, after he brings his second rook into the game, he can create threats against the black king, as well as the a6-pawn.

29.\( \mathcal{A} a5 \) \( \mathcal{A} a8 \) 30.\( \mathcal{C} c4 \pm 

The game remains absolutely one-sided. It is worth pointing out that, thanks to the tripled f-pawns, White can afford to sacrifice the g2-pawn in the future in order to gain something else, because Black will still be a long way from creating a passed pawn.

b) Unfortunately, Black can cause more trouble with the surprising alternative: 20...e4!

21.\( \mathcal{G} g3 \) \( \mathcal{H} g6 \) 22.\( \mathcal{F} f5 \) \( \mathcal{W} b8 \)

21.\( \mathcal{G} g3 \) \( \mathcal{H} g6 \) 22.\( \mathcal{F} f5 \) \( \mathcal{W} b8 \) is met by: 23.\( \mathcal{W} b3 \) \( \mathcal{W} b8 \) 24.a4! (24.\( \mathcal{W} x f7 \) e4! gives Black annoying counterplay) 24...b4 25.g4! White dominates.

23.a3!

21.\( \mathcal{G} c7 \) \( \mathcal{X} x g8 \) 24.\( \mathcal{X} x g8 \) \( \mathcal{X} x g8 \) is Black’s idea. After 25.c4 it is certainly possible that White is better, but the position is a bit messy. The knight is so great on f5 that it would be a pity to swap it off so soon, even for a rook.
23...g3 could be investigated more deeply but I am happier with the main move. A sample line is 23...\texttt{b}b6 24.\texttt{h}h2 \texttt{e}e8 25.\texttt{e}e2 \texttt{c}c4 26.\texttt{xc}xc4 (26.\texttt{a}a3 deserves attention) 26...bxc4 27.\texttt{g}g2 \texttt{eg}8 intending ...\texttt{x}xg3, which looks okay for Black.

23...\texttt{d}d8

23...\texttt{b}b6 24.\texttt{d}d2 e4 25.\texttt{ie} loses the exchange for insufficient compensation.

24.g3!

I like this because it completely shuts down the ...\texttt{x}xg2 idea, forcing Black to find something else to do.

24.\texttt{d}d2 e4! and 24.\texttt{e}e2 \texttt{d}d5! both seem okay for Black.

24...\texttt{e}e8

24...\texttt{f}2 25.\texttt{c}c maintains control.

25.\texttt{g}2 \texttt{c}4?

Exchanging queens is generally desirable for Black in these positions. In this case, however, White retains the better chances because the mighty knight on f5 remains unchallenged.

26.\texttt{xc}4

26.\texttt{c}3 \texttt{e}6! gives White nothing better than returning the queen to d3.

This seems like an appropriate place to end the analysis. The computer assesses the position as close to equal, but Black does not seem to have any serious way to improve his position. White, on the other hand, has several possible plans. The rook on h3 could centralize via h1 and e1. Another idea is to drop the bishop back to h1 and prepare f3-f4 or g3-g4, as exchanging the light-squared bishops should be great for White. Another way of arranging this could be with \texttt{h}2 and g3-g4. Obviously there is no need to hurry with any of this, and we could start by simply improving the king with c2-c3 and \texttt{c}2.

B) 9...\texttt{d}e5
This used to be the absolute main line of the Taimanov English Attack. Its popularity is easy to understand, as Black activates his knight while forcing White to think seriously about the possibility of ...\textit{xc3} or ...d5.

\textbf{10.d3}

10.g4 is well met by 10...h6! when White is no longer able to move the d4-knight.

Retreating the knight may seem like a strange choice at first, but almost everyone plays it — and those who didn’t go for it probably just forgot the theory! The idea is to prepare for Black’s two main ideas of ...\textit{xc3} and ...d5. In the event of the former, the knight will be excellent on b3 in the endgame. The knight retreat also prepares \textit{d4} to prevent the doubling of White’s pawns, as well as to deal with the ...d5 break.

We will consider \textbf{B1)} 10...d5 before moving on to the main line of \textbf{B2)} 10...b5.

10...\textit{x}c3? 11.\textit{x}c3 \textit{xc3} 12.bxc3 gives Black a bad endgame due to the weak dark squares.


10...0–0 11.\textit{b}1 \textit{e}7 (11...d5 12.\textit{d}4↑) 12.f4 gives White an easy initiative, for instance:

\textbf{B1) 10...d5}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{scope}[scale=1]
\draw[help lines] (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{scope}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

This is likely to be the first move that comes to mind for anyone seeing the position for the first time. However, it is not seen too often these days, as White has a simple route to a small but safe advantage.

\textbf{11.d4 0–0}

Obviously 11...\textit{xe}4?? 12.\textit{xe}5 wins because of the mate on d8.

\textbf{12.b1}

Preparing to put the queen on f4 without allowing a discovered attack.

\textbf{12...\textit{xe}4}

12...\textit{c}4 has been played in a couple of engine games, but 13.\textit{g}5 h6 14.\textit{g}3 \textit{x}g3 15.hxg3 gives White an obvious advantage in the endgame.

13.\textit{f}4 \textit{d}6 14.\textit{xe}4 \textit{xe}4 15.\textit{xe}4
It may not look like a huge advantage, but White has the more pleasant position and has scored excellently in practice.

19.\texttt{\texttt{exd6}} \texttt{\texttt{exd6}} 20.\texttt{\texttt{exe5}} \texttt{\texttt{d1}}\texttt{\texttt{f1}} 21.\texttt{\texttt{c1}} \texttt{\texttt{d5}} 22.\texttt{\texttt{d3}} \texttt{f5}

Black is just about surviving, but White can maintain serious pressure:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\t\node at (0,0) {
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\hline
\end{tabular}
};
\t\node at (4,4) {
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\hline
\end{tabular}
};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

15...\texttt{\texttt{g6}}

15...\texttt{\texttt{c6}} allows 16.\texttt{\texttt{b6!}} \texttt{\texttt{xb6}} 17.\texttt{\texttt{xd6}} \texttt{\texttt{c7}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{d2}}\texttt{\texttt{f}} with a nice edge. The text move avoids such a simplification, but the knight makes an inviting target for our h-pawn.

16.\texttt{\texttt{h4}} \texttt{\texttt{e5}} 17.\texttt{\texttt{c3}} \texttt{\texttt{e6}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{h5}}

18.\texttt{\texttt{g4}} \texttt{\texttt{f4}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{h2}} \texttt{\texttt{ad8}} 20.\texttt{\texttt{hd2}}\texttt{\texttt{f}} was also nice in Dominguez Perez – Alsina Leal, Leon 2012.

18...\texttt{\texttt{f4N}}

18...\texttt{\texttt{e7}} was played in Dworakowska – Laltos, Szeged 2004, when 19.\texttt{\texttt{h6}}\texttt{\texttt{f}} would have seriously weakened Black’s dark squares.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\t\node at (0,0) {
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\hline
\end{tabular}
};
\t\node at (4,4) {
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\hline
\end{tabular}
};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

B2) 10...\texttt{\texttt{b5}}

For many years this was regarded as the ultimate main line of the Taimanov English Attack, and it remains one of the most important options for us to prepare for.

11.\texttt{\texttt{b1}}

White has tried all sorts of moves here, with 11.\texttt{\texttt{e1}} and 11.\texttt{\texttt{d4}} being the two
other main contenders. A lot of ideas revolve around avoiding ...\(D_c4\), but I actually think the structure after ...\(bxc4\) is not something White should fear. By the way, please note that White’s last move threatens to win a pawn with \(\text{\textdagger}xb5\).

Black’s two main replies are B21) 11...\(D_c4\) and B22) 11...\(\text{\textdagger}e7\).

As usual, 11...\(\text{\textdagger}xc3\) 12.\(\text{\textdagger}xc3\) \(\text{\textdagger}xc3\) 13.\(\text{\textdagger}xc3\) lands Black in a worse endgame due to his weak dark squares. Black’s remaining bishop doesn’t have much potential, and a common scenario is to reach a position with opposite-coloured bishops after ...\(D_c4\), with White’s dark-squared bishop being a lot more active than its counterpart. A good example continued:

11...\(\text{\textdagger}xb8\) is the only other sensible way to deal with the threat of \(\text{\textdagger}xb5\), but White can benefit from the insertion of the last two moves with: 12...\(\text{\textdagger}d4\) (12...\(\text{\textdagger}f4\) could also be explored) 12...\(\text{\textdagger}e7\) (12...\(\text{\textdagger}c4\) 13.\(\text{\textdagger}g5\)\(\pm\)) 13.\(\text{\textdagger}g5\) \(\text{\textdagger}g6\) (13...\(\text{\textdagger}c4\) 14.e5\(+\) Savchenko – J. Geller, Krasnodar 2003) White can exploit the inclusion of the moves \(\text{\textdagger}b1\) and ...\(\text{\textdagger}b8\) with:

14.e5 \(\text{\textdagger}e4\) 15.\(\text{\textdagger}e3\)! In the analogous position that could have arisen after 11...\(\text{\textdagger}d4\), this would have been impossible due to ...\(\text{\textdagger}g5\). 15...\(\text{\textdagger}xc3\) 16.\(\text{\textdagger}xc3\) b4 17.\(\text{\textdagger}d4\) a5 18.\(\text{\textdagger}d3\)\(\pm\) Followed by advancing the h-pawn. (18.g3 \(\text{\textdagger}b7\) 19.\(\text{\textdagger}d3\) slightly favoured White in Kritz – Ivanisevic, Biel 2008, but g2-g3 is not required.)

This is the critical continuation of course, and was mentioned by Khalifman as sufficient reason to avoid 11...\(\text{\textdagger}b1\). At first the open b-file might appear to tilt things in Black’s favour, but it’s only one narrow avenue of activity. Once we take measures to limit Black’s counterplay along that file, it will become clear that he doesn’t have a great deal of dynamism in his position. He has limited options for
pawn breaks; there is a possibility of ...d5, but it will take some time to prepare, and White can always react with exd5 and, after ...exd5, plonk a minor piece on d4. Looking further ahead to potential endgames, the static nature of Black’s structure is something we may be able to exploit.

Our first objective should be to nullify Black’s counterplay. Once that has been achieved, we can begin playing on the kingside with g4-g5 and h2-h4, after which White’s initiative should flow quite naturally. Nevertheless, the question still remains as to how White should organize his defence of the b2-pawn, keeping in mind the annoying pin on the c3-knight and future possibilities such as sacrificing the bishop on a3.

13.a3!

I introduced this idea in 2010 but for some reason it has only been repeated in a couple of obscure games: one Internet encounter and another featuring low-rated players in a junior competition, so it retains considerable surprise value. After analysing the alternatives 13...d4 and the more popular 13...c1 for a long time with my coach Vladimir Chuchelov, he realized that Black’s counterplay was usually linked to the annoying bishop on b4. It is hard to get rid of this piece after either of the other knight moves, as Black has options of ...a5, ...a5 or even ...a5 (in response to a2-a3) at times; that’s when he came up with this amazingly subtle novelty. It doesn’t win the game or anything – the computer perpetually evaluates it as 0.00 – but the upcoming positions are a lot harder to play for Black than for White.

Our plan is fairly straightforward: we will defend the b2-pawn if required, and then start with g4-g5 and the usual pawn assault. There is not really any official theory here, nor can we analyse it exhaustively, but I’ll present some lines to show our ideas more clearly.

13...e7

This was played in all three of the existing games. If Black does not preserve his important bishop, he is headed for trouble:

13...a5? 14.axb4 axb4 15...b5+

13...cxb3?! 14.axb4 d5 (14...bxc2† 15...xc2 0-0 0 16...c5 e8 17...d6+) 15...c5! As usual, the bishop is deadly.

13...xa3 14.bxa3 cxb3

14...b8 15.e5 d5 16...xd5 exd5 17...a2 cxb3† 18.cxb3 0–0 19...c1 b7 20...c3 is also great for White.

15.cxb3

White’s bishop is worth a lot more than Black’s, for instance:

15...0–0

15...b8 16.b4 0–0 (16...a5 17...c1! b7
18...d6 catches the black king) 17...c1 b7
18...c5 e8 19...d6±

16...e5
16...b6 17...d6! xb3+ 18...a1 e8
19...b1 c4 20...h1 is winning for White.
17...g5 b8 18...xf6 xb3+ 19...c2 xa3

14...d4
14...c1?! was the less logical continuation
seen in Aldegeerds – Hampel, Rotenburg
2013. The knight is more active on d4, and it
keeps the first rank clear so that the rook can
get to b1 if needed.

18...e8 19...d6±

14...b7
14...b8 16...a1 leads straight to our main
line.
15...d6 16...g5 h5 17...e2±
Finally, 15...d5 16...g5 h5 17...d5 b7+ is
merely a slightly odd way of transposing to
our main line after 18...a1 b8 19...b1.

14...b8
This was Black's choice in both my game and
the subsequent email encounter.

14...0–0
This is likely to transpose, as Black will surely
put the rook on b8 at some point.
15...g4!
15...a1 d5 16.exd5 exd5! 17...e6
e6 18...d5 xd5 19...d5 c3± gives
Black more activity than I would like. It's
important to be ready to meet ...d5 with
g4-g5 before exchanging. That way, after
a pawn trade on d5, we can just leave the
knight on d4 and continue with our kingside
plans.

15...b7
15...b8 16...a1 leads straight to our main
line.
15...d6 16...g5 h5 17...e2±
Finally, 15...d5 16...g5 h5 17...d5 b7+ is
merely a slightly odd way of transposing to
our main line after 18...a1 b8 19...b1.

16...a1 d5 17...g5
17...d5? b8 18...b1 exd5 is not what we
want.
17...b8 18...b1
Once again we are back in the main line.

15...a1 0–0
15...b7N 16...b1 could be another
transpositional option. Black can take the
game in a different direction with 16...d6, but
after 17...g4 0–0 18.h4 he has no counterplay in
sight while White's kingside play is just getting
started.
15...h5 was my opponent's choice. There is some logic behind it as g2-g4 does look scary, but Black's kingside is permanently weakened while White has multiple ways to keep a solid edge. 16.hxh1 (16.e5 a5!? might lead to some messy complications; 16.h3± is a good alternative though) 16...d6 17.h4 18.g5 Negi – Matsenko, Hoogeveen 2010.

15...a5N is another idea, when I suggest: 16.b1! (16.d5 xd2 17.xf6† xf6 18.xd2 is another interesting option to consider. The light-squared bishop is clearly unimpressive, and Black's structure is a bit unwieldy. Still, I think White can cause even more problems with the queens on.) Black is unable to castle due to d5 tricks, and it is hard for him do much else:

16...d5?N

This seems like a logical attempt to improve Black's play.

In the Internet (presumably computer-assisted) game, Black played more slowly and was duly destroyed on the kingside: 16...d8 17.h4 d5 18.e5 d7 19.fx5 g6 20.ex5 gxh5

21.g6!? (there is nothing wrong with 21.h5 but the game continuation works spectacularly well) 21...fxg6 22.h5 b7 23.b1 gxh5 24.xh5 g6

16.g4

25.f5!! exf5 (25...gxh5 26.f6) 26.xh7† h7 27.h2† g8 28.b4 e6 (28...c7 29.g1) 29.h1 Black resigned in Bocanegra Moreno – Lehnhoff, Internet 2010. Indeed, the machine confirms that he has no defence, for instance: 29...f8 30.xe6 xe6 31.h8† f7 32.h7† e8 33.c5 xh7 34.bxc5 xc5 35.bxc5 d4 36.c6 dxc3 37.h8† f7 38.f6†
\[ \text{\#}g8 39.\text{\#}xg6 \text{\#}f8 40.\text{\#}h6\text{\#} \text{White will pick up the bishop with check, with an easy win.} \]

17.g5
17.e5?! could be considered here too. Compared with the game in the previous note, Black has saved time by omitting ...\text{\#}d8 and he might use the rook to support a quick ...\text{\#}f6 break. Nevertheless, it's still an interesting position to analyse further.

17...\text{\#}b7
17...\text{\#}h5 18.exd5 \text{\#}b7 19.\text{\#}b1 is another possible transposition.

18.\text{\#}b1 \text{\#}h5 19.exd5 exd5 20.f4
White has the easier position and it's not obvious how Black can generate counterplay.

20...\text{\#}c5 21.\text{\#}f2 \text{\#}e8
21...g6 22.\text{\#}f5 \text{\#}xe3 23.\text{\#}h6\text{\#} \text{\#}h8 24.\text{\#}xe3\text{\#} leaves Black vulnerable on the dark squares.

22.\text{\#}f3 g6 23.\text{\#}f2 \text{\#}c7
I also considered 23...\text{\#}d8 24.\text{\#}he1 \text{\#}g7 25.\text{\#}e5 \text{\#}xd4 26.\text{\#}xd4 \text{\#}f5, when White keeps the advantage with a temporary piece sacrifice:

27.\text{\#}c2! \text{\#}xd4 (27...\text{\#}c6? 28.\text{\#}xf5! \text{\#}xf5 29.\text{\#}c5+-) 28.\text{\#}e8\text{\#} \text{\#}xe8 29.\text{\#}xe8\text{\#} \text{\#}g7 30.\text{\#}e5\text{\#} \text{\#}g8 31.\text{\#}xd4\text{\#}

24.\text{\#}h1 \text{\#}b7
24...\text{\#}xf4?! 25.\text{\#}xd5\text{\#} is not a good trade for Black.

25.f5\text{\#}
Black’s light-squared bishop faces a bleak future; he is under some pressure on the kingside too.

B22) 11...\textit{\textbf{e7}}?

This has been almost as popular as the previous line. Considering Black’s difficulties in obtaining counterplay in the ...\textit{bxc4} pawn structure, I regard the bishop retreat as the bigger challenge for us.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{a} & \textbf{b} & \textbf{c} & \textbf{d} & \textbf{e} & \textbf{f} & \textbf{g} & \textbf{h} \\
\hline
\textbf{8} & \textbf{7} & \textbf{6} & \textbf{5} & \textbf{4} & \textbf{3} & \textbf{2} & \textbf{1} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textbf{B221) 12...\textit{\textbf{b7}}?}

This move is directed against a quick \textit{g2-g4}, but White can target the bishop with a surprising manoeuvre.

\begin{center}
\textbf{B221) 12...\textit{\textbf{b7}}?}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{a} & \textbf{b} & \textbf{c} & \textbf{d} & \textbf{e} & \textbf{f} & \textbf{g} & \textbf{h} \\
\hline
\textbf{8} & \textbf{7} & \textbf{6} & \textbf{5} & \textbf{4} & \textbf{3} & \textbf{2} & \textbf{1} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textbf{12.\textit{\textbf{w}}f2}

It is worth mentioning B221) 12...\textit{\textbf{b7}}? as an interesting sideline, but the main line by far is B222) 12...\textit{\textbf{d6}}.

12...0–0 has scored well for Black in a few games, but after 13.g4 \textit{d6} we transpose to a position considered on page P144; see 13...0–0 in the notes to variation B2222, where White is doing excellently.

12...\textit{\textbf{b8}} is premature; Black should normally wait for White to commit to something like \textit{\textbf{d4}} before putting his rook here. After 13.\textit{\textbf{a7}}! \textit{\textbf{b7}} 14.\textit{\textbf{d4}} White’s bishop settles on a good square while Black’s rook is obviously misplaced. 14...d6 15.g4 h6 16.h4\textit{\textbf{±}} Negi – Ter Sahakyan, Cappelle la Grande 2013.

13.\textit{\textbf{a5}}!

Capturing the knight would cost Black his queen so – unless he is willing to make a humiliating retreat to \textit{c8} – he must allow the exchange of his light-squared bishop, which feels like a serious concession.

13.g4? \textit{\textbf{b4}}!N 14.\textit{\textbf{a4}} \textit{\textbf{xf3}}! shows the value of the bishop on \textit{b7}.

13.\textit{\textbf{b6}} \textit{\textbf{b8}} 14.\textit{\textbf{d4}} \textit{d6} transposes to variation B2221 under the 12...\textit{\textbf{d6}} move order, which is not my main recommendation.

13...0–0

13...\textit{\textbf{x}}a5? 14.\textit{\textbf{b6}} \textit{\textbf{b4}} 15.a3+– traps the queen of course.

13...\textit{\textbf{c8}} 14.\textit{\textbf{b6}} \textit{\textbf{b8}} is no fun for Black, especially after 15.\textit{\textbf{c5}}! \textit{d6} 16.\textit{\textbf{b4}}\textit{±} followed by f3-f4.

13...\textit{\textbf{c8}} is also not much help: 14.\textit{\textbf{x}}b7 \textit{\textbf{x}}b7 15.\textit{\textbf{d4}} \textit{d6} (15...\textit{\textbf{c6}} 16.e5\textit{±}) 16.g4 \textit{\textbf{fd7}} 17.h4 0–0 18.g5\textit{±}
After the text move I found an engine game where White played 14...b6 and kept the knight on a5. Objectively this seems favourable for White, but things are much simpler and easier if we just swap off Black’s bishop and play for a kingside initiative in the usual way.

14...xc3 15.bxc3 d6 16.g4 17.d7 17.h4 could also be considered.

15...ac8 16.g1!?
16.g5 17.g1 15.f5! gives Black decent play. By putting the rook on g1 first, I want to advance the g-pawn and be ready to meet ...h5 with f3-f4.

It is worth mentioning that 16.e2?! is not a good way to regroup. After 16...c7 17.g3? White is trying to control the h5-square, but 17...exg4 (or 17...fxg4!) is devastating.

16...d6
After 16...xc3 17.bxc3 Black is still in the game, but he does not have enough for the exchange.

16...c4 17.xc4 (17...bxc4 18.a1) 18.g5 h5 19.e2; also looks good for White.

17.g5 18.h4?
18.f4 19.c4 19.xc4 xc4 would leave the e4-pawn weak.

18...c4
After 18...b4 19.a4 it is not clear what Black is doing next.

19.xc4 xc4 20.e2 xc8 21.d2?
It is not clear how Black will advance his queenside attack. Meanwhile, he will have to decide what to do about the simple plan of h4-h5 and g5-g6.

B222) 12...d6

This is the most popular move, which takes us to a typical-looking Sicilian position. Before
going any further, I would like to explain some of the key ideas which provide the framework for the next few moves. It is obvious that both sides will want to start their respective pawn avalanches. At first White’s path seems easier; if Black meets g4-g5 with ...\( \text{d}h5 \), the knight will be targeted by means of \( \text{e}2 \) and \( f3-f4 \) or something similar, while \( \text{f}d7 \) will give White free rein to continue the attack.

Black’s most obvious idea is ...b4. His ideal scenario would see White’s knight retreat to e2, allowing ...\( \text{c}4 \) and ...a5-a4 (taking care to avoid any tricks involving \( \text{d}4-b5 \)), when he will have a great game. Therefore White usually strives to respond with \( \text{a}4 \), leading to a whole new battle: will the knight be a strong blockader or will Black be able to trap it? Right now it looks as though \( \text{b}6 \) will always be possible, but this will all change after ...\( \text{fd7} \) and ...\( \text{b}8 \). (Actually ...\( \text{b}8 \) might not even be required because there could be tactical resources such as ...\( \text{x}f3 \) to distract the overloaded queen from the b6-square.) In short, Black will aim to play ...b4 at a time when he is suitably placed to meet \( \text{a}4 \).

Keeping in mind the above, it’s clear why a traditional advance with g4-g5 and h4-h5 might prove too slow. Therefore White often follows the g4-g5 advance with \( f3-f4 \) – of course after preventing ...\( \text{a}4 \) with a move like \( \text{g}1 \). The idea is that ...\( \text{c}4 \), \( \text{x}4 \) bxc4 leads to the kind of static structure that we saw in the 11...\( \text{c}4 \) variation, where Black’s dynamism is considerably restricted. If White can arrange g4-g5, \( \text{g}1 \) and \( f3-f4 \), and Black isn’t in time to respond with ...b4 followed by an effective attack on the a4-knight, then White usually gets a deadly attack, as you will see in some of the games.

Considering all of this, it is obvious that both sides need to save every possible tempo, so it is no surprise that Black usually delays castling. Another useful idea that can be drawn from imagining this tug of war for a tempo is that White can save time by holding back from g4-g5. Since ...\( \text{fd7} \) is an essential part of Black’s plans to trap the knight on a4, a clever technique is to play g2-g4 and \( \text{g}1 \), delaying g4-g5 for a move. Now ...\( \text{fd7} \) can simply be met by an immediate \( f3-f4 \), effectively saving a tempo which would otherwise have been spent on g4-g5. If Black plays some other move such as ...0-0, White will just play g4-g5 followed by \( f3-f4 \), when Black will have lost a vital tempo on the queenside. In response, Black’s latest and most sophisticated strategy involves an even more pre-emptive ...\( \text{fd7} \) as soon as the white pawn lands on g4. The idea is that g4-g5 costs White a vital tempo while, if White tries to carry out his time-saving strategy with \( \text{g}1 \), Black will counter the \( f3-f4 \) plan with ...g5, creating a thematic Sicilian blockade.

Before we see these ideas play out, White actually has to make an important decision. B2221) 13...\( \text{b}6 \) has been the higher-scoring move, but a recent refinement leads me to think that B2222) 13\( g4! \) is the best try for an advantage.

B2221) 13...\( \text{b}6 \) 14...\( \text{a}5 \) only helps White.

B2222) 13...\( \text{b}6 \) 14...\( \text{d}4 \)
For a long time this was considered to be a smart way to centralize the bishop while 'misplacing' the black queen. In several games Black returned the queen to c7 within five or ten moves, bolstering the notion that White's manoeuvre was effectively winning a tempo. But recently, particularly in light of an ingenious tactical combination played by Giri with Black against Akopian, it seems that the queen on b8 isn't badly placed at all. On further exploration, Black's pieces seem to work well together to execute the plans described in the comments to move 12.

14...\textit{b}7!

A devilish move order, the point of which is particularly clear after g2-g4. Giri arrived at this position via a slightly different sequence. Apart from that, I only found a single game where the text move was played. Alternatives are not so problematic for us:

14...\textit{c}4? 15...xc4 bxc4 16...a5\# Van Eijk - Harezlak, Hilversum 2008.

14...0-0?! has been the most popular choice but it is generally too slow in this line, and White gets a chance to carry out his plan just the way he wants: 15.g4 \textit{b}7 16.g5 \textit{fd}7 18...xc4 bxc4 19...d2\# 18...e5 bxc3 19.exd6 \textit{xd}6 This was T. Kosintseva - Javakhishvili, Fuegen 2006, when 20...g2!N\# would have solidified White's advantage.

14...\textit{c}6 15...e3

This way Black avoids the problems of the above line, but now his knight is somewhat misplaced.

14...d7 15...d7 16.g4 \textit{e}5 17.g5 \textit{h}5 18...g1 b4 19...e2 \textit{c}4 20...d4\#N (20...c1 also favoured White in Erenburg - Einarsson, Reykjavik 2006) 20...e5 (20...0-0 21...h4 g6 22...g3\#) 21...g3 \textit{xg}3 22...xc4 \textit{h}5 23...e3\#

16.g4 0-0 17.g5 b4 18...a4!

18...e2? a5 gives Black counterplay. The game continuation is a perfect example of how the a4-knight can be a strong blockader.
18...\(\text{bxc5} \) 19.\( \text{g}1 \text{b7} \) 20.\( \text{a5}! \)
20.f4 \(\text{c6} \) 21.fxe5 \(\text{xa4} \) 22.exd6 \(\text{xd6} \) 23.h4 \(\text{c7} \) is not so clear.
20...\(\text{c8} \) 21.b3!

15.g4
15.\(\text{g}1?! \)
I have already mentioned that g2-g4 can often be followed by \(\text{g}1 \), delaying g4-g5 in order to avoid prematurely driving the knight to d7, where it helps in entrapping the a4-knight after ...b4, \(\text{a4} \). Here White goes a step further and plays the rook move even earlier, preparing g2-g4 while avoiding the tactical trick shown in the main line.
15...0-0N
15...\(\text{f}7 \) is too slow, and 16.g4 \(\text{b4} \) 17.\(\text{a4} \) gave White an ideal position for this line in Lutz – Perunovic, Calvia (ol) 2004.

16.g4
Despite the novelty on the previous move, a few games have reached the present position via a different move order.
16...\(\text{c8}?! \)
16...\(\text{f}d7 \) 17.f4 was promising for White in Real de Azua – Lafuente, Buenos Aires 2004.
16...\(\text{b4} \) 17.\(\text{a4} \) \(\text{f}d7?! \) is another idea, intending 18.f4N \(\text{c6} \) with unclear play.
17.g5 \(\text{f}d7 \) 18.f4

In A. Sokolov – Lazarev, Basel 2005, Black should have played:

15...\(\text{b4} \)!
15...0-0?! transposes to 14...0-0?! 15.g4 \(\text{b7} \) in the note to Black’s 14th move.

16.\(\text{a4} \)
16.\(\text{e}2 \) is something White never wants to do because he can no longer oppose Black’s attack with ...a5-a4.

16...\(\text{xf3} \)!
17.\(\text{xf3} \)
17.\(\text{xf6} \) \(\text{xf6} \) 18.\(\text{xf3} \) \(\text{c6} \)
17...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{x}}}}e4 18.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{h}}}}h3 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{x}}}h1 19.g5 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}}e4

Black went on to win a fascinating game in Akopian – Giri, Doha 2014.

\textbf{B2222) 13.g4!}

13...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}fd7!

As I explained earlier, this sophisticated move is the best way to combat White's \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{g}}}}1 plan.

13...b4 14.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}a4 leaves Black with nothing better than 14...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}fd7 to cover the b6-square. Now in Matta – Himanshu, Mumbai 2016, White should have played 15.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{g}}}}g1N, transposing to line B22222 below.

13...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}}b7

14.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{g}}}}g1!N (stronger than 14.g5, when 14...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}fd7 transposes to 14.g5 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{x}}}b7 as given in the note to White's next move in the main line) 14...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}fd7 (14...h6 15.h4±) transposes to variation B22221 below.

13...0–0 is once again too slow. 14.g5 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}fd7 15.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{g}}}}g1 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}}b8 (15...b4 16.\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}a4 is covered on page 147 – see 15...0–0 16.g5 in the notes to variation B22222 below)

16.f4 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}}c4 17.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{x}}}xc}4 bxc4 18.\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}}d4 In Vehi Bach – Manfredi, Turin (ol) 2006, White was perfectly placed to attack on the kingside, while any threats along the b-file could be easily defused by \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}}c1.

\textbf{14.\textit{\textit{\textit{g}}}}g1!

14.g5

This move is worth checking as it prevents ...g5 entirely. The drawback is that White's knight will not be entirely safe on a4; practical results have favoured Black so far, but there is still a great deal to discover in the ensuing positions.

14...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}}b7

14...b4? is a similar idea. 15.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}a4 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}}b8 16.\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}}d2 (16.\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}}a7 \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}}b7 17.\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}}d4 \textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}}c6 leads to a complicated mess) 16...\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}}b7∞ Pruijssers – Mihok, Apolda 2009. Retreating the knight to d2 is clearly not our ideal scenario, but it's still an interesting position to investigate.
15.h4?
This is not White's usual plan in this variation, but there is a specific reason for it here.
15.g1 b4! 16.a4 (16.e2 c4?!N 17.cl a5?) 16...xf3! 17.xf3 c6 18.h3 g6 led to some strange complications in Ivanovic – Djukic, Podgorica (4) 2008.
15...b4 16.a4 xe4?!N
This is certainly a critical line to consider.
The main reason for White's 15th move is that 16...xf3? can now be refuted by 17.b6!t.
16...d8 17.d4 occurred in Karasalo – Arppi, email 2007. Yet again, it's a complex position that deserves to be analysed more.
17.fxe4 xc6

18.xc2?
18.b6 b4 19.a5 xf2 20.xc6 xd1 21.xa8 xe3 22.c7+ f8 23.xa6 reaches an interesting endgame where White seems to be the slight favourite.

18...xa4 19.h5 xc8 20.g2
Despite Black's apparent solidity, White has rather good compensation; the immediate threat is g5-g6. Still, Black has valid alternatives on moves 14 and 16, so I will leave it for interested readers to investigate these lines more deeply.

14...xb8N transposes to a super-GM game which is worth following for a few moves:
15.f4 c4 (15...b4 16.a4 transposes to variation B22222 below) 16.a7! (16.xc4 bxc4 17.d2 wb7 makes it difficult to control Black's counterplay)
16...\(\texttt{b7}\)N (a reasonable attempt to improve over 16...\(\texttt{a8}\)?! 17.\(\texttt{d4}\)± as in Anand – Grischuk, Monte Carlo [rapid] 2011) 17.\(\texttt{d4}\) 0–0 18.\(\texttt{xc4}\) (18.\(\texttt{g5}\)?--) 18...\(\texttt{xc4}\) 19.\(\texttt{d2}\)± Black has no good way to attack b2, and a subsequent \(\texttt{a1}\) will leave him with no counterplay whatsoever.

**B22221) 14...\(\texttt{b7}\) 15.f4**

15.\(\texttt{g5}\) leads back to the Ivanovic – Djukic game quoted on page 145, where Black seems to be doing okay.

15...\(\texttt{b4}\)**

In this sharp position I found a crucial improvement.

**16.\(\texttt{d5}\)N**

16.\(\texttt{a4}\) \(\texttt{c4}\) 17.\(\texttt{xc4}\) \(\texttt{xc4}\) was seen in Ivanovic – Djukic, Cetinje 2008. (According to the database, this game occurred just a few days after the aforementioned game between the same players.) The pressure on e4 justifies Black's play and distracts White from his kingside ambitions.

16...\(\texttt{exd5}\) 17.\(\texttt{fxe5}\) \(\texttt{xe5}\)

17...\(\texttt{dxe5}\) 18.\(\texttt{exd5}\) leaves Black without a good way to block the pawn. 18...0–0 19.\(\texttt{g2}\) \(\texttt{d6}\) 20.\(\texttt{h4}\) White has the faster attack, for instance: 20...\(\texttt{a5}\) 21.\(\texttt{e4}\) \(\texttt{g6}\) 22.\(\texttt{h3}\)±

18.\(\texttt{exd5}\) 0–0

Black seems to have a solid position with prospects for counterplay, but we have a nice way to keep control.

**B22222) 14...\(\texttt{b4}\) 15.\(\texttt{a4}\)**

19.\(\texttt{b6}\)!

19.\(\texttt{g5}\) \(\texttt{d8}\) 20.\(\texttt{h4}\) \(\texttt{a5}\) 21.\(\texttt{h5}\) \(\texttt{a4}\) 22.\(\texttt{d4}\) \(\texttt{xd5}\) is rather unclear.

19...\(\texttt{d7}\) 20.\(\texttt{a5}\)±

Of course the bishop isn't ideal on \(\texttt{a5}\), but it prevents any counterplay with ...\(\texttt{a5}-\texttt{a4}\) for now. Black's pawn weaknesses might become significant in a future endgame and, more importantly, White has bought himself enough time to launch his own pawn assault with \(\texttt{g4}-\texttt{g5}\), \(\texttt{h2}-\texttt{h4}\) and so on.
15...\textbf{b}8
15...g5?! just gives Black a worse version of variation B22223: 16.h4 h6 17.\textbf{h}1 \textbf{g}8 18.hxg5 hxg5 19.\textbf{b}6\textsuperscript{±} Akopian - Damljanovic, Gothenburg 2005.

15...0-0 16.g5!
As usual, after castling Black’s counterplay is too slow. A couple of examples:

16...\textbf{c}4

16...a5 17.f4 \textbf{c}4 18.\textbf{x}c4 \textbf{x}c4 19.f5 \textbf{a}6 20.f6\textsuperscript{±} Black failed to put up any resistance to White’s plan in Akopian - Iotov, Plovdiv 2008.
17.\textbf{x}c4 \textbf{x}c4 18.h4 \textbf{b}5

19.\textbf{d}4! \textbf{b}7
19...\textbf{x}a4 20.b3 \textbf{a}5 21.\textbf{c}6 regains the piece with a clear advantage.
20.h5 \textbf{c}5 21.\textbf{x}c5 dxc5 22.\textbf{e}2 \textbf{c}7 23.f4 \textbf{b}7 24.f5\textsuperscript{±}
White’s play was far too easy in Pruijssers - Sulypa, Wijk aan Zee 2010.

16.f4!
White has achieved his objective of saving a tempo by omitting the g4-g5 move.

16...\textbf{c}4
In Ramesh - Sharma, Visakhapatanm 2006, White retreated the bishop to c1, but it would have been stronger to play:

B22223) 14...g5?!
an outpost on e5 is a well-known motif throughout the Sicilian, and it seems like a better attempt than other plans such as trying to trap the a4-knight. At the same time, the whole concept will require further testing to see if Black can find new ideas to try and develop it; right now, the course of the aforementioned game indicates that he has some problems to solve.

15.h4 h6
15...gxh4? 16.f4 Qc4 17.Qxc4 bxc4 18.Qd2± will be one-way traffic: Black's queenside play is virtually nonexistent, while the kingside is ready to be ripped apart.

16.Qh1

16...gxh4!?N
This move seems counterintuitive but perhaps it deserves more attention.

Mamedyarov chose 16...f8, but after 17.hxg5 hxg5 18.Qh3 White had a pleasant game. As usual, Black's main plan is ...b4, but it is not so easy to dislodge the knight from a4. 18...f8 19.Qd4 (19.Qh2?N and 19.a3?!N also deserve attention)

17...Qb7
17...Qc4 18.Qxc4 bxc4 19.Qd2± reaches a familiar structure which, yet again, favours White.
Chapter 6 – 8...d4 – Old Lines

17...d4 18缺陷 d8 19.f4 骑后c4 allows a typical shuffling of pieces:

```
 8  7  6  5  4  3  2  1
 a b c d e f g h

20.a7 (20.缺陷! also seems promising for White, who can follow up with 湮h4)
20...b7 21.d4 c5 22.缺陷c4 湮xc4 23.fxe5 dxe5 24.缺陷c5±

18.f4 骑后c4 19.缺陷c4 湮xc4
As usual, 19...bxc4 20.缺陷d2 favours White.

```

11...e7!? 12.缺陷f2 d6 is perhaps the most challenging variation of the chapter, leading to a double-edged position with many positional and tactical nuances. After a brief digression to explain why I was not satisfied with the sophisticated 13.缺陷b6, I went on to recommend 13.g4! 湮f7! 14.缺陷g1! as White's most promising continuation. Black has a few possible replies, but I think I have shown how we can make his life difficult in all cases.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the traditional main line of the Taimanov English Attack, in which Black develops his bishop actively with 8...d4. After the automatic 9.f3, we focused on two knight moves.

Beginning with 9...e7 10.缺陷e2, the obvious-looking 10...d5?! is well met by 11.缺陷g5, leading to a mostly forcing line where White ends up with an excellent long-term initiative for a sacrificed pawn. 10...b5 is more solid, and the main line results in a highly unusual pawn structure. Black's practical results have not been bad, but I found some nice ways to cause problems for the defence.

9...缺陷e5 is more popular, when 10.缺陷b3 is our move. Then 10...d5 allows us to claim a small edge by simple means, so 10...b5 is the more important move. I favour 11.缺陷b1, intending to meet 11...缺陷c4 with 12.缺陷c4 bxc4 13.a3?!, which I believe offers excellent prospects.

11...缺陷e7? 12.缺陷f2 d6 is perhaps the most challenging variation of the chapter, leading to a double-edged position with many positional and tactical nuances. After a brief digression to explain why I was not satisfied with the sophisticated 13.缺陷b6, I went on to recommend 13.g4! 湮f7! 14.缺陷g1! as White's most promising continuation. Black has a few possible replies, but I think I have shown how we can make his life difficult in all cases.

It is hard to give a definite evaluation of White's exchange sacrifice, but it looks dangerous to me.
Taimanov

8...b4 – Modern Lines

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d4 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 Qc6 5.Qc3 Qc7 6.Qc3 a6 7.Qd2 Qf6 8.0–0–0 b4 9.f3 0–0

10.g4

A) 10...Qd5!?

A1) 11.g5 Qh5

A11) 12.a3

A12) 12.Qg1!? 

A2) 11.Qg1!N

A21) 11...b5

A22) 11...d5

B) 10...b5 11.g5

B1) 11...Qe8

B2) 11...Qh5 12.Qde2!

B21) 12...Qe5

B22) 12...f5!?

B23) 12...Qa5!? 

B24) 12...Qd8!? 

note to 9...0–0

B23) after 14...d5

B24) after 12...Qd8!?
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 d6 5.c3 c7 6.e3 a6 7.d2 d6 8.0-0-0 b4 9.f3

9...0-0

This popular move will be the main focus of the present chapter. I would also like to mention a couple of sidelines which I regard as having a 'modern feel' about them.

9...h5?!

I used to wonder why this move was not played more often. In the position with the bishop on e7 this line is all the rage, so why not go for something similar while trying to provoke a weakening with a2-a3? The problem becomes clear after White's next move.

10.b1!

Setting up tactical ideas such as c6 and then b5 to exploit the misplaced bishop on b4.

10.b5

10...e5? was played in Racz – Csonka, Zalakaros 2001, when 11.cb5!N a5 12.d6! (12.c7 is similar) 12...f8 13.c3 xd6 14.b3 c7 15.xd6+ xd6 16.xd6 would have given White an overwhelming positional advantage.

10...e7 may be Black's best but in that case we have an improved version of variation B of Chapter 4, as we have gained the useful b1 as a free move. 11.c6N gives White an improved version of that chapter, although other moves such as f4? must also be decent for White thanks to the extra tempo. After the text move we have a simple way to improve over McClement – Barnes, England 2013.

11.xc6N xc6

After 11...dxc6? 12.xb5 Black loses a pawn and will be massacred on the dark squares.

12.d4+

I have already talked on pages 94-95 about the favourable aspects of the exchange on c6 when Black recaptures with the queen. Here Black's prospects are bleaker than ever, as his queenside play is blocked by his own bishop and his kingside has been permanently weakened.

9...b5

This is another attempt to play in the spirit of a popular variation – see page 97 for the 'correct' version with the bishop on e7. White can once again exploit the exposed bishop on b4 with:

10.b1

This is the simplest solution.

10.f4? is a fancier continuation which also works well: 10.e5 (10.b6 11.c6 dxc6 [11...xc6 12.e5+ transposes to the 10...e5 line] 12.d6+ 11.c6? A rather striking idea, but it amounts to the same
thing as a simple exchange on c6. 11...\textcolor{blue}{\textit{wxc6}} (11...\textcolor{blue}{\textit{dxc6?!}} 12.\textcolor{red}{\textit{axe5}} is even worse for Black) 12.\textcolor{red}{\textit{axe5}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{b7}} 13.\textcolor{red}{\textit{g5±}} Cheparinov – Kazantzidis, Internet (blitz) 2003.

10...0–0
This has scored surprisingly well for Black. Several other moves have been tried but I don’t see any problems after any of them, for instance: 10...\textcolor{blue}{\textit{b7}} 11.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{xc6}} 12.\textcolor{red}{\textit{d4±}} Todorovic – Spassov, Budapest 2001.

11.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{xc6}}
11...\textcolor{blue}{\textit{dxc6}} 12.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xb5}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{a5N}} (12...\textcolor{red}{\textit{axb5?}}
13.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xb4}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{a4}} 14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{d6}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{a5}} 15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{a3+}}–
Marciniak – Belheine, France 2009)
13.\textcolor{red}{\textit{c3}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{b8}} 14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{a1±}} The open b-file gives Black some chances, but it’s hardly full compensation for the missing pawn.

12.\textcolor{red}{\textit{d4}} d6
12...\textcolor{red}{\textit{e7}} loses time, and 13.e5 (there is also 13.g4 with a pleasant version of the English Attack) 13...\textcolor{red}{\textit{e8}} 14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{d3}} clearly favoured White in Savchenko – P. Petersen, Helsingor 2011.

13.\textcolor{red}{\textit{d5±}}
However, White could also start with 13.a3!N, intending something similar if the bishop retreats to a5.

13...\textcolor{red}{\textit{xd5}}
13...\textcolor{red}{\textit{xd2}} 14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{e7±}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{h8}} 15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc6}}
14.exd5 \textcolor{red}{\textit{xd2}} 15.dxc6 \textcolor{red}{\textit{a5}} 16.c4
Black will have a hard time coping with the c6-pawn in the endgame.

10.g4

10...e5? 11.\textcolor{red}{\textit{f5}} d5
This has not been played but it is worth checking, as Black tries to wrest the initiative by force. This overambitious plan can be refuted as follows:

12.\textcolor{red}{\textit{h6}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{xf5}}
12...\textcolor{red}{\textit{xc3}?} 13.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{g5}} ends the game immediately.

12...\textcolor{red}{\textit{e8}} 13.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xg7}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{xg7}} 14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xg7}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{g7}}
15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{g5±}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{h8}} 16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{xd5}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{e7}} 17.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{h6}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{d6}}
18.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{xd6}} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{xd6}} 19.\textcolor{red}{\textit{b6}} forces 19...\textcolor{red}{\textit{xe4}}
20.fxe4, when White’s extra pawn gives him excellent winning chances.
A specialty of the Dutch GM Swinkels, this move has been used by several other strong players in recent years. It is less popular than the other main variation, but it's an interesting one to study. Analysing this line is especially useful in helping us to understand one of the key position types associated with the Taimanov English Attack: the endgame structure after ...\textit{xc}3. Black's last move prepares this exchange, but he will endeavour to wait for the right time. For instance, if White provokes it with an early a2-a3, he will be happy to trade on c3 and play a quick ...d5, which will free his position and solve most of his dark-square problems. Naturally, White should look to improve his position in other ways, and both sides will have to be mindful of the possibility of ...\textit{xc}3 at every turn.

I would like to start by analysing the natural A1) 11.g5 to show some of the ideas and resources available to both sides. Once that has been done, you should be in a better position to appreciate the benefits of my subtle improvement A2) 11.\textit{g}1\textit{N}.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textbf{A) 10.\textit{e}5??}

A specialty of the Dutch GM Swinkels, this move has been used by several other strong players in recent years. It is less popular than the other main variation, but it's an interesting one to study. Analysing this line is
12.\texttt{\textbf{12.\texttt{g}e2 \texttt{g}g6}} is okay for Black, as the f4-square is under his control and the bishop is misplaced on e2.

12.\texttt{b}b1
This may lead to similar situations as variation A11, but there are two important points that count against it. Firstly, it doesn’t force ...\texttt{xc3}, which seems to invite trouble from opponents seeking new ways to handle the position. Secondly, the king on b1 doesn’t seem to offer any special benefit to White in the ensuing endgame. The following game was an excellent example of White’s play, but I don’t think the king on b1 helps much in this regard.

12...\texttt{xc3} 13.\texttt{x}xc3 \texttt{xc3} 14.bxc3 d5 15.g1
Preparing f3-f4.

15...\texttt{g}g6
15...\texttt{xe8}! seems to be a better defence, and I will discuss the same idea in more detail in the 12.a3 section below. For now I will just say that after 16.f4, as in Y. Santiago – Leitao, Campinas 2011, Black should play 16...\texttt{g}g6!N since f4-f5 is impossible.

16.\texttt{b}b3!
This is an important resource for White in the endgame structure.

16...\texttt{xe8} 17.\texttt{c}c5 \texttt{b}6!N
17...\texttt{b}5? 18.a4+ leaves White with a dominant knight on c5 while Black has no way to continue development, Jakovenko – Zakhartsov, Taganrog 2011.

18.a4
The game goes on, and White is usually willing to invest a tempo to get the knight back to c5, which will often leave him slightly better. Here though, Black has the additional option of 18...\texttt{b}b8!!, trying to make use of the king on b1. It’s not a huge difference, but it once again shows that having the king on b1 is not necessarily a gain. In short, if White wants to play this type of position then he may as well select 12.a3 instead.

A11) 12.a3
Forcing Black to enter the endgame is the most direct approach, but Black seems to have sufficient resources.

12...\texttt{xc3}
12...\texttt{a}5? makes no sense due to 13.\texttt{b}b3! \texttt{xc3} 14.\texttt{x}xc3 \texttt{xc3} 15.bxc3, when capturing the f3-pawn would cost Black a piece. Instead he played 15...d5 in J. Hess – A. Ward, email 2010, but we can end the discussion here, as we have reached the same position as in the main line below, except it’s White to move instead of Black.

13.\texttt{x}xc3 \texttt{xc3} 14.bxc3
14...d5!

14...f6?! was played in the stem game from this position but it fails to solve Black’s structural problems, particularly the backward d7-pawn and the related dark-square weaknesses. 15.Bg1 Gg6 16.c4! b6 17.Rd3 Bb8 18.Bb3 Bb7 19.a4 Gf4 20.e2 e5 21.Gxf4 Gxf4 22.Bxb6+ Cheparinov – Maletin, Budva 2009.

Maletin learned from his mistake and chose the text move the following year, and almost all other Black players did the same. Black needs to break free of his current passivity, and a pawn exchange on d5 would allow just that. Therefore White should try to play more subtly.

15.Bb3


16...Bb8 19.Bxe2 Gg6 20.a4 Gf4 21.e1

Black eventually held the draw in Timmerman – Knobel, corr. 2009. Nevertheless, White has the better practical chances due to his excellent bishops and Black’s trouble in completing development.

Perez, Balaguer 2010, and the h5-knight was also a target. It seems to me that White’s activity more than makes up for his shoddy pawn structure.

So far Black remains undefeated with the text move at correspondence level, but statistics do not necessarily tell the full story.

16.Bc5!

16.e2 Gg6 17.Bc5 Gf4 18.Gf1 b6 19.Bd3 Gxd3† 20.cxd3 also deserves attention. Black managed to draw the two correspondence games from this position, but he was under pressure in both of them, and in a practical game White’s position would definitely be more pleasant.

16...b6 17.Ba4 b5 18.Bc5

This plan also deserves attention, although Black might consider throwing in ...Gxf3, which could lead to messy complications, even if White does eventually prove an advantage.
After spending a long time thinking at the board, I decided this would be the most useful move while waiting for ...\textit{\textit{x}}c3. My idea was to threaten f3-f4, as the rook will prevent ...\textit{\textit{g}}4. Of course Black can play ...\textit{\textit{b}}5 or ...\textit{\textit{d}}5 to support the knight on c4 but I firmly believed, due to having analysed similar positions involving ...\textit{\textit{c}}4, \textit{\textit{x}}xc4 \textit{\textit{b}}xc4/dxc4, that such a structure favours White. However, my opponent was prepared with an amazing idea.

12...\textit{\textit{g}}6!

It may seem hard to believe this can be any good but, after analysing it for a long time, I have found nothing better than transposing to a slightly different version of the 12.a3 line.

White's last move would be vindicated after:
12...\textit{\textit{x}}c3?! 13.\textit{\textit{f}}xc3 \textit{\textit{f}}xc3 14.bxc3 \textit{\textit{d}}5
14...\textit{\textit{g}}6?! 15.c4 is reminiscent of the Cheparinov – Maletin game, which was already better for White, and here we have virtually gained a tempo by playing \textit{\textit{g}}1 instead of a2-a3.

15.f4!

Thanks to the rook on g1, White gets to play the move Black was always trying to prevent in the 12.a3 line.

15...\textit{\textit{c}}4

15...\textit{\textit{g}}6 16.f5±
16.\textit{\textit{x}}xc4 dxc4

All of White's pieces are better than their counterparts, especially the bishop and knight.

17.a4±

White's ideas include a4-a5, \textit{\textit{f}}3-e5 and \textit{\textit{d}}4, or even the blunt e4-e5 followed by \textit{\textit{e}}2 and \textit{\textit{d}}6.

Finally, let us briefly note that 12...\textit{\textit{b}}5 transposes to variation A21 on page 158, and 12...\textit{\textit{d}}5 to the 12...\textit{\textit{h}}5 line in the notes to variation A22, as given on page 160.

13.\textit{\textit{d}}e2

This is the most critical move of course, but Black has an unexpected resource.
Bearing in mind the later variation B2 on page 166, as well as my game against Quesada, as featured in variation A22 of Chapter 4 on page 76, the idea of 14...g3 screams for attention. Indeed I tried for a long time to make this work, but after 14...xf3 15...f2 xg3 16.xg3 e5 it’s surprisingly hard to build an attack, mainly because Black has the defensive plan of ...e7 and ...h6 against the battery on the h-file. Blade’s play on the queenside is happening quickly as well, and the knight is excellent on e5.

14...g6
After one repetition I decided there was nothing better than forcing the endgame.

15.a3 x3 16.xc3 xc3 17.bxc3 d5
At this point I should have tried:

A2) 11.g1!N

This might seem overly subtle but, after going through the variations above, the point should be clear. I want to threaten g4-g5 and f3-f4, just like in my game against Alsina Leal, without allowing Black to take the f4-square with the annoying ...g6.

Black’s most logical replies are A21) 11...b5 and A22) 11...d5.

Going for an endgame with 11...xc3?! 12.xc3 xc3 13.bxc3 remains dubious for the same reason as before: White has not wasted a tempo on a2-a3 and will soon make use of the rook on g1. 13...d5 14.g5 d7 Black has this extra option available because of the delayed g4-g5, but it does not help him at all. (14...h5 transposes to the 12...xc3?! line given in the notes to variation A12) 15.exd5
exd5 16.f4 \( \Box c4 \) 17.\( \Box x c4 \) dxc4 18.\( \Box f5 \)± Black is almost paralysed.

Trying to replicate Alsina's plan with 11...\( \Box g6 \) seems extremely weird here. The funny thing is that the computer suggests moves like g4-g5 or a2-a3, which would just transpose to lines analysed earlier. However, the simple human move 12.h4! seems more promising: 12...d5 (12...\( \Box x h4 \)? 13.\( \Box h1 \) will lead to a crushing attack along the h-file) 13.h5 \( \Box e5 \)

14.\( f4 \)!! Other moves are possible too, but I like this the most. 14...dxe4 15.\( \Box x e4 \) \( bxc4 \) 15...\( \Box x c4 \)N gives White a choice of promising lines: 15.\( \Box e2 \)?? (15.\( \Box d e2 \) leaves the queen on c4 without much of a purpose there, for instance: 15...\( \Box x c3 \) 16.\( \Box x c3 \) b4 17.\( \Box a 4 \) \( \Box x a 2 \) 18.\( \Box x b 4 \)±) 15...\( \Box x e 2 \) 16.\( \Box x e 2 \) Black has a difficult endgame; he has no easy way to continue development, and he will soon have to worry about \( \Box g 3 \).

15.\( \Box d e 2 \)!

A typical regrouping.

15...\( \Box b 8 \) 16.\( \Box g 4 \)!!

Going after the h5-knight is a logical plan, which has so far scored 3/3 in correspondence games.

16.\( \Box b 1 \) is too slow, as after 16...\( \Box b 7 \) 17.\( \Box a 1 \) \( \Box a 3 \) White is forced to play the weakening b2-b3, which I would prefer to avoid.
Therefore we will need to come up with a different defensive mechanism.

16...\texttt{b}b7 17.a\texttt{d}4
Preventing to defend b2, while also planning a future assault on the dark squares.

17...d6
17...a\texttt{a}5 can be met by 18.a4! when the b2-pawn is completely safe.

17...a\texttt{a}5 forces the weakening 18.b3 but on this occasion Black is unable to make use of it, while White is all set to attack with \texttt{h}4xh5.

18.\texttt{h}4 g6 19.e\texttt{c}3
White has a pleasant choice, as 19.g3!? is similarly strong: 19...g7 20.e3 a5 21.b3
It is hard for Black to develop his attack, whereas White is poised to create serious threats. 21...d7

22.f5! \texttt{c}c8 23.xg7 cxb3 24.axb3 \texttt{x}g7
25.g2 \texttt{c}7 26.d3 \texttt{c}5 27.h3±
Emelyanov – Wilhelmi, email 2012.

19.\texttt{c}5 20.b3 \texttt{b}4 21.g3 \texttt{xd}4 22.xd4

22...\texttt{x}f4!?
A clever but rather desperate attempt to complicate the game. Unfortunately for Black, it leaves too many weak squares.

23.xf4 \texttt{a}3† 24.d2 e5 25.d5 \texttt{e}6
26.f5 \texttt{xd}5 27.e7† \texttt{g}7

28.h4! \texttt{e}6 29.f2†
With mating nets all over the place, Black soon had to resign in Bubir – Knobel, corr. 2009.
A22) 11...d5

12.g5 Qf6
This seems like the best try.

12...Qh5 has occurred in a few games via transposition, but it makes the knight into a target for White’s attack. 13.f4 Qc4 14.Qxc4 Qxc4 (14...dxc4 gives Black a worse version of our main line, as the knight would have better prospects on d7) 15.Qde2 dxe4

16.Qe1! (16.Qd4 Qxd4 17.Qxd4 Qc5 18.Qxe4 Qxe3+ 19.Qxe3 Qd7 was okay for Black in Haslinger – Swinkels, Haarlem 2010) 16...Qc7 17.Qd4 g6 18.Qg3! Qxf4 19.Qgxe4 Qh5 The computer mentions a few good alternatives for White along the way, but there is no need to improve on the following correspondence game:

13.f4 Qc4 14.Qxc4 dxc4
At first the computer seems happy with Black’s position, but it suffers from the same flaw as in the ...bxc4 structure. Black’s attacking potential has been reduced to just a single plan: advancing the b-pawn – and it’s not even particularly scary. Meanwhile, we have all sorts of ways to launch our kingside initiative, so we just need to play the most logical of moves.

15.a3 Qa5
15...Qxc3 16.Qxc3 g6 (16...b5? is refuted by 17.g6! hxg6 18.Qxg6!+) 17.Qf3±

16.Qde2 b5

16...\texttt{c5} 17.\texttt{d4} does not help Black.

16...\texttt{d8} 17.\texttt{e1} b5 18.\texttt{h4} is dangerous for Black, for instance: 18...b4 19.axb4 \texttt{xb4}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Diagram 1}
\end{center}

20.g6! hxg6 21.f5→ with a crushing attack.

17.\texttt{d4} b4 18.axb4 \texttt{xb4} 19.\texttt{e3}

Just ignoring Black's ...\texttt{a5} ideas, and continuing to build on the kingside and in the centre.

19...\texttt{a5} 20.h4!

20.\texttt{b1} \texttt{b8} would not make White's king any safer, so we should continue to ignore Black's counterplay.

20...\texttt{a1}†

20...e5 21.fxe5 \texttt{xe5} 22.\texttt{b1} \texttt{b8} 23.\texttt{d5}†

21.\texttt{d2} \texttt{xb2}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Diagram 2}
\end{center}

22.\texttt{a1}! \texttt{xc3}† 23.\texttt{xc3} \texttt{b6} 24.\texttt{xb6} \texttt{xb6} 25.\texttt{gb1} \texttt{d7} 26.\texttt{e3}†

Despite being a pawn down, White is completely dominating. If Black is to get his pieces out he will probably have to give up both of his queenside pawns, so it will be a one-sided game.

B) 10...b5

\begin{center}
\textbf{Diagram 3}
\end{center}

As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, the same idea has become quite popular with the bishop on e7, so it is hardly surprising that Taimanov players started experimenting with the ...\texttt{b4} version as well. The idea is that the pin is constantly annoying White and, in the event of a2-a3, Black will retreat the bishop to e7 and threaten to open the queenside with ...b4.
There are obviously certain parallels between this position and variation A of Chapter 4, so there is a potential danger of getting the different lines mixed up. It is important to realize that White actually uses rather different approaches against each of the four set-ups (...b4 or ...c7, followed by either ...e8 or ...h5 in response to g4-g5). Along the way I will point out some of these differences; it is important to notice them and understand what White is trying to do, rather than just trying to memorize a load of moves.

11.g5
Black must make an important choice between B1) 11...e8 and B2) 11...h5.

B1) 11...e8

Exchanging on c6 makes a lot of sense after ...e8 has been played. As we have seen in some earlier chapters, Black should generally prefer to take back with the d-pawn in the Taimanov, but in that case the knight will be misplaced on e8 (if it were still on f6 then Black could have met g4-g5 with ...h5, thereby considerably reducing White's kingside attacking potential). Therefore Black usually recaptures with the queen, but we will see that White can cause plenty of problems against that too.

12...xc6
12...dxc6
If you compare this to the ...dxc6 positions in the New Main Line featured in Chapter 5, you will see that White has a much better version here.

13.f2!
13.a3? was a bad decision in Negi – Kunte, Subic Bay 2009, and I was swiftly punished by Black's rapid counterplay with ...b4.

The most important thing to realize here is that White hardly ever has to worry about ...xc3, as this would leave Black terribly vulnerable on the dark squares. However, if Black avoids the exchange then his bishop just gets in the way of his queenside pawns, and White has achieved great results by simply playing on the dark squares with c5.
13...f6
13...\texttt{xc3}? 14.bxc3± is great for White. The only thing worth adding is that 14...\texttt{e5} can be met by 15.\texttt{c5}! \texttt{xc3} 16.\texttt{b1} with a winning position.

13...e5 14.\texttt{c5 xxc5} 15.\texttt{xc5 xxe6} 16.h4 \texttt{a7} 17.\texttt{xe5 xxe3} 18.\texttt{b1 xxf3} 19.\texttt{e2 xxe3} 20.\texttt{xd3 xxa7} 21.g6± kept Black under heavy pressure in Erenburg – M. Andersen, Helsingor 2013.

14.h4 e5 15.\texttt{xc5 xxc5} 16.\texttt{xc5 xxe6} 17.\texttt{e2 fXg5} 18.hXg5 g6 19.\texttt{d2 xxc8} 20.b3 \texttt{xf7} 21.d1 \texttt{g7} 22.\texttt{f2 xc8} 23.\texttt{d6 xd7} 24.\texttt{d3}±

White was dominating in Volokitin – Bosiocic, Austria 2011.

Recapturing with the queen has been Black’s main try recently. His practical results have been okay, but I think this is mainly because White has a lot of options, which makes it easy to spend too much time and play imprecisely. Our first task is to deal with the pin.

13.\texttt{d4} Guarding against ...\texttt{xc3} is the most ambitious approach. True, in some cases the ensuing thematic endgame can be better for White but here, since the knights have also been exchanged, Black’s apparent passivity would not be such a worry. His position is generally solid, and he can follow up with a quick ...f6 to avoid any problems with \texttt{c5}.

13...d6?! The latest idea – Black won two fairly effective games here. Black hopes that, by threatening ...e5, he can provoke f3-f4, which will soften White’s centre and perhaps induce a further weakening with a2-a3. Moreover, plans such as ...\texttt{c5}, ...\texttt{b4} and ...\texttt{d7-b5} are possible if White doesn’t do much.

13...\texttt{e7} was played in one correspondence game, but it seems too slow. White has a few ways to continue, but I would be happy to follow the game for a few more moves: 14.\texttt{b1} (14.\texttt{d3}N is a good alternative) 14...\texttt{b4} 15.\texttt{e2 a5} 16.\texttt{c3 xxc7}

17.\texttt{d4}N± Now ...\texttt{a6} wouldn’t be a great exchange for Black, and his counterplay on the queenside seems extremely unimpressive. (17.h4 a4 18.h5 \texttt{a6} 19.g6 \texttt{xc8} did not turn out so well for White in Tochacek – Schoen, corr. 2008. White’s blunt attack fails to impress, particularly because it gives Black the excellent f6-square for the bishop; moreover, the exchange of light-squared bishops will take place in a favourable situation to Black.)

14.a3!N An important improvement! Whether or not we, play f3-f4 on the next move will depend on the square Black chooses for his bishop.
14.f4 \(\text{b7} \ 15.\text{d3} \) (or 15.\(\text{g2} \ \text{c5!} \ 16.\text{b1 b4} \ 17.\text{e2 c7!} \) and suddenly Black is getting great counterplay!) 15...\(\text{c8} \ 16.\text{h4 c5} \ 17.\text{e2 xd4} \ 18.\text{xd4 b6} \ 19.\text{e3 e5} \) was fine for Black in Vuilleumier – Spraggett, Geneva 2012.

14...\(\text{a5} \)

14...\(\text{c5} \) has the drawback that ...\(e5\) is no longer a threat. Thus White doesn’t need to weaken himsself with f3-f4, and can instead play 15.h4!\(±\) with good prospects.

15.f4

15.b4? certainly deserves attention as well. Black’s counterplay on the queenside is considerably slowed, and White can focus on building an attack. Nevertheless, I am not completely happy about weakening my queenside without immediate gains.

Unlike the analogous position after 14.f4 above, White can trade bishops without having to worry about ...\(dxc5\). True, the a3-pawn can potentially be used by Black to open the queenside, but in the meantime it holds up the ...\(b4\) advance. 17.\(\text{xb6} \ \text{xb6} \ 18.f5± \) White will be the first to create threats against the opposing king.

16.axb4 \(\text{xb4} \ 17.\text{f2 a5} \)

17...\(\text{b7} \ 18.\text{d3}± \) gets nowhere for Black.

Advancing the a-pawn is Black’s only serious attacking idea. At first he seems to be getting his counterplay rather quickly but, rather than attempting a pawn storm on the kingside, I propose a faster attacking plan which also helps to neutralize Black’s threats.

15...\(\text{b4} \)

15...\(e5 \ 16.fxe5 \ \text{dxe5} \ 17.\text{xe5 g4} \ 18.\text{e2 xe2} \ 19.\text{xe2 e6} \ 20.\text{d5}± \) just leaves White with an extra pawn.

15...\(\text{b7} \ 16.\text{g2 b6} \) shows the real value of the novelty on move 14:
18.\textit{g}2!
I want to attack along the h-file with \textit{d}3-h3, while also using the rook to guard the c3-knight.

The immediate 18.\textit{d}3 allows 18...\textit{a}6 19.\textit{h}3 \textit{xf}1 20.\textit{xf}1 \textit{xc}3 21.\textit{xc}3 \textit{xe}4 when I don't see a way through for White. 22.\textit{f}5 is one idea, but 22...\textit{xf}5 23.\textit{g}2 \textit{b}5 24.\textit{f}4 \textit{d}5 defends.

18.\textit{g}1! a4 19.\textit{g}3 is an interesting alternative. It seems logical to go for the version with the bishop on g2 though, so I will focus on that.

18...\textit{a}4
18...\textit{a}6 prevents \textit{d}3 but White can easily carry out his plan using the other rook: 19.\textit{he}1 a4 20.\textit{e}3 a3 21.b3 Black's counterplay is blocked and White is ready to deliver mate on the kingside. 21...a2 22.\textit{b}2

19.\textit{d}3! a3 20.\textit{b}3
It is hard for Black to do much on the queenside, while the kingside threats stillloom large. I would like to shut down Black's counterplay completely, and only then proceed with the attack.

20...\textit{c}7
Threatening ...\textit{c}5 is Black's best chance.

20...\textit{a}2 21.\textit{b}2 does not really help Black.
Both 20...\textit{c}7?! and 20...\textit{a}6 can be met by 21.\textit{a}2! when Black's attack grinds to a halt.

21.\textit{hd}1!
Preventing any counterplay.

21.\textit{h}3 seems tempting, but 21...a2! 22.\textit{b}2 e5 creates an unrequired mess.

21...\textit{b}7
Now 21...a2 22.\textit{b}2 e5 gets nowhere for Black after 23.\textit{b}6+.

22.\textit{xa}2 \textit{c}5 23.\textit{xc}5 \textit{xc}5 24.\textit{xc}5 \textit{xc}5 25.\textit{c}3
Black has avoided the mating attack but the endgame holds no joy for him.

B2) 11...\textit{h}5

As we have seen in some earlier chapters, White's most effective plan against the knight on h5 is to manoeuvre a knight to g3 – but which knight? When I reached this position in 2011 I went for the \textit{ce}2 plan, but the problem is that this requires White to commit to a2-a3, which leaves White vulnerable to ideas like ...\textit{b}4, or even ...\textit{a}5? to take aim at the b3-square, bearing in mind the pin along the c-file. We will therefore go for the \textit{de}2 plan without creating any additional weaknesses on the queenside – quite logical when you think about it. Another plus point is that the bishop on b4 blocks the b5-pawn, so Black may want to move it anyway – all the more reason to avoid a2-a3.

12.\textit{de}2!
12.\textit{b}1 \textit{b}7 has been the most popular continuation, but Black has done well from this position and I will not take up any more space discussing it.
It is worth mentioning Black’s two possibilities after 12.a3 \( \text{a7} \) 13.\( \text{f5} \):  

a) 13...\( \text{a}5?! \) is a tempting idea to exploit a2-a3, but White has a strong reply: 14.\( \text{g}3! \) e5

b) Unfortunately, 13...\( \text{b}4! \) is a better move, as in Negi – Adhiban, Aurangabad 2011, and some other games. I won’t go into further details here; it will suffice to say this move may lead to extreme complications, and I am not convinced that there is any advantage to be found for White.

The theory here is still being developed, but I would say Black’s most important options are B21) 12...\( \text{c}5 \), B22) 12...f5?! , B23) 12...\( \text{a}5?! \) and B24) 12...\( \text{d}8?! \). The last two moves in particular have scored respectably for Black so far.

12...f6 is a typical idea in similar positions, but we can just continue 13.\( \text{g}3! \) \( \text{xc}3 \) 14.gx\( \text{f}3 \) \( \text{f}3 \) 15.f4 when the open h-file more than compensates for the missing pawn. Black’s position looks unenviable to say the least, and White went on to win in Volokitin – Markus, Murska Sobota 2007, and Motylev – Li Shilong, China 2010.

12...d5 is no problem as long as White chooses the right option on the next move:  

a) 13.exd5 allows 13...\( \text{d}8! \) (13...exd5? 14.a3 \( \text{xc}3 \) 15.\( \text{xc}3\) N. Kosintseva – Peng, Rijeka 2010) 14.\( \text{el} \) exd5, transposing to the note on page 172 after 12...\( \text{d}8 \) 13.\( \text{e}1\)N d5! 14.exd5 exd5, which seems quite okay for Black.

b) 13.a3!N is stronger: 13...\( \text{xc}3 \) (13...\( \text{a}5?! \) 14.exd5 \( \text{d}8 \) 15.d6+) 14.\( \text{xc}3\) and the dark-squared bishop will surely make its presence felt.

B21) 12...\( \text{c}5 \) 

This natural-looking move runs straight into White’s idea.

13.\( \text{g}3! \)
Giving up the f3-pawn in return for opening up the kingside is a no-brainer.

13...\textit{xc3}  
13...g6 is a big commitment from Black. It might not be as dangerous as opening the h-file, but after 14.\textit{xh5} gxh5, in Pourkashiyan – Botsari, Tromso (ol) 2014, Black had gained nothing in return for allowing her structure to be spoiled. The best way forward for White is:

14.bxc3 $\texttt{xf3}$ 15.\textit{lf2} $\texttt{xf3}$ 16.\textit{lf5} 17.\textit{xf3} was hopeless for Black in Van l(arnpen – Van Foreest, Hilversum 2014, as the white king can easily escape the checks and Black is in no position to bring up reinforcements.

15.f4\textit{N} $\texttt{xc4}$ 16.\textit{xc4} $\texttt{xc4}$ 17.\textit{d4} With a clear advantage.

14.bxc3 $\texttt{xf3}$ 15.\textit{xf2} $\texttt{xg3}$ 16.\textit{hxg3} $\texttt{e5}$  
16...\textit{xc3}? 17.\textit{xf3} was hopeless for Black in Van Kampen – Van Foreest, Hilversum 2014, as the white king can easily escape the checks and Black is in no position to bring up reinforcements.

17.\textit{h2} h6 18.gxh6 g6  
The computer is unconvinced about White’s prospects at first, but Black’s dark squares seem far too vulnerable — although a certain amount of accuracy is required.

19.\textit{f2} f6 20.\textit{c5} $\texttt{f7}$  

21.h7\textit{N}  
21.\textit{b2} \textit{h7}!\textit{N} makes it harder to reach the king. (Instead 21...\textit{b7}? 22.\textit{d6} $\texttt{xc4}$ 23.\textit{xc4} $\texttt{xc4}$ 24.h7\texttt{h8} 25.\textit{e5} led to a quick win for White in Adhiban – Shamima, Visakhapatnam 2012.)

21...\textit{h8} 22.\textit{b2} $\texttt{g4}$  
No better is: 22...d5 23.exd5 $\texttt{g4}$ 24.\textit{gl} exd5 25.\textit{d3+}

23.\textit{d4} d5 24.\textit{g2+}  
White’s fantastic bishops and Black’s airy king will make it hard for the second player to survive.

B22) 12...f5?!  
This has only been played in one game but it poses some interesting problems.
13. exf5N
The most natural move.


13... fxe5!
13... fxe5? 14. f5 gives White an easy initiative. The text move leads to interesting complications, and was surely Black’s intended follow-up in the aforementioned game.

14. d4?
Other moves can certainly be analysed but this is the most forcing, and leads to a pleasant endgame for White.

14... fxe3 15. fxe3 b7 16. fxe6 dxe6
17. e2 e4
17... fxe3? 18. d7±

18. f4 f4 19. d6 dxd6 20. dxd6 fxf3
21. e1 f7
Now White has a few ways to get a preferable endgame, although Black will have chances to hold.

13. b1
This is the most obvious way of dealing with the threat, and it is the only move to have been tested so far. I considered two alternatives:
I briefly considered 13.a3?, based on the fact that ...\textit{b}d8 would transpose to the 12...\textit{b}d8 line examined below – but of course Black has 13...b4! 14.axb4 \textit{xb}4 when his attack is too fast, for instance: 15.\textit{g}3 \textit{b}8!

13.\textit{g}3! \textit{b}4 14.\textit{d}5? is more interesting. The critical position arises after: 14...exd5 15.\textit{lx}h5 \textit{b}3 16.\textit{x}h5 bxc2

At first White's attacking prospects with the knight on h5 seem exciting, and I thought White could try to sacrifice an exchange for a strong initiative, but it doesn't seem easy at all. For example: 17.\textit{d}4 \textit{b}6! 18.\textit{f}4 \textit{xd}4! 19.\textit{xc}7 \textit{e}3+ and Black regains the queen to reach a clearly better endgame.

13...b4

13...\textit{e}5 14.\textit{g}3! gives White a even better version of the already promising variation B21 above. In the following example Black was soon crushed: 14...b4 15.\textit{a}4 \textit{gx}g3 (15...b3 16.c3 bx\textit{a}2+ 17.\textit{a}1 does not change a great deal) 16.hgx3 b3 17.c3

I also considered:

13...\textit{b}8N

Quite a logical move, but it's a bit too slow.

14.\textit{g}3! d5?!

A similar idea works well for Black in variation B24 below, but the inclusion of the moves \textit{b}1 and ...\textit{a}5 favours White.

14...b4 15.d5! (15.\textit{cc}2?! deserves attention as well) 15...exd5 16.exd5 White is able to win back the piece and then just have a better structure or attacking possibilities.

16...b3 (16...\textit{x}g3 17.hgx3+) 17.c3 bx\textit{a}2+ (17...\textit{e}5 18.\textit{x}h5+) 18.\textit{a}1 g6 19.\textit{hx}5 gxh5 20.dxc6 dxc6 21.\textit{c}2±
15...exd5 exd5 16.Qxh5 d4 17.Qd3! dx3 18.Qe2
White’s pieces are perfectly placed to launch an attack against the king, while Black’s pieces still lack some coordination. Compared to variation B24, the fact that ...cxb2 does not come with check obviously makes a huge difference, as does the presence of the bishop on a5, which blocks the queen from coming to that square to threaten mate.

18...Qe6
18...cxb2 19.Qf4 Qe7 (19...Qb7 20.Qe4—) 20.Qxe7 Qxe7 21.Qe4 Qa7 22.Qe5±

14...b3 has not been played and with good reason, as 15.c3 bxa2† (15...d5 16.axb3+) 16.Qa1 doesn’t cause White any worries.

14...Qd8
This seems less natural than 14...d5, although it makes a certain amount of sense to strengthen the pawn break, and the two moves might even transpose, as mentioned in the next note. Perhaps Black’s idea is to avoid the possibility of 14...d5 15.exd5. In any case, I propose the same treatment as in the main line.

15.Qc1
Avoiding any ...b3 threats while conveniently getting the queen off the d-file.

15.Qg3 is the obvious move, but 15...b3 16.c3 d5! 17.axb3 (17.Qxh5 d4 transposes to 14...d5 15.Qg3 d4! 16.Qxh5 b3 17.c3 Qd8! as mentioned in the notes to the main line below) 17...d4 18.Qxh5 dxe3 19.Qc1 Qxd1 20.Qxd1 Qd7 21.Qe2 Qd8 22.Qg1 Qe5 gave Black compensation and an eventual draw in Broudin – Vetek, corr. 2011.

15...Qe5
15...d5 transposes to 15...Qd8 in the note to Black’s next move in the main line below.

16.Qg3!
Once again, the f-pawn is a small price to pay to open the h-file.

16...Qxg3 17.hxg3 Qxf3 18.Qe2 Qe5 19.Qh2 d6
19...b7 would allow 20.c5.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\foreach \y in {0,...,7} {
\foreach \x in {0,...,7} {
\ifnum\x=7 \draw [line width=0.5pt] (\x,\y) -- (\x+1,\y) ; \fi
\ifnum\y=7 \draw [line width=0.5pt] (\x,\y) -- (\x,\y+1) ; \fi
\draw [line width=0.5pt] (\x,\y) circle (0.1);\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

20.dh1 b7 21.xh7 f8 22.xd3 xd3 23.exd3 xc1 24.xc1±

Black remains under unpleasant pressure, as 24...ac8 will be met by 25.xf1! and the attack persists.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\foreach \y in {0,...,7} {
\foreach \x in {0,...,7} {
\ifnum\x=7 \draw [line width=0.5pt] (\x,\y) -- (\x+1,\y) ; \fi
\ifnum\y=7 \draw [line width=0.5pt] (\x,\y) -- (\x,\y+1) ; \fi
\draw [line width=0.5pt] (\x,\y) circle (0.1);\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

15.dxe4

15...xe5 meets with a familiar reply:
16.xg3! xe3 17.xf3 xf3 18.exd5 exd5 19.xc2 xe5 20.xd5±

15...d8

This is a reasonable move but it feels a bit too slow.
16.xg3 d4
16...xe3? 17.xg3 d4 18.xf2±
17.xd2 g6 18.xh5 gxh5 19.b3

Now that Black’s kingside structure has been destroyed, White can just play patiently and bring his pieces out to good squares.
19...b7 20.b2 a7 21.h4 a5 22.xb5 axb5 23.xd3±

Black’s bishops are ineffective and he has no counterplay in sight. White can either target one of the weak pawns on b4 and h5, or just ignore them and prepare to open the kingside.

15.xe5! N

This important novelty avoids all tricks involving ...b3, thus preparing xg3.

15.xg3 would be an ideal move, but 15...d4! 16.xh5 b3 17.c3 d8! led to crazy complications in Mekhitarian – Iturrizaga Bonelli, Mar del Plata 2012. It’s possible to explore this further, but my initial impression is that Black is doing okay. I don’t see any need to spend more time on this because my recommended move is a lot stronger.
16.\textit{g}3! \textit{x}g3
16...g6 17.\textit{h}xh5 gxh5 18.f4± is great for White as well.

17.hxg3
As usual, once the h-file has been opened, Black's prospects look bleak.

17...\textit{e}5?!?
Neither 17...\textit{w}xg3 18.fxe4± nor 17...\textit{exf}3 18.\textit{d}3 g6 19.\textit{c}5± is any good for Black.

The text move seems like the best chance to get some counterplay. And from a defensive point of view, eliminating the dark-squared bishop (after f3-f4, ...\textit{g}4) considerably improves Black's chances.

18.f4
18.f4?! could also be investigated.

18...\textit{g}4 19.\textit{g}2 \textit{b}7 20.\textit{h}4
The simplest, just aiming at getting a slight edge.

20.\textit{xc}3 21.\textit{xc}3 \textit{d}8 22.\textit{d}b1 h6 23.\textit{xe}4 \textit{xe}4 24.\textit{xe}4 \textit{d}5 25.b3
White can take the h6-pawn whenever he wants.

25.\textit{f}d8 26.\textit{b}2±

The knight is perfectly placed, and Black's counterplay is restricted.

B24) 12...\textit{d}8?!?

This has only been played only in a few games so far, but I think it's the most critical move. The idea is of course to prepare ...d5-d4, and in order to achieve it Black is willing to completely ignore the \textit{g}3xh5 idea.

13.a3!N
13.\textit{g}3 runs into 13...d5! and Black was doing well in Quesada Perez – Adhiban, Tromso (ol) 2014.

I also considered 13.\textit{w}e1N but Black has a good reply: 13...d5! 14.exd5 exd5 15.\textit{xd}5 (15.a3 \textit{a}5 16.b4 \textit{f}5\textdagger) 15...\textit{e}8\textdagger

13...\textit{a}5
13...\textit{xc}3 is an ugly move: 14.\textit{xc}3±

14.b4!
An unexpected move, but it achieves the all-important objective of dealing with the ...d5 plan, thus enabling White to go after the h5-knight.

14.\textit{g}3 would once again be met by 14...d5! of course.
14...\(\text{c5}\) d6! 15.\(\text{xd6}\) \(\text{wa7}\uparrow\) also works out nicely for Black.

14...\(\text{b6}\)

14...\(\text{xb4}\) 15.axb4 \(\text{xb4}\) 16.\(\text{d4}\) is not too dangerous for White.

15.\(\text{xb6}\) \(\text{xb6}\) 16.\(\text{g3}\) g6

Weakening the kingside structure is the lesser evil for Black.

16...\(\text{xg3}\) 17.hxg3 a5

Obviously this must also be checked, but White’s attack along the h-file proves quicker.

18.\(\text{xb5}\) axb4

21.\(\text{xa3}\) 22.\(\text{h8}\uparrow\) \(\text{e7}\) 23.\(\text{xg7}\) wins.

22.c3 \(\text{b7}\)

22...\(\text{e7}\)? 23.\(\text{h8}\uparrow\) \(\text{g8}\) 24.\(\text{g6}\) leaves Black defenceless.

22...\(\text{xg5}\) is not stupid, but the calm 23.f4 \(\text{xg3}\) 24.\(\text{e2}\) \(\text{g6}\) 25.\(\text{h8}\uparrow\) \(\text{e7}\) 26.\(\text{h4}\uparrow\) \(\text{f6}\) 27.\(\text{f2}\) d6 28.\(\text{e3}\) leaves Black in trouble.

23.\(\text{d3}\) \(\text{xg5}\) 24.\(\text{f4}\) \(\text{c5}\) 25.\(\text{h8}\uparrow\) \(\text{e7}\)

26.\(\text{h4}\uparrow\) \(\text{g5}\)

26...\(\text{f8}\) 27.\(\text{g4}\) is nasty.

27.\(\text{xg5}\) \(\text{h8}\) 28.\(\text{f4}\) \(\text{e5}\) 29.\(\text{h6}\uparrow\)

Black has avoided being mated but it is doubtful that he will be able to save the ensuing endgame.

17.\(\text{xh5}\) \(\text{gxh5}\)

19.\(\text{h2}\) \(\text{e3}\uparrow\)

19...\(\text{bxa3}\) 20.\(\text{wh7}\uparrow\) \(\text{f8}\) 21.\(\text{h8}\uparrow\) \(\text{e7}\)

22.\(\text{xg7}\) and it’s all over.

20.\(\text{b1}\) \(\text{f8}\) 21.\(\text{wh7}\) b3

\(\text{We have reached another critical position}.\)
Black is ready to start his counterplay with ...a5, so White needs to decide whether he should go after Black’s king or try to consolidate his position, keep his king safe, and hope to reap the rewards of Black’s spoilt structure. As it happens, going after the king with \( \text{f4} \) is dangerous, but Black is able to survive with precise defence. That is why I propose playing solidly, preventing Black’s counterplay and eventually transferring our king to safety.

18.\( \text{\textit{d6}} \)

After a sharp opening White starts to play surprisingly prophylactically! One of Black’s major problems is that his light-squared bishop is more or less dead. After plonking the queen on d6, White’s domination over the dark squares makes it harder than ever for Black to activate the bishop or generate other forms of counterplay. We will be willing to play an endgame under most circumstances, as then we can start picking up the weak black pawns.

18.\( \text{\textit{f4}} \)? with the idea of e4-e5 gives White a potent attack, but his weakened queenside gives Black enough counterplay to force a draw. I will just present the main line of my analysis with a few brief variations: 18...a5 19.e5 axb4 20.\( \text{\textit{d3}} \)

18...a5

The alternative is:

18...\( \text{\textit{b7}} \) 19.\( \text{\textit{d3}} \)!

19.\( \text{\textit{b2}} \) a5! could be annoying; even if White remains objectively better after capturing the b5-pawn, I would rather not allow the queenside to be opened up with my king on b2.

19...\( \text{\textit{ac8}} \)

19...\( \text{\textit{a5}} \) 20.\( \text{\textit{d2}} \) transposes to the note to Black’s 19th move in the main line below.

19.\( \text{\textit{d4}} \)  20.\( \text{\textit{xd4}} \)  21.\( \text{\textit{xf1}} \)  \( \text{\textit{ac8}} \)

22.\( \text{\textit{b2}} \)±

The text move prepares to exchange queens with ...\( \text{\textit{c7}} \), but the arising endgame will almost certainly favour White.

22...b4! 23.\( \text{\textit{f6}} \) (23.axb4 \( \text{\textit{a6}} \) ) 23...\( \text{\textit{xa3}} \)−
Now that Black’s rook has vacated the a-file, we can put the king here without worrying about ...a5.

20...d5?! is a fun idea but after the precise 20...exd5 21.exd5 Ne3+ 22SingleOrDefault b1 N e5 23.Nh6 N h8! 24.dxc6 N xc6 25.Nxh5 N c6! Black is just about okay.

20...c7 21.Nxc7 Nxc7 22.f4±
Black is fairly solid, but White has a long-term edge due to his better pawn structure.

The text move seems like the most challenging option, as it forces White to find an immediate answer to Black’s queenside counterplay. Taking the b5-pawn would be risky, as it would open lines for Black’s pieces, so instead we should look for a way to regroup and coordinate our pieces.

19.SingleOrDefault d2!
Intending d3, hfl and e2. The magnificent white queen on d6 makes it hard for Black to threaten anything.

19...d3 is playable but the main line is just a better version of this. 19...axb4 20.axb4 b8?! 21.Nxb8 bxb8 White might still be a touch better, but his edge seems to be slipping away.

19.e2 is interesting as well, but White has to be accurate after 19...a7 20SingleOrDefault d2?!. Once again it’s similar to the main line, but moving the king immediately gives White a better version as the bishop really belongs on d3.

19...axb4
19...b7 20.d3 dxc8 21.hh1 axb4 22.axb4 a3 23.e2 keeps everything under control; Black does not have much counterplay at all.

19...f2+ does not achieve much: 20.e2 axb4 21.axb4 a3 22.hh1 a7

23.d3 d4 24.e2 xe2 25.xe2± White is slowly improving his position; his king is safe and he is in complete control. He can either play on the kingside against the weak pawns, or just focus on further centralization of his pieces. Black’s bishop remains virtually dead.
20.axb4 \( \text{W} \text{b}8 \)

\[ 20...\text{W}f2+ 21.\text{e}2 \text{transposes to the previous note.} \]

20...\( \text{a}3 \) is met by 21.\( \text{d}3! \) \( \text{W}f2+ 22.\text{e}2 \text{±} \) and White’s regrouping is perfect, as 22...\( \text{xf}3? \) 23.\( \text{df}1 \) would be suicidal for Black.

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
& 8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
8 & & & & & & & & \\
7 & & & & & & & & \\
6 & & & & & & & & \\
5 & & & & & & & & \\
4 & & & & & & & & \\
3 & & & & & & & & \\
2 & & & & & & & & \\
1 & & & & & & & & \\
a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\
\end{array}
\]

21.\( \text{W}xb8 \)

\[ 21.\text{xb}5? \text{a}6 \text{could also be investigated. I would be reluctant to allow Black to swap off his bad bishop; nevertheless, White seems to be somewhat better here too, so take your pick.} \]

21...\( \text{xb}8 \) 22.\( \text{xb}5 \) \( \text{d}4 \)

After 22...\( \text{xb}4 \) 23.\( \text{xb}1 \) \( \text{c}6 \) 24.\( \text{xc}6 \) \( \text{dxc}6 \) \( \text{f}2 \) 25.\( \text{e}3 \text{±} \) White’s knight is far better than Black’s bishop, and the weak kingside provides ample targets.

23.\( \text{d}3 \) \( \text{xb}4 \)

\[ 23...\text{xf}3? 24.\text{e}3 \text{e}5 \text{b}5 \text{±} \text{is another tough endgame for Black; I can imagine most players would prefer to eliminate the passed b-pawn.} \]

24.\( \text{e}3 \text{d}5 \)

\[ 24...\text{c}6 25.\text{e}2 \text{±} \]

25.\( \text{e}2! \text{xe}2 26.\text{xe}2 \text{±} \)

Black is still some distance from full equality.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has dealt with two rather fashionable variations after 8...\( \text{xb}4 \) 9.\( \text{f}3 \) 0–0 10.\( \text{g}4 \). Beginning with 10...\( \text{e}5 \text{?} \), when I have eschewed the almost universally played 11.\( \text{g}5 \) in favour of the brand new 11.\( \text{g}1 \text{N} \), a subtle improvement which robs Black of some key resources. I analysed the two obvious replies of 11...\( \text{b}5 \) and 11...\( \text{d}5 \); White maintains clearly better chances in both cases.

The other main branch occurs after 10...\( \text{b}5 \) 11.\( \text{g}5 \), when 11...\( \text{e}8 12.\text{xc}6 \text{xc}6 13.\text{d}4 \) gives White good prospects, although some precise follow-up play is needed. An even more challenging line is 11...\( \text{h}5 \), when a deep investigation led me to conclude that 12.\( \text{de}2! \) is best. I analysed four main ways in which Black may try to deal with the threat of \( \text{g}3 \), and am satisfied that White can continue to pose problems against all of them.
Kan

Various 5th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{\textdollar}f3\) e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\text{\textdollar}xd4\) a6

5.\(\text{\textdollar}d3\)

A) 5...\(\text{\textdollar}b6\)
B) 5...\(\text{\textdollar}c6\) 6.\(\text{\textdollar}xc6\) dxc6 7.0–0 e5 8.\(\text{\textdollar}d2\) \(\text{\textdollar}f6\)

9.\(\text{\textdollar}c4\) \(\text{\textdollar}c7\) 10.\(\text{\textdollar}d2\) b5 11.\(\text{\textdollar}a5\) \(\text{\textdollar}b8\) 12.\(\text{\textdollar}b6\)

B1) 12...\(\text{\textdollar}a7\)
B2) 12...\(\text{\textdollar}g4!\)

C) 5...\(\text{\textdollar}e7\)

C1) 6.c4!
C2) 6.0–0

D) 5...g6

D1) 6.c4!

D1) 6.c4!

D2) 6.0–0 \(\text{\textdollar}g7\) 7.\(\text{\textdollar}b3\) \(\text{\textdollar}e7\) 8.c4 0–0

9.\(\text{\textdollar}c3\) \(\text{\textdollar}bc6\) 10.e2 f5 11.\(\text{\textdollar}g5\)!

D21) 11...fxe4N

D22) 11...h6

E) 5...d5!? 6.exd5 \(\text{\textdollar}xd5\) 7.\(\text{\textdollar}c3\)!

E1) 7...\(\text{\textdollar}e5!\)

E2) 7...\(\text{\textdollar}xg2\) 8.e4 \(\text{\textdollar}h3\) 9.\(\text{\textdollar}e2\) \(\text{\textdollar}f6\) 10.\(\text{\textdollar}f3!\)

E21) 10...\(\text{\textdollar}bd7\)

E22) 10...\(\text{\textdollar}c5\)
The Kan is an extremely flexible and solid system, whose only drawback is the slight delay in Black’s development.

5.\( \text{d3} \)

This is widely regarded as the main line. 5.\( \text{d3} \) has been played in roughly the same number of games, but I would rather not give Black a target for \( \text{...b5} \).

As you would expect for such a flexible system, Black has tried all kinds of moves here. In this chapter we will discuss A) 5.\( \text{\textbf{b6}} \), B) 5.\( \text{\textbf{c6}} \), C) 5.\( \text{\textbf{e7}} \), D) 5.\( \text{\textbf{g6}} \) and E) 5.\( \text{\textbf{d5?}} \).

The two most important moves are 5.\( \text{\textbf{f6}} \) (Chapters 9 and 10) and 5.\( \text{\textbf{c5}} \) (Chapters 11-14). Others do not require too much attention:

5.\( \text{...b5} \)

This has been played in hundreds of games but it is obviously premature, and gives White an easy target for a2-a4. Even in positions with the knight on c3, White often is willing to play a2-a4, intending to meet \( \text{...b4} \) with \( \text{a2} \) followed by c2-c3, and that plan is usually unpleasant for Black unless he can quickly arrange counterplay in the centre. Here White will not need to waste time with the knight, which can simply go to d2 and then c4 or some other good square.

6.0-0 \( \text{\textbf{b7}} \)

6.\( \text{\textbf{c7}} \) 7.\( \text{\textbf{a4}} \) 8.\( \text{\textbf{d2 \textbf{b7}}} \)

10.\( \text{\textbf{c4 \textbf{c6}}} \)

11.\( \text{\textbf{xc6 \textbf{xc6}}} \)

12.\( \text{\textbf{e5N}} \)

Is clearly better for White (there is also 12.\( \text{\textbf{a5}} \), reaching the same position as after 12.\( \text{\textbf{c4}} \) in the line below).

7.\( \text{\textbf{a4 \textbf{b4}}} \)

8.\( \text{\textbf{d2 \textbf{c6}}} \)

9.\( \text{\textbf{xc6 \textbf{xc6}}} \)

10.\( \text{\textbf{e2}} \)

10.\( \text{\textbf{b3}} \) is not really necessary, although White is better here too: 10.\( \text{\textbf{f6 \textbf{b2}}} \)

11.\( \text{\textbf{e7 \textbf{a5}}} \)

13.\( \text{\textbf{b1}} \) Predojevic - M. Popovic, Plovdiv 2008.

10.\( \text{\textbf{f6 \textbf{a5}}} \)

11.\( \text{\textbf{c7 \textbf{d4}}} \)

12.\( \text{\textbf{c4+}} \)

Ziaiulkina - Arig, Gaziantep 2012.

5.\( \text{\textbf{\textbf{c7}} \textbf{6.0-0}} \)

This has been played in thousands of games, but the vast majority have continued with 6.\( \text{\textbf{f6}} \), transposing to Chapter 10.

6.\( \text{\textbf{c6}} \)

This has been second-most-popular move but it makes no sense to me, despite the many hundreds of games of the database. 6.\( \text{\textbf{d6}} \) is met by 7.\( \text{\textbf{h1}} \) when it is not clear what Black is doing. White just has a better version of variation B of Chapter 10, as Black’s knight is still on g8 while White’s queen might go to g4 instead of e2.
7. \( \text{fxc6 dxc6} \)
7. ... \( \text{Wxc6} \) is just a plain ugly way to recapture the knight.
7... \( \text{bxc6} \) gives Black an inferior version of the Taimanov structure which arises in Chapter 1. The fact that White has not played \( \text{Wc3} \) gives him extra options, \( 8.\text{c4} \) being the simplest.

8. \( \text{f4?!} \)
This is the most ambitious try, but the simpler options of \( 8.\text{a4} \) and \( 8.\text{Wd2} \) are also good. We will see more of this ...dxc6 structure in variation B below. Here White has an improved version, because there is no real reason for the black queen to go to c7 so early.

A) 5... \( \text{Wb6} \)

9. \( \text{Wc2?!} \)
9. \( \text{Wb3} \) led to fantastic play for White after 9... \( \text{Wxa2?!} \) 10. \( \text{Wxc5} \) in Parisi – Di Giorgio, Frascati 2009, but 9... \( \text{Wxe3!N} \) 10. \( \text{Wxa1} \) \( \text{Wf4} \) would have given Black approximate material equality for the queen, with no obvious way for White to exploit his lead in development.
9... \( \text{Wxd4} \)
In Simonyan – A. Hansen, Budva 2003,
White got a good position after recapturing with the bishop, but it was possibly even simpler to play:
10.cxd4!?N
Materially Black will be more than okay after trading his queen for the f1-rook, but he will have a hard time withstanding White’s initiative. For example:

10...\(\text{d}7\)
11.c3 \(\text{xf}1\)† 12.\(\text{xf}1\) 0–0 13.d5†
It is hard to see how Black can complete development without giving up material or weakening himself in some other way.

8.\(\text{c}2\)!
The most precise, forcing Black to worry about a quick \(\text{c}4\).

8...\(\text{xb}2\)
8...\(\text{xd}4\) is safer, but 9.\(\text{c}4\) \(\text{c}7\) 10.cxd4

9.0–0!
Khalifman recommends 9.\(\text{c}1\)? but castling is obviously the move we would like to play – and happily, I found a way to make it work.

9...\(\text{xc}3\)

10.\(\text{xe}2\)!
10.\(\text{xc}6\) has been the most common continuation and it has scored heavily in practice, but 10...\(\text{xe}3\) 11.\(\text{xe}3\) b5!N is mentioned by Khalifman as a strong reply.

The text move is a better way to simplify the tangle in the centre. Once the c5-bishop disappears, Black’s dark squares will be painfully weak.

10...\(\text{e}5\)
This was Black’s choice in the only game on my database. The alternative is:
10...\(\text{xd}3\)N 11.\(\text{xc}5\) d6
After 11...\(\text{ge}7\) 12.\(\text{hb}1\) Black’s queen
is on the verge of being trapped! 12...a5
(12...0-0 13.c3 b6 14.b6 d3 15.f4+- Followed by f3.)
12...4f4 c3
12...4b5 13.xd6 ±

13.c1!
13...xd6 d4! 14.a3 ge7 should be survivable for Black.
13...f6 14.xd6 e5 15.c4! exf4 16.b6+ The material pendulum is about to swing back in White's favour.

11.c4 h5
In Hulse – Lanin, email 2001, White inexplicably allowed a queen exchange by moving the e2-knight. An obvious improvement is:

12.xc1N ge3

12...ge7? is refuted by 13.g3 xe3 14.d6+ f8 15.fxe3+- with a double attack on the queen and the f7-pawn.

12...e7? leaves Black too far behind in development: 13.f4 h4 14.g3 h6 15.e5 xe5 16.b6+-

13.xe3 ge7 14.d6+ f8 15.f4+ White has a huge initiative for the two sacrificed pawns.

B) 5...c6 6.xc6 dxc6

6...bxc6 is not worth discussing in detail. I will mention in passing that 7.c3 transposes to the Taimanov as covered in Chapter 1, but there is no need for White to do that, as he has the even more tempting plan of 7.0-0 followed by c2-c4. The main battle lies ahead of course, but from a theoretical perspective it's quite sufficient to conclude that Black has a dubious version of a typical structure – and it should also be noted that your opponent would have to be either badly prepared or just not very bright to go for such a move order.

Recapturing with the d-pawn is more logical, at least in the sense that this option was not really playable in the Taimanov move order. The present variation has been played many
times, and quite successfully, by the Latvian GM Miezis, but he seems to have struggled against well-prepared opponents, trying to combat them by switching between different sidelines or just accepting a worse position.

7.0-0

Khalifman recommends 7.\(\text{Qd}2\), postponing castling for a few moves; this is also promising of course, but I don’t think it makes a great deal of difference. As a general rule, if White makes one or two pointless moves then Black will get a comfortable version of the symmetrical structure; however, it only takes a small amount of precision for White to develop a lasting advantage.

7...e5 8.\(\text{Qd}2\)

The knight clearly belongs on c4. Please note that ...b5 will severely weaken Black’s queenside and give us a ready-made target for a2-a4, as mentioned in the next note.

8...\(\text{Qf}6\)

8...b5 9.a4!± Playing ...b4 for Black will lead to an ugly structure, while otherwise he has to deal with constant pressure along the a-file, and in the end he won’t even be able to stop the knight from coming to c4, as we can prepare c2-c4 as well to force the pawn away from b5.

8...\(\text{Qd}6\) 9.\(\text{Qc}4\) \(\text{Qc}7\) 10.b3!

10.f4 \(\text{Qf}6\)! 11.\(\text{Qxe}5\) \(\text{Qxe}5\) 12.\(\text{fxe}5\) \(\text{Qg}4\) will be fine for Black.

10.a4 has been played many times – but ...b5 isn’t really something we should be worried about. As I mentioned earlier, it only creates more weaknesses for Black that we can start targeting immediately. And if Black does not play ...b5, then the text move causes some immediate problems in the centre, and \(\text{Qa}3\) ideas are annoying as well.

10...b5 11.\(\text{Qb}2\) \(\text{Qe}7\) (11...\(\text{Qd}7\) 12.\(\text{Qa}3\)±; 11...0-0 12.\(\text{Qxe}5\) \(\text{Qe}7\) 13.\(\text{Qc}4\) hardly gives Black sufficient compensation for the pawn) 12.\(\text{Qa}3\)N Now ...c5 is ugly, while moving the queen leaves Black’s king stuck.

12.\(\text{Qd}8\) 13.\(\text{Qf}3\)±

11.\(\text{Qe}3\) \(\text{Qf}6\)

11.\(\text{Qe}7\) 12.a4 \(\text{Qe}6\) Slettebo – Nordstrom, Sweden 1994. 13.a\(\text{xb}5\)N axb5 14.\(\text{Qxa}8\) \(\text{Qxa}8\) 15.\(\text{Qf}5\)±

In Nowak – Baumann, Internet 2004, White could have got a big advantage with:

12.a4!N b4

12...\(\text{Qe}6\) 13.a\(\text{xb}5\) axb5 14.\(\text{Qa}3\)±

12...0-0 13.axb5 \(\text{cx}b5\) 14.\(\text{Qxb}5\)±

13.\(\text{Qb}2\) 0-0 14.\(\text{Qf}3\)±

White has vastly superior pieces, the better structure, and pretty much everything else going for him.
Chapter 8 – Various 5th Moves

9. \( \boxtimes c4 \) \( \boxtimes c7 \)

Not restricting his development. Now White needs to show some precision.

9. ... \( \boxtimes g4 \) helps White get ready for \( f2-f4: \)
10. \( \boxtimes e1 \) \( \boxtimes d7 \) 11. \( f4! \) \( \text{exf4} \) 12. \( \text{xf4} \) \( \pm \) Nakamura – Phiri, Baku 2015.

9. \( \boxtimes d7 \)

Miezis has played this a few times recently. He did well against a couple of lower-rated players, but that was mostly because they failed to find a good plan after obtaining a nice structure.

10. a4!? \( \boxtimes c5 \) 11. a5 0–0

This position occurred in Paravyan – Miezis, Riga 2013. A simple but effective plan for White would have been:

At some point, particularly if the black knight moves, we would like to play b2-b4 and \( \boxtimes e3 \) and then plonk our knight on b6, and in general just annoy Black on the weak dark squares. If the black knight doesn't move, then we have other manoeuvres like \( \boxtimes e3-f5 \), or \( \boxtimes f3-g3 \) followed by poking around with \( \boxtimes g5 \) or \( \boxtimes h6 \).

12. ... \( \boxtimes e7 \) 13. \( \boxtimes f3 \) \( \boxtimes e8 \)
13. ... \( \text{xf6} \) 14. \( \boxtimes g3 \) \( \boxtimes e8 \) 15. \( \boxtimes g5 \) \( \pm \)
13. ... \( \text{a7} \) 14. \( \text{c2} \) \( \text{c5} \) 15. \( \boxtimes e3 \) \( \text{f6} \) 16. \( \boxtimes d1 \) \( \pm \)

Installing the knight on d6 is another way to get an advantage.

14. b4 \( \text{a7} \) 15. \( \text{c3} \) \( \pm \)

15. \( \boxtimes g3 \) is a sensible alternative but exchanging bishops seems simplest. Sooner or later Black will have to move his knight, allowing \( \boxtimes b6 \) and further play on the dark squares.

10. \( \boxtimes d2! \)

Aiming to pose concrete problems on the queenside.

10. ... \( \boxtimes e3 \) looks tempting, but after 10... \( \text{xe6} \) 11. \( \text{b6} \) \( \text{b8} \) the bishop on b6 is less troublesome than a knight would be, and Black can drive it away later.

10. ... b5

The critical move, played several times by Miezis.
10...a5 has not been tried: 11.\textit{e}1 b6 12.f4!± sees White changing the direction of the play to good effect.

10...\textit{g}4 has been the most popular alternative but 11.\textit{e}1 \textit{d}7 12.f4-+ was excellent for White in Barua – Soman, Mumbai 2003.

11.\textit{a}5 \textit{b}8 12.\textit{b}6

We will analyse B1) 12...\textit{a}7 and B2) 12...\textit{g}4?.

\textbf{B1) 12...\textit{a}7 13.\textit{x}c8 \textit{xc}8}

\textbf{B2) 12...\textit{g}4?}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Miezis has scored an amazing 4/4 from the black side of this position, although all the games are from more than a decade ago, and in more recent times he seems to have abandoned this line in favour of other sub-variants. Even though White has the two bishops and Black is still two moves away from castling, Black has a solid structure and a generally sound position, so it is essential that White comes up with a purposeful plan. My main idea is to attack on the queenside with a2-a4 and c2-c4, but the exact way we prepare it will depend on what Black does.}

\textbf{14.a4 \textit{b}8?}

Black leaves the rook on the a-file for the time being, in order to be ready for the plan of \textit{c}2 and c2-c4.

\begin{center}
14...\textit{d}7 15.\textit{e}2 has occurred in two Miezis games:

\begin{enumerate}
\item a) 15...\textit{e}7 16.\textit{c}4 \textit{b}4 17.\textit{c}5 \textit{xc}5 (17...\textit{d}4?? seems a better try, although 18.\textit{xa}6 \textit{e}6 19.\textit{xc}1 \textit{xe}4 20.\textit{xf}1 still favours White)
\item b) 15...\textit{b}8 occurred in Reefat – Miezis, Dhaka 2001, when White’s strongest plan would have been:
\end{enumerate}

The text move was played in Handke – Miezis, Andorra 2001. Black is well placed to meet a quick c2-c4 with ...\textit{b}4, so I suggest rerouting the dark-squared bishop to a better square:
\end{center}
15.\texttt{\textsc{d}2!N} \texttt{\textsc{e}7} 16.\texttt{\textsc{e}3}  
Forcing Black to make a difficult choice.

16...\texttt{\textsc{d}7} 
16...\texttt{\textsc{a}8} 17.\texttt{c}4 \texttt{b}4 (17...\texttt{bxc}4 18.\texttt{\textsc{x}c}4 \texttt{\textsc{d}xc}4? 19.\texttt{\textsc{w}f}3+-) 18.\texttt{c}5 is also unpleasant for Black.

The text move keeps the rook active, but Black gives up the a-file for good.

17.\texttt{axb}5  \texttt{axb}5 18.\texttt{\textsc{e}2} 0–0 19.\texttt{\textsc{a}6} \texttt{\textsc{e}8} 20.\texttt{\textsc{f}a}1\texttt{\textsc{f}}

White can slowly improve his position while waiting for the right moment to play \texttt{c}2–\texttt{c}4. Having complete control over the a-file is a great benefit, and there isn't much counterplay that Black can generate.

I think this is the most challenging move. Strangely, it has only been played in one game in 1976.

13.\texttt{\textsc{c}2!N} 
13.\texttt{\textsc{c}xa}8?! \texttt{\textsc{x}d}1 14.\texttt{\textsc{c}7}\texttt{\textsc{d}}7 15.\texttt{\textsc{f}xd}1 was the continuation of Schlick – Gscheidlen, Germany 1976. This could certainly be explored further, but our knight will probably be trapped, and it's not clear if we will get enough compensation. It all seems like too much work when the main line leads to a solid edge.

I also considered 13.\texttt{\textsc{e}1?!N}, but found 13...\texttt{\textsc{a}7} 14.\texttt{\textsc{c}3} \texttt{c}5 15.\texttt{b}3 \texttt{\textsc{d}6} 16.\texttt{a}4 0–0?! to be quite unclear.

13...\texttt{\textsc{xe}2} 14.\texttt{\textsc{xe}2} \texttt{\textsc{a}7} 15.\texttt{\textsc{e}3}

It is essential to prevent ...\texttt{\textsc{c}5}. It's hard for Black to target the b6-knight, and we are now ready to open up the queenside with \texttt{c}2–\texttt{c}4. In the worst case, we can play \texttt{c}4–\texttt{c}5, after which the b6-knight will be both untouchable and annoying for Black, and then we can continue looking for rook manoeuvres and other ideas around the board.
15...\texttt{b7} \\
15...\texttt{c7}? 16.\texttt{c8}! is a nice tactical point.

15...	exttt{g4} achieves nothing after 16.\texttt{g3}.+

16.\texttt{c4} \texttt{d6}!

By forcing \texttt{c4-c5}, Black at least manages to stabilize his position and avoid an immediate disaster.

Once again, 16...\texttt{g4}? is pointless: 17.\texttt{g3} \texttt{f6} 18.a4 b4 19.c5+.

16...\texttt{e7} is well met by 17.cx\texttt{b5}!, based on the following point: 17...ax\texttt{b5}?! Ambitious but wrong. (17...\texttt{xb5} 18.\texttt{a1} 0-0 19.\texttt{d1}±; 17...\texttt{c5} 18.\texttt{a4}! \texttt{xb5} 19.\texttt{d2}±) 18.\texttt{a1} \texttt{c5}

17.\texttt{c5} \texttt{c7} 18.a4? \\
I decided to focus on the most direct approach. \\
The more patient 18.\texttt{a1} 0-0 19.\texttt{d3} could certainly be considered, but my concern is that after something like 19...\texttt{d8} 20.\texttt{fd1} \texttt{xd3} 21.\texttt{xd3} h6 Black is on his way towards neutralizing the pressure and being completely okay.

18...0-0 19.\texttt{c3} \\
Creating threats along the a-file.

19...\texttt{xb6} \\
19...\texttt{e8}? 20.ax\texttt{b5} ax\texttt{b5} 21.\texttt{a8}+- traps the queen.

20.\texttt{xb6} \texttt{xb6} 21.\texttt{xe5}
21...\(\text{g}4!\) 22.\(\text{x}\text{b}8\) \(\text{dxe}3\) 23.\(\text{a}7\) \(\text{xf}1\)
24.\(\text{x}\text{b}6\) \(\text{d}2\)
Black's accurate 21st move has kept him in the game, but the endgame is still no fun for him at all.

25.axb6 axb6 26.f3±
Blade's accurate 21st move has kept him in the game, but the endgame is still no fun for him at all.

C) 5...\(\text{e}7\)

This move may easily transpose to lines we analyse from the 5...g6 variation, but there are some subtle move-order differences, and I'll focus on those here. It is worth considering C1) 6.c4!? and C2) 6.0–0.

C1) 6.c4!? \(\text{b}c6\) 7.\(\text{c}2\)

This move may easily transpose to lines we analyse from the 5...g6 variation, but there are some subtle move-order differences, and I'll focus on those here. It is worth considering C1) 6.c4!? and C2) 6.0–0.

8.0–0!?

This is a rare but interesting attempt to exploit Black's move order. The point is that a subsequent ...\text{g}6 will give us an improved version of variation D2, as our knight would be much better placed on c2 instead of b3. Black's best reply has yet to be tested, and is not completely equal either – so I feel that some players might wish like to try this idea out.

7...\(\text{d}5!\)

This would not be an easy decision to make at the board, but it is crucial for Black to play the central break immediately, as opposed to developing the bishop to g7 first.

7...\text{g}6 8.\(\text{c}3\) \(\text{g}7\) 9.0–0 \(\text{d}5\)N (9...0–0 is covered later under the 5...g6 move order – see notes to Black’s 7th move in Variation D1. For reasons that will be explained there, White has a great version compared to the usual position with the knight on b3.) 10.cxd5 exd5 11.\(\text{g}5\) Black is under some pressure, for instance:

8.0–0!?

This is a rare but interesting attempt to exploit Black's move order. The point is that
8...exd5 exd5 9.0-0 can be compared with the 7...g6 line mentioned in the notes above. 9...dxe4 10.\textit{Q}xe4 \textit{Q}xd1 11.\textit{Q}xd1 g6 12.\textit{Q}c3 \textit{Q}g7 13.\textit{Q}g5 0-0

The analogous position with \textit{R}xd1 was better for White, but here we can’t get as much because the rook’s placement on a1 makes itself felt: 14.\textit{Q}a4 \textit{Q}g4 15.f3 \textit{Q}f5 The pressure on the b2-pawn is annoying.

8...dxc4

8...dxe4 9.\textit{Q}xe4 leaves Black with the problem of finding a good way to develop.

8...d4 9.f4 e5 10.f5 could be explored in more detail, but I like White’s prospects.

9.\textit{Q}xc4 \textit{Q}c7

Things could be close to equal eventually, but there is a lot more to be explored – especially if White can find a way to put Black under pressure before he catches up on development. I regard 7.\textit{Q}c2 as an interesting, unexplored area which was worth pointing out, so I will leave it for interested readers to investigate more deeply if they wish to do so.

C2) 6.0-0

This is the normal move, inviting a transposition to another area of our repertoire.

6...\textit{Q}ec6

This seems to me to be the most significant independent option.

In the event of 6...\textit{Q}bc6 I suggest avoiding the knight exchange with 7.\textit{Q}b3, as Black’s knights just look weird. 7...\textit{Q}g6? (7...g6 is better, when 8.c4 \textit{Q}g7 9.\textit{Q}c3 0-0 transposes to the later variation D2; 7...d5 has been played several times, but 8.\textit{Q}c3 gives White an easy game with a lead in development.) The text move has been Black’s most popular choice but the knight is terribly misplaced: 8.\textit{Q}c3 \textit{Q}e7 9.a4 b6 10.f4 d6 11.\textit{Q}d1 d2 \textit{Q}b8 12.c3+ Salem – Kunte, Sharjah 2014. Not only has Black lost a tempo putting his knight on g6 instead of f6, but it also looks horrid there. White can do whatever he likes, including building up on
the kingside with g2-g3 and h2-h4 when the
time is right.

7.c3!
Improving our structure with ...\(\text{Q}x\text{d}4\) is
certainly not what Black wants, but refraining
from it will leave his knights weirdly placed.

7...\(\text{Q}x\text{c}7\)
After 7...d5 8.exd5 \(\text{Q}x\text{d}5\) 9.e3 \(\text{Q}e\text{c}7\) (9...\(\text{Q}e\text{e}5\)
10.\(\text{Q}x\text{c}2\)) 10.\(\text{Q}d\text{d}2\) White’s development was
clearly superior in Adams – Portisch, Yerevan
(ol) 1996.

The present position could be analysed in
depth, but I just can’t imagine why anyone
would choose to play in such a convoluted
way with Black. I will therefore just show
one nice example in which White soon built
up a winning advantage with simple, elegant
play.

8.\(\text{Q}e\text{e}3\) 0–0 9.\(\text{Q}d\text{d}2\) d6 10.a4 \(\text{Q}d\text{d}7\) 11.\(f\text{f}4\)

Black is still struggling to do anything useful
because taking on d4 remains dubious. It is
hard to imagine what Black may hope to gain
from all these knight theatrics.

11...\(\text{Q}c\text{7}\) 12.\(\text{Q}h\text{1}\) b6

White exploited his opponent’s slow play to
develop an overwhelming attack in Ni Hua –
Potkin, Ningbo 2010.

D) 5...\(g\text{6}\)

Against this solid option I would like to
extend the theme from the previous variation
by mentioning an interesting, unexplored idea
in D1) 6.\(c\text{4}\)?, before examining the main
subject of D2) 6.0–0.

D1) 6.\(c\text{4}\)? \(\text{Q}g\text{7}\) 7.\(\text{Q}c\text{2}\)

Just like in the earlier variation C1, White is
trying to get an improved version of a standard
position with the knight on c2 instead of b3.
7...d5!N

Once again, this is the only move to avoid an unpleasant version of Black's normal life.

7...c6 8.c3 e6N 9.0–0 0–0 10.e2! prevents ...d5 and gives White an ideal position.

7...d5 8.0–0 0–0 9.c3 bc6

9...d5 is too late to solve Black's problems, as 10.exd5 exd5 11.g5 dxe4 12.xe4 gives White a lot of pressure on the queenside.

10.g5! h6

This is how Black plays in the position with the white knight on b3.

10...a5N is the only conceivable attempt to exploit the knight's placement on c2, but

11.d2 is a good reply, as 11...b5 12.cxb5 axb5 13.b4 is good for White.

11.h4 g5N

11...c7 12.d2N gives White easy play, for instance: 12...f5 13.f4 d6 14.ad1±

11...f5N gives White the attractive option of

12.exf5 gxf5 13.d5?, among other moves.

12.g3 e5

12...g6 allows 13.d6.

13.f4! gxf4 14.xf4

White will follow up with e3, when the knight will be perfectly placed to switch to the kingside, as well as helping to guard the c4-pawn. The position could be analysed a lot more, but I like White's chances. If we could get this type of position, it would completely vindicate the decision to play the quick 6.c4 followed by 7.e2.

8.cxd5

The main alternative is: 8.exd5 exd5 9.0–0 e7 10.c3 dxc4 (10...d4 11.e4±) 11.xc4 xxd1 12.xd1 bc6 White has a slight lead in development but I think Black should be fine eventually. Unfortunately, this is one line where the c2-knight would be better on b3, as it would be good to have the option of c5 to annoy Black.

8...exd5 9.0–0 dxe4 10.xe4 xxd1 11.xd1 f6 12.f3 c6

Black's position should be holdable; at the same time, White has a tiny edge which a good technical player might convert to something bigger.

D2) 6.0–0 g7 7.b3

This is the standard reaction, intending to set up a Maroczy formation.

7...e7

7...d6 8.c4 f6 is too passive, as White gets an easy advantage by putting pressure on d6 as soon as he can: 9.d3 0–0 10.f4 (or 10.e2 immediately) 10...c6 11.e2 e8 Black is
stuck in a bind, with no counterplay, and will spend an eternity trying to equalize. 12.\(\text{d2}\) \(b6\) 13.\(\text{e3d1}\) \(\text{g7}\) 14.\(\text{e3}\) Gonzalez Vidal – Kamsky, Arlington 2014.

8.c4 0–0 9.\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{bc6}\)

9...d5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.\(\text{g5}\) dxe4 12.\(\text{xe4}\) \(\text{wxdl}\) 13.\(\text{axd1}\) was no fun for Black in D. Mastrovasilis – Gajek, Gorzow 2014. Compared with the earlier lines where Black met the early \(\text{c2}\) with ...d5, here White has some additional options like \(\text{c5}\), and Black is still well behind in development.

The text move maintains the options of ...d5 or ...f5 to activate Black’s pieces, so that is what we need to fight against.

10.\(\text{g5}\) is a critical move, but after 10...h6 11.\(\text{h4}\) (11.\(\text{f4}\) d5) 11...g5! 12.\(\text{e3}\) \(\text{e5}\) it is not clear if we can exploit the weakened kingside. The knight on e5 holds Black’s position together quite well, and in my analysis I couldn’t quite convince myself of any clear path to an advantage for White.

10...f5

After the text move I would like to somehow utilize Black’s lack of development, particularly by playing \(\text{c4-c5}\) to block his queenside pieces, but it needs to be timed correctly to avoid being undermined by ...b6.

11.\(\text{g5}\)?

11.c5 has been the most common choice but I would prefer not to rush this move for the reason mentioned above.

The text move – which is not mentioned in The Most Flexible Sicilian – is intended to provoke weaknesses. The bishop is really annoying for Black, and if he chases it with ..h6 he may end up with a loosened kingside after an eventual opening of the centre. We will analyse D21) 11...\(\text{fxe4}\)N and D22) 11...\(\text{h6}\).

D21) 11...\(\text{fxe4}\)N 12.\(\text{xe4}\)

12...d5

12...\(\text{xb2}\) can be met by 13.\(\text{c5}\), as it would clearly be too risky for Black to take the exchange. 13...\(\text{g7}\) 14.\(\text{c1}\) b5 15.\(\text{xb6}\) \(\text{xb6}\) 16.\(\text{d6}\)±
12...b6 13.\textit{\textipa{d}d6} (or 13.\textit{\textipa{c}d2}? \textit{\textipa{c}7} 14.\textit{\textipa{a}c1} with the idea 14...\textit{\textipa{b}7} 15.\textit{\textipa{c}5\pm}) 13...\textit{\textipa{c}7} 14.\textit{\textipa{d}d2} \textit{\textipa{f}5} 15.\textit{\textipa{x}f5} \textit{\textipa{x}f5} 16.\textit{\textipa{e}e3} White is in control, with ideas of \textit{\textipa{a}ad1} and \textit{\textipa{d}d6}, while Black has a bunch of weaknesses.

13.\textit{\textipa{c}3?}
13.cxd5 exd5 14.\textit{\textipa{c}3} is a decent alternative; each option has minor pros and cons. 14...d4

15.\textit{\textipa{a}a4?} Just playing for a blockade on d3, after which White will be able to keep manoeuvring forever. (15.\textit{\textipa{c}c4\dagger} \textit{\textipa{h}8} 16.\textit{\textipa{d}d5} \textit{\textipa{f}5\dagger} is an extra option for Black compared to the main line. Now we're forced to simplify on Black's terms: 17.\textit{\textipa{x}xe7} \textit{\textipa{x}xg5} 18.\textit{\textipa{x}c6} bxc6\textit{\textipa{a}a6}) 15...h6 16.\textit{\textipa{x}xe7} \textit{\textipa{x}xe7} 17.\textit{\textipa{e}e1} \textit{\textipa{h}7} 18.\textit{\textipa{a}ac5\pm}

13...d4
Delaying cxd5 gives Black this extra option, but I don't find it as agreeable for Black as the computer.

13...h6 is well met by 14.cxd5 exd5 15.\textit{\textipa{h}4\pm}, as now ...d4 runs into \textit{\textipa{c}4\dagger} followed by \textit{\textipa{d}d5}. So Black is struggling to do much; playing ...g5 is possible, but it exposes the king even more.

14.\textit{\textipa{e}e4}
The computer indicates that Black is okay here, but I think White's position has a lot more potential.

14...\textit{\textipa{f}e4N}
This seems like Black's best try.

Closing the position with 12...\textit{\textipa{f}4} doesn't help Black; he will achieve nothing on the kingside,
and the rest of the board is for White to loot:
13.\textcircled{c}5 b6 14.\textcircled{d}6 \textcircled{b}7

15.\textcircled{d}x\textcircled{d}4!N With the idea of c4-c5. (15.\textcircled{d}d2 \textcircled{e}5 16.\textcircled{f}3 \textcircled{f}7 17.\textcircled{d}fd1 \textcircled{c}8 was too slow for White in Mamyrbay – Nitin, Al Ain 2015) 15...\textcircled{f}7 16.c5 b5 17.\textcircled{b}b6±

13.c5
13.\textcircled{d}d2?! \textcircled{f}5 14.c5 followed by \textcircled{x}e4 might transpose, but Black has some extra options involving a quick ...b6.

13...\textcircled{f}5
13...b5 14.\textcircled{e}x\textcircled{e}4 \textcircled{d}5 15.\textcircled{d}d6±

13...b6 14.\textcircled{e}x\textcircled{e}4 bxc5 15.\textcircled{d}d6! and it’s still hard for Black to complete development.

14.\textcircled{e}x\textcircled{e}4 b5
14...\textcircled{x}xb2 15.\textcircled{b}1 \textcircled{g}7 16.\textcircled{d}d6!\textsuperscript{=} Black will struggle to finish developing the queenside for a long time and, with his kingside being as vulnerable as it is, things could soon turn ugly.

15.\textcircled{d}d6?! 15.\textcircled{d}d2 is a solid alternative – the choice comes down to personal taste. The computer wants to squeeze out some counterplay with 15...a5 16.\textcircled{a}d1 a4 17.\textcircled{c}1 \textcircled{a}5 but after 18.\textcircled{c}2 I would be quite worried as Black, because his kingside is vulnerable and his position seems to be divided in half.

15...\textcircled{x}xb2 16.\textcircled{b}1
White could also reduce the tension a bit with 16.\textcircled{x}f5 \textcircled{xf}5 17.\textcircled{b}1 \textcircled{g}7 18.\textcircled{d}3 \textcircled{d}5 19.\textcircled{e}2\textsuperscript{=} when Black’s pieces look weirdly displaced.

16.\textcircled{g}7 17.\textcircled{d}d2= The position is complicated but Black still has a development problem. It’s hard to reach a definite conclusion because there are too many possible options, but I think it looks nicer to play as White.

E) 5...d5?!
with. We transpose to positions reminiscent of the French Tarrasch, where the computer seems to be too much in awe of White’s great development, not realizing that Black is generally fine as soon as he gets his pieces out.

6.exd5 \(\text{exd5} \ 7.\text{c3}?!\)

Playing in the most energetic way possible.

By far the most common approach has been:

7.0–0 \(\text{d7}?!\)

Forcing White to spend a bit of time defending the d4-knight. Meanwhile Black will quickly develop and retreat the queen to c7, with a perfectly sound position.

8.\text{f3}?!\)

This was my best attempt to prove something for White.

8.\text{e3} \text{c5} 9.\text{c3} \text{e5} is the usual continuation, which has done fine for Black.

8.\text{e2} \text{gf6} 9.\text{f3} \text{d6} 10.g3 \text{e7} 11.\text{c3} 0–0 12.\text{f4} \text{b6} 13.\text{b3} e5 14.\text{e1} \text{c7} 15.\text{d5} \text{xd5} 16.\text{xd5} \text{xc2} 17.\text{e2} \text{g6}=

Akopian – Nikolov, Albena 2012.

8...\text{gf6} 9.\text{c3}

9.\text{f4}?! is worth considering but 9...b5!

10.\text{c3} \text{c6} 11.a4 b4 12.\text{e2} \text{b7} was okay for Black in Hannibal – Bouquet, engine game 2013.

9...\text{d6}!?\)

9...\text{a5} was played in Dgebuadze – Romanov, Cappelle la Grande 2012, but this move has the drawback of allowing 10.\text{f4}!N, which could prove annoying for Black (rather than the game continuation of 10.\text{e1} \text{c7} 11.\text{g5} \text{c7=} when Black was fine).

10.\text{e2}?

Other moves can be met in a similar way.

10...\text{c7}

Without the \text{f4} resource, White will struggle to turn his slight lead in development into anything serious.

Let’s return to my recommendation for White. This ambitious move has only been tested in seven games out of more than 150 according to my database, making it all the more interesting to investigate. Black’s two main options are E1) 7...\text{e5}!\) and E2) 7...\text{xf2}.

E1) 7...\text{e5}!\)

Rather than grabbing a pawn, Black aims for something similar to the lines above, that is, retreating peacefully to c7 and finishing development. Both 8.\text{e3} and 8.\text{e4}N allow Black to achieve his aim rather easily, after which White’s lead in development will evaporate. Fortunately, we have a much more interesting idea available.

8.\text{de2}!\)
I have been droning on for a while about how Black wants to put his queen on c7 and White would love to disrupt this plan with $f4$. Well, this is our chance to do it! One difference here is of course that Black has the option of meeting $f4$ with ...e5, but we shouldn’t be disappointed with that, as it will create serious weaknesses in Black’s position: the d5-square being the prominent one, but it also gives White f2-f4 as a potential pawn lever for the future. Compared to the rock-solid structure with the pawn on e6, provoking ...e5 will count as a definite achievement for us. If Black refuses to play it, he will find the bishop on f4 annoying to deal with.

8...$c7

Preparing to challenge the bishop with ...e5 seems critical. Naturally, I also considered a few ways in which Black may develop his pieces while leaving the pawn on e6.

8...$c6 9.$f4 $a5 10.0-0 $e7

After 10...$f6 11.$e4! $xe4 12.$xex4 the f4-bishop is really irritating for Black! 12...$e7 (12...e5 13.$d2 $c7 14.$c3±) 13.$d3±

8...$f6 9.$f4 $a5 10.0-0 $e7

Concentrating on kingside development seems natural, but White can cause some problems here too.

11.$e4! e5 12.$d2 $d8 13.$e1!? $f6

a) 13...f5 seems a little too open: 14.$g3 $f4 15.$f5 $xf5 16.$f5±

b) 13...$c7 14.$g3 h5 15.f4?! h4 16.$xe5 $xe5 (16...hxg3? 17.$d6+−) 17.$f5 $xf5 18.$xf5±

c) 13...$e6 14.$c3 (14.$g3) 14...$f6

15.$xf6† $xf6 16.$g3 h5 (16...0-0 17.$h5±) 17.$e4±

14.$xf6† $xf6 15.$d1

15...$e6

Black must be careful, as 15...0-0 16.$b4! and 15...$c7 16.$f4! both leave him in serious trouble.

16.$g3±

White has a meaningful initiative having successfully provoked ...e5.

8...$f6 9.$f4 $a5 10.0-0 $e7

Concentrating on kingside development seems natural, but White can cause some problems here too.

11.$e4! 0-0

After 11...$xe4 12.$xex4 0-0 13.c3 Black still struggles to continue without ...e5 because the f4-bishop is so irritating. As I have said repeatedly, Black really wants his
queen on c7 in these positions, otherwise, he finds it hard to develop. 13...e5 (13...c6
14.d4 cxd4 15.exd4 d8 16.e3)
14.e3 c6 15.b3 c7 16.b6
12.exf6 xf6 13.c3
13.g3? could be considered, but there is no particular need to sacrifice anything.
13.c6 14.g3

14.e5
Black probably has to give in and play this sooner or later, but it gives us nice squares to play with.
14.g6 15.e4 g7 16.d2
15.e3 e6 16.f3
White maintains some pressure on the kingside.

9.f4
Once again provoking ...e5.

9.e5
9.d6 10.b5 e7 is unlikely to appeal to many human players, but is worth checking just in case. White has a pleasant choice: 11.d4? The maximalist try. (We can also just play a nice position with 11.exd6 xe6 12.d3) 11.e6 12.0-0 e5 13.e3 c5 14.c4 xe3 15.xe3

10.e3
10.g3 c6 11.0-0 could also be investigated, but my instinct would be to reserve the g3-square for the knight.

9.f6 11.0-0 e7 12.g3 e6
12.0-0 13.ge4 (13.h5?) 13.e6
14.xf6 xf6 15.e4? (15.f3 c6 16.d5 xd5 17.xd5 is also possible but I like the text move even more)
15...\textit{c6} (15...d6) 16.d5 \textit{d7} 17.xe6 xe6 18.xd5+ 16.d5 xxd5 17.xd5±
Black will suffer on the light squares.

13.f5!
Presenting Black with a difficult choice.

13...c4
Allowing xe6 would be plain ugly but, aesthetically speaking, the text move is only marginally better.
13...xf5 14.xf5 0–0 15.rf3 is clearly not much fun for Black either.

14.e1 0–0
Delaying castling does not fundamentally alter the position; Black will remain under pressure on the light squares.

14.bd7 15.df3 e6 (15...0–0 transposes to the note on 15...bd7 below) 16.ce4 0–0
17.xe6 fxe6 18.g5±

14.c6 15.ge4 xe4 16.xe4 0–0 17.d5 xxd5 18.xd5 ad8 19.df3±

15.df3 c6
15...bd7 runs into: 16.xd7! (16.ad1±)
16...xd7 (16...xd7 17.df5± followed by ad1 and g5) 17.df5 White has dangerous attacking prospects involving h6, ad1, ce4 and so on.

16.\textit{ce4} \textit{d4} 17.xxd4 exd4 18.b3 \textit{b5}
19.xf6t xf6 20.ce4±
20...c6 is Black's only way to defend the b-pawn while guarding against xf5, but in that case he will leave us with a good knight against bad bishop.

E2) 7...\textit{xf2}

Grabbing the pawn is the critical test of course.

8.e4 \textit{h3} 9.e2 \textit{f6}
We have reached a key position, which has only occurred in a single game thus far. White made a good decision:

10.\textit{f3}
10...\texttt{g}5 \texttt{h}5! is an important resource for Black. Even here White would not be taking too much risk in the endgame, but I did not have a queen exchange in mind when I sacrificed the g2-pawn.

10...\texttt{d}2?!N deserves attention as well. The critical continuation is: 10...\texttt{g}6 (10...\texttt{g}4 11...\texttt{f}3! \texttt{x}e4 12...\texttt{x}e4 \texttt{f}6 13...\texttt{g}1 \texttt{h}5 14.0-0-0\texttt{c}5 11...\texttt{f}3 0-0 12...\texttt{g}1 \texttt{e}4 13...\texttt{e}4 \texttt{e}7 14.0-0-0 \texttt{g}6 15...\texttt{f}4 \texttt{f}5 16...\texttt{e}3\texttt{e}111...\texttt{g}1 \texttt{g}7 12...\texttt{f}3 (12.0-0-0-0 is likely to transpose) 12...0-0 13.0-0-0 White has some initiative for the pawn, but Black's kingside is more solid than in the main line. This could be analysed in more detail, but I don't see the need for it as the main move seems excellent.

We will analyse E21) 10...\texttt{bd}7 and E22) 10...\texttt{c}5N.

10...\texttt{g}6?! does not work here due to: 11...\texttt{f}4! \texttt{g}7 (11...\texttt{h}4 12...\texttt{e}3+) 12...\texttt{d}6!

10...\texttt{b}4 can be ignored by 11...\texttt{g}5 followed by 0–0–0–0, as Black is hardly in a position to capitalize on doubled c-pawns.

11...\texttt{f}4?!N is also interesting but one promising line is enough.

11...\texttt{h}6 12...\texttt{xf}6N
An obvious novelty – the game wasn't theoretically relevant beyond this point.

12...\texttt{d}2?! \texttt{h}4 (12...\texttt{c}5 would have been more ambitious) 13...\texttt{f}5 \texttt{h}3 14...\texttt{d}4 \texttt{h}4 15...\texttt{f}5 \texttt{h}6-\texttt{h}5 was the surprising end of Por – D. Berczes, Budapest 2001.

12...\texttt{xf}6 13.0-0-0 \texttt{c}5
Tactical tricks abound; for instance, 13...\texttt{e}7? 14...\texttt{c}6! is already winning for White.

13...\texttt{b}4 allows a different implementation of the same motif: 14...\texttt{d}3 (14...\texttt{a}4\texttt{e} is also interesting) 14...\texttt{h}4 15...\texttt{c}6! 0–0 16...\texttt{b}4 \texttt{b}4 17...\texttt{e}5 \texttt{d}7 18...\texttt{g}3\texttt{g}3

14...\texttt{h}g1!
I considered 14...\texttt{e}5, but was unable to find anything convincing after: 14...\texttt{xd}4 15...\texttt{xd}4 0–0 16...\texttt{d}3 \texttt{f}5 17...\texttt{g}1 e5 18...\texttt{h}4 \texttt{h}8! Intending ...\texttt{f}4. (But note that the immediate 18...\texttt{f}4\texttt{f} 19...\texttt{xf}4 \texttt{xf}4 allows 20...\texttt{d}4 \texttt{b}8 21...\texttt{xf}4 \texttt{h}8 22...\texttt{d}1\texttt{d} when
White’s initiative carries through to the endgame.

14...$xh2

Grabbing the second pawn looks terribly risky, but Black has already crossed that bridge.

14...$xd4? 15.$xd4 0-0 16.$e5 $h8 18.$e4 is crushing.

14...0-0 is well met by: 15.$e5! $xd4 16.$e4 $d5 (16...$xf3 17.$xf4+-) 17.$e3±

15.$g3 $h4

15.$e5! $e7

In the event of 16...$xd4? 17.$xe7 $e6 18.$e3+- White regains the pawn with an overwhelming position.

17.$e3 $d7

17...0-0? 18.$h1+- wins material.

18.$e4†

With a huge initiative.

E22) 10...$c5N

This is a bit more challenging as Black chases our knight away from the centre, but it does not change the fact that White has massive compensation for a tiny material investment.

11.$b3 $e7

11...$d6 seems an odd choice as the bishop will soon have to move again: 12.$e3 $bd7 13.0-0-0 $c7 14.$h1†

11...$b4 enables White to build a powerful attack with precise play: 12.$g1!! $h2 (12...$e7 13.$xg7 $xh2 14.$e3 $e5 15.0-0-0 $xc3 16.$g5 $xb2† 17.$b1 $c7 18.$xb7) 13.$xg7 $f8 14.$g3 $d6

15.$g5! $bd7 16.$g2 $h1† 17.$d2 The knight on b3 has its uses! 17...$h3 18.$ag1†

11...$b6 12.$g5 0-0 (12...$bd7 13.0-0-0 0-0 14.$hg1#) 13.$g1 $bd7 14.0-0-$f6 It is too early to speak of a forced win, but the position is clearly dangerous for Black.

A sample continuation is: 14...$c7 15.$c5! $xc5 16.$xf6 $h6† 17.$g5 $f4† 18.$xf4 $xf4† 19.$b1±
12.\( \text{g1} \) \( \text{hxh2} \)

12...0-0 13.\( \text{g3} \) (13.\( \text{d2} \) \( \text{hxh2} \) 14.0-0-0 is also possible but one good option is enough) 13...\( \text{hxh2} \) 14.\( \text{f4} \) \( \text{h4} \) 15.\( \text{g5} \) \( \text{b4} \) 16.0-0-0 \( \text{d8} \) 17.\( \text{h1} \) looks horrifyingly dangerous for \( \text{Blade} \).

12...g6 13.\( \text{g5} \) White shouldn’t care about the h2-pawn of course. (13.\( \text{f4} \) 0-0 14.\( \text{d4} \) \( \text{h4} \) 15.\( \text{e3} \) 16...\( \text{hxh2} \) 14.0-0-0 \( \text{c7} \) 15.\( \text{e3} \) \( \text{bd7} \) 16.\( \text{b1} \) \( \text{c5} \) 17.\( \text{d2} \) \( \text{c7} \) 18.\( \text{g1} \) \( \text{Black is just sitting around waiting to be crushed} \) – there are far too many tactical options in the air.

13.\( \text{exg7} \) h5 14.\( \text{e3} \) \( \text{g4} \)!

White develops his initiative effortlessly against other moves:

14...\( \text{c7} \) 15.0-0-0 \( \text{d7} \) 16.\( \text{g5} \) \( \text{c6} \) 17.\( \text{b1} \) \( \text{f8} \) 18.\( \text{g1} \) \( \text{t} \)

14...\( \text{bd7} \) 15.0-0-0 h4 16.\( \text{b1} \) \( \text{c7} \) 17.\( \text{d4} \) \( \text{t} \)

The text move is the computer’s attempt to defend. It would seem weird for any human player to venture this with \( \text{Black} \), but okay, let’s see how to handle it anyway.

15.\( \text{gxg4} \) \( \text{f6} \)

Trapping the rook.

Both 15...\( \text{hxg4} \) 16.0-0-0± and 15...\( \text{f8} \) 16.0-0-0\( \text{f} \) 17.\( \text{d4} \)+ \( \text{f8} \) 18.\( \text{hxh} \) \( \text{hxg4} \) 19.\( \text{e5} \) \( \text{h5} \) 20.\( \text{b1} \) \( \text{t} \) are great for \( \text{White} \).

16.0-0-0 \( \text{g7} \) 17.\( \text{f3} \)

White has tremendous compensation of course. It’s hard to notice that \( \text{White} \) is an exchange down, because we can only see \( \text{White’s pieces on the board} \).

17...\( \text{c6} \)

17...\( \text{d7} \) 18.\( \text{e4} \) \( \text{e5} \) 19.c3± leaves \( \text{Black} \) facing too many threats.

18.\( \text{e4} \) \( \text{t} \)

Black is in trouble, as 18...0-0 19.\( \text{g3} ! \) h4 20.\( \text{h5} \) is horrible for him.

**Conclusion**

This chapter covered an assortment of Kan variants after my recommended 5.\( \text{d3} \). The provocative 5...\( \text{b6} \) seems a little too risky, while 5...\( \text{c6} \) 6.\( \text{xc6} \) dxc6 offers \( \text{White} \) good chances to take the initiative on the queenside with the thematic plan of \( \text{d2-c4} \) and \( \text{d2-a5} \). We then looked at the two related options of 5...\( \text{e7} \) and 5...g6. In both cases 6.c4?! is worth considering, although I have stuck with the tried-and-tested 6.0-0 as my main recommendation. Finally, 5...d5?! 6.exd5 \( \text{xd5} \) is trickier than it looks, but the rare 7.\( \text{c3} \)?! poses difficult problems to the defender, whether or not he decides to grab the g2-pawn.
Introduction to 5...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}f6\)

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}f3\) e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}xd4\) a6 5.\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}d3\) \(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}f6\)

6.0–0

A) 6...e5!?
B) 6...d6 7.c4
   B1) 7...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}bd7\)
   B2) 7...b6
   B3) 7...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}e7\)
   B4) 7...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}d7\)!! 8.\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}c3\) \(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}c6\) 9.\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}xc6\) \(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}xc6\) 10.\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}e2\) \(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}e7\) 11.\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}f4\)
      B41) 11...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}d7\)
      B42) 11...0–0

B1) after 10...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}c5\)
B2) after 12...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}xc6\)
B3) after 16...\(\text{\textit{\text{\textbf{\textit{}}}}}b8\)
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 a6 5.d3 d6

This is the first of the two ‘big moves’ – the other being 5...d5, which will be covered in Chapters 11-14.

6.0-0

6.e5? loses a pawn to 6...a5† of course. Now that White has castled though, Black’s choices are limited by the need to restrain the e-pawn.

In this chapter we will deal with A) 6...e5?? and B) 6...d6.

6...c7 is the most popular move, and it will be discussed in the next chapter.

6...d5 is not really a serious option, as 7.e5 leaves Black unable to play the ‘natural’ 7...d7 on account of 8.xe6!

A) 6...e5??

This move has become surprisingly popular – especially with stronger players, among whom it is just as popular as the venerable main lines with 6...c7. The idea is that it leads to a drastic shift in the position. The resulting positions are more reminiscent of certain Najdorf variations than the Kan, and it’s a big departure from the lines White was used to facing after 5.d3. There have been numerous attempts (especially by me) to instantly punish Black for such blasphemous pawn play in the opening, but they don’t quite work out. However, when I looked more closely I was surprised to see that White players have barely tried a much simpler idea, utilizing the one major difference from the Najdorf – the fact that we are still able to play c2-c4.

7.b3!

The two main alternatives are 7.d3 and the aggressive 7.g5??, but I am not convinced by White’s chances after either of them.

7...d6

Black has nothing to gain from delaying this, for instance: 7...c6 8.c4 a5?? Just because the centre is closed, it does not mean Black can afford to forget about development altogether. 9.c3 a4 10.d2 a3

11.bxa3?N Intending to take control over the queenside before Black can complete development. (White can also consider 11.d5, as in Danilenko – Pardo Simon, Prague 2012, or 11.b3N, with a nice position in either case) 11...xa3 (11...c5 12.b3 d6 13.xc5 dxc5 14.d5 is also far from satisfactory for Black) 12.xa3 xxa3 13.c1 c8 14.c5 0-0 15.c4± Black’s experimental play with the a-pawn has clearly backfired.
8.c4 \textit{e}7 9.\textit{c}3 0-0

10.f3!

Black has only one serious plan: exchanging the dark-squared bishops with an eventual ...\textit{g}5. As long as you grasp this concept, you should find White’s play easy to understand.

10.h3 has been the most common but it’s a short-sighted move. 10...\textit{c}6 11.\textit{c}e3 \textit{e}6 12.\textit{d}d5 \textit{d}7 13.\textit{w}d2 (13.\textit{e}c1 \textit{g}5 was completely okay for Black in Ter Sahakyan – Grigoryan, Yerevan 2015. He had just one idea – preparing ...\textit{g}5 – and White happily allowed him to play it.)

11.\textit{e}e6

11 ...\textit{d}d7, gives him comfortable play. Please also note that h2-h3 is completely redundant here, whereas f2-f3 would have been so much more useful – hence my recommendation, to which we will now return.

10...\textit{e}6

10...\textit{c}6 11.\textit{c}e3 \textit{e}6 is the same thing.

11.\textit{c}e3 \textit{d}6

Other moves are no better, for instance:

11...\textit{d}f7 12.\textit{w}d2 \textit{h}6 13.\textit{d}d5 \textit{g}5 14.\textit{w}xg5 \textit{hxg}5 15.\textit{b}4+ and White wins a pawn.

11...\textit{b}d7 12.\textit{d}d5 \textit{e}8 (12...\textit{h}5 13.\textit{w}d2 \textit{h}6 14.g3±) 13.\textit{w}d2 \textit{h}6 14.\textit{a}5! maintains the pressure.

11...\textit{a}5 12.\textit{w}d2 \textit{a}4 13.\textit{c}c1 \textit{b}d7 14.\textit{d}d1±

Once again, Black is a long way from equality.

12.\textit{d}5 \textit{d}7

12...\textit{a}5N just spends time on helping White manoeuvre the b3-knight to a better place: 13.\textit{w}d2 \textit{a}4 14.\textit{c}c1 \textit{b}d7 15.\textit{c}e2 \textit{h}6

13...\textit{h}6!N (13...\textit{e}8 was an odd choice in Lin Chen - Yu Shaoteng, Beijing 2012) 14.\textit{w}xe7+ \textit{xe}7 15.\textit{d}d1 \textit{c}5 Black’s dark-square control, along with some concrete ideas involving

16.\textit{b}4? (or 16.\textit{w}c5 17.\textit{d}c3 \textit{w}xe7 18.\textit{d}e2±) 16...\textit{g}5 (16...\textit{axb}3 17.\textit{w}xe7+ \textit{xe}7 18.axb3±) 17.\textit{w}xg5 \textit{w}xg5 18.\textit{w}xg5 \textit{hxg}5 19.\textit{a}3±

13.\textit{w}d2 \textit{h}6
14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxe7}}}

14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd1}}}? was played in both the games to reach this position, in which White was again completely clueless against Black's only idea: 14...\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qg5}}} 15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qac1}}} a5 16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qf1}}} a4 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qa1}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd5}}} 18.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qcxd5}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxe3}}}+ 19.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxe3}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qd4}}} Qashashvili - Jojua, Tbilisi 2014.

14.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qg3}}}?!N

This is a more aggressive option which also deserves serious attention.

14...\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qg5}}} 15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qf4}}} a5 16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qf6}}} (16...\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qexf4}}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxf4}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qf6}}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd1}}} 16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd5}}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qd4}}} 18.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qh4}}} I feel White's attack could soon become dangerous, but it's not so easy to convince the computer of that. Since this isn't our main line, I will leave it for the reader to make up his own mind.

15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qad1}}}

15...\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qe4}}}

15...\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qg5}}} 16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qf6}}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd5}}} 18.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qcxd5}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qd4}}} 19.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qh4}}} is similar to the previous note.

16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qc1}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qc5}}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qb1}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qh3}}}

Black is resorting to some sophisticated tricks to get White to exchange the bishops, but it might actually backfire because of the way his pieces are scattered around.

18.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qf2}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qg5}}}

19.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qf4}}}! \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxf4}}} 20.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxf4}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qh4}}} 21.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qe5}}}! \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxf2}}+} 22.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxf2}}}

White has a tremendous amount of activity for the exchange.

14...\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxe7}}} 15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qfd1}}}!

It is important to preserve the light-squared bishop, even though it doesn't look like the prettiest piece right now.

After 15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qc1}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qc5}}} Black gets the bishop and a nice position: 16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qe2}}} (16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qb3}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd3}}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd3}}} b5!; 16.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qe2}}} saves the bishop but it does not combine well with White's previous move — it is far better to tuck this piece away on f1) 16...\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd3}}} 17.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxd3}}} b5! 18.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxb5}}} a\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{xb5}}} 19.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxb5}}} \textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qxc8}}} With plenty of counterplay for the sacrificed pawn.

15.\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{Qa5}}}?! is a reasonable move, but it feels more natural to free the f1-square for the bishop before doing anything else.
15...\(\text{c}5\)
15...a5 is not a problem due to 16.\(\text{a}1\) a4 17.\(\text{c}1\) and the d6-pawn falls.
15...\(\text{fd}8\) 16.\(\text{f}1\) gives Black nothing better than 16...\(\text{c}5\), transposing to the main line.

It's nice to get these guys off; now White should be able to continue exerting pressure forever.

Actually, even 17.\(\text{c}1?!\) followed by \(\text{e}2\)-c3 looks quite one-sided to me. Black's position seems quite fragile without the dark-squared bishop; the dark squares would normally be his main hope of counterplay in this type of structure, but without the bishop he will have to be extremely wary of opening the position.

B) 6...d6

This is similar to the 6...\(\text{c}7\) 7.\(\text{e}2\) d6 variation covered in the next chapter, but there are some subtle differences to take into account. In most cases the present variation is less flexible, as Black loses certain options such as developing his bishop to c5, or playing ...\(\text{c}6\) and recapturing with the d-pawn.

On the other hand, the text move allows Black to think about a different plan involving ...\(\text{d}7\) followed by ...\(\text{c}6\). At the same time, the plan of ...\(g6, ...\text{g}7\) is not good because, not having played \(\text{e}2\), White can quickly exert pressure against the d6-pawn. As you will see in the next chapter, after 6...\(\text{c}7\) 7.\(\text{e}2\), we will go to great pains to prevent Black from getting a comfortable version of the kingside fianchetto.

7.c4
This is the usual route. Most lines will, sooner or later, end up transposing to one of the main lines analysed in the next chapter after 6...\(\text{c}7\). The one notable exception is 7...\(\text{d}7?!\) — a somewhat passive way to continue, but one which leads to a slow manoeuvring game. White keeps a slight advantage, which is a perfectly satisfactory outcome from the opening, even if there's nothing especially exciting going on. At the same time, I realize that we haven't explored that type of Maroczy structure in much depth anywhere else in this repertoire, so I will mention two other options as well.

Firstly, a word of warning: 7.f4 isn't so great here because of 7...\(g6!\). Generally I like to meet this move by attacking the d6-pawn, but this plan does not work well with the pawn on f4. We could try attacking on the kingside, but it
is hard to make this plan work against Black's kingside fianchetto.

It was while considering the above problem that I had the idea to try:

7.\textit{\textbf{h1?!}}

A waiting move which is useful against both ...\textit{\textbf{c7}} and ...\textit{\textbf{g6/f7}} set-ups. It should also be noted that ...\textit{\textbf{b5}} isn't really an option because a2-a4 would be annoying. White's idea is best illustrated after:

7... \textit{\textbf{g6}}

If Black plays some combination of ...\textit{\textbf{c7}} and ...\textit{\textbf{bd7}}, we will just revert to a standard set-up with f2-f4, \textit{\textbf{e2}} and c2-c4, which will almost always transpose to the next chapter unless Black does something drastically different. There can be subtle differences between the exact lines, but I am mainly focusing on ideas and plans when covering these positions in the next chapter, so I don't feel it's necessary to go to great depth examining every possible move order. A few brief examples are:

a) 7...\textit{\textbf{bd7}} 8.f4 \textit{\textbf{c7}} 9.\textit{\textbf{e2}} \textit{\textbf{c7}} 10.c4 \textit{\textbf{b6}} 11.b3 should transpose to the next chapter in a few more moves. The only difference is that White has played \textit{\textbf{h1}} a little early, but I don't see any special way for Black to exploit this.

b) 7...\textit{\textbf{c7}} 8.f4 \textit{\textbf{bd7}} 9.\textit{\textbf{e2}} \textit{\textbf{c7}} is the same thing.

c) 7...\textit{\textbf{d7}} can be compared with variation B4 of this chapter. With the pawn still on c2, White has the strong plan of 8.f4! \textit{\textbf{c6}} 9.\textit{\textbf{f3}} \textit{\textbf{c7}} 10.\textit{\textbf{e1}} \textit{\textbf{c7}} 11.\textit{\textbf{c3\pm}} as in Vatter – Bosback, Germany 1989, when the bishop on d7 is badly placed, as it makes e4-e5 a serious annoyance for Black.

8.c4!

The point of the previous waiting move is that White is well placed to counter the kingside fianchetto by playing against the d6-pawn.

8... \textit{\textbf{g7}} 9.\textit{\textbf{c3}} 0–0 10.\textit{\textbf{e2}} \textit{\textbf{b6}} 11.\textit{\textbf{g5\pm}}

The position is similar to the 7...\textit{\textbf{g6?!}} line mentioned on the next page. The early \textit{\textbf{h1}} means that White's position is slightly less favourable here, but it should be useful in the future – and one tempo does not enable Black to free his position or change the basic fact that the structure favours White.

Summing up, 7.\textit{\textbf{h1?!}} is worth considering if you really like the positions in the next chapter, as the most likely outcome is a transposition to one of the lines examined there. However, I feel that 7.c4 is the right move to have as the main line.

Black's main options are B1) 7...\textit{\textbf{bd7}}, B2) 7...\textit{\textbf{b6}}, B3) 7...\textit{\textbf{e7}} and B4) 7...\textit{\textbf{d7?!}}. The first three can all transpose to each other, but each move may lead to certain
independent possibilities. The fourth option leads to a different type of game.

7...g6?!
This has been played in several hundred games, but it’s not a good choice.

8.¢c3 6g7 9.¢e2!
The simplest, but it has hardly ever been played!

9.¢e3 has been the most popular choice but it lacks purpose and has scored badly. The database contains many older games in which White just shuffled around with the pieces, allowing Black to get a pleasant version of this structure. Instead we will go after the d6-pawn as quickly as possible.

8...0-0

10.¢g5!N
10.¢e3 is weaker. The bishop is massively annoying on g5, but chasing it away leads to other problems for Black.

10...¢bd7
After 10...h6 11.¢e3+ Black’s kingside has been compromised and White will soon win a tempo with ¢d2, which is a move he wants to play anyway.

11.¢b3 6c7
We have transposed to a game in which White chose a move order starting with 9.¢g5.

12.¢d2±

Before we go any further, I suggest that you look at the diagram at the top of page 233 in order to familiarize yourself with the set-up I recommend in variation C2 of the next chapter, under the move order 5.¢d3 6¢f6 6.0-0 6c7 7.¢e2 d6 8.f4?! 6¢bd7 9.¢e4 6¢c5 10.¢b3? 0-0 11.¢b2. In most games Black has the same type of set-up in mind, and it makes little difference whether he plays ...¢bd7 before or after ...6c7. However, taking into account that I would like to aim for a set-up with the dark-squared bishop on b2, we actually need to consider our move order quite carefully.

8.b3?!
8.¢c3 has been the overwhelmingly most popular choice, and in my first draft I noted this move with a probable transposition to variation C2 of the next chapter. However, I then realized that 8...6c7! presents a problem, as 9.b3 would give Black the annoying option of 9...¢b5.

The other natural try is: 8.¢e2 b6 9.f4 6¢b7 10.b3 (10.¢c3 can once again be met by 10...6c7 or 10...¢c8??, either of which prepares to meet h2-b3 with ...¢b5) The problem with this move order is that we have to reckon on 10...¢c5, hitting the e4-pawn
and the d3-bishop (or 10...\text{\texttt{c}}c8!? 11.\text{\texttt{b}}2 \text{\texttt{c}}c5 with the same idea).

The text move seems the best way to reach our desired set-up in the event that Black plays ...\text{\texttt{c}}c7. It has hardly ever been played, presumably because White has been reluctant to allow a quick ...\text{\texttt{c}}c5, hitting the e4-pawn and the d3-bishop. However, a closer inspection reveals that this is no problem at all.

8...b6

It would be risky for Black to try:

8...\text{\texttt{c}}c5 9.\text{\texttt{c}}c3 \text{\texttt{xd}}3 10.\text{\texttt{xd}}3

Black has a solid structure and the two bishops, but he is about to come under pressure in the centre due to the impending \text{\texttt{a}}a3.

10...\text{\texttt{c}}c7

10...\text{\texttt{e}}c7 occurred in Martinovic – Adamski, Vrn\j\acka Banja 1984, and now after 11.\text{\texttt{a}}a3!N 0–0 12.\text{\texttt{ad}}1 Black has to transpose to one of the other two lines by putting his queen on a5 or c7.

10...\text{\texttt{a}}a5N is well met by 11.\text{\texttt{c}}c2? \text{\texttt{e}}e7

12.\text{\texttt{a}}a3 0–0 13.\text{\texttt{ad}}1 \text{\texttt{d}}d8 14.\text{\texttt{g}}g3\texttt{\texttt{=} threatening e4–e5.

In Laven – Groenegress, Germany 1988, White missed a chance to cause serious problems with:

11.\text{\texttt{a}}a3!N \text{\texttt{e}}e7 12.\text{\texttt{ad}}1 0–0

13.e5! dxe5 14.\text{\texttt{db}}5! axb5 15.\text{\texttt{xb}}5 \text{\texttt{d}}d8 16.\text{\texttt{xd}}8 \text{\texttt{xd}}8 17.\text{\texttt{xe}}c7\texttt{\texttt{=}.

9.\text{\texttt{c}}c3 \text{\texttt{b}}b7 10.\text{\texttt{b}}2 \text{\texttt{c}}c5

10...\text{\texttt{e}}e7 11.\text{\texttt{e}}e2 0–0 12.\text{\texttt{f}}f4 \text{\texttt{c}}c7 13.\text{\texttt{e}}e1 reaches a popular position, which you can find analysed on page 236.

10...g6 is another option, but after 11.\text{\texttt{d}}d2 \text{\texttt{g}}g7 12.\text{\texttt{ad}}1\texttt{=} White will soon start targeting the d6-pawn. This is one reason why I chose not to hurry with \text{\texttt{e}}e2.

The text move sees Black trying a different version of the ...\text{\texttt{c}}c5 plan. Strangely enough, nobody has found the strongest answer against it.

11.\text{\texttt{c}}c2!N \text{\texttt{c}}xe4

Gobbling the pawn is risky for Black – but
if he doesn't take it, then why did the knight go to c5?

12.\( \text{dx}e4 \text{ dx}e4 \\
12...\text{dx}e4? 13.\text{dx}e4 \text{ dx}e4 is refuted in great style: 14.\text{f}f3 \text{ f}f6 15.\text{f}f1 \text{ f}e7

11.\text{ylf}6 209

13.\text{il}x\text{e}4 13.\text{il}x\text{e}4 14.\text{il}b7 15.\text{W}h\text{h}5

White has a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

B2) 7...b6 8.\text{c}c3 \text{ b}7

16.\text{W}h\text{h}6 17.\text{cc}c6 \text{ c}8 18.\text{xc}g7\text{ f}d7 (19.\text{f}f7 20.\text{f}e1!!+) 19.\text{xf}6 Black is defenceless.

13.\text{d}d\text{e}4 \text{d}d\text{e}4 14.\text{d}d\text{e}1 \text{b}7 15.\text{W}h\text{h}5

White has a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

9...\text{g}6

This is provocative, to say the least.

10.\text{f}5 \text{gf}5

10...\text{e}5?! 11.\text{g}5! (11.\text{e}6? \text{fxe}6 12.\text{fxe}6 \text{g}7 13.\text{d}5\text{w} is entertaining but not at all necessary) 11...\text{g}7 12.\text{fxg}6 \text{hxg}6 13.\text{c}2 \text{bd}7 14.\text{w}f3 \text{wc}7 15.\text{e}3±

11.\text{exf}5 \text{ag}8

11...\text{e}5? would be disastrous for Black: 12.\text{d}6! \text{fxe}6 13.\text{fxe}6 \text{ag}8 Tsereteli – Khurtsidze, Tbilisi 2010. 14.\text{d}5!\text{n} \text{xd}5 15.\text{cx}d5±

12.\text{f}h3 \text{e}5 13.\text{d}d2 \text{h}6

13...\text{bd}7 14.\text{w}e2 is likely to transpose at some point.

14.\text{e}2 \text{bd}7 15.\text{b}4 \text{ac}8 16.\text{ac}1±

Sheretyuk – Pinho, corr. 2012. White has no immediate way through, but Black’s king is unlikely to feel safe for a long time.

10.\text{w}e2 0–0 11.\text{b}3 \text{c}c6 12.\text{xc}c6 \text{xc}c6

This position can arise from a few different move orders, so it’s worth exploring more. I like the way our pieces are placed: the queen, knight and, after \text{b}2 and \text{ad}1/e1, the bishops and rooks will all be pointing in the right direction. Then we will either look for a break in the centre or continue improving our position.

9.\text{f}4 \text{g}7

9...\text{bd}7 is virtually certain to transpose to lines considered elsewhere.

13.\text{h}h1\text{n}
The move is a novelty but it immediately transposes to lots of games.

13...b2 has been played several times but 13...b5! shows why I would prefer to take the king off the a7-g1 diagonal.

13...d7
Black will have to play this sooner or later, otherwise the e4-e5 threats will become too hard to bear.

13...c7 14.b2 was excellent for White in Nunn – Gheorghiu, Biel 1983.

14.b2 f6
This has been Black’s usual plan, but the bishop seems rather misplaced to me. On the other hand, if Black doesn’t do this, he will struggle to do anything useful, while White just puts pieces on nice squares and starts transferring major pieces to the kingside.

B3) 7...c7 8.c3 0–0

9.b3!
I like this move order the most.

It is worth comparing a more common alternative:

9.e2
The main difference is how we want to deal with the ...c6 plan – I prefer having the bishop on b2 in such cases. Plus the queen has no specific reason to be on e2 – perhaps it will prove more useful on the d-file.

9...c6 10.xc6 bxc6
The resulting structure is generally pleasant for White, but I don’t consider this the most favourable version for us to aim for.

11.f4
It’s quite possible that White is better after 11.e3, but what is the queen meant to be doing on e2?

15.ad1 c7 16.b1
11...e5! 12.\texttt{\textcopyright}h1
12.f5 is playable, but Black gets an improved version of the next note with 12...\texttt{\textcopyright}b7, with ideas of ...d5.
12...exf4!
12...\texttt{\textcopyright}d7? 13.f5! a5 14.\texttt{\textcopyright}e3 a4 15.\texttt{\textcopyright}f3 \texttt{\textcopyright}g5
16.\texttt{\textcopyright}f2 \texttt{\textcopyright}c5 17.\texttt{\textcopyright}e2 \texttt{\textcopyright}a5 18.\texttt{\textcopyright}d1 \texttt{\textcopyright}d8
19.\texttt{\textcopyright}g3 \texttt{\textcopyright}f4 20.\texttt{\textcopyright}h3 \texttt{\textcopyright}a6 21.\texttt{\textcopyright}g4 f6 22.\texttt{\textcopyright}h4±
Adams – Christiansen, Reykjavik 1990.
13.\texttt{\textcopyright}xf4 \texttt{\textcopyright}d7=

9...\texttt{\textcopyright}c6
9...\texttt{\textcopyright}c7 10.\texttt{\textcopyright}b2 b6 11.\texttt{\textcopyright}e2 \texttt{\textcopyright}b7 12.f4 \texttt{\textcopyright}bd7 13.\texttt{\textcopyright}ad1 transposes to variation C22 on page 236.
9...\texttt{\textcopyright}bd7 10.\texttt{\textcopyright}b2 \texttt{\textcopyright}c7 11.f4 b6 12.\texttt{\textcopyright}e2 \texttt{\textcopyright}b7 is the same.

10.\texttt{\textcopyright}xc6 bxc6 11.\texttt{\textcopyright}b2 e5
11...c5N 12.f4 leaves Black with nothing better than 12...\texttt{\textcopyright}d7, transposing to the line below.

11...\texttt{\textcopyright}d7 12.f4 c5
12.f5 is not losing but it was certainly loosening in Grela – Vachulka, Marianske Lazne 2011. 13.\texttt{\textcopyright}e2\texttt{\textcopyright}N looks like a good response.
In Gara – Shtereva, Litohoto 1999, White should have continued:

13.\texttt{\textcopyright}c2\texttt{\textcopyright}N
Black’s position might look solid but he will struggle to find good squares for his pieces, whereas White can easily increase the pressure in the centre and on the kingside.
13...g6 14.\texttt{\textcopyright}d2 \texttt{\textcopyright}c7
14...\texttt{\textcopyright}b7 allows 15.e5! dxe5 16.\texttt{\textcopyright}ad1 \texttt{\textcopyright}b6 17.\texttt{\textcopyright}e3±.
15.\texttt{\textcopyright}ad1 \texttt{\textcopyright}d8
15...\texttt{\textcopyright}b8? is too slow, and 16.f5! leaves Black without a good defence.
16.f5 \texttt{\textcopyright}e5 17.\texttt{\textcopyright}e2±
Black will struggle to hold his position together.

12.\texttt{\textcopyright}a4!
12.c5 d5 leads to unnecessary complications.

12...\texttt{\textcopyright}d7
12...\texttt{\textcopyright}e6 is well met by 13.c5.
12...\text{l}c5 takes away the possibility of c4-c5, but White can happily bring the knight back towards the centre with 13.\text{\textit{d}c}3\text{\texttt{+}}. After a few more improving moves he will plonk the knight on d5 and recapture with the c-pawn, in the likely event that Black takes the knight. White should then be able to start creating pressure on the kingside, and it is hard to see how Black can get much counterplay.

13.\text{\textit{w}}e2

White should actually take the opportunity to play 13.\text{c}5!\text{N}, as 13...d5 is not really playable here due to 14.exd5 cxd5 15.\text{c}6. However, I want to give a few moves of a practical game where White played c4-c5 to good effect on the next move.

13...\text{\textit{w}}e8

13...\text{\textit{d}}b6! avoids White's next move, which is why we should have played it on the previous turn.

14.\text{c}5! dxc5 15.\text{\textit{f}}d1 \text{w}c7 16.\text{\textit{a}}c1 \text{\textit{b}}8

17.\text{\textit{c}}4\text{\texttt{N}}

17...\text{\textit{b}}xa6 allowed things to get messy after 17...\text{\textit{b}}xa6 18.\text{\textit{c}}xa6 \text{\textit{b}}b5 in Short – Landenberger, Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1994.

17...\text{\textit{f}}8

18.\text{\textit{c}}3\text{\texttt{+}}

This is a perfect example of what can be achieved with a timely c4-c5 in these structures. White is completely dominating the position and Black is barely able to move anything.

B4) 7...\text{\textit{d}}7!?
10. b3 seems like a more aggressive set-up, pointing both bishops towards the kingside and playing f2-f4. Unfortunately, Black will at the very least have a slightly improved version of the earlier variation B2, as his bishop has gone to c6 without having wasted time on ... b6.

\[ \text{Diagram 10.0} \]

10... c6 11. f4
Black must decide between B41) 11... d7 and B42) 11... 0-0.
11... e5 has never been played and is, of course, a serious concession: 12. e3±

B41) 11... d7
White could consider meeting this move with 12. fd1, inviting a transposition to variation B42 in the event that Black castles. However, I would be tempted to try the following idea:

12. d5?! 0-0
Allowing the capture of the dark-squared bishop is a serious sin – it will be hard to challenge the excellent white bishop now.

If 12... exd5 13. exd5 xd5 14. cxd5± the two bishops promise White the more pleasant game.

12... xd5? is another idea, intending to block the centre with ... e5. I think White is better after both recaptures; it’s a matter of taste as to whether to allow Black no counterplay, or play a slightly more double-edged game after exd5.

I prefer the former option: 13. cxd5 e5 14. d2

\[ \text{Diagram 10.1} \]

The idea is to meet ... g5 with b4! when White crucially keeps both his bishops alive. In the long run he can aim to restrict Black’s bishop with g2-g3 and h2-h4, and eventually transfer the light-squared bishop to h3.

13. xe7† xe7 14. e2 fd8 15. fd1 e5 15... e5 16. c5±

B42) 16. e3±
It’s true that we can’t exploit the d5-square, but the presence of the dark-squared bishop means that Black is similarly unable to plonk his knight on d4. White has other ways to improve his position, the simplest plan being to advance on the queenside.

\[ \text{Diagram 10.2} \]
16...a5 17.f3 0-0 18.b3 f6 19.a3

B42) 11...0-0 12...\text{e}d1

12...\text{e}d1 leads to similar positions but, in situations after an eventual \text{d}d5 followed by one or two exchanges on that square, my recommended rook set-up will be more flexible for White.

12...\text{a}e8 20.b4 \text{e}e6 21.\text{b}b3 \text{f}7 22...\text{a}b1 axb4 23.axb4 \text{a}6

13...\text{c}2

It's a tough decision whether we need to play this or not. White could also play \text{d}d5 immediately; the main thing to consider is what we're doing after ...\text{e}xd5. I generally like the idea of cxd5, and playing the closed position after ...e5. The bishop pair should offer White a solid edge in the long term – in particular, endgames with two bishops versus bishop and knight may prove highly unpleasant for Black, as the apparently passive light-squared bishop can become a monster on the h3-c8 diagonal. However, it is vital to make sure Black does not get the chance to exchange the dark-squared bishops early on.

The alternative is 13...\text{d}d5!N, intending 13...\text{a}d5 14.cxd5 e5 15...\text{d}2! Now we are ready to move away our dark-squared bishop.

24...c5! dxc5 25.bxc5 \text{e}xd1\text{+} 26...\text{d}x1 \text{e}6 27...\text{d}5 \text{c}7 28...\text{a}1!

White has played in textbook precise style, and 'he' eventually converted the full point in Sting – Chiron, engine game 2013.
temporarily after 15...g5 16.c3=. The drawback is that the bishop is less than ideal here; on the other hand, there is a positive aspect as we have not had to make any committal pawn moves like g2-g3 and f2-f4, as we do in the main line below. If Black doesn't get counterplay fast, then we can slowly regroup our pieces. If we can maintain control and eventually achieve full coordination, then who cares if White’s bishops had to make some convoluted manoeuvres on the way?

17...c1N
17...d1 is comparable, but I see no reason to move this rook for the second time. After 17...d8 18.d2 h6 there are two moves worth mentioning:

a) 19.d1 was played in Rasik – Rublevsky, Ostrava 1992, when 19.g5N would have been fine for Black.

b) 19.g3!?N is more challenging: 19...g5 (19...f6 20.f3 h7 achieves nothing after 21.h4 h6 22.d3 with the idea of f1-h3. Even if Black swaps off all the major pieces, the endgame will still be highly unpleasant for him.) 20.f4 exf4 21.gxf4 h6 White might be better here, but the whole thing works better with the other rook on c1.

17...d8
Black has to try to exchange the dark-squared bishops, otherwise his position is just worse.

17...a5 gets nowhere after 18.b1=.

18.d2 h6
20.f4 exf4

20...\texttt{\textit{f6}} should lead to the same thing, as Black hardly has anything better than playing ...exf4 next.

21.gxf4 \texttt{\textit{f6}} 22.\texttt{\textit{h1}}!

22.\texttt{d3} is also possible but the main line looks extremely dangerous for Black.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

22...\texttt{xh2} 23.\texttt{b1} \texttt{c3} 24.\texttt{d3}

With excellent attacking chances for a mere pawn.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter dealt with the various 5...\texttt{f6} 6.0-0 lines where Black refrains from an early ...\texttt{c7}. 6...e5? looks like an odd choice but it has done pretty well for Black so far. However, my analysis shows that White has excellent chances in the c2-c4 structure, as long as he prevents Black from trading the dark-squared bishops.

6...d6 was the main topic of the chapter. Then 7.\texttt{h1}! is an interesting option to keep in mind, but I mainly focused on the more traditional 7.c4. We then looked at 7...\texttt{bd7}, 7...b6 and 7...\texttt{e7}, all of which can transpose to one another – and things get even more confusing when you consider that ...\texttt{c7} might come at any moment, leading to some variation from the next chapter. I hope I have succeeded in pointing out the relevant differences and independent possibilities associated with each move order.

The final variation saw Black take the play in a different direction with 7...\texttt{d7}! 8.\texttt{c3} \texttt{c6} 9.\texttt{xc6} \texttt{xc6}. This is a respectable set-up, but I like White’s chances after 10.\texttt{e2} \texttt{e7} 11.\texttt{f4}, especially in connection with the \texttt{d5} pseudo-sacrifice.
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xxd4 a6 5.d3 a6 6.0-0 c7

7.e2

A) 7...c5
B) 7...d6
C) 7...d6 8.f4!
   C1) 8...g6
       C11) 9.f5!!
       C12) 9.c3?! g7 10.e5 dxe5 11.db5?! axb5 12.db5 e7
              13.fxe5 0-0 14.exf6 xf6 15.c3 g7 16.a4
       C121) 16...a6N
       C122) 16...d7!
   C2) 8...bd7 9.c4 e7 10.b3?! 0-0 11.db2
      C21) 11...e8!? 233
      C22) 11..b6 12.c3 bb7 13.eal
            C221) 13..g6
            C222) 13...ad8

A) after 10...b4

B) 7...d6

C) 7...d6 8.f4!
   C1) 8...g6
       C11) 9.f5!!
       C12) 9.c3?! g7 10.e5 dxe5 11.db5?! axb5 12.db5 e7
              13.fxe5 0-0 14.exf6 xf6 15.c3 g7 16.a4
       C121) 16...a6N
       C122) 16...d7!
   C2) 8...bd7 9.c4 e7 10.b3?! 0-0 11.db2
      C21) 11...e8!? 233
      C22) 11..b6 12.c3 bb7 13.eal
            C221) 13..g6
            C222) 13...ad8

C2) note to 9...e7

C22) note to 17...g7N
1.e4 c5 2.Bf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 a6 5.Qd3 Qf6 6.0–0 \textit{c7}

This is the more classical Kan move. Having the queen on c7 will always be useful in the future, and postponing \ldots d6 keeps Black's position more flexible.

7.$\textit{e2}$

The most flexible move, renewing the possibility of e4–e5. We will analyse the relative sidelines A) 7...\textit{c5} and B) 7...\textit{d6}, followed by the main line of C) 7...\textit{d6}.

7...b5 8.a4 b4 9.Qd2 looks downright unpleasant for Black, for instance: 9...\textit{b7} 10.e5 \textit{Qd5} 11.Qc4= De Rosa – Meijers, Ischia 2010.

7...h5 8.e5 \textit{Qd2} looks an inferior cousin of variation A from the previous chapter. A big difference is that 8.Qf5! can be played without fear of \ldots d5, as it would be too risky for Black to open the e-file with the queen already on e2. Therefore Black must settle for: 8...d6 9.Qg5 \textit{hf5} 10.exf5

A final option is:

7...d5 8.e5 Qe4

8...Qf4 followed by Qe3 and Qd2 gives White a nice version of a French.

The text move led to an eventual draw
after 9.d2 in Karjakin – Svidler, Moscow (rapid) 2012, but Svidler was surely just using this line as a surprise weapon, as White only needs a bit of accuracy to get a clear advantage.

9.c4!

9...exf6 10.dxe5 la6 11.a3 could be better for White as well, but the text move is more convincing.

9...c6

Black's alternatives are also bleak:
9...c5 10.b3+
9...c5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.c3+
9.exf6 10.b3! la6 11.cxd5 exd5 12.c3+
10.bxc6 bxc6 11.exd6 12.lxd6

White is simply a pawn up.

A) 7...c5 8.b3

8...e7

8...a7 is more common, but it leads to problems after: 9.e5 d5 10.c4 d4

11.e1!N The a7-bishop is misplaced because after 11...dxe5 12.xd5 Black's kingside is too vulnerable: 12...0-0 (12...b5 13.g3+) 13.g3+

9.e5 d5 10.c4 d4

11.e1!N White has other decent options, both here and on the previous move, but this pawn sacrifice is just too powerful to ignore.

11.f4 has been played a few times, with good results for White.

However, 11.e1N d5 12.xd5 0-0 is not
as simple as in the note to move 8, as Black's bishop is much better placed for defensive duties on e7.

11...\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}}xe5 12.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}c3 \texttt{f5}}?

This move is critical but it might lead to even bigger problems for Black.

12...\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}c7} is less weakening, but after 13.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}g4 g6} 14.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{H}}}h6 d6} (14...\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}f6} 15.c5±) 15.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}g3±} Black is struggling with too many open files and too little development.

13.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{F}}}4} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}c7}

13...\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}f6} 14.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{F}}}f3} 0-0 15.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}e3±}

Now White gets a chance for a smashing piece sacrifice:

14.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}xf5! exf5} 15.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}a3} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}d4} 16.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}d5} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}d6}

16...\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}d8} 17.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}e3±}

\textbf{B)} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{E}}}d6}

8.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{H}}}h1}

This is the easiest way to continue. Black is playing a little weirdly, so we don't have to do anything special.

That said, 8.f4!? \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}c5} 9.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}e3} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}b6} 10.c3 \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}c6} 11.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{H}}}h1} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}xd4} 12.cxd4 \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}xd4} 13.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}xd4} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}xd4} 14.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}c3} looks like decent compensation for White and has scored heavily in practice. See, for instance, Kindermann – Mertens, Zürich 1982.

8...\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}c6} 9.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}xc6} dxc6

9...bxc6? is just ugly: 10.f4 e5 11.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}d2}±

Grischuk – Miladinovic (rapid) 2003.

17.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}e3} 0-0 18.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{B}}}b6} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}a7} 19.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{Q}}}ad1} \textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}e6} 20.\textit{\textbf{\texttt{\textsc{W}}}f2}±

White will soon win back the material with interest.
10.a4!

Preventing ...b5 and securing the c4-square for the knight.

10...e5

Black might also try:
10...0-0N 11.f4

Those who favour a solid approach can consider: 11.\(\text{d2}\) b6 (11...\(\text{e7}\) 12.a5±) 12.\(\text{c4}\) \(\text{e7}\) 13.e5 \(\text{d5}\) 14.\(\text{g4}\)±

11...e5 12.f5

Intending g4-g5 and... “BOOM!”

12...b5 13.g4 \(\text{b7}\) 14.g5 \(\text{d7}\) 15.\(\text{e3}\)

15.\(\text{b5}\) also looks dangerous, although Black might be able to survive with 15...\(\text{fd8}\) in order to prepare ...\(\text{f8}\).

15...c5

12.\(\text{c4}\) \(\text{c5}\) 13.\(\text{f4}\) ! \(\text{x}\text{c4}\) 14.\(\text{x}\text{c4}\) 0-0 suspicious and I can’t imagine anyone being happy playing against the pawns on f5 and g5.

11.\(\text{d2}\)!

If Black gives up either of the bishops, we will just have a solid, long-term edge.

11...\(\text{e6}\)N

This has not been played but it seems like the most natural move to me.

11...\(\text{g4}\) occurred in Korneev – Friedrich, Porto Mannu 2009. The simplest reply is 12.\(\text{f3}\) \(\text{e6}\) when I don’t see how Black has benefitted from provoking White’s last move. For instance, after 13.\(\text{c4}\) (13.\(\text{c4}\)± is also good) 13...\(\text{c5}\) 14.\(\text{f4}\) we have transposed to the main line below.

11...\(\text{c5}\) 12.\(\text{f4}\) \(\text{e7}\) 13.\(\text{f5}\) was simple and strong in Reinhold – Schlumbohm, email 2014. Even when Black has not castled, the kingside pawn advance is unpleasant for him.

Finally, 11...0-0 12.\(\text{c4}\) \(\text{e7}\) 13.a5± and 11...b6 12.\(\text{c4}\) \(\text{e7}\) 13.f4± are both excellent for White.

12.\(\text{c4}\) \(\text{c5}\) 13.\(\text{f4}\) ! \(\text{x}\text{c4}\) 14.\(\text{x}\text{c4}\) 0-0

14...\(\text{xf4}\)? 15.\(\text{xf4}\) is even worse for Black.
15.f5±
Intending g4-g5.

C) 7...d6

This is the main line by far, and requires careful handling.

8.f4!
There are thousands of games after 8.c4 g6. The general consensus is that White has slightly better chances, but Black has a lot of options - and often what matters more is who is more experienced and better understands these types of slow manoeuvring positions. The kingside fianchetto works well because there is very little pressure on the d6-pawn, and White’s hopes of launching a kingside offensive are almost completely neutralized.

I feel that it is more in the spirit of our repertoire to aim for a more aggressive set-up. In some lines, it may not seem immediately obvious why 8.f4 is much different from 8.c4, but the key point is that we want to force Black to develop the dark-squared bishop to e7. After that, our attacking aspirations on the kingside are much more realistic. And as we will soon see, if Black stubbornly tries to continue with the ...g6 plan anyway, we will have some tricks in store.

We will consider C1) 8...g6 and C2) 8...bd7.

8...e7 can be met by 9.c4 with a likely transposition to the 8...bd7 lines.

8...c6 9.xc6 bxc6
I am generally not a fan of this structure for Black, and this is no exception.

10.d2 e5
It’s hard to imagine Black being able to avoid this move for much longer.

11.b3!? e7
11...exf4 is well met by 12.c4!N, intending to take back on f4 with the bishop.

12.b2 0–0
A more recent example continued: 12...e6 13.h1 a5 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.e4 xc4 16.xc4 d7 17.h5± Wei Yi – Galego, Gibraltar 2014.

13.fxe5!
13.h1 exf4 14.xf4 d7 is not so clear.

13...dxe5 14.h1
14.c4N d7 15.c3 might also offer White an edge, but there is no real need for White to deviate.
White should be happy to proceed with a more pleasant structure. Possible plans include \( \text{c4} \), \( a4-a5 \) or even \( \text{c3-a5} \). If Black plays \( ...a5 \) himself then the pawn will become a target, as demonstrated exquisitely by Geller in the following game:

14...\( a5 \) 15.\( \text{c4} \) \( d7 \) 16.\( a4 \) \( h8 \) 17.\( \text{c3}! \) \( f6 \)
17...\( b4 \) 18.\( \text{xb4} \) \( axb4 \) 19.\( \text{e1} \) gives White a protected passed pawn, and the b-pawn still needs to be defended.

18.\( \text{d2} \) \( d8 \) 19.\( \text{ad1} \)
Black was severely tied down in E. Geller – Hort, Sousse 1967.

**C1) 8...g6**

This is certainly provocative but the onus is on White to prove something against it; I decided to cover two interesting attempts. **C11) 9.f5?!** is an obvious move to consider, even though it may seem unsophisticated. **C12) 9.\( \text{c3}?! \)**, on the other hand, involves a tactical skirmish leading to a simplified position which bears little resemblance to a normal Sicilian. I rather like White’s chances in both lines, but there is certainly a lot more to be discovered in both of them.

**C11) 9.f5?!**

This leads to a more typical Sicilian scenario.

**9.\( \text{g7} \)**

9...e5N is extremely committal, and 10.fxg6 \( hxg6 \) 11.\( \text{b5} \) axb5 12.\( \text{xf6} \) looks good for White.

9...\( \text{e7} \) looks weird after \( ...g6 \), and White gets an easy initiative with 10.fxe6 followed by \( \text{h6} \).

**10.\( \text{g5}?N \)**

I want to maintain the tension while increasing the pressure on the f6-knight.

Most games have continued:

10.\( \text{fxe6} \) \( \text{fxe6} \)
10...\( \text{xe6} \) 11.\( \text{f5}! \) is trouble for Black.
11.\( \text{c4} \) \( \text{c6} \! \)
11...\( \text{c5} \) 12.c3 b5 13.\( \text{b3} \) e5 14.\( \text{e3}N \)
15.\( \text{xd4} \) 15.\( \text{xd4} \) \( \text{h5} \) 16.\( \text{c2} \) looks scary for Black; a sample line is 16...\( \text{xd7} \) 17.\( \text{h3} \) \( \text{xh3} \)
18.\( \text{c3} \) \( \text{d7} \) 19.\( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 20.\( \text{d5} \) \( \text{g5} \)
21.\( \text{d2} \) with domination!
Unfortunately, the text move dampens White’s initiative.

12.\( \text{e3} \)
12.\( \text{xe6}?! \) is refuted by 12...\( \text{xe6} \) 13.\( \text{xe6} \) \( \text{d4} \) and Black wins a piece.
12...\( \text{xd4} \) 13.\( \text{xd4} \) 0–0
The position is approximately equal.

**10.\( \text{0–0} \) 11.\( \text{d2} \)**
I also considered $11.f_g6$ $f_xg6$ $12.\text{Qxd2}$, but found that $12...e_5$ ($12...d_7$ $13.\text{Qc4}$ $e_5$ $14.\text{Qc3}$ $e_8$ looks weird but might also be solid enough) $13.\text{Qc4}$ $\text{h8}$ is okay for Black. The main point is:

$$\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & \\
& a & b & c & d & e & f & g \\
\hline
1 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
2 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
3 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
4 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
5 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
6 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
7 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
8 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{array}$$

$14.\text{Qe6}$ $\text{xg6}$ $15.\text{xg6}$ $\text{bxd7}$ Unfortunately, we can’t keep the light-squared bishop alive, otherwise this would have been a great position. $16.c3$ $d_5$ $17.\text{b3}$ $x_b3$ $18.axb3$ White still has some hopes connected with the $d5$-square and the bad bishop on $g7$, but it’s not much.

$$\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & \\
& a & b & c & d & e & f & g \\
\hline
1 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
2 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
3 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
4 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
5 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
6 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
7 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
8 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{array}$$

$11...e_5$? $12.\text{Qxc6}$ $\text{xc6}$

$$\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & \\
& a & b & c & d & e & f & g \\
\hline
1 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
2 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
3 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
4 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
5 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
6 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
7 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
8 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{array}$$

$13.e_5!$ $\text{dxe5}$ $14.\text{Qxf6}$ $\text{xf6}$ $15.f_g6$ $f_g6$ $16.\text{Qc4}$ $g_7$ $17.\text{Qf8}$ $\text{h1}$ Followed by $\text{Qf1}$ with a crushing initiative on the kingside, while Black isn’t even developed.

$11...gxf5$? $12.exf5$ $e_5$ would be a serious mistake due to $13.\text{Qxf6}$ $\text{xf6}$ $14.\text{Qe4}$, for instance:

$$\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & \\
& a & b & c & d & e & f & g \\
\hline
1 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
2 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
3 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
4 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
5 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
6 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
7 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
8 & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{array}$$

$14...\text{c7}$ (or $14...\text{d7}$ $15.\text{Qh5}$ $\text{h8}$ $16.\text{Qb3}$ $\text{g8}$ $17.\text{d6}$) $15.\text{Qxf6}$ $\text{h8}$ $16.\text{Qf8}$ $\text{h1}$ (15.$\text{Qh5}$ $\text{f8}$ is another winning move) $15...\text{Qxf6}$ $16.\text{Qe6}$! and White is winning.

Finally, $11...\text{exf5}$ $12.exf5$ can be explored in more detail, but White does not have much to prove here. Black, on the other hand, needs to show if he can really equalize with an inferior structure and lack of development. $12...\text{c6}$ $13.\text{Qxc6}$ $\text{xc6}$ $14.\text{f2}$ is a brief sample line, with an obvious edge for White.
Chapter 10 - 6...\text{\textbf{c}7}  
225

12.\text{\textbf{d}4b3} \text{\textbf{b}d7}  
We have reached a critical position in which both sides have different plans available. Black has stabilized his kingside, but the \ldots\text{\textbf{e}5} move has rendered the g7-bishop useless for the foreseeable future. Having achieved all we can on the kingside for the time being, I came up with a plan to improve White’s prospects on the opposite flank.

13.\text{\textbf{a}4!}  
Getting a bind with a4-a5 would be nice, so Black’s next move is an obvious answer.

13...\text{\textbf{b}6}  
13...\text{\textbf{h}6} 14.\text{\textbf{e}e3} only weakens Black’s kingside.

14.\text{\textbf{a}5!} \text{\textbf{b}5}  
After 14...\text{\textbf{b}b7} 15.\text{\textbf{axb6}} \text{\textbf{wb6}}\uparrow 16.\text{\textbf{h}h1} White is ready to take over the queenside with \text{\textbf{c}c4} followed by plonking one of the knights on a5.

15.\text{\textbf{c}4!} \text{\textbf{b}4}  
15...\text{\textbf{bxc4}} 16.\text{\textbf{xc}c4} \text{\textbf{b}b7} 17.\text{\textbf{ac}1} \text{\textbf{wb}8} 18.\text{\textbf{h}h1}\uparrow

16.\text{\textbf{c}5!}  
A key move which poses serious problems for Black.

16...\text{\textbf{d}xc5}  
16...\text{\textbf{xc}c5} is no better: 17.\text{\textbf{ac}1} \text{\textbf{b}b7} (17...\text{\textbf{a}a7} 18.\text{\textbf{xc}c5} \text{\textbf{d}xc5} 19.\text{\textbf{e}e3}*) 18.\text{\textbf{xc}c5} \text{\textbf{d}xc5} 19.\text{\textbf{b}b3}\uparrow

17.\text{\textbf{ac}1} \text{\textbf{b}b7} 18.\text{\textbf{e}e3}  
Black’s position is highly unpleasant. White does not have to hurry to regain the pawn, and can continue to build up on the kingside, especially if the rook moves away from f8.

C12) 9.\text{\textbf{c}c3}?  

This move is based on a concrete plan involving \text{\textbf{d}b5} and \text{\textbf{e}4-e5}. On the one hand it’s a flashy approach, but correct play results in a more stable structure with a lot of positional nuances.

9...\text{\textbf{g}7}  
9...\text{\textbf{c}c6}?! has never been played, and 10.\text{\textbf{xc}c6} \text{\textbf{bxc6}} 11.\text{\textbf{e}e5} indeed looks ugly for Black.

10.\text{\textbf{e}5} \text{\textbf{dxe5}}  
10...\text{\textbf{f}fd7}? is as dodgy as it looks: 11.\text{\textbf{db}5!} \text{\textbf{axb5}} 12.\text{\textbf{xb5}} \text{\textbf{d}d8} 13.\text{\textbf{xd}6\uparrow} \text{\textbf{f}f8} 14.\text{\textbf{e}e3} \text{\textbf{c}c6}
15.\texttt{Rd1}N (15.a3 gave White good compensation in \textbf{Wan Junguo – Sadorra}, Las Vegas 2014, but why play such a move? It's not as if Black will ever be able to capture the a2-pawn.) 15...\texttt{g8} (Okay, if you want to see proof of the last statement: 15...\texttt{xa2}? 16.\texttt{c4} \texttt{xb2} 17.\texttt{xf7!} \texttt{xf7} 18.\texttt{f5+}) 16.\texttt{e4±}

11.\texttt{fxe5} \texttt{d7} 12.\texttt{xf7?} (12.\texttt{e4?} N \texttt{xe5} 13.\texttt{xf6}+ \texttt{xf6} 14.\texttt{xf6} could be compensation, but it's far from clear) 12...\texttt{xf7} 13.\texttt{xe6} This attempt to blast Black off the board looks fascinating, but Black can eat everything;

15.\texttt{c3}
Chapter 10 – 6...\textit{\textbf{Cc7}}

15.\textit{\textbf{Wf2}} \textit{\textbf{Cg7}} 16.\textit{\textbf{Wf4}} looks pointless due to 16...\textit{\textbf{Ce5}} 17.\textit{\textbf{Ce3}} \textit{\textbf{Ca6}} as in Shyam – Karthikeyan, Nagpur 2015.

15...\textit{\textbf{Cg7}}
15...\textit{\textbf{Cd7}}N should be met by 16.a4 when I don't see anything better for Black then transposing to variation C122 with 16...\textit{\textbf{Cg7}}.

16.a4!
16.\textit{\textbf{Ce3}} has been played a couple of times, and was the move order of the Sanchez Sandoval – Perez Gormaz game which is quoted briefly in the comments to variation C122. Despite this and other potential transpositions, we will soon see that there is a good reason to advance the a-pawn before developing the bishop.

We will analyse C121) 16...\textit{\textbf{Ca6}}N and C122) 16...\textit{\textbf{Cd7}}.!

16...\textit{\textbf{Ce5}} and 16...\textit{\textbf{Cc6}} are both strongly met by 17.b3!, which is why I wanted to hold the bishop on c1 for another move.

C121) 16...\textit{\textbf{Ca6}}N

This has yet to be tested but it seems like an obvious move to consider.

17.\textit{\textbf{Ce3}}!
I want to play against the a6-knight.

17.b3 is not so effective here due to 17...\textit{\textbf{Cc5}} 18.\textit{\textbf{Ca3}} b6 19.a5 \textit{\textbf{Cb7}}! and the complications are not unfavourable to Black.

17.\textit{\textbf{Cf4}} e5 18.b4 \textit{\textbf{Cd8}} 19.\textit{\textbf{Cc2}} \textit{\textbf{Cc7}} is also at least equal for Black.

17...\textit{\textbf{Cc5}}
17...\textit{\textbf{Cc7}} 18.\textit{\textbf{Cf2}}! gives Black nothing better than crawling back to a6 with the knight.

17...\textit{\textbf{Cd7}} resembles variation C122, which I believe to be Black’s best try. However, in this position we have more useful ways to spend a tempo than by playing a4-a5. I propose:

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=10cm]{chess_board.png}
\end{center}

18.b4! (18.\textit{\textbf{Ce4}} \textit{\textbf{Cc5}} 19.\textit{\textbf{Cc2}} is another idea, hoping to gain time with b2-b4, but it gives Black a chance to improve or exchange his knight with 19...\textit{\textbf{Ce5}} or even 19...\textit{\textbf{f5}}?) 18...\textit{\textbf{Cc6}} 19.\textit{\textbf{b6}}\textbf{?}+ Continuing to limit the prospects of the a6-knight, which is our main strategy.

Another obvious candidate is:

17...\textit{\textbf{Ce5}}
Playing this voluntarily isn’t the most pleasant decision for Black; now we can continue exerting pressure on all sides.

18.\textit{\textbf{f4}}
18.\(\text{c4}\) \(\text{e6}\) 19.\(\text{fbl}!!\) is also perfectly reasonable – it is a matter of taste whether to stick the pawn on b4 immediately or postpone it for a few moves.

White clearly has the more dangerous pawn majority.

18...\(\text{c6}\) 19.\(\text{c4}\) \(\text{fc8}\)

19...\(\text{xc4}\) 20.\(\text{xc4}\) \(\text{xc8}\) 21.\(\text{wa2}\) \(\text{c6}\)

(21...\(\text{c7}\) 22.\(\text{c5}!\) 22.\(\text{xc5}\) \(\text{xe8}\) 23.\(\text{fcl}\))

20.\(\text{xe6}\) \(\text{xe6}\) 21.\(\text{fcl}\) \(\text{c6}\)

21...\(\text{c7}\) 22.\(\text{d6}\)\(\text{e}!\) practically forces Black to give up the exchange with 22...\(\text{d5}\).

22.\(\text{a5}\) \(\text{xc5}\)

18.\(\text{c2}\) \(\text{c5}\) 19.\(\text{b4}\) \(\text{a6}\)

Unfortunately for Black, 19...\(\text{e6}\) 20.\(\text{b3}\)\(\text{e}!\) comes with the annoying threat of \(\text{xe6}\), winning the exchange for dubious compensation.

20.\(\text{b3}\)

White should be able to continue exerting pressure forever.

20...\(\text{e6}\) 21.\(\text{a2}\) \(\text{xb3}\) 22.\(\text{xb3}\) \(\text{a4}\)

22...\(\text{h8}\) 23.\(\text{ad1}\) \(\text{f5}\) is too slow: 24.\(\text{d6}\)\(\text{e}!\)

22...\(\text{f8}\) 23.\(\text{b6}\) \(\text{d7}\) 24.\(\text{ad1}\) and White keeps control.

22...\(\text{e4}\) 23.\(\text{ad1}\) \(\text{a8}\) does not change much. A good continuation is:

23.\(\text{d6}\)\(\text{e}!\) 24.\(\text{xc7}\)

24.\(\text{xc6}\) \(\text{xc6}\) 25.\(\text{xc7}\) \(\text{xc7}\) 26.\(\text{b6}\)

\(\text{xe7}\) (26...\(\text{xc3}\) 27.\(\text{b2}\)\(\text{e}!\)\(\text{e}!\)) 27.b5\(\text{e}!\) is also promising.

24...\(\text{xc7}\) 25.\(\text{c4}\)

White clearly has the more dangerous pawn majority.

24.\(\text{c4}?!\) (24.\(\text{c4}?!\) and 24.\(\text{xd8}\) \(\text{xf8}\) 25.\(\text{c4}\)
could also be considered) The last move is based on a small tactical finesse: 24..\text{c8}
25.\text{d5} \text{c8} 26.\text{g5}+\text{c7}

![Chessboard image]

23.\text{ad}1 \text{fd}8 24.\text{d5}!
White is in full control.

C122) 16...\text{d7}!

![Chessboard image]

This is the most precise way to develop. Black prepares to put his bishop on c6 while keeping a few options open for his knight. White has two main ways to play against it. We can try to provoke ...e5 with \text{f4}, and play in the spirit of the previous variation. The difference here is that White would be losing a tempo, so the question is whether or not it really changes the overall evaluation. On the other hand, we can also continue just developing normally and challenge Black to find a better plan than ...e5. How exactly does he plan on completing his development and obtaining counterplay?

17.\text{e3}?!N
17.b3 \text{xb5} 18.\text{xb5} \text{xc3} 19.\text{a3} \text{b4} 20.\text{b2} might give White adequate compensation, but is not really a serious try for an advantage.

The alternative I looked at more closely is:
17.\text{f4}

This was Wei Yi's choice. As mentioned above, White sacrifices a tempo in order to force Black's hand in playing ...e5. Black's ...\text{d7} is hardly the most useful way to spend a tempo, and the lost time shouldn't matter much in the long run. On the other hand, Black does have a few extra short-term resources - although their effect on the overall evaluation of the position is still not clear.

17...e5
17...\text{xb5}?! 18.axb5 is pleasant for White.
18.\text{b4}

Neither 18.\text{ael} \text{xa4} nor 18.\text{c4} \text{e6} is anything great for White.
18.\text{e3} \text{e6} (18...\text{a6} 19.\text{c4}) 19.\text{b4} \text{c8} 20.\text{c5} \text{xc5}! 21.bxc5 \text{a6} gives Black excellent compensation.

![Chessboard image]

18...\text{c8}?!N
In the game Black failed to do anything
with his extra tempo, and White effortlessly achieved a clear advantage: 18...\(\text{a6}\) 19.\(\text{a}1\) \(\text{a}8\) 20.\(\text{c}4\) \(\text{c}6\) 21.\(\text{c}3\) e4 22.\(\text{a}2\)± Wei Yi – Artemiev, Chongqing 2013.

The text move is the right way to make use of the free ...\(\text{a}7\) move. Black puts some pressure on the c3-pawn and may consider giving up the exchange in response to the typical \(\text{e}3\)-\(\text{c}5\).

19.\(\text{a}1\) \(\text{a}4\)

19...\(\text{c}6\) 20.\(\text{c}3\) \(\text{d}8\) 21.\(\text{c}5\) \(\text{xc}5\) 22.\(\text{xc}5\) \(\text{xc}5\)† 23.\(\text{f}2\) is a possible version of the exchange sacrifice. It’s hard to say for sure if the endgame is a draw, but White is the only one with realistic winning chances.

19...\(\text{f}6\)?! 20.\(\text{a}5\) is another possible direction, with a complicated position.

20.\(\text{xc}5\) \(\text{xc}5\) 21.\(\text{xc}5\) \(\text{xe}5\) 22.\(\text{xe}5\) \(\text{e}6\) 23.\(\text{xe}3\)

The endgame looks fairly drawish, but Black is not yet fully equal.

17...\(\text{c}6\)

18.\(\text{d}4\) was played in Sanchez Sandoval – PerezGormaz, Valdivia 2016, when 18...\(\text{d}5\)N would have been fine for Black.

I checked the immediate 18.\(\text{a}7\) but it’s not so great after 18...\(\text{d}5\), as Black’s knight is suddenly perfectly placed on b8 – so it’s better to keep the knight jump in reserve for the moment.

18...\(\text{a}6!\)

The alternative knight development gives White an easier life:

18...\(\text{d}7\) 19.\(\text{a}7!\) \(\text{d}5\)

Simply giving up the light-squared bishop with 19...\(\text{e}5\) 20.\(\text{xc}6\) \(\text{xc}6\) 21.\(\text{b}6\) looks unpleasant for Black. It remains hard for him to push the kingside pawns, while White is ready to roll on the queenside.

18.\(\text{a}5\)N

Due to a transposition, we get to play our second novelty in a row. Since Black has not played ...e5 here, it’s not so easy for us to play b2-b4. However, we do have the possibility of \(\text{a}7\) to annoy Black at any moment.

20.\(\text{c}4\)? \(\text{c}6\) 21.\(\text{xc}6\) bxc6

Ideally I would prefer the pawn back on c3 of course, but it seems to me that opening the long diagonal for the g7-bishop is less significant than our strong queenside pawns supported by the light-squared bishop.

22.\(\text{e}4\) \(\text{f}c8\) 23.\(\text{a}6\) f5

23...\(\text{c}5\) 24.\(\text{xf7}\)! \(\text{xf7}\) 25.\(\text{xc}5\)± is a good exchange sacrifice.

24.\(\text{f}3\) e5 25.\(\text{g}4\)?! e4 26.\(\text{g}2\)

The position remains complicated, but Black seems to be teetering on the edge.

26...\(\text{cb}8\) 27.\(\text{a}2\)±
The knight on a6 is better placed to help Black handle the plan in the above note. Nevertheless, White should go for it anyway.

19.\(\text{\textit{d7}}\) \(\text{\textit{d5}}\)
19...\(\text{\textit{d7}}\) 20.\(\text{\textit{b6}}\)

20.\(\text{\textit{c4}}\)
20.\(\text{\textit{b6}}\) maintains the tension while keeping our options open. A plausible continuation is: 20...f5 (20...\(\text{\textit{c5}}\) 21.\(\text{\textit{b5}}\) also seems fairly promising for White, though it requires further analysis)

21.\(\text{\textit{ad1}}\) (21.\(\text{\textit{c4}}\) \(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 22.\(\text{\textit{xc6}}\) \(\text{\textit{bxc6}}\) gives White a slightly worse version of the 20.\(\text{\textit{c4}}\) line, as his bishop is unable to get to the h1-a8 diagonal so easily) 21...\(\text{\textit{c5}}\) 22.\(\text{\textit{b5}}\) White continues to exert pressure, although the knight on a7 could be a worrying factor. It is worth adding that 22...\(\text{\textit{b3}}\) is of no concern as 23.\(\text{\textit{e3}}!\) is a good reply.

20...\(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 21.\(\text{\textit{xc6}}\) \(\text{\textit{bxc6}}\)

Compared with the 18...\(\text{\textit{d7}}\) line in the notes above, Black’s knight is better off on a6, but he still won’t have an easy time dealing with White’s two bishops and queenside pawns. Speaking of bishops, White should take the opportunity to improve one of them:

22.\(\text{\textit{e4}}!\) \(\text{\textit{f8}}\) 23.\(\text{\textit{f3}}\)
White can put the other bishop on b6 and continue pressing for a long time. Advancing the central/kingside pawns might weaken Black, especially if the bishops can go to work on the kingside while the knight is stranded on a6. It is worth keeping in mind the possibility of g2-g4 in response to ...\(\text{\textit{e5}}\) and ...\(\text{\textit{f5}}\). At the same time, while it’s clear that White has the easier game, it may well be that Black is okay with accurate defence. However, we have already explored these positions quite a bit (not to mention the alternative option of 9.\(\text{\textit{f5}}!\)) and since White takes little risk here, it should be a pleasant position to play.

\(\text{\textit{C2}}\) 8...\(\text{\textit{bd7}}\)
This is the most natural move. It looks as though Black is remaining flexible on the kingside, but actually he won’t be able to play ...g6 and ...Ag7 for tactical reasons. Thus he will be forced to put his bishop on e7 which, as I mentioned before, enables us to act more ambitiously on the kingside.

9.c4 Ae7

9...b6 is likely to transpose but the text move is a tad more flexible, as Black keeps the option of playing ...b5 in one move – just in case.

9...g6?

This is virtually unplayable with the knight on d7 because of the typical retort:

10.f5!

10.\text{\texttt{c3}} gives Black time for 10...g7 11.f5 \text{\texttt{e5}} with an unclear game.

10...e5

10...\text{\texttt{e5}}? is obviously not possible as 11.fx6 hits the knight on f6.

10...gx5 11.exf5 e5 gives White a pleasant choice between 12.\text{\texttt{e6}}? and the simple 12.\text{\texttt{c3}} \text{\texttt{g7}} 13.\text{\texttt{b3}}.

Black is so stuck that it is hard to see him getting into the game at all.

10.b3!?

This interesting move order was suggested by my trainer, Vladimir Chuchelov. The usual continuation is 10.\text{\texttt{c3}}, but then b2-b3 will give Black the annoying option of ...b5. Therefore White usually follows up with \texttt{d2} and \texttt{ae1}, hoping to build an attack with e4-e5 or perhaps g4-g5. However, I get the impression that in most games White just switches from one plan to another without a clear, coherent picture of what he wants to do. I prefer to start by putting the bishop on b2, and will say a bit more about White’s subsequent plans after the next move.

10...0–0

10...h5? has been played a few times, but is essentially a pointless move which creates too many weaknesses.

10...\text{\texttt{c5}}N should obviously be met by 11.\text{\texttt{c2}}, as the bishop could prove a vital piece for our future attack. 11...e5? is Black’s only real attempt to cause problems, but 12.f5! (12.fx5? \texttt{g4}! 13.\texttt{e1} dxe5 14.\texttt{f5} \texttt{xf5} 15.exf5 0–0–0?) 12...\texttt{xf5} 13.exf5 0–0 14.g4 gives White excellent attacking prospects.

11.\text{\texttt{b2}}
Before analysing any further, I would like to give you a clear idea of the plans, which should enable you to play the position without having to memorize too many lines. White’s general plan is to attack on the kingside, as should be obvious — and with that in mind, the dark-squared bishop is perfectly placed on b2. Even if the long diagonal gets blocked after e4-e5, the bishop still helps by reinforcing the central pawn and supporting ideas like lile4-f6†. After White completes development with lile3 and llace1, Black will have to figure out a way to prevent or take the sting out of e4-e5.

Assuming Black finds some way to discourage e4-e5, we will have to improve our position in some other way. One common plan is g4-g5, but I am not sure if I like it too much with the bishop on b2. It seems much more natural for me to consider ideas like lide3, which not only supports e4-e5, but also creates new threats like lide5, just prodding Black until he weakens himself or makes some other mistake. We can also consider ideas like lide1 and lide2, or some other regroupings based on whatever weakness Black may present us with.

Although these plans have been implemented in some games, they often involve different move orders, with some slight inaccuracies along the way. Therefore in the following pages I will largely rely on my own analysis to show the ideas, rather than existing games.

The two most important options are C21) 11...lde8? and C22) 11...b6.

Pointless is: 11...lde5 12.lle2 e5N (12...g6 has been played, but after 13.lle3 there is no reason why the c5-knight should be useful) 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.lle3 The plan of lle3-d5 will be unpleasant for Black to deal with. White’s idea, of course, is to recapture with the e-pawn, when both bishops will be perfectly placed.

C21) 11...lde8?  

Black can try postponing ...b6, but there is no other good way to develop the c8-bishop. The only serious extra option revolves around playing ...b5.

12.lle3 b5N  

12...b6 13.lle1 will surely transpose to variation C22 within a few moves.

12...lde8 13.lle1 g6 14.e5 lhe5 was a dubious plan from Black in Degraeve – Chuchelov, Cappelle la Grande 1995. White has several good moves, but perhaps the simplest is 15.lle2N± intending g2-g4.

13.cx b5  

13.lde1 b4 (or 13...bxc4 14.lle4 lde7 15.lle1) 14.lle1 could be considered, but I prefer the main line.
We have reached a critical position. Black is structurally okay and I am not sure what the knight is doing on a4 — but we can utilize our active pieces to launch a dangerous attack.

14...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}xh6}}

14...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}xa4}}? leads to interesting tactics but Black can maintain the balance: 14...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}xd4}} 15.e5! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe5! (15...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}a7}} 16.exf6 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xf6 17.a4! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}b7 18.a5\ldots) 16.ae4 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}a7 17.a7xf6! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xf6 18.fx e5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe5 19.a xe5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe5 20.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe5 axb5 21.axb5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}d8 22.a4 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}b7=

14...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}xb6}} 15.a4 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}a7}}

We have reached a critical position. Black is structurally okay and I am not sure what the knight is doing on a4 — but we can utilize our active pieces to launch a dangerous attack.

16.e5! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}d5 17.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}h1} \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}b7 18.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}h5}!

It's tempting to stop here and say that it's a strong attack, but I couldn't resist checking a bit more deeply. The following lines are not intended for you to memorize, but rather to inspire and show you the kinds of resources that are available in such positions.

18...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}f8}}

The alternative is:
18...g6 19.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}h3}}!

This can lead to some amazing variations.
19...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe5 20.fxe5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe5

21.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe6! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe6 22.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe6\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}xe6 23.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}e6!+-

21...hxg6 may be objectively best, but
22.a4! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{W}}}h4!
26.\text{c}c7 \text{c}c8
This is the computer's top choice – at least until it understands what is in store.
27.\text{c}c3 \text{b}b8 28.\text{c}c4 \text{g}h8

29.f8\text{t}! \text{g}g7 30.f7\text{t} \text{h}h6 31.c1\text{g}5 32.h8\text{t} \text{x}h8 33.f6\text{t}++

A little too long, a little too detailed – but it was an elegant line which shows White’s considerable attacking potential. Note the remote placement of Black’s queen and rook, neither of which contributed anything to the defence.

19.f3!
I also considered 19.eae1 but found 19...g6! to be quite unclear.

19.f3 looks tempting but does not quite work after: 19...dxe5 20.fx\text{e}6 f6! 21.f7\text{t} \text{h}h8

22.g5 \text{xe}6! 23.e4 (23.xe6 \text{f}8 backfires on White) 23...\text{d}c7 and Black is safe.

19...g6 20.h6 dxe5 21.fxe5 \text{d}b4

We are already past the normal limits of opening preparation, considering that Black’s 12th move has never been played. However, I’d just like to mention two contrasting ways to continue playing, without going into great depth.
(23...\text{xf6}?? 24.exf6 leads to an immediate mate) 24.\text{c6}!

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{a} & \text{b} & \text{c} & \text{d} & \text{e} & \text{f} & \text{g} & \text{h} \\
\hline
\text{8} & \text{7} & \text{6} & \text{5} & \text{4} & \text{3} & \text{2} & \text{1} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

24...\text{xf6}! 25.\text{xa7} \text{g7} 26.\text{we3} \text{fd7} 27.\text{c5} \text{xc5} 28.\text{xc5} \text{ed8} 29.\text{xe5} \text{xe5} 30.\text{we5} \text{xa7} 31.\text{h3}!

22.\text{xd3} 23.\text{xd3} \text{e4} 24.\text{d2}

Intending \text{f1}, with continuing pressure.

C22) 11...b6 12.\text{c3} \text{b7} 13.\text{ae1}

15.\text{d2}N (Motylev chose 15.\text{f3}, which is also good for White, but I would prefer to keep the third rank clear for a rook lift) 15...\text{fe8} 16.\text{e3}!±

C221) 13...g6

This is a standard prophylactic move, ensuring that the h7-pawn will not come under fire after a future e4-e5.

13...\text{fd8} 14.\text{h1} \text{f8} 15.\text{f3} does not require special analysis, as White's ideas will remain the same. I will just add that most experts on Black's side tend to prefer the rook on e8, as it reinforces the e6-pawn and shadows White's queen.

13...\text{c5} 14.\text{h1} \text{h5} seems a weird place for the queen. (14...\text{xd4}?? loses to 15.\text{a4} of course; 14...\text{ad8} 15.f5!±)

13...\text{xc5} 14.\text{h1} \text{h5} seems a weird place for the queen. (14...\text{xd4}?? loses to 15.\text{a4} of course; 14...\text{ad8} 15.f5!±)

13...\text{xc5} 14.\text{h1} \text{h5} seems a weird place for the queen. (14...\text{xd4}?? loses to 15.\text{a4} of course; 14...\text{ad8} 15.f5!±)

13...\text{xc5} 14.\text{h1} \text{h5} seems a weird place for the queen. (14...\text{xd4}?? loses to 15.\text{a4} of course; 14...\text{ad8} 15.f5!±)
14.\textit{\textbf{Q}}h1 \textit{\textbf{Q}}e8

As usual, there are many options, but in most cases we will go for approximately the same plans as mentioned in the comments to White's 11th move on page 233.

14...\textit{\textbf{R}}ad8 15.\textit{\textbf{Q}}f3\textit{N} The simplest. (15.\textit{\textbf{f}}5?! is also decent, intending 15...e5 16.\textit{\textbf{Q}}f3) 15...\textit{\textbf{Q}}h5 There aren't many sensible plans for Black which don't involve ...\textit{\textbf{Q}}fe8. This knight move is one such idea, but it is easy enough to meet. 16.\textit{\textbf{Q}}e3

16.\textit{\textbf{Q}}f6 (16...\textit{\textbf{Q}}fe8 17.\textit{\textbf{Q}}g5! \textit{\textbf{Q}}xg5 18.fxg5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xg5 19.\textit{\textbf{Q}}e2 \textit{\textbf{Q}}g7 20.\textit{\textbf{Q}}a4\pm) 17.\textit{\textbf{Q}}g4 \textit{\textbf{Q}}g7 18.\textit{\textbf{Q}}g5 Black faces an unpleasant choice: he must either trade off his dark-squared bishop for a knight, or retreat to e7 and face a powerful attack after f4-f5.

14...e5 is committal, though not altogether bad. A sensible reply is: 15.\textit{\textbf{Q}}f3?! (15.\textit{\textbf{f}}xe5 dxe5N 16.\textit{\textbf{c}}c2 [16.\textit{\textbf{Q}}f3 \textit{\textbf{Q}}b4\textit{\textbf{f}}] 16...\textit{\textbf{Q}}c5 I don't like to give up the light-squared bishop, although White is perhaps still better.) 15...\textit{\textbf{c}}xf4 16.\textit{\textbf{d}}d5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xg5 17.\textit{\textbf{Q}}xg5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}f6 18.\textit{\textbf{Q}}xf6 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xf6 19.\textit{\textbf{d}}d2 \textit{\textbf{Q}}h5 20.\textit{\textbf{c}}c4 \textit{\textbf{Q}}ae8 21.\textit{\textbf{f}}xe8 (21.\textit{\textbf{c}}c2\textit{\textbf{N}}) 21...\textit{\textbf{c}}xe8 22.\textit{\textbf{c}}c2\pm White wins back the pawn while keeping some initiative, Mueller – Gruenberg, Germany 1992.

15.\textit{\textbf{Q}}f3!! \textit{\textbf{R}}ad8

15...d5? is wildly premature: 16.cxd5 exd5 17.e5\pm

15...\textit{\textbf{c}}8 16.e5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}h5 17.\textit{\textbf{Q}}g5! was dangerous for Black in Panchenko – K. Berg, Tallinn 1986.

16.\textit{\textbf{Q}}g5\textit{N} The knight lunge is hard to resist.

That said, 16.\textit{\textbf{B}}b1 is a good alternative, which actually transposes to a line on page 238 – see 15...g6 16.\textit{\textbf{Q}}f3 in the notes to variation C222 below.

16...h6

16...\textit{\textbf{f}}8 17.e5! is strong, based on 17...dxe5 18.fxe5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xe5 19.\textit{\textbf{B}}b5!.

17.\textit{\textbf{Q}}xf7?!

This is just too tempting, but White could also calmly retreat the knight to f3 or h3 and continue probing on the kingside.

17...\textit{\textbf{Q}}xf7 18.\textit{\textbf{B}}b1?\textit{\textbf{f}}

18.e5 is the obvious move, but after 18...dxe5 19.\textit{\textbf{f}}xe5 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xe5 20.\textit{\textbf{Q}}c4 \textit{\textbf{Q}}xe4 21.\textit{\textbf{Q}}x e4 \textit{\textbf{Q}}h5 Black somehow survives.

The text move leaves Black in a tough situation, with different pawn breaks and piece manoeuvres to keep an eye on. The whole thing just seems unpleasant to play for Black, while White's play with the 'slow sacrifice' just looks so cool.
C222) 13...\textit{\textbf{c}ad8}

This is similar to the previous line, but there is a slight benefit for Black in delaying ...g6.

14.\textit{\textbf{g}h1}

As usual, it is worth tucking the king away before committing to a plan.

I briefly considered 14.g4?! on the basis that 14...g6?! 15.g5 \textit{\textbf{c}h}5 16.f5! is great for White. However, I rejected it because 14...d5 leads to messy play where Black’s chances are not worse.

14.f5 has been tested a few times but 14...e5 seems unnecessarily complicated, for instance: 15.\textit{\textbf{c}c}2 b5±

14...\textit{\textbf{f}e}8 15.\textit{\textbf{b}b}1!

I really like this move. It’s too early to commit to a definite plan right now, so White tucks the bishop out of the way and gives himself the option of \textit{\textbf{c}c}2 to attack h7 later. Compare the note below to see why this is so useful.

15.\textit{\textbf{f}f}3 h6! is surprisingly hard to crack. Now the f3-knight is useless, and White is left wishing he could somehow provoke ...g6 to make a real target on the kingside. 16.g4 d5 would be too messy for my taste, while if 16.\textit{\textbf{b}b}1, hoping to provoke a weakness by threatening \textit{\textbf{c}c}2 and e4-e5, Black can defend with the subtle 16...\textit{\textbf{h}h}7! intending ...\textit{\textbf{f}f}8.

15...\textit{\textbf{f}f}8

This is the most flexible choice, postponing any pawn moves on the kingside.

15...g6 allows us to resume our normal plan: 16.\textit{\textbf{f}f}3 (there is also 16.\textit{\textbf{e}e}1 or 16.f5) 16...\textit{\textbf{h}h}5 (16...h6N 17.e5 \textit{\textbf{h}h}5 18.\textit{\textbf{d}d}e4±) In Mamedov – S. Kovacevic, Benasque 2007, White’s easiest continuation would have been:

17.\textit{\textbf{d}d}2 (or 17.\textit{\textbf{c}c}3?!N) and it’s still not clear what Black is doing – while White’s kingside intentions are obvious.

16.\textit{\textbf{f}f}3 g6

This seems like the natural choice.

The other pawn move runs into problems: 16...h6 17.e5

Unlike the earlier note to White’s 15th move, the f8-square isn’t available to the black knight! That said, 17.\textit{\textbf{c}c}2?!N± might be even simpler. After ...g6 we can start experimenting with \textit{\textbf{h}h}4 ideas.

17.\textit{\textbf{x}x}f3N

This seems a better try than 17...\textit{\textbf{h}h}7 when, in Trois – Rubinetti, Buenos Aires 1979, White could have got a clear advantage.
with: 18.\(\text{c}5\) 19.\(\text{fxe}5\)

19.\(\text{exd}6\) 20.\(\text{c}6\) 21.\(\text{b}4\) 22.\(\text{d}7\)

18.\(\text{xf}3\) \(\text{dxe}5\) 19.\(\text{fxe}5\) \(\text{g}4\)

This was the game continuation, at which point I found an improvement for White:

19.\(\text{c}4\)\(\text{N}\)

19.\(\text{xf}7\)\(\text{xf}4\) (19...\(\text{xf}4\)\(\text{N}\) also looks good) 20.\(\text{xd}6\) led to an eventual win for White in McDonald – Ciuksyte, England 2012, but 20...\(\text{xd}6\)\(\text{N}\) would have called White’s play into question.

19.\(\text{xf}7\)\(\text{N}\) \(\text{xf}7\) 20.\(\text{f}5\) looks like a lot of fun – but the text move is simple and strong.

19...\(\text{dxe}5\) 20.\(\text{f}5\)\(\text{e}7\) 21.\(\text{f}2\)

18.\(\text{e}5\) \(\text{h}5\)

\(\text{g}5\)!

This has only been played in one game, but I am happy to follow a similar strategy as in the earlier variation C221.

17...\(\text{g}7\)\(\text{N}\)

This looks natural, and the position has actually occurred a few times with Black to play.

17...\(\text{h}6\) 18.\(\text{xf}7\) \(\text{xf}7\) 19.\(\text{e}5\) gives White a huge attack.

19.\(\text{f}5\)!

19.\(\text{xf}7\)\(\text{dxe}5\) is excellent for Black.
19...\(\text{dxe5}\) looks tempting, but 19...\(\text{dxe5}\) 20.\(\text{fxe5}\) \(\text{Qxe5}\) 21.\(\text{Qxe5}\) \(\text{Qxe5}\) 22.\(\text{Qxf7}\) \(\text{Qd7}\) is not altogether clear.

19...\(\text{Qxe5}\)!
19...\(\text{dxe5}\)? 20.\(\text{Qxf7}\)! and 19...\(\text{exf5}\)?! 20.\(\text{e6}\)! lead to serious trouble for Black.

19...\(\text{Qxe5}\) is not so terrible, but 20.\(\text{Qxf7}\)! \(\text{exf5}\) 21.\(\text{Qxd8}\) \(\text{Qxd8}\) 22.\(\text{Qd5}\) leaves Black struggling to demonstrate compensation for the exchange.

20.\(\text{fxe6}\)!
20.\(\text{Qxf7}\) can be met by 20...\(\text{exf5}\)! intending 21.\(\text{Qxd8}\) \(\text{Qxd8}\) 22.\(\text{Qf2}\) \(\text{Qdf6}\)! when, amazingly, Black has a decisive initiative.

20...\(\text{fxe6}\) 21.\(\text{Qf7}\) \(\text{Qf4}\)
21...\(\text{Qc8}\) 22.\(\text{Qxe5}\) \(\text{Qxe5}\) 23.\(\text{Qe4}\)

This line could certainly be analysed in greater detail, but it seems to me that White gets a pleasant position after:

\[22.\text{Qxd8} \text{Qxd8} 23.\text{Qg4} \text{Qe5} 24.\text{Qh3} \text{Qd2} 25.\text{Qxe5! dxe5} 26.\text{Qe4}\]

**Conclusion**

6...\(\text{Qc7}\) 7.\(\text{Qe2}\) is an important branch of Kan theory. The bishop moves 7...\(\text{Qc5}\) and 7...\(\text{Qd6}\) appear active, but we saw that both moves have drawbacks that we can look to exploit.

7...\(\text{d6}\) is more solid, but I find 8.\(\text{f4}\)! an attractive move order for White, when Black has two main options.

8...\(\text{g6}\) would work perfectly if White responded with the c2-c4 set-up, but we have two more appealing options available. 9.\(\text{f5}\)! is a natural way to put pressure on Black; and if he defends against the immediate attack, White may even change direction entirely and look to take over on the queenside. The other option is 9.\(\text{Qc3}\) \(\text{Qg7}\) 10.\(\text{e5}\) \(\text{dxe5}\) 11.\(\text{Qdb5}\)!, which looks like a mad attacking line, but actually leads to a sophisticated positional struggle where I like White's chances.

8...\(\text{Qbd7}\) is the main line, when I propose 9.\(\text{Qc4}\) \(\text{Qc7}\) 10.\(\text{b3}\)!, ensuring that the bishop can settle on b2 before we put the knight on c3. After a few more natural developing moves, White will look for a suitable moment to launch an attack with e4-e5. If Black sets up a sufficiently solid defence against that possibility, then White will have several possible improving moves, such as \(\text{Qb1}\), preparing a possible battery with \(\text{Qc2}\), and/or \(\text{Qf3-g5}\) to provoke a weakening or even prepare a sacrifice on f7. The positions can get pretty double-edged, but I think I have shown that Black faces the greater danger.
5...\textit{c}5 – Introduction to 6.\textit{b}3 \textit{a}7

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\textit{f}3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\textit{xd}4 a6 5.\textit{d}3 \textit{c}5 6.\textit{b}3 \textit{a}7 7.0–0 \textit{c}6

8.\textit{g}4

A) 8...\textit{f}6  
B) 8...\textit{f}6 9.\textit{x}g7 \textit{g}8 10.\textit{h}6 \textit{e}5 11.\textit{e}2 b5 12.\textit{g}5 \textit{g}6  
13.\textit{h}4 \textit{b}7 14.\textit{d}1d2 h6 15.\textit{xf}6 \textit{xf}6 16.a4! \textit{g}6 17.\textit{g}3

B1) 17...b4  
B2) 17...\textit{f}4? 

B) note to 14...h6  
B) after 16...\textit{g}6  
B2) after 24...\textit{g}5

20.e5!N  
17.\textit{g}3N  
25.\textit{h}3!N
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xd4 a6 5.d3 e5

One of the many lines that involve 'poking' the d4-knight, which has been left undefended by White's last move. In many Sicilians, the knight is excellently placed on d4 – there are prospects for sacrifices in the centre, and it can switch to either side depending on White's plans. In some cases, the xxc6 exchange can cause Black a lot of annoyance, as for instance in variation B of Chapter 8. The last move is one of many possible attempts by Black to try and play a typical Sicilian position after driving the knight back to the more passive b3-square. Still, it remains to be seen whether it will really benefit Black; moreover, developing the bishop so early makes him somewhat susceptible to wg4 ideas.

6.db3

Black faces a crucial decision. 6...e7 is a major option which will be discussed in Chapters 13 and 14. In this and the next chapter, we will deal with the other sensible bishop retreat:

6.a7

This is rather critical, as Black keeps his bishop on its most active diagonal and is ready to meet wg4 with ...d6, as wxg7 runs into ...g6. Thus he doesn't have to worry about weakening the kingside with ...g6, which he generally does in the 6...e7 lines. On the other hand, one clear drawback is that we can exchange the dark-squared bishops with wg2 and e3 whenever we want. The fact that Black has committed to the ...e6 structure makes his dark-square weaknesses more prominent. At the same time, the d3-bishop is not ideally suited to playing against this structure, and in some lines Black can play a quick ...d5. White can prevent this with c2-c4 and c3, but then Black gets the chance to start playing on the dark squares himself with ...e5, ...d6-d7, possibly ...a5-a4, ...e5, ...d4 and so on.

7.0-0

Since Black can't play ...d6 immediately because of e4-e5, I would like to prepare wg4 on the next move. The main benefit of doing it this way is that the g2-pawn is defended, which means White can seriously consider capturing on g7.

7.wxg4 d6 8.wg3 is a serious alternative but, as I mentioned, I would like to have the option of taking on g7 (keeping in mind that 8.wxg7?! would backfire here due to 8...g8 9.wxh6 xxf2†).

7.w2 followed by e3 is another popular option, but I think this plan works best when Black has committed his knight to the c7-square – see the next chapter for more about this.
7...\textit{c6}

7...d6?! 8.\textit{g4} just gives White a better version of our main line, as Black is unable to activate his second knight in any meaningful way. For instance, after 8...d6 9.\textit{xg7} \textit{g8} 10.\textit{h6} \textit{g6} 11.\textit{h4} \textit{g4} 12.\textit{h3} e5 13.\textit{f3} \textit{g6} 14.h3 \textit{c6} 15.\textit{c3±} Black had no real compensation for the pawn in Rau – Urlau, email 2005.

The text move is quite a challenging one for us to deal with. Black refuses to commit to 7...\textit{c7} (see the next chapter), which would reduce his options against certain set-ups from White, and instead invites us to attack g7. Gobbling the g-pawn has done quite well for White in practice, but I think Black's chances have been underestimated in previous theory. As I explored more deeply I realized that Black gets lasting compensation, and White needs to show a lot of accuracy to pose problems.

8.\textit{g4}

We will consider A) 8...\textit{f6} and B) 8...\textit{f6}.

It hardly needs stating that the latter move is critical, and any attempt to avoid it can be considered a big concession.

8...\textit{f8} is a move in the spirit of the French Winawer, but things are rather different here! After 9.\textit{e2} d6 10.\textit{e3} \textit{f6} 11.\textit{d2} e5 12.\textit{d1±} it's just a normal position where Black's king is on a strange square, Aagaard – Bezold, Stockholm 2004.

A) 8...\textit{f6} 9.\textit{c3} \textit{ge7}

9...h5 has been played several times but I don't think it warrants any special consideration. White simply plays 10.\textit{e2} \textit{ge7} 11.\textit{e3±} and Black's weaknesses will make themselves felt sooner or later.

9...d6 can be met by 10.\textit{g3?!} \textit{e5} 11.\textit{e2} \textit{g6} 12.\textit{h3} intending \textit{e3} and f2-f4. The e5-knight is a sitting target, and what's the black queen doing?

10.\textit{g5}

Trying to exploit the placement of the black queen.

10...\textit{g6} 11.\textit{h4} f6

11...h5 has not been played, but I would like to point out the tactical motif of 12.\textit{d5!}, which is worth remembering.

11...h6 has been played a few times; I propose 12.\textit{f4}N e5 13.\textit{d2±} when the e5-square has been taken away from Black's knight, and \textit{d5} ideas are in the air. White may even consider \textit{e3} at some point in order to open the f-file.

12.\textit{f4} \textit{e5} 13.\textit{e2} \textit{f7}

13...h5N 14.\textit{ad1} b5 15.\textit{xe5} fxe5 16.\textit{d3?±}
14.\textit{g3} 0–0 15.\textit{c3}±

In Pospelov – Palmateer, email 2008, Black’s pieces were awkwardly placed. The e5-knight can be kicked at any moment, and it is hard to imagine what the black queen is supposed to be doing.

B) 8...\textit{f6}

9.\textit{gxg7}

Challenge accepted! Of course opening the g-file does not come without risk, but my analysis indicates that Black faces a tough battle to get full value for his pawn sacrifice. At the same time, in some of the key games in the most critical lines, White has not found a clean way to quell Black’s compensation. Thus we have to analyse these lines much more precisely, as opposed to just following the games.

9...\textit{g8} 10.\textit{h6} \textit{e5}

10...\textit{g6} does not really accomplish anything: 11.\textit{h4} \textit{g4} 12.\textit{h3} \textit{e5} Santo Roman – Koch, Auxerre 1996. 13.\textit{e3N}±

11.\textit{e2} b5

After 11...\textit{g6} 12.\textit{h4} I don’t see anything better than 12...b5, when 13.\textit{g5} transposes to the main line.

11...d5?! It is too early for Black to open the centre like this. 12.\textit{c3!} dxe4

13.\textit{g5!} (This is more convincing than 13.\textit{e3} \textit{g6} 14.\textit{h4} \textit{d7} 15.\textit{ad1}± as in Van Kampen – A. Rombaldoni, Jerusalem 2015.) 13...\textit{g6} 14.\textit{h4} h6N (14...\textit{d7}? 15.\textit{xe4}± Hellers – Sjoberg, Malmo 1994) 15.\textit{xf6} \textit{xf6} 16.\textit{xf6} \textit{xf6} 17.\textit{xe4}±

11...\textit{eg4} 12.\textit{xg4} \textit{g6}

This has been played in quite a few games, but White gets an advantage by fairly simple means.

13.\textit{h4!}


The text move is better; Black would ideally prefer to recapture with the knight, but this will now allow a queen exchange.
13...\text{n}xg4
13...\text{n}xg4 keeps the queens on the board, but 14...\text{h}3 leaves Black’s rook misplaced.
14...\text{g}6 (14...\text{x}e4 15...\text{g}5+) 15...\text{c}3 \text{x}e4 16...\text{x}a7 \text{x}a7 17...\text{c}3± Simmelink –
Sutkalenko, email 2012.
14...\text{h}xd8+ \text{xd}8 15...\text{c}3 \text{b}5 16...\text{f}4?±
Sukhodolsky – Pitkaenen, corr. 2011. The
bishop is heading for g3, where it will nullify
most of Black’s kingside activity. Later, White
can play \text{h}1 and eventually f2-f3 to untangle.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{chessboard1.png}
\end{center}

\begin{itemize}
\item 12...\text{g}5 \text{g}6
Black has also tried:
\item 12...\text{e}g4 13...\text{xf}6
It is also worth considering: 13...\text{x}g4?N
\text{x}g4 14...\text{x}d8 \text{x}h6 15...\text{f}6 \text{b}7 16...\text{d}2
\text{e}8 17...\text{c}3 \text{d}5 18...\text{e}a1 White maintains his
extra pawn and it is debatable how much
compensation Black gets from the two
bishops.
\item 13...\text{x}f6 14...\text{f}3 \text{b}7 15...\text{d}2 \text{g}6 16...\text{h}4
16...\text{h}3?N also seems good enough for an
dedge, for instance: 16...e5 17...\text{a}4 \text{d}6 18...\text{x}b5
\text{x}b5 19...\text{e}2±
\item 16...\text{g}4
16...e5 17...\text{a}4±
\end{itemize}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{chessboard2.png}
\end{center}

\begin{itemize}
\item 13...\text{h}4 \text{b}7
13...\text{h}6 14...\text{xf}6 \text{xf}6 15...\text{d}2 \text{b}7 transposes.
\item 14...\text{d}2 h6
Black has also tried playing on the other side
of the board with:
\item 14...\text{c}8 15...\text{d}5 16...\text{ad}1 \text{h}6
16...\text{e}7 17...\text{f}3! \text{xf}3+ 18...\text{x}f3 \text{d}xe4
19...\text{h}5 \text{xe}5 20...\text{exe}5 \text{d}5 21...\text{e}2± Oll –
\end{itemize}
20.e5!N
20...\texttt{xf6}?! was played in Bures – Ponizil, Czech Republic 2014, when 20...\texttt{xe4}N
21.\texttt{xe7t xe7} would have been excellent for Black.
20...d4
20...\texttt{e4} 21.\texttt{xe7t xe7} 22.\texttt{xe4 dxe4} 23.\texttt{h5 gg8} 24.\texttt{e3±}
20...\texttt{d7} 21.\texttt{h3! c5} 22.\texttt{f3 e4} 23.\texttt{d4}±
21.\texttt{g3 d5} 22.\texttt{xc4 wh4} 23.\texttt{d6f8} 24.\texttt{exh4±}
In all these lines, White keeps a material advantage and excellent winning chances.

\textbf{15.\texttt{xf6}} \texttt{xf6}

Exchanging queens is senseless for Black:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\chessboard[columns=8, rows=8, standard, white-path=light, transforms={mirror}, board-color=light-gray, light-color=white]
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\begin{itemize}
\item 15.\texttt{xf6} 16.\texttt{xf6} 17.\texttt{xf6} 18.\texttt{d5} Chambers – Valverde Toresano, email 2002.
\end{itemize}

We have reached a critical position. The computer strongly prefers White, but it often underestimates Black's long-term chances. It is vital to understand that Black's compensation does not tend to lead to immediate tactical threats; rather, it is based on his well-placed pieces, particularly the bishop on a7 – a lot of my efforts have gone into trying to neutralize that guy.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\chessboard[columns=8, rows=8, standard, white-path=light, transforms={mirror}, board-color=light-gray, light-color=white]
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textbf{16.\texttt{a4}!}

To help you appreciate Black's resources, let me show you a few other options I considered:

\begin{itemize}
\item 16.\texttt{g3 e7}?! 17.\texttt{h5 e8} 18.\texttt{c3 g8} 19.\texttt{xf3 xf3t 20.\texttt{xf3 g5} 21.\texttt{xg5 hxg5} gave Black fine compensation in Yu Yangyi – Javakhishvili, Doha 2014.
\item 16.\texttt{h5N g6} 17.\texttt{g3 b6} 18.\texttt{xf3 d5} 19.\texttt{ae1 0–0–0} with excellent compensation. Weirdly, White is almost completely stuck.
\item 16.\texttt{g3} is possible but after 16...\texttt{g6} White had better play 17.\texttt{a4!} to reach our main line. I also looked at trying to simplify with 17.\texttt{e5?N} but found 17...\texttt{xf4!} to be an annoying reply, for example:
\end{itemize}
Chapter 11 – 5...c5 — Introduction to 6.Qb3 a7

The text move is a novelty, though it immediately transposes to a correspondence game, which featured the 16.Qg3? move order as noted above. Black may react with B1) 17...b4N or B2) 17...Qf4!

B1) 17...b4N

This seems like a natural move but it allows White to force the play as follows.

18.Qc4 Qb8

Alternatives are no better:

18...c5 19.Qad1 d6 20.Qh5 Qf8 21.Qxg6 Qxg6 22.Qf3 Qc7 23.Qba5±

18...Qf8 19.Qd3! (19.Qd6 Qc6 would go some way towards justifying Black’s previous move) 19...Qf4 20.Qh1 Qc7 21.Qca5

17.Qg3N

17.Qxh6 has been played a few times but 17...Qf4 18.Qh8† Qe7 19.Qxd8† Qxd8 20.Qf3 b4 gave Black plenty of compensation for the two pawns in Mantu – Sulle, corr. 2008.

18.Qf3 Qxf3 19.Qxf3 h5 White’s queen is uncomfortably placed. There are some other options on move 18, but the ...h5 plan will still be hanging in the air.

16...Qg6

16...Qe7? 17.axb5 Qg6 was the weird continuation of Grandelius – Di Nicolantonio, Albena 2011. White’s most accurate continuation would have been: 18.Qg3N Qf4 (or 18...axb5 19.Qxb5) 19.Qf3 Qb8 20.Qh4 Qg6 21.Qh5+ Black is two pawns down with no real counterplay.

17...Qe5 19.Qad1 d6 20.Qh5 Qf8 21.Qxg6 Qxg6 22.Qf3 Qc7 23.Qba5±
21...\textit{c}6 (21...\textit{c}8 22.\textit{\textit{c}3} e5 23.g3+) 22.\textit{\textit{c}xc6} dxc6 23.\textit{h}4 \textit{e}5 24.\textit{a}5±

Black's activity has been contained, and the open nature of his position might lead to serious grief. At the same time, I'm not entirely happy with my awkward knight.

21.\textit{d}2? is perhaps the most ambitious: 21...\textit{d}5 (21...\textit{x}g2? 22.\textit{\textit{x}x}g2 \textit{f}4† 23.\textit{h}1 \textit{\textit{x}xe}2 24.\textit{e}5 \textit{f}4 25.\textit{e}4+) 22.\textit{\textit{x}x}b4 We are back to being a pawn up, and Black needs to demonstrate his compensation.

21...\textit{\textit{x}d}3 22.\textit{\textit{x}d}3±

With the bishops off the board, our king will feel particularly safe. Meanwhile Black's king lacks a safe shelter and his scattered pawn structure contains plenty of potential targets.

19.\textit{d}6†

I like this move because it simplifies the situation and changes the nature of the game - from Black having given up a pawn for the initiative, we now reach a situation where Black equalizes the material but White starts to build an initiative of his own.

19.\textit{e}3? is an interesting alternative but it's more complicated than the text move, so I don't see much reason to analyse it further.

19...\textit{\textit{x}d}6 20.\textit{\textit{x}d}6 \textit{\textit{x}e}4

White has a few different ways to continue. There is no forcing route to a drastic advantage, but we can keep some pressure on Black, which is good enough for me. The main objective should be to find a good role for our knight, which can go via d2 or c5.

21.\textit{d}3

This seems simplest to me, although the following alternatives are all worth checking.

21.\textit{\textit{x}b}4 \textit{\textit{x}g}2 22.\textit{\textit{x}x}g2 \textit{f}4† 23.\textit{h}1 \textit{\textit{x}xe}2 is rather messy.

21.d5 e5 22.\textit{d}2.\textit{c}6 23.d3 a5 24.c3 B2) 17...\textit{f}4!

This move led to a black victory in a fairly recent correspondence game, so it deserved to be analysed carefully. Moreover, it is very much in the spirit of Black's earlier pawn sacrifice: whereas 17...b4 allowed us to simplify the position and aim for some positional pressure, here Black preserves his bishop pair, along with his hopes for a long-term initiative.

18.f3

From here the bishop guards g2 and prepares e4-e5.
18.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{c}d3}} is well met by 18...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{c}c7}} 19.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{h}h4}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{e}e7}}! followed by ...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g8}} and ...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g6}}, when all Black's pieces are in action.

18...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f8}}

Black has to avoid the queen exchange.
After 18...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{b}b6}} 19.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{a}xa6}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{xa6}}} 20.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{x}xa8}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{xa8}}} 21.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g8}}\!\!\texttt{\textbf{\textit{e}e7}} 22.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{x}xd8}}\!\!\texttt{\textbf{\textit{xd8}}} 23.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{a}a1}} White has pretty good chances of converting his extra pawn.

19.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{a}xa6}}

19.e5 is premature due to 19...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{c}c8}}\!\! 20.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{x}xa8}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g6}} 21.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g4}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{h}h5}} and Black keeps some initiative.

I also considered 19.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{h}h4}} e5 20.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{d}d5}}, but after 20...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{c}c8}}\!\! there no obvious way to make progress without returning the knight to \texttt{\textbf{\textit{b}b3}}. If 21.b4 \texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g7}} 22.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{a}xa6}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{xa6}}} 23.c4 Black has 23...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f8}}\!\!\!\texttt{\textbf{\textit{e}e7}}\!\!\!\texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g6}}.

20...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{a}xa6}}

At this point we have a choice between two quite promising ideas. The main line is the more ambitious, and involves following the aforementioned correspondence game for a few more moves before I suggest an improvement. However, you may also consider heading for a position with rook and two knights versus a queen, which I believe offers real winning chances in a practical game.

21.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g3}}

This is the maximalist try.
21.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f1}} is a sensible human move. 21...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f2}} (Black had better go for this while he has the chance. Instead 21...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f1}} followed by \texttt{\textbf{\textit{e}e3}} or \texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g3}}. Note that the rook on \texttt{\textbf{\textit{d}d1}} prevents counterplay with ...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{d}d5}}, which would have been annoying had the rook gone to \texttt{\textbf{\textit{e}e1}} instead.) 22.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{x}xa6}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{xf2}}\!\!\!\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f1}} 23.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f2}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f2}} 24.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f2}}

19...e5!

19...\texttt{\textbf{\textit{a}xa6}}? runs into 20.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{x}xa7}} \texttt{\textbf{\textit{xa7}}} 21.e5 \texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f5}} 22.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{d}d4}}\!, so the text move is Black's only way to keep his position together.

20.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{h}h4}}

Avoiding 20.bxa6 \texttt{\textbf{\textit{xa6}}!} when White must give up the exchange, as 21.\texttt{\textbf{\textit{f}f1}}? \texttt{\textbf{\textit{g}g6}} traps the queen.
It is hard to put a definite assessment on this position, but White is certainly not risking much. Materially he has more than enough for the queen, but it might be hard to improve his position because of the somewhat exposed king. The computer thinks it's close to level, but engines have a tendency to overestimate the queen's chances—and even if the position really is equal, it may require machine-like precision to get the most out of the queen. There is no perpetual check happening immediately, so I think White has good chances to improve his coordination and put some pressure on Black.

21...\textit{g7} 22.\textit{h1} \textit{e6}

22...\textit{g6} 23.\textit{g4} leaves Black's knight with fewer prospects.

23.\textit{g4}± \textit{g6} 24.\textit{h5} \textit{g5}

Finally the moment has come where we should deviate from the aforementioned correspondence encounter.

25.\textit{h3}!N

The game continued 25.\textit{h4} \textit{b6}, at which point White played most mysteriously, first exchanging on a8 and then moving his bishop away from the long diagonal. 26.\textit{xa8} (26.\textit{g2} makes more sense, but things are still far from easy here) 26...\textit{xa8}

27.\textit{e2} (27.\textit{a1} \textit{c8} leaves the c2- and f2-pawns under fire; 27.\textit{g2} still had to be tried, though 27...\textit{f5} 28.\textit{f3} \textit{f4} gives Black promising play) 27...\textit{f5} 28.\textit{f3} \textit{f4} Black went on to win in good style in Shchebenyuk – Rimkus, corr. 2013.

The text move is an obvious improvement. I prefer it because the queen is less vulnerable and has better prospects of regrouping, for instance via f1. Other ideas include \textit{g4}, followed by \textit{f5} or \textit{f2-f4}.

25...\textit{b6}

It seems reasonable for Black to follow the same path as in the correspondence game.

25...\textit{g6}? 26.\textit{h5} \textit{f6} 27.\textit{f4}±

25...\textit{c7} 26.\textit{c3} \textit{b6} 27.\textit{xa8} (27.\textit{a1} \textit{a2}) 27...\textit{xa8} transposes to the main line below.

26.\textit{xa8} \textit{xa8}

In the event of 26...\textit{xa8} 27.\textit{a1}! \textit{d8} (or 27...\textit{c8} 28.\textit{f1}) 28.\textit{f1} White gets his regrouping and has great prospects, for instance: 28...\textit{c6} (28...\textit{g6} 29.\textit{xb5}±) 29.\textit{g2} \textit{g6} 30.\textit{a1} \textit{f6} 31.\textit{d3}±

27.\textit{c3}

27.\textit{g2} threatens \textit{f2-f4}, but 27...\textit{c7} 28.\textit{c3} \textit{d6}! prevents it while making Black's queen into a real nuisance.
the light squares, but the a8-bishop can be shut down completely with f2-f3. After that, neither of Black's bishops will cause us much trouble and, as we take our time to regroup, Black will have to prove his compensation for the pawn.

27...c7
27...c6 28.g2 g6 29.f4±

28.g4!
28.a1 c6! has one key difference from the 26...xa8 line: the b5-pawn is already protected, so 29.wf1 does not gain a tempo. This gives Black time for 29...g6! with annoying and persistent compensation. We don't have a comfortable way to defend the f2-pawn, and leaving the bishop on f3 exposes us to ideas like ...g5. 30.e2 (30.g2 f6 31.f3 h5) 30...f6 31.h4 d8 or 31...d6.

The text move is the right way to regroup, though I must admit it took me some time to accept it. After analysing it for a while I went back to try and find a way to improve earlier, as I didn't fully trust the idea of moving the bishop off the long diagonal. However, when I returned to it and looked more closely, I realized that things were not easy for Black. After most normal moves, White just puts the bishop on the ideal f5-square and prepares f2-f4. Black's only way to create problems is with the somewhat artificial ...d6-d3 plan. Against this, it's true, we will have to give up our dear bishop, but it's not such a bad thing to eliminate the black knight, which has the potential to annoy us by jumping all over the place. Of course we must be wary of weakening...

28...b4!
Black's best bet is to force some weaknesses before activating his queen.

28...d6 and 28...d5 are both met by 29.f5±.

To see why the main line is Black's best choice, we should compare the alternative:
28...d6 29.xe6 fxe6 30.f3
The closed queenside reduces the mobility of the black bishops, while White doesn't have any weaknesses there either. White will continue to shuffle around and regroup in a similar fashion, and it's still hard for Black to crack through the centre.

28...c6 29.xe6 fxe6 30.f3
30...\textcolor{red}{\texttt{b}6}

30...\textcolor{red}{\texttt{b}4} 31.\texttt{\textbullet}a1 \texttt{bxc}3 (31...\texttt{\textbullet}c6 32.\texttt{\textbullet}f1±) 32.\texttt{bxc}3 \texttt{\textbullet}c6 33.\texttt{\textbullet}f1±
30...\texttt{\textbullet}d3 31.\texttt{\textbullet}a1 \texttt{\textbullet}b7 32.\texttt{\textbullet}f1±
31.\texttt{\textbullet}a1 \texttt{\textbullet}c6 32.\texttt{\textbullet}f1 \texttt{\textbullet}g6 33.\texttt{\textbullet}e2 \texttt{\textbullet}c7 34.\texttt{\textbullet}c1±
Followed by \texttt{\textbullet}d3.

Followed by \texttt{\textbullet}d3.

29.\texttt{\textbullet}xe6

29.cxb4?! \texttt{\textbullet}d6! 30.\texttt{\textbullet}xe6 fxe6 31.f3 \texttt{\textbullet}xb4 makes life much harder for White. It is better to keep a c-pawn than a b-pawn, as it helps to control the centre and keeps our position more compact.

29...\texttt{\textbullet}xc3!

29...fxe6 30.c4! is what we'd like. Next will come f2-f3 and, with Black's bishops neutralized and his central breaks under control, White will continue regrouping and manoeuvring the knights for a long time.

30.\texttt{\textbullet}xc3

30.\texttt{\textbullet}d5?! This seems tempting but Black narrowly escapes in the end.
30.\texttt{\textbullet}xd5 31.exd5 cxd2 32.\texttt{\textbullet}xd2 \texttt{\textbullet}c2 33.\texttt{\textbullet}f3 \texttt{\textbullet}f5 34.\texttt{\textbullet}g4+
34.\texttt{\textbullet}h4 \texttt{\textbullet}xf2 35.\texttt{\textbullet}f5+ \texttt{\textbullet}g6 and White must force a draw.

34...\texttt{\textbullet}f6!

34...\texttt{\textbullet}g8 35.\texttt{\textbullet}e1 \texttt{\textbullet}h5 36.\texttt{\textbullet}b4+ \texttt{\textbullet}c5 37.\texttt{\textbullet}xc5+ \texttt{\textbullet}xc5 38.\texttt{\textbullet}\texttt{d}3 \texttt{\textbullet}d4 39.\texttt{\textbullet}e1±
35.\texttt{\textbullet}b4

Both 35.\texttt{\textbullet}g1 \texttt{\textbullet}c5 and 35.\texttt{\textbullet}e1 \texttt{\textbullet}d2 36.\texttt{\textbullet}h4+ \texttt{\textbullet}g7 are fine for Black.
35...\texttt{\textbullet}g7 36.\texttt{\textbullet}xb6
36.\texttt{\textbullet}g2 \texttt{\textbullet}e2 is equal.
36...\texttt{\textbullet}xf3

36...\texttt{\textbullet}e2 37.\texttt{\textbullet}g1 may give White some chances.

37.\texttt{\textbullet}g1 \texttt{\textbullet}b3
37...\texttt{\textbullet}d2 is also good enough to hold.
38.\texttt{\textbullet}d6 \texttt{\textbullet}e4 39.\texttt{\textbullet}xd7 \texttt{\textbullet}xb2 40.d6 \texttt{\textbullet}d2=

30...\texttt{\textbullet}xe6 31.c4

The presence of b-pawns would have restricted Black's activity still further but, even here, it's not clear how he can generate counterplay. The bishops look pretty but they are not doing much, and the one on a8 can
be shut down at any time by f2-f3. Of course the bishops must be respected as they could still become dangerous in the future, but Black has no clear path to that unless White does something careless. Black's rook is also out of place, and transferring it to the queenside will take time. Meanwhile White is ready to start regrouping with f2-f3, b1/c1 and f1, followed by manoeuvring the knights, possibly to d3 and e3. Trying for a queen exchange would also make sense.

32 ... d6 33.f3

32.a1 c6 33.f1 could be considered, but the black bishop belongs on c6 anyway, and f2-f3 is always useful.

32.c6 33.e1

33.b1 h5 34.f1 h4 35.g4 e3 36.e2 d4 37.c5 f8 38.h3 is possible, though I would ideally prefer to keep my kingside pawns more flexible.

33.b4

33.d3 and 33.d4 would also be met by 34.f1 when White just continues with his plan.

Conclusion

In this chapter we began our investigation into the 5...c5 branch of Kan theory by analysing the position after 6.b3 a7 7.0-0 c6, when I recommend 8.g4 in order to put pressure on Black's weakest point. If he defends the g7-pawn with 8...f6, he misplaces his queen and allows White to build an initiative by fairly simple means. The more challenging option is 8...f6, when 9.xg7 g8 10.h6 leads to a complex, unbalanced position where Black will try to demonstrate compensation for the sacrificed pawn. There are a great many positional and tactical subtleties, and you should always be aware that analysis engines have a tendency to underestimate Black's long-term compensation. Ultimately I think I succeeded in posing a serious challenge to Black's compensation — but the chapter must be studied carefully, as a lot of the details would be hard to find over the board.
Kan

6.\textbf{b3} a7 with 7...\textbf{e7}

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\textbf{f3} e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\textbf{xd4} a6 5.\textbf{d3} \textbf{c5} 6.\textbf{b3} a7 7.0-0 \textbf{e7}

8.\textbf{we2} \textbf{bc6}

A) 9.c4  
B) 9.\textbf{e3}!
   B1) 9...\textbf{x}e3!?
   B2) 9...0-0  

A) after 14...\textbf{g8}

B2) note to 12...\textbf{e5}

B2) after 16...\textbf{f5}

15.\textbf{xd5}!N

13.f4!N

17.\textbf{h3}!N
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xd4 a6 5.d3 c5 6.b3 a7 7.0-0 lce7

The point of this move is to avoid the g4 threat, which can now be met by castling. The drawback is that the knight is less than ideally placed, for reasons described below.

8.e2

At first glance, one might be tempted to ask why we didn't just play 7.e2 on the previous move—a popular line in itself, which keeps the option of long castling. The answer has been alluded to in the previous comment: having the knight on e7 is a surprisingly big gain for us when compared to the 7.e2 line. The explanation is as follows. As I described earlier, after the dark-squared bishop exchange, White will play a quick c2-c4 to discourage the ...d5 break. Black generally switches to the alternative plan of playing on the dark squares with ...d6 and ...e5. When you imagine that structure, you'll realize that, ideally, Black would like to manoeuvre the king's knight via f6-d7-e5, and possibly later e6-d4. Now, on the other hand, the knight will be stuck on e7 without many prospects. Moving it to g6 will not lead anywhere as we can always play g2-g3; and until Black is able to move the other knight to d4, ...e6 isn't much of an option for Black. In short, what seems like a small detail actually makes a big difference to the plans and assessment of the position.

You may have noticed that Black does have one additional active option with the knight on e7: the ...f5 break is available, and the knight is suitably placed to support it. But is ...f5 really a good option?

If Black plays ...f5 early, that is, without ...d6 and ...e5, White will simply take and answer ...xf5 with xf5, leaving Black with a lot of weak squares in the centre. If, on the other hand, Black develops with ...d6, ...e5 and ...e6 before playing ...f5, then we reach a different situation.

White has two ways to deal with it. He can just exchange twice on f5 and then hope to exploit the weak light squares in the centre—particularly if he can plonk a knight on e4. But this isn't always possible—particularly when the bishop isn't on d3 (for example, if White retreats it to e2 or f1 to clear the d-file), as then Black can quickly activate all his pieces with ...xf5 and ...fd4. However, White has the alternative plan of completely ignoring ...f5. If Black plays ...fxe4 then we gain time with xe4—a move we would like to play anyway. If Black goes ...f4 then we will get an interesting strategic battle—but as long as an immediate ...f3 isn't a worry, we can develop pressure against the d6-pawn and on the queenside.

8...bc6

8...0-0 9.e3 has no special significance; all the games from this position have transposed to lines considered below after a few more moves.

8...d6

This is almost certain to transpose to our main lines, while giving White the additional comfort of not having to worry about an early ...d5. There is just one independent idea that occurred to me, which I will mention below:
9.\textit{\&}e3 0-0 10.\textit{\&}xa7 \textit{\&}xa7 11.c4N

This will be our standard set-up in this chapter, and the text move is only a novelty here because Black’s move order is so rare.

11...e5 12.\textit{\&}c3

12...\textit{\&}ec6?! 12...\textit{\&}bc6 transposes to our main line as covered in variation B2.

Moving the other knight to c6 looks weird, but there is a certain logic behind it. When discussing the drawbacks of having the knight on e7 instead of f6, I mentioned that a knight on f6 could go to d7 and c5. The text move is another way of aiming for the same set-up with knights on c6 and c5. However, by committing to this plan before he has developed the rest of his pieces, Black gives us an opportunity to attack the d6-pawn.

13.\textit{\&}fd1 \textit{\&}d7 14.\textit{\&}d2 \textit{\&}c5

15.\textit{\&}e2!! Black has serious problems with the weak pawn. It is worth mentioning the following detail:

15...\textit{\&}xb3 16.axb3 \textit{\&}d4 17.\textit{\&}b5!

White wins a pawn.

As I mentioned earlier, we will be aiming for a set-up with c2-c4 and \textit{\&}c3, while Black generally opts for ...d6, ...e5 and ...\textit{\&}e6. However, not for the first time in the Kan, we also have to take into account the possibility of an early ...d5.

It is important to be precise with the move order, so I will cover two options in order to highlight the differences. A) 9.c4 is the more common move order to reach the structures I described, but B) 9.\textit{\&}e3! is actually more accurate.

A) 9.c4 0-0 10.\textit{\&}c3

At first this seems like a decent way to discourage the ...d5 break, particularly since the only serious option which avoids transposing to our main lines (involving a quick ...e5 followed by ...\textit{\&}d4) isn’t such a worry. However, it turns out that Black can get a good game with the help of a pawn sacrifice.

10...d5!
This has hardly ever been played, as it allows White to bag a pawn with a simple $\&xh7+$ tactic – but it turns out that Black gets decent compensation.

10...\textit{e}5

This should lead to the main lines examined later. I will just mention a few independent possibilities for instructive purposes.

11 $\&e3 \textit{d}6$

11...$\&d4$ was once played by Kramnik, but White doesn't have to worry about it too much. It is more of a problem if White has already committed his rooks to $d1$ and $c1$, as in the example below, which is included for comparison. The difference is that after 12.$\&xd4$ exd4 13.$\&d5 \textit{d}6$ we can place our pieces more effectively for future play on the kingside, beginning with 14.$\&ae1$.

In any case, all these things are more to get a general idea about the position, and to see why we need to eventually take $\&xa7$ anyway, even in the $...\textit{e}5$ lines, while in the main line, we take $\&xa7$ even earlier to avoid $...d5$ ideas.

12.$\&fd1$

12.$\&xa7! \&xa7$ 13.$\&fd1$ transposes to the later variation B2. This was the move order of Motylev – Andreikin, Nizhni Novgorod 2013, and many other games.

12...$\&e6$ 13.$\&ae1$!

This was the last chance to take on a7.

13...$\&d4$! 14.$\&xd4\textit{exd4}$ 15.$\&d5 \&g6$

White's rooks are badly placed for this structure, as you can see from his next move:

16.$\&f1 \&d7$ 17.$f4 \&ae8+$


11.$\textit{exd5}$

11.$\textit{exd5}$ exd5 12.$\&g5$ (12.$\textit{exd5}$ is the main line) deserves attention, but 12...$d4$ 13.$\&d5 \textit{f}6$ seems okay for Black.

11...$\textit{exd5}$ 12.$\textit{cx}d5$

12.$\&h5 \textit{N} \textit{g}6$ 13.$\&h4 \textit{dxc4}$ 14.$\&xc4 \&f5$

15.$\&xd8 \&xd8+$

12.$\&g5N$ is a reasonable move, but after 12...$\textit{dxc4}$ 13.$\&xc4 \textit{h}6$ Black should be able to neutralize White's tiny advantage in activity.

12...$\&xe5$

12...$\&b4$? 13.$\&e4$ left Black in trouble in Joecks – Stelting, Hamburg 1990, as capturing the $d5$-pawn would expose him to a pin along the d-file.

13.$\&xh7+$ $\&xh7$ 14.$\&h5+$ $\&g8$

15.$\&xd5N$

This improves on a couple of existing games, but I was still unable to find a real advantage.
15...\textit{e}6 16...\textit{c}3

If 16...\textit{d}1 \textit{xd}5 17...\textit{x}d5 \textit{xf6} White has nothing better than 18...\textit{f}3, which obviously leaves Black with great compensation.

16...\textit{f}4 17...\textit{x}c4 17...\textit{d}1 \textit{xf6} also gives Black considerable activity for the pawn.

16...\textit{b}4!

This position could be analysed in more depth, but I believe Black has enough compensation. A sample continuation is:

17...\textit{e}3 \textit{xa}2 18...\textit{e}8 19...\textit{x}a7 \textit{xc}3 20...\textit{d}4 \textit{xb}3 21...\textit{h}4 \textit{f}6 22...\textit{c}5=

White is unable to capitalize on Black's exposed king and Black is fine after 22...\textit{e}8, among other moves.

B) 9...\textit{e}3!

The bishops will be exchanged, but on which square? We will analyse B1) 9...\textit{xe}3!? and B2) 9...0–0.

9...\textit{d}5 has been played a couple of times, but 10...\textit{xa}7 \textit{xa}7 11...\textit{xd}5 \textit{e}4± gives White an easy advantage in piece activity.

9...\textit{e}5 has no independent significance, as 10...\textit{xa}7 \textit{xa}7 11...\textit{c}4 \textit{d}6 12...\textit{c}3 0–0 transposes to variation B2.

B1) 9...\textit{xe}3!? 10...\textit{xe}3

Generally Black doesn’t want to be the one who makes this exchange - it’s in his interests to wait for ...\textit{xe}7 because the rook on a7 can be usefully placed after ...\textit{d}6 and ...\textit{b}6. Also, the white queen is nicely placed on e3, as you will see in some of the later variations. Therefore, if Black is to justify his last move, his most logical plan is to play a quick ...\textit{d}5, having avoided the possibility of ...\textit{xe}7.

10...0–0

10...\textit{e}5!? has been the most common choice but it is illogical for the reasons described above. White simply plays 11...\textit{c}4 with an improved version of variation B2.

10...\textit{d}5 shows Black’s hand rather early. 11...\textit{e}5 is one good option, which has scored heavily; alternatively, there is 11...\textit{g}3!N 0–0 12...\textit{xd}5 \textit{xd}5 13...\textit{d}1, transposing to our main line.

11...\textit{d}1!

This is the ideal move, as it is useful whether Black proceeds with ...\textit{d}5 or reverts to a ...\textit{d}6 set-up.
I spent some time looking at 11.c4 d5! but concluded that Black is eventually okay. You can find the details under 10.c4 ±xe3 11.±xe3 d5! in the notes to variation B2 below.

11.±1d2 has the idea of meeting ...d5 with e4-e5, with a promising French-type position. However, it gives Black the perfect opportunity to switch plans with 11...e5!. Now the knight would be misplaced in a c2-c4 set-up, while if 12.±c4 d6N 13.±b6 ±b8 14.±xc8 ±xc8= the light-squared bishop is not a big deal.

11 ...bSN merely creates targets on the queenside, as is usually the case when the knight has yet to go to c3. A good reply is:

12.a4 b4 13.±ld2=;

11...f5N is another attempt to justify the early ...±xe3 but, as I mentioned earlier, opening up the position like this may backfire on Black. 12.exf5 ±xf5 13.±xf5 ±xf5 14.±1d2± White can target Black's central pawns and he has several potential outposts on the dark squares.

11...b6 12.c4 a5 is a weird attempt to delay moving the d-pawn. (12...d6 once again gives us a favourable version of a normal structure) 13.±a3!? (13.±c3N a4 14.±d4= also looks fine) 13...a4

14.±d4 (avoiding exchanges with 14.±d2N is a good alternative) 14...±xd4 15.±xd4 ±b7 In Vasiukov – Dzindzichashvili, Rostov-on-Don 1969, 16.±b5N± would have kept a nice edge for White.

12.exd5 ±xd5N

12...exd5 13.±c3 gave White a typical slight edge playing against the IQP in Ilyin – Schwarte, corr. 2014. I would add that ±e2-d4 (or f4) is a useful manoeuvre to keep in mind, even though White did not use it in the above game.

The text move avoids an isolated pawn but leaves Black with some problems completing development – particularly the c8-bishop, whereas White can easily mobilize the queenside pieces with c2-c4 and ±c3.

13.±g3

I briefly considered 13.±h3, hoping for 13...g6 14.±g3, when White has a slightly better version of the main line due to Black's weakened dark squares. However, 13...f5! 14.c4 ±f4 is rather unclear.
A more tempting alternative is:

13. \texttt{\textbackslash w}c5?! \texttt{\textbackslash w}c7

13...\texttt{\textbackslash w}c7? would be a blunder due to:

14. \texttt{\textbackslash n}xh7! \texttt{\textbackslash n}xh7 15. \texttt{\textbackslash w}xf8+–

13...d7 is met by 14.c4 b6 15.\texttt{\textbackslash d}d6 \texttt{\textbackslash d}f6
16.\texttt{\textbackslash c}c3 \texttt{\textbackslash b}b8 17.\texttt{\textbackslash e}e2 and White continues to exert pressure, although Black is hanging on.

14.\texttt{\textbackslash e}e4?!

14.c4 should be similar, but the text move keeps our position more flexible.

13...f6!?N

A somewhat artificial, but active, method to finish development.

13...\texttt{\textbackslash w}c7N 14.\texttt{\textbackslash w}xc7 \texttt{\textbackslash n}xc7 15.\texttt{\textbackslash e}e4±

13...\texttt{\textbackslash w}c7 was played in Bayod Rubia – Vera Jimenez, Aragon 2009. A logical answer is

14.c4N \texttt{\textbackslash f}f6 15.\texttt{\textbackslash c}c3 \texttt{\textbackslash d}d8 16.\texttt{\textbackslash d}e4± when Black's position is solid, but the problem of developing his queenside remains.

14.\texttt{\textbackslash e}e4!?

Black is unlikely to be ready to exchange on d5 any time soon, so we will just prepare \texttt{\textbackslash d}xf4 and then play with the better pawn structure.

17...\texttt{\textbackslash e}e6 18.\texttt{\textbackslash w}e3?!±

\textbf{B2) 9...0–0}

10.\texttt{\textbackslash x}xa7!

Once again I would like to emphasize this subtle move-order distinction. The key point is that White has to be ready for ...d5 at any moment, so it is worth luring the black rook to a7, where it will be misplaced in the event of a ...d5 break. Also, if you think back to the Van Kampen – Nevednichy game mentioned on page 257, you will recall that White is better off
playing $\text{a}x\text{a}7$ at some point anyway, otherwise Black will start having ideas involving ...$e5$, ...$d6$ and ...$\text{d}4$. So now we are just making the exchange a little earlier, which doesn't have any negative effect on our position.

10.$c4$

This has mostly led to standard positions after some combination of ...$d6$ and ...$e5$, but Black can instead take the opportunity to free his position with:

10...$\text{x}e3$ 11.$\text{wx}e3$ $d5$! 12.$\text{xd}5$ exd5 13.$\text{d}1$

Even though the ...$d5$ plan is correct, Black still has to be careful to equalize from here.

13...$\text{e}8$!N

A fairly obvious improvement.

13...$\text{e}6$ was played in Bolle - Ramos Guaz, Malaga 2009, when 14.$\text{a}4$N would have been awkward.

13...$d4$ is premature: 14.$\text{w}g3$ $\text{e}8$ 15.$\text{a}3$± 14.$\text{f}4$ $\text{b}6$!

14...$d4$ 15.$\text{d}1$d2±

15.$\text{c}3$ $\text{b}4$!

Another precise move from the computer. The position can be analysed a lot more, but it seems to me that Black is close to equality.

15...$\text{dxc}4$ 16.$\text{xc}4$ $\text{f}5$ 17.$\text{a}4$ $\text{a}7$

18.$\text{ac}5$±

16.$\text{d}4$ $\text{dxc}4$ 17.$\text{xc}6$ $\text{bxc}6$?

17...$\text{xc}6$ 18.$\text{d}5$! $\text{xb}2$ 19.$\text{c}7$ $\text{xd}3$

18.$\text{xc}4$ $\text{xb}2$=

Intending ...$\text{d}5$.

10...$\text{a}7$

As I mentioned earlier, this rook will not be well placed to get into the game after ...$d5$, making this the right moment to establish our central clamp.

11.$c4$ $d6$

11...$e5$ 12.$\text{c}3$ $d6$ transposes. Apart from that, Black has the usual alternative ways to strike at our centre:

11...$f5$N just creates weaknesses, as usual:

12.$\text{ex}d5$ $\text{xf}5$ 13.$\text{c}3$ $b6$ 14.$\text{ad}1$±

11...$d5$ 12.$\text{ex}d5$ exd5 13.$\text{d}1$!

In the 10.$c4$ line in the notes above, we saw that Black was only able to equalize after a series of precise moves. This position is almost identical, but White's queen is on $e2$ rather than $e3$ (which doesn't affect things a great deal) and Black's rook is misplaced on $a7$.

13...$\text{e}8$N

This seems like Black's best try.

13...$\text{e}6$ 14.$\text{c}3$ $b6$ 15.$\text{h}7$ $xh7$ 16.$\text{cxd}5$ $\text{xd}5$ 17.$\text{xd}5$ $\text{xd}5$ 18.$\text{h}5$ $g8$ 19.$\text{xd}5$±

13...$d4$ is well met by 14.$\text{a}3$± when the $d4$-pawn is clearly a weakness rather than a strength.
\[14. \text{Bc}3 \text{ d}4 15. \text{Bc}2!\]

Freening up a better square for the knight.

15...g6 16.\text{Be}4?!

16.\text{Be}2 also favours White but the text move prepares \text{Dd}5, with good chances to win the d4-pawn.

\[12. \text{Cc}3\]

You won’t find many games from this exact position, as most players have used one of the less precise move orders mentioned earlier. After Black’s reply, however, the game count jumps up considerably.

\[12...e5\]

In a few games Black has tried:

12...b6

The idea is to utilize the rook’s position on the 7th rank to bring it to d7, but it strikes me as a passive set-up which is not really in the spirit of the ...\text{Cc}5-a7 system. White can probably keep a slight edge by simply developing and keeping control in the centre, but it looks even more promising to start playing on the kingside with:

\[13.\text{Ff}4!\text{N} \text{Ff}7 14.\text{Ff}3!\]

Note that a move like 14.\text{Ff}d1 would have no real point to it. Instead this rook could serve more purpose on f1, where it anticipates ideas like ...\text{Dg}6 and supports a possible f4-f5.

14...\text{Cb}4

14...\text{Bb}7 15.\text{Ff}f1 \text{Dg}6 16.\text{Fh}h3\uparrow gives White a slightly better version as he has not had to waste time on a2-a3.

15.\text{Bb}1 \text{Bb}7 16.a3 \text{Bb}c6 17.\text{Cc}2\uparrow

White has had to spend a tempo playing a2-a3, but it doesn’t affect the evaluation too much. If Black tries to break with ...d5 then we will simply block his play with cxd5 followed by e4-e5, and I don’t see what other active ideas he may hope for. Meanwhile, we can continue building up on the kingside with \text{Ff}f1 and \text{Fh}h3.

\[13.\text{Ff}d1\]

Some players have tried \text{Ff}d1, but I would prefer to keep the option of putting the second rook on c1 if needed. Also, even though I like to retreat the bishop from d3 to e2 in the main line, it might be handy to have the option of putting it on f1 as well. The structure is quite different from the ones we get in most other Sicilian variations (in the course of three volumes, I have rarely recommended c2-c4 lines), so I will spend a lot of time talking about ideas and plans – perhaps even redundantly in places! – to make you more comfortable with it. The first question is: what does Black want here? Ideally, he would like to establish a knight on d4, possibly via c5 and e6 – but with the king’s knight on e7, that is hard to accomplish. One way could be to play ...a5-a4 to drive our knight away from the defence of d4, but this
will create a major hole on b5. White’s knight can look rather intimidating on this square, and it also takes over the role of guarding d4. With that in mind, you will sometimes see Black respond to \( \text{Qd5} \) with \( \ldots \text{a5} \), since the knight has gone in another direction. In that case, White might simply return the knight to c3 and go to b5 anyway – the odd tempo tends not to matter too much when the centre is blocked like this.

What else could Black want? It is vital to understand that, even though there are some games in which Black appears to play passively with moves like \( \ldots \text{Ke6} \), \( \ldots \text{Wb8} \), \( \ldots \text{d7} \) and so on, that is not what he really wants at all. Given a suitable opportunity, he would love to break out with a well-timed \( \ldots \text{b5} \). Sometimes he will even do this at the expense of a pawn, as he will derive compensation from the open lines on the queenside plus the loosening of White’s grip on the centre, which may lead to further counterplay with \( \ldots \text{d5} \). In short, the \( \ldots \text{b5} \) break is something we must constantly be on the lookout for – even when it looks as though we have it under control. Black might also try to generate counterplay with \( \ldots \text{f5} \) but, as explained earlier on page 255, this is a less pressing concern. As long as we can keep those two pawn breaks in check, we should be able to gain space and gradually make Black suffocate.

13...\text{Ke6}

This is the most flexible developing move, which is useful in all scenarios.

I don’t see any alternatives which are worth discussing in detail. For instance, neither 13...\text{Qg6} 14.g3 nor 13...\text{b6} 14.\text{We3} will disrupt White’s plans at all.

14.\text{We3}!

Once more, the move order is important.

If White instead starts with 14.\text{d2}, Black can switch plans with 14...\text{Qa5?!N} 15.\text{Qxa5} \text{Wxa5} 16.\text{Qe3} \text{Qaa8=} and White is not in time to attack d6; thus Black solves the problem of his redundant knight and stands fine.

14...\text{Wb8}

14...\text{a8} 15.\text{Ke2}! is similar to the main line, but with fewer options for Black.

15.\text{Ke2}!

Again, precision is required. The careless 15.\text{d2}? allows the dreaded 15...\text{b5!!} 16.cxb5 \text{axb5} 17.\text{Qxb5} \text{Qb7}, when Black gets strong compensation and is likely to win the pawn back with an easy game. For example: 18.\text{We2} (18.\text{Qc3} \text{Qxb3} 19.axb3 \text{Qbx3=}) 18...\text{Qb4} 19.\text{Qc3} \text{Qxa2} 20.\text{xa2} \text{Qxb3+} Zagrebelny – Volokitin, Sochi 2004.
To understand the importance of the text move, we must compare the alternative:

15...f1

I will discuss the pros and cons of having the bishop on e2 versus f1 a little later. For a while I believed the text move to be more accurate, but then I discovered a problem after:

15...\textbf{d8}!

Black bolsters his centre in preparation for counterplay with ...b5.
The immediate 15...b5? allows 16.cxb5 axb5 17.d5\# when, since the bishop is no longer on d3, Black’s d6-pawn will be hanging.
In my first draft I analysed 15...b6 extensively. This resembles our main line, but the placement of the bishop changes a few of the subsequent details which I will not go into just now.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chessDiagram1.png}
\end{center}

16.d5?!N

The text move is a logical novelty, but Black seems to have enough resources to maintain the balance:

16...b5! 17.c5

This is not forced, but it is generally the way I would look to counter the ...b5 break.

17...\textbf{d7}!

17...dxc5 18.xc5 \textbf{c8} 19.a3 gives White some pressure.

18.e1?!

18.cxd6 \textbf{xd6} 19.xe7+ \textbf{xe7}=

18...\textbf{d4}!

18...h6 19.ac1+ 19.xd4 exd4 20.xe7+ \textbf{xe7} 21.c6 \textbf{c7}

White will be left with a symbolic advantage due to the isolated d6-pawn, but no realistic winning chances.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chessDiagram2.png}
\end{center}

15...b6

Black needs to give the a7-rook a route into the game at some point.

15...\textbf{d8}

Of course we should also consider this move, which was played in Ramesh – Oral, Bled (ol) 2002, and one other game. We will proceed in parallel to the 15.f1 line until we reach the point where the placement of the bishop makes a difference.
Chapter 12  6.\(\square3\) a7 with 7...\(\square7\)  

16.\(\square3\) b5 17.c5  
17.\(\squarec1\)! deserves attention as well.  
17...\(\squareb7\)  
17...dx\(\square5\) 18.\(\square x\) c5 \(\square b7\) 19.\(\square f3\)±  

![Diagram](image)  

18.\(\square f3\)!  
18.\(\square a1\) \(\square x\) d5 19.\(\square x\) d5 \(\square d4\) 20.\(\square x\) d4 \(\square x\) d4  
21.\(\square x\) d4 \(\square x\) c5 22.\(\square x\) c5 \(\square x\) d5 is close to equal.  
After the text move we finally get to see the real value of having the bishop on e2 instead of f1. There is no easy way for Black to break the tension, as the bishop reinforces d5 and defends d1, preventing any tactical tricks which might otherwise have enabled Black to simplify and equalize.  
18...h6  
18...dx\(\square5\) 19.\(\square x\) c5±  
18...a5 19.\(\square x\) d6 \(\square x\) d6 20.\(\square x\) c7† \(\square x\) c7  
21.\(\square x\) a5 wins a pawn.  
19.g3±  
White can continue improving his position with moves like h2-h4 and \(\square a1\) (or perhaps a2-a4), before releasing the central tension at a moment of his choosing.  

16.\(\square d2\)  
Apart from helping to deal with the ...b5 plan in the previous note, the bishop on e2 also gives us the useful plan of h2-h3 followed by \(\square g4\). However, there is one potential danger that must be pointed out. In the event that Black advances on the kingside with ...f5-f4, there is a real danger, if White's queen leaves the third rank, that Black might play ...f3, intending an exchange sacrifice followed by ...\(\square g6-f4\) with a strong attack. If the bishop was on f1, White would be able to ignore Black's advance, as ...f3 could always be met by g2-g3.  

16...f5  
We also need to consider 16...b5!?N again. The computer seems to think that Black is doing okay, but it overestimates Black's chances: 17.cxb5 axb5 18.\(\square x b5\) \(\square a4\)  

![Diagram](image)  

19.a3! The important thing to understand here is that Black's counterplay depends on a rather shaky concept involving ...f5. His rook already looks awkward on a4, and it will be even more strangely placed on e4. 19...f5 20.\(\square c3\) \(\square x e4\)  
21.\(\square f1\)† There is still a lot of tension on the board, but Black's pieces — particularly the rook on e4 — seem far from ideally placed.  

![Diagram](image)
17.\texttt{\textit{h3}N}

17.\texttt{\textit{Ad1} f4} was played in Zalcik–Schwarte, corr. 2014. At this point 18.\texttt{\textit{d3}N \textit{d7} 19.\texttt{\textit{d5}}} is a logical continuation. I analysed something similar in the analogous line with the bishop on f1 and liked White’s chances, so the same idea could be considered here too – even though I slightly prefer the version with the bishop on f1.

Having weighed up the different options, I like the idea of playing the exf5 structure even more. This will render Black’s central pawns more vulnerable, and will also enable us to utilize the bishop on e2 in a positive way, by bringing it to g4.

17...\texttt{\textit{f6}}

17...\texttt{\textit{d8}} misplaces the knight: 18.\texttt{\textit{exf5} \textit{xf5} (18...\texttt{\textit{xf5} 19.\texttt{\textit{g4}}\texttt{\textit{+}})} 19.\texttt{\textit{w3} 20.\texttt{\textit{ad1}} \textit{d7}}

21.\texttt{\textit{a4}! \textit{c8} 22.\texttt{c5±} Black is in trouble.

17...\texttt{\textit{h6}} 18.\texttt{\textit{ad1} \textit{d7} 19.\texttt{\textit{d3} \textit{d8}} also fails to equalize after: 20.\texttt{\textit{exf5} \textit{xf5} (20...\texttt{\textit{xf5} 21.\texttt{\textit{w3}\textit{e3\texttt{+}}}) 21.\texttt{\textit{w5}}

18.\texttt{\textit{exf5}}

18.\texttt{\textit{d5}?!} 19.\texttt{\textit{w3} fxe4 20.\texttt{\textit{ad1}} is a more ambitious continuation, which could be analysed in more detail. The general evaluation is pretty similar though: as long as White avoids any annoying knight jumps, he should remain in control.

18...\texttt{\textit{xf5}}

After 18...\texttt{\textit{xf5} 19.\texttt{\textit{w3} Black’s bishop is misplaced and White will follow up with \texttt{\textit{d5}} or \texttt{\textit{e4}}.}

19.\texttt{\textit{g4+}}

White has the more pleasant game. He can continue to improve his pieces while Black is not yet able to plonk a knight on d4. A future exchange of bishops may well turn out in White’s favour too, as Black is potentially weak on the light squares.

\textbf{Conclusion}

By choosing the 6...\texttt{\textit{a7} 7.0–0 \textit{c7} variation, Black takes the sting out of the \texttt{\textit{g4}} plan and forces White to look for other possible paths to an advantage. I favour a set-up with c2-c4, but it is important to choose the correct move order beginning with 8.\texttt{\textit{w3} \texttt{bc6} 9.\texttt{\textit{w3}}} Then 9...\texttt{\textit{xe3}} 10.\texttt{\textit{w3} 0–0} is interesting, but 11.\texttt{\textit{ad1}} is a good move which enables White to meet the ...d5 plan with confidence. The main line is 9...0–0, when 10.\texttt{\textit{xa7} \texttt{xa7} 11.\texttt{c4} sees White set up his desired formation under optimal circumstances, now that ...d5 has been discouraged by the weird placement of the rook on a7. The real battle is only just starting though, and many challenges lie ahead. A close study of this chapter should pay dividends, as I talked a lot about thematic piece manoeuvres and also discovered some important nuances. For instance, being familiar with the pros and cons of putting the bishop on e2 or f1 can make a big difference to the outcome of certain lines.
Introduction to 6...\textit{e}7

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\textit{f}3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\textit{xd}4 a6 5.\textit{d}3 \textit{c}5 6.\textit{b}3 \textit{e}7

7.\textit{g}4

A) 7...\textit{f}6 8.f4!? d6 9.\textit{c}3 \textit{c}6 10.\textit{d}2 \textit{ge}7 11.0-0-0!
  
  A1) 11...0-0
  
  A2) 11...b5

B) 7...\textit{g}6 8.\textit{e}2 d6 9.0-0
  
  B1) 9...\textit{c}6
  
  B2) 9...\textit{d}7 10.\textit{c}3
    
    B21) 10...\textit{e}5
    
    B22) 10...b6

A) after 9...\textit{c}6

A2) after 11...b5

B1) after 13.\textit{g}8

10.\textit{d}2!N

12.c5!N

14.\textit{B}ae1!N
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 exd4 4.Qxd4 a6
5.e3 d6 6.Qb3 Qe7
This is a more conservative option than 6...a7. Black clearly shows his intention to play a typical Sicilian structure, most likely with ...d6, ...Qf6 and ...0-0, rather than the mix of active but slightly unorthodox ideas that we saw with the bishop on a7.

7.Wg4
White has often played without this move, instead establishing a Maroczy structure with c2-c4. In that case, however, Black’s ...Qc5 would seem to have served its purpose, while the extra move he gave White is amply compensated by the awkward d3-bishop.

Black has two sensible ways of dealing with the attack on the g7-pawn: A) 7...Qf6 and B) 7...g6.

7...Qf6?! is a typical motif in the 6...Qa7 variation, but the pawn sacrifice does not work nearly as well with the bishop on the less active e7-square. 8.Qxg7 Rg8 9.Wh6 Qc6 (9...Qxg2 10.e5+) 10.0-0 b5 11.Qc3 Qe5 12.f3! In the lines with the bishop on a7, this move is so much harder to play. 12...b4 (12...Qb7 13.Qe3N+) In Psalchis – Kurajica, Cap d’Agde 1994, the easiest way to cement White’s advantage would have been:

A) 7...Qf6

This unusual move has gained in popularity recently. There isn’t much established theory, so it often leads to somewhat novel positions early on. White has numerous options, which is often a bad thing when dealing with such lines over the board, or even while preparing, as it’s easy to spend lots of time or play a few careless moves and let Black get a perfectly nice position out of the opening.

8.f4?
One of the advantages of playing Wg4 before 0-0 is that we have the flexibility to contemplate long castling. One key point to realize is that the f6-bishop may turn out to be a good piece if we continue with a slow plan involving short castling and normal centralization, but it is awfully placed to deal with a kingside pawn assault.

8...d6
8...d5 seems a weird choice. 9.e5 Qh6 10.Wc2 Qh4† 11.g3 Qe7 occurred in Glatthaar – Moore, corr. 2011, and now 12.Qd2N† followed by Qf3 and c2-c3 would have given White a pleasant version of a French structure.
Alternatives can certainly be considered, but I like the simple plan of \( \text{Qc3, Qd2, 0-0-0, Qf3} \) and g2-g4, as shown by the Armenian GM Ter Sahakyan. Logically and aesthetically it all makes sense, as White’s pieces will be placed harmoniously and he will be ready to target the bishop on f6. That said, we still require some precision in the move order to avoid a quick ...b5-b4.

9...c6

The immediate 9...b5? allows 10.e5! dxe5 11.Qf3 a7 12.0-0 and Black’s horrid development will soon be exploited.

9...e7 10.d2 bc6 (10...b5 11.e5!?) was the move order of the Ter Sahakyan game referenced below, but the text move has been more popular and it requires a novelty from White.

10.d2!

10.e3 has occurred in all the games on my database, but I like Ter Sahakyan’s treatment with the bishop on d2.

10...e7

This transposes to two games that got here via different move orders.

10...b5 11.e5! dxe5 12.Qf3 is similar to variation A2 below and will most likely transpose, as I can’t see Black doing without ...Qge7 for much longer.

10...b4?

If you look ahead to the note to White’s next move, you will see that this knight move is a key resource which we will be looking to avoid, so it is natural to wonder if Black might benefit from playing it immediately. However, there is a crucial difference, as we don’t need to castle on the queenside anymore!

11.0-0 Qxd3

11...e7? 12.e5! has the nasty point that 12...dxe5 13.fxe5 uncovers an attack on the b4-knight.

12.cxd3

Black faces serious problems finishing his development.

12.e7

12.g6 13.e5! dxe5 14.Qf3?? There are other promising moves, but one strong option is enough. 14...g7 15.fxe5

12...a5 13.e3! (13.ael a4 14.Qc1 Qb6† 15.h1 Qxb2 16.e5 Qh6! and Black survives) 13.a4 14.a2 a3 15.ab1 axb2 16.Qb5

13.e5?

13.ael is also possible.

13.dxe5 14.e4?
14.fxe5 dxe5 15...e1 f5 gives White compensation but no clear way through.

14...h5
14...exf4 15...d5 16...g3 gives White nice compensation, as 16...0-0 is met by 17...h6!
14...xd3 15...bc5 ...d8 16...ad1↑
15...xf6↑ gxf6 16...g7 ...g8 17...xf6±

11.0–0–0!
11...f3 was the move order of the Ter Sahakyan – Karthikeyan game quoted below but, instead of 11...0–0 12.0–0–0, which is covered in variation A1, it gives Black an extra opportunity: 11...b4!N This annoying move prepares to meet 0–0–0 with ...xc3 while, compared with 10...b4 above, Black is not so far behind in development. 12.a3 (12.0–0 ...xd3 13.cxd3 0–0! 14.g4 g6 is fine for Black)

12...xd3↑ 13...xd3 b5 14.0–0–0 0–0 15.g4 ...c6 16.g5 ...e7∞

Black's main options are A1) 11...0–0N and A2) 11...b5.

11...b4 12...e2 achieves nothing for Black, since 12...xc3? is met by 13.bxc3 ...bc6 14...xg7 with a winning position.

11...a5 is also pointless, as 12.a4 blocks the queenside.

A1) 11...0–0N 12...f3

This move takes us back to Ter Sahakyan – Karthikeyan, having avoided Black's improvement on the previous turn.

12...h3?! also deserves attention – the queen might turn out to be better on either square, depending on how Black responds. The main line looks great to me, so we don't need to analyse the text move too much. I will just mention 12...b4 13.b1 ...g6? 14.g4 (14...h1 ...d3 15...d3 is also possible) 14...xc3 as one extra option that should be considered if the queen goes to h3.

12...a5
12...g6?! is too slow: 13.g4 ...g7 14.h4+
12...d7 13.g4 g6 14.g5 xc3 15.xc3 e5 can he met by a strong pawn sacrifice:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 8 & 8 & 8 & 8 & 8 & 8 & 8 \\
7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 7 & 7 \\
6 & 6 & 6 & 6 & 6 & 6 & 6 & 6 \\
5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 & 5 \\
4 & 4 & 4 & 4 & 4 & 4 & 4 & 4 \\
3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 & 3 \\
2 & 2 & 2 & 2 & 2 & 2 & 2 & 2 \\
1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

16.f5! xg5† 17.b1 f4 18.hg1

12...d4 13.xd4 xxd4 14.e2 c5 (14...f6 15.g4+) 15.h1 Black’s bishop is weirdly placed on c5, enabling us to target the dark squares on the kingside, for instance: 15...d7 16.h4 c6 17.h5 e7 18.h6 g6 19.g4†

13.a4!

The right choice, since Black has no convincing way to utilize the h4-outpost or the slight loosening of the h3-knight.

13...e5P

This seems a better try than 13...b4 14.b1 d7 15.b5± which was great for

White in Ter Sahakyan – Karthikeyan, Kolkata 2013.

14.f5 d4 15.h5 d5 16.g4!

It turns out that we can simply ignore Black’s apparent activity in the centre.

16...xb3† 17.cxb3 d4 18.b5

18.g6 19.h3 c6 20.c4+

Black has little counterplay.

A2) 11...b5

Commencing counterplay seems absolutely natural, but we can launch an immediate attack before the black h-pawn can hit its target.
12.e5!N

12.a3 b4 occurred in Hachijan – Siebrecht, Dieren 2010. The computer still prefers White's position, but it hardly seems in our interests to allow the opening of a queenside file.

12...f3?N is worth considering, though it gives Black some interesting concrete options, one example being: 12...b4 13.a4 e5 14.f5 d7 15.g4 c8?? Holding up White's kingside advance and preparing to target the knight on a4. It's not clear if this is okay for Black or not, but there is no need to allow these complications.

12...dxe5 13.f3 b7

13...a7 is hardly an improvement: 14.e3 d7 15.c5 exf4 16.dxd7 xd7 17.xf4 xc3 18.bxc3 e5 19.g5 a5 20.e4 xa2 21.d3±

14.b1?N

White has no immediate way through the defence, but his pieces are so active that he can afford to spend a tempo securing his king and waiting to see what Black does.

14.c5 b6 15.xb7 xb7 16.e4 d8 17.g4 d5 18.f5 also gives White a strong initiative for the pawn. The f6-bishop is dead and we have an outstanding knight on e4.

14...c8

It seems reasonable for Black to make a non-committal move in reply. Here are a few other possibilities:

14...a5?! gives White a pleasant choice between 15.e4! and 15.e4!, with serious problems for Black in either case.

14...exf4 15.c5 b6 16.e4 d8 17.xf4±

14...0–0 15.c5 c7 (15...b6 16.d7) 16.e4! (16.g4 exf4 17.xf4 e5 is not at all clear)

16.d5 17.xb7 xb7 18.xf6 f6 19.fxe5 d7 20.e4 g6 21.h6±

14...c7 15.c5 d8 16.e4 (16.e1!? is also strong: 16.g6 [or 16...c8 17.e4] 17.xb7 xb7 18.e4 c8 19.xg6 hxg6 20.fxe5 xe7 21.e4+)
Chapter 13 – Introduction to 6...\texttt{\texttt{d}7

16...\texttt{\texttt{d}}4 17.\texttt{\texttt{d}}xf6! gxf6 18.\texttt{\texttt{d}f}b7 \texttt{\texttt{d}c}5 19.fxe5 \texttt{\texttt{d}d}xe5 (19...fxe5 20.\texttt{\texttt{d}g}5±) 20.\texttt{\texttt{d}e}3±

15.\texttt{\texttt{d}e}4 \texttt{\texttt{d}d}5

This is the main line of course, and it leads to an interesting strategic battle. Black’s last move has the potential to weaken his kingside but, if he is allowed to castle quickly, it might even turn out to be useful in preparing the thematic bishop regrouping to g7. Thus Black would ideally like to play ...\texttt{\texttt{d}f}6 followed by ...0–0 at some point, whereas White would like to be able to meet ...\texttt{\texttt{d}f}6 with \texttt{\texttt{d}h}6, which would clearly pinpoint the drawback of the ...g6 move. Black is not really threatening to carry out his plan immediately because e4-e5 would be unpleasant for him, so we don’t need to move the queen right away; on the other hand, it’s hard to come up with another useful move, so...

16.\texttt{\texttt{f}5! 16.\texttt{\texttt{d}h}f1 is a good move but I like the text even more.}

16...\texttt{\texttt{d}d}4 16...\texttt{\texttt{d}e}5 17.\texttt{\texttt{d}xf}5 also leaves Black under serious pressure.

17.\texttt{\texttt{d}xd}4 \texttt{\texttt{d}xd}4 18.\texttt{\texttt{f}e}6 fxe6 19.\texttt{\texttt{h}e}1

White has overwhelming compensation for a mere pawn.

B) 7...\texttt{\texttt{g}6

8.\texttt{\texttt{d}e}2

This has been played in a huge majority of the games, but it’s certainly not the only move worth considering.

8.\texttt{\texttt{c}c}3 followed by h2-h4? (or 8.h4!? immediately) has been tried in some recent games; although the concept is an interesting one, it does not quite seem strategically robust. See Lagno – Koneru, Beijing (rapid) 2013, for one example.

8.0–0 is likely to transpose to one of our main lines, unless Black tries to get away with 8...\texttt{\texttt{f}f}6 9.\texttt{\texttt{e}e}2 0–0, which doesn’t seem like a great idea on account of 10.e5 (or 10.\texttt{\texttt{h}h}6 first).

I found a fascinating new idea, which has yet to be tested, despite there being more than a thousand games with Black’s last move:

8.\texttt{\texttt{d}1!}\texttt{N}

It’s always interesting to find and/or play a novelty in such a common position. I won’t go into extensive detail here, but will instead just mention a few key lines to show why I find the move interesting. The essence of
the idea is to get an improved version of the 10.a4!? line discusses in the notes to variation B2.

8...d6 9.0–0

9...Qd7

9...Qf6 is virtually guaranteed to be a bad idea when the reply 10.Qh6 is available, and this is no exception.

9...b6!? is quite a sophisticated reply; one clear drawback of having the queen on d1 instead of e2 is that the e4-pawn is less secure, so Black prepares to play ...Qf6 with an attack on the pawn. I propose 10.a4 Qb7 11.Qa3!? Qf6 12.Qc4! with the idea: 12...Qxe4 (12...Qbd7 13.Qh6??) 13.Qxe4 Qxe4 14.Qe3 This could be analysed further, but it certainly appears that Black is under some pressure.

10.a4! b6

10...Qe5 11.Qe2! Qf6 12.Qc3 Qd7 13.f4± gives White a rather nice Scheveningen-style position.

11.Qa3 Qb7

11...Qc7!? changes things slightly; White has a few ideas that could be explored, including 12.a5 as below, or 12.Qc4 first.

12.a5 b5 13.c4 bxc4

13...b4 14.Qc2±

14.Qxc4 Qb8 15.Qb6?

The last move is not the only option but it seems quite annoying for Black, as taking twice on b6 will open the queenside for all of White's pieces. Once again, to fully appreciate the hidden advantages of the queen on d1, I would advise you to compare this to the 10.a4!? line on pages 276-7.

8...d6

8...Qc6 has been played several times but it almost always transposes to variation B1 after a subsequent ...d6.

9.0–0

Now B1) 9...Qc6 is worth considering, but B2) 9...Qd7 is the main line by far.

9...Qc7 has been played in a bunch of games but it's hard to see any advantage for Black in playing it so soon. 10.Qc3 is a simple reply, when 10...Qc6 and 10...Qd7 both transpose to main lines; alternatively, 10.a4!? b6 11.Qa3 looks promising and has scored impressively in practice.

B1) 9...Qc6

This is much the less popular of the two main moves – and for good reason, as the knight isn't as flexible on c6. Black does not have many sensible options aside from a quick ...Qe5, which is covered in variation B21 under the 9...Qd7 move order. Obviously I will focus on any independent possibilities in this section.
10.\(\text{d}c3\) \(\text{e}7\) 11.\(\text{d}2\) \(\text{d}f6\)

11...\(\text{f}8\)? looks unappealing and is certainly not something we should worry about. Nevertheless, it should not be dismissed immediately, as Svidler used it to get an excellent position against Short. Black’s idea, of course, is that the bishop will be ideally placed on g7, and this will enable him to develop the g8-knight without having to worry about \(\text{h}6\) ideas.

a) 12.\(\text{f}4\) was Nigel’s choice but it was not particularly effective: 12...\(\text{g}7\) 13.\(\text{a}e1\) \(\text{f}6\) 14.\(\text{d}d1\) 0–0 15.\(\text{c}e3\) \(\text{b}5\) 16.\(\text{g}4\) \(\text{d}5\) Short – Svidler, Dubai (rapid) 2002.

b) Apart from costing two tempos, the only drawback of Black’s manoeuvre is that it weakens the d6-pawn, making it a perfect time for White to switch plans: 12.\(\text{a}d1\)!

I won’t go into too many specifics here, other than to say that 12...\(\text{g}7\) can be met by any of 13.\(\text{d}f4\), 13.\(\text{e}3\) or even 13.\(\text{g}5\), followed by \(\text{d}d2\) – and the black bishop will no longer be as well placed on g7. The exact moves aren’t too relevant as long as you follow the general plan.

11...h5!?N has not been tested in this exact position, but Bruzon Batista played the same move in the similar position with White’s bishop on e3 instead of d2, so it is worth checking it here as well. As you will see in the main line, ...h5 can be a useful move for Black. However, it seems an odd choice when White has not even committed to playing \(\text{f}2\)-\(\text{f}4\).

A good reply is:

12.\(\text{h}3\)!

12...\(\text{h}6\) \(\text{b}5\)

12...\(\text{f}8\) 13.\(\text{a}d2\)! is virtually always an unpleasant exchange for Black because of the many dark-square weaknesses; see Grischuk – Svidler, Rishon LeZion (blitz) 2006.

13.\(\text{f}4\) \(\text{g}8\)
If Black has to resort to such moves then he clearly isn’t doing well – especially after the following improvement.

14.\texttt{Kan} 10.\texttt{Qc3}

Before going any further, it is worth mentioning one interesting alternative:

10.a4??

For a long time I preferred this move, which aims to cause immediate problems on the queenside, particularly if Black responds with the natural \ldots b6. Another attractive point is that the knight can come into play via a3 and c4. It is worth mentioning two possible replies:

a) 10..b6

The following game perfectly illustrates White’s ideas:

11.\texttt{Qa3} 12.a5
12.\texttt{Qc4?!} 13.a5 b5 14.\texttt{Qb6} 15.axb5
15.axb5 16.\texttt{Qa5} is another interesting plan.

12..b5 13.c4 b4 14.\texttt{Qc2} 15.\texttt{Qg6}

The improvement 14..\texttt{Qc5}! 15.\texttt{Qxc5} dxc5 led to a satisfactory position for Black in Pokazanov – Shaposhnikov, Novokuznetsk 2008, and a few other games. If you compare this with the 8.\texttt{Qd1?!}N line noted on pages 273-4, you will understand one of the points of that move: the queen on d1 robs Black of the \ldots\texttt{Qc5} resource, as White could simply respond with \texttt{Qxb4} when the b3-knight is defended! Food for thought – although of course Black has some other ideas available when the queen goes to d1, as explained earlier.

14.\texttt{Kan}!

14.a4 b4 15.\texttt{Qb1} was also better for White in Parligras – Posedaru, Calimanesti Caciulata 2015, but retreating to b1 doesn’t seem like the optimal way to handle the position.

14..\texttt{b7} 15.\texttt{Qg5!}

The bishop has done its job in preventing Black from castling, and this small retreat sets up the unpleasant threat of e4-e5. White’s pieces are perfectly placed to develop an initiative in the middlegame ahead.

B2) 9.\texttt{Qf4}

14.\texttt{Qa1}N

For a long time I preferred this move, which aims to cause immediate problems on the queenside, particularly if Black responds with the natural \ldots b6. Another attractive point is that the knight can come into play via a3 and c4. It is worth mentioning two possible replies:

a) 10..b6

The following game perfectly illustrates White’s ideas:

11.\texttt{Qa3} 12.a5
12.\texttt{Qc4?!} 13.a5 b5 14.\texttt{Qb6} 15.axb5
15.axb5 16.\texttt{Qa5} is another interesting plan.

12..b5 13.c4 b4 14.\texttt{Qc2} 15.\texttt{Qg6}

The improvement 14..\texttt{Qc5}! 15.\texttt{Qxc5} dxc5 led to a satisfactory position for Black in Pokazanov – Shaposhnikov, Novokuznetsk 2008, and a few other games. If you compare this with the 8.\texttt{Qd1?!}N line noted on pages 273-4, you will understand one of the points of that move: the queen on d1 robs Black of the \ldots\texttt{Qc5} resource, as White could simply respond with \texttt{Qxb4} when the b3-knight is defended! Food for thought – although of course Black has some other ideas available when the queen goes to d1, as explained earlier.
Chapter 13 – Introduction to 6...\texttt{e}e7

15.\texttt{B}xb4 \texttt{d}5 16.e5! \texttt{dxe}4 17.\texttt{B}xa6 \texttt{B}xa6 18.\texttt{B}xa6 \texttt{B}e8 19.\texttt{B}b4 \texttt{B}xc5 20.\texttt{B}xc5 \texttt{B}xc5 21.\texttt{B}d2±

In Hammer–Kotronias, Cappelle la Grande 2008, White's queenside play was a lot more important than Black's central majority.

b) Unfortunately, 10...\texttt{B}e5! is more problematic:

The point is that even if White establishes a firm bind on the queenside with a4-a5, he doesn’t actually achieve too much, while after ...\texttt{B}xd3 and cxd3 Black will get a stable outpost on b5 for his bishop. In the meantime, Black will continue developing normally with ...\texttt{B}d7, ...\texttt{B}f6 and so on. It's possible to analyse this further, but I suspect Black is okay.

Once again though, this line highlights an advantage of 8.\texttt{B}d1?!N – in that case, ...\texttt{B}e5 can always be met by \texttt{B}e2 and \texttt{f}2-f4 – which seems like a favourable regrouping – and the knight will be forced back to c6 or d7.

With that brief diversion out of the way, let's consider the position after my recommended move.

I want to develop in the simplest possible way, at least for the next few moves. The basic plan involves \texttt{B}d2, \texttt{B}ae1 and \texttt{f}2-f4, after which e4-e5 could be on the cards. Compared to a typical Sicilian, White's pieces aren't perfectly placed – I would rather have my knight on d4, and I'm not quite sure about the bishop on d3 and queen on e2 – although this configuration definitely has its plus points. However, the most important difference from a normal Sicilian position is the weakening ...g6 move which we provoked earlier. This ensures that ...\texttt{B}f6 will always be met by \texttt{B}h6, which presents Black with something of a conundrum over how to complete his development.

One typical way to avoid the \texttt{B}h6 stuff is to play ...\texttt{B}e5 and then ...\texttt{B}f6, so that \texttt{B}h6 can be met by a knight jump to g4. We also saw above in the 10.a4 line that ...\texttt{B}e5 is a key resource for Black, but here there is one major difference: White has not played a4-a5. Besides the obvious cost of two tempos, this advance also gave away the crucial b5-square for the black bishop after ...\texttt{B}xd3, cxd3. In the present line, on the other hand, White rarely has to worry about the cxd3 structure, as it will leave Black struggling to find good squares for his pieces.
It is also worth noting that, despite the absence of a2-a4, Black still isn't quite ready to play ...b5. The point is that this advance can usually be met by a2-a4 to provoke ...b4, after which a2a2 and d2 will provoke the further ...a5, and finally c2-c3 followed by c2 will simplify the queenside structure to one that is highly favourable for us, because we will get the b5-outpost plus the open c-file. Therefore, in the upcoming lines, Black's main aim will simply be to castle, while our job will be to prevent this from happening, or at least make it as difficult as possible.

In the rest of this chapter we will analyse B21) 10...e5 and B22) 10...b6.

10...c7 is the main line, and will be examined separately in the next chapter.

10...g6 makes no sense; as we will soon see, White is usually happy to meet this move with h6 even after having moved the bishop once. After 11.h6 b5 12.a4 b4 13.a2 b6 14.a5 b8 15.f4 Black was completely stuck, while White was ready to open either the queenside or the centre in Schuster – Gmuer, corr. 2005.

**B21) 10...e5**

11.f4

The simplest option, since Black isn't quite able to complete developing normally.

11..xd3 12.cxd3 f6 13.e5 h5

13..d7 allows us to open everything with: 14.exd6 d6

15.f5! c5 (15...xf5 16.fx5->) 16.xc5 xc5+ 17.h1 A. Silva – Tobella Torras, corr. 2009.

13...d5 is also risky: 14.xd5 exd5 15.exd6 xd6 16.e1 e6 (16...d4?! 17.f5! xf5 18.f4 xe6 19.f2+ J. Geller – Tunik, Kazan 2012)

14.e4!

White's idea is to provoke ...d5, followed by
a typical dark-square strategy to play against Black's bad light-squared bishop. Moreover, the fact that Black's knight is completely out of place hardly bodes well for him.

with the main lines considered in the next chapter, Black may try to avoid ...\textit{c7} altogether, which might give him some useful extra options in certain lines.

\textbf{11.\textit{d2} \textit{b7}}

11...\textit{e5}?! has not been tried here, and after 12.f4 \textit{xd3} 13.\textit{xd3} Black just seems to have a worse version of the previous variation, for instance: 13...\textit{b7} (13...\textit{f6} 14.f5 e5 15.d4±) 14.f5 \textit{xf5} 15.\textit{xf5} e5 16.d4±

\textbf{12.f4!}

In the next chapter we will play \textit{ae1} before touching the f-pawn, but here it is important to threaten e4-e5, which virtually forces Black to commit his queen to c7.

12.\textit{ae1} is not a move I would recommend, but it is worth looking at a couple of Black's options in order to understand the significance of delaying ...\textit{c7}:

a) 12...\textit{gf6}

This is not the best move so it's not directly relevant, but I am including it because the following line contains some instructive points.

13.\textit{h6}

13.f4 0–0 is what Black wants.

13...\textit{f8}

This is a more subtle move order. Compared
After 14.\(\text{xf}8\) \(\text{xf}8\) 15.f4 e5! the black pieces were suddenly rather well placed in Motylev – Topalov, Bastia 2003. The king is heading for g7 to plug the gap on the kingside, while Black's pawn structure is perfect to restrict the white knights.

The text move is a novelty here but it's a standard idea, stopping the black king from easily getting to g7.

14...\(\text{xh}6\) 15.\(\text{wh}6\) \(\text{g}4\)

This seems as good a try as any to solve Black’s problems on the kingside; it is hard to see what else he should be doing.

16.\(\text{wh}4\)

Forcing the knight to an uncomfortable square.

After 16.\(\text{wh}3\) \(\text{gf}6\) Black is ready to castle, and it's not so easy to exploit his weaknesses.

16...\(\text{ge}5\) 17.e2

Black has managed to arrange castling, but we can easily switch to attacking the d6-pawn.

17...0-0 18.\(\text{wd}2\) \(\text{ff}6\)

18...\(\text{we}7\) 19.\(\text{zd}1\)\(+\)

19.f4 \(\text{ed}7\) 20.\(\text{fb}3\)\(+\)

Black is holding his position together for the time being, but he is still some way from equalizing.

b) Black would be better advised to play 12...\(\text{e}5\)! 13.f4 \(\text{xd}3\) 14.\(\text{xd}3\) \(\text{ff}6\) as in a few correspondence games. The queen is nicely placed on d8, away from the open c-file. More importantly, compared to variation B21 with 10...\(\text{d}5\), here e4-e5 is not a big deal because ...\(\text{dd}5\) is a solid reply.

15.\(\text{f}5\)\(\text{N}\) is an interesting try, but 15...\(\text{gx}f5\) 16.\(\text{ex}f5\) e5 followed by ...\(\text{eg}8\) leads to a mess.
is too exposed, and he will have to move his knight sooner or later.

13.e5 dxe5
13...\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}5\) 14.exd6 \(\text{\textit{x}}\text{xd6}\) 15.\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{e}4\) \(\text{\textit{e}}\text{e}7\) allows White to smash through in style:

![Diagram 1]

16.f5! gxf5 17.\(\text{\textit{xf}}\text{xf5}\) exf5 18.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}6\) \(\text{\textit{f}}\text{f}8\)
19.\(\text{\textit{h}}\text{h}6\) \(\text{\textit{g}}\text{g}8\) 20.\(\text{\textit{xf}}\text{f5}\)–

14.fxe5 \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}5\) 15.\(\text{\textit{x}}\text{xd5}\) \(\text{\textit{xd5}}\)

![Diagram 2]

16.c4 \(\text{\textit{b}}\text{b}7\) 17.\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{e}4\) \(\text{\textit{xe}4}\) 18.\(\text{\textit{xe}4}\)!

With the simple plan of \(\text{\textit{h}}\text{h}6\) followed by \(\text{\textit{f}}\text{f}3\), Black is in no position to generate much compensation after an exchange sacrifice, which he will almost certainly have to make.

7...\(\text{\textit{f}}\text{f}6\) looks slightly odd but the bishop has a lot of potential on the long diagonal. The only way to challenge Black's set-up is to use the bishop as a target to launch an attack with either e4-e5 or g4-g5. My recommendation is 8.f4! d6 9.\(\text{\textit{c}}\text{c}3\) \(\text{\textit{c}}\text{c}6\) 10.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}2\) \(\text{\textit{ge}7}\) 11.0–0–0!, when we considered two options for Black. 11...0–0 is a natural move but after the simple 12.\(\text{\textit{f}}\text{f}3\) it is hard for Black to find a good answer to the simple attacking plan of g4-g5. 11...b5 seems like a logical attempt to accelerate Black's queenside play, but White can strike first with 12.e5! dxe5 13.\(\text{\textit{f}}\text{f}3\), sacrificing a pawn for a dangerous initiative.

7...g6 is a more reliable choice. After a brief discussion of the intriguing new option of 8.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}1\)N, we moved on to the main line of 8.\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{e}2\) d6 9.0–0, when Black must decide how to proceed. As a rule, the development of the g8-knight to f6 will automatically be met by \(\text{\textit{h}}\text{h}6\), preventing Black from castling. This is always worth doing, even if we have already spent a tempo on \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}2\).

In view of the above, Black generally makes a few more developing moves on the queenside before moving the knight from g8. 9...\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}6\) is one such option, but White gets comfortable play after 10.\(\text{\textit{c}}\text{c}3\) followed by \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}2\); it is hard to see how Black can benefit from having the knight on c6 instead of the more common d7-square.

9...\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d}7\) is a more typical move in this system, when 10.\(\text{\textit{c}}\text{c}3\) gives Black a choice. 10...\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{e}5\) is met by the simple 11.f4 \(\text{\textit{xd}}\text{3}\) 12.cxd3, when
White gets a favourable structure, with good chances to create pressure on the dark squares. 10...b6 is a safer choice, when 11.\(a_d2\) \(b7\) 12.\(f4!\) is the most accurate move order. In that case Black really should play 12...\(c7\), which leads straight to the next chapter. If he tries to do something different then he soon gets into trouble, as my analysis showed.
Main Line

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d4 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 a6 5.d3 c5 6.a3 b3 b7 7.g4 g6 8.e2 d6 9.0-0 d7 10.a3 c7

11.d2

A) 11...gf6
B) 11...b6 12.e1 b7 13.f4
   B1) 13.h4
   B2) 13.b5
   B3) 13.gf6
   B4) 13.h5!

C) 11.h5!? 12.f4 gf6 13.e1 b5!? 14.h3! b4! 15.a4 b7 16.e5
   C1) 16.d5
   C2) 16.dxe5 17.fxe5 d5
      C21) 18.d4!
      C22) 18.f2 0–0 19.h6
         C221) 19..xe5
         C222) 19..c6!
            C2221) 20.g3?!
            C2222) 20.c4?!

note to move 11

B1) after 14.gf6

C) after 13.b5!
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 a6 5.c3 c5 6.b3 d6 7.gg4 g6 8.e2 d6 9.0-0 dd7 10.c3 cc7

Black puts his queen on this square in the great majority of games in this line although, as we saw towards the end of the previous chapter, he can also use the 10...b6 move order.

11.cd2

This is the standard developing move, delaying f2-f4 in order to maintain the option of gh6 in response to ...ggf6. Black has three main replies. A) 11...ggf6 ignores White's idea but has achieved decent results for Black, so it should be checked carefully. B) 11...b6 is the most flexible move, which has been played in the majority of games. However, I believe the modern C) 11...h5?! to be the most critical test of all.

11...b5? gives White an easy target on the queenside: 12.a4 b4 13.aa2 ff6 (13...c5 14.c3±) 14.xb4 (The simple 14.abb1± is also strong) 14...a5 15.aa6 xa6 16.xa6 xb2 17.xa5 wa7 In Blackwood - Landman, email 2001, White missed a chance to exploit his opponent's dubious play:

12.d5


12...e5N can be met by 13.h3± with the idea of f2-f4.

The text move is better than ...b6, as it is not so easy for White to attack on the queenside with his bishop already on h6. Instead he should continue developing with:

13.ea1

Black's king is stuck no matter what.
In the event of 13.a4 b4 14.\( \text{c}2 \text{d}5 \) it is not clear if White can exploit the opening of the centre.

13...\( \text{b}7 \) 14.\( \text{f}4 \text{N} \)
A novelty, but it's a natural move which immediately transposes to a few games.

14...\( \text{b}4 \)
14...\( \text{f}8 \) 15.\( \text{xf}8 \)\( \text{xf}8 \) 16.\( \text{e}5 \) gives White easy play.

14...\( \text{c}5 \text{N} \) is playable but after 15.\( \text{h}1 \) Black's problem remains the same: it is hard for him to castle on the kingside and his king is unlikely to feel safe on the queenside – and it's only a matter of time before White launches an attack with \( \text{e}4-\text{e}5 \).

15.\( \text{b}1 \! \)\( \text{N} \)
15.\( \text{d}1 \)\( \text{f}8 \) was not so easy in De Firmian – Skjoldan, Copenhagen 2005. Obviously White is unable to play \( \text{d}2 \) to reinforce the outpost on \( h6 \), so he will have to exchange on \( f8 \), allowing the black king to get to \( g7 \). When that happens, the knight will be better placed on \( b1 \) than on \( d1 \), for reasons that will soon become clear.

15...\( \text{f}8 \text{N} \)
15...\( \text{a}5 \) seems too slow. In Kassimov –

Arestanov, Karaganda 2009, 16.\( \text{e}5 \text{N} \) \( \text{d}5 \)
17.\( \text{d}2 \) would have given White a promising initiative.

I also considered:
15...\( \text{d}5 \text{N} \) 16.\( \text{e}5 \)
16.\( \text{exd}5 \) \( \text{xd}5 \) 17.\( \text{c}4 \) \( \text{b}7 \) 18.\( \text{d}2 \) \( \text{f}8 \)
19.\( \text{h}5 \) \( \text{e}7 \)
16...\( \text{e}4 \) 17.\( \text{d}2 \)
17.\( \text{c}4 \)\( \text{d}5 \)! 18.\( \text{exd}5 \)\( \text{xd}3 \) 19.\( \text{x} \text{d}3 \)\( \text{b}6 \! \)
backfires on White.
The text move is simple and strong. White has a pleasant version of a French structure, with the black king stuck awkwardly in the centre.
16.\textit{\textsf{x}}f8  \textit{\textsf{x}}f8 17.e5!  \textit{\textsf{d}}d5  
17...\textit{\textsf{h}}h5 18.\textit{\textsf{d}}d2 just leads to something similar with Black having a misplaced knight.

18.\textit{\textsf{d}}d2

Now the reason for 15.\textit{\textsf{b}}b1! becomes clear. In the analogous position after 15.\textit{\textsf{d}}d1, it would not have been so easy to regroup the knight, because \textit{\textsf{f}}f2 would have left the \textit{\textsf{f}}4-pawn hanging.

18...\textit{\textsf{dxe5}} 19.\textit{\textsf{fxe5}}  \textit{\textsf{g}}g7

Black has had to spend a lot of time carrying out artificial castling. White remains in control; the only real question is whether the \textit{\textsf{d}}2-knight should go to c4 or e4 next.

\begin{tikzpicture}

% Diagram code here

\end{tikzpicture}

20.\textit{\textsf{c}}e4!

I prefer this option because it offers additional flexibility. With the e5-pawn securely defended, White does not have to hurry to put the knight on d6, and can instead consider other plans such as \textit{\textsf{d}}d2 followed by a rook lift to the h-file. It is worth having a quick look at 20.\textit{\textsf{e}}4. I will show one bad option for Black, followed by a better one:

a) 20...\textit{\textsf{w}}xe5? 21.\textit{\textsf{a}}a5!  \textit{\textsf{c}}c8 22.\textit{\textsf{c}}c6  \textit{\textsf{x}}xb2
\hspace{1cm} (22...\textit{\textsf{c}}c7 23.\textit{\textsf{x}}f7\textit{t}!  \textit{\textsf{xf7}} 24.\textit{\textsf{g}}5\textit{t}  \textit{\textsf{f}}f6

25.\textit{\textsf{x}}e6+–) 23.\textit{\textsf{b}}b1!  \textit{\textsf{xa2}} Now White can win with a simple but attractive tactical sequence:

\begin{tikzpicture}

% Diagram code here

\end{tikzpicture}

b) 20...\textit{\textsf{h}}f8! is more tenacious:

\begin{tikzpicture}

% Diagram code here

\end{tikzpicture}

21.\textit{\textsf{d}}d6  \textit{\textsf{g}}8 White may still be a bit better, but I don’t like the idea of playing \textit{\textsf{d}}d6 so quickly.

20...\textit{\textsf{h}}f8

20...a5 21.\textit{\textsf{h}}h1 a4 22.\textit{\textsf{d}}d4\textit{t} would be extremely dangerous for Black.

21.\textit{\textsf{d}}d2 a5 22.\textit{\textsf{f}}3

22.\textit{\textsf{e}}4\textit{t}? could also be considered.
22...a4 23.a3 h5 24.d4 c5 25.h4! a6 26.h1
Everything is under control on the queenside, but it is not so easy for Black to keep his kingside together.

27.gxh5! gxh5 28.c6! wins, so Black has to fight on a pawn down.

28.exh8 Exh8 29.f2

B) 11...b6

This has been the most popular choice, avoiding any commitments on the kingside.

12.ae1 b7 13.f4
We have reached an important position, where White has arranged all his pieces perfectly in anticipation of Black’s usual ...g6 development. True, the last move took away the h6 option, but we are now ready to play e4-e5 to launch an attack against Black’s weakened kingside.

We will analyse four moves: the sidelines B1) 13...h4 and B2) 13...b5, followed by the natural B3) 13...g6, and finally the modern B4) 13...h5?.

B1) 13...h4

This looks weird and has only been played in one game; I guess Black wants to disrupt White’s harmonious set-up before going back with the bishop to f6.

14.bd1 f6
14...e7 15.f5! sees White launch an attack while the bishop is weirdly placed on h4.

14...e7?N
This might be an objectively better move than the main line, but it is hard to imagine
anyone wanting to play this way. Just in case, here is a good line for White:

15.e5! d5
15...Qh6 16.exd6 Qxd6 17.Qe4 0–0 18.Qxb7 Wxb7 19.Qg4± leaves Black's knight misplaced on h6, while White is ready to cause problems with Qe4.

15.f5!
15...Qh1 Qe7 16.f5 gxf5 17.exf5 e5 18.Qe4 Qxe4 19.Qxe4 d5 was not clear at all in Hendriks – Rotstein, Germany 2001. The text move is a clear improvement, as White does not have to waste time moving his king.

15...Qe5
15...Qe7? 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.Qg4 leaves Black without a good defence.

15...gxf5 16.exf5 e5 17.Qe4+ gives White a much better version of the aforementioned game; since Black can't play ...d5, White is completely dominating.

16.fxе6 fxе6 17.Qd4 Qe7 18.Qf3±
White has good attacking chances while Black’s kingside is still completely undeveloped.

B2) 13...b5

This was played in N. Kosintseva – Koneru, Moscow (blitz) 2010. It has not been repeated, but the idea of creeping forward on the queenside makes a certain amount of sense. I propose:

14.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{\texttt{h1?}}}}

This move should prove useful in all scenarios. Meanwhile, what does Black do next?

14...\textit{\textbf{\textsc{g6}}}

This gives White an even nicer version of variation B3 below, but what else could Black do?

14...b4 should not bother us at all, as White often tries to provoke this anyway with a2-a4. 15.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{d1}}} a5 16.c3± (16.a3?±)

14...h5 15.a4!? b4 (15...bxa4 16.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xa4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textsc{g6}}}

17.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{a5?}}}) 16.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{a2}}} a5 (16...h4 17.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xh4?}}}

17.c3! bxc3 18.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xc3}}} This line shows the usefulness of the \textit{\textbf{\textsc{h1}} move; without it, Black would be able to win a piece with ...\textit{\textbf{\textsc{b6?}}}.

15.e5 dxe5

15...\textit{\textbf{\textsc{h5}} is well met by: 16.f5! \textit{\textbf{\textsc{xe5}}}}

(16...\textit{\textbf{\textsc{exf5}} 17.exd6 \textit{\textbf{\textsc{xd6}} 18.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{a5}} \textit{\textbf{\textsc{c8}}}}

19.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{d5—}}})

16.fxe6 0–0 (17...fxe6 18.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{d4}} \textit{\textbf{\textsc{c8}} 19.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{h6?}}}})

18.exf7† \textit{\textbf{\textsc{xf7}} 19.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xf7}} \textit{\textbf{\textsc{xf7}} 20.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{c4+}}}}}

16.fxe5 \textit{\textbf{\textsc{d5}} 17.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xd5!}}}}

17.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{e4}} is less convincing after 17...\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xc3}}}

18.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xc3}} \textit{\textbf{\textsc{xe4}} 19.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xe4}}}} 0–0 when the bishop is not so great on c3.

17...\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xd5}}}

18.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{e4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textsc{c4}}}

This is the critical reply, but Black is playing with fire.

18...\textit{\textbf{\textsc{exf4}} 19.\textit{\textbf{\textsc{xe4}}}} 0–0 is safer; still, after
20.\textbf{\textit{h6}} \texttt{f8} 21.\texttt{d4} the bishop on h6 is annoying for Black. He can try to exchange it, but after 21...\texttt{f8} 22.\texttt{f4} he has to deal with all the weak dark squares.

\textbf{19.\texttt{f2}} \texttt{xf1} 20.\texttt{xf1} 0--0--0
20...0--0? 21.\texttt{xax8} wins trivially.

\textbf{19.\texttt{xf2}} \texttt{xf1} 20.\texttt{xf1} 0--0--0
20...0--0? 21.\texttt{xax8} wins trivially.

21.\texttt{a5} \texttt{b8} 22.\texttt{c4}!
White has an extremely dangerous attack.

\textbf{B3) 13...\texttt{g}f6}

This has been a popular choice, but White can develop a strong initiative with mostly natural moves.

\textbf{14.e5} \texttt{d5}
14...\texttt{h5}
This has been played several times but it allows White to open the kingside immediately.
15.f5! \texttt{xe5}
15...\texttt{dxe5} 16.\texttt{fxe6} \texttt{exe6} 17.\texttt{h6} \texttt{hf6} (17...\texttt{g8} 18.\texttt{e4}+) 18.\texttt{e4}+ J. Geller – Zubov, Voronezh 2012.
15...\texttt{xf5}N 16.\texttt{exd6} \texttt{xd6} 17.\texttt{x}f5 \texttt{xf5} 18.\texttt{yh5}+

16.\texttt{fxe6} \texttt{exe6} 17.\texttt{d4} \texttt{c5}
17...\texttt{d7} 18.\texttt{c4} \texttt{xc4} 19.\texttt{xc4}+
18.\texttt{e3} \texttt{c8}
In Albertwall – Maryanne, Internet 2008, White should have continued with 19.\texttt{h6}N or 19.\texttt{e4}N, with more than enough play for the pawn in either case.
15.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{e}}\texttt{\texttt{4}}}}! \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{e}}\texttt{\texttt{5}}} 16.\texttt{\texttt{f}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{e}}\texttt{\texttt{5}} \texttt{0-0}

16...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{x}}}\texttt{\texttt{e}}\texttt{\texttt{5}}}? is much too greedy: 17.\texttt{\texttt{c}}\texttt{\texttt{4}}! \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{3}}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{3}} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{4}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{4}} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{4}} 20.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{4}}+- Tomnikova – Gasik, Katowice 2014.

16...\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{5}} can be met by 17.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{6}}\texttt{\texttt{+}} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{6}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{6}} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{\texttt{6}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{e}}\texttt{\texttt{7}} as in Wolf – Sharf, email 2009. White has more than enough compensation for the pawn, as Black is weak on the dark squares and his king is dangerously stuck in the centre, bearing in mind that long castling would lose the f7-pawn. 20.\texttt{\texttt{f}}\texttt{\texttt{f}}\texttt{\texttt{2}}?N seems a good way to improve White’s position, overprotecting the g2-pawn and preparing a possible doubling of rooks at some point.

17.\texttt{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{B}}}}\texttt{\texttt{f}}\texttt{\texttt{2}}}!

This is the key manoeuvre which promises White an advantage. Clearly, allowing the knight to g4 looks dangerous for Black, but so does playing ...h5.

17...\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{5}

17...\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{4}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{\texttt{6}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{8}}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{g}}\texttt{4} is horrible for Black, for instance:

19...\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{4} 20.\texttt{\texttt{g}}\texttt{3} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{3}} 21.\texttt{\texttt{c}}\texttt{\texttt{x}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{3} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{e}}\texttt{\texttt{7}} 22.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{f}}\texttt{\texttt{2}}+- Grandelius – Smirin, Stockholm 2014.

Here is another illustrative line: 17...\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{5}}N 18.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{g}}\texttt{4} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{4}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{\texttt{6}}} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{5}}

20.\texttt{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{B}}}}\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{1}}! \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{c}}\texttt{\texttt{8}} 21.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{d}}\texttt{\texttt{4}} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{6}} 22.\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{f}}\texttt{\texttt{3}} White’s attack proceeds smoothly. As you will see in some other lines, White is in no hurry to capture on f8.

18.\texttt{\texttt{a}}\texttt{3}

In \textit{Play The Sicilian Kan}, Johan Hellsten gives this line up to 17...h5, mentioning that Black’s last move prevents \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{g}}\texttt{4}. Unfortunately for the followers on Black’s side, this is only a temporary solution to the problems on the kingside. White’s last move guards the b4-square, forcing Black to worry about c2-c4. Once Black prevents this, we will turn our attention back to the kingside, which has been permanently weakened by Black’s last move.

18...\texttt{\texttt{b}}\texttt{\texttt{5}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{6}} \texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{4}}

19...\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{c}}\texttt{\texttt{8}} 20.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{B}}\texttt{\texttt{h}}\texttt{3}}! leaves Black facing a huge attack.
20.a4 \(\text{\texttt{b5}}\) 21.\(\text{	exttt{x}}\) 22.\(\text{\texttt{e4}}\)

In Mista – E. Hansen, Germany 2014, Black was material down and still faced a nasty attack.

B4) 13...h5?

This way Black postpones the development of his knight for even longer! He also has noticed that White's principal attacking plan is e4-e5 so, rather than place his knight directly in the path of this move, he prepares to meet e4-e5 with a quick ...\(\text{\texttt{h6}}\), when his knight will be perfectly placed and ready to hop to \(f5\) or \(g4\) depending on circumstances. Otherwise, Black can try to annoy us with ...h4, and if we play h2-h3 then he can switch back to the ...\(\text{\texttt{f6}}\) plan, as the knight will be able to go to \(h5\) and \(g3\).

The text move has certain similarities with the trendy 11...h5 line, which can be found later on page 295. In the present line White has committed to \(f2-f4\), which takes away certain options; on the other hand, here Black has already played ...b6, so he has missed out on the chance for a quick ...b5-b4.

14.h3

14.e5 should be met by 14...dxe5!N (avoiding any tricks involving exd6 and \(\text{\texttt{x}}\)g6) 15.fxe5 \(\text{\texttt{h6}}\) and Black gets his dream position.

Hellsten covers 13...h5 as a secondary option for Black, but the Swedish GM does not consider our flexible reply. White's idea is simply to wait for the knight to go to \(f6\) before playing e4-e5. Black will have to allow this sooner or later, as ...\(\text{\texttt{h6}}\) makes no sense at all with the pawn still on \(e4\). Still, it would be helpful if we could find some ways to create other concrete ideas. The text move is useful in just about every scenario.

14...h4

Black is preparing \(\text{\texttt{g6-f6-h5}}\) etc.

14...\(\text{\texttt{h6}}\)? is pointless, and 15.f5\(\text{\texttt{+}}\) gives White an easy attack.

14...\(\text{\texttt{g6}}\)?

This has been tried a few times but it looks extremely suspicious.

15.e5 dxe5 16.fxe5 \(\text{\texttt{d5}}\) 17.\(\text{\texttt{e4}}\) 0–0

Black's kingside is overly exposed, but it's not as if his king had anywhere else to go.

18.c4 \(\text{\texttt{b4}}\)

19.\(\text{\texttt{b1}}\)?

19.\(\text{\texttt{f6}}\)\(\text{\texttt{+}}\) \(\text{\texttt{x}}\) 20.\(\text{\texttt{e6}}\) \(\text{\texttt{x}}\) 21.\(\text{\texttt{x}}\) 22.\(\text{\texttt{d3}}\) 21.\(\text{\texttt{x}}\) 22.\(\text{\texttt{d3+}}\) was somewhat favourable for White in Frolyanov – Sjugirov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013, but the text move is more convincing.

19...\(\text{\texttt{xe4}}\) 20.\(\text{\texttt{xe4}}\) \(\text{\texttt{c6}}\)

Going after the e5-pawn seems like the only way to cause problems, but White can obliterl the defence:
Chapter 14 – Main Line

A final possibility is:
14...b5
This is not stupid but it seems a little slow. White can respond with the typical:
15.a4! b4
15...bxa4 16.\(a\)xa4++;

16.\(a\)d1
16.\(a\)a2 is also reasonable: 16...a5 17.c3 bxc3 18.\(x\)xc3 (unfortunately, 18.\(x\)xc3?? is impossible because 18...\(b\)b6+ wins a piece) 18...\(g\)f6 19.\(e\)e3 'The knight doesn’t seem ideal on a2, although we can still push for an edge by shifting our focus to the queenside with \(c\)c1 in the near future.
16...a5 17.c3±
Compared with the note above, the knight will be ideally placed on f2, and it may go to e4 after e4-e5 at some point in the future.

I also considered 15.f5!?N, but found 15...\(g\)xf5 16.exf5 e5 to be quite unclear.

15.\(d\)d4!
I analysed a whole bunch of options, but against most neutral moves Black gets a fine position with ...\(g\)f6 followed by either ...0-0 or ...\(h\)h5. The text move is an ideal solution as it not only improves White’s worst-placed piece, but also sets up some concrete threats involving e4-e5, \(x\)xe6 and \(\times\)g6, as well as the simple \(f\)f3-g5.

15.e5 dxe5 16.fxe5 \(h\)h6! 17.\(f\)f4 \(f\)f5± is exactly what Black wants, Timofeev – Kalegin, Kazan 2015.

I also considered 15.f5!?N, but found 15...\(g\)xf5 16.exf5 e5 to be quite unclear.

15...\(g\)f6!
This is the only critical move; Black has to try to deal with e4-e5 head on. Other moves give White a free hand to do whatever he pleases.

15...\(f\)f6 16.\(f\)f3 leaves Black struggling to place his pieces, while White can think about abandoning the e4-e5 plan in favour of \(g\)g5 and f4-f5.

15...\(h\)h6 can also be met by 16.\(f\)f3 with the idea of \(g\)g5. Again, the knight on h6 is misplaced if we don’t play e4-e5.
15...b5 16.Wf2 with the idea of e4-e5 (or 16.e5?? immediately). I can't see ...b5 being of much use to Black.

For a time I incessantly analysed 16.e5!?N dxe5 17.fxe5, trying to bash Black's head in. White does get a strong initiative in many lines, but the accurate 17...Jll.c5! 18.exf6 Jllxd4t 19.Jllhl Jllc5 leads to insane complications. The pawn on f6 is impressive but Black's bishops are nice too.

After analysing the above line, I realized that we don't need to be in such a hurry. After all, what is Black doing next? We have many possible ways to improve our position - the main thing is to be ready for the ...Jllh5-g3 plan.

16...Jllh5

This is consistent with Black's previous few moves, and was played in the only game to have reached this point.

16...Wg8 17.Jllf3 is good for White, who can either gobble the h4-pawn or plonk the knight on g5.

16...0-0-0N is an interesting idea, as our pieces are not ideally placed for attacking on the queenside. Nevertheless, we can start switching them over with 17.b4± followed by a2-a4 and Wb1. I think White's play should be faster than Black's on the kingside.

16...Jllc5 17.b4 Jllxd3 18.cxd3 makes the queenside even less hospitable for the black king, so it will remain stuck in the centre, while we can start jumping around with Jllf3.

16...e5!?N

This is a natural move to consider and it prevents e4-e5, but we have some concrete tactics against it.

17.fxe5!

17.Jllf3 Jllh5! would be annoying.

17...Jllxe5

17...Jllxe5 should be met by 18.Jllf3! with pressure both on the f-file and against the h4-pawn, while the black king is unlikely to feel comfortable on either side.

18.Jlld5!

An important detail, as 18.Jllf3 Jllh5! is not clear at all.

18...Jllxd5 19.exd5 Wc5

19...exd4 20.Jllb4! is crushing.

20.Jllc6 Wxf2† 21.Wxf2±

Black is in no position to deal with White's active pieces, especially the c6-knight.
Chapter 14 – Main Line

17.f5!
White needs to take action before ...\( \text{g3} \) comes.

17...\text{xg5} 18.exf5 e5 19.f6! \text{hxg6}
This seems like Black's best try.

19...\text{xf6}! 20.\text{lg5} \text{lg3} doesn't help Black after the following strong reply:

21.\text{xe4}! \text{xe4} 22.\text{xe4} \text{xe4} 23.\text{xe4} d5 24.\text{e2}+

The game continued:
19.\text{dxf6} 20.\text{f5} \text{g8} 21.\text{e4} \text{xe4}
White's correct continuation would have been:
22.\text{xe4}!
22.\text{xe4} would be a great move if Black had to take the exchange, but 22...\text{d5}! 23.c4 \text{xe4} was not so easy for White in Roser – Abergel, Erts La Massana 2015.

Compared to the main line below, I don't see how Black can benefit from having a knight on h5 instead of d7, for instance:

22...\text{g3}
Perhaps White was concerned about 22...d5, but the powerful reply 23.\text{xe7} \text{xe7} 24.\text{xe7} gives White a deadly attack.
22...\text{a7} 23.\text{xh4}± picks up a pawn while hitting f7.
22...\text{xe4} 23.\text{xe4} \text{c8} 24.b3 \text{d7} 25.\text{c4}±
23.\text{xg3} \text{xe3} 24.\text{f7}+ \text{d7} 25.\text{f5}+ \text{d8}
26.\text{xb7} \text{xb7} 27.\text{e2}
White is close to winning.

20.\text{f5} \text{g8} 21.\text{e4} \text{xe4} 22.\text{xe4}
Having the knight on d7 slightly improves Black's chances compared to the 19...\text{dxf6} line mentioned above, but White still has a great initiative for the sacrificed pawn. For example:

22...\text{xe4} 23.\text{xe4} \text{e4} 24.b4 \text{e4} 25.\text{c4}±

This is the latest trend, having been played by Svidler and other GMs, with Black scoring 4½/5 at the time of writing! As we have seen in the previous variation, pushing the h-pawn
is a pretty common way for Black to cope with his development issues. One obvious advantage is that \( \ldots \text{Qg}f6 \) can’t be met by \( \text{h}h6 \) anymore, while Black also sets up \( \ldots \text{Qg}4 \) ideas. And as we have already seen, if White plays \( h2-h3 \) then \( \ldots \text{Qg}f6-h5-g3 \) becomes an obvious plan. Moreover, \( \ldots \text{h}5 \) is quite an aesthetically pleasing move, in the sense that Black remains flexible across the rest of the board. In particular, he would like to play actively on the queenside with \( \ldots b5 \) (as opposed to the slower \( \ldots \text{b}G \)), so he delays moving the b-pawn until a moment when White’s pieces are not suitably placed to meet \( \ldots b5 \) with a quick a2-a4.

There is, of course, an obvious downside to Black’s last move, as it irrevocably weakens his kingside. If we can avoid being harmed by Black’s knight jumps, then eventually g6 can become a serious target after \( \ldots 0-0 \) – and it’s hard to imagine Black wanting to castle queenside. There is also the weak g5-square, although this is not so easy for us to utilize right now. It’s important for White not to be confused by the many possibilities and the apparently slow nature of the game – if Black gets enough time to develop (typically with \( \ldots \text{Qg}f6, \ldots \text{b}5, \ldots \text{b}b7 \) and \( \ldots 0-0 \)) then he will be doing fine and might even have the better chances. We need to be ready to interfere with this simple plan, so we should continue with our usual scheme of \( f2-f4 \) and \( \text{a}a\text{e}1 \), looking for the right moment to play e4-e5. If this is timed correctly then Black may end up worse than usual because of the kingside weaknesses, but the question is whether he will be able to cause problems with the \( \ldots \text{Qg}4 \) or \( \ldots \text{h}5-g3 \) ideas mentioned above.

12.f4

White could also play 12.\text{a}ae1 and possibly reach the same position.

12.a4?! is too slow. The following game is an excellent example of Black’s flexibility, and of why we cannot afford to spend a tempo restricting Black on the queenside: 12...b6 13.f4 \( \text{Qg}f6 \) 14.\text{a}ae1 \( \text{b}b7 \) 15.\text{h}3 h4! Compared to the analogous line after 12.f4, Black’s b-pawn is only on b6 instead of b5, but he has used his extra tempo to put his bishop on b7, which makes the \( \ldots \text{h}5-g3 \) plan all the more effective.

12...\text{Qg}f6 13.\text{a}ae1 b5!

This is the big idea behind delaying \( \ldots b6 \) (with 11...h5) – now Black can play \( \ldots b5 \) freely without worrying about the repercussions involving a2-a4, \( \text{Q}a2 \) and c2-c3, as White has already spent time gearing up for e4-e5.
13...b6?! defeats the whole purpose of 11...h5, as Black just gets a more passive version of the main line. I will just add that the natural continuation 14.h3 $b7 transposes to 14...$gf6?! in the notes to variation B4 above.

14...h4 is premature when Black has yet to play ...$b7 (compare the Svidler game where White wasted time with a2-a4), because now e4-e5 and $e4 will easily parry the ...$h5-g3 threat. 15.e5 $h5 (15...dxe5? 16.fxe5 $h5 17...f3+-)

14.h3!N
A rather simple novelty, preparing e4-e5. The key to my new approach is the immediacy with which we will try to put pressure on Black: we have a lead in development and we should try to exploit it as quickly as possible. In all the other games after 11...h5 White played far too slowly, allowing Black to complete development and, in most cases, outplay White and take the full point.

14...b4!
Black had better drive the knight away from the centre before e4-e5 comes. The following lines show the dangers if he neglects to do so:

14...0-0 is clearly dangerous, particularly since Black has not yet brought his bishop to b7. 15.e5 $e8 16.f5?! would be my choice.

16.exd6 $xd6 (16...$xd6 allows 17...$xg6!)
17.$e4 Black's pieces seem misplaced and his kingside is clearly vulnerable.

14...$b7
This move is playable but it seems like a worse version of the main line for Black.

15.e5 $d5
15...dxe5 16.fxe5 $d5 17...f2! As usual, Black has problems with the f7-pawn. Compared to the later variation C22 on page 304, White's knight is still on c3, which gives us a bunch of extra options like $e4 at some point.
16...\textit{xd6} \textit{xd6}
16...\textit{xd6} 17.f5! gx\textit{f}5 18.\textit{xf}5 \textit{d}7 19.\textit{f}h5 0-0-0 (19...\textit{xf}h5 20.\textit{xf}h5+) 20.e4± The open files and two bishops pointing towards our king might look menacing, but the reality is that Black’s play is easily parried.

17.d5!
Another typical idea. After eliminating the light-squared bishop, White will have a safe advantage.

17...b4
The tactical point is that after 17...\textit{b}6, 18.\textit{h}1 the knight is untouchable, and if 18...b4 19.e4 \textit{c}7 20.d5 \textit{xd}5 21.f5 gxf5 22.\textit{xf}5± Black is in trouble.

18.a4!
18.\textit{xb}7 \textit{b}6, 19.\textit{f}2 bxc3 is fine for Black.
The position after the text move can also be reached via the 14.b4 move order – see 17...\textit{xd}6 in the notes to variation C1 below.

18.c6
18...\textit{c}7 19.\textit{xb}7 \textit{xb}7 20.c4± is similar.
18...\textit{c}8 19.c4 gives White a nice initiative. The knights might not seem ideal on the a-file, but they control some important squares and can return to the centre at any moment; the c8-bishop, on the other hand, is completely misplaced.

19.\textit{xc}6 \textit{xc}6 20.c4!±
kingside will cause Black serious problems, as the open nature of the game makes it easy for White to start planning to attack g6, or to start transferring more pieces towards the kingside.

8.\texttt{!}, M

\begin{center}
\begin{sideways}
\begin{tabular}{c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{sideways}
\end{center}

18.\texttt{\$xd6} \texttt{\$xa4} 19.c4! \texttt{\$xd6} 20.\texttt{cxd5}

The situation on the board may seem a little weird, but the position settles down fairly quickly.

20...\texttt{\$b4}

20...\texttt{\$c5}!! 21.\texttt{\$h1} \texttt{\$xd5} 22.e6 \texttt{\$b4} 23.f5!!
is extremely dangerous for Black.

20...\texttt{\$b8} 21.\texttt{\$xe6} \texttt{\$xe5} 22.\texttt{fxe5} \texttt{\$xe6}

23.\texttt{\$h1}±

21.\texttt{\$xe6} \texttt{\$xe1} 22.\texttt{\$xe1} \texttt{\$c6} 23.\texttt{\$xd7} \texttt{\$b6}±

24.\texttt{\$h2} \texttt{\$xd7}

25.\texttt{\$f3}!!

White has two pawns plus the initiative for the exchange. Black’s kingside is vulnerable and the f4-f5 break is constantly hanging in the air. A possible continuation is:

16.e5

This move requires no explanation, as our previous few moves have been directed towards preparing it. There are two reasonable replies:

\textbf{C1}) 16...\texttt{\$d5} is certainly worth considering, while \textbf{C2}) 16...\texttt{dxe5} is the computer’s preference.

\textbf{C1}) 16...\texttt{\$d5}

This is the safer, more human move, but the upcoming position isn’t without problems for Black.

17.\texttt{\$xd6} \texttt{\$xd6}

17...\texttt{\$xd6} is met by 18.\texttt{\$a5}!, teaching a position that was covered on page 298 under the move order 14...\texttt{\$b7} 15.e5 \texttt{\$d5} 16.\texttt{\$xd6} \texttt{\$xd6} 17.\texttt{\$a5}! \texttt{b4} 18.\texttt{\$a4}!. We should be happy to take the light-squared bishop and have fun from there.

18.c4!

18.f5 \texttt{\$xf5} 19.\texttt{\$xf5} \texttt{\$g8} is too double-edged for my liking.
18.\text{\textbf{x}}g6 \text{fxg6} 19.\text{\textbf{w}}xe6 \text{\textbf{d}}e7 is also unnecessarily complicated. White has some pawns plus attacking chances for the piece, but Black's king has decent protection and the b7-bishop could become extremely dangerous.

18...\text{\textbf{b}}xc3
18...\text{\textbf{d}}xf4? is inadvisable due to: 19.\text{\textbf{x}}f4 \text{\textbf{d}}xf4 20.\text{\textbf{x}}g6! 0–0–0 21.\text{\textbf{c}}e4\text{+}

19.\text{\textbf{c}}xc3 \text{\textbf{c}}c5
19...0–0? 20.\text{\textbf{x}}g6! is an important detail to keep in mind.

19...\text{\textbf{g}}uf6 is risky due to: 20.\text{\textbf{d}}xd5 \text{\textbf{d}}xd5 21.f5! \text{\textbf{g}}xf5 22.\text{\textbf{f}}xf5→

Black's most sensible alternative is:
19...\text{\textbf{g}}5f6 20.\text{\textbf{c}}c1
20.f5 \text{\textbf{g}}4?! might be better for White somehow, but the text move is simpler.

20...0–0
After 20...\text{\textbf{d}}d8 21.f5! \text{\textbf{g}}xf5 22.\text{\textbf{f}}xf5 the c1-rook takes away the option of ...0–0–0, so Black is unable to get much counterplay.

21.\text{\textbf{b}}b5
Of course we should take the bishop as soon as we can. I think most human players would consider the position without the dark-squared bishop to be rather suspicious for Black, but I will provide a few more moves as it requires some accuracy to convince the engines of White's superiority.

21...\text{\textbf{b}}8 22.\text{\textbf{f}}xd6 \text{\textbf{w}}xd6 23.\text{\textbf{h}}2!
This is a surprisingly vital detail.

23.\text{\textbf{h}}1 is inaccurate due to 23...\text{\textbf{f}}c8
24.\text{\textbf{a}}5 \text{\textbf{d}}d5 25.\text{\textbf{c}}c3 \text{\textbf{c}}c5! intending 26.\text{\textbf{d}}f6?! \text{\textbf{d}}xd3 27.\text{\textbf{w}}xd3? \text{\textbf{d}}xg2+, which is only possible because the king is on h1.

23.\text{\textbf{a}}b8
23...\text{\textbf{f}}c8 24.\text{\textbf{a}}5! \text{\textbf{d}}d5 25.\text{\textbf{c}}c3\text{+} makes the most of the king's position on h2.

24.\text{\textbf{c}}d1\text{+}
The position remains complex, but White's safer king and strong dark-squared bishop make him the favourite.
23...a5
23...\$fe8 24.\$c2 f5 (24...\$f8?! is not much a defence due to 25.\$xg6 \$xg6 26.\$xg6+ \$h7 27.f5!) 25.\$e5+ maintains an obvious edge for White.

24.\$c1!
24.\$c2?! leads to some fun tactical ideas, but Black seems to be okay with precise play. My main line runs as follows: 24...\$b4! 25.\$xg6 \$xc3 26.\$h7+ \$g7 27.\$e4 \$e5!

25.\$e2+
White has no immediate breakthrough and Black is pretty solid; nevertheless, it is hard for him to challenge the excellent bishop on c3, and he will have to be on guard against kingside tricks for a long time.

C2) 16...\$xe5 17.\$xe5 \$d5

This is definitely the most critical continuation from the analytical perspective. At first, it looks like Black is almost busted due to the open f-file and the loosening effect of the ...h5 move, but the more I analysed it, the more complex the upcoming positions proved to be. In the end, it seems that Black might just be able to keep balancing on the precipice, but only after astonishingly accurate play. At the same time, it is also important for White to know what he is doing – otherwise it is easy to lose your way, and the positions with the pawn on e5 can easily turn from looking nice for White to being plain bad.

This critical position has yet to be tested, so it is wide open to interpretation. I have therefore decided to cover two possibilities: the dangerous C21) 18.\$d4?! and the more thematic C22) 18.\$f2.
C21) 18.\texttt{d}d4!?

This move sets up various sacrificial ideas: the single biggest threat is \texttt{Exf}7 followed by \texttt{Wxf}2\texttt{f}, but ideas like \texttt{Exg}6 and \texttt{a}xe6 are floating in the air as well. Of course the knight is somewhat unstable, being undefended and with the king still on g1 – but that’s why it can be great to have the other knight on a4! And if Black goes after the knight on the rim, we will just ignore him and continue to try and break through on the kingside.

18...\texttt{0–0!}

18...\texttt{c}c5 seems like a natural and critical reply, but White gets a good position after a few accurate moves: 19.\texttt{Wf}2! (19.\texttt{Exc}5 \texttt{Exc}5 20.c3 is also reasonable but I would prefer to provoke long castling from Black) 19...\texttt{0–0–0} (19...\texttt{0–0} 20.\texttt{Ah}G! transposes to 19...\texttt{Exc}5 20.\texttt{Wf}2! in the notes to the main line below)

20.\texttt{Exc}5 \texttt{xc}5 21.c3\texttt{f} The play will slow down a little, and there are many options for both sides, but it seems to me that White should not find it too hard to open lines on the queenside – the rooks can be transferred whenever the time is right, and the a2-a3 sacrifice could be considered at any moment. Black, on the other hand, has no easy way to start a kingside offensive, so he will probably have to settle for merely trying to remain solid in the centre and on the queenside – but in that case it is clear that White will be in the driver’s seat.

19.\texttt{h}h6 \texttt{h}4!

This can lead to some insane variations. Black has to do something drastic, as moving the rook from f8 will allow a crushing sacrifice with \texttt{Exf}7 or \texttt{a}xe6.

Going after the a4-knight would be perilous for Black:

19...\texttt{c}c5 20.\texttt{Wf}2! \texttt{xa}4
20...\texttt{xd}3 21.cxd3 may be the lesser evil, but in that case Black will be an exchange down without enough compensation.

21.\texttt{Wg}3

Threatening \texttt{Xg}6. It’s a miracle that Black is not being mated by force, but it’s still an extremely dangerous attack.

21...\texttt{c}c5 22.\texttt{cg}6 \texttt{xd}4 23.\texttt{h}h1

23...\texttt{f}6
23...\texttt{xf}6 24.\texttt{Wxg}6+ \texttt{h}8 25.\texttt{xf}8+—
Chapter 14 – Main Line

23...f5 24.\textit{xf5} \textit{h8} 25.\textit{xf8} \textit{xf8} 26.\textit{e4}! \textit{c5} 27.\textit{xf8}+ \textit{xf8} 28.\textit{f1}+– with the idea of \textit{g6}.
24.\textit{e4}?

The black king is in grave danger.

20.\textit{e4}!
20.\textit{xf8} \textit{xf8} 21.\textit{d1} \textit{g3}\to gives Black decent compensation for the exchange.

I find it hard to fathom how Black can survive the assault on his king, but the computer insists, and I don’t feel like boring you with a bunch of long lines. Here is a brief example:

20...\textit{xe1} 21.\textit{xf7}
21.\textit{xe6} \textit{c3}\to is apparently the only move, which again leads to eventual equality.

21...\textit{f4}! 22.\textit{g7}+ \textit{h8} 23.\textit{xel} \textit{d5}

Somehow, after various options, this crazy position should liquidate into some kind of balanced endgame. I will give a few lines to show you what I mean.

24.\textit{h4}?

This is the trickiest option.

24.\textit{f1} is another natural try, but Black just about survives with precise play: 24...\textit{xe5} 25.\textit{xd7} \textit{xd4}+ 26.\textit{h2} \textit{e5} 27.\textit{g7}+ \textit{xg7} 28.\textit{xd7} \textit{xg7} gives White some chances after: 29.\textit{b6} \textit{ae8} 30.\textit{d7} \textit{ff7} 31.\textit{e5} \textit{ee6} 32.\textit{f2}\textsuperscript{2} Thanks to the excellent knight on e5, White can play on for a while with no real risk.

25.\textit{xd3}

25.\textit{e7} \textit{xe5} 26.\textit{h7}+ \textit{g8}– leads to an immediate perpetual.
26...\textit{c1} 27.h2 \textit{f4} 28.xf4 \textit{xf4} 29.xh5 \textit{f7}

Black seems to be okay, although it's still an interesting endgame with plenty of play remaining.

C22) 18.\textit{f2}

Hitting the \textit{f7}-pawn directly is the most obvious plan.

18...0–0

18...\textit{h7}?

I can't quite believe I am mentioning such a move, but I'll include a few lines because the engine insists it's okay for Black.

19.\textit{d4}?

There are other options, but forcing Black to put his king on the queenside is too tempting, particularly since the rook is on \textit{h7}. Actually, everything is tempting because the rook is on \textit{h7}! From a theoretical perspective, its assessment might hinge on the eventual endgame with queen versus two rooks, where White is pressing without much risk. Practically though, I find it hard to imagine many players wanting to play like this with Black, so I won't go into much detail.

19...0–0 20.c4 \textit{5b6}

20...bxc3 21.xc3–

21.xb6\textit{xb6} 22.\textit{e3} \textit{c5} 23.\textit{b3} \textit{xe3} 24.xe3 \textit{xe5} 25.\textit{c5!} \textit{c7}

25...\textit{d3} 26.\textit{xd3} \textit{c7} 27.\textit{xd8} \textit{xd8} 28.\textit{d2}+

26.\textit{c6}!

A natural sacrifice to set up a pin along the \textit{c}-file. White has more than enough compensation for the two pawns.

26...\textit{xd3}

26...\textit{xc6} 27.\textit{c1–}

27.\textit{xd3} \textit{xd3} 28.\textit{b7} \textit{b8} 29.\textit{c1} \textit{xc1}+

30.\textit{xc1} \textit{d1}+ 31.\textit{h2} \textit{xc1} 32.\textit{b6} \textit{c7}

Normally I would expect Black to hold a position with this material balance and pawn distribution, but his coordination is hampered by the bad position of the \textit{h7}-rook, which enables the white queen to collect a few pawns.

33.\textit{xa6} \textit{xb7} 34.\textit{d6+} \textit{a7} 35.\textit{c5+} \textit{a6}

36.\textit{c6+} \textit{a7} 37.\textit{a4+!}

Forcing the king to the back rank.
37...\texttt{b8} 38.\texttt{e8}\# 39.\texttt{g8} f5 40.\texttt{xg6}+

19.\texttt{h6}

This is the normal follow-up of course. \texttt{C221) 19...\texttt{xe5}} is the most obvious response, but the subtle \texttt{C222) 19...\texttt{c6}} is more accurate.

\texttt{C221) 19...\texttt{xe5}}

White's pieces would be placed unimpressively after accepting the exchange sacrifice, but we don't need to part with our brilliant \texttt{h6}-bishop!

20.\texttt{d4}!

Tying Black's pieces into a bind.

20.\texttt{e4} is another idea, but after 20...\texttt{c6} 21.\texttt{ac5} \texttt{fd8}! 22.\texttt{d3} \texttt{e8} Black is safe.

20...\texttt{d6}

20...\texttt{f6}? loosens Black's position and allows 21.\texttt{xf8} \texttt{xf8} 22.\texttt{ac5}+.

21.\texttt{ac5}!

White's formerly misplaced knight comes back into the game nicely.

21.\texttt{bc5} \texttt{c6} 22.\texttt{e4} \texttt{e7} leaves White without a clear follow-up.

21.\texttt{a5} leads to some forcing lines but ultimately results in excessive simplifications: 21...\texttt{h7}! 22.\texttt{xb7} \texttt{xb6} 23.\texttt{xd6} \texttt{xd3} 24.\texttt{xf7}! \texttt{xf7} 25.\texttt{xf7} \texttt{xf7} 26.\texttt{xd3} \texttt{f4}! Perhaps White still has some chances, but I would rather strive for a middlegame initiative.

21...\texttt{fb8}

Nothing else is playable. Normally I would stop analysing here, since Black seems to be on the ropes and White has multiple options to continue. However, considering that the 11...\texttt{h5} variation is at the forefront of \texttt{Kan theory}, and all of the moves since 14.\texttt{h3!N} have been quite logical, it makes sense to explore a bit more deeply and try to eke out a firm conclusion.

22.\texttt{a4}!

Once you realize that ...\texttt{a5-a4} is Black's main source of counterplay, this elegant move makes perfect sense. If Black exchanges on \texttt{a3} then the possibility of \texttt{c2-c4} threatens to topple Black's pieces from their precarious posts in the centre. If Black ignores the pawn, then it serves the purpose of shutting down Black's counterplay.

22.\texttt{xg6} looks tempting but there is no need to rush things when we have the initiative: 22...\texttt{fxg6} 23.\texttt{xe6} \texttt{b6} 24.\texttt{ec5}
compensation, but at least it avoids an immediate slaughter.

22...a5 23.\texttt{b}b5! Preventing ...\texttt{c}c6. 23...\texttt{h}h7 24.\texttt{e}e4! \texttt{x}h6 (24...\texttt{e}e7 25.\texttt{g}g5+--) 25.\texttt{x}xd6 \texttt{x}xd6 26.\texttt{e}xe5 \texttt{e}e7 27.g4? \texttt{g}g8 (27...f6 28.g5+! f\texttt{x}g5 29.\texttt{c}c5+-; 27...\texttt{x}g4 28.hxg4 \texttt{h}h7 29.\texttt{f}f2+) 28.\texttt{c}c5 \texttt{d}ad8 29.\texttt{d}d3 \texttt{c}c8 30.g5+ \texttt{h}h7 31.\texttt{e}e4= With a complete bind.

22...\texttt{b}xa3 23.\texttt{b}xa3  

As mentioned earlier, this exchange opens up the possibility of c2-c4. Even without looking any further, one gets the feeling that Black is barely holding his position together. Still, it is worth giving a few more moves, as it takes some precision to prove White’s advantage against the computer’s defence.

23...\texttt{c}c6  

23...a5 24.\texttt{e}e4 \texttt{e}e7 (24...\texttt{a}xa3 25.c4 \texttt{a}a6 26.\texttt{e}ec5+) 25.\texttt{b}c5 \texttt{e}c6 26.\texttt{h}h1 \texttt{d}d8 (26...\texttt{h}h7 27.\texttt{xf}7+! \texttt{h}h6 28.\texttt{xe}6+-) 27.\texttt{a}a1= Black is still stuck, and c2-c4 will come sooner or later.

24.\texttt{f}f2!  

Preparing for c2-c4.  
The immediate 24.c4 allows 24...\texttt{e}e7! 25.\texttt{f}f4 \texttt{x}g2! 26.\texttt{x}g2 \texttt{c}c7 27.\texttt{e}e2 \texttt{xd}3 28.\texttt{xd}6 \texttt{ex}e1+ 29.\texttt{h}h1 \texttt{xd}6 30.\texttt{xf}7+ \texttt{h}h8 and White has no more than a draw.

24...\texttt{e}e8
Other moves exist, but I will focus on what I believe to be the most resilient defence.

25.\textit{Af}!!

25.c4 \textit{O}c7 26.\textit{D}xe6 \textit{O}f7c6 enables Black to hang on in the ensuing endgame.

25...\textit{Sh}h7

25...\textit{Ed}8 26.\textit{De}4 \textit{Ec}7 27.\textit{G}g5 gives White a dangerous attack.

26.\textit{De}4!!

26.\textit{Ac}1 \textit{X}xb3 27.\textit{D}xb3 \textit{O}c6 28.\textit{W}d2 \textit{G}g3 is not too bad for Black.

26.\textit{O}c7

26...\textit{X}xh6 27.\textit{D}xd6 \textit{W}xd6 28.\textit{X}xe5±

26...\textit{X}xa3 is met by 27.\textit{X}f4! \textit{X}xf4 28.\textit{X}f6\textit{f} 29.\textit{X}xf4 \textit{d}d6 30.\textit{O}d4\textit{f} intending \textit{G}g5.

27.\textit{Ac}1 \textit{O}c6 28.\textit{W}d2 \textit{W}e5

26.\textit{D}xe4!

26.\textit{O}c1 \textit{X}xb3 27.\textit{D}xb3 \textit{O}c6 28.\textit{W}d2 \textit{G}g3 is not too bad for Black.

26...\textit{O}c7

26...\textit{X}xh6 27.\textit{D}xd6 \textit{W}xd6 28.\textit{X}xe5\textit{f} ±

26...\textit{X}xa3 is met by 27.\textit{X}f4! \textit{X}xf4 28.\textit{X}f6\textit{f} 29.\textit{X}xf4 \textit{d}d6 30.\textit{O}d4\textit{f} intending \textit{G}g5.

27.\textit{Ac}1 \textit{O}c6 28.\textit{W}d2 \textit{W}e5

29.c4!

Finally!

29...\textit{X}xb3 30.\textit{c}xd5 \textit{exd}5 31.\textit{W}f6\textit{f} 32.\textit{X}xe5 \textit{X}xe5 33.\textit{W}xd5\textit{f} ±

23.\textit{X}xa6

This seems simplest.

23.\textit{W}h1!! \textit{E}e8 24.\textit{O}e4 \textit{F}f8 25.\textit{X}xf8 \textit{E}xf8 could also be explored.

23...\textit{E}xa6 24.\textit{X}xa6 \textit{W}h7

24...\textit{X}xa4 25.\textit{W}h1\textit{f}

25.\textit{G}g5 \textit{X}xa4 26.\textit{W}h1\textit{f}

Black compensation isn't too scary, and we still have a lot of scope to continue playing on the kingside.

C222) 19...\textit{O}c6!

The point of this move is to try and provoke \textit{xf}8 – and if you have played through the
19...\texttt{\textbackslash \textbackslash}xe5 variation, you will understand why that will benefit Black. Obviously I would like to avoid taking the exchange, but it's harder to find good alternatives here. I will present my analysis of both C2221) 20.g3\texttt{\textbackslash \textbackslash}? and C2222) 20.c4\texttt{\textbackslash \textbackslash}?.

20.e5xf8 e5xf8 21.a5c5 dxe5 Even though Black will have no extra pawns for the exchange (after White takes on a6), his strong bishops and White's weak kingside give him ample compensation. Black's position is harmonious and flexible, and I would stay clear of this line purely based on how it feels from White's side. A possible continuation is: 22.a6xe6 (22.a6 c7) 22...dxe5 23.cxd3 d8 24.e2 d6 Intending ...d4.

20.e5c5\texttt{\textbackslash \textbackslash}? is a safe move, but I'm not sure about White's prospects for an advantage after: 20...a5c5 21.a5c5 c5 22.d5c5 d5c8= Black's dark squares look weak but it will be hard for us to exploit them after the likely queen exchange.

C2221) 20.g3\texttt{\textbackslash \textbackslash}?

This is quite possibly the most critical move, but Black seems to have just enough resources to maintain the equilibrium.

20...h4 21.d5g4 dxe5

Black's last two moves are more or less forced.

22.d4 d6

The queen triangulation feels strange, and Black seems to have got the extra move ...c6 when compared to the earlier variation C221 with 19...dxe5 – but the other key difference is the pawn on h4, which can be a crucial weakness in many lines. Still, it's hard to reach a firm conclusion against Black's accurate defence.

23.a5c5 ffe8!

Avoiding g6 ideas and introducing the possibility of ...f5. The upshot is that White does not have such a free hand as he did in the 19...dxe5 variation.
White does not seem to have anything better than forcing a draw with:

24...f5
24...e7 25.e4+

25.e1 dxe5 26.dxe5

This move leads to more open-ended play, with less chance of a forced draw than the line above.

20...bxc3
20...a4 will leave the bishop misplaced, and won't prevent White's initiative: 21.cxd5 e5 22.g3 a7 23.e3 b8 24.e4! and White has a lot of pressure for the pawn.

21.xc3 e5 22.d4!
It is important to provoke some weaknesses.

The immediate 22.xf8 xf8 gives Black a comfortable game with plenty of compensation for the exchange.
22...f6 23.\fxf8
Unfortunately, we don't have any way to maintain the initiative with the bishop on h6. However, the weaknesses created by Black's last move will make his task more complicated.

23...gxf8 24.\xe4
Compared with the earlier options of 20.\xfxf8 and 22.\xfxf8, Black's compensation on the kingside is far from one-sided, and White can look for opportunities there as well. If he can exchange the light-squared bishops he will have a clear advantage.

24...\dxc3 25.\xc3 \d6t 26.\h1
26.\e3 is *almost* good enough for an advantage: 26...\xe3t 27.\xe3 \d5! After other moves I would be suspicious as to whether Black would have enough compensation, but now we get a virtually forced sequence which results in a drawn rook endgame:

26...\b5 27.\g1
This is the only safe square. It feels a bit awkward to have to go here with the rook, but Black's position contains targets as well, so he can't just play for long-term compensation.

27...\g7!
A vital resource, which would be hard to find over the board. The point is to prepare ...\g4!.

27...\d8 28.\d1t would give White every chance to get coordinated and convert his material advantage.

28.\d4
28.\d4 \g4? leads to a mess. The justification for Black's last move is: 29.hxg4 hgx4 30.g3 e5

I also considered 26.\f2 as a way to avoid the weird ...\g4 motif which can arise in the main line below. Unfortunately, after 26...\b5 Black's pieces are annoyingly active and the pin on the a7-g1 diagonal is a problem. We can't even get rid of it by exchanging queens, as then the bishop will take over: 27.\e3 \xe3 28.\xe3 \d8t

31.\c7! The only move. (31.\c2? \f2→)
31...\textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{x}}}}}d4 32.\textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{x}}}}}xe7† \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{f}}}}}f7 33.\textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{e}}}}}e6 \textit{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{f}}}}}f8= The threats against the white king force us to accept a repetition.

Conclusion

This final Kan chapter has dealt with the main line of the ...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{c}}}}5-c7 system, where Black follows up by setting up a Hedgehog formation with his queen on c7. From the tabiya after 11.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{\texttt{d}}}}2, we started by seeing how the immediate 11...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{g}}}f6 could be met by 12.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{h}}}6 – a familiar theme from the previous chapter. We then dealt with the traditional 11...b6 12.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{a}}}ae1 \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{b}}}b7 13.f4, when White’s pieces are beautifully placed to develop an initiative, although the precise details will depend on how Black proceeds. In each of the four lines I analysed, White is doing excellently.

The most critical theoretical battleground in the whole chapter occurs after the trendy 11...h5!? 12.f4 \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{g}}}f6 13.\texttt{\texttt{ae}}e1 b5?!, when 14.h3!N is a logical novelty which will surely be tested soon. My main line continues 14...b4! 15.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{d}}}a4 \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{b}}}b7 16.e5 dxe5 (16...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{d}}}5 was also given due consideration) 17.fxe5 \texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{d}}}5, when I analysed both 18.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{d}}}4?! and 18.\texttt{w}f2. Both moves are interesting, although the latter poses the greatest problems to the defence. Ultimately Black’s position seems robust enough to survive, but his task is not easy at all, while White can choose between various attacking ideas.
Chapter 15

Scheveningen

4...\(\text{d}c6\) and 5...\(\text{d}6\)

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{f}3\) e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\text{xd}4\) \(\text{c}6\) 5.\(\text{c}3\) \(\text{d}6\)

6.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{f}6\) 7.f4

A) 7...e5
B) 7...a6
C) 7...\(\text{d}7\)
D) 7...\(\text{e}7\) 8.\(\text{e}2\)!
   D1) 8...e5?! 9.\(\text{f}3\) 0–0 10.0–0–0
       D11) 10...\(\text{d}4\)N
       D12) 10...\(\text{d}7\)
   D2) 8...0–0 9.0–0–0
       D21) 9...a6N
       D22) 9...\(\text{xd}4\) 10.\(\text{xd}4\) \(\text{a}5\)
           D221) 11.f5?!N
           D222) 11.\(\text{e}1\)!N

B) after 7...a6
D21) after 12...\(\text{d}7\)
D21) after 16...\(\text{xb}4\)

8.\(\text{e}2\)?!N
13.a3?!N
17.f5?!N
Chapter 15 - 4...c6 and 5...d6

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 c6

My recommendation is 6.g4, the Keres Attack, which will be covered in Chapters 16-18.

5.c3 d6

This system does not have a universally recognized name of which I am aware, but it can essentially be characterized as an attempt to reach a Scheveningen while taking some of the impact away from the g4-g5 advance.

6.e3

6.g4 has been played many times but it gives Black many possible ways to try and improve over a standard Keres Attack.

6...f6

6...a6 has occurred in several games, but it makes little sense to move this pawn so soon. White simply plays 7.f4 with similar ideas as in the main line, while Black can hardly hope to benefit from postponing ...f6 for much longer.

6...g7 is occasionally seen but I don't rate it too highly, as the knight doesn't seem to have much of future besides going to c6 after ...xd4. We can take that future away with the simple 7.b3 when I don't see a good plan for Black's problem knight. In most games from this position it has gone to g6 at some point, but it does no useful work on that square and will inevitably become a target for a future h4-h5.

The text move is a more logical choice for Black; indeed, it may appear that we have been 'move-ordered' into a variation of the Scheveningen which lies outside our repertoire. However, the fact that Black has already committed to ...c6 makes a big difference, as it considerably reduces his options against the c3 set-up, especially after White's next move.

7.f4

If White were to meet a normal Scheveningen with 6.e3 followed by f2-f4, ef3 and 0-0-0, Black could get a fine game with ...a6, ...b5 and ...b7, but with the knight already on c6 this is impossible. So what else can Black do?

With a quick queenside expansion out of the question, Black's most challenging response to the early f2-f4 is to counter with a quick ...e5. My recommended set-up is a hybrid of sorts: I want to play in the general style of the f2-f4, ef3 and 0-0-0 line, but with a slight modification - our queen will go to e2 instead of f3, to reduce the effectiveness of ...e5.

7.e2 also deserves attention. The idea is to castle quickly and then advance on the kingside with g2-g4, while having the flexibility to avoid f2-f4 entirely. It's not that f2-f4 isn't a useful move - but it's tempting to see if we can avoid any potential counterplay with ...e5. However, the drawback is that Black can still play a quick ...e5, as in the following game: 7...xd4 (7...e5? could also be considered) 8...xd4 e5!? 9...e3 a6 10.0-0-0 e7 Ding Liren - Xu Yinglun, Zaozhuang 2015. White has an interesting version of something resembling a Najdorf English Attack. This certainly warrants further investigation, but it would be a drastic shift from our repertoire against the Najdorf,
which is why I have chosen not to cover it in more detail here.

7...\texttt{c7} transposes to variation A of Chapter 2 on page 30.

\textbf{A) 7...e5}

This is Black's most direct attempt to challenge our chosen set-up, so it makes sense to check it first. The problem for Black is that he spends too long reaching a common structure, and White gets an excellent position with accurate play.

\texttt{8.d3 g4}

Going after the bishop has been Black's most popular choice.

Here are a few instructive examples to show what can happen if Black opts for normal development:

\texttt{8.e7 9.d2 0–0 10.0–0–0 a5 11.b1 exf4 12.exf4}

White has a great version of a typical structure. Black will struggle to establish a knight on e5 or obtain any other type of counterplay.

\texttt{12.e6 13.g5?!}

Also possible is: 13.d5 \texttt{xd2} Kosashvili – Vydeslaver, Kfar Sava 1993. 14.xf6+N \texttt{xf6} 15.xd2 e5 16.e3 a6 (16...\texttt{f8}) 17.e2 d5 18.\texttt{hd1} e7 19.\texttt{f4±} 17.xe5 dxe5 18.\texttt{b6±}

13.g4

13.\texttt{f8?!} 14.\texttt{xe6 fxe6} 15.\texttt{c4 f8} 16.\texttt{b3±}

13.d7 14.c4 \texttt{ac8} 15.b3±

14.e2 \texttt{xe2} 15.\texttt{xe2} h6

15.\texttt{f8} can be met by 16.\texttt{c4? d8} 17.h4 with an excellent position.

16.\texttt{f3 f8} 17.\texttt{xh6} \texttt{xd6} 18.\texttt{xd6 b4}

19.xf6\texttt{ gxf6}

In A. Das – Jaulin, Sautron 2008, White should have followed up with:

20.\texttt{h4N–}

With a pawn plus great attacking prospects for the exchange.
We have reached the same thematic structure as in the note above. It would be nice to still have the dark-squared bishop, but it’s not the most important thing. Quite a likely scenario is to get opposite-coloured bishops after Black takes a white knight on d5 – and that should really help White’s attacking chances. He has an obvious plan of 0–0–0, g4-g5, h2-h4 and so on, whereas Black will not be as quick to mobilize his forces on the queenside.

12.0–0–0 0–0 13.b3!

An important precaution, as 13.g4 e5! is annoying.

13.e6 14.d5 c8

14.xd5N 15.xd5!

An important moment, 15.exd5 could be met by 15.e5!!, when the opposite-coloured bishops should enable Black to withstand being a pawn down.

The position after the text move might look close to level due to the opposite-coloured bishops and equal number of pawn islands, but it’s actually deceptively dangerous for Black, as White will find it so much easier to advance his kingside pawns. Of course, we still have to watch out for tactics on the queenside, especially involving...b4 jumps.

15.c3

I would go as far as to say that Black’s only hope here is to conjure up some trick on the queenside, otherwise he will be doomed against our straightforward attacking plan.
In any case, here is a line showing some of the resources both sides should look out for in this structure: 15...\( \textit{x}d5?N \) 16.\( \textit{xd5} \) (16.exd5 \( \textit{\&e5}! \) 17.\( \textit{ixe5 dxe5} \) 18.\( \textit{wxe5 \&d6=} \) 16...\( \textit{wxb6} \)

17.\( \textit{\&b5!?} \) Not my favourite square for the rook, but it gives White time to regroup and enjoy the favourable aspects of this pawn structure. (17.g4 \( \textit{\&f6}! \) is suddenly tricky: 18.\( \textit{\&b5 \&f2=} \) 17...\( \textit{\&c7} \) 18.\( \textit{\&c4 \&e5} \) 19.\( \textit{\&b3} \+)

15...\( \textit{\&xd5} \) 16.\( \textit{\&xd5!} \)

Improving over 16.exd5 \( \textit{\&e5}! \) 17.\( \textit{\&xe5 dxe5} \) 18.\( \textit{\&e4 \&d6=} \) as seen in Sutovsky – Topalov, Dortmund 2005.

After drawing the above game, Sutovsky must have studied the position carefully and realized that Black gets nothing from a quick ...\( \textit{\&b4} \). And if Black fails to obtain counterplay soon, White will simply advance his kingside pawns.

16...\( \textit{wxb6} \)

16...\( \textit{\&b4} \) 17.\( \textit{\&d2 \&b6} \) 18.g5 is the same thing, and was the move order of the Jakovenko – Stellwagen game quoted below.

16...\( \textit{\&c7} \) 17.c3 a6 18.g5 b5 19.h4?N

19.\( \textit{\&h3 \&b8} \) 20.\( \textit{\&c1=} \) was also good for White in Sutovsky – Timofeev, Khanty-Mansiysk 2005. The text move is another promising way to handle the position, so take your pick.

16...\( \textit{\&c7} \) 17...\( \textit{\&b6} \) 16...\( \textit{\&b4} \) 17.\( \textit{\&d2 \&c5?} \)

18...\( \textit{\&xc2?!} \) 19.\( \textit{\&xc2 \&xc2} \) 20.\( \textit{\&xc2 \&f2=} \) 21.\( \textit{\&b1 \&c8} \) 22.\( \textit{\&d3=} \) must have been a miscalculation by Black in Sutovsky – Gelfand, Rishon LeZion (blitz) 2006.

19.a3 \( \textit{\&c6} \) 20.h4 \( \textit{\&a5} \) 21.\( \textit{\&d3 \&b5} \) 22.\( \textit{\&c1=} \)

Not exactly a typical square for the queen, but it does the job; Black has basically run out of counterplay again.

22...\( \textit{\&c8} \) 23.e2 \( \textit{\&b8} \) 24.h5N+

24.\( \textit{\&f1} \) is also good although, in Jakovenko – Stellwagen, Wijk aan Zee 2007, White soon panicked because of ...\( \textit{\&g7} \) pseudo-threats.
I don't see a good continuation for Black. A sample line is:

24...g6 25.hxg6 hxg6 26.c3 g7 27...d6 b6 28...d6±

B) 7...a6

This has been played in a lot of games, especially when transpositions are taken into account. It was a surprise to see that my recommendation on the next move has never been tested: the bishop can play an important role from g2, as in the main line of my analysis below.

8...c7

With no practical tests, the choice of main line is rather arbitrary. I decided to focus on this move because it seems like the best attempt to exploit the position of the queen on e2, as Black can aim for a quick ...b5 without allowing any e4-e5 tricks. Please also note that g2-g4 is impossible due to ...i:d4 followed by ...e5; if the queen had been on f3, White could have countered that idea with fxe5 followed by g3.

8...a5 9...b3 c7 10.g4± is good for White.

8...xd4 9...d4 b5 (9...a5!! 10.e5±; 9...c7 10.0–0–0 transposes to 9...xd4 10...xd4 in the note to Black’s next move in the main line below) 10.0–0–0 b7 11.a3 c7 12.g4 White’s attack is developing smoothly.

Here is another sample line – not forced, but just showing how White can develop his attack against normal-looking moves by Black:

8...e7 9.0–0–0 c7 (9...0–0 transposes to variation D21 on page 327) 10.g4 d7 (10...b5? 11.xc6 xc6 12.c5+) 11.g2 0–0

8.c2?!N

Most games have continued 8.f3, which is perfectly playable, but going to e2 feels sneaker to me. Once g2-g4 has been played,
9.0-0-0 b5

9...\textit{exd4} 10.\textit{exd4} e5 (10...b5 11.e5±) can be met by:

11.\textit{d5! exd5} 12.\textit{exd5} f6 13.\textit{g4±}

9...\textit{d7} 10.\textit{g4! exd4} 11.\textit{xd4} e5 12.\textit{d5 exd5} 13.\textit{exd5} f6 14.\textit{g5} also favours White.

10.\textit{dxc6}

10.a3 b4 11.axb4 \textit{xb4} 12.\textit{g4} could be explored further, but I prefer the text move.

10...\textit{xc6} 11.\textit{g4}?

Provoking some interesting complications.

11...\textit{b4}

Black has to do something active before White plays \textit{g2} followed by e4-e5 or g4-g5.

11...\textit{b7} 12.\textit{g1} b4 could be considered, but I found a nice idea for White:

13.e5! \textit{dxe5} 14.\textit{xe5} \textit{xc3} 15.\textit{exf6} \textit{xb2}+ 16.\textit{b1} Black’s king seems a lot more vulnerable.

12.e5! \textit{bxc3} 13.\textit{exf6} \textit{xb2}+ 14.\textit{b1}

I like White’s chances, as his king is safe and there are quite a few options to create problems for Black on the kingside and in the centre. Of course the position is complicated, and it would be possible to analyse it in great depth, but we are already deep into unexplored territory, so I will just give a few illustrative lines to show that White’s initiative is real.

14...\textit{b7}

14...\textit{xf6} 15.\textit{g2} d5 16.\textit{d4 e7} 17.\textit{xf6 xf6} 18.\textit{xd5±}
15...\texttt{g1} \texttt{gxf6}

15...\texttt{\texttt{f4}} gives White a few options: 16...\texttt{g3} \texttt{gxf6} 17...\texttt{d4} \texttt{d5} 18...\texttt{b3?! \texttt{xb3} 19...\texttt{b3} \texttt{d7} 20...\texttt{xf6} \texttt{g8} 21...\texttt{xb2} seems decent; alternatively, 16...\texttt{g3?!} looks annoying for Black - a pawn will remain on f6 for a while to come, and there still isn't much happening for Black on the queenside.

16...\texttt{g2}

16...\texttt{g3?!} could also be considered.

16...\texttt{\texttt{c7} 17...\texttt{d4}}

One way or another, the f6-pawn will fall. After that Black is still a pawn up, but the extra pawn is on b2, so for practical purposes the material is basically equal; White still has some initiative though.

17...\texttt{\texttt{g8}}

17...\texttt{\texttt{e7} 18...\texttt{g5!}}

18...\texttt{xf6}\texttt{c8}

Or 18...\texttt{\texttt{xb7} \texttt{xb7} 19...\texttt{g3?!}; in both cases, White has the better chances due to his safer king.

C) 7...\texttt{d7}

8...\texttt{\texttt{g3}}

This time 8...\texttt{e2} does not work quite so well; after 8...\texttt{\texttt{xd4?!} 9...\texttt{xd4} \texttt{\texttt{a5} 10.0-0} 11...\texttt{e3} \texttt{c8} 12...\texttt{b1} \texttt{\texttt{e7} I did not find anything special for White.

8...\texttt{\texttt{xd4} 9...\texttt{xd4} \texttt{\texttt{a5}}}

This seems like the only real attempt to justify the early...\texttt{d7}.

10.0-0-0 \texttt{e5} 11...\texttt{f2!}

11...\texttt{e3 is less accurate due to 11...\texttt{c8! 12.fxe5 dxe5 13...\texttt{d7} \texttt{\texttt{a7} 14...\texttt{f5! \texttt{b7} 15...\texttt{b5} \texttt{c7 and the black king escapes, Scvian - Sukandar, Saint Louis 2015.}}}}

11...\texttt{c8}

11...a6N is a somewhat useful move to control the b5-square, but it allows White to increase his lead in development: 12.fxe5 dxe5 13...\texttt{c4} \texttt{g4 (13...\texttt{c8 14...\texttt{f7! \texttt{xf7 15...\texttt{xd7}++} 14...\texttt{g3}}}
14...\texttt{c7} (14...\texttt{xd1} 15...\texttt{xd1+} followed by \texttt{d5} gives White a huge initiative) 15...\texttt{d5} \texttt{xd5} 16...\texttt{xg4} \texttt{f6} 17...\texttt{c2}\pm

12.fxe5
12...\texttt{h4} \texttt{xc3}! is a good exchange sac.

12...\texttt{dxe5}

13...\texttt{xc3}!
We already have seen this idea in a few other lines so it shouldn't come as any surprise. White is trying to exploit the fact that Black hasn't played ...a6.

14...\texttt{xd7}!
I consider this the critical move. By retreating the rook to the 6th rank, Black defends the f6-knight against \texttt{h4} ideas.

14...\texttt{xd3}?! 15...\texttt{xd3} \texttt{xa2} is a bad idea due to 16...\texttt{b5}\mp! \texttt{d7} 17...\texttt{d2}!\pm followed by \texttt{c4}.

14...\texttt{c7} has been played in both of the games from this position. 15...\texttt{b1} \texttt{c5} 16...\texttt{h4} (16...\texttt{g3}!N is even more ambitious, intending 16...\texttt{b6} 17...\texttt{b3}! in order to win the e5-pawn, but the game continuation is simple and strong)

17...\texttt{e8}\mp \texttt{d8} 18...\texttt{xg8}! \texttt{xd8} 19...\texttt{bxc3} \texttt{a3}\mp 20...\texttt{d2}\pm Despite the doubled c-pawns, the extra pawn clearly means something. White can continue adding pressure on the queenside along the b-file and following up with c4-c5 at some point.
16...Ne7 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.e2 White intends to transfer his bishop to the excellent b3-square, while the black bishop does not have much of a future. 18...0-0 19.c3 Bc8 20.d1 b5 21.a3 Ne7 22.Bb3± Yu Yangyi – Salem, Sharjah 2014.

15.Bb3!
Targeting the b7-pawn is the only real way to challenge Black’s last move.

15...a6 16.Bxb7 Wxa2
The position is extremely double-edged. Black’s lack of development gives us cause for optimism, but White still requires a lot of precision to prove an advantage. Exchanging queens will be one of our main goals, in order to keep our king safe and exploit the bishop pair in the endgame.

17.Bb8† Bc7

18.Bb3!
Provoking some concessions.


18...Ne7
18...Be6 19.Bb7† Rc8 20.Wb3! works out well for White:


19.Bb7† Be8
19...Bd8 20.Bh4! Wa4† 21.Bd2 Bd6† 22.Bc3 Wa5† (22...Bc6† 23.Bb3++) 23.Bb3 Bb6† 24.Bxb6 Bxb6† 25.Ba2† is a funny line - the white king has run a lap of the c2- and b2-pawns, but Black’s king is much further from safety.

20.Bb3!!
20.Bf5!? is the computer’s top choice, and it may well be strongest. However, I want to
show that White can also keep the advantage by simple means.

20...\texttt{Wxb3} 21.\texttt{xb3} \texttt{exe4} 22.\texttt{e3}\texttt{f}\texttt{e}  
White has excellent compensation: his bishops are strong and Black still has to go to some effort to develop his kingside pieces.

D) 7...\texttt{c7}  
This flexible move prepares to castle while keeping the option of ...\texttt{e5} at any moment.

The main point of putting the queen on e2 instead of f3 is to render ...\texttt{e5} less effective – for instance, by keeping the f3-square available for the knight. Although it may seem strange to block the f1-bishop, there are actually quite a lot of Sicilian variations in which the queen may prove effective on the e2-square. Just look at 1.e4 \textit{vs The Sicilian I}, which covers the Najdorf: in seven out of the first nine chapters, my recommended set-up features an early \texttt{we2}.

Black's most logical replies are D1) 8...\texttt{e5}\texttt{!?} and D2) 8...0–0.

8...\texttt{xd4} 9.\texttt{xd4} \texttt{e5} (9...0–0 10.0–0–0 transposes to variation D22 below) is a weird idea from an engine game. An appropriate solution was found by Komodo in the game: 10.\texttt{exe5} \texttt{dxe5} 11.\texttt{b5}! (11.\texttt{xe5} 0–0\texttt{=} 11...\texttt{d7})

\begin{itemize}
\item 12.\texttt{g1}!\texttt{a6} 13.\texttt{b3} \texttt{c5} 14.\texttt{xc5}! \texttt{xc5} 15.\texttt{b5}! \texttt{d7} 16.\texttt{xd7}! \texttt{xd7} 17.\texttt{d5}  
White reached a typical scenario with good knight versus bad bishop in Komodo – Fire 4, engine game 2015.
\end{itemize}

D1) 8...\texttt{e5}\texttt{!?}

Compared to variation A with 7...\texttt{e5}, the queen on e2 seems misplaced – but we can still find uses for it with some clever play.

9.\texttt{f3}

9.\texttt{f5} \texttt{xf5} 10.exf5 0–0\texttt{=} 11.0–0–0 \texttt{exf4} 12.\texttt{fxf4} \texttt{d5} followed by ...\texttt{d4} gives Black reasonable play.

D12) 10...\texttt{d7}
D11) 10...exf4N 11...xf4

11...a5 12.b1 e6
Black should mobilize his pieces as quickly as possible.

The slower 12...a6 gives us enough time to regroup and get a typical edge: 13.e1 (13.g4? hxg4 14.xg4) 13...e6 14.g5 (14.d5? xex1 15.xex7+ xex7 16.xex1 might also be enough for an edge) 14...g4 15.e2 xex2 16.xex2 Once again, White has the better chances in this thematic structure, for instance:

13.e5!
This time 13.e1 can be met by 13...ac8 14.a3 (14.g5 b4!) 14...e8! when taking on d6 should allow Black enough compensation.

13.c7
13...d8 runs into 14.e5+ of course.

14.d5
Forcing Black to swap off his bishop.

14...xd5 15.exd5 e5 16.e2
The queen has done her job on the queenside. Now we will simply regroup and hammer the g-pawn up the kingside.
16...\(\text{Ng6}\)
16...\(\text{Nd7}\) 17.\(\text{g4}\)±

17.\(\text{xc1}\) \(\text{Kf8}\) 18.\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{e5}\) 19.\(\text{Wc2}\)±
Black will struggle to generate counterplay.

**D12) 10...\(\text{d7}\)**

At first, it may seem as though Black is putting his bishop on a worse square than in the previous line, but he still has chances to create threats on the queenside after \(\text{...e8}\). Moreover, by maintaining the central tension, he may be hoping to make it harder for White to make plans – but actually, we can proceed in more or less the same way as before.

11.\(\text{b1}\)

11.\(\text{h3}\) \(\text{e8}\) 12.\(\text{g4}\) \(\text{b4}\)! 13.\(\text{a3}\) \(\text{xc3}\)! 14.\(\text{bxc3}\) \(\text{a5}\)± is an example of what to avoid.

11...\(\text{c8}\) 12.\(\text{h3}\)\(N\)

12.\(\text{d2}\) \(\text{exf4}\) 13.\(\text{xf4}\) \(\text{e6}\) was played in Wunderlich – Dothan, corr. 2008. A possible continuation is 14.\(\text{h3N}\) \(\text{a6}\) (14...\(\text{e8}\) 15.\(\text{g4}\) \(\text{a5}\) 16.\(\text{a3}\) \(\text{de5}\)!) 15.\(\text{g5}\) \(\text{b5}\) 16.\(\text{g5}\) \(\text{d7}\) 17.\(\text{xd5}\) \(\text{de5}\) 18.\(\text{xe2}\)±, reaching a typical structure which has been discussed elsewhere. I like the text move even more, though.

12...\(\text{h5}\)!?

Trying to exploit the dark-square holes on the kingside.

If Black plays a slow move such as 12...\(\text{a6}\), White simply plays 13.\(\text{g4}\)± followed by a typical kingside advance, with the usual favourable position.

12...\(\text{b4}\)! is not quite sound: 13.\(\text{fxe5}\) \(\text{xc3}\) (13...\(\text{xe4}\) 14.\(\text{xe4}\) \(\text{f5}\) 15.\(\text{d2}\) \(\text{xc2}\) 16.\(\text{c3}\)±) 14.\(\text{bxc3}\) \(\text{a5}\) (14...\(\text{xe4}\) 15.\(\text{d4}\)!) 15.\(\text{c4}\)±

12...\(\text{a5}\) 13.\(\text{a3}\) \(\text{exf4}\) 14.\(\text{xf4}\) is also promising for White, for instance:

20.\(\text{b5}\)! \(\text{b6}\) 21.\(\text{xb6}\) \(\text{axb6}\) 22.\(\text{c4}\)! (but not 22.\(\text{d2}\) \(\text{c5}\)! when White loses a
Chapter 15 – 4...dxc6 and 5...d6

piece) 22...\text{x}d5 23.exd5\text{c} With superb compensation for the exchange.

14.\text{W}d2!
14...\text{x}d4 dxe5 seems fine for Black.

14...\text{D}xe5
14...dxe5 15.\text{W}xd7 \text{a}5 (15...\text{W}xd7 16.\text{W}xd7\text{e}8 17.\text{W}g4 \text{e}8 18.\text{W}xd1 \text{e}6 19.\text{c}4\text{c}±)

15.\text{W}xf4 \text{e}6

Again we have reached a thematic structure, where White is in control and has a clear plan of advancing the kingside pawns. If Black goes for ...b5-b4, we will happily plonk the knight on d5.

D2) 8...0-0 9.0-0-0

13.\text{D}xe5!
13...\text{W}xe5 is an interesting, but ultimately less convincing, alternative: 13...\text{W}g3 14.\text{W}e1 \text{x}h1 15.exd6 \text{f}6 16.\text{D}d5 \text{e}8 (16...\text{e}6 17.\text{c}4 \text{e}8 18.\text{W}f4\text{c})

14...\text{W}d2!
14...\text{D}xe5
14...dxe5 15.\text{W}xd7 \text{a}5 (15...\text{W}xd7 16.\text{W}xd7\text{e}8 17.\text{W}g4 \text{e}8 18.\text{W}xd1 \text{e}6 19.\text{c}4±)

15.\text{W}xf4 \text{e}6

Again we have reached a thematic structure, where White is in control and has a clear plan of advancing the kingside pawns. If Black goes for ...b5-b4, we will happily plonk the knight on d5.

D2) 8...0-0 9.0-0-0

17.\text{D}d3 \text{e}5 18.\text{W}xh1 \text{xd}3 19.\text{e}xd3 \text{xe}4 It's an insanely complicated position, but I have a feeling that Black should be able to wriggle his way out of this one.

13...\text{W}xf4
13...\text{W}g3 14.\text{W}f3 \text{x}h1 15.\text{e}xd7 \text{xd}7 16.g4\text{c} After White recovers the knight, he will have excellent compensation for the exchange because of the great pawns and strong minor pieces.
I only found seven games from this position, compared with a few hundred with the queen on f3! We will analyse D21) 9...a6N and D22) 9...ødxd4.

Black has also tried:

9...wc7

The position is almost the same as variation B2 of Chapter 2, but the white queen is on e2 instead of f3.

10.gc4N

The slow 10.h3 has been played a couple of times, but such prophylaxis is not needed. 10.ødxb5?N is interesting – I recommended the same idea on page 33, when the queen was on f3 instead of e2. It doesn't work quite as well here after 10...wb8 11.g4 a6 12.ød4 ødxd4 13.ødxd4 e5 14.g5 exd4! 15.gxf6 dxc3 16.fc7 1xe8. In the version with the queen of f3, 17.1xd3 would have been winning, but now it's not so clear. White still has good compensation, but the whole line seems unnecessarily complicated.

I especially like the text move because it works much better with the queen on e2 than on f3.

10...ødxd4 11.1xd4!

A typical idea to avoid ...e5 followed by ...1xg4.

In that case Black would be able to play 12...1xg4 with good prospects, but here the same move would just lose a piece because the white queen is defended on e2! Therefore Black must settle for 12...wd8, when 13.g5 1xe7 14.f5? 1xg4 15.1g1 1xe3† 16.1xe3 gives White good attacking prospects for the sacrificed pawn.

12.e5

12.exd5 1xd5 13.1xd5 exd5 14.f5 1f6∞

12...1d7 13.1b5

This move has a couple of ideas. The obvious plan is to move the rook and transfer the knight to d4 but, if Black chases it with a quick ...a6, we can plonk the knight on d6, sacrificing a pawn in order to eliminate Black's dark-squared bishop and gain time to attack.

13...wd8

13...c6 14.1d1! enables the knight to come to d4 with a tempo: 14...1e6 15.1d4 1c7 16.1b1 1c4 17.1h4 1xd7 18.1c1+ 13...a5 14.1b1 a6 15.1d6 1xd6 16.exd6 1c5 17.1g2 1xd6 18.c4+

14.1b1 a6

14...1b6 15.1f2! 1d7 16.1d1† 15.1d6 1c5

15...1xd6 16.exd6 1c5 17.1g2 1xd6 18.f5? (18.c4 is the more positional alternative) 18...1d7 19.f6 with a dangerous initiative.
Chapter 15 – 4...\(\text{c6}\) and 5...d6

16.\(\text{dx}c8\) \(\text{fx}c8\)
16...\(\text{fx}c8\)? 17.c4! dxc4 18.\(\text{fx}c4\)± is a worse version for Black.
17.c4±
The light-squared bishop has a lot of potential.

D21) 9...a6N

10.g4 \(\text{fx}d4\) 11.\(\text{dx}d4\) b5
11...e5 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.\(\text{c}c5\) \(\text{wc}7\) 14.\(\text{xe}7\) \(\text{wc}7\) 15.g5 is pleasant for White.
12.g5 \(\text{Od}7\)

We have briefly transposed to a game, Najer – Ionov, St Petersburg 2004, where 13.\(\text{g}g1\) was played. Instead I would prefer:

13.a3?!N
Other moves could certainly be considered, but I like the idea of stabilizing the knight on c3. The position vaguely reminds me of certain Najdorf lines – see, for instance, the position after 12.\(\text{h}4\) on page 140 of 1.e4 vs The Sicilian I – that is, until I consider how much better the white bishop is on d4 than on h4.

13...\(\text{b}8\)
13...b4?! is too optimistic: 14.axb4 \(\text{b}8\)
(if 14...a5 15.b5 a4 16.\(\text{b}b1\) a3 17.b3 Black has no attack) 15.\(\text{a}2\) \(\text{c}7\) 16.h4 e5 17.fxe5 \(\text{dx}e5\) 18.\(\text{h}3\)±
13...e5?! changes the structure but after 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.\(\text{xe}5\) \(\text{g}5\) 16.\(\text{b}1\) White remains on top. For example:
16...\texttt{xf6} 17...\texttt{xf6} \texttt{xf6} 18...\texttt{e1} \texttt{e5} 19...\texttt{d5} \texttt{h6} 20...\texttt{g1}±

14...\texttt{h4}

Despite the novelty on the previous move, we have suddenly transposed to a whole host of games. This position can actually be reached via the Keres Attack, as shown in variation B1 of the next chapter. However, via that move order I like the option of 10...\texttt{f4}!? (see variation B2 of the next chapter on page 341) even more.

A final possibility is:

14...\texttt{a5}±N 15...\texttt{e1}!

Threatening \texttt{d5}.

15...\texttt{f5} \texttt{b4} 16...\texttt{xb4} \texttt{xb4}∞

15...\texttt{d8}

15...\texttt{b4} 16...\texttt{a2}±

15...\texttt{e8} 16...\texttt{b1}±

14...\texttt{e8}

Also considered:

14...\texttt{b4} 15...\texttt{xb4} \texttt{xb4} 16...\texttt{f5} \texttt{a5} 17...\texttt{f6} \texttt{gxf6} (17...\texttt{xd4} 18...\texttt{xd4} \texttt{gxf6} 19...\texttt{b1}±) 18...\texttt{gxf6} \texttt{xf6} 19...\texttt{xf6} \texttt{e6} 20...\texttt{c3}! \texttt{h8} 21...\texttt{h6} \texttt{d8} 22...\texttt{xd6}+

15...\texttt{h3}! \texttt{b4}

Black had better do something on the queenside, as White's attack is coming regardless.

16...\texttt{xb4} \texttt{xb4}

This line is a nice example of how White can change the direction of the attack; Black is struggling to hold his queenside together.
17.f5!N
A natural improvement over 17.g6?! which was much less convincing in Gutenev – Askarov, Kazan 2006.

17... hà8
After 17...exf5 18.Àd5 Àb5 19.c4 Àa5 20.Àxf5± Black’s kingside looks ready to collapse.

18.fxe6 fxe6 19.Àhfl Àe7
Black already has to tread carefully to survive.

19...Àa5? 20.Àf3! wins immediately.

19...Àc7 20.Àxe6! Àxe6 21.Àf3! leaves Black without a decent way of preventing Àf7++. For example: 21...Àe7 22.Àd5 Àd8 23.Àxb4+-

20.Àg2 Àe5 21.h5

21...Àc6
21...a5 22.g6 h6 23.Àxe5 dxe5 24.Àf7±

22.Àe2 Àxd4 23.Àxd4±
White is dominating.
13...\(\text{e}1!\) \(\text{g}4\)
13...\(\text{d}7??\) runs into 14.\(\text{b}5++\) of course.
13...a6 is playable but rather slow: 14.\(\text{d}3\) \(\text{d}7\) (14...\(\text{d}7??\) 15.\(\text{h}4++)\) 15.\(\text{e}4\) \(\text{b}6\)
16.\(\text{d}4\) \(\text{c}7\) 17.\(\text{f}1\)±
14.\(\text{b}5\) \(\text{b}6\) 15.\(\text{d}4\) \(\text{c}5\)
15...\(\text{a}5\) runs into 16.\(\text{d}5!!\).
15...\(\text{c}7\) gives White a few good options, including 16.\(\text{h}3\)\(\text{xf}4\)† (16...\(\text{f}6\) 17.\(\text{e}5\) \(\text{b}6\) 18.\(\text{g}4\)±) 17.\(\text{b}1\) \(\text{f}6\) 18.\(\text{g}4\) with lots of activity for a mere pawn.

\[\text{Diagram 1}\]

16.\(\text{a}4\) \(\text{xb}5\) 17.\(\text{xc}5\) \(\text{c}6\) 18.\(\text{h}3\) \(\text{h}6\)
19.\(\text{e}4!\) \(\text{b}6\)
19...\(\text{f}6\) 20.\(\text{g}4\)→
20.\(\text{f}6?!\) \(\text{h}8\) 21.\(\text{g}4\)
With a strong attack.

\[\text{Diagram 2}\]

13...d5 14.exd5 \(\text{b}4\) 15.\(\text{d}2\) \(\text{xc}3\) 16.\(\text{xc}3\) \(\text{xa}2\) 17.\(\text{g}2\)± White’s bishops are strong and nothing too bad is happening on the queenside.

11...e5 12.\(\text{f}2\)
Black had better do something fast, otherwise \(\text{g}4\)-\(\text{g}5\) will crush him.
12...d5
12...b5 13.\(\text{\#}x\text{b5}\) \(\text{\#}c7\) 14.g4 \(\text{\#}b8\) 15.\(\text{\#}e2\) leaves Black without any serious play for the pawn.
12...\(\text{\#}d7\) 13.\(\text{\#}e1!\) \(\text{\#}f8\) 14.\(\text{\#}b1\) \(\text{\#}d8\) 15.g4± is perfect for White.

16.\(\text{\#}c4\)
Otherwise White will have problems completing development.

16...\(\text{\#}xg2\) 17.\(\text{\#}xe6\)\#h8 18.\(\text{\#}h1\) \(\text{\#}c6\)
White keeps some pressure, but his initiative might dissipate after a few more accurate defensive moves by Black.

The move chosen as the main line is Black's best defensive idea. Perhaps White can still claim a slight edge, but I'm not sure how significant it is.

12.fxe6
Other moves would give Black some nice ideas for counterplay. For instance, 12.g4 e5! 13.f2 d5! 14.\(\text{\#}e1\) (14.exd5 \(\text{\#}b4\)) 14...d4 15.d5 \(\text{\#}xa2\)! 16.xe7\#h8 gives Black an improved version of the 11...e5 line mentioned above.
few possible ways of handling this problem: retreating the queen would obviously be a concession, but other moves all come with some kind of drawback.

11...b6
11...\textit{d}d7 does not lose outright, but 12.\textit{a}d5! \textit{w}d8 13.\textit{a}xe7+ \textit{w}xe7 is at least slightly better for White. There is more than one good continuation, but 14.e5!? dxe5 15.\textit{w}xe5+ seems like a logical way to play on the dark squares.

11...e5 12.\textit{a}d5! \textit{w}xe1 13.\textit{a}xe7+ \textit{h}h8 14.\textit{w}xe1 exd4 is not yet a complete disaster for Black, but he is stuck in an endgame with no compensation for his inferior structure. Both 15.\textit{a}d5 \textit{a}xd5 16.exd5 and 15.\textit{a}xc8 \textit{a}xc8 16.\textit{e}d1 give White a pleasant advantage.

11...\textit{h}h8 prevents \textit{a}d5 but has no other purpose, whereas \textit{w}e1 is a generally useful move, as it frees the f1-bishop and prepares to deploy the queen on a square like g3 or h4 when the time is right. 12.\textit{b}b1 \textit{d}d7 (12...e5 13.\textit{e}e3 exf4 14.\textit{xf}4 \textit{e}e6 15.a3 \textit{f}d8 16.\textit{a}d5?! \textit{w}xe1 17.\textit{xe}1 \textit{a}xd5 18.exd5 \textit{f}8 19.c4+) 13.\textit{d}d3 \textit{c}6 (13...\textit{a}c8?! 14.e5+) 14.\textit{g}1 e5 15.\textit{e}e3 exf4 16.\textit{xf}4+.

Black's last move seems like the best try, but it reduces Black's prospects for counterplay, as he is unlikely to be able to play ...\textit{b}5 any time soon. White can go about his business of improving his pieces and preparing g2-g4.

12.\textit{b}b1?!
This is not forced but it's always a useful move, and I want to emphasize the fact that White can afford the time for such moves. I don't see how Black can create any problems for us, now that he has effectively abandoned the ...\textit{b}5 plan. Therefore I suggest improving as many of our pieces as possible before choosing the right moment for e4-e5 or g2-g4.

12.g4? e5! doesn't quite work.

White could, of course, try something like 12.\textit{d}3 \textit{b}7 13.\textit{f}1, trying to save time by omitting \textit{b}1, but I don't see any special need for it.
Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the position after 4...\texttt{d}c6 5.\texttt{d}c3 when, instead of opting for one of the Sicilian variations examined elsewhere in the book after 5...a6, 5...\texttt{c}c7 or even 5...\texttt{f}6, Black plays the flexible 5...\texttt{d}6. This avoids the 'pure' Keres Attack, so instead I propose 6.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{f}6 7.\texttt{f}4, when the presence of the knight on c6 makes it harder for Black to get his queenside counterplay off the ground.

We considered several moves. 7...e5 is a principled choice, but the resulting thematic structure after ...exf4 works out well for White. 7...a6 is a natural move, when my brand new idea of 8.\texttt{e}2?!N leads to tricky problems for Black. Against 7...\texttt{d}7, on the other hand, the queen should go to f3. In the main line Black goes for quick counterplay while leaving his king in the centre, but the \texttt{xd}7 exchange sac is an important resource which does well for White. The final option was 7...\texttt{e}7, when I once again favour the unusual 8.\texttt{e}2?! Apart from its surprise value, this has a number of advantages over the normal \texttt{f}3 move, and I have shown how White can cause problems against just about any reasonable set-up Black may choose.
Chapter 16

Scheveningen

Keres Attack – Various 6th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 d6 5.c3 d6 6.g4

A) 6...e5?!
B) 6...c6?! 7.g5 d7 8.e3 e7 9.h4 0–0
   B1) 10.e2
   B2) 10.f4?!
C) 6...a6?! 7.g5 d7 8.e2 g2?!
   C1) 8...e7
   C2) 8...c6
C3) 8...b5 9.e5!N d5
   C31) 10...d5!
   C32) 10.a4?!
      C321) 10...xe5
      C322) 10...bxa4
      C323) 10...b4

A) after 13...f8
C1) after 10...d5
C3) after 8...b5
1.e4 c5 2.d4 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 d6
5.c3 d6
This move introduces the 'real' Scheveningen. It can also arise from a 2...d6 move order, although I guess the majority of Black players will prefer 2...e6 in order to rule out 3..b5.

6.g4
The Keres Attack has long been regarded as one of the toughest challenges to the Scheveningen. I will mention in passing that 6.c3 is another popular move, which would lead back to the previous chapter if only Black would play an early ...d6. The problem, of course, is that 6...a6 leads straight to the English Attack against the Najdorf – not a bad choice in itself, but completely different from my recommendation of 6.g5, as covered in 1.e4 vs The Sicilian I. Interestingly, the text move can also give rise to some Najdorf transpositions after a subsequent h2-h3. This approach has been understandably popular lately, because h3 against the Najdorf has gained a lot of attention, and Black's set-up with ...c6 is perhaps not the most challenging reaction to it, so White doesn't need to know much theory when playing that way. Nevertheless, I would prefer to steer clear of any such transpositions and instead focus on the good old-fashioned Keres Attack, in which White simply tries to blast through the kingside.

6...e5
Generally Black doesn't want to give White free rein on the kingside, and will instead try to put some obstacles in our path. He might try playing in the centre with ...d5 or ...e5, often after a preliminary ...h6 to hold up the g4-g5 advance. In the past, there have been many games where Black was content to allow g4-g5, but nowadays this is generally considered too compliant.

In this chapter we will deal with the sidelines A) 6...e5?! B) 6...d6?! and C) 6...a6?.

Black's main lines all begin with 6...h6, and we will deal with them in the next two chapters.

6...c7 7.g5 d6d7 8.h4 does not have much independent significance, as Black almost always plays ...d6 or ...a6 in the near future, thus transposing to variation B or C below.

6...d6d7 7.g5 should transpose to one of the other variations. I found one old game where Black tried 7..b6?!, but I don't think this warrants any special attention; the knight only gets in the way of Black's counterplay on the queenside, and ...c4 isn't even a threat when our bishop is still on f1.

A) 6...e5?!
This is one of the most direct ways of meeting the Keres, but it has lost most of its followers. One of the reasons is that White has more than one route to an advantage – he just needs to know what he's doing.

A more nuanced version of the same idea is 6...h6 7.h4 e5??, as covered in variation C of the next chapter.

7.\(\text{d}5\)

7.\(\text{b}5^+\) has been more popular but the text move is at least as strong.

7...h5

Attempting to undermine the knight has been Black's usual policy.

7...g6 8.e3 gives White a firm grip on the centre, and attempting to fight for the dark squares with 8...h6 only makes things worse for Black: 9.\(\text{g}4\) 10.g5 \(\text{h}5\) 11.e2 \(\text{g}7\) 12.\(\text{d}5^+\) Antonov – Savic, corr. 1982.

7...c6 allows White to clamp down on the light squares: 8.g5 h6 9.xf6 xf6 10.d5 d8 11.h4 g6 12.e3 e6

8.g5!

8.g5 has scored pretty well but I prefer the more dynamic text move. It leads, almost by force, to a position with opposite-coloured bishops, where White has great prospects on the light squares.

8...hxg4 9.d5 d5 10.xf6 xf6 11.exf5 h6

This has been the usual choice, trying to bring the bishop to life. Other moves are less challenging:

11...h4 was played in Conlon – Barrett, Hinckley Island 2008. Black's last move is a little slow, and the simplest way to exploit it is 12.g1!N xh2 13.xg4, when White's pieces will easily find active squares. For instance, 13...a6 14.xf3 d7 15.g2^+ and White dominates the light squares while Black's king lacks a safe haven.

11...d7 12.b5 c8 13.c3 c5 Berchtenbreiter – Pozueta Alegria, Fermo 2009.
14...a4!N (A simple improvement over 14...ixd7†  #xd7. White simply postpones the exchange in order to provoke a weakening of Black's queenside.) 14...a6 15...ixd7†  #xd7 16.b4  #c6 (16...#c8 17.a5±) 17...xg4  #c8 18...b1± White's knight is much better than Black's bishop, and he can open the queenside whenever it suits him.

11...#c6 12.c3 #h6
It is worth comparing this to the main line, as the inclusion of the moves ...#c6 and c2-c3 means that White should proceed in a different way.

12...hxg4!
Preventing ...#g5.

12...#xg4? #a5†! forces the knight back to c3, when White loses all his coordination.

12.h3 is less accurate than the text move because of 12...#c6!, when hxg4 would entail an exchange sacrifice. It's still an interesting position but there is no point in analysing it as the main line reduces Black's options.

12.c3 has been the most popular choice but 12...#g5! is an annoying reply, intending 13...#xg4 #h4 with quite a robust blockade of the kingside.

12...#xh3
12...#c6 13.c3† gives White an easy edge, as ...#g5 has been prevented and #xg4 will follow.
12...\texttt{\textcolor{#000000}{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}d7}}}} 13.\texttt{\texttt{\textcolor{#000000}{\texttt{\texttt{e}g1}}}} \texttt{\textcolor{#000000}{\texttt{\texttt{b}6}}} 14.\texttt{\textcolor{#000000}{\texttt{\texttt{x}g4\pm}}} is similarly pleasant for White.

13.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}xh3}} \texttt{\texttt{f8}}

14.a4!N
Black’s only real plan is to exchange the knights somehow. He can do this with ...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}a6-c7}}, ...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}d7-b6}} or ...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}c6-e7}}. The first option is stopped by the bishop on f1; the a4-pawn helps stop the second one by planning a4-a5; and against the third one, we plan to bring the a1-rook into action via a3!

14.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b}b3}} takes the rook in the wrong direction: 14...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}c6!}} 15.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}xb7}} \texttt{\texttt{b}b8\pm} Volokitin – Papp, Mamaia 2012.

14.c3 would of course be met by 14...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d7}}! 15.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}g4}} \texttt{\texttt{b}b6} and Black carries out his plan.

14...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c}c6}}
14...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d7}} 15.a5!\pm leaves Black without a good plan.
14...\texttt{\texttt{e}a6} 15.\texttt{\texttt{x}xa6} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a}a5\pm}} 16.\texttt{\texttt{e}c3} \texttt{\texttt{bxa6}} (16...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}xa6}} 17.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c}c7\pm}}) 17.\texttt{\texttt{xf6\pm}}

15.\texttt{\texttt{e}aa3!}
The rook is heading for the h-file.

15.a5?! \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}c7}} 16.\texttt{\texttt{a}a4} is another possible way, but I would prefer not to leave the a-pawn potentially hanging with check.

15...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d7}}
Black continues with his plan. I considered two other possibilities:
15...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d4}} 16.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}g2!}} \texttt{\texttt{xf5}} 17.\texttt{\texttt{h}h1} \texttt{\texttt{e}c8} (17...\texttt{\texttt{g}g7} 18.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h}h8\pm}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}h8}} 19.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h}h5\pm}}) 18.\texttt{\texttt{e}ah3} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}c4}} 19.c3\pm The pressure on the h-file will cost Black material, as White can play \texttt{\texttt{f}f3} and \texttt{\texttt{h}h5} if needed.

15...\texttt{\texttt{a}a5\pm} 16.c3 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d8}} (16...\texttt{\texttt{e}e7} 17.\texttt{\texttt{xf6}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d8}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{d}d3\pm}) Black tries to block the rook’s path, but it will soon get back on track:

17.a5! \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}e7}} 18.\texttt{\texttt{a}a4\pm} Compared with 15.a5 in the notes above, White has gained the useful extra move c2-c3.
16.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}e7 \texttt{\texttt{x}e7}}}

16...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}e7 17.\texttt{\texttt{d}5 \texttt{\texttt{f}8}}}} (17...\texttt{\texttt{b}8 18.\texttt{c}4++)

18.\texttt{\texttt{c}b3 \texttt{\texttt{b}8 \texttt{\texttt{c}4 \texttt{\texttt{d}7}}}} 20.\texttt{\texttt{f}1} and \texttt{Black is absolutely stuck.}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

17.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a}g3!}}

17.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h}1?? \texttt{\texttt{d}2+}} would undo all of our previous good work.}

The text move is a more convoluted way to double on the h-file – but when the rook finally arrives there, it will be extremely powerful.

17...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}7}}

17...\texttt{\texttt{c}8? 18.\texttt{\texttt{c}1+--}} is a nice trick to keep in mind.

18.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}4 \texttt{\texttt{e}7}}}

18...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}f5? 19.\texttt{\texttt{x}d6+ \texttt{\texttt{e}8 20.\texttt{\texttt{b}5+}}}} is game over.}

19.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}h4 \texttt{\texttt{a}c8?}}}

19...\texttt{\texttt{g7 20.\texttt{\texttt{h}7! \texttt{\texttt{x}h7 21.\texttt{\texttt{h}7 \texttt{\texttt{g}8}}}}}

(21...\texttt{\texttt{f}8 22.\texttt{\texttt{d}5+--}}) 22.\texttt{\texttt{b}5 \texttt{\texttt{c}7 23.\texttt{\texttt{d}5}}}

leaves \texttt{Black stuck in a fatal bind, so giving up the bishop is probably his best chance.}

20.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}h6 \texttt{\texttt{x}h6 21.\texttt{\texttt{x}h6 \texttt{\texttt{x}a4 22.\texttt{\texttt{d}3+}}}}}

There is still some work to do, but \texttt{White has excellent chances to convert his extra piece.}

B) 6...\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c}6? 7.\texttt{\texttt{g}5 \texttt{\texttt{d}7}}}}

Allowing \texttt{g4-g5 with the knight on c6 does not help Black's cause at all. As I explained in the introductory comments to the previous chapter, the early ...\texttt{\texttt{c}6 is actually a significant concession from Black if he wishes to play on the queenside with ...b5. In the last chapter, we generally had to work quite hard to arrange g4-g5, avoiding various ...e5 tricks on the way -- whereas here we have been handed the g5-pawn on a platter. I suspect that the only reason why Black has occasionally done well from this position is that White became confused by having so many attractive options, so I will present a simple plan of development.}

8.\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}3 \texttt{\texttt{e}7}}}

Although these moves have occurred in many hundreds of games, I won't examine the alternatives in huge detail as I regard the entire variation as substandard for Black.

The most common alternative has been 8...a6 9.h4 \texttt{\texttt{c7 when, just like the main line below, White can choose between 10.\texttt{\texttt{e}2 and the more ambitious 10.\texttt{f}4?}. Delaying ...\texttt{\texttt{e}7 does not change the position a great deal.}

9.h4 0-0
9...a6 makes no real difference to us; once again, 10.f4!? would be my top choice.

White has tried a multitude of options after Black’s last move. I decided to cover the simple B1) 10.\( \text{W}e2 \) followed by the maximalist B2) 10.f4!?.

**B1) 10.\( \text{W}e2 \)**

This move fits with the style of variation D of the previous chapter. It is possible to reach almost the same positions through the present line, but there are some subtle differences. Naturally we will explore those differences, but it’s clear White is quite comfortable here as well, even if his last move is not the most ambitious option available.

10...a6

Here is another example from an engine game: 10...\( \text{Q}xd4 \) 11.\( \text{Q}xd4e5 \) (11...a6 12.0–0–0 reaches our main line) 12.\( \text{Q}e3 \) b6 13.0–0–0 \( \text{Q}e6 \) 14.\( \text{h}3 \) (14.f4! exf4 15.\( \text{xf4} \)± seems even stronger. I have often ranted about how this structure is overwhelmingly unpleasant to play for Black with our pawn on g5 – see, for instance, variation A of the previous chapter, while similar situations can also arise via the Classical Sicilian, as covered in the previous volume.)

14...\( \text{Wd7} \) 15.\( \text{Q}xe6 \) fxe6 16.\( \text{b}1 \) a6 17.\( \text{X}xb6 \) axb6 18.\( \text{h}3 \)± Gull – Hannibal, engine game 2014. Even though \( \text{h}3\text{xe6} \) would not have been my first choice, it still left White with a solid positional edge, which shows how easy it is to play the white side of such positions.

11.0–0–0 \( \text{Q}xd4 \) 12.\( \text{Q}xd4 \) b5 13.a3

We analysed almost exactly this position in the previous chapter, as you can see by turning back to page 327. Generally I regard it as a great achievement for White to reach such a position with g4-g5 on the board, as he has an easy attacking plan while Black struggles to generate much counterplay. The only difference here is that we have played f2-f4 instead of h2-h4, but there isn’t much that Black can do to exploit it.

13...\( \text{a}5 \)
13...\textit{b}8 14.f4 transposes exactly to a position covered on page 328.

14.f4!

Simply ignoring Black’s play – it’s not like he’s going to mate us on the queenside.

One significant difference between this line and the analogous one from the previous chapter occurs after: 14.\textit{e}1 \textit{d}8! Now the plan with 15.\textit{h}3 \textit{b}4 16.\textit{a}2? is not so good, as not having a pawn on f4 has serious consequences: 16...e5! and Black gets a lot more play than he deserved.

14...b4

14...\textit{b}8 reaches a position from page 328.

15.axb4 \textit{xb}4

16.\textit{c}4?! \textit{a}5!

Trying to get the best possible version of the queen exchange.

17.\textit{a}4 \textit{xa}4 18.\textit{xa}4 \textit{b}7 19.\textit{c}3

White certainly stands better, although I am not sure how much of his apparent superiority is due to the optical effect of his impressive pawns. Obviously you should make up your own mind, but I would tend to prefer the more ambitious alternative below.

B2) 10.f4?...

This move gains space without spending time moving the queen. White realizes that, in order for Black to get his queenside play underway with ...b5, he usually has to play ...\textit{d}xd4 at some point – in which case we intend to recapture with the queen. And at the risk of sounding like a broken record, the structure following a possible ...e5 break will always be unpleasant for Black, because we already have our pawn on g5.

10...d5?!

10...\textit{d}xd4?! 11.\textit{xd}4 plays into White’s plans.

10...a6

This is a natural alternative. Black is waiting for us to move the queen before taking on d4 and playing ...b5, but of course we will have other ideas.

11.a3!

We have already seen that a2-a3 is often played in response to ...b5, so here we will play it pre-emptively in order to save time by playing \textit{xd}4 in one move.

11...\textit{xd}4

Black has not found anything better in practice.

11...d5?! 12.exd5 exd5 13.\textit{f}3!± followed by 0–0–0 gives White a better version of the
main line, as a2-a3 stops the bishop from coming to b4.  
11...Wc7 stubbornly avoids exchanging on d4, but Black's queen will be misplaced after an exchange on c6: 12.h5 b5 13.\( \texttt{dxc6} \) Wxc6 14.Wd4±  
12.Wxd4 b5 13.h5  
Black decided to change the central structure, but he remained clearly worse:  

\[ \begin{array}{cccccccc} 
8 & & & & & & & \\
7 & & & & & & & \\
6 & & & & & & & \\
5 & & & & & & & \\
4 & & & & & & & \\
3 & & & & & & & \\
2 & & & & & & & \\
1 & & & & & & & \\
\end{array} \]

11.Wd2  
11.cxd5 exd5 12.a3 \( b4 \) was annoying for White in Pushkarev – Bragin, Tomsk 2006.  
11...dxe4  
11...\( \texttt{b6} \) gives White a pleasant choice: 12.h5 is likely to transpose to the main line, but the simple 12.exd5 exd5 13.0–0–0± also looks good.  
11...\( \texttt{dxd4} \) 12.exd4 dxe4 13.\( \texttt{exe4} \) \( \texttt{b8} \) (13...\( \texttt{b6} \) 14.0–0–0±) occurred in Van der Kleij – Hafner, corr. 1994, when White's most energetic continuation would have been:  

\[ \begin{array}{cccccccc} 
8 & & & & & & & \\
7 & & & & & & & \\
6 & & & & & & & \\
5 & & & & & & & \\
4 & & & & & & & \\
3 & & & & & & & \\
2 & & & & & & & \\
1 & & & & & & & \\
\end{array} \]

11...\( \texttt{d5} \)N \( \texttt{xd5} \) 19.exd5±  
White has an ideal position, but it is worth pointing out a key improvement on the next move.  
17...\( \texttt{b8} \)  
In Iordachescu – Gabrielian, Plovdiv 2012, White should have played:  

\[ \begin{array}{cccccccc} 
8 & & & & & & & \\
7 & & & & & & & \\
6 & & & & & & & \\
5 & & & & & & & \\
4 & & & & & & & \\
3 & & & & & & & \\
2 & & & & & & & \\
1 & & & & & & & \\
\end{array} \]

18.\( \texttt{d5} \)N \( \texttt{xd5} \) 19.exd5±  
White can strengthen his position with moves like \( \texttt{g1-g3} \), and Black must watch out for ideas of g5-g6 and h5-h6 at every turn.
12.\(\text{Qxe4}\) \(\text{Qb6}\)

Black has to try for quick counterplay, otherwise White’s pieces will be overwhelmingly active.

12...\(\text{Qxd4}\) 13.\(\text{Qxd4}\) transposes to 11...\(\text{Qxd4}\) 12.\(\text{Qxd4}\) \(dxe4\) 13.\(\text{Qxe4}\) above.

13.\(\text{h5!N}\)

13.0–0–0 \(\text{Qd5!}\) was not so easy in Hedrera – Eckert, Argentina 1998.

13...\(\text{Qd5}\)

13...\(\text{e5}\) is a natural move to consider, but it just loses a pawn: 14.\(\text{Qxc6}\) \(\text{bxc6}\) 15.\(\text{fxe5}\) \(\text{Qxd2+}\) (15...\(\text{Qe8}\) 16.\(\text{Qd3}\)\(\rightarrow\)) 16.\(\text{Qxd2}\) \(\text{Qf5}\) 17.\(\text{Qd3}\)\(\pm\)

13...\(\text{Qd5}\) is rather slow: 14.\(\text{Qxc6}\) \(\text{bxc6}\) 15.0–0–0 \(\text{Qxe3}\) 16.\(\text{Qxe3}\) \(\text{Qb6}\) 17.\(\text{Qc3}\)\(\pm\) With the huge threat of \(\text{h5-h6}\).

14.\(\text{Qg1!}\) \(\text{e5}\)

14...\(\text{Qxe4}\)? 15.\(\text{g2}\) traps the queen of course.

14...\(\text{Qxd4}\) 15.\(\text{Qxd4}\) \(\text{Qxd4}\) 16.\(\text{Qxd4}\)\(\pm\) maintains serious pressure on the kingside.
Black has escaped to an endgame, but he will be tormented for a long time by White's two bishops and the pawn on h6.

C) 6...a6!? 7.g5 \$fd7

Black's set-up resembles the Najdorf but this is not a good version for him, as White has carried out the g4-g5 advance far more easily than he would be able to in, say, the Najdorf English Attack. Nevertheless, I still found it surprisingly difficult to prove an advantage for White. Compared with the 6...\$c6 variation analysed above, here Black is ready to commence his queenside play with ...b5 – which explains my choice on the next move.

8.\$g2!?

Black's only real plan for counterplay is to play a quick ...b5, so I want to prepare against it. Although the text move has been played quite a few times, I have a completely new follow-up in mind, as detailed in variation C3 below.

8.\$e3 has been by far the most popular choice. I will just mention the specific line which I found hard to crack: 8...b5 9.a3 \$b7 10.h4 \$c6 11.\$xc6 \$xc6 12.\$d4 (12.h5 \$b8) 12...\$b8?? Intending ...\$b6, when Black should be okay in an ensuing endgame. White can keep the queens on if he chooses, but in that case he will have to watch out for ...b4 ideas.

We will analyse C1) 8...\$e7 and C2) 8...\$c6, before moving on to the critical C3) 8...b5.

C1) 8...\$e7 9.h4

9.f4!? is another idea but I think the text move is the best fit for our repertoire, as it maintains the possibility of transposing to other recommended lines, especially if Black plays ...\$c6 in the near future.

In most games Black has indeed played ...\$c6 in the next few moves, leading to a positions covered under variation C2 below. However, things are not so simple if he goes for immediate counterplay with:

9...b5!?

This has only been played a couple of times, but it seems logical enough. It is worth mentioning that the position has occurred several times with Black to move, via the 6.h3 Najdorf, where White has spent an additional tempo on h3-h4. This would seem to indicate that White should have good prospects in our line – but it still requires some analysis.
9...\(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{e3}}\) transposes to 9...\(\text{\textit{e7}}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{h4}}\) in the notes to variation C2 below.

9...\(\text{\textit{c7}}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{f4}}\) \(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 11.\(\text{\textit{e3}}\) transposes to the Marinkov – Zarkovic game, which is referenced in the same note.

9...0–0 10.\(\text{\textit{e3}}\) \(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 11.\(\text{\textit{f4}}\) is a third possible transposition to the same note – see the move order 8...\(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 9.\(\text{\textit{e3}}\) \(\text{\textit{e7}}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{h4}}\) 0–0 11.\(\text{\textit{f4}}\) as featured on page 348.

**10.\(\text{\textit{e5}}\) d5**

This position was reached in Vyskocil – Schwarhofer, Austria 2016. The game continued 11.\(\text{\textit{f4}}\) with double-edged play, but I have a more dynamic idea in mind:

9...\(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{c3}}\) \(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 11.\(\text{\textit{f4}}\) is a third possible transposition to the same note – see the move order 8...\(\text{\textit{c6}}\) 9.\(\text{\textit{c3}}\) \(\text{\textit{e7}}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{h4}}\) 0–0 11.\(\text{\textit{f4}}\) as featured on page 348.

**11.\(\text{\textit{xd5!}}\) N**

11.\(\text{\textit{a4}}\) b4 12.\(\text{\textit{xd5!}}\) exd5 13.e6 is similar; the possibility of a\(4\)-a\(5\) may help White in some lines, so you could certainly investigate this in more detail. However, unlike variation C3 below, I don’t think White needs the a\(2\)-a\(4\) finesse to demonstrate an advantage here.

We will see the same type of piece sacrifice a bit later in the chapter on page 350. At first it might seem that the extra developing move ...\(\text{\textit{e7}}\) should improve Black’s chances, but actually the bishop is not so well placed here, while h\(2\)-h\(4\) is always a useful move for White.

**11...\(\text{\textit{xd5}}\) 12.\(\text{\textit{e6}}\) \(\text{\textit{b6}}\)**

Black can give back the material with 12...0–0, but after 13.exd7\(\text{\textit{f7}}\) followed by \(\text{\textit{e3}}\) White has a pleasant advantage; his pieces are all on good squares, and the IQP is a long-term weakness.

We should also check the other knight move of course:

12...\(\text{\textit{c5}}\) 13.exf7\(\text{\textit{f7}}\) 14.\(\text{\textit{f3}}\) \(\text{\textit{e8}}\) 14...\(\text{\textit{g8}}\)?? 15.\(\text{\textit{xd5}}\) wins.

15.\(\text{\textit{f4}}\)

White isn’t winning immediately, but his active pieces are dominating in the centre, and he will quickly increase the pressure with 0–0–0 and \(\text{\textit{d1}}\). Meanwhile, Black is struggling to develop any more pieces, and his position looks as though it may collapse at any moment. Here are a few illustrative lines:

15...\(\text{\textit{f8}}\)

15...\(\text{\textit{e6}}\) 16.\(\text{\textit{c3}}\) \(\text{\textit{f8}}\) 17.\(\text{\textit{xh6}}\) \(\text{\textit{f7}}\) 18.\(\text{\textit{xf7}}\)\(\text{\textit{+}}\) 15...\(\text{\textit{a5}}\) 16.\(\text{\textit{c3}}\) \(\text{\textit{f8}}\) 17.0–0 \(\text{\textit{b6}}\) 18.\(\text{\textit{f1}}\)\(\text{\textit{+}}\) 16.0–0 \(\text{\textit{e6}}\) 17.\(\text{\textit{c6}}\) \(\text{\textit{x6}}\) \(\text{\textit{xe6}}\) 18.\(\text{\textit{d7}}\) \(\text{\textit{he1}}\) \(\text{\textit{d7}}\) White’s simplest solution is to wipe out Black’s kingside with:
Again, White simply continues developing, emphasizing the fact that it is hard for Black to do the same. The important thing to realize is that White does not have to prove his compensation by force, as Black has resigned himself to playing indefinitely without the h8-rook, and his other pieces will struggle to develop as well.

15...h6

This seems like the best attempt to activate the rook.

Other moves give White easy play, for instance:

15...d6 16.0-0-0 a7 17.exd6 wxd6 18.eh1 c7 19.h5?± Black has nothing to do.

15...d7 16.0-0-0 c6 17.eh1 a7 (17...cxd4 18.exd4 b7 19.eh3+-) 18.b3 w5

13.exf7+ xf7 14.e3+ g8 15.e4!

Again, White simply continues developing, emphasizing the fact that it is hard for Black to do the same. The important thing to realize is that White does not have to prove his compensation by force, as Black has resigned himself to playing indefinitely without the h8-rook, and his other pieces will struggle to develop as well.

15...h6

This seems like the best attempt to activate the rook.

16.0-0-0?!

White sacrifices another pawn in order to bring his pieces into play as quickly as possible.

16...bxd5 17.hxg5 exh1 18.exh1 xg5
19. \( \text{dxe2!} \)

21. \( \text{hfe3 \text{xfxb2\#}} \)

22. \( \text{dxe3 \text{dxe3 \text{b7}}} \)

25. \( \text{dxe3! \text{f7 \text{dxe3}}} \)

Despite the reduced material, White keeps a strong initiative.
Black's queen is misplaced and it will invariably have to move again at some point, whereas all of White's pieces are ideally placed. 12.\( \text{\#d2} \) b7 13.0-0-0 \( \text{\#c7} \) 14.h4± For a comparison, it is worth looking back at the 8.\( \text{\#e3} \) line mentioned in the notes on page 344, where Black was able to develop more efficiently. Here White is effectively a few tempos ahead.

9...\( \text{\#e7} \) 10.h4!

10.f4 is the move I would have ideally liked to play, but it leads to some specific problems: 10...\( \text{\#xd4!} \) 11.\( \text{\#xd4} \) e5 12.\( \text{\#d2} \) \( \text{\#xf4} \) 13.\( \text{\#xf4} \) \( \text{\#e5} \) The g2-bishop is not well placed and, more importantly, Black will have time for ...\( \text{\#g4} \), forcing us to castle on the kingside. (14.0-0-0 \( \text{\#c4!} \) is an important detail, exploiting the weak g5-pawn.)

10...0-0

a) 10...\( \text{\#c7} \) led to a similar situation in Marinkov – Zarkovic, Obrenovac 2008.
b) 10...\( \text{\#d5} \) can be dealt with in the same way as our main line: 11.\( \text{\#xc6} \) bxc6 Capone – Vojdani, Kemer 2009. 12.b3N±
c) 10...\( \text{\#xd4} \) 11.\( \text{\#xd4} \) 0-0\( \text{\#N} \) (11...e5 has been played but is an obvious concession) 12.0-0-0 b5 13.f4 \( \text{\#b8} \) 14.h5 \( \text{\#b6} \) 15.\( \text{\#d2} \) White has a hugely improved version of the earlier note on 8.\( \text{\#e3} \), as his pawns are further advanced, while Black's bishop is still on c8 and his king has committed itself to the kingside, presenting a clear target.

11.f4

An almost identical position has been covered on page 341 – see 10...a6 in the notes to variation B2. This is a marginally less favourable version as we have played \( \text{\#g2} \) instead of my preferred a2-a3, but the general character of the position is the same. Here is a brief illustrative line:

11...\( \text{\#xd4} \) 12.\( \text{\#xd4} \) e5\( \text{\#N} \) 13.\( \text{\#d2} \) \( \text{\#xf4} \) 14.\( \text{\#xf4} \) \( \text{\#e5} \) 15.0-0-0±

The bishop isn't ideally placed on g2, but I feel that these positions are so overwhelmingly pleasant for White that it doesn't make a big difference. Black has not even started imagining his counterplay.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

10.\( \text{\#xc6!} \)

This ensures that we will be able to push our pawns quickly, and the change in the structure will not trouble us too much.

10...bxc6

10...\( \text{\#xc6} \) 11.f4±

11.b3 d5

11...\( \text{\#e7} \) 12.f4 \( \text{\#d7} \) occurred in Honfi – Vachev, Kecskemet 1981, when White should have played:
13.h4!N (13.0–0N e5! is not so clear) White’s last move seems a little primitive, but it enables him to finish developing before pressing ahead on the kingside. 13...b7 14.Wd2 c5 15.0–0–0±

12.0–0!?  
Avoiding any annoying ...b4 ideas. The position remains quite pleasant for White; in the following engine game, White demonstrated that there is no need to go on an immediate offensive, especially now that Black has played ...d5.

14...b8 15.f4 0–0 16.e5 a5 17.d4 a3 18.Ef2 E.a8 19.Ec3±
Critter – Houdini, engine game 2012.

C3) 8...b5

Against this critical move, I found a completely new concept for White.

9.e5!N  
Seizing the initiative before Black can post his bishop on b7.

9...d5  
It looks as though Black has succeeded in blocking the long diagonal, but I want to blast the position open with a piece sacrifice. There are actually two versions of the idea.

My first thought was to look at the immediate C31) 10.Exd5??, going straight for the kill. This is certainly dangerous, and there is every chance that an unprepared opponent would quickly collapse under the strain; nevertheless, Black seems to be able to wriggle out with equality after precise defence. Naturally, we will analyse it anyway, as it could be an excellent practical weapon.

From a theoretical perspective, C32) 10.a4!? seems even more challenging; White tries to get a better version of the E.xd5 madness, but Black gets a couple of extra options as well.
In this version, I don’t see a clear path to equality for Black.

I should briefly mention that 10.f4 is playable, but our pieces are not ideally placed for a kingside attack, while Black has decent prospects on the queenside.

**C31) 10.\(\text{cxd5}\) e\(\text{xd5}\) 11.e6**

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & & \\
8& & & & & & & & \\
7& & & & & & & & \\
6& & & & & & & & \\
5& & & & & & & & \\
4& & & & & & & & \\
3& & & & & & & & \\
2& & & & & & & & \\
1& & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

11...\(\text{b6}\)

11...\(\text{fxe6}\) 12.\(\text{cxe6}\) \(\text{c7}\) 13.0–0! is dangerous, for instance: 13...\(\text{e5}\)

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & & \\
8& & & & & & & & \\
7& & & & & & & & \\
6& & & & & & & & \\
5& & & & & & & & \\
4& & & & & & & & \\
3& & & & & & & & \\
2& & & & & & & & \\
1& & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

14.\(\text{f4}\)! Not the only decent move, but I find it the most convincing. (14.\(\text{xf8}\) \(\text{xf8}\) 15.\(\text{f4}\) is certainly playable but it would seem a pity to help develop Black’s kingside) 14...\(\text{g4}\) Initially the computer likes Black here but it soon changes its tune. 15.\(\text{fx3}\) \(\text{f5}\) 16.\(\text{xd5}\) Followed by \(\text{f3-f4}\), with all sorts of tactical threats along the central files and the long diagonal.

11...\(\text{e5}\) 12.\(\text{f4}\) (12.\(\text{f4}\)?) 12...\(\text{xe6}\) (12...\(\text{c4}\)
13.\(\text{xf7}\) \(\text{xf7}\) 14.0–0; 12...\(\text{fxe6}\) 13.\(\text{fxe5}\) \(\text{c5}\) 14.0–0 \(\text{c6} 15.\text{c3}\) 13.\(\text{xe6}\) \(\text{d7}\) 14.\(\text{xe6}\) \(\text{fxe6}\) 15.0–0\(\pm\) Material is equal and White keeps some initiative.

**12.\(\text{exf7}\)† \(\text{xf7}\) 13.0–0**

We have reached a critical position, where I only found one route to equality for Black.

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & & \\
8& & & & & & & & \\
7& & & & & & & & \\
6& & & & & & & & \\
5& & & & & & & & \\
4& & & & & & & & \\
3& & & & & & & & \\
2& & & & & & & & \\
1& & & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

13...\(\text{a7}\)!

The other main candidate is: 13...\(\text{d6}\) 14.\(\text{g3}\)† \(\text{g8}\) 15.\(\text{f5}\) \(\text{c7}\) (15...\(\text{xf5}\)?)
16.\(\text{xf5}\) \(\text{a7}\) 17.\(\text{e3}\)†

14.\(\text{f4}\)! Not the only decent move, but I find it the most convincing. (14.\(\text{xf8}\) \(\text{xf8}\) 15.\(\text{f4}\) is certainly playable but it would seem a pity to help develop Black’s kingside) 14...\(\text{g4}\) Initially the computer likes Black here but it soon changes its tune. 15.\(\text{f3}\) \(\text{f5}\) 16.\(\text{xd5}\) Followed

16.\(\text{a4}\)! Striking from an unexpected angle.
16...\(\text{bxa4}\) 17.\(\text{e1}\) \(\text{c6}\) 18.\(\text{e3}\) \(\text{e5}\) 19.\(\text{d1}\) \(\text{b8}\)
Chapter 16 - Keres Attack - Various 6th Moves

14...\textit{a}4!? is playable here too, but it is not quite so effective as in the note above. A weird drawing line is: 14 ... bxa4 15.\textit{e}e1 \textit{x}d6 16.\textit{x}d5 \textit{x}d5 17.\textit{f}f3 \textit{f}f6 18.\textit{g}xf6 \textit{xf}6 19.\textit{d}d5 \textit{g}6 20.\textit{g}2 \textit{f}f7=

15.\textit{g}8 16.\textit{e}6?!

Aiming for long-term compensation after eliminating the light-squared bishop. This is almost enough to ensure an advantage, but my main line shows that Black is just in time to arrange counterplay.

16.\textit{x}e6 17.\textit{x}e6 \textit{e}7!

17...\textit{f}7 is less precise: 18.\textit{e}3 \textit{f}f8 19.b3? d4 20.\textit{e}4 \textit{e}7

18.\textit{h}3 \textit{c}6

18...\textit{f}7?! is another idea, hoping for an improved version of the previous note, as the bishop no longer attacks the d5-pawn - although in some ways the bishop is more active on h3. Since 10.\textit{xd}5 is not my main recommendation, I will leave it for interested readers to explore such nuances for themselves.

19.\textit{e}3 \textit{e}5 20.\textit{g}2 \textit{e}x6 21.\textit{x}e6+ \textit{f}8

White has compensation, but not enough for an advantage against correct defence. One possible continuation is:
Black has enough counterplay to maintain the balance. The whole line could be explored further; for instance, White could look for some way to arrange f2-f4 earlier in the game, but ultimately I decided that the following alternative was the most promising try for an advantage.

C32) 10.a4!

This move presents Black with a difficult choice between C321) 10...\(\mathcal{D}\)xe5, C322) 10...bxa4 and C323) 10...b4.

11.0-0? also deserves attention, intending 11...b4 12.\(\mathcal{D}\)xd5! or 11...\(\mathcal{D}\)c5 12.\(\mathcal{D}\)e1. Still, the text move seems more consistent with White's last. Black's problem, of course, is that the game is opening up while he is significantly behind in development.
12.0-0
12.\textit{e}3 can be met by 12...\textit{b}6! with the idea of ...\textit{c}4 (but not 12...0-0 13.\textit{xe}6!).

12.\textit{b}3 \textit{d}6 13.f4 looks interesting, but I was not completely happy after: 13...\textit{g}6! (13...\textit{c}4 14.\textit{xd}5! exd5 15.\textit{xd}5 0-0 16.0-0 \textit{e}7 17.\textit{xc}4 axb5 18.\textit{d}4 \textit{xa}1 19.\textit{xa}1 \textit{a}6 20.\textit{f}2 \textit{e}6 21.\textit{e}3+)

12 ... 0-0 13.\textit{e}3 \textit{b}6 14.\textit{a}4!
Other moves exist, but hunting down the enemy bishop is simple and straightforward.

14...\textit{xd}4 15.\textit{xd}4 axb5 16.\textit{xe}5 bxa4

Intending \textit{a}3, with two strong bishops and a nice initiative for the pawn.

C322) 10...bxa4

11.0-0!
There is no hurry to recapture. By castling first, White forces Black to worry about the possibility of \textit{xd}5.

11.\textit{xd}5?! would be premature due to 11...exd5 12.e6 \textit{b}6 13.\textit{f}7 \textit{xf}7 14.0-0 \textit{c}5! and ...bxa4 proves extremely useful because White doesn’t have \textit{b}3.

11.\textit{xa}4 \textit{b}7! 12.0-0 \textit{c}7 13.f4 g6 makes it hard for White to cause much damage. For example: 14.c4? (14.\textit{e}3 \textit{c}6=)
11...\textit{\texttt{b7}}

The greedy 11...a3?! invites 12.\texttt{xd5}! of course.

11...\texttt{c5} 12.\texttt{xa4} (12.\texttt{xd5}?! exd5 13.e6 is playable, but 13...\texttt{b6} 14.b4 \texttt{xd4} 15.\texttt{xd4} fxe6 16.\texttt{xe7} \texttt{f8} seems okay for Black) 12...\texttt{xd4} 13.\texttt{xd4} \texttt{c6}

11...\texttt{c5} 12.\texttt{xa4} (12.\texttt{xd5}?! exd5 13.e6 is playable, but 13...\texttt{b6} 14.b4 \texttt{xd4} 15.\texttt{xd4} fxe6 16.\texttt{xe7} \texttt{f8} seems okay for Black) 12...\texttt{xd4} 13.\texttt{xd4} \texttt{c6}

12.f4!

12.\texttt{xd5} \texttt{xd5} 13.\texttt{xd5} exd5 14.e6 \texttt{c5} is not so convincing – the removal of the light-squared bishops will surely help Black’s defence.

12...\texttt{g6} 13.\texttt{e3}!

White should not be tempted by the immediate: 13.f5 gxf5 14.\texttt{xe6} fxe6 15.\texttt{h5}† \texttt{e7}

13.\texttt{xb6} \texttt{xb6} 14.\texttt{xe3} \texttt{c7} 15.c4±

By placing the bishop on b7, Black guards against \texttt{xd5} tricks while hoping to transpose to the 11.\texttt{xa4} \texttt{b7} 12.0–0 line in the event that White recaptures on a4. However, the drawback of Black’s last move is that f4-f5 ideas become more prominent.

16.g6 This allows 16...\texttt{b6}†! 17.\texttt{h1} \texttt{xe5} 18.\texttt{g5}† \texttt{d6} – entertaining stuff, but objectively it’s not quite enough for White.

The text move prevents any checks on the a7-g1 diagonal, making it virtually impossible
for Black to find a suitable defence against the various sacrificial ideas involving f4-f5 and/or \( \text{Q} \times d5 \).

13...\( \text{c}7 \)

13...\( \text{c}7 \) 14.f5! gxf5 15.\( \text{Q} \times e6 \) fx6 16.\( \text{W} \times h5 \)\( + \) \( \text{f}8 \)

17.\( \text{Q} \times d5 \)\! \( \text{Q} \times e5 \) 18.\( \text{W} \times f4 \) +

13...\( \text{c}6 \) 14.\( \text{Q} \times d5 \)! exd5 15.e6! fx6 16.\( \text{Q} \times e6 \)

16...\( \text{W} \times c8 \) 17.\( \text{E} \times e1 \) \( \text{c}7 \) 18.\( \text{W} \times f2 \) + Black is collapsing.

13...\( \text{b}6 \) 14.f5! gxf5 15.\( \text{Q} \times f5 \) exf5 16.\( \text{W} \times f5 \) also gives White a raging attack, for instance:
16...\( \text{W} \times g7 \) 17.\( \text{W} \times h5 \) (17.e6!? is interesting but the text move is stronger) 17...0-0 18.\( \text{W} \times f1 \) \( \text{c}4 \)

19.\( \text{W} \times f4 \) \( \text{Q} \times d7 \) (19...\( \text{Q} \times e3 \) 20.\( \text{W} \times h4 \) h6 21.gxh6 \( \text{W} \times f6 \) 22.h7+ \( \text{W} \times h8 \) 23.exf6 \( \text{Q} \times d7 \) 24.\( \text{W} \times h6 \) \( \text{Q} \times f6 \) 25.\( \text{Q} \times e3 \) +) 20.\( \text{W} \times h4 \) h6 21.\( \text{Q} \times c4 \) dxc4 22.\( \text{W} \times b7 \) White is close to winning.

14.f5! gxf5 15.\( \text{Q} \times d5 \)! \( \text{Q} \times d5 \)

15...exd5 16.e6 \( \text{c}5 \) 17.\( \text{W} \times h5 \) gives White a huge attack.

16.\( \text{Q} \times d5 \) exd5

16...\( \text{W} \times e5 \)? 17.\( \text{W} \times a8 \) \( \text{W} \times e3 \) + 18.\( \text{W} \times h1 \) is certainly better for White, although Black is still in the game.

17.e6 \( \text{Q} \times e5 \) 18.\( \text{W} \times f7 \) + \( \text{W} \times f7 \) 19.\( \text{Q} \times f5 \) + White has a powerful attack for the piece, and can increase the pressure with moves like \( \text{d}4 \) and \( \text{W} \times h5 \).
C323) 10...b4

11.\(\text{Qxd5}\)

This was always the idea of course; we are aiming for an improved version of the 10.\(\text{Qxd5}\) line examined earlier.

11...\(\text{exd5}\) 12.e6 \(\text{Qe5}\)!

This is virtually forced.

12...\(\text{fxe6}\) 13.\(\text{Qxe6}\) \(\text{Qe7}\) 14.0-0 \(\text{Qe5}\) 15.\(\text{Qf4+}\) is excellent for White, just as in the analogous note in variation C31.

12...\(\text{Qb6}\) was our main line in the equivalent position from variation C31, but here it loses on the spot: 13.\(\text{Qxf7+}\) \(\text{Qxf7}\) 14.\(\text{Qe2+}\) \(\text{Qg8}\)

13.\(\text{f4}\)

The simplest move, although there are some others which also deserve attention.

13.\(\text{Qf4+}\) is one such option. A few brief lines are: 13...\(\text{Qd6}\) (13...\(\text{fxe6}\) 14.\(\text{Qxe5}\) \(\text{Qxg5}\) 15.\(\text{Qg3}\) \(\text{c5}\) 16.0-0 0-0 17.\(\text{Qf1}\) feels like good compensation to me, although this isn't conclusive) 14.\(\text{Qe2}\) \(\text{d3+}\) 15.\(\text{Qxd3}\) \(\text{Qxf4}\) 16.\(\text{Qxf7+}\) \(\text{Qf8}\) 17.0-0\(\text{Q}\) There is a lot more to explore here, but the main line looks good enough to me.

13.\(\text{Qe2+}\) could be another idea to check out.
13...\texttt{c5} 
13...\texttt{xe6} 14.\texttt{fxe5} \texttt{c5} 15.\texttt{xe6} \texttt{fxe6} 16.\texttt{Wh5}+ g6 17.\texttt{Wh3} \texttt{d7} 18.\texttt{f1} is also pleasant for \texttt{White}, for instance:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{chessboard}
\text{8}\text{7}\text{6}\text{5}\text{4}\text{3}\text{2}\text{1}
\text{a}\text{b}\text{c}\text{d}\text{e}\text{f}\text{g}\text{h}
\end{chessboard}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

18.\texttt{c6} 19.\texttt{e3} \texttt{xe3} 20.\texttt{xe3}\# White intends \texttt{f6} and continues to exert pressure.

14.\texttt{fxe5}
14.\texttt{b3} \texttt{b6} 15.\texttt{xd5} (15.\texttt{fxe5} \texttt{xe6}\#) 15...\texttt{e6}! is rather unclear.

15.\texttt{fxe6} 15.0-0

The position has calmed down, and the main thing to notice is that the black king is stuck in the centre, which can’t be a great sign for him. The pin on the d4-knight isn’t much of a problem since it can easily be defended with c2-c3, and White will play \texttt{h1} at the earliest convenience. It seems to me that Black will struggle to find a decent set-up, as taking the e5-pawn looks risky, while manoeuvring his knight to f5 is rather slow.

15...\texttt{c6}
15...\texttt{b6} 16.\texttt{c3} \texttt{bxc3} 17.\texttt{bxc3} \texttt{bxc3} allows White to get a nice initiative with 18.\texttt{a5}!, among other options.

15...\texttt{f8} 16.\texttt{h1} \texttt{xf1}+ 17.\texttt{xf1} \texttt{a7} meets with a strong retort:

18.g6! hxg6 19.\texttt{d3}+

16.\texttt{c3} \texttt{d7}
16...\texttt{b6}?! 17.\texttt{h1} \texttt{xd4}?! is too greedy: 18.\texttt{a5}! \texttt{a7} 19.\texttt{cxd4} \texttt{xd4}

20.g6! hxg6 21.\texttt{g4} With a crushing attack.
16...\texttt{xe5}?! 17.\texttt{xb4} \texttt{xb4} 18.\texttt{e2}+ also looks horrible for Black.
16...bxc3 17.bxc3 \( \mathcal{Q}xe5 \) cannot be refuted immediately, but after 18.\( \mathcal{Q}h1 \) Black’s position looks much too exposed.

17.\( \mathcal{Q}h1 \)

17.\( \mathcal{Q}h3?! \) could also be considered, but stepping out of the pin seems most natural.

17...\( \mathcal{Q}xd4 \) 18.cxd4\footnote{Conclusion}

Black’s position is reasonably solid but his life cannot be easy after just giving up the dark-squared bishop. Among other plans, we can look for opportunities to sacrifice the g-pawn with g5-g6, intending to meet ...hxg6 with \( \mathcal{Q}g5 \), aiming for long-term compensation.

6...e5?! might be okay against an unprepared opponent, but our main line involves a relatively forcing sequence leading to a middlegame with opposite-coloured bishops, where White can develop a strong initiative.

6...\( \mathcal{Q}c6?! \) avoids such a direct confrontation, but is rather passive, and White gets an easy initiative after 7.g5 \( \mathcal{Q}d7 \) 8.\( \mathcal{Q}e3 \) followed by h2-h4. I analysed more deeply of course, but you don’t need to prepare much more than this.

6...a6?! 7.g5 \( \mathcal{Q}d7 \) is the trickiest line of the chapter. I propose 8.\( \mathcal{Q}g2 \), forcing Black to think about the long diagonal. The critical continuation is 8...b5 9.e5!N d5, when both 10.\( \mathcal{Q}xd5?! \) exd5 11.e6 and the preliminary 10.a4?! offer White good chances. If Black finds himself defending either of these lines unprepared, he will have a hard time making it through the opening in one piece.
Scheveningen

Various 7th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 d6 5.c3 d6 6.g4 h6

7.h4

A) 7...a6
B) 7...e7
C) 7...e5! 8.d5
   C1) 8...e6!
      C11) 9.h5?N
      C12) 9.g5??
   C2) 8...c6 9.h5!
      C21) 9...b6
      C22) 9...d5?N

A) note to 10...d7

C12) after 9...dxe4

C21) after 9...b6
1.e4 c5 2.g3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 d6 5.e3 d6 6.g4 h6

This is the most popular move by far, putting some obstacles in White’s path.

7.h4

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, a lot of strong players have tried 7.h3, angling for a transposition to the trendy 6.h3 system against the Najdorf. We, on the other hand, will stick with the traditional Keres plan of marching ahead on the kingside.

Because of the potential pin along the h-file, White will require an additional preparatory move to make g4-g5 a real threat. As we will see, Black generally uses this momentary respite to prepare some kind of action in the centre. In the coming pages we will analyse A) 7...a6, B) 7...e7 and C) 7...e5.

7...Qc6 is the main line, which will be considered separately in the next chapter.

7...h5?! 8.g5 Qg4 9.f3 Qe5 10.Qe3 just gives White an English Attack with several extra tempos.

7...d5?! is premature due to 8.exd5 Qxd5 9.Qb5†, forcing Black to accept an isolated pawn: 9...Qd7 10.Qxd5 exd5 11.Qe2† Qe7

This should be compared with the main 7...Qc6 lines of the next chapter. Here Black still wants to prepare ...d5, but he wishes to prevent options like Qb5. Also, when you look at variation C112 of the next chapter, beginning on page 386, you will see that White generally exchanges knights on c6, hoping to exploit Black’s weakened structure after ...bxc6, so the text move avoids this option too. The drawback is obvious though: Black’s last move does not develop a piece or put any kind of pressure on White’s centre, so it gives us a lot more flexibility in choosing our next move.

A) 7...a6

This move prepares g4-g5 in its most active way possible, exploiting the fact that Black hasn’t played ...Qc6. Surprisingly, it has hardly ever been played.

8.Qf3!

This move prepares g4-g5 in its most active way possible, exploiting the fact that Black hasn’t played ...Qc6. Surprisingly, it has hardly ever been played.

8.Qg1 has been the most popular choice but 8...d5! is a good answer, for instance: 9.exd5 Qxd5 10.Qxd5 Qxd5 11.Qg2 Qc4 12.c3 Qe7 13.Qb3 Qxb3 14.axb3 0–0 15.h5 Qd7= Azarov – Kempinski, Czech Republic 2015.
8...\(d)\! has been played many times. This move also deserves attention and I might have recommended it, but I like the text move a lot more.

\[ \ldots d5 \]

\[ 9.\!x\!d5\! \!b4?! \] fails to impress.

\[ 9...\!c\!d\!e\!6\! 10.\!c\!e\!3\! \!c\!d\!c\!6\! 11.\!f\!g\!2\! \!d\!c\!8\! \] 

\[ 12.d\!d\!3\! \!b\! \!c\! \!c\!6\! 14.\!d\!e\!d\! \!c\! \!c\!d\! 15.0-0-0 \]

\[ 13.e3\!N\! (13.g6 \!b\!b\!8\!N\! is slightly annoying - and certainly a better bet for Black than 13...\!f\!x\!g\!6\!?! 14.\!d\!g\!2\! \!f\!7\!15.e3 \!b\!b\!8\!16.0-0-0\! as in Perske - Hinrichs, Luneburg 2014) 13...\!b\!b\!8\! 14.0-0-0 g6 (14...\!a\!a\!5\! 15.\!c\!c\!4\!; \!14...\!d\!5\! 15.g6\!±\! 15.\!h\!h\!8\!±\!

The text move avoids opening the h-file but White keeps an excellent position. As you will see in variation B below, after 7...\!c\!e\!7\! I will be recommending exactly the same plan for White, and the present position is simply a worse version for Black since ...a6 is a useless move.

9.\!x\!c\!6\! b\!x\!c\!6\! 10.g5 \!d\!d\!7

\[ 10...\!h\!x\!g\!5\! 11.\!h\!x\!g\!5\! \!x\!x\!h\!1\! 12.\!x\!x\!h\!1\! \!d\!d\!7\] should be met by:

\[ 11.\!g\!3??\!N\]

11.g6? led to interesting play in Padmini – Pustovoitova, Pune 2014, but I don't feel the need to rush things.

\[ 11.gxh6\!N\! is perfectly nice; indeed, in variation B with 7...\!c\!e\!7\! I propose exactly this plan. White seems to be better here too, and the ...a6 move is largely redundant – although Black might try to claim that having the bishop on \!f\!8 helps to guard against a potential invasion on \!g\!7.

Ultimately though, White's position is so pleasant that it seems a shame to release the tension so soon. Black will struggle to complete his development, let alone find
a safe place for his king, and it will be hard for him to generate serious counterplay along the b-file; in the worst case, White can always play b2-b3. At the same time, White can exert pressure in every other part of the board. His last move supports g5-g6, which might be further prepared by \( \text{h}3 \).

11...hxg5

11...\( \text{e}7 \) gives us a clearly improved version of variation B after 12.gxh6 gxh6 13.\( \text{e}3 \) intending 0-0-0, \( \text{g}7 \) and so on.

11...\( \text{b}8 \) 12.b3\( \text{t} \) doesn’t change much.

12.\( \text{xg}5 \) \( \text{b}6 \)

12...\( \text{a}5 \) 13.0-0-0 \( \text{b}8 \) allows the following instructive plan: 14.\( \text{c}4 \) (14.\( \text{h}5 \) \( \text{b}4 \) 15.b3 is also possible) 14...\( \text{b}6 \) 15.\( \text{b}3 \) c5

16.\( \text{h}5 \)! c4 17.\( \text{a}4 \) \( \text{xb}2\) 18.\( \text{d}2\) White’s king is still pretty safe; Black’s not so much...

13.0-0-0 \( \text{b}8 \)

13...\( \text{a}5 \) 14.\( \text{c}3 \) \( \text{b}7 \) 15.\( \text{b}1 \) \( \text{b}8 \) 16.b3\( \text{t} \)

14.b3 d5

14...\( \text{b}4 \)? 15.\( \text{b}1\)\( \text{t} \) achieves nothing for Black.

15.\( \text{b}1\)\( \text{t} \)

White has much the safer king in all these lines.

B) 7...\( \text{e}7 \)?

In terms of popularity, this move ranks as the clear second choice behind 7...\( \text{c}6 \), and its significance has been boosted by a slew of recent engine games.

8.\( \text{f}3 \)!

I favour the same recipe as against 7...a6, as I mentioned in the notes to that line. White chose other moves in most of the engine games, but the text has scored well in those games in which it was played. Interestingly, the queen move has, overall, been White’s second-most-popular choice in the present position – a stark contrast to variation A above, where it is almost a novelty.

8.\( \text{g}1 \) d5! has been debated heavily in both human and engine practice. The positions
are interesting, but I don’t see any need to go down this path.

8...\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{c6}\)

Several other moves have been tried but, in most cases, White gets an advantage with easy and natural moves:

8...\(\text{\textit{w}}\text{b6}\) is no problem after 9.\(\text{\textit{b}}\text{b5}^+\) followed by \(\text{\textit{e}}\text{e3}\), when Black will have to waste time moving his queen again.

8...d5?N 9.exd5 \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{xd5}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{b}}\text{b5}^+\) \(\text{\textit{f}}\text{f8}!\) is a weird way to utilize the ...\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{e7}\) move, but 11.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{xd5}\) \(\text{\textit{w}}\text{xd5}\) 12.\(\text{\textit{w}}\text{xd5}\) exd5 13.\(\text{f}3^+=\) favours White.

8...g6 has been tested by a few engines but 9.g5 hgx5 10.hxg5 looks to be no fun whatsoever for Black:

\[
\text{a b c d e f g h}
\]

10...\(\text{\textit{h}}\text{hl}\) \(10...\text{\textit{h}}\text{h5}\) 11.\(\text{\textit{c}}\text{c6}\) 12.0–0–0 \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{xd4}\) 13.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{xd4}^+=\) gave Black a bad version of a normal Sicilian structure in Bouquet – Stockfish, engine game 2012) 11.\(\text{\textit{w}}\text{hxh1}\) \(\text{\textit{h}}\text{h5}\) 12.\(\text{\textit{a}}\text{a2}\) \(\text{\textit{d}}\text{c6}\) 13.\(\text{\textit{a}}\text{xc6}\) bxc6 14.\(\text{\textit{w}}\text{hxh5}\) gxh5 15.\(\text{\textit{w}}\text{hxh5}^+=\) Stockfish – Bouquet, engine game 2012.

8...f6? 9.gxf6 \(\text{\textit{h}}\text{hxh5}\) 10.\(\text{\textit{g}}\text{g5}^!\)

Black’s big problem is that a sensible-looking move like ...\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{f6}\) would mean losing a bunch of time compared to the many variations where White plays g4–g5 and recaptures with the bishop. On the other hand, exchanging on g5 never looks very appealing for Black, as it opens the h-file and leaves him weak on the dark squares.

\[
\text{a b c d e f g h}
\]

10...\(\text{\textit{c}}\text{c6}\) 11.0–0–0 \(\text{\textit{a}}\text{g5}^+\)

There isn’t much else Black can do.

11...\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{d7}\) 12.\(\text{\textit{a}}\text{xc7}\) \(\text{\textit{a}}\text{xc7}\) 13.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{db5}^+=\)
12.hxg5 hxg5 13.b1 xd4 14.xd4 xd7 15.xd6 c6 16.xd1
The pin on the h-file is annoying and the black king is still stuck in the centre.

11.gxh6
11...g1 was played successfully by Nunn a couple of years ago, but 11...b8?? makes it harder for White to develop than I would like.

11...gxh6 12.d2
Let's quickly complete our development and only then think about how to develop our initiative. Attacks along the b-file aren't dangerous; but beyond that, it's hard to find any credible ideas for Black.

12.xh4
This was played in most of the games from this position. I also decided to see what happens if Black activates either of his rooks:

12...g8 13.0-0-0 e5 14.e2 a5 15.f4 g4 16.h3 h5 17.dg1±

12...b8 13.0-0-0 b6
13...f6 is met by 14.a4?? intending c3. 14.b3

9.xc6 bxc6 10.g5 d7
10...hxg5 11.hxg5 xh1 12.wxh1 has been played a few times but Black can hardly expect good things after opening the h-file. Here is a brief example: 12...d7 13.wh8+ f8 14.e3 b8 15.0-0-0 a5 16.a4± Winsnes – Jasnikowski, Gothenburg 1994.

14.f6
14...a5 15.a4± brings Black's counterplay to a standstill.
14...c5 15.g1 a5? is even worse: 16.g7+- 14...d5 seems risky: 15.exd5 cxd5 16.e4! d6 17.b5±
15.a4 c7
15...d4?? threatens mate, but 16.c3 traps the queen.
16.c3±
14.e5!?  
14...\f4 has scored well, and virtually any other sensible move maintains fine compensation for a pawn. Ultimately though, the direct attacking approach was too tempting to resist.

14...\xe5 15.\h5

13.0-0-0 \e7  
13...h5N 14.\e2 \b8 15.\e3 \e7 16.\f4 \f6 17.\xe6\f6 leads to a tough endgame for Black.

13...\xe5 14.\g2 \e7 15.f4 \g6 16.\d3 clearly favours White:

15...\e6 16.\d3  
Everything is too open for Black.

16.\f6 17.\g6 \xg6 18.\xg6\f7  
White has a pleasant choice; if I were playing this position, I think I would prefer to keep the queens on.

19.\g3N  
After 19.\xf7 20.\e4 \d5 21.\xf6 \xf6 22.\c3\e5 23.f4 \e7 24.\d1 \f5 25.\g7\c6 26.\xe5\c6 Black failed to hold this worse endgame in Bellmann – Tirabassi, email 2011. Still, I like the idea of playing for an attack against Black's exposed king.
This move can be considered the modern reincarnation of the dubious 6...e5 line. There are a lot more subtleties involved, and White will not get the chance to launch a quick attack in the manner of variation A of the previous chapter. This line also has the benefit of being relatively new and untested, so it is essential to prepare well in order to avoid being caught off guard.

8...e5?

8...b5† has been played often, but 8...bd7! 9.e5 a6 shows the flexibility of Black’s set-up. In most of the games from this position White has exchanged on d7, but I can’t believe it can be good to give away the important light-squared bishop so cheaply.

We will analyse two main moves: the subtle C1) 8..e6? followed by the more common C2) 8..c6.

8...xf5? 9.gxf5 gives White everything he wants. At the very least, Black should wait for White to put his bishop on g2 before exchanging on f5, although even then it will be strategically risky for him. 9.e7 10.g1 g8 11.c4+ Mauquoi – Mergen, Luxembourg 1992.

8...h5? 9.g5N gives White a clear extra tempo over variation A of the previous chapter. (I am sure White can also get some advantage with 9.g5N, or 9.gxh5N followed by h5, but we may as well follow the same path as before.) 9...hxg4 10.d5 xf5 11.xf6 xf6 12.exf5± If you turn back to page 337 you will see that h2-h4 is often a desirable move in these positions, and here we have been given it for free.

8...a6 seems like a waste of time. Black really should be aiming to challenge the f5-knight in some way, but this move does not help him towards his goal. Perhaps the simplest continuation is: 9.g5N hxg5 10.xg5 c6 (10...xf5 11.exf5 c6 12.g2±) 11.g2±

8...g6! is the only other alternative worth mentioning, but it is premature due to: 9.xh6! xh6 (9...c6 10.g5 h5 11.g4±) 10.xh6

10.exh6 (after 10...xh6 11.g5 h8 12.gxf6± Black has to worry about b5 or d5, not to mention h4-h5) 11.g5 b6 12.db2± Cimicki – Bozic, Internet 2011.

C1) 8..e6?!

This interesting move order was used by Hou Yifan against me in our match in November...
2015; the main idea seems to be to prepare ...d5 in response to h4-h5. In the game I got no advantage but, with the benefit of subsequent analysis, I believe that both C11) 9.h5!?N and the more ambitious C12) 9.g5!? offer White the better chances.

9...g2 was my choice in the rapid time control, but after 9...g6 10.c3 c6 Black reached her target position in Negi – Hou Yifan, Saint Louis (rapid) 2015, as we transposed to a previous game of Hou Yifan’s, in which she defeated Harikrishna. I will give a few more details on page 370 – see 9...g2 in the notes to variation C2.

C11) 9.h5!?N d5

This is the consistent follow-up to Black’s previous move.

9.c6 transposes to 8...c6 9.h5! e6, as mentioned in a brief note on page 371.

9...bd7 10.f3 resembles some of the lines we will see later after 8...c6. The knight may be on a different square but Black suffers from the same types of problems, for instance: 10...c8 11.d2 a6 12.0-0-0 b5

13.d5! c5 14.xf6+ xf6 15.b1+ Black is behind in development and he lacks counterplay.

10.exd5 xd5 11.xd5 xd5 12.xd5 xd5 13.h3!

13.g1 allows Black to free himself with 13...g6.

The text move sets up a future rook swing and, more importantly, makes it extremely difficult for Black to break the bind on the kingside. If he plays ...e6 we can just ignore it, as ...xf5 will lead to a new set of problems for Black, while ...g6 is not likely to be possible for a long time. Here are a few sample variations.

13.c6 14.e3 0-0-0 15.0-0-0 e6 16.xd8+ xd8 17.a3 c7

17...g6 18.hxg6 fxg6 19.xh6+ leaves Black a pawn down with no way to exploit the misplaced knight.
If 17...\(\text{xf5}\) 18.\(\text{gx}f5\) White's light-squared bishop is strong and Black's kingside majority remains crippled.

17...b6 18.\(\text{d}3\) \(\text{e}7\) 19.\(\text{f}4\) also keeps Black under pressure.

18.\(\text{d}3\) b6 19.\(\text{d}2\)!!

Certainly not the only move, but it has a couple of uses: if Black plays ...\(\text{e}7\) we can respond with \(\text{f}2\)-\(\text{f}4\) without fearing ...\(\text{d}5\); and it might also be handy to have the option of swinging the rook to \(\text{c}3\) at some point. It is still not clear how Black will free his kingside pieces, as 19...\(\text{xf5}\) will leave him distinctly worse after 20.\(\text{xf5}\) or 20.\(\text{gx}f5\)!

C12) 9.g5!

The most ambitious.

9...\(\text{xe}4\)

10.\(\text{xe}4\)!N

A surprising pawn sacrifice, but a powerful one.

10.\(\text{d}xg7\) \(\text{d}xg7\) 11.\(\text{xe}4\) \(\text{e}6\)!N (there is also 11...\(\text{d}5\)?, as in Hybl – Nedoma, corr. 2010) 12.\(\text{h}3\) \(\text{hxh}\) 13.\(\text{hxh}\) \(\text{d}5\) is messy but ultimately okay for Black according to my analysis.

10...\(\text{xf5}\) 11.\(\text{f}3\) \(\text{e}6\)

In the event of 11...\(\text{d}7\) 12.\(\text{g}xh6\) \(\text{xe}4\)
13.\(\text{xe}4\) \(\text{g}xh6\) (13...\(\text{c}6\) 14.\(\text{g}2\)) 14.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{f}5\)
(14...\(\text{c}6\) 15.\(\text{h}3\)) 15.\(\text{d}3\) it seems to me that Black will sorely miss his light-squared bishop.

11.\(\text{xe}4\) 12.\(\text{xe}4\) \(\text{c}6\)

Here too, having eliminated the bishop we will target the light squares:

13.\(\text{g}6\) \(\text{d}5\)
13...\(\text{f}6\) 14.\(\text{c}4\)
14.\(\text{g}xh7\) \(\text{xf7}\) 15.\(\text{f}3\) \(\text{e}8\) 16.\(\text{g}2\)
16.\(\text{h}5\) is also good of course. Either way, Black's king remains exposed – and even if he manages to exchange queens at the expense of the \(\text{d}5\)-pawn, he will suffer in the endgame because of our two strong bishops.

16...\(\text{f}6\)
16...\(\text{e}4\)? 17.\(\text{h}5\) would be disastrous for Black.
16...\textit{c7} allows, at the very least, 17.\textit{xd5 \textit{xd5} 18.\textit{xd5}±} with a lasting endgame advantage.

17.\textit{xd5 \textit{d8} 18.\textit{b5 \textit{g6} 19.0-0! \textit{d7} 20.\textit{e3}}}

15.\textit{lg3!}

Presenting Black with a tricky choice.

15.\textit{g3!}

Presenting Black with a tricky choice.

16...\textit{g3!}

Presenting Black with a tricky choice.

15.\textit{g3!}

Presenting Black with a tricky choice.

17.\textit{xh6 \textit{c6} 13.\textit{hxg7 \textit{xg7} 14.c3 \textit{d5}}}

Black has to force the play, otherwise the openness of the position will catch up with him.

17.\textit{g7} (17.\textit{0-0-0 \textit{e6} 18.\textit{g5 \textit{g7} 19.\textit{h3}})

17...\textit{d7 18.\textit{c5}†}

18...\textit{e7} (18...\textit{c8} 19.\textit{g7 \textit{h8} 20.\textit{g1}±)

19.\textit{g5}† \textit{f6} 20.0-0-0±

15.\textit{g8} 16.\textit{c5 \textit{g7}}

16...\textit{f5} saves the bishop but leads to other problems for Black: 17.\textit{h6 \textit{f6} (17...\textit{f8}

18.\textit{g1 \textit{f6} 19.\textit{g5±}) 18.\textit{g5 \textit{g6} 19.\textit{h5 \textit{d6} 20.\textit{f3}†}}

17.\textit{xe6 \textit{xe6} 18.\textit{h5}

18.\textit{h3 f5 19.\textit{g5 \textit{f6} 20.0-0-0 0-0-0∞)

18...\textit{f5} 19.\textit{h6 \textit{f6} 20.\textit{d3} 0-0-0 21.\textit{d2}

Black's pawn centre looks impressive, but he can't achieve much with it. These same pawns could easily end up as weaknesses to be targeted by White's light-squared bishop, and in the meantime the \textit{h}-pawn serves as an annoying distraction.

15...\textit{xf6}

15...\textit{h6} 16.\textit{xe6 \textit{xe6} gives White a couple of ways to get an edge: 17.\textit{g8}†
370 Scheveningen

21...e4
21...d4?! is worse: 22.0-0 e4 23.\textit{c}c4± 22.\textit{f}b5±

16.\textit{x}f6+\textit{xf}6 17.\textit{g}5 \textit{g}6 18.\textit{d}3!
Provoking Black into fixing his pawn formation.

19.\textit{e}2 f6 20.\textit{e}3 \textit{xf}3 21.\textit{x}f3
Black's position isn't so terrible but he is clearly on the defensive, just trying to hold his position together, while White should be able to continue shuffling around and creating problems for his opponent.

C2) 8...\textit{c}6

This has been Black's usual choice. White's strongest continuation has hardly ever been played.

9.h5!
So far this has only been played in a couple of email games. It may seem strange to make another pawn move rather than develop a piece; however, once you realize that the only way for Black to complete his development is by playing ...g6 at some point, it starts to make sense. Clearly, allowing hxg6 seems ugly for Black, while ...\textit{xf}5 doesn't seem desirable for him either. If Black plays slowly then we will just complete development and have a great position, so I will mainly focus on Black's attempt to free his game with a quick ...d5.

Before looking any further, I will explain why I was not satisfied with the most obvious alternative.

9.\textit{g}2 g6 10.\textit{e}3 \textit{e}6
Hou Yifan has scored 2/2 against strong Indian GMs from this position – including her game against me, which arrived here via the transposition noted on page 367.

10...\textit{g}7 would make 11.h5?!N more appealing than in the note below.

11.\textit{d}5
11. h5N gxh5! is the reason why we need to advance the h-pawn a couple of moves earlier. (11...gxg3 12.hxg6 fxg6 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxh8+ g8h8 15.e5 g4 16.g5±) 12.gxh5 g8h8

11...g7?! 
I actually think this is a touch more accurate than Hou Yifan's play, as delaying the exchange on d5 reduces White's options.

11...xd5 gives White the choice between 12.exd5 e7, as in Harikrishna - Hou Yifan, Wijk aan Zee 2013, and 12.xd5 xd5 13.exd5 e7, which was my choice in Negi - Hou Yifan, Saint Louis (rapid) 2015.

12.h5
In Nita - Nenciulescu, email 2012, this would have been a good time for:
12...xd5N 13.exd5 e7 14.hxg6 fxg6
With a double-edged position.

Returning to our main line, I think Black's two most important options are C21) 9...wb6 and C22) 9...d5N. Other moves should not trouble us at all, for instance:

9...g6? 10.hxg6 fxg6 11.e3±

9...a5 is a computer move which I refuse to take seriously. After 10.d2 wb6 White has many options, 11.c4 being one, leaving Black's queen strangely placed.

9...e6 10.g2 Once the bishop has gone to this square, my intention will generally be to meet a future...xf5 with exf5 to improve the bishop. If Black tries 10...c8 instead, we can establish a nice bind with:

11.d5! xd5 12.exd5 e7 13.e3 g6 14.hxg6 fxg6 15.g5±

9...xf5 10.gxf5 is playable for Black, but obviously our light-squared bishop gains huge potential. 10...d5 (10...b8 11.e3 wa5 12.d2 d5 13.exd5 wxd2+ 14.b2 xe4 15.c3 c5 16.xc5 bxc5 17.0–0–0†) 11.xd5 xe4 12.g2 b6
9...a6
This could be tried as a waiting move, postponing \( \texttt{\text{xf5}} \) until our bishop has gone to g2, so that \( \texttt{gxf5} \) will be less desirable. I have no problem allowing Black to carry out that plan!

10.\( \texttt{g2} \)

10.\( \texttt{e3} \) \( \texttt{e6!} \) 11.\( \texttt{g2} \) \( \texttt{c8} \) gives Black a slightly improved version of the 9...\( \texttt{e6} \) line above. The point is that 12.\( \texttt{d5} \) is no longer as strong due to 12...\( \texttt{xd5} \) 13.\( \texttt{exd5} \) \( \texttt{e7} \), when White doesn’t have the wonderful \( \texttt{e3} \) option because the bishop is blocking that square! Attempting to preserve the knight with 14.\( \texttt{g3?!} \) runs into 14...\( \texttt{d5?!} \) because 15.\( \texttt{xd5} \) \( \texttt{a5?!} \) regains the piece.

10...\( \texttt{xf5} \)

10...\( \texttt{b5?!} \) 11.\( \texttt{g5?} \)

11.\( \texttt{exf5} \)

11.\( \texttt{gxf5} \) is not bad, and White could certainly fight for an advantage here too – but the text move fits in better with the bishop on g2.

11...\( \texttt{e7} \) 12.\( \texttt{e3?!} \)

Since \( \texttt{...d5} \) is impossible for the foreseeable future, Black struggles to do anything – and castling on the kingside still risky for him.

C21) 9...\( \texttt{b6} \)

This is one of the computer’s top choices, which may explain why it was played in both of the correspondence games that reached the position – but it still seems like a strange move. Black already faced some challenges to complete his development, and his last move runs the risk of compound the problem by giving us a chance to gain a tempo against the queen.

[Chess Diagram]

10.\( \texttt{a3?!} \)

This seems like the simplest solution, preparing \( \texttt{e3} \).

10.\( \texttt{e3} \) was played in both of the games, but I would rather leave the knight where it is and develop my bishop with gain of tempo.

I have a feeling that 10.\( \texttt{e3?!} \) \( \texttt{xb2} \) 11.\( \texttt{d2?} \) would be a lot of fun to analyse – not to mention distinctly dangerous for Black – but it doesn’t seem appropriate to go for a speculative ‘poisoned pawn’ sacrifice when we have a much simpler alternative.

10...\( \texttt{xf5} \)

Swapping off the knight and plonking the knight on d4 seems like Black’s only serious attempt to justify his previous move.

10...\( \texttt{e6} \) 11.\( \texttt{e3} \) \( \texttt{a5} \) 12.\( \texttt{a4?!} \) shows the point behind a2-a3 12.\( \texttt{g2?!} \) gives us everything we could wish for.
11.\textit{gx}f5 \textit{d}4 12.\textit{e}3 \textit{a}6

12...\textit{c}8 13.\textit{b}5\dagger \textit{d}8 14.\textit{d}3 looks dodgy for Black, for instance:

13.\textit{c}4 \textit{c}6

14.\textit{d}3?!\textit{d}2 15.\textit{f}d4 \textit{xc}3 (15...\textit{ex}d4 16.\textit{a}4\textit{f}4) 16.\textit{xc}3 \textit{xc}3\dagger 17.\textit{f}f1 Black can hardly claim full compensation for the exchange when his king is so unsafe.

C22) 9...\textit{d}5?N

This is certainly a critical try but there are two promising answers to it, so you can choose whichever one you prefer.

10.\textit{xd}5?! This is the more complex move, leading to an interesting middlegame where I prefer White.

It is also possible to force an endgame with:

10.\textit{ex}d5 \textit{xf}5 11.\textit{dx}c6 \textit{xd}1\dagger 12.\textit{xd}1 \textit{gx}g4 13.\textit{cx}b7 \textit{xb}8 14.\textit{a}6 \textit{d}6 15.\textit{e}3 \textit{f}3

After the text move Black has a few ways to win a pawn but he is playing with fire, as he is far behind in development and his position is full of weak squares.

14.\textit{d}3?!\textit{d}2

14.\textit{e}4 \textit{a}5\dagger 18.\textit{d}2 \textit{xd}5 19.0–0–0 is also perfectly nice.

Material is equal but there is no doubt that White’s pawns are easier to push than Black’s. Whether or not that translates into a serious edge remains to be seen, but it seems clear to me that White is the only side with a realistic chance of playing for more than a draw.
10...\(\text{dxe4}\) 11.\(g2\) \(\text{d6}\)

11...\(\text{f6}\) 12.\(\text{e3}\) \(\text{xe6}\) (12...\(\text{xd5}\) 13.\(\text{xd5}\) \(\text{xd5}\) 14.\(\text{xd5}\) \(\text{xf5}\) 15.\(gxf5\) \(\text{e7}\) 16.0–0–0)
13.\(c4\)

12.\(\text{f3!}\)

This avoids unnecessary simplifications and makes it harder for Black to get coordinated.

12...\(\text{e6}\) 13.\(\text{d3}\) \(\text{d7}\)

13...\(\text{c8}\) 14.b3! maintains control. (14.\(d2\) allows 14...\(e4\)! 15.\(\text{xe4}\) \(\text{xe5}\) 16.\(\text{d4}\) \(\text{c6!}\) with a forced repetition) Now 14...\(e4\) is well met by:

15.\(\text{d2!}\) \(\text{e5}\) 16.\(\text{b2}\) \(\text{xe4}\) 17.0–0–0± Black is a pawn up but his position is terrible.

14.\(\text{d2}\) 0–0–0 15.\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{b8}\) 16.0–0–0±

The whole line requires further exploration and testing, but I like White's chances with the strong minor pieces and pressure along the d-file.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we dealt with three of Black's most important options after 6.\(g4\) \(h6\) 7.\(h4\). The first two, 7...\(a6\) and 7...\(\text{e7}\), both suffer from the same drawback, as they allow White to prepare \(g4-g5\) in the most active way possible with 8.\(\text{f3!}\). Generally White will answer ...\(\text{c6}!\) by exchanging on \(c6\), advancing with \(g4-g5\) and parking his king on the queenside, with excellent chances.

7...\(e5?!\) is a more serious try for Black, aiming for an improved version of the 6...\(e5?!\) variation of the previous chapter. I recommend 8.\(\text{f5}\), when Black has two main options.

8...\(\text{e6?!}\) is a tricky move order, when I analysed two options for White: 9.\(h5?!\) is an interesting idea which should lead to a slightly more pleasant endgame, while 9.\(g5?!\) \(\text{xe4}\) 10.\(\text{xe4}\)\(\text{N}\) is the more aggressive alternative.

8...\(\text{c6}\) is the other natural move, when the rare 9.\(h5!\) seems best. Then 9...\(\text{b6}\) is a weird choice, while the most natural 9...\(d5?!\)\(\text{N}\) awaits a practical test. The latter move seems critical but I like White's chances, and it's always nice to have a choice between a small but safe endgame edge and a more complex middlegame with better chances.
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 \(\mathcal{d}f6\) 5.c3 \(\mathcal{c}c6\) d6 6.g4 h6 7.h4 \(\mathcal{c}c6\)

8.g1

A) 8...d7

B) 8...h5

C) 8...d5 9.exd5 \(\mathcal{d}xd5\) 10.\(\mathcal{d}xd5\)
   C1) 10...\(\mathcal{d}xd5\) 11.\(\mathcal{g}g2\)
   C11) 11...\(\mathcal{e}e5\) 12.\(\mathcal{e}e3\)
   C111) 12...\(\mathcal{h}h2\)
   C112) 12...\(\mathcal{d}d7\)
   C12) 11...\(\mathcal{c}c4\)!

C2) 10...exd5 11.\(\mathcal{c}c3\)
   C21) 11...\(\mathcal{e}e7\)
   C22) 11...\(\mathcal{h}h4\)!
   C221) 12...\(\mathcal{e}e7\)
   C222) 12...\(\mathcal{d}xd4\)!

B) note to 14.\(\mathcal{b}b1\)

C) note to 9...

C2) note to move 11
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 d6
5.c3 d6 6.g4 h6 7.h4 c6
This is the main line and Black’s most logical bet, as it develops quickly and avoids the f3 plan from the previous chapter. I have already mentioned that the big drawback of the knight on c6 is that it inhibits Black’s queenside counterplay with ...b5. That is why I believe Black’s most logical plan is to follow up with a quick ...d5.

8.e1
With f3 unavailable, this is the obvious way to prepare g4-g5. We will analyse three options: A) 8...d7, B) 8...h5 and C) 8...d5, the last of which is the most important theoretical line nowadays.

Let’s have a quick look at a few rare and dodgy alternatives:

8...a5 does nothing to counter White’s plan: 9.b3 c7 10.g5 hxg5 11.hxg5 d7 12.e3 a6 13.g6+ Garbar – Secrieru, email 2011.

8...a6 also allows 9.g5 hxg5 10.hxg5 when White’s attack develops smoothly, for instance:

10...xd4 This seems like the best chance. (10...d7?! 11.g6 de5 12.gxf7† xf7 occurred in Macieja – Abdel Razik, Khanty-Mansiysk [ol] 2010, when 13.e2!!N xf6 14.g5 would have been the most accurate route to a decisive advantage for White.) 11.xd4 d7 12.e3 e5 13.e2 c6 14.d2 b5 15.g6+ A. Markovic – Kocic, Belgrade 2011.

8...g6 prevents the g5-g6 idea but White can happily switch plans with: 9.g5 hxg5 10.xg5!
8...e5?! 9.Qb3 (9.Qf5 h5! is Black's idea) 9...e6 10.g5 hxg5 11.hxg5 Qd7 is also pleasant for White. The simplest continuation is:

![Chessboard Diagram]

12.Qe3N (the immediate 12.g6 is also reasonable) 12...a6 (12...g6 13.Qd2 a6 14.0-0-0 b5 15.f4 exf4 16.Qxf4 Qd5 17.Qd5±) 13.Qd2 b5 14.0-0-0± Roganovic - Vdlickovic, Sombor 2009.

9.Qg5 bxg5

Inserting 9...Qxd4 10.Qxd4 hardly helps Black: 10...hxg5 11.Qxg5! A typical idea, putting rapid development ahead of pawn structure. 11...f6 12.Qe3 a6 13.0-0-0±

10.Qxg5!

10 hxg5 is not so bad but I prefer the text move.

10...Qb6

10...Qf6 transposes to variation B.

![Chessboard Diagram]

11.Qb3 a6 12.Qd2 Qc7

I think it would be as well for Black to play 12...Qf6 to reach the same worse position as found in variation B below. Obviously Black is free to try other moves but the knight is awkwardly placed on d7, and where else is it going?

12...Qce5N is well met by 13.Qe2!, ensuring that the knight will not be able to go to c4 and thus preparing f2-f4 with maximum effect.

13.0-0-0 b5

White can play in many different ways, but I like the plan chosen by Anand in the following game.
14.\texttt{b1} \texttt{ce5}

14...\texttt{b7} occurred in Dorfman – Ehlvest, Moscow 1981, when 15.a3N \texttt{c8} 16.\texttt{h3} would have given White excellent chances.

15.\texttt{g3} \texttt{b4} 16.\texttt{e2} \texttt{f6} 17.\texttt{xe3} \texttt{xb4} 18.\texttt{ed4} \texttt{ce5}

\textbf{This used to be the main line and is still the most popular move in sheer numbers, but it has been more or less abandoned by strong players – at least the human ones. It is worth pointing out that White will get an improved version of the 7.g5 hxg5 8.\texttt{xg5} line, which is not a bad option itself. More importantly, Black tends to struggle to get counterplay, whereas White will find it relatively easy to complete development and build an initiative.}

\textbf{B) 8...h5}

9.\texttt{gxh5} \texttt{xb5}

9...\texttt{b6}?!N is an idea waiting to be tried. White has two decent responses:

a) 10.\texttt{e3}?! is the maximalist try, intending 10...\texttt{xb2} 11.\texttt{db5}, but there is no need to prepare something so complicated against a move you will probably never face.

b) 10.\texttt{b3} is simpler. After 10...\texttt{h5} Black can claim that, compared with the main lines below, White is unable to go for certain fancy lines involving \texttt{xc6}. However, since I am not recommending that approach anyway, it makes no difference to us.

10.\texttt{g5} \texttt{f6}

10...\texttt{b6} 11.\texttt{b3} \texttt{a6} 12.\texttt{e2}?! \texttt{f6} 13.\texttt{d2} will almost certainly transpose to our main line after a subsequent 0–0–0 and \texttt{b1}. As we will soon see, the white bishop belongs on \texttt{e2} anyway.
As I mentioned earlier, this set-up would be interesting for White even with the rook on h1 and pawn on h2 (as could occur after 7.g5). With the benefit of the extra h2-h4 and Elg1 moves, White should simply complete development and be overjoyed to have reached such a pleasant position from the opening. Of course, it's still good to know a couple of exact lines in order to get the most out of it.

11.\text{\texttt{d2 b6}}
This is almost always played – it makes sense for Black to drive the knight away from the centre while he has the chance.

12.\text{\texttt{b3 a6}}
12...\text{\texttt{e5}} gets nowhere after 13.\text{\texttt{e2}}.

Black has also tried:
12...\text{\texttt{d7}} 13.0-0-0 \text{\texttt{e5}}
13...\text{\texttt{a6}} leads straight to our main line.

14.\text{\texttt{e2! c8}}
14...\text{\texttt{xf2}}? 15.\text{\texttt{d4}} is much too dangerous for Black. A good example continued:
15...\text{\texttt{c6}} 16.\text{\texttt{db5}} 0-0-0 17.\text{\texttt{gfl}} \text{\texttt{b6}}
18.h5 \text{\texttt{a6}} 19.\text{\texttt{a4}} \text{\texttt{a5}} 20.\text{\texttt{xa5}} \text{\texttt{xa5}}
21.\text{\texttt{b6}} and Black resigned in Trussler – Girard, corr. 1993, as 21...\text{\texttt{b8}} 22.\text{\texttt{xd6}} would be hopeless for him.

15.f4
15.\text{\texttt{e3N c7}} 16.f4 \text{\texttt{c4}} 17.\text{\texttt{xc4}} \text{\texttt{xc4}}
18.\text{\texttt{d4}} is a good alternative.

After the text move Black should probably sac the exchange on c3 and hope for the best, although he will remain worse after decent play by White. In the following game he soon collapsed:

```
...%000
```

15...\text{\texttt{c4}} 16.\text{\texttt{xc4}} \text{\texttt{xc4}} 17.e5 \text{\texttt{e4}} 18.\text{\texttt{xe4}}
\text{\texttt{xe4}} 19.\text{\texttt{exd6+}}

Anderskewitz – Carroll, email 2006.

```
...
```

13.0-0-0 \text{\texttt{d7}} 14.\text{\texttt{b1}}
14.\text{\texttt{g3}} \text{\texttt{c7}} 15.\text{\texttt{e2}} 0-0-0 16.f4 \text{\texttt{b8}}
17.h5 \text{\texttt{e7N}} 18.\text{\texttt{b1}} \text{\texttt{c8}} should be compared with 15...0-0-0 in the notes to the main line below. I would prefer to be able to drop my bishop back to e3 when Black castles on the queenside.

14.\text{\texttt{e2 c7}} 15.h5!! is a nice idea but after the greedy 15...\text{\texttt{d6h5}} (15...\text{\texttt{b5}} 16.a3 could lead to
similar lines) I'm not sure if White can prove anything. An interesting try is:

16.e5?!N (All the games have continued 16...h1 g6 when White certainly has compensation, but he hasn't quite demonstrated a clear path to an advantage.) 16...d5 (16...dxe5? 17.h1! g6 18.f4 d6 19.e4 gives White a huge attack) 16.f4 e7 This could be explored further but the main line seems more promising to me.

15...e7 16.h5 dxe5?!N (16...0-0-0 transposes to the next note) 17.xe7 dxe7 18.xh5 hxh5 19.xg7 leaves Black with a weak d6-pawn, but White's initiative is so strong that he may not even bother to capture it.

15...0-0-0 16.h5!
Threatening h5-h6 and thus provoking Black's next move.

16...e7 17.e3!
This is the reason why we didn't rush to play f2-f4 earlier. The bishop is perfectly placed to target the queenside, especially the b6-square, and gaining a tempo against the g7-pawn is a nice bonus. It is hardly worth worrying about the h5-pawn.

15...c7 16.e2!
Instead of rushing ahead with 15.f4, it is better to wait for Black to decide whether to go for ...0-0-0 or ...b5. In the former case, we will benefit from the option of e3; and having the king on b1 and light-squared bishop on e2 will be useful in all scenarios.

15...b5
This seems a natural move, but Black has virtually no chance of getting any serious counterplay on the queenside. Other possibilities include:

16...\(\text{e7}^N\) 17.f4 \(\text{e8}\) (17...b4 18.axb4 \(\text{cxb4}\) 19.e5±)

16.a3 \(\text{e5}\)

This seems a natural move, but Black has virtually no chance of getting any serious counterplay on the queenside. Other possibilities include:

16...\(\text{e7}^N\) 17.f4 \(\text{e8}\) (17...b4 18.axb4 \(\text{cxb4}\) 19.e5±)

18.e5! \(\text{dxe5}\) 19.fxe5 \(\text{dxe5}\) 20.e4±

16...b4 17.axb4 \(\text{cxb4}\) 18.h5 \(\text{e7}\)

19.h6! \(\text{gxh6}\) 20.\(\text{e}^6\) \(\text{h6}\)\(^±\) \(\text{Lucky} - \text{Kusnierz, corr. 2010.}\)

16...\(\text{b8}\)

This has been played in a couple of games. Even though White won both of them, I would like to offer an improvement:
17.h5!N \text{\textgreek{a}}xh5 \\
17...\text{\textgreek{g}}8 18.f4! \\
17...b4 18.axb4 \text{\textgreek{a}}xb4 19.h6 \text{\textgreek{e}}xe4 20.\text{\textgreek{e}}xe4 \\
\text{\textgreek{e}}xe4 21.\text{\textgreek{c}}3! \\
18.f4 b4 \\
18...\text{\textgreek{f}}6 19.e5! dxe5 20.fxe5 \text{\textgreek{c}}xe5 21.\text{\textgreek{f}}4 is crushing.

19.axb4 \text{\textgreek{a}}xb4 \\
19...\text{\textgreek{a}}xb4 20.\text{\textgreek{d}}5! exd5 21.exd5 leaves Black without a good defence. \\
20.\text{\textgreek{h}}1 g6 21.f5 \text{\textgreek{g}}7 22.fxg6 fxg6 23.\text{\textgreek{g}}4! \\

17.\text{\textgreek{a}}x\text{\textgreek{f}}6 \\
This has scored 4/4 so far, but I am not sure if it is even required.

17.f4!N \text{\textgreek{c}}4 18.\text{\textgreek{w}}e1 \text{\textgreek{c}}8 19.\text{\textgreek{g}}3 is another way to keep the advantage, while maintaining more tension in the position.

17...gxf6 18.\text{\textgreek{f}}4 \text{\textgreek{d}}8 \\
In the event of 18...\text{\textgreek{e}}7 19.h5 it will be hard for Black to deal with the h-pawn, for instance: 19...\text{\textgreek{b}}8 20.\text{\textgreek{g}}3 a5 21.\text{\textgreek{g}}7 \text{\textgreek{f}}8 22.h6 b4 23.axb4 axb4 24.\text{\textgreek{a}}2+- \\
18...\text{\textgreek{g}}6?N is not ridiculous, but after 19.\text{\textgreek{w}}f6 \\
\text{\textgreek{e}}7 20.\text{\textgreek{d}}4 \text{\textgreek{a}}7 21.\text{\textgreek{x}}a7 \text{\textgreek{x}}a7 22.h5! Black can hardly claim full compensation for the missing pawn.

19.h5 \\
White has excellent prospects. Black is barely able to hold against the pressure along the d- and g-files, and he will soon face even greater problems after f2-f4 is played.

19...\text{\textgreek{c}}8 20.\text{\textgreek{h}}1 \text{\textgreek{h}}6 21.\text{\textgreek{g}}3 \text{\textgreek{c}}6 22.f4 \\
\text{\textgreek{c}}4 23.\text{\textgreek{d}}4 \text{\textgreek{b}}7 24.\text{\textgreek{h}}d1+ \\

C) 8...d5 \\
This has taken over as the main line nowadays.

9.exd5 \\
9...\text{\textgreek{b}}5 used to be a big main line but most strong players prefer the text move these days.

9...\text{\textgreek{d}}x\text{\textgreek{d}}5
This has hardly ever been played; indeed, I don’t know why anyone would leave the knight on f6 to be kicked by g4-g5.

10.\( \text{b}5 \text{d}7 \\
10...\text{d}6 11.\text{e}2\text{d}8? \ (11...\text{e}6 \text{ is better although } 12.\text{e}3 \text{ clearly favours White})

12.\text{e}3 \text{was horrible for Black in Bracker – Rahls, Germany 2009.}

In Horvath – Nemeth, Hungary 1991, White should have continued:

11.\text{g}2

There are two main options to consider. The forcing C11) 11...\text{e}5? has been Black’s most popular choice, but C12) 11...\text{c}4? is slightly more challenging for us.

The only other sensible option is:

11...\text{a}5\text{d} 12.\text{d}2 \text{b}6

12...\text{e}5\textd leads to variation C11 with an extra move played.

13...\text{xc}6 \text{b}xc6 14.\text{f}3 \text{d}7

14...\text{b}7 15.0–0–0 \text{c}5 16.g5 \text{hxg}5 occurred in Mokry – Boensch, Olomouc 1982, when the simple 17.hxg5N would have maintained a clear advantage for White, because 17...\text{xf}2?? 18.\text{gf}1 is obviously suicidal for Black.

10.\text{x}d5

This brings us to an important crossroads, as Black’s two options lead to different pawn structures and contrasting types of positions.

C1) 10...\text{xd}5 is solid, whereas C2) 10...\text{ex}d5 can be much more of a crazy affair.

C1) 10...\text{xd}5

This generally leads to an endgame where White is trying for an edge but Black isn’t too far behind, and a struggle lies ahead. The structure is undoubtedly worse for Black, but there are a lot of other subtleties involved. Still, by understanding the main plans and ideas, it should be possible for us to put pressure on Black without risking much.

11.\text{g}2

There are two main options to consider. The forcing C11) 11...\text{e}5? has been Black’s most popular choice, but C12) 11...\text{c}4? is slightly more challenging for us.

The only other sensible option is:

11...\text{a}5\text{d} 12.\text{d}2 \text{b}6

12...\text{e}5\textd leads to variation C11 with an extra move played.

13...\text{xc}6 \text{b}xc6 14.\text{f}3 \text{d}7

14...\text{b}7 15.0–0–0 \text{c}5 16.g5 \text{hxg}5 occurred in Mokry – Boensch, Olomouc 1982, when the simple 17.hxg5N would have maintained a clear advantage for White, because 17...\text{xf}2?? 18.\text{gf}1 is obviously suicidal for Black.
In Groszpeter–Lenz, Zalakaros 2008, White's most accurate continuation would have been:

\[ \text{C11) 11... \text{e}e5}^\dagger 12. \text{e}c3 \]

Black tries to make a nuisance out of his queen, but White has an excellent way to counter it.

\[ \text{13. \text{f}4!} \text{xd}4 14. \text{e}d4 \text{xh}4^\dagger 15. \text{e}c2?! \]

The most ambitious.

15. \text{e}f2 \text{d}8 16. \text{xd}8^\dagger \text{xd}8 17.0–0–0^\dagger \text{c}c7

18. \text{e}d3 is a decent alternative which gave White plenty of compensation in Gashimov – Giri, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2011. Objectively Black should have been able to hold, but practically his defensive task is not easy.

15... \text{d}8 16. \text{c}3?!?

Avoiding the queen exchange while keeping Black's development in check.

Black's two main options are C111) 12... \text{h}2 and C112) 12... \text{d}7.

12... \text{a}xd4?! 13. \text{xd}4 \text{xd}4 14. \text{x}d4^+ gives Black a worse version of the endgame as the \text{c}8-bishop is virtually impossible to develop.

12... \text{b}4?! also proves to be dubious after accurate play by White: 13. \text{e}2 \text{d}5 14. \text{xd}5! \text{xd}5 15. \text{b}5 \text{c}6 16. \text{f}4^+ Michalek – Miskovsky, corr. 1999.
16...\textit{\texttt{d7?N}}

The critical move, returning the extra pawn in order to catch up on development.

16...\textit{\texttt{f6? 17.e6?}} is horrible for Black.

16...\textit{\texttt{c7?}} prepares to trap the queen if it captures on \texttt{g7}, but 17.\textit{\texttt{ad1 d7 18.xb7}} simply wins for White.

16...\textit{\texttt{e7?}} feels too awkward, and in the following correspondence game White showed perfect domination: 17.\textit{\texttt{gdl d7 18.d4!}} \texttt{h5} (18...\textit{\texttt{gc8 19.b3? 18...b5? 19.e1?}}) 19.\textit{\texttt{ad1 b5? 20.e1 hxg4}}

21.a4! \textit{\texttt{h2 (21...\texttt{a6 22.e6?}) 22.xb5}} \textit{\texttt{gxg2 23.xf1 g3 24.b4 f5 25.c8? Exc8 26.bxc8?? \texttt{f7 27.d7 28.\texttt{f4 Balabanov – Brodt, corr. 2010.}}}}

17.\textit{\texttt{xb7}}

White does not have much of a choice, as 17.\textit{\texttt{gdl? gc8 18.d3 c7??}} would leave him struggling to demonstrate compensation for the pawn.

17...\textit{\texttt{b8 18.a6! c7}}

18...\textit{\texttt{f6 is a clear concession. 19.xf6 gxf6 20.b3? It will be hard for Black to create a passed pawn, whereas White's queenside pawns are strong and relatively easy to advance.}}
21.\text{c7} \text{c6}

Neither 21...\text{c8} 22.\text{d3}± nor 21...\text{b5}†
22.\text{xb5} \text{xb5}† 23.\text{c4} \text{e8} 24.\text{g5}± is much
help to Black.

22.\text{g5} \text{h5}

After 22...\text{hxg5} 23.\text{fxg5}± Black is not losing
immediately, but the open h-file should give
him cause for concern.

23.\text{f2}±

I like White’s chances, although the position
remains complicated and could certainly be
analysed further. Black’s pieces are still rather
awkwardly placed, while White has some
attacking ideas like \text{e5} and \text{d4}, perhaps
with \text{d3} at some point. And even if Black
reaches an endgame, White still has the more
mobile pawn majority.

C112) 12...\text{d7}

This is the most popular continuation, inviting the following endgame.

13.\text{xc6} \text{xc6} 14.\text{xc6}† \text{bxc6} 15.\text{d4} \text{xd4}

15...\text{d6} occurred in Bracker – Werthebach,
Chemnitz 2009, when 16.0–0–0N \text{xd4}
17.\text{xd4} would have been similar to the main
line below. A logical continuation would be
17...\text{f6} 18.\text{h5}, which actually transposes to the

Kraus – McClement game referenced on the
next page.

It is worth considering the alternative:
15...\text{a5}†?

16.\text{e2}!!

16.c3 \text{d8} 17.\text{xa7N} (I also considered
17.\text{c4} \text{c7} 18.\text{e2} \text{e7} 19.\text{h5}?!N but
found that 19...0–0 20.\text{ad1} \text{d5} is fine for
Black) 17...\text{b5} 18.\text{ad1} \text{xd1}† 19.\text{xd1}
\text{xb2} could be analysed further, but it seems
unnecessarily complicated.

16...\text{a6}?!N

16...\text{c5} 17.\text{e4} \text{a6}† 18.\text{c4} \text{b8} (18...\text{c8N}
19.\text{b3}±) 19.\text{b3}± gave White a pleasant
edge in Charleshouse – Dorrington, West

In the event of 16...\text{d8N} 17.\text{c4} \text{c7}
18.\text{ad1} our king is perfectly safe, and we
have essentially gained a tempo by avoiding
c2-c3. 18...\text{e7} 19.\text{xd8}† \text{xd8} 20.\text{h5}±
With the queens on, White still has some
attacking chances in the event that Black
castles, although a favourable endgame is
still the main strategic aim.

17.\text{f3} c5 18.\text{e5}!

18.\text{e4} \text{c8} seems okay for Black.

18...\text{d6}?!?

18...\text{c6}† 19.\text{xe4} \text{xe4}† 20.\text{xe4} reaches
the same type of endgame that we will
examine later. This seems like a slightly
improved version for White, as his king is
more active.
Black does not have much counterplay; in fact, White arguably has the safer king overall.

16...\texttt{d4} 

While Black is certainly solid, I think it's obvious that only one side is playing for an advantage. Black's queenside is vulnerable, and simplifying – for instance, by exchanging rooks along the d-file – is unlikely to solve his problem if White can quickly bring his king to the queenside. Black also faces a dilemma over where to place his king. If it stays on the kingside then, as I mentioned, there is a risk of the white king penetrating on the queenside after rook exchanges. However, if it goes to the queenside then we can prepare g4-g5 in order to harass Black's kingside pawns. White has won a decent percentage of games – and even in those cases where Black has survived, he has often only done so after prolonged suffering.

16...\texttt{c5} 

Not much is changed by: 16...\texttt{f6} 17.h5 (17.g5? is completely the wrong idea – we should be fixing Black's pawns on dark squares, not exchanging them for no good reason. 17...\texttt{xg5} 18.hxg5 e5 19.gxf6 gxf6 20.\texttt{e3} $\texttt{xf7}$= Tomazini – Stevic, Wolfsberg 2013.) 17...\texttt{d6} 18.0-0-0 $\texttt{f6}$ Kraus – McClement, Albena 2011.

17.\texttt{c3!} 

The bishop is perfectly placed on this square.

17...\texttt{d8} 

Black can also park his king on the queenside: 17...0-0-0 18.\texttt{d1} 18.\texttt{e2} f6 19.h5 \texttt{d5}N 20.b3 is another viable plan, intending \texttt{b2} and c2-c4, similar to the Naiditsch – Movsesian game mentioned below.

18...\texttt{d5}
388 Scheveningen

Both sides have many moves available at every turn, so it’s pointless to go too deep analysing specific lines. Instead we should simply remember that putting the rook on d5 is a sensible approach by Black, and there are a few ways to deal with it. One way to remove the rook is with b2-b3, \( \text{b2} \) and \( \text{c2} \)-c4, as illustrated in the Naiditsch game below. In this brief line, we will follow a game where White came up with an alternative plan.

19.\( \text{g3} \)

19...\( \text{d7} \) 20.\( \text{h5} \) \( \text{d6} \) 21.\( \text{e3} \) \( \text{f6} \) 22.\( \text{e4} \)

Bok – Pichot, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015. By manoeuvring the rook to e4, White maintained control over the position while forcing Black to be ready for \( \text{e}4 \) at any moment. Black went on to hold, but only after White allowed him to play \( \text{e}5 \) to simplify to a rook ending, which is something we should generally try to prevent.

19.\( \text{e2} \) \( \text{f6} \)

Another game continued: 18...\( \text{d5} \) 19.\( \text{b3} \) \( \text{f6} \) 20.\( \text{b2} \) (I would play 20.\( \text{h5} \) right away, but it doesn’t change much) 20...\( \text{e7} \) 21.\( \text{c4} \) \( \text{d8} \) 22.\( \text{h5} \) \( \text{f7} \) 23.\( \text{ad1} \)

23...\( \text{g6} \) 24.\( \text{h}x\text{g6} \) 25.\( \text{c1} \) \( \text{a6} \) 26.\( \text{e3} \)\( \text{f2} \)

Black eventually survived in Naiditsch – Movsesian, Odessa 2010, but it wasn’t much fun for him.

19.\( \text{h5}! \)

Fixing the pawns.

19...\( \text{d6} \) 20.\( \text{ad1} \) \( \text{e7} \) 21.\( \text{ad3} \) \( \text{c7} \) 22.\( \text{gd1} \) \( \text{xd3} \) 23.\( \text{xd3} \) \( \text{b8} \)

23...\( \text{d8}?! \) is at best dangerous for Black, and might even be losing by force. 24.\( \text{xd8} \) (If Black found a clear drawing plan in the ensuing endgame then White could of course
play 24...\texttt{b}3 followed by \texttt{c}4, but it seems to me that the bishop endgame is extremely unpleasant for Black.) 24...\texttt{xd}8 25.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{d}7 26.\texttt{c}4 \texttt{c}6

White has a simple plan of creating a passed pawn on the queenside, while Black is essentially a pawn down as he has no obvious way of mobilizing his kingside majority. Maybe there is some last-ditch way of creating kingside play, but I don’t see it. A sample line is:

\begin{verbatim}
27.\texttt{d}2 \texttt{a}6 28.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{d}6 29.\texttt{c}3 \texttt{e}7 30.\texttt{b}4 \texttt{b}4 31.\texttt{c}5 \texttt{a}4 \texttt{e}7 32.\texttt{b}5+ \texttt{a}5 33.\texttt{b}5+ \texttt{b}7 35.\texttt{a}5+-
\end{verbatim}

\textbf{24.b3 \texttt{d}6 25.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{c}4}

Up to now White’s play has been exemplary, but here he should have continued playing calmly.

\textbf{26.\texttt{e}4!N}

26.\texttt{d}4 e5! 27.\texttt{bxc}4 \texttt{b}4 gave Black enough activity in Fier – Valerga, Villa Martelli 2010 – although even then, the practical difficulties proved too much, and White eventually won by breaking through to the g7-pawn.

\textbf{26...\texttt{cxb}3 27.\texttt{axb}3 \texttt{d}5}

Intending \texttt{c}4, tying Black to the defence of \texttt{a}7 and preparing a slow advance on the queenside. Black’s kingside pawns remain stuck, and he will be under pressure for a long time.

\textbf{C12) 11...\texttt{e}4!?}

This is an interesting attempt to obtain a better version of the thematic endgame from the previous variation.

\textbf{12.\texttt{b}xc6}

12.\texttt{c}3 \texttt{d}7 13.\texttt{xc}6 \texttt{xc}6 14.\texttt{d}4 \texttt{b}4+! 15.\texttt{c}3 \texttt{xd}4 16.\texttt{xc}6+ \texttt{bxc}6 17.\texttt{xd}4 \texttt{c}5 would vindicate Black’s 11th move. Unlike variation C112, White is unable to put his bishop on the ideal \texttt{c}3-square, and the \texttt{c}3-pawn might also prove weak in some lines. It’s only a subtle difference but, in such an endgame, such small details can make a significant difference to the overall assessment.
18...e3 0–0–0 19.e2 e7 20.h5 b7 21.b4 (21.ad1 exd1 22.ad1 c6 23.b3 a5! shows another clear drawback of the pawn on c3: the b3-pawn is short of defenders, so Black will get sufficient counterplay with ...a4) 21...xb4 22.cxb4 d5= Sjugirov – Gabrielian, Vladivostok 2014.

12...bxc6 13.e2!

The simplest way to force the queen exchange. Most of the games from this position have been from correspondence play, from which White has scored one win and the rest draws. I would expect a higher winning percentage to occur from over-the-board games, as the task of defending a worse endgame becomes much easier when you have a computer to assist you. At the same time, there are still some specific ideas from Black that we need to address.

13.b3 led to a victory for White in Guliyev – Ducarmon, Hilversum 2012, but Black was outrated by nearly 500 points. Besides, the improvement 13...b4!?N 14.d2 c5 15.xb4 xb4+ 16.d2 xd2+ 17.xd2 b7 gives Black a relatively comfortable version of the endgame. One of the recurring themes of these endgames is that White should try not to allow Black to exchange the dark-squared bishops, as this will make his defensive task so much easier. Of course he is still slightly passive, and White can keep playing for a while, but the most likely outcome is that Black will go on to draw from a slightly worse rook endgame after ...0–0–0 and ...c5.

Black has tried two other moves:

15...0–0–0? is an attempt to seize the initiative in return for the c6-pawn. 16.xc6 b4† 17.c3 c5 In Gruenenwald – Schuh, Germany 1988, White should have played:

15...b7

This seems a little too passive.

16.e3 e7 17.h5 0–0–0 18.d1!!

Chapter 18 – 7...dc6

18...exd1+ 19.exd1 a5
Another plan is: 19...c5N 20.dxe7+ dxe7 21.dxe2 dc6 22.b3 ed8 (22...a5 23.a4+ leaves Black’s a-pawn too weak) 23.c4± Black just has to sit and wait while White shuffles around and improves his position. Maybe c2-c4 wasn’t even required – but you get the idea.
20.b3 ed8 21.dxe2 dc7 22.dxe4 f6 23.f4+
White went on to win in Skiba – Lizorkina, email 2011. The a5-pawn is an additional target, and the g4-g5 break is in the air.

16.de3 c5
I also found an engine game featuring an interesting idea from Black:
16...e7? 17.xa7
17.h5 d6! is annoying, as White is forced to take an inferior version of the main line. 18.d1 c5 19.b3 The d1 move is simply a wasted tempo – and in the main line, I even prefer to avoid b2-b3 as well.
17.xh4 18.d4N
18.c3 c5 19.a4 0–0 was about equal in Bouquet – Komodo, engine game 2014. The computer might not think it’s a big deal to leave the bishop on a7 – but returning it to the centre seems to me like an obvious improvement.
After the text move White may not achieve anything fantastic right away, but the bishop is well-placed and the queenside pawns should advance smoothly. Because of the structure of the pawns on the kingside, it will be hard for Black to create passed pawns there – at least without leaving weaknesses behind.

18...0–0
18...f6 19.xf6 gxf6 20.dh1
19.a4 c5 20.xc3 xg5 21.xf1 xf1
21.xb7 22.a5±
22.xf1±
Black’s defence is not easy at all. Obviously these moves were not all forced, but White’s moves are natural enough and his position is inherently easier to play.

17.d1
White can also start with 17.h5N; it makes no great difference.

17...e7 18.h5 f6
18...b5 has also been played but it lacks a clear idea, as exchanging the bishops with ...c6 would not be in Black’s favour. In Royer – Blomstroom, corr. 2000, White could have got an edge with:

19...b7?N Just provoking a slight misplacement of Black’s rook. (19.b3 c4\textsuperscript{2})
19...c4 White can consider f2-f4 in the near future. Play may continue 20...c6
21.xc6t exc6 22.e2t with a typical edge for White.

19.c3!
19.b3 has the drawback of allowing 19...c3t! (19...0-0? 20.c4\textsuperscript{3}; 19...c4 20.b4t)
20.d2 xd2t 21.xd2 e7 and, as usual, the removal of the dark-squared bishops eases Black’s defence considerably. For instance, after 22.c4 hd8t 23.e3 xd1 24.xd1 d8 Black should hold the bishop endgame easily enough. Had the dark-squared bishops been left on the board instead of the light-squared ones, it would be a completely different story.

The text move is better. As you will have gathered from the comments above, our dark-squared bishop is a great asset: it has numerous targets, and it may well be able to dominate its counterpart in a pure bishop endgame. On the other hand, the bishop on a6 is a pain, and restricts our activity considerably – so we would very much like to exchange it.

20.f4 allows Black to obtain enough counterplay: 20...b8! 21.d2 d8 22.xd8t xd8 23.b3 a5 24.f2 xc3 25.xc5 d8=

20.d2tN is an interesting alternative. The king would seem ideally placed on c2, as it not only defends against ...b8 ideas, but would also be ready to spring into action after potential rook exchanges. However, there is a concrete problem: 20...d8t 21.c2 d4! Once again, exchanging the dark-squared bishops alleviates Black’s troubles. At the same time, the fact that Black must rely on such tricks gives us reason to be suspicious of his position. Will he always have such a ‘lucky’ break available? We are under no obligation to play d2-c2 just yet, so instead we can look for other ways to improve our position, and wait for a more suitable opportunity for the king walk.

19...0-0 20.f1!
Continuing with the plan.

20.f1 allows 20...d8! 21.d2 d8 22.xd8t xd8 23.b3 a5 24.f2 xc3 25.xc5 d8=

20...xc6
20...xf1 is too compliant: 21.f1 b8 22.c1 fd8 23.e2 f8 24.xd8t xd8 25.e3 e7 26.d1t and we are close to our ideal bishop endgame.
Preserving the better of Black’s bishops is quite logical, but we can easily continue regrouping.

21. \( \text{c}4 \)

21. \( \text{g}5? \) is an interesting alternative which seems to lead to some pressure, but I don’t see any special reason to change the structure so radically.

The text move prepares \( \text{e}2 \) with full coordination, so Black only has one challenging reply.

21. \( \text{f}3 \)

21. ..\( \text{f}8 \) 22. \( \text{xd}8 \) \( \text{xd}8 \) 23. \( \text{e}2 \)

21. \( \text{e}2 \)

22. \( \text{d}2 \) is tempting, but 22...\( \text{e}5! \) is yet another awkward-looking move which narrowly enables Black to maintain the balance. My main line continues 23. \( \text{e}2! \) \( \text{h}2! \) (23...\( \text{b}7 \) 24.\( \text{f}4 \)) 24.\( \text{x}f3 \) \( \text{g}1 \) 25.\( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{g}5 \) 26.\( \text{d}6 \) \( \text{d}8 \) 27.\( \text{b}7 \) \( \text{d}6 \) 28.\( \text{xd}6 \) \( \text{c}7 \) and Black should hold.

22. \( \text{d}5 \)

22...\( \text{b}7 \) 23.\( \text{f}4 \)

23.\( \text{c}4 \) \( \text{b}7 \) 24.\( \text{b}3 \)

Black still can’t take over the d-file, and we are ready to advance with f2-f4 and g4-g5 – or even g4-g5 without further preparation.

24...\( \text{f}d8 \) 25.\( \text{xd}8 \) \( \text{xd}8 \) 26.\( \text{d}3 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 27.\( \text{e}2 \) Intending f2-f4.

21. \( \text{d}2! \)

Now this works perfectly because the plan of ...\( \text{d}8 \) followed by ...\( \text{d}4 \) is no longer possible.

21. \( \text{b}8 \)

21...\( \text{d}8 \) 22.\( \text{c}2 \)

22.\( \text{c}2 \) \( \text{xf}1 \) 23.\( \text{gx}f1 \) \( \text{b}7 \) 24.\( \text{f}4 \)

Black went on to draw in Aldrete Lobo – Acevedo Villalba, corr. 2006, but a practical game is a completely different situation. Black has many things to worry about, and I would not fancy his position at all.
This move has a completely different character to the previous option. The queens generally stay on the board for a while, and there will usually follow opposite-sided castling and many complications. We will need to work to prove our advantage; but at the same time, Black runs a greater risk of being blown off the board.

11...e3

11...e2† e7 12.e3 would have been nice to avoid ...xh4 ideas, but Black can suddenly change direction with 12...a5†! 13.c3 d7, as first played in Schlosser – Schuh, Bad Neuenahr 1987. It’s not easy for us to castle, and Black might benefit from the option of putting his own king on the queenside.

Black has two main options: C21) 11...e7 and C22) 11...xh4. Other moves give White a free hand to do whatever he wants, for instance:

11...d7N 12.e2 e7 13.0–0–0†
11...d6 12.d2 0–0 13.0–0–0 xh4 14.e5 xf5 15.gxf5– Simmelink – Peto, email 2007.
Chapter 18 – 7...\(\text{Qc6}\)

C21) 11...\(\text{Qe7}\)

\[\text{Diagram:} \]

12.\(\text{Qd2}\)

Of course we don’t care about the h4-pawn.

12...\(\text{Qxh4}\)

12...\(\text{Qe5?!}\) 13...\(\text{Qc2}\) does not help Black at all: 13...\(\text{Qxh4}\) (13...\(\text{Qc4}\) 14...\(\text{Qxc4}\) \(\text{dxc4}\) 15.0–0–0 \(\text{Qxh4}\) 16.g5 gave White a huge attack in Menkov – Savitskiy, St Petersburg 2015) 14.0–0–0 \(\text{Qf6}\) 15.\(\text{Qc4}\) \(\text{Qxc4}\) 16.\(\text{Qxc4}\) \(\text{dxc4}\) In Demchenko – Savitskiy, Moscow 2015, the strongest of several promising continuations would have been:

\[\text{Diagram:} \]

12...0–0 13.0–0–0 (13.g5 \(\text{h5}\) 14.0–0–0 \(\text{g6}\) 15.\(\text{Qb1}\) \(\text{Qe6?!}\) 16.\(\text{Qxe6}\) \(\text{fxe6}\) 17.\(\text{Qh3}\) was also good for White in Hracek – Babula, Rijeka 2010) 13...\(\text{Qe5}\) (13...\(\text{Qxh4}\) seems better, but it leads straight to the main line below)

14.g5 h5 In Macieja – D. Fernandez, Mexico City 2012, White had several good options, but 15...\(\text{Qe2}\) \(\text{Qc6}\) 16.\(\text{Qge1}\) seems simple and strong.

13.0–0–0 0–0

13...\(\text{Qxd4}\) 14.\(\text{Qxd4}\) 0–0 occurred in Nieminen – C. Berczes, Budapest 2000, when White should have played:

\[\text{Diagram:} \]

15.\(\text{Qd3}\)! Intending \(\text{f2-f4}\) and \(g4-g5\). If Black tries to simplify with 15...\(\text{Qf6}\), then 16.\(\text{Qxf6}\) \(\text{Qxf6}\) 17.g5 \(\text{hgx5}\) 18.\(\text{Qxg5}\) gives White a winning attack.

14.\(\text{Qxc6?!}\)

This seems simplest to me, although White has other good options, including the untested 14.\(\text{Qd3}\)\(\text{Qf6}\).
14...bxc6 15.g5 hxg5

15...fxe5?! 16.gxh6 g6 is not much of a blockade: 17.Wc3 f6 18.d4 exd4 19.exd4 f6 20.d3±

16...hxg5 17.hxg5 f6 18.g3 f5

19.d3! xd3 20.h6!

Improving over a previous game, in which 20.xd3 e8 21.f5 was agreed drawn in Pitkaenen – Sciallero, corr. 2009.

20...e7

20...e7 21.h1! g5 22.cxd3 fb8 23.f3 is winning for White.

21.h1 e7 22.h8+ f7 23.gxh7+ e6

24.xc7+ xc7 25.g7+ d6 26.g3±

Even if Black avoids losing by force, there is nothing but suffering ahead for him. In Yakovlev – Recky, email 2010, White went on to convert his initiative into a winning endgame.

C22) 11...xh4??

This has occurred in fewer games than the previous variation, but I consider it the more critical move.

12.e2!!

Not the most popular or fashionable move, but I like it. The idea is simply to complete development and then play on the kingside. Compared with the more popular 12.f3, there are a few subtle differences in the event that Black tries to force a queen exchange.

Before going any further, I will show you why I was not quite satisfied with the two main alternatives, even though White has done quite well with them in practice.

12.b5 h2! (White would be happy after 12...d7 13.e2 followed by 0–0–0) 13.f4? N (13.d2 was okay for Black in Van den Doel–Sethuraman, Haarlem 2013) 13...h4+ (13...b4? 14.c3 c5 also deserves attention) 14.f2 e7+ 15.f1 d7∞ White’s set-up is less than ideal.
Chapter 18 – 7...\texttt{c6}

12.\texttt{f3 \texttt{xd}4 13.\texttt{x}d4 \texttt{e7}! 14.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{e}4}

Black wants to force the queens off the board and then give back his extra pawn in order to complete development and reach a drawish endgame.

15.0–0–0

15.\texttt{c3 \texttt{e6} 16.\texttt{d}2 \texttt{d}6 17.f3 \texttt{f}4 18.\texttt{xg7 \texttt{xd}2+ 19.\texttt{x}d2 \texttt{f}4+ 20.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{g}8 21.\texttt{d}4 \texttt{f}5= Inarkiev – Xu Yinglun, China 2015. 15...\texttt{xf}3 16.\texttt{xf}3 \texttt{e}6}

A similar position can arise after 11.\texttt{e}2, but in that case we have the additional option of \texttt{f4f5}, which feels important.

17.\texttt{g}1\texttt{e}1 \texttt{d}7

18.\texttt{c}4?N

18.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{b}6 19.\texttt{e}5 \texttt{e}8 was equal in Verrelli – Tassone, email 2014. The text move is my best try for an advantage in this line, but Black seems to be okay after accurate defence. My main line continues:

18...\texttt{c}8 19.b3 \texttt{h}5!

After 19...\texttt{b}5 20.\texttt{x}d5 \texttt{xd}5 21.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{bxc}4 22.\texttt{x}d5+ \texttt{c}6 23.\texttt{bxc}4 it is not so easy for Black to continue developing.

20.\texttt{gxh}5 \texttt{b}5

Black’s king is awkwardly stuck in the centre but there is no way to exploit it.

21.\texttt{c}3 \texttt{bxc}4 22.\texttt{xd}5 \texttt{d}6!

Intending to meet \texttt{xg}7 with ...\texttt{xh}5.

23.\texttt{x}e6+ \texttt{xe}6 24.\texttt{b}4 \texttt{cx}b3+ 25.\texttt{b}2 \texttt{c}6 26.\texttt{g}1 \texttt{h}7 27.\texttt{xb}3 \texttt{c}7

Black should make a draw without much drama.

Against my recommended move Black may try C221) 12...\texttt{e}7 or C222) 12...\texttt{x}d4!.

C221) 12...\texttt{e}7
Castling on the kingside is bound to be dangerous for Black, especially as his last move also blocks off some of the queen’s potential retreat squares.

13.0–0–0 0–0 14.\textit{f3}

White would maintain decent compensation after a quiet move like 14.\textit{b1N}, but the text gives Black an unpleasant choice between an unfavourable endgame or allowing the g-file to be opened.

14...\textit{f6}

14...\textit{xe4} 15.\textit{xe4} \textit{xe2} 16.\textit{xe2} \textit{xe4} 17.\textit{xe6} \textit{f6} 18.\textit{xd5} \textit{d8} 19.\textit{xd8}+ \textit{xd8} 20.\textit{c3}+ gave White a pleasant endgame edge thanks to the two bishops in Figlio – Perez, corr. 2001.

15.\textit{g5} \textit{h} \textit{5} 16.\textit{xe5} \textit{f5}

16...\textit{d6} 17.\textit{xe3} \textit{f5} 18.\textit{h4}+ 17.\textit{xe7} \textit{e} \textit{8}

White probably has a few ways to get a nice initiative, but the following line seems simplest.

18.\textit{d2} \textit{xe7}+ \textit{N}

This is the computer’s top choice, and it seems a good attempt to improve Black’s play.

18...\textit{xe7} 19.\textit{g3} \textit{xe5} 20.\textit{xe5} \textit{xe5} occurred in Timmerman – Van Wely, Netherlands 1993, when White could have got a clear advantage with 21.\textit{d3}N followed by \textit{d} \textit{g} \textit{1}.

19.\textit{h5} \textit{d8}

19...\textit{d7}? loses to 20.\textit{d4}.

20.\textit{g5} \textit{f6} 21.\textit{f4} \textit{f5} 22.\textit{h2} \textit{ac8} 23.\textit{d3}→

White’s attack is worth more than a pawn.

C222) 12...\textit{xd4}!

The strongest defence. Black needs to respond with concrete play, and exchanging the queens is his best chance.

13.\textit{xd4}+ \textit{e7}
14. \( \text{wx} \text{e7} \text{N} \)

14...\( \text{wx} \text{e}7 \) 15. \( \text{xe} \text{2} \) \( \text{e}6 \) occurred in Grobler – Kral, corr. 2006. I want to get an improved version of the endgame, where Black's king will be awkwardly placed on e7 – even if only temporarily.

14. \( \text{xe}3 \text{N} \) is the move I would have wanted to play, but after 14...\( \text{b}4 \text{t} \) (14...\( \text{e}6 \) 15.0-0-0 \( \text{c}7 \) 16.\( \text{f}6 \)\( \pm \)) 15.\( \text{c}3 \) (15.\( \text{d}2 \text{t} \) \( \text{e}4 \)) 15...\( \text{a}4 \) it is hard for White to get coordinated. The position could certainly be analysed further, but I think Black is okay.

14...\( \text{xe}7 \)

14...\( \text{xe}7 \) 15.\( \text{xg}7 \) \( \text{g}8 \) 16.\( \text{xh}6 \) \( \text{xg}4 \) 17.\( \text{b}5 \text{t} \) \( \text{d}8 \) 18.0-0-0 reaches a position with equal material and an obvious initiative for White.

15.0-0-0 \( \text{e}6 \)

15...b6 16.\( \text{b}5 \text{t} \) creates some annoying threats. 16...\( \text{e}6 \) 17.\( \text{f}4 \text{f} \)

White's plan should be to win the d5-pawn – which will not be too hard – and to block the kingside structure with f4-f5. The idea is to leave Black with an immobile pawn majority on the kingside, which will make future endgames quite unpleasant for him, even with limited material.

17.f5 \( \text{f}7 \) 18.\( \text{g}2 \) \( \text{d}7 \) (18...\( \text{h}5 \) 19.\( \text{h}1 \text{t} \)) 19.\( \text{f}2 \) \( \text{c}6 \) makes it harder for us to win the d-pawn.

17...\( \text{d}7 \)

17...\( \text{f}7 \) 18.\( \text{g}2 \text{t} \) enables White to carry out his plan easily enough.

The most important alternative to consider is: 17...\( \text{h}5 \)!

Black tries to break open the kingside by force, but it is too optimistic to play this way with his king in such a bad position.

18.\( \text{f}5 \)!

18.\( \text{g}2 \text{h}x \text{g}4 \) 19.\( \text{f}5 \) \( \text{f}7 \) is solid enough for Black.

18...\( \text{f}7 \) 19.\( \text{h} \text{h}1 \) \( \text{g}6 \)

20.\( \text{e} \text{e}1 \text{t} \) \( \text{d}7 \)

20...\( \text{d} \text{d}6 \)? 21.\( \text{g}3 \text{t} \) \( \text{c}6 \) 22.\( \text{f} \text{g}6 \) \( \text{xg}6 \) 23.\( \text{e}6 \text{t} \) wins.

20...\( \text{d} \text{d}6 \) 21.\( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 22.g5\( \pm \) is highly unpleasant for Black.

21.\( \text{b} \text{b}5 \text{t} \) \( \text{d}6 \)

Also after 21...\( \text{c}7 \) 22.\( \text{f} \text{g}6 \) \( \text{xg}6 \) 23.\( \text{e} \text{e}6 \) there are constant threats against Black's king, as well as his pawns.

22.b4?!

The king does not receive a moment's respite!

The last move threatens \( \text{g}3 \text{t} \).

22...\( \text{c}7 \) 23.\( \text{f} \text{g}6 \) \( \text{xg}6 \) 24.\( \text{e} \text{e}6 \)

Compared with the 21...\( \text{c}7 \) line above, Black is helped by the inclusion of b2-b4,
but he is still a long way from equality.  
24...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xb4 25.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{g}}}}3\textsuperscript{f} 26.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xf6+ 
The king remains awkwardly stuck.  

26.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd6 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd6 27.b4! The ensuing pawn endgame is winning for White, as he is effectively a pawn up.  

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard1.png}
\end{figure}

18.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{g}}}}2 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{d}}}}d6 19.f5 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{f}}}}7 20.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd5 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd5  
21.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd5 
This position might look close to equal at first, but Black still faces a tough battle for a draw. The main reason is that the kingside structure makes any bishop or pawn endgame a risky proposition for Black, as his pawn majority will be essentially neutralized. Another important point is that Black does not have time to free his kingside with \ldots h5, as there are too many threats in the centre. 

21...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{c}}}}c6  
21...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{c}}}}c7? 22.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{g}}}}d1 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{a}}}}8d8 allows a simple trick:  

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard2.png}
\end{figure}

22.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{g}}}}d1 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{a}}}}ad8  
22...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{e}}}}5?? 23.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{c}}}}c5\textsuperscript{f} wins immediately.  

23.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{e}}}}d4  
Threatening a nasty check on c4.  

23...b6  
23...h5 24.gxh5 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xh5 25.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{g}}}}g3 wins the exchange.  

24.b4  
We have already seen in an earlier note that a pawn endgame may prove fatal for Black. A bishop endgame could be similarly tough for him, because White will still be effectively a pawn up, and all of Black's kingside pawns will be fixed on dark squares.  

24...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{c}}}}c7  
Black will have to relieve the tension along the \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{d}}}}-file at some point.  

24...b5 25.c4\textsuperscript{f}  

25.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{e}}}}xd8 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{g}}}}xd8  
After 25...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd8? 26.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd8 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{x}}}}xd8 27.c4 Black will have to suffer for a long time, if he can
survive at all. After some thinking time, even the computer’s assessment changes drastically to say that White is close to winning. The continuation might be:

27...\[e7 28.b5+ \[d6 29.c2+ Black’s problem is not only that his pawn majority is crippled, but also that his kingside pawns are sitting ducks. I don’t think it’s necessary to take up space trying to prove that White is winning, as Black’s defensive task is much too unpleasant for anyone to want to defend this particular endgame.

Keeping a pair of rooks on the board is a better defensive strategy, but Black’s position remains unpleasant and ...h5 is still unlikely to work because of the simple $h1.

26.a4
26.c4? We are a long way out of the opening and of course these moves were not all forced – but I think I have succeeded in showing that the early queen exchange does not guarantee Black an easy path to a draw.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the 6...h6 7.h4 \[c6 branch of the Keres Attack, where we start by playing 8.g1 to prepare g4-g5. Both 8...\[d7 and 8...h5 – the latter of which is the old main line – lead to a thematic structure where White’s g-pawn is traded for Black’s h-pawn. Theoretically this leaves White with a weakened structure, but practically he has great chances due to his considerable piece activity and safer king.

8...d5 is the main line nowadays, when 9.exd5 \[x\[x5 10.x\[x5 leads to an important branching point. After 10...\[x\[x5 11.g2, the two main options of 11...\[e5+ and 11...\[c4 both lead to a number of theoretical intricacies. However, with careful play, White can generally look forward to a lasting advantage in a simplified position with the better pawn structure. By contrast, 10...exd5 11.e3 leads to a sharper type of game, where White is happy to sacrifice the h4-pawn in order to accelerate his development and launch an attack. Black’s best equalizing attempt looks to be 11...\[xh4? 12.e2 \[x\[x4! 13.x\[x4+ \[e7, but I believe 14.\[e7\[e7N to be an important refinement which should keep Black under pressure for a long time to come.
Sidelines

2...d6

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6

3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 f6 5.c3

A) 5...e5
B) 5...bd7
C) 5...d7? 6.g5 e6 7.d2
   C1) 7...e7
   C2) 7...a6
   C3) 7...h6!

A) after 11...e7

C1) after 9...b5

C2) note to 10...g5

12.d3!N

10.e5!N

12.gb5!N
Chapter 19 – 2...d6

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6
Black’s sidelines after 2...c6 will be covered in Chapter 20, and those after 2...e6 in Chapter 21. All other second moves can be found in Chapter 22.

3.d4 cxd4
3...d6 4.c3 hardly leaves Black with anything better than taking on d4. Other weird alternatives on moves 3 and 4 are not worth our time.

4:cxd4 d6 5.c3

This chapter will deal with three significant sidelines: A) 5...e5, B) 5...d5 and C) 5...d7?

A) 5...e5 6.b5†

There is a reason why 5...a6 is such a popular move...

6.d7 7.d7† d7 8.de2

Having traded off the light-squared bishops, our natural plan will be to play g5 followed by xf6 at some point. Ideally, this will lead to a thematic good-knight-against-bad-bishop scenario.

8...c6
8...g4 prevents the g5 plan, but such pawn-hunting in the opening is unlikely to end well for Black. 9.d3! xg2 10.xg1 xh2 11.b5? (11.g5 d7 12.xf6 xf6 13.wf3 was also promising for White in Berg–Becker, Germany 2014)

11.a6 12.g5 d5 13.exd5 c5 14.wf5 d7 15.0–0–0 g6 16.wf3 f6 17.e3± Fire – Naum, engine game 2014.

9.g3 d7 10.g5 g6 11.0–0 e7

12.wd3!N
12.xf6 xf6 13.wd3 0–0 14.f4 f8 15.f1± was pleasant for White in Wan–Bitoon, Manila 2013, but there is no need to take on f6 so soon.

12...0–0 13.wf1
White can exchange on f6 whenever he feels like it, but it makes sense to postpone it for a few more moves, as the bishop on g5 is quite annoying for Black. In the meantime, White's last move prepared d5-e3, with complete control over the d5-square.

B) 5...bd7

This is a reasonably popular sideline, but it is rather early to commit the knight. In the Najdorf, for instance, there are plenty of variations in which the knight turns out to be better placed on c6, and several others in which Black plays ...e5 and ...e6 before putting the knight on d7. We could easily get a good version of an English Attack, but I like the following continuation even more:

6.g4!

Not only did Black's last move make this advance possible by blocking the c8-bishop; it also increases the impact of g4-g5 by blocking the natural retreat square of the f6-knight.

6...h6

6...c5 7.f3± leaves the knight misplaced on c5.

7.h4?

7...e3 has been the usual choice.

7...a6N

7...xb6 was played in Milman – Arnold, Lubbock 2011, when 8.g1N followed by g4-g5 would have given White a great game.

7...e5 runs into 8.g1!± when the pawn cannot be captured: 8...xg4 9.xg4! fxg4 10.b5+–

8.g1

Just as in the Keres Attack, we should aim for g4-g5 as quickly as possible.

8...g2 9.g5 hxg5 10.hxg5 xh1 11.xh1 h5 12.e3 e5 does not seem quite so convincing.

8...g6

Black has to play this to prevent g5-g6, but having the knight on h5 won't help.

9.g5 hxg5 10.hxg5 h5 11.e3 g7 12.d2 b5 13.0–0–0 b7 14.b1+ White's position is both objectively better and easy to play.
This is actually a fairly sensible option which deserves to be played more. Perhaps the main reason why it isn’t so popular is that the Classical Rauzer – the ‘parent variation’ on which this line is based – is not particularly fashionable these days. Here Black tries to get a better version of that system, but he definitely needs to be well versed in the typical plans and motifs in the Classical Rauzer.

6...e6

In the overwhelming majority of games, Black has either played this move or transposed straight to a Rauzer with 6...c6. A few weird alternatives have been tried but I don’t see much point in listing them, as Black will generally have to play either ...e6 or ...c6 pretty soon in order to progress his development.

6...g5

Playing in the same style as the Rauzer.

6.f3!? could be a good option for a player whose repertoire includes the English Attack. However, after 6...e5 we will reach a drastically different type of position from my recommendations against the Najdorf and Classical systems. I don’t see the point in studying such things just to play against a rare sideline.

6...d6

We will analyse three moves: C1) 7...e7 is a natural developer; C2) 7...a6 is the most popular move; and C3) 7...h6!? is possibly the most precise.

C1) 7...e7

The problem with this move is that the tactical trick involving ...h6 and ...dxe4 will hardly ever work for Black. Therefore White can just continue playing in the style of the Rauzer, and Black will either have to transpose to one of those lines, or play something clearly more awkward.

8.0-0-0 a6

8...e5 9.f4 c6 transposes to the Classical Rauzer – see page 202 of my previous Sicilian volume.

9.f4 b5

9...c6 is another Rauzer transposition – see page 250 of 1.e4 vs The Sicilian II.

As I mentioned earlier, 9...h6 can be met by the simple 10.h4, as the ...dxe4 trick does not work. I don’t see anything better for Black than transposing to a Rauzer line with ...c6 in the near future.
Surprisingly, this strong move has not yet been tested.

10...dxe5
10...b4 11.exf6 gxf6 (11...bxc3 12.\textit{W}xc3 gxf6 13.\textit{W}h6+ and Black's development remains difficult) 12.\textit{W}e4 fxg5 13.fxg5 d5 14.\textit{W}f6+ \textit{xf6} 15.gxf6 \textit{xf6} 16.\textit{W}xb4+

11.exf6 lile5 lild5 12.lile4 lile7 13.lie4 0–0
14.lld3 \textit{xc6} 15.lxc6 lxc6
15...lxc6 16.lle4+ is excellent for White. The text move is the one Black would prefer to play, but it allows something even worse.

9.\textit{W}h6 \textit{g8} 20.lle8+
Black must give up his queen to avoid an immediate mate.

C2) 7...a6 8.0–0–0 h6

9.lld4!
9.lle6 \textit{xf6} is fine for Black; I don't see the point in giving away the dark-squared bishop for no reason. Of course, we also need to take into account the following pawn grab.

9...llee4
9...\textit{c6} would transpose to the normal Classical Rauzer positions after 10.f4 – see page 244 of the previous volume.

10.lle5 lld5
This was the only move to have been tested up until quite recently.

10...\textit{f6}?
I first analysed this as a novelty, but then it was tested towards the end of 2015 and repeated in another game a few months later.

11.llead5
In the stem game, Krishnan – A. Rombaldoni, Las Vegas 2015, White played 12.\textit{W}xd8 \textit{xf4} and went on to lose the endgame. We have two ways to improve on that game, each leading to a different type of struggle.
This move is definitely the most fun.

12...\(\text{d}6 13.\text{c}3\) occurred in Haast – Van Foreest, Wijk aan Zee 2016. It's not clear to me if White stands better here or not. His pieces are certainly more active, but it could just be a transient edge unless he finds a concrete way to pose Black problems.

12...\(\text{x}b5\)!

12...\(\text{axb}5\) 13.\(\text{xd}6\) \(g5\) (13...\(f6\) 14.\(\text{xf}6\) \(gxf6\)
15.\(\text{xf}6\) \(e7\) 16.\(\text{xb}5\)! puts Black's king in huge danger) 14.\(\text{xf}6\) \(e7\) 15.\(\text{xd}5\) \(hxg5\) 16.\(\text{xd}5\) \(a5\) (16...\(\text{d}8\) 17.\(\text{d}3\)\(+\)) 17.\(\text{b}4\)!
\(a3\)\(+\) 18.\(\text{d}1\) The white king has escaped from the immediate threats, but the black one will not find it so easy:

18...\(\text{a}6\) (18...\(\text{xa}2\) 19.\(\text{d}5\)\(+\) \(e8\)
20.\(\text{c}7\#\); 18...\(\text{c}6\) 19.\(\text{d}5\)\(+\)\(-\)) 19.\(\text{d}3\)!
\(\text{xa}2\) 20.\(\text{c}1\)! (20.\(\text{h}7\)\(+\) \(e8\) 21.\(\text{xf}8\) \(\text{a}1\)\(+\)
22.\(\text{d}2\) \(\text{e}5\)\(+\)) 20...\(\text{c}6\) 21.\(\text{h}7\)\(+\) \(e8\)

White's position seems more pleasant, but it's not easy to make progress. I think White should aim to make it harder for Black to get his second rook out, and in the meantime continue adding pressure on the queenside.

White can continue to press without any real risk.

11.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{c}7\) 12.\(\text{f}4\)

12.\(\text{d}3\) \(\text{c}6\) 13.\(\text{f}4\) \(\text{b}6\)\(+\) makes White's life harder. (13...\(\text{h}7\) 14.\(\text{xe}7\) \(\text{xe}7\) 15.\(\text{d}7\)
\(\text{xe}7\) 16.\(\text{f}5\)\(+\) Zinchenko – Smirnov,
Rethymnon 2010) 14.\textit{xf}2 \textit{xd}4 15.\textit{xd}4 \textit{xd}4 16.\textit{xd}4 \textit{h}7 17.\textit{xg}7 \textit{g}8 18.\textit{d}4 \textit{f}5 Black has a solid position and intends ...\textit{fg}6, perhaps followed by ...\textit{d}5 and ...\textit{e}4.

12...\textit{h}7 13.\textit{xe}7 \textit{xe}7

14.\textit{g}4!
Black is still a pawn up but he will struggle to finish development; and castling on the kingside will always be a dangerous decision.

14...\textit{f}6
14...\textit{c}6 15.\textit{g}1\uparrow
14...\textit{c}6 15.\textit{g}2 \textit{c}8\uparrow!N seems like a reasonable attempt to avoid giving us a target. (15...0–0 16.h4 \textit{f}6 was played in Marholev – Markovic, Novi Sad 2016, when 17.\textit{f}3\uparrow would have been the logical way to prepare \textit{g}4–\textit{g}5.) 16.\textit{g}1\uparrow! (16.\textit{h}4\uparrow could also be considered) 16...0–0

15.\textit{g}2 \textit{c}6
15...\textit{xg}4?? 16.\textit{xf}3 wins.

16.\textit{f}1\uparrow 0–0
16...\textit{xf}4 17.\textit{g}3\uparrow

16...0–0–0 can be met by the simple 17.\textit{h}4\uparrow when the black king remains vulnerable.

17.\textit{g}5! \textit{hxg}5 18.\textit{xf}5 \textit{xe}7 19.\textit{xe}7 \textit{c}6 20.\textit{xc}6 \textit{bxc}6 21.\textit{gxf}5 \textit{d}5 22.\textit{d}1\uparrow Despite Black's better structure on the king side, he is struggling because he can't really attack the white pawns, whereas White will find it easier to go after Black's queenside targets.
18...\textit{h7} 19.g6 fxg6 20.\textit{d5} \textit{w7} 21.\textit{xe6} \textit{wx6} 22.\textit{wx6}\textasciitilde \textit{xe6} 23.\textit{xe6}\textasciitilde

\textbf{19.\textit{g3} \textit{xe5}† 20.\textit{d1}}

White had a strong initiative for the two sacrificed pawns in Roberts – Daurelle, email 2009.

\textbf{C3) 7...h6!?}

By hitting the bishop immediately, Black effectively rules out the option of retreating to \textit{h4}.

\textbf{8.\textit{xf6}}

8.\textit{h4}? \textit{fxe4}! 9.\textit{w4} \textit{fxf6} leaves White without a convincing follow-up, as 10.\textit{xe4} can be met by 10...\textit{wa5}†.

8.\textit{d3} is another idea which takes the game in a different direction, but I want to try and exploit the absence of ...\textit{a6}.

8...\textit{xf6} 9.\textit{db5}!

9.0–0–0 \textit{a6}! would give Black an ideal position.

The text move is the main reason why it's more common for Black to play 7...\textit{a6}. Now we can force him into a completely different kind of position, although things are still far from easy.

\textbf{9...\textit{xb5} 10.\textit{xb5}†}

10.\textit{xb5}?! \textit{wxb2} 11.\textit{a6} 12.\textit{xd6}† \textit{xd6} 13.\textit{xd6} \textit{w4} 14.\textit{xb4} \textit{xb4} 15.\textit{b5}† \textit{c6} 16.\textit{xc6}† \textit{bxc6} 17.\textit{ind} \textit{c8} gave White a tiny, risk-free endgame edge in Hovhannisyan – Ter Sahakyan, Chennai 2011, but Black's drawing margin is too wide for me to recommend this path.

10...\textit{c6} 11.0–0–0 \textit{a6} 12.\textit{xc6}† \textit{bxc6}

This position has barely been tested so there is a lot to discover. After studying it for a while, I came up with a promising new idea:

\textbf{13.\textit{he1}!?}

13.\textit{f4} \textit{d8}! (13...\textit{e7} 14.\textit{e5} seems risky for Black) gives White a few options, but so far he
Sidelines

has not managed to pose many problems out of the opening:

a) 14.\( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{b}8 \) followed by ...\( \text{b}6 \) was tested in the stem game, Bagi - Lehmann, Pardubice 2015. I think the endgame is slightly better for White but I prefer the version we get in our main line, as we are able to provoke ...\( c5 \) there — whereas here the pawn stays on \( c6 \), which gives Black the annoying possibility of ...\( d5 \) at some point in the future.

b) Not long afterwards Leko tried to build a middlegame initiative with 14.g4?, but after:

\[ \begin{array}{cccccccc} 8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\ \\ a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\ \\ \end{array} \]

14...\( \text{c}5 \)

This is a small but significant concession. Black effectively rules out any possibility of playing ...\( d5 \) later, which means we can calmly go for the endgame and manoeuvre patiently.

14...\( \text{b}8 \) is an obvious move to consider, but now we get to see the big advantage of \( \text{h}1 \) over \( \text{f}2 \): 15.\( \text{e}3! \) \( \text{b}6 \) 16.\( \text{e}2! \) Suddenly the e3-rook is perfectly placed to put pressure on Black’s queenside.

13...\( \text{e}8 \)

13...\( \text{e}7? \) 14.\( e5 \) \( dxe5 \) 15.\( \text{d}7? \) \( \text{f}8 \)

16.\( \text{xc}6? \) is obviously not a good idea for Black.

13...\( \text{g}6 \) misplaces the queen, which becomes especially clear after 14.\( f4 \) \( \text{e}7 \) 15.\( \text{e}3 \).

14.\( \text{d}4 \)

Black must decide how to solve the problem of his undeveloped kingside.

\[ \begin{array}{cccccccc} 8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\ \\ a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\ \\ \end{array} \]

16...\( \text{xd}4 \) 17.\( \text{xd}4 \) (17.\( \text{xd}4? \) \( d5 \) 17...\( \text{e}7? \) 18.\( \text{a}4 \) \( \text{b}6 \) 19.\( \text{b}3? \) 18.\( \text{ex}d5 \) \( \text{xc}5 \) might be better for White somehow, but there is no need for us to play a double-edged position with a couple of pawns for the exchange.) 17...\( \text{d}7 \) (17...\( \text{b}6 \) 18.\( \text{dd}3? \) 18.\( \text{f}3 \) \( f6 \) 19.\( \text{b}3? \) Black’s pawn structure is not nice at all.

14...\( \text{g}5? \) is a computer suggestion but it
seems terribly artificial. 15...b1 (15...e3 e7 16.e5 d5 17.f4 is playable, but I would rather have my king safely tucked away on b1, whereas it is not clear if the rook will be needed on the third rank) 15...e7 16.e5 d5

17.f4 g6 (17...xg2? 18.g1 xh2 19.xg7 f8 20.xg1† is a good example of why I rejected 15.e3. Here we have the extra move b1 rather than having lost a tempo with e3-g3xg7.) 18.g4! The black queen still seems awkwardly placed.

15..a4† d7 16.e3?! The various rook jumps along the third rank may prove quite annoying for Black.

19.b6† c7 20.c4 e8 21.red3 c6 22.f4±

Black's position is solid but there is no obvious way for him to get out of the bind, whereas White can continue improving his position without many worries.

Conclusion

After 2...d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xd4 f6 5.c3 Black does not have many noteworthy sidelines. Both 5...e5 and 5...bd7 have clear positional drawbacks, so 5...h6 is the only really serious option. White should proceed as in the Rauzer with 6.g5 e6 7.d2, while keeping in mind the many potential transpositions to my previous volume. Assuming Black avoids transposing with an early ...c6, his main idea is to play an early ...h6 to set up a ...xe4 tactic. I have shown some good ways to counter this plan, although the exact method will depend on whether Black plays ...h6 with or without a preliminary ...a6.
Sidelines

2...\(\text{\&c6}\)

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{\&f3}\) \(\text{\&c6}\)

3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\text{\&xd4}\)

A) 4...d5  
B) 4...\(\text{\&f6}\) 5.\(\text{\&c3}\) \(\text{\&b8}\)  
C) 4...\(\text{\&b6}\) 5.\(\text{\&b3}\) \(\text{\&f6}\) 6.\(\text{\&c3}\) e6 7.\(\text{\&e2}\)!

C1) 7...\(\text{\&c7}\)  
C2) 7...d6 8.g4

C21) 8...h6  
C22) 8...a6  
C3) 7...\(\text{\&b4}\) 8.\(\text{\&d2}\) 0–0 9.a3

C31) 9...\(\text{\&e7}\)  
C32) 9...\(\text{\&xc3}\)!

A) after 9...\(\text{\&c8}\)  
C21) after 13...\(\text{\&d7}\)  
C32) after 13...\(\text{\&c8}\)
1.e4 c5 2.d4 c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4
In this chapter we will start by examining the rare A) 4...d5, followed by the weird sideline B) 4...e6 5.dxc6 Axb8. The most important subject of the chapter, by far, will be C) 4...Bb6.

A) 4...d5 5.exd5!? 5...b5 is a popular move which should lead to an endgame advantage, but I like the idea of luring Black's queen into the centre and using our lead in development to develop a middlegame initiative.

5...Wxd5 6.e3

6...e6!? This has not been the most popular choice, but it seems natural and has been tested in some recent engine games.

6...e5 7.d3 Bb4 8.db5 is simply bad for Black.

6...e6 7.d3 Bb4 This has been Black's most popular choice but we can get excellent chances by targeting the dark squares.

8.g4! 8.db5 can be safely met by 8...f5! 9.a3 9.e7, intending ...a6 and ...Bc7, when Black's queen will be placed perfectly.

B) 4...e6 5.d4 c6 6.dxc6 Axc6

8...f6 8...ge7 9.fc6 Bxc6† 10.bxc6 Bxc6 11.xg7 Bg8 12.Bc5 Ad7 13.0-0-0 Zelcic – Saric, Stari Mikanovci 2011.


12.fc6!?N Continuing the dark-squared strategy by preparing to plonk the bishop on d6.


13.Bd6 Bxc3 14.Bb1† The bishop on d6 is a monster. Black's king is stuck in the centre, his extra pawn is not too relevant and he is unable to create serious counterplay on the queenside.
7.\( \text{c3} \) \( \text{a5} \) 8.\( \text{f3} \) \( \text{d7} \) 9.0-0-0 \( \text{c8} \)

10.\( \text{b3} \) \( \text{N} \)

10.\( \text{b5} \) was played in a few engine and correspondence games, but putting the bishop there seems pointless to me.

10...\( \text{c7} \) 11.\( \text{h3} \)

Preventing \( \text{f4} \) and asking Black how he intends to develop his kingside.

11...\( \text{a6} \)

This seems a little slow, but Black needs to guard the b5-square before playing ...e6.

In the event of 11...e6? 12.\( \text{b5} \) \( \text{b8} \) 13.\( \text{c5} \) Black’s position is already collapsing, for instance: 13...\( \text{a6} \) 14.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 15.\( \text{xd7} \)+

11...\( \text{b4} \) 12.\( \text{e2} \) e6 is not quite so bad, but White still gets a powerful initiative with: 13.a3 \( \text{c6} \) 14.\( \text{b5} \) \( \text{b8} \) 15.\( \text{g4} \)! (15.\( \text{c5} \) leads to a long-term edge based on the bishop pair, but the direct attacking continuation is even stronger) 15...\( \text{a6} \) (15...\( \text{e7} \) 16.\( \text{g2} \) a6 17.\( \text{g5} \)! \( \text{d5} \) 18.\( \text{xd5} \) exd5 19.\( \text{c3} \)+)

12.\( \text{c5} \) e6 13.\( \text{f4} \) \( \text{e5} \)

13...\( \text{a5} ? \) allows 14.\( \text{xb7} \) of course.

13...\( \text{b6} \) 14.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 15.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 16.\( \text{c3} \) \( \text{b4} \) 17.\( \text{xf7+} \) \( \text{e7} \) 18.\( \text{xf4} \) gives White great play for the exchange – there is no immediate mate of course, but where is the black king going to hide?

14.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{fxd7} \) 15.\( \text{g3} \)

Black can escape from the pin easily enough, but he stays worse in the long run because of White’s bishop pair.
**Chapter 20 – 2...\(\text{c6}\)**

### 15...\(\text{a5}\) 16...\(\text{b1}\) \(\text{g6}\) 17...\(\text{g5}\)!

17...\(\text{d2}\) would give White a slightly better version of the main line if Black's queen retreated to \(\text{c7}\), but 17...\(\text{b6}\) makes a bit more sense for Black with the pawn still on \(\text{h7}\) – compare the note below.

### 17...\(\text{c7}\)

17...\(\text{h6}\) 18...\(\text{d2}\) is good for White, as 18...\(\text{b6}\) can be met by 19...\(\text{f4}\), intending \(\text{d3}\) to gain time against the loose knight on \(\text{g6}\). It is worth adding that 19...\(\text{a3}\)! 20...\(\text{a4}\) \(\text{c6}\) 21...\(\text{c3}\) leads to an excellent endgame for White.

### 21...\(\text{g2}\)!

The bishop pair gives White fine prospects in the endgame.

### B) 4...\(\text{f6}\) 5...\(\text{c3}\)

From this position, all of Black's major options have been covered elsewhere in the repertoire. In this short section I will just mention a few eccentric sidelines.

### 5...\(\text{b8}\)

5...\(\text{e6}\) is an important option which can be found in the next chapter under the 2...\(\text{e6}\) move order.

5...\(\text{c7}\)! 6...\(\text{db5}\) \(\text{b8}\) 7...\(\text{d5}\) \(\text{xd5}\) 8...\(\text{exd5}\) \(\text{a6}\) 9...\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{e5}\) 10...\(\text{e2}\) gave White a great position in Gallagher – Schneuwly, Graechen 2013.

5...\(\text{b6}\)?! is a provocative and rather pointless move order. If nothing else, White can play 6...\(\text{b3}\) with a simple transposition to the Grivas System, which will be analysed shortly. However, we can also aim to punish Black's last move with 6...\(\text{e3}\)! \(\text{xb2}\) 7...\(\text{db5}\) \(\text{b4}\) 8...\(\text{d2}\) as in Lastin – Kononenko, Russia 2009, when White has a big lead in development and a strong initiative for a measly pawn.

### 6...\(\text{g5}\) \(\text{a5}\)
Black’s set-up looks weird, but the reasoning behind it can be understood when you compare it to the 6...a5 sideline of the Rauzer, as analysed on page 163 of the previous volume.

7.\texttt{\texttt{xf6}}

In the Rauzer line I recommended 7.b5, but obviously this move loses all its impact with the pawn still on d7, and Black could simply take the e4-pawn with a winning position.

7...gxf6 8.b3

In the previous volume I mentioned that Black had done quite well in the Rauzer equivalent of this position. However, he is practically a tempo down here, as the rook on b8 is not so useful and he will have to play ...d6 soon anyway.

8...g5

8...e5 occurred in Lederman – Chernikov, Arco 2010, when 9.g3N would have been simple and strong.

9.g3 d6 10.f4 g6

In Ringoir – Reinderman, Netherlands 2008, White should have continued:

11.d3N\texttt{\texttt{f}}

Intending 0–0–0 and g2, with a fine position.

C) 4...b6

At first sight this might look like an odd choice, but it’s simply an early implementation of a thematic Sicilian plan. Black’s idea is to drive the knight to the passive b3-square before retreating the queen to c7 and developing normally. The drawback of Black’s plan is that the absence of the knight from d4 opens up some additional opportunities for White, such as playing a quick g2-g4.

5.b3 a6

This is by far the most popular move order.

5...e6

Black seldom postpones the development of the g8-knight, but here are a few sample lines in which he does so.

6.c3 a6

6...f6 transposes to the main line of course.

6...b4 7.g4 is similar to 7...b4 below.

9...e5 occurred in Lederman – Chernikov, Arco 2010, when 9.g3N would have been simple and strong.

9.g3 d6 10.f4 g6

In Ringoir – Reinderman, Netherlands 2008, White should have continued:

11.d3N\texttt{\texttt{f}}

Intending 0–0–0 and g2, with a fine position.
Chapter 20 - 2...c6

7.\textit{f4!}
7.\textit{c2} is not so effective here, because the main ideas of \textit{e4-e5} and \textit{g4-g5} are a lot less worrying with the knight still on \textit{g8}: 7...c7 8.d2 b5∞. 7.a3 can be met by 7...c7, preventing \textit{f4.}

7...\textit{d6}
7...\textit{b4} 8.g4!\textit{g6} 9.\textit{f3} leaves Black with too many weaknesses.

8.a3!
8.\textit{d6} is possible but not required. The text move underlines the fact that Black has no good ideas apart from ...\textit{b4} and ...\textit{c7}, both of which have now been prevented.

Black has a few contrasting ways to continue. C1) 7...\textit{c7} is a rare but flexible move; C2) 7...\textit{d6} commits to a kind of Scheveningen set-up; and C3) 7...\textit{b4} is the main line, developing the bishop on its most active square.

C1) 7...\textit{c7} 8.g4 \textit{h6}

8...\textit{c7} 9.e5!
9.\textit{d6} \textit{xd6} 10.\textit{xd6} c6 11.\textit{f4} d5 12.exd5 \textit{dxd5} 13.\textit{xd5} exd5 14.0–0–0∞

Kokarev – Akopian, St Petersburg 2013.

6.\textit{c3} e6 7.\textit{c2}?

By now, you will probably have noticed that I like putting the queen here in numerous Sicilian variations. It might not seem the most natural square, particularly since it blocks the f1-bishop, but it has its advantages: we prepare to castle and threaten a quick e4–e5, while also supporting a future g2-g4. Once the g-pawn has advanced up the board, White will be able to develop the f1-bishop without having to move the queen again. Overall, the biggest advantage is simply the speed with which White develops, without giving Black any obvious targets for counterplay.
10...b5 has not been played. A good reply is: 11.\texttt{Qd5! exd5 12.exd5+ Ke7 13.d2 \texttt{Qd6 14.dxc6 dxc6 15.g5 hxg5 16.hxg5 \texttt{Qxh1+ 17.\texttt{Qxh1 \texttt{Qd5 18.0–0–0}}}

11.\texttt{Qe3 d6}

11...h5 12.g5 \texttt{Qg4 13.d2} was also better for White in Huschenbeth – Anastasian, Kemer 2007.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline\hline
b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textbf{C2} 7...d6 8.g4

12.\texttt{0–0–0IN}

I like this more than 12.f4 h5 13.g5 \texttt{Qg4 14.g1}, as seen in Bok – Inarkiev, Moscow 2015. Perhaps White is still better, but I prefer not to allow the black knight to settle on g4.

12...h5

12...b5?? loses immediately to 13.e5! dxe5 14.\texttt{Qf3}.

12...\texttt{Qg7 13.g5 \texttt{Qh5 14.Qd2±}}

12...\texttt{Qd7 13.Qa4!? Qe5 14.Qb6 \texttt{Qd8 15.Qxd7 \texttt{Qxd7 16.g5±}}}

The text move seems like Black's best try, but it allows a strong tactical blow.

13.e5! dxe5

13...\texttt{Qxe5 runs into 14.g5! with ideas of \texttt{Qd4, f2–f4 and Qd5.}}

14.\texttt{g5 Qe7}

14...\texttt{Qd7 15.Qe4 gives White a huge initiative.}

14...\texttt{Qg7 15.Qxc6+ bxc6 16.gxh5 gxh5 17.Qe4±}

15.gxh5 gxh5 16.\texttt{Qxf6 Qxf6 17.Qxc6+ bxc6 18.Qd2±}

White's knights dominate.

This gives rise to a further split between \textbf{C21} 8...h6 and \textbf{C22} 8...a6.

8...\texttt{Qe7 has no special significance. After 9.g5 \texttt{Qd7 10.Qe3 \texttt{Qc7 11.0–0–0 Black has nothing}}
better than 11...a6 12.f4 b5, transposing to variation C22 below.

**C21) 8...h6**

In the Keres Attack, this method of holding up g4-g5 is Black's main line. However, the difference here is that Black is in no position to use the brief kingside respite to take action in the centre or on the queenside. The g4-g5 advance will be easy enough to prepare, and it should come with greater force now that Black has weakened himself on the kingside.

9.h4 a6 10.\(\text{\#e3}\)

10.\(\text{\#h3?!}\) is interesting but not required.

10...c7 11.0–0–0 b5

11...\(\text{\#e5}\) 12.\(\text{\#g1}\) defends the g-pawn and prepares to kick either of the black knights.

12.\(\text{\#g2}\) \(\text{\#b7}\)

This is the only move to have been tested.

12...\(\text{\#e5?!}\) is easily refuted by 13.f4! \(\text{\#exg4}\)

14.g5 g6 (14...a5 15.g6\(\#\); 14...\(\text{\#e7}\) 15.g6\(\#\))

15.h5! Blasting open the kingside, with a great position.

13.g5 \(\text{\#d7}\)

13...hxg5?! is even worse: 14.hxg5 \(\text{\#xh1}\)

15.\(\text{\#xh1}\) \(\text{\#d7}\) 16.g6\(\#\)

14.\(\text{\#g6?!N}\)

14.f4\(\#\) was also good for White in Arakhamia-Grant – Khurtсидзе, St Petersburg 2009.

14...b4 15.gxf7\(\#\) \(\text{\#xf7}\) 16.\(\text{\#a4}\\#\)

Black's king is not safe at all.
C22) 8...a6

We don't have to worry about ...b4 because the knight will settle on a4; it wasn't doing anything special in the centre anyway. Black has three main plans on the queenside. One option is to play ...b4 and try to trap the knight on a4, but there is virtually no chance of this plan succeeding. Another is to put his knight on b6 and plan ...b4 once 12.a4 has been prevented. The third idea, which I will take as the main line, is leave his pawn on b5 and aim for a disruptive ...Qb6-a4.

9.g5 Qd7 10.Be3 Wc7 11.0-0-0 b5 12.f4

Let's examine the other two options:

12...Qe7

12...b4 13.Qa4 Qb7 14.Wf2 Ye7N
14...Qa5 15.Qb6 Qxb3† 16.axb3 Qxb6
17.Qxb6 Qc6 Krejci – Iskusnyh, Pardubice 2007. 18.Qc4N (or 18.f5!!N) 18...Qe7
19.Qd4†
15.h4 is similar; the main point is that Black has no serious counterplay.

12...Qb6 13.Wf2!

Improving the queen while annoying the knight.

13...Qb8

13...Qc4? 14.Qxc4 bxc4 15.Qb6 Qb8
16.Qd2+- wins a pawn for nothing.
13...\(\text{a4}?!\) 14.\(\text{xa4}\) \(bxa4\) 15.\(\text{b6!}\) \(\text{b}8\) 16.\(\text{a5}\) \(\text{xa5}\) 17.\(\text{xa5}\) and White is in complete control.

14.\(\text{b1!}\)

The point of this move will become clear in the note below.

14...\(\text{d7}\)

After 14...\(\text{a4}\) 15.\(\text{e2!}\) Black has run out of useful ideas on the queenside. (If the king was still on \(c1\), then ...\(\text{b4}\) would have been an annoying reply.) 15...e5 16.\(f5\) \(\text{a5}\) 17.\(\text{c1}\) \(\text{c4}\) 18.h4 \(\text{b7}\) 19.\(\text{g2}\) \(\text{c8}\) 20.\(\text{g3}\)± Vuckovic–Chirila, Plovdiv 2008.

In Smeets–Fedorchuk, Leiden 2013, White should have continued:

13.\(h4\)

13.\(\text{b1}\)! is also possible, since White is not in any great hurry on the kingside. A sample line showing the usefulness of the king move is: 13...\(\text{b6}\) (13...\(\text{b4}\) 14.\(\text{a4}\)+) 14.\(\text{h2}\) \(\text{a4}\)

Now 15.\(\text{e2!}\) is possible, since ...\(\text{b4}\) is nothing to worry about. This way, White does not have to go for the plan of \(\text{xa4}\) followed by \(\text{b6}\) and \(\text{a5}\) – although we will see this working well in the main line below, so I don’t see any special reason to avoid it.

13...\(\text{b6}\) 14.\(\text{h2}\) \(\text{a4}\)

14...\(\text{b8}\) 15.\(\text{b1!}\) should be a familiar theme by now. Once again, the key line is 15...\(\text{a4}\) 16.\(\text{e2!}\) \(\text{b7}\) 17.\(\text{g3}\) when Black is stuck without much play, for instance:

15.\(\text{xa4}\) \(bxa4\) 16.\(\text{b6}\) \(\text{b7}\) 17.\(\text{a5}\) \(\text{xa5}\)

18.\(\text{xa5}\)

It is hard for Black to generate any serious threats. I will show a few possible lines to prove my point.

18...0–0?N

18...\(\text{b8}\) 19.\(\text{c3}\)+

18...\(\text{a3}\) 19.b3 0–0 was the move order of V.H. Nguyen – Pacis, Manila 2008. Now 20.\(\text{d4}\)N reaches the main line below, and 20.\(\text{h5}\)+ is also strong.
422 Sidelines

19...Wla7 20.Wlxa7 !lxa7 21 .a3± gives White a lasting endgame advantage. I like the text move even more though. A possible continuation is:

19 ... a3 20.b3 !leS 21 .il.c4 il.d7 22.hS il.bS 23.h6±

C3) 7...il.b4

This is the most active and popular option for Black.

9.0–0–0 d5 10.exd5 (10.e5 ilxa3 11. ilxc3 ilxe4 seems fine for Black) 10...exd5 11.a3 ilxc3 12. ilxc3 led to an eventual victory for White in Nepomniachtchi – Golod, Netanya 2009.

But 12...ilc8!N would have given Black excellent chances.

Black may respond with C31) 9...il.e7 or C32) 9...ilxc3?.

C31) 9...il.e7

This has been played often enough but it does not impress me.

10.0–0–0 d5

This seems to me like the only serious attempt to justify Black’s earlier play. Other
moves are likely to leave him in a normal Sicilian structure without the usual activity, for instance:

10...a6 11.g4 \(\text{c7}\) 12.g5 \(\text{d8}\) occurred in Neverov – Lazarev, Sautron 2001. White has a few decent continuations, but my suggestion would be:

10...d6 11.g4 a6 12.g5 \(\text{d7}\) 13.h4

13.g2!N Anticipating 13...b5, which can now be met by 14.d5! exd5 15.exd5 \(\text{b7}\) (15...\(\text{c5}\) 16.d6++–) 16.dxc6 dxc6 17.e3e1 with a clear advantage.

10...d6 11.g4 a6 12.g5 \(\text{d7}\) 13.h4

White's kingside play flows easily. Black's only hope is that the a2-a3 move might prove to be a weakness, but his counterplay is rather slow.

13.c7 14.f4 b5 15.b1 b4 16.axb4 \(\text{cxb4}\) 17.f5 \(\text{b8}\)

18.f6?N
18...f4 was also good for White in Anand – Kramnik, Mainz (blitz) 2001.
18...gxf6 19.gxf6 \(\text{xg7}\) 20.g6 hxg6 21.h5±
19...fxe6 20.fx4+–
20.h6 \(\text{h8}\) 21.\(\text{f8}\) \(\text{x8}\) 22.\(\text{f8}\)±

White has attacking chances plus a material advantage.

11.exd5
11.e5 seems promising as well, but the main line is simpler.

11...exd5 12.e3 \(\text{c7}\) 13.h3!

This move is an excellent idea from Shirov, who has used it successfully in two games so far. White can afford to spend a tempo to
establish an ideal kingside formation with g2-g4.

13...\texttt{xe}6 14.g4 \texttt{ad}8 15.\texttt{g}2 \texttt{fe}8 16.\texttt{b}5 \texttt{wb}8 17.\texttt{fh}1 \texttt{f}8

This was played in the original game with 13.h3!, and it seems as good a choice as any.

Later the same year Black deviated with 17...\texttt{e}e4?!, but after 18.f3 \texttt{f}6 19.f4 he was a tempo down on the main line in Shirov – Alekseenko, St Petersburg (rapid) 2014.

13...\texttt{d}6 14.\texttt{ad}6 \texttt{ld}4 (12...\texttt{e}e6? 13.\texttt{a}5+-) 13.\texttt{xd}4 \texttt{xd}6 14.\texttt{c}5 \texttt{wc}7 15.\texttt{xf}8 \texttt{xf}8 16.\texttt{c}4± Buzeti – Frank, Graz 2015.

13...\texttt{d}8 is rather slow – Black requires more urgency if he is to justify giving up the dark-squared bishop. 12.g4 d6 13.g5 \texttt{e}e8 (13...\texttt{d}7 14.h4 is also great for White) 14.h4 \texttt{b}8 15.\texttt{gl} a5 16.\texttt{d}2 b6 17.\texttt{b}1± Palac – Kurajica, Sarajevo 2015.

This has not been as popular as the previous variation, but it seems like a decent attempt to reach a double-edged position.

\textbf{11.0–0–0}  
The engines have played a massive amount of games here, trying virtually every legal move... except the one that causes White the most problems!

\textbf{11...a5!}

Before discussing this move, let me show you why I am not so bothered by Black's alternatives.

11...\texttt{d}6 12.\texttt{xd}6 \texttt{xc}4 20.\texttt{xe}4 \texttt{dxe}4 21.\texttt{xd}8 \texttt{xb}2

White had a clear advantage in Shirov – Kanep, Jyvaskyla 2014, thanks to his better structure, more active pieces and safer king.

11...\texttt{d}8 12.\texttt{d}6! is an important idea which was first played by Adams in 1997:
Chapter 20 - 2...\textsuperscript{c}6

12...\textsuperscript{c}c7 (12...\textsuperscript{e}e8? runs into 13..\textsuperscript{a}a5!) 13...\textsuperscript{g}gxf6 \textsuperscript{g}gxf6 14...\textsuperscript{g}g4 \textsuperscript{f}h8 15...\textsuperscript{h}h4 \textsuperscript{d}d6 15...\textsuperscript{g}g7 16...\textsuperscript{d}d2+- Istratescu – Petrov, Porto Rio 2014) 16...\textsuperscript{f}f4 White has great play for the exchange and has scored well in both human and engine games from this position.

11...\textsuperscript{h}h8?
Apart from the main line, this is the trickiest of Black’s options. However, White gets an edge with the accurate response:
12...\textsuperscript{b}b1!
12...\textsuperscript{d}d6? \textsuperscript{d}d4! wins material for Black.
After 12...\textsuperscript{g}g4 \textsuperscript{d}d5! 13...\textsuperscript{e}exd5 \textsuperscript{g}xg4 14...\textsuperscript{f}f3 \textsuperscript{d}d4 the tactics lead to eventual equality; see Amonatov – Arzumanian, Tula 2004.
12...\textsuperscript{f}f3 \textsuperscript{d}d8! 13...\textsuperscript{b}b5 (The clever point of Black’s play is seen after 13...\textsuperscript{d}d6 \textsuperscript{c}c7 14...\textsuperscript{f}xf6 \textsuperscript{g}xf6 when the pawn on f3 prevents the queen from going to g4.) 13...\textsuperscript{c}c7 Black was okay in Adamson – Ipatov, Saint Louis 2013.

12...\textsuperscript{c}c7 13...\textsuperscript{f}f3
13...\textsuperscript{g}g4 would be premature due to the familiar 13...\textsuperscript{d}d5!.
13...\textsuperscript{d}d6
In Garcia Ramirez – Tobella Torras, corr. 2011, the logical continuation would have been:
14...\textsuperscript{g}g4N=

Let’s return to the most challenging option of 11...\textsuperscript{a}a5!:

16...\textsuperscript{c}c7 (16...\textsuperscript{g}g8 17...\textsuperscript{d}d2 N– Sting – Equinox, engine game 2014) 17...\textsuperscript{b}b5= Adams – Knezevic, France 1997.

11...\textsuperscript{h}h8?
Black has achieved a plus score from this position, including some recent GM games, so the whole line is clearly waiting to become quite popular. However, I think the obscurity
of Black's system has been one of the keys to its success so far. It is hard to find the right path over the board but, with a bit of precise knowledge, we can pose significant problems.

12.g4!

This direct move seems like the most promising option.

12...b1 led to success for White in Caruana – Azarov, Las Vegas 2015. However, instead of the pointless 12...a4?, Black should have played 12...d8!. The point is that 13.d6 can now be met safely by 13...e8, since the reply a5 is no longer possible thanks to the pawn on a5.

12.f4 d5! is critical. (12...e8 is a more human move but 13.h3! is a good answer to prevent any ...d5 ideas; in A. Mammadov – Petrow, Canakkale 2015, White's eventual defeat was nothing to do with the outcome of the opening.) 13.exd5!N I checked this as a potential improvement, but it just leads to unclear play. (13.exd5 g4 14.b5 xb5 15.a4 a7 was seen in Edwards – Silva Filho, Internet 2012) 13...d6 14.exd5 d4 15.e5 xb3 16.f5 g4 17.g5!N

The text move is more logical. Rather than drive the b3-knight to a better square, he prepares to target the knight while completing development with ...e6.

13.g5 e8

14.h4!N

With this new move, I intend to ignore Black's play entirely. His queenside threats are actually quite limited; I am happy to allow ...xb3 as it's worth sacrificing a pawn to eliminate Black's light-squared bishop in return for our not-so-useful knight.

14.f4 e6 15.f5 xb3 16.cxb3 c8 is messier than I would like. 17.b1N (17.c4 proved to be a serious mistake after 17...d5! 18.exd5 d6 19.e2 d4 in Volokitin – A. Zhigalko, Warsaw 2015) 17...xb3 18.c2 xc2+ 19.xc2 b5? White has reasonable compensation but Black is certainly better off here than in our main line.
14...\textit{e}6 15.h5
White is ready to defend against any specific threats which may appear on the queenside. Meanwhile, the possibility of g5-g6 constantly hangs over Black.

15...\textit{xb}3
How else should Black continue? I considered four other possibilities:

a) 15...\textit{b}4?! should be checked, but after 16.axb4 axb4 17.\textit{e}1 Black has no real attack. For instance:

b) 15...a4 16.\textit{d}2 \textit{c}5 (16...\textit{c}8 17.\textit{c}4 \textit{c}5 18.\textit{e}3\texttt{±})

17.\textit{e}3\texttt{±} This is not the only good move, but it's always nice to play with a risk-free advantage. 17...\textit{x}e3 18.fxe3\texttt{±} Black's queenside and centre pawns are vulnerable, and White is clearly dominating on the kingside.

c) 15...a4 16.\textit{d}2 \textit{c}5 (16...\textit{c}8 17.\textit{c}4 \textit{c}5 18.\textit{e}3\texttt{±})

17.\textit{e}3\texttt{±} This is not the only good move, but it's always nice to play with a risk-free advantage. 17...\textit{x}e3 18.fxe3\texttt{±} Black's queenside and centre pawns are vulnerable, and White is clearly dominating on the kingside.

d) The only other logical move is:

15...\textit{c}8 16.\textit{b}1 \textit{xb}3 17.cxb3 \textit{xb}3 18.\textit{d}3! Black's queenside play is under control and his extra pawn has little relevance, while White's kingside attack is just about to get started.
18...£c4
18...£b6 19.£g6†
18...£a4 19.£h3 £c7 20.f3 £b5 21.£d1 £xd1† (21...£c4? 22.£d5 £b4 23.£f1++;)
22.£hxdl £g6 23.£g4 £b4 24.axb4 axb4
25.£d2†
19.£f3 £a4 20.£h3 £c7

21.£g6! £c4
21...£b5 22.£c6!→
22.£gxh7† £h8 23.£h6 £g6 24.£xd6 £xh7 25.£d5†
Black's plan for queenside domination has not even started yet.

16.£xb3 £xb3
16...£c8 was played in the equivalent position in Volokitin – Zhigalko, but it does not really work when h4-h5 has been played instead of f4-f5. The difference is 17.£g4! £c7 18.£c4+ when White is in complete control.

18...£f6?!
Trying to get some activity.

19...£c8 20.£b1
20.f4!
A nice way to open the game for the bishops.

20...exf4 21.gxf6 gxf6 22.d2 h8 23.xf4

The amazing bishops matter a lot more than Black’s extra pawn.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have dealt with two extremely rare lines followed by one relatively mainstream one. 4...d5 gives White more than one route to an advantage; the choice is a matter of taste, but I have chosen the active 5.exd5 wxd5 6.e3 as a route to a promising lead in development. Next there was 4...fe6 5.cc3 fb8, which has the idea to meet 6.g5 with 6...fa5, but after 7.xf6 followed by cb3 White gets an improved version of a Rauzer sideline.

The main subject of the chapter was 4...wb6, the Grivas System. I recommend 5.cb3 cf6 6.cc3 e6 7.wc2! when, just as in several other parts of the repertoire, the queen has several useful functions on e2. Black has several different set-ups, all of which require a certain amount of care from White. In particular, I found 7...b4 8.d2 0–0 9.a3 xc3!? 10.xc3 e5 11.0–0–0 a5! a tricky line to face. Ultimately I am happy with White’s chances after my recommendation of 12.g4! d6! 13.g5 be8 14.h4!N, but it’s worth looking at this carefully, as it would be difficult, not to mention time-consuming, to figure out the details over the board.
Sidelines

2...e6

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6

3.d4 cxd4 4.e3

A) 4...b6

B) 4...c5 5.e3 b6 6.a3!
   B1) 6.d5
   B2) 6.a5†

C) 4.f6 5.c3
   C1) 5.b6
   C2) 5.b4 6.e5
       C21) 6.e4?
       C22) 6.d5
   C3) 5.c6 6.db5
       C31) 6.c5
       C32) 6.b4 7.a3 xc3† 8.xc3 d5 9.exd5
           C321) 9.xd5
           C322) 9...exd5

C21) after 13.b2

C22) after 11.c6

C322) note to 19..b5† N

14.e3!N

12.b5!N

20.a4!N
1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4

We will analyse the various sidelines involving A) 4...b6, B) 4...c5 and C) 4...d6.

4...d6 can be conveniently met by: 5.c4! (5.b3 a6 is an annoying Najdorf-Kan hybrid which would present a problem for our repertoire, especially if Black doesn’t mind switching to a Scheveningen at some point.) 5...d6 6.b3 c5 7.e2 0-0 8.0-0 a6 9.e3 White has an improved version of a Kan. As we saw in some of the Kan variations in Chapter 8, it is not uncommon for White to retreat the bishop from d3 to e2 in such positions, which is why Kan players often make a point of waiting for White to put his queen on e2 before playing ...d6 and allowing the c2-c4 bind. In the present variation the bishop has gone to the optimal e2-square without any loss of time, so we should be more than happy.

A) 4...b6

This odd move resembles a few other sidelines: the 4...c5 line that will be analysed shortly; the Grivas System from the previous chapter; and the 4...d6 5.b3 c5 6.b6 line covered later in variation C1. Moving the queen so early, especially while eyeing up the b2-pawn, seems most anti-positional. Amazingly, most White players have reacted with the timid 5.b3, but I would much rather take the opportunity to get a huge lead in development.

5...d6

5...d6 leads to variation B.

6.d2 a6 7.c3!

7.c3 allows Black to regroup into a solid position with 7...c3! 8.0-0 c7. White’s lead in development certainly provides some compensation, but it is hard to say if it will be enough for an advantage.

The text move is almost a novelty; it has been played in a single game in 2007, and I assume it wasn’t home preparation. The idea is brilliant: White makes it harder for the black queen to get back to c7, while also preparing the surprisingly strong a4 resource.

7...b6N

The critical reply. The queen wants to go to c7, and the immediate knight jumps do not accomplish much.

7...d5 makes some sense, but it also creates weaknesses while opening the game for White’s, better-developed pieces. 8.exd5 exd5 9.d3N (9.e2 b6 10.0-0 e7 11.c4 0-0
12...\textit{cxd5} \textit{\&xd5} let Black off the hook in Thinius
- Greiner, Jena 2007) 9...\textit{f6} 10.0-0 \textit{\&e7}

10...\textit{\&xd4}

10...\textit{b5}? 11.\textit{\&xb5} axb5 12.\textit{\&xa8} bxc4 is impossible due to 13.\textit{\&b6}.

11.\textit{\&b6!} \textit{\&b8} 12.\textit{cxd4}±

White dominates the centre and the queenside. On top of everything else, there is an immediate threat of \textit{\&f4}, which forces Black to develop his bishop to the awkward d6-square.

\textbf{B) 4...\textit{c5}}

I don’t know why anyone would want to play this rare sideline, but it deserves some attention as it was covered in great detail in a recent book. I will be guided by the principle of simplicity: rather than go heavy in the theory as I do in some of the main lines, I will present a simple, natural set-up which does not require serious analysis or memorization.

5.\textit{\&e3} \textit{\&b6}

6.\textit{\&a3}!? 

This is the move I would instinctively want to play if I encountered this position during a game. White prepares \textit{\&c4} to harass the black queen while indirectly defending the \textit{b2}-pawn. The exchange on \textit{a3} is nothing to worry about.
6.b4!? has been described as a refutation and is certainly the most principled, but I am wary of sacrificing material unless I can prove an advantage easily, especially against such a rare sideline. After 6...AXB4† 7.c3 e7! 8.e5 N d8 9.e4 d6 Black’s position is reasonably solid despite being somewhat undesirable. It would take some effort to demonstrate a clear advantage, so I will focus on the much simpler alternative.

Black has two sensible moves: B1) 6...d5 and B2) 6...e5†.

6...b2? 7.e5 d6 puts Black in serious trouble.

6...xa3? 7.bxa3 leaves Black too vulnerable on the dark squares. 7...e5† 8.d2 e5 (8...b6 9.e5 a6 10.c3++–) 9.e5 a6 (9...c4† 10.e2++–) 10...c4 e4† 11.e2 c4† 12.e2 Despite the queen exchange, Black’s lack of development and dark-square weaknesses proved his undoing in Manik – G. Papp, Austria 2006.

B1) 6...d5 7.exd5 exd5

8.e5† d7
8...c6 9.xc6 bxc6 10.xd5! was a swift disaster for Black in Ducarmon – Van den Berg, Vlissingen 2013.

9.0–0
Now that the king is safely tucked away, Black will have to watch out for tactics involving b2-b4.

9...e7
9...f6† 10.b4! xb4 11.f5+– occurred in Grischuk – Pavlenkov, Internet (blitz) 2003, highlighting the above point.

Black accepts an isolated pawn, hoping to benefit from the misplaced knight on a3. As long as we can find a way to bring this piece into action smoothly, we should be doing well.

10.c3!
10.b4 d4 11.f5 f6∞ is not especially convincing.

The text move prepares b2-b4 on the next move, in order to force Black to give up the dark-squared bishop.

10...bc6
10...0–0 11.b4 d4 12.xd4= Wuest – Colombo, corr. 2007.
10...xb5N 11.xb5 0–0 12.b4 d4 13.b4=±

After the text move White has a few possible ways to continue, but I don’t see why we shouldn’t proceed with the original plan:
Not the most natural-looking move, but it avoids any worry about an exchange on a3 while preparing a nice little tactic in the event that Black tries to chase the knight away.

8...d5
8...a6 9.e3! is the point behind White's last move. 9...xe3 10.d6† Followed by 11.fxe3± as in Keller – Litz, Internet 2011.

White has an obvious initiative due to Black's exposed king.

B2) 6...a5† 7.d2 d8

8.db5!
Not the most natural-looking move, but it avoids any worry about an exchange on a3 while preparing a nice little tactic in the event that Black tries to chase the knight away.

8...d5
8...a6 9.e3! is the point behind White's last move. 9...xe3 10.d6† Followed by 11.fxe3± as in Keller – Litz, Internet 2011.

White has a pleasant edge. The knight on a3 is not too awkward, as it will easily reroute to d4 via c2, but the same cannot be said for the black knight on a6.

11.e6 12.e2 0–0
In the correspondence game quoted below Black went for 12.e4 13.0–0 0–0, but I will go with castling as the main move order in order to check a few other options available to Black.

13.0–0

13.e4
Chapter 21 - 2...e6

This leads into the correspondence game. White has no trouble keeping an edge against other moves:

13...\f5 and 13...\f8 should both be met by 14.\c2± of course.

13...\b6 gives White a pleasant choice: 14.c4? Putting pressure on Black in the centre. (14.\c2 is possible, although Black starts gaining a semblance of normal life with 14...\c5 followed by ...\a6; however, 14.\d6!?± could be quite annoying for Black.) 14...\f6 This is virtually forced. (14...dxc4 15.\xc4±) 15.\b3 \c5 16.\d4± Black faces the unpleasant prospect of \xe6 at any moment.

14.\c2

Continuing the policy of simple chess.

14...\b6?N

14...\e8 was played in Scherer – Baumann, corr. 2013, when 15.a4N± would have preserved a nice edge for White. The text move seems like a logical improvement, aiming to bring the a6-knight into play.

15.a4!

A nice way to interfere with Black's plan. The key continuation is:

15...\ac5 16.a5 \xa5 17.\xa5 \f6!

The text move keeps Black in the game, but White keeps a risk-free advantage after:

17...\xa5 18.b4±

From this position Black’s most important move is 5...d6, which has been covered in Chapters 16-18. In the rest of this chapter we will deal with C1) 5...\b6, C2) 5...\b4 and C3) 5...\c6.
5...a6? has been played in hundreds of games, but 6.e5 \( \text{d}g8 \) 7.\( \text{f}4 \) gives White a massive lead in development; there is no need to look any further.

**C1) 5...\( \text{w}b6 \) 6.e5!**

6.\( \text{b}3 \) invites a transposition to the Grivas System, but 6...\( \text{b}4 \) is an inconvenient reply which forces us into a different set-up with 7.\( \text{d}3 \).

6...\( \text{c}5 \)

7.\( \text{db}5! \)

This can be regarded as a near-refutation of Black’s set-up; the second player has scored horribly from this position.

7...a6

7...\( \text{x}f2\) 8.\( \text{e}e2 \) \( \text{g}4 \) 9.\( \text{h}3 \) \( \text{xe}5 \) 10.\( \text{d}6 \) was winning for White in Safarli – Narmontas, Budva 2003, and a few other games.

7...\( \text{d}5 \) 8.\( \text{e}e4 \) 0–0 9.\( \text{xc}5 \) \( \text{xc}5 \) 10.c4\( \pm \) gave White an easy advantage in Garcia Rojas – Behling, corr. 2001.

8.exf6 axb5

9.\( \text{e}4 \) g6 10.\( \text{d}3\pm \)


**C2) 5...\( \text{b}4 \)**

This may look like an active choice but it leaves Black vulnerable on the kingside.

6.e5

We will analyse C21) 6...\( \text{e}4? \) and C22) 6...\( \text{d}5 \).

**C21) 6...\( \text{e}4? \)**

This has long been known to be a losing move, but the database still contains a surprising number of games with it.

7.\( \text{g}4 \) \( \text{a}5 \)
7...\textbf{dxc3} 8.\textbf{wxg7} \textbf{e8} 9.a3!
A well-known idea from ages ago. White easily wins back the piece because the f8-rook is horribly stuck.

9...\textbf{b5}†
9...\textbf{a5} 10.\textbf{h6} \textbf{e7} 11.\textbf{b3}! was winning for White in Flores Gutierrez – Franke, corr. 1984.
10.\textbf{axb4} \textbf{xd4}
11.\textbf{h6} \textbf{e7} 12.\textbf{d3} is also good.
11...\textbf{b6} 12.\textbf{h6} \textbf{xb4}† 13.\textbf{c3} \textbf{b5} 14.\textbf{cx}b4 \textbf{dxg7} 15.\textbf{xd}xg7 \textbf{g8} 16.\textbf{f6}
White has a huge advantage, as first shown way back in Szabo – Mikenas, Kemeri 1939.

12.\textbf{a3}† \textbf{xa3} 13.\textbf{xc}8 \textbf{e2}

14.\textbf{e3}!N
White actually went wrong with 14.\textbf{b3}? in Schatzle – Filartiga, corr. 1975, when 14...\textbf{xe}5 would have been unpleasant. The text move is just winning though.

14...\textbf{xa1} 15.\textbf{xe4}
The king is safe enough, as Black has no way to create serious threats against it. Meanwhile White is poised to win more material on the queenside.

15...\textbf{e1}† 16.\textbf{d}3 \textbf{xe}5 17.\textbf{b}7+-

C22) 6...\textbf{d}5

8.\textbf{wxg7} \textbf{c3}† 9.bxc3 \textbf{xc3}† 10.\textbf{e}2 \textbf{b}6 11.xb8† \textbf{e}7
White has the luxury of choosing between a few winning moves. One such continuation is:
7...\texttt{wg4}

7...\texttt{d2} is playable but less ambitious. 7...\texttt{xc3!} 8.bxc3 Black may be slightly worse, but he has succeeded in reaching an interesting, double-edged position.

7...\texttt{0-0}

The critical reply, challenging White to prove an advantage, rather than just handing it to him.

7...\texttt{f8} 8.\texttt{d2} leaves the black king horribly placed, so White basically has a much better version of the nice version of the 7.\texttt{d2} variation. For example: 8...\texttt{h5} (8...\texttt{xc3?} 9.\texttt{xe6\#}+ is a nice trick; 8...\texttt{d6} is met by 9.exd6 \texttt{xd6} 10.\texttt{db5} followed by a2-a3 and 0-0-0, with easy play for White.) 9.\texttt{e4 xc3} 10.bxc3 \texttt{c7} 11.\texttt{c4±} Stankovic – Zivkovic, Kraljevo 2011.

Also after 7...\texttt{g6} 8.\texttt{d2} the weakening of the kingside helps White. 8...0-0 has scored well for Black but 9.h4! seems promising, for instance:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}

\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

9...\texttt{h5} (9...\texttt{d6} was played in Usbeck – Wyder, corr. 2011, when 10.h5!N would have been obvious and good: 10...\texttt{dxe5} 11.\texttt{hxg6 f6\#} 12.\texttt{xf3±}) In Behul – Blahus, Slovakia 2002, White could have got a good game with: 10.\texttt{g3N d6}

8.\texttt{h6 g6}

White has many possibilities but I will follow the most efficient route: a simple, forcing continuation which promises us a strong initiative. This alone makes the whole line an unattractive proposition for Black – although there may well be something even stronger available for White. For most players though, there is not much point in carrying out detailed analytical work just to try and refute a rare sideline.

9.a3?

9.\texttt{xf8} \texttt{xf8} gives Black reasonable compensation for the exchange; the pin is annoying and our development will be hampered if we have to play a move like \texttt{de2}. 
9...\texttt{wa}5
9...\texttt{xa}5?! 10.\texttt{xf}8 \texttt{xf}8 11.\texttt{b}3 solves the problem of the annoying pin. Now we will simply be an exchange up for no compensation; in fact, White even looks to be better off than Black in terms of development and piece activity.

The text move is the most principled choice but it smells suspicious to me.

10.axb4!
I have always found it fun to offer this kind of sacrifice to lure the enemy queen away from the action, so I could not resist exploring it in greater detail.

10...\texttt{wa}1\uparrow 11.\texttt{d}1 \texttt{c}6
11...d6 has not yet been tested. The simple 12.\texttt{xf}8 \texttt{xf}8 13.exd6 is perfectly nice for White, but going after the king with 12.h4!\rightarrow seems like more fun.

11...\texttt{a}4?! 12.\texttt{xf}8 (Keeping the strong bishop with 12.c3!\texttt{N} is even stronger; for instance, 12...\texttt{c}6 13.\texttt{b}5 \texttt{a}2 14.0-0 and White is already winning. However, I want to show that even an imprecise continuation still leads to a clear advantage.) 12...\texttt{xf}8 13.c3 \texttt{c}6 14.\texttt{b}5 \texttt{a}2 This was Vinje Gulbrandsen – Stein, Gausdal 1986, and now after the simple 15.0-0\texttt{N} the queen on a2 may as well not exist.

12.\texttt{b}5!\texttt{N}
White has won a couple of games by exchanging on c6, but I like the bishop development even more.

12...\texttt{db}4
After 12...\texttt{xd}4 13.\texttt{xd}4 White is dominating and Black has no time to even complete development.

12...f5 13.\texttt{h}4 \texttt{xd}4 14.\texttt{xd}4 a6 15.\texttt{e}2\uparrow does not change much.
The knight comes into attack as well. White’s development advantage is overwhelming.

C3) 5...\( \Delta \)c6

This is the Four Knights Sicilian – definitely the most respectable of the systems examined in this chapter. It can also be reached via a 2...\( \Delta \)c6 move order, but I guess most of its adherents will prefer 2...e6 in order to rule out the Rossolimo.

6.\( \Delta \)db5

6...\( \Delta \)xc6 bxc6 7.e5 is a big alternative but the text move is much easier to play.

Black has two serious moves: C31) 6...\( \Delta \)c5 and C32) 6...\( \Delta \)b4.

6...d6 7.\( \Delta \)f4 e5 8.\( \Delta \)g5 transposes to the Sveshnikov, with one extra move having been played.

C31) 6...\( \Delta \)c5 7.\( \Delta \)d6†?

7.\( \Delta \)f4 is the more conservative approach. It should lead to a pleasant endgame for White, although Black remains solid as well. The text move aims for the maximum.

7...\( \Delta \)e7 8.\( \Delta \)f4 e5 9.\( \Delta \)f5† \( \Delta \)f8 10.\( \Delta \)g5

10.\( \Delta \)e3 \( \Delta \)b4! would cause us some trouble.

10...d6

In light of the previous note, we should also consider:

10...\( \Delta \)b4

Here this move is no problem because our bishop is much better on g5 than on e3. This is best shown after:

11.\( \Delta \)e3! \( \Delta \)a5

11...h6 12.\( \Delta \)xf6 \( \Delta \)xc3† 13.bxc3 \( \Delta \)xf6 leaves our structure a bit spoilt but Black will be under pressure on d6, and perhaps also along the f-file. The prospect of \( \Delta \)d5 will also be annoying for him. 14.\( \Delta \)c4 d6 15.0-0† Salgado Lopez – Chernov, Haguenau 2013.

12.\( \Delta \)c4! \( \Delta \)xc3† 13.bxc3 \( \Delta \)xc3† 13...\( \Delta \)c5 14.\( \Delta \)xf6 gxf6 15.\( \Delta \)f3+

14.\( \Delta \)d2 \( \Delta \)d4 15.f3
Ortiz – Chernov, Baden 2014, when 17.\texttt{c1!N} followed by \texttt{a3} would have been awkward for Black.

16.\texttt{c3 e5 17.\texttt{e3 d4 18.\texttt{c1! g8 19.a3}}}

White has more than enough activity for a pawn.

Black’s position in the main line is not so terrible, but I don’t see the appeal of playing a normal Sicilian structure with the king misplaced on f8. True, his dark-squared bishop is actively placed, but I still think it’s a good trade-off for White.

11.\texttt{d3}

I like the simplicity of this move.

I would prefer not to play 11.\texttt{xf6 xf6} without being provoked, especially as 12.\texttt{d5 g6} forces White to waste time with a move like \texttt{f3} before the f1-bishop can be developed.

11.\texttt{c4} may look like a better square for the bishop but 11...\texttt{e6} is slightly annoying, for instance: 12.\texttt{b3 h6! 13.xf6 xf6 14.d5 d8 15.0–0 g6 16.fe3} \texttt{g7} Black’s position does not look too bad compared to some other Sicilian variations.

11...\texttt{e6?!N}

This seems like a logical attempt to improve Black’s play. Other moves give White an easy life:

11...h6 12.\texttt{xf6 xf6} leaves White essentially a tempo up on the 11.\texttt{xf6} line noted above; more importantly, Black cannot prevent our quick development. 13.\texttt{d5 g5} Abergel – Gervasio, Paris 1998. 14.0–0N\texttt{+}

11...xf5 12.exf5 \texttt{d5} occurred in Nicolenco – Galvan, email 2009, and here the simple 13.\texttt{xf6} Gxf6 14.h5 gives White the better chances thanks to his safer king. The presence of opposite-coloured bishops does not help Black, especially if White manages to provoke \ldots d4 at some point, which should be feasible. A sample line is:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[help lines,step=0.5cm] (0,0) grid (7,7);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

14...\texttt{g8} (14...\texttt{d4 15.0–0}) 15.0–0 \texttt{g7}

16...\texttt{d1 d4 17.e2 xe2} \texttt{xe2} Black will have to play \ldots d4 in the near future, when we will have the simple plan of putting the bishop on e4 and transferring one or both rooks along the third rank.

14...\texttt{xd5} 15.\texttt{c6} \texttt{d5}

I want to fight for the initiative with a pawn sacrifice.

12.\texttt{d5!}

Declining the pawn with 14...\texttt{xd3}

15.\texttt{h3} \texttt{f6 16.xf6 xf6 17.g3} leads to a comfortable edge for White; the bishop is misplaced and having the king on f8 does...
not help Black either. White will soon start pushing the queenside pawns using the misplaced bishop.

The open files and diagonals should give White excellent compensation, while Black will struggle to coordinate his pieces due to the misplaced king and bishop.

16.\textit{d}2 h6
16...\textit{e}e6 17.b4 \textit{b}6 18.\textit{ad}1 \textit{dx}g5
19.\textit{wx}g5 \textit{e}e8 20.\textit{cl}!! \textit{fl}6 21.\textit{e}e4±

17.\textit{x}f6 \textit{xf}6 18.b4 \textit{b}6 19.\textit{ac}1 g6
19...\textit{e}e6?! is a reasonable attempt to return the pawn, but 20.\textit{xd}6 \textit{d}8 21.c5 \textit{c}7
22.\textit{c}4! \textit{xd}6 23.\textit{cxd}6 \textit{d}4 24.\textit{f}4! \textit{xd}6
25.\textit{e}c3 keeps a strong initiative for White.

C32) 6...\textit{b}4

19.\textit{b}4! \textit{xb}4 20.\textit{ab}1 \textit{c}5 21.\textit{x}b7 White is clearly better, as 21...\textit{gxf}5? 22.\textit{xf}5 would be suicide for Black.
This may look like an active, exciting move, but it soon converts into a dull, slightly worse position for Black.

7.a3 \text{\texttt{xc3}}+ 8.\text{\texttt{xc3}} d5 9.exd5

We will consider C321) 9...\text{\texttt{xd5}} followed by the more popular C322) 9...exd5.

C321) 9...\text{\texttt{xd5}} 10.\text{\texttt{xd5}} exd5

10...\text{\texttt{xd5}} 11.\text{\texttt{xd5}} exd5 12.\text{\texttt{f4}} gives White an easy endgame edge, for instance:

12...\text{\texttt{f5}} 13.0–0–0 0–0–0 14.\text{\texttt{e2}} (The exact moves don’t matter too much. Another sensible continuation is: 14.f3 h5 15.\text{\texttt{d2}} \text{\texttt{he8}} Peng – Christiansen, Yerevan [ol] 1996. 16.\text{\texttt{e2N}} f6 17.h4 d4 18.\text{\texttt{hd1}}± 14...\text{\texttt{he8}} In Sobisch – Kopisch, Germany 1994, the most precise continuation would have been: 15.\text{\texttt{d2N}} d4 16.b3 f6 17.\text{\texttt{hd1}} Black faces an unenviable struggle for a draw.

13.\text{\texttt{e5}} 14.b5+ \text{\texttt{d7}} 15.\text{\texttt{xd7}}

15.a4?! is too sophisticated; after 15...0–0–0 16.\text{\texttt{d1}} \text{\texttt{f5}} Black was okay in Akopian – Safarli, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013. Exchanging bishops isn’t bad for White, so why avoid it?

15...\text{\texttt{xd7}} 16.\text{\texttt{d1}} \text{\texttt{c6}} 17.f3

17.b3N \text{\texttt{he8}} 18.\text{\texttt{f1}} is possible, but we will soon be able to develop the bishop on b2 anyway, so it seems more convenient to put the king on f2 instead of f1.

17...\text{\texttt{he8}} 18.\text{\texttt{f2}} \text{\texttt{e6}}

18...\text{\texttt{ad8}} 19.\text{\texttt{e3}} b6 20.b3 does not change much.

11.\text{\texttt{d3}} \text{\texttt{e7}}

11...0–0 12.0–0± has been played several times but I don’t see much point in analysing it in detail, as it is obvious that White has a pleasant advantage. The text move seems a better try, as Black at least forces a slight misplacement of our king.

12.\text{\texttt{e2}} \text{\texttt{xe2}}+ 13.\text{\texttt{xe2}}

Despite the temporary king misplacement, White has the more pleasant endgame. Winning it will not be easy of course, and Black was able to hold a draw in some engine games, but it won’t be any fun to defend Black’s position in a practical game.
19.b3 \textit{eae}8 20.\\textit{\textbf{b}2} \textit{\textbf{g}6}

This is the more popular recapture, avoiding excessive simplifications.

10.\\textit{\textbf{d}3} 0–0 11.0–0 \textit{d4}

Black can also try holding this pawn back, for instance:

11...\textit{g4} 12.\textit{f3} \textit{\textbf{e}6}
12...\textit{\textbf{h}5} 13.\textit{\textbf{g}5} \textit{\textbf{w}b6}† 14.\textit{\textbf{h}1} \textit{\textbf{e}4}?
looks fancy, but 15.\textit{\textbf{x}e}4 dxe4 16.\textit{\textbf{x}e}4 \textit{\textbf{w}xb2} 17.\textit{\textbf{w}b1} \textit{\textbf{w}xb1} 18.\textit{\textbf{e}axb1} \textit{f5} 19.\textit{\textbf{d}3}

13.\textit{\textbf{g}5}

The pin is extremely annoying for Black.

13...\textit{\textbf{b}6}†
13...\textit{\textbf{h}6} 14.\textit{\textbf{h}4} does not change much.

14.\textit{\textbf{h}1} \textit{\textbf{d}7}
14...\textit{\textbf{w}xb2}? 15.\textit{\textbf{x}f6} gxf6 16.\textit{\textbf{d}2} was a disaster for Black in N. Mueller – J. Szekely, Gyor 1906.

15.f4! f5
15...\textit{\textbf{f}6} 16.\textit{\textbf{h}5} f5 17.\textit{\textbf{f}3} is the same thing.

16.\textit{\textbf{f}3} d4 17.\textit{\textbf{d}5} \textit{\textbf{w}a5} 18.\textit{\textbf{c}4} \textit{\textbf{h}8} 19.b4 \textit{\textbf{d}x}d5 20.\textit{\textbf{x}d}5†

White keeps a pleasant advantage with two bishops against two knights, Van der Tak – Arnlind, corr. 1973.
12. \( \text{\textit{\textup{e}4}} \)

12. \( \text{\textit{\textup{e}4}} \) seems like a sensible alternative, but after 12. \( \text{\textit{\textup{f}5}} \) 13. \( \text{\textit{\textup{g}5}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{x}e}4} \) 14. \( \text{\textit{\textup{x}e}4} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{e}8}} \) Black has performed surprisingly well with two knights against two bishops. His pieces are well coordinated and it is hard for White to put any serious pressure on the d4-pawn.

12. \( \text{\textit{\textup{g}4}} \)

12. \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}5}} \) hasn’t been played much recently, and for good reason: 13. \( \text{\textit{\textup{f}4}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}6}} \) 14. \( \text{\textit{\textup{h}5}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{x}h}5} \) 15. \( \text{\textit{\textup{x}h}5} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{h}6}} \) The simplification only makes White’s life easier; there is more than one good way to proceed from here:

14. \( \text{\textit{\textup{f}4}} \) has achieved a slightly higher percentage score, but 14... \( \text{\textit{\textup{g}6}} \) 15. \( \text{\textit{\textup{x}g}6} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{h}xg}6} \) 16. \( \text{\textit{\textup{f}6}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{b}6}} \) has been doing rather well for Black at correspondence level. It is hard to prove something against concrete play from Black; one such line is 17. \( \text{\textit{\textup{f}3}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{e}8}} \) 18. \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}2}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{e}3}} \) as in Oechslein – Puzone, email 2013.

White’s strategy after the text move is simple: win the d4-pawn! The plan for the next few moves will involve \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}2}} \), \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}1}} \) and \( \text{\textit{\textup{h}4-f}2} \), which will bring tremendous pressure to bear on the pawn. To defend it, Black will have to resort to some sophisticated queen manoeuvres, as shown in our main line.

14. \( \text{\textit{\textup{g}6}} \)

This has been overwhelmingly the most popular choice, and it seems to be best.

14. \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}6}} \) is less precise: 15. \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}2}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{g}6}} \) 16. \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}1}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}8}} \) (16... \( \text{\textit{\textup{f}8}} \) 17. \( \text{\textit{\textup{h}4}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{a}c}8} \) 18. \( \text{\textit{\textup{f}2}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{x}d}3} \) 19. \( \text{\textit{\textup{d}3}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{e}5}} \) 20. \( \text{\textit{\textup{x}d}4} \) Neiksans – Lavendelis, Riga 2012) 17. \( \text{\textit{\textup{g}6}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textup{h}g}6} \)
18...e3? (The positioning of Black's queen enables this slight modification of White's plan, although 18.h4 might just amount to the same thing.) 18...f6e8 19.f2 d5 20.c3 Black soon found himself a pawn down in Neiksans-Annaberdiev, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

15...h4!
I want to bring the bishop to f2 in order to deal with any ...b6 ideas.

15.e8 16.e1 c8 17.xg6 hxg6 18.h4! would be thwarted by 18...b6!, threatening both ...d3† and ...xb2.

15...e8
15...d6 can be met by 16.g3, driving the queen to a slightly worse square before the bishop goes to f2. 16.d7 17.xg6 hxg6 18.d2+ Schuller – Schoenbeck, corr. 2013.

16.xg6 hxg6 17.f2 b6!
Without this, the d-pawn would soon perish.

18.d2!

I also considered 18.b3?N but found 18...d5! to be an adequate answer: 19.d2 e3 20.f1 f5 21.g3 xg3 22.xg3 a6 23.a4 b6 24.f2 c5 Black keeps the d-pawn alive and should hold without much difficulty.

18...d8 19.e1
19...\textsubscript{W}b5?!N

This seems like Black's best try. The queen is obviously not comfortable opposite White's bishop, so Black wants to transfer it to a better square to defend d4, while at the same time creating some ideas for counterplay. Still, I can't help feeling suspicious about the level of precision Black needs just to get any sort of activity.

19...\textsubscript{W}c7? 20.\textsubscript{Q}xd4+ leaves Black a pawn down with no way to exploit the pin.

19...\textsubscript{Q}d5N 20.b4! threatens to grab the pawn, and if 20...\textsubscript{Q}e3 21.c3 the tension along the g1-a7 diagonal clearly favours White.

19...a5

This move was played in Kotronias – Janjgava, Ankara 1995. I found an instructive improvement for White:

20.a4!N

Black is running out of useful moves. He will have to continue to shuffle around and be passive, while White has many possible ways to improve his position. For instance, he could play b2-b3 and \textsubscript{Q}f4, then exchange rooks and renew the pressure on d4, or simply plant the knight on d3.

20...\textsubscript{g}5?!

Preventing the aforementioned plan, but now Black has an extra weakness to worry about.

21.h3

21.\textsubscript{W}xg5?! \textsubscript{W}xb2± would be pointless; but what is Black supposed to do now?

21...\textsubscript{Q}d5 22.b3 \textsubscript{W}b4

22...\textsubscript{W}e5 23.\textsubscript{R}ad1 \textsubscript{R}ed8 24.\textsubscript{Q}c1±

23.\textsubscript{W}xb4 axb4 24.\textsubscript{R}ad1 \textsubscript{R}ed8 25.\textsubscript{Q}c1

Other plans are possible of course; this is just an illustrative line to show the types of manoeuvres that are available in such positions. The knight will not only be an excellent blockader on d3; it will also put unpleasant pressure on the b4-pawn. A possible continuation is:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}
20.a4 \text{\textit{d5}}

20...\textit{xf5} 21.\textit{xd4±}

21.\textit{\textit{xf6}}

Inserting 21.b4 a6 does not improve White's chances.

21.\textit{\textit{ad1}} would be a good move if it were not for 21...\textit{\textit{a2}}! 22.\textit{\textit{b1}} (or 22.b3?! d3!) 22...d3 23.\textit{\textit{c3}} \textit{\textit{xe1\dagger}} 24.\textit{\textit{xe1}} \textit{\textit{c4}} when Black equalizes.

21.b3 d3 22.c4!? (22.\textit{\textit{bc3}} \textit{\textit{xe1\dagger}} 23.\textit{\textit{xe1}} \textit{\textit{f5=}}) could be explored more, but it will be hard to win the d3-pawn, and White's queenside pawns are somewhat vulnerable too.

21...\textit{\textit{g5}}

21...\textit{\textit{xf5}} 22.\textit{\textit{xe8\dagger}} \textit{\textit{xe8}} (22...\textit{\textit{xe8}}? 23.\textit{\textit{e2±}) 23.\textit{\textit{e1}} is essentially the same position, but Black may as well take the opportunity to provoke a slight weakening of our kingside.

Gaining control over the e-file is a slight achievement, and of course the d4-pawn will remain weak for the foreseeable future. White can continue playing useful moves such as b2-b3 and \textit{\textit{d3}}, while also keeping in mind the possibility of advancing on the kingside with g2-g4 and \textit{\textit{g2}} at some point. Black remains pretty solid of course, but it is hard to think of an active plan for him, so he will just have to sit and wait for White to do something.

**Conclusion**

4...\textit{\textit{b6}} looks suspicious and White builds up a significant lead in development after sacrificing the b2-pawn – although it helps to know about the 7.\textit{c3!} finesse to get the most from White's position.

4...\textit{\textit{c5}} 5.\textit{\textit{xe3}} \textit{\textit{xe6}} is a related line; I find 6.\textit{\textit{a3?!}} to be a good practical reply, when White gets a pleasant edge without having to remember any complicated variations.

Finally we looked at a few options after 4...\textit{\textit{f6}} 5.\textit{\textit{c3}}. Firstly there was 5...\textit{\textit{b6}}, which can almost be refuted if White knows what he is doing. 5...\textit{\textit{b4}} is not so terrible, as long as Black avoids the losing 6.e5 \textit{\textit{e4?}} – but even after the superior 6...\textit{\textit{d5}}, White has good attacking prospects. The main line of the chapter was the Sicilian Four Knights with 5...\textit{\textit{c6}}, when I recommend 6.\textit{\textit{db5}}. Then 6...\textit{\textit{c5}} is an interesting move, but I like White's position after checking on d6 followed by simple development. The main line is 6...\textit{\textit{d4}} 7.a3 \textit{\textit{xc3\dagger}} 8.\textit{\textit{xc3}} d5, which generally leads to some sort of IQP position. Black's active piece play gives him some compensation for the pawn weakness, but generally White keeps some pressure without incurring much risk – and it's always nice to have the two bishops.
Sidelines

Move 2 Alternatives

Variation Index

1. e4 c5

2. \( \text{\#f3} \)

A) 2...g6
B) 2...\( \text{\#f6} \) 3.\( \text{\#c3} \)
   B1) 3...e6
   B2) 3...\( \text{\#c6} \)
   B3) 3...d5 4.\( \text{\#b5}\)
       B31) 4...\( \text{\#c6} \)
       B32) 4...\( \text{\#d7} \)
B) 2...\( \text{\#f6} \) 3...e6
   B2) 3...\( \text{\#f6} \)
   B3) 3...d5 4...\( \text{\#d7} \)
   B31) 4...\( \text{\#c6} \)
   B32) 4...\( \text{\#d7} \)
C) 2...b6 3.d4 exd4 4.\( \text{\#xd4} \) \( \text{\#b7} \) 5.\( \text{\#c3} \)
   C1) 5...\( \text{\#c6} \)
   C2) 5...\( \text{\#f6} \)
   C3) 5...a6

Variation Index

1. e4 c5

2. \( \text{\#f3} \)

A) 2...g6

B) 2...\( \text{\#f6} \) 3.\( \text{\#c3} \)
   B1) 3...e6
   B2) 3...\( \text{\#c6} \)
   B3) 3...d5 4.\( \text{\#b5}\)
       B31) 4...\( \text{\#c6} \)
       B32) 4...\( \text{\#d7} \)
B) 2...\( \text{\#f6} \) 3...e6
   B2) 3...\( \text{\#f6} \)
   B3) 3...d5 4...\( \text{\#d7} \)
   B31) 4...\( \text{\#c6} \)
   B32) 4...\( \text{\#d7} \)
C) 2...b6 3.d4 exd4 4.\( \text{\#xd4} \) \( \text{\#b7} \) 5.\( \text{\#c3} \)
   C1) 5...\( \text{\#c6} \)
   C2) 5...\( \text{\#f6} \)
   C3) 5...a6

450

452

452

454

458

458

458

459

460

461

462

463

464

465

467

473

473

474

A) after 8...d6

B2) note to 6...\( \text{\#xc3} \)

C1) note to 8...\( \text{\#b4} \)
1.e4 c5 2.d3

A) 2...g6 3.d4

This almost always transposes to the Accelerated Dragon after a subsequent ...cxd4 and dxd4. The rare exceptions are those cases where Black plays an early ...a5.

3...g7 4.d3 a5

Black's set-up is known as the Pterodactyl, and is one of the options recommended by Charlie Storey in his Sniper repertoire book.

Another version of the same idea is:
4...c6 5.e3 a5 6.d5!

As we will see below, this move works well even without the knight on c6, so in this particular position the decision is easy.

6...e5 7.xe5 xe5

White has brought the queen to d2 in a few games, but he can happily sac a pawn.

b) I would prefer 3.d3 (c3!? is also good), avoiding Black's main idea after d2-d4. Now Black will have to transpose to some other Sicilian where ...h6 is unlikely to be of much use.

   a b c d e f g h

8...e2! Nxe3

Both 8...b5 9.d6!? and 8...f6 9.0–0 e3 give White a dangerous initiative.
White does not have to hurry to attack, and can simply strengthen his position while the dark-squared bishop remains a long-term asset.

14...d6 15.Wd2 d7 16.c3 e8 17.hf1±

5.d5!?

5.e3 d6 6.Wd2 cxd4 7.xd4 c6 reaches a weird kind of Dragon. I doubt it’s great for Black, but it seems simpler just to avoid it.

The text move is direct and ambitious; it gains space in the centre while preventing any pesky ...c6-d4 ideas. I wouldn’t worry about the possibility of Black taking on c3, as his king will be vulnerable and his extra pawn will not have much effect on the ensuing battle. However, if he does not accept the pawn sacrifice then the ...a5 set-up just seems like a waste of time, especially as this is already not the best version of the Benoni for him.

5...xc3†

5...d6 6.e2 gives White an easy game, for instance: 6...g4 (6...f6 7.0–0 0–0 8.d2 x8 9.a4±; 6...xc3† 7.bxc3 g4 8.0–0 d7 9.c4±) 7.0–0 xB3 8.xf3 d6 9.d2 xB8 10.a4 xg6 11.g3 0–0 12.g2±

6.bxc3 d6

6...Wxc3†? 7.e2 gives White a huge initiative for a measly pawn.

6...d6 7.e2 d6 8.c4 Wc7 9.d3 also gives White a clear advantage; the dark-squared bishop is powerful and the doubled pawns are not really weak.

7.xe4 8.0–0 d6

8...xc3 9.We1 gives White a serious initiative.

8...f5 9.h6 d6 10.d3 d7 11.xe4 fxe4 12.g5± is unpleasant for Black.

8...0–0 9.e1 is also great for White: 9.d6 (9...xc3 10.xd2 x2† 11.xe2 e8 12.h2 d6 13.e3++; 9...xc3 10.h6 e8 11.d3 h6 12.d1) 10.d3 xB6 11.xc7 xD5 12.e1 c6 13.h6±
1.e4 vs the Sicilian III

9.\textit{\textbf{\textit{B}}h6?N}

9.d3 \textit{\textbf{\textit{g}}f6 10.\textit{e}e1 \textit{\textbf{g}}g4 11.h3 \textit{\textbf{xf}}3 12.\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 \textit{\textbf{bd}}7 13.\textit{\textbf{f}}f4 0-0 14.\textit{\textbf{xe}}7 was better for White in Gobet – Keene, London 1981. However, I like the idea of preventing short castling even more.

9...\textit{\textbf{g}}g4

9...\textit{\textbf{xc}}3 10.\textit{\textbf{e}}e1 \textit{\textbf{xe}}2\textdagger 11.\textit{\textbf{xe}}2 is dangerous for Black.

9...\textit{\textbf{d}}7 10.\textit{\textbf{e}}e1 \textit{\textbf{df}}6 11.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3 \textit{\textbf{g}}g4 12.\textit{\textbf{f}}f4 \textit{\textbf{xc}}3 13.\textit{\textbf{d}}2 clearly favours White.

10.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3 \textit{\textbf{xf}}3 11.\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 \textit{\textbf{f}}f6 12.\textit{\textbf{ab}}1\textbf{N}

White has more than enough play for a pawn.

B) 2...\textit{\textbf{xf}}6 3.\textit{\textbf{c}}c3

3.e5 \textit{\textbf{d}}5 is also interesting, but I find the text move a simpler choice. The threat of e4-e5 means that Black only has a few sensible options, and against all of them White intends to play 4.d4, when ...\textit{\textbf{xd}}4 will lead to a normal Sicilian.

Naturally we will focus on Black’s attempts to avoid this transposition. He may consider B1) 3...\textit{\textbf{e}}6, B2) 3...\textit{\textbf{c}}c6 and B3) 3...\textit{\textbf{d}}5.

B1) 3...\textit{\textbf{e}}6 4.d4

Obviously exchanging on d4 would lead to normal Sicilian play, but Black can keep the game in independent territory with:

4...\textit{\textbf{d}}5

This has occurred in a few hundred games, and has not scored too badly for Black.

5.\textit{\textbf{ex}}d5 \textit{\textbf{xd}}5

This is the usual choice.

If Black recaptures with the pawn then his centre will come under heavy fire:

5...\textit{\textbf{ex}}d5 6.\textit{\textbf{g}}g5

6.\textit{\textbf{b}}b5\textdagger \textit{\textbf{c}}c6 7.0-0 \textit{\textbf{e}}7 8.dxc5 is also promising for White.

6...\textit{\textbf{e}}7

6...\textit{\textbf{e}}6 7.\textit{\textbf{b}}b5\textdagger \textit{\textbf{c}}c6 8.0-0 a6 9.\textit{\textbf{xc}}6\textdagger \textit{\textbf{xc}}6 10.\textit{\textbf{e}}e1 \textit{\textbf{e}}7 11.\textit{\textbf{a}}a4\textbf{N} c4 12.\textit{\textbf{c}}c5 \textit{\textbf{xc}}5 13.dxc5\textdagger
7. Bb5+ a6 8. dxc5

The pressure on d5 makes it hard for Black to get the pawn back.

8... 0-0

8... Bxc5 9. Bxf6 Bxf6 occurred in Bueno Villena – Lino, Oviedo 2000, when the simple 10. Bxd5± would have been a safe pawn grab.

9. 0-0 Be6


Giving up the g2-pawn is a typical idea to accelerate White’s development. Variation E of Chapter 8 (beginning on page 193) is a similar example that springs to mind. Incidentally, the text move was first played by Nimzowitsch more than a century ago!

9... e5

After 9... Bxg2 10. f3 Black may try:

a) 10... Bh3 11. Bf3 gives White superb compensation; I don’t think we need to spend any more time analysing this.

b) I can’t resist including the full game:

10... g6 11. d2 e5?! 12. 0-0-0! exd4 13. Bxd4 c6

8. Bxd4 a6

8... e7 9. Bb5± was poor for Black in Shakuro – Kremenetsky, St Petersburg 1999, so he needs to spend another tempo on a pawn move.
1. \( e4 \) vs the Sicilian

III

17. \( \text{Wd}8 \)† \( \text{xd}8 \) 18. \( \text{Wxe}8 \# \) Nimzowitsch - Alapin, Vilnius 1912.

10. \( \text{Qb}3! \)

10. \( \text{Qb}3 \) \( \text{Wa}5 \)† was not so convincing in Tiviakov - Afek, Vlissingen 2003.

10. \( \text{Wxd}1 \)†

10. ... \( \text{Wxg}2 \) 11. \( \text{Qf}3 \) \( \text{Wg}6 \) 12. \( \text{We}2 \) is similar to 9. ... \( \text{Wxg}2 \); once again, White has great play for a mere pawn.

11. \( \text{Qxd}1 \) \( \text{Cc}6 \) 12.0-0

Black is significantly behind in development and will find moves like \( \text{Qc}5 \) extremely irritating.

12. ... \( \text{Qe}7 \)

12. ... \( \text{Qe}6 \) 13. \( \text{Qc}5 \)†

13. \( \text{Qc}5 \)†

One way or another, Black is likely to have to give up one of his bishops, handing White a clear, long-term advantage.

B2) 3... \( \text{Qc}6 \)

Just like the previous line, Black can follow this up with either ... \( \text{cx}d4 \), leading to a normal Sicilian, or \( 4.\text{d}5 \), which gives this move order its distinctive flavour. Obviously we will focus on the latter.

4. \( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{d}5 \) 5. \( \text{ex}d5 \) \( \text{Qxd}5 \) 6. \( \text{b}5! \)

After 6. \( \text{dx}c5 \) \( \text{Qxc}5 \) 7. \( \text{Wxd}8 \)† \( \text{Wxd}8 \) 8. \( \text{bxc}3 \) \( \text{f6} \) Black is doing surprisingly well, with ... \( \text{e}5 \) and ... \( \text{Qe}6 \) coming next.

The text move is really annoying for Black. Depending on how Black continues, White may increase the pressure with ... \( \text{e}5 \), damage Black’s structure by exchanging on \( \text{c}6 \), or even retreat the bishop to \( \text{d}3 \) after a few moves, as in our main line below.
6...\(\text{dx}c3\)

Black has tried several other moves but none of them solve his problems:

6...a6 7.\(\text{dx}c6\)t bxc6 8.0-0 \(\text{dx}c3\) (8...e6 9.\(\text{e}4\)±) 9.bxc3 \(\text{g}4\)tN (9...e6 10.\(\text{e}5\)± Pogats – Florian, Budapest 1952) 10.h3 \(\text{h}5\) 11.\(\text{e}1\) e6

8.\(\text{dx}c6\)t

This provides an edge by simple means.

8.\(\text{e}5\)t! (8...\(\text{f}3\) 9.0-0 \(\text{e}6\) 10.\(\text{d}1\)±) 9.\(\text{c}4\) \(\text{a}5\) was okay for Black in Bielby – Seitz, Whitby 1962.

8...bxc6 9.e6 \(\text{dx}c3\) \(\text{a}5\) 10.\(\text{x}d6\)t \(\text{b}7\) 10.0-0 \(\text{e}5\) 11.\(\text{x}c6\)t \(\text{d}7\) 12.\(\text{e}4\) \(\text{c}8\) 13.\(\text{c}4\)± 10.\(\text{f}4\) \(\text{f}6\) 11.0-0-0t

Penrose – Isles, Buxton 1950.
6...\textit{g4} 7.h3 \textit{h5} 8.0-0 \textit{\textita{xc}3} 9.bxc3 \textit{e6}
10.g4! \textit{\textit{g6}} 11.\textit{\textit{e}5}

The pin is unpleasant for Black, for instance:

11...\textit{a6}
11...\textit{\textit{xc}6?!} is met by 12.f4! \textit{\textit{e}4} 13.f5 exf5
14.gxf5+- followed by \textit{\textit{g}4} with a crushing initiative.

12.\textit{\textit{xc}6} \textit{\textit{c7}} 13.\textit{\textit{a}4} bxc6
13...\textit{\textit{b}5} 14.\textit{\textit{xf}3} bxa4 15.\textit{\textit{f}4}+

14.d5 0-0-0 15.\textit{\textit{xc}6} exd5 16.\textit{\textit{xd}5} \textit{\textit{e}4}
In Andrae – Wojciechowski, corr. 2012, White kept some advantage with 17.\textit{c4}, but it seems even more tempting to play:

17.\textit{\textit{xe}4}!N \textit{\textit{xd}1} 18.\textit{\textit{xd}1} \textit{\textit{d}6} 19.\textit{\textit{b}1}+

White has approximate material equality for the queen, plus a strong initiative against Black’s vulnerable king.

7.bxc3 \textit{cxd4}
Now 8.cxd4 \textit{\textit{a}5}† would be annoying, but White has something far stronger.

8.0-0!
This is the key idea that makes the \textit{\textit{b}5} plan work. Taking the second pawn would be too risky, so White will be able to convert to a favourable central structure.

8...\textit{\textit{e}6}
8...\textit{\textit{g}4}?! 9.h3 \textit{\textit{xf}3} (9...\textit{\textit{h}5} 10.\textit{\textit{cx}d}4\textit{+})
10.\textit{\textit{xf}3} \textit{\textit{c8}} 11.\textit{\textit{cx}d}4 \textit{\textit{e}6} 12.\textit{\textit{d}1}+- Sulypa – Tomczak, Legnica 2011.

8...\textit{\textit{dx}c}3
This is too greedy, though obviously we should check it just to make sure.
9.\textit{\textit{xd}8}† \textit{\textit{xd}8} 10.\textit{\textit{d}1}† \textit{\textit{c}7}
10...\textit{\textit{e}8} 11.\textit{\textit{e}5} a6 12.\textit{\textit{a}4} (12.\textit{\textit{xc}6} \textit{\textit{d}7}?) 12...\textit{\textit{f}6} 13.\textit{\textit{xc}6} \textit{\textit{d}7} 14.\textit{\textit{xd}7} \textit{\textit{xd}7}
Pirttimaki – Pribyl, Helsinki 1984. White has a few good moves, but 15.\textit{\textit{e}5}†\textit{N}+) seems most convincing; White’s minor pieces are clearly stronger than Black’s spare rook.
11. **\( \text{Bxc6!N} \)**

Giving up the bishop seems like a surprising choice, but it is worth it as the knight was an important defender.

11... **\( \text{Bxc6} \)**

11... **\( \text{Bxc6} \)**

12. **\( \text{e5}\uparrow \text{Bb6} \)**

13. **\( \text{dxf7} \)**

14. **\( \text{Bb1}\uparrow \)**

9. **\( \text{cxd4} \)**

The central structure favours White. If Black develops normally and castles, then White will build up pressure against the h7-pawn with **\( \text{d3} \)** and c2-c3, followed by either **\( \text{g5}\)**, or **\( \text{c2} \)** and **\( \text{d3} \)**. White could also consider a setup with c2-c4, which should probably lead to a solid edge as well.

9... **\( \text{d6}\uparrow \)**

9... **\( \text{e7} \)** 10. **\( \text{c3} \)** 0–0 11. **\( \text{e2} \)** **\( \text{d7} \)**

12. **\( \text{d3} \)**

This untested move order is Black’s best attempt to limit the damage.

12... **\( \text{e5}\uparrow \)**

11... **\( \text{e5} \)**

11... **\( \text{h6} \)** stops the knight from going to g5, but 12. **\( \text{c2} \)** followed by **\( \text{d3} \)** is unpleasant for Black.

11... **\( \text{b6} \)**

12. **\( \text{g5} \)**

12... **\( \text{g6} \)** (12... **\( \text{h6} \)** occurred in Boruchovsky – Nasuta, Pardubice 2015, when 13. **\( \text{h7}\uparrow \text{Be8} \)** 14. **\( \text{Wh5} \)** would already have been winning for White). In Kunkel – Reich, Passau 1996, White missed a strong idea:

10. **\( \text{d3} \)**

10. **\( \text{c4} \)** 0–0 11. **\( \text{e1}\uparrow \)** is an alternative plan.

10... **\( \text{0–0} \)**

10... **\( \text{b4} \)** 11. **\( \text{e4} \)** **\( \text{f5} \)** 12. **\( \text{d3}\uparrow \)**

11. **\( \text{c3} \)**

Suddenly we have transposed to a huge number of games.
and transposes to our main line below) 14...\text{ex}e8 15.\text{b}5 and White won the exchange in Sevillano – Stanec, Moscow 1994.

This is Black’s most direct way of striking in the centre.

4.\text{b}5†

4.exd5 \text{ex}d5 5.\text{b}5† is the usual continuation, when 5...\text{d}7 is normal. White can certainly fight for an edge here, as Khalifman shows, but I like the text move even more.

We will consider B31) 4...\text{c}6 followed by B32) 4...\text{d}7.

B31) 4...\text{c}6 5.\text{e}5?

5.\text{xc}6 \text{bxc}6 6.d3 might be decent as well, but I want to aim for a better version of this structure by luring the bishop to \text{d}7.

Finally, 5.exd5 \text{ex}d5 6.\text{e}5 \text{xc}3 7.dxc3 \text{xd}1† 8.\text{xd}1 \text{a}6 (8...\text{d}7 9.\text{xc}6 \text{xc}6 10.\text{xc}6 \text{bxc}6 11.\text{e}3\text{k}) 9.\text{xc}6† \text{bxc}6 reaches an endgame with a structural advantage for White, but the two bishops give Black excellent chances to hold, and his practical results have been fine.
5...\(\text{\textit{d}6}\)
5...\(\text{\textit{d}7}\) gives us exactly what we want after 6...\(\text{\textit{x}c6}\) \(\text{bxc6}\)N 7.d3. The knight on e5 is annoying for Black, and the c6-c5-d5 pawn blob will remain weak no matter what Black does.

6.d4 a6
6...cxd4N 7.Wfxd4 li:ld7 8.ixc6 bxc6 9.li:lxd7 l'!lxd7 10. exd5 e6 11.d6 \(\text{\textit{d}6}\) 12.\(\text{\textit{d}6}\) \(\text{\textit{x}d6}\) 13.\(\text{\textit{e}3}\) gives White a typical endgame edge.

7.\(\text{\textit{x}c6}\)\(\text{bxc6}\)
White can attempt to exploit his development advantage in a few ways. My suggestion is:

8.exd5?N cxd5 9.if4 Wfb6 10.0-0 cxd4
11.\(\text{\textit{a}4}\)N
White is too far ahead in development.

B32) 4...\(\text{\textit{d}7}\) 5.e5!
This is the big difference from the 4.exd5 line. Khalifman mentions that 5.exd5 \(\text{\textit{x}b5}\) 6.\(\text{\textit{x}b5}\) \(\text{\textit{x}d5}\) gives White no advantage, but he does not mention the text move.

5...\(\text{\textit{x}b5}\)
5...d4
This move opens things up and changes the structure, but not in Black’s favour.

6.exf6 dxc3 7.fxg7 cxd2\(\uparrow\) 8.Wxd2?
Taking with the bishop is also good, but I prefer the text move because I see a more specific and easy plan for the next few moves.

8...\(\text{\textit{x}g7}\)
Black cannot be satisfied with 11...\texttt{\texttt{e}}7 12.\texttt{a}5 or 11...0-0 12.\texttt{d}d1+. 12.\texttt{c}2 0-0-0 13.\texttt{c}3 
White has the safer king and will soon play b2-b4, which can be prepared by a2-a3 if necessary.

6.\texttt{x}b5 \texttt{f}d7

7.e6!
This type of sacrifice is thematic and almost always strong.

7...\texttt{f}xe6 8.0-0 \texttt{b}6
8...\texttt{c}6 is not a bad move, but 9.\texttt{c}3 \texttt{f}6 10.\texttt{e}1 \texttt{c}6 11.d4 cxd4 12.\texttt{x}d4 \texttt{c}2 13.\texttt{f}d4 \texttt{c}8 14.\texttt{f}4 keeps an edge for White.

8...e5 occurred in Jakovenko – Llobel Cortell, San Sebastian 2006. White has several possible continuations, but I like the following straightforward approach: 9.d3N (9.c4?N is also interesting) 9.\texttt{c}6 (9...\texttt{b}6 10.\texttt{c}3 e6 [10...\texttt{c}6 11.\texttt{e}1±] 11.\texttt{g}5 \texttt{f}6 12.\texttt{f}4+) 10.c4 dxc4 (10...d4 11.\texttt{g}5+) 11.\texttt{g}5 \texttt{b}6 12.dxc4 a6 13.\texttt{c}3 \texttt{d}4 14.\texttt{d}5 \texttt{c}6 15.\texttt{e}3 Black’s position is ugly.

9.c4!
The same idea led to a good position in the note above, and it works well here too.

9...\texttt{f}5?N
After 9...g6 10.\texttt{e}1 White is already threatening \texttt{f}xe6.

9...\texttt{c}6 was played in Adams – Grandelius, Reykjavik 2015. I think White’s best continuation is: 10.\texttt{e}1!N (Adams chose 10.d3 and stood better, but Grandelius took the opportunity to stabilize his position with 10...d4! and he eventually saved the game) 10...dxc4 (10...\texttt{d}8 11.d4±) 11.\texttt{a}3 \texttt{a}6 12.b3 White has a dangerous initiative.

10.\texttt{e}1 dxc4
In the event of 10...e4? 11.\texttt{g}5± the knight threatens to go to e6, while Black’s centre is on the verge of collapsing.

11.\texttt{a}3±
11.\texttt{a}4± is also good. Either way, Black is vulnerable on the light squares and his extra pawn is not of much use.

C) 2.b6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\texttt{d}d4 \texttt{b}7 5.\texttt{c}3
To play this variation with Black requires a certain amount of desperation to avoid mainstream theory. Jobava and Kamsky have tried it a few times each, but not particularly successfully. One of the drawbacks of this variation is that, while Black does indeed
avoid the main theoretical paths, the ensuing positions are still pretty normal for the Sicilian. This means that White can proceed with well-known plans, just as he would do in other variations, while Black has sacrificed a good deal of flexibility. More specifically, Black's typical queenside counterplay with ...a6 and ...b5-b4 would render the earlier ...b6 a mere waste of a tempo.

Black's three main options are C1) 5...c6, C2) 5...f6 and C3) 5...a6.

C1) 5...c6 6.e3

I favour the English Attack against Black's set-up.

6...f6 7.f3 e6 8.d2 b4

8...c8 is a possible attempt to switch the move order in order to avoid my recommendation in the main line below. However, it gives White some extra options as well: 9.0-0-0N b4 This position occurred in one game via a slightly different move order. 10.db5! d5 Now in Laihonen – Alho, Finland 2014, White should have played:

9.a3!

9.0-0-0 0-0 10.a3 xc3 11.xc3 c8!
12.e1 xd4 13.xd4 c7 14.d3 e5
15.c3 fe8 was great for Black in Robson – Kamsky, Saint Louis 2012. By kicking this guy on b4 immediately, we can prevent Black from getting such a nice version of the position.

9...xc3 10.xc3 0-0

The key difference from the Robson – Kamsky game is that 10...c8 runs into 11.b5!±.
10...\( \text{cxd4} \) 11.\( \text{xd4} \) 0–0 12.\( \text{d6}! \)N is good for White. (The last move improves over 12.0–0–0 \( \text{d5} \), which was unclear in Jurkovic – Faddi, Bizovac Metalis 2007.)

This is more provocative than the other moves but there is something to be said for Black's approach – at least this way he does not fall into such an unpleasant version of the English Attack.

6.\( \text{g5}! \)

6.\( \text{f}3 \) doesn't quite feel as right here; even so, it is not clear if Black has anything better than playing ...\( \text{e6} \) at some point, when White will get his ideal position.

6...\( \text{e6} \)

Accepting the sacrifice is risky: 6...\( \text{xe4} \) 7.\( \text{xe4} \) \( \text{xe4} \) 8.\( \text{e2} \) \( \text{d5} \) White is far ahead in development and his next few moves are not particularly difficult.

11.\( \text{xc6}! \) \( \text{xc6} \)N

11...\( \text{dxc6} \) 12.\( \text{d1} \) (or 12.\( \text{e2N} \)?) gave White an easy advantage in Peng – Jokmin, email 2012.

12.\( \text{a6} \)!

Next we can castle on the kingside, with a clear positional advantage now that Black has given up his dark-squared bishop.

C2) 5...\( \text{f6} \)

9.0–0–0 (9.\( \text{b5} \)?) \( \text{a6} \) 10.\( \text{c3} \) \( \text{g6} \) 11.\( \text{h3} \) \( \text{h6} \) 12.\( \text{h4} \) \( \text{a7} \) 13.\( \text{xd5\pm} \) 9...\( \text{e6} \) 10.\( \text{f3} \) \( \text{g6} \) 11.\( \text{g4} \) \( \text{h6} \) 12.\( \text{h4} \) \( \text{c7} \) 13.\( \text{f5}! \)

6...\( \text{c6} \) is well met by 7.\( \text{f5}\)!? intending \( \text{xf6} \), when White gets a great version of the typical Rauzer structure: 7...\( \text{h6} \)? A waste of time, but Black is worse whatever he does. (7...\( \text{d6} \) 8.\( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{gxf6} \) 9.\( \text{h5\pm} \); 7...\( \text{b8} \) 8.\( \text{d2\pm} \) 8.\( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{gxf6} \) 9.\( \text{e2} \) \( \text{a6} \) 10.\( \text{h5\pm} \) Psakhis – Dizdarevic, Palma de Mallorca 1989.

7.\( \text{e5} \) \( \text{h6} \) 8.\( \text{h4} \) \( \text{g5} \) 9.\( \text{g3} \) \( \text{e4} \) 10.\( \text{xe4} \) \( \text{xe4} \)

White's bishop is not great on \( \text{g3} \), but Black's weakened kingside is a more important
feature of the position. In Leitao – Limp, Sao Paulo 2005, White could have maximized his advantage with:

12. \( 0-0 \) \( \text{dxc6} \)
12. ... \( \text{a6} \) 13. \( \text{c4} \) \( \text{b7} \) 14. \( \text{xe6} \) wins.

13. \( \text{b5} \) \( \text{xa2} \)
13. ... \( \text{e8} \) 14. \( \text{c3} \) 

11. \( \text{c2}! \) \( \text{d5} \)
11. ... \( \text{b7} \) 12. \( 0-0-0 \) \( \text{c6} \) (12. ... \( \text{c7} \) 13. \( \text{b5} \) is a nice detail.

12. \( 0-0-0 \) \( \text{c6} \)
12. ... \( \text{a6} \) 13. \( \text{c4} \) \( \text{b7} \) 14. \( \text{xe6} \) wins.

Another promising direction is: 10. \( \text{f4} \) \( \text{c5} \)N (11. ... \( \text{d6} \) 12. \( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xc3} \) 13. \( \text{bxc3} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 14. \( \text{h3} \) \( \text{xe6} \) Morokova – Gorbatyuk, email 2013) 12. \( \text{f4} \) \( \text{xc3} \) 13. \( \text{bxc3} \) \( \text{c6} \)

Just as in the earlier variation C1, White will get a favourable version of the English Attack. Black almost always has to play ...b5 to launch any serious counterplay, but the cost of one tempo is too great a sacrifice in such a sharp line. I will focus on Black’s possible attempt to make use of his set-up or to avoid giving White an easy life of kingside pawn-pushing, but there isn’t too much he can do.
14. \( \text{d6?} \) This is by no means the only move; White can also consider taking on either \( c6 \) or \( f6 \). 14...\( \text{xc3} \) 15. \( \text{xc6} \) \( \text{xc6} \) 16. \( \text{g1} \) The strong dark-squared bishop more than makes up for the missing pawn.

10...\( \text{d5} \) 11.\( \text{a3} \) \( \text{e7} \)

11...\( \text{xc3?} \) 12.\( \text{xc3} \) \( \text{dx}4 \) is much too risky:

13.\( \text{f4} \) \( \text{c8} \) 14.\( \text{d6?} \)

In Gallardo Garcia–Fedorchuk, Madrid 2012, White could have developed his initiative with:

12.\( \text{f4} \) 13.\( \text{c8} \) 14.\( \text{xd}5 \) \( \text{xd}5 \)

13...\( \text{xd}5 \) 14.\( \text{xd}5 \) \( \text{xd}5 \) 15.\( \text{c3} \) \( \text{b7} \)

16.\( \text{d4?} \) wins a pawn for White.

14.\( \text{g3} \) \( \text{b7} \)

14...0–0 allows 15.\( \text{f5} \) \( \text{exf5} \) 16.\( \text{xd}5 \) \( \text{xd}5 \)

17.\( \text{xd5} \), White the better structure as well as the bishop pair.

15.\( \text{d3} \) 0–0 16.\( \text{ge4} \) \( \text{xe4} \) 17.\( \text{xe4} \)

17...\( \text{c6} \)

17...\( \text{d8} \) is met by 18.\( \text{e3?} \) with ideas such as \( \text{g5} \), or simply advancing the h-pawn up the board.

17...\( \text{xe4} \) 18.\( \text{xe4} \) \( \text{a7} \) 19.\( \text{f2?} \) White has the two bishops plus a lead in development.

18.\( \text{d6} \) \( \text{xd6} \) 19.\( \text{xd6} \) \( \text{d8} \) 20.\( \text{f4?} \)

D) 2...\( \text{a6} \)
Often regarded as a minor sideline, this move actually demands some serious study, as it is used by some Kan players as a move-order trick. Everyone knows that 3.d4 is not the best idea here, but what is less obvious is that White cannot just pick whichever sensible-looking alternative he feels like.

3.c3

Surprisingly, in the context of my proposed repertoire, we don’t have much choice but to go for the improved Alapin. Obviously the inclusion of the always-useful d3 and the non-developing ...a6 makes a significant difference, and Black tends to get a more passive position with much less flexibility than in the 2.c3 variations. Let’s quickly consider the alternatives in order to understand why the text move is the best way to go.

One option is to play 3.d3 and later d2-d4, but then Black gets to play a Kan having avoided the major option of 5.d3, which I advocate in this book.

3.c4 is a popular move which I have used in a few of my own games, and it generally transposes to some version of a Kan where Black employs a Hedgehog formation. Something similar to this can be found in variation C2 of Chapter 10, so you could consider it here too. However, in that variation I only advocate c2-c4 after Black has committed his knight to f6 and queen to c7, whereas here he has other options available, so I decided it was not such a suitable choice for us.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that 3.b4?! gives White an improved version of the Wing Gambit. I suspect that Black should be fine with accurate play, but correct defence is far easier in analysis than in a real game. I will not go into any further details, other than to say that it will be a fun game with White having decent compensation for the pawn.

Returning to 3.c3, we will consider three responses: D1) 3...d6, D2) 3...d5 and D3) 3...e6.

D1) 3...d6

This is the main line against 2.c3, but it is hard for Black to make sense of the ...a6 move.

4.e5 d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.e4

This seems like the most energetic, although 6.cxd4 would also give White an improved version of a normal 2.c3 Sicilian.

6...b6 7.b3

7...d5
7...
8...
9.
10.
11.
12.

8...e6 gives White a few options, but the simplest is 9.cxd4 $\text{c}6 10.$c3± as in P. Popovic – Barlov, Novi Sad 1995. If Black's knights were on normal squares like c6 and f6 then his position would make sense, but here he has spent valuable time moving one knight to the unfavourable b6-square. White has the simple plan of castling and $\text{d}3$ followed by attacking h7.

9.0–0!

9.cxd4 $\text{e}6$! would be annoying; the bishop exchange definitely helps Black.

9...e6

Now 9...e6 10.$xe6 $\text{xe}6$ does not come with check, and 11.cxd4 is the simplest way to develop White's initiative. Black's queen is misplaced and he is still several moves away from castling.

Let us note that 9...g4? would be even worse due to 10.$xf7$!

Finally, after 9...dxc3 10.$g5$! e6 11.$f3$ $\text{e}7$ 12.$xc3$ White has an overwhelming lead in development.

10.cxd4 $\text{e}7$ 11.$c3$ 0–0
12...e6 13.e4 was not such a good way to defend d4 in Solak – Benidze, Denizli 2013.

12...c6 13.a3

Despite the novelty, we have transposed to a few games. As usual in this structure, the b6-knight is completely misplaced, and White’s simple threats on the kingside will be tough for Black to deal with.

13...d8 14.d5!?N

The most aggressive, although 14.d1 was also pretty good in Schild – Schalkwijk, email 2009.

15.xg5 16.h4 f5 17.e3+-

5...e6

Black can develop either knight or exchange on d4 in various move orders, but most of them will end up reaching roughly the same type of position.

5...f6 6.e2 g6

Here we see something different, but it doesn’t seem like a good version for Black at all.

7.0–0 g7 8.c4!? d6 9.d5!N

I’m a little uncertain about the structure that would have occurred after dxc5 – Black tends to be strategically okay in such positions, and White has play quite aggressively to ensure an edge. The text move keeps things simpler. Black will be forced to play ...e6 (or ...e5) to generate any play, at which point dxe6 will lead to a symmetrical structure where White

**D2) 3.d5 4.exd5 wxd5 5.d4**

This structure is commonplace in the Alapin, but Black obviously has an inferior version due to having played an early ...a6 in place of a developing move.
clearly has the upper hand due to his better development and ability to target Black's queenside with moves such as \( \text{Wb3} \).

9...0-0 10.\( \text{Qc3} \) e6 11.dxe6 \( \text{Wxe6} \) 12.\( \text{e3}\)

12.\( \text{e1} \) is perhaps a simpler route to an edge: 12...\( \text{Wb6} \) (12...\( \text{Qc6} \) 13.\( \text{e3} \) b6 14.\( \text{Qd5}\); 12...\( \text{Rxe8} \) 13.\( \text{f1} \) \( \text{Wc6} \) 14.\( \text{Qd5}\)) 13.\( \text{Qe5} \) \( \text{Qe6} \) 14.\( \text{Qf3} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 15.\( \text{Qxc6} \) bxc6 16.\( \text{Qa4}\)

12...b6

12...\( \text{Qbd7} \) 13.\( \text{Re1}\) leaves Black struggling to complete his development.

13.\( \text{Qg5} \) \( \text{Wc7} \) 14.\( \text{Qf3} \) \( \text{Qb7} \) 15.\( \text{Wb3} \) \( \text{Qxf3} \) 16.\( \text{Qxf3} \) \( \text{Wc7} \)

16...\( \text{Qbd7} \) 17.\( \text{Qf4}\)

17.\( \text{Qg5} \) \( \text{Qbd7} \) 18.\( \text{Qad1} \) \( \text{Qfe8} \) 19.\( \text{h3} \)

White keeps a more pleasant position because Black is so tied down – his knights cannot really move because the threat of \( \text{Qd5} \) is hanging in the air.

19...\( \text{Qe6} \) 20.\( \text{Qfe1} \) \( \text{Qxe1}\)

20...\( \text{Rxe8} \) 21.\( \text{Qxe6} \) \( \text{Qxe6} \) 22.\( \text{Wxa4}\)

21.\( \text{Qxe1} \) h6 22.\( \text{Qh4} \) \( \text{Qe8} \) 23.\( \text{Qd1} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) 24.\( \text{Qg3}\)

6.\( \text{Qe2} \) \( \text{Qf6} \) 7.0-0

7...\( \text{Qxd4}\)?

I think this is the best move order as it reduces White's options. The point is that if Black brings his knight to \( \text{c6} \) first, there are a couple of ways for White to fight for the advantage by recapturing on \( \text{d4} \) with the knight, whereas after the text move that does not trouble Black at all.

7...\( \text{Qe7} \) 8.\( \text{Qe3} \) (8.\( \text{c4}\) is an extra option) 8...\( \text{Qxd4} \) 9.\( \text{Qxd4} \) \( \text{Qc6} \) transposes to the main line below.

7...\( \text{Qc6} \) gives White more than one promising path:

a) 8.\( \text{Qf4}\) prevents Black from putting either his queen or his bishop on \( \text{d6} \). 8...\( \text{Qxd4} \) (8...\( \text{Qe7} \) 9.\( \text{Qe5}\) \( \text{Qxe5} \) 10.\( \text{Qxe5} \) 0-0 11.\( \text{Qf3} \) \( \text{Wd8} \) can be explored further, but it's clear that White has a lot of pleasant options from which to choose) 9.\( \text{Qxd4} \) \( \text{Qxd4} \) 10.\( \text{Qxd4} \) White has a comfortable position with \( \text{Qf3} \) and \( \text{Qc3} \) on the way.
b) $8.\text{c}e3 \text{cxd4} 9.\text{c}xd4?!$ also makes a lot of sense—a glance at the position and the practical results on the database are enough to show that White is doing well. I will not delve any deeper though, as $9.\text{cxd4}$ leads straight to our main line, and we don’t really need an extra option as White is doing well there too.

$8.\text{cxd4}$

Without the knight on c6, Black can safely meet $8.\text{c}xd4$ with $8...\text{c}e7 9.\text{f}3 \text{d}6$. The queen can drop back to c7 at some point, and it will be hard to cause a dent in Black’s solid structure.

$8...\text{c}c6 9.\text{e}3?!$

$9.\text{e}c3$ is also perfectly fine, but I have chosen a small finesse in order to avoid Black’s set-up after $9...\text{d}8?! 10.\text{c}e3 (10.\text{g}5 \text{c}7) 10...\text{d}6$. Of course it’s not such a big deal, as White still has a nice version of the IQP structure. Still, the text move leads to an even more pleasant position and, crucially, keeps White’s middlegame plans more consistent.

$9...\text{e}7$

The point of White’s last move is that $9...\text{d}8$ can now be met by $10.\text{e}5!++$. Black has also tried:

$9...\text{d}6 10.\text{c}c3 \text{a}5$

White has a few good options, but I prefer:

$11.\text{d}2?!$

The other obvious plan is to expand on the queenside and plant a knight on the c5-square: $11.a3 0-0 12.b4 \text{d}8 13.\text{d}3 \text{d}5!$ (I found a couple of engine games in which $13...\text{d}7$ was played, but after $14.\text{g}5! \text{h}6 15.\text{x}f6 \text{x}f6 16.\text{c}2$ Black is struggling, as $\text{d}3$ will provoke a kingside weakening and $\text{e}4-c5$ is coming as well.) $14.\text{e}4$ White has the easier game and can improve his position with moves like $\text{c}1, \text{b}1, \text{c}5, \text{d}3$ and so on.

$11...\text{c}7$

$11...0-0 12.\text{c}4 (12.\text{f}3?!$ is a more sophisticated alternative, when Black’s queen remains somewhat misplaced. If it retreats to c7, we will transpose to the main line. If Black does something else, the $\text{c}4$ threat will continue to hang in the air, and we can trade the bishop off later.) $12...\text{c}7 13.\text{d}x\text{d6} \text{x}d6$ The dark-squared bishop has the potential to become a real nuisance, especially if White can play $\text{d}4-\text{d}5$ at some point. Even in the more closed position after $14.\text{f}3 \text{d}5 15.\text{x}d5 \text{exd5} 16.\text{c}1 \text{e}6 17.\text{d}2$, the bishops are strong and White can press with no risk with $\text{f}4, \text{c}5$ and $\text{fc}1$.

12.g3 0-0 13.\text{f}3!

13.\text{c}4 is premature: $13...\text{b}5 14.\text{xd6} \text{x}d6 15.\text{f}3 \text{b}7 16.\text{f}4 \text{e}7! (16...\text{d}7 17.d5++) White has no advantage, as 17.d5?
runs into 17...\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)xd5 18.\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)xd5 exd5 19.\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)xd5 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)ad8\(\text{\textipa{f}}\) and Black wins a pawn. The text move makes it harder for Black to develop his queenside, and his queen will soon be a target along the c-file.

13...e5
Both 13...\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)e7 14.\(\text{\textipa{e}}\)g5\(\text{\textipa{f}}\) and 13...\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d7 14.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c1\(\text{\textipa{f}}\) keep an edge for White.

14.\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d5 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d4
Black has obtained some activity, but White has more than one way to keep the upper hand.

15.\(\text{\textipa{g}}\)g2?N
15.\(\text{\textipa{e}}\)xd4? exd4 16.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c4 led to an eventual success for White in Stolz – Duran Vállverde, email 2010, but we do not have to release the tension so soon.

15...\(\text{\textipa{g}}\)g4 16.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f5 17.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c1\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)
Intending \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)e4.

10.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c3 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d6
10...\(\text{\textipa{g}}\)g5 11.\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d2? This is the simplest move, just to keep consistent plans across different lines. (11.a3 0–0 12.\(\text{\textipa{b}}\)b4 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d8 13.\(\text{\textipa{e}}\)e5\(\text{\textipa{f}}\) also leads to a pleasant position for us) 11...0–0 12.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c4 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d8. This position is covered below via 11...0–0 12.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c4 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d8 in the note to Black’s next move in the main line.

Black also fails to equalize after:
10...\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d8 11.\(\text{\textipa{e}}\)e5! \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d7
11...0–0 12.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f3 \(\text{\textipa{h}}\)b4 13.\(\text{\textipa{b}}\)b3 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d5

14.\(\text{\textipa{g}}\)g5 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d7 (14...\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c3 15.\(\text{\textipa{b}}\)xc3 \(\text{\textipa{a}}\)a7 16.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)fd1 \(\text{\textipa{b}}\)c7 17.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c4 Almasi – Csom, Hungary 1993; 14...\(\text{\textipa{h}}\)h6 15.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f4\(\text{\textipa{f}}\) 15.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f5 16.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f7 \(\text{\textipa{h}}\)h8 17.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f7 \(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f8 18.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f6 \(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f8 19.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f6 Baklan – Sigurpalsson, Reykjavik 2012.

12.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f3!
12.a3 is too slow – we should not give Black a chance to regroup his pieces. 12...0–0 13.\(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c1 \(\text{\textipa{c}}\)c8 14.\(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d3 \(\text{\textipa{d}}\)d6 15.\(\text{\textipa{f}}\)f4 \(\text{\textipa{e}}\)e7= Kosteniuk – Kempinski, Moscow 2006.
Chapter 22 – Move 2 Alternatives

12...\text{c}8 13.\text{c}xd7 \text{c}xd7 14.d5 exd5
14...\text{e}5 15.dxe6 \text{f}xe3! 16.\text{x}f3 fxe6
17.\text{a}d1±
15.\text{x}d5 \text{c}xd5 16.\text{c}xd5
White has an easy edge and will torture his opponent for a long time with the two bishops.

15.\text{x}d5! This idea has been known for a long time; it will not be possible for Black to pick up the a8-knight. 15...\text{x}d5 16.\text{b}6 \text{f}e4 (16...\text{x}d4 17.\text{x}a8 \text{d}7 18.d5 \text{a}xa4 19.\text{d}c6 \text{x}xc6 20.\text{d}d2±) 17.\text{x}a8 \text{g}4 18.\text{f}e1± Sax – Fernandes, Debrecen 1992.

Returning to the main line, White has a couple of ways to obtain an edge in the ensuing ...exd5 structure. The choice comes down to whether we want the remaining knight on c5, with a view to creating kingside play in the future, or on c5, hoping to keep a solid bind.

11.\text{d}2±!
Several other moves have been played, but I am a big fan of the knight manoeuvre to c4. On this occasion it immediately causes Black trouble in the centre.

11...\text{d}5
It is important to consider the alternative:
11...0–0 12.\text{c}4 \text{d}8 13.\text{f}3! \text{d}5 (13...\text{b}4
14.\text{b}3 \text{b}d5 15.\text{x}d5 \text{x}d5 16.\text{x}d5 exd5
17.\text{b}6 \text{b}8 Korpa – K.I. Toth, Hungary 2011. White has a few good moves, but the simplest is: 18.\text{x}c8N \text{c}c8 [18...\text{x}c8
19.\text{b}7\text{c}7±] 19.\text{d}d5±) 14.\text{x}d5 exd5

12.\text{e}4
This was Leko’s choice. The second option is:
12.\text{c}4 \text{c}d8!N
12...\text{c}7 is risky due to the open c-file:
13.\text{f}3! \text{c}c3 14.\text{xe}3 0–0 15.\text{c}c1 \text{d}8
16.\text{x}c6 \text{bxc}6 17.\text{e}5 Black is not in time to defend the c6-pawn. 17...\text{c}5 (17...\text{d}7
18.\text{a}4±) 18.\text{xf}7 \text{g}5 19.\text{f}3± Zarezenko – Garagulya, Novosibirsk 2001.
13.\text{x}d5
13.\text{f}3 \text{c}c3 (13...\text{xc}3? 14.\text{bxc}3±) 14.\text{f}3 0–0 is not clear at all. Black’s queen is better placed on d8 than c7, and Black’s bishops have considerable potential. A possible continuation is 15.\text{x}c6 \text{bxc}6 16.\text{e}5 \text{b}7
17.\text{a}4 \text{c}5! with double-edged play.
13...\text{ex}d5 14.\text{e}5
White is slightly ahead in development, his knight is more active and he can think about kingside play with moves like $d3$.

14...$0-0$

14...$x$e5 15.dxe5 0--0 16.f4 $f5$ 17.$f3$ 15.$c1$ $b6$ 16.$d3$? $g6$

16...$x$xb2 17.$x$xc6 $bxc6$ 18.$x$xc6 favours White.

16...$f6$ 17.$x$xc6 $bxc6$ 18.$c2$ $x$xd4 19.$x$h7+ $h8$ 20.$xd4$ $xd4$ 21.$d3$

17.f4

This could be analysed further. White's position is slightly preferable, but I think the overall chances of success are higher if we focus on the queenside, as in the main line.

14.$c5$ 0--0 15.$c1$ $f6$

15...$f5$ seems too rash: 16.$d3$ $d6$

17.$g3$N (17.f4 let Black off the hook, and after 17...$b6$ 18.$h1$ $e6$ 19.$d2$ $e8$ he was almost fully equal in Leko – Morozevich, Moscow 2014) The text move keeps control while avoiding unnecessary weaknesses. White remains clearly better after 17...$b6$ 18.$f3$ or 17...$g5$ 18.$b3$.

16.$f3$ $b6$

17.$e6$?N

17.$a4$ $b7$ 18.$e1$ $e8$ 19.$d3$ $c8$ left Black pretty solid, although White was still slightly for choice in Mercader Martinez – R. Szabo, email 2014.

17...$xe6$
17...\textit{fxe6} 18.\textit{\texttt{Bxc6 d7}} 19.\textit{\texttt{c2}}±

18.\textit{\texttt{Bxc6 Bc8}} 19.\textit{\texttt{c2 d7}}

19...\textit{\texttt{Bxc6}} 20.\textit{\texttt{Bxc6}}±

20.\textit{\texttt{c1}}±

White enjoys a typical scenario of playing for two results.

D3) 3.e6 4.d4 d5

5.exd5

I would happily have played 5.e5 here as I have some experience with the Advance Variation of the French, and the ...a6 line is hardly Black's best way of meeting it. However, for the purposes of our repertoire, it would seem impractical to venture into a whole new type of position just to meet this one Sicilian sideline.

5...\textit{exd5} 6.\textit{\texttt{d3}}

6.\textit{\texttt{c2}} has been played in a lot of games, but I prefer the more active d3-square. It is worth noting that similar positions can arise from a lot of different move orders, particularly via the French Defence. Often White has to spend an extra tempo to get the bishop to d3, for instance if \textit{b5} or \textit{c2} has been played earlier. The only potential negative of the text move is that it gives Black the option of playing ...\textit{c4} with tempo but I am not worried by this, and in the normal lines where Black just develops his pieces, the bishop will be perfectly placed on d3.

We will analyse D31) 6...\textit{c4} and D32) 6...\textit{\texttt{c6}}.

D31) 6...\textit{c4} 7.\textit{\texttt{c2 d6}}

8.\textit{\texttt{e5}}!

It is important to get the move order right. It is worth comparing the more obvious 8.0-0 to see where the difference occurs. 8...\textit{\texttt{e7}} 9.\textit{\texttt{e5}} 0-0 10.\textit{\texttt{h5}} g6 11.\textit{\texttt{f3}} is similar to our main line, but here Black can play 11...\textit{f6}! 12.\textit{\texttt{g4}} \textit{f5}?! (12...\textit{xg4}N 13.\textit{\texttt{xg4 d7}} is a playable but less ambitious alternative for Black; even 12...\textit{\texttt{bc6?!}}N could be considered, as taking on f6 would put White's knight in a deadly pin.) 13.\textit{\texttt{e5}} \textit{\texttt{bc6}}± Zumsande – Naroditsky, London 2014.

8...\textit{\texttt{e7}}

8...\textit{\texttt{e6N}} 9.0-0 \textit{\texttt{e7}} 10.\textit{\texttt{h5}} transposes to the main line.

8...\textit{\texttt{f6}} only cements the position of the proud knight, as White hardly has to worry about ...\textit{\texttt{xe5}}. 9.0-0 \textit{\texttt{e7}} 10.\textit{\texttt{h5}} g6 11.\textit{\texttt{g5}} \textit{\texttt{e6}} 12.\textit{\texttt{h4}} \textit{\texttt{xe5}} 13.\textit{\texttt{dxe5 d7}} 14.\textit{\texttt{d2}}± Black did not last long in Kokarev – Grachev, Sochi 2015.
8...\(\text{c6}\)N is playable but it too has the drawback of cementing the e5-knight: 9.0–0
0–0 10.\(\text{g5}\) \(\text{bd7}\) 11.f4+

Continuing in the style of the above game.

11...\(\text{f6}\) 12.\(\text{h4}\)± maintains some pressure.

11...\(\text{xe5}\) 12.\(\text{xe5}\) \(\text{c5}\) 13.\(\text{d2}\) \(\text{h6}\) 14.\(\text{b3}\) \(\text{b5}\) 15.\(\text{fb3}\) \(\text{b8}\) 16.\(\text{b4}\) \(\text{b6}\) 17.a4± White has excellent prospects all across the board.

12.\(\text{xd7}\)

12.\(\text{xc4}\)? \(\text{dxc4}\) 13.\(\text{xe6}\) \(\text{g6}\) 14.\(\text{xe7}\)† \(\text{xe7}\) 15.\(\text{f3}\) 0–0 16.\(\text{h6}\) \(\text{f6}\) 17.\(\text{d2}\) offers White compensation plus a pawn for the exchange, but there is no need for it.

12...\(\text{xd7}\) 13.\(\text{h3}\) \(\text{g6}\)

13...0–0–0 14.\(\text{b3}\) would be a serious gamble for Black.

14.\(\text{f3}\) \(\text{f5}\) 15.\(\text{xf5}\) \(\text{xf5}\) 16.\(\text{xf5}\) \(\text{gxf5}\) 17.\(\text{g5}\)

White’s better structure gives him a slight endgame edge without much risk.

D32) 6...\(\text{c6}\)

This time Black maintains the tension and heads for an IQP position.

7.0–0 \(\text{xd4}\)

7...\(\text{d6}\) 8.\(\text{e1}\)† \(\text{ge7}\) 9.\(\text{xc5}\) \(\text{xc5}\) 10.\(\text{bd2}\) 0–0 11.\(\text{b3}\) \(\text{b6}\) 12.\(\text{e3}\)± gives White everything he wants.
Chapter 22 – Move 2 Alternatives

8...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e7}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\)

8...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e7}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) leads to similar play, but we may as well throw in the check to reduce Black's options.

8...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e7}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 9...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d4}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\)

9...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d4}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) led to success for White in an engine game, which might be food for thought. Nevertheless, I feel that in a practical game it might be difficult for White to cash in on his minor development advantage.

9...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{f6}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\)

9...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{f6}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 10...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d4}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) is a different story to the previous note; without those knights on the board, Black is in more immediate danger: 10...\(\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d4}}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 11...\(\textit{\texttt{g5N}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 0–0 12...\(\textit{\texttt{d3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) Despite the novelty on the previous move, this position has occurred via transposition in a few games.

12...\(\textit{\texttt{e6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) (12...\(\textit{\texttt{h6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 13...\(\textit{\texttt{xe7!}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) is an important point) 13...\(\textit{\texttt{c2}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{e8}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) (13...\(\textit{\texttt{h6?}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 14...\(\textit{\texttt{xf6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{xf6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 15...\(\textit{\texttt{d3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{g6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 16...\(\textit{\texttt{xe6+;}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 13...\(\textit{\texttt{g6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 14...\(\textit{\texttt{b3+}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 14...\(\textit{\texttt{d3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{g6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 15...\(\textit{\texttt{e3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) (there is also 15...\(\textit{\texttt{b3N}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\)) White maintained a pleasant edge in Fien – Schwing, Germany 2009.

10...\(\textit{\texttt{e3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\)

This move solidifies White's nice structure and central outpost. In most other lines with this pawn structure (such as 6...\(\textit{\texttt{b2}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\)), White rarely manages to establish the knight on \(\textit{\texttt{d4}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) so easily, while often the black bishop is annoyingly placed on the a7-g1 diagonal.

10...\(\textit{\texttt{f5}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) looks tempting, but eliminating the light-squared bishop is not much of an achievement considering the loss of time involved: 10...\(\textit{\texttt{xf5}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 11...\(\textit{\texttt{xf5}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 0–0 12...\(\textit{\texttt{c3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{e8}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 13...\(\textit{\texttt{h3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{f8}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 14...\(\textit{\texttt{d3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{e5=}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) S. Zhigalko – Ivanisevic, Warsaw 2013.

10...\(\textit{\texttt{e2}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) is interesting, but after 10...\(\textit{\texttt{xd4}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 11...\(\textit{\texttt{dx6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{c6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 12...\(\textit{\texttt{e4}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) \(\textit{\texttt{g6}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) there is no easy way for White to breach the defences.

10...\(\textit{\texttt{0–0}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) 11...\(\textit{\texttt{d2}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\)

11...\(\textit{\texttt{h3}}^{\textit{\texttt{1}}}\) is playable, but I don't see the need to spend a tempo covering the g4-square at this stage.
11...\textit{g}4

This is a logical move, but it doesn't achieve much.

I also considered: 11...d6 12.h3 \textit{c}7 13.xc6?! (13xf3 \textit{d}6 14.xc6 bxc6 15.c4± is also promising, as the h2-square is easily defended) 13...bxc6 As you can see, the exchange on c6 is an idea we can use liberally in such positions.

14.c5 \textit{e}8 15.wa4± Although Black's pawn structure appears more stable after the exchange on c6, White's blockade on c5 and pressure against the queenside pawns is actually quite annoying for Black.

12.f4 \textit{d}6 13.xd6 wxd6 14.cf3 \textit{d}7

14...xd4 forces 15.cxd4 when Black no longer has to worry about the IQP, but White has a comfortable advantage as his bishop, knight and e1-rook are all more active than their black counterparts.

15.h3 cf6 16.fb3 wc7 17.e2N±

17.c2? followed by \textit{e}3 was an interesting but rather strange manoeuvre in Fire - Critter, engine game 2014. The text move maintains a slight but enduring advantage.

**Conclusion**

Even the sidelines of the Sicilian are not always easy to handle. At least 2...g6 is not too difficult to handle; if Black does not go for one of the mainstream Dragons and instead opts for a weird \textit{wa5} set-up, White gets a promising initiative by advancing with d4-d5, and should not hesitate to sacrifice a pawn or two if it means speeding up his development and preventing Black from castling.

2...\textit{f}6 is a somewhat underrated move; I recommend the simple 3.cf3, angling for a transposition to a normal Sicilian variation. Black has three main ways to avoid this; none of them are quite good enough to equalize fully, but White needs to know what he's doing against each of them.

2...b6, on the other hand, doesn't impress me much. After 3.d4 cxd4 4.xd4 \textit{b}7 5.cf3 White has the simple plan of \textit{e}3 and f2-f3, leading to an improved version of an English Attack. Black can either lose a tempo with ...a6 and ...b5 or try to confuse White by playing some unorthodox plan, but I think his position is dubious in both cases.

Finally we looked at 2...a6, when 3.cf3 is the most logical choice. Black can choose between 3.df6, 3...d5 or 3...e6 4.d4 d5, but in each case the general picture is the same: White has an improved version of a 2.cf3 Sicilian, as ...a6 is clearly not the best way for Black to spend a tempo. Nevertheless, proving an advantage is not always easy, and Black's system definitely has the right to exist.
Appendix

A Missing Line from the Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.\f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\f4 f6 5.\f3 g6 6.\e3 \g7 7.f3 0-0 8.\d2 \c6 9.\c4 \d7 10.0-0-0

In my previous volume I covered the Dragon (and several other systems) quite extensively, but forgot to include the following variation:

10...\b8

This is not a main line but, with more than 500 games on the database, our repertoire should definitely cover how to play against it.

11.h4

11.\d5!? also looks promising, but the text move is natural and strong.

11...\b5

The other natural follow-up to Black's last move is: 11...\c8 12.\b3 a5 13.a4 \x4 14.\xd4 b5 15.\d5 e5. The best chance, but it enables White to win a pawn. (Black must avoid 15...\xd5? 16.\xg7 \xg7 17.\xd5 \a7 18.h5+ as in Class – Eickhoff, Germany 1987)
13. \( \text{d5!} \)

13. \( \text{d5} \) has been more common but after 13...\( \text{c8} \) the c3-knight is a target. The text move avoids this problem.

13...\( \text{b7} \)

13...\( \text{c8} \) 14. \( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 15. \( \text{d3} \) is similar to our main line.

13...\( \text{xd5} \) 14. \( \text{xd5} \) \( \text{c8} \) (After 14...\( \text{xd5} \) 15.\( \text{exd5} \) White has a free pass on the kingside while Black’s queenside play has been slowed down, as there are no white minor pieces there to act as targets.) 15.\( \text{h5} \) Zenker – Stadler, email 2007.

14. \( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \)

The text move continues the strategy which began on move 13: White is removing his minor pieces from the queenside, which has the effect of slowing down Black’s attack. Meanwhile, White’s kingside initiative will proceed smoothly.

15.\( \text{h5} \)

15...\( \text{b4} \) 16.\( \text{h5} \)

15...\( \text{d5} \) 16.\( \text{exd5} \) \( \text{xd5} \) 17.\( \text{h5} \)

Initially the computer likes this position for Black, but it soon changes its tune.

16.\( \text{g4} \) \text{hxg4} 17.\( \text{h5} \) \text{gxf3} 18.\( \text{dg1} \)→

With a powerful attack.

15. \( \text{d3!N} \)

A surprising improvement over 15. \( \text{d5} \), which was played in Southam – Ochkoos, Ontario 1993.
Chapter 1

1.e4 c5 2.\textit{d}f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\textit{d}xd4 \textit{c}c6 5.\textit{c}c3 a6 6.\textit{c}xc6 bxc6 7.\textit{d}d3

A) 7...\textit{e}5 10
B) 7...\textit{c}7 8.0–0 \textit{f}f6 9.\textit{e}e1 11
   B1) 9...d6 12
   B2) 9...\textit{d}d6!? 13
C) 7...d5 8.0–0 14
   C1) 8...\textit{f}c7 15
   C2) 8...\textit{f}f6 9.\textit{e}e1 16
   C21) 9...\textit{f}c7 16
   C22) 9...\textit{b}b7 18
   C23) 9...\textit{e}7 10.e5 \textit{d}d7 11.\textit{g}4 19
   C231) 11...\textit{g}6 12.\textit{h}6 \textit{b}b8 13.\textit{d}d1! \textit{b}b4 14.c4! 19
   C2311) 14...\textit{a}5 20
   C2312) 14...\textit{d}c4 22
   C232) 11...\textit{f}8!? 23

Chapter 2

1.e4 c5 2.\textit{d}f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\textit{d}xd4 \textit{c}c6 5.\textit{c}c3 \textit{c}7 6.\textit{e}e3 \textit{f}f6 7.f4

A) 7...d6 8.\textit{f}f3 30
   A1) 8...a6 31
   A2) 8...\textit{e}7 32
B) 7...\textit{d}xd4 35
C) 7...\textit{b}b4 8.\textit{d}b5 \textit{a}5 9.e5 37
   C1) 9...\textit{e}4 10.\textit{d}d3 37
   C11) 10...f5 37
   C12) 10...\textit{xc}3 38
   C2) 9...\textit{d}d5 10.\textit{d}d2 \textit{xc}3 11.bxc3 40
   C21) 11...\textit{e}7 41
   C22) 11...\textit{c}5 12.c4 \textit{d}8 13.\textit{d}d3 42
   C221) 13...\textit{b}6 43
   C222) 13...0–0 14.\textit{h}5 44
   C2221) 14...\textit{h}6??N 44
   C2222) 14...g6 15.\textit{h}6 47
   C22221) 15...d5 47
   C22222) 15...f5 48
Chapter 3

1.e4 c5 2.\f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\xd4 \c6 5.\c3 \c7 6.\e3 a6 7.\d2

A) 7...\xd4!? 52
B) 7...d6 53
C) 7...\f6 8.0–0–0 54
   C1) 8...d6 9.\e2? \e7 10.f4 55
   C11) 10...\d7 59
   C12) 10...0–0 60
   C2) 8...\xd4 9.\xd4! \g4 10.\b6 \c6
       11.\d4 e5 12.\e3 \e7 13.\d5 \d8 14.\b3 63
       C21) 14...\xe3 64
       C22) 14...d6!? 65

Chapter 4

1.e4 c5 2.\f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\xd4 \c6 5.\c3 \c7 6.\e3 a6 7.\d2 \f6 8.0–0–0 \e7 9.f3

A) 9...0–0 10.g4 b5 11.g5 69
   A1) 11...\e8?! 69
   A2) 11...\h5 12.\ce2 71
       A21) 12...\xd4 13.\xd4 72
       A211) 13...\d8 72
       A212) 13...f6!? 73
       A22) 12...\d8 76
B) 9...h5 10.\xc6 81
   B1) 10...\xc6 82
   B2) 10...\xc6 11.\f4 e5 12.\g5 83
      B21) 12...d6 85
      B22) 12...a5 86
      B23) 12...0–0? 88
Chapter 5

1.e4 c5 2.\f6 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\dx4 \c6 5.\c3 \c7 6.\e3 a6 7.\d2 \f6 8.0–0–0

A) 8...b5 94
B) 8...\e7 9.f3 b5!? 10.\xc6? dxc6 11.g4 97
   B1) 11...\b7 100
   B2) 11.e5 12.h4 \e6 13.\fl2!? 102
      B21) 13...a5 103
      B22) 13...\b4 104
      B23) 13...\d8 105
   B3) 11...0–0 12.\f2 \e5 13.h4 106
      B31) 13...\e6 107
      B32) 13...\d8! 14.\d3?!N \b8 15.h5 108
         B321) 15...\h6 109
         B322) 15...\e6 16.g5 110
            B3221) 16...\e8 111
            B3222) 16...\d7! 111

Chapter 6

1.e4 c5 2.\f6 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\dx4 \c6 5.\c3 \c7 6.\e3 a6 7.\d2 \f6 8.0–0–0 \b4 9.f3

A) 9...\e7 10.\d2 122
   A1) 10...d5?! 122
   A2) 10...b5 124
B) 9...\e5 10.\b3 131
   B1) 10...d5 132
   B2) 10...b5 11.\b1 133
      B21) 11...\c4 134
      B22) 11...\e7?! 12.\f2 139
         B221) 12...\b7?! 139
         B222) 12...d6 140
            B2221) 13...\b6 141
            B2222) 13.g4! \fd7! 14.\g1! 144
               B22221) 14...\b7 146
               B22222) 14...\b4 146
               B22223) 14...\g5?! 147
Chapter 7

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xxd4 Qc6 5.xc3 e7 6.xe3 a6 7.xd2 Qf6 8.0-0-0 xb4 9.f3 0-0 10.g4

A) 10...Rxe5?! 153
   A1) 11.g5 Qh5 153
       A11) 12.a3 154
       A12) 12.Qg1? 156
   A2) 11.Qg1!N 157
       A21) 11...b5 158
       A22) 11...d5 160

B) 10...b5 11.g5 161
   B1) 11...Qe8 162
   B2) 11...Qh5 12.Qde2! 165
       B21) 12...Qe5 166
       B22) 12...f5?! 167
       B23) 12...a5?! 168
       B24) 12...Qd8?? 172

Chapter 8

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xxd4 a6 5.d3

A) 5...Qb6 179
B) 5...Qc6 6.Qxc6 dxc6 7.0-0 e5 8.Qd2 Qf6 9.Qc4 Qc7 10.Qd2! b5 11.Qa5 Qb8 12.Qb6 181
   B1) 12...Qa7 184
   B2) 12...Qg4?! 185
C) 5...Qc7 187
   C1) 6.c4?! 187
   C2) 6.0-0 188
D) 5...g6 189
   D1) 6.c4?! 189
   D2) 6.0-0 Qg7 7.Qb3 Qc7 8.c4 0-0 9.Qc3 Qbc6 10.Qc2 f5 11.Qg5?! 190
       D21) 11...fxe4N 191
       D22) 11...h6 192

E) 5...d5?! 6.exd5 Qxd5 7.Qc3?! 193
   E1) 7...Qe5†?! 194
   E2) 7...Qxg2 8.Qe4 Qh3 9.Qe2 Qf6 10.Qf3! 197
       E21) 10...Qbd7 198
       E22) 10...Qc5 199
Chapter 9

1.e4 c5 2.\f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\xd4 a6 5.\d3 \f6 6.0-0

A) 6...e5!? 202
B) 6...d6 7.c4 205
   B1) 7...\bd7 207
   B2) 7...b6 209
   B3) 7...\e7 210
   B4) 7...\d7!? 8.\c3 \c6 9.\xc6 \xc6 10.\we2 \e7 11.\f4 212
      B41) 11...\d7 213
      B42) 11...0-0 214

Chapter 10

1.e4 c5 2.\f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\xd4 a6 5.\d3 \f6 6.0-0 \we7 7.\we2

A) 7...\c5 219
B) 7...\d6 220
C) 7...d6 8.f4! 222
   C1) 8...g6 223
      C11) 9.f5!? 223
      C12) 9.\c3 \g7 10.e5 dxe5 11.\db5?! axb5 12.\xb5 \we7
           13.fx e5 0-0 14.exf6 \xf6 15.c3 \g7 16.a4 225
      C121) 16...\a6N 227
      C122) 16...\d7! 229
   C2) 8...\bd7 9.c4 \e7 10.b3!? 0-0 11.\b2 231
      C21) 11...\e8? 233
      C22) 11...b6 12.\c3 \b7 13.\ael 236
         C221) 13...g6 236
         C222) 13...\ad8 238

Chapter 11

1.e4 c5 2.\f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\xd4 a6 5.\d3 \c5 6.\b3 \a7 7.0-0 \c6 8.\g4

A) 8...\f6 243
B) 8...\f6 9.\xg7 \g8 10.\h6 \e5 11.\e2 b5 12.\g5 \g6
   13.\h4 \b7 14.\d2 h6 15.\xf6 \xf6 16.a4?! \g6 17.\g3 244
      B1) 17...b4 247
      B2) 17...\f4? 248
1. e4 c5 2. d3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 a6 5. Qd3 a5 6. Qb3 a7 7. 0-0 d7 8. Qe2 Qb6

A) 9. c4 256
B) 9. Qe3! 258
   B1) 9... Qxe3?! 258
   B2) 9... 0-0 260

Chapter 13

1. e4 c5 2. Qf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 a6 5. Qd3 a5 6. Qb3 a7 7. g4

A) 7... g6 8. Qf4! d6 9. Qc3 Qc6 10. Qd2 Qge7 11. 0-0-0! 268
   A1) 11... 0-0 270
   A2) 11... b5 271
B) 7... g6 8. Qe2 d6 9. 0-0 273
   B1) 9... Qc6 274
   B2) 9... Qd7 10. Qc3 276
      B21) 10... Qe5 278
      B22) 10... b6 279

Chapter 14

1. e4 c5 2. Qf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 a6 5. Qd3 a5 6. Qb3 a7 7. g4 g6 8. Qf2 d6 9. 0-0 d7 10. Qc3 Qc7 11. Qd2

A) 11... Qg6 284
B) 11... b6 12. Qae1 Qb7 13. f4 287
   B1) 13... h5! 287
   B2) 13... b5 289
   B3) 13... Qg6 290
   B4) 13... h5?! 292
C) 11... h5?! 12. f4 Qg6 13. Qae1 b5?! 14. h3! N b4! 15. Qa4 Qb7 16. e5 295
   C1) 16... Qd5 299
   C2) 16... dxe5 17. fxe5 Qd5 301
      C21) 18. Qd4?! 302
      C22) 18. Qf2 0-0 19. Qh6 304
         C221) 19... Qxe5 305
         C222) 19... Qc6! 307
            C2221) 20. Qg3? 308
            C2222) 20. c4?! 309
Chapter 15

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qc6 5.Qc3 d6 6.Qe3 Qf6 7.f4

A) 7...e5 314
B) 7...a6 317
C) 7...d7 319
D) 7...Qe7 8.Qe2?! 322
   D1) 8...e5?! 9.Qf3 0–0 10.0–0–0 322
   D11) 10...exf4N 323
   D12) 10...Qd7 324
   D2) 8...0–0 9.0–0–0 325
      D21) 9...a6N 327
      D22) 9...Qxd4 10.Qxd4 Qa5 329
         D221) 11.f5!?N 330
         D222) 11.Qe1!N 331

Chapter 16

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qf6 5.Qc3 d6 6.g4

A) 6...e5?! 335
B) 6...Qc6?! 7.g5 Qd7 8.Qe3 &e7 9.h4 0–0 339
   B1) 10.Qe2 340
   B2) 10.f4!! 341
C) 6...a6?! 7.g5 Qfd7 8.Qg2?! 344
   C1) 8...&e7 344
   C2) 8...Qc6 347
   C3) 8...b5 9.e5!N d5 349
      C31) 10.Qxd5!? 350
      C32) 10.a4?! 352
         C321) 10...Qxe5 352
         C322) 10...bxa4 353
         C323) 10...b4 356
Chapter 17

1.e4 c5 2.\( \text{\&f3} \) e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\( \text{\&xd4} \) \text{\&f6} 5.\( \text{\&c3} \) d6 6.g4 h6 7.h4

A) 7...a6 360
B) 7...\( \text{\&e7} \) 362
C) 7...e5!? 8.\( \text{\&f5} \) 366
   C1) 8...\( \text{\&e6}! \) 366
       C11) 9.h5?! N 367
       C12) 9.g5?! 368
   C2) 8...\( \text{\&c6} \) 9.h5! 370
       C21) 9...\( \text{\&b6} \) 372
       C22) 9...d5?! N 373

Chapter 18

1.e4 c5 2.\( \text{\&f3} \) e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\( \text{\&xd4} \) \text{\&f6} 5.\( \text{\&c3} \) d6 6.g4 h6 7.h4 \text{\&c6} 8.\( \text{\&g1} \)

A) 8...\( \text{\&d7} \) 377
B) 8...h5 378
C) 8...d5 9.exd5 \( \text{\&xd5} \) 10.\( \text{\&xd5} \) 382
   C1) 10...\( \text{\&xd5} \) 11.\( \text{\&g2} \) 383
       C11) 11...\( \text{\&e5}! \) 12.\( \text{\&c3} \) 384
       C111) 12...\( \text{\&h2} \) 384
       C112) 12...\( \text{\&d7} \) 386
   C12) 11...\( \text{\&c4}?! \) 389
   C2) 10...exd5 11.\( \text{\&e3} \) 394
       C21) 11...\( \text{\&e7} \) 395
       C22) 11...\( \text{\&xh4}?! \) 12.\( \text{\&e2}?! \) 396
       C221) 12...\( \text{\&e7} \) 397
       C222) 12...\( \text{\&xd4}?! \) 398

Chapter 19

1.e4 c5 2.\( \text{\&f3} \) d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\( \text{\&xd4} \) \text{\&f6} 5.\( \text{\&c3} \)

A) 5...e5 403
B) 5...\( \text{\&bd7} \) 404
C) 5...\( \text{\&d7}?! \) 6.\( \text{\&g5} \) e6 7.\( \text{\&d2} \) 405
   C1) 7...\( \text{\&e7} \) 405
   C2) 7...a6 406
   C3) 7...h6?! 409
Chapter 20

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xd4

A) 4...d5 413
B) 4...c6 5.d3 b8 415
C) 4...b6 5.b3 f6 6.c3 e6 7.e2! 416
   C1) 7...c7 417
   C2) 7...d6 g4 418
       C21) 8...h6 419
       C22) 8...a6 420
   C3) 7...b4 8.d2 0–0 9.a3 422
       C31) 9...e7 422
       C32) 9...xc3? 424

Chapter 21

1.e4 c5 2.d3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.xd4

A) 4...b6 431
B) 4...c5 5.e3 b6 6.a3! 432
   B1) 6...d5 433
   B2) 6...a5† 434
C) 4...f6 5.c3 435
   C1) 5...b6 436
   C2) 5...b4 6.e5 436
       C21) 6...e4? 436
       C22) 6...d5 437
   C3) 5...c6 6.db5 440
       C31) 6...c5 440
       C32) 6...b4 7.a3 xxc3† 8.xc3 d5 9.exd5 442
          C321) 9...xd5 443
          C322) 9...xd5 444
Chapter 22

1.e4 c5 2.dıf3

A) 2...g6 450
B) 2...dıf6 3.dıc3 452
   B1) 3...e6 452
   B2) 3...dıc6 454
   B3) 3...d5 4.ıb5† 458
      B31) 4...dıc6 458
      B32) 4...ıd7 459
C) 2...b6 3.d4 cxd4 4.dıxd4 ıb7 5.dıc3 460
   C1) 5...dıc6 461
   C2) 5...dıf6 462
   C3) 5...a6 463
D) 2...a6 3.c3 464
   D1) 3...dıf6 465
   D2) 3...d5 467
   D3) 3...e6 4.d4 d5 5.exd5 exd5 6.ıd3 473
      D31) 6...cı4 473
      D32) 6...dıc6 474