Grandmaster Repertoire

Parimarjan Negi

1.e4 vs
The Sicilian I

Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!

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Grandmaster Repertoire

1.e4 vs
The Sicilian I

By
Parimarjan Negi

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Several years ago, Nigel Short once gifted me an opening book with the wry comment, “I expect this doubles your chess library.” While that was a slight exaggeration, it is true that I never depended much on opening books for my theoretical knowledge. This scepticism for written material is often rooted in the fact that the modern openings are so fluid, constantly changing, with variations evolving every week. How can a static book keep pace with ideas that are developed, replaced, and forgotten on a weekly basis?

In this series, I aim to provide a foundation and structure around which you can develop a lifelong repertoire with 1.e4. I hope a good number of my recommendations will withstand the relentless assaults of time, but I am realistic enough to know that many of the bright novelties and variations will eventually wither away. However, even if some of the finer details will eventually have to be revised in the future, I believe that the core selection of recommended lines will remain valid for a long time to come.

There is a process by which I have developed my own repertoire, as laid out in this series. In several critical positions I have discussed the pros and cons of different options, and explained why I eventually chose one over the other. Apart from remembering the moves themselves, I hope you will also absorb something of this process, so that you will be able to find your own ideas to react to whatever new developments may come along.

The selection of recommended systems against Black’s various defences has followed a logical pattern, taking into account the structure of the whole repertoire. Throughout the process, I have aimed for active, fluid positions, sometimes sacrificing material but always remaining fundamentally sound. There are a number of long, forcing lines, which are necessary to justify any suggestion these days, but I have endeavoured to show that even seemingly abstract moves are still based on strategic, human principles. To make the best possible use of this book, I encourage you to pay attention to all such explanations, with the aim of building a framework of interconnected ideas in your own mind.

Parimarjan Negi
New Delhi, July 2014
In my first book, my aim was to present a repertoire built around an interlinked set of ideas, and the moves were often just an extension of the explanations and themes. You might notice some changes in style in the present volume – mostly because the opening being tackled here is a completely different type of beast.

I have tried a few different set-ups against the Najdorf, but the aggressive 6...g5 has always been my main weapon. It is one of the most concrete theoretical lines out there and, with the advent of correspondence databases and modern computers, it has been analysed to such astonishing depths that one may wonder if there is anything new to discover at all. Some of the lines are long, and I cannot promise to find a logical explanation for all of them, besides the simple fact that they do work.

Despite the forcing, tactical nature of our subject, I am pleased to say it is not just about following the computer's suggestions. As you make your way through the book, you will find that the recommendations against different variations will fit together as a coherent whole. For instance, both the 6...bd7 and 6...e6 7.f4 bd7 lines are dealt with in a similar manner with we2. The queen move may not seem like the most natural response, but once you see the flow of development with 0–0–0 and f2–f4, followed by e4–e5 or g2–g4, you will realize that the two lines have many recurrent ideas, with White essentially trying to achieve the same goals.

The Poisoned Pawn stands alone as the most hotly-debated variation in the Najdorf. But despite thousands of games – many of them from the correspondence realm – there are a surprising number of new ideas waiting to be explored, and I have highlighted the most promising of the ones I discovered. It will always be hard to prove an advantage against the most precise, computer-generated defences, but the important thing is to realize that you can always pose new problems, even when the theory seems incredibly far advanced. And while a correspondence player with plentiful time and a powerful computer might navigate the pitfalls, it will be practically impossible for an over-the-board player to do the same.

This method of exploration is a constant process that does not have to end with this book. Sooner or later my new suggestions will be tested as well, but if you continue your investigations in a similar vein, you will discover your own original methods to pose problems for your opponents.

Several other variations have rich histories, but they are less challenging for us than the Poisoned Pawn. In most cases, White will build a powerful attack, and will be able to choose from a plethora of exciting options. I hope that after reading this book, you will not only understand how to handle the opening, but that you will also have an improved sense for the initiative and how to exploit it.

Parimarjan Negi
Palo Alto, December 2014
Key to symbols used

±  White is slightly better
¶  Black is slightly better
±  White is better
¶  Black is better
+-  White has a decisive advantage
→  Black has a decisive advantage
=  equality
≥  with compensation
≥  with counterplay
a  unclear

?? a weak move
?? a blunder
!  a good move
!! an excellent move
!? a move worth considering
?! a move of doubtful value
#  mate

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Introduction and Rare 6th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{\&}f3\) d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\text{\&}xd4\) \(\text{\&}f6\) 5.\(\text{\&}c3\) a6

\(6.\text{\&}g5\)

A) 6...e5 8
B) 6...\(\text{\&}d7\) 9
C) 6...\(\text{\&}c6\) 9
D) 6...\(\text{\&}bd7\) \(7.\text{\&}e2!\) 11
   D1) 7...\(\text{\&}a5??\) 11
   D2) 7...e5 13
   D3) 7...b5 15
      D31) 8.0–0–0 15
      D32) 8.f4! e5 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.0–0–0! 16
         D321) 10...exd4 19
         D322) 10...\(\text{\&}b6N\) 19
         D323) 10...h6N 20
         D324) 10...\(\text{\&}b7N\) 11.\(\text{\&}f5\) 21
            D3241) 11...\(\text{\&}b6\) 22
            D3242) 11...\(\text{\&}c7\) 23

D1) after 10...h6

D2) after 13...\(\text{\&}c8\)

D321) after 14...\(\text{\&}f6\)

11.0–0–0??N

14.\(\text{\&}d2??\)N

15.\(\text{\&}xe7??\)N
1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 Qf6
5.Qc3 a6 6.Qg5

We will begin our journey by checking the rare options of A) 6...e5, B) 6...Qd7 and C) 6...Qc6, before introducing the rather important topic of D) 6...Qbd7, coverage of which will run for a few more chapters.

A database search will show that Black has tried almost every legal move at some point, but most of them can be discarded quickly. A few examples:

6...Wb6? does not work without ...e6 because of 7.Qxf6 gx6 8.Qd5.

6...g6?! does not make any sense here, since 7.Qxf6 exf6 8.Qd2 leaves Black with an inferior version of the Rauzer with 6...g6.

6...Wa5 is conveniently handled by 7.Qxf6 (7.Qd2 Qbd7 can be compared with the 6...Qbd7 lines) 7...gx6 8.Qb3 Qd8 when Black has lost some time compared with typical positions with this structure. Here it looks good for White to include 9.Wh5† before playing 0–0–0 and f2–f4.

A) 6...e5

This does not make much sense, as the bishop on g5 is perfectly placed to help White exploit the weakened d5-square. The only thing White should not do is misplace his knight by retreating it to b3.

7.Qf5

This seems simplest, because it more or less forces Black to exchange on f5.

7...Qxf5

7...e6 has been tried by Nakamura in an internet blitz game, but White can just play 8.Qxf6 Wxf6 (8...gxf6 9.Qe2 leaves Black in a horrible position) 9.Qxd6† and win a pawn.

8.Qxf6!

This is the easiest choice, giving White a pleasant position without any risk.

8...Qxf6 9.Qd5

9.exf5?? is also possible. After 9...Qxf5 10.Qd5 Qa7 11.Qd3 White has excellent compensation for the pawn, but there is no need to sacrifice.

9...Qd8 10.exf5+

White’s domination of the light squares gives him a stable advantage, which will remain even if Black swaps down to an opposite-coloured-bishop middlegame.
Chapter 1 – Rare 6th Moves

B) 6...d7

This gives Black the option of converting to a line of the Rauzer, but it also has a few tricky points of its own.

7.f4!

It is important to get the move order right. 7...d2 e6! is slightly annoying, as both 8.f4 and 8.0–0–0 can be met by 8...h6, when retreating the bishop to h4 allows a ...exf4 trick.

7...c6

Black had better play this now, otherwise the queen will go to f3.

8.d2 b5

9.exf6!

Another important detail, avoiding 9.0–0–0 b4! 10.exf6 bxc3 11.xc3 gxf6 12.xc6 cc7 when Black will have good compensation in the coming endgame, Kalod – Obsivac, Morava 1997.

9...gxf6 10.0–0–0

10.f5 is a tempting possibility to exploit Black’s move order, but it allows for an interesting possibility: 10...b4 11.c1

11...d5! N Creating a strange mess. (11...c7 12.e3 e6 13.g3 favoured White in Mokry – Oltean, Balatonbereny 1985.) 12.xd5 cc7 13.d2 e6 14.g3 h5

Now I don’t see anything better for Black than:

10...e6

Finally we transpose to a major branch of the Rauzer, which will be discussed in a subsequent volume.

C) 6...c6

This is a strange hybrid of the Najdorf and Classical Sicilians. It has brought Black surprisingly decent results, particularly in the recent games of Ivan Saric, but it should not cause much trouble against a well-prepared opponent.
7. \( \text{d2} \)

Playing in the style of the Classical Rauzer is the simplest way. Exchanging on f6 would lead to a thematic type of position from that system, but not necessarily one of the better versions for White.

7... \( \text{dxd4} \)

This early exchange is the idea behind Sarić's set-up. Most other moves, such as 7...e6, 7...\( \text{d7} \) and 7...\( \text{b6} \), will lead to variations of the Rauzer that will be covered in a future volume. Here we will concentrate on Black's attempts to keep the game in independent territory.

8. \( \text{xd4} \)

8... \( \text{a5} \)

8...e5 has long been abandoned by strong players, and with good reason: 9.\( \text{a4} \) \( \text{d7} \) 10.\( \text{xf6}! \) \( \text{xf6} \) (10...\( \text{gf6} \) 11.\( \text{b3}+ \) 11.\( \text{b5} \) \( \text{d8} \) 12.\( \text{xd7}+ \) \( \text{xd7} \) 13.\( \text{b3} \) White obtained a dream position with good knight against bad bishop in Kotronias – Kovalev, Debrecen 1992.

9. \( \text{d2} \) \( \text{c7} \)

With 9...e5 Black just accepts a slightly worse position, so it's not much of a concern for White. 10.\( \text{d3} \) \( \text{e6} \) 11.\( \text{d5} \) \( \text{d8} \) 12.\( \text{c4} \) \( \text{d5} \) 13.\( \text{cxd5} \) \( \text{d7} \) 14.\( \text{a3?!} \) \( \text{e7} \) 15.\( \text{d3} \) 0–0 16.0–0 White's space advantage gave him a pleasant position in Oparin – Yuffa, Moscow 2012.

The text move is Sarić's idea. Black remains flexible in terms of ...e6 or ...e5, and he has already caused White to put his pieces on unusual squares. In most games White has failed to achieve anything special against Black's unfamiliar set-up. However, in 2014 Vladimir Akopian hit upon the right idea.

10. \( \text{d5!} \)

Exploiting Black's refusal to play ...e6.

10...\( \text{xd5} \) 11.\( \text{exd5} \) \( \text{x2N} \)

This move is the only real deterrent towards White's 10th move, but it allows White to obtain a huge initiative.

11...e5 12.\( \text{ex6} \) \( \text{xe6} \) 13.0–0–0\( \pm \) gave White a safe, pleasant advantage in Akopian – Ter Sahakyan, Minsk 2014.

12.\( \text{c1} \) \( \text{f5} \) 13.\( \text{e2} \)

White can simply finish his development, knowing that Black has no easy way to do the same.

13... \( \text{e5} \)

13...\( \text{d7} \) 14.\( \text{c7} \)\( \pm \)
14.dxe6 \&xe6 15.0–0\&

Black struggles with his basic development.

D) 6...\&bd7

This move became fashionable a few years ago, mainly due to the possibility of 7.f4 \&c7 8.\&f3 h6 9.\&h4 g5!, whereby Black offers a pawn in return for dynamic counterattacking chances. Needless to say, I have no intention of allowing anything like this.

7.\&e2!

Playing in the same spirit as the 6...e6 7.f4 \&bd7 8.\&e2 line, as covered later in Chapters 8 and 9. Black can transpose to that variation by playing ...e6 at various points over the next few moves, but the present move order also offers a lot of independent possibilities. In this chapter we will deal with D1) 7...\&a5?!, D2) 7...e5 and D3) 7...b5.

7...g6 is the topic of the next chapter.

7...h6 will be covered in Chapters 3 and 4.

D1) 7...\&a5?!

It seems to me that the black queen will be moving around rather aimlessly in this line, while White’s next move actually serves a useful purpose.

8.\&d2!

The bishop might not appear all that impressive here, but it clears the path for White’s kingside pawn expansion without spending extra time.

Black’s idea is only justified against: 8.f4 h6! (The immediate 8...e5 could be played with similar ideas, but it is worth chasing the bishop away first, since now after 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.\&f5 h6 White has an interesting extra option in 11.\&d2.) 9.\&h4 e5! Now it makes no sense for the knight to go to f5 because of ...g6, so White is essentially forced to play 10.\&b3 \&c7. The resulting position can be compared with the 7...h6 8.\&h4 g6 variation, as covered later in Chapter 4. Here Black has avoided the weakening move ...g6, improving his chances in the battle that lies ahead.

8.h4 is similar to the main line, especially if Black reacts with 8...h6, but the inclusion of these moves is not particularly in White’s favour, since Black will get some extra options involving ...\&e5, without having to fear the reply f2-f4.

8...\&b6

8...\&c7?! doesn’t bother White at all, and the knight remains excellently placed on d4. 9.g4 b5 (9...h6 10.0–0–0 leaves Black with a highly
suspicious version of a Keres Attack.) 10.\textit{g}2!?! This seems simplest. (10.g5 b4 leads to some complications, although after 11.\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}5 \textit{\textit{x}}d5 12.exd5 \textit{\textit{b}}7 13.\textit{\textit{g}}2 b6 14.0-0 White is still doing well.) 10...\textit{\textit{b}}7 (10...b4 11.\textit{\textit{d}}5 \textit{\textit{x}}d5 12.exd5\textit{±}) 11.g5 b4 12.\textit{\textit{d}}1\textit{±}

9.\textit{\textit{b}}3 \textit{\textit{e}}6

9...\textit{\textit{e}}5? is met by 10.f4\textit{±} and the knight has no good squares. It would have been a different story had White played 8.h4, as noted above.

9...\textit{\textit{g}}6?! is also poor: 10.0-0-0 \textit{\textit{g}}7 11.g4 \textit{\textit{e}}5 (11...h6 12.f4\textit{±}) Now 12.h3\textit{±} is a further reminder of why the h-pawn should be held back on move 8.

10.g4

10.0-0-0?! is also perfectly playable, and should lead to similar play to the main line below.

10...h6

11.0-0-0?!N

11.h4 gives White a decent position, but I don’t see any reason to rush with it. 11...\textit{\textit{c}}7 (11...\textit{\textit{e}}5 12.f4 d4xg4 13.h5!N e5 14.f5 g6 15.hxg6 fxg6 16.d5 \textit{\textit{x}}d5 17.gxg4 \textit{\textit{e}}7 18.0-0-0 \textit{\textit{d}}7 19.h4 strongly favours White.) 12.g2 (In the event of 12.h3?! h5 13.g5 \textit{\textit{g}}4 things are far from clear.) 12...\textit{\textit{e}}5 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxg5 \textit{\textit{x}}h1\textit{†} 15.\textit{\textit{\textit{x}}h1 \textit{\textit{f}}d7 16.0-0-0 \textit{\textit{b}}6 17.f4 d4e4 18.\textit{\textit{e}}1 d7 19.g6 fxg6 20.h4 \textit{\textit{c}}8 White’s position remained preferable, but it was still a complicated fight in Ter Sahakyan – Karthikeyan, Chennai 2013.

11...\textit{\textit{c}}7

11...\textit{\textit{e}}7 12.h4 \textit{\textit{c}}7 (12...\textit{\textit{e}}5? 13.f4 d4xg4 14.e5+; 12...h5 13.g5 \textit{\textit{g}}4 14.\textit{\textit{h}}3\textit{±}) 13.\textit{\textit{h}}3?!\textit{†} White’s initiative is developing quickly, the immediate threat being g4-g5.

12.\textit{\textit{g}}2!

Preventing ...b5, which can now be refuted by e4-e5.

12...\textit{\textit{e}}5

12...\textit{\textit{b}}8 and 12...\textit{\textit{e}}7 are both met by 13.h4\textit{±}, when Black does not have much of an answer to the imminent g4-g5.

13.f4 \textit{\textit{c}}4 14.\textit{\textit{e}}1?!

There were certainly other options, since the exchange on d2 would not have been a big deal, but the text move works well. The idea is to open things up with a quick e4-e5.

14.\textit{\textit{b}}8

14...\textit{\textit{e}}7 is well met by 15.d4! b6 (or 15...b5 16.e5\textit{±}) 16.e5\textit{±}.
15.e5! dxe5 16.fxe5 Qd7
16...Qxe5 17.Qg3+-

17.Qg3+

White is well ahead in development, and Qd5 is a nasty threat.

D2) 7...e5

It seems strange for Black to play this so early, particularly since White’s knight is allowed to go to f5 rather than to the more passive b3-square. Nevertheless, it is worth considering how best to exploit White’s positional advantages.

8.Qf5 h6 9.Qh4 g6 10.Qe3

Compared to the more popular variation involving 7...h6 8.Qh4 g6 9.0–0–0 e5 10.Qb3, as covered later in Chapter 4, White’s knight is ideally placed on e3. True, he has spent one more tempo, but that is a small price for the huge improvement in prospects for this piece. Not only is d5 within the knight’s reach, but ideas of jumping towards the kingside are in the air.

10...Qc7 11.0–0–0 b5 12.f3 Qb7

12...b4 13.Qxf6! is a typical idea, since an immediate Qd5 isn’t possible. 13...Qxf6 14.Qcd5 Qxd5 15.Qxd5 a5 16.h4± Note that the ...b4 move has weakened Black’s queenside and presented White’s bishop with the important c4-square.

13.a3!

An important move, since ...b4 was becoming an annoying threat. If White can successfully stifle his opponent’s queenside play, his kingside potential will come into its own.

13...Qc8

13...0–0 14.Qb1 w7c7 15.g4± gives White an automatic attack.

14.Qd2!?N

Keeping the bishop on h4 restricts Black’s play, since he can’t start moving around with his knights yet.

14.Qe1 is also somewhat better for White, but it gives Black a bit more freedom, and in N. Kosintseva – Bodnaruk, Moscow 2010, Black eventually prevailed.

14...Qf8

It seems logical to park the king on g7.
14...\textcolor{red}{c}7 should be met by 15.\textcolor{blue}{b}1±, waiting to see what Black does next.

14...\textcolor{red}{c}5 15.\textcolor{blue}{x}f6! Now that Black cannot take back with the knight, this exchange gives White complete control of the d5-square.

15...\textcolor{blue}{x}f6 16.\textcolor{blue}{b}1 \textcolor{red}{g}5 17.\textcolor{red}{g}3±

14...0–0 15.\textcolor{blue}{b}1 \textcolor{blue}{x}e4!? (15...\textcolor{red}{c}7 16.\textcolor{red}{g}3!± avoids any ...\textcolor{blue}{x}e4 tricks and intends \textcolor{blue}{h}3 or \textcolor{blue}{g}4 next.) 16.\textcolor{blue}{x}e4 \textcolor{blue}{x}h4 17.\textcolor{blue}{x}d6 \textcolor{blue}{c}7 18.\textcolor{blue}{x}b7 \textcolor{blue}{x}b7 19.\textcolor{red}{g}3 \textcolor{red}{e}7 20.\textcolor{red}{x}e2±

Returning to the main move, it is important to demonstrate a bit of precision.

15.\textcolor{red}{g}4!

15.\textcolor{blue}{b}1 is inaccurate here due to 15...\textcolor{red}{g}7!, threatening ...\textcolor{red}{x}e4. 16.\textcolor{red}{f}2 (With the rook on h8, 16.g3 can be met by 16...g5! 17.\textcolor{blue}{f}5+ \textcolor{red}{f}8±.) 16...\textcolor{blue}{b}6 17.\textcolor{red}{g}4 d5!? 18.\textcolor{blue}{c}xd5 \textcolor{blue}{f}xd5 19.exd5 \textcolor{blue}{c}5=

15...\textcolor{red}{g}7

15...\textcolor{red}{c}5 16.\textcolor{red}{f}2! (16.\textcolor{blue}{x}f6 is less convincing after g2-g4 has been played, as White is left with a lot of holes on the dark squares.) Now White intends h4-h5, while Black has little chance of a quick ...d5. His only real chance of counterplay involves manoeuvring his knight to d4, but this takes time. 16...\textcolor{blue}{e}6 17.\textcolor{red}{h}4

\textcolor{blue}{d}4 18.\textcolor{blue}{h}3 a5 (18...\textcolor{red}{g}7 19.\textcolor{red}{h}5+) 19.\textcolor{blue}{b}1 b4 (19...\textcolor{blue}{c}6 20.g5! \textcolor{blue}{h}5 21.\textcolor{blue}{e}d5 \textcolor{blue}{x}d5 22.\textcolor{blue}{x}d5 \textcolor{blue}{x}c2 23.\textcolor{red}{e}1±)

20.\textcolor{blue}{b}5! \textcolor{blue}{x}b5 21.\textcolor{blue}{x}b5 \textcolor{red}{b}xa3 22.\textcolor{blue}{c}4!±

16.\textcolor{blue}{g}3!

This is the idea behind g2-g4. White does not have to waste time putting his king on b1 here, and can proceed with the blunt plan of h4-h5.

16.\textcolor{blue}{f}2 d5!? 17.\textcolor{blue}{e}d5 \textcolor{blue}{x}d5 18.\textcolor{blue}{x}d5 \textcolor{blue}{x}d5 19.exd5 \textcolor{blue}{g}5 20.\textcolor{blue}{e}3 \textcolor{blue}{x}e3 21.\textcolor{red}{w}xe3 \textcolor{blue}{g}5 22.\textcolor{blue}{w}xg5 hxg5 looks like decent compensation for Black.

16...\textcolor{blue}{c}5

16...d5 17.\textcolor{blue}{c}xd5 \textcolor{blue}{x}d5 18.\textcolor{blue}{x}d5± does not give Black any serious compensation.
16...\texttt{a}5 can be met by 17.h4, since the exchange sacrifice on c3 isn't really a threat. 
17...\texttt{c}5 (17...\texttt{d}8 18.h5\texttt{f} 18...\texttt{b}1 \texttt{e}e6 19.h5\texttt{f} 17.h4 \texttt{e}6 18.\texttt{b}1 \texttt{d}4 19.\texttt{g}2

White has an excellent position, for instance:

19...a5 20.f4!?±

The last move reminds us that h4-h5 is not the only strong plan available.

\begin{center}
\textbf{D3) 7...b5}
\end{center}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chessboard.png}
\caption{Diagram showing the position after 7...b5.}
\end{figure}

This move has become quite fashionable in the last few years. White's most popular continuation has been \textbf{D31) 8.0–0–0.} I spent some time analysing this, but was not completely satisfied. I will give a quick summary of this line before moving on to \textbf{D32) 8.f4!}, which I believe to be more accurate.

\begin{center}
\textbf{D31) 8.0–0–0}
\end{center}

I believe Black is doing okay after this move, but it takes some precision to show it. So far nobody has played Black's best line, so I will quickly show you the line that caused me the most trouble.

8...\texttt{b}7 9.f4

Some other games have continued:
9.\texttt{xf}6 \texttt{xf}6! 10.e5
10.f4 b4? is a forcing route to equality. (10...g6\texttt{N} is a playable alternative if Black wants to maintain the tension.) 11.d5 \texttt{xd}5 12.exd5 \texttt{xd}5\texttt{N} (12...g6\texttt{N} is also probably okay.) 13.\texttt{b}5 e6! 14.\texttt{xd}5 \texttt{e}7 15.\texttt{xd}6\texttt{f} \texttt{xd}6=
10...dxe5 11.\texttt{d}b5
11.\texttt{xe}5 \texttt{d}6=
11...\texttt{d}7 12.\texttt{a}3

This was played in Grabarczyk – Heinemann, Schwetzingen 2013. If White has nothing better than retreating his knight in this way, it is hard to believe that Black can have any problems. A good continuation is:
12...g6\texttt{N} 13.h4 \texttt{g}7 14.h5 \texttt{c}7 15.\texttt{e}3 0–0 16.hxg6 hxg6 17.\texttt{h}3 \texttt{f}d8\texttt{f}=

9...\texttt{e}8! 10.e5

10.\texttt{xf}6\texttt{N} gives Black a choice. 10...gxf6 is simplest, while the provocative 10...\texttt{xf}6!? 11.e5 \texttt{xc}3 12.exf6 \texttt{c}5 would have to be checked further.

10...dxe5\texttt{N}

10...\texttt{xc}3 was recommended in \textit{Grandmaster Repertoire 6}. It was a novelty at the time, and has been tested a few times since then, but it is not the best move. 11.exf6 gxf6 12.bxc3 fxg5
13.\texttt{f}5! (13.fxg5 brought White success in a
recent blitz game, but matters are not so clear after 13...g7N. 13...e6 14...xd6† ...xd6 15...xd6 c7 16...d2 gxf4. This position was reached in Ziatdinov – Harsha, Chennai 2013, and was also the ending point of Ftacnik’s analysis. At this point White should play 17...e2!N intending d1, with a powerful initiative.

11.fxe5 Exc3 12.exf6
12.bxc3 e4! 13.e6 fxe6 14...d2 b6 is pretty good for Black.

After 12...xf6 c5 White lacks a decisive combination. I found nothing better than 13...f5 gxf6 14.e6, when Black can, at the minimum, force a draw with 14...d5 15.exf7† xf7 16...h5† g8 17...g4† f7, when White is forced to repeat with 18...h5†.

12...Ec5!
The position looks scary for Black, but everything holds together.

13.h4
13...f3 d5 is unclear, while 13.fxe7 xe7 14...xe7 xe7 15...xe7† xe7 16.e2 e8 17...f3 xf3 18.xf3 f8 reaches an equal endgame.

13...e5 14...f2?
14.fxg7 xg7 15...f2 gives White no advantage after: 15...b6 (15...0–0 16...f5±) 16...h3 0–0 17...g3 h8 18...xe7 (18...f4 d5 19.xg7 xg7=) 18...xe7 19...g7 h6† 20...d2 (20.g5 f6 21...f5 fxg5†) 20...xg7 21...f5...f6 22...xe7 xe7 23...xd7 xd7 24...f6† g8=

14...gxf6
14...exf6 15...f4 d5 16.c4 bxc4 17...c4+

15...e3
Black’s lack of development seems worrying, but the computer is happy, and his position contains a lot of resources.

15...g8 16...g1∞
The position is rich in possibilities for both players, but I do not believe White can claim an advantage.

D32) 8.f4!

By forcing the issue in the centre, White provokes ...e5 and avoids the plan of ...b7, ...c8 and ...xc3 that we saw previously.
Chapter 1 – Rare 6th Moves

There has been played almost exclusively, although there are some other important options to consider.

8...e5
This has been played almost exclusively, although there are some other important options to consider.

8...h6 9.h4 transposes to 7...h6 8.h4 b5 9.f4, as covered in variation C of Chapter 3 – see page 48. (9.xf6? xf6 10.0-0-0 g4 11.h3 is another interesting possibility, but there is no need to spend any time on this.)

8...c7!! 9.xf6?
9.0-0-0 is a good alternative. Now 9.e5 10.fxe5 dxe5 is discussed under 8...e5, and 8...b4 9.d5 transposes to 8...b4 below. 9.e6 is also dealt with elsewhere in the book – see variation B of Chapter 8 on page 133.

Having said that, the text move is rather tempting, as it allows White to fight for the advantage by more forcing means.

9.xf6 10.e5 b4
10...dx5 11.fxe5 b4 12.a4! d5 13.e6!
10.0–0–0
The knight can be left where it stands, as any opening of the position should be in our favour.
10...xf6 11.xf6† gxf6 may also be better for White, but this structure tends to result in an intense strategic fight. Although Black has created some holes in his queenside, White is not ideally developed either.
10...xd5 11.exd5 c7
11...xd5?? 12.f5+
12.g4!?
There is no need to defend the d5-pawn.
12...xd5
13.h6 13.h4 g5 14.fxg5 hxg5 15.xg5 16.f5 e6 17.e4+
13.g2!
13.f5?? is playable, but 13...e6 blocks the attack for the time being.
13...xg2

14.hel! Cc5
14...e6 loses immediately to 15.xe6.
14...e5 15.xg2 c8 16.b1 Black has no easy way to continue developing.
15.xg2 c8 16.b1
Here too, it is hard for Black to continue his development. The main problem is:
16...e6 17.f5 e5 18.f6!
Black's position is unpleasant, and delaying ...e6 will not change much.
9.fxe5

Ideally White would prefer to avoid committing to this exchange, but here it seems to be a necessity.

If 9.f5 then 9...wa5!!N is quite strong. Some messy complications lie ahead, but a bit of analysis convinced me that Black is out of danger.

9.0–0–0?? doesn't work as smoothly here as in the main line below. Here is a shortened version of my analysis: 9...exd4?! 10.e5 e7 11.exf6 gxf6 12.d5 fxg5 13.e1 c5!!N (13...gxh5 14.xf7 e5 15.c6 c7 16.xd4 b7 was also pretty unclear in Soymya – A. L'Ami, Astana 2013.) 14.xe7 e6 15.f5!! f6 16.g4 This position could be analysed further, but I find White's play in the main line more convincing.

9...dxe5

10.0–0–0!
10.f5 was played in an amateur game in 2005. Castling is much more dynamic, and was my choice when I encountered this variation in 2012. Black has many possible moves here. My own game continued with D321) 10...exd4, but White must also consider D322) 10...b6N, D323) 10...h6N and D324) 10...b7N.
10...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c7} gives White a choice. 11.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{d5} may well transpose to variation D324 after 11...\textit{\texttt{b7}, but White can also consider 11.\textit{\texttt{d5}?! \textit{\texttt{xd5 12.exd5 \textit{\texttt{b7 13.g4}±.}}}}}}}}}}

\textbf{D321) 10...\texttt{exd4 11.e5 \texttt{e7}}}

I found an internet game where 11...\texttt{e7} was played, but 12.exf6 \texttt{xe2 13.\texttt{xe2} led to an obvious advantage for White.}

\texttt{12.exf6 gxxf6 13.\texttt{d5 fxg5 14.e1 d6}}

\textbf{15.\texttt{xe7}!N}

15.\texttt{xf6f8 \texttt{e4} 16.e6 \texttt{e6} was an unclear mess in Negei – Vorobiov, Leiden 2012.}

\texttt{15...\texttt{e6 16.\texttt{c6 d5}}}

After 16...\texttt{d3 17.xd3 \texttt{xd3 18.xd3 0–0 19.h4± White has easy play thanks to Black's weak kingside structure.}}

\texttt{17.\texttt{f2}!}

This was the move I missed in my calculations. Now White gets a pleasant position by force.

\texttt{17...\texttt{xc6}}

After 17...\texttt{g4 18.xd4 \texttt{xd4 19.d4} Black is facing a tough endgame.}

\textbf{18.xf6 d7 19.h4?}

19.xd4+ d5 20.xd5+ xd5 21.e5± is also possible.

\texttt{19.g4 20.d3}\n
White has a dangerous initiative for a mere pawn.

\textbf{D322) 10...\texttt{b6N}}

\texttt{11.d5!}

11.\texttt{f5} is not so good because of 11...\texttt{b4!}, intending 12.d5 \texttt{xd5 13.exd5}?? \texttt{g6}! and Black wins a piece.

\texttt{11...\texttt{xd5 12.exd5 g6?}}

12...d6? 13.d5 0–0 14.b1 c5 15.g4 gives White an ideal position for this structure.

12...\texttt{c5} is slightly better, as the f5-square is off-limits to the white knight on account of the ...\texttt{g6} trick. However, 13.d6 0–0 14.g4 \texttt{b7 15.g2}± still leaves White with a pleasant position.

\texttt{13.h4! d6}

13.h6 14.d2 d6 15.h5 looks ugly for Black.

\texttt{14.c6}
This is simplest. 14.g4? h6 15.d2 f6 16.f5 is an interesting pawn sacrifice, but there is no need for it.

14...0–0 15.e7

15.g4?! f6 16.h3± is also good.

15...e7 16.xe7 e8

17.d6 b7 18.b1 c8 19.b5 e6 20.h4±

The bishop on e7 seriously limits Black’s active possibilities.

D323) 10...h6N

13.xb5! xd5

13...xb5? 14.xb5 wins effortlessly.

13...xd5 14.exd5 axb5 15.xe5+ e7 16.xb5+ d8 17.xe7+ e7 18.d6 f8 19.a4± The queenside pawns are too much for Black to handle.

14.exd5 e7 15.d6!

White still needs to play accurately. The simplistic 15.c3 would offer Black excellent compensation after 15...0–0 16.e5 e8 17.f5 e8.

15...g5+ 16.b1 axb5 17.xe5+ f8 18.d7!

It would be slightly misleading to say that White has excellent compensation, because he will not even be materially down for more than another move or two.
Chapter 1 – Rare 6th Moves

Black has a number of possible moves here, but with the d-file open, the two most natural choices are D3241) 11...\texttt{b6} and D3242) 11...\texttt{c7}.

11...\texttt{c8} 12.\texttt{d5}! Swapping this piece for Black's light-squared bishop is always welcome. 12...\texttt{xd5} 13.\texttt{exd5} \texttt{h6} (13...g6 14.\texttt{d4±}) 14.\texttt{f4} (14.\texttt{h4} might give White an edge too.) 14...\texttt{c7}

15.\texttt{d3}! Intending to deploy the rook on c3 or e3. 15...\texttt{xc2}+ (15...\texttt{b4} 16.\texttt{e3±}) 16.\texttt{xc2} \texttt{xc2}+ 17.\texttt{xc2} \texttt{exf4} 18.\texttt{d6±}

11...\texttt{h6} 12.\texttt{xf6}! \texttt{xf6} 13.g3 Now \texttt{h3} is an annoying threat, and it is hard for Black to get a normal position with short castling. 13...\texttt{c5} (13...0–0–0 14.\texttt{a4±}) 14.\texttt{b1}

14...\texttt{b6} (14...\texttt{g6} 15.\texttt{xh6}! \texttt{xh6} 16.\texttt{d2} is an important point; 14...\texttt{d8} is met by

This is arguably the most challenging move of all.
15.\(\text{h}3\)± and Black still cannot castle or play ...g6.) 15.\(\text{xb}5\)! 0–0 16.\(\text{bd}6\)±

11...\(\text{a}5\)

It is hard to imagine that this can work now. 12.\(\text{b}3\)!!

The most punishing, although the simple 12.\(\text{b}1\) is also possible, for instance: 12...b4 13.\(\text{d}5\) \(\text{xd}5\) 14.\(\text{ex}d5\) \(\text{xd}5\) 15.b3\(\text{c}5\)

12...\(\text{c}8\)

12...b4 13.\(\text{c}4\)! \(\text{c}7\) (13...\(\text{bc}3\) 14.\(\text{xf}7\)\(\text{xf}7\) 15.\(\text{xd}7\)\(\text{xd}7\) 16.\(\text{d}6\)\(\text{e}6\) 17.\(\text{xb}7\)\(\text{xd}7\) 18.\(\text{xf}6\) \(\text{gx}f6\) 16.\(\text{d}5\) \(\text{xd}5\) 17.\(\text{ex}d5\) gives White huge compensation.

Another promising continuation is:

12.\(\text{xf}6\)! \(\text{xf}6\) (12...\(\text{xf}6\) 13.\(\text{xb}5\)! \(\text{xe}4\) 14.\(\text{g}3\) leads to rather complicated stuff, but it looks dangerous for Black.) 13.\(\text{b}1\)? (13.\(\text{d}2\) 0–0–0\(\text{b}∞\)) It is not easy for Black to continue, and the queen on \(\text{f}6\) looks out of place. 13...\(\text{c}5\) (13...0–0–0 14.a4\±) 14.h4 \(\text{g}6\) 15.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{b}6\) 16.h5\±

12...\(\text{g}6\)

12...\(\text{c}8\) is well met by: 13.\(\text{xf}6\)! \(\text{xf}6\) (13...\(\text{xf}6\) 14.g5 \(\text{d}7\) 15.\(\text{h}3\)––) 14.\(\text{d}2\)\(\text{c}6\) (14...\(\text{b}6\) 15.g5 \(\text{d}8\) 16.\(\text{f}2\) \(\text{c}7\) 17.\(\text{h}3\) with a crushing initiative.) 15.g5 White threatens \(\text{h}3\), and Black has severe problems to even complete his development.

13.\(\text{e}3\)

13.\(\text{h}6\)? b4 14.\(\text{d}5\) \(\text{xd}5\) 15.\(\text{ex}d5\) \(\text{f}6\) 16.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{a}5\) reaches a position analysed under 13.\(\text{h}6\)? in the notes to variation D3242 below.

D3241) 11...\(\text{b}6\)

The queen is slightly misplaced on \(\text{b}6\), and White has more than one pleasant way to continue. He does, however, need to watch for ...\(\text{xc}3\) ideas.

12.g4
17...gxh5 18.hxg5 h8 19.h7#. wins.

18...d8 19...h5 gxh5 20...h5 hxg5 21.xg5 hxg5 22.e7#. Black will soon have to give up the dark-square bishop to avoid mate, leaving White with two superb minor pieces for a rook.

Let's return to the main line where Black forces the knight away from f5. Here White can choose between an aggressive move and a more solid one. Both options offer him better chances, so the choice depends on personal taste.

13...e3

13...h6!?

Normally a knight on this square will be extremely annoying for Black, as his king would be stuck in the centre, but here there are some concrete lines that must be considered.

13...d5 e5 15.exd5 f6 15.d6 e3#
13...c8 16.b1 f6 17.e3 c5 18.c1!±

The bishop on c5 is in the way of Black's other pieces.

16.e3 a5

Without this forcing move, Black's king would have come under heavy fire.

17.b1 xd5

18.xd5! xd5 19.g2 e4 20.f2!

White is able to win back the material.

20.xh6 21.xe4 e6

21..e5 22.g3±

22.e1 e5

14.xf6

14.h4!? is another idea that could be explored. 14.e7 (14..g7 15.g2 b4 16.cd5 xd5 17.xd5 xd5 18.exd5± With both of his bishops still on the board, this structure is excellent for White.) 15.b1 b4 Now White is forced to take on f6, but I would argue that the bishop on e7 is less than ideally placed. (15..0-0 16.g5! 16xf6 d6 17.cd5 xd5 18.xd5 xd5 19.exd5 h5 (19..0-0 20.h4!±) 20.g2±

14.xf6 15.f3!

White's plan includes d3, h2-h4, and a pawn advance to g5 or h5.

15.h4 is slightly less ambitious, but still leads to a pleasant position: 15..d8 16.ed5 xd5 17.xd5 xd5 18.exd5 h5! (18..d6 19.h5!±) 19.g5 g7 20.g2 0-0 Black is solid, and it is not easy for White to break through on the kingside. Nevertheless, he can keep a risk-free edge with 21.e4 followed by piling up the heavy pieces on the f-file.

13..h6

13..e7 14.h6! keeps the king pinned down in the centre.
Chapter 1 – Rare 6th Moves

Conclusion

Starting with Black's rare 6th moves, 6...e5 is clearly dubious, but 6...d7 and 6...c6 both have some tricky points, so it is worth checking both these lines.

The most important function of this chapter has been to introduce the increasingly popular 6...d7 variation, against which I favour 7.e2! intending some combination of long castling and a central attack with f2-f4.

7.a5?! does not make much sense; the bishop simply retreats to d2 and White's initiative develops smoothly. 7.e5 seems like a surprising choice, but it is worth paying attention to some of the details that follow, as White has to play accurately to exploit the weakness of the d5-square.

The largest and most important section of the chapter was devoted to 7...b5. Then 8.f4! e5 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.0-0-0! is an idea that I tested in one of my own games, and awaits further tests. The position is rich in possibilities for both sides, but more dangerous for Black, whose king is unlikely to feel safe for quite some time.

White can press for a long time in this opposite-coloured bishop position. His bishop has better potential, and it is not obvious what Black should do with his king, or how he should defend his light squares against the plan of d3 and h4-h5.
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 v6 5.vc3 a6 6.vg5 vbd7 7.ve2! g6

8.0-0-0

A) 8...vc7 27
B) 8...e5 28
C) 8...v7 9.h4? 31
   C1) 9...h6 31
   C2) 9...h5 10.vb1 vc7 11.g4?!N 34
      C21) 11...vb6 35
      C22) 11...hxg4 12.h5! vxh5 13.vxh5 gxh5 14.db5 cb8 15.vg2 36
         C221) 15...e6 38
         C222) 15...vb8 39
         C223) 15...vc5! 40

A) after 8...vc7

C1) after 9...h6

C2) after 10...vc7

9.h4!N

10.vxf6!N

11.g4?!N
The kingside fianchetto is one of the most important options afforded to Black by 6...b\_bd7, and in the present chapter he makes use of it immediately. This never used to be a popular choice, but then in 2012, against Alekseev, Grischuk showed that Black could go for the Dragon set-up and simply ignore White's plan of f2-f4 and e4-e5. That game had continued 7.f4 g7 8.e2, but of course the same plan was instantly adopted against 7.e2 as well. However, the fact that White has not yet committed himself to f2-f4 provides him with interesting and relatively unexplored additional options.

8.0-0-0

8.h4?! is an imprecise move order because of 8...h6!. Now 9.e3 h5!? 10.0-0-0 g7 transposes to 8.0-0-0 g7 9.h4 h6 10.e3 h5! - something we are trying to avoid, as explained later in variation C1. 9.xf6 is not much good due to 9...xf6! when, in contrast to variation C1, the e4-e5 push is toothless.

After the text move it is worth considering A) 8...c7 and B) 8...e5, but the main move is obviously C) 8...g7.

This position has occurred a few times via a 7...c7 move order. Black's set-up is quite interesting; having moved the queen off the d-file, he intends to meet h2-h4 with ...h6, and xf6 with ...xf6, without allowing e4-e5 at the end of the sequence. However, White can throw a stick into the wheel.

9.h4!N

9.d5 xd5 10.exd5 was played in Kosteniuk – Dzagnidze, Beijing 2013, but now 10...b6N would have led to an unclear game.

9.f4 e5!? is surprisingly hard to deal with. For instance, after 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.b3 b5, the position can be compared with variation B of Chapter 4 on page 59. The key difference is that here Black has improved his chances by avoiding weakening his kingside with ...h6.

9...h6

9...h5 10.b1 d7 is covered later under the move order 8...d7 9.h4 h5 10.b1 c7 - see variation C2 on page 34.

10.e5!!

This leads to some amazing tactical possibilities.
10...dxe5
10...hgx5 11.exf6 xf6 11...e5 12.d5 looks horrid for Black.) 12.db5!— is a nice point.

11.xf6 exf6
Or 11...xf6 12.db5! axb5 13.xb5 b8 14.c4± and Black's position is falling apart.

12.d5 d6
12...d8 13.h5! undermines the light squares, creating additional squares for the d4-knight too. Despite having all those pawns, Black's position is precarious. 13...b6 14.xb6 xb6 15.hxg6 fxg6 16.e4±

13.c4 exd4 14.c7 d8 15.xa8 b5
16.xf7
White's spectacular play has netted an extra exchange, but he still needs to play accurately to save the a8-knight.

16...b7 17.e1 e7
17...e4 18.b1 c5 19.g7! e8 20.xe8+ xe8 21.xg6+ d8 22.g8+ f8 23.b6 d6 24.c4 bxc4 25.xc4±

18.c7! e5 19.g7 f8 20.f4 f7
Alternatively, after 20...d3 21.d1 x7 22.xd3 x7 23.xd3 e8 24.xc3 c6 25.xc6 x7c6 26.xe7 e8 27.f7 White has good winning chances due to his extra pawn and the exposed black king.

21.g8+ x7 22.fxe5 e6

23.b1!
23.d3 xa2 24.e6 f8 25.h7 d8 could get really messy.

23...f5 24.d3 b4 25.d1
Black is still in the game, but White's extra exchange makes it a mostly one-sided affair.

B) 8...e5

In the analogous position with ...h6 and h4 included, the same move is quite good
for Black. In fact, if you turn ahead to the beginning of Chapter 4, you will see that with the bishop already on h4 I recommend playing f2-f4 before castling, to avoid this very possibility. However, with the bishop still on g5 White benefits from some extra options.

9.\( \text{d5?!N} \)

The most ambitious.

9.\( \text{b3} \) may lead to a slightly odd version of an English Attack. 9...h6 (9...e7 10.h6! is annoying for Black.) 10.e3! (10.h4 is the same kind of unfavourable transposition as outlined above.) The bishop on e3 makes it harder for Black to develop, and White's g- and h-pawns are free to roam forwards. 10...b5 11.f3 Now 11...\( \text{b6?!N} \) looks like Black's best chance, and could be explored further. (Instead after 11...b7 12.a3 c8 13.c4 the ...c4 threat is easily parried, and ...\( \text{b6} \) will usually be met by a5. 13...c7 14.a8± Yu – Gordon, Gibraltar 2013.

9...h6

9...exd4? 10.e5 is horrible.

After 9...g7 10.b3! h6 11.h4± the bishop is misplaced on g7. It won't be able to help the d6-pawn and, even more importantly, the pin will remain a source of great annoyance.

10.\( \text{c4! hgx5} \)

10...exd4 11.\( \text{xf6! \text{xf6} \text{d7} \text{e7} \text{xa8 \text{e6} \text{b4 \text{xa8} \text{e5 gives White a huge attack against the uncastled king.}} \}

11.\( \text{c7?! \text{xc7!} \}

This leads to a double-edged situation involving three pieces against a queen. 11...e7 is playable, but it leads to more one-sided positions where Black will have to fight for a draw an exchange down. 12.\( \text{de6 \text{b6} \text{xd8 \text{xc4} \text{xf7} \text{White can also consider: 14.\text{xc4 \text{xd8 15.\text{xa8 \text{xe4 16.\text{he1 \text{xf2 17.\text{d2 \text{g4 18.\text{xf7 \text{h2 19.\text{g6}}\text{b5 14...\text{xb2 15.\text{xb2 \text{xf7 16.\text{xa8 \text{xe4 17.\text{d3}}\}} \}

12.\( \text{xc7 exd4} \)

The computer gives a positive evaluation for White, but it is not at all easy for a human player to assess the position. Fortunately there are some concrete ways to pose problems for Black.

13.\( \text{xd4} \)

13...c4 \text{e7} 14.\text{xd4 allows Black to get organized with 14...\text{f8! 15.f3 \text{g7 16.b3 \text{e8 17.\text{c4 \text{e5 18.e2. The struggle goes on, and the computer prefers White, but I think Black's position is acceptable.}} \}

13...g4

13...\text{e5 can be met in the same way.}
14.\texttt{exd6!}

Giving up material for the sake of the initiative.

After 14.\texttt{c4 h6}\dagger 15.b1 \texttt{f4} Black regroups his pieces excellently.

14...\texttt{exd6} 15.\texttt{exd6}

Suddenly Black's position doesn't look so well organized, despite having a rook and two knights against a queen.

15...\texttt{dxe4} 16.\texttt{b4}

16.\texttt{d4} also deserves attention. 16...\texttt{ef6} 17.\texttt{c4} 0–0 (17...\texttt{f8} 18.\texttt{e1 g7} 19.f3 \texttt{gxh3} 20.g4+) 18.h3 g3! (18...\texttt{gxh3} 19.\texttt{xh3} is too dangerous.) 19.fxh3 b5 20.\texttt{b3} a5 21.a3 (21.a4!) 21...\texttt{b7} 22.\texttt{f1} a4 23.\texttt{a2} \texttt{ad8} 24.\texttt{xf6} \texttt{xf6} 25.\texttt{xf6} \texttt{d5} I think Black should be able to hold.

16...\texttt{d6!}

16...\texttt{d6} 17.d3±

16...\texttt{c5} 17.c4 0–0 18.h4! Opening up the h-file will give White a strong initiative, with the rook and queen combining to create mating nets.

17.c4 \texttt{h5!}

This is the only way to prevent an instant collapse.

After 17...\texttt{f8} 18.\texttt{c3 e7} 19.\texttt{e1} \texttt{e6} 20.\texttt{f3} \texttt{gxh3} 21.\texttt{a3} \texttt{e8} 22.\texttt{xf3} followed by \texttt{f1}, Black's position is hard to keep together.

18.\texttt{e1}\dagger \texttt{e5}

An interesting position has arisen. Despite being far behind in development, Black is not in any immediate danger. White is ahead in development, but he is running out of pieces and needs to find a plan.

19.a4!

Preparing to stifle Black's intended development of his queenside pieces.

19...\texttt{xe1}\dagger

19...b6 just loses the pawn: 20.\texttt{xe5}\dagger \texttt{xe5} 21.\texttt{xe5}±

19...a5 gives away the critical b5-square. 20.\texttt{xe5}\dagger \texttt{xe5} 21.b5\dagger \texttt{f7} (21...\texttt{ed7} 22.\texttt{d6+}) 22.\texttt{d6} \texttt{d8} 23.h3 \texttt{gxh3} 24.gxh3 White intends f2-f4, and 24...\texttt{g5} is not much of a defence due to 25.f4! \texttt{gf4} 26.h4 when the h-pawn seems unstoppable.

20.\texttt{xe1}\dagger \texttt{f8} 21.\texttt{b4}\dagger \texttt{e8}

Black should not allow the queen to go to e7.

22.a5
How should Black continue development now?

22...b5!?

Normal development with 22...e5 is difficult since after 23.e1! df7 24.d5 the b7-pawn is hard to protect. 24.f8 (24...b8 25.h3!) 25.xb7 b8 26.d5±

23.axb6 xb8

White has a few ways to maintain some pressure without taking any risks. For instance:

24.b3 xb6 25.xf7 e7 26.c4 b7
27.xg6 xg2 28.c3

The endgame will go on, but Black will have to struggle to establish a defensive fortress.

C) 8...g7

This is the more natural-looking response, but it has a drawback.

10.xf6!N

Exploiting the fact that Black cannot recapture with the knight.

10.e3 looked like a good move after 10...b5, when 11.h5! e5 12.hxg6 fxg6 13.f4 gave White an ideal position in Durarbayli – Georgiev, Dubai 2014.

However, 10...h5! is a stronger move which gives Black an improved version of variation
C2, since the bishop on e3 gets in the way of the f2-f4/e4-e5 plan, and also does not support an attack on the e7-pawn like the bishop on g5.

When we look ahead to variation C2, we will see that Nakamura chose 9...h5 over 10...h6. There is little doubt that he would have preferred the version with the bishop on e3, so we can infer that he was put off 9...h6 by the prospect of the text move.

10...\(\text{hxf6}\)

10...\(\text{hxf6}\)? 11.e5! \(\text{h5}\) (11...\(\text{dxe5}\) 12.\(\text{c6}\)+) 12.e6 looks extremely bad for Black.

11.h5

This is the most solid option, aiming for a slight edge.

11.\(\text{d5}\)?

Planning h4-h5 on the next move is more ambitious, since Black cannot blockade the position with ...\(\text{xd4}\) as in the main line, but it is harder to reach an exact conclusion here.

11...\(\text{g7}\)

11...\(\text{xd4}\) 12.\(\text{xd4}\)+ is a dubious choice without the inclusion of h4-h5 and ...g5, as Black's kingside is too vulnerable.

12.h5 e6!

Other moves would give White an ideal position.

12...\(\text{c7}\)

12...\(\text{xd4}\) Black's dark-squared bishop seems too strong to just give away. 18.\(\text{xd4}\) \(\text{c6}\) 19.\(\text{a3}\)+

17...\(\text{c7}\)

17...\(\text{xd4}\) Black's dark-squared bishop seems too strong to just give away. 18.\(\text{xd4}\) \(\text{e6}\) 19.\(\text{a3}\)+

17...\(\text{f8}\) is met by the brilliant 18.e5! \(\text{xe5}\) 19.\(\text{e1}\) and the position gets opened up rather unpleasantly for Black, for instance 19...\(\text{f6}\) (19...\(\text{d7}\) 20.\(\text{h6}\)) 20.f4 \(\text{xf4}\)

17...\(\text{h7}\) \(\text{xf6}\) 22.\(\text{h7}\) \(\text{f6}\) 23.\(\text{f3}\) with a
crushing initiative.

18.f4!?  
This seems the most critical, setting up constant threats involving e4-e5. It's a complicated position, but Black's life seems harder. For instance:

18...\textit{d}d7  
Or 18...\textit{e}c5 19.e5! dxe5 20.\textit{g}g3! \textit{f}f7 21.\textit{h}h5! with a strong attack.

19.\textit{h}h5?! \textit{h}h8 20.e5 dxe5 21.\textit{f}xe5 \textit{a}c8 22.\textit{a}a3! \textit{f}f7 23.\textit{g}g3!  
Intending \textit{d}d3 with good attacking chances.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Diagram 1}
\end{center}

11...g5  
Other moves would obviously result in a hideous kingside structure.

12.\textit{d}d5 \textit{xd}d4  
12...\textit{e}e5 is rather awkward, as Black will constantly have to worry about f2-f4 threats. 13.g3! e6 14.\textit{e}e3 \textit{c}c7 15.\textit{g}g2± intending \textit{h}h1 and f2-f4.

13.\textit{xd}d4 \textit{e}e5  
At first Black appears to have a solid position, and the absence of his dark-squared bishop isn't felt immediately. But without that bishop, there is also not much scope for his queenside counterplay. Also it is important to appreciate that if White manages to play g2-g3 and f2-f4, then Black's apparent solidity on the kingside will just crumple. Black may try to obstruct this plan with a timely ...g4, but this will bring the dark-square weaknesses into focus. In the meantime, White can just continue developing normally, place his pieces on good squares, and see where it leads him. Keeping in mind these ideas, the next few moves will be easy to understand.

14.\textit{e}e3! \textit{e}e6  
14...b5 is not terribly useful, since the bishop is better on e6 than on b7.

14...\textit{a}a5 can be met by 15.g3!, since taking on a2 will allow a check on c7. (15.\textit{b}b1 is too slow: 15...\textit{e}e6 16.g3 \textit{c}c8 17.\textit{f}f4 \textit{c}c5! 18.c3 \textit{c}c6=)

15.g3!  
After 15.f3 \textit{a}a5 16.\textit{b}b1 \textit{c}c5 it will be hard to arrange g2-g3 and f3-f4.

15...g4  
Black should not allow f2-f4.

16.\textit{b}b1 \textit{c}c8 17.\textit{e}e2 \textit{a}a5 18.c3 \textit{c}c5 19.\textit{f}f4±  
Black is pretty solid, but his position contains a number of weaknesses and he has no counterplay.
At first it appears that White can just build a quick central initiative with f2-f4, followed by a pawn advance to e5 or f5, while if Black castles, the weaknesses caused by the ...h5 move might be felt. Initially the computer seemed to endorse that view, but then Nakamura played this way with Black, and showed that the above assessment might be unfounded. One important point is that f2-f4 will give Black the excellent g4-square for his knight, while any \( \text{d}d5 \) threats can be prevented by placing the other knight on b6.

10.\( \text{g}b1 \)

The idea of connecting this move with the rather striking novelty on the next turn is not something I came up with directly.

First I tried 10.f4N, with the idea of meeting 10...\( \text{c}7 \) with: 11.g4!? (11.\( \text{b}1 \) transposes to 11.f4 in the note to White's next move in the main line below.) The idea was to prevent Black's knights from using the g4-square, and I noticed that 11...hxg4 would run into the strong 12.h5!. (In this version White's f2-f4 move proves far more useful than \( \text{b}1 \), as occurs in the main line.)

So far so good, but then I realized that Black had a good answer in 11...\( \text{b}6! \), guarding against any \( \text{d}d5 \) ideas, while the ...\( \text{x}g4 \) threat spoils White's plans completely. I analysed this a bit further but did not get anywhere, so I began to think of other ways to implement the \( g2-g4 \) idea. Ideally, we want to meet ...hxg4 with h4-h5, while avoiding the problems caused by a timely ...\( \text{b}6 \).

10...\( \text{c}7 \)

10...b5? 11.\( \text{c}6! \) \( \text{c}7 \) 12.\( \text{x}e7 \) is a nasty trap.

10...\( \text{b}6? \) doesn't work either due to 11.e5+.

10...0-0?! is too committal, and after 11.f3\( \text{b}6 \) White's kingside initiative will be swift.

11.\( \text{g}4! \)N

This seems like the ideal moment to go for the \( g2-g4 \) plan.

I found no advantage for White after the more obvious attacking try:

11.\( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{b}6! \)

Again this knight move plays a key role in the defence. Now the critical move is obviously:

12.e5

12.f5 \( \text{g}4! \) 13.\( \text{h}3 \) \( \text{c}5 \) 14.\( \text{b}3 \) \( \text{f}2 \)
15.\( \text{d}3 \) \( \text{e}5 \) 16.\( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{x}d4 \) 17.\( \text{x}d4 \) \( \text{c}6 \)

was fine for Black in Solak – Nakamura, Rhodes 2013.
12...dxe5
12...0–0?! gives White too many options, one example being 13.exf6 exf6 14.f5–
13.fxe5 Qg4?!
13...Qfd5 is safer, and 14.Qxd5 Qxd5 15.e6
0–0 16.Qc4 fxe6 17.Qxc7 Qxc7 18.Qxe7
Qe8 seems playable for Black. The main line
also works well though.
14.e6 0–0
The position looks dangerous for Black, but
it is hard to maintain the pawn on e6.

15.g3?!
15.exf7+ Qxf7∞
15...Qh8!
15...Qxd4 is met by 16.exf7+ Qxf7 17.Qxd4±,
but now Black really is threatening to take
on d4.
16.Qh3
16.exf7 e5! 17.Qb3 Qf5 seems fine for Black.
16...Qxd4 17.Qxd4 Qxe6 18.Qxg4 Qxg4
19.Qxe7 Qxe7 20.Qxe7 Qe8
White has no more than a faint initiative in
the endgame.

Returning to the position after 11.g4?!N, Black
may try C21) 11...Qb6 or C22) 11...hxg4.

C21) 11...Qb6

This is much less effective than it was in the
similar position after 10.f4N Qc7 11.g4?!
With the pawn back on f2 here, the prospect
of a bishop arriving on g4 is far less annoying.

12.Qxh5 Qxh5
After 12...Qg4 13.Qf3 Qxh5 14.Qh3± Black’s
bishop is stuck out of play.
12...Qxh5 13.Qf3! Qxf5 14.Qxf6 Qxf6
15.Qxh5 Qxc3 16.Qg1! White invades through
the kingside.

The changed landscape on the kingside seems
to favour White. Kingside castling is out of the
question for Black, and White can improve
his position in anticipation of plans involving...
0–0–0.

13.Qd5?!
White has more than one good way to
continue. Another is:
13.Qg1 Qd7 14.Qe3?!
Anticipating long castling.
14...0–0–0
After 14...Qc8 15.f4 Black’s king is
permanently stuck in the centre, and White
will prepare to break through, either along
the g-file or with e4–e5. 15...Qc4 seems like
the obvious try to get counterplay, but White
can react powerfully with: 16.Qd5 Qa5
17.Qg5! Qa4 18.e5! e6 19.Qc1! dxe5 20.Qxe5
exd5 21.e6 fxe6 22.Qxe6 Qf7 23.Qh3±
15.Qg5?!
This move prepares a possible rook lift to a5!
Another useful point is:
15...\textit{h}6 16.\textit{f}3!? 
If Black takes on \textit{g}5, the knight recapture will give White more than enough compensation. This could be an interesting position to explore further, but since the main line gives White an edge by simpler means, there is no need to delve any deeper into it here.

13...\textit{x}d5 14.\textit{e}xd5 \textit{f}6

14...0–0? is too dangerous due to 15.\textit{g}2 followed by \textit{f}3, destroying the blockade on the kingside.

14...\textit{e}5 15.\textit{e}3 \textit{f}8 (15...\textit{f}6 16.\textit{d}3!±) 16.\textit{e}2 followed by \textit{f}2–\textit{f}4 also looks grim for Black.

15.\textit{g}2

It is not easy for Black to develop further, as his king will not be safe on either side of the board.

15...\textit{g}4 16.\textit{f}3 \textit{h}5

The bishop may be misplaced here, but it seems like the best try to stabilize the kingside to prepare castling.

17.\textit{h}el \textit{x}d5

This allows a nice tactical sequence. 17...0–0 is no better due to the simple 18.\textit{xe}7±.

Objectively Black’s best continuation may be 17...\textit{f}8, although 18.\textit{h}3± leaves White in control.

18.\textit{e}6! \textit{xe}6 19.\textit{xe}6 \textit{b}4

19...\textit{f}6 20.\textit{xf}6 \textit{xf}6 21.\textit{xf}6 leaves Black’s king in danger.

20.\textit{xc}7† \textit{xc}7 21.\textit{xe}7† \textit{f}8 22.\textit{xb}7 \textit{c}6 23.\textit{xd}6 \textit{a}5 24.\textit{b}4±

White is close to winning. He has three pawns for a piece, his rooks are absolutely dominating, and the black knight is close to being trapped.

C22) 11...\textit{hxg}4

12.\textit{h}5!

The key idea. White is looking to create entry points for his knights.

12...\textit{xb}5
Other moves can be brushed aside with relative ease.

12...b5? 13.g2± creates threats on the long diagonal while defending the rook in preparation for hxg6.

12...gxh5 is similar to the main line, but keeping another pair of rooks on the board only serves White's purpose. 13.g5 f8 14.f4?! (White can also play 14.g2 b8 15.f4, by analogy with the main line.) 14...gxf3 15.xf3 e5 16.f4 xf5 17.exf5 White has a useful initiative. In the position without the rooks on h1 and h8, Black can get away with 17...0–0–0, but here it runs into 18.xf6 exf6 19.d5 c6 20.h3! and White wins.

12...b6 13.h6! g8 (13...f8 14.xf6±)

14.a4! White intends to chase away the knight and plonk his own horse on d5. (14.xd2 e5 also looks pretty good for White, but the position is messier.) 14...xh6 (14...e6? 15.hxg7! xh1 16.db5!±→) 15.a5 d7 16.d5±

12...a5 13.d2? Other moves can be analysed, but this is the simplest.

13.h6 xg5 14.hxg7 xh1 15.d5 is a fun position to explore, but there is no need for it.

13...xh5 14.xh5 gxh5 15.d5 f8
15...h8 16.xe7+

16.g2

Compared with the main line below, the inclusion of the moves ...a5 and d2 is clearly in White's favour. It is harder for Black to arrange ...e6, while White's queen move sets up attacking ideas involving h6, or possibly even with e1.

12...a5 13.f4
17.e1?! can also be considered.
17.e5 does not quite work: 17...xe5 18.dxe7 xe7 19.e7 c5 20.e7+ xe7 21.d5+ xe6 White has many entertaining ways to give a perpetual, but the win proves elusive.

17...gxf3 18.xf3 b5
Otherwise it is hard to see the point behind putting the queen on a5 and rook on b8.

19.d4 b4 20.d5±

13.xh5 gxh5 14.d5
The knight is majestically placed here.

14...f8
There is nothing else. After 14...h8? 15.xe7! Black's position collapses, while 14...f8 is not much better after 15.e3!± followed by h6.

We have reached a critical position. Retreating the bishop to f8 looks ugly of course, but
White needs to prove if his initiative is worth the flashy double pawn sacrifice. As you will see in the following lines, it will be hard for Black to untangle and complete his development, despite the existence of moves like ...e6 which seem so obvious. And even if Black manages to complete his development, it should not be too hard for White to recover the loose kingside pawns, so we are not taking too big a risk.

15...\textit{g}2

This calm developing move prevents ...b5 and prepares f2-f4. It also prepares a nice way to deal with ...e6.

If White could establish a pawn on f4 then Black would be busted, but he can always take en passant of course. For example: 15.f4 gxf3 16.\textit{x}f3 \textit{e}5 17.\textit{x}f4 \textit{x}f5 18.exf5 0-0-0 19.\textit{x}f6 exf6 20.\textit{d}5 \textit{c}6 21.\textit{x}f6 \textit{f}3=/ I have included this line mainly to show that White is perfectly safe even when Black manages to complete his development, but of course we should make it as hard as possible for him to do this. Returning to the main line, Black has three main tries: (C221) 15...e6, (C222) 15...\textit{b}8 and (C223) 15...\textit{c}5!.

15...\textit{b}6? is more or less refuted by 16.\textit{d}6† exd6 17.\textit{x}f6± followed by \textit{d}5.

16.\textit{e}5!

This is particularly effective after Black has committed to ...e6, as there will be more open lines around his king.

16.\textit{f}4? is quite a sweet idea too, but it will most probably transpose to the later variation C223: 16...\textit{g}xf3 (16...exf5 17.exf5+ \textit{e}7 18.\textit{e}1 \textit{d}8 19.\textit{d}5! followed by \textit{c}4 is an amazing example of domination.) 17.\textit{x}f3 \textit{c}5 This position is covered later via the move order 15...\textit{c}5 16.\textit{f}4 \textit{g}xf3 17.\textit{x}f3 e6. (Black had better avoid 17...\textit{g}4 18.\textit{e}5! \textit{g}xe5 19.\textit{x}h5+, or 17...exf5 18.exf5+ \textit{e}7 19.\textit{x}h5+.)

16...\textit{d}xe5 17.\textit{g}3

Now we're three pawns down! But all of our pieces are participating in the game, which certainly cannot be said about the opposition. Black's position is incredibly difficult, and it is hard to play even single moves, while White's tactical options abound. Here are a few illustrative lines.
17...\textit{b}8

17...\textit{h}7 18.\textit{h}4 \textit{f}5 19.\textit{xe}h5 \textit{fl} 20.\textit{f}3!± and White opens up the kingside.

17...\textit{e}7 18.\textit{d}2! \textit{b}8 19.\textit{xf}6! \textit{xf}6 20.\textit{h}6+- and White just wins the knight.

17...\textit{b}6 can be met by 18.\textit{a}1\textit{a}5, avoiding any tricks and asking Black how he intends to develop his pieces.

18.\textit{d}2 \textit{b}5 19.\textit{xf}6! \textit{xf}6

20.\textit{c}6!\textit{d}7 21.\textit{x}d7\textit{xd}7 22.\textit{g}5 \textit{e}7 23.\textit{xe}5 \textit{b}6 24.\textit{c}e4±

White is absolutely dominating.

\textbf{C222) 15...\textit{b}8}

This seems like a natural way to continue development. Now we have a pleasant choice between a forcing continuation and a more patient one.

\textbf{16.\textit{f}4}

The more violent option is 16.\textit{e}5? \textit{xe}5 (16...\textit{xe}5 17.\textit{xe}3 is more dangerous for Black) 17.\textit{xd}6! \textit{xd}6 18.\textit{xf}6 \textit{e}6. White has excellent compensation here, but it wasn’t easy to prove an advantage against the computer. The position can be explored further, but I tend to prefer the more measured build-up.

\textbf{16...\textit{gxf}3}

It is hard to imagine Black tolerating the pawn on \textit{f}4. For instance, if 16...\textit{e}6 then 17.\textit{e}1!\textit{t} leaves him facing too many tactical threats involving \textit{e}4-\textit{e}5.

17.\textit{xf}3 \textit{b}5

17...\textit{xe}5 allows a familiar response: 18.\textit{e}5!\textit{dxe}5 19.\textit{g}3± White has an even better version of variation C221 above.

17...\textit{e}5 is covered under the move order 15...\textit{e}5 16.\textit{f}4 \textit{gxf}3 17.\textit{xf}3 \textit{b}8 – see the notes to Black’s 17th move in variation C223 below.
18.e5! dxe5
18...dxe5 19.\(\text{d}x\text{d}6\) exd6 20.\(\text{d}x\text{f}6\) \(\text{d}e6\) 21.\(\text{d}x\text{e}5\) dxe5 22.\(\text{d}d5\) (22.\(\text{d}d5\)?) 22...\(\text{d}x\text{d}5\) 23.\(\text{d}x\text{d}5\) gives White a long-term initiative, which is only enhanced by the presence of opposite-coloured bishops.

19.\(\text{d}d5\) \(\text{d}x\text{d}5\) 20.\(\text{d}x\text{d}5\) \(\text{d}f6\) 21.\(\text{d}x\text{f}6\) exf6 22.\(\text{h}x\text{h}5\) \(\text{d}x\text{f}5\) 23.\(\text{d}x\text{f}5\)

Compared with the last note, Black has a more compact structure with a pawn on f6 instead of h5. Nevertheless, White keeps a persistent initiative. A possible continuation is:

\[\text{C223) 15...\text{c}5!}\]

This seems like the best defensive move, cutting out the e4-e5 tricks. The queen is better on c5 than on a5, since the future plan of \(\text{d}b8\) and \(\text{b}5\) will not cut the queen off from the centre.

16.\(\text{f}4\)

This is the simplest way to continue, but there are a lot of other more sophisticated methods as well. I will mention a few of the more interesting possibilities that could be explored more deeply:

16.\(\text{h}4\) e6 17.\(\text{e}1\)? is an ambitious try. White may even follow up by putting a second knight en prise on d5.

After 16.\(\text{e}1\) e6 I found nothing better than 17.\(\text{d}2\) transposing to 16.\(\text{d}2\) below.

An extremely complicated position results from:

16.\(\text{d}2\)? e6 16...\(\text{b}8\) 17.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{a}5\) 18.\(\text{h}6\)\(\text{c}5\) 17.\(\text{e}1\)

How should Black continue his development?

17...\(\text{g}8\)!

A most unnatural defence for a human, but probably necessary since it frees the d7-knight and avoids being hit by e4-e5.

17...\(\text{exf}5\)? 18.\(\text{exf}5\)\(\text{d}8\) 19.\(\text{d}5\) \(\text{g}7\) 20.\(\text{b}4!\) wins.

The logical 17...\(\text{b}8\) runs into our typical, beautiful idea of 18.e5!! dxe5 19.\(\text{d}4!\) \(\text{c}7\) 20.\(\text{g}3\) when Black is completely tied down.

\[\text{18.e3 \(\text{c}7\)}\]

There are various options that deserve attention here. One possible continuation is:

19.\(\text{f}4\) \(\text{gxf}3\) 19...\(\text{g}6\) 20.\(\text{d}4\)\(\text{f}3\)
20.\textit{xf}3 \textit{e}5 21.\textit{gg}2?! \textit{f}6 22.\textit{gg}7\uparrow \textit{xg}7
23.\textit{wx}g7
White has a strong initiative with pressure on the dark squares.

16...\textit{gx}f\textit{3}
16...\textit{bb}8?! gives White a few good options, the simplest being: 17.\textit{oo}xd6\uparrow! exd6 18.e5 dxe5 19.fxe5 \textit{h}7 20.\textit{f}4±

17.\textit{xf}3 \textit{e}6
This seems like the most logical way, as Black has to try and get rid of the knight.

After 17...\textit{ee}5 18.\textit{h}4\uparrow the queen will easily be driven away, so Black's last move doesn't have much point.

17...\textit{ee}5 18.\textit{xf}6 exf6 19.\textit{dd}5± is excellent for White.

17...\textit{bb}8
This move prepares ...b5-b4, but it gives White a lot of time. I like the idea of invading on the kingside with:

18.\textit{gg}2?! 18.\textit{xh}5?! is also quite dangerous. 18...e6 19.\textit{ee}3 (19.\textit{dd}5 often runs into the following defence: 19...exd5 20.exd5\uparrow \textit{ee}5!
21.\textit{xf}6 \textit{x}f5 22.\textit{xe}5 \textit{xc}2\uparrow 23.\textit{xc}2\uparrow 24.\textit{xc}2 dxe5=) 19...\textit{ee}5 20.\textit{dd}4

18...b5
Black is not helped by 18...e6 19.\textit{ee}3 \textit{ee}5 20.\textit{gg}7\uparrow±.
19.\textit{ee}3 \textit{cc}7
19...\textit{ee}5 20.\textit{dd}4 \textit{ee}6 21.\textit{ee}2! \textit{bb}7 22.\textit{ff}4 \textit{cc}4 23.b3 \textit{cc}6 24.\textit{dd}3±
20.\textit{g}7\uparrow \textit{gg}7
20...\textit{dd}8 21.\textit{xx}h5±
21.\textit{wx}g7
Now White gets an excellent initiative on the dark squares:

21...\textit{ee}5 22.\textit{dd}4! \textit{xx}f3
Or 22...b4 23.\textit{xx}e5 bxc3 24.b3 \textit{ee}6 25.\textit{dd}4 intending e4-e5.
23.\textit{hh}8\uparrow \textit{dd}7 24.\textit{xx}f6 exf6 25.\textit{xx}f6 \textit{ee}5 26.\textit{xx}e5±
Let's return to the more critical 17...e6.

18...\text{\textit{e3}}!

Other moves such as 18...\textit{xh5} and 18...\textit{f1} lead to interesting play, but the text move is the most critical.

18...\textit{e5}

18...\textit{c7} 19...\textit{g3} (19...\textit{h6}!? is a dangerous alternative.) 19...\textit{e5} (19...\textit{h4} 20...\textit{h5} \textit{xh5} 21...\textit{xh5} \textit{e5} [21...\textit{f6} 22...\textit{g5}!\uparrow] 22...\textit{f2}±) 20...\textit{xh5} \textit{f5} 21...\textit{xf5} \textit{d7} 22...\textit{f2}! Black still cannot castle due to \textit{b6}, while 22...\textit{c6} is met by 23...\textit{f1}± intending \textit{g5}, maintaining the pressure.

19...\textit{h6}!?

Creating a lot of tactical tricks, so Black is practically forced to give up his crucial dark-squared bishop. A few other moves are also promising to explore further:

19...\textit{d4} \textit{f4} 20...\textit{f1}!? \textit{exf5} 21...\textit{exf5} \textit{d8} 22...\textit{c4} leads to some crazy complications; White may indeed have excellent compensation, but there's no need to sacrifice a piece.

19...\textit{d4}

This nondescript move also gives White decent compensation. Black has a lot of options, so I'll settle for giving a few sample lines.

19...\textit{e7} 19...\textit{b5} 20...\textit{c6}± 19...\textit{g4} 20...\textit{xg4} \textit{hxg4} 21...\textit{xg4} It is not easy for Black to complete development while keeping White's pieces from invading through the kingside.

20...\textit{g4}!\uparrow \textit{g4}

Or 20...\textit{a5} 21...\textit{g5} \textit{c7} 22...\textit{hxh5} \textit{e5} 23...\textit{f3} and White keeps some initiative.

21...\textit{xg4} \textit{hxg4} 22...\textit{xg4} This might look okay for Black, but he is still under some pressure. Particularly the black queen finds it hard to find a safe haven.

22...\textit{f6}

22...\textit{w8} 23...\textit{g2}! leads to strong threats: 23...\textit{f6} 24...\textit{f5}! \textit{exf5} 25...\textit{d5} \textit{c5} 26...\textit{g8} \textit{w8} 27...\textit{xg8}± \textit{d7} 28...\textit{xf6}± \textit{c6} 29...\textit{exf5} \textit{b5}± 30...\textit{f8}±

23...\textit{g7}! \textit{f8}

23...\textit{d7} 24...\textit{h8}±
24.g2 d7 25.e2! Black has annoying problems in the centre.

20.xh6
Now Black’s dark squares are glaringly weak. As long as he doesn't escape with ...0–0–0, he will continue to suffer.

20...b5
Or 20.g3 21.f1 e5 22.d1?? xf3 23.xf3 g6 24.c1 and Black will struggle to defend his dark squares.

19...xh6
After 19...e7 20.g1! Black's queen is being shoed away: 20...a5 21.xf7! xf7 22.g5 c7 23.xh5+–

19...b5 allows the same type of sacrifice: 20.xf7! xf7 21.d4 f4 22.e5 dxe5 23.e3±

19...a5 20.g1! e5 21.xh5 (21.g8?? xg8 22.xg8 d7 23.g2 is also unpleasant for Black.) 21...d7 22.xf7 xf7 23.xf7+ xf7

21.g1!
Most other moves allow Black to complete his queenside development and get castled.

21.a3 b7 22.d2 0–0–0! 23.f4 c5 24.xd6 e5! 25.xc5 xd2 26.xd2 xf3 27.ed3 xe4 would be fine for Black.

21.e3 b7 22.d4 f4 gives White nothing better than repeating with 23.e3.

21...b4
21...b7 22.g5±

22.d1 b8
22...a5? 23.g5 d4 24.e5 wins for White.

24.e5! xe5 (24...dxe5 25.f1!±) 25.g5± The black queen is trapped rather spectacularly in the middle of the board!
The text move abandons all hope of castling, leaving White with several ways to develop his initiative.

23...\text{\texttt{eg}}5
White can also go for 23...\texttt{eg}7?! immediately, for instance: 23...\texttt{eb}7 24.\texttt{ef}2 25.\texttt{eb}5 26.\texttt{ed}3 and there is no easy way for Black to solve his problems.

23...\texttt{d}4 24.\texttt{g}5 \texttt{e}5
24...\texttt{eb}7 25.\texttt{ee}3! 26.\texttt{g}5 traps the queen.

25.\texttt{e}3 26.\texttt{g}2

\textbf{26...\texttt{eg}4}
26...\texttt{ab}7 27.\texttt{ag}8!±

27.\texttt{xg}4 \texttt{xg}4 28.\texttt{h}7!! 29.\texttt{b}5 29.\texttt{d}2±
We have gone a bit deeper than necessary, but the general picture is clear: White has enduring compensation and Black must defend with great care.

\textbf{Conclusion}

7...\texttt{g}6 is becoming increasingly popular, and so far Black's position has withstood all of White's attempts to break it. After the natural 8.0-0-0, even the sidelines 8...\texttt{c}7 and 8...\texttt{e}5 forced me to find new and inventive ways to challenge the defence. Most of the time you can expect to face 8...\texttt{g}7, after which 9.\texttt{h}4!! forces Black to make an important choice.

9...\texttt{h}6 is conveniently met by 10.\texttt{xf}6!N, when Black cannot realistically recapture with the knight, and 10...\texttt{xf}6 leaves White with more than one promising continuation.

9...\texttt{h}5 is more critical, and here long analysis convinced me that 10.\texttt{b}1 \texttt{c}7 11.\texttt{g}4!N causes significant problems to the defence. There are many ways for Black to lose quickly, but even with best play, I found no clear way for him to defuse the pressure.
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 Bd7 7.e2!! h6

8.h4

A) 8...e6?!
B) 8...g5
C) 8...b5! 9.f4
   C1) 9...e5N
   C2) 9...g5 10.fxg5 hxg5 11.xg5 b7 12.0–0–0 e6 13.g4!
      C21) 13...e7
      C22) 13...b4!?N

A) after 10...b5

C1) after 11...b6

C22) after 13...b4!?N

11.e5!N 12.b1!?N 14.d5!
1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.exd4 e6 4.c3 a6 5.g5 \(\text{d7}\) 6.c4 \(\text{h6}\) 7.e2

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.exd4 e6 4.c3 a6 5.g5 \(\text{d7}\) 6.c4 \(\text{h6}\) 7.e2

Prodding the bishop has been Black's most popular choice in the position. Though it may seem like a small detail, it can change the character of many of the ensuing variations.

8.\(\text{h4}\)

On the negative side for White, he has lost the chance to meet \(\text{...h6}\) with \(\text{xf6}\), as exchanging in the present position would clearly be premature. Also, the bishop has been driven away from the centre; there will be no returning to \(\text{e3}\) or \(\text{d2}\) for a while. However, Black has paid a price in the slight weakening of the g6-point.

In this position Black's most important option is 8.g6, and we will deal with it separately in the next chapter. For the time being, however, it is important to check three alternatives: A) 8.e6?! B) 8.g5 and C) 8.b5?.

8.e5 9.d5 g6 10.e3 has been covered via the 7.e5 move order – see variation D2 of Chapter 1.

8.\(\text{e5}\) should be met by: 9.0–0–0 (9.f4 allows 9.e5!, which is similar to 7.f4 \(\text{c7}\) 8.e2 e5, which is considered to be doing fine for Black.)

10.0–0–0 \(\text{b5}\)

11.e5!N

An obvious improvement over several existing games, including one between strong grandmasters: 11.f5 \(\text{c5}\) 12.fxe6 fxe6 13.e5 dxe5 14.g3 b4 was an unclear mess in Potkin – Laznicka, Havana 2012.
11...dxe5 12.fxe5 Qxe5
12...Qxe5 13.Qf3! Qb8 14.Qxf6 Qxf6
(14...gxf6 15.Qd5! exd5 16.Qe1++) 15.Qc6 Qb7 16.Qd5! White has a serious initiative.

13.Qg3 Qfd7 14.Qf3 f6 15.Qxe5 Qxe5
16.Qh5+ Qf7

17.Qe2!
The queen exchange will do nothing to dampen White’s initiative.

17...Qxh5 18.Qxh5+ Qf7 19.Qf3 Qa7
20.Qc6+ Qe7 21.Qe2+
Black must lose an exchange, and most probably the game in the long run.

B) 8...g5 9.Qg3

9...e6
9...e5 restricts the bishop on g3, but creates too many weaknesses, and after 10.Qf5 Qc5
11.0–0–0 Qxf5 12.exf5 Qc7 13.h4 Black was under pressure in Balogh – Savchenko, Dubai 2010.

10.0–0–0 Qc7 11.h4 Qg8 12.hxg5 hxg5
13.Qe3!
This seems like the most effective continuation, but even the more routine 13.f3 should offer White an edge.

13...Qe5
13...b5 14.Qxb5! axb5 15.Qdxb5 Qa5
16.Qxd6+ Qxd6 17.Qxd6± gives White an excellent position. Black might succeed in exchanging the queens on b6, but such endgames with three connected passed pawns for a piece tend to favour White.

14.Qf3!
Refusing to give Black time to regroup and develop the queenside.

14...Qg4
After 14...Qxf3 15.Qxf3 there is no way to hold the kingside together. 15...Qe7
(15...Qd7? 16.Qh7++) 16.Qd6±

14...b5 is not much better due to 15.Qxe5
dx e5 16.f3, when Black’s king is stuck rather unpleasantly in the centre. He needs to worry about sacrifices on b5 (for instance, 16...\textit{\texttt{\textbf{b}}}_7? is refuted by 17.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d}}}_xb5!), but even if he avoids these tricks, his king will have nowhere to go, and his position will remain divided in two parts.

15.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d}}}_2 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_7

15...\textit{\texttt{\textbf{x}}}_f3 16.gxf3 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_5 17.f4 gxf4 18.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{x}}}_f4 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{d}}}_7 19.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_2\pm White has easy play, with \textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_3 and f3-f4 coming soon. Black will evacuate his king to relative safety on the queenside, but he does not have many good squares for his pieces.

16.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_2 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{d}}}_7

16...b5 is met by 17.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{x}}}_e5 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{x}}}_e5 18.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_h7 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{b}}}_7 19.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{h}}}_5 \textit{\texttt{f}}_8 20.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{x}}}_e5 dx e5 21.\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_2 when Black’s king is stuck in the centre again.

This move is something of a recent trend, having been used by a few big names including Cheparinov, Wojtaszek and Khismatullin. There are of course some parallels with the 7...b5 line that we encountered in variation D3 of Chapter 1, but there are also some big differences. One of Black’s main ideas here is to be able to meet f2-f4 with ...g5, taking the game in a completely different direction.

9.f4

Unlike the 7...b5 line, there is not much difference here between castling and playing f2-f4. The point is seen after: 9.0-0-0 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{b}}}_7 10.f4 \textit{\texttt{c}}_8? This was a problem in the 7...b5 line, but here it does not work. 11.e5 dx e5 12.fxe5 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{x}}}_c3 13.bxc3 \textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}}}_4 14.e6 Black is dead lost, as capturing the e6-pawn would allow an instant mate.

Nevertheless, I will stick with the familiar move order, as it seems like the best way to cut down Black’s options. The two main choices are C1) 9...\textit{\texttt{e}}_5\textit{\texttt{N}} and C2) 9...g5.
9...b4 10.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d}}5} \texttt{b}7 11.0–0–0! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}d}5 12.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}d}5 \texttt{c}7 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{e}}}1 (13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}5}? \texttt{\textit{\texttt{b}}}6 14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{e}}}4 is also possible.) 13...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{b}}}6 14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}5}! This is particularly nasty for Black when he has already committed himself to ...h6. 14...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}d}5 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d}}}2= Black cannot finish his development.

\textbf{C1) 9...e5N}

The 8...h6 line is usually played with the intention of following up with ...g5, which explains why the text move has not yet been tested. However, it is a typical move for the Najdorf, so it is only a matter of time before someone tries it here.

It is interesting to compare the present variation with 7...b5 8.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}}2 e5, as covered in line D32 of Chapter 1 on page 16. In that line, a subsequent ...h6 could be met by exchanging the bishop on f6, or even by leaving the bishop temporarily en prise while threatening something else. So could this be a better version for Black? No, because here we have the important option of omitting the pawn exchange on e5.

\textbf{10.0–0–0!}

It is important to play this before moving the knight away.

10.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}}5 is once again met by 10...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{a}}5}!, just like in the position without ...h6 and ...h4. (10...g6?! 11.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}e5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}e5 is also interesting, but the queen move is more convincing.) A possible continuation is 11.0–0–0 b4 12.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f6 bxc3 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}g7 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}5! and the tables have been completely turned.

10.fxe5 dxe5 11.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}}5 gives Black a few options, the simplest being: 11...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{a}}5}! 12.0–0–0 b4 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d}}}5 (Or 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f6 bxc3 14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}g7 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{b}}}6! 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f8 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}xb2\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}}16.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{b}}}b1 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{a}}}4 17.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d}}}3 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f8 and Black is doing well.) 13...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}d5 14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}d5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{a}}}2 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}4 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}4 16.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}4 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{b}}}7 17.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{d}}}6\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}} \texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}d6 18.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}d6 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}5 The endgame is double-edged, but Black seems to be doing fine.

10...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{b}}}7

Now 10...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{a}}5}? runs into 11.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}e5 dxe5 12.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f6! \texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f6 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}6 and White wins.

10...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}d4 11.e5 highlights the drawback of Black's early ...h6 move.

With the white bishop on g5, he could play ...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{e}}}7 and take back on f6 with the g-pawn, leaving White with two pieces en prise. With the bishop already on h4, the same idea is impossible, so Black must try something else, for instance: 11...\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}e5 (11...dxe5 may be best, although 12.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}}x5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{e}}}7 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f6 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}f6 14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}}xf6 gxf6 15.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{c}}}4 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{a}}}7 16.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}d4\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}} is still unpleasant for Black.) 12.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}e5 \texttt{\textit{\texttt{g}}}4 13.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{e}}}1 dxe5 14.\texttt{\textit{\texttt{x}}}e5\texttt{\textit{\texttt{f}}} \texttt{\textit{\texttt{e}}}7
11. \( \text{Qf5} \)!

Once again, refusing to exchange on e5 reduces Black’s options.

11... \( \text{Qb6} \)

11... \( \text{Qa5?!} \) 12. \( \text{Qxd6!} \) is unpleasant.

11... \( \text{Qxf4} \) is also rather risky: 12. \( \text{Qxd6!} \) \( \text{Qxd6} \) 13. \( \text{Qxd6+} \) \( \text{Qf8} \) 14. \( \text{Qxf6} \) \( \text{Qxf6} \) (14... \( \text{Qxf6} \) 15. \( \text{Qxb7} \) \( \text{Qb6} \) 16... \( \text{Qxf6} \) 15. \( \text{Qh5} \) \( \text{Qe5} \) 16. \( \text{Qxb7} \) \( \text{Qb6} \) 17. \( \text{Qh4!} \) \( \text{Qxb7} \) 18. \( \text{Qxf6} \) \( \text{Qg6} \) 19. \( \text{Qd5\#} \) )

12. \( \text{Qc8} \)

12... \( \text{Qf6} \) 13. \( \text{Qd5} \) \( \text{Qxd5} \) 14. \( \text{Qxd5} \) 16. \( \text{d6\#} \) 12... \( \text{Qxe3} \) 14. \( \text{Qe3\#} \) 14. \( \text{Qf5} \) \( \text{Qd5} \) 16. \( \text{d6\#} \) 12... \( \text{Qxf4} \) 13. \( \text{Qxf6!} \) \( \text{Qxf6} \) 14. \( \text{Qd5} \) \( \text{Qxd5} \)
15. exd5† əd8 16. g3† g6 17. əd4 əxd5
(17...fxg3, 18. əc6† əxc6 19. dxc6†)
18. əg2†
13. g3?! b4
13... g6 14. əe3 maintains the pressure.

12. əb1?! N
12. əd2 N əc8 13. əb1 əxc3?! could be interesting to analyse further, but it could be messy: 14. əxc3 əxe4 15. əe1 g6 16. əe3 f5

12.fxe5 dxe5 13. g4 əc8 14. əxf6?! N (14. əg2 g6 15. əe3 əxc3 16. bxc3 əa3† 17. əb1 0–0 Black had enough compensation in Krzyzanowski – Kowalczyk, corr. 2013.)
14... əxf6! It is not clear if White has achieved much. This could be analysed in more detail, but I prefer the main line.

12... əc8
12... g6 is usually a weakness, and now White can transfer the knight towards d5. 13. fxe5 (13. əe3 exf4=) 13... dxe5 14. əe3 əe7 Now the most logical continuation is arguably:

15. əe1?! Preparing to put a knight on d5.

Let’s now return to 11... əb6. This is the most active set-up for Black, as he is aiming for ... əc8 and a possible sacrifice on c3. The last move also transposes to an existing game, but only momentarily, as I would like to take the play in another direction.
15...0-0 16.\(\text{c}d5\) (16.h4 \(\text{a}d8\) 17.h5 is also decent.) 16...\(\text{c}xd5\) 17.\(\text{c}xd5\) \(\text{c}xd5\) 18.exd5± White intends g2-g4 and \(\text{g}2\), and a later h4-h5 could be extremely annoying for Black.

17.g4! e4 18.g5!
18.\(\text{g}2\)? is also good, but I like the directness of the text move.

18...hxg5 19.\(\text{x}g5\) \(\text{a}5\)!
Threatening \(\ldots\text{b}4\) or \(\ldots\text{x}b2\).

19...\(\text{c}5\) 20.c3! Black’s counterplay is blocked, and his kingside will soon be ripped apart:
20...\(\text{x}c3\) (20...\(\text{e}5\) 21.f6 \(\text{h}8\) 22.h4++) 21.bxc3 \(\text{b}3\) 22.\(\text{d}2\)++

13.\(\text{d}5\)
I also considered 13.\(\text{x}f6\) \(\text{x}f6\) 14.\(\text{f}e5\) dxe5 15.\(\text{d}5\), but found the position after 15...\(\text{c}xd5\) 16.exd5 \(\text{f}6\) 17.g4 \(\text{g}6\) to be unclear.

13...\(\text{c}xd5\) 14.exd5 \(\text{g}6\)
14...\(\text{c}7\) doesn’t change much: 15.g4 \(\text{g}6\) 16.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{g}7\) 17.f5!

15.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{g}7\) 16.f5! 0-0
16...\(\text{g}5\) is met by 17.\(\text{f}2\) followed by h2-h4.

17.g4! e4 18.g5!
18.\(\text{g}2\)? is also good, but I like the directness of the text move.

18...hxg5 19.\(\text{x}g5\) \(\text{a}5\)!
Threatening \(\ldots\text{b}4\) or \(\ldots\text{x}b2\).

19...\(\text{c}5\) 20.c3! Black’s counterplay is blocked, and his kingside will soon be ripped apart:
20...\(\text{x}c3\) (20...\(\text{e}5\) 21.f6 \(\text{h}8\) 22.h4++) 21.bxc3 \(\text{b}3\) 22.\(\text{d}2\)++

20.\(\text{d}2\)!
A change of plan.
20.c3 allows 20...\(\text{x}c3\)! , while 20.a3 \(\text{x}b2\)!
21.\(\text{x}b2\) \(\text{c}3\) 22.\(\text{a}1\) \(\text{e}5\) creates extreme complications.

20...\(\text{x}d2\)
20...\(\text{b}4\)? 21.fxg6 fxg6 22.\(\text{h}3\) is crushing.

21.\(\text{d}2\)
Black has no counterplay, while White’s initiative continues unhindered in the endgame.

21...\(\text{e}5\)
21...\(\text{f}6\) 22.\(\text{f}4\)±

22.\(\text{f}6\)!
22.\(\text{g}2\) \(\text{f}3\) 23.f6 \(\text{h}8\) 24.h4±
Black's bishop is buried in the corner, and he will continue to suffer for a long time.

C2) 9...g5

As I mentioned previously, this is the main idea behind the set-up with 7...h6 and 8...b5.

10.fxg5 hxg5 11.\(\texttt{\textbf{x}}\)\(\texttt{\textbf{g}}\)\(\texttt{5}\)\(\texttt{\textbf{b}}\)\(\texttt{7}\) 12.0-0-0 e6

It makes sense for Black to prevent any \(\texttt{d5}\) ideas.

12...b4N is an attempt to force the play.

13.\(\texttt{d5}\) \(\texttt{d5}\) 14.exd5 \(\texttt{a5}\) (14...\(\texttt{e5}\) 15.\(\texttt{b3}\)±) Black is making an unusual attempt at immediate counterplay, but he only has an active queen, which doesn't seem enough.

15...\(\texttt{c7}\)

15...\(\texttt{d5}\) 16.\(\texttt{b1}\) \(\texttt{b6}\) 17.\(\texttt{f5}\) e6 18.\(\texttt{h3}\)

Black simply cannot develop. 18...\(\texttt{d7}\) 19.\(\texttt{d4}\)± Black is in trouble, with \(\texttt{f3}\) coming next.

16.\(\texttt{b1}\) \(\texttt{d5}\)

16...\(\texttt{xd5}\) 17.\(\texttt{b2}\)

17.\(\texttt{f2}\)! \(\texttt{g7}\) 18.\(\texttt{d3}\) \(\texttt{c5}\) 19.\(\texttt{c3}\)

Followed by \(\texttt{hxh}1\).

13.g4!
I discovered this move myself before finding a correspondence game, which will be referenced later.

13.a3 has been played a few times, but it is too slow, and after 13...Ec8! 14.Ed1 Exc3 15.bxc3 Ec7 16.Ed3 Ec5∞ Black had an excellent position in Rasulov – Khismatullin, Baku 2013.

13.g3?!N can be played with similar intentions to the main line. The pawn might actually be better placed on g3 in the event that Black develops with ...Ec7 and ...Ee5 etc., but the drawback occurs in the critical line involving a piece sacrifice: 13...b4! 14.Ed5 exd5 15.exd5† Ec5 16.Edb1†! (16.Ed2 Eh6∞ is the key difference; with the pawn on g4, White could just play Exh6 and g4-g5, winning the piece back.) 16...Ed6 17.Ed4 Ed8 18.Ed2 White has interesting compensation, but it is less convincing than in the main lines with the pawn on g4.

After the text move Black has two main ideas: C21) 13...Ec7 and C22) 13...b4?!N.

I am not too worried by:

13...Ec8N 14.Ed2 Exc3
14...b4 15.Ed5 exd5 16.exd5† Ec7 17.Ed5 Ec5 18.Edxe7∞


15.bxc3

The exchange sacrifice is relatively ineffective here, as the e4-pawn has been protected.

15...Ec7 16.Edf1 Ed7 17.h4

Black is struggling to get compensation, for instance:

17...Ec3
17...d5 18.Edxf6 Edxf6 19.g5 Exe4 20.Exe4 dxe4 21.Ed6†

18.Edb3

Black has no real threats, and will soon face a punishing counterattack.


C21) 13...Ec7

17...Ec3
17...d5 18.Edxf6 Edxf6 19.g5 Exe4 20.Exe4 dxe4 21.Ed6†

18.Edb3

Black has no real threats, and will soon face a punishing counterattack.

14.\( \text{g2} \) \( \text{e5} \)

Centralizing the knight is a logical idea, and Black needed to do something about the threat of e4-e5.

14...b4 15.e5! \( \text{xg2} \)

15...\( \text{xe5} \) 16.\( \text{xb7} \) bxc3 17.\( \text{xa8} \) cxb2† 17...\( \text{xa8} \) 18.b3† 18.\( \text{b1} \) \( \text{xa8} \) 19.\( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 20.\( \text{h1} \) \( \text{e7} \) 21.g5 Black is clearly worse, and grabbing a pawn back with 21...\( \text{xg5} \)? leads to disaster after 22.\( \text{xe6}! \) fxe6 23.\( \text{xd6} \).

16.\( \text{xb7} \) gg8

16...\( \text{a5} \) 16...\( \text{a5} \) 16...\( \text{b6} \) 17.\( \text{a3} \) when Black's compensation was unconvincing in Schon – Dutra, corr. 2013.

15...b4 16.\( \text{a4}! \) \( \text{a5} \) 17.b3 \( \text{d3}† \) 17...\( \text{c8} \) 18.\( \text{b1} ‡ \) 18.cxd3 \( \text{a5}† \) 19.\( \text{b1} \) \( \text{d7} \) 20.\( \text{c1} \) \( \text{g7} \) 21.\( \text{c6} \) gives White a big advantage.

16.\( \text{b1} \) \( \text{g8} \)

16...\( \text{c4} £ \) is refuted by 17.e5!, while 16...\( \text{b6} \) 17.\( \text{h1} \) \( \text{fd7} \) 18.\( \text{xe7} \) \( \text{xe7} \) 19.\( \text{d2} £ \) is also pretty depressing for Black.

17.\( \text{f4} \) \( \text{fd7} \) 18.\( \text{h1} \) \( \text{a5} \)

18...b4 19.\( \text{a4} \) \( \text{a5} \) 20.b3

18...\( \text{xc3} \) 19.\( \text{xc3} \) \( \text{c7} \) 20.\( \text{b3} \) \( \text{xc3} \) 21.\( \text{d2} \) \( \text{c8} \) 22.\( \text{a5} £ \)

19.\( \text{a3} \) \( \text{c4} \)

19...\( \text{xc3} \) is refuted by 20.\( \text{d2} ! \).

20.\( \text{a2} £ \)

Despite his apparent activity, Black has no real threats on the queenside. Meanwhile White remains a pawn up and can look to develop threats in the centre.

C22) 13...b4?N

15.h3

Black is struggling to prove compensation here. White has no problems in the centre, and can create threats either along the f-file, or with various knight sacrifices.

15...\( \text{c8} \)N

This seems like a natural way to deviate from 15...\( \text{a5} \) 16.\( \text{b3} \) \( \text{b6} \) 17.a3, when Black's

This forcing move is critical, but it runs into a strong sacrifice.
14. \( \text{Qd5! exd5} \)

After 14...\( \text{Qg7} \) 15.\( \text{Qxf6} \) 16.\( \text{Qxf6} \)\( \text{Qxf6} \) 17.\( \text{Qg2} \) White consolidates with an extra pawn.

15.\( \text{exd5} \) \( \text{Qe5} \)

15...\( \text{Qe7} \) 16.\( \text{Qg2} \) 0–0 is refuted by 17.\( \text{Qh1} \)\( \text{Qe8} \) 18.\( \text{Qf2} \) and the \( f6 \)-knight will soon fall.

15...\( \text{Qe7} \) 16.\( \text{Qd2}! \) \( \text{Qe5} \) (16...\( \text{Qg8} \) 17.\( \text{Qg2} \) 17.\( \text{Qg2} \) \( \text{Qxg5} \) is almost a great way to simplify, but after 18.\( \text{Qxg5} \) \( \text{Qh6} \) 19.\( \text{Qxh6} \)\( \text{Qxh6} \) 20.\( \text{Qf5} \) \( \text{Qxg4} \) 21.\( \text{h3} \) White consolidates with an extra pawn.

16.\( \text{Qg2} \) \( \text{Qe7} \)

16...\( \text{Qh6} \)? 17.\( \text{Qxh6} \)\( \text{Qxh6} \) 18.\( \text{g5} \) is no good for Black, and 16...\( \text{Qg7} \) 17.\( \text{Qf5} \) \( \text{Qg8} \) 18.\( \text{Qh1} \)\( \text{Qh8} \) 19.\( \text{Qf4} \) also leaves him under heavy pressure.

17.\( \text{Qf5} \) \( \text{Qg8} \) 18.\( \text{Qh4}! \)

White has huge compensation, and Black hardly has any normal moves available. The specific details are not so important at this point, but I will present a few illustrative lines anyway.

18...\( \text{Qg6} \)

18...\( \text{Qc8} \) 19.\( \text{Qh1} \)\( \text{Qg6} \) (19...\( \text{Qxg5} \) 20.\( \text{hxg5} \)\( \text{Qg8} \) 21.\( \text{g6} \)\( \text{fxg6} \) 22.\( \text{Qg7} \)\( \text{Qd7} \) 23.\( \text{g5} \))\( \text{Qf4} \) 20.\( \text{Qd4} \) (20.\( \text{Qb1} \)?) 20...\( \text{a5} \) 21.\( \text{Qdf4} \)

19.\( \text{Qhe1} \)

19...\( \text{Qf1} \) is also promising.

19...\( \text{Qc8} \)

19...\( \text{Qc8} \) 20.\( \text{Qd2} \) threatens \( \text{Qxe5} \), and after 20...\( \text{Qf8} \) 21.\( \text{h5} \)\( \text{Qxg5} \) 22.\( \text{Qxg5} \) White has a clear advantage.

20.\( \text{Qd2} \)\( \text{Qxg5} \) 21.\( \text{hxg5} \)\( \text{Qfxg4} \) 22.\( \text{Qxe7} \)\( \text{Qxe7} \) 23.\( \text{Qh1} \)

Material is approximately even, but White keeps an obvious initiative.

**Conclusion**

The position after 7...\( \text{h6} \) 8.\( \text{Qh4} \) is a relatively fresh theoretical topic, and the existing games have barely scratched the surface. We saw that 8...\( \text{e6} \) has certain disadvantages, while 8...\( \text{g5} \) is playable but extremely committal. Most of the attention has been on 8...\( \text{b5} \), when 9.\( \text{f4} \) reaches a position rich in possibilities. 9...\( \text{e5} \) has not yet been tested in practice, but I am sure it is only a matter of time, and I found that White needs to work hard to maintain an edge. The most important line in the current chapter is 9...\( \text{g5} \), sacrificing a pawn in an attempt to wrest the initiative. However, after 10.\( \text{fxg5} \)\( \text{hxg5} \) 11.\( \text{Qxg5} \)\( \text{b7} \) 12.0–0–0 \( \text{e6} \) 13.\( \text{g4} \), my analysis indicates that White has the upper hand, although he should be willing to sacrifice a knight on \( d5 \) if the position demands it.
8...g6

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{\texttt{d}3}\) d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\text{\texttt{x}d4}\) \(\text{\texttt{f6}}\) 5.\(\text{\texttt{c3}}\) a6 6.\(\text{\texttt{g5}}\) \(\text{\texttt{bd7}}\) 7.\(\text{\texttt{e}2}\) h6

8.\(\text{\texttt{h4}}\) g6

9.f4! e5 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.0–0–0!

A) 11...\(\text{\texttt{e}7}?!\)
B) 11...\(\text{\texttt{c}7}\) 12.\(\text{\texttt{b}3}\) b5 13.\(\text{\texttt{d}5}!\) \(\text{\texttt{xd5}}\) 14.exd5
   B1) 14...\(\text{\texttt{b}7}?!\)
   B2) 14...\(\text{\texttt{d}6}\) 15.\(\text{\texttt{wd2}}!\)
      B21) 15...\(\text{\texttt{f}5}\)N
      B22) 15...\(\text{\texttt{f}8}?!\)
         B221) 16.\(\text{\texttt{b}1}\)
         B222) 16.g4!N
      B23) 15...0–0?!N 16.\(\text{\texttt{w}xh6}\) \(\text{\texttt{b}7}\)
         17.\(\text{\texttt{b}1}\) \(\text{\texttt{fe8}}\) 18.\(\text{\texttt{e}2}\) \(\text{\texttt{ac8}}\) 19.\(\text{\texttt{wc1}!!}\)
         B231) 19...\(\text{\texttt{e}4}\)
         B232) 19...\(\text{\texttt{f}8}\)
            B2321) 20.d6?!
            B2322) 20.\(\text{\texttt{f}3}?!\)

A) after 11...\(\text{\texttt{e}7}?!\)
B22) after 15...\(\text{\texttt{f}8}?!\)
B23) after 18...\(\text{\texttt{ac8}}\)
1. e4 c5 2. d3 d6 3. d4 exd4 4. cxd4 e6
5. c3 a6 6. g5 b5 d7 7. e2 h6 8. h4 g6

This is one of the most critical variations of the Najdorf these days, having been used by several high-ranking players. Surprisingly, Black's idea is not ... g7, but instead a primitive set-up with ... e5 and ... e7, having first prevented the knight from jumping to f5. It looks counterintuitive for Black to aim for ... e5 in the 6. g5 Najdorf, but White has not played in the most energetic fashion with the early e2. So far Black's set-up has yielded considerable success, with a score of more than 60%, but I believe this is largely due to the fact that White players have often been caught unprepared as this line came up.

9. f4!

The only critical move. Instead 9. 0-0-0 e5 followed by ... e7 leads to a stable position with good prospects for Black.

9... e5

Other moves don’t make much sense in conjunction with ... g6. Besides, Black has to do something about the threat of e4-e5.

10. fxe5

10. f3 has been played a few times and could be explored in more depth, but my impression is that it does not pose any serious problems.

Please note that 10. 0-0-0?! does not work due to 10... e4! 11. e5 dxe3 12. fxe3 e5! 13. fxe5 e6 when Black has the initiative.

10... dxe5

10... dxe5 has been used successfully by Anna Ushenina in one game, but it seems to hand White a pleasant position after: 11. 0-0-0N (11. h3? was too slow, and after 11... e7 12. e5 b5 Black was more comfortable in Kosteniuk – Ushenina, Geneva 2013.) 11... e7 (11... g7 12. f3!±) 12. f3

b5 Trying to maintain the knight on e5.

13. g5! (13. f1 b1 e6 looks okay for Black; 13. fxe5!? dxe5 14. fxe5 f6 15. f6 g7 16. c4 0-0 17. h4± is a quieter route to an edge, pointed out by Roiz in ChessPublishing annotations which appeared late in 2014.) 13... f3 14. fxe5 g4 15. f3± 14. fxe5! f6 15. c4 f6 16. b1 c7 17. f2 White has excellent compensation for the exchange. 17... g4 18. e1 0-0 19. d4 d8 20. f2 White has a fine position with a lot of promising plans.

11. 0-0-0!

Another version of what will now be a familiar sacrificial motif. It is trivial to see that capturing on d4 is a bad idea for Black, and
so far all games have continued with either A) 11...\(e7?\) or B) 11...\(c7\).

![Diagram](image1)

**A) 11...\(e7?\)!**

This was played by Vishy himself, but my guess is that it was due to a slip of memory. Not long after the game, one of his prominent seconds, Wojtaszek, preferred the more appropriate move that we will deal with shortly. So far nobody has followed in Anand’s footsteps, and indeed after correct play Black runs into some problems in completing his development.

**12.Bb3!N**

After 12.Bf3 \(c7\) Black continued developing normally and obtained a good position in Hou Yifan – Anand, Wijk aan Zee 2013.

**12...0-0**

12...\(c7\) 13.Bf3! is an important point. Now the misplacement of the bishop on e7 can be clearly seen after 13...\(b5\)? 14.Bxd7!.

12...\(b5\) can be met by 13.Bxf6?! Bxf6 14.g3 when Black’s queenside pieces are stuck rather uncomfortably, as he is unable to develop either the queen or the light-squared bishop. 14...0-0 (14...\(c7\) 15.Bd5 \(d6\) 16.Bh3 \(b6\) 17.B\(e6\)! is a nice touch, winning the queen.)

![Diagram](image2)

**15.Bh3 Bg7 16.Bb1=**

**13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Bb1 b5**

14...\(c7\) 15.Bd5 \(d6\) 16.h4 also favours White.

![Diagram](image3)

**15.g3 Bc7 16.Bd5 \(d6\) 17.h4!**

A typical way to annoy the defender.

**17.Bb6 18.h5\#**

Black faces a difficult decision over what to do about the troublesome pawn.

**B) 11...\(c7\)**

![Diagram](image4)

This is the more logical option, removing the queen from danger on the d-file while maintaining several options for the bishop.
12.\textit{b3}

12.\textit{d5N} looks tempting, but there is no way to exploit the knight's position on d4. An important line is: 12...\textit{xd5} 13.\textit{exd5 d6} 14.\textit{g4!} (14.\textit{e3 d6!} is an annoying pin.) This looks like an interesting practical try, with the idea of sacrificing the knight on f5 if Black castles. Unfortunately Black can get the better game with the help of a nice idea:

\begin{itemize}
  \item 14...\textit{d5!}

This only has been played in a single game so far, but it is definitely the most critical approach. Most games have continued 13.\textit{f3 g7} (13...\textit{g7??} is impossible due to 14.\textit{d7}) followed by ...0–0, when Black's position is virtually impregnable. By opening up the centre and creating threats like d5-d6, we are aiming to exert instant pressure on the opponent.

13...\textit{xd5} 14.\textit{exd5}

Despite the lack of practical testing, I consider this an absolutely critical position for the future of this variation. We will start by examining B1) 14...\textit{b7??N}, which can be considered a conservative approach, followed by B2) 14...\textit{d6}, which has the idea of sacrificing the h6-pawn in certain positions.

B1) 14...\textit{b7??N}

As we will see later, one of Black's problems after 14...\textit{d6} 15.\textit{d2!} is that ...\textit{b7} becomes undesirable due to \textit{a5} ideas. Therefore it makes sense to consider Black's possible attempt to get his queenside development out of the way before turning to the kingside. Now White has various ways to continue, but the aim should be to prevent Black from smoothly catching up on kingside development and thus getting the best of both worlds.

15.\textit{d2!}

This is an ideal square for the queen, since it works in all directions. Apart from the blunt d5-d6, the queen supports a possible \textit{a5}, while eyeing the h6-pawn and thus making it harder for Black to play ...\textit{d6} and ...0–0. I explored a few other possibilities, and will just give a shortened version of my analysis:

15.\textit{e1?!} is interesting, but I feel reluctant to remove the bishop from a perfectly decent square on h4. My main line continues: 15...\textit{b4!} 16.\textit{b1 a5!} (I found 16...\textit{c8} and 16...\textit{d6} to be less convincing.)
17.\( \texttt{d} \texttt{d} \texttt{4} \texttt{c} \texttt{c} \texttt{5} \texttt{!} \texttt{!} \texttt{18.}\texttt{c} \texttt{c} \texttt{6} \texttt{(18.}\texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{5} \texttt{w} \texttt{b} \texttt{6} \texttt{leads} \texttt{to} \texttt{interesting} \texttt{complications.)} \texttt{Now} \texttt{18...}\texttt{x} \texttt{c} \texttt{6} \texttt{?!} \texttt{19.}\texttt{d} \texttt{x} \texttt{c} \texttt{6} \texttt{w} \texttt{x} \texttt{c} \texttt{6} \texttt{20.}\texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{5} \texttt{w} \texttt{x} \texttt{b} \texttt{5} \texttt{0} \texttt{0} \texttt{0} \texttt{22.}\texttt{c} \texttt{3} \texttt{w} \texttt{b} \texttt{6} \texttt{gives} \texttt{White} \texttt{the} \texttt{more} \texttt{pleasant} \texttt{endgame,} \texttt{but} \texttt{18...0} \texttt{0} \texttt{0} \texttt{!} \texttt{is} \texttt{more} \texttt{challenging.} \texttt{This} \texttt{position} \texttt{can} \texttt{be} \texttt{analysed} \texttt{in} \texttt{more} \texttt{depth,} \texttt{but} \texttt{I} \texttt{find} \texttt{the} \texttt{main} \texttt{line} \texttt{more} \texttt{convincing.}\

15.g4?!  
This seems like a natural way to continue development, but it does not pose Black too many hard questions.
15...\texttt{d} \texttt{d} \texttt{6} \texttt{16.g} \texttt{g} \texttt{2}  
16.\texttt{d} \texttt{d} \texttt{2}?! \texttt{\textasciicircum} \texttt{x} \texttt{d} \texttt{5} \texttt{17.g} \texttt{g} \texttt{2} \texttt{c} \texttt{c} \texttt{8} \texttt{18.e} \texttt{e} \texttt{4} \texttt{e} \texttt{x} \texttt{e} \texttt{4}  
19.\texttt{e} \texttt{x} \texttt{e} \texttt{4} \texttt{0} \texttt{0} \texttt{20.b} \texttt{b} \texttt{1} \texttt{is} \texttt{interesting,} \texttt{but} \texttt{not} \texttt{particularly} \texttt{clear.}  
16...\texttt{c} \texttt{c} \texttt{8}!  
16...00 17.\texttt{d} \texttt{d} \texttt{2}! \texttt{f} \texttt{c} \texttt{8} \texttt{18.e} \texttt{e} \texttt{4} \texttt{e} \texttt{x} \texttt{e} \texttt{4}  
17.\texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{1} \texttt{0} \texttt{0}  
17...\texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{4} \texttt{allows} \texttt{18.d} \texttt{d} \texttt{4} \texttt{0} \texttt{0} \texttt{19.c} \texttt{c} \texttt{6}±.

18.c3 a5!  
The key move to get counterplay. Without it, White will just continue playing logical moves and eventually put pressure on Black's dodgy kingside.
19.\texttt{d} \texttt{d} \texttt{2}  
19.\texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{5} \texttt{a} \texttt{4} \texttt{!} \texttt{20.}\texttt{\textasciicircum} \texttt{x} \texttt{a} \texttt{4} \texttt{(20.}\texttt{a} \texttt{a} \texttt{5} \texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{8}±) \texttt{20...}\texttt{a} \texttt{a} \texttt{8} \texttt{21.e} \texttt{e} \texttt{4} \texttt{e} \texttt{b} \texttt{8} \texttt{followed} \texttt{by} \texttt{...}\texttt{a} \texttt{a} \texttt{6} \texttt{and}  
\texttt{...e} \texttt{c} \texttt{4} \texttt{offers} \texttt{Black} \texttt{excellent} \texttt{compensation.}  
19...\texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{4} \texttt{20.c} \texttt{c} \texttt{4} \texttt{a} \texttt{6}  
20...\texttt{b} \texttt{b} \texttt{3}?! \texttt{leads} \texttt{to} \texttt{similar} \texttt{positions.}
21.\texttt{c} \texttt{c} \texttt{1}  
At first I thought White had successfully consolidated with a pleasant position, but unfortunately Black has some dazzling tactical resources.
16.\texttt{b1}

16.\texttt{a5?} is impossible due to 16...\texttt{b4}.

16.c3 has the same idea of preventing any tricks based on the potential mate on c2, but it does not seem appropriate to weaken the queenside at this early stage.

16...\texttt{d6}

It seems essential to block the d-pawn. Let's see what may happen if Black refuses to do so:

16...\texttt{g7}?! 17.d6 \texttt{b6}

17...\texttt{b8} 18.e7\texttt{t} is similar.

18.e7?!

The calm 18.f2 \texttt{w8} 19.e3 also looks pleasant for White, but it is hard to resist planting the bishop in front of Black's king. Although the position looks disastrous for Black, the computer is not easily convinced,

so I will present a few lines. It is always satisfying to prove that the machine isn't all-knowing.

18...\texttt{e4}

18...\texttt{h5} intends ...\texttt{h6} and perhaps ...\texttt{e3}.

19.d3 \texttt{h6} (19...\texttt{e4} 20.e1! exd3 21.cxd3 f5 22.f6\texttt{t} \texttt{f7} 23.xg7 \texttt{xe7} 24.e7\texttt{t}++)

20.g5! (20.e1 \texttt{e3}!) 20...\texttt{g} 21.e2 0-0 22.e7 \texttt{fe} 23.hf1 \texttt{f8} 24.g4! \texttt{xe} 7 25.\texttt{xh} 5 White has a strong attack.

19.e2! \texttt{e3}

19...\texttt{e5} 20.hf1 \texttt{e3} 21.d3 \texttt{xe} 2 22.g1\texttt{t}

20...\texttt{xg2}

20...\texttt{e5} 21.h4\texttt{t}

20...\texttt{e5} 21.f3! \texttt{xf3} 22.gxf3\texttt{t}

21.g1 \texttt{b7} 22.g3 \texttt{e5} 23.d3! \texttt{xe} 3 24.xg3

Black's extra exchange is irrelevant, and White is completely dominating.
17.\textit{d}3!

By defending the c2-pawn, White frees his queen and thus prevents Black from castling.

17.c3 offers Black a lot of extra options such as 17...\textit{b}6, or just 17...\textit{f}8 and ...\textit{g}7.

17...\textit{f}5

I am always sceptical about this move – it seems to open up Black’s position too much, and his set-up will become increasingly unstable as long as White can avoid the instant threats. Although I will admit that such provocative moves can sometimes work...

17...\textit{b}4? is too slow. 18.\textit{h}f1 \textit{f}5 (18...a5 19.\textit{e}3 a4 20.\textit{d}4+) 19.\textit{e}3! Threatening \textit{d}4. 19...\textit{e}4 20.\textit{x}e4 fxe4 21.\textit{xe}4+ \textit{e}5 22.\textit{ede}1 Black is routed in the centre.

17...\textit{f}8 is safer, but after 18.\textit{h}f1 \textit{g}7 19.\textit{g}4\textsuperscript{=} White has an ideal position. He can double his rooks on the f-file and continue to manoeuvre around, while Black’s counterplay on the queenside looks at best to be a matter for the distant future.

18.\textit{c}3!

The attempt to charge right in with 18.g4?! backfires after 18...\textit{e}4 19.\textit{he}1 \textit{e}5, reaching an unclear position where Black’s pawn advances seem to make sense.

18...\textit{c}4

I considered a couple of other approaches for Black.

18...\textit{b}6 is well met by 19.g4!, since Black does not have the defensive plan of ...\textit{e}4 followed by ...\textit{e}5 blocking the e-file. 19...\textit{e}4 (19...\textit{c}4 20.\textit{e}2 \textit{g}5 21.\textit{f}2 \textit{xd}5 22.\textit{xf}5 \textit{h}1 23.\textit{f}h1\textsuperscript{=} White has overwhelming compensation for the exchange.) 20.\textit{xf}5! exd3 21.\textit{f}e1+ \textit{d}7 22.\textit{fxg}6\textsuperscript{+} This looks too dangerous for Black.

18...\textit{f}7 is safer, but it does not equalize. 19.\textit{g}4! \textit{f}4 (19...\textit{e}4?! is too risky: 20.\textit{xf}5! \textit{g}5 [20...exd3 21.\textit{fxg}6\textsuperscript{+} \textit{g}7 22.\textit{d}4+\textsuperscript{=} 21.\textit{xe}4 \textit{gxh}4 22.\textit{f}6! White has a strong attack, with \textit{h}f1, \textit{f}5 and \textit{d}4 on the way.) 20.g5 h5 21.\textit{c}e2\textsuperscript{=} White has a stable edge. Black’s position looks artificial, while White has excellent squares for his pieces – especially \textit{e}4, which may be used by either the bishop or the knight.

19.\textit{c}2

Now there is a severe threat of \textit{d}4-e6.

19...\textit{e}5

19...\textit{f}7 20.\textit{d}4 gives White a big advantage.

After 19...\textit{g}5 20.\textit{f}2 Black’s pawn advances in front of his king are not impressive at all, and White is ready to crack open the position.
Finally, 19...b4 is met by 20.cxb4 0–0 21.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{4!}\) intending 21...\(\text{\textit{x}}\text{d5}\) 22.\(\text{\textit{b}}\text{5}\) and White wins material.

20.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{4} \text{\textit{c}}\text{4}\) 21.\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{1}\) 0–0?  
21...e3 22.g4! sees White's attack get underway in the usual fashion.

21...\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{5}\) does not change much after 22.\(\text{\textit{f}}\text{1}\) intending g2-g4, when Black's position is resting on shaky foundations.

22.\(\text{\textit{e}}\text{6}\) \(\text{\textit{b}}\text{6}\) 23.\(\text{\textit{x}}\text{f8}\) \(\text{\textit{x}}\text{f8}\)  
Black has some compensation for the exchange but White can, at the very least, return the material to regain the initiative.

24.g4 b4 25.\(\text{\textit{g}}\text{xf5}\) \(\text{\textit{b}}\text{c3}\)

26.\(\text{\textit{b}}\text{3!}\) c2\(\uparrow\) 27.\(\text{\textit{xc2}\text{\textit{e}}\text{3}\uparrow\text{\textit{b}}\text{1}\text{\textit{xd1}}\text{\textit{w}}\text{d1}\)) 29.\(\text{\textit{w}}\text{xd1}\) \(\text{\textit{x}}\text{f5}\) 30.\(\text{\textit{g}}\text{4}\)  
The e4-pawn will soon drop. Black faces a difficult defence, a pawn down with the more exposed king.

B2) 14...\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{6}\)

If Black is allowed to castle without repercussion, he should reach a comfortable position, as White is not in much of a position to generate threats on the kingside. With that in mind, and following on from the previous variation, White's next move should come as no surprise.

15.\(\text{\textit{d}}\text{2!}\)  
The queen hits the h6-pawn, discouraging Black from castling, while also preparing \(\text{\textit{a}5}\) in case the bishop goes to b7. Black has many possible moves, but there are three that deserve particular attention. B21) 15...\(\text{\textit{f5}}\text{N}\) is ambitious but rather risky. Oddly enough, the two most troublesome continuations are diametrically opposed in their aims. The patient B22) 15...\(\text{\textit{f8}}\text{!}\text{N}\) strives for a solid position with artificial castling, whereas the dynamic B23) 15...0–0?!\text{N} offers a pawn sacrifice in order to generate counterplay.

15...\(\text{\textit{b}}\text{7}\) allows White to demonstrate one
of the points of his last move: 16.\(\text{a}5!\) \(\text{c}8\)
17.\(\text{xb}7\) \(\text{x}b7\) 18.\(\text{b}1\pm\) It is not smart for
Black to give up the light-squared bishop
so cheaply. Moreover, it is still not easy for
Black to castle, while White can just continue
developing.

15...\(\text{a}5?!\) is almost a tempting option, but it
runs into tactical problems: 16.\(\text{xb}5\) \(\text{a}4\)

17.\(\text{d}4!\) exd4 18.\(\text{he}1\) \(\text{f}8\) 19.\(\text{x}d4\) \(\text{h}7\)
(19...\(\text{g}8\) 20.\(\text{e}7\)\(\text{t}\) \(\text{xe}7\) 21.\(\text{x}e7\) \(\text{d}6\)
22.\(\text{de}1\) \(\text{xe}7\) 23.\(\text{xe}7\) \(\text{xe}7\) 24.\(\text{e}4\)\(\text{t}\) \(\text{f}8\)
25.\(\text{d}6\)\(\text{t}\)\(\text{h}\)\(\text{g}\)\(\text{f}\)\(\text{e}\)\(\text{d}\)\(\text{x}\)\(\text{d}\)22.\(\text{xe}8\)\(\text{t}\) \(\text{f}8\) 23.\(\text{c}4!\)+-- White's pawns are too
strong, especially with the rook out of play on
\(\text{h}7\).

It seems a bit too early for Black to expand
in the centre.

16.\(\text{g}4\)
The simple 16.\(\text{b}1?!\) is a good alternative.
It is hard to give a definitive verdict as there
are a lot of possibilities for Black, but in
general White's play looks a lot easier thanks
to Black's airy king. 16...\(\text{g}5\) The computer
often recommends playing this move early,
but it looks suspicious to me. 17.\(\text{e}1\) \(\text{f}6\)
18.\(\text{h}4\) \(\text{g}4\) 19.\(\text{h}5\) \(\text{d}7\) 20.\(\text{h}4\) \(\text{f}7\) 21.\(\text{d}3\)
\(\text{d}h5\) 22.\(\text{e}f1\) \(\text{d}f4\) 23.\(\text{e}x\)\(\text{f}4\) exf4 24.\(\text{d}4\) \(\text{c}8\)
25.\(\text{f}1!\)\(\text{t}\) White intends to take on \(\text{f}4\) with
a dangerous initiative, whether or not Black
accepts the second exchange sacrifice.

16...\(\text{f}4\)
Another nice line is: 16...\(\text{b}6?!\) 17.\(\text{b}1!\)
(17.\(\text{gxf}\)\(\text{5}\) \(\text{xf}\)\(\text{5}\) is surprisingly unpleasant for
White, as he isn't ready to deal with \(\ldots\) \(\text{c}4\),
and the \(\text{c}\)-pawn is weak; 17.\(\text{a}5?!\) \(\text{f}4\) 18.\(\text{h}3\)
might give White the upper hand, but it isn't
obvious.) 17...\(\text{c}4\) 18.\(\text{xc}4\) bxc4 19.\(\text{d}4!\)

19...\(\text{c}3\) (19...\(\text{exd}\)\(\text{4}\)? 20.\(\text{he}1\)\(\text{f}7\) 21.\(\text{x}d4\) is
crushing.) 20.\(\text{e}3\) \(\text{g}5\) (20...\(\text{c}5?!\) 21.\(\text{gxf}\)\(\text{5}\) \(\text{gxf}\)\(\text{5}\)
22.\(\text{g}3!\)+--; 20...\(\text{b}6\) 21.\(\text{b}3\)\(\text{t}\) 21.\(\text{e}6\) \(\text{d}e6\)
\(\text{d}e6\) \(\text{g}xh4\) 23.\(\text{xf}\)\(\text{t}\)

17.\(\text{d}3\)
17.\(\text{g}5?!\) leads to less fancy lines, but also has
the potential to be dangerous for Black, despite
what the computer seems to think.
66

6...\textcircled{b}d7

17...g5 18.f2 \textcircled{f}6 19.h4 g8 20.hxg5 hxg5 21.d4!

21.h6 is less convincing due to 21...\textcircled{x}g4
22.h7 \textcircled{d}7 23.f5 \textcircled{f}6 24.xd7+ \textcircled{x}d7
25.a5 0-0-0 26.c6 \textcircled{h}8! and Black is surviving.

The ensuing lines may appear insane, but White's play is actually quite straightforward. The rest of the analysis just proves the natural and simple point that Black cannot get away with pushing all those pawns and allowing the position to be opened up with his king in such a position.

21...\textcircled{x}g4

21...exd4 22.xd4 \textcircled{c}xd5 (22...e7 23.de1! \textcircled{f}8 24.h6!+--) 23.he1+ \textcircled{e}7 (23...f8
24.h2+--) 24.h7±

22.h6! 0-0-0

After 22...\textcircled{f}7 23.e6 \textcircled{x}e6 24.dxe6+ \textcircled{x}e6
25.h7! \textcircled{h}8 26.d3! \textcircled{x}h7 27.h3+ White will eventually catch the king.

Another nice line is 22...\textcircled{x}d1 23.xf6 exd4
(or 23...g4 24.c6† and Black is absolutely stuck) 24.e1† \textcircled{d}8 25.e6 \textcircled{e}8 26.xd6+\textcircled{x}d6 27.exd6+ \textcircled{e}7 28.e6† \textcircled{d}7 29.xd1 \textcircled{e}6 30.f5 and White should win the endgame.

23.xf6 exd4 24.h1 \textcircled{d}f8

25.h7! \textcircled{x}f6

Or 25...d7 26.fh6\textcircled{e}8 intending 26.g4
27.xd7 xd7 28.a5+ when Black cannot handle the threats of \textcircled{xa}6† and \textcircled{h}7.

26.xc7† \textcircled{x}c7 27.xd4

Despite Black’s two rooks and connected passed pawns, he is let down by his exposed king.

27...\textcircled{h}6 28.g2! \textcircled{h}3

28...d7 29.d6 wins.

29.h1! \textcircled{d}6 30.a4†

White will create threats on the queenside before Black can land a touchdown with his pawns.
This was played in the only game so far in which 13...\texttt{d}5 occurred. Putting the king on g7 may seem like a primitive plan, but it leads to exceedingly interesting play. Black's plan takes a few moves to accomplish, but once his king gets settled on g7, he will have an appealing choice between starting a queenside avalanche with \ldots a5-a4 and expanding in the centre with \ldots f5. White should therefore act quickly.

I focused on two main options. B221) 16.Bb1 was played in the existing game, and it is worth analysing it to gain a better understanding of the position. However, my investigation ultimately led me to conclude that B222) 16.g4!N is the strongest move.

16.a5?N

This is another idea along similar lines to the second main move, i.e. taking immediate action without the prophylactic king move. However, Black gets a good game with a direct reply.

16...e4!

16...g7 17.c6 f5 18.g4 f4 19.g2 is the kind of position White is aiming for.

17.Bb1

Neither 17.Bg7 18.xd6 \texttt{wd}6 19.e2 \texttt{f}8 nor 17.Bd4 e5 18.g3xd4 19.xc7 \texttt{b}6 gives White any advantage.

17...e3 18.Bd4

In the event of 18.Bf1 19.c6 (or 19.e2 e5 20.Bf1 f5 21.c6 xc6 22.dxc6 \texttt{he}8 23.g4 f4) 19...f8 20.e3f1 \texttt{f}7 Black has good prospects.

18.e5 19.Bg3


19.xd4 20.xc7 \texttt{b}6

21.xb6

21.xd6f1 \texttt{f}7 22.c6 b7 23.Bac8 24.Bf3 \texttt{he}8 is at least equal for Black.

21...xB6 22.Be2 Bg7 23.Bhe1 f5 24.Bf3 Bac8 25.Be2 \texttt{he}8

The position remains about equal.
Even though the king move is not objectively strongest, it is certainly not bad either, as it takes the king off the c-file while avoiding any tricks involving ...e4 and ...f4. I think you will find it useful to discover the problems I encountered in this line, in order to appreciate the advantages of delaying the king move. As the theory of this variation develops further, you might find it useful to know something about both directions of play.

16...g7

Now White must make an important choice.

17.g4? N

This direct move seems like the most dangerous for Black, even though a clear route to an advantage remains elusive.

17.d3 is slow, as Black starts his counterplay immediately with 17...a5!.

The one existing game continued:

17.a5

Blocking Black's queenside play and entering a complicated strategic fight. This seems like a logical plan, but it is hard to prove anything for White.

17...e8

17...f5!? N is also possible, when 18.c6 e8 reaches the main line below.

18.c6N

This seems like a logical attempt to improve over 18.g4 e4, when Black had a nice position in T. Kosintseva – Ushenina, Geneva 2013.

18.f5 19.g4 f4 20.g2

After 20.g5 h5 21.g2 b8! 22.he1 xc6 23.dxc6 d8 Black is quite all right.

20.c5

20...g5 21.xg5! hxg5 22.h4! leads to some insanely dangerous stuff for Black.

21.g5 f5!

21...h5 22.f+ h6 22.gxh6 h7∞

It is hard to assess what is going on here.
17...a5!
17...b7? 18.a5 would be unpleasant for Black.

17...b4? wastes time pushing the less important queenside pawn, and after 18.d3 a5 19.f2 a4 20.d2 a3 21.e4!± Black pays the price.

17...b6
This is less energetic than the main move, but it is interesting enough to be worth exploring a bit more deeply.

18.h3
18.g2 and 18.g1 are also possible. Having a piece on the g-file will be useful if Black ever plays ...f5, but against other moves it is more convenient to have g4 defended by a pawn. I don’t think White needs to be afraid of ...f5 here anyway.

18...a5
18...e8 19.a5±
18...c4 19.xc4 bxc4 20.a5 c3 (20...d7 21.h1±) 21.xc3 xc3 22.bxc3±
18...f5 cannot be refuted directly, but as long as White avoids giving his opponent too much activity, he will have good chances to exploit the weaknesses caused by Black’s last move. A good answer is 19.g2, preparing for an eventual opening of the kingside, and after 19...c4 20.f2 White is on top.

19.f2!
19.xb5 a4 is too complicated. For instance, the tempting 20.h1 axb3 21.f6+ g8 22.xh8 d7!, followed by ...a7, plays into Black’s plans.

19...f5 20.gxf5 xf5 21.d3 h8 22.g2
White keeps the better chances, although the position is far from one-sided.

18.xb5
This brave move is the most critical. The position is extremely complicated and I haven’t been able to make any final conclusions, but Black seems to be okay. Other moves also lead to exciting play:

18.f2 a4 19.d2 a3 20.e4 axb2 21.xb5 (21.f6+ g8 22.xb5 a2! 23.xd6 a5 24.c4 a3 25.g3 a1+ 26.c2 b1=+ 27.xb1 a2+ 28.d1 xd6 29.xh8 b6! is likely to lead to a draw.)
21...\textsc{f}8!! A surprisingly cool defensive move. It is necessary to stabilize the kingside before returning to the mess on the queenside. (21...\textsc{xa}2? is refuted by 22.\textsc{d}xd6.) 22.\textsc{xf}6† (22.\textsc{hx}f1 \textsc{f}6∞) 22...\textsc{g}8 23.\textsc{d}3 \textsc{xf}6! 24.\textsc{xf}6† \textsc{g}7∞

18.\textsc{e}3
Another way of preparing \textsc{d}2-e4.

18...a4
18...g5 is the computer's main suggestion after both of the above queen moves, but it seems hugely committal, even though it might prove objectively okay for Black eventually: 19.\textsc{g}3 \textsc{f}6 20.\textsc{xb}5! a4! The critical move. (20...\textsc{gx}g4 21.\textsc{w}e2 can be analysed further, but Black's position looks shaky; 20...\textsc{gx}g4 21.\textsc{c}6! \textsc{xd}1 22.\textsc{xd}1 \textsc{ab}8 23.c4\textsc{a} White has good compensation, although the position remains unclear.) 21.\textsc{d}2 \textsc{xd}5 22.\textsc{f}3 \textsc{b}7 Again we have a complicated mess on the board.

19.\textsc{d}2 a3 20.\textsc{e}4 \textsc{xb}2 21.\textsc{xb}5
The position of the queen on \textsc{e}3 instead of \textsc{f}2 necessitates a different approach from Black.

18...\textsc{a}4 19.\textsc{c}1
19.\textsc{c}6 \textsc{xb}3 20.\textsc{xa}8 \textsc{a}7 21.\textsc{xb}3 \textsc{xa}8 is at least equal for Black.

19...\textsc{b}8!
19...a3?! needlessly blocks the queenside, and after 20.b3 \textsc{c}5 21.\textsc{g}2 \textsc{b}8 22.\textsc{c}6 White is better.

19...\textsc{c}5 20.\textsc{df}1! intends to provoke ...\textsc{f}5, when White intends \textsc{gx}f5 followed by sacrificing the exchange to open the g-file. If Black avoids this with 20...g5, he must reckon on 21.\textsc{gx}g5?! \textsc{e}4 22.\textsc{xf}6† \textsc{xf}6 23.g5 \textsc{h}5 24.\textsc{gx}h6† \textsc{hx}h6 25.\textsc{g}5† \textsc{g}6 26.\textsc{hx}h5 \textsc{g}4 27.\textsc{h}4±.

20.c4
20.\textsc{xa}4 \textsc{c}5 21.\textsc{c}6 \textsc{gx}g4 is extremely complicated.

20...\textsc{c}5 21.\textsc{e}2
21...g5! works better for Black here, as the piece sacrifice isn’t as clear: 22...xg5?! (After 22...f2 2xe4 23...xc5 2xc5 24.h4 f5! 25.hxg5 h5 Black is doing surprisingly well.) 22...xe4 23...e2 (23...f6? 2xf6 24.g5 2xd5?!) 23...2xg5 24.h4 2h7 25.g5 Again we are in some strange complications, which could be interesting to analyse further.

21...f5!

21...d7 looks more normal, but after 22...h1 g5 23...f2 2xb5 24.axb5 2d7 25.h4 White is doing quite well.

22.a3

This is the relatively safe choice, whereas 22.d3?! 2xd3 23...xd3 a3∞ is messier.

22.h3? is a sensible move to maintain the tension. The position is hard to assess, especially with the computer throwing puzzling ideas such as ...h5?! into the mix.

22...fxg4 23...a1 2f5 24...h1

White has given up a pawn in order to stabilize his position, and he intends 2f2-e3 next. Once again, the “unclear” assessment seems about right.

B222) 16.g4!N

In the previous variation, Black was just in time to generate counterplay with ...2g7 followed by ...a5-a4. This made me wonder if White could benefit by omitting the precautionary 2b1. Another possible benefit is that a future ...a3 might be met by b2-b3, when ...c3 might not necessarily lead to mate. Of course the negative aspect is the possibility of ...e4 and ...f4, so White needs to take care over how he deploys his pieces.

16...2g7

16...a5?!

This is an attempt to punish White immediately for not vacating the c1-square for the knight. However, White has a far more effective possibility to bring the knight to e4.

17...e3!

Not only enabling the knight to go to d2, but also keeping the c3-square under control, so that ...a3 can be met by b2-b3.

17...g5?!

This somewhat ugly move is the most challenging. After 17...a4 18...d2 a3 (18...b7 19.e4 2c8 20.d3±) 19.b3± it is not clear what Black is doing next. 17...h5 18.h3! does not change much, for instance: 18...a4 19...d2 a3 20.b3 b7 21...e4±
Finally, in the event of 17...b7 18.xb5! a4 19.d2 a3 20.e4! axb² 21.b1+ White's pieces are ideally placed to prevent any attack.

Let's return to 16.g7. Now, it is critical to think about how White may improve on moving the king to b1, which would just transpose to the previous line.

17.g2!
By removing the queen from the f4-c1 diagonal, White prepares to develop with d3 and hfl, without being hit by ...e4. He also clears the way for the knight to go to e4.

17.a5 is well met by 18.d2!, as the knight will be ideally placed on e4. 18.b4 (Or 18.a4 19.e4 and since ...a3 can be met by b2-b3, I don't see how Black will generate counterplay. Actually, even 19.xb5!? a3 20.b3 is possible, since ...c3 can be met by c4, but why go for these forcing lines when we can just avoid Black's idea altogether?) 19.e4 a4

22.c4! b6
22...f4 23.f5 xh1 24.xf4 exf4 25.xd6+--
23.xb7?!
23.d3 is also possible.
23...xb7 24.xd6 e7 25.hf1
Chapter 4 – 8...g6

20.\abb5! b3 (20...a3? 21.b3±) 21.a3±

Another idea is:

17...\bb6? 

Hitting the d5-pawn. The drawback is that the knight loses touch with the f6-square.

18.\bd3

18.\bb5!? is another valid possibility, and after 18...\dd7 19.\bd3 White stands better, for instance: 19...c4 20.\bbf3! \bbxa5 (20...\bbxa5 21.\bbf6+ \bhb7 22.\bxe8±) 21.\bbf6+ \bhb8 22.\bbxc4±

18...\bbf8

18...\bbxd5 is refuted by 19.e4! (but not 19.\bbd5?? \bb7 when the queen is trapped)

19...\bbd3 20.\bbf3 \bbxd1 21.\bxc6+ and White wins.

18...g5 19.e2 \bbxd5 20.cd4! \bb6 21.\bbf5+ \bbxf5 22.gxf5 gives White a dangerous initiative for a mere pawn.

19.e4! \bbxd5!

19...c4 20.\bbf6† gives White excellent attacking chances, so Black may as well take a pawn and head for complications.

20.e4! \bb3 21.\bbf6+ \bhb7 22.\bbh3 \bbxd1!

22...\bbxf1? is the wrong rook. 23.\bd3! is nasty.

23.g5

23.\bbf3 \bbf2! 24.\bbxf2 \bb6 leaves White without a clear win.

23...\bbh8 24.\bbd5! \bbg7 25.\bbf6+ \bhb7 26.\bbxa8

White wins some material, although there is still a lot of fight in the position.

18.\bd3 a5

Once again, the knight should not leave f6 unattended: 18...\bb6 19.e4! a5 20.\bbf1 and Black is in trouble.

18...g5!? is tricky, but White just needs a few accurate moves to secure a big positional advantage: 19.e1 (19.e2 loses the d5-pawn after 19...\bbf6†.) 19.\bbf6 (19...a5 20.\bbxb5 a4 21.\bb5±) 20.a5! \bb7 21.\bbf5 White's pawns have been defended and Black's queenside advances have been blocked.

19.\bbd2 g5

It seems to me that Black has to go for this.

19...a4 is met by 20.e4! a3 (20...\bbd5 21.\bbxb5±) 21.b3 and once again Black's attack is completely stifled.

20.\bbg3 \bb6

21.e4! \bbxd5

21...\bbd5? 22.\bbx6 \bbd6 23.e4 gives White a larger advantage.

22.\bbf1 \bbxe4 23.\bbxe4

The game goes on, but Black's serious weaknesses on the kingside should provide White with excellent long-term compensation.
Surprisingly, this pawn sacrifice is the computer's top choice, and it was the most troubling move for me to deal with. It turns out that Black can tolerate the queen on h6, and his quick development will compensate for the missing pawn.

16.\texttt{W}xh6 b7 17.\texttt{D}b1

White has to play this in order to avoid the threat of ...\texttt{E}f(a)c8, and if c2-c3 then ...b4. There was also a problem of ...e4 and ...\texttt{D}f4† winning the queen.

I wondered if White could avoid this move with 17.\texttt{D}g5??, but found that after 17...\texttt{E}fc8 18.c3 b4 19.c4 a5 20.\texttt{e}2 (20.\texttt{d}d3 \texttt{f}8 21.\texttt{h}4 \texttt{xd}5†) 20...a4 21.\texttt{h}f1 \texttt{f}8 22.\texttt{h}4 f5† Black is in time with his queenside counterplay.

17...\texttt{E}fe8

With the king safely on b1, 17...\texttt{E}ac8? is refuted by 18.\texttt{D}d3!. Instead Black must be ready to answer the bishop move with ...e4.

18.\texttt{D}e2

It is worth mentioning a couple of other tries, mainly to show some of Black's resources.

18.\texttt{g}3 intends h4-h5 at the right time, but allows 18...\texttt{D}f6! 19.\texttt{d}d3 (19.h4 \texttt{D}h5*) 19...e4 20.\texttt{xd}6 \texttt{xd}6 21.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{xd}5 with an unclear position.

18.\texttt{g}5 has the idea of keeping the queen on the h-file after ...\texttt{D}f8. The critical line is 18.\texttt{E}ac8 19.c3 \texttt{f}8 20.\texttt{h}4 \texttt{d}6! 21.\texttt{d}d3 (21.\texttt{d}d2? \texttt{xd}5 22.\texttt{h}3 \texttt{g}7†) 21...\texttt{xd}5 when the position is complicated, but my analysis indicates that Black is doing quite well.

18...\texttt{E}ac8

19.\texttt{D}c1!!

I feel particularly proud of this move, as I had thoroughly analysed this line twice before eventually noticing this idea! Retreating the queen looks passive, but one advantage is that Black will not be able to play ...\texttt{f}8-g7† with gain of tempo. Another plus point is that White avoids weakening his queenside with c2-c3.

19.\texttt{D}d2? is a worse version of the idea, as after 19...\texttt{b}6† Black will gain a tempo against the queen.

19.c3 is the obvious continuation, but after 19...\texttt{f}8 20.\texttt{D}d2 \texttt{d}6! Black's play is surprisingly easy: 21.\texttt{h}f1 (21.\texttt{g}3 \texttt{b}6 22.h4
The queen retreat reaches another critical position, where Black's two main ideas are B231) 19...e4 and B232) 19...f8.

19...b6 makes less sense now, since ...c4 isn't a threat anymore. 20.g6! bxc5 (20...d7 is met by 21.g5+ followed by h4-h5.) 21.exd5 c6 22.hxg6+ 21.gxf5 23.g6+t h8 23.d1 White's two pieces should outwork the black rook.

19...b4 does nothing to address White's plans, and allows: 20.g4! Now Black must worry about d5. 20...f5 21.xf5! gxf5 22.g5+t h8 23.h6+t g8 24.g6+t h8

With the bishop still on d6, Black is not ready to play 20.f5 on account of 21.g5! fxg4 (21...f8 22.xf5+; 21...xc2 22.a1 xf4 23.xg6+t h8 24.xd6++) 22.xg6+t h8 23.d4! with a winning attack.

21.g5

Now it will be hard for Black to hold on to the e-pawn.

21.f5

21...e2 22.d2 e5 23.exf2 exf2 24.d2 exd5 25.f3 xf3 26.gxf3± White not only has an extra pawn, but also has chances for a kingside initiative with an eventual h4-h5.

22.f3 e2 23.d2!

After 23.ed1 e5 24.exf2 xf3 25.exh8 exf2 26.gxf3 d5 the bishop pair might compensate for Black's open kingside.

23...e5 24.xe2 d4

25.f3! e5

Or 25...xd2 26.xd2 with huge compensation.

26.d4

White will be left with two pawns for the exchange, with excellent minor pieces and a safer king.
The main aim of this move is to carry out the regrouping plan of ...\textit{\texttt{d}}7, ...\textit{\texttt{g}}7 and ...\textit{\texttt{b}}6. Should Black achieve this optimal set-up, his position will have a wealth of potential. White's choice on the next move is of key importance, and I would like to present two interesting options leading to different types of positions.

**B2321) 20.d6?!**

This move White returns the extra pawn and takes his chances in a complex middlegame.

**20...\texttt{xf6} 21.g4!**

This is the idea behind returning the pawn. Now Black must decide what to do about his awkwardly-placed pieces.

**B2321) 20.\texttt{f3}?!**

21...\texttt{e4}

21...\texttt{xg2} is too greedy, and after 22.\texttt{he1} Black's poor coordination is more of a factor than his extra pawn.

21...\texttt{f5} 22.\texttt{xf5}! is an important motif.

21...\texttt{g4} 22.\texttt{d2} \texttt{e7} avoids the loss of a piece, but after 23.\texttt{xe7} \texttt{xe7} 24.\texttt{g5} \texttt{e8} 25.\texttt{h4}! \texttt{e4} 26.\texttt{h5}! White has a strong attack, and the c2-pawn doesn't matter.

22.\texttt{d2} \texttt{f5}

Black shuts out the annoying bishop, but now his kingside has been permanently weakened.

After 22...\texttt{e7} 23.\texttt{xd7} \texttt{xh4} 24.\texttt{xe8} \texttt{xe8} 25.\texttt{e2}± Black's bishop pair offers some
compensation for the exchange, but it is not enough to equalize.

23...\textit{xf}3
23...a8 is a loss of time, as after 24.\textit{d}1 \textit{e}6 25.\textit{e}1\pm Black does not seem to have anything better than taking on f3 anyway.

23...c6!?
This move is slightly more sophisticated than the retreat to a8, but White keeps the more pleasant position all the same.

24.\textit{h}d1
24.\textit{d}1 is another possible try. 24...\textit{e}6 25.\textit{e}1 \textit{c}5 (After 25...\textit{xf}3 26.\textit{gf}3\pm the earlier retreat to c6 would be pointless.) 26.\textit{d}8!? \textit{b}8 27.\textit{xc}5 \textit{xc}5 28.\textit{xc}6 \textit{xc}6 29.\textit{g}5 \textit{cd}6 30.g4 White maintains some pressure due to the open kingside.

24.\textit{e}6 25.\textit{xc}6 \textit{xc}6 26.\textit{a}5 \textit{c}7 27.\textit{b}7 \textit{xb}7 28.\textit{xd}6 \textit{f}8

White has the superior minor piece, and he just needs to get coordinated and find a good place for his queen.

29.\textit{g}3
29.\textit{d}6\textit{f}5!? is another idea.

29...\textit{xd}6 30.\textit{xd}6 \textit{cd}6 31.\textit{d}1
White keeps the better chances.

24.\textit{gf}3
I was tempted to stop analysing here. There are of course a lot of options, but the stark weaknesses in Black’s kingside will remain a nagging problem even if White does not manage to conduct a swift attack. It is worth exploring a few more moves just to avoid any immediate counterplay from Black, and to show a few of White’s ideas.

24...\textit{e}6!
This keeps both the g6-pawn and the d6-bishop defended. Now Black can think about counterplay with ...a5.

24...\textit{f}8 25.\textit{g}1 \textit{e}6 26.\textit{d}1 \textit{b}6 27.\textit{d}8!? \textit{b}8 28.\textit{xb}6 \textit{xb}6 29.h4\pm The exchange of bishop for knight seems favourable for White.

24...\textit{b}6 25.\textit{g}2 \textit{e}6 26.\textit{hg}1 \textit{g}7 (26...\textit{h}7 27.\textit{d}2; 26...\textit{f}7 27.\textit{h}6\rightarrow) 27.\textit{f}2 (27.\textit{g}5!? is also possible, intending h4-h5.) 27...\textit{d}5 (27...\textit{c}4 28.h4\rightarrow) 28.\textit{g}3 The last
move prevents ...\(\text{d}4\), and now the rooks may transfer to the d-file gaining a tempo. White has the more compact position and can shuffle his pieces around, creating threats across the board.

25.\(\text{xe}1!\)

Threatening \(\text{d}4\), and thus forcing Black to commit one of his pieces to defending the rook on e6. Even after he does so, White can always keep in mind the f3-f4 idea to win the d4-square in the future.

25.\(\text{e}1\) can be met by 25...a5! 26.\(\text{d}2\) \(\text{f}8\) and it is hard to deal with the ...a4 threat.

20...e4

Black’s choices were limited, as the bishop was ideally placed on f3 and White was threatening d5-d6.

In the event of 20...d6 21.g3 g7 22.h4! Black is too slow to get counterplay, while the h4-h5 attack is already upon him.

21.g4 f5

This is more or less forced, as 21...e3 22.\(\text{xe}1\) wins the e-pawn while 21...\(\text{d}6\) runs into the unpleasant 22.\(\text{a}5!\).

26.\(\text{de}2\)

Both sides continue to have various options, but it seems to me that Black’s exposed kingside means he has more to worry about.
22.d6!
Removing the excellent dark-squared bishop from the defence. It is interesting to note the point behind provoking ...e4 with the earlier \( \text{d}f3 \) in this line. If the pawn was back on e5, then Black would have the devastating reply \( \text{d}c4 \), winning a piece.

22...\( \text{d}xd6 \)
22...\( \text{b}6 \) 23.\( \text{g}5! \) f\text{x}g4 24.\( \text{g}6 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 25.\( \text{g}4 \) \( \text{e}5 \) 26.\( \text{g}3 \) \( \text{d}7 \) 27.g5? gives White terrific compensation.

23.\( \text{xf}5 \) \( \text{f}4! \)
23...gxf5? 24.\( \text{g}5 \) h7 gives White more than one way to win, with 25.\( \text{h}5 \) g7 26.\( \text{d}4 \) perhaps being the simplest.

24.\( \text{xd}7 \)!
24.\( \text{g}3 \) \( \text{xc}1 \) 25.\( \text{xc}7 \) gxf5 26.\( \text{xd}7 \) \( \text{e}3 \) reaches a different type of endgame where Black’s bishop pair seems more impressive.

24...\( \text{xc}1 \) 25.\( \text{xc}7 \) \( \text{gx}f5 \) 26.\( \text{xd}7 \) \( \text{e}6 \)
There follows a strange dance involving the rooks and bishops before the position settles into a normal type of endgame.

27.\( \text{g}3 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 28.\( \text{f}5 \) \( \text{f}6 \) 29.e5 \( \text{xf}5 \)

30.\( \text{xg}7 \) \( \text{g}5 \)
Although we are a long way into the game, Black’s last ten moves have been mostly forced. Now White has a couple of good options.

31.\( \text{d}4! \)
The most ambitious.

31.\( \text{c}3 \) is a decent alternative, leading to a slightly favourable endgame. 31...e3 32.h4 \( \text{h}6 \) 33.g4? \( \text{xh}1 \) (33...\( \text{f}2 \) 34.\( \text{e}1 \) ) 34.\( \text{xf}5 \) \( \text{e}4 \) 35.\( \text{d}4 \) (35.\( \text{c}5 \) \( \text{xf}5 \) 36.\( \text{xa}6 \) \( \text{f}7 \) is OK) 35...\( \text{g}7 \) 36.\( \text{xe}2 \) Getting rid of the bishop pair. 36...\( \text{xc}3 \) (36...\( \text{h}6 \) 37.\( \text{e}5 \) \( \text{xf}5 \) 38.\( \text{f}4 \) ) 37.\( \text{xc}3 \) The king will watch the e-pawn, and the knight can start hunting the queenside pawns. Black can probably hold the endgame, but there is still some work to do.

31...e3
Now it is a bit harder to stop the pawn, but White can keep the advantage with precise play.

32.\( \text{e}1 \) e2 33.\( \text{c}3! \) \( \text{d}5! \)
33...\( \text{f}1 \) 34.\( \text{d}4 \) \( \text{gx}g2 \) 35.\( \text{xe}2 \) should be close to winning.
Conclusion

In this, our final chapter on the 6...\textit{bd}d7 complex, we have dealt with the topical position occurring after 7.\textit{e}2 h6 8.\textit{h}4 g6. I advocate the direct 9.f4!, intending to meet 9...e5 with 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.0-0-0!, exploiting the fact that the d4-knight is poisoned. Several games between strong players have continued 11...\textit{c}7 12.\textit{b}3 b5, but at this point I believe White should deviate from the majority of games with the dynamic 13.\textit{d}5! \textit{xd}5 14.exd5. The resulting positions abound in tactical and strategic complexity. It may seem that I went to the extreme in terms of the depth of my analysis of a variation that has hardly ever occurred in a practical game, but I am certain that this line will become more popular in the future. If I am right, then readers of this book will be ready with a full arsenal of ideas.

34.a4!
34.a3 \textit{d}1\# 35.\textit{a}2 \textit{xe}1 36.\textit{xe}1 \textit{g}2 37.\textit{d}4 \textit{f}1 reaches a strange endgame, where the e2-pawn makes the situation slightly double-edged.

34...\textit{d}1\#
34...\textit{b}xa4 35.\textit{d}4\#

35.\textit{a}2 \textit{xe}1 36.\textit{xe}1 \textit{b}xa4
36...\textit{g}2 37.axb5 axb5 38.\textit{d}4 \textit{f}1
39.\textit{xb}5 gives White a serious advantage.

37.\textit{d}4 \textit{g}2 38.\textit{xe}2\#

It is not clear if White can convert the extra pawn, but it is a pleasant endgame with two possible results.
Chapter 5

6...e6 7.f4

Introduction and Sidelines

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6

7.f4

A) 7...d7

B) 7.c6? 8.xc6 bxc6 9.e5 h6 10.h4 g5
   11.fxg5 d5 12.e4 b6 13.c3!
   B1) 13...b8
   B2) 13...xb2
   B3) 13...dxe5

C) 7.e7 8.f3
   C1) 8...a5
   C2) 8...c7

A) after 12...a5

B2) after 17...f7

C1) after 16...gxf6

13.e5!N

18.xg6†!

17.e4!N
82 6...e6 7.f4

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4

From this extremely popular position, Black's main options can be summarized as follows:

7...c7 and 7...b5 are important moves which receive dedicated coverage in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

7...bd7 is a major system which you can find in Chapters 8 and 9.

7...e7 may give rise to three major set-ups: The Gothenburg Variation (Chapter 10), and the ...c7/...bd7 set-up, which I call the "Three-Piece" system. The latter can be implemented either with an early ...h6 (Chapter 11) or without (Chapter 12).

Finally, 7...c7 introduces the ever-critical Poisoned Pawn variation, which is covered in Chapters 13-18.

In this chapter we will deal with three topics: the sideline A) 7...d7, the formerly-interesting-but-now-almost-refuted B) 7...c6?, and finally some miscellaneous variations after C) 7...e7.

7...h6 8.h4 does not have much independent significance. For instance, the 'deferred Poisoned Pawn' with 8...b6 will simply be met by 9.d2 xb2 10.b1 a3 11.e5, transposing to our main lines.

A) 7...d7

This was tested by Bent Larsen a few times in the 1950s, and is still used now and again by strong players. Black is preparing ...c6, which may lead to some sort of Najdorf/Rauzer hybrid.

8.d3

8.e5 dxe5 9.fxe5 a5! is one idea behind Black's set-up.

White cannot transpose to a Rauzer with 8.d2 on account of 8...h6, intending 9.h4? xe4!.

8.e2 also does not impress me much, since after 8...c6 9.0-0-0 the position resembles the more popular 7...c7 8.e2 c6 9.0-0-0 line, but Black may get some additional options as he has not yet committed his queen to c7. Fortunately, there is nothing wrong with the standard development of the queen to f3.

8...c6 9.0-0-0 xd4

9...h6 10.h4 does not change much.

9...b6 can be met by 10.xc6 xc6 11.f5?N when Black has problems with the e6-pawn, for instance 11...a5 (11...e7?! 12.fxe6 fxe6 13.h3!± is strong) 12.xf6 gxf6 13.c4 e5 14.hf1± and Black is under pressure.

9...c7 10.xc6? gives Black a difficult choice. 10...bxc6 (10...xc6 is met by 11.e2± intending e4-e5; 10...xc6 misplaces the bishop, and 11.xf6 xf6 12.f5± followed by c4 and hf1 is promising for White.)
Recapturing with the b-pawn is positionally desirable for Black, but his queen and bishop are awkwardly placed on c7 and d7 respectively.

11.\textit{\texttt{c4 e7 12.\texttt{he1 e5}}}

This position occurred in Stan – Nemeth, Bucharest 2003, and now 13.\texttt{fxe5N dxe5 14.g3!} would have been strong.

10.\texttt{xd4}

10...\texttt{c6}

This is the logical way to follow on from the earlier 7...\texttt{d7}.

11.\texttt{e2 e7 12.g3!}

Renewing the threat of e4-e5, while making it hard for Black to castle.

12...\texttt{a5}

In the event of 12...\texttt{c7 13.hd1 h6 (13...0-0?! loses an exchange after 14.e5 \texttt{ød5 15.\texttimes xd5 \texttt{xd5 16.\texttt{h6+}) 14.\texttt{xf6 \xe6 15.xd6 0-0 16.e5 White has an extra pawn for hardly any compensation.}}}

This position was reached in H. Albert – Lombardy, Mar del Plata 1957, and one other game. Here White could have pressed ahead with:

13.\texttt{e5!N dxe5 14.fxe5 c5}

14...\texttt{d5?! 15.xe7 \texttt{xe7 16.xg7 \texttt{g8 17.\texttt{h6+}}}

15.\texttt{xf6!?}

This exchange sacrifice is not forced, but it is absolutely justified.

15...\texttt{xd4}

15...\texttt{xf6 16.d3†}

16.xg7 \texttt{f8 17.h5 \texttt{b4}}

17...\texttt{xc3?} is refuted by 18.\texttt{xf7†! \texttt{xf7 19.g8†.}}

18.d1 \texttt{xc3 19.bxc3 \texttt{c5 20.d6}}

White maintains extreme pressure. The following illustrative line shows that even a queen exchange does not solve Black's problems.
20...\textit{\texttt{h}e3\texttt{f}} 21.\textit{\texttt{d}d1} \textit{\texttt{g}g1\texttt{f}} 22.\textit{\texttt{e}e2} \textit{\texttt{x}xg2\texttt{f}}
23.\textit{\texttt{x}xg2} \textit{\texttt{x}xg2}

White still has excellent compensation, for instance:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\fill[lightgray!30] (0,0) rectangle (8,8);
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

24.c4!

Why hurry to take on e6? This pawn can be captured at any moment, as defending it only leads to greater problems for Black:

24...\textit{\texttt{h}h3?!} 25.\textit{\texttt{f}f3!} \textit{\texttt{b}b8} 26.\textit{\texttt{x}xb7\texttt{f}}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\fill[lightgray!30] (0,0) rectangle (8,8);
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

This line experienced something of a resurgence in roughly 2006/07, but nowadays it can be regarded as having been buried deep in the ground. Nevertheless, White needs to know a few precise lines to be sure of a big advantage.

8.\textit{\texttt{x}xc6} \textit{\texttt{b}xc6} 9.\textit{\texttt{e}e5} \textit{\texttt{h}h6}
9...\textit{\texttt{d}xe5} 10.\textit{\texttt{x}xd8}\texttt{f} 11.\textit{\texttt{f}xe5} \textit{\texttt{h}h6} 12.0-0-0\texttt{f} 13.\textit{\texttt{x}xf6} \textit{\texttt{g}xf6} 14.\textit{\texttt{e}xe6} leaves White with an extra pawn as well as the better structure.

10.\textit{\texttt{h}h4} \textit{\texttt{g}5}
10...\textit{\texttt{d}xe5} leads to typically worse positions for Black after 11.\textit{\texttt{x}xd8}\texttt{f} 12.\textit{\texttt{f}xe5} \textit{\texttt{g}g5} 13.0-0-0\texttt{f} 14.\textit{\texttt{f}f6}\texttt{f}.

11.\textit{\texttt{f}xe6} \textit{\texttt{d}d5} 12.\textit{\texttt{e}e4} \textit{\texttt{b}b6}
12...\textit{\texttt{d}xe5} is not really challenging. 13.\textit{\texttt{f}f6}\texttt{f} 14.\textit{\texttt{x}xd8}\texttt{f} 15.gxf6 gives White an extremely pleasant endgame due to all those pawn weaknesses in Black’s camp.

After the text move we reach the starting position of most of the theoretical debate in this variation.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\fill[lightgray!30] (0,0) rectangle (8,8);
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

13.c3!

A lot of other moves were tried, rather unsuccessfully, before the strength of this move became apparent. White prevents the annoying check on b4 while maintaining various attacking ideas. Black may respond with B1) 13...\textit{\texttt{b}b8}, B2) 13...\textit{\texttt{w}xb2} or B3) 13...\textit{\texttt{d}xe5}.
13...hxg5? is weaker: 14.\textit{hxg5} \textit{g8N} (14...dxe5 15.\textit{xd5}! gave White a quick win in Fendrik – Forgacs, Hungary 2010; 14...\textit{xb2} 15.\textit{e3} has been played a few times, and now 16.\textit{c4N} is crushing.) The rook move is Black's only chance, but it is not good enough:

\begin{center}
\begin{figure}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard.png}
\end{figure}
\end{center}

15.\textit{h5!} \textit{xb2} 16.\textit{d1} White has a huge attack. A possible finish is 16...\textit{a7} 17.\textit{c4!} \textit{xg2} 18.\textit{xd5} \textit{xh1}+ 19.\textit{f2} and wins.

The early queen exchange does not help Black either: 13...\textit{e3}+ 14.\textit{xe2} \textit{xe2}+ 15.\textit{xe2} dxe5 (15...\textit{hxg5} 16.\textit{xg5} dxe5 17.\textit{xf6}+ \textit{xf6} 18.\textit{xf6} \textit{g8} 19.\textit{xe5} left White a clear pawn up in Videnova – Avagianos, Rethymno 2011.) Here White can improve on the game Yilmaz – Keler, Konya 2012, with: 16.g6\textit{N} \textit{fxg6} (16...\textit{f5} 17.\textit{xf6}+ \textit{xf6} 18.\textit{xf6} \textit{g8} 19.0–0–0 17.0–0–0 \textit{e7} 18.\textit{xe7} \textit{xe7} 19.\textit{xf3} White has a clear advantage.

\textbf{B1) 13...\textit{b8}}

This was played successfully in a recent Grandmaster game. It makes some sense for Black to avoid the awful structure that occurs after ...dxe5, but the idea runs into problems against accurate play.

\textbf{14.g6!}

14.\textit{f3} \textit{e7} 15.\textit{d3} \textit{e3}+ 16.\textit{xe3} \textit{xe3} 17.\textit{d2} \textit{f5} was pretty unclear in Hector – Ziska, Copenhagen 2014.

\begin{center}
\begin{figure}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard.png}
\end{figure}
\end{center}

14...\textit{fxg6}

14...\textit{e3}+ does not help: 15.\textit{e2} \textit{fxg6} 16.\textit{f6}+ \textit{f7} 17.\textit{xd5} \textit{xe2}+ 18.\textit{xe2} cxd5 19.0–0+ \textit{g8} 20.\textit{f6} \textit{h7} 21.b3 Even though the material remains equal, Black is too far behind in development.

\textbf{15.\textit{f6}+ \textit{f7}}

In the event of 15...\textit{xf6} 16.\textit{xf6} \textit{g8} 17.exd6± Black is a pawn down with a weak structure.

\begin{center}
\begin{figure}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard.png}
\end{figure}
\end{center}

16.\textit{xd5} \textit{exd5}

16...\textit{cxd5} 17.\textit{f3}+ \textit{g8} 18.\textit{d3} is too dangerous for Black.

17.\textit{f3}+ \textit{g8} 18.\textit{d3}! \textit{dxe5} 19.\textit{xg6N}
19.\textit{f6!} allowed Black to escape with a draw in Yazgeldiev – Odeev, Turkmenistan 2011.

Going after the targets.

16...\textit{f4}  
This is the only way to defend the g6-pawn.

16...\textit{wxg2} Taking the kingside pawns doesn't help Black to generate any counterplay.  
17.\textit{fxg6}! \textit{hxg6} (17...\textit{e3} leaves White with only one good move, but it is absolutely crushing: 18.\textit{wa4}++–) 18.\textit{g4} White had a decisive attack in Drozel – Wosch, corr. 2013. If Black tries 18...g5, then 19.\textit{g3 wa2} 20.exd6 decides the issue.

16...\textit{e3} 17.\textit{e6+ d8} (17...\textit{f7} is refuted by 18.\textit{exg6}, when 18...\textit{g6} 19.\textit{wh5}+ \textit{g7} 20.\textit{e8} leads to mate in two, while 18...\textit{g7} is not much of an improvement, and 19.\textit{f3} led to a quick win for White in Poulopoulos – Papadakis, Athens 2013.) 18.\textit{d5+} (18.\textit{g4}+ is the same.) 18...g5 19.\textit{xe3}

B2) 13.\textit{xb2} 14.\textit{b1 wa2}

15.\textit{g6!}  
We are already familiar with this idea to create huge weaknesses around the black king.

15...\textit{fxg6} 16.\textit{d3}

19...\textit{gxh4}N The only move that makes sense, but it is soon refuted. (19...\textit{a5} 20.\textit{g3 xxc3+ 21.h2++– Fier – Matuszewski, Prague 2012.) 20.\textit{f3 g7 21.xc6 xe5 22.0–0 xa7 23.b8 c7 Now 24.b6 wins comfortably, while 24.xc8+ achieves the same result in a flashier way.

17.\textit{f6+ f7}  
17...\textit{d8} loses to 18.\textit{d5+ g5} 19.\textit{xf4 gxh4 20.f3}, threatening both \textit{g6} and \textit{xc6}. 

\textbf{86}
18. $\text{hxg6}^!$

This was first pointed out by Kozul in an NIC Yearbook survey, and has resulted in a clean sweep of white victories so far.

18... $\text{gxh6}$

18... $\text{hxg6}$ 19.0–0 leaves Black’s king too exposed. A sample line is 19... $\text{exf4}$ 20. $\text{dh5}^!$ $\text{gxf5}$ 21. $\text{e8}^+$. $\text{f6}$ 22. $\text{xg6}^+$ $\text{d7}$ 23. $\text{f7}^+$. $\text{e7}$ 24. $\text{xe7}^+$ $\text{xe7}$ 25. $\text{g7}^+$. $\text{d8}$ 26. $\text{h8}^+$ $\text{c7}$ 27. $\text{exd6}^+$ and mate will follow soon.

19. $\text{g4}^+$. $\text{f7}$ 20.0–0

20... $\text{gxh2}^!$

20... $\text{dxe5}$ was tried in one game, and here 21. $\text{h5}^!$. $\text{g8}$ (21... $\text{e5}^+$ 22. $\text{h1}$ doesn’t change anything) 22. $\text{xf4}^+$. $\text{xf4}$ 23. $\text{xf4}$ $\text{g8}$ 24. $\text{f6}^+$ would have decided the game immediately.

21. $\text{gxh2}$ $\text{gxh2}$ 22. $\text{gxh2}^+$ $\text{dxe5}$

Other moves are no better. Here are a few illustrative lines:

22... $\text{g6}$ 23. $\text{f3}$. $\text{e7}$ 24. $\text{g3}^+$. $\text{f7}$ 25. $\text{f1}$ $\text{xf6}$ 26. $\text{xf6}^+$. $\text{h7}$ allows a forced win:

22... $\text{g7}$ 23. $\text{h5}^+$. $\text{g6}$ 24. $\text{g7}^+$. $\text{g8}$ 25. $\text{f6}$ $\text{dxe5}$ 26. $\text{f3}$. $\text{g7}$ 27. $\text{g7}^+$. $\text{g7}$ gives Black a temporarily healthy material balance, but White can exploit his superior activity as follows:

28. $\text{g1}^!$. $\text{a7}$ 29. $\text{f2}^+$. $\text{h7}$ 30. $\text{f8}$. $\text{c7}$ 31. $\text{e3}$. $\text{d5}$ 32. $\text{e4}^+$. $\text{a6}$ 33. $\text{xe5}^+$
There is more than one way to intensify White's attack, but I like the idea of opening the g-file for subsequent checks.

23...a5
23...e4 runs into 24.\textit{d}5! \textit{g}8 25.\textit{g}1 \textit{g}7 26.\textit{e}7 \textit{h}7 27.\textit{xc}8 and White wins a piece.

24.\textit{d}5 \textit{g}6 25.\textit{g}1 \textit{f}5 26.\textit{c}7 \textit{a}7

27.\textit{g}4!
White wins thanks to a beautifully constructed mating net.

14.\textit{g}6!
Again we see this typical idea, which ruins Black's structure and creates new targets for White's pieces.

14...\textit{fxg}6
14...\textit{e}3!
This way Black manages to exchange queens, but Black's problems are far from over in the endgame.

15.\textit{e}2 \textit{fxg}6
15...\textit{e}2 \textit{e}2 16.\textit{xe}2 \textit{f}xg6 17.\textit{f}6 \textit{f}7 18.\textit{g}4 transposes to the main line, while 18.0-0\pm is also good.

16.\textit{f}6
16.\textit{xe}3 \textit{xe}3 17.\textit{f}6 \textit{h}7 18.\textit{d}2 \textit{xf}1 19.\textit{hx}f1 is another pleasant endgame.

16...\textit{f}7 17.\textit{g}4 \textit{xe}2 18.\textit{xe}2
18...\textit{g}7 19.0–0\textit{f}4
Or 19...\textit{g}8 20.\textit{f}6 with an obvious advantage.
20.g3 \textit{g}5 21.gxf4 exf4 22.\textit{f}2±

The text move reaches a critical position. White has a wide choice, but his advantage has not been proven as conclusively here as in some of the previous lines. I suggest a simple, calm approach.

15.\textit{c}2!?
Defending the b2-pawn while taking aim at g6.
15.\textit{f}2?! is another interesting line that gives White excellent compensation, but I don’t see the point of giving up the b- and a-pawns here, as the text move manages everything perfectly.

15...\textit{b}8N
The best try.

15...\textit{e}3\textit{t} has been played a couple of times, with joyless results for Black. 16.\textit{e}2 \textit{f}4 17.\textit{f}6\textit{t} \textit{f}7 18.\textit{g}4! \textit{x}e2\textit{t} (18...\textit{x}g2\textit{t} 19.\textit{f}1 \textit{h}5 20.\textit{x}g2 \textit{h}xg4 21.\textit{a}f1\textit{t}+- Kanmazalp – Yaramis, Konya 2011.) 19.\textit{xe}2 \textit{xe}2 Now in Agamaliev – Kovchan, Konya 2011, the simple 20.\textit{xe}2\textit{N}± would have left Black with too many weaknesses.

15...\textit{e}7N is another idea, but after 16.\textit{f}2 \textit{c}5 (or 16...\textit{c}7 17.\textit{d}2\textit{t}) 17.\textit{d}2!± the g6-pawn is under fire and the knight is ready to take up a perfect outpost on c4.

16.0–0–0 \textit{e}7
16...\textit{e}3 doesn’t work due to 17.\textit{d}6\textit{t}! \textit{x}d6 18.\textit{x}g6\textit{t} \textit{f}8 19.\textit{d}2! With b2 safely protected, Black cannot prevent his exposed king from being mated soon.
16...\textit{h}5 is met by the familiar 17.\textit{d}2! when it is hard to defend g6.

17.\textit{g}3!
This seems simplest, although there are other good moves, for instance 17.\textit{f}2 \textit{a}5 18.\textit{c}4 0–0 19.\textit{h}4\textit{a}5 and White’s position clearly has a lot of potential.

17...\textit{f}8
This is an awkward-looking computer attempt to keep Black in the game.

17...\textit{f}4 18.\textit{d}2!± is strong.

17...\textit{e}3 loses in exactly the same way as on the previous move: 18.\textit{d}6\textit{t}! \textit{x}d6 19.\textit{x}g6\textit{t} \textit{f}8 20.\textit{d}2+-

17...0–0 18.\textit{d}2! The same idea again.
18.\textit{f}5 19.\textit{c}4 \textit{c}5 20.\textit{d}3!± Black has little counterplay and will have to lose material.
18...e5!
This is the simplest way to continue. 18...d2 e3! 19...xg6+ f7 isn’t as clear.

18.d3 e3 19...d2?? xd1 20.xd1 is also quite good according to the computer, but there is no need to sacrifice an exchange.

18...e5 19.d3±
White will soon be ready for d2-c4, while Black’s position remains uncoordinated and full of weaknesses.

C) 7...e7 8...f3

In this section we will deal with a few set-ups which do not quite fit in to any of the other chapters involving 7...e7. They are not at all bad, but at the same time they are not significant enough to warrant their own dedicated chapters. We will start with the unusual C1) 8...a5, before checking a sideline after the more common C2) 8...c7.

8...c6 gives White no special problems. It has been played by Judit Polgar, but only in a blindfold game, so we don’t need to take it too seriously. 9.0–0–0 xd4 10.xd4 c7 11.e2 0–0 12.hd1

Black has problems with the d6-pawn. She tried to solve them with 12...e8, but after 13.xe7 xe7 14.e5 White had a clear advantage in Karjakin - Polgar, Bilbao (blind) 2007.

C1) 8...a5

This has been favoured by some strong players in the past, and White will have to play precisely to prove anything against it.

9.0–0–0 d7
Black’s set-up looks strange, but he is ready to play ...c6 with a normal Sicilian position. I recommend an immediate tactical strike before Black gets a chance to complete development.

8...c6 gives White no special problems. It has been played by Judit Polgar, but only in a blindfold game, so we don’t need to take it too seriously. 9.0–0–0 xd4 10.xd4 c7 11.e2 0–0 12.hd1

10.xf6! xf6
10...xf6 11.f5 gives White an excellent version of a typical structure.
11.e5 dxe5 12.\(\text{dxe6}\)!

12.fx e5 is met by the amazing defence
12...c6! 13.\(\text{cxe6 g5}\)† 14.\(\text{b1 xc6}\) as in
Chernih – Le Quang, Yerevan 2006.

12...\(\text{xe6}\)

12...fxe6 13.\(\text{xb7}\) 0–0 (13...c6 14.\(\text{c8}\)†
\(\text{d8}\) 15.\(\text{xe6}\)†--) 14.\(\text{xa8}\) \(\text{c6}\) 15.\(\text{a7}\)
exf4 16.\(\text{c4}\) left Black with insufficient
compensation for the exchange in Sochacki –
Chabradze, Gorges 2011.

13.\(\text{xb7}\) exf4 14.\(\text{xa8}\) 0–0

15.\(\text{d5}\)!

It is easy for White to defuse Black’s
queenside aspirations and consolidate with his
extra exchange.

15...\(\text{xa2}\) 16.\(\text{xf6}\)† \(\text{gx6}\)

Now in Startstek – Combatiente, Internet
2012, the most accurate continuation would
have been:

17.\(\text{e4!N a1}\)† 18.\(\text{d2 a5}\)† 19.\(\text{b4 c7}\)
20.\(\text{d3 f5}\) 21.\(\text{d4}\)†

White is ahead on material and Black’s
kingside is a wreck.

C2) 8...\(\text{c7}\) 9.0–0–0

From this position the great majority of
games have continued with ...\(\text{bd7}\), either
with or without a preliminary ...h6 and \(\text{h4}\).
In the final part of this chapter we will consider
an interesting way for Black to postpone the
development of his knight.

9...0–0

This is an older way to handle the position,
but it should not be forgotten. The main
idea is that the b8-knight can go to c6 or d7
according to circumstances.

9...b5? is premature due to 10.e5 \(\text{b7}\) 11.\(\text{g3}\).

10.\(\text{g3}\)!

10.\(\text{d3}\) is not particularly strong because of
10...\(\text{c6}\)†, immediately drawing attention to
the lack of support for the knight on d4.

10.g4 is also not dangerous due to 10...b5
11.\(\text{xf6 xf6}\) 12.g5 \(\text{xd4}\) 13.\(\text{xd4 c6}\) when
Black stands at least equal. These two lines
show the ...\(\text{c6}\) plan working perfectly.

10...\(\text{bd7}\)

Black needs to prevent e4–e5. 10...\(\text{c6}\) does
not make much sense here, as White can either
play 11.e5 immediately or exchange on c6 first.
11. \( \text{d}3 \)

11.\( \text{e}2 \) b5 12. e5 dxe5 13. fxe5 \( \text{d}xe5 \) 14. \( \text{f}3 \) led to an eventual win for White in Archeo – Dzwonek, corr. 2002, but after 14... \( \text{b}7! \)\( \text{N} \) 15. \( \text{x}b7 \) \( \text{xb7} \) 16. \( \text{x}e5 \) \( \text{g}4 \) 17. \( \text{f}4 \) \( \text{xg}5 \) 18. \( \text{xg}5 \) \( \text{f}2! \) it is difficult to claim much of an edge for White.

11...b5 12. \( \text{h}1 \) b4

This has been the usual continuation, forcing the play before e4-e5 comes.

12... \( \text{b}7! \)\( \text{N} \) has not yet been tried, but it is worth checking how the game may continue: 13. e5 dxe5 14. fxe5 \( \text{h}5 \) 15. \( \text{h}4 \) \( \text{xg}5 \) 16. \( \text{xg}5 \) g6

White does not have an immediate way through, but the calm 17. g4 \( \text{g}7 \) 18. a3 maintains an edge. A possible continuation is: 18... \( \text{ad}8 \) 19. \( \text{b}1? \) \( \text{d}xe5 \) 20. \( \text{dxb}5 \) \( \text{axb}5 \) 21. \( \text{xe}5 \) \( \text{xe}5 \) 22. \( \text{xe}5 \) b4 23. \( \text{axb}4 \) \( \text{d}4 \) Black maintains material equality, but both 24. b5 and 24. \( \text{e}2 \) leave White with the more dangerous pawn majority in the endgame.

13. \( \text{d}5! \)

Nothing else makes sense.

13... \( \text{exd}5 \) 14. \( \text{d}5 \) \( \text{d}8 \) 15. \( \text{xg}7! \) \( \text{h}8! \)

Otherwise \( \text{f}5 \) is killing.

16. \( \text{exd}5 \)


16. \( \text{f}5 \)\( \text{N} \) is playable, but after 16... \( \text{h}5 \) 17. \( \text{h}4 \) \( \text{xg}5 \) 18. \( \text{xg}5 \) \( \text{df}6 \) 19. e5 \( \text{g}8 \) Black has enough resources to maintain the balance.
16...\texttt{Ec5!N}

After 16...\texttt{Eg8?} 17.\texttt{Df5 Ec5} 18.\texttt{Exf6\#} Black resigned in Kozjak – Buturin, Lvov 1997, in view of 18...\texttt{Exf6} 19.\texttt{Exg8\#} 20.\texttt{Ee8\#}.

The text move enables Black to survive the attack. It was proposed in \textit{Sicilian Attacks} by Yakovich, who called the position unclear, but it seems to me that White maintains some advantage.

17.\texttt{Wh4! Dfe4!} 18.\texttt{Dxe4 f5}

There is no other defence.

19.\texttt{Dxd8 \textbf{Exd8} 20.\texttt{Wxd8 Exd8}}

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21.\texttt{Dxf5 Dxe4} 22.\texttt{Dxe4 Axf5} 23.\texttt{Dxb4\#}

White has good chances in the endgame, with four pawns against a bishop.

\textbf{Conclusion}

From the popular tabiya after 6.\texttt{Eg5 e6} 7.f4, this chapter has dealt with a variety of set-ups that do not quite fit into any of the other chapters.

7...\texttt{Dd7} is a quirky move, but not a bad one. White obtains a good position with the typical plan of castling, placing the queen on g3 and forcing through e4-e5, although he must keep playing energetically and possibly sacrifice some material if he is to exploit his initiative.

7...\texttt{Dc6?} was tricky for a while, but the critical continuation of 8.\texttt{Dxc6 bxc6} 9.e5 h6 10.\texttt{Dh4 g5} 11.\texttt{fxg5 Dd5} 12.\texttt{De4 Wh6} 13.\texttt{c3!} can be regarded as a near-refutation of Black’s 7th move.

7...\texttt{De7} 8.\texttt{Wf3} is one of the most important positions in the Najdorf, arguably second only to the Poisoned Pawn in terms of the complexity of the ensuing positions. We will return to this in Chapters 10-12, but for now we can say that 8...\texttt{Da5} does not work out too well, while 8...\texttt{Cc7} 9.0-0 0-0-0 is trickier, but still quite promising for White in the critical line involving a kingside attack with a forced transition to an endgame.
Chapter 6

6...e6 7.f4

7...c7

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d4 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 f5 5.\text{c}3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 c7

8.e2!?

A) 8...b5 96
B) 8...c6 9.e5 90–0–0 96
   B1) 9...e7 96
   B2) 9...d7? 100
   B3) 9...\text{c}4 10.\text{c}d4
      B31) 10...b5!? 101
      B32) 10...e7 11.b1!N 104
         B321) 11...0–0 105
            B3211) 12.g3 105
            B3212) 12.h4!? 106
         B322) 11...h6 12.h4 108
            B3221) 12...g5? 108
            B3222) 12...0–0 109

B1) after 12.b6

B31) note to 11.eb8

B32) after 10.eb7

13.e2!N

15.d2!N

11.b1!N
Chapter 6 – 7...\texttt{c7}

1.e4 c5 2.\texttt{d3} d6 3.d4 \texttt{exd4} 4.\texttt{\texttt{d}x}d4 \texttt{d}f6 5.\texttt{c3} a6 6.\texttt{g}5 e6 7.f4 \texttt{c}7

This was the favourite choice of the young Garry Kasparov, and has been recommended in at least three popular books: \textit{Mastering the Najdorf} by Arizmendi and Moreno, \textit{Play the Najdorf: Scheveningen Style} by Emms, and \textit{Play the Najdorf Sicilian} by Rizzitano. It is easy to understand the appeal for Black, as play tends to take on a slower pace, with fewer forcing lines than in most Najdorf variations. Quite a lot of games have continued with an exchange on f6 over the next few moves, leading to a long strategic fight. Even though White has some decent plans there, Black will have achieved his main goal of reaching a stable position with no immediate danger. Instead I would like to propose a different approach which ties in with my recommendation against 7...\texttt{bd}7.

8.\texttt{c}2!

One of the most natural moves here is 8...\texttt{bd}7, which transposes into 7...\texttt{bd}7 8.\texttt{c}2 \texttt{c}7 as discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. This leaves us with two alternatives to cover in the following pages: the sideline A) 8...\texttt{b}5 and the more popular B) 8...\texttt{c}6.

A) 8...\texttt{b}5 9.a3!

9.e5 looks natural, but after 9...\texttt{dxe}5 10.\texttt{dxe}5 we reach a line of the Polugaevsky Variation (7...\texttt{b}5 8.e5 \texttt{dxe}5 9.fxe5 \texttt{c}7 10.\texttt{e}2) which I prefer to avoid in favour of 10.\texttt{exf}6, as covered in Chapter 7.

The text move maintains the parallel with the 7...\texttt{bd}7 8.\texttt{c}2 variation, and I do not see anything better for Black than transposing to that line.

9...\texttt{b}7

9...\texttt{bd}7 seems the most natural way, when 10.0–0–0 takes us to page 133.

9...\texttt{e}7 can simply be met by 10.e5 \texttt{dxe}5 11.fxe5 \texttt{d}5 12.\texttt{xd}5 \texttt{exd}5 13.\texttt{xe}7 \texttt{xe}7 14.g3 0–0 15.\texttt{g}2 \texttt{e}6 16.0–0–0 with an obvious edge to White.

9...\texttt{c}6 is normally dubious when Black has to recapture with the queen, and White gets easy play after 10.\texttt{xc}6 \texttt{xc}6 11.0–0–0 \texttt{e}7 (11...\texttt{b}7?! 12.\texttt{d}5!±) 12.g4 \texttt{b}7 13.\texttt{g}2±.

10.0–0–0 \texttt{e}7??N

The only games in my database continued with 10...\texttt{bd}7, leading to page 134.

10...\texttt{c}6? is not a good idea due to 11.\texttt{xc}6 \texttt{xc}6 12.\texttt{d}5!±.
11.f5!
11.g4 h6 12.h4 \(c6\) is an important extra option, when 13.\(x\)c6 \(x\)c6 is okay for Black.

11...e5 12.\(x\)xf6! \(g\)xf6
12...\(x\)xf6 allows 13.\(x\)xb5! axb5 14.\(x\)xb5 when White will get three pawns plus the initiative for the piece.

13.\(x\)b3
Black's position is solid for now, but with the d5-square securely under White's control, it is clear that Black will suffer for a long time.

B) 8...\(c\)6

This is the usual way to avoid transposing to the ...\(b\)bd7 lines.

9.0–0–0
I once played 9.\(x\)xf6, but nowadays if I wanted to change the structure this way I would do it on the previous move.

Black has tried three options: B1) 9...\(e\)7, B2) 9...\(d\)7?? and B3) 9...\(x\)d4. As we will see, there are some reasons why Black may try to delay the knight exchange, but doing so also gives White some extra options.

B1) 9...\(e\)7

This move forces us to take a completely different path to the 9...\(x\)d4 10.\(x\)d4 \(e\)7 line.

10.\(x\)c6!
10.\(b\)b1 would be fine if Black had to swap knights and transpose to variation B3, but 10...\(d\)7!N is more of a problem. (10...0–0 11.g3 \(d\)7 12.\(g\)2 \(x\)d4 13.\(x\)d4 \(c\)6 14.\(h\)d1 could be unpleasant for Black.) 11.g3 \(x\)d4 12.\(x\)d4 \(d\)6 13.\(g\)2 h6 14.\(h\)4 \(c\)8 This position could be reached via a 9...\(x\)d4 move order, but one that involves 11.g3 instead of my recommended 11.\(b\)b1!.

Other moves such as 10.g4 can be met by 10...\(x\)d4, transposing to another line I am not recommending.

10...bxc6

Recapturing with the queen seems more awkward:
10...\(w\)xc6 11.e5 \(d\)xe5 12.fxe5 \(d\)5 13.\(x\)xe7 \(x\)xc3
After 13...\(x\)e7 14.\(h\)5! White has an excellent version of the structure with the pawn on e5. Black is a long way behind with his counterplay, and can do little to prevent White from building his initiative with \(d\)3, \(e\)4 and so on.
14.bxc3!
14...d2?! is a safe alternative: 14...d7
(14...d7 15.h4! is excellent for White,
the main point being 15...xd1 16.b4!)
15.xc3 xe7 16.d3! White intends e4,
and keeps a pleasant edge without damaging
his pawn structure. The text move is more
ambitious.
14...xe7 15.g4 d7 16.c4!
White should not hurry with 16.xg7, as
after 16...h8 it is not so easy to complete
development. The bishop move solves that
problem, and Black still does not have a
convenient way to defend g7.
16...c5
16...b5 17.xg7 h8 18.b3 xc3
19.b1 c5 20.d6+-

11.e5 dxe5
After 11...d5 12.xe7 xe7 13.e4 dxe5
14.fxe5 0–0 15.c4 Black’s dark squares are
too weakened.

12.xe5!
A typical way to play against the spoilt
queenside structure. The ensuing endgames
are always more pleasant for White.

12.fxe5 is not so clear: 12...d5 13.xe7
c3? 14.g4 xe5! 14...xa2 (14...xd1 15.d6 b6 16.xd1 d5) 15.b1
e7 16.a2 d8∞

17.xg7 h8 18.xd7+ xd7 19.xf7+ c6 20.xe6+ c7 21.d6+
White could keep the queens on: 21.f7+ b6 22.f6+ a7 23.xg8 xg8 24.e6±
12...\textit{b6}

Every queen move has a drawback of some kind. The problem with this one is that $\text{\textit{a4}}$ may prove annoying at some point.

12...\textit{xe5} 13.\textit{fxe5} $\text{\textit{d5}}$ 14.\textit{xe7} $\text{\textit{xe7}}$

15.\textit{e4}$\pm$ is pleasant for White.

12...\textit{b8}

Black has managed to draw two correspondence games after this move, but I found a promising new idea.

13.\textit{g3}$!\text{N}$

Defending the f4-pawn. The significance of this will soon become obvious.

13...\textit{h6}

This is the only real attempt to justify the queen's position on b8.

13...\textit{xe5} 14.\textit{fxe5} $\text{\textit{d5}}$ 15.\textit{xe7} $\text{\textit{xe7}}$

16.\textit{e4} gives White a slightly improved version of 12...\textit{xe5}, as the extra g2-g3 move may be of some use.

13...0–0 14.\textit{xe4}$!\text{!}$ \textit{xe5} 15.\textit{fxe5} $\text{\textit{d4}}$

16.\textit{xe7} $\text{\textit{f2}}$ (16...\textit{e8} 17.\textit{g2} \textit{f2}$\pm$

18.\textit{xc6}$\pm$) 17.\textit{g2} \textit{xd1} (17...\textit{h1}$\pm$

18.\textit{xf8}$\pm$) 18.\textit{xd1} \textit{b7} 19.\textit{fxf8} $\text{\textit{d8}}$

20.\textit{d7} $\text{\textit{b8}}$ 21.\textit{b4}$\pm$

A final try is:

12...\textit{a7}$!\text{?N}$ 13.\textit{e2}

13.\textit{d3} 0–0 14.\textit{e4}$!\text{!}$ is a mistake due to

14...\textit{g4}$!\text{!}$ 15.\textit{c3} \textit{f6} with excellent chances for Black.

13.\textit{d3}$!\text{!}$ is a more interesting alternative, with the blunt idea of transferring the rook to the kingside. 13...\textit{e5} (13...0–0 14.\textit{g3}$!\text{!}$ \textit{d7} 15.\textit{e1} \textit{xg5} 16.\textit{fxg5} followed by $\text{\textit{d3}}$ gives White good attacking chances.)

14.\textit{e4} \textit{xe4} 15.\textit{xe4} 0–0 16.\textit{g3} White has chances to develop a serious initiative.

13...0–0 14.\textit{xe4}$!\text{!}$ \textit{xe4}$\text{!}$

Both 14...\textit{d7} 15.\textit{c3} \textit{f6} 16.\textit{h4}$\pm$ and

14...\textit{d5} 15.\textit{xe7} \textit{xe7} 16.g3$\pm$ leave White with a pleasant advantage.

15.\textit{xe4}$\text{!}$

White is happy to allow the exchange on g5 as it will increase his attacking potential.

15...\textit{b8}$\text{!}$

After 15...\textit{g5} 16.\textit{fxg5}$\pm$ the g5-pawn cramps Black's kingside. White will play $\text{\textit{d3}}$ next, intending to meet ...\textit{g6} with h4-h5.
16. \( \text{d3} \) 
16. \( \text{dxe7} \) \( \text{xe7} \) 17. \( \text{d3} \) \( g6 \) 18. \( h4 \) is a tempting alternative.

16...f5 17. \( \text{e5} \) \( \text{xg5} \) 18. \( \text{fxg5} \)

Black has gained some breathing room on the kingside, but the e6-pawn is backward and his dark squares are weak.

13. \( \text{e2!N} \)

I like this simple developing move, as it maintains the options of both \( \text{e4} \) and \( \text{a4} \).

13. \( \text{a4} \) has been played, but the critical reply has not: 13... \( \text{a7!N} \) (13... \( \text{b4} \) was seen in Hracke - Wojtkiewicz, Warsaw 1990, and here both players must have overlooked that after 14.a3!N the knight is untouchable. 14... \( \text{b8} \) [14... \( \text{xa4?} \) 15. \( \text{d4} \) traps the queen.] 15. \( \text{e2} \) 14. \( f5? \) 0-0 15. \( \text{e3} \) \( \text{b7} \) 16. \( \text{fxe6} \) \( \text{xe6} \) 17. \( \text{c5} \) \( \text{xc5} \) 18. \( \text{xc5} \) White has the better structure and a nice pair of bishops, but Black has decent prospects for counterplay on the queenside.

13...h6?

This seems like the most stubborn attempt.

After 13...0-0 14. \( \text{e4} \) \( \text{d7} \) 15. \( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 16. \( \text{d3!} \) the rook perfectly restricts Black's counterplay, and is also ready to switch to the kingside for an attack. 16... \( \text{e7} \) 17. \( \text{hd1} \) \( f6 \) 18. \( \text{h5?!} \)

14. \( \text{a4!} \)

This seems like the right time, as after 14. \( \text{h4} \) 0-0 15. \( \text{a4} \) \( \text{a7} \) the black queen is quite well situated.

14... \( \text{b7} \)

Now 14... \( \text{a7} \) can be met by 15. \( \text{xf6!} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 16. \( \text{c5} \).

14... \( \text{b4} \) allows White an intriguing possibility: 15.a3? (15. \( \text{d4} \) is a safe way to maintain a slight edge.) 15... \( \text{xa4} \) 16. \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{xd4} \) 17. \( \text{xd4} \) \( \text{hxg5} \) 18. \( \text{fxg5} \) \( \text{h7} \) 19. \( h4 \) 0-0 20. \( \text{d3} \) Even though Black has a rook and two pieces for the queen, his pieces are disorganized and White has decent attacking chances.

15. \( \text{h4} \) 0-0 16. \( \text{d3!} \)
16...\textit{e}d8
16...\textit{g}4 17.\textit{x}g4 \textit{x}h4 18.\textit{f}3 also favours White.

17.\textit{b}3 \textit{a}7 18.\textit{b}6 \textit{b}8 19.\textit{f}2 c5
This pawn sacrifice is the best practical attempt to free Black's position.

20.\textit{xc}5 \textit{xc}5 21.\textit{xc}5 \textit{d}5 22.\textit{d}1!±
Black cannot exploit the pin, and White should be able to untangle himself within a few moves and keep his extra pawn.

\textbf{B2) 9...\textit{d}7?}

Here Black tries to be even smarter with his move order than in the previous line. The bishop is not so active on d7, but White still needs to know how to continue.

10.\textit{xc}6!
The reasoning for this move is more or less the same as in the previous line. 10.\textit{b}1 can be met by 10...\textit{e}7, when White does not get the desired transposition to variation B32.

10...bxc6
10...\textit{xc}6?! 11.\textit{d}5! was unpleasant for Black in Milliet – Stankovic, Basel 2010.

11.\textit{e}3N

11.\textit{x}f6 \textit{gxf}6 has been played, but I see no point in giving Black such a fantastic pawn wall.

11.\textit{d}2 is similar to the main line, but it allows 11...d5!. That explains why we need the queen on the e-file.

11.g3?! is another possible way to develop the light-squared bishop, but I prefer the main line.

11...a5
11...\textit{b}8 12.\textit{e}2 is similar to the main line, but White could also consider 12.\textit{xa}6?.

11...\textit{e}7 looks natural, but 12.e5! leaves Black with an unpleasant choice:

\begin{itemize}
  \item [a)] 12...\textit{d}5 13.\textit{xd}5 cxd5 14.\textit{xe}7 \textit{xe}7 15.\textit{ex}d6\textsuperscript{†} \textit{xd}6 16.\textit{c}4! \textit{c}6 17.f5\textsuperscript{†} The black king is clearly vulnerable.
  \item [b)] 12...dxe5 13.\textit{xe}5± Compared to the earlier line B1, Black has the extra move ...\textit{d}7, but this actually favours White, as the bishop is tactically vulnerable and the ...\textit{d}7 retreat is not available. (13.fxe5? also deserves attention, for instance: 13...\textit{d}5 14.\textit{xd}5 cxd5 15.\textit{xe}7 \textit{xe}7 16.\textit{g}5\textsuperscript{†} \textit{f}8 17.\textit{d}3 \textit{b}5 18.\textit{h}1±)
\end{itemize}

12.\textit{e}2
Simplest, although 12.\textit{c}4?! is also playable. It is hard to suggest a further course of action
for Black; ...d5 isn’t possible, ...e7 runs into e4-e5, while ...b8 and ...b7 can always be met by b2-b3.

12...b8

12...a4 13.he1 a3 14.b3 gets nowhere for Black.

12...e7 13.e5 dxe5 14.xe5 is similar to 11...e7 as mentioned above, and the inclusion of ...a5 and e2 must surely favour White.

12...h6 13.xf6!? (13.h4 is perfectly sensible as well) 13...gxf6 14.h5+ shows another use of the bishop on e2.

13.he1 b6

13...b7 14.b3±

14.xb6 xb6 15.h4

The endgame is clearly more pleasant for White.

B3) 9...xd4 10.xd4

Now B31) 10...b5?! is an interesting sideline, but the most popular move has been B32) 10...e7.

B31) 10...b5!

It seems odd to try and delay ...e7 any longer, but there is a point: with the bishop on e7, Black constantly has to worry about e4-e5, as we will see in variation B32.

11.g3

11.g4 can be met by 11...xb8?! Now exchanging on f6 makes less sense, and against other plans Black’s set-up is justified.

11...b8

11...e7 has been played a few times, but it makes little sense: 12.g2 b8 13.e5 dxe5 14.fxe5 d5 Now in Hector – Hillarp Persson, Borlange 2014, White missed an opportunity to win a pawn with:

15.d2+!N xg5 (15...xc3 16.c6+!—)
10...e6 7.f4

16...xg5 0–0 (16...xc3 17.c6!!+)
17.xd5±

I also considered 11...d7N to avoid any xf6 ideas, but now Black will not be able to play ...b4 in time. 12.g2 b8 13.d5! a7 14.h4! Both the knight on d5 and the rook on d4 are untouchable. 14.h6 15.g4± Followed by f2.

12.g2
12.xf6?N

This is the safe player’s move, and in the long run White’s position should be more pleasant. An important point is that Black has committed himself to ...b5 and ...b8, depriving himself of the opportunity for long castling.
12...gxf6 13.g2 h5
13...e7 14.b1 d7 15.d1±

14.e1!!

Setting up d5 ideas.
14...d7
14...b7 15.d5! is a rude shock. 15...d8 (15...exd5? 16.exd5+ e6 17.e4++) 16.e3± White has achieved a favourable regrouping with gain of time.
14...c5 15.d2 b7 16.b1 e7 17.d1 f8 18.e3 g7 19.d1 is another possible direction, where White maintains a typical edge.

15.d1

Even though Black’s position is solid, it does not offer much hope for counterplay. It is not easy to activate the dark-squared bishop, launch a queenside offensive, or find a suitable home for his king. Meanwhile White intends to improve his position with e3 and b1, then continue manoeuvring.

15...h4

Black should probably get rid of this pawn before it becomes a target.

16.e3 hXg3 17.hXg3

The position remains complex, but I prefer White for the reasons outlined above. Black has exchanged off the weak h-pawn, but the opening of the kingside leaves his king with no place other than the centre. Even though the king looks safe there right now, its positioning makes it hard for Black to connect his rooks and arrange any meaningful counterplay. White, on the other hand, can shuffle his pieces
around in preparation for either a break in the centre or an invasion along the open h-file. On a cautionary note, White should keep in mind the solidity of Black’s position and the latent potential of the bishop pair, and avoid getting too aggressive too quickly.

12...b4 13.axf6?!N
With Black committed to ...b4, this exchange is more critical than it was on the previous move.

13.d1 d7 14.h4 h6 15.b1 a5 is a slightly unusual set-up for Black, but keeping the bishop on f8 gave him good play in Le Bled – Ruemmele, corr. 2010.

I spent some time looking at 13.c4N a5! 14.d5?! but it does not quite work as desired: 14...exd5 15.exd5† e7 16.xf6 gxf6 17.e1 d8 18.h5 f8 19.e4 b7 Black is doing fine.

13...bxc3?!?
This is the most testing reply. 13...gxh6 14.d1 a5 15.e3± gives Black a much less solid version of the 12.xf6 line analysed above, as the ...b4 and ...a5 moves have left some holes on the light squares.

15.xb2?! b7 is unclear, but of course White should avoid capturing the b-pawn, as it will ensure the safety of his king – for a while at least. Now it is not easy for Black to choose a square for his queen, and after that he will have problems completing the development of his kingside.

15...a5
16.c3 b5 17.d1± is bad for Black, while after 15...d7 16.d4 a5 (16...b7 17.d1±) 17.c3 followed by d1, Black’s lack of development portends an unpleasant future for him.

16.c3 a5
Guarding the b4-square, but taking up additional time.

I also considered: 16...d7 17.b4 b5 18.e3 c7 19.a4 c6 20.xb8† xb8 21.d4! Black’s kingside is still completely stuck, while White is ready to bring his rook around and get dangerous play in the centre or on the queenside.

17.d1 d7
The computer’s suggestion of 17...h5 seems horrifyingly slow, and White can go on the attack with 18.f5! e5 (18...d7 19.fxe6 fxe6 20.xh3±) 19.d2±.
18.a4!? 

This is the simplest move, intending to break through in the centre. (18...f1!? is more concrete, although I don’t see any need for it. For what it’s worth, the idea is 18...b5 19.a4! axc4 20.xc4 e7 21.xg7 g8 22.fc3 with a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed material.)

B32) 10...e7 

This popular move reaches a surprisingly critical position, where I found it necessary to forge a completely new path.

11.b1!N 

Before discussing this move, I will offer a shortened version of my analysis of another important line to give you an idea of the difficulties.

11.g4 

This blunt attacking move is the other critical line, but Black’s position seems to hold up.

11...h6 

I analysed several other replies, but will focus on the most challenging one.

12.h4 g5 

Judging by the practical results from this position, it looks as though Black has walked right into what White wanted, but despite all the tempting options, it has not been easy to demonstrate an advantage here.

13.e5 

13.fxg5 d7! does not bring much, for example: 14.e5 xe5!N An obvious improvement. 15.xe4 hxg5 16.xg5 xe5 17.e5 c7 

13...dxe5 

I also analysed 13...gxh4!N in detail, but will focus on the best defensive moves.

14.c4 

14.fxe5 gxh4 15.exf6 xf6 16.d5 g5† 17.b1 d8 18.e4 0–0 19.c3 f6 is unclear.

14..b8 15.fxg5 d7! 16.e4 

This move protects g5 and threatens g5-g6 or gxh6, the point being that ...xh4 will allow xxc8† followed by a deadly fork on d6.

16...b5! 17.xc8† xxc8 18.gxh4! c7 

18...hxh6 19.xe7 xe7 20.d2† 

19.xe7 xe7 20.d2 ag8 21.g5 d5! 22.g2 xe4 23.xe4 fc4 24.e1 d4 25.f4 exd4 26.e3

White can press for a while in this endgame, but Black should be able to hold it with careful defence, which is what happened in Le Bled – Moreno, corr. 2010.

Let’s now turn to my new idea of 11.b1!N. Though it may look like a quiet move, it has the useful function of renewing the threat of e4-e5, since a future ...xg5 will no longer come with check. It is worth adding that the king move is not mentioned in any of the three
Najdorf guides referred to in the introductory paragraph.

Black’s two most important replies are B321) 11...0–0 and B322) 11...h6.

The following alternatives run into concrete problems.

11...d7? is a standard developing move, but after 12.e5! dxe5 13.fxe5 c5 14.c4 d5 15.e4 Black is headed for trouble.

11...e5 12.fxe5 dxe5 13.xf6 xf6 14.d5 d8 15.d3± gives White a typical edge in what is likely to become an opposite-coloured-bishop middlegame.

11...b5 12.e5! dxe5 13.fxe5 d5 (13...c5?! is bad due to 14.d3 d7 [14...d5 15.xd5 exd5 16.g4 also leaves Black under pressure] 15.e4, with the point that 15...0–0? 16.f6! xe5 17.e5 wins for White.) 14.xd5 exd5 15.xe7 xe7 Now White has a pleasant choice.

12.g3 is enough for a slight edge, while B3212) 12.h4?! may lead to sharp tactics.

12.e5 is too soon. 12.dxe5 13.fxe5 d5! This thematic pawn sacrifice offers Black decent compensation: 14.xd5 exd5 15.xe7 xe7 16.xd5 e6

B3211) 12.g3

Now you can choose between two promising moves according to your own taste. B3211) 12.g3 is enough for a slight edge, while B3212) 12.h4?! may lead to sharp tactics.

12.e5 is too soon. 12...dxe5 13.fxe5 d5! This thematic pawn sacrifice offers Black decent compensation: 14.xd5 exd5 15.xe7 xe7 16.xd5 e6

B3211) 12.g3

This resembles – and may transpose to – the later variation B3222, which arises after 11...h6 12.h4 0–0 13.g3. However, the present move order gives White an intriguing extra possibility.

12.h6 13.h4?!

13.h4 reaches variation B3222 of course – see page 109.

13...b5

Neither 13...d7 14.e5± nor 13...e5 14.xd2 xg4 15.d3± are acceptable for Black.
14.e5! dxe5

14...b7!! leads to interesting complications, but White stays on top: 15.exf6 Bxf6 16.fxg7 Bg8 17.f5! hxg5 18.hxh2! (18.hxg5 exf5 19.Bxh5 Be7 20.Bg4 Bg5 21.Bd2 Be8 is not so clear.) 18...exf5 19.Bxh5 Be7 20.hxg5 White stands better. One important detail is:


15.fxe5 Bd5 16.Bxd5

16...Bxd5 does not work due to 16...Bb7! 17.Bxh6 exd5.

16...exd5


The position can be compared to the later variation B3222. The inclusion of the h2-h4 move should not make much of a difference.

B3212) 12.h4!!

This move serves an important purpose: by defending the g5-bishop, White makes e4-e5 into a serious threat.

12...Bd8!

This is the best way to prepare for the advance of the e-pawn.
12...b5? 13.e5 dxe5 14.fxe5 \d5 (14...\e8 15.g4\#) 15.\xd5! shows the significance of the h2-h4 move. 15...\xg5 16.hxg5 exd5 17.\xd5 \d8 18.\e4 Black is completely busted.

12...e5 13.fxe5 dxe5 14.\xf6 \xf6 15.\d5 gives White an obvious initiative.

12...\e8

13.e5! dxe5 14.fxe5 \d7
14...\d5 15.\xd5 \xg5 16.\d4 \e7
17.\e4! \d7 18.\d3 g6 19.h5 gives White good attacking chances.

15.\xe7 \xe7 16.g4 \e8 17.\g2?! A rather interesting pawn sacrifice. White has a big lead in development and can simply keep pushing his pawns. I will present a few possible lines to show the strength of White’s compensation.

17...\xe5
17...\xe5 18.\f2 \c7 19.g5\#

18.h5! \c6
18...h6 19.g5! hxg5 20.h6 \f6 21.\e4 gives White a dangerous attack.
19.\dd1 \e5 20.\f2 h6 21.\e4 \f6 22.g5! fxg5 22...hxg5? 23.h6 is crushing.
23.\h1 \c7 24.\d6 \d8 25.\d2!
White has excellent chances. The last move sets up a beautiful trap:

13.e5?! Despite Black’s last move, White can still proceed with his main plan.

13...dxe5 14.\c4! \d7 15.fxe5 \d5 16.\xd5 exd5

The alternative is: 16...\xd5 17.b3?! (17.c3 \xg5! 18.hxg5 \d1\# 19.\x1d1 \xd1\# 20.\c2 \e1 21.\c4 \f8 22.\xh7 \xe5 23.h8\# \e7 24.g6 b5 should be survivable for Black.)
17...\texttt{d}1† (After 17...\texttt{d}7 18.\texttt{e}3† it will be impossible to get rid of the g5-bishop, and White just continues piling up the other pieces on the kingside.) 18.\texttt{b}2 \texttt{xe}2 19.\texttt{xe}2 \texttt{f}6 20.\texttt{xf}6 \texttt{gx}6 21.\texttt{e}3 \pm White has a pleasant endgame.

17.\texttt{f}4!

The usefulness of h2-h4 becomes clear, as the bishop on g5 is rather annoying for Black.

17...\texttt{e}6

17...\texttt{h}6? 18.\texttt{tx}h6! \texttt{gx}h6 19.\texttt{h}5 \texttt{e}6 20.\texttt{d}3 leaves Black defenceless.

18.\texttt{f}3! \texttt{xe}5

18...\texttt{f}6 can be met by 19.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{fx}e5 (19...\texttt{fx}g5 20.\texttt{hx}h7†++) 20.\texttt{f}5 \texttt{c}6 21.\texttt{hx}h7† \texttt{hx}h7 22.\texttt{f}f7 \texttt{f}8 23.\texttt{xf}8 \texttt{xf}8 24.\texttt{xf}8 and White will maintain the pressure with h5-h6.

19.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{f}6 20.\texttt{d}1! \texttt{d}6

20...\texttt{fx}g5? 21.\texttt{hx}h7† is winning for White, since 21...\texttt{hx}h7 22.\texttt{h}5† \texttt{g}8 23.\texttt{f}7† leads to a quick mate.

21.\texttt{f}f1!

21.\texttt{h}5 \texttt{f}5 22.\texttt{f}3 \texttt{g}6 23.\texttt{xe}7 \texttt{xe}7 is not so easy.

21...\texttt{h}6

By driving the bishop back to h4 before castling, Black avoids any plans involving h2-h4 from White. At the same time, ...\texttt{h}6 is a committal move which weakens the kingside a bit.

12.\texttt{h}4

Here we should stop to consider the unsound B3221) 12...\texttt{g}5? before addressing the saner B3222) 12...0-0.

B3221) 12...\texttt{g}5? 13.\texttt{fx}g5 \texttt{d}7

This is a thematic idea for this variation, but it does not work here.

14.\texttt{g}6!

14.\texttt{d}2 \texttt{e}5 would be unclear.

14...\texttt{hx}h4
Black had better take the piece, since after 14...fxg6 15...xe7 8xe7 16...d2 b5 17...e2 he is virtually lost, as his king is exposed and the d6-pawn is terribly weak.

15...xf7+ f8

15.e5! d8

16...xe7 17...xd6 8xd6 18...xe6 is horrible for Black, and 16...d8 17...x d6 b8 18...h5 also leaves him struggling to survive.

16...h5 g5

17...e7 18...xd6 f6 19...g4 e5 20...g3 xf7 21...c4 followed by f1 leaves Black defenceless.

16...d1!

18...xh4 8xh4 19...xh4 8xe5 20...e2 xf7 leaves White with some initiative, but the text move is more ambitious and stronger.

18...dxe5

After 18...xe5 19.g3 White restores material equality while keeping a huge advantage.

19...d6 e7

19...g6 20...d3 is winning, while after 19...d8 20...e4!± White is completely dominating.

20.g3 f6 21...e4

Black is completely stuck. A possible conclusion could be:

21...xf7 22...c4 f8 23...h5+ g7 24...xf6++

The black king will soon perish.

B3222) 12...0-0

13.g3?

Just as in some of the earlier lines, White is preparing e4-e5.

The immediate 13.e5 dxe5 14...c4 (or 14.fx e5 d5) 14...d8 15...xf6 xf6 16.fxe5 e7 is less convincing.

13.g4?!

Whereas the main line may lead to slower positions, this alternative sees White going for the throat.

13...xe4!

This daring move is the critical answer.

13...b5 might just be playable, but it looks dangerous to allow the pawn to advance:

14.g5 h7 (14...hxg5 15...xg5+) 15.gxh6! 8xh4 16.hxg7 e8 17...d3! b4 (17...f6 18...g1 c5 19...g2 followed by h3 and e4-e5 gives White a winning attack.) 18.d1 f6 19...g1 c5 20...g2→
13...e5 14.g5! (After 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.\textit{xf}6 \textit{xf}6 16.\textit{d}5 \textit{w}d8 17.\textit{d}d3 \textit{e}e6 18.\textit{g}2 \textit{h}4 the dark-squared bishop blocks everything for a while.) 14...\textit{ex}d4 (14...hxg5 15.fxg5 \textit{h}7 [15...\textit{ex}d4 16.gxf6 dxc3 17.\textit{g}1+]) 16.\textit{d}2 \textit{xf}5 17.\textit{x}g5 \textit{xf}5 18.\textit{d}d5+ 15.gxf6 dxc3 16.\textit{g}2! \textit{xf}6 17.\textit{xf}6 \textit{g}6 18.\textit{d}3→ White will soon develop a crushing attack.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chess_board}
\caption{Chess Board}
\end{figure}

14.\textit{xe}4 \textit{hx}4 15.g5 f5! 16.\textit{xd}6 16.\textit{d}2? hxg5 17.\textit{f}3 e5 is bad for White, and 16.gxf6 \textit{xf}6 17.\textit{xf}6+ \textit{xf}6 18.\textit{g}1 \textit{d}7 is also fine for Black.

16...hxg5 17.\textit{fx}g5 \textit{xf}5 18.\textit{g}2 \textit{b}8

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chess_board}
\caption{Chess Board}
\end{figure}

19.\textit{h}4 \textit{f}6 20.\textit{d}3

Both sides have their trumps: Black’s dark-squared bishop is formidable, while White has the potential to cause a lot of trouble on the kingside with h4-h5-h6. I will not endeavour to provide an exact conclusion here, as the main line seems like a safer route to an edge, but players who enjoy this kind of double-edged position should be able to play it without much worry.

13...b5

13...\textit{e}8 is too slow, and after 14.\textit{g}2, intending \textit{h}d1 and e4-e5, Black has no good way to continue.

13...\textit{d}7?!

This move isn’t as easy to brush off with the moves ...h6 and \textit{h}4 included.

14.e5 dxe5 15.fxe5 g5? 15...\textit{a}3 16.\textit{xf}6 \textit{wb}6 17.\textit{b}5! \textit{xb}5 18.\textit{g}4 g6 19.bxa3 \textit{c}6+ 20.\textit{c}1 \textit{h}1 21.\textit{h}4+-

The main move looks horrid, but it is actually quite testing.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chess_board}
\caption{Chess Board}
\end{figure}
16...\texttt{b}b6!
16...\texttt{a}5 17...\texttt{g}xg5! h\texttt{g}5 18.h\texttt{h}4 \texttt{d}d5 19.hx\texttt{g}5 \texttt{g}7 20.h\texttt{h}7\texttt{t}! wins in good style.

17...\texttt{x}f6
17...\texttt{g}xg5 hxg5 18.h\texttt{h}4 \texttt{d}d5 19.hx\texttt{g}5 \texttt{g}7 21.h\texttt{h}7\texttt{t} \texttt{x}h7 22.h\texttt{h}5\texttt{t} \texttt{g}7 23.h\texttt{h}6\texttt{t} \texttt{g}8 24.g\texttt{g}6 fx\texttt{g}6 25.x\texttt{g}6\texttt{t} \texttt{h}8= White must take the perpetual.

17...\texttt{x}f6

18.h\texttt{h}5! \texttt{c}6
18...\texttt{g}7 19.xg5 h\texttt{x}g5 20.h\texttt{x}g5±

19.x\texttt{h}6
19...\texttt{g}7 20.e\texttt{e}4 \texttt{ad}8! leads to insane complications. My main line continues 21.x\texttt{xh}1 22.a4 e5! and Black manages to survive.
19...\texttt{g}7 20.x\texttt{x}g5 f6 21.g\texttt{g}6 \texttt{x}h1 22.a3
White has excellent compensation for the exchange. For instance:
22...f5 23.g\texttt{g}5 \texttt{f}7 24.d\texttt{d}3 \texttt{d}5 25.b\texttt{b}4 \texttt{g}1\texttt{t} 26.c\texttt{c}1
Intending \texttt{e}2-f4.

14.e5 dx\texttt{e}5 15.fx\texttt{e}5 \texttt{g}5? These ...\texttt{g}5 moves often turn out to be surprisingly annoying for White.

15...\texttt{d}d5
This allows White to win a pawn. We have already touched on the resulting type of position in a couple of the earlier lines.
16...\texttt{x}d5 ex\texttt{d}5 17.x\texttt{e}7 \texttt{xe}7 18.\texttt{g}2

The \texttt{d}5-pawn will fall, leading to a position of two results. Black's best saving chance is to head for a major-piece endgame where it might not be easy for White to convert the extra pawn.
18...\texttt{e}6 19.x\texttt{d}5 x\texttt{d}5 20.x\texttt{d}5 \texttt{ad}8 21.h\texttt{h}1 x\texttt{d}5 22.x\texttt{d}5 \texttt{e}8
22...f6 23.a4?! (23.b3 is another possibility.)
23...\texttt{w}e6 24.x\texttt{d}6! \texttt{xe}5 25.x\texttt{e}5 fxe5 26.x\texttt{x}a6 leads to a more dangerous endgame for Black: 26...\texttt{f}1\texttt{t} 27.a2 bxa4 28.x\texttt{a}4 \texttt{f}2 29.c\texttt{c}4!±
23.b3?! f6 24.e4 fxe5 25.b2!
White has returned the extra pawn but kept a bind. He can improve his position by advancing pawns on both flanks, while Black can only remain passive. Later White can start prodding him with various rook moves.

16...hxg5!? 16.g2 (16.exf6 xf6 17.g4 b7 18.g2 is the same thing) 16...b7 17.exf6 xf6 18.g4 xg2 19.wxg2 e7! (but not 19...xc3 20.xg5!) leaves a strange mess on the board. Black’s position might actually be rather decent.

16...hxg5 17.h4 b7
17...d5? loses to 18.xg5 xc3! 19.xc3 threatening wh5 or zd4.

18.hxg5 18.g2 xg2 19.hxg5 is met by 19...e4! 20.xg2 xg5! and a draw is most likely after 21.d7 xd7 22.h2 f5 23.h8+ f7 24.wh5+.

18...g4!
White has various tries here, but they all seem to be simplifying to some sort of endgame.

19.h4!
This seems best. 19.g2 xe5! 20.xe5 xe5 21.xb7 a7 22.g2 xg5 is about equal.

19.e4!? is a funny move, but Black defends cold-bloodedly with 19...g7! 20.h4 xe4 21.xe4 h8 22.xg4 xac8∞.

19...xe5 20.d7 xe2 21.xe2 f3!?
21...e5 might transpose to the main line after 22.xe7 f3 23.xf3 xf3, but White could also take the other bishop with 22.xb7??, when 22...xg5 23.e4 f6 24.a4 leaves him with some initiative.

22.xf3 e5 23.xe7 xf3
Chapter 6 – 7...\(\text{\texttt{c7}}\)

The knight on g5 is out of the game for the time being, and White’s rooks are well placed to create threats on the queenside.

Conclusion

The 7...\(\text{\texttt{c7}}\) system has a lot going for it, as it offers Black a sound position with decent counterattacking potential, while avoiding the crazy complications of some other Najdorf variants. It is no accident that it has been recommended for Black in several repertoire books.

8.\(\text{\texttt{e2}}\) is a convenient answer for us, as it not only fits in with my recommendation of 7...\(\text{\texttt{b6d7}}\) 8.\(\text{\texttt{e2}}\) (see Chapters 8 and 9 for more about that), but also presents a legitimate threat in the event that Black keeps the game in independent territory with 8...\(\text{\texttt{c6}}\) 9.0–0–0.

In the early part of the chapter we saw that 9...\(\text{\texttt{e7}}\) and 9...\(\text{\texttt{d7}}\) should both be met by 10.\(\text{\texttt{xc6!}}\), preventing Black from exchanging on d4 at a moment that suits him. The main line sees Black force the issue with 9...\(\text{\texttt{xd4}}\) 10.\(\text{\texttt{xd4 e7}}\), and here my detailed investigation revealed 11.\(\text{\texttt{b1!}}\) to be the strongest move, the main point being to threaten e4–e5. Having explored both 11...0–0 and 11...h6 in detail, I am confident in White’s chances, especially considering the surprise value of our 11th move.
6...e6 7.f4

The Polugaevsky Variation

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\( \text{\textit{e}} \)f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\( \text{\textit{e}} \)xd4 \( \text{\textit{e}} \)f6 5.\( \text{\textit{e}} \)c3 a6 6.\( \text{\textit{g}} \)g5 e6 7.f4 b5 8.e5 dxe5 9.fxe5 \( \text{\textit{c}} \)c7 10.exf6 \( \text{\textit{e}} \)xe5 11.\( \text{\textit{e}} \)e2 \( \text{\textit{x}} \)g5

12.0-0

A) 12...\( \text{\textit{e}} \)e5 115
B) 12...\( \text{\textit{a}} \)a7 13.\( \text{\textit{w}} \)d3 \( \text{\textit{d}} \)d7 14.\( \text{\textit{e}} \)e4
   B1) 14...\( \text{\textit{g}} \)g6!? 117
   B2) 14...\( \text{\textit{e}} \)e5 15.\( \text{\textit{f}} \)f3
      B21) 15...\( \text{\textit{c}} \)c7!? 119
      B22) 15...\( \text{\textit{x}} \)xb2 16.\( \text{\textit{w}} \)e3 \( \text{\textit{b}} \)b7 17.\( \text{\textit{a}} \)ab1!
         B221) 17...\( \text{\textit{x}} \)xc2
         B222) 17...\( \text{\textit{x}} \)xa2!

A) note to 13...\( \text{\textit{a}} \)a7

B) note to 14.\( \text{\textit{e}} \)e4

B21) note to 20...\( \text{\textit{x}} \)xb2

15.\( \text{\textit{f}} \)f5!

19.fxg7!N

21.\( \text{\textit{g}} \)g4!N
1.\textit{e4 c5 2.\textit{f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 \textit{f6 5.\textit{c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 b5}}}

This provocative move, which seemingly ignores the e4-e5 threat, was developed by the great Soviet grandmaster and theoretician Lev Polugaevsky. Such an idea doesn’t seem like such a big deal today, but to play so anti-intuitively in the 1950s was another matter. Even though this variation has come under heavy fire over the years, Black has been hanging on, and we still see the occasional strong grandmaster employ it.

8.\textit{e5 dxe5}

8...h6? is not a viable alternative: 9.\textit{h4 g5 (9...dxe5 10.fxe5 transposes to the note to Black’s next move.) 10.fxg5 \textit{h7 (10...dxe5 11.\textit{dxb5±) Now any of 11.exd6, 11.\textit{g4 or 11.\textit{h5 give White a large advantage.}}}

9.\textit{fxe5 \textit{c7}}

Again Black does not have much of a choice. 9...h6? 10.\textit{h4 g5 is no good due to: 11.exf6 \textit{gxf6 12.\textit{f3 a7 13.0–0–0 \textit{b6 (13...\textit{d7 is swiftly refuted by 14.\textit{xb5! axb5 15.\textit{xe6!}) 14.\textit{d3 c5 15.b3 e3\textsuperscript{†} 16.\textit{b1 d7 17.\textit{h1 Black soon got smashed in Cardenas – Cortes, Santiago 1971.}})}}

10.\textit{e2 is a serious alternative, but I regard the text move as clearly the one that asks Black the more difficult questions.}

10...\textit{e5\textsuperscript{†} 11.\textit{c2 xg5 12.0–0}}

We have reached the first major crossroads, as far as Black’s options are concerned. \textbf{A) 12...\textit{e5 deserves close attention, but B) 12...\textit{a7 is the main theoretical path.}}

Other moves are worse, and not worthy of detailed analysis. Here are a few brief examples showing how Black’s position may fall apart after one or two inaccurate moves:

12...\textit{b7 13.\textit{f3! e3\textsuperscript{†} 14.\textit{h1 xf3 15.xf3± Stripunsky – Jaracz, Polanica Zdroj 1995.}}}

12...gxf6 13.d4! e3\textsuperscript{†} 14.h1 e7 15.xd7\textsuperscript{†} xf6 16.xf6 d7 17.f3 White’s advantages in mobility and king safety gave him a winning position in Jakovenko – Smeets, Wijk aan Zee 2007.

12...c5 13.h1 b7 (13...x5 transposes to 13...c5 in the notes to variation A below.) 14.f3 a7 15.b7 xxb7 16.e4 e5 17.fxg7 Black was busted in Fezza – De Toma, Campobasso 2007.

\textbf{A) 12...e5}
This used to be considered an important theoretical option but, with the help of the correspondence players, it has more or less been put out of business.

13.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{h1}}}! \)

The most popular option has been 13.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{f3}}} \) (the only move analysed by Rizzitano in this position), but it is not easy to prove anything here.

13...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e7}}} \)

13...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{gxf6}}} \) is refuted by 14.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{h5}}}!+-- \) followed by \( \text{\textit{\textbf{e1}}} \) and a disaster on e6.

13...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{c5}}}?! \) is not much better: 14.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{fxg7}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{g7}}} \) (14...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{g8}}} \) 15.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{dxb5}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{d7}}} \) [15...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{axb5}}} \) 16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{xb5}}}+ \) followed by \( \text{\textit{\textbf{f3}}} \) is crushing.] 16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{f3}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{b8}}} \) 17.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e1}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{g7}}} \) 18.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{d6}}}+ \) White won quickly in Kuntermann – Cornaccini, corr. 2007.) Now White can seal Black’s fate with some simple tactics:

15.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{f5}}}! \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{exf5}}} \) (15...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{w6}}} \) 16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{h6}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{a7}}} \) 17.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{xf7}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{xf7}}} \) 18.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{h5}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{h8}}} \) 19.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{xf7}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{xf7}}} \) 20.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{f3}}} \) gave White a quick win in Rissanen – Lassen, corr. 2002.) 16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{d5}}} \) 0–0 17.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{a8}}} \) White eventually converted his material advantage in Crosa Coll – Coelho, Ilha Solteira 2003.

14.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{f3}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{xf6}}} \)

After 14...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{w6}}} \) White kicks the queen around rather easily: 15.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e1}}}! \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{w6}}} \) (15...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{d7}}} \) 16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{xb5}}}+--; \) 15...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{b6}}} \) 16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{d5}}} \) \( \text{\textit{\textbf{c5}}} \) 17.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{c4}}}+--; \) 16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e1}}}! \)

16.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{w1}}}! \)

With \( \text{\textit{\textbf{d1}}} \) coming next, White is much too far ahead in development.

16...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{f5}}} \)

16...\( \text{\textit{\textbf{e7}}}?! \) is refuted by 17.\( \text{\textit{\textbf{g3}}}! \) with a deadly double attack, as in Bazantova – Lukasova, email 2012.
16...\(\textit{d}c6\) 17.\(\textit{d}d1\) \(\textit{e}c7\) 18.\(\textit{f}g5\) \(\textit{e}e5\) 19.\(\textit{h}5\) gave White a crushing attack in Bartley – Kelleher, Parsippany 1998.

17.\(\textit{d}d1\) \(\textit{e}d7\) 18.\(\textit{g}3!\) \(\textit{c}c6\)

18...\(\textit{f}xe4\) is met by 19.\(\textit{e}e5\), with the deadly threat of 20.\(\textit{h}5+\) and mate.

19.\(\textit{f}g5\)

Not the only way to win, but perfectly good enough.

19...\(\textit{d}d5\) 20.\(\textit{h}5\)\(+\) \(\textit{g}6\) 21.\(\textit{x}d5\) \(\textit{exd}5\)

This was first played by Polugaevsky in 1959, and remains the main line today.

13.\(\textit{d}d3\) \(\textit{d}d7\)

13...\(\textit{e}e5\) is sometimes played, but after 14.\(\textit{e}e4\) Black has no real choice but to play 14...\(\textit{d}d7\), transposing to variation B2 below.

14.\(\textit{e}e4\)

In this position B1) 14...\(\textit{g}6!\)? is a rare but possibly underrated move, but B2) 14...\(\textit{e}e5\) has been the overwhelmingly most popular choice.

14...\(\textit{d}d5?!\) poses White no problems. 15.\(\textit{c}3\) \(\textit{c}c6\) 16.\(\textit{e}x\textit{xc}6\) \(\textit{e}x\textit{xc}6\) 17.\(\textit{e}e3\) \(\textit{b}7\) 18.\(\textit{f}3\) \(\textit{c}4?!\) (18...\(\textit{g}6\) is better, although 19.\(\textit{f}d1\) gives White a strong initiative.) Now in Sulskis – Stocek, Port Erin 2002, White could have refuted his opponent’s play with:

19.\(\textit{f}xg7!N\) \(\textit{x}g7\) 20.\(\textit{c}5+\)-- Winning material.

B1) 14...\(\textit{g}6!\)?

This move has hardly ever been played, but it certainly deserves more attention. Black’s idea is to play ...\(\textit{b}7\) when the pressure against the knight may become awkward, considering that White would prefer to avoid a queen exchange.
15...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}3}}}

I also considered 15.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}}}e}1N}, but found the position after 15...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b}}}b}7} 16.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}}}f}3 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c}}}c}6 17.c3 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}}}g}8 to be unclear.

15...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b}}}b}7 16.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}}}d}3

16.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}5?? \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}}}e}x}e}4! 17.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h}h}4} h}6 18.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}}}e}x}e4 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c}}}c}5†
19.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{h}h}1 0–0} 20.\textit{\texttt{f}fxg}7 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}d}8= is another murky line. The text move seems more logical, turning the black queen into a target.

16...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h}h}6}}

17.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}4!}}

A typical way to avoid the queen exchange, while bringing more pieces into the attack.

17.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}}}e}x}h}6?! \textit{\texttt{gx}h}6 seems fine for Black.

17...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}}}xe}4}

17...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}}}xd}4?? loses to 18.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}d}4} \textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}4} 19.\textit{\texttt{f}fxg}7.

17...g6 is not so terrible, but 18.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}3±} leaves White with a stable advantage. Black is behind in development and his king faces an uncertain future.

18.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}}}e}x}e4

This seems like Black's best attempt to improve on 18...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d}6} 19.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}fx}g}7 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}g}7}} 20.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}5} \textit{\texttt{\texttt{c}c}5†} 21.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{h}h}1} \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d}b}2} 22.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}ff}f}1!±} as played in Jarecki – Gagliardi, corr. 2011.

18...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{g}g}6} 19.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}5} g}6 20.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{h}h}1} \textit{\texttt{\texttt{c}c}5} 21.\textit{\texttt{a}a}f1± looks horrible for Black.

19.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}fx}g}7 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{g}g}8}

Bringing in another piece.

19...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}g}7}}?? is worse: 20.c3 \textit{\texttt{e}5} (20...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{e}e}g}8 21.g3±) 21.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}3} \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d}4}} 21...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d}8} 22.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}5!±}) 22.\textit{\texttt{c}xd}4 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}d}4} 23.\textit{\texttt{e}e}2± Black's king is too vulnerable.

20.c3 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}f}x}g}7 21.\textit{\texttt{a}a}f1

21.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{h}h}1} can be met by 21...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d}x}d}4 22.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{c}c}x}d4 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{c}c}6} 23.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{a}a}f1} \textit{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}d}x}d}4 24.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{a}a}8†} \textit{\texttt{\texttt{d}d}8} 25.\textit{\texttt{\texttt{a}a}x}a6 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{g}g}5} and Black is doing all right.
The text move defends the rook on f4, and hence avoids the \( \ldots \text{dc}6 \) idea, which means Black still has to find a way to develop the knight. A possible try is:

21...\text{ad}5

22.\text{e}f2!\hspace{1cm}

Removing the pin on the d4-knight.

22...\text{h}h1 23.\text{d}f3  \text{gg}3! would have turned the tables.

22...\text{dc}6!

22...\text{d}d7 23.\text{c}c2  \text{ee}5 24.\text{b}b3\pm

22...\text{xd}4 23.\text{cxd}4  \text{dc}6 runs into 24.\text{e}e1! followed by \text{c}c3, and the inevitable queen entry will cause a lot of trouble for Black.

23.\text{dc}5!

23.\text{xc}6 f5! will lead to a perpetual after:

24.\text{e}e2  \text{xf}4 25.\text{xe}6\uparrow  \text{xf}8 26.\text{c}c8\uparrow  \text{f}7

27.\text{d}d4  \text{c}c1\uparrow  28.\text{f}f1  \text{e}e3\uparrow  29.\text{h}h1  \text{xd}3

30.\text{e}e6\uparrow=

23...\text{xf}2\uparrow  24.\text{xf}2  \text{c}c1\uparrow  25.\text{f}f1  \text{g}g5

26.\text{d}d4  \text{xc}7\uparrow  \text{xd}7

Here Black seems to have decent drawing chances in the event that White grabs the h7-pawn, so I prefer:

27.a4!?

White's chances are preferable in the middlegame, as he can continue to generate threats against the enemy king, although Black is still not out of the game by a long way.

B2) 14...\text{e}e5

If the database is anything to go by, almost all of your games against the Polugaevsky are likely to reach this position if you follow my recommendations.

15.\text{f}3

15.c3 has been played, but I prefer the more energetic way of dealing with the pin. Black has two sensible replies: B21) 15...\text{c}c7?? and the more popular B22) 15...\text{xb}2.

B21) 15...\text{c}c7??

This calm move simply aims at keeping Black's position together, without resorting to pawn-grabbing. This move attracted some followers after Nakamura used it in 2012, so it is one of the key battlegrounds in the debate over the Polugaevsky's resurgence.

16.\text{e}3 \text{xb}7

16...\text{g}6 was once played by Polugaevsky himself, but it is practically refuted by the
following strong plan: 17...c4! b4 (17...bxc4 18.\texttt{\textsc{xac}1} is horrible for Black.) 18.\texttt{\textsc{d}1}! (This is much more convincing than 18.\texttt{\textsc{h}1}, which led to an eventual draw in Novopashin – Polugaevsky, Vilnius 1960.) 18...b7 19.\texttt{\textsc{a}4} \texttt{\textsc{c}6} 20.\texttt{\textsc{xc}6} \texttt{\textsc{xc}6} White’s bishop manoeuvre has enabled him to swap off a key defender, and he soon makes inroads along the d-file.

I found this move myself, but it is not quite a novelty, as it was played in an internet game a couple of years ago.

17.\texttt{\textsc{fg}5} h6 led to complications in Wang Hao – Nakamura, Biel 2012. White eventually won that game, but Black seems to be holding his own at this point.

17.c4!? is sensible, but after 17...bxc4! it is not easy to find an advantage for White. For instance, after 18.\texttt{\textsc{ac}1} \texttt{\textsc{xe}4} 19.\texttt{\textsc{fxg}7} \texttt{\textsc{xe}7} 20.\texttt{\textsc{xe}4} 0–0 Black’s position was safe enough in Erdelyi – Galyas, Kecskemet 2012.

Here White would like to play 20.\texttt{\textsc{ad}1}, but Black has a safe answer in 20...\texttt{\textsc{c}6}!. By aiming for a similar position with the moves \texttt{\textsc{a}2–a4} and ...\texttt{\textsc{b}4}, we can eliminate this possibility as the \texttt{\textsc{b}4}-pawn will be left hanging.

White can instead play 20.\texttt{\textsc{ab}1} \texttt{\textsc{c}3} 21.a4 \texttt{\textsc{b}4}, reaching a position that will be discussed via transposition in the note to White’s 21st move in the main line. For a quick verdict, I will say it is not clear if White is better.

17...\texttt{\textsc{b}4}

17...bxa4?! 18.\texttt{\textsc{xa}4} just seems to be inviting trouble.
18...g6 gives White extremely easy play due to the suffocating f6-pawn. 19...ad1 h5 20...fg5 a6 21...c5±

18...d5 seems rather awkward. White has a few pleasant options, for instance: 19.c3? bxc3 20.bxc3 gxf6 21.bxd5 bxd5 22...ac1 a5 (22...ad7 23.fe1→) 23...h6 With an ongoing initiative.

18...d6 19...ad1 a6 4 (19...g6 20.b4±) 20.e4! (20.fxg7 a6 21.e4 a6b7! allows Black to castle next, as b5 has been prevented.) 20...gxf6 21.bxd6 bxd6 22...a6± White’s life will be much easier. Black’s king faces an uncertain future, and the passed a-pawn gives him something else to worry about.

19.fxg7 a6 20.e4 a6b2N
This seems critical. 20...0-0?? is a blunder due to 21.g5.

20...b7 21.b4N
Improving over 21.e3 as played in Gonzaga Grego – Morcin, Internet 2012.
21...xb2
21...0-0 22.g5! gives White a strong attack. A brief sample line is 22...h6 23.e6 fxe6 24.e6 a6 25.e8b8+ a8 26.c4! and wins.
22...ab1 a3

17...axe4 18.e4 gxf6 (18...b7 19.f4 gxf6 20.axb5 axb5 21.f6 g8 22.h4 leaves White with an excellent initiative without even being a pawn down.) 19.axb5 b6 20...h1

21.c3! Preparing d4. 21...c5 (21...g7 22.b4!±; 21...e7 22.d4±) 22.g4!± Once again White has a strong initiative, the immediate threat being g7.

18...h1!
Angling for an improved version of 17.h1, as discussed earlier.

18...axe4
This is the most logical reply to the king move.
18...xc2 19.f5! followed by ac1 will give White a crushing initiative.
continues: 21...\texttt{c}c3 22.\texttt{g}g5 \texttt{h}h5 (22...\texttt{w}e5?? leads more or less by force to an endgame: 23.\texttt{x}xb4 \texttt{h}h6 24.\texttt{w}xe5 \texttt{x}xe5 25.\texttt{x}xf7 \texttt{w}xf7 26.\texttt{h}h5 0-0 27.\texttt{x}xf7+ \texttt{w}xf7 28.\texttt{w}xf7 \texttt{x}xf7 29.\texttt{b}b7+ \texttt{w}f6 30.g3 White keeps some winning chances.) Now White has two serious options:

a) 23.\texttt{xf}f7?? plunges the game into insane-looking complications, where best play leads to another difficult-to-assess endgame: 23...\texttt{w}xe7 24.\texttt{w}xe6 \texttt{c}c6 25.\texttt{x}xe5 (25.\texttt{w}xe6+ \texttt{d}d7=) 25...\texttt{d}xe5 26.\texttt{g}g6 \texttt{h}h5 27.\texttt{x}xf7 \texttt{w}xf7 28.\texttt{x}f7 \texttt{w}f7 29.\texttt{d}d7\texttt{w}e8 30.\texttt{d}d3\texttt{w}e5+ and White can keep playing without much risk, but Black has excellent chances of delivering a perpetual check at some point.

b) 23.\texttt{f}f3 \texttt{w}e5! is a key resource, forcing White into some concrete variations, and preventing a long-lasting initiative:

21.\texttt{e}d\texttt{d}1!

As explained earlier, this is the moment where we see the advantage of 17.a4! over 17.\texttt{e}h1.

21.\texttt{e}ab1 is the computer's top choice, and also warrants consideration. The critical line
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24...bxc4 25.bxc4 25...g5 26.xh8 26...xh8 27.b4 27...e7 28.xa6 28...d1 29.d1 It will be hard for White to convert his extra pawn, as Black’s pieces are active and he can aim for counterplay against White’s king. These lines can of course be explored further, but overall I consider the main line a better bet.

21...xd1

This seems like the best chance. Black is not helped by:

21...b7 22.b4!

Preventing castling.

22.h6

After 22...g5 23.f4 h6 24.h3 the king will be stuck permanently in the centre.

22...xd1 23.xd1 24.d7 24.g5! leaves Black without a good defence: 24...g8 25.f4 f6 (25...e5 26.e4++; 25...f6 26.a6 26...xa6 27.b8+ e7 28.c7++)

26.xd7 27.xf6+

23.d4!

White is trying to provoke the exchange of Black’s dark-squared bishop, which will lead to the collapse of his position.

23...d5

Or 23...db6 24.a5! intending 24...xa5 25.d7 WINNING.

24.d3 c6 25.d4±

Black’s king remains stuck in the centre.

22.xd1 c5

22...g8 23.xb4 f6 24.a5 leaves Black struggling to get his king to safety.

23.f4

The most straightforward way to get an edge. A more sophisticated try could be: 23.h4?! f6 (23...h6 is met by 24.d4±, intending 24...0-0 25.d3 when Black will not be able to defend h7 with ...g5.) 24.d4 e7 25.g5 g5 26.hxg5 d7 White has a few different options, perhaps the most critical being:
27.\textbf{axa6?!} h6 28.\textbf{h4} \textbf{wxg5} 29.\textbf{xb4+} \textbf{c5} 30.\textbf{e2} \textbf{d8} 31.a5 White keeps the better chances, although I am not sure if this endgame is likely to be winning. I will refrain from going any deeper, as the main move seems like a simpler way to conclude the theoretical discussion.

23...0-0

After 23...\textbf{c6} 24.\textbf{xa6=} the passed a-pawn is an important asset, while the issue of king safety remains a concern for Black.

24.\textbf{d3} \textbf{g7}

Black had better avoid 24...\textbf{c6?!} 25.\textbf{fxa6=} the passed a-pawn is an important asset, while the issue of king safety remains a concern for Black.

24.\textbf{e4} \textbf{g7} 25.\textbf{xb4}

Black will have to bring the knight to assist with the defence of the weakened kingside, but this will leave the a6-pawn a sitting duck.

Grabbing the b2-pawn is the main line. Although this line is obviously dangerous for Black, you also need to know your stuff with White, since these forcing lines can be hard to play over the board. Many strong grandmasters have stumbled while trying to prove an advantage – including me!

16.\textbf{e3} \textbf{b7} 17.\textbf{bab1!}

17.a4 used to be considered the main line, especially after Leko won a spectacular game with White against Ghaem Maghami, who played 17...\textbf{b4}. For a while that game was considered the refutation of Black’s set-up, but then a stronger defensive plan was identified. The critical continuation is 17...\textbf{b4!} 18.c4 (18.\textbf{f5} \textbf{xe4} 19.\textbf{xe4} \textbf{d4} is another key point) 18...\textbf{xe4} 19.\textbf{xe4} \textbf{xf6} as in Luther – Bromberger, Austria 2006. The position remains messy and there is scope for further investigation, but my analysis indicates that the text move is stronger, a verdict supported by the practical results so far.

Black must decide between \textbf{B221) 17...xc2} and \textbf{B222) 17...xa2!}. 

26...\textbf{c6} 27.\textbf{e4} \textbf{e5}

Or 27...\textbf{e7} 28.\textbf{xa6} \textbf{d5} 29.\textbf{f1=} and White keeps an extra pawn, as well as chances of a kingside initiative.

28.\textbf{xa6} \textbf{xf3} 29.\textbf{xf3} \textbf{xf3} 30.\textbf{xf3}

Black will have to fight for a draw in a one-sided endgame.
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B221) 17...\(\textbf{w}xc2\)

This appears critical and has been the more popular choice, but it is refuted spectacularly in the style of the aforementioned Leko – Ghaem Maghami game.

18.\(\textbf{c}\text{g5}\)

Now Black must be careful to avoid an instant loss.

18...\(\textbf{w}c7\)

18...\(\textbf{w}xe4? 19.\(\textbf{c}\text{xe4}\) does nothing to help Black.

18...\(h6? 19.\(\textbf{h}bc1 \textbf{wa4}\) 20.\(\textbf{c}\text{xe6}\) gave White a quick win in Albers – Euler, corr. 1971.

18...\(g6?\) was played in my first game in this line: 19.\(\textbf{h}bc1 \textbf{wa4}\) (Other moves do not change the result: 19...\(\textbf{w}xa2\) 20.\(\textbf{w}a7!\) Black’s position collapses; 19...\(\textbf{h}b2\) 20.\(\textbf{d}xf7! \textbf{xf}7\) 21.\(\textbf{d}d6\) \(\textbf{xd}6\) 22.\(\textbf{w}xe6\)++)

20.\(\textbf{c}\text{xe6! fxe6 21.\textbf{f}7\text{t} – Negi – Hermansson, Malmo 2007.\)

19.\(\textbf{a}4!\)

Today this move seems obvious with the help of modern engines, but when I analysed it for the first time with Nigel back in 2006, it was quite an impressive discovery. All other moves let Black off the hook. For instance, Rizzitano points out that 19.\(\textbf{fxg7} \textbf{hxg7}\) 20.\(\textbf{d}f6\) \(\textbf{xf}6\) 21.\(\textbf{xf}6 \textbf{ed}5\) leads to equality, but does not consider the text move.

19...\(\textbf{w}e5\)
19...bxa4 meets with a spectacular refutation:
20.fxg7 hxg7 21...xf7! xf7 22...xb7!+-

21.axb5 hxg5
21...axb5 22...f3 a7 sees Black get demolished after 23...xa7 xa7 24...xb5
xb5 25...xb5.

22.bxc6 xc6
After 22...xh2+ 23...f2 Black quickly runs out of checks.

23.h3 a7 24...b6+-
Once again Black is routed.

A final unsuccessful try for Black is:
19...h6 20...fc1! c6N
20...e5 21...xb5 axb5 22...xb5 Gagliardi – Lecha Gonzalez, corr. 2011.
20...c6 21.axb5 hxg5 (21...xb5 22...f3+-)
22.bxc6 xc6 (22...xh2+ 23...f2+-)
23.g3+- ‘yorkman’ – ‘JTB’, Internet 2009.

20.axb5 a5 21...bc1!
Indirectly defending the e4-knight, as highlighted in the next note.

21...g6 22...f3! a4 23...c8+! reveals the point behind White’s 21st move. 23...d8
24...xd8+ xd8 25...b6+ e8 26...c7!+-

21...h6 22...f3!
Using the same idea again.

22...a4 23...c8+! d8 24...xd8+ e8 25...b6+ e8 26...d1+-

B222) 17...xa2!
Although this position appears extremely dangerous for Black, it is not trivial to demonstrate a concrete advantage for White.

18.\textit{c4}

This is the theoretically-travelled path, and probably the strongest move.

18.\textit{\textsc{fg}g5N} looks like another tempting option, but I am not completely convinced by it: 18...\textit{\textsc{xe}4} 19.\textit{\textsc{xe}4} \textit{\textsc{d}d5} 20.\textit{\textsc{bd}1} \textit{\textsc{e}e5} 21.\textit{\textsc{b}b6} \textit{\textsc{g}6}\textit{?} (After 21...\textit{\textsc{c}7} 22.\textit{\textsc{xc}7} \textit{\textsc{xc}7} 23.\textit{\textsc{fxg}7} \textit{\textsc{xg}7} 24.\textit{\textsc{d}d6}+ \textit{\textsc{f}f8} 25.\textit{\textsc{h}h5} White has a bit of pressure, although I think Black should be okay.) 22.\textit{\textsc{xd}7} \textit{\textsc{xd}7} 23.\textit{\textsc{c}c6} \textit{\textsc{c}c5}\textit{+} 24.\textit{\textsc{h}h1} 0–0 25.\textit{\textsc{bd}1} \textit{\textsc{xf}6} 26.\textit{\textsc{xf}6}+ \textit{\textsc{xf}6} 27.\textit{\textsc{xc}5} \textit{\textsc{d}d8} 28.\textit{\textsc{f}f1} \textit{\textsc{d}d4} Black has a stable position with three pawns against a bishop. White can certainly try to press for a while, but Black should be able to hold it.

18.\textit{\textsc{f}f4?!N} is another completely new idea. I discovered some amazing tactical points further down the line, but it demands a great deal of accuracy from White. Moreover, there are some ways for Black to simplify to a worse but possibly defensible endgame. Although it would have been nice to include this move, the reality is that 18.\textit{c4} is a more straightforward route to an advantage.

18...\textit{\textsc{xe}4} 19.\textit{\textsc{fxg}7}

19.\textit{\textsc{xe}4} \textit{\textsc{gxf}6} 20.\textit{\textsc{cb}5} has never been played, and indeed after 20...\textit{\textsc{g}g7}\textit{!} 21.\textit{\textsc{ba}6} 0–0 Black is safe.

19...\textit{\textsc{gxg}7} 20.\textit{\textsc{xe}4} \textit{\textsc{d}d6}\textit{?}

An interesting defensive idea. Black's plan often revolves around the potential opposite-coloured-bishop endgames, which tend not to justify the computer's excitement for White.

20...\textit{\textsc{h}h6} has been tested, but it is hard to imagine any human player wishing to play this way. Play continues: 21.\textit{\textsc{e}e5} \textit{\textsc{xe}5} 22.\textit{\textsc{xe}5} 0–0 23.\textit{\textsc{a}a1} \textit{\textsc{d}d2} 24.\textit{\textsc{f}f4} \textit{\textsc{fd}8} 25.\textit{\textsc{af}1} \textit{\textsc{c}c6} 26.\textit{\textsc{g}g4}+ \textit{\textsc{f}f8} Black is narrowly avoiding being mated, but he will remain under pressure for some time.

27.\textit{\textsc{g}g7}\textit{+} \textit{\textsc{e}e7} 28.\textit{\textsc{e}e4} \textit{\textsc{g}g5} 29.\textit{\textsc{xf}7}\textit{+} \textit{\textsc{d}d6}
30.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}f2 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}c7 31.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exe}}6 (31.\textcolor{red}{\textit{C}}xb5 axb5 32.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exe}}6 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}d4 33.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exe}}4 is similar.) 31...\textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}d4 32.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exa}}6 \textcolor{red}{\textit{exe}}2\textbf{t} 33.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}xe2 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}5\textbf{t} 34.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{Sh}}h1 \textcolor{red}{\textit{xc}}4 35.\textcolor{red}{\textit{We}}5\textbf{t} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{b}}7 36.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{ba}}a1 I found two computer games that reached this position, one of which was won by White, with the other ending in a draw. For a human player, it is obvious that Black will have to suffer for a long time due to his exposed king.

21.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{Cxb}}5!

This seems like the simplest route to an advantage.

The alternative is:
21.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{Cg}}5 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}4 22.\textcolor{red}{\textit{We}}e3?!

In my game I made a tactical oversight with 22.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}b7? 0-0 23.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}d3, and after 23...\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}e2! Black was suddenly winning in Negi – Shomoev, Moscow 2012.

22...\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}d2

22...0-0? 23.\textcolor{red}{\textit{C}}xf7! \textcolor{red}{\textit{Wxf}}7 24.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exe}}6+-

23.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}xd2 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Wxd}}2 24.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Sh}}h5 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}d4\textbf{t} 25.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Sh}}h1

25...0-0! N

A strong human improvement.

After 25...\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}f2 26.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exf}}2 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Wxf}}2 27.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Wf}}1! \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Wf}}7? 28.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exf}}2 f6 29.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Ee}}4 f5 30.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}d2 White went on to convert his advantage in Caire – Reyes Maldonado, corr. 2013.

26.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exf}}7\textbf{t} \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Sh}}h8 27.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{Cxb}}5

27.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{Exe}}6 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Ec}}8 28.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{Exd}}4 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Exd}}4 29.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{Cxb}}5 axb5 30.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exb}}5 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Cd}}7 reaches a similar endgame.

27...\textcolor{red}{\textit{Wf}}2 28.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exf}}2 \textcolor{red}{\textit{Wxf}}2 29.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exe}}6 axb5 30.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Exb}}5 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Ec}}3 31.\textcolor{red}{\textit{Ef}}3 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{Cc}}6

White can press with absolutely no risk, although ultimately the position is probably a draw.
Chapter 7 – The Polugaevsky Variation

21...0–0 22.b6!

22.\text{\textit{h1}} is met by 22...h6 when Black’s king is safe for now.

22...\text{\textit{a}}6 23.\text{\textit{fe1}}? \text{\textit{a}}5 24.b7

The passed pawn is a huge asset which clearly outweighs Black’s extra pawn. In the following Internet game White skilfully converted his advantage by combining threats on both flanks.

24...\text{\textit{e}}5† 25.\text{\textit{h1}} f5 26.\text{\textit{a}}4 \text{\textit{h}}8 27.\text{\textit{ed1}} e5 28.\text{\textit{h}}4 \text{\textit{h}}6 29.\text{\textit{ed1}} \text{\textit{d}}6 30.\text{\textit{g}}5 \text{\textit{g}}6 31.\text{\textit{e}}3 \text{\textit{e}}6

32.\text{\textit{c}}7!

The defence is almost at breaking point. The main threat is \text{\textit{c}}4.

33.e4 33.\text{\textit{g}}5 \text{\textit{f}}6 34.h4 h6 35.\text{\textit{h}}3! a5 36.\text{\textit{c}}8 a4 37.\text{\textit{h}}2

1–0


Conclusion

For more than half a century now, the Polugaevsky Variation has defied all White’s attempts at refutation. This is quite remarkable considering that, in the position after 8.e5 dxe5 9.fx e5 \text{\textit{e}}5 10.\text{\textit{xf}}6 \text{\textit{e}}5† 11.\text{\textit{e}}2 \text{\textit{x}}g5 12.0–0, White has developed three minor pieces and castled, while Black has only developed his queen and moved some pawns.

From the above position, 12...\text{\textit{e}}5 has been more or less buried by the correspondence players, but the main line of 12...\text{\textit{a}}7 is harder to crack. After 13.\text{\textit{d}}3 \text{\textit{d}}7 14.\text{\textit{e}}4, I believe that 14...\text{\textit{g}}6!? may have been unfairly neglected. I found some promising ideas for White, but one could certainly make the argument that Black is at no more of a disadvantage here than in the main lines.

The main theoretical path continues 14...\text{\textit{e}}5 15.\text{\textit{f}}3 \text{\textit{xb}}2 16.\text{\textit{e}}3 \text{\textit{b}}7 17.\text{\textit{ab}}1!, when 17...\text{\textit{xa}}2! is the acid test. The position is complicated, but White can obtain excellent chances by using the last internet game as a model.
Chapter 8

Gelfand Variation

Introduction

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{\textbf{\textit{}}f}3 \text{d}6 \text{3.d}4 \text{cxd}4 \text{4.\textbf{xf}4 f}6 \text{5.h}3 a6 \text{6.g}5 e6 \text{7.f}4 \text{\textbf{\textit{}}bd}7 \text{8.e}2 \text{\textbf{\textit{}}c}7 \text{9.0-0-0} \)

A) 9...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}e}7
B) 9...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}b}5 10.a3
   B1) 10...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}b}7
   B2) 10...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}e}7 11.g4
      B21) 11...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}b}7
         B211) 12.f5!
         B212) 12...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}h}4
            B2121) 12...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}c}5
            B2122) 12...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}b}6
            B2123) 12...g6!
   B22) 11...h6

A) after 15...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}b}8
B2122) after 14...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}c}8
B22) after 18...\text{\textbf{\textit{}}g}4

16...e3!N
15...b1!N
19...g6!?N
Chapter 8 - Introduction


This is one of the most natural ways to develop. It is often referred to as the Gelfand Variation due to the Israeli icon’s colossal contribution in the main lines after 8.Wf3. Even though 6...Bd7 has recently taken over as the most fashionable alternative to the Poisoned Pawn, no particular problems have been found for Black in the main theoretical lines of the present variation. Its only drawback is a slight lack of flexibility (especially when compared to 6...Bd7), and the considerable volume of theory that Black needs to remember.

8.We2

8.Wf3 is a big option of course, but I believe the text move to be at least as dangerous. The queen supports a possible e4-e5 break, while leaving the long diagonal free for the lightsquared bishop, for instance after g2-g4 and Bh4.

Before we get into the business of discussing different moves and plans, I should mention that this variation has a lot of different move-order possibilities. To help make sense of it all, I would like to draw your attention to the following position, which often arises after Black’s 12th move.

8...Cc7

8...h6 9.Bh4 gives Black nothing better than converting to one of the usual paths. 9...e5 has been played in several games, but after 10.0-0-0 (10.fxe5 should also be pretty good) the position is the same as variation C1 of Chapter 3, except that Black is missing the ...b5 move.

8...Cc7 does not have much independent value. 9.0-0-0 h6 (9...Cc7 reaches variation A below.) 10.Bh4 Wa5 Black is trying to prepare ...g5, but the queen may turn out to be misplaced. 11.Bf3! Preventing ...g5. 11...e5 12.Bb1! Now the queen looks awful on a5. 12...exf4 13.Bd5 Bxd5 14.exd5 Wd8 15.Wel g5 16.Bf2 Kurnosov – Vorobiov, Moscow 2012.

Both sides have arranged their forces logically but, along the way, certain move orders will offer independent possibilities for both sides. The timing of the ...h6 move may also prove significant. Another peculiar point is that while ...h6 provokes Bh4, retreating the bishop to h4 may also provoke ...h6 due to the threat of g4-g5, which only increases the number of possible transpositions.

The above position will serve as the starting point for the next chapter. Before then, we will examine the various ways in which the game may veer off in a different direction.
9.0–0–0

We will start by considering A) 9...c7, before moving on to the main move B) 9...b5.

A) 9...c7 10.g4

White proceeds with his normal plan. Now Black has nothing better than converting into one of the lines discussed under 9...b5.

10.d3!? used to be considered quite strong, but things aren't so easy after 10...h6 11.h4 e5. There is a lot more to explore here, but White has absolutely no reason to go down this path.

10...h6

10...b5 11.a3 takes us to variation B2.

10...0–0 is not great, and 11.g2! makes it hard for Black to develop at all. Perhaps the best attempt is 11...b6, but this is far from an ideal solution. Shirov showed an easy way to deal with Black's plan: 12.h4! c4

11.h4 g5!?

If Black is determined to avoid transposing to normal paths with ...b5, this is the only serious option.

12.fxg5 hxg5
12...\(\text{h7}\) 13.\(\text{g3! h}xg5\) 14.\(\text{f5! e5}\) 15.\(\text{xe7 xe7}\) 16.\(\text{f2}\) is excellent for White.

13.\(\text{gxg5}\) b5 14.a3

Black has a bit of compensation for the pawn, but White's play is quicker.

14...\(\text{e5}\) 15.\(\text{g1 b8}\)

![Diagram]

16.\(\text{e3!N}\)

By threatening g5-g6, White improves on 16.\(\text{b1}\) b4\(\text{=}\) as played in Yilmaz – Aveskulov, Kharkov 2011.

16...\(\text{b7}\)

16...b4?! is unsatisfactory due to 17.axb4 \(\text{xb4}\) 18.g5 \(\text{fd7}\) 19.g6\(\text{!}\), but now, with the b-file blocked, Black's queenside counterplay is at a standstill.

17.\(\text{f4}\)

White is definitely better.

B) 9...b5

This is the most natural way to continue – there is no need to commit the bishop to e7 just yet.

10.a3

White has tried a few other alternatives but, while they may have posed some troubles initially, most of them have been successfully repelled. By nudging the a-pawn forwards, White shows that he is in no hurry to break through in the centre. Instead he tries to limit Black's counterplay before preparing the g4-g5 advance.

Over the next few moves Black usually develops both of his bishops, with ...h6 thrown in somewhere. We will examine B1) 10...\(\text{b7}\) and B2) 10...\(\text{e7}\) in turn. The first move has been more popular, but I believe the second is more accurate in terms of limiting White's options, as well as maintaining maximum flexibility for Black.

This would not be a great time for Black to play 10...h6\(\text{?!}\). White can either play 11.\(\text{h4}\), staying on course for the target position shown on page 131, or try to exploit Black's move order with 11.\(\text{xf6!}\) \(\text{xf6}\) 12.g4, with favourable prospects.

10...\(\text{b8}\) has been played a few times, but is not something White needs to worry about. 11.g4 (11.\(\text{d5?!}\) is interesting but unnecessary.) 11...b4 Rather risky. (11...\(\text{e7}\) transposes to 11...\(\text{b8}\) in the notes to variation B2 – see page 136.) Now in Chirila – Nastase, Baile Olanesti 2010, White could have obtained an improved version of the sacrifice with:  

![Diagram]
12.\(\text{d}5\)!\(\text{N}\) \(\text{exd}5\) 13.\(\text{exd}5\)\(\text{\vdash e}5\)? (13...\(\text{\vdash e}7\) 14.\(\text{\vdash c}6\) \(\text{\vdash f}8\) 15.\(\text{\vdash x}f6\) \(\text{gxf}6\) 16.\(\text{axb}4\) gives White a great position.) 14.\(\text{fxe}5\) \(\text{dxe}5\) 15.\(\text{\vdash x}f6\) \(\text{gxf}6\) 16.\(\text{a}4\) Material is level, and White has a promising initiative with great prospects on the light squares.

\[\text{B1) 10...\text{\vdash b}7}\]

This is the normal way to continue, but it gives White a few additional options besides converting into the main line considered in the next chapter.

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

11.\(\text{\vdash x}f6\)? \(\text{\vdash x}f6\) 12.\(\text{g}4\) is another interesting direction, which makes sense when you consider that Black often recaptures with the bishop in the 10...\(\text{\vdash e}7\) lines. However, I will focus on the normal continuation.

11...\(\text{\vdash c}8\)?!

Black should prefer 11...\(\text{\vdash e}7\), leading to a position discussed below under the 10...\(\text{\vdash e}7\) move order. The text move looks natural, but it gives White a relatively simple path to an advantage.

12.\(\text{\vdash x}f6\)! \(\text{gxf}6\)

12...\(\text{\vdash x}f6\) looks normal, but after 13.\(\text{g}5\) \(\text{\vdash d}7\) 14.\(\text{h}4\)\(\text{\vdash h}3\) Black's position is rather unpleasant. There is no clear counterplay on the queenside, while White's kingside advance already looks imposing. White also has the option of \(\text{\vdash h}3\) to restrain any counterplay.

13.\(\text{h}4\) \(\text{\vdash b}6\)

Sending the knight towards c4 looks like Black's most logical idea. Other ideas include:

13...\(\text{h}6\) 14.\(\text{\vdash h}3\)! The rook is perfectly placed here. 14...\(\text{\vdash e}8\) 15.\(\text{\vdash b}1\) \(\text{\vdash b}6\) 16.\(\text{f}5\) \(\text{e}5\) 17.\(\text{\vdash d}3\)

Grischuk - Wang Hao, Beijing 2013.

13...\(\text{d}5\)\(\text{N}\) has not been tested, with good reason in my view. 14.\(\text{exd}5\) (I might also be tempted by 14.f5!? when Black's position looks shaky.) 14...\(\text{\vdash x}f4\)\(\text{\vdash h}4\) 15.\(\text{\vdash b}1\) \(\text{\vdash x}c3\) 16.\(\text{bxc}3\) \(\text{\vdash x}d5\) 17.\(\text{g}2\) \(\text{c}4\) This was given by Palliser, who suggested that Black had compensation for the exchange, but Goh Wei Ming shows that 18.\(\text{\vdash e}1\) \(\text{\vdash e}7\) (18...\(\text{\vdash e}5\)? 19.\(\text{\vdash c}6\)\(\text{--}\)) 19.\(\text{c}6\) is good for White.

13...\(\text{\vdash b}6\) 14.\(\text{\vdash h}3\) \(\text{h}5\)\(\text{N}\) is an interesting suggestion from Goh Wei Ming. (14...\(\text{\vdash c}5\)? 15.f5 \(\text{e}5\) 16.\(\text{\vdash d}5\) was excellent for White in Ortiz Suarez – Becerra, Silvania 2011.)
15.f5!? (Goh Wei Ming's idea was 15.g5 fxg5 16.hxg5 &g7 with counterplay for Black.) 15...e5 (15...hxg4 gives White a pleasant choice between 16.&xg4 and 16.fxe6?) 16.&b3 hxg4 17.&xg4 Black has managed to swap off his isolated h-pawn, but White has good control over the light squares and the h-pawn might become a factor if more pieces are exchanged.

15...h3 &b6 16.e5 17.&d5 &d8
Here we can improve on the analysis of the Singaporean IM.

18.g5!
18.&b3 &g8 leads to a tense game according to Goh Wei Ming, but the knight does not have to retreat.

18...exd4
18...fxg5 19.&e6! is crushing.

19.&xf6† &e7 20.&hd3!
White has a huge initiative for the sacrificed piece. Here is just one illustrative line:

20...&e3 21.&xd4! &xd1 22.e5 &g7
23.exd6† &f8

14.&b1 &c4N
This seems like the most energetic move, and an obvious attempt to improve on the slower 14...h6 15.&h3 &g8 which was played in Rui – Molner, Santa Clara 2014. In the game White went for an immediate attack with 16.g5?, but Goh Wei Ming’s 16.&g3N &c4 17.&e1 is a simpler way to fortify the queenside, when White remains in control and is ready for f4-f5.
24.d7 Ba8 25.We5!
Threatening a deadly check on c5.

25...We7 26.Wc7 Bxd8 27.Bxd1+-
White will soon pick up the b7-bishop as well. Material will thus be about equal, but the mighty d7-pawn is crippling for Black.

**B2) 10...Ec7**

This move order has a few advantages for Black. Firstly, it enables him to recapture on f6 with the bishop if White decides to exchange there. Secondly, it gives him the option of ...Bb8, delaying the development of the c8-bishop in order to threaten ...b4. Finally, even if Black simply intends to enter the main line of the next chapter, the text move enables him to reduce White's options.

11.g4
Now we will analyse B21) 11...Bb7 followed by B22) 11...h6.

11...Bb8
This has been a more common move order, but it gives White some additional options, without offering any real perks for Black.

12.g2
Another simple reply is 12.h4, when the threat of g4-g5 means that Black has nothing better than 12...h6, transposing immediately to variation B22 below. However, the text move is even more flexible. An interesting independent possibility is: 12.gxf6!? Bxf6 13.g5 Ae7 (13...Bx4 14.Bx4 would be fine for Black if he had played ...g7 instead of ...b8, as he could just play ...e5, but here it is not so easy for him.) 14.h4 b4 The only justification for the rook on b8. (15...Wb6 is possible, but it provides some additional options for White as well.) 15.axb4 Bxb4 Black may be okay here, but he has to worry about various attacking ideas such as f4-f5 and Qf5. Another good reason for Black to avoid this move order!

12...h6
12...Bb4?! 13.axb4 Bxb4 14.e5! leads to a quick conclusion, as after 14...dxe5 15.Qc6 the f4-pawn is defended, so Black cannot take it with his rook. 15...Bb7 16.Qxb4 Qxb4 17.Bxe5 Bxe3 18.exf5 gxf5 19.Bxc3±

13.h4?!N
My official recommendation would have to be 13.h4, transposing to variation B22. However, I cannot resist mentioning the text move. Even though Black is objectively okay in the end, the sacrifice is worth considering for its shock value.
exd5 19.gxf7 ♘xf7 20.e5 is another possible direction.) 18...♘xf7 19.♗xe6! The analysis goes on, but Black is certainly not having an easy time of it.

14.axb4 ♘xb4 15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.e5 dxe5 17.♕c6 ♘xf4 18.♖e4

This position is almost the same as the main line shown in the earlier diagram on page 131, the only difference being that the moves ...h6 and ♕h4 have not been played here. Before going any further, it is worth highlighting one important point: if White continues developing with the natural ♗g2, he will have to consider the annoying possibility of ...♗c4. Queenless positions are generally okay for Black, while if the white queen moves away, then ...b4 will give Black attacking chances.

It is worth considering two approaches for White. B211) 12.f5!? is an interesting attempt to exploit the fact that Black has been slow to play ...h6, while B212) 12.♗h4 invites Black to play ...h6 and transpose to the main line, which will be analysed in the next chapter. However, Black is not forced to comply, and we will examine his attempts to keep the game in independent territory.

It is worth mentioning that 12.♗g2 is not completely pointless here, because after 12...♗c4 13.♗d2 the absence of ...h6 and ♕h4 is definitely in White's favour. However, Black still seems to be doing fine, so I will not go into any more details here.

12.♗xf6 is also ineffective due to 12...♗xf6! 13.g5 ♘xd4 14.♗xd4 e5 15.fxe5 ♘xe5 when Black is fine.

B21) 11...♗b7

B211) 12.f5?!

This is a unique possibility when Black develops his bishops and neglects to play an early ...h6.

12...e5

12...♗c5N has never been played, and indeed after 13.fxe6 fxe6 14.♗g2 0-0 15.♗b1± White has plenty of targets to attack.
13.\texttt{exf6}  
13.\texttt{b3}?! loses a pawn after 13...\texttt{xe4}!  
14.\texttt{xe4 \textsf{nxg5}}

13...\texttt{xf6}  
13...\texttt{xf6}?!N 14.\texttt{dxb5 \textsf{axb5}} 15.\texttt{\textsf{xb5} \texttt{b6}}  
16.\texttt{\textsf{xd6}}

14.\texttt{\textsf{b3}}

At first, Black seems to be doing rather well here, especially judging by the only over-the-board game. However, if White takes the correct measures to stop Black's counterplay on the queenside, then his kingside pawn avalanche may prove dangerous.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textsf{a} & \textsf{b} & \textsf{c} & \textsf{d} & \textsf{e} & \textsf{f} & \textsf{g} & \textsf{h} \\
\hline
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

14...\texttt{h6}  
14...\texttt{c8}?!N 15.\texttt{\textsf{d7}} 16.\texttt{\textsf{h3} \texttt{c8}} is covered under 16...\texttt{d7} in the notes to the main line below. (This was the actual move order from the Balogh – Gabrielian game, as referenced there.)

15...\texttt{c8}  
15...\texttt{\textsf{d7}} 16.\texttt{\textsf{h3}} \texttt{c8} is covered under 16...\texttt{d7} in the notes to the main line below. (This was the actual move order from the Balogh – Gabrielian game, as referenced there.)

15...0–0–0 brings the king to safety, but leaves White with a considerably more pleasant position. 16.\texttt{\textsf{g2} \texttt{b8}} 17.\texttt{\textsf{b1} \texttt{c8}} 18.\texttt{\textsf{g5}} (18.\texttt{\textsf{h3}}? is also possible, not being in a hurry to advance the g-pawn.) 18...\texttt{hxg5} 19.\texttt{hxg5 \textsf{h7}} (19...\texttt{d7}? 20.\texttt{\textsf{d2}}) 20.\texttt{g6} \texttt{fxg6} 21.\texttt{fxg6 \textsf{f6}} 22.\texttt{\textsf{h3} \texttt{c5}}

23.\texttt{e6}! White showed exceptional technique to outplay his opponent in the following game: 23...\texttt{\textsf{d8}} 24.\texttt{\textsf{d3} \texttt{c7}} 25.\texttt{\textsf{f7} \texttt{e7}} 26.\texttt{\textsf{hxh1 \textsf{b6}}} 27.\texttt{\textsf{d5} \texttt{xd5}} 28.\texttt{\textsf{xd5} \texttt{f6}} 29.\texttt{\textsf{f7} \texttt{a7}} 30.\texttt{\textsf{c1} \texttt{c8}} 31.\texttt{\textsf{a2} \texttt{a5}} 32.\texttt{\textsf{b4}}± Schubert – Bubir, corr. 2009.

15...\texttt{\textsf{b6}}?!  
This was played in another correspondence game.

16.\texttt{\textsf{h3}}

16.\texttt{\textsf{d2}}?! can be compared with the main line below. The idea is to prevent ...\texttt{b4}, although White does not have to be too worried about it for the moment.

16...\texttt{\textsf{b8}}  
16...\texttt{b4} 17.\texttt{\textsf{axb4} \texttt{xb4}} 18.\texttt{\textsf{d2}}

15...\texttt{\textsf{d7}} 16.\texttt{\textsf{h3}} 17.\texttt{\textsf{g6}} \texttt{f6} 18.\texttt{\textsf{f6} \texttt{f6}} 19.\texttt{\textsf{g6} \texttt{g6}} 20.\texttt{\textsf{g6} \texttt{xg6}} 21.\texttt{\textsf{g6} \texttt{g6}} 22.\texttt{\textsf{h3} \texttt{c5}}

23.\texttt{e6}! White showed exceptional technique to outplay his opponent in the following game: 23...\texttt{\textsf{d8}} 24.\texttt{\textsf{d3} \texttt{c7}} 25.\texttt{\textsf{f7} \texttt{e7}} 26.\texttt{\textsf{hxh1 \textsf{b6}}} 27.\texttt{\textsf{d5} \texttt{xd5}} 28.\texttt{\textsf{xd5} \texttt{f6}} 29.\texttt{\textsf{f7} \texttt{a7}} 30.\texttt{\textsf{c1} \texttt{c8}} 31.\texttt{\textsf{a2} \texttt{a5}} 32.\texttt{\textsf{b4}}± Schubert – Bubir, corr. 2009.

15...\texttt{\textsf{b6}}?!  
This was played in another correspondence game.

16.\texttt{\textsf{h3}}  
16.\texttt{\textsf{d2}}?! can be compared with the main line below. The idea is to prevent ...\texttt{b4}, although White does not have to be too worried about it for the moment.

16...\texttt{\textsf{b8}}  
16...\texttt{b4} 17.\texttt{\textsf{axb4} \texttt{xb4}} 18.\texttt{\textsf{d2}}
17.\textit{\textit{d}}d2!N
Preventing \ldots b4 due to the reply \textit{\textit{c}}c4. Meanwhile the g4-g5 threat is becoming increasingly strong.
17.g5 hxg5 18.hxg5 Exh3 19.\textit{\textit{x}}xh3 \textit{\textit{d}}h7 20.g6 \textit{\textit{g}}5\textit{f} 21.\textit{\textit{b}}b1 \textit{\textit{f}}6 was unclear in Kain – Avotins, corr. 2013.
17.\textit{\textit{d}}d7 18.\textit{\textit{b}}b1 \textit{\textit{c}}c5 19.\textit{\textit{g}}2!
White is in no hurry to play g4-g5. Black has no clear counterplay, since \ldots b4 is still hard to arrange.
19.g5 is slightly premature, and 19...hxg5 20.hxg5 Exh3 21.\textit{\textit{x}}xh3 \textit{\textit{x}}xg5 22.\textit{\textit{h}}h5 \textit{\textit{d}}8 is unclear.
19...\textit{\textit{c}}c6
Intending \ldots a5 and \ldots b4.
19...\textit{\textit{d}}d8 20.\textit{\textit{g}}3\mp

20.\textit{\textit{e}}e2
20.b4?! \textit{\textit{d}}d7 21.\textit{\textit{b}}b3 is also favourable for White, although it seems a bit too ‘computerish’.

16.\textit{\textit{h}}3
Preparing g4-g5, while guarding against potential exchange sacrifices on c3.

16.\textit{\textit{b}}6
Threatening both \ldots b4 and \ldots \textit{\textit{x}}xc3.
16.\textit{\textit{d}}d7 transposes to a grandmaster game a few years ago. 17.\textit{\textit{b}}b1N (17.\textit{\textit{d}}d5?! is too soon. 17...\textit{\textit{x}}xd5 18.exd5 \textit{\textit{b}}b6 19.\textit{\textit{f}}f2 \textit{\textit{a}}a4\mp Balogh – Gabrielian, Plovdiv 2012.) 17...\textit{\textit{b}}b6
16...\(\text{c4}N\) could be considered, but after 17.\(\text{xc4} \text{bxc4} 18.\text{a5} \text{a8} 19.\text{xc4} \text{xe4} 20.\text{xe4} \text{xe4} 21.\text{e3} \text{b7} 22.\text{d5}^\pm\) it's a rather one-sided game.

It is worth adding that going into an opposite-coloured-bishop endgame would only make things worse for Black: 22...\(\text{c5}\) 23.\(\text{g2} \text{xd5} 24.\text{xd5} 0-0 25.\text{b4}^\pm\)

17.\(\text{d2}!\)

As we have already seen, this is the perfect way to prepare for ...b4. Now White just needs a few more preparatory moves before playing g4-g5.

17...\(\text{d7}\)

17...b4 is met by 18.axb4 \(\text{xb4} 19.\text{c4}^\pm\) intending \(\text{d5}\).

18.\(\text{b1} \text{d8}\)

18...\(\text{c5} 19.\text{g5}^\dagger\)

19.\(\text{f2} \text{c5} 20.\text{g5}! \text{hxg5} 21.\text{f6}!\)

With promising play for White.

B212) 12.\(\text{h4}\)

This invites a transposition to the next chapter with 12...h6, which is by far the most common continuation. However, Black can also consider deviating with B2121) 12...\(\text{c5}\), B2122) 12...\(\text{b6}\) or B2123) 12...g6?.

The tactical operation 12...\(\text{xe4}?!\) does not work due to 13.\(\text{xe4} \text{xe4} 14.\text{xe6}! \text{fxe6} 15.\text{xd6}^\dagger \text{e7} 16.\text{g1} \text{h8} 17.\text{xb7} \text{xb7} 18.\text{g2} \text{c7} 19.\text{xa8} \text{xa8} 20.\text{b1}^\dagger\) with an
excellent position for White, Rotella – Aykent, corr. 2010.

B2121) 12...\textit{\textbf{c5}}

This seems scary for Black, but I am not sure if there is anything better.

13.\textit{\textbf{g2}} 0–0

This seems scary for Black, but I am not sure if there is anything better.

13...\textit{\textbf{h5}}?! is a funny idea, but it doesn’t work.

14.\textit{\textbf{xe7}} (14.\textit{\textbf{xb5}}?! axb5 15.\textit{\textbf{dxb5}}\textit{\textbf{d7}}
16.\textit{\textbf{xe7}}\textit{\textbf{xe7}} 17.\textit{\textbf{gxh5}} is a messier variation which also favours White.) 14...\textit{\textbf{xf4}}
15.\textit{\textbf{f2}}\textit{\textbf{xe7}} 16.\textit{\textbf{xf4}}\textit{\textbf{e5}} 17.\textit{\textbf{g3}}\textit{\textbf{exd4}} 18.\textit{\textbf{xd4}}
White has a solid advantage.

14.\textit{\textbf{g5}}?!?

14.\textit{\textbf{e5}} is a good alternative which leads to a safe edge. 14...\textit{\textbf{dxe5}} (14...\textit{\textbf{xb2}}
15.\textit{\textbf{dxe5}}\textit{\textbf{d5}} 17.\textit{\textbf{d5}}\textit{\textbf{exd5}} 18.\textit{\textbf{xe7}}
\textit{\textbf{exe7}} 19.\textit{\textbf{he1}}\textit{\textbf{f4}} 20.\textit{\textbf{dxe4}}\textit{\textbf{d8}}
23.\textit{\textbf{g5}}±) 20.\textit{\textbf{d2}}
\textit{\textbf{b6}} (20...\textit{\textbf{fd7}} 21.\textit{\textbf{d5}} is also unpleasant.)
21.\textit{\textbf{f1}} Black is under pressure.

13...\textit{\textbf{c8}}

13...\textit{\textbf{c8}} 14.\textit{\textbf{e5}}\textit{\textbf{xb2}} 15.\textit{\textbf{dxe5}}\textit{\textbf{d5}} 16.\textit{\textbf{exe5}}
\textit{\textbf{xe5}}
14...\textbf{b6}

13.g5 \textbf{d}f7 14.e\textbf{g}1!

14.f5 has been played by Shirow, but the position after 14...\textit{e}5 15.\textbf{f}3 \textit{c}8 is not so easy. For instance, after 16.e3 \textit{c}4 17.\textbf{xc}4 \textit{xc}4 the position was double-edged in Sapozhnikov–Amanov, Philadelphia 2011.

14...\textit{c}8

After 14...\textit{c}5??N 15.f5 \textit{e}5 16.\textbf{f}3 the knight on \textit{c}5 is completely misplaced, and \textit{f}5-f6 comes next.

14...\textbf{a}4N is also not helping Black: 15.\textbf{xa}4 \textit{xa}4 16.f5 \textit{e}5

17.\textbf{a}4N is also not helping Black: 15.\textit{c}4N 15.e\textit{h}3

Already \textit{xe}6 is quite a strong threat. 15.e\textit{e}1?! is a more solid move, which can be compared with the main line below after 14...\textit{c}8.

15...d5

15...0–0 16.e\textit{xe}6?? (16.g6?? \textit{xh}4 17.gxf7\textit{f} 18.e\textit{xe}6 \textit{fx}e6 19.d\textit{d}5 is a slightly more restrained alternative. 19...\textit{xd}5 20.\textbf{xd}5 \textit{xc}8 21.f5 \textit{xh}8 22.e\textit{xe}4 \textit{xf}4 I prefer White, due to his attacking chances and the excellent bishop on d5.) 16.fx\textit{e}6 17.\textit{d}xe6 \textit{xc}8 18.f5 White has a dangerous initiative, the main threat being f5-f6.

16.ex\textit{d}5 \textit{xa}3

16...\textit{xf}4?? 17.g1 is too dangerous for Black.

17.b\textit{a}3!

The position after 17.d\textit{xe}6 \textit{xb}2?? 18.d1 0–0 is exceptionally crazy.

17...d6?

This insane idea \textit{almost} works.
18.\(\mathcal{b}1\) \(\mathcal{w}xf4\)† 19.\(\mathcal{d}d2\) \(\mathcal{w}xh4\)
19...\(\mathcal{d}xd2\) 20.\(\mathcal{d}xe6\)±
20.dxe6 0–0 21.\(\mathcal{e}xf7\)† \(\mathcal{h}h8\)
21...\(\mathcal{f}xf7\) 22.\(\mathcal{h}e6\)±
22.\(\mathcal{d}xd7\) \(\mathcal{d}xd2\) 23.\(\mathcal{g}g4\)±

15.\(\mathcal{b}b1\)!N
White has no need to hurry.

15.\(\mathcal{e}e1\) d5 16.e5 g6 was unclear in Pucher – Carrillo, Hayange 2013.

15...\(\mathcal{c}c4\) 16.\(\mathcal{e}e1\)!
With the knight on c3 securely defended, Black has no good way to develop his queenside play. White, on the other hand, it just getting started on the kingside.

16...\(\mathcal{d}db6\)
16...0–0 17.f5! e5 18.\(\mathcal{b}b3\)±

17.\(\mathcal{g}g3\)
Black has a highly unpleasant position.

**B2123) 12...\(\mathcal{g}6\)!?**

This rare but surprisingly interesting move is intended to prepare ...e5. We will see a similar idea in variation C2 of the next chapter on page 155.

13.\(\mathcal{f}f5\)!
The direct approach seems quite appealing.

13.\(\mathcal{h}h3\) led to success for White after 13...\(\mathcal{c}c8\)
14.g3 \(\mathcal{h}h5\) 15.\(\mathcal{h}hf1\)± in Stanciu – Brunner, Aix-les-Bains 2011, but the improvement 13...h6!N would completely block White’s play.

13.\(\mathcal{b}b1\) is not a bad alternative. 13...e5
14.\(\mathcal{f}xe5\) \(\mathcal{c}xe5\) 15.\(\mathcal{g}g1\)! 0–0 16.g5 \(\mathcal{d}fd7\)
(16...\(\mathcal{h}h5\) 17.\(\mathcal{e}e1\) \(\mathcal{ff}e8\) 18.\(\mathcal{d}d5\) \(\mathcal{d}xd5\) 19.\(\mathcal{e}xd5\) \(\mathcal{f}f8\) 20.\(\mathcal{w}f2\)±) 17.\(\mathcal{e}e1\) \(\mathcal{ff}e8\) 18.\(\mathcal{h}h4\) \(\mathcal{f}f8\) 19.\(\mathcal{h}h5\)
\(\mathcal{g}g7\) 20.\(\mathcal{h}xg6\) h\(\mathcal{g}g6\) 21.\(\mathcal{w}h2\) White had the better chances in Najer – Idani, Baku 2011. However, I like the main move even more.

13...e5 14.\(\mathcal{b}b3\)
14.\(\mathcal{xf}6\)?! \(\mathcal{xf}6\) 15.\(\mathcal{b}b3\) \(\mathcal{g}xf5\) 16.\(\mathcal{g}xf5\) 0–0–0∞ is less convincing.

14...\(\mathcal{c}c8\)
14...\(\mathcal{g}xf5\)?!N 15.\(\mathcal{g}xf5\) seems rather dodgy; the king will be permanently stuck on e8, and once White prevents against any immediate tricks, he can utilize the g-file. 15...\(\mathcal{g}g8\) 16.\(\mathcal{g}g2\)
\(\mathcal{c}c8\) 17.\(\mathcal{g}g3\) \(\mathcal{c}c4\) 18.\(\mathcal{d}d3\)±

15.\(\mathcal{xf}6\)!!N
15.\(\mathcal{g}g2\) is a sensible continuation, but it is hard to decide whether or not White should
allow 15...d5!? He was successful after 16.exd5 (16...xd5 17...xd5 18...xh4 is equal) 16...xh4 17...d2! 0-0 18...d4 g5 19.f6 w6 20...d3 in Krauss – Gonzalez Alcon, corr. 2013. Black may be able to improve somewhere, but it seems to me that he is under some pressure here too, so take your pick between this and the novelty given in the main line.

15...xf6
15...xf6 16.h4!? gxf5
After 16...g5 17...b1 h6 18...xg5...xg5 19...g2± Black's structure has been permanently damaged, and it is hard to imagine what his king will do.
17.g5!?
After 17.gxf5...g8 Black seems safe for now.

17...e7
17...g7 18...h3 f4 19...xd6 wxd6 20...d1...b6 21...xd7+...e7 22...xc8...xc8 23...b1± Black's king is exposed and the g7-bishop is unimpressive.
18...h3!? f4
18...fxe4 19...hfl†
18...xe4 19...xe4 fxe4 20...xe4±
19...b1!
Avoiding the irritating...b6-e3. White does not need to rush with his attack, as he has the basis for a lasting initiative on the light squares.

19...w6
19...h6 runs into 20...f5! hxf5 21...xg5 when the opening of the kingside looks dangerous for Black.
19...d8 20...f5...f8 21...d5...xd5 22...d5±
20...d5...xd5 21...xd5 21...d5!? also looks interesting.
21...c7 22...f5±
Black has little chance of counterplay, while White can continue to shuffle his pieces around and exert pressure.

16...g2
I doubt that Black can just sit around and allow g4-g5 and...f5-f6, so he needs to make a decision.

16...xf5
None of 16...g5 17.h4, 16...0-0 17.h4 or 16...c4 17.d3 are much help to Black.

16...h6 is not an ideal solution, as Black’s structure will be rather loose after an exchange on g6. 17.b1!! Keeping many options open. (17.fxg6 fxg6 18.h4 0-0 19.b1 also looks more pleasant for White.) 17...g5 (17...0-0 18.h4++; 17...gxf5 18.exf5±) 18.h4 g8 19.hxg5 hxg5 20.c1!!±

17.exf5!
17.gxf5 is less dangerous after White has given away the dark-squared bishop.

17...exg2 18.xg2 g8
18...c6 19.xc6+ xc6 20.g5 g8 21.f6±

19.g5!
19.h3 c6∞

19...d5
19...h6 20.h4 does not help Black. This is especially true if he continues with 20...d5?, because of 21.xd5 xd5 22.xd5, when the inclusion of ...h6 and h2-h4 prevents Black from taking on g5 with a piece, and after 22...hxg5 23.b1 Black is in deep trouble.

20.he1!
20.b1 d4 21.xd4 exd4 22.xd4 looks dangerous, but Black can equalize with precise defence: 22.c6! (22.h8 23.h3 g5 24.h6 g7 25.g1++; 22...h6 23.h4 c6 24.h2 hxg5 25.hxg5 xg5 26.e1+) 23.xc6! xc6 24.gxf6 xf6 25.e1+ f8 26.d2 g5=

20...h6
The attempt to counterattack with 20...xa3 comes unstuck after 21.xd5 xd5 22.xd5 xb2+ 23.b1! c3 24.ed1+.

20...d4 is well met by 21.xd4! exd4 22.xd4 h6 23.h4 f8 24.d2 hxg5 25.hxg5 e8 26.g6!± intending h6.

21.g6 d4
21.fxg6 22.xd5 xd5 23.xd5+–

22.e4 xe4 23.xe4
Black is under considerable pressure, as his king is unsafe and White dominates the light squares.

**B22)**

11...h6

It makes sense for Black to insert this move, regardless of whether he intends ...b8 or ...b7 next.

12.h4
Black's last move was well timed. One important point is that 12...\texttt{x}f6 can be met by: 12...\texttt{x}f6! 13\texttt{\texttt{d}}xb5 axb5 14\texttt{\texttt{d}}xb5 \texttt{\texttt{c}}5 (14...\texttt{\texttt{b}}2\texttt{\texttt{t}}!? 15\texttt{\texttt{d}}xb2 \texttt{\texttt{b}}8 is possible, but there is no special reason for Black to go for this.) 15\texttt{\texttt{d}}xd6\texttt{\texttt{t}} \texttt{\texttt{f}}8 I spent a while analysing this wild position, but did not find anything special for White. The main line of my analysis runs: 16\texttt{e}5 \texttt{\texttt{b}}xa3 ! 17\texttt{\texttt{d}}1 \texttt{\texttt{a}}4 18\texttt{ex}f6 \texttt{\texttt{w}}a5 19\texttt{c}4 \texttt{\texttt{a}}1\texttt{t} 20\texttt{\texttt{f}}c2 \texttt{w}a4\texttt{t} 21\texttt{d}d2 \texttt{\texttt{b}}4\texttt{t} 22\texttt{\texttt{e}}3! \texttt{\texttt{b}}3\texttt{t} 23\texttt{d}d3 \texttt{\texttt{b}}6\texttt{t} 24\texttt{\texttt{d}}d4 \texttt{\texttt{g}}f6 The position remains a crazy mess, but Black does not seem to have any complaints.

12...\texttt{\texttt{b}}8

If Black intends a set-up with the rook on b8, this is the best move order, as the inclusion of ...h6 and \texttt{\texttt{h}}4 reduces White's options. (Compare the earlier note with 11...\texttt{\texttt{b}}8 on page 136.)

12...\texttt{\texttt{b}}7 is the most common move, reaching the main-line position as covered in the next chapter.

13\texttt{\texttt{g}}2

The only additional option for White via the present move order is 13\texttt{\texttt{e}}1, but this does not seem to present much of a problem after: 13...g5!? 14\texttt{f}5 (14\texttt{fx}g5 \texttt{hx}g5 15\texttt{h}4 \texttt{\texttt{e}}5 seems fine for Black.) 14...\texttt{\texttt{e}}5\texttt{\texttt{c}}7

13...\texttt{\texttt{b}}4 14\texttt{\texttt{ax}}b4 \texttt{\texttt{xb}}4 15\texttt{\texttt{e}}1!

15\texttt{e}5 dxe5 16\texttt{\texttt{c}}6 \texttt{\texttt{xf}}4! 17\texttt{\texttt{g}}3 \texttt{\texttt{g}}4 doesn't really work for White.

I once tested this variation with Black. My opponent continued with the unimpressive 15\texttt{\texttt{f}}2?! reaching a position that Black has even been ready to play a move down in some games. 15...g5! 16\texttt{fx}g5 \texttt{\texttt{g}}4! 17\texttt{\texttt{g}}4 \texttt{\texttt{g}}5\texttt{f} 18\texttt{\texttt{b}}1 \texttt{\texttt{xc}}3 19\texttt{\texttt{b}}3 \texttt{\texttt{c}}7\texttt{f} I went on to win in Yu Yangyi - Negi, Ho Chi Minh City 2012.

15\texttt{\texttt{h}}1? is a fascinating alternative, intending either a sacrifice with \texttt{\texttt{d}}5 or \texttt{\texttt{f}}5, or a breakthrough with e4-e5. I analysed this in some detail, but did not find anything conclusive for White.

15...\texttt{\texttt{c}}6

15...\texttt{c}4 16\texttt{h}4! intending g4-g5 leaves Black with an unpleasant position, regardless of the queen exchange.

16\texttt{\texttt{f}}2!

After 16\texttt{\texttt{b}}3 a5?? 17\texttt{\texttt{f}}2 \texttt{\texttt{c}}5 Black is doing quite well.

16...\texttt{\texttt{c}}7

Losing a move like this is certainly not Black's dream scenario, but his position has held up in several correspondence games (as
After 16...\(\text{\textit{b2}}\) 17.\(\text{\textit{db5}}\)! Black loses an exchange for insufficient compensation.

16...\(\text{\textit{c5}}\) 17.e5?! led to a fine win for White in a correspondence game: 17...dxe5 (17...\(\text{\textit{xb2}}\) 18.\(\text{\textit{f5}}\)! \(\text{\textit{d7}}\) 19.\(\text{\textit{xe7}}\) \(\text{\textit{xe7}}\) 20.exd6\(\text{\textit{xa2}}\) 18.\(\text{\textit{c6}}\) \(\text{\textit{xf4}}\) 19.\(\text{\textit{hxf1}}\) \(\text{\textit{c7}}\) 20.\(\text{\textit{xc5!}}\) (20.\(\text{\textit{xe5}}\) 0–0\(\text{\textit{a2}}\) 20...\(\text{\textit{xf1}}\) 21.\(\text{\textit{xe7}}\) \(\text{\textit{xd1}}\) 22.\(\text{\textit{xd1}}\) \(\text{\textit{b7}}\) 23.\(\text{\textit{d6}}\) \(\text{\textit{b6}}\)

24.\(\text{\textit{a3!}}\) \(\text{\textit{c7}}\) 25.\(\text{\textit{h1}}\)! Black resigned in Cipka – Siigur, corr. 2012. Most humans would play on a bit longer, but it is obvious that Black will not be able to evacuate his king from the centre without suffering heavy losses.

17.h4 h5 18.g5 \(\text{\textit{g4}}\)

19.g6?!N

I found some correspondence games where White played more slowly, but it is hard to resist the allure of the direct attacking move. Black’s position seems to be on the edge, but things are still not easy.

19...0–0

Also after 19...\(\text{\textit{f6}}\) 20.gxf7\(\text{\textit{xf7}}\) 21.\(\text{\textit{h3}}\) White keeps the upper hand, although the position remains complicated.

20.\(\text{\textit{e1}}\)!

Avoiding 20.gxf7\(\text{\textit{xf7}}\) 21.\(\text{\textit{xe6}}\) \(\text{\textit{a5}}\) when Black is suddenly doing well.

20...\(\text{\textit{c5}}\)

20...\(\text{\textit{b8}}\) 21.gxf7\(\text{\textit{xf7}}\) 22.\(\text{\textit{xe6}}\)
Conclusion

7...\text{\texttt{Q}}bd7 is a flexible move, as evidenced by the bewildering number of move orders that may all end up at the same position (as featured in the next chapter). Even though 10...\text{\texttt{Q}}b7 has been the most popular so far, I do not believe it is the most accurate, as after 11.g4 \text{\texttt{Q}}e7 (or 10...\text{\texttt{Q}}e7 11.g4 \text{\texttt{Q}}b7) White has the tempting option of 12.f5\textsuperscript{??}. Whether or not you prefer this over 12.\text{\texttt{Q}}h4 – which invites a transposition to the next chapter with 12...h6, but also leaves Black with the independent possibilities of 12...\text{\texttt{Q}}c5, 12...\text{\texttt{Q}}b6 and 12...g6\textsuperscript{??} – is up to you, but if I were playing Black, I would not give my opponent the choice.

For this reason, 10...\text{\texttt{Q}}e7 11.g4 h6 makes a good deal of sense. After 12.\text{\texttt{Q}}h4, we ended the chapter by considering the interesting possibility of 11...\text{\texttt{Q}}b8. This is quite challenging, although Black’s main line involves shuffling the queen to b6 and back to c7, a tacit draw offer which might in itself dissuade a lot of players from choosing this line. Obviously we have some ways to keep the game going, and I am satisfied with White’s chances in the main line I analysed.

Having concluded our examination of the different move orders and sidelines, we may turn the page and consider the main line after 12...\text{\texttt{Q}}b7.
Chapter 9

Gelfand Variation

The Main Line

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d4 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 bd7
8.2e2 c7 9.0-0-0 b5 10.a3 e7 11.g4 h6 12.h4 b7

13.b1!

A) 13...g5!?N
B) 13...b8
C) 13...c8 14.g1
   C1) 14...b8
   C2) 14...g6
   C3) 14...g5 15.fxg5 hxg5 16.xg5 b6! 17.e1
       C31) 17...e5?!N
       C32) 17...xc3 18.xf6 xf6 19.xc3 xe4 20.e1
           C321) 20...h4
           C322) 20...f6

B) after 14...a8

C1) after 14...b8

C322) after 24...h4

15.c1!N

15.g3!N

25.g6!N
1.e4 c5 2.\(\textit{d}f3\) d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\textit{c}xd4\) \(\textit{d}f6\)
5.\(\textit{c}c3\) a6 6.\(\textit{g}g5\) e6 7.f4 \(\textit{b}bd7\) 8.\(\textit{w}e2\) \(\textit{w}c7\)
9.0–0–0 b5 10.a3 \(\textit{e}e7\) 11.g4 \(\textit{h}6\) 12.\(\textit{h}4\) \(\textit{b}b7\)

This position can be considered the main line after 8.\(\textit{w}e2\). It has occurred more frequently via the 10...\(\textit{b}7\) move order, but my investigations in the previous chapter indicated that the bolded move order is the most logical for Black, as it limits White’s options while keeping White guessing for a few moves.

13.\(\textit{b}b1!\)

Other moves are less effective, for instance:

13.\(\textit{g}g1\) g5! 14.fxg5 \(\textit{d}7\) is quite okay for Black.

13.\(\textit{g}2\) \(\textit{c}4\)! (13...\(\textit{c}8\) 14.\(\textit{h}e1\) \(\textit{c}4\) 15.e5!+) 14.\(\textit{w}x\textit{c}4\) Other moves have been tried, but without great success. 14...\(\textit{x}c4\) 15.h3 This endgame has been contested several times, but White is only fighting for a minimal advantage.

I think White’s best approach is to delay \(\textit{g}2\) in order to render the ...\(\textit{w}c4\) idea less appealing. Instead he will improve his position and eventually prepare attacking ideas such as g4-g5. Black is not really in a position to castle on either side, so his main idea will be to prepare a timely ...g5. We will analyse the untested A) 13...g5?!N, followed by the rare but quite logical B) 13...\(\textit{f}b8\), and finally the most popular C) 13...\(\textit{e}c8\).

**A) 13...g5?!N**

Even though this move has never been played, it is an obvious candidate for Black to consider, so it is important for White to know how to react.

14.fxg5 \(\textit{d}7\)

Even though this move has never been played, it is an obvious candidate for Black to consider, so it is important for White to know how to react.

15.\(\textit{g}3\)

15.\(\textit{f}3\) hxg5 16.\(\textit{f}2\) \(\textit{f}8\) 17.\(\textit{d}4\) \(\textit{g}8\) is unclear.

15.g6!? does not work: 15...\(\textit{h}4\) 16.\(\textit{x}b5\) (16.gxf7†? \(\textit{x}f7\) does not give White anything.+) 16...\(\textit{x}b5\) 17.\(\textit{x}b5\) \(\textit{b}6\) 18.\(\textit{d}6\) \(\textit{e}7\) 19.\(\textit{g}x\textit{h}7\) \(\textit{e}5\)†

15...hxg5 16.h4!

We need to create instant problems, otherwise Black’s excellent structure will promise him a fine game.

16.\(\textit{x}b5\)! axb5 17.\(\textit{x}b5\) \(\textit{c}6\) 18.\(\textit{x}d6\) \(\textit{e}8\) 19.\(\textit{x}e7\) (19.\(\textit{d}2\) \(\textit{f}6\)†) 19...\(\textit{x}e7\) 20.\(\textit{d}6\) \(\textit{e}d8\) 21.\(\textit{f}2\) \(\textit{f}6\) is rather messy.
16...gxh4

16...\(\text{Qe5} 17.\text{hxg5} 0-0-0 18.\text{g6! Qxg6} \)
19.\(\text{Qxb5 axb5} 20.\text{Qxb5 Bb6} 21.\text{Qf2 Ba5} \)
22.\(\text{Qd4 Qe5} 23.\text{b4}+\)

Objectively, the best move is perhaps 16...\(\text{Qh8}\), but after 17.\(\text{hx5}\) the establishment of a protected passed pawn makes Black’s position considerably less appealing.

17.\(\text{Qxh4! Qxh4}\)

17...\(\text{b4} 18.\text{Qd5! exd5} (18...\text{Qxd5} 19.\text{exd5 Qxh4} 20.\text{Qxh4 e5} 21.\text{axb4}+) 19.\text{exd5 Qe5} \)
20.\(\text{Qh5} 0-0-0 21.\text{axb4}+\)

18.\(\text{Qdxb5!} \)

18...\(\text{axb5} 19.\text{Qxb5}\)

Black has a number of options, but White’s play is similar in all cases. Despite being a rook down, his initiative is tremendous.

19...\(\text{Qd8}\)

19...\(\text{Ba5} 20.\text{Qxd6}+ Qf8 21.\text{Qxh4 Qc6} \)
22.\(\text{Qe1} \) transposes.

19...\(\text{Bb6} 20.\text{Qxd6}+ Qf8 (20...\text{Qe7} 21.\text{Qxh4}+ Qh6 22.\text{Qf2 Qc7} 23.e5 Qd5 24.\text{Qd4}+) \)
21.\(\text{Qxh4 Qg8} (21...\text{Qe5} 22.\text{Qd2} 22.\text{Qd2 Qxg4} 23.\text{Qf2 Qc7} 24.\text{Qb4}+) \)

19...\(\text{Qxc5} 20.\text{Qxd6}+ Qf8 21.\text{Qxh4 Qc6} 22.\text{Qf2 Qg5} (22...\text{Qa5} 23.\text{Qe1 Qg5} 24.\text{Qd2 Qg7} \)
25.\(\text{Qc4}+) 23.\text{Qe3 Qe7} 24.\text{Qc4 Qa4} 25.\text{b3 Qh6} 26.\text{Qg5}+\)

19...\(\text{Qxg3?!} \) is an interesting try: 20.\(\text{Qxc7}+ Qe7 21.\text{Qxa8 Qxa8} \) At first, Black seems to have decent compensation, but White will continue to cause him trouble:

20.\(\text{Qxd6}+ Qf8 21.\text{Qxb7 Qb6}\)

21...\(\text{Qg5} 22.\text{Qxh4 Qxh4} 23.\text{Qxd7} \) White will soon regain his coordination, and the queenside passers will give him great chances in the endgame.
22.\text{\textit{\textbf{xd7 f6}}}
22...\text{\textit{\textbf{xe3}}} 23.\text{\textit{\textbf{f3 g5}}} 24.\text{\textit{\textbf{f6 h7}}}
25.\text{\textit{\textbf{e7+}} (25.\text{\textit{\textbf{xc5?}}}} also looks good.)
25...\text{\textit{\textbf{g8}}} 26.\text{\textit{\textbf{xe5+}} g7} 27.\text{\textit{\textbf{f6+}}}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

23.\textit{\textbf{c7! c6}} 24.\textit{\textbf{d6+ g8}} 25.\textit{\textbf{c7 xe4}}
26.\textit{\textbf{xe5 xe2}} 27.\textit{\textbf{xe2}}
The queenside pawns ensure that Black will continue to suffer in the endgame.

B) 13...\text{\textit{\textbf{b8}}}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

14.\textit{\textbf{g1 a8}} 15.\textit{\textbf{e1!N}}
15.\textit{\textbf{g2}} has been played, but the thematic 15...\textit{\textbf{c4}} would have been okay for Black.
(15...\textit{\textbf{b4?}} 16.\text{\textit{\textbf{xb4}} x\text{\textit{\textbf{b4}}}} 17.\text{\textit{\textbf{xa6 b8}}}
18.\textit{\textbf{db5+}} was great for White in Sutovsky – Efimenko, Kallithea 2008.)

15...\text{\textit{\textbf{c5}}}
15...\text{\textit{\textbf{b4}}} 16.\text{\textit{\textbf{xb4 xe4}} 17.\textit{\textbf{xa6+}}
15...\text{\textit{\textbf{g5}}} 16.\textit{\textbf{h4+}} \text{\textit{\textbf{xf4}}} 17.\text{\textit{\textbf{g5}}} looks too dangerous for Black.

16.\textit{\textbf{g2}}
White should not be too hasty to launch his attack, for instance:
16.e5 dxe5 17.\text{\textit{\textbf{xe5}} dxe5} 18.b4 0–0!∞ creates a mess.
16.g5 hxg5 17.\text{\textit{\textbf{xe5}} dxe5} 18.\textit{\textbf{xe5 xe4}}
19.\textit{\textbf{xe5 xe4}} (18...\textit{\textbf{xe4}} 19.\text{\textit{\textbf{g6+}}}) 19.b4 White wins a piece, but once again the game becomes too complicated after 19...\textit{\textbf{d5?!}}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

16...\textit{\textbf{fd7}}
16...\textit{\textbf{b4?!}} 17.\text{\textit{\textbf{xb4}} x\text{\textit{\textbf{b4}}}} 18.e5
16...0–0 17.e5 dxe5 18.\textit{\textbf{xe5 h7}} 19.\textit{\textbf{xa8 xa8}}
20.h4 gives White a promising initiative.

17.\textit{\textbf{h4 b6}} 18.\textit{\textbf{b3?!}}
Preventing Black's counterplay. White's kingside initiative will continue uninterrupted, while Black does not seem to have a clear plan.
C) 13...Ec8 14.Ec1

Rizzitano covers 8.Ec2 rather briefly in his chapter on the Gelfand Variation, and in a note covering this position he just mentions that 14.Ec2 Ec4 is equal. The text move is stronger, and fulfills several purposes. White conveniently keeps the bishop on f1 to deter Ec4, while also avoiding the threat of Ee4 and supporting a future g4-g5. Black has made all the obvious developing moves, and now needs to show his plan. We will analyse the rare options of C1) 14...Eh8 and C2) 14...Eg6 before examining the most popular and combative move, C3) 14...Eg5.

14...Eh6?! is an inferior version of variation C1, because the queen is more exposed and does not restrain e4-e5. A good answer is 15.Ed2!? (15.e5 is also strong) 15...Ec3 16.Dxe6 with complications that favour White.

14.Edb6 15.Edxf6! forces 15...Exf6 (15...Edxf6 allows 16.Edb5) and now both 16.f5 and 16.Eg3?! are promising for White.

C1) 14...Eh8

15.Eg3?!N

This is the most logical move for a human player to understand, so I have given it mainline status.

Both 15.Ed1 Dxe4! and 15.Ed1 Ec5?! are interesting to analyse, but I found no clear route to an advantage in either case.

15.Ed2 led to an extremely impressive win for White in an email game, but this style of play would be much harder to emulate without the aid of a computer. You can use the game as a starting point for your own investigation if you wish: 15...Ec3 16.bxc3 Edb6 17.Ed3 Ec4 (17...Ec7 is better, but again 18.e5 seems good for White.) 18.e5! dx5 19.Edf6 gxf6

15...Eg5

Trying to exploit White's last move.

15...g6 prepares ...e5, rather like variation C2 below. I like 16.Edh3?! here. Even though the rook looks weird, it serves a useful purpose in discouraging Black from castling. Now f4-f5 is possible at any point, so Black had better not delay his central action: 16...e5 17.fxe5 Dxe5 (17...dx5 18.Edb3± Black's position is stuck.)
18.\texttt{g}2\texttt{d}5 White intends \texttt{d}5, while Black does not have an obvious way to continue.

16.\texttt{fxg}5 \texttt{h}7 17.\texttt{h}3!
Discouraging Black from recapturing with the h-pawn.

17.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{hxg}5 18.\texttt{g}3 \texttt{e}5 is unclear.

17...\texttt{xg}5
17...\texttt{hxg}5 is positionally desirable, but after 18.\texttt{e}1\texttt{d}5 the pin along the h-file is troublesome. Black will struggle to untangle his pieces, for instance: 18...\texttt{e}5 (18...0–0 may be a better try, but after 19.\texttt{f}3 Black's king can hardly feel safe.) 19.\texttt{f}3 \texttt{c}7 20.\texttt{xe}5 \texttt{dxe}5 21.\texttt{f}3\texttt{d}3 and \texttt{e}2.

18.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{de}5 19.\texttt{g}3
Intending h2-h4.

19...\texttt{c}4
19...\texttt{g}8 20.\texttt{h}4 \texttt{xc}3 (20...\texttt{h}7 is refuted by 21.\texttt{xe}6! \texttt{fxe}6 22.\texttt{xe}5 \texttt{dxe}5 23.\texttt{g}5+– the queen gets to h5.) 21.bxc3 \texttt{h}7 22.\texttt{g}5! \texttt{hxg}5 23.\texttt{xe}5 \texttt{dxe}5 24.\texttt{xe}6!±

20.\texttt{ed}3 \texttt{a}8
20...\texttt{e}5 is met by 21.\texttt{xe}5 \texttt{dxe}5 22.\texttt{b}3\texttt{d}5 when White's ideas include \texttt{d}7 and h2-h4.

21.\texttt{d}5!
21.h4 b4! is unclear.

21...\texttt{xe}4
Maybe Black should prefer 21...exd5 22.exd5 \texttt{f}6, although after 23.\texttt{h}4 \texttt{f}7 24.\texttt{e}6\texttt{c}∞, intending \texttt{f}5, he continues to suffer, while White has a dominating initiative.

22.\texttt{xe}7 \texttt{xe}7
22...\texttt{xe}3 23.\texttt{hxg}3 \texttt{xe}7 24.\texttt{f}5±

23.\texttt{h}4\texttt{f}8

24.\texttt{xe}6!±
24.\texttt{g}2 \texttt{c}5∞
24...fxe6 25.\textit{g}2 \textit{c}5 26.\textit{f}1+ \textit{g}8 27.\textit{b}4! \textit{x}g2 28.\textit{b}xc5 \textit{e}5 29.\textit{c}xd6 \textit{xf}1 30.\textit{xe}5+-

C2) 14...\textit{g}6

A completely different concept from the more popular 14...\textit{g}5. Black takes away the f5-square from the knight and prepares to play ...\textit{e}5. It looks a little slow, but White hasn’t been plotting any quick combinations either.

15.\textit{f}5!
This is the only move to cause Black any problems.

15.\textit{g}2 e5 16.\textit{fx}e5 \textit{d}xe5 17.\textit{g}3 \textit{c}4 is equal.

15.\textit{g}5 \textit{hx}g5 16.\textit{x}g5 \textit{b}6 is comfortable for Black.

15...\textit{e}5 16.\textit{b}3
Exchanging the bishop serves no purpose:
16.\textit{xf}6 \textit{xf}6 17.\textit{b}3 \textit{g}5 and Black is fine. After the text move we arrive at a typical blocked position.

16...\textit{g}5??
Blockading the kingside is logical, as Black’s more combative attempts do not work.

After 16...\textit{b}6N 17.\textit{fx}g6 \textit{fx}g6 18.\textit{e}1 White has a pleasant position, and Black has to worry about the fluid state of the kingside. 18...\textit{c}4 19.h4 \textit{b}6 20.\textit{g}3=

16...\textit{xe}4 17.\textit{xe}4 \textit{xe}4 18.\textit{xe}4 \textit{gxf}5
19.\textit{xf}5 \textit{hx}h4 20.\textit{g}2\textit{e} occurred in Sherwood – Konstantinov, Internet 2012. White’s position looks extremely pleasant due to the light squares.

Finally, after 16...\textit{gxf}5 17.\textit{ex}e5 Black has tried two moves:

a) 17...d5 18.\textit{g}2 e4 19.\textit{g}3 \textit{e}5 Now in Langer – Zakharov, Internet 2011, White could have secured an edge with:

b) 17...\textit{e}4!? 18.\textit{xe}4 \textit{xe}4 19.\textit{xe}4 \textit{hx}h4 occurred in Depasse – Kolar, Internet 2013. Here White should have played:
20.\( \text{g2!N} \) Overprotecting c2 and preparing to centralize the rook. 20...\( \text{b6} \) 21.\( \text{c2} \) \( \text{c4} \) 22.\( \text{c1!} \) The knight starts making its way towards d5. Black is weak on the light squares and his king lacks a safe home.

17.\( \text{e1!} \)

17.\( \text{f2} \) seems less accurate due to 17...\( \text{h5} \) 18.\( \text{h3} \) \( \text{b6} \) 19.\( \text{a5} \) \( \text{a8} \), intending 20.\( \text{g2} \) \( \text{a4!} \). By putting the bishop on e1, White overprotects the knight on c3 while preparing to support a knight on a5 in the future.

17...\( \text{h5} \) 18.\( \text{h3} \) \( \text{c5} \)

18...\( \text{b6} \) is met by 19.\( \text{a5!} \) \( \text{a8} \) 20.\( \text{g2} \). White's last move prevents a ...d5 break, and now he can just continue playing patiently, and slowly improving his position. Here is an illustrative line: 20...\( \text{c4} \) 21.\( \text{xc4} \) \( \text{xc4} \) 22.\( \text{d3} \) a5 23.b3 \( \text{c5} \) 24.\( \text{h1} \) \( \text{hxg4} \) 25.\( \text{hxg4} \) \( \text{exh1} \) 26.\( \text{exh1} \) \( \text{b8} \) (26...\( \text{xc6} \) 27.\( \text{h3} \) 27.\( \text{f2} \) \( \text{c7} \) (Or 27...\( \text{xa3} \) 28.\( \text{a2}! \) and the queen is stuck.) 28.\( \text{h3} \) \( \text{c6} \) 29.\( \text{e3} \)

19.\( \text{xc5} \)

I also considered 19.\( \text{g2}!? \), but after 19...\( \text{xb3} \) 20.\( \text{xb3} \) \( \text{hxg4} \) 21.\( \text{hxg4} \) b4!? Black obtains some counterplay: 22.\( \text{axb4} \) \( \text{b6} \) 23.\( \text{d2} \) \( \text{xb4} \) 24.\( \text{h5} \) \( \text{xb3} \) 25.\( \text{d3} \) \( \text{b6} \) 26.\( \text{xc3} \) \( \text{b4} \)

19...\( \text{xc5} \)
24.b3 \(\text{c}6\) 25.\(\text{d}5\) \(\text{xd}5\) 26.\(\text{exd}5\) \(\text{a}6\)
27.\(\text{h}1\)

The alternative is 27.\(\text{f}1\) b4 28.a4, intending \(\text{e}4\), \(\text{d}1\) and so on. We have a similar type of closed position where both sides can continue manoeuvring for a long time. White’s chances appear a little better, although Black’s position remains hard to crack.

27...\(\text{exh}1\)† 28.\(\text{a}xh1\)

White has chances to generate pressure along the h-file, while Black does not seem to have any concrete plan for now.

C3) 14...g5

15.fxg5 hxg5

15...h7?! has turned out badly for Black in a few games: 16.g6 \(\text{hxh}4\) 17.gxf7† \(\text{xf}7\) (17...\(\text{e}7\) 18.g5 \(\text{hxg}5\) 19.\(\text{g}4\) \(\text{c}8\) 20.\(\text{exh}4\) \(\text{xf}7\) 21.\(\text{g}4\)± R. Bauer – Gerola, corr. 2012.)

16.\(\text{hxg}5\) \(\text{b}6!\)

Black has serious prospects for counterplay, with both ...b4 and ...\(\text{c}3\) on the cards.

17.\(\text{e}1\)

17.\(\text{g}3\) is another logical try. If you wish to explore this in more detail, I suggest using the following game as a starting point: 17...\(\text{c}4\) 18.\(\text{d}3\) \(\text{e}5\) (18...\(\text{c}5\) 19.\(\text{xe}6\)?) 19.\(\text{f}5!\) \(\text{xd}3\) 20.\(\text{exe}7\) \(\text{xb}2!\) 21.\(\text{xb}2\) \(\text{b}4\) 22.\(\text{a}1\) \(\text{d}4!\) 23.\(\text{xf}6\) \(\text{bxc}3\) 24.\(\text{b}1\) \(\text{c}5\) 25.\(\text{a}2\) \(\text{d}2\) 26.\(\text{xb}7\) \(\text{xe}2\) 27.\(\text{b}8\)† \(\text{d}7\) 28.\(\text{b}7\)† \(\text{e}8\) 29.\(\text{b}8\)† \(\text{d}7\)½–½ Walsh – Weber, corr. 2009. This line featured some insane complications,
and there are a number of ways to deviate, but ultimately I found no advantage for White.

At this point we will analyse the tempting but inaccurate C31) 17...\textit{\textbf{\textup{\textup{D}e5?}}}/N, followed by the more critical C32) 17...\textit{\textbf{\textup{Exc3}}}.

A playable but less exciting try is 17...b4?/N, after which 18.axb4 \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxb4}}} 19.h3 \textit{\textbf{\textup{Exc3}}}? 20.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xf6}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Exf6}}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxc3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxc3}}} 22.bxc3 \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xe4}} 23.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}b2}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{f6}}} reaches a slightly better endgame for White. Black of course has decent compensation, but it is not enough to equalize completely.

C31) 17...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}e5?}}/N

This computer suggestion does not end well for Black.

\textbf{18.h4! \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}fxg4}}}

18...\textit{\textbf{\textup{Exc3}}} 19.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxc3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xe4}} 20.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxe3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xg5}} 21.hxg5 \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wg8}}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}g2}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xg5}} 23.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wg3}}} is a typical situation where Black has less than full compensation for the exchange.

18...b4 is possible, but Black will just remain a pawn down, while White consolidates: 19.axb4 \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxb4}}} 20.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Gg3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Gb8}}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Be2}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Da8}}} 22.b3

Finally, 18...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}exg4}} runs into a spectacular refutation: 19.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xb5}}! axb5 (19...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}e5}} 20.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Cc3}}})

\textbf{20.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xb5}}! \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}f8}} (20...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}d8}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textup{E}xe5}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxe5}}}++)

21.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xg4}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xg4}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wg1}}/+ A brilliant win.

19.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Be2}}}
19.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxe7}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Dxe7}}} 20.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Cc2}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}f6}} is murky.

19...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}f6}}

19...\textit{\textbf{\textup{Exc3}}?} does not work: 20.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xe7}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxe7}}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xd6}}! \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxd6}}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}f5}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wb6}}} 23.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}d6}}! \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}f8}} 24.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xb7}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxb7}}} 25.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}b4}}+/+

19...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xg5}} 20.hxg5 leaves the knight short of squares, and after 20...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}e3}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xb5}}! axb5 22.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxe3}}} White is clearly better.

20.\textbf{\textit{\textup{Ff1}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{D}ed7}}

20...\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xe4}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Dxe4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textup{Dxe4}}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textup{D}xb5}}! axb5 23.\textit{\textbf{\textup{Wxe4}}+}
21. \( \texttt{\textsc{Qd5}} \)
Out of nowhere!

21... \texttt{\textsc{exd5} 22.\textsc{exd5+}}
Intending \( \texttt{\textsc{g4}} \), with a powerful attack.

\textbf{C32) 17...\texttt{\textsc{Bxc3}}}

Following the wisdom of the crowds...

18. \texttt{\textsc{Qxf6} \textsc{Qxf6} 19.\textsc{Bxc3} \textsc{Qxe4} 20.\textsc{We1}}

Amazingly enough, almost all games have ended in draws from here. Does this position look like 0.00 to you? This kind of situation highlights the danger of using correspondence games to build a repertoire: there are some positions which are objectively defensible, yet so much harder to play over the board. I would definitely argue that White is better here, notwithstanding the fact that it is difficult to overcome the precise defence of a silicon brain.

From this position \textbf{C321) 20...\textsc{h4}} is a sensible move, but \textbf{C322) 20...\textsc{f6}} has been the overwhelming favourite among the correspondence players.

20...\texttt{\textsc{Exh2N}} is not much of a concern, and White has a pleasant choice:

a) 21.\texttt{\textsc{Bg2} \textsc{h4}} (21...\texttt{\textsc{h6} 22.\textsc{Be2} \textsc{h4} 23.\texttt{\textsc{Bb4} \textsc{e7} 24.\texttt{\textsc{g2} \textsc{g3} 25.\texttt{\textsc{f2+}}}}) 22.\texttt{\textsc{Bb4} \texttt{\textsc{Bxg2}} (22...\texttt{\textsc{c3?}}) 23.\texttt{\textsc{Bxc3} \textsc{Bxg2} 24.\texttt{\textsc{Bxg2} \textsc{Bh3+}} wins material.) 23.\texttt{\textsc{Bxg2} \textsc{Bc5} 24.\texttt{\textsc{Bxc5} dxc5 25.\textsc{Bf3}} With only one pawn for the exchange, Black faces a tough endgame.

b) 21.\texttt{g5?} should lead to a better version of variation \textbf{C322: 21...\texttt{\textsc{Bxg5} 22.\textsc{Bb3 g6} 23.\texttt{Bh6} 24.\textsc{Bg2}} 23.\texttt{\textsc{Bxh1} \textsc{Bb4} 24.\textsc{Bb2} \texttt{\textsc{Bxg2} 25.\textsc{Bxg2} d5 26.\textsc{Bf3} \textsc{Bxf3} 27.\textsc{Bxf3}}

Now White is ready to infiltrate with his rook through the kingside. Black will remain under pressure, for instance: 27...\texttt{\textsc{a5} (27...\texttt{\textsc{f5} 28.\textsc{Bh1} \texttt{\textsc{d7} 29.\textsc{Bg3+}}) 28.\textsc{Bh1 b4 29.\textsc{Bh8+ \texttt{\textsc{d7} 30.axb4 axb4}}

\begin{figure}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ch09_diagram.png}
\end{figure}
The Gelfand Variation

Another ugly move, but Black's pieces also lack harmony.

22...\(\text{e7}!\)

Intending ...a5.

22...\(\text{c5N}\) is less challenging, as it leads to a worse endgame for Black, though a lot of fight remains.

C321) 20...\(\text{h4}\)

This has been tried successfully in a few correspondence games, and it seems quite logical since White is forced to play a couple of odd-looking moves.

21.\(\text{b4}\) \(\text{f2}\)

21...\(\text{e7}!\) is too slow: 22.\(\text{g2}\) \(\text{f2}\) (22...\(\text{c8}\) 23.\(\text{xe4}\) \(\text{xe4}\) 24.\(\text{gf1}\)\(\text{f1}\) 23.\(\text{xe4}\) \(\text{xe4}\) 24.\(\text{gf1}\) a5 25.\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{hxh2}\) 25...b4 26.\(\text{xb4}\) axb4 27.\(\text{c6}\) \(\text{xc6}\) 28.\(\text{xc6}\) \(\text{xc6}\) 29.\(\text{fxf2}\) 26.\(\text{xf2}\) \(\text{xf2}\) 27.\(\text{e1}\) \(\text{e4}\) 28.\(\text{e3}\) \(\text{xc2}\) 29.\(\text{xc2}\) \(\text{c5}\) 30.\(\text{c3}\)\(\text{c3}\)

22.\(\text{g2}\)

Restraining Black's a-pawn and intending g4-g5.

After 23.g5 a5 24.\(\text{xb5}\) \(\text{xd4}\) 25.\(\text{xd4}\) \(\text{c3}\)\(\text{f1}\) 26.bxc3 \(\text{xb5}\) 27.\(\text{b5}\) \(\text{g2}\) 28.\(\text{a4}\) White seems a bit better, but Black should have enough counterplay to equalize.

23...\(\text{e5}\)!

This has been played in all games so far. The point is that Black has no real way of stopping g5-g6, and you will see in the main line that the advancing e-pawn is an important source of counterplay in the ensuing endgame.

24.g5!

The most straightforward attempt, and since it's only playing for two results, I see no reason to avoid it.

24.c4 has been played a few times, but after
the inevitable exchanges Black seems to be able to make a draw: 24...bxc4 25.Qa5 Wxb4 26.axb4 a8 27.Qxc4 Qd4 28.Qxe2 Qh4 29.Qe3 Qxe3 30.Qxe3 Qf2 31.Qc1 Qxg4 32.Qc7 Qd8 33.Qc3 Qe4t 34.Qa2 Qe3 Black was able to hold in Kubicki – Zuev, corr. 2011.

24.Qd3?!N is an interesting move which may lead to insane complications. It is hard to make much sense of the position; for instance, after 24...f6, the computer suggests going back with 25.Qd1. However, I don’t see any need to enter this mess when the main line provides a safe way to try for an edge.

24...Qh4!
Again, the only move to have been played.

25.g6!N
25.h3 Qf4! 26.g4 Qxg4 27.hxg4 Qxg5 was okay for Black in Dunlop – Petersen, corr. 2011.

25...fxg6
25...Qf6
This may lead to a similar type of endgame with a slight edge to White.
26.Qxd6! Qxb4 27.Qxb6 Qxg2 28.Qxg2 Qxb6 29.axb4 fxg6 30.Qb7 g5
After 30...Qg4 31.Qxa6 Qhx2 32.Qxb5± Black’s pawns are much harder to push.

31.h3?!
The simplest.
31.Qxa6 g4 32.Qc5?! would be more combative, but the text move is enough for a slight plus.
31...Qh5 32.Qxa6 Qf4 33.Qc8!
33...Qxb5 Qxh3 34.Qe2 may also be better for White, but it gives Black some counterplay.
33...e4 34.Qc1 e3 35.Qd1 Qd6 36.Qg4±

26.Qxg6 Qf7

27.Qg2!?
27.Qg3 is a tempting option, but 27...Qxg3 28.hxg3 Qh1! leads to some forcing lines where I found no more than a draw for White.

Also after 27.Qd3 Qxg6 28.Qxe4 Qxe4 29.Qxd6 Qg5 30.Qxb6 Qxb4 31.Qxb7 Qh4 Black has enough counterplay for equality.
27.gxd6!? is possible, but I think White gets more winning chances in our main line. After 27...hxg6 28.hxg6 hxg6 29.f6 gxf6 30.axb4 White is definitely trying, but the two bishops may well be enough to neutralize the extra pawn.

27...f6 28.xd6
28.xd6 hxg6 29.xg6 hxg6 30.xg6 gives Black additional options.

27...xb4 28.xb4
28.xb4 30.axb4 31.xb4 e4 32.c3 is obviously better for White.

29...g2 31.b7+ g6
Usually I would stop analysing after reaching an endgame, but it is worth seeing how White should keep the e-pawn under control.

32.h3!
32.xc6 bxc6! solves Black's problems. Now both 33.xg2 g4 and 33.a5 a4! 34.db3 c4 just repeat the position, while after 33.d7 exd7 34.exd7 ec6 Black is certainly not worse due to the activity of his pieces.

32...h4 33.c8 e4 34.e7 e3
At first glance, Black seems to be close to a draw, but once we are able to stop the e-pawn, Black's queenside weaknesses will not be so easy to defend.
37.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}4 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xh2} 38.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e5! \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}c7} 39.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}4\#}}

Once again the pawn has been successfully halted, resulting in a one-sided endgame. The bishop will go to e2, after which White can start poking around on the queenside or targeting the e-pawn.

\textbf{C322) 20...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}}6}}

This is the most popular and logical move. Black is provoking c2-c3, which can often be considered a weakness in the upcoming lines.

\textbf{21.c3 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xh2}}

21...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}5\textcolor{red}{\textbf{a}}}? 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}5! \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xg5} 23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}2 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{x}}xg2}}

24.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xg2} just gives White an additional h-pawn compared to the main lines.

At first, White doesn't seem to have a way to untangle, until you notice the following idea.

22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}5?! \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xg5}}

After 22...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}5?} 23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}6 Black's position would collapse.}

22...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xd4\textcolor{red}{\textbf{N}}}

Exchanging doesn't seem logical, but White should still be quite precise here.

23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}xd4 b4?!}

Ruining White's structure.

24.axb4
24.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xb4 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}d2\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}}} 25.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e1 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{w}}xb4} 26.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{a}}xb4 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}}3}}
27.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e1 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}d5\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}}}}
24...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}5 25.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}g2\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}}}?
25.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}g2\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}c6} would turn the tables.
25.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e3 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}6} 26.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}}5?! \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{a}}xb5} 27.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{a}}a5 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e7}}
28.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{a}}a7\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{b}}b7} 29.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xb7\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}xb7} 30.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{c}}c1}
leads to an interesting endgame where White is pressing, but I'm not sure if it's enough.
25...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}}h1}

26.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}6! \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{f}}xg6} 27.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e2!}
A nice switch! Now White gets good play along the c-file.
27...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e7 28.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e3 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{w}}xb4} 29.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{d}}d1\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}}}}
White maintains some initiative.

23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}g3 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}}h6!}}

23...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{h}}h8}
This retreat has been played more frequently, but it is less precise.
24.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{g}}g2 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textbf{e}}e4\textcolor{red}{\textbf{t}}}}


24...\( \text{dxg2} \) 25.\( \text{wxg2} \) d5 26.\( \text{gf1} \) e7 27.\( \text{df3} \) leads to an unpleasant defence for Black.

24...\( \text{ce4} \) 25.\( \text{we1} \) highlights the drawback of the rook on h8 instead of h6. 25...d5 (After 25...\( \text{eg8} \) 26.\( \text{ha1} \) the knight cannot move, since the rook is unprotected on g8.) 26.\( \text{xe4} \) dxe4 27.\( \text{g3} \) White has a clear initiative.

25.\( \text{ha1} \) d5 26.\( \text{df1} \) e5

Or 26...\( \text{e7} \) 27.\( \text{xe4} \) \( \text{exe4} \) 28.\( \text{g7} \) \( \text{f8} \) 29.\( \text{h1} \) and Black is suffering.

Certainly a natural move, although we have some other options here as well.

24.\( \text{Dg1} \) is quite logical, but I won't analyse it in detail since there are just too many options for both sides. White keeps the ideas of \( \text{g2} \) and \( \text{e3} \) intact, and the computer indicates that Black must play the bizarre 24...\( \text{d7} \) in order to transfer the king to a safer place. A brief line is 25.\( \text{g2} \) (25.\( \text{e3} \) \( \text{c5} \)) 25...d5 26.\( \text{df1} \) \( \text{d6} \) 27.\( \text{e1} \) \( \text{e5} \) and Black seems okay.

24.\( \text{Dd3} \) is another way of playing, intending to regroup with moves like \( \text{ed1} \) and \( \text{c2} \). I think practically it looks harder for Black to continue, even if objectively his position is okay. A few brief possibilities: 24...\( \text{Dd7} \) (24...\( \text{e4} \)? 25.\( \text{e3} \) \( \text{h4} \) 26.\( \text{df1} \) ±; 24...\( \text{e7} \) 25.\( \text{xc2} \) \( \text{h3} \) 26.\( \text{g4} \) \( \text{c5} \) 27.\( \text{ed1} \) \( \text{d5} \) 28.\( \text{xb3} \) \( \text{xb3} \) 29.\( \text{xb3} \) \( \text{c4} \) 30.\( \text{d4} \) ±) 25.\( \text{c2} \) \( \text{c7} \)°

24.\( \text{we3} \) is the most popular move, which also deserves attention. 24...\( \text{c5} \) 25.\( \text{g2} \) \( \text{xc2} \) 26.\( \text{xc2} \) \( \text{d5} \)! If Black can exchange queens, he will be completely comfortable.

24...\( \text{Dg2} \)

27.\( \text{f2} \) (I found nothing special for White after 27.\( \text{g4} \) \( \text{h1} \) or 27.\( \text{g1} \) \( \text{xd4} \).) 27...\( \text{e4} \) There are some other moves, but I just want to show White's idea. 28.\( \text{g1} \)! Avoiding the queen exchange. 28...\( \text{d7} \) 29.\( \text{a1} \) \( \text{c5} \) 30.\( \text{e1} \) White maintains some pressure.
Chapter 9 – The Main Line

24...\( \text{De4} \)

24...\( \text{De4} \)†, 25.\( \text{Dxe4} \) \( \text{Dxe4} \) 26.\( \text{Wg8} \)† \( \text{Dxe7} \)

27.\( \text{Aa8} \)+

24...d5?! is risky; there is no need for Black to allow the queen to go to b8.

24...\( \text{Dxg2} \) also makes White’s life easier than in the main line. 25.\( \text{Wxg2} \) d5 26.\( \text{Wd2} \) \( \text{Wg6} \)

27.\( \text{Df3} \) a5 (27...e5 28.\( \text{Df2} \)±) 28.\( \text{Df1} \) \( \text{Dxe7} \)

29.\( \text{Dd3} \) (29.b4?!?) 29...b4 30.\( \text{cx} \)b4 axb4 31.\( \text{a4} \)±

25.\( \text{Df1} \)

25...\( \text{Dg8} \)† \( \text{f6} \) does not help White.

25.\( \text{Wf3} \) \( \text{Dh4} \) 26.\( \text{Df1} \) e5 27.\( \text{Df5} \) \( \text{Dxe3} \)

28.\( \text{Dxe3} \) should be okay for Black, although his coordination is not great. Black has drawn a couple of correspondence games from this position, but White might have some chances to press in an over-the-board game.

25...\( \text{Dg6} \)!

Another machine-generated idea which keeps Black in the game.

25...\( \text{Dh4} \)? 26.\( \text{Df1} \)± leaves Black poorly coordinated.

26.\( \text{Df2} \)

26.\( \text{Df1} \) unfortunately runs into 26...\( \text{Dxc3} ! \)

27.\( \text{Dxc3} \) \( \text{Dxd4} \) 28.\( \text{Dxd4} \) \( \text{Dxg2} \) when White has no more than a draw.

29.\( \text{Dg8} \)†!N

29.\( \text{Df2} \) e5! 30.\( \text{Dg8} \)† \( \text{Dd7} ! \) is the reason why White needs to check on g8 a move earlier.

31.\( \text{Df5} \)† \( \text{Dxe7} \) 32.\( \text{Df1} \) \( \text{Dd5} \) Black managed to hold in Kupsys – Oates, corr. 2009.

29...\( \text{Df7} \) 30.\( \text{Df2} \)

Now Black’s position is stuck, and White has multiple ways to develop his initiative. Without the computer’s resourcefulness, Black’s position would be collapsing almost instantly, but even with it, he is barely staying alive.

30...\( \text{Df7} \)

30...\( \text{Dxd4} \) 31.\( \text{cx} \)d4±

30...\( \text{Dxd6} \) 31.\( \text{Dg1} \) \( \text{Dxd4} \) (31...\( \text{Df5} \) 32.\( \text{Dc2} \)†; 31...\( \text{Df5} \) 32.\( \text{Df1} \) f6 33.\( \text{Dh1} \)±) 32.\( \text{Dxd4} \)±
31. \( \text{Qc2} \)
Regrouping the knight.
31. \( \text{Bg1} \) is another logical move, intending to attack along the f-file. Black barely survives with 31... \( \text{Ke5} \) 32. \( \text{Kf1} \) \( f6 \). Even here, after 33. \( \text{Bd1} \) intending \( \text{Cc2-e3} \), Black's position looks unenviable.
31... \( \text{a5} \)
31... \( \text{Be5} \) 32. \( \text{Bh4} \) \( \text{Kf6} \) 33. \( \text{Bh6+} \)
32. \( \text{Bg1} \) \( \text{Ke5} \) 33. \( \text{Ce3} \)
33. \( \text{Bh4\#} \) \( \text{Cd6} \) 34. \( \text{Dd1\#} \) \( \text{Cd5} \) 35. \( \text{Bxe4} \) \( f5 \)
36. \( \text{Bxe2\#} \)

\[ \text{Diagram 1} \]

33... \( \text{b4} \)
33... \( \text{f5} \) 34. \( \text{Bh4\#} \) \( \text{Cd7} \) 35. \( \text{Bh7\#} \) \( \text{Cc6} \)
36. \( \text{Bg6} \) \( \text{C8} \) 37. \( \text{Dxf5\#} \)
34.axb4 \( \text{axb4} \) 35. \( \text{Cxb4\#} \)
White remains a slight favourite.

27. \( \text{Bd3} \) and 27. \( \text{Bf2} \) are sensible alternatives. The text move has the advantage of keeping the queen in contact with the g2-bishop, while also threatening to take on e6.
27... \( \text{d5} \)
27... \( \text{Kxg2} \) 28. \( \text{Kxg2} \) \( d5 \) 29. \( \text{Kh3\pm} \) leaves Black under pressure.
27... \( \text{Ke5} \) tries to maintain the tension, but White has many ways to keep a pull. I won't go into too much depth here, but will just show a few sample lines to make my point:
28. \( \text{De1} \) \( \text{Ke7} \) 29. \( \text{Dd3} \) \( \text{Xd4} \) 30. \( \text{Cxd4} \) \( \text{Df5} \)
(30... \( \text{Ch5} \) 31. \( \text{Dxb7} \) \( \text{Exg1} \) 32. \( \text{Dxg1} \) \( \text{Cxb7} \)
33. \( \text{Cc1\#} \) 31. \( \text{Exf5} \) \( \text{Exg2} \) 32. \( \text{Ee2} \) \( \text{C6} \) 33. \( \text{Ca1} \)
34. \( \text{Dd2} \) \( \text{Bb7} \) 35. \( \text{Cc1\#} \)
28. \( \text{Df3} \)
A battle of slow manoeuvring lies ahead, but White can keep poking around with his queen, or going after the g3-knight, while Black just has to wait and defend.
28... \( \text{Dd6} \) 29. \( \text{De1} \) \( \text{Bg7} \) 30. \( \text{Ff2} \) \( \text{Ke5} \) 31. \( \text{Dc3} \)
31. \( \text{Wh2\#} \) is another idea. I think it's safe to say that White has the better chances.

\[ \text{Conclusion} \]
We have now analysed the most complex paths of the 8. \( \text{Ne2} \) variation against 7... \( \text{Cbd7} \). Like many of the more difficult Najdorf lines, it is mostly the domain of correspondence players. The main line continues 13. \( \text{Cb1} \) \( \text{C8} \) 14. \( \text{Eg1} \) \( g5 \) 15. \( \text{fxg5} \) \( \text{hxg5} \) 16. \( \text{Exg5} \) \( \text{Ebd6} \), although there were some deviations along the way. Now after my recommended 17. \( \text{Ee1} \), Black can sacrifice an exchange on c3 and pick up at least one extra pawn; sometimes two. Despite being materially okay, he still suffers from a slightly exposed king, and I think I have demonstrated how White can maintain enduring pressure.
Classical Main Line

The Gothenburg Variation

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6
7.f4 e7 8.f3 h6 9.h4 g5 10.xg5

10...fd7

A) 11.h5!? 168
B) 11.xe6! fxe6 12.h5† f8 13.b5! h7! 14.e5?!N 170
   B1) 14.axb5 171
   B2) 14.xe5 15.0–0† g8 16.g6!
      B21) 16.xg6 174
      B22) 16.g7 175
      B23) 16.xh4! 176

B) note ro 13...h7! B) after 13...h7! B2 1) after 16...lx g6

17.c4!N 177
1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.dxd4 f6
5.e3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 e7 8.f3 h6
9.h4 g5

You see before you the Gothenburg Variation, named after the famous Gothenburg tournament of 1955, where the Soviet trio of Geller, Spassky and Keres scored spectacular wins with White against, respectively, Panno, Pilnik and even Miguel Najdorf himself.

Since then, this variation has regularly been proclaimed dead, only to be revived by some new defensive twist. Still, the Gothenburg has never been the most popular choice for Black. That is possibly due to the first impression you get from the main lines: with his whole kingside stripped apart, Black appears to be on the verge of getting mated. It is amazing that Black's audacious scheme has survived such sustained analytical assaults; I even felt sufficiently inspired to try it myself in 2011, and went on to draw without too many problems against Balogh.

10.fxg5 fd7

Here I will present two options for White. A) 11.h5!? has recently become popular, and can be considered an unpretentious alternative to the swashbuckling sacrifices, but I was unable to make it work in quite the way I would have wished. This led me to focus on B) 11.xe6! as my main weapon.

A) 11.h5?!

Normally allowing the knight to establish itself on e5 would give Black an excellent position, but here White has some concrete ways to challenge for this key square.

11...e5 12.g3

This is the latest move to cause Black some worries.

12.f2 xg5 13.h4 e7 14.0-0-0 a5 15.g4 bd7! 16.g5 gd6 17.b3 c7 18.gxh6 f6 19.e2 has occurred in a few correspondence/email games. So far Black has always recaptured the h6-pawn, but I think he can ignore it in favour of 19...b5?N, with good compensation.

12...xg5 13.f3? bd7

Black should maintain a knight on e5, even if it means losing the bishop pair.

After 13.xf3† 14.xf3 Black's position is hard to hold together due to the open kingside and pressure on d6. A good example is: 14...c6 15.h4 f6 16.0-0-0 e5 17.f2 g8 18.xe5 xe5 19.e2 b5 20.d2! (20.d4 is also possible.) In De Filippis – Yordanova, corr. 2011, White obtained a pleasant advantage after doubling on the d-file.
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14.\textit{xg}5 \textit{hxg}5 15.\textit{d}1!
White has to go after the d6-pawn immediately.

15...h5!
A key resource for the defence.

16.\textit{xd}6 h4 17.\textit{f}2
A more human try is 17.xe5 xe5 when White remains a pawn up, but Black controls the dark squares. The likely plan of ...d7-c6 and ...e8d8 may lead to an endgame where it will be hard for White to capitalize on his extra pawn.

17...h3

18.\textit{g}1?!

18.gxh3 \textit{f}3† 19.d1 de5 looks too dangerous for White. The text move has a ‘computerish’, correspondence feel to it. White has indeed been victorious in two correspondence games so far, but to me the position seems unclear.

18...b5!
Improving over 18...g8 19.d4 b5 20.g3 b7 21.e2 hgxg2 22.xg2 c6 23.f2 b4 24.a4± as seen in H. Kolev – Yordanov, corr. 2011.

19.a4
19.g3?! e3† 20.e2 c4 21.d4 e5 22.xe3 xe3 leads to an endgame where White can try to make something of his bishop pair, but Black should probably be okay.

19...b4!N
This seems more logical than 19...bxa4 as played in Czegledi – Cardoso, Internet 2012.

20.e2 a5
Alternatives such as 20.f6 and 20.b3?! could also be explored.

21.d4 f4 22.b5 a6 23.d2 xd2† 24.xd2 c7
The position remains double-edged, despite White’s extra pawn. There is a lot of room for
exploration in the 11.\textit{h}5 line, but overall I find it less convincing than recent results might suggest. That is why the bulk of the chapter has been devoted to the following piece sacrifice.

B) 11.\textit{xe}6! \textit{fxe}6 12.\textit{h}5\textit{f}8

13.\textit{b}5!

The bishop is essential on b5 to challenge Black's control over the e5-square. If he could establish a knight on e5 then all would be well, but now ...\textit{e}5 can be met by \textit{g}3, and the b5-bishop is ready to eliminate the other knight if necessary. Compare the line 13.\textit{c}4 \textit{e}5 14.\textit{g}3 \textit{bc}6! when Black defends successfully.

The text move was played in all three of the Gothenburg 1955 games (credit goes to Geller for being the first to find it over the board), and was an amazing idea for its time. The constant mating threats make the bishop immune from capture for the time being, but Black has a lot of resources too.

13...\textit{h}7!

This was used by Fischer to draw with Gligoric in 1958, and remains Black's best, and indeed only, hope to make this variation work. The two alternatives can be dealt with quickly, and are mainly of historical interest:

13...\textit{e}5 14.\textit{g}3! \textit{h}7

14...\textit{g}5? 15.0-0+ \textit{e}7 16.\textit{xe}6 \textit{b}6+ 17.\textit{h}1 \textit{dxe}5 18.\textit{f}7+ \textit{d}6 19.\textit{ad}1+ Black was soon mated in the stem game Geller – Panno, Gothenburg 1955.

15.\textit{xe}5! \textit{dxe}5 16.\textit{ad}1 \textit{d}7

16...\textit{d}7 17.\textit{g}6 \textit{f}7 18.\textit{xf}6+ \textit{g}8 19.\textit{g}6 \textit{g}7 20.\textit{c}4 \textit{b}6 21.\textit{d}5 was winning for White in Ninov – Spasov, Bulgaria 1989.

The text move leaves White with a few promising continuations, but the most convincing looks to be:

17.\textit{c}4!N \textit{g}7

Neither 17...\textit{b}6 18.\textit{ad}3! nor 17...\textit{g}5 18.\textit{xe}6 offers much hope for Black either.

18.\textit{g}6 \textit{h}8 19.\textit{xe}6

White should win.

13...\textit{h}7

This leads to a long sequence of forced moves (on Black's side at least), culminating in a winning position for White.

14.0-0 \textit{e}5

14...\textit{g}8 15.\textit{g}6 \textit{h}4 (Or 15...\textit{f}6 16.\textit{xf}6+ \textit{xf}6 17.\textit{e}5 \textit{xe}5 Stein – Zheliandinov, USSR 1956, 18.\textit{d}3N followed by \textit{f}7+ winning.) 16.\textit{xd}7 \textit{xd}7 17.\textit{h}4 \textit{d}8 18.\textit{f}7+ \textit{g}6 19.\textit{e}7+- Vasilchuk – Suetin, USSR 1956.

15.\textit{g}3 \textit{g}6 16.\textit{g}xh6+ \textit{h}6
17.\textit{\textsc{f}7}!!

A key detail.
17...\textit{xf7} 18.\textit{xe6} axb5 19.\textit{f1} \textit{e8}
20.\textit{g6} \textit{f7} 21.\textit{c6} \textit{d5} 22.\textit{d5} \textit{xa2}
23.\textit{h}4 \textit{h}8? 24.\textit{xe7} \textit{xe7} 25.\textit{g5} also led
to a quick win for White in Keres – Najdorf,
Gothenburg 1955. The text move is slightly
more accurate, although it should not matter
too much.

23...\textit{xb2}
23...\textit{h}8? 24.\textit{xe7} \textit{xe7} 25.\textit{g5} \textit{a1}+
26.\textit{h}2 \textit{d}8 27.\textit{xb5}+ \textit{c}7 28.\textit{c5}+
was another rout in Spassky – Pilnik,
Gothenburg 1955.
23...\textit{exd6} 24.\textit{xd6}+ \textit{e}8 25.\textit{g6} \textit{d}7
26.\textit{exd5} \textit{a}6 27.\textit{e}4 leads to the same final
result.
24.\textit{h}2 \textit{b}1 25.\textit{f}6+-

Followed by \textit{xe7} and \textit{h}4; the latter move
shows why moving the pawn to \textit{h}3 was more
accurate than \textit{h}4 on move 23, although White
should eventually win either way.

Let’s return to 13...\textit{h}7! This position has
been reached in well over a hundred games
and analysed for more than half a century, so
I was especially happy to discover a promising
novelty.

14.e5!?N

The natural 14.0–0+ has been overwhelmingly
the most popular choice. I could fill several
pages with analysis of this move, but it will
suffice to say that I am not altogether convinced
by White’s chances.

My new move has the simple idea of opening
further lines of attack, while trying to delay the
check along the f-file until the most inconvenient
moment for Black. There are two logical replies:
B1) 14...\textit{xb5} and B2) 14...\textit{xe5}.

B1) 14...\textit{xb5} 15.exd6!

We should continue to delay castling for the
moment.

15.0–0+ \textit{g}8 16.g6 looks tempting, but Black
has a decent reply in 16...\textit{h}4! (16...\textit{g}7
17.\textit{f}7! gives White a powerful initiative)
17.gxh4+ \textit{h}8. The position is rather messy, but
Black’s king is safe for now.
15...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{\textdagger}}}}
15...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}\texttt{xg5} 16.g6 wins trivially.

16.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}\texttt{xg5} 17.0–0\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}
Perfect timing.

17...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}\texttt{f6}
Black has little choice, as 17...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g7 18.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e8!
\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g6 19.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xc8 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h8 20.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xb7 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}a6 21.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f3 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}b6
22.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}c7 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xc2 23.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g3\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h7 24.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f1 gives him
little hope of survival.

18.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf6\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf6 19.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f1 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf1\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}
19.d7 should be met by 20.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e4!
(20.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf6\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf6 21.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g6 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f7 22.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xh6\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g8!
is good enough for equality) 20...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf1\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}} 21.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf1, transposing to the note to Black's
next move in the main line below.

20.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf1
In material terms Black is more than okay,
with two rooks and a piece for the queen,
but his king is awful and his development
nonexistent. White's queen and knight will
work together in perfect harmony, enabling
him to gobble up a lot of pawns and ultimately
reach a promising endgame.

20...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f7\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}
20...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}d7 21.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e4
21.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e2? is an interesting alternative, aiming
to keep the rook stuck on h7.

21...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f7\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}
21...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g4 is refuted by 22.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g5!.
22.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g1 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g7 23.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g4\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h7 24.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xe6 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g7
25.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g4\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h7

26.h4!
White has a few ways to exert pressure,
and there is certainly no need to go for the
forcing lines as suggested by the computer.
Nevertheless, from a theoretical point of
view the main line seems most clear-cut.
26.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h4 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g7 27.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g3\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h7 28.h3? \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xa2
29.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}d3 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g8 30.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h2 is a decent alternative.
White maintains a more pleasant position,
and Black will have to struggle for a draw.

26...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xa2!
26...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e5? 27.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h5! \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f5 28.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e8 wins.
26...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}b4 27.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h5! \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g7 (27...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g7 28.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g5\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g8 29.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xh6+) 28.g4! \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f6 (28...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xa2
29.g5 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xg5 30.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xg5++) 29.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf6 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xf6
30.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e8! \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f7 31.h5 The queen is absolutely
dominating the position. 31...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}b6 32.d7!
\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}xd7 33.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g6\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h8 34.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h6\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}} The kingside
pawns will be unstoppable.
27.h5 \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}g7 28.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}f5\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}h8 29.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textdagger}}}e6?!
Black's minor pieces are both stuck, while his
rooks remain uncoordinated. Obviously Black
still has chances for a draw, and we should
remember that fortress defences are often
underestimated by computers. Nevertheless, it
seems that Black will have to suffer for a while
longer, while White gets to choose between
pleasant alternatives.
21.\textbf{\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{e2!}}

21.c1 also looks interesting, but after 21...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g7} 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{e}}}}\textit{e5+} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{7!} Black continues to hang by the edge. (22...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g8} 23.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{e}}}}\textit{e4!} is more dangerous for him.) 23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{e}}}}\textit{e4†} (23.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{e}}}}\textit{e4 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{c}}}}\textit{c6} 24.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{5 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g7∞} ) 23...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g7} 24.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{4†} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g8!} (24...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{7?} 25.h4∞) 25.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{d3} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g7} 26.h4 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{7!} 27.h5 \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{f}}}}\textit{5∞}

21...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g7} 22.g4!

The simple plan of g4-g5 makes White’s position easy to handle. Black is still surviving, but he is clearly a long way from equality. In the upcoming variations the computer suggests various alternatives for White, but I will just present a few illustrative lines to show how White can continue to exert pressure.

22...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{d7}

After 22...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{c}}}}\textit{c6} 23.g5 Black has two possibilities:

a) 23...hxg5 24.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}\textit{g5†} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{f}}}}\textit{8} Now we get to see a nice example of some effective zig-zag queen manoeuvring.

b) 23...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{d4†} 24.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{d3} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{f}}}}\textit{5} 25.gxh6† \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}\textit{h6} 26.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{5†} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{7} 27.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{e}}}}\textit{4}

27...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{d}}}}\textit{d7} (27...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{g8} 28.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}\textit{b5±}) 28.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{f}}}}\textit{6†} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}\textit{f6} 29.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}\textit{f6±} The game goes on, but White’s pawns give him the better chances.

23.g5 hxg5 24.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}\textit{g5†} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{7}

24...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{8} 25.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{e}}}}\textit{4} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{a}}}}\textit{4} (25...\textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{f}}}}\textit{5} 26.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{6†} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{8} 27.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}\textit{e6†}) 26.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{h}}}}\textit{5†} \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{7} 27.im \textit{\textcolor{red}{\textit{\textbf{g}}}}\textit{5±
25.\texttt{Wh5}!\texttt{t!}

White still requires some precision to maintain the pressure. 25.\texttt{Qe4} \texttt{Qf5}!\texttt{t} is less convincing.

25...\texttt{Qg7} 26.\texttt{Qg4}t \texttt{Qf8} 27.\texttt{Qe4} \texttt{Qf6}

27...\texttt{Qa4} can be met by 28.\texttt{Wh6}, threatening \texttt{Qg5}. 28...\texttt{Qg7} (28...\texttt{Qxa2} 29.\texttt{Wh6}t \texttt{Qg8} 30.\texttt{Qxe6}+-) 29.\texttt{Qxe6} Black's position remains unpleasant.

28.\texttt{Wh4}! \texttt{Qg8}

If Black has to play such a move, he clearly isn't having a good time.

29.\texttt{Qd8}t \texttt{Qg7} 30.\texttt{Qc5}

30.\texttt{h4}?! also deserves attention.

30...\texttt{b6} 31.\texttt{Qxe6}t

31.\texttt{Wxb6} e5!∞ allows Black's bishop to become active.

31...\texttt{Qxe6} 32.\texttt{Qxa8} \texttt{Qh6} 33.\texttt{Qc6} \texttt{Qf5} 
34.\texttt{Qd2} \texttt{Qd7} 35.\texttt{Qc1} \texttt{Qxd6} 36.\texttt{Qxb5}t

White can continue to press in the endgame without any risk.

28.\texttt{Qh4}! \texttt{Qg8}

15.0–0\texttt{t} \texttt{Qg8}

15...\texttt{Qg7}?! leaves Black awfully placed on the kingside, and he is swiftly punished: 16.\texttt{Qg3}! \texttt{axb5} 17.\texttt{Qxe5}t \texttt{dxe5} 18.\texttt{Qf7}t \texttt{Qh8} 19.\texttt{Qxh7}t \texttt{Qxh7} 20.\texttt{Qxh6}t \texttt{Qg8} 21.\texttt{Qf1}+-

16.\texttt{g6}!

I also considered:

16.\texttt{Qd3}?! 

It is tempting to remove the annoyingly strong e5-knight, but it only leads to some nice tactical lines where Black manages to hold on with precise defence.

16...\texttt{Qxd3} 17.\texttt{g6} \texttt{Qg7}

17...\texttt{Qxh4}?! is impossible now that we have diverted the knight, and 18.\texttt{gxh7}t wins easily.

18.\texttt{Qxe7} \texttt{Qxe7}

18...\texttt{Qb6}t?! 19.\texttt{Qh1} \texttt{Qf2}t 20.\texttt{Qxf2} \texttt{Qxf2} 21.\texttt{Qe4} \texttt{Qf4} 22.\texttt{Qf6}t \texttt{Qh8} 23.\texttt{Qg4} \texttt{Qxe7} 24.\texttt{Qxh6} \texttt{Qc6} is another wild line, where it seems that White will eventually have to settle for just a draw. (However, 24...\texttt{Qg7}? would be a fatal error due to 25.\texttt{Qg4}! \texttt{Qg8} 26.\texttt{Qh4} when White wins the queen and the game.)
19. e4 d7 20. cxd3 d5
20... e5 21. wxh6 e6 22. f7! xg6
23. xg7+ xg7 24. e6+ h8 25. xd6 is
dangerous for Black.
21. xf7 xf7 22. gxf7+ xf7 23. xh6 g7!
24. xxe4+ f6 25. f1 g7 26. e8+ g8 27. xe4 Black is in trouble,
despite the two extra pieces.
24. xxe6+ f7 25. g4+ g7=
White has nothing more than a draw.

Returning to the main line, we have reached a critical position where Black has three plausible moves: B21) 16... xg6, B22) 16... g7 and
B23) 16... xh4! Only the last option offers serious resistance.

B21) 16... xg6

17. xe7!
Black has avoided being mated, but his endgame prospects are dismal.

**B22) 16...\(\text{g7}\)**

This move looks obvious but it is too slow, and White easily builds a strong attack.

17.\(\text{d3}\)

Safeguarding the bishop and overprotecting the g6-pawn. White will soon develop a lethal attack around this tower of terror.

18...\(\text{g7}\)

18...\(\text{xd3}\) 19.\(\text{cxd3}\) \(\text{g7}\) 20.\(\text{f4}\)\(+\)

If Black gives up the h6-pawn without a fight then he will soon be crushed, for instance:

18...\(\text{g7}\) 19.\(\text{xb6}\) \(\text{cxb6}\) (19...\(\text{g4}\) 20.\(\text{f4}\) \(\text{c5}\) 21.\(\text{xc6}\) \(\text{dxc6}\) 22.\(\text{h4}\)\(+\)) 20.\(\text{f4}\) \(\text{b8}\) (20...\(\text{f6}\) 21.\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{c3}\) 22.\(\text{g4}\)\(+\)) 21.\(\text{f4}\) \(\text{c5}\) 22.\(\text{xc5}\) \(\text{xc5}\) 23.\(\text{g4}\) \(\text{b6}\) 24.\(\text{e4}\)\(+\)

19.\(\text{f4}\)\(+\) \(\text{d7}\)

19...\(\text{bc6}\) 20.\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{d7}\) 21.\(\text{h4}\) should end in the same result. If Black tries 21...\(\text{d5}\) to stop the knight from going to \(\text{e4}\), then 22.\(\text{e2}\)\(+\) sets it on another path towards the kingside.

20.\(\text{f1}\)

20.\(\text{f4}\) is also promising.

20...\(\text{c6}\) 21.\(\text{f8}\) \(\text{xf8}\)

After 21...\(\text{b6}\)\(+\) 22.\(\text{h1}\) \(\text{c3}\) 23.\(\text{h4}\) Black will have to give up his bishop to force a queen exchange, and the pin on the eighth rank will decide the game.

22.\(\text{xf8}\) \(\text{xf8}\) 23.\(\text{h6}\)\(+\) \(\text{g8}\)
Black's queenside pieces are stranded, and he has no good answer to \( \text{d}2\text{g}3 \) etc.

**B23)** 16...\( \text{xh}4! \)

As mentioned before, this is the only move to present a real challenge.

17.gxh7\( \text{+} \)\( \text{xh7} \)

Sometimes the pawn on h7 can act as a hindrance to White's attack, but here it only helps him.

18.\( \text{d}3! \)

The bishop is perfectly placed here, but Black can hardly afford to exchange it, as the loss of the knight on e5 will give White too many squares, especially f7.

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

18...\( \text{e}7 \) 19.\( \text{ae}1 \) gives Black nothing better than 19...\( \text{bd}7 \), when 20.\( \text{e}4 \) transposes to 18...\( \text{bd}7 \) 19.\( \text{e}4 \) \( \text{e}7 \) 20.\( \text{ae}1 \) as given below.

18...\( \text{g}5 \) 19.\( \text{ae}1 \) \( \text{bc}6 \) runs into 20.\( \text{h}4! \) \( \text{d}2 \) (20...\( \text{xh}4 \) 21.\( \text{wh}4! \) is one example of why the h7-pawn matters) 21.\( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{xc}3 \) 22.\( \text{xc}3 \) \( \text{d}7 \) 23.\( \text{e}3 \) \( \text{e}7 \) 24.\( \text{g}3 \) and White wins cleanly.

19.\( \text{e}4 \) \( \text{e}7 \)

19...\( \text{d}5 \) 20.\( \text{d}6 \) \( \text{e}7 \) 21.\( \text{f}7 \) \( \text{xf}7 \) 22.\( \text{x}f7 \) is crushing.

20.\( \text{ae}1 \) \( \text{d}5 \) 21.\( \text{f}2! \)

The knight blocks the f-file, but only temporarily.

21.\( \text{d}6 \)

21...\( \text{xd}3? \) 22.\( \text{xd}3 \) wins more quickly.
22.\(g4!\) \(\text{hxg4}\) 23.\(\text{hxg4}\) \(e5\) 24.\(\text{d4}\) \(e7\)
25.\(\text{h1}\)
25.\(b4\) \(d7\) 26.\(f6\) \(d7\) 27.\(\text{e1+}\) is also strong.
25...\(d7\) 26.\(\text{xe5}\) \(d7\) 27.\(f6!\)
A nice touch, with the simple tactical point:

\[ \text{Wxf6 28.\(\text{xd5}\) \(e4\)} \]
Simplifying to a winning ending.

White can go for an all-out attack with 19.\(g3!\), but it ultimately falls short: 19...\(e7!\) (But not 19...\(g5\) 20.\(\text{ae1}\) \(\text{bc6}\) 21.\(\text{h4}\) \(\text{d2}\) 22.\(\text{e4+}\) and White dominates.) 20.\(\text{f7+}\) (20.\(\text{f2}\) \(\text{bd7}\) 21.\(\text{e4}\) \(b5\) 22.\(\text{af1}\) \(g8\) defends everything.) 20...\(\text{xf7}\) 21.\(\text{g6+}\) \(\text{f8}\) 22.\(\text{f1}\) \(\text{f6+}\) 23.\(\text{g2}\) \(e8\) 24.\(\text{xf7}\) \(\text{c6}\) 25.\(\text{h5}\) \(\text{d8}\) 26.\(\text{xe6}\) \(\text{xe6}\) 27.\(\text{xe6}\) \(\text{xb2}\) 28.\(\text{d5}\) \(e5\) Black defends successfully, and emerges with some winning chances.

19...\(\text{bc6}\)
19...\(e7?\) 20.\(\text{h1!}\) is too dangerous, for instance 20...\(\text{bc6}\) (or 20...\(\text{d7}\) 21.\(\text{f3!}\) \(\text{xf3}\) 22.\(\text{gxf3}\) \(\text{e8}\) 23.\(\text{g1+}\) \(\text{g5}\) 24.\(\text{h4++}\) with a crushing attack) 21.\(\text{ae1}\) \(\text{d4}\) 22.\(\text{c3}\) \(\text{f5}\) 23.\(g4++\) and White wins material.

20.\(\text{xd6}\)
White should take the opportunity to capture a valuable pawn. Instead after 20.\(\text{h1?}\) \(d5\) 21.\(\text{d6}\) \(\text{xd6}\) 22.\(\text{h4}\) \(e7\) his initiative is dead.

20...\(\text{xd6}\) 21.\(\text{h4}\)

Black had better exchange queens of course.

18.\(\text{d3}\)
18.\(\text{g8}\) is a cool-looking move, but after 18...\(g5\) 19.\(\text{e2}\) \(e7\) the position gets messy.

18...\(\text{g7}\)
18...\(\text{xd3}\) 19.\(\text{f7}\) is the usual idea.

19.\(\text{e4!}\)
Preparing \(\text{xd6}\) is not only the most

21...\(\text{d4}\)

Pragmatic choice, but also the strongest in an absolute sense.
After 21...\textit{Wc}7 22.\textit{Wg}3\textit{Wg}5 23.\textit{Wf}2 \textit{d}7 24.\textit{We}4\textpm Black faces an uncertain future, as the a1-rook will soon make its way towards the kingside.

\textbf{22.\textit{Wxd}4 \textit{xd}4}

It looks as though Black has escaped the immediate problems, and can settle into a safe endgame, but... not so fast! Actually White is still able to generate a lot of threats due to Black’s lack of development and still-vulnerable king. Even without those factors, the material balance of rook and pawn versus two knights is not so bad, and if White gets a chance to pick up the e6-pawn, he will obtain a clear, long-term advantage.

23.\textit{We}4!

23.\textit{Wad}1 is less convincing: 23...\textit{dc}6 24.\textit{We}4 \textit{d}7 25.\textit{x}c6 (25.c3 is playable, but it does not stop Black from consolidating and equalizing.) 25...\textit{xc}6 26.\textit{Ede}1 \textit{c}4 27.b3 \textit{a}3 The knight looks slightly awkward, but after 28.c4 \textit{E}8! Black gets enough counterplay.

23...\textit{dc}4!?

Preventing the desirable \textit{ad}1. I considered several other moves, none of which offer a complete solution to Black’s problems.

23...\textit{Ec}2\textpm 24.\textit{h}1 does not achieve anything for Black.

23...\textit{dc}6 24.\textit{Eae}1 \textit{d}7 transposes to 23...\textit{d}7 24.\textit{Eae}1 \textit{dc}6 as analysed below.

23...\textit{f}7 24.\textit{Ead}1 \textit{f}5 25.\textit{Ed}3 \textit{g}5 (25...\textit{Ed}6?! 26.\textit{Eh}5 \textit{xf}5 27.\textit{g}4 \textit{Ee}7 28.\textit{Ed}f3\textpm; 25...\textit{E}b8 26.\textit{Ec}3\textpm Once again White finds a way to infiltrate. The rook will be hard to deal with once it arrives on c7.)

26.\textit{xf}3\textpm It is hard for Black to complete his development, and the knights are stuck in strange positions on the kingside. (26.\textit{x}f5 \textit{xf}5 27.\textit{Ed}8 looks tempting, but after 27...\textit{f}7 28.\textit{Ee}8 \textit{Ed}6 it is impossible to maintain the rook on the eighth rank.)

23...\textit{Ec}4?!

This is an active approach, but Black does not seem to be completely ready for it. Particularly annoying for him is the threat of penetrating with a rook to d8.

24.\textit{Ead}1!

24.\textit{Etf}2?! is another way of maintaining pressure: 24...\textit{f}5 (24...\textit{d}6 25.\textit{Ee}1\textpm) 25.\textit{Ee}1 \textit{xb}2 (25...\textit{cd}6 26.\textit{Ed}2 Black’s pieces are still awkward and his development remains hard.) 26.\textit{E}4! Threatening to win a piece with \textit{xf}5 and \textit{Eb}1. 26...\textit{d}6 27.\textit{Eg}4\textpm \textit{f}6 28.\textit{g}6\textpm \textit{e}5 29.\textit{f}3\textpm \textit{d}4 30.\textit{Exh}6\textpm The kingside pawns will be hard to stop.
24...e5
24...e2† 25...e2 f4 26...d8±
25...d3 g4 26...xb7 a7 27...d5 xb2
28...d3 d1
After 28...e2† 29...h1 f4 30...b3± the knight is out of play on b2.
29...xe5 c3 30...b3±
White keeps both of his extra pawns safe.

23...d7
This looks like the most obvious developing move, but it also leads to some problems.
24...ae1!
Now Black has to make a difficult choice.

24...dc6
This seems best. Neither 24...c6 25.c3! xe4 26.cxd4± nor 24...b5 25...f2 g4 26...d2 d8 27...xb7± is any good for Black.
25...d3!
Threatening a nasty check on g3, while Black's pieces remain hard to untangle.

25...f7
25...e8 26...xc6 xc6 27...xe6 reaches a depressing endgame for Black. Typically, scenarios involving rook versus two minor pieces, with three pawns against two on one flank and two against one on the other, can be considered practically lost for the minor pieces (with the possible exception of rook against a pair of bishops). Here White will have to spend a few moves consolidating, while making sure that Black's rook does not combine with the pieces to create counterplay, but once that is done, he can simply go about improving his position at Black's expense.

26...d1 ce5
26...e8 27...xc6 xc6 28...xe6 reaches the same type of endgame as discussed above.
27...c3! c6
After 27...b8 28...c7 c6 29...xc6 bxc6 30.b3 Black's knights are clumsily placed, and he will find it hard to hold on to the many weak pawns.
28...xc6 xc6
28...bxc6 29.b3± is similar to the last note.
29...d7 b8 30...d8 e3 cd8 31...g3† f8 32...c7±
The rooks are tremendously active, and it will be hard for Black to do anything without losing another pawn.

Let's return to the more challenging 23...f5!.
Chapter 10 – The Gothenburg Variation

24...\texttt{e}1!

The alternatives 24.\texttt{e}1 \texttt{f7} 25.\texttt{ad}1 \texttt{d}6 26.\texttt{f}3 \texttt{b}8 and 24.\texttt{fd}1 \texttt{f7} 25.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{f}6 26.\texttt{e}1 \texttt{d}6 27.\texttt{f}3 both left me unsatisfied.

24...\texttt{f}7

24...\texttt{c}4 25.\texttt{f}4! \texttt{cd}6 (25...\texttt{xb}2 26.\texttt{xf}5 \texttt{xf}5 27.\texttt{b}1-- ) 26.\texttt{xf}5 \texttt{f}5 (26...\texttt{exf}5 27.\texttt{d}4 \texttt{e}4 28.\texttt{d}8+) 27.\texttt{c}4 leaves Black with typical problems for this line.

24...\texttt{f}6!?

This looks rather provocative, but there is no immediate refutation.

25.\texttt{d}1

25.\texttt{e}2?! \texttt{d}7 26.\texttt{fe}1 could be an interesting alternative.

25...\texttt{d}7 26.\texttt{xb}7?!

Black is in time to refute 26.\texttt{g}4? with 26...\texttt{g}8!.

26.\texttt{h}3 is another possibility: 26...\texttt{h}5 27.\texttt{fe}1 \texttt{c}6 28.\texttt{xf}5 \texttt{xf}5 29.\texttt{d}2! \texttt{g}6 30.\texttt{f}2 \texttt{g}5 31.\texttt{xe}6. For the time being, the fixing of White's kingside makes it hard for him to make a passed pawn. However, it should be possible to continue improving his pieces and eventually play g2-g3 after suitable preparation. In short, White has reasonable winning chances.

26...\texttt{b}8 27.\texttt{xa}6 \texttt{xb}2

28.\texttt{g}4!

Now that ...\texttt{g}8 is impossible, this wins material.

28...\texttt{xa}2

28...\texttt{xc}4 29.\texttt{xd}7+

The simplest reply to 28...\texttt{c}6 is 29.\texttt{e}2. (29.\texttt{xf}5?! \texttt{f}3 30.\texttt{f}2 \texttt{xc}2 31.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{xa}2 32.\texttt{a}1 \texttt{xc}2 33.\texttt{xe}6 \texttt{ex}e6 34.\texttt{f}d1 reaches an extremely interesting endgame. The black king is forced to go to the last rank after 34...\texttt{e}5 35.\texttt{e}8+ \texttt{e}7 36.\texttt{a}7+ \texttt{e}8 and, with both of his rooks on the board, White has plenty of scope to create mating threats.

29.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{xc}2

30.\texttt{f}2! \texttt{xc}5 31.\texttt{xf}5 \texttt{ex}f5

It will not be easy for White to make progress from here, but he can certainly keep trying for a while, for instance by slowly improving his king. A rook exchange may help to facilitate this. I do not see any fortress, so Black will have to defend carefully and react to White's ideas.
After the text move White must decide whether to start poking around with his rook immediately, or to play more slowly.

25.\textit{\textbf{e}}f3!!

Aiming to put maximum pressure on the opponent with \textit{\textbf{c}}3-\textit{\textbf{c}}7.

25.b3 is the other main idea, preparing c2-c4 at the right time. (The immediate 25.c4 is met by 25...\textit{\textbf{d}}5d6 26.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3 b6, when Black is able to develop his queenside pieces more easily than I would like.) Black has to resort to some sophisticated manoeuvring, but he seems to be okay after 25...\textit{\textbf{d}}5d6! 26.\textit{\textbf{f}}3 \textit{\textbf{a}}7!, while preparing to move the b-pawn, and ensuring that a white rook will not be able to invade on c7. White can continue probing, but the position seems tenable for Black.

25...\textit{\textbf{d}}5d6

25...\textit{\textbf{d}}7? would be a big mistake due to 26.\textit{\textbf{e}}xf5 exf5 27.\textit{\textbf{e}}7±.

A couple more short but instructive lines are 25...\textit{\textbf{d}}7d6 26.\textit{\textbf{x}}xf5! \textit{\textbf{x}}xf5 27.\textit{\textbf{c}}3± and 25...\textit{\textbf{g}}g5 26.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3! \textit{\textbf{x}}e4 27.\textit{\textbf{e}}xe4±, both of which see White swapping off his bishop in order to invade with a rook to either the seventh or eighth rank.

26.\textit{\textbf{c}}3 \textit{\textbf{b}}8

I also considered 26...\textit{\textbf{d}}xe4 27.\textit{\textbf{e}}xe4 e5 28.\textit{\textbf{c}}7 \textit{\textbf{f}}8, when Black intends ...b5 and ...\textit{\textbf{e}}6. For the moment Black has solved his development problems, but there are still quite a few weaknesses in his position, and White's rooks are rather active. The passed e-pawn is not too dangerous as the white king can always blockade it. In the event of a rook exchange, Black's pawn weaknesses are likely to come into sharp focus.

26...\textit{\textbf{d}}d7

26...\textit{\textbf{b}}b8 is not much good due to 27.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3 b5 28.\textit{\textbf{e}}e3 \textit{\textbf{e}}6 29.b3, intending to meet 29...\textit{\textbf{d}}8?! with 30.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3! \textit{\textbf{x}}d3 31.\textit{\textbf{c}}xd3±.

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

Safeguarding the bishop and introducing the possibility of \textit{\textbf{h}}5 combined with \textit{\textbf{c}}7.

27...\textit{\textbf{d}}d7 is not much good due to 27...\textit{\textbf{b}}5, but 27.\textit{\textbf{f}}f3! \textit{\textbf{f}}8 28.\textit{\textbf{h}}h7±. 29.\textit{\textbf{g}}g8 is interesting, as Black will have to go to some trouble to escape the pin.

27...\textit{\textbf{f}}6

After 27...\textit{\textbf{b}}5 28.\textit{\textbf{d}}d3 \textit{\textbf{b}}b6 29.\textit{\textbf{d}}e1 \textit{\textbf{f}}5 30.\textit{\textbf{h}}h5 \textit{\textbf{e}}5 31.\textit{\textbf{c}}3± Black's shuffling of the knights has not helped him.
27...b5 also falls short of equality: 28...c7 29.g4! e5 (29...f6 30.h5!! e6 31.d1 b6 32.xd6 exd6 33.xc8=+) 30.xc8 c8 31.xc8 xc8 32.e3= The black pawns are sitting ducks, and knights are well known to be hard to coordinate against a rook in the endgame. Moreover, the passed e-pawn is not much of a worry with the white king so close.

28.h5?! 
This is the most forcing route, though not the only good one.

28.c7 b5 29.c4 is another way to break Black’s co-ordination, while the white pieces can continue to jump around and exert pressure, for instance: 29.d7 (or 29.e5 30.f1) 30.f4+ e7 31.c4 c7 32.h5=

28...c7
28.e5 29.d4! soon gets nasty for Black after 29...e5 30.g3 f5 31.g8=.

29.c7 d7 30.f4!? d8 31.xd7 d7 32.c5 c8 33.xd6 xd6 34.f2
Material is level, but White keeps certain advantages in the form of the better minor piece, the outside pawn majority and a target on h6.

Conclusion
Even by the standards of the Najdorf, the Gothenburg Variation is rather provocative, yet so far it has defied all of White’s attempts at outright refutation. Recently 11.h5!? has been used by some strong players. Although Black does not have an easy time, I was not completely satisfied with White's chances.

For this reason, I devoted most of my efforts on the sacrificial main line with 11.xe6! fxe6 12.h5+ g8 13.b5! h7, after which my novelty 14.e5!?N poses serious problems to the defence.

14.axb5 is one obvious answer, but then the rather forcing 15.exd6! xg5 16.xg5 xg5 17.0–0!! f6 18.exf6+ xf6 19.f1 xf1 20.xf1 reaches an endgame where White’s queen and extra pawns enjoy the upper hand over Black’s uncoordinated mob of pieces.

14.xe5 can arguably be considered the main line, when 15.0–0!? g8 16.g6! again forces Black’s hand. The best defence is 16..xh4!, when 17.xh7+ xh7 18.d3+ g7 19.e4! bc6 20.xd6 xd6 21.xh4 d4+ 22.xd4 xd4 reaches another type of favourable endgame, where White’s early advantages in development and mobility continue to make themselves felt.
Chapter 11

Classical Main Line

Three-Piece System with ...h6

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.cxd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 e7 8.f3 h6 9.h4 c7 10.0–0–0

10...bd7

A) 11.f5?! 185
   A1) 11...e5 186
   A2) 11...0–0!?N 187
   A3) 11...e5 189

B) 11.e2 192
   B1) 11...g8? 192
   B2) 11...g5?! 193
   B3) 11...b8?! 195
   B4) 11...b5 198
   B5) 11...0–0!? 200

B2) after 16...d7

B3) note to 12...g8

B3) after 16...d8

17.e1!N 19.g3!N 17.b7!N
Chapter 11 – Three-Piece System with ...h6

1.e4 c5 2.d4 d6 3.dxe5 cxd4 4.exd4 Qf6
5.Qc3 a6 6.Qg5 e6 7.f4 Qe7 8.Qf3 h6
9.Qh4 Qc7 10.0–0–0

My “Three Piece” terminology refers to Black’s set-up on the seventh rank after his next move. He can play this way either with or without the moves ...h6 and ...h4 included, the latter scenario being the focus of the next chapter. Both versions are somewhat out of fashion these days, although they can still be seen in grandmaster games from time to time.

10...Qbd7

10...Qxe4? has been played in quite a few games, but hardly anyone managed to find the clear refutation: 11.Qxe6N (11.Qxe4 Qxh4
12.Qf5 Qe7 13.Qxg7+ Qxh8 was not so simple in Deepan Chakkravarthy – Wang Yue, Kuala Lumpur 2002.) 11...Qxe6 (11...fxe6? 12.Qxe4 Qh4 13.Qh5+–) 12.Qxe7

12.Qxc3 (Or 12...Qxe7N 13.Qxe4 d5
14.Qd3 and White wins a pawn.) 13.Qxd6 Qxa2+ (After 13...c6 14.Qxc3 Qxc3
15.bxc3± Black has severe problems with the dark squares, and he is also a pawn down.)
14.Qxb1 Qc3+ 15.bxc3± Black’s dark squares are too weak and he went down in Blanes – Conde Poderoso, email 1998.

My “Three Piece” terminology refers to Black’s set-up on the seventh rank after his next move. He can play this way either with or without the moves ...h6 and ...h4 included, the latter scenario being the focus of the next chapter. Both versions are somewhat out of fashion these days, although they can still be seen in grandmaster games from time to time.

10...Qbd7

10...Qxe4? has been played in quite a few games, but hardly anyone managed to find the clear refutation: 11.Qxe6N (11.Qxe4 Qxh4
12.Qf5 Qe7 13.Qxg7+ Qxh8 was not so simple in Deepan Chakkravarthy – Wang Yue, Kuala Lumpur 2002.) 11...Qxe6 (11...fxe6? 12.Qxe4 Qh4 13.Qh5+–) 12.Qxe7

The present position can be considered the real starting point of the chapter. Black is combining the three-piece set-up with the thematic plan of ...g5, which gave him excellent results in early outings. However, once White figured out the correct plans, Black’s prospects diminished considerably.

I will start by presenting A) 11.f5!? as an interesting sideline, but my main recommendation is B) 11.Qe2.

A) 11.f5!?

Apart from its surprise value, this line has the major advantage of being equally playable without the moves ...h6 and ...h4 included. See variation A of the next chapter for coverage of that scenario.

The inclusion of ...h6 should help Black slightly, but he still faces plenty of challenges. We will consider three replies: A1) 11...Qe5,
A2) 11...0–0!?N and A3) 11...e5.
12. \textit{Wh3}! 0--0?!N

Black appears to be castling into the fire, but it is actually harder for White to prove something than I had imagined initially.

12...exf5? 13...xf6 xf6 14...d5 looks awful for Black.

12...fg4 has been played a few times, but the strong reply 13...e2! shows that the inclusion of ...h6 and \textit{h4} is not without benefits to White.

13...e2!

My first thought in this position was that 13.g4 looked dangerous for Black, but after 13...b5 it turns out that White’s attack is not so special, while Black’s counterplay is coming fast.

13.fxe6 fxe6 transposes to variation A2 below. Although White can fight for the advantage there, he should not hurry to exchange on e6 if he can avoid it. The text move is an ideal solution which keeps all options open.

13...b5

Black has problems after other moves as well:

13...exf5 14...xf6 xf6 15...d5 g5† 16...b1 c5 17...xf5±

13...d6 14...d4 d4d4 15...xd4 Black has no clear counterplay, while White has the whole position under control and g4-g5 will follow soon.

13...d7 14.g4! With the moves e2 and d7 included, this leads to a strong attack. 14...b5 15.g5 h5 16...xg5 b4

17...h6! e8 (17...gxh6? 18...xh6+-) 18...hg1 White has a strong initiative.

14.fxe6!

We have seen that the g2-g4 plan would be too slow, but the inclusion of the last two moves makes this a more favourable moment to capture on e6.
14...fxe6 15...xe6 wb7

This time 15...a5 16.b1 f7 runs into a tactical refutation: 17.xf6! xe6 (17...xf6 18.xd6=) 18.h5+ g6 19.xh6 xf6 20.h7+ e8 21.xd6+=

16.hf1 f7 17.a3!

White has time to stabilize on the queenside, and there is no obvious way for Black to exploit the pin on the knight. The following line is critical, but it works out well for White.

This is a computer-esque move, but it can be characterized as an attempt to reach an improved version of the previous line.

12.fxe6

12.g4 e5 can be compared with 11...e5 12.h3 0–0, when it was noted that 13.g4 was not the best move. True, White can put his queen somewhere other than h3, but I was unable to find anything convincing. One important point is that 13.g3 can be met by the annoying 13...g5!.

12...e5 13.h3

Grabbing a pawn is risky: 13.exf7+ xf7 14.e2 (14.g3 g5= is an important point.) 14...g4 15.f3 c8 White is a pawn up, but Black has a lot of activity and there are too many tactical tricks hanging in the air.

13...fxe6

Compared to variation A1, White has been forced to commit to fxe6, which considerably reduces his attacking potential. Nevertheless, there are still ways to put the opponent under pressure.

A2) 11...0–0?N

14.e2

14.xe6?! a5! 15.e2 f7! does not work for White, but the bishop move renews the threat.
14...\texttt{d7}

14...\texttt{b5} transposes to variation A1, where we saw that White could simply take on \texttt{e6}.

14...\texttt{d7}?! seems playable thanks to some computer tactics. The critical line is: 15.\texttt{xe6 \texttt{a5}} (15...\texttt{c8} 16.\texttt{d5 \texttt{xd5}} 17.\texttt{exd5 \texttt{h4}} 18.\texttt{xe6 \texttt{xe6}} 19.\texttt{dxe6 \texttt{xe6}} 20.\texttt{b1} (!)

16.\texttt{b1 \texttt{ac8}} 17.\texttt{d5 \texttt{xd5}} 18.\texttt{exd5 \texttt{h4}} is 15...\texttt{b5} 16.\texttt{a3 \texttt{b7}} 17.\texttt{hg1 \texttt{xe4}} 18.\texttt{xe4 \texttt{xe4}} 19.\texttt{g5}, reaching a complicated position where White certainly has some initiative for the pawn.

15.\texttt{fg4}

Supporting the crucial knight on \texttt{e5}.

After 15...\texttt{xf3}?! 16.\texttt{gf3} the open g-file gives White an automatic attack.

15...\texttt{c7} 16.\texttt{xe5 dxe5} 17.\texttt{g4}?! \texttt{b5} 18.\texttt{d3}! looks a bit unpleasant for Black. White intends \texttt{g4-g5}, and if ...\texttt{b4} or ...\texttt{b4}, White can just play \texttt{d2} and \texttt{g3}.

15.\texttt{f3}

15.g4?! could also be explored. A possible line
where the same position is reached with the pawn on h7 instead of h6. Here the position may be even more favourable for White, as the pawn on h6 enables White to open files more easily with g4-g5.

12. dxe2 b5 13. xf6
This exchange is a key part of White’s plan.

13... xf6 14. d5

15. exd5N 16... b4
After 16... c8 17. d3 White’s ideas include b1, h5 and eventually f5-f6, as pointed out by Marin in his annotations to the Smeets – Nakamura game.

16... 0–0–0 seems dangerous after 17. d3 intending e4, h5, g2-g4 and so on. 16... 0–0 puts the king in a safer spot, but now Black has no counterplay, and eventually White can open up the queenside as well. 17. b1 b8 18. e4 c8 19.c3 b6 20. e2 b4 21.c4±

17. h5!
17. d3 a5! is Black’s idea.

Now it is not easy to defend the g7-pawn. 17... g8
17... 0–0? 18. f6 is too dangerous.

14... c5!
This may look like a surprising choice, but it avoids giving White the easy play he gets after the exchange on d5.

14... xd5N 15.exd5 b7 16. g3
This structure will be discussed at greater length in variation A2 of the next chapter,
With the rook committed to g8, Black's position looks awkward. White intends to secure everything with d3-e4 before advancing on the kingside.

Stopping the aforementioned plan, but White can make a simple adjustment.

Followed by e4 with a fine position.

After 15.\textbf{x}e7 \textbf{x}e7 16.g4 \textbf{h}7 17.g3 d5! Black is helped by the inclusion of the ...h6 move, and White's play is too slow.

I don't see any reason for White to exchange on f6 yet, and he will save time if Black exchanges on d5. I guess White's idea was to be able to counter ...\textbf{c}8 with c2-c3, but it seems to me that this pawn move is what allows Black to get counterplay in the opposite-coloured-bishop middlegame that is likely to arise.

To illustrate these points, it is important to see what happened in the game: 16.\textbf{x}f6+ \textbf{xf}6 17.d5 \textbf{c}8! 18.c3 \textbf{xd}5 (18...b4?!N seems like an improvement, stopping the idea of a quick ...b4. It should be similar to our main line, but I'd still prefer not to commit to c2-c3.) 20.\textbf{c}6 21.a3

21...b4!N It is important for Black to open a file for counterplay. (21...\textbf{e}7 22.b1 h5 23.e2 h4 was played in Smeets - Nakamura, Wijk aan Zee 2010, and now 24.\textbf{f}3!N would have stopped the queen from jumping to f2. White is slightly better, for instance: 24...\textbf{b}8 25.d1 a5 26.b3\#) 22.axb4 \textbf{xb}4 23.b1 \textbf{b}6 24.h4 0-0\textsuperscript{=}
16...b4 17.\textit{\texttt{Q}}a4 \textit{\texttt{Q}}a5 18.\textit{\texttt{Q}}ab6 \textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 19.\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 (19.\textit{\texttt{Q}}xa8? \textit{\texttt{Q}}f6!) 19...\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 20.\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 \textit{\texttt{Q}}b6 21.g4 results in a similar type of position.

17.\textit{\texttt{Q}}e2!

I want to get a similar position to the Smeets – Nakamura game, but without committing to c2-c3. The queen might seem misplaced on e2, but this is only temporary. After a subsequent h2-h4 and g2-g4, the queen may move to g2, where it will be ideally placed to support White’s kingside play.

17.\textit{\texttt{Q}}d3 would squander the advantage: 17...\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 18.\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 \textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 19.exd5 \textit{\texttt{Q}}f6 20.\textit{\texttt{Q}}e4 a5 Without the white knight, it will be hard to get the initiative going on the kingside.

17...\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 18.\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 \textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 19.\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd5 \textit{\texttt{Q}}b6

The computer assessment is close to equal here, but White has definite potential on the kingside. Black does not have much scope for counterplay, as the following lines demonstrate.

21...a5

21...0-0 seems too dangerous after 22.g4 \textit{\texttt{Q}}c8 23.g5. Black should therefore leave his king in the centre, but in that case the h8-rook will remain out of play, and his queenside counterplay will not carry much weight.

22.g4 a4?P

22...b4 makes the c4-square available for White’s bishop. This can be exploited by: 23.b3! (White can also start by moving the queen first.) 23...\textit{\texttt{Q}}c6 (23...a4 24.bxa4?; 23...\textit{\texttt{Q}}c3 24.\textit{\texttt{Q}}g2±) 24.\textit{\texttt{Q}}g2! a4 25.\textit{\texttt{Q}}c4 White has an obvious edge.

23.\textit{\texttt{Q}}e3 \textit{\texttt{Q}}a5

After 23...\textit{\texttt{Q}}b7 24.\textit{\texttt{Q}}hh2 b4 25.g5 White’s initiative is developing nicely.

23...\textit{\texttt{Q}}c6 is well met by 24.a3! intending c2-c3, now that the ...b4 plan is off the table.

24.\textit{\texttt{Q}}hh2!

Preparing to push the g-pawn.

24...a3

24...f6 restrains the kingside advance, but is an obvious positional concession. 25.c3! b4 If Black does not play this, a2-a3 will block the queenside, leaving White in complete control. 26.cxb4 \textit{\texttt{Q}}xb4 27.a3 \textit{\texttt{Q}}b7 28.\textit{\texttt{Q}}c2±
25.\textit{g5}
White is on top, as the following line illustrates:

25...\textit{axb2} 26.\textit{f6}!
Opening up the kingside. Black's bishop is particularly poor.

26...\textit{gxf6}
After 26...\textit{f8} 27.\textit{fxg7} \textit{hxg7} 28.\textit{Exd6} Black's position is collapsing.

27.\textit{gxf6} \textit{g8}
27...\textit{f6} 28.\textit{Exd6} wins.

28.\textit{Exg2}
White is dominating.

\textbf{B) 11.\textit{ge2}}

This has been White's most popular move, as well as the highest-scoring. We will consider five main responses from Black: \textbf{B1) 11...\textit{f8}?}, \textbf{B2) 11...\textit{g5}?!,} \textbf{B3) 11...\textit{h8}?!}, \textbf{B4) 11...\textit{b5} and B5) 11...0-0?!.

11...\textit{\textit{b6}} does not seem to help Black's cause at all. White has a few plans, but the simplest is to prepare e4-e5: 12.\textit{\textit{ge3}} 0-0 13.\textit{\textit{h1c4}} (13...\textit{d7N} allows 14.e5 followed by \textit{\textit{e4}} with excellent play for White.) 14.\textit{xxc4} \textit{\textit{xc4}} 15.\textit{e5} \textit{\textit{c6}} 16.\textit{\textit{f6e5} d5} 17.\textit{\textit{dxd5 exd5}} 18.\textit{\textit{b3 c5}} 19.\textit{\textit{f2 a5}} 20.\textit{\textit{g4}}± Cheparinov – Dominguez Perez, Linares 2002.

\textbf{B1) 11...\textit{\textit{f8}?}}
Preparing ...\textit{g5} in this way is too slow.

12.\textit{\textit{h1f1}}
Anticipating Black's next move.

12...\textit{\textit{g5}}
12...\textit{\textit{b5N}} is met by the typical 13.\textit{\textit{xf6!}} \textit{\textit{xf6}} 14.\textit{e5} \textit{\textit{b7}} 15.\textit{\textit{xc4} e4} 16.\textit{\textit{xe4 x4}} 17.\textit{\textit{f3 x3}} 18.\textit{\textit{xf3}} with a clear advantage.

13.\textit{\textit{g3}!}
This counterintuitive move is an important discovery from the correspondence arena.

13.\textit{\textit{f5}} works out fine after 13...\textit{hgx5}?!,
14. \( \text{g3} \) \( \text{c5} \) \( \text{dxe5} \) \( \text{dxe5} \) \( \text{db5!} \) \( \text{axb5} \)
17. \( \text{xb5} \) \( \text{c5} \) 18. \( \text{d6\dagger} \) \( \text{f8} \) 19. \( \text{h5!} \) led to an impressive victory for White in Robson – Lu, Ningbo 2013. However, Black can avoid this with 13... \( \text{c5!} \), after which 14. \( \text{f2} \) h\( \text{xg5} \) 15. \( \text{g3} \) \( \text{d7} \) transposes to the unclear game Mathes – Luethke, corr. 1983.

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

13...\( \text{g}4 \) 14. \( \text{f2\pm} \) gives White an excellent position, since the entire purpose of the ...\( \text{g}5 \) push – namely, to wrest control of the e5-square – has been thwarted.

14. \( \text{xf4!} \)

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

The tactical point of White’s play is revealed after 14...\( \text{e}5\ldots \) 15. \( \text{f2!} \) exd4 16. \( \text{d5} \) \( \text{d8} \) 17. \( \text{xd4\ldots} \) when Black can do nothing about the threat of \( \text{xe7} \) followed by \( \text{xd6} \).

14...\( \text{e}5 \) 15. \( \text{h6} \) \( \text{g6} \) 16. \( \text{h8\dagger} \) \( \text{g8} \) 17. \( \text{h4} \) \( \text{g6} \) 18. \( \text{h6} \) \( \text{d7} \) 19. \( \text{f2\pm} \) was not much better for Black in Vittore – Patzereli, Internet 2012. White is a pawn up and the e5-square isn’t all that helpful for Black.

15. \( \text{xh6} \) \( \text{b}4 \)

This looks like a reasonable try for counterplay, but it is refuted spectacularly.

16. \( \text{xe6!} \) fx\( \text{e}6 \) 17. \( \text{e}5 \) bxc3 18. exf6 cxb2\dagger 19. \( \text{b}1 \)

White had a crushing attack in Oseledets – Palladino, corr. 2009.

B2) 11...\( \text{g}5?! \)

Initially this was considered one of the main ideas here, but the results have been clearly in White’s favour, which has led to a loss of interest in the pawn sacrifice. White just needs to place his pieces on the right squares.

12. \( \text{fxg5} \) \( \text{e}5 \) 13. \( \text{f3!} \)

13. \( \text{f2} \) \( \text{fg4} \) forces White to either take on g4 or place his queen on the awkward f4-square.
13...\texttt{f}g4

13...\texttt{h}7 has been played more often, but the knight is too passive on this square. White simply continues development and puts pressure in the centre: 14.\texttt{f}f3 \texttt{h}xg5 (14...\texttt{x}f3 15.\texttt{x}f3 \texttt{g}xg5 16.\texttt{d}d3 \texttt{b}5 17.\texttt{g}g3 gave White a big advantage in Larino Nieto – M. Gomes, Barcelona 2011.) 15.\texttt{g}g3 \texttt{d}7 White has more than one good option here, but the simplest was played in the latest game.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chessboard.png}
\end{center}

16.\texttt{d}xe5!? (16.\texttt{d}d4 has been more popular, but it seems pointless to allow ...\texttt{f}6.) 16...\texttt{d}xe5 17.\texttt{h}f1 Preventing long castling and preparing \texttt{h}5. 17...\texttt{f}8 18.\texttt{f}2 \texttt{f}6 19.\texttt{h}4!± Li Chao – Ji, Xinghua 2010.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chessboard.png}
\end{center}

14.\texttt{d}d2!

14.\texttt{x}g4 \texttt{x}g4 15.\texttt{d}d2 has been played several times, but after 15...\texttt{e}5!? the position is not easy at all. There is no reason for White to commit to the exchange on g4 so soon.

14...\texttt{h}xg5

14...\texttt{c}5 can be met by 15.\texttt{a}a4!?\texttt{c}7 16.\texttt{h}3± and White is in control.

14...\texttt{g}8 15.\texttt{x}g4 \texttt{x}g4 16.\texttt{f}3 was also excellent for White in Grabarczyk – Dinger, Germany 2009.

15.\texttt{x}g5 \texttt{f}6 16.\texttt{f}4 \texttt{d}7

16...\texttt{f}2 occurred in Bernal – Sridharan, Internet 2005, and now the simple 17.\texttt{b}5!\texttt{b}6 18.\texttt{x}xb5 \texttt{b}b6 19.\texttt{e}3 would have given White a large advantage.

After the text move I found a simple improvement over the game Ootes – Zherebukh, Leeuwarden 2009, where 17.\texttt{h}f1 was played.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chessboard.png}
\end{center}

17.\texttt{e}11!\texttt{N}

Surprisingly, Black’s position is on the verge of collapsing.

17...0–0–0

17...\texttt{b}5 18.\texttt{g}3 embarrasses the knight on g4.

18.\texttt{f}5! \texttt{c}6
18...\textit{xf}8 19.\textit{xg}4 \textit{xg}4 20.\textit{xd}6+ \textit{xd}6 21.\textit{xd}6 give White an extra pawn plus a huge initiative.

19.\textit{d}5!?

Definitely the flashiest move, although 19.\textit{xe}7+ \textit{xe}7 20.h3 \textit{h}6 21.\textit{fx}2 \textit{b}8 22.\textit{b}6 is also pretty conclusive.

19...exd5 20.exd5 \textit{e}8 21.\textit{xe}7+ \textit{xe}7 22.\textit{xe}4

White is winning.

\textbf{B3)} 11...\textit{b}8?!

12.\textit{g}3 \textit{g}8

Other moves also fail to solve Black's problems:

12...b5 runs into 13.e5! dxe5 14.\textit{xe}6 fxe6 15.\textit{xe}7 \textit{g}8 16.\textit{h}5+ \textit{d}8 17.\textit{fx}6+-- as in Adhiban – Mustafae, Tashkent 2007.

12...0–0 13.\textit{f}3 makes it hard for Black to continue developing. 13...\textit{b}6 (13...b5? 14.e5! dxe5 15.\textit{fx}5 \textit{xe}5 16.\textit{c}6+-)

14.\textit{he}1!? Continuing to strengthen the position. (The immediate 14.e5 dxe5 15.\textit{fx}e5 \textit{d}5 16.\textit{xd}5 \textit{xd}5 17.\textit{xd}5 \textit{xh}4 18.\textit{xe}4 exd5 19.\textit{e}1 \textit{xe}8 20.\textit{e}3 was also pleasant for White in Kotronias – Kulaots, Heraklio 2007.) 14...\textit{d}7 15.e5 dxe5 16.\textit{fx}e5 \textit{d}5

17.\textit{xd}5?!N \textit{xh}4 18.\textit{xe}4 \textit{xd}5 19.\textit{xd}5 exd5 20.\textit{e}3

This has been played in a lot of games but it is rather slow, and White has scored excellently.
The last of Black’s alternatives is:
12...g5 13.fxg5 hxg5
13...f6 14.exf6! fxe6 15.gxf6 was great for White in Weiler – Stanek, Donaueschingen 1985, since 15...exf6? would have lost instantly to 16.h5†.
14.exg5 b5
14...g5 15.h4 b5 16.ae4 b4 17.b1 b7 18.d2± gave White an excellent position in Nunn – Nemet, Biel 1983.

15.e5!
White obtains a powerful initiative by opening up the centre.
15...a5 16.xf6 xf6 17.hf1 e7 18.g7 h4
18...xf2 19.e4 leaves Black without a good move, as 19...b7 20.xe6! fxe6 21.xf6† is crushing.

19.g3!N
19.xg8† xg8 20.xf7 xf7 enabled Black to stay in the game in Planinec – Nemet, Zagreb 1977.
19.xh2 20.e4 d5 21.g5
With a raging initiative.

Let’s return now to 12...g8. This has been the most popular choice, but it seems such an awkward set-up for Black. White just prepares the typical e4-e5 break while ensuring he is suitably placed to meet ...g5.

13.xf1 b5
13...g5 14.fg5 gives Black an unpleasant three-way choice:

a) 14...hxg5N 15.xg5†

b) 14...e5 runs into a spectacular refutation:
15.xe6! fxe6 16.gxf6 xg3

c) 14...\textit{\texttt{e5}} 15.\textit{\texttt{f3}} h\textit{\texttt{xg5}} 16.\textit{\texttt{xg5}} This position first occurred in a correspondence game from 1981, and Black has still not found a good answer. A recent example: 16...\textit{\texttt{h5}} 17.\textit{\texttt{h3}} \textit{\texttt{xg5}}+ 18.\textit{\texttt{xg5}} \textit{\texttt{hxg5}} 19.\textit{\texttt{xh5}} b5

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (-0.5,0) -- (7.5,0);
\draw (0,-0.5) -- (0,7.5);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

20.\textit{\texttt{xe2}} \textit{\texttt{w7}} 21.\textit{\texttt{f4}} \textit{\texttt{g7}} 22.\textit{\texttt{b1}} \textit{\texttt{d7}} 23.\textit{\texttt{e2}} \textit{\texttt{g8}} 24.\textit{\texttt{h5}} \textit{\texttt{d8}} 25.\textit{\texttt{g4}} White was in full control in Sanchez Rodenas – Vinchew, email 2009.

17.\textit{\texttt{f7!!}}

Not everything is good here. For example, 17.\textit{\texttt{f5?!}} exf5 18.\textit{\texttt{xh6}} \textit{\texttt{xh6}} 19.\textit{\texttt{d5}} \textit{\texttt{w6}} 20.\textit{\texttt{xh5}} led to a win for White in Lombardy – Quinteros, Manila 1973, but the result might have been different had Black found 20...\textit{\texttt{e6!!}}+ with ...\textit{\texttt{b7}} coming next

17.\textit{\texttt{xf6}} \textit{\texttt{xh6}} 18.\textit{\texttt{f7}} \textit{\texttt{h8}} 19.\textit{\texttt{e4}} \textit{\texttt{e7}} 20.\textit{\texttt{g4}} was a better continuation which gave White excellent play in Barczay – Ribli, Budapest 1976, but the text move is even more conclusive.

17.\textit{\texttt{e6}} 18.\textit{\texttt{xf6}} exf4 19.\textit{\texttt{e4}} \textit{\texttt{g8}}

19...\textit{\texttt{e5}} 20.\textit{\texttt{xf8!!}} \textit{\texttt{xf8}} 21.\textit{\texttt{xf6!!}} is a nice detail.

14.\textit{\texttt{e5!!}}

Having made all the necessary preparatory moves, it is time to start the attack.

14...\textit{\texttt{dxe5}} 15.\textit{\texttt{xe6}} fxe6 16.\textit{\texttt{g6!!}} \textit{\texttt{d8}}
20.\( \text{exh6!} \)

This is stronger than 20.\( \text{xf7} \) \( \text{xf8} \) 21.\( \text{xe6} \) \( \text{b6} \) 22.\( \text{f5} \) \( \text{b7} \) when White does not seem to have a knockout blow.

20...\( \text{xe4} \) 21.\( \text{xe7} \) 22.\( \text{h7} \) \( \text{f8} \)

23.\( \text{xe4} \)

Threatening \( \text{xf4} \). Black only has one response.

23...\( \text{e5} \) 24.\( \text{f5} \) \( \text{g7} \) 25.\( \text{g5} \) \( \text{f8} \)

25...\( \text{h8} \) 26.\( \text{h6} \) is mate.

26.\( \text{h6} \) \( \text{g7} \)

26...\( \text{e7} \) 27.\( \text{h7} \) \( \text{f8} \) 28.\( \text{h5} \) would not change much.

27.\( \text{xd7!} \) \( \text{xd7} \) 28.\( \text{h8} \)

White is winning.

B4) 11...\( \text{b5} \)

This is Black's old main line in this variation, but everything has been well established. A relatively forcing sequence leads to an opposite-coloured-bishop endgame where Black has chances to make a draw a pawn down, but must suffer endlessly.

17.\( \text{g6} \! \! \! \text{!} \)

17.\( \text{h5} \! \! \! \text{!} \) is also strong, but the text move is virtually winning by force.

17...\( \text{d8} \) 18.\( \text{xe6} \) \( \text{e8} \) 19.\( \text{g6} \) \( \text{g5} \)

19...\( \text{c6} \) 20.\( \text{g3} \) \( \text{c7} \) (20...\( \text{xg2} \) 21.\( \text{d3} \) \( \text{c6} \) 22.\( \text{g4} \) 21.\( \text{f3} \) \( \text{e6} \) 22.\( \text{g4} \) \( \text{xe5} \)

23.\( \text{xd7} \! \! \! \text{!} \) 1–0 J. Williams – Agulnick, corr. 2013.

20.\( \text{b1} \)
20...\textit{xe}7
20...\textit{xe}5 was played in Figuero Toro - Damaso, Evora 2008. 21.\textit{g}4N \textit{e}7 22.\textit{d}5 \textit{xd}5 23.\textit{xd}5+–
21.h4 \textit{c}6 22.\textit{d}6
Black resigned in Bernal – Deghose, Internet 2011.

16.\textit{xe}6!
The next few moves are forced.

16...\textit{xe}6 17.\textit{g}6\textit{d}7 18.\textit{g}4 \textit{xe}5
19.\textit{xd}5 \textit{g}5†!
The only move. After 19...\textit{xd}5? 20.\textit{xd}5+ \textit{xd}5 21.\textit{d}1 \textit{g}5† 22.\textit{b}1 \textit{xd}1† 23.\textit{xd}1
Black might be doing okay materially, but the presence of opposite-coloured bishops amplifies White's attacking chances against the weak black king. An instructive example of White's play continued:

23.\textit{c}5†!
By nudging the king to b6, White hopes to get a slightly better version of the typical endgame. This move is not mentioned by Ftacnik in \textit{Grandmaster Repertoire 6}, but it has been played in almost all of the recent correspondence games.

23...\textit{b}6
23...\textit{d}6 holds onto the e-pawn, but after
Black is under pressure. That is why most players have kept the king on the queenside.

24...gac8 25.gac1 g6 26.gf3 gb6 27.ed1+ leads to a similar type of situation. See the game Lepage – Teichmann, corr. 2012, for one example where White successfully overcame Black’s resistance.

25.ge1

25...gac8

25...b4!? leads to a change of structure, but after 26.h5 e7 27.xe6+ xex6 28.xe6+ c5 29.f3 a7 30.bc6+ b5 31.c4+ bxc3 32.xc3 the position remained similarly one-sided in Devour – Amartne, Internet 2011.

26.f3 c7 27.xe6+ 27.a4 e7 28.h5 e8 29.f3 c8 30.h5 ec8 31.xe6+ xex6 32.xe6+ c6 33.a5+ c5 34.e4 was also better for White in Robson – Le Quang, Lubbock 2011, although Black managed to hold on.

27.xe6 28.xe6+ a7

Black has decent defensive chances, but he faces a long and thankless task, so it is not surprising that this particular recommendation of Ftacnik has not really taken off. I will leave you with an instructive example of White’s model technique from a correspondence game.

29.a3 a5 30.c3 e7 31.c6 f6 32.a2 d5 33.a4 bxa4 34.h3 c7 35.b6 c6 36.h4 b6 37.xa4 e7 38.b3 d7 39.c4 e6 40.a4 e1 41.g4 c5 42.b3 b5 43.a4 c1 44.c4 a1 45.b6 c6 46.c4 a6 47.e4 b6 48.e6 a7 49.b3 b8 50.e4 a7 51.b4 a2 52.e2 b6 53.c5 d4+ 54.b3 a1 55.e6 c5 56.c6 d1 57.b3 d6 58.e4 b5 59.c4 e5 60.b7 a4+ 61.a3 d2 62.a4+ a6 63.c6 a7 64.e8 c2 65.xa4 xb2 66.c5

White has made steady progress, and he went on to win in Fleetwood – Stalmaich, corr. 2012.

12.g3

12.g4?! is an exciting alternative which I analysed in some detail. I will just show the
main variations to show why I was not quite satisfied with it: 12...b5 13.g5 hxg5! (13...h7 14.b3! h4 15.xe6 fxe6 16.xe6+ h8 17.xg7 fxg7 18.xh7 g6 19.d5 c5 20.xh4) 14.xg5 b4! 15.d5?! An attempt to refute Black's play outright. (15.h6 g6! is complicated.)

12...b5 is best met by 13.d3! (After 13.d5 xd5 14.xd5 xh4 15.xh4 b6 16.f3 xd5 17.xd5 exd5 18.xh1 White eventually prevailed in Swiercz – Banikas, Rijeka 2010, but White's attacking ideas of e4-e5 or d5 will be much stronger on the next move.) 13.b4 (13.b7 14.e5! dxe5 15.fxe5 wins material.) 14.d5! xd5 (14.exd5 15.f5 dxe5 16.exd5 c5! 17.xd5 xe4 18.xd5 xh4 19.xf6 gxf6 20.xc5 17.e5 c5! 18.xe7 xe7 19.e5 dxe5 20.xe5 g4)

15.exd5 (15.xd5 16.xg7!! was good for White in Solovyev – Nordal, corr. 2012.) 16.f5!N (16.exd5 has been played, but Black seems to be okay after the forcing line: 16...b7!N 17.xh7 18.xf6 c5 19.xg6 g6 20.f3 xg7 21.fxe6 fxe6 22.xg6+ h8 16...c5! 17.xe4 xe4 18.xe4 xe4 gives White more than one decent continuation: 16.xf4 (There is also 16.xe3, transposing to 15.xe3 dxe5 16.fxe5 as covered in the next note.) 16.xe7 xe7 17.xf3 xe7 18.xf3± Intending to attack with h4 and g4-g5.

13.e5!N
13.d3 e5! is Black's idea, when he seems to be doing alright.

13.fxe4
13...dxe5 14.fxe5 fxe4 (14...d5 15.xd5 exd5 16.xe7 xe7 17.xe3 xh8 18.xf4) 15.xe4 dxe4 gives White more than one decent continuation: 16.xe4 (There is also 16.xe3, transposing to 15.xe3 dxe5 16.fxe5 as covered in the next note.) 16.xe7 xe7 18.xf3 Intending to attack with h4 and g4-g5.

14.xe4 fxe4 15.xf3
It is hard to decide if it is more precise to put the queen on f3 or e3.

15.xe3 c3?!
This is an extra possibility which is not available when the queen goes to f3.
15...dxe5 allows White to go for 16.fxe5, since the black knight will not hit the queen from g5. (16.Wxe4 transposes to the main bolded line below.) 16...c3 (16...g5 17.g3±) 17.xe7 e2† 18.xe2 xe7 19.g3 Intending h5 with some initiative.

15...dxe5

I consider this the best try.

15...c3?? 16.xe7 just wins now that the queen is on f3.

15...xh4

This is the computer's first suggestion, but I think the machine is underestimating White's attacking prospects.

16.Wxe4 d8?!

This looks odd, but it is not easy to refute. 16.e7 17.d3 g6 18.h4→ 16...dxe5 17.fxe5 xh4 18.hf1? d7 19.d3 g6 20.h4±

16...d5 17.e3 xh4 18.g4± White has an excellent version of this structure since h6 is a severe weakness.

17.g4?!
17.\text{xd}3 \text{g}6 18.\text{g}3 \text{\text{6}} \text{e}7 19.\text{h}4 \text{dxe}5 20.\text{fxe}5 \text{b}6! is unclear.
17.\text{exd}6 \text{\text{xd}6} 18.\text{\text{3}} \text{f}3 \text{\text{e}7} 19.\text{\text{3}} \text{d}3 \text{f}5 20.\text{\text{e}2} gives White some attacking chances based on g2-g4, although he will have to watch out for possible counterplay involving Black's strong dark-squared bishop.

17...\text{d}7
17...\text{dxe}5 18.\text{\text{3}} \text{f}3! \text{\text{e}7} (18...\text{\text{f}6} 19.\text{\text{g}5}++)
19.\text{\text{xe}5} followed by \text{\text{3}} \text{d}3 gives White some initiative.
18.\text{\text{3}} \text{g}6

19.\text{f}5! \text{dxe}5
19...\text{d}5 20.\text{\text{e}2}±
20.\text{fxe}6 \text{\text{e}8}
20...\text{\text{xd}4} 21.\text{exf}7\text{\text{f}8} 22.\text{\text{w}xg}6 looks extremely dangerous.
21.\text{\text{3}} \text{\text{f}6} 22.\text{\text{b}1}
Black has held his kingside together, but White's position remains more pleasant.

16.\text{\text{e}4}
16.\text{\text{e}5} is met by 16...\text{\text{g}5}! 17.\text{\text{e}3} \text{b}5 intending ...\text{\text{b}7}, when Black is in time to avoid the attacking plan of \text{\text{g}3}, h2-h4, \text{\text{w}e}4 and \text{\text{\text{d}3}}.

16...\text{\text{xd}4} 17.\text{\text{xe}7} \text{\text{xe}7} 18.\text{\text{xd}4} \text{\text{a}7}!
The only way to continue developing.

Both 18...\text{\text{d}8} 19.\text{\text{xd}8}+ \text{\text{xd}8} 20.\text{\text{d}1} and 18...\text{\text{b}8} 19.\text{\text{d}3} \text{g}6 20.\text{\text{e}5} leave Black under heavy pressure.

19.\text{\text{h}4}!
This virtually forces Black to play ...\text{f}5 in the near future. Even though h2-h4 might not be an ideal move in that structure, if White can consolidate, he will have the better chances.

After 19.\text{\text{d}3} \text{g}6! (19...\text{f}5 20.\text{\text{e}5}±) it is surprisingly hard to break through on the kingside: 20.\text{h}4 \text{h}5 21.\text{g}4 (21.\text{f}5 \text{\text{gxf}5} 22.\text{\text{e}2} \text{b}5 23.\text{\text{h}3} \text{f}6 24.\text{\text{g}3}+ \text{\text{h}8} 25.\text{\text{\text{h}5}+} \text{\text{h}7}∞) 21...\text{b}5 22.\text{\text{e}3} \text{h}xg4 23.\text{h}5 \text{f}5! 24.\text{hxg}6 \text{\text{f}6}∞

19...\text{\text{b}5} 20.\text{\text{d}3} \text{f}5
20...\text{g}6 21.\text{h}5±

21.\text{\text{\text{e}2}}
The queen is better here than on \text{e}3, as it can help to support a future g2-g4.
Conclusion

Against the ...h6 version of the Three-Piece System, we have covered two promising approaches for White. The rare 11.f5!? packs a definite punch, which is only enhanced by its surprise value. The untested 11...0–0!?N may be Black's best bet, although even here he must overcome plenty of pitfalls. A nice bonus of the early f4–f5 is that it works just as well (or perhaps even better) in the version without ...h6, making it an especially convenient line to have in your repertoire.

We also covered the tried-and-tested 11...e2, which remains in excellent theoretical shape. We looked at five responses in detail, of which the first three – 11...g8?, 11...g5?! and 11...b8?! – all suffer from clear drawbacks. 11...b5, on the other hand, is fairly reliable, but there cannot be many players who would relish the prospect of being tortured in a pawn-down endgame.

Black's most interesting option is 11...0–0!?, although my new idea of 13.e5!N introduces plenty of fresh problems for the defence. I would encourage you to make up your own mind as to whether to put the queen on f3 or e3 a few moves later; either way, I like White's chances.
Chapter 12

Classical Main Line

Three-Piece System – Main Line

Variation Index

1. e4 c5 2. â3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. âxd4 âf6 5. âc3 a6 6. âg5 e6
7. f4 âe7 8. âf3 âc7 9.0–0–0

A) 10. f5!?  
   A1) 10... âe5  
   A2) 10... e5  
B) 10. g4  
   B1) 10... h6 11. âxf6 âxf6 12. âb1!?  
      B11) 12... g5  
      B12) 12... âb6  
   B2) 10... b5 11. âxf6  
      B21) 11... âxf6  
      B22) 11... âxf6 12. g5 âd7 13. f5  
         B221) 13... âxg5†?! 14. âb1  
         B2211) 14... âe5  
         B2212) 14... 0–0  
      B222) 13... âc5  
      B223) 13... 0–0?! 14. h4!! b4 15. âce2  
         B2231) 15... âb7?!  
         B2232) 15... e5  

A) 10. f5!?  
   A1) 10... âe5  
   A2) 10... e5  
B) 10. g4  
   B1) 10... h6 11. âxf6 âxf6 12. âb1!?  
      B11) 12... g5  
      B12) 12... âb6  
   B2) 10... b5 11. âxf6  
      B21) 11... âxf6  
      B22) 11... âxf6 12. g5 âd7 13. f5  
         B221) 13... âxg5†?! 14. âb1  
         B2211) 14... âe5  
         B2212) 14... 0–0  
      B222) 13... âc5  
      B223) 13... 0–0?! 14. h4!! b4 15. âce2  
         B2231) 15... âb7?!  
         B2232) 15... e5  

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1.e4 c5 2.δf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.δxd4 δf6
5.δc3 a6 6.δg5 e6 7.f4 δe7 8.δf3 δc7
9.0–0–0 δbd7

This is the starting position for the Three-Piece System without ...h6, which used to be considered one of the absolute main lines of the Najdorf. We will analyse the rare but promising A) 10.δf5?! followed by the more traditional B) 10.g4.

A) 10.δf5?!

This attacking plan is even more appealing here than it was in the previous chapter, as Black's options are considerably reduced without the moves ...h6 and δh4 included. I therefore feel it is a fully valid alternative to the huge theoretical lines after 10.g4, even though White is in good shape there too. The text move considerably reduces the number of lines White needs to know; not just because there have been fewer games played, but also because the play tends to be less forcing in general.

Black has two choices: maintaining the pawn on e6 with A1) 10...δe5, or blocking the centre with A2) 10...e5.

After 10...h6N White can, of course, transpose to the previous chapter by retreating to h4, but an easier solution is 11.fxe6! δe5 (11...hxg5 12.δd5! δa5 13.exd7† δxd7 14.δc4±) 12.δh3 fxe6 13.δd2 when Black is under pressure. The threat of δxe6 is real, and if Black defends suitably then the simple plan of δe2 and g4-g5 looks promising.

A1) 10...δe5 11.δh3

I played the pointless 11.δg3?! here, but the lack of pressure on the e6-pawn meant that Black was comfortable in Negi – Wen Yang, Mashhad 2011.

11...δf4

11...0–0?! 12.δe2! threatens to take on e6, and the upcoming g4-g5 plan renders Black's position shaky. In the previous chapter we analysed a similar position with ...h6 and δh4 included, but here it's simply a worse version for Black, so I won't go into further details.

12.δxe7 δxe7 13.δg3

13...0–0

13...δg5† 14.δb1 δe3 has been played a few times, but after 15.δf3!N Black is struggling due to the pressure on the d6-pawn.

14.δe2 δf6
We have reached a complicated middlegame with a lot to explore. The most interesting direction seems to be:

15. \( \textsf{W}f4! \)

15.fx\( \textsf{e}6 \textsf{N} \textsf{f}xe6 16. \textsf{B}d3 \textsf{C}c7 \) does not seem like much for \textsf{W}hite. Instead we will prepare \( g4-g5 \), while also overprotecting the \( e4 \)-pawn for the future.

15... \( \textsf{h}5 \)

This position was reached in Nguyen Kim – Le Thi, Vietnam 1994. Here I propose:

16.a3N

Holding up the queenside play, and forcing \textsf{B}lack to come up with a good counter to the \( g4-g5 \) plan.

A2) 10.e5 11. \( \textsf{B}de2 \textsf{b}5 \)

12. \( \textsf{B}xf6! \)

This has hardly ever been played, but it gives \textsf{W}hite a slightly improved version of the Smeets – Nakamura game from the previous chapter, as \textsf{B}lack's kingside is slightly less solid with the pawn on \( h7 \) instead of \( h6 \).

12... \( \textsf{B}xf6 \) 13. \( \textsf{B}d5 \textsf{B}xd5 \)

This is the only move to have been tested.

13... \( \textsf{C}c5!? \textsf{N} \) may be objectively better, but it gives \textsf{W}hite a pleasant choice. 14. \( \textsf{B}ec3 \) is a simple option which can be compared with variation A3 of the previous chapter. With the pawn on \( h7 \) instead of \( h6 \), \textsf{W}hite will find it easier to advance on the kingside. Alternatively, 14. \( \textsf{B}xe7!? \textsf{C}xe7 \) 15.g4 is an ambitious attempt, when the extra tempo required by \textsf{B}lack to prevent \( g4-g5 \) might prove crucial.

14. \( \textsf{exd5} \)

A very interesting strategic situation. The computer assesses it as comfortable for \textsf{B}lack, with an evaluation veering towards the dreaded “\( + \)”, but that is incomprehensible to me. \textsf{B}lack’s king lacks a safe haven, and he has virtually no counterplay on the queenside; or at least it will be extremely slow to materialize. If he ever opts for kingside castling, as the computer so cheerfully does in many lines, \textsf{W}hite will just
plonk his bishop on e4 to secure the d5- and c2-pawns, then put his knight on h5 before starting a terrifying kingside pawn assault. Even in the centre, the black king cannot feel too comfortable, since White can either advance on the kingside in the same way, or perhaps even play b1 followed by opening the c-file.

14...b7N

Trying to delay or avoid ...0–0 altogether.

14...b4 15.g3 was good for White in Grabarczyk – Matuszewski, Poland 2007. Black faces the same type of problems, and the premature advance of the b-pawn only leads to a loss of flexibility on the queenside.

Another possible line is 14...0–0N 15.g3 d7 16.d3 f6 17.h5 d8 18.g4 b7 19.h4 f7 20.e4 c8 21.b1 with good prospects for White. Some of Black's moves may appear strange, but the computer approved of all of them. Even now the machine seems to think Black is fine, but the inevitable g4–g5 break, which White can prepare in his own sweet time, makes me strongly question this assessment.

15.g3 c8 16.d3 c5

After 16...d8 17.h4 f6 Black's set-up does not seem very stable to me, and White gets a good position with either 18.e4!, or 18.e4 followed by h5.

The text move intends ...g5 followed by ...e3, but White can easily avoid the queen exchange and maintain his positional advantages.

17.e4

17.g4!? g6 18.e4 is another idea, avoiding the ...g5 plan altogether.

17...g5† 18.b1 c3 19.h5±

White will soon drive the enemy pieces away with d3 and h2–h4.

B) 10.g4
This is the big main line. Now B1) 10...h6 is a significant option, but by far the most important move is B2) 10...b5.

B1) 10...h6 11.\texttt{xf6} \texttt{xf6} 12.\texttt{b1}!

12.h4 leads to similar variations, and it is useful to look at the following line to understand why I prefer the text move. 12...\texttt{b6} 13.\texttt{b3} (13.\texttt{de2} deserves attention, but that is another story.) 13...\texttt{c7} (13...\texttt{c5} led to a nice victory for me a long time ago: 14.\texttt{xc5} \texttt{xc5} 15.\texttt{e5}! \texttt{dxe5} 16.\texttt{e4} \texttt{a5} 17.\texttt{d6}+ \texttt{f8} 18.g5+ Negi – Efimenko, San Marino 2006.) 14.e5 \texttt{dxe5} 15.f5 \texttt{b6}! 16.\texttt{e4} \texttt{exf5} 17.gxf5 \texttt{d7}

As we will see a bit later, this same position offers White a lot more scope with \texttt{b1} played instead of h2-h4. As things stand, after 18.\texttt{a5} 0–0–0 19.\texttt{d6}+ \texttt{b8} 20.\texttt{xb7}+ \texttt{xb7} 21.\texttt{dxb7} \texttt{c8} 22.\texttt{d6} \texttt{c7} Black equalized fairly easily in Shirov – Dominguez Perez, Sofia 2009.

At this point Black has two main options: B11) 12...\texttt{g5} and B12) 12...\texttt{b6}.

12...\texttt{e7} 13.h4 b5 14.g5 gives White a nice position with an automatic attack, for instance: 14...\texttt{b4} 15.\texttt{cc2} \texttt{c5} 16.f5 e5 17.f6 \texttt{gxf6} 18.gxf6 \texttt{f8} 19.\texttt{f5}± Kloster – Petukhov, corr. 2011.

This possibility seems to be the main argument for preferring 12.h4 over 12.\texttt{b1}, but here I found a new and exciting idea:

13.e5!N dxe5 14.\texttt{xe6}!

It is hard to resist attaching two exclamation marks to such an idea!

14.\texttt{fxe5} \texttt{xe5} 15.\texttt{e4} gives White decent compensation too, but it is much less exciting.

14...\texttt{fxe6} 15.\texttt{f5}

Despite being a piece down, White’s pieces are almost perfectly placed.

15...\texttt{xg5}

15...\texttt{hxg5} 16.\texttt{d7}±
16.\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}e4

Threatening a nasty check on d6. The following analysis is certainly not exhaustive, but it clearly demonstrates that White has a huge initiative.

16...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}f8

After 16...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}c7 17.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g2 it is virtually impossible for Black to continue development. 17...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}f8 18.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}h3→

16...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}f4 runs into another amazing idea: 17.g5!

![Diagram](image1)

17...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}b6 (17...hxg5 18.h4!! I hardly even know how to explain this, but the kingside is being torn open, and Black has no pieces to bring to its defence.) 18.gxh6 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d7 (18...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d5 19.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g1 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d7 20.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}h5\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d8 21.c4→) 19.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d6\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}f8 20.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g4 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}a4 21.b3→

17.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}h3 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d8

Trying to run away via c7.

17...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}a5 18.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}h5\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}e7 (18...\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d8 transposes to the main line below.) 19.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g6 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}f6 20.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d6 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d5 21.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g7\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}xd6 22.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}xf8\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}c6 23.c4±

18.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}h5 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}a5


20.g5 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}c7 21.gxh6 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}b4

After 21...b5 22.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g5! \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}xg5 23.hxg5 Black will not be able to cope with the connected passed pawns.

22.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g2 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}e7 23.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}h3 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}f4 24.h7 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}g7 25.\textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}d6 \textit{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{\textbf{}}}}}b8


Black’s position is collapsing.
This is a normal move in these positions, but it enables White to get an improved version of the Shirov – Dominguez game mentioned in the note to move 12.

13.\(\mathcal{D}b3\) \(\mathcal{W}c7\)

After 13...\(\mathcal{D}c5?!\) 14.e5 \(\mathcal{D}xc5\) \(\mathcal{W}xc5\) 16.\(\mathcal{D}e4\) \(\mathcal{W}c6\) 17.\(\mathcal{Ag}2\) Black was in trouble in Sulskis – H. Hunt, Warsaw 2005.

13...\(\mathcal{E}e7\)N just gives White easy play: 14.h4 \(\mathcal{D}c5\) 15.f5 \(\mathcal{D}d7\) 16.g5±

14.e5?!N

This is the only way to justify the placement of the knight on b3. Black was threatening ...\(\mathcal{D}xc3\), and was also ready for the usual queenside play with ...b5. Although the text move is technically a novelty, the same idea has been played more than once after 12.h4, and for the next few moves we will follow one of the critical games from that line.

14...\(\mathcal{D}xe5\)

14...\(\mathcal{E}e7\) 15.\(\mathcal{Ex}d6\) \(\mathcal{Ex}d6\) 16.\(\mathcal{D}d4\) \(\mathcal{E}e7\) 17.h4±

15.f5 \(\mathcal{D}b6\)

Other moves give White a clear edge, as he will be able to ruin Black's structure after fxe6.

A couple of examples are 15...\(\mathcal{W}c6\) 16.\(\mathcal{W}xc6\) \(\mathcal{B}xc6\) 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.\(\mathcal{D}e4\)±, and 15...0-0 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.\(\mathcal{D}d3\)±.

16.\(\mathcal{D}e4\) \(\mathcal{Ex}f5\) 17.\(\mathcal{G}x\)f5 \(\mathcal{D}d7\)

In the Shirov – Dominguez game mentioned earlier, White had the pawn on h4, which is pretty useless in the majority of lines. It is not immediately obvious why \(\mathcal{B}b1\) might be useful, but one concrete point will become clear in the main line below.

18.\(\mathcal{D}a5\)

18.\(\mathcal{D}d6\)† deserves attention, but forcing the king to f8 does not give us any immediate returns, so there is no need for this.

18.\(\mathcal{D}bc5?!\) makes some sense, as after 18...\(\mathcal{W}c6\) Black cannot play ...0-0-0 anymore, but I prefer the text more.

18...0-0-0 19.\(\mathcal{G}g2\)??

I believe this is the right time to deviate from the parallel Shirov – Dominguez game.

19.\(\mathcal{D}d6\)† \(\mathcal{G}b8\) 20.\(\mathcal{W}xb7\)† \(\mathcal{W}xb7\) 21.\(\mathcal{D}xb7\) \(\mathcal{E}c8\) would be like the game, and even though White has a better version here, it is not obvious if he can claim an advantage.

Another idea is 19.\(\mathcal{D}d3\)?, forcing 19...\(\mathcal{Cc}6\) 20.\(\mathcal{D}xc6\) \(\mathcal{B}xd3\) 21.cxd3 (this would not be
possible with the king on c1) 21...\(\text{W}xc6\) 22.\(\text{g}2\). White seems to have terrific compensation for the pawn. His opposite-coloured bishop is clearly superior, but it is still not easy to break through. 22...\(\text{b}8\) 23.\(\text{c}1\) \(\text{d}5\) 24.\(\text{c}5\) \(\text{d}7\) 25.\(\text{c}2\) \(\text{d}5\) Black is just holding on, although White still has the better prospects.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{chess_board}
\caption{Position after 21...\(\text{ WD}5\) 22.\(\text{ WD}5\) 23.\(\text{ WD}5\)}
\end{figure}

19...\(\text{c}6\) 20.\(\text{xc}6\) \(\text{xc}6\)

20...\(\text{bxc}6\)?! 21.\(\text{a}3\) regains the pawn while keeping a clear advantage.

21.\(\text{b}3\) \(\text{c}7\)

This move gives White a pleasant choice.

22.\(\text{xf}6\)

22...\(\text{xd}1\) 23.\(\text{c}8\) 24.\(\text{b}3\) also offers White better chances due to the higher potential of his light-squared bishop.

22...\(\text{xf}6\)

22...\(\text{g}2\) 23.\(\text{xb}6\) \(\text{xd}1\) 24.\(\text{d}1\) \(\text{g}6\) 25.\(\text{xf}6\) \(\text{e}8\) 26.\(\text{xf}7\) \(\text{c}8\) 27.\(\text{b}3\) \(\text{xe}2\) 28.\(\text{a}4\)! Even though the material is equal, White has a lot of scope to create threats against the enemy king.

23.\(\text{a}4\)!

The a4-a5 threat forces Black to weaken his queenside.

23...\(\text{a}5\) 24.\(\text{b}5\)

24.\(\text{e}4\) is also good.

24...\(\text{d}6\) 25.\(\text{he}1\)

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{chess_board}
\caption{Position after 24...\(\text{d}6\) 25.\(\text{he}1\)}
\end{figure}

22.\(\text{d}3\)!

Black is unable to exchange rooks because the opening of the c-file will prove fatal. This would not have been the case with the king on c1!

22...\(\text{c}4\) 23.\(\text{c}5\)

23.\(\text{c}3\) also makes sense, but the text move leads to an excellent position.

23...\(\text{d}2\) 24.\(\text{xd}2\) \(\text{xd}2\) 25.\(\text{xb}7\) \(\text{d}8\)

26.\(\text{e}4\) \(\text{d}7\) 27.\(\text{d}5\)

Black is still holding his position together, but it looks extremely unpleasant to play, while White can continue improving his position in various ways.

\section*{B2) 10...b5}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{chess_board}
\caption{Position after 10...b5}
\end{figure}
This is the main theoretical path, which has been tested in thousands of games.

11.\( \text{\textit{xf6}} \)

White exchanges his bishop to make way for the g-pawn. Here we will consider the underrated B21) 11...\( \text{\textit{xxf6}} \) followed by the standard B22) 11...\( \text{\textit{xf6}} \).

11...gxf6?!

This has been played in a lot of games, with surprisingly okay results, but I believe this is mostly because a lot of White players have not found the right way to punish it.

12.f5!

It is possible to take a slower approach, but it makes sense to launch an immediate attack as Black will not get enough time to recover. Notice how quickly we can zone in on the weak e6-pawn, with plans such as \( \text{\textit{ce2-f4}} \) and \( \text{\textit{h3-g4-g5}} \) hanging in the air.

12...\( \text{\textit{ce5}} \)

12...\( \text{\textit{c5}} \) has been played successfully by Movsesian, but White can punish it immediately: 13.g5! fxg5N (13...b4 14.fxe6 bxc3 15.exf7+ gave White a crushing attack in Casallas Abril – Camargo, Bogota 2010.) 14.fxe6 \( \text{\textit{xe6}} \) (14...fxe6 15.e5 followed by \( \text{\textit{h5}} \)+ destroys Black's position.) 15.\( \text{\textit{d5}} \) \( \text{\textit{xd5}} \) 16.exd5\( ^\pm \) Followed by \( \text{\textit{c6}} \) and \( \text{\textit{h3}} \).

13.\( \text{\textit{h3}} \) 0–0

13...b4 14.\( \text{\textit{ce2}} \) just helps White.

13...\( \text{\textit{d7}} \) is met by 14.\( \text{\textit{ce2}}^+ \), when the threats created after \( \text{\textit{f4}} \) are too hard to deal with. The text move has been the most popular, but Black seems to be castling into fire.

14.\( \text{\textit{g1}} \)

14.\( \text{\textit{ce2}} \) has also done well for White, but one good line is enough.

14...\( \text{\textit{h8}} \) 15.\( \text{\textit{ce2}} \) \( \text{\textit{g8}} \) 16.\( \text{\textit{g3}} \) \( \text{\textit{b7}} \) 17.\( \text{\textit{g2}} \)

17...d5?!

17...\( \text{\textit{ac8}} \) 18.fxe6 fxe6 19.\( \text{\textit{f4}}^+ \) Yilmaz – Darini, Kemer 2009.

18.\( \text{\textit{f4}}^+ \) \( \text{\textit{c5}} \)?

Black should prefer 18...\( \text{\textit{ac8}} \) as played in Gaida – Jedrzejowski, corr. 1992, although 19.exd5\( ^N \) still gives White the better chances. The text move allows a thematic tactical refutation.

19.\( \text{\textit{wh7}}^+ \) \( \text{\textit{gx7}} \) 20.\( \text{\textit{h3}}^+ \) \( \text{\textit{g7}} \) 21.\( \text{\textit{dxe6}}^+ \) fxe6 22.\( \text{\textit{exe6}}^+ \) \( \text{\textit{f7}} \) 23.\( \text{\textit{h7}}^+ \)

This move definitely deserves more attention than it has been given.

12...\textit{xf6}

White had better go for the forced stuff, as after the more popular 12.g5 Black seems to get a fully playable position.

12...\textit{b8}

The critical move, creating immediate threats against b2.

12...axb5? 13.\textit{xd}x6 \textit{a5} 14.\textit{xd}6t \textit{e7} 15.e5 is just horrible for Black.

With 12...0–0 Black shows he is willing to play a pawn down, but he does not seem to have enough compensation for it. 13.\textit{xd}7 \textit{xd}7 14.g5 \textit{xd}4 15.\textit{xd}4 \textit{ab}8 16.\textit{d}d3± Fier – Williams, Reykjavik 2011.

The next few moves are logical and relatively forced.

13.g5 \textit{xd}4 14.\textit{xd}7t \textit{xd}7 15.\textit{xd}4 \textit{xb}6 15...\textit{xb}2 16.\textit{xb}2 \textit{b}6t 17.b5! is a nice trick.

17...\textit{b6} 18.\textit{xd}6 \textit{c}7 19.\textit{d}d4 leaves Black a pawn down with little counterplay.

18.\textit{g}3!N

18.\textit{e}3 has been the usual choice, as well as the computer's suggestion, but after the accurate 18...\textit{a}3! White does not seem to have anything better than 19.\textit{b}1 0–0 20.\textit{xb}5 \textit{a}5t 21.\textit{c}3 \textit{xb}5 22.\textit{x}a5 \textit{xa}5 with a drawish endgame.

18...0–0

The main point of White's last move is that 18...\textit{a}3?? is refuted by 19.\textit{xb}5 \textit{xa}3 20.\textit{xd}6t.

19.a4 \textit{d}7

19...\textit{c}6 20.\textit{b}1 \textit{a}3 21.\textit{xb}8 \textit{xb}8 22.\textit{d}d3 d5 23.exd5 exd5 24.\textit{xd}5 also favours White. Despite the open nature of the position, I do not see how Black can really exploit the open king, particularly with the knight around. If Black retreats with the queen, White should just move the knight away, probably to e3, and keep a solid edge.

20.\textit{b}1 \textit{a}3 21.\textit{xb}8 \textit{xb}8 22.\textit{d}3±

White's king might seem vulnerable, but it is actually pretty safe on d2, particularly since Black's bishop has limited prospects. In the
likely event of an endgame – for instance after ...Ec8 and Ec4 – the centralized king will be a great asset. Therefore it seems to me that Black is destined to suffer.

B22) 11...Qxf6

This is the main move of course.

12.g5 d7 13.f5

Leaving the g5-pawn hanging is standard practice for this line. We will analyse B221) 13...Qxg5†!, B222) 13...Qc5 and the currently fashionable B223) 13...0-0?!

13...Qe5?! places the knight on a superficially good square, but it neither exerts any pressure on e4, nor defends e6. 14.Qg3 0-0 (14...b4 only helps to improve White’s knight: 15.Qce2 Qb7 [15...0-0 16.Qf4±] 16.fxe6 Qxe4 17.Qg2±) 15.Qb1 (15.f6?! also deserves attention. The bishop will be awkward on d8, and White may launch a full-throttled kingside attack with h4-h5 or Qce2-f4.) 15...Qe8 16.fxe6 Not the most ambitious choice, but it keeps things simple and is more than enough for a slight edge. 16...fxe6 17.Qce2! Qd8 18.Qf4 Qe7 19.h4± Rowies – Maia, corr. 2011.

B221) 13...Qxg5†! 14.Qb1

I find it hard to explain the popularity of this variation. Most of the lines end up in an opposite-coloured-bishop middlegame where Black has few prospects and White keeps a constant, nagging initiative. We will analyse B2211) 14...Qe5 and B2212) 14...0-0.

B2211) 14...Qe5

This is the most popular choice, but White only needs a few accurate moves to secure an edge.

15.Qh5 Qe7
15...Qd8 16.h4

The most precise way. 16.Qxe6 would be slightly less accurate here, as a subsequent Qd5 will not hit the queen. 16...Qf6 17.fxe6 0-0 18.Qh3
18...\texttt{h}8
18...\texttt{f}xe6 19.\texttt{x}xe6+ \texttt{h}8 20.\texttt{d}5 is the same thing.
18...g6 19.\texttt{we}2 does nothing, apart from giving White the attacking option of h4-h5.
19.\texttt{d}5 \texttt{f}xe6 20.\texttt{x}xe6 \texttt{c}4
20...\texttt{b}7 21.\texttt{h}f1 \texttt{g}6 22.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{x}h4 23.\texttt{h}1 gave White a powerful initiative in Ljubicic – Karacsony, corr. 2012.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{scope}
\pgfsetlinewidth{2pt}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{scope}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

16.\texttt{c}6 \texttt{w}e8 22.\texttt{w}xe8 \texttt{xe}8 23.\texttt{xf}6 \texttt{xe}6 24.\texttt{d}5 \texttt{xe}4 25.\texttt{c}7!±

Luther – Vink, Wijk aan Zee 2001. I remember playing through this game as a kid and being impressed by the way White trapped the rook.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{scope}
\pgfsetlinewidth{2pt}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{scope}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

21.\texttt{e}2
Funnily enough, the above position was reached in a recent GM game with Black to move, as White reacted to 15...\texttt{d}8 with the imprecise 16.\texttt{xe}6. Despite the lost tempo, White still had little trouble demonstrating his long-term initiative. Play continued: 21...\texttt{a}7 This is not the most accurate, but it is still useful as a free move. 22.\texttt{g}3 \texttt{h}5 23.\texttt{g}1 \texttt{h}6 24.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{h}7 25.\texttt{df}1 \texttt{h}4 26.\texttt{f}2± Van Kampen – Fedorowicz, Montreal 2014.

21.\texttt{c}3?! is arguably the most precise way to continue, and has been popular among correspondence players. However, I don’t see the need for anything fancy, as White keeps an edge with simple developing moves.

21...\texttt{f}8 22.\texttt{hf}1±

With a one-sided game.

18.\texttt{xf}7+ \texttt{xf}7 19.\texttt{h}3 \texttt{g}7 20.\texttt{d}5 \texttt{d}8
Black has managed to hold this position in quite a few correspondence games, but it is an unpleasant defensive task, especially for an over-the-board player.
This is a more forcing way, which at least prevents White from playing with an easy initiative. At some point I thought this might be an interesting way to revamp this line, but White emerges on top with a bit of a precision.

15.\textbf{fxe6} \textbf{\textit{b6}}
A series of logical moves follow.

16.\textbf{\textit{d5}} \textbf{\textit{xd5}} 17.\textbf{exd5} \textbf{\textit{fxe6}} 18.\textbf{\textit{g4}}

18...\textbf{\textit{e5}}
After 18...\textbf{\textit{f6}} 19.\textbf{\textit{xex6}} \textbf{\textit{xe5}} 20.\textbf{\textit{g2}} Black will have to exchange on e6 sooner or later, leaving White with much the better bishop, not to mention a safer king.

19.\textbf{\textit{xg5}} \textbf{\textit{exd4}} 20.\textbf{\textit{d3}} \textbf{\textit{g6}}
Black is barely hanging on, but now he plans ...\textbf{\textit{f5}} to simplify the position.

21.\textbf{\textit{hfl}}
21.\textbf{\textit{hg1}} is met by 21...\textbf{\textit{g7}} intending ...\textbf{\textit{f5}}.

21...\textbf{\textit{g7}}
21....\textbf{\textit{h3}} 22.\textbf{\textit{g1}}! \textbf{\textit{g7}} 23.\textbf{\textit{g3}} shows the point behind the \textbf{\textit{f1-g1}} finesse. 23....\textbf{\textit{f5}} 24.\textbf{\textit{xf5}} \textbf{\textit{xf5}} 25.\textbf{\textit{xd6}} \textbf{\textit{e8}} 26.\textbf{\textit{c5}} \textbf{\textit{d8}} 27.\textbf{\textit{xd4}} White's superiority has been demonstrated in a few correspondence games, one example being Kevicky – Raidaru, corr. 2010.

22.\textbf{\textit{xf8}}\textbf{\textit{+}} \textbf{\textit{xf8}} 23.\textbf{\textit{\textit{xg6}}}!
The critical move.

23.\textbf{\textit{f1}} \textbf{\textit{e8}} 24.\textbf{\textit{h4}} \textbf{\textit{a7}} 25.\textbf{\textit{a4}} is a more subtle try, but it is not easy to prove an advantage.

23...\textbf{\textit{hxg6}} 24.\textbf{\textit{\textit{gxg6}}+} \textbf{\textit{g7}} 25.\textbf{\textit{e8}}\textbf{\textit{+}} \textbf{\textit{h7}}

26.\textbf{\textit{f1}} \textbf{\textit{h6}}
26...\textbf{\textit{b7}}? runs into 27.\textbf{\textit{h5}}+ \textbf{\textit{g8}} 28.\textbf{\textit{d1!}} with the deadly threat of \textbf{\textit{g1}}.

27.\textbf{\textit{e1}} \textbf{\textit{g5}}
27...\textbf{\textit{h5}}? is refuted by 28.\textbf{\textit{e2}}+ (28.\textbf{\textit{g1}} \textbf{\textit{e5!}}) 28...\textbf{\textit{h6}} 29.\textbf{\textit{f2!}} followed by \textbf{\textit{g1}}.
28.\f{f}8
Continuing the domination theme.

28...\b{b}4
28...\e{b}7? 29.\e{e}6† wins quickly.

28...\e{g}7 29.h4 \e{e}5 30.\f{f}2 maintains a big advantage, for instance 30...\a{a}5 (30...\a{a}7 31.\xc{c}8±) 31.a3+- and the queen is ready to move.

29.\f{f}2!N
Improving over 29.\f{f}1 \e{e}7 30.\h{h}8† \g{g}7 31.\h{h}5 \g{g}6 32.\h{h}8 \g{g}7 when White could only draw in Motylev – Sjugirov, Rijeka 2010.

29...\a{a}7
29...\e{e}7 30.\h{h}8† \g{g}7 31.\xd{d}4† \e{e}5 32.\h{h}4!+– is the point behind putting the queen on f2.

30.\xc{c}8 \f{f}7
White has a few ideas here, but the simplest is to convert to a favourable queen endgame.

31.\h{h}8† \g{g}7 32.\h{h}7† \xf{x}h7 33.\f{f}7† \h{h}6 34.\e{e}6† \g{g}7 35.a3!
White can also start with 35.\f{f}7†. However, 35.a4 is less accurate as 35...\b{b}3! gives Black chances to resist.

35...\b{b}3? 36.\e{e}d6 would also lead to suffering for Black.

36.\e{e}d7† \g{g}6
36...\g{g}8 loses to 37.\f{f}c8† followed by \b{b}7† and \xb{b}3.

37.\e{e}d6† \h{h}5
Now White can neutralize his opponent’s activity with:

38.\g{g}3! \xc{c}2† 39.\xf{x}c2 \e{e}d5 40.h4
With excellent winning chances. Note that if the pawn had gone to a4 instead of a3 on move 35, Black could have given an annoying check on b4 at this point.

B222) 13.\c{c}5
14...g1!?  
This is an old idea of Boleslavsky, which has recently been taken up successfully by correspondence players. White isn't in a hurry to define the kingside structure, and Black does not seem to have a good plan to fight against the impressive pawn behemoth.

14...f6 gxf6 15...xf6 gxf6 16.g1 has traditionally been considered dangerous, but in recent years correspondence players have been holding the fort for Black in this line.

14...b4  
The only way for Black to offer resistance is by trying hard for counterplay.

I will show a bad move to illustrate White's idea in this line: 14...b8? 15...e6! Now of course Black should not take with the knight and allow d5, while taking with the bishop allows f5: So 15...xe6 is more or less forced, but then 16...f6! fxg6 17...xg6 h7 18...h3 leaves Black without a good defence.

15...ce2

15...e5  
This has been the usual choice in correspondence games, but now the kingside pawns are extremely strong.

15...b7 also falls short of equality: 16.fxe6 0-0 (16...f6 17...f4+) 17...f4 &xe4 (17...xe4 18...h5 d5 19.exf7† &xf7 20...d6 &e5 21.g6 &h5 22...h5 hxg6 23...g6±) This position arose through a slightly different move order in Tidman – D. Coleman, Sunningdale 2009. Here White's simplest path to an advantage would have been:

16...b3!  
16.f6? exd4 17.fxe7 d3! 18.cxd3 b3 was seen in the stem game Boleslavsky – Aronin, Moscow 1957, where White was lucky to escape with a draw.

16...g6  
16...d5 can be met by the blunt 17...g3 &xb3† 18...xb3 &g5† 19...b1 d4 20...h5 with good attacking chances, Penzler – Migliorini, corr. 2012.

16...d7 17...b1 a5 (After 17...b7? 18...g3 0-0 19.f6 Black resigned in Fajs – Achermann, corr. 2009.) 18...g3 a4 19...d2 The queenside attack is obviously much less impressive than White's kingside play. The one example on my database ended as follows: 19...b3 20.axb3
\( \text{\textnormal{\textit{Classical Main Line}}}

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\( \text{\textnormal{\textit{Classical Main Line}}}

\text{xg5} (20...\text{x}b3 21.\text{x}b3 \text{x}g5 22.\text{h}5±)

21.\text{c}4 \text{e}7 22.\text{h}5 \text{axb3} 23.\text{x}g7+ \text{f}8

24.\text{cxb3}

24...\text{b}7 25.\text{g}4 \text{c}6 26.\text{d}5 \text{f}6 27.\text{e}6+ \text{f}xe6 28.\text{g}7+ 1-0

\text{J. Fernandez - Flores Ramos, corr. 2010.}

17.\text{b}1 \text{a}5

17...\text{b}7 has also been played in some correspondence games, but White has scored heavily. A few examples: 18.\text{xc}5 \text{xc}5 (18...\text{d}c5 19.\text{f}6 \text{f}8 20.\text{h}4 \text{h}5 21.\text{h}3 \text{c}6 22.\text{c}4± \text{Valinova - Gromotka, corr. 2013.})

19.\text{c}1 \text{h}6 (19...\text{gxf}5 20.\text{xf}5 \text{c}8 21.\text{f}3 \text{a}5 22.\text{b}3! \text{e}6 23.\text{h}3±) 20.\text{h}3 \text{xe}4 21.\text{d}3

21...\text{gxf}5 (21...\text{xf}5 22.\text{xf}5 \text{gxf}5 23.\text{d}3 \text{c}4 24.\text{gh}6 also favoured White in Barlow - Joao, corr. 2008.) 22.\text{gh}6 \text{f}6 23.\text{h}7 \text{c}6 24.\text{xe}4 \text{fxe}4 25.\text{df}1 \text{e}7 26.\text{h}6 \text{d}5 27.\text{g}2+--

\text{Barlow - Santana Penade, corr. 2009.}

18.\text{h}4

White has a much more pleasant position.

The following game is a good illustration:

18...\text{a}4 19.\text{xc}5 \text{xc}5 20.\text{f}6 \text{d}8 21.\text{h}5 \text{b}7

22.\text{h}1 \text{f}8 23.\text{c}1 \text{b}6 24.\text{g}4 \text{c}6

25.\text{h}2

Preparing to centralize the rook. Black cannot take the e4-pawn because the check on b5 would be devastating.

25...\text{d}4 26.\text{hd}2 \text{gxh}5 27.\text{f}5 \text{f}8 0-0

28.\text{e}2±

Black was able to castle, but his position still contained numerous weaknesses in Cremasco - De Filippis, corr. 2012.
Chapter 12 – Three-Piece System – Main Line

Despite being nowhere near as popular as the previous two moves, this is perhaps the most critical continuation of all. Castling looks extremely provocative, and White has to be careful not to be sucked into the trap of trying to play for mate too quickly. Instead we will aim for a pleasant version of a typical structure.

14.\textit{h4}!?

Several direct attacking ideas have been tried, but I did not find any of them fully convincing.

14.\textit{g1} has been the most popular choice, and can be played with similar ideas to the text move. After 14...\textit{b4} 15.\textit{ce2} e5 16.\textit{f6} exd4 17.\textit{fxe7} \textit{e8} 18.\textit{xd4} \textit{e5} the position is similar to the main B232 line as featured below, with a few different details. The basic premise – that White should be better in this structure once he neutralizes Black’s immediate threats – should hold, but I prefer to aim for the position with h2-h4, as a subsequent h4-h5/g5-g6 is a typical plan, whereas the rook on g1 does not serve an immediate purpose.

14...\textit{b4} 15.\textit{ce2}

Now it makes sense to consider B2231) 15...\textit{b7}!?, and B2232) 15...\textit{e5}.

15...\textit{e5}? misplaces the knight, and 16.\textit{g3}± leaves Black with big problems.

B2231) 15...\textit{b7}!?

Black tries to keep the tension for as long as he can, while hinting at ideas like ...\textit{d5}.

16.\textit{g2}!?

Anticipating the central pawn break.

After 16.\textit{fxe6} \textit{c5}! Black regained the pawn with a decent game in O’Brien – Wood, email 2012.

16.\textit{g3} is a natural move, but now 16...\textit{d5} creates a mess. (16...\textit{e5} 17.\textit{f6}! gives White excellent attacking chances.) There are many ideas to explore here, but overall I find the main line more appealing.

16...\textit{ac8}!?

Another noncommital move, escalating the tension even further. A few other ideas:

16...\textit{d5} 17.\textit{exd5} \textit{xd5} 18.\textit{h3}± is not too worrying here.

16...\textit{e5} 17.\textit{f6} exd4 (17...\textit{xf6} 18.\textit{f5} \textit{d8} 19.\textit{xd6} \textit{c6} 20.\textit{g6}! \textit{fxg6} 21.\textit{b3}† \textit{h8} 22.\textit{f7}† \textit{xf7} 23.\textit{xf7}±) 18.\textit{fxe7} \textit{e8} 19.\textit{xd4}
19...\(\text{\textit{c}})\text{c}5 (19...\text{\textit{xe}}7 20.\text{\textit{f}}5±) 20.\text{\textit{f}}5 \text{\textit{xe}}4 21.\text{\textit{h}}3 \text{\textit{xf}}5 22.\text{\textit{xf}}5 White has obtained the typical structure for this line. The queenside seems to be well under control, and the h5-g6 attacking plan is on the cards.

Another sensible continuation is:

16...exf5 17.\textit{xf}5 \textit{f}e8 18.\textit{g}3

I also considered 18.\textit{b}1 \textit{f}8 19.\textit{f}4 \textit{ac}8, and now the aggressive 20.\textit{ed}4?! \textit{c}5 21.h5 \textit{xe}4 22.g6 is interesting, but White does not seem to have more than a draw.

18...\textit{f}8

18...\textit{e}5 19.\textit{b}1 \textit{ac}8 20.\textit{ed}4± Black's counterplay is at a standstill, and the simple h5-g6 plan gives White clearly better chances.

19.\textit{xd}6

This leads to heavy simplifications, but the upcoming endgame is not as equal as you might first think.

19...\textit{xd}6 20.\textit{xd}6 \textit{xd}6 21.\textit{xd}6 \textit{c}5 22.\textit{g}3 \textit{xe}4 23.\textit{xe}4 \textit{xe}4 24.\textit{e}1 \textit{c}6 24...\textit{b}7?! 25.\textit{x}e8\# \textit{xe}8 26.\textit{b}6± 25.\textit{xe}8\# \textit{xe}8 26.h5±

The pawn is going to h6 next, and White keeps a definite plus in the endgame.

16...\textit{ac}8?! keeps the position in flux for even longer; there are many interesting possibilities, but I like the following line, which is surprisingly almost forced on Black's side.

17.\textit{fx}e6 fxe6 18.\textit{h}3 e5 19.\textit{e}6\# \textit{h}8 20.\textit{xe}7 \textit{xd}4

After 20...\textit{fe}8 21.\textit{f}7 \textit{xd}4 22.\textit{xd}4 \textit{f}8 23.\textit{b}3± Black does not have enough compensation for the pawn.

21.\textit{xd}4 \textit{ce}8
22.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}6\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{f}c2+}}}}} 23.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{e}x\textit{c2}}} 24.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d}d2}}} 25.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{d}x\textit{d2}+}}}} 26.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{c}h3}}} 27.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{c}e4}}}

After so many exchanges it may seem that we are heading for a draw, but in fact White continues to exert pressure after:

26.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{h}3}}} 27.\text{\textit{\texttt{\textbf{c}c1}!}}

An excellent example of domination in the endgame.

27...\textit{\texttt{b6}}

27...\textit{\texttt{d5}} 28.\textit{\texttt{e}x\textit{c5} dxc5} 29.\textit{\texttt{e}x\textit{c5\pm}} obviously favours White due to his more active pieces, especially the king.

28.\textit{\texttt{a}a1?! \texttt{h6}}

28...\textit{\texttt{d7}} 29.\textit{\texttt{d}d8\pm}

29.\textit{\texttt{e}e3 \texttt{g}6} 30.\textit{\texttt{d}d4\pm}

Black’s extra pawn is irrelevant, and White’s excellent pieces give him lasting pressure.

B2232) 15...\textit{\texttt{e}5}

16...\textit{\texttt{e}d4} 17.\textit{\texttt{f}x\textit{e7 \texttt{e}e8}} 18.\textit{\texttt{e}x\textit{d4 \texttt{d}e5}} 19.\textit{\texttt{g}2}

19.\textit{\texttt{f}2} is also possible, but I am not sure if White is better in the upcoming line: 19...\textit{\texttt{e}x\textit{e7}} 20.\textit{\texttt{h}5 \texttt{g}4}! Trying to generate quick counterplay. (20...\textit{\texttt{b}7} 21.\textit{\texttt{g}2\pm} gives White an ideal position.) 21.\textit{\texttt{c}e2 \texttt{e}x\textit{e2}} 22.\textit{\texttt{w}x\textit{e2}} I would normally be happy with this structure, but here Black has the annoying 22...\textit{\texttt{c}c4!} 23.\textit{\texttt{w}x\textit{c4 \texttt{d}x\textit{c4}}} and it’s hard to assess how much better White is in this endgame. It could be worth exploring in further detail, but I like the main line even more.

19...\textit{\texttt{e}x\textit{e7}}

19...\textit{\texttt{w}x\textit{e7}} is met by 20.\textit{\texttt{f}5 \texttt{w}x\textit{f5}} 21.\textit{\texttt{e}x\textit{f5} a5} (21...\textit{\texttt{e}c8} 22.\textit{\texttt{f}6 \texttt{w}c7} 23.\textit{\texttt{h}5\texttt{+}}) 22.\textit{\texttt{b}5!} \textit{\texttt{e}c8} 23.\textit{\texttt{a}4\pm} when Black is stuck without any real counterplay.

19...\textit{\texttt{g}4} is not much good here, because Black will not be in time to exchange the queens later: 20.\textit{\texttt{e}e2 \texttt{e}x\textit{e2}} 21.\textit{\texttt{w}x\textit{e2 \texttt{e}x\textit{e7}} 22.\textit{\texttt{f}5 \texttt{e}6} 23.\textit{\texttt{h}5} White has typical, comfortable play for this structure. 23...\textit{\texttt{c}8} (23...\textit{\texttt{c}4?!} 24.\textit{\texttt{w}x\textit{c4 \texttt{d}x\textit{c4}}} 25.\textit{\texttt{d}d4\pm}) 24.\textit{\texttt{d}d4 \texttt{e}e8} 25.\textit{\texttt{g}6 \texttt{f}x\textit{g6}} 26.\textit{\texttt{hxg6 \texttt{h}6} 27.\textit{\texttt{b}b1\pm}

16.\textit{\texttt{f}6\texttt{!N}}

Technically a novelty, although it has been played many times in the similar position with \textit{\texttt{g}1} played instead of \textit{\texttt{h}2-h4}.

20.\textit{\texttt{f}5!}

Preventing any counterplay with ...\textit{\texttt{g}4}.

20...\textit{\texttt{xf5}}
20...\textit{Be8} 21.\textit{h5} \textit{Qe6} 22.\textit{b1} gives White a pleasant position.

\textbf{21.exf5}\textit{Be8}  
It is a similar story after other moves: White’s advanced kingside pawns give Black plenty to worry about.

21...\textit{Qae8} 22.\textit{f6} \textit{Be6} 23.\textit{h5}±

21...\textit{Qc8} Black does not have many threats.
22.\textit{f6} \textit{Qee8} 23.\textit{h5} \textit{Qc6} (23...\textit{Qg4} 24.\textit{g6}!)  
24.\textit{Qxc6} \textit{Qxc6} 25.\textit{Qg2} \textit{Qb6} 26.\textit{fxg7} \textit{Qxg7} 27.\textit{h6}±

22.\textit{Qb1} a5 23.\textit{f6} \textit{Qe6} 24.\textit{h5}
24.\textit{b3}?!± is another idea, preventing ...a4.

\textbf{24.a4} 25.\textit{fxg7} a3  
25...\textit{Qxg7} 26.\textit{g6}! gives White a dangerous attack.

25...\textit{b3} also proves insufficient after 26.\textit{cx b3 axb3} 27.\textit{axb3} \textit{Qxb3} 28.\textit{Qc1}±.

\textbf{26.\textit{g6} hxg6} 27.\textit{hxg6} \textit{Qxg6} 28.\textit{Wh2} \textit{Qxg7} 29.\textit{Qg2}
Black is in considerable danger.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Just as in the previous chapter, the early 10.\textit{f5}!? is a useful option which offers good chances to put the opponent under pressure without having to memorize too many complicated variations. Nevertheless, despite the appeal of this approach, the traditional main line with 10.\textit{g4} was too interesting a topic to ignore.

10...\textit{h6} is a reasonable move, but we saw that 11.\textit{Qxf6} \textit{Qxf6} 12.\textit{Qb1}!! poses a lot of problems to the defence, usually in conjunction with a sacrificial attack based on a timely e4-e5.

The usual continuation is 10...\textit{b5} 11.\textit{Qxf6} \textit{Qxf6} 12.\textit{g5} \textit{Qd7} 13.\textit{f5}, when Black must make a pivotal choice. 13...\textit{Qxg5}?! does not make much sense to me, as White soon regains his pawn while keeping the more active position. 13...\textit{Qc5} is the old main line, but here 14.\textit{Qg4}?! seems like an excellent way to strengthen White’s position without yet committing to f5-f6. Black seems to be under real pressure here.

13...0–0?! is the most important option nowadays, but I still like White’s chances after 14.\textit{h4}?! b4 15.\textit{Qce2}. Black’s 13th move is rather provocative, and White should resist the temptation to throw everything into a hasty kingside attack. Instead, if he keeps an eye on the centre, he should be able to bring all his pieces into play and gradually build an attack from a position of strength.
Poisoned Pawn

Introduction and 12...\texttt{d5}!?

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The Najdorf Poisoned Pawn is one of the most notorious opening variations in chess. It is also one of the most theoretically challenging, and a favourite among correspondence players who know they will have enough time (not to mention computer assistance) to navigate the many pitfalls. I cannot promise to refute it, but I will certainly show you some interesting ways to cause trouble for your opponents.

A) 10...\(\text{Qf}d7\)

I spent a while analysing this variation back in 2006, but nowadays it's just a matter of following correspondence games where White's advantage has been proven beyond a doubt.

B) 10...\(\text{dx}e5\)

Another noteworthy game continued 13...\(\text{Qbc}6\) 14.\(\text{Qxc}6\) \(\text{bxc}6\) 15.\(\text{Qe}4\) \(\text{d}5\) 16.0-0 \(\text{Qe}7\) 17.\(\text{Qb}3\) \(\text{a}4\) 18.\(\text{Qxe}7\) \(\text{wx}e4\) 19.\(\text{Qd}6\) \(\text{Qf}7\) 20.\(\text{Qc}5\) and Black was busted in Anand – Polgar, Moscow (blitz) 2006.

14.0-0

14.\(\text{Qb}3\)?! has been played several times, but simple main line is much more convincing.

C) 10...\(\text{h}6\).

A) 10...\(\text{Qf}d7\)

I spent a while analysing this variation back in 2006, but nowadays it's just a matter of following correspondence games where White's advantage has been proven beyond a doubt.

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14.0-0

14.\(\text{Qb}3\)?! has been played several times, but simple main line is much more convincing.

C) 10...\(\text{h}6\).
Chapter 13 - Introduction and 12...\(\text{\texttt{d5?!}}\)

12.\(\text{\texttt{de4}}\) \(\text{\texttt{wa2}}\)

Once again Black can insert 12...h6, when 13.\(\text{\texttt{h4}}\) leads to the next chapter. In the present variation we will see how the absence of these two moves may lead to some important nuances.

13.\(\text{\texttt{ad1}}\)

13.\(\text{\texttt{ab3?!}}\)

This used to be considered interesting, but it has been more or less refuted by:

13...h6!

Black needs to drive the bishop back to h4 for his defensive idea to work.

13...\(\text{\texttt{exd5?!}}\) 14.\(\text{\texttt{b5!}}\) is certainly not advisable for him.

13...\(\text{\texttt{wa5?!}}\) 14.\(\text{\texttt{f2}}\) \(\text{\texttt{wa4}}\) was first played in the famous game Tal - Tolush, Leningrad 1956, which resulted in a spectacular win for White after 15.\(\text{\texttt{b5?!}}\). Interestingly, Tolush repeated this position and won a subsequent game with the help of an improvement he found, but this is a moot point since 15.\(\text{\texttt{xd6!}}\) exd6 16.\(\text{\texttt{xd6}}\) exd6 17.\(\text{\texttt{xd6}}\) gave White a winning attack in Fekih - Tavinski, corr. 2007.

14.\(\text{\texttt{wc3}}\)

14.\(\text{\texttt{h4}}\) \(\text{\texttt{a1}}\) 15.\(\text{\texttt{f2}}\) \(\text{\texttt{a4}}\) is a fairly well-known line that has been established as good for Black.

14...\(\text{\texttt{c6}}\) 15.\(\text{\texttt{xc6}}\) hxg5!

16.\(\text{\texttt{a7}}\)
White’s attack seems to be fading away so he tries to win some material, but Black has a lot of resources too.

16...\texttt{wa4} 17.\texttt{wxd3 wh4}! 18.\texttt{wd6+ \texttt{xd6}} 19.exd6 \texttt{wxf4}! 20.\texttt{d1 wxd6}! 21.\texttt{wxc8 wxc5}

This position has been reached in several correspondence/internet games. Black stands better, and has achieved a heavy plus score.

Let’s return to the main line, and to the question of who will benefit from the absence of ...h6 and \texttt{h4}. Practical results seem to indicate that the difference favours White, but it is important to be aware of some details.

13...\texttt{wd5}

Apart from 13...h6, when 14.h4 transposes to the next chapter, Black does not have many sensible alternatives.

13...\texttt{b6}?

This is a fairly pointless move, and White could possibly continue with a slow initiative, but it’s nice to see how soon things can go bad for Black after:

14.\texttt{wb5?! \texttt{wd5}}

14...\texttt{wa5?! 15.c3! axb5 16.0-0!+-}

14...h6 15.0-0! hxg5 16.\texttt{f2+-}

14...axb5 15.\texttt{xb5} looks terrible for Black.

14...\texttt{b7} 15.\texttt{xd7f! \texttt{xd7}} 16.\texttt{b5!+-}

15.\texttt{wxf4! \texttt{b4}+ 16.c3 \texttt{b7}}

16...axb5 17.0-0 0-0 18.\texttt{f6! \texttt{xf6}} 19.exf6 g5 20.\texttt{g4+!}

13...\texttt{wb2}

Black might try to play along the lines of Radjabov – Karjakin (see variation A of the next chapter on page 249) without including ...h6.

14.\texttt{we3N}

14...\texttt{we2 \texttt{b4} 15.c3 \texttt{wd2}\texttt{+ 16.wx2 \texttt{xe7}}} is no good for us.

14...\texttt{c5}

14...\texttt{xc6 15.xc6 bxc6 16.e2+}

15.c3!

This is a lot stronger without ...h6 and \texttt{h4} included.
15.\textit{\textsc{c}e}2?! \textit{\textsc{c}}6 16.c3 \textit{\textsc{a}3} gives White a worse version of the Radjabov – Karjakin game. One illustrative line is 17.0–0 \textit{\textsc{xd}4} 18.\textit{\textsc{xd}4} \textit{\textsc{xd}4} 19.\textit{\textsc{xd}4} 0–0 20.\textit{\textsc{f}6}† \textit{\textsc{gf}6}! when there is no \textit{\textsc{g}4}†, and Black threatens to exchange queens with ...\textit{\textsc{c}5}.

15.\textit{\textsc{a}3}

15...\textit{\textsc{c}6} 16.\textit{\textsc{xc}5} \textit{\textsc{xc}5} 17.\textit{\textsc{xc}6}+–

15...\textit{\textsc{h}6} 16.\textit{\textsc{xc}5}! \textit{\textsc{xc}5} (16...\textit{\textsc{hg}5} 17.\textit{\textsc{cx}e}6+–) 17.\textit{\textsc{f}5}! \textit{\textsc{hg}5} 18.\textit{\textsc{g}7}† wins for White.

15...\textit{\textsc{b}6} 16.\textit{\textsc{e}2} \textit{\textsc{c}6} 17.0–0 0–0 18.\textit{\textsc{f}6}†! \textit{\textsc{xf}6} 19.\textit{\textsc{xf}6} \textit{\textsc{gf}6} 20.\textit{\textsc{ex}f}6 \textit{\textsc{d}8} 21.\textit{\textsc{g}5}† \textit{\textsc{f}8} 22.\textit{\textsc{h}5} \textit{\textsc{d}7} 23.\textit{\textsc{h}1}! is also crushing.

16.\textit{\textsc{g}3}!

In the analogous position with ...\textit{\textsc{h}6} and \textit{\textsc{h}4} included, Black could simply play ...\textit{\textsc{g}5} here. Now \textit{\textsc{c}1} is a serious threat, and Black can hardly castle.

16.\textit{\textsc{xd}4}

16...\textit{\textsc{g}6} 17.\textit{\textsc{h}6}+– sucks for Black as well.

17.\textit{\textsc{d}6}† \textit{\textsc{f}8} 18.\textit{\textsc{xd}4}

White is winning.

14.\textit{\textsc{xe}3} \textit{\textsc{xe}5}

14...\textit{\textsc{c}5}

The analogous position featuring ...\textit{\textsc{h}6} and \textit{\textsc{h}4} will be analysed extensively in variation B1 of the next chapter. White should proceed in exactly the same way here:

15.\textit{\textsc{xe}6}! \textit{\textsc{b}4}† 16.c3 \textit{\textsc{xe}6} 17.\textit{\textsc{xb}4} 0–0 18.\textit{\textsc{d}6}N

18.\textit{\textsc{c}e}2 has been played, and also looks to be a good move, but I am happy to proceed by analogy with the ...\textit{\textsc{h}6} line.

18...\textit{\textsc{xe}5}

19...\textit{\textsc{a}2} 19.\textit{\textsc{c}e}2 \textit{\textsc{b}1}† 20.\textit{\textsc{f}2} \textit{\textsc{xb}1} 21.\textit{\textsc{h}6}! \textit{\textsc{xf}2} 22.\textit{\textsc{g}5} \textit{\textsc{g}6} 23.\textit{\textsc{xf}8} \textit{\textsc{xf}8} 24.\textit{\textsc{e}6}! is winning for White.

19.\textit{\textsc{c}4}!

With the moves ...\textit{\textsc{h}6} and \textit{\textsc{h}4} included, Black’s best continuation is ...\textit{\textsc{h}5}, so he faces a difficult choice.

19...\textit{\textsc{c}6}

This seems like the best chance.

19...\textit{\textsc{e}8} 20.\textit{\textsc{xf}7}† \textit{\textsc{xf}7} 21.\textit{\textsc{b}3}† \textit{\textsc{e}6} 22.0–0† \textit{\textsc{f}6} 23.\textit{\textsc{xf}6} \textit{\textsc{gf}6} 24.\textit{\textsc{xf}6} \textit{\textsc{xd}6} 25.\textit{\textsc{e}5}† wins for White.

19...\textit{\textsc{b}5} 20.\textit{\textsc{f}4}! In the ...\textit{\textsc{h}6} variation the bishop’s retreat to \textit{g}3 is crushing (see page 249 for details), so here we go to \textit{f}4 instead.

20...\textit{\textsc{b}2} (20...\textit{\textsc{a}1}† 21.\textit{\textsc{d}1} \textit{\textsc{xd}1}† 22.\textit{\textsc{xd}1}+) 21.\textit{\textsc{b}3}†

20.0–0 \textit{\textsc{d}6} 21.\textit{\textsc{b}3} \textit{\textsc{f}5} 21...\textit{\textsc{h}8} 22.\textit{\textsc{f}4} \textit{\textsc{b}5} 23.\textit{\textsc{g}5}±

22.\textit{\textsc{f}6}† \textit{\textsc{xf}6} 23.\textit{\textsc{xe}5} \textit{\textsc{xe}5} 24.\textit{\textsc{xf}5} \textit{\textsc{fxg}5} 25.\textit{\textsc{xe}5}±

Black has avoided being mated, but the endgame will certainly not be a picnic for him.

15.\textit{\textsc{e}2}?! \textit{\textsc{c}5}

15...\textit{\textsc{f}5} does not change much: 16.0–0 (16.\textit{\textsc{xe}6}?! is possible, but the text move is simpler, as it should just transpose to our main
16...£5? 17.xe5 as the queen is defended. A nice detail is 17...£xe5 18.xf7! when Black is toast.

16...£xd4? 17.xd4 0-0 18.xf6! is crushing, for instance: 18...£xf6 19.xf6t gx6 20.e4 g5 (20...£b2 21.xf3! £h8 22.e3 £xf5 23.xh6t+) 21.h4 £xg4 22.xg4 d7 23.xh6 I doubt that Black can survive.

16...0-0 17.e4 £d5
17...£xd4 18.xd4 £a5 19.g3 Black is under pressure.

18.e4 £c6
18...£xd4 19.xd4 £a5 20.g3t
Now White must find (or know) some strong moves to break through.

Castling seems like the most attractive idea, especially since it represents a clear and substantial improvement over the position with ...h6 and £h4 included. The reason is explained in the next note.

16...£c6? gives Black a near-decisive advantage in the ...h6 line, but with the bishop still on g5, White has a simple refutation in
22.c5!

Forcing the exchange of a valuable defensive piece. If the queen moves away then the e6-pawn drops, so Black has to capture on c5.

22...\textit{\texttt{dx}c5}

22...\textit{\texttt{dx}c5} 23.\textit{\texttt{dx}xf6\texttt{gxf6} 24.\texttt{eb}f6+-
23.\textit{\texttt{dx}c5} \textit{\texttt{dx}c5} 24.\textit{\texttt{db}3} \textit{\texttt{bd}7} 25.\textit{\texttt{dx}c5} g6

In material terms Black is just about hanging on, but his position will be left in tatters.

26.\textit{\texttt{ec}1} gxh5 27.\textit{\texttt{dh}1+-

White has a winning position, as Black's king is too exposed.

Many years ago when I analysed this variation with an older version of Fritz, it was hard to convince the engine of White's superiority. Nowadays Houdini is quick to grasp the truth of the position.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard}
\caption{Diagram of the position after 22.c5!}
\end{figure}

21.\textit{\texttt{ed}6} \textit{\texttt{ef}7}

21...\textit{\texttt{de}d7} 22.\textit{\texttt{ee}1!} leaves Black unable to cope with the numerous threats.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard2}
\caption{Diagram of the position after 21.\textit{\texttt{ed}6} \textit{\texttt{ef}7}}
\end{figure}

22.\textit{\texttt{bb}1!N}

Improving over 22.\textit{\texttt{cc}4}, which forced a draw in 'Auditora' – 'Bevo Xiv', Internet 2009.

22...\textit{\texttt{eb}5}

22...\textit{\texttt{ed}7} 23.\textit{\texttt{ex}b7} \textit{\texttt{hd}8} 24.\textit{\texttt{xa}6} reaches an endgame with equal material and ongoing problems for Black.

23.\textit{\texttt{fh}5!}

Taking the opportunity to weaken a key diagonal.

23...\textit{\texttt{gf}6} 24.\textit{\texttt{ff}3} \textit{\texttt{dd}7} 25.\textit{\texttt{dd}4+}

White will pick up an exchange, and his active pieces will enable him to pick up one of Black's queenside pawns, leaving him with good winning chances.

C) 10...\textit{\texttt{h}6}

Black can also nudge the bishop a move or two later, but I will group all of the ...\texttt{h}6 lines under the present move order for the sake of simplicity.

11.\textit{\texttt{dh}4}
Black’s move order has the small practical advantage of preventing the bishop from retreating to f4, although in most cases after ...dxe5 and fxe5 the bishop should retreat to h4 anyway.

11...dxe5

11...g5? has hardly ever been played, and for good reason: 12.fxg5 dxe5 13.g6! Hammering the nail into Black’s coffin. 13...e7

12...d5!

This is Andriasyan’s proposal in *Winning with the Najdorf Sicilian*. Its forcing nature makes it an appealing choice for Black, who needs to worry about far fewer possibilities than in most other variations of the Poisoned Pawn.

12...fxe5

We have reached an important branching point. 12...f6d7 is the subject of the next two chapters, and the most popular 12...g5 will be covered in Chapters 16-18. In the following pages we will concentrate on a move which can be considered a sideline in terms of popularity, but which has achieved the best statistical score of all Black’s options.

12...d5?!

Most other moves allow Black to complete his development quickly with ...e7 (or ...c5) and ...0–0.

13...xe6

Other moves have hardly ever been tried, but I will briefly mention a few alternatives.

14...xg6

Other moves have hardly ever been tried, but I will briefly mention a few alternatives.

14...xg6? 15...d3! and White’s initiative is too strong.

14...xg6?! has been played in a few correspondence games, almost all of which
have been won by White. After 15.exf7\t 16.d1 White has massive compensation for the two pawns.

14...\f7N 15.exf7\t 16.xe7\t 17.e2 is mentioned by Andriasyan, and indeed White has excellent chances here too.

15.xe6 fxe6 16.d3

16.e2 has been used by some strong players in an attempt to improve on the main line, but it did not bring anything special to the table.

16...\f7

Black's next few moves are virtually forced.

17.g6\t d8 18.xe7\t xe7 19.0-0

Now we need to consider C1) 19...b5? and C2) 19...d7.

Preventing f7 with 19...f8? is punished swiftly: 20.xf8\t xf8 21.a5\t c8 22.b6 e7 23.c4!+-

19...c5\t 20.h1 d7 has been played a few times, but White can, at the minimum, play 21.f7 transposing to variation C2 below. (21.f7?! is an alternative try to exploit Black's move order, but there is no reason to spend time on this.)

C1) 19...b5?

This used to be the top suggestion of some analysis engines, so it is hardly surprising that it has been tested in a lot of correspondence games. However, Black is ignoring his development completely, and the last move can now be considered dead and buried thanks to the brilliant reply:

20.c4! c5\t
20...bxc4 21.f7 c5\t 22.h1 is the same.

21.h1 bxc4 22.f7! d7 23.b7

The rooks are too strong.

23.e5 24.xg7 xg6
25. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{W}}e1!

This has been played successfully in several correspondence games.

25... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}f8 26. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}xg6 \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c6 27. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}gg7 c3 28. h4 \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}d6 29. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}g1 d4 30. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{W}}e4

White was winning in Dibley – Lelenko, corr. 2008, and several subsequent games.

C2) 19... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}d7

Of course this developing move is better.

20. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}f7

20. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}xb7 is met by 20... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c5† 21. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}h1 \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}f8 and Black is doing quite all right.

20... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c5† 21. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}h1

The first critical divergence. Let's first consider C21) 21... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c8 before moving on to the more common C22) 21... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}f8.

C21) 21... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c8

This was Andriasyan's proposal, making it an especially important move for us to consider. It's a logical method of dealing with the \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}xb7 threat: Black simply plans to play ... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c7, and his king is not feeling too unsafe in the centre for now. At the same time, Black gives himself the option of bringing his king to a safe haven on the queenside, either with ... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c7-b8 or, more likely, ... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c7 and ... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c8-b8. So far White has not demonstrated a clear path to an advantage, even in the latest correspondence games.

22. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{W}}e1!

22. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}xb7 ?c7 23. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}xc7 ?xc7 24. ?xg7 ?f8! is okay for Black, so White must come up with something a bit more subtle. The text move not only hits the e6-pawn, but also prepares a potentially annoying check on h4.

22... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}c6

22... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{W}}d6 places the queen on a better square, but the drawback is seen after: 23. \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}xb7 ?c7 24. ?xc7 ?xc7 25. ?xg7

Unlike the 22. ?xb7 line, White has no problem with his back rank here, so he can develop threats against Black's king without having to make any real concessions. 25... ?b8 (25... ?f8 26. ?d3†;) 26. h3 ?c6 27. c4†

22... \textit{\textcolor{blue}{B}}f8N is an attempt to simplify the position and bring the king to safety immediately, but Black loses his extra pawns and White can strive for a long-term edge: 23. ?xe6 (23. ?xg7? ?c3†;) 23... ?xf7 24. ?xf7 ?c7 (24... ?e7 25. ?xd5 ?e5 26. ?f7† is a line given by Andriasyan.) 25. ?f5 ?d8 26. ?xg7 ?d6 Black is ready for ... ?b8, but he cannot claim full equality, for instance:
Chapter 13 – Introduction and 12...d5?

23.\(\text{h}4\)† \(\text{c}7\)

Now White has various permutations of queen checks, and it is hard to find the correct plan to either prevent the enemy king from running to \(b8\), or create pressure elsewhere.

24.\(\text{f}4\)†!

This is not mentioned by Georgiev and Kolev.

The more popular continuation is:

24.\(\text{g}3\)†

White gets some pressure here, but the ensuing lines are a bit too forcing for my taste, the main problem being that Black has a chance of analysing it in great depth and making a draw. My recommendation in the main line offers White a more fluid position that is harder to analyse to a definite conclusion. At the same time, the variations are interlinked, and I must mention my concerns in this line as well:

24...\(\text{d}8\) 25.\(\text{b}f1\) \(\text{c}7\) 26.\(\text{x}g7\) \(\text{c}3\)

26...\(\text{c}8\) 27.\(\text{f}7\)†

27.\(\text{d}3\)

27...\(\text{e}6\) 28.\(\text{h}4\)

28.\(\text{f}7\) \(\text{a}1\)† 29.\(\text{f}1\) \(\text{c}8\)=

28...\(\text{c}8\) 29.\(\text{f}7\) \(\text{e}5\)!!N

29...\(\text{d}8\) 30.\(\text{h}7\) \(\text{b}6\) 31.\(\text{h}2\) \(\text{a}1\) 32.\(\text{g}7\)

\(\text{x}g7\) 33.\(\text{f}xg7\) \(\text{c}7\) 34.\(\text{x}h6\) \(\text{d}6\) seems dangerous for Black to me, even though the computer is less worried.

30.\(\text{x}e5\) \(\text{x}e5\) 31.\(\text{x}b7\) \(\text{g}8\)

This endgame requires further analysis to reach a clear conclusion. A few possible lines are:
32.h5 a5 33.g4
33...bc7† xc7 34.xg8† d7 35.g4 c7f7 is safe enough for Black.
33...xg7 34.xg7 c7 35.xg8†
Or 35.xc7† xc7 36.g5 hxg5 37.h6 f7 38.h7 d6= and the king goes to g7.
35...b7 36.g5
Maybe 36.xg2!? is the best chance to achieve something.
36...hxg5 37.h6 cxd3 38.cxd3 c6 39.g2 c5
Black has enough counterplay to hold the draw.

24...d8 25.d4!
This is the main idea behind the check on f4. White is aiming to lure the enemy rook to g8.
It is hard to see why this should be in White's favour, but you will see the idea in the next few moves.

25...g8
25...c7?? 26.b6! wins instantly.
25...b5 opens up the queenside, and after 26.xg7 b8 (26...c3 27.h4† c7 28.e7!±) 27.h4† c7 28.d3± the black king will be under pressure for a long time.

26.b4† c7 is the only line given by Andriasyan. Black can also play 26...c7 intending ...c8-b8 with a safe position.

26.b6 has been played in one correspondence game, but after 26...c3 White found nothing better than 27.xd7† forcing a draw.

26...c7 27.g3† d8 28.f1
28.f2? c7 29.b6 xb6 30.f8† e7 31.xg8 d6 32.d8† d7 33.h3 could be an interesting position to explore further, but the computer insists on an evaluation of 0.00, and it may well be right.

28...c7
28...c3?? 29.d6 wins immediately.

28...c5 seems awkward. After 29.c4! f8 30.xf8† xf8 31.cxd5 exd5 32.f5 c7 33.h4± White's initiative continues, and the black king is unlikely to feel safe for a long time.

29.h7!
Now the reason for provoking ...g8 becomes clear.

29...e8 30.xg7
Most of the following lines are similar, in that White will capture both of the kingside...
pawns, while Black takes his king to safety. In
the ensuing positions White aims to restrain
his opponent's counterplay, while gradually
pushing his kingside pawns. Piece exchanges
will tend to favour White, whose kingside
pawns will become more dangerous, while
Black's pawns are not really intimidating.
Finally, although Black's king might be safer
on b8 in the short term, once the endgame
arises, it will be too far away to help deal with
the g- and h-pawns.

30...c8
30...h5 only postpones the inevitable:
31.g6 c8 (31...h4! 32.e7! is a pretty win.)
32.hx5±

30...d6 31.xh6 e5 32.g5+ c8
33.xc7+ xc7 34.d3 c3 35.f4 also
favours White.

31.xh6 e5

There does not seem to be much sense
in delaying this move, as the following lines
demonstrate:

31...b8 32.d3 d6 33.h4? White's play is
straightforward. 33.e5 (33.e5 34.f8±;
33.g8 34.g7±) 34.g7±

31...d6 32.d3 White just regroups his

pieces. 32.e5 33.xc7+ (33.f8 xf8
34.xf8+ d7 35.f1 reaches a similar type
of position.) 33.xc7 34.h4 (34.f8+ xf8
35.xf8+ d8 36.xd8+ xd8 37.ec2 is
another interesting endgame where the strong
kingside pawns make White the favourite.)
There is no easy way for Black to equalize, for
instance:

32.f8
32...xc7+ would lead to a similar position,
but the queen will be better placed on c7, so
I prefer to exchange the rooks a different way.

32...ec7

The only move.

33.xe8+ xe8 34.d3

White's play seems unassuming, but we are
simply following the broad plan outlined in
the comments to White's 30th move. Black has
many options of similar value, but no forcing
way to solve his problems.

34...c3
34...c7 35.h4? maintains White's
advantage.

Exchanging pieces with 34...xd3 35.cxd3 is
no problem for White, particularly since it is
hard for Black to create a passed pawn. Black’s exposed king may also enable White to gain a couple of tempos by checking at the right time. 35...b8 36.h4+ Simply pushing the pawns. (36.f8 xf8 37.xf8+ a7 38.h4 also leads to an unpleasant endgame for Black, but I don’t see any reason to exchange the rooks just yet, as the pure queen endgame gives Black more checking possibilities.)

35.f4!

White does not mind an exchange on d3, as his pieces are ready to launch a quick along the c-file.

35...g8

35...xd3 36.cxd3 just increases White’s initiative, while 35...h8 36.h3+ does not really change the position.

36.h3 c7

After 36...b8 37.g4! a7 38.f6! c7 39.g2± White’s play continues smoothly.

37.g4±

White continues with his plan, and Black has no clear way to ease the pressure.

C22) 21...f8

This is the more direct way to deal with the xb7 threat. Black aims to solve all his problems by generating quick counterplay.

22.xg7 f6

Black almost always plays this, probably because 22...c7 23.f7! causes immediate problems. A recent example continued: 23...e7 24.c3+ b8 25.g3+ c8?! Ibarra Chami – Hevia Alejano, Villahermosa 2014. Here White could have made excellent use of his advanced bishop with:

26.g8!N f6 27.h3 Black is badly tied up and it will be hard to keep his position together.

23.d3!

Georgiev and Kolev do not consider this.
23...g8? f8 24.g7 was played in many games, and at some point the variation was even written off as a draw, since exchanging rooks on f8 promised White little. But of course Black’s life should not be so easy with his king stuck in the centre.

The text move prepares c2-c4, and has injected a new lease of life into this variation. When I analysed it several years ago, I felt it was an unpleasant position to play for Black, since he seems to be constantly passive and barely hanging on to the draw. However, since then a huge explosion of interest in correspondence games has resulted in Black finding forced draws in many variations. The basic premise for White remains the same as in some earlier lines: he tries to create practical problems for Black by aiming at the weak light squares and, most importantly, restricting his counterplay. In most of the following lines the computer indicates that Black is okay, but there is a huge difference between a computer (or correspondence player) demonstrating equality and a human player doing it over the board. Our main aim will be to avoid any forced draws, and preserve a nagging initiative.

23...c7

After 23...f8 Andriasyan gives a nice line: 24.h7 c8 25.a5+ c7 26.h8 c8 27.xb7 f1+ 28.xf1 c3 29.xc7+ c7 30.xc7 c7 31.xa6 White has excellent winning chances, with an extra pawn and the prospect of two outside passers.

24.c4 d4

Black has to keep the centre blocked.

25.e1!

A fine regrouping move. Another important idea is to prevent Black from exchanging the excellent rook on g7 with ...af8-f7. 25.e2 is similar, but the queen just looks more elegant on e1.

25...af8

25...b6 26.e4 af8 transposes to variation C222 below.

26.e4

Here it is necessary to consider the surprising C221) 26.f7?!N followed by the normal C222) 26...b6.

C221) 26.f7?!N

This untested move was my biggest worry initially, since the position after the other move just looked like a free initiative for White – but first things first. Here Black tries to exchange some pieces and challenge White’s plan with
a more provocative but active scheme for counterplay.

27...\texttt{Nxb7}+ \texttt{Kd8} 28...\texttt{Nxf7}

White can hardly avoid the rook exchange: 28...\texttt{g3}?! \texttt{b6}! favours Black, while after 28...\texttt{e4} \texttt{e5}! White has nothing more than a repetition.

28...\texttt{Nxf7} 29...\texttt{x}a6

Unlike the lines you will see after 26...b6, it is White who is materially ahead here! At the same time, Black's king is in less danger following the rook exchange, and he has excellent posts for his pieces. However, if White can consolidate his position then Black will fall short of full equality.

29...\texttt{e5}

Intending ...\texttt{c5}.

After 29...\texttt{e7} 30...\texttt{b7}! \texttt{f2} 31.a4=\texttt{a} White's queen is excellently placed for both active and defensive purposes.

30...\texttt{h3}!

This is stronger than 30.a4 \texttt{c5}! 31...\texttt{a}5+ \texttt{e7} when Black's active pieces and strong passed pawns give him good chances.

30...\texttt{d7}

Another possible line is:

30...\texttt{c5} 31...\texttt{a}5†!

31...\texttt{a}8† is possible, but the queen is better on a5. It keeps the c5-knight in a pin and prepares \texttt{e}1, and the queen may come back to d2 or e1 in some lines.

31...\texttt{e}7 32...\texttt{e}1 \texttt{d}6 33...\texttt{g}6 \texttt{f}2

Both 33...\texttt{f}8 34.a4 and 33...\texttt{f}6 34...\texttt{h}5 favour White.

34...\texttt{a}8!

Preventing ...\texttt{c}6 and threatening a check on e8.

34...\texttt{h}5 \texttt{c}6 forces White to go passive.

34...\texttt{f}8 35...\texttt{a}7† \texttt{d}7 36...\texttt{d}1 \texttt{f}4

36...\texttt{e}5 37...\texttt{h}5±

37...\texttt{a}8 \texttt{f}8 38...\texttt{b}7±

White's coordination is improving and he will soon be ready to advance the a-pawn.

31...\texttt{b}7

Pinning the knight and protecting g2.

31...\texttt{f}8 32...\texttt{d}1† \texttt{b}8

32...\texttt{b}8 meets with an instructive reply: 33...\texttt{e}4! \texttt{f}4 34...\texttt{e}1=\texttt{e} White should avoid the queen exchange for the moment, as Black's central pawns would be too strong in the endgame.

33...\texttt{a}7 \texttt{c}5

33...\texttt{h}5?! 34...\texttt{c}2 is excellent for White.
34.\textit{\texttt{a}a4} e5
Or 34...h5 35.\textit{\texttt{c}c2±} and White has successfully regrouped.

35.\textit{\texttt{g}g6!}
35.\textit{\texttt{c}c2} d5 36.a4 b3\textbf{ is far from clear.}
The text move deals with the ...c5 threat, while also preparing to transfer the bishop to a more useful square such as f3. At the same time, the rook becomes useful.

35...\textit{\texttt{c}c5}
Another illustrative line is 35...\textit{\texttt{g}g8}
36.\textit{\texttt{b}b4+} c5 (36...\textit{\texttt{c}c5} 37.\textit{\texttt{e}e4±}) 37.\textit{\texttt{b}b1!}
c4 38.\textit{\texttt{h}h5±} when Black's light squares are glaringly weak.

36.\textit{\texttt{a}a5}
36.\textit{\texttt{a}a3} f6 37.\textit{\texttt{c}c2} is another way to maintain a slight plus.

36...\textit{\texttt{f}f6}
36...\textit{\texttt{g}g8 is met by 37.\textit{\texttt{h}h5±} intending \textit{\texttt{f}f3. Again, White seems to be quite well coordinated.}

37.\textit{\texttt{e}e1} d6 38.\textit{\texttt{h}h5±}
White intends \textit{\texttt{d}d2, and he may even start playing against the black king.}
We have reached the most critical position for the assessment of the 12...\textit{d}d5 variation. The computer constantly shows “0.00” here, but don’t let that deter you, as things are far from simple. Most importantly, as you will see in the coming variations, Black’s play mainly revolves around moves such as ...\textit{d}d6-c7, waiting for White to do something rather than carrying out his own active ideas. Moving the queen might allow c4-c5, while all his other pieces are stuck for now.

Meanwhile, White faces a struggle to open up lines on the queenside. He would be happy to sacrifice at least the c-pawn, and sometimes even the a-pawn before bringing the queen back from h7 to utilize all those open files on the queenside. One major problem is the relative weakness of the white king. If White tries to enter with his second rook through the kingside, the weakness of his first rank will give Black ample opportunity for counterplay.

In short, Black’s pieces are well placed but it is hard for him to improve his position, apart from a few ideas like ...\textit{d}d6 and \textit{f}f8. The challenge for White is to find a way to break through. The c4-c5 break is a constant theme, but White needs to make sure the rest of his pieces are sufficiently well placed for it to work.

\textbf{28...\textit{d}d6}

Sometimes Black has preferred:

\textbf{28...\textit{e}e5}

In all five of the examples on my database, White has responded with 29.a4, inviting 29...\textit{d}d6 with a position normally reached after 28...\textit{d}d6. However, since I am not recommending this path for White in the main line, we need to find an alternative. Fortunately there is another idea, which should appear obvious in light of my earlier comments.

29.c5! \textit{x}xc5
29...bxc5? 30.xa6 wins immediately.

\textbf{30.e4!}

White has the simple plan of bringing the queen back to e1, which will leave Black worrying about several ideas, including \textit{c}c1, \textit{e}e4 and \textit{x}xa6.

30.a4 is met by 30...\textit{d}d5! when White’s queen is temporarily cut off on h7.

\textbf{30...\textit{d}d5}

30...a5 31.\textit{b}b5±
31.\textit{e}e1 \textit{d}d6
31...a5 32.\textit{h}h4†
In the event of 31...e5, both 32.\textit{e}e4 and 32.\textit{x}xa6 look dangerous for Black.

32.\textit{x}xa6 \textit{f}f5 33.\textit{b}b5 \textit{d}d5 34.\textit{c}c1† \textit{b}b7
35.\textit{b}b2

With ongoing pressure on the black position.

\textbf{29.\textit{c}2!N}

An important improvement, the point of which will be discussed shortly. Firstly, I will
briefly show why I was not satisfied with the alternatives.

Moving the queen back with 29.\textit{\texttt{We}}e4 almost always runs into 29..\textit{\texttt{Zd}}f8!, so this manoeuvre is of no use for the time being.

29.a4 has been played in almost every game on my database from this position. Preparing the a4-a5 break is an obvious idea, and White was successful with it in several games. Eventually, however, the correspondence guys found an incredible and forcing way to hold the position together: 29...\textit{\texttt{Zc}}e5! 30.c5\texttt{??} (In the event of 30.a5 bxa5! White has more than one drawing line, but I was unable to find a way to increase the pressure.) 30...\textit{\texttt{Zd}}xc5!

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\end{center}

31.\textit{\texttt{Xb}}xb6! (After 31.\textit{\texttt{Xa}}7 \textit{\texttt{Zd}}5! 32.a5 \textit{\texttt{Wf}}2 33.axb6 \textit{\texttt{Wg}}3 34.\textit{\texttt{Zf}}f1 d3 Black is doing well, despite the king on d5!) 31...\textit{\texttt{Zd}}d5 32.\textit{\texttt{Za}}c4\texttt{??} \textit{\texttt{Zxc}}4 33.\textit{\texttt{Zc}}2\texttt{??} \textit{\texttt{Zd}}5 34.\textit{\texttt{Za}}2\texttt{??} \textit{\texttt{Ze}}4 35.\textit{\texttt{Zb}}1 \textit{\texttt{Zf}}1\texttt{??} 36.\textit{\texttt{Zf}}f1 \textit{\texttt{Xg}}7 37.\textit{\texttt{Zc}}e1\texttt{??} \textit{\texttt{Ze}}5 38.\textit{\texttt{Zc}}2\texttt{??} \textit{\texttt{Zf}}6 Black has held this position in several correspondence/internet games.

Let's return to my new suggestion of 29.\textit{\texttt{Zc}}2!N. The main point of this move is that White now threatens \textit{\texttt{Za}}4, so Black cannot just sit around and wait. I do not claim this to be a refutation of Black's set-up, and there will be a lot of possibilities for Black at every step - and that is actually part of the problem for him, since he will have to make a hard choice on every turn, while constantly having to worry about tactical motifs. For White, the main aim is to keep the initiative going without allowing a forced draw. Obviously he must also take care to keep Black's central pawns in check. Although my analysis is not completely conclusive, I believe I have fulfilled those objectives.

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29...\textit{\texttt{Zf}}8

This is the reply that you are most likely to face should you ever encounter this variation in a game, as Black avoids the main threat without weakening his position or committing himself in a serious way. The alternatives all involve clear drawbacks or risks of some kind.

29...\textit{\texttt{Zc}}7?? 30.\textit{\texttt{Za}}4 is killing, and 29...\textit{\texttt{Wc}}5? 30.\textit{\texttt{Za}}4 is also bad for Black.

29...\textit{\texttt{Wx}}c4 should not be too worrying, as White wanted to sacrifice this pawn anyway. 30.\textit{\texttt{Zd}}3 \textit{\texttt{Wd}}5 (30...\textit{\texttt{Zc}}5 31.\textit{\texttt{Za}}6\texttt{??} ; 30...\textit{\texttt{Wc}}8 31.\textit{\texttt{Za}}6\texttt{??} The open files clearly favour White.) 31.\textit{\texttt{Za}}6 White stands better. An important point is that 31...\textit{\texttt{Wf}}5? is refuted by:

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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chessboard2}
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32.\textit{\texttt{Wd}}d7! \textit{\texttt{W}}xd7 33.\textit{\texttt{Xb}}6\texttt{??} \textit{\texttt{Zc}}5 34.\textit{\texttt{Zb}}5 and wins.

29...\textit{\texttt{Wc}}6 30.\textit{\texttt{Za}}4?! a5 (30...\textit{\texttt{Zc}}5 31.a5! \textit{\texttt{Wxa}}5 32.\textit{\texttt{Zc}}4 \textit{\texttt{Zc}}5 33.\texttt{??} Black's last move has prevented an immediate breakthrough, but
left a hole on the b5-square, meaning that the ...\textit{\&}c5 defence will probably never work. White has a few tempting options, for instance:

31.\textit{\&}d3 (31.\textit{\&}e4? unfortunately runs into 31...\textit{\&}f8!, but 31.\textit{\&}d3?! is possible.) 31...\textit{\&}f4 32.\textit{\&}g3 \textit{\&}df8 33.\textit{\&}d3

29...b5?!

Though it may look cooperative to open the queenside, it is not easy to prove anything here for White.

30.cxb5

This is certainly the most natural move, and the easiest to handle.

30.\textit{\&}e4?! would have been a fun move, but 30...\textit{\&}df8! ruins it by threatening a powerful check on f1.

30.\textit{\&}d1?! is a fascinating alternative. I analysed this in considerable depth and found it a worthy alternative, but there are a lot of fine details and nuances. Interested readers may conduct their own research, but I will focus on the more straightforward option.

30...axb5 31.\textit{\&}d3 b4 32.\textit{\&}d1?!

The idea is to prevent ...\textit{\&}e5 in a creative way... and then the game just continues.

32.\textit{\&}c2 is a sensible alternative, but I was not quite able to make it work the way I wanted. The key line continues: 32...\textit{\&}b5! Rather artificial, but it prevents \textit{\&}a4 while threatening a check on f1, so it makes sense.

33.\textit{\&}g1 \textit{\&}c2! Preventing the white queen from returning to the centre. 34.\textit{\&}d1 \textit{\&}e3\dagger 35.\textit{\&}h1 \textit{\&}f8 36.\textit{\&}h8 \textit{\&}e5 The position remains quite messy, but White’s pieces are not so flexibly placed, so Black should be okay.

32...\textit{\&}b6

32...\textit{\&}e5?! 33.\textit{\&}b5! is extremely unpleasant. Now there are many possibilities, but we are already a long way into a rather weird line, so I will just give a few more logical moves to illustrate how the play might go.

33.\textit{\&}c2? \textit{\&}df8

Or 33...\textit{\&}d7 34.\textit{\&}d7\dagger \textit{\&}xd7 35.\textit{\&}a4 \textit{\&}b6 36.\textit{\&}h8 and the pressure continues.

34.\textit{\&}d3 \textit{\&}c4 35.\textit{\&}g3\dagger e5 36.\textit{\&}d3

White maintains excellent compensation for the pawn, and Black must watch out for \textit{\&}b7 ideas.
30. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d3}}}}}}  \\
30. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g8 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d7}}}}}}}}}}=

30... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d7}}}}}}}} 31. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g3}}}}}}}}}

I also analysed 31. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g4}}}}}}}}? and found it interesting, but I prefer the text move.

31... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e5}}}}}} 32. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g8}}}}}

The more pieces that remain on the board, the greater our chances of an initiative. Now Black has a wide choice, but White also has a lot of ways to improve his position: a prophylactic \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h2}}}}}; attacking with a4-a5; and various ways to poke Black's position on the light squares using the bishop.

32. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d7}}}}}

32... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c7}}}}} should be met by 33. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e4}}}}, when the bishop will be ideally placed on d5. 33... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d7}}}} 34. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h2 \texttt{\texttt{f4}}}} 35. \texttt{\texttt{d5}}±

32... \texttt{\texttt{b5}} 33. \texttt{\texttt{d3! \texttt{\texttt{b4}}}}

Black has blocked the queenside for the moment, but White can prepare a2-a3.
33... \texttt{\texttt{bxc4 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c4}}}}}}! is excellent for White, since 34... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{xc4}}?} loses to 35. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b6}}}}±.
34. \texttt{\texttt{h2}}  \\

Again Black has a lot of possible moves, but in general he seems to be suffering due to a lack of counterplay. A nice illustrative line is:
34... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d7}}}

35. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a3! \texttt{\texttt{bxa3}}} 36. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e4}}}!}

Threatening \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b3}}}. 36... a2 37. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a1}}} \texttt{\texttt{xc4}}} 38. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a3}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d7}}} 39. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a2}}} \texttt{\texttt{f1}}}}

White has a few good options here, but just one line to show an advantage is:
40. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a4}}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e7}} 41. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f3}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f3}}} 42. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b4}}} \texttt{\texttt{d7}}} 43. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b7}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d8}}} 44. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b6}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d7}}} 45. \texttt{\texttt{gf3}}±

33. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h2}}}!

As usual for this line, there is no need to hurry!

It is too soon for 33. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e4}}}?! as Black gets counterplay with: 33... \texttt{\texttt{b5}}! (33... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f1}}} 34. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{xf1}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f1}}} 35. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h2}}} favours White, who threatens \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g7}}}}.) 34. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d5}}} (34. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{xb5}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f1}}} 35. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{xf1}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{xf1}}} 36. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h2}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{c1}}}!?) 34... \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f1}}} 35. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h2}}} \texttt{\texttt{d3}}! This works because the bishop on d5 prevents White from taking on d3 with check. 36. \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{xf1}}}
Poisoned Pawn

33...\( \text{Rf4}! \)

The rook seems slightly awkward here, but it is important to prevent \( \text{e4} \).

33...\( \text{Rd7} \) and 33...\( \text{Re6} \) are both met by 34...\( \text{a8} \) with pressure against Black's queenside.

33...\( \text{b5} \) 34...\( \text{b3}! ? \)

34...\( \text{e4} \) \( \text{bxc4} \) 35...\( \text{gb8} \) might give some compensation, but after 34...d3 Black has got more counterplay than I want to allow. Some of the following lines might seem difficult, but the main point is that the positions are much harder to play for Black. With White you do not need to find many 'only moves' – there are multiple ways to maintain a tense position, while Black does not have that luxury.

34...\( \text{xc4} \)

34...\( \text{bxc4} \) 35...\( \text{b8}! \) \( \text{d5} \) 36...\( \text{g4}! \) \( \text{f4} \) 37...\( \text{xf4} \) \( \text{xf4} \) Now there follows a nice zigzag manoeuvre by the queen: 38...\( \text{d8}! \) \( \text{d6} \) 39...\( \text{a5}! \) \( \text{c5} \) 40...\( \text{xa6} \) \( \text{d3} \) 41...\( \text{b5} \) \( \text{xc2} \) 42...\( \text{xc5}! \) \( \text{xc5} \) 43...\( \text{a5}! \) The queen will pick up the e2-pawn.

35...\( \text{a3}! \) \( \text{c5} \) 36...\( \text{xa6}! \) \( \text{c6} \) 37...\( \text{a3}! \) \( \text{c5} \)

An unusual but effective way to avoid the repetition. White maintains some pressure, although a long fight lies ahead.

34.a4

Black has no threat, so White can improve his position and force Black to consider a4-a5 on every turn.

34...\( \text{c7} \)

34...\( \text{d7} \) as usual runs into: 35...\( \text{a8}! \) \( \text{e7} \) (35...\( \text{c7} \) is met by 36...\( \text{g6}! \) intending \( \text{e4} \).

35...\( \text{e4f6} \) 36...\( \text{xe4} \) 37...\( \text{xe4} \) 38...\( \text{d3} \) \( \text{c7} \) 38...\( \text{a5} \) \( \text{bxa5} \) 39...\( \text{h6} \) With an ongoing initiative.

We have reached another critical position. White has played just about all the useful moves he has available, so it is time to make something happen.

35...\( \text{g6}! \)

Normally I would hate to exchange my bishop for such a knight, but here the exchange would grant an entrance for the white queen – an unpleasant scenario for Black, especially when combined with the rook on g8. If Black does not take the bishop, then it will go on to annoy him in other ways.

35...\( \text{d7} \)

35...\( \text{f6} \) 36...\( \text{h5}! \) leaves Black facing
the direct threat of \( \texttt{g7} \), as well as the more patient \( \texttt{g4} \) or \( \texttt{f3} \).

Here is some proof of why taking the bishop does not help Black: 35...\texttt{xf6} 36.\texttt{gxf6} \texttt{e4f6} (36...\texttt{xf7f6} 37.\texttt{e8+-} ) 37.\texttt{g4}! \texttt{f8}

36.a5! \texttt{bxa5} (38...\texttt{g8} 39.\texttt{g8} \texttt{f8} 40.\texttt{d5} + ) 39.\texttt{g7}† \texttt{f8} 40.\texttt{xf7} + \texttt{xf7} 41.\texttt{g6}! Amazingly, Black's position is collapsing. 41...\texttt{xc4} (41...\texttt{d7} 42.\texttt{xa6}+- ) 42.\texttt{h6}+- Intending \texttt{c1}!

36.\texttt{e8}!

A cool idea! The rook is excellently placed to help launch Black's counterplay with ...\texttt{d3}, so the bishop takes a short detour to displace it.

In the event of 36.\texttt{d3} \texttt{d7} it is hard to improve White's position further. I briefly thought that 37.\texttt{h8} might be a good try, but 37...\texttt{e4}! 38.\texttt{xe4} \texttt{e5} solves all Black's problems.

36...\texttt{e7} 37.\texttt{h5}

White can continue improving his pieces with \texttt{f3}, \texttt{g4}, or even \texttt{h8xh6}. Black's position has not yet been breached, but he remains under pressure, with no clear way to simplify or obtain counterplay.

Conclusion

This is only the first of many Poisoned Pawn chapters, and already we have encountered some insanely complicated positions. At least it did not take long to establish that 10...\texttt{fd7} does not have much of a future, while after 10...\texttt{dxe5} 11.\texttt{f5}, Black has little to gain by avoiding ...\texttt{h6}.

The real fun begins after 10...\texttt{h6} 11.\texttt{h4} \texttt{dxe5} 12.\texttt{f5}. The bulk of this chapter was spent analysing 12...\texttt{d5}?! , a favourite move among correspondence players as well as the recommendation in Andriasyan's book. After the relatively forcing sequence 13.\texttt{xd5} \texttt{exd5} 14.e6! \texttt{xe6} 15.\texttt{xe6} \texttt{fxe6} 16.\texttt{d3} \texttt{e7} 17.\texttt{g6}† \texttt{d8} 18.\texttt{xe7}† \texttt{ xe7} 19.0–0, we arrive at a position where Black has tried solving the problem of his uncastled king in various ways. The biggest challenge came in the final variation C222, where I had to find a novelty on move 29(!) to pose new problems to the defence. Most readers will never have to prepare their openin gs in this much depth, and if you play through some of the lines you should get enough of a feel for the available plans and piece manoeuvres to cause your opponents plenty of problems.
Poisoned Pawn

12...\(\text{fd7}\)

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.\(\text{f3}\) d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\(\text{\textit{xf4}}\) \(\text{xf6}\) 5.\(\text{c3}\) a6 6.\(\text{g5}\) e6 7.f4 \text{b6} 8.\(\text{d2}\) \(\text{xb2}\) 9.\(\text{b1}\) \(\text{a3}\) 10.e5 h6 11.\(\text{h4}\) dxe5 12.fxe5 \(\text{fd7}\) 13.\(\text{e4}\) \(\text{xa2}\)

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B) 14...\(\text{d5}\) 15.\(\text{e3}\)
   B1) 15...\(\text{c5}\) 252
   B2) 15...\(\text{xe5}\) 16.\(\text{e2}\) \(\text{c5}\) 17.\(\text{g3}\) 254
      B21) 17...\(\text{d5}\) 255
         B211) 21...\(\text{d8}\) 255
         B212) 21...\(\text{f5}!\) 257
      B22) 17...\(\text{xd4}\) 18.\(\text{xd4}\) \(\text{a5}\)† 19.\(\text{d2}\) 0–0 20.\(\text{d6}\) 261
         B221) 20...\(\text{e8}\)? 261
         B222) 20...\(\text{c6}!\) 262
         B223) 20...\(\text{f5}\) 265

A) after 25...b5

26.\(\text{xd8}!\)\(\text{N}\)

B212) after 23...\(\text{bd7}\)

24.\(\text{f3}!\)\(\text{N}\)

B223) after 28...\(\text{fd7}\)

29.\(\text{d1}!\)\(\text{N}\)
1.e4 c5 2.\f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\f6 5.\f3 a6 6.\g5 e6 7.f4 \b6 8.d2 \xb2 9.b1 \a3 10.e5 h6 11.\h4 dxe5 12.fxe5 \fd7 13.\e4

This can be considered the old main line. It has been tested in a few thousand games over the years, sometimes through different move orders such as 10...dxe5 11.\xe5 \fd7 12.\e4 h6 (12...\xa2 was covered in variation B of the previous chapter) 13.\h4.

13...\xa2

It is not worth spending much time on other moves. Here are a few brief examples:

13...\xe5? allows 14.Bb5 \d3† 15.\xd3 axb5 16.\xb5† \d7 17.0–0 with a huge initiative for White.

13...\a4 14.\c6? 15.\xe6 g5? 16.\f6† 1–0 was a fiasco for Black in Radjabov – Anand, Rishon Le Zion (blitz) 2006.

13...g5 14.\g3 \xa2 has been played a few times, but after 15.\d1 it is hard to believe that Black will benefit from having weakened his kingside.

14.\d1

In this position the rare A) 14...\b2? is worth taking seriously, but the most popular move by far is B) 14...\d5.

14...\c6? is not a serious option: 15.\xc6 (15.\c2 \b4! ends all the fun.) 15...bxc6 16.\d3! (16.\c2 \a4 17.\f4 \a5† 18.c3 g5 was a mess in Nataf – Perunovic, Herceg Novi 2005.)

16...\d5 17.0–0 \xe5 18.\h1 White had an obvious initiative, which soon turned into a winning attack after 18...\e7 19.\g3 \d4 20.c3 \b6 21.d6† \xd6 22.xd6 in Oesterman – Weber, corr. 2008.

A) 14...\b2?

This was first played by Karjakin against Radjabov in 2006, but White won the game and the move has never really caught on. Apart
from threatening ...\texttt{b}4, it is hard to see much purpose for the queen on b2, although some of the ensuing lines are still not easy.

15.\texttt{we}3 \texttt{dc}5
15...\texttt{dc}6 16.\texttt{xc}6 \texttt{bxc}6 17.\texttt{we}2 \texttt{xe}5 18.0–0 gives White a typical initiative thanks to his huge lead in development.

16.\texttt{we}2
16.c3?! is an interesting alternative. This move is less effective when the moves ...\texttt{h}6 and \texttt{h}4 have been included (compare 13...\texttt{b}2 in the notes to variation B of the previous chapter, on page 228), but it could still be explored further in this variation as well. However, since the main line seems to be in excellent health, there is no need for White to deviate.

16...\texttt{wa}3!
16...\texttt{dc}6? was played in Radjabov – Karjakin, but this is the wrong move order. White missed the chance to play 17.\texttt{xe}6!, instantly getting a winning advantage, as 17...\texttt{xe}3?? 18.\texttt{d}6 is mate.

17.c3 \texttt{dc}6
We have now transposed back to the aforementioned game.

18.0–0 0–0

18...\texttt{xd}4 19.\texttt{xd}4! \texttt{xd}4 20.\texttt{xd}4 0–0 21.\texttt{f}6\texttt{t} is similar to the main line below. 21...\texttt{xf}6 (21...\texttt{xe}6 22.\texttt{xf}6 transposes exactly to Radjabov – Karjakin.) Now White has a forced win:

\begin{center}
\textbf{22.\texttt{g}4\texttt{t} \texttt{h}8 (22...\texttt{h}7 23.\texttt{d}3\texttt{t}+–) 23.\texttt{f}4! \texttt{c}5\texttt{t} 24.\texttt{h}1 \texttt{h}7 (24...\texttt{xe}5 25.\texttt{hx}6\texttt{t} \texttt{g}8 26.\texttt{f}3+–) 25.\texttt{xf}6 \texttt{xf}6 26.\texttt{d}3\texttt{t}! \texttt{g}8 27.\texttt{g}3\texttt{t}! \texttt{h}8 28.\texttt{xf}6 Mate is unavoidable.}
\end{center}

19.\texttt{f}6\texttt{t}! \texttt{xf}6
19...\texttt{h}8 20.\texttt{e}4 \texttt{xf}6 (20...g6? 21.\texttt{f}4+–) 21.\texttt{xf}6 g6 22.\texttt{f}2 White has good attacking chances.

20.\texttt{xf}6 \texttt{xd}4
Also after 20...\texttt{e}7 21.\texttt{g}3 \texttt{g}6 22.\texttt{h}4 Black is in trouble.

22...♕d7? also fails to offer much resistance:
23.♗g4 ♦g6 24.♗h3 ♦h7 25.♕g5!–

23.♗g4 ♖f8!
23...g6?! 24.♗d3! ♦h7 (24...♗c5+ 25.♕h1 ♦h7 26.♗f3++) 25.h4 ♖xc3 26.♖f3 ♖c1+ 27.♕h2+–

24.♗d3!
I also checked 24.♖f3?! N, but after 24...♕h8! Black can defend: 25.♗h5 (25.♖d3 ♖xf6 26.♕xf6 ♖d8 27.♕h5 ♖xd3 28.♖xh6+ ♕xh6 29.♖xh6+ ♔g8=) 25...♖xf6 26.♕xf6 ♕g7! 27.♖d3 ♕g8 28.♖xh6 ♚d8! White only has a choice of draws.

24...♖d8!
24...♕h8?? loses instantly to 25.♖e4! ♕g8 26.♖f4 (or 26.♕h4).

24...a5? 25.♖f3! leaves Black defenceless.

24...♗d7?! 25.♖f3 ♖b5 26.♖c2 also puts Black in big trouble, with ♖g3 coming next.

25.♖f3!
25.♖xd8? ♖xd8 26.♖e4 ♖g6 leaves White struggling to justify the two-pawn deficit.

25...♗b5! 26.♖xd8??
Black’s last move prepared to meet 26.♖g3? with 26...♖xd3 27.♖xd3 ♖b7, stopping ♖d8.

26.♖e4 has been played in all the games so far (all of them internet/correspondence encounters), but 26...♗b7! 27.♖xb7 ♕d1+ 28.♕f2 ♖ad8 29.♖xd8 ♕c5+ 30.♖e2 ♖xd8 31.♖f4 ♕c7 gives Black some compensation, as shown in Sadowski – Cardelli, corr. 2009. Still, with a bishop for two pawns, White is pretty much playing for two results here, so you may still consider this if you find the main line too double-edged.

26...♖b7
26...♖xd8 gives White a much-improved version of the note to move 25 above. With the rook already on the third rank, he can create serious threats with: 27.♖g3! g5 (27...♖f8 28.♖e4! threatens mate while hitting the rook on a8.) 28.♖e4 ♖b6† 29.♖f1 ♖b7 30.♖h1+ ♕f8 31.♖xh6† ♕e8 32.♖xg5±

27.♗b6 ♖xf3 28.♖xf3–
Material is roughly level, but White has excellent chances to create an attack.
B) 14...\textbf{d5}

This is the most natural and popular move, centralizing the queen and attacking a few white units.

15.\textbf{e3}

Defending the e4-knight and opening the d-file. Now we will analyse B1) 15...\textbf{c5} followed by the main move B2) 15...\textbf{xe5}.

15...\textbf{c6N}

Now White must decide whether to win the enemy queen or continue his brewing attack.

16.\textbf{xc6}!

16.\textbf{b5} is the materialistic option, but 16...\textbf{xd1}↑ 17.\textbf{xd1} axb5 will lead to a long, slow fight.

16...\textbf{xc6} 17.\textbf{e2}

White has excellent compensation, and Black will have to weaken his kingside just to complete his development.

17...\textbf{g5} 18.\textbf{g3}

18.\textbf{f2}↑ is also dangerous. The text move may give Black the extra option of ...\textbf{c5} at some point, but it defends e5 and leaves the f-file open. Either way, White can develop a massive attack.

18...\textbf{xc2} 19.\textbf{f3} and 18...\textbf{e7} 19.h4 both give White a strong initiative.

19.0–0 \textbf{c5} 20.\textbf{xc5} \textbf{xc5} 21.\textbf{d4!} 0–0 22.h4→

It would be amazing if Black could survive such an attack.

B1) 15...\textbf{c5}

16.\textbf{xe6}!

Nothing else will do! 16.\textbf{e2}? \textbf{c6} 17.\textbf{c3} 0–0 is clearly better for Black, while 16.\textbf{c4?} \textbf{xe5} 17.\textbf{g3} \textbf{xd4} 18.\textbf{xd4} \textbf{a5}↑ leads to a considerably worse version of the main line for White.

16...\textbf{b4}↑

Black has no choice, as 16...\textbf{xe6}?\ 17.\textbf{xc5} \textbf{c6} 18.\textbf{a3}, 16...\textbf{xe3}? 17.\textbf{c7}↑\textbf{f8} 18.\textbf{xd5} and 16...\textbf{xe6}? 17.\textbf{xc5} \textbf{xc5} 18.\textbf{xc5} \textbf{xc5} 19.\textbf{d8}↑\textbf{f7} 20.\textbf{hxh8} all leave him close to defeat.

17.\textbf{c3} \textbf{xe6} 18.\textbf{xb4} 0–0
The last couple of moves were forced on both sides. In this position White has tried a few moves, but the strongest is:

19. \( \text{d}6! \text{xe}5 \\
\)
19...\( \text{a}2 \) leads to a short but intense tactical sequence, which is worth remembering: 20. \( \text{e}2 \text{b}1\uparrow \) (20...\( \text{a}1\uparrow \) 21. \( \text{d}1! \text{xe}5 \) 22.0–0\( \pm \))
21. \( \text{f}2 \text{xb}4 \) (21...\( \text{xh}1? \) 22.\( \text{xe}h6!\))
22.\( \text{f}4!\)N This suggestion of Goh Wei Ming seems to be winning. (22.\( \text{e}h6 \text{c}6 \)
23.\( \text{xe}6 \text{xe}5 \) 24.\( \text{d}4 \text{b}1 \) 25.\( \text{f}6! \text{xf}6 \)
26.\( \text{xf}6 \text{gxf}6 \) 27.\( \text{g}3 \text{g}6 \) 28.\( \text{xf}6 \text{fxg}6 \) 29.\( \text{b}3\pm \) as has been played in a few correspondence games.) 22...\( \text{a}5 \)
(22...\( \text{a}5 \) 23.\( \text{e}h1 \text{c}5 \) 24.\( \text{d}4 \text{xe}4 \)
25.\( \text{xe}4 \text{b}2 \) 26.\( \text{g}3! \) Threatening \( \text{d}3 \).
26...\( \text{f}5 \) 27.\( \text{xf}5 \text{xe}2 \) 28.\( \text{e}4 \text{c}2 \) 29.\( \text{xe}6 \text{c}3\)
30.\( \text{g}4! \) gxf6 31.\( \text{h}5!\)) 23.\( \text{xe}6 \text{gxf}6 \)
24.\( \text{xf}6 \text{b}6\uparrow \) 25.\( \text{g}3 \text{xf}6 \) 26.\( \text{xf}6\uparrow \)
\( \text{g}7 \) 27.\( \text{d}1 \text{h}8 \) (27...\( \text{f}5 \) 28.\( \text{d}6 \) 28.\( \text{c}4! \)
\( \text{f}5 \) 29.\( \text{h}4! \) Goh Wei Ming’s analysis ends here, and indeed after 29...\( \text{c}6 \) (or 29...\( \text{g}6 \)
30.\( \text{h}5) \) 30.\( \text{d}7! \text{a}8 \) 31.\( \text{h}2! \) Black is defenceless.

20.\( \text{c}4! \text{h}5! \\
\)
The most popular choice, and the strongest. Several other moves have been tried, and it is worth playing through the lines, not to memorize them but rather to grasp the various
tactical ideas, and understand why the queen move is necessary.

20...\( \text{e}8? \) is instantly refuted by 21.\( \text{xf}7\uparrow \)
\( \text{xf}7 \) 22.\( \text{b}3\uparrow \).

20...\( \text{b}6? \) is not so terrible, but it leads after 21.\( \text{xb}6 \) \( \text{f}5 \) (21...\( \text{a}1\uparrow \) 22.\( \text{f}2 \text{xe}5 \)
23.\( \text{g}6\uparrow \)) 22.\( \text{f}6\uparrow \) \( \text{xf}6 \) 23.\( \text{xe}5 \text{xe}5 \) 24.0–0 to a position where White has a pleasant
dependable initiative.

20...b5 21.\( \text{g}3! \text{b}2\uparrow \) (I wanted to see if Black could improve on 21...\( \text{a}1\uparrow \) 22.\( \text{d}1 \)
\( \text{xd}1\uparrow \) 23.\( \text{xd}1 \text{bxc}4 \) 24.\( \text{f}1! \text{c}6 \) 25.\( \text{d}6 \)
\( \text{xb}4 \) 26.\( \text{xf}7! \) \( \text{d}5 \) 27.\( \text{xe}6\uparrow \) with a
winning position for White, as seen in some correspondence/internet games.) 22.\( \text{b}3! \)
Black does not seem to have a good move, for instance:

22...\( \text{e}5 \) (22...\( \text{b}7 \) 23.0–0! \( \text{xe}4 \) 24.\( \text{d}2!\))
23.0–0 \( \text{c}4 \) 24.\( \text{xc}4 \) \( \text{bxc}4 \) 25.\( \text{e}1!\)– The
bishop will be monstrous on c3.

A final alternative is:

20...\( \text{c}6 \) 21.0–0! \( \text{b}6N \\
\)
21...\( \text{h}5 \) meets with a beautiful refutation: 22.\( \text{f}6!! \) (A year later Shirov missed this
move and played 22.\( \text{f}4 \) against Wang Hao, but he won anyway.) 22...\( \text{xf}6 \) 23.\( \text{xf}6\uparrow \)
\( \text{xf}6 \) 24.\( \text{xf}6 \) \( \text{e}5 \) 25.\( \text{xf}6 \text{xc}4 \) 26.\( \text{xe}7 \)
1–0 Sjugin – Brodsky, St Petersburg 2008.
22.\( \text{f6} \)!

This leads to a winning position, but even if this tactic was not available, the simple 22.\( \text{b3} \) would leave White with a great deal of activity.

22...\( \text{gxf6} \)

22...\( \text{h8} \) 23.\( \text{wd3} \)

23.\( \text{wxh6} \) \( \text{dxc4} \) 24.\( \text{d3}! \)

Black is defenceless.

21.\( \text{g3}! \)

21.\( \text{f4} \) had been my original intention, but 21...\( \text{e5}! \) is still quite complicated.

21...\( \text{c6} \) 22.0–0 \( \text{de5} \) 23.\( \text{xe5}! \) \( \text{xe5} \)

23...\( \text{xe5} \) 24.\( \text{g3} \) \( \text{g4} \) 25.\( \text{d5} \) \( \text{ae8} \) 26.\( \text{h3} \) wins material, and White has won almost all games from this position.

24.\( \text{d5} \) \( \text{b2} \)

Eating the pawn is normal.
16.\textit{e}2
Developing another piece while incidentally preventing ...f5, which would allow an embarrassing mate from h5.

16...\textit{c}5
16...\textit{b}4† has never been played, and White gets a clear advantage with precise play:
17.c3 0–0 18.cxb4 f5 19.g3! (19.f6† xxf6 20.xe5 xe5 21.xf6 gxf6 22.xf5 bc6) 19...f4 (19...xe4 20.xe4 xe4 21.xe6 leaves White with a powerful initiative.)
20.xb3 xe8 21.xf5! fxg3 22.xed6±

17.g3
Now we should consider the bizarre B21)
17...\textit{d}5 for the sake of completeness, but the great majority of games have continued with B22) 17...\textit{xd}4.

\textbf{B21) 17...\textit{d}5}
This is one of the weirdest ideas I have ever seen. Black just provokes c2-c4, and then plays exactly like in the main line after 17...\textit{xd}4. This has been played in over a hundred correspondence games, but it is hard for a normal player to make sense of Black's idea. Finally, however, I was able to find a key line where the c2-c4 move may hamper White's play, forcing us to modify our plans slightly.

18.c4
18.xf3 looks harmless due to: 18...0–0!
19.xc3 a5! 20.0–0 e5 21.xf6† xf6 22.xd5 \textit{xd}4† 23.xd4 exd4 24.xd4 \textit{xd}5 25.xd5 bc6

18...\textit{xd}4
18...\textit{b}4† has never been played, for good reason: 19.xf1 a5 20.xd6† xd6 21.xd6→

19.xd4 a5† 20.xd2 0–0 21.xd6

So far everything is proceeding in parallel with the main line which will be examined later, except for the position of the pawn on c4 instead of c2. Here B211) 21...\textit{d}8 has been Black's most popular choice, but B212) 21...f5! is the best attempt to utilize the difference in placement of the white pawn.

\textbf{B211) 21...\textit{d}8}

22.g4!
The same plan that we will see later. Instead 22.xg3 \textit{f}5 23.e5 \textit{g}6 24.xh4 \textit{c}6 25.xh5 \textit{f}5 26.xg7 xc5! 27.xxc5 \textit{xg}7 reaches a messy position.

22...xc6
22...f5? is too dangerous: 23.g5! fx4
24.gxh6 \(\text{De}5

25.0–0! \(\text{Exd6} 26.\text{Exd6} g6 27.\text{h5!} \text{d}7
28.\text{f}4 This was Borwell – Sueess, corr. 2013, which was won by White in brilliant style, which is rather typical of the correspondence games in this line.

23.0–0!?
This is the simplest way, which does not require too much analysis.

23.g5!?N is the maximalist try, when play may continue: 23...hxg5 24.g1 f6 25.de5
26.hxg5 f5 27.\(\text{f}6+ \text{f}7

In the position with the pawn on c2, White does best to avoid this situation by playing c2-c3 instead of hxg5 – see variation D32 of the next chapter on page 283. However, in the current scenario he can exploit the extra move with 28.c5!\#f6, obtaining excellent compensation. Instinctively I think White should be doing well after 23.g5!?N, and you may wish to play this way, using the analysis in the next chapter as a starting point. However, for the purposes of analysing in this book, it seems a bit excessive to check every possible line to see if the c2-c4 move might help Black somewhere, as the entire 17...\(\text{d}5 variation is extremely rare in over-the-board play.

23...\(\text{de}5

23...f6 enables White to make good use of the c-pawn: 24.c5! b5 25.g5 hxg5 26.\text{h}3 f5 27.\text{h}5 \(\text{ce}5 28.\text{df}2 \text{e}7 29.\text{gxg5} \text{f}6
30.\text{xe}5 1–0 Selen – Dorer, corr. 2012.

24.h4
24.c5!\# has been played, and also deserves attention.

24.\text{xd}6

24...\(\text{Exd}6 seems more critical, but it meets with a forceful reply: 25.\text{xf}6+! \text{xf}6 26.\text{xf}6 \text{f}7 27.\text{g}6+ \text{h}7 28.\text{h}5! \text{xd}6 29.\text{f}4! \text{c}5++
30.\text{g}2 \text{cd}8 31.\text{xd}6 \text{xd}6 32.\text{f}6 \text{e}5
33.\text{h}6+ \text{g}8 34.\text{h}8+ \text{xh}8 35.\text{xe}5+- Sommerbauer – Reinstadler, corr. 2014.

25.\text{xd}6
White is heading for a more pleasant endgame, although Black has some drawing chances.

25...b6 26.g5 \b5 27.\xc5 bxc5 28.\xf5 \xg5 29.\xg5 \xd7 30.\xf7 \xe8 31.\xe5 \xe5

This is the line in which Black can, rather amazingly, make use of the fact that White's pawn is on c4 instead of c2. The main idea is that the pawn can become a weakness, enabling Black to simplify to certain types of endgame that would be unfavourable with the pawn on c2. There is even a line where White's inability to put a piece on c4 enables Black to get away with an otherwise dubious line of play.

22.\xf8

Other moves don't promise much.

22.\xf8 23.\xd6 \bd7

24.\xf3N

White is angling for an improved version of a thematic endgame, and intends to meet ...\e5 or ...\c5 with \f2 and \xe2 respectively, letting Black exchange on e3 rather than taking on e5. Also, White is not in a hurry to play g2-g4, since that move will not be required in the upcoming endgames.

24.g4 is the recommended move with the pawn on c2, but here Black has two ways of exploiting the small change in the position:

a) 24...fxg4!? 25.0-0 \e5 If you turn ahead to page 267, you will see that with the pawn on c2 White can get a great position with \c4
here. Here it is not possible, and after 26.\textit{f2}  
\textit{g6} 27.\textit{xg4} \textit{g5} 28.\textit{h1} the position was balanced in Ntliris - David-Bordier, corr. 2014.

b) 24...\textit{e5} leads to a version of the endgame which I prefer to avoid. 25.\textit{xe5} (Ideally White would like to keep the queens with 25.\textit{f2}, but Black can launch a series of checks: 25...\textit{a1} 26.\textit{d1} [After 26.\textit{d1 \textit{c3}} there is no way to escape the checks, since 27.\textit{f1? \textit{h3} 28.\textit{g1 \textit{e5}} looks bad.] 26...\textit{e5} If White is to escape the checks he must play the ugly 27.\textit{f1 \textit{f6}}, when Black is fine.) 25...\textit{xe5} 26.\textit{gf5} \textit{exf5} 27.0-0 \textit{g6} 28.\textit{b1} Later on page 266 we will encounter the almost-identical position with the pawn on c2, when Black faces a rather unpleasant endgame. The difference here is felt after:

\begin{center}
\textbf{24.\textit{f2}!N}
\end{center}

Trying to get an improved version of the endgame by luring White’s rook to a slightly worse square. If the rook stays on d2, then the h1-rook can instantly go to b1, leaving both rooks excellently placed. If the rook is on d1, it will cost White a tempo to reach the same configuration.

24...\textit{e5}? makes no sense, and after 25.\textit{f2}! Black’s position can quickly spiral out of control. 25...\textit{xe3}† (25...\textit{b8} 26.\textit{xe5 \textit{xe5}} 27.\textit{b1±) 26.\textit{xe3 \textit{c5}} 27.\textit{b1 \textit{b8}} (After 27...\textit{fd7} 28.\textit{xb7}! \textit{xb7} 29.\textit{xb7} Black does not have much of a blockade against the c-pawn.)

28.\textit{c6}! Not strictly necessary here, but still rather strong. We will see a similar idea in the main line, but here White has an extra tempo.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw (0,0) grid (8,8);
\draw (0.5,0.5) circle (0.25);
\draw (1.5,1.5) circle (0.25);
\draw (2.5,2.5) circle (0.25);
\draw (3.5,3.5) circle (0.25);
\draw (4.5,4.5) circle (0.25);
\draw (5.5,5.5) circle (0.25);
\draw (6.5,6.5) circle (0.25);
\draw (7.5,7.5) circle (0.25);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}
28...g5 29.\texttt{\textregistered}d4 b6 30.\texttt{\textregistered}xc8 \texttt{\textregistered}xc8 31.\texttt{\textregistered}xb6 Black’s position is collapsing.

24...\texttt{\textregistered}c5 is slightly better than the above line, as Black does not have to take on e3 so quickly, but after 25.\texttt{\textregistered}e2!, which avoids the pin on White’s queen, it is hard for Black to do anything, and he always has to worry about White’s queen suddenly moving away.

25...\texttt{\textregistered}b8 (25...a5 26.\texttt{\textregistered}b1±) 26.\texttt{\textregistered}b1

26.\texttt{\textregistered}h7 (26...g5 is met by 27.h4! intending 27...g4 [27...\texttt{\textregistered}xe3† 28.\texttt{\textregistered}xe3 \texttt{\textregistered}c5 29.hxg5 hxg5 30.\texttt{\textregistered}db2±] 28.\texttt{\textregistered}xh6! gxh6† 29.gxh6 and suddenly White gets a crushing attack.) 27.g4! \texttt{\textregistered}g6 (27...fxg4 28.\texttt{\textregistered}xg4†) 28.gxf5 \texttt{\textregistered}h5 \texttt{\textregistered}xe3† 30.\texttt{\textregistered}xe3 f4† 31.\texttt{\textregistered}f2 White can continue to press without any worries.

25.\texttt{\textregistered}d1 \texttt{\textregistered}e5

25...\texttt{\textregistered}a5† does not make sense for Black after 26.\texttt{\textregistered}f2! intending g2-g4.

26.\texttt{\textregistered}f2 \texttt{\textregistered}xe3†

26...a5? This way Black can try to keep some tension, and not make a concrete decision about the queens. At the same time, it invites the \texttt{\textregistered}b1-b5 plan in the future. Again, there are multiple ways to continue, but perhaps the simplest decision is:

27.\texttt{\textregistered}xe5

I also considered 27.\texttt{\textregistered}he1 but found that Black was okay.

27...\texttt{\textregistered}c5

27...a5?! is premature: 28.c5?! g5 (After 28...\texttt{\textregistered}xc5 29.\texttt{\textregistered}c1 \texttt{\textregistered}fd7 30.\texttt{\textregistered}hd1!± Black loses a piece.) 29.c6 Black is in trouble.
27...\texttt{b}8 28\texttt{d}2 leads to the same type of positions as the main line.

We now reach an important moment, where White has to decide where to place his rooks: on \texttt{a}1 and \texttt{b}1, \texttt{b}1 and \texttt{d}1, or \texttt{d}2 and \texttt{b}1. The first set-up does not achieve much, but choosing between the other two is not easy.

28\texttt{d}2

I analysed 28\texttt{b}1 \texttt{b}8 29\texttt{hd}1 in some detail, but will just show the main line where I found a slight problem: 29...\texttt{g}5 30\texttt{c}6? \texttt{g}7 31\texttt{d}4 \texttt{b}6 Now if 32\texttt{xc}8?! \texttt{xc}8 33\texttt{xb}6 \texttt{d}8!! the position of the rook on \texttt{d}1 instead of \texttt{d}2 makes all the difference. A better try is Alternatively 32\texttt{xb}6, but after 32...\texttt{xb}6 33\texttt{xc}5 \texttt{b}8 34\texttt{e}8?! \texttt{ff}7 35\texttt{d}6 \texttt{b}6? 36\texttt{c}5 \texttt{xc}6\texttt{f} 37\texttt{xc}6 \texttt{xe}8 38\texttt{c}7 \texttt{d}7 39\texttt{c}6 \texttt{xc}6 40\texttt{xc}6 \texttt{e}7 Black draws comfortably.

28\texttt{g}4?! is another idea that deserves attention, but I will focus on the main line.

28...\texttt{b}8 is met by 29\texttt{b}1 intending \texttt{c}6 and \texttt{d}4. Most probably Black should go for 29...\texttt{g}5, which converts to 28...\texttt{g}5 below.

28...\texttt{g}5 29\texttt{b}1 \texttt{b}8 (29...\texttt{f}4 30\texttt{d}4 \texttt{fd}7 31\texttt{g}3\texttt{e} 30\texttt{c}6! Preventing ...\texttt{fd}7, while threatening \texttt{d}4. 30...\texttt{d}7 (30...\texttt{g}7 31\texttt{d}4! \texttt{b}6 32\texttt{xc}8! \texttt{xc}8 33\texttt{xb}6 is good for White since the \texttt{d}2-rook isn’t hanging.) 31\texttt{xd}7 \texttt{fxd}7

32\texttt{xb}7! \texttt{f}4 33\texttt{e}2\texttt{e} With one of the knights exchanged, Black’s blockade on \texttt{c}5 doesn’t appear as strong, and White is definitely on top.

29\texttt{b}1

The rook manoeuvre to \texttt{b}5 works well, despite the loss of time. Black will not be able to push the pawn beyond \texttt{a}4, as it will only become a weakness then.

28...\texttt{a}5?!

Trying to exploit the fact that White did not put his rook on \texttt{b}1 on the last move. Now he will have to waste time if he wishes to bring the rook to \texttt{b}5.

29...\texttt{a}4 30\texttt{b}5 \texttt{fd}7 31\texttt{g}4?!?

It is hard to analyse precisely as there are many possibilities, but White’s position is certainly preferable. He can exert pressure on \texttt{b}7 or perhaps try a \texttt{g}2-\texttt{g}4 break at some point, simply bringing the king over towards the queenside.
Chapter 14 – 12...\textbullet\textbullet \textbullet f7

We are heading down the main theoretical path of the chapter. The next couple of moves are not completely forced, but they are clearly the most logical, and alternatives are virtually never played.

18...\textbullet\textbullet a5f 19.\textbullet\textbullet d2 0–0 20.\textbullet\textbullet d6

Now we reach an important branching point. In the rest of this chapter we will look at B221) 20...\textbullet\textbullet e8?, B222) 20...\textbullet\textbullet c6?! and B223) 20...\textbullet\textbullet f5.

The most popular move has been 20...\textbullet\textbullet d8, which will be covered in the next chapter.

B221) 20...\textbullet\textbullet e8?

Practical results have demonstrated that this is an inferior cousin of 20...\textbullet\textbullet d8.

21.0–0 f5

If Black's rook was on d8 instead of e8, White's last move could have been met by 21...\textbullet\textbullet b6. Thanks to the poor placement of the black rook, the same move now runs into 22.\textbullet\textbullet x b6 \textbullet\textbullet x b6 23.\textbullet\textbullet h5! when Black has no good way to defend f7.

21...\textbullet\textbullet c6 22.\textbullet\textbullet g3 also leaves Black without much of an answer for the coming attack. The statistical score has been a massacre for White. One nice example continued: 22...\textbullet\textbullet b6f (22...\textbullet\textbullet e7 23.\textbullet\textbullet c7 b6 24.\textbullet\textbullet x d7 \textbullet\textbullet x d7 25.\textbullet\textbullet f6?! \textbullet\textbullet h8 26.\textbullet\textbullet x d7f) 23.\textbullet\textbullet h1 \textbullet\textbullet e7 24.\textbullet\textbullet c7 \textbullet\textbullet c6

25.\textbullet\textbullet x f7f \textbullet\textbullet x f7 26.\textbullet\textbullet d6f \textbullet\textbullet g8 27.\textbullet\textbullet x e8 \textbullet\textbullet f5

28.\textbullet\textbullet g6 \textbullet\textbullet c3 29.\textbullet\textbullet x e6f \textbullet\textbullet h8 30.\textbullet\textbullet x f5 \textbullet\textbullet x d2

Black is doing his best to hang on, but it just takes a few more accurate moves to break through to his king.
31...\textit{e}f7! \textit{e}e1† 32.\textit{f}f1 \textit{a}a1 33.\textit{f}d6 a5 34.\textit{c}c3! \textit{x}c3 35.\textit{f}f8 \textit{xf}8 36.\textit{xf}8† \textit{h}7 37.\textit{d}d3†+-- Kubi\cacute{k}i – Marek, corr. 2009.

22.\textit{g}g3! \textit{c}c6

Another game ended after 22...\textit{f}xe4 23.\textit{g}g6! \textit{d}d8 24.\textit{f}f7 \textit{c}c3 25.\textit{b}b4 \textit{e}e5 26.\textit{g}g4! \textit{h}h8 27.\textit{x}xg7 \textit{x}xg7 28.\textit{c}c3 with mate to follow, Siefring – Leontiev, corr. 2010.

23.\textit{g}g6 \textit{d}d8 24.\textit{d}d3! \textit{e}e7

24...\textit{f}xe4 25.\textit{f}f7 is killing.

25.\textit{g}g3 \textit{d}d4 26.\textit{d}d3

White has a deadly attack. My database shows a long list of correspondence/internet games, with White scoring close to a hundred percent. Probably the best defensive try is:

26...\textit{b}b5 27.\textit{c}c3 \textit{b}b7 28.\textit{x}xd4 \textit{f}xe4 29.\textit{xe}e4 \textit{xe}e4 30.\textit{xe}e4 \textit{c}c8 31.\textit{xe}e7 \textit{xe}e7 32.\textit{g}g6×

Tinturé – Schmidt, corr. 2007. Black has avoided being mated, but the position should be technically winning for White.

B222) 20...\textit{c}c6?!

This used to be considered a decent option for Black, but recent games and analysis indicate that it is imprecise. The point is that White is in no hurry to swap his mighty bishop for the rook on \textit{f}8, as this will only help Black to get coordinated. The bishop is so strong on \textit{d}6 that Black usually plays ...\textit{f}5 a move or two later in order to force the exchange on \textit{f}8, but if it is going to play ...\textit{f}5 anyway, he should do it on move 20 (as in variation B223 below), in order to force White’s hand.

In short, Black’s last move can be considered an inferior version of 20...\textit{f}5, and I will mention a few places where the two lines can be compared with one another.

21.0–0!

21.\textit{xf}8? \textit{xf}8 22.0–0 \textit{e}e5 23.\textit{f}f2 \textit{f}6 is much more solid for Black. It is important to understand that the bishop on \textit{d}6 is exerting a much greater influence than the rook on \textit{f}8, and White should not exchange those pieces unless there is a compelling reason.
It is worth mentioning that 21.g4 is not the most effective choice here. Black has a precise defence with: 21...\textit{W}b6! 22.\textit{W}c3?! (22.\textit{W}h3 \textit{f}5! was better for Black in Smirnov – Nepomniachtchi, Novokuznetsk 2008; 22.\textit{W}g3 \textit{d}4! is another key idea. Now 23.g5 is met by 23...\textit{f}5 24.\textit{W}g2 \textit{h}5! when White's attack is not really dangerous.) The text move is a good try, but Black has a good answer: 22...\textit{a}5! Possibly the only move. Now 23.\textit{W}g3 can be met by 23...\textit{d}4 24.\textit{d}1 \textit{f}5! 25.\textit{f}xe8 \textit{fxe}4 and Black is doing well.

21...\textit{c}e5

Trying not to commit to ...\textit{f}5 makes sense, as playing this move will just lead to a worse version of 20...\textit{f}5. However, White is not in a hurry to take on \textit{f}8 either.

21...\textit{b}6 is not really a viable option due to 22.\textit{W}xb6 \textit{\textit{x}}xb6 23.\textit{xe}8 \textit{xe}8 24.\textit{d}6 \textit{f}6 25.\textit{x}7! (25.\textit{b}1 is also promising) with a clearly better endgame for White.

21...\textit{d}8 meets a horrible fate: 22.\textit{f}4! \textit{f}5 23.\textit{h}4 \textit{a}5 (Another game continued 23...g5 24.\textit{h}6 \textit{xe}4 25.\textit{x}5+ \textit{g}6 26.\textit{h}4! \textit{h}7 27.\textit{h}5! \textit{f}5 28.\textit{d}3 1–0 Blank – Lounet, corr. 2008.)

24.\textit{d}3! White has too many pieces in the attack. 24...\textit{f}8 25.\textit{h}5 \textit{f}5 26.\textit{g}3 \textit{h}7 27.\textit{f}4! This position has occurred in several correspondence games, with White maintaining a perfect score so far. Here is one brief example: 27...\textit{d}7 28.\textit{g}6! \textit{b}6+ 29.\textit{e}3 \textit{d}8 30.\textit{x}7 1–0 Pheby – Palekis, corr. 2011.

As mentioned previously, 21...\textit{f}5 leads to a worse version of the more respectable 20...\textit{f}5 line. 22.\textit{xf}8 \textit{xf}8 23.\textit{d}6

Black finds it hard to exchange queens here, and even if he does manage it, he gets an unfavourable version. It may still be possible to hang on and defend, especially in a correspondence game, but I can't imagine anyone wishing to do so in a tournament. I will show a few example lines after a) 23...\textit{e}5, b) 23...\textit{h}7 and c) 23...\textit{e}5.

a) 23...\textit{e}5 24.\textit{b}1 \textit{h}7 (24...\textit{b}5 25.\textit{dd}1 \textit{fg}6 26.\textit{a}1 \textit{c}7 27.\textit{xb}5 \textit{xc}2 28.\textit{ac}1± Moore – Ryan, corr. 2009.) 25.\textit{x}7 \textit{xb}7 26.\textit{xb}7 \textit{c}8 27.\textit{h}3 \textit{fg}6 28.\textit{h}5± Laffranchise – Price, corr. 2011.

b) 23...\textit{h}7

This is a strangely popular move in correspondence games. The simplest reply seems to be:

24.g4

Another interesting plan is 24.h4?! \textit{e}5 25.\textit{xe}5 \textit{xe}5 26.\textit{e}1 \textit{fd}7 27.\textit{h}5 \textit{f}6
28.\texttt{\textbackslash d}d1 \texttt{\textbackslash c}c6 29.\texttt{\textbackslash f}f3 \texttt{a}5 30.\texttt{c}3 as in Magalhaes – Rosas, corr. 2009. White maintains his extra exchange, and will slowly collect some of the pawns back while retaining long-term pressure.

24\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash e}e5

24\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash g}6 25.\texttt{\textbackslash g}xf5 \texttt{e}xf5 26.\texttt{\textbackslash h}5 \texttt{\textbackslash g}e7

27.\texttt{\textbackslash g}2\texttt{\textbackslash t}

25.\texttt{\textbackslash r}xe5 \texttt{\textbackslash x}e5 26.\texttt{\textbackslash x}f5 \texttt{e}xf5

Fischer – Spitz, corr. 2012. When you compare this position with the 20...f5 endgames, it becomes obvious that White has an improved version here.

c) 23...\texttt{\textbackslash e}e5

This gives White a pleasant choice: he can either simplify to a slightly better endgame, or continue to press with queens on the board.

24.\texttt{\textbackslash r}xe5

24.\texttt{\textbackslash a}f2!? \texttt{\textbackslash d}7 (24...\texttt{\textbackslash b}8 N 25.\texttt{\textbackslash g}4!?) 25.\texttt{\textbackslash x}b7 \texttt{\textbackslash b}4 26.\texttt{\textbackslash c}5\texttt{\textbackslash t} Kozlowski – Mamonovas, corr. 2008.

24\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash x}e5 25.\texttt{\textbackslash a}1\texttt{\textbackslash l}

There is not much point in giving exact variations here, since both sides have many options, but a few games to show the general ideas are:

25...\texttt{\textbackslash b}5

25\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash a}f7 26.\texttt{\textbackslash x}c8 \texttt{\textbackslash x}c8 27.\texttt{\textbackslash x}b7 \texttt{\textbackslash c}5

28.\texttt{\textbackslash a}7\texttt{\textbackslash t} Santos – Flor Trejo, corr. 2011.

26.\texttt{\textbackslash a}1 \texttt{\textbackslash b}4 27.\texttt{\textbackslash a}5

27.\texttt{\textbackslash d}d4?! \texttt{\textbackslash b}8 28.\texttt{\textbackslash a}4 \texttt{\textbackslash a}5 29.\texttt{\textbackslash x}c8 \texttt{\textbackslash x}c8

30.\texttt{\textbackslash x}a5 \texttt{\textbackslash f}d7 31.\texttt{\textbackslash a}2 \texttt{\textbackslash f}7 32.\texttt{\textbackslash x}b4 also gave White the better chances in Walter – Teeriaho, corr. 2011.

27...\texttt{\textbackslash f}d7 28.\texttt{\textbackslash b}5 \texttt{\textbackslash f}6 29.\texttt{\textbackslash e}2 \texttt{\textbackslash g}6 30.\texttt{\textbackslash g}3 \texttt{\textbackslash f}8 31.\texttt{\textbackslash c}4


22.\texttt{\textbackslash a}1\texttt{\textbackslash d}d1!

22.\texttt{\textbackslash c}4 \texttt{\textbackslash b}5 is not so clear.

22...f5

22\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash e}8 is seldom a good idea in these positions, and this is no exception. 23.\texttt{\textbackslash h}5! \texttt{\textbackslash g}6 24.\texttt{\textbackslash f}3 \texttt{\textbackslash f}5 25.\texttt{\textbackslash e}2 \texttt{\textbackslash a}5 26.\texttt{\textbackslash x}f7! \texttt{\textbackslash x}f7

27.\texttt{\textbackslash g}4 \texttt{\textbackslash d}f8 28.\texttt{\textbackslash f}1\texttt{\textbackslash t}++ Sutkus – Guevara, corr. 2009.

22\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash g}6 23.\texttt{\textbackslash c}4 \texttt{\textbackslash e}8 24.\texttt{\textbackslash c}5\texttt{\textbackslash t} White was dominating in Yeremenko – Enricci, corr. 2008.

23.\texttt{\textbackslash x}f8

23.\texttt{\textbackslash d}2?! is an interesting alternative, but one good line is enough.

23\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash x}f8 24.\texttt{\textbackslash d}6 \texttt{\textbackslash c}5

24\ldots \texttt{\textbackslash f}6 can be met by 25.\texttt{\textbackslash h}1\texttt{\textbackslash t} when, with the queens on the board for the foreseeable future, White has a pleasant position.
A rather obvious novelty, preventing a queen exchange and preparing g2-g4. This move was mentioned by Georgiev and Kolev in *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012* as part of the explanation for why they abandoned 20...c6.

25...d4!N

The latest trend, and the recommendation in *The Sharpest Sicilian*. Apart from being an objectively good move, the text has the advantage of forcing White’s hand, making it an appealing choice for over-the-board players. Compared to the previous line where Black played 20...c6 and followed up with ...f5, here Black is more flexible, as he keeps the useful option of developing the b8-knight to d7.

21...xf8 xf8 22.d6

No other move makes any sense.

22...bd7!

This is the best square for the knight. Now Black can offer a queen exchange from either c5 or e5.

22...a1† is premature, as after 23.d1 bd7 24.c3 the queen is stuck.

23.h4N intending to meet ...c5 with h3

The latest trend, and the recommendation in *The Sharpest Sicilian*. Apart from being an objectively good move, the text has the advantage of forcing White’s hand, making it an appealing choice for over-the-board players. Compared to the previous line where Black played 20...c6 and followed up with ...f5, here Black is more flexible, as he keeps the useful option of developing the b8-knight to d7.

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This is the best square for the knight. Now Black can offer a queen exchange from either c5 or e5.

22...a1† is premature, as after 23.d1 bd7 24.c3 the queen is stuck.

23.h4N intending to meet ...c5 with h3
seemed like an interesting idea, until I realized that Black can simply avoid the queen exchange and continue developing with 23...fos6! 24.0–0 fc7, when White is too slow to generate any initiative.

23.0–0! fc5 24.cd3 is quite an interesting alternative, when 24...b6 25.bb1 fc7 26.g4 has been played in a few correspondence games. White has decent chances here, although I am a bit mystified by Black’s plan of ...b6 and ...fc7. The rook on d3 seems rather awkward, and I would be worried about proving an advantage in some versions of the many possible endgames. Still, this could be a possible direction to explore in the event that the main line gets exhausted.

23...fxg4
This has been played in almost all games so far. Black can try to exchange the queens immediately, but it only seems to lead to slightly worse endgames where Black will have to suffer in the hope of drawing.

23...fs6 24.cg1 gives White a promising initiative.

23...fe5 is the most convenient version of the endgame for White: 24.wxe5 dx5 25.gxf5

26.0–0 g6 (26...b5 27.czxf5±) 27.bb1 (27.be1 intending cd1 is another possibility.) 27...b5 28.ca1± White will pick up the b5-pawn. Even though Black will still have two pawns for the exchange, White’s rooks are active and the c-pawn will be strong.

23...wa1†?
This improves slightly on the above line, as White is forced to misplace either his bishop or his rook. However, this does not greatly alter the assessment of the endgame.

24.cd1 wc5 (24...fxg4? 25.0–0±) 25.wxe5 dx5 26.gxf5
Going after the f5-pawn seems simplest.

27.cf2 was played in a correspondence game. White managed to create some pressure, although it wasn’t sufficient in the end: 27...ee6 28.cxb7 ee8 29.be1 df7 30.cf3 eg5 31.cg2 ec4 32.ca1 eh7 33.cd6 ef4† 34.ce1 eg6 35.axa6 eh4 and Black went on to hold in Schinke – Turati, corr. 2012. Obviously it’s a lot easier to defend like this when you have the assistance of a computer.
27...\texttt{d7} \\
27...\texttt{g6} 28.\texttt{xe1} \pm \\
28.\texttt{xf5} \\
28.\texttt{xe1} is also possible, for instance 28...\texttt{fg6} \\
29.h4! \texttt{g4} 30.\texttt{xb7} \pm and White has no \\
cause for complaint. \\
28.\texttt{xe8} 29.\texttt{c3} \pm \\
Obviously Black has drawing chances, but \\
he is a long way from being completely safe.

\[ \begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|} 
\hline 
& a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\
\hline 
1 & \texttt{d4} & \texttt{b6} \\
2 & \texttt{e5} & 26.\texttt{d3}! (26.\texttt{c4} \texttt{h7} 27.\texttt{d3} \texttt{g8} \\
3 & \texttt{f5} \texttt{b5}! \texttt{[avoiding 28...exd4 29.\texttt{xe8} \pm]} \\
4 & \texttt{may look tempting for White, but it is hard} \\
5 & \texttt{to find anything conclusive.}) \texttt{White will get an} \\
6 & \texttt{improved version of the endgame, as the pawn} \\
7 & \texttt{will be weaker on e5 than on e6. For instance:} \\
8 & \\
\hline 
\end{array} \]

25.\texttt{d4}! \\
25...\texttt{b5? would be a mistake. The fact that} \\
the queen remains unprotected will come back \\
to haunt Black after 26.\texttt{xg4} \texttt{f6} 27.\texttt{xf6}! \\
\texttt{gxf6} 28.\texttt{f3} \texttt{[threatening \texttt{g4}].} \\

24.\texttt{0-0}! \\
This move, intending to stay in the \\
middlegame, is not mentioned in \textit{The Sharpest} \\
\textit{Sicilian.} \\

24.\texttt{xe4} has been the main try, but it will \\
be hard to prove anything in the upcoming \\
endgame where Black has three pawns for an \\
exchange. 24...\texttt{a1} \texttt{[A familiar idea, forcing} \\
the bishop back to d1, although the immediate} \\
24...\texttt{e5} also seems playable.) 25.\texttt{d1} \texttt{e5} \\
26.\texttt{xe5} \texttt{exe5} 27.0-0 This position was \\
reached in Yu – Wei Yi, Xinghua 2014, and \\
now after 27...\texttt{a5} Black should be fine.

24...\texttt{c5} \\
This is the only move to have been played. \\
24...\texttt{c5} would be a mistake due to 25.\texttt{xe5} \\
\texttt{xe5} 26.\texttt{c4}! \texttt{ed7} (26...\texttt{xc5} 27.\texttt{d8} \texttt{[–]} \\
27.\texttt{xe4} with a clear advantage to White.

\[ \begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|} 
\hline 
& a & b & c & d & e & f & g & h \\
\hline 
1 & 26.\texttt{h5} (26.\texttt{xe3} \texttt{h6} 28.\texttt{xe5} \texttt{b5} \\
2 & 29.\texttt{a1} \pm) \texttt{Defending the g-pawn seems logical,} \\
3 & \texttt{but after 27.\texttt{xc5} \texttt{xc5} 28.\texttt{d5} \texttt{d7} 29.\texttt{f5} \\
4 & \texttt{g6} 30.\texttt{f7} \texttt{e6} 31.\texttt{d1} \texttt{b5} 32.\texttt{e7} \texttt{f8} \\
5 & 33.\texttt{d3} \pm \texttt{White maintained the pressure} \\
6 & \texttt{in Siefrein – Zarate, corr. 2010.} \\
\hline 
\end{array} \]
26.\textit{Hf2!}

In the event of 26.\textit{Hf2} \textit{Hf6} 27.\textit{He8}, Black can play 27...\textit{He8}! 28.\textit{Hxe6}+ \textit{Hxe6} 29.\textit{Hd8}+ \textit{Hf7} 30.\textit{Hxc5} bxc5 31.\textit{Hg4} \textit{He7} defending everything.

26.\textit{Hf7} was played in one of the few over-the-board games on my database, but Black immediately got a good position after 26...\textit{He5}! 27.\textit{He4} \textit{Ha5} 28.\textit{Hf1} \textit{Hb7} in Akshayraj – Sandipan, Kolkata 2012.

26...\textit{He5}

26...\textit{h5} feels too artificial. I like White’s position after 27.\textit{Hd3}!?, intending 27...\textit{He5}! 28.\textit{He4}! \textit{He7} 29.\textit{Hg5}±.

26...\textit{He5} seems a logical move, but once again White can exploit the weakness of the 8th rank to force Black into a passive endgame: 27.\textit{Hxe5} \textit{Hxe5} 28.\textit{Hc4}! \textit{Hd7} (28...\textit{Hxc4}? 29.\textit{Hd8}+) 29.\textit{Hg4} Black has a lot of pawns, but it is hard for him to develop. 29...\textit{Hb8} (29...\textit{Hb5} 30.\textit{Hb6}! \textit{Hxb6} 31.\textit{Hd8} \textit{Hbd7} 32.\textit{Hxe6}+−) 30.\textit{Hd6} \textit{b5} 31.\textit{Hc5} \textit{b6} 32.\textit{Hd2} The a6-pawn will eventually fall, and Black remains under pressure. The following line is not forced, but it illustrates White’s plan: 32...\textit{Hxd6} 33.\textit{Hxd6} \textit{He5} 34.\textit{Hh3} \textit{Hf7} 35.\textit{Hd8} \textit{Hd7} 36.\textit{Ha8} \textit{Hfg6} 37.\textit{Hxa6} \textit{Hf4} 38.\textit{Hf1}±

27.\textit{Hd4} \textit{He7}

Black could consider deviating with:

27...\textit{Hc7}N

This makes some sense, since \textit{d6} can now be met by ...\textit{Hc5}.

28.\textit{Hg3}! \textit{Hb7} 29.\textit{Hg4} \textit{Hh7}

The critical position.

30.\textit{Hh5} was the machine’s first suggestion, but it leads to a drawish endgame after:

30...\textit{Hxe4}! 31.\textit{Hxe4} \textit{Hfd7} 32.\textit{Hf2} \textit{Hc5}+ 33.\textit{Hg2} \textit{Hf8} 34.\textit{Hxe5} \textit{Hxe5} 35.\textit{Hxe5} \textit{Hxc2}+ 36.\textit{Hc2} \textit{Hc6}+ 37.\textit{Hf3} \textit{Hd6} 38.\textit{He2} \textit{Hg3}+ 39.\textit{Hg3} \textit{Hf6} It is hard to imagine White winning from here.

30.\textit{Hd6} \textit{Hc5}! 31.\textit{Hc6} 32.\textit{Hf7} \textit{Heg6} looks shaky, but Black is surviving.

30...\textit{Hd5}?

A strange computer idea to survive.

30...\textit{Hc8} 31.\textit{Hh5}±

30...\textit{Ha5} runs into 31.\textit{Hd6} \textit{Hc5} 32.\textit{Ha2} \textit{Hc6} 33.\textit{He7}+ and now h4-h5 is an important resource against a knight on g6.

31.\textit{Hd6} \textit{Hb7}

Black’s idea is that \textit{d6} can be met by ...\textit{Hc5}, since c2-c3 cannot be played now. However, White can switch plans while conveniently making use of the free c2-c4 move.

32.\textit{Hg1}!

With a dangerous initiative.

28.\textit{Hd6} \textit{Hfd7}
Another game continued:

28...d6

Here Black is able to simplify more easily, but it is still not enough to kill the game.

29.d3 g5 30.xg5 hXg5 31.xg6 31.f7 leads to the same position.

31.xg6 32.f7 b7 33.xg5 a5 33.e5 34.e2 c5 35.xf3 35.xf3

26...e6 b5 37.e7 (or 37.b6?) is not yet a draw.

34.d7 f3 35.xe6 f8!

36.d8= N

36.xg7+ h8 37.e7 xxe6 38.xe6 b5 (38...a4 39.c4! a3 40.e1†) 39.h3 a4 ½–½ was Walter – Johnson, corr. 2011, one of those typical insane draws which would be hard to imagine in an over-the-board game. The continuation might be 40.hxg4 a3 41.xf3 a2 42.e1 a1= 43.xa1 xxa1† 44.f2 c1 when Black seems to be able to force the exchange of his b-pawn for White’s c-pawn. Perhaps White can look for a finesse somewhere in this line, but I find the text move a lot more logical.

36.xd8 37.xd8

Exchanging a pair of rooks makes perfect sense. The a-pawn is not really dangerous, and it will be hard for Black to hold on to his pawns once White has activated his rook. A few illustrative lines:

37.h7

37...h7 38.d2±

38.d2

The safe choice.

38.c4!? e8 39.e6† e7 40.xg7 d6 41.h4 is more of a mess, although White may well be better here too.

38...f8 39.e6† 39.d7= 39.e7 40.xg7 xg5 41.c4±

Obviously Black has chances to make a draw in all these lines, but his task is not easy.

29.d1= N

The point of this move is to threaten c3, as the reply ...c5 will not be possible due to the hanging knight on e5.

I found a few games where White played rather insipidly with 29.xc3 c5 30.g3 and draws were soon agreed. 30.xg4 is a more ambitious try, but it leads to a messy position after Black completes development: 30...d7 31.g3 c6 32.d1 f8 33.xf8† xfx8 34.xf1 xe7∞ Matei – Kruger, corr. 2013.

29.h3? N gxh3 30.h2 is an interesting idea, intending to attack along the g-file, but we don’t need to hurry with it.
29...\texttt{b}b\texttt{8}

This is the computer's top suggestion. Black prepares ...\texttt{b}b\texttt{7} in some lines, and removes the rook from its slightly exposed position on the long diagonal.

29...a\texttt{5}?! introduces the possibility of ...\texttt{a}a\texttt{6}. Here White can switch plans with 30.\texttt{e}e\texttt{4} \texttt{b}b\texttt{8} and now the amazing 31.\texttt{f}f\texttt{1}!, just making sure that the knight will not come to f3 with check. It's still a messy position, but more dangerous for Black, who has to worry about \texttt{b}5.

30.\texttt{c}c\texttt{3} \texttt{d}d\texttt{8}

The only move.

31.h\texttt{3}!

31.\texttt{g}g\texttt{2}?! deserves attention as well, but I like the text move more.

31...b\texttt{5}

31...a\texttt{5} 32.hxg\texttt{4} b\texttt{5} is the same thing.

31...gxh\texttt{3} 32.\texttt{h}xh\texttt{3} \texttt{e}e\texttt{7} 33.\texttt{c}c\texttt{3} \texttt{d}d\texttt{8} 34.\texttt{g}g\texttt{2}! gives White a powerful initiative, for instance: 34...b\texttt{5} 35.\texttt{g}g\texttt{4}?! (35.\texttt{h}h\texttt{5}?) 35...\texttt{q}x\texttt{g}4 36.\texttt{d}x\texttt{g}4

32.hxg\texttt{4} a\texttt{5}

32...b\texttt{4} 33.g\texttt{g}3 \texttt{g}g\texttt{5} 34.\texttt{e}e\texttt{4}! \texttt{g}g\texttt{6} 35.\texttt{c}c\texttt{5} \texttt{g}g\texttt{5} 36.\texttt{c}c\texttt{4}+!

33.g\texttt{5}!

33.g\texttt{5} should lead to a pleasant endgame: 33...a\texttt{4} (33...g\texttt{g}5 34.\texttt{e}e\texttt{4}+; 33...b\texttt{4} 34.\texttt{c}c\texttt{4}+) 34.\texttt{x}x\texttt{b}5 \texttt{g}g\texttt{5} (34...a\texttt{3}? 35.g\texttt{5} \texttt{x}g\texttt{5} 36.\texttt{x}g\texttt{5} h\texttt{x}g\texttt{5} 37.\texttt{x}x\texttt{c}8++) 35.\texttt{a}a\texttt{4} \texttt{f}f\texttt{6} 36.\texttt{f}f\texttt{4} \texttt{x}g\texttt{4}+ 37.\texttt{x}g\texttt{4} \texttt{f}f\texttt{g}4 38.\texttt{f}f\texttt{4} White is pressing, but I prefer the attacking continuation shown in the main line.

33...\texttt{x}g\texttt{5}+

33...b\texttt{4} 34.\texttt{d}d\texttt{4} \texttt{x}g\texttt{5}+ 35.\texttt{g}g\texttt{2} reaches the note to Black's next move in the main line.

34.\texttt{g}g\texttt{2} \texttt{d}d\texttt{8}

34...b\texttt{4} 35.\texttt{d}d\texttt{4}! (35.\texttt{h}h\texttt{3} \texttt{e}e\texttt{7} 36.\texttt{h}h\texttt{6} \texttt{b}b\texttt{7} gives Black a slightly improved version of the main line after 34...\texttt{d}d\texttt{8}.) 35...\texttt{e}e\texttt{7} 36.\texttt{f}f\texttt{1}! g\texttt{5} This ugly move is forced. 37.\texttt{h}h\texttt{5} White has a powerful initiative, although it's not conclusive yet.

35.\texttt{h}h\texttt{3}!

I also considered 35.\texttt{b}3, when 35...\texttt{h}h\texttt{7}? allows White to perform a nice dance with the queen: 36.g\texttt{g}3! \texttt{g}g\texttt{5} (36...\texttt{e}e\texttt{7} 37.\texttt{f}f\texttt{1} \texttt{b}b\texttt{7} 38.\texttt{f}f\texttt{7} \texttt{g}g\texttt{5} 39.\texttt{d}d\texttt{3}+!++) 37.\texttt{c}c\texttt{3} \texttt{d}d\texttt{8} 38.\texttt{f}f\texttt{7}+-
However, a better defence is 35...\textit{\texttt{W}}e7 36.\textit{\texttt{Q}}f5 \textit{\texttt{W}}c5↑ 37.\textit{\texttt{E}}d4 \textit{\texttt{Q}}f3↑ 38.\textit{\texttt{A}}xf3 \textit{\texttt{W}}xf5 39.\textit{\texttt{A}}g4 \textit{\texttt{W}}c5 40.\textit{\texttt{A}}xe6↑ \textit{\texttt{G}}h8 41.\textit{\texttt{W}}e3 when White keeps some pressure, although the position is simplifying a bit faster than I would like.

35...\textit{\texttt{W}}e7

35...\textit{\texttt{W}}h7? 36.\textit{\texttt{Q}}g3! transposes to 35.\textit{\texttt{W}}b3 \textit{\texttt{W}}h7? 36.\textit{\texttt{Q}}g3! in the previous note.

36.\textit{\texttt{W}}xh6

36.\textit{\texttt{Q}}h2?! also seems to offer White a strong initiative.

36...\textit{\texttt{A}}b7 37.\textit{\texttt{E}}g3↑

White keeps creating threats, while Black does not seem to have a clear way out.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The 12...\textit{\texttt{Q}}fd7 variation is one of the most important in the Poisoned Pawn. After the usual continuation of 13.\textit{\texttt{Q}}e4 \textit{\texttt{W}}xa2 14.\textit{\texttt{Q}}d1 \textit{\texttt{W}}d5 15.\textit{\texttt{W}}e3 \textit{\texttt{W}}xe5, Black has deposited three extra pawns in the bank, but White has a formidable lead in development. Of the many variations examined in this chapter, there are two that stand out as especially interesting.

Variation B21 with 17...\textit{\texttt{Q}}d5 sees Black deliberately lose a tempo to provoke c2-c4. In the majority of positions this free move is more likely to benefit White, but there are a few specific cases where it can help Black. I have shown how White can modify his plans to use the extra move advantageously, although I should add that this line has almost exclusively been the domain of correspondence players so far.

The last section of the chapter introduced the main line beginning with 17...\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd4. After the standard moves 18.\textit{\texttt{Q}}xd4 \textit{\texttt{W}}a5↑ 19.\textit{\texttt{Q}}d2 0–0 20.\textit{\texttt{Q}}d6 we reach an important branching point where, after dismissing a few questionable alternatives, we examined 20...\textit{\texttt{W}}f5 in detail. My analysis departs from that in \textit{The Sharpest Sicilian 2012} at move 24, which is actually quite early by the standard of the Poisoned Pawn nowadays. With the help of an improvement over a correspondence game a few moves later, I believe I have been able to keep the defence under pressure.

In the next chapter we will deal with the most popular 20...\textit{\texttt{Q}}d8.
Chapter 15

Poisoned Pawn

20...\textit{\textsuperscript{d}d}8

Variation Index

1.\textit{e}4 \textit{c}5 2.\textit{\textsuperscript{d}f}3 \textit{d}6 3.\textit{d}4 \textit{cxd}4 4.\textit{\textsuperscript{d}xd}4 \textit{\textsuperscript{d}f}6 5.\textit{c}3 \textit{a}6 6.\textit{\textsuperscript{g}g}5 \textit{e}6 7.\textit{f}4 \textit{\textsuperscript{b}b}6 8.\textit{d}2 \textit{\textsuperscript{w}xb}2 9.\textit{\textsuperscript{w}b}1 \textit{\textsuperscript{w}a}3 10.\textit{e}5 \textit{h}6 11.\textit{\textsuperscript{h}h}4 \textit{dxe}5 12.\textit{fxe}5 \textit{\textsuperscript{d}d}7 13.\textit{\textsuperscript{e}e}4 \textit{\textsuperscript{w}xa}2 14.\textit{\textsuperscript{d}d}1 \textit{\textsuperscript{w}d}5 15.\textit{\textsuperscript{w}e}3 \textit{\textsuperscript{w}xe}5 16.\textit{\textsuperscript{g}g}2 \textit{\textsuperscript{c}c}5 17.\textit{\textsuperscript{g}g}3 \textit{\textsuperscript{d}xd}4 18.\textit{\textsuperscript{w}xd}4 \textit{\textsuperscript{w}a}5\textsuperscript{†} 19.\textit{\textsuperscript{d}d}2 0–0

20.\textit{\textsuperscript{d}d}6 \textit{\textsuperscript{d}d}8

21.\textit{g}4\textsuperscript{!!}

A) 21...\textit{\textsuperscript{w}b}6

B) 21...\textit{f}6

C) 21...\textit{\textsuperscript{d}f}6

D) 21...\textit{\textsuperscript{d}c}6 22.\textit{g}5 \textit{h}xg5 23.\textit{\textsuperscript{g}g}1!

D1) 23...\textit{g}6?

D2) 23...\textit{\textsuperscript{d}f}6!?

D3) 23...\textit{f}6 24.\textit{h}4!?

D31) 24...\textit{\textsuperscript{d}f}8

D32) 24...\textit{\textsuperscript{d}de}5

C) after 22...\textit{gx}f6

D31) after 36...\textit{f}4

D32) after 27...\textit{f}4!?
Chapter 15 – 20...\texttt{\textbackslash{d}8}

1.e4 c5 2.\texttt{f}3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\texttt{\textbackslash{d}}xd4 \texttt{\textbackslash{f}}6 5.\texttt{\textbackslash{c}}3 a6 6.\texttt{\textbackslash{g}}5 e6 7.f4 \texttt{\textbackslash{b}}6 8.\texttt{\textbackslash{d}}2 \texttt{\textbackslash{x}}xb2 9.\texttt{\textbackslash{b}}1 \texttt{\textbackslash{a}}3 10.e5 h6 11.\texttt{\textbackslash{h}}4 dxe5 12.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}e5 \texttt{\textbackslash{d}}fd7 13.\texttt{\textbackslash{\textbackslash{e}}4} \texttt{\textbackslash{x}}xa2 14.\texttt{\textbackslash{\textbackslash{d}}1} \texttt{\textbackslash{d}}5 15.\texttt{\textbackslash{e}}3 \texttt{\textbackslash{x}}e5 16.\texttt{\textbackslash{c}}2 \texttt{\textbackslash{c}}5 17.\texttt{\textbackslash{g}}3 \texttt{\textbackslash{x}}xd4 18.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}xd4 \texttt{\textbackslash{a}}5 19.\texttt{\textbackslash{\textbackslash{d}}2} 0-0 20.\texttt{\textbackslash{d}}6 \texttt{\textbackslash{d}}8

It seems strange to start a chapter twenty moves into the game, but the Poisoned Pawn is – to put it mildly – not like other opening systems. In terms of popularity Black’s last move is the most important option in the position, although it was untested until 2006. Like many of the lines examined in this and the previous chapter, it has mostly been used in correspondence games due to the dangers it involves. Still, White needs to play extremely precisely if he is to prove anything. I remember analysing this line in great detail in 2006, when there was not a single example in the database. No correspondence games to kill all the fun, and even the engines were not too strong in those days. Maybe I used to be a good player back then, because eventually I discovered the following idea.

21.g4!!

I remember analysing this line in something of a daze for a few days – it just felt too surreal. I finally got a chance to play it four years later, and now, with more than thirty subsequent games (mostly correspondence), the idea still seems quite potent.

21.\texttt{g}3 has been played in many hundreds of games, without any clear conclusion in White’s favour. I will just give an extremely short summary of the theoretical picture. 21...\texttt{\textbackslash{c}}6! (21...\texttt{\textbackslash{f}}5 used to be the main line, but this was refuted spectacularly by 22.\texttt{\textbackslash{e}}5! \texttt{\textbackslash{g}}6 23.\texttt{w}h4 \texttt{\textbackslash{c}}6 24.\texttt{\textbackslash{h}}5 \texttt{\textbackslash{f}}5 25.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}g7!, which has brought White hundreds of wins in correspondence play.) 22.\texttt{\textbackslash{c}}7 \texttt{\textbackslash{a}}1 23.\texttt{d}1 \texttt{\textbackslash{b}}2 24.\texttt{c}3?! The critical line. 24...\texttt{\textbackslash{\textbackslash{e}}8} 25.\texttt{\textbackslash{d}}6 f5! 26.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}f8 \texttt{\textbackslash{x}}f8 27.\texttt{\textbackslash{d}}6 \texttt{\textbackslash{d}}7 28.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}e3 f4 29.\texttt{\textbackslash{d}}2 \texttt{\textbackslash{x}}d2 30.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}d2 \texttt{\textbackslash{e}}5 31.0-0 g5 (31...\texttt{\textbackslash{c}}6?! 32.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}f4 \texttt{\textbackslash{d}}f7 also gives decent drawing chances.) 32.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}b7 a5 With double-edged play, Busemann – Zambor, corr. 2010.

I have analysed four main moves here, of which the last is by far the most important:

A) 21...\texttt{\textbackslash{b}}6, B) 21...\texttt{f}6, C) 21...\texttt{\textbackslash{f}}6 and D) 21...\texttt{\textbackslash{c}}6.

The untested 21...\texttt{f}5? may seem like a natural reaction, but it just opens up the position for White. 22.\texttt{g}xf5! exf5 (22...\texttt{\textbackslash{a}}1 23.\texttt{d}1 \texttt{\textbackslash{a}}5 24.\texttt{c}3 exf5 25.\texttt{g}1++)

23.\texttt{g}1! \texttt{\textbackslash{h}}8 (23...\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}e4 24.\texttt{d}4! \texttt{\textbackslash{e}}5 25.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}g7\texttt{\textbackslash{\textbackslash{+}}} 26.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}e5\texttt{\textbackslash{\textbackslash{+}}} 24.\texttt{d}4 \texttt{\textbackslash{g}}8 25.\texttt{g}6! \texttt{\textbackslash{h}}7 26.\texttt{\textbackslash{c}}4! \texttt{\textbackslash{x}}g6 27.\texttt{\textbackslash{x}}g8 With mate to follow.
A) 21...\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}f6

This move has the idea to disturb White's pieces, but White has a convenient answer.

22.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{W}}g3!?

Renewing the threat to push the g-pawn. The queen only seems to be improved now.

22.\textcolor{red}{\textit{f}}f6† is not so clear after 22...\textcolor{red}{\textit{h}}h8! (22...\textcolor{red}{\textit{g}}x\textcolor{red}{\textit{f}}6 23.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}x\textcolor{red}{\textit{h}}6→) 23.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}c5 \textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}a5 24.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{e}}e7 \textcolor{red}{\textit{c}}c6 with complications.

22...\textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}c6N

This seems like the most logical attempt to improve on 22...\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}b1† 23.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}d1 \textcolor{red}{\textit{c}}c6 24.g5 \textcolor{red}{\textit{h}}xg5 25.h4! g4 26.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}xg4 \textcolor{red}{\textit{b}}b2 27.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{g}}g1 g6 28.h5 when Black resigned in Dolgov – Tarrio Ocana, corr. 2013.

22...\textcolor{red}{\textit{f}}6? is no good due to 23.g5! \textcolor{red}{\textit{h}}xg5 24.h4 and Black's position is collapsing.

23.g5 \textcolor{red}{\textit{h}}xg5 24.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}xg5

24.h4!? looks quite strong as well.

24.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{b}}b1† 25.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{d}}d1 \textcolor{red}{\textit{x}}c2 26.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{g}}g1 g6 27.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{g}}g4 \textcolor{red}{\textit{b}}b2 28.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{h}}h4 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{e}}e8

28...\textcolor{red}{\textit{b}}5 29.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{e}}e7+-

29.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}c5!

Threatening \textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}xd7.

B) 21...\textcolor{red}{\textit{f}}6

Trying to hold back the g-pawn? No chance!

22.g5! \textcolor{red}{\textit{x}}g5

22...\textcolor{red}{\textit{h}}xg5 allows White to carry out a dreamlike onslaught: 23.h4! g4 24.h5 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}c6 25.h6 g6 26.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}xg4 f5

27.\textcolor{red}{\textit{g}}g5! \textcolor{red}{\textit{h}}h7 28.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{h}}h5!+-

23.h4 g4

23...\textcolor{red}{\textit{x}}xh4 24.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{h}}xh4 \textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}c6 (After 24...\textcolor{blue}{\textit{f}}f5 25.\textcolor{blue}{\textit{c}}c4+- every white piece is coming into the attack.) 25.\textcolor{red}{\textit{W}}xh6! Black will be annihilated on the kingside, for instance:
Chapter 15 – 20...d8

25...a1t (25...gxh6 26.xh6 d4 27.xh5+-)
25...d4 26.xd4 gxh6 27.c4+-) 26.d1 b2 27.h8t! xh8 28.h3+ g8 29.xe6+ h8 30.h3+ g8 31.c4 mate!

Another beautiful winning line is: 24...b6 25.f6t! h8 26.e4 gxf6 (26.a1t) 27.d1 xf6 28.e5 xd2 29.xf6+-)
27.g6 xd6 28.xf6+ h7

29.e7+ g8 30.0-0+-

25.g1

The attack is too strong, and White probably has multiple ways of winning. A few examples:

25...h8 26.g3 a1t
Or 26.de5 27.d1! g8 28.f8 c7 29.f2+ threatening xg7t.

27.d1 g8

28.g5! d8 29.c7
Black resigned in Hohne – Permykov, Internet 2013.

C) 21.f6
This provocative move has been played twice in email games. White tried to refute Black's play with a blunt attack, but in both cases Black survived with seemingly miraculous defence. The chances of anyone doing the same over the board are minimal, but just in case, I found a way for White to build his initiative more slowly. It seems Black's best-case scenario is to simplify to an exchange-down endgame and fight for a draw.

22.\( \text{Qxf6} \)† \( \text{gx} \text{f6} \)

23.\( \text{c3?!} \)

Avoiding 0–0 completely. My idea is that the rook on h1 can be well placed to support an attack with h2-h4 and g4-g5, while in the likely endgames after a ...\( \text{Ex} \text{d6} \) exchange sacrifice, it will be useful to have the king in the centre.

23.0-0 \( \text{Qc6} \) leads to some insane variations where Black just seems to hold on. See the game Tesic – Shablinsky, corr. 2013, where Black survived the middlegame and held a suspicious-looking endgame with rook and knight against queen. From a practical point of view this would not be much fun for Black either, but I like my recommended line even more.

23...\( \text{Qc6} \)

The immediate 23...\( \text{Ex} \text{d6} \) would lead to similar variations. 23...\( \text{f7} \) is met by 24.h4! threatening g4-g5.

24.\( \text{h4} \)\( \text{Ex} \text{d6} \)

24...\( \text{h7} \) is a computer suggestion, but it seems artificial. White gets a strong initiative after: 25.\( \text{g5} \) f5 26.\( \text{g1}! \) I'm sure there are other good moves. 26...\( \text{Ex} \text{d6} \) 27.\( \text{Ex} \text{d6} \) \( \text{e} \text{e} \) 28.\( \text{Ex} \text{d6} \) \( \text{h2} \)

29.\( \text{f1} \) Black is in trouble. After some thinking, the only way the computer manages to survive is by entering a piece-down position after: 29...\( \text{e5} \) 30.\( \text{d4} \) \( \text{h5} \) 31.\( \text{h5} \) 32.\( \text{g6} \) f4 33.\( \text{g2} \) \( \text{h1} \) 34.\( \text{f2} \) \( \text{b7} \) 35.\( \text{d7} \) \( \text{cxd7} \) 36.\( \text{xd7} \) \( \text{h8} \) 37.\( \text{b7} \) Materially Black has enough pawns for the bishop, but he is in obvious danger due to his exposed king.

25.\( \text{Ex} \text{d6} \) \( \text{e} \text{e} \)
25...\textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{g}7 just provokes 26.g5! fxg5 27.hxg5 hxg5 28.\textit{\texttt{h}}\textit{h}5 with a strong attack.

25...\textit{\texttt{c}}\textit{c}7 26.\textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}2 \textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}7 is a logical attempt to develop, but it is too slow. 27.\textit{\texttt{h}}\textit{h}3! Threatening \textit{\texttt{x}}\textit{xh}6. (27.g5 \textit{\texttt{e}}\textit{e}7! creates a mess.) 27...\textit{\texttt{g}}\textit{g}7 (27...\textit{\texttt{e}}\textit{e}7 28.\textit{\texttt{w}}\textit{xh}6±) 28.g5 With an attack.

25...\textit{\texttt{e}}\textit{e}7 tries to create quick counterplay, but Black is far too behind in development. 26.\textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{f}1! The king will be useful in the centre after the queen exchange. 26...\textit{\texttt{e}}\textit{e}5 (26...\textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}5 27.\textit{\texttt{x}}\textit{x}d5! is the key idea. 27...\textit{\texttt{x}}\textit{x}d5 28.\textit{\texttt{w}}\textit{x}f6 \textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}7 29.\textit{\texttt{x}}\textit{xh}6± Threatening \textit{\texttt{h}}\textit{h}5.) 27.\textit{\texttt{w}}\textit{x}e5 \textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{xe}5 28.g5 hxg5 29.\textit{\texttt{b}}\textit{d}8+ \textit{\texttt{g}}\textit{g}7 30.hxg5 White intends \textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}3 and \textit{\texttt{h}}\textit{h}1, while Black is absolutely stuck.

26.\textit{\texttt{w}}\textit{x}e5 \textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{xe}5

After 26...\textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{xe}5 27.g5! White will be able to create an entry for the rook either along the h- or the g-file, and Black’s a-pawn is not really dangerous yet. 27...hxg5 (27...a5 28.gxh6±; 27...\textit{\texttt{g}}\textit{g}7 28.gxh6+ \textit{\texttt{x}}\textit{xh}6 29.\textit{\texttt{g}}\textit{g}1±) 28.hxg5

28.\textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{f}2!

The endgame will be unpleasant for Black. 28.\textit{\texttt{h}}\textit{d}2!? also makes sense, intending to use the king to blockade the a-pawn in the future.

28...\textit{\texttt{b}}\textit{b}5

28...a5 29.\textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{h}1 a4 30.\textit{\texttt{e}}\textit{e}8! followed by \textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}d8 will create mating threats as well as planning to take on c8. 30...\textit{\texttt{c}}\textit{c}6 31.\textit{\texttt{b}}\textit{b}3+

Both 28...\textit{\texttt{c}}\textit{c}6 29.\textit{\texttt{e}}\textit{e}8± and 28...\textit{\texttt{b}}\textit{b}6 29.\textit{\texttt{b}}\textit{b}1± favour White as well.

29.\textit{\texttt{a}}\textit{a}1±

Black will drop a pawn on the queenside.

D) 21...\textit{\texttt{c}}\textit{c}6

28...e4 (28...a5 is met by 29.\textit{\texttt{b}}\textit{b}3+ followed by \textit{\texttt{x}}\textit{xc}6 and \textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}8(+) with mating nets.) 29.\textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}1!? \textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{f}8 30.g6 \textit{\texttt{g}}\textit{g}7 (30...\textit{\texttt{f}}\textit{xf}6 31.\textit{\texttt{h}}\textit{h}7±) 31.\textit{\texttt{g}}\textit{xf}7 \textit{\texttt{xf}}7 32.\textit{\texttt{h}}\textit{h}4± Black will continue to struggle with development for a while, so the position remains one-sided.

27.\textit{\texttt{d}}\textit{d}8† \textit{\texttt{g}}\textit{g}7
Developing the knight is the obvious move, and it has been by far the most popular choice.

22.g5 hxg5
22...\texttt{a1}?! has never been played, and after 23.\texttt{d1} \texttt{a5}† 24.c3 the change in position helps White as Black is deprived of the check on a1, which can be an important resource in some lines.

22...h5?!
This second untested move is also relatively easy to refute.

23.\texttt{xh5} \texttt{a1}†
23...g6 24.\texttt{d1}†
23...f5 24.gxf6 \texttt{xh5} gives White several ways to win, for instance 25.fxg7+ intending 0-0.

24.\texttt{d1}
24.\texttt{f2}? \texttt{xh1} 25.\texttt{xf7}† does not work due to 25...\texttt{xf7} 26.\texttt{f4}† \texttt{g8} 27.g6 \texttt{e5} 28.\texttt{f7}† \texttt{h8} when there is no mate and Black wins.

24.\texttt{d1}? is interesting, but the text move is more forcing.

24...\texttt{a5}† 25.c3 f5 26.0-0?! \texttt{ce5}
26...\texttt{de5}? 27.\texttt{f6}† wins.
27.\texttt{d2}±

23.\texttt{gl}!
23.h4?! is more romantic, and I spent considerable time analysing it in 2006, but it turns out that 23...g4! 24.h5 \texttt{f6}! is a fairly straightforward refutation. After 25.\texttt{xf6}† gxf6 White still has some compensation, but his attacking prospects are virtually nil.

We now come to a final dividing point, where Black has tried D1) 23...\texttt{g6}?, D2) 23...\texttt{f6}! and D3) 23...\texttt{f6}.

D1) 23...\texttt{g6}?

This allows White to continue the attack unhindered.

24.\texttt{c3}!
24.\texttt{xg5} may also be good, but I like the logic of preventing the queen from assisting in the defence via a1-h8.

24...\texttt{g7}
24...\texttt{b6} 25.\texttt{f6}† \texttt{g7} 26.\texttt{h5}† 1–0 was the quick end to the game Kozma2 – Bereza, Internet 2013.

25.\texttt{xg5} \texttt{b6} 26.\texttt{f4} \texttt{e5} 27.\texttt{f3}
I found one internet game where Black gave up in this position, and another where he stumbled on for a few more moves.
27...\texttt{b1}\texttt{t} 28.\texttt{d1} \texttt{c1} 29.\texttt{f5} \texttt{xd2}\texttt{t} 30.\texttt{xd2} \texttt{gxf5} 31.\texttt{g3}\texttt{t} \texttt{h8} 32.\texttt{h4}\texttt{t} \texttt{g7} 33.\texttt{g5}\texttt{t}  

27...\texttt{xd8} 28.\texttt{d3} \texttt{e5} 29.\texttt{g5}\texttt{t} 27.\texttt{h5!} \texttt{xc7} 28.\texttt{h3} Now Black is forced to run with 28...\texttt{f8}, but after 29.\texttt{xd2} he faces considerable trouble with his poor development and vulnerable king.

25.\texttt{d1}  
I briefly checked 25.\texttt{d1?} \texttt{xe4} 26.\texttt{e5}, but it is refuted by 26...\texttt{xd1}\texttt{t} 27.\texttt{xd1} \texttt{xd1}\texttt{t} 28.\texttt{xd1} \texttt{xe5} 29.\texttt{xe5} \texttt{xe5} 30.\texttt{xe5} \texttt{d7} with a winning endgame for Black.

25...\texttt{xd1}\texttt{t}  
Another game continued: 25...\texttt{xe4} 26.\texttt{xa1} \texttt{xe5} 27.\texttt{c7!} (27.\texttt{d1} f6\texttt{t}) 27...\texttt{d7} (27...\texttt{d5} 28.\texttt{c4} \texttt{d7} 29.\texttt{xe5} \texttt{xc7} 30.\texttt{a3!} \texttt{t}) 28.\texttt{xe5} \texttt{xc7}  

29.\texttt{a3!} White quickly brings his last piece into the attack. 29...\texttt{f5} 30.\texttt{g3} \texttt{b5} 31.\texttt{g6} \texttt{e7}
26.\texttt{\textbackslash \textgreek{c}xd1!
}

In the stem game where I introduced 21.g4!!., I played 26.\texttt{\textgreek{c}xd1} which was also quite dangerous for Black. After 26...\texttt{\textgreek{d}xe4} 27.\texttt{\textgreek{w}xe4} \texttt{\textgreek{b}xd6} 28.h4 f6 29.\texttt{\textgreek{g}3}

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

I eventually won a crazy game in Negi – Huschenbeth, Chotowa 2010, but the text move gives White a better version.

26...\texttt{\textgreek{d}xe4} 27.\texttt{\textgreek{w}xe4} \texttt{\textgreek{b}xd6} 28.\texttt{\textgreek{c}1}

Compared with the previous note, White's king can help to block the a-pawn, and the bishop is well placed to join in the attack via d3 or h5.

28...\texttt{\textgreek{d}4} 29.h4 also gives White a strong attack.

29.\texttt{\textgreek{h}5} \texttt{\textgreek{d}5} 30.\texttt{\textgreek{e}5} \texttt{\textgreek{d}7} 31.\texttt{\textgreek{g}4} \texttt{\textgreek{d}5} \texttt{\textgreek{f}6} 32.\texttt{\textgreek{f}8} 33.\texttt{\textgreek{c}3} g6 34.\texttt{\textgreek{f}3} \texttt{\textgreek{b}5} 35.h4 → Black did not manage to find a suitable defence in Ulbig – Fortune, corr. 2013.

D3) 23...f6

This is the most critical variation for the assessment of White's 21st move. All the other lines were unpleasant for Black, and most of White's moves were direct and easy to understand. Now he must make an important decision.

24.h4!?

My original intention was:

24.\texttt{\textgreek{d}xe4}?

Unfortunately, some correspondence guys found an unbelievable forcing line, where White does not appear to have more than a draw. I will present the game with a heavily shortened version of my notes.

24...\texttt{\textgreek{d}c5!} 25.c3!?

25.\texttt{\textgreek{d}f7} \texttt{\textgreek{x}x7} 26.\texttt{\textgreek{d}xg7} \texttt{\textgreek{x}g7} 27.\texttt{\textgreek{g}3} \texttt{\textgreek{h}8} 28.\texttt{\textgreek{h}4} \texttt{\textgreek{g}8} 29.\texttt{\textgreek{g}4} \texttt{\textgreek{h}8} was agreed drawn in Berg – Williamson, corr. 2013.

25...\texttt{\textgreek{d}6} 26.\texttt{\textgreek{d}6} \texttt{\textgreek{e}5} 27.\texttt{\textgreek{d}4}!
Chapter 15 – 20...\textit{d}8

27.\textit{h}3!\textit{f}7 28.\textit{d}1 intending \textit{f}4-h5 deserves further attention, but I think Black should be okay.

27...\textit{d}7 28.\textit{f}3 \textit{xf}3\textdagger 29.\textit{e}x\textit{f}3 \textit{c}6 30.\textit{h}3! 30.\textit{x}g7\textdagger leads to a forced draw. I also analysed 30.\textit{e}3 and 30.\textit{g}3, but in both cases Black can hold with precise defence.

30...\textit{e}4! 31.\textit{e}x\textit{g}3!

Intending \textit{h}5 and \textit{h}3. In the key correspondence game Black found what is probably the only way to defend, which even the computer initially fails to give as its top choice.

31...\textit{f}5! 32.\textit{h}5 \textit{h}6! 33.\textit{h}4 \textit{c}6 34.\textit{h}4 \textit{h}1\textdagger 35.\textit{f}1 \textit{g}5! 36.\textit{h}8\textdagger \textit{f}7 37.\textit{h}7\textdagger \textit{x}h7 38.\textit{x}h7\textdagger \textit{f}8 39.\textit{h}8\textdagger \textit{f}7 40.\textit{x}a8 \textit{e}4\textdagger! 41.\textit{f}2 \textit{c}6!

Despite being rook down, Black has enough counterplay.

27.\textit{h}3!

Preventing any ...\textit{h}2 jumps, and preparing to attack along the h-file.

27...\textit{f}5

After 27...\textit{h}7 28.\textit{x}g5 \textit{x}g5 29.\textit{h}5! Black's position collapses.
28.hxg5
This seems like the natural choice, preparing a future g5-g6.

28...hxg5 is an interesting alternative. The critical line continues: 28...d7 29.d3 e7 30.h5 h7! 31.g1 b5! Taking away the c4-square from the knight. 32.c4 c6 White seems to have the initiative, but I couldn’t find anything concrete.

28...d7
The computer’s “0.00” is deceptive, as Black is barely hanging on. White has multiple ways to create problems, which at the very least make Black’s position practically hard to play. Moreover, having dug a bit deeper, I believe Black’s position to be problematic even after correct defence.

29.c4
By driving the queen away, White takes away ...g6 as means of covering the h8-square.

29...h1 g6 30.c4 g7 31.f2 is another interesting position that could be explored further. The queen seems rather stuck on g7, but White’s initiative has been neutralized for now, so the position seems balanced.

29...f4 30.h1 f7

31.g6!!?
There are other possibilities, but this seems the most tempting. At several of the following moves, White has different options, but the main correspondence game seems good enough – right up to the moment where I found a clear improvement.

31...xg6 32.d6 f6 33.f1 h6 34.g3 g6 35.d1!!
Removing the king from various checks. It is hard to see how Black is going to improve his position, while White has a lot of possibilities:

35.e5
Trying to get some counterplay. 35...e7 36.xb7 leaves Black under pressure.

36.c4 f4

37.c1!N
37.h2 reduced the pressure on Black, and after 37...e7 38.f2 xh2 39.xh2 xd6 he was able to hold in Simmelink – Boehme, Internet 2013.

After the text move Black is rather stuck; he has little counterplay and will find it tough to survive from move to move.
37...\texttt{g7}
37...\texttt{e7} 38.\texttt{g1}! is excellent for White.
37...\texttt{h3} 38.\texttt{e4}†! avoids the queen exchange, and after 38...\texttt{g7} 39.\texttt{e1} Black must worry about \texttt{h1}.

38.\texttt{f2}
38.\texttt{e1} is similar. In either case, Black's position requires computer accuracy to defend.
A few final brief lines:

38...\texttt{h3}
38...\texttt{g5}? 39.\texttt{g1} \texttt{e7} 40.\texttt{h2} wins.

39.\texttt{d3} \texttt{h6}
39...\texttt{h5} 40.\texttt{d5}±

40.\texttt{fd1}
40.\texttt{d5} g5! attacks the knight on d6, but the text move maintains White's initiative.

D32) 24...\texttt{de5}

25.\texttt{c3}
25.hxg5? is insufficient due to 25...\texttt{f5}!
26.\texttt{f6}† (or 26.\texttt{c3} fxe4) 26...\texttt{f7} when there is no mate. White can try the tricky 27.\texttt{c3}?!, but Black keeps a big advantage with 27...\texttt{g6}! intending ...\texttt{xd6} and ...\texttt{e5}.

25...\texttt{g6}

25...\texttt{g4}? is refuted by 26.\texttt{xf6}†! gxf6
27.\texttt{xg4} with a winning attack.

25...\texttt{xd6}? has been played only once, but deserves further attention. 26.\texttt{xd6} (After 26.\texttt{xd6} g4! 27.\texttt{g4} f5! 28.\texttt{f5} exf5
29.\texttt{xg7}† \texttt{g7} 30.\texttt{g5}† \texttt{h7} White only has a perpetual.) 26...\texttt{g4}

a) 27.h5 \texttt{d7}! 28.h6 \texttt{g6} 29.\texttt{xb7} (29.\texttt{g4} \texttt{h7}!∞; 29.h7? \texttt{h8}∞) 29...\texttt{c7} 30.\texttt{c5} \texttt{e8}
31.\texttt{g4} \texttt{h8} 32.\texttt{e2} This insane position was reached in Simmelink – Wurtinger, corr. 2013.
White is materially ahead, but it is hard to be certain about anything without much deeper analysis. The game eventually ended in a draw after a long fight.

b) 27.\texttt{g4}?N \texttt{g7} 28.\texttt{g4} \texttt{e5} 29.\texttt{xe5}
(29.\texttt{e4}?! \texttt{h5} looks extremely dangerous for Black, but it’s not easy to prove anything against the computer.) 29...\texttt{xe5}
30...\texttt{g}3 We have reached a pretty one-sided endgame. Materially, Black is more than okay, but White's rooks are extremely active, making it hard for Black to hold on to all those pawns. He certainly has drawing chances, but he will need to play accurately.

26.hxg5 \texttt{f}5 27.\texttt{h}5!

27.\texttt{h}1 is an interesting option, but Black has far too many options to draw any conclusions.

27...\texttt{f}4?!

This seems like a critical line to consider. However, if my analysis proves correct, it is not objectively best.

27...\texttt{f}7?! 28.\texttt{c}5 is just bad.

27...\texttt{x}d6 28.\texttt{x}d6 \texttt{g}e5

Black's play is not terribly logical, and is quite easy to refute, despite the computer's initial insistence that Black is okay.

28...\texttt{g}e7?! is certainly not an improvement:

29.\texttt{f}6+ \texttt{f}8 30.\texttt{f}2 \texttt{e}5 31.\texttt{g}d1!+-

A better idea is 28...\texttt{f}xe4, when 29.\texttt{x}g6 transposes to 27...\texttt{f}xe4 below.

29.\texttt{f}6+ \texttt{f}8 30.\texttt{f}2! \texttt{g}6

Both 30...\texttt{b}8 31.\texttt{g}d1! and 30...\texttt{b}6 31.\texttt{d}2! give Black big problems as well.

31.\texttt{d}d1!

With the knight on \texttt{f}6, Black's position is ready to fall apart.

31...\texttt{c}7

31...\texttt{a}4 32.\texttt{f}3 \texttt{h}4+t 33.\texttt{g}2 \texttt{f}4 34.\texttt{c}5+ \texttt{f}7 35.\texttt{x}c6 \texttt{x}g5+t 36.\texttt{f}1 \texttt{x}f6 37.\texttt{e}4 \texttt{e}8 38.\texttt{e}1 maintains heavy pressure.

32.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{f}7

27...\texttt{f}xe4! is objectively best, and possibly the only move to survive. At the same time, Black voluntarily enters a slightly worse endgame, so White should not have any complaints.

28.\texttt{x}g6 \texttt{x}d6 29.\texttt{x}d6 \texttt{e}5 30.\texttt{x}e4 \texttt{c}4

31.\texttt{h}7+! A nice touch. 31...\texttt{f}8 (31...\texttt{x}h7? 32.\texttt{d}3+-) 32.\texttt{g}3 \texttt{e}5+ 33.\texttt{xe}5 \texttt{xe}5 34.\texttt{e}4 \texttt{e}7 35.\texttt{d}4 White kept the better chances in Ljubicic – Müller, corr. 2012. In the game Black was able to hold a draw with precise defence, but over the board this would not be at all easy.
28...f6!N
28...xf4  xd2 29..xg6  e7! 30..h7† was agreed drawn in Malashenkov – Noth, corr. 2014. After 30...xh7 31.g6† g8 32..xd2 d5 the position looks quite dangerous for Black, but it’s hard to prove anything.

I also considered 28.e2!? N f5 with a strange mess, as well as 28.f3 f5 29..xg6 xg6 30..xf4 e5 31.f3 f5 with equality, before ascertaining that the main line was the best.

28...gxf6 29.h3! b6
Another nice variation is: 29...e5 30.d3 f5 31.xg6! e6

32...h7†! xh7 33..h3† g8 34..h1 a1† 35..d1 xd1† 36..xd1 xd6† 37.e1±

30.h1!!
Can a move be both ridiculous and brilliant at the same time?

30...f5
30...e3† 31.d1 xd6 32.xd6 xc3 33.gxf6 f8 (33...a1† 34.e2++) 34.xg6 xf6 35.e4 e7 36.d2+-

31.xg6 d7 32.xf4
32.h2? e3† 33.f1 c1† 34.f2 b2† is only a draw.

32...b1†
32...g7 33.h2! xg6 34.h1 leaves Black without a defence.

33.f2!
33.\texttt{d}e2 \texttt{b}5† 34.\texttt{f}2 \texttt{c}5† 35.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{b}5†
is a draw.

33...\texttt{e}4

34.\texttt{d}6!!
The analysis is stretching a bit too far, but I cannot resist putting in the complete variation.

34.\texttt{exe}4 \texttt{exe}4 35.\texttt{xe}4 \texttt{e}5 should be about equal.

34...\texttt{xh}1
34...\texttt{e}5 35.\texttt{exe}4 \texttt{exe}4 36.\texttt{exe}5 \texttt{xd}2† 37.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{d}5 38.\texttt{f}6±

35.\texttt{xh}1 \texttt{d}8
Neither 35...\texttt{g}7 36.\texttt{h}6± nor 35...\texttt{a}7 36.\texttt{g}3± help Black's cause.

36.\texttt{h}7† \texttt{g}7 37.\texttt{e}5† \texttt{xe}5 38.\texttt{xd}8 \texttt{b}5 39.\texttt{g}8† \texttt{f}7 40.\texttt{a}1±
White should win the endgame with accurate play.

\section*{Conclusion}

From the chapter’s starting position after 20...\texttt{d}8, I am pleased that my attacking plan involving 21.\texttt{g}4!!, which I discovered in 2006 and introduced as a novelty in 2010, is still going strong.

We started by analysing three sidelines, all of which are playable, while at the same time suffering from clear defects. Black's most popular and reliable move is 21...\texttt{c}6, after which 22.\texttt{g}5 \texttt{hxg}5 23.\texttt{g}1! leads to another branching point, where 23...\texttt{f}6 24.\texttt{h}4?? leads to the most complicated positions of the chapter.

Both 24...\texttt{f}8 and 24...\texttt{de}5 lead to the same type of story: Black's position cannot be refuted outright, but he is constantly in danger. The main challenge for White is to avoid certain forcing lines which might be analysed all the way out to a draw, which seems a bit crazy, but it could happen nowadays. I am satisfied that I have accomplished this goal. I cannot promise that my recommendations will break the defences of correspondence players armed with computers, but I am confident that they will cause problems to anyone who takes up Black's position over the board.
12...g5

13.\textit{f2}!!

Variation Index

\begin{align*}
\text{1.e4} & \text{c5} \text{ 2.\textit{f3} d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\textit{xd4 \textit{f6} 5.\textit{c3} a6 6.\textit{g5} e6 7.f4 \textit{b6} 8.\textit{d2}} \\
\text{\textit{xb2} 9.\textit{b1 a3 10.e5 h6 11.\textit{h4 dxe5 12.fxe5 g5}}}
\end{align*}

13.\textit{f2}!! \textit{g4} 14.\textit{g3}

\begin{enumerate}
\item A) 14...\textit{g7}? 15.\textit{e4}
  \begin{enumerate}
  \item A1) 15...\textit{e3}+?!N \\
  \item A2) 15...0–0
  \end{enumerate}
\item B) 14...\textit{d7} 15.\textit{e2} \textit{gxe5}
  \begin{enumerate}
  \item B1) 16.\textit{xe6}?! \\
  \item B2) 16.0–0 \textit{g7} 17.\textit{xe6}! \textit{fxe6} 18.\textit{e4}
    \begin{enumerate}
    \item B21) 18...\textit{f7}?!N \\
    \item B22) 18...\textit{f8} 19.\textit{c4}!!N
      \begin{enumerate}
      \item B221) 19...\textit{b6} \\
      \item B222) 19...\textit{b5}!
      \end{enumerate}
    \end{enumerate}
  \end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

A2) after 19...\textit{xf6}

B1) after 17...\textit{e7}

B22) after 18...\textit{f8}

20.\textit{xf6}+!N

18.\textit{e3}?!N

19.\textit{c4}!!N
1. e4 c5 2. d3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. qxd4 qf6 5. qa3 a6 6. qg5 e6 7. f4 qb6 8. qd2 qxg2 9. b1 qf3 10. e5 h6 11. qh4 dxe5 12. fxe5 g5

The biggest theoretical debate going on in the entire 6. qg5 Najdorf has been centred around this variation. Black has done surprisingly well in the games here, with ambitious White players often seeing the tables turned. My aim is to demonstrate some interesting tries which have not yet been analysed out to a finish, and those in which I feel Black will not have the easy life that he gets in many of the main lines.

13. exf6 has been the overwhelmingly most popular move, and we will cover it in the final two chapters of the book. Before then, however, I would like to draw your attention to a rare move which I believe has been unfairly neglected.

13. qf2?

This move has been played in barely a dozen games out of nearly four thousand on my database! Superficially it may seem that White is taking too much time, but there is definite logic behind the decision to preserve the dark-squared bishop. Black will soon be forced to capture the e5-pawn, leaving all of the central files open. Obviously the challenge for White will be to prove something concrete for his two-pawn investment.

13. qg3 is the poor cousin of the text move, and Black is doing rather well after: 13... qh5 14. qe4 (Trying to keep the bishop alive with 14. qf2 is pointless, since a future ... qf4 jump will be annoying: 14... qd7! 15. qe2 qf4 16.0-0 qg7 17. qe4 0-0+) 14... qxg2 15. qb3 (15. qd1 is usually the ideal move, but here after 15... wbd5 Black will most likely be able to eliminate both the dark-squared bishop and the e5-pawn.) 15... qd7 16. qc3 b6! 17. qd6† qxd6 18. qd3 qg3 19. qxe6 wa5 20. qc7† qg8 21. qb4 we5† 22. qxe5 qxe5= Revuelta Capablanca – Biedermann, corr. 2011.

13... qg4 14. qg3

White is threatening to trap the knight, so Black only has two serious options: A) 14... qg7? and B) 14... qd7.

A) 14... qg7?

This move has only occurred in a single internet game. It has the advantage of avoiding the qxe6 ideas that may occur after the knight goes to d7, and it is also useful for Black to have the option of castling at a moment's notice.
15. \( \text{dx}e4 \)  
15. \( \text{b}5?! \)  
I also analysed this direct attempt, but did not find anything clear. I will present a shortened version of my analysis which you can use as a starting point for your own investigation should you wish.

15... \( \text{d}7! \)  
15...axb\( 5? \) 16. \( \text{dx}b5 \) works out badly for Black.
15... \( \text{d}7 \) is met by the clever 16. \( \text{e}2! \) \( \text{xe}5 \) 17. \( \text{e}4 \), when the bishop is misplaced on \( d7 \). Now the knight is unable to go to \( d7 \) to prevent \( \text{f}6+t \), and the b7-pawn may be left hanging in some lines.

16. \( \text{xd}7t \) \( \text{xd}7 \) 17. \( \text{b}3 \) \( \text{a}5 \) 18. \( \text{xb}7 \) \( \text{xe}5 \) 19.0-0 \( \text{c}8 \)

After 19...0-0 20. \( \text{b}3 \) \( \text{c}4 \) 21. \( \text{xd}7 \) \( \text{xc}3 \) 22. \( \text{xf}7 \) \( \text{xf}7 \) 23. \( \text{xf}7t \) \( \text{h}8 \) 24. \( \text{xe}6 \) \( \text{xc}2 \) 25. h3= White has chances to develop a serious initiative.

20. \( \text{f}5! \)  
Black must play accurately to survive.

20...exf5 21. \( \text{xe}5 \) 0-0 22. \( \text{g}7 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 23. \( \text{d}4t \) \( \text{h}7! \) 24. \( \text{xd}7 \) \( \text{xc}3 \) 25. \( \text{xf}5 \) \( \text{xa}2 \) 26. \( \text{f}6? \)

A nasty idea, but Black is just in time with a brilliant defence.

26... \( \text{g}8 \) 27. \( \text{g}6t \) \( \text{h}7 \) 28. \( \text{f}5 \) \( \text{a}1t \) 29. \( \text{f}2 \)

29... \( \text{xc}2t! \)  
If it were not for this resource, Black could resign.

30. \( \text{xc}2 \) \( \text{d}4t \) 31. \( \text{e}2 \) \( \text{e}5t \) 32. \( \text{d}2 \) \( \text{d}4t= \)

There is no way to escape the checks. It is no use moving the king to \( c1 \) in order to block a check with the b7-rook, as this would release the pin on the \( f7 \)-pawn.

Let's now return to 15. \( \text{e}4 \).

Black can try either A1) 15... \( \text{e}3t? \) \( \text{N} \) or A2) 15...0-0.

15... \( \text{xe}5 \) 16. \( \text{b}3 \) \( \text{e}7 \) 17. \( \text{f}3 \) gives White a strong initiative.
A1) 15...\textit{\textbf{g}}3\textsubscript{f}!?N

It is easy to ignore this move when analysing with the computer, as it will tell you that castling is stronger, but any human player can understand the logic for Black in exchanging queens. It is tempting to assume that Black must be completely okay, but White can still put his activity to use.

16.\textit{\textbf{xe}}3 \textit{\textbf{xe}}3 17.\textit{\textbf{d}}6\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{e}}7 18.\textit{\textbf{e}}2!
18.\textit{\textbf{xb}}7?! \textit{\textbf{f}}5! favours Black.

18.\textit{\textbf{d}}3 is nothing special: 18...\textit{\textbf{d}}7 19.\textit{\textbf{e}}2 \textit{\textbf{d}}5! (19...\textit{\textbf{g}}4 might seem more natural, but 20.\textit{\textbf{h}}f1 \textit{\textbf{g}}xe5 21.\textit{\textbf{e}}4! gives White excellent compensation.) 20.\textit{\textbf{xc}}8\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{xc}}8 21.\textit{\textbf{xb}}7 \textit{\textbf{c}}3\textsubscript{f} 22.\textit{\textbf{d}}2 \textit{\textbf{a}}4 Black intends \ldots \textit{\textbf{ac}}5 with a comfortable position.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

18...\textit{\textbf{d}}7

If 18...\textit{\textbf{gx}}g2\textsubscript{f} 19.\textit{\textbf{f}}2 \textit{\textbf{f}}4 20.\textit{\textbf{xc}}8\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{xc}}8 21.\textit{\textbf{xb}}7\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{f}}8 22.\textit{\textbf{xf}}4 \textit{\textbf{xf}}4 23.\textit{\textbf{h}}5 White maintains some pressure.

19.\textit{\textbf{d}}2

In the event of 19.\textit{\textbf{f}}2 \textit{\textbf{d}}5 20.\textit{\textbf{xc}}8\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{xc}}8 21.\textit{\textbf{h}}xc8 \textit{\textbf{h}}f8 22.\textit{\textbf{d}}4 \textit{\textbf{d}}xf4 23.\textit{\textbf{a}}5 White has the exchange for two pawns. The main line seems like a slightly favourable version though.

19...\textit{\textbf{g}}xe5 20.\textit{\textbf{c}}1!

20.\textit{\textbf{e}}2 \textit{\textbf{xf}}3 21.\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 \textit{\textbf{xc}}6 22.\textit{\textbf{d}}6 \textit{\textbf{xf}}6 23.\textit{\textbf{d}}6 \textit{\textbf{xc}}6 24.\textit{\textbf{e}}xf6 \textit{\textbf{f}}6 25.\textit{\textbf{h}}xf6 \textit{\textbf{xf}}6 26.\textit{\textbf{f}}6 \textit{\textbf{e}}f6 27.\textit{\textbf{e}}c1 \textit{\textbf{c}}6 28.\textit{\textbf{f}}6 \textit{\textbf{xf}}6 29.\textit{\textbf{f}}6 \textit{\textbf{c}}6 30.\textit{\textbf{g}}6 \textit{\textbf{g}}6 31.\textit{\textbf{h}}f6 \textit{\textbf{h}}f6 32.\textit{\textbf{f}}6 \textit{\textbf{f}}6 is equal.

24...\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 25.\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 \textit{\textbf{h}}d8

19...\textit{\textbf{d}}5

This would be a hard move to make, but Black is surviving on the edge here.

20.\textit{\textbf{xc}}8+ \textit{\textbf{xc}}8 21.\textit{\textbf{xb}}7 \textit{\textbf{f}}4 22.\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 \textit{\textbf{g}}6

23.\textit{\textbf{d}}1

23.\textit{\textbf{c}}6 \textit{\textbf{hd}}8 24.\textit{\textbf{a}}4 \textit{\textbf{gxe}}5 25.\textit{\textbf{xe}}5 \textit{\textbf{e}}5 26.\textit{\textbf{c}}6\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{xc}}6 27.\textit{\textbf{xc}}6 \textit{\textbf{d}}6 28.\textit{\textbf{f}}3 \textit{\textbf{e}}7 29.\textit{\textbf{d}}1 \textit{\textbf{c}}8 (intending \ldots \textit{\textbf{xc}}7) leads to a similar type of endgame where White has the exchange for two pawns. The main line seems like a slightly favourable version though.

23...\textit{\textbf{gxe}}5 24.\textit{\textbf{c}}1!

24.\textit{\textbf{e}}2 \textit{\textbf{xf}}3 25.\textit{\textbf{c}}6\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{f}}6 26.\textit{\textbf{dxd}}7 \textit{\textbf{f}}h8

27.\textit{\textbf{d}}6 \textit{\textbf{xc}}6 28.\textit{\textbf{xf}}6 \textit{\textbf{f}}x8 29.\textit{\textbf{xf}}7\textsubscript{f} \textit{\textbf{g}}6

30.\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 \textit{\textbf{d}}6 is equal.

24...\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 25.\textit{\textbf{xf}}3 \textit{\textbf{h}}d8

26.\textit{\textbf{c}}7 \textit{\textbf{e}}8 27.\textit{\textbf{xd}}8 \textit{\textbf{xd}}8 28.\textit{\textbf{h}}3

I prefer White's chances in this complicated endgame. Materially Black is fine, but he has
some coordination problems and White's rooks are extremely active.

20.\textit{\textbf{Qxc8}}\textbf{#} \textit{\textbf{Qxc8}} 21.\textbf{Qxb7} \textbf{Qf4}

21...\textit{\textbf{Qe8}}?! is unsatisfactory due to 22.\textit{\textbf{Qh5}}!, while 21...\textit{\textbf{Qab8}} 22.\textit{\textbf{Qxb8}} \textit{\textbf{Qxb8}} 23.\textit{\textbf{Qb1}} \textbf{Qd7}

24.\textit{\textbf{Qb7}} also preserves a plus for White.

22.\textbf{Qxf4}

22.\textit{\textbf{Qf3}} looks tempting, but it allows 22...\textit{\textbf{Qc4}}! 23.\textit{\textbf{Qe3}} \textbf{Qac8} when Black regroups.

22...\textit{\textbf{Qxf4}} 23.\textbf{Qd1} \textbf{Qab8}

23...\textit{\textbf{Qxe5}} 24.\textit{\textbf{Qc1}} \textbf{Qab8} 25.\textit{\textbf{Qc6}}\textbf{#} \textit{\textbf{Qxc6}}

26.\textit{\textbf{Qxd7}}\textbf{#} \textit{\textbf{Qf6}} 27.\textit{\textbf{Qxf7}}\textbf{#} \textit{\textbf{Qg5}} 28.\textit{\textbf{Qxb8}} \textit{\textbf{Qxb8}}

29.\textit{\textbf{Qd2}} a5 30.\textit{\textbf{Qd3}} \textit{\textbf{Qe5}} 31.\textit{\textbf{Qe2}} reaches a one-sided endgame. Despite the considerable simplifications and opposite-coloured bishops, Black is still a long way from securing a draw.

24.\textbf{Qxa6} \textbf{Qxb7} 25.\textbf{Qxb7} \textbf{Qc7} 26.\textbf{Qc6}\textbf{#} \textbf{Qe8}

27.\textbf{Qb1} \textbf{Qc5}

After 27...\textbf{Qxe5} 28.\textbf{Qxe5} \textbf{Qxe5} 29.a4 White's pawns seem more dangerous, for instance: 29...\textbf{Qe7} 30.\textbf{Qb3} \textbf{Qd4} 31.\textbf{Qd3} \textbf{Qe3}

28.\textbf{Qa8} \textbf{Qc8}

29.\textbf{Qb5}\textbf{!} \textbf{Qxa8} 30.\textbf{Qxc5} \textbf{Qc8}\textbf{?}

After 30...\textbf{Qxa2} 31.\textbf{Qb4} Black should probably hold, but White can keep playing on by targeting the f4-pawn.

31.\textbf{Qc4} \textbf{Qd7} 32.\textbf{Qa5} \textbf{Qxe5} 33.\textbf{Qxc8} \textbf{Qxc8} 34.\textbf{Qd3}
Black's kingside pawn mass is not doing much for now, and White's knight can jump around and create weaknesses. Obviously there is a fair chance of a draw, but it is clearly Black who will need to work harder to achieve it.

A2) 15...0–0

This was played in the one game involving 14...g7. It looks dangerous to castle having already weakened the kingside, but it is not easy to prove anything for White.

16.h4!
Of course, otherwise there is no way to question Black's last move.

16...\textit{xa2}!
Black has to play concretely, otherwise White will get an overwhelming initiative.

16...\textit{e3}† 17.\textit{xe3} \textit{xe3} 18.hxg5 hxg5 19.\textit{h5}†
16...d8 is too slow. 17.hxg5 c6 18.c3†

Also after 16...f5 17.\textit{xf6} \textit{xf6} 18.\textit{xf6}† \textit{xf6} 19.c3 White has good attacking chances.

17.\textit{d1} \textit{d5} 18.\textit{e2} f5!
Again, the most concrete method is required.

19.\textit{xf6} \textit{xf6}

20.\textit{xf6}†N
20.\textit{d6} runs into the annoying 20...\textit{a5}†, when White is more or less forced to exchange queens: 21.\textit{d2}N (21.\textit{d2}? \textit{c6} left White with insufficient play in ‘Vigon777’ – ‘Otshehnik’, Internet 2012.) 21...\textit{xd2}† 22.\textit{xd2} Although White has decent compensation for the two-pawn deficit, it seems hard to imagine him converting it into more than equality.

20...\textit{xf6} 21.\textit{d3}!
Preventing Black from capturing on d4 due to the check on g6. We are left with an interesting position where Black has no immediate way to kill the initiative.

21...\textit{g7}
This natural move is safest.

21...\textit{g7} 22.\textit{d6}! gives White good prospects.

21...e5 22.hxg5! exd4 23.\textit{xf6} \textit{xf6} 24.\textit{e2} \textit{a5}† 25.c3 gives White an ongoing initiative.

21...\textit{d7} is also risky for Black: 22.\textit{g6}† \textit{g7} 23.\textit{d3} \textit{f7} (23...\textit{f6} 24.\textit{h7}† \textit{f8} 25.\textit{e4} \textit{a5}† 26.\textit{e2}†) 24.\textit{f3} gxh4 25.\textit{hxh4}
Chapter 16 – 13...f2!?

White’s king problem has been solved and his pieces remain extremely active.

25...d8 26.g4 e5 27.h5 a5? 28.f1 e6 29.g1 White’s king problem has been solved and his pieces remain extremely active.

22...xg5 23.d6 f7

23...d8 24.f3 f6 25.e4 c3† 26.e2! reaches a weird position with good chances for White, despite the misplaced king. The immediate threat is e5.

26...c6 (26...c6 defends the rook, but is met by 27.e5! all the same. Black’s lack of development is starkly visible after 27...xe5 28.xd8† xxd8 29.xe5 when there is no defence.) 27.f4 (27.d3 xd6 28.xd6 xd6 29.xd6 c6=) 27...xc2† 28.d2 c3 29.g3 (29.d3 c2†=) The position remains extremely complicated, but White is not the one who is taking the risks.

22.hxg5!?

This is the most ambitious continuation. There are many interesting lines ahead, but considering how unexplored this whole variation is (remember 14...g7 has only been played in one obscure Internet game), I will not analyse it too exhaustively. Instead I will present a few variations to show that White is at least not objectively worse, while highlighting what I consider the more promising possibilities for future analysis and testing.

It is worth mentioning that 22.g6 should lead to a draw: 22...f6 (22...a5† 23.d2 a1† 24.e2 a5 might also lead to equality.) 23.e8† f8 24.g6=

24.f3 a5†

24...f5 25.e3 a5† 26.f2 d7 27.d3 White has dangerous compensation,
with a comparatively safe king and a huge lead in development.

25...d7
25...b6† is met by 26.g3! when the king is completely safe.

25...d7 26.h4 c6 27.g1 d7 28.d4 maintains White's initiative.

25...c6 26.g6!? f5 (26...e7 27.xe7 exe7 28.xh6†) 27.exh6 xg6 28.xg6

The endgame is interesting, but White is at least not worse due to his extreme piece activity. A possible continuation is 28...a5 29.d3 a4 30.a3! e5 31.e4 d7 32.h1 with some initiative.

Both 26..f6 27.g1 and 26...d5 27.e2 maintain White's initiative.

26...b6† 27.g3 e5 (27...f6 28.e5†) 28.h2! also seems quite promising.

27.f4
27.g4?! runs into 27...f6! 28.f4 b6† when it is not possible to put the king on g3 due to the fork on h5.

However, the immediate 27.g3?! could be considered.

27...xf4 28.xf4

The position remains exceptionally complicated, but I feel happy about White's prospects. At the very least, it would seem dangerous to play this way with Black in a practical game.

B) 14...d7

To date, this has occurred in all but one of the games in which 13.f2 was played.

15.e2 gxe5

We have reached a critical crossroads. So far White's development has been logical, and the stage is set for various tactical ideas. White actually has a few interesting tries here, and I
decided to present both B1) $16.\text{a}4x\text{e}6$! and B2) $16.0-0$ in detail.

There is even a third idea:

$16.\text{a}4\text{e}4 \text{a}7 17.\text{h}4$!

Forcing some weakening on the kingside.

Black also needs to react precisely after $17.\text{a}4x\text{e}6$! $\text{f}xe6 18.\text{a}2b3 \text{a}4 19.\text{a}3d6t \text{a}7 20.0-0 \text{a}8 21.\text{a}5d1$, but after $21...\text{c}6$! I found no more than a draw.

$17...\text{g}4$!

$17...\text{g}xh4$? is refuted spectacularly by:

$18.\text{a}4x\text{e}6$! $\text{f}xe6 19.\text{a}2b3 \text{a}4 20.\text{a}3h5t \text{a}8d8 21.\text{a}5xh4t$ The point. $21...\text{c}6 22.\text{a}2d6#$

$17...\text{c}5$ seems rather shaky for Black after $18.\text{a}3d6t \text{a}8f8 19.\text{c}3 \text{a}5cd3t 20.\text{a}5xd3 \text{a}3xd6 21.0-0\text{c}6$.

$18.\text{a}2f4N$

$18.0-0 0-0 19.\text{a}5x\text{e}5$ occurred in Staratorzhsky – Jandek, corr. 2009, and now $19...\text{a}5x\text{e}5!N$ leaves White with nothing better than forcing a draw: $20.\text{a}5x\text{e}6 \text{f}xe6 21.\text{a}2xh6 \text{a}8e7 22.\text{a}2xg4 \text{a}5xf1t 23.\text{a}2xf1 \text{a}8f8! 24.\text{a}2xf8t \text{a}5xf8 25.\text{a}5x6t \text{a}5xe6 26.\text{a}2xe6t \text{a}8f7 27.\text{a}2xe5 \text{a}5f8=$

The text move prevents Black from castling. Initially I thought it was promising for White, but unfortunately Black has a strong defence:

$18...\text{a}5f6$!

$18...\text{h}5$? is pointless, as $19.0-0 0-0 20.\text{a}5x\text{e}5$! just wins.
White's piece sacrifice is the bluntest approach, and is not mentioned in either *The Sharpest Sicilian 2012* or Andriasyan's *Winning with the Najdorf*. Compared with the variation B2 below, White has a few interesting ways to try and exploit the fact that the bishop has not yet gone to g7.

18...\(\text{B}e3!\)\( \text{N} \)

Another tricky continuation is:

18...\(\text{B}xe5?! \)\( \text{Q}xe5 \) 19.0-0\( \text{R}d7! \)

Intending to walk the king to d8 and c7.

After 19...\(\text{B}f5\) 20.h1\( \text{g}7 \) 21.Bbe1 Black is collapsing.

19...\(\text{B}g7\) does not lose instantly, but Black comes under heavy pressure after: 20.Bbd1!\( \text{B}c5\) 21.Bh1 a5 (21...Bc7 leads to similar lines but gives White extra options, such as putting the knight on b5 instead of a4.) 22.Ba4! (22.Be4 is also interesting.)

22...\(\text{B}c7 \) 23.Be3 \(\text{B}d7 \) (23...Bb5? 24.Bxe5! and mate follows.) 24.Bb6 Ba8 25.Bf1
The initiative continues, and Black does not have an easy way to untangle.

20.Ba4

20.Bf1\( ? \) just drives the king where it wants to go: 20...Bd8 21.Bd1 \(\text{B}c7\)\( \text{F} \)

20...Bd8!

Now it is difficult to find an advantage, although White's compensation is enough to recover the material and maintain the balance.

21.Bf3\( \text{N} \)


24.Bxb6\( \text{B}e7 \) 25.Bxh7+ Bxh7 26.Bc5\( \text{F} \)

was only good enough for a draw in 'grasuI2009' – 'guardio', Internet 2013.

21...Ba4

21...Bxa2?! 22.Bd1 Ba4 23.Bd6 is becoming increasingly dangerous for Black.

22.Bd1?\n

22...Bc7

22...Bc7? 23.Bxf8+–

22...e5 23.Bd5 Bb5 24.Bc6+\n
22...Bc6 23.Bh1 Bc7 24.Bf7! Bf8 25.Bxc7 \(\text{B}xe7 \) 26.Bb4\( \text{B}c5 \) 27.Bc3! (27.Bxc5 Bxb5–+) 27...e5 28.Bxh5

23.Bf7

White is playing for the same idea as after 22...Bc6 above, but here Black has another defence available.
23...\texttt{b4}!
23...\texttt{xe4}?? loses to 24.\texttt{a5}†.
24.\texttt{f2}
24.c3?? allows 24...\texttt{xe4} as the check on a5 is unavailable.
24...\texttt{c7} 25.\texttt{d4} \texttt{b1}† 26.\texttt{d1} \texttt{b4}=
White has nothing better than to repeat moves.

Although the above line resulted in a draw, it was anything but boring. Now we return to 18.\texttt{e3}?! N.

\textbf{18...\texttt{a5}}
Forced, as 18...\texttt{g7}? 19.\texttt{d5}† wins the queen.

\textbf{19.0–0 \texttt{g7}}
19...\texttt{d8} is too slow here. 20.\texttt{e4} (20.\texttt{h1}?!?) 20...\texttt{c4} 21.\texttt{e2} \texttt{b5} 22.\texttt{bd1} \texttt{e7} (22...\texttt{b6}† 23.\texttt{h1} \texttt{e7} 24.\texttt{f7}†)

23.\texttt{h1}! (23.\texttt{f7} \texttt{f8}?) 23...\texttt{e5} (23...\texttt{f8} 24.\texttt{xf8}† \texttt{xf8} 25.\texttt{xe5}! h\texttt{xg5} 26.\texttt{xe6}++)
24.\texttt{f6}! \texttt{xf6} 25.\texttt{xf6} \texttt{c7} 26.\texttt{f7} With a strong attack.

\textbf{20.\texttt{e4} \texttt{f8} 21.\texttt{d1}!}
Intending the sneaky \texttt{e1}.

\textbf{21...\texttt{c4}!}
21...\texttt{c7} is no good due to 22.\texttt{a3}†.

22.\texttt{e2}
22.\texttt{d3}?! leads to absolute mayhem; Black barely survives, but with accurate play he ends up with the better position: 22...\texttt{d5} 23.\texttt{e2} \texttt{d4}† (23...\texttt{c6} 24.\texttt{e6}† \texttt{xe6} 25.\texttt{xd6} \texttt{xd6} 26.\texttt{xe6} \texttt{xe6} 27.\texttt{d1}† \texttt{c7} 28.\texttt{xe6} \texttt{b8} 29.\texttt{e8}++) 24.\texttt{h1}

24...\texttt{e3}! 25.\texttt{d6}† (25.\texttt{d3}? \texttt{xe4}++) 25...\texttt{d8} 26.\texttt{xf8} \texttt{xe4} 27.\texttt{d3} \texttt{xf8} 28.c3 \texttt{d7} 29.\texttt{f3} \texttt{f5} 30.\texttt{xd4} \texttt{b5} 31.\texttt{xb5} \texttt{axb5} 32.\texttt{xe3} \texttt{g4}†

\textbf{22...\texttt{b5}!}
Amazingly the only move again! (22...\texttt{a4} does not lose instantly, but White’s initiative seems overwhelming.) Now White does not have many options against the intended regrouping with ...\texttt{b6}.

\textbf{23.\texttt{h1} \texttt{b6}}
23...\texttt{b7}? 24.\texttt{d6}†
24...\textit{xc4}
This is more or less forced. Black was threatening ...\textit{e3}, and if 24...\textit{d6} \textit{xd6} 25...\textit{xd6} \textit{a7} 26...\textit{xe6} \textit{xe6}, Black's king is surprisingly safe, despite the possibility of a discovered/double check.

24...\textit{xb}4 25...\textit{xb}6

25...\textit{e}5!
25...\textit{xb}6? 26...\textit{d6} was White's idea, but the text move is enough to save Black. Now White must even be a bit careful.

26...\textit{xe}5!
26...\textit{g}4?! \textit{xb}6 27...\textit{xe}5 is perhaps a bit too ambitious for White, and Black can at least give back the material with 27...\textit{f}5, when he is in no danger at all.

After 26...\textit{b}4 \textit{g}3 27...\textit{g}3 \textit{a}7 28...\textit{xc}4 \textit{b}7 29...\textit{cd}4 White has regained the missing pawn and the endgame should probably be a draw, but Black has a positional edge.

26...\textit{xe}5 27...\textit{h}3 \textit{xd}7 28...\textit{c}5 \textit{fb}8

29...\textit{xd}7!\textit{t}
Without this sacrifice White would be worse in the endgame.

29...\textit{xd}7 30...\textit{xe}6 \textit{d}8 31...\textit{xa}6 \textit{b}1\textit{t} 32...\textit{h}2 \textit{b}6 33...\textit{c}5
Despite the simplifications, the position remains complicated but equal according to the computer. Black has an extra exchange, but his kingside pawns are weak and White may be able to develop threats against the king.

B2) 16...0–0

16...\textit{e}7
16...\textit{e}7 is not so good in view of 17...\textit{xe}6! fxe6 18...\textit{h}5\textit{t} \textit{d}8 19...\textit{xe}5.
17. \( \text{bxc6} \)

White should not allow the black king to get castled of course.

17... \( \text{fxe6} \) 18. \( \text{e4} \)

In this position it is worth considering the untested B21) \( \text{...f7!?N} \) as well as B22) \( \text{...f8} \).

B21) 18... \( \text{f7!?N} \)

This was mentioned briefly by Palliser in Chesspublishing. By threatening to castle, Black forces White to make immediate decisions rather than continue his attack on a slow burner. At the same time, it requires extreme precision for Black to pull this off, and even after perfect defence, it is not clear if he can fully equalize.

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

It is important to note that 19. \( \text{d6}\) \( \text{xd6} \) 20. \( \text{xd6} \) does not work, since after 20... \( \text{c3!} \) the queen exchange cannot be avoided.

19. \( \text{b3} \) \( \text{a4} \) 20. \( \text{b4} \) \( \text{c6!} \) forces matters, and after 21. \( \text{f3} \) 0–0 22. \( \text{xf6} \) \( \text{xf6} \) 23. \( \text{xc6} \) bxc6 Black’s three pieces seem quite enough to deal with the queen.

19... \( \text{xd6} \) 20. \( \text{xd6}\) \( \text{d8} \)

The first critical position, where White has many possible ways to continue.

21. \( \text{f7}\)!

This seems like the most dangerous. Certainly 21. \( \text{h1?!} \) \( \text{f8} \) is too slow for White.

21. \( \text{fd1} \) is the only move mentioned by Palliser. After 21... \( \text{e5} \) 22. \( \text{xc8} \) \( \text{c5}\) 23. \( \text{h1} \) \( \text{xc8} \) White can win back the piece and equalize with either 24. \( \text{f3} \) or 24. \( \text{g4} \), but he gets no advantage.

A more serious alternative is:

21. \( \text{f7}\) \( \text{c3}\)!

21... \( \text{c5}\) may appear safer, but the endgame after 22. \( \text{h1} \) \( \text{d4} \) 23. \( \text{xd1} \) \( \text{xd2} \) 24. \( \text{xd2} \) \( \text{c3} \) 25. \( \text{d3} \) \( \text{c7} \) 26. \( \text{xc8} \) \( \text{xc8} \) 27. \( \text{xd7}\) \( \text{c6} \) 28. \( \text{xb7}\) is not yet drawn, and Black will need to defend accurately.
22...\text{\textit{\textbf{a}}\text{\textit{b}}7} \uparrow \\
22...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d3} \text{ \textit{e}5!} \phantom{1} 23...\text{\textit{\textbf{a}}\text{\textit{b}}7} \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}e8} \phantom{1} 24...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d6} \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{h}}d8} \phantom{1} \text{is just a draw.} \\
22...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d1} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}c5} \uparrow \phantom{1} 23...\text{\textit{\textbf{a}}\text{\textit{h}}1} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d4} \phantom{1} 24...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}xd4} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{a}}\text{\textit{d}}}4 \phantom{1} 25...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d1} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d8} \phantom{1} 26...\text{\textit{\textbf{f}}x}d4 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}x}f7 \phantom{1} 27...\text{\textit{\textbf{f}}xf7} \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}e7} \phantom{1} 28...\text{\textit{\textbf{h}}x}h6 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}f6} \phantom{1} 29...\text{\textit{\textbf{g}}g}4 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{b}}5} \phantom{1} \text{reaches a comfortable endgame for Black.} \\
22...\text{\textit{\textbf{f}}fe8} \phantom{1} 23...\text{\textit{\textbf{e}}d6} \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d8} \\
\text{White obviously has a draw in his pocket, but can he achieve anything more?} \\

\begin{center}
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24...\text{\textit{\textbf{e}}e3} \\
24...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d3} \text{ \textit{e}5!} \phantom{1} \text{transposes to 22...\textit{\textbf{d}}d3} \phantom{1} \text{above and forces a draw.} \\
24...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d1} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{a}}a7!} \phantom{1} (24...\text{\textit{\textbf{c}}c5} \uparrow \phantom{1} 25...\text{\textit{\textbf{h}}h1} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d4} \phantom{1} 26...\text{\textit{\textbf{f}}x}d4 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}x}d4 \phantom{1} 27...\text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d1} \uparrow) \phantom{1} \text{Black's position looks incredibly dangerous, but somehow he is surviving: 25...\textit{\textbf{f}}f3} \phantom{1} (25...\textit{\textbf{e}}e4 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}e5} \phantom{1} 26...\textit{\textbf{c}}c8 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}x}c8 \phantom{1} 27...\textit{\textbf{e}}e6 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{d}}d6=} \phantom{1} 25...\textit{\textbf{g}}g4 \phantom{1} 26...\textit{\textbf{e}}e3 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}c5} \uparrow \phantom{1} 27...\textit{\textbf{h}}h1 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}e5} \phantom{1} 28...\textit{\textbf{f}}f7 \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{h}}h7} \phantom{1} 29...\textit{\textbf{h}}h8 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}g8} \phantom{1} 30...\textit{\textbf{w}}w2 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}g7} \phantom{1} \text{Black is doing rather well.} \\
24...\text{\textit{\textbf{f}}fxd6} \phantom{1} 25...\textit{\textbf{w}}xg3 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{g}}f8!} \\

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chess_diagram2.png}
\end{center}

22...\text{\textit{\textbf{b}}b4}! \phantom{1} \\
22...\text{\textit{\textbf{h}}xh8} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{h}}xh8} \phantom{1} \text{favours Black.} \\

22...\text{\textit{\textbf{f}}f6} \\
22...\text{\textit{\textbf{e}}e5} \phantom{1} \text{leads to an insane but relatively forcing variation: 23...\textit{\textbf{w}}xe5 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}xe5} \phantom{1} 24...\textit{\textbf{h}}h1 \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}f7} \phantom{1} 25...\textit{\textbf{c}}c4! \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}d8} \phantom{1} 26...\textit{\textbf{c}}c7 \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{e}}e8} \\

\begin{center}
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27...\text{\textit{\textbf{w}}xg8} \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{w}}xg8} \phantom{1} 28...\text{\textit{\textbf{h}}h5} \uparrow \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{f}}f7} \phantom{1} 29...\text{\textit{\textbf{w}}xf7} \phantom{1} \text{\textit{\textbf{c}}c5} \uparrow
30.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}h1} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d5! 31.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}d}5 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}xd5 32.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}7}! \textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}d8 33.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}x6\texttt{±} White keeps some pressure in the endgame.

\textbf{23.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d6\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}xf7 24.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}c7\texttt{±}}

24.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}b7\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}xb7 25.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}5! \textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}g8 26.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}x6\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}7 27.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}5\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}g8 28.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}6\texttt{±} is a draw.

\textbf{24...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}g6!}

The king must dodge all sorts of mating nets here. One example is: 24...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}8 25.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d8\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}7 26.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}3\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}d3 27.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}xd3\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}g8 28.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}6\texttt{±}

\textbf{25.c3!}

After 25.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d3\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}d3 26.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{a}}}xa3 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}8\texttt{±} Black is consolidating.

25.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}b3 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{a}}}4 26.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}f6\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}f6 27.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}3\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}4! is also okay for him.

\textbf{25...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}7}

25...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}8 is a smart defensive idea, but White has a strong answer: 26.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d3\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}4 27.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}e4\texttt{±} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}5 28.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{b}}}3! (28.g4 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}c3 29.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}c3 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}c3 30.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}4 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}5 31.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}xf5\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}6 32.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}xe6\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}4 is rather drawish.)

26.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d3\texttt{†}

26.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}f6 gives Black chances to force perpetual check: 26...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}1\texttt{†} 27.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}2 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}2! 28.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}e3 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}1\texttt{†} 29.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}3 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}7 30.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d3\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}8 31.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}2 (31.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}d7 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}1\texttt{†} 32.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}2 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}2\texttt{†}=) 31...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}f6 32.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}d7 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}c3 33.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}b7 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}5\texttt{†}=

26...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}8 27.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d8\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}7 28.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}7\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{g}}}8

29.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d4! \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}8!

After 29...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{d}}}d7 30.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}d7 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}8 31.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}5! White continues to dominate. Black can avoid an immediate loss with a few precise moves, but he will continue to suffer: 31...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}8 32.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}b7 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}7 33.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{b}}}8 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{e}}}8 34.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}}4 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}7 35.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{b}}}7\texttt{±} (35.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}e6\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}e6 36.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}e6\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}8 37.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}8\texttt{†} \textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}8 38.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{x}}}f6 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{c}}5\texttt{†} 39.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{f}}}1 \textit{\textsf{\texttt{b}}}7 40.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{b}}}3\texttt{±}) 35...\textit{\textsf{\texttt{h}}}8 36.\textit{\textsf{\texttt{b}}}3\texttt{=}
Another critical position.

Even though Black has plenty of material for the queen, not to mention the computer's approval, I think his position remains quite tricky, especially in a practical game.

32.\texttt{\texttt{x}\texttt{b}7}!

Even though Black has plenty of material for the queen, not to mention the computer's approval, I think his position remains quite tricky, especially in a practical game.

32.\texttt{xf6} makes Black's life easier, and after 32.\texttt{xf6} 33.\texttt{x}7 34.\texttt{x}6 35.\texttt{g}7 he manages to regroup. The opposite-coloured bishops can still be used to create some pressure, but Black should enough resources.

32...\texttt{c}8

32...a5 33.\texttt{xf6} gives White an improved version of the above note.

32...\texttt{d}8 33.\texttt{g}6!! (33.\texttt{c}4 34.\texttt{b}6 35.\texttt{h}1 36.\texttt{c}2 37.\texttt{f}7 34.\texttt{a}4 35.\texttt{e}7 33...\texttt{b}8 (33...\texttt{h}5 34.\texttt{x}6 35.\texttt{a}5 36.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{g}4 37.\texttt{a}4 34.\texttt{x}6 White keeps an edge, and is ready to meet 34...\texttt{d}5 with 35.\texttt{b}7!.

33.\texttt{e}6

33.\texttt{c}7 leads to similar positions, but the queen seems better on c6 as she is ready to capture some pawns.

33...\texttt{h}5

33...a5 34.\texttt{c}7 a4 35.\texttt{c}4 \texttt{h}5 36.\texttt{c}5 g4 37.\texttt{h}4 favours White.

After 33...\texttt{d}7 34.\texttt{x}a6 \texttt{g}4 (34...\texttt{d}5 35.\texttt{d}6!) 35.a4! the a-pawn may prove troublesome, for instance:

35...\texttt{e}5?! (35...\texttt{x}f1+ 36.xf1 is objectively better, although White keeps an edge here too.) 36.\texttt{b}7! \texttt{xh}2+ 37.\texttt{h}1 \texttt{x}f1+ 38.\texttt{x}f1 The advancing a-pawn is more important that the small loss on the kingside.

34.a4 a5 34...\texttt{h}4 35.\texttt{x}a6 (35.\texttt{h}3?) 35...\texttt{x}a6 36.\texttt{xe}6+ \texttt{h}7 37.\texttt{x}a6±

35.\texttt{c}7 \texttt{g}4 36.\texttt{c}4

36.\texttt{h}4?! is also possible.
It will not be easy for Black to coordinate his forces and restrain the a-pawn.

B22) 18...\textit{xf8}

We have reached another critical position, where a deep investigation led me to conclude that a novelty was needed.

19.c4!!N

Let us briefly note that after 19.\textit{h5}$t$ \textit{e7 20.b3 \textit{xf1}$t$ 21.bxf1 \textit{c4}! 22.a3 \textit{xd2}$t$ 23.d2 \textit{e5} White was struggling for compensation and Black eventually converted his extra pawn in Anand - Nepomniachtchi, Mainz (rapid) 2009.

To understand the real value of the text move, we should compare it to the following line:

19.\textit{h1}?

This was played in a correspondence game. Here I was unable to find an advantage after: 19.b5!N

19...b6 was played in Drossler - Dobrica, corr. 2013, and now 20.c4!N would have been strong. You can find this position analysed in variation B221 below, under the move order 19.c4!! b6 20.\textit{h1}!

I considered a few other moves, including 19...\textit{e7}, when 20.c4! is strong once again. The main idea is to cut off the black queen from the defence with c4-c5. Once I realized the importance of this idea, I began investigating the same possibility a move earlier. You can find my main recommendation analysed below, but first I will just show a few lines demonstrating the robustness of Black's defence in the present line.

20.\textit{h5}$t$ 20.\textit{f2} hopes for land a lethal pair of checks on h5 and c5, but after 20...\textit{xf2}! 21.bxf2 \textit{d8}! White must force a draw with: 22.b3 \textit{xa2} 23.c5 \textit{e7} 24.e4 \textit{d8}=

20.d6$+$ \textit{e7 21.bf1 \textit{b8}! 22.b4 \textit{e6} 23.c3 seems like a romantic position, but I don't think Black has any objective problems.

20...\textit{e7} 21.a8 \textit{f8} 22.\textit{f1} \textit{g8} 22...\textit{e7} 23.d4 looks extremely dangerous for Black.
23.\(\text{\&}x\text{e}5\) \(\text{\&}x\text{e}5\)

23...\(\text{\&}x\text{e}5\) 24.\(\text{\&}d8+\) \(\text{\&}h7\) 25.\(\text{\&}f6+\) \(\text{\&}x\text{f}6\) 26.\(\text{\&}x\text{f}6\) \(\text{\&}d6\) 27.\(\text{\&}g6+\) \(\text{\&}g8\) 28.\(\text{\&}f7+\) \(\text{\&}h7\)

might be another way to make a draw.

24.\(\text{\&}x\text{g}5\)

After 24.\(\text{\&}f7+\) \(\text{\&}g7\) 25.\(\text{\&}x\text{e}6\) \(\text{\&}f6\) 26.\(\text{\&}x\text{c}8\) \(\text{\&}x\text{c}8\) 27.\(\text{\&}x\text{f}6\) \(\text{\&}d6\)! Black is doing well.

24...\(\text{\&}e7\) 25.\(\text{\&}f7\) \(\text{\&}g7\) 26.\(\text{\&}x\text{h}6+\) \(\text{\&}h8=\)

I found nothing more than a perpetual for White.

Let's return now to the stronger 19.\(\text{\&}c4!!\). Depending on Black's response, White can either play \(\text{\&}h1\) having avoided the defensive line given above, or do something else. Black has two main tries:

B221 19...\(\text{\&}b6\)

is playable but leaves Black under pressure, so

B222 19...\(\text{\&}b5!\)

seems like a better try.

19...\(\text{\&}c6\) 20.\(\text{\&}h1\) gives White a strong initiative.

20.\(\text{\&}h1!\)

Transposing to a favourable version of 19.\(\text{\&}h1\) where White has bypassed the resilient 19...\(\text{\&}b5!!\).

20...\(\text{\&}x\text{f}1\)

20...\(\text{\&}e7?\) loses quickly after 21.\(\text{\&}d6+\) \(\text{\&}d8\) 22.c5!, and 20...\(\text{\&}b7?\) 21.\(\text{\&}d6+\) \(\text{\&}e7\) 22.\(\text{\&}x\text{b}7\) is also unpleasant for Black.

20...\(\text{\&}d8?!\) 21.\(\text{\&}f1\) gives White an improved version of the main line below, since the king cannot escape via \(\text{\&}f7\) now. 21...\(\text{\&}b8\) (21...\(\text{\&}c7?\) 22.c5!+; 21...\(\text{\&}e7\) 22.\(\text{\&}b3\) \(\text{\&}a4\) 23.\(\text{\&}d6\) \(\text{\&}f7\) 24.\(\text{\&}f1\) \(\text{\&}g8\) 25.\(\text{\&}x\text{f}8\) \(\text{\&}x\text{f}8\) 26.\(\text{\&}x\text{e}5\) ) 22.\(\text{\&}b3\) \(\text{\&}e7\) 23.c5 White has a powerful initiative.

21.\(\text{\&}x\text{f}1\) \(\text{\&}d8\) 22.\(\text{\&}d1\)

After 22.c5 Black can defend with 22...\(\text{\&}b7\)!, so White should prevent the bishop from developing.

22...\(\text{\&}c7!\)

The only way to offer serious resistance. 22...\(\text{\&}c7?\) 23.c5 is crushing, while after 22...\(\text{\&}a7\) 23.c5! Black's position is collapsing again: 23...\(\text{\&}x\text{c}5\) 24.\(\text{\&}x\text{g}5\)! hxg5 25.\(\text{\&}x\text{g}5\) \(\text{\&}c7\) 26.\(\text{\&}x\text{g}7++\)

23.\(\text{\&}d6\) \(\text{\&}b8!\)

23...\(\text{\&}c7\) 24.c5! \(\text{\&}x\text{c}5\) 25.\(\text{\&}e3\) \(\text{\&}b8\) 26.\(\text{\&}x\text{c}8\) \(\text{\&}x\text{c}8\) 27.\(\text{\&}x\text{e}5\) maintains some pressure.

In the main line the computer continues to find obscure defensive ideas, but Black's position still remains on the edge.
24.c5
24...h5!? gives White excellent compensation too, while avoiding too many forced lines. This could be relevant in case Black finds an exact way to equalize after the text move.

24...b7 25.axb7† axb7 26.c6
26.axa6!! a7 27.exe5 exe5 28.d6 d6! leads to a slightly worse endgame for White.

26...c7
No better is: 26...xc6 27.f3 c5 (27...a5 28.d6 e8 29.d3!) 28.c1 (28.f2!? is also tempting.) 28.d4 29.c2 de5 30.d1 d7 31.xd4 xd4 32.b1± Black has enough material for the queen, but the queen is in her element with targets spread across the board.

27.b2!
27.cxd7xd7 is perfectly safe for Black, but there is no need to release the tension so soon.

27...xc6!
After 27...c5 28.f3! g4 29.e4! (29.cxd7 xd7 30.f2 b5 31.xb6† e8 32.xb5 axb5=) the two bishops will continue to provide terrific compensation against Black's exposed king, for instance:

28.xe5 xe5 29.wxe5
The position looks rather unpleasant for Black, although the computer continues to find defensive resources.
29...c5! 30.h8+ c7 31.xa6 d5!
32.a1?! Avoiding the forced draw that may occur after 32.e2 e5 33.e8 d6 34.c1 c6.

32...c3 33.b1 d6 34.f1

The computer would have you believe that Black is absolutely fine after every move, but I would argue that White maintains nagging pressure. Of course Black’s position is defensible with computer precision, but there is no forcing route to a draw, which is rather annoying for the player with an open king. Black’s extra pawn is not too significant, as the major pieces are still on the board. Also, while Black needs to choose between lots of relatively indistinguishable options, White has a number of easy moves such as b5, a2-a4, and various ways of poking around with the queen and rook.

B222) 19...b5!

20.c5 20.d6+? c7 21.fd1 b8 (21...bxc4 22.h1+) Black intends ...b6, and after 22.cxb5 b7! White’s initiative is stalling.

20...xf1+

20...c4? can be dispatched surprisingly easily. 21.xc4 bxc4 22.b1! (22.c6 d3! 23.d6 e7 24.xc8 xc8 25.b4 e8 26.cxd7 xxd7=)

21.xf1 d8!

The only way to survive. Even though the king cannot run to c7 yet, he at least avoids the immediate threats.

22.d1

Keeping up the pressure. A move like 22.h1 would be too slow, and after 22...b7 White
will struggle to demonstrate compensation.

22...\( \triangle c6?! \)

Somewhat counter-intuitive, but Black creates important resources like ...\( \triangle b2 \) or \( \triangle b4 \) to threaten a queen exchange, as well as the possibility of putting a piece on \( d4 \) to block White's attack.

22...\( a5?! \) intends \( \triangle b4 \), but White can easily deal with this: 23.\( \triangle x b5 \) \( \triangle b4 \) 24.\( \triangle e2 \) \( \triangle e7 \) 25.\( \triangle e1! \) (25.\( \triangle h1 \) looks good too, but Black has an incredible defensive line beginning with 25...\( \triangle b8! \), when I found no more than a draw for White.) 25...\( \triangle a3 \) 26.\( \triangle f2 \) Black is under heavy pressure, with no obvious way of simplifying.

A more resilient attempt is:

22...\( \triangle a7 \) 23.\( \triangle h1 \)

23.\( \triangle x g5 \) does not work due to 23...\( h x g5! \) 24.\( \triangle x g5+ \) \( \triangle c7 \) 25.\( \triangle x d7+ \) \( \triangle x d7 \) 26.\( \triangle x e5+ \) (after 26.\( \triangle x g7 \) \( \triangle x c5+ \) Black is at least equal) 26...\( \triangle e5 \) 27.\( \triangle x e5+ \) \( \triangle b7 \), when White must force a draw with 28.\( \triangle f3+ \) \( \triangle c8 \) 29.\( \triangle h8+ \) \( \triangle c7 \) 30.\( \triangle e5+ \).

Now \( \triangle x g5 \) is a huge threat, as White will be able to capture the bishop on \( g7 \) without the \( c5 \)-pawn falling with check. Black's position is on the verge of collapse, and he only has one defence.

23.\( \triangle f3! \)

This keeps Black in the game, although it feels rather awkward.

25.\( \triangle x e5 \)

25.\( \triangle e4?! \) \( \triangle a4 \) 26.\( \triangle f4 \) is another possibility, when there are a lot of threats hanging in the air.

The text move is a safer alternative which leads to a forcing line.

25...\( \triangle x e5 \) 26.\( \triangle f3 \)

23...\( \triangle c7! \) 24.\( \triangle x g5 \) \( \triangle e6 \)

26...\( \triangle c3! \)

Another only move to survive.

27.\( \triangle e3 \)

27.\( \triangle e2 \) \( \triangle x c5 \) 28.\( \triangle x c6 \) \( h x g5 \) 29.\( \triangle x e6 \) \( \triangle d4 \)

30.\( \triangle g4 \) leads to a balanced endgame.

27...\( \triangle x c5 \) 28.\( \triangle x e6+ \) \( \triangle x e6 \) 29.\( \triangle x e6 \) \( \triangle c7 \)

30.\( \triangle x h6 \)

It is hard to assess this position, even with a computer at your disposal. Although the fight will continue for three possible results, Black's decisions are likely to be harder, considering his open king. Another significant point is that a queen exchange may not be bad at all for White, as he will then be able to advance his kingside pawns more easily.

23.\( \triangle f3! \)

I also analysed 23.\( \triangle d6 \) \( \triangle e3\), but found that Black could maintain the balance.

Another interesting try is:

23.\( \triangle h1?! \) \( \triangle b2 \)

23...\( \triangle d4 \) 24.\( \triangle d6!+-- \)
24...d3?
24...e3 d4! 25...f3 e5 26...d6 c7

24...e5
There are many possibilities, but I will focus on the computer's top choice. After 24...d4 25...f3 g4 26...xg4 c2
27...xc2 xc2 28.c6 d3 29...h5! Black remains under pressure; the rook cannot be taken because of the brilliant mating net with c6-c7+ and d6. 29...e5 30...d3
25...d6 xg3 26.hxg3 c5 27...e3 c2
Or 27...b8 28...f3 and the fight goes on.

25...c6 a7
24...xc6 25...d6±

25...d6
The most obvious human way.

25...f2 and especially 25...h4? are interesting alternatives which can be checked.

25.c6 f6 30...b6+ e7 31...c7+ d7
32.cxd7 fxd7 33...h5 a3
33...xc1 34...xc1 xd6 will also leave Black on the defensive for a long time.
34...c8+ bxc8 35...xc8
White can continue trying without risk.
26...gxf3 27...c2!\n27...e1 leads to similar stuff.

There is no way for Black to force a draw, and White's initiative is likely to continue with moves like g3, d6 and possibly a rook lift. White is a few pawns down (the piece does not really count, as the d7-knight can be removed at any moment), but the position is much trickier to play for Black.

Conclusion

Considering how heavily the Najdorf Poisoned Pawn has been analysed, it seems almost inconceivable that an almost-new move such as 13...f2!? could actually be any good. Having studied it in detail, I believe it to be a fully viable alternative to the 'automatic' 13.exf6.

After the logical 13...g4 14.g3, we began by looking at 14...g7!? 15.e4. At this point the most obvious move for a human is the untested 15...e3†, but we saw that White's tremendous piece activity offered promising compensation even after the queen exchange. The computer prefers 15...0–0, but then 16.h4! leads to interesting complications where both kings may become somewhat exposed, but Black's position remains trickier to handle.

14...d7 has been the most common choice in the few games in which the position has been reached. Then after 15.e2 gxe5 we analysed 16.xe6!? as a tricky sideline, but I believe the acid test of Black's position to be 16.0–0 g7 17.xe6! fx6 18.e4. Black has several options in the battle ahead, but in all lines White maintains a potent initiative for the sacrificed piece. Crucially, Black does not seem to have any way to force a draw, either by perpetual check or heavy simplification. Considering the objective dangers in the position, and factoring in the considerable surprise value of 13.f2!!, I regard this hitherto-ignored move as a serious practical weapon.
12...g5

13.exf6 – Introduction and 16.â1

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.âf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.âxd4 âf6 5.âc3 a6 6.âg5 e6 7.f4 âb6 8.âd2 âxb2 9.âb1 âa3 10.e5 h6 11.âh4 dxe5 12.fxe5 g5 13.exf6 gxh4

14.âe2

A) 14...âd7?! 311
B) 14...âa5 15.0–0 313

B1) 15...h3?! 16.âf3!! âd7 17.âd5 âc5!

18.âbe1!N âd6 19.âh1! 313

B11) 19...âe5 315
B12) 19...âe5 316

B2) 15...âd7 16.âh1 âg5 17.âd3?!

B21) 17...âc5 319
B22) 17...âxf6!? 321

B1) after 17...âc5!
B21) after 17...âc5
B22) after 17...âxf6!?
Chapter 17 – 13.exf6 – Introduction and 16.\h1

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.e4 e6 4.d5 a6 5.c3 e6 6.g5 d6 7.f4 \xd5 8.d2 b6 9.g1 a3 10.e5 \xex 11.fxe5 h6 12.\h4 \gf 13.exf6 \g1

Although 13.\e2?! is a fascinating possibility, it would seem wrong not to also consider the established main line. Fortunately there are plenty of new paths to explore here as well.

14.\e2

Considering that 14.\e2 \d7 15.\e4 is a promising line for White, it is logical to ask if 14.\e4 might be a good idea a move earlier. It prevents ...\a5 and was indeed considered interesting a while back, but eventually Black found a good antidote that did not involve committing himself to ...\d7. Here is a brief summary: 14...\xa2 15.\d1 (15.\b3 \d7 16.\c3 is met by 16...b6! intending ...\a5; this move has more or less killed the 15.\b3 variation. 17.\xe6 \xe6 18.\f7+ \e7 19.\xh8 \xc2 20.\e3 \b7 Black had excellent play in Karthikeyan – Adhiban, Kolkata 2012.) 15...\d7!? The key difference. The knight will be much better on c6, and then Black can play ...0–0–0 quickly as well. 16.\e2 \d5 17.\e3 \a5+ 18.c3 \c6 This was Walsh – Neto, corr. 2010, where Black was ready for ...0–0–0 in the near future. I tried looking for a way of switching to a queenside initiative, but it didn’t yield anything.

After the text move Black sometimes tries A) 14...\d7?!, but B) 14...\a5 is the more reliable move.

14...h3 can be ignored by 15.0–0, with a likely transposition to one of the later lines involving ...h3.

A) 14...\d7?!

A fair number of players, including Areshchenko, have apparently not noticed any difference between this and the second main variation. In fact the text move gives White a powerful extra option.

15.\e4!

I should mention that White is not obliged to play this way, and can easily transpose to the main line with 15.0–0 when Black almost invariably plays 15...\a5. I will not analyse the text move in great detail, but I do consider it a promising attempt to exploit Black’s chosen move order.

15...\xa2 16.\d1 \d5

16.\g8 17.\b3? (After 17.0–0 \d5 18.\e3 h3 19.g3 \c5 the position is more
complicated as $\text{xc5}$ isn't possible, although I still prefer White.) 17...$\text{exg2}$ (17...$\text{a3}$ 18.0–0$\uparrow$) 18.$\text{xf1}$ $\text{exe2}$ (18...$\text{g6}$ 19.$\text{h5}$) $\text{xe2}$ $\text{b2}$ 20.$\text{g1}$ $\text{xf6}$ 21.$\text{d4}$ $\text{xe4}$ 22.$\text{xe4}$ White keeps some initiative.

16...$\text{h3}$ can be ignored. 17.0–0 $\text{hxg2}$ This is not particularly scary, but there is nothing better. (17...$\text{g8}$ 18.$\text{b3}$? [18.$\text{f3}$ $\text{hxg2}$ 19.$\text{f1}$ seems quite dangerous for Black as well.] 18...$\text{exe2}$$\uparrow$ 19.$\text{h1}$ As usual, losing the g2 pawn is no big deal. 19...$\text{a3}$ 20.$\text{f3}$$\pm$) 18.$\text{f2}$ $\text{d5}$

19.$\text{e3}!$ $\text{e5}$ (19...$\text{c5}$ 20.$\text{xc5}$ $\text{xc5}$ 21.$\text{f5}!$ $\text{b6}$ 22.$\text{h5}$) 20.$\text{f5}!$ $\text{exf5}$ 21.$\text{xf5}$ $\text{e6}$ 22.$\text{c4}$ $\text{c6}$ 23.$\text{d6}$ $\text{d6}$ 24.$\text{xd6}$$\uparrow$ $\text{d8}$ 25.$\text{xf7}$$\uparrow$ $\text{c7}$ 26.$\text{f4}$$\uparrow$ $\text{b6}$ 27.$\text{hxh8}$$\pm$

Both 17...$\text{g8}$ and 17...$\text{h3}$ are met by 18.$\text{b5}$$\uparrow$ with a clear advantage to White.

After 17...$\text{c5}$ 18.0–0 it will not be easy for Black to finish development. 18...$\text{h3}$ (18...$\text{e5}$ 19.$\text{xc5}$ $\text{xc5}$ 20.$\text{f2}$$\pm$) 19.$\text{b3}$$\uparrow$ $\text{hxg2}$ 20.$\text{xc5}$ (20...$\text{h3}$$\uparrow$) 20...$\text{xc5}$ 21.$\text{f5}$ $\text{e5}$ 22.$\text{g3}$$\rightarrow$

18.$\text{c3}$ $\text{e5}$

This prepares ...$\text{d7}$ and ...$\text{c6}$, but Black will end up two tempos down on the 14.$\text{e4}$ line mentioned above. Therefore it will be easy for White to generate counterplay against the intended long castle.

19.0–0 $\text{d7}$ 20.$\text{a1}$ $\text{c7}$ 21.$\text{h1}$ $\text{g8}$ 22.$\text{h3}$ 0–0–0

White was ready to increase the pressure with moves like, $\text{e2}$, $\text{f3}$ or $\text{ab6}$.

27.$\text{d3}$$\uparrow$ $\text{e8}$ 28.$\text{b5}$ $\text{b8}$ 29.$\text{xc6}$$\uparrow$ $\text{xc6}$ 30.$\text{xb8}$$\uparrow$ $\text{d7}$ 31.$\text{xc6}$ $\text{xc6}$ 32.$\text{c4}$

This was the wonderfully instructive game Hebels – De Carlos Arregui, corr. 2012. White has achieved a dominating position, and he went on to win by exploiting the pin along the eighth rank.
This is the usual move, effectively ruling out a quick $\text{Qe}4$ on account of the queen exchange.

15.0–0

Now we will consider B1) 15...h3!? followed by the more popular B2) 15...$\text{Qd}7$.

B1) 15...h3!?

This move has largely been ignored by over-the-board players as it offers White plenty of attacking possibilities, whereas developing the knight to $d7$ is much easier to understand as a plan. Nevertheless, a number of lines have been deeply explored in correspondence play.

16.$\text{Qf3}!$

It seems to me that this is a good moment to steer the game away from the heavily trodden paths of the correspondence players.

16.g3 is another possible direction to explore, but I would prefer to activate my pieces more quickly.

The most natural and popular move has been: 16.$\text{Qe}3$

Apart from preventing the $...\text{Qg}5$ threats, the queen is ideally placed on e3 to support further tactical motifs in the centre.

16...$\text{Qc5}!$ 17.$\text{Qh}1$?

17.$\text{Qf3}$ has been much more common, but Black seems to have nullified all of White's attempts here. The king move has hardly ever been played, but is a useful precaution against the annoying $...\text{Qc}6$.

17...hxg2† 18.$\text{Qxg2}$

Losing time with the king is certainly a concession, but Black's pieces are not active enough to utilize the g-file, and White might actually be able to make better use of it after a few moves. Unfortunately, Black has a surprisingly effective defence.

18...$\text{Qxd}4$!

With the simple idea of completing development as quickly as possible. The open king on g2 gives Black enough counterplay to make up for the loss of the dark-squared bishop. All other moves seem to be bad for Black, but I will not take up space with the details.

19.$\text{Qxd4}$ $\text{Qc6}$ 20.$\text{Qd3}$ $\text{Qd7}!$ 21.$\text{Qxb7}$ 0–0–0 22.$\text{Qb2}$ $\text{Qc7}$

Black was doing fine in Rasmussen – Siigur, corr. 2012.

Let's now focus on my recommended move. Placing the bishop on f3 is a typical way to meet $...h3$, since $...\text{hxg}2$ is never a real threat. White also anticipates $...\text{Qg}5$. 
16...\textit{d}d7

This has almost always been played.

16...hxg2 only gets in the way of Black’s future ideas, and after 17.\textit{f}f2! White has a fine position. A short illustrative line is 17...\textit{d}d7 18.\textit{d}d5! \textit{c}c5 19.\textit{x}xe6 fxe6 20.\textit{h}h5\textit{d}d8 21.\textit{f}f4 and wins.

17.\textit{d}d5

Obviously the critical move! The correspondence players continue the calm defence with:

17...\textit{c}c5!

Not 17...\textit{x}xd2? 18.\textit{c}c7\textit{d}d8 19.\textit{d}xe6f xxe6 20.\textit{e}xe6\textit{e}e8 21.\textit{h}h5 mate!

Now for some reason everyone has placed the wrong rook on the e-file!

18.\textit{e}be1!N

Frankly the most logical move. Moving the other rook to el seems intuitively the wrong attacking option to me, even though it has the advantage of keeping an active rook on b1.

18...\textit{d}d6

This has been the normal response in the analogous position where the other rook has gone to e1.

18...\textit{b}b6 seems senseless. Both 19.\textit{x}xb6 \textit{xb}6 20.\textit{h}h1\textit{c}c4 and 19.\textit{e}e7 \textit{c}c4 20.\textit{c}c3 (or even 20.\textit{f}f2) give White a pleasant position with a typical initiative.

An additional option, when compared to 18.\textit{xf}e1, could be:

18...\textit{d}d8?!

This hardly looks like the most worrying line for White, even though it is not easy to refute.

19.\textit{e}e7

Plonking the knight in the far reaches of the enemy position is a typical idea. It often proves annoying for Black, as exchanging it for the dark-squared bishop would open up his whole position.

19...\textit{e}e3?? is also possible, intending a slower attack against the enemy king.

19...e5

19...\textit{xe}e7 20.\textit{x}xe7\textit{xe}e7 21.\textit{f}f2 maintains White’s initiative.

19...\textit{xf}6 is unsatisfactory due to 20.\textit{xc}8 \textit{xc}8 21.\textit{x}xb7! \textit{xb}7 22.\textit{x}f6 and White is totally dominating.

20.c3

20.\textit{e}e4? also deserves attention. This could all be analysed considerably further, but it doesn’t seem too theoretically relevant. I think White has a strong initiative here, and there was also a safer alternative on move 19, so take your pick.
Chapter 17 - 13.exf6 - Introduction and 16...h1

19...h1!

By escaping the pin, White prepares for all sorts of knight jumps.

19...f4 is too slow, and after 19...xf6! (19...hxg2 20.xfxf6) 20...h1 e7! (20...d7? 21.dxe6! wins) 21.xh3 e5 22.b3 c7 Black seems safe.

I also considered: 19...f2 e5!? Not the only move, but the most forcing. 20.c3 exd5! 21.g4 d6! (21...d8 22.xd7 seems unpleasant for Black.) 22.xd7+ xd7 23.f5 e6 24.g7 d6= White has no more than a repetition, despite Black's awkward pieces.

We will now analyse B11) 19...e5 and B12) 19...e5.

The second has been the universal choice in the parallel position with a rook on b1 instead of f1, but the first is certainly playable as well.

19...hxg2+! 20.xg2 does not help Black at all.

B11) 19...e5 20.b3 c6

20...b5 21.a4 would not really help Black.

After 20...xf3?! 21.gxf3 there will no longer be any threat of ...exd5, so White gets a lot of options. 21...c6 22.a5 c5 23.e4! The idea is surprisingly just xd1. Black has no way to continue development. 23...g8 24.e3± Black's position seems to be on the verge of collapse.

Returning to the main line, White has a few ways to keep the initiative going.

21.e3!?

This is the simplest move, just aiming for a long-term initiative, particularly since Black's development woes continue.

After 21.a5 c5 there is nothing better than repeating with 22.b3.

21.e7?! is another tempting possibility.

21...c7 (21...xf3 22.xf3 hxg2+ [22...c7 23.c3!++; 22...xe7 23.xe7+ 23.xe7+ 23.xe7+ 23.xe7+] 23.xg2 c7 24.d4+ seems dangerous for Black.) 22.d4! Increasing the pressure. 22...d7 (22...xe7 23.fxe7++; 22...xf3 23.xf3+) 23.h5?! The position is unclear but certainly dangerous for Black.

21...b6

21...c7 22.c4! d7 23.c5 gives White a powerful initiative.

21...xf3 22.gxf3 Now the knights are
jumping, and it already seems impossible to hold Black’s position together. 22...\textit{f}4
(22...\textit{d}7 23.\textit{a}5! \textit{c}7 24.\textit{d}5+--; 22...\textit{c}7 23.\textit{f}5±)

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\textit{a} & \textit{b} & \textit{c} & \textit{d} & \textit{e} & \textit{f} & \textit{g} & \textit{h} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

23.\textit{d}4! \textit{d}6 24.\textit{d}5 \textit{g}5 25.\textit{c}5! White wins.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\textit{a} & \textit{b} & \textit{c} & \textit{d} & \textit{e} & \textit{f} & \textit{g} & \textit{h} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

This appears awkward, but it has been the universal choice in the 18.\textit{fe}1 line, and is also the computer’s top choice.

\textbf{20.\textit{b}3!}

In the position with the rook on \textit{b}1 instead of \textit{f}1, White has always played 20.\textit{xe}6 \textit{fxe}6
21.\textit{b}6, but after 21...\textit{b}8 the defence has held firm, and the database shows a long list
of draws. I would like to steer the game in a different direction; one which enables us to
make use of the rook on \textit{e}.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\textit{a} & \textit{b} & \textit{c} & \textit{d} & \textit{e} & \textit{f} & \textit{g} & \textit{h} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

22.\textit{d}1!? 21.\textit{a}5!

22.\textit{c}4 would run into 22...\textit{b}4, so the rook steps aside.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\textit{a} & \textit{b} & \textit{c} & \textit{d} & \textit{e} & \textit{f} & \textit{g} & \textit{h} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

22...\textit{c}7

None of the other squares look convenient.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\textit{a} & \textit{b} & \textit{c} & \textit{d} & \textit{e} & \textit{f} & \textit{g} & \textit{h} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

23.\textit{gxh}3↑

The position looks awfully dangerous for Black. Note that it is not possible for him to
continue developing with ...\textit{d}7 on account of \textit{c}4.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
8 & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \\
\hline
\textit{a} & \textit{b} & \textit{c} & \textit{d} & \textit{e} & \textit{f} & \textit{g} & \textit{h} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
Challenge accepted!
22.c4!? might offer White a decent initiative too, but it will require a lot more analysis.
22...\texttt{xe}5 23.\texttt{g}4 exd5 24.\texttt{xe}5f 25.\texttt{x}b7
The struggle remains complicated, but Black is under pressure and has no forcing way to equalize.

22.c4!
Continuing to add firepower to the attack.

22...\texttt{xd}5
22...\texttt{g}8 is met by 23.gxh3 exd5 (23...\texttt{g}5 24.c5) 24.\texttt{x}d5 \texttt{a}7 25.\texttt{f}5! and Black's position is collapsing.

22...\texttt{b}8 runs into a spectacular refutation:
23.c5! \texttt{xc}5 (23...\texttt{xc}5 24.c1++) 24.\texttt{xe}5! \texttt{xe}5

25.\texttt{d}7! \texttt{d}7 (25...\texttt{b}7 26.\texttt{ac}6 \texttt{c}7 27.\texttt{c}1++; 25...\texttt{e}4 26.\texttt{e}1+) 26.\texttt{ec}6+-

23.c5?!
23.\texttt{xd}5 \texttt{f}8 could also be explored further.

23...\texttt{xc}5
23...\texttt{xc}5 24.\texttt{xd}5+

22.c4!
Continuing to add firepower to the attack.

24.\texttt{xd}5 \texttt{xd}5
24...\texttt{e}6 25.\texttt{xa}8±
Despite the simplifications, the f6-pawn remains annoying for Black. If he castles to bring his rook into play, then his king may come under fire.

**B2) 15...\textit{d}7**

From this theoretical tabiya I have examined just about every plausible try for White, and will present what I consider to be the two most promising directions.

16.\textit{h}1

This has been by far the most popular choice, but I will soon be adding a fresh twist.

16.\textit{bd}1?! is a rare but potent alternative which will be analysed in detail in the final chapter.

16...\textit{g}5

This is one of the most heavily debated positions in the Poisoned Pawn, and it is crucial for the viability of the 12...g5 variation. Unfortunately, the majority of games have followed the sad trend of repeating well-established lines from correspondence games and reaching forced draws. At some point even I got the feeling that this line was close to being ‘dead’ for White, but then I realized there is an oasis of possibilities that have yet to be worked out in detail.

25.\textit{xd}5 \textit{a}7 26.\textit{xe}5\textit{f} e6 27.\textit{d}1

It is obvious that we need to avoid the queen exchange, but this is the rarest way of doing it, having been played in only about twenty games out of a few thousand. It has been ignored by most sources, but I believe it is a good practical try.

I used to think 17.\textit{e}1?! was dangerous as well, but by now the correspondence players have figured out that 17...\textit{xf}6! leads more or less by force to a drawish position.

17.\textit{f}4 is the well-known theoretical line. Once upon a time nobody knew much about this position, but then after a lot of correspondence and computer testing it was played in a wild battle between Nisipeanu and Wojtaszek in 2011. At the time this ushered in a new chapter of the Poisoned Pawn, but by now there isn’t much excitement left, so I will cut down on the analysis and just mention the main line with a few brief notes: 17...\textit{e}5 (17...\textit{xf}6? 18.\textit{db}5!!\textit{f}) 18.\textit{d}5 exd4 19.\textit{xd}4 \textit{d}8!

20.\textit{e}7! There are other moves, but they have also been analysed to death in correspondence games. 20...\textit{e}5! (Amazingly, 20...\textit{c}5?! 21.\textit{b}2!! is rather good for White. It’s an exciting position to check further, but since it has little relevance to the theoretical debate, I won’t go any deeper.) 21.\textit{d}2 \textit{xe}7 22.fx\textit{e}7\textit{f} 23.\textit{g}4 \textit{f}5! 24.\textit{xf}5 \textit{e}8 Many games
have been drawn from here. Here are a couple of examples showing the general pattern:


Returning to my recommended move, we will start by looking at the natural B21) 17...c5 before checking B22) 17...xh6?.

B21) 17...c5 18.c4!

This unusual-looking move may offer considerable shock value. As you may have noticed, it is often hard for White to find a safe square for his queen in these positions, so in that sense c4 is not a bad square at all. A more important point is that Black cannot easily prepare long castling as his knight will be caught in a pin. He can put his rook on cB to chase the queen, but then she will just retreat to the ideal e2-square and Black's king will be stuck in the centre.

18...b5
This is the first move that comes to mind, but it looks extremely scary for Black. Still, the sacrifice on b5 is not winning outright, and we should check it to make sure Black does not have a refutation or a forcing path to equality.

18...h3 is met by 19.f3 when, as usual, the opening of the g-file is of little concern for White. 19...xg2? (19...g8 20.g3=) 20.xg2 d7 21.e2! Black still cannot castle, and White is ready to jump all over the centre with f5, f3 or f3. This can be analysed further of course, but it is clear that White has the initiative.

18...d7 19.f3 d6 (19..c8 20.e2 only improves the position of the white queen, and after 20...d6 21.e4 dxe4 22.xe4 Black lacks a safe place for his king.) 20.e4? (20.e2 e4!) 20...dxe4 21.dxe4 0-0 (21...c8 22.d3=)
22...\textit{\texttt{e2}?! The pawn on \texttt{f6} gives White a constant initiative, and he can patiently build up his position, for instance: 22...\textit{\texttt{fd8}} 23.\textit{\texttt{be1}?! (Avoiding 23.\textit{\texttt{d3 c5} 24.\textit{\texttt{f3 e3!}} when Black equalizes.) 23...\textit{\texttt{ac8}} 24.\textit{\texttt{d3! \texttt{xf8}} 25.\textit{\texttt{e4}}–)}

23...\textit{\texttt{h3}!}

23...\textit{\texttt{xh5} 24.\textit{\texttt{xh5}} is winning for White.

23...\textit{\texttt{b6}?!}

This does not lose by force, but it looks too strange and gives White a lot of possibilities. At least one way to continue pressing is:

24.\textit{\texttt{xh4}}

24.\textit{\texttt{d2 xxb5} 25.\textit{\texttt{b5}} \textit{\texttt{c6}} 26.\textit{\texttt{d7}} 27.\textit{\texttt{xg6 f6}} 28.\textit{\texttt{d1 e7}} 29.\textit{\texttt{d7}} is only a draw.

24.\textit{\texttt{h3}?! is another possibility, but I don’t see any need to go too deep here. 24.\textit{\texttt{g8}} (24...\textit{\texttt{d6} 25.\textit{\texttt{e1+}}; 24...\textit{\texttt{xh5} 25.\textit{\texttt{xb5}} \textit{\texttt{d6}} 26.\textit{\texttt{g1}} ±) 25.\textit{\texttt{d4}?! With extreme complications.

24...\textit{\texttt{g8}} 25.\textit{\texttt{b4}} \textit{\texttt{xb5}}

The only defence, but White has an attractive reply.

23...\textit{\texttt{e5}} 21.\textit{\texttt{fd1}!}

Black seems to be in considerable danger, but he can survive as follows.

21...\textit{\texttt{d7} 22.\textit{\texttt{f3}} \textit{\texttt{b8}}}

22...\textit{\texttt{a6} 23.\textit{\texttt{d2}! \texttt{e6} 24.\textit{\texttt{xd6}} \textit{\texttt{xd6}} 25.\textit{\texttt{xh4}} ±}

23.a4

Black seems to be on the verge of losing, but he can stay in the game with:

26.\textit{\texttt{xb5}}! \textit{\texttt{xb5} 27.\textit{\texttt{c6}} \textit{\texttt{d7} 28.\textit{\texttt{xd7} f6}} 28...\textit{\texttt{xb1}}? 29.\textit{\texttt{d1}# is a beautiful line.

29.\textit{\texttt{bd1}! \textit{\texttt{d6} 30.\textit{\texttt{xd6} f8} 31.\textit{\texttt{xb5}}

Black will have to fight for a draw. White’s pawns are dangerous, and he does not take any risk.

24.\textit{\texttt{e1}}

24.g3 also looks tempting, but there are some beautiful defensive ideas: 24...\textit{\texttt{g8}!} (24...\textit{\texttt{h5 25.a5 h4 26.a6! h5xg3 27.hxg3 \texttt{xg3 28.\texttt{c3}+–) 25.a5 \texttt{e4}! 26.\texttt{xg4 \texttt{xb5 27.xb5 e5} and Black should survive.
24...exf6!

Lines like this are great fun to analyse. Fortunately, Black's amazing defensive resources do not guarantee a draw.

24...hxg2+ 25.xg2 would lead to the same position in a few moves.

25.axb5

Black seems to be getting away, but White can cash in his passed b-pawn to win the knight by force.

26.b6 d6 27.b7 hxg2+ 28.xg2 e7 29.b8=Q xb8

29...xb8 30.xb8 xb8 31.xc5† d6 32.c4 f4 33.xf4 xf4 34.c4 also gives White risk-free chances to press.

30.Qc5† d6 31.Wh5 31.Wc3 Wh4 32.h3 Qg8∞

31...g5 32.Wf3

Despite the computer’s assessment of 0.00, the outcome is still uncertain and I would definitely consider Black’s position harder to play.

B22) 17...Qxf6?

Even though the analysis of the previous line was not exhaustive, we saw clearly that White’s initiative persisted, so let us now look at a blunt, even artificial, attempt to force things.

18.Qc3?

18.Qc3 looks natural, but unfortunately a relatively forced drawing line has already been demonstrated here: 18...Qg8 19.Qd1 (19.Qe4? looks exciting, but it still only leads to a draw: 19...Qxe4 20.Wf7+ Qd8 21.Qf3 Qd6 22.Qxe6† Qxe6 23.Qxe6 Qg6 24.Qb3 Qc8 [24...Qb8 also leads to the same outcome.] 25.Qxb7 Qe7 26.Qb6† Qc7 27.Qc6 h3 28.g3 Qg7! An amazing defensive move. Despite his big lead in development, White found nothing better than 20.Qxe6 Qxe6 21.Qxb7 Qc8 22.Qxf6 Qxf6 23.Qb5† when a draw was agreed in Jensen – Pellen, corr. 2011.
18...\textit{g7}

It would be too risky to post the queen on the queenside with the black king so exposed.

19.\textit{\textcolor{red}{d}e4} \textit{\textcolor{red}{d}xe4}

19...\textit{h3} is not a good idea, since after 20.gxh3 the open file will only benefit White.

19...\textit{\textcolor{red}{e}7} 20.\textit{\textcolor{red}{d}d6}! \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}d6} 21.\textit{\textcolor{red}{w}xd6} \textit{\textcolor{red}{e}4} 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{b}4} \textit{\textcolor{red}{c}3} looks scary for Black after both 23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{b}e1} and 23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{d}2}!, when 23...\textit{\textcolor{red}{x}e2}? would lose to 24.\textit{\textcolor{red}{c}4}.

20.\textit{\textcolor{red}{w}xe4} \textit{\textcolor{red}{c}e7}!

20...\textit{\textcolor{red}{f}5} 21.\textit{\textcolor{red}{c}4} \textit{\textcolor{red}{e}7} 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{d}4}! is too shaky for Black.

The computer's initial suggestion was:

20...\textit{\textcolor{red}{c}5} 21.\textit{\textcolor{red}{b}d1}!

Black's idea is: 21.\textit{\textcolor{red}{x}h4} \textit{\textcolor{red}{d}4} (21...0–0 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{f}3}!→) 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{f}3} 0–0 23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{h}5} White seems to have some initiative, but in fact Black is fine after 23...\textit{\textcolor{red}{e}7} 24.\textit{\textcolor{red}{f}3} \textit{\textcolor{red}{g}7}, when it is hard to avoid a queen exchange.

21...0–0 22.\textit{\textcolor{red}{x}h4} \textit{\textcolor{red}{e}7} 22...\textit{\textcolor{red}{a}7} 23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{h}5} looks dangerous.

23.\textit{\textcolor{red}{f}5}! \textit{\textcolor{red}{x}f5} 24.\textit{\textcolor{red}{w}xe7}\pm

White has a considerably improved version of the main line analysed below. The rook is on d1 instead of b1, so the a2-pawn will not be captured with tempo. The computer still indicates that Black is not doing too badly, but

once you compare the lines below, you will see that Black is suffering here.
23...\textit{\texttt{}}g5!
Gaining a useful tempo.

23...\textit{\texttt{}}e6 seems natural, but now White can arrange the optimal piece placements:
24...\textit{\texttt{}}xb7 \textit{\texttt{}}xa2 25...\textit{\texttt{}}a1 \textit{\texttt{}}e6 26...\textit{\texttt{}}e5 26...\textit{\texttt{}}d3 \textit{\texttt{}}d5 27...\textit{\texttt{}}b6 \textit{\texttt{}}e6 28...\textit{\texttt{}}ae1±) 26...\textit{\texttt{}}d3

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\SetUpBoard{\BoardSize=3,\Grid={false,\Color{black}},\NColor{black},\WColor{white},\FColor{white}}
\onslide<5->{\SetFenToBoard{\fiftythree}{}{40}}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

26...\textit{\texttt{}}fb8 (26...a5 27...\textit{\texttt{}}a4 \textit{\texttt{}}fd8 28...\textit{\texttt{}}f3 \textit{\texttt{}}d5 29...\textit{\texttt{}}f2±) 27...\textit{\texttt{}}f3 \textit{\texttt{}}g4 28...\textit{\texttt{}}e3 \textit{\texttt{}}g5 29...\textit{\texttt{}}e2\textit{\texttt{}} The a1-rook is ready for its lift to the kingside.

24...\textit{\texttt{}}c7
24...\textit{\texttt{}}b4 is a more solid approach, and a decent practical try because Black's 25th move isn't easy to find. 24...\textit{\texttt{}}c6 25...\textit{\texttt{}}f3 \textit{\texttt{}}h7! The only clear way to equalize. (25...\textit{\texttt{}}h8 26...\textit{\texttt{}}b7! and Black cannot capture on a2 due to \textit{\texttt{}}b2+) 26...\textit{\texttt{}}d3 \textit{\texttt{}}g8 27...\textit{\texttt{}}g1\textit{\texttt{}}b5 With a likely draw after White takes the f5-pawn.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\SetUpBoard{\BoardSize=3,\Grid={false,\Color{black}},\NColor{black},\WColor{white},\FColor{white}}
\onslide<5->{\SetFenToBoard{\fiftythree}{}{40}}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

27...\textit{\texttt{}}d3?!
If 27...\textit{\texttt{}}xa6 \textit{\texttt{}}f4 28...\textit{\texttt{}}f3 \textit{\texttt{}}d5 White's pieces are somewhat awkward.
Also after 27...\textit{\texttt{}}xa6 \textit{\texttt{}}xa6 28...\textit{\texttt{}}xa6 \textit{\texttt{}}d5 Black is okay.

27...a5
27...\textit{\texttt{}}d8 can be met by 28...a5! when the fight goes on. White can continue improving his position with moves like h2-h3, while keeping the option of suddenly switching over to the kingside. Black will have to keep choosing between many okay-looking moves, without quite making a draw yet.

28...\textit{\texttt{}}a4 \textit{\texttt{}}f8
28...\textit{\texttt{}}b8 29...\textit{\texttt{}}f3 \textit{\texttt{}}a7 30.h4! is suddenly unpleasant for Black: 30...\textit{\texttt{}}g7 (30...\textit{\texttt{}}g6 31.g4±) 31...\textit{\texttt{}}xf5±
Conclusion

13...exf6 gxf6 14...e2 can be considered the 'ultimate main line' of the Poisoned Pawn. We started by considering the inaccurate 14...e7?!., when White can either allow a transposition to the main line or attempt to punish Black's last move with 15...e4!, the latter being fully justified according to my analysis.

14...a5 is the correct move order, and after 15.0-0 we analysed a couple of paths. 15...h3?! is a bit risky, but nowadays you never know if your opponent may have spent hours memorizing some long forced drawing lines discovered by correspondence players. For that reason I chose the slightly unusual 16...ab3?!, and after 16...e7 17...d5 e5 my new suggestion of 18...be1!N poses a lot of problems to the defence.

The more natural and popular choice is 15...d7, when 16...h1 g5 has been tested in thousands of games. Here I chose to investigate a rare but surprisingly venomous option in 17...d3?!., Then 17...e5 18...c4!N is extremely dangerous for Black, although he seems to survive after correct defence. The alternative is 17...exf6?!, but this leads to a relatively simplified position where Black's weakened kingside enables White to test the defence while taking virtually no risk: a nice scenario in a practical game.

In the final chapter we will investigate a fascinating alternative for White on move 16.
12...g5

16..bd1!?  

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 b6 8.d2 
xb2 9.b1 a3 10.e5 dxe5 11.fxe5 h6 12.h4 g5 13.exf6 gxf6 14.e2 a5 
15.0-0 d7

A) 16...b4N 326
B) 16...g5!? 17.d3!N c5 18.c4! d7 19.f3 328
   B1) 19...h3!? 329
   B2) 19...e3†! 20.h1 b5 331
      B21) 21.b4 331
      B22) 21.d5!? 333
C) 16...h3!?
   C1) 17.g3 337
   C2) 17.g4!?N 339
      C21) 17...hxg2 339
      C22) 17...g5!? 340
      C23) 17...e5! 343
   C3) 17.d3!?N 345
      C31) 17...e5 345
      C32) 17...e5 346
      C33) 17...hxg2! 18.f4!? 347
         C331) 18...c7 347
         C332) 18...d6! 348
1. e4 c5 2. ﹄f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ﹄xd4 ﹄f6 5. ﹄c3 a6 6. ﹄g5 e6 7. ﹄f4 ﹄b6 8. ﹄d2 ﹄xb2 9. ﹄b1 ﹄a3 10. c5 dxe5 11. ﹄xe5 h6 12. ﹄h4 g5 13. exf6 gxh4 14. ﹄e2 ﹄a5 15.0-0 ﹄d7 

We began our examination of this position in the previous chapter, where I noted that the most popular continuation of 16. ﹄h1 ﹄g5 was holding up fairly well for Black - even though 17. ﹄d3!? is an excellent practical try.

In this chapter I would like to shift the spotlight to an exceedingly rare move.

16. ﹄bd1!!

I find it staggering that this move has only been played in four games. Presumably most players have felt reluctant to move the rook from its seemingly active post on the b-file, but my analysis indicates that it is more purposeful on d1, while White may yet be able to do without ﹄h1. The first important question is how White should respond to the critical A) 16... ﹄b4N. Once we have dealt with that move, we will consider B) 16... ﹄g5 and C) 16... h3!!?

16... ﹄e5N can be compared with 16... h3 17. g3 ﹄e5, as covered on page 337 in the note to Black’s 17th move in variation C1. White has good prospects there, and the absence of ...h3 and g2-g3 only helps White, so I will not go into further details here.

A) 16... ﹄b4N 17. ﹄e3!

Threatening ﹄x6e6; a recurring motif in this chapter.

17... ﹄g5 17... ﹄xc3? meets an unpleasant fate:
18. ﹄x6e6! ﹄f6e6 19. ﹄xe6t ﹄d8 20. ﹄e7t ﹄c7 21. ﹄d6t ﹄d8 22. ﹄f7 ﹄g7 23. ﹄g4 ﹄b5 24. ﹄f8= ﹄f8 25. ﹄xf8t ﹄xf8 26. ﹄xf8t ﹄c7 27. ﹄d6t ﹄f8

17... ﹄g5 18. ﹄e4! As I have explained before, White’s key objectives are to avoid a queen
exchange and increase the activity of his pieces. Here everything is ideal: 18...c5 19.f3! Unpinning the e4-knight. 19...b6 (19...a7 is met by 20.h1, intending a3, when White has as good a position as he could hope for in this line.)

20.xc5! A rare case when White’s initiative carries over into the endgame: 20...xe3+ 21.xe3 xc5 (21...xc5 22.c6 eb7 23.xh5!—) 22.xf5xd7 23.d6f8 24.xc4 White has a great deal of activity for a mere pawn.

18...f3! Intending e4.

18.e4 c5! (18...xc3 allows 19.xe6!) 19.h1 h3! (19...e5? 20.xh4+) Now Black is ready for ...e5 when it will not be easy to avoid the queen exchange, although White’s position might still be preferable.

18...h3
18...xf6? is impossible due to 19.xe4!.

18.xc3 19.xc3 0–0 cannot be refuted immediately but, without the dark-squared bishop, Black’s position can’t be good. 20.f3 xf6 21.d4 g7 22.xh4 With a clear initiative.

19.xf2!
A typical way to respond to the pawn’s arrival on h3.

19.hxg2 20.e4 e5 21.b3!
A nice touch, although a simple move like 21.c3 would also give White a promising position.

21...f8
21...a5 22.c3± does not change much.

21...c5 22.xc5 xc5 23.b4 leaves the knight paralysed due to the potential mate on e7. 23...d7 24.b3 e8 25.a5 Black has no defence.

22.xe6! xe6 23.h5+ d8
23...xh5 24.xe6+ d8 25.d5 wins.
24.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{b}6}\texttt{\textcolor{red}{c}7} 25.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}e6}

Black is defenceless.

\textbf{B) 16...\texttt{g}5}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[help lines] (0,0) grid (8,6);
\foreach \y in {1,...,6} {
\foreach \x in {1,...,8} {
\fill[black!20] \x\y rectangle ++(3,3);
}}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

After checking the above lines, I initially thought this was the end of the road for 16.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{b}d}1. However, after analysing the 16.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{h}1} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{g}5} 17.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{d}3}! line from the previous chapter, I suddenly realized White could put the queen on d3 here as well. It is always nice to find a promising move that does not appear in the top three suggestions of the computer – something that happens quite often in these positions. When comparing the present variation to the similar line in the previous chapter, you will notice that the rook turns out to be better placed on d1.

17...\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{c}5}

17...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}f6} doesn’t work of course: 18.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{f}3} \texttt{\textcolor{blue}{c}5} (18...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{g}8} 19.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{f}2}!→) 19.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{h}1} 0–0 20.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}f6}±

17...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{g}8} 18.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{f}2}! does not change anything, and after 17...\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{c}5} 19.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{c}4}! \texttt{\textcolor{red}{d}7} 20.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{f}3} the play is similar to the main line below.

17...\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{e}5} places the knight rather awkwardly. Now 18.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{h}3}\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{x}}}c5} 19.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{f}5}! (19.g3\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{x}}}c5}) 19...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{e}5} 20.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}e5}\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{x}}}c6} 21.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{f}3} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{f}4} 22.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{c}7} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{c}5} 23.\texttt{e4} \texttt{\textcolor{blue}{e}8} 24.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{x}b}7 \texttt{\textcolor{red}{e}5} 25.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{x}c}5 \texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}c}5 26.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{h}1}±

17...\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{f}4} seems tempting too, but 17...\texttt{e5} proved perfectly fine for Black in Kasperek – Domanov, Internet 2010. It is worth mentioning the following brilliant idea: 18.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{e}6}?!N (Also after 18.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{d}5}N \texttt{\textcolor{red}{c}5}! 19.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{h}1} \texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}d}4 20.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{c}7}\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{x}}}f8} 21.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{x}a}8 \texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}f6} Black is doing well.) 18...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}e}6 19.\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{e}4} This is such a devilish idea, but after 19...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}f}4! (19...\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}f}4 20.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{h}5}\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{x}}}d}8} 21.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{a}5}\texttt{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{\textcolor{blue}{\textcolor{red}{x}}}f}7} leads to a quick mate) 20.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{x}g}5 \texttt{\textcolor{blue}{h}x}5 21.\texttt{\textcolor{red}{c}3} \texttt{\textcolor{blue}{f}7}± Black is safe.
18.\textmust起步c4!

An amazingly effective square for the queen! Now it is safe against immediate attempts to exchange, and most importantly it prevents...0-0-0. Without the option of long castling, it will be hard for Black's king to feel safe.

18...\textmust起步d7

18...\textmust起步b5? was barely playable in the 16.\textmust起步h1 line, and here it is an outright mistake. 19.\textmust起步xb5 axb5 20.\textmust起步xb5 \textmust起步e5 21.\textmust起步f3 \textmust起步a6 22.\textmust起步f2 \textmust起步d6 23.\textmust起步xd6\textmust起步f\textmust起步d6 24.\textmust起步xh4±

18...\textmust起步h3 can be ignored by 19.\textmust起步f3!, for instance: 19...\textmust起步e3†! (Black should prefer 19...\textmust起步d7 transposing to variation B1 below; 19...hgx2? should definitely be avoided, as 20.\textmust起步f6! \textmust起步d7 21.\textmust起步xb7! \textmust起步xb7 22.\textmust起步xe6 wins outright.) 20.\textmust起步f2! \textmust起步d7 21.\textmust起步f5! \textmust起步e5 (21...exf5 22.\textmust起步d5 \textmust起步e5 23.\textmust起步e2++) 22.\textmust起步g7† \textmust起步d8 23.\textmust起步e2 \textmust起步c7 24.\textmust起步f5±

19.\textmust起步f2!

After 19.\textmust起步f2 \textmust起步c8! the queen has no place to hide, but the text move frees the e2-square. Here I analysed two main moves: B1) 19...\textmust起步h3⁉ and B2) 19...\textmust起步e3†!.

19...0-0-0-0? 20.\textmust起步b1! is too dangerous for Black, despite the loss of time with the rook, for instance: 20...\textmust起步b8 21.\textmust起步xb7†! \textmust起步xb7 22.\textmust起步xa6+-

19...h5 20.\textmust起步h1 \textmust起步h6 is an attempt to eliminate the f6-pawn, but it is refuted by 21.\textmust起步xb7! \textmust起步xb7 22.\textmust起步xe6! fxe6 23.f7† \textmust起步d8 24.\textmust起步c6 \textmust起步e7 25.\textmust起步xb7 and White wins.

19...\textmust起步c8 20.\textmust起步e2 sees the queen settle on an ideal square, while Black has been prevented from castling. It is hard to suggest a plan for Black, for instance: 20...h5 (20...\textmust起步d6 21.\textmust起步f5 \textmust起步f4 22.\textmust起步g7† \textmust起步f8 23.\textmust起步e4 \textmust起步e5 24.\textmust起步h1!) 21.\textmust起步h1 \textmust起步h6 (21...\textmust起步h6 22.\textmust起步d5±) 22.\textmust起步d5 Black is not yet losing by force, but the position looks horrifyingly dangerous for him.

B1) 19...\textmust起步h3⁉

Considering how hard it is for Black to develop, trying to create a mess on the kingside makes sense.

20.\textmust起步f2!

The only way to fight for an advantage. This avoids a check on e3 while keeping the f6-pawn protected.

20.g3 \textmust起步e3†! 21.\textmust起步h1 b5 is perfectly fine for Black, for instance: 22.\textmust起步b4 (22.\textmust起步d5 \textmust起步e5 23.\textmust起步xe6 \textmust起步xe6! 24.\textmust起步b4 \textmust起步d6 25.\textmust起步e7 \textmust起步xe7 26.\textmust起步c6† \textmust起步f8 27.\textmust起步xe7† \textmust起步xe7 28.\textmust起步f1 a5!) 22...\textmust起步e4 23.\textmust起步b3 \textmust起步xc3 24.\textmust起步xe4 \textmust起步c8!=
20...\text{\texttt{d8}}

The rook is better placed here than on c8.

20...hxg2 21.\texttt{xh7+}! \texttt{e7} (21...\texttt{xb7?} loses to 22.\texttt{xe6}) 22.\texttt{f3+}

20...\texttt{c8}?! 21.\texttt{e2} h5 (21...\texttt{g8} 22.g3 \texttt{g6} 23.\texttt{d5+}; 21...\texttt{d8} 22.\texttt{h5+}) 22.\texttt{h1} \texttt{d8} Trying to justify the placement of the rook on c8. 23.gxh3 \texttt{c7}

24.h4! \texttt{hxh4} 25.\texttt{e5+} \texttt{b6} 26.\texttt{b1+} \texttt{a7} 27.\texttt{e4} The attack is irresistible.

21.\texttt{e2} h5

21...\texttt{g8} 22.g3±

22.\texttt{el}!

Anticipating the plan of ...\texttt{h6} and ...\texttt{e3}. Black's position is on the verge of crumbling.

22...\texttt{g8}

22...\texttt{h6} 23.\texttt{e2}+–

23.\texttt{h1} \texttt{g6}

23...\texttt{d6} 24.gxh3±

24.gxh3!

24.\texttt{d5} \texttt{d6} 25.gxh3 \texttt{e6} 26.\texttt{xc6 bxc6} is not so clear.

24...\texttt{d6}

24...\texttt{xf6} 25.\texttt{d5}! is winning.

25.h4! \texttt{e5}

25...\texttt{hxh4} 26.\texttt{f5}+–

26.\texttt{e2} \texttt{xf6} 27.\texttt{xh5}

White has a formidable initiative.
Since the other lines all leave White with a strong initiative, this direct attempt to exchange queens seems best. But even here, Black's defence is incredibly hard, even with a computer!

20.\text{\texttt{h1}} b5

Now White has the pleasant scenario of being able to choose between B21) 21.\text{\texttt{b4}}, which leads to a safe endgame with two possible results, and B22) 21.\text{\texttt{d5}}? leading to wild complications.

21.\text{\texttt{dxb5}} axb5 22.\text{\texttt{xb5}} is almost winning, but after the accurate 21...\text{\texttt{a4}}! 22.\text{\texttt{c7}}\text{\texttt{d8}} 24.\text{\texttt{xd7}} \text{\texttt{xd7}} 25.\text{\texttt{b5}}\text{\texttt{xc7}} 26.\text{\texttt{c6}}\text{\texttt{d8}}= White is left to choose between many different perpetuals.

B21) 21.\text{\texttt{b4}}

This simple move, without trying anything spectacular, is a decent practical try.

21...\text{\texttt{e4}}!

21...\text{\texttt{c8}} 22.\text{\texttt{fe1}} \text{\texttt{a4}} 23.\text{\texttt{xe3}}! \text{\texttt{xb4}} 24.\text{\texttt{xa4}} bxa4 25.\text{\texttt{f5}} leads to a one-sided endgame, for instance:

25.\text{\texttt{f3}}

This is perhaps the most logical try.
25.a4 looks tempting, as Black cannot afford to open up the queenside, but the computer indicates that 25...a3! is not easy to crack. 26.\textbf{\textit{\textit{c}c2 \textit{\textit{c}c5 27.d3 b3 28.c1 b8 29.c6 c7 Black is holding everything together.}}}

A more promising attempt could be: 25.c1+ b8 26.c6+ xc6 27.xc6

Swapping down to an opposite-coloured-bishop position doesn’t look ambitious, until you notice that White can win the queenside pawns by force. I have not analysed this endgame in much depth since it is too deep, with many options for both sides. Black should be able to equalize with correct play, but it is obvious that White’s queenside passed pawns have the potential to be more dangerous than Black’s disjointed kingside pawns.

27...d6 28.xc1 xc6 29.xc6 b4 29.a5 30.a6±

30.xa6 d8 31.xg1

31.a8+ c7 32.d8 d8 33.c6 c3 34.xb5 x6f6 is equal.

31.g3!? intending g2 is similar to the main line. Here too, I believe Black can equalize with accurate defence, but a lot of play remains.

31.xc5+ Also after 31.d4 32.c3 c5 33.f1 Black still has to prove the draw.

32.xf1 d2 33.xa5 c7 34.xb5 d4 35.a4

Black should be able to hold, but White can keep pressing with no risk.

25...c7 26.xf2!

A sweet way to bring the rook into play. The less accurate 26.xd2 can be met by 26...a3, stopping the second rook from coming to the c-file.

26.xa3! Amazingly enough, this is the only move.

27.xc2+ b6 28.cd2 c7 29.xe5 c8 30.xd8 30.g4!? This is another possible try.

30...hxg3

30...xd2 31.xd2 f8 32.g2! looks dangerous for Black, intending a king march
up the h-file. 32...\texttt{d}d6 33.\texttt{c}c2 $\texttt{b}b8$ 34.\texttt{c}c6 $\texttt{c}c7$ 35.\texttt{h}h3 $\texttt{b}b6$ 36.\texttt{x}hx4 $\texttt{b}b7$ 37.\texttt{h}h5 $\texttt{c}c2$ $\texttt{h}xg3$ 32.\texttt{x}xd2 $\texttt{f}f8$ 33.\texttt{g}g2 $\texttt{d}d6$ 34.\texttt{c}c2 $\texttt{b}b8$ 35.\texttt{c}c6 $\texttt{b}b7$ is equal.

31...$\texttt{b}b6$ 32.\texttt{x}xd8 $\texttt{d}d8$ 33.\texttt{xf}7 Now Black needs to be precise.

33...$\texttt{d}d1$ $\texttt{f}f8$ 34.\texttt{e}e5 $\texttt{g}g2$ $\texttt{x}hx2$ 35.\texttt{x}hx2 $\texttt{b}b7$ 36.\texttt{x}xb7 $\texttt{x}xb7$ 37.\texttt{g}g2 $\texttt{f}f8$ 38.\texttt{e}e2

Black should be able to hold, but the advanced f-pawn makes the position a bit unpleasant for him.

30...$\texttt{x}xd8$ 31.\texttt{x}xd8 $\texttt{xf}7$ $\texttt{d}e8$ 33.\texttt{x}h6 $\texttt{b}b2$ 34.\texttt{g}g4 $\texttt{f}f7$ 35.\texttt{g}g3 $\texttt{h}xg3$ 36.\texttt{h}h4 $\texttt{x}f6$ 37.\texttt{x}f6 $\texttt{xf6}$ 38.b4!

Black is still suffering.

B22) 21.\texttt{d}d5?!

This is the most critical move, and it leads to some amazing ideas.

21...\texttt{e}e5 21...\texttt{b}xc4 22.\texttt{x}xe3 0–0–0 23.\texttt{xc}4 $\texttt{e}e6$ gives White a pleasant endgame.

22.\texttt{xe}6!! A beautiful idea, although Black has an equally miraculous defence.
22...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}}e6!}


23.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}h4} 0–0–0!

Another possible pitfall for Black is:

23...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d8} 24.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{f}}}e1} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{b}}}b8}

![Chessboard image]

25.a4!!

In the event of 25.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{b}}}b4} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d6} Black is surviving somehow, while after 25.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{f}}}f4} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}xd1} 26.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{x}}}xd1} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d6}! Black is ready to castle.

Amazingly, the text move leaves Black absolutely paralysed, and the opening of a queenside file is enough to break the defence.

25...\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{g}}}g8}


25...h5 also does not help: 26.axb5 axb5 27.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{b}}}b4} \texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{d}}}d6} 28.\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textsc{}}}}\texttt{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textbf{a}}}a1}+–

26.axb5 axb5
We have reached a fascinating position. It is hardly possible to analyse every possibility here, but the general evaluation is that Black is walking on the edge, while White can consider a few plans and ideas. At the very least, this doesn't seem a pleasant position to play over the board for Black, as a single misstep could prove costly; for instance, if he allows a file to be opened on the queenside. He will therefore have to spend most of his time playing waiting moves, or perhaps aiming for a conservative level of kingside counterplay.

29...\texttt{g3}  \texttt{g3} is similar and may transpose.

29...\texttt{h5}!

29...\texttt{xa2} 30...\texttt{a1}! is awkward for Black.

If Black plays too slowly then White will play \texttt{e5}-and, sooner or later, break open the queenside with a2-a4.

30...\texttt{e5} \texttt{h4}

30...\texttt{g8} can be met by: 31...\texttt{c3}! (31...\texttt{a4} \texttt{g4}! is an annoyingly strong idea!) 31...\texttt{g4}! Otherwise White can play \texttt{h2-h3} and later a2-a4. 32...\texttt{d5}+

31...\texttt{a4}!

After 31...\texttt{b4} it is hard for White to improve, although Black also does not have much to do besides waiting.

31...\texttt{h3} would be desirable, but Black is just in time with 31...\texttt{e8}! intending ...\texttt{g3}.

31...\texttt{h3}

31...\texttt{b4} 32...\texttt{d4}! just wins: 32...\texttt{h6} 33...\texttt{xb4}--

31...\texttt{xa4}? is met by 32...\texttt{e4}! and the queen entry will be lethal.

31...\texttt{h6} 32...\texttt{h3} \texttt{h8} (32...\texttt{g6} 33...\texttt{xb5} a\texttt{xb5} 34...\texttt{a1}++) 33...\texttt{d4}! White intends \texttt{xb5} and \texttt{a1}.

32...\texttt{g4} \texttt{g8}

32...\texttt{h6} leads to a similar situation after 33...\texttt{f4}! intending \texttt{g4-g5}. Black is limited to shuffling around with his rook, while White has many possible moves, but no clear way to break through.

33...\texttt{g5} \texttt{h8}

Black's position appears to be on the edge, but White has no obvious way through. The game is in something of a deadlock, although White can shuffle around a bit with c2-c3, \texttt{d4}, \texttt{f4/g3} and so on. I guess it's possible to
explore this line in more detail, in the hope of finding a nuance to improve White’s prospects. For the time being through, the above line is enough to cause serious practical problems for the defender.

C) 16...h3!?

This is already a good sign for White – we will easily avoid an early queen exchange, and we are entering a whole new world of variations and ideas. There are only two correspondence games in the database here, so there is a great deal to explore. At the same time it will be difficult to draw many firm conclusions due to the sheer amount of possibilities for both sides. Whenever I discovered an interesting idea for White, there always seemed to be an ingenious defensive idea in the position, and the complicated battle raged on. Instead of recommending a single move for White, I will present a few different tries and identify what I think are the most critical lines that may be developed with new games and analysis.

We will begin by analysing the blunt C1) 17.g3, before considering the more fluid options of C2) 17.g4?!N and C3) 17.d3?!N. Considering the dearth of games after White’s 16th move, any one of these moves could serve as an excellent practical weapon. However, as the theory unfolds in the future, some lines might become neutralized, or at least better known. Before discussing these three options, I will mention a few other moves that I discarded.

White’s final option can be understood when you consider the variation 17.e3 e5!, when it is hard to hold on to the f6-pawn. 18.xh3 (Or 18.e4 c5! 19.f4 d6 20.f3 c7 intending ...0-0-0 and Black is doing just fine.) This was Isaev – Tritt, email 2010, and now 18...xf6 19.e1 g5, intending ...e7 and ...0-0, seems to be okay for Black.

17.ef4N is a crazy version of the next line below, but here Black has a forcing defence: 17...b4! All other moves give White an excellent initiative. 18.e3 g5! 19.g3 xf6 20.e4 xe4 21.e4 c5 Intending ...d5, and Black is doing well.

17.e2N

The idea of this move is to be ready for ...hxg2, but Black has no reason to play that. 17...e5!

Now it will be hard for White to stop the plan of ...d7 and ...0-0-0.

17.hxg2? 18.b3! gives White a crushing initiative, but I will spare the further details as Black can do much better than this.

17.b4?! 18.e3! is strong, and 17...h5 18.e3 e5 19.e4 c5 (19...h6 20.d3) 20.f3 also favours White.
Chapter 18 - 16.\texttt{bd1}

18.\texttt{b3}
18.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{d}7 19.\texttt{x}h3 is a possibility, but Black's king will be safe now, and his bishop pair will offer him better chances.

18...\texttt{c}7 19.\texttt{b}5! \texttt{d}7!
19...\texttt{d}7 20.\texttt{x}d7\texttt{xd}7 21.\texttt{d}5 \texttt{d}6 22.\texttt{e}3 gives White some initiative.
20.\texttt{e}2 \texttt{g}8?!
20...\texttt{e}5= repeats the position, but the text move tries for more than equality. Either way, this is not what I want to achieve from the opening.

\textbf{C1) 17.g3}

\begin{center}
\textbf{\texttt{\textcolor{red}{\texttt{g}}3}}
\end{center}

This could be considered the most natural reply – even though we have seen several instances where White just ignores the pawn on h3. The real question now is who will benefit from the inclusion of ...h3 and g2-g3. Incidentally, this position has been reached via transposition a few times, via the move order 15...h3 16.g3 (in variation B1 of the previous chapter I recommended 16.\texttt{f}3?!). 16...\texttt{d}7 17.\texttt{bd1}.

17...\texttt{b}4?!N
Surprisingly, all of the existing correspondence games – which are usually known for their precision – missed this idea.

17...\texttt{g}5? is bad due to: 18.\texttt{f}4 \texttt{xf}6 (18...\texttt{e}5 19.\texttt{e}4\texttt{xe}4+) 19.\texttt{xf}6 \texttt{xf}6 20.\texttt{e}4 \texttt{d}8 21.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{e}7 22.\texttt{f}5! \texttt{xd}1\texttt{xd}1 23.\texttt{xd}1 \texttt{exf}5 24.\texttt{d}6? \texttt{f}8 25.\texttt{c}3!±

17...\texttt{e}5
This has been played in several correspondence games, so it might well be the choice of an over-the-board opponent too.

18.\texttt{f}3
18.\texttt{e}3 \texttt{d}7! 19.\texttt{xe}6 (19.\texttt{e}4 0–0–0∞) 19...\texttt{xe}6 20.\texttt{f}7\texttt{xf}7 21.\texttt{e}4 0–0–0 22.\texttt{xf}7 \texttt{e}8 23.\texttt{xd}8\texttt{xd}8 seems okay for Black.
18...\texttt{c}6
18...\texttt{b}4? does not work due to 19.\texttt{e}5 \texttt{xc}3 20.\texttt{d}6 \texttt{b}4 21.\texttt{d}3 \texttt{d}5 22.\texttt{f}3 \texttt{xd}3 23.\texttt{xd}3 0–0 24.\texttt{e}4!, intending \texttt{f}4 with a winning attack in the endgame. However, after the text move White really does have to worry about the bishop’s arrival on b4.

19.\texttt{a}3?N
19.\texttt{e}4 was played in three correspondence games, but the queen exchange obviously makes Black’s life easier.
19...\texttt{d}3 \texttt{b}4! and 19...\texttt{b}1 \texttt{d}7! both seem fine for Black.

19...\texttt{xa}3
19...\texttt{b}5 just gives White easy play, while Black will struggle to complete development:
20.\texttt{h}1 \texttt{a}7 21.\texttt{e}3! \texttt{d}7 22.\texttt{xd}7 \texttt{xd}7 23.\texttt{d}1†
20.\textup{\textit{d}}d3
Now the ...\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}b4 idea is less effective as the bishop will be stuck on a3. In most lines Black will have to waste time returning his bishop to f8, and in such positions a tempo may prove far more important than a pawn.

20...\textup{\textit{e}}c7
20...\textup{e}5 21.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}e}4 \textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}e}6 22.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{w}}}e}3 \textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}f}8 23.c4\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}c}4
Black's king is stuck in the centre, and White has excellent prospects of an initiative.

21.\textup{\textit{w}}e3!?
21.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}e}4 \textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}f}8 is similar, but White does not need to commit the knight just yet.

21...\textup{d}d7 22.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{w}}}e}3 \textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{f}}}f}8 23.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}b}1! b5
Both 23...0–0–0 24.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}a}4 and 23...\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}d}8 24.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}d}5 \textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}a}5 25.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{h}}}h}1 \textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}c}8 26.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}b}d1 see White maintaining some initiative.

24.\textup{\textit{\textit{f}}}f1!!
24.\textup{\textit{\textit{d}}}d5 \textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{a}}}a}7\textup{\textit{\textit{a}}}t is annoying, while after 24.\textup{\textit{\textit{h}}}h1 0–0–0 the following sacrificial ideas do not work.

24...0–0–0
24...\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{w}}}a}7 25.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}e}4\textup{\textit{\textit{a}}}t
25.\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}a}4\textup{\textit{\textit{a}}}t
White has various attacking ideas including \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}}}c}3, \textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}d}b3 and a possible bishop sacrifice on b5. (25.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{d}}}x}b5?! axb5 26.\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{e}}}c}3 looks quite dangerous as well.)

Let's now return to the more accurate 17...\textit{\textit{\textit{b}}}b4!\textup{\textit{\textit{\textit{n}}}n}, which can be compared with the earlier variation A. As we will see, the inclusion of ...h3 and g2–g3 proves useful for Black here.
We may conclude that 17...g3 is a reasonably safe move that could easily catch an unprepared opponent, but it is not too difficult for Black to find a path to safety. In the remaining part of the chapter we will focus on a couple of surprising but extremely dangerous options available to White.

C2) 17.\textit{g4?N}

With this move White shields the g-pawn against ...\textit{g5} ideas, while setting up various sacrifices on e6. Black may consider C21) 17...\textit{hxg2}, C22) 17...\textit{g5!?} or C23) 17...\textit{e5!}.

17...\textit{b4} 18.\textit{xe6!} \textit{xc3} 19.\textit{e3} is too dangerous for Black.

C21) 17...\textit{hxg2}

18.\textit{f4!}

Of course the pawn has to be ignored, but this looks insane. Still, White's pieces come together perfectly.

18...\textit{f2} is less precise due to 18...\textit{e5} 19.\textit{h5 d7} when Black will be able to castle.

18...\textit{e5}

18...\textit{b4} is met by 19.\textit{e3 e5} 20.\textit{e4 g5} 21.\textit{d5! xe3} 22.\textit{xe3} and Black will lose material.

19.\textit{f3!}

Challenging the strong knight.
Black's position looks so shaky, but he can survive with a crazy-looking line.

24.fxe7 $\text{Exg4}$

The only move, as is Black's next.

25.$\text{f3}$ $\text{hxg4}$

Black is still in some danger.

26.$\text{dxe4}$ $\text{hxg3}$

Other moves are not so dangerous:

18.$\text{dxe5}$ 19.$\text{f2}$
19.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c5}}} 20.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d7}}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{h1}}} 0–0–0 is safe for Black.

19.\textit{\textcolor{red}{d3}} is met by 19...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c5}}}! when it is hard to untangle for White. 20.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{b6}}!} (20...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}+} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}+} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{hxd4}}} 23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{g4}}}) 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xh3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c5}}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xc5}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xc5}}} again ...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} is a threat. 23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{h1}}} (23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d7}}}! 24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{h1}}} 0–0–0\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{\textdagger}}} 23...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} 24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} 25.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c7}}}=

19...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c5}}}!?

A slow move such as 19...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{b4}}}? will be blown away by 20.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}}! \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{fxe6}}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe1}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{h5}}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c7}}} 23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d4}}}! with a winning attack.

19...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{hxg2}}}

This just gives White a typical initiative.

20.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe1}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xf6}}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e3}}}

21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{f5}}}? could be dangerous as well.

The text move intends \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e4}}}, \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e6}}} or \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e6}}}, and Black will have to defend carefully to hold his position together.

21...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{g5}}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e2}}}!

22.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d5}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe3}}}+ 23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d6}}} 24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e5}}} is just a draw.

22.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{h3}}}?! is also interesting, but after 22...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e5}}} 23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{f4}}} 24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}}! \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{fxe6}}} 25.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{h5}}}+ \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{f7}}} 26.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{f5}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e7}}}! I found nothing more than a forcing line leading to an equal endgame.

22...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c5}}}

After 22...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{c5}}} 23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{f5}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{g8}}} (23...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d7}}}

24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{h4}}}+\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{\textdagger}}} 24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d4}}}! White's initiative continues.

23.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}}! \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{fxe6}}} 24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}}+ 25.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e5}}} 26.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd7}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd7}}} 27.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d7}}}+ 24.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}}+ \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{g8}}}

There is no mate, but White can win back the piece.

25.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}}+ 26.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xd4}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e5}}} 27.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{d6}}}! \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}} 28.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe6}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{f6}}} 29.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xf6}+}}

White's active pieces give him the more pleasant endgame.

20.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xe1}}}!

20.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xh3}}} would be thwarted by 20...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xf6}}} (20...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xf6}±}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{a4}}}! \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{a7}}} 22.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{b2}+\textdagger}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e3}}} \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{g5}}}! and we cannot avoid the queen exchange.

20...\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{xf6}}} 21.\textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{f3}}}

Threatening \textit{\textbf{\textcolor{red}{e4}}}.
21...0-0
21...\textit{g}6? is bad due to 22.\textit{e}4 0-0 23.\textit{x}c5 \textit{x}c5 24.\textit{e}5! \textit{d}7 25.\textit{h}5! hxg2 26.\textit{d}2 with a winning attack.
21...\textit{e}7 leads to some fireworks after 22.\textit{e}4 \textit{g}6 23.\textit{x}e6! fxe6 24.\textit{d}6+- \textit{d}8.
Here is an illustrative line, where all of Black's moves are forced, though White has some options along the way:

21. ... \textit{e}7 leads to some fireworks after 22.\textit{e}4 \textit{g}6 23.\textit{x}e6! fxe6 24.\textit{d}6+- \textit{d}8.

22.\textit{e}4 \textit{g}7 23.\textit{x}c5 \textit{xc}5 24.\textit{e}2
24.\textit{h}1!? will lead to similar positions. Black has two extra pawns, but White has excellent attacking prospects, especially since Black does not have his dark-squared bishop anymore.

24...\textit{d}7 25.\textit{f}4 \textit{e}5
25...\textit{f}6 can be met by 26.\textit{h}1!? intending 26...hxg2 26...\textit{e}5 27.\textit{x}h3\textit{f} 27.\textit{d}g2 \textit{h}8 28.\textit{g}1 and Black's position is collapsing.
25...\textit{e}5 26.\textit{e}3! leads to a shockingly swift and deadly attack: 26...hxg2 (26...\textit{xf}3 27.\textit{xf}3 \textit{h}7 28.\textit{g}3! \textit{f}6 29.\textit{e}4--; 26...\textit{h}8 27.\textit{e}2 \textit{g}4 28.\textit{g}xg4 \textit{g}xg4 29.\textit{dd}3!)

24...\textit{d}7 25.\textit{f}4 \textit{e}5
25...\textit{f}6 can be met by 26.\textit{h}1!? intending 26...hxg2 26...\textit{e}5 27.\textit{x}h3\textit{f} 27.\textit{d}g2 \textit{h}8 28.\textit{g}1 and Black's position is collapsing.
25...\textit{e}5 26.\textit{e}3! leads to a shockingly swift and deadly attack: 26...hxg2 (26...\textit{xf}3 27.\textit{xf}3 \textit{h}7 28.\textit{g}3! \textit{f}6 29.\textit{e}4--; 26...\textit{h}8 27.\textit{e}2 \textit{g}4 28.\textit{g}xg4 \textit{g}xg4 29.\textit{dd}3!)

26.\textit{h}5!
26.\textit{h}3 \textit{f}6 27.\textit{h}4 also gives White compensation but the attack is slowed down. 26.\textit{d}5 \textit{f}6 seems okay for Black.
26...\textit{g}5
26...\textit{g}6 27.\textit{h}4! maintains the attack.
27.\textit{\textbf{h}}1? \\
After 27.e3 f6 Black can defend.

27...hxg2† \\
Now 27...f6? is refuted by 28.gxh3 f5xh5 29.g1.

\begin{figure}
\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chess-board1.png}
\end{center}
\end{figure}

28.g1! \\
28.xg2 fxh5 29.g1 h7 30.f3 f5 31.g2 f5 leads to a draw, but the text move is an amazing way to keep the initiative.

28...f6 \\
Black must take great care, for instance:

28...h8 29.d6! f6 30.h4 g6 31.e2 wins.

28...e8 29.d6! e4 30.e3 with a dangerous attack.

28...g6 29.e2! h8 30.e3 Black remains under pressure, for instance 30...b6 31.xb6 xxb6 32.d6! and wins.

\begin{figure}
\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chess-board2.png}
\end{center}
\end{figure}

29.h4 g6 30.e5 g4 \\
30...xh5 31.xh5+–

31.xg4 xg4 32.f6† h8 33.d4+ \\
This line was not completely forced, but it certainly highlights some of the dangers for Black. The next move is the most resilient of all.
19. \( \text{b3} \) \( \text{c7} \) 20. \( \text{b5} \) \( \text{b6} \) 21. \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{xd4} \)
22. \( \text{xd4} \) axb5 23. \( \text{xb4} \)
Black seems to be almost out of the woods, but he still has to be careful.

23... \( \text{d7} \)!
23... \( \text{xa2} \)
The computer indicates that this is just as good, but a closer investigation shows that it does not fare as well.
24. \( \text{xb5} \) \( \text{d7} \)
After 24... \( \text{c6} \) 25. \( \text{c5} \) the pawn on f6 ensures White's easier play.
25. \( \text{xd4} \) b6 26. \( \text{b4} \)?
Preparing to switch the rook to the kingside in anticipation of castling.

26... \( \text{b7} \)
26... h5 27. \( \text{b5} \) 0–0 28. \( \text{g4} \) \( \text{xc2} \) (28... \( \text{hxg4} \)
29. \( \text{xg4} \) \( \text{h8} \) 30. \( \text{f3} \)++) 29. \( \text{xh5} \)

24 \( \text{e1} \)
24. \( \text{d4} \) \( \text{c6} \) is fine for Black.
24...\textit{\textit{d}}c4 \\
24...\textit{\textit{g}}6 25.\textit{\textit{c}}c5±

25.\textit{\textit{d}}d4 \textit{\textit{x}}a2
25...\textit{\textit{d}}d6 gives White various options including \textit{\textit{f}}3-e5, or transferring the \textit{\textit{b}}4-rook to the kingside. Black might still be okay, but it is not an ideal situation for him.

26.\textit{\textit{x}}xb5 \textit{\textit{x}}xb5 27.\textit{\textit{x}}xb5 \textit{\textit{x}}c2 28.\textit{\textit{x}}xb7 0–0

There is still some play, but it should be a draw.

C3) 17.\textit{\textit{d}}d3?!N

This is arguably the most logical move of all, as it avoids the threats of \textit{\textit{b}}4-e5 and \textit{\textit{g}}5. White also avoids putting the queen on e3 where it could be harassed by \textit{\textit{w}}e5, as noted earlier on page 336.

Once again, Black has three main candidates, and we will analyse C31) 17...\textit{\textit{e}}e5, C32) 17...\textit{\textit{w}}e5 and C33) 17...hxg2! in turn.

17...\textit{\textit{c}}c5 leaves the queen cut off on a5. 18.\textit{\textit{e}}e4 e5 19.\textit{\textit{f}}f5! exd4 (After 19...\textit{\textit{x}}xd4 t 20.\textit{\textit{w}}xd4 exd4 21.\textit{\textit{x}}xa5 White’s initiative continues in the endgame.) 20.\textit{\textit{x}}xc5 \textit{\textit{x}}xc5 21.\textit{\textit{w}}xd4 \textit{\textit{x}}xf5 \\
22.\textit{\textit{w}}d6 \textit{\textit{d}}d8 23.\textit{\textit{e}}e5\textdagger \textit{\textit{e}}e6 24.\textit{\textit{b}}b8\textdagger \textit{\textit{b}}d8 25.\textit{\textit{w}}xf5\textdagger The f6-pawn is strong.

C31) 17...\textit{\textit{e}}e5

This is quite likely to be the reaction of a surprised opponent, as it enables Black to castle on the queenside in the near future. Nevertheless, it does not solve all his problems, as White can grab the h3-pawn before starting an initiative on the queenside.

18.\textit{\textit{w}}xh3 \textit{\textit{d}}d7 19.\textit{\textit{h}}h1
19.\textit{\textit{w}}e3 leads to similar positions, for instance 19...0–0–0 20.\textit{\textit{e}}e4 \textit{\textit{b}}b8 21.c4 \textit{\textit{c}}c7 22.c5 with good prospects for White.

19...0–0–0 20.\textit{\textit{e}}e4 \textit{\textit{g}}g8
20...h5 21.c4! \textit{\textit{h}}4 22.c5 \textit{\textit{b}}b8 23.\textit{\textit{d}}d2 \textit{\textit{a}}a8 24.\textit{\textit{b}}b1 also gives White some initiative.
18...hxg2? is bad as usual, and after 19...e1 White has an overwhelming initiative.

18...c5 is met by 19.e4 when exchanging on d4 gives Black an unpleasant endgame, and otherwise White's initiative just gets stronger.

18...c5 19.c4! can be compared to the earlier variation B with 16...g5, but this is a much better version for White. 19...d6 20.g3 d7 21.e1 xf6 22.d5↑

19.e4!

White can simply ignore the threat to the h2-pawn, as his pieces are so active. Instead after 19.g3 dx6 Black might be okay.

19...xh2↑ 20.f2 hxg2

20...e5 21.h1 f4 22.g3 wins.

18.f3!

18.g3 c5! allows Black to regroup in time to arrange castling. (18...xf6 19.xf6! xf6 20.e4 d8 21.e3+) 19.f3 d7 20.e1 c7 21.f5 0–0–0 Black is doing well.

18...d6

18...xf6? is refuted by 19.c6!.

23.e2!

23.xe6!? fxe6 24.d4 leads to some insane stuff, but I was only able to find a draw here, so there is no need to force the issue.

23.e5

23...c7 24.h5 e5 25.g3↑

24.c4?
White has an ongoing initiative. Black is surviving for the moment, but his position does not look like much fun.

C33) 17...hxg2!

In most cases Black does best to postpone this move. The present case is an exception to the rule, although it would be practically impossible to figure this out over the board.

18...f4!? This looks strange at first, but it makes sense when you consider 18...e5! 19...e3 d7 intending ...0–0–0 with a safe position for Black. Now the prospect of a rook lift along the fourth rank makes it harder for Black to castle.

18...xg2 is not bad according to the computer. This could be investigated further, but I have chosen the option that does not involve opening up my king.

Here we have a final branching point, with C331) 18...c7 and C332) 18...d6! the main candidates.

18...e5? is no good here due to 19...e3! d7 (or 19...c7 20.e4++) 20.e4! d6 (20...c6 21.xe6++) 21.xe6 and White is winning.

If Black tries 18...c5 then 19.xg2 makes more sense, escaping the pin and preparing all sorts of knight jumps. Black does not have the time to exploit the open king, for instance: 19...e5 20.g3 d7

21.b3 (21.xe6!? leads to some forcing lines, and also favours White according to the computer.) 21...c7 22.e4 d6 23.xd6 xd6 24.xe5±

C331) 18...c7

This is the most natural move, but it leads to trouble for Black.

19.e3!

19.g3 is possible, but I prefer not to have the rook pinned.
19...c5

Intending ...We5.

19...e5 20.De6! fxe6 21.Rc4 Wxc4 22.Dh5+ Dd8 23.a4! threatens b6, and if 23...b5 24.Dxe5! White wins.

19...Db6 gives White a pleasant choice. 20.Df5!! (There is also 20.Dh5!? Dc5 21.Wg3!, when it is hard for Black to develop further, as ...Dd7 will allow Dxf7.) 20...Dd7 (20...Dc5 21.Dg7+ Df8 22.Ed8+ Wxd8 23.Wxc5+ Dg8 24.Dg4++) 21.e7 There is no clear win yet, but it looks horribly dangerous for Black.

20.Df5!!

Amazingly enough, Black is rather stuck, and White just has to throw pieces at his king!

20...Da7

Other moves also fail to solve Black's problems:

20...b5 21.De4! Db6 22.Wa3 is winning.

20...Db6 21.Exc5 Wxc5 22.De4 Dd5 23.Wg3 Wc7 24.Wa3!

20...Df8 21.Exc5! Wxc5 22.De4+

20...e5 21.De4 It will be hard for Black to contain White's activity.

21.Dh5! Df8


22.Dd5 Wd6 23.De5 Dd7 24.De7

Total domination has been achieved, and Black will have to give up his queen to avoid an even worse fate.

24...Db8 25.Dc6 Wxd1+ 26.Exd1 bxc6 27.Wc3

White should win.

C332) 18...Dd6!
This may be the only way for Black to survive.

19...\text{\textsc{d}e}5

19...\text{\textsc{d}e}6? \text{\textsc{x}f}4 20...\text{\textsc{x}f}4 does not work due to 20...\text{\textsc{w}c}5\text{\textsc{t}} 21...\text{\textsc{x}g}2 \text{\textsc{w}g}5\text{\textsc{t}}\text{\textsc{t}}, but after the text move the bishop on \text{\textsc{d}6} is a genuine target.

19...\text{\textsc{d}e}5

19...\text{\textsc{b}b}4 20...\text{\textsc{d}e}4 is obviously dangerous for Black, while 19...\text{\textsc{w}c}7 is well met by 20...\text{\textsc{x}e}6! \text{\textsc{x}h}2\text{\textsc{t}} 21...\text{\textsc{x}g}2 \text{\textsc{f}xe}6 22...\text{\textsc{g}g}6\text{\textsc{t}} \text{\textsc{d}d}8 23...\text{\textsc{f}f}3± intending \text{\textsc{w}g}7.

Now White has a choice between a sound yet tricky continuation which leads to draw after accurate defence by Black, and a wildly complicated line with unclear consequences.

20...\text{\textsc{g}g}3

I have put this as the main line, as it is impossible to determine what is happening after the alternative.

20...\text{\textsc{e}e}3?!?

This leads to a completely out-of-control position.

20...\text{\textsc{c}c}7

I have a feeling that White may be able to conjure a strong initiative here, but so far I have not been able to demonstrate it.

21...\text{\textsc{b}b}3

21...\text{\textsc{d}d}5 \text{\textsc{a}a}5 22...\text{\textsc{c}c}5 \text{\textsc{d}d}6! 23...\text{\textsc{f}f}3 \text{\textsc{d}d}7 24...\text{\textsc{a}a}6 0–0–0! is okay for Black.

21...\text{\textsc{b}b}4!!

21...\text{\textsc{a}a}3 22...\text{\textsc{e}e}4!?

21...\text{\textsc{b}b}6 22...\text{\textsc{c}c}5 \text{\textsc{d}d}7 23...\text{\textsc{b}b}1 \text{\textsc{c}c}6 24...\text{\textsc{b}b}7 (24...\text{\textsc{f}f}3 \text{\textsc{b}b}6 25...\text{\textsc{x}d}7 \text{\textsc{d}d}7 26...\text{\textsc{g}g}2\text{\textsc{t}}) 24...\text{\textsc{c}c}8 25...\text{\textsc{c}c}7! \text{\textsc{w}c}7 26...\text{\textsc{f}f}3\text{\textsc{t}} looks dangerous for Black.

22...\text{\textsc{d}d}4

22...\text{\textsc{c}c}5? \text{\textsc{b}b}6\text{\textsc{t}} is not much good for us.

22...\text{\textsc{d}d}7 23...\text{\textsc{c}c}3 \text{\textsc{a}a}3 is a strange mess, but Black is ready to castle so he should be doing well.

22...\text{\textsc{b}b}6!

22...\text{\textsc{f}f}8 23...\text{\textsc{c}c}5\text{\textsc{t}}

23...\text{\textsc{a}a}4 \text{\textsc{b}b}6 24...\text{\textsc{b}b}2 \text{\textsc{d}d}7 25...\text{\textsc{c}c}5 0–0–0 26...\text{\textsc{g}g}7\text{\textsc{t}}

The position remains unclear, but Black seems out of danger.

20...\text{\textsc{c}c}7!

Black does best to avoid both 20...\text{\textsc{a}a}8 21...\text{\textsc{e}e}4\text{\textsc{t}} and 20...\text{\textsc{d}d}7 21...\text{\textsc{e}e}6! \text{\textsc{a}a}6 22...\text{\textsc{x}d}6 \text{\textsc{d}d}7 23...\text{\textsc{e}e}4±.

21...\text{\textsc{b}b}5!

A nice attacking idea, but unfortunately Black can hold with brilliant defence.

21...\text{\textsc{a}a}b5!

This leads to a forced draw after precise play.
Black is in danger after:
21...b8 22.a4!

22.h5?! is fun to analyse, but it should lead to an exotic draw: 22...axb5 23.e2 g6! (23...b6 24.e5±) 24.e6! b6†
25...e3 xe3† 26.xe3 xh2† (26...xe6? 27.xe6† xe6 28.xg6† f8 29.d8#) 27.xh2 xe6 28.xe6† xe6 29.xg6† f8 30.d7=

22...b4

Both 22...d7 23.a3! and 22...axb5 23.axb5 d7 24.g7 f8 25.e6! are winning for White.

23.c3 c5 24.b3 f8 25.e3! d7
25...axb5 26.b6†+
26.c4! axb5 27.axb5±

Black faces serious threats including b6 and d3 (or d2).

24.g7† f8 25.e6†=

Neither side can avoid the repetition by now.
Conclusion

In such a heavily analysed variation as the Poisoned Pawn, it would seem almost miraculous to find a fresh idea, which has been played in just a handful of games out of a few thousand, and discover that it is actually rather good. This exactly sums up my experience of analysing the intriguing option of 16.\(\text{B}\)d1!? in this most critical of variations.

We started by analysing the crude attempt to punish White’s 16th move with 16...\(\text{b}\)4. Once you appreciate that White can disarm the threat with 17.\(\text{W}\)e3!, threatening to smash through on e6, White’s position starts to make more sense. We then considered the natural 16...\(\text{W}\)g5!?; when my new suggestion of 17.\(\text{W}\)d3!N \(\text{c}\)5 18.\(\text{W}\)c4! poses Black plenty of problems. Even if Black defends optimally, White will still have some freedom at move 21 to steer the game towards the kind of position that suits him.

The most complicated reply of all is 16...\(\text{h}\)3!?; when I analysed three main replies for White. All of them are sound and, although none of them offer a forced route to an advantage, each of them poses different problems to the defender.

17.g3 is probably the easiest move for Black to equalize against, although even here he must avoid some pitfalls while White does not risk much.

17.\(\text{A}\)g4!?N leads to a tactical minefield, where 17...\(\text{A}\)e5! seems best, with Black just about maintaining the balance with precise defence.

17.\(\text{W}\)d3!?N was our final option, after which Black’s only fully satisfactory defence seems to be the counterintuitive 17...hxg2!, then meeting 18.\(\text{W}\)f4! with 18...\(\text{d}\)6!. Even here White has a draw in his pocket in the main line, with the option of going for unclear complications along the way if he wishes.

Throughout my coverage of the Poisoned Pawn, I have been under no illusions about refuting it. Instead I have looked for ways to avoid the many forced drawing lines that have been mapped out by correspondence players, proposing a variety of new and theoretically sound ways to pose problems to the defender. With the analysis in this chapter, combined with the ideas in the previous couple of chapters, you will have a whole array of weapons with which to trouble your future opponents.
Chapter 1

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5

A) 6...e5 8
B) 6...d7 9
C) 6...c6 9
D) 6...bd7 7.e2! 11
   D1) 7...a5?! 11
   D2) 7...e5 13
   D3) 7...b5 15
   D31) 8.0–0–0 15
   D32) 8.f4! e5 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.0–0–0! 16
   D321) 10...exd4 19
   D322) 10...b6N 19
   D323) 10...h6N 20
   D324) 10...b7N 11.g5 21
      D3241) 11...b6 22
      D3242) 11...c7 23

Chapter 2

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 bd7 7.e2! g6 8.0–0–0

A) 8...c7 27
B) 8...e5 28
C) 8...g7 9.h4?! 31
   C1) 9...h6 31
   C2) 9...h5 10.b1 c7 11.g4?!N 34
      C21) 11...b6 35
      C22) 11...hxg4 12.h5! xh5 13.xh5 gxh5 14.f5 f8 15.g2 36
         C221) 15...e6 38
         C222) 15...b8 39
         C223) 15...c5! 40
Chapter 3

1. e4 c5 2. d3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 Qf6 5. Cc3 a6 6. Qg5 Qd7 7. We2! h6 8. h4

A) 8...e6?! 46
B) 8...g5 47
C) 8...b5?! 9.f4 48
   C1) 9...e5N 49
   C2) 9...g5 10.fxg5 hxg5 11. Qxg5 Qb7 12.0–0–0 e6 13.g4! 53
      C21) 13...e7 54
      C22) 13...b4?!N 55

Chapter 4

1. e4 c5 2. d3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 Qf6 5. Cc3 a6 6. Qg5 Qbd7 7. We2! h6 8. h4 g6 9. f4 e5
   10. fxe5 dxe5 11.0–0–0!

A) 11...e7?! 59
B) 11...Qc7 12. Qb3 b5 13. Qd5! Qxd5 14. exd5 59
   B1) 14...e8?!N 60
   B2) 14...d6 15. Qd2! 64
      B21) 15...f5N 65
      B22) 15...Qf8?! 67
         B221) 16. Qb1 68
         B222) 16.g4!N 71
   B23) 15...0–0–0?!N 16. Qxh6 Qb7 17. Qb1 Qfe8 18. Qe2 Qac8 19. Qc1!! 74
      B231) 19...e4 75
      B232) 19...Qf8 76
         B2321) 20.d6?! 76
         B2322) 20.Qf3?! 78

Chapter 5

1. e4 c5 2. d3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Qxd4 Qf6 5. Cc3 a6 6. Qg5 e6 7. f4

A) 7...Qd7 82
B) 7...Qc6? 8.Qxc6 bxc6 9.e5 h6 10. Qh4 g5 11.fxg5 Qd5 12.Qe4 Qb6 13.c3! 84
   B1) 13...Qb8 85
   B2) 13...Qxb2 86
   B3) 13...Qxe5 88
C) 7...e7 8. Qf3 90
   C1) 8...Qa5 90
   C2) 8...Qc7 91
Chapter 6

1.e4 c5 2.d4 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qf6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 Qc7 8.e2?

A) 8...b5 95
B) 8...d6 9.0-0 0-0 96
   B1) 9...e7 96
   B2) 9...d7?! 100
B3) 9...Qxd4 10.Qxd4 101
      B31) 10...b5?! 101
      B32) 10...e7 11.d1!N 104
      B321) 11...0-0 105
         B3211) 12.g3 105
         B3212) 12.d4? 106
      B322) 11...h6 12.xh4 108
         B3221) 12...g5? 108
         B3222) 12...0-0 109

Chapter 7

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qf6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 b5 8.e5 dxe5 9.fxe5 Qc7 10.exf6 Qe5! 11.e2 Qxf5 12.0-0

A) 12...Qe5 115
B) 12...Qa7 13.Qd3 Qd7 14.Qe4 117
   B1) 14...Qg6? 117
   B2) 14...Qe5 15.Qf3 119
      B21) 15...Qc7?! 119
      B22) 15...Qxb2 16.Qe3 Qb7 17.Qb1! 124
         B221) 17...Qxc2 125
         B222) 17...Qxa2! 126

Chapter 8

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 Qf6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 Qbd7 8.Qe2 Qc7 9.0-0-0

A) 9...Qe7 132
B) 9...b5 10.a3 133
   B1) 10...Qb7 134
   B2) 10...Qe7 11.g4 136
      B21) 11...Qb7 137
         B211) 12.f5?! 137
         B212) 12.Qh4 140
            B2121) 12...Qc5 141
            B2122) 12...Qb6 142
            B2123) 12...g6?! 143
      B22) 11...h6 145
Chapter 9

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 4.d6 5.d5 c6 6.d5 e6 7.f4 d7 8.e2 e7 9.0–0 b5
10.a3 a7 11.g4 h6 12.h4 b4 13.b1!

A) 13...g5?? N 150
B) 13...b8 152
C) 13...e8 14.g1 153
   C1) 14...b8 153
   C2) 14...g6 155
   C3) 14...g5 15.fxe5 h5 16.g5 e6 17.e5 157
      C31) 17...e5?? N 158
      C32) 17...xc3 18.gxf6 exf6 19.exe3 exe4 20.e1 159
         C321) 20...h4 160
         C322) 20...f6 163

Chapter 10

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 4.d6 5.d5 c6 6.d5 e6 7.f4 e7 8.e2 h6 9.h4 g5 10.fxg5

A) 11.h5?? N 168
B) 11.xe6! fxe6 12.e5h5+ g8 13.b5! h7! 14.e5?? N 170
   -B1) 14.axb5 171
   B2) 14...xe5 15.0–0+ g8 16.g6! 174
      B21) 16...e6g6 175
      B22) 16.f7 176
      B23) 16.xh4! 177

Chapter 11

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 4.d6 5.d5 c6 6.d5 e6 7.f4 e7 8.e2 h6 9.h4 e7 10.0–0–0 d7

A) 11.f5?? 185
   A1) 11...e5 186
   A2) 11...0–0?? N 187
   A3) 11...e5 189
B) 11.g2 192
   B1) 11...g8?? 192
   B2) 11...g5?? 193
   B3) 11...b8?? 195
   B4) 11...b5 198
   B5) 11...0–0?? 200
Chapter 12

1.e4 c5 2.\f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\xd4 \f6 5.\c3 a6 6.\g5 e6 7.f4 \e7 8.\f3 \e7 9.0-0 \bd7

A) 10.f5! 206
   A1) 10...\e5 206
   A2) 10...\e5 207
B) 10.g4 208
   B1) 10...h6 11.\xf6 \xf6 12.\b1! 209
      B11) 12...\g5 209
      B12) 12...\b6 211
   B2) 10...b5 11.\xf6 212
      B21) 11...\xf6 214
      B22) 11...\xf6 12.g5 \d7 13.f5 215
         B221) 13...\xg5+?! 14.\b1 215
         B2211) 14...\e5 215
         B2212) 14...0-0 217
   B22) 13...\c5 218
   B223) 13...0-0?! 14.h4?! b4 15.\ce2 221
      B2231) 15...\b7?! 221
      B2232) 15...\e5 223

Chapter 13

1.e4 \c5 2.\f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.\xd4 \f6 5.\c3 a6 6.\g5 \e6 7.f4 \b6 8.\d2 \xb2 9.\b1 \a3 10.e5

A) 10...\fd7 226
B) 10...\xe5 (without ...h6) 227
C) 10...h6 11.\h4 \xe5 12.fxe5 \d5?! 13.\xd5 \xd5 14.e6?! \xe6 15.\xe6 \xe6 16.\d3 \e7
17.\g6+ \d8 18.\xe7+ \xe7 19.0-0 231
   C1) 19...\b5? 233
   C2) 19...\d7 20.\f7 \e5+ 21.\h1 234
      C21) 21...\c8 234
      C22) 21...\f8 22.\xg7 \f6 23.\xd3! \c7 24.c4 d4 25.\e1! \af8 26.\e4 238
      C221) 26...\f7?! N 239
      C222) 26...\b6 241
Chapter 14


A) 14...Qb2?! 249
B) 14...Qd5 15.Qe3 252
   B1) 15...Qc5 252
   B2) 15...Qxe5 16.Qe2 Qc5 17.Qg3 254
      B21) 17...Qd5 255
          B211) 21...Qd8 255
          B212) 21...f5! 257
      B22) 17...Qxd4 18.Qxd4 Qa5† 19.Qd2 0–0 20.Qd6 261
         B221) 20...Qe8? 261
         B222) 20...Qc6?! 262
         B223) 20...f5 265

Chapter 15


A) 21...Qb6 274
B) 21...f6 274
C) 21...Qf6 275
D) 21...Qc6 22.g5 hxg5 23.Qg1! 277
   D1) 23...g6? 278
   D2) 23...Qf6?! 279
   D3) 23...f6 24.h4?! 280
      D31) 24...Qf8 281
      D32) 24...Qe5 283
Chapter 16

1. e4 c5 2. d3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. exd4 f6 5. c3 a6 6. g5 e6 7. f4 b6 8. d2 xb2 9. b1 a3 10. e5 h6 11. h4 dxe5 12. fxe5 g5 13. f2 g4 14. g3

A) 14... g7! 15. e4 288
   A1) 15... e3??N 290
   A2) 15...0–0 292
B) 14. d7 15. e2 gxe5 294
   B1) 16. xe6?? 295
   B2) 16.0–0 g7 17. xe6! xe6 18. e4 298
      B21) 18... f7??N 299
      B22) 18... f8 19. c4!!N 303
         B221) 19... b6 304
         B222) 19... b5! 306

Chapter 17

1. e4 c5 2. d3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. exd4 f6 5. c3 a6 6. g5 e6 7. f4 b6 8. d2 xb2 9. b1 a3 10. e5 h6 11. h4 dxe5 12. fxe5 g5 13. exf6 gxf4 14. e2

A) 14... d7?? 311
B) 14... a5 15.0–0 313
   B1) 15... h3?? 16. b3!! d7 17. d5 c5! 18. be1!!N d6 19. h1! 313
      B11) 19... e5 315
      B12) 19... e5 316
   B2) 15... d7 16. h1 c5 17. d3?? 318
      B21) 17... c5 319
      B22) 17... xf6?? 321
Chapter 18

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.exd4 f6 5.c3 a6 6.g5 e6 7.f4 b6 8.db2 xb2 9.b1 a3 10.e5 dxe5 h6 11.fxe5 g5 12.exf6 gxh4 14.e2 a5 15...0 d7 16.bd1!

A) 16...b4N 326
B) 16...g5! 17.db3! c5 18.c4! d7 19.d3 328

B1) 19...h3?! 329

B2) 19...e3?! 20.h1 b5 331

B21) 21.b4 331

B22) 21.d5?! 333

C) 16...h3?! 336

C1) 17.g3 337

C2) 17.g4?! N 339

C21) 17...hxg2 339

C22) 17...g5?! 340

C23) 17...e5! 343

C3) 17.b3?! N 345

C31) 17...e5 345

C32) 17...e5 346

C33) 17...hxg2! 18.h4?! 347

C331) 18...c7 347

C332) 18...d6! 348
Ever since its inception in 2008, the Grandmaster Repertoire series has produced some of the world’s best opening books, but an elite repertoire with 1.e4 has always been missing – until now.

In this, the second volume of the Grandmaster Repertoire – 1.e4 series, Indian superstar Parimarjan Negi tackles the fearsome Sicilian Najdorf, presenting his own world-class repertoire with 6...g5. Building on a foundation of tried-and-tested main lines, the author unveils a wealth of new ideas against the Poisoned Pawn and other critical variations, making this an essential addition to the library of every ambitious player.

- Countless novelties
- Fresh ideas and new plans at surprisingly early stages
- Written by a world-class player and theoretician

Parimarjan Negi is a former child prodigy who is the second-youngest player of all time to obtain the Grandmaster title. He was Asian Champion in 2012, and played on Board 1 for the Indian team which won bronze medals at the Tromsø 2014 Olympiad.