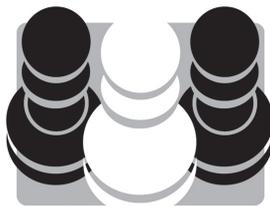


Grandmaster Repertoire 6A

Beating the Anti-Sicilians

By

Vassilios Kotronias



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Preface

Dealing with the Anti-Sicilians has never been a trivial task for chess players and writers alike. One has to be ready for a wide spectrum, which varies from boring to surprisingly dangerous, and this diversity is extremely hard to cope with, especially if you are not armed with sound positional knowledge.

I believe that this book divulges as much of this positional knowledge as I am able to offer; while at the same time contributing to the development of opening theory. I tried to create a universal weapon, paying attention to both tactical and positional mechanisms, and I sincerely hope that this attempt has paid off, but this is ultimately for the reader to judge. An important consideration was to reduce White's options and suggest lines that could be viable irrespective of the Sicilian system one plays as Black, and whenever possible I tried to make the repertoire choice work in this manner.

As the reader will notice, it is the 2.c3 and the 3.♘b5(†) Sicilians that take a lot of the space in this book, and this is not surprising as they are both quite popular. The means I used to combat them adhered to the rule "one tool for many purposes". In the first case, by suggesting a system based on ...e6, I complied with the needs of the move order 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.c3.

In the latter case I chose a set-up including both ...♗c6 and ...d6 on moves 2 and 3 – making the line accessible to various types of Sicilian user. These systems require tactical mastery, and there is a slight disadvantage that one has to be aware of: sometimes castling is delayed, bringing whatever dangers this may incur. On the other hand, it is probably for this reason that they offer better winning chances than other set-ups, as Black aims for the best possible structure before resorting to safety. In this world, nothing comes for free.

One point to note is that I cover the Morra Gambit in Chapter 19, via the move order 2.♗f3 g6 3.d4 cxd4 4.c3, rather than in the Various 2nd Moves section.

Of course, this book includes practically all Anti-Sicilians, and there are other dangerous systems to cope with. I am particularly happy with the results of my work in the system 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗c3. The Sveshnikov is a line a lot of people want to play as Black, and my suggestion of 3...e5 coincides with the choice of Sveshnikov himself. It has been postulated that this big hole on d5 is something that denies Black winning chances, but this is a rather simplistic assessment, as the reader will notice by going through Chapter 12.

I would like to thank my editors, and wish all my readers many creative achievements in battling the Anti-Sicilians.

Vassilios Kotronias
Athens, November 2015

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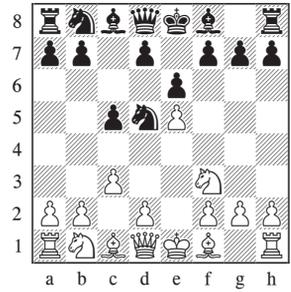
2.♠f3 ♘c6

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Chapter 6

c3 Sicilian



Rare 5th Moves

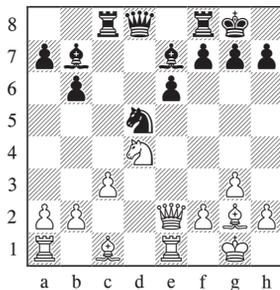
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.♗f3

4...e6

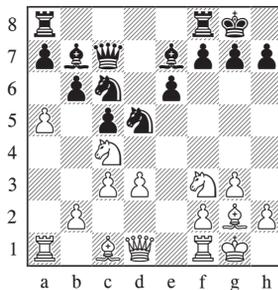
A) 5.c4	97
B) 5.♗a3	98
C) 5.g3 ♗c6 6.♙g2 d6 7.exd6 ♙xd6 8.0-0 0-0	100
C1) 9.♗a3	100
C2) 9.d4 cxd4 10.♗xd4 ♗xd4 11.♙xd4 ♙c7 12.♗d2 ♙d7	
13.♗e4 ♙e5	102
C21) 14.♙d3	103
C22) 14.♙c5!?	104

C1) note to 10.d3



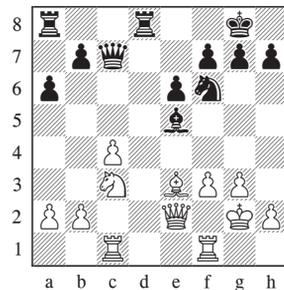
15...♙f6!N

C1) note to 13.♙e2!?



13...b5N

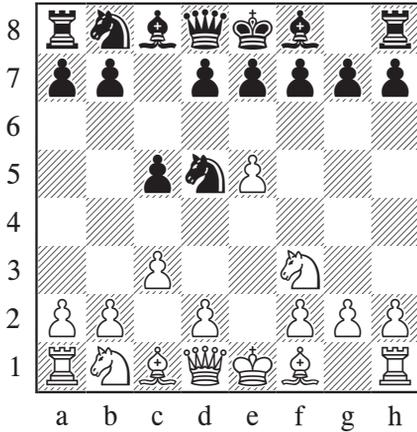
C2) note to 12.♗d2



19...♙ac8!N

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♖f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.♗f3

The most logical and flexible development, which maintains several options for White.



4...e6

This provides us with a universal system against c3 Sicilians. It is a solid move: supporting the d5-knight and preparing to castle quickly.

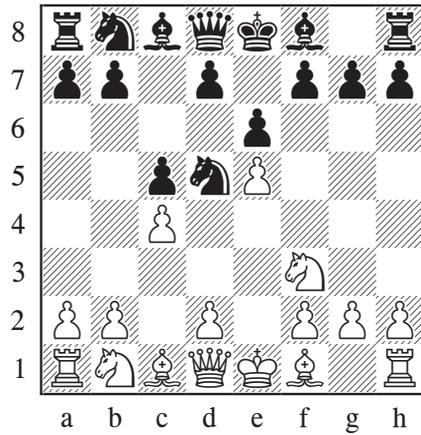
At this point there are several less popular alternatives worth mentioning. I will only make a brief report of what I consider essential, to arm readers sufficiently for their tournament games. This chapter will cover A) 5.c4, B) 5.♗a3 and C) 5.g3.

5.d4 is covered in the next three chapters.

5.b4?! is an extravagant gambit which Black does best to accept. After 5...cxb4! 6.c4 ♗c7! 7.d4 d6 8.exd6 ♙xd6 9.♙d3 ♗c6 10.0-0 ♙e7! White has no real compensation for the pawn.

After 5.♙c4 I have analysed the move 5...♗b6! in detail, concluding that Black has a good game. However, in an ...e6 based repertoire like the present one, it would be a waste of time and energy to devote space to it. The simple 5...d6 6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 is a direct transposition to our main line, featured in Chapters 8 and 9.

A) 5.c4

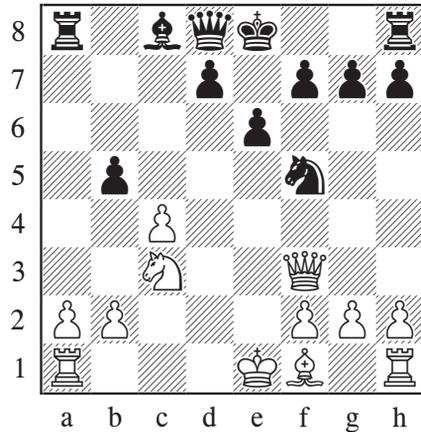


A time-consuming attempt to challenge control of d5.

5...♗e7!

Seeking to contest control of the critical d4-square. The main line of my analysis continues as follows:

6.♗c3 ♗bc6 7.d4! cxd4 8.♗xd4 ♗xe5
 9.♗db5 ♗f5!? 10.♙f4! a6! 11.♙xe5 axb5
 12.♗xb5 ♙b4† 13.♙c3 ♙xc3† 14.♗xc3 b5!?
 15.♙f3
 15.♗xb5 ♙b7



15...d5!?

In my opinion, it is obvious that Black gets enough counterplay in return for the pawn here. He has superb piece activity and fast development.

16.cxb5

16.cxd5 0-0

16...♔d7 17.a4

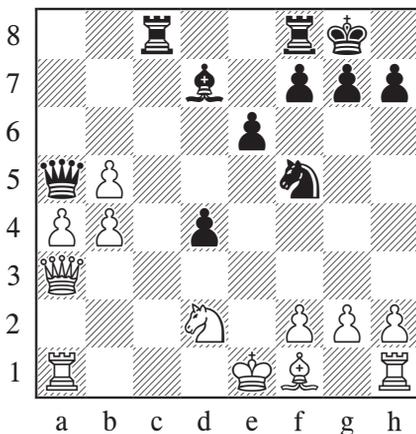
17.♔d3 d4 18.♗e4 ♖a5† 19.♗d2 0-0 20.a4 ♗d6± is a complete mess. The white king is stuck temporarily in the centre, while Black threatens to take on b5.

17...d4 18.♗e4 ♖a5† 19.♗d2 0-0 20.♖a3 ♜ac8

20...♜fc8 21.♔d3 ♗h4 (21...♗e3 22.fxe3 dxe3 23.0-0 exd2 24.♖d6! is better for White) 22.♔e4 ♜a7 23.b4 ♖d8 24.♖d3 f5 25.♔f3± gives White a slight edge, so the other rook move should be trusted more.

21.b4

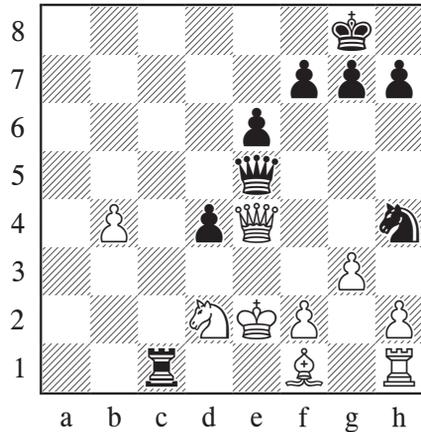
After 21.♔d3 the knight invasion 21...♗e3! looks strong. 22.fxe3 dxe3 23.0-0 exd2 24.♖d6 does not work anymore, in view of 24...♜fd8. Black coordinates his defences excellently, by putting the bishop on e8 next while maintaining the strong pawn on d2.



21...♖b6!

The weakness of the c3-square and White's stilted development gives Black excellent chances. For example:

22.♜c1 ♜xc1† 23.♖xc1 ♜c8 24.♖b1 ♗h4!
 25.g3 ♖b7 26.♖e4 ♜c1† 27.♔e2 ♔xb5†
 28.axb5 ♖xb5† 29.♖d3 ♖e5† 30.♖e4
 30.♗e4?? ♜c3 would spoil White's day somewhat.



30...♖b5† 31.♖d3 ♖e5†=

With a picturesque perpetual check.

B) 5.♗a3

Putting the knight on the rim may look strange, but the idea is to control d6 – or even challenge the d5-knight by means of ♗c4-e3.

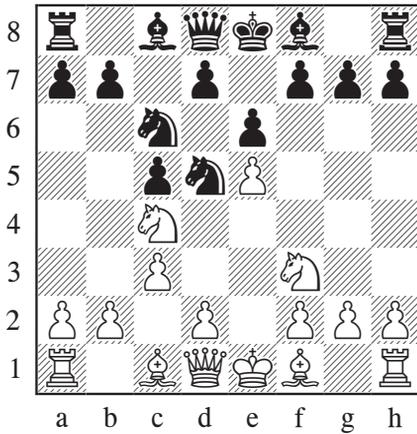
5...♗c6

5...d6 is another sound way to continue, but for the purposes of our repertoire I will rely upon the text.

6.♗c4

The only move to have any point.

After 6.♔b5 ♖c7 7.♔xc6 ♖xc6 Black is already threatening ...b5 and is slightly better.



6...♖c7!?

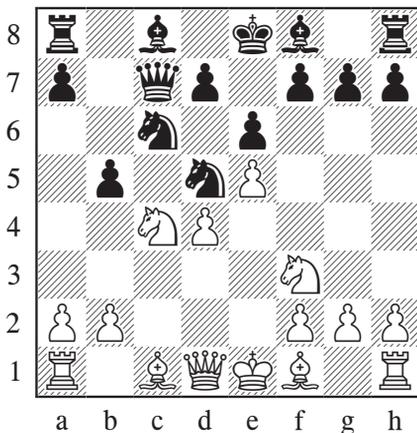
This move, covering d6 and intending ...b5, was the reason I decided to refrain from offering 5...d6. It leads to intriguing play, with excellent chances for Black.

6...b5 7.♘e3 ♘e3 8.fxe3 ♖b6 9.d4 leads to a position where White's play on the kingside, based on the newly opened f-file, might cause Black serious concerns later on. The Ukrainian GM Vladimir Baklan is a specialist in this line as White.

7.d4

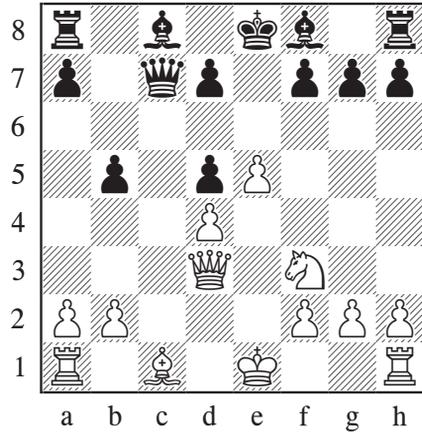
The obvious continuation. Black has no reason to worry after: 7.a4 ♘b6! 8.♘xb6 axb6 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 d6 11.♗b5 ♗d7= With comfortable equality.

7...cxd4 8.cxd4 b5!



An incisive move, leaving Black with a pleasant position. The temporary weakness of the c2-square is an important factor that allows him to play in this fashion.

9.♘e3 ♘cb4! 10.♘xd5 exd5! 11.♗d3 ♘xd3†
12.♖xd3



12...♖c4!

This move is the point of the whole operation. White has to either undouble our pawns or stay with his king in the centre.

13.♖xc4

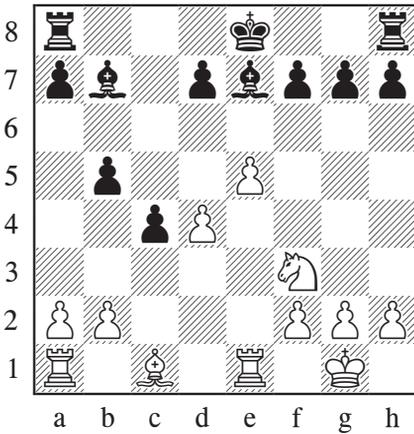
After 13.♖e3 b4! 14.b3 ♖a6! 15.♘h4! g6 16.f4 ♗e7 17.♘f3 d6 18.♗d2 ♖b8 Black has successfully completed his development and is at least equal.

13...dxc4 14.0-0 ♗b7

Black may even be slightly better at this stage.

15.♗e1 ♗e7

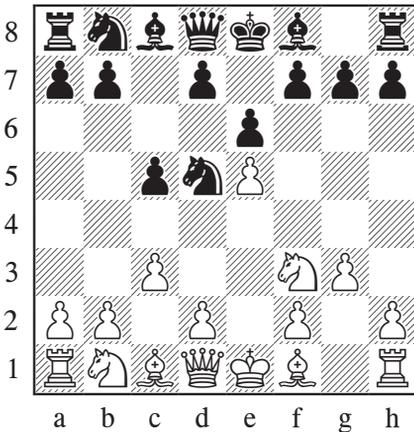
15...♖c8!N♞ looks like a good way to play for the full point.



16. ♖g5! 0-0 17. ♘e4 ♙xe4 18. ♞xe4 d5
 19. exd6 ♙xd6 20. ♙f4 ♙xf4 21. ♞xf4 ♞fe8
 22. ♙f1

The position was balanced, and the players soon agreed to a draw, in Bontempi – Jurcik, Stare Mesto 2010.

C) 5.g3



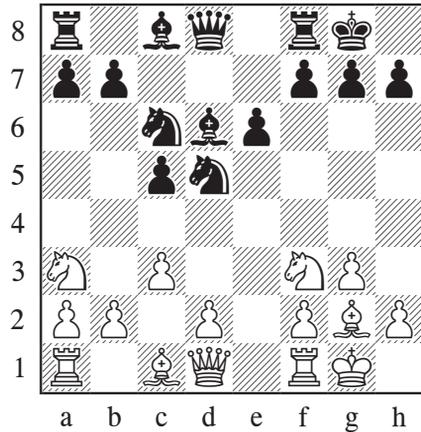
A natural move, which is mostly employed by players who hate too much theory. So, if you are playing one of them, please beware!

5... ♘c6 6. ♙g2 d6 7. exd6 ♙xd6 8. 0-0 0-0

After liquidating the e5-pawn Black is certainly fine, but he shouldn't relax.

White may continue with either C1) 9. ♘a3 or C2) 9.d4.

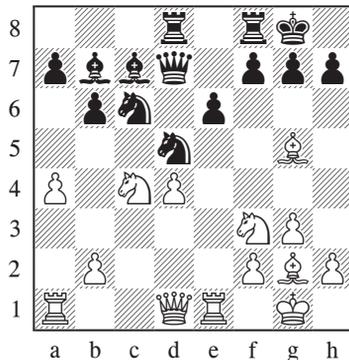
C1) 9. ♘a3



This slow move can be answered in two ways: retreating the d6-bishop to either c7 or e7. Needless to say that both treatments are okay, though I will give the latter move as my main line.

9... ♙e7

9...b6 10. ♘c4 ♙c7 11. ♞e1 (11.d3 ♙b7 12. ♞c2 h6 13. ♙d2 ♞d7 14. ♞fe1 ♞ad8= was also equal in Erenburg – Jakovenko, Oropesa del Mar 2001.) 11... ♙b7 12. a4 ♞d7 13. d4 cxd4 14. cxd4 ♞ad8 15. ♙g5 So far, this is Lupu – Florescu, Romania 1994.

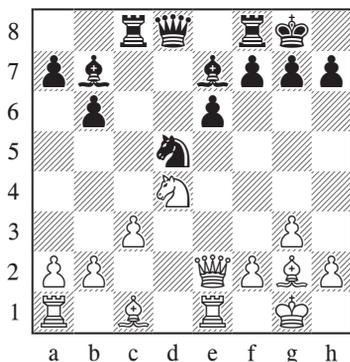


15...f6!?N 16. ♙d2 ♞fe8= Although objectively

equal, I would like Black's position in actual play. The manoeuvre ...♘c6-e7-f5 is on the cards, while White is hard pressed to find a constructive plan.

10.d3

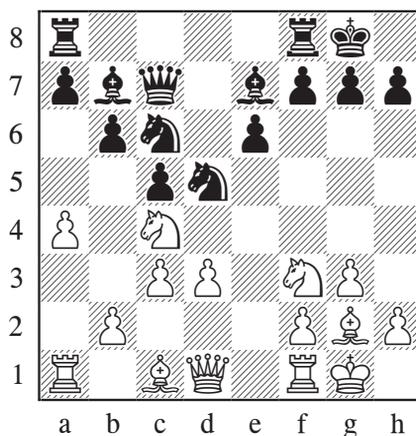
In case of 10.♞e1 (preventing ...e5, as 10.♘c2 e5 is quite okay for the second player), Black plays normal moves and gets a nice position: 10...b6 11.♘c2 ♘b7 12.d4 cxd4 13.♘fxd4 ♘xd4 14.♘xd4 ♞c8 15.♞e2 This was Deviatkin – B. Savchenko, St Petersburg 2009, when most accurate was:



15...♞f6!N Putting the question to the knight on d4, with complete equality. It is possible to take this position a bit further: 16.♞d1 ♞d7 17.♞g4 ♞fd8 18.♞g5 ♞xg5 19.♞xg5 h6 20.♞e5 ♘f6= After the exchange of light-squared bishops, the white monarch becomes weaker, and this renders White's pawn preponderance on the queenside unimportant; Black will always have counterplay by harassing His Majesty, one way or another.

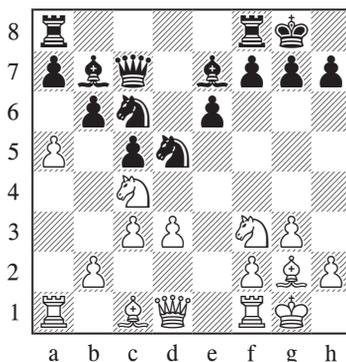
10...b6 11.♘c4 ♘b7 12.a4 ♞c7

Black's position is harmonious, and his slightly superior pawn structure means that he can never be worse. The next step is to place the rooks on the central files.



13.♞e2!?

A friend pointed out to me that White can already play 13.a5 here, when I think one possible reply for Black is:



13...b5N 14.a6 ♞c8 15.♘e3 ♘f6!⇌ A complicated position has arisen, though it is not unfavourable for us.

When the pawn is on e6, defending the d5-knight, the following queen sally looks rather harmless: 13.♞b3 a6! To prevent a4-a5. 14.♞g5 ♞ab8 15.♞fe1 (15.♞xe7 ♘xc7) 15...♞fd8 16.♞xe7



16...dxc7!? Playable, albeit not forced.
 17. ♖xb6 ♗xb6 18. ♘xb6 ♖a5! 19. ♘c4 ♘xc4
 20. dxc4 ♙xf3 21. ♙xf3 ♗xb2 22. ♗ad1 ♗xd1
 23. ♗xd1 g6=

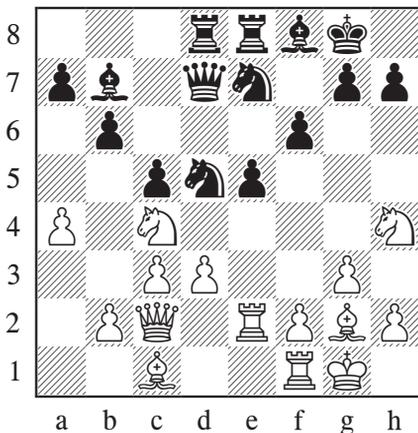
13...♗ad8 14. ♙d2 ♗fe8 15. ♗ae1 ♙f8 16. ♙g5
 f6 17. ♙c1 e5 18. ♘h4 ♗d7 19. ♗c2 ♘ce7=

Black has the somewhat easier game, though objectively the chances are approximately balanced. We will follow a correspondence game to verify this assessment:

20. ♗e2

This may actually not be best.

20. ♙e4!N g6 21. ♗d1 ♙c6 22. b3 ♙g7
 23. ♗fe1= would have kept the position equal by maximizing White's activity.



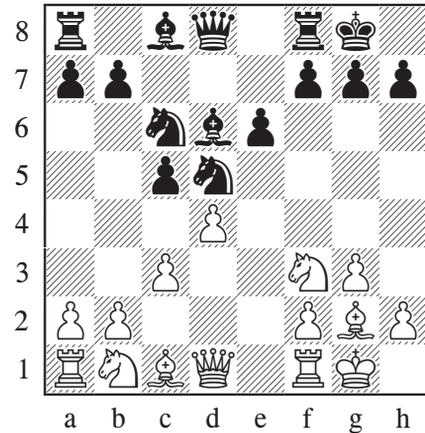
20...g5!?

20...♙c6!?N 21. b3 a6!̄, intending ...b5, seems to lead to an advantage for Black.

21. ♘f3 ♙g7 22. ♗b3 g4 23. ♘h4 ♙c6 24. a5
 ♘h8 25. axb6 axb6 26. ♗fe1 b5̄

Black was doing fine in Chopin – Bertrand, corr. 1994.

C2) 9.d4



Obviously, White can only hope for an advantage by fighting for the centre.

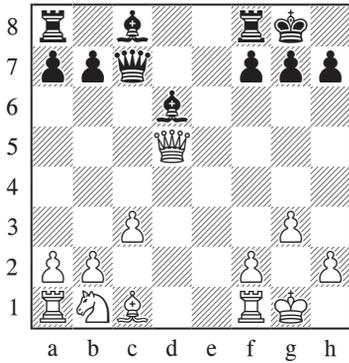
9...cxd4 10. ♘xd4

Weaker is 10.cxd4 b6 11. ♘c3 ♘ce7!̄?̄ when, if anything, Black is slightly better. I do not see how White can generate threats on either side of the board, while Black's firm control over d5 is a long-term asset.

10...♘xd4 11. ♗xd4 ♗c7 12. ♘d2

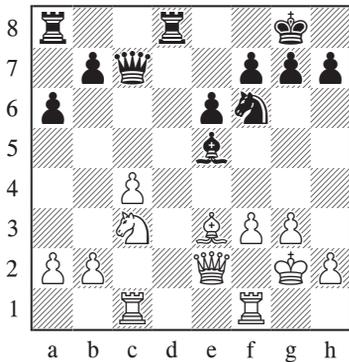
This is the standard developing move in the position.

12. ♙xd5 exd5 13. ♗xd5?! (If I were White, I would have chosen 13. ♙e3!̄?N̄ with better hopes of weathering the storm.)



13...♔h3 14.♖e1 ♜ae8 15.♙e3 ♞e5 16.♞f3 ♞c8 (16...h5!?) 17.♘d2 ♞fe8↑ Black was certainly the one dictating events in Ziffer – Learte Pastor, corr. 2004. However, I would like to point out that this is not an automatic win for Black.

12.c4 has been played by Deviatkin, a man who knows his way around in the 2.c3 variation, so it should be treated with respect. 12...♘f6 13.♘c3 ♙d7 14.♙e3 (14.♖d1 ♙e5=) 14...♙e5 15.♞d3 ♞fd8 16.♞ac1 ♙c6 17.♞e2 ♙xg2 18.♔xg2 a6 19.f3 This was played in Deviatkin – Tregubov, Dagomys 2009, and now I recommend:



19...♞ac8!N 20.♞fd1 (20.b3 b5!?! or 20...♙xc3=) 20...♞xd1 21.♘xd1 h5!?! 22.♘f2 h4!?! With good counterplay for Black. Once more, the exchange of light-squared bishops has weakened the position of the white king, and the advance of the h-pawn hurries to

exploit this fact by creating a weakness on g3 to pile up on. A sample line showing how things might evolve is: 23.♘d3 hxg3 24.f4 ♙d6 25.hxg3 ♞d8 26.♙f2 ♙f8 27.♘e5 ♘d7 28.♞d1 ♘xe5 29.♞xd8 ♞xd8 30.♞xe5 ♞d2=

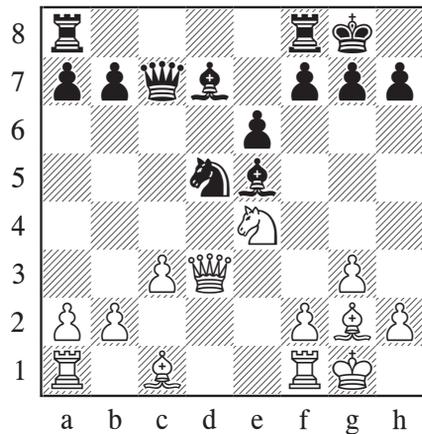
12...♙d7 13.♘e4

13.♘c4?! ♙c5 is already a bit better for Black.

13...♙e5

An important moment, with two possibilities for White: the older C21) 14.♞d3 or the fashionable C22) 14.♞c5!?

C21) 14.♞d3



14...a6=

This natural move has been tested in a number of games.

14...♞ad8 adheres to the rule of placing a rook opposite to the enemy queen. Efim Petrovic Geller used to tell me how important this rule is in chess, and I must admit that this and other teachings of his, no matter how simple they may appear now, significantly helped me to evolve as a player. After 14...♞ad8 I analysed several possibilities for White, concluding that none of them offer the first player any chances for an advantage. What follows is a summary

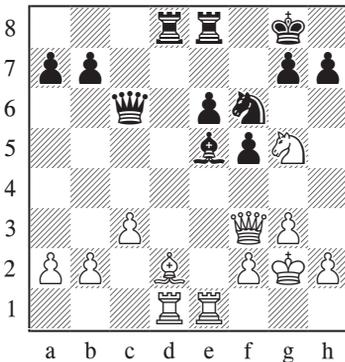
of my analysis, comprising what I consider the most important points for the readers:



a) 15. ♖g5?! g6 16. ♖e1 ♖c6 17. ♗e2 ♗g7

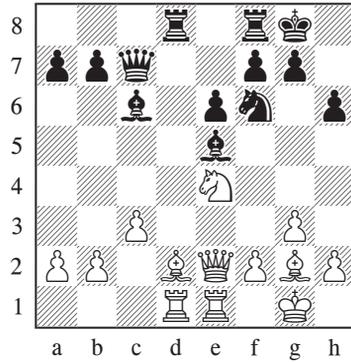
b) 15. f4 ♗b6†! 16. ♔h1! (16. ♖f2 f5!) 16... ♖b8! 17. c4! (17. ♗c2 ♖c6) 17... ♗e7!∞ leaves Black with a good game; he would like to place his bishop on c6 and knight on f5.

c) I also analysed the move 15. ♗g5N which, although untested, seemed logical to me. After 15...f6 16. ♗d2 f5! 17. ♗g5 ♗f6 18. ♖f1 (18. ♗e2 ♗d6!) 18... ♖c6 19. ♗e2 ♗xg2 20. ♔xg2 (20. ♗xe6? ♗c6 21. ♗xd8 ♖xd8+) 20... ♖fe8 21. ♖ad1 ♗c6† 22. ♗f3 (22. ♗f3 ♖c7=)



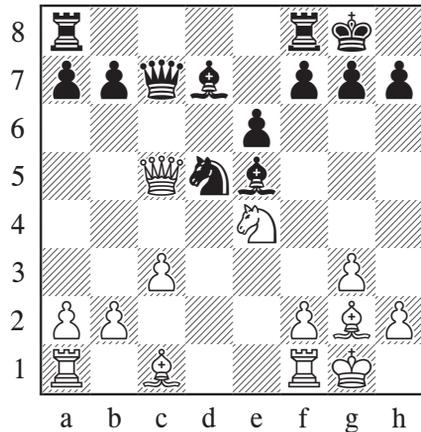
22... ♖d5! Black reaches comfortable equality. A nice tactical point is: 23. b3 (23. ♖c1 is answered by 23... ♖xd1 24. ♖xd1 ♗a6! 25. ♗h3 ♗b6 26. ♗f4 ♗xf4 27. ♗xf4 ♗c6† 28. ♗f3 ♗e4= with balanced play.) 23... ♖xd2 24. ♗xc6 bxc6 25. ♖xd2 ♖xc3=

d) 15. ♖e1 is by far the main line. After 15... ♖c6 16. ♗e2 (16. ♗c2?! h6! ♖) 16... h6! 17. ♗d2 ♗f6 18. ♖ad1 Black has a choice of routes to a draw:



18... ♗xe4 (18... ♗d5!N 19. ♗xf6† ♖xf6 20. ♗xd5 ♖xd5 21. ♗f4 ♗c6 22. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 23. c4 ♗a5 24. b3 ♖d8 25. ♖e3=) 19. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 20. ♗xe4 ♖f6 21. ♖e3 a6 22. ♗g4 ♗a5 23. a3 ♗b5 24. ♖c1 ♖g5 25. c4 ♗b3 26. ♖xg5= The players shook hands in Rozentalis – Akopian, Philadelphia 1994.

C22) 14. ♗c5!?



White's latest attempt, seeking to transfer play into an ending where he hopes his 3–2 queenside pawn majority might prove of significance.

14... ♗b8!

Houdini also gives this move the seal of approval, so I will not analyse any others.

15. ♖c4

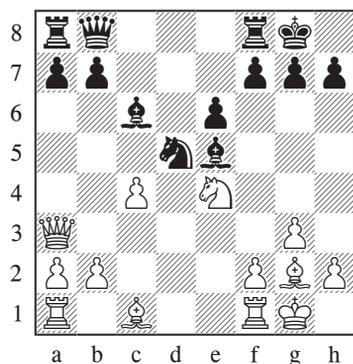
The least committal in my opinion, but there are alternatives:

15.f4 creates weaknesses around the white king without gaining anything substantial in return. After 15...♙c7 16.♙h1 ♙b6 17.♖d6 ♙b5!? 18.♖xb8 ♖axb8 19.♙e1 ♙c6!? I prefer Black, if only slightly. The idea is simply ...♖fd8 followed by ...♙e7-f5, maximizing the activity of all the black pieces.

15.♖a3 ♙c6! 16.c4N

16.f4 ♙f6! 17.♙xf6† ♙xf6 18.♙xc6 bxc6 19.♙e3 ♖b5 is slightly better for Black, at least in human chess.

16.♙d2 can be met by 16...♙b6!, as in Van Dooren – Coenen, Maastricht 2015.



16...♙b6! 17.♖b3 ♖c7 18.♙e3 ♖ad8

The looming positional idea of ...♙a4 gives Black a slight edge. For example:

19.♖fe1!

19.♖fc1?! ♙a4 20.♖ab1 b6! is worse.

19...♙a4 20.♖e2 b6 21.♖c1 ♖c8 22.f4!

22.c5 ♖a6

22...♙d4 23.♖d2 e5!?

23...♙xe3† 24.♖xe3 ♖xd2 25.♖xd2 ♙xe4

26.♙xe4 ♙c5 (26...♖d8 27.♖c2) 27.♙f3

♖d8 28.♖e2 shouldn't be worse for White.

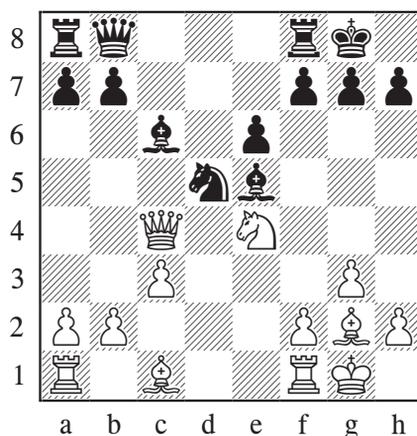
24.♙xd4 ♖xd4 25.♖xd4 exd4 26.♖d3 ♖d8 27.b3 ♙c5 28.♙xc5 bxc5 29.♖e1 ♙xg2 30.♙xg2 ♖a6 31.♖e2 g6

Black has the nicer position, but with careful play White should eventually draw.

15...♙c6

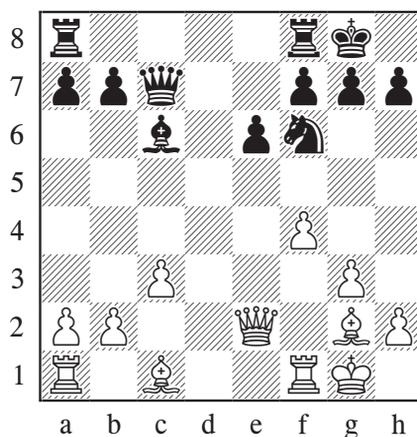
This centralizing move looks best.

After 15...a6 16.♖e2 ♖c7 17.c4 ♙f6 18.♙xf6† ♙xf6 19.♙f4 e5 20.♙e3 ♙c6 I slightly prefer White, as I don't like to have my pawn on e5.



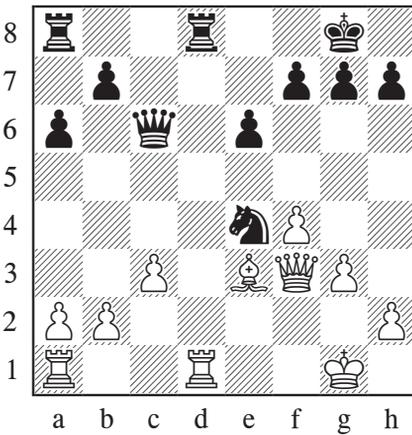
16.♖e2 ♖c7 17.f4 ♙f6 18.♙xf6† ♙xf6

With a balanced position. One way to continue would be:



19.♙e3 ♜xg2 20.♖xg2 ♚c6† 21.♗f3 ♘e4
22.♞fd1 ♞fd8 23.♜g1 a6

Conclusion



A draw was agreed here in Garagulya – Ionov, Smolensk 2000, though a decent amount of play remains. I would take Black: he has the better minor piece, and White's queenside pawn majority is idle for the time being.

This chapter dealt with less common 5th move tries for White after 1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.♘f3 e6. The most dangerous of these is 5.g3, where the first player hopes to take the game away from well-trodden theoretical paths. After the further continuation 5...♘c6 6.♙g2 d6 7.exd6 ♙xd6 8.0–0 0–0 Black no longer has to worry about White's central e-pawn, but he should still proceed with care. There are several positional ideas that Black should familiarize himself with, but the second player can look forward to a safe game with chances to play for more.