

THE
RICHTER-RAUZER
REBORN

THE KOZUL VARIATION

by
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and
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KEY TO SYMBOLS

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+ -	White has a decisive advantage
- +	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
△	with the idea of
▷	better is
≤	worse is
N	novelty
+	check
#	mate

FOREWORD

Four years have passed since the first edition of our *Richter-Rauzer Reborn* book and if we look at the recent past, we can see that this variation of the Sicilian has been gaining more and more popularity and is very often seen in tournament practice. The fact that this opening has become part of a standard repertoire against 1.e4 for many top players such as Rapport, Dubov, Li Chao, Korobov, Gupta, Vovk etc. speaks for itself about the quality and the fascination of the variation and also about the many possibilities it offers. It's hard to pinpoint the real reasons for this popularity, but it's likely that the answer lies in the complexity of the positions that arise on the board and the large number of new ideas, which we will talk about in this book.

Exactly that was a motive and an additional impulse for GM Alojzije Jankovic and myself to write this new material on the Richter-Rauzer as an update to our first book. The basic idea of the book is to give an overview of theoretical novelties and new ideas in the positions we have already dealt with, and also to give you some new lines and suggestions that may be particularly interesting to players who are in the process of creating a repertoire for Black. In particular, I would like to point out the fact that our variation could be seen in games of the world's best players such as Fabiano Caruana and the World Champion himself, Magnus Carlsen, which makes us proud. It is a great recommendation and boost for this opening so in the book we have especially considered the games of the World Champion Carlsen and his 2018 challenger, Caruana.

In the main lines, the new position that we analyse is the one that arises when White instead of 12.♖xc6 plays 12.♖ce2. It is in this line that we can see some new and very original ideas, for example when White plays 13.h4!?. Although in that line we are often mixing with already known positions, there are some positions when new possibilities and new plans are emerging. The same goes for 10.♗f3.

As for the known positions we have already analysed, we have tried to bring a complete overview of all the latest ideas and theoretical news from tournament practice. As might be expected, practical games have brought many new ideas and different ways of treating certain positions. It was certainly very interesting to see the Anand-Carlsen game in which the World Champion

showed a completely new way of playing with Black! It should be said that some positions have endured the test of tournament combat, but there are also positions in which White players have found ways to increase the pressure, so then we needed to look for additional ideas and analyses as to how to react as Black.

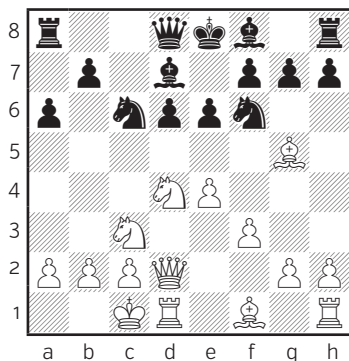
I will mention again that, as before, with the necessity of using the help of the engine, the emphasis was always on the practical aspect of the position. Very often, therefore, our assessment of the positions as well as suggestions for further play were not just the result of engines' advice, but our personal estimation based on years of experience and tournament practice. This also means that when you are reading this book and come to a moment when lines are branching over one another, our main move suggestion does not necessarily mean that it is absolutely the best or most-played continuation. There is often a situation where there are moves of equal strength and it's just a matter of your taste and style to choose one. In that sense, our recommendations are the result of a subjective assessment based on previous knowledge and experience. So whenever we thought it necessary, we included textual explanations of critical positions to better explain the dangers that lie in the positions and the opponent's threats, and give the plan and recipe for further play. That is precisely the main concept of our entire book, along with the inevitable number of moves and lines to help the reader to dig, as much as possible, into the nature and essence of the position. When this is achieved then it is much easier at the board to understand things in the right way and accordingly make the correct decisions. I believe and hope that to all present and future admirers of the Richter-Rauzer variation this book will prove to be a valuable asset.

Zdenko Kozul
November 2019

CHAPTER 1

THE KOZUL VARIATION WITH 9.f3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6
6.♙g5 e6 7.♚d2 a6 8.o-o-o ♙d7 9.f3



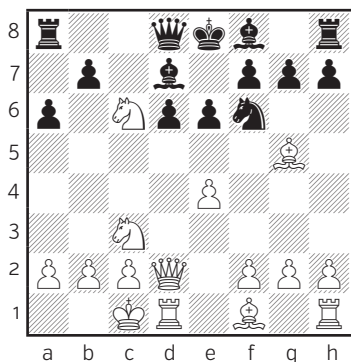
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1

9. ♖xc6 alternative

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4
 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 ♘c6 6. ♙g5 e6 7. ♚d2 a6
 8. o-o-o ♙d7 9. ♖xc6



When players create an opening repertoire, in addition to the main line they have to deal with possible deviations.

In this section, we therefore analyse this line which may not occur so often, yet in the database we can find a lot of strong grandmasters' games.

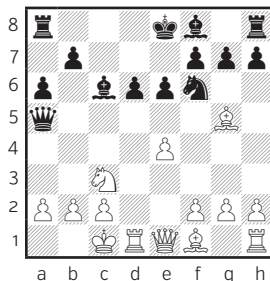
The basic idea is that White quickly creates threats in the centre with e4–e5 or ♘d5. In our opinion, the whole line is not particularly dangerous for Black, but it hides some traps and it is always useful to be prepared in advance against such surprises.

9... ♙xc6

Trying to create a strong pawn mass in the centre with 9...bxc6?! is bad due to 10.e5! dxe5 11. ♙xf6 gxf6 12. ♘e4↑ and Black was already in trouble in Haznedaroglu, K (2395)-Lupulescu, C (2555) Istanbul 2004.

10. ♚e1 h6

If we check a database we will find that the main move is 10... ♙a5.

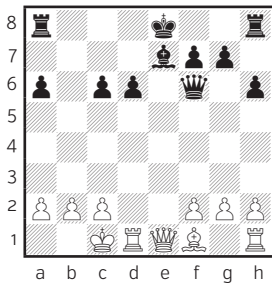


However, our idea was not to automatically follow well-known theory, but that, on the basis of our experience and understanding of these positions, we should give some new ideas and suggestions on how to deal with such positions. After all, that was the whole concept of the book. Thus, in this position we're going in a completely new way. The move ...h6 forces White to immediately define his intentions with the bishop.

11. ♙f4

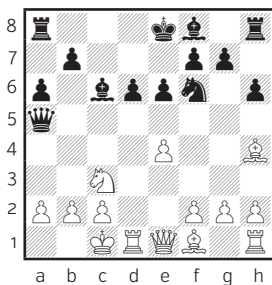
This seems the most logical, but let's look at other possibilities:

a) In case of 11. ♖xf6 Black benefits from the fact that now he is not obligated to spoil his pawn structure by recapturing with the g-pawn. 11... ♕xf6 12. ♖d5 exd5 (He can also play 12... ♕d8!?) 13. exd5+ ♖e7 14. dxc6 bxc6



A position with opposite-coloured bishops has arisen in which White has a somewhat healthier pawn structure. However, in this case it may even be beneficial to Black because he can use the open b-file to quickly organize pressure against White's king.

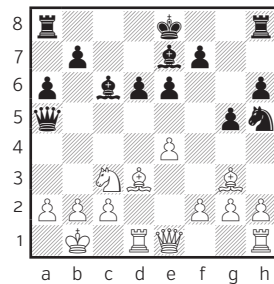
b) 11. ♖h4 ♕a5



The first question that arises is: what is the difference compared to the well-known theory when Black plays the immediate 10... ♕a5? If White now takes on f6 there is no real difference (whether the black pawn is on h7 or h6 is not so important). But the idea comes to the fore in other lines, connected with the move ...g7-g5. Especially in the positions where White plays f2-f4, the move ...g7-g5 can be very strong. 12. ♖d5!? This move leads to wild complications. It is possible since the bishop is no longer on g5.

b1) 12. ♖d3 g5 13. ♖g3 ♖h5 The simplest. After removing the opponent's dark-squared bishop Black should not have any problems.

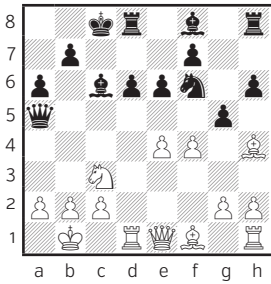
b2) 12. ♖b1 A logical move. 12... ♖e7 13. ♖d3 And now, although engines suggest various queen moves, our proposal in this position is 13...g5! 14. ♖g3 ♖h5



15. ♖xd6 A small tactical trick, but Black is ready for it. 15... ♖xd6

16. ♖e2 ♜f4 17. ♜xd6 ♖c5 18. ♖d2
 (Black is also fine after 18. ♜d2
 ♜xg2 19. ♖d1 ♜e7 20. ♖d3 ♜f4.)
 18... ♜xe2 (More entertaining is
 18... ♖xf2!?) 19. ♜xe2 ♖xe4=.

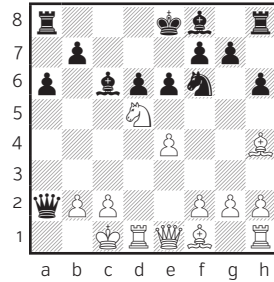
b3) If White plays 12.f4 then Black
 should react with 12...o-o-o (Here
 12...g5? is a mistake because of
 13. ♜d5!±.) 13. ♜b1 (Black is bet-
 ter in case of 13.e5 dxe5 14. ♜xd8+
 ♖xd8 15.fxe5 g5 16. ♖g3 — or
 16.exf6 gxh4 17. ♖xh4 ♜g8± — 16...
 ♜h5±.) 13...g5±



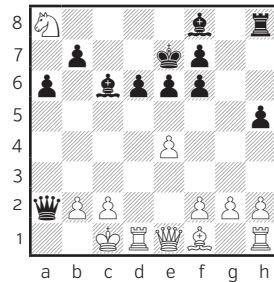
Now is the right moment for our
 key move! Black gets control of the
 e5-square for one of his pieces and
 he has excellent prospects!

b4) We have already mentioned
 the possibility 12. ♖xf6 gxf6= which can also arise in the theo-
 retical main line after 10... ♖a5.
 Black's pawn is now on h6 instead
 of h7, but that difference is not
 significantly important. In gen-
 eral, we think that after castling
 queenside black has a comfortable
 position.

12... ♖xa2!



Black goes all-in! (If Black doesn't
 want to enter complications he can
 equalize with 12... ♖xe1 13. ♜xf6+
 gxf6 14. ♜xe1 ♖e7= or even 14... ♜e7.)
 13. ♖xf6 (The immediate 13. ♜c7+? is
 bad due to 13... ♜d7 14. ♜xa8 ♜xe4±;
 and Black also has the initiative af-
 ter 13. ♜xf6+ gxf6 14. ♖xf6 ♜g8±.)
 13...gxf6 14. ♜c7+ ♜e7 15. ♜xa8 h5!

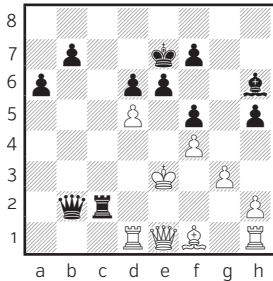


Black does not want to even think
 about catching the knight on
 a8 — his main goal is the enemy
 king! 16.f4 ♖h6 17.g3 ♖a1+ 18. ♜d2
 ♖xb2 19. ♜c7 Black has only two
 pawns for the rook, but his initia-
 tive is very dangerous. 19... ♜c8

[Black can try 19... ♖b4+!? 20. ♜c1
 ♖a3+ 21. ♜b1∞ but it looks as

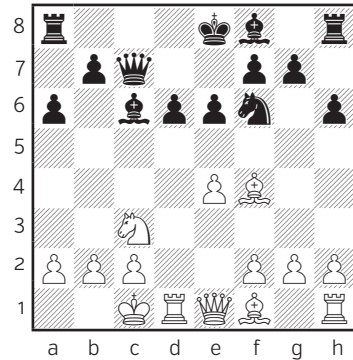
though White's king is now somewhat safer. (21.♔d2? is a mistake because of 21...♚a5+.)

20.♘d5+ (in case of 20.♘xa6 Black plays 20...♙a4!?) 20...♙xd5 21.exd5 ♖xc2+ 22.♚e3 f5



Even after many exchanges White's pieces still cannot breathe. His pieces are still on the initial squares and it is not easy to develop. 23.♙d3 (White can't hide his king, e.g. 23.♚f3? e5 24.♙e2 e4+ 25.♚f2 ♙g7+ and now Black's a-pawn can become a strong asset!; in case of 23.♖b1 Black follows up with 23...♚a3+ 24.♙d3 ♚c5+ 25.♚f3 ♚xd5+ 26.♚e3 ♚c5+ 27.♚f3 ♚c6+ 28.♚e3 and Black can claim a draw or continue playing after 28...♖c3!; we need also to check 23.dxe6, when Black plays 23...♙g7! and holds the initiative after 24.♚f3 ♚b6→.) 23...♚e5+ 24.♚f3 ♚xd5+ 25.♚e3 ♚c5+ And Black has at least a draw, but he can also try to muddy the waters.

11...♚c7

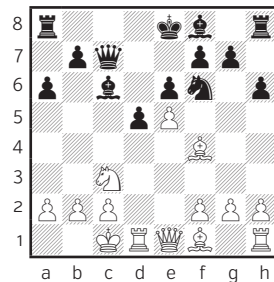


12.h4

This looks the most concrete. It enables the bishop to remain on the diagonal h2–b8 and sometimes the h1-rook can quickly enter the game. Let's look at other possibilities.

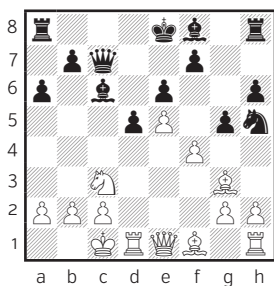
a) Nothing is achieved with 12.e5 dxe5

[It's matter of taste which position Black would choose. Since the e5-pawn is pinned Black can try 12...d5!?



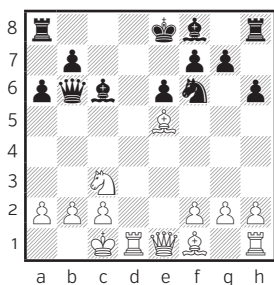
13.♙g3?! After this natural move, Black gains the initiative. (13.♚b1 ♘d7 14.♙g3∞ should be the best

White can achieve, with an unclear position, Bauer, T (2335)-Dobos, J (2340) Szekszard 1993.) 13... ♖h5 14.f4 g5! ↑



15.fxg5 (15.f5 doesn't change much: 15... ♖xg3 16. ♖xg3 0-0-0 Jansa, V (2475)-Radulov, I (2505) Smederevska Palanka 1982.) 15... ♖xg3 16.hxg3 ♔g7 ♞ Pokojowczyk, J (2420)-Radulov, I (2480) Polanica Zdroj 1982.]

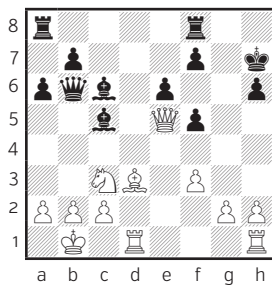
13. ♔xe5 ♖b6



14.f3 (Black shouldn't be worried after 14. ♔xf6 gxf6 15. ♖e4 ♔e7 ♞ since with the following ... ♞d8 he will be fine.) 14... ♔e7 15. ♖b1 0-0 16. ♖g3

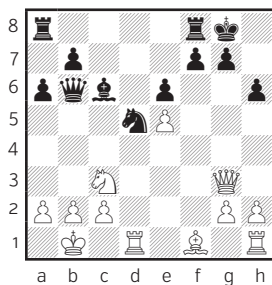
[Another possibility is 16. ♔d4 ♔c5 This is an attempt to play for

a win! Black believes that there are no real threats to his king. (16... ♖c7 17. ♔e5 is move repetition) 17. ♔xf6 gxf6 18. ♖g3+ ♖h7 19. ♔d3+ f5 20. ♖e5∞



Indeed we can see that White has no real threats. If Black manages to exchange the queens he will have a nice advantage. The position is from the game Garcia, G (2367)-Finegold, B (2494) Wheeling 2011.]

16... ♖h5!? (Also after the simple 16... ♞fd8= it is evident that Black has managed to develop harmoniously.) 17. ♖h3 ♔f6 18.f4 ♔xe5 19.fxe5 ♖f4 20. ♖g3 ♖d5

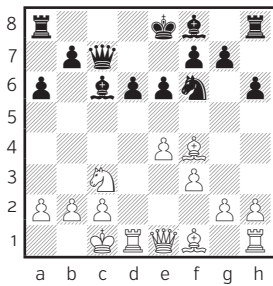


21. ♖xd5 ♔xd5= (Black was fine also after 21...exd5 22. ♔d3 ♞ae8 23. ♞hf1

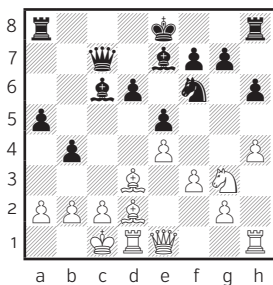
♙c7 24. ♖de1 ♜e6 25. ♗f5 ♜e7 26. e6 ♙xg3= in Lau, R (2410)-Doncevic, D (2340) Budapest 1985).

b) One option for White is to play 12. ♘d5, but after 12... ♗xd5 13. exd5 e5= White's clumsy bishop on f4 gives Black an important tempo to finish his kingside development (Black can also insert 13... ♖c8!?).

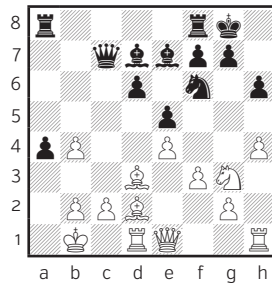
c) White can try 12.f3 as well, but in this type of position the bishop is badly placed on f4 and Black will exploit that.



12... ♗e7 13. h4 b5 Black delays castling and first defines things on the other wing. 14. ♗d3 b4 15. ♘e2 e5 16. ♗d2 a5 17. ♘g3 And now, it was the right moment for



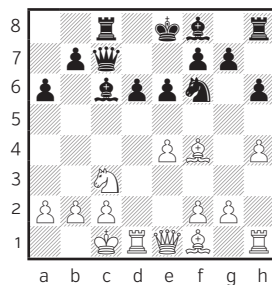
17...b3!! It is important that White cannot take with the c-pawn! (In the game Arencibia Rodriguez, W (2480)-San Segundo Carrillo, P (2485) Moscow 1994, Black failed to spot that blow and quickly got into difficulties after 17... ♗d7 18. ♖b1 o-o 19. ♘f5 ♗xf5 20. exf5↑.) 18. axb3 a4 19. b4 ♗d7 20. ♖b1 o-o=



Every true Sicilian player would be happy with this compensation! With the pawn sacrifice play switches to the queenside and Black will have enough time to activate all his pieces.

12... ♗e7

A good alternative is 12... ♖c8!? with the threat of ... ♗xe4.

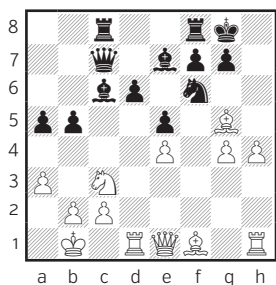


13.f3 e5 14.♔d2 b5 15.a3 A standard reaction. White wants to keep the knight on c3, hoping that Black will not be able to organize the ...b5–b4 break.

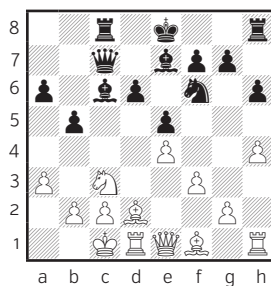
[A position with chances for both sides results from 15.♔d3 b4 16.♘d5 (In case of 16.♘e2!? Black can play 16...♔a4 17.b3 ♕b5 18.♖b1 d5∞ with messy play.) 16...♘xd5 17.exd5 ♕xd5 18.♕xb4∞.]

15... ♕e7

[Tempting is 15...h5 to stop White's pawns straight away. Next could follow 16.♕g5 ♕e7 17.♖b1 A good prophylactic move which has a hidden idea. 17...o–o 18.g4! hxg4 19.fxg4 a5 It looks like everything is OK for Black and that he is on time with his counterplay, but as we shall see, things are not so simple!



20. ♕xf6 ♕xf6 21. ♕xb5 ♕xb5 22. ♘xb5 ♖xc2+ 23. ♖a1↑ White had this position in mind when playing his 17th move. His knight will dominate Black's bishop.]



16.♖b1 (On the aggressive 16.g4 Black would react with 16...d5↔; and if 16.♔d3 then Black should play 16...h5, not allowing White to push g2–g4. 17.♕g5 ♖b8↔ Black has good counterplay. In a game Jansa-Martinovic, back in 1984, Black first played ...♖f8 and only then ...♖b8, which was an unnecessary delay.) 16...h5∞ We think that this is the most practical way. Black buys time to prepare the ...b5–b4 push. Likewise, Black should not castle prematurely since it automatically gives the opponent a clear game plan! The position is unclear.

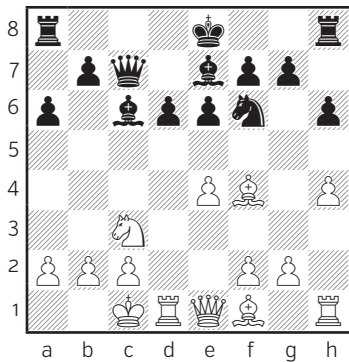
a) White is better prepared for opening the centre after 16...d5? 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♕xd5 and now he has the simple 19.♕c3±.

b) We have already mentioned that there is no need to hurry with castling; nevertheless, let's take a look at how things could develop in that case. 16...o–o 17.g4 a5 18.g5 ♘h5 (Unfortunately, the piece sacrifice does not work:

18...b4 19.gxf6 ♖xf6 20.♗a2 ♙a4
21.♙a1 ♙xc2 22.♞c1± and Black
doesn't have enough compensa-
tion.) 19.gxh6 b4 20.hxg7 ♞fe8 It
looks like Black is taking the ini-
tiative, but White has the strong
21.♞e3! bxc3 22. ♙xc3 ♗f4 23.h5∞
and it's clear that he has powerful
compensation!

c) Black can also try 16...♞b8!? and
if 17.g4 then 17...a5 but the impres-
sion is that White's kingside play
is more concrete.

Note that 12...e5!? can also be tested.
Now back to 12... ♙e7.

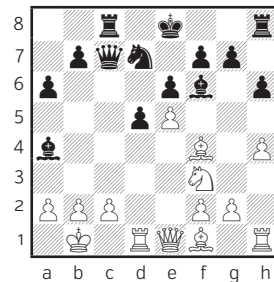


13.e5

An attempt to activate the rook
with 13.♞h3 won't bring anything
good for White after 13...e5 (13...b5!?)
14. ♙d2 b5↖ since now he must de-
cide how to defend the e4-pawn
and then the move ♞h3 looks like
a waste of time.

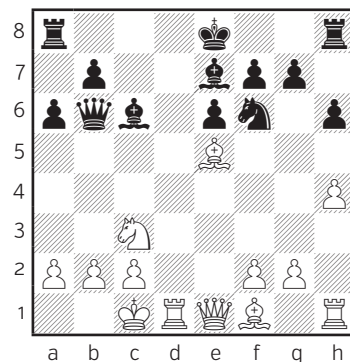
13...dxe5!

As in similar positions, Black can
try 13...d5. 14.♗e2 (Now 14.♞h3!?
is a legitimate plan 14...♗d7 15.♙b1
♗c5 16.h5 o-o-o 17.♗e2 ♙b5 18.g4±
as in Kotronias, V (2590)-Shirov, A
(2685) Chalkidiki 1993.) 14...♗d7
15.♗d4 ♙f6 (an interesting possibil-
ity is 15... ♙b5!?) 16.♗f3♗ ♞c8 17.♙b1
♙a4∞



This was seen in Jansa, V (2445)-Tuk-
makov, V (2590) Bor 1983. The posi-
tion is by no means clear. White will
yield the c2-pawn, but Black will re-
main with development problems.

14. ♙xe5 ♞b6↖



This occurred in Psakhis, L (2570) -Ivanchuk, V (2665) Moscow 1990. The next moves are castling and rook to the d-file. Finally, we can summarize things from this line. In different lines and sub-lines we have analysed the positions that could occur so that the reader could get a clearer picture of what to expect in a tournament game.

The overall conclusion is that the Black is OK, but there are positions that can be dangerous. It is therefore very important to get a feel for the position, which then makes it easier to take important decisions in the game, such as: when it is dangerous to castle and when it is not, when should you break in the centre with d6–d5, or when to go for a timely attack on the queenside.

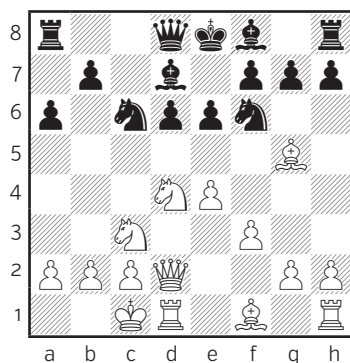
2

9...h6 10. ♕e3 b5 11. ♖b1

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 ♘c6 6. ♕g5 e6 7. ♔d2 a6 8.0–0–0 ♕d7 9.f3

In this chapter we analyse positions that differ greatly in character from most positions we have seen in the book. Immediately you can notice a great similarity with the English Attack from the Sicilian Najdorf. However, there is an important dif-

ference — Black has already developed his knight to c6 and bishop to d7 (in standard positions of the English Attack the bishop usually goes to b7 and the knight often stays on b8 for a while).

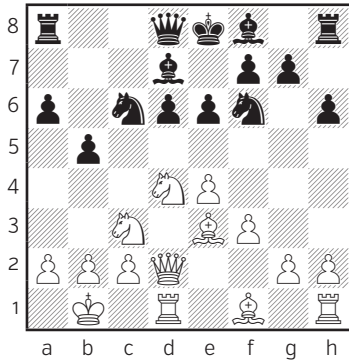


9...h6

This is our current recommendation, which will especially suit players who prefer a complicated struggle. Immediately it should be said that Black has several (equally good) possibilities. In first place is 9... ♕e7 which is, according to the database, the main line.

Then, a very common continuation is 9...b5, and so is 9... ♖c8; Black can also play 9... ♔c7. Kozul: “I would like to mention that in my tournament practice I have tried all of these moves and it is difficult, on the basis of that experience, to say which move is objectively the best.” 9... ♘xd4!? is Carlsen’s interesting new move — see subchapters 9 and 10.

10. ♖e3 b5 11. ♔b1!?



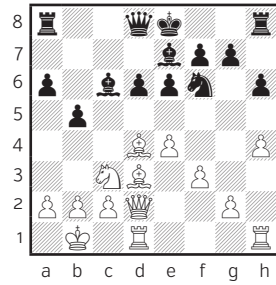
A useful prophylactic move which is often played with the idea of waiting to see what Black will do next.

Since all the light pieces will remain on the board, we will have a totally different kind of position in comparison to previous ones.

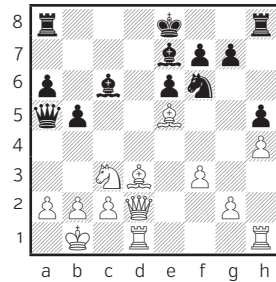
11... ♖e5

a) It's worth noting that Black should be careful with moves such as 11... ♖c7?! since White has the possibility of the piece sacrifice 12. ♖xb5 and after 12...axb5 13. ♖dxb5 ♖b8 14. ♖xd6+ ♖xd6 15. ♖xd6 ♖xd6 16. ♖xd6± there arises a position which can be holdable, but it's certainly not fun to play it since White doesn't risk much.

b) Many games have seen 11... ♖e7, with some strong players on the Black side. There could follow 12. ♖d3 ♖xd4 13. ♖xd4 ♖c6 14.h4

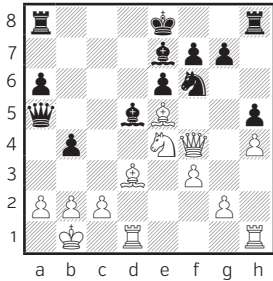


14...h5 (Certainly deserving of attention is 14...e5 15. ♖e3 h5 16. ♖d5 ♖xd5 17.exd5 ♖d7. Engines commonly evaluate this type of position as better for White (0.50–0.60), but I (Kozul) think it is quite acceptable to play. It's just important to note that Black does not have to rush with castling, which could give his opponent the possibility to attack directly with g4.) 15.e5 dxe5 16. ♖xe5 ♖a5



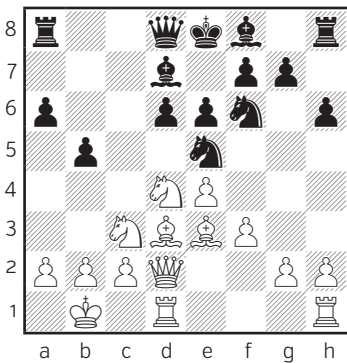
Now White missed a strong move in the game Vallejo Pons, F (2716) -Gharamian, T (2657) Essen 2014. 17. ♖f4! (17. ♖g5 b4 18. ♖xf6 ♖xg5 19. ♖xg5 bxc3 20.b3± In the emerging position, which occurred in the game, White has a small but lasting advantage thanks to the queenside pawn majority as well as the po-

tentially weak pawn on c3.) 17...b4
18. ♖e4 ♙d5



And now White has the very unpleasant 19.c4! bxc3 20. ♖xc3 ♙c6 21. ♙c2±.

12. ♙d3

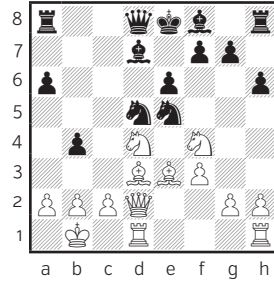


An interesting alternative to 12. f4, which we will investigate in the next subchapter.

12... ♙c7

Black can react with the standard 12...b4 13. ♖ce2 d5, but as we shall see he is not completely ready for this opening of the position (A possible alternative is 13... ♖xd3!?)

14.exd5 (Black is not in danger after 14. ♙f4 ♖c4 15. ♙xc4 dxc4∞.) 14... ♖xd5 15. ♖f4 And now Black has to decide how to proceed. There are many moves with both knights so let's look at them:



15... ♖xe3

a) Exchanging both knights with 15... ♖xd3 16. ♙xd3 (White cannot insert 16. ♖xd5 on account of 16... ♖xb2↖.) 16... ♖xe3 is not good because White has a huge developmental advantage and his knights in the centre are ready for action! 17. ♙xe3 ♙b6 18. ♙e4 o-o-o There is no other choice, Black must try to hide his king. 19. ♖d3 Now White threatens the ♖e5 jump. 19... ♙d6 20.c3↑

