

CANDIDATE MOVES

A Grandmaster's
Method

by

Christian Bauer



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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

PREFACE

Prior to this one, I had written three books dedicated to chess openings. When I was offered the chance to write a book for Thinkers Publishing, I had no particular idea on what to write about within that area and I wanted to try something (a bit — I am not that foolish!) new.

My lazy side prompted me to think that a collection of my games could do the trick, since, based on statistics, among my average of some hundred classical games per year, a certain proportion of them should be of interest. At least I hope.

I found the idea to switch sides. By this, I mean to look at games from White's perspective and then from Black's. A rather interesting concept, as things often appear quite different, depending on the viewpoint. If one searches for videos showing a joint analysis of elite players, one may often see them completely disagree on certain positions, both of them claiming he stood, or would have stood, better here or there. And, more than likely, had the colours been swapped, the very same players would also have preferred "their side"; while the engine found the game more or less balanced from beginning to end :). There is a famous anecdote involving an ex-World Champion, who would label the same position as better for one side or the other, depending on whether he was conducting the White or Black pieces. The justification being: he knew what to do (the plans) for both sides!

On a more serious note, when playing a game, one can hardly expect to be completely objective. Given one's personality, a certain player may have a pessimistic or optimistic tendency, often find his ideas and decisions justified while they are in fact questionable, or vice versa. Looking at a game from White's standpoint and then from Black's, aims, in my view, at diminishing the subjective portion of the analysis, even though one will often naturally feel more sympathy for one camp or the other in a given position.

At some points throughout the book, I make some comparisons with better-known openings, to illustrate where some ideas may have been borrowed from and to facilitate the reader's pattern recognition. For instance, in Bauer-Valles from chapter 4, the position we reached out of the opening had significant

similarities with a certain line from the Trompowsky. I also tried to offer diversity early on in the analysis of these games in order to suit readers of either a solid or a more daring style.

There is, at times, little justification behind some subjective choices. In general, I always try to win. It remains true, however, that decisions made over a chess board by professionals may often be subject to external factors such as prizes, tournament situation or prestige. The result of this is that while I believe my decisions to have been rational, I did not take unconsidered risks to “win at all costs”.

CHAPTER 1. THE INGREDIENTS OF AN EXCHANGE-SACRIFICE

In general, an exchange-sacrifice, when objectively correct, or at the least “interesting” from a practical point of view, doesn’t come out of nowhere. There are, on the contrary, good reasons why in a given situation such a material investment proves justified. These reasons can vary greatly in nature, and sometimes accumulate. For instance, getting a harmonious position, where the pieces are well coordinated, or in order to start an attack faster than if one had decided to care more about material. A psychological aspect is also often attached to an exchange-sacrifice: by investing material, one side acquires activity while his rival tends to turn into “the defender”.

In Bauer-Shengelia, my exchange-sacrifice is to be seen more as a lesser evil than a well-planned material investment. It did, however, have the merit of changing the game’s character, and although White’s compensation wasn’t sufficient, Black’s conversion task proved difficult due to his numerous weaknesses.

Bauer-Bacrot: Here, I would say that sacrificing the exchange was the re-

sult of a gradual process by which White tried to maintain the pressure. My decision (playing 21. ♖b5 — after which there was no turning back) seemed to me the best way to pose Black some real problems. Similarly to my game against Lai, I felt that a more materialistic approach would have given my opponent some respite. Moreover, given the “history” of the game, I believed there was a way for White to maintain his advantage. Some concrete factors aided my decision: White’s space advantage, the great knight on f5, the fact that my opponent’s rooks were lacking open files, and finally his loose queenside pawns.

In Bauer-Hansen, I was at the receiving end of the rather late exchange-sacrifice 22... ♖xf3, which gave Black a pawn and the sounder pawn-structure. The sacrifice itself was correct, but in time-trouble my opponent failed to defend his King carefully enough. I was eventually lucky, in the sense that my counterplay was direct and easy to carry out.

In Bauer-Halkias, the decision to part with an exchange was a fair-

ly light one. In return, White got a pawn, a fearsome bishop-pair and a powerful attack on the enemy King. Had he tried to hang on to his material, unpleasant concessions would have been inevitable.

Bauer-Burmakin: In this game, I wasn't exactly sure of what was going on strategically, both sides disposing of their own strengths. There was certainly some psychology involved behind 21. ♖e5!?, after which Black could no longer continue the plan to transfer his knight to the e4 square. Thus, he had to adapt to the changed nature of the position.

In Lai-Bauer, I regard the White set-up as “inviting” his opponent to attack as early as the opening phase. Indeed, while White is rather solid, the way he develops his pieces allows his opponent to deploy an aggressive configuration: the bishop pair is eyeing the enemy King, the knight on e5 is very well placed, Black also enjoys a semi-open f-file and his queen can join the assault via e8 and h5. For those reasons, Black got tempted to spice things up with the sharp 14... ♕xa3, rather than having to retreat.

The white King stuck in the centre, as well as my desire not to allow my opponent to attack, prompted the moves 15... ♖d8 followed by 17...

♗xd3 in the game Beukema-Bauer. This left Black with a harmonious position with well-coordinated pieces, whereas the vulnerable white King remained an issue for him until the end.

Finally, in Admiraal-Bauer, the compensation was mainly due to Black's firm control over the dark-squares. That, added to the extra-pawn and bishop pair, made Black's position more attractive.

There is a common feature in the aforementioned games (except from in Bauer-Shengelia): the exchange-sacrifice enabled the side with this slight material deficit to seize the initiative.

1

▷ **C. Bauer [2618]**

▶ **D. Shengelia [2523]**

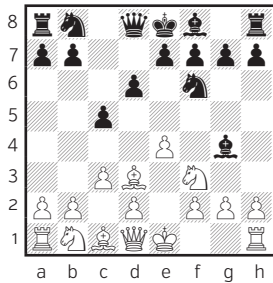
Dresden 2007

FROM WHITE'S POINT OF VIEW

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.c3 ♗f6 4.h3

The aim of this little pawn-move is to avoid ... ♕g4 rather than to tempt Black to grab the central pawn with 4... ♗xe4?? (which fails to 5. ♖a4+, followed by a “thank you!”).

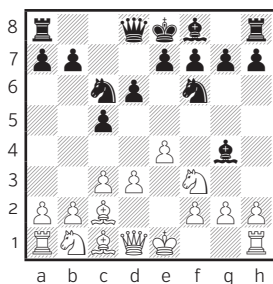
4. ♖d3 with the idea ♖d3-c2 and d2-d4, is playable as well. For instance:
4... ♗g4



5. ♖c2

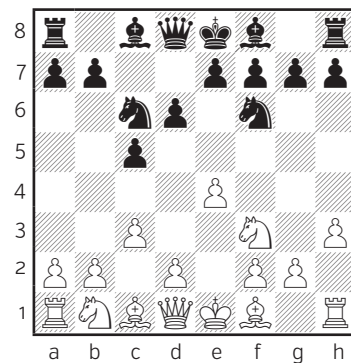
[5.h3 ♖h5 (5... ♗xf3 6. ♖xf3 ♖c6 7. 0-0 ♖d7 8. ♖b5 g6 9. ♖d1 ♖g7= Svidler,P (2735)-Vallejo Pons,F (2686) Monte Carlo (rapid) 2005.) 6. ♖c2 ♖c6 7.d3 e6 8. ♖bd2 d5 9. ♖e2 ♖e7 10. ♖f1 0-0 with equal chances in Svidler,P (2765)-Grischuk,A (2717) Moscow (blitz) 2006. (Instead of his last move, Black could also have altered the pawn-structure by means of 10...c4; or 10... ♖a5, intending 11. ♖d2 c4)]

5... ♖c6 6.d3



6...e6 (6... ♗xf3!? at once seems strange, but if Black wishes to continue with ...g7-g6, it is quite justified. Indeed, after 6...g6 7. ♖bd2 ♖g7 8.h3 ♗xf3 9. ♖xf3, White saves some tempi on preparing the d3-d4 advance. Taking on f3 immediately, Black does not give White time to play ♖bd2 and capture on f3 with the Knight. 7. ♖xf3 g6 8. ♖d2 ♖g7 9. 0-0 0-0 10. ♖e2 b5 11.a3 a5 12. ♖f3 ♖d7 13. ♖d1 ♖b6 14. ♖e3± Nevednichy,V (2590)-Kozul,Z (2597) Warsaw 2013; White disposes of the two Bishops and will eventually achieve d3-d4.) 7. ♖bd2 ♖e7 8.h3 ♖h5 9. ♖e2 ♖c7 10.g4 ♖g6 11. ♖h4 ♖d7= Duda,J (2645)-Gajewski,G (2646) Dresden 2016.

4... ♖c6

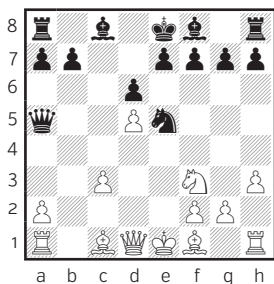


5. ♖d3

While 5.d3 is a bit timid, the gambit 5.d4 has been out of fashion for a long time. 5...cxd4 6.cxd4 ♖xe4 7.d5 ♖a5+ This check is the reason why Black needed to insert ...cxd4 cxd4 (other-

wise, removing the Knight from c6 would have ran into ♔a4+, takes e4).

8. ♖c3 ♗xc3 9. bxc3 ♗e5



10. ♗xe5

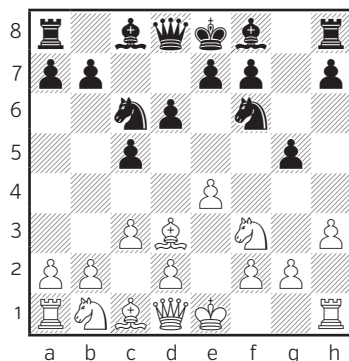
[On 10. ♗b3 Black best reply is 10... ♗xf3+! (Instead 10... ♗d7? 11. ♖e3 gave White enough compensation in Okhotnik,V (2467)-Koepke,C (2404) Austria 2012.) 11. gxf3 ♖d7 with a clear plus.]

10... ♗xc3+ 11. ♖d2 ♗xe5+ 12. ♖e2 g6

[12... ♗xd5!? 13. 0-0 e6 (or 13... e5) should also be better for Black. Even though White will generate some activity, three pawns is a heavy deficit.]

13. 0-0 ♖g7 14. ♖b5+ ♗f8 15. ♗f3 (or 15. ♖c1 ♗xd5+ If Black achieves ...h5, ...♖f6 and ...♗g7 converting the extra material will only be a matter of time.) 15...h5 16. ♖ac1 a6 17. ♖d3 ♖g4! 18. hxc4 hxc4 19. ♗g3 ♗xc3 20. fxc3 ♖d4+ 21. ♖f2 ♗h5+ Kaforos,D (2213)-Banikas,H (2617) Athens 2010.

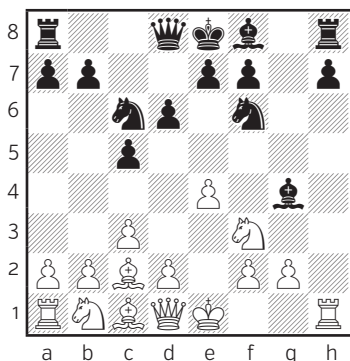
5...g5!?



6. ♖c2

The over-cautious 6. ♖e2?!, anticipating the pin that arises from ...g5-g4 hxc4 ♖xc4, isn't convincing. From a strategic point of view, Black is happy to trade his flank-pawn for White's central one. Therefore, 6... ♗xe4 seems the more principled continuation to me: 6...g4 (6... ♗xe4! 7.d3 ♗f6 8. ♖xc4 ♖g8!? Not fearing 9. ♖xf6 exf6+ when White cannot conveniently protect g2 and Black has the pair of Bishops) 7.hxc4 ♖xc4 8.d4! (In my opinion, White should have focused on his superior pawn-structure and have stabilized his centre with 8.d3) 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 Vandenbussche,T (2401)-Meshkov,Y (2354) Baku 2016.(Instead of his last move, Black could also have opted for complications: 9... ♗xe4 10.d5 ♗a5+)

6...g4 7.hxc4 ♖xc4

**8.d3**

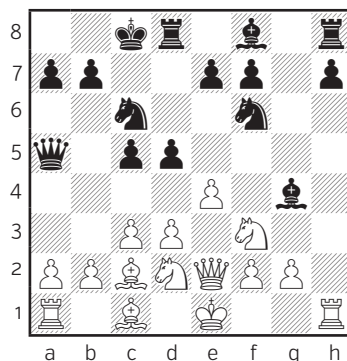
My Knight being pinned, the central thrust 8.d4?! seemed over-ambitious. Indeed, after 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 ♖b6 (9...e5?! 10. ♔a4 is a bit better for White according to the engine. After 9...♗b6, White can't maintain his central duo and must advance.) 10.d5 ♘e5↔

8...d5 9. ♗e2

9. ♘bd2 would likely have had the same result, except that White would have deprived himself of the possibility to develop his dark-squared Bishop first.

9... ♗a5 10. ♘bd2

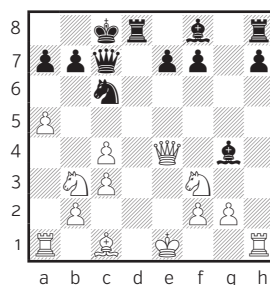
White had to parry 10...♘d4, but in that respect 10.o-o? would of course have been foolish with the semi-open g-file. 10...♖g8→

10...o-o-o**11.exd5**

White wasn't quite ready to advance in the centre, which the following line demonstrates:

a) 11.e5?! ♘d7 12. ♘b3 ♗b6 13.d4 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♔xf3 15. ♗xf3 ♘xd4 16. ♗c3+ ♘c6;

b) 11. ♘b3, on the other hand, deserved serious attention: 11...♗b6 12.a4! (12. ♔d2 h5; 12. ♔g5 dxe4 — or 12...♖g8!? — 13.dxe4 h5 led to unclear positions.) After 12.a4 Black may have tried to sharpen the game with 12...c4 13.a5 ♗c7 14.dxc4 dxe4 15. ♔xe4 ♘xe4 16. ♗xe4,

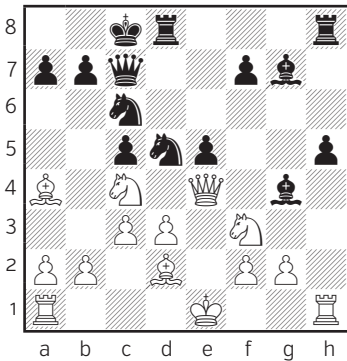


but White seems to have the upper hand, even after the funny 16... ♖e5!? 17. ♗bd2 ♕xe4+ 18. ♗xe4 ♗e5 19. ♗d4 ♖xc4 20. f3±

11... ♗xd5 12. ♕e4?!

I should have favoured 12. ♗c4 ♖c7 13. ♙a4, even if the position after 13... h5!? remains complex.

12... h5 13. ♗c4 ♖c7 14. ♙a4 ♙g7 15. ♙d2 e5



16. ♙xc6?!

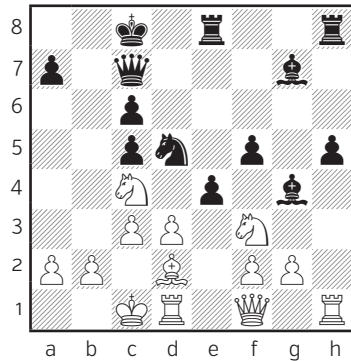
16. 0-0-0 was a tad better, for a subtle reason. Indeed, after 16... f5 (16... f6! might be best here.) 17. ♕e2 ♖de8 (or 17... ♖he8) 18. ♙g5 Black doesn't win an exchange as in the game. In the event of 18... e4 the Knight on d5 is hanging, contrarily to what happened in the game. Following 19. dxe4 fxe4 20. ♖xd5 exf3 21. ♗d6+ ♕xd6 22. ♕xe8+ ♖xe8 23. ♖xd6 fxd6 24. ♖g1 ♙f3 25. ♙d1, the tactical skir-

mish would have left White standing in good stead.

16... bxc6± 17. 0-0-0

17. ♗h4? would have lost material after 17... f5! 18. ♗xf5 ♗f6±

17... f5 18. ♕e1 ♖de8 19. ♕f1 e4



20. ♗h4?

It wasn't easy to assess that 20. dxe4 fxe4 21. ♗g5 ♙xd1 22. ♕xd1 would have given White better hopes of salvation. The subtlety being that Black's Rooks are less threatening here, and the same goes for his pawn standing on e4 rather than d3. 22... ♙b8±.

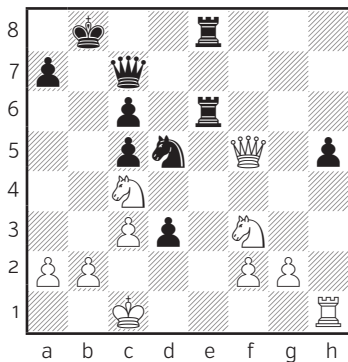
20... ♙xd1 21. ♕xd1 exd3± 22. ♕f3

I decided against 22. ♗xf5?! ♖e2 in order to activate my Queen.

22... ♙h6 23. ♕xf5+

Or 23. ♖xd3 ♙xd2+ followed by ... ♖hf8. There is no doubt that Black is better, but his slightly exposed King and shattered pawn-structure mean White isn't totally lost.

23... ♖b8 24. ♙xh6 ♖xh6 25. ♘f3 ♖he6



26. ♖xd3

In time-trouble, my instinct told me to get rid of the most dangerous enemy pawn. But 26. ♖xh5 may in fact have been stronger.

26... ♖f4+ 27. ♖b1 ♖e4?? 28. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 29. ♘d6 ♘f4?! 30. ♘xe4 ♖xe4 31. ♖h4

Not exactly a well-deserved victory, but on the other hand, the game always remained complicated enough to give Black chances to err.

1-0

2

▷ C. Bauer [2618]

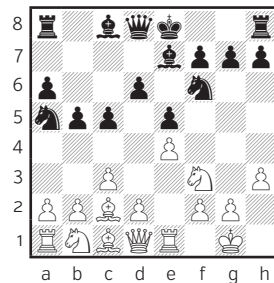
▶ D. Shengelia [2523]

Dresden 2007

FROM BLACK'S POINT OF VIEW

1.e4 c5

1...e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4 ♘f6 5. o-o ♙e7 6. ♖e1 b5 7. ♙b3 d6 8. c3 ♘a5 (8...o-o is the most common move, played thousands of times before.) 9. ♙c2 c5 10. h3

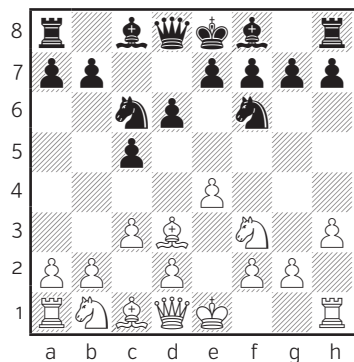


10...g5!? A curiosity: this bold move was originally played in the game Maroczy,G-Janowski,D, Prague 1908 (0-1) and was only to be seen again in 2016! The surprise-effect still seems to work as Black scored 3 draws recently... 11.d4 g4 12.dxe5 dxe5 13. ♖xd8+ ♙xd8 14. ♘xe5 gxh3 15.g3 h5↔ Leko,P (2693)-Ivanisevic,I (2645) Novi Sad 2016.

2. ♘f3 d6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.h3 ♘c6

A kingside fianchetto is another way of handling this line for Black: 4...g6 5. ♖d3 ♙g7 6. ♙c2 ♜c6 (6...e5! 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 exd4 9. ♞xd4 o-o with a quick ...d6-d5 should equalize easily.) 7.d4 cxd4 8.cxd4 ♞b4?! 9. ♙a4+ ♙d7 10. ♞c3 o-o 11. ♙b3± Bauer,C (2618)-Babula,V (2596) Heraklion 2007.

5. ♙d3



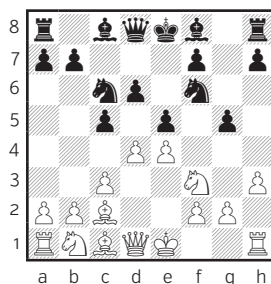
5...g5!?

Shengelia is a very creative player and such an early “provocation” was to be expected. At the cost of a slightly inferior pawn-structure, the g-pawn thrust will soon provide Black with dynamic piece-play. If one compares this with the introductory Leko-Ivanisevic game, there is however a considerable nuance: White is yet to reveal which side his King will reside on. As a consequence, he doesn’t need to fear a direct assault, so that keeping the Queens on isn’t a worry.

5...d5!? is another way of approaching the variation for Black. Play may then continue 6.e5 ♞d7 (6...c4!?) 7. ♙b5 ♜b6 8. ♙a4 (8. ♜a4 e6 9.d3 ♞db8 10.c4 a6 11. ♞c3 d4 12. ♞e4 ♙d7 Bauer,C (2605)-Damljanovic,B (2573) France 2009 was quite fine for Black.) 8...c4! Not letting White set up the c3-d4-e5 pawn-chain. 9.d4 cxd3 10.o-o ♜c7 (The hasty 10...♞c5?! runs into 11. ♙e3! ♜xb2? 12. ♙xc5 ♜xa1 13. ♜b3+-) 11. ♜xd3 ♞c5 12. ♜d1 ♞xa4 13. ♜xa4= Malakhov,V (2679)-Palac,M (2568) Dresden 2007.

6. ♙c2 g4

The most logical continuation but Black could also consider 6...e5, when White must decide between the restrained 7.d3, and an open game, following 7.d4



7...cxd4

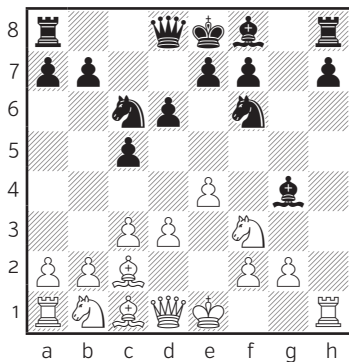
a) 7...h6!?

b) 7...exd4 needs testing as well: 8.cxd4 (8. ♙xg5!? ♜g8↵) 8...g4

9.hxg4 ♙xg4 10.dxc5 dxc5 11.♘c3 and White may claim a small plus thanks to his superior pawn-structure;

8.cxd4 g4 9.hxg4 ♙xg4 10.♙a4∞

7.hxg4 ♙xg4 8.d3



8...d5

Quite a few other moves would have made sense too, like 8...♖g8, having a possible ... ♙h5 in mind, or 8...♙g7.

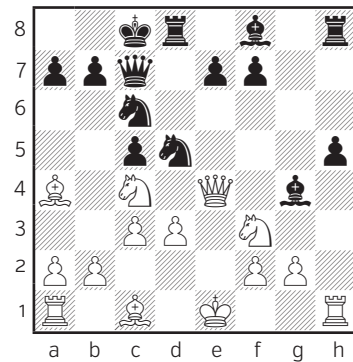
In an ulterior game Black tried 8...h5 9.♙e3 e6 (9...♙h6!? perhaps gives better chances to equalize) 10.♘bd2 d5 11.♙a4 ♖c7 12.♖c2 o-o-o 13.♙xc6 bxc6 14.♖a4 Savic,M (2503)-Indjic,A (2533) Vrbas 2015. Black's pair of Bishops doesn't fully compensate for the state of his pawn-structure.

9.♖e2 ♖a5

Obviously threatening 10...♘d4 but also intending to quickly castle queen-side. During the game I thought this move was "artificial", but things turned out to be more complex.

Black was once again spoilt for choice, and besides the text-move, 9...♖c7, 9...e6 and 9...d4 were all playable.

10.♘bd2 o-o-o 11.exd5 ♘xd5
12.♖e4?! h5 13.♘c4 ♖c7 14.♙a4



14...♙g7

Now that the white light-squared Bishop has left c2, targeting the backward d3-pawn could have been tempting. Therefore 14...e6!?, enabling ... ♙f5. Then 15.♙xc6 bxc6 16.♘h4 or (16.♙d2) would have remained balanced.

15.♙d2 e5

All the moves my opponent chose in this game were the most active and direct ones.

the “theoretically” vulnerable enemy King.

a) 15...e6 was still available...;

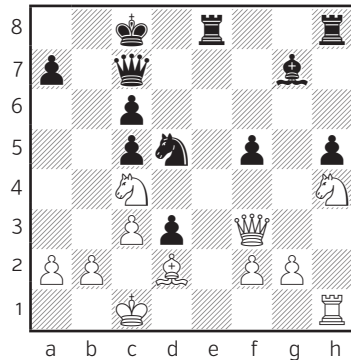
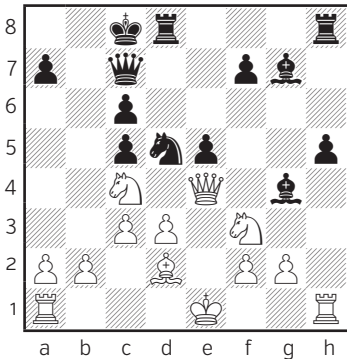
17.0-0-0 f5 18.♖e1 ♜de8 19.♗f1 e4

b) ...as well as the prophylactic 15...♖b8 16.♙xc6 f5!? (Or else 16...bxc6 17.♘h2 ♙e6 and now White can carry on with 18.0-0-0∞ or test his opponent’s intentions by proposing a move repetition with 18. ♘f3) 17.♗e6 ♙xf3 18.gxf3 ♖xc6 At that point White should decide between 19.♗xf5 h4, when Black achieves decent compensation for his pawn, and 19.♖xc6 bxc6 20.♙e2 with an approximately equal ending.

Black was in no hurry to cash in the exchange and could have driven back the rival’s Knight first, with 19...♘b6!? After the plausible 20.♘a5 e4 21.dxe4 fxe4 22.♘g5 ♙xd1 23.♖xd1 a similar scenario to the game would have emerged: the black pawn-structure is a wreck, but his extra-exchange outweighs that setback.

20.♘h4? ♙xd1 21.♖xd1 exd3∓
22.♗f3

16. ♙xc6?! bxc6∓

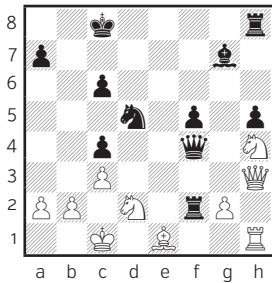


22... ♙h6

Black has got doubled and/or isolated pawns on both wings, but the dynamic features of his position more than compensate for this inconvenience. Of importance is also the fact that White’s army is too remote from the queenside to bother

A good move, as was 22...♜e2!? At any rate, Black should not stop playing actively since his scarce pawns can easily get grabbed one by one. Some sample lines after 22...♜e2: 23.♖xd3 (In reply to 23.♘xf5, both 23...♖b8 and 23...♙e5!? retain a large

advantage.) 23...♖xf2 24. ♔e1 ♕f4+ 25. ♘d2 It looks like Black will have to return the exchange, but 25...c4 comes as a nasty surprise: 26. ♖h3

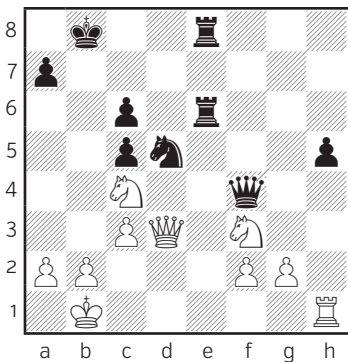


26...♗b4!! 27.cxb4 ♖d8 28. ♘hf3 c3 (or 28...♖e2!?) 29.bxc3 ♔xc3→ Obviously, anticipating the consequences of 22...♖e2 in time-trouble was not humanly possible.

23. ♕xf5+ ♔b8 24. ♔xh6 ♖xh6 25. ♗f3 ♖he6 26. ♖xd3 ♕f4+

26...♖e2! was stronger.

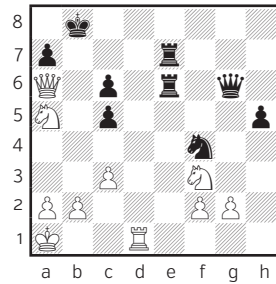
27. ♔b1



27...♕e4??

Until now, there was nothing about Black's play to criticise, but this blunder transforms his large advantage into a technically lost ending.

Instead, the adequate 27...♕f6! could have resulted in something quite brilliant: 28. ♗a5 ♗f4 29. ♕a6 ♖8e7 30. ♖d1 and now 30...♕g6+ 31. ♔a1



31...♕d3!!≠ forces the trade of Queens in a rather unusual way.

28. ♕xe4 ♖xe4 29. ♗d6 ♗f4?

Running into a deadly pin, but 29... ♗f6 30. ♗xe8 ♖xe8± was no fun to defend anyway.

30. ♗xe4 ♖xe4 31. ♖h4 1-0