

Grandmaster Repertoire 12

The Modern Benoni

By

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Introduction

By the Author

Welcome to the Modern Benoni, one of the most dynamic openings in all of chess. Make no mistake: this book is for players who enjoy the wild and adventurous side of the game. Modern Benoni devotees are forced to play on the edge, and will often have to live with positional weaknesses and/or sacrifice material to avoid being driven into passivity. On the plus side Black gets active piece play with rich counterattacking possibilities, perhaps more so than in any other opening against 1.d4.

The Benoni got its name from a German manuscript published in 1825 entitled *Ben-Oni*. For the rest of the 19th century it was rarely seen and had a poor reputation. Then in the early 1900s it was adopted by a few maestros of the day, most notably Frank Marshall. Even the great Alekhine played it a few times, despite having stated it was not a good opening. It was not until the late 1950s that the Modern Benoni really became popular, thanks to the great Mikhail Tal. The Benoni, with all its dynamism and counterattacking potential, suited Tal's aggressive tactical style perfectly. His games say more than my words ever could, so let's whet our appetites by seeing a couple of them.

Bukhuti Gurgenedze – Mikhail Tal

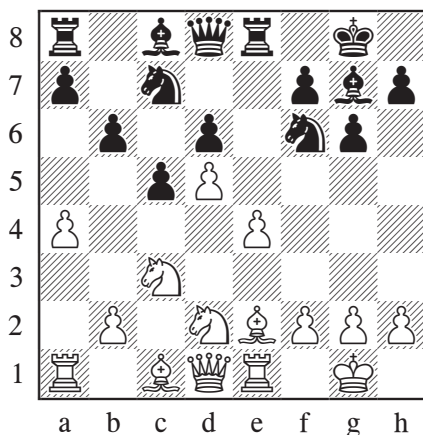
Moscow 1957

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘f3 g6 7.e4 ♘g7 8.♙e2 0-0 9.0-0

Gurgenedze employs the Classical System, which can be found in Chapters 7 and 8.

9...♞e8 10.♘d2 ♘a6 11.♞e1 ♘c7 12.a4 b6

At this stage it is hard to predict where Black's counterplay will come from, but just watch how quickly the situation changes.

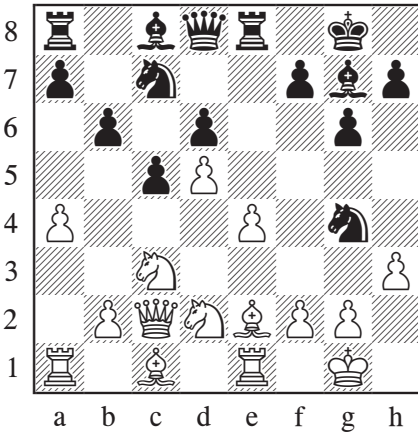


13. ♖c2

Nowadays the main move is 13.f4.

13... ♘g4! 14.h3?

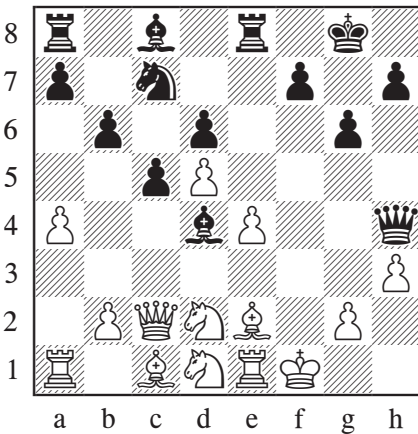
White must have been asking himself where the knight could be going. Playing against Tal, perhaps he should have been more cautious.



14... ♗xf2!!

A brilliant combination! Suddenly White's king is in grave danger.

15. ♕xf2 ♖h4† 16. ♕f1 ♔d4 17. ♘d1



17... ♕xh3!

Taking on h3 with the bishop is promising, but doing it with the queen is so much stronger, not to mention spectacular.

18. ♕f3

18.gxh3? ♕xh3 is mate of course.

18... ♖h2 19. ♗e3 f5!

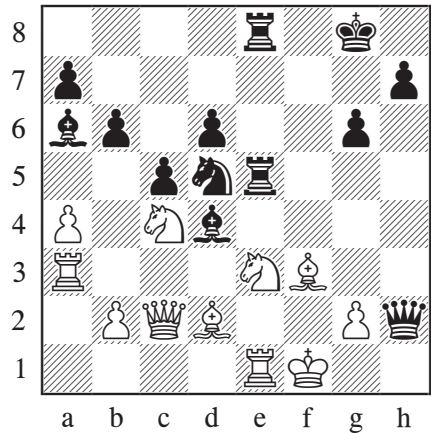
The quote from *The Lord of the Rings*, “Even the smallest person can change the course of the future”, applies just as much to pawns as it does to hobbits.

20. ♗dc4 fxe4 21. ♕xe4 ♕a6!

The bishop finds a perfect home. There are too many pins, open files and diagonals for White to deal with.

22. ♕f3 ♖e5 23. ♖a3 ♖ae8 24. ♔d2 ♗xd5!

An excellent demonstration of team play. After the earlier sacrifice Tal has simply brought his pieces to good squares and the white position soon crumbles to dust.



25. ♕xd5† ♖xd5 26. ♕e2 ♕xe3 27. ♖xe3 ♕xc4†

0-1

Any player would be proud to win such a game, and Tal's play from 1957 showed he was way ahead of his time. No wonder his opponents became scared to sit down opposite him before a game! Here is one more game from the following year.

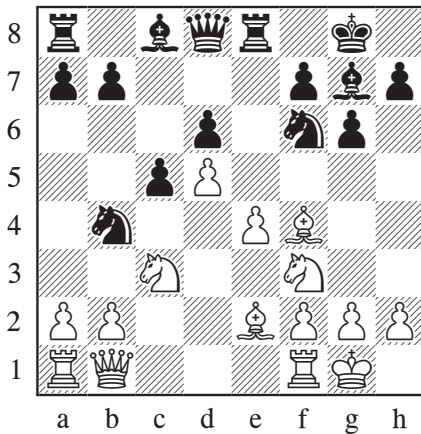
Yuri Averbakh – Mikhail Tal

Riga 1958

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c5 4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5
d6 6.e4 g6 7.♙e2 ♙g7 8.♗f3 0–0 9.0–0 ♖e8
10.♚c2 ♗a6 11.♙f4 ♗b4

Another knight attack, this time from the other side.

12.♚b1



12...♗xe4!?

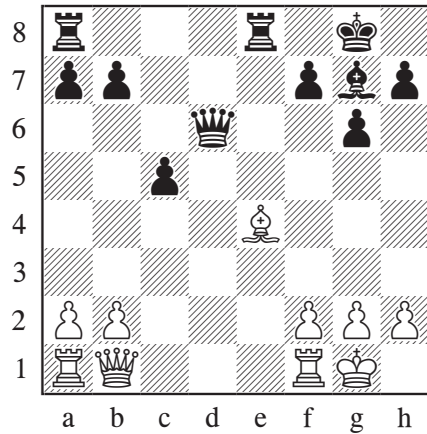
This move must have come as a huge psychological shock to Averbakh. In fact it is not fully correct, but over the board it caused problems that were too much for White to handle. The fact that Black can even contemplate giving up a piece in this way says something about the wealth of possibilities offered by the Benoni.

13.♗xe4 ♙f5 14.♗fd2 ♗xd5 15.♙xd6?

15.♙g3 would have made it harder for Black to prove his compensation.

15...♗f6 16.♙f3 ♗xe4 17.♗xe4 ♙xe4
18.♙xe4 ♚xd6

Black has emerged a pawn up with a more active position.



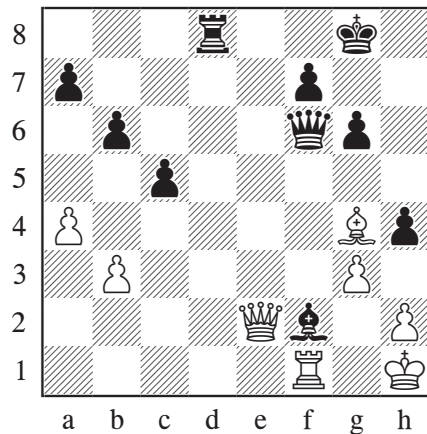
19.♚c2 ♖e7 20.♙f3 ♖ae8 21.♖ad1

The opposite-coloured bishops give White realistic drawing possibilities, so it is interesting to observe how Tal breaks the defence.

21...♙d4 22.a4 b6 23.b3 ♖e5 24.♖d2 h5
25.♖e2 ♖xe2 26.♙xe2 h4 27.♗h1 ♚f4 28.g3
♚f6 29.♚d1 ♖d8 30.♙g4?

Under heavy pressure, White commits a fatal oversight.

30...♙xf2! 31.♚e2



31...♖d2!!

It is only fitting that the game is decided by tactics.

32. ♖e8†

32. ♖xd2 ♖c6† leads to mate.

32... ♔g7 33. gxf4 ♖d4 34. ♕h3 ♖d3 35. ♕g2 ♗d1

0–1

About this book

I have been playing the Modern Benoni for about a decade. Before then I played the King's Indian, so it was a natural transition as I was already used to having my bishop on g7. For my own reasons I have usually preferred the move order 1.d4 g6, intending to transpose to a Benoni after a subsequent c2-c4. Of course I understand most readers will prefer a more conventional move order, so I have taken the position after the standard moves 1.d4 ♗f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 as my starting point for the book.

A friend of mine once told me “Every time when I see your pawn on d6 it makes me sick!” However, he also admitted he wished he could get such interesting positions from the black side of the Queen's Gambit Declined, which is his favoured defence. The thing I like about the Modern Benoni is that it almost always gives rise to a tense position where both players must make concrete decisions. I have also observed that there are many players who do not enjoy facing the Benoni, as White finds it hard to control the game the way he often does in most 1.d4 openings.

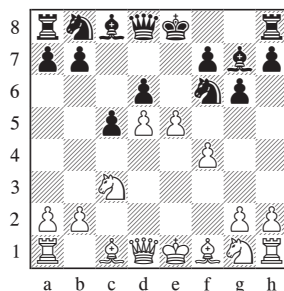
In this book I have departed slightly from the strict ‘repertoire approach’ of giving one recommendation against each of the opponent's options. Against most major options I have provided coverage of two or more lines; the Benoni is a versatile beast and I hope the reader will find it useful to have multiple weapons in his arsenal. In some cases I have even spent time covering a less promising alternative, in order to provide some theoretical background and highlight the reasons that led me not to recommend something different. No doubt some readers would argue in favour of a more detailed ‘one recommendation’ approach, but I am happy with the final balance of detail versus choices. I also made the decision to focus my attention on the most popular and critical attempts for White to handle each major variation. In almost every early position there are probably ten or more uncommon moves that have been played at some point, but does anyone really need a recommendation against every possible move that they're unlikely ever to face?

I hope you will enjoy reading this book and putting its recommendations into practice. Remember one thing: the Modern Benoni is not an opening that can be played by book alone. Preparation has its place of course, but more important are the resolve, wit and ingenuity of the brave warrior who puts his pawns on c5 and d6. Thus I invite you to summon your inner Tal, turn the page and get started.

Marian Petrov
Burgas, Bulgaria
February 2013

Chapter 1

f4 Systems



Mikenas Attack

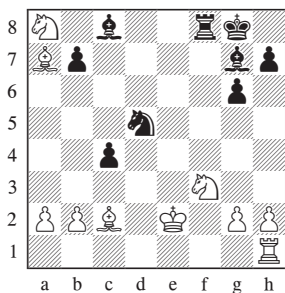
Variation Index

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.e4 g6 7.f4

7...♙g7 8.e5

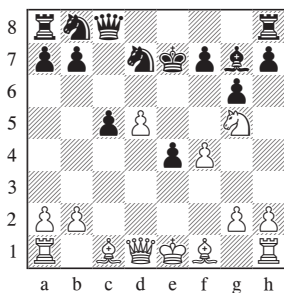
A) 8...dxe5	10
B) 8...♘fd7 9.♘b5 dxe5 10.♘d6† ♙e7 11.♘xc8† ♚xc8 12.♘f3 ♜e8	12
B1) 13.f5	14
B11) 13...♘b6N	14
B12) 13...e4!	15
B2) 13.fxe5	17

A) note to 11...♘f6



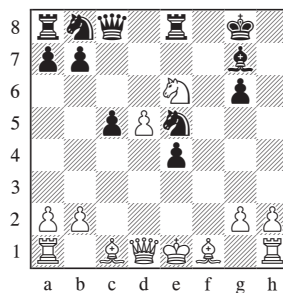
23...♙g4!N

B) note to 12...♜e8



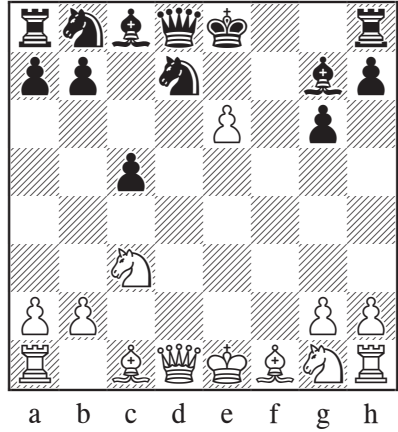
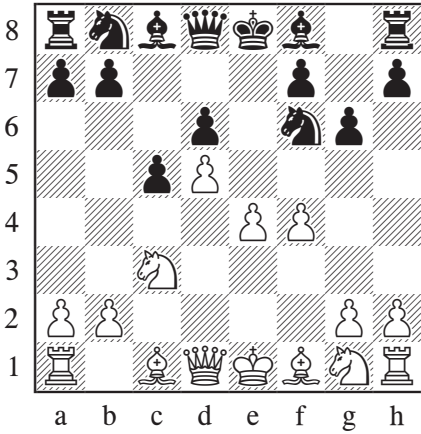
b) 13...♙d4!N

B12) after 18.♘e6



18...♘bc6!!N

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3 exd5 5.cxd5 9.fxex5 ♘fd7 10.e6 fxe6 11.dxe6
d6 6.e4 g6 7.f4

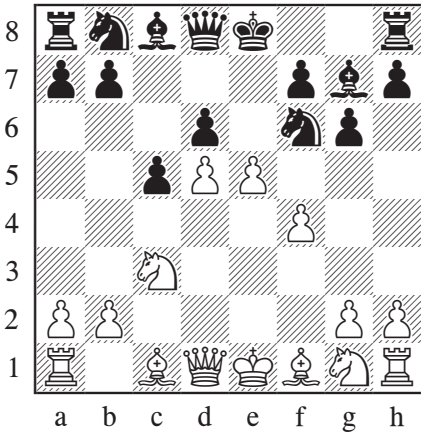


11...♘f6

The first six chapters of the book will focus on this aggressive continuation, which continues to be a source of headaches for a lot of Benoni players.

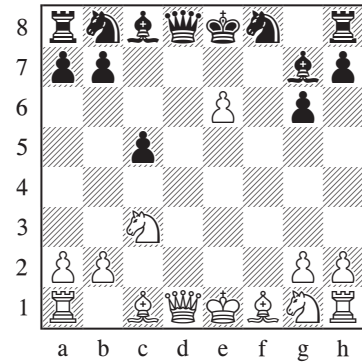
Now White must go into an endgame. I believe this is the best move, although I will mention three other options:

7...♙g7 8.e5



The tempting 11...♙h4?! does not work: 12.g3 ♙xc3† 13.bxc3 ♙e4† (13...♙e7 14.♘f3 ♙xe6† 15.♙e2 0-0 16.0-0 ♘g7±) 14.♙e2 ♙xe2† 15.♘e2 ♘f8 16.e7± White has good compensation.

11...♘f8 occurred in Alfonso Nogue – Almeida Quintana, Badalona 2009. Here White has a natural improvement:



This is known as the Mikenas Attack. It is rarely played, but Black should be prepared. The two main replies are A) 8...dxe5 and B) 8...♘fd7.

A) 8...dxe5

12.♙xd8†N ♘xd8 13.♙g5† ♘e8 14.♙b5† ♘c6 15.0-0-0 ♘xe6 16.♘f3

This is an acceptable choice for players who don't wish to study long variations.

Finally there is:

11...♖e7

This has been the most popular move, but I don't like it much.

12.♘d5

Now you must enter a long forced line:

12...♖xe6† 13.♖e2 ♖xe2† 14.♙xe2 0–0

14...♙e5? 15.♘f3 ♙d6 16.♙h6±

15.♘c7 ♘c6 16.♘xa8 ♘b4 17.♙d1

17.♘f3 ♘c2† 18.♙d1 ♘xa1 19.♙c4† ♙h8

20.♙e1 a6= 21.♙e6 ♘e5 22.♙xe5?? ♙xe5–+

Shereshevski – Semeniuk, Vilnius 1974.

After the text move Black needs to fight hard just to stay in the game, while White has many ways to stay a piece up for one or two pawns.

17...♘d3†

17...♘e5 18.♘f3 ♘ed3† 19.♙f1 ♘d5

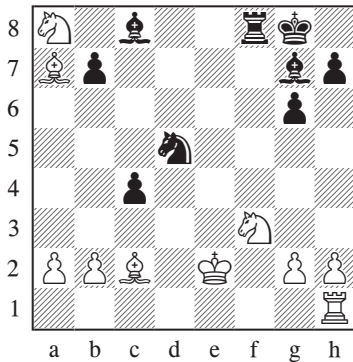
20.♙b3 ♙e6 21.♙g5 ♙xa8 22.♙d1 c4

23.♙xc4 ♘e3† 24.♙xe3 ♙xc4 25.♙g1 ♙xb2

26.h4±

18.♙e2 ♘f2 19.♙e3 ♘xh1 20.♘f3 c4 21.♙c2

♘f6 22.♙xh1 ♘d5 23.♙xa7



23...♙g4!N

I prefer this over 23...♘f4†± as played in Marcotulli – Fredriksen, e-mail 2002.

24.♘b6 ♘f4† 25.♙d2

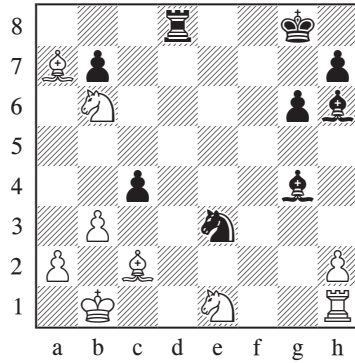
25.♙f2? ♘xg2 26.♙e4 ♙xf3 27.♙xf3 ♘h4

28.♘xc4†

25...♘xg2 26.♘e1 ♙d8† 27.♙c1 ♙h6†

28.♙b1 ♘e3 29.b3

29.h3? ♙f5–+



29...♘xc2

29...♙f5 30.♙xf5 ♙d1† 31.♙b2 ♙g7†

32.♙a3 gxf5 33.♘xc4 ♙xe1 34.♙xe1 ♘c2†

35.♙a4 ♘xe1±

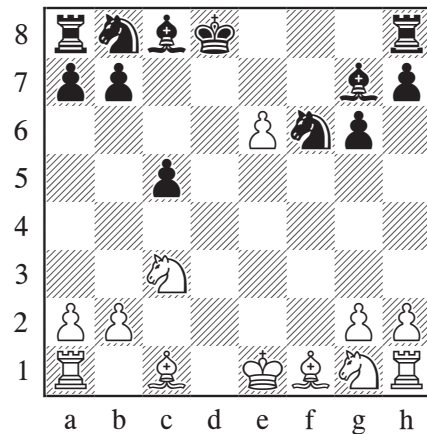
30.♘xc2 cxb3 31.axb3 ♙d3

Black keeps a playable position, but overall I don't find this line particularly appealing.

12.♖xd8†

12.♙b5†?! ♘c6 favours Black.

12...♙xd8



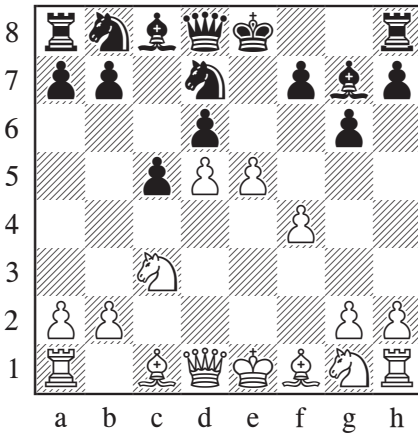
13.♙e3N

13.♙g5?! ♙xe6 14.0–0–0† ♘bd7 15.♘f3 h6 left White struggling to demonstrate compensation in Moehring – Hesse, Annaberg-Buchholz 1965.

13...♙xe6 14.♙xc5=

The queenless middlegame is balanced.

B) 8...♘fd7



This is the main line, and leads to more complex play.

9.♘b5

9.♘e4 dxe5 10.♘d6† is the same.

9.e6?! is worse: 9...fxe6 10.dxe6 ♘b6 11.♘e4 d5 12.♙b5† (12.♘xc5 ♚e7) 12...♘c6 13.♘xc5 This position occurred in Kratochvil – Hradecky, Frydek Mistek 2005, and now 13...♚e7!N would have left Black clearly better.

Finally, 9.exd6 0–0 10.♘f3 ♘f6 11.♙e2 ♚xd6 12.0–0 ♘bd7= is not dangerous.

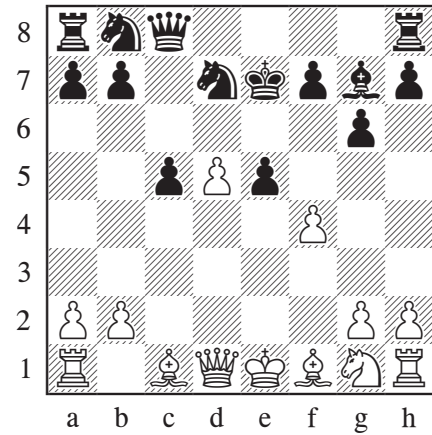
9...dxe5 10.♘d6†

In return for the sacrificed pawn White has managed to give an early check, forcing our king to stay in the centre for a while.

10...♙e7 11.♘xc8†

11.♘b5? is deservedly rare: 11...♚e8 12.d6† ♙f8 13.♘c7 For some reason the natural 13...♚h4†!N has not been played so far, but it brings Black a clear advantage as shown after: 14.g3 (14.♙e2 ♘f6 15.♘f3 ♙g4 16.♘xe8 ♘xe8) 14...exf4† 15.♙f2 fxg3† 16.♙g2 ♚e4† 17.♘f3 gxh2†

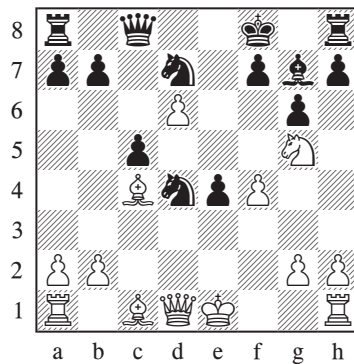
11...♚xc8



12.♘f3

White needs to catch up on development.

12.d6†?! is premature: 12...♙f8 13.♘f3 ♘c6 14.♙e2 (14.♙c4 ♘b6 15.♙d3 ♚d7 16.♙e4 ♚e8 17.0–0 exf4† Nogues – Bertorello, Villa Martelli 2008.) 14...e4 15.♘g5 ♘d4† 16.♙c4 The counterattack is not working.



16...♘b6! 17.♙xf7 h6 18.♙xg6 hxg5 19.fxg5 ♙e5–+ Maiorov – Marcotulli, e-mail 2002.

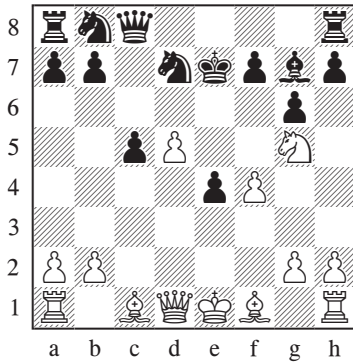
12...♚e8

This is the main move, but there are a couple of promising alternatives.

12...e4!?

Keeping the e- and f-files closed is a rare but nice idea which seems to work well.

13. ♖g5



Few games have reached this position, so there is room to explore. Black must certainly avoid 13... ♞e8?? 14. d6† ♔f8 15. ♖d5+-. However, it is worth checking both a) 13... ♖b6 and b) 13... ♔d4N.

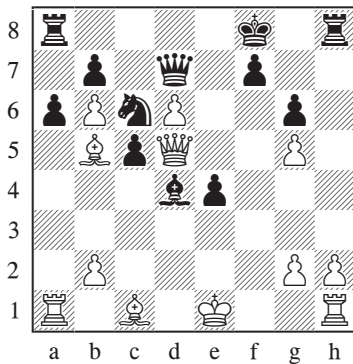
a) 13... ♖b6

This has been the most common choice, although I only found six games in which it was played.

14. d6†

The untested 14. ♖b3!N may be White's best bet: 14... ♔f8 15. ♔e3 h6 The safest move. 16. ♖xe4 ♖e8 17. ♖c2 ♔g8 18. ♔f2 ♖xd5 19. ♔xc5 ♖xf4

14... ♔f8 15. a4 h6 16. a5 hxg5 17. axb6 a6 18. ♖d5 ♖d7 19. fxg5 ♖c6 20. ♔b5 ♔d4



21. ♔f4? ♖b4!N

Better than 21... ♔g7 as in Nguyen Chi Minh – Schabanel, Issy les Moulineaux 2002.

22. ♖xd4 cxd4 23. ♔xd7 ♖d3† 24. ♔f1 ♖xf4

b) 13... ♔d4!N

An ambitious but risky move which I found.

14. ♖b3

14. ♔c4?! looks dangerous, but after 14... ♖b6 I think Black has enough resources to repel the attack: 15. d6† (15. ♔b3 ♞d8 16. ♖xe4 ♖xd5) 15... ♔f8 16. ♔xf7 h6 17. ♔e6 ♖e8 18. f5 hxg5 19. ♖g4 ♔g7 20. ♔xg5 gxf5 21. ♔xf5 ♖h5 22. ♖g3 ♞g8 23. ♔e3† ♔h8 24. ♔xd4† cxd4 25. ♖e5† ♞g7

14... f6 15. d6†?

15. ♖e6 ♖b6

15. ♖xe4 ♞e8 16. ♔e2 ♖b6

15... ♔xd6 16. ♖f7† ♔c7 17. ♖xh8 ♖xh8 18. ♔e3 f5

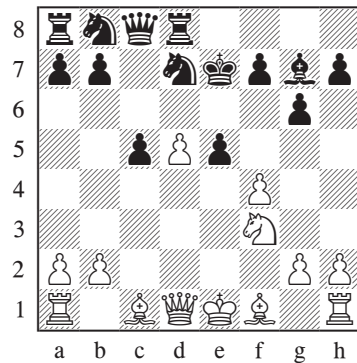
Black has excellent compensation.

19. 0-0-0 ♖c6

Black has a second promising alternative in the form of:

12... ♞d8!N

The rook is going directly after the d5-pawn.



13. fxg5

13. ♔c4 ♖b6 14. ♖e2 e4

13. d6† ♔f8 14. ♔e2 ♖c6 15. 0-0 e4 16. ♖g5 ♔d4† 17. ♔h1 h6 18. ♖xe4 f5 19. ♖c3 ♖f6

13... ♖xe5 14. ♔e2

Black's 12th move was also suggested by Ziegler, who offers the following line:

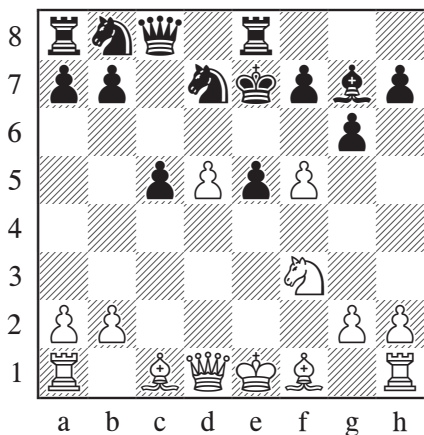
14. ♔g5† f6 15. ♔e3 ♖g4 16. ♔d2 ♖f5

14... ♖xf3† 15. ♔xf3 ♔f8 16. 0-0 ♖d7

To summarize, it seems Black really is spoiled for choice at move 12. Let us now return to the main line of 12...♖e8 which, as we will soon see, is also promising for him.

From this position it is worth considering both **B1) 13.f5** and **B2) 13.fxe5**.

B1) 13.f5



This move has only been seen in a few games, but it is my engine's first choice. For instructive purposes it is worth analysing **B11) 13...♗b6!?**, but the strongest move for Black is **B12) 13...e4!**.

The following alternatives are less appealing:

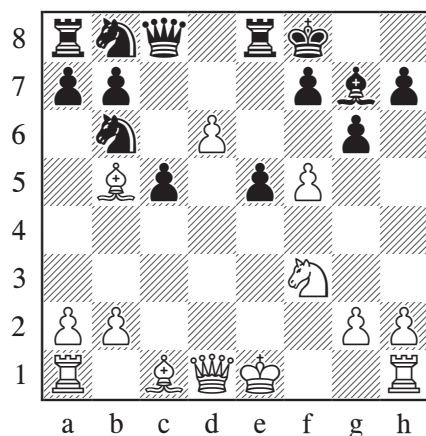
13...♗f6? 14.fxg6 hxg6 15.♗g5 ♖f8 16.♙c4±
Inkiou – Hamdouchi, Cap d'Agde 2010.

13...gxf5 looks playable but risky: 14.♗h4
♗f6 15.♞c2 f4 16.♗f5† ♖f8 17.♗d6 ♞c7
18.♗xe8 ♜xe8

B11) 13...♗b6N

Although this is not the move I recommend, I decided to include it mainly for its entertainment value.

14.d6† ♖f8 15.♙b5

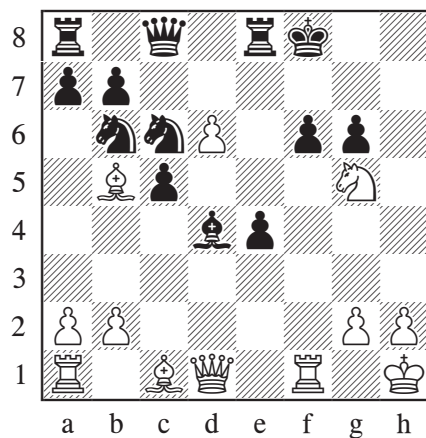


15...♗c6

15...e4 16.♗g5 ♖e5 17.f6 ♙h8 18.♙f4 ♞d5
19.♞e2 ♗c6

16.fxg6 hxg6 17.0-0 e4 18.♗g5 ♙d4†
19.♖h1 f6

Now White has to find some accurate moves:

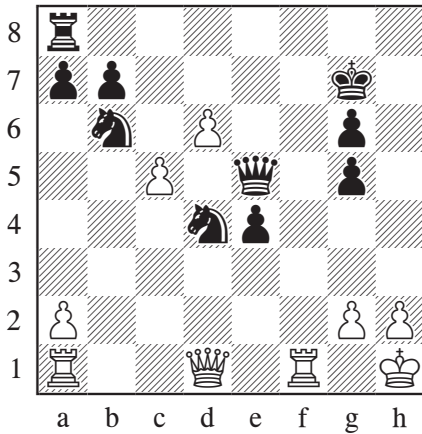


20.♙e3! ♖g7 21.♙xd4

I have chosen this as the main line for instructive and aesthetic purposes, but it should be noted that 21...♙xc6!± is the strongest move.

21...♗xd4 22.♙xe8 ♞xe8 23.b4! ♞e5
24.bxc5 fxg5

24...♞h8 25.♗h3 ♗d7

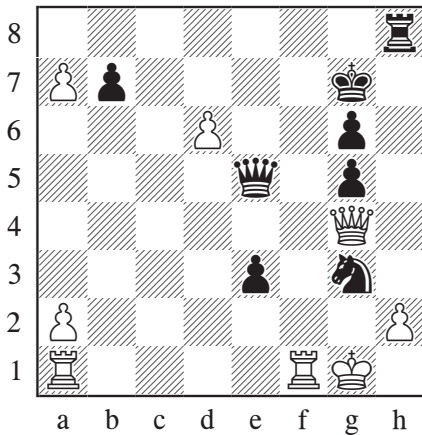


25.cxb6 Bxh8 26.g3

26.h3 Qf3 27.Bxf3 exf3 28.Bc1 g4↑

26...e3 27.Wg4 Qf5 28.bxa7 Qxg3† 29.Qg1!

29.Qg2 Bxh2† 30.Qxh2 Qxf1†→



29...Bxh2! 30.Bf7†!

Both sides are exchanging powerful shots.

30.Qxh2? Qxf1† 31.Qg2 Bb2†→

30...Qxf7 31.Wf3† Qg7 32.Qxh2 Qe2†

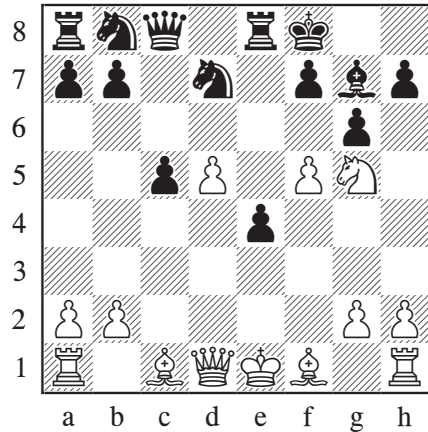
33.Qg2 Qf4† 34.Qg3=

Such a sequence would surely win any Best Game Prize if it ever occurred over the board!

B12) 13...e4!

Let's return from fantasy land to concentrate on the stronger move.

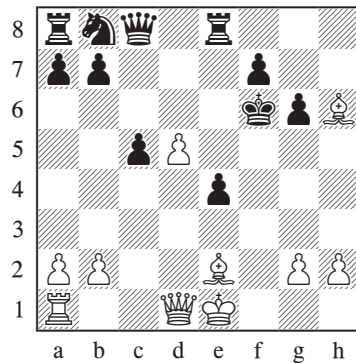
14.Qg5 Qf8



15.Qxh7†!:

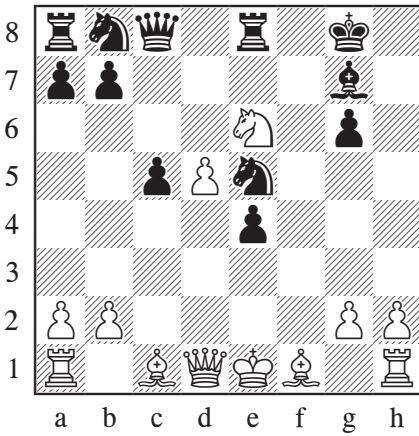
This is excessively greedy. White loses too much time for the sake of an insignificant pawn, while most of his pieces remain undeveloped.

15.fxg6 hxg6 16.Qe2 should be about equal, for instance: 16...Qd4 17.Bf1 Qf6 18.Bxf6 Qxf6 19.Qh7† Qg7 20.Qxf6 Qxf6 21.Qh6 This was Feller – Marzolo, Marseille 2009, and here Black should have played:



21...g5!N 22.Wb3 Qg6 23.Qxg5 Qxg5 24.Wg3†=

15...Qg8 16.fxg6 fxg6 17.Qg5 Qe5 18.Qe6



White's knight has made a long journey, but just look at his other pieces. Now the punishment comes:

18... Nbc6!!N

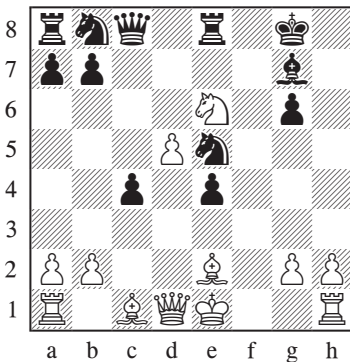
This beautiful move emphasizes development above all else!

It is worth comparing this move with the following practical example:

18...c4 19. Qe2?

19. Qxg7 N Qxg7= was correct.

Now in Szczesniak – Radecki, corr. 1992, Black could have used the same idea as in our main line, in an even more favourable setting:



19... Nbc6!N

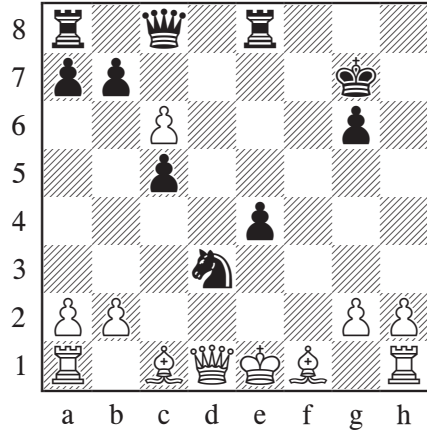
This should decide the game, for instance:

20. Qxg7 Qxg7 21. dxc6 Qd3† 22. Qd2 Bd8 23. Wf1 c3†! 24. Qc2 Wxc6-+

19. Qxg7 Qxg7

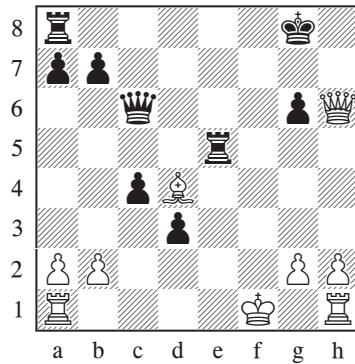
Now we reach a comical situation where all of White's pieces are on their starting positions!

20. dxc6 Qd3†



21. Qd2

No better is: 21. Qxd3? exd3† 22. Qf1 c4! 23. Wd2 Wxc6 24. Wh6† Qg8 25. Qe3 B5 26. Qd4



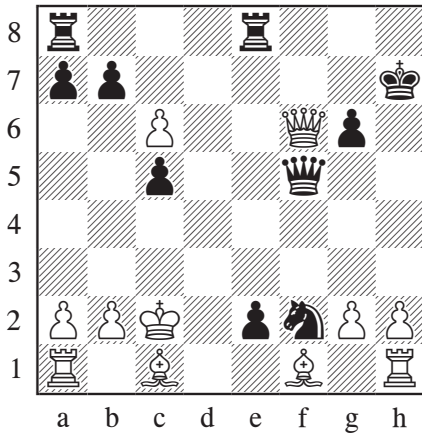
26... Wd6! 27. Qxc5 Bf8† 28. Wxf8† Wxf8† 29. Qe1 W7-+

21... Qf2 22. Wb3 e3† 23. Qc2 e2 24. Wc3† Qh7 25. Wf6!

Only this move can save White.

25... Wf5†

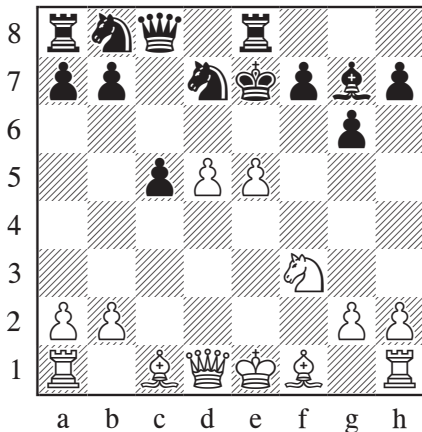
25... Qxh1=



26. ♖xf5 gxf5 27. ♕f4 bxc6 28. ♖g1 exf1=♖
29. ♖axf1 ♖e2† 30. ♖b3 ♖d8‡

White is still not altogether out of trouble.

B2) 13.fxe5



This is the more popular move.

13... ♖xe5 14. ♕b5 ♖bd7 15. 0-0
15. ♖xe5 ♖f8 leads to the same thing.

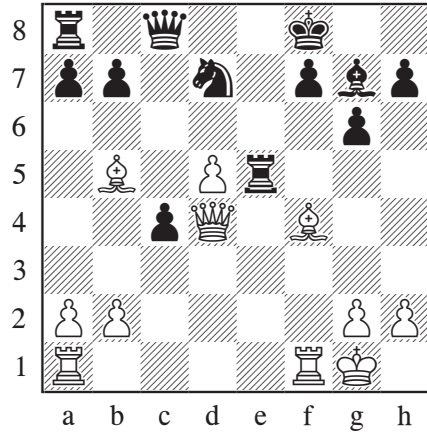
15... ♖f8 16. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 17. ♕f4 c4

This is the main move, although 17... ♖e4 is also possible: 18. ♖f3 f5 19. ♖ae1 ♖xe1 (19... ♕d4† 20. ♖h1 ♖f6‡) 20. ♖xe1 a6 21. ♕f1 ♕d4† 22. ♕e3 Saint Amour – Hase, Internet 2004.

18. ♖d4

18. ♕xd7?! ♖c5† 19. ♖h1 ♖xd5 20. ♖g4 f5 21. ♖h3 ♖xd7 22. ♖xh7 ♖f7 23. ♖ad1 (23. ♕h6‡) 23... ♖ad8 24. ♖xd7† ♖xd7‡ Yuferov – Kapengut, Soviet Union 1976.

The text move leads to an endgame.



18... ♖f5

This is my preferred square for the rook.

19. ♖xc4 ♖xc4 20. ♕xc4 ♕xb2 21. ♖ad1 ♕e5!

It is important to challenge the strong bishop, even though Black's kingside structure now gets destroyed.

22. ♕h6† ♖e7 23. ♖xf5 gxf5 24. g3 ♖g8 25. ♖f1 ♖g6=

Kirsanov – Smirnov, corr. 2002.

Conclusion

The Mikenas Attack is not too dangerous, and Black has the luxury of more than one good reply. Players wishing to avoid heavy theory can play 8...dx5 which leads to a balanced endgame. Those who desire a full-blooded fight will get their wish after 8... ♖fd7, and I would encourage the reader to investigate the alternatives analysed at move 12, as they may well be as strong or stronger than the main line.