

opening repertoire

Nimzo and Bogo Indian

Christof Sielecki

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About the Author

Christof Sielecki is an International Master and professional chess coach from Germany. As a player he has competed in the first leagues of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, where he managed to win the National Team Championships with his team from Voerendaal in 2012. In Germany he plays on the top board for his hometown club of Dinslaken, and in recent years he has helped the team to gain promotion from the 7th division to the 2nd division. His greatest success as an individual player was winning the Open Tournament of Latschach 2013, ahead of several Grandmasters and International Masters.

He is a regular producer of instructional chess videos and a live commentator of top-level events for online chess platforms like the Internet Chess Club and Chess24. His own YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/chessexplained) features more than 3,500 chess videos and has an audience of close to 20,000 subscribers. This is his first book.

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Introduction

Let me begin with a confession: I've always been addicted to chess books. I've bought, browsed through and read so many that I've lost count.

This thirst for chess information has influenced my own play a lot. I have changed openings so often over the years that there is only very little territory on the wide map of chess openings that I have never dared to enter at least once. This has led to my knowledge of the openings being rather broad, but not very deep for any specific opening. I've never had an opening that I felt particularly attached to, or where I felt I had some special knowledge or unique approach. When the idea of writing a book came up in early 2013, I had no idea what to write about as I basically played everything on and off – against 1 d4, the Queen's Gambit Declined, the Slav, the King's Indian, the Tango, etc.

So what to write about? Rather quickly I decided that it should be a black repertoire book against 1 d4. Against 1 e4 I had already found 'my' reply with 1...e5, but against 1 d4 I was constantly switching. So I figured to finally learn one opening in reasonable detail against 1 d4, I should for once not buy yet another new book, but write one myself.

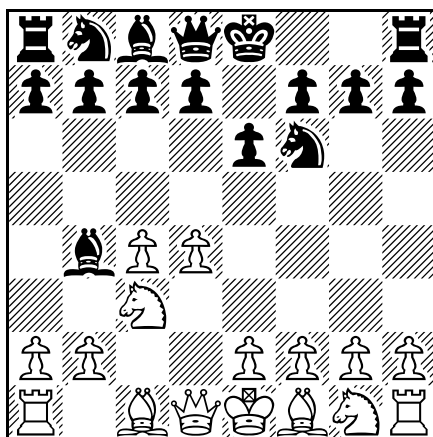
I compiled a small list of points that a chosen repertoire against 1 d4 should fulfil:

- 1) Fundamental soundness; at best White should get a slight edge with perfect play.
- 2) It should act as a base for further repertoire expansion.
- 3) Sharing common strategic themes to simplify the learning of typical middlegames.
- 4) Possible to play without memorizing huge amounts of forced lines; it should be possible to find good moves over the board if you forget the concrete line you studied earlier.
- 5) If possible to create some imbalances to make it easier to play for a win if needed – none or only very few lines that lead to very drawish positions.
- 6) If possible it should contain lines that have not been covered extensively elsewhere.
- 7) As I want to play it well, I need to like it.

All these points reduce the openings to consider quite a bit. I don't want to go through all the possible openings and argue why I discarded them for this project, but let's discuss what I ultimately went for – I settled on one part of the repertoire rather quickly: the Nimzo-Indian Defence with 1 d4 ♖f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♘b4.

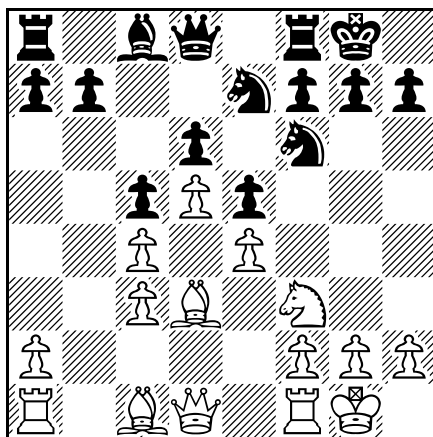
The Nimzo offers an excellent balance between soundness and asymmetry. It creates imbalances without risking anything substantial. Many lines of the Nimzo can be played with little concrete knowledge of specific variations as the position is rather closed. The Nimzo has many sub-variations so it's easy to switch to other lines if desired. All this pretty

much added up to being the perfect fit for the needs described above.



While scanning the available repertoire style books on the Nimzo, I found out that almost all of them advocate a 'light-squared' approach. What does this mean? Well, they focus on playing either with ...b6 to fianchetto the light-squared bishop or they occupy the centre with a quick ...d5.

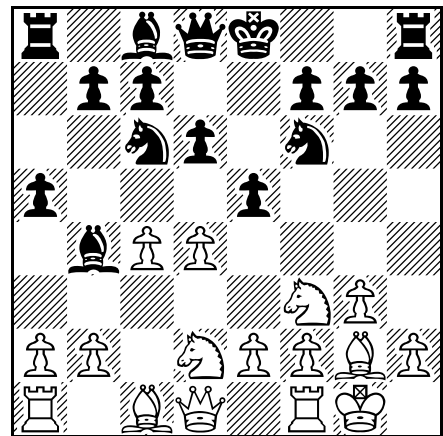
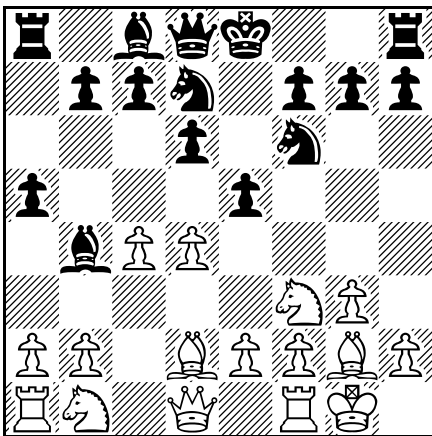
The Nimzo is one of the most versatile of all openings. Because of the initially undefined central structure Black can interpret the opening in various ways. Another way to do things is a strategy focused on placing the pawns on dark squares, like c5, d6 and e5. This approach has not been covered as extensively and is perfectly playable against most white choices on move 4. Here is a classic example of a dark-squared strategy:



Black's very basic strategic theme behind the dark-squared approach is to trade the Nimzo bishop on c3 and then place his pawns on dark squares, keeping only his 'good bishop' and his pair of knights. The closed centre usually leads to a game based more on

ideas and long-term understanding than on calculation or knowledge of concrete lines; there is little need to learn heaps of critical, long variations. Indeed, lots of lines given in this book are there to illustrate typical ideas and stratagems; they are not included to be learnt by heart in hours of study. I can assure you that I don't know all the concrete lines, but studying them while analysing the repertoire increases your chances considerably to find the best or at least a good solution over the board.

Of course, that is only about half of a black repertoire against 1 d4 as the Nimzo needs at least one supplementary opening if White avoids it by going 3 ♖f3 or 3 g3. After having decided on a dark-squared approach as the common link, the Bogo-Indian Defence after 1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗f3 ♗b4+ fitted the bill perfectly. In most lines Black will be able to follow up with ...d6 and ...e5, and build the structure that is well known to us from the Nimzo-Indian. Here are two main positions that are part of the repertoire.



A serious practical advantage of the Bogo lines chosen for the repertoire is that 1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 g3, aiming for a Catalan, can be answered in the same style with 3...♗b4+ and has almost no independent value. If you elected to play the Queen's Indian or a line in the Queen's Gambit as a partner opening to the Nimzo, you would need to learn an entirely new line just to have an answer to 3 g3, whereas with the Bogo it is almost a 'two-for-one' solution.

This book features some of my own games. Since the start of this project I have employed the lines presented here in my tournament games whenever possible and appropriate. Besides the included games with a classical time control, I have played the repertoire in countless blitz and rapid games on the internet that are to be found as live commentary videos on my *YouTube Channel*: www.Youtube.com/Chessexplained.

Testing out your repertoire in internet blitz or rapid games is an excellent way to practice the lines and arising middlegames. After every game do a little reference check with the book to assess your play and possibly learn of improvements to gradually increase your knowledge of the whole repertoire.

Opening Repertoire: Nimzo and Bogo-Indian

I believe that the repertoire presented in this book is a good choice for the practical player, aiming to get decent positions without studying heaps of theoretical lines and ones that need to be memorized in a tedious process. The repertoire is fundamentally sound and you will be able to find good moves over the board in case you face something you not have yet studied or have simply forgotten.

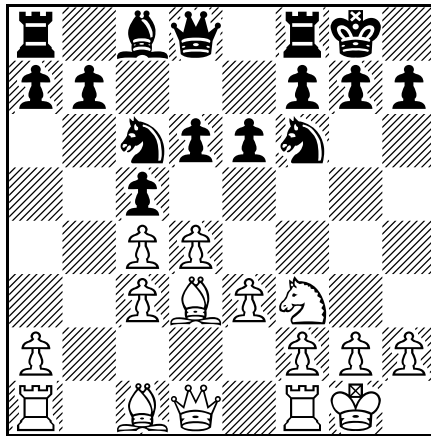
I hope you'll both enjoy the read and your games with the Nimzo and Bogo!

Christof Sielecki,
Duisburg, Germany,
June 2015

Chapter Eight

Nimzo-Indian: Hübner Variation, 4 e3 0-0 5 ♖d3 c5 6 ♞f3 ♞c6 7 0-0 ♙xc3 8 bxc3 d6

1 d4 ♞f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♞c3 ♙b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♙d3 c5 6 ♞f3 ♞c6 7 0-0 ♙xc3 8 bxc3 d6



The Hübner variation, my repertoire choice against White's most natural set-up with ♙d3 and ♞f3 in the Rubinstein. The concept of this set-up, giving up the bishop voluntarily to inflict the doubled pawns and then go ...d6 and ...e5, dates back to Nimzowitsch himself (P.Johner-A.Nimzowitsch, Dresden 1926). It was revived about 40 years later by Robert Hübner, then a promising junior player who later came very close to challenging Anatoly Karpov for the world title.

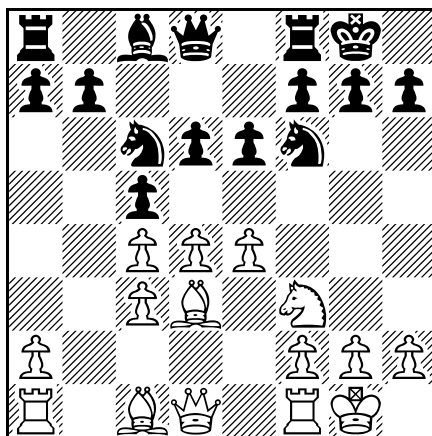
While Hübner's games showed the viability of the line, it only became popular in the

early 1970s when it was played by Bobby Fischer in Game 5 of the Match of the Century in Reykjavik to beat Boris Spassky in just 27 moves. Nowadays the Hübner is still a very respectable line, but it is not that popular anymore at the top level. I think this is mostly due to the fact that other lines with an open centre, like the Karpov variation, are easier to analyse with engine assistance. Those open positions are much more likely to lead to forced lines that simplify to clear equality than the manoeuvring battles of the Hübner.

The Hübner variation leads to strategically very complex positions of a closed nature that offer wide scope for creativity. There are almost no forced lines that you need to know; it's all about structures, plans and patterns. I can assure you that many long-time Nimzo players rely on the opening's fundamental soundness and finding the right continuations while over the board, not at home using a chess engine.

Our coverage of the Hübner is divided into five games:

- a) The game Ulko-Goganov (Game 16) gives an overview of White's less common deviations before move 9, like early d4-d5 attempts.
- b) Often White goes 9 e4.

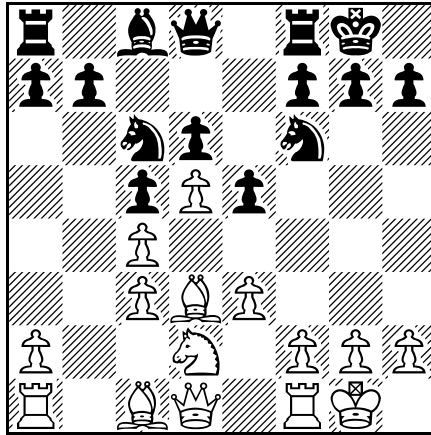


The game Kveinys-Sielecki (Game 17) analyses all the sidelines that White may play after 9 e4.

c) 9...e5 10 d5 ♖e7 11 ♘h4 is the main line of the Hübner with 9 e4. The game Anagnostopoulos-Antic (Game 18) is a recent example of White's most dangerous plan associated with ♗f3 and ♘f5. Black's play is more demanding against this approach than against the older plans like Spassky's f4, where Black often even obtains the better game quite quickly.

On move 9 White is not obliged to play the traditional 9 e4. Indeed, my database shows 16 different 9th moves that have tried, almost all the moves that don't blunder material or are downright crazy. Don't worry, we don't need to look at all 16 moves, but the bad news is that Games 19 and 20 will be full of transpositions and move order wrinkles. There is no way around that unfortunately.

The good news is that very often we reach closed positions where understanding and strategic abilities are more important than concrete knowledge of some lines. With a proper feel for the position, you will find good moves and plans over the board in case you have forgotten certain details. The game Henrichs-Berkes (Game 19) shows the most dangerous plan for Black to face, initiated by the moves 9 ♘d2 e5 10 d5.



This is the most frequently played line after White has chosen to avoid 9 e4 in the first place. By avoiding e3-e4, the possibility of recapturing with the e-pawn after a later f2-f4 is introduced. However, I think that Black does not have any problems, as the situation in the centre is clarified early and he can react accordingly, as demonstrated in the actual game and analysis. It is absolutely necessary to examine this game and Game 20 together to get a complete picture.

The direct 10 d5 of Game 19 does not trouble Black too much, so White has tried to refine the idea of playing d4-d5 followed by a later f2-f4. Starting on move 9, White may adopt an approach that I call the 'Waiting Game'. He usually starts with 9 ♘d2 (though 9 ♗b1, 9 ♗e1 and 9 h3 may lead to the same), but does not clarify the central situation after 9...e5 by going 10 d5 directly, as examined in Game 19. Instead, he plays little strengthening moves like ♗b1, h3, etc, and keeps the tension, hoping that Black will commit to something that does not fit into the structure after d4-d5 is ultimately played.

This sophisticated approach and White's other ideas on move 9 are seen in the game Van der Stricht-Sielecki (Game 20). I consider the Waiting Game to be the most challenging approach for Black in the Hübner, as move order issues can become very confusing. The 'rules of thumb' approach described in the notes to Game 20 will, however, guide you through this tricky line.

Game 16
J.Ulko-A.Goganov
 Izhevsk 2014

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♙d3

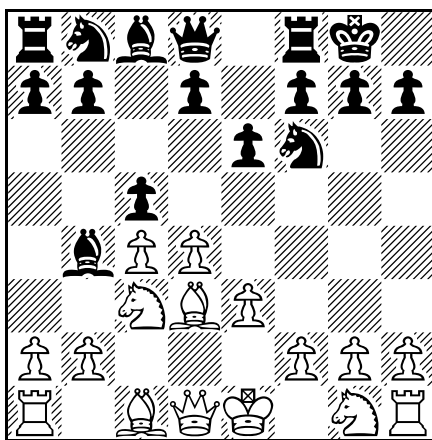
Otherwise:

a) 5 a3 transposes to the Sämisch, as discussed in Chapter 2.

b) 5 ♘ge2 is the Reshevsky Variation examined in Chapter 6.

c) 5 ♘f3 has little independent value. After 5...c5 once in a while White tries 6 ♙e2, but Black can just answer in similar style as after 6 ♙d3, which would just transpose to the main line: 6...♘c6 7 0-0 ♙xc3 8 bxc3 d6 (with the bishop on d3, White now could play e4, but this needs further preparation here) 9 ♘d2 e5 10 d5 ♘e7 11 ♚c2 ♙h8 12 ♙d3. This is a sure sign that ♙e2 was rather pointless – to be honest I don't quite understand the rationale behind it. In Y.Balashov-E.Mochalov, Kaunas 2012, Black now went 12...♘g4, which I don't like. It prepares ...f5, but I prefer 12...♘e8 with the same idea.

5...c5



6 ♘f3

Again, 6 a3 leads to the Sämisch, while 6 ♘ge2 was discussed in Chapter 7.

The only independent move here is 6 d5, after which Black may choose from two good options; one leads to a decent Nimzo-Benoni structure, the other to a gambit in the spirit of the Blumenfeld. Let's examine:

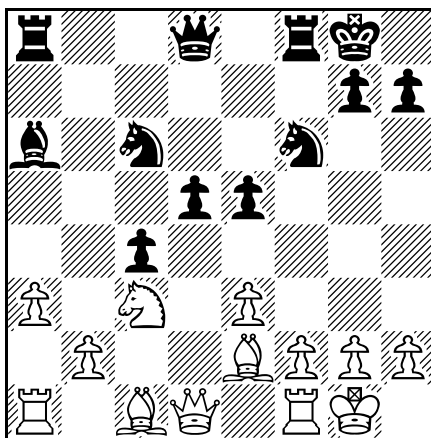
a) A recent example of the Benoni-style set-up is 6...exd5 7 cxd5 d6 8 ♘ge2 ♘bd7 9 0-0 a6 10 a4 ♙b8 11 h3 ♙e8 12 ♙h1 ♘e5 13 ♙c2 b5 14 axb5 axb5 15 e4 ♙d7 16 f4 ♘g6 with sharp play in N.Short-D.Howell, Douglas 2014.

b) The gambit move 6...b5 was even played by Anatoly Karpov in his 1978 match against Viktor Korchnoi. After 7 dxe6 fxe6 8 cxb5 a6 (in an earlier game of the match Karpov had

played 8...♙b7; his willingness to repeat the gambit in a world championship match is quite a seal of approval and I'll give the complete game because it features one of the most picturesque final positions in world championship history) 9 ♜g2 d5 10 0-0 e5 11 a3 Black has:

b1) 11...axb5 12 ♙xb5 ♙xc3 13 bxc3 ♙a6 14 ♖b1 ♗d6 15 c4 d4 16 ♜g3 ♞c6 17 a4 ♜a5 18 ♗d3 ♗e6 19 exd4 cxd4 20 c5 (after some inaccuracies by both sides, Korchnoi has now reached an almost winning position) 20...♞fc8 21 f4 ♞xc5 22 ♙xa6 ♗xa6 23 ♗xa6? (23 ♖b8+! ♜f7 24 ♖b5 wins even more convincingly, but the text move should also be enough to win) 23...♞xa6 24 ♙a3 ♞d5 25 ♜f5 ♜f7 26 fxe5 ♞xe5 27 ♖b5 ♞c4 28 ♖b7+ ♜e6 29 ♜xd4+ ♜d5 30 ♜f3 (30 ♞c2! ♞xa4 31 ♙f8 is the computerish solution, but Korchnoi was in time trouble in almost every game of this match) 30...♜xa3 31 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 32 ♞e7+ ♜d4 33 ♞xg7 ♞c4 34 ♞f4+ ♜e4 35 ♞d7+ ♜e3 36 ♞f3+ ♜e2 37 ♞xh7 (37 ♞e7 ♞cd2 38 ♞a3 is still much better for White) 37...♞cd2 38 ♞a3 ♞c6 (now White absolutely needs to move the g-pawn to draw, but...) 39 ♞a1?? ♜f3+! and Korchnoi resigned. This was Game 17 of the Baguio City match of 1978.

b2) 11...♙xc3 12 ♜xc3 c4 13 ♙e2 axb5 14 ♜xb5 ♙a6 15 ♜c3 ♞c6 is one improvement.



This should lead to about equal chances.

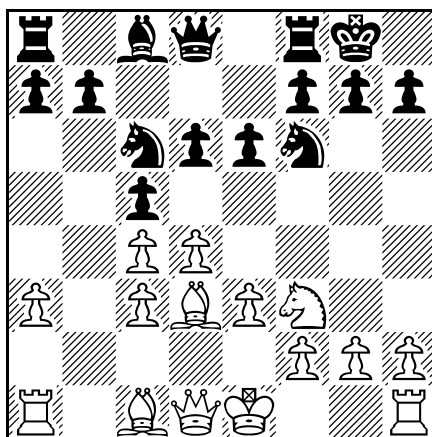
6...♞c6 7 d5

This and 7 a3 are ways for White to avoid the main starting position of the Hübner after 7 0-0 ♙xc3 8 bxc3 d6, which is discussed in the subsequent games of this chapter.

Let's examine 7 a3. This is quite a curious way to play: isn't White just losing a tempo, wouldn't Black just capture voluntarily after 7 0-0, and isn't that just a Sämisch with a misplaced knight on f3?

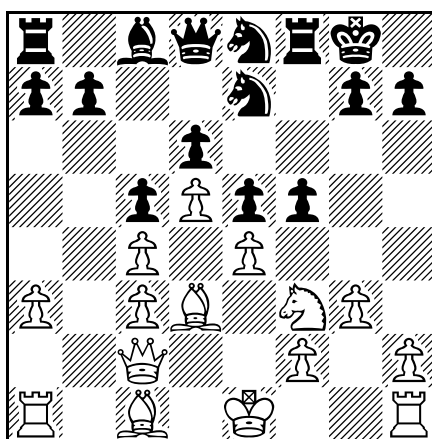
In some ways all these questions can be answered with 'yes', but there is a point to 7 a3 – players like Suat Atalik and Nikita Vitiugov know their openings and have some ideas behind their lines. Here White spends a move to force the typical Hübner structure, but with White's king uncommitted. This gives Black some additional issues to think about af-

ter 7...xc3+ 8 bxc3 d6.



This position also arises from various different move orders, starting with 4 f3 or 4 a3. Frankly speaking, lots of weaker white players just stumble into this position without any particular idea and just play the Hübner a move down, but as explained above it's not that easy for Black. After 9 e4 (in fact the most popular move here is 9 0-0, which simply is a Hübner a move down; by the way: this doesn't mean Black is already better, as we are still talking about a very closed position here, although it should be a bit more comfortable than usual for Black and quite easy equality) 9...e5 10 d5 f6 White can try to expand on the kingside:

a) S.Atalik-J.Werle, Wijk aan Zee 2007, saw 11 g3 f6 12 c2 g6?!, which weakens the dark squares. I prefer the straightforward 12...f5.

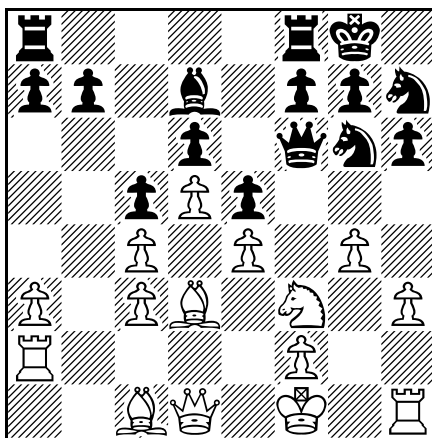


One idea is the line 13 g5 f6! (initiating a long, forced sequence) 14 exf5 e4 15 e4 xe4 16 xe4 xf5 17 e3 d7 18 xe7 fe8 19 0-0 xe7 20 d2 g4 and Black had

excellent play for the pawn. In the game, though, White exploited the 12...g6?! move immediately with 13 ♙h6 ♗g7 14 h4 f6 15 ♗h2 ♖h8 16 f4 ♗g8 17 ♙xg7+ ♖xg7 18 f5 and enjoyed a huge space advantage. Black should go 12...f5 for more active play.

b) White may also play 11 ♗h4, which is less pointed. The ♗h4 plan is quite normal for these structures, but not having castled is no particular bonus here. Black can just play as he would in the position with 0-0 played instead of a3 (see the main game). A sample game: 11...h6 12 ♗f3 ♗g6 13 ♗f5 ♙xf5 14 ♗xf5 ♗a5! (here not having castled is even a serious problem for White) 15 ♙d2 ♗f4! 16 ♙f1 ♗d8! 17 ♙xf4 g6 18 ♗h3 exf4 and Black was already significantly better in A.Ipatov-A.Sumets, Palma de Mallorca 2009.

c) Another way to initiate play on the kingside is 11 h3 ♗g6 12 g3 (White goes for slow expansion, not giving the black knights any early outposts) 12...♙d7 13 ♖f1 h6 14 ♖a2 ♗h7 when Black is ready for ...f5. White might now decide to prevent that, but it seems the cure is worse than the disease: 15 g4?! ♗f6.



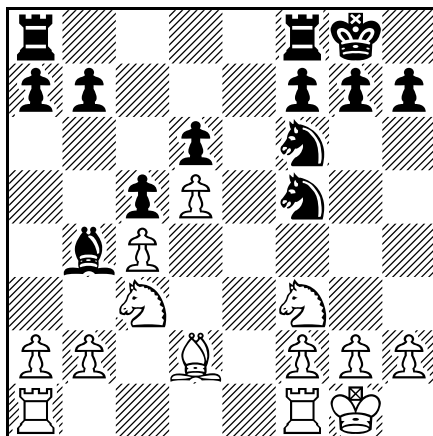
Black now has an excellent blockade on the dark squares and after 16 ♗g1 ♗h4 17 f3 ♗fb8 18 ♗f2 g5 (probably not the best move, but still leading to very one-sided play; now only Black has ideas to open up the queenside with ...b5) 19 ♗e2 a6 20 ♗g3 b5 21 ♗f5 ♙xf5 22 exf5 bxc4 23 ♙e4 (23 ♙xc4 e4 24 fxe4 ♗xc3 is disastrous for White) 23...♗b3 24 ♗c2 ♗d8 25 ♗e2 ♗a5 26 ♗xc4 ♗ab8 27 ♖f2 ♗f6 28 ♙d3 ♗c7 29 ♗d1 ♗b6 I am a bit surprised that *Houdini* only gives Black a minuscule edge. It's not so easy for him to make progress, but it's clear that White is only suffering in defence. N.Vitiugov-D.Khismatullin, Plovdiv 2012, concluded 30 ♙e2 ♗b7 31 ♖f1 ♖g7 32 ♖f2 ♗b1 33 ♗a2? (the decisive mistake, but it wasn't fun to play in any case) 33...e4! 34 f4 ♗xc1 35 ♗cxc1 gxf4 36 ♖f1 ♗e7 37 ♙c4 e3 38 ♗h2 ♗e5 39 ♗c2 ♗e4 and White resigned.

7...♙xc3+

This is fine, but Black has some choice here:

a) 7...♗e7, as played by Kasparov and leading to a closed position: 8 e4 d6 (8...♙xc3+ 9 bxc3 d6 might lead to the main line, but White has not castled yet and you can also view

this position as the line with 7 a3, but with an extra tempo for White; Kasparov's move is more flexible, but it allows White to avoid the doubled pawns) 9 ♔d2 exd5 10 exd5 (10 cxd5 ♘g6 is a fine Nimzo-Benoni that can easily turn in Black's favour quickly) 10...♙f5 (Black has less space and welcomes exchanges) 11 ♖c2 ♗d7 12 0-0 ♙xd3 13 ♗xd3 ♖f5 14 ♗xf5 ♘xf5.



Chances were equal here in R.Ponomariov-G.Kasparov, Linares 2003.

b) If you prefer a more open type of game, you can also follow another legend's example and play 7...exd5 8 cxd5 ♘xd5 9 ♙xh7+ ♔xh7 10 ♗xd5 ♙g8 11 0-0 ♙xc3 12 bxc3 d6 13 e4 ♙g4, with about equal play in S.Gligoric-B.Larsen, Niksic 1983. Black needs to be a bit cautious though, as the missing h-pawn causes his king some discomfort.

8 bxc3 ♘e7 9 d6

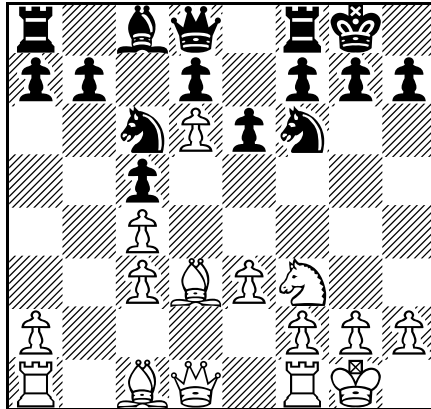
This avoids transpositions like 9 e4 d6 10 0-0 e5 and leads to interesting play.

9...♘c6

Black should avoid 9...♘g6 10 h4 e5? (10...♘g4 is the weird computer move that is still okay for Black) 11 h5 e4 12 hxg6 hxg6 13 ♙c2 exf3 14 ♗xf3 and White already had a decisive attack in S.Furman-A.Cherepkov, Leningrad 1956.

10 0-0

10 e4 e5 will lead to the game position or something very similar, but Black should avoid 10...♘e8?! 11 e5!, as happened in M.Raffalt-K.Petschar, Finkenstein 1990.



10...♞e8

Black was probably worried about the possible pin with ♙g5 coming, but I don't think this move is strictly necessary.

I suggest going 10...b6 to stay flexible. Now 11 e4 e5 12 ♙g5 is not that much of a problem due to 12...h6 13 ♙h4 ♞e8, intending ...♞e6 and ...♞f8, which will unpin and pick up d6 in the process: for example, 14 ♘e1 ♞e6 15 ♘c2 ♞f8 16 ♘e3 ♞xd6 and I doubt that White has sufficient compensation. He has some (the engines evaluate this position as equal), but his initiative might be only temporary.

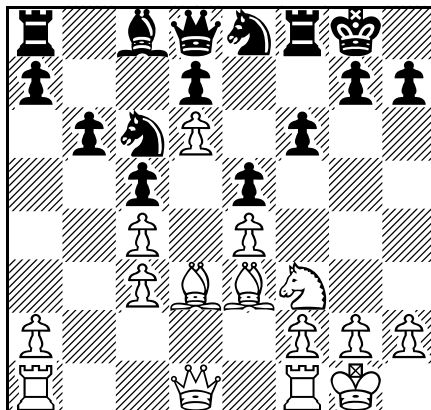
11 e4

11 ♙c2 was interesting, trying to provoke a weakness in Black's kingside, although after 11...b6 12 ♞d3 g6 13 e4 f6 14 ♙h6 ♘g7 Black is fine.

11...e5 12 ♙g5?! f6

This is a useful move for Black, so White shouldn't have provoked it with ♙g5.

13 ♙e3 b6



Opening Repertoire: Nimzo and Bogo-Indian

White must act quickly, otherwise d6 will fall without any substantial compensation.

14 ♖e2 ♖b7 15 ♘h4 ♜b8

15...g6 16 ♖h6 ♘g7 was also good. Indeed, White will struggle to find compensation whenever his d6-pawn is attacked by the coming ...♜e8 and ...♘d8-f7 manoeuvre.

16 ♖g4

16 ♖h5 ♜xd6 17 ♜g4 ♜c7 doesn't help either. White does not have enough compensation for the pawn.

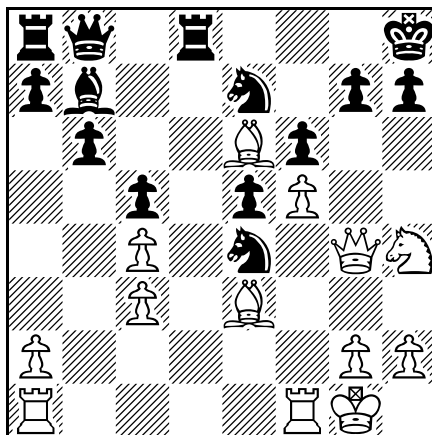
16...♘xd6 17 ♖xd7 ♘e7?

17...♘d8 would have preserved Black's advantage.

18 f4?

18 ♜g4 is still okay for White, quite surprisingly. After 18...♖xe4 19 ♜ad1 the ideas of ♖e6+ or ♜e6+ give him enough play: for example, 19...f5 20 ♜h3 ♘f7 21 ♘xf5 ♘xf5 22 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 23 ♜xf5 ♜e8 24 ♜d7 and it's about equal.

18...♘xe4 19 ♜g4 ♖h8 20 f5 ♜d8 21 ♖e6



White has some compensation, but it's not enough.

21...♜d3?

21...♜d6! was stronger, intending 22 ♘g6+ ♘xg6 23 fxg6 ♜xe6 24 ♜xe6 ♜c8 25 ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 26 gxh7 ♖a6 and Black is better, since he will soon enjoy two pawns for the exchange and a harmonious set-up.

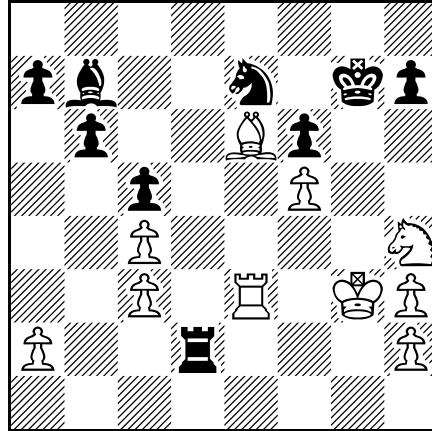
22 ♜ae1?

22 ♜ad1! was key, and White is even better. In the case of 22...♜xe3? 23 ♜d7 it's even a decisive advantage.

22...♜e8

22...♘xc3?? 23 ♘g6+ ♘xg6 24 fxg6 ♜f8 25 ♜h5 was to be avoided.

23 ♜f3 ♜ad8 24 ♜h3 ♘g5 25 ♖xg5 ♜xh3 26 gxh3 fxg5 27 ♜xg5 ♜f8 28 ♜xe5 ♜d1+ 29 ♖f2 ♜f6 30 ♜xf6 gxh6 31 ♜e3 ♜d2+ 32 ♖g3 ♖g7



The dust has settled. White now managed to hold this slightly worse endgame.

33 a3 ♖f8 34 ♗f3 ♕xf3 35 ♖xf3 ♗xh2 36 ♖e4 ♗d2 37 a4 ♗d1 38 ♗e2 h5 39 a5 bxa5 40 ♗a2 ♗e1+ 41 ♖f4 ♗f1+ 42 ♖e4 ♗e1+ 1/2-1/2

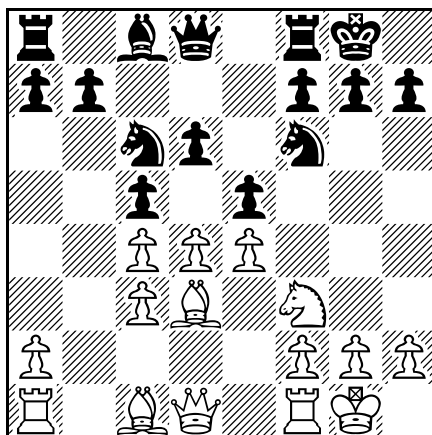
Summary

The early deviations don't challenge Black in a theoretical sense, but they lead to complex positions in almost all cases. I was particularly fascinated by 7 a3, which shows that losing a tempo might actually have a point in some cases. After early d4-d5 advances, Black usually gets a decent Nimzo-Benoni structure or might even strike in Blumenfeld style with ...b5, as played by Karpov.

Game 17
A.Kveinys-C.Sielecki
 Lluçmajor Open 2014

1 d4 ♗f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♗c3 ♕b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♖d3 c5 6 ♗f3 ♗c6 7 0-0 ♕xc3 8 bxc3 d6 9 e4 e5

I was surprised to get the Hübner on the board in this game. Kveinys had rarely played the Rubinstein and when he did he employed ♗e2-based set-ups. This game will analyse all White's ideas after 9 e4 with the exception of the main line with 11 ♗h4, which will be discussed in the next game.



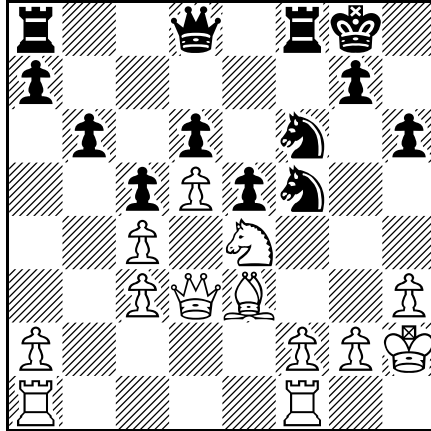
10 d5

Once in a while White tries 10 h3. This move is not exactly forcing in nature, so Black has quite some range for creativity:

a) The move played most often is 10...h6. This is a useful move in the Hübner in most cases. It serves multiple purposes, like clearing a square for the knight on h7, preparing ...g5 if needed, and avoiding ♕g5 (this is rarely a threat though). After 11 ♕e3 b6 the game I. Ibragimov-M. Cebalo, Djakovo 1994, was very instructive: 12 d5 ♖e7 13 ♖h2 ♗h7 14 ♖c2 (14 g4? ♗g6 is excellent for Black; see Vitiugov-Khismatullin, as discussed in the notes on 7 a3 in Game 16, for a similar structure) 14...f5 15 exf5 ♕xf5 (Black welcomes the exchange of the bishops, as with less space, some exchanges are useful; in this specific case 15...♗xf5?? was not playable anyway due to 16 g4) 16 ♗d2 ♕xd3 17 ♖xd3 ♗f5 18 ♗e4:

a1) In the game Cebalo continued 18...♖e7 19 ♕d2 (preserving the bishop to support the coming pawn advances) 19...♗f6 20 ♖ae1 ♖ae8 21 g4 ♗h4 22 f4 exf4? (this sacrifices material for insufficient compensation; the computer still likes 22...♗xe4 23 ♖xe4 ♗g6 24 f5 ♗h8 for Black, but it seems like a rather grim prospect to me and the alternative on move 18 is just much easier to play) 23 ♗xc5 bxc5 24 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 25 ♕xf4 ♗e4 26 ♕g3 ♖xf1 27 ♕xh4 ♖ff7 28 ♕xe7 ♖xe7 29 ♖g2 ♖f7 30 ♖f3+ ♗f6 and probably should have lost, but in the end held this semi-fortress.

a2) My suggested improvement is 18...♗f6, intending to exchange the minor pieces.



If White now tries 19 ♖d2 then Black has 19... ♗xe4 20 ♜xe4 ♜h4 21 ♜e2 e4!? and he is fine.

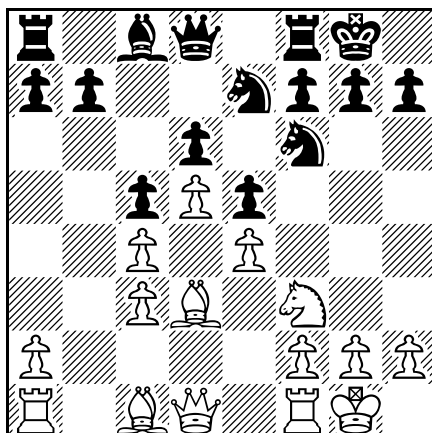
b) Black has some alternatives to 10...h6, of course. The ever-creative Bent Larsen came up with 10...b6 11 ♜e1 ♔h8 12 ♜b1 ♜e8 13 ♜b2 ♙a6 14 d5 ♗a5. This is a rare set-up in this line. The normal square for the knight is e7, supporting ...f7-f5 or heading for g6. In this particular case there is a concrete idea behind ...♗a5:

b1) White can simply cover the pawn with 15 ♜e2, after which 15... ♜a4 16 ♙c2! ♜d7 (not 16... ♜xc4?? 17 ♜d1! and Black will have to lose material to save the queen) 17 ♗d2 leads to a complicated manoeuvring game. White has a more interesting option, though.

b2) 15 ♗h4 (very dynamic play by Svetozar Gligoric, a true master of the Rubinstein variation for White) 15... ♙xc4 16 ♙b1 ♜d7 17 f4 ♗g8 (one point of the mysterious ...♔h8 move becomes clear) 18 fxе5 dxe5 19 ♜h5 ♜ac8 20 ♜f2 (White could have captured on e5, with excellent play, but I wonder if this is a database error and Larsen actually played 19... ♜ae8 instead of 19... ♜ac8) 20... ♗b7 21 ♜e3 g6 22 ♜g5 (again, e5 was hanging, or not) and White had some compensation for the pawn, but Black enjoyed an extra pawn and had some hopes to convert it in the long run, S.Gligoric-B.Larsen, Bugojno 1982.

Returning to 10 d5:

10... ♗e7



11 ♖e1

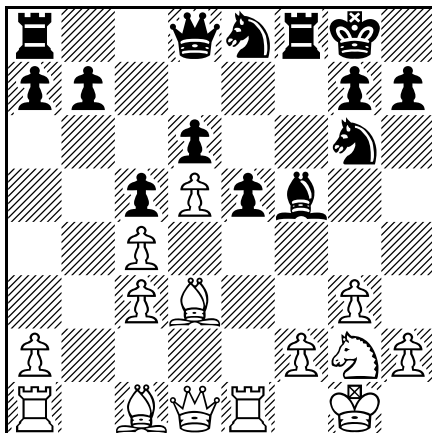
This is a rare move, but it has some interesting points. There are some less dangerous alternatives, though: for example, the similar knight move 11 ♖d2, which plans to move the knight to g3 or e3, but it is rather slow and does not address Black's ...f5 plan at all. After 11...h6 12 ♙e1 ♘h7 13 ♗f1 f5 14 exf5 ♕xf5 15 ♘g3 ♕xd3 16 ♗xd3 ♗d7 17 a4 ♙f7 18 a5 ♙af8 Black is in good shape once again. White's only meaningful plan is f2-f4, and that is very hard to realize. In the game Y.Balashov-R.Vaganian, Odessa 1989, White lost his way in an equal position: 19 f3 ♗f5 20 ♘xf5 ♙xf5 21 ♙b1 ♙f7 22 ♙b2 ♗d8 23 ♙xb7 ♙xf3 24 gxf3 ♙xb7 25 f4 ♗h4 26 ♗g3 ♗xg3+ 27 hxg3 e4! 28 f5 (28 ♙xe4 ♗f6 29 ♙e1 ♙b3 is about equal) 28...♙b1 29 ♗f1 ♗f7 30 g4 ♗f6 31 ♕f4 ♙xe1+ 32 ♗xe1 ♘xg4 33 ♕xd6 a6 34 ♕xc5? (34 ♗e2 was still equal) 34...♗e5 35 ♕d4 ♗xc4 36 ♗f2 g6 37 fxg6+ ♗xg6 38 ♕b6 ♗f6 39 ♕c7 h5 40 ♗g3 ♗f5 41 ♗f2 h4 and 0-1.

There also is 11 ♕g5?!, which does not match the position's requirements at all. After 11...♗g6 12 ♗h4 h6 13 ♗xg6 fxg6 14 ♕d2 g5 Black was in very good shape in a number of games. In this pawn formation White has no real plans at all, while Black might consider ...♗f6-h5 and always has the long-term target on c4.

11...♗e8

I think that Black should go for the ...f7-f5 break as soon as possible in the Hübner. It gives him some space and possible play along the f-file. When Kveinys played 11 ♗e1 against me, I had to decide over the board what to do. I had looked at the move before, but forgotten the finer points.

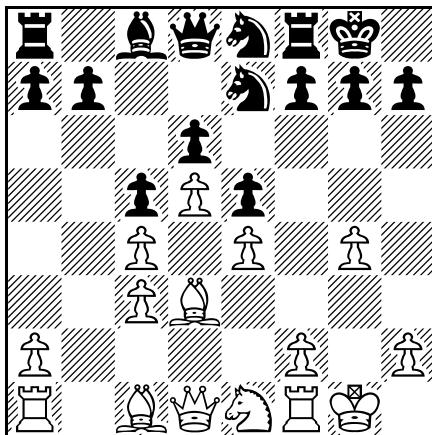
In fact my files said Black should go 11...♗g6 instead. Looking at it again after the game, I had to agree that this is preferable. Now White usually plays 12 g3 to control f4 and h4, and clear g2 for the knight. Following 12...♕h3 13 ♗g2 Black has tried various moves. Jan Timman played 13...♗e8 against Svetozar Gligoric in Bled, 1979, and then 14 ♙e1 f5 15 exf5 ♕xf5.



This is already very convenient for Black. What exactly is White's plan in this position? Gligoric tried the active 16 f4?, but after 16...♙xd3 17 ♖xd3 ♗d7 18 ♜b1 ♘f6 19 ♜b2 ♜ae8 20 ♜f1 ♗h3 his light squares were terribly weak. Timman went on to win after some inaccurate moves by both sides: 21 f5 ♘g4 22 ♗e1 e4 23 ♗e2 ♗6e5 24 ♗xe4 ♜f7? (24...♗h5!) 25 ♗g2?? (25 ♘f3 would have been a good defence when White would have been back in the game) 25...♗xg2+ 26 ♙xg2 ♗xc4 (now it's over) 27 ♜c2 ♜e5 28 h3 ♘f6 29 g4 ♘xd5 30 ♜f3 b5 31 ♜cf2 a5 32 g5 b4 33 cxb4 axb4 34 ♙h2 ♗c3 35 a3 ♗e4 36 ♜e2 ♘xg5 and Gligoric resigned. In short, 11...♗g6 is perfectly acceptable for Black.

12 ♗c2

White has a surprising alternative here that is not so easy to meet for Black, 12 g4!.



This is very radical, but a good move. Now ...f5 is out of the question and the e1-knight gains a good spot on g2, where it covers the sensitive squares f4 and h4, and helps to prepare the relevant pawn advances. Here 12...♗g6 13 ♘g2 h6 (13... ♗h4 was tried in M.Tabatabaei-

Y.Hou, Nakhchivan 2015; White should play 14 f3 intending ♖e1, when I think White is slightly better) 14 ♜f3 was played in H.Nakamura-E.Perelsteyn, Southampton 2003:

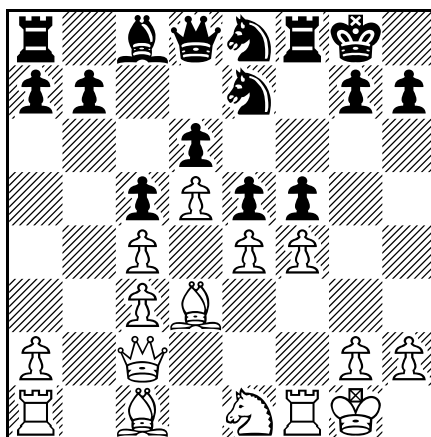
a) The game went 14...♗h4?!, which I believe is mistimed. The position is very interesting to study, though. Black would be in good shape if the e8-knight were on h7, supporting the blockade. It is not so easy, though, to transfer it via f6 as this is met by g4-g5. After 15 ♜g3 ♗xg2 16 ♜xg2 (now Black is in slight trouble; f4 is a threat and the only way to prevent it reliably is bad) 16...g5? (16...♗f6 is also answered with 17 f4!, but was relatively better) 17 ♜h1 ♗g7 18 h4 f6 19 hxg5 hxg5 20 ♜f3 ♗f7 21 ♜xg5 ♜xg4 22 ♜xg4 fxg5 Nakamura's 23 ♜h6 was clearly better for White, but 23 ♜h7 would have ended the game instantly; ♜h1-h6 is just too much.

b) My suggested improvement for Black is a waiting move like 14...b6. If White now plays 15 ♜g3, Black has the opportunity to play 15...♗f6. After that White should play 16 f3 (16 g5? ♗h5 17 ♜f3 ♗hf4 18 gxh6 ♜f6 is excellent for Black) 16...♜e8 17 h4 ♗h7. This position is very resilient for Black, but he has few active ideas.

It seems to me that Nakamura's 12 g4 is a very interesting idea for White, so Black should opt for 11...♗g6, instead of my move 11...♗e8. After Kveinys' 12 ♜c2, though, Black is fine and the game is not very relevant in a theoretical sense from here on. It does, though, illustrate some typical themes quite nicely.

12...h6

Here 12...f5?! was premature, in view of 13 f4!



Now 13...exf4 14 ♜xf4 fxe4 15 ♜xe4 h6 16 ♜b1 is slightly better for White. 12...h6 is a useful move anyway, though, and asks White to make a move that does the same; i.e. improve a little bit without conceding anything.

13 g3

Technically a novelty, but we were just playing over the board, not reproducing some elaborate preparation. 13 a4 had been played before, after which 13...f5 14 f4 fxe4 15 ♜xe4 exf4 16 ♜xf4 ♗f6 is similar to the note to move 14 and gives Black equality.

13...f5

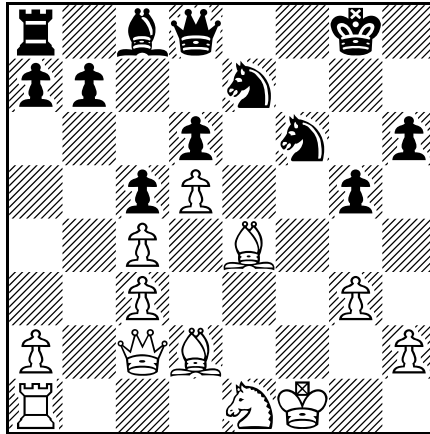
There are no useful preparatory moves left, so this is right.

14 f4

14 exf5 ♙xf5 15 f4 ♙h3 16 ♗g2 ♗f6 17 fxe5 dxe5 is no problem for Black. Maybe White should still have taken on f5, though, as the improvement for Black in the next note seems promising.

14...exf4?!

This is imprecise. Instead, 14...fxe4! was a simple and good way to play. After 15 ♙xe4 exf4 16 ♙xf4 g5! 17 ♙d2 ♗xf1+ 18 ♙xf1 ♗f6 I'd rather be Black, given the choice.



Black will obtain play on the weakened light squares, with ...♙h3 and ...♗d7 being natural follow-up moves.

15 exf5!

This I had underestimated. I actually thought it did not matter if I took on e4 or f4 first, and just wanted to get to the 14...fxe4 line by another move order.

15...fxg3?

Making Black's life much tougher. Here 15...♙xf5! 16 ♙xf4 ♗d7 was much simpler to handle and Black is fine. He has no problem piece and a sound structure – just what you want in this line.

16 hxg3 ♗f6 17 ♗g2 ♗g4 18 ♗h4 ♗e5

I thought this manoeuvre was fine when I went for 15...fxg3, but White now has the better chances.

19 f6

Direct play, but 19 ♙e4! with a long-term build-up including ♙f4, ♗g2, g4-g5 and so on would have been difficult to defend. Here 19...♗xc4? fails to 20 f6 ♗xf6 21 ♗xf6 gxf6 22 ♙xh6 ♗e5 23 ♗f1 and the attack smashes through.

19...♗xf6 20 ♗xf6 gxf6 21 ♙xh6 ♗d7

Aiming for counterplay on h3 or g4.

22 ♗f1 ♗h3?

Opening Repertoire: Nimzo and Bogo-Indian

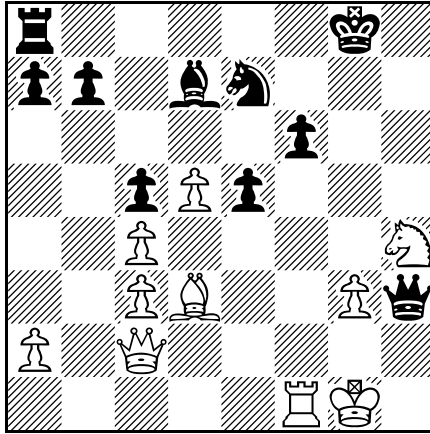
22...♔g4! was still okay for Black. He is under pressure, but not lost like in the game continuation.

23 ♖f4 ♗d7

Black needs to prepare ...♖f8, so there was not much choice.

24 ♗xe5 dxe5

24...fxe5? 25 ♖f2 is over immediately.



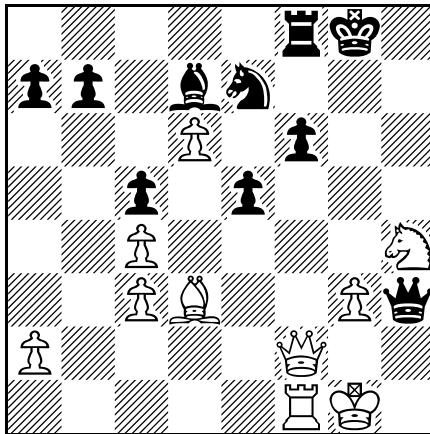
25 ♖f2?

25 ♖f3! would have been unbearable for Black: for instance, 25...♔g4 26 ♖f2 ♖f8 27 d6 ♞c6 28 ♞f5 ♗xf5 29 ♗xf5 ♖xc4 30 ♖h2 ♖f7 31 ♗g6 ♖g7 32 ♖xf6 and we approach 'mate in x' territory.

25...♖f8

Black is back in the game now, if still worse.

26 d6?



This hit me by surprise. Did Kveinys overlook the reply ...♙c6?

With 26 ♙e4 White could have kept the initiative.

26...♙c6 27 ♖e3

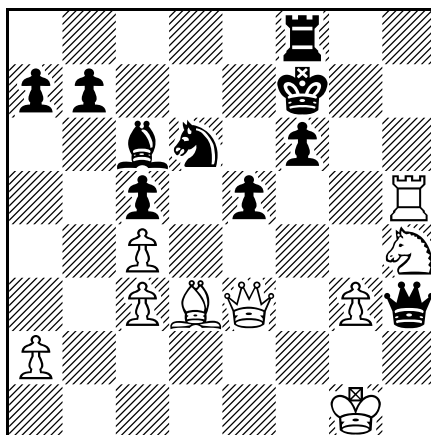
The only move to keep the balance.

27...♗c8 28 ♗f5??

This turns the table completely.

Both 28 d7 and 28 ♙f5 would have kept an equal game or drawn straight away, such as after 28...♖h1+ 29 ♔f2 ♖h2+ 30 ♔e1 ♗xd6 31 ♙e6+ ♔g7 32 ♗d3 ♗e4 33 ♗f5+ ♔h8 34 ♙d5 ♙xd5 35 cxd5 ♖g2 36 ♗h4 c4 37 ♖e3 ♖c2 38 ♖h6+ with perpetual check.

28...♗xd6 29 ♗h5 ♔f7



The king will be quite safe on e6.

30 ♙g6+

30 ♗h7+ ♔e6 also leads nowhere. The knight on d6 is a nice example of the maxim 'the knight is the king's best friend'. From here on Black has many ways to win and I managed to find one.

30...♔e6 31 ♔f2 ♗xc4 32 ♗d3 ♖h2+ 33 ♔e1 ♖g1+ 34 ♔e2 ♗d6 35 ♙f5+ ♗xf5 36 ♖xf5+ ♔d6 37 ♗h7 ♖xg3 38 ♗g6 ♖g2+ 39 ♔e3 ♙b5!

The only move to win. Others only lead to a draw.

40 c4 ♖g1+ 41 ♔d2 ♗d4+ 42 ♔e1 ♖e3+ 43 ♔f1 ♙xc4+ 44 ♔g2 ♙e6 0-1

A lucky win for me after I had bungled up the result of a good opening.

Summary

All in all, the sidelines after 9 e4 are not too troublesome, but are interesting to study to gain a better feel for this type of position. Noteworthy is Nakamura's 12 g4, which initiates a fascinating strategic battle. Indeed, I recommend avoiding this possibility altogether by going for 11...♗g6.