

Every now and then there comes a book that just makes things simple and understandable. This book is one such rare gem.

John and Joshua Doknjas make a substantial effort to dissect one of the most complex and often misunderstood openings and provide the user with an objective understanding of the many complex lines. Notably, this is done while maintaining an eminently easy to read and enjoyable format and writing style. The book is full of passion, reflecting the young authors' love for the game. The sample games are well chosen and annotated and present good examples of the various lines and their pros and cons.

Perhaps more importantly, the book does not require the reader to memorize countless lines until move 30, but rather strives to develop the general feel for the resulting middlegame positions and typical plans and transformations.

If you would like to develop an appreciation for this complex opening, improve your general understanding of the game, and have an enjoyable read, then this book is for you, whether you are a weekend club player or a seasoned grandmaster.

International Master Yan Teplitsky

Former National Youth Coach and Olympic Medallist for Team Canada

opening repertoire

the Sicilian Najdorf

John Doknjas & Joshua Doknjas

Foreword by grandmaster **Emil Sutovsky**

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About the Authors

John Doknjas is a FIDE Master, who has finished first in the Under 18 2017 Canadian Youth Chess Championships. He has won several strong tournaments in British Columbia, Canada, including the Grand Pacific Open. John is a chess teacher with over five years of experience, and has annotated games for distinguished national chess publications.

Joshua Doknjas is a National Master from Canada who has enjoyed success competing internationally. He has won six national titles for his age. Joshua enjoys researching topical lines in the opening, and frequently discovers new ideas. Joshua and his brother, John, have been playing the Najdorf for over eight years; they have analysed and discussed cutting-edge developments, which are shared in this book.

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Foreword

Writing a book on Najdorf is always a challenge. Writing it from the black side is an even bigger challenge, as you have to deal with the numerous dangerous lines – and I was a bit sceptical when the request to review the present book arrived. Honestly, I didn't know much about Joshua and John, but their joint effort was a pleasant surprise. Long past are the days when one had to be a strong grandmaster and renowned theoretician to write an opening manual. The Doknjas brothers have penned a comprehensive repertoire book on one of the most complex openings, and managed to make it a good read as well as an in-depth research. The authors discuss both topical and side lines; they bring a lot of key games that are augmented by their analysis, and even provide the reader with tasks and puzzles. They focus on their favourite lines – as repertoire books usually do, but keep being in touch with the reader and do not dig too deep. They obviously use engines, but there is no feeling they were overused – it is pretty much a human book.

This is the first such massive work for the Doknjas brothers and, as often happens in these cases, you see a lot of passion for the work – and it resulted in a book that will be useful for both club players and grandmasters.

Grandmaster Emil Sutovsky

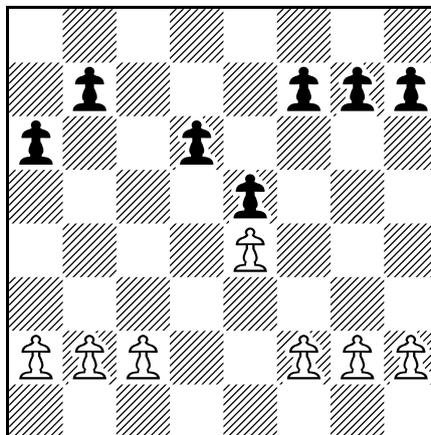
President of the Association of Professional Chess Players,
Aeroflot Open and Gibraltar Chess Festival Co-Champion,
and Olympic Gold Medallist for Team Israel

Introduction

The Najdorf Sicilian is a treasure trove of dynamic potential and opportunities to seize the initiative, as well as a variety of structures which widen the ambitious player's chess horizons. This is in essence what drew us to it around eight years ago when we first began playing the Najdorf, and it has since become one of our favourite openings. However, one problem that often discourages many players from learning the Najdorf is the immense amounts of theory (such as the Poisoned Pawn variation of 6 ♖g5). Keeping this in mind, our book is conscious of providing practical lines that are understandable, as opposed to a labyrinth of variations that require extreme memorization. At the same time, we ensure that Black's position is theoretically sound and contains good opportunities to play for the win.

The Structure of the Repertoire

We typically recommend going for the pawn structure where Black plays ...e5 on the 6th move. This is the structure the Najdorf tends to be most commonly associated with.



The main drawback is the weak d5-square, but Black can keep this square monitored to prevent White from achieving a positional advantage. This structure gives Black active play along the c-file and allows him to gain space on the queenside with ...b5. Perhaps most

Opening Repertoire: The Sicilian Najdorf

importantly, the pawn on e5 occupies key centre space, making a possible ...d5 break significantly more powerful.

However, against several of White's tries, we opt for a different approach if ...e5 isn't ideal. For example:

-  After 6 ♖c4 or 6 ♗g5, White's control of the d5-square is too strong and our preference is 6...e6 and 6...♗bd7 respectively. Notice how these moves don't concede the fight for the d5-square.
-  If White plays 6 h3, our repertoire covers 6...e6, aiming for a more dynamic position as opposed to the standard 6...e5.
-  Finally, going for a Dragon set-up works better against some of White's sidelines. An example of this is seen after 6 a4, when 6...g6 gives Black a much improved version of the Dragon because the inclusion of a4 makes castling queenside for White very treacherous.

A Model Najdorf Game

To give a taste of the Najdorf, we'd like to show a game by one of its greatest practitioners of all time. The game features a wide variety of typical Najdorf ideas in both attack and defence. We hope it serves as strong encouragement for your journey through the depths of this fascinating opening.

M.Adams-G.Kasparov Linares 2005

1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 a6 6 ♗e3 e6

Kasparov heads into a Scheveningen structure, which he had earned a very good reputation for handling with expertise. However, our preference against the English Attack is to take up a greater influence in the centre with 6...e5, as can be seen in Chapter 1.

7 ♗e2

Quite a common move, but not White's most energetic approach. Instead 7 f3, preparing a kingside attack with g4, is the main line. 7 g4!? immediately is also an interesting alternative.

7...♙c7 8 ♙d2

8 a4 is more popular, restricting Black's queenside play. It leads to a different type of game after 8...b6 9 f4 ♗b7 10 ♗f3 ♗bd7, where both sides have dynamic chances. White controls more centre space but Black can develop good play against White's vulnerable e4-pawn.

8...b5 9 a3 ♗b7 10 f3

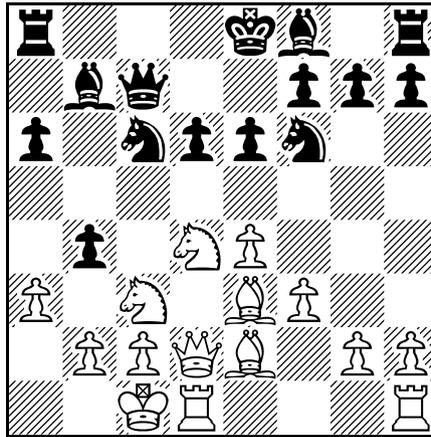
White plays for the classic English Attack set-up. He aims to castle queenside and begin advancing his kingside pawns. One plan for Black is to work towards attacking in the

centre with ...d5. Another plan, as seen in this game, is expanding on the queenside with ...b4. This is especially effective here because of the “hook” White has created with a3.

10...♞c6

Kasparov develops his queenside quickly before worrying about castling. As is often seen in the Najdorf, Black can quickly seize the initiative if White isn't being too threatening.

11 0-0-0 b4!



Blasting open lines on the queenside and beginning to develop a powerful attack against White's king. Using the a3-pawn as a hook to play ...b4 is a common theme in several Najdorf structures.

12 axb4 ♞xb4 13 g4 ♕e7 14 g5 ♞d7 15 h4!

White gains space on the kingside and prepares to undermine Black's e6-pawn with h5 followed by g6.

15...♞c5!

Protecting the e6-pawn while simultaneously bringing another piece into the attack.

16 ♖b1 ♜b8

The rook creates pressure on the b-file, eyeing White's king. Note how White can't really neutralize Black's attack by playing b3 since this will weaken the queenside dark squares and leave the c3-knight vulnerable.

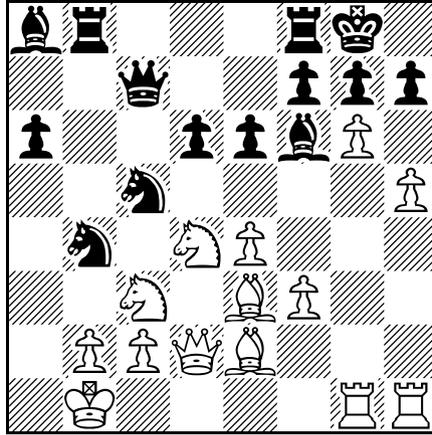
17 h5 0-0

This may look dangerous because of White's incoming attack on the kingside. However, Kasparov has prepared an excellent way to meet g6.

18 g6 ♕f6!

Holding the kingside together while exerting pressure along the long diagonal. This idea is also seen in a variation of Game 38 from Chapter 8 on f6-h3.

19 ♜dg1 ♕a8!



Unleashing the power of the b8-rook while keeping the bishop on the a8-h1 diagonal to continue hammering down on White's centre.

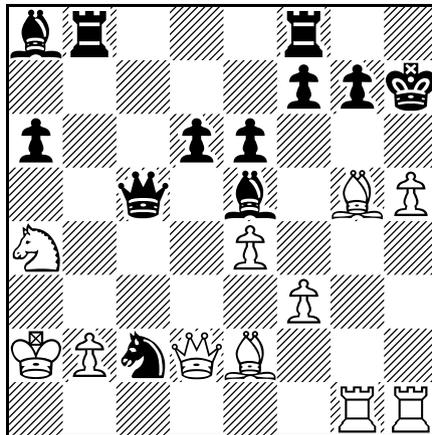
20 ♖g5 ♗e5 21 gxh7+

21 ♖f4 would continue the attack on Black's powerful bishop, but here Black has the excellent resource 21...♘bd3!, when White will experience problems with Black's attack on the unprotected d4-knight and along the b-file.

21...♙xh7 22 ♘b3 ♘xc2!

Undermining the b3-knight and destroying the cover of White's king. This is the culmination of Black's massive build-up of forces on the queenside.

23 ♘xc5 ♘a3+ 24 ♙a2 ♚xc5 25 ♘a4 ♘c2!!



A brilliant way to finish off the game. Kasparov is able to leave his queen en prise because of the mate threat with ...♚xb2.

26 ♙b1

The point of Black's previous move is seen after 26 ♖xc5 ♗xb2 mate.

26...♗a3 0-1

White resigned, as taking the knight runs into ...♗fc8.

Tips for Getting the Most out of This Book

- ♁ Pay attention to the exercises and questions in the games as these tend to highlight important and instructive concepts.
- ♁ After playing through each of the games, read the conclusion to make sure you have understood the main ideas. Most of the conclusions mention the critical variation(s) of their game, so it is especially beneficial to review these lines.
- ♁ It's more important to memorize theory in the most critical and sharp chapters such as 6 ♖g5, 6 ♖e3, 6 h3 and 6 ♖c4. The reason for this is because the positions can be quite concrete and therefore precision is often a necessity. In the quieter systems such as 6 ♖e2, 6 g3, 6 f4 and most sidelines, understanding the general ideas and plans is of a higher priority.

Acknowledgements

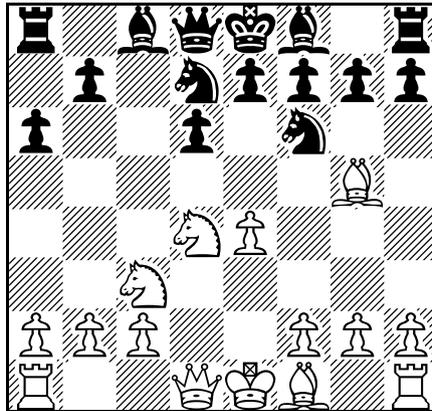
There are several people who we would like to thank for their help and support throughout this project. First of all, we want to express our gratitude to Victoria, Dave, and Neil for their diligent proofreading and review of our work. We are also appreciative of Yan Teplitsky and Emil Sutovsky for their honest feedback and opinions of the book. Finally, thanks to Byron Jacobs for always providing us with helpful direction and guidance.

Joshua Doknjas and John Doknjas,
Canada,
November 2018

Chapter Two

Theoretical Paths: 6 ♖g5

6 ♖g5 is one of the most critical lines for Najdorf players to face. By meeting 6 ♖g5 with the more fashionable 6...♗bd7, we avoid many of the theoretically intensive lines that occur after 6...e6, such as the Poisoned Pawn system. These lines often require understanding and memorizing over 30 moves of theory in many different variations. With our recommendation of 6...♗bd7 the theoretical workload is much less demanding. Black's idea is to develop his queenside quickly and gain play in that sector, while keeping a close eye on the e5-square (often delaying White's attempts to break through quickly in the centre). Another virtue of 6...♗bd7 is that it delays developing the f8-bishop, and Black only has to decide on its location once White has committed to a particular set-up.



White has three main ways to play against 6...♗bd7. These are: 7 ♕e2, 7 f4, and 7 ♖c4. Game 8 starts by looking at a couple of rare lines White has after 6...♗bd7. We also consider some of the less critical lines after 7 ♕e2. In all of these, Black doesn't have much to worry about and will usually achieve a comfortable position out of the opening.

Game 9 continues examining the 7 ♕e2 variation, but this time White chooses to play

the critical 9 f4! line. This is certainly one of White's most dangerous tries and Black needs to react with some accuracy. However, it should be noted that White also needs to play with precision or his attack will be exhausted quite quickly.

Game 10 covers some of the rare lines in the 7 f4 variation. Black doesn't have much to worry about here, but some of the lines can be tricky and are useful to learn. The most important of these is 10 g4!?, as tried in the game.

Game 11 examines 10 ♘d3 in the main line of the 7 f4 variation. Against this, we recommend avoiding the natural ...e6 and instead fianchettoing the dark-squared bishop. White won't be able to rely on a direct attacking approach as the fianchetto makes White's attack much more difficult to carry out.

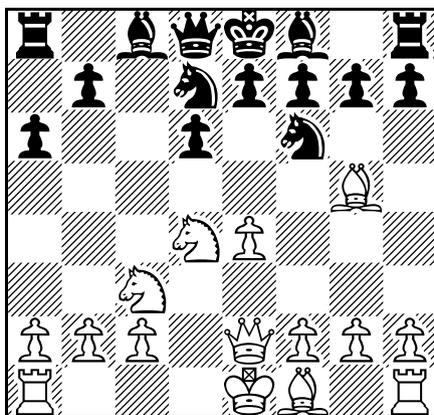
Game 12 considers an alternative approach for Black against 7 f4 with 7... ♖a5!?. The idea with this line is to pressurize White's c3-knight immediately and prepare to attack in the centre with ...e5. In this game we will see how the play can lead to less explored and very interesting positions.

Game 13 looks at the 7 ♘c4 variation and the sidelines after Black replies with 7... ♖b6!. In particular, we analyse the critical 8 0-0 which has become very popular in recent years. However, our recommendation leads to a decent position and limited theory to learn.

Game 14 analyses 8 ♘b3, the main line for White in the 7 ♘c4 variation. White's most critical try is castling queenside, but we also take a look at plans involving kingside castling. Black is doing well theoretically and can expect to have unbalanced play with attacking chances for both sides after the opening.

Game 8
F.Urkedal-S.Shankland
Baku Olympiad 2016

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♘g5 ♗bd7 7 ♖e2!?



A popular approach that was advocated by Parimarjan Negi in his book *1 e4 vs The Sicilian I*. White's idea is to attack in the centre with f4 and e5 and castle queenside.

White can choose from several other moves here:

a) 7 ♖d2 is playable, but not very consistent with White's last move as the bishop on g5 now seems to be misplaced. Black should continue with 7...e6 8 0-0-0 and now 8...h6! (8...b5 would allow 9 ♘d5!? with an unclear position), with the point that 9 ♟h4 can be met by 9...♗xe4! 10 ♟xd8 ♗xd2 11 ♟h4 ♗xf1, winning a pawn. And if White chooses 9 ♟xf6 instead, then 9...♗xf6 10 f4 b5 (or first 10...♖c7) is fine for Black.

b) 7 ♟e2 is harmless after 7...e6, when Black can develop normally; for example, 8 0-0 ♖c7 9 f4 ♟e7 10 ♟f3 ♗b8, followed by ...b5, with a comfortable position.

c) 7 a4 is a positional approach that was tried in S.Karjakin-B.Gelfand, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015. White can't expect any advantage with this line and play typically leads to fairly pleasant positions for Black. After 7...e6 8 a5 (or 8 ♟e2 ♖c7 9 0-0 ♟e7 10 f4 0-0 11 ♟f3 ♗b6 and Black is doing well) 8...♟e7 9 ♟e2 0-0 10 0-0 ♖c7 11 ♖d3 h6 12 ♟d2, we suggest 12...b5! and Black has no problems.

d) 7 ♖f3 is an interesting way to play against 6...e6, but Black can meet this with the same set-up that is chosen in the present game. That is, 7...h6 (the more popular 7...♖a5 is also fine for Black) 8 ♟h4 g6 and Black has an improved version of the positions we will see in the game because the queen on f3 gets in the way of White's f-pawn. Play may continue 9 0-0-0 e5 (9...♟g7 is also fine for Black) 10 ♗b3 b5 11 ♖b1 ♟e7 12 a3 ♟b7 with no problems for Black.

The two mainlines, 7 ♟c4 and 7 f4, will be looked at later in this chapter.

7...h6

7...e6 8 f4 ♖c7 9 0-0-0 transposes to a main line that is typically reached through the 6...e6 move order. We prefer to avoid this transposition.

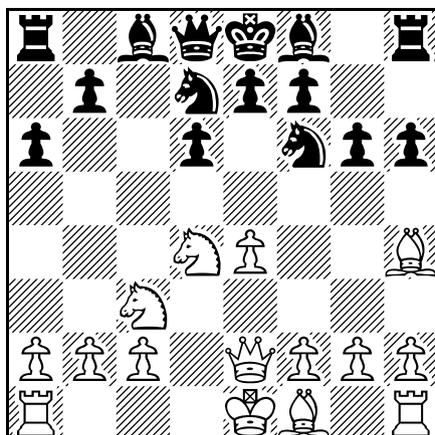
Question: Instead of playing 7...h6 and then 8...g6, why can't Black play 7...g6 immediately?

Answer: If Black tries to avoid 7...h6 and plays 7...g6, then 8 0-0-0 e5 allows 9 ♗d5! (Black needs to circumvent this by playing 7...h6 first because he is then able to play ...g5!, getting out of the pin) 9...h6 (9...exd4 also runs into trouble after 10 ♖c4 followed by ♗c7) and now 10 ♖c4!, as pointed out by Negi, gives White a dangerous initiative.

8 ♟h4

8 ♟xf6 ♗xf6 9 0-0-0 (9 g3 was tried in H.Nakamura-G.Gopal, Gibraltar 2017; after 9...e5 10 ♗f5 ♟e6 11 0-0-0 g6 12 ♗e3, White is aiming to control the d5-square so Black continued actively with 12...♗c8 13 ♗ed5 ♗xd5 14 ♗xd5 ♗c5! and achieved a comfortable position) 9...e5 10 ♗f5! g6 11 ♗e3 ♟e6 12 ♖b1 ♗c8 13 ♗ed5 ♟g7 was fine for Black in B.Jobava-A.Sarana, Minsk 2017, and he later went on to win.

8...g6!



This is the most fashionable way to counter White's 7 ♖e2. The main idea behind this move isn't actually to fianchetto the dark-squared bishop; we will see that only in a couple of lines will Black choose to place his bishop on g7. Instead, the key point of Black's move is to take away the f5-square from White's knight.

For example, 8...e5 would run into 9 ♘f5 g6 10 ♗e3 and White is much better because he controls the important d5-square.

9 0-0-0

The critical 9 f4 will be examined at in the next game.

9...e5 10 ♗b3

If White tries 10 ♗d5?, then 10...g5! wins a piece.

10...♗e7 11 ♖b1

Others:

a) Aiming to attack with ♗d3 and f4 by playing 11 ♖d2 is White's most critical plan in this line. Following 11...b5 12 a3, Black has a choice:

a1) 12...♗f8?! 13 ♖b1 ♖g7 14 f4 ♗b7 15 ♗d3 ♜c8 16 ♞hf1 slowly led to trouble for Black in M.Schröder-C.Jacobs Jr., correspondence 2016, once White was able to expand on the kingside.

a2) 12...♞c7!? (aiming for a quick ...♗b6 and ...♗c4) 13 ♗d3 (White could try to play 13 f4 immediately, but 13...exf4 with the threat of ...g5 is good for Black) 13...♗b6 leaves Black well prepared to meet White's f4 plan. For example, 14 f4 is met by 14...exf4 15 ♗f2 ♗c4 and Black has an excellent position, while 14 ♞hf1 is too slow and should be countered by 14...g5! 15 ♗g3 ♗c4.

a3) 12...♗b7 13 ♗d3 ♞c7! (13...♗b6 runs into 14 ♗a5!; and 13...♗f8 14 ♖b1 ♖g7 15 f4! was slightly better for White in V.Durarbayli-Li Ruifeng, St. Louis 2017) 14 ♖b1 transposes to the note on White's 13th move (13 ♖d2).

b) 11 f3 b5 12 a3 ♞c7 is likely to transpose to the game after 13 ♖b1. White could also try 13 g4!?, when Black should continue with 13...♗f8, followed by bringing the king to

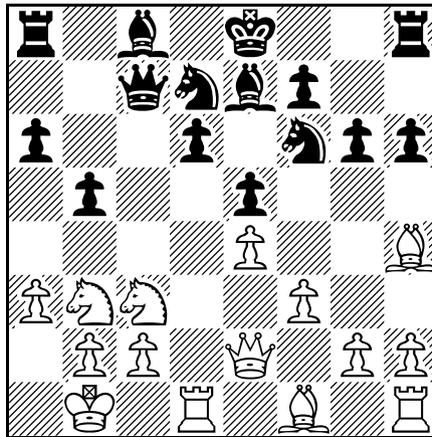
safety with ...♔g7 and then ...♗b6.

11...b5 12 a3

Because of the way Black is able to attack the weakness created by 12 a3, it makes sense to consider 12 f3, but after 12...♖c7 White should probably play 13 a3, transposing to the game, as 13 g4 b4! gave Black a much better position in C.Schwarhofer-T.Henrichs, Austrian League 2017.

12...♖c7 13 f3

White should try to play more aggressively with 13 ♖d2! ♗b7 14 ♗d3, and now to maintain equality Black should remember that the best way to counter the f4 plan is with 14...♗d8! (preparing to put pressure on the d-file) 15 f4 (15 ♖he1 should be met by 15...♗c5) 15...exf4 (15...♗c5! is also interesting) 16 ♗f2 (White cannot take the pawn immediately with 16 ♖xf4 because of 16...g5), and now 16...d5! 17 exd5 0-0 followed by ...b4 gives Black good play.



Exercise: What is best way for Black to continue in this position?

Answer: 13...♗f8!

Getting the king out of the centre, while keeping the rook on h8 where it can help to defend the kingside.

The other moves Black might consider are:

a) 13...♗b7 may seem natural, but Black usually shouldn't play this because it makes playing on the queenside more difficult. This is seen after 14 g4, when Black would like to play 14...♗b6, but White has 15 ♗a5! in reply.

b) 13...0-0 isn't bad, but it's less flexible than the game continuation. For example, after 14 g4 ♗g7 15 g5 hxg5 16 ♗xg5, Black would prefer to have his rook on h8, helping to defend against White's attack.

c) 13...♗b6 can be met by 14 ♖d2!, threatening ♗xf6. The typical trick with 14...♗xe4

Opening Repertoire: The Sicilian Najdorf

would work if Black's king was out of the centre. However, in this situation, White has 15 ♖xe4 ♙xh4 16 ♜xd6+, and after 16...♔f8 17 f4! he develops a powerful initiative.

14 ♙f2

White could try to attack at once with 14 g4!?, but after 14...♙g7 15 g5 hxg5 16 ♙xg5 Black can respond with 16...♜b6!, gaining excellent play on the queenside.

14...♙g7

Because White has played slowly in the opening and created a weakness with his pawn on a3, his position is already very difficult to defend. The pawns on g6 and h6 also protect Black's king against any possible attack from White. We will see in the upcoming moves that White is unable to create any serious threats.

15 h4 ♜b6 16 g3?!

This is probably too slow, but White's position is already quite unpleasant. For instance, 16 g4 would be met by 16...♙e6 17 ♙h3 (White is intending to play g5; meanwhile, 17 h5 allows Black to play 17...g5, completely closing the kingside) 17...♜c4 with the idea of ...♜xa3, which is good for Black; and 17...♜a4!? is also interesting.

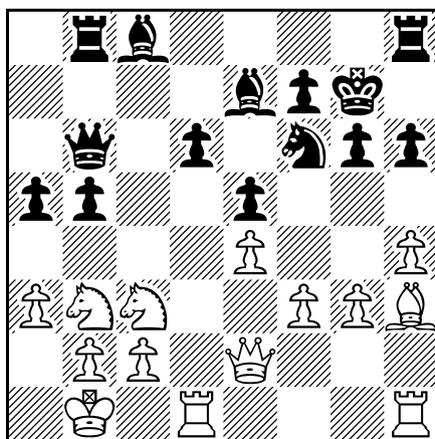
16...♜b8

16...♜c4 could have been played immediately, but there is nothing wrong with activating the rook.

17 ♙xb6?!

It was not too late to play 17 g4 but the pawn on a3 still makes it difficult for White to defend his queenside. For example, 17...♜c4 18 ♙e1 ♙e6 19 ♙h3 a5, followed by ...b4, gives Black a strong attack.

17...♙xb6 18 ♙h3 a5



Black already has an overwhelming position because of his quick queenside attack and White's weakness on a3.

19 ♙xc8 ♜hxc8 20 ♜d5 ♜xd5 21 ♜xd5 a4 22 ♜c1 b4 23 axb4 ♙xb4 24 ♜d3 ♙c3!

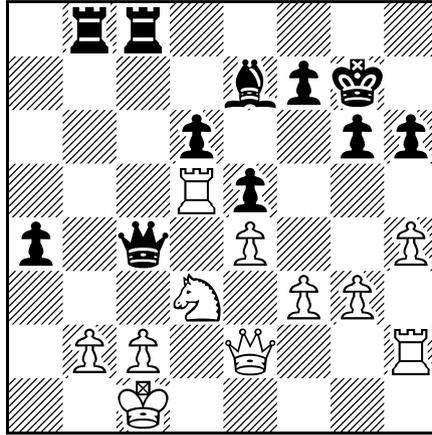
The threat of ...a3 forces White's king to move.

25 ♖c1 ♗c4!

Now Black's queen threatens to invade on a2.

26 ♖h2

If White tries to cover the a2-square with 26 ♖b1, then 26...a3 27 b3 ♖xb3+! (27...a2+! would win as well) 28 cxb3 ♗xb3+ 29 ♖a1 ♖c2 is completely winning for Black because White's rooks are uncoordinated.



Exercise: Black has multiple ways to win here, but what is the quickest way to get through on the queenside?

Answer: 26...a3!

Blasting through White's defences on the queenside. Reversing the move order with 26...♗a2 followed by ...a3 works as well.

27 bxa3 ♗a2 28 ♖d1 ♖b1+! 29 ♖c1 ♗xa3 30 ♗d2 ♗xf3+ 31 ♖e2 ♗xg3 0-1

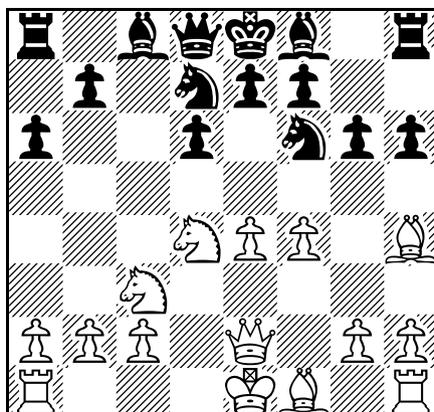
In this game, we looked at some of White's rare 7th move options as well as the less critical ideas in the fashionable 7 ♗e2 variation. White should have tried to play on the kingside more quickly in the opening. Once Black was able to bring his king to safety with 13...♖f8!, White was unable to generate enough play. This gave Black time to take advantage of White's weakened queenside by creating a powerful pawn storm which was too much for White to handle.

Game 9

Wan Yunguo-I.Cheparinov

Chinese Team Championship 2018

1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♖f6 5 ♗c3 a6 6 ♔g5 ♖bd7 7 ♗e2 h6 8 ♗h4 g6 9 f4!



9...e5 10 fxe5

Others:

a) 10 0-0-0? has been played a couple of times, possibly due to White mixing up the move order in this line. The difference between castling and starting with 10 fxe5 is that Black has 10...exd4 11 e5 dxc3 12 exf6+ ♖e5!, and after 13 fxe5 ♗e6 14 ♚e1 ♜c8 White will have difficulties defending the queenside once Black starts playing moves like ...♚a5 or ...d5 (activating the f8-bishop). For example, after 15 b4 d5 Black had already gained a decisive advantage in K.Sek-A.Dreev, Sochi 2017.

b) 10 ♖f3 ♚c7 11 0-0-0 b5 12 ♖d5 ♖xd5 13 exd5 ♗g7 14 fxe5 dxe5 15 d6 (15 ♗e7 ♗b7 16 d6 ♚a5 17 ♗b1 transposes to 15 d6 etc) 15...♚a5 16 ♗b1 ♗b7 17 ♗e7 ♜c8 is given by Goh Wei Ming as leading to a fine position for Black, and after 18 ♖d2 ♚d4! Black obtains excellent counterplay. Although Black is unable to castle, his king is quite safe in the middle of the board.

10...dxe5 11 0-0-0

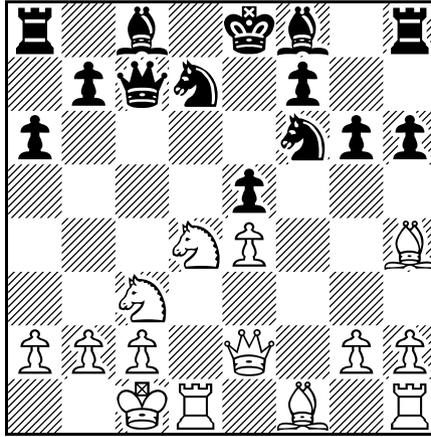
White can also try:

a) 11 ♖f3 led to a victory for White in S.Khader-S.Karjakin, Riyadh (rapid) 2017. However, Black can easily improve with 11...♗b4! and the pin on the c3-knight becomes annoying. For example, after 12 ♚e3 (12 ♚c4 ♚a5 is good as well) 12...♚c7 Black will continue with ...b5, bring his king to safety with ...♗f8-g7, and then put more pressure on the pinned c3-knight. Meanwhile, White is unable to generate much play against Black because of his pinned knight and development problems.

b) 11 ♖b3 should be met by 11...♗b4 (11...♚c7?!, as tried in I.Yeletsy-A.Sarana, Loo 2018, was better for White because he is able to switch plans and castle short after 12 ♚f3 ♗g7 13 a4 b6 14 ♗d3 ♗b7 15 0-0! and White has a small edge thanks to his pressure on the f-file and Black's lack of play) 12 ♚f3 g5! (getting out of the pin) 13 ♗g3 ♚c7 14 ♗e2 b6 15 0-0 ♗xc3 (this needs to be played as ♖d5! was a threat) 16 bxc3 ♗b7, and Black's pressure along the c-file and on the e4-pawn compensates for the slightly weakened kingside with ...g5.

11...♙c7

11...exd4? loses to 12 e5, when Black has no defence.

**12 ♖b3**

Others are:

a) 12 ♖d5 ♗xd5 13 exd5 ♙d6 14 ♖b3 (14 g4 is briefly considered by Negi in *Grandmaster Repertoire – 1 e4 vs The Sicilian I*, but he gives 14...h5! and Black has at least even chances in this unbalanced middlegame) 14...b5 and now:

a1) 15 ♙e1!? with the idea of ♙a5 is interesting, and was tried against me (Joshua) in I.Perez-J.Doknjas, Seattle 2017. Black has several good moves here, but best is probably 15...♗f6!, which threatens ...♙g4 and also prepares to meet 16 ♙a5 with 16...♙e7.

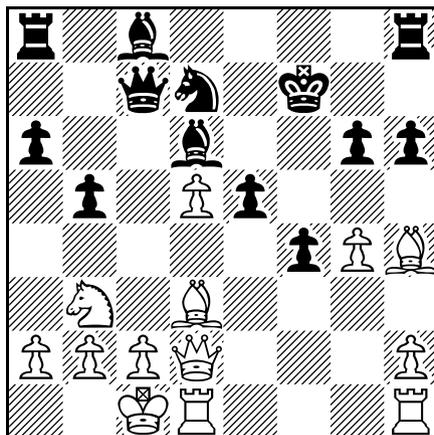
a2) 15 g4?! is premature and can be met by 15...h5! 16 g5 ♖b6, which quickly gave Black an overwhelming position in L.Yankelevich-D.Jakovenko, Baden Baden 2017, because of the closed kingside and excellent prospects for Black on the queenside with ...♗c4 or ...♙f5.

a3) 15 ♙d2 is advocated by Negi and is a critical line for Black. Best is to gain space on the kingside by playing 15...f5! (alternatively, we can suggest 15...♙f8 as a line for those who find the 15...f5 lines too complicated; Black's simple plan is to bring the king to safety with ...♙g7 and then start playing on the queenside; for example, R.Homont-V.Antonenko, correspondence 2016, continued 16 g4 – Negi also considers 16 ♙b1 and 16 ♗a5, but these aren't very critical for Black – 16...♙g7 17 ♙g2 ♙b7 18 ♙d3 a5 19 ♗d2 ♜hc8! – 19...g5 is analysed by Negi, and leads to a pleasant position for White – 20 ♜hf1 a4 and Black had a decent position) and now:

a31) 16 ♙b1 g5 17 ♙e1 ♗f6 (17...f4!? is an alternative way to try to hold the kingside) 18 h4 g4 19 h5 was mentioned by Negi as an alternative to his main line with 16 g4. This was also seen in A.Caruso-L.Nouveau, correspondence 2015, and 19...♗e4! gave Black a good position.

a32) 16 g4 f4 17 ♙d3 attacks the g6-pawn (17 g5 is briefly considered by Negi, but Black has either 17...h5 closing up the kingside, or 17...e4!? followed by ...♗e5 with good play in

the centre), and we think Black's best is 17...♔f7! (17...g5?! 18 ♖f2 ♘f6 19 h4! is shown by Negi, and gives White a dangerous initiative).



Now White must try to bring his queen to the vulnerable e4-square:

a321) 18 ♖g2 g5 (18...♗b7 is the alternative for Black, when 19 ♖e4 would be met by 19...♖ag8) 19 ♖e4 ♖g8 transposes to the forcing line that we will see after 18 ♖e2.

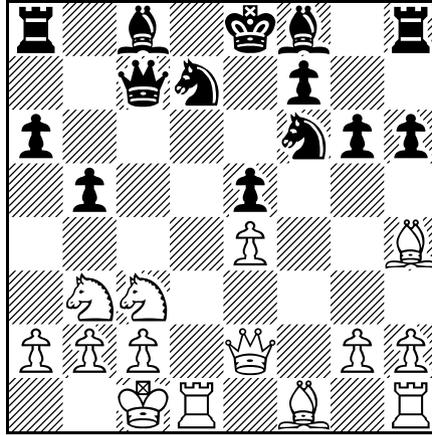
a322) 18 g5 would be met by 18...h5!, making it difficult for White to create play on the kingside. In my game, J.Cigan-J.Doknjas, Seattle 2016, I was able to get a much better position after 19 ♖e2 ♘b6 20 ♘d2 ♗g4.

a323) 18 ♖e2 g5 (Black can also choose to avoid the forced line that follows by playing 18...♖g8!?, and a complicated battle ensues where White will have trouble breaking through on the kingside, though he does have the e4-square; meanwhile, Black will try to activate his knight with ...♘b6-c4 and play on the queenside) 19 ♖e4 was seen in A.Pichot-H.Asis Gargatagli, Barcelona 2018 (if White chooses not to play energetically and decides on 19 ♗f2?!, then 19...♘f6! 20 h3 ♗b7 gives Black an excellent position as White lacks active play). Here 19...♖g8! was best for Black, and a repetition follows after the forced: 20 ♖h7+ ♖g7 21 ♗g6+ ♗f6 22 ♖xh6 ♖xg6 23 ♗xg5+ ♗f7 24 ♖h7+ ♖g7 25 ♖f5+ ♗g8 26 ♖e6+, when a draw was agreed in D.Loisel-I.Bucsa, correspondence 2017, because of 26...♖f7 27 ♖g6+ ♖g7 28 ♖e6+.

b) 12 ♖f3? has never been tried before, but it's worth noting that 12...exd4 13 ♗xf6 ♘xf6 14 ♖xf6 looks like White will achieve a material advantage as the rook on h8 is hanging. However, 14...dxc3 15 ♖xh8 cxb2+ 16 ♖xb2 ♗e6 is already dangerous for White because Black can develop quick play on the queenside with ...♖c8 and ...♖a5.

c) 12 ♘f3?! isn't the most active square for the knight and 12...b5 13 ♖d2 ♗b4 14 ♗d3 ♗b7 15 ♖he1 ♖c8, followed by ...♗f8-g7, provided me with a better position in L.Liu-J.Doknjas, Quebec City 2018.

12...b5



13 ♖f3

White can also try:

a) 13 ♜xd7!? ♞xd7 14 ♞d5 is an interesting rook sacrifice, and Black has two ways to meet this:

a1) 14...♞d6 15 ♞a5 g5! allows Black to develop more easily. White's best try is 16 ♟e1! (threatening ♟b4) 16...♞b6 17 ♟b4 ♞g6 18 ♞c7+ ♟d8 19 ♟c3! (not 19 ♞d2+? which was the continuation of M.Haubro-H.Ziska, Kollafjord 2017; after 19...♟xc7 20 ♞c3+ ♟d7 21 ♟xb5+ axb5 22 ♞d1+ ♟e8, White didn't have nearly enough compensation and Black won a few moves later), and now play may continue with 19...♟xc7 20 ♟xe5+ ♟d6 21 ♟xh8 f6 22 ♞f2 ♞xe4 23 ♟xf6, when White has regained his sacrificed exchange and a pawn, but after 23...♟e6 24 ♟d3 ♞f4+ 25 ♞xf4 ♟xf4+ 26 ♟b1 ♞d5, Black is completely fine in this endgame.

a2) 14...♞b8 is probably Black's safest choice; White can then try 15 ♟f6 (15 ♞a5 ♟b7 16 ♞d2 ♟xd5! exchanges off White's strong knight and is fine for Black after 17 ♞xd5 ♟d6 18 ♟e2 0-0 19 ♞c6 ♞b6!) 15...♞xf6 (we suggest 15...♞h7!? if Black wants to avoid the forced draw; after 16 ♞a5 ♟b7 17 ♞xb7 ♞xb7, White has compensation for the exchange but nothing more) 16 ♞xf6+ ♟e7 17 ♞d5+ ♟e8, which leads to a draw, as seen in H.Raja-A.Sarana, Moscow 2018.

b) 13 g4 is another attacking try, but not particularly dangerous for Black with his h6- and g6-pawn blockade. Black can choose from two squares for the bishop:

b1) 13...♟g7?! would be inaccurate because of 14 ♟g2 0-0 15 ♞hf1 ♟b7 16 ♟b1, followed by ♞d5, giving White a small advantage; 16 ♞d5!? immediately is promising too.

b2) 13...♟e7! is best, and A.Das-S.Praneeth, Delhi 2015, continued 14 ♟g2 0-0 15 ♟b1 b4 (the slower 15...♟b7 would also be fine for Black) 16 ♟xf6 ♞xf6 17 ♞d5 ♞xd5 18 exd5 ♟d6 19 h4 a5 20 ♞d2 a4 21 h5 and here Black should have closed up the kingside with 21...g5!.

c) 13 ♞d5 ♞xd5 14 exd5 ♟d6 transposes to 12 ♞d5 in the previous note.

13...♟g7

Opening Repertoire: The Sicilian Najdorf

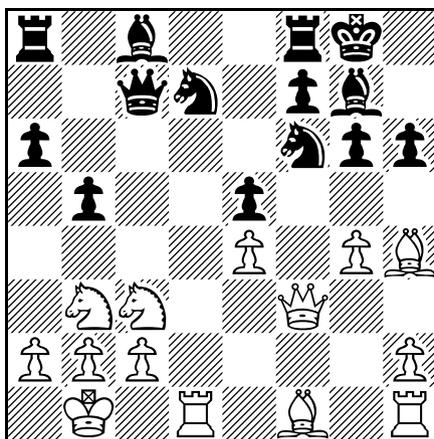
It's important for Black to remember that 13...♙e7?? is met by 14 ♖xd7!, which happened in G.Guseinov-V.Dobrov, Riyadh (blitz) 2017. If 14...♘xd7, then 15 ♘d5 picks up a piece.

14 ♙b1

White could also try 14 g4, and after 14...♙b7 15 a3 0-0 16 g5 we prefer 16...hxg5 (instead of 16...♘h5!?, as in P.Bobras-N.Huschenbeth, Aachen 2016) 17 ♙xg5 ♖ac8 with good play.

14...0-0 15 g4?!

White should have played 15 a3 right away. Then after 15...♙b7 16 g4, we have transposed to the game.



Exercise: How should Black take advantage of White's last move?

15...♙b7?!

Answer: Black could have played 15...b4! immediately. Now play would likely continue 16 ♘d5 ♘xd5 17 ♖xd5 a5 18 ♙e7 ♖e8 19 ♙d6 ♗b6 and Black is much better.

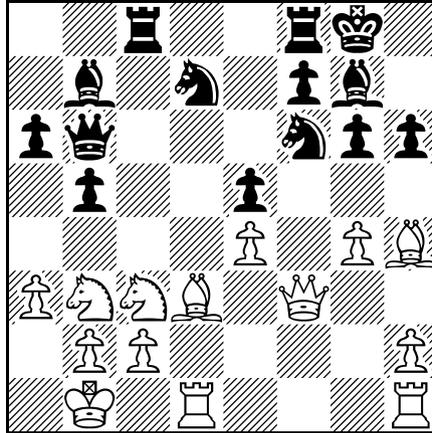
16 a3

White needs to prevent Black from playing ...b4, but this creates a weakness that Black is able to exploit.

16...♖ac8

An alternative plan for Black with 16...♙c6!? is good as well. This move has the idea of playing ...♖ab8 and expanding on the queenside. Play may continue 17 ♙d3 ♖ab8 18 ♘d5 ♙xd5 19 exd5 and in I.Kurnosov-R.Wojtaszek, Jurmala (rapid) 2013, Black played an interesting pawn sacrifice with 19...e4!?. Instead, 19...♖b6 is mentioned by Goh Wei Ming and has the idea of ...♖d6, which is probably sounder.

17 ♙d3 ♗b6



Question: What was the purpose of Black's last move and how should White deal with it?

Answer: 17...♖b6 threatened an exchange sacrifice with ...♖xc3!. White should protect his knight and his next move is designed to do this.

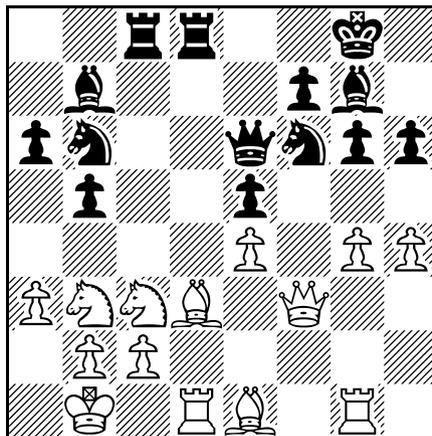
18 ♖e1!

Duly defending the knight on c3.

18...♖e6!

Black's queen moves to e6 where it attacks the g4-pawn and prepares to move the d7-knight to b6.

19 ♖g1 ♘b6 20 h4 ♗fd8



Black's plan is to play ...♗c4 and push his queenside pawns. This won't be easy for

Opening Repertoire: The Sicilian Najdorf

White to defend against, especially with the weakness on a3. White will have to try to breakthrough on the kingside, but with Black's pawns on h6 and g6, this isn't easy to achieve and White was unable to do so during the game.

21 ♖d2?!

This is too slow and allows Black to quickly start an attack on the queenside. Instead, 21 g5 was probably White's best, even though Black can try to close up the kingside with 21...hxg5 22 hxg5 ♗h5. Now White can play 23 ♖e2, but after 23...♖xd1+ 24 ♖xd1 ♗f4 both sides have their fair share of chances.

21...♗c4 22 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 23 ♖de1 b4!

Black begins his breakthrough on the queenside. 23...a5!? would have been slightly slower but was also a viable option as White isn't able to create active play quickly.

24 axb4 ♖xb4 25 g5 hxg5

Interesting was 25...♖xb3!?, which has the idea of meeting 26 cxb3 with 26...♖xd2, while 26 gxf6 could be met by 26...♖xd2 27 fxg7 ♖b6!.

26 hxg5 ♗h5 27 ♗d5 ♖c4 28 ♗a5 ♖xe4

Black is forced to give up the exchange here, but he quickly obtains excellent compensation.

29 ♖xe4 ♖xd5 30 ♖b4 ♖c8 31 ♖g4

White needs to restrict Black's g7-bishop. This can be done by playing 31 ♖c3, and if 31...♗f4 then 32 ♖g3! protects the c3-bishop and creates balanced chances.

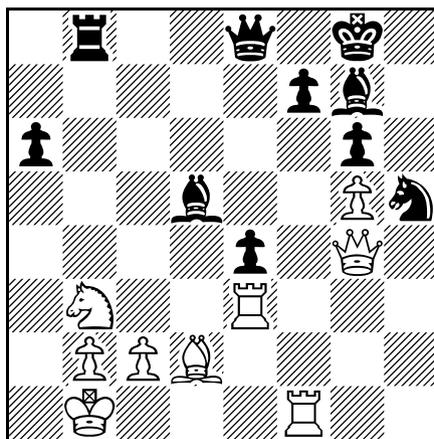
31...♖e8 32 ♖gf1?

Again, White needed to try 32 ♖c3.

32...e4!

Suddenly Black has several pieces pointing towards White's queenside. This move also activates the g7-bishop and White's position becomes very difficult to defend. Black's immediate threat is ...♖b8 or ...♖b5.

33 ♖e3 ♖b8 34 ♗b3



Exercise: How should Black continue his attack?

Answer: 34...a5!

Threatening ...a4 and trying to win the b2-pawn.

35 ♠xa5 ♠xb3 36 cxb3 ♣b5!

And now White's unprotected rook on f1 and bishop on a5 are under attack.

37 ♣fe1

37 ♣xf7! was the last chance, with the idea of meeting 37...♠xf7 with 38 ♣xe4.

However, Black has 37...♣xa5 38 ♣e6 ♠h7 and White's position isn't so easy to defend.

37...♣xa5 38 ♣xe4 ♣xb3

Now Black's attack is too powerful.

39 ♣1e2 ♣b5 40 ♣c8+ ♠h7 41 ♣c1 ♣d3+ 0-1

White resigned as 42 ♠a2 would be met by ...♣b6 followed by ...♣a6.

In this game, we looked at all of White's most critical tries in the 7 ♣e2 variation. Black is objectively fine, but there are a couple of specific lines that must be played accurately, especially in the dangerous 12 ♠d5 variation. On the other hand, as we saw in this game, if White doesn't play energetically or is unfamiliar with the theory, Black can quickly gain a powerful initiative and a strong attack against White's king.

Game 10

T.Kantans-L.Van Wely

Tal Memorial (rapid), Jurmala 2017

1 e4 c5 2 ♠f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♠xd4 ♠f6 5 ♠c3 a6 6 ♠g5 ♠bd7 7 f4

This is one of the most aggressive and direct ways for White to play and leaves Black with several responses, all with the idea of developing and delaying ...e6. The key in the 6...♠bd7 lines is to play ...e6 only when it is favourable or necessary. In this game and the next two games devoted to 7 f4, we will see several examples of how Black is able to use the delayed ...e6 to his advantage.

7...♣c7

Besides this move, Black has several alternatives:

a) The interesting 7...♣a5!? will be examined later in this chapter.

b) Playing for a version of the "Poisoned Pawn" variation with 7...♣b6 8 ♣d2 e5 9 ♠f5 ♣xb2 leads to difficult positions that we would prefer to avoid. Play may continue 10 ♣b1 ♣a3 11 ♠e2 (11 ♠c4!? is also tricky for Black) 11...h6 12 ♠h4 exf4 13 0-0 which was covered by Kevin Goh Wei Ming in *Chess Developments: The Sicilian Najdorf 6 ♠g5*. This position has been tried in several games, most notably in T.Radjabov-H.Nakamura, Medias 2011. However, Black's position is very difficult to hold and requires precise knowledge of the many ways White may start attacking.