

opening repertoire

the Modern Sämisch

Combating the King's Indian and Benoni with 6 Bg5!

Eric Montany

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About the Author

Originally from Hawaii, Eric Montany has twice won the state championship of Colorado and was awarded the National Master title from the United States Chess Federation in 2012. He studied physics and engineering and is currently a science teacher and chess club advisor at The Harker School in San Jose, CA, whose students won the 2016 Team National High School Chess Championship. In addition to playing chess, Eric is an avid guitar player, motorcyclist, and outdoors enthusiast.

This is his first book.

Acknowledgments

For everyone who has helped me over the years.
And for Saul, who I should have listened to.

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Foreword by Matthew Sadler

It's always a pleasure to see one of your favourite openings in the spotlight, especially when that opening has been somewhat neglected by theoretical manuals. I first noticed the idea of 6 Bg5 in the Samisch around the age of 14 while searching for an alternative to my enjoyable but over-sharp Four Pawns Attack (5 f4). Some impressive games of Boris Gulko (a truly wonderful player at his best) fired my enthusiasm and it has been the cornerstone of my anti-King's Indian repertoire ever since.

My experience with the opening at the very top level took flight during my time as a second for the French super-GM Joel Lautier. His sharp battles with Kasparov in this opening (resulting in three draws) were a highlight of our work together. However much we analysed (and we analysed a lot!) Kasparov had always gone a step further, but Joel's unique ability not to lose to Kasparov saved the day!

Two themes in the Modern Benoni structures typical of this opening have won me a lot of points over the years, and it's good to see these well-represented in this book:

- 1) b4, stopping Black's queenside counterplay with ...b5 in its tracks.
- 2) f3-f4, preparing e4-e5 often as a pawn sacrifice.

Both ideas can set difficult problems for the unprepared Black player. In particular, the shift from f2-f3 (solidly protecting the e4 pawn and negating Black counterplay against the centre) to an aggressive central strategy with f3-f4 often catches Black players unaware in practical play.

I hope you gain as much pleasure and success from this opening as I have in the past 30 years. This book should certainly provide you with an excellent foundation for some very enjoyable anti-King's Indian adventures!

Matthew Sadler

Introduction

Chess saved me from a failed rock career.

At least, that's how I remember it. Few people know that in my late teens I sent demo cassettes to record companies, never to be heard from; far fewer know that some of those songs popped up on the internet a couple of years ago. I imagine a teenaged intern, tasked with cleaning a dusty closet, pitifully uploading the tracks onto the record company's YouTube channel for posterity's sake before tossing the tapes into a large green dumpster behind an empty parking lot, the sort where teenaged imitations of creativity begin their final journey to be put to rest, and fade, out of sight and without shame, in great trash-heaps far from view. Some of my imitations were denied that merciful fate and now live on, digitized; but I digress.

I learned most of the rules from my father as a child in rural Hawaii, but it was only after a ski accident during my senior year of high school that I figured out all of those tricky ones like en passant or not being able to castle through check. Torn tendons in the forearm of my fretting hand meant that I couldn't play the guitar, and chess seemed like a reasonable substitute for music.

Unlike my potential rise-to and fall-from 90s rock icon status, no fortunate accident rescued me from Caissa's grip. Entirely ignorant of competitive chess, I entered the Under-1600 section of my first tournament a few months later. My thought process at the board roughly went "If I can lose two pieces in the span of five moves, then he can, too!" I lost all four of my games.

Naturally, I was hooked.

The Sämisch and I met in the Kona Borders. Joe Gallagher introduced us, and I remember it as love at first sight. I know that Fate intended us to be together because it was one of, perhaps, three chess books in the whole store, and the only one that covered the mysterious King's Indian Defense. I also know that my copy of that book loves me for rescuing it from the incessant clamor of coconut-sunscreen-clad tourists debating which tour guide to buy; no-one else on the Big Island was going to.

Armed with a growing chess library, my play improved dramatically. A couple of years after my disastrous debut, I won the Open section of the same tournament with a perfect score of four wins, including my first victory over a USCF Master! The heights of chess achievement were mine for the scaling! Post-victory, I confessed to my friends that I

wanted to become a Master by the time I graduated from college. Saul (who is wise) counseled me to “graduate from college or become a Master, take your pick.”

My personal road to chess improvement is long and winding, with many exits and few entrances. Shortly after that small success I dropped out of college and joined the Air Force. September 11 happened, I lost the opportunity to play in the Armed Services National Chess Championship, I went to a new university after the military, transferred to another, began a professional career, moved, moved again, and again—adult life got in the way. Despite multi-year absences, I’ve loved the game with that naïve devotion unique to amateurs. I’m happy to have twice won the state championship of Colorado, and eventually earned the National Master title from the US Chess Federation. I’m happier to think that further progress awaits me in the future. If it doesn’t? Well, I have more excuses now than I ever did!

Through all of this, the Sämisch has been my faithful companion. My love for its dynamic h-file attacks, sacrificial pawn thrusts, boa constrictor grips, and suffocating space advantages compels me to share everything that I’ve learned with you, dear reader. Perhaps I will one day remember myself modestly as an expert on the opening.

And because I don’t know whether my memory can be entirely trusted, I wrote everything down.

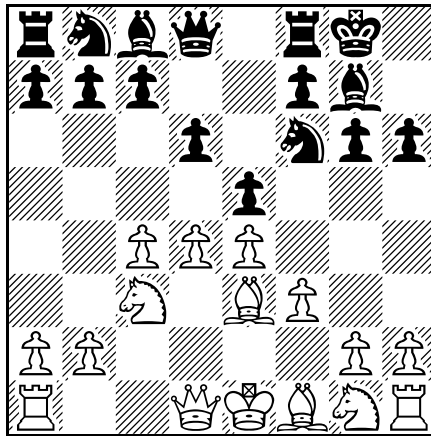
Eric Montany,
November 2017

Chapter One

6...h6 7 ♖e3 e5?! and the Attempted Classical

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♙g5 h6

Because playing in classic King's Indian fashion with 6...e5? immediately drops material to 7 dxe5! dxe5 8 ♖xd8 ♜xd8 9 ♘d5, we start our theoretical investigation by illustrating the challenges Black faces if he accepts a weak pawn on h6 to prepare his central advance. 7 ♖e3 e5?!



Seventh move deviations are inferior versions of other chapters: for instance, 7...♘c6?! 8 ♘ge2 a6 9 ♗d2, when protecting the h-pawn costs Black time and weakens his king's position.

7...c5! is the one exception, when 8 d5 (White might consider accepting the gambit with 8 dxc5 as in some of the 6 ♖e3 c5 gambit lines Black's ...♙g7-h6 is a useful resource, but I

won't cover that possibility here as Black can bypass it by altering his move order) 8...e6 9 ♖d2 exd5 10 cxd5 transposes directly to a main line of the 6 ♗g5 c5 complex, as covered in Chapter Four.

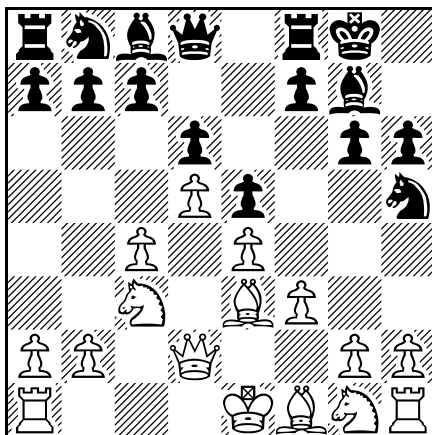
8 d5!

8 ♘ge2 is also playable, but I prefer to gain space when possible.

8...♘h5

Making way for the f-pawn is most popular. 8...c6 is analyzed in B.Gulko-M.Podgaets, USSR 1973.

9 ♖d2



Now Black has a choice:

a) 9...f5 immediately is M.Taimanov-I.Kashdan, Moscow 1955.

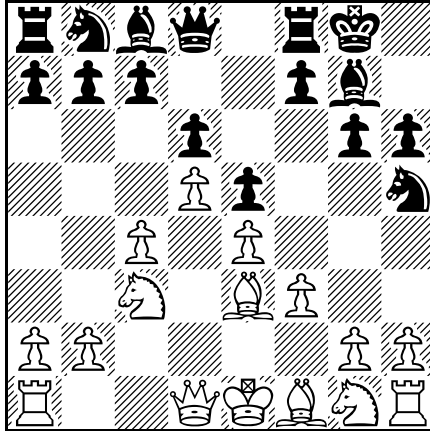
b) The inspired queen sacrifice 9...♖h4+!? 10 g3 (10 ♗f2! is analyzed in the illustrative section 'Avoiding the Queen Sac' at the end of the chapter) 10...♗xg3! 11 ♖f2 ♘xf1 12 ♖xh4 ♗xe3 was introduced by David Bronstein, though with Black's pawn still on h7. In the present position it's little-explored, but we'll investigate the complications in Y.Razuvaev-A.Shchekachev, Zaragoza 1996, and in independent analysis to close the chapter.

Game 1
M.Taimanov-I.Kashdan
Moscow 1955

1 c4 ♗f6 2 ♘c3 g6 3 e4 d6 4 d4 ♗g7 5 f3 e5

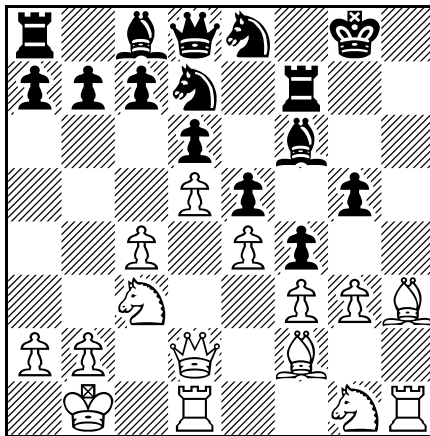
The more common move order would be 5...0-0 6 ♗g5 h6 7 ♗e3 e5 8 d5. More on that later.

6 d5 0-0 7 ♗g5 h6 8 ♗e3 ♘h5



Preparing to move the f-pawn in classic King's Indian fashion.

8...♗e8 is less active and limits Black's options. White can follow Taimanov's example from the main game with 9 ♖d2 f5 10 exf5 gxf5 11 0-0-0, but 10 0-0-0 also gives White a large advantage. After 10...f4 11 ♖f2 ♖f6 12 ♖b1 ♗d7 (12...♖h4 13 g3! accomplishes nothing) 13 g3 g5 14 h4! ♗f7 15 hxg5 hxg5 16 ♖h3! White had a strategically won position in D.Rajkovic-P.Van Herck, Ybbs 1968.



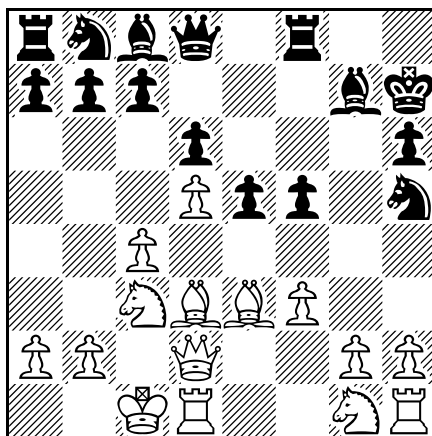
The rest of the game is instructive: 16...♗f8 17 ♗ge2 ♖xh3 18 ♗xh3 ♗h7 19 ♗xh7 ♖xh7 20 gxf4 exf4 (giving the dark-squared bishop some life on the long diagonal, but Black lags in development and his king is exposed along the open h-file) 21 ♗d4 ♗g7 22 ♗h1+ ♖g8 23 ♗h6 ♖f7 24 ♗db5 a6 25 ♖d4 ♗g6 26 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 27 ♗d4 ♖d7 28 e5+! dxe5 29 ♗e4+ ♖f7 30 ♗xg5+ ♖e8 31 ♗xg6 exd4 32 ♖e2+ 1-0.

9 ♖d2 f5

Black carries on, but with h6 hanging this works poorly. The only other reasonable move

is 9...♖h4+, as analyzed later.

I have had 9...♖h7? played against me more times than I can count in blitz. Black tries to play as if this were a standard position in the 6 ♕e3 line, forgetting that while White has wasted a move getting his bishop to e3, Black has wasted two. In addition, his g6-pawn and square are irrevocably weakened, and if Black persists with standard King's Indian moves he just loses: 10 0-0-0 f5 11 exf5! gxf5 12 ♕d3!.



The obvious follow-up. If you weren't convinced that Black's ...h6 was a weakening move before, I hope that you are now! Here's one game that makes me look like an attacking wizard, but in reality Black is already lost: 12...♖f4 13 ♕c2 ♖g6 14 ♖ge2 ♗f6 15 g4 ♖h4 16 ♗df1 ♖a6 17 ♗hg1 ♖g6 18 ♖g3 f4 19 ♖h5 ♗g5 20 ♕f2 ♕h8 21 h4 ♗e7 22 ♗d3 ♗g8 23 ♖xf4 exf4 24 h5 ♗f7 25 ♗e1 ♖c5 26 hxg6+ ♗xg6 27 ♗e7+ 1-0, E.Montany-NN, Internet (blitz) 2013.

10 exf5!

Please don't fall for 10 ♕xh6? ♗h4+ 11 ♖d1 ♖g3!.

Of course, 10 0-0-0 is also strong, but Taimanov plays to expose the light squares in Black's kingside, made even weaker with his 7th move.

10...gxf5 11 0-0-0

Now h6 really does need defending.

11...♗f6

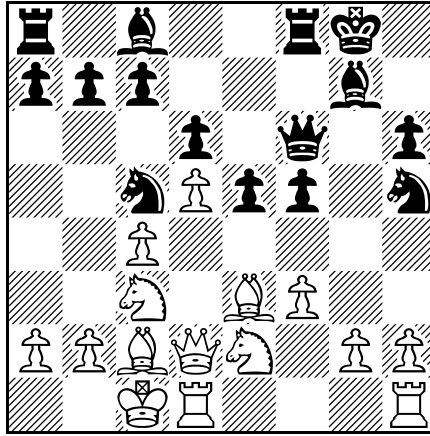
The best way to cover the pawn, but Black is in very bad shape:

a) 11...♗f6 12 ♕d3 ♕f8 13 ♖ge2 f4 14 ♕f2 ♕e7 15 ♖e4 ♗f7 16 g4 ♖f6 17 h4 was T.Kovacs-S.Gal, Hungarian League 2003. This kind of e4 blockade is a dream scenario for White.

b) Pressing forward with 11...f4 12 ♕f2 a6 13 g4 ♖f6 14 ♕d3 b5 15 h4 bxc4 16 ♕c2 e4 17 ♖xe4 ♖xe4 18 ♕xe4 was another way for Black to reach an awful position in A.Bazhin-D.Osipov, Cheliabinsk 2005. White is prepared to neutralize the King's Indian bishop with an exchange on d4, after which the black king will be even weaker and the c4-pawn will fall.

c) 11...♔h7? 12 ♕d3! transposes to the note to move 9.

12 ♕d3 ♖a6 13 ♖ge2 ♘c5 14 ♕c2!

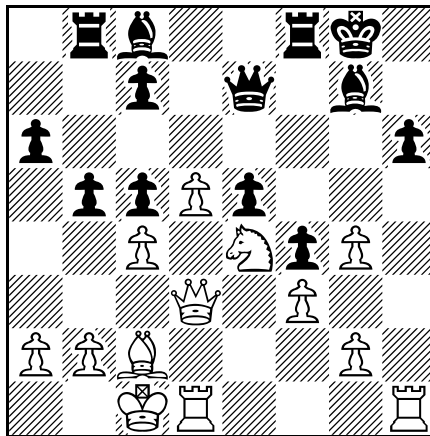


White preserves the bishop that will attack Black's light squares, the only defender of which is the pawn on f5. White is now fully mobilized for attack and threatens 15 g4!, tearing open the kingside.

14...f4?

Hastening the end, but White's king is perfectly safe and Black's should be routed in a few moves anyway.

Astonishingly, this line made an appearance at grandmaster level 52 years later! Black found the only way to avoid dropping his king, but avoiding defeat was too much to ask: 14...a6 15 ♖g3! (15 g4! fxg4 16 fxg4 ♕xg4 17 ♖hg1 is also thematic) 15...♖xg3 16 hxg3 f4 17 ♕xc5 dxc5 18 ♖e4 ♗e7 19 g4 b5 20 ♗d3 ♖b8...



...21 d6! (notice how similar this is to the main game; it pays to know your classics)

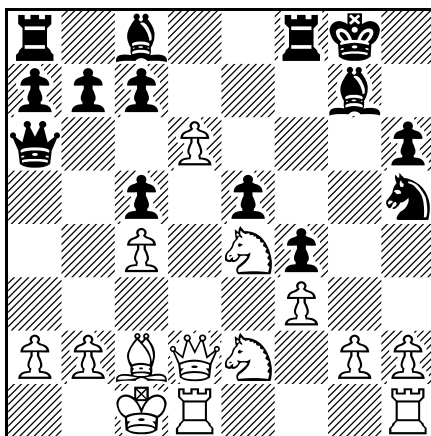
Opening Repertoire: The Modern Sämisch

21...cxd6 22 ♖xd6 e4 (White threatened mate on h7) 23 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 24 ♙xe4 bxc4 25 ♘xc4 a5 26 ♗d6 ♝e8 27 ♗hd1 was V.Hort-H.Westerinen, Dortmund 2007. Black limped on for another 25 moves, but he's simply down a pawn with weaknesses.

15 ♙xc5! dxc5 16 ♘e4 ♜a6

Or 16...♜e7 17 g4 ♘f6 18 ♜d3 and the light squares are Black's undoing.

17 d6!



As quickly as that, the game is over. Black is behind in development and his position is full of holes.

17...♜xc4

Alternatively, 17...cxd6 18 ♜d5+! ♙h8 19 ♘xd6 ♘f6 20 ♜xe5 ♘h7 (White threatened 21 ♘xf4) 21 ♜e4! ♘g5 22 ♜d3 and White will win by kicking the knight with h2-h4.

18 ♘2c3

White's biggest threat is the devastating 19 ♙b3!, but that isn't his only one.

18...♜d4

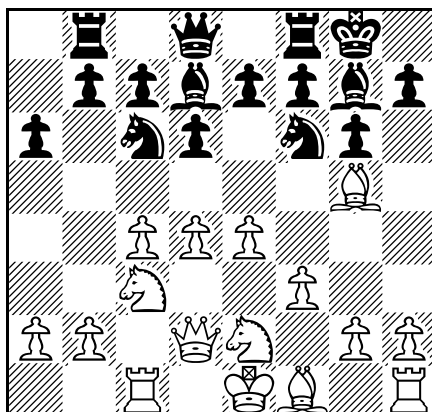
18...♙e6 saves the queen, but loses the bishop to the skewer 19 ♙b3.

19 ♜e2 ♜e3+ 20 ♜xe3 fxe3 21 d7 1-0

Perfectly played by the great maestro. He convincingly refuted this entire variation, and besides one or two accidentally stumbling into it over the years, no titled players have wanted anything to do with the black side since. Still, you should expect to see this from time to time at the club level. This game and the ones found in the notes are exactly what White wants when playing 6 ♙g5, so make sure that you know how to bring in the full point!

Game 9
M.Sadler-D.Larino Nieto
 Barcelona 2011

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 ♙g5 a6 7 ♚d2 ♘c6 8 ♘ge2 ♜b8 9 ♜c1! ♙d7!



Black's best response to the rook move, simply protecting the c6-knight so that the b-pawn can advance.

If Black plays 9...♞e8 to prepare 10...e5, White can expand in the centre with 10 d5 ♘e5 11 b3 e6! 12 ♘g3 c5 13 ♙e2 exd5 14 cxd5 b5 15 0-0 with a good version of Yusupov's Plan (see 6...c5) in R.Wojtaszek-D.Szoen, Sroda Wielkopolska 2005. Alternatively, the creative 10 ♘d5!? paid off for super-GM Vitiugov after 10...e6 11 ♘xf6+ ♙xf6 12 h4! e5 13 d5 ♘d4 14 ♘xd4 exd4 15 ♚f4 ♘g7 16 c5 ♙d7 17 ♙d3 ♙e5 18 ♚d2 ♙f6 19 ♘f2 h5 20 ♚f4 ♙g5 21 ♚xg5 ♚xg5 22 hxg5 dxc5 23 ♜xc5 c6 24 ♜hc1 cxd5 25 exd5 ♜e3? 26 ♙e4! ♙b5 27 ♜xb5! axb5 28 ♜d1 f5 29 gxf6+ ♘xf6 30 ♜xd4 ♜xe4 31 fxe4 and a quick win, N.Vitiugov-A.Fier, Dubai (rapid) 2014.

10 b3!

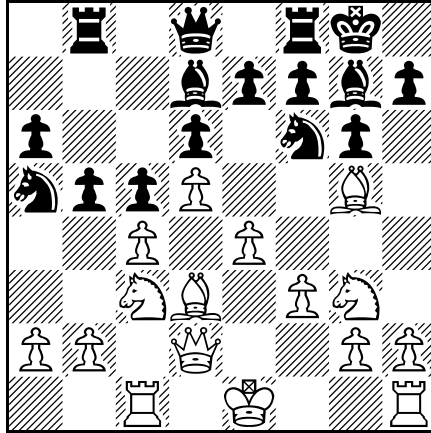
Combined with 9 ♜c1, the text is the idea that has caused Black the most problems. White prophylactically protects c4 after moving his rook off of the long diagonal. He is essentially saying that because of his space advantage he can play more useful moves than Black can before forcing the play. Once Black plays a slow move or misplaces one of his pieces, the d4-d5 push will come with more strength than it would have if played on move 9.

This is excellent in theory and has worked well in practice, but it takes good judgement to know which moves are useful and which are not. Playing over the games in this chapter and paying careful attention to when certain piece arrangements work and when they do not should help you to time the push correctly.

As always, 10 d5 is possible, but the inclusion of 9 ♜c1 and 9...♙d7 doesn't bother Black at all:

a) 10...♗e5?! is risky when the retreat square on d7 is unavailable, and Dreev claims that White obtains a large advantage as follows: 11 b3 ♗h5 (or 11...b5 12 f4 ♗eg4 13 ♗g3 h6 14 ♗h4 ♗h7 15 ♗e2) 12 ♗g3! f5 13 ♗xh5 gxh5 14 ♗e2 ♗g6 15 exf5 ♗xf5 16 0-0, as in A.Dreev-M.Muhutdinov, St.Petersburg 1993.

b) 10...♗a5! 11 ♗g3 c5 12 ♗d3 b5.

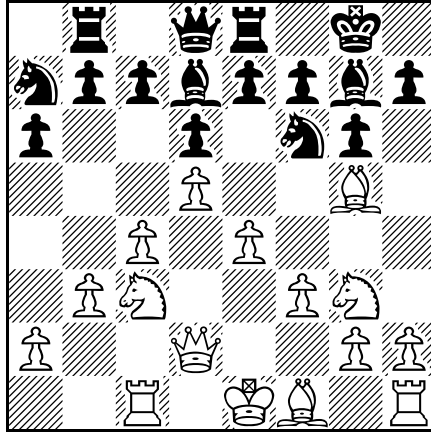


After 13 b3 (notice how essential this move is!) 13...bxc4 14 bxc4 ♖b4! 15 ♗d1, going 15...♖c7! 16 0-0 ♖fb8 would have given Black excellent play in S.Mamedyarov-I.Cheparinov, Antalya 2004. Indeed, 9 ♖c1! and 10 b3! might best be thought of as prophylaxis against Black's plan of playing the knight to a5.

10...e5?!

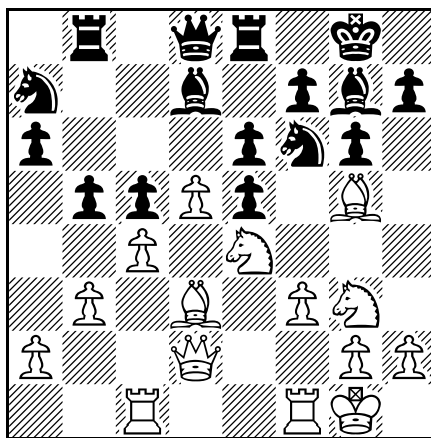
Black tires of waiting and strikes in the centre, but White has a nice rejoinder. The best move, 10...b5, will be analyzed in the next game.

In fact Black is running out of waiting moves that improve his position. Because c4 is firmly under White's control, he's ready for central action, and after 10...♖e8?! 11 d5!, 11...♗a7 is forced (if 11...♗e5? 12 f4! or 11...♗a5?! 12 c5! dxc5 13 e5 ♗h5 14 g4). Black will get in ...b7-b5, but he does better to play it on move 10 when he doesn't need to put his knight on a7. After 12 ♗g3 we have a split:



a) 12...b5 13 ♗e2 bxc4 14 ♗xc4 ♖b5 tries to exchange the bad knight, but 15 ♗ce2! avoids this and leaves White with a very pleasant position. He will have pressure down the c-file and access to the d4-square after driving Black's knight back from b5: 15...♗b7 (Black probably does best to eliminate his weak backwards c-pawn, such as with 15...♗c8 16 0-0 ♗b7 17 ♗fd1 c6) 16 0-0 ♗a8 17 ♗d3 a5 18 a4! ♗a7 19 ♗xa5 and Black's opening was a complete failure in P.Van der Sterren-P.Enders, German League 1997.

b) Sämisch hero Matthew Sadler lost twice following 12...c5 13 ♗d3 b5 14 0-0 e6 15 dxe6, once to Mark Hebden in 1988 and once to Michael Hennigan in 1995, though his position out of the opening was for preference in both games. I'm sure he kicked himself after the second loss, however, because after the following correspondence game he never got a third try: 15 e5! dxe5 16 ♗ce4!

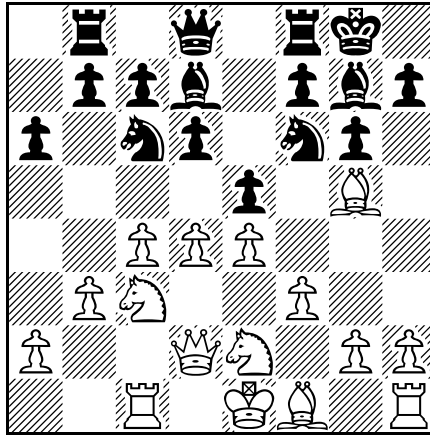


White exposes the sham that is Black's position for the price of a pawn. His pieces control all of the important central squares while both of Black's bishops are passive, one of his

knights is out of play on a7, the other is caught in a pin on the kingside, he's weak down the d-file, and the c5-pawn is hanging.

After 16...exd5 17 cxd5 ♘xe4 18 ♘xe4 f6 19 ♕e3 ♕f5 20 ♘xc5 just like that, Black is lost. He can't protect the a6-pawn, defend his king, and blockade White's passed d-pawn. White finished accurately: 20...♚d6 21 ♕xf5 gxf5 22 ♘e6! ♖b7 23 ♜fd1 ♜d7 24 ♚a5! 1-0, G.Lorscheid-M.Baer, correspondence 1995. Go back to move 15 and admire this amazing transformation of the position! Well done, Herr Lorscheid!

Returning to 10...e5?!



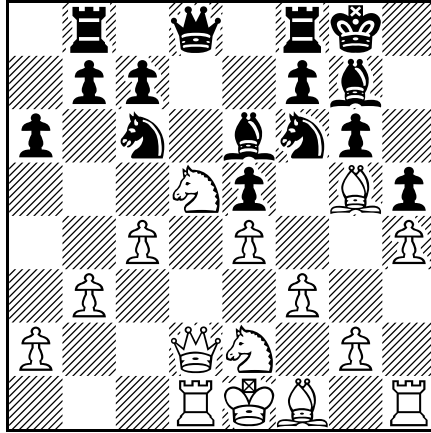
11 dxe5!

This is now the correct way for White to proceed, as the bishop on d7 becomes vulnerable after this exchange.

11 d5 has been pretty much ignored because after 11...♘e7 12 ♘g3 Black can use the bishop on d7 to play 12...b5, but even this looks a little better for White to me.

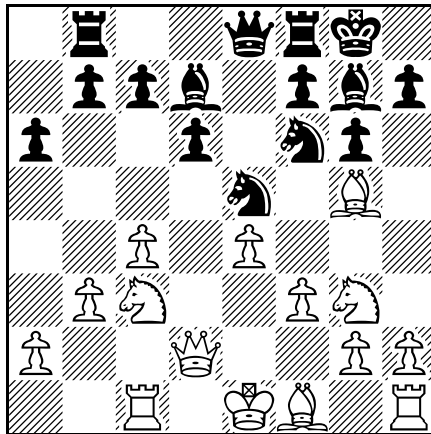
11...♘xe5

The d5-square and strong pin combine for some serious pressure following 11...dxe5? 12 ♘d5 ♕e6 13 h4! (an improvement over the 13 g3 ♘a7? 14 ♚e3 ♘c8 15 ♜d1! ♕xd5 16 cxd5 ♚d7 17 h4 h5 18 ♕h3 of L.Istvandi-T.Meszaros, Mindszentkalla 2002; instead, 13...♜c8! prepares to grovel with ...♘c6-b8-d7, bringing extra protection to the knight on f6, and for this reason I like increasing the pressure on the d-file more quickly) 13...h5 14 ♜d1.



Black is falling into a bind. His queen is needed on d8 to defend the pinned knight, and White threatens simply to move his queen from the d-file when ♖xf6+ will win material. Thus Black's forced to eliminate the knight with 14...♙xd5 (14...♖c8 15 ♗b2! ♙xd5 16 cxd5 ♘d4 17 ♘xd4 exd4 18 ♗xd4 is a free central pawn for White) 15 cxd5 ♘e7, when Black lacks play and will soon face pressure down the c- and d-files. In addition, he will need to face the wrath of White's tremendous bishop pair after 16 g3!, aiming for the beautiful h3-c8 diagonal.

12 ♘g3 ♗e8



Black escapes the pin, which while not as deadly as after 11... dxe5, still disturbs the development of his pieces.

13 ♙e2 h5

Planning to drive the bishop from g5 and potentially creating counterplay with ...h5-h4-h3. Grandmaster Sadler finds a flaw, but it's very difficult to suggest something better. One

of Black's problems is that he can never play ...c7-c6 to keep White's knight out of d5 because it would drop the d-pawn:

a) Attempting to attack White's c-pawn with 13...b5? backfires: 14 cxb5 axb5 15 ♕xf6! ♕xf6 16 ♖d5 ♕g7 17 ♖xc7.

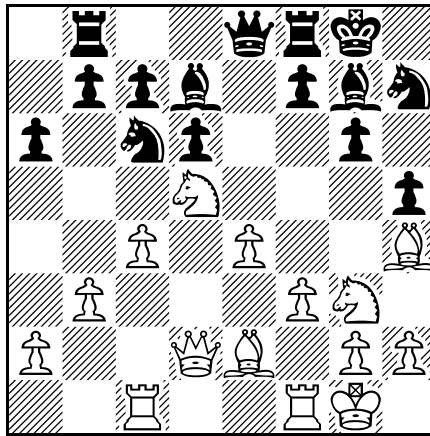
b) 13...♖c8 protects c7 in preparation of ♖d5, but it's purely passive and Black will run out of moves. Where could his queen and rooks possibly go from here?

c) 13...♕c6 14 0-0 ♖ed7 holds things together for the time being, but is also passive. Note the influence White's bishop has from g5, even after Black has stepped out of the pin. White can press with 15 b4!, and his advantage is growing.

14 0-0 ♖h7 15 ♕h4!

15 ♕e3 might allow Black to dirty the waters with 15...h4 16 ♖h1 h3.

15...♖c6 16 ♖d5!



Dominating the knight on h7. White is much better and Black has no choice but to play for complications.

16...♖e5

Passive defence such as 16...♖c8 will be overrun on the kingside, beginning with 17 f4!.

17 ♖h1!

Avoiding 17 ♖xc7? ♖d4+! 18 ♖xd4 ♕xd4+ 19 ♖h1 g5!.

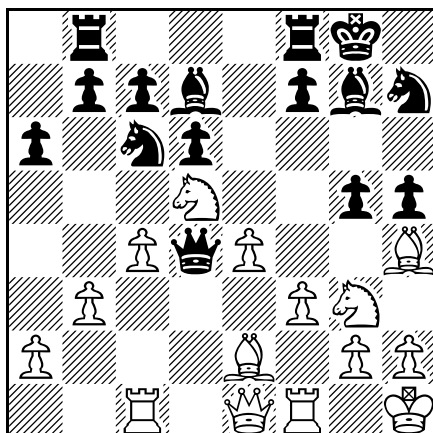
17...♖d4

Consistently playing to trap the dark-squared bishop by eliminating one of the defenders of g5.

18 ♖e1!?

Sadler falls for the 'trap', and he has everything worked out.

18...g5!



At least Black goes down swinging. The passive defence 18...♖bc8 19 ♖d1 ♗b2 20 ♖d2 ♗a3 allows 21 f4! and White crashes through on the kingside. Black's pieces don't look so bad at first, but where can he move them, and how can they defend his king? White is already winning: 21...♗fe8 22 ♕xh5! gxh5 23 ♖xh5, etc.

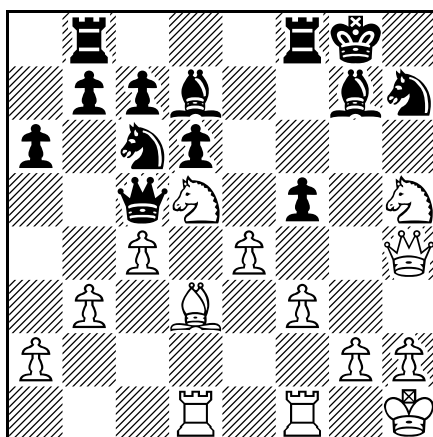
19 ♖d1 ♗c5 20 ♖xh5!

20 ♕xg5! ♖xg5 21 ♖xh5 wins in similar fashion.

20...gxh4 21 ♗xh4 f5

Black needs to cover the f6-square with his rook.

22 ♕d3!



Black's queenside pieces are powerless to defend their king. The game was soon over.
22...♖be8 23 exf5 ♖e5 24 ♗g3 1-0

One of the true experts in the 6 ♕g5 Sämisch returned from retirement to play an excellent game. Welcome back, Mr. Sadler!