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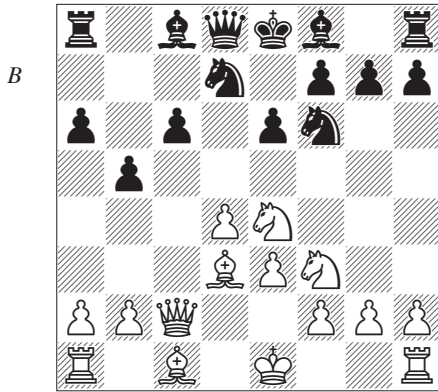
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Game 17 [D45]

Alexei Dreev – Yakov Geller
Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2004

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♖c3 c6 4 e3 ♘f6 5 ♘f3 ♗bd7
 6 ♔c2 ♙d6

Can Black not simply take on c4 and continue with ...b5 as in the regular variations of the Meran? With the queen on c2, White can use the tempo gained to prevent Black's freeing move ...c5; for example, 6...dxc4 7 ♙xc4 b5 8 ♙d3 a6 9 ♘e4! (D).



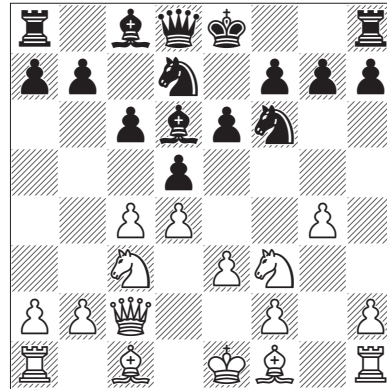
Now the usefulness of the tempo gained with the queen on c2 becomes obvious, since from there it attacks c6. After 9...♙b7 10 ♙d2 (with the obvious idea of playing b4 and preventing the freeing ...c5 once and for all) 10...♖c8 11 b4! ♘xe4 12 ♙xe4 ♘f6 13 ♙d3 ♘d5 14 a3 we see the type of position that White should aim for and Black should avoid: total control of c5 and the bishop entombed on b7.

7 g4 (D)

7...♘xg4 8 ♖g1 ♘xh2?!

The most natural way of staying a pawn up. It appears that Black does not lose much time, since White in turn must capture the g7-pawn and keep moving his rook, but after these semi-forced moves, White will be only two moves away from completing his development (♙d2 and 0-0-0) whereas Black will still need three or four tempi to bring the king to the queenside, the only place of safety.

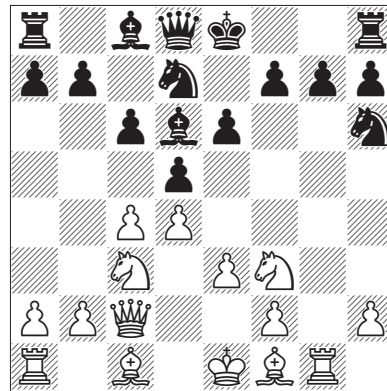
B



Black has other ways of keeping the pawn:

a) 8...♘h6?! (D) has the drawback of decentralizing the knight.

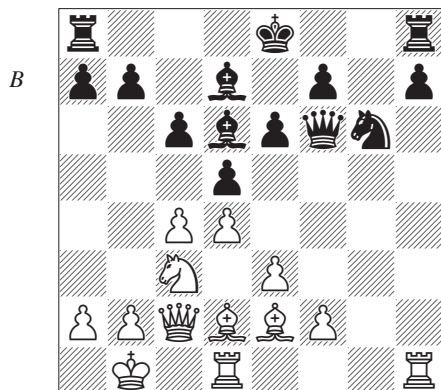
W



9 e4! (White opens the centre, exploiting the bad position of the black pieces and the tempo that he has spent on capturing the g-pawn; watch out for the trap 9 ♖xg7??, which would leave White a piece down after 9...♗f6!) 9...dxe4 10 ♘xe4 ♙b4+ 11 ♙d2 ♙xd2+ 12 ♗xd2 ♘f5 13 0-0-0. Here we can talk about clear compensation. Black has not completed his development and his king is still in the centre.

b) The attempt to activate the queen by 8...♗f6 has not been played very much. After 9

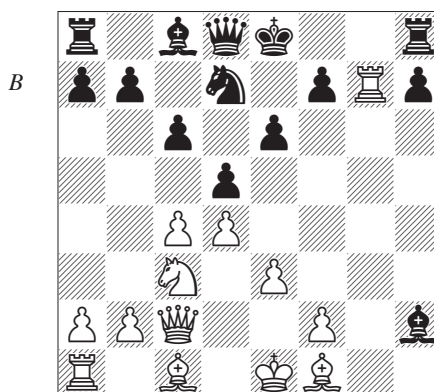
♖xg4 ♜xf3 10 ♜xg7 ♘f8 (threatening ...♘g6 trapping the white rook) 11 ♜g1! (better than defending the h-pawn with 11 ♜g2, because White would have difficulties in dislodging the annoying queen from f3) 11...♘g6 12 ♙d2!? ♙xh2 13 ♙e2 ♜f6 14 ♜h1 ♙d6 15 0-0-0 ♙d7 16 ♖b1 (D).



Black's extra h-pawn does not mean much, and is even a nuisance for Black since it needs constant defence. On the other hand, the tempi that White has gained and the poor positioning of some of the black pieces (the queen on f6 does not feel safe, the knight on g6 is badly placed, the bishop on d7 is quite passive and the king is still in the centre) allows White to choose between opening the position with e4 or even playing more for the long term with moves such as f4, followed by doubling rooks with ♜h5 and ♜dh1.

c) 8...f5!? is a respectable line of play. Black returns the pawn but keeps the position closed and places a strong knight on e4, which prevents White from achieving the thematic e4 break. In practice this system has enabled Black to complete his development quickly with 9 h3 ♘gf6 10 ♜xg7 ♘e4 11 ♙d2 ♜f6 12 ♜g2 ♘f8 13 0-0-0 ♘g6. Despite his advantage in development, White does not have a clear game-plan. In general, he doubles his rooks on the g-file and tries to dislodge the knight from g6 by advancing his h-pawn or by the manoeuvre ♘g5 with idea of ♘xh7. For his part Black plans ...0-0-0 and the later break with ...e5.

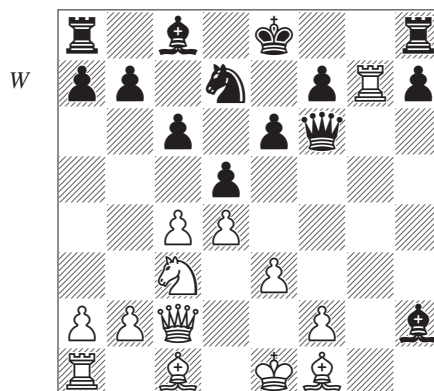
9 ♘xh2 ♙xh2 10 ♜xg7 (D)



In this type of position, White's aim is to castle as soon as possible and at the right moment open the position with e4. In practice this gives more than sufficient compensation for the missing pawn. The reader should note that regaining the pawn with ♜xh7 simplifies Black's task. The h-pawn (extra and passed) would be of great value in an ending, but with all the pieces on the board and the black king in the centre, it is of little importance.

10...♜f6 (D)

If 10...♘f8, with the recurring idea of imprisoning the rook with ...♘g6 and continuing the development of the queenside, there follows 11 ♜g2 ♙d6 12 ♙d2 ♙d7 13 0-0-0 a6 14 e4 ♜c8 15 ♜e1 ♙e7 16 f4 b5 17 c5 dxe4 18 ♘xe4 (Garcia Ilundain-Illescas, Leon 1992) and one could not ask for more in exchange for a pawn. Black's pieces are completely tied up and short of space and his king will soon be a target for attack by the aggressive white pieces.



11 ♖g2!

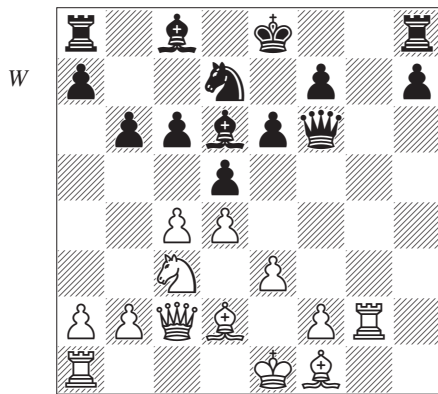
Prioritizing development and time, ahead of the material balance. 11 ♖xh7, as played for instance in Shirov-Piket, Monaco (Amber blind-fold) 1995, is less ambitious.

11...♗d6 12 ♗d2!

Before breaking with e4, it is best, as we have said, to get on with development. Black does not have enough time to do likewise before White breaks in the centre.

12...b6 (D)

If 12...♗f8 13 0-0-0 ♗d7 White can break immediately with 14 e4! since Black cannot take on d4 on account of 14...♞xd4 15 ♗h6 ♞f6 16 ♗g7 ♞f4+ 17 ♖b1 ♗g8 18 ♗h6, winning the exchange and retaining the more active pieces.

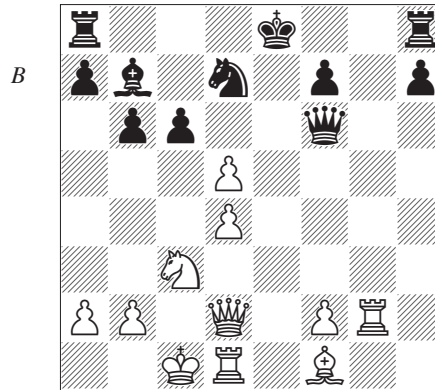
**13 e4 ♗f4**

It is not wise to capture the d-pawn, exposing the queen with 13...♞xd4 14 cxd5 exd5 15 0-0-0, when Black faces serious problems.

14 cxd5 exd5 15 exd5 ♗xd2+ 16 ♞xd2 ♗b7

It is necessary to return material to speed up development. If 16...cxd5, then 17 0-0-0 ♗b7

18 ♗e1+ ♗d8 19 ♗g5 and the d-pawn will soon drop, while the black king is still without a refuge.

17 0-0-0 (D)**17...cxd5**

Retaining the material advantage at the expense of the safety of his king. As Dreev indicates, 17...0-0-0 would not solve the problems either: 18 ♗e4 ♞f3 19 ♗g3 ♞xe4 20 ♗g2 ♞f5 21 dxc6 ♗xc6 22 ♗xc6 and the black position is a disaster: weak king, passive pieces, etc.

18 ♗e1+ ♗d8 19 ♗g5 ♗c8 20 ♗h3 ♗c7 21 ♗e3 ♗c6 22 ♗f5 ♞h4 23 ♗xf7 ♖c8 24 ♗g1! h6 25 ♗g6 ♞h5 26 ♗gg7?!

With 26 ♞g3! White could have forced immediate resignation, since Black is unable to deal with the two threats of ♗f5 and ♗xc6 followed by ♗xd7+.

26...♗d8 27 ♞g3! b5 28 ♗f5 ♞e8 29 ♖d2

Even the king is joining in the struggle, defending the possible entry-square at e1.

29...♖b7 30 ♞d6 ♗dc8 31 ♗ff7 b4 32 ♞xb4+ ♖a8 33 ♞e7 ♞h8 34 ♗d6 ♗b6 35 ♞xc6+! 1-0

A brilliant game by Dreev.

Game 18 [D45]

Gabriel Sargissian – Tiger Hillarp Persson

Reykjavik 2006

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♗c3 ♗f6 4 ♗f3 e6 5 e3 ♗bd7 6 ♞c2 ♗d6 7 g4 h6 (D)

This natural move has been gaining supporters in recent times. Black prevents the advance