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2 Dutch Variation: White Plays 9 h4

In this chapter, instead of trying to push in the centre with e4, White seeks to hunt down Black's f5-bishop with the manoeuvre $\mathcal{N}h4$. This is most commonly played after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 $\mathcal{N}f3$ $\mathcal{N}f6$ 4 $\mathcal{N}c3$ dxc4 5 a4 $\mathcal{N}f5$ 6 e3 e6 7 $\mathcal{N}xc4$ $\mathcal{N}b4$ 8 0-0 0-0 (or 8... $\mathcal{N}bd7$), although White also frequently plays 6 $\mathcal{N}h4$, forcing Black to make an early decision. Usually Black cannot avoid the trade of knight for bishop, but he can generally choose how and where it is exchanged. The resulting middlegames are generally very strategic in nature and offer chances to both sides.

The Games

Game 5 (Moiseenko-Swathi) examines the structure arising after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 $\mathcal{N}f3$ $\mathcal{N}f6$ 4 $\mathcal{N}c3$ dxc4 5 a4 $\mathcal{N}f5$ 6 e3 e6 7 $\mathcal{N}xc4$ $\mathcal{N}b4$ 8 0-0 0-0 9 $\mathcal{N}h4$ $\mathcal{N}bd7$ 10 $\mathcal{N}xf5$ exf5. In the game Black plays a quick ...c5 to discourage e4, but White manages to play it anyway, based on a typical pawn sacrifice to open the position for White's pair of bishops. Black declines the pawn, but his pieces lose their coordination. After White gets $\mathcal{N}h6$ in, Black neglects his back-rank problems and loses material to some rather elementary tactics.

Game 6 (Sakaev-Kasparov) sees White play $\mathcal{N}h4$ before Black castles. White is wary of playing $\mathcal{N}h4$ xg6 because it will open the h-file for Black's rook. When Black decides to preserve the bishop with ... $\mathcal{N}h5$, White does not respond critically with g4 and he quickly loses the initiative. Kasparov's forceful play gives him a better ending, which he duly converts into victory. In the notes to this game we also examine lines with a quick $\mathcal{W}b3$ by White.

Game 7 (Carlsen-Gelfand) investigates the immediate 6 $\mathcal{N}h4$. Black responds with the provocative 6... $\mathcal{N}g4$. After 7 h3 $\mathcal{N}h5$ 8 g4 $\mathcal{N}g6$ 9 $\mathcal{N}xg6$ hxg6 we have a typical case where White has the bishop-pair and space while Black has good development and a solid position. When White errs with 12 $\mathcal{N}f1$?, Black quickly seizes the initiative. White is quickly saddled with structural weaknesses and he is overrun by Black's active knights and rooks.

Game 5

Alexander Moiseenko – Ghate Swathi

Montreal 2006

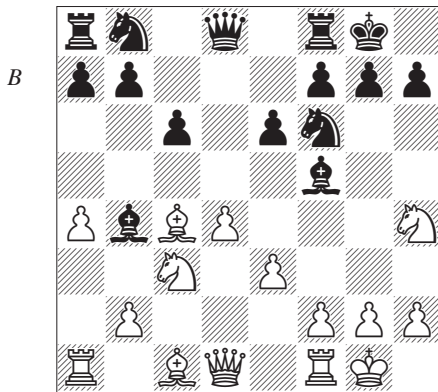
1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 $\mathcal{N}f3$ $\mathcal{N}f6$ 4 $\mathcal{N}c3$ dxc4 5 a4 $\mathcal{N}f5$ 6 e3 e6 7 $\mathcal{N}xc4$ $\mathcal{N}b4$ 8 0-0 0-0 9 $\mathcal{N}h4$ (D)

This is a completely different approach from the one we saw in Chapter 1. White is less interested in advancing in the centre and he grabs the opportunity to corral Black's bishop. The position after Black's next move can, and frequently

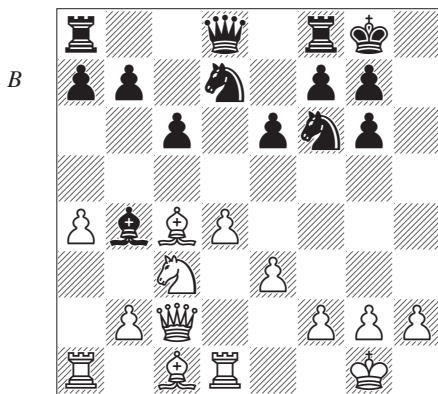
does, arise via the move-order 8... $\mathcal{N}bd7$ 9 $\mathcal{N}h4$ 0-0 as well.

9... $\mathcal{N}bd7$

Black allows the exchange of minor pieces on f5, drastically changing the pawn-structure. Here the retreat 9... $\mathcal{N}g6$ is rather compliant. After 10 $\mathcal{N}xg6$ hxg6 White can play 11 $\mathcal{W}c2$!



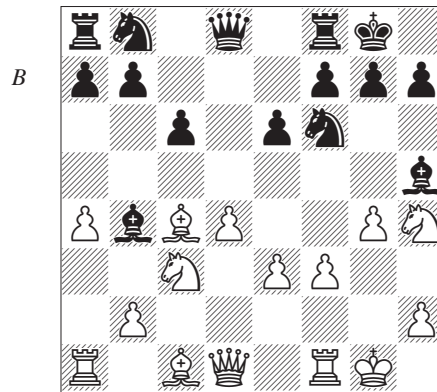
$\text{♞}b7$ 12 $\text{♞}d1$ (*D*) with good chances for an advantage.



If we compare this position to Game 2, White's queen is on c2 instead of e2. This is a subtle improvement, because the c3-knight is already protected, and in fact we saw earlier that White often spends a tempo playing $\text{♞}c2$ in the $\text{♞}e2$ lines. Also note that ...e5 can be difficult to achieve because then White could play $\text{♞}xg6$.

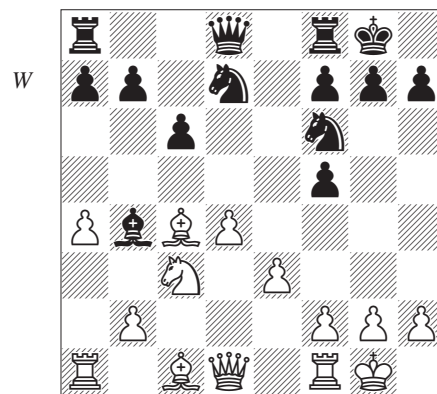
9... $\text{♞}g4$ is a popular alternative. After 10 f3 $\text{♞}h5$ (10... $\text{♞}d5$ 11 fxg4 $\text{♞}xh4$ 12 $\text{♞}f3$ $\text{♞}xc3$ 13 bxc3 $\text{♞}xc3$ is met by 14 $\text{♞}a3!$, when Black's king is very uncomfortable) 11 g4 (*D*) we have a common situation in the $\text{♞}h4$ lines.

Black will acquiesce to the exchange of his bishop, but he wants to lure White's pawns forward first. This is double-edged – White gains a lot of space, but he may become overextended. After 11... $\text{♞}g6$ (11... $\text{♞}d5$ 12 $\text{♞}g2$ $\text{♞}g6$ 13 $\text{♞}a2$ $\text{♞}e7$ 14 e4 $\text{♞}b6$ is also possible) 12 $\text{♞}xg6$ hxg6



13 e4 the position is unclear. White has the bishop-pair and space, but the g4-pawn looks rather out of place. Black can complete his development with 13... $\text{♞}bd7$ or strike immediately at the centre with 13...c5.

10 $\text{♞}xf5$ exf5 (*D*)



This is an important pawn-structure in the Main-Line Slav. At first it looks like Black has just ruined his pawn-structure and given White the bishop-pair as well, but matters are not so simple. The f5-pawn helps Black to control e4, and in some cases it may advance to f4 to disrupt White's control of d4. If Black can get a bind on the e4- and d5-squares, he might even be able to play for a kingside attack. It is also not always so easy for White to develop his c1-bishop, in part because of the queenside weaknesses created by 5 a4. White will often try to play f3 and e4, even as a pawn sacrifice. This can lead to a very strong initiative for White,

but his ‘hanging’ central pawns may also become vulnerable. Because Black is slightly ahead in development, sometimes he will be the one trying to open the position with ...c5. The structure is quite delicate for both sides – White may break with e4 or d5, while Black can strike with ...c5 or ...f4. A lot depends on the specifics of each position, and both sides must take extreme care with their next few moves.

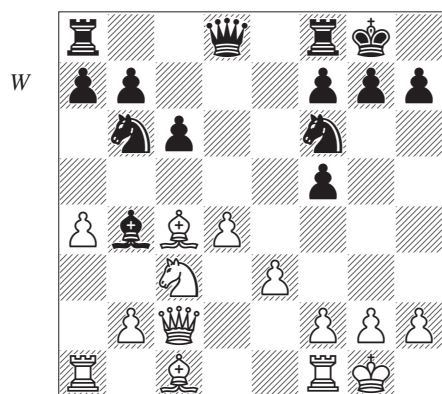
11 ♖c2

White attacks the f5-pawn and covers c3. He may then continue with ♗d1 or f3, or both. Instead 11 ♖f3 is another way of hitting f5, but it is much less flexible, because White cannot expand in the centre. After 11...g6 12 h3 ♖a5 13 ♗e2 ♗ae8 14 b3 ♗e4 Black had a nice grip on the central squares in Polugaevsky-Ivanchuk, Biel 1989.

11...g6

This obvious defence of the f5-pawn is by far the most common move. Having given up his light-squared bishop, Black does not object to erecting a light-squared pawn-chain. Nevertheless, this move creates some weaknesses around the black king. This may become important if White can achieve the e4 advance because the f-file may open up for White’s rook and both ♗g5 and ♗h6 become possibilities. Black would then have to be very wary of pressure coming down on f6 and f7.

A case can certainly be made for the alternative 11...♗b6!? (D).



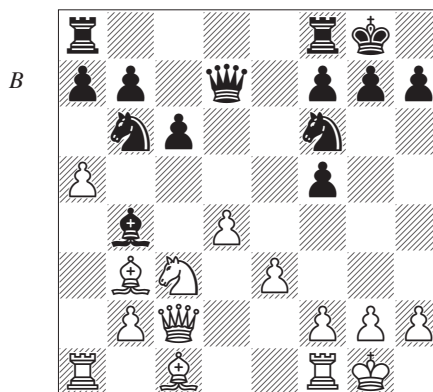
This move avoids creating weaknesses on the kingside because Black will be able to play

...♖d7 to protect the vulnerable pawn on f5. Now:

a) 12 ♗e2 is a bit passive. 12...♖d7 13 ♗a2 (13 a5 ♗bd5 14 a6 b6 15 ♗d2 ♗ac8 16 ♗fc1 ♗fe8 17 ♗xd5 cxd5 18 ♖d3 ♗xd2 19 ♖xd2 h5 is quite solid for Black, and he even went on to win in Filippov-Wang Yue, Moscow 2005) 13...♗d6 14 b4 ♗ac8 15 ♗d2 ♗e4 16 ♗c1 ♗d5 17 ♗d3 ♖e7 18 ♗ab1 ♗fe8 19 g3 g6 20 ♗c5 h5 was Pomerleano-Vigorito, Philadelphia 2006. This is an ideal set-up for Black. He has a grip on the centre and attacking chances on the kingside.

b) After 12 ♗d3 Black will indeed be forced to play 12...g6, but from d3 the bishop is less active (there is no more pressure on f7) and the d4-pawn will be more vulnerable, making it more difficult for White to engineer an advance of his e-pawn. The bishop may also be misplaced because ...♗d5-b4 becomes an additional possibility. 13 a5 ♗bd5 14 a6 b6 15 ♗d2 ♗c8 16 ♖b3 ♗d6 17 ♗xd5 cxd5 18 ♗fc1 ♖d7 19 g3 ♖e6 20 ♗g2 h5 was fine for Black in Kasimdzhanov-Bu Xiangzhi, Doha 2006 and the game was drawn in a few moves.

c) It is generally better for White to keep the bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal, where it controls d5 and eyes the slightly weak f7-pawn. Thus: 12 ♗b3 ♖d7 13 a5 (D).



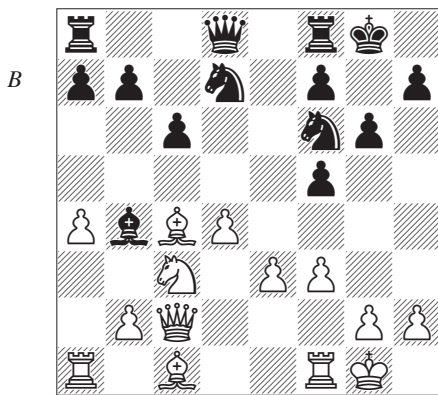
This is a typical idea for White to gain space and prevent ...a5. The pawn may even advance to a6 to weaken the light squares in Black’s camp, while ♗a4 becomes a distinct possibility as well. 13...♗bd5 14 f3 (14 ♗d2 ♗ac8 15

♞a4 ♟xd2 16 ♖xd2 ♜fe8 17 ♝c5 ♞e4 18 ♞xe4 ♜xe4 19 g3 ♜ce8 was solid enough for Black in Ehlvest-Donaldson, Stratton Mountain 2003) 14...♜fe8 15 ♞xd5 ♞xd5 (15...cxd5? 16 ♟a4) 16 e4 (White tries to seize the initiative) 16...♞f6! (Black keeps the f-file closed) and now White has tried:

c1) 17 ♟e3 ♞h8 18 ♜a4 ♟f8 19 ♟g5 fxe4! (Black does not fear doubled pawns because White's d4-pawn will also be weak after the coming simplifications) 20 ♟xf6 gxf6 21 fxe4 b5 22 axb6 axb6 23 ♜c4 (this leads to mass simplifications) 23...b5! 24 ♜xc6 ♖xd4+ 25 ♞h1 ♖xe4 26 ♖xe4 ♜xe4 27 ♟xf7 ♜e2 28 b3 ♟e7 was soon drawn in Onishchuk-Rublevsky, Poikovsky 2007.

c2) 17 ♖c4 ♟f8 18 ♟g5 (after 18 exf5 ♜ad8 19 ♞h1 ♜e7 20 ♖c2 a draw was agreed in Kramnik-Anand, Linares 2000) 18...fxe4 19 fxe4 ♜xe4 20 ♟xf6 gxf6 21 ♜ad1 ♜ae8! and Black's piece activity maintained the balance in Lautier-Bareev, Enghien-les-Bains 2003.

12 f3 (D)

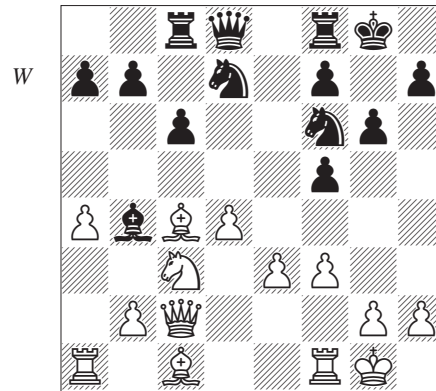


This is the most ambitious. White hopes to make use of the rook on the f-file, where it may assist in an attack on the kingside.

12...♜c8 (D)

Black logically lines up his rook against White's queen in preparation for ...c5. Instead 12...♜e8? allows 13 ♟xf7+ ♞xf7 14 ♖b3+. After playing ...exf5, Black must always mind the f7-square carefully. The natural 12...♖e7?! runs into 13 e4! because 13...fxe4 14 fxe4 ♟xc3 15 bxc3 ♖xe4 16 ♖b3 leaves Black's kingside

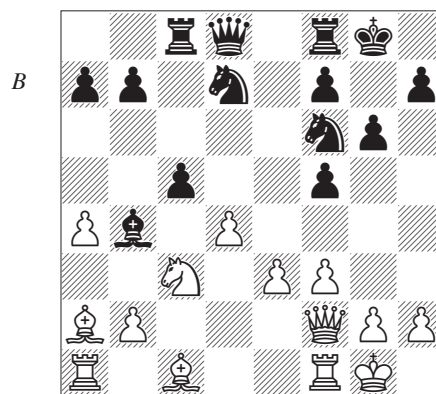
under tremendous pressure. However, 12...♖b6 and 12...♞b6 both put some pressure on d4 and are worthy alternatives.



13 ♞h1

White tucks his king away in anticipation of the centre opening up. The immediate 13 e4?! would be met by 13...♞b6, attacking both c4 and d4. This double attack is frequently part of Black's defence in many positions in the Dutch Variation. Thus 13 ♟a2 is another prophylactic move that White can try. He also has a couple of aggressive options:

a) 13 ♖f2 covers the d4-pawn and swings the queen over to the kingside. After 13...c5, White removes his bishop from the glare of the c8-rook with 14 ♟a2 (D).



Black is in no rush to capture on d4, because this would free White's c1-bishop. It appears that White will have trouble playing e4 now,

but Black must be careful, because the advance may come in the form of a sacrifice. For example, 14...a6 15 ♔h1 ♖b6 16 ♗h4 ♜fe8 (now may be the time for 16...cxd4) 17 dxc5 ♘xc5 18 e4! and White developed a strong attack in I.Sokolov-De Vreugt, Amsterdam 2001.

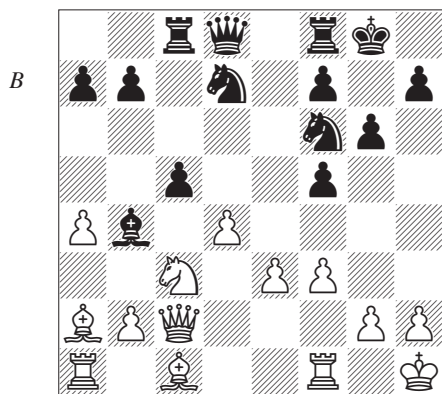
b) 13 ♜d1 would seem to indicate that White wants to play in the centre. After 13...♗e7, 14 e4!? is a sharp try by Onishchuk. White offers up a pawn even though his rook has left the f-file. Black can play:

b1) 14...fxe4 15 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 16 fxe4 c5 (Black fixes White's pawn-centre, but the b4-bishop is locked away from the kingside) 17 d5 ♗d6 18 a5 a6 19 ♜f1 ♜ce8 (Black surrenders the exchange because 19...♘e5 20 ♙h6 gives White the initiative) 20 ♙h6 ♘e5 21 g3 f6 22 ♙xf8 ♜xf8 23 ♜f4 left Black with too little for the exchange in Onishchuk-Shirov, Poikovsky 2006.

b2) 14...♙xc3 15 bxc3 fxe4 16 fxe4 and now 16...♗xe4 17 ♗f2 gives White compensation according to Onishchuk. This may not be so bad for Black, but there is also 16...♘xe4(?), when Onishchuk claimed 17 ♜e1(?) as winning for White, although 17...♜fe8 holds (e.g., 18 ♙d3?! ♗h4!). However, 17 ♙a3 c5 18 ♜e1 ♜fe8 19 ♙d3 looks strong; e.g., 19...♘df6 20 ♜e2 intending ♜ae1.

13...c5 14 ♙a2 (D)

White must meet the threat of ...cxd4. Instead 14 ♘a2 ♙a5 (14...♘b6 is also good) 15 dxc5 ♜xc5 (15...♗e7 16 b4 ♙xb4 17 ♘xb4 ♗xc5 is similar) 16 b4 ♙xb4! is a typical trick. After 17 ♘xb4 ♗c7 Black wins back the piece, and 18 ♙xf7+ ♜xf7 is about equal.



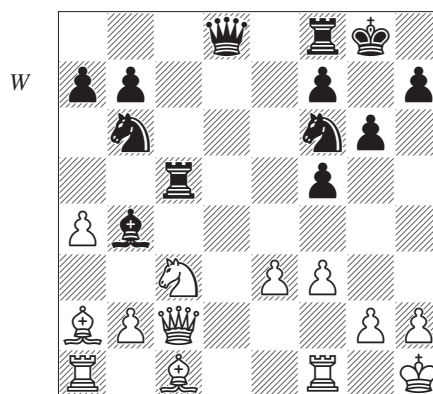
14...♘b6

14...♗b6 is another idea. White can retain the tension with 15 ♜d1 or 15 ♗f2, or release it by 15 dxc5 ♘xc5 16 e4!? fxe4 17 ♙g5 with sharp play.

15 dxc5

If White plays 15 ♗f2 now, Black might even try 15...f4!? to fight for the initiative.

15...♜xc5 (D)



Black's pieces are coming into play very quickly, but White's next move shows that Black will not be so well coordinated when the position opens up.

16 e4! ♗e7

Because recapturing with the rook on f5 looks a bit funny, 16...fxe4 may seem more natural, but it is risky to open the f-file. After 17 fxe4 (17 ♙h6!? also looks dangerous for Black) 17...♘g4 18 h3 ♗h4 (Babula-Haba, Karlovy Vary 2005), Babula suggests 19 ♗e2 because 19...♜h5? loses to 20 ♜f4.

Instead 16...♙xc3 17 bxc3 ♗c7 is also possible, when Babula gives 18 exf5 ♜xf5 19 ♙e3, heading for d4. White clearly has some compensation for the pawn, but Black's pieces are all reasonably well placed.

17 ♗b3

Before capturing on f5, White tries to disturb the coordination of Black's pieces yet further.

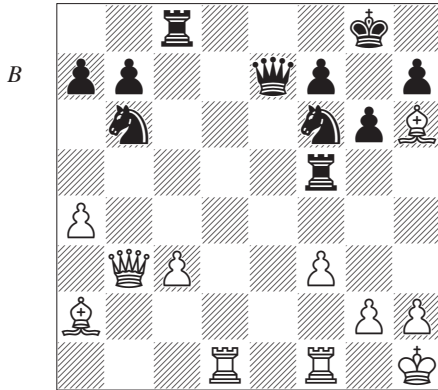
17...♜a5

This is a strange way to protect the bishop. Instead 17...♙a5, or even 17...♙xc3 18 bxc3 ♗c7 transposing to the previous note, comes into consideration.

18 ♖h6 ♜c8 19 exf5 ♕xc3

Black is forced to part with the bishop, because after 19...♞xf5? 20 ♞fe1, Black's queen is overloaded trying to protect both the f7-square and the b4-bishop.

20 bxc3 ♞xf5 21 ♞ad1 (D)



White's bishops generate strong pressure around the king, so Black must be careful.

21...♞fd5?

This is a blunder. It was better to chase off White's bishop with 21...♞h5 to prepare ...♞fd5 or ...♞c4. The knights need firm outposts if they are to compete with the bishops.

22 a5 ♞c4

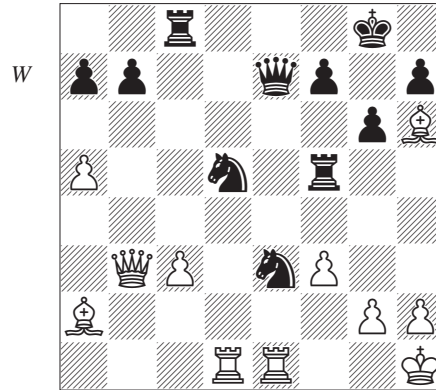
Probably Black saw 22 a5 and was counting on this, but his pieces are not as stable as they may appear to be.

23 ♞fe1

Black has tactical problems because of his weak back rank.

23...♞ce3 (D)

23...♞c7 fails to the simple 24 ♞xc4, and after 23...♞d7 24 ♞xc4 ♞xc4 25 ♕xc4 White will win the knight and be left with rook and two bishops for the queen. Therefore Black must walk into a pin.



24 ♞xd5

24 ♕xe3 ♞xe3 25 ♞d3 is even simpler because after 25...♞e5 White has 26 ♞dx3! ♞xe3 27 ♞xe3 ♞xe3 28 ♞xf7+ ♖h8 29 ♞f6#.

24...♞xd5 25 ♞xe3 ♞a3

Black tries some back-rank tricks himself, but they are not so effective.

26 h3 ♞xb3 27 ♕xb3

The black rooks are no match for White's rook and two bishops.

27...♞h5 28 ♕f4 ♞b5 29 c4 ♞xa5 30 ♞e7 ♞f5 31 ♕g3 a5 32 ♞xb7 a4 33 ♕a2 ♞d8 34 ♞a7 ♞d1+ 35 ♖h2 ♞d2 36 ♞xa4 ♞xf3 37 c5 ♖g7 38 c6 f6 39 c7 ♞c3 40 ♞c4 1-0

Game 6

Konstantin Sakaev – Garry Kasparov

European Clubs Cup, Rethymnon 2003

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♞f3 ♞f6 4 ♞c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♕f5 6 e3 e6 7 ♕xc4 ♕b4 8 0-0 ♞bd7 9 ♞h4

If either the main line of Game 1 or the pawn sacrifice of Game 3 lacks appeal to White, then 9 ♞h4 is a popular alternative. However, in comparison with 8...0-0 9 ♞h4 lines, here White may need to use a little more care chasing the

bishop around, because Black has not yet castled and ...hxg6 would open the file for the h8-rook.

9 ♞b3 (D) is another possibility for White. This is an attempt to exploit the fact that Black has played ...♞bd7 instead of ...0-0 (after 8...0-0, 9 ♞b3 is relatively harmless as Black can safely reply 9...♞e7).