

FABIANO CARUANA

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CARUANA'S RUY LOPEZ

A White Repertoire for Club chesscafe.com Players

Contents

Title page 3

Explanation of symbols 6

Preface 7

Introduction 9

Chapter 1 An Anti-Marshall set-up: 3...a6 4.♙a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 0-0 8.a4 11

Chapter 2 An Anti-Classical set-up: 3... a6 4.♙a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.a4 45

Chapter 3 Chigorin Variation: 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♖a5 10.♙c2 c5 11.d4 53

Chapter 4 Breyer Variation: 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♖b8 58

Chapter 5 Zaitsev Variation: 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♙b7 63

Chapter 6 Open Variation: 3...a6 4.♙a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♖xe4 69

Chapter 7 Berlin Defence: 3...♖f6 84

Chapter 8 Modern Arkhangelsk: 3...a6 4.♙a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♙b3 ♙c5 109

Chapter 9 Averbakh Variation: 3...a6 4.♙a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 d6 122

Chapter 10 Classical Defence: 3...♙c5 126

Chapter 11 Bird's Defence: 3...♖d4 132

Chapter 12 Schliemann Defence: 3...f5 138

Chapter 13 Cozio Defence: 3...♖ge7 147

Chapter 14 Cozio Defence Deferred: 3...a6 4.♙a4 ♖ge7 154

Chapter 15 Smyslov Defence: 3...g6 162

Chapter 16 Steinitz Defence: 3...d6 170

Chapter 17 Steinitz Defence Deferred: 3...a6 4.♙a4 d6 178

Chapter 18 Norwegian Variation: 3...a6 4.♙a4 b5 5.♙b3 ♖a5 194

Index of variations 199

Index of names 205

Fabiano Caruana

Caruana's Ruy Lopez
A White Repertoire for Club Players

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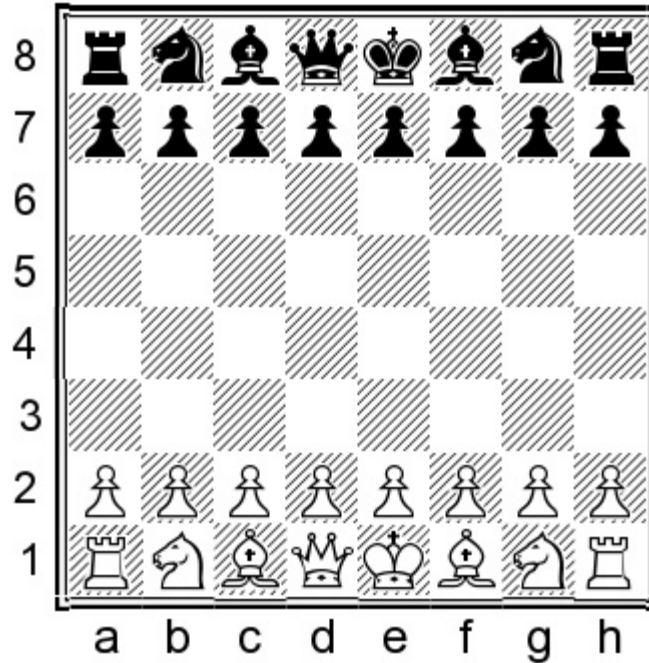
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Explanation of Symbols

The chessboard with its coordinates:



♔ King

♚ Queen

♖ Rook

♗ Bishop

♘ Knight

± White stands slightly better

∓ Black stands slightly better

± White stands better

∓ Black stands better

+− White has a decisive advantage

−+ Black has a decisive advantage

= balanced position

! good move

!! excellent move

? bad move

?? blunder

!? interesting move

?! dubious move

mate

ch championship

zt zonal tournament

izt interzonal tournament

ct candidates tournament

tt team tournament

ol olympiad

m match

cr correspondence

qf quarterfinal

sf semifinal

f final

Preface

My aim with this book is to present a basic repertoire for White in the Ruy Lopez, which covers all of Black's major lines, and to give white players lines which have coherence. As the reader will see, very often we are aiming for similar structures and similar types of positions.

In some cases I offer the reader more than one option. Chess is a rich game and there is no need to limit ourselves to just one opening line which we play for life.

Not everything is covered in the same amount of detail and scrutiny; my main recommendations are naturally given more attention. I wanted to leave the reader with a good sense of the theoretical direction, a good sense of where top players and strong grandmasters are focusing their attention and what recent high-level games have shown. I also wanted to give the reader a repertoire in which they can feel confident.

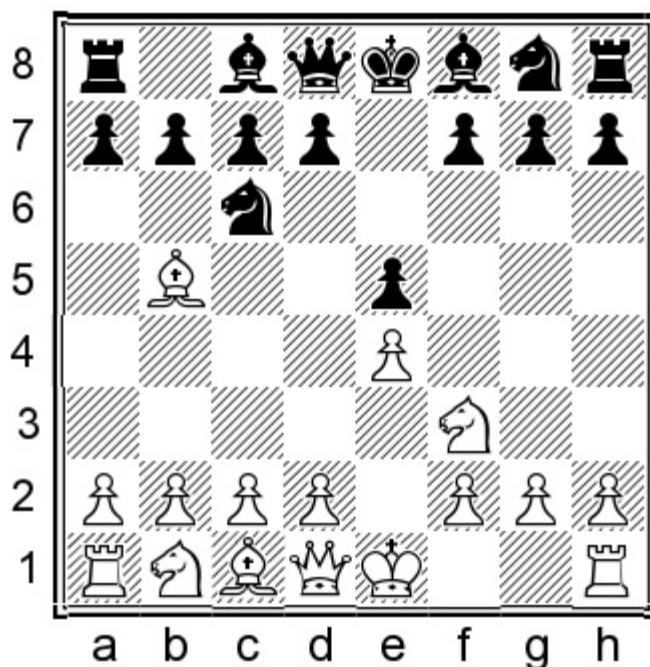
Fabiano Caruana

St Louis, MO, USA, June 2021

Introduction

The Ruy Lopez, or Spanish Game, has long been one of the most popular openings at all levels of chess, from the humble club players all the way up to the World Champions. It offers the first player the best opportunity of gaining an advantage after **1.e4 e5**.

The further moves **2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5** bring us to the starting position of the Ruy Lopez opening.



In this book, Fabiano Caruana, the world's number two player and former World Championship finalist, offers a full repertoire for White in the Ruy Lopez opening. *Caruana's Ruy Lopez* is a transcription, done by Sean Marsh, of the three-volume ChessBase video the American top grandmaster published in 2019 with the title *Navigating the Ruy Lopez*.

The Ruy Lopez is one of Caruana's favourite openings; the one he has played the most from both sides of the board – making him the ideal author for this book.

The theory of the Ruy Lopez is vast. Caruana has structured the material to cover the main variations in considerable depth and to show potent ways to counter all of Black's options. Additionally, he gives to the reader a general understanding of this extremely popular opening from White's point of view, while showing the extensive range of possibilities for Black.

Caruana's style is, in our opinion, remarkably lucid and instructive. This work is a remarkable feat for an elite player in that the American top grandmaster manages to 'descend to the lower echelons' and explain things in a highly accessible way, making this book suitable for players of all levels. The slightly 'chatty' way of explaining things on video turns out to work remarkably well in book form, too, although of course some slight changes had to be made here and there.

The theory is ever-expanding, partly because the opening is so old and still extremely popular. It is important to show not just the moves but also the ideas behind them. White's methods of meeting the various defences for Black offer similar structures and similar types of positions, to help the first

player absorb the repertoire more efficiently.

In some cases Caruana offers more than one option against a particular defence. Chess is a rich game and it is good for a player's development to investigate and understand more than one way of playing.

Readers will also gain an insight into where the world's top players and Ruy Lopez experts are currently focusing their attention and will learn from a whole range of recent games played at the highest level.

By standing on the shoulders of giants, a player will enjoy great confidence in the repertoire recommended by Caruana.

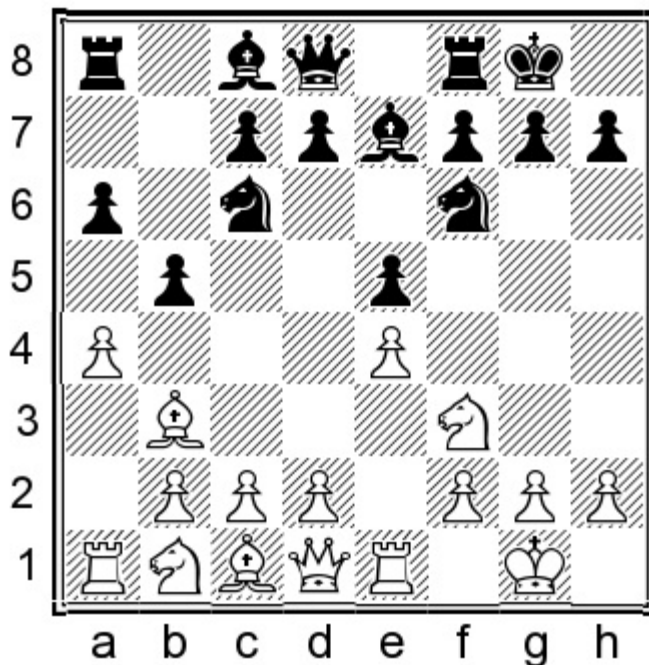
Alkmaar, July 2021

The editors

Chapter 1

An Anti-Marshall set-up: 3...a6 4.♘a4 ♟f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♘b3 0-0 8.a4

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♘b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♟f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♘b3 0-0 8.a4



The Marshall Attack was devised by Frank James Marshall as a surprise weapon for José Raúl Capablanca. It is unclear how long Marshall kept the variation under wraps, but when he finally did get the chance to use it against Capablanca – in 1918 – his opponent saw his way through the complications and won anyway.

The Marshall Attack has evolved considerably since then and it is currently one of Black's most popular and most successful ways to meet the Ruy Lopez. The theory goes on for a very long time.

The Marshall Attack is one of the biggest challenges to White's desire to gain an advantage out of the opening. Just like the Berlin Defence, it is one of the lines which is very popular at all levels, but especially at the top level.

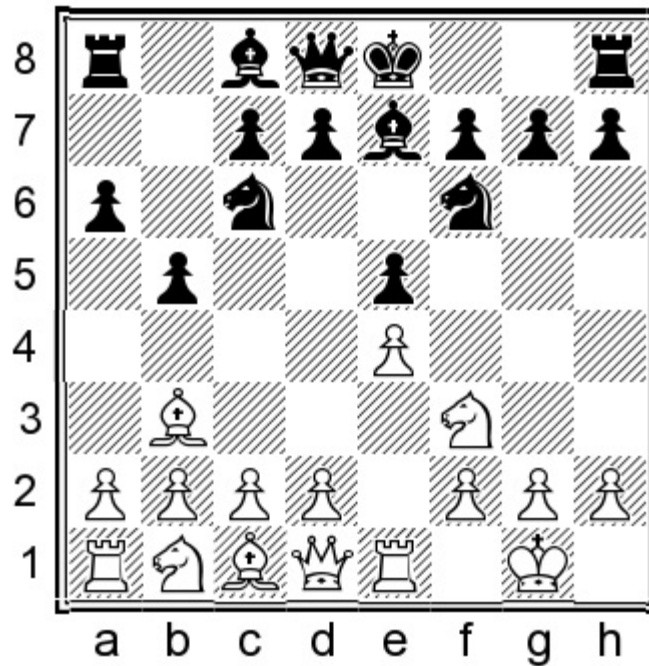
White has tried many approaches over the years but has struggled to prove an advantage.

We are recommending an Anti-Marshall system with 8.a4 as a way of cutting down on the huge body of theory, while still giving White excellent chances to fight for the initiative.

The Marshall Attack

Before showing why we need an Anti-Marshall approach, it makes sense to look at the gambit itself.

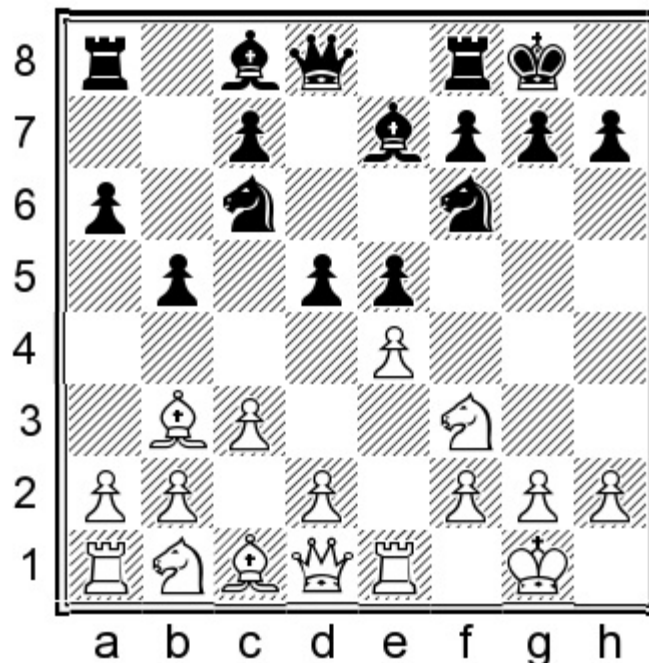
1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♘b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♟f6 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♘b3



Now, after 7...d6, very often we get one of the classical approaches to the Ruy Lopez. Black then has various approaches, such as the Breyer System, the Chigorin or the Zaitsev, and various other lines as well. These will be examined elsewhere in this book. If Black wants to avoid those options he can play

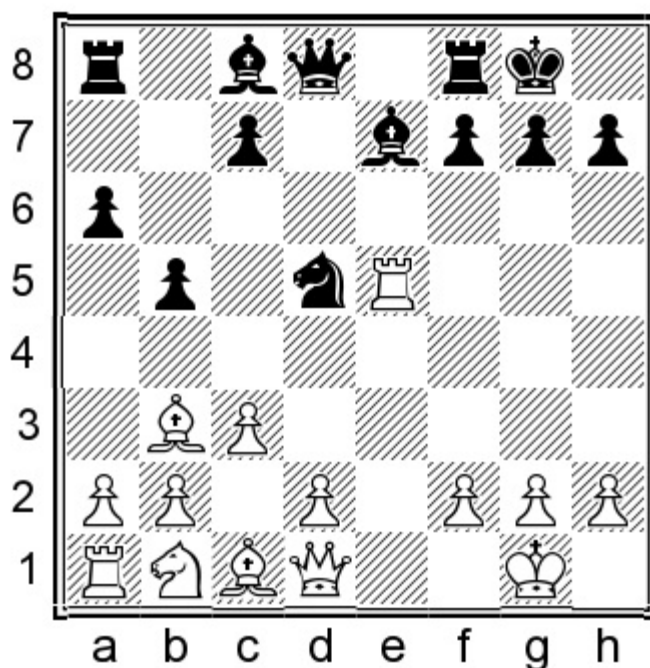
7...0-0

which is an invitation to the Marshall. Now if White plays **8.c3**, to try and get back to the same position of the classical lines after 8...d6 and 9.h3, Black has the option of **8...d5**.



This is the Marshall Attack. It is a very principled move which basically forces the play, because if White doesn't take the pawn then Black has freed his position and has more central control.

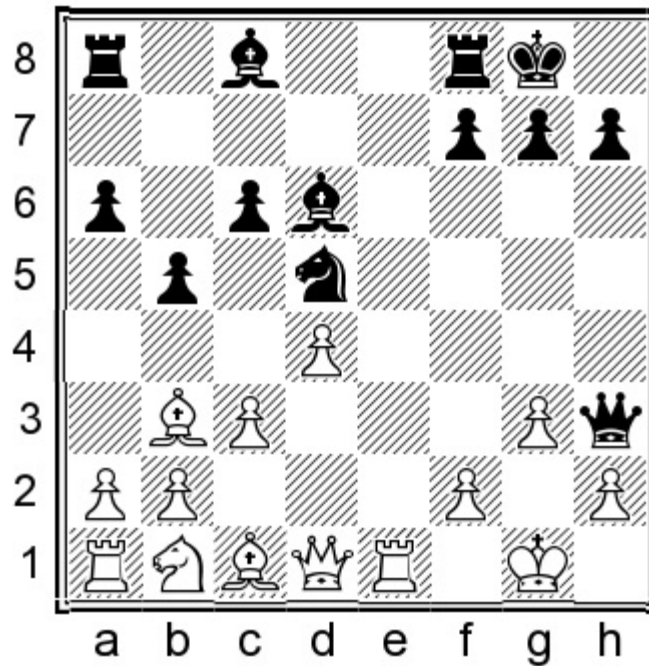
If White *does* take the pawn with **9.exd5** ♖xd5 **10.♗xe5** ♗xe5 **11.♞xe5** then we get the main position of the Marshall Attack.



Black's compensation is based on the fact that White's kingside is suddenly devoid of defenders. Black gets very quick development and will gain a tempo by attacking the rook on e5.

The move c2-c3 by White, while not exactly a mistake, prevents the development of the queen's knight to c3, hoping to trade off Black's active knight. The point is that as the position becomes more simplified then there are more chances of exploiting the extra pawn.

There is plenty of theory here, and Black can very quickly start to attack the white kingside. For example, after the further moves **11...c6** **12.d4** ♔d6 **13.♞e1** ♚h4 (White has to weaken the kingside, because there is no longer a defensive knight on f3) **14.g3** (14.h3?? always runs into 14...♔xh3) **14...♚h3** Black has serious counterplay.



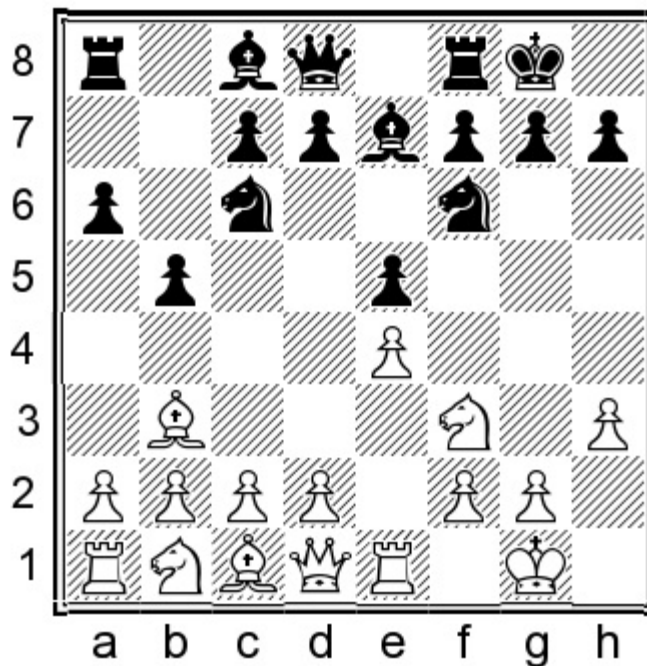
Suddenly he has ideas of ...♕g4 and ...♖ae8, attacking with tempo.

Black is considered to have good theoretical chances and also a lot of attacking chances. These days players don't really want to allow their king to be attacked.

It can be considered a very healthy gambit. Black gives up one pawn for quick development and has very good chances not only to equalize but to take over the initiative.

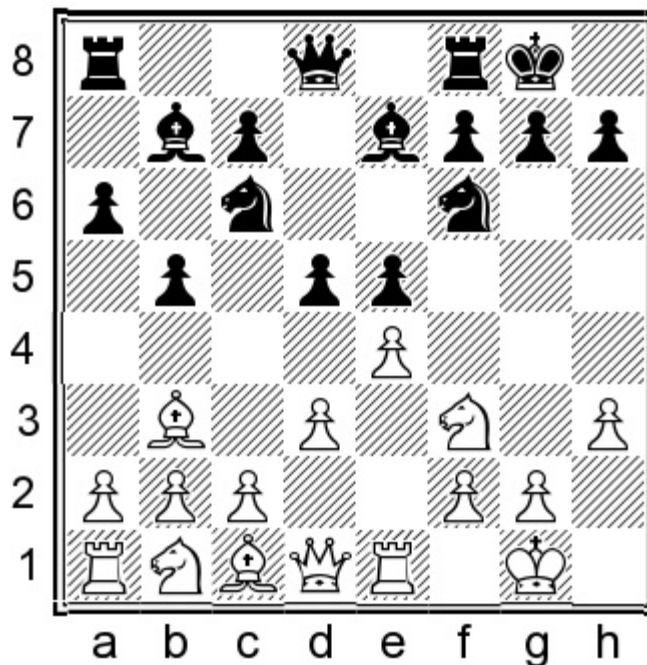
The other problem with this opening, from White's point of view, is that there is a huge body of theory and you have to memorize a lot. You can prepare well, but you're still going to have to memorise many variations.

White has other approaches; for example, instead of 8.c3 he can play **8.h3**. This is the same move you can play after 7.c3 d6, and if Black replies 8...d6 here then White plays 9.c3 and we get a classical Ruy Lopez.



After 8.h3 Black will play **8...♗b7** and, of course, if 9.c3 again, we'll run into 9...d5 with an improved Marshall Attack for Black. That is why **9.d3** has been the main move, and this has been a very popular theoretical battlefield as well.

There have been thousands of games in which Black played 9...d6, and here we can choose one of several different set-ups. 10.a3 was a very popular one, 10.a4 is another, and 10.c3. White tries to prove that the bishop is not that well placed on b7; it would rather still be on c8, when it can go to e6, and that is a very valid argument I'd like to make. The problem these days is that Black still plays **9...d5**, and this is considered also to be a very healthy pawn sacrifice.



Again, White doesn't have to take the pawn, but it is the principled move – otherwise Black does have the centre. I have played this position from both sides, but Black is considered to be doing well.

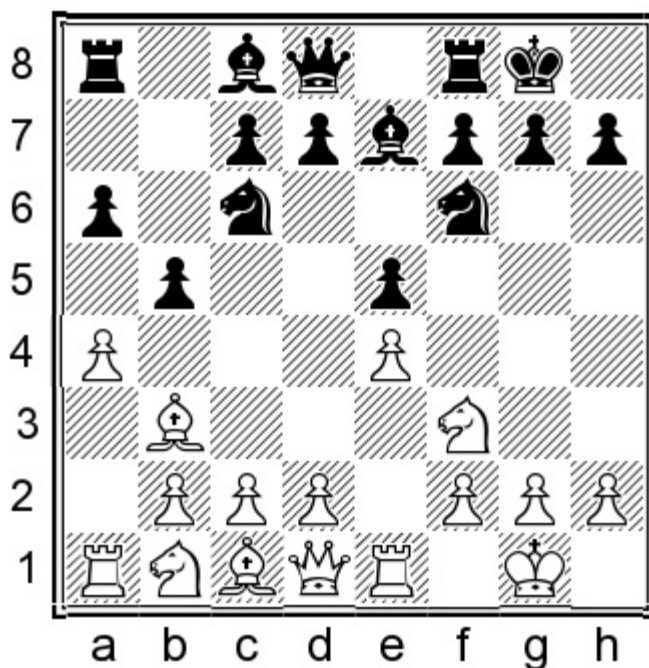
After 10.exd5 ♖xd5 11.♗xe5 ♗xe5 12.♙xe5 there is a big body of theory, but 11...♗d4 is considered to be an accurate way to get a good position. This line was played in Karjakin-Carlsen in the sixth game of their World Championship Match in 2016. Both players were well prepared and they quickly reached a forced draw. This looks very healthy from Black's point of view. He is down a pawn but on the other hand you can see his activity.

The other thing is that, even if White consolidates, Black does have a lot of positional pressure. We're not getting attacked immediately, but very often Black has the bishop pair, the knight starts getting kicked around with ...f7-f6, very often the other white knight will come to e4 and then it gets kicked around by ...f6-f5. So Black has the initiative. Moreover, it has the same problem as the Marshall Attack; not quite as much theory, but still a significant body. And theoretically, White has failed to prove anything.

My recommendation

So, after 7...0-0, those are two of the main approaches. One of the other main approaches, which I'll be recommending, is:

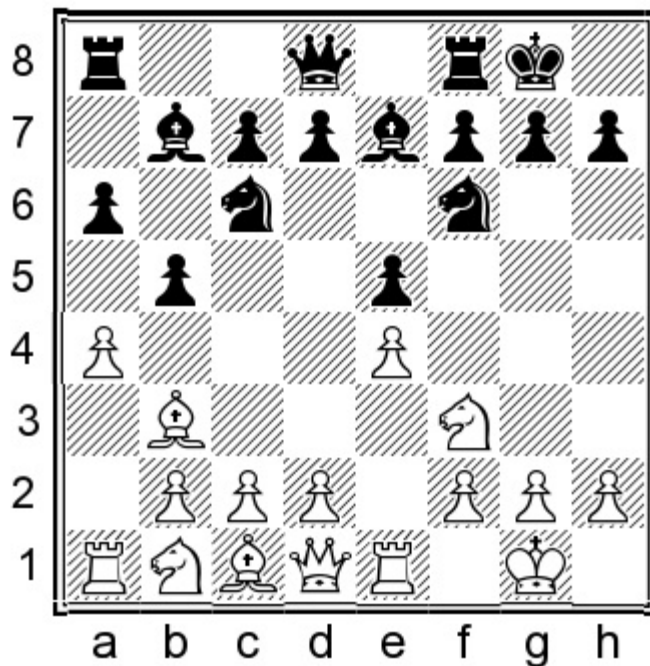
8.a4



This is the move I have probably played the most in this position. Of course, I've tried 8.c3 and 8.h3 as well, but 8.a4 is the move I've come back to time and again.

It is a logical move, creating pressure against the b5-pawn. We see this idea very often in these positions. Black has weakened his structure early on, and so we start to ask him uncomfortable questions. Black has two approaches: he must react with either 8...♗b7 or 8...b4. Both of these moves have pluses and minuses.

The advantage of 8...♗b7 is that Black doesn't weaken the c4-square and doesn't fix his pawn structure.



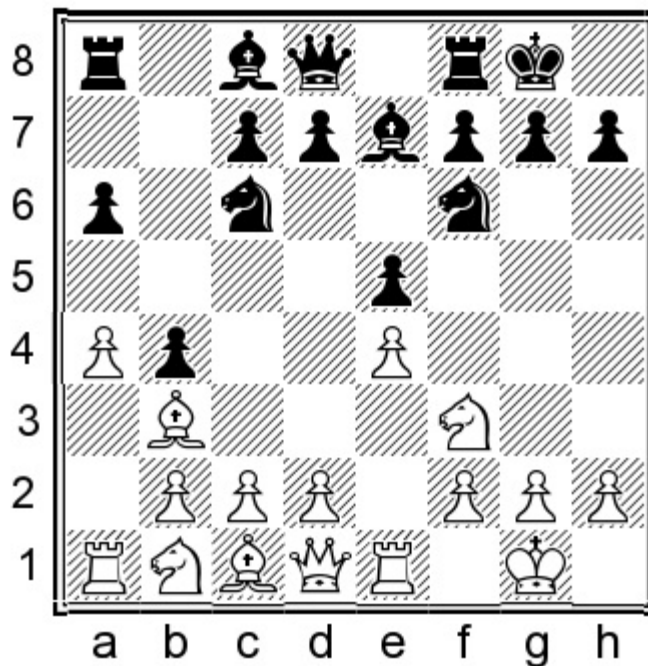
On the other hand, if Black doesn't play an eventual ...d7-d5, the bishop is considered slightly misplaced on this diagonal.

Here, for example, after 9.d3 d6 (9...d5 is considered a worse version with the pawn on a4, because White has the option of 10.axb5 and 11.♖xa8, relieving a lot of pressure and possibly distracting Black's pieces on a8) the black bishop very often wants to get back to e6 to neutralize the white bishop on b3.

This is the downside of playing 8...♗b7. Generally speaking, if the bishop goes to b7 then White should consider playing d2-d3 to blunt the bishop. It's a bit of a slower approach for White, of course. We're not trying to get the centre immediately. But in the Anti-Marshall, you don't *try* to get the centre immediately. You try to develop your pieces with c2-c3, ♖bd2, ♗f1, ♖g3 or even ♗e3 sometimes. White plays slowly and then only when you get the knight to g3 you start to think about playing d3-d4.

We will look at this line below. First we examine:

8...b4



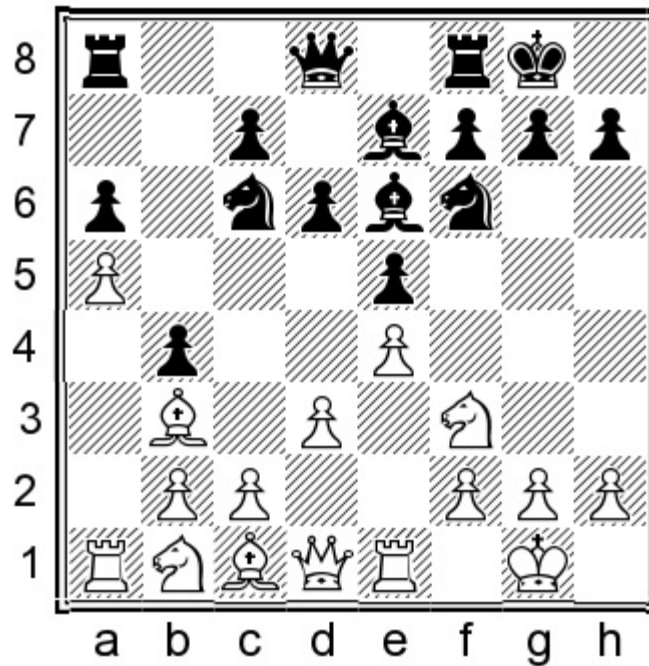
As I mentioned, this move weakens the c4-square and fixes Black's pawn structure. The plus side is that the pawn on b4 is actually rather annoying for White, especially as it limits his options. For example, we would love to have the c3-square for the knight, but it can't go there any more. So this pawn is cramping White.

Again, White has different approaches here.

One of the approaches is to play **9.a5**, which is a typical idea which we will see again further on. 9.a5 is a purely positional move. It just fixes the weakness on a6. Of course, right now, it might sound a bit funny to call this a weakness. But in a lot of endgames, this weakness will start to tell. White has a natural way to attack the pawn, with ♖c4. Right now, of course, the pawn is over-defended. But more often than not, it becomes a weakness.

Basically, the pawn on a6 is weaker than White's pawn on a5. Black can only achieve significant pressure against a5 after an exchange of the bishops. If the rook goes from a8 to b8, Black gets hit very often by either ♗c4 or ♗a4. Even if Black manages to win the a5-pawn, sometimes the rook gets trapped there and vulnerable to attack by ♘d2 and ♘c4.

After **9...d6 10.d3, 10...♗e6** is one approach for Black. It's a big theoretical position and White has tried different approaches here.



Sometimes White plays Nb1-d2-c4 ; sometimes Nd2 , Qc4 and then Nb3 , asking Black, do you want to take on c4 or not? These days, it's very common to take on e6 and play c2-c3 and d3-d4. Or sometimes White plays more slowly with Nd2 , and then Nb3 or Nc4 .

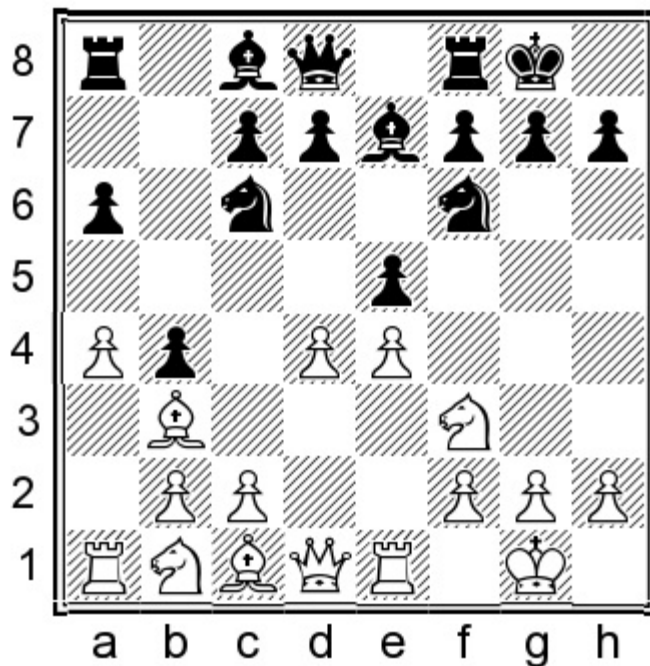
This position has been played a lot at the top levels, but it's not considered that White is really better. Of course, there are games you can study where White did well. For example, Wesley So won an excellent game as White against Levon Aronian in the 2018 Candidates.

Magnus Carlsen has experimented with this line a lot with white against Aronian, and also as Black. I had a game in this structure against him where I took and played Nd2 , and eventually it ended in a draw.

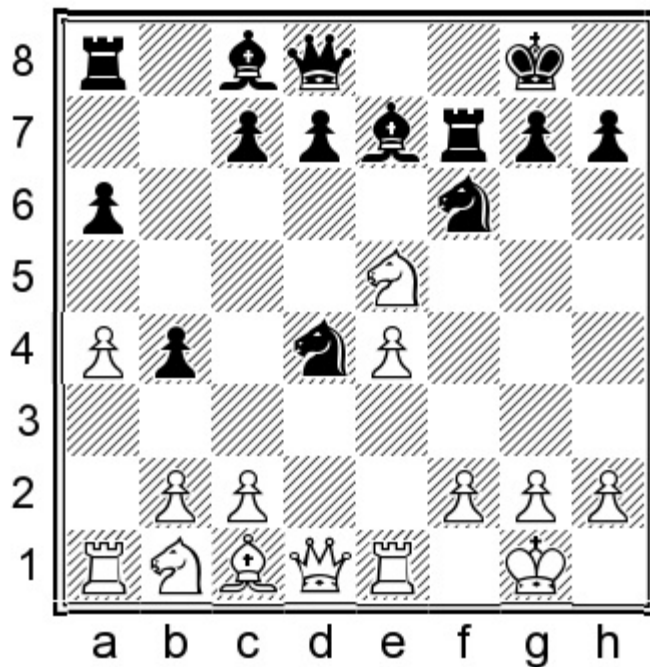
I think it's an interesting line to look into, and there are a lot of very instructive games. It leads to a kind of fighting play. So it's always an option.

I like the line

9.d4.



This is similar to 8.d4 ♖xd4 9.♗xd4 exd4 10.e5 ♖e8 (without 8.a4 and 8...b4), which is a big theoretical position as well, but 9.d4 is considered these days to be a better version for White; especially after 9...♗xd4?, when White has a tactic: 10.♙xf7+ ♖xf7 11.♗xe5,

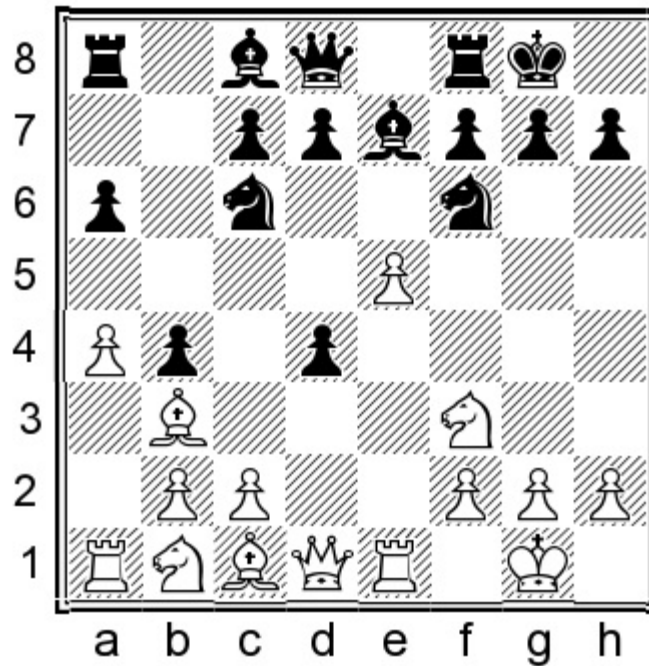


attacking both f7 and d4.

The difference between this line and 8.d4 is the inclusion of the moves 8.a4 b4, which leaves the c4-square in White's hands. For instance, after 11...♖f8 12.♙xd4 there is a threat of 13.♙c4+.

If 11...♗e6 12.♗xf7 ♖xf7 Black has two pieces for the rook and all looks great for him, but after 13.e5 the knight cannot move without allowing 14.♙f3+, picking up the rook on a8.

If 9...exd4, 10.e5 is really strong.



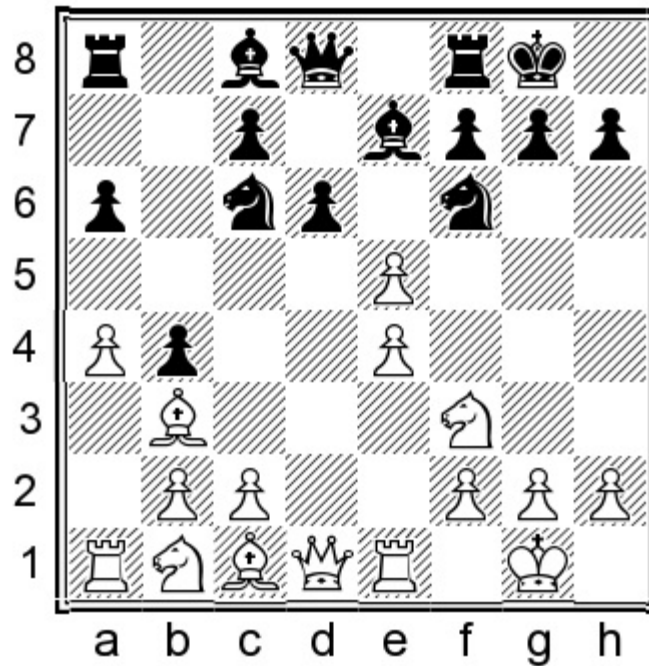
The black knight is forced to go back to e8 and White has more than one approach, but the simplest path is (10...♞e8) 11.♜xd4 ♞xd4 12.♚xd4. Once again, the inclusion of 8.a4 b4 is in White's favour. If Black ever plays ...c7-c5 there won't be any chance of playing ...c5-c4 afterwards, so the bishop on b3 is entrenched in the position, and White has a space advantage and the black knight is misplaced on e8.

So after 9.d4, the reply

9...d6

is basically considered to be forced and is exclusively played at top level. Again, White has different moves here, but Black is threatening 10...♙g4, so it's best to clarify the central tension:

10.dxe5



Here Black has a choice. This is an interesting moment, because Black's two approaches are both considered kind of equivalent, theoretically, but they are very different moves. They lead to similar but slightly different types of positions. So Black's choice is a matter of taste.

In both cases, we get a symmetrical structure on the kingside, and a sort of asymmetrical structure on the queenside where Black has a weak c4-square and very often we play a4-a5 to target the a6-pawn in the endgame. Again, it's not a clear weakness for the moment, but in the long term it definitely is.

On the other hand, because of this b4-pawn, which controls c3, Black has d4 as an outpost.

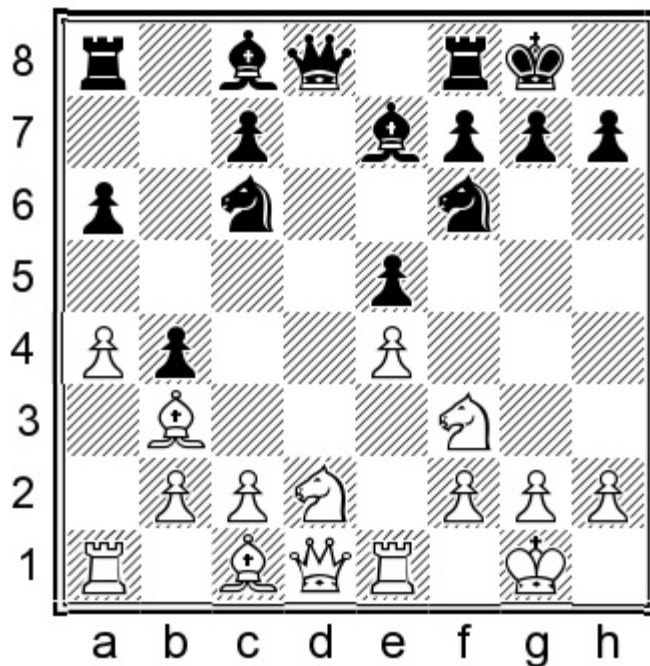
Black takes back with the pawn

10...dxe5

In this line, very often the black knight comes to d4. To cover that square, White would have to play c2-c3, which leads to a liquidation on the queenside, and has its own tactical problems in some positions.

I prefer to keep the queens on:

11.♘bd2



This move keeps a lot of tension in the position. This is actually an enormously complex position. Only one pair of pawns have been traded and it is very likely that most of the pieces will remain on the board. There may be an exchange of a couple of minor pieces, but the queens will stay on for a long time, because we are not going to move the knight until after we play ♖e2.

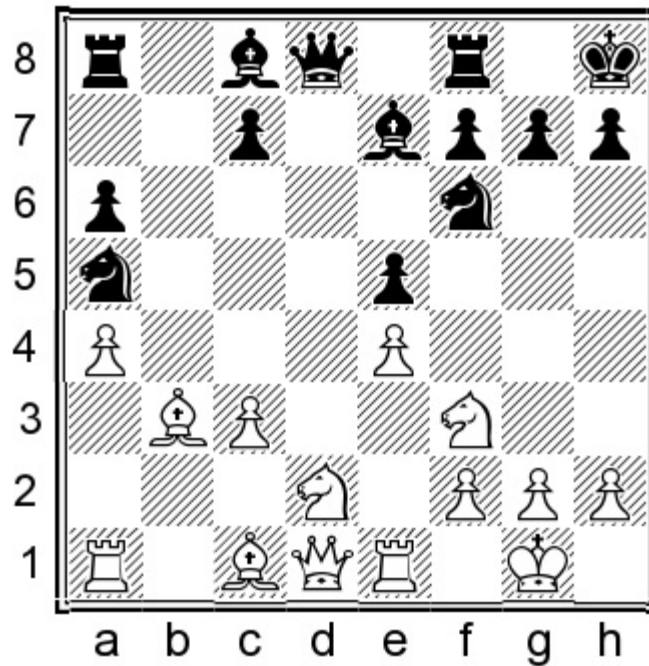
So what are our ideas here?

In an ideal world we'll try to get in a4-a5, ♖e2, ♙c4 and ♘b3. Suddenly we are bearing down on the a6-pawn and Black can no longer move any of the pieces defending it. Then we will play ♙e3 in some cases, we'll get the d-file and we will also be attacking the c5-square. We have an option of playing ♙d5, if this square is not defended by two black pieces. It's very often a tactical idea, because if Black takes on d5 and you take back with the pawn, attacking the c6-knight, it leaves Black's e5-pawn very weak. So Black struggles with the weakness of e5 and very often also with the long-term weakness of a6.

Also, as a tactical point, I should mention that a4-a5 sometimes opens up the possibility of ♙a4 when the knight on c6 might become vulnerable.

There is another positional point I should mention. Black's knight very often comes to the semi-outpost d4. To combat that, we would love to restrict this knight. So if in this position we get the chance to play a4-a5, for example, followed by ♖e2 and then c2-c3, this is actually a good thing for us. The black knight on c6 has problems. It can't go to a5 and it can't go to d4, so it is sort of an awkward piece. It just remains on c6. It would love to be on some other square, like c5, for example, but it can't get there.

Here, if after 11...♙h8 we were to play 12.c3 immediately, this is a different story, because after 12...bxc3 13.bxc3 ♘a5 the knight also has sort of a semi-outpost.

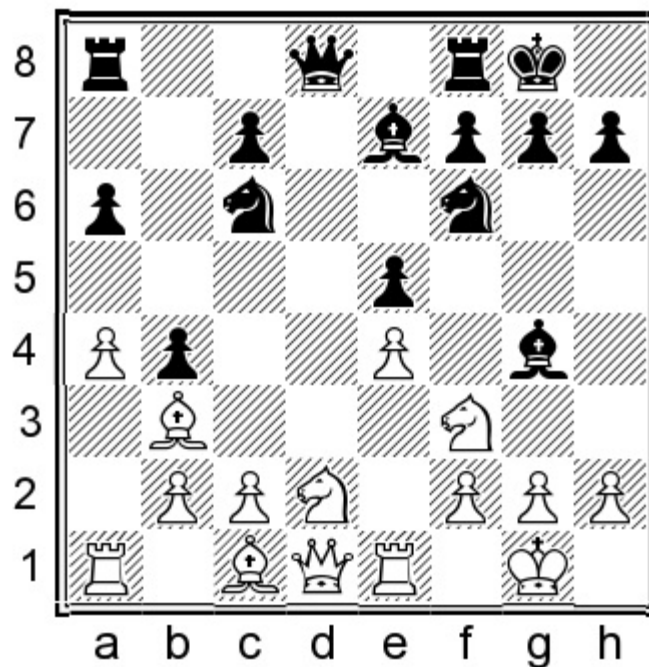


It can't be chased away by anything really; White doesn't have a b-pawn to play b2-b4. You wouldn't call it a great outpost because it's on the rim, but the knight does exert some influence here. It attacks the bishop on b3. If the bishop moves and then the d2-knight moves, the black knight can come to c4. These are just some positional ideas to be aware of.

After 11.♞bd2 there are a lot of games at the top level. Black almost exclusively plays

11...♝c5.

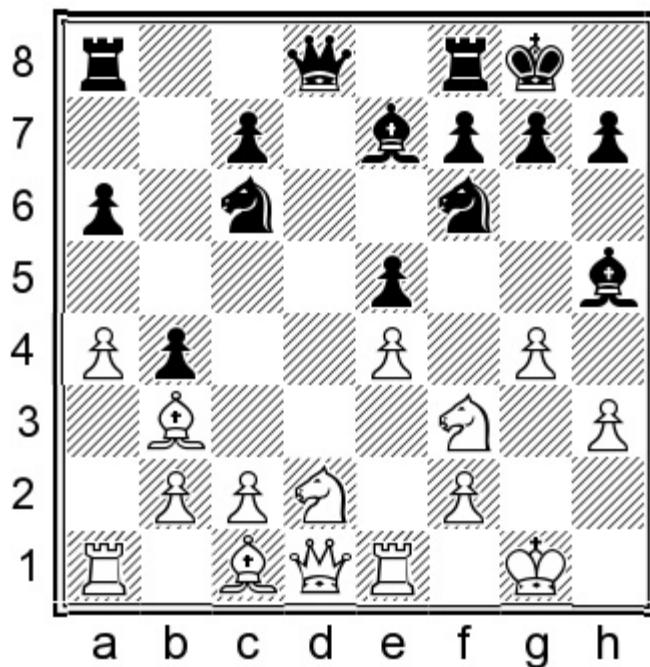
It's a very logical move. The bishop was passive on e7 but now it is active and attacks f2. **11...♝g4**, for example, is also logical.



Here the bishop gets kicked back with **12.h3**. If **12...♙xf3 13.♘xf3 ♚xd1 14.♖xd1** Black cannot win a pawn with **14...♗xe4** due to **15.♙d5!**; after **15...♖ad8** just **16.♙e3** leaves the two knights in the fork and Black will have to sacrifice the exchange with **16...♖xd5**.

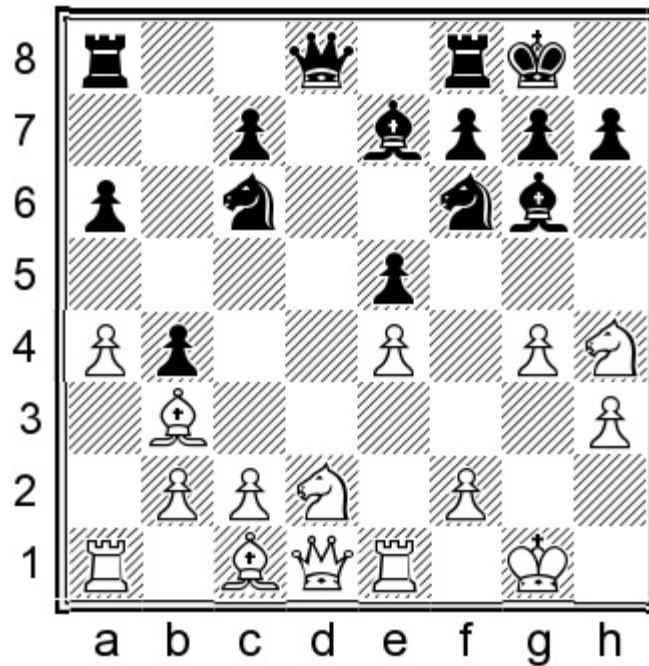
He could try **14...♖ad8**, which is met by **15.♙e3**. Black has given up the bishop pair and, more importantly, the a6-pawn is vulnerable. After **16.♖xd8 ♖xd8 17.a5** and **18.♙c4** Black is much worse.

If instead Black plays **12...♙h5**, we are absolutely happy to play **13.g4**.



First of all, the sacrifice **13...♗xg4 14.hxg4 ♙xg4** might look a bit scary but the knight on f3 is very well defended. With **15.c3 bxc3 16.bxc3** we prevent **16...♗d4**; Black has only two pawns for the knight and there is no good follow-up for him. White is ready for **17.♗f1** and if **17...♚xd1** then simply **18.♙xd1** and Black's attack is over.

So Black is virtually forced to go back with **13...♙g6**. With **14.♗h4**, for example, we can even eliminate this bishop.



This is not the first move which comes to my mind, but I checked it and it is actually the best move. It looks like we have some dark-square weaknesses, for instance on f4, but they can't be exploited. The ♖b3 is unopposed and just completely dominates Black's light squares.

Now the tactics don't work for Black, e.g.:

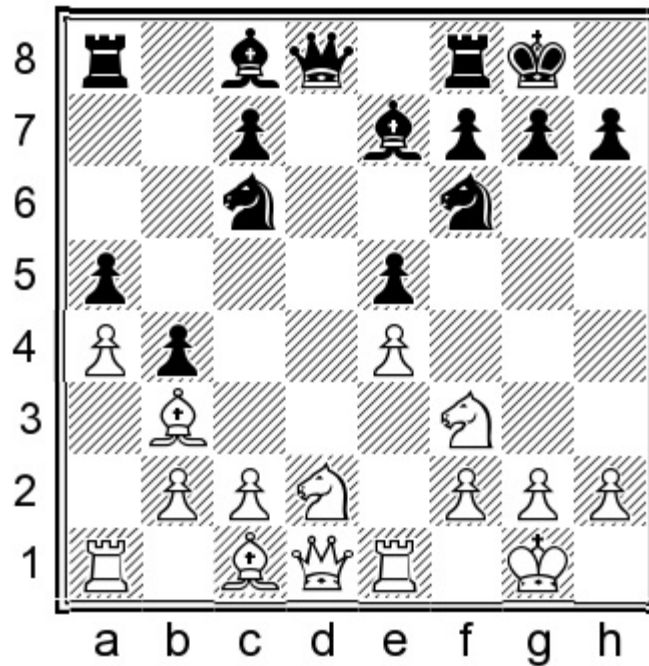
A) 14...♙xe4 15.g5!;

B) 14...♘xe4 15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♗xe4;

C) After 14...♘d4 15.♗xg6 hxg6 16.♙c4, we're going to follow up with c2-c3, kick this knight back and play 17.♗f3, possibly to be followed by ♖g5, with pressure on f7. The ♖b3 is really a monster.

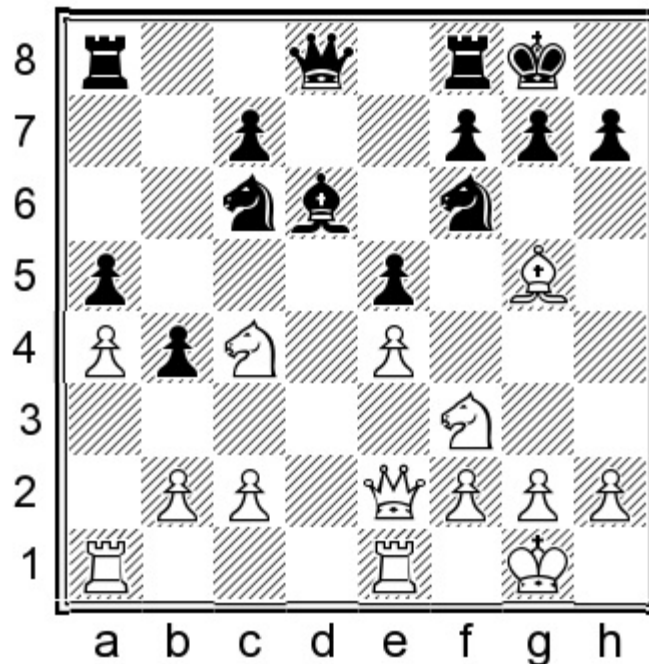
This is why after 11.♗bd2, 11...♙g4 is not considered a very good move.

Black can also try **11...a5**, which is a logical move.



Black doesn't want to be saddled with a weakness on a6, so he simply moves the pawn. However, there is now a new weakness on b5. This is relevant, because after e.g. 12.♙e2 we are already threatening 13.♙b5, attacking the knight and the pawn on e5, and Black has to start making awkward defensive moves. While Black is wasting time, we are happy to play our knight to c4.

If 12.♙e2 ♟a6 then 13.♟c4 ♟xc4 14.♞xc4 develops with a tempo; the e5-pawn is hanging and if 14...♟d6, 15.♟g5 is an important pin to be aware of.



Then after 15...h6, 16.♟xf6 ♞xf6 gives White a good position. The knight on c4 is powerful and after 17.♞ed1 and 18.♞d5 we have tremendous pressure. Black's bishop is a bad piece.

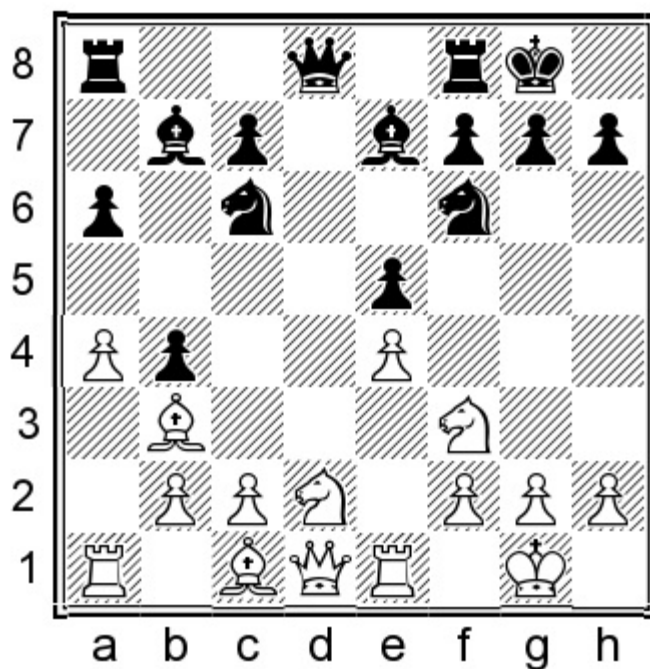
Alternatively, 16.♟h4 keeps the strong pin and if 16...g5 then 17.♟g3 may leave our bishop a little

misplaced, but Black's f5-square is chronically weak.

Generally speaking, the trade of the light-squared bishops – especially if we can gain a tempo at the same time – is beneficial for White.

12.♘c4 followed by ♘b5 is also a good plan.

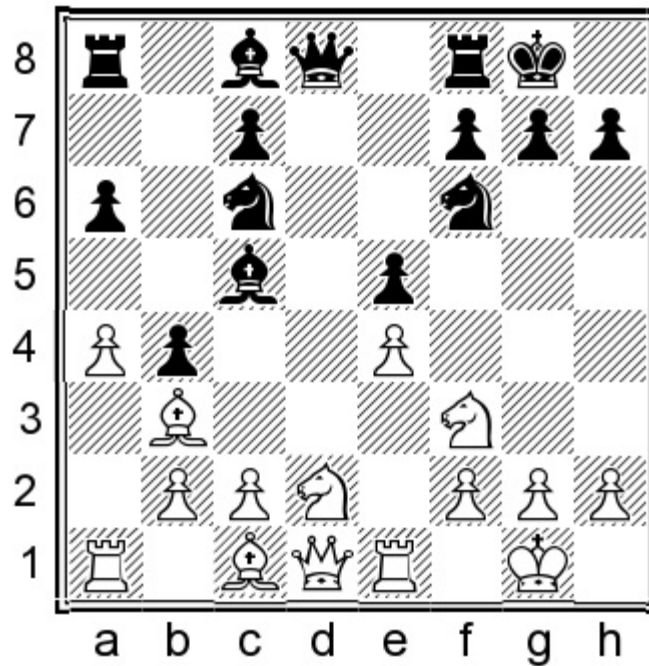
11...♘b7 can also be tried, but the bishop is not a great piece on this square.



It is restricted by his knight on c6 and if we play 12.a5 the c6-knight will struggle to find anywhere to go.

We can also play either 12.c3 or 12.♙e2. The ♘b7 is definitely misplaced.

This is why 11...♘c5 is considered to be the best move. This position has been seen in a lot of high-level games.

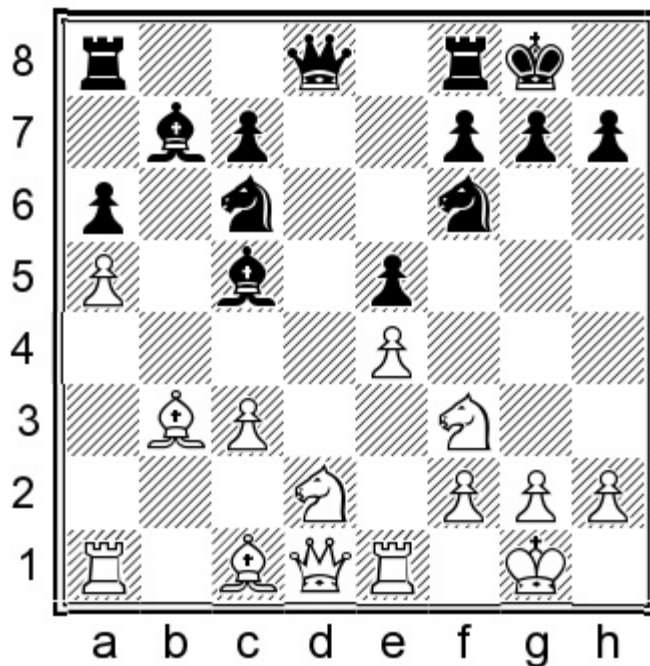


White usually plays 12.♞e2, as, for example, in Grischuk-Svidler in the London Candidates 2013. But the way I played in 2013 was:

12.a5

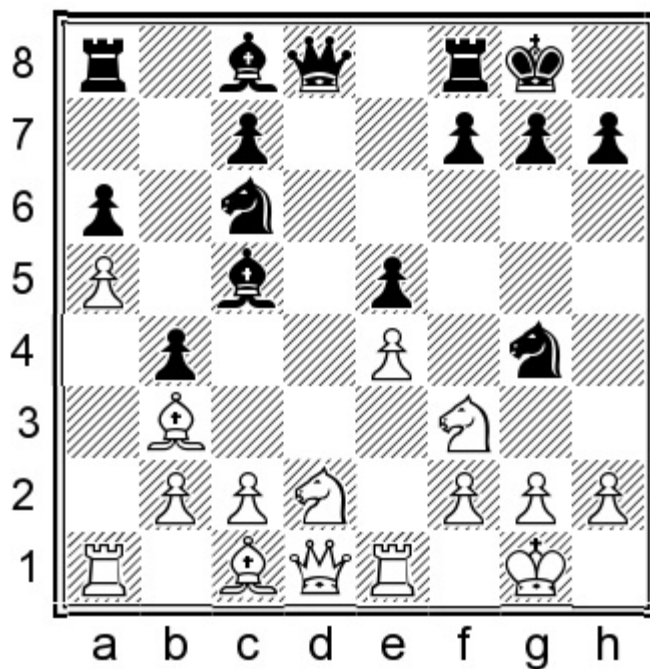
This is a very logical move and I was surprised that it was a novelty at the time. I'm stopping 12...♞a5 and I'm just getting the structure which generally we are happy with. My next moves will be 13.♞e2 and then 14.c3. After I played 12.a5 the move exploded in popularity and it has been played many times, also by top players like Wesley So. Here Black does have to act fast:

A) If 12...♞b7 I'm allowed time to play 13.c3 (13.♞e2 has also been played here) and after 13...bxc3 14.bxc3 White will look to follow up with ♞c4, ♞e2 and ♞b3.



We should always be wary of the black queen coming to d3. He can play 14... ♙d3 here, attacking c3, but here I'm even happy with the endgame after 15. ♖c2 ♜xc2 16. ♙xc2. The a6-pawn will once again be a long-term weakness in the endgame. ♞c4 is coming; e5 will be weak and we can even consider ♙a4, attacking the knight on c6.

B) 12... ♞g4 has been played by Lev Aronian.



White is not afraid of 13. ♜f1 13... ♞xf2 14. ♜xf2 ♙xf2+ 15. ♙xf2. The two pieces we have for the rook are very good and we are going to follow up with ♜e2 and ♞c4. Even though the material balance of the exchange is equal, Black's pieces are inferior. The ♜a8, for example, compares poorly to our two minor pieces.

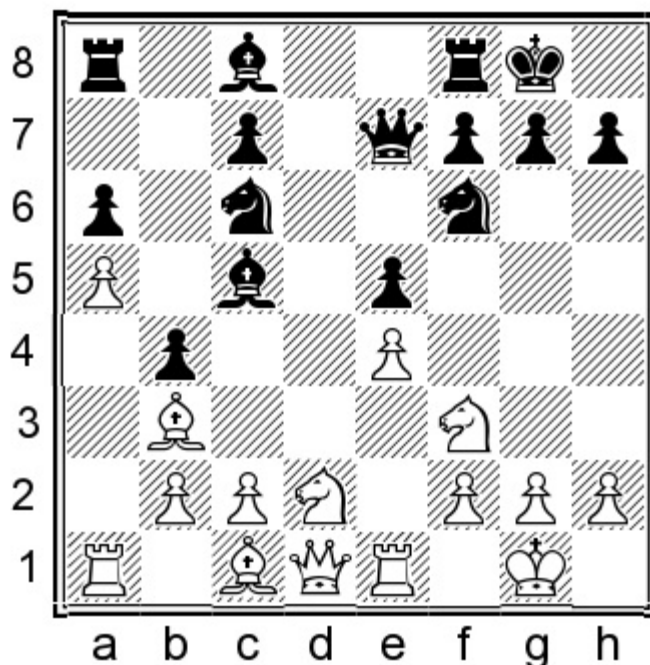
After 13.♖f1, Aronian went back in more than one game with 13...♞f6.

It's a valid idea. He's just asking White: is there a better move than 14.♞e1 here? Of course, you can repeat with white, but we are looking for more.

The thing for Black is that he doesn't have very useful moves. With the knight on g4, suddenly, there are ♕d5 ideas. For example, after 13...♞e7, we play 14.♕d5 straight away and the pin on the knight is very annoying. That's why he goes back with the g4-knight and asks, which move do you want to make? 14.♞e2 is one choice. For example, Dominguez Perez likes to play this way.

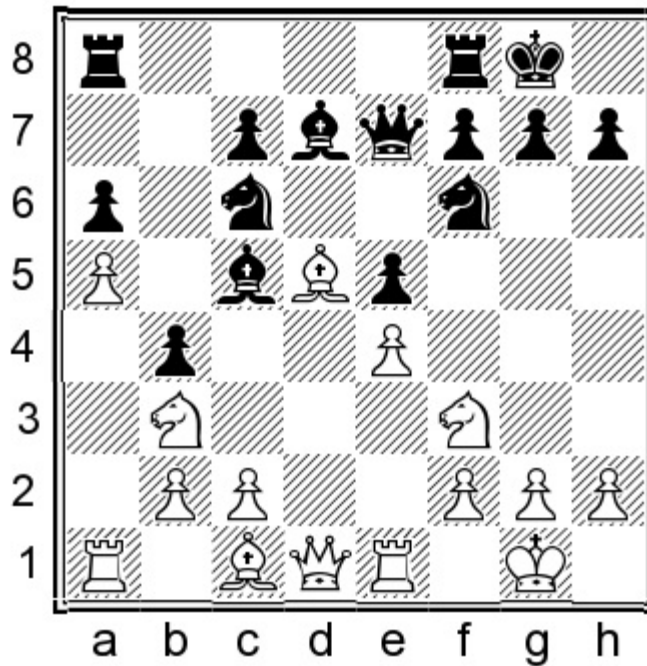
So 12...♞g4 is a playable move but I don't really see it, as I don't think it is threatening us very much if he goes back and forth with the knight;

C) In the initial game when I played 12.a5, at the European Team Championship in Warsaw, 2013, Nybäck, a very strong grandmaster, played 12...♞e7.



I think this is a natural way of playing. Black wants to play ...♞d8 and develop naturally. But there is a tactical problem with this move: 13.♕d5! This is a recurring theme. Once Black plays ...♞e7, or moves the knight from f6, then d5 is no longer under control by two pieces and ♕d5 can be played immediately.

Now if 13...♞xd5 14.exd5 the e5-pawn will fall. As Black can't do that, my opponent played 13...♕d7 and now 14.♞b3, developing and attacking with tempo.

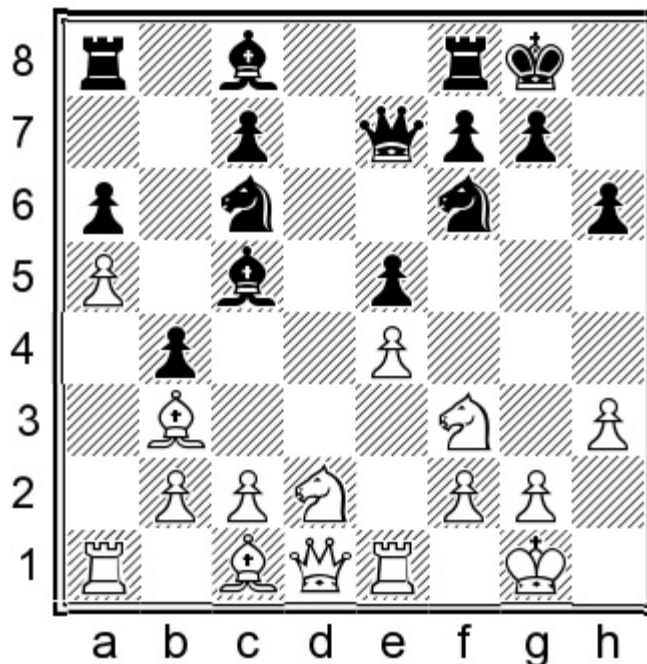


The bishop is hanging and one of White's ideas is ♞d1-d3-c4 , putting pressure on c5 and c6.

Another idea is to play ♕g5 ; for example, after $14...♕d6$. Black is pinned everywhere and after $15.♕g5 \text{ h6 } 16.♕h4 \text{ g5}$ I think $17.♖xg5!$ is a very strong way to play: $17...hxg5 \text{ 18.♕xg5}$ and we follow up with ♞e1-e3-g3 , or even ♞f3 . There are a lot of threats and there is no quick way to break this pin.

It's not like Black has a horrible position. He's not losing immediately, but we have pressure. He doesn't have an easy move he can make. I'll continue to own up the pressure slowly;

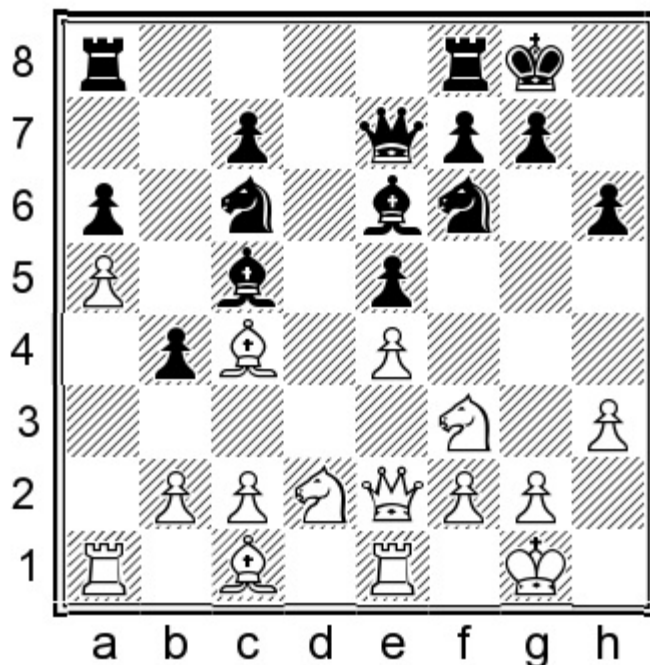
D) There is another version of the $...♞e7$ line. Black can play $12...h6$ which is logical, because ♕g5 occurs often and Black likes to prevent it. White plays $13.h3$; a useful move stopping $...♕g4$ and $...♖g4$. $13...♞e7$



Here, for some reason I played **14.♞e2** in another game I had, against Tomashevsky in Dubai 2014. I'm not sure why; it was a rapid game and maybe I just didn't want to play **14.♙d5** at the time. The idea to remember is that once the black queen leaves the d-file, we play **14.♙d5**.

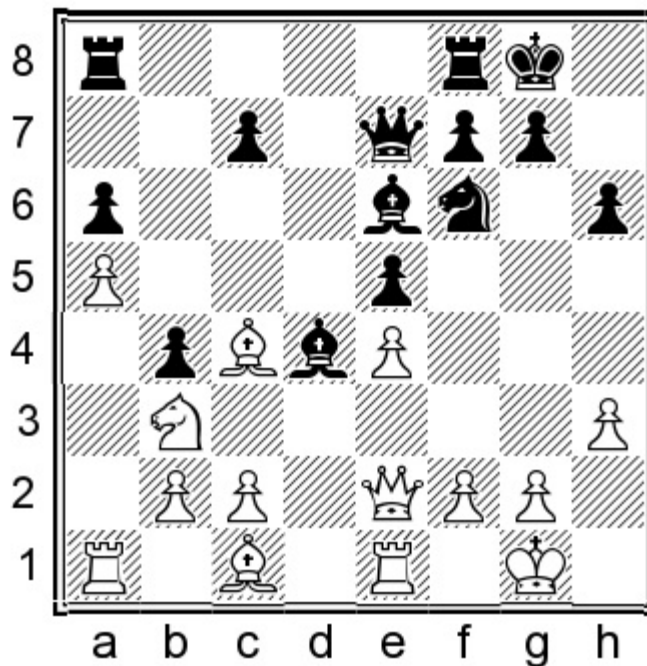
After my **14.♞e2**, now if **14...♙b7** we play **♞d3** and if **♙a7** then **♞c4** with a slightly different version to the other line, but not a worse version. White has pressure. The only difference is that here we don't play **♙g5**. We are more likely to trade the bishops with **♙e3** and then try to take advantage of the c5-square. Tomashevsky played very logically but still ran into trouble:

14...♙e6 15.♙c4



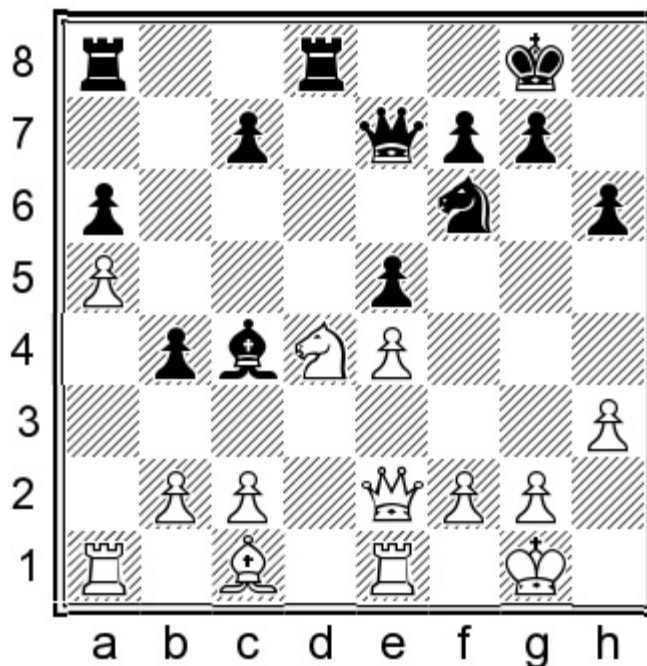
Now if **15...♙xc4 16.♞xc4** White follows up with **♞b3** and it is clear that the black pieces on c5 and c6 are awkwardly placed.

The game with Tomashevsky went **15...♞d4 16.♞xd4 ♙xd4 17.♞b3**.



Now Black has trouble with his bishop. If it drops back to a7 then White simply plays 18.♙xa6. If 17...♙xc4 then 18.♚xc4 when it is important to note that after 18...♙a7, 19.♚xa6 is not possible due to 19...♙xf2+, winning the queen. Instead of this, we have 19.♙d2, attacking b4. Now it is difficult for Black to defend; his position is awkward. 19.♙e3 is also a very fine move because after 19...♙xe3 20.♚xe3 the position is simplified, but the queen stands very well on c4 and Black's pawns are all weak. It has become clear that this inclusion of a2-a4/b5-b4 and a4-a5 has weakened his queenside.

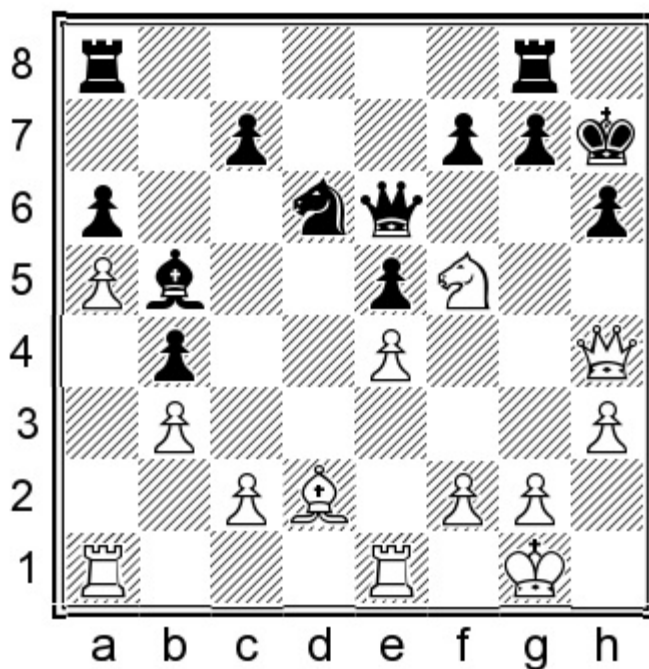
17...♜fd8 Trying to maintain the bishop on d4. **18.♞xd4 ♙xc4** If 18...♜xd4 19.♙xa6 ♜xe4 20.♙e3. Tactically it is all working out for White. There are threats of ♙b7 and ♙d3 in the air and White has a very strong passed a-pawn. This is a recurring theme; if Black ever loses the a6-pawn then our pawn is already very close to promotion.



Black is hoping for 19. ♖xc4 ♜d4!, hitting the e-pawn with tempo, but I had a zwischenzug: **19. ♘f5!** Rather than worrying about my queen, I noticed that after 19... ♙xe2 20. ♘xe7+ ♔f8 there is 21. ♘c6, when Black has his bishop and rook both under attack. He doesn't have to lose a piece as he has 21... ♜d6, but then I can decide which pawn I want to take. Both captures are winning but 22. ♘xe5 is probably best. After the alternative move 21... ♜d1, a sample line is 22. ♜xd1 ♙xd1 23. ♙d2 ♙xc2 24. ♙xb4+ ♔g8 25. f3 ♘d7 26. ♜c1 ♙d3 27. ♘e7+ ♔h7 28. ♜xc7, with a winning position.

That's why he played 19... ♜e6, defending both queen and bishop. **20. ♜f3**

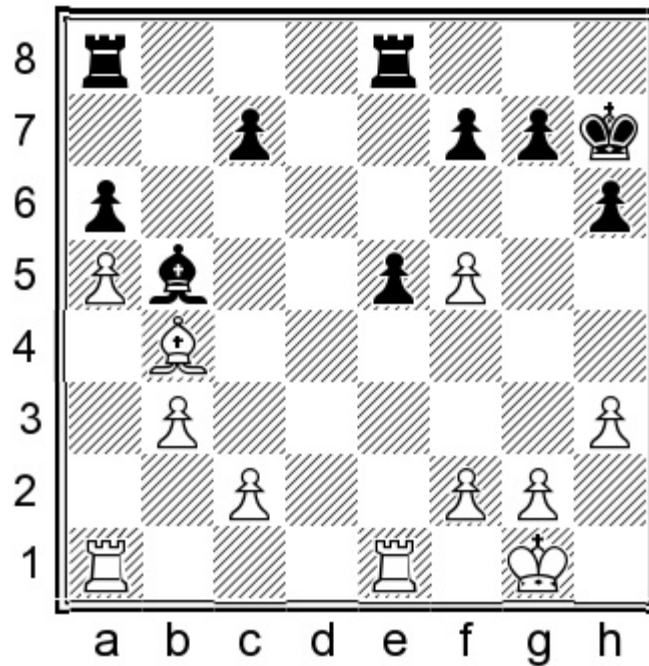
Black is now in a rather awkward situation. The bishop on c4 is doing nothing and is just going to get kicked around. On top of that, 21. ♙xh6 is a direct threat, to be followed by ♜g3+. **20... ♔h7 21. b3 ♙b5 22. ♜g3** Threatening checkmate on g7. **22... ♜g8 23. ♜h4** Every move has a threat. This time it's 24. ♙xh6. **23... ♘e8** Black has to make awkward moves just to try and survive. **24. ♙d2** Continuing the threats. **24... ♘d6** After 24... c5 25. ♙e3 ♜c8, 26. ♜ad1 is a simple way for White to keep the initiative. This is even better than 26. ♘e7 as Black doesn't have any good moves. For example, a knight move is met by 27. ♜d6.



25. ♜e7!

Now if 25... ♘xf5 26. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 27. exf5 at first glance it looks as if Black is out of the woods, but after 27... exf5 28. ♜xe5 his pawns on b4 and f5 are both hanging. White will soon be a pawn up with a winning endgame. If Black tries 25... ♜xe7 26. ♘xe7 ♜ge8 27. ♘d5, again White will win a pawn.

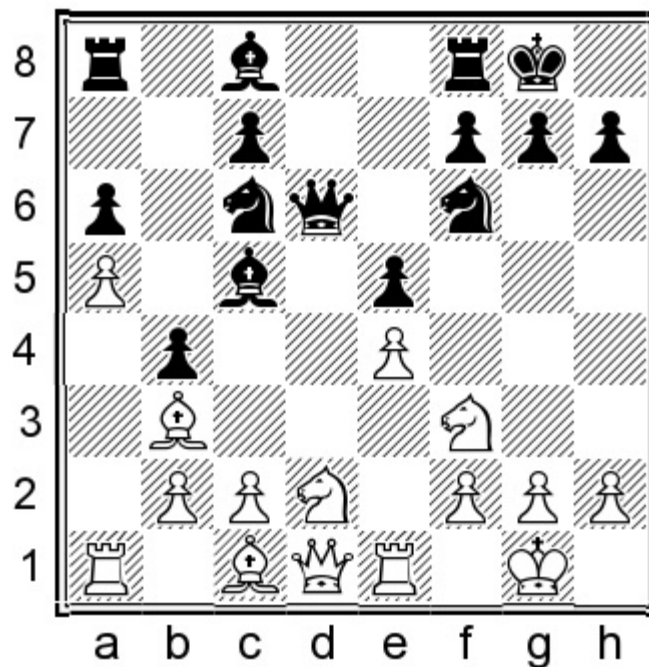
The position is concrete. We are trying to attack him but we are also playing on the queenside, where he has weaknesses. It doesn't matter whether we win by checkmating him or by being up a pawn in the endgame; the result is the same. **25... ♜ge8 26. ♜xe6 ♜xe6 27. ♙xb4 ♘xf5 28. exf5 ♜ee8**



Maybe Black thought that with opposite-coloured bishops there would be drawing chances. But this game didn't last very long. We have opposite-coloured bishops but all the rooks are still on the board. If we trade off all of the rooks, it's a draw, but with all the rooks on the board Black is just losing. We traded pawns but it didn't help Black's position. His pawns were still weak and I followed up with an attack on the king: 1-0 (41) Caruana-Tomashevsky, Dubai 2014.

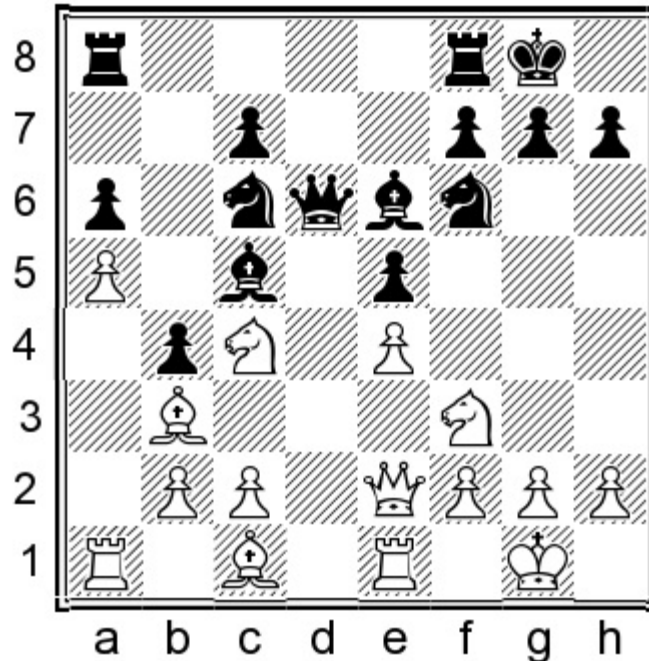
I think this was an instructive game although I still recommend 14.♔d5 instead of 14.♙e2;

E) Black can also develop the queen to d6: 12...♙d6



He can do this again with the inclusion of ...h7-h6/h2-h3 or without. In both cases, we play the same way:

13. ♔e2 ♕e6 If 13... ♖g4 then simply 14.c3 prevents 14... ♞d4. 14. ♞c4!

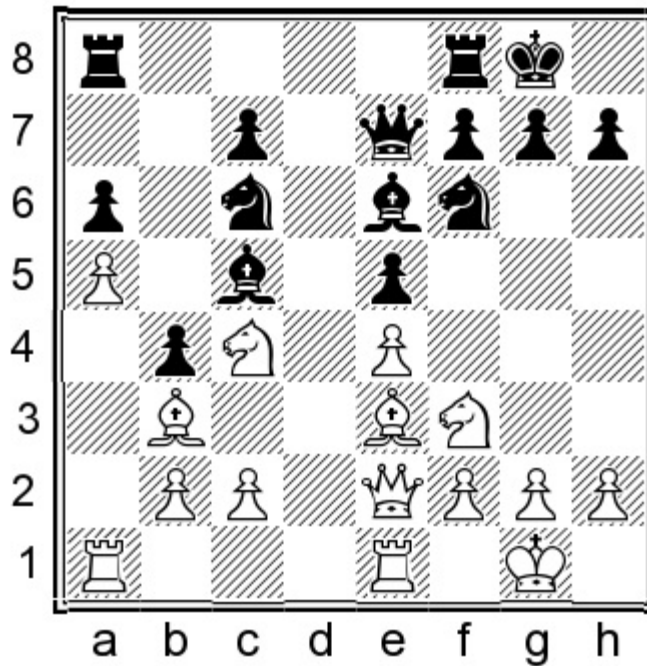


This shows the downside of having the queen on d6. We attack the queen and Black is not happy to give up the bishop pair: 14... ♕xc4 15. ♕xc4 and we see again the weakness of the pawn on a6; it keeps coming back. Black could try 15... ♞d4 16. ♞xd4 ♕xd4, trying to control the dark squares, but White has an accurate option in 16. ♔d3, threatening to play c2-c3 at some point.

In general, in these positions White is almost always better when he has the bishop pair, but you will need to find the best concrete option in each individual position.

Most players play 14... ♔e7 here. So Black has lost a tempo with these two queen moves, but he can argue that he has the bishop on e6 and at least he has prevented our set-up with our bishop on c4.

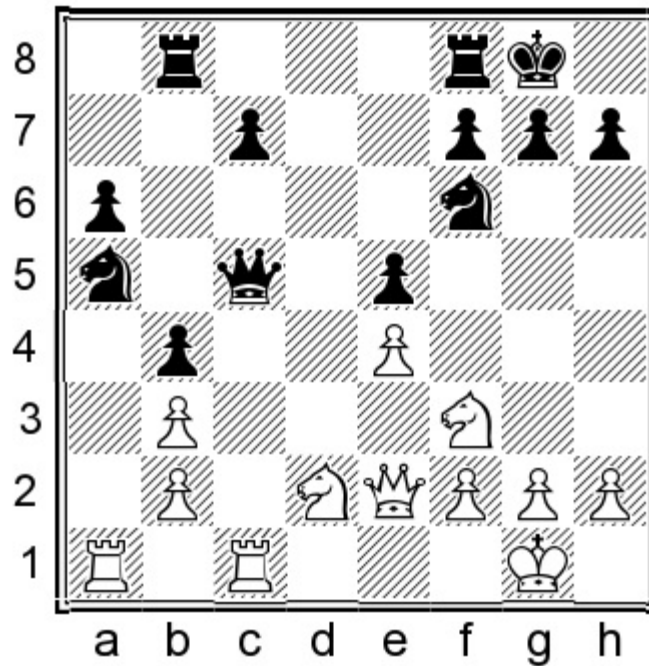
15. ♕e3 In general, Black doesn't really want to take right now. After 15... ♕xe3, 16. ♔xe3 is fine for White but we can also play 16. ♞xe3 as the e-pawn is safe due to 16... ♞xe4 17. ♞d5 ♕xd5 18. ♕xd5 with a fork on the knights.



So here Black has played either 15...♖ab8 or 15...♖ad8.

In general, it's better to play **15...♖ab8** which is a bit surprising, but if Black plays 15...♖ad8 we reply 16.♙xc5 ♜xc5 17.♘cd2. This is a very strong move. Basically I'm just attacking the a6-pawn with my queen. Again we see this weakness, and if 17...♙xb3 18.♘xb3 Black is struggling to defend the pawn. 18...♜a7 is a poor square for the queen and 18...♜b5 19.♜xb5 ♖xb5 leaves White with the passed a-pawn, which is really dangerous. This is why 15...♖ab8 is the better move.

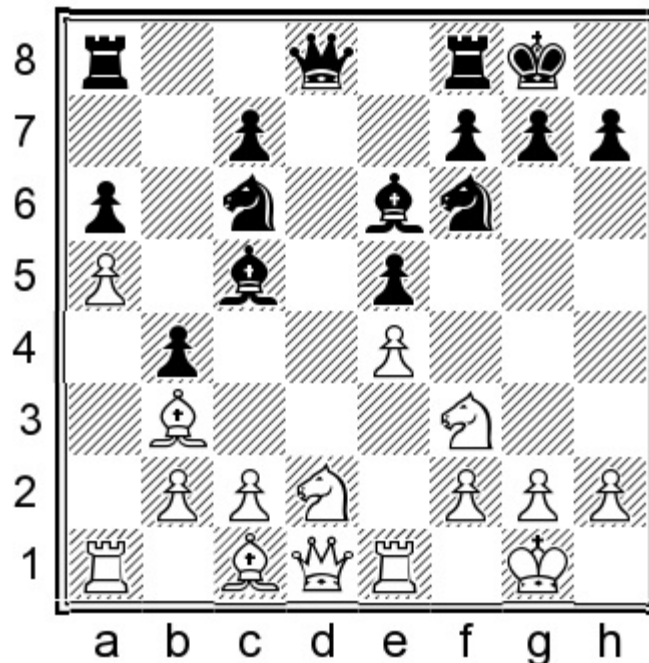
Now if **16.♙xc5 ♜xc5 17.♘cd2 ♙xb3 18.♘xb3 ♜b5 19.♜xb5 ♖xb5!** equalizes, as we are now tied down to our a5-pawn. This is why I am suggestion the interesting recapture with the pawn: **18.cxb3** The idea is to use the c-file. If we have one more move we can play 19.♖ec1, which would win the a-pawn and the game. **18...♘xa5** Completely forced. **19.♖ec1**



Now after 19...♙b5 we play 20.♙xb5 ♜xb5 21.♞xc7 with a better endgame. The material is equal but the knight on a5 is very badly placed.

After 19...♙b6 20.♞xe5 we have traded our a-pawn for the black e-pawn. This gives us a pawn majority on the kingside. It is much more difficult for Black to make use of his queenside majority. We have the open a-file, c4 for our knights, and we will capture Black's a-pawn if the knight ever moves;

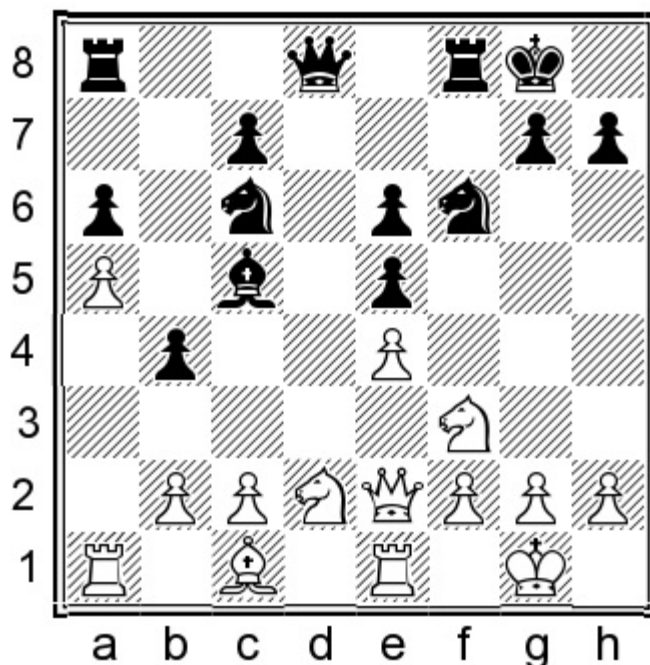
F) 12...♞e6 is a very interesting move, which was played by Rustam Kasimdzhanov against Parimarjan Negi in the 2014 Olympiad in Tromsø.



It's a very concrete idea. After 13...♞e6 ♜xe6 Black has ruined his own structure. Positionally, with all

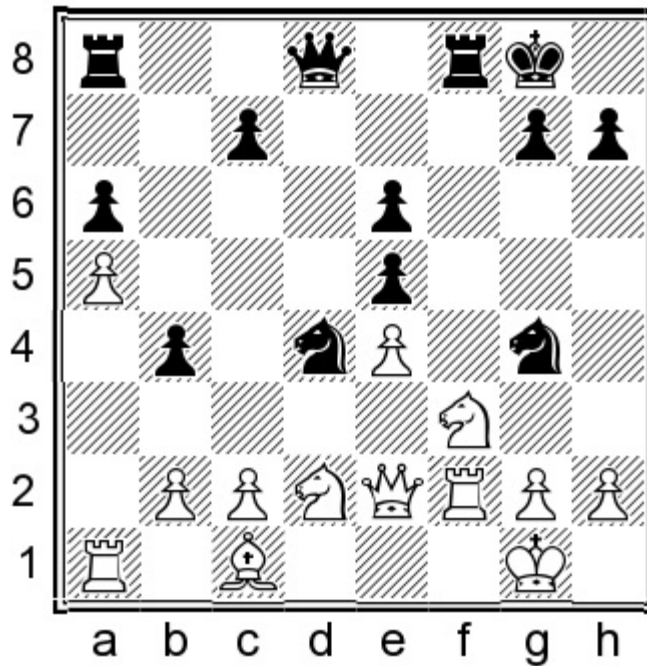
of his weak pawns, he's just completely busted. And he does it for only concrete reasons. Now he has the f-file and the bishop has c5. He will combine these with the moves ...♘g4 and ...♘d4, and it's a very dangerous approach. Unfortunately, it doesn't work out.

We play **14.♙e2**. Given one more move, we will play 15.c3 and Black is going to be left with a horrible structure. He needs to have the d4-square for his knight. We also introduce the threat of ♙c4, attacking c5, e6 and potentially c6. Black has to act fast.



If 14...♘d4 15.♘xd4 ♙xd4 16.♘f3, because Black didn't create threats fast enough, he's just left with a miserable position.

That's why in the high-level game between Wesley So and Levon Aronian, London 2017, Black played **14...♘g4**. The attack on f2 forces **15.♙f1**. Now we need one more move to play either 16.h3, 16.♘b3 or 16.♙c4 to spoil Black's plans, so in the game Aronian struck fast with 15...♙xf2+ 16.♙xf2 ♘d4, which is awkward for White:



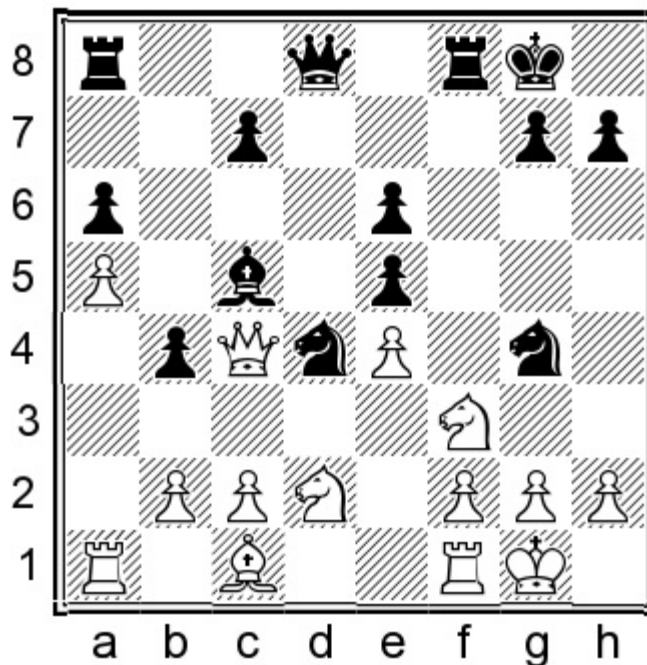
17. ♖xd4 ♜xf2 18. ♛xg4 ♛xd4, with a lot of threats.

Wesley played 17. ♛c4 and after 17... ♖xf2 18. ♕xf2 ♛h4+ 19. ♕g1 ♛g4 the position was a bit of a mess and it eventually led to a draw.

17. ♛d3! is much stronger. 17... ♖xf2 18. ♕xf2 ♖xf3 19. ♖xf3 and the two pieces are much better than the rook and White is already borderline winning.

After 15. ♜f1 Black's best move is 15... ♖d4, with the funny point that 16. ♖xd4 is met by 16... ♜xf2!. It looks crazy; everything is hanging. After 17. ♜xf2 ♛xd4 White cannot adequately cover f2 and Black regains all of his material and is a pawn up.

So after 15... ♖d4 we play the strong move 16. ♛c4.



Then 16...♞xf3 17.♞xf3 is leading nowhere for Black, because both c5 and e6 are hanging. For example, after 17...♞d6 18.h3 Black is forced to retreat the knight and is just left with a miserable structure.

This is why after 12.a5, most people play

12...h6

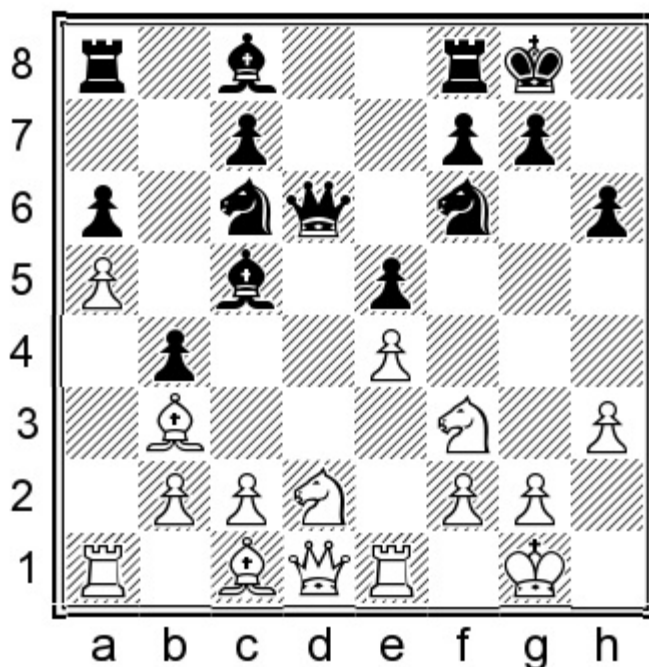
and then we have

13.h3.

Now if 13...♞e7 White still has 14.♞d5 as we have seen.

13...♞d6

Of course, in a position like this, 13...♞e6 doesn't make any sense: 14.♞xe6 fxe6 and now either 15.c3 or 15.♞e2 are much better for White; note that Black doesn't have any tricks with 15...♞g4.



14.♞e2

Having the pawns on h3 and h6 doesn't change a whole lot compared with the previous line. In both cases, Black should play:

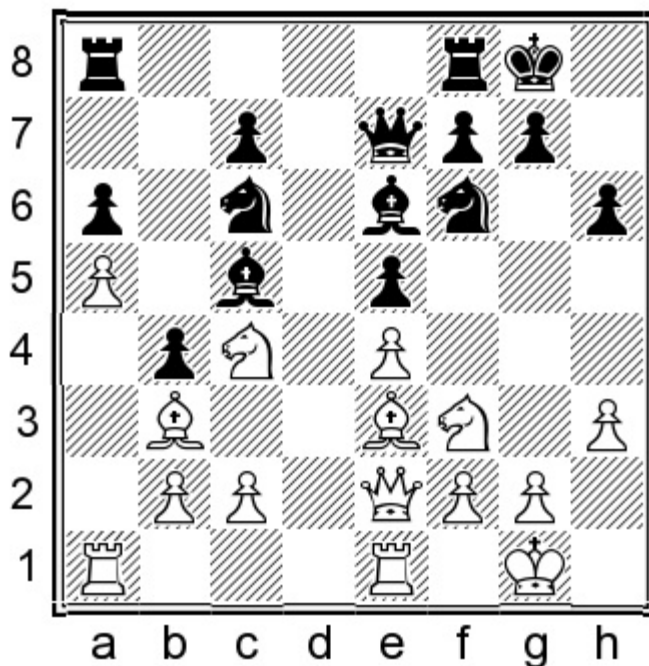
14...♞e6

After 14...♞d8 15.♞c4 ♞e7 16.c3 ♞e6 17.♞c2, Black is left with a misplaced knight on c6. By breaking the pin with 17.♞c2, White has renewed the threat of taking on e5. Black is congested. After

17...♞d7, White can simply play 18.♞e3, with ideas of ♞d5 and ♞f5. Black remains under pressure with weak pawns on a5 and e5.

15.♞c4 ♞e7 16.♞e3

After 16.c3, Black will play 16...♞ab8 instead of ...♞d8, putting pressure on our bishop on b3.



We now have myriad variations:

A) 16...♞ad8 17.♞xc5 ♞xc5 18.♞cd2 ♞xb3 19.♞xb3 and it's the same old story; Black's queen has nowhere good to go;

B) 16...♞ab8 17.♞xc5 ♞xc5 18.♞cd2 ♞xb3 19.cxb3 ♞a5 20.♞ec1 ♞b5 21.♞xb5 ♞xb5 22.♞xc7 and White is better. In fact this is an easy position for Black to lose. His pieces are completely marooned on the queenside and things could go very wrong for him.

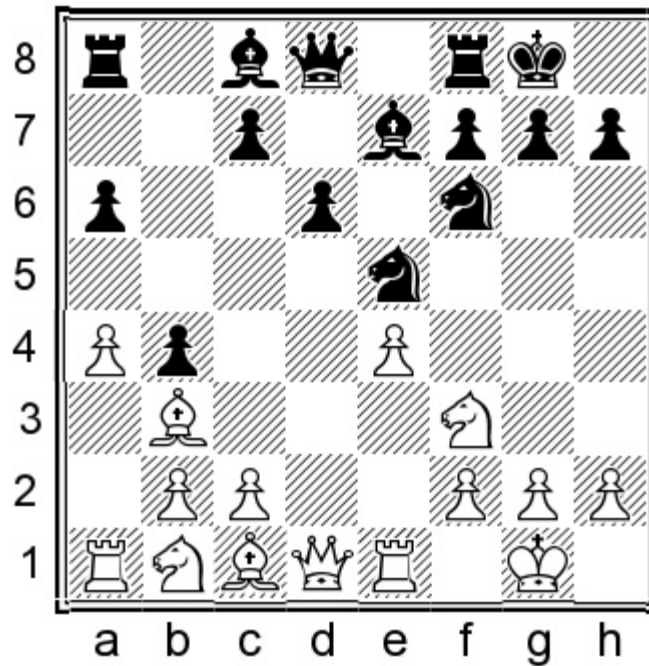
Alternatively, after 20...♞b6 21.♞xe5 ♞fe8 22.♞ec4 ♞xc4 23.♞xc4 our structure is better and after 23...♞c5 24.♞e3 or 23...♞e6 24.f3 White will soon be able to target the pawns on a6, b4 and c7.

If both sides play well, we will be close to equality. However, I think White will have good chances to outplay Black, especially as White will be very knowledgeable about the position. It is likely that Black will arrive here without a great deal of knowledge and there is a good chance he will be shorter on time and unsure of his position.

Summing up, the relatively new idea of exchanging bishops on c5 and following up with ♞cd2 is very dangerous for Black.

Black takes back with the knight

1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♞b5 a6 4.♞a4 ♞f6 5.0-0 ♞e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♞b3 0-0 8.a4 b4 9.d4 d6 10.dxe5 ♞xe5



Black often ends up with a misplaced knight on c6 in the lines we have already examined. This time he tries to solve the problem with 10...♞xe5. This move also has its downsides. After the knights are exchanged, Black will not be able to pin the knight on f3 with ...♕g4 and ideas with ...♞d4 are not going to be possible.

White can still play for an advantage even with 11.♞bd2 instead of exchanging the knights on e5. This leads to a different structure, with White enjoying a slight space advantage. Black needs to be ready for this path when he plays 10...♞xe5.

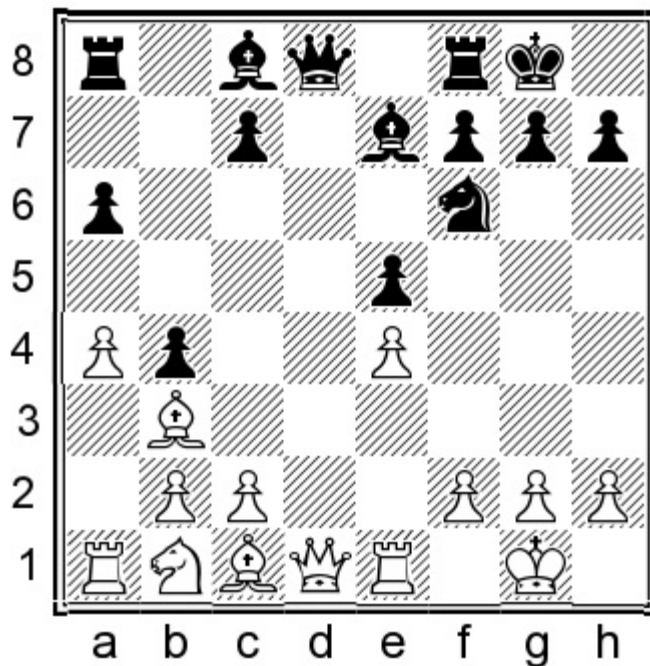
White's most promising move is

11.♞xe5

when

11...dxe5

leads to positions similar to those we have already seen, only without the knights on f3 and c6.



This dilutes White's plans with ♕d5 , as the black c6-knight will no longer be a target. On the other hand, White has a promising route for his own knight, via d2 and f3.

I have played this position a number of times and have used different moves here. One move I keep coming back to is $12.\text{♕e2}$.

Other options include trading the queens immediately with $12.\text{♕xd8}$ or playing $12.\text{♕g5}$ and allowing Black to play $12...\text{♕xd1}$.

$12.\text{♕f3}$

is another option. The queen is quite active here. White's idea is to play ♖b1-d2-f1-e3 (or g3) and try to exploit the f5-square. The game Piorun-Fressinet (Heraklio 2017) continued:

$12...\text{♕c5}$ $13.\text{♗d2}$ a5

Fressinet knows these lines very well. He has worked extensively with Magnus Carlsen, and Carlsen is a Marshall player himself, so he definitely isn't new to this type of position.

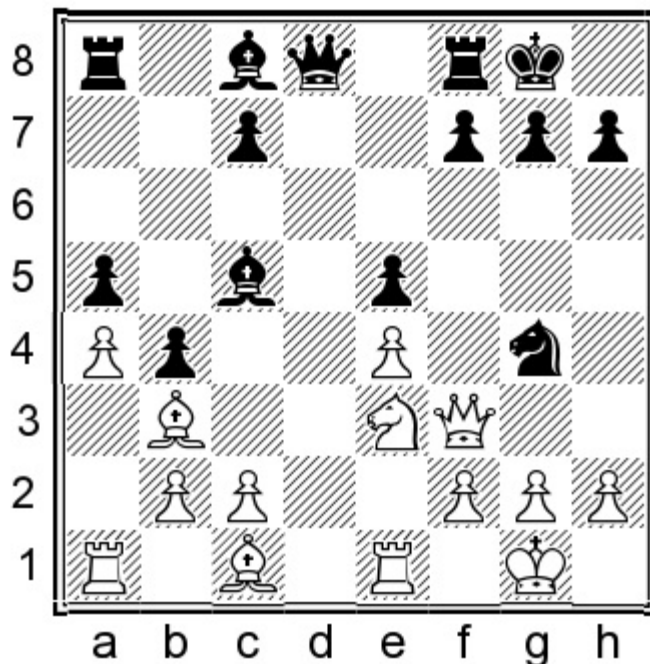
An alternative is $13...\text{♗g4}$ $14.\text{♖f1}$ h6 $15.\text{h3}$ ♗f6 but now $16.\text{♖d1}$ and White's rook is very useful on d1; he has gained half a tempo.

$14.\text{♗f1}$ ♗g4

Black is probably worried about the possibility of $15.\text{♕g5}$, pinning the knight, with ♗e3 to follow. After $14...\text{h6}$ $15.\text{♕e3}$ ♕xe3 $16.\text{♗xe3}$ it is easy to see how quickly White develops. ♖ad1 and ♗f5 will follow, giving White the initiative. $15.\text{♗e3}$ immediately is also good, to be followed by $16.\text{♗f5}$. $15...\text{♕xe3}$ $16.\text{♕xe3}$ leaves White with the bishop pair.

15. ♖e3

15. ♖e2 ♔d1! followed by 16... ♕a6 is dangerous for White.



15... ♔h4

Black can simplify the position with 15... ♗xe3 16. ♕xe3 ♕xe3 17. ♖xe3 but then his task is not at all simple. He has weaknesses, c5 in particular, and we also have the plan of ♖ac1 followed by c2-c3. The c-file becomes very important and there will be pressure against the backward pawn on c7.

17. ♖xe3 is also interesting, as after a subsequent c2-c3 bxc3 we can recapture with the rook on c3.

In fact it doesn't matter how much Black simplifies the position, he still has to deal with all of his weak pawns. Even the simple line 17... ♖e7 18. ♖ed1 ♕e6 19. ♕xe6 ♖xe6 20. ♖d5 ♖fd8 21. ♖ad1 ♖xd5 22. ♖xd5 maintains White's advantage. Taking so many pieces off the board doesn't mean Black is any closer to a draw.

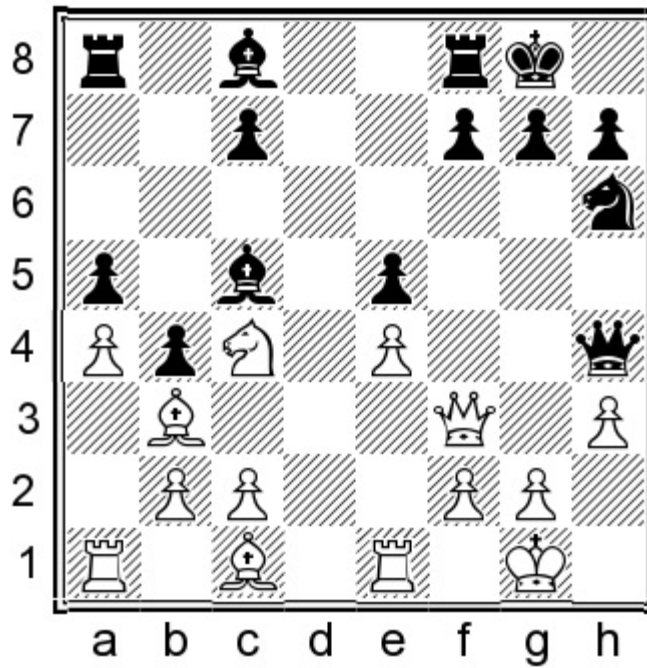
16. h3 ♗h6

To cover the f5-square, but the knight is horrible on h6.

16... ♗f6 17. ♗f5 ♕xf5 18. ♖xf5 is very good for White. One potential threat is 19. ♕g5.

16... ♗xe3 17. ♕xe3 ♕xe3 18. ♖xe3 is similar to the lines given above, but we can question what the black queen is doing on h4. However, this would still have been preferable to what he played in the game.

17. ♗c4



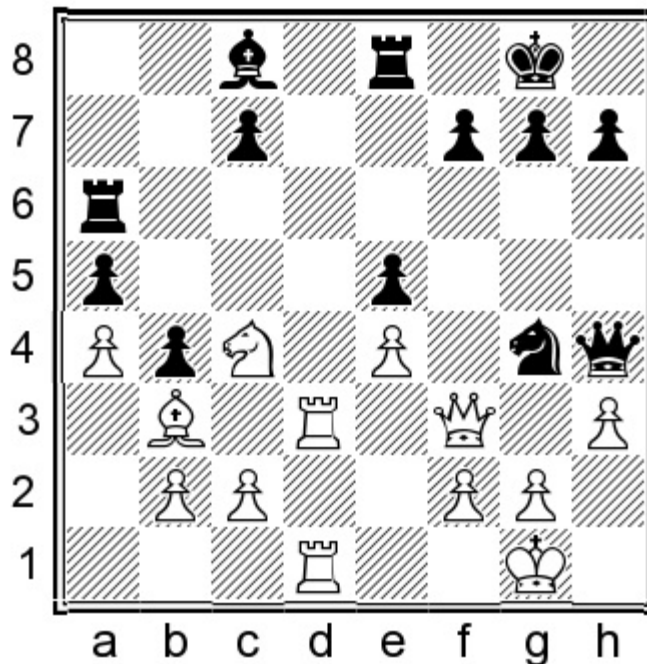
17...Ra6

Black is hoping to follow up with ...Rg6 with some threats against the king, but it doesn't work out for him.

18.Ke3 Qxe3 19.Rxe3 Re8 20.Rd1

Intending 21.Red3, with ideas of Nxe5, or simple play with Ne3.

20...Ng4 21.Red3



21...♖f8

21...♘f6 allows the tactics to start with 22.♗xe5, when 22...♖xe5 loses to 23.♖d8+ ♖e8 24.♖xe8+ ♗xe8 25.♔xf7+ with checkmate on the next move. It is clear things have gone very wrong for Black. White now took the knight and simplified to a winning endgame:

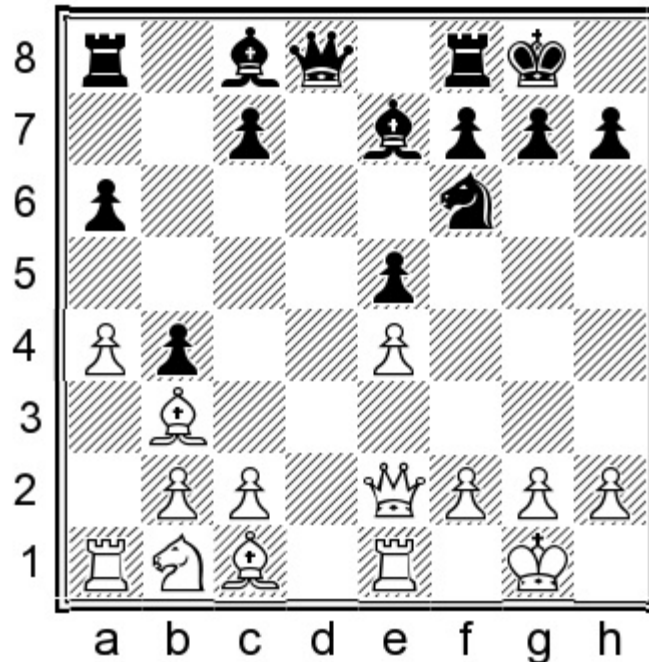
22.hxg4 ♗xg4 23.♔g3 ♖xg3 24.fxg3 ♗xd1 25.♖xd1 1-0

If things can go so wrong so quickly for a 2700+ player then it is clear that this is not an easy position, by any means.

12.♔f3 is certainly an interesting way of playing, but I actually like 12.♔e2 even more:

12.♔e2

I like to put my knight on f3, attacking e5.

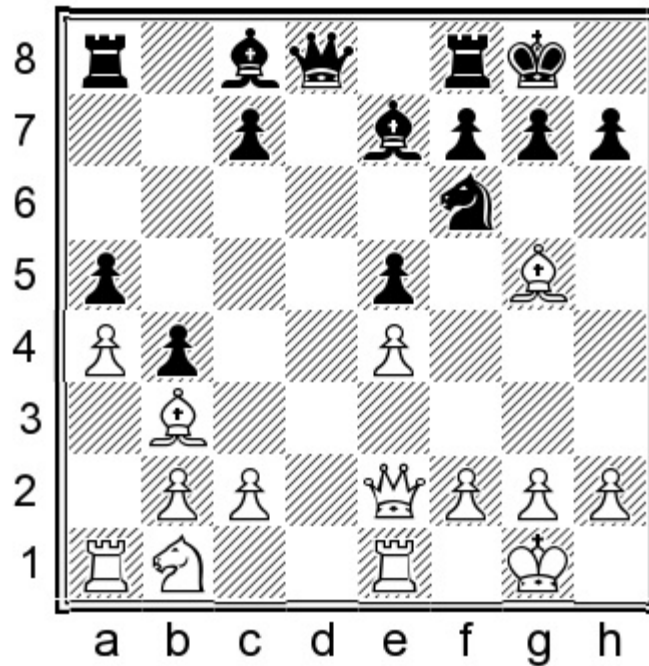


This is all very harmonious for White. My dream scenario is: ♗f3, a4-a5, ♗c4 (attacking a6) and Black is completely tied down.

A) 12...♗b7 13.♗d2 ♗c5 14.a5 ♖e7 15.♗c4 ♖fd8 and now 16.♗d3 is an important move. The point is that we want to defend the e-pawn so we can move the knight. The bishop is still active, still attacking a6. After 16...h6 we can decide between 17.♗b3, 17.♗c4 and 17.♗f3. It is a matter of taste and in any case, White is better here;

B) 12...a5 is another idea. Black stops White playing a4-a5 and there are ideas with ...♗a6. White has tried various moves, including:

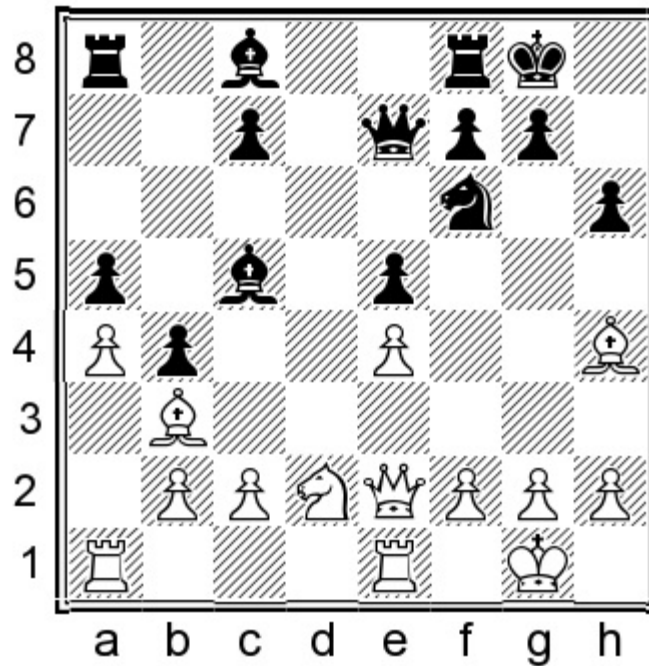
B1) 13.♗g5



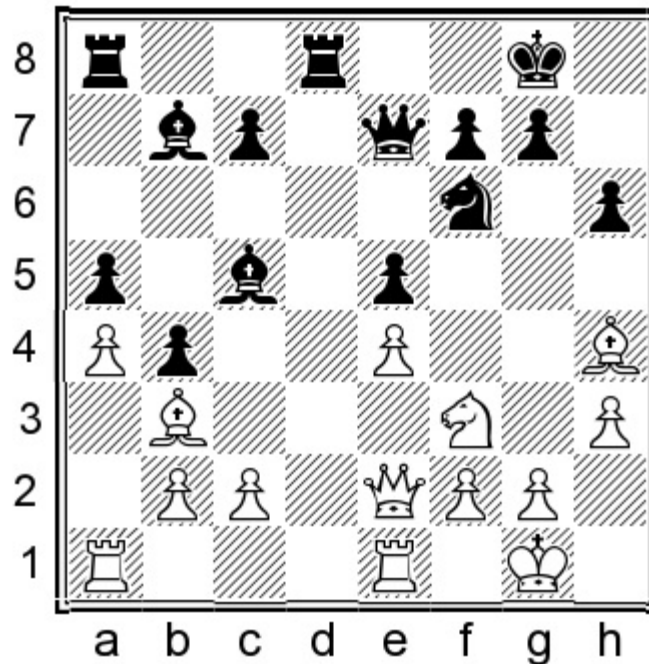
Now 13...♙a6 14.♙c4 ♙xc4 15.♚xc4 is interesting. White just needs one more move and Black will be positionally busted; for example, after ♖d2, ♗b3 and ♜ad1. This is why Black plays 15...h6. After 16.♙xf6 ♙xf6 we can't develop the knight to d2, so White plays 16.♙e3 ♖g4 17.♗d2! ♗xe3 18.fxe3! and the knight is immune, as 18...♚xd2 19.♜ad1 troops the queen. If Black doesn't take the knight, White will continue with ♗b3. Black's a-pawn is a big weakness, which is very difficult to defend. White's doubled e-pawns don't matter very much; Black cannot attack them, so I would argue that they are not really weak. Meanwhile, White has the new option of using the f-file, or simply playing ♜ad1-d5 and it is very likely that Black is going to lose one of his weak pawns – especially the one on a5. If White wins that pawn then Black is just dead lost because of the passed a-pawn. White is significantly better.

The game Navara-Grandelius (Germany Bundesliga 2017/18) proceeded:

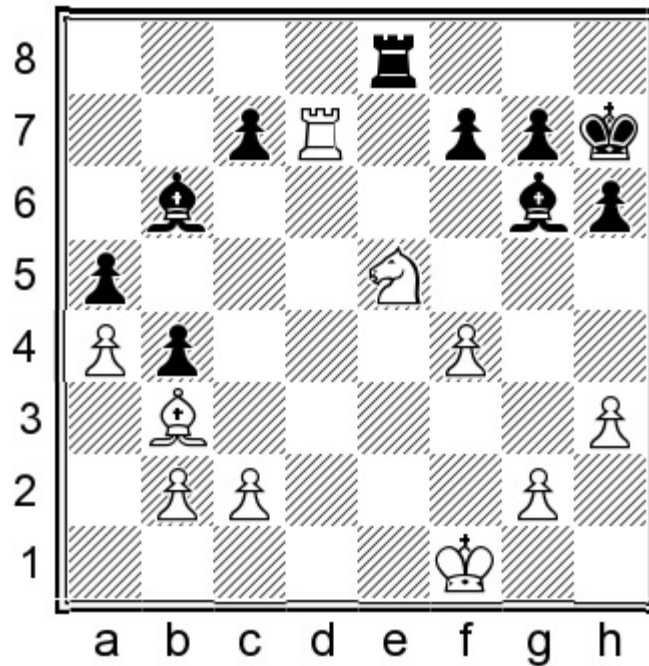
13...♙c5 14.♗d2 h6 15.♙h4 ♚e7



16.h3 Just preventing any ideas of ...g4 or ...g4. **16...Rd8** **17.Nf3** **Bb7** As usual, **17...a6** **18.c4** is not something that will worry us, as the trade of bishops is good for White.

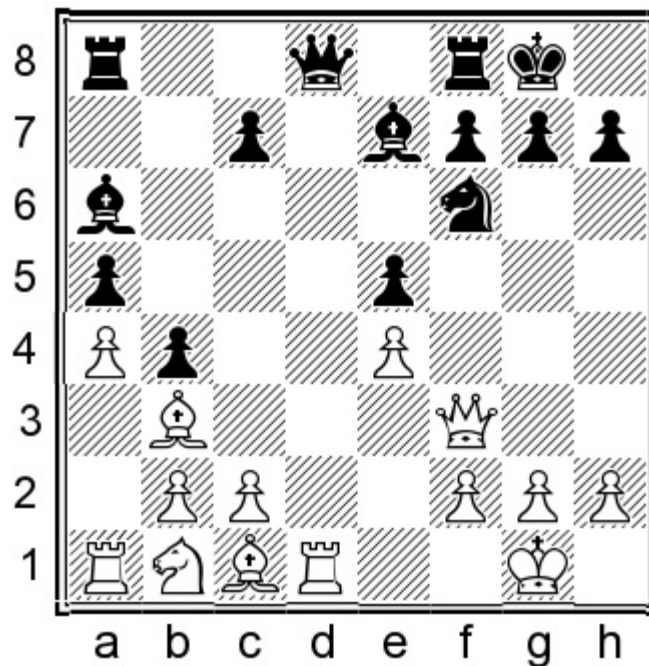


18.Bxf6 **Bxf6** **19.Bb5** **Bb6** Black has the bishop pair, but White's bishop is an amazing piece, with significant pressure on f7. **20.Bad1** **Bxd1** **21.Bxd1** **Bxe4** **22.Bd7!** **Bg6** **22...Bxf3** **23.Bxf7!** **23.Bxe5** **Bxe5** **24.Nxe5** **Ch7** **25.Cf1** **Re8** **26.f4**

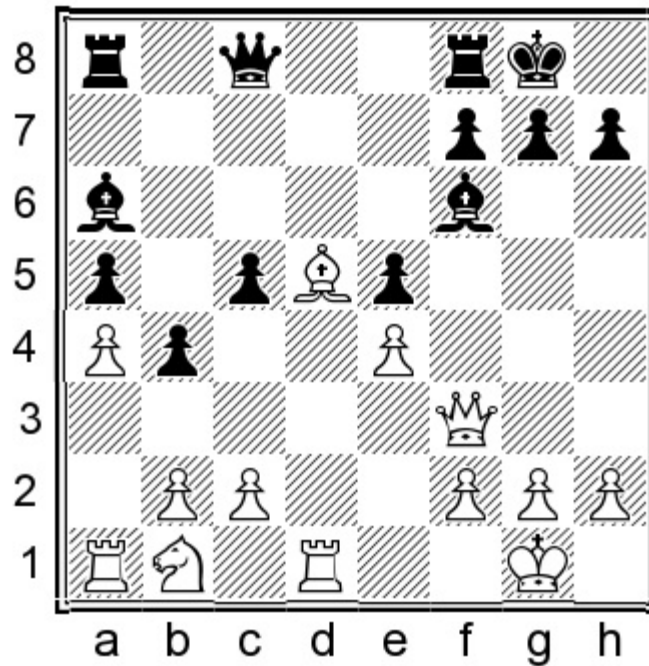


Black is under strong pressure and White went on to win the endgame;

B2) I also like the move **13.♖d1**, which has been played by Anish Giri, who gave it his seal of approval. The game Giri-Ding Liren, Wenzhou match 2017, continued: **13...♙a6** If **13...♚e8**, then **14.♙g5** gives White the edge. **14.♜f3**



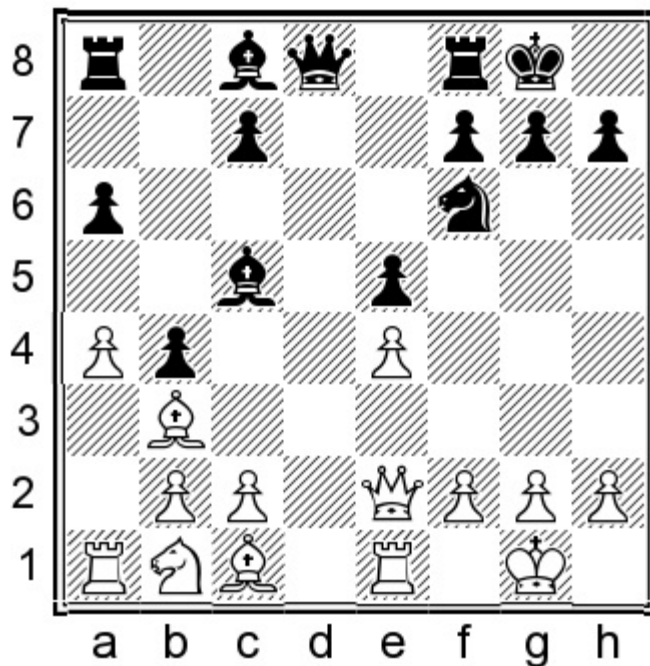
14...♚c8 On **14...♙d6**, **15.♙g5** is a really annoying pin. If **15...h6** **16.♙xf6 ♜xf6** **17.♚xf6 gxf6** White can simply manoeuvre his knight to f5, with an excellent position. This is why the black queen side-steps first. **15.♙g5** White wants to play **16.♘d2** and take control of c4, so Black has to do something. **15...c5** Threatening **16...c4**, but it weakens d5. **16.♙xf6 ♙xf6** **17.♙d5**



The bishop is now entrenched on d5 and Black isn't getting rid of it, as even if he manages to exchange the light-squared bishops then White will just replace it on d5 with another piece. **17...♖b8** Now, 18.c4 is more pleasant for White, but it is hard to actually do anything. In the game, both players shuffled their pieces around before agreeing to a draw. I am recommending **18.♘d2**. We just need one more move to play 19.♘c4. The problem is that Black plays 18...c4. Here White has chances to play for an advantage after 19.c3. The pawn on c4 is now a weakness, for the simple reason that I can attack it with two minor pieces and Black can only defend it with one. This, together with White's powerful bishop on d5, gives him a very pleasant position.

After 12.♙e2, the main move is one that I faced twice myself:

12...♗c5



The bishop is very well placed on this diagonal. It hits f2 and could come to d4.

13.♙e3

We play this immediately because Black's bishop is such an active piece. We are happy to trade bishops because even though it releases some of the tension on Black's position, c5 is weakened.

13.♘d2 has also been played. After 13...♘g4 we are not too worried; we just play 14.♖f1 and 15.h3. After 13...♙g4 14.♘f3 ♙d4 Black gets d4 for his bishop, but White has the bishop pair after 15.h3 ♙xf3 16.♖xf3. White now wants to play 17.c3 and then develop the bishop from c1. Black played 16...♖b8 to indirectly target the bishop on b3 in Lu-Dai, Tianjin 2008. That game continued with 17.a5 ♗d6 and the game was drawn after 42 moves.

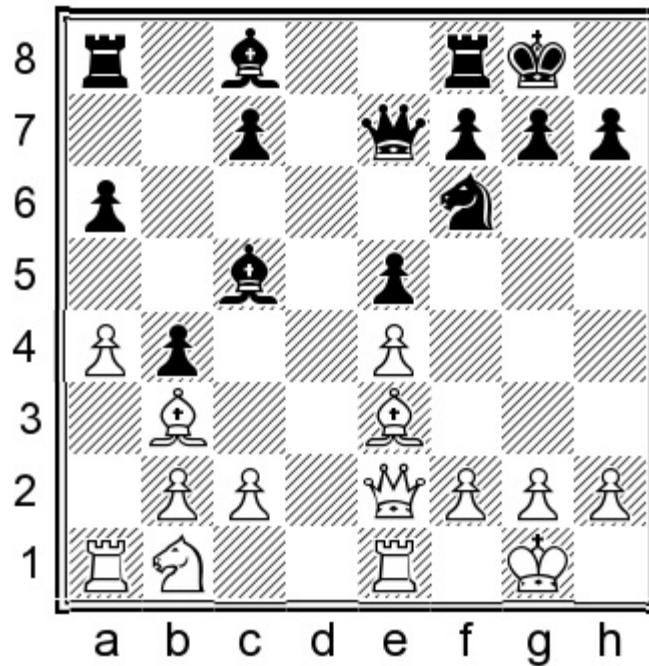
White could improve on this line with 17.♙c4 a5 18.c3. Getting in c2-c3 is more important than fixing the black pawn on a6 in this line. White has a pleasant advantage. Black has improvements too; for example, 13...a5.

I played 13.♙e3 against Fressinet in Elancourt 2013. At the time I think he was unfamiliar with this position.

13...♖e7 is not the best move.

13...♘xe4 is not good because of 14.♖c4 ♙xe3 15.♖xe4, with a fork on a8 and e3. Neither is 13...♙xe3 14.♖xe3 ♖e7 15.♘d2, when White gets what he wants. If allowed, he will play a4-a5 and ♙c4. If Black prevents this with 15...a5 then 16.♖ac1 and 17.c3; White will open the c-file and take advantage of the backward pawn on c7.

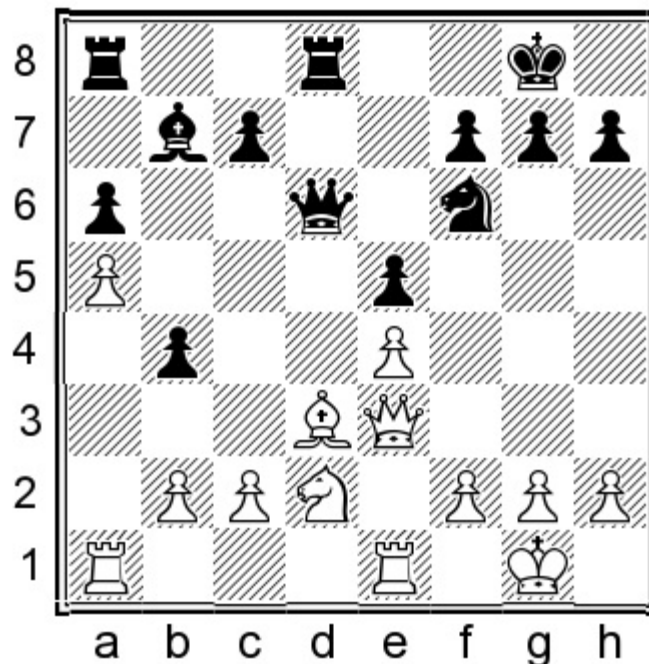
(13...♖e7)



After 14. d2,

A) the game Robson-W.Morrison (Las Vegas 2014) continued 14... b7. White now has options of a4-a5, c4 and b3 or b4 followed by a5, hitting the bishop on b7. 15. c4 f8 White is now happy to fix the black pawn on a6; a recurring theme. 15...a5 16.f3 with 17. b3 is also good for White. The pawn is still weak when it is on a5. The knight will attack it and this will prevent the rook moving from a8. Black has a choice of evils here.

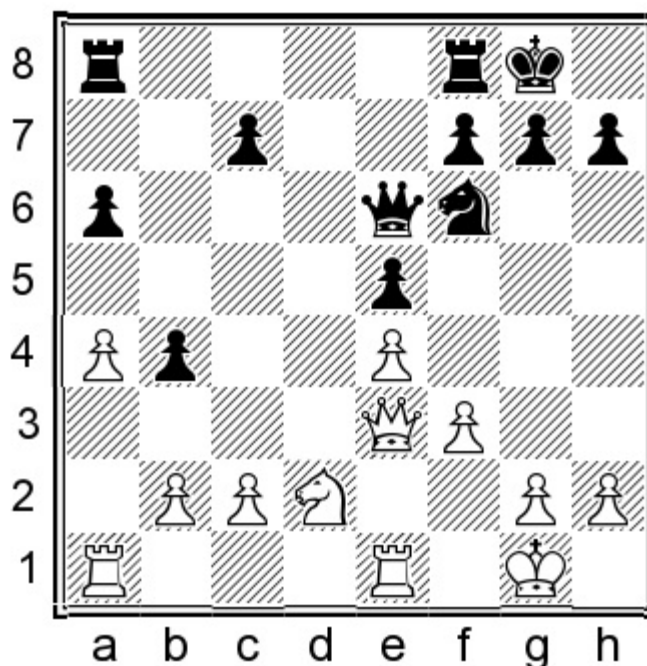
16.a5 cxe3 17. wxex3 wxd6 18. d3



Consolidating e4 and paving the way for the knight to go to b3 or c4, depending on the position. This is a typical position where Black has not solved his opening problems and he remains tied down.

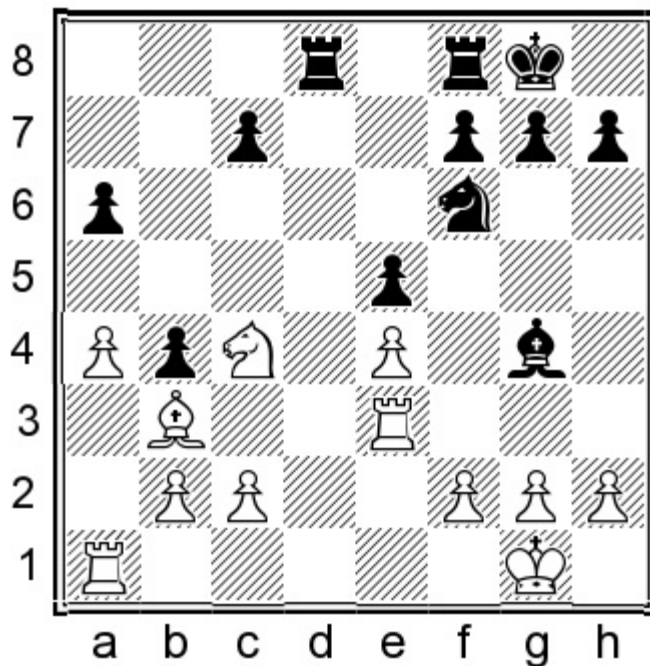
18...♖d7 19.♗b3 ♗f8 20.♗c5 ♕c8 21.♕c4 Black's position becomes really critical and eventually Robson won this game (1-0, 53);

B) there are other ways to play for Black: 14...♕g4 If White now plays 15.f3 ♕xe3+ 16.♖xe3 ♕e6 17.♕xe6 ♖xe6, this is a better version for Black.



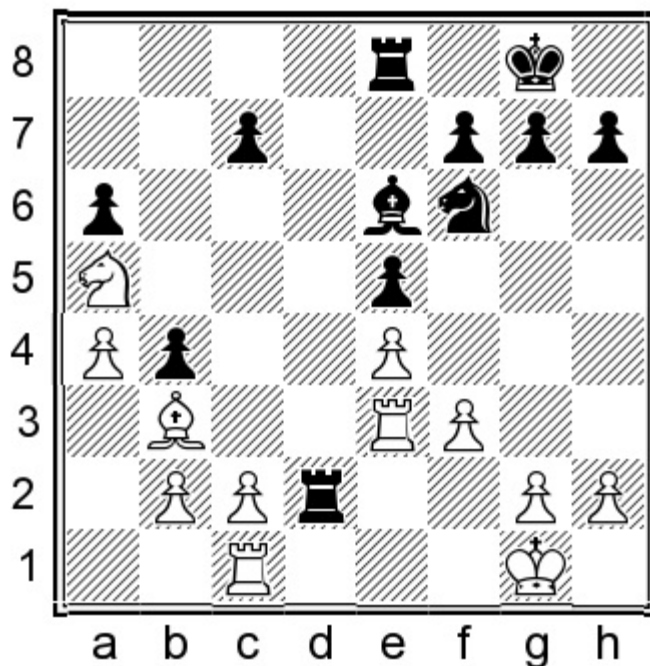
His bishop isn't stuck on b7, biting on granite, and he could also argue that White's position is a little looser with the pawn on f3 instead of f2. Not seriously, but enough to give Black more chances of equality.

My game with Fressinet went: 15.♕xc5 ♖xc5 16.♖e3 ♖xe3 16...♖e7 would admit that the whole 14...♕g4 idea isn't working out: 17.♗c4 a5 (otherwise 18.♗xa5 is strong; 18...♖d8 is prevented due to 19.♗c6) 18.♖ac1 ♖fd8 19.c3 is very good for White. e5 is weak and once again we are going to open the c-file. This is not at all good for Black, but probably it would still have been better than what happened in the game. 17.♖xe3 ♖ad8 18.♗c4



The exchange of queens doesn't make Black's task easier in any way. White gains a tempo by hitting the e-pawn.

18...Rfe8 19.Na5 This is a very annoying move. **20.Nc6** is a threat, hitting d8, b4 and e5. **19...Qe6** Fressinet tries to solve his problems tactically. **19...Rd6** does not work out well; we have **20.Nb7 Rxc6 21.Rd3**, grabbing the d-file. **20.Qc4**, attacking a6, is another interesting move. **20.f3** Black's point is revealed after **20.Nc6 Rd6 21.Nxb4 Qxb3 22.cxb3 Rb8!**. **20...Rd2** Black tries to play actively. **21.Rc1**

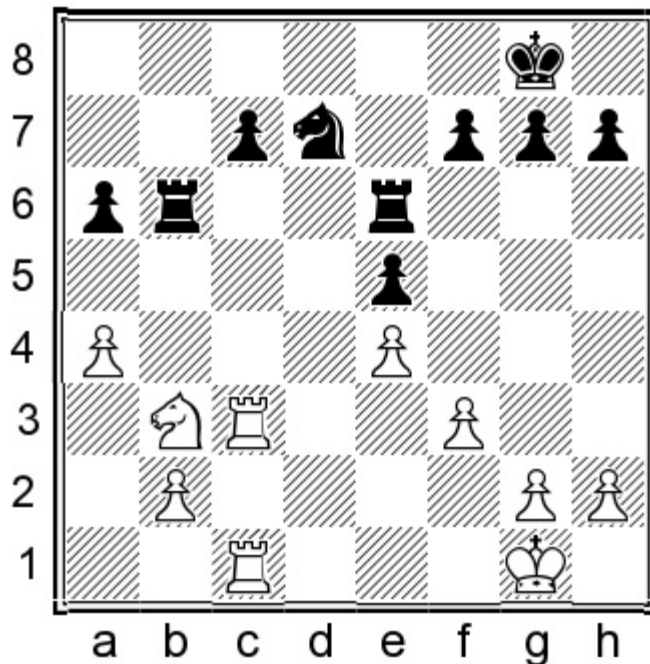


Black does appear to be active, but it's actually an illusion.

21...Nd7 21...h6 22.Qxe6 Rxe6 23.Nb3 Rd8 24.c3 shows White's plan. After **24...bxc3** we can take with either rook. c7 is weak and this ending is not even close to equal; Black is much worse.

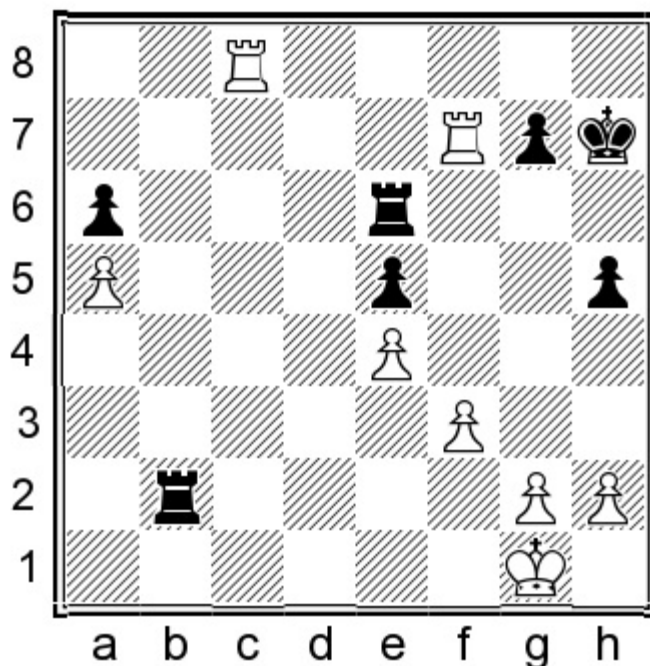
22. ♖xe6 ♜xe6 23. ♘b3 ♜dd6 24. c3 bxc3 24...c5 25. cxb4 cxb4 26. ♜c8+ ♔f8 and I can start attacking his pawns with ♘c5 and ♜b8.

25. ♜exc3 ♜b6



c7 is hanging but he was hoping to find some refuge in the rook ending.

26. a5 ♜b5 27. ♜xc7 ♜xb3 28. ♜xd7 h5 The weak back rank means he can't capture on b2 immediately and I can pick up the pawn on f7. 29. ♜c8+ ♔h7 30. ♜xf7 ♜xb2



Maybe he thought there were still some chances after ...♜g6, but I just kept attacking his pawns and he ended up with a lost position:

31. ♜f5 ♜b1+ 32. ♔f2 ♜b2+ 33. ♔g3 ♜g6+ 34. ♔h3 ♜gxg2 35. ♜xh5+ ♔g6 36. ♜xe5 ♜xh2+ 37. ♔g3

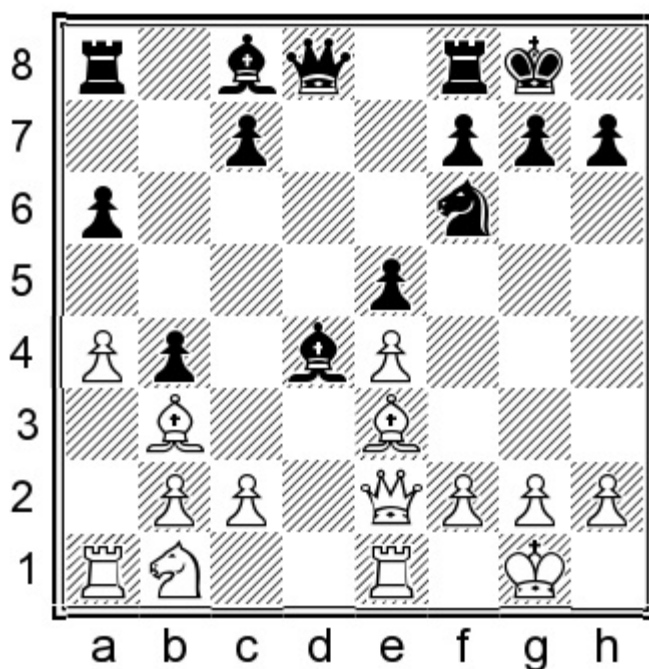
♖hg2+ 38.♕f4 ♜b5 39.♞c6+ 1-0, Caruana-Fressinet, Elancourt 2013.

This just shows that after 14.♘d2, it doesn't matter how many pieces Black exchanges; he is still left with significant weaknesses. All of the pawns on a6, b4, c7 and e5 are potentially weak. It is worth remembering how weak the c7-pawn is after the plan of c2-c3 and the opening of the c-file. If Black could put the b-pawn back on b7 it would make a huge difference, as there is symmetry in the position, but its early advance has left c7 as a backward pawn.

After 13.♙e3, the most challenging move is

13...♙d4.

It is also a very logical move.



14.♙xd4 ♜xd4 and now:

A) 15.c3 bxc3 16.♘xc3. If White can get the c-file, it will be very good for him, but in this line Black has good chances of occupying the b-file, with good counterchances against b2;

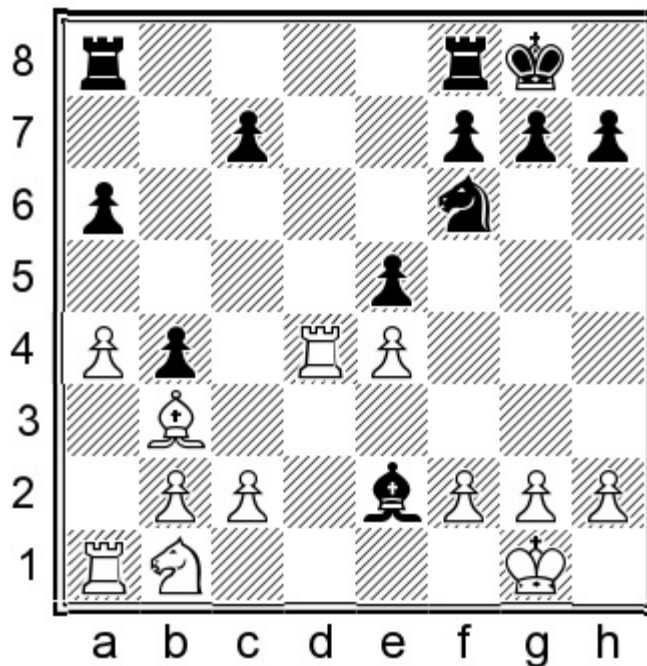
B) White does have a tactical approach too: **15.♞d1** and now:

B1) 15...♜xb2 16.♞a2 traps the queen;

B2) 15...♜xe4 16.♜xe4 ♘xe4 17.♙d5 and if 17...♞d8 we have 18.♙xf7+, picking up the rook;

B3) 15...♜c5 16.♘d2 and this is exactly the sort of position we want as White. We develop the knight without having to worry about b2. After 16...♙g4 17.♘f3 White will try to obtain the superior minor piece with 18.h3. The bishop on b3 is going to be very strong;

B4) **15...♙g4** is the best move for Black. f2-f3 is not possible because of the pin and the exchange of queens is forced: **16.♞xd4 ♙xe2**

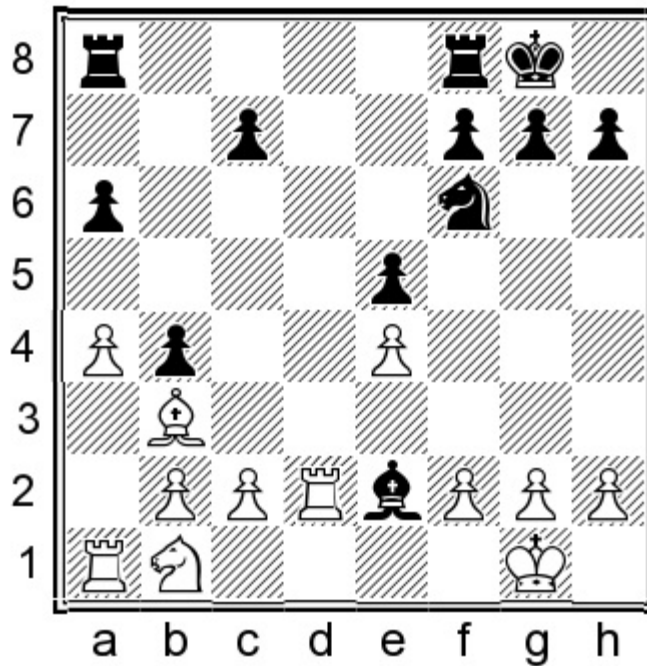


This is a position with a lot of theory, going deep into the endgame. Black is considered to be a little bit worse, but he is holding on if he plays precisely.

White can play in two different ways:

B41) **17. ♖xb4 a5 18. ♖b7 ♜fc8 19. ♙a2** White cannot protect e4 with 19.f3, as unfortunately Black would play 19...♙a6 and the rook on b7 is trapped. **19... ♗xe4 20. ♖b3** Dubov won a game from here. He understood that there are some strategic problems for Black. Yes, Black has won the central pawn, but there are still a lot of weaknesses in his position. Tactics simplified the position immediately: **20... ♙c4 21. ♖e3 ♙xa2 22. ♖xe4 ♙xb1 23. ♖xb1 f6 24. ♖d1** It may be surprising that White won this ending, but Black's long-term weaknesses are still relevant, even here. **24... ♖d8 25. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 26. ♔f1 c5** I can't really recommend this for White as objectively it should be a draw, but even a player as strong as Sasikiran found some issues here (1-0, 58, Dubov-Sasikiran, Moscow 2015);

B42) The other approach is not to trade b4 for e4 and play **17. ♖d2** instead.

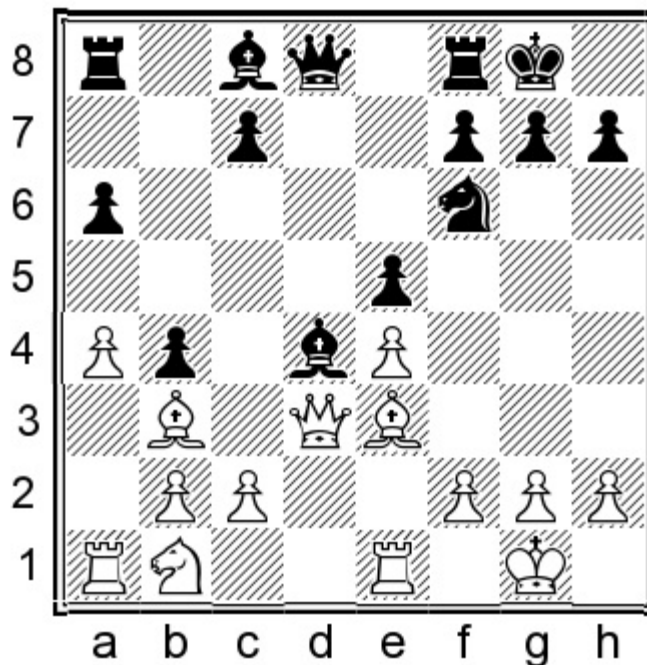


If 17...♙g4 White is quite happy to chase the bishop back to a horrible square with 18.f3 ♗d7 and then play 19.c3 bxc3 20.♘xc3 with a typical position, similar to what we have already seen in several other positions. White will try to exploit the weak pawns on a6 and c7.

However, Black can again equalize with tactics: 17...♖fd8 18.f3 18...♗xe2 ♖d1+. 18....♗xd2 19.♘xd2 ♗d8 20.♘c4 ♗xc4 21.♙xc4 a5 If White had control of the d-file we'd be doing great, but Black has it under control.

So here I want to recommend a new move:

14.♙d3!?



This looks very strange but the point is very simple. If we are given a move here we want to take on d4 and play e4-e5 when Black recaptures with the pawn.

Now Black has a choice:

After 14...♙xe3 15.♖xe3 we have the same position as if Black had played 13...♙xe3 and we reply with 14.♖xe3.

14...c5 15.c3 ♙xe3 16.♖xe3 and the c-pawn is a bit of a weakness, for example: 16...♕e7 17.♘d2 to be followed by ♘c4 and possibly ♘b6, to be supported by a4-a5. This would give an outpost for the knight, and it would be a very powerful piece. If Black plays 17...a5 we play 18.♙c4 and 19.♘b3. c5 is a serious weakness, as is a5.

14...♙xb2

is the most critical line.

15.♙xf7+

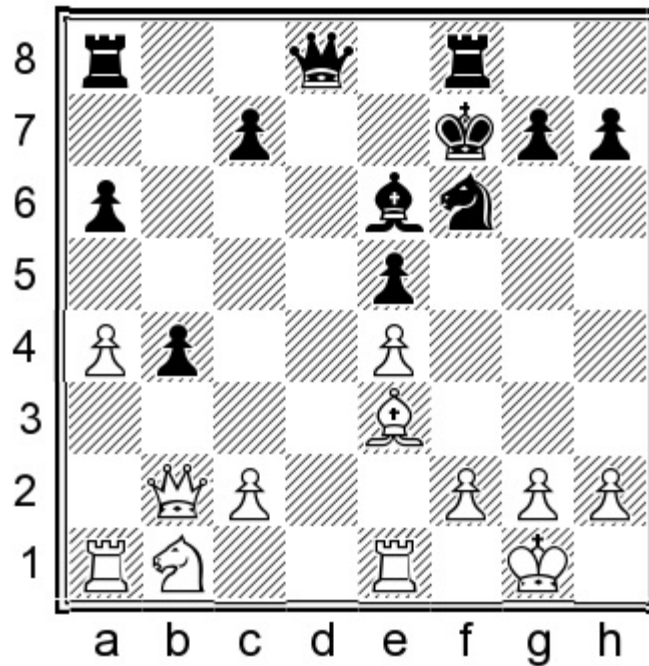
This reveals the tactical point of 14.♖d3 (15.♞a2 ♙d4 gives White some compensation for the pawn, but it is unclear). Now there is 15...♔h8 (15...♞xf7? 16.♖xd8 ♞xd8 17.♞a2 ♙d4 (17...♙c3 18.♘xc3 gives White the advantage of the bishop pair and the c-pawn will drop off too) 18.♙xd4 ♞xd4 (18...exd4 19.♘d2 followed by e4-e5-e6 is very good for White) and now there is another choice. We can play 19.c3 bxc3 20.♘xc3 with a slight edge, based on the strengths and weaknesses of the respective pawns. We can also wait and play 19.f3 ♙d7 20.♞c1, preparing more slowly before playing c2-c3.

15...♔xf7

Going down the critical line.

16.♖b3+

Now after 16...♙e6 17.♖xb2 material equality is restored.

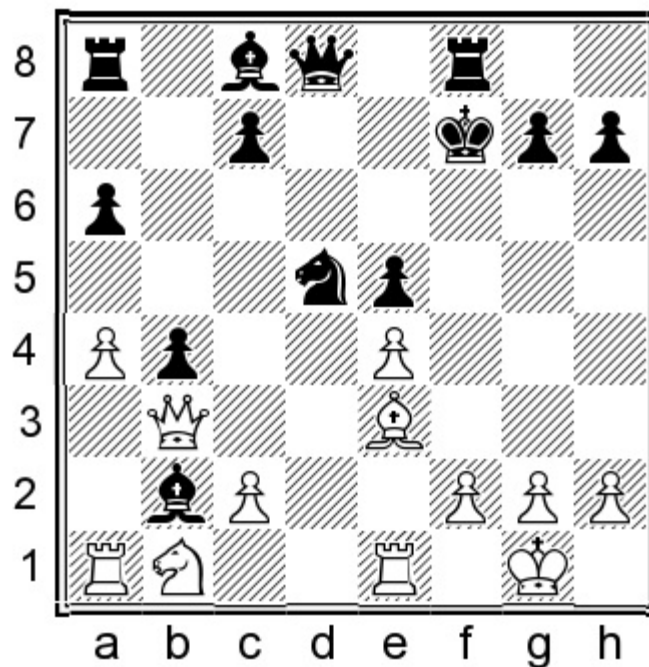


e5 is critically weak. Basically we have traded our b-pawn for Black's f-pawn. Now if 17...♔d6 then 18.♘d2 followed by 19.♘f3. Ideas with c2-c3 are still in the air, opening up the queenside and yet again taking advantage of the weak c-pawn. Even the opposite-coloured bishops work against Black, as ours can attack the weak e-pawn but Black's cannot defend it.

Black can also try 16...♔g6 17.♙xb2 ♘g4 18.h3 ♘xe3 19.♖xe3 and it is easy to see that the black king, on a strange square, is coming under attack.

The best move for Black is the weird

16...♘d5.



Now 17. ♖xb2 ♜xe3 is not the best for White: 18. ♝xe3 ♚d1+; 18. ♚b3+ ♜d5! and White's pawn structure is a little spoiled after 19. exd5. Better is:

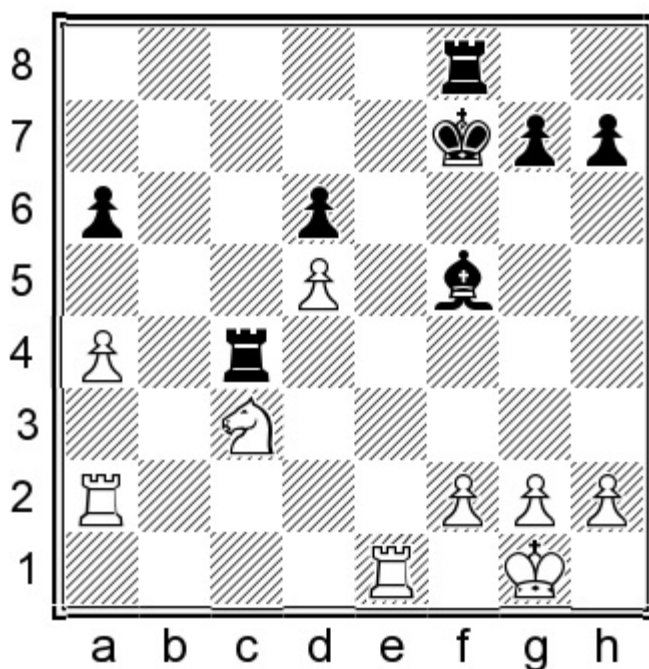
17. ♝a2 ♞d4 18. exd5 ♚d6

This is a bit of a mess, but Black is OK.

19. c3 bxc3 20. ♜xc3 ♞f5

To stop White's strong threat of 21. ♜e4.

21. ♚c4 ♝ab8 22. ♞xd4 ♝b4 23. ♞xe5 ♝xc4 24. ♞xd6 cxd6

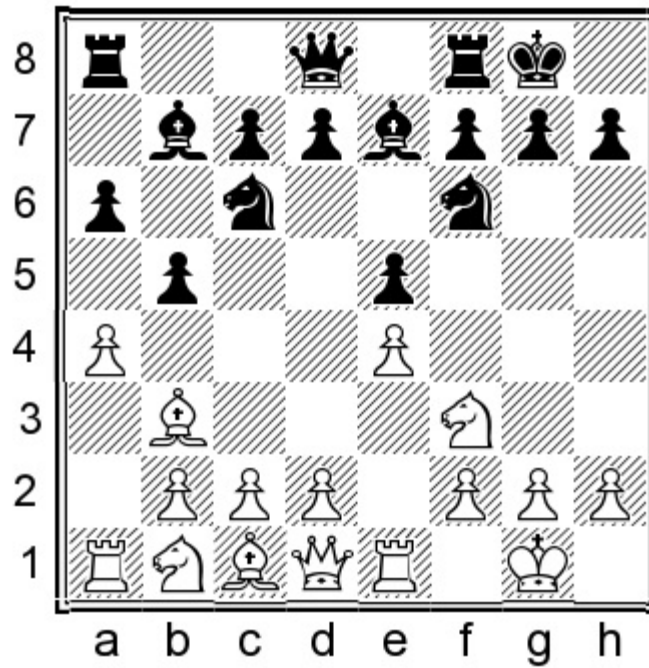


And White is a pawn up, but most likely Black will have enough compensation for a draw.

But... what can you do, if he plays perfectly?

The alternative 8... ♞b7

1. e4 e5 2. ♜f3 ♜c6 3. ♞b5 a6 4. ♞a4 ♜f6 5. 0-0 ♞e7 6. ♝e1 b5 7. ♞b3 0-0 8. a4 ♞b7

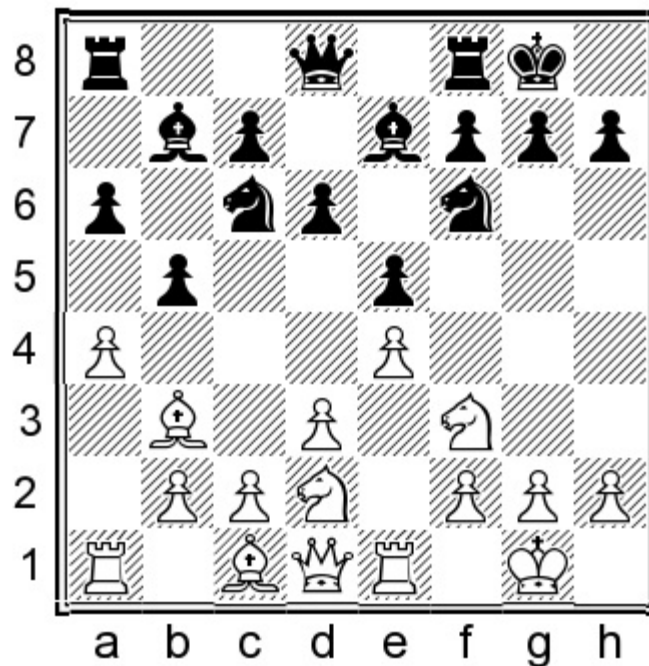


This is Black's alternative to 8...b4. It is currently not as popular as 8...b4 at the highest levels, but it is a very natural move. Black develops a piece and deals with the threat of 9.axb5.

9.d3

The only problem for Black is that after this move the bishop is a bit misplaced on b7.

9...d6 10.♘bd2



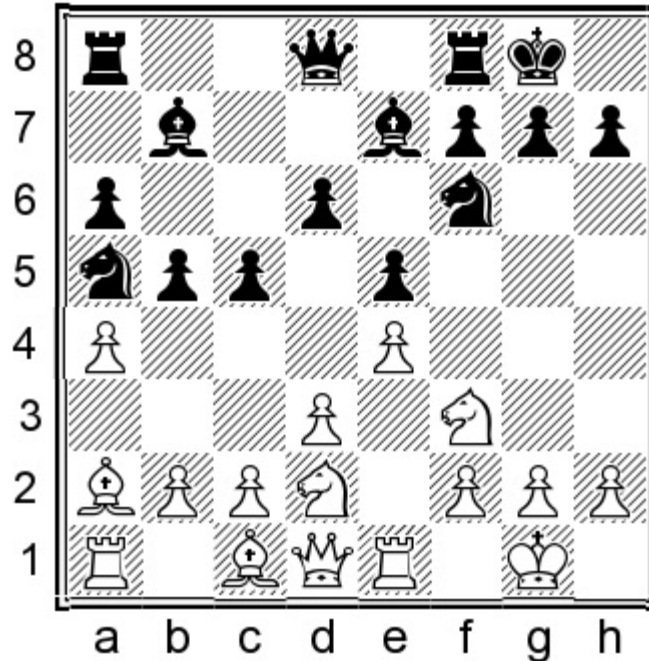
One of a number of options for White. It is a little more flexible than playing 10.c3 immediately.

10...♘a5

This is the main move for Black here.

After 10...♞d7 11.c3 ♞c5 12.axb5 axb5 13.♖xa8 ♜xa8 14.♙c2 we see the downside of Black's knight on c5; it has become a target for d3-d4 or b2-b4, e.g. 14...♞f6 15.b4 ♞e6 16.♞f1 ♜b7 17.♞e3 g6 18.♞b3 and White has the advantage (Kasparov-Short, London Wch m 1993, Game 7). His pawn structure is very solid and the bishop on b3 is very well placed. One of the major factors in this sort of position is Black's misplaced knight on c6. It has limited scope and gets in the way of the c-pawn.

11.♙a2 c5



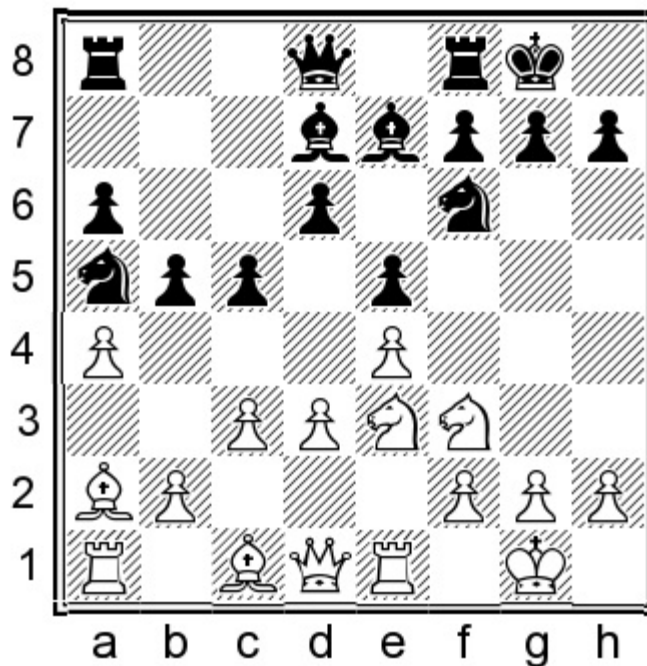
Black has gained space but he has weakened his position. The d5-square is weaker because the c-pawn has moved to c5. The weakness is not immediately exploitable, but White can play ♞f1, ♞g5 (to eliminate the knight on f6, which is defending d5), ♞e3 and ♞d5, gaining control of the outpost. Black has to come up with a plan to try and stop this happening.

12.♞f1 ♜c8 13.c3 ♞d7

13...♞e6 14.♞xe6 fxe6 15.axb5 axb5 16.d4 and Black is left with a lot of weaknesses.

Black has spent two moves just playing the bishop from b7 to d7. This is the clearest indication that even though 8...♞b7 is a natural move, it is one with downsides.

14.♞e3



14...♔c7

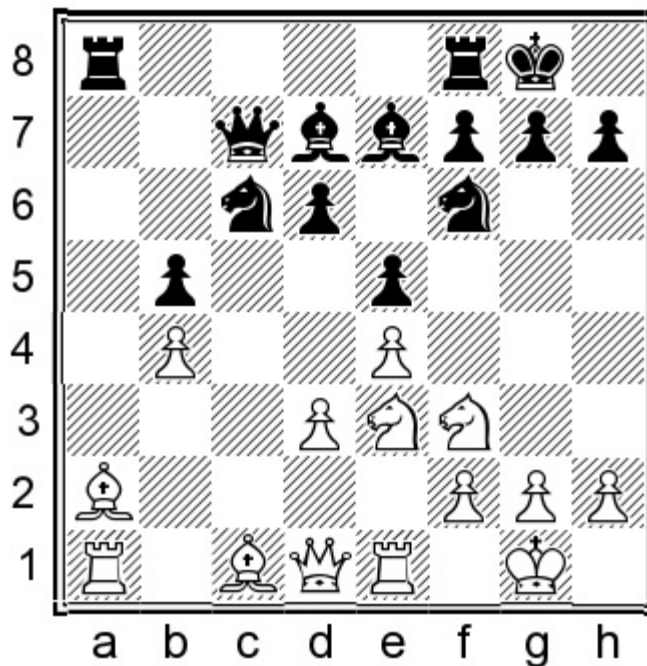
In general, Black can play 14...bxa4, but it leaves new weaknesses on the light squares. White can't win the pawn back immediately, but one day it will be recaptured.

One idea for White is 15.♖c4 ♗xc4 16.♙xc4, gaining an outpost for the bishop.

Another very interesting idea is to play 15.♗d2. This clearly shows the downside of 14...bxa4. As soon as Black weakens c4, we start to take advantage of it. One idea is to follow up with ♙b1, ♙c2 and ♙xa4. White had to cover b3 first but now this plan is possible. White may be taking a long time to recapture on a4, but once it happens, Black will be left with lots of weaknesses and he doesn't have any immediate counterplay.

15.axb5 axb5 16.b4 ♗b7

After 16...cxb4 17.cxb4 ♗c6, we have an exactly symmetrical pawn structure, but White's pieces are still better placed.



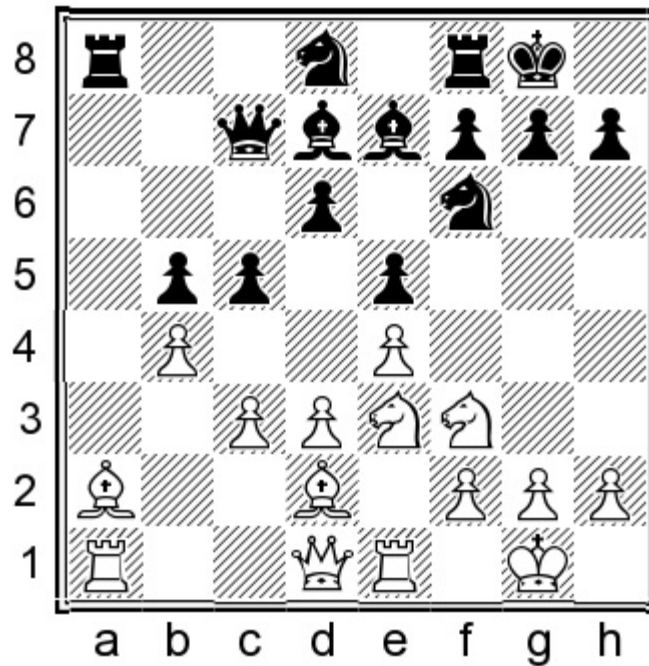
Note that the white knight, being on e3 instead of c3, doesn't block the defence of the b-pawn and controls two important squares on d5 and f5. Also, comparing the bishops shows another advantage for White. The bishop on a2 bears down on f7, controls d5 and is generally very active. Black's bishops are both passively placed. White is perhaps not significantly better, but is certainly much more comfortable.

17. ♖d2

Black is left with the big question of what to do with his knight. But Black has another problem. It looks like he controls the a-file, because our bishop on a2 is in the way. But if Black tries to use the a-file with ... ♖a6, intending to double the rooks, he is hit by ♙xf7+! and ♖xa6. If he plays ... ♖a4, where it is defended, we play ♙b3, forcing ... ♖xa1 ♙xa1 and now White has the a-file.

17... ♗d8

A funny move, but sneaky.



Note that 18. ♕xf7+?? doesn't win the rook this time because 18... ♖xf7! connects Black's rooks again.

18. ♕b3 ♜xa1 19. ♚xa1

Now it is clear Black has effectively spent four moves to get his knight from b8 to d8, and that's not a good sign, especially as it *still* has nowhere good to go.

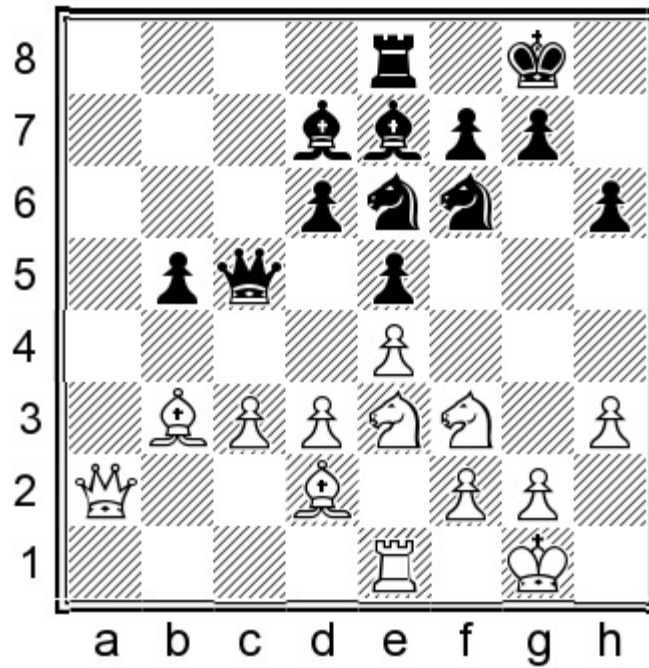
19... ♜e8 20. bxc5 ♚xc5

20... dxc5 21. ♘d5 ♘xd5 22. exd5 kills the knight on d8. 22. ♕xd5 is also very interesting as it is a clear outpost on d5. Then 22... ♘c6 23. ♚a2 ♜f8 24. ♜a1 is very good for White. In fact White's position is so good he can even try 24. ♕g5 or 24. ♘g5.

21. ♚a2

Putting pressure on the f-pawn. Black stops 22. ♘g5:

21... h6 22. h3 ♘e6

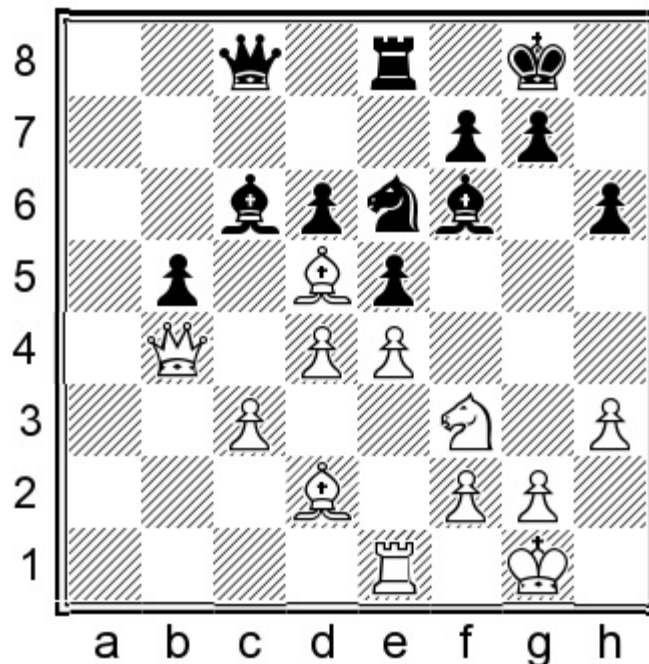


Finally, he has managed to put his knight on another square, but even though it looks more active it can't move anywhere, because of the attack on f7.

23. ♖d5 ♜xd5 24. ♙xd5 ♚c8 25. d4 ♜f6 26. ♛b3

White has significant pressure which can increase after ♛b4, attacking d6, or ♜a1, followed by ♜a8.

26... ♜c6 27. ♛b4



Now the pressure is very serious. Black tries to make the tactics work for him:

27...exd4 28.cxd4 ♙xd5 29.exd5 ♞g5 30.♜xe8+ ♚xe8 31.♙xg5 hxg5 32.♛xd6

Black is lost. White plans ♖e5, ♕c6 and d5-d6.

(Leko-Ivanchuk, Linares 2006, 1-0, 39)

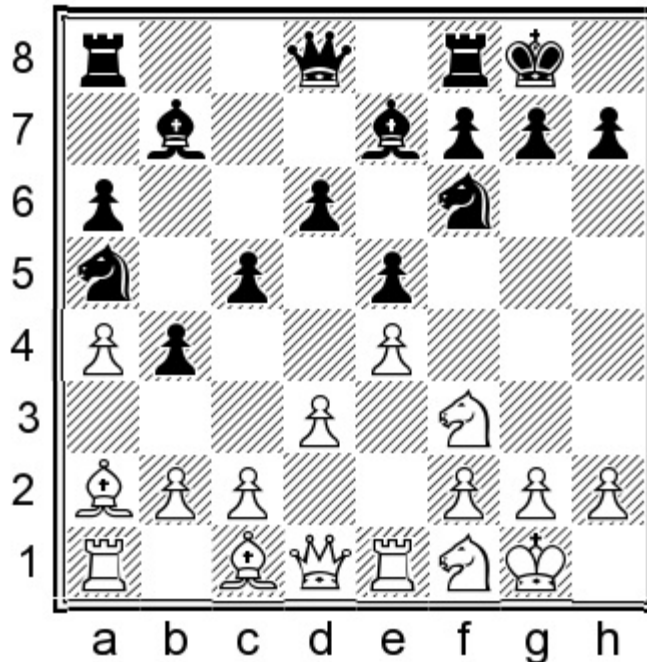
Going back a little, after

8...♙b7 9.d3 d6 10.♘bd2 ♘a5 11.♙a2 c5 12.♘f1

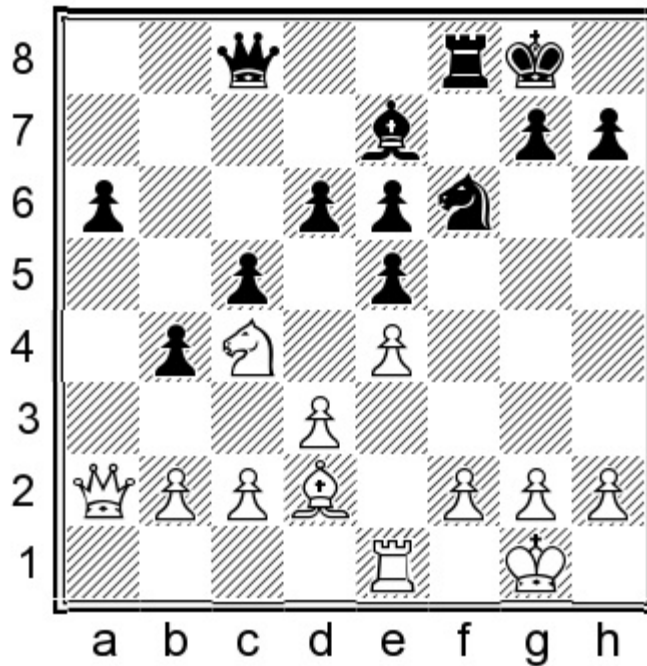
Black can try

12...b4.

This is the main move. The reason is clear:



Black wants to avoid White dictating the timing and play after axb5. On the other hand, Black ends up with another weakness, on c4. White's idea is similar to the one we saw earlier: ♘e3, ♘d2 and play to occupy c4: 13.♘e3 ♙c8 Heading to e6, to help in the battle for c4. 14.♘d2 ♜b8 15.♘dc4 ♘c6 15...♘xc4 16.♙xc4 favours White. Apart from gaining a grip on the light squares, he has also been relieved of the problem of what top chess trainer Mark Dvoretsky called the 'superfluous piece'. Basically, White has two knights wanting to occupy c4 and would welcome a trade of one of them. 16.♙d2 ♙e6 17.a5 ♜b5 18.♙b3 ♘xa5 19.♘xa5 ♜xa5 20.♙xe6 fxe6 21.♘c4 ♜xa1 22.♜xa1 ♜c8 23.♜a2



White has a degree of compensation for the pawn, as Black has serious weaknesses on both a6 and e6, but it is not enough for a serious advantage. The game Milos-Adams, Istanbul 2000, was drawn after 27 moves.

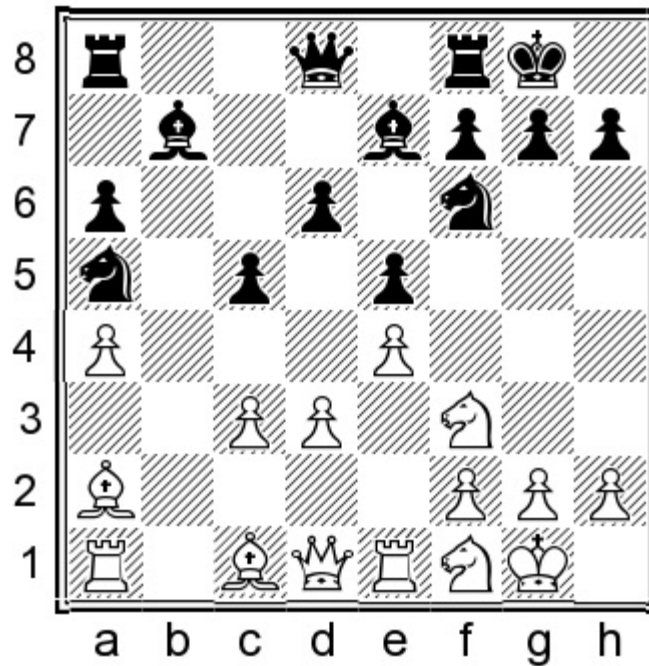
My recommendation is:

13.c3 bxc3

If Black doesn't take first he will end up with a weak b-pawn. On the other hand, White does now have the b-file.

13...♔c8 14.cxb4 cxb4 15.♕d2 ♖c6 is better for White, as is 15...♜b8 16.♘e3 b3 17.♕xa5! ♚xa5 18.♕xb3. Black may even get the pawn back, but he will be left with lots of light-square weaknesses. The fact that we have lost our dark-squared bishop is not too relevant here.

14.bxc3



14...c4

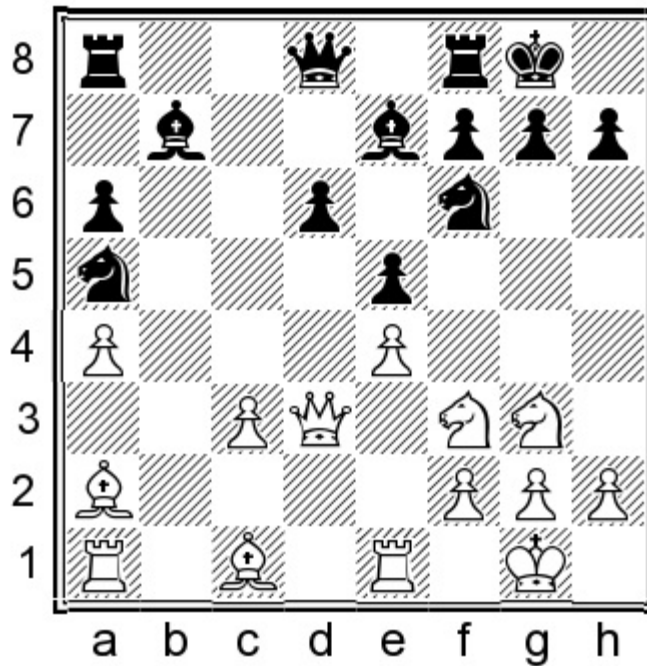
A very logical move, breaking up White's pawn structure.

If 14...♖b8 15.♘e3 ♙c8 16.d4 ♚c7 (once again the e-pawn is immune; 16...♘xe4 17.♘d5 ♘f6 18.♘xe7+ ♚xe7 19.dxe5 dxe5 20.♘xe5 is much better for White, with the two bishops in an open position and threats against f7) 17.dxe5 dxe5 18.♘c4 ♘d7 19.♘fd2 ♘xc4 20.♘xc4 White has the advantage despite the symmetry of the pawn structure. This was seen in Vachier-Lagrave-Stefanova, Gibraltar 2013 (1-0, 39).

15.♘g3

15.dxc4 ♘xe4 is better for Black.

15...cxd3 16.♚xd3



Black has taken two tempi and helped White develop his pieces. There are weakness for both sides: a4 and c3 for White and the d6- pawn plus the d5-square for Black. White can start attacking with ♖a3 and ♜f5. Also, after ♖a3, he can maybe put pressure on Black's knight on a5 with ♘b4.

16...♙c8

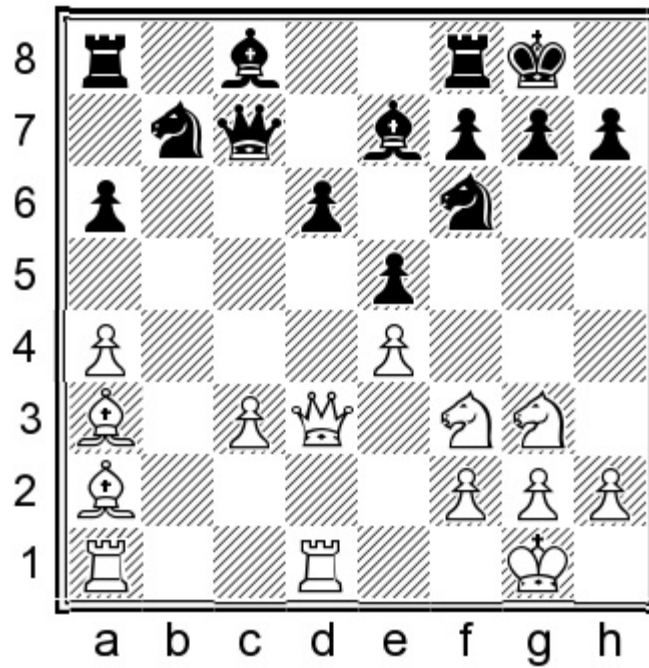
It is crucial to stop 17.♜f5.

Black's attempts to liberate the position with a pawn sacrifice are inadequate: 16...d5 17.exd5 ♜xd5 18.♜xe5 or 17...♙xd5 18.♜xe5 ♙xa2 19.♞xa2 ♝xd3 20.♜xd3 both leave Black without compensation.

The normal-looking developing move 16...♞c8 leaves White with the initiative after the simple 17.♜f5, followed by ♖a3. If Black makes even slight inaccuracies here, he will be losing. Another move to watch out for is ♜g5 in reply to ...♞e8.

17.♖a3 ♝c7 18.♞ed1 ♜b7

18...♞d8 19.♜g5!.



19. ♙c4

19. ♘h4! was even stronger, heading to f5. Then 19...g6 leaves Black with obvious weaknesses on the dark squares.

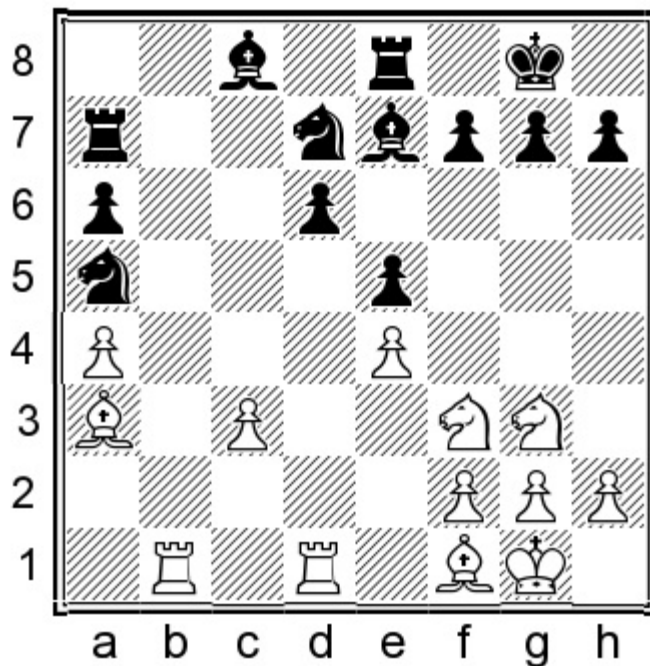
19... ♙xc4 20. ♘xc4

White has the more pleasant position. 21. ♘xe5 is a threat.

20... ♖e8

20... ♘c5 21. ♘xc5 dxc5 22. ♘xe5 is the point.

21. ♖ab1 ♖a7 22. ♖b6 ♘a5 23. ♘f1 ♘d7 24. ♖bb1



White was much better in the game Svidler-Ivanchuk, Morelia/Linares 2006, but Ivanchuk eventually held the draw after 55 moves.

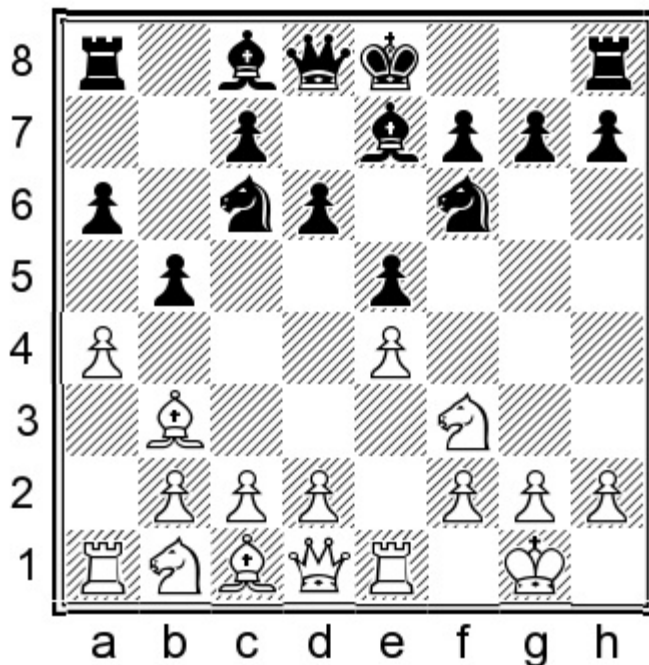
Summing up, the weaknesses in the respective positions are always relative. White is the one with the initiative and the more active pieces and is able to attack d6 and e5. Black never quite gets the opportunity to attack White's potentially weak pawns.

It seems that every time Black develops the bishop to b7 it soon has to relocate back to c8. 8...b4 is a more direct way to try to equalize, which is why it is seen more frequently at the top levels. 8...♗b7 is not a *bad* move but White has many options to try to gain the initiative. On the other hand, Black doesn't have to weaken his pawn structure here. Black is trying to keep the advantages of his position, which boil down to space. It is quite rare in modern chess for Black to have so much space.

Chapter 2

An Anti-Classical set-up: 3...a6 4.♘a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.a4

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.a4



After the moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 Black has a very fundamental choice. Should he invite the Marshall Attack with 7...0-0 or does he allow the Classical Ruy Lopez with 7...d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3, with a choice of various systems including the Zaitsev, Chigorin and Breyer?

After 7...d6 White can cut across Black's plans with 8.a4!?. This is a very interesting option I want to recommend against the Classical Variation. The system is consistent with the 8.a4 Anti-Marshall system we have seen already, into which it often transposes. It has similar ideas and avoids a huge body of theory. This has the advantage of taking the game into territory which is more likely to be unfamiliar to Black, compared to, for example, his pet line in the Zaitsev.

8.a4 is a relatively rare line and one which black players are less likely to have seen or studied in depth. I think it is always an interesting concept to try to get one step ahead of your opponent by deviating early on.

Black now has a choice of variations, but the good news for us is that a lot of them will transpose:

A) 8...♙b7 9.d3 ♘a5 10.♙a2 c5 11.♘bd2 will transpose after 11...0-0 and therefore has no incidental value from our point of view;

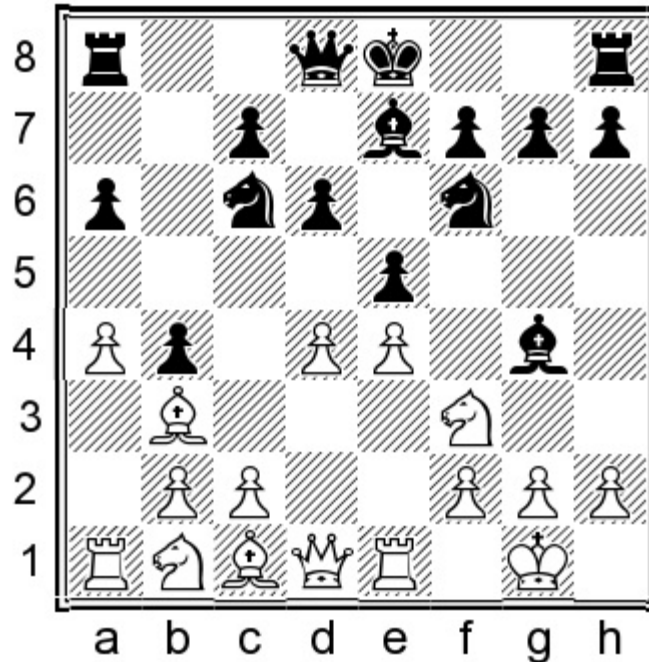
B) 8...b4 9.d4 and now if 9...0-0 10.dxe5 we have a direct transposition to the Anti-Marshall lines we have already seen. 9...exd4 10.♘xd4 ♘xd4 11.♙xd4 c5 12.♙d3 is just very good for White. We

can exploit the weak c4-square with an advantage.

The only way for Black to avoid the Anti-Marshall is with 8...♔g4. First we will show why this move is no good if Black precedes it with 8...b4 9.d4.

Introduction

8...b4 9.d4 ♔g4 is a bit dubious, compared to transposing to the Anti-Marshall.

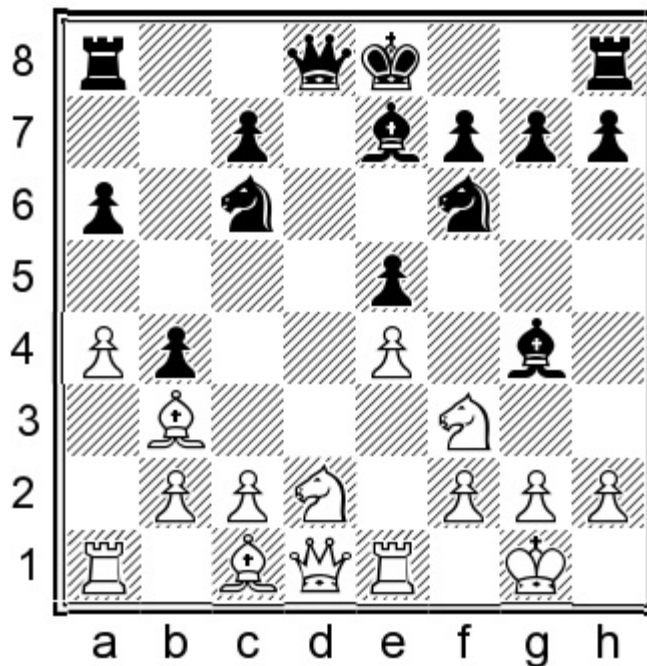


The bishop is a little misplaced here:

10.dxe5 dxe5 10...♖xe5 11.♗bd2 0-0 12.h3 ♔h5 13.g4 ♔g6 (13...♗fxg4? 14.♗xe5!) 14.♗xe5 dxe5 15.♔f3 followed by ♗f1, ♗g3 and Black's bishop is trapped out of the game. Our f4-square is not really weak; our bishop defends it and none of Black's pieces can reach it any time soon.

Alternatively, after 12...♗xf3+ 13.♗xf3 ♔h5 14.g4 ♔g6 15.e5 dxe5 16.♗xe5 the weakening of the kingside is not significant here. Very often we go into an ending in which g4 is not a weakness at all.

11.♗bd2



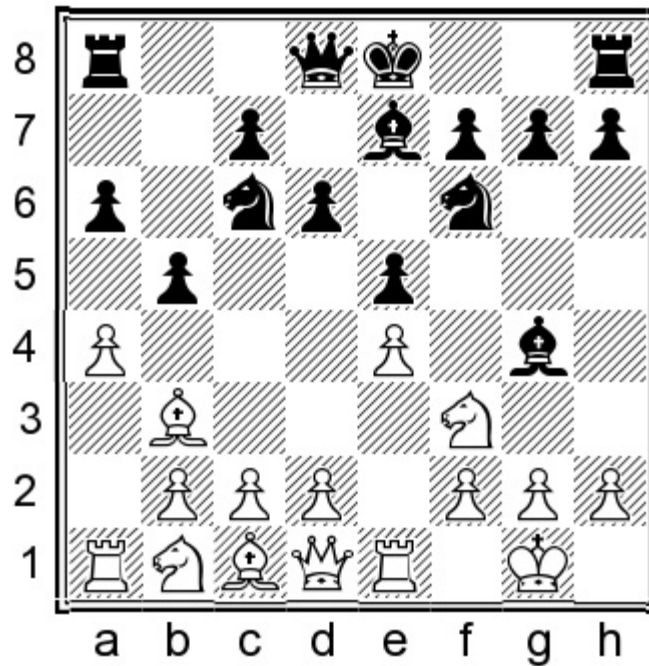
11...0-0 11...♖d4? 12.♙xf7+! ♕xf7 13.♗xe5+ when one nice detail is 13...♔g8 14.♗xg4 ♗xg4 15.c3! (15.♞xg4 ♗xc2 is good too but risks necessary complications) 15...♗e5 (15...♗xf2 16.♔xf2 and Black is in trouble; if the knight moves we have 17.♞b3+ and 16...♙h4+ 17.g3 is fine for White. It is going to be difficult for Black to exploit the position of our king with his own king stuck on g8, blocking his rook) 16.cxd4 ♞xd4 and White remains a pawn up.

Now we have a position from the Anti-Marshall, where Black is committed to having his bishop on g4.

Basically, if Black tries to get cheeky with his move-order, it's not going to work out for him; he's going to get a bad position.

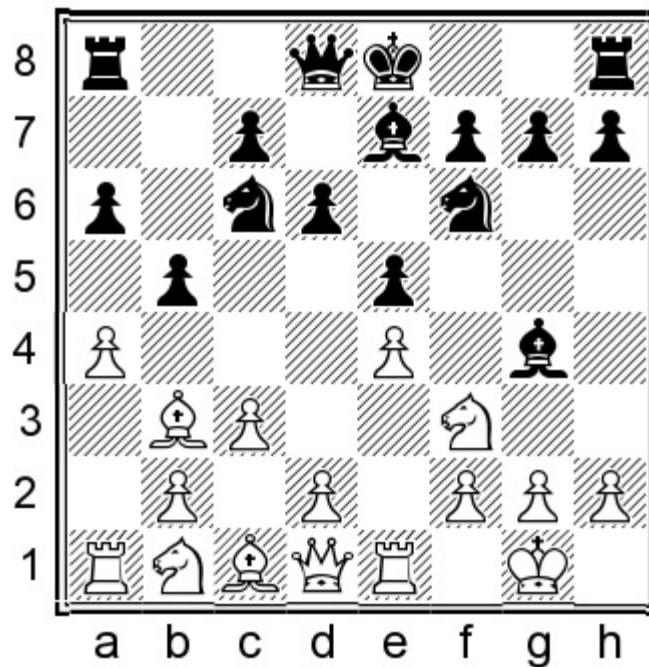
Black wants an independent move, which doesn't transpose to the Anti-Marshall lines:

8...♙g4



The only way to do it. This is a dual-purpose move. It deals with the threat of $9.\text{axb5}$ – because a8 is now defended – and it introduces the threat of $9...\text{♞d4}$. If we try to solve the problem with $9.\text{h3}$ he plays $9...\text{♞xf3}$ $10.\text{♚xf3}$ ♞d4 , hitting our queen and bishop, which is rather awkward for us.

9.c3



Our plan is to try and prove that having the bishop on g4 is more of a downside for Black than an advantage. As a general guideline for the Ruy Lopez, Black's bishop is likely to be misplaced on g4 if White hasn't played d2-d4 . White retains options of d2-d3 and ♞bd2 . The bishop will either have to be exchanged for the knight on f3 after we play h2-h3 , leaving us with the bishop pair, or it will have to retreat to h5 , when we can kick it back to a passive square with g2-g4 . chesstouring.com

This is the basic premise for White: we have provoked the bishop to g4 and now we hope he will lose time by having to go back to h5, or he will have to give it up for the knight.

This has been the battlefield in a lot of high-level games. A lot of white players navigate here to get their opponents out of the main theory and into a position where he has to be accurate to avoid ending up worse.

Black plays on the queenside

9...♖a5

If 9...b4, then 10.a5, fixing the pawn on a6. This idea should be a part of every white player's arsenal. 10...0-0 11.h3 ♗h5 (11...♗xf3 12.♕xf3 is much better for White, who has the bishop pair and will follow up with ♗c4, targeting the a-pawn) 12.g4 ♗g6 13.d3. Again, there is nothing to worry about with the apparent weakening of the kingside, as Black has no way to exploit it. We will follow up with ♜bd2, ♜f1 and ♜g3, after which the kingside will no longer look weak.

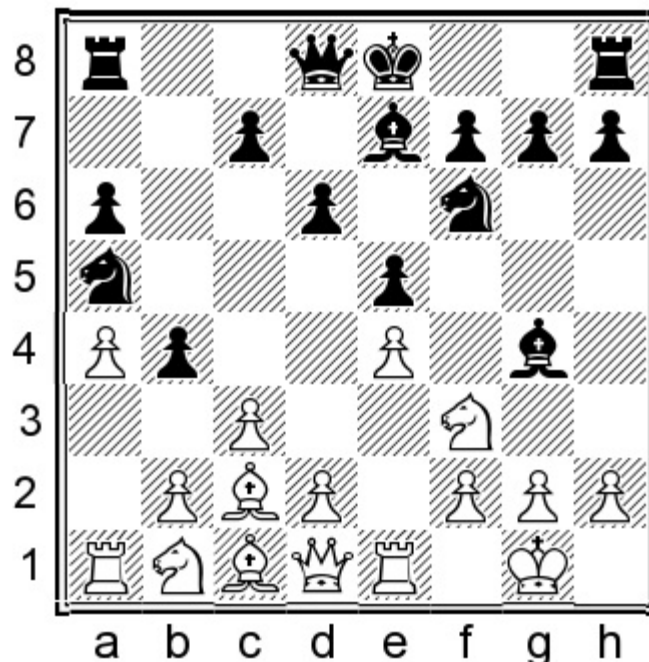
10.♗c2

10.♗a2 has two problems. Black can capture on a4 and if we can't recapture the pawn quickly it could become a problem for us. The other problem is that Black can play ...c7-c5 and ...c5-c4, blocking the bishop out of the game.

10...b4

If 10...0-0 11.b4! and Black ends up losing time with his knight.

10...c5 11.axb5! (a good time to take, just as Black was getting ready for 11...b4) 11...axb5 12.h3 ♗xf3 13.♕xf3 0-0 14.d3 with the usual advantage for White.

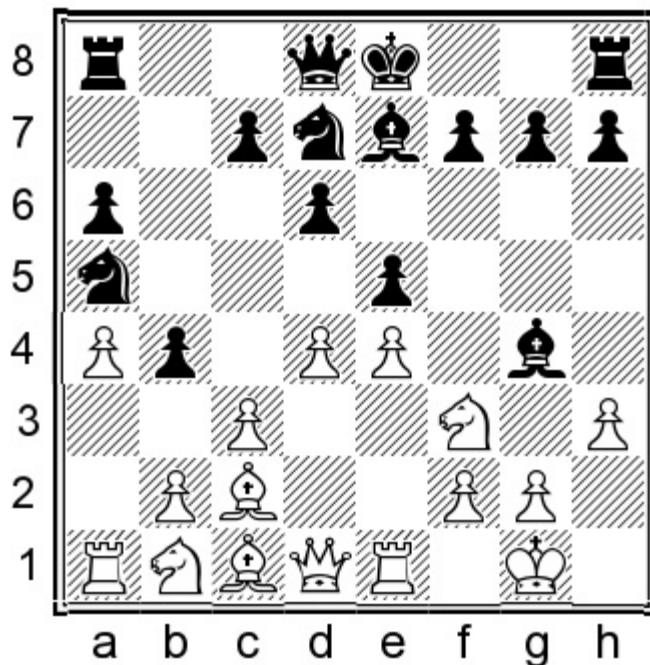


11.d4

Timed well, because Black has yet to play ...c7-c5.

If 11.cxb4 ♞c6 and the knight has a choice of capturing the b-pawn or moving to d4.

11...♞d7 12.h3



After 12...♞h5, 13.g4 ♞g6 is the typical way for White to proceed, as we have already seen in other lines.

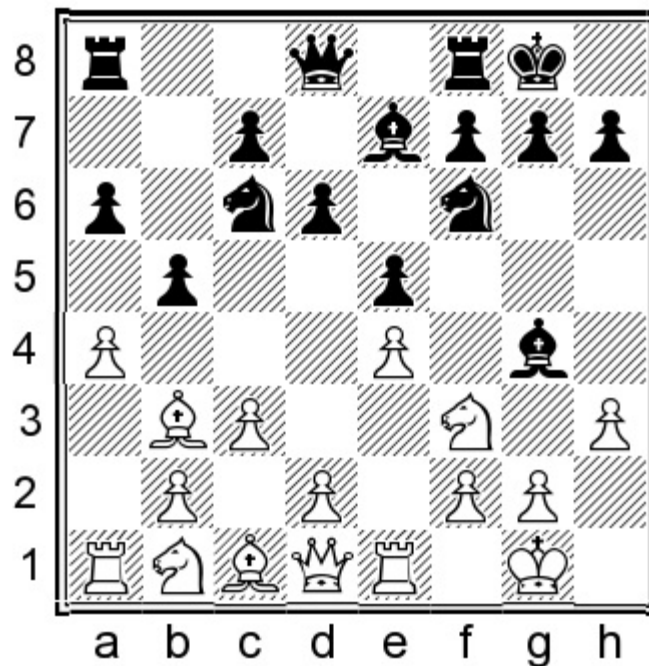
12...♞xf3 13.♚xf3 ♞g5 sees Black trying to prevent White from retaining the bishop pair, but there is a tactical problem: 14.♚g3 ♞xc1 15.♚xg7 and Black is in trouble. For example, 15...♚f6 16.♚xf6 ♞xf6 and White is a pawn up for nothing. After the alternative line 15...♞b2 16.♚xh8+ ♚e7 17.♚xd8+ ♚xd8 18.♚a2 Black doesn't end up with enough compensation.

We can even play for an advantage without the tactics with 14.d5. Now we are threatening 15.cxb4 as the knight can no longer go to c6. 14...♞xc1 15.♚xc1 b3 16.♞d3 ♞c5 17.♞d2 is a double-edged position. I can't say for certain that White is better here. Black has a grip on the queenside, but on the other hand his knights are immobile.

Additionally, after 13...♞g5 White can play 14.cxb4 ♞c6 15.dxe5 ♞dxe5 16.♚c3 and suddenly everything comes together for White. b4 is defended and f2-f4 is threatened.

Black castles

9...0-0 10.h3

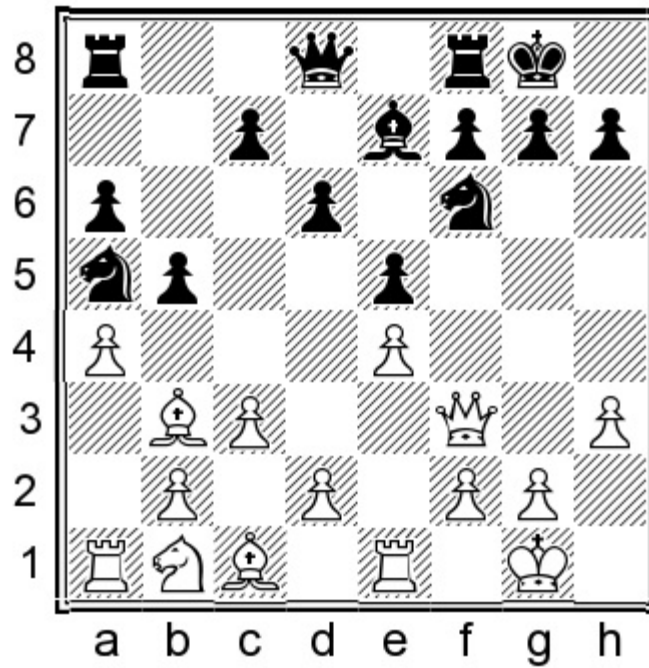


10...♙xf3

Given the problems experienced by Black after 10...♙h5, most strong players prefer to give up the bishop right away. It makes a lot of sense, especially as after 10...♙h5 Black ends up having to give up the bishop anyway, one way or another. So why waste a tempo going to h5 and then taking on f3? The immediate capture circumvents the loss of the tempo.

However, all things being equal, this is a huge achievement for White. For instance, after 11.♙xf3 b4 12.a5 I think, in a higher sense, White is already winning in this position. It might sound funny, but the bishop is coming to c4 to target the terrible weakness on a6 and if you had this position played out 1000 times between near-perfect players – or top chess engines – White would have a huge winning percentage.

11.♙xf3 ♘a5



This is the most popular line.

12. ♔c2

12. ♔a2?! bxa4 and Black is ready for 13... ♞b3, because White is not quite in time to play ♞bd2.

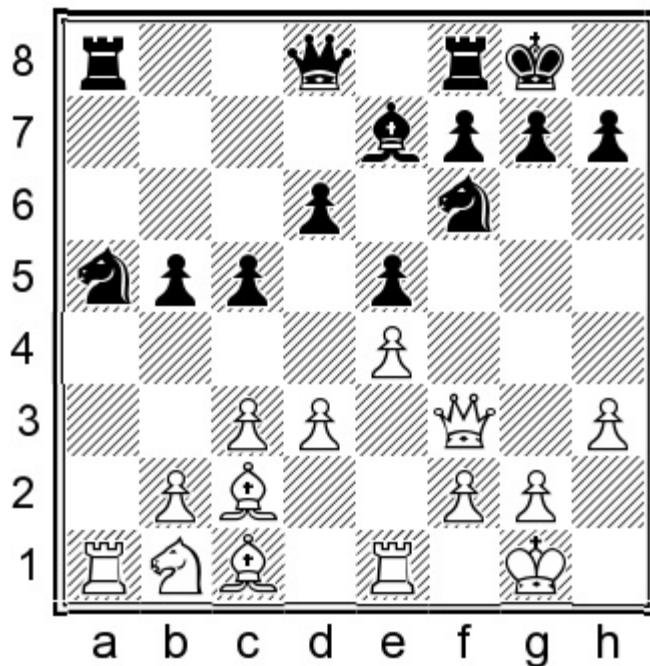
12...c5

12...b4 13.d4! and we get the centre, e.g. 13...c5 14.d5 and the knight on a5 is now really misplaced.

13.axb5

Once again, this capture is timed just as Black is getting ready to play 13...b4.

13...axb5 14.d3



The point is the white a-pawn is no longer shielding Black's knight, which will be half-hanging.

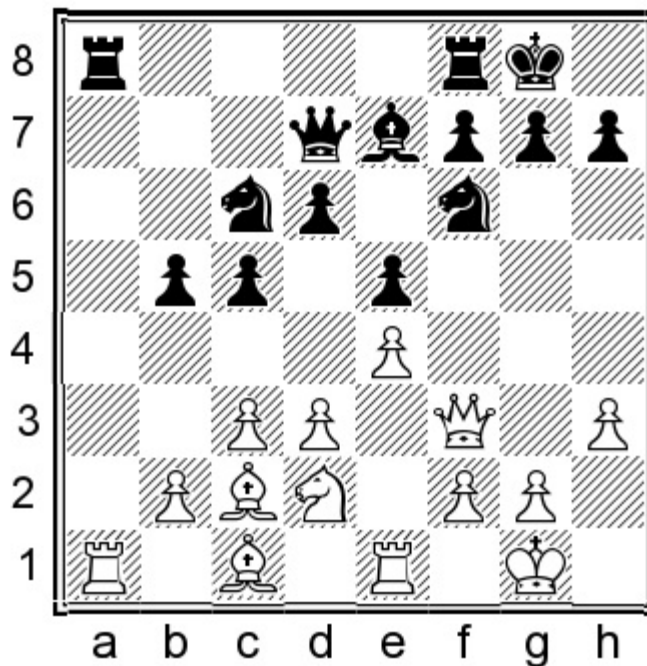
14...♔d7

The game Adams-Romanov, Germany Bundesliga 2015/16, continued with 14...b4 15.♘d2 ♘d7 16.♙f1 ♕g5 17.♘e3 ♘b6. White retained the initiative but the game was drawn in 38 moves.

The text move was played in Dominguez Perez-Adams, Baku 2015. I like this game because as Adams plays this line with both colours his play must be taken very seriously. Also, White gets to show a good idea.

Black's idea is to play 14...♘c6 but if he does it immediately then after 15.♖xa8 ♔xa8 the queen gets rather sidelined. After 14...♔d7 Black can recapture on a8 with the other rook, which is much more harmonious for him. 16.♔d1 is the most accurate for White here. His plan is ♘b1-d2-f1-g3 with good play.

15.♘d2 ♘c6



16. ♖b1!

Players who have studied the Closed Sicilian will recognize this idea. Very often, White plays a2-a4 to stop ...b7-b5, or will allow ...b7-b5 and then play a2-a3. Either way, at some point, an exchange of a-pawns will happen and there will be the stand-off of the rooks down the a-file, and then White plays ♖b1.

Here, it is the same idea. If 16. ♖xa8 ♜xa8 17. ♗f1 then 17... ♖a1 is not then end of the world for White but Black's rook is very annoying there.

We don't want to allow all of this counterplay. It is better for us to have two rooks on the board – one to defend b2, just in case; the other for active play.

Now that Black can no longer invade on a1 we are ready for the usual plans with ♗d2-f1-g3-f5. It is not so easy for Black to find the best squares for his pieces to counter this plan.

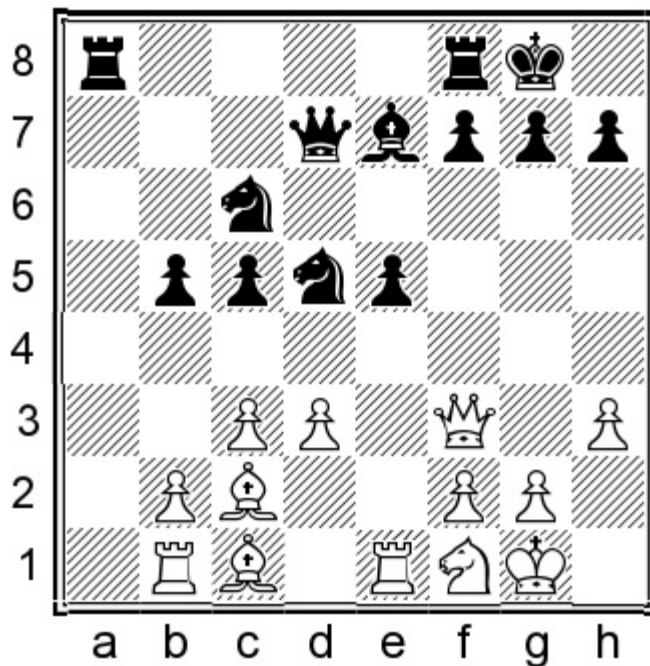
16...d5

The correct approach. He can't waste time and allow White to get everything he wants.

17. exd5 ♘xd5

17... ♙xd5 18. ♗e4 ♘xe4 19. dxe4 is good for White, as is 18. ♙b3 ♙xf3 19. ♗xf3 ♙d6 20. ♙g5 when Black should be rather worried by this endgame.

18. ♗f1



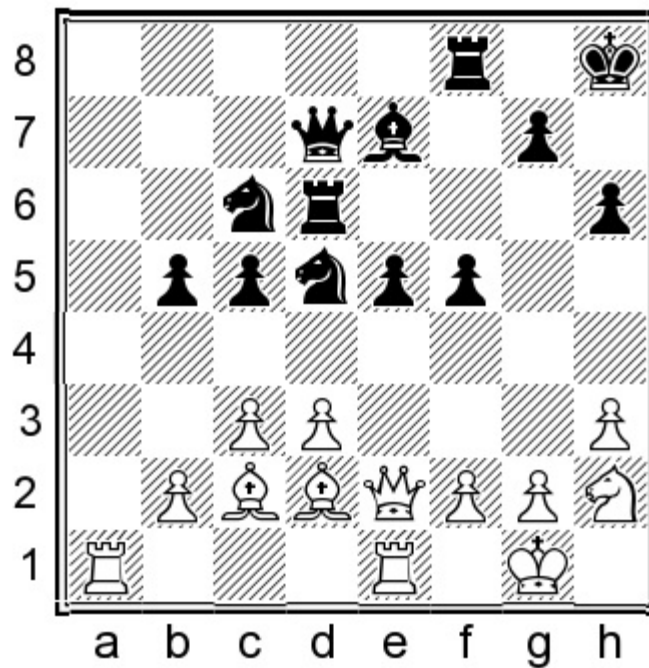
Black has got some of the centre, but once again White's bishops have enormous potential. Here, we can already look at ideas with d3-d4 and following up with ♕e4. The black knights, on light squares, will end up being vulnerable. This just shows how quickly the light-squared bishop, which appears passively placid on c2, can spring to life in these lines, either on b3 or along the b1-h7 diagonal.

18...♖h8 19.♗d2

I quite like the alternative move, 19.♘e3. Then if 19...♘xe3 20.♗xe3 and I think White's position is more pleasant. First of all, Black has weak pawns on c5 and e5. White can play ♖bd1 and maybe one day d3-d4. ♗c2-b3-d5 is also possible, putting pressure on the light squares, including f7.

As it went, White lost the thread of the game a little bit and ended up going back and forth with his pieces:

19...f5 20.♖a1 ♖ad8 21.♖a6 ♖f6 22.♖aa1 h6 23.♗h5 ♖df8 24.♘h2 ♖d6 25.♗e2



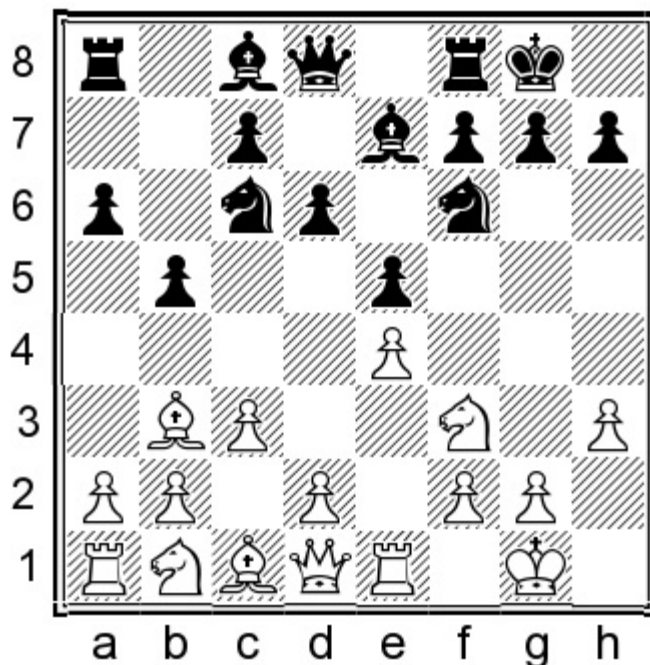
Here the game (Dominguez Perez-Adams, Baku 2015) was drawn, but the position is still fully playable for both sides.

A lot of these lines demonstrate an important balance. Black has a space advantage but White's bishops have great potential. Whenever you gain space, you do it by advancing pawns, but this always leaves weaknesses in your own ranks.

Here, for example, the f-pawn can only be defended by a piece, as h6 is loose afterg7-g6. The b-pawn is currently defended by nothing and if it comes under attack then it will have to move and that will leave more weaknesses; c4, for example. It is easy to see how much potential there is for Black to go wrong.

Classical main lines – introduction

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♙b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3



Now we come to the main lines.

The reason I am recommending 8.a4 against the Classical Variation is that it fits in with my Anti-Marshall repertoire. If you are a Ruy Lopez player with white then you should experiment with different lines.

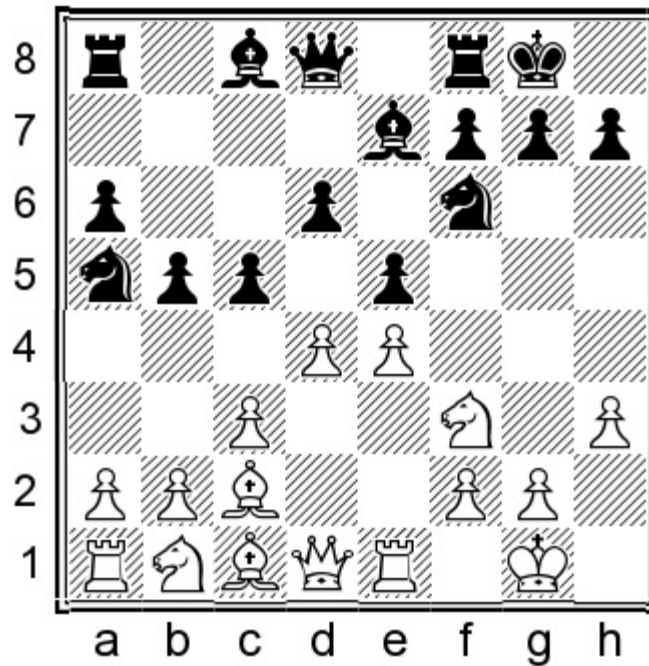
White can also try 9.d4 ♙g4, which is considered to be decent for Black, from a theoretical point of view. I think 9.h3 offers more chess and more chances to play for an advantage.

This position has been the richest battlefield for ideas throughout chess history. Top games with this variation were plentiful in the past, but these days we don't see them too often, as most players head for the Marshall Gambit with black. This is a little bit sad, but it is a sign of modern chess. It is considered that the Classical Variation gives White a little *too* much play and these days players try to find ways to neutralize White's advantage earlier on.

Chapter 3

Chigorin Variation: 9...♘a5 10.♙c2 c5 11.d4

9...♘a5 10.♙c2 c5 11.d4



We have seen this sort of position already. Black kicks the bishop back and then grabs space in the centre. The disadvantages are that his knight on a5 is misplaced and White is given the chance to play d2-d4 – which White should do, for sure. A lot of tension arises, with big decisions awaiting both players when it comes to finding the best ways to proceed.

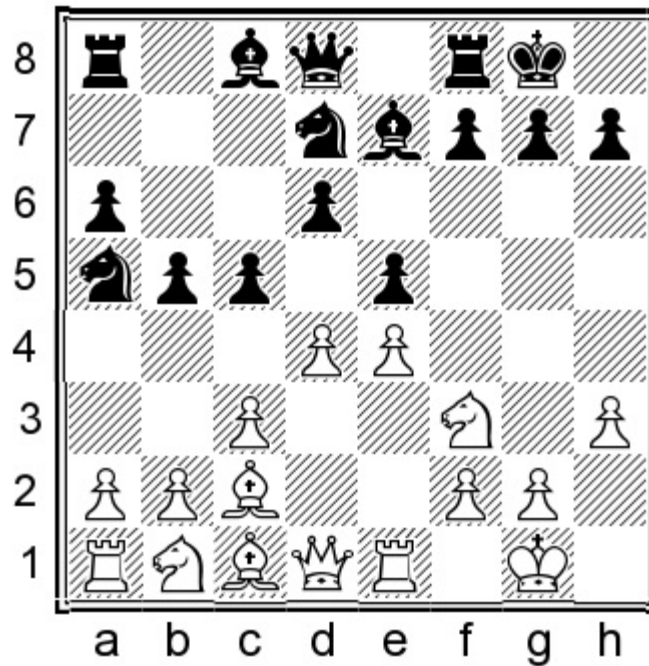
Mikhail Chigorin's variation is a tough nut to crack. It has been around a long time – since the turn of the 20th century, in fact.

Now Black has a slightly difficult decision to make. e5 is hanging, and he doesn't want to give up the centre just yet by trading pawns, as after 11...cxd4 12.cxd4 exd4 13.♘xd4, White, with an e4-pawn against Black's d6-pawn, has a certain advantage, especially as Black's knight is still out of the game on a5.

If Black defends e5 with 11...♘c6 then we play 12.d5 and Black is getting kicked around too much. For example, after 12...♘b8, just look how many moves he has spent with the knight, just to get it back to its starting square. It's far too many. White will play 13.a4 with threats.

Black has two main choices:

11...♘d7 is a formerly popular line which is considered a bit dubious these days, for multiple reasons.

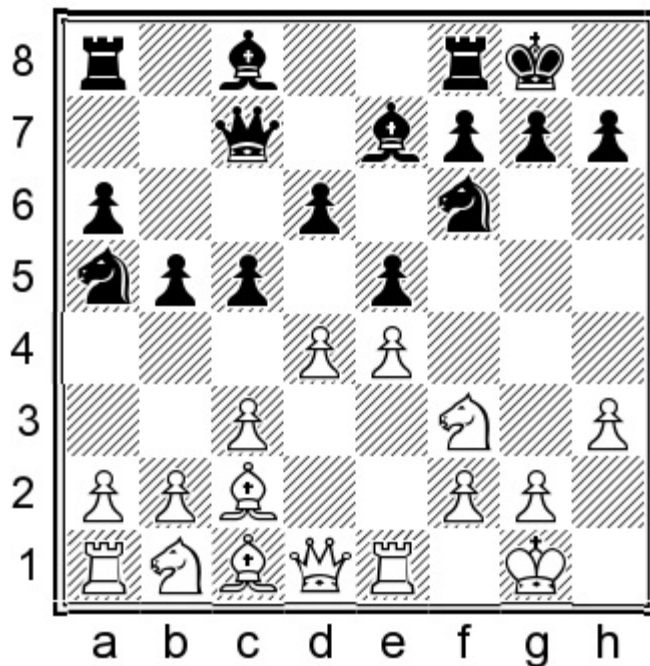


One is 12.d5, which is similar to lines we'll see after 11...♔c7.

12.♘bd2 is very sharp, because Black can go for a Benoni-type position with 12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♘c6 14.d5 ♘ce5. White plays 15.♘xe5 ♘xe5 16.f4 (or 16.a4 ♖b8 first) 16...♘g6 17.♘f3 and the problem for Black is that f4-f5 is a huge threat. There's a lot of theory here but it is still considered dubious for Black.

Fischer had a phase in his career when he liked to play 12.dxe5 and he won some model games with it. He would follow up with ♘bd2-f1-e3 and try to exploit the d5-square. However, these days the structure after 12.dxe5 dxe5 is considered okay for Black. So now we try not to surrender the centre with 12.dxe5.

11...♔c7

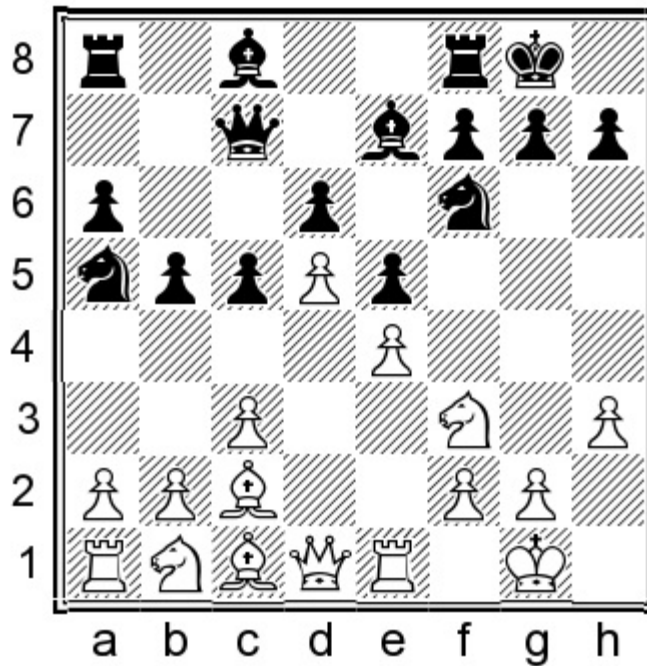


This is the main move. It is the most natural way to defend e5 while keeping the king's knight on a good square, f6, rather than the awkward square d7.

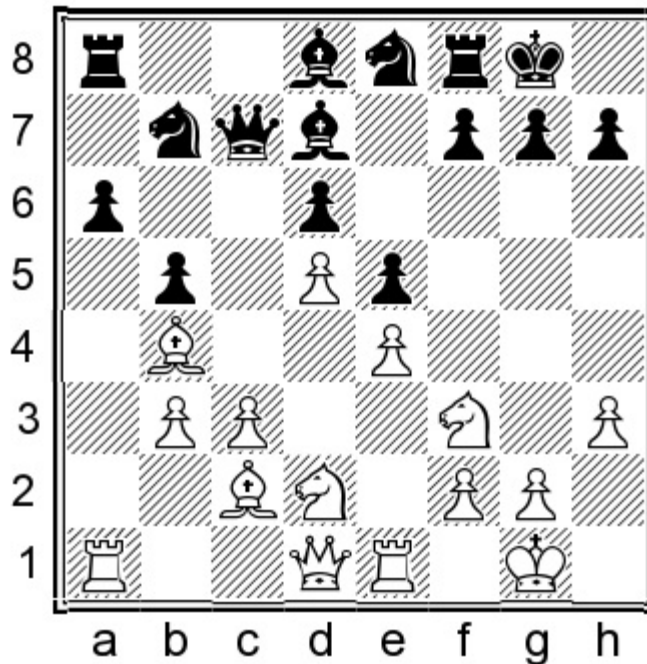
The most common way to play here is 12. ♖bd2 cxd4 13. cxd4 ♘c6 14. d5 ♘b4 15. ♕b1 a5 16. a3 ♘a6 17. b4, but this has a huge amount of theory.

12.d5

A very natural move. We get a King's Indian structure where Black has already advanced the queenside pawns. This is both a plus and a minus. On the plus side, Black has more space and doesn't have to deal with the standard King's Indian advance of b2-b4 and c2-c4-c5. On the other hand, his structure is vulnerable to a2-a4. The main problem is the knight on a5.



It is considered that Black should bring the knight back immediately. If instead he makes another developing move, 12...♙d7 for example, then we play 13.b3 and the knight has nowhere good to go. Sometimes it goes to a5-b7-d8 and f7, but that is a long journey and on f7 it doesn't look like an amazing piece. A model game in this line is Topalov-Ivanchuk, Sofia 2009: 13...c4 14.♙a3 (14.b4 ♘b7 15.a4) 14...♙d8 (14...♖fe8 15.♘xe5 dxe5 16.d6 ♙xd6 17.♙xd6) 15.♘bd2 ♘e8 16.♙b4 cxb3 17.axb3 ♘b7



18.♙e2 ♙b8 19.♙a3 ♙b6 20.b4 ♘c7 21.♙d3 a5 22.♘f1 axb4 23.cxb4 f6 (vacating the f7-square for the knight) 24.♘e3 g6 25.♙b2 ♖xa1 26.♖xa1 ♘d8 27.♘d2 ♘f7 28.♙h2 ♙d8 29.♖f1 ♙e7 30.♙c1 ♖a8 31.♘b1 ♙d4 32.♘c2 ♙b6 33.♘c3 (with pressure on the permanent weakness on b5) 33...f5 34.exf5 gxf5 35.f4 ♖c8 36.♙e3 ♙xe3 37.♙xe3 ♘e8 38.♙e2 ♙f6 39.♙d2 exf4 40.♘d4 ♙e5 41.♙xb5 f3+

42.♔g1 ♕xb5 43.♖cxb5 fxg2 44.♖xf5 ♖e4 45.♗c3 ♗h4 46.♗xg2+ and White won on move 81.

12...♗c4

The most popular move. Black avoids the a5-b7-d8-f7 route for his knight.

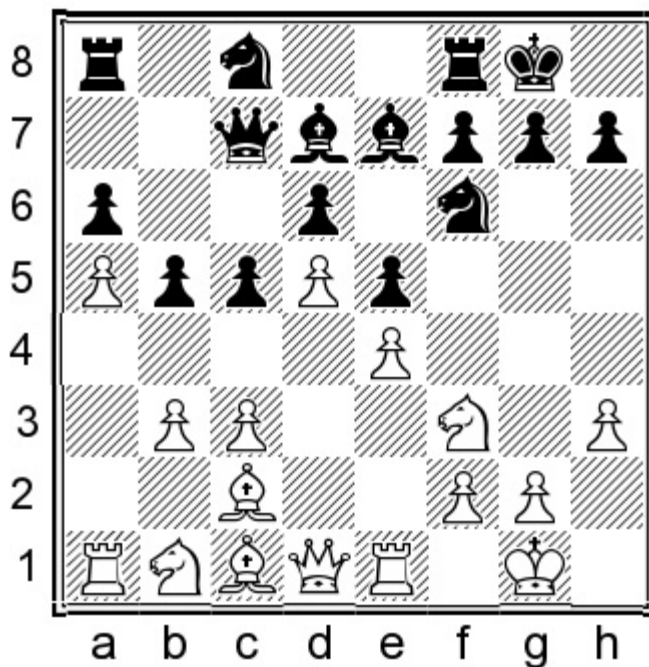
13.b3 ♗b6

Black's knight is still a target and will be kicked away by a2-a4-a5:

14.a4 ♗d7

14...bxa4 15.bxa4 a5 16.♗a3 ♗d7 17.♖b1.

15.a5 ♗c8

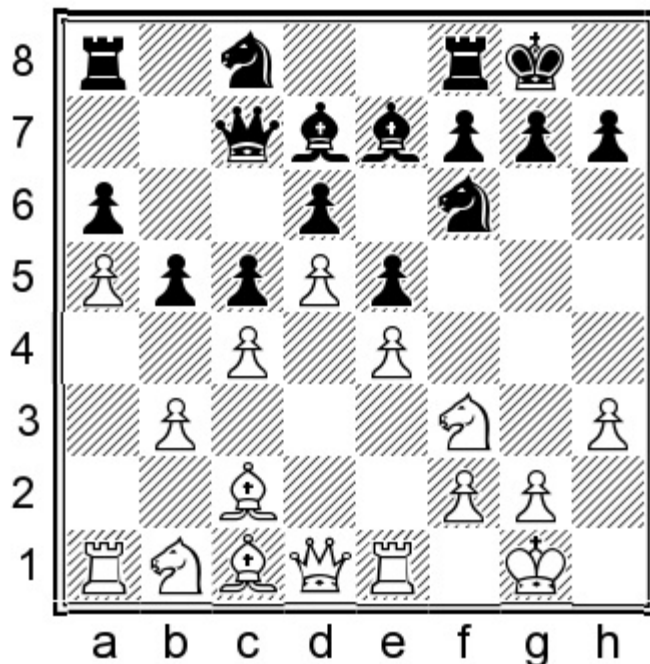


16.c4

The best move. At this point, White can no longer make progress on the queenside, but it is still possible to make progress on the kingside. We can do this because Black still has problems with his rather awkwardly-placed pieces and it will take time to readjust them in a way that will improve his coordination.

16.b4 c4 17.♗bd2 is an alternative, as in Kasparov-Ivanchuk, Prague 2002. The game was eventually drawn after 17...g6 (17...♗d8 18.♗f1 ♗e8 19.g4 ♗e7 20.♗g3 ♗h8 21.♗h2 ♗g8 22.♖g1 g6 23.♗e3 ♗g7 24.♗d2 ♗f6 25.♖f3 ½-½ Fressinet-Sokolov, Selfoss 2003) 18.♗f1 ♗h5 19.♗h6 ♖e8 (19...♗g7 20.♗g3 ♗d8 21.♖d2 ♗h8 22.♖ad1 f6 23.♗h2 ♗e7 ½-½ Reutsky-Farakhov, Fasel Jamala 2003) 20.♖d2 ♗f8 21.♗g3!? (21.g4) 21...♗xg3 22.fxg3 ♗e7 23.♖f1±.

I guess one reason for preferring b3-b4 over c3-c4 is to protect a5, thereby freeing the ♖a1 for action on the queenside. c3-c4 on the other hand gives added support to d5, which can be useful later on if Black tries to free himself with ...f7-f5 at some point.



With 16.c4, White defends d5 again in case the e-pawn ever gets traded off. The queen's knight also gets access to c3. Maybe one day the bishop can use the a1-h8 diagonal; if we play f2-f4, for example.

16...g6

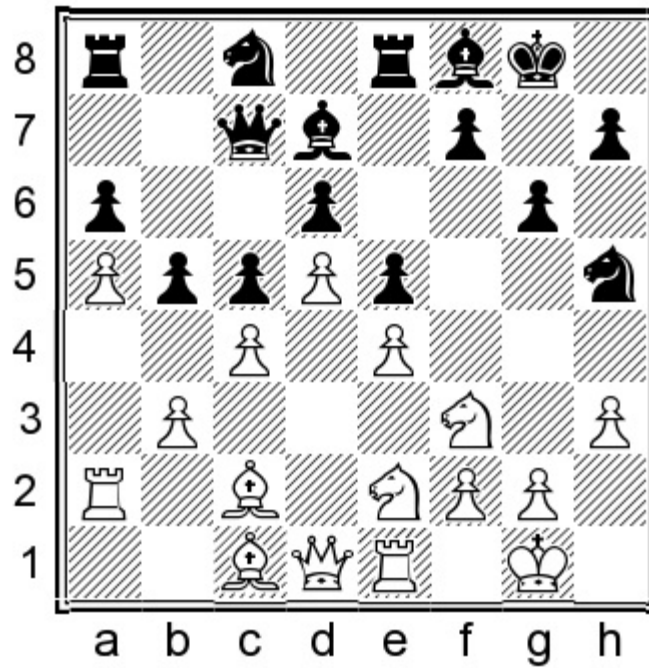
Open the b-file with ...bxc4 or close the queenside with ...b5-b4 ? Black decided to wait with that decision in the game Topalov-Shirov, Linares 2004, which we will now look at.

16...b4 was seen in another model game. After 17.♘bd2 g6 18.♘f1 ♘h5 19.♙h6 ♖e8 20.♚d2 ♙f8 21.g4! ♘g7 (21...♙xh6 22.♚xh6 ♘f4 23.♘g5) 22.♘3h2 ♚d8 (22...♘e7 23.f4) 23.f4 exf4 24.♚xf4 ♚e7 25.♘f3 f6 26.♘g3 ♖d8 27.♖f1 ♘e8 28.♙xf8 ♚xf8 29.e5 dxe5 30.♘xe5 ♘cd6 31.♖ae1 ♚g7 32.♘d3 ♖ac8 33.♚f2 f5 34.♘e5 ♘f6 35.♘xd7 ♖xd7 36.gxf5 g5 37.♖e6 White won on move 46 in Adams-Kasimdzhanov, Tripoli 2004. I have spoken to Rustam and he won't play this line as Black any more, because of this game. I can understand why; when you lose a game without being allowed a single shred of counterplay, it really turns you off from a line.

17.♘c3 ♘h5 18.♘e2 ♖e8

With 18...f5 Black can attack White's structure but this turns out badly for him, although he is cramped and it is not easy to suggest good alternatives.

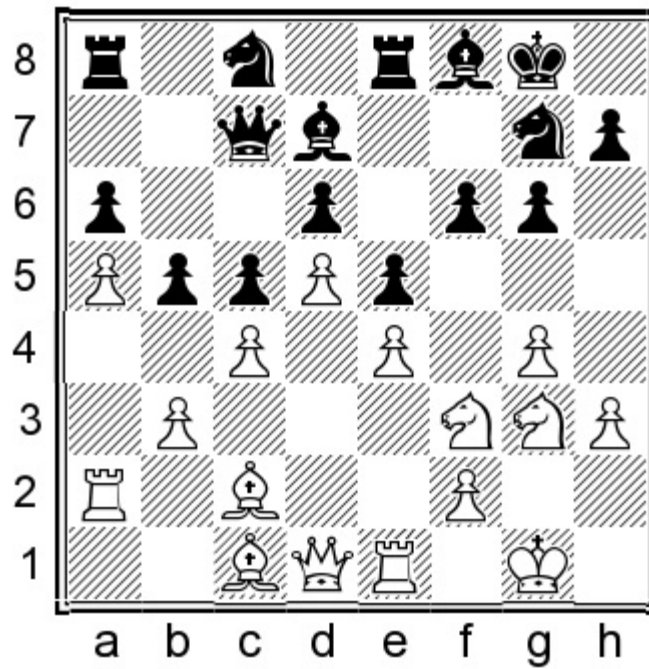
19.♖a2 ♙f8



20.g4!

A recurring theme. White increases his attacking chances against the black king.

20...♖g7 21.♗g3 f6



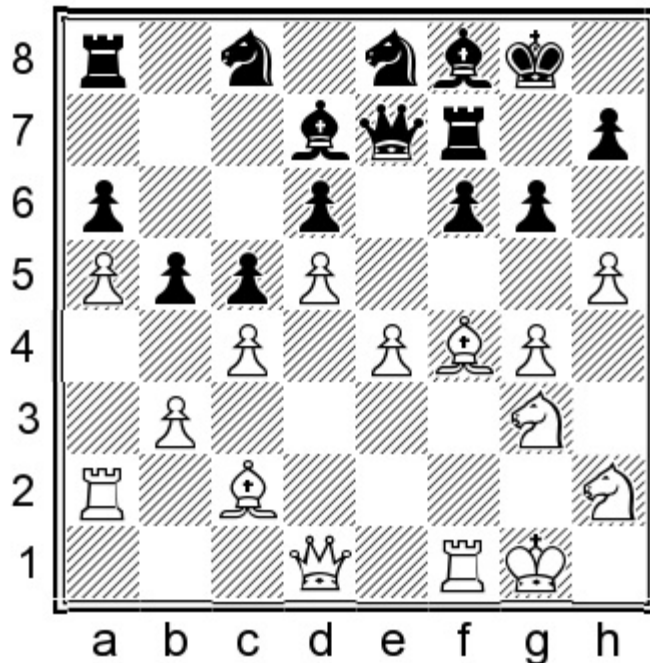
22.♗h2!

Setting up f2-f4 while 22...g5 now leaves a gaping hole on f5.

22...♖e7 23.h4 ♜f7 24.f4 exf4

Black cannot allow the pawn roller to continue with f4-f5, g4-g5 and h4-h5.

25.♙xf4 ♚d8 26.♞f1 ♛e7 27.h5 ♘e8



28.♙d3!

With Black being so cramped, it is easy for White to find moves to steadily increase the pressure.

28...♙g7 29.♜g2 ♛f8 30.♛c1 bxc4

Black is desperately fishing for counterplay but it is very hard for him to achieve anything.

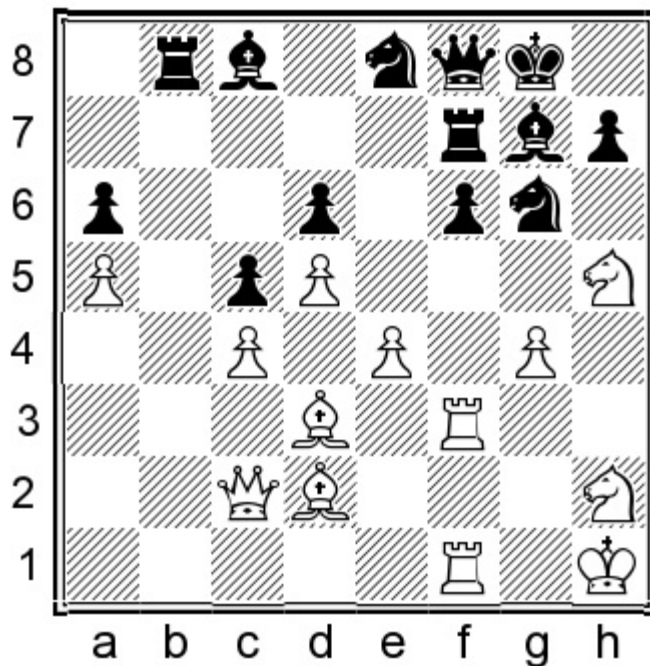
31.bxc4 ♜b8 32.♞af2 ♜b3 33.♞f3 ♘e7 34.♙d2 ♙c8 35.♛c2 ♜b8

Black's quest for counterplay has not been successful.

36.♜h1 gxh5

It is very difficult for Black to defend. It is easy to criticize a move like this, but alternatives are few and far between.

37.♘xh5 ♘g6



Black is desperately trying to get the knight to e5.

38.e5!!

Perfectly timed.

38...dxe5

Unfortunately for Black, getting the knight on e5 no longer has the desired effect due to the open lines. After 38... Nxe5 39. Qxh7+ Kh8 40. R3h3 White will win.

39.Qxg6 hxg6 40.Wxg6 e4 41.Rh3 Rfb7

The desperate 41...f5 won't distract White from victory: 42. $\text{N}xg7$ $\text{R}xg7$ 43. $\text{W}h5$ $\text{N}f6$ 44. $\text{W}h8+$ $\text{K}f7$ 45. $\text{W}xf8+$ $\text{K}xf8$ 46. $\text{Q}h6$ is crushing.

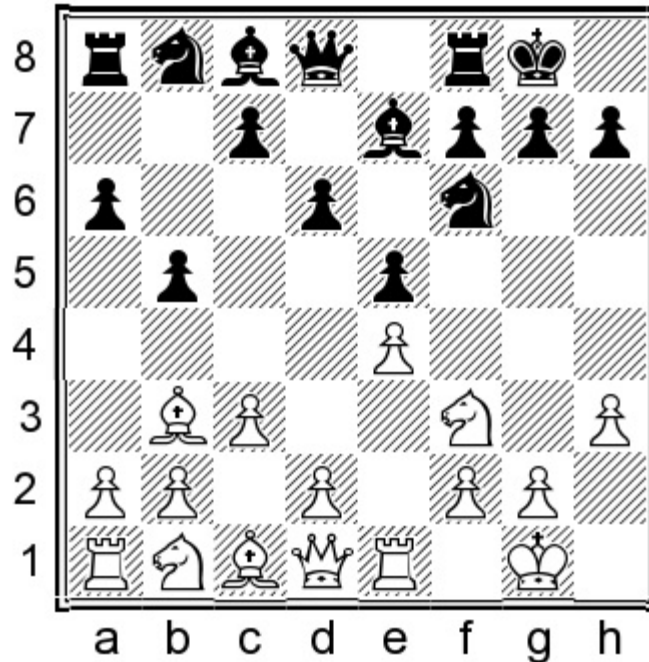
42.Nf4 Rb1 43.Wh7+ Kf7 44.Wh5+ Kg8 45.Ng6

1-0 Topalov-Shirov, Linares 2004. After 45... Wd6 , 46. Qf4 is coming next.

Chapter 4

Breyer Variation: 9...♞b8

9...♞b8



This variation is named after Gyula Breyer, the free-thinking Hungarian grandmaster and hypermodernist.

Black's key idea is to reroute the queen's knight from c6 to d7, via d8. The idea may look odd but this is a very solid system which has been used extensively by the likes of Boris Spassky, Lajos Portisch and even Magnus Carlsen.

In the Chigorin, Black gains time by attacking the bishop with his knight, but his knight ends up on a bad square. In the Breyer, which is characterised by 9...♞b8, he gets his knight to a good square but it takes him two more moves to get there.

On d7 the knight is very harmoniously placed. It defends e5 and after ...♞b7 the bishop is no longer obstructed.

10.d4

White grabs the centre, naturally. When we get the chance, we shouldn't turn it down.

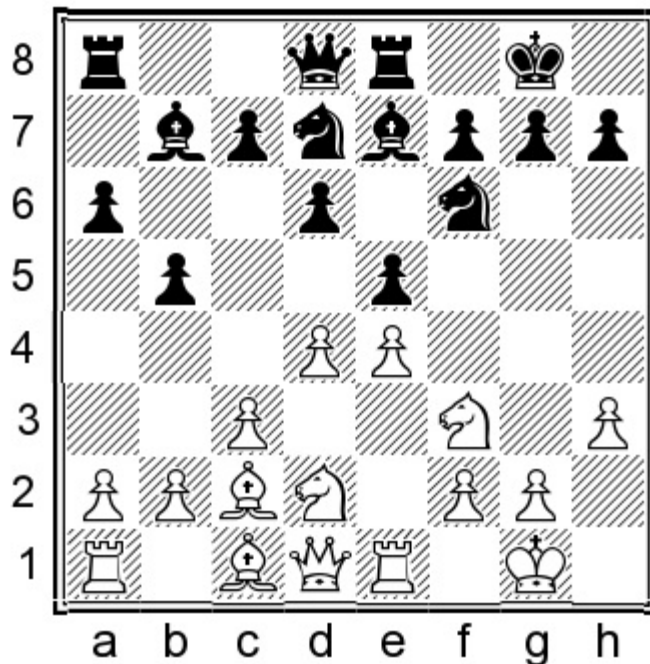
10...♞bd7 11.♞bd2 ♞b7

This has a point. e4 is kind of weak and we can't play 12.♞f1 because of 12...♞xe4.

11...h6 12.♞f1 and 13.♞g3 leads to a good position for White.

If 11...♖e8?? 12.♗xf7+ ♕xf7 13.♘g5+ ♕g8 14.♘e6 wins the queen.

12.♗c2 ♖e8

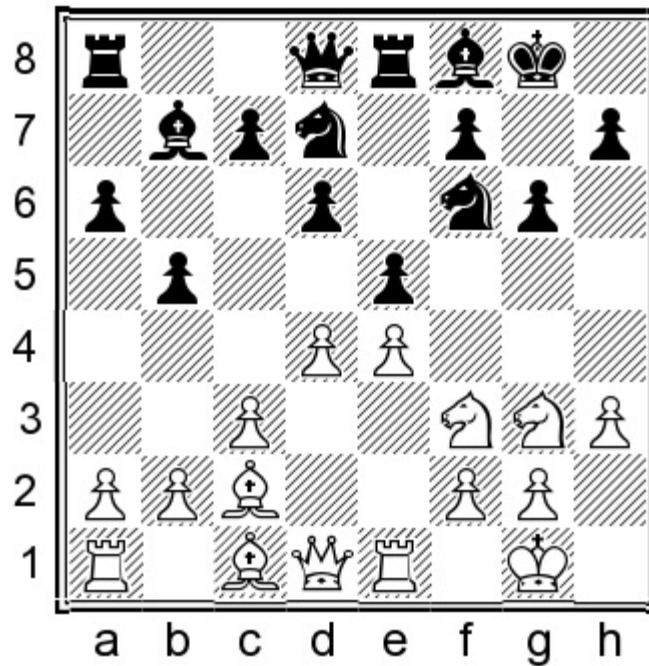


Neither side is doing anything too combative at the moment. They are both trying to complete their development and get the set-up that they want. It's a manoeuvring game.

White is planning ♘f1, now that e4 is protected, and Black's plan is ...g7-g6, ...♗f8 and ...♗g7. He is using a lot of time, it is true; he has spent two extra tempi on his knight and now the bishop is using two more tempi to get to g7. On the other hand, White has played ♗f1-b5-a4-c2 and ♘bd2-f1-g3 will also take time.

13.♘f1 ♗f8 14.♘g3 g6

The first crucial moment, where White can choose different set-ups.



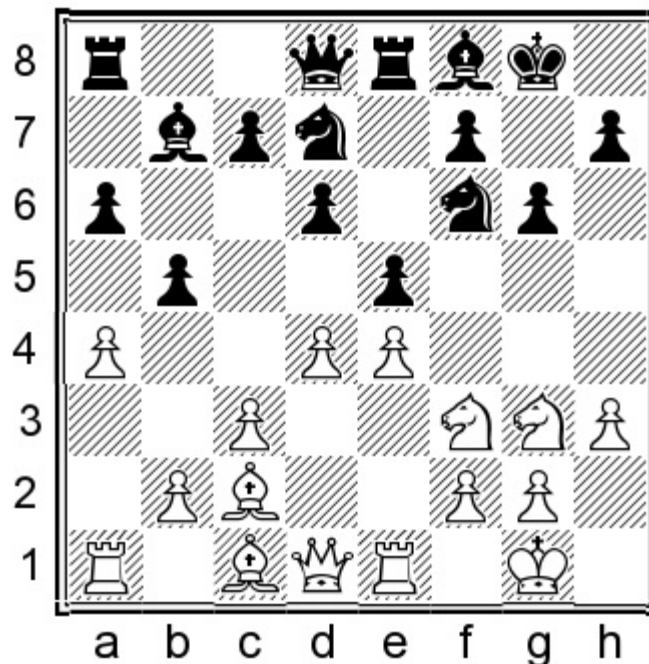
One is to play 15.b3 and follow up with d4-d5 and c3-c4, securing the pawn centre.

If we play 15.d5 immediately, unfortunately Black can play 15...c6 and we can't defend d5 with c3-c4, so we have to trade it off with 16.dxc6 ♖xc6 and Black gets a good Sicilian-type structure. Black will be ready to play ...d6-d5 at some point.

15.♗g5 is another way of playing. This pin can become annoying, especially if White follows up with ♙d2. Black often kicks it back: 15...h6 16.♗d2 (16.♗e3? exd4 17.cxd4 ♘xe4).

The move I am recommending is the old main line:

15.a4



There are two approaches here for Black:

1) 15...♙g7

Black keeps developing. White will then put pressure on b5 with

16.♙d3,

forcing Black to play

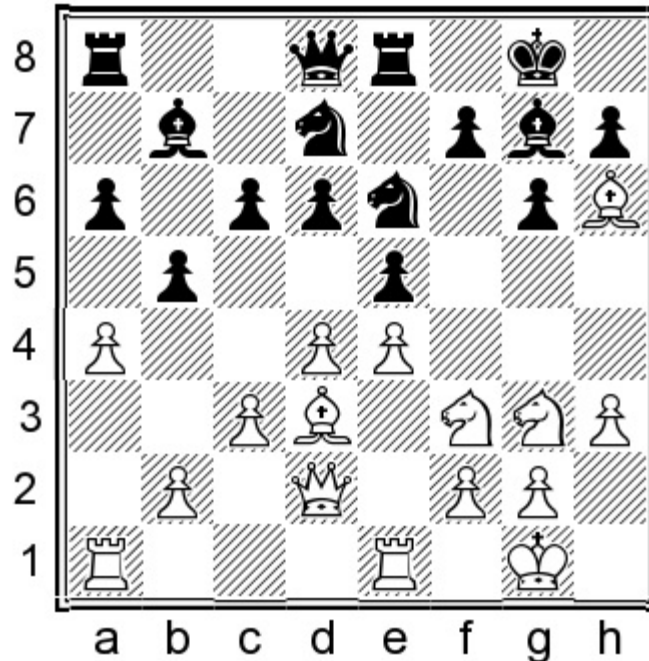
16...c6.

Black stops the d4-d5 plans for White but his bishop is a little blocked in. This is not a bad set-up for Black.

Ivan Saric beat his grandmaster opponent Valeriy Neverov in a smooth way. This game is an excellent demonstration of White's ideas: ♖d1, ♙f1 and the idea of b2-b4 especially – and, at the right moment, to take on b5.

Although Black's position is not tragic, it is difficult for him to find easy moves.

17.♙g5 ♜f8 18.♚d2 ♜e6 19.♙h6 ♜d7



20.♖ed1

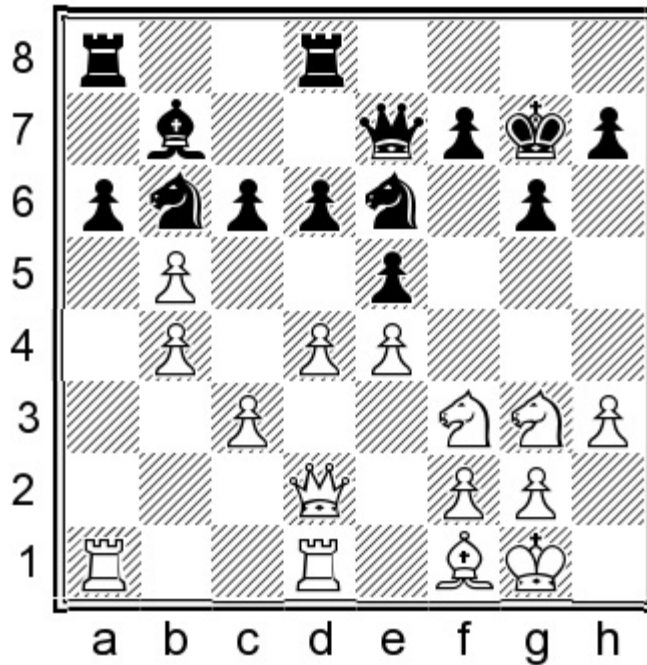
This is not the only move for White. Alternatives also give him the better game:

A) 20.axb5 axb5 21.♖xa8 ♙xa8 22.♙xg7 ♜xg7 23.♖a1 ♙b7 24.♙f1 ♚c7 25.♖d1 ♜b6 26.b3 f6 27.♜e1 d5 28.exd5 ♜xd5 29.c4 bxc4 30.bxc4 ♜df4 31.dxe5 fxe5 32.♚d7+ ♖e7 33.♚xc7 ♜xc7 34.♜f3 c5

35. ♖xe5 and 1-0 (53) Radjabov-Sasikiran, Skopje 2015;

B) 20. ♘c2 ♘xh6 21. ♖xh6 ♖f6 22. ♖ad1 ♖ad8 23. d5 cxd5 24. exd5 ♖f4 25. ♖xf4 ♗xf4 26. ♗e4 ♘xd5 27. axb5 axb5 28. ♗xd6 ♖e6 29. ♗e4 f5 30. ♗fg5 ♖e7 31. g3 ♘xe4 32. ♘xe4 fxe4 33. gxf4 ♖f8 34. ♗xe4 ♖xf4 35. b4 ♗f6 36. ♗d6 ♖f3 37. ♗xb5 ♖xh3 38. c4 ♖h4 39. ♗d6 and 1-0 (49) Carlsen-Baramidze, Baden-Baden 2015.

20... ♖e7 21. ♘f1 ♖ed8 22. ♘g7 ♗xg7 23. b4 ♗b6 24. axb5



24... cxb5

Taking back with the a-pawn is also good for White: 24... axb5 25. ♖xa8 and now we get the advantage no matter how Black recaptures: 25... ♗xa8 26. ♖e3 or 25... ♘xa8 26. ♖e3 ♗d7 27. ♖a1, or 25... ♖xa8 26. dxe5 dxe5 27. ♗xe5.

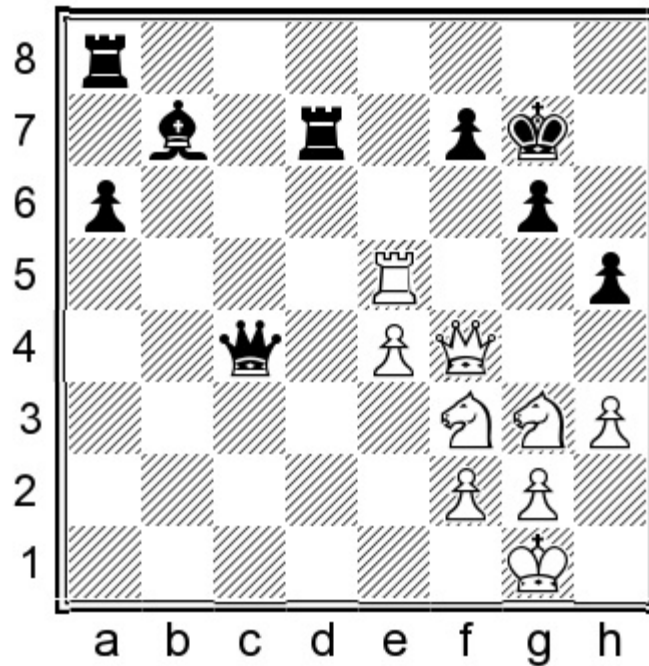
25. ♖e3 ♗d7 26. c4 bxc4 27. ♘xc4 ♗f4

Releasing some of the tension doesn't help either: 27... exd4 28. ♗xd4 ♗xd4 29. ♖xd4 ♗e5 30. ♘f1 d5 31. exd5.

28. ♖a5 h5 29. dxe5 dxe5 30. ♖xd7 ♖xd7

30... ♖xd7 31. ♖xe5.

31. ♖xe5 ♖xb4 32. ♖xf4 ♖xc4



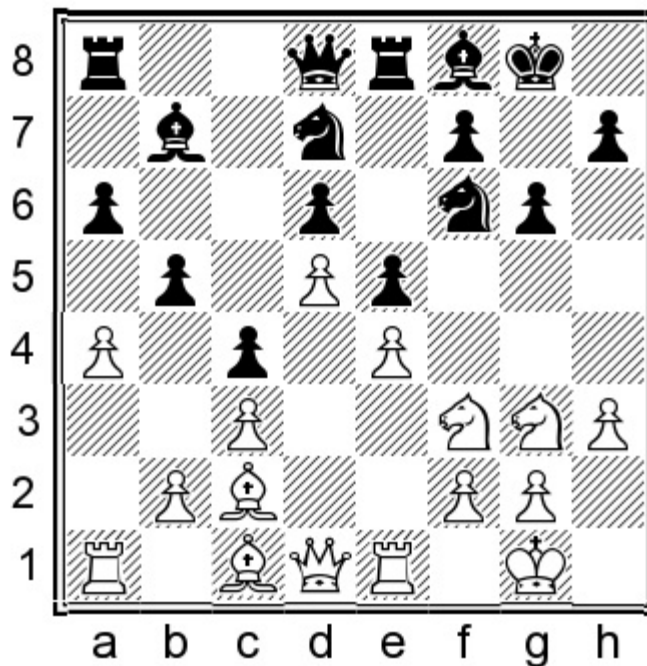
33. ♖xh5+

And Black resigned in Saric-Neverov, Skopje 2019, because of 33...gxf5 34. ♕g5+ ♔h7 35. ♕xh5+ ♔g7 36. ♕g4+ or 34...♔f8 35. ♕h6+ ♔g8 36. ♖g5 checkmate.

2) 15...c5 16.d5

Now we get a King's Indian type of pawn structure. Following 16...♗g7 17.b3 we are going to put pressure on b5 with ♗d3. It's actually very difficult for Black to deal with this pressure. It is no surprise that after 17...bxa4 18.♖xa4 White would have a serious advantage. That's why the best move is considered to be:

16...c4



This structure makes sense for Black when b3 is weakened. If the white pawn was on a2, the structure would not be good for Black because I can play b2-b3 and after ...cxb3 I can take back with the a-pawn. With the pawn on a4, I would have to reply to ...cxb3 with ♙xb3 and I am left with a potentially backward and weak c-pawn.

17. ♙g5

It is useful to provoke ...h7-h6, especially here. Black's king often comes under attack.

It is worth remembering that Black is trying to achieve ...d6-d5, which is another reason why we play 17. ♙g5.

You wouldn't think it, with such a closed structure, but because the bishop on b7 is out the game and we have a space advantage, we have the possibility to play on both sides of the board. We can create an attack on the kingside and we'll see how Vishy created one against Magnus:

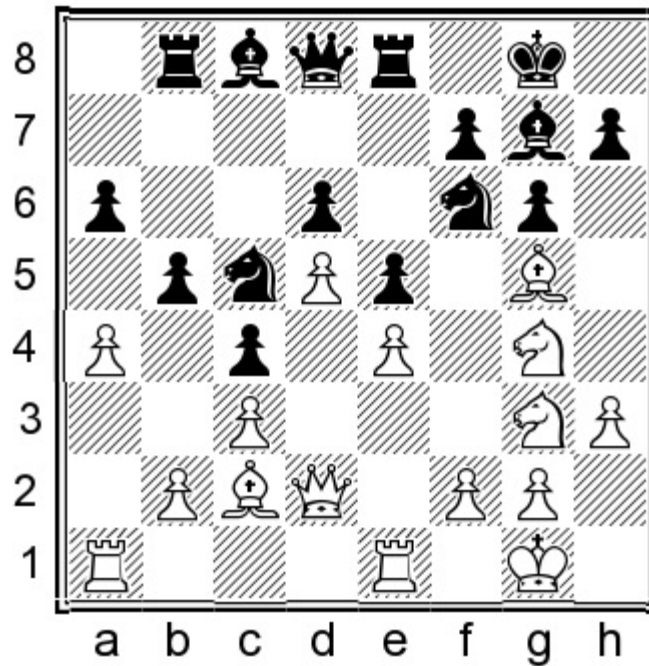
17... ♙g7

Black doesn't gain a tempo by hitting our bishop, as we will get it back very quickly: 17...h6 18. ♙e3 ♙g7 19. ♖d2 ♖h7 (or 19...h5 20. ♙h6 and White is attacking) 20. b3 cxb3 21. ♙xb3 ♘c5 22. ♙xc5 (22. ♙c2 ♘xa4 23. ♙xa4 bxa4 24. ♖xa4) 22...dxc5 23. ♖eb1 and White is doing well.

18. ♖d2 ♖b8 19. ♘h2 ♙c8

If Black moves his pieces to the queenside we can play for f2-f4: 19... ♖c7 20. ♖f1! ♘c5 21. f4 exf4 22. ♖xf4 ♘cd7 23. ♖h1 with the initiative.

20. ♘g4 ♘c5



21. ♖h6+ ♗xh6

Our rooks become very active if Black moves his king away with 21...♔f8: 22.♖e3! ♗d7 23.axb5 axb5 24.♖f3 ♕e7 25.♖a7 ♖a8 26.♘g4 ♖xa7 27.♘xf6.

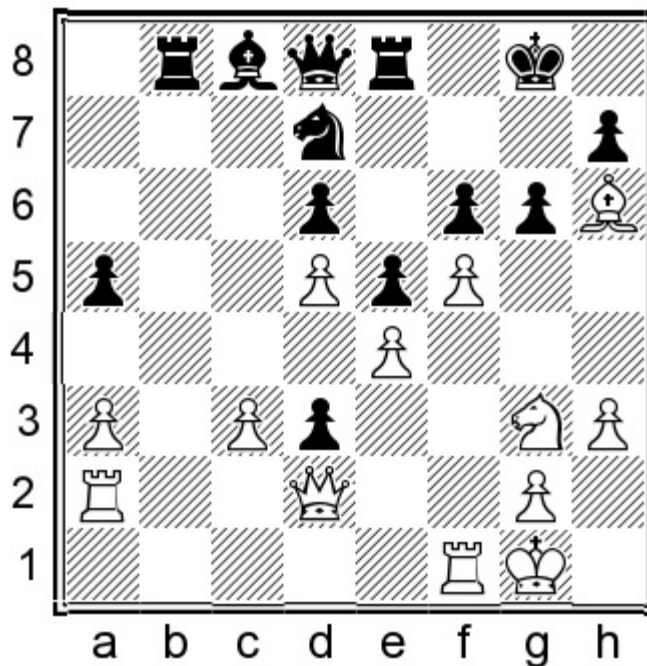
22. ♗xh6 bxa4 23.♖a2 a3 24.bxa3 ♘fd7 25.f4 a5

Trying to take the pressure off with 25...exf4 doesn't work out because of 26.♕xf4 ♘e5 27.♗g5.

26. ♖f1 f6 27.f5 ♘d3

Seeking activity; 27...g5 allows 28.♘h5.

28. ♗xd3 cxd3



29. ♖d1! ♜e7 30. ♝af2 ♜f7 31. ♚xd3 ♞c5 32. ♞f3 ♜a6 33. ♞g4 g5

33... ♜xf1 34. fxg6 only helps White.

34. h4 ♜xf1 35. ♝xf1 ♞d7 36. hxg5 fxg5 37. ♞h5 ♜h8 38. f6 ♝g8 39. ♜g7+ ♝fxg7 40. fxg7+ ♞xg7
41. ♞f5 ♞g6 42. ♞xg6 ♝xg6 43. ♞e7 ♜g7 44. ♞xg6 ♜xg6 45. ♝f8 a4 46. c4 h5 47. ♜f2

1-0 Anand-Carlsen, Stavanger 2015.

By some strange move-order they ended up in this position, and it was *not* Carlsen's plan to get here. You could see it on his face; he wasn't happy to get this position from the opening.

Where did Carlsen go wrong? It's one of this funny situations where Black plays a line which has been played thousands of times. It's a playable variation and he doesn't make any serious mistakes, but ends up losing.

I once had sort of the same thing. I played this line as Black against a strong grandmaster. I immediately regretted it when I got it over the board. The exact same thing happened: he played ♞d2, ♞h2, ♝f1 and f2-f4. My position started to fall apart and I was quickly losing.

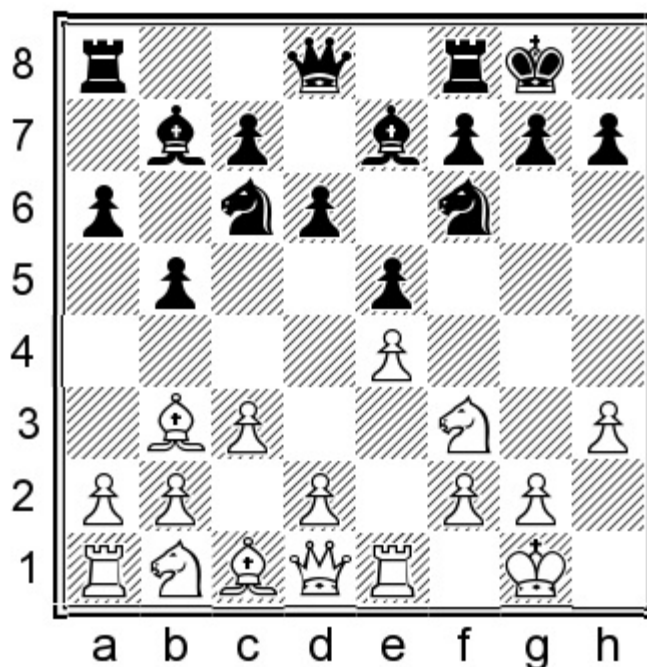
It is possible that the position after 18. ♞d2 is already very dangerous for Black. It might sound a bit strange that Black makes normal moves and ends up in a bad position, but there are strategic risks from the opening. He has a bad bishop on b7, White has a space advantage and an attack on the kingside. That's just the way the position is!

I would say to White: be careful. Just because you have a good position it doesn't mean you can do whatever you want. You have to be very accurate to prove the advantage.

Chapter 5

Zaitsev Variation: 9...♙b7

9...♙b7



Sometimes called the Flohr-Zaitsev Variation, this line was popularized by Anatoly Karpov. Karpov used it in several extremely tense games in his World Championship matches against Garry Kasparov. Igor Zaitsev, who took up the variation's theoretical baton from Salo Flohr, was one of Karpov's trainers.

It is a challenging variation and both sides need to know a lot of theory to avoid ending up worse.

It is worth pointing out that some players prefer to reach the Zaitsev Variation with the 9...♞e8 move-order. The reason is that after 9...♙b7, White has the move 10.d3. As we have pointed out in other lines, this makes sense when the bishop is committed to b7. White will then play ♘b1-d2-f1-g3 and Black will very often have to play ...♙c8 to cover f5. After 9...♞e8, if White plays 10.d3, suddenly Black can develop the bishop to e6 and claim to have saved a tempo.

For us, it doesn't matter, as in both cases I'm recommending 10.d4.

10.d4 ♞e8

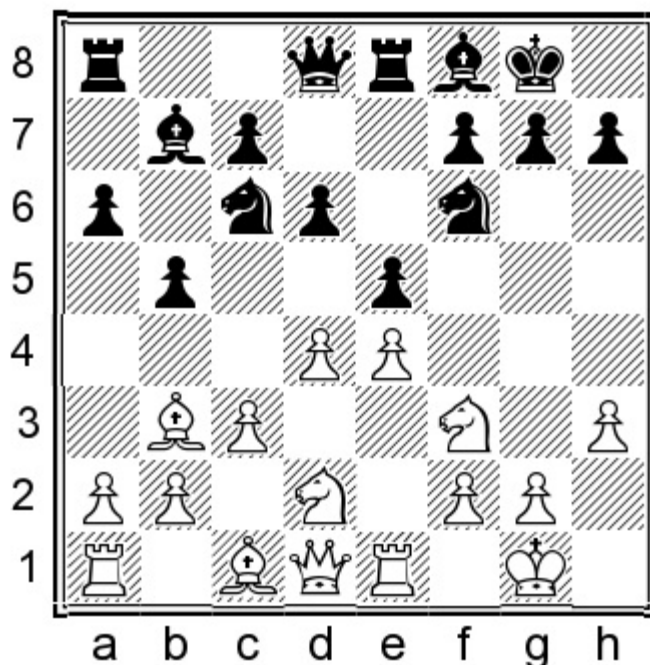
It is going to be a battle for the e4-pawn. If Black plays the Smyslov System with 10...h6 we just play 11.♘bd2 ♞e8 12.♘f1 ♙f8 13.♘g3 and we get everything we want. We can call this 'the poor man's Zaitsev' for Black!

The other thing about the Zaitsev which is important to know is that White has a draw in hand. A very famous draw too, which has been seen in thousands of games: 11.♘g5 ♞f8 12.♘f3 ♞e8 with a

repetition of moves. So if you are ever in a must-draw situation, this is a good one to be aware of. Karpov allowed this many times as Black. He was a big Zaitsev player and it was one of the big theoretical battlegrounds in his matches with Kasparov. It has been around for decades and has always been one of Black's most reliable options in the Classical Ruy Lopez.

Generally speaking, Black is not afraid of the repetition. White should only take the draw if a half-point is specifically required to win a tournament or achieve a title norm.

11. ♖bd2 ♕f8



12.a4

The old main line, which has always been considered one of the most critical lines. The reason I want to look at this is that it leads to the most exciting, chaotic and tactical lines.

12. ♖f1 isn't so good here because of 12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♖a5, which is good for Black.

12. ♖g5 ♜e7 leaves Black's rook in a funny place on e7, but the knight just gets kicked back with ...h7-h6.

12. ♕c2 g6 13.d5 ♖b8 14.b3 c6 15.c4 ♖bd7 could transpose to our other lines.

12.d5 ♖b8 and the knight will again reroute itself to d7.

12...h6

Black wants to challenge the centre. He wants to do this by playing ...exd4 cxd4 and then ...♖b4, giving up the centre to put pressure on e4. Unfortunately, if he plays 12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♖b4 here, then 14. ♖g5 is a strong move: there is no comfortable way of defending f7. If 14...♜e7 then 15. ♖xf7 ♜xf7 16. ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 17. ♚b3+ d5 18.e5 is considered good for White.

This is the reason Black plays 12...h6.

White is now confronted with the same problem. How do I develop my knight?

13.♗c2

Planning d4-d5 and ♗b3, to target the b-pawn. So Black takes in the centre.

13...exd4 14.cxd4 ♖b4 15.♗b1

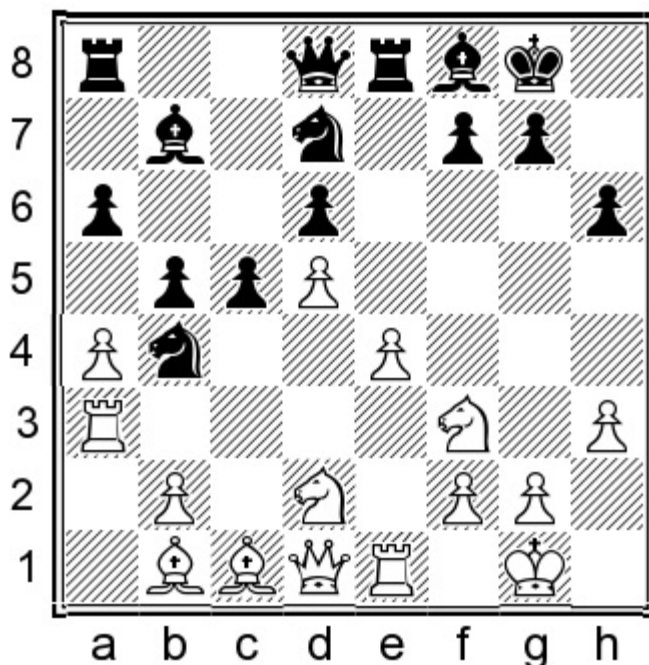
White has wasted a lot of time with this bishop, but on the other hand we have the centre, which Black has to challenge.

15...c5 16.d5 ♞d7

Black has two ideas: ...c5-c4 and ...♞c5 or ...f7-f5, breaking up the centre.

17.♞a3

17.♞f1 f5 18.exf5 ♞xe1 19.♞xe1 ♗xd5 and Black is doing well. His kingside may look a little shaky, but he has many good factors in his position, including the uncontested knight on b4, the strong bishop and f6 for his other knight.



Now White is ready to play ♞h2 and ♞g3. White's bishops look passive but after the knight moves from d2 they are going to be sweeping across the board. If the e-pawn ever disappears then White will have two bishops bearing down on Black's king.

Black has two main moves here:

1) 17...f5

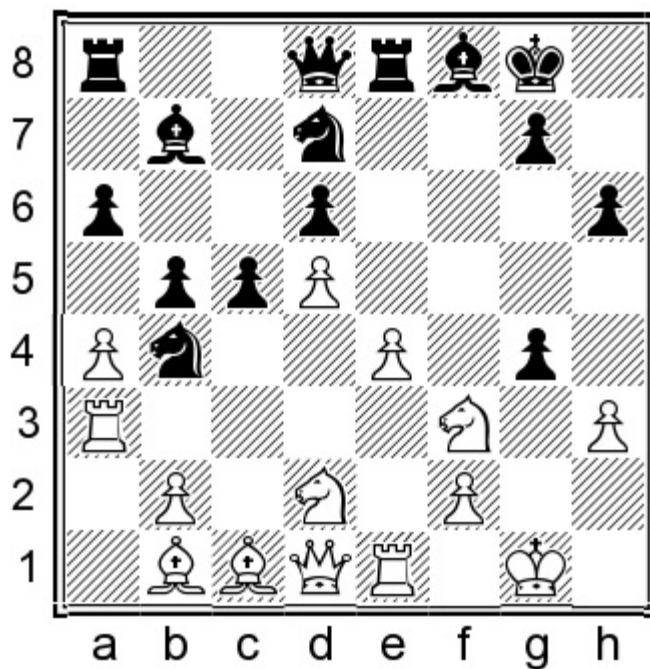
The sharpest – putting pressure on White’s centre to avoid being simply worse.

18.g4!?

This is more challenging than 18.exf5.

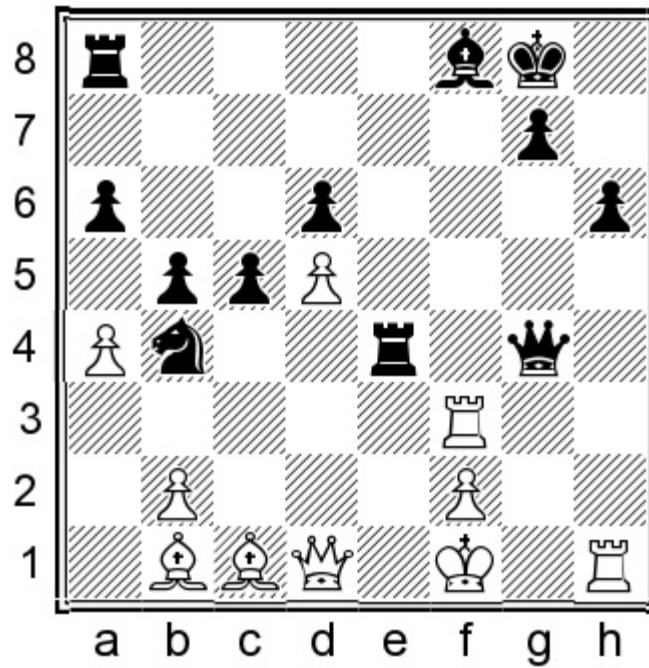
18...fxg4

The pawn’s influence is felt after 18...fxe4 19.♖xe4 ♘xd5 20.g5!.



19.♗h2!

In the following game, White played differently and still won: 19.hxg4 ♖e5 20.g5 ♘c8 21.♗xe5 ♙xg5+ 22.♞g3 ♙xe5 23.♗f3 ♙h5 24.♙g2 ♘g4 25.♞h1 ♘xf3+ 26.♞xf3 ♙g4+ 27.♙f1 ♞xe4

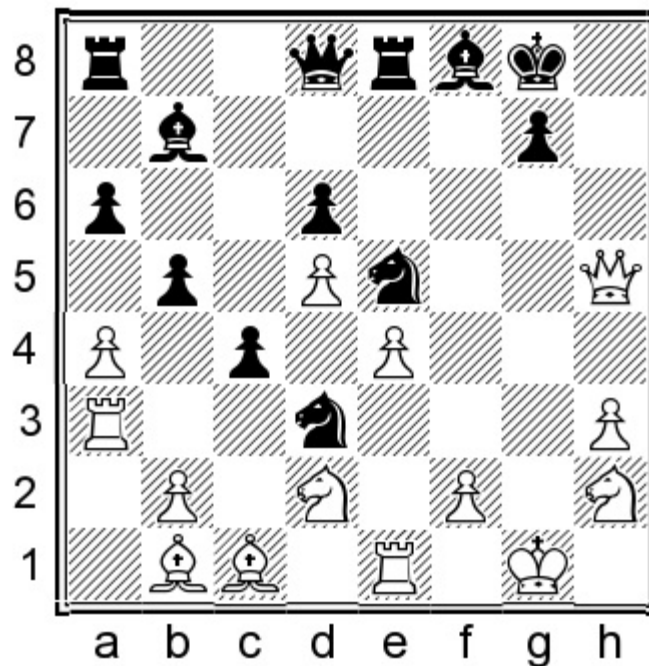


28. ♕xh6 ♖a7 29. ♕d2 ♜f7 30. ♕xe4 ♛xe4 31. ♜fh3 ♜f5 32. ♕xb4 ♛xb4 33. ♛e2 ♛c4 34. ♛xc4 bxc4 35. ♜h5 1-0 (46) Kasimdzhanov-Ivanchuk, Turin 2006.

19...c4

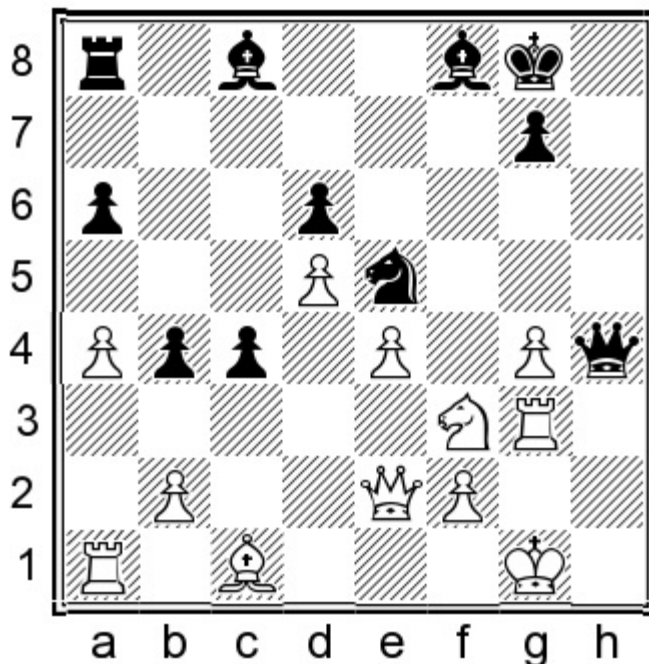
This is better than 19...gxh3 20. ♜g3!.

20. ♘xg4 h5 21. ♘h2 ♘e5 22. ♛xh5 ♘bd3



23. ♜xd3!

This is my recommendation, though the alternative capture also worked well for Ivan Saric in the following highly complicated game: 23.♙xd3 b4 (or 23...♗xd3 24.♗df3 ♗xe1 25.♗g5) 24.♖a1 ♗xd3 25.♖e3 ♖e5 26.♜e2 ♖g5+ 27.♔h1 ♜f6 28.♗g4 ♖xg4 29.hxg4 ♜h4+ 30.♔g1 ♗e5 31.♖g3 ♙c8 32.♗f3



32...♜xg3+ 33.fxg3 ♙xg4 34.♙f4 ♗xf3+ 35.♔f2 g5 36.♜xc4 ♖a7 37.e5 ♖h7 38.e6 ♖h2+ 39.♔e3 gxf4+ 40.gxf4 ♖h3 41.♔f2 ♗d2 42.♜xb4 ♖f3+ 43.♔e1 ♗f1 44.♖a3 ♗e3 45.♔d2 ♗xd5 46.♜d4 ♖f1 47.♜e4 ♖f2+ 48.♔c1 ♖f1+ 49.♔c2 ♖f2+ 50.♔b1 ♖f1+ 51.♔c2 ♖f2+ 52.♔b3 ♖f3+ 53.♔a2 ♗b4+ 54.♜xb4 ♙xe6+ 55.♔b1 ♙f5+ 56.♔c1 ♖f1+ 57.♔d2 d5 58.♖g3+ ♔f7 59.♜b7+ 1-0 Saric-Bromberger, Germany Bundesliga 2017/18.

23...♗xd3

Or 23...cxd3 24.f4 ♗f7 25.♙xd3 ♜b6+ 26.♔g2 ♗h6 27.♗df3.

24.♗df3 ♗xe1

24...♙e7 (to keep the knight from g5) 25.♙xd3 cxd3 26.♗g4 leads to a winning attack for White as well.

25.♗g5

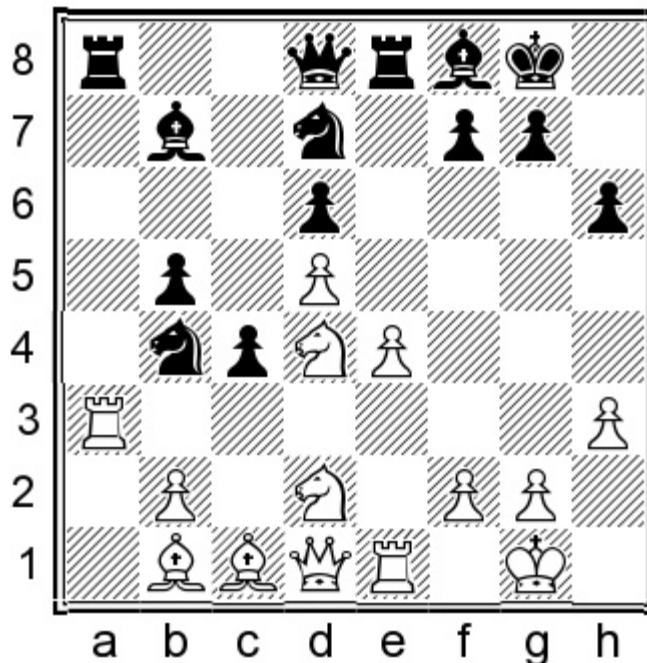
And White wins.

2) 17...c4

With the idea of ...♗c5 and ...♗d3, which would be great for Black. The position is very tense and has themes similar to a Benoni.

The downside of the text is that we can play:

18. axb5 axb5 19. ♖d4



Occupying the d4-square and attacking b5. This line was played in a game between Vishy Anand and Mickey Adams in the World Championship Tournament in San Luis, 2005:

19... ♙b6!?

This is a rare move, which entails a great deal of risk. Adams must still have been in his preparation, but Vishy had prepared even deeper.

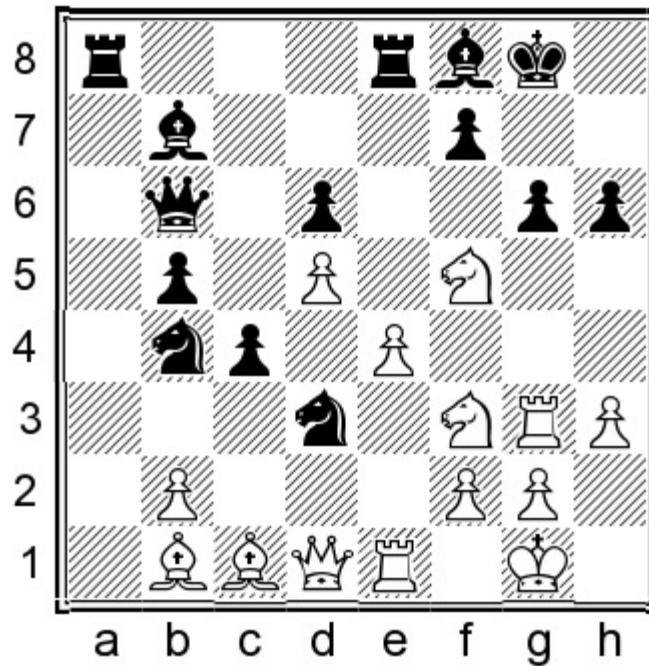
20. ♗f5 ♗e5

It is tempting for Black to stop the rook swinging across to the kingside, but the trade doesn't turn out well for him: 20... ♖xa3 21. bxa3 ♗d3 22. ♗xd3 cxd3 23. ♗xh6+! gxh6 24. ♙g4+ is winning for White.

21. ♖g3 g6

The dangers of this line were demonstrated in this correspondence game: 21... ♔h7? 22. ♗f3 ♗bd3 23. ♗e3 ♙a5 24. ♗xd3 ♗xd3 25. ♗xh6! gxh6 26. ♗g5+! ♔g6 27. ♙h5+!! 1-0 Marcinkiewicz-Zundel, cr 2002. If 27... ♔xh5 28. ♗h7! ♙xe1+ 29. ♔h2 and White wins.

22. ♗f3 ♗ed3



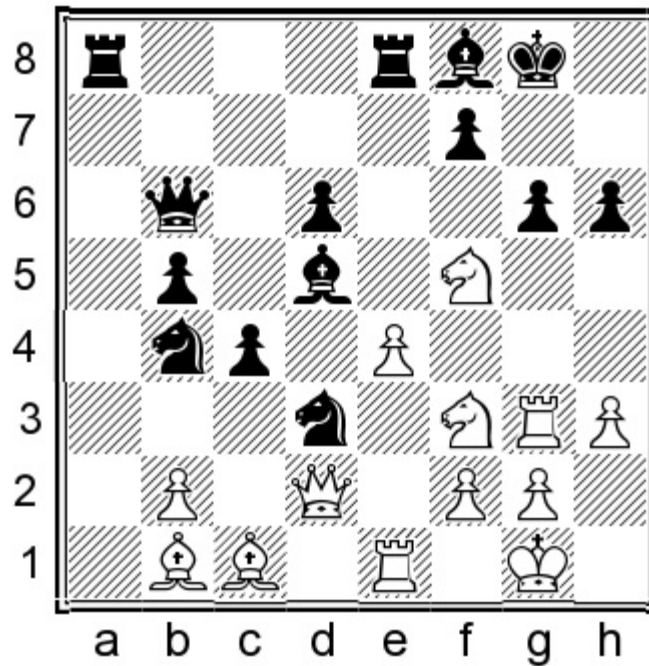
Combative, but Black's kingside starts to look seriously undefended, especially as the queen has gone to b6.

23. ♔d2!

This was a novelty, originally prepared by Vishy to play against Kamsky. 23. ♘e3 was the normal choice before this game, after which Black brought the queen back to defend, with 23... ♔d8.

23... ♘xd5?

Played after a long think. Adams knew he was facing deep preparation. He should have taken his chance in the huge complications after 23... ♞xe1!?



24. ♖xh6+!

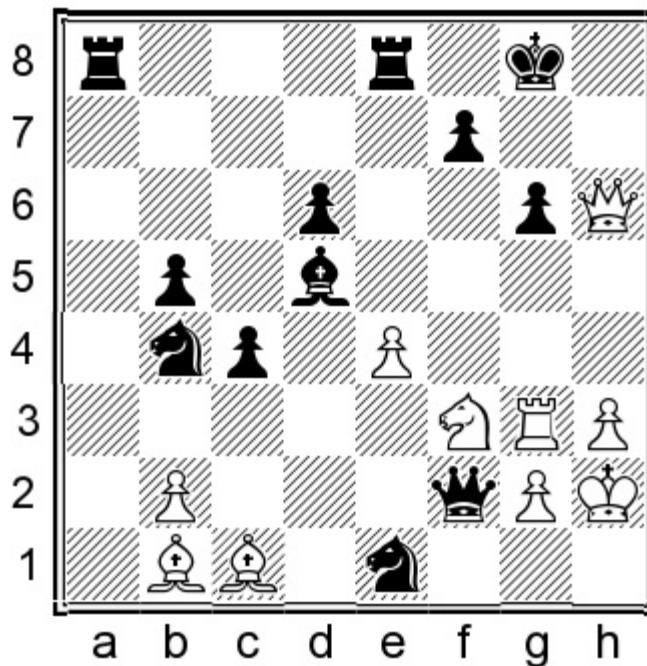
White is not afraid to sacrifice, but then again this was all still preparation. This move is obviously much better than 24. exd5?! ♘xe1 25. ♖xe1 ♜a1 when Black is definitely back in the game. This idea of Black's rook coming to a1 after we have played ♞g3 is worth remembering, as it is a key part of Black's counterplay.

24... ♙xh6 25. ♚xh6 ♛xf2+

25... ♘xe1 allows 26. ♖h4!, a recurring motif in this line.

26. ♕h2 ♘xe1

After 26... ♞e5 we have 27. ♖h4! again.



27. ♖h4! ♜ed3

Now Black is clearly lost. 27...♖a7 was the best move, but White is still in full control after 28.♜f5.

28. ♜xg6 ♜xg3+ 29. ♔xg3 fxg6 30. ♜xg6+ ♔f8

If 30...♔h8 then 31.♙g5 is extremely strong.

31. ♜f6+ ♔g8 32. ♙h6 1-0

Anand-Adams, San Luis 2005.

32...♖a7 33. ♜g6+ ♔h8 34. ♜xe8+ ♙g8 35. ♜g6 ♖f7 36. ♙g5 is fatal for Black.

In these lines, you will definitely need to work with a computer to help you analyse – but it should be fun! And just because the computer may say of a certain line, ‘it’s a draw,’ doesn’t mean that your opponent will know all the best moves. Sometimes, preparation is about trying to figure out where your opponent is not knowledgeable and trying to find things which are difficult for him to solve over the board. It is so chaotic and difficult to play that just because objectively he can hold on, that doesn’t mean he will. The one taking the risk is the one who is worse prepared!

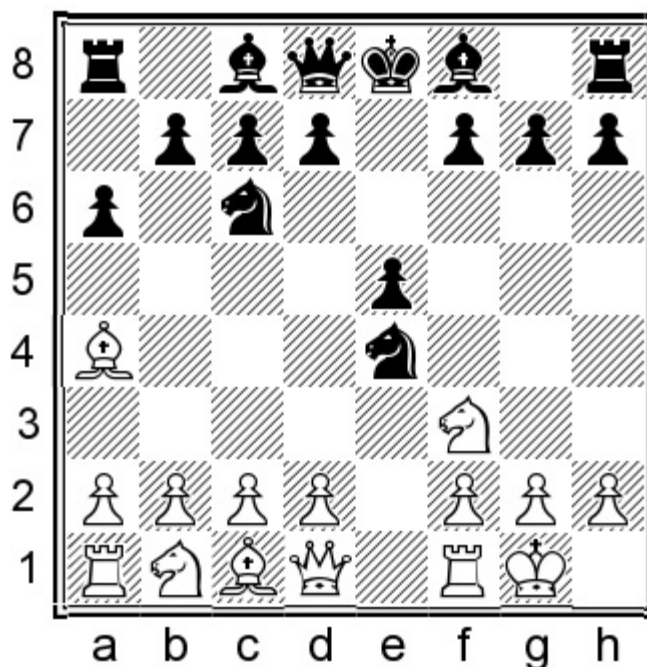
I think any human player – whether you are Garry Kasparov or the average-strength club player – is going to struggle to figure these positions out, unless they have a good knowledge of it.

So I recommend that if you play this line, check it well and be prepared. And have fun!

Chapter 6

Open Variation: 3...a6 4.♘a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♗xe4

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♗xe4



The Open Variation is one of Black's most combative options against the Ruy Lopez. Black gains a foothold in the centre and aims for active play with his pieces.

This was one of the major battlefields of the World Championship matches between Anatoly Karpov and Viktor Kortchnoi in both 1978 and 1981. It has a long history and is used by players who strive for a win with black. Therefore it should be no surprise to see that the list of proponents also includes chess fighters such as Johannes Zukertort, Siegbert Tarrasch, Emanuel Lasker, Max Euwe, Artur Jussupow and Jan Timman.

White needs to be very wary of Black's tactical ideas through the game. Because the Open Variation is so annoying for White, a lot of people play 5.d3 to avoid it, but this is a concession, of course. The most principled way has always been to castle, to put pressure on Black.

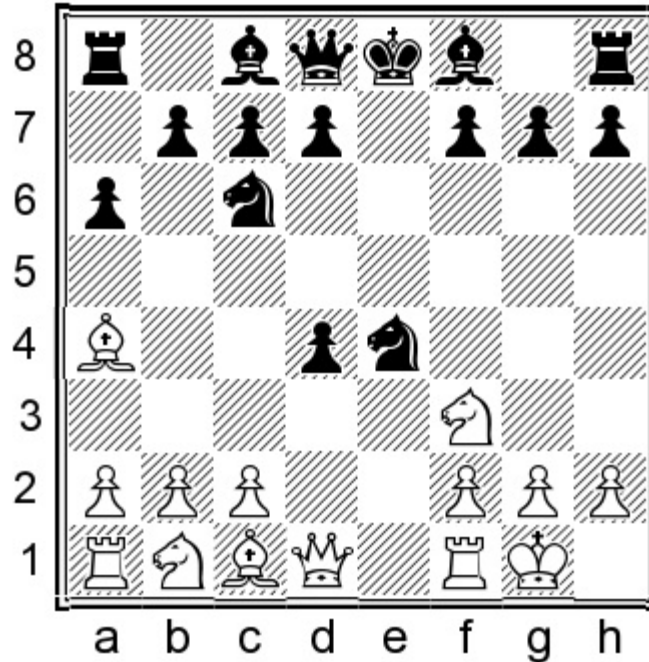
I don't think 5...♗xe4 should scare us. I've spent a lot of time analysing and playing this move on both sides. The interesting thing about modern chess is that often you try to refute something from White's point of view but in the process you analyse it so much that you feel ready to play it as Black. At one point, everyone seemed to be playing 5...♗xe4, and I spent a huge amount of time trying to find ideas against it.

It is the most direct way of playing the Spanish, I would say. If Black plays 5...♙e7 instead, for example, he has to be ready for a whole range of moves, including 6.♖e1 and 6.d3. If Black wants to play the Marshall Attack then he has to be ready for various Anti-Marshall lines, for example with a2-

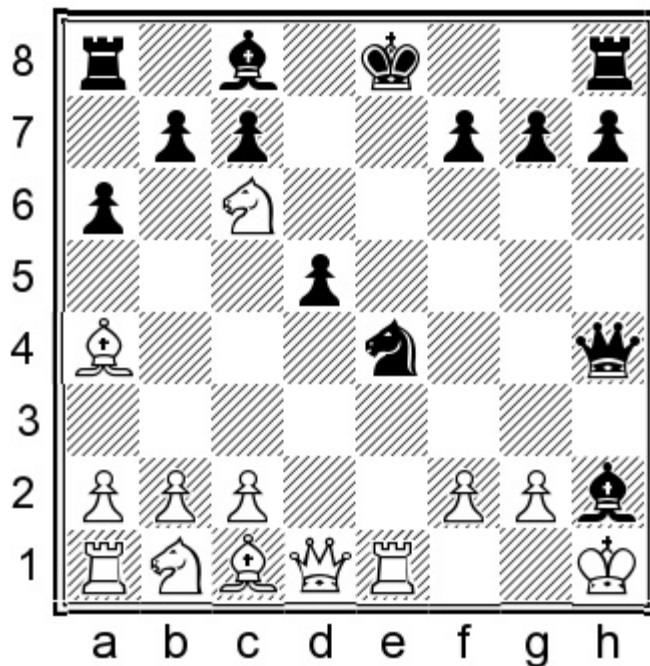
a4 or h2-h3. Here Black is avoiding all of that, and he is going for the most principled and most direct continuation.

A dubious sideline – 6...exd4

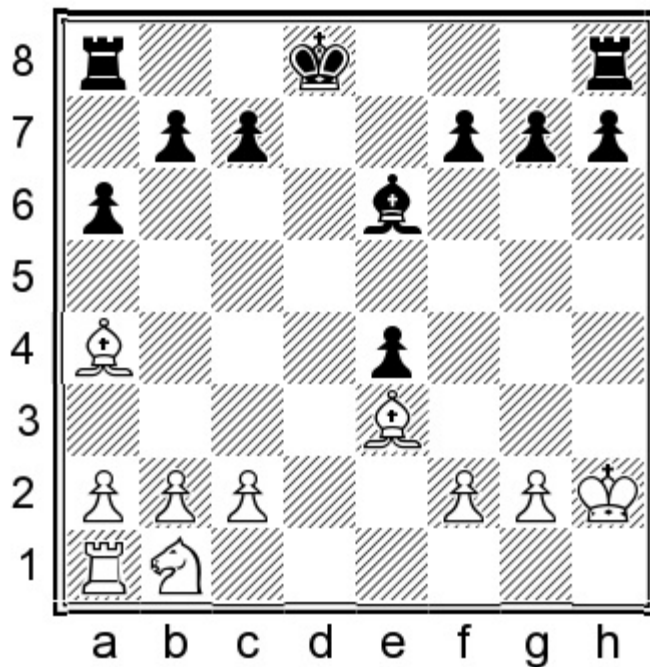
In the process of checking 6.d4, I found that 6...exd4 is possible, which I didn't really know about before.



7.♞e1 d5 8.♘xd4 Almost all players capture with the knight, which is a perfectly good move. 8...♙d6 Because of the weakness on c6, Black goes for some counterplay. This leads to typical play we see in a lot of these types of positions. 9.♘xc6 ♕xh2+ 10.♖h1 If 10.♖xh2 ♚h4+ 11.♔g1 ♚xf2+ Black gets at least a draw. 10...♚h4 Forced – and accompanied by serious threats. If 10...bxc6, Black just loses everything to 11.♙xc6+. After 11...♙d7 we don't even need to take the rook; 12.♚xd5 is better, winning the knight.



To deal with the threats we need to capture the knight: 11. ♖xe4+ dxe4 11... ♙xe4 12. ♘d4+ followed by capturing on h2 gives White a large advantage. Now we have to play the only move, which trades the queens: 12. ♚d8+ ♜xd8 13. ♘xd8+ ♙xd8 14. ♙xh2 ♘e6 15. ♘e3



The endgame has been reached by force. White has two pieces for a rook and two pawns. On paper, this is a good balance for Black, but in this case his pawns are actually not so strong. If the e-pawn could go back to e5 it wouldn't leave our dark-squared bishop completely unopposed. White will continue with 16. ♘c3, attacking the pawn, and gain the initiative with 17. ♖d1+.

White should avoid trading rooks in this line. This is because if Black becomes active with his other rook, he might start taking some of our pawns. An ending with rook against two pieces, where the side with the rook also has passed pawns, is very dangerous for the side with the two pieces.

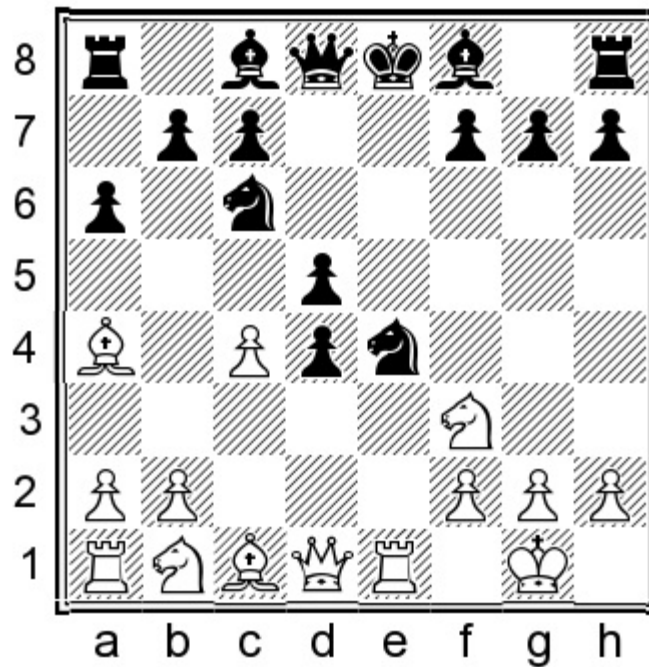
Essentially, the white rook is a better piece than one of Black's rooks, because it will act as the defender of our position.

If, after we play 16.♘c3, Black defends the e-pawn with 16...f5, we will very often play g2-g4 to undermine the central pawn. If we can trade the g-pawn for the e-pawn then we will end up with a lot of squares for our knight, which will start jumping around everywhere.

The thing about this position is that it is better for White but it's not concrete. You are going to have to play well for a long time to prove the advantage and also be ready for Black's various plans.

Generally speaking, White should not be afraid of exchanging the light-squared bishops. This will leave the remaining minor pieces very strong in the endgame.

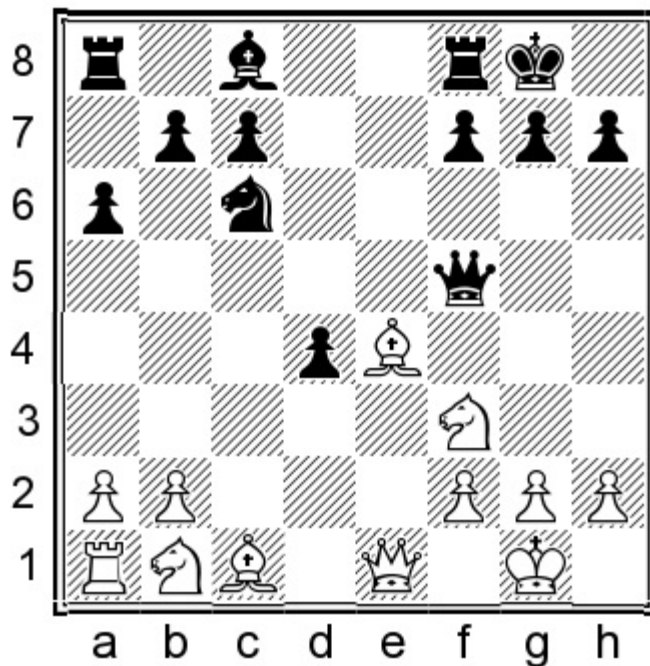
This is not the only way to play. Most people play 8.♘d4 but White also has the interesting option of playing **8.c4!?**.



Now on 8...dxc3 9.♘xc3 we are temporarily down two pawns, but it shouldn't be a surprise that we will regain the material very quickly. We are threatening to capture on d5 with our knight or queen and after 9...♙e6 we have 10.♘d4 with threats. Black is undeveloped and his king is still in the centre.

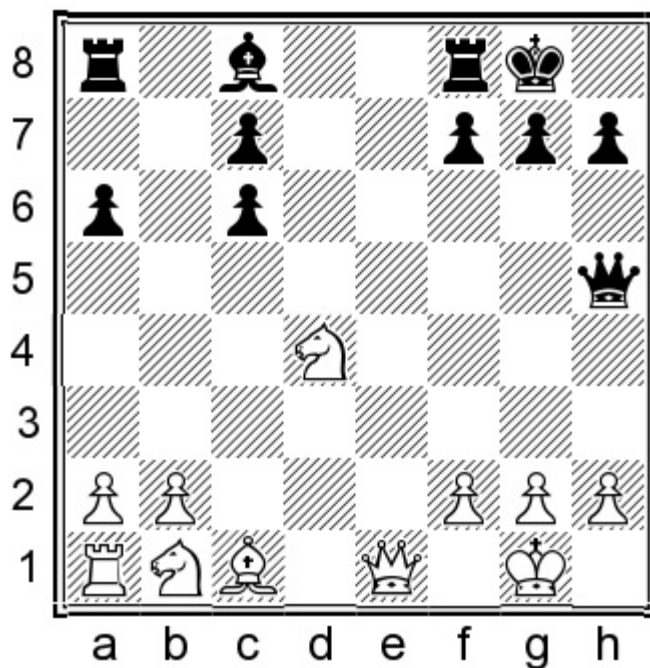
A better try for Black is **8...♙b4**, threatening the rook and preparing to castle. Then we have the following very interesting line:

9.cxd5 ♙xe1 10.♙xe1 ♙xd5 11.♙b3 ♙f5 12.♙c2 0-0 13.♙xe4



We have the familiar material balance of two minor pieces against a rook and two pawns. This time, with the queens still on and the weakness of the black d-pawn, White has a very strong initiative. We can combine threats against Black's queen with threats against his king and his pawns.

After a couple more moves, **13...♔h5 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.♘xd4,**



we can see that White is doing very well.

The main move – 6...b5

This explains why 6...exd4 is considered dubious and why Open Spanish players automatically play:

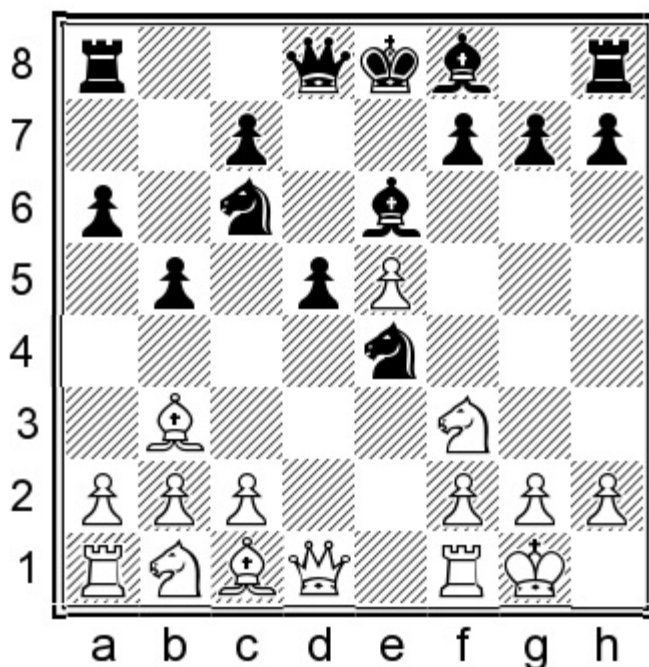
6...b5

The reason Black includes 6...b5 before 7...d5 is, of course, that after 6...d5, White would play 7.♘xe5 and it is hard to defend the knight on c6.

7.♘b3 d5

Again, 7...exd4 runs into 8.♞e1, which is a problem for Black. One sample line goes 8...d5 9.♘c3 ♗e6 10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♞xe4 ♗e7 12.♗xe6 fxe6, which is good for White, as is 9.♗xd5 ♞xd5 10.♘c3. In general, these are good tricks to remember. We could even go with the mundane 8.♘xd4, which is also strong.

8.dxe5 ♗e6

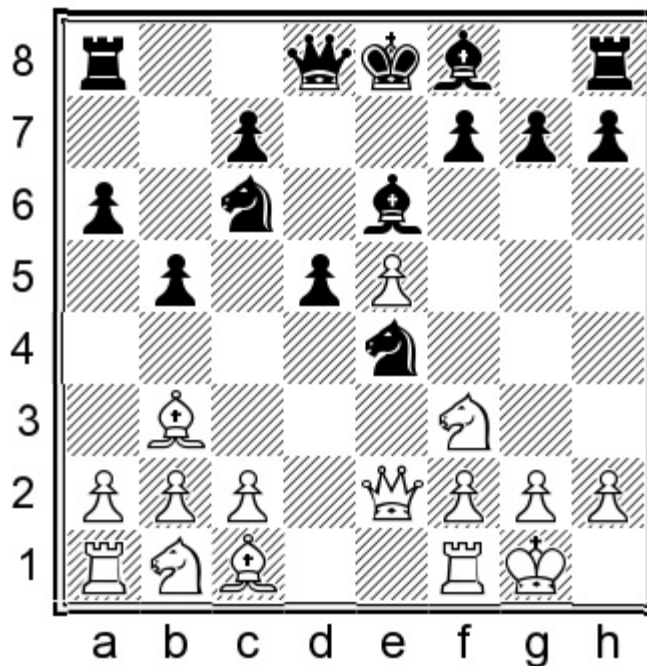


Here White has a wide choice. The main moves have traditionally been 9.♘bd2, 9.c3 and the popular 9.♗e3. I decided against recommending these lines because there is a huge body of theory after, for example, 9.♘bd2 ♘c5 10.c3 ♗e7 11.♗c2 and here 11...d4 is a new line which is considered highly reliable for Black.

One line now is 12.♘b3 d3 13.♘xc5 dxc2 14.♞xd8+ ♞xd8 15.♘xe6 fxe6 16.♗e3 ♞d5 and now we will round up the c2-pawn but Black will capture the e5-pawn. We end up with the slightly better structure, but more often than not, Black holds this position comfortably. It is a way for White to play and it is a little unpleasant for Black, but I think there are fresher and more interesting ways that I would like to recommend.

The move I am suggesting is:

9.♞e2



I say fresh, but this is, of course, an old move, which has undergone a renaissance recently. Basically, White will play ♞d1 , putting direct pressure on the d-pawn, and then c2-c4, exploiting the pin on the d-pawn and breaking open the centre.

I played this move twice against Anish Giri. Anish himself has also played this move recently and he has shown some new ideas.

Black has a number of ways to play and the main move is $9... \text{♙e7}$, which we will look at in the next section. There is also $9... \text{♞c5}$, which Anish and Mamedyarov played against me, and $9... \text{♙c5}$.

After $9... \text{♙c5}$, we are generally happy to play $10. \text{♙e3}$, to trade off the bishops. After $10... \text{♙xe3}$ $11. \text{♚xe3}$, you can tell from the structure that Black ends up with some slight dark-square weaknesses. Nothing which is immediately crushing for him, but we will still continue with ♞d1 , the pressure on d5 is unpleasant and Black might, one day, start to feel these weaknesses because of the trade of the dark-squared bishops.

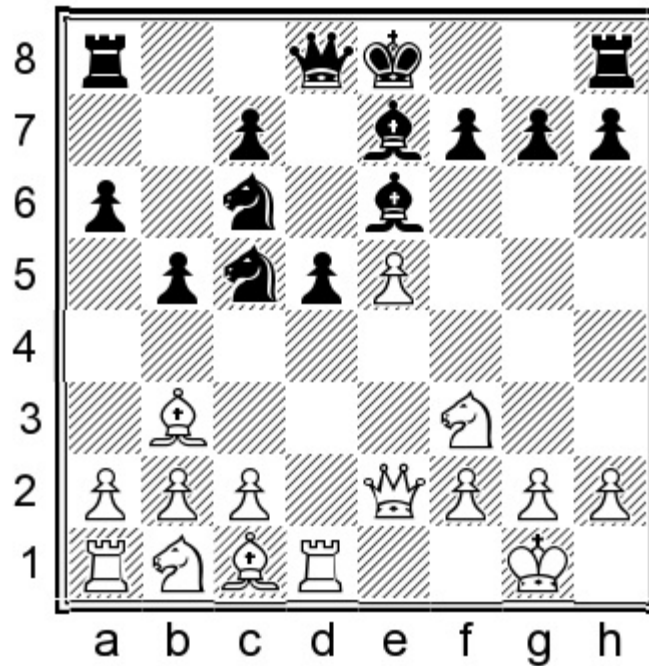
Open Variation – $9. \text{♚e2} \text{ ♞c5}$

$1. \text{e4} \text{ e5} 2. \text{♞f3} \text{ ♞c6} 3. \text{♙b5} \text{ a6} 4. \text{♙a4} \text{ ♞f6} 5. 0-0 \text{ ♞xe4} 6. \text{d4} \text{ b5} 7. \text{♙b3} \text{ d5} 8. \text{dxe5} \text{ ♙e6} 9. \text{♚e2} \text{ ♞c5}$

This move is positionally motivated, of course. Black is just trying to gain the bishop pair, but it comes at the cost of a significant amount of time.

Now after

$10. \text{♞d1} \text{ ♙e7}$



White has

11. ♖xd5,

a very important move to remember.

11... ♗xd5 12. ♘c3

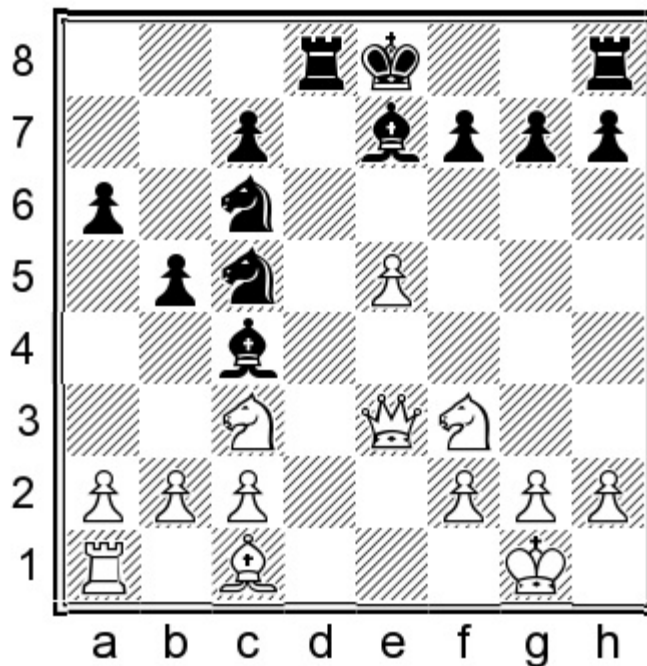
And we are using the pin. It is important that we can capture on d8 with check, which means the tactic 12... ♗xf3 doesn't work for Black.

If Black now castles we play 13. ♘xd5 with a clear advantage, so Black has to sacrifice the queen instead:

12... ♗c4 13. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8

White's queen now has limited squares so it is still a difficult position. 14. ♕e1 is a big mistake; Black has 14... ♗b4 and there is no good way to defend c2. Once this pawn falls, the queen is trapped and the rook is hanging as well. That's why White has to play:

14. ♕e3!



The main point of this is to meet 14...♞b4 with 15.♘e1 and, if Black gives us one more move to play, 16.b3 followed by 17.♙a3 or 17.♙b2 and we are winning; we're up a huge amount of material.

14...b4

Black has to act quickly.

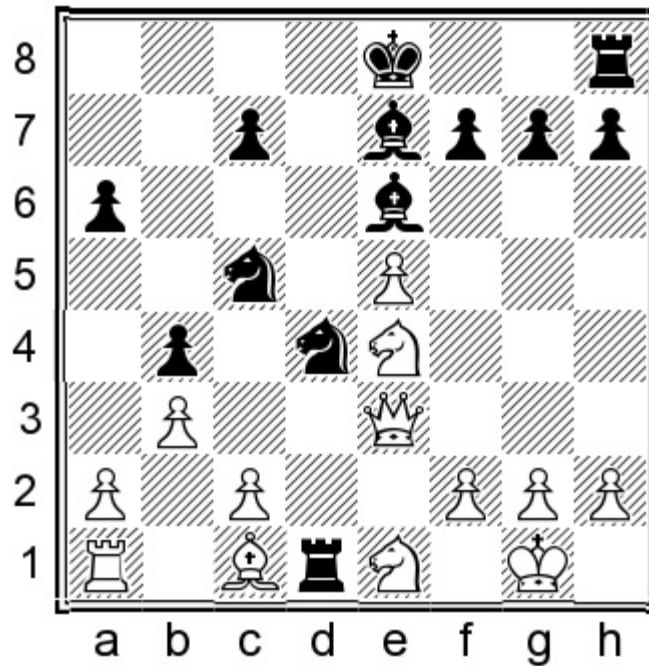
15.b3

Another very important move. If instead we play 15.♘e4 straight away, our back rank is very weak after 15...♞d1+ 16.♘e1 ♞d4 with numerous threats. That's why 15.b3 is so important. Not only does it attack the black bishop, it also opens up in preparation for ♙b2.

15...♙e6

If Black plays the natural move 15...bxc3, anticipating 16.bxc4 ♞d1+ 17.♘e1 ♞d4, which is not good for White, White has the intermediate move 16.♙a3. This stops 16...♞d1+ and suddenly both the knight and bishop are hanging, which means we conveniently win the piece back.

16.♘e4 ♞d1+ 17.♘e1 ♞d4



With 15.b3 having been played, this is a very different story. It still looks scary to allow the rook to come to d1, but there are two important details.

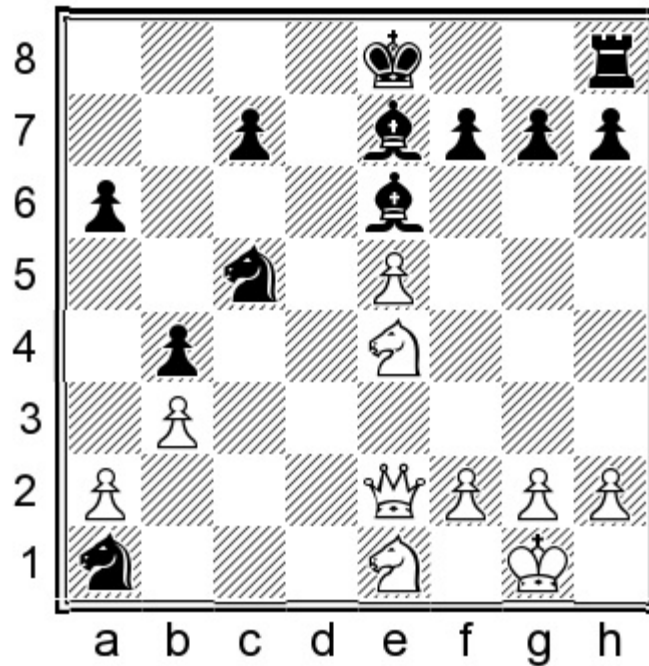
First, we basically got a free tempo with 15.b3, which enables us to play 18.♙b2 and then trade rooks.

The other important point is that in this line, with the bishop on e6, there is no ...♘e2+ to worry about, as the bishop is longer protecting the knight from c4.

18.♙b2 ♘xc2

Black has to go fast. 18...♖xa1 is too slow; 19.♙xa1 and White consolidates easily and enjoys a winning material advantage.

19.♙e2 ♖xa1 20.♙xa1 ♘xa1



Temporarily, Black has regained the material – and more. However, White has solved all of the problems on the back rank and Black’s active rook has been traded off for our passive one. Now our initiative starts.

21. ♖xc5 ♗xc5 22. ♖d3

With an important tempo. There are two important things now: we have the initiative and the black knight on a1 is, for the moment, stranded.

22... ♗e7

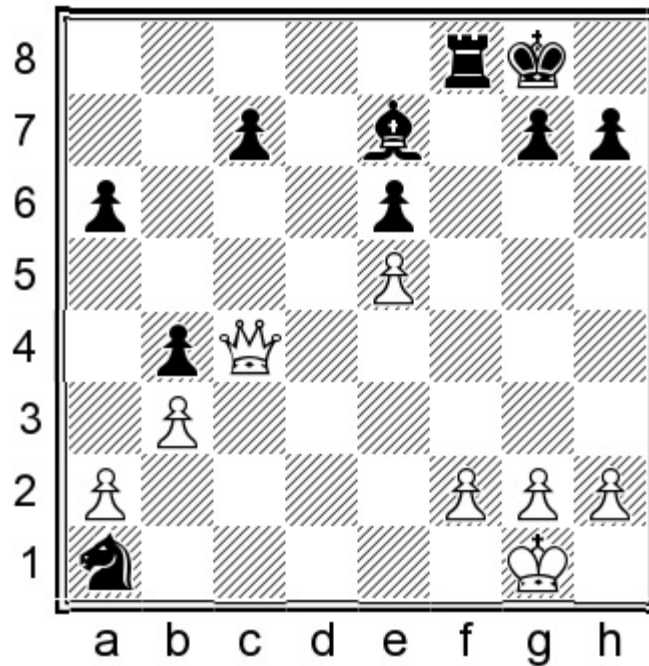
If Black tries to keep the bishop active and also defend the knight with 22... ♗d4, then, unfortunately for him, 23. ♕e4 is winning as we are threatening the bishop and also 24. ♕a8+, winning the rook.

23. ♖f4

It is possible to play 23. ♕b2, picking up the knight, but I prefer to play for the initiative.

23... 0-0 24. ♖xe6 fxe6 25. ♕c4

25. ♕xa6 is also strong. In both cases, we are not going after the knight; we are going after the weak e-pawn. Once we capture the pawn we will be able to combine threats against his king with threats we will create with our passed e-pawn.



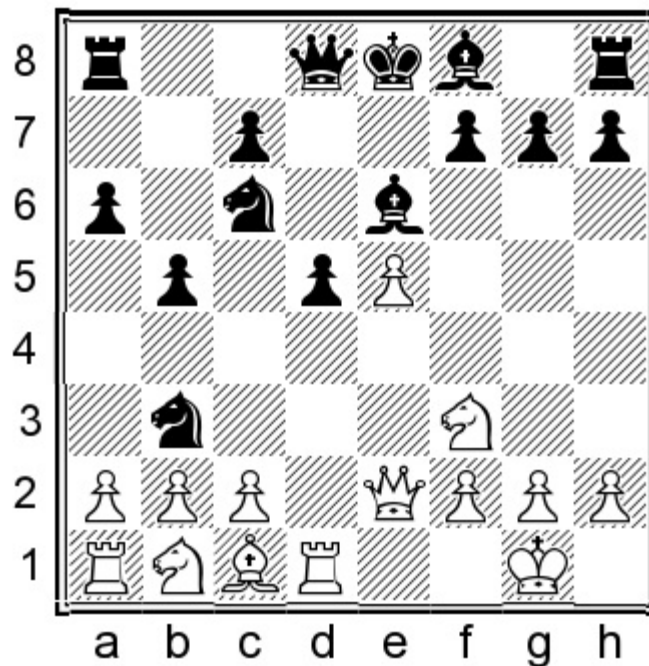
Note that the knight on a1 is still marooned. Black has no good way to play this position. Even 26. ♔xc7 is a threat, as Black's bishop will really struggle to find a good square after it is attacked.

In this position, the queen is tremendous, despite being numerically outgunned by Black's pieces. Of course if the knight were somewhere better such as on d5, then Black would just be winning. It can be a fine line between a queen which can do nothing against a group of pieces and a queen which is just ravaging the position.

What else has Black got? Well, after White's 10th move **10. ♖d1** in this line there is

10... ♘xb3

and now:



11.cxb3!

An over-the-board decision. This is how I played against Anish and people were surprised by this move, but to me it felt very natural – although it is hard for me to pinpoint exactly why. The obvious choice is 11.axb3, to open up the a-file, but for some reason it feels like the a-file doesn't actually matter. My rook is aimed at the black a-pawn, but it is defended and I am not threatening to win it. After 11...♙e7 12.c4 b4! 13.cxd5 ♗xd5 White cannot play 14.♘c3 because of 14...bxc3 and there is no way of exploiting the pin on the bishop. Black can play ...♚d7, ...♚e6 and ...0-0. He has the bishop pair and, most importantly, White's knight on b1 has no future on c3. Black has a good position.

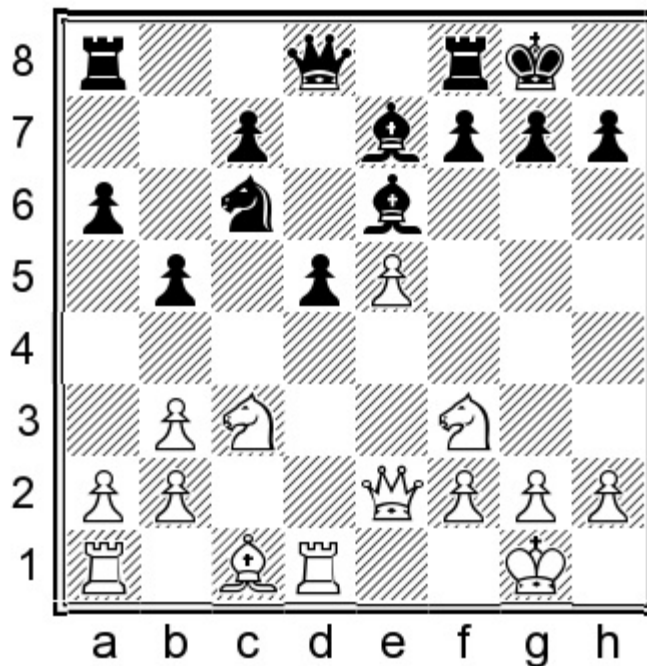
In the above line, the a-file doesn't matter, but I think the c-file really matters – and I still think 11.cxb3! is a good choice. White is going to develop simply with ♘c3 and ♙e3, whereas Black's knight isn't going to feel comfortable on c6. It is likely to have to go back to b8 or d8, which would be rather unpleasant for Black.

11...♙e7

There is no better move: 11...b4 12.♙e3, followed by ♘d2 and ♖ac1, and the c-file pressure will soon become significant.

12.♘c3 0-0

It is important to note that after 12...b4 we have 13.♘e4.



13.♙e3 ♚d7 14.h3?!

This is how I played against Anish, but it is not the best move. Anish could have taken advantage of it with 14...f6! 15.exf6 ♖xf6 and here, Black has a very good position – I would even say he has the better position. Black is getting lots of counterplay and he already has ideas of ...♙xh3, or ...♖g6 followed by ...♙xh3. He can even play more slowly with ...♖af8 to increase the pressure on f3.

My recommendation for White here is 14.♖d2!. I am not sure why I didn't play this over the board, because it is a very natural move. I am going to play ♖ad1 and put a lot of pressure on the d5-pawn, which is very annoying for Black to deal with.

In a game Perez Ponsa-Ding Liren (Baku 2016) there followed 14...♘d8, with the idea of playing 15...c6, because d5 is very weak and he needs to defend his pawn structure.

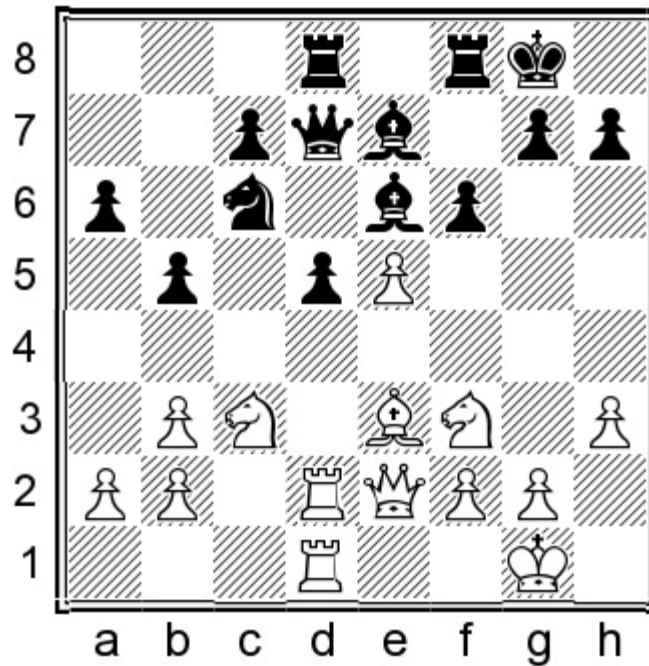
If 14...♖ad8, there are two options for White. One is 15.♖ad1, when d5 is under severe pressure and it is hard for Black to find moves. The other move is 15.h3, which leads back to my game with Anish.

I realized over-the-board that 14...f6 is very strong, but luckily he played:

14...♖ad8 15.♖d2 f6

With the rook on d1, ...f7-f6 was fine. With the rook on d2, there is a problem. I was actually quite proud of the concept which I found and which he underestimated. Rather than taking on f6, I played:

16.♖ad1!

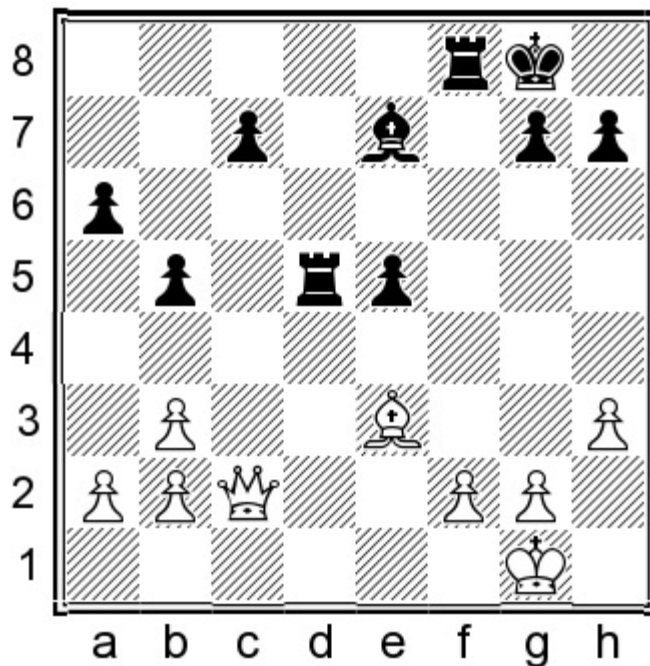


The point is that whether he takes on e5 with the pawn or the knight, we take on d5. For example, if he plays 16...fxe5 I will give my two rooks for the queen with 17.♖xd5 ♕xd5 18.♗xd5 ♖xd5 19.♗xd5 ♗xd5. Normally this would be a safe material advantage for Black, but in this case, Black is very awkwardly placed. After we play 20.♙c2 he has a serious issue to deal with. Potentially, he is dropping the c7-pawn and he needs to decide where to put his knight. If he plays 20...♘d4 then White is actually directly winning material: 21.♙xd4 exd4 22.♙e4 and Black can't defend all of his pieces because if 22...♗d7 23.♙e6+ wins the rook. That's just one of the lines which shows how difficult it is for Black to coordinate his pieces and pawns.

It is worth noting that 11.cxb3! is the move which allowed my queen to go to c2.

Anish decided to play it another way, which involved trading knights:

16...♘xe5 17.♘xe5 fxe5 18.♘xd5 ♕xd5 19.♗xd5 ♖xd5 20.♗xd5 ♗xd5 21.♙c2



The same position as earlier, apart from the fact that the knights on f3 and c6 have gone. This should be a good exchange for Black, partly because the knight isn't hanging on c6 in this line. On the other hand, he still has the annoying weakness on c7 to deal with and I think he was surprised at just how bad this position is for Black.

It's not that he is already losing, but you would think that with two rooks against a queen – and equal pawns – Black would not be in any danger. In fact, he is in a very significant amount of danger, even though, tactically, he isn't losing anything.

21...c5 22.g3 ♔h8

Surprisingly, Black can't do anything, while I am going to play ♔g2, to get my king safe, followed by h3-h4-h5-h6, and combine the kingside action with threats to Black's queenside. For example, I can play ♕g4 at some point to attack the rook and after ...♖fd8 I will play ♕g4, threatening to play ♕e6+ and ♕xa6.

The only thing that White seeks to avoid is an exchange of bishops. Without the bishops, Black's rooks would become very active, attacking f2, and it would be a different story. It wouldn't be better for Black, but it would just be equal.

23.h4 ♖fd8 24.♕e4 h6

24...g6 is met by 25.h5, giving Black plenty of problems. After the game move, he just has to wait around as he can't get his rooks fully active.

25.♔g2 ♕f6 26.♔h3

Intending g3-g4-g5. Black has no counterplay.

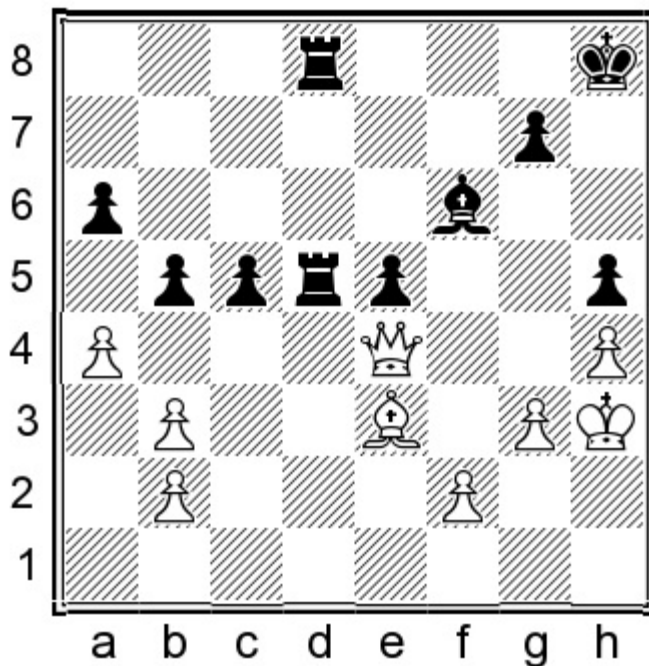
26...h5

To stop the advance of the g-pawn, but now the h5-pawn is chronically weak.

27.a4

Playing on two flanks and creating a minor zugzwang.

27.♔g6 was also tempting, but after 27...e4 28.♔xe4 Black's position improves with ♖f6 when the bishop hits b2.

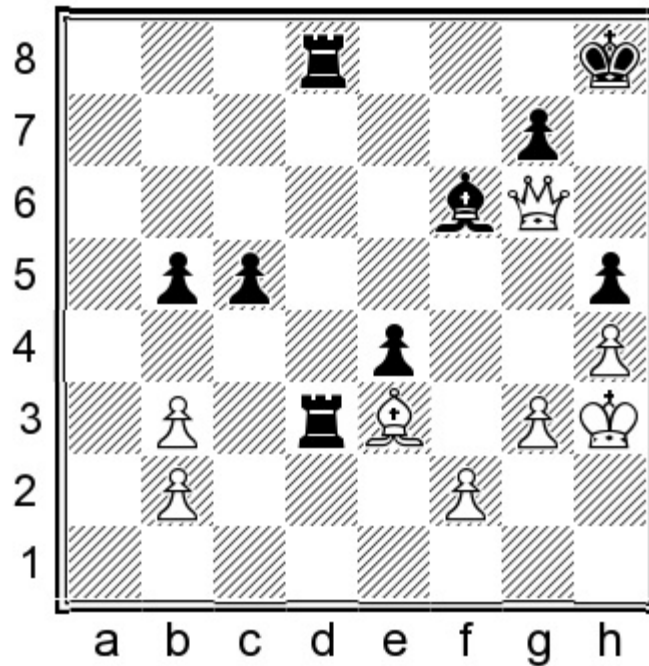


Which move would you make here for Black?

27...♞d3

If 27...♔g8 then 28.♔f5 e4 29.♔e6+ ♔h8 30.♔xa6 and I end up with a passed a-pawn.

28.axb5 axb5 29.♔g6 e4



Abandoning the h-pawn to try and find counterplay, but I now collect his pawns and develop threats against his exposed king.

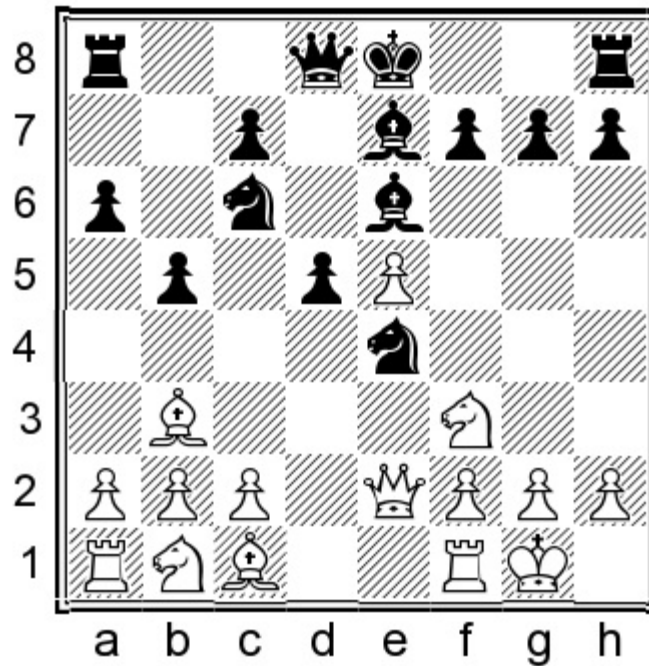
30. ♖xh5+ ♔g8 31. ♗f5 ♕xb2 32. ♗xe4 c4 33. bxc4 bxc4 34. ♗xc4+ ♖3d5 35. g4 ♔h8 36. g5 ♕d4 37. ♕xd4 ♖xd4 38. ♗f7 ♖8d7 39. ♗e8+ ♔h7 40. ♗h5+ ♔g8 41. g6 ♖e4 42. ♗h7+ ♔f8 43. ♗h8+ ♔e7 44. ♗xg7+ ♔e6 45. ♗h8 ♖d3+ 46. ♔h2

And Black resigned in Caruana-Giri, St Louis 2016.

So this was a very nice concept, showing that even with a queen against two rooks, Black is still in serious danger. I think this line with 11.cxb3! is really interesting for White.

Open Variation – 9. ♗e2 ♕e7

1. e4 e5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♗b5 a6 4. ♗a4 ♘f6 5. 0-0 ♘xe4 6. d4 b5 7. ♗b3 d5 8. dxe5 ♕e6 9. ♗e2 ♕e7



This is the main move. White is happy with 9...♙c5 10.♙e3 ♘xe3 11.♚xe3.

10.♞d1 0-0

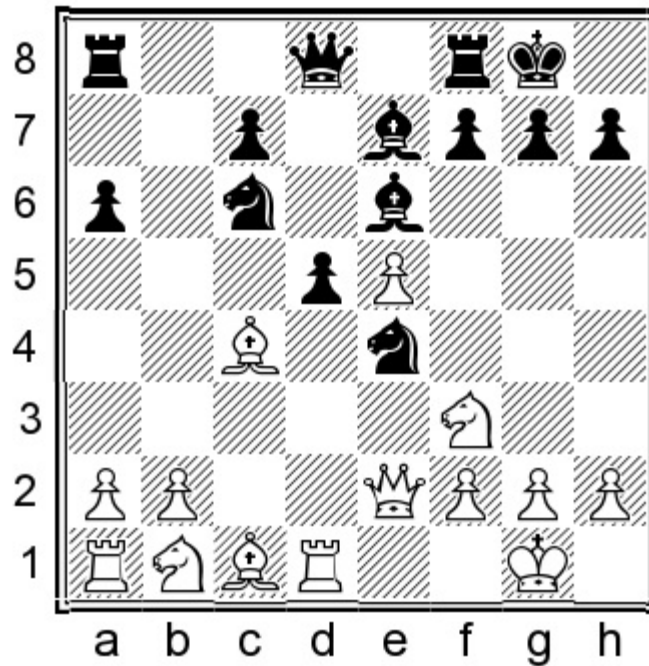
10...♘c5 allows 11.♙xd5!, which transposes to the lines we looked at earlier. So most people, after 10.♞d1, choose to castle, quite naturally.

Here, **11.c3** is an interesting line. The idea is to go ♘bd2 and ♙c2. Usually, Black plays ...f7-f6 at some point and we get a complicated fight. My recommendation is more direct, more forcing, and is also the main move:

11.c4 bxc4

Black has no choice, as we were threatening to capture on d5. Now, similar to the line we looked at earlier, our main idea is to open the c-file, to put pressure on the knight on c6.

12.♙xc4

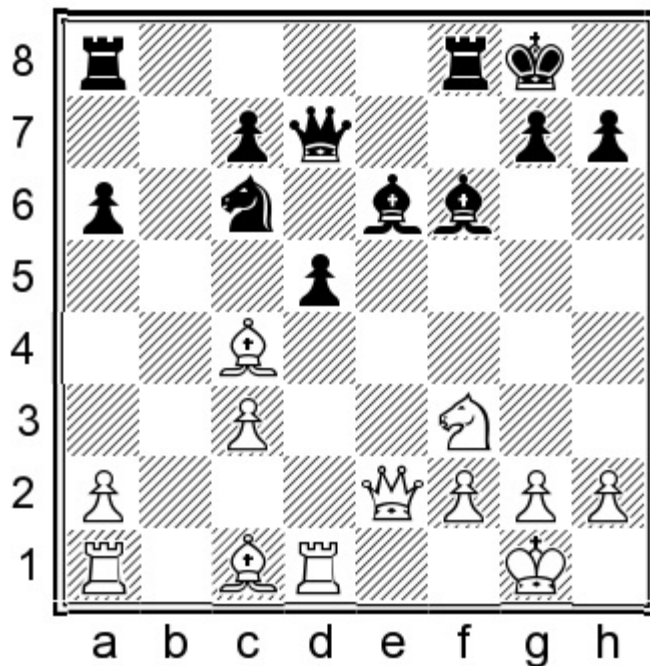


12...♙c5

This is the main – and best – move, attacking f2. Black does have a choice and many games have been played with 12...♚d7. Even Carlsen played this move once. It is a logical move but it is not the best one. White plays 13.♘c3, forcing the trade of knights: 13...♘xc3 14.bxc3 Black is struggling to find a move. Now that we have a pawn on c3, White is going to be ready to play c3-c4 again at some point. The pawn on a6 is hanging too, which is important. If Black plays 14...a5 then we have 15.♙b5. It might not be completely winning, but it is enough to convince Black not to play this move.

Magnus played 14...f6 and drew after 15.♙f4 fxe5 16.♘xe5 ♘xe5 17.♙xe5 c6 18.♙b3 a5 19.♞e1 ♙f6 20.♙xf6 ♞xf6 21.♞ad1 a4 22.♙c2 ♙f7 23.♞b1 a3 24.h3 d4 25.♚d3 ♙g6 26.♚c4+ ♙f7 27.♚d3 ♙g6 28.♚c4+ ♚f7 29.♚xf7+ ♙xf7 30.♙b3 dxc3 31.♙xf7+ ♞xf7 32.♞b3 ♞d7 33.♞xc3 ♞d2 34.♞xc6 ♞xa2 35.♞c7 ♞b2 36.♞ee7 a2 37.♞xg7+ ½-½ Leko-Carlsen, Moscow 2007.

One of the positional themes of the Open Spanish is that the knight on c6 is misplaced. Black would love to move it somewhere else and play ...c7-c6. So in this case we don't want to allow Black to trade the knights and instead of Leko's 15.♙f4 we should play 15.exf6 ♙xf6



16. ♖g5!, a strong move. Black cannot allow 17. ♖xe6 and 16... ♙g4 runs into 17. ♙xd5+ and if 17... ♗xd5 then 18. ♗xg4, when White ends up a pawn ahead. Black is forced to take with **16... ♙xg5** **17. ♙xg5** and now Black has a choice of moves, but in all cases White is better. He has the bishop pair and after, for example, 17... ♖ae8 we can simply play 18. ♙b3, when the queen threatens to capture on a6. Basically, we have the bishop pair and the initiative, based on his weak pawns. There is a tactical point here too; if 18... ♙g4, 19. ♖xd5! is very strong.

This shows why 12... ♗d7 is not the best move here and it explains why most players prefer 12... ♙c5 – with good reason. Black has to break the pin on the d-file somehow, and he chooses to break it tactically.

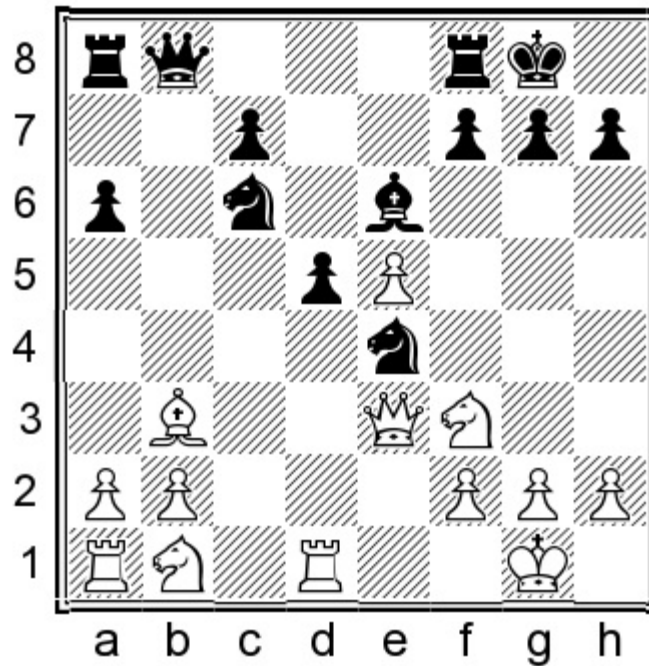
13. ♙e3 ♙xe3 14. ♗xe3 ♗b8

Escaping from the pin and attacking b2.

There is also the very natural move 14... ♖e7 here. Black moves the knight and hopes to play ...c7-c6, but now there are problems with the knight on e4: 15. ♙d3 ♗b8 16. ♖bd2 ♖xd2 17. ♖xd2 ♗b6 18. ♗xb6 cxb6 19. ♖d4 as in Smeets-J.de Jong, Hilversum 2008 (1-0, 48), which is still a model game for this line. One of Black's main problems is the weakness of the dark squares after the exchange of bishops. This is a recurring theme in the Open Spanish, as after playing both ...b7-b5 and ...d7-d5, there are clearly going to be holes in the structure once Black's dark-squared bishop has been removed.

This is why Black has to play concretely by attacking b2 immediately.

15. ♙b3



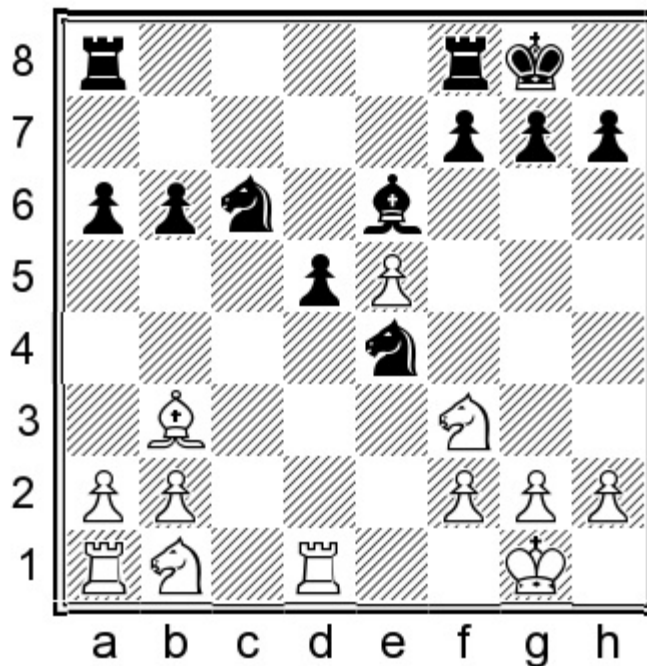
Once the pin is broken, the bishop is hanging. 15. ♕xd5? is losing for White after 15... ♗xd5 16. ♖xd5 ♜xb2 and the rook on a1 is hanging.

White now intends to play ♘bd2 to trade off Black's active knight and then to exploit the weaknesses on the c-file with ♖ac1. Black must again play concretely and he has a number of ways from this position:

15... ♘a5

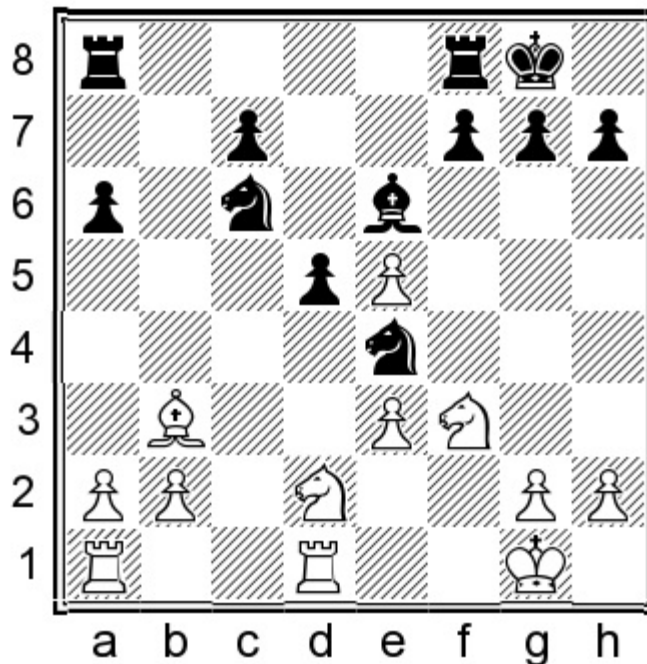
15... ♖d8 is a very natural move. White then plays 16. ♘c3 ♘xc3 17. ♙xc3 with play down the c-file again. 17... ♘e7 18. ♖ac1 and Black is just left with weaknesses. An easy way for White to continue would be to play ♘d4, ♕c2 and f4-f5. This demonstrates quite clearly that Black does not have time for natural moves here.

The main alternative is 15... ♙b6, when 16. ♙xb6 ♗xb6 is a better version for Black than the one seen above, as his knight covers d4.



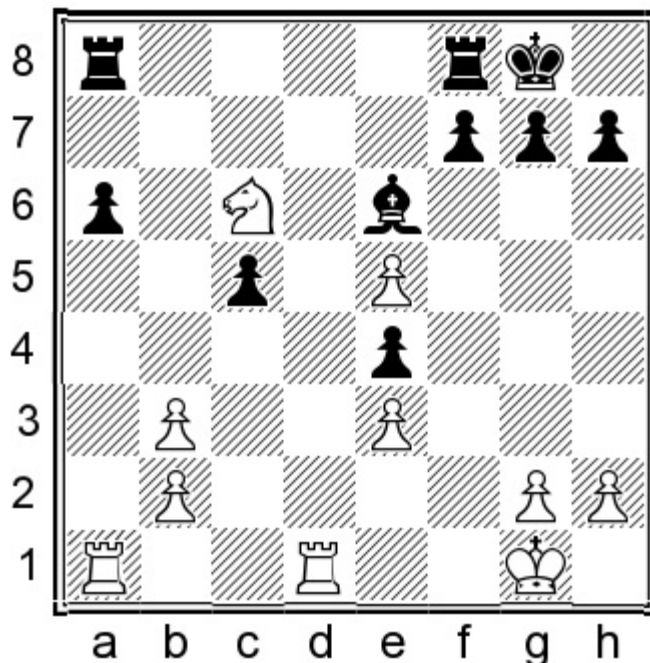
Yet this is still very playable for White: 17.♘a3 Heading for d4. 17...♞fd8 18.♟c2 ♞ac8 19.h3 ♟a5 20.♟cd4 ♟c4 21.♞ab1 This position is, objectively, roughly equal. White has a knight on d4, but e5 is kind of vulnerable. White would love to swap off the knights on f3 and c4 and then play f2-f4. At the moment the knight on c4 is very annoying, but White went on to outplay his opponent in Sjugirov-Vitiugov, Moscow 2009 (1-0, 83).

Anish Giri played impressively with white after 16.♟bd2 ♔xe3 17.fxe3,



accepting the doubled e-pawns but planning the usual pressure down the c-file: 17...♟a5 17...♞ab8 18.♞ac1 ♞b6 19.♟f1! gives White a huge advantage; d5 is hanging and it is difficult to deal with this problem. 18.♟xe4 ♟xb3 19.axb3 dxe4 20.♟d4 The engines say Black is completely fine here, but it is easy to see the possibilities for White. 21.♞dc1 will follow unless Black plays actively. 20...c5

21. ♖c6!



A very strong move and I am 100% sure this was preparation by Anish. The knight dominates the black rooks, ruling out exchanges, and White has the initiative, although Black eventually held the draw in Giri-Mamedyarov, chess.com 2018 (½-½, 88).

We can reach the same position via a slightly different sequence in the main variation after

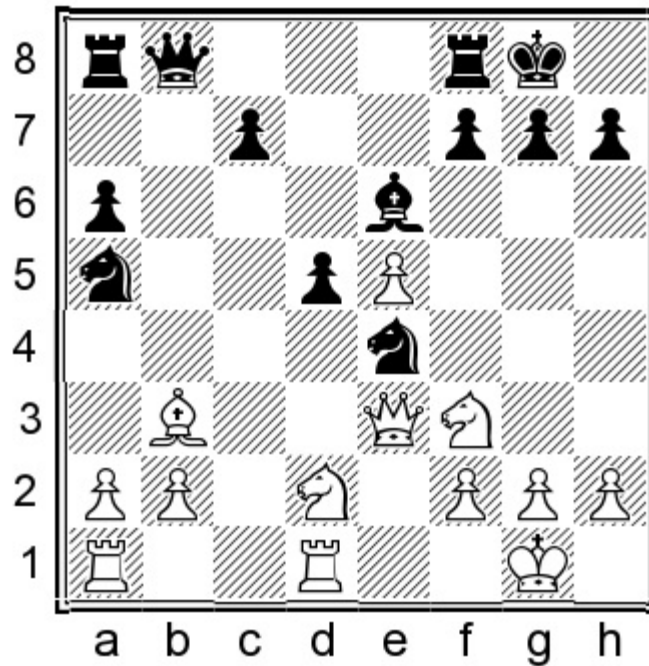
16. ♖bd2:

16... ♔a7 17. ♖xe4 ♔xe3 18. fxe3 ♖xb3 19. axb3 dxe4 20. ♖d4 c5 21. ♖c6

One of the reasons these endgames are so unpleasant for black players is that they play the Open Spanish to achieve activity for their pieces, but after the trades they are just left with weaknesses. If Black makes just one mistake, or plays a natural move which is an inaccuracy, then suddenly his position is much worse and sometimes even borderline losing. On the other hand, it is very hard to find a single position where White can be worse and usually he can play for an advantage without any risk – which is always a nice thing!

If Black really prepares well he may find a way to equalize – which is going to be the case with every line. I didn't stop playing the Open Spanish because of any particular variation; I just became disinterested in the main lines where Black has to remember a huge amount of theory and it just didn't seem fun to me.

Going back to the 16th move, there is another move I should mention here after 15... ♖a5 16. ♖bd2:



16...♞xd2

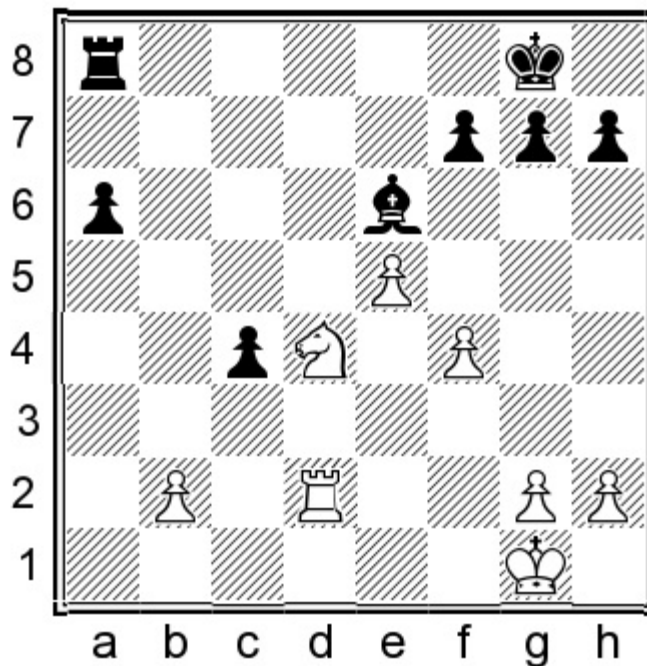
This seems cooperative, but it has been played by Nakamura. Any move that gets the sealed approval from a top player deserves a lot of attention.

17.♞xd2 ♞xb3 18.axb3 ♞c8

If we are allowed to play ♞c2 and ♞a5, taking a firm grip on the c5-square, we will have a big advantage, so Nakamura tries to play ...c7-c5.

19.♞c1 ♞b4

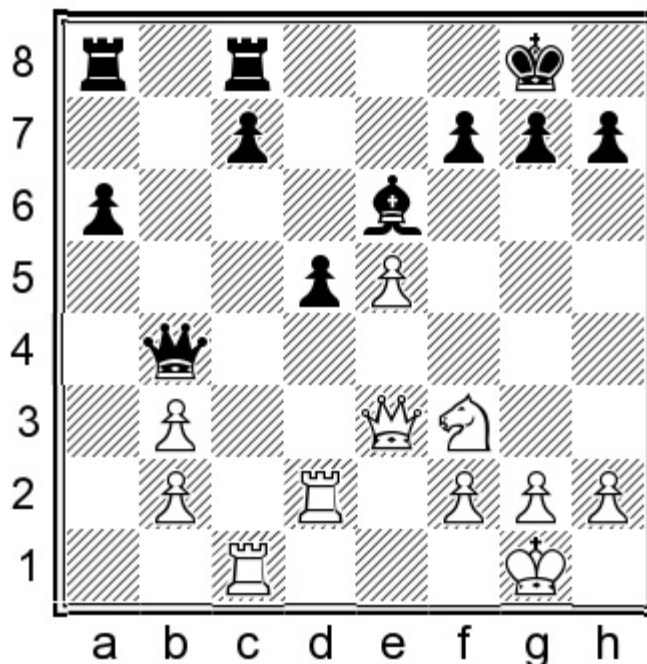
There was a chance here for Nakamura to play 19...c5, forcing a trade of pawns, followed by the queens: 20.♞xc5 ♞xc5 21.♞xc5 ♞xb3 22.♞d4 ♞c4 23.♞xc4 dxc4 24.f4.



I think he avoided it for good reason. Although it is a very simplified position, White has a healthy kingside majority, he can bring his king to the centre via f2 and maybe one day he can play $\text{N}d4-e2-c3$ and start to dominate the dark squares. Even though the material has simplified, this is by no means a sign that Black has an easy task to draw here. Usually White is not risking anything in these games and plays for two results: a win, or the much better side of a draw.

In general, the strategy is to play positions where you keep control and you can put positional pressure on Black, especially in modern chess. This is how players try to play at the top. You notice that the top players search for positions where they can play for a win without letting things get out of control.

After 19... $\text{c}7-c5$, Nakamura is trying to achieve ... $\text{c}7-c5$ under more favourable circumstances.



20.♖c6

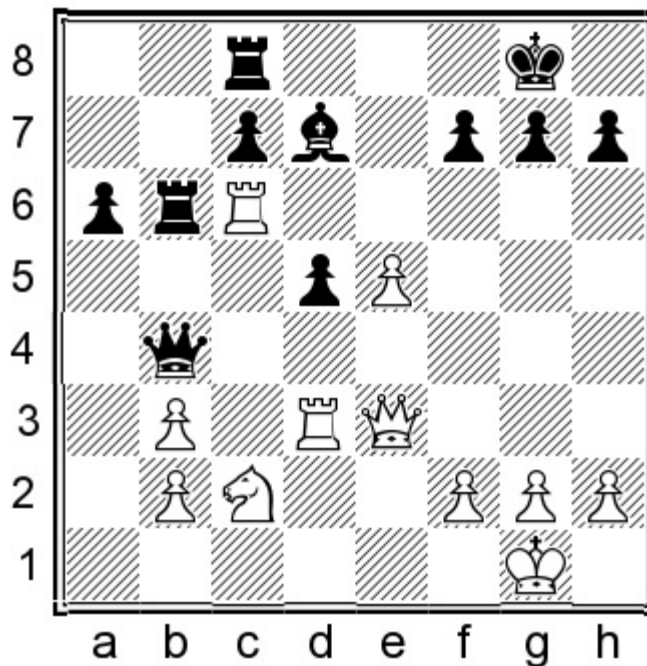
The most accurate.

Ivanchuk erred against Nakamura and didn't make the best of the position after 20.♖c5 ♖ab8 21.♞d3 ♞b5 22.♖c6 ♞b6 23.♞xb6 ♞xb6 24.♞xb6 cxb6 25.♖c3 ♞xc3 26.bxc3 a5 27.♟d4 ♟d7 28.♞f1 ♞f8 29.f4 ♞e7 30.f5 h5 31.♞e2 f6 32.e6 ♟e8 33.h3 h4 34.♞e3 g6 35.♟f3 gxf5 36.♟xh4 ♞xe6 37.g3 ♟h5 38.♟g2 ♟d1 39.♟f4+ ♞d6 40.b4 a4 41.♞d2 a3 42.♞c1 ♟b3 ½-½ Ivanchuk-Nakamura, Cap d'Agde 2008.

20...♞ab8 21.♞d3 ♞b6 22.♟d4 ♟d7

If 22...♞xc6 23.♟xc6 and Black's queen is forced to go the miserable square f8, to avoid 24.♟e7+. 22...♟d7 is better, but we have a strong reply:

23.♟c2!

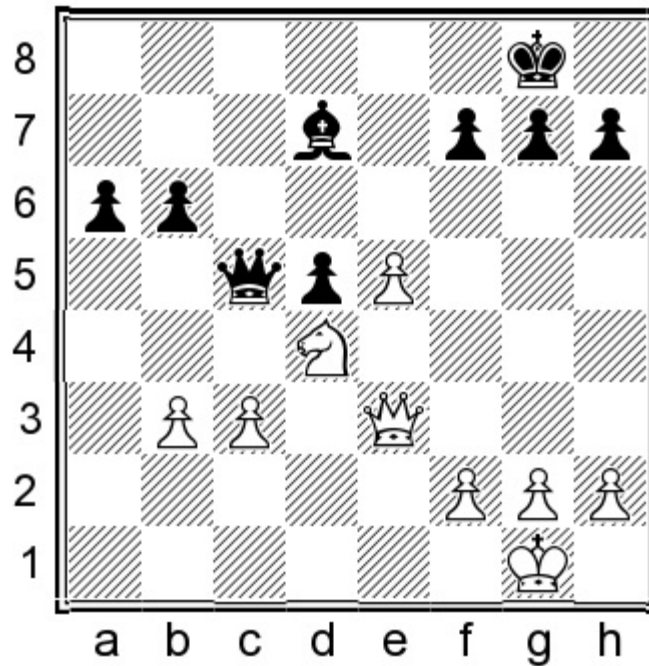


This looks a little unusual, but the point is simple: 23...♞b5 24.♖c5! and the queen is trapped.

23...♞e7 24.♖xb6

24.♖c5 is another option. We still have the bind, but the rook is a little unstable. After 24...c6 25.♞dc3 the e5-pawn may become a bit of a weakness. 24.♖xb6 is a little less ambitious but it is safer.

24...cxb6 25.♖c3 ♞xc3 26.bxc3 ♞c5 27.♟d4



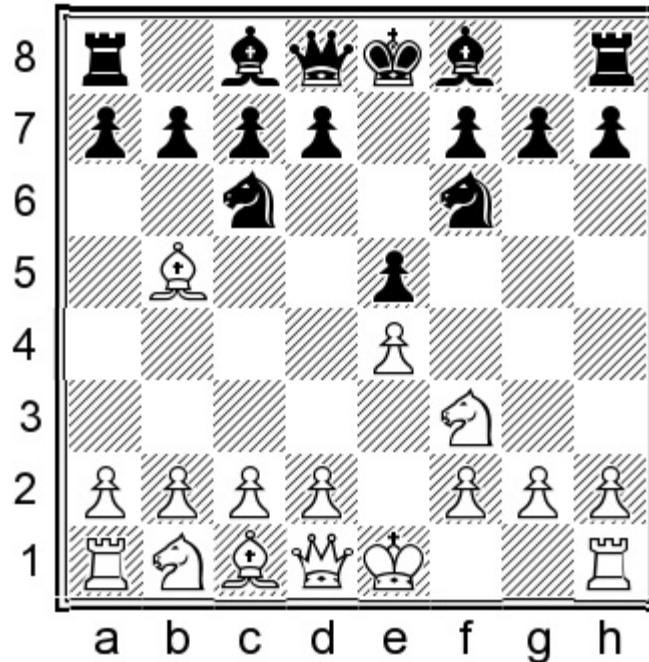
This is the same as the Ivanchuk-Nakamura game, but with the queens on. This gives White better chances of fighting for the advantage. Objectively, again, although Black should hold on here, the queen and knight pairing (traditionally better than queen and bishop), together with the slightly vulnerable position of the black king, allows us to start an attack with ♔g5, h2-h4-h5-h6 and maybe even e5-e6 one day.

The Open Spanish is still being played at the top level, but our way of playing against it allows White to try for a risk-free advantage, where one bad move for Black can prove disastrous.

Chapter 7

Berlin Defence: 3...♞f6

1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♙b5 ♞f6



Few openings have experienced quite such a revival as the Berlin Defence to the Ruy Lopez. Once considered a relic, it has been the height of fashion since the 2000 World Championship Match between Garry Kasparov and Vladimir Kramnik. Kramnik used the Berlin repeatedly to keep Kasparov quiet. So quiet, in fact, that he didn't win a single game in the match and had to spend a lot of time banging his head against the 'Berlin Wall'.

Kramnik kept the Berlin Defence as a main part of his opening repertoire until he retired from serious play in 2019. Now the Berlin Defence is rife at the top levels of chess and the fashion shows no signs of being replaced, despite being more than two decades old. Indeed, it is mainly because the Berlin is such a tough nut to crack that so many players have switched from the Spanish Game to the Italian Game (1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♙c4) in recent years.

I have a lot of experience on both sides of this variation. The Berlin is the cornerstone of many top players' repertoires. Virtually every top player has used it at some point, whether they have just dabbled with it or used it as a main part of their repertoire.

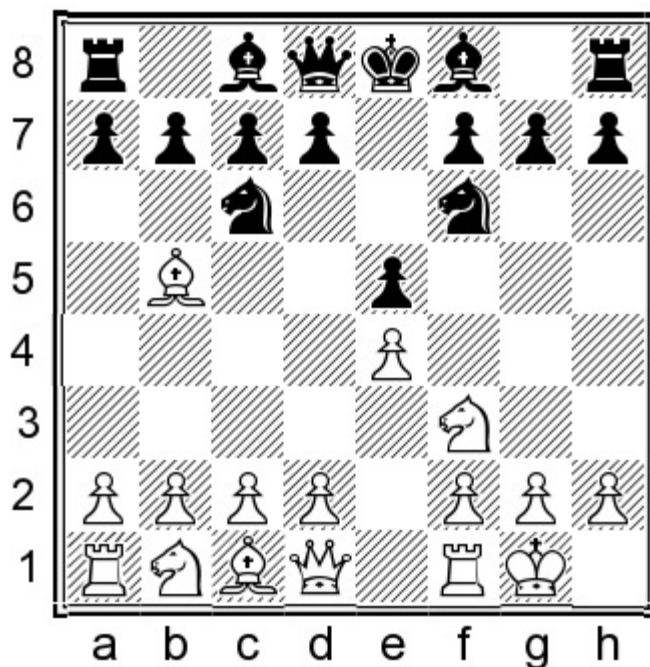
It is a very direct variation. Black avoids the Exchange Variation with 3...a6 4.♙xc6 and he only really has to deal with two main moves here: 4.d3 and 4.0-0. 4.d4 is not such a dangerous move and 4.♙e2 is not part of the general repertoire I am suggesting and is also quite healthy for Black. That leaves 4.♞c3, which transposes to the Four Knights – which is a completely different opening!

4.d3 has a huge body of theory, but after 4...♙c5, Black has a healthy position and is unlikely to be

blown away anytime soon. The reason I am not recommending 4.d3 here is because theoretically, Black is doing excellently. When I play the Berlin I am always hoping 4.d3 is the move I am going to face. It feels like Black has already won the opening battle. Of course, it is a bit absurd to say that so early, but you already feel you have a healthy position, with a good chance to fight as Black. Having said that, 4.d3 is the move I have played most often over the last few years, because it leads to a complicated fight.

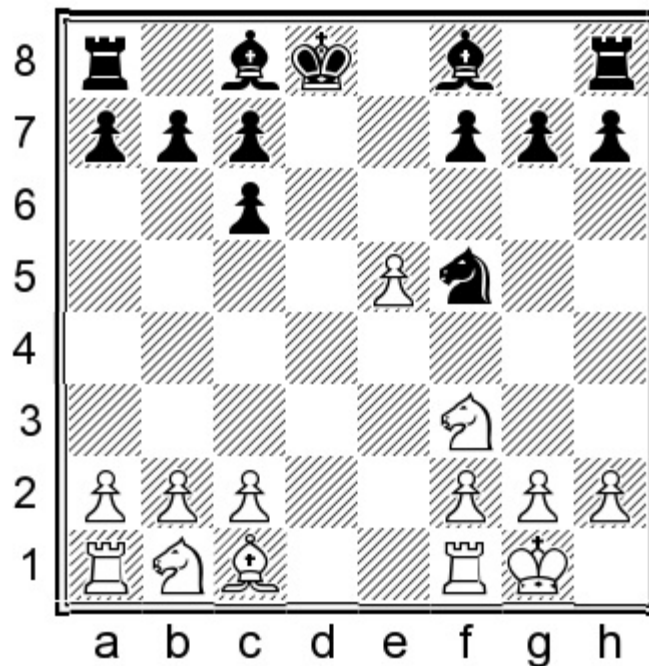
4.0-0

is the move I am recommending.



4...Nxe4

Not the only move, but the one which is commonly played to reach what is known as the Berlin Endgame. This arises after 5.d4. What differentiates this line from the Open Spanish is the exclusion of 3...a6 4.Qa4. Black cannot transpose as here, 5...a6 is not really a move, but here Black benefits by being able to kick the bishop back while placing his knight on a central square: 5...Nxd6 6.Qxc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 Nf5 8.Qxd8+ Qxd8



This is the famous ending. It has been known for a long time, but became really famous after the Kasparov-Kramnik World Championship Match in 2000. I have had this ending a handful of times with black. Not with great results; I was always worried about this endgame. Although it is very healthy for Black and has a good reputation theoretically, it still feels very dangerous; your king is in the centre. The main thing isn't that White has a kingside pawn majority, although this is, of course, a factor. The main problem is that Black can't castle.

The king either tries to go to c8 and then b7, which takes a lot of time and leaves f7 weak, or it stays in the centre and goes to e8 – which is the most popular approach now. You live with the fact that your king is there for a long time. Your rooks are not connected and it is very hard to free the king from that square and complete your development. This is why Black very often plays with ...h7-h5, which tries to make use of the rook on h8 and supports the knight on f5.

This is actually the most principled way for White to play. For example, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave usually plays this way as White and I think that is noticeable because he is such a principled player who usually goes straight for the main lines.

The problem with this approach is that there is a huge amount of theory and it is very difficult to play for both sides. It doesn't really take any big mistakes for things to go wrong. It just takes one inaccurate or passive move and then you are worse with white.

With white, I played this endgame quite a lot and I managed some notable victories. I have a very good score on the White side of the Berlin, but I also became disillusioned with it at some point. I drew an enormous amount of games – especially against Karjakin. Sometimes I would cause problems for my opponents but more often than not I would get nothing and we would draw.

Theory in these lines can go on to move 50. There was a game between Vachier-Lagrave and Karjakin which ended as a draw in an endgame with just a bishop against a knight and it was all analysis from both of them, beyond move 40.

The reason I am not recommending this ending for White is that it is very difficult to cover all of Black's options. Also, these days, especially in the main lines, White's progress has been rather stagnant. There haven't been many new ideas of late.

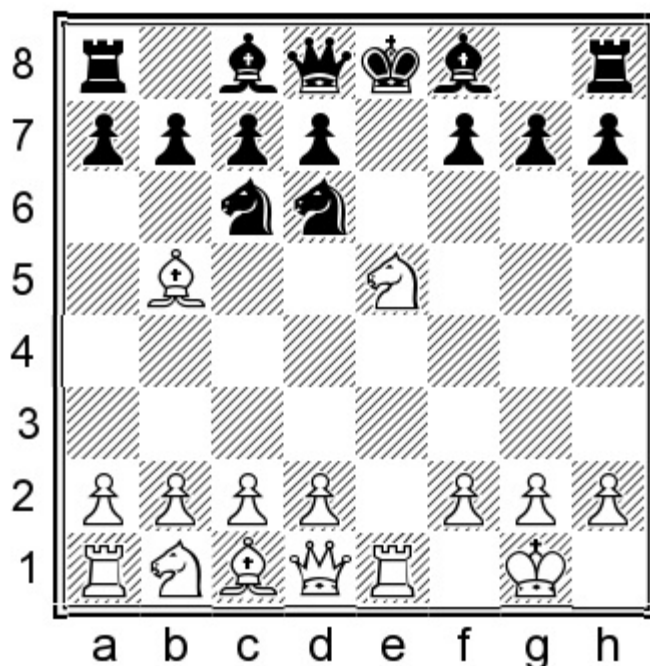
The Berlin had a reputation as being quite bad in the 1980s and 1990s, which is what caught Kasparov off-guard when Kramnik revived it in their match. Kasparov was probably torn, because on the one hand, I doubt he liked the style of the endgame, but as a principled player, with the belief that White has the better endgame, he probably felt he had to go for it. It would have probably worked out very differently if he had chosen another line. Maybe 4.d3, for example, would have suited him better.

My recommendation is:

5.♠e1 ♘d6

The best move, attacking the bishop.

6.♘xe5



For the moment, the bishop is immune: if 6...♗xb5?? 7.♘xc6+ wins the queen with a discovered check.

6...♗e7 7.♗f1

7.♗d3 is also an option. It looks anti-positional but after Black castles we can start to target the pawn on h7. It doesn't usually work out and is considered healthy for Black, but it is still an aggressive option. After 7...♘xe5 8.♠xe5 0-0 Black can follow up with ...♗e8 and ...♘f6 to defend the kingside.

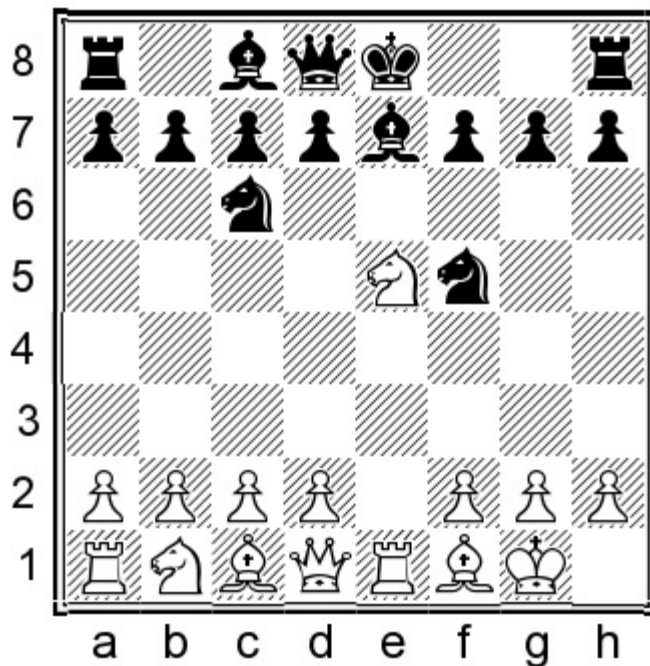
Black has a fundamental choice after 7.♗f1, which splits players into two categories: those who want

to keep the knights on the board, and those who want to take them off the board.

Black has two main moves: 7...♘f5 and 7...♘xe5. A third option, 7...0-0, usually transposes to one of the other two lines.

Black keeps the knights on the board

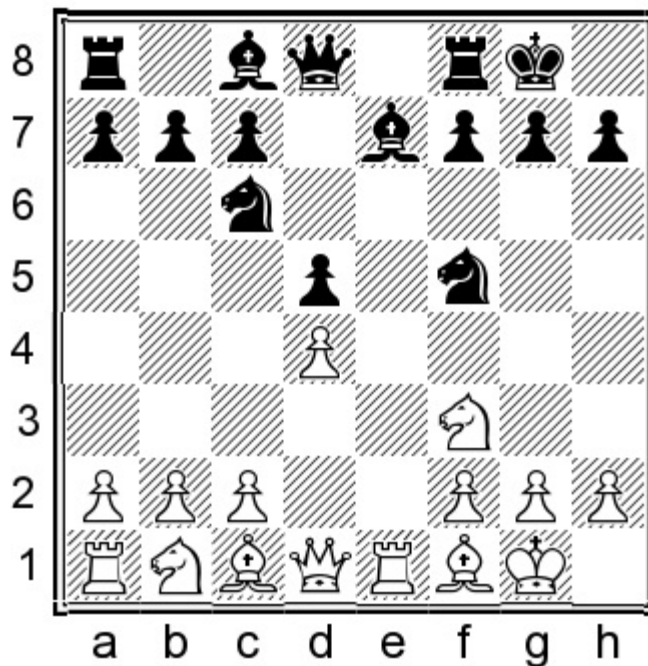
7...♘f5



8.♘f3

White avoids the trade of knights.

8...0-0 9.d4 d5



This is one of the major positions in this line. It is very similar to the Petroff Defence. The position is a symmetrical one, where White has one main advantage – the black knight on c6 is misplaced. White has the open e-file, for the moment at least. Black can challenge it with ...♖e8 and♘d6, but it takes time.

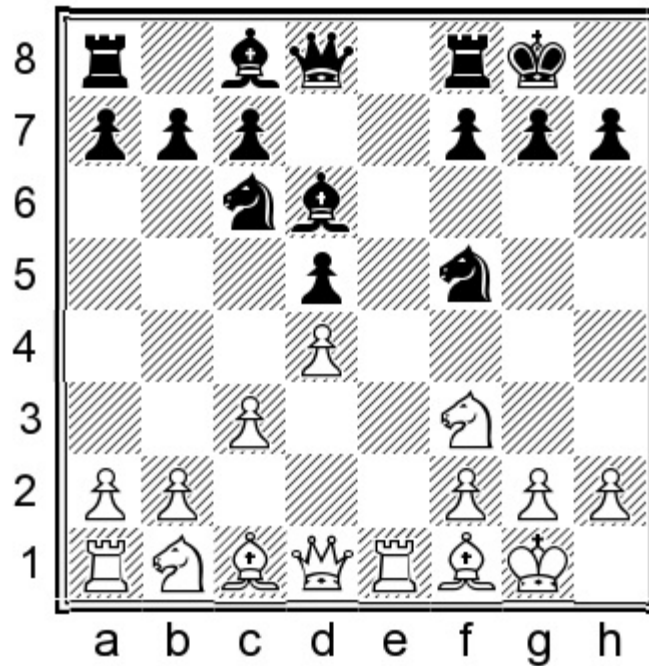
While everyone else was playing the less complicated positions with 7...♘xe5, one player who was consistently going for this line was Kramnik. He seemed to enjoy having the extra knights on the board, although I would say this is rather a riskier option for Black, because the knight on f5 could also end up being misplaced. Sometimes Black spends a lot of time just shuffling things around, without ever getting the pieces where he wants them to be. On the other hand, with more pieces on the board, there is a chance he can outplay White. I remember seeing, on more than one occasion, Kramnik playing this for a win by outplaying his opponents who were sometimes lower-rated – although I am still talking about top grandmasters rated 2700!

Now White has a choice. I remember seeing the following game, which wasn't played at the classical time limit; I think it was 60 minutes each but I was impressed by how White played.

10.c3

A natural move, defending d4 and preparing ♘d3 without worrying about ...♘b4 stuff.

10...♘d6



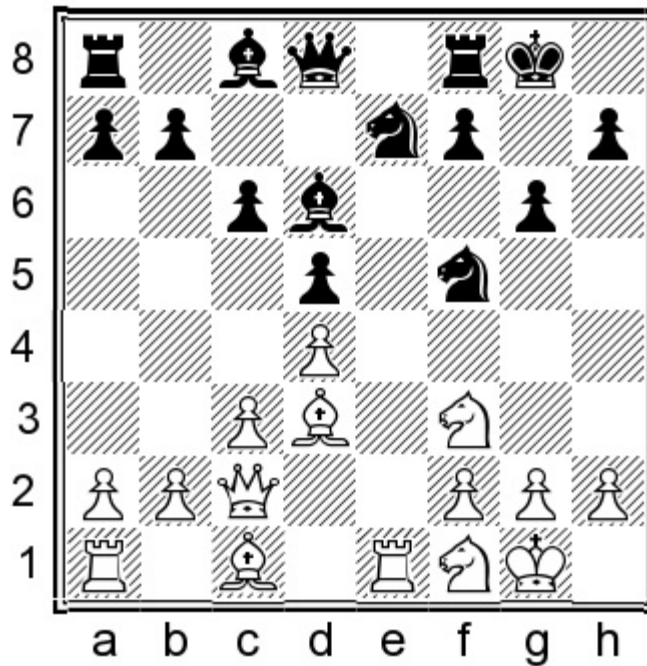
Black wants to play ...♞ce7, to get the knight from the awkward square where it does nothing, to somewhere else. A typical piece arrangement for Black here is ...g7-g6, ...f7-f6, ...♞g7 and then ...♞c6-e7-f5. The kingside looks a bit weakened, but it isn't really because White doesn't have any way to attack these pawns. The pawn on f6 covers e5 and g5 and the knight on g7 is safe from being hit by g2-g4.

White will probably go for ♕d3 and ♞bd2-f1-g3.

11. ♕d3 ♞ce7 12. ♞bd2 c6 13. ♙c2 g6

White was threatening 14.g4. 13...h6? saves the pawn but then after 14.g4 the knight on f5 is trapped.

14. ♞f1



Black is a bit congested and needs to arrange his pieces somehow.

14...♘g7

This looks a bit congested too, but it's difficult to find a way to complete Black's development without resorting to this plan. If 14...♙e6 then the bishop will be hit by ♘g5 at some point and if 14...♙d7 it will be hit by ♘e5. The bishop will have to move again unless Black wants to give up the bishop pair.

15.♘g3

Played primarily to stop 15...♙f5, as Black would be quite happy to trade the light-squared bishops.

15...f6

15...♙g4 16.♘e5 demonstrates once more the problem with the bishop.

16.♙h6 ♖e8

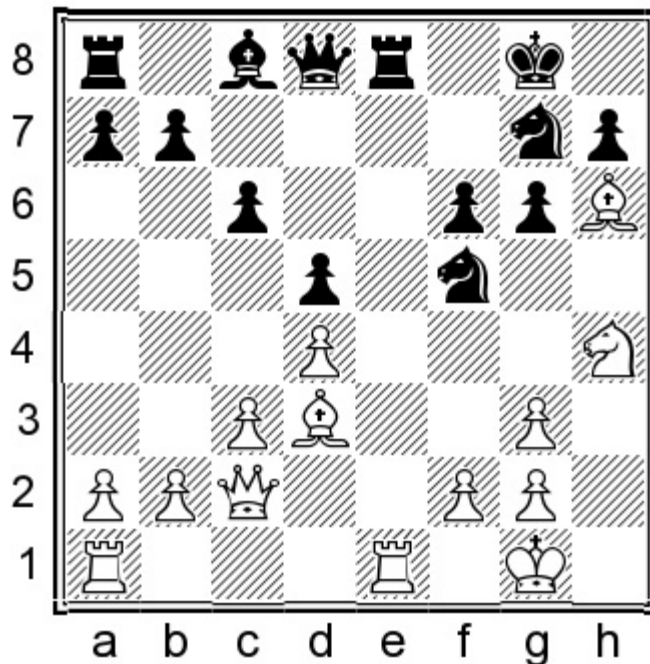
On 16...♙g4 White can play for c3-c4. After 17.♘d2 (17.♖e3 ♘ef5 18.♘xf5 ♘xf5 19.♙xf8 ♘xe3 20.fxe3 ♗xf8 21.♖f1 ♗e7 or 17.♗e2 ♖e8 18.h3 ♘ef5 or 17.♘h4 ♗d7 are all fine for Black) 17...♗d7 Black's weaknesses on the kingside aren't really noticeable here but once the centre opens up, if I get the e4-square, I should be able to probe the weaknesses a bit: 18.c4 dxc4 19.♙xc4+ with ♘e4 to follow.

17.♘h4 ♙xg3

Black needs to act quickly, otherwise White will simply play 18.♖e2 and 19.♖ae1 with significant

pressure. The plan of c3-c4 is still possible too.

18.hxg3 ♖ef5



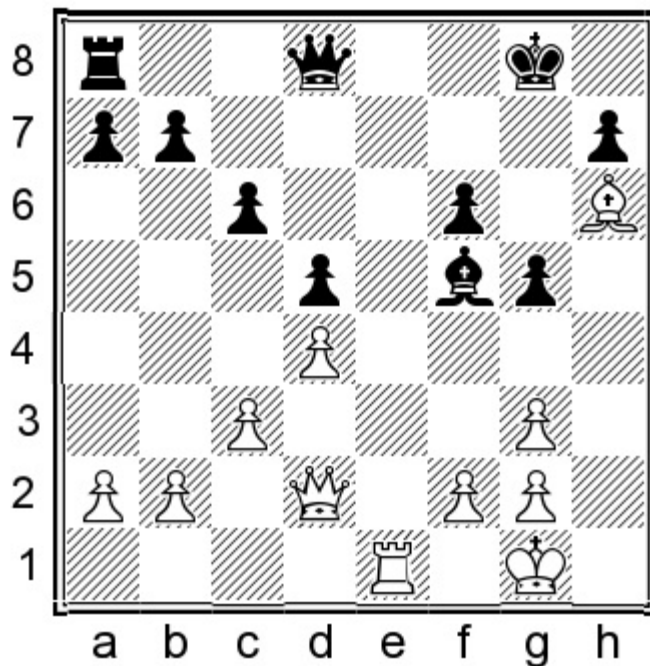
19.♔d2

Black was hoping for 19.♖xf5 ♗xf5 20.♗xf5 (20.♗xg7 ♗xd3 21.♔xd3 ♖xg7 with complete simplification) 20...♖xf5, easing his game.

19...g5

A double-edged move. 19...♖xh6 was worse; after 20.♔xh6 we suddenly have ideas of ♖xg6. With the text Black does cut out the bishop, but either it will work tactically, or it won't – and in this case, it doesn't.

20.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 21.♖e1 ♔d8 22.♖xf5 ♖xf5 23.♗xf5 ♗xf5



I saw this game as I was playing in the same event. I wasn't sure if White was much better here. His bishop is trapped and Black has the idea of ...♔f7 and ...♔g6. Either this will end very badly for White, or he is just going to start an attack. In the game he started an attack – and in fact the position is just much better for White.

24. ♖e2 ♔f7

Black must prevent 25. ♖e7. For example, after 24... ♗d7 25. ♖e7 ♗xe7 26. ♖xe7, he is not going to survive the endgame.

25. g4 ♗d7

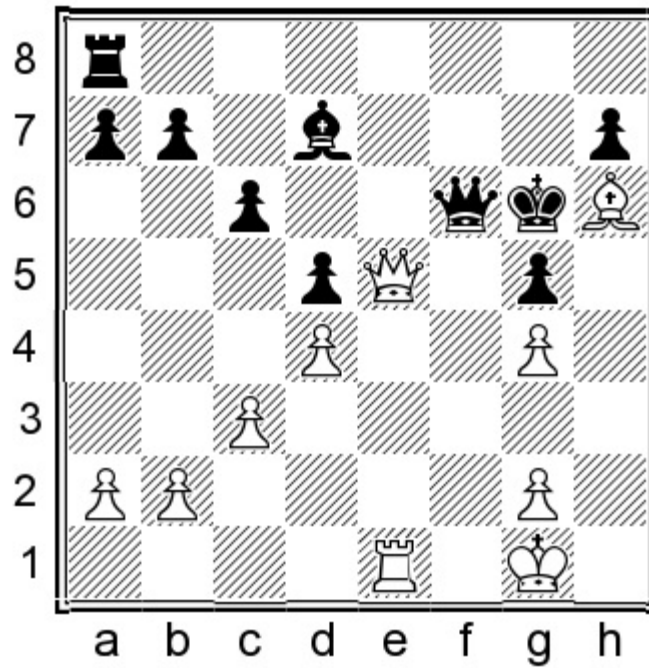
Or 25... ♗g6 26. ♖e6 checkmate.

26. f4 ♔g6

The bishop is still trapped, but it is not too surprising that the tactics work out well for White in this position.

27. fxg5 fxg5 28. ♖e5! ♗f6

28... ♔xh6 29. ♖d6+ ♔g7 30. ♖e7+ picks up the bishop – which is the least of Black's problems.



I have a feeling there is more than one way for White to convert the advantage in this position, but the way he played was really strong:

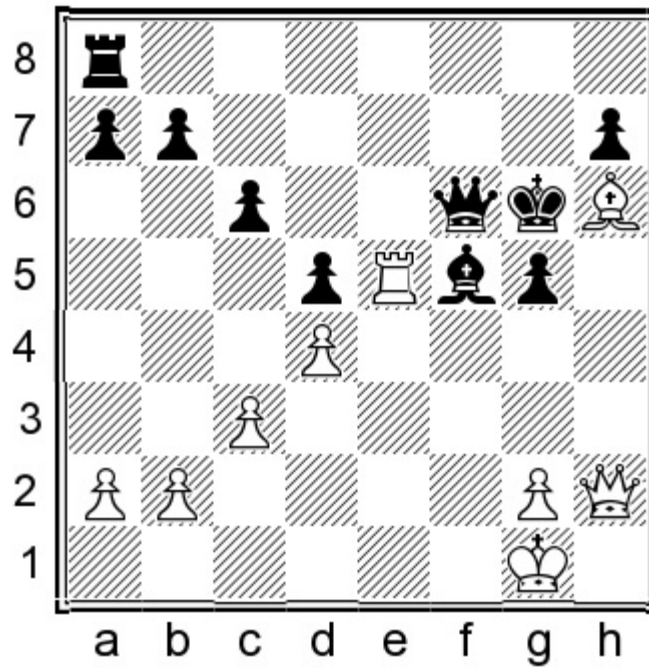
29. ♔h2

A beautiful move! White decentralizes and threatens checkmate on h5.

29... ♖xg4 30. ♖e5

Now the rook comes into the game, with the decisive threat of capturing on g5.

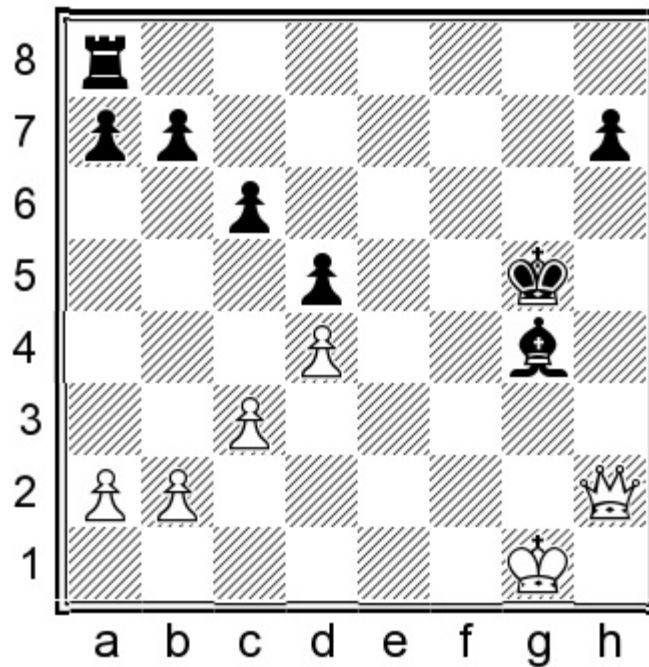
30... ♖f5



31.g4

The final deflection sacrifice.

31...♙xg4 32.♖xg5+ ♚xg5 33.♙xg5 ♔xg5



White has won the queen and now goes on to win the game:

34.♚xh7 b6 35.♚b7 ♖c8 36.♚xa7 b5 37.b3 ♔f4 38.♔f2 ♙f5 39.a4 bxa4 40.bxa4 ♔e4 41.a5 ♖h8 42.♚c7 ♔d3 43.a6 1-0

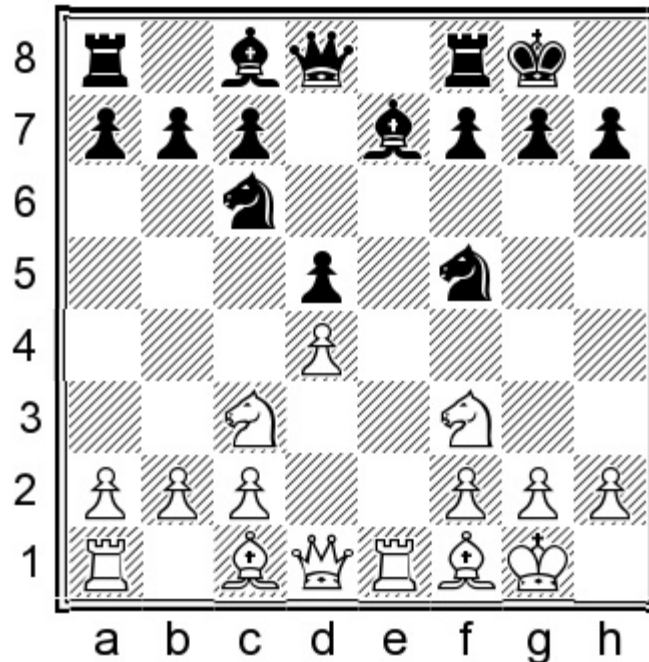
This was Topalov-Nakamura, St Louis 2016.

I thought this was a really well played game. Black was doing OK, objectively, but he was always under some slight pressure. It also shows that just because a position is symmetrical, it doesn't mean that game won't end with a direct attack on Black's king.

I was looking at this variation again and I quite like the way Anish Giri played it against Hikaru Nakamura in the blitz tournament in Leuven 2018. It is a matter of taste, but Anish tried the move 10.♘c3!.

Anish Giri
Hikaru Nakamura
Leuven 2018

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.♞e1 ♘d6 6.♘xe5 ♙e7 7.♙f1 ♘f5 8.♘f3 0-0 9.d4 d5 10.♘c3!



It looks a bit funny, especially as we said earlier that Black's knight is misplaced on c6. In the other position, our route was ♘b1-d2-f1-g3 and it also took a move for us to play ♙d3 to free the f1-square. By playing 10.♘c3, we are trying to go ♘c3-e2-g3, or in some cases the knight goes to f4. It is a slightly faster way of getting there.

The downside is that the knight on e2 will temporarily block the e-file and allow Black to play ...♞e8. Black has a variety of moves here:

10...♘h4

This is the main move, which made me interested in this line. Alternatives include:

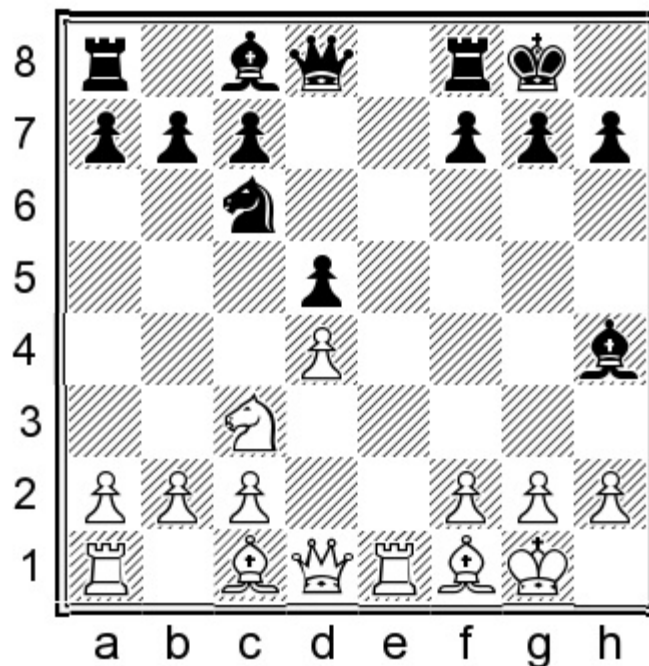
A) 10...♔e6 11.♘e2 ♚d7 12.♘f4, planning on obtaining the advantage of the bishop pair;

B) 10...♔f6 11.♘e2 ♚e8 12.c3 and Black's dark-squared bishop is biting on granite, while the light-squared bishop remains a problem once more;

C) 10...♔b4 11.♔f4 ♘ce7 12.a3 ♔d6 and Black is fine. Here I prefer 11.a3, simply getting the bishop pair after 11...♔xc3 12.bxc3. We spend a tempo and we allow our pawn structure to be damaged a little bit, but on the other hand we do have the dark-squared bishop, which is coming to f4 unopposed, and after 12...♘d6 13.♘e5 we have a powerful outpost. If Black plays 13...♘xe5 then after 14.dxe5 we create this kingside majority, which allows some attacking chances, especially with the bishop pair. If now 14...♘e4, we just play 15.c4. After 13...♔f5 we can even trade the light-squared bishops with 14.♔d3 ♔xd3 15.cxd3. It is more pleasant for White but it's not a tragedy for Black. This is why 10...♔b4 is one of Black's better moves.

In most of these lines, Black always gets close to – but never quite achieves – complete harmony for his pieces.

11.♘xh4 ♔xh4



12.♘e2!

It is surprising, but this is actually rather unpleasant for Black. In the past, people played 12.♔f4 here. I myself played this against Nakamura but I didn't achieve anything from the opening.

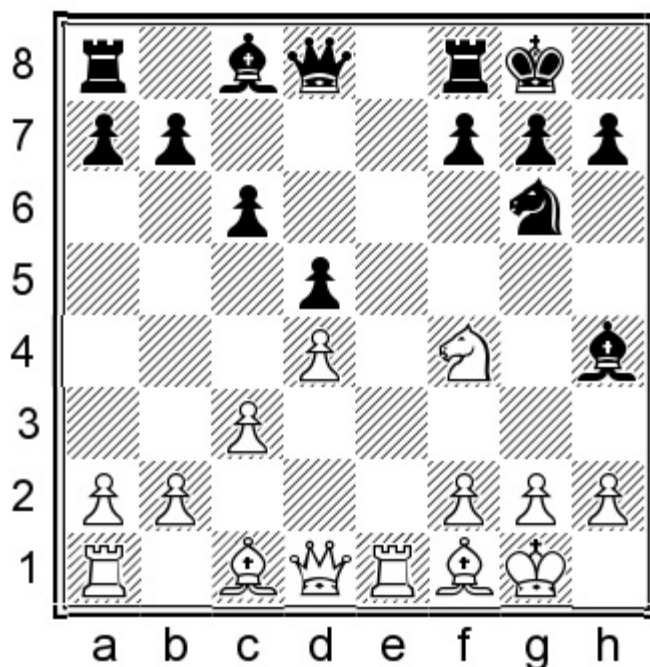
A combination of factors makes this position difficult for Black. The knight on c6 doesn't allow ...c7-c6, which leaves the d-pawn under pressure after White plays c2-c3 and ♘f4. The white structure is going to be very solid after c2-c3, but in Black's structure the d-pawn will be hanging most of the time. The bishop on h4 is on the side of the board, doing nothing. Even if it goes straight back to e7,

Black still has to find another place for it in order to contest the e-file. This all adds up to give White the edge.

12...♖e8

Black has alternatives:

A) 12...♞e7 is a natural way of trying to get the knight somewhere: 13.c3 ♞g6 14.♞f4 c6.



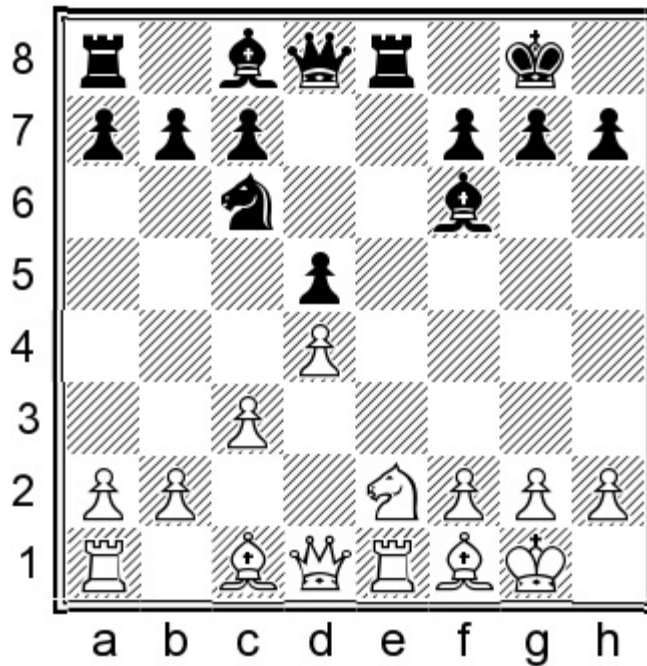
It was a surprise to me, but even if Black trades the knights it is still unpleasant for him: 15.g3 ♙f6 16.♙d3 ♞xf4 17.♙xf4 – both of White’s bishops are far better than Black’s and yet again Black has a hard time contesting the e-file. White will play with the initiative, e.g. 17...♙e6 18.♚f3 ♚d7 19.♙e5 ♙xe5 20.♞xe5 ♞ae8 21.♞ae1. White’s advantage is obvious, and tactical solutions never work out for Black in positions like these either, for example: 21...f6 (21...♙g4 22.♚e3 ♞xe5 23.♚xe5, with domination of the e-file again) 22.♙xh7+ ♔xh7 23.♞xe6 ♞xe6 24.♚f5+ with a large advantage for White;

B) 12...♙f5 13.c3 ♚d7 14.♞f4 ♞ae8 15.♙e3 and

C) 12...♙e7 13.♞f4

are both good for White.

13.c3 ♙f6



What Giri played now was very logical and he went on to win a good game: 14.♔f4 ♖e7 15.♘g3 g6 16.♚f3 ♗g7 17.♙e5 ♙e6 18.♚f4 c6 19.♙d3 ♚d7 20.♙xg7 ♔xg7 21.♚e5+ ♔g8 22.♚g5 f6 23.♚xf6 ♖c8 24.♙e5 ♚e7 25.♚f4 ♚f7 26.♚g5 ♖b6 27.♙ae1 ♖d7 28.♙e3 ♖f8 29.♘h5 ♖d7 30.♘f4 ♖f8 31.h4 1-0 (38), Giri-Nakamura, Leuven blitz 2018. I think White can do even better and I like (in the above diagram position):

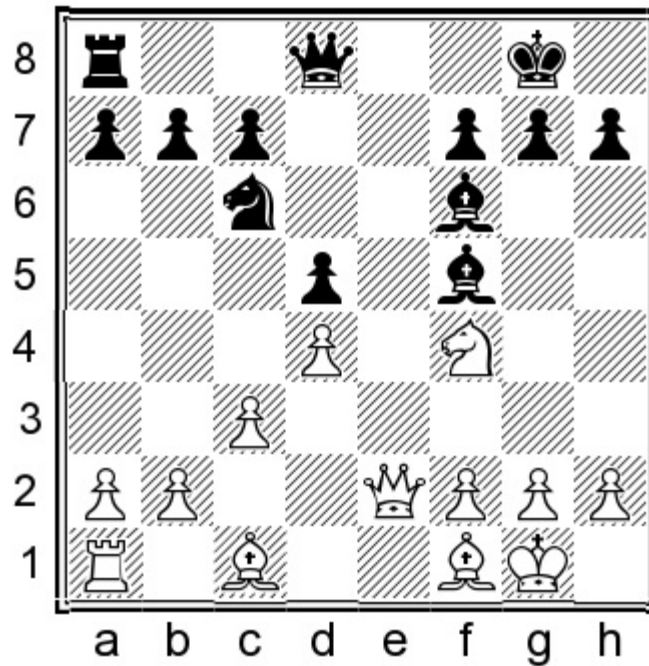
14.♘f4

Threatening to trade rooks and then to take on d5.

14...♙xe1 15.♚xe1 ♙f5

After 15...♖e7 16.♘h5 Black is not getting what he wants.

16.♚e2



Here we see the typical idea of threatening 17.♞b5 to attack b7 and d5.

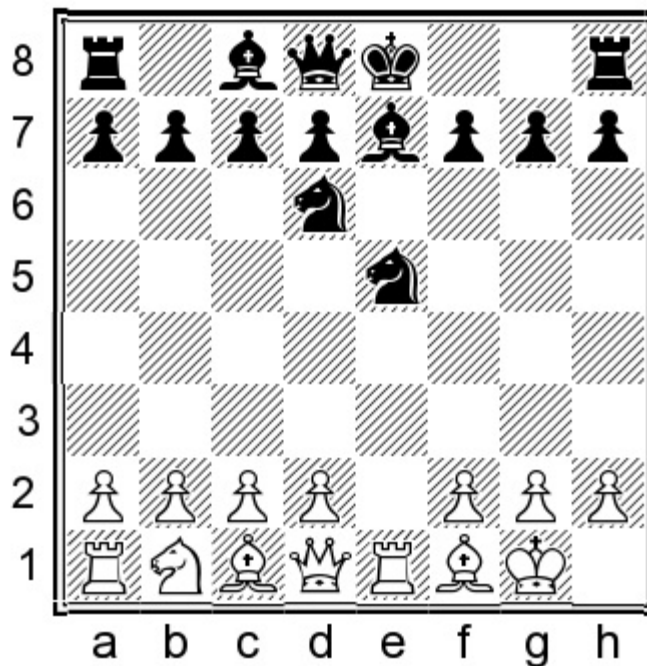
16...♞d7

If Black plays 16...a6 then we play 17.♞f3, provoking 17...♙e4 when we play 18.♞g4. Now this is awkward for Black. For example, after 18...♞d6 I might play 19.♘h5 and 20.♙f4, when the white initiative is growing and it is easy to imagine it can turn into a dangerous attack.

Summing up, it seems that the d5-pawn is always a weakness and that White's c3- and d4-pawns are killing Black's dark-squared bishop.

Black trades the knights

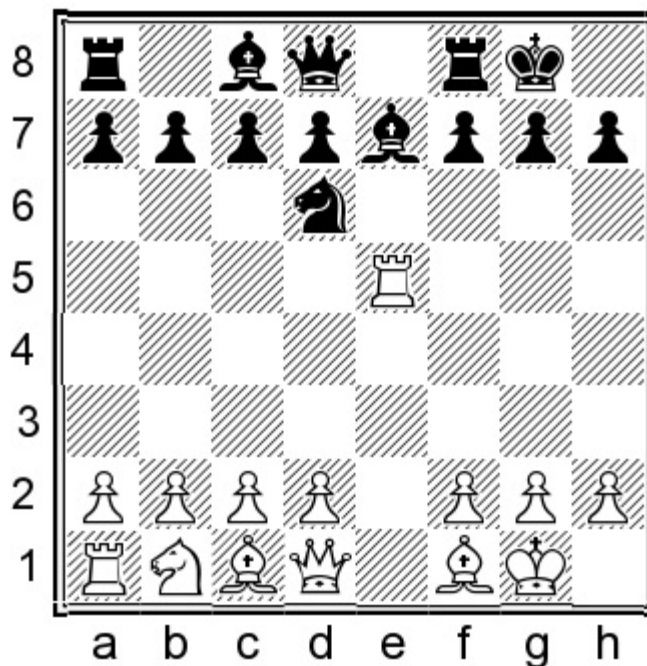
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.♞e1 ♘d6 6.♘xe5 ♙e7 7.♙f1 ♘xe5



This is Black's other option; trading off the knights immediately. Black is trying to equalize more clearly, but he gives up his ambitions to play a more complex position. White will have a lot of ways to play, very safely, for a slight advantage. I also think that White has ways to create imbalances in the position and play for more than a slight advantage.

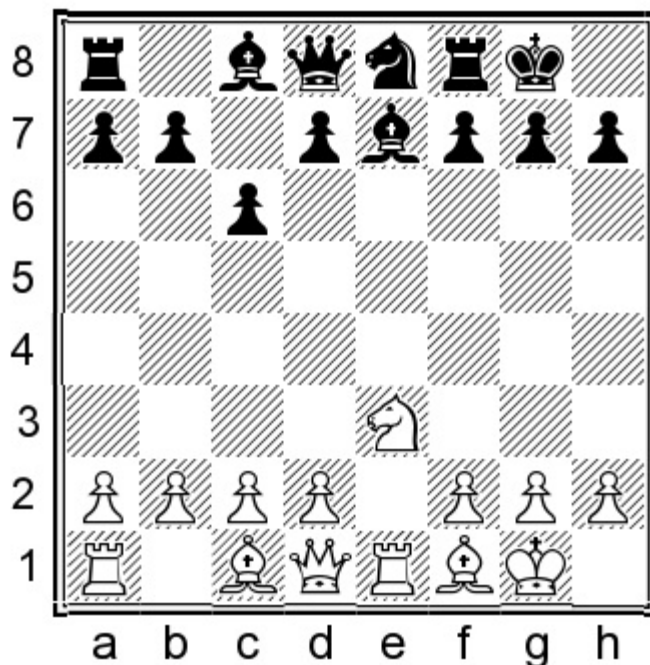
It is not so easy, as the pawn structure is symmetrical and there is only one open file. If Black's knight were on g6 instead on d6 then Black would be completely comfortable. On d6, the knight is really misplaced. It gets in the way of the d-pawn, it doesn't have a great square to go to, and very often Black plays ...Nf6, which takes a lot of time.

8. ♖xe5 0-0



9.d4

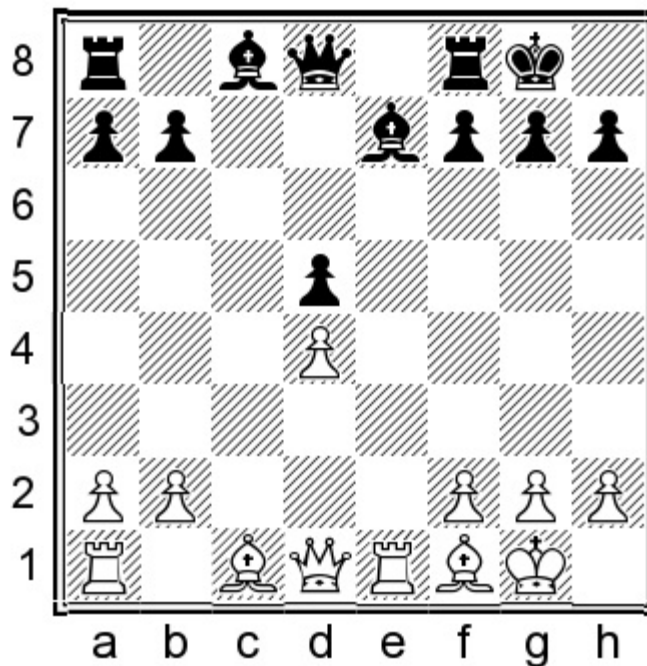
White can also try 9.♘c3 ♖e8 10.♘d5 ♙d6 11.♞e1 c6 12.♘e3 ♙e7. Black is spending a lot of time trying to reorganize his pieces. But White is also spending a lot of time jumping around with his knight, trying to create threats...



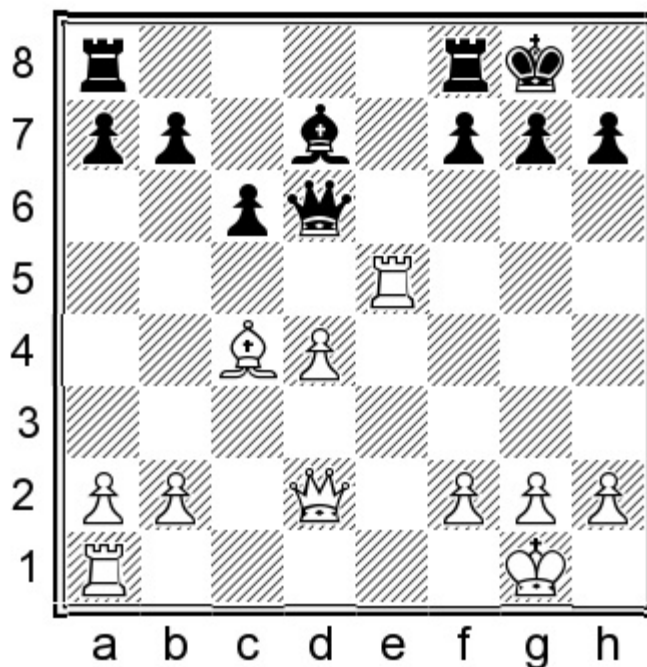
... especially if he plays 13.♘f5 here.

9.♘c3 is an interesting move, but I don't feel it gives White enough of an advantage here. I have played this a lot as Black.

One idea for White is to play the funny-looking move 13.c4 in the diagram position, stopping 13...d5 because of 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♘xd5 ♙xd5 16.♞xe7. But Black can play 13...♘c7 to prepare ...d7-d5. There is a great deal of theory here: 14.d4 d5 15.cxd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 cxd5.



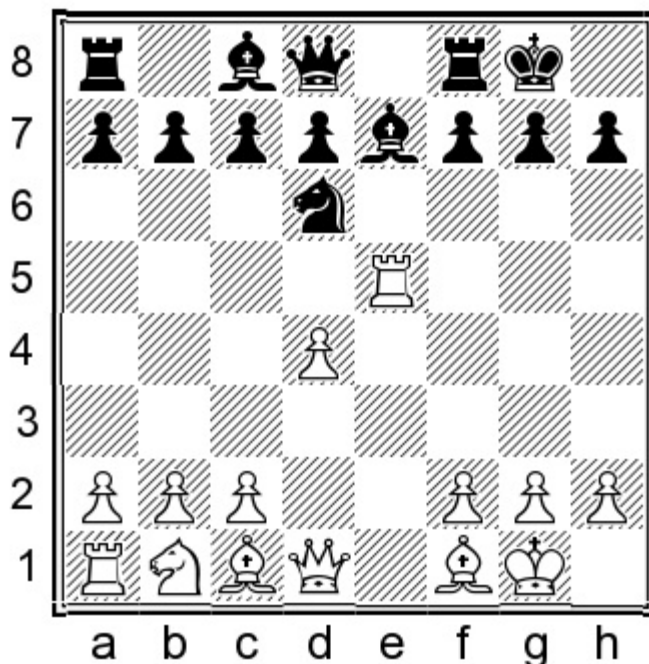
I played this position against Magnus Carlsen and you wouldn't think that White can create many chances here, but I was suffering a bit in that game. I eventually drew, but it was by no means easy. Since this position is considered a little unpleasant for Black, just because White has the e-file and is quicker to get his bishops to nice squares, Black has started playing 15...♔b4 (instead of 15...♘xd5) 16.♕d2 ♕xd2 17.♚xd2 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♚xd5 (the difference is that there is no longer a bishop hanging on e7, so Black can recapture with the queen instead of the pawn) 19.♖e5 ♚d6 20.♕c4 ♕d7.



This position has been played a lot. White has tried in many top games to prove the slightest advantage here, but mostly in vain. I have drawn a number of games here with black, against very strong players. The only reason that Black is in a slightly uncomfortable position is that he can't really put his bishop on e6, which is why it goes to d7. This leaves White with pressure on the f7-

pawn. Even though Black very often draws, it is not always pleasant and I always felt under a bit of uncomfortable pressure.

In any case, although this is an interesting place to explore, it is not my main recommendation. 9.d4 is the more natural move.



Rather than jumping around with the knight, we just develop. If allowed, we would play 10.c4 and 11.Nc3, possibly followed by 12.d5. This space advantage would be unpleasant for Black.

To avoid being worse, Black has to quickly organize ...d7-d5.

Now 9...Re8 is a mistake, even though it looks like a natural move. After 10.Nc3, the black knight has nowhere to go, because e8 is taken by the rook. Black already has to be very careful, as this sample line shows: 10...b6 11.Nd5 Qf8 12.Qg5 f6 13.Qd3! fxg5 (13...Rxe5 14.dxe5) 14.Wh5 g6 (14...h6 15.Wg6) 15.Qxg6 hxg6 16.Wxg6+ Qg7 17.Rxg5 with a winning advantage.

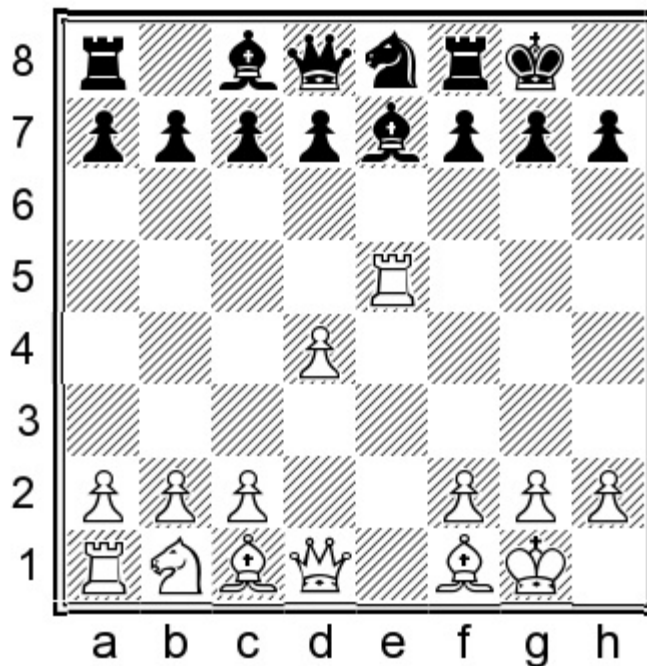
If Black plays 9...b6 10.Nc3 Qb7 11.Nd5 Qxd5 12.Rxd5 he has no compensation for giving up the bishop pair.

This position is very popular at the top level, with a lot of players trying to prove an advantage for White and others trying to prove it is fine for Black.

I have played this from both sides, although more often with black.

1) Black moves the knight

9...Ne8



A favourite of Levon Aronian. It is a very direct way of playing. If Black is given one more move then he will play 10...d5 and he is fine.

10.d5

10.c3 is too slow to give White any advantage: 10...d5 11.♘d2 and Black wins an important tempo with 11...♙d6, because 12.♞xd5 (12.♞e1 ♘f6 is fine for Black) runs into 12...♙xh2+ 13.♔xh2 ♚xd5.

After the text, Aronian used to play to exchange his king's bishop with 10...d6 11.♞e1 ♙g5, but he suffered in those games after 12.c4 ♙xc1 13.♚xc1 ♘f6 14.♘c3 with a space advantage. It isn't fun for Black.

10...♙c5!

Getting the bishop out of the pawn chain before playing ...d7-d6. The bishop is strong on c5 and it attacks f2. Black can play ...d7-d6, ...♘f6 or possibly even ...♚h4, adding to the pressure on f2.

This highlights the downside of 10.d5; it weakens the dark squares, although this is only noticeable if Black finds 10...♙c5.

There is a lot of theory here.

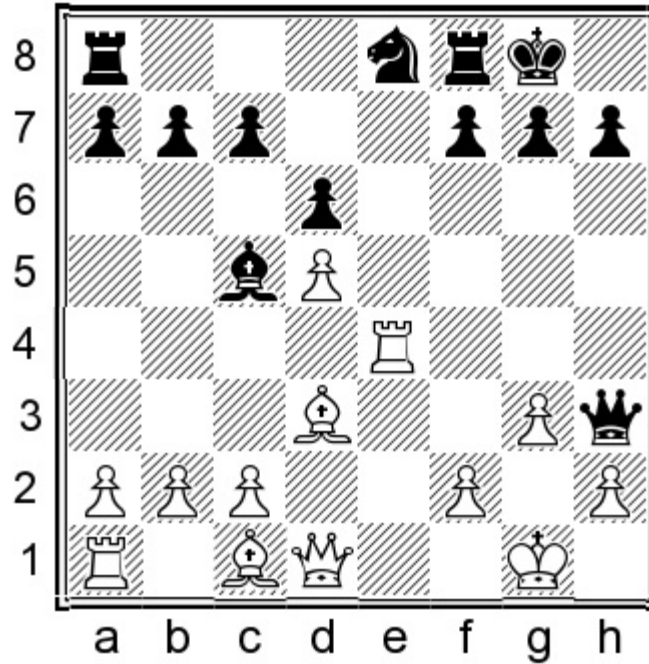
11.♞e1 d6 12.♘c3 ♙f5

Deterring 13.♘e4.

13.♙d3 ♚h4!

White would have been happy after 13...♙xd3 14.♚xd3 with ♘e4 to follow.

14.g3 ♔h3 15.♘e4 ♙xe4 16.♖xe4



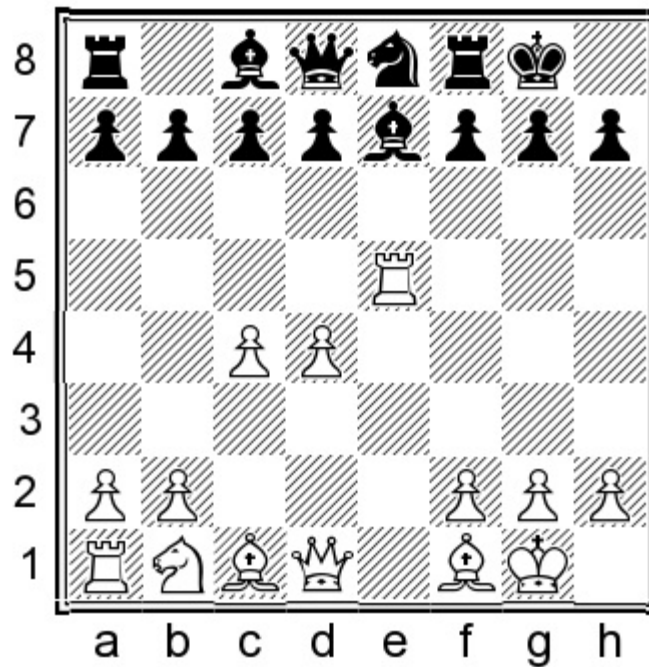
Now it looks like White is going to force Black back with 17.♖h4, but he gets hit with a sacrifice:

16...♙xf2+! 17.♔xf2 ♚xh2+

This position is actually a forced draw, as happened in Robson-So, St Louis 2019.

10.c4

is very interesting.



It is a very positionally-motivated move. White wants to play 11.♘c3 and eventually d4-d5. After 10...d6 11.♞e1 ♘f6 12.♘c3 ♞e8 13.d5 ♙f8 14.♙g5 Black has no good squares for his bishops and he has no space either.

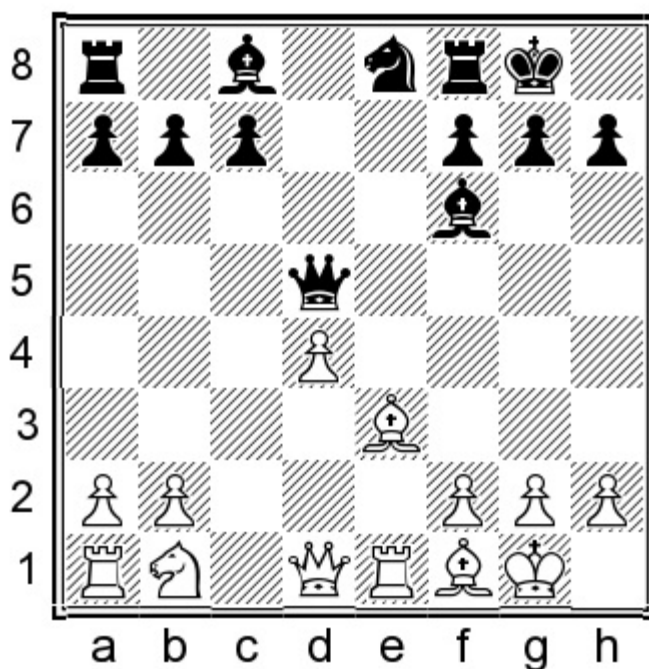
10...♙f6 11.♞e1 d5 12.cxd5

Black can take a pawn with 12.♘c3 dxc4 13.♙xc4 ♚xd4. The other thing to note is that even though 12.c5 gives White a significant space advantage, the d4-pawn can be very weak after 12...c6 13.♙f4 ♙f5 14.♘c3 ♘c7 15.♙d6 ♞e8 and the pawn will come under attack after ...♘e6.

12...♚xd5

Structurally, Black is doing great now, but he is still a bit awkwardly placed, with the queen on d5 and the knight on e8.

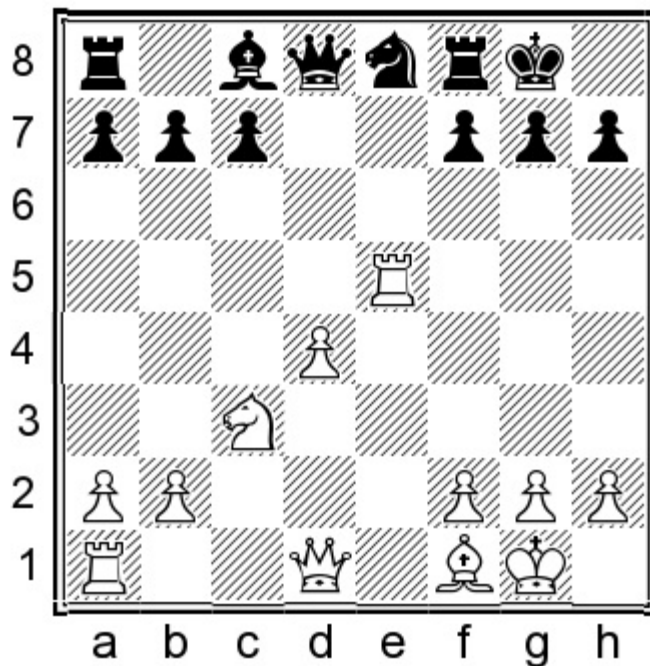
13.♙e3



The plan is simple; I want to play ♘c3 and start harassing the black pieces, then continue playing for the initiative with moves like ♙c4, ♘e4 and maybe ♚h5.

Black now has a choice of moves and all of them are roughly equivalent.

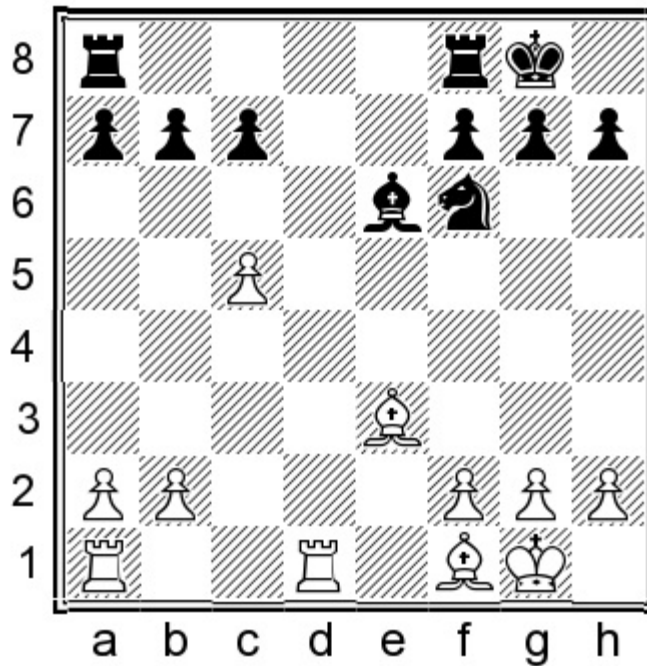
Aronian moved the queen back immediately in a game against Anand. His idea was to exchange the bishops: **13...♚d8 14.♘c3 ♙g5** I think this is a questionable move, but we have already seen that Aronian likes to trade these bishops in general, to relieve the tension in the position. 14...♘d6 is awkward for Black after 15.♘d5 ♙h4 16.♙f4 c6 17.♘c3 ♘f5 18.d5 cxd5 19.♘xd5, when Black's pieces remain misplaced. **15.♙xg5 ♚xg5 16.♞e5 ♚d8**



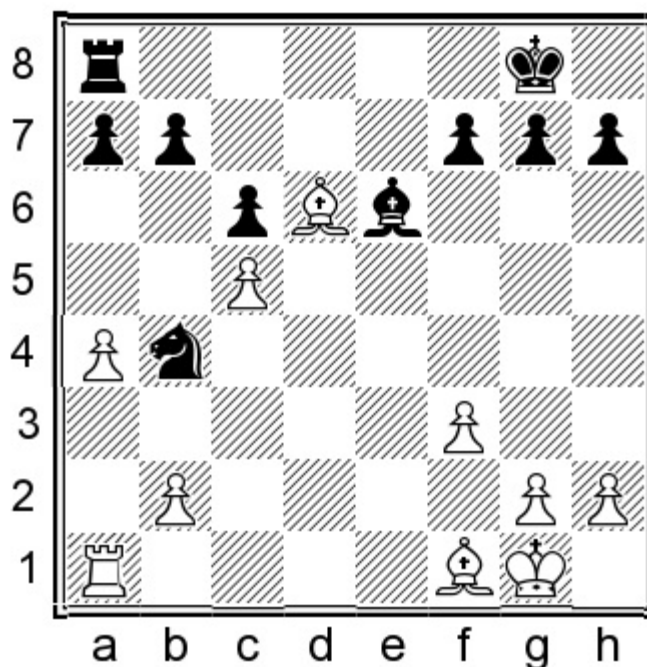
17.♖d2 I think a better try for an advantage is 17.♙c4 ♘d6 18.♙b3 ♙d7 19.♗h5 ♖f6 20.♘d5. Now this is annoying for Black. He can't get rid of the rook on e5 and he can't oppose the bishop on b3. Although I have an isolated d-pawn, it is difficult to attack it, and it provides me with a large space advantage. Black is not losing, but he is definitely suffering. 17...♘f6 18.♙c4 ♘g4 19.♞e2 ♗d6 20.g3 ♘f6 21.♞ae1 ♙d7 22.♞e5 ♞ad8 23.♘e4 ♘xe4 24.♞1xe4 ♙c6 25.d5 ♙d7 26.♗c3 a6 27.♙b3 ♞fe8 28.h4 ♞xe5 29.♗xe5 ♗xe5 30.♞xe5 ♘f8 31.f4 f6 32.♞e3 ♙e8 33.♞c3 c6 34.dxc6 ♙xc6 35.♙c2 ♞d2 36.b4 h6 37.♘f1 ♘e7 38.♘e1 ♞h2 ½-½ Anand- Aronian, Kolkata 2018.

Aronian has also tried 13...♙e6 but he still suffered. Aronian is a great expert in the Berlin. If even a player like Levon is struggling then it shows that White's chances to put pressure on Black are very serious. I think that Aronian just believes in the black position. Black always comes under pressure but remains extremely solid – and Aronian does draw most of his games in the Berlin.

14.♘c3 ♗d7 If instead 14...♗d8 15.♗f3 ♘d6 16.♞ad1 ♗d7 17.h3 then the pressure is not going away any time soon. We have ideas of ♙e3-f4-e5 and also ♘d5. **15.♘e4** Instead, there is 15.d5 which actually limits our options. For example, we can't play ♘d5. 15.♘e4 is very logical, hitting the bishop and with the option of 16.♘c5. It helps that we directly prevent 15...♘d6 because of 16.♘xf6+, when Black's pawn structure would be ruined. 15...♙e7 16.♘c5 White can also wait a move before playing ♘c5 with 16.♙d3!?. 16...♙xc5 Black needs to take, otherwise there are tactical problems. For example, 16...♗c8? 17.♘xe6 ♗xe6 (17...fxe6 18.d5 is also bad for Black) 18.♙g5. **17.dxc5 ♗xd1 18.♞exd1 ♘f6**

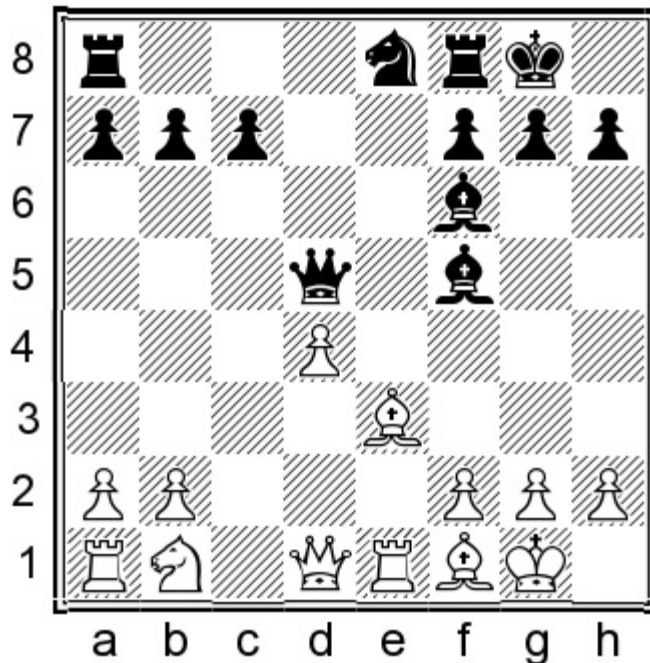


White has a slight advantage in this ending. Not a tremendous one, but we do have the bishop pair. We would prefer the pawn to be on c4, to cover our light squares a little better, but in any case I think White can play for an advantage here: **19.f3** When we have an unopposed dark-squared bishop, we are not worried about creating any slight weaknesses on the dark squares here. We are also happy to create some *luft*, which helps us to bring our king to the centre, and just prevent ...♘g4 and ...♘e4 ideas. **19...♞fd8 20.a4 ♘d5** We are happy if Black plays 20...a5 as this pawn can become a weakness. **21.♙f2 ♘b4 22.♙g3 c6 23.♞d6 23.♙d6 ♘c2 24.♞ac1 ♘e3 25.♞d4 ♘xf1 26.♙xf1 ♞e8 27.♞b4** is more drawish due to the opposite-coloured bishops, but Black will still be made to suffer. **23.♙c7 ♞xd1 24.♞xd1** is also good, getting the d-file. **23...♞xd6 24.♙xd6**



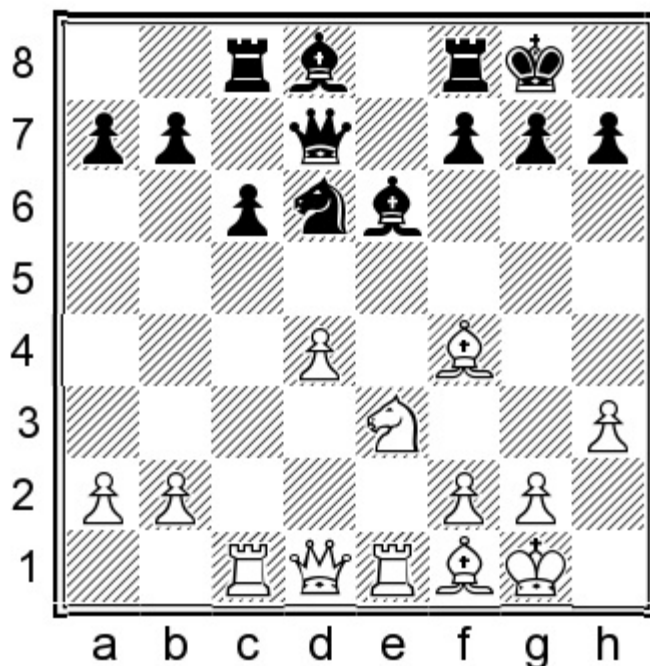
With a very pleasant advantage for White.

That leaves 13...♙f5.

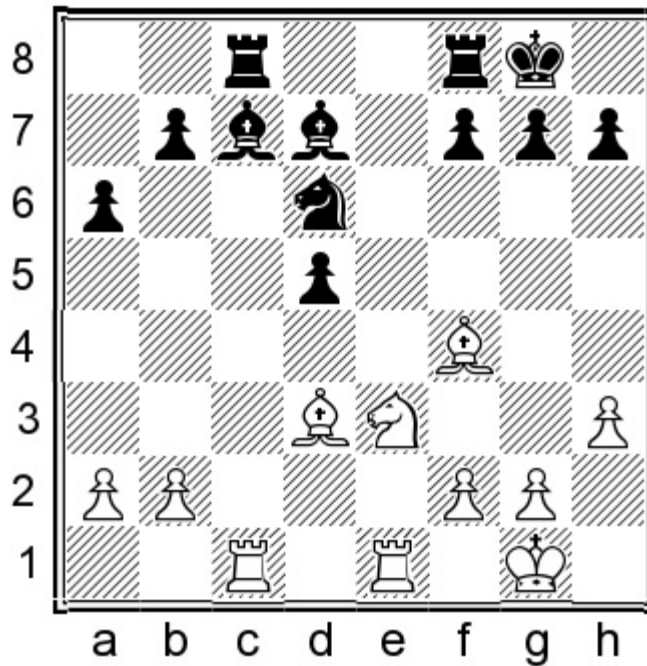


This rules out our ♖e4 ideas, but the downside for Black is that if he plays ...♗d6 he is going to get hit by ♗d5. White will keep the pressure on and it is difficult for Black to free his game, as shown by this line:

14.♗c3 ♛d7 15.♞c1 ♞c8 If 15...c6 16.d5 cxd5 17.♙c5 ♗d6 18.♛xd5; 15...♗d6 16.♗d5 ♙d8 17.♙f4 c6 18.♗e3 ♙g6 19.d5. 16.h3 In some cases, White will be able to play g2-g4-g5. 16...♗d6 17.♗d5 ♙d8 18.♙f4 c6 19.♗e3 ♙e6



20.♙d3 20.d5 is not as strong; 20...cxd5 21.♗xd5 ♞xc1. 20...♙c7 Black needs to be aware of a tactic after 20...♙a5: 21.♙xh7+ ♔xh7 22.♛h5+ ♔g8 23.♛xa5. 21.♛a4 a6 22.d5 cxd5 23.♛xd7 ♙xd7



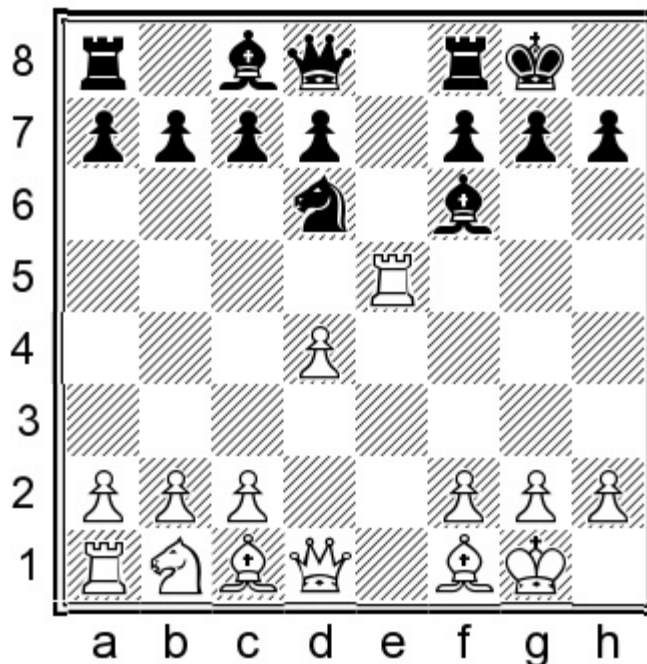
24. Rxc7 Rxc7 25. Qxd6 Winning a piece.

In all the lines we saw, Black is on the edge of equality – almost there, but never quite getting there. There is no forcing way for Black to prevent White from taking the initiative. After a long and patient defence a strong player will probably hold it, if he plays very well, but he will not be equalizing the position any time soon. It will not be easy to contain White’s activity for 30 or 40 moves.

I was happy, on checking this line, to find that Black doesn’t fully equalize.

2) The main line

9... Qf6

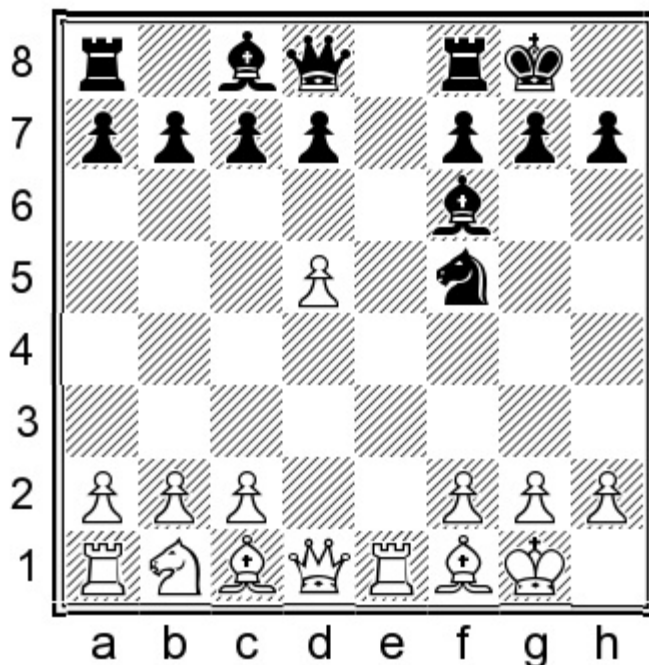


This is the move I prefer as Black and it is recognized as the main line. It is also the most logical move. Black attacks the rook and aims to trade rooks almost immediately.

10. ♖e1

Now: 10... ♗f5 11. d5 11. c3 d5 and Black has achieved what he wants and he should be able to equalize. We can play 11. d5 here because Black's bishop cannot go to c5.

Aronian – again! – was playing this line quite a lot. He was experimenting with many different Berlin lines.

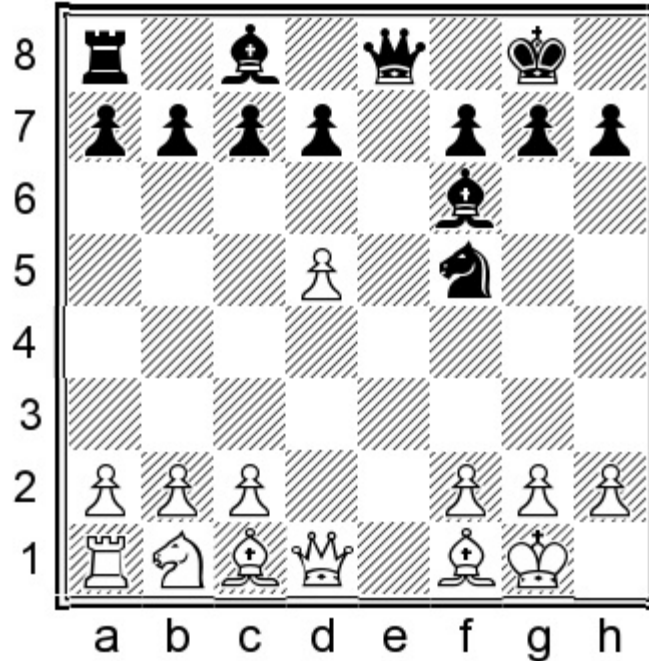


Aronian played 11... ♖e8 against me, and also against Carlsen. If Black delays ... ♖e8 then yet again his pieces are awkward, especially the knight on f5, which just isn't going anywhere: 11... d6 12. ♗d2 ♖e8 13. ♗e4! ♗d7 (13... ♗e7 14. ♗d3 with an initiative on the kingside; 15. ♗h5 is coming next) 14. c3 (14. ♗xf6+ ♗xf6 frees Black's position and he suddenly becomes active) 14... h6 (14... ♗e5 15. ♗g5 and 14... ♗e7 15. ♗d3 are both better for White) 15. ♗d2 (15. ♗d3 ♗h4 16. g3 ♗g6 17. f4 c6 18. ♗e3 was seen in Anand-Kramnik, Leuven blitz 2017. Vishy got an advantage, but I am not sure it is the best way to play – ½-½, 70) 15... a5 16. g3 ♗e7 17. c4 ♗b8 18. ♗c3 ♗a7 19. ♗g4 ♗f8 20. ♗d3 (20. ♗xg7+ ♗xg7 21. ♗xd7 is also very strong, but Palac is after more) 20... ♖ad8 21. ♗c5 ♗xc5 22. ♗xf5 1-0 Palac-Neubauer, Zadar 2005.

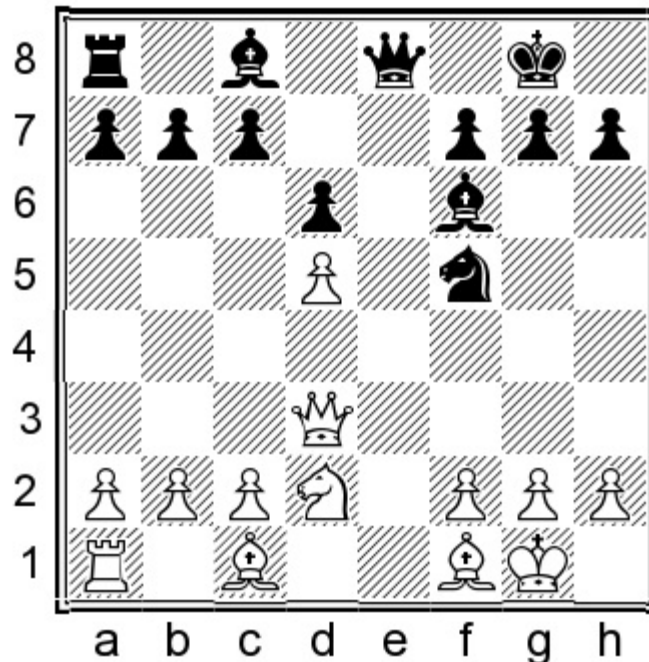
12. ♖xe8+ Exchanges bring relief for Black, as he has a very cramped position. Against Aronian I played differently: 12. ♗d3 ♖xe1+ 13. ♗xe1 ♗e7 14. ♗xe7 ♗xe7. Now I sacrificed a pawn to ruin Black's structure: 15. d6 (15. c4 d6 with 16... ♗f5 to follow, trading off another piece) 15... cxd6. Black has an extra pawn but his bishop is locked out and he has isolated pawns, but this was not enough to give me a serious advantage: 16. ♗a3 d5 17. ♗b5 d6 18. ♗xd6 ♗c6 ½-½ (32) Caruana-Aronian, Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2018.

Then Aronian, who must have felt comfortable in this line, repeated it against Carlsen – but Magnus

was very well prepared: 12...♞xe8



13.♞d3! An unusual move, but a very strong one. The point is simple: White wants to get his knight to e4. If I play 13.♘d2 d6, the knight isn't getting to e4 very easily, as after 14.♞f3 I get hit by 14...♘d4. 13...d6 14.♘d2

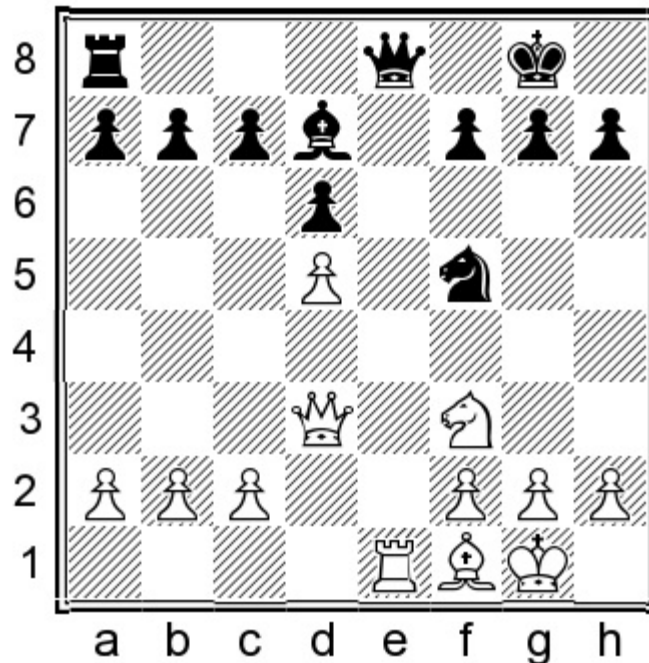


14...♙g5 14...♙d7 15.♘e4 and Black is awkwardly placed yet again. White will follow up with ♙c1-d2-c3 and ♖e1. We have traded off one pair of rooks, but that doesn't ease Black's suffering. If Black could trade off the other pair of rooks too then he would probably be OK, but here White has a space advantage and a strong initiative.

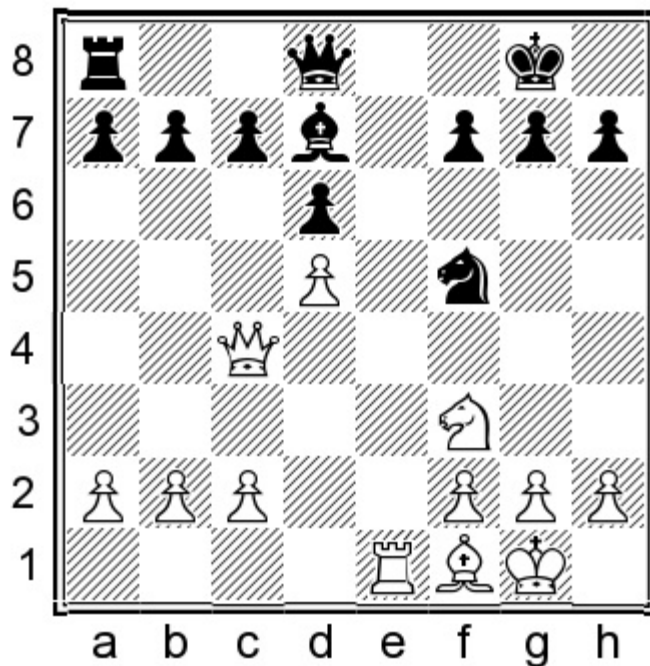
After 14...c6, 15.♘e4 ♙e5 16.c4 (16.dxc6 bxc6) 16...cxd5 17.cxd5 ♞a4 18.♙d2 ♙xb2 19.♘c3 ♙xc3

20. ♖xc3 ♔d7 21. ♖c7 ♜c8 22. ♖xb7 was seen in Oleksienko-Malakhov, Turkey tt 2018 (½-½, 56). Now that we are trading pawns and heading for an isolated pawn position I am not sure I want the knight on e4 any more. The new 15. c3! is a quiet waiting move, just to see how Black will play the position. I might prefer my knight on f3 instead of e4: 15... cxd5 16. ♖xd5 ♖c6 17. ♖d3 d5 18. ♗f3, followed by ♔f4, ♜e1 and ♔e5 and Black is still slightly worse, due to the isolated pawn and the awkward knight. Maybe this is the best way for Black to pay, but it is still not equalizing.

Aronian plays his favourite bishop trade, but Black should probably take stronger measures to try and equalize: **15. ♗f3 ♔xc1** He traded off another pair of pieces and probably thought this was enough to equalize – but he never got there. The reason is that he again struggled to trade the remaining rooks and he never managed it. **16. ♜xc1 ♔d7 17. ♜e1**

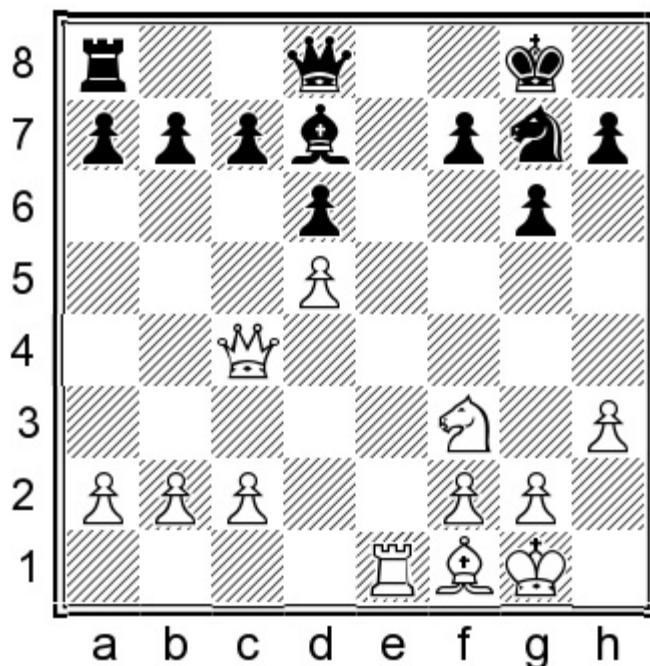


17... ♖d8 Black would love to play 17... ♖f8 followed by 18... ♜e8 but his queenside is weak and this gives White the initiative: 18. ♖b3 b6 19. ♖c3 ♖d8 (19... ♜c8 20. ♔a6) and Black cannot get the set-up he wants. From here, I will play 20. ♔d3, putting pressure on his knight, then I slowly play ♖c3-c4-f4, or even h2-h3 and one day g2-g4. The main point in this position is that Black doesn't have any active play and has to wait and see what White wants to do to him. **18. ♖c4!**



Black may have wanted to play 18...♟f6, hitting b2 and preparing 19...♞e8, but we stop him in his tracks. **18...g6** A double-edged move. It is immediately clear that f6 is now a weakness, especially without the dark-squared bishop, but he wanted to have a square for his knight. If 18...a5 19.♙d3 ♜e7 then there is a tactic with 20.♙xh7+ ♜xh7 21.♞h4+ ♜g8 22.♞xe7 and I win a pawn. Or 18...♞e7 19.♙d3 ♙f5 (19...♞g6 20.h4 and the knight is still a problem) and I hit you with 20.♞xe7 ♟xe7 (20...♙xd3 21.♞xc7) 21.♙xf5 which is very strong.

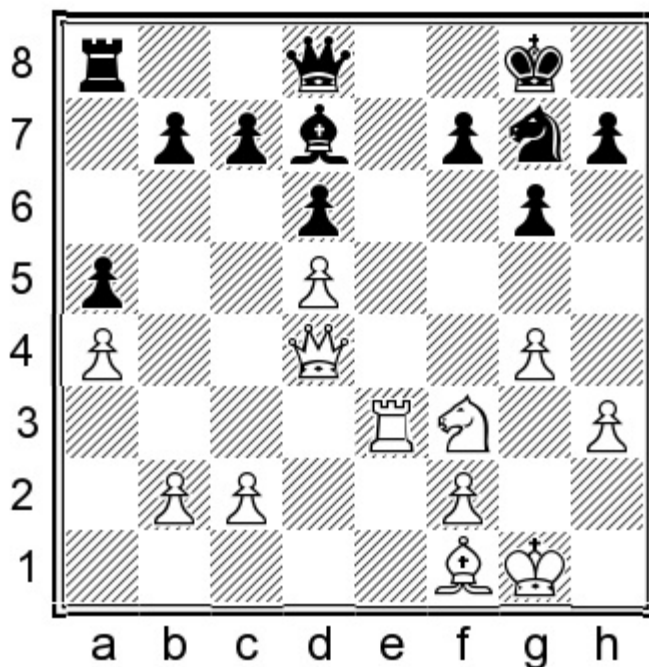
19.h3 Showing that White has time. This creates *luft* for the king, but g2-g4 is also an idea – not just to attack the knight, but more to restrain Black’s pieces. **19...♞g7**



20.♞e3 Preparing, one day, to maybe play ♞b3 or ♞c3.

I actually noticed an idea by the computer, which looks a bit odd, but has a point: 20.b4. Black wants to play ...a7-a5 and we are restricting him: 20...a5 21.b5. Normally I would recommend very strongly against doing this, as Black could put a bishop or a knight on c5. But because Black can't use the c5-square here, this move actually has a clear positional purpose. I am making sure Black can't play ...c7-c6, which leaves c7 as a backward pawn. After 21...♞c8 22.♞c3 b6 White has strong pressure. He can consider 23.g4, taking away the squares from Black's minor pieces. The way that Carlsen played was probably a bit more human!

20...a5 21.a4 Stopping the plan of activating the rook via ...a5-a4, ...♞a5 and ...♞c5. **21...♞e8** Trying to get to f6. If 21...♞f5 22.♞b3 b6 23.g4 ♞e7 (23...♞g7 24.♞f4) 24.♞e3 or even 24.♞f4, heading to h6, with the advantage and the initiative. **22.♞d4 22.♞f4 ♞g7**, followed by an offer to trade queens with 23...♞f6, suits Black. White should definitely avoid an exchange of queens. **22...♞g7** Not a good sign that he has to go back. Now 22...♞f6 would be a great positional move, but of course it loses to the tactic 23.♞xe8+ and 24.♞xf6. 22...♞f6 reaches a better square but the queen is tied to the knight's defence. White can play quietly with 23.b3 or try for more with 23.♞g5. **23.g4**



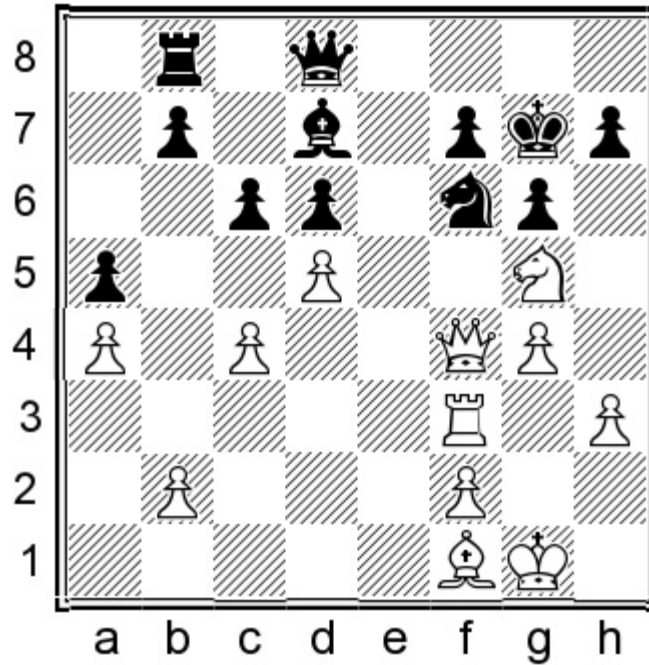
23...c6 It looks like Black is getting what he wants after 23...♞f8 24.♞d2 ♞e8, but he is losing after 25.♞e4. He can play 24...f5 instead, but this doesn't solve the problems, e.g. 25.♞c3 ♞c8 and White has a plethora of good options here. **24.c4 ♞e8** Aronian was desperate at this point, so he moved the knight back again. The alternatives are not promising either:

A) 24...cxd5 25.cxd5 stops Black going ...♞e6. It is the recurring theme of restricting Black's pieces with pawns;

B) Black could have grabbed a pawn with 24...c5 25.♞f4 ♞xa4, but I completely understand why he didn't: 26.♞a3 (26.♞g5 f5 27.♞e6 ♞xe6 28.♞xe6 fxg4 29.♞xd6 ♞e7 and the position gets messy and Black gets activity) 26...♞e8 27.♞h6 f6 28.♞d2 f5 29.♞f3, followed by 30.♞g5 and a mating attack.

From this moment on, Carlsen played perfectly; it is impossible to criticize any of his moves.

25.♚f4! ♔g7 26.♞b3 ♞b8 27.♘g5 ♘f6 It starts to look like Black is defending after 27...♚f6, but suddenly we drop our queen back with 28.♚d2 and then 29.♞f3 is a huge threat, and if 28...h6 29.♘e4 ♚e7 30.♞e3. 28.♞f3



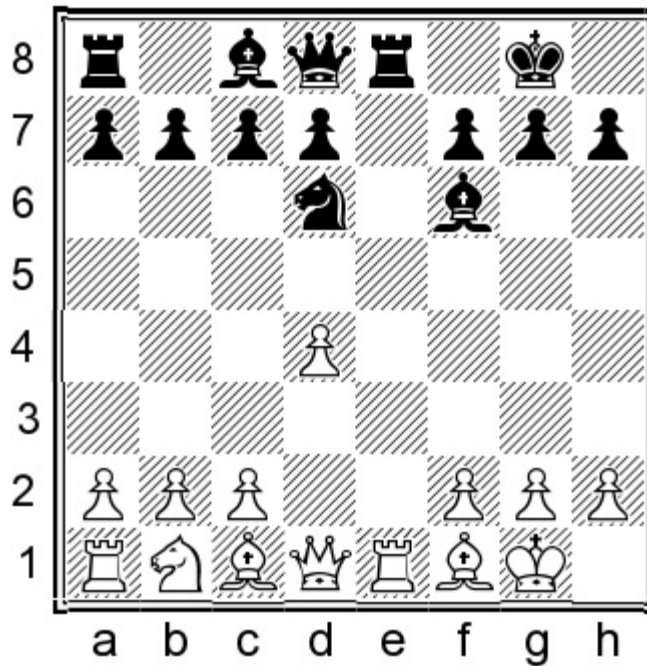
It is already over: 28...h6 29.♘e4 ♘xe4 30.♚xf7+ ♔h8 31.♚xg6 1-0 Carlsen-Aronian, Stavanger 2018.

Aronian resigned because of 31...♚g5 32.♚xe4 and 31...♘g5 32.♚xh6+ ♘h7 33.♞f7.

This was a great game, showing the possibilities White has, even when material has simplified. Black is never fully equalizing.

That is why after 10.♞e1, I don't think 10...♘f5 is Black's best option:

10...♞e8



I think this is the best option for Black, and it has traditionally been considered to be the main line. White has tried a lot of very sharp options here.

There was a trend with 11.♘c3, offering a pawn sacrifice with 11...♖xe1 12.♙xe1 ♕xd4 13.♘d5, but all of these sharp options do not really lead to much as we have also seen in Caruana-So, Paris rapid 2021.

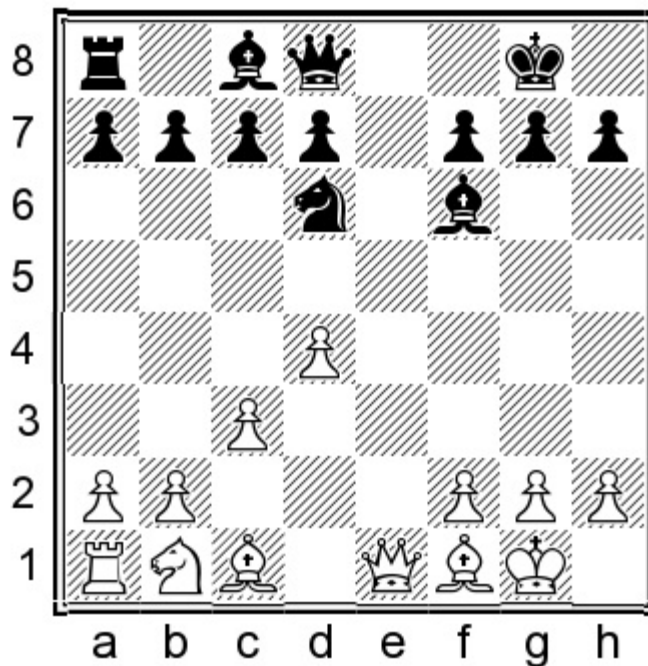
At some point White started to experiment with 11.♖xe8 ♘xe8 12.d5, which I have played myself, but I don't feel like White has any serious advantage here, although it is fully playable.

My recommendation is:

11.c3,

which is sort of an improved version. Black usually plays:

11...♖xe1 12.♙xe1



12...Nf5

If Black goes 12...b6, then we play 13. Qf4 Qf8 (13... Qb7 14. Qxd6 cxd6 15. Na3 and Black has a bad structure) 14. Na3 Qb7 15. f3! Re8 16. Qd2. Black is left with a really awkward knight on d6, which has nowhere to go. This was the point of 15.f3!. I can play Nc2, a2-a4-a5, Ne3, and White's pressure is increasing.

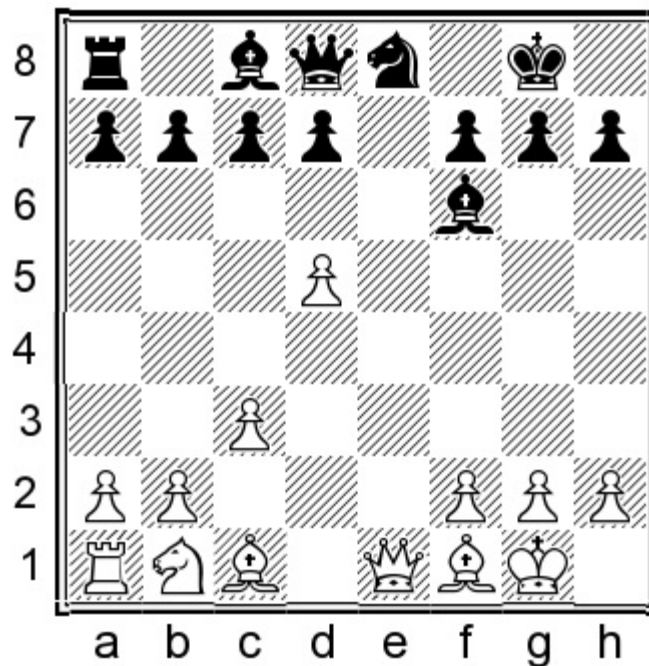
12...Nf5 is in some ways Black's most natural move, because f5 looks like a better square for the knight than e8. The downside to this move is a tactical one: 13. Qf4 c6 (13... d6 14. Qd3; 13... d5 14. Qxc7 Qxc7 15. Qe8#) 14. a4!? a5 (14... d5 15. a5 gives White more space) 15. Qc7! with long-term pressure which White eventually converted in Nakamura-Giri, Hoogeveen 2012 (1-0, 53).

I think 14.a4 is an interesting move, which deserves to be analysed and also deserves further tests in practice.

But the main move is 12...Nf5.

This is problematic for White, because now, after 13. Qf4 d5, there are no tactics on c7, unlike after 12...Nf5. This position has been played a lot and I don't feel the need to show any of the boring theory in this line.

13.d5



A fresh idea. Rather than acquiescing to a symmetrical structure, we play ambitiously and take the space advantage. This is how Anish played against me in the last Olympiad, and at the time it was new to me.

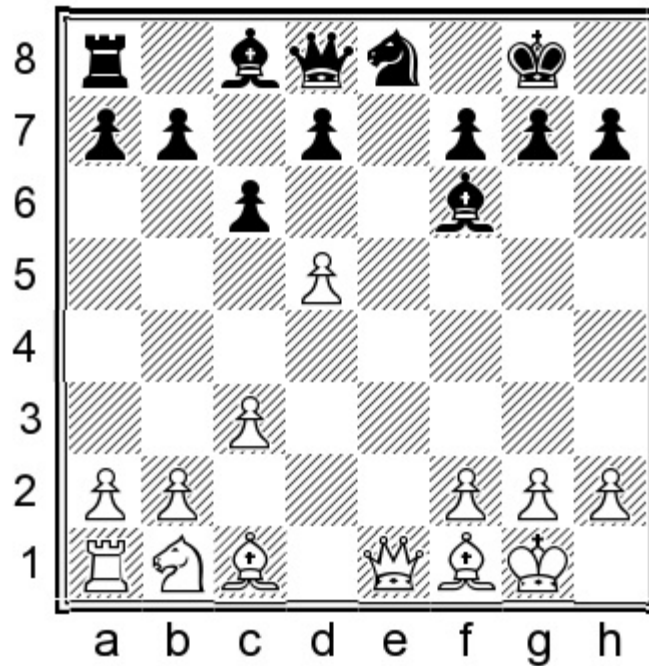
White's pawn on c3 is an advantage for him, but having the queen on e1 is better for Black than having the queen on d1. This is because after 13...c6 we would love to have the queen on d1, to recapture on d5.

If Black doesn't play 13...c6 and goes 13...d6 instead, his passive play – as usual – leads to an unpleasant position, e.g. 14.♔d3 g6 15.♖d2 ♖g7 16.♗e4 (we have seen these themes many times by now) 16...♙e7 17.♙e3 ♙f5 18.♚d2 with a space advantage. If Black ever takes on e4 I have the bishop pair and otherwise, because of White's space advantage, the black queenside is just weak. White can continue with ♙d4, or more slowly with h2-h3 and maybe g2-g4 one day; maybe a2-a4 too. White has options.

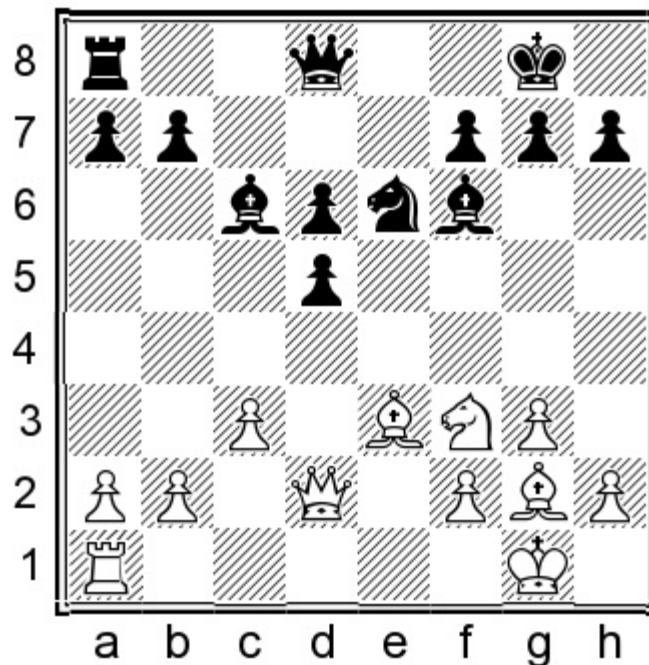
If Black plays 13...b6, White continues with 14.♙f4 ♙b7 15.♚d2 and clearly White has a space advantage and he went on to win in Nepomniachtchi-Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2019 (1-0, 36).

13...c6

Black has to challenge the centre immediately. The above lines show that Black must play in a very concrete way or he will end up suffering.



In this game against me, Anish quickly – and confidently – sacrificed a pawn: **14. ♖d2 cxd5 15. ♗f3 d6 16. ♕e3** At first I thought this can't be serious. Okay, I have isolated d-pawns – but I do have two of them, and I am not going to lose either of them any time soon. Then I started to feel a bit uncomfortable and I thought for a while here before finding a good set-up. It involved putting the bishop on c6, rather than the more natural-looking f5. **16... ♗c7 17. ♔d2 ♕d7 18. g3 ♕c6 19. ♕g2 ♖e6**



Now I have secured my pawn and I have a lot of control over d4. Anish could find nothing better than mass exchanges, leading to a draw: **20. ♖d1 ♔a5 21. a3 h6 22. ♗d4 ♗xd4 23. ♕xd4 ♕xd4 24. ♔xd4 ♖e8 25. ♕xd5 ♕xd5 26. ♔xd5 ♔xd5 27. ♖xd5 ♖e2 28. b4 ♖c2 29. ♖xd6 ♖xc3 30. ♖d8+ ♗h7 31. ♖d7**

♠xa3 32.♠xb7 ½-½ Giri-Caruana, Batumi 2018.

I was quite happy that I found a set-up which forced Anish to go for the draw.

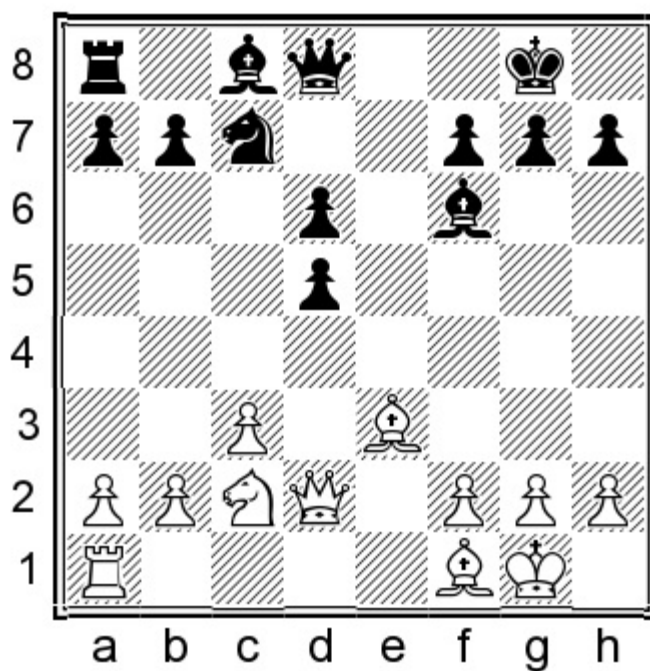
Later on, Anish's idea found a following and people started playing (from the position in the diagram on the previous page):

14.♙e3 cxd5

14...d6 15.dxc6 (15.♘a3 ♘c7 16.dxc6 bxc6 17.♘c4 ♘d5 18.♙d4 ♙xd4 19.cxd4) 15...bxc6 16.♘d2 ♙f5 17.♘f3 ♘c7 18.♠d1 d5 19.♘d4±.

15.♙d2 ♘c7 16.♘a3! d6 17.♘c2

This is a much better way of playing.



The knight is not in the way on f3 now, and it allows g2-g3 and ♙g2, pressuring the pawn on d5. I think the main thing to remember is that although White isn't getting the pawn back any time soon, he does have a certain amount of positional pressure, just based on the fact that Black's pawns are immobile.

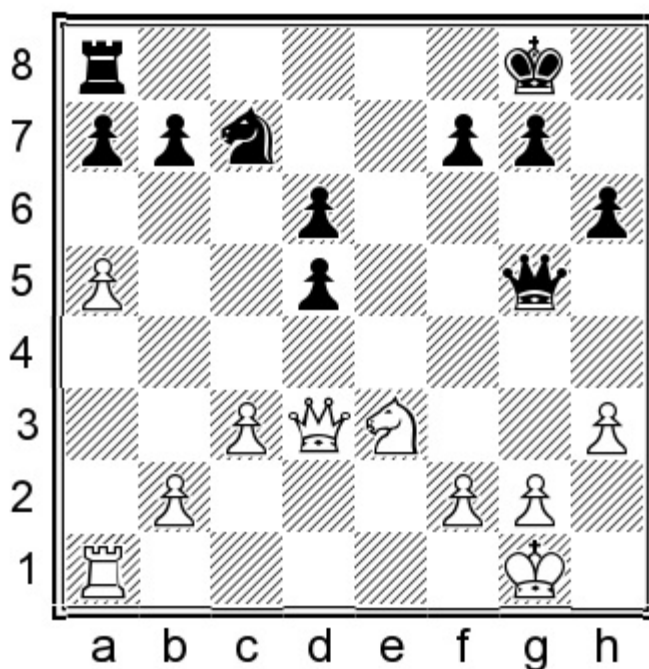
As Black does not have any active ideas, White can also play slowly with a2-a4-a5. This reveals a surprising weakness in the black camp; the a7-pawn. He might want to move his rook and if he plays ...a7-a6, then b6 is a weakness. If he plays ...b7-b6, then a4-a5 gains in strength, because it would be very good for us to trade the a-pawns.

17...♙f5

17...♙d7, as in my game against Anish, is not as good here: 18.g3 ♙c6 19.♙g2 ♘e6 20.♙xd5 with the

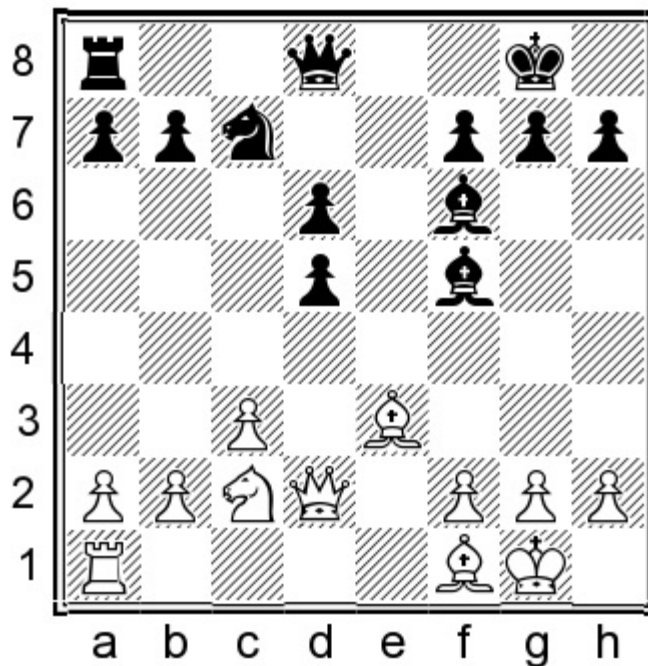
advantage; instead, on 19...♞d7 we can play 20.♟b4, or play more slowly with 20.♞d4 or 20.♟d4. After 20.♟b4, Black isn't going to save the pawn and he can give it back this way: 20...d4 21.♞xd4 ♟xg2 22.♟xg2 ♞xd4 23.♞xd4 ♟e6 24.♞d5, with a slight advantage for White as Black's d-pawn is weak, as is his queenside. The downside for White is that our king feels a little airy and if at some stage Black gets active, he could take advantage of that.

After 17...♞e6, we first of all create some *luft* for our king with 18.h3 h6 and then we can play as we have seen before, with 19.a4 ♞g5 20.a5 ♞f5 (20...♞xe3 21.♞xe3, putting pressure on a7, but 21.♟xe3 is a good move too. White has the more pleasant position in both cases) 21.♞d3 ♞xd3 22.♞xd3 ♞xe3 23.♟xe3 ♞g5



24.♞d4 making it difficult for Black to develop the rook; if 24...a6, then 25.♞b6. I think also 24.♞a4 is attractive and it may even be the better move. We have a few ideas, one of which is ♞g4 with a direct attack on the queen. Another one is a more serious idea and that is just to play the rook to b4 to attack b7. For example, 24...♞e8 25.♞b4 ♟a6 and now 26.♞g4 is probably best, to avoid crazy stuff like 26.♞xb7 ♟c5 27.♞b5 ♞xe3 28.♞b8+ ♟h7 29.fxex3 ♞xe3+. In any case, White has a significant amount of pressure after 26.♞g4 and I would be very worried if I were Black here.

In both of those lines it seems that White is better, so it looks like 17...♞f5 is the better move.



18. ♖d4

18. ♖b4 has also been played: 18... ♗e4 19. ♖d1 (Black's tactical point is shown after 19. f3 a5! 20. fxe4 axb4 21. cxb4 dxe4 and Black is doing very well) but I don't feel that White is really better after 19... a5. Now after 20. ♗c2 ♕d7 21. a3 ♖e8 Black was certainly very comfortable and went on to win in McShane-Radjabov, Batumi 2018 (0-1, 79).

Black tried to do without moving his a-pawn in Kovalev-Van Foreest, Wijk aan Zee 2019, and played 19... ♕e7, but he ended up just losing the d-pawn: 20. a3 h6 21. f3 ♗f5 22. ♕f2 b6 23. ♗xd5 ♗xd5 24. ♖xd5, and eventually lost (1-0, 79).

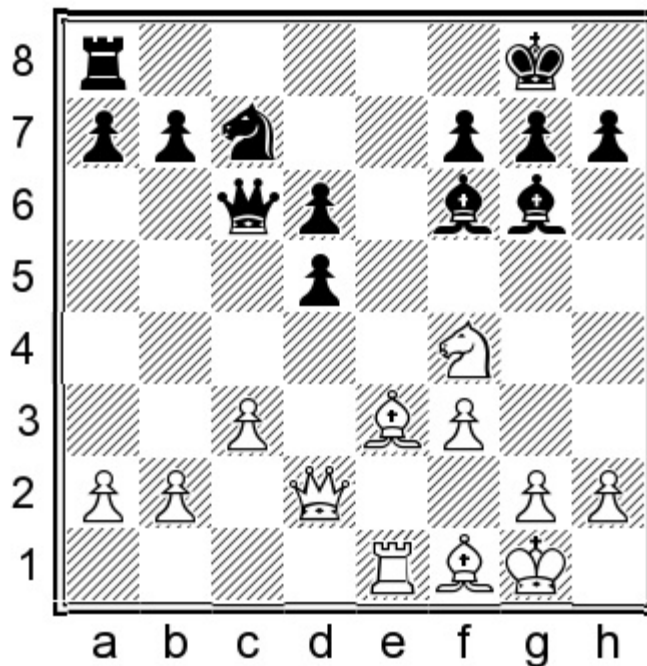
I think going to d4 immediately is better here than playing ♗c2-b4-c2-d4.

18... ♗e4

On 18... ♗g6 we play 19. ♗e2, and when the knight gets to f4 it will be putting pressure on d5 and g6. Black provokes f2-f3 first in this line.

After 18... ♗d7 we play our typical idea with 19. a4 again: 19... ♗e6 20. a5 ♗xd4 21. ♗xd4 ♗xd4 22. ♕xd4 ♗e6. Black has traded everything and it looks like he is close to equality, but he still has to deal with the weakness of the d-pawn. White can continue with 23. g3 and 24. ♗g2. We don't even have to take the pawn quickly as we have an advantage that isn't going away any time soon.

19. f3 ♗g6 20. ♗e2 ♕d7 21. ♗f4 ♕c6 22. ♖e1



White keeps the pressure on. The bishop on g6 is misplaced and out of the game. I am not going to take it any time soon; I will keep that in reserve. Instead, I might play ♖f2, h2-h4, g2-g4 and h4-h5 to bother the bishop with my pawns.

22.♖d1, putting more pressure on d5, is also a good move.

In either case, White's advantage is not tremendous, but there is pressure. I can say this from experience, because when I was playing Black, even in a better version than here, I felt under pressure.

I think this is a very interesting line for White to play. It is not boring at all and we have a very unbalanced position. It is very unusual as well; we almost never see doubled, isolated d-pawns.

So I think playing 18.♘d4 is the most promising way for White to play this variation.

Summing up, the Berlin Defence is positionally complicated but I think we have shown enough for people to grasp the typical ideas and to see what both sides want.

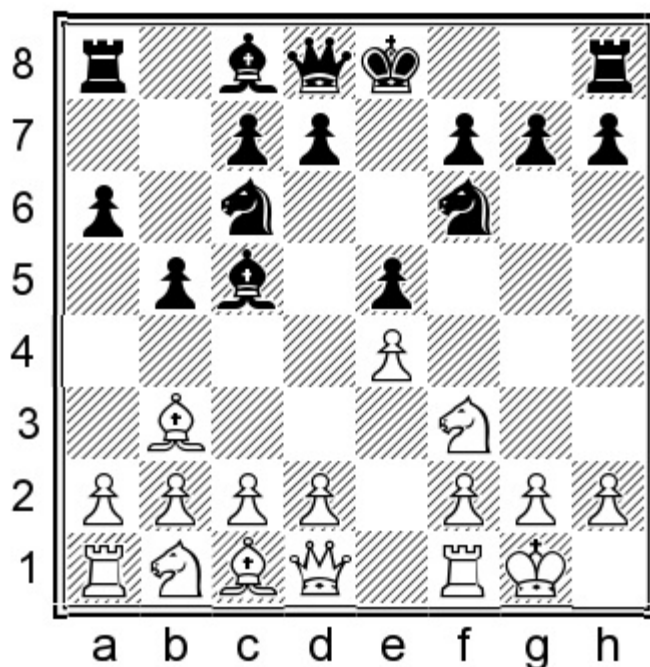
The main thing to realize, in general, is that the position is statically equal but everything we do as White is aimed to stop Black getting the set-up that he wants, such as a better square for his knight and to play ...d7-d5. Black has to play very accurately and precisely just to get a normal, playable position.

What we are trying to do as White is create a position which offers possibilities to outplay our opponents, which is why I chose the move a2-a4 in a lot of the lines in the other chapters of this book. It's the type of move we play to create an unbalanced position. If you approach the position not as a typically dull, boring Berlin then you can find possibilities to outplay your opponent.

Chapter 8

Modern Arkhangelsk: 3...a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♙b3 ♙c5

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♙b3 ♙c5

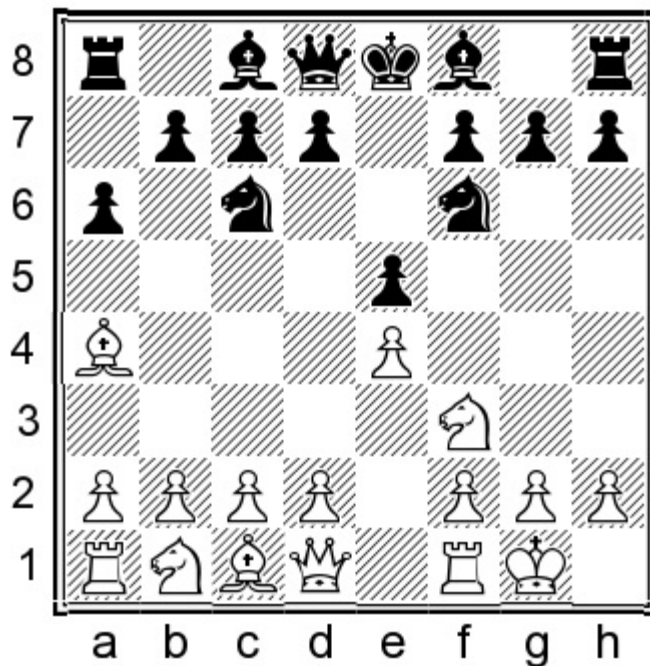


The Modern Arkhangelsk has been a popular choice amongst grandmasters in recent years.

The name ‘Arkhangelsk’ is also seen in the similar forms of ‘Archangel’ and ‘Archangelsk’. It is the name of a city in North West Russia. Several grandmasters in the area were the first to use the variation on a regular basis, which is why the name has stuck.

It leads to complex positions, in which Black is not afraid to fight for the initiative.

(5.0-0)



After 5.0-0, as opposed to the classical lines with ...♕e7, Black can also play 5...♕c5, which has its plusses. Obviously, the bishop is active and, all things being equal, it is better on c5 than on e7, as it bears down on the a7-g1 diagonal. The downside is that it runs into c2-c3 and d2-d4. This allows White to gain a tempo as he gets the centre, and it also weakens the h4-d8 diagonal for Black, leaving him having to deal with ♕g5.

There are two ways of getting there; before or after playing ...b7-b5. In our case, with the line I recommend, it doesn't really make a difference. The reason that Black might play ...♕c5 before ...b7-b5 is that after 5...b5 6.♕b3 ♕c5, White can play 7.a4. If 5...♕c5 6.c3 b5 7.♕b3 d6 8.a4, then Black can play 8...♕g4.

The other thing is that by playing the move-order with 5...♕c5, Black avoids the most dangerous version of the ♖xe5 line for White. Here, it will be 6.♖xe5 ♖xe5 7.d4 b5 8.♕b3 ♕xd4 9.♔xd4 d6. The line Black avoids has the inclusion of a2-a4 and ...♖b8. The difference is that if White now plays 10.a4, Black has 10...c5 and 11...c4, pushing the bishop back to a2.

One of the downsides to this move-order for Black is that after 5...♕c5 we have 6.c3 b5 7.♕c2, which is a very serious move and one I have played myself. Now 7...d6 8.d4 is sort of like a tempo up for White, as the bishop is better on c2 than on b3. After 8...♕b6 9.a4 ♖b8 10.♖a3 White is better.

After 7.♕c2 Black can also play 7...d5 and there is a huge amount of theory here. It is considered these days to be reasonable for Black, even though it looks very dangerous. We are not going to be delving into that line.

After 6.c3, it is important to note that Black can never really take the e-pawn: 6...♖xe4 7.d4 exd4 8.cxd4 ♕a7 (8...♕e7 9.d5) 9.d5 ♖b4 10.♔e2 (10.♔e1 ♔e7 11.d6 is also an option, although I still prefer 10.♔e2). This stuff is bad for Black.

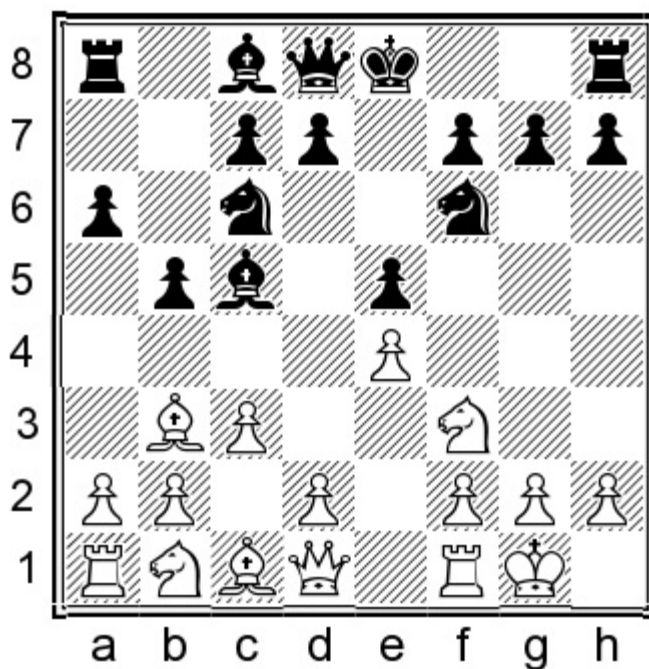
So after 5...♕c5 6.c3 b5 I think we should stick with 7.♕b3. This is the line we are going to discuss in this chapter. Then 7...d6 8.d4 (8.a4 ♕g4) 8...♕b6 (8...♕a7 is a worse place for the bishop, we play

9.a4 and the bishop ends up just getting in the way) 9.♔e3 0-0 (tactics are not in Black's favour; 9...♗xe4 10.♕d5 loses a knight) 10.♖bd2.

White is playing to maintain the centre and to prove that the bishop on b6 is locked out of the game. We will follow up with h2-h3, to stop ...♗g4, then ♖e1 and the transfer of the knight from d2 to g3, via f1. After that, once we have consolidated our centre with all of these moves, we stand better. Black's task is to try and disrupt all these plans.

We are not trying to refute Black's set-up immediately, we are just trying to consolidate our centre.

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♕b5 a6 4.♔a4 ♗f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♕b3 ♕c5 7.c3



7...d6

7...♗xe4 8.d4 exd4 9.cxd4 ♕e7 10.d5 ♗a5 11.♕c2 ♗f6 12.♖e1 0-0 13.♔d3 and Black has spent all of his time moving his bishop around twice and his knight three times, and White ends up with a huge initiative. 14.♕g5 is a big threat and White is nearly winning already here.

In general, Black almost never takes the pawn on e4.

8.d4 ♕b6

Again, 8...♔a7 is just a worse version for Black.

9.♔e3 0-0

Black nearly always castles here. If he tries to play 9...♕g4 immediately, without castling, and tries to win a pawn, then the tactics work in our favour: 10.♖bd2 exd4 (10...0-0 is best, transposing) 11.cxd4 ♗xd4 12.♕xd4 ♕xd4 13.♕xf7+ ♖xf7 (this works precisely because Black has not castled) 14.♔b3+

♔f8 15.♘xd4. Material is equal but Black's king ends up stuck in the centre and he has nothing to compensate for it. White has a large advantage.

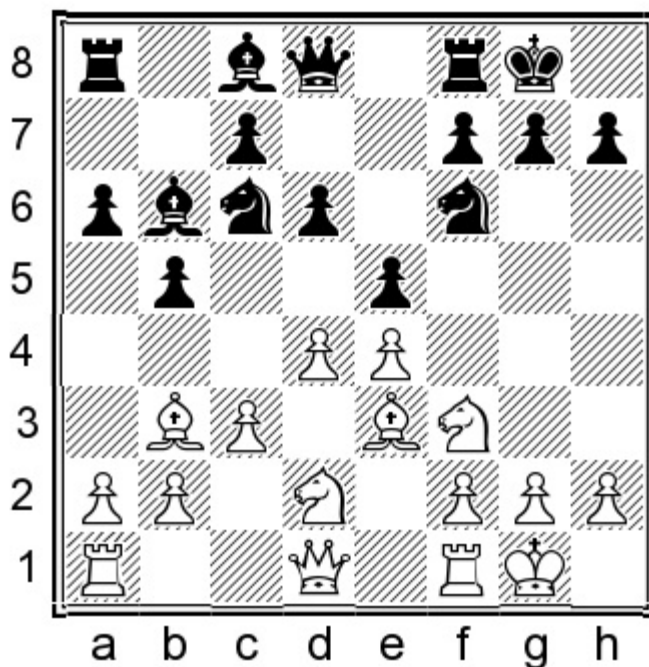
The other alternatives are not good for Black either:

A) 9...♘xe4 runs into 10.♙d5 again;

B) 9...♙b7 10.d5 ♙xe3 (10...♘e7 11.♙xb6 cxb6 12.♘bd2) 11.dxc6;

C) 9...♘g4 10.♙g5 and Black's best move is going back with 10...♘f6.

10.♘bd2



This line started to get fashionable around 2008 and at some point this was considered to be the best line for White against the Arkhangelsk. In fact I was playing this opening as Black for several years and this was the line I feared the most. I spent most of my time trying to find solutions for Black. These days, it is not as fashionable, but it still has a very healthy reputation for White.

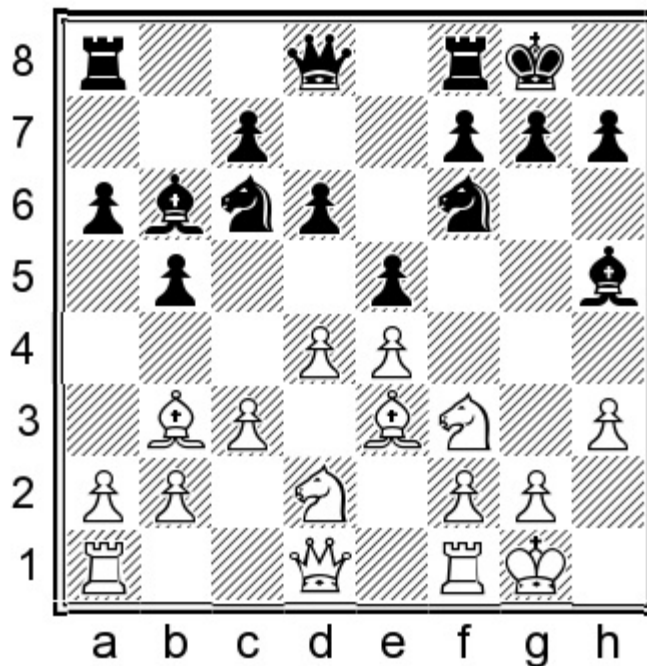
Black pins the knight

10...♙g4

A very common and logical move. White will play 11.h3 more often than not, so Black takes the last opportunity to pin the knight and try to win the pawn on d4.

11.h3 ♙h5

As usual, taking the pawn with 11...♙xf3 12.♘xf3 ♘xe4 runs into 13.♙d5.



Here, there are few options for White and at first I wasn't sure which one to recommend.

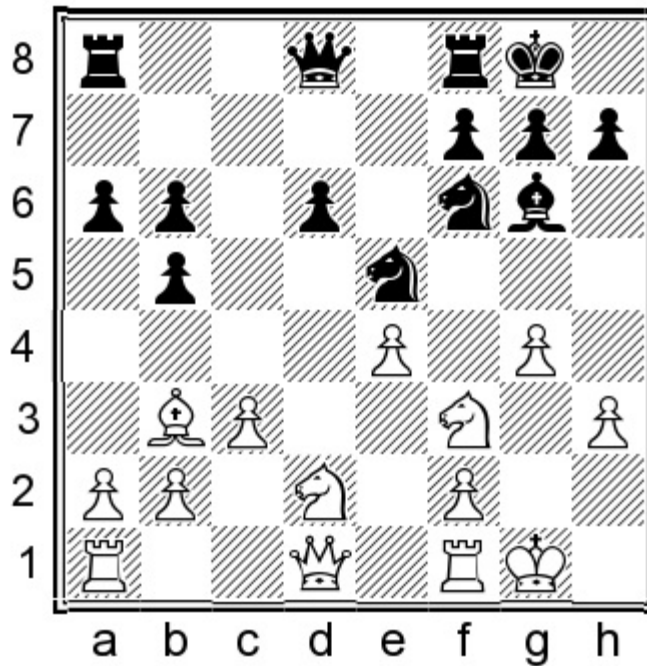
There is this very sharp move, **12.♔g5!?**. It is logical, as Black finds it very hard to break the pin on the knight: **12...exd4** Black runs into more tactics after **12...h6 13.♕xf6 ♖xf6 14.♕d5** and Black is losing the exchange. This is a direct exploitation of Black's light-squared bishop leaving the queenside. **13.♕d5 dxc3 14.♕xc6 cxd2 15.♕xa8 ♖xa8** Black sacrifices the exchange but usually gets fully sufficient compensation for it: **16.♕xf6 gxf6 17.♖xd2 ♖xe4** and Black has two pawns and the bishop pair for the exchange. I don't really know how to evaluate this position. I feel, objectively, maybe White is better here, so this line could be an option to investigate. After **18.♞fe1 ♗f5 19.♘h4 ♗g5 20.♖xg5+ fxg5 21.♘f5** White has the initiative, but I can also imagine things going wrong if he makes just one tiny mistake – especially as in endgames, more often than not, Black will have a good position. The bishop on b6 is very strong, he will have two very dangerous passed pawns, and I didn't want to recommend a line where if White makes just one inaccuracy he could end up losing the game.

That's why I quite like this other option:

12.dxe5 dxe5

Black also has the option **12...♕xe3 13.exf6 ♕xd2 14.♖xd2 ♕xf3** (after **14...♖xf6** I like **15.♘d4 ♘xd4 16.cxd4**) **15.♖g5 ♖xf6 16.♖xf6 gxf6 17.♕d5 ♘e5 18.♕xa8** (or **17...♕h5 18.♕xc6 ♞ab8 19.g4 ♕g6 20.f4 h6 21.f5 ♕h7**, killing the black bishop eternally, **17...♕e2 18.♞fe1 ♕c4 19.♕xc6** and Black's damaged kingside gives White the advantage).

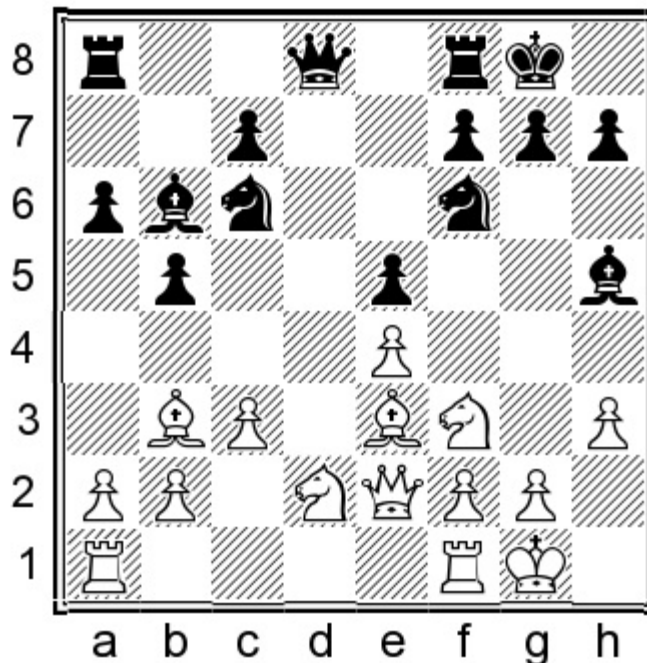
12...♘e5 allows Black's structure to become seriously damaged: **13.♕xb6 cxb6 14.g4 ♕g6**



15. ♖d4!. A pawn sacrifice – and we are threatening f2-f4-f5, winning immediately, so we are forcing Black’s hand: 15... ♗xe4 (15... ♕xe4 16. ♖xe4 ♗xe4 17. ♕d5 – we have seen this idea many times now) 16. ♕d5 ♗xd2 17. ♔xd2 ♗c4 (17... ♖c8 18. f4 and 19. f5, winning the bishop) 18. ♔c1 ♖c8 19. b3 ♗a5 20. f4 h6 21. f5 ♕h7 22. ♔e3 and White will keep control and enjoy a large advantage.

13. ♔e2

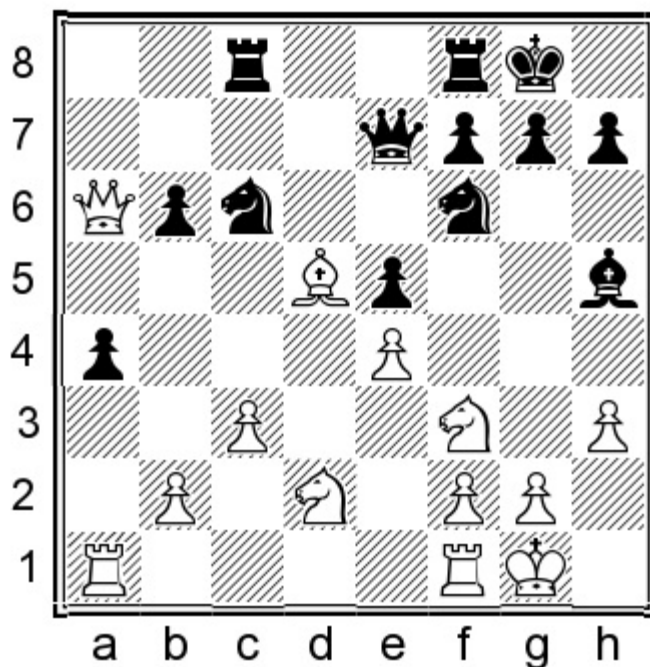
13. ♕xb6 cxb6 is more acceptable for Black. With the pawn still on e5 this doesn’t look like a bad structure.



13... ♔e7

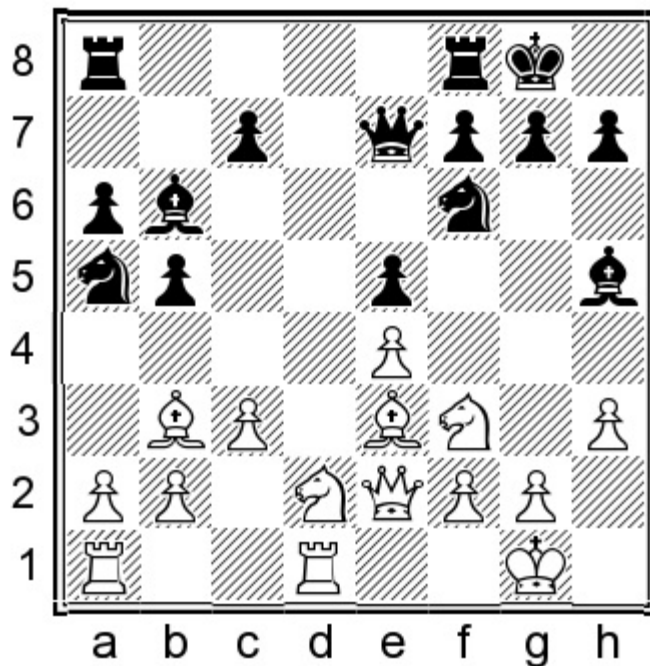
13...♙xe3 14.♚xe3 breaks the pin, so now our knight can move: 14...♛e7 15.♘e1, with the aim of going ♘d3 and ♘c5 and also of shutting Black's bishop out of the game, because if Black cannot pin or exchange the knights then it has nothing else to do but go back to g6. There are other options too, including the tactical 15.♙d5 ♘xd5 16.exd5, winning the e-pawn.

After 14.♙xb6 cxb6 15.♙d5! ♜ac8 16.a4 bxa4 17.♚xa6



Black's queenside structure is crumbling.

Movsesian played a good game with a different move: 14.♜fd1 Not the move I am recommending, but in general a good move. 14...♘a5



I think Onischuk thought he had a decent position, but Movsesian showed the dangers Black faces:
15. ♖f1 ♜xb3 16. axb3 ♜e6 17. b4 Fixing both the pawn on a6 and the c5-square. **17... ♙xe3 17... ♙g6**
18. ♘g3 ♙xe3 19. ♜xe3 h6 20. ♗e1 ♜c6 21. f3 and the knight is free to head to d3 and c5. **18. ♜xe3 ♜fd8 18... ♙xf3 19. ♜xf3 ♜fd8 20. ♗e3. 19. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 20. ♗e1** The key knight manoeuvre again.
20... ♜c6 21. f3 ♜d6 22. ♗d3 with an advantage White duly converted in Movsesian-Onischuk, Ningbo 2011 (1-0, 44).

White is pressing in all of these lines. You just need to know the typical ideas. The tactic with ♙d5 is one of them. Another idea to remember is ♜fd1, ♗f1, ♘g3 and especially the plan with ♗f3-e1-d3-c5. In general, if you can get ♗e1 and f2-f3 then you will stand better. It is noticeable how many times Black's queenside structure with a6 and b5 became a burden to him.

This all explains why, these days, 10... ♙g4 is not the most common move.

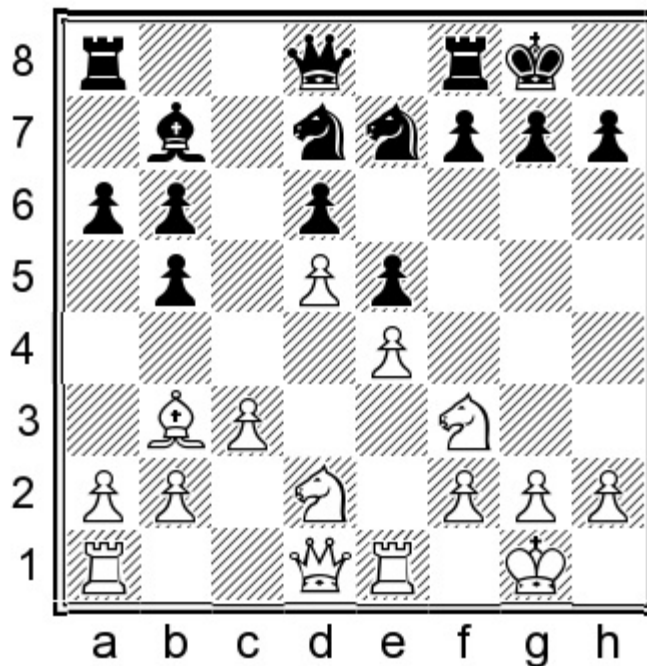
The lines 10... ♙b7, 10... h6 and 10... ♜e8

1. e4 e5 2. ♗f3 ♗c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4 ♗f6 5. 0-0 b5 6. ♙b3 ♙c5 7. c3 d6 8. d4 ♙b6 9. ♙e3 0-0 10. ♗bd2

Instead of 10... ♙g4, Black can try to put pressure on White's centre in a different way.

A) He can also play **10... ♙b7**, but this is considered to be a slightly dubious move after **11. d5 ♗e7** (but not **11... ♙xe3 12. dxc6 ♙xd2 13. cxb7**) **12. ♙xb6 cxb6 13. ♜e1** and now:

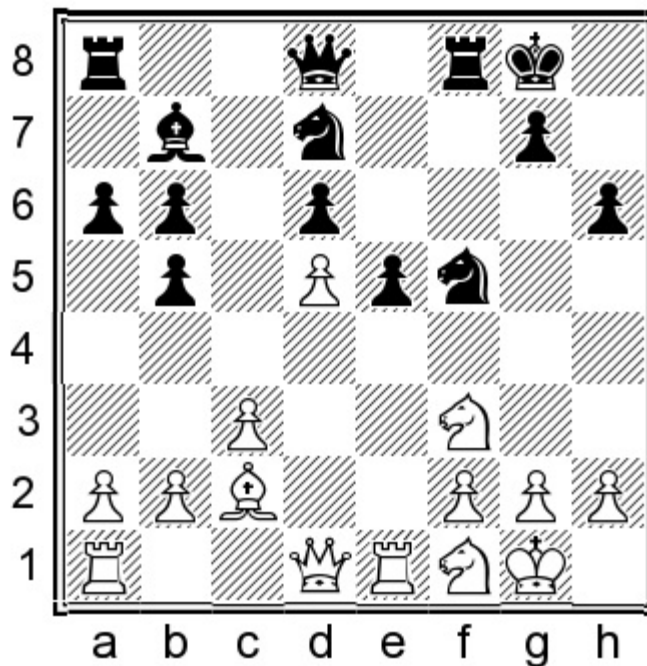
A1) **13... ♗d7**



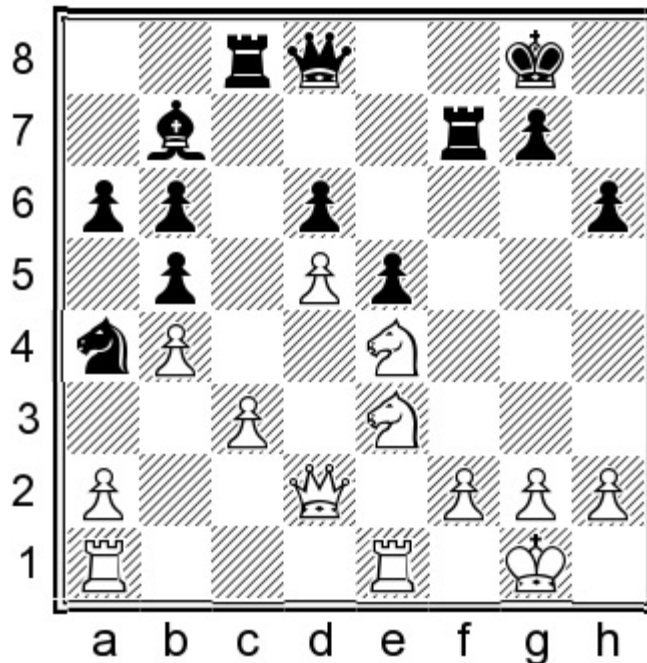
We now have a King's Indian structure with doubled b-pawns, which is very rare. As far as I know, this structure occurs in two openings only. One is the present one, and the other is the Bogo-Indian. Generally speaking, this is not a good structure for Black, because d6 is weak. Not immediately, but one day I will trade off Black's foremost b-pawn and play ♞c4 to attack the pawn, either in the middlegame or in the endgame. The other reason that this is a bad structure is that Black would love to be able to play $\dots\text{c7-c6}$ and break up the white structure but he can't do that here. Black is left with one pawn break, $\dots\text{f7-f5}$, and we will do our best to prevent it.

The other important thing is that after Black has played $\dots\text{♝b7}$, the bishop is just biting on the d-pawn and very often it has to go back.

There is a good game by Yu Yangyi which went: $14.\text{♙c2 h6}$ $14\dots\text{f5}$ is met by $15.\text{♞g5}$. $15.\text{♞f1 f5}$ Black needs to strike now, as if White is given one more move to play $16.\text{♞g3}$ then Black will be left without any counterplay. $16.\text{exf5 ♞xf5}$ $16\dots\text{♞xd5}$ runs into a pin with $17.\text{♝b3}$ and if $16\dots\text{♝xd5}$ then $17.\text{♞e3 ♝xf3}$ $18.\text{♞xf3}$ and yes, Black has the centre, but look at my pieces – $19.\text{♞fd1}$ is coming and all of my pieces are fighting and Black's pawns are more weak than strong.



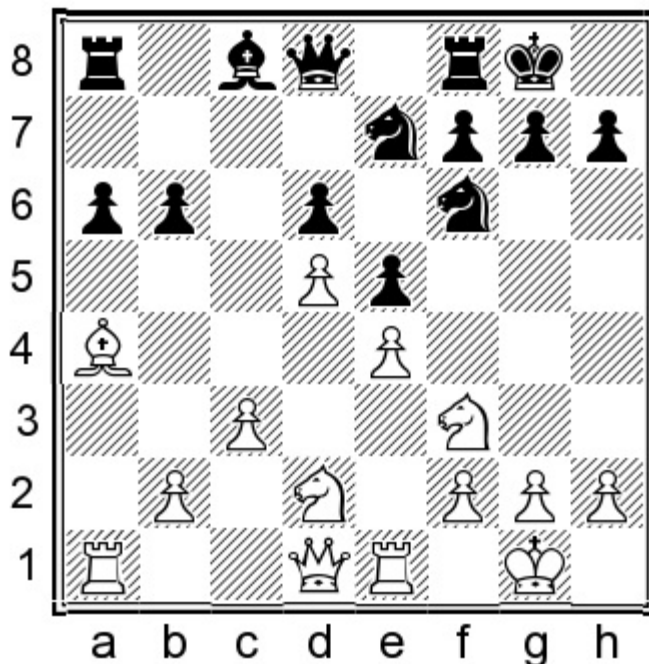
17. Nc5 ! A great move and a very surprising one. Basically, the knight is just aiming for the e4-square but White is combining that with threats of Wg4 . 17... Nc5 17... Nc5 18. Nc3 Nf6 19. Ne4 Nxe4 20. Nxe4 ; 17... Nxd5 18. Nxf5 Nxf5 19. Nc3 . 18. b4 ! Na4 Now the knight is out of the game. 19. Nxf5 Nxf5 20. Nc3 Nf7 20... Nxc3 21. Wc2 and everything is hanging. 21. Ne4 Nc8 22. Wd2



White dominates the position and Black's knight is still trapped out of the game. White eventually won in Yu Yangyi-Bu Xiangzhi, Shenzhen 2016 (1-0, 38).

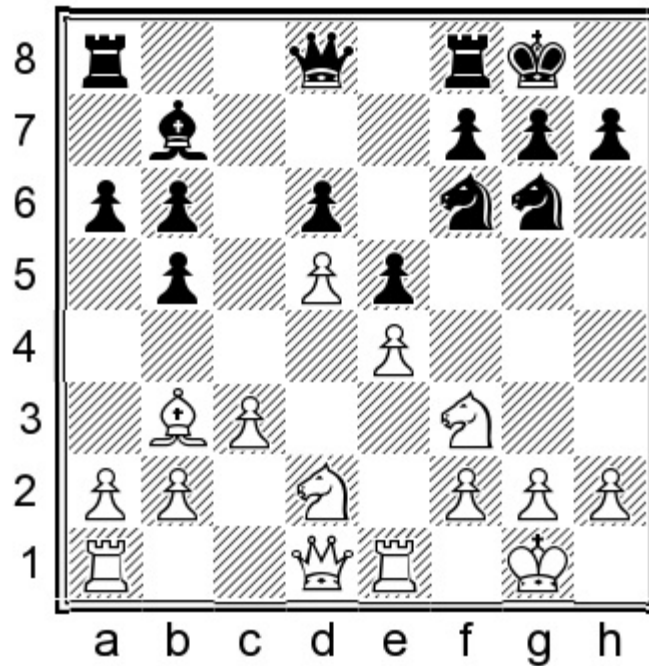
This shows that Black can't solve his problems tactically or positionally here. It's a tough position to play and White will need to be very accurate, but the fact that Black's ...f7-f5 usually doesn't work and White has the long-term possibilities of attacking the d6-pawn means that White can look to the future with confidence. This is why 10... Ng4 and 10... Nb7 are both considered to be dubious moves;

A2) Sometimes, instead of 13...♞d7, Black plays **13...♝c8** directly, which is clearly losing two tempi. On the other hand, Black can argue that at least he has cleared the central tension and he can try to prepare ...f7-f5. Here I recommend **14.a4 bxa4 15.♝xa4**.



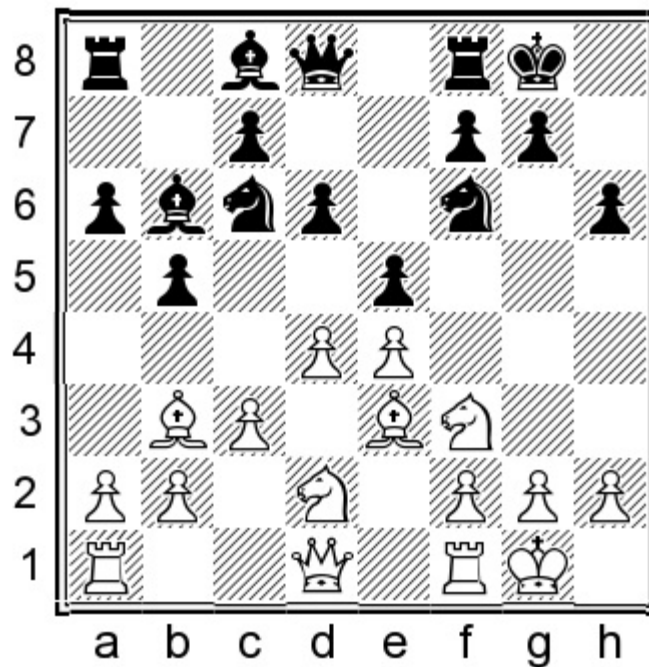
We have undoubled Black's pawns but on the other hand we have ideas of attacking d6 with ♞c4. We also have ideas of one day playing b2-b4, c3-c4 and c4-c5, breaking up the pawn chain and luring the d-pawn away from the defence of e5. Here, Black has no good way of achieving ...f7-f5: 15...♞d7 (there is a tactical problem with 15...♞h5: White wins a pawn with 16.♞xe5) 16.b4, restricting the knight. Now 16...f5 runs into annoying stuff, like 17.exf5 ♞xf5 18.♞e4 and Black ends up with a weak d-pawn;

A3) Black can also play **13...♞g6**.

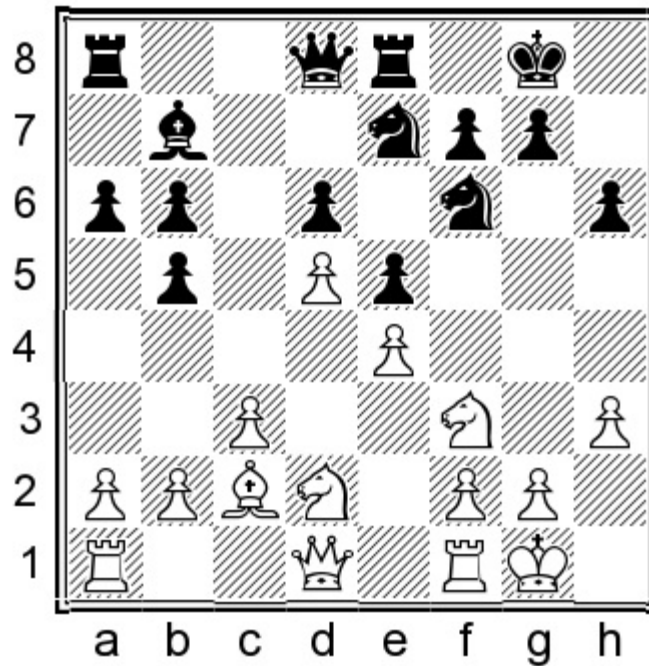


This looks like a nice square for the knight, but it's a bit static: **14.g3** In general, don't be afraid to play this move. You are stopping ... f4 and that's the main thing. **14... c8 15. c2** Discouraging ...f7-f5 and we also have the plan of playing the bishop to f1. **15...h6 16. d3** and once the bishop goes to f1, it will attack the black queenside pawns and also defend our own kingside.

B) **10...h6** is a useful move which can easily transpose to 10... e8 .

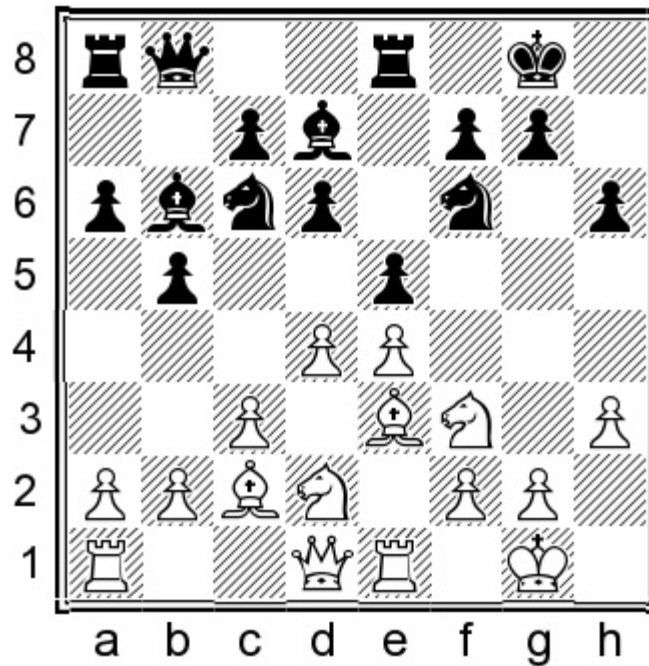


It also stops g5 . After **11.h3 11... b7** we can play **12. c2** , overprotecting e4 and preparing d4-d5. Black doesn't want to give up the centre with **12... exd4 13. cxd4** and if he plays **12... e8** , now we play **13.d5**. On **13... xe3** we play **14. dxc6** , winning a piece with a familiar trap. After **13... e7 14. xb6 cxb6**



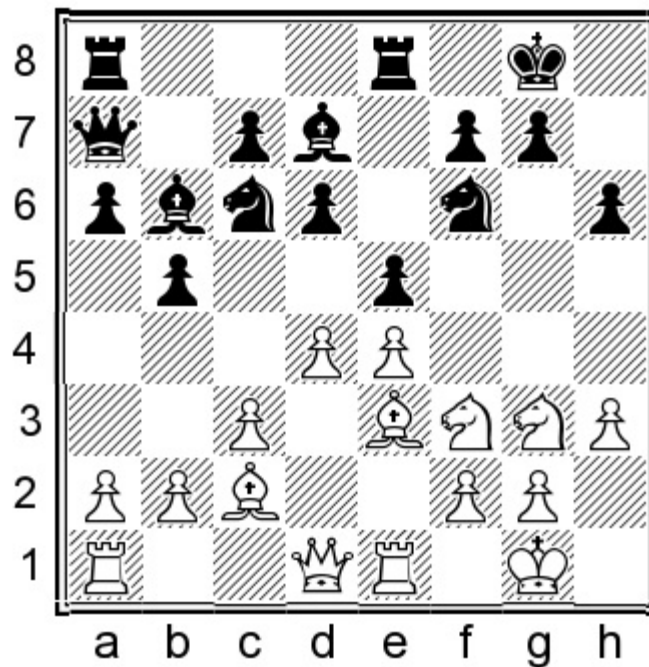
White has a better version of the line now we have included 10...♖e8 and 12.♙c2, for a couple of reasons. First, the bishop on c2 is well-placed and after ♖e1 we can play ♙c2-d3-f1. The other thing is that the rook on e8 is actually very poorly placed. One of Black's ideas is to move the knight from f6 and then play ...f7-f5 and the rook would prefer to be on f8 to support that move. Very often, Black spends another tempo just going back to f8.

When I was playing this line as Black, I started experimenting with a slow way of playing: 11...♖e8 12.♖e1 ♙d7. I played this multiple times, against strong players, including Vishy Anand, Navara and Gashimov. I must have played it five or six times. My results were okay, but I think that actually it's not such a good position for Black after 13.♙c2. He has to do something; he doesn't want to wait around forever. One of the ideas to do something is to play 13...♚b8. It's a manoeuvre sometimes seen in King's Indian structures.



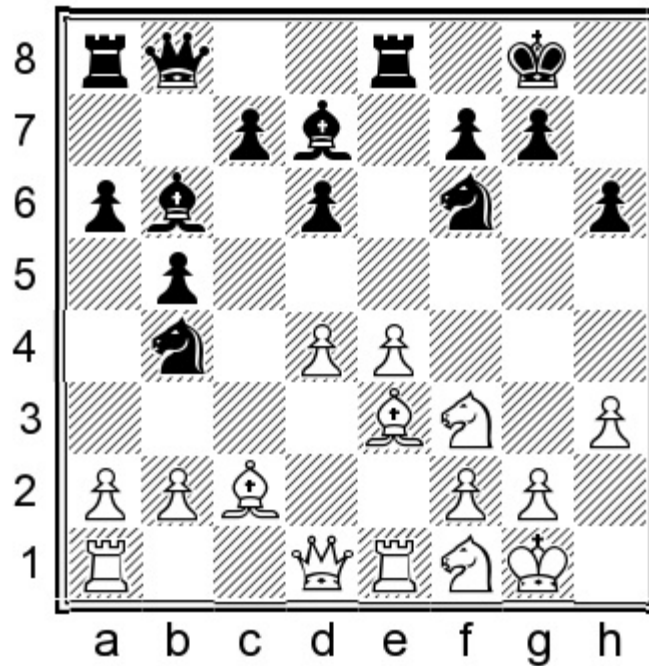
The idea is to play 14...♕a7, putting pressure on d4. I quite like this way of playing for Black. David Navara played 14.a3, preparing b2-b4 to gain space and eliminating the idea of Black's knight ever going to b4. It's a subtle, prophylactic move, but I think it's a little slow.

I prefer playing more concretely with 14.♘f1. Now 14...♕a7 makes no sense. I just play 15.♘g3 – and look at my centre!



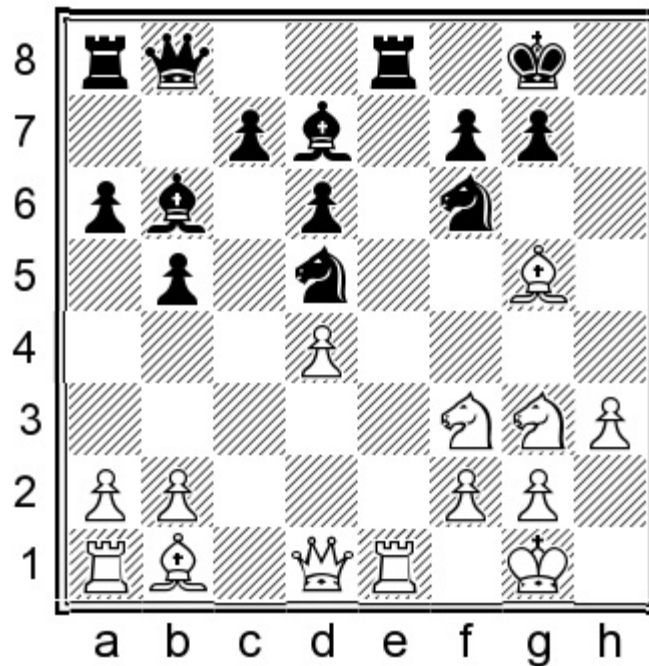
I have achieved everything I want as White and next I will play 16.♕d2, contemplating sacrifices on h6. In fact White can play on any side of the board he wants. The main thing is that Black has no counterplay.

The only critical line is 14...exd4 15.cxd4 ♘b4 (15...♘xe4? 16.d5!).



White can now consider 16. ♖g3 ♜xc2 17. ♚xc2, giving up the bishop pair but keeping the strong centre, but I think there is something more dangerous for Black: **16. ♜b1 ♜xe4 17. ♜xh6!** and I am collecting my pawn back: 17...gxh6 18. ♜xe4 and it is equal material, but look at the black kingside. After 19. ♚d2 I am really going to start attacking you.

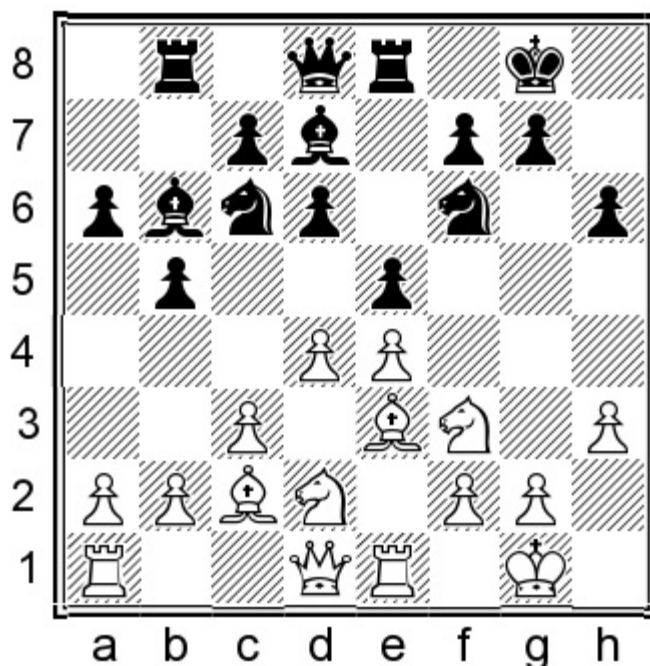
Black should go back with the knight: 17... ♞f6 18. ♜g5 ♜bd5 19. ♞g3 and Black is relatively solid.



He has good squares for his knights, he's not getting run over immediately, but the long-term chances are still with White, because the black king is weak after the loss of the h-pawn. For example, if Black plays ...g7-g6 at some point, it will open up the possibility for sacrifices because you only have one pawn protecting g6. Black is also suffering because the bishop on b6 is still out of the game.

It is really a matter of taste whether you play like this or with Navara's 14.a3, which is a perfectly good move. I was suffering in my game with him, but if you want to play a sharper, more tactical game then I recommend 14.♘f1.

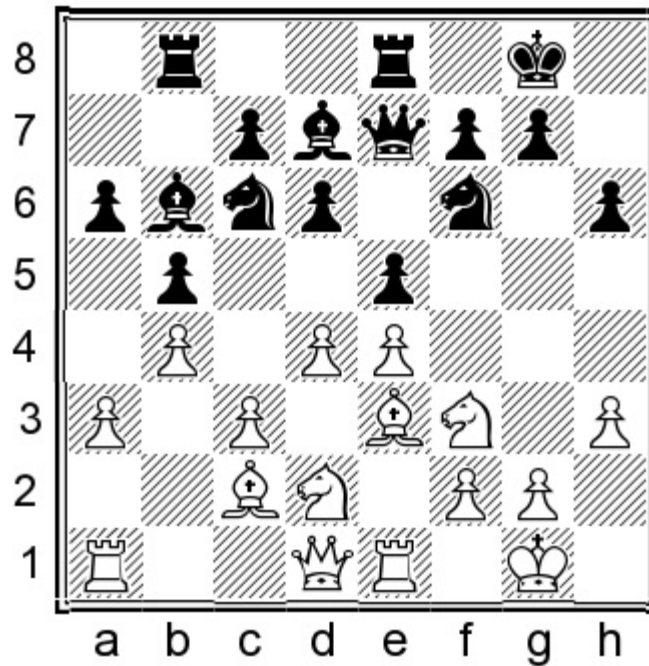
Instead of 13...♙b8, I have also played 13...♖b8 on more than one occasion.



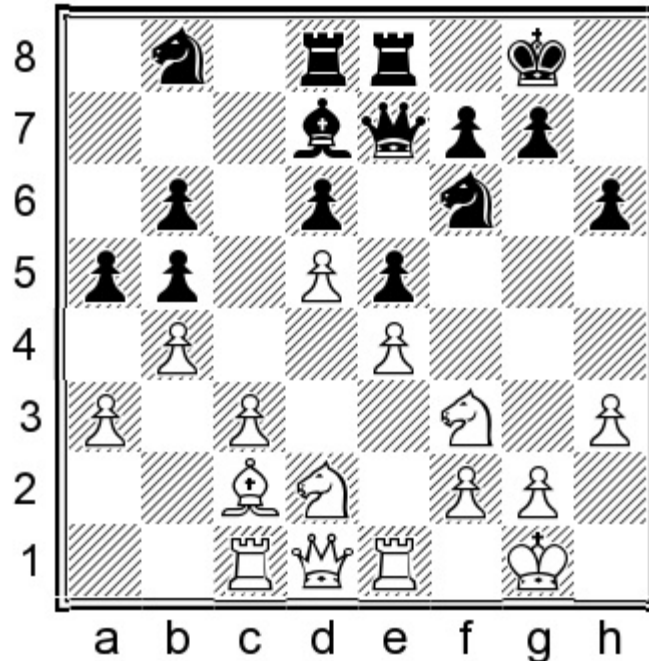
It's like a semi-useful move. I am getting out of the way of any future skewers on the h1-a8 diagonal and may be preparing ...a6-a5 and ...b5-b4 one day. Maybe I'm even getting ready to recapture on b6 with the rook in case of ♙xb6. The only problem is that 13...♖b8 doesn't actually do anything.

Vishy played 14.♖c1 against me. It is a waiting move, just hoping that one day the c-file opens up: 14...♘h7 (14...a5 15.b3) 15.♙d3 ♙f6 16.♘b3 ♘f8 17.♙h2 g5 18.d5 ♘e7 19.c4 ♙xe3 20.♖xe3 c5 21.dxc6 ♙xc6 22.♙g1 ♘fg6 and Black was doing well (0-1, 45) in Anand-Caruaana, Zürich 2013.

I prefer **14.a3**, which stops the knight coming to b4 in the future and also prepares b2-b4. Navara won a good game in this line: **14...♙e7 15.b4**



This doesn't look like much, but it starts to feel like a serious space advantage. **15...Rbd8** It looks like this is preparing ...d6-d5 at some point but in fact Black never gets this in: **16.Rc1 a5 17.d5 Nb8 17...Qxe3 18.dxc6 Qxd2 19.cxd7 Qxc1 20.dxe8=Q+ Qxe8 21.Qxc1** with an extra piece. **18.Qxb6 cxb6**

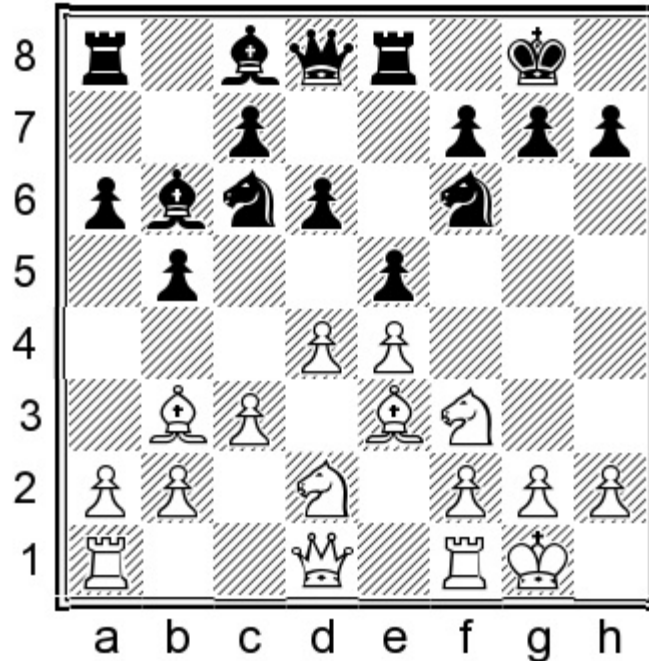


A familiar structure, but in a worse version. The knight on b8 is horrible and b5 is very weak because Black has played ...a6-a5. **19.Qe2 19.Qd3** is also fine. **19...Nh5 20.Qe3** Targeting b6. **20...Nf4 21.h4** A typical move in a lot of positions. White simply wants to play g2-g3 without losing the h-pawn. **21...Qf6 22.g3 Qc8** Desperation, but after **22...Ng6 23.Qxb6** White just starts taking the pawns and you lose your whole queenside. **23.gxf4 exf4 24.Qd4 Qg6+ 25.Qh1 Qh5 26.e5 Qg4 27.Nh2 Qxh4 28.exd6 1-0** Navara-Onischuk, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011.

Black can try 14...a5 instead of 14...♖e7 but after 15.d5 ♞e7 Black's queenside pawns end up weak: 16.♙xb6 ♜xb6 17.a4 and White wins the c4-square for the knight.

In general, White just needs to be patient. If you see your opponent making moves like 13...♜b8, it is perfectly fine to play a move like 14.a3 or 14.♞c1; anything which hinders Black's expansion on the queenside. Black usually ends up with a misplaced bishop in these lines. Which brings us back to the correct move for Black after 10.♞bd2, being:

10...♞e8



11.h3

The best move.

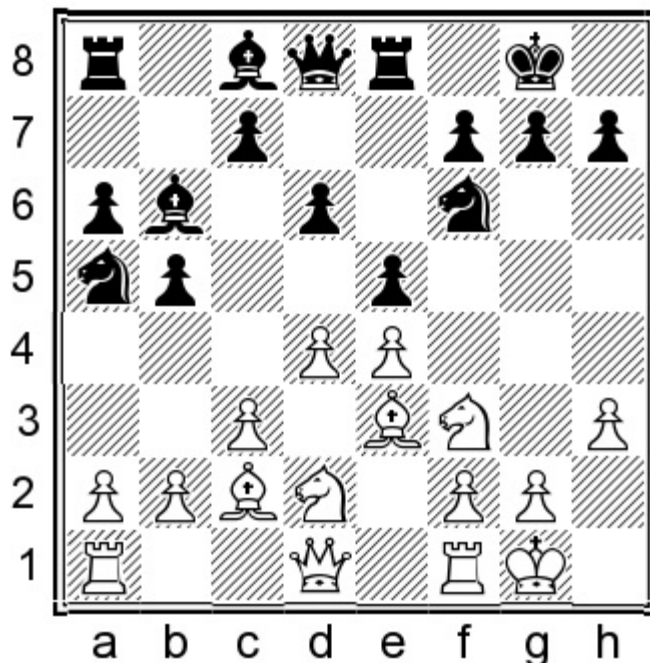
- A) 11.d5 doesn't work in this line due to 11...♙xe3 12.dxc6 ♙b6 and White is left without the bishop pair;
- B) 11.a4 ♜b8 12.axb5 ♜xb5 and the exchange of pawns actually helps Black, because we can no longer play a2-a3 to stop the black knight coming to b4 later on. Once the knight gets an outpost there it will be really annoying;
- C) 11.♙c2 is the move we would love to play, but unfortunately after 11...♙g4 we are just not in time to play 12.h3, because Black wins a pawn with 12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♙xf3 14.♞xf3 ♞b4 15.♙b1 ♞xe4 – one of the rare occasions when Black can actually take on e4.

11...♞a5

The correct move, but Black has other options here:

- A) 11...h6 12.♔c2 is a direct transposition to the lines we just saw;
- B) 11...exd4 12.cxd4 ♘xe4?? 13.♘xe4 ♖xe4 14.♘g5 ♜e7 15.♚h5 is very bad for Black;
- C) 11...♙b7 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♙xb6 cxb6 14.♞e1 ♘g6 15.g3 ♙c8 16.♗h2 with similar play to the lines we have already seen;
- D) 11...♙d7 12.♙c2 and again White is getting what he wants.

12.♙c2



12...exd4

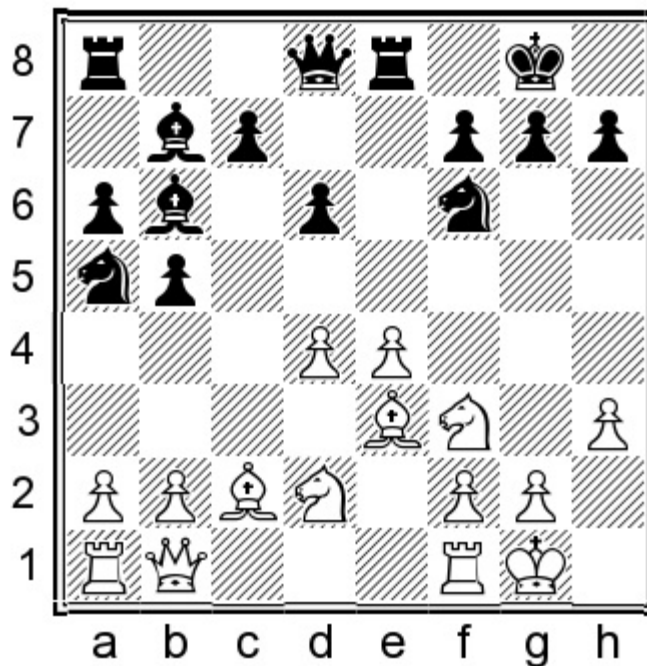
Black has a concrete idea. Alternatives are worse:

- A) 12...c5 13.d5 c4 14.♙g5!? (14.♚e2 is also good) 14...h6 15.♙h4 g5 and now it's no surprise that our sacrifice works here: 16.♘xg5 hxg5 17.♙xg5 ♖g7 18.♚f3 and Black can never break the pin;
- B) 12...♙b7 13.♚b1 ♘c4 (13...c5 14.d5) 14.♘xc4 bxc4 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♚e1 is also better for White.

13.cxd4 ♙b7

Attacking e4.

14.♚b1



With ideas of e4-e5, due to the pressure on h7. If we could have one more tempo to play 15.b3, stopping ...♗c4, then Black's position would be pointless, as the knight would be completely out of the game on a5.

14...♗c4

This is considered the best line for Black.

15.♗xc4 bxc4 16.♗d2

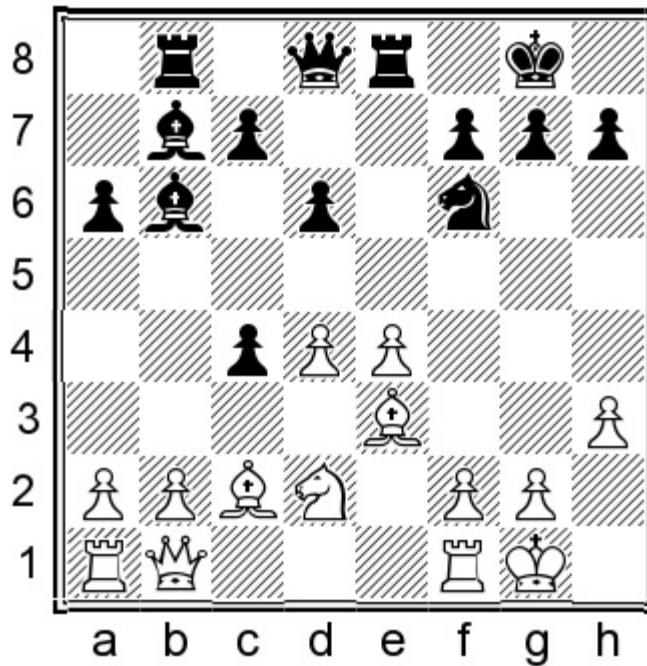
16.e5 looks very attractive, but there is a tactical point: 16...dxe5 (but not 16...♗d5 17.♗xh7+) 17.dxe5 ♗xf3 18.exf6 ♗xg2! 19.♗xh7+ ♔h8 20.fxg7+ ♔xg7 21.♔xg2 ♚d5+ 22.♔h2 ♚e5+ 23.♔g2 (23.♔h1 ♚d5+) 23...♚d5+ with a draw by perpetual check.

16...♖b8

A good move, placing the rook on the same file as the white queen. At the moment, there are still a lot of pieces on the b-file, but White will need to be careful.

16...c5 17.d5 and 16...h6 17.♖e1 ♗a5 18.♖e2! ♗xd2 (18...c3 19.♗c4 cxb2 20.♚xb2) 19.♗xd2 are better for White.

Now White has to make a choice.



Unfortunately the best move isn't what we want positionally. We have to trade off our central e-pawn for one of the doubled c-pawns:

17. ♖xc4

The alternatives are easier for Black:

A) 17. ♖e1 ♔a5! is better for Black than earlier, because of the rook on b8: 18. ♖e2 c3 19. ♖c4 cxb2 20. ♚xb2 ♔xe4;

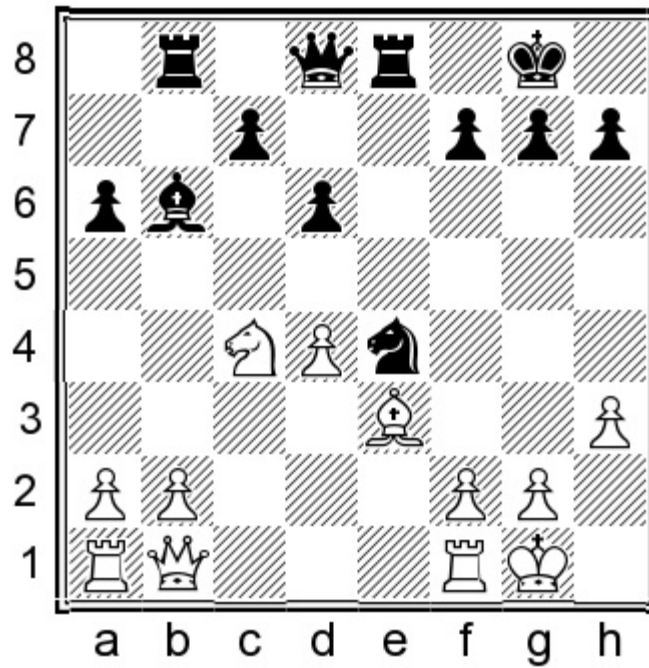
B) 17. ♖d1 h6;

C) 17. f3 d5! 18. e5 ♖xe5 19. dxe5 ♔xe3+ is bad for White.

17... ♔xe4

17... ♖xe4 is not as good: 18. ♖xb6 cxb6 19. ♖e1 and I am going to play f2-f3 to blunt the bishop and to kick the knight away and then I will play with the two bishops. d6 is a weakness too, so here White has a slight but enduring advantage.

18. ♔xe4 ♖xe4



19. ♔d3

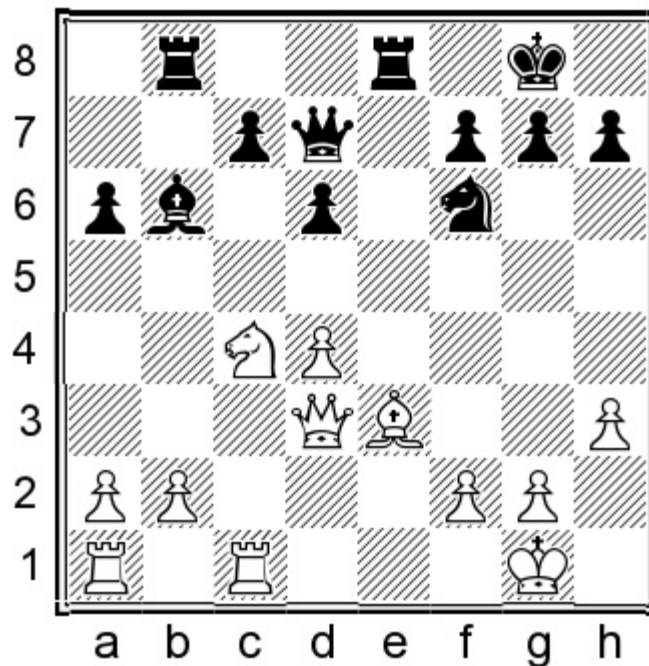
19. ♘xb6 ♖xb6 is healthy for Black. We would rather keep the bishop on the board but blunted.

19... ♔d7 20. ♖fc1

Planning on doubling rooks on the c-file and then playing ♘xb6, as we will then be attacking c7.

20... ♗f6

The knight looked active on e4, but it was more of a hanging piece than anything else, so it heads for d5 instead.



21.b3

This is my recommendation. It is a subtle preparatory move.

After 21.♙d2, a well-prepared Giri found a way to activate his queen and generate enough counterplay to gain a draw: 21...♙a7 22.♞e1 h6 23.b3 ♚b5 24.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 25.♞e1 ♞xe1+ 26.♙xe1 ♚d5 27.♙c3 c5 ½-½ (37) Ponomariov-Giri, Zug 2013.

21...♞d5

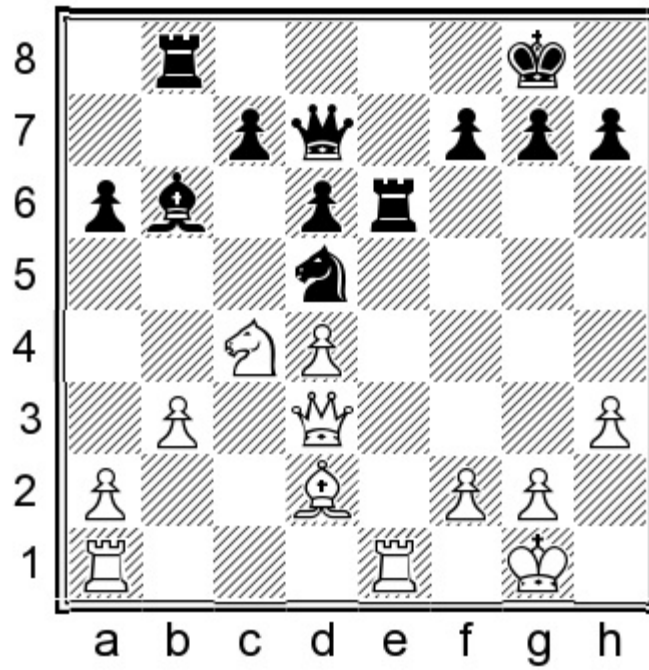
After 21...♙a7 22.♞a5 we see the point of 21.b3; b2 is no longer hanging.

21...♚b5 22.a4 ♚d5 and, unlike in the game above, d4 is no longer hanging. I now have time to play 23.♞c2, which is slightly better for White.

22.♙d2 ♞e6

Or 22...h6 23.♞xb6 ♞xb6 24.♞e1 ♞xe1+ 25.♞xe1 ♚b5 (25...c6 26.♙a5 ♞b5 27.a4 ♞xa5 28.♚d2 ♚d8) 26.♚g3! and White has a strong initiative.

23.♞e1

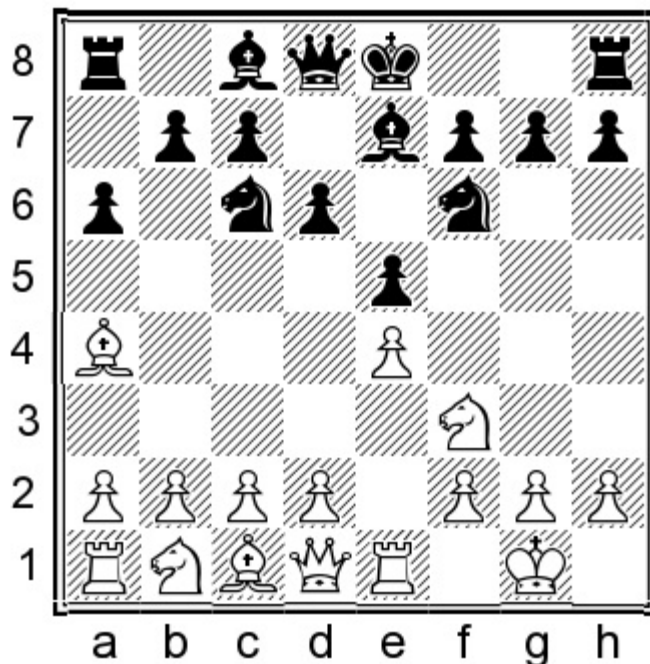


With the more pleasant game for White.

Chapter 9

Averbakh Variation: 3...a6 4.♘a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 d6

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♘a4 ♖f6 5.0-0 ♙e7 6.♞e1 d6



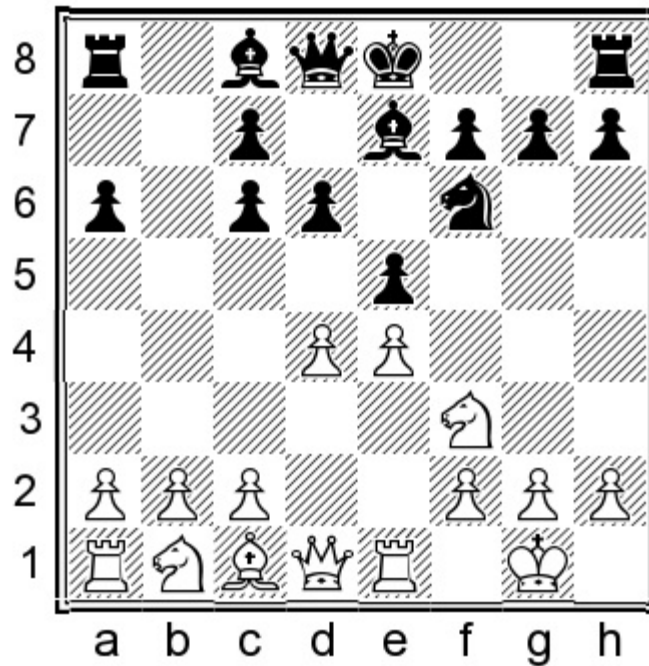
It is important to note that White does have a threat after 6.♞e1. I have seen many of my grandmaster colleagues fall for this in blitz: 6...0-0 7.♙xc6 dxc6 8.♗xe5. This is why Black needs to play 6...b5 or 6...d6.

In this line there are transitional possibilities to the Steinitz Deferred. Black can also head for fresh positions after 7.c3 with 7...♙g4; it is maybe a little better for White, but certainly playable for Black.

7.♙xc6+

I thought it would be good to remain consistent with the other lines where we go for d2-d4. We would love to play d2-d4 immediately, without trading bishop for knight, but there are big problems with the bishop after 7.d4 b5 8.♙b3 ♗xd4 9.♗xd4 exd4 10.♙xd4 c5. This is why we take on c6 first.

7...bxc6 8.d4



8...exd4

Black should probably take. He can play 8...♞d7, trying to keep the central structure, but White will put more pressure on the pawn with 9.♞a3 0-0 10.♞c4. This manoeuvre is important to remember. The c4-square is very nice for the knight, because Black can't really kick it with anything; ...d6-d5 is difficult to achieve. 10...exd4 (10...f6 looks even uglier and might have tactical problems as well, e.g. 11.♞a5 ♞b8 – Black doesn't really want to do this!) 11.♞xd4 ♟b7 (11...c5 12.♞c6 ♚e8 13.♚d5) 12.♞a5 and White is getting a strong initiative.

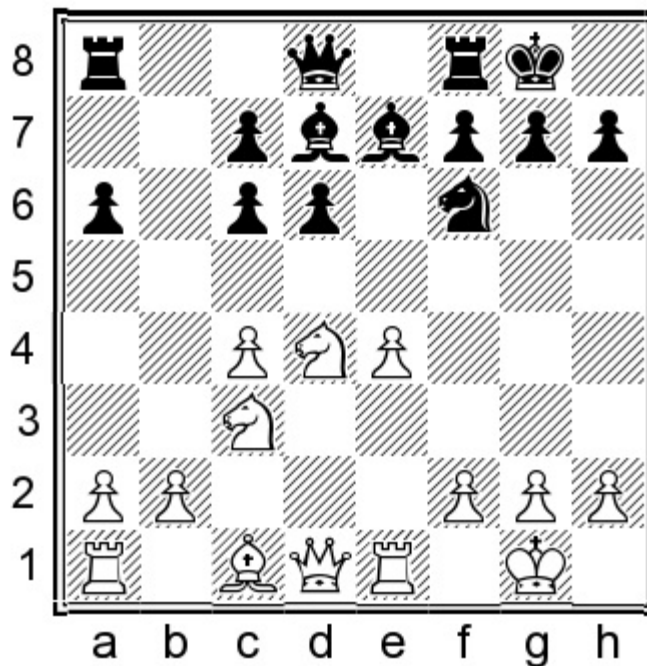
9.♞xd4

9.♚xd4 0-0 10.e5 ♞d5 is not so effective.

9...♟d7

9...♟b7 runs into 10.♞f5 stuff; that will be a very strong knight.

10.c4 0-0 11.♞c3



Now we have a Maroczy structure from our side. Our pawns discourage Black from playing ...d6-d5 and also gain space. Also, by moving the c-pawn, we give our queen more scope. Later on, she could go to a4, for example, putting pressure on Black's queenside pawns. Another idea for White is to play b2-b3 and ♖b2, but it depends entirely on how Black plays.

11...♖e8

Black also has the option of looking where we are going to put our knight after 11...c5: 12.♘f5 ♗xf5 (the knight is very annoying on f5 and Black doesn't want to allow the possibility of 13.♘xe7+ and 14.♙g5) 13.exf5 ♘d7 (13...♖e8 14.♙g5; Black's bishop on e7 is very passively placed so he manoeuvres it to f6) 14.♙d2! (14.♘d5 ♙f6 isn't too bad for Black as we don't really want to take the bishop just now) 14...♙f6 15.♚c2 ♖e8 16.♗xe8+ ♚xe8 17.♘d5 ♖c8 18.♖e1 ♚f8 19.h3 and Black is awkwardly placed.

12.♚f3

This is always a good square for the queen, unless we are running into ...♙g4 stuff – which, in this case, we are not.

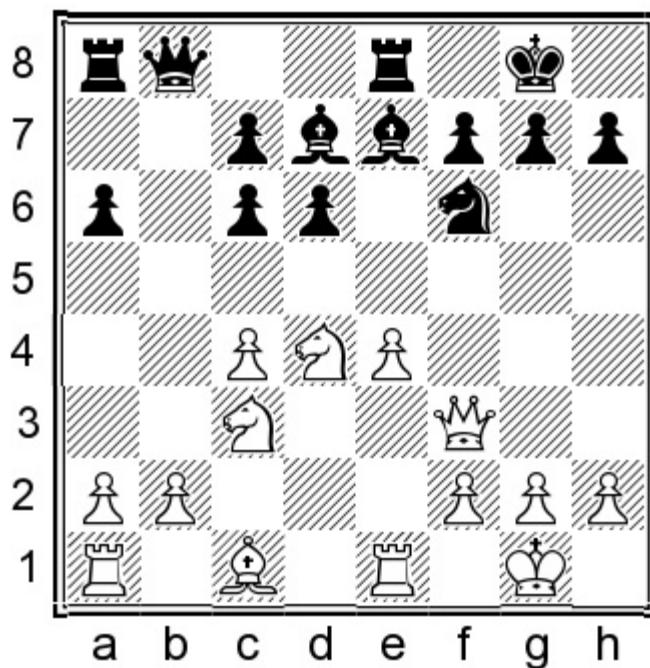
12.h3 was played in a high-level encounter: 12...c5 (12...♙f8 13.♚d3 c5 14.♘f3) 13.♘f5 ♗xf5 14.exf5 ♘d7 ½-½ Kasimdzhanov-Mamedyarov, Tashkent 2016. White can continue with 15.♙d2 ♙f6 16.♗xe8+ ♚xe8 17.♚c2, but it's not as good for White as our main line.

12...♚b8

Romanishin likes to play this way.

12...c5 13.♘f5 ♗xf5 14.♚xf5 (14.exf5 ♘d7 15.♙d2 ♘e5 is also playable but it is a matter of taste

whether to capture with the queen or with the pawn) 14...♞d7 15.♞d5 ♕f6 16.♞xf6+ ♜xf6 17.♕d2 followed by ♕c3, preparing e4-e5, is more pleasant for White.



13.h3

The most natural move is 13.b3. Black plays 13...♞b6 14.♞f5 (14.♕e3 ♞g4, trading off our bishop, is not what we want) 14...♕xf5 15.exf5 d5! (equalizing) 16.♕e3 ♞a5 17.♕d4 c5 18.♕e5 d4 ½-½ Ulybin-Romanishin, Turin 2000.

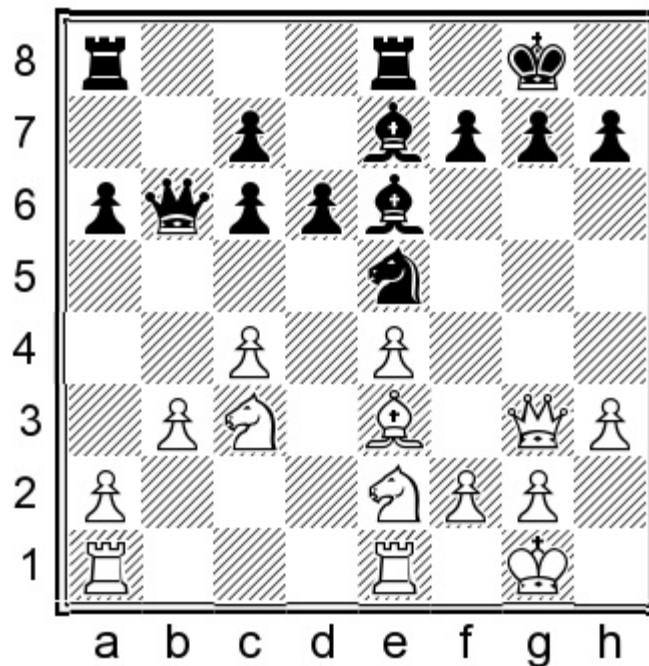
13...♞b6 14.♞de2 ♕e6

Or 14...♕f8 15.b3 and I don't see what Black is doing.

15.b3 ♞d7

A natural move by Black, but now we can kick the queen around and it feels to me that White is better.

16.♕e3 ♞e5 17.♞g3



With a very pleasant position for White. Black has to do something about the attack on his queen. In general, 17...c5 is not a move Black wants to play. It weakens d5 a lot and it looks like you are closing your queen out of the game.

17...♙b4 isn't good either as 18.f4! is very strong now. Where does the knight go? If 18...♞d3 19.♙d4! and we are attacking g7 and d3. 18...♞g6 19.f5?! ♙h4 is messy, but I can play 19.♙f3 and I have a huge advantage.

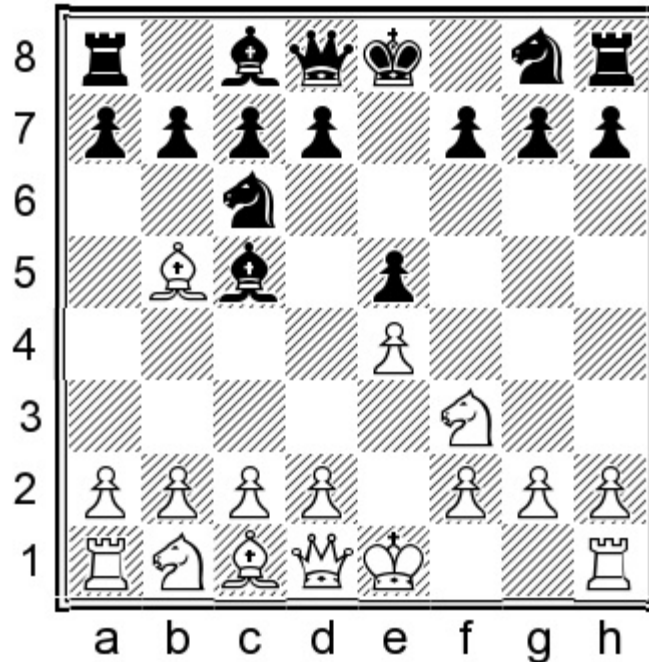
In summary, I like this set-up for White. Black has been quite committal with the queenside pawn structure and I think people tend to underestimate the strategic risk that Black faces here. One of the reasons for this is that we don't study these openings concretely, because we think they are sidelines and we don't give them their due attention. It is very rare that people go through this line or the Steinitz Variation and analyse them extensively.

In a lot of the games I have seen in the variation, players with white make a slight inaccuracy and they lose their advantage. It's not like just any move is good; you have to play accurately. The way to do this is to know, concretely, what to do, or know the typical ideas. Knowing that it is good to play c2-c4 and to develop your queen to f3 will help a lot. I saw some games where White knew what he was doing and then Black quickly got into trouble.

Chapter 10

Classical Defence: 3...♟c5

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♟c5



The Classical Defence sees Black developing his king's bishop to a strong central square. He wants to continue developing in classical style, but White can disrupt the plan by playing for an early occupation of the centre, using the bishop as a target.

The defence has never been very popular and it is rarely seen at any level of chess. I have never actually faced this move so I would consider it a sideline. It does have a lot of history and there are some strong players who have experimented with it, but these days it is not considered a very reliable choice for Black. In fact it is considered a bit dubious.

The problem with 3...♟c5 is that it opens Black up to the risk of c2-c3 and d2-d4 early on. If Black decides to go for the Berlin with 3...♘f6 and White replies with 4.d3 then here 4...♟c5 is a much better choice. This is because the plan with c2-c3 and d2-(d3-)d4 will now lose a tempo. Also after 4.0-0, 4...♟c5 is a better version as well compared to 3...♟c5.

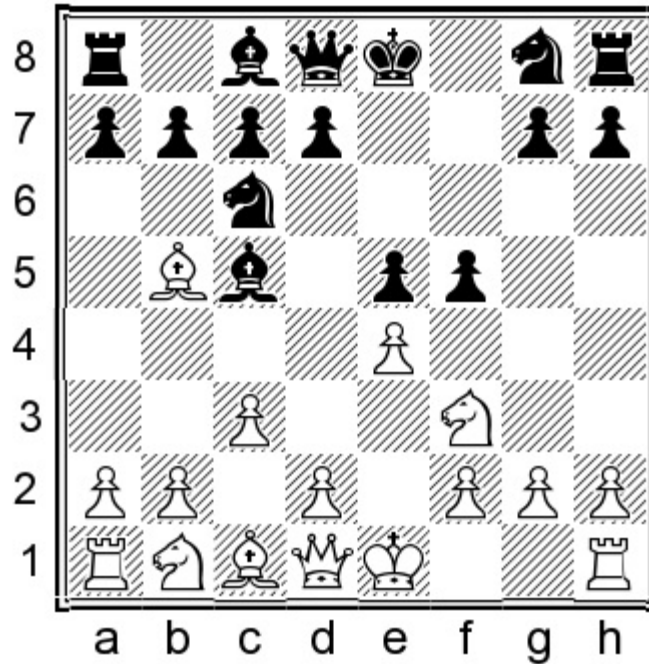
Of course, White can still play 4.0-0 or 4.d3, but my recommendation is to play an immediate c2-c3 and d2-d4.

4.c3

Black doesn't have too many options here. White is threatening 5.d4, taking over the entire centre, so really, Black is limited to two moves, leading to two very different types of play.

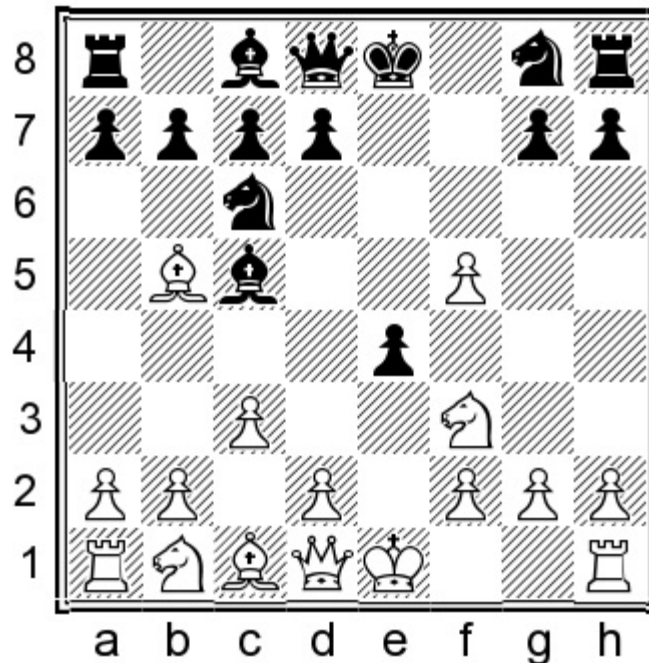
4...♘f6

This is the more natural move, but I think the better move is 4...f5, even though Black is sacrificing a pawn and opening up his king.



It makes some sense after White has played 4.c3 because you are directly interfering with White's plans to get the centre.

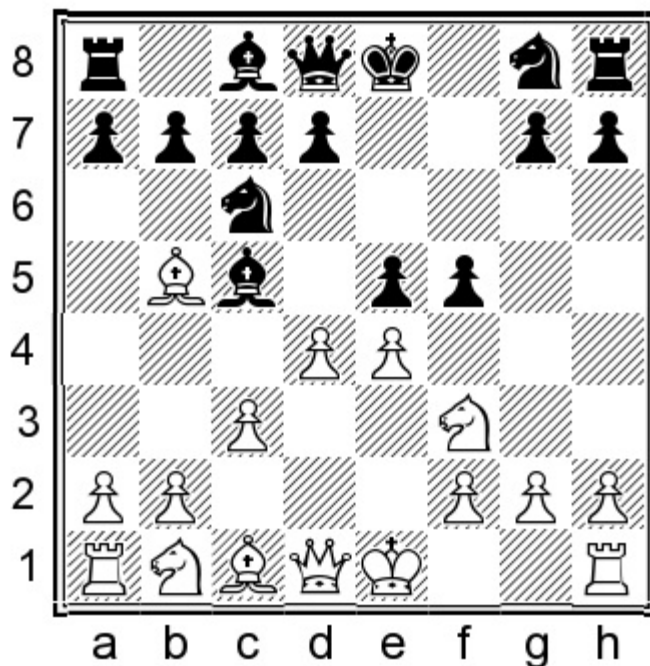
On 5.exf5, Black plays 5...e4. Even though this may be better for White objectively, I am not recommending it because it gets quite messy:



6.d4 exf3 7.dxc5 ♔e7+ 8.♙e3 fxg2 9.♖g1 ♘f6 10.♗xg2 0-0. At first I thought this position would be better for White, but then I realized that Black's king is quite safe and White's king, still in the centre

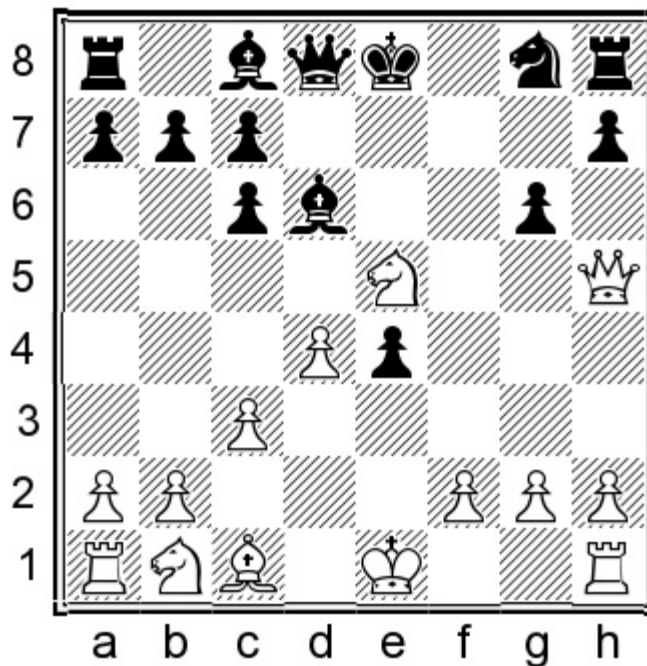
– although it does have a future on c1 – is, in the short term, rather vulnerable and this position will not be easy to play. I think that this is the best that Black can hope for in these lines, so my recommendation after 4...f5 is to follow the example set by Vishy Anand:

5.d4 This leads to some rather forcing moves.



5...fxe4 This is Black's best move. On 5...exd4 we play 6.exf5. Now ...e5-e4 is no longer an option and our knight is rather secure. If White is given time to castle and play ♖e1 then the position is simply going to be bad for Black: 6...♙e7+ 7.♙e2 dxc3 8.♘xc3 ♘f6 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙c4+ ♔h8 11.♞e1 ♚d8. Material is equal but White has a very strong initiative.

6.♙xc6 Eliminating the defender of the e5-pawn. Although normally we don't want to give the bishop pair away, it is the best move. 6.♘xe5 ♘xe5 7.dxe5 c6 8.♙c4 ♙h4 9.g3 ♙h3 is messier. **6...dxc6** 6...exf3 7.♙xf3 is simply good for White. **7.♘xe5 ♙d6** Surprisingly, Black is holding on here, tactically. **8.♙h5+ g6** It is useful to provoke this weakness.

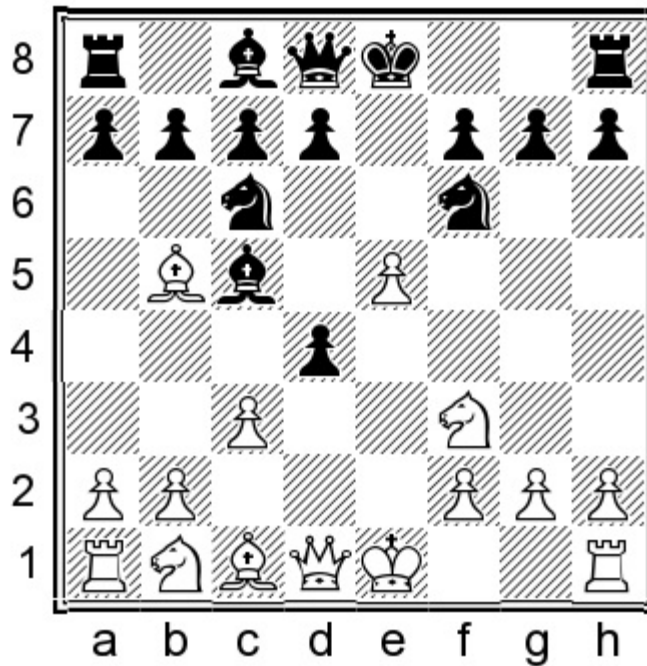


9.♞e2 9.♟xg6 looks like it just wins a pawn, but after 9...♞f6 10.♞h4 ♜g8 this position is not so clear. 9...♟f5 10.♟f4 Vishy played 10.h3, but I don't quite see the need for this move: 10...♞e7 11.♟f4 (Anand-l'Ami, Germany Bundesliga 2016/17, 1-0, 31). 10...♞e7 10...♞f6 11.♞d2 0-0 12.0-0 is better for White, who will play f2-f3 soon. Black should prefer to castle queenside. 11.♞d2 ♞f6 12.0-0 0-0-0 13.f3 exf3 14.♞dx f3 White has a solid positional advantage, with extra space thanks to the knight on e5, which is impossible for Black to get rid of. Also, because we have provoked the move 8...g6, Black's knight is more vulnerable. For example, if at some point we play ♟g5, his knight might be very awkward to defend. For the moment we are just going to play ♞ae1 and we have a lot of pressure down the e- and f-files, whereas Black has no space and no particular counterplay. I think White has a significant advantage. It is very easy for things to go wrong for Black. For example: 14...c5 15.♞h1 cxd4 16.♞xd4 (16.cxd4 is also good for White) 16...♞he8 17.♞dc6 bxc6? 18.♞a6+ ♞b8 19.♞xc6+ ♞a8 20.♞xa7 checkmate.

5.d4 exd4

5...♟b6 6.dxe5 (6.♞xe5 ♞xe5 7.dxe5 ♞xe4 8.♞g4 ♞xf2 9.♞xg7 ♞f8 10.♟g5 and 8...♟xf2+ 9.♞e2 ♞h4 10.♞xg7 ♞f8 11.♟h6 ♟c5 12.♞d2 are both good for White) 6...♞xe4 7.0-0 d5 (7...0-0 8.♞d5 ♞c5) 8.exd6 ♞xd6 9.♞e1+ is very good for White. All of these lines show how difficult it is for Black to comfortably play the position after 5...♟b6.

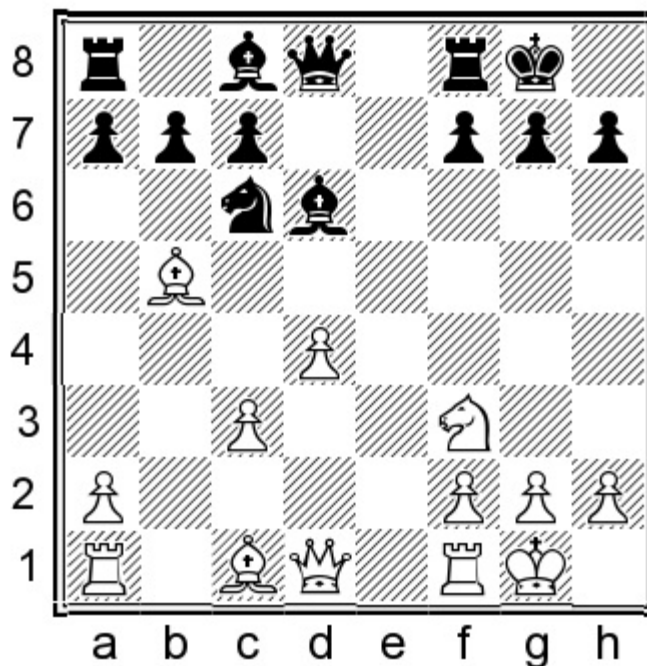
6.e5



This line is comparable to the Italian Game, where the bishop is on c4 instead of b5, but there Black will play 6...d5, gaining a tempo on the bishop – and then White plays 7.♘b5 ! So to me, it seems that White is just a clear tempo up compared to that line.

Here, Black has only two moves:

After 6...♘d5, White has more than one good option: 7.0-0 7.cxd4 ♘b4+ 8.♘bd2 0-0 9.0-0 is also good for White. 7...♘e7 If 7...0-0 8.cxd4 and Black doesn't have a check anymore, so we have gained half a tempo: 8...♘e7 9.♘c3 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 with a very pleasant position for White. 9.♙b3 is another strong way for White to play. Black has lost a lot of time and will be wondering why he played 3...♘c5 in the first place. 8.cxd4 d6 9.♘c3 ♘xc3 10.bxc3 0-0 11.exd6 ♘xd6



White has a comfortable advantage here; it looks like a good version of a line against the Petroff Defence.

Most players prefer:

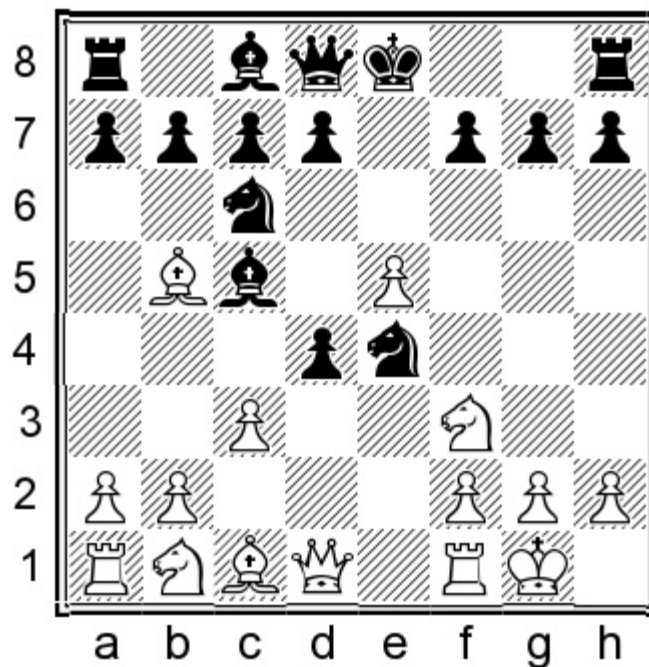
6...♘e4

At first, I thought the way that Vishy played was the best in this position:

7.cxd4 ♘b4+ 8.♘bd2 0-0 9.0-0 ♘xd2 10.♙xd2 ♙xd2 11.♚xd2 with a slight advantage, which he eventually converted: 11...♘e7 12.♘g5 d6 13.f4 ♙f5 14.♞ae1 dxe5 15.fxe5 ♚d5 16.♚b4 ♙g6 17.♞f4 h6 18.♘f3 ♚d8 19.♚b3 ♘d5 20.♞g4 ♙f5 21.♞g3 c6 22.♙c4 ♚b6 23.♙xd5 cxd5 24.♚xb6 axb6 25.a3 and 1-0 (50), Anand-Vallejo Pons, Doha 2016.

I think that in general Black should be happy to trade off pieces because White has a big space advantage, so I recommend another move instead of 7.cxd4:

7.0-0!



I think this is the most critical move. Most likely, Vishy hadn't analysed the line very recently and probably wanted to play a line which was a bit safer. Castling, of course, involves a pawn sacrifice, so it is necessary to be familiar with the tactical intricacies of this line – but it is also the most ambitious move.

7...dxc3

The sharpest and most ambitious line for Black.

I would say about 80% of players now play 7...d5. Again, this is the line from the Italian Game but White is a clear tempo up. Usually, it is Black's move in this position: 8.cxd4 Or 8.exd6 0-0 9.♙xc6

bxc6 10.dxc7 ♖xc7 11.cxd4. **8...♗b6 9.h3** We can use our extra tempo to stop 9...♗g4. **9...0-0 10.♘c3** Black's bishop is just dead; blocked out by the pawns. We also have a space advantage with the pawn on e5, which allows attacking chances, for example after we play ♗d3. If Black plays the combative 10...f6, then I think there are a number of good ways to play this position. 11.♖b3 is kind of sharp and probably good for White, but I think the easiest way to play is probably 11.exf6 ♖xf6 12.♗e3, just consolidating our space advantage. One day we can consider taking on c6 and getting the e5-square for the knight, but depending on Black's move we will have many good ways to play this position. It is just a theoretical line but with a tempo up for White, which is always good.

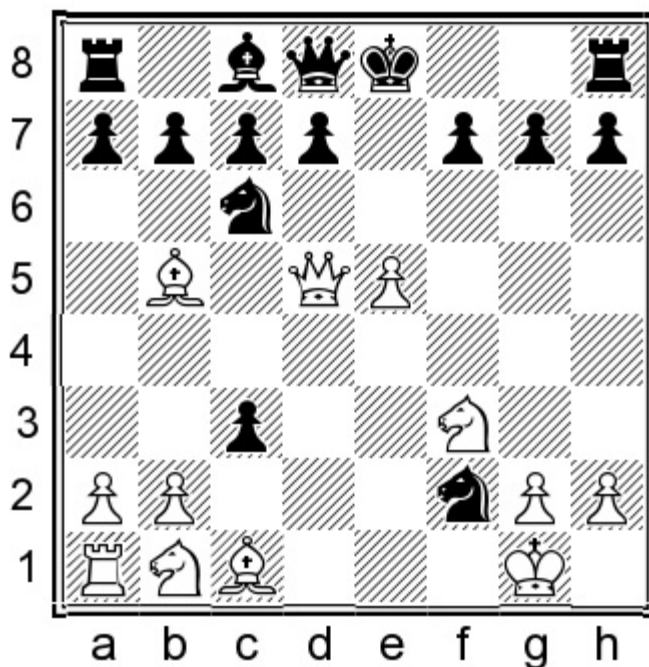
8.♖d5!

This is why not many people go for 7...dxc3 as Black. We are attacking two pieces at once and we are directly forcing Black's hand.

8...♗xf2+

Now 9.♔h1 is a good option, but we can just take the material:

9.♖xf2 ♘xf2



10.♘xc3!

We don't want Black to get the pawn after 10.♔xf2 cxb2.

10...♘g4

If we are allowed to take on f2 we will be up on material and position, so Black really needs to try to

preserve the knight.

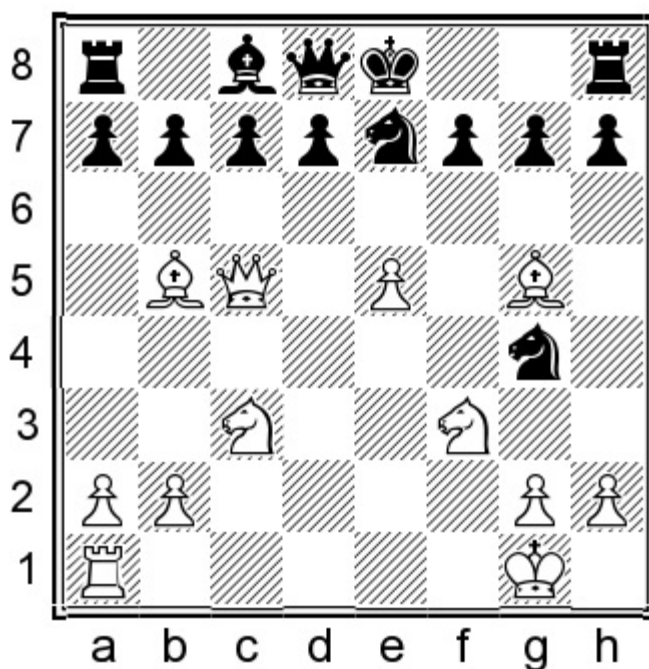
11. ♖g5

It is very awkward for Black to meet this move.

11... ♘e7

Or 11... f6 12. exf6 ♘xf6 13. ♖e1+ and Black probably won't survive too long from this position. It looks like a game from 200 years ago!

12. ♕c5



An important move, stopping Black from castling. 13. ♘d5 is now a rather nasty threat.

12... c6

If he tries to force our hand with 12... h6, then 13. ♖xe7 ♕xe7 14. ♕xc7 with the threat of ♘d5 – and with Black's knight still marooned on g4 this is just a bad position for Black. Even though he has some material, all of his pieces are bad and White is practically winning here.

Black has to find a way to develop and the main problem is that he can't move his d-pawn.

We don't need to move the bishop as we have a very strong move:

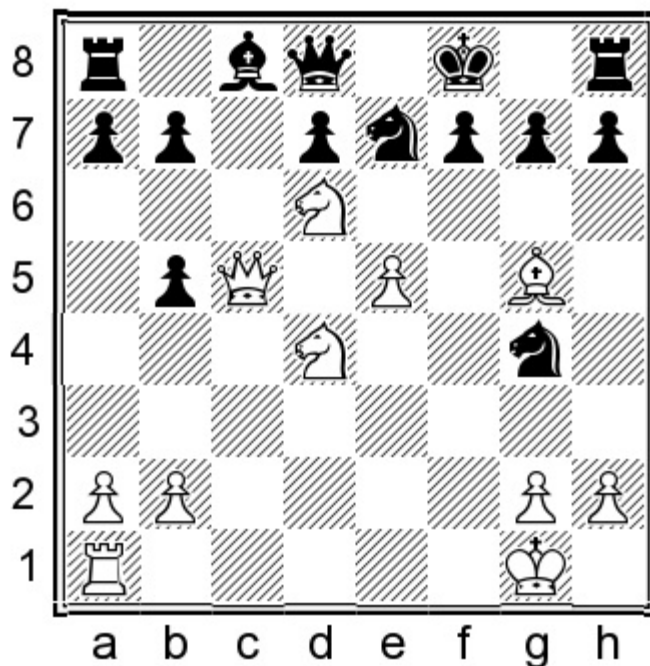
13. ♘e4!

Investing more material into the attack, but in this case it is fully worth it.

13... cxb5

13...d5 14.exd6 f6 15.♖e1.

14.♘d6+ ♔f8 15.♘d4



We are down a rook and two pawns but I don't think it is too surprising that White is just winning here. 16.♖f1 is our main threat, after which Black will come under a direct attack and will have to shed material rather quickly.

One important detail is that after 15...♙b6 we can play 16.♙xe7+ ♔xe7

17.♘xc8+, picking up everything.

Basically, there are no good moves for Black in this position.

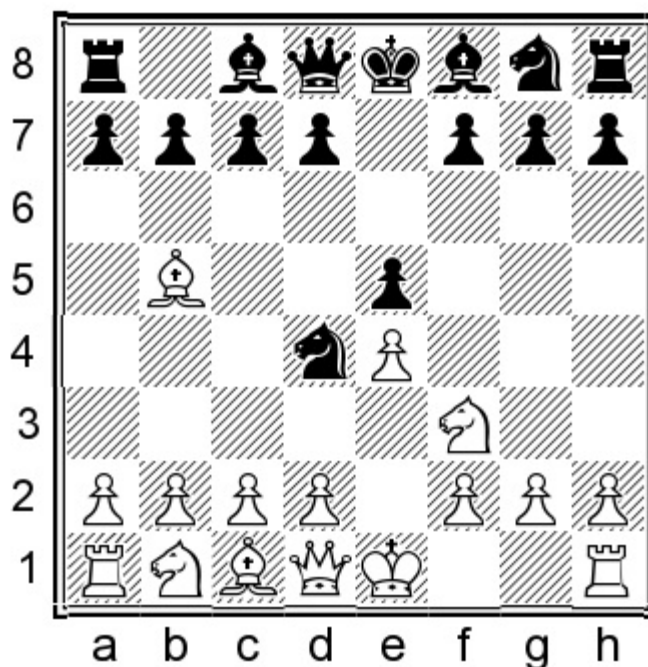
In general here, even though it is difficult to prepare for every move, you can be confident that White has a winning advantage and also all of the fun.

Summing up, neither of the main options is attractive for Black, but 4...f5 is the more challenging move. However, 4...♘f6 is the more common move and I think that our recommendation is actually a lot of fun for White and objectively good too.

Chapter 11

Bird's Defence: 3...♞d4

1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♙b5 ♞d4



This defence is named after Henry Bird (1829-1908), who was noted for his eccentric chess openings (1.f4 is, of course, known as Bird's Opening).

There are various tricks and traps but Black relies on catching White unawares. However even Magnus Carlsen had his fingers burned when he tried 3...♞d4 recently.

A well-prepared player should definitely be able to play for an advantage as White. The bombastic Bird is not really a problem for the first player. It is an old move with a lot of history and many, many games, but not very popular these days – and with good reason, I think.

Black moves the same piece again, which contradicts basic opening principles, and we trade it off immediately, damaging Black's structure at the same time. On the plus side, you do gain some space as Black. Although it is not such a good structure, as White has a kingside majority, the pawn on d4 does prevent ♞c3 and can get in the way of our central progress. Black, on the other hand, will find it difficult to develop as our e-pawn is unrestricted. If he plays ...♞f6 he will always have to worry about e4-e5.

Introduction

4.♞xd4 exd4

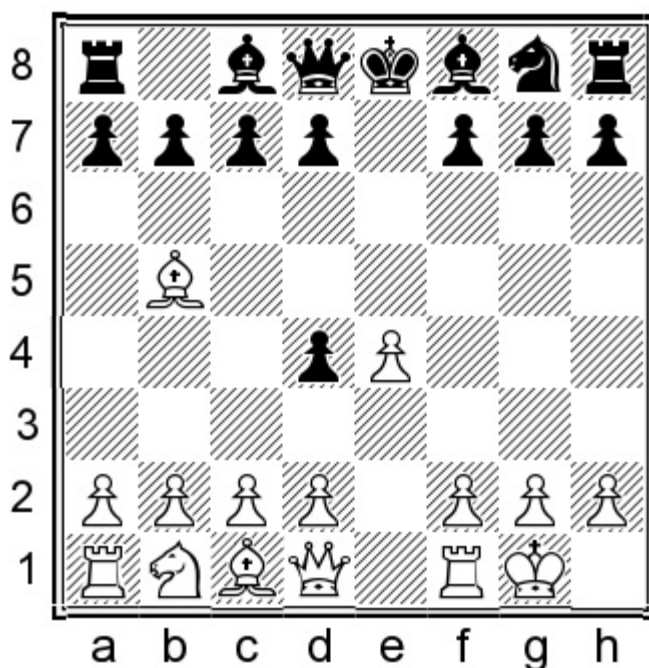
The most high-profile game in recent years was when Magnus played Bird's Defence in the Olympiad against Saric, and it didn't work out very well for him.

The game continued with 5.♔c4. This is not the move I am recommending, but it is still a good one. The logic is that the bishop is not doing anything on the a4-e8 diagonal so it switches to the other diagonal and tries to attack f7: 5...♘f6 6.0-0 d5. Magnus experimented here, but this is not really a good move. He ended up down a pawn and never really got it back: 7.exd5 ♕e7 8.♖f3 ♔g4 9.♖f4 0-0 10.h3 ♕d6 11.♗xd4 c5 12.♗d3 ♕h5 13.♘c3 ♖e8 14.f4 a6 15.a4 ♗d7 16.♗g3 ♘e4 17.♘xe4 ♖xe4 18.b3 ♗c7 19.d3 ♖e2 20.♗g5 g6 21.♕b2 ♕e7 22.♕f6 h6 23.♕e5 ♗d8 24.♗xh6 ♖xe5 25.d6 ♖e2 26.dxe7 and 1-0 (37) in Saric-Carlsen, Tromsø ol 2014.

I think this turned him off from 3...♘d4, probably forever.

5.0-0

is my recommendation.



I looked at some Bird games and I found that Richard Rapport is the only player who plays it consistently with black.

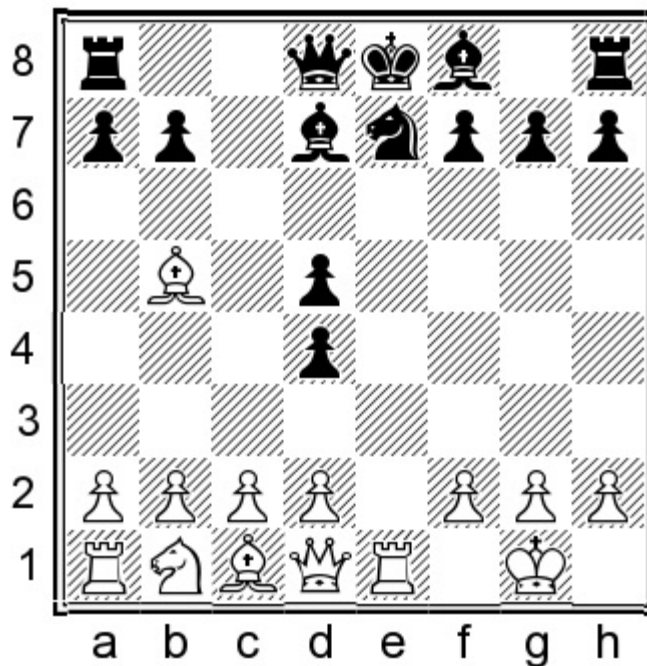
5...♕c5

This is how Rapport plays the position. The knight will go to e7, which is the only reliable way for him to develop.

Black's basic problem is that he needs to develop his pieces, but it's difficult, as the alternatives show:

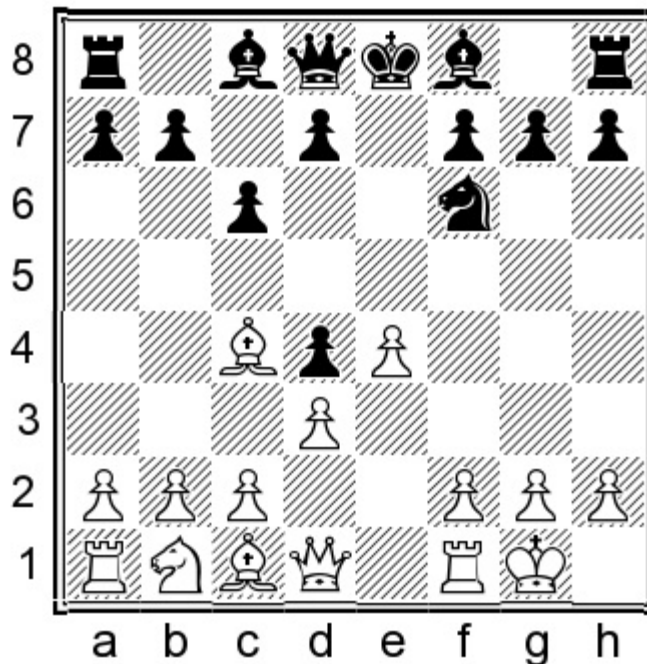
A) 5...♘f6 6.e5 is awkward for Black;

B) 5...c6 used to be popular here, although it leads to a really rotten pawn structure after 6.♕c4 d5 7.exd5 cxd5 8.♕b5+ ♕d7 9.♖e1+ ♘e7 (or 9...♕e7? 10.♗g4! ♕xb5 11.♗xg7 and White is winning easily)

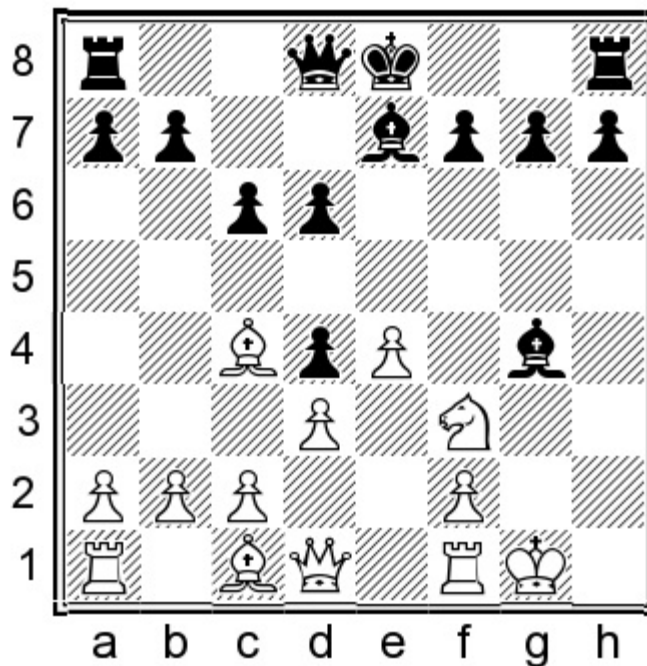


10.c4! a6 11.♙xd7+ ♚xd7 12.d3 0-0-0 13.♘d2 – White’s advanced pawns on the queenside give him space and they will be useful in the attack, Kasparov-Khalifman, Moscow 2002 (1-0, 23). Black has a couple of alternatives at move 10 but they don’t work out well either: 10...♙xb5 11.cxb5; 10...dxc3 11.♘xc3 and White is much better in both cases.

After 5...c6 6.♙c4 Black can also play 6...♘f6 7.d3 (7.e5? doesn’t work here as after 7...d5 8.exf6 dxc4 9.♖e1+ ♙e6 Black is doing very well) and now Black has options.



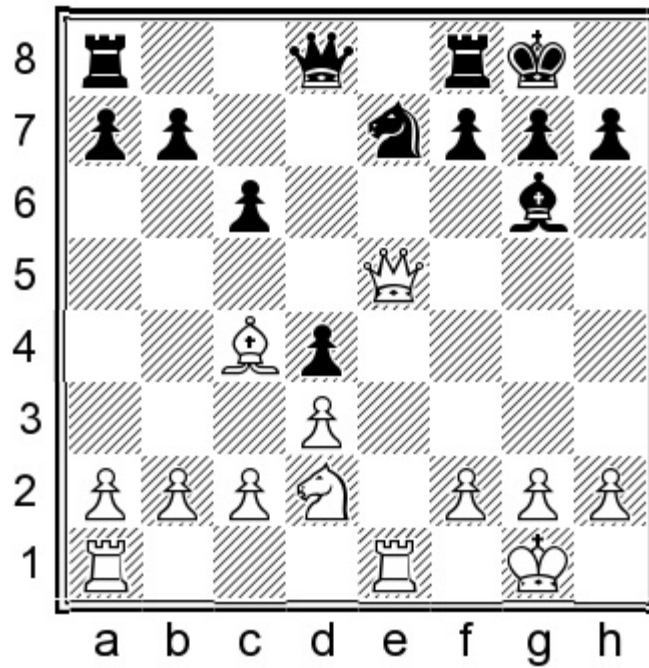
In the case of 7...d6, we just develop normally: 8.♘d2 ♙e7. Black is not going to get blown away in this line, but he is still left with a weak d-pawn: 9.♘f3 ♙g4 10.h3 ♙h5 (10...♙xf3 11.♚xf3 is no fun for Black – we have the kingside majority, the bishop pair and a significant advantage) 11.g4 ♘xg4 (Black’s critical option, sacrificing a piece; 11...♙g6 12.♘d4 is just a pawn) 12.hxg4 ♙xg4.



It looks a little bit awkward, but after 13.♔g2 ♚d7 14.♖h1 we will eventually free ourselves and I don't see enough compensation for Black. I don't even think there is close to enough.

There is an important point that (in the above diagram position after 7.d3) after 7...♙e7 we can now play 8.e5 d5 (8...♘d5 9.♙xd5 cxd5, with tripled pawns, is rather sad; White can play 10.♚g4, for example) 9.exf6 and we attack the bishop on e7, so Black loses a piece.

Black's option to really try to free his game is 7...d5 8.exd5 ♘xd5 (8...cxd5 9.♙b5+ ♙d7 10.♙xd7+ ♚xd7 11.♘d2 ♙c5 12.♖e1+ is no fun for Black and if 11...♙e7 we just win a pawn after 12.♘b3) 9.♖e1+ ♙e7 (after 9...♙e6 we can liquidate to a good ending with 10.♚h5 ♚d7 11.♙xd5 ♚xd5 12.♚xd5 cxd5 13.♘d2 when both 13...♖c8 14.♘b3 ♖xc2 15.♘xd4 and 13...♙c5 14.♘b3 ♙b6 15.♙f4 ♖c8 16.♖ac1 are better for White) 10.♙g5 0-0 11.♙xe7 ♘xe7 12.♘d2 ♙f5 13.♚h5 ♙g6 14.♚e5,

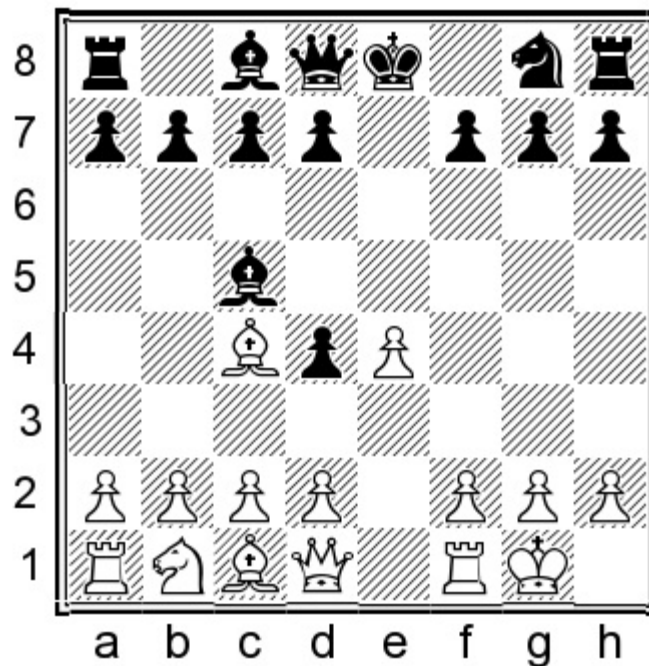


once again targeting the chronically weak d-pawn;

C) 5...a6 6.♙c4 just leaves White a tempo up on the Saric-Carlsen game, so it is not worth it for Black.

After 5...♙c5, I recommend:

6.♙c4

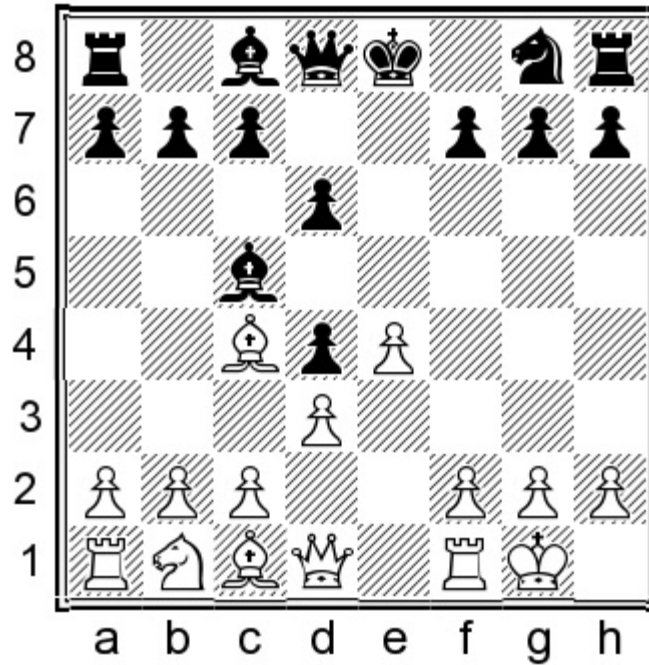


There is a direct threat of 7.♙xf7+ ♔xf7 8.♙h5+ and 9.♙xc5, winning a pawn and gaining a winning position.

6...♔h4

6...♘f6 runs into 7.e5 and if then 7...d5 we have 8.exf6 dxc4 9.fxg7 ♖g8 10.♕h5, attacking c5 and h7. White is simply winning.

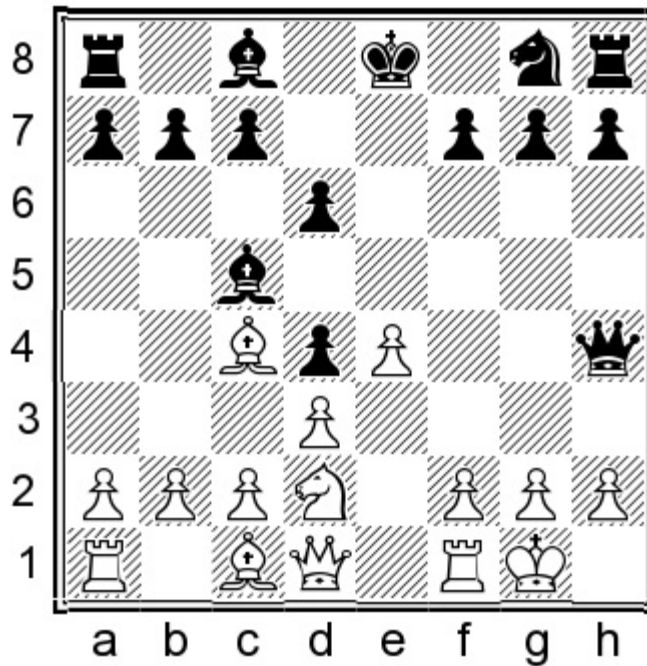
6...d6 looks the most natural. It defends the bishop so we no longer have the trick of ♕xf7+. We play 7.d3 and Black has a few ways of developing:



A) If 7...♘f6 then we have this very annoying pin: 8.♕g5 h6 9.♕h4 g5 10.♕g3 and f2-f4 is coming, although we have to be careful with timing because of a potential ...♘g4 move;

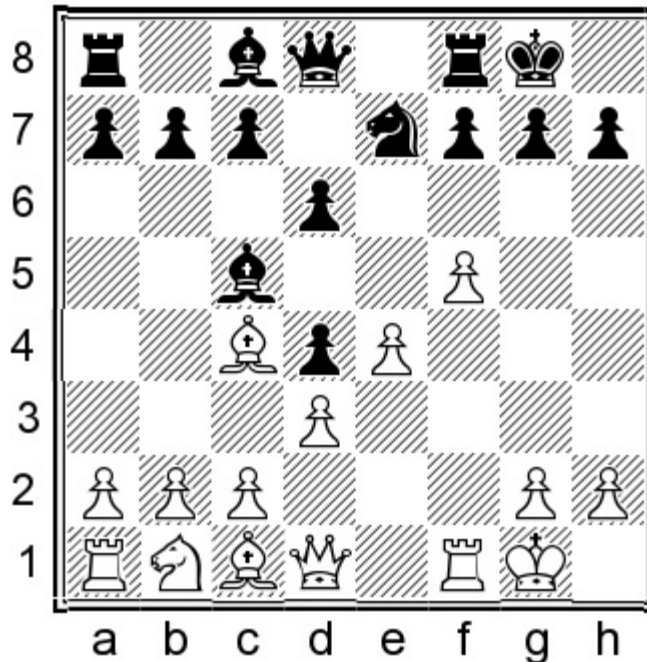
B) 7...♔h4 is certainly more 'Bird-like'. Black is trying to develop without running into ♕g5 and just attempting to start some counterplay. The problem with Black's position is that it is strategically very dubious, with the doubled d-pawns and the bishop on c5 which is out of the game. So at least Black wants to try and create something here, maybe with ...♘f6 and then ...♘g4 to get in White's face.

The problem with 7...♔h4 is that we are going to get a tempo on the queen: 8.♘d2



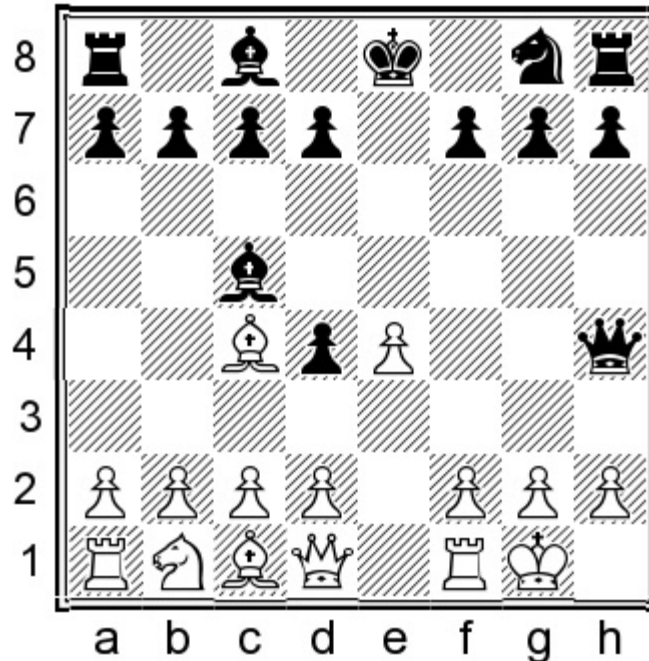
8...♗e7 8...♘f6 9.♗f3 ♖h5 10.h3 and now we have stopped 10...♙g4, it is not clear what his next move is. He can play 10...0-0 and after 11.♞e1 (preparing e4-e5) 11...♙xh3 12.gxh3 ♖xh3 13.♗g5 and then ♖f3, he doesn't have any pieces attacking us. Also in this line there is 11...♞e8 12.♗g5 ♖xd1 13.♙xf7+. 9.f4 0-0 10.f5 d5 11.♙b3 dxe4 12.♗xe4, attacking the bishop, and White is much better;

C) After 7...♗e7, there is another problem: 8.f4 0-0 9.f5



It is kind of a general rule that with a knight on e7, this plan of f2-f4-f5 has a lot of potency. We are really restricting his knight and setting up an attack. f5-f6 is on the cards, and maybe even ♖h5, ♞f3 and ♞h3: 9...d5 10.♙b3 dxe4 11.dxe4 d3+ 12.♗h1 and White is doing very well. I don't think Black will have any fun in this line.

The point of Rapport's move is to try and save on ...d7-d6, getting ...d7-d5 in one go.



7.d3

At first I was torn. There is also 7.♖f3! here which the engine was recommending very strongly, but the lines quickly became chaotic and even though I do think White is better here, I don't like how messy it was. I think in this case, simple is good.

Here are some sample lines after 7.♖f3! in case you want to investigate this alternative:

A) 7...♖f6 8.♖h5 d6 9.d3;

B) 7...d5 8.♗xd5 (8.exd5 ♗d6 9.♖e1+ ♘e7 10.g3 ♗g4 11.♗b5+ ♔f8 12.♖e4 ♖h5 13.b3) 8...♘f6 9.♗b3 (9.d3 ♘xd5 10.exd5 0-0 11.h3) 9...♗d6 (9...0-0 10.d3; 9...d3 10.♖xd3) 10.g3 ♗g4 11.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 12.♖b3+ ♗e6 13.gxh4 ♗xb3 14.axb3 ♘xe4 15.d3 ♘f6 16.♗d2.

7...♘e7

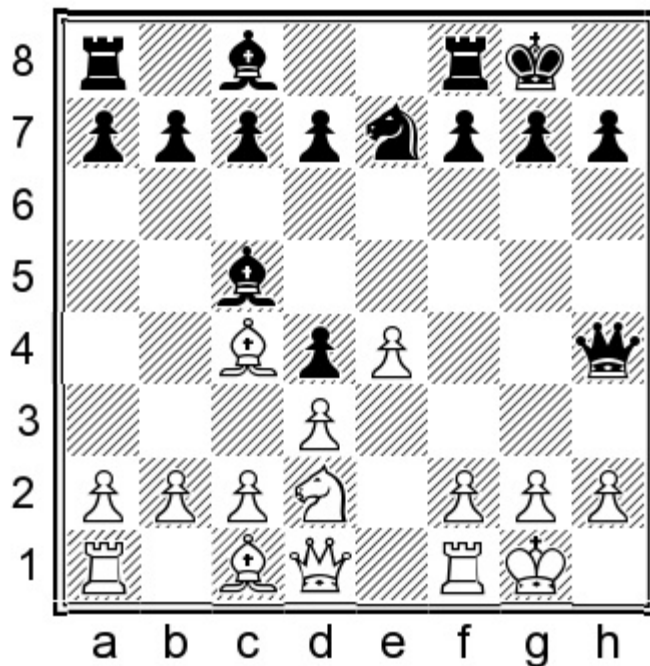
7...d6 transposes to other lines after 8.♗d2.

After 7...♘f6 I believe that once again 8.e5 is a very good option: 8...♗g4 9.♗f4 and Black has no follow-up and who knows where the black knight will end up?

8.♗d2 0-0

It is clear that Black is trying to get in ...d7-d5, even as a pawn sacrifice.

8...d6 9.f4 transposes to the earlier lines.



9.f4

9.c3 allowed Black to get in 9...d5 in one of Rapport's games and there followed 10.exd5 ♘g4 11.♗f3 ♖h5 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♙xf3 ♖xf3 14.gxf3 ♘g6 15.♞e1 ♞fe8 16.♞e4 ♘e5 17.♔g2 f5 18.d6+ ♘xc4 19.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 20.d7 ♞d8 21.dxc4 dxc3 22.bxc3 ♞xd7 and ½-½ (53) Sutovsky-Rapport, Ashdod 2015.

9.c3 just doesn't feel right to me as White isn't able to simply take the full centre.

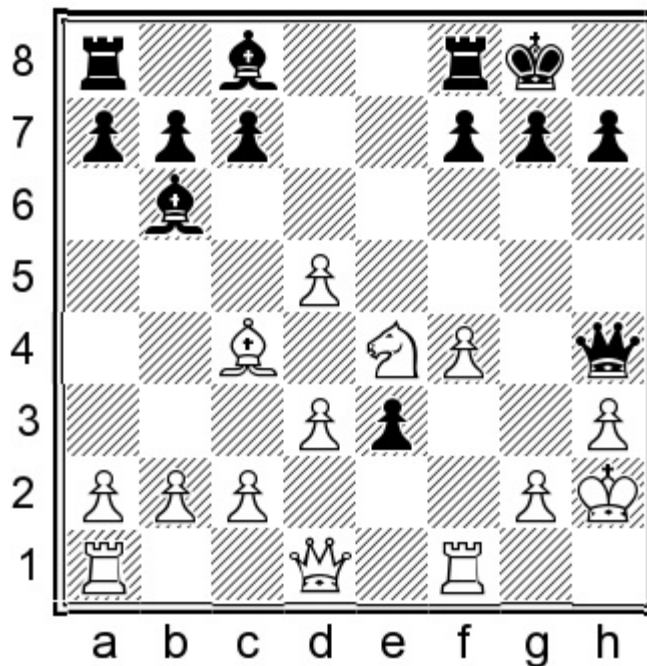
9...d5

Most people would be reluctant to play this way with black, but after 9...d6 we have the usual stuff with 10.f5 d5 11.♙b3 dxe4 12.♗xe4.

10.exd5 ♗f5 11.♗e4 ♙b6 12.h3

With the idea of putting the king on h2.

12...♗e3 13.♙xe3 dxe3 14.♔h2



Now that our king is out of the way, we will be able to round up the e3-pawn with c2-c3 and d3-d4 to kill the black bishop. It is worth noting that although Black's dark-squared bishop is unopposed, it is not a good piece as it doesn't do anything. We have such a tremendous central presence and we are a pawn up, so White actually has a very significant advantage. Black doesn't have any good moves and we are going to end up just a pawn up for nothing.

I don't know what Rapport had in mind after 9.f4, but I also couldn't find anything which is remotely good enough for Black.

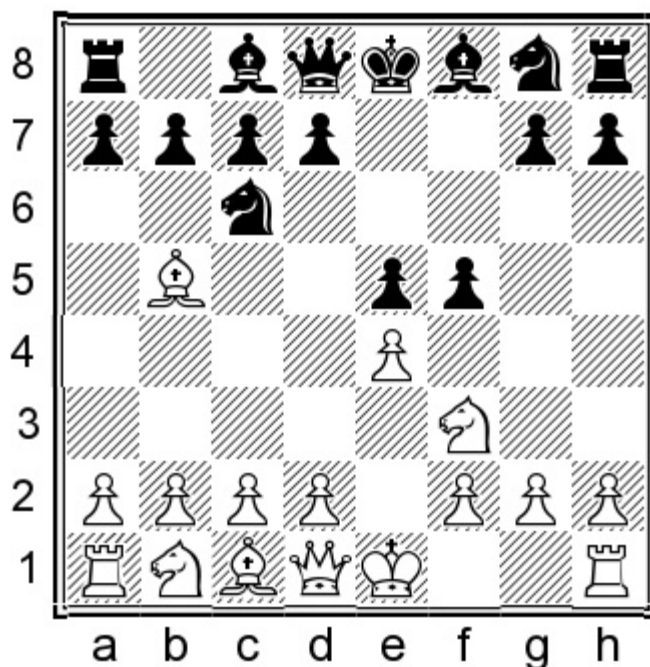
Basically, the Bird Defence is a strategically dubious opening, but it allows Black to go for unusual positions and chances against unprepared opponents. It can be confusing, because White has several attractive options, which all look good, but they all have subtle differences. If White doesn't know the theory very well then it is confusing when it comes to knowing when to play ♘c4 and when to play d2-d3. Yet, if you are familiar with the lines and, especially, the ideas – such as playing f2-f4-f5 when the knight goes to e7, playing e4-e5 when the knight goes to f6 and the sacrifice of the bishop on f7, for example – then you have a very good chance of getting a big advantage.

Although Rapport seems to like the Bird and enjoys good results with it, I think this is more due to his strength than due to the strength of the opening.

Chapter 12

Schliemann Defence: 3...f5

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 f5



This aggressive variation is named after Adolf Schliemann (1817-1872). It is sometimes called the Jaenisch Gambit, after Carl Jaenisch (1813-1872), who actually used it before Schliemann.

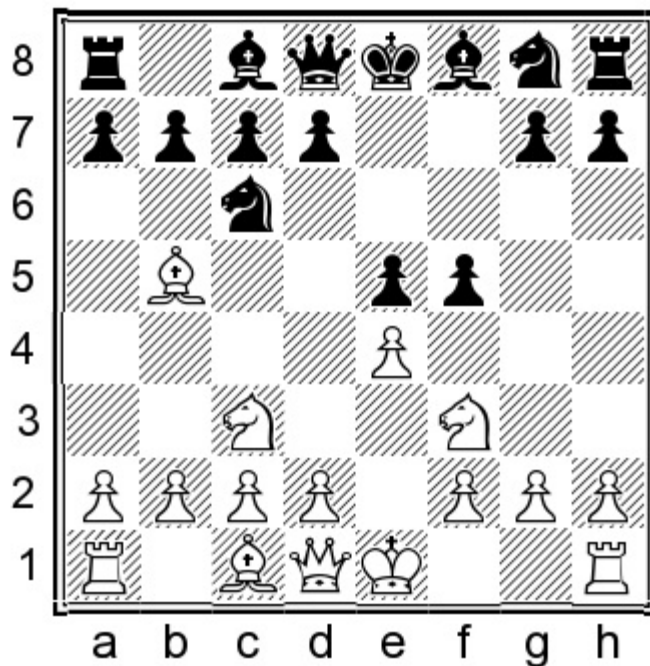
Moving the f-pawn so early on in the game is clearly very committal but an expert with black can be a very dangerous opponent.

I recommend avoiding the most theoretical lines after 4.♘c3 and using the much simpler option 4.d3, which will give White every chance of seizing the advantage.

This is a line with a lot of history and there is plenty of theory behind it. It is one of the most direct ways for Black to play but it is also probably the riskiest. Whenever Black sacrifices the f-pawn then a tempo is a big deal, so a reversed King's Gambit approach is always going to be risky.

4.d3

The old main move is 4.♘c3 and there is a huge amount of theory here, of course.



There is some chaotic theory in this line: 4...fxe4 5.♘xe4 d5 6.♘xe5 dxe4 7.♘xc6, with a lot of computer analysis, but that's not my recommendation at all – although it might be a very interesting place for independent research.

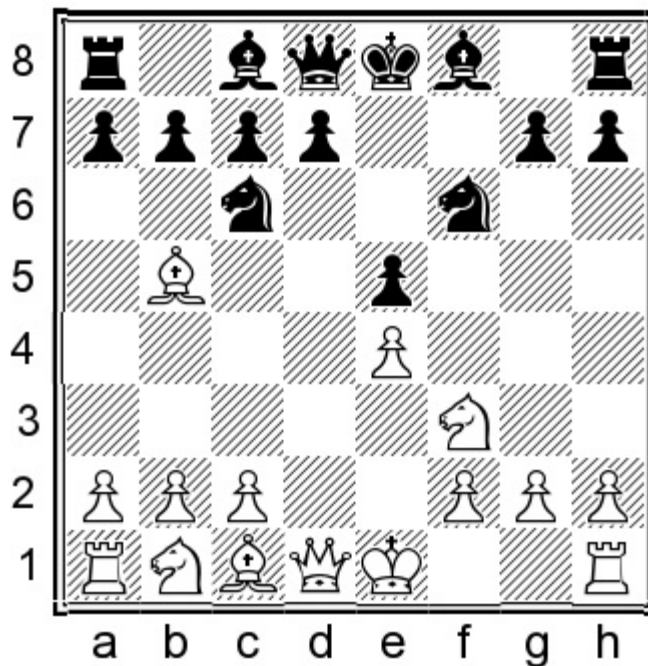
I think 4.d3 is a much simpler option. It is much more practical and also the best way for White to get an advantage. I have played against 3...f5 a couple of times recently against high-class opponents and I will show the games below.

4...fxe4

After 4...♘f6 we simply take the pawn with 5.exf5, as we have stopped the 5...e4 threat. I wish I could show more lines here, but basically the position is just bad for Black. We just win a pawn and he will have a hard time getting it back. We will just castle and then e5 may well fall at some point too.

This is why almost everyone takes on e4 as Black.

5.dxe4 ♘f6



An important moment for White.

6.0-0

The best move. The natural move might be to play 6.♘c3 but after 6...♙b4 we don't have what we want. Black will ruin our pawn structure and then he will castle quickly. We don't want to allow him that extra tempo with 6...♙b4.

I actually played 6.♙d3 once, against a player around the 2300 level in the Olympiad, and I didn't get any advantage with this move. It looks a little artificial, but this is a move you can play if you want to castle queenside. I think 6.0-0 is just a better move.

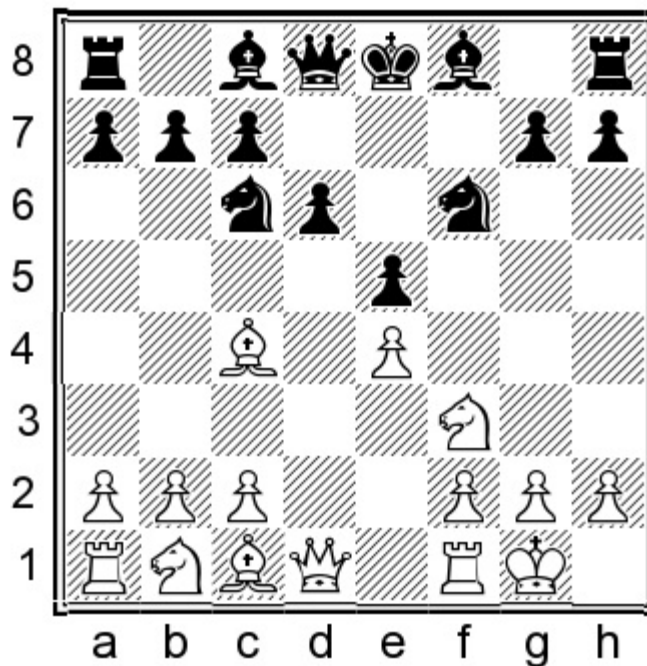
Black can't really take on e4 after 6.0-0: 6...♞xe4 7.♞e1 and 8.♞xe5 if the knight moves. Also on 7...d5, 8.♞xe5 is still very strong.

Now there are two main moves for Black.

6...d6 has undergone some sort of revival recently. The thing is that, even though it looks passive, Black has strategic potential here. If he can play ...♙e7 and ...0-0 he will have a good position. He can also get a decent position if he can play ...♙g4, ...♙d7 and ...0-0-0. The structure is not bad for him; he has traded his f-pawn for our d-pawn. His only problem is that he is behind in development and his king will still struggle to find a safe place.

I faced 6...d6 in 2018, against Aronian in London. Aronian played 3...f5 because he was in a must-win situation.

7.♙c4 is a good move.



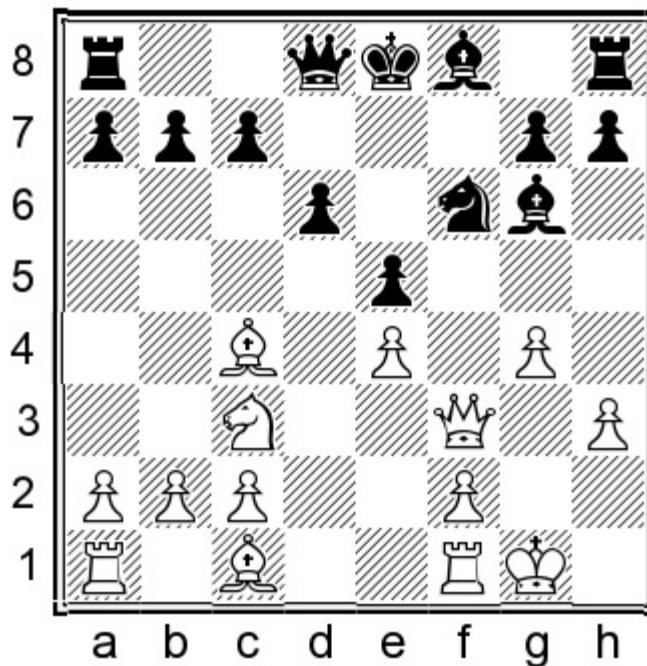
Black wants to play ...0-0 as soon as possible so this makes it difficult for him. I am also opening up ideas of ♖g5. Aronian played 7...♗g4. The alternatives are not good:

A) If 7...♞a5 then 8.♙e2 and Black hasn't really gained a tempo on the bishop as his knight is misplaced on a5. Also, even though our bishop on e2 looks passive, it can join the attack after ♖g5 as a check on h5 can sometimes be very annoying for Black: 8...♙e7 (8...♙e6 9.♖g5 is strong for White) 9.b4 ♞c6 10.b5 ♞b8 (or 10...♞a5 11.♙d2, potentially ruining his pawn structure: 11...b6 12.♙xa5) 11.♙c4 and there is no safe place for the black king to go to. Kingside castling is impossible and queenside castling is very unrealistic. Meanwhile, we are ready to attack with ♖g5;

B) 7...♙e7 is simply bad for Black as 8.♖g5 ♜f8 9.♞xh7 ♞xh7 10.♞h5+ wins a pawn and also the position.

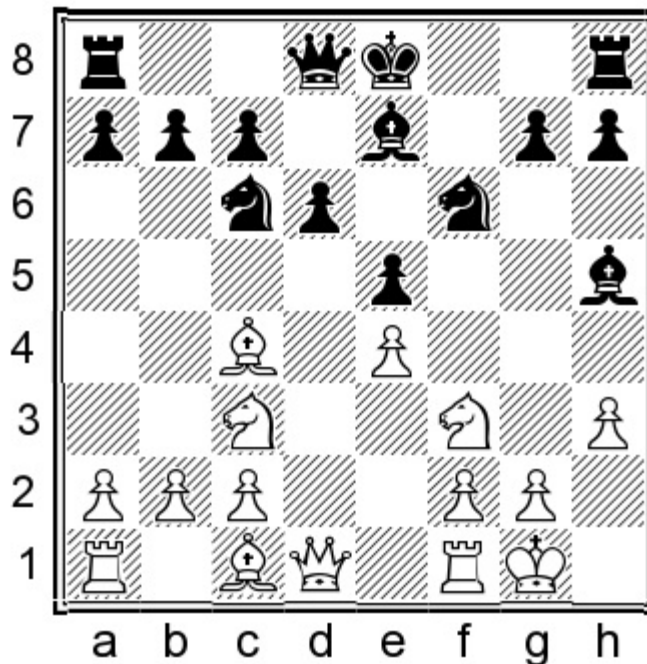
8.h3 ♗h5 8...♙xf3 9.♞xf3 ♞d7 10.♞c3 0-0-0 11.♙e3 and White has a good position. Note how the lack of a pawn on f7 makes the light squares even weaker for Black. **9.♞c3** I think 9.g4 ♙g6 10.♖g5 ♞e7 isn't much good for White. ♖g5 ideas with Black protecting f7 are rather empty and if we continue with 11.♞e6 then we will probably even end up losing after 11...♙f7.

Now Aronian played a move which probably wasn't that good: 9...♞d4 10.g4 ♞xf3+ (or 10...♞xg4 11.♞xd4 exd4 12.hxg4 and I win a piece) 11.♞xf3 ♙g6.



Now I played 12.♙e6 but I eventually got kicked back and went on to lose the blitz game Caruana-Aronian, London 2018 0-1 (77). Instead of 12.♙e6, I think White has many good moves and I like 12.g5, forcing him back: 12...♘d7 13.h4 and he has no way of bringing his king to safety, as 13...♙e7 runs into 14.♘d5 and there are also threats of h4-h5. It's going to be tough for him to survive this one. If I hadn't played 12.♙e6 I am pretty sure I would have won the game.

Black doesn't have to play 9...♘d4. There is also 9...♙e7

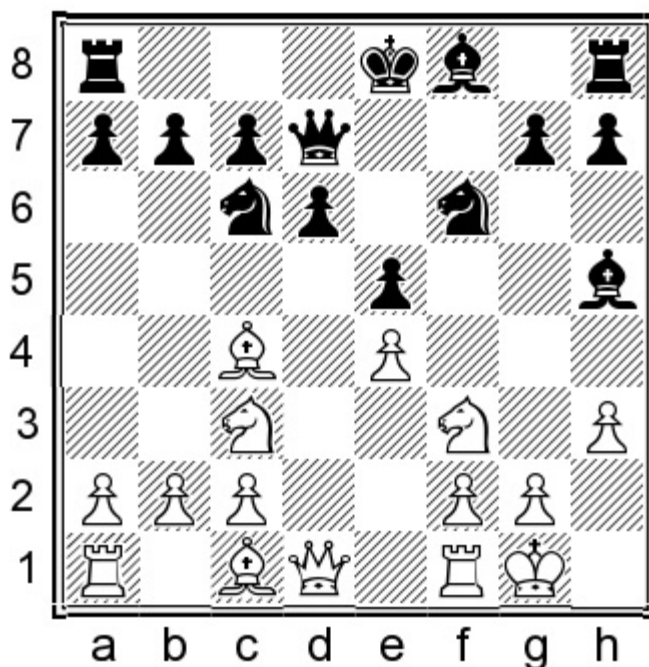


and now I recommend that White plays 10.g4 ♙g6 (10...♘xg4 11.hxg4 ♙xg4 12.♙d3 or 12.♙e2 and Black doesn't have enough for the sacrifice) 11.♘g5 and now it is different than in the earlier lines. With the bishop on e7, the black queen has nowhere good to go. 11...♘d4 (to stop 12.♘e6; if 11...♙d7 12.♙e6) 12.f4 (Black is undeveloped so we might as well start throwing out stuff at him)

12...h6 13.♘f3 (13.♘e6 also looks good) 13...♗xf3+ 14.♙xf3 and White is clearly better.

Our main focus in this line, tactically, is to keep him from castling.

9...♙d7 is Black's best move.

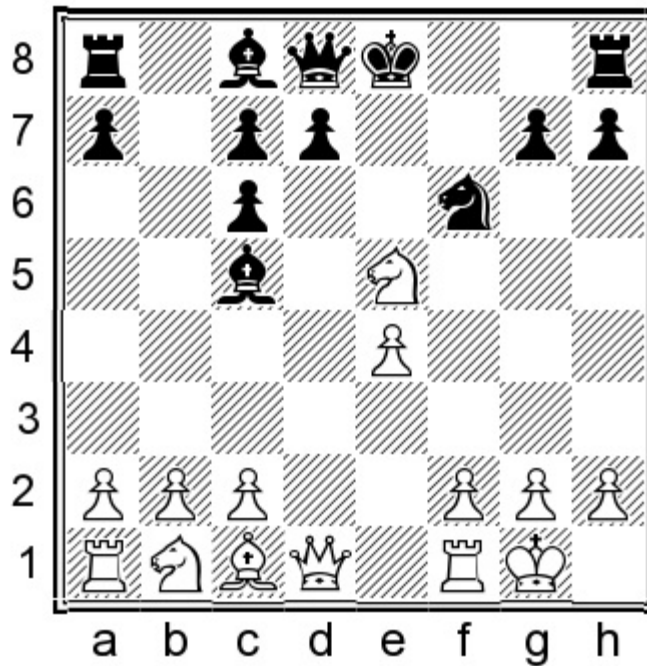


10.♙e3 A good developing move. Don't play 10.g4? when the queen is on d7!: 10...♗xg4 11.hxg4 ♙xg4+. 10...0-0-0 10...♙e7 11.♙e2 ♙g6 12.♗h4 ♙f7 13.♗f5. 11.♙b1 I think 11.♙e2, breaking the pin, is also a good move, but I recommend this plan of going for b2-b4. It is a very direct caveman approach to the position. 11...♙e7 11...♗b8 12.b4. 12.b4 ♗b8 13.♙e2 A useful prophylactic move which is worth remembering. 13...d5 14.b5 ♙xf3 15.♙xf3 ♗b4 16.exd5 ♗bxd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.♙xd5 ♙xd5 19.a4 ♙xd1 20.♙fxd1 and the endgame is good for White. Black has an isolated e-pawn and our queenside pawns are still restricting Black quite a lot. Even though it is an ending, I can still see his king getting weak after a4-a5-a6 and our attack is not necessarily over.

6...♙c5

has traditionally been the main line and it also a pawn sacrifice:

7.♙xc6 bxc6 8.♗xe5



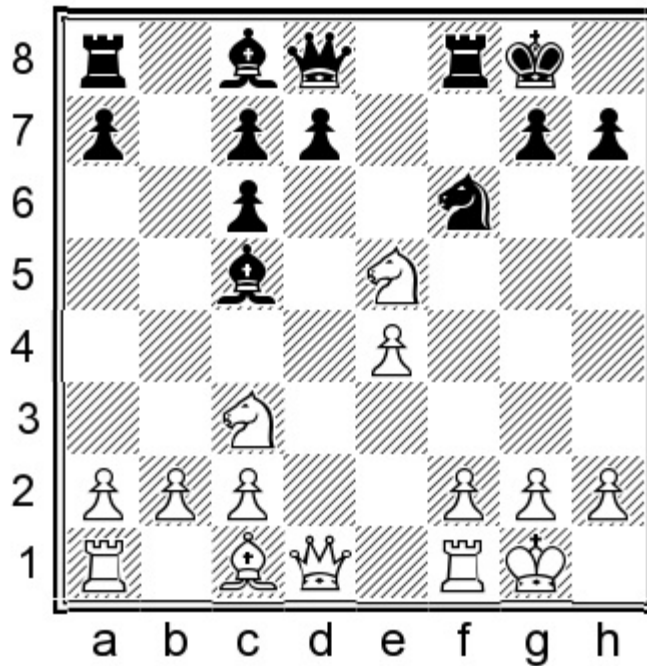
Giving up the bishop pair in order to accept the pawn sacrifice. This is the line I am recommending.

8...0-0

Black has sacrificed a pawn but he has the bishop pair and the half-open f-file. He has had a great deal of success from this position in the past. Radjabov has played this quite a lot – including one game against me – but I think that if White knows what he is doing then the position is actually just not good for Black.

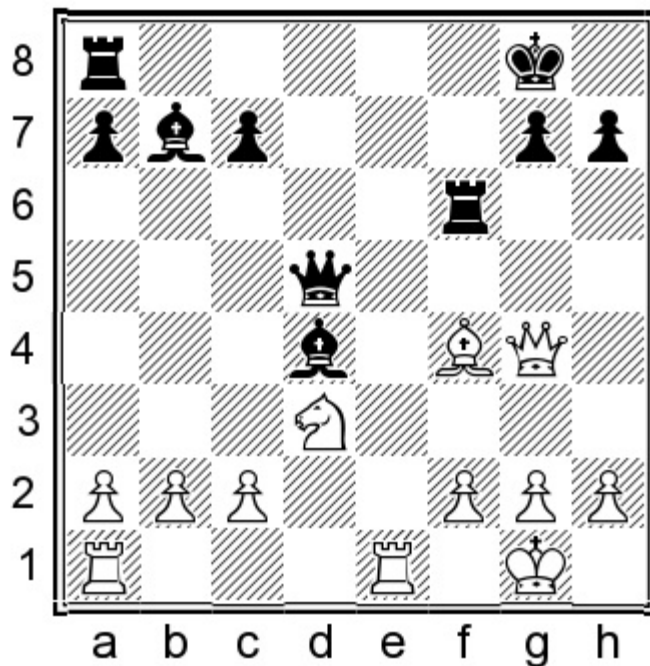
I think that in general Black does not have enough compensation for the pawn. It's not only that he is down a pawn, it is also that his structure is bad. We have a pawn structure with no weaknesses, a safe king and we do have a big pawn majority on the kingside. So it's only working for Black if he quickly gets something based on his bishop pair, either with a bishop on a6 or some counterplay against f2, or even something with ...d7-d6 and a quick ...♔g4. If White knows what he is doing then Black doesn't have enough.

9.♘c3

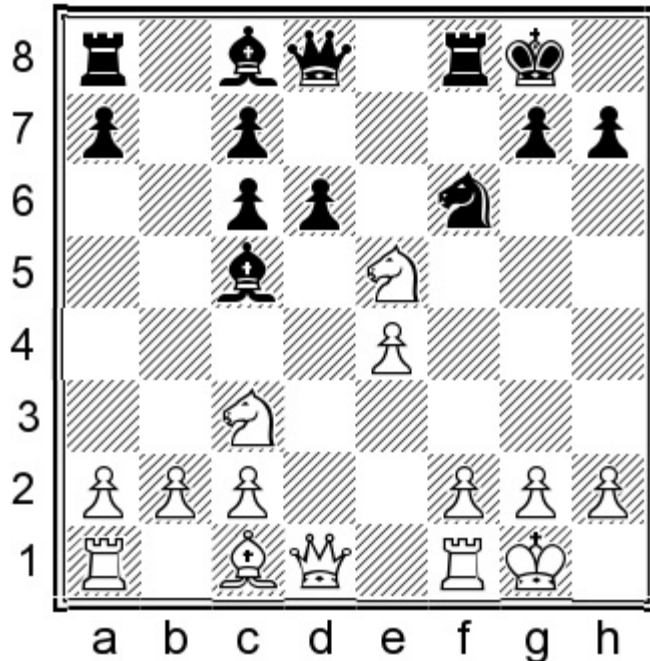


9...d6

9...♙a6 is a very natural alternative, attacking the rook. 10.♘d3 But not 10.♞e1?? ♙xf2+ 11.♔xf2 ♜g4++. 10...♙d4 10...♙b6 11.♙g5 ♚e8 12.♞e1 ♞b8 (obviously something has gone wrong if Black is playing this move, which has no direct idea) 13.♘a4 ♙xd3 14.♘xb6 ♞xb6 15.cxd3 ♞xb2 16.♚c1 and White, with the much better structure, went on to win in Robson-Chirila, Princeton 2012. Also in this line, 12...♙xd3 doesn't work either: 13.cxd3 ♙xf2+ 14.♔xf2 ♘xe4+ 15.♔g1 ♘xg5 16.♞xe8. 11.♞e1 d5 11...♚e8 12.e5. 12.exd5 cxd5 Now Black has corrected his pawn structure but White will soon consolidate his pawn advantage. 13.♙f4 Not the only good move; White also has 13.♘f4. 13...♘e4 The computer thinks this is the only way for Black to play, but now he is sacrificing two pawns in the hope that the bishop pair will become very active here. 14.♘xe4 dxe4 15.♞xe4 ♙b7 16.♞e1 ♚d5 17.♚g4 ♞f6

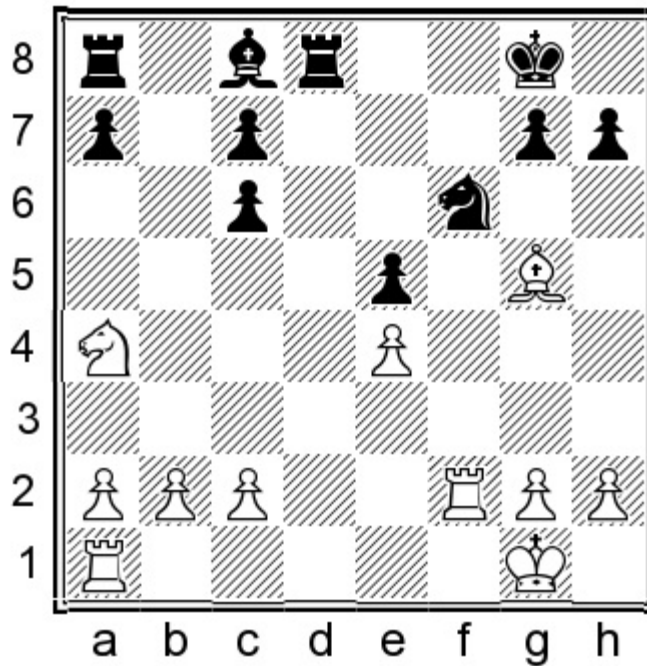


Preventing the queen trade on e6 and also threatening 18...♖g6. This looks very serious, but here White has a very nice move to get a probably decisive advantage: **18.c4!** ♖xc4 **19.♗e5** ♖xd3 **20.♖xd4** ♖g6 (20...♖xd4 21.♗xd4) **21.♗g3** and White is winning. White has to be accurate in these lines, but I think it is really Black who is playing with fire.



10.♗a4!?

When I played this against Radjabov it wasn't a new move but it was a very rare one. It has now gathered a large body of theory. Basically, once we get rid of the dark-squared bishop, the game is not going to go well for Black.

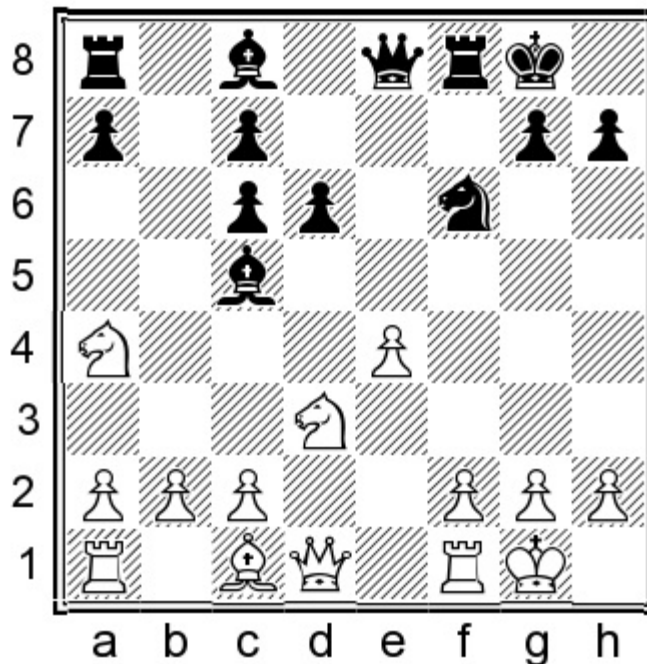


he is in a nasty pin and is extremely likely to get a very bad endgame, e.g. 13...♖d6 (or 13...♖d4 14.♙xf6 ♜xa4 15.♙xe5 ♜xe4 16.♙xc7, winning a pawn again and gaining a very significant advantage) 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♘c5 and I think, in a higher sense, Black is just lost.

These variations explain why Radjabov prefers to play 10...♙e8.

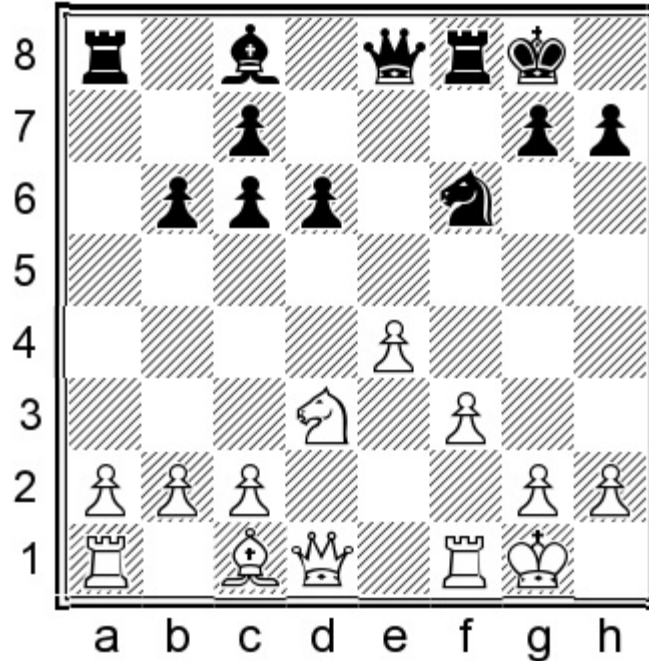
11.♘d3

After the incorrect 11.♘xc5 ♙xe5 Black will regain the pawn on e4. This is not what we want.



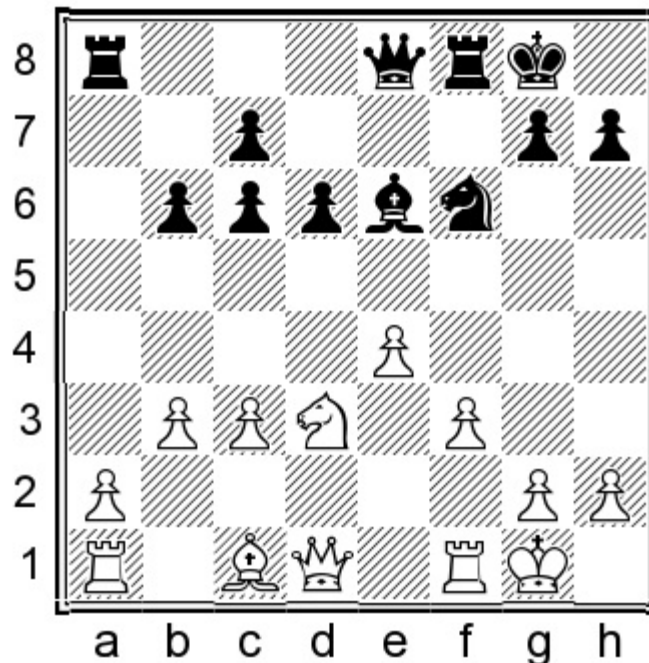
11...♘xe4

Or 11...♙b6 and it's a familiar story after 12.♘xb6 axb6 13.f3.



This time Black's queenside structure is better, but it is still not enough to compensate for White's extra pawn. We can continue with b2-b3 and ♗b2, putting the bishop on a very good diagonal.

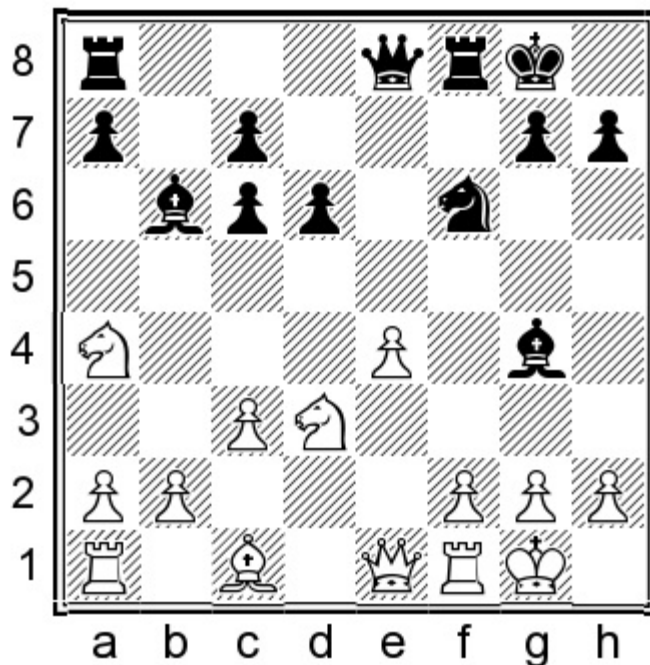
We can get a similar sort of position after 11...♙d4 12.c3 ♗b6 13.♘xb6 axb6 14.f3 ♙e6 15.b3



and we can follow up with ♗b2 and c3-c4. As we have an unopposed dark-squared bishop, it is good for us to put our pawns on light squares, so that we also defend the light squares and restrict his bishop.

If I were Black I would play 11...♙g4, taking advantage of the one moment White can't play f2-f3, because of the pin. But we can play 12.♙e1 and we get a similar position to other lines after 12...♙d4

13.c3 ♖b6.



Now, rather annoyingly, 14. ♖xb6 axb6 15. f3 ♗e6 16. b3 doesn't work because of 16... ♗xb3. This is taking advantage of the fact that our queen has gone to e1, where it doesn't protect b3. He is also attacking the a-pawn and we will have weaknesses if we have to play 16.a3. So instead we play:

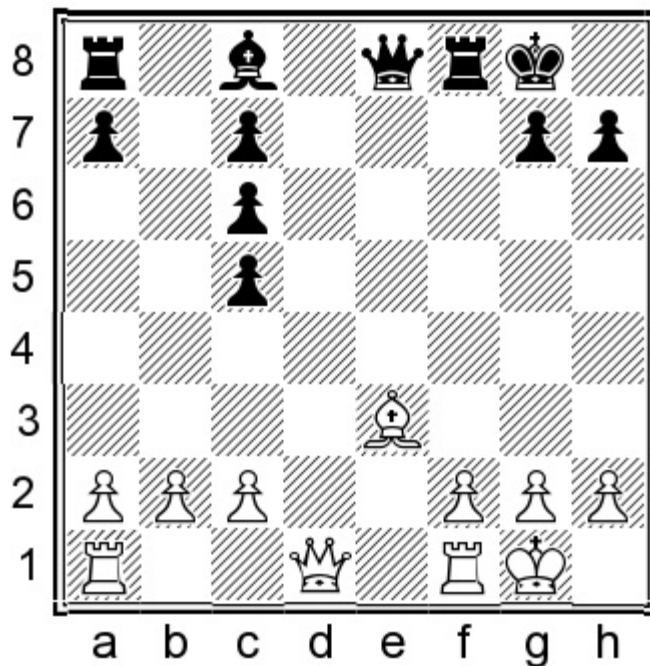
14.h3 ♗h5 In case of 14... ♗e6 we return to the plan with b2-b3, ♖xb6 and c3-c4. **15.e5 dxe5**

16. ♖xe5 and we are planning on taking on b6 again, while still being up a pawn. It is not going to be an easy conversion, but a pawn is a pawn! A good way to play from here would be to put the bishop on g3, where it will be very well placed.

By taking on e4, Black regains the pawn, but it leads to a very sad position for him:

12. ♖axc5 ♖xc5 13. ♖xc5 dxc5 14. ♗e3

Now he has these tripled c-pawns.



Although the material count is even, he has a funny majority on the queenside where he can't do anything with his pawns and we have a proper three against two majority on the kingside. We also have the safer king and he has a weak g-pawn. We even attack the c5-pawn.

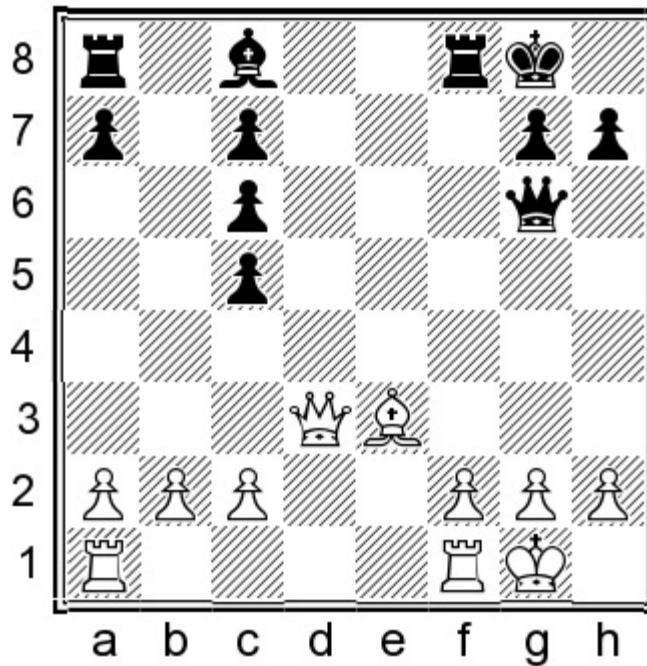
14...♔g6

If he plays 14...c4 we manoeuvre our bishop to c3, starting with 15.♗d4. The bishop will be unassailable and next we will play f2-f3 and then we will attack the g7-pawn in the long run. This is the sort of position where it is going to take a while to actually win, but I think, in a higher sense, White might just be winning. It wouldn't surprise me at all. Apart from anything else, it is definitely no fun for Black. We could even play 15.♔d2 instead. Basically, in this position, we have a million good moves and you just need to choose the one you like.

15.♔d2

We need to avoid 15.♗xc5 ♗h3.

In my game against Radjabov I played **15.♔d3**, which I thought was a good move, because the endgame is very attractive for White.



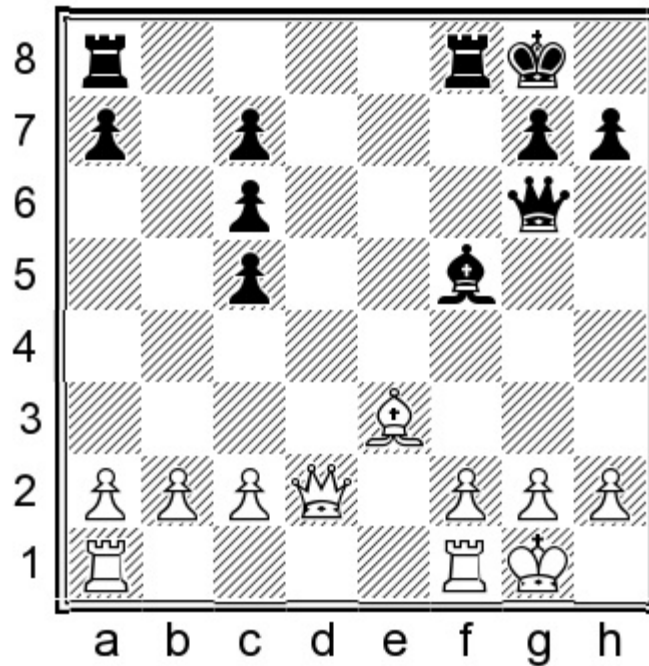
15...♙f5 Black avoids the endgame which would arise after 15...♚xd3 16.cxd3. This time we are not up a pawn, but c5 will likely fall: 16...♙f5 17.♖fc1 ♙xd3 18.♗xc5 ♙e4 19.♗a5 and Black has just a bunch of weaknesses everywhere. In this endgame, the only thing I have to warn you about is to not trade all of the rooks, which will probably lead to a draw.

My game against Radjabov continued 16.♚c4+ ♙e6 17.♚e2 (17.♚xc5 ♙d5) 17...c4 (17...♙h3 18.f3 ♗ae8 19.♗f2) 18.f3 a6 19.♙d4 ♗ae8 20.♙h1 ♙d5 21.♚d2 ♗e6 22.♙c3 h6 23.♗f2 ♙h7 24.♗af1 ♗f5 25.♗e1 ♗d6 26.♙e5 ♗d7 27.♚c3 ♚g5 28.♗fe2 ♗df7 29.♗e3 h5 30.♗1e2 ♚g6 31.h3 ♚g5 32.♙h2 h4 33.♚d4 ♗e7 34.♚g4 and 1-0 (51) Caruana-Radjabov, Zug 2013.

I now think 15.♚d2 is stronger than 15.♚d3.

15...♙f5

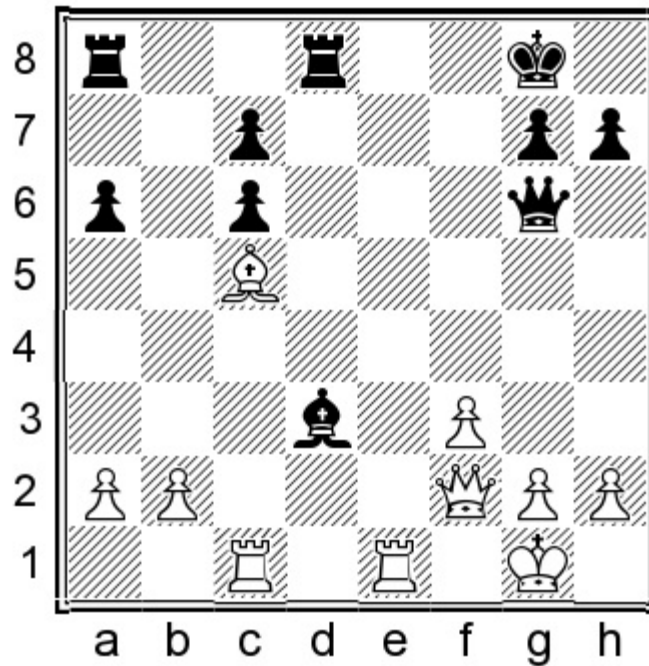
15...♙h3 16.f3.



16.f3

It is important not to fall for 16.♙xc5 ♜e4 17.f3 ♞xf3, because once we lose our f-pawn we no longer have the advantages we enjoyed before. Now we can consolidate once again.

16...♙xc2 17.♙xc5 ♞fd8 18.♚f2 a6 19.♞ac1 ♙d3 20.♞fe1



There is nothing good about Black's position. He is simply left with a weak king and our bishop will be unassailable on c3.

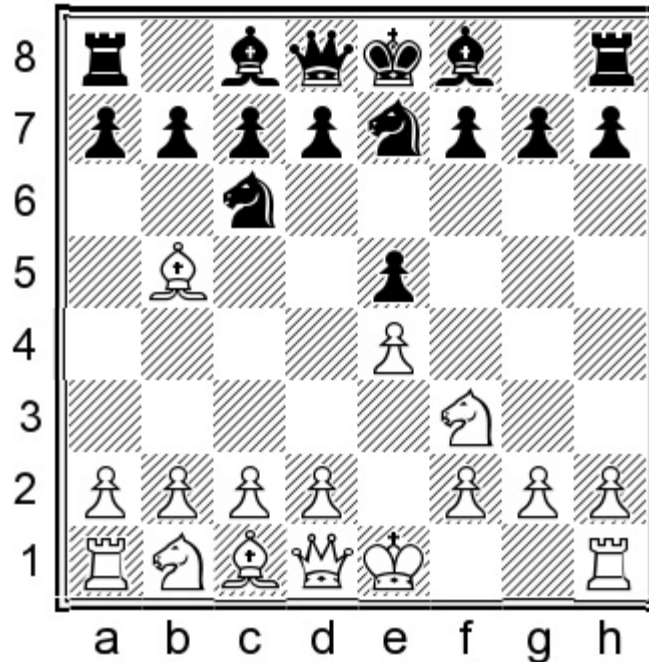
The Schliemann Defence is tricky and interesting. White can play for an advantage with 4.d3 which is

simple, strong and avoids the main theoretical lines.

Chapter 13

Cozio Defence: 3...♞ge7

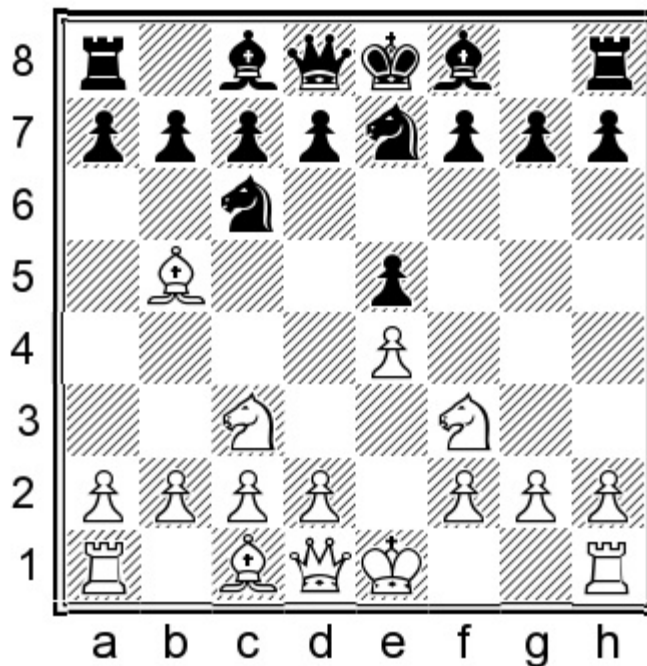
1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♙b5 ♞ge7



There are two different ways of playing the Cozio Defence: one with 3...a6 included and one without. They are independent lines.

The version with 3...♞ge7 was always one of the more popular sidelines and, over time, players as Black became dissatisfied with the positions after 4.♞c3. Then I saw that Grischuk had started playing it with 3...a6 and it started to become popular. As ♞c3 is not such a problem after 3...a6, this came to be known as the improved Cozio Defence (see the next chapter).

4.♞c3



This is the move I'm recommending, but there are subtleties here. After 3...a6 4.♔a4 ♞ge7 I recommend 5.c3. The reason I am not recommending 4.c3 against the original Cozio Defence is first of all because I think 4.♞c3 is a very satisfactory option and also because there is this move 4...d5!? which is a bit different here, so it's not like you can play c2-c3 against both options: 5.♞xe5 (5.exd5 ♜xd5 and our bishop gets hit) 5...dxe4 and again we are prone to having our pieces hit by ...♞d5. It's not a bad position for White, but it's not what I want.

I think 4.♞c3 is a very good move and I also think it is because of this that people are playing 3...♞ge7 less and less.

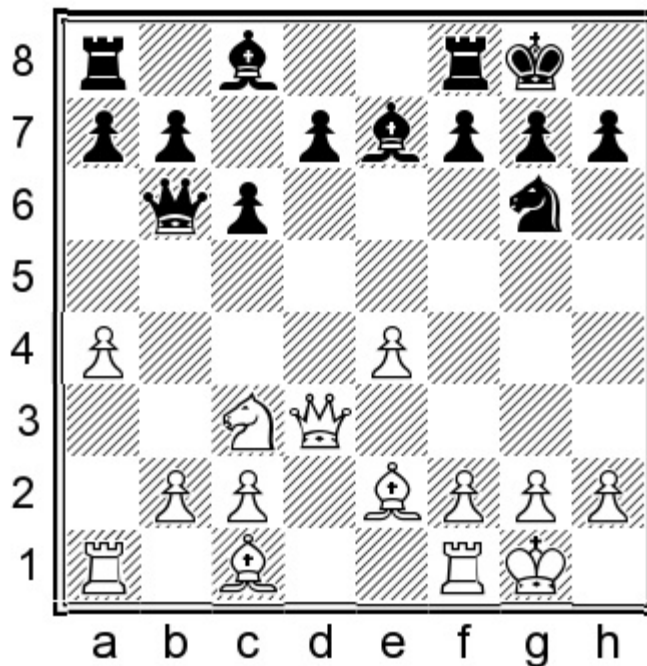
Black has two main ideas, and 4.♞c3 is a good move in both cases.

4...g6

The traditional move, and this is what Black usually wants to do.

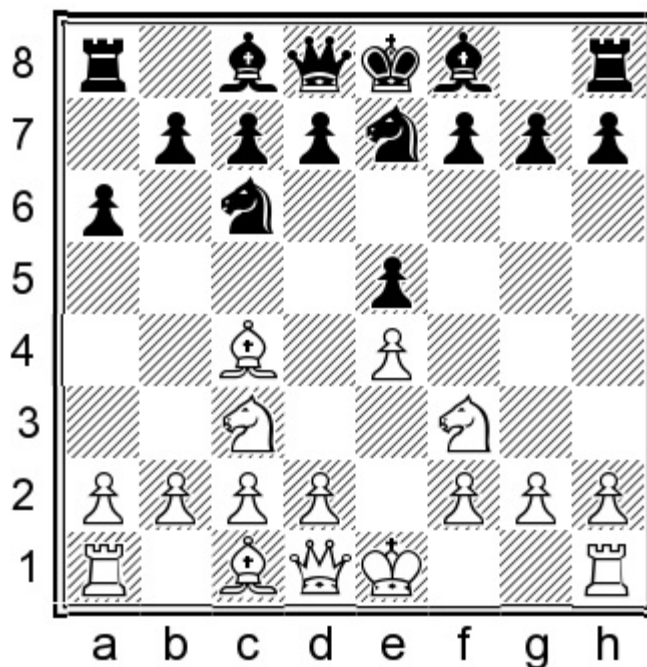
There are alternatives here.

A) 4...♞g6 is a normal move, but White can gain the advantage: 5.d4 exd4 6.♞xd4 ♞xd4 7.♞xd4 c6 Black can't develop the king's bishop normally because of the attack on g7. 8.♔e2 ♞b6 Black uses the tempo gained by 7...c6 to try and trade the queens. I would say that White should avoid the trade. 9.♞d3 ♔e7 9...♔c5 10.0-0 and Black risks running into ♞a4 ideas. 10.0-0 0-0 11.a4



with two ideas. One is to play 12.a5 and the other is to play 12.♙e3, because after 12...♙xb2 we will trap the queen with 13.♖fb1, since she can't escape to a3. If Black doesn't take the pawn we will continue with f2-f4 and even though we can't claim an overwhelming advantage, we do have a certain amount of pressure;

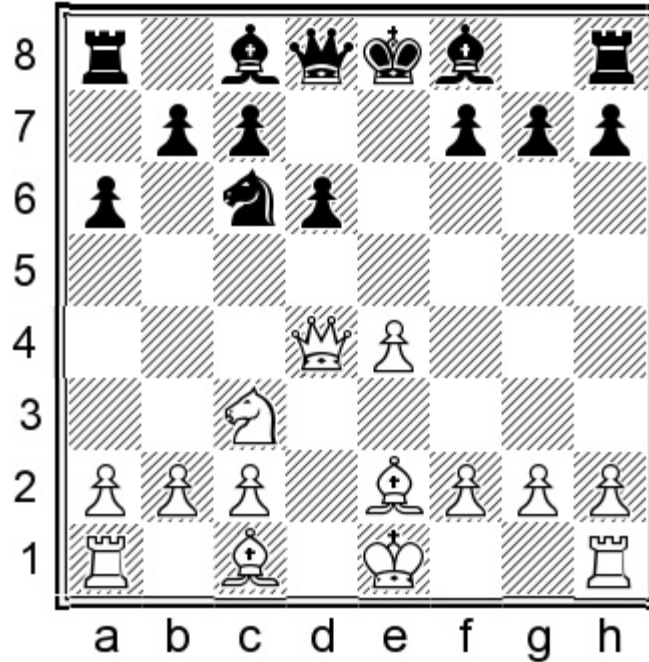
B) Black can also play 4...a6 but we don't have to go back to a4; we can play 5.♙c4,



when 5...g6 and 5...d6 6.♘g5 are very bad for Black. He has to stop ♘g5 with 5...♘g6 and we follow up with 6.d4 exd4 7.♘xd4 and we have what is, basically, a good Scotch Game. Yes, you could say we lost a tempo on ♙c4, but Black's ...a7-a6 is not so important and in the Scotch the knight does not belong on g6. One of the reasons is that ♘f5 becomes very annoying: 7...♙c5 8.♙e3 8.♘f5 0-0 9.♙h5 is an even more adventurous option. We will play ♙g5, 0-0-0 and one day maybe sacrifice on g7.

8...♘xd4 9.♙xd4 ♘xd4 10.♚xd4 0-0 11.0-0-0 and White has an excellent position, with many different ways of continuing;

C) There is also the move 4...d6, which has been played by Nakamura: 5.d4 exd4 6.♘xd4 a6 7.♙e2 ♘xd4 8.♚xd4 ♘c6 is Nakamura's idea, gaining a tempo on the queen.



9.♚d3 g6 Or 9...♘b4 10.♚d1 g6 11.♙e3 ♘g7 12.♚d2 0-0 and Black's knight will, at some point, have to go back. We can castle on either side; it is all a matter of taste. White has the advantage either way.

10.♙e3 ♘g7 11.0-0-0 and again, we don't have a killing advantage, but it is a very nice edge.

Basically, this is a better structure for White than in the Sicilian Dragon, because there is no open c-file for Black to use.

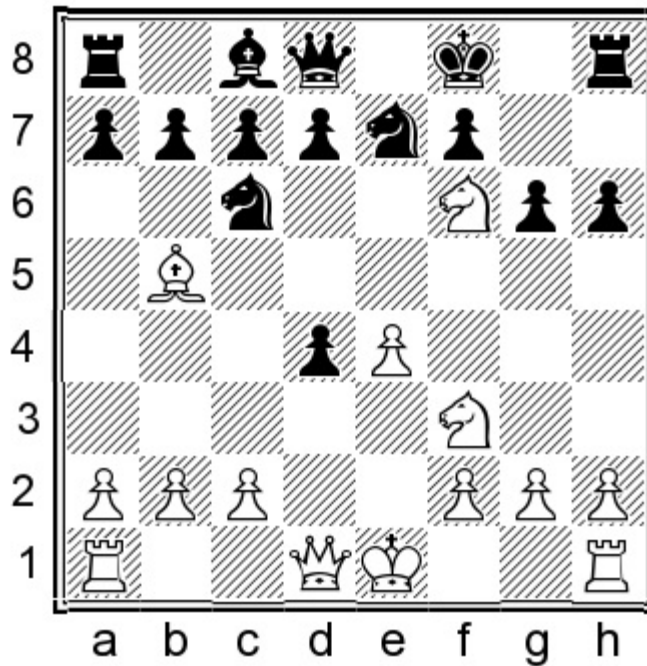
After 4...g6, Black is hoping to develop in a very harmonious way, but we are not going to allow him to do that at all:

5.d4 exd4

Black doesn't want to allow us to play 6.d5. After 5...♘g7 we have another very strong option: 6.dxe5 ♘xe5 7.♘xe5 ♙xe5 8.♙h6 and Black can't castle any more.

Now 6.♘xd4 ♘g7 is probably fine for Black.

6.♘d5



This is a big position in this line. I would say that hundreds of games have been played here. White has spent three moves to get the knight to f6, but Black hasn't done much with the tempi.

It is true however that if Black can safely get his king to g7, kick our knight back and then develop his pieces, then it could turn out that he equalizes.

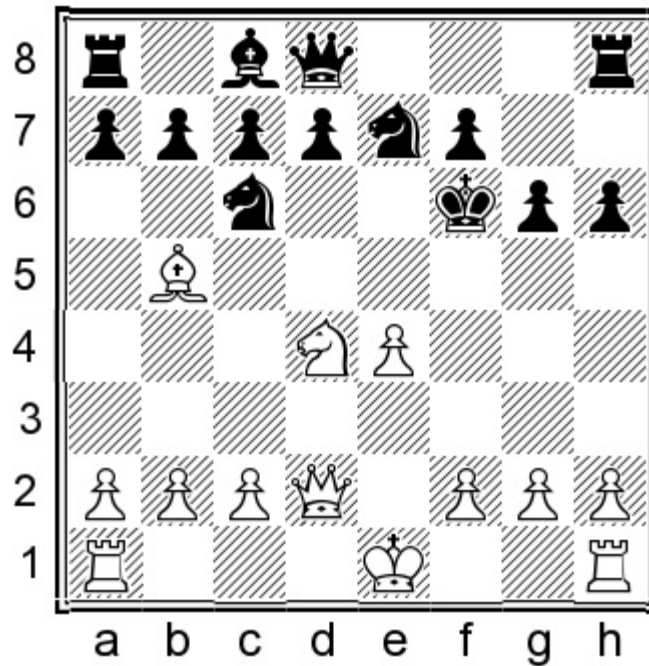
There are a few tactical tricks here and the main one I want to point out is that if you play the natural capturing move 10. ♖xd4, then 10... ♘f5 happens and this works out well for Black, surprisingly: 11. exf5 (11. ♘xc6 ♙xf6) 11... ♙xf6 12. ♘xc6 dxc6 and suddenly we end up down a pawn.

White can play 10. 0-0 here, which is a fine move, but my recommendation here is to play:

10. ♙d2

Just waiting to see what Black does. Now Black has many options.

A) The most natural move is 10... ♖g7 and now we see the very important point of our queen move: 11. ♘xd4 ♖xf6 (of course, Black can capture the knight, and he is temporarily up a piece; 11... ♘xd4 12. ♙xd4 with the threat of double check and mate; 11... ♘f5 is no longer working out for Black; I play 12. ♘xf5+ and the check prevents 12... ♙xf6 in this line).



Now we have the strong move 12.♔c3! ♖e5 (if you take, I take back – and I’m going to mate you. There’s no way to escape here: 12...♗xd4 13.♔xd4+ ♕e6 14.0-0-0 or even 14.♙c4+ d5 15.exd5+ ♕d7 16.♙b5+ c6 17.dxc6+ ♕c7 18.♔e5+ are both winning for White) 13.f4 and we will win back the knight and castle kingside, attacking the king with tempo, and Black is losing.

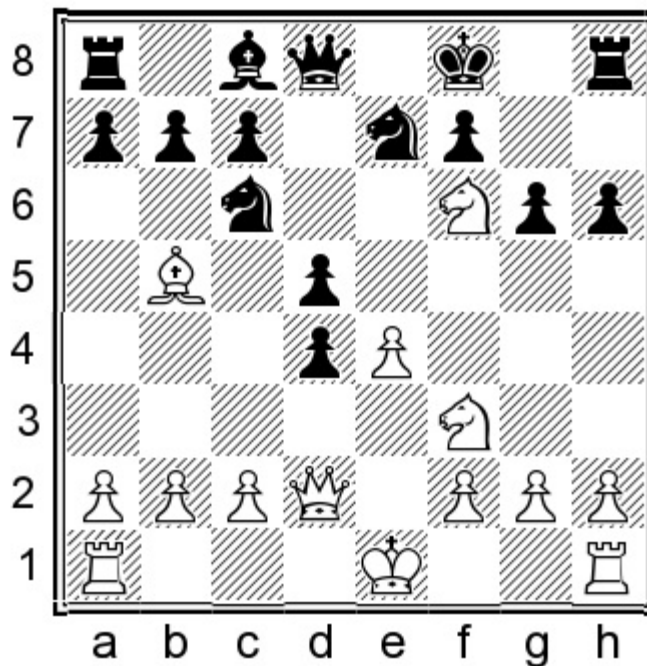
That is why Black should not be greedy here;

B) It is also important to note that after the tactical 10...♗f5, we just calmly go back with 11.♗d5 and when he moves his knight we will just play 12.♗xd4, or even patiently 12.0-0-0, because the pawn isn’t running anywhere. This is a huge advantage for White;

C) 10...d6 doesn’t change anything: 11.0-0-0 ♕g7 (11...♗f5 12.♗d5) 12.♗xd4 ♕xf6 13.♔c3 and it’s the same story after 13...♗e5 (13...♗xd4 14.♙xd4) 14.f4, with a winning position for White.

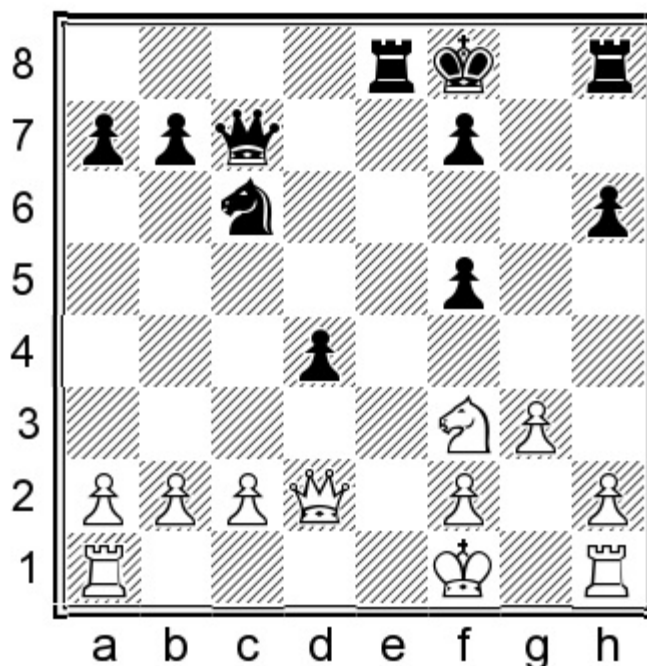
Strong players with Black have tried two other moves after 10.♔d2:

D) **10...d5** is where some of the strongest players have tried to find refuge for Black.



Here, it becomes sharp, because Black has freed his bishop, he has ideas of ...♙d6, trying to kick our knight back, and ...dxe4 of course, so White has to play concretely as well:

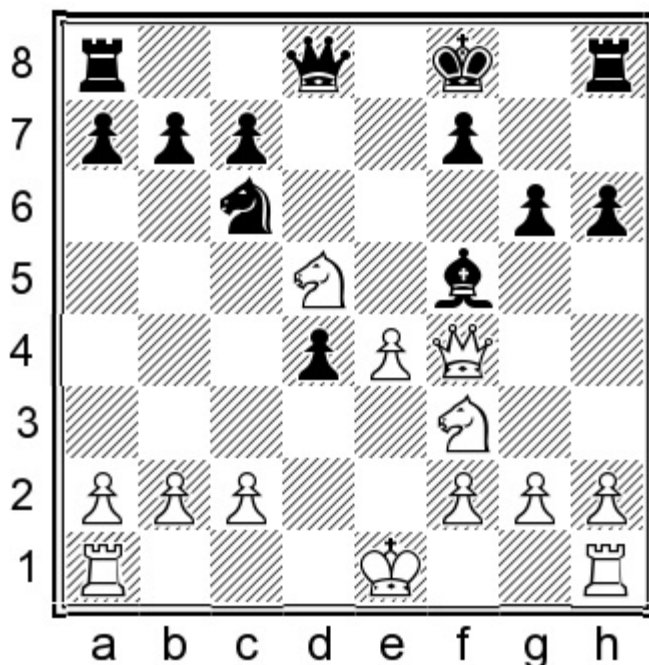
11. ♖xc6 ♜xc6 On 11...bxc6 then 12. ♙xd4 is very good, recapturing the pawn with threats like 13. ♜xd5 and 13. ♜d7+. **12. ♜xd5** Black needs to play concretely now, because we have our pawn back and we are threatening d4: **12... ♙f5** 13. exf5 ♙xd5 is OK for Black. A number of strong players, such as Giri and Navara, have played 13. ♜xc7 ♙xc7 14. exf5 but unfortunately we can't castle after 14...♞e8+ 15. ♙f1 gxf5 16. g3.



However, this popular line has given White lots of success. Black's structure is ruined; a weak pawn on d4, doubled f-pawns, isolated h-pawn. Black can't keep any momentum going because his structure is too much of a problem, but it is still not easy to win this and Black has a lot of activity.

Although it's worked out in a lot of games for White, I think that my main recommendation given below is an even better way to play. Readers can, of course, decide which line suits their taste, as both are good options. Here is a sample game after 16.g3: 16...♔g7 17.♕g2 ♖e4 18.♗he1 ♜d8 19.♘h4 ♚e5 20.f3 ♞e3 21.♞xe3 dxe3 22.♙xe3 ♚xe3 23.♘xf5+ ♕g6 24.♘xe3 ♜d2+ 25.♔f1 ♞xh2 26.♞d1... 1-0 (35) Navara-Stevic, Croatia tt 2014.

My recommendation is **13.♙f4**.

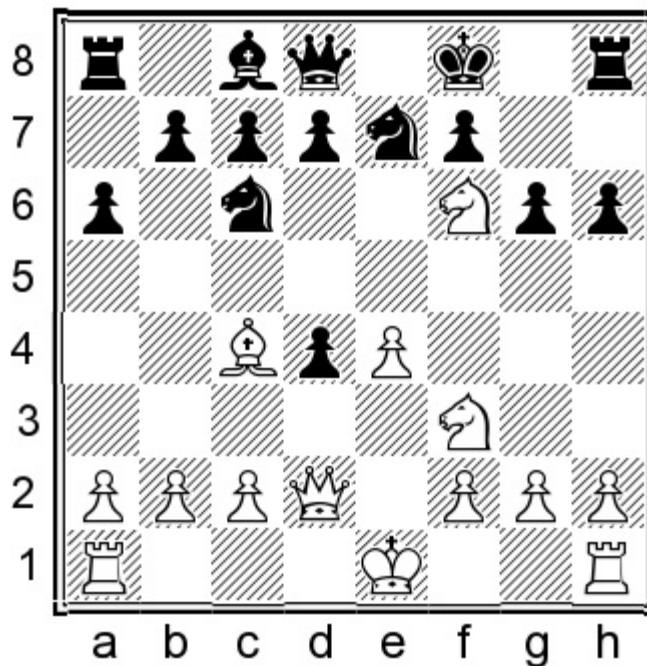


Black's hand is completely forced. I am threatening 14.♘xc7, and also 14.0-0-0, when I will pick up the d-pawn. So Black relies on tactics: **13...♙xe4 14.♙xe4 ♚d6 15.♘xc7** If 15.0-0-0 ♖e8 regains the piece. **15...♙xc7 16.0-0-0** If 16.0-0 then 16...♜d8 and I'm not sure we can round up d4 so easily. **16...♞e8 16...♔g7 17.♘xd4** and 16...♜d8 17.♘xd4 give me a pawn for nothing. **17.♙h4 g5 17...♞e2 18.♗he1 ♞xe1 19.♞xe1** takes care of Black's very temporary activity. **18.♙g3** But not 18.♘xg5 ♘b4, giving Black far too much counterplay. **18...♙d7 19.♔b1** Protecting our king from any potential danger on the c-file. We can play h2-h4 and Black's structure remains highly problematic.

So White has two different ways to play at move 13, depending on whether he wants a more tactical or a more positional game.

E) **10...a6 11.♙c4**

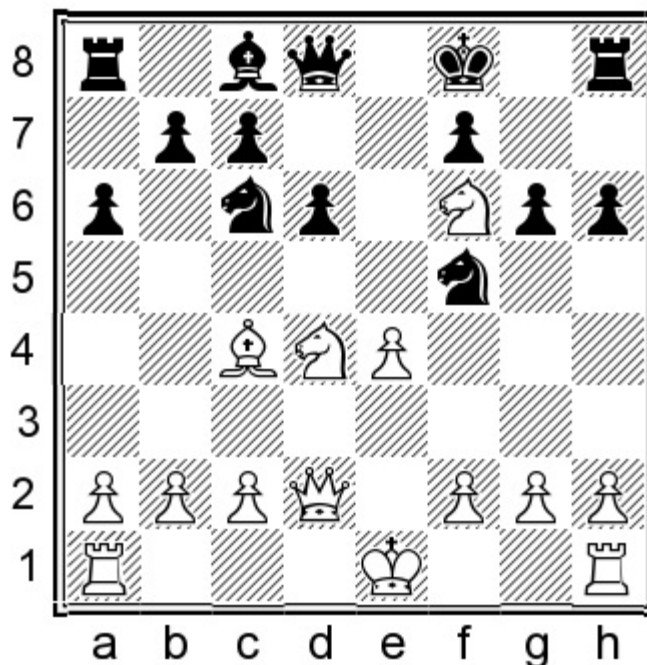
Back when I analysed this line, years ago, I thought 11.♙a4 was the main move, but after rechecking it quite recently I now believe this is correct.



11...d5 The alternatives lead to the same ideas we have already seen, for example:

E1) 11...g7 12.dxd4 gxf6 13.c3 e5 14.f4 dxc4 15.dxc6+ and if it's not mate, I'll have the queen;

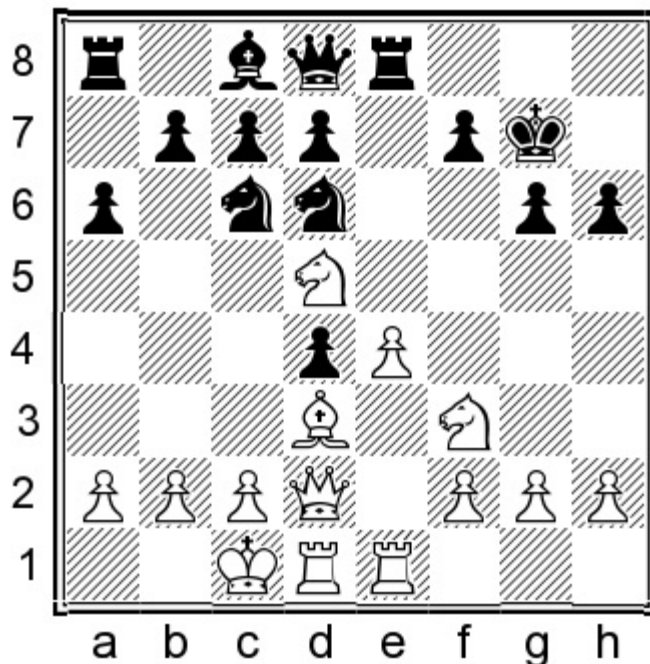
E2) After 11...d6 12.dxd4, 12...d5 is no longer an issue,



the point being that my bishop is no longer under attack when Black takes back on c6: 13.dxc6 bxc6 14.exf5 cxf6 15.fxc6 is positionally bad for Black, who will end up with a broken structure and the weaker king;

E3) 11...g8 12.d5 (12.dxc8 gxc8 and at least Black has traded off one of our active pieces) 12...d6 13.dxd4 d6 14.dxc6 bxc6 15.c3 g7 16.0-0-0 is again in White's favour.

12. ♖d5 ♜d6 Black has retained the pawn but the knight is misplaced on d6, where it is blocking in the bishop on c8 and running into e4-e5 in many cases. 13. ♗d3 ♔g7 14. 0-0-0 ♝e8 15. ♞he1 Again, e4-e5 is a threat.



Now 15... ♗b5 16. a4 ♜ba7 – if Black has to send the knight to a7 then you know that things aren't going well. It is probably simply a very bad position for him.

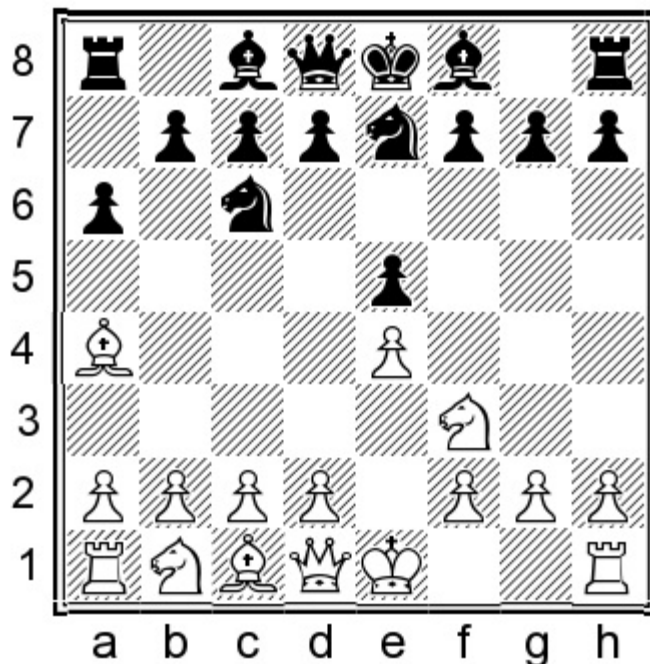
If he tries something else with 15... f6, hoping to get the knight back to f7, then 16. ♞f4 is very nice, with pressure on c7. If 16... ♗e5 (16... g5 17. ♞g3) then we can just take the pawn with 17. ♖xd4. At this point, Black doesn't even have any extra material to compensate for his ruined structure or his locked-in bishop.

Summing up, I just couldn't find a reliable way for Black to play after 12. ♞d2. You need to know this ♞c3 idea in most lines and Black just has a dubious position.

Chapter 14

Cozio Defence Deferred: 3...a6 4.♙a4 ♖ge7

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♙a4 ♖ge7



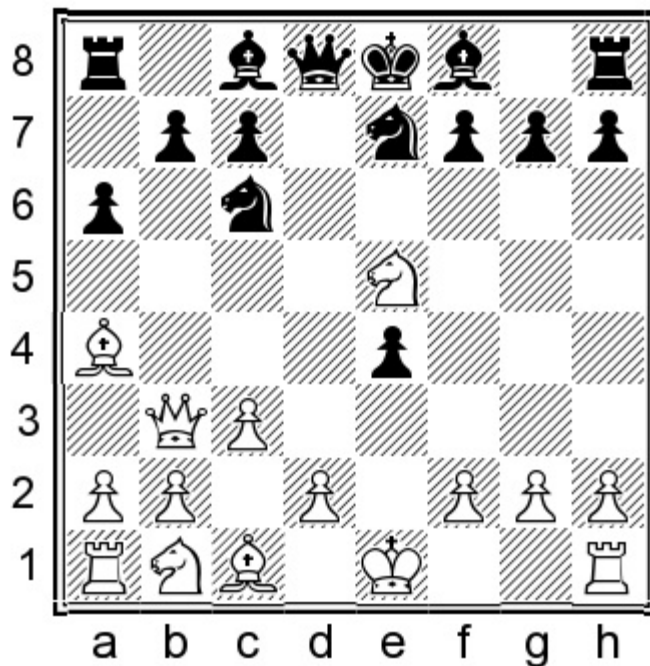
One thing to note is that Black often plays 3...♖ge7 to avoid the Exchange Variation (3...a6 4.♙xc6) but with this move-order he doesn't avoid it at all. This is outside the scope of our book, of course – as we are definitely not recommending 4.♙xc6 !

Now after 5.♘c3 Black plays 5...d6 and it's just a different story, because after 6.d4 exd4 7.♗xd4 there is 7...b5, for example. Also, after 5...g6 6.d4 exd4 7.♗d5 ♙g7 8.♙g5 b5 it is a very different story than in the lines after 3...♖ge7. That's why I am not recommending 5.♘c3 against the Cozio Deferred, but 5.c3.

5.c3

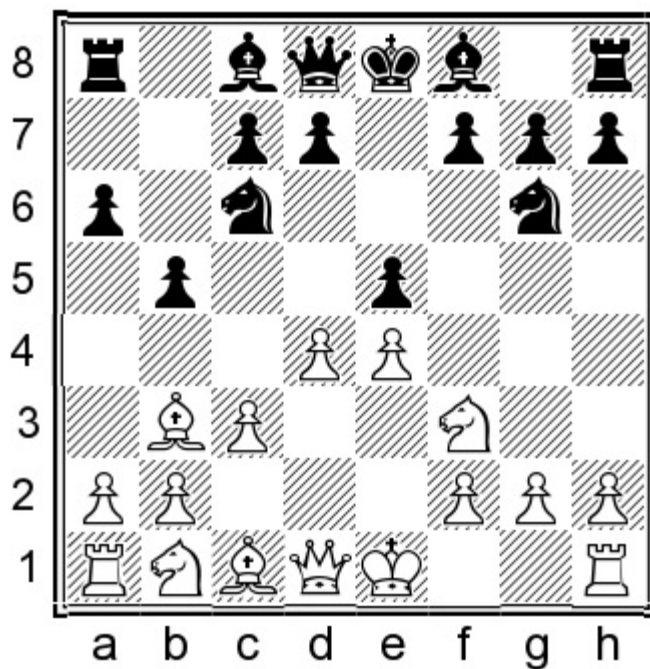
Our idea is just to play d2-d4. Simple.

There is another important difference between the two variations. Black can't play 5...d5? because of 6.♗xe5 dxe4 7.♙b3!



when I challenge you to find a move that doesn't lose on the spot for Black! For example, 7...♔e6 8.♙xb7; 7...♘d5 8.♘xc6; 7...♙d5 8.♙xd5 ♘xd5 9.♘xc6 ♔d7 10.♘b4 ♘xb4 11.♔xd7+ ♔xd7 12.cxb4 and we are a piece up. So 7.♙b3! is just decisive.

It doesn't really help Black to include 5...b5. After 6.♙b3 we are threatening 7.♘g5 and then 6...♘g6 7.d4 is not a good version for Black.

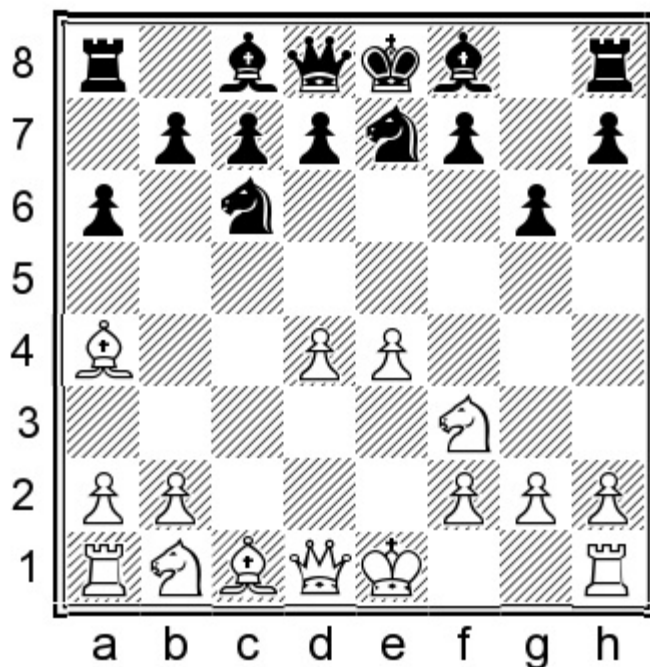


There is nothing attractive about his position here.

There is also the move 5...♘g6, but then 6.d4 leads to a solid advantage. The game continues; Black hasn't made any horrible mistakes, but we have the centre and his knight isn't very well placed on g6 – and it took two moves to get there, so I think that White can be happy with the opening.

5...d6 transposes to the Deferred Steinitz lines, which we will come to later.

5...g6 6.d4 exd4 7.cxd4



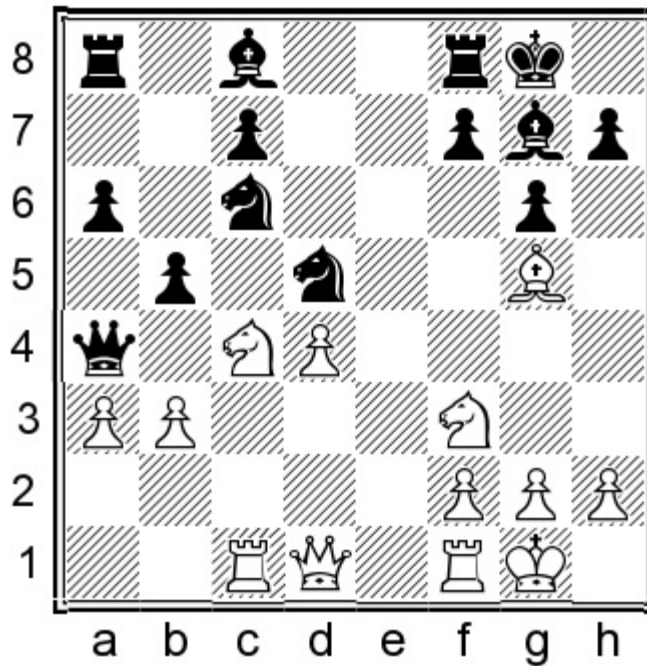
7...b5

This move has led to something of a revival for this line (Aronian and Vishy Anand have recently used this as Black), when it was found that this isn't as easy for White as was previously thought – but I still think that White can play for an advantage.

The alternatives aren't any good:

A) 7...♙g7 8.d5 and his knight has nowhere good to go;

B) 7...d5 (trying to stop White from playing d4-d5) 8.exd5 ♞xd5 9.0-0 ♙g7 10.♙g5 (a very strong move) 10...♚d6 (the queen has nowhere else good to go, because after, for example, 10...♚d7, he won't be able to meet 11.♞e1+ with 11...♙e6) 11.♞bd2 0-0 12.♞c4 ♚b4 13.♞c1 b5 14.a3 ♚xa4 15.b3



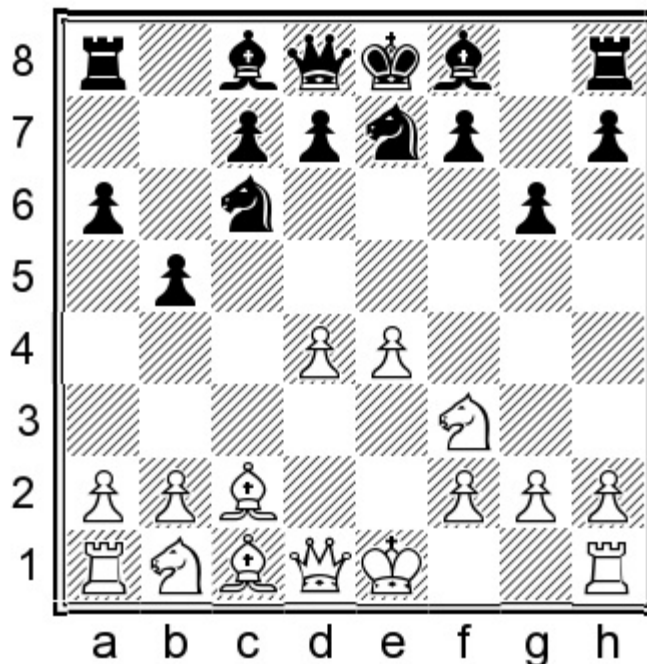
and the queen is trapped. Black can get two pieces, but that will not be enough.

This explains why 7...b5 is the main move. Black gives up the centre but wants to play something like a Benoni, where he already has ...b7-b5 for free. The problem is that it is difficult for Black to get exactly what he wants.

Now White has a choice between the two bishop moves:

8.♖c2

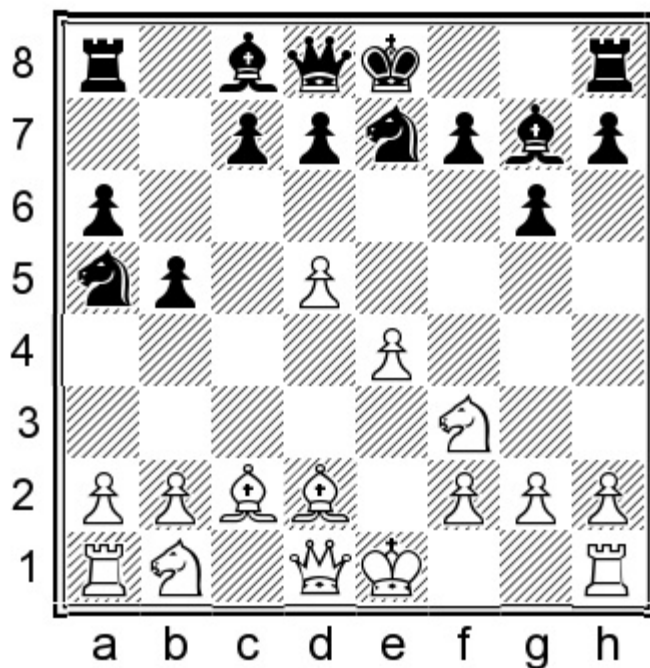
This is my recommendation. The reason is that after 8.♖b3 ♗g7 9.d5 ♞a5 we might want to bring the bishop back to c2. But if we play 8.♖c2 immediately we will be a tempo up.



8...d5

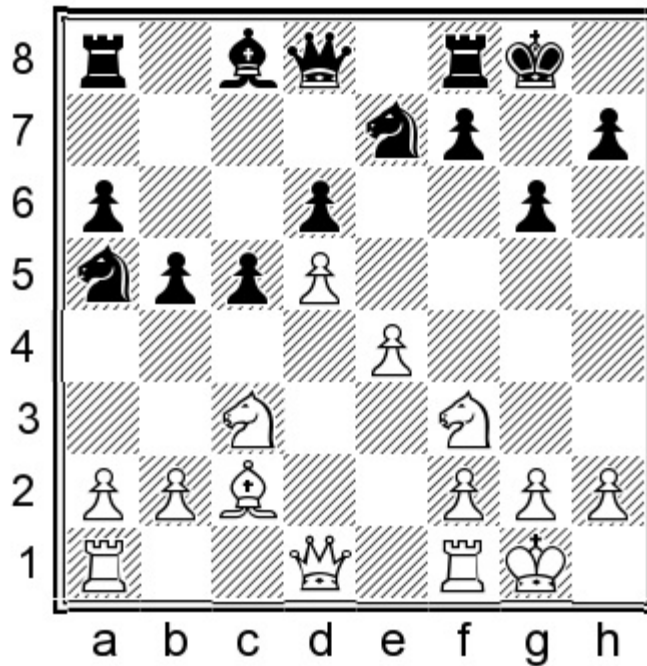
This positionally motivated move is the main line for Black. Black doesn't want the knight on c6 to be hit by d4-d5.

The point of 8.♘c2 is shown by 8...♙g7 9.d5 ♞a5 (9...♞b4 10.♙b3 a5 11.a3 ♞a6 12.♞c3 is very ugly for Black) 10.♙d2!.



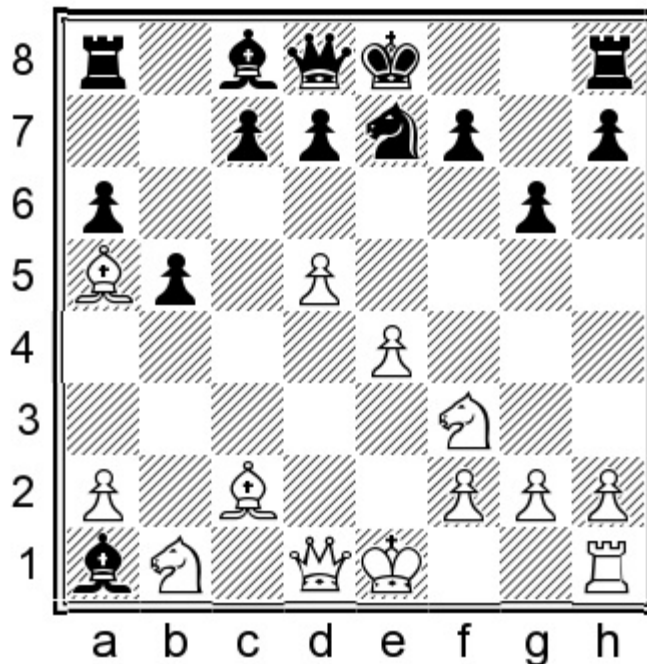
A very strong and concrete way of playing, made possible by the other bishop not being on b3, when Black would trade with 10...♞xb3. It is very annoying for Black, even though he has a number of options here:

A) 10...c5 11.♙c3 0-0 12.0-0 ♙xc3 13.♞xc3 d6.



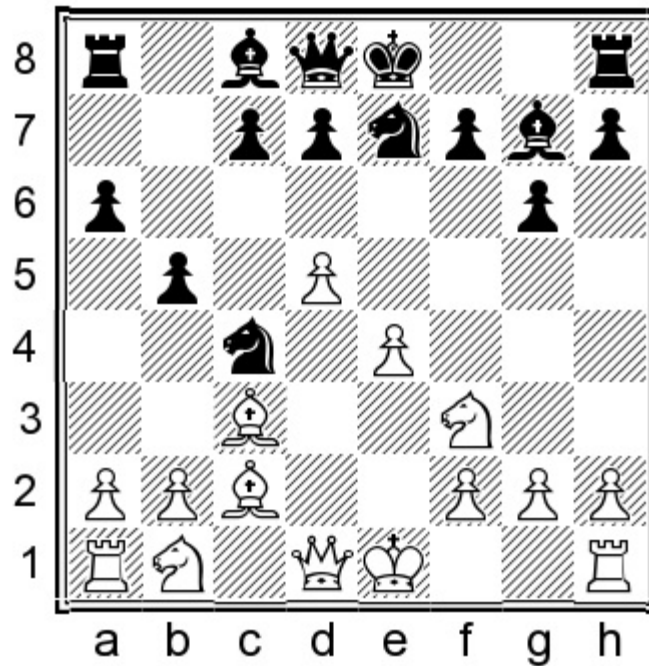
It's a Benoni without the dark-squared bishops and this favours White: 14.b3 f5 (the justification for having the knight on e7) 15.e5 dxe5 16.d6 and White is winning;

B) 10...♙xb2 is the most critical move, but it's just directly bad for Black: 11.♙xa5 ♙xa1



12.♘c3 (even better than the tempting 12.d6) 12...♙b2 (12...♙xc3+ 13.♙xc3 and Black is borderline lost; both 13...0-0 and 13...♖g8 will be met by 14.♙f6) 13.d6 ♘c6 14.dxc7 (14.♘d5 is also very interesting, e.g. 14...♘xa5 15.dxc7) 14...♚e7 15.♘d5 and although White is still down material, I just keep attacking him with tempo;

C) 10...♘c4 11.♙c3

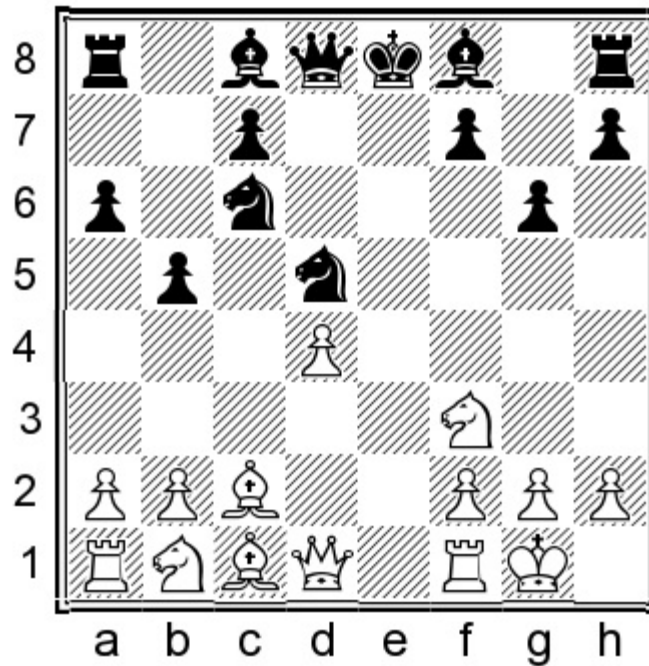


11...♙xc3+; this is an excellent trade for White, because if you think about it, all of Black's dark squares are weak; especially with the knight on e7, which gets in the way of his defence of the f6-square: 12.♘xc3 ♜xb2 13.♚d4 0-0 and White has more than one attractive option here, for example 14.e5 or 14.h4.

9.e5

Even though 9.e5 makes it look like Black has a dangerous structure, it's not so easy, because one day he can undermine the centre with ...f7-f6 and he also has options of ...♞d4 followed by ...c7-c5 to open the centre up. White should play more in the spirit of the position, which is to keep the initiative.

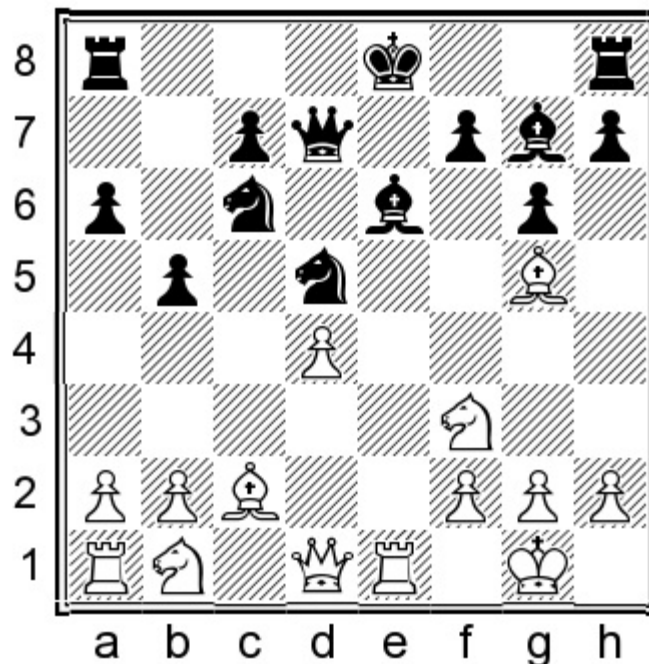
9...♞xd5 10.0-0



10...♙e6

Black has a natural alternative in 10...♙g7 and now:

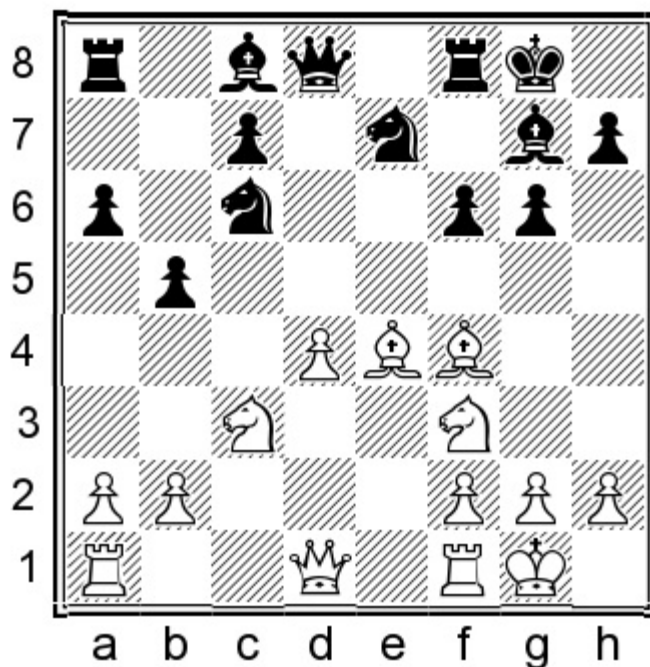
A) Vishy Anand mixed up his lines and included a bad check in one game: 11.♖e1+ ♙e6 12.♙g5 ♔d7.



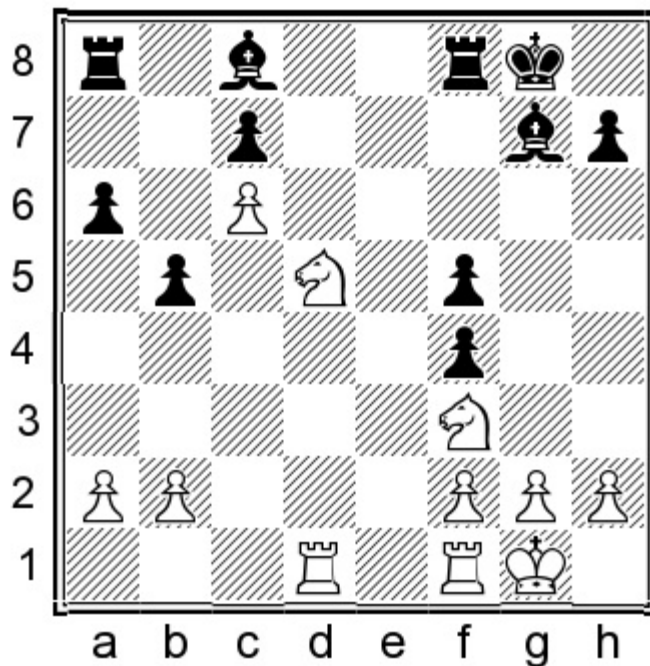
This is the point: White has allowed the black queen to find a decent square. It no longer blocks in the bishop here. We really don't want Black to get this harmonious queen and bishop set-up, which is why we normally attack the queen first. 13.♘c3 0-0 14.♙e4 ♖ae8 15.♙xd5 ♙xd5 16.♘e5 ♘xe5 17.dxe5 c6 18.f4 f6 19.♙xf6 ♙xf6 20.♘xd5 cxd5 21.exf6 ♖xe1+ 22.♚xe1 ♖xf6 and the game Anand-

Mamedyarov, Stavanger 2018, was drawn on move 32;

B) So: **11.♙g5 ♜de7** Or **11...♚d6 12.♞bd2 0-0 13.♞e4 ♚d7 14.♙b3** and Black is never really consolidating. If **11...♞ce7 12.♞c3** and Black has concrete problems, e.g. **12...♞xc3 13.bxc3 0-0 14.♞e1** with a very annoying pin. If you are forced to play **...f7-f6** at some point then you are in a lot of trouble. Also, **11...♚d7 12.♞e1+** is very awkward for Black. **12.♙e4 f6 13.♙f4 0-0 14.♞c3**



Black has avoided losing material but he has a funny-looking position. **14...g5** Planning on playing **15...f5** to continue attacking the bishops. If **14...f5 15.♙c2** (or **15.♙xc6 ♞xc6 16.d5**) **15...♞xd4 16.♞xd4 ♚xd4 17.♙b3+ ♜h8 18.♚xd4 ♙xd4 19.♞fe1** both turn out badly for Black. Now, I think **15.d5!** is very good: **15...gxf4 15...♞b4 16.d6. 16.dxc6 ♚xd1** Black has to go into the ending. **17.♞axd1 f5 18.♙d5+ ♞xd5 19.♞xd5**



and even though Black has the bishop pair, his pawns are very bad. Our knight on f3 is virtually on an outpost and the c6-pawn is a major asset.

After 15.♔g3, Morozevich won a good game: 15...f5 16.♕xc6 ♖xc6 17.d5 f4 18.dxc6 fxg3 19.♚b3+ ♔h8 20.fxg3 g4 21.♗h4 ♜xf1+ 22.♞xf1 ♚e7 23.♞f7 ♕d4+ 24.♔h1 ♞xf7 25.♞xf7 ♕e6 26.♞f4 ♕xc3 27.bxc3 ♕xa2 28.♗f5 a5 29.♗d4 ♕c4 30.♗c2 ♕d3 31.♞f2 a4 32.♞d2 ♕xc2 33.♞xc2 ♞a6 34.♞b2 ♞xc6 35.♞xb5 ♞b6 0-1 Zhigalko-Morozevich, Bilbao 2014.

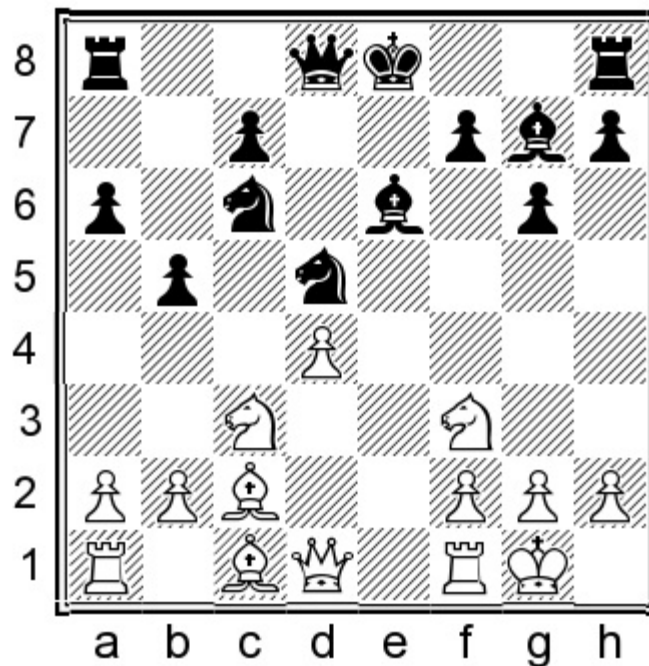
It is important to refrain from the tempting and natural ♞e1+ until the correct moment, but the fact that Anand played it just shows it is a mistake anyone can make. We need to play ♔g5 before ♞e1+, to disrupt Black's natural development. Positionally, Black isn't doing too badly. He has blocked the d-pawn and if he gets two moves to play ...♔g7 and ...0-0 then he's doing great. We need to make sure he doesn't have time to consolidate. It also explains why a lot of players like to play 10...♕e6, just to get in ...♞d7 after ♔g5.

11.♗c3

I recommend we just develop naturally. If 11.♔g5 ♞d7 and Black has his desired set-up.

11...♔g7

There is no better move.



12. ♕g5

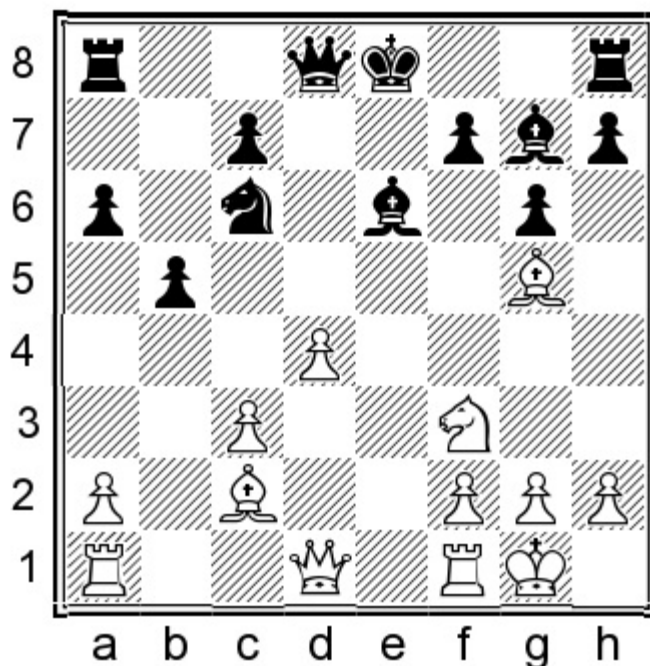
It's very tempting to play 12. ♖xd5 ♔xd5 (12... ♕xd5 is no good because there is no reliable way to block the 13. ♖e1 check: 13... ♕e6 14. d5, winning a piece; 13... ♖e7 14. ♕g5 ♕e6 15. ♕xe7 ♔xe7 16. d5 is the same story) 13. ♕b3, but Black has 13... ♔f5 14. ♕xe6 (14. d5 0-0-0!) 14... fxe6 and although we have ruined Black's structure a bit, he also has a lot of light-square control.

Now it is a different story. Black cannot play ...0-0-0 as in the line we saw above, and 12... ♔d7 runs into 13. ♖xd5 ♕xd5 (13... ♔xd5 14. ♕b3 ♔f5 15. d5) 14. ♖e1+ ♔f8 15. ♖e5 (or 15. ♕e4; in this position White can play however he wants) 15... ♖xe5 16. dxe5.

12... ♖xc3

A necessary move, and there are quite a lot of games which have gone this way.

13. bxc3



13...♙d7

Almost everyone has played like this in this position. Black can't play 13...♘e7 as after 14.♖e1 there is a lot of trouble: if 14...0-0, 15.d5 wins a piece, for example.

The problem with 13...♙d6 is that I am going to play 14.♗d2 and, for example, if 14...0-0 then I'm going to hit you with 15.♗e4, when ♘f6+ is coming. Basically, I just gain a lot of tempi on your queen. It's not hopeless for Black by any means but it is very dangerous, and objectively better for White.

Dubov has played 13...♙d7 and anything he plays must be taken seriously. Generally speaking, he knows what he is doing!

14.♗e4

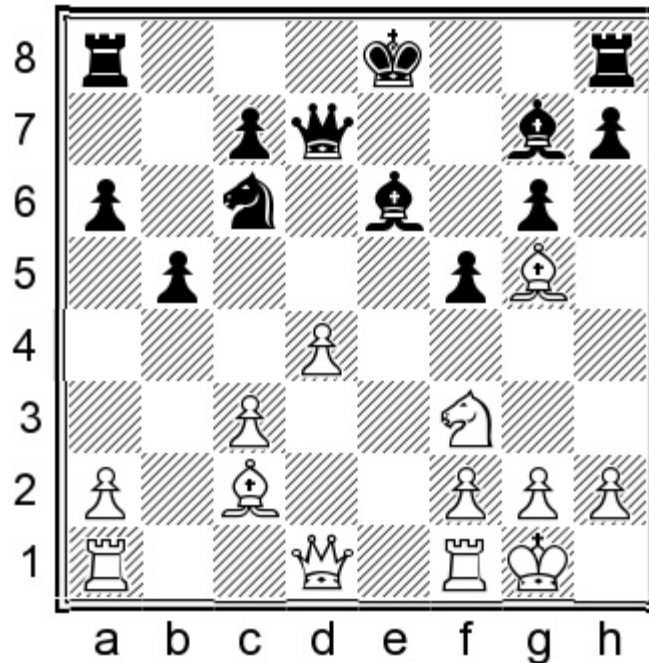
Threatening 15.d5.

We have to be very concrete here, as positionally we are worse. Give Black a couple of moves to castle and play ...♗d5, or ...♘c6-a5-c4, and he will be fine with his better structure. If we make a move like 14.♖e1, which is what we might call 'a lazy move', then 14...0-0 and maybe Black isn't better, but he's definitely not worse.

14...f5

14...0-0 15.d5 is bad for Black, obviously. If 14...h6 then I think it is still very good to play 15.d5 and on 15...hxg5 16.dxe6 and Black's position comes crumbling down, right? That's why he has to play 14...f5, which works tactically but positionally is a concession. To start with, it really weakens the e5-square and it also just generally weakens Black's king.

15.♔c2



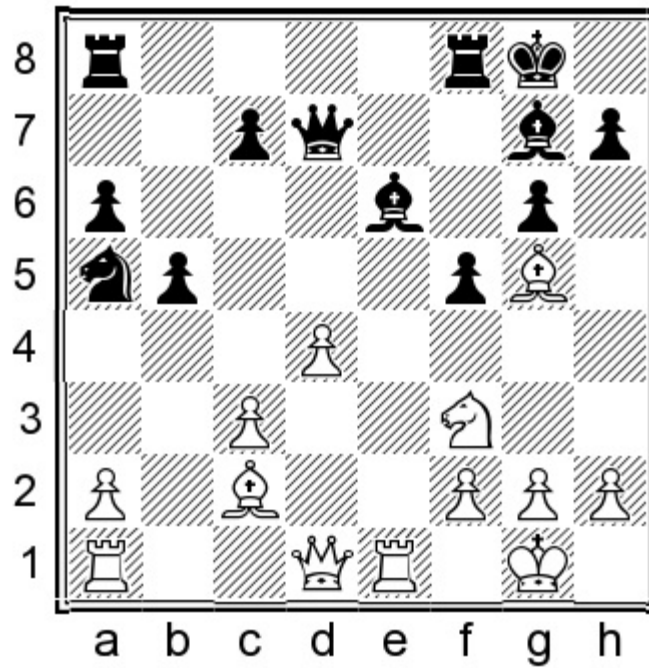
Basically, we have spent two tempi provoking 14...f5. But now if he plays 15...0-0, I have this very strong move 16.d5 ♔xd5 (16...♙xd5 17.♔b3) 17.♔b3 ♖ad8 18.♔xd8 ♗xd8 and White has won the exchange and has a huge advantage.

15...♘a5

I think this is actually the only move. Black is in a huge amount of tactical danger; just give me one move and I'll play ♖e1, when your position starts to fall apart.

16.♖e1 0-0

Black is forced to castle, as 17.d5 was a threat. If the knight had still been on c6 I would play 17.♗xe6 and 18.♔b3, but here you cover b3.



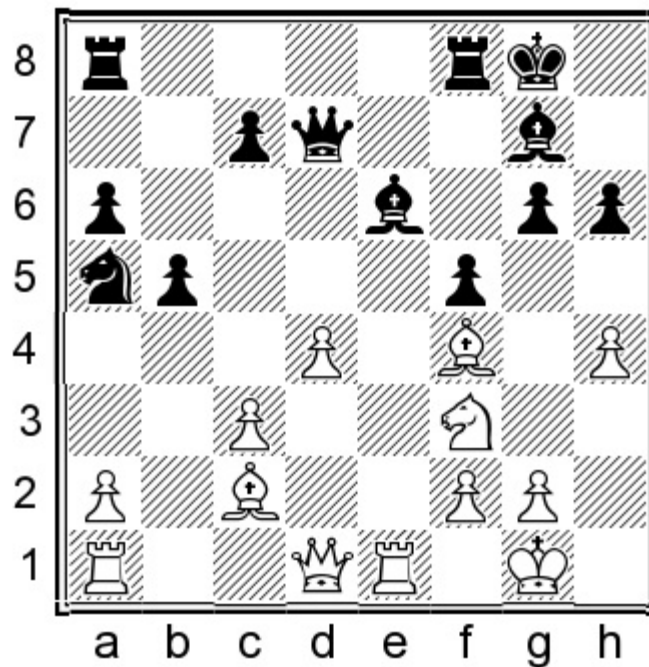
17.h4

This is what I recommend. This is not, by any means, a big advantage for White, but it is a certain advantage.

17...h6

On 17...♞c4 18.♙f4 or 18.♚c1.

18.♙f4



Black would love to get 18...g5 in, but I've stopped it with 17.h4. Black's dark squares are very weak. With the pawn on f5 rather than f7, there are always long-term strategic risks for Black. One of the things is that once I play ♖e5 and you take with the knight I will recapture with the pawn and I have a passed e-pawn. With the black pawn back on f7, ours would not be a passed pawn.

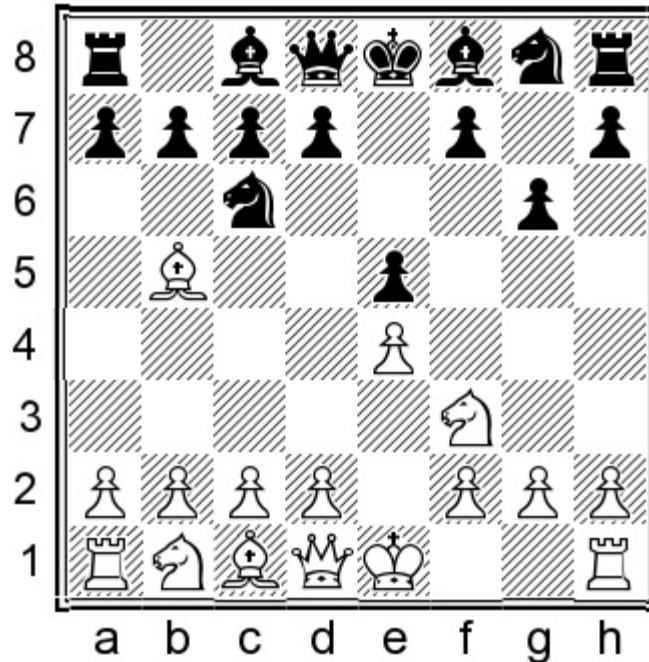
The other thing is that once I play h4-h5, if you allow me to take on g6 then Black will be left with a major weakness on that square. Or, if you allow me to play h5-h6, then you can see how I'm creating some future mating nets around your king. Black won't notice the weakness of having played ...f7-f5 in the very short term; I'm not going to immediately tactically win because it is there, but you will notice it at some point down the road.

Once the position opens up, lots of tactical possibilities will arise. White has the initiative and the more pleasant position to play.

Chapter 15

Smyslov Defence: 3...g6

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 g6



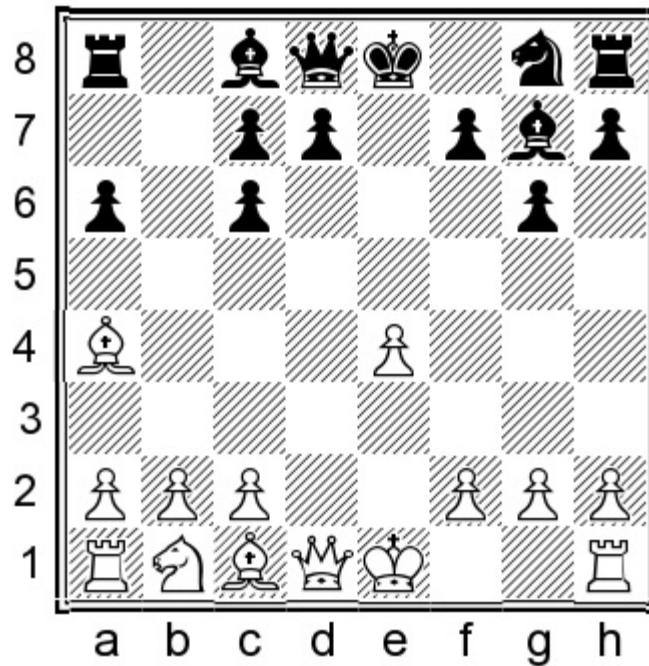
This variation is named after the Seventh World Champion, Vasily Smyslov (1921-2010).

There was a resurgence in the popularity of the variation in the 1980s but it didn't stay in fashion for very long. The turning point came when players with white moved away from the standard 4.0-0 to the much more challenging 4.d4!.

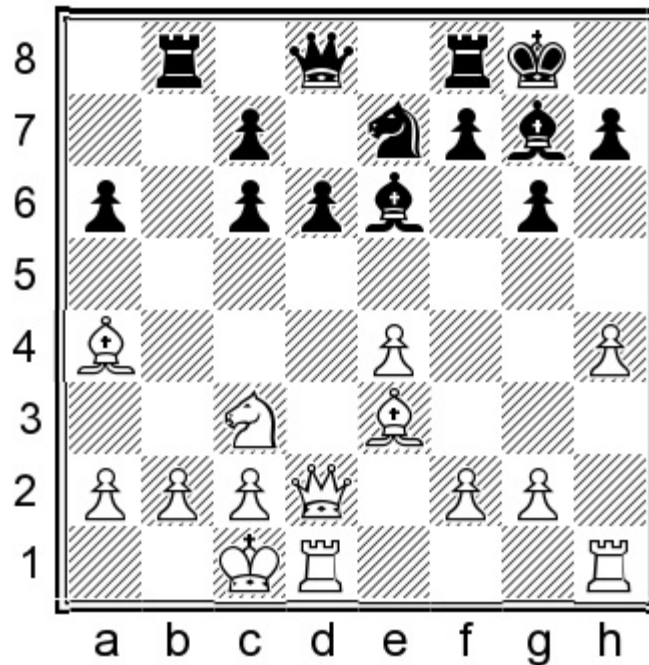
3...g6 is currently a rare visitor to the tournament circuit.

This is similar to the Cozio Defence in that Black wants to play ...♙g7, ...♘ge7 and ...0-0 but again, both move-orders have their own concrete problems.

Mention should also be given to 3...a6, just like in the Cozio lines. Here, I think it has a serious problem. I have even played this move-order as Black myself, but the problem is that after 4.♙a4 g6 5.d4 exd4 6.♘xd4 ♙g7 7.♘xc6, 7...bxc6 no longer attacks our bishop.

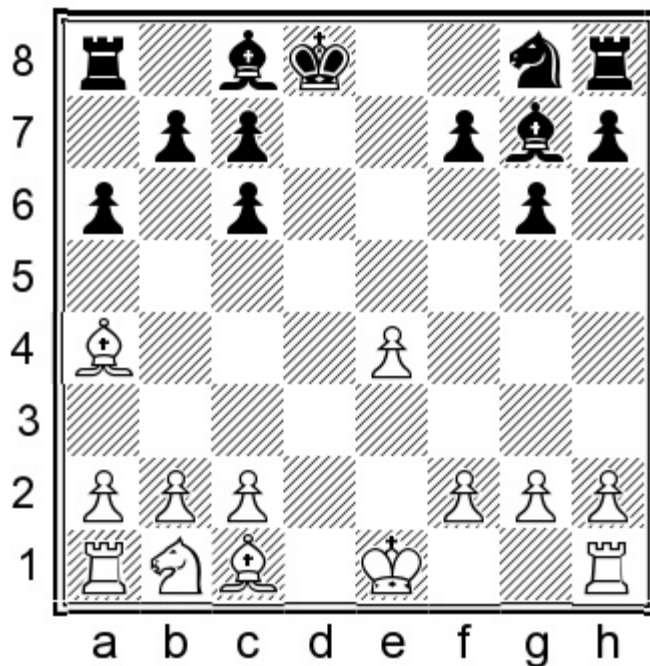


8. Nc3 and we are a tempo up on the other lines. The bishop on a4 is excellent and it goes to b3. Here is a game by Tukhaev, where his play was excellent: 8... Nc7 9. Bc3 0-0 (9... Bb8 10. Bb3) 10. Qd2 d6 11. 0-0 Bc6 12. h4 Bb8 .



The position is reminiscent of a Sicilian Dragon, but one in which Black has no serious counterplay. 13. h5 c5 14. Bh6 Bh8 15. f4 f5 16. hxc6 Nxc6 17. g4 fxe4 18. f5 Be5 19. fxe6 Bf3 20. Bb3 Ch8 21. Nxe4 c4 22. Ng5 cxb3 23. axb3 Qf6 24. Nxf3 Qxf3 25. Qa5 Bc8 26. Qa4 c6 27. Qxa6 Be8 28. Cb1 c5 29. Qb5 Ba8 30. Bd2 Bg7 31. Bc3 Bxc3 32. bxc3 Ne5 33. e7 1-0 Tukhaev-Sindarov, New Delhi 2018.

It is the same story after 7... dxc6 8. Qxd8+ Cxd8 .

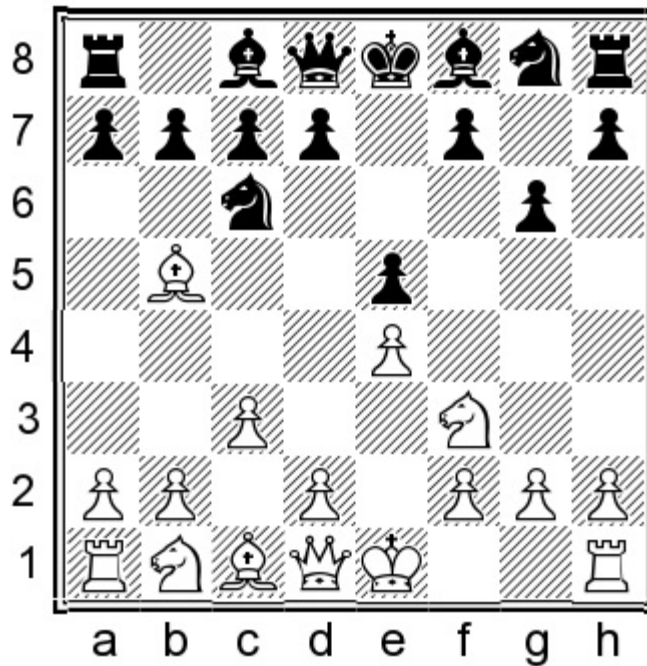


Here we get something similar to the Berlin Endgame, with the big difference being that we haven't given up the bishop pair. Black has a damaged structure and a king on d8; we have a kingside majority and we still have both bishops. Trading a pair of bishops after 9. ♖c3 ♕e6 10. ♗b3 will also be good for White. So this is just a solid endgame advantage.

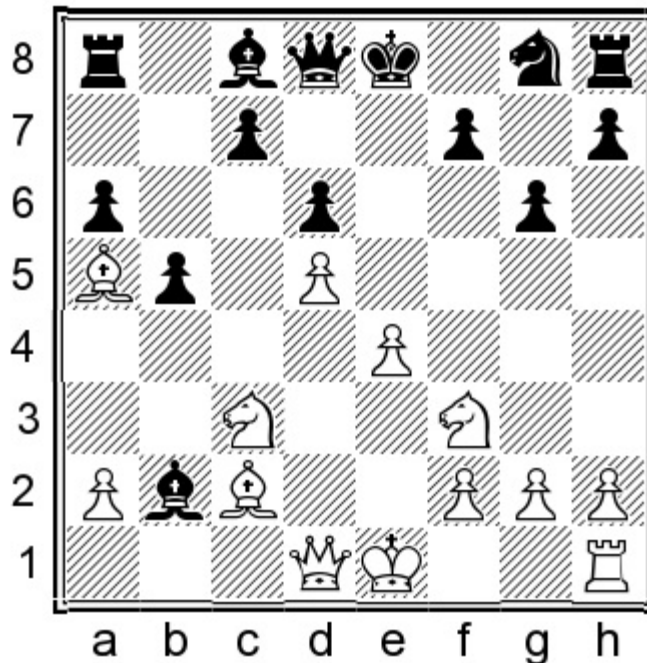
This is why the move-order with 3...a6 is not popular. To be honest, I don't even know why I played it with black and I don't know what I was hoping for in this position! 3...g6 is the better move-order and is the one Magnus has quite a lot of experience with.

4.d4

I have to say that 4.c3 is also a fine move and it can transpose. These lines are actually very confusing to me; they are all similar and there are so many transpositions:



4...a6 4...♙g7 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4. 5.♙a4 5.♙xc6 dxc6 6.d4. 5...♙g7 5...♞ge7 6.d4 is a direct transposition to what we saw earlier. 6.d4 exd4 6...b5 7.♙b3. 7.cxd4 b5 This is the version Vishy Anand has played. 8.♙c2 8...♞ge7 9.d5 transposes again into what we want. 8...d6 This is the problem if White is trying to transpose. 9.d5 ♞a5 10.♙d2 ♙xb2 11.♙xa5 ♙xa1 12.♞c3 ♙b2

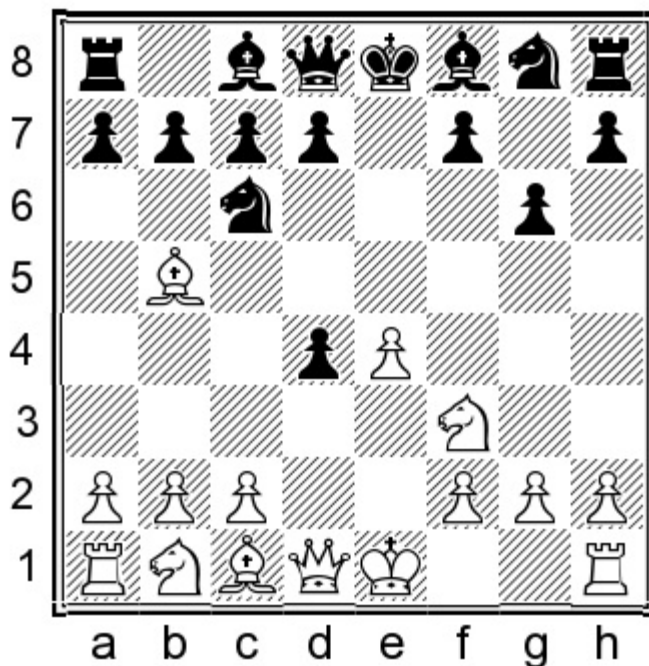


and at the end of this line there isn't the option of 13.d6 for White.

Although this position is still interesting for White, I don't think it's fully correct. We are going to have to castle and then play for some slightly vague compensation. In this line it is a real sacrifice, which is fine if you want to take a big risk and play some exciting chess – but I can't, in good conscience, recommended this line.

It is worth remembering this subtlety, when Black plays 8...d6 before ...♘ge7, because it is an important one.

4...exd4



5.c3!?

If 5.♘xd4 then 5...♙g7.

The old main line, which people were playing decades ago, is 5.♙g5 ♙e7 6.♙xe7 ♚xe7 7.♙xc6 dxc6 8.♚xd4 ♘f6 which is still playable for White but I don't think it's as interesting as 5.c3.

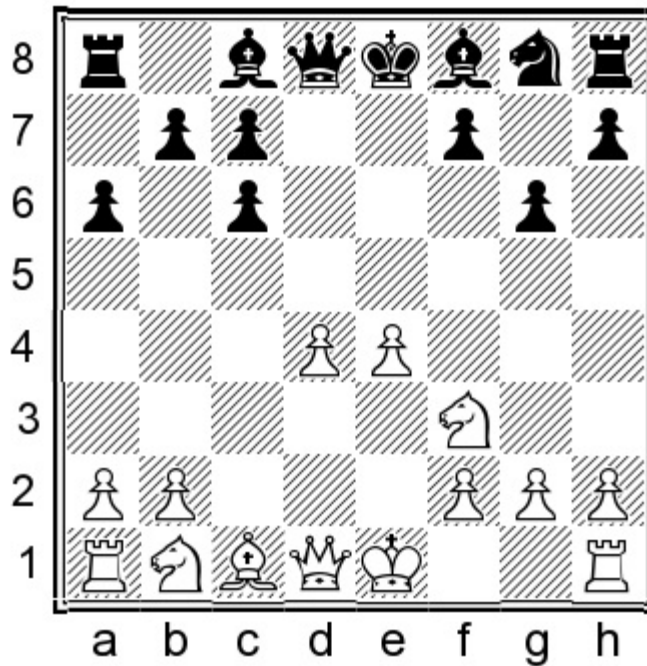
It's a pawn sacrifice, but I'm not sure that Black wants to take it.

5...♘ge7

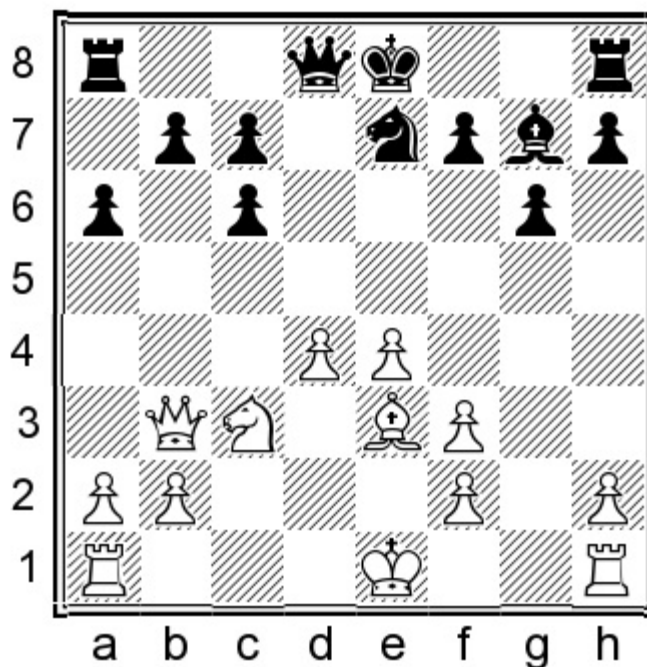
Black has other choices:

A) 5...♙g7 6.cxd4 a6 7.♙a4 transposes to the line we just saw, with 8...d6;

B) 5...a6 6.♙xc6 Damaging Black's structure. 6...dxc6 7.cxd4 We have the centre but we had to give up the bishop pair. This has been played in a number of high-profile games.

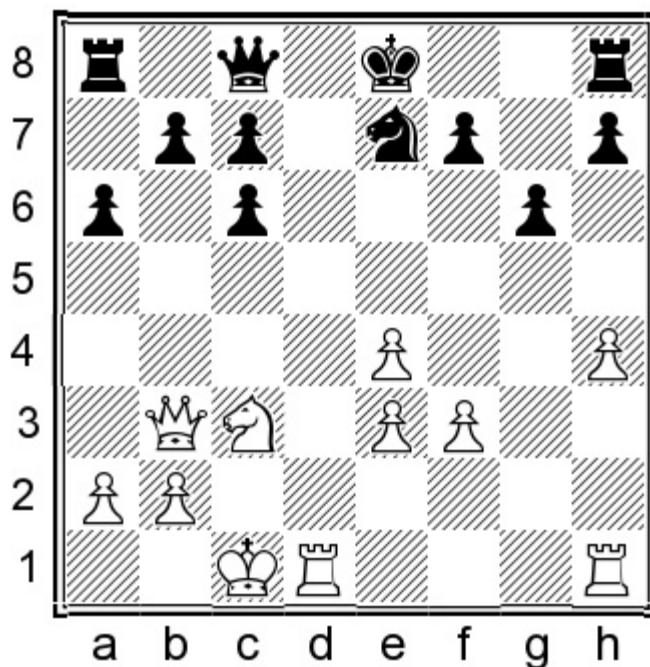


7...g4 7...g7 8.h3 and Black has missed his last chance to play 7...g4; the position is just pleasant for White. 8.♖b3 ♗xf3 8...g7 9.♘e5 ♗xe5 10.dxe5 is better for White. If Black can castle queenside he will be OK, but 10...♗d7 runs into 11.f3 ♗e6 12.♗xb7. 9.gxf3 ♗g7 9...♗xd4 10.♗xb7 ♗b4+ 11.♗xb4 ♗xb4+ 12.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 13.♘xd2 and the ending is very good for White. 10.♗e3 10.♗xb7 ♘e7 when Black will castle and then pick up the d-pawn at the right moment for him. 10...♘e7 Taking the pawn now isn't good for Black: 10...♗xd4 11.♗xd4 ♗xd4 12.♗xb7 ♗d8 13.♗xc6+ ♔f8 14.0-0 and we will end up a pawn ahead. 11.♘c3



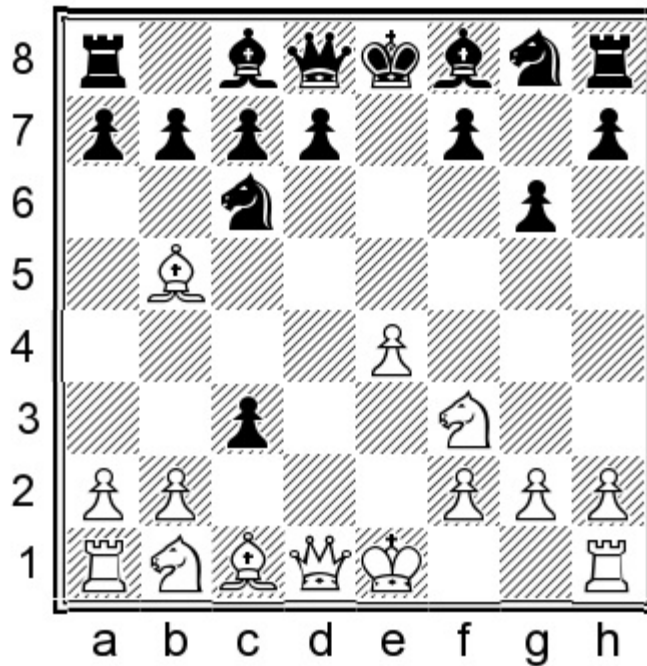
11...xd4 Black really needs to take the pawn at this point, or I will just protect my centre after 11...0-0 12.0-0-0 which is highly reminiscent of a Grünfeld, but a version which is much better for White. We will continue with h2-h4-h5 and Black hasn't got his normal Grünfeld counterplay. 12.0-

0-0 12.♔xd4 ♖xd4 13.♗xb7 0-0 was played in Karjakin-Mamedyarov, Berlin Candidates 2018. Black went on to win, although at this point it doesn't look too bad for him. Karjakin eventually drifted into trouble. 12...♔xe3+? 12...c5 13.♗xb7 is not amazing for Black, but is certainly better than what happens. 13.fxe3 ♖c8 14.h4

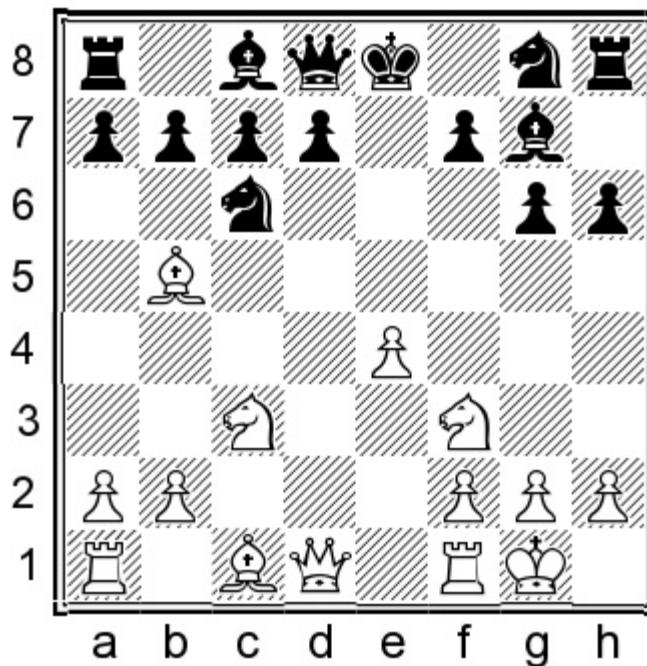


Black has won a pawn, but his position is basically just lost, surprisingly. 14...b6 14...0-0 15.h5 and Black's position is in ruins. 15.h5 ♖e6 16.♗a4 0-0 17.♗d4! A good move, stopping 17...♖ad8 because of 18.♗xd8. 17...c5 18.♗d7 ♖ac8 18...♗xd7 19.♖xd7 is just terrible for Black. I am just winning c7 and then everything collapses. 19.f4 ♘c6 20.hxg6 hxg6 21.♗d2 Heading back to the h-file. 21...♔g7 22.♘d5 ♘b4 23.f5 ♘xa2+ 24.♔b1 ♗xe4+ 25.♔xa2 ♖xf5 26.e4 1-0 Fressinet-Stevic, Batumi 2018. White's play in this game was very impressive;

C) 5...dxc3



Black grabs the pawn and attempts to hold onto it, but White's superior development gives him lots of chances: **6. ♖xc3 h6** Black has to stop **7. ♗g5**, even at the cost of neglecting development: **6... ♗g7 7. ♗g5 ♖ge7 8. ♗d5 h6 9. ♗f6 ♗xf6 10. ♗xf6+ ♖f8 11. ♖d2** with a dangerous position, similar to those we saw in the Cozio Defence. Black can also play **6... a6** but I don't think it helps him after **7. ♗c4** when f7 becomes a big target: **7... ♗g7 8. ♗g5 ♖h6** is rather ugly for Black. **7.0-0 ♗g7**



8. ♗d2! The computer suggests this slightly odd-looking move instead of the more natural **8. ♗f4** or **8. ♗e3**. **8... ♖ge7 9. ♖c1 d6** If **9... g5**, **10. ♗d5 0-0 11. ♗c3** is really strong and it shows the advantage of putting the bishop on d2: **11... d6 12. ♗xg7 ♖xg7 13. ♖c3+ f6 14. ♖ac1** and Black's king is very weak, as is c7. **10. ♗d5 ♖f8 10... ♗d7 11. ♗c3. 11. ♗xc6 ♖xc6 12. ♗c3 ♗e6 13. ♖e1** and White is doing very well.

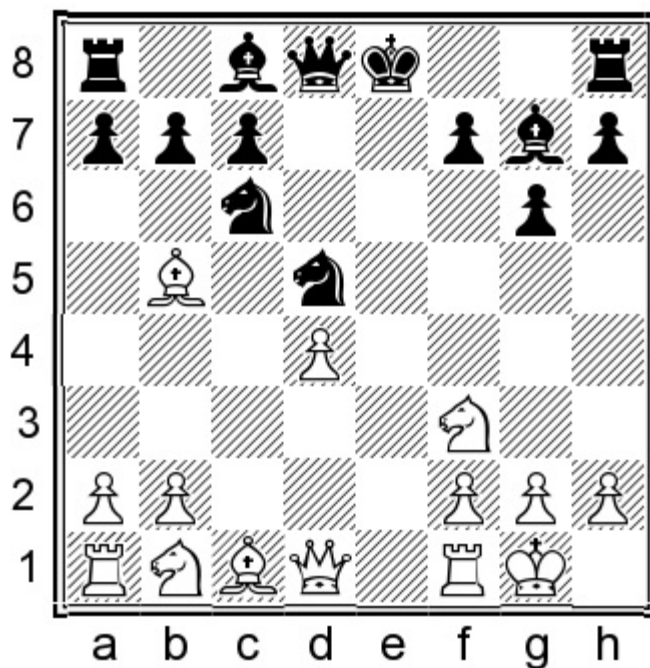
Despite it being a computer move, I think the idea of 8.♔d2 is easy to understand. We stop Black from castling and then follow up with ♖d5 and ♙c3. Suddenly everything comes into play.

6.cxd4 d5

6...a6 7.♙a4 b5 8.♙c2 is another transposition to a Cozio.

7.exd5 ♖xd5 8.0-0 ♙g7

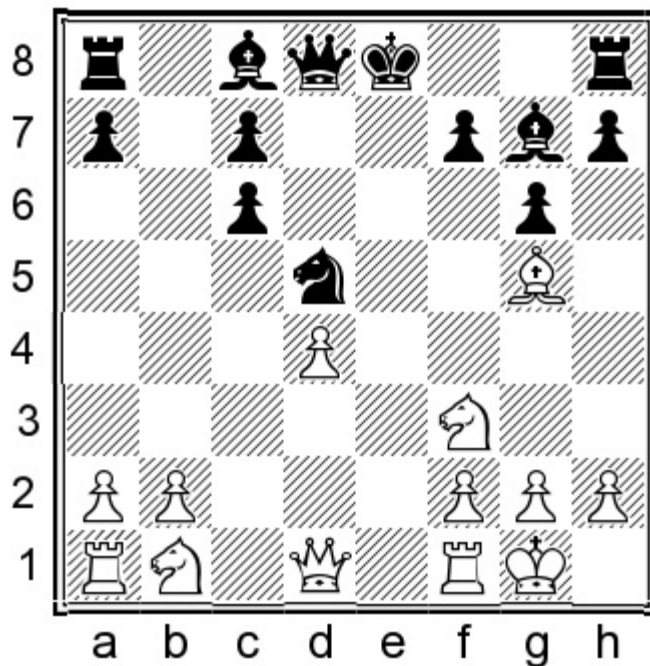
Black can't transpose back to earlier lines with 8...a6 because 9.♙xc6+ comes with gain of tempo.



9.♙xc6+

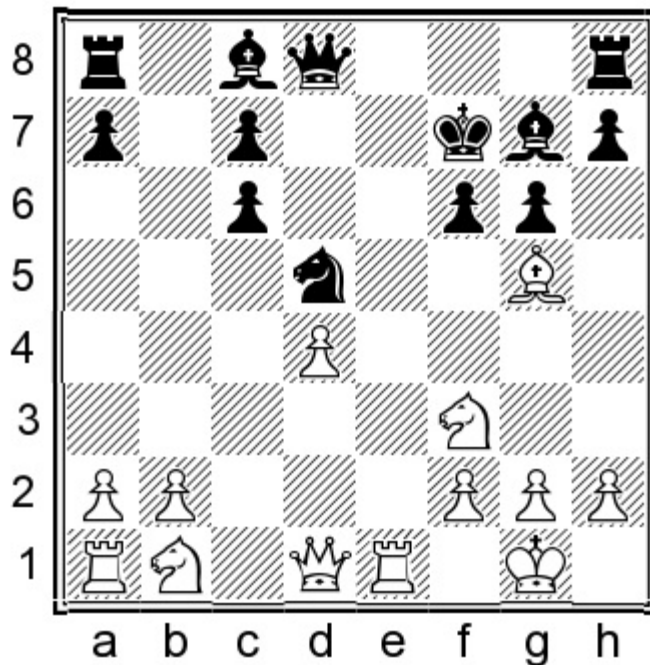
I think this move-order is fine and it is most likely to lead to the same position as in the other move-orders, but a simpler move-order, which limits Black's options, is to play 9.♙g5 first: 9...♞d6 9...f6 10.♞e1+ ♗f7 11.♙d2. 10.♞e1+ ♙e6 11.♖bd2 0-0 12.♖e4 ♞b4 13.♙xc6 bxc6 14.♞c1 and this is what we see below. The reason that I am recommending this move-order is because after 9...f6 10.♞e1+ ♗f7 we play 11.♙d2 with a good position, which is a little different than the position which follows.

9...bxc6 10.♙g5

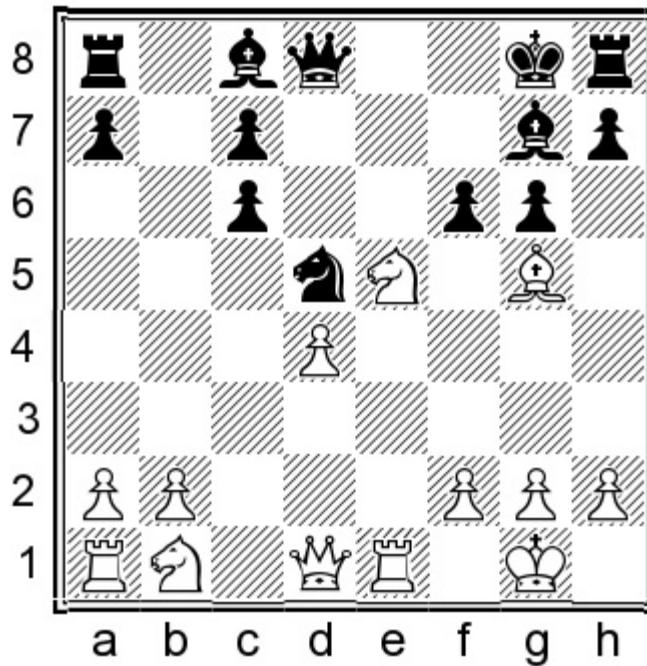


10...♙d6

Here there is the option of 10...f6. It is not good for Black, but it's a little extra thing to remember and it's a bit weird. Here we have to play 11.♖e1+ ♔f7



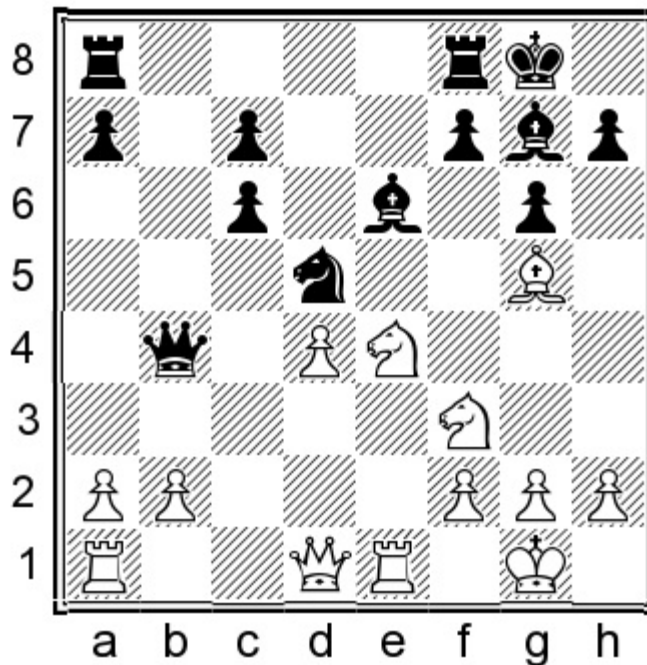
and now retreating with 12.♕d2 is not as good as in the line given above, because we have given up the bishop pair and his knight on d5 is very stable. This position is probably good for Black. But we do have an alternative in 12.♘e5+ ♔g8



13. ♖c3!. A beautiful idea (unfortunately 13. ♖xc6 ♔d7 is not really working out for White): 13...fxg5 (13... ♖xc3 14.bxc3 fxg5 15. ♖xc6 and ♔b3+ is coming; this is going to be really nasty for Black) 14. ♖xc6 ♔d7 15. ♖xd5 and the knights protect each other, due to the potential fork on e7.

11. ♚e1+ ♘e6 12. ♖bd2 0-0 13. ♖e4 ♔b4

This is an important position for the whole line.



14. ♔c1!

An excellent move. It protects b2, attacks c6, gets ready for ♔h6 and also stops 14...h6 for Black. If

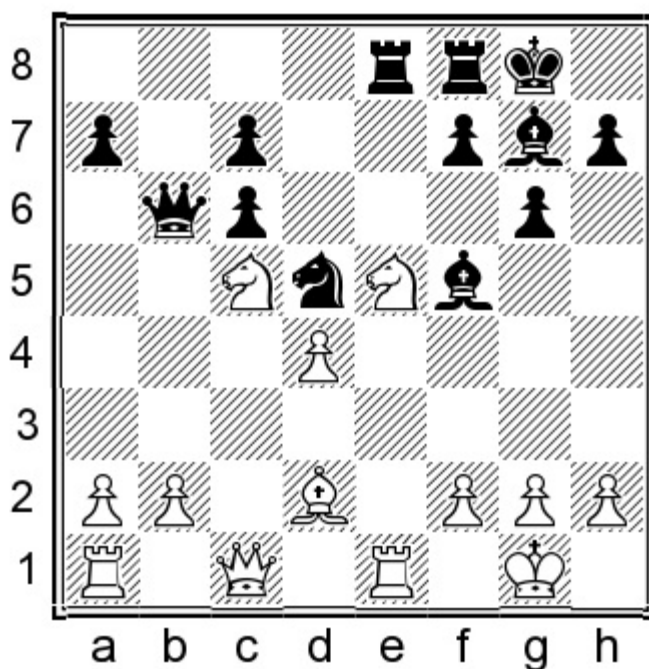
you don't know this idea, it is very easy to play a move like 14.♞c2 and Black will play 14...h6, when he covers some dark squares.

The main problem for Black here is that his dark squares are weak. Yes, he has the bishop pair – but he has big weaknesses on c5, f6 and h6. Very often we will play ♖e5 and ♗c5 and get a grip on those dark squares.

14...♞fe8

If 14...♞ab8 we just play 15.b3.

After 14...♞ae8 it is quite important that we chase the queen to another square with 15.♙d2 so she will not be attacking d4 when we move our knights: 15...♞b6 16.♗c5 ♙f5 17.♗e5.



Now you can see how we are taking a strong grip on his dark squares and also, incidentally, threatening 18.♗c/ed7, forking the rook and queen. It is interesting that Black's knight cannot do anything about White's plans. It's a good, stable piece but Black has a lot of positional problems.

15.♙d2 ♞b6

After 15...♞b5 we are not at all afraid of playing 16.a4. In fact this move is good for us, because if we get the same sort of position after 16...♞b6 17.♗c5 we are now threatening ♞a1-a3-b3, trapping the queen. I think it shows just how bad this structure is for Black when his queen can get trapped on b6.

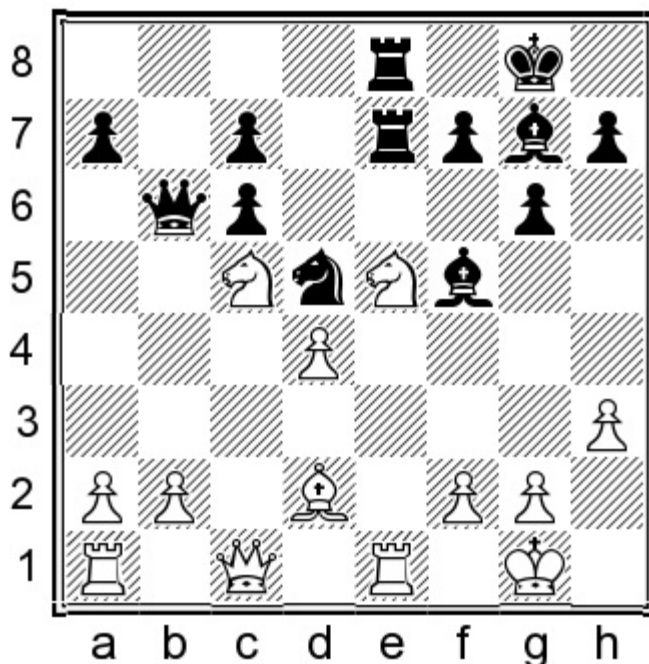
16.♗c5 ♙f5

If 16...♙g4 it's actually even worse for Black after 17.♗e5, attacking his bishop.

17.♗e5 ♞ad8

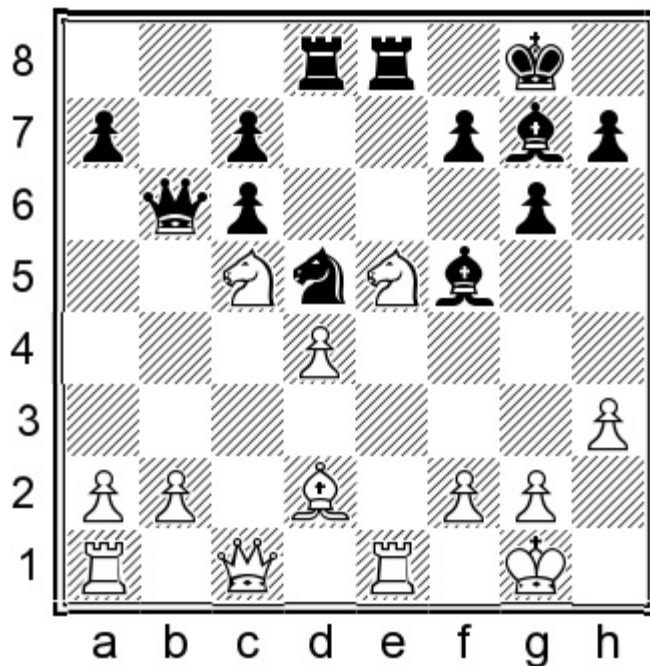
Very natural, putting the rooks on open files.

If Black plays 17...♖e7, which looks logical, as Black wants to double on the e-file and attack the knight, we first make a small prophylactic move with 18.h3. It's not at all forced, but it is useful in general to have some *luft*. Black plays 18...♖ae8



and now we are not at all afraid of him taking the knight. We play 19.a4!, once again threatening ♖a1-a3-b3. This is a good way of developing the rook and potentially embarrassing his queen. We're not worried about 19...♙xe5 20.dxe5 ♖xe5 21.♖xe5 ♖xe5 because although he wins a pawn, it's not necessarily a good pawn for him. I can play 22.♖a3 here, for example. His king is really weak too and I don't think it was really worth him taking the pawn. 22.♙h6 is also good, trying to set up a mating net around his king. This is also potentially very dangerous for Black.

18.h3



Creating *luft* again and demonstrating White's long-term advantage. You don't need to rush to beat Black; you can do it slowly. In fact there are several ways for White to continue, which again shows there is a big strategic advantage which is not of a temporary nature.

18...♘f6

Attacking the d-pawn.

19.♘b3

Not the only option, but this is a good one. White defends the pawn on d4 and c6 is now under attack also. Maybe White is even getting ready for stuff with ♘a5.

19...♞d5

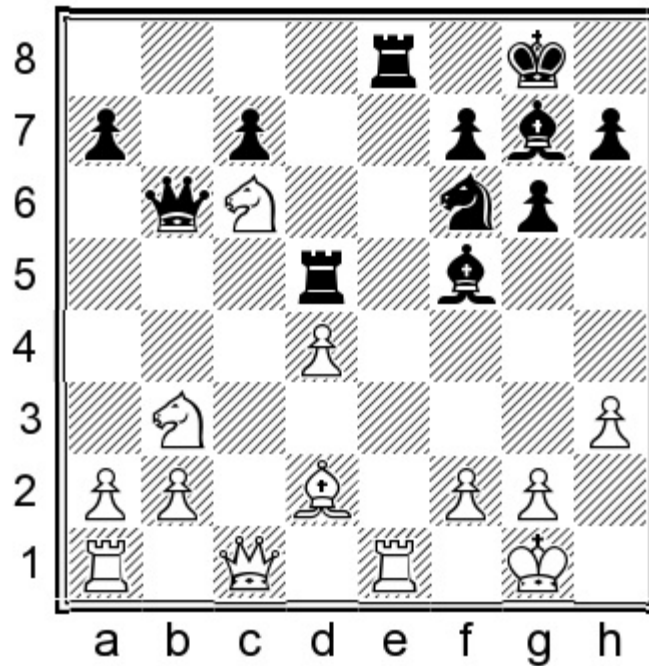
This looks weird and it also sacrifices the pawn.

Black's alternatives are:

A) 19...♙e4 20.♙a5 ♚b5 (20...♚b7 21.♘c5; 20...♚b8 21.♘xc6 ♙xc6 22.♚xc6) 21.♙xc7 ♞c8 22.♙d6 is very strong for White;

B) 19...♞e6 also looks natural but we play 20.♙a5 with the same story. Black is going to lose material.

20.♘xc6



Naiditsch played this way against Nakamura in Douglas 2018. Then he got short of time and the game spiralled out of control, although White eventually won. In this position, White is just a pawn up for nothing.

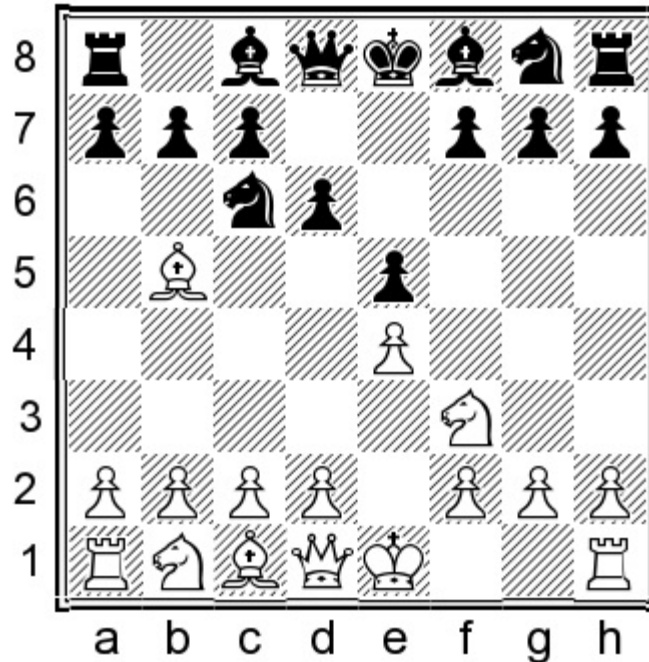
I really like the way Naiditsch played the opening. It shows he has a good feeling for this line.

Note that White's dark-squared bishop is very active and flexible in all of these lines. Black is very vulnerable around his king, with f6 and h6 usually becoming very weak. He also has a broken pawn structure, giving White a long-term strategic advantage.

Chapter 16

Steinitz Defence: 3...d6

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 d6

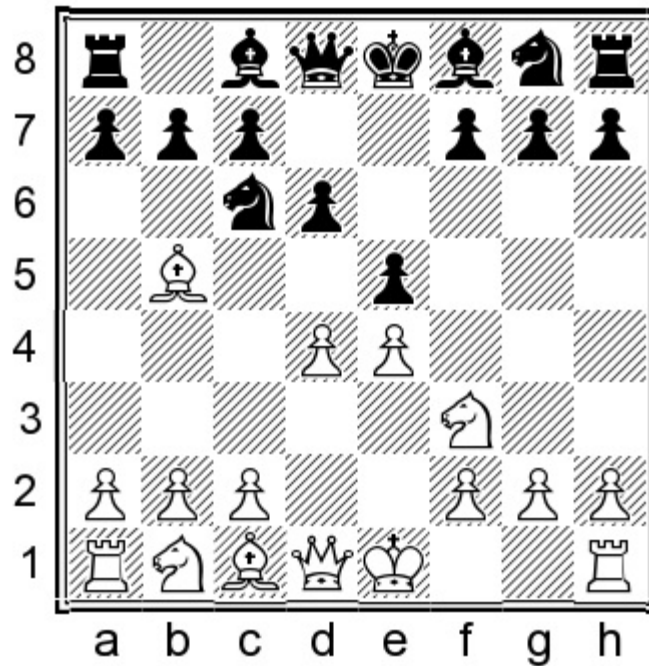


This variation is named after the First World Champion, Wilhelm Steinitz (1836-1900). It has a reputation for being solid but passive.

The Steinitz Defence can be a tough nut to crack, but we are going to meet it aggressively.

Later on we will see the improved version, the Steinitz Defence Deferred with 3...a6 and 4...d6. Still, some people do still play 3...d6. It's a popular move with a great deal of theory. Many great players have played this way, including Capablanca.

4.d4

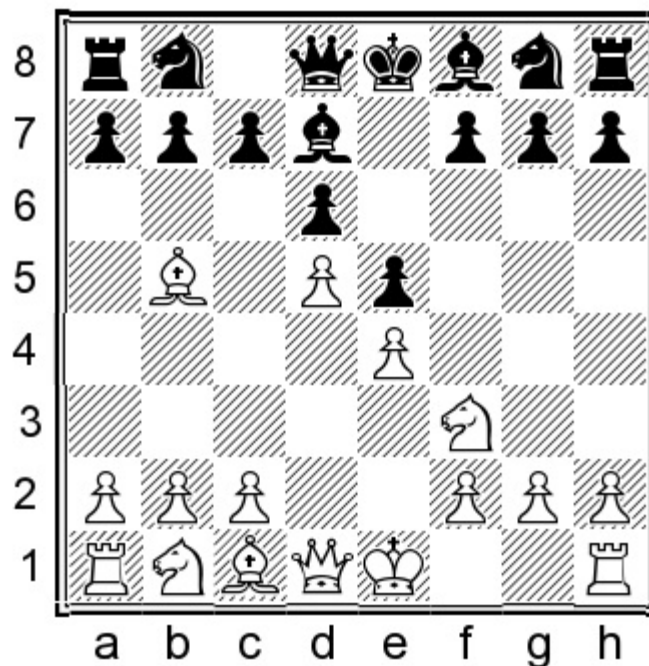


Of course, this is not the only move, but I think it is the best way to take advantage of Black's move-order.

4...exd4

Black has to deal with the problem of his e-pawn.

The only other realistic move for Black is 4...♞d7. The only thing about this move – which has also been played thousands of times – is that it allows White to play for an immediate space advantage, and I'm recommending we do so: 5.d5 ♖b8



We reach a structure that can occur very often in the Ruy Lopez, but it's more commonly known from

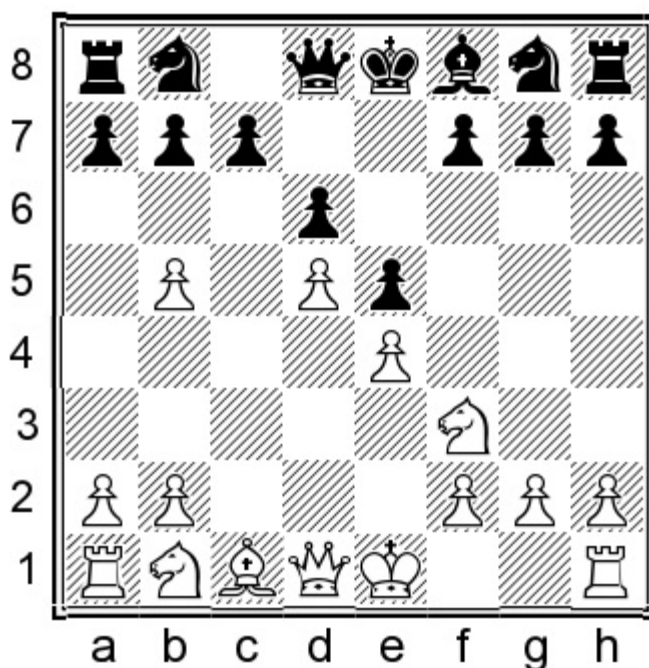
the King's Indian. It's essentially a King's Indian structure.

The general rule in this structure is that the exchange of light-squared bishops is good for White and the trade of dark-squared bishops is good for Black. The reason is the pawn structure. Black's dark-squared bishop is hemmed in by his pawn chain, which is on dark squares. And as a general guideline, the reason a trade of light-squared bishops is good for White is that Black's main way of playing is to play ...f7-f5 and then ...f5-f4, to attack on the kingside, if White castles there. If you have your light-squared bishop on c8 or d7, for example, it really assists Black's attack. It is very, very difficult for Black to attack without this bishop.

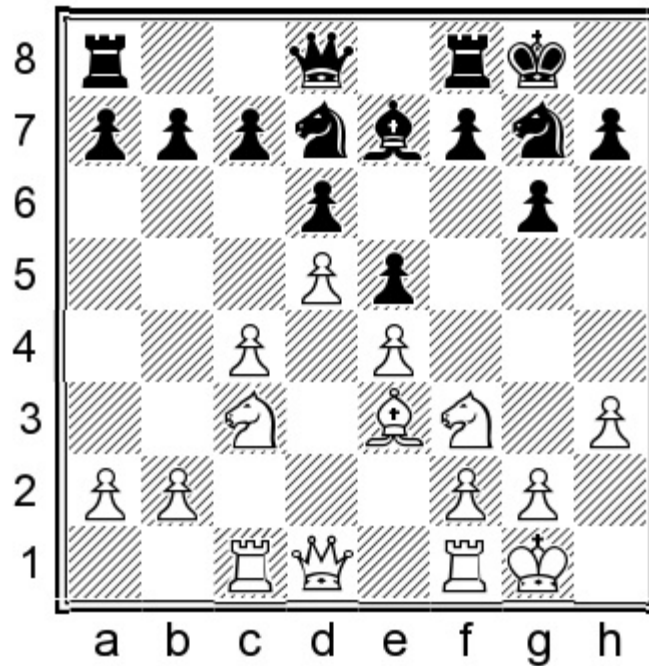
The other point is that if Black plays ...f7-f5 without the light-squared bishop, very often he gets hit by ♖g5.

Anyway, I don't think that we need to take immediately. There are two ways I think are good to play. Ivanchuk did it like this:

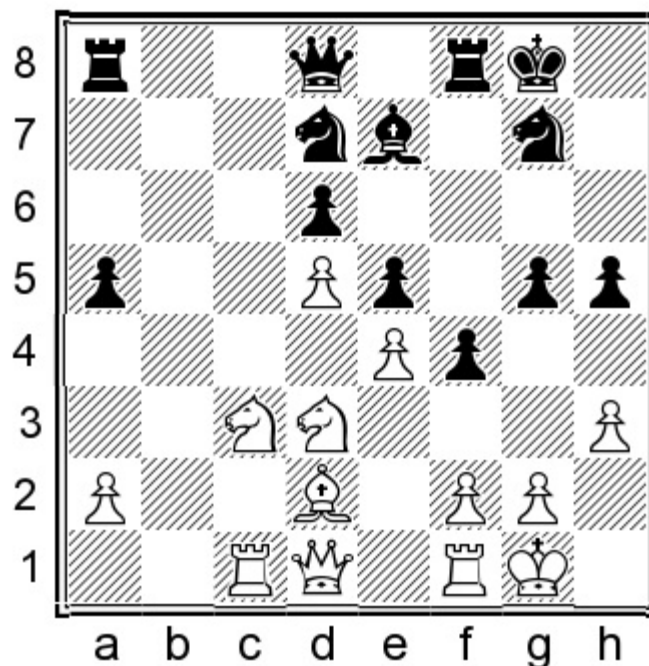
6.c4 This is an interesting way of playing. **6...♟f6** If Black takes then we get a very good structure for White: **6...♟xb5 7.cxb5**.



Now we have the c-file and one day we'll move our bishop, maybe to e3, our knight to d2 and our rook to c1. Then we will put a lot of pressure on the c7-pawn and it will never stop being a weakness. That's why Ehlvest decided to wait in the game. **7.♟c3 ♟e7 7...c6 8.♟a4 ♟e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.h3 ♟a6 11.♟e3** and Black will have problems with d6 being weak. **8.♟xd7+** Ivanchuk didn't have to trade here but he may have been worried that after **8.♟e3 0-0** Black might be able to move the bishop to g4 to escape the swap. **8...♟bxd7 9.♟e3 g6 10.h3 ♟h5 11.0-0 0-0 11...f5 12.exf5 gxf5 13.♟xe5** is a good trick to know; h5 is hanging. **12.♟c1 ♟g7**



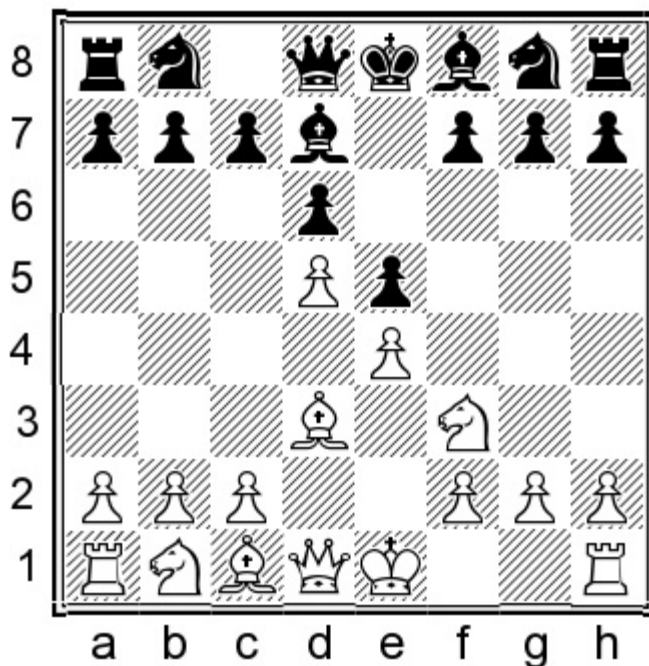
A typical idea, supporting the ...f7-f5 break. **13.b4** Playing to break up the centre, but there are various ways to continue here; 13.♖e1 f5 14.f3 f4 15.♙f2 and this is where Black really needs his light-squared bishop. Even after ...h7-h5 and ...g6-g5 he can never achieve ...g5-g4 because I can always take it and win a pawn. **13...f5 14.c5 f4 14...dxc5 15.bxc5** is generally a very dangerous way for Black to play. We're going to pay d5-d6 and Black's e5-pawn is weak. Once the centre opens up, Black's king will also be weak. **15.cxd6 cxd6 16.♙d2 a6** To stop ♖b5. **17.b5 g5 18.bxa6 bxa6 19.♖e1 h5** Once again, without the light-squared bishops, Black's play is rather obtuse. **20.♖d3 a5**



21.g4 A typical idea from the King's Indian to kill Black's play, but it is not really necessary here as Black wasn't threatening to play 21...g4. White has many moves; 21.♖b5, for example, is an attractive option, with the knight going to c7 and the rook to c6. In any case, White had quite a large

advantage and eventually won the following game: 21...f3 22.♖e1 hxg4 23.hxg4 ♘f6 24.♙xf3 ♚d7 25.♙h3 ♘xg4 26.♗g2 ♗f7 27.f3 ♘f6 28.♙xd7 ♘xd7 29.♘d3 a4 30.♙b1 ♙a7 31.♘b5 ♙aa8 32.♘c3 ♙a7 33.♙b4 ♘h5 34.♙fb1 ♘f4+ 35.♙xf4 exf4 36.♘b5 ♙a5 37.♘d4 ♘c5 38.♘c6 ♘xd3 39.♙b7 ♙c5 40.♙xe7+ ♗g6 41.♙e6+ ♗g7 42.♘d4 g4 43.♙xd6 gxf3+ 44.♗xf3 ♘e5+ 45.♗f2 ♙c4 46.♘e6+ ♗f7 47.♙b7+ 1-0 Ivanchuk-Ehlvest, Jurmala 2013.

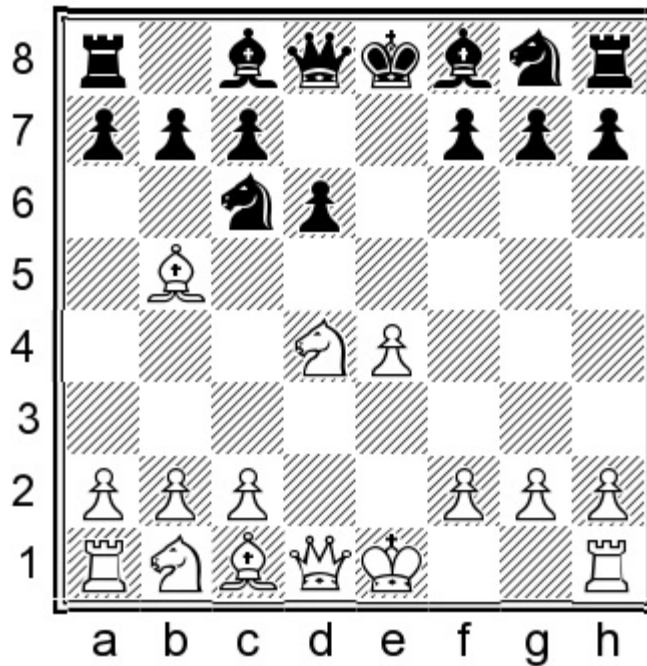
I also noted that the computer just plays **6.♙d3**.



This is a matter of taste. Positionally we would like to trade the bishops but the advantage of this move is that Black's pieces are weird. Instead of helping him develop, we ask him where he's going. Where will his queen's knight go, for example? The other thing is we are discouraging his ...f7-f5 quite a lot with our bishop on d3. We will continue with c2-c4, ♘c3 and ♙e3 with a very harmonious set-up. I think this a very good King's Indian for White.

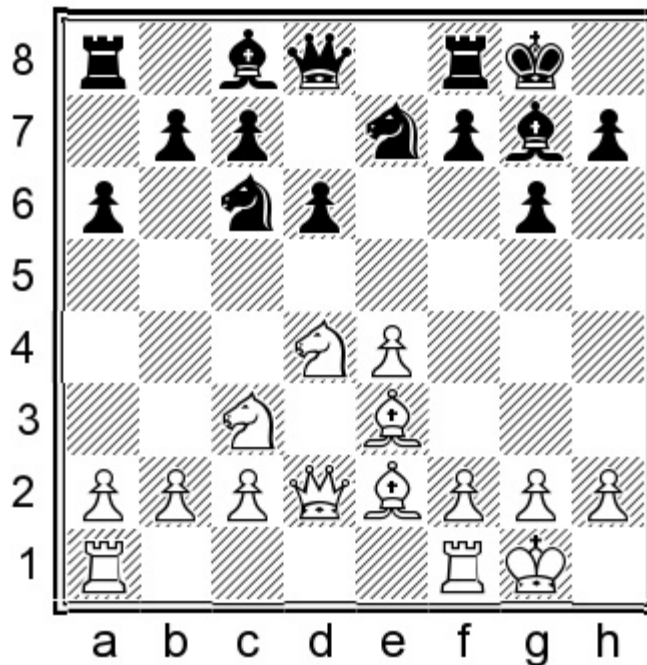
5.♘xd4

5.♙xd4 is another move. This line, for Black, has been played by Aronian. I was a bit surprised to find that it's not easy to prove an advantage here for White. I think taking with the knight is better.



5...♙d7

5...♘ge7 is rather passive but Black's plan is to play ...g7-g6, ...♙g7 and ...0-0, with harmonious development: 6.0-0 a6 6...g6 7.♘xc6 ♘xc6 8.♙d4!. 7...♙e2 7...♙c4 is possible too but I think 7...♙e2 is more harmonious. On c4 the bishop is more likely to be hit by something, like ...♘e5. 7...g6 8...♙e3 ♙g7 9...♘c3 0-0 10...♙d2

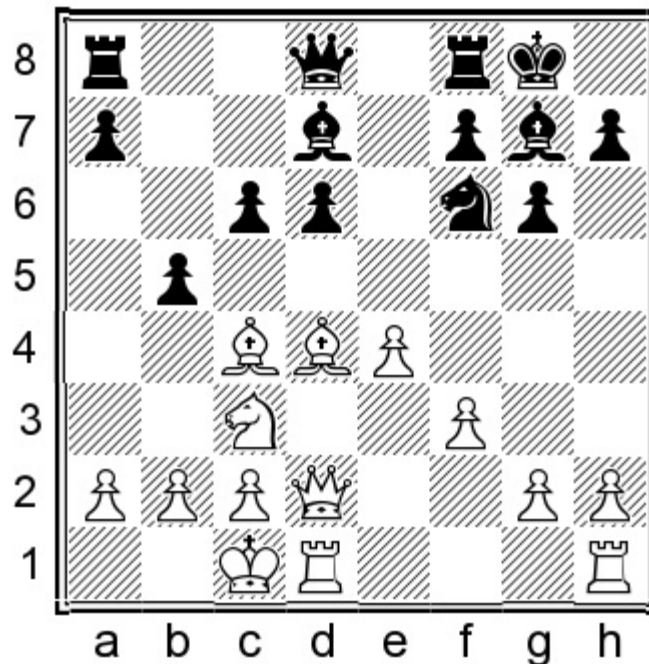


And I think White has a slight but stable advantage, just based on the pawn structure: 10...♘xd4
 When I was younger I used to think Black should play 10...f5 in these positions. But then, when I'd gained some experience, I realized that when White takes on f5, for example after 11.♘xc6 ♘xc6

12.exf5, Black ends up being worse in this structure: 12...♙xf5 13.♞ad1 and we still have the important d5-square. It doesn't look like an outpost, but it can act as one because Black has a very difficult time playing ...c7-c6. 11.♙xd4 ♙xd4 12.♞xd4 ♘c6 13.♞d2 and we can think about f2-f4-f5, attacking on the kingside.

6.0-0

Here I wanted to try queenside castling, but it always felt Black could get a typical Dragon with ...♘f6, provoking f2-f3, and then trade knights on d4 followed by hitting the bishop with ...c7-c6. After the logical sequence 6.♘c3 g6 7.♙e3 ♙g7 8.♞d2 ♘f6 9.f3 0-0 10.0-0-0 ♘xd4 11.♙xd4 c6 12.♙c4 b5

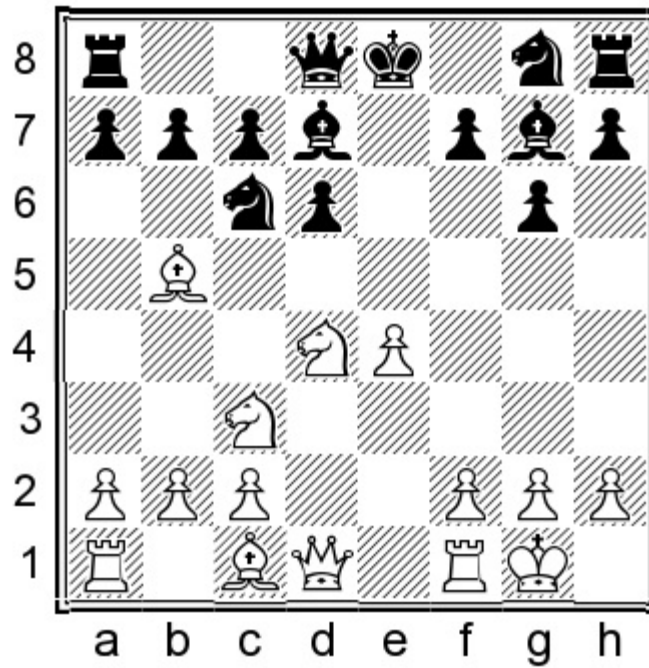


to my surprise Black's counterplay was actually extremely potent here.

Or 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.♙c4 g6 8.♘c3 ♙g7 9.♙e3 ♘f6 10.f3 0-0.

6.♙xc6 bxc6 7.0-0 g6 8.c4 c5 9.♘f3 ♙g7 10.♘c3 ♘e7 11.h3 0-0 12.♞e1 ♘c6 13.♙g5 f6 14.♙e3 f5 15.exf5 ♞xf5 16.♞c1 ♘e5 17.♘xe5 ♙xe5 18.♞d2 ♙c6 19.♘d5 ♞d7 20.♙xc5 ♞f7 21.♙e3 ♞b8 22.b4 ♙xd5 23.cxd5 ♞b5 24.♞ed1 ♞xd5 25.♞c2 ♞xd1+ 26.♞xd1 a6 27.♞e2± 1-0 (43) Bologan-Ivanchuk, Astana 2012.

6...g6 7.♘c3 ♙g7



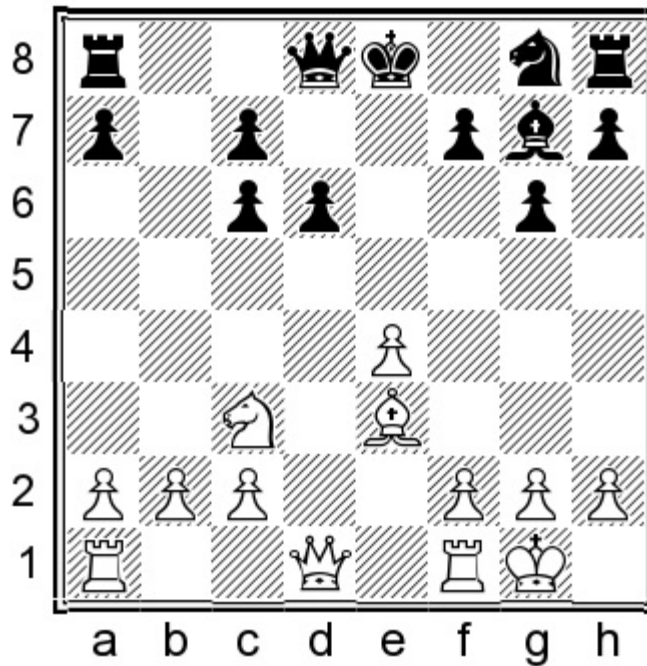
8. ♖xc6

I recommend that we damage Black's pawn structure rather than play the standard 8. ♕e3 ♖f6 9. f3 0-0.

8...bxc6

It may not seem like much, but Black's queenside pawns are weak and in endgames this will show up.

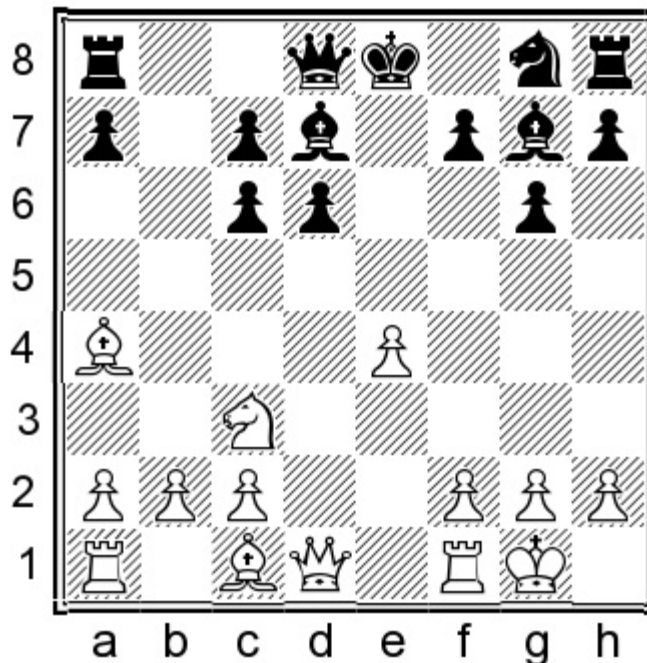
I don't see why trading bishops helps Black after 8... ♕xc6 9. ♕xc6+ bxc6 10. ♕e3. In fact, it seems like we have gained half a tempo because we didn't need to move our bishop back to a4.



The way to approach this position is to play ♖d2 and ♕h6, or play ♕d4 immediately to trade the bishops that way. Eventually, you can play f2-f4 and f4-f5, playing aggressively on the kingside. So I think taking back with the pawn is Black's better option after 8.♟xc6.

9.♕a4

It may look a little more natural to play 9.♕c4, but I finally decided the bishop is better on a4. This is because after 9.♕c4 ♞f6, Black very often gains counterplay with ...d6-d5. This is a tactical idea which actually works out quite often. On a4, the bishop will no longer be attacked by ...d6-d5.

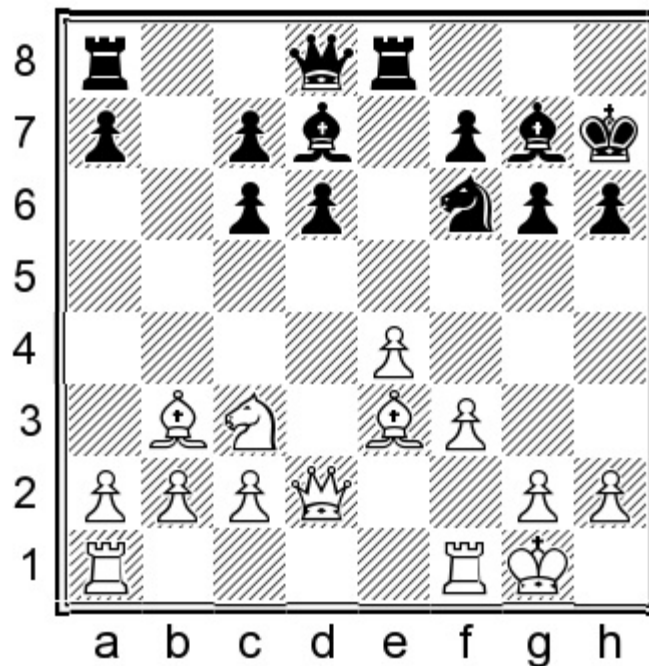


9...♞e7

Black can also develop his knight to f6. There are plusses and minuses to both moves.

The plus to the move **9...♞f6** is that generally speaking the knight is better placed here. It has more prospects of maybe coming to g4, then going to e5. The downside is that the knight gets in the way of the bishop and there is this pin, which is kind of annoying: **10.♙g5 h6 10...0-0 11.e5 dxe5 12.♘e4** is very dangerous for Black – and that is a slight understatement, as we are winning a piece here!

11.♙e3 11.♙h4 is not as good; Black plays **11...0-0** and has ideas of **...g6-g5**. **11...0-0 11...♞g4 12.♙d4** does not work out for Black. The trade of bishops is good for us and his knight is going to get kicked around by h2-h3 and f2-f4. **12.f3** Preparing ♖d2 – and that's the reason why we provoked **10...h6**. **12...♞e8 12...♞b8 13.♙d2 ♞xb2 14.♙b3** and although you always have to be careful about tactics in these positions, I think here the rook is just trapped. We are going to play **15.♘a4**. The other problem for Black is that after **12...♞b8**, his a7-pawn is just hanging, so all he did was create more problems for himself. **13.♙d2 ♞h7 13...h5 14.♙g5** with a very stable square for our bishop. **14.♙b3**



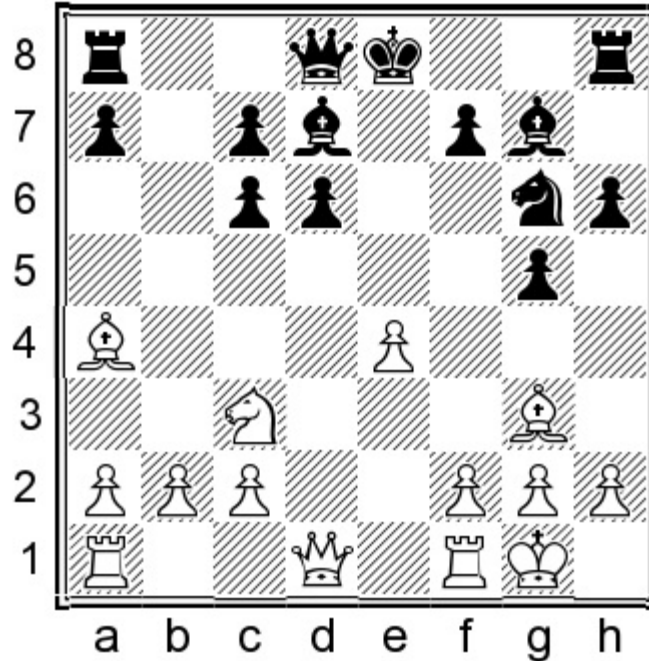
This is a very useful diagonal for the bishop and it already attacks the f7-pawn. I think White has a slight but stable advantage, based on the superior pawn structure. Black can play **14...♙e6**, but you'll notice that, also because of the pawn structure, Black really doesn't want to take on b3 because after **...♙xb3 axb3** you'll really see the weakness of the a7-pawn. White might now consider **15.♘e2** followed by **16.♘d4** to attack the bishop and ask Black a slightly uncomfortable question.

There is limited practice in this position, but **9...♞e7** is the more popular move.

10.♙e3

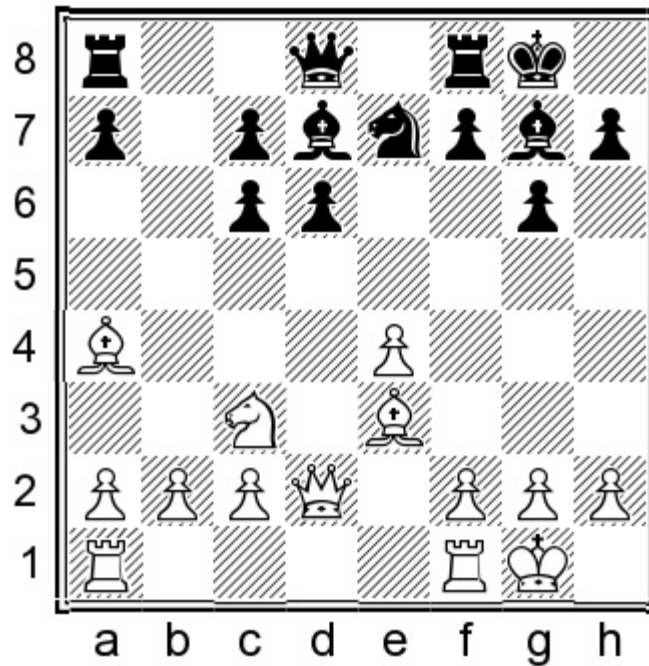
Danny King had a game with white where he played **10.♙g5 h6 11.♙h4 11.♙e3 0-0 12.♙d2 ♞h7** is not as useful as in the line we saw above. There are a few reasons for this. In general, with the knight on f6 instead of e7, we can play ♖d1 and we have ideas of playing e4-e5, but here I feel Black is more harmonious with the knight on e7. Black might try to get **...f7-f5** in, for example, and then **...g6-g5**. So

after 9...♘e7 I don't recommend provoking 10...h6. 11...g5 12.♙g3 ♘g6



Black is achieving something harmonious and it starts to look like he has a grip on the dark squares. Suddenly White can't play f2-f4, the e5-square is under Black's control and the knight on g6 is looking very stable. Of course, Black has also weakened his kingside a bit, especially the f5-square, but it's not easy for White to make use of it. The game finished in a draw: 13.f3 0-0 14.♖b1 ♔h7 15.♘e2 c5 16.c3 f5 17.exf5 ♙xf5 18.♙c2 ♚f6 19.b4 ♙xc2 20.♚xc2 ♚f5 21.♖fc1 ♖ab8 22.♚xf5 ♖xf5 23.♙f2 c4 24.♘d4 ♙xd4 25.♙xd4 ♘f4 26.♖e1 ♖f7 27.♖bd1 ♘d3 28.♖e4 c5 29.bxc5 dxc5 30.♙e3 ♖fb7 31.h4 ♖b1 32.♖xb1 ♖xb1+ 33.♔h2 ♖b2 ½-½ (49) King-Beikert, Germany Bundesliga 1998/99.

10...0-0 11.♚d2



Now we are ready for ♕h6. Positionally, this trade is good; it weakens Black's king – especially with the knight on e7. After the trade of bishops, the f6-square will become weaker.

11...♞b8 12.♕b3

Suddenly 13.♕xa7 is a threat and after...

12...c5

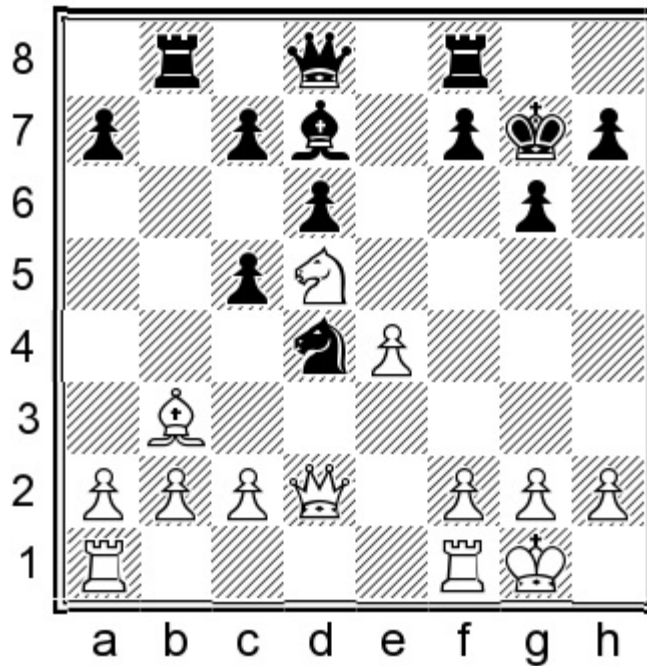
... we can trade bishops:

13.♕h6 ♘c6

Black can try to exploit the d4- square.

If left alone, White will attack on the kingside with f2-f4-f5.

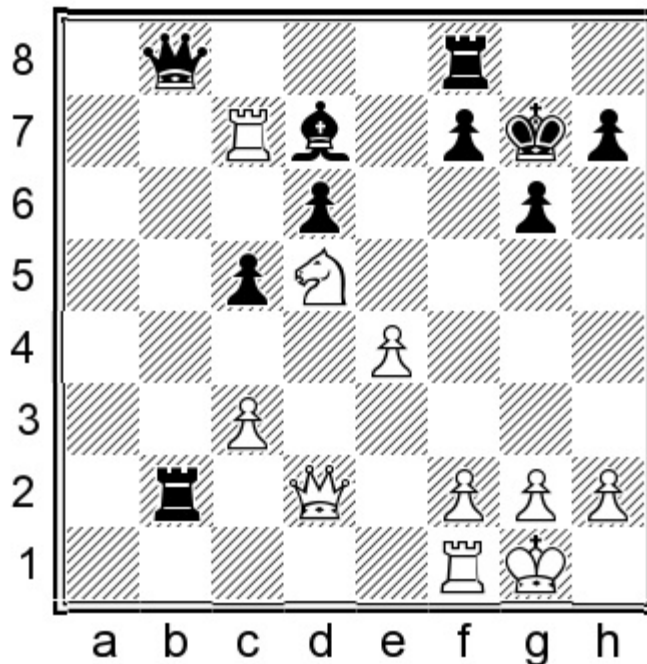
14.♕xg7 ♜xg7 15.♘d5 ♘d4



I don't think this is such a dangerous move for us. Play can continue:

16.c3 ♖xb3 17.axb3 ♜xb3 18.♞xa7

This is not a good trade for Black, because c7 is suddenly very weak. You will also notice the weakness of Black's queenside. If his queen were ever to move, for example, then Black is in big trouble: 18...♞b8 19.♞xc7 ♜xb2



20.♞f4 and 21.♞f6+ is a mating attack.

This is not the only way for White to play, but I just don't see the black knight coming to d4 as a dangerous threat. We could either cover this with c2-c3 or wait for the knight to get there and then

play c2-c3, as we just saw. Also, after our knight goes to d5, we must keep in mind that ♖d2-c3 (+) at some point could be extremely dangerous for Black.

So I quite like this whole line. It took me a while to decide that this is the way White should play, but when I saw the idea with 9.♗a4 it started to feel really good for White. On a4, the bishop is much more annoying for Black than it would be on c4. It attacks c6, it keeps Black a bit congested in a way and it doesn't run into these ...d6-d5 ideas.

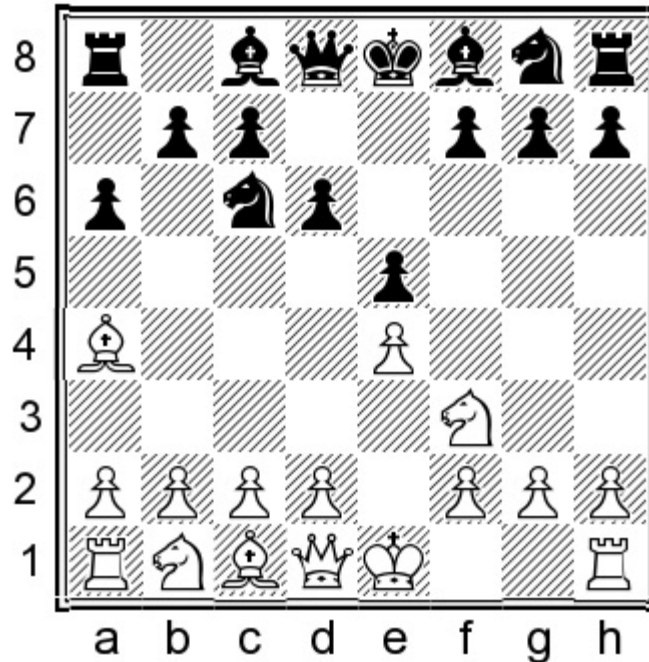
Black's queenside pawns are a real weakness, but this doesn't become noticeable until later in the game. I don't even think the half-open b-file is useful for Black. It only looks superficially active.

The Classical Steinitz with 3...d6 remains a viable system, but after 4.d4 I think that White can fight for an advantage.

Chapter 17

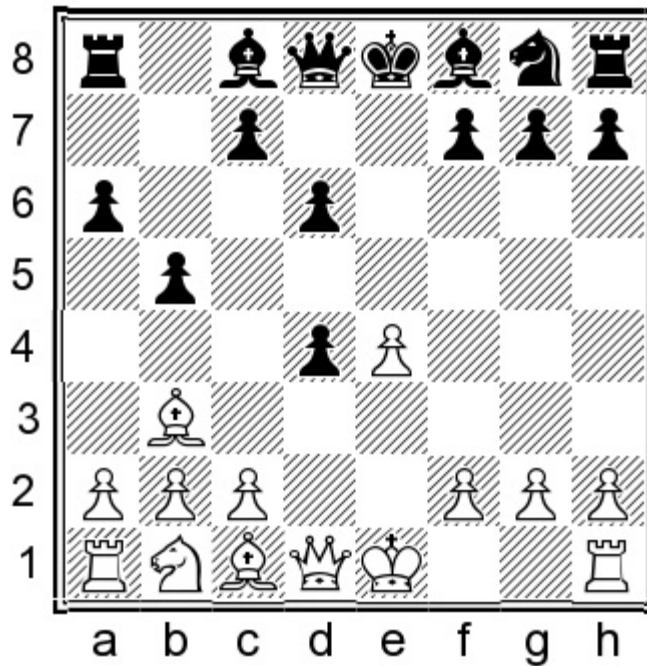
Steinitz Defence Deferred: 3...a6 4.♘a4 d6

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 a6 4.♘a4 d6



This is a more popular version for Black. The Steinitz Defence Deferred is an attempt for Black to improve his chances of gaining activity, by delaying ...d7-d6 by one move.

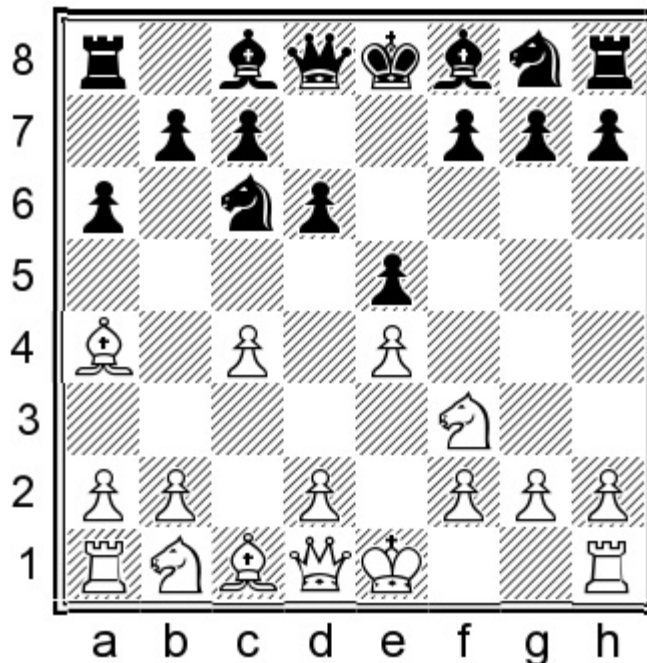
I should make one observation here. If you ever find yourself in a must-draw situation for White, then 5.d4 is the move I recommend. The reason is that here Black plays 5...b5 (if Black takes we have a better version of the other lines after 5...exd4 6.♞xd4 ♙d7 7.♞xc6 bxc6) and now 6.♙b3 ♞xd4 7.♞xd4 exd4



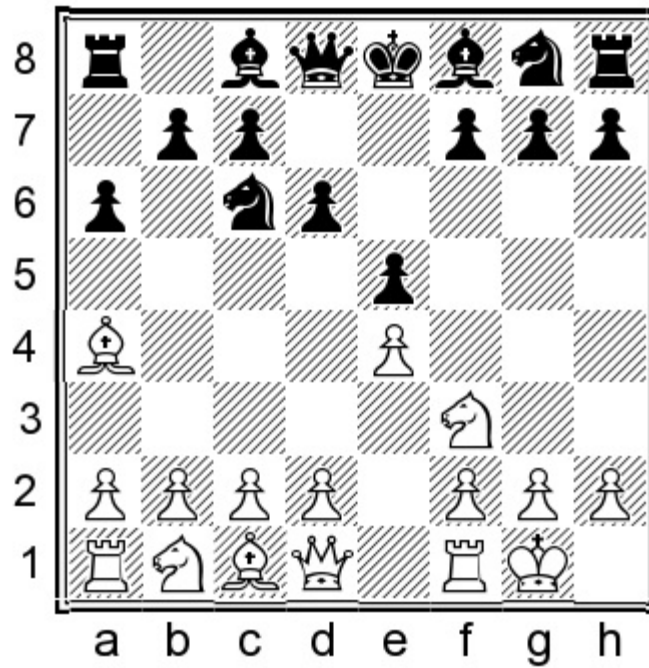
8.c3 (the old trap 8.♞xd4 c5 9.♞d5 ♔e6 10.♞c6+ ♔d7 11.♞d5 c4 is definitely not the way White wants to play) 8...dxc3 (Black should take, otherwise White will get the centre with 9.cxd4) 9.♞d5 (9.♞xc3 is not a fully adequate pawn sacrifice) 9...♔e6 10.♞c6+ ♔d7 11.♞d5 ♔e6 and this is a famous drawing line, but not something I want to recommend for White.

So I was a bit torn here, as White has two main moves to try for an advantage. The other move is 5.c3, immediately trying to gain the centre.

As an aside, there is also the move 5.c4, which is rather popular, but not as much as the two main lines. It stops ...b7-b5 and White plays ♞c3 and d2-d4 to try and get a sort of Maroczy Bind.



Even though it is popular, I don't think it's the best way to fight for an advantage, but it could be



we are sort of playing in a different way. Here, we are trying to get d2-d4 without playing c2-c3 first. I think this fits in well with the other lines in our repertoire.

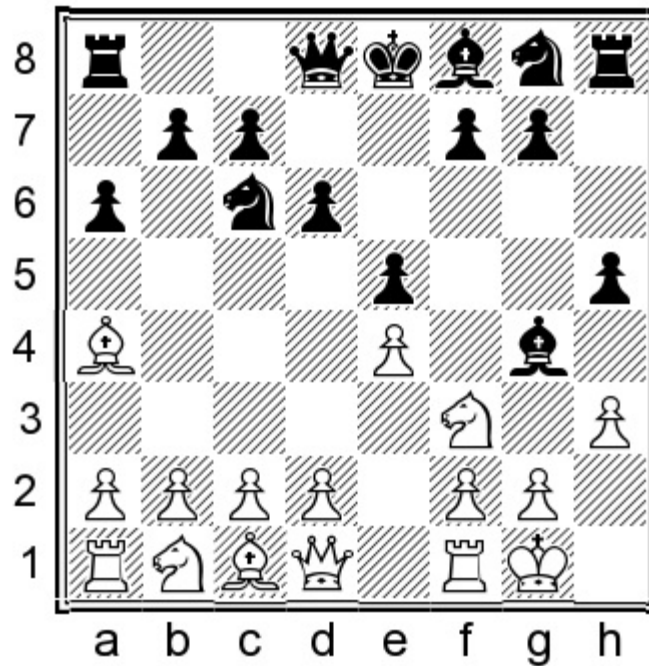
Of course, we have to be prepared for Black's next move:

The piece sac

5...♗g4?!

An old move which is considered dubious these days – but still very difficult to handle if you don't know it well.

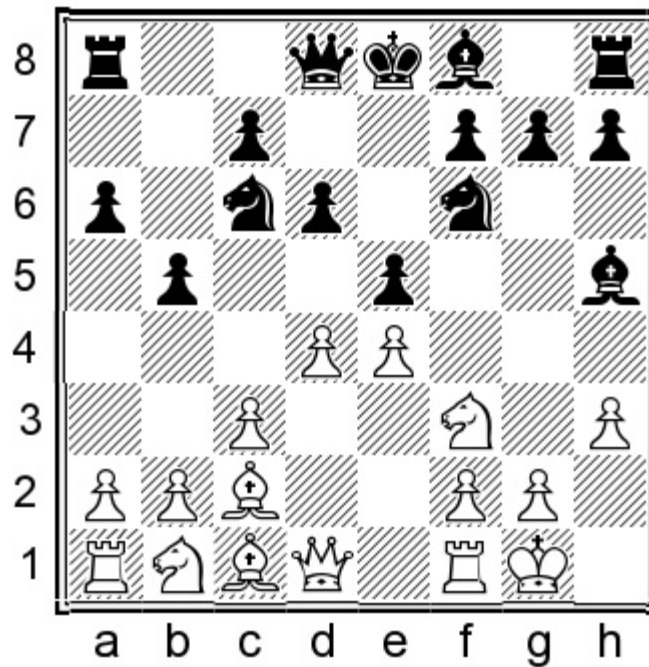
6.h3 h5



A typical idea, which is also seen in the Exchange Ruy Lopez.

If Black takes on f3 then he is admitting that 5...Qg4 is not the way to play. White will gain the bishop pair and then play c2-c3 and d2-d4.

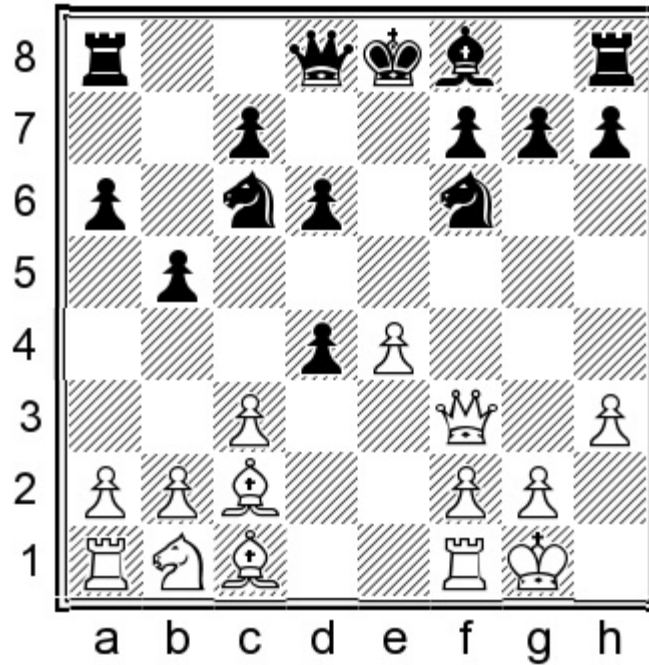
Likewise, if Black plays 6...Qh5 White quickly gets the centre: 7.c3 Qf6 8.d4 Already threatening to take on e5 or in some lines to go to d5, which are both very strong. 8...b5 9.Qc2



Now Black has to somehow challenge our centre, because if we are given a few moves to consolidate with Qe3 and Qbd2 then we just have the centre and an advantage – and Black has no compensation for it: 9...Qxf3 9...exd4 10.cxd4 Qxf3 11.gxf3 and we are not worried about this structure. Of course our kingside is a bit weakened, but on the other hand we have the bishop and the centre. Black's

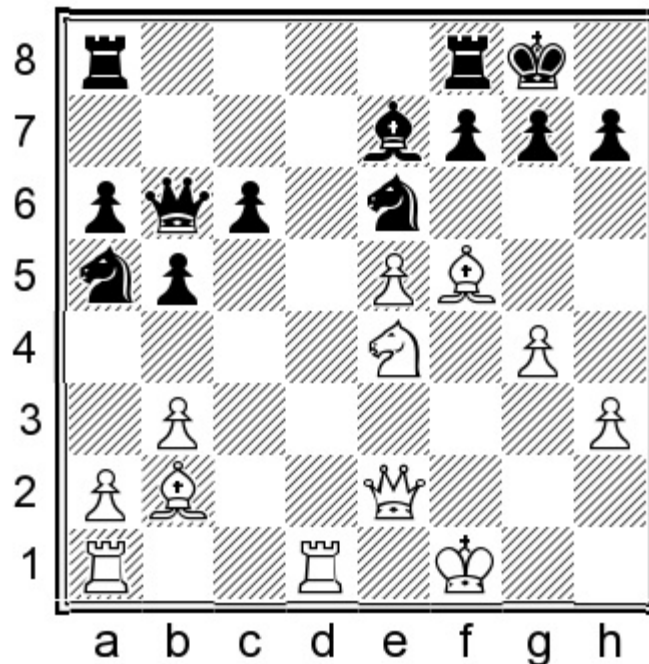
knight on c6 is rather awkwardly placed. We will follow up with ♞c3 and f3-f4 . We will end up with a huge centre and the doubled pawns are not too relevant here. White has a serious advantage.

10. ♖xf3 10.gxf3 ♞h5 is a different story; Black will get a grip on the dark squares. **10...exd4**



11. ♖d3! A suggestion from a chess engine. It is an extremely strong move which gives White an almost decisive advantage.

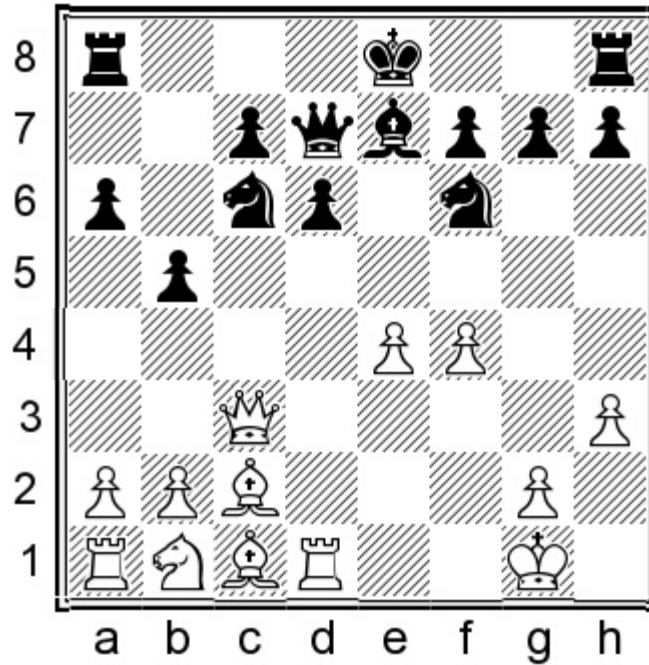
There are some old games with an alternative move here, such as this one: $11.\text{♖d1 } \text{♞e5 } 12.\text{♗g3 } \text{♞h5 } 13.\text{♗h2 } \text{dxc3 } 14.\text{♞xc3 } \text{c6 } 15.\text{f4 } \text{♗b6+ } 16.\text{♙f1 } \text{♞c4 } 17.\text{g4 } \text{♞f6 } 18.\text{♗e2 } \text{♞e7 } 19.\text{b3 } \text{♞a5 } 20.\text{e5 } \text{dxe5 } 21.\text{fxe5 } \text{♞d7 } 22.\text{♞f5 } \text{♞f8 } 23.\text{♞e4 } \text{♞e6 } 24.\text{♞b2 } 0-0$



$25.\text{♞f6+ } \text{gxf6 } 26.\text{exf6 } \text{♞c5 } 27.\text{♞xe6 } \text{♙h8 } 28.\text{♖d7 } \text{♗ae8 } 29.\text{♖ad1 } \text{♞b7 } 30.\text{♗e7 } \text{♖d8 } 31.\text{♖xf7 and 1-0}$

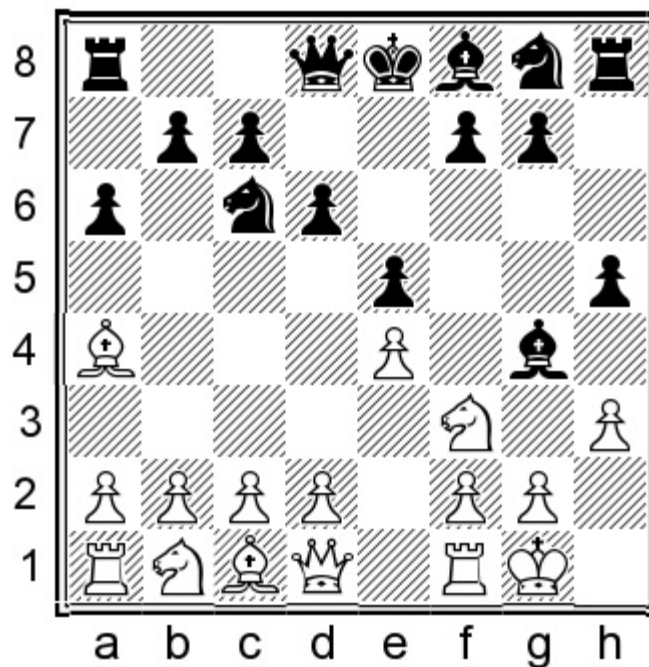
(37) Altshuler-Estrin, cr 1965.

11...dxc3 Black can also get rid of our bishop pair but only at the cost of giving us a very strong centre: 11...♔e7 12.cxd4 ♖b4 13.♕c3 ♗xc2 14.♕xc2 0-0 15.♘c3 c5 16.dxc5 dxc5 17.e5 and White has a large advantage. **12.♕xc3 ♕d7** The knight on c6 is difficult to handle. For example, if 12...♘e5 13.f4, hitting the knight again. **13.♖d1 ♔e7 14.f4**



And Black will find it very difficult to deal with the threat of e4-e5. In fact White is already practically winning.

So that's why Black doesn't play 6...♔h5 in this line.



7.d4!

A strong move. It's not a new one – there have been many games from this position.

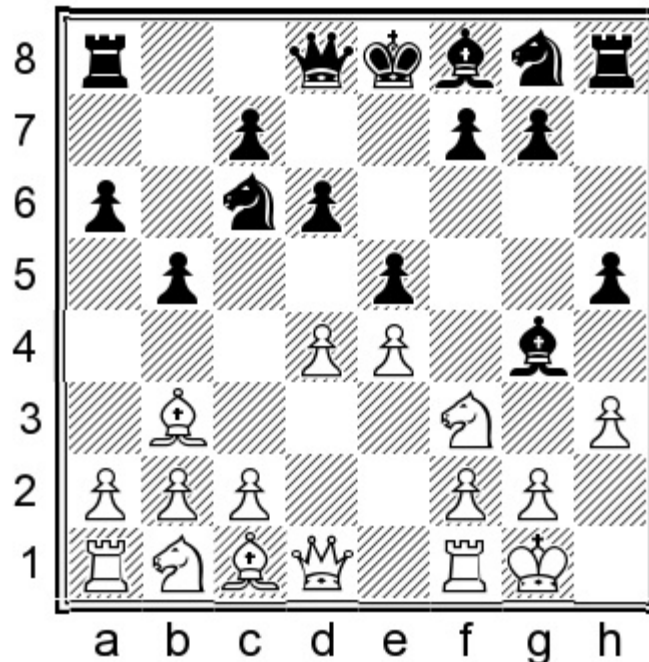
You don't want to take here: 7.hxg4 hxg4 and suddenly the h-file is open and if the knight moves from f3 then Black plays ...♔h4 and mates.

The main point of 7.d4 is that we control g5, so if 7...exd4 8.hxg4 hxg4 we play 9.♘g5, and the knight is defended by the bishop. There is no ...♔h4 for Black and we are ready to take on g4 as well. There's really nothing good in this position for Black.

7...b5

The main move, breaking the pin.

8.♙b3



8...♗xd4

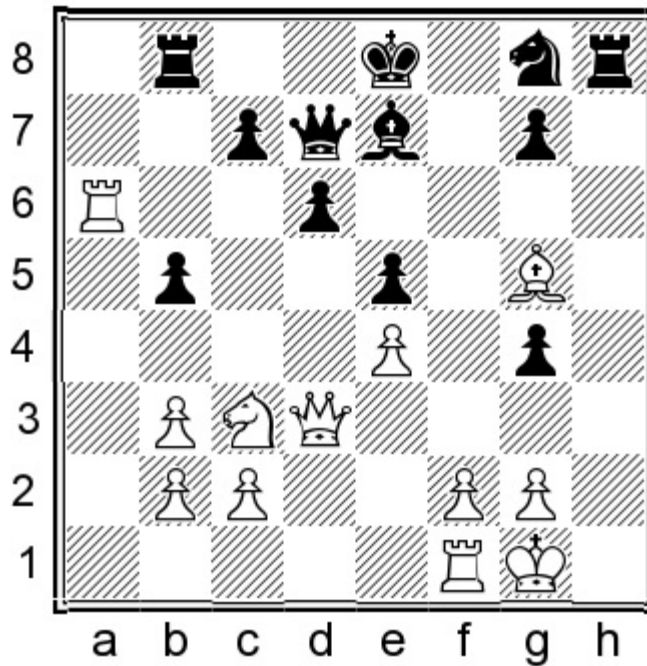
Black commits to sacrificing a piece.

It is important that Black can't play 8...♙xf3 first, because after 9.♔xf3 f7 is hanging. There is another move-order too: 7...♙xf3 8.♔xf3 b5 (8...exd4 9.e5! and this is going to get very nasty for Black. He has no development and this king is stuck in the centre) 9.♙b3.

Now, we have to take the bishop. There is nothing else to do.

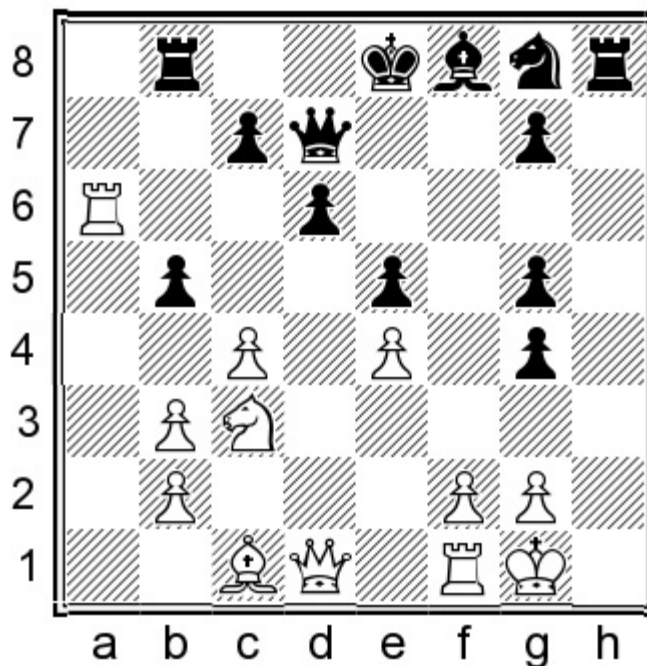
9.hxg4 hxg4

Black has to decide whether or not to take on b3 in this line. Taking on b3 avoids the ♙d5 trick we



16.f4 gxf3 17.♙xf3 ♘f6 18.♘d5 ♘xd5 19.♙f7+ ♔d8 20.♙xg7 ♔c8 21.♙xh8+ ♔b7 22.♙h7 ♙g4 23.exd5 ♙d4+ 24.♔h1 ♙xg5 25.♟fa1 ♙e3 26.♟a7+ and 1-0 (33) Gashimov-Grischuk, Baku 2008.

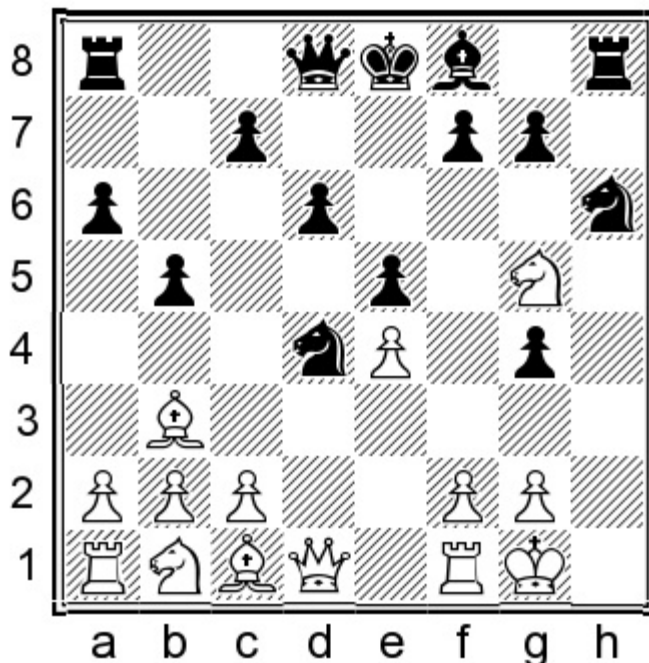
My recommendation is **12.c4**. Now Black usually plays **12...♟b8**. Black wants to recapture with the a-pawn, so he can use the c-pawn to go to c6 (the point of 12.c4 is shown after 12...c6 13.cxb5 cxb5 14.♘c3 f6 15.♙d5! attacking the rook and preparing 16.♘e6), but now we can take on a6: **13.♟xa6 f6** We no longer have 14.♙d5, but we no longer care about the knight on g5 either. We have broken up his queenside and we are ready to sacrifice the knight: **14.♘c3 fxe5**



Now Black has ideas of getting his queen to the h-file, so we need to act fast, although with accurate moves we don't need to be too afraid of his threats. White is the one with the most immediate initiative: **15.♟a7! ♙f7 16.♘d5 ♙h5 17.♘xc7+ ♔d8 18.♙xg5+ ♘f6** Black can't allow 18...♙xg5

19. ♖e6+. 19. f4 exf4 Neither 19...g3 20. ♖xh5 or 19...♖h2+ 20. ♕f2 help Black. There is much less danger for White's king when compared to Black's king now. 20. ♖e6+ ♕e8 21. ♕f2! and Black's attack was quickly over after 21...g3+ 22. ♕e1 ♖xd1+ 23. ♕xd1 1-0 in Makarov-Calonge Gonzalez, cr 2012.

10. ♖g5 ♖h6



Black stops the threats of taking on f7 and g4, but on the other hand, as he has blocked the h-file, he won't be mating me any time soon. Black's play now doesn't come down the h-file, but after ...♕e7 he will be trying to take advantage of my knight on g5. It isn't trapped but it is strangely placed and difficult to defend. We do have a strong move in reply:

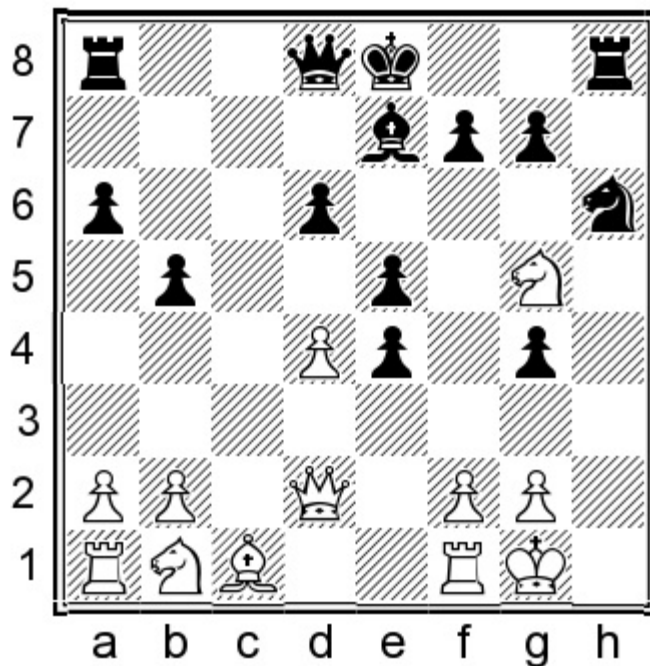
11. ♕d5 c6

It is difficult for Black, e.g. 11...♕e7 12. c3 ♕xg5 13. cxd4 or 11...♖b8 12. c3 and the knight is embarrassed.

12. c3 cxd5 13. cxd4

We are up a piece, but the game is far from over, because our knight on g5 is rather marooned. This line is still being played by Black. There have been dozens of games; it is a very theoretical position.

13...♕e7 14. ♖d2 dxe4



15. ♖c3!

Playing this move immediately is better than 15.dxe5. White has ideas of ♖cxe4 and also ♖d5, as we would love to get rid of Black's bishop. I wouldn't say it is over by any means, but it is much better for White. You will still have to play very well to win this. Black has a number of pawns for the piece, and you will still have to watch out for the h-file, but his attack is not going anywhere.

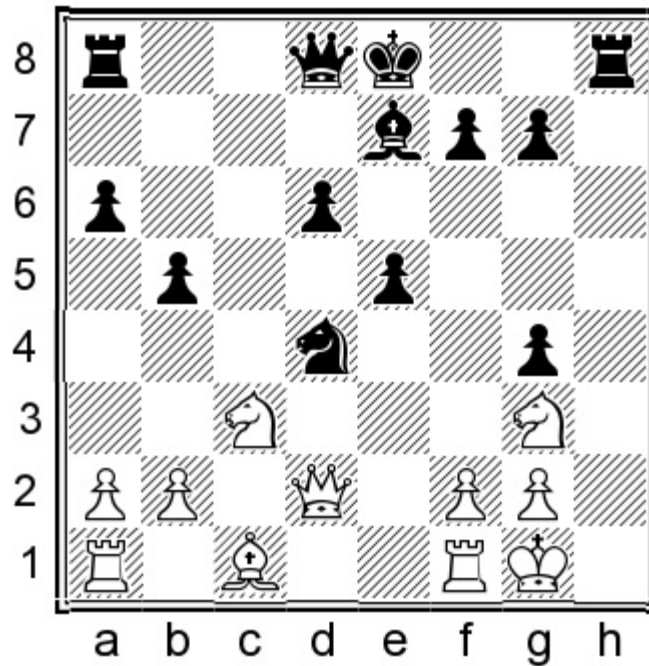
Here is a sample game with the older move: 15.dxe5 d5 16.♖c3 e3 17.♙xd5 ♗xg5 18.♙c6+ ♔f8 19.♗xe3 ♗xe3 20.fxe3 ♙e8 21.♙d6+ ♔g8 22.♞ad1 g3 23.♖d5 ♔h7 24.♞f6 ♖g4 25.♞d4 ♞d8 26.♞xg4 ♞xd6 27.exd6 ♔g8 28.♖e7+ ♔f8 29.♖g6+ ♔g8 30.♖e7+ ♔f8 31.♖g6+ with a draw in De Firmian-Timman, Reykjavik 2000.

Now Black can try to open the h-file again:

15... ♖f5 16. ♖gxe4 ♖xd4

16...exd4 17.♖d5 looks closer to winning for White than anything else. Again, if Black could play ...♙h4 here, he would be mating us, but unfortunately for him, there is no way for the queen to get there. Our next move could be 18.♙f4, for example.

17. ♖g3!



Suddenly, we have the h1-square covered, so the knight on g3 really defends our king very well and Black is going to have a hard time attacking. This is a very important point.

These lines, although complicated, are objectively good for White. If White doesn't know the lines or forgets something then he can get mated.

However, you should approach these lines with confidence, knowing that the position is good for White. You will likely have to solve problems over the board at some point because it's impossible to remember everything. If you calculate well, then you're probably going to win.

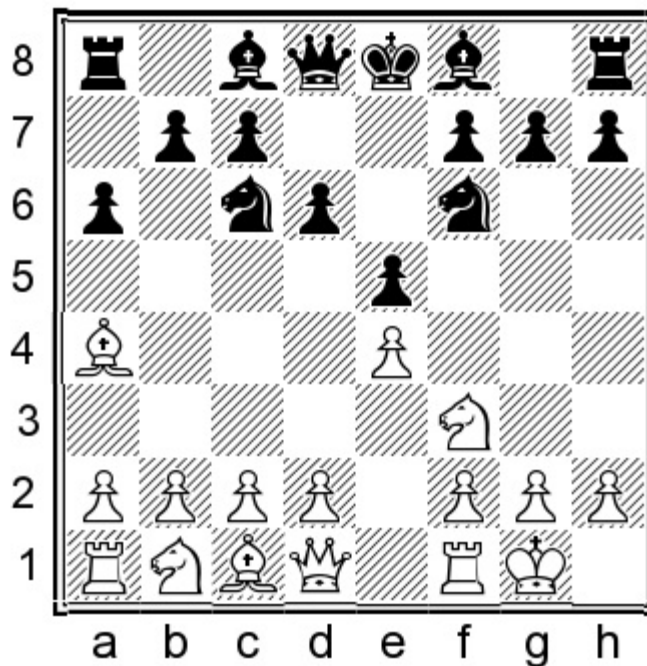
If Black wants to go for this, it's a gamble and as White we should be ready to take our chance. I think these days it's only going to be employed as a surprise weapon, in the hope that White doesn't know what to do.

Black develops – 5...Qd7/ 5...Nf6

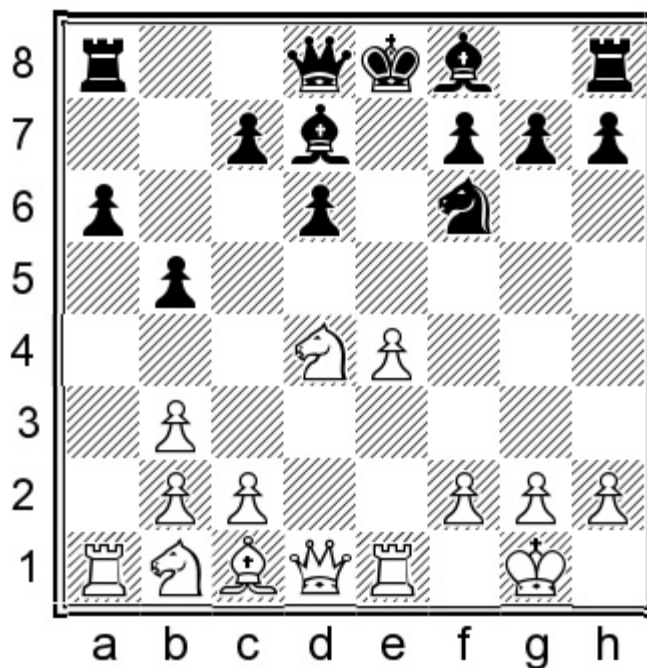
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Qb5 a6 4.Qa4 d6 5.0-0 Qd7

A typical way for Black to deal with the pin.

5...Nf6 is actually a bit shaky:

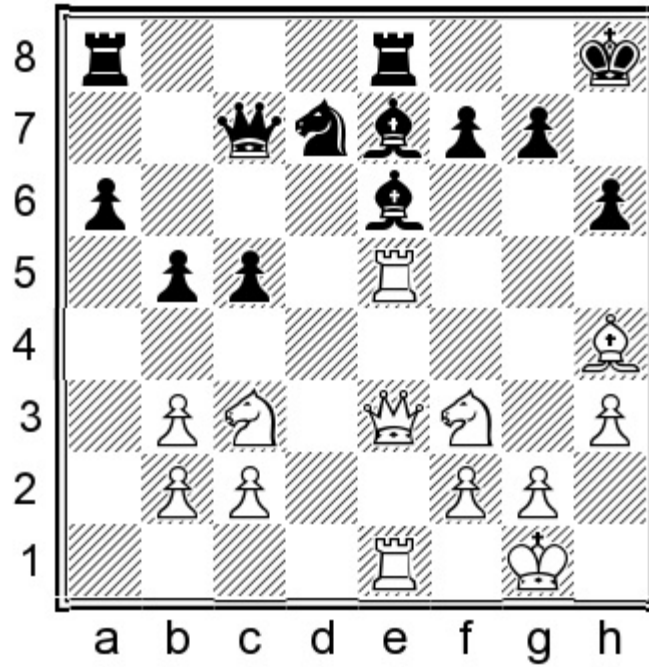


6.♞e1 b5 7.♙b3 ♞a5 Trying to gain the bishop pair, but Black is mixing his systems. He was probably worried that if he played something like 7...♙e7 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 we would have ended up in one of the main lines of the Classical Spanish. 8.d4 is also an interesting move: 8...♞xd4 9.♞xd4 exd4 and it might be possible to play 10.c3 here. **8.d4 ♞xb3** Black gains the bishop pair but it doesn't work out for him. **9.axb3 exd4 10.♞xd4 ♙d7**



11.♞f5 The simplest move. Ideas with ♙g5 and e4-e5 are a real threat. Black has to get rid of the knight somehow and probably the best way to do it is to just take it immediately: **11...♙xf5 12.exf5+ ♙e7 13.♞e2** and Black will struggle to break the pin. Unfortunately for Black, he's not going to be castling any time soon. He might have to resort to artificial castling with ...♞f8 at some point and as we haven't even invested any material, we have a large advantage.

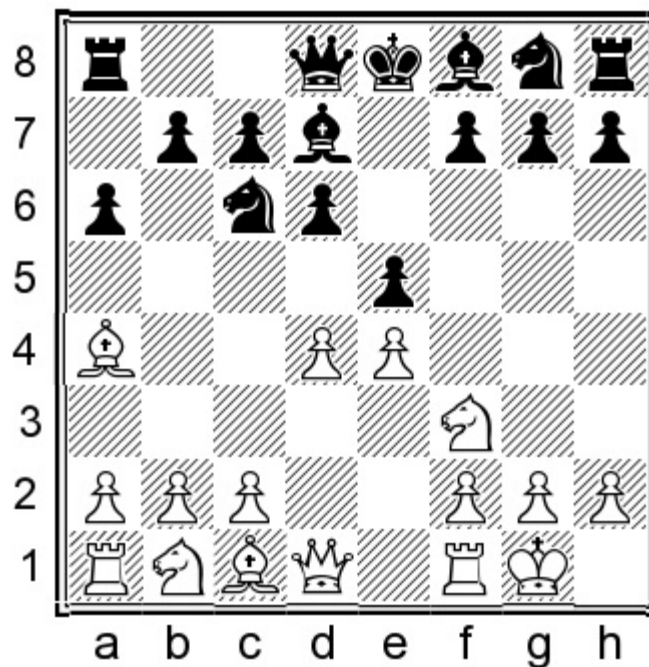
There was a game where Hübner played 11.e5 dxe5 12.♞xe5+ ♕e7 13.♞e2 c5 14.♘f3 ♕e6 15.♙g5 0-0 16.♘c3 ♞c7 17.h3 h6 18.♙h4 ♞fe8 19.♞e1 ♖h8 20.♞e3 ♘d7



21.♞xe6 fxe6 22.♙xe7 b4 23.♘h4 bxc3 24.bxc3 ♞c6 25.♞d1 c4 26.♞d6 ♞b5 27.♞xe6 ♘f8 28.♞f7 ♞xe7 29.♞xe7 ♞e8 30.♞c7 ♞e1+ 31.♖h2 ♞e5+ 32.g3 ♞e2 33.♞b6 ♖h7 34.♞d8 ♘e6 35.♞h8+ 1-0 Hübner-Kavalek, Tilburg 1980.

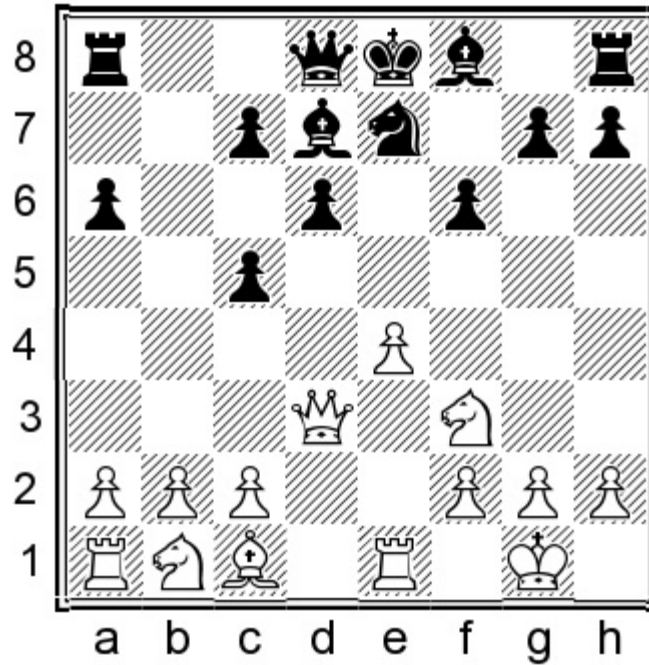
After 5...♙d7 I recommend:

6.d4

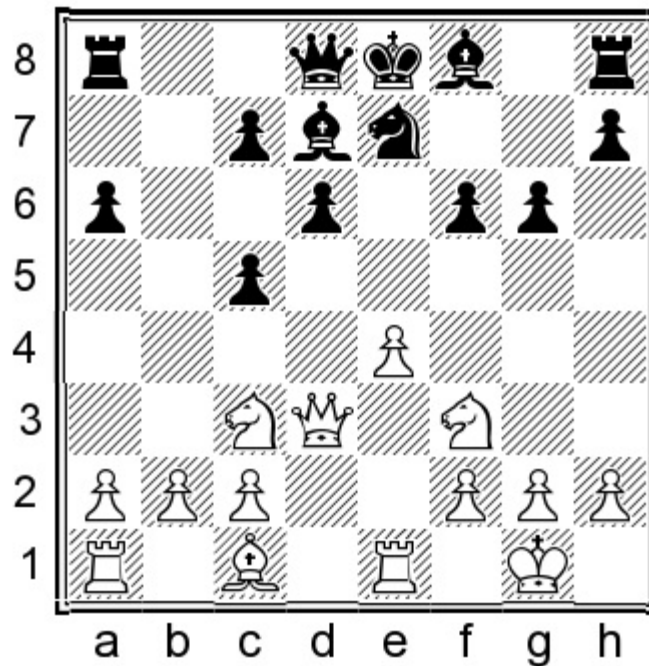


Now in this position, Black has a choice:

A) Black can accept the immediate damage to his structure with 6...exd4 7.♙xc6 7...bxc6. In this case we can take the chance to recapture with the queen: 8.♚xd4 c5 (8...♘f6 runs into 9.e5, as usual; it's always an idea to watch out for) 9.♚d3 ♘e7 10.♞e1 f6.



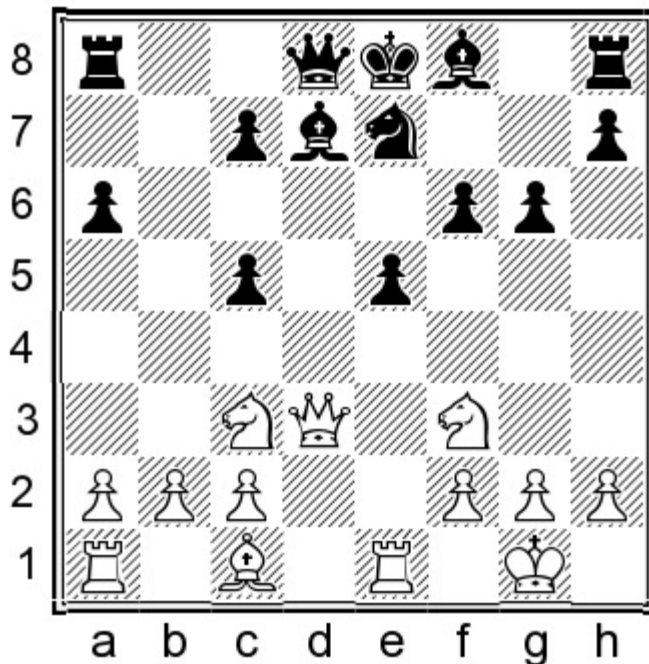
Black wants to stop e4-e5 and then play ...g7-g6, ...♙g7, ...0-0 and get some sort of stability. The problem is that he's too undeveloped: 11.♘c3 g6



and now 12.♘d5 is a perfectly good move, and White went on to win after 12...♙g7 13.♙f4 ♙e6 14.c3 0-0 15.b4 cxb4 16.cxb4 ♙f7 17.♞ac1 ♘xd5 18.exd5 ♚d7 19.a3 ♞fe8 20.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 21.h3 g5 22.♙e3 h5 23.♚c4 g4 24.hxg4 hxg4 25.♘d4 f5 26.♘e6 ♙xe6 27.dxe6 ♚xe6 28.♚xe6+ ♞xe6 29.♞xc7 ♙e5 30.♞c6 f4 31.♙d2 g3 32.♙f1 ♙d4 33.fxg3 fxg3 34.♙e1 ♞f6+ 35.♙e2 ♞e6+ 36.♙d1 ♙e5 37.♞xa6 1-0 (51) in Mista-Piorun, Warsaw 2018.

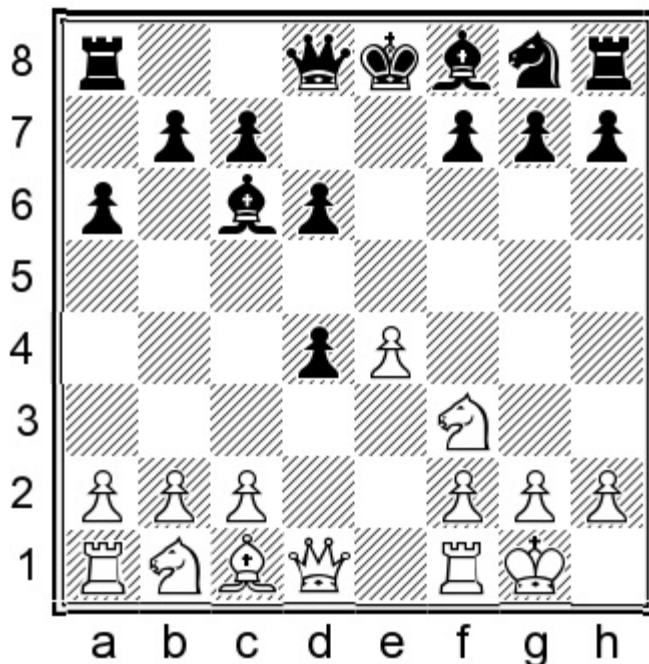
I noticed there was a beautiful move instead of 12.♖d5, and that is 12.e5!.

Although this position is unlikely to appear in practice, this move is very strong: 12...dxe5 (if 12...fxe5 13.♗g5 and if Black misses the threat with 13...♗g7 we play 14.♖d5! and Black can resign, although there is no good move for Black anyway and we are winning)

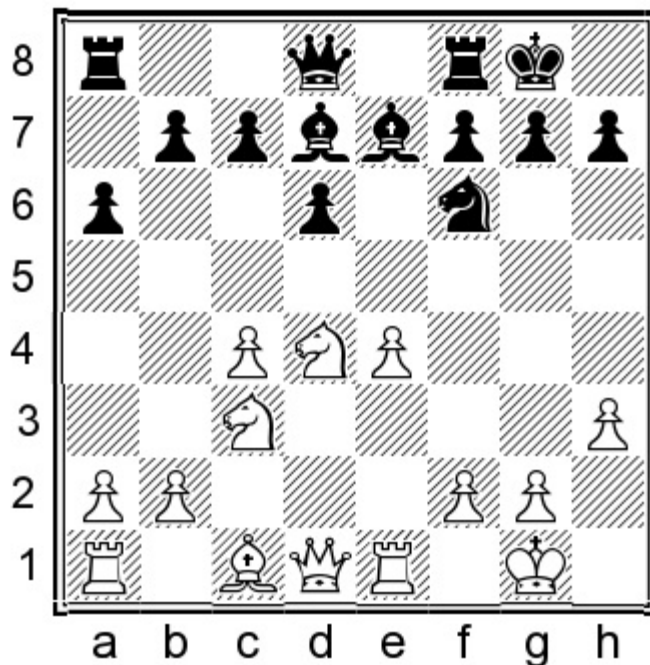


13.♗g5! (I think this is a beautiful idea) 13...♗g7 (13...fxg5 14.♖xe5 ♗xe5 (15...♗f5 16.♗c4 with too many threats for Black to deal with: 16...♗xd1 17.♗f7+) 16.♗xe5 ♗g4 17.♗de1 ♗xd3 18.♗xe7+ and we end up with equal material but you can see by Black's pawn structure that White is winning.

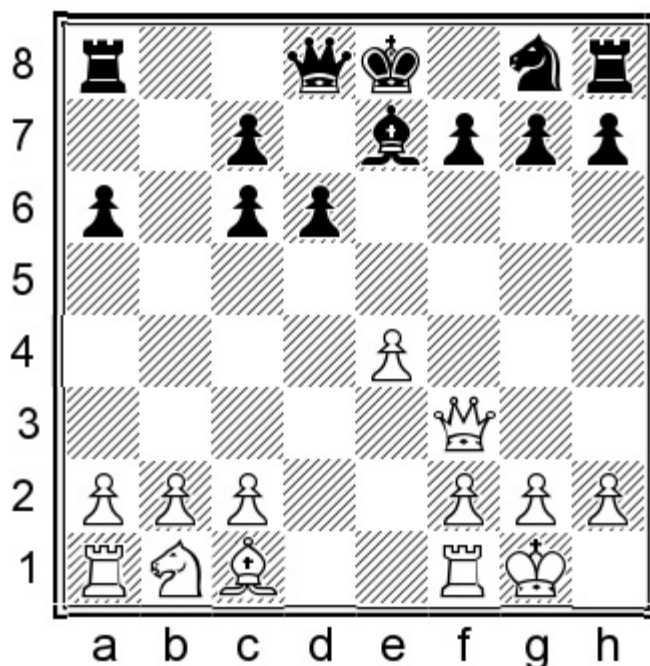
This is why, after 6...exd4 7.♗xc6, 7...♗xc6 is the better move.



8. ♖xd4 ♙e7 Black's other choice is going back with the bishop, not allowing us to damage his structure: 8...♙d7. Now that e4 is not hanging, we can take the opportunity to set up the Maroczy pawn structure: 9.c4 ♞f6 10.♞c3 ♙e7 11.h3 0-0 12.♞e1.

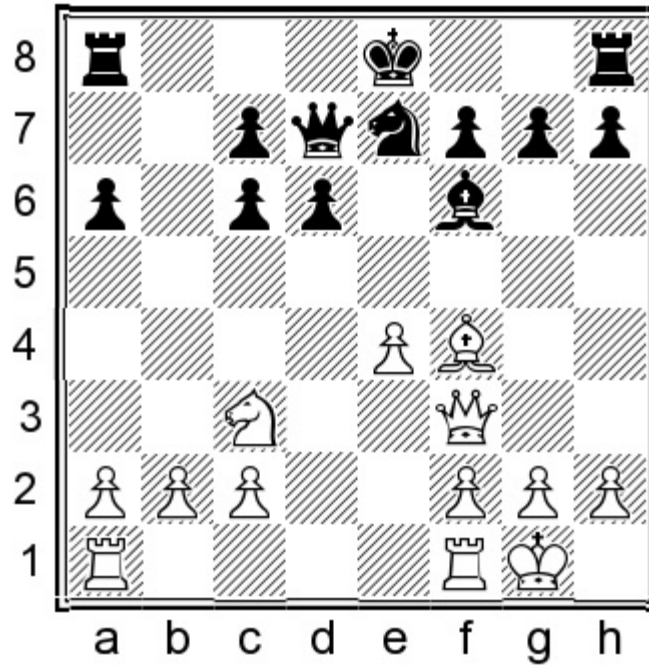


All things being equal, we prefer our pawn to be on c4 rather than c2. I think it was worth the tempo. It gives us more space and restricts ...b7-b5 and ...d6-d5. We'll follow up with the typical moves ♙f3, ♙f4, ♞ad1 and eventually g2-g4. 9. ♞xc6 In general it is always a good idea to make this trade. 9...bxc6 10. ♙f3!

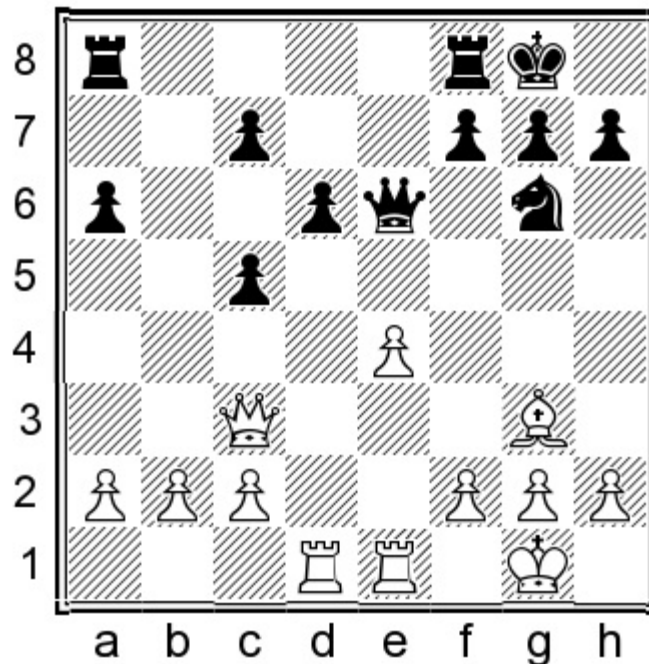


A very strong move, worth remembering. The queen is generally good here. 10...♙d7 10...♞f6 11.e5 dxe5 12.♙xc6+ ♞d7 13.♞d1 is bad for Black, who has a bad structure and a weak king, which is not going to be castling any time soon. 11. ♙f4 The computer mentions a slightly weird idea here: 11.b3

♖f6 12. ♘c3 ♗e7 13. ♕d2. I think this is a sign that White just has a good position, structurally.
 11... ♕f6 11... ♗f6 12. ♘c3 0-0 13. e5 dxe5 14. ♕xe5, once again with a significant structural advantage.
 12. ♘c3 ♗e7

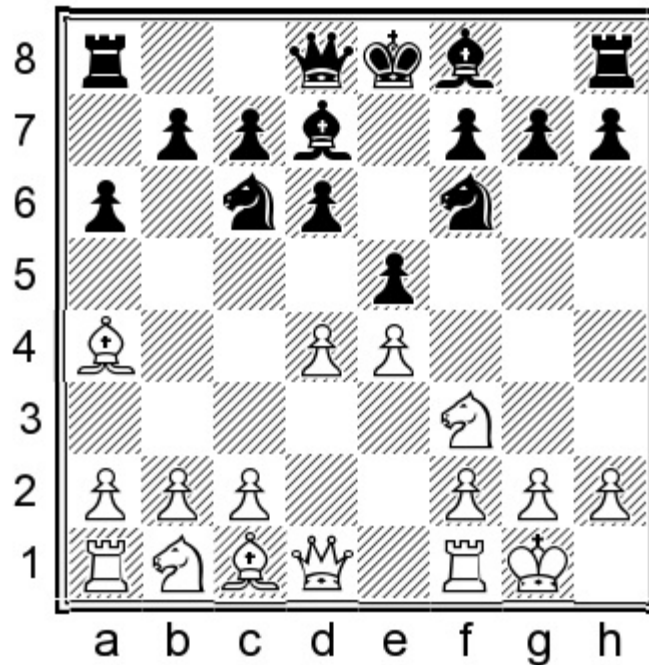


13. ♖d3! Another very good move. I am wondering if the white player had prepared deeply, as he played so well, but it's also possible that he found all this stuff over the board. 13... ♕xc3 13... ♗g6 14. ♕d2 0-0 15. f4 ♖ab8 16. b3; 13... 0-0 14. e5 ♗g6 15. exf6 ♗xf4 and White has a large advantage in both cases. 14. ♖xc3 0-0 15. ♖ad1 I really like the way Motylev played in this game. He just played natural, good moves and kept putting pressure on Black. A lot of his play was based on the fact that e4-e5 is a strong idea. 15... ♖e6 16. ♖fe1 c5 It is worth mentioning that after 16... ♖xa2 17. b3 Black's queen is marooned on a2. 17. ♕g3 ♗g6

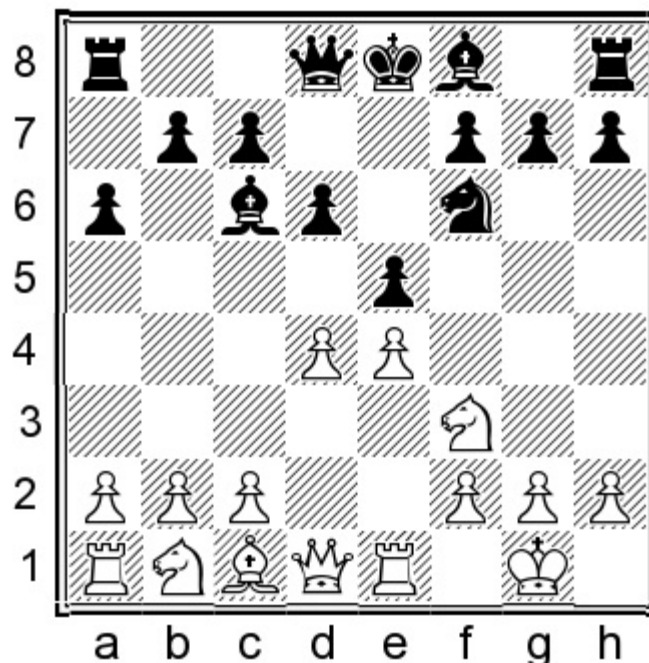


White quickly converted this position just based on the fact that he had the better structure: 18.e5 dxe5 19.♙xe5 ♘xe5 20.♞xe5 ♚xa2 21.b3 ♚a3. Now Black's pawns start to drop off: 22.♞xc5 a5 23.g3 ♞ad8 24.♞a1 ♚b4 25.♚xb4 axb4 26.♞xc7 and 1-0 (32) Motylev-Le Roux, London 2017. I think this is a model game, showing how White exploits the weaknesses in Black's structure;

B) 6...♘f6 is a natural-looking move.



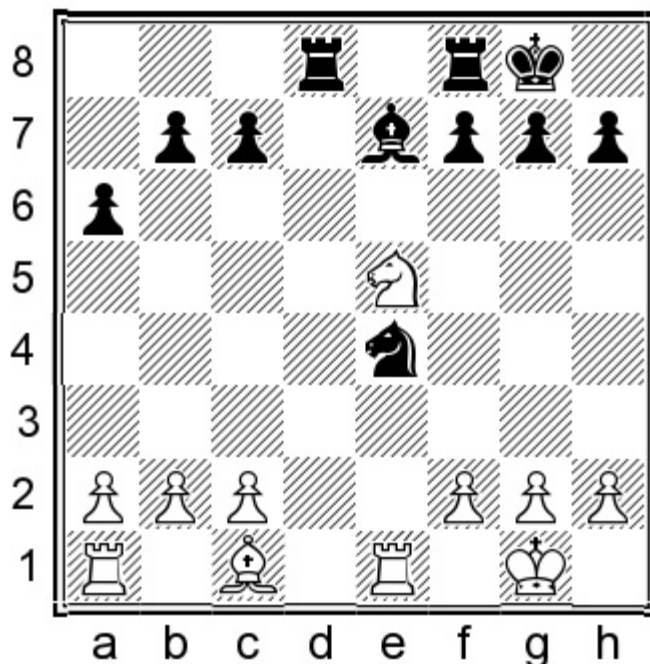
Here, we give up the bishop pair voluntarily, but with good reason, I think: 7.♙xc6 7...♞e1 is the natural move, but there are these things you kind of have to deal with... 7...b5 8.♙b3 ♘xd4 9.♘xd4 exd4 and we can't take back because of 10...c5. 7...♙xc6 8.♞e1



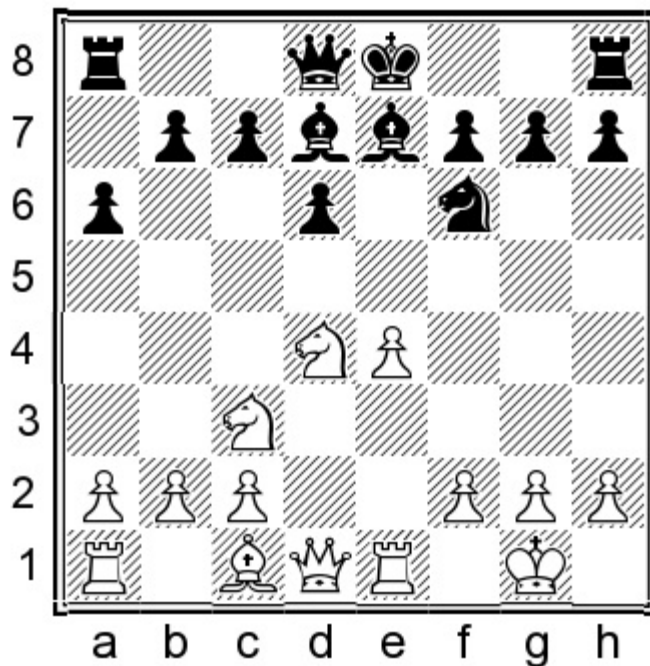
It is important to note that our e-pawn is sort of hanging, but also sort of poisoned, in a way 8...♘xe4

is now directly losing a piece to 9.d5 and 8...♙xe4 gives White a very strong initiative, either with 9.♘c3 or with 9.♙g5, when after 9...♙xf3 10.♚xf3 suddenly everything is hanging.

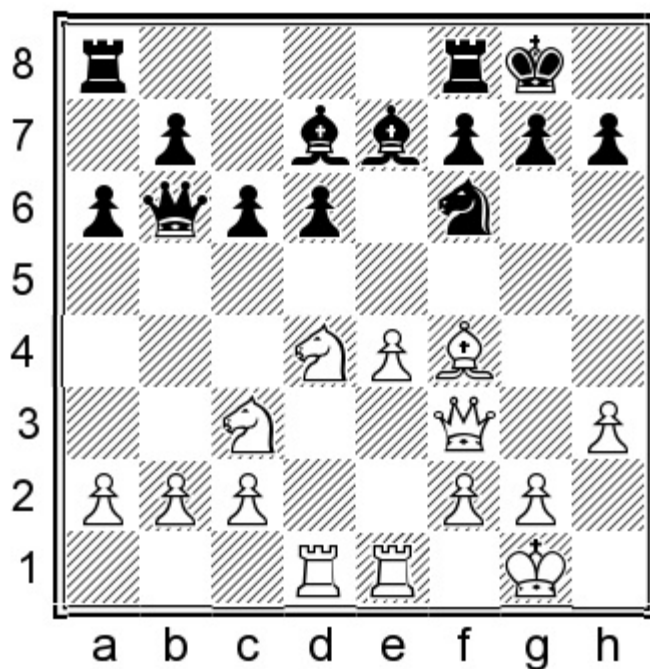
Black has another choice. He can give up the centre immediately or bring out the bishop first: 8...♙e7 9.♘c3 exd4 Black is obliged to give up the centre. If instead he tries to exploit the weakness of our back rank – which is not so obvious in this position – then this doesn't work out for him: 9...0-0 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♚xd8 ♖axd8 12.♘xe5 ♙xe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4



and we can't capture the knight because of the check on d1, but we do have a very nice move: 14.♘d3, covering the back rank and now we have a skewer on the knight and the bishop. Black has only one way to preserve the piece: 14...f5 15.f3 ♙c5+ 16.♘xc5 ♘xc5 17.♙g5. For the moment, Black has saved the material, but wherever the rook moves, White has 18.♙e7, winning an exchange. 10.♘xd4 10...♙d7.

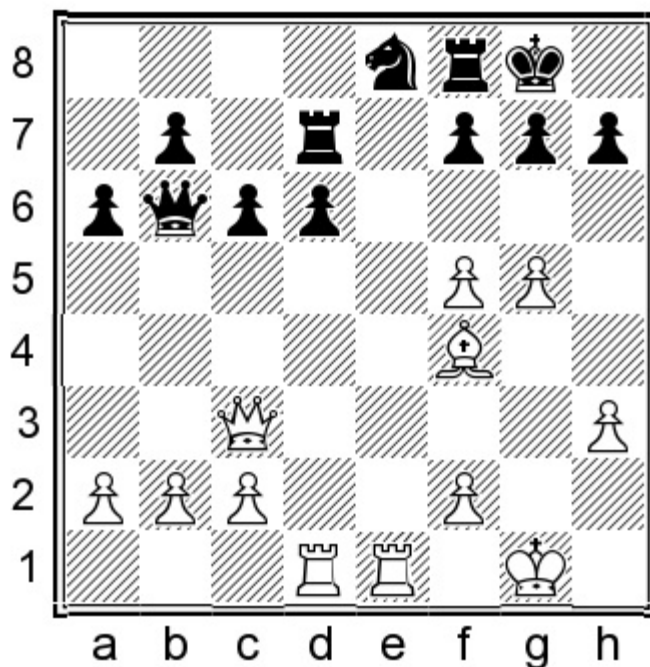


I like the following game by Svidler from this position. He didn't win, but for most of the game he played extremely well: 11.h3 (a generally useful move; you just want to gain control of the g4-square. It's not the only move, but it provides some *luft* for the king and takes control of the square, in case Black wants to play ...♘g4) 11...0-0 12.♙f3 (a good square for the queen, for several reasons. First of all, it facilitates ♗f5 and if Black takes then we can take back with the queen. It also allows us to develop with ♘f4 and ♖ad1, and suddenly our rooks are in the centre and we are ready for e4-e5 stuff. You can see that Black is rather cramped here, because of this structure, with e4 against d6, and with Black not achieving ...d6-d5 any time soon, he really has no way to gain more space for his pieces) 12...c6 13.♙f4 ♙b6 14.♖ad1 (14.♘b3 might be the most obvious move, but it lets go of the initiative)



14...♖ad8 (14...♙xb2 15.♖b1 ♙a3 16.♘d5 ♙xf3 17.♘xe7+ ♔h8 18.♘xf3 and White ends up with an

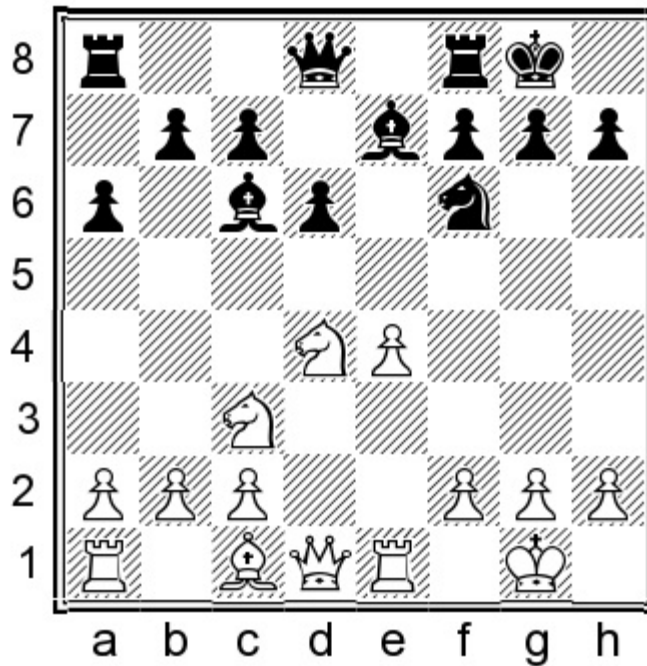
extra piece. So that's why, tactically, things are not working out for Black) 15.g4 (I like this move quite a lot. I think if Black doesn't have counterplay, and he's not achieving ...d6-d5, then we might as well start attacking. It's quite a scary prospect for Black. White has ideas of ♖f5) 15...♘e8 16.♘f5 ♙xf5 17.exf5 ♙f6 18.g5 ♙xc3 19.♚xc3 ♜d7.



This position is absolutely horrible for Black. It's a bit of a surprise that White didn't win this one.

20.f6 ♚d8. Trying to defend with his last reserves of strength. White has many moves to get a winning advantage: 21.♚g3 (21.♙h1 was played in the game, when White started to lose the thread and let Black escape: 21...♘c7 22.♚g3 ♜e8 23.♞xe8+ ♚xe8 24.fxg7 ♚e4+ 25.♙h2 ♘d5 26.♙xd6 ♚xc2 27.♞g1 ♜d8 28.♙e5 ♚e2 29.♞g2 ♜e8 30.f4 ♚e4 31.♞f2 a5 32.h4 ♘e3 33.♚f3 ♜xe5 34.fxe5 ♚xh4+ 35.♙g1 ♚xg5+ 36.♙h1 ♚h4+ 37.♙g1 ½-½ Svidler- Ivanchuk, Moscow 2002) 21...gxf6 22.gxf6+ ♙h8 23.♞xe8 and White will win.

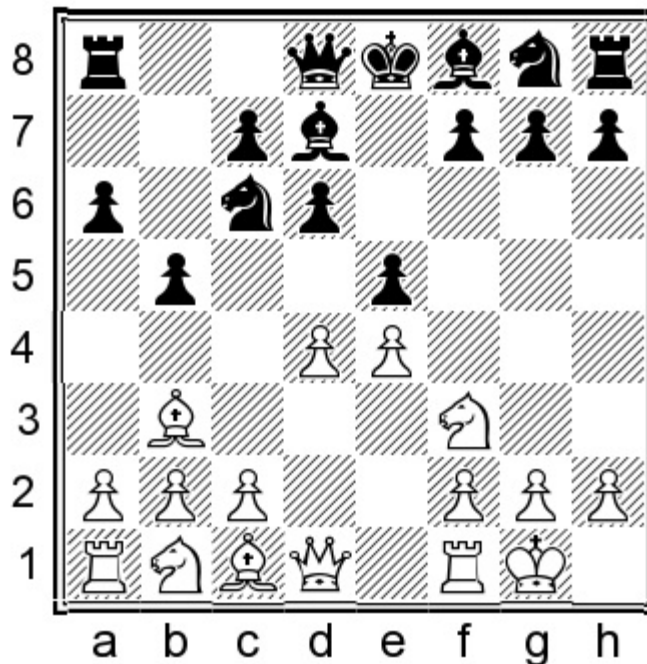
Overall, I think Svidler's plan of h2-h3, ♚f3 and g2-g4 was very dangerous. Therefore, Black should be prepared to give up his bishop pair sooner. After 10.♘xd4 10...0-0



we can play 11. ♖xc6 bxc6 12. f4 ♜e8 13. ♙e3 ♙f8 14. ♚f3 ♞b8 15. b3 with advantage or even try 11. ♗f5 ♙d7 12. ♗xe7+ ♚xe7 13. ♙e3 with a slight advantage for White, partly due to the space advantage of e4 against d6 – but it's not a large advantage.

This rather lengthy series of notes explains why Black prefers to play concretely:

6...b5 7. ♙b3



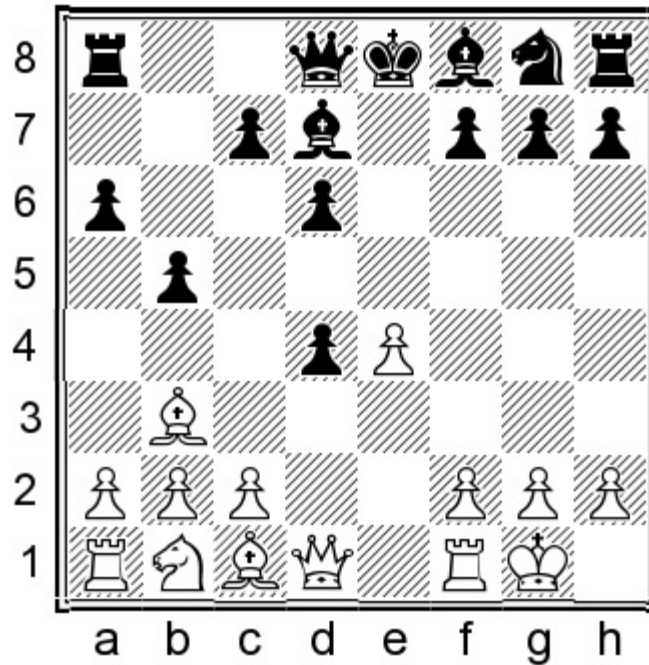
7... ♗xd4

Black tries to win a pawn – and there are two ways to do it. One way is clearly better than the other. If

he doesn't do this then after, for example, 7...♖f6, he runs into all our 8.♗g5 stuff.

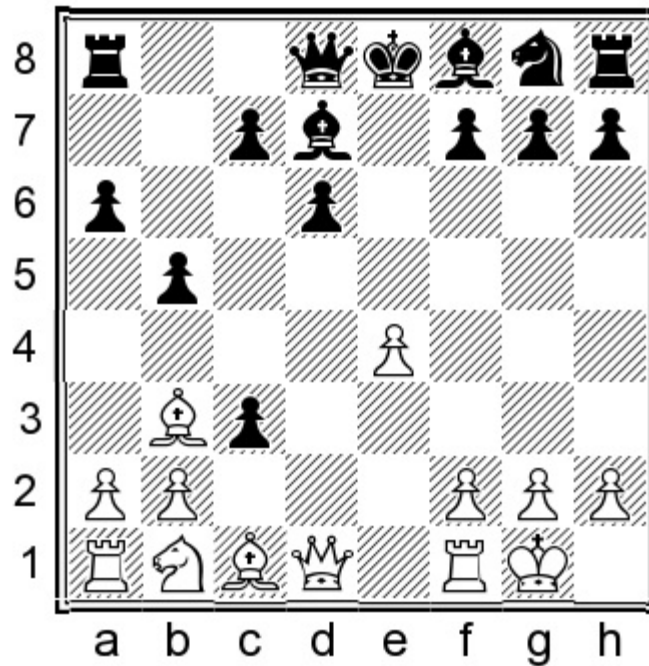
If 7...exd4 we play 8.c3 (we must remember never to play 8.♗xd4 ♗xd4 9.♙xd4 c5, and we lose a piece) 8...dxc3 9.♗xc3 ♕e7 (Black finds it very hard to develop and the fact that we sacrificed a pawn is pretty much irrelevant; 9...♗f6 10.♗g5 is a recurring problem) 10.♙d5! which is crushing.

8.♗xd4 exd4



9.c3 dxc3

Black has to take. If we are given a chance, we take the centre. For example, 9...♗f6 10.cxd4 and we have a large positional advantage and ideas of e4-e5.



10. ♖h5

Here 10. ♘xc3 is a perfectly fine move too. If you are in a must-draw situation you can play 10. ♕d5 ♙e6 11. ♖c6+ ♙d7 with a repetition of moves. Now Black is forced to defend against the threat on f7 in a very uncomfortable way:

10...g6

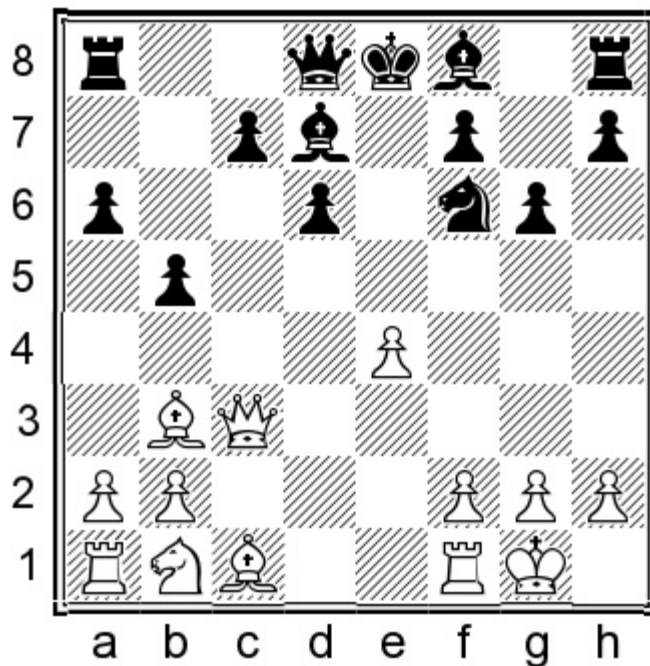
10... ♗e7 11. ♘xc3 ♘f6 12. ♕f3 and if Black now has to play 12... ♗d8 to develop, it's a very bad sign for him. 10... ♗f6 11. ♘xc3, with the threat of 12. ♘d5, is the same story.

11. ♕d5 ♙e6 12. ♖c6+ ♙d7

This time White is not interested in a repetition of moves:

13. ♖xc3 ♘f6

This is really the only option for Black. Moves like 13... ♗f6 are positionally horrible. 13... ♗f6 runs into the loss of a pawn after 14. ♖xc7. Once we regain the material we are just positionally winning.



14. ♖e1

It's tempting to play 14. ♗g5 but here it doesn't offer us much.

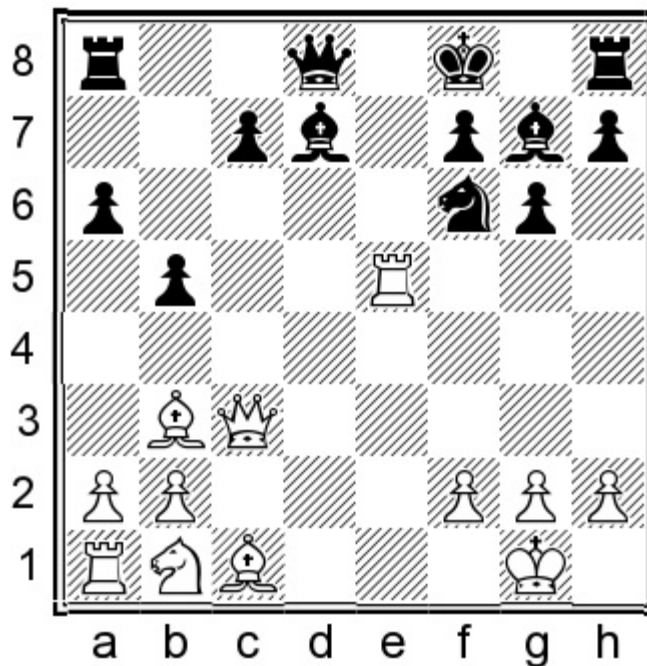
There is another way to play here, with 14. e5 dxe5 15. ♖xe5+ ♔e7 (15... ♗e7 16. ♖e1 and the pin is very strong, Black can no longer castle; 16. ♗h6 is also strong) 16. ♖xc7 (16. ♖c3 b4 17. ♖f3 ♖b8) 16... ♗g7 17. ♘c3 0-0 18. ♗f4 with the advantage, based on more active pieces and some tactical possibilities.

With 14. ♖e1, which I think is the most ambitious move, we are preparing e4-e5 more slowly. We also force Black's king to remain in the centre.

14... ♗g7

14... ♗e7 15. e5 dxe5 16. ♖xe5 is again very strong for White.

15. e5 dxe5 16. ♖xe5+ ♔f8



Here we don't have a tactical way to win, but we can play slowly:

17.h3!

Preventing ... $\text{N}g4$ stuff and we create some *luft* for our king. We have a very solid amount of compensation, but I can't say that White is objectively much better or anything. It's just a dangerous position for Black.

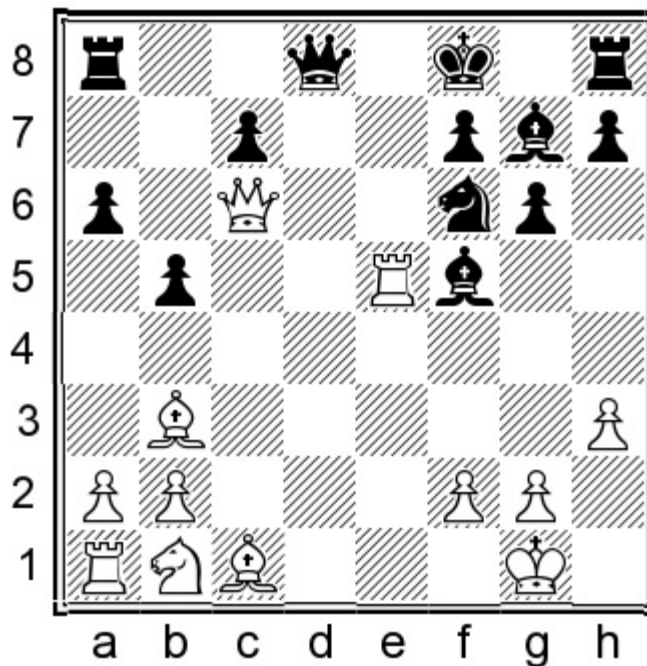
After 17... $\text{N}e8$ I would seriously consider sacrificing the exchange with 18. $\text{Q}f4$. I think it would be very dangerous for Black to take it. If I want to keep the exchange, I can play 18. $\text{W}f3$ $\text{N}d6$ 19. $\text{Q}g5$, with a huge advantage for White.

It's difficult for Black to find a move here. He can try to play something like 17...h6 and then 18... $\text{K}g8$. I think the thing to note is that even if he can manage that then 19... $\text{K}h7$ is hard to achieve, as f7 is hanging to the bishop. White can continue developing here with $\text{Q}f4$ or $\text{Q}e3$. There's more than one way to play this position.

17... $\text{Q}f5$

Black's most natural move, but now we take advantage of the c6-square:

18. $\text{W}c6$!



This queen is really in Black's face. Suddenly the rook on a8 is a little loose.

18...♖d7 19.♞d5 ♔e8 20.♞d1

OK, 20.♞d1 is a bit of a computer line, but it shows that White's initiative never really stops. c7 is hanging and we are ready for ♖c3, ♕f4, ♖d5; all sorts of active ideas. We have a strong initiative.

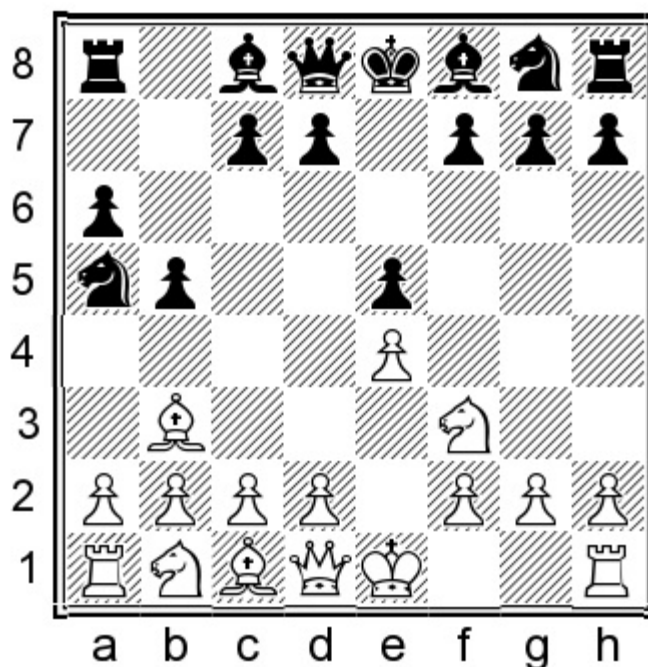
The queen manoeuvre ♔d1-h5-d5-c6xc3 is worth remembering. It's not a new idea, but it is kind of rare. Half of these lines are forgotten. People mainly play the Marshall and the Berlin these days and we've forgotten about the sharp old lines of the Steinitz.

I think we have seen a nice, direct way of playing which is aimed at putting pressure on Black.

Chapter 18

Norwegian Variation: 3...a6 4.♘a4 b5 5.♘b3 ♖a5

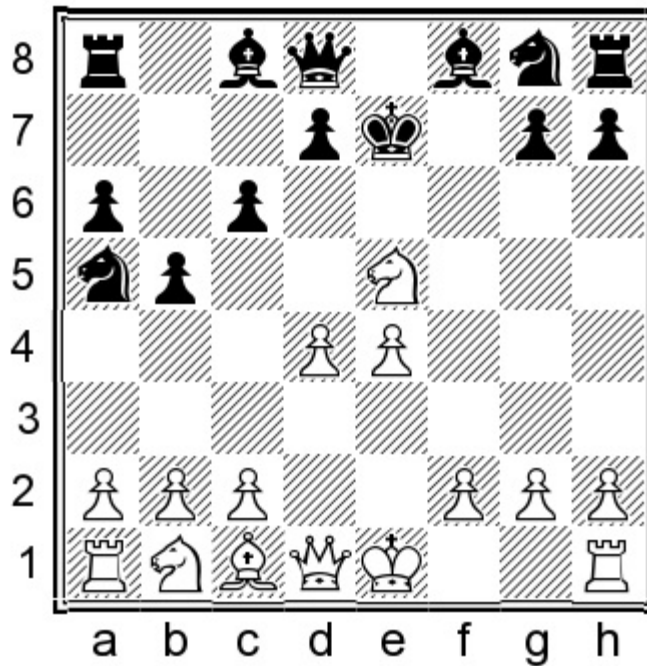
1.e4 e5 2.♖f3 ♗c6 3.♘b5 a6 4.♘a4 b5 5.♘b3 ♖a5



This line was formerly known as the Taimanov Variation or the Wing Variation. The plan of removing White's light-squared bishop may seem sensible, but it costs a lot of moves for Black to achieve this aim, and his defence does not stand up to modern scrutiny.

This variation has been played quite a lot, but it is considered to be a rather dubious line. It looks very funny. Black leaves e5 hanging, moves the knight for the second time and will most likely move it for a third time.

My first instinct was that White should play 6.♘d5 and then after 6...c6, 7.♘xf7+ ♔xf7 8.♗xe5+ ♔e7 9.d4...



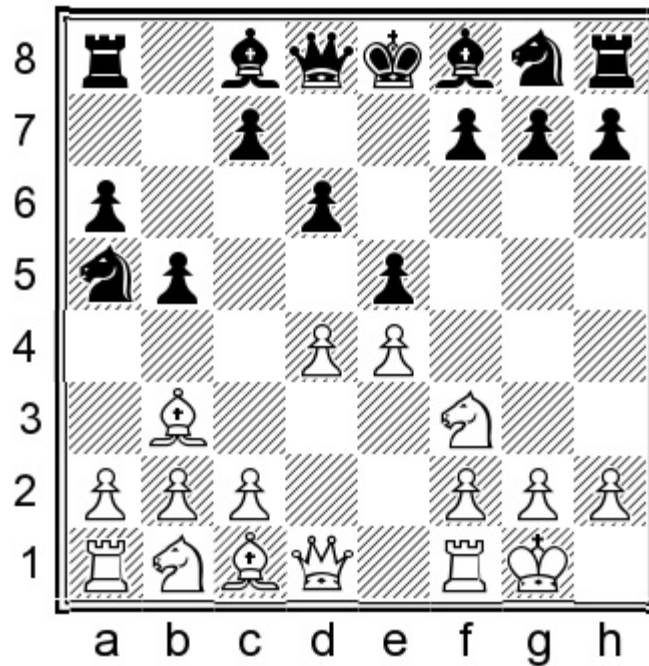
White has two pawns and the initiative for the sacrificed piece. It reminds me of the famous Cochrane Gambit in the Petroff Defence, after 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗xf7 ♔xf7, which is not considered very good these days, but it has been played by Topalov and other strong players, so I was thinking if this sacrifice is playable, then 7.♙xf7+ must be amazing. Objectively though, after 8...♔e7, White probably has enough compensation for the piece but it is unlikely to be more than enough.

I wouldn't criticize anyone for going for this. I would say if you feel like being adventurous, then give it a try – but White also has ways to play for an advantage without sacrificing anything.

6.0-0 d6

It's not going to change anything if Black captures on b3 first. After 6...♘xb3 7.axb3 d6, we'll play 8.d4 anyway and we will most likely get the same position.

7.d4



It is natural to open up the centre.

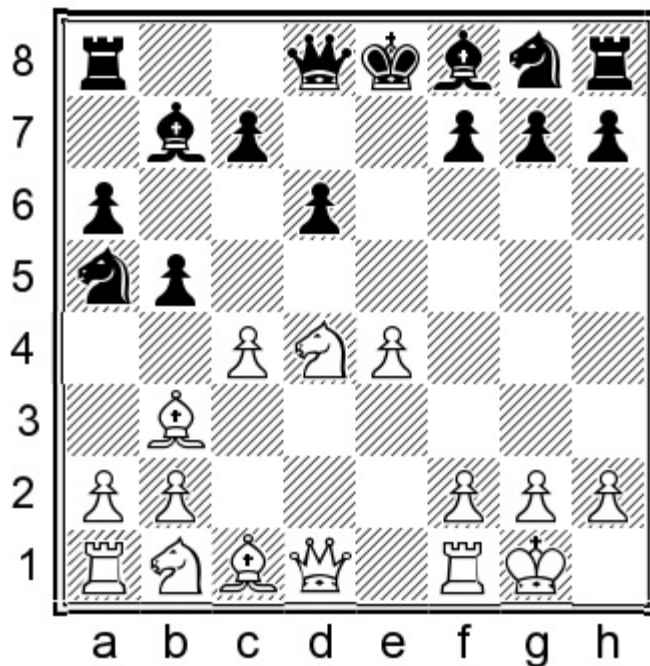
7...exd4

With a structure we have seen a lot in the Steinitz. This one is even better for White, because we don't have to spend time capturing on c6; here, Black is spending his time capturing our bishop.

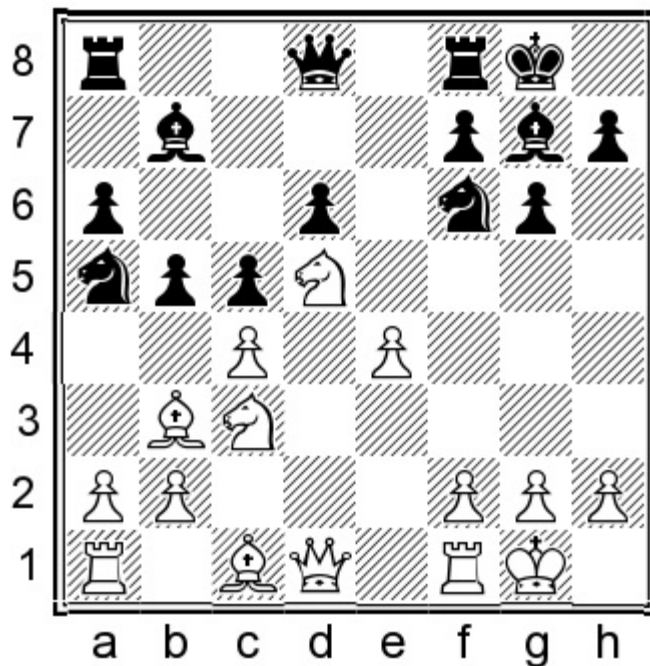
8.♘xd4 ♙b7

Best. Again, Black can capture the bishop first with 8...♘xb3 9.axb3; but it has no advantage in this case. We actually provoke him to take later, so this is just a worse version for Black. Here 8...c5 allows 9.♙d5 and after 9...♞b8 we can play either 10.♘f5, 10.♘f3 or 10.♘b3, all of which are very tempting.

At first, I thought 9.c4 looked like a very interesting move here.



This is how Vishy Anand played when he was confronted with the line. It's a strange-looking move, but the point is simple: the pawn is immune. **9...c5** 9...bxc4 10.♔a4+ c6 11.♕d2 is crushing; 12.♖e1 will follow and Black is losing the knight. A very sad way to lose a game! 9...♘xc4 is not as bad, but here White plays 10.a4, undermines the b-pawn and will start to kick the knight around. Black won't even have a pawn to show for it. 10.♖f5 g6 11.♗e3 ♘f6 12.♘d5 ♕g7 13.♘bc3 0-0.

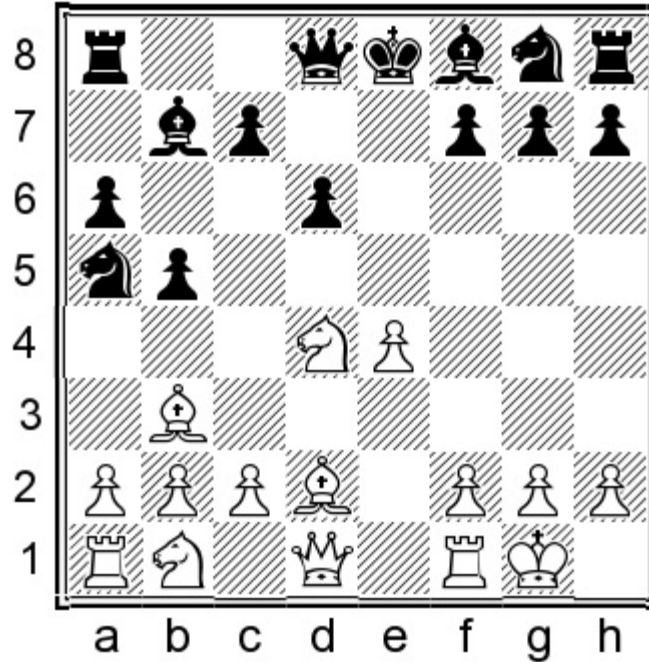


Black has consolidated and reached a reasonable position; this is about equal. Although Vishy eventually won in the game Anand-Mamedyarov, Moscow 2009, it was nothing to do with this position.

After 9...c5, there is a rare and interesting move: **10.♘e2**

Basically, White just wants to get a grip, but without losing time. Here again, 10...bxc4 will run into 11.♔a4+ and the knight will be marooned on a5 and if 10...♔xe4 then 11.♖g3 ♔b7 12.♞e1+ is a good way of playing.

9.♔d2!

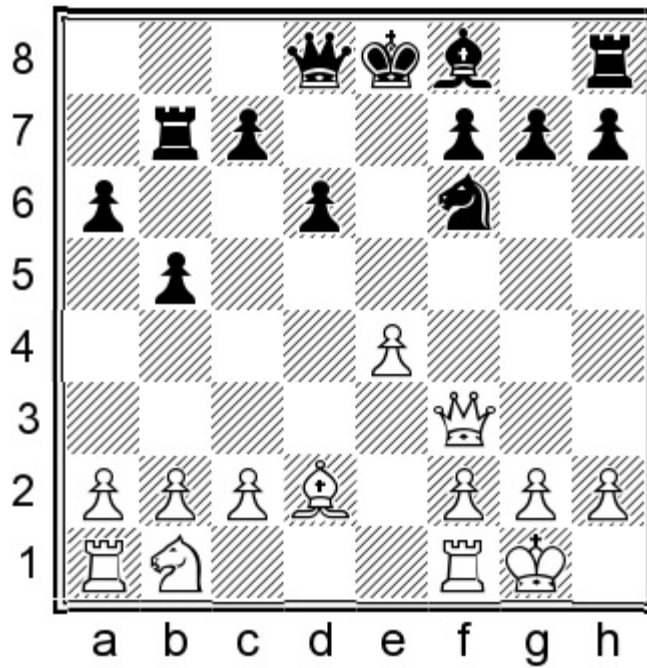


I think this is even stronger, putting the question to the knight: does Black want to take, or not?

9...c5

The critical move. At first glance it looks like Black might be winning a piece.

If he decides to take with **9...♖xb3**, we don't take with the pawn, because a5 is a big weakness: **10.♖xb3 ♖f6 11.♖a5 ♜b8** The e-pawn is usually immune in these lines: **11...♔xe4 12.♞e1 ♔e7 13.♖c3 d5 14.♖c6 ♜d7 15.♖xe7 ♜xe7 16.f3** and White wins a piece. **12.♖xb7 ♜xb7 13.♞f3**

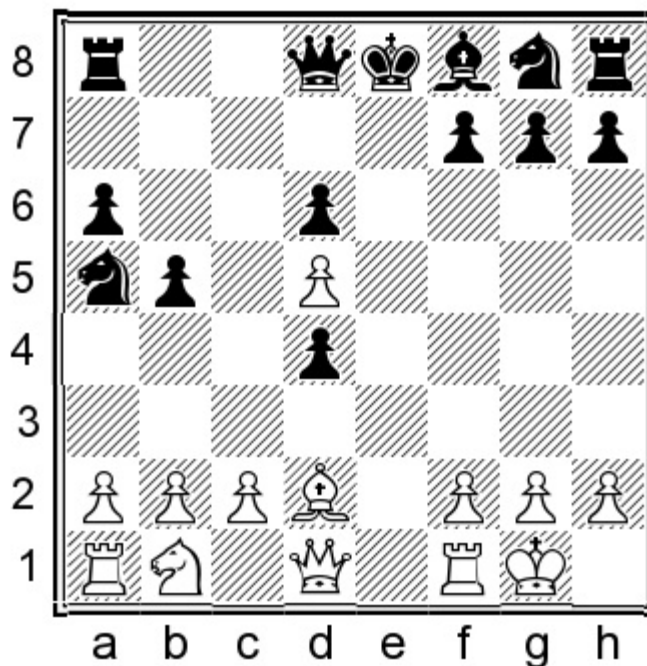


Black is left with a king in the centre and a lack of development. 14.e5 is a big threat: **13...♖b8**
14.♘c3 ♕e7 15.♞ad1 and White just keeps playing with the initiative.

10.♕d5 ♖xd5

Black can't play 10...cxd4 as after 11.♕xa5 ♔xa5 12.♕xb7 we will check on c6 next, before picking up the d-pawn.

11.exd5 cxd4



12.♔e1+

Winning back the piece. Black will be left with a king in the centre and a weak structure.

12...♔e7

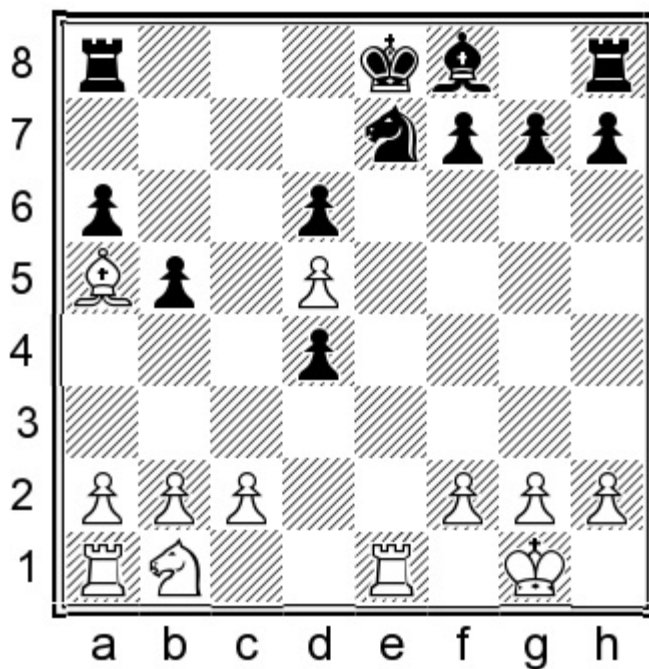
This is the move most people go for.

12...♙e7 13.♙xa5 gives White an enormous advantage. We will simply play ♘b1-d2-f3 and attack the d4-pawn.

13.♙xa5 ♔xe1

If Black gives us one more move to play, 14.♔d2, then it's going to be the end.

14.♙xe1+ ♘e7



Black would start to feel happy if he had time to play ...♔d7, ...♘f5, ...♙e7 and to gain some central presence. I am now recommending a move which I don't think has been played before:

15.c4!

A little surprising, but really strong. Black is lacking in development so we are just putting pressure on him.

15...dxc3

Probably Black's best move; 15...bxc4 16.♘d2 ♙c8 17.♙ac1 and then 18.♘xc4 will be very annoying for Black, especially as d6 will be hanging. Likewise, if Black plays 15...♔d7 we have a choice between 16.♘a3 and 16.♘d2. Both are very tempting. We will follow up with 17.♙ac1, cxb5 and then

♖c7+ with a much better position for White.

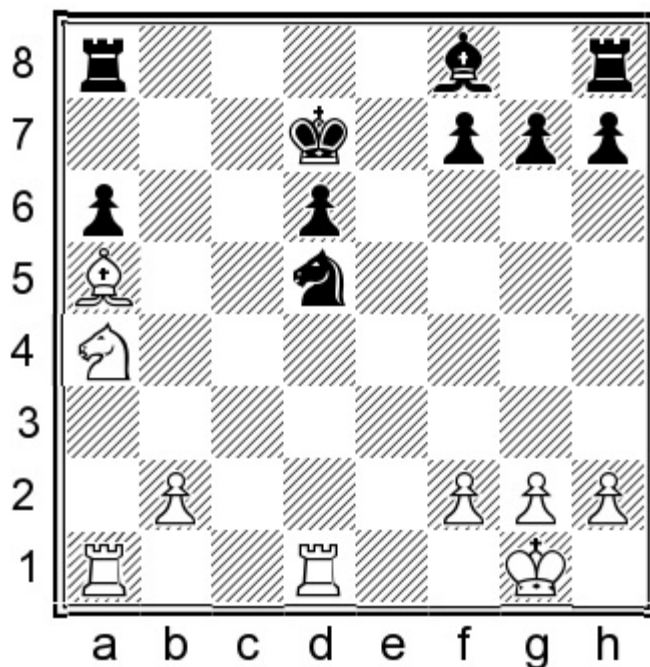
16. ♘xc3 ♔d7

We have a choice of how to play this position.

17.a4

This is one very tempting move, basically to open up the position.

17...bxa4 18. ♘xa4 ♘xd5 19. ♖ed1



White has a serious initiative here.

So I would say 15.c4 is quite an important move. Maybe not the best move, but a very good one to gain a serious advantage.

9. ♘d2 is a very concrete move, even though it doesn't look like it's the most natural. It's like in a lot of other lines; Black is trying to achieve a harmonious set-up, where he is imagining a really good future. He imagines he can just take the bishop on b3, develop his pieces and then castle. He will then have a safe king and the bishop pair.

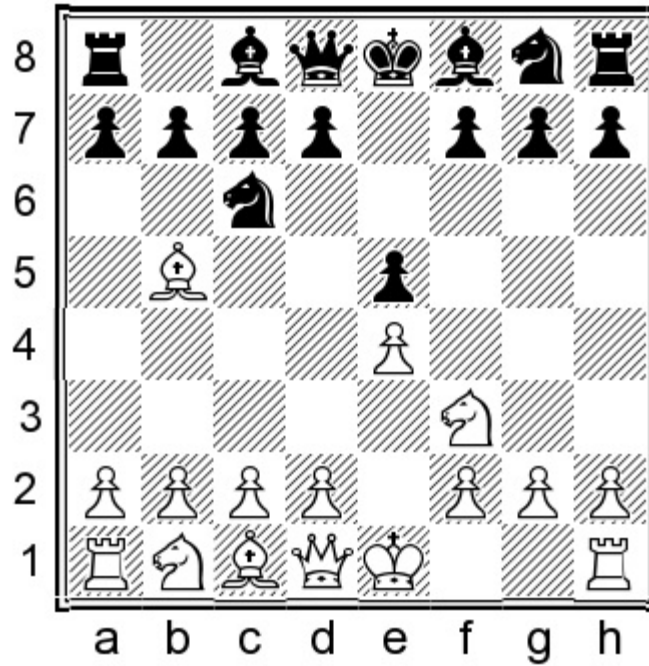
But clearly, in this position, he's going to spend three moves with his knight just to trade our bishop. We are castled and he's not – and he still hasn't developed any of his pieces on the kingside. It is very clear that we should be energetic here. We need to fight for the initiative. So, just like in other variations, we are playing forcing moves. 9. ♘d2 and 15.c4 are both very forcing moves. We are energetically taking advantage of his loose pieces and his weak king.

This Norwegian Variation, as I have heard it called, is not fun for Black.

Index of variations

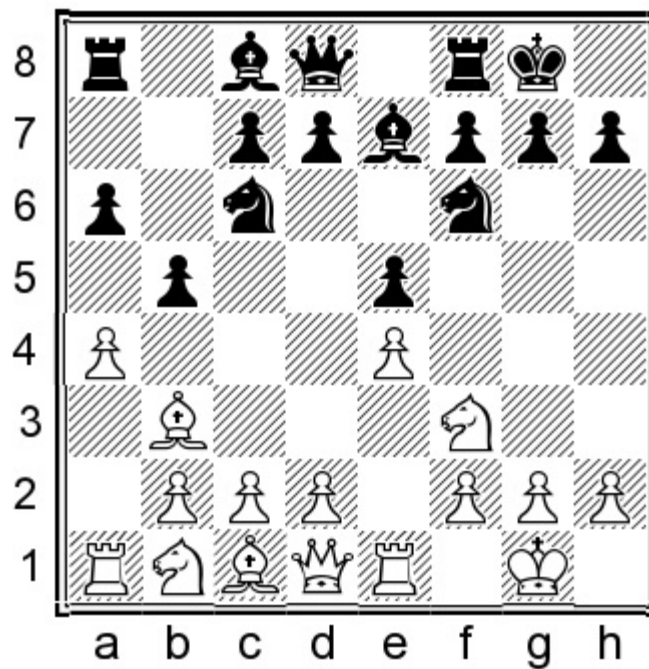
Ruy Lopez

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♝c6 3.♗b5



Anti-Marshall set-up

3...a6 4.♗a4 ♞f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.a4



8...b4 9.a5 d6 10.d3 ♖e6 **15**

9.d4 ♜xd4 10.♗xf7+ **16**

9...exd4 10.e5 **16**

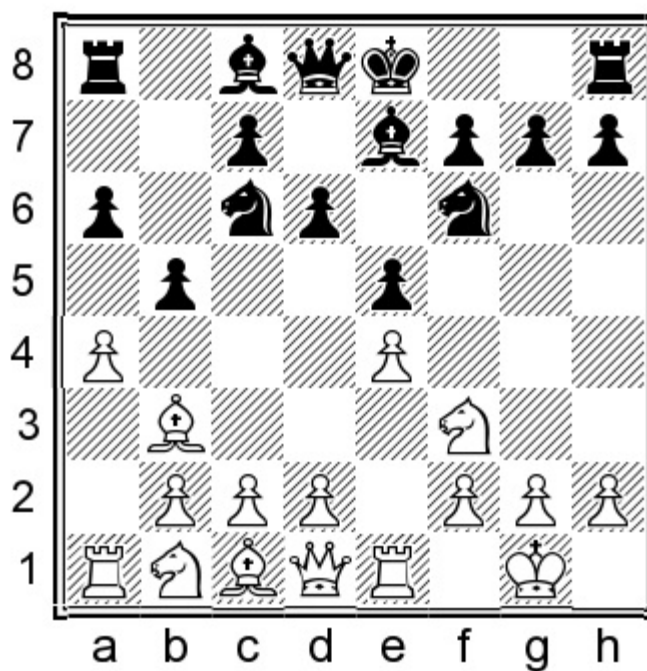
9...d6 10.dxe5 dxe5 **17**

10...♞xe5 11.♞xe5 dxe5 **29**

8...♗b7 9.d3 d6 10.♞bd2 **39**

Anti-Classical set-up

3...a6 4.♗a4 ♞f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.a4



8...b4 9.d4 ♗g4 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♞bd2 **46**

8...♗g4 9.c3 b4 10.a5 **47**

9...♞a5 10.♗c2 0-0 11.b4 **47**

10...c5 11.axb5 **47**

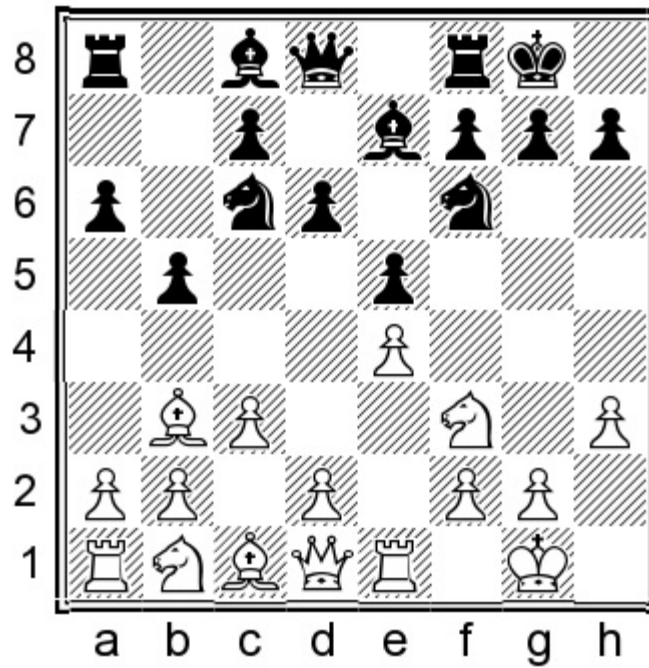
10...b4 11.d4 **48**

9...0-0 10.h3 ♗xf3 11.♞xf3 ♞a5 12.♗c2 b4 13.d4 **49**

12...c5 13.axb5 axb5 14.d3 **49**

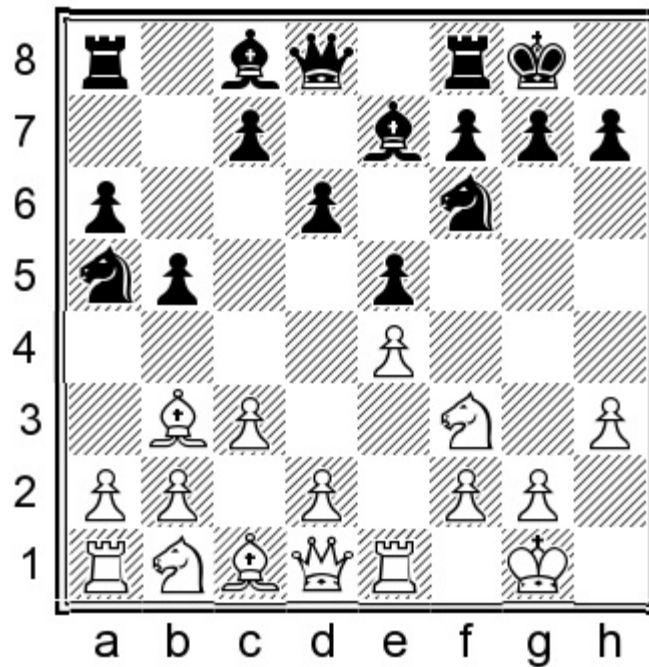
Classical main lines

3...a6 4.♗a4 ♞f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♞e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3



Chigorin Variation: 9...♞a5

9...♞a5



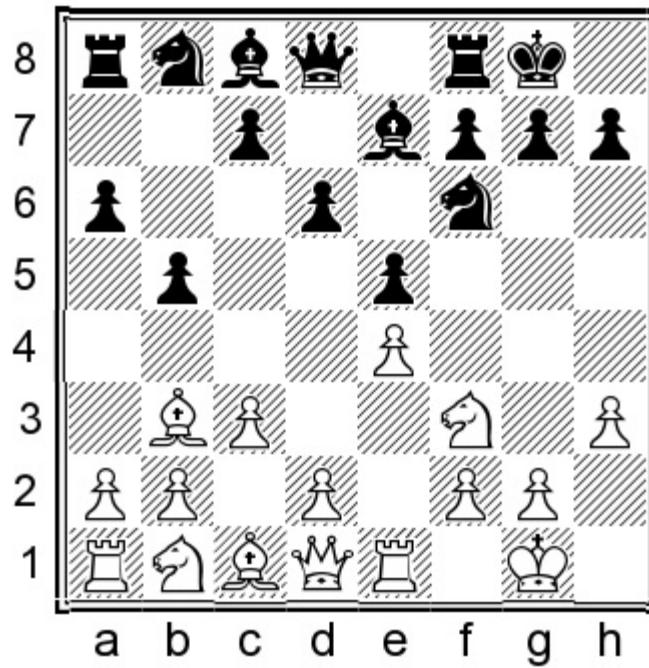
10.♙c2 c5 11.d4 ♞d7 **54**

11...♚c7 12.d5 ♙d7 13.b3 **55**

12...♞c4 13.b3 ♞b6 14.a4 **55**

Breyer Variation: 9...♞b8

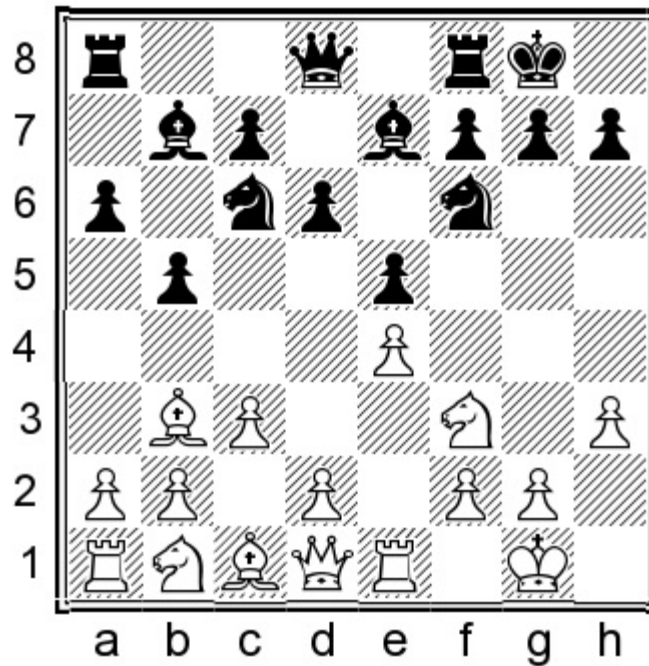
9...♞b8



10.d4 ♖bd7 11.♗bd2 ♘b7 12.♙c2 ♜e8 13.♗f1 ♙f8 14.♗g3 g6 15.a4 ♙g7 **59**
 15...c5 **61**

Zaitsev Variation: 9...♙b7

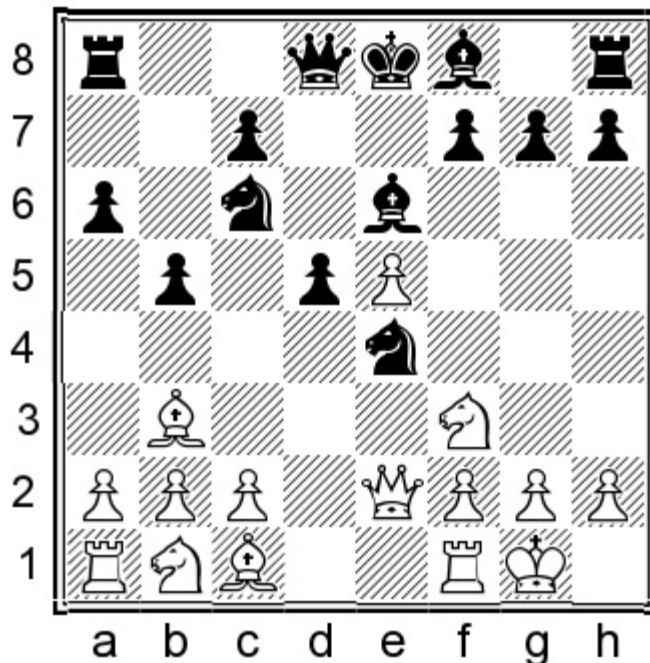
9...♙b7



10.d4 ♜e8 11.♗bd2 ♙f8 12.a4 h6 13.♙c2 exd4 14.cxd4 ♗b4 15.♙b1 c5 16.d5 ♗d7 17.♞a3 f5 **65**
 17...c4 **66**

Open Variation

3...a6 4.♘a4 ♟f6 5.0-0 ♟xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♘b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♘e6 9.♙e2



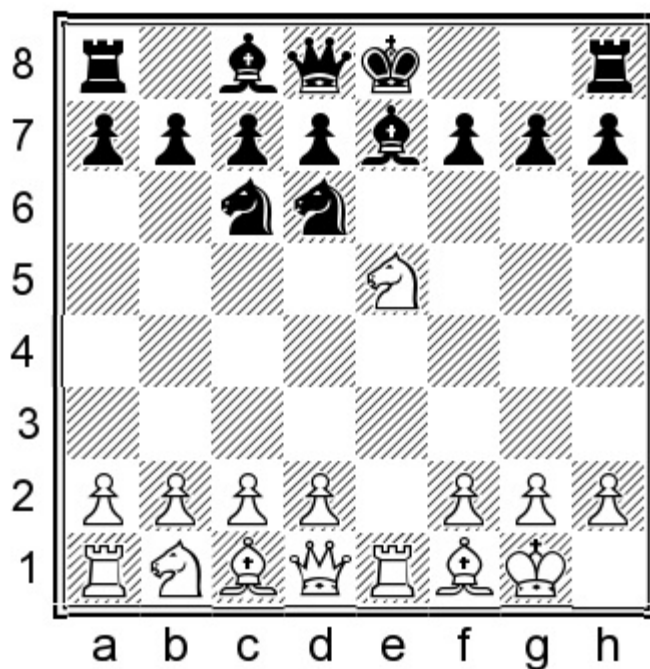
9...♘c5 10.♘e3 **73**

9...♟c5 10.♙d1 **73**

9...♘e7 10.♙d1 **78**

Berlin Defence

3...♟f6 4.0-0 ♟xe4 5.♙e1 ♟d6 6.♟xe5 ♘e7 7.♘f1



7...♟f5 8.♟f3 0-0 9.d4 d5 10.c3 **88**

10. ♖c3 **91**

7... ♗xe5 8. ♖xe5 0-0 9. ♗c3 **94**

9. d4 ♖e8 **95**

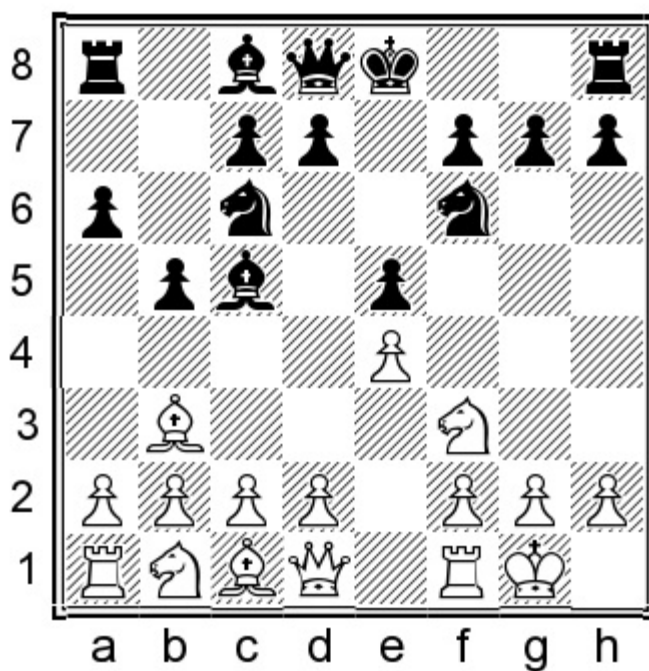
9... b6 **95**

9... ♗e8 **96**

9... ♗f6 10. ♖e1 **100**

Modern Arkhangelsk

3... a6 4. ♗a4 ♗f6 5. 0-0 b5 6. ♗b3 ♗c5



7. c3 ♗xe4 **111**

7... d6 8. d4 ♗b6 9. ♗e3 ♗g4 **111**

9... 0-0 10. ♗bd2 ♗g4 **111**

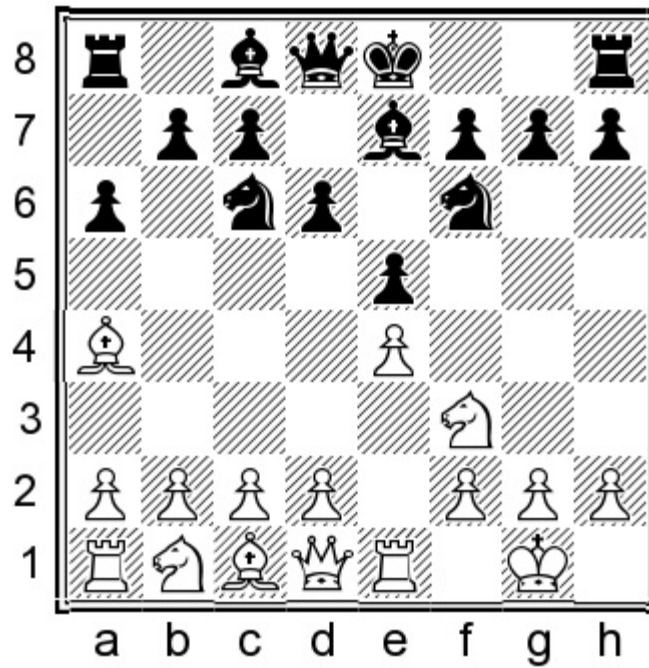
10... ♗b7 **114**

10... h6 **116**

10... ♖e8 **119**

Averbakh Variation

3... a6 4. ♗a4 ♗f6 5. 0-0 ♗e7 6. ♖e1 d6

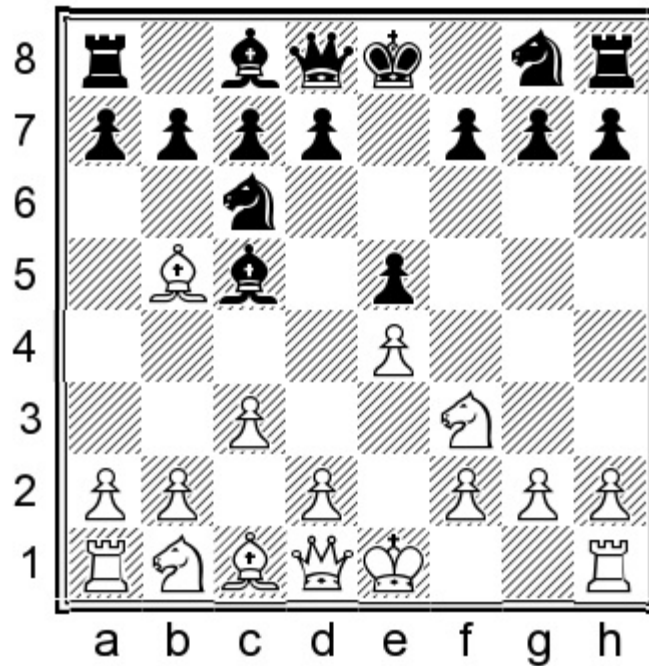


7. cxc6+ bxc6 8. d4 d7 9. a3 **123**

8... exd4 9. xd4 d7 10. c4 **123**

Classical Defence

3... c5 4. c3



4... f5 5. d4 **127**

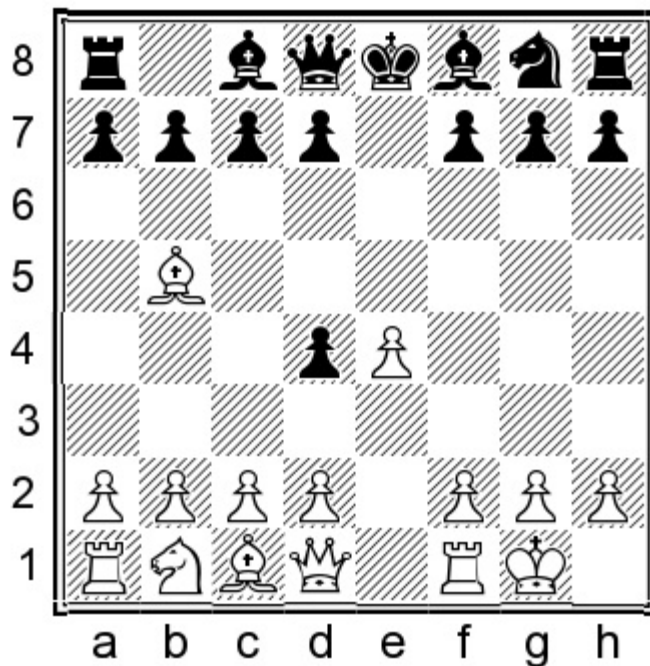
4... f6 5. d4 b6 6. dxe5 **128**

5... exd4 6. e5 d5 7. 0-0 **129**

6...♘e4 7.0-0 **129**

Bird Variation

3...♘d4 4.♘xd4 exd4 5.0-0



5...♘f6 6.e5 **133**

5...c6 6.♙c4 **133**

5...a6 6.♙c4 **134**

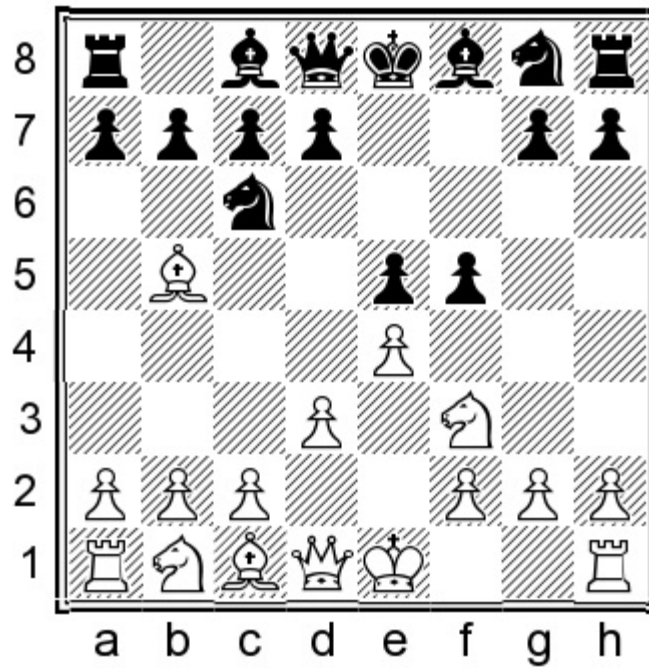
5...♙c5 6.♙c4 ♘f6 7.e5 **135**

6...d6 7.d3 **135**

6...♞h4 7.d3 **136**

Schliemann Defence

3...f5 4.d3



4... ♖f6 5.exf5 **139**

4... fxe4 5.dxe4 ♖f6 6.♖c3 ♗b4 **139**

6.♙d3 **139**

6.0-0 ♖xe4 7.♙e1 **139**

6...d6 7.♗c4 ♖a5 8.♗e2 **140**

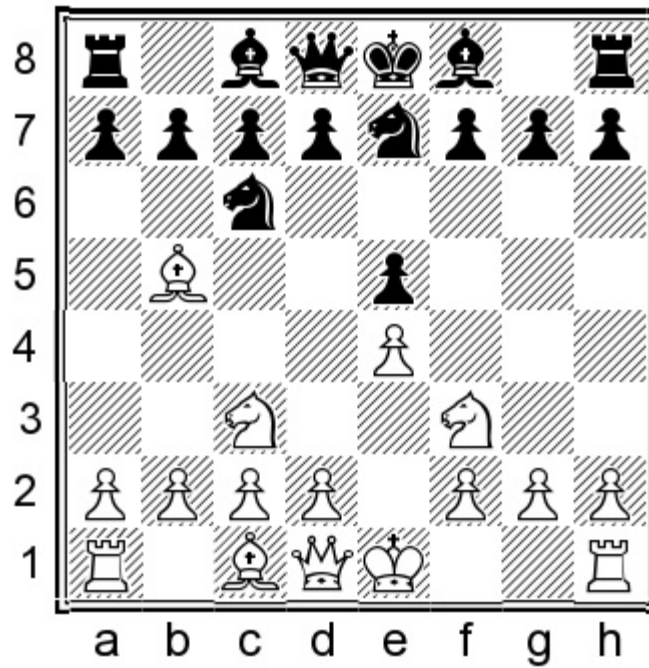
7...♗e7 8.♖g5 **140**

7...♗g4 8.h3 ♗h5 9.♖c3 **140**

6...♗c5 7.♗xc6 bxc6 8.♖xe5 0-0 9.♖c3 **142**

Cozio Defence

3... ♖ge7 4.♖c3



4...d4 5.d4 **148**

4...a6 5.c4 d6 6.d4 **149**

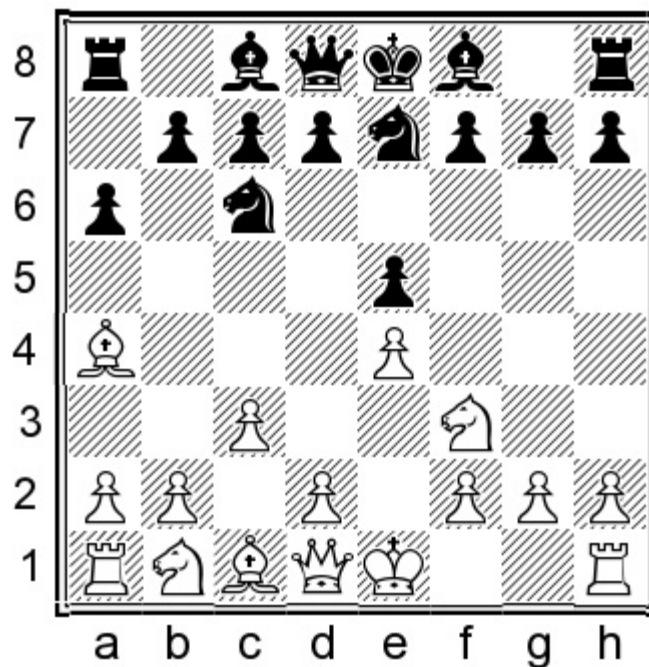
4...d6 5.d4 exd4 6.dxd4 a6 7.e2 **149**

4...g6 5.d4 g7 6.dxe5 **149**

5...exd4 6.d5 **149**

Cozio Defence Deferred

3...a6 4.a4 dge7 5.c3



5...d5 6.♘xe5 dxe4 7.♚b3 **155**

5...b5 6.♙b3 ♘g6 7.d4 **155**

5...♘g6 6.d4 **155**

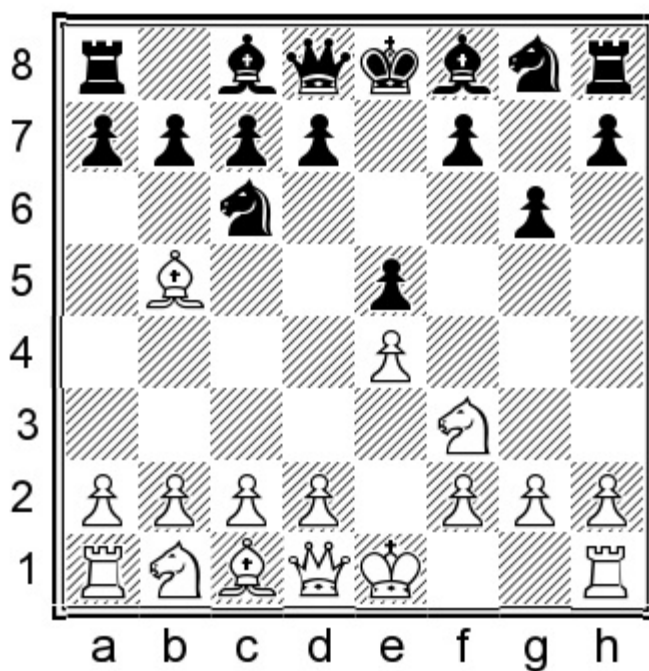
5...g6 6.d4 exd4 7.cxd4 ♙g7 8.d5 **155**

7...d5 8.exd5 ♘xd5 9.0-0 ♙g7 10.♙g5 **155**

7...b5 8.♙c2 **156**

Smyslov Defence: 3...g6

3...g6



4.c3 a6 5.♙a4 ♙g7 6.d4 **164**

4.d4 exd4 5.♘xd4 **164**

5.♙g5 **164**

5.c3 ♙g7 6.cxd4 **164**

5...a6 6.♙xc6 **164**

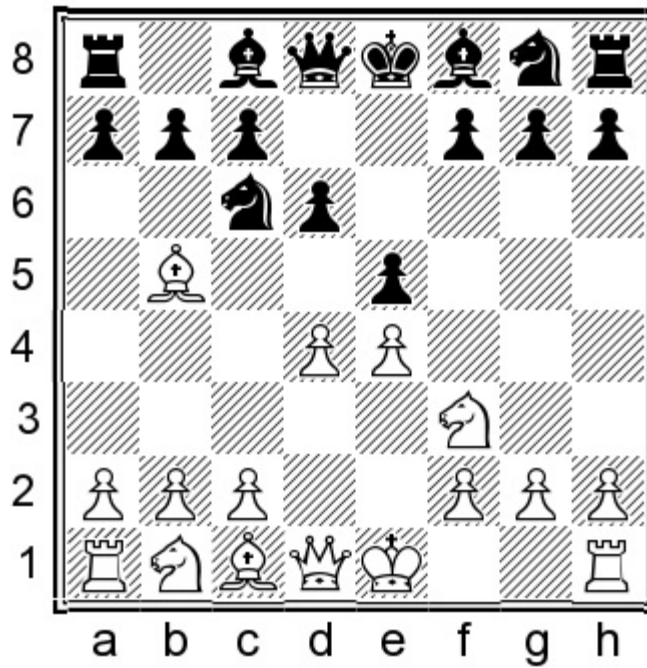
5...dxc3 6.♘xc3 h6 7.0-0 ♙g7 8.♙d2 **166**

5...♘ge7 6.cxd4 d5 7.exd5 ♘xd5 8.0-0 ♙g7 9.♙g5 **167**

9.♙xc6+ bxc6 10.♙g5 **167**

Steinitz Defence: 3...d6 4.d4

3...d6 4.d4



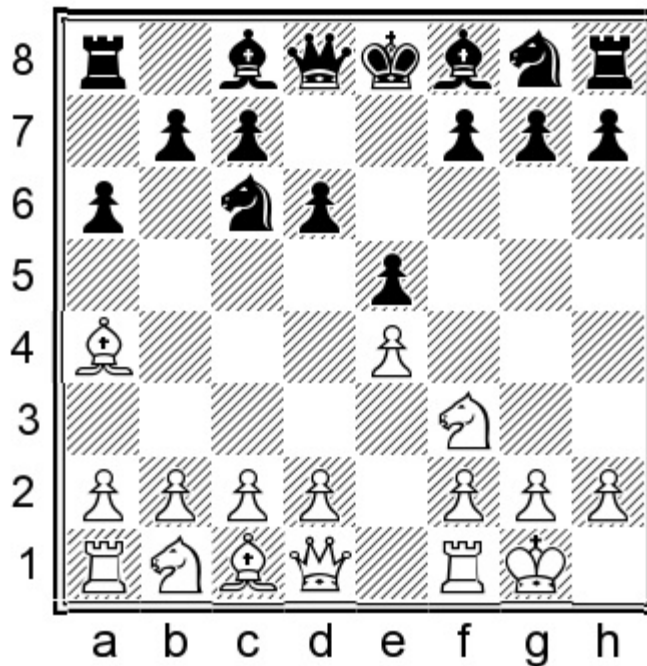
4...♔d7 5.d5 **171**

4...exd4 5.♗xd4 ♖ge7 **173**

5...♔d7 6.0-0 **173**

Steinitz Defence Deferred: 3...a6 4.♔a4 d6 5.0-0

3...a6 4.♔a4 d6 5.0-0



5...♔g4 6.h3 ♔h5 7.c3 ♗f6 8.d4 b5 9.♔c2 **180**

6...h5 7.d4 b5 8.♔b3 ♗xd4 9.hxg4 ♗xb3 10.axb3 hxg4 11.♗g5 **182**

9...hxg4 10.♘g5 **183**

5...♘f6 6.♖e1 b5 7.♙b3 ♘a5 8.d4 **185**

5...♙d7 6.d4 exd4 7.♙xc6 **186**

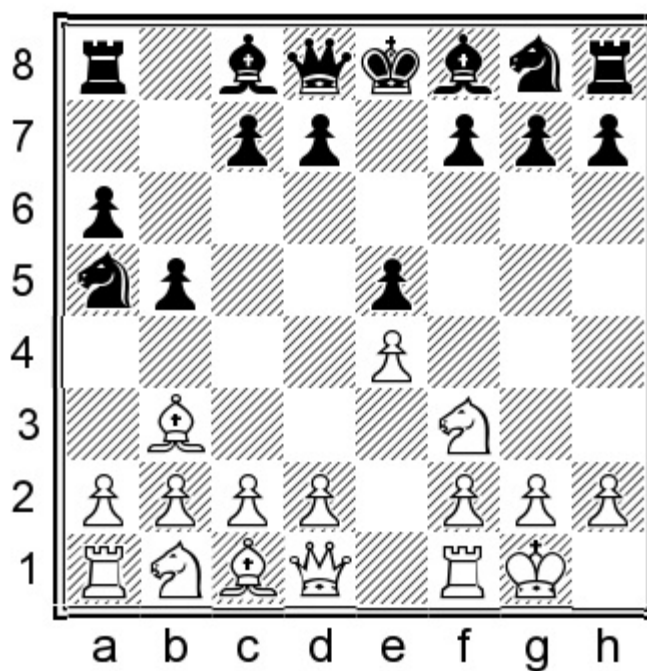
6...♘f6 7.♙xc6 **188**

6...b5 7.♙b3 exd4 8.c3 **191**

7...♘xd4 8.♘xd4 exd4 9.c3 **191**

Norwegian Variation: 3...a6 4.♙a4 b5 5.♙b3 ♘a5 6.0-0

3...a6 4.♙a4 b5 5.♙b3 ♘a5 6.0-0



6...♘xb3 7.axb3 d6 8.d4 **195**

6...d6 7.d4 exd4 8.♘xd4 ♘xb3 9.axb3 **195**

8...c5 9.♙d5 **195**

9...♖b8 10.♘f5/10.♘f3/10.♘b3 **195**

8...♙b7 9.c4 **195**

9.♙d2 ♘xb3 10.♘xb3 ♘f6 11.♘a5 **196**

9...c5 10.♙d5 ♙xd5 11.exd5 cxd4 12.♙e1+ **197**

Index of names

(numbers refer to pages)

A

Adams 43, 49-50, 56, 66-68, 180

Altshuler 181

Anand 62, 66, 68, 97, 100, 116, 118, 127-129, 155, 157-158, 164, 196

Aronian 16, 21, 27, 96-98, 100-101, 103, 140-141, 155, 173

B

Baramidze 60

Beikert 176

Bird 132

Bologan 174

Breyer 58

Bromberger 66

Bu Xiangzhi 115

C

Calonge Gonzalez 183

Capablanca 11, 170

Carlsen 14, 16, 30, 58, 60, 62, 79, 94, 100, 102-103, 132-134

Caruana 25, 36, 78, 100, 105, 118, 141, 146

Chirila 142

D

De Firmian 184

De Jong 80

Ding Liren 32, 76

Dominguez Perez 22, 49-50

Dubov 37, 159

Dvoretzky 42

E

Ehlvest 172

Estrin 181

Euwe 69

F

Farakhov 56

Fischer 54

Flohr 63

Fressinet 29-30, 34-36, 56, 166

G

Gashimov 116, 183

Giri 32, 72, 78, 81, 91, 93, 104-105, 121, 151

Grandelius 32

Grischuk 21, 147, 183

H

Harikrishna 179

Hübner 185-186

I

Ivanchuk 42, 44, 55-56, 65, 83, 171-172, 174, 190

J

Jaenisch 138

Jussupow 69

K

Kamsky 67

Karjakin 14, 87, 165, 180

Karpov 63-64, 69

Kasimdzhanov 26, 56, 65, 124
Kasparov 40, 56, 63-64, 68, 84, 86-87, 133
Kavalek 186
Khalifman 133
King 175-176
Kortchnoi 69
Kovalev 107
Kramnik 84, 86-88, 100, 105

L

l'Ami 128
Lasker 69
Leko 42, 79
Le Roux 188

M

Magnus 180
Makarov 183
Malakhov 101
Mamedyarov 73, 81, 124, 158, 165, 196
Marcinkiewicz 67
Marshall 11, 30
McShane 107
Milos 43
Mista 186
Morozevich 158
Morrison 34
Motylev 188
Movsesian 113

N

Naiditsch 169
Nakamura 82-83, 91-93, 104, 149, 169

Navara 32, 116-118, 151-152

Negi 26

Nepomniachtchi 105

Neubauer 100

Neverov 60-61

Nybäck 22

O

Oleksienko 101

Onischuk 113, 118

P

Palac 100

Perez Ponsa 76

Piorun 29, 186

Ponomariov 121

Portisch 58

R

Radjabov 60, 107, 142-146

Rapport 133, 136-137

Reutsky 56

Robson 34, 96, 142

Romanishin 124

Romanov 49

S

Saric 60-61, 66, 133-134

Sasikiran 37, 60

Schliemann 138

Shirov 56-57

Short 40

Sindarov 163

Sjugirov 81
Smeets 80
Smyslov 162
So 16, 21, 27, 96
Sokolov 56
Spassky 58
Stefanova 43
Steinitz 170, 195
Stevic 152, 166
Sutovsky 137
Svidler 21, 44, 189-190

T

Tarrasch 69
Timman 69, 184
Tomashevsky 23, 25
Topalov 55-57, 91, 195
Tukhaev 163

U

Ulybin 124

V

Vachier-Lagrave 43, 86-87
Vallejo Pons 129
Van Foreest 107
Vitiugov 81

Y

Yu Yangyi 114-115

Z

Zaitsev 63

Zhigalko 158

Zukertort 69

Zundel 67

Table of Contents

Title page	3
Explanation of symbols	4
Preface	6
Introduction	7
Chapter 1 An Anti-Marshall set-up: 3...a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.a4	9
Chapter 2 An Anti-Classical set-up: 3... a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 d6 8.a4	74
Chapter 3 Chigorin Variation: 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Na5 10.Bc2 c5 11.d4	86
Chapter 4 Breyer Variation: 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Nb8	96
Chapter 5 Zaitsev Variation: 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 Bb7	105
Chapter 6 Open Variation: 3...a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Nxe4	115
Chapter 7 Berlin Defence: 3...Nf6	143
Chapter 8 Modern Arkhangelsk: 3...a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 b5 6.Bb3 Bc5	185
Chapter 9 Averbakh Variation: 3...a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 d6	209
Chapter 10 Classical Defence: 3...Bc5	214
Chapter 11 Bird's Defence: 3...Nd4	223
Chapter 12 Schliemann Defence: 3...f5	233
Chapter 13 Cozio Defence: 3...Nge7	250
Chapter 14 Cozio Defence Deferred: 3...a6 4.Ba4 Nge7	261
Chapter 15 Smyslov Defence: 3...g6	276
Chapter 16 Steinitz Defence: 3...d6	291
Chapter 17 Steinitz Defence Deferred: 3...a6 4.Ba4 d6	305
Chapter 18 Norwegian Variation: 3...a6 4.Ba4 b5 5.Bb3 Na5	334
Index of variations	342
Index of names	355



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