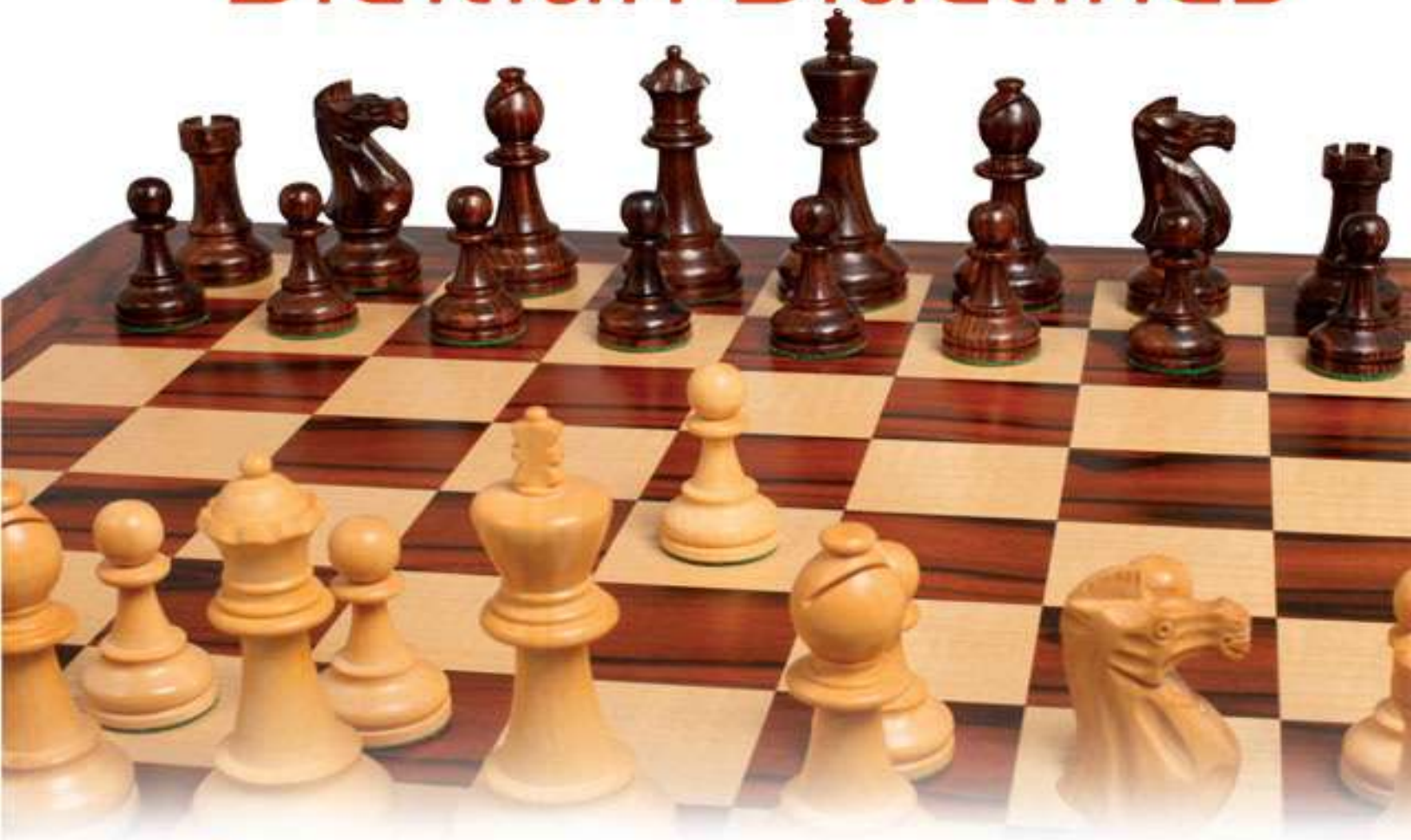
John Shaw

Playing 1.e4

French Defence & Sicilian Sidelines



A GRANDMASTER Guide

QUALITY CHESS

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Keys to symbols used

Key to symbols used

² White is slightly better
³ Black is slightly better
± White is better
µ Black is better
+– White has a decisive advantage
–+ Black has a decisive advantage
= equality
© with compensation
„ with counterplay
ƒ with an initiative
÷ unclear
? a weak move
?? a blunder
! a good move
!! an excellent move
!? a move worth considering
?! a move of doubtful value
™ only move
mate

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Preface

The purpose of Playing 1.e4 is to supply a top-class repertoire for White. This second volume covers the French Defence and some Sicilian sidelines. The first volume covered the Caro-Kann, 1...e5 and minor lines. The repertoire is completed by the third volume on the main lines of the Sicilian. My original intention was to create a two-volume complete repertoire, with the French and Sicilian in just one volume, but the material grew to such an extent that a split was essential.

In creating a 1.e4 repertoire, one could choose the sharpest lines, cover them in full academic detail, and supply a complete repertoire spanning a multitude of volumes. Or one could create a slim, single-volume repertoire by ducking all the theoretical challenges and giving “club players’ favourites” such as the King’s Indian Attack. My three-volume series is at neither extreme. It delivers a repertoire which I am confident will be e?ective even at GM level, but it demands a workload from the reader that is manageable, albeit challenging in places.

The main defence met in this volume is the French: 1.e4 e6. After 2.d4 d5 the absolute main line is 3.Nc3, as Negi covered in his Grandmaster Repertoire 1.e4. I believe Negi’s anti-French chapters are among the best analysis Quality Chess has ever published, but note that Negi’s repertoire includes many sharp lines, so you need to keep updating regularly. I am duty-bound to offer an alternative, so I have gone a very different route to Negi – I recommend the Tarrasch variation with 3.Nd2, which is popular at GM level but should be comparatively low maintenance. Also, I am a positional player, and I have always found 3.Nd2 to be easier to play than 3.Nc3, as the Tarrasch tends to lead to rational, controlled positions where White often has the better structure. This applies particularly to the 3...Nf6 main lines, where we will see many examples of Black suffering from a nasty hole on e5.

In the final three chapters of this volume we start our fight against the Sicilian, with some minor lines for Black. My choice is the Open Sicilian, as I feel the anti-Sicilians are not threatening enough to form an ambitious repertoire. But I will have much more to say about the Sicilian in the next volume.

As with my previous books for Quality Chess, my name is on the cover, but creating the book was a team e?ort. I had the final say on words and analysis, but I was aided by GM Jacob Aagaard, IM Andrew Greet and Nikos Ntirlis.

I hope you enjoy reading this book, and that Playing 1.e4 leads you to success.

John Shaw
Glasgow, April 2018

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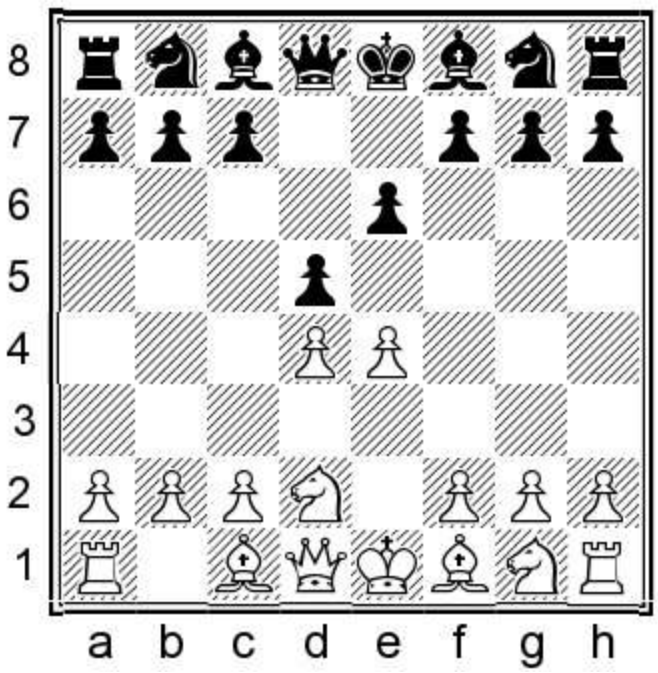
Introduction to the Reperoire

Chapters 1-11 French

1.e4 e6

The French Defence is the third most common reply to 1.e4, so this is a vital part of our repertoire. My recommendation is the Tarrasch Variation, as I feel it strikes the right balance of challenging for an edge without requiring extreme levels of memorizing theory.

2.d4 d5 3.Nd2



And here we are, at the tabiya of the Tarrasch. I would like to introduce some Rules of Thumb about how we should handle this system:

1) We play e4-e5 in response to ...Nf6.

2) We play exd5 when we see ...c5, but not if we have played our bishop to d3 – which therefore means that in the 3...c5 4.exd5 lines, we will not place our bishop on d3!

3) Ngf3 is not necessarily an automatic move, because if we play it, then we need to have a clear idea of where the d2-knight is heading. However, if Black plays a slow move which does not put immediate pressure on our centre, then 4.Ngf3 will generally be our choice.

The value of these guidelines will become clearer after you read through a few chapters.

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Chapters 12-14 Sicilian Sidelines

1.e4 c5

The Sicilian Defence has long been regarded as Black's most challenging response to 1.e4. We need a serious weapon against it, and to me that means the Open Sicilian.

2.Nf3

Against Black's most popular 2nd moves our response will be 3.d4. The different variations all have their own themes and ideas, which we will see one chapter at a time. In this volume, we will start with a few Black sidelines, leaving the main lines for the final volume.

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Chapter 1 - Rare lines

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2

A) 3...e5 10
B) 3...g6 11
C) 3...b6 12
D) 3...a5 14
E) 3...Ne7 16
F) 3...Bd7 Game 1 19
G) 3...f5 4.exf5 exf5 5.Ndf3! Nf6 6.Bd3 Bd6 7.Ne2 21
G1) 7...Nc6!? 22
G2) 7...0-0 22
G3) 7...c6 23
H) 3...h6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.c4!? 23
H1) 6...dxc4 24
H2) 6...Be7 26
H3) 6...c5! 27
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5
Other moves do exist, but they require only the briefest acknowledgement here.

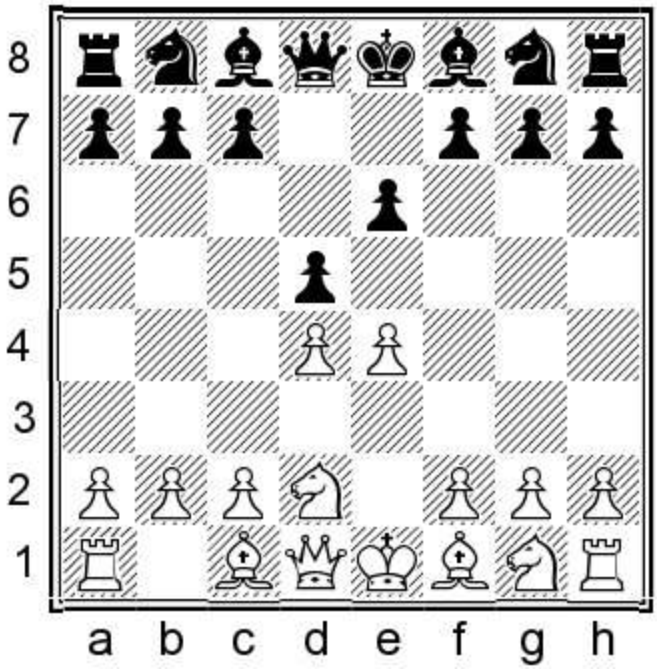
2...c5 3.Nf3 immediately reaches the Sicilian.

2...b6 leads to Owen’s Defence, which was covered in Playing 1.e4 – Caro-Kann, 1...e5 & Minor Lines.

Things like 2...d6, 2...Be7 etc. have of course been played, but you don’t need an opening book to face such moves.

3.Nd2
With this, we reach the starting point of our Tarrasch repertoire against the French.

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In this chapter we will consider Black's rare third moves. The moves we will see are A) 3...e5, B) 3...g6, C) 3...b6, D) 3...a5, E) 3...Ne7, F) 3...Bd7, G) 3...f5 and H) 3...h6.

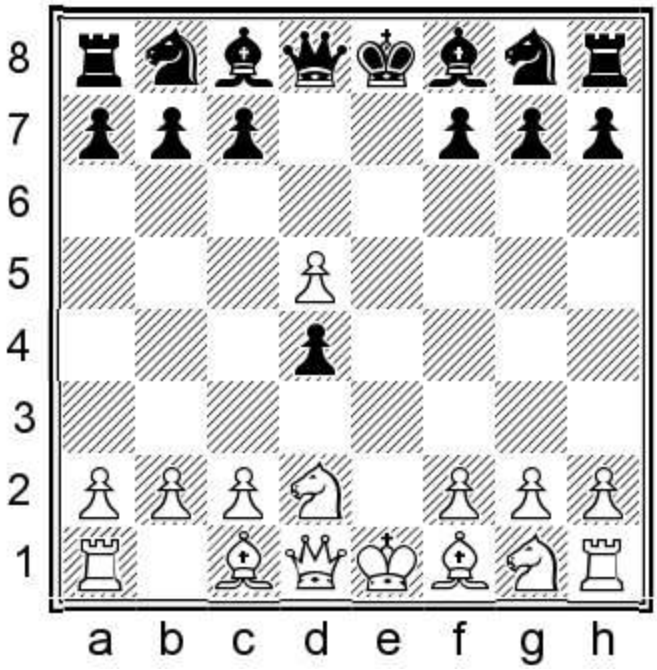
A) 3...e5

A move with great surprise value, which was once successfully played by French expert Emanuel Berg. Until I did a database search after 3.Nd2 for this book, I had no idea the move 3...e5 existed, and that's after over two decades of Tarrasching.

4.exd5
Black's main idea is 4.dxe5 dxe4 5.Nxe4 Qxd1† 6.Kxd1 Nc6 with compensation due to White's displaced king; there are similar positions in the Scandinavian, and they are no fun to play as White.
Instead of 5.Nxe4, White could try a different pawn-grab with 5.Qe2 but that also allows some messy compensation, which is not the way I recommend playing against such an obscure sideline.

4...exd4
Correctly avoiding 4...Qxd5?! 5.Ngf3 exd4 6.Bc4± when White's lead in development in such an open position massively outweighs the missing pawn; a rook is likely to appear on e1 in exactly two moves time.

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5.Bb5†!N
The g1-knight belongs on e2, blocking any disruptive checks, and leaving f3 for its colleague.

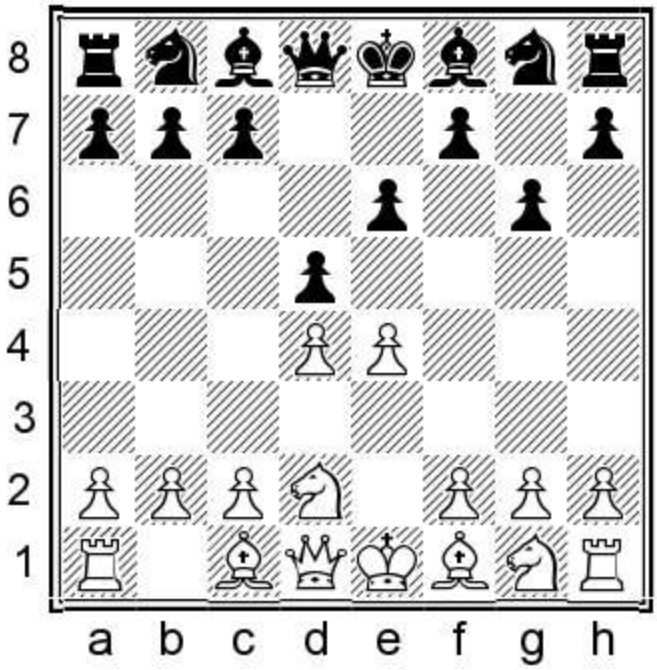
Instead 5.Ngf3 Nf6 6.Bb5† Bd7 7.Bc4 Qe7†! was an annoying check in Urkedal – Berg, Fagernes 2012. White had very little advantage, and eventually lost.

5...Bd7 6.Bc4 Nf6 7.Ne2!²
White will castle without disruption, and continue developing smoothly with Nf3. For example:

7...c5 8.dxc6 Nxc6 9.0-0
With a pleasant edge.

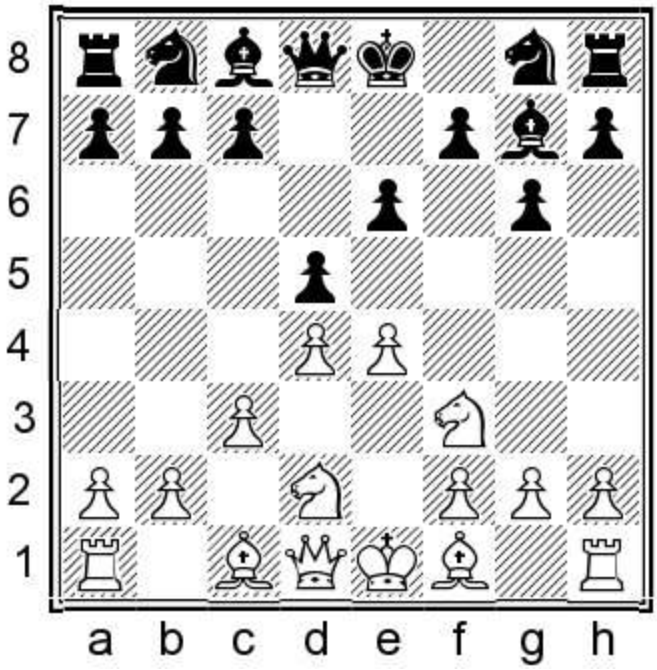
B) 3...g6

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Well, it’s a slow move. We have lots of time, so...

4.Ngf3 Bg7 5.c3
This move keeps our life simple, with no needless extra homework.



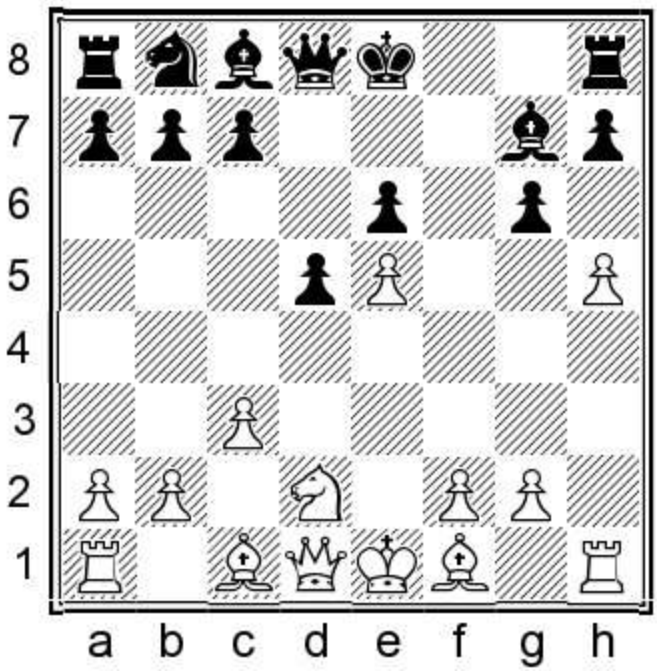
5...Nf6?!
An independent line but not a good one.
5...Nh6 is an oddity that has scored a surprising 3/4, so we shall treat it with the respect it deserves: 6.h4!?N I don’t think more is needed, but I will offer one plausible sample line: 6...0-0 7.h5 g5 8.Nb3 f6 9.e5*f*

5...Ne7 looks by far the likeliest move, leading to a version of variation E on page 16, where Black has committed himself to ...g6 slightly prematurely.

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6.e5 Nfd7 7.h4±
White is obviously happy. Let's follow one game:

7...f6 8.h5 fxe5 9.Nxe5 Nxe5 10.dxe5

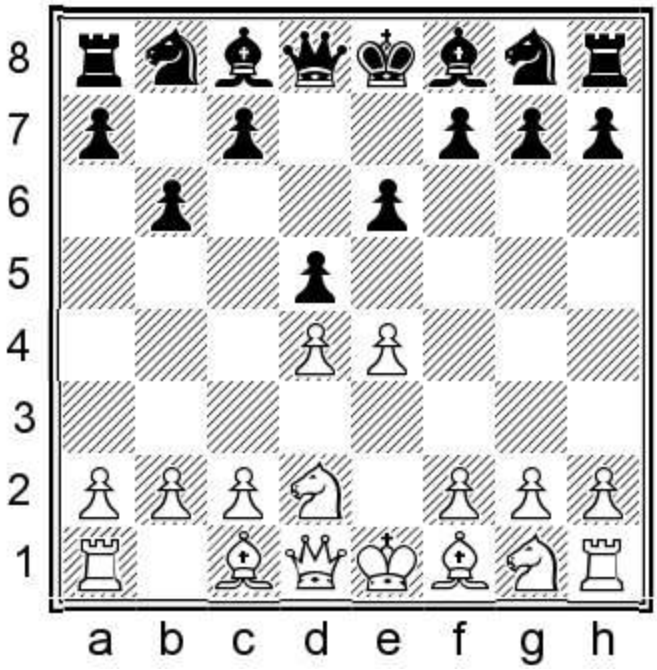


10...Nd7
The critical try is the greedy 10...Bxe5 but after 11.Nf3± White has more than enough compensation. In fact after the natural 11...Bf6 12.hxg6 Black should return the pawn at once as 12...hxg6?! 13.Rxh8† Bxh8 14.Qc2 Qf6 15.Bg5+– is fatal; White has 0-0-0 and Bd3 on the way.

11.f4 Qe7 12.Bd3 Nc5 13.Bc2±
Black was getting squished in Gentilleau – N. Thomas, Bled (ol) 2002, though he later escaped with a draw.

C) 3...b6

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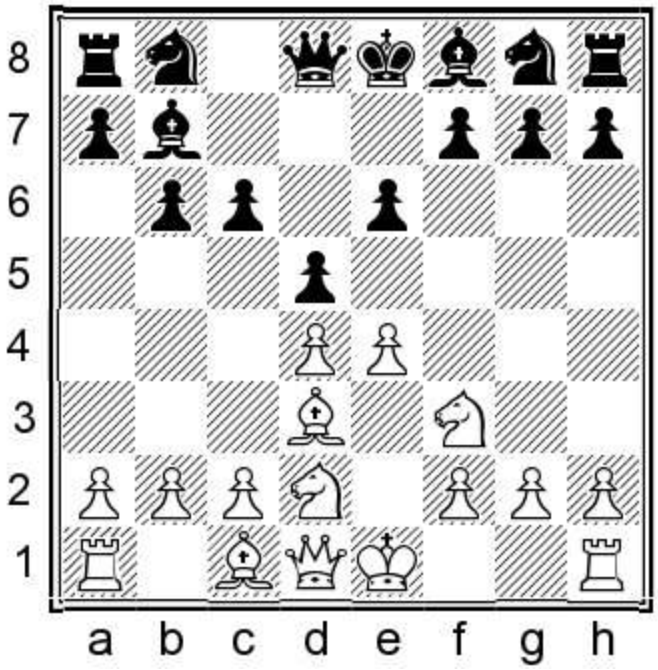
An offbeat line, so yes, it has been tried by Morozevich and Rapport. This ...b7-b6 advance is only good after e4-e5 has been played, because now on every move White will have the option of entering a good version of the Exchange French by taking on d5. Even good versions of the Exchange variation are not devastating, but we will settle for an edge.

4.Ngf3
Or 4.exd5!? exd5 5.Bd3 is even a sensible choice at once, but we will wait a little to limit Black's options, especially the destination of the c8-bishop.

4...Nf6
Trying to provoke e4-e5.

4...Bb7
This move does not demand much theoretical knowledge from White, as committing the bishop to b7 gives up on Black's more intriguing options.
5.Bb5†!?
Or 5.exd5!? exd5 6.Bd3 is a fine version of the Exchange variation, as the bishop is passive on b7 compared to its usual Exchange variation options of f5 or g4.
5...c6 6.Bd3²

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You do not need to know more; White will start the fight with slightly better chances. I will offer a few more moves as an example just because there is a Kasparov game:
6...Be7 7.0-0 dxe4 8.Nxe4 Nf6 9.Nxf6† Bxf6 10.Bf4 0-0 11.Qe2 Qd5 12.Be4 Qh5 13.a4 Nd7 14.a5±
In Kasparov – Agdestein, Tilburg 1989, Black had no better move than the ugly 14...bxa5 which shows he was already in trouble.

4...dxe4 5.Nxe4 is an option, but not a great one for Black, as we will see in variation B of Chapter 10 on page 256.

5.Bd3
We refuse to be provoked.

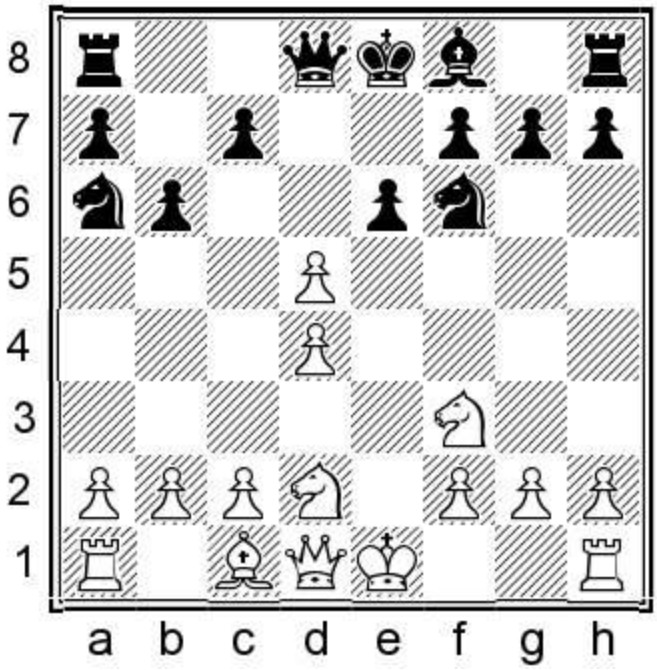
After 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Ba6 8.Bxa6 Nxa6 Black's play looks logical and justified, as in Safarli – Morozevich, Berlin (blitz) 2015.

5...Ba6
This is the principled try, but White has an excellent response.

Instead 5...c5 can be met by 6.c4!?N pointing out that Black has made several pawn moves and only developed one piece.

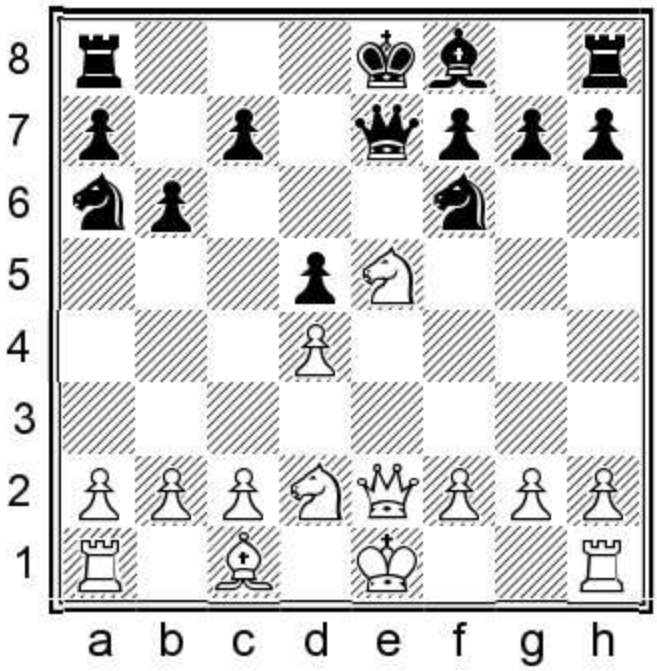
6.Bxa6 Nxa6 7.exd5!
Beautifully timed to prevent Black reaching an Exchange variation type of position.

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7...Qxd5
Black has no choice.

7...exd5?!
This is refuted by a tactical line which is well worth remembering.
8.Qe2† Qe7
No choice, as otherwise the a6-knight is hanging.
9.Ne5

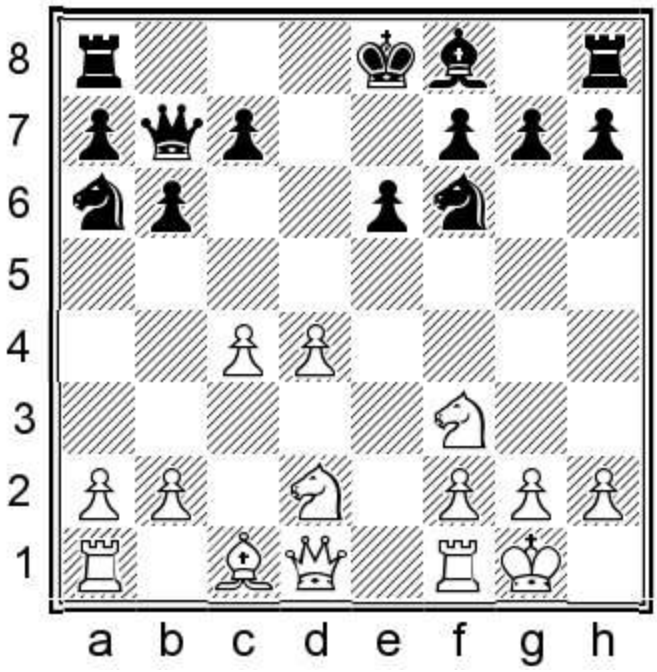


9...Nb8
Again, Black has no choice.
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9...Nb4? is refuted by: 10.c3! Nc2† 11.Kd1 Nxa1 12.Qb5† Nd7 13.Re1+– Followed by a killing discovered at-

tack.
10.0-0±
Knowing to this point is enough. Obsessives can stretch the line with:

10...Nfd7 11.Qb5 Qd6 12.Ndf3 Be7 13.Bf4 0-0 14.Rfe1
When the advantage is rolling along well.

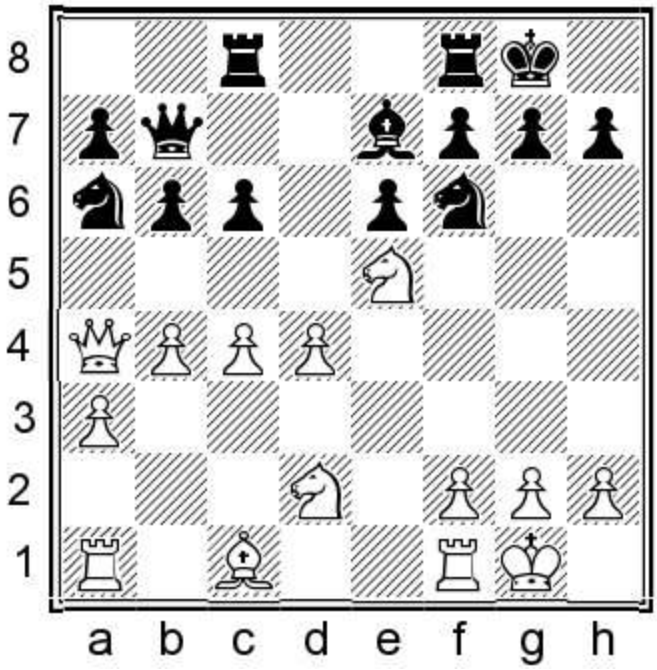
8.c4 Qb7 9.0-0²
With more of the centre and an oddly-placed black knight on a6, White can legitimately claim an opening edge. We will continue just to get ideas of typical middlegame play.



9...Bd6
An active square for the bishop, but leaving the f6-knight lacking support.

9...Be7
I think this passive-looking move is the best option. The position is far from forcing, so I will offer two illustrative lines.
10.Qa4†!?
This would be my choice, trying to fix the pawn on c6.
Also fine is: 10.a3!? Planning b2-b4, so a natural response is: 10...c5 11.Qa4† Nd7 12.Re1 cxd4 (of course not 12...0-0? 13.d5 when Black loses a pawn) 13.Nxd4 Rc8 14.N2f3 0-0 15.Bf4 A plausible follow-up is Rad1, Nb5 and b2-b4.
10...c6 11.Ne5 Rc8 12.a3!? 0-0 13.b4

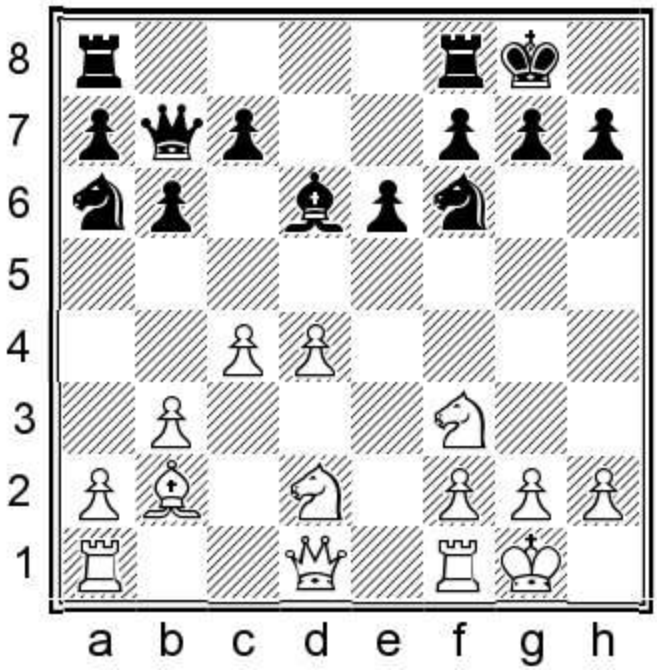
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White has a well-secured space advantage.

10.b3
As above, White has a range of options, including 10.a3!? planning b2-b4.

10...0-0 11.Bb2²
Now we see the dark side to placing the bishop on d6, as d4-d5 followed by Bxf6 is on the cards.

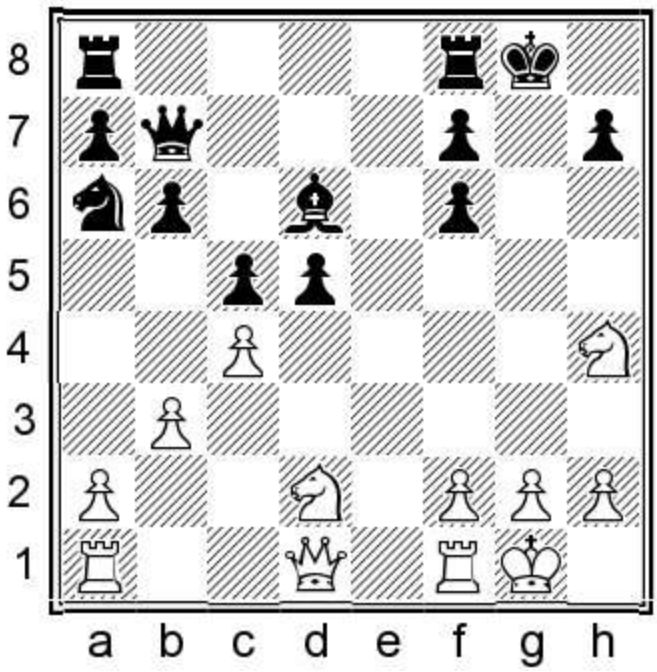


11...c5
By not developing, Black makes the planned break even stronger.

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But even after the more logical 11...Rad8 White still has the option of 12.d5!? exd5 13.Bxf6 gxf6 14.Nh4*f* with

more than enough compensation for the pawn.

12.d5 exd5 13.Bxf6 gxf6 14.Nh4±
Black could have defended better over the next few moves, but it's easy to say that with an engine whirring in the background; plus, this was a rapid game.

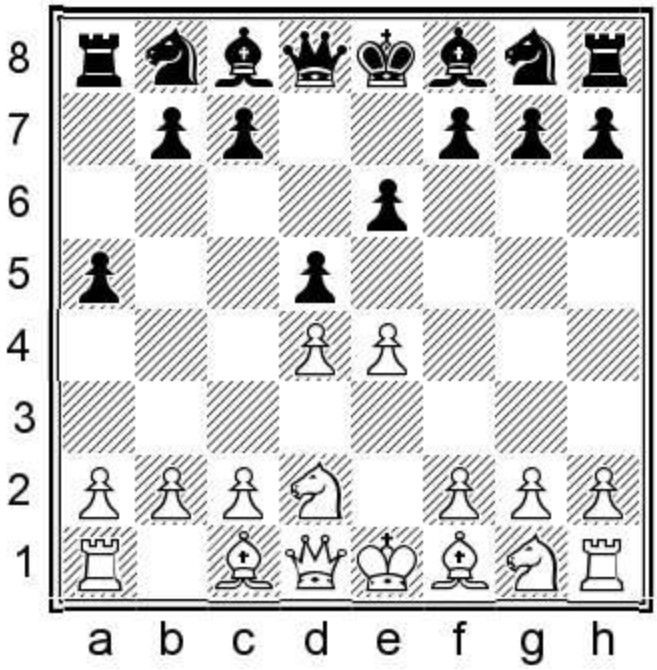


14...Kh8 15.Qf3 Be5 16.Rae1 Rg8
In Adams – Hertneck, Garmisch Partenkirchen (rapid) 1994, White could have crowned his beautiful play with:

17.Rxe5! fxe5 18.Qf6† Rg7 19.Nf5 Rag8 20.Nf3+–
Black cannot hold his position together. For example: 20...Nc7 21.Nxg7 Rxg7 22.Qd8† Rg8 23.Qe7 with Nxe5 or Ng5 to come.

D) 3...a5

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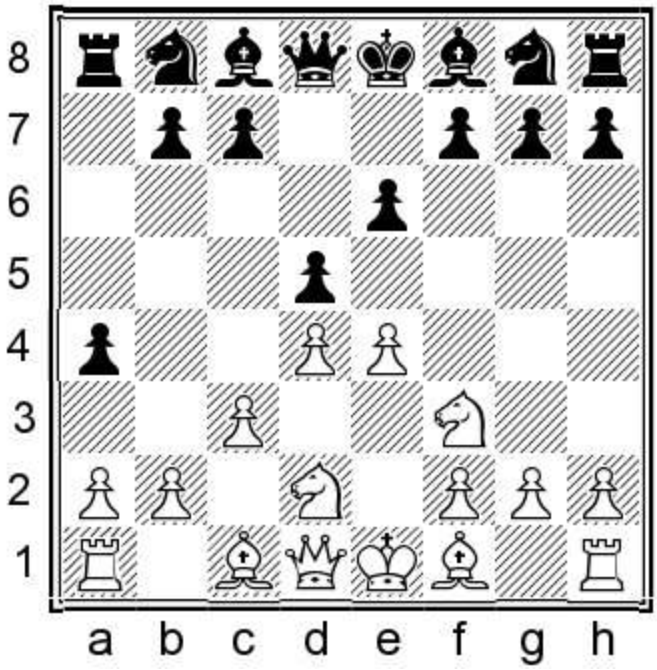
Nepomniatchtchi's idea, though in the last decade he has played it only in blitz games. One problem this line poses for White is the destination of the d2-knight, especially if the other knight goes to f3. As we shall see, the d2-knight sometimes goes to b3 to free White's pieces. This is what 3...a5 is about: Black is about to play ...a4 and take away this square from the knight! That's deep; probably too deep.

4.Ngf3
We follow our rule of thumb. Black has played a slow move that gives us plenty of time, so it's a Ngf3 moment.

4...a4 5.c3!
A useful move, which incidentally attacks the a4-pawn.

5.Bd3!? Nf6 6.0-0 Be7 7.c4² was another logical reaction by White in Dominguez Perez – Nepomniachtchi, Beijing (blitz) 2013 – the same tournament as the main game.

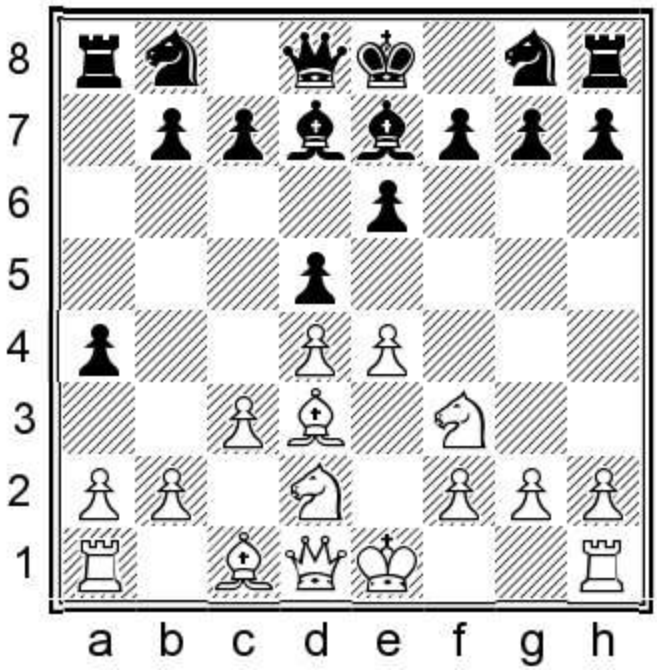
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5...Be7
Sensible development.

5...Nf6?! leads to problems with the far-advanced a-pawn. 6.e5 Nfd7 7.Bb5 a3 8.b4± White has a solid grip on plenty of space.
8...b6 Preparing ...c7-c5; I cannot see any other logical plan for Black (if Black slowly develops with 8...Be7 then 9.Qb3 simply collects the a3-pawn). 9.0-0 c5 10.bxc5 bxc5 11.c4! White is better developed, so he opens up the game in his favour.

6.Bb5†!? Bd7 7.Bd3
The point of the bishop check is that the g8-knight cannot be developed to f6 as after e4-e5 the d7-square is occupied.



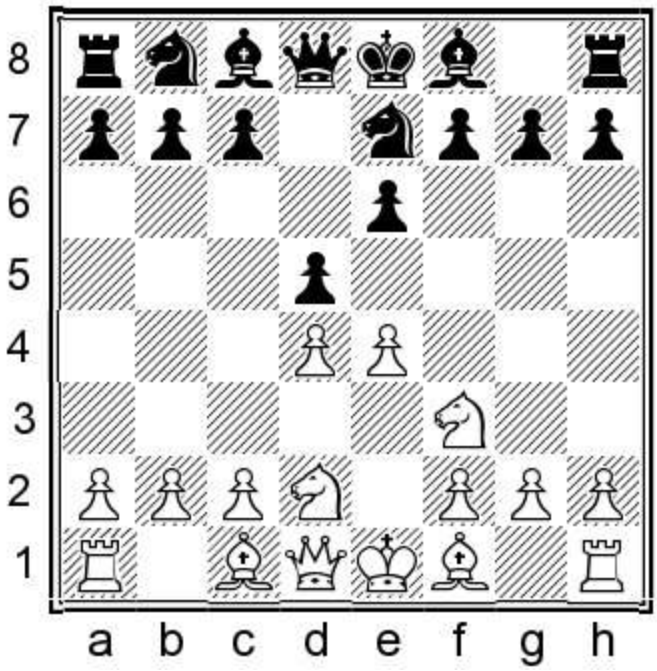
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7...dxe4
Conceding central space, but at least it allows Black to develop his kingside.

7...Nf6?! 8.e5 Ng8 This is obviously unpleasant, but let's see a few more moves. 9.0-0 c5 How should White continue? We simply have to solve the problem of our d2-knight, as mentioned above. 10.Re1 Nc6 11.Nf1± is the human way. Or 10.dxc5 Bxc5 11.b4 axb3 12.Nxb3 is the engine way to solve the problem of the knight!

8.Nxe4 Nf6 9.Ne5 Nc6 10.Nxd7 Qxd7 11.0-0²
White's bishop pair and central control were worth an edge in Vachier-Lagrave – Nepomniachtchi, Beijing (blitz) 2013.

E) 3...Ne7 4.Ngf3

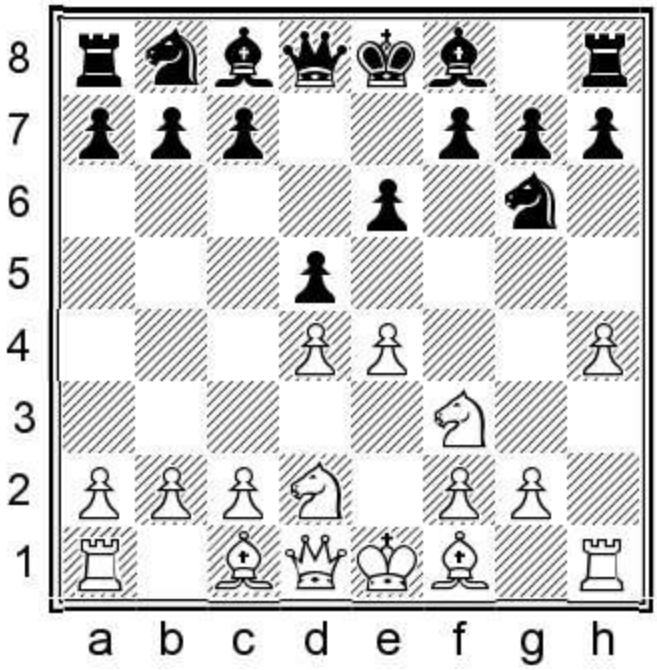


4...Nd7
This is a flexible way of development that the great Petrosian tried a couple of times.

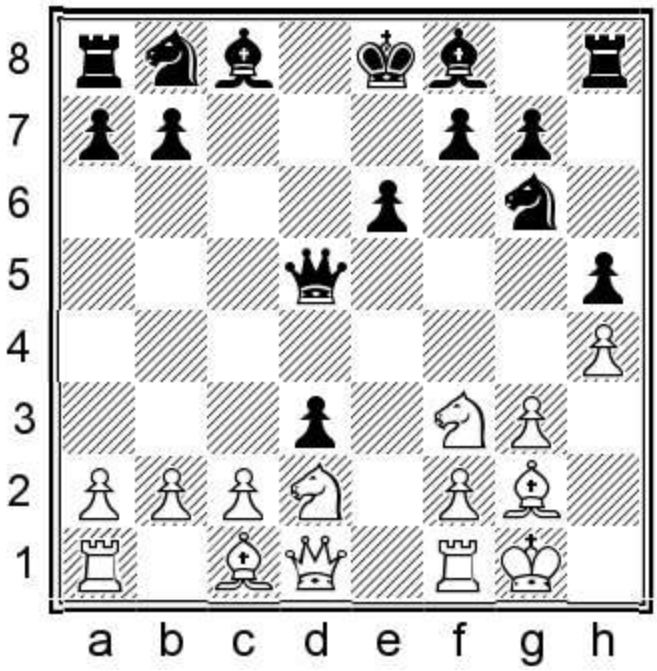
In contrast, 4...g6 is inflexible, when 5.c3 or even 5.h4 are fine responses.

4...Ng6
This is even more inflexible, and provokes a natural and strong response:
5.h4

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5...h5
Or 5...Be7 6.h5 leads to the ugly 6...Nf8 as 6...Nh4? 7.Nxh4 Bxh4 8.Qg4 is a rout.
6.g3
The h5-pawn is weak and the g6-knight misplaced. Let's see one example:
6...c5 7.Bg2 cxd4 8.exd5 Qxd5
Or 8...exd5 9.0-0 Nc6 10.Nb3² is a simple positional edge.
9.0-0 d3

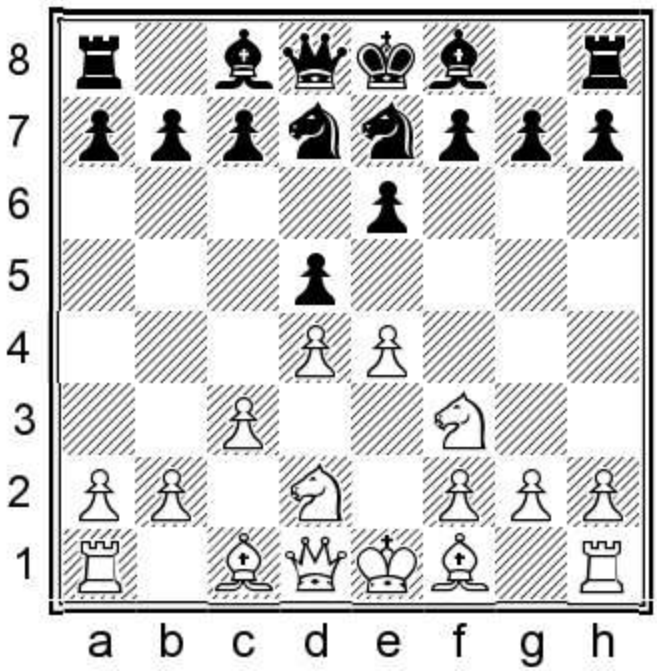


In Kaplan – Vedder, Hoogeveen 2008, one of many potent options was:
10.Re1!N
White threatens Ne5, forcing Black to lose yet more time with his queen. For example:
10...Qd8 11.Ng5 Be7 12.Nc4±

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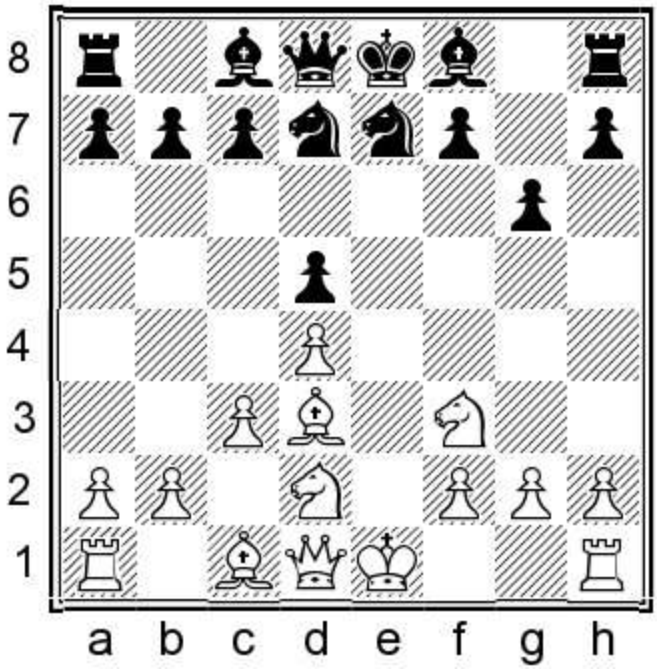
Black cannot castle due to the silly h5-pawn, which leaves him needing to play precisely to avoid losing a miniature.

5.c3!
Instead 5.c4?! gives Black exactly what he wants after 5...g6! and if 6.h4 then 6...h6 7.Bd3 Bg7 followed by ...0-0 and ...c5 as in Beukema – Dgebuadze, Schelle 2015; Black has an excellent game.



5...c5
The other option is:
5...g6
When I recommend:
6.exd5!
6.g3!? is also sensible and shows another argument in favour of the 5.c3 move order – remaining flexible with the f1-bishop's destination. For example: 6...Bg7 7.Bg2 0-0 8.0-0 c5 9.exd5 Nxd5 10.dxc5 Nxc5 11.Nb3²
6...exd5
Or 6...Nxd5 7.Bc4² is pleasant for White.
7.Bd3

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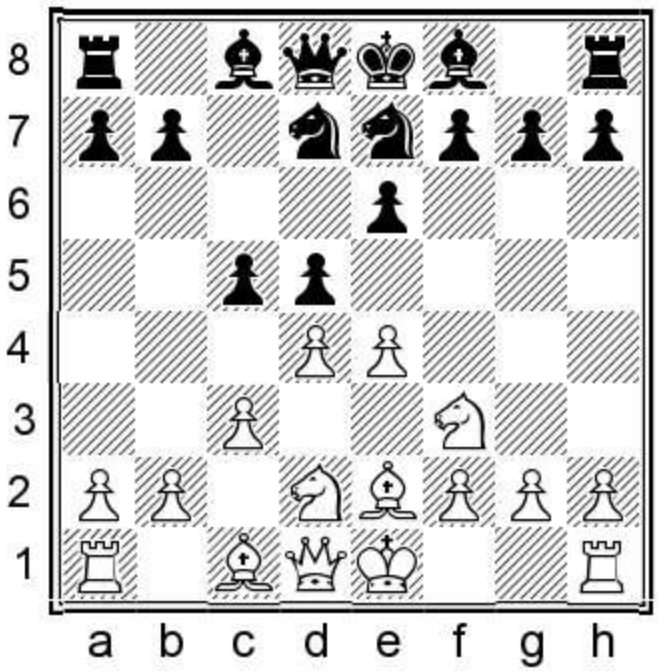


White is not trying for a refutation; a slightly more pleasant position will suffice against this rarely-seen line. For example:
7...Bg7 8.0-0 0-0 9.Re1
White makes room for the knight to go to f1.
9...c5 10.dxc5 Nxc5 11.Nb3!²
Rogic – Levacic, Bol 2014.

6.Be2!?
Rare but logical; maintaining the tension induces a concession from Black.

Our rule of thumb is to take on d5 when Black plays ...c7-c5, but here is an exception. 6.exd5 allows Black to release the traffic jam on e7 after 6...Nxd5 when any edge White has is tiny.
And just to really annoy rule-of-thumb fans, 6.Bd3 is also fine, despite Black's ...c5-break. The point is that Black's passive knights on d7 and e7 allow White the freedom of many possible set-ups.

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6...cxd4
The safest option.

6...dxe4?! 7.Nxe4 accelerates White's development. 7...cxd4?? 8.Nd6# is the comedy exit, but even the more sensible 7...Nd5 allows 8.Bg5 when 8...Be7 9.Nd6† Kf8 10.c4!? is highly promising.

6...Nc6 allows a rather standard IQP position: 7.exd5 exd5 8.dxc5 Nxc5 9.Nb3²

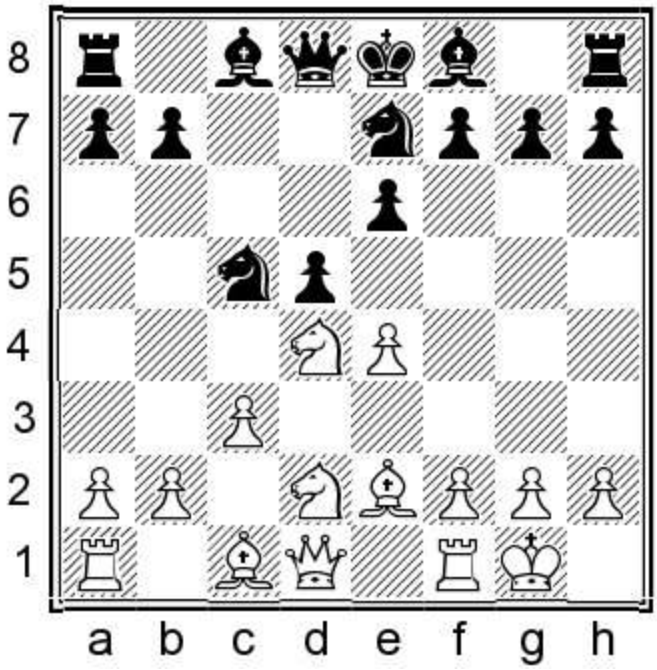
7.Nxd4 Nc5
The only move to have been tried.

7...dxe4 8.Nxe4± is just as nasty as the similar line above.

The untested 7...Nc6N looks sturdiest. 8.exd5 Nxd4 9.cxd4 exd5 10.0-0² I won't claim the advantage is great, but White has gained a move since the start of the game.

8.0-0!²
Developing is the right choice, as White has no reason to worry about captures on e4.

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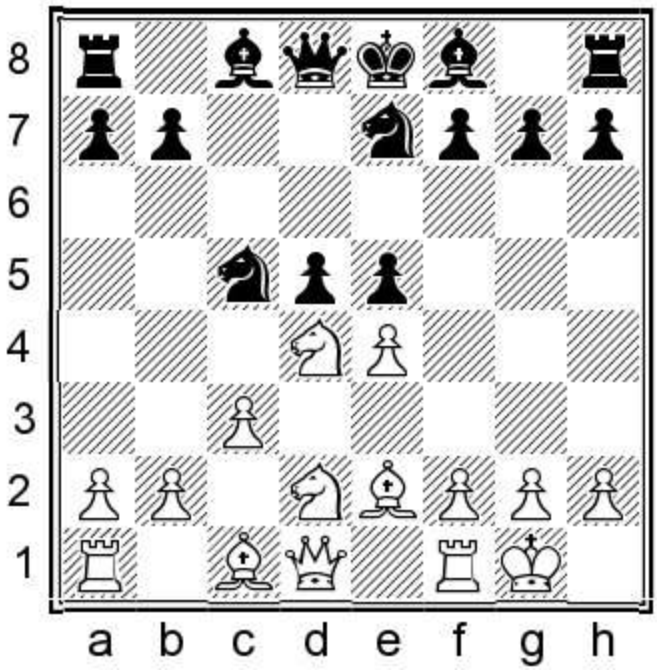


8...e5?!
This was tried in A. Vajda – F. Berkes, Budapest 2001, but there is a less-than-obvious refutation.

8...dxe4?! 9.b4! Nd7 10.Nxe4± is ugly for Black.

Or 8...Nxe4?! 9.Nxe4 dxe4 10.Qc2± and White will quickly regain the pawn with a dangerous lead in development.

Black's best option was to be cautious with
8...a6 or 8...Bd7, though White has a sure edge in either case.



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9.exd5!!N

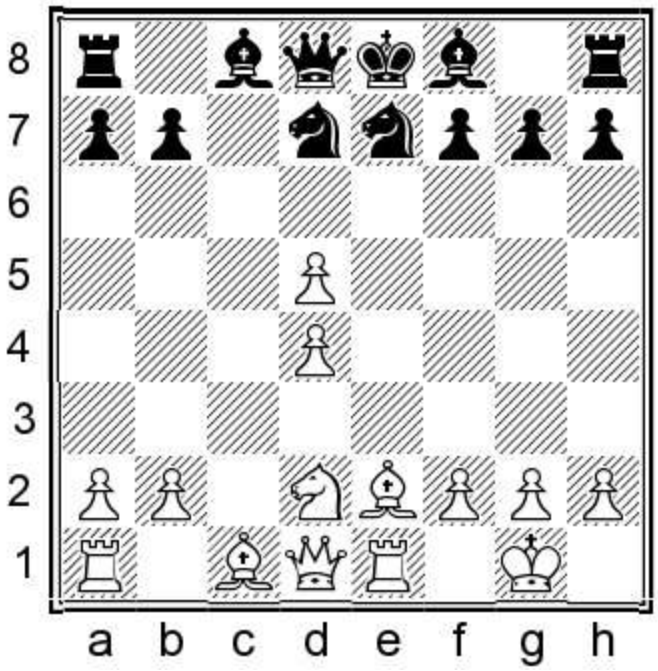
It takes computer-enhanced vision to see that White has a deadly initiative brewing along the e-file.

9...exd4 10.cxd4
The c5-knight has no good squares.

10...Nd7
Or 10...Nxd5 11.dxc5± returns the piece, leaving White clearly better, especially as 11...Bxc5? is impossible due to: 12.Qa4†+–

10...Na6?! 11.Re1+– is similar to the main line, but even worse for Black.

11.Re1±
White has more than ample compensation; in fact, White's advantage is close to decisive. The threats involve e-file play plus Bb5 or Nc4 or d5-d6 or various others.



I will offer a couple of sample lines:

11...Nf6
Returning the piece wit11...Nxd5 12.Bc4† Be7 13.Bxd5 0-0± may well be the best Black can do; he is not getting quickly mated but he is a pawn down for nothing.

12.Qb3! Qxd5 13.Bc4 Qa5 14.Re5 Qb6 15.Bb5† Bd7 16.Nc4 Qc7 17.Bg5+–
White's pieces flow into the game with tempo.

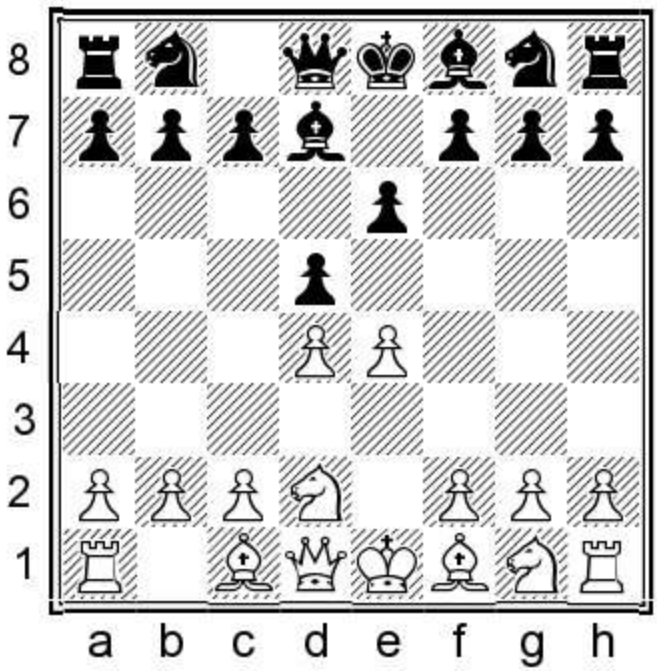
F) 3...Bd7

GAME 1

Lazaro Bruzon Batista – Richard Rapport
Camarinas 2013

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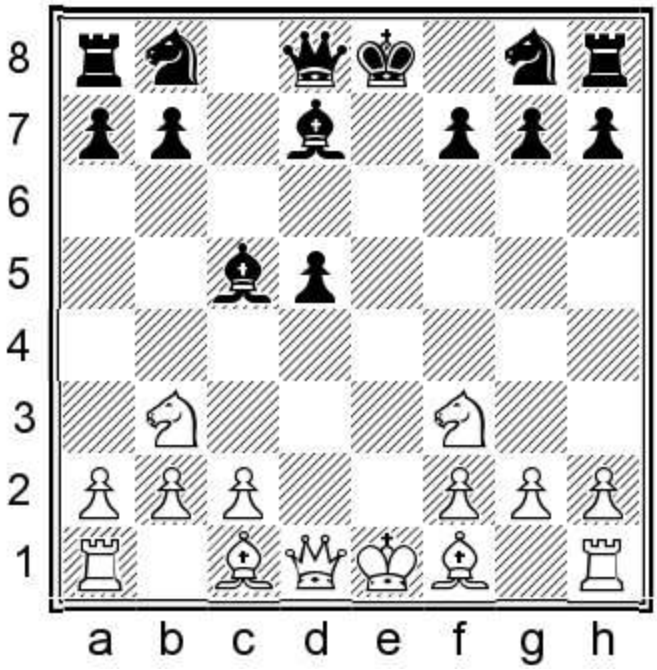
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Bd7
A weird move that was briefly a pet line of Rapport and Jobava. If Black intends to play a Fort Knox then this is a viable alternate move order, but as an independent line it has no appeal.



4.Ngf3
As mentioned earlier in the “Rules of Thumb”, if Black gives us time, then we develop the g1-knight to f3. Playing an Exchange French after 4.exd5 exd5 5.Bd3, claiming the bishop is not so well placed at d7, makes some sense, but White cannot hope to get much of an edge with such an insipid approach.

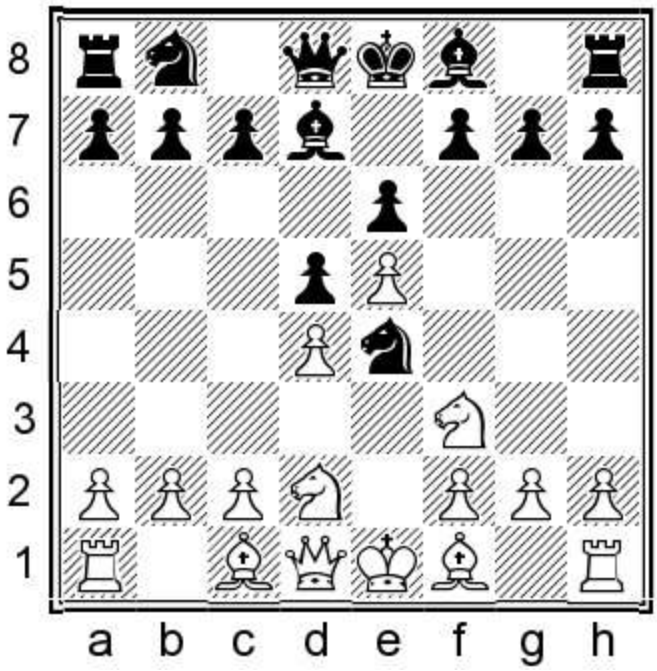
4...Nf6?!
Rapport tried this independent line once, but White is comfortably better.
4...dxe4 5.Nxe4 Bc6 brings us back to the Fort Knox (3...dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bd7) and this was Jobava’s choice every time.
4...c5
As mentioned earlier, this ...c5-break usually works better when the bishop is on d3; also, Black’s bishop makes no sense on d7 in an IQP set-up. White gets the upper hand with:
5.exd5 exd5 6.dxc5 Bxc5 7.Nb3

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The bishop jumped from f8 to c5 in one go, but the d7-bishop will have to move again to somewhere more productive, so it shakes out to a normal anti-IQP edge. For example:
7...Qe7† 8.Be2 Bb6N
The first choice of the engines.
8...Nf6 9.Nxc5 Qxc5 10.0-0± was Walther – Sandig, Germany 1962.
9.0-0 Nf6 10.Bg5 0-0 11.Re1²
It's nothing dramatic, but White's certainly better.

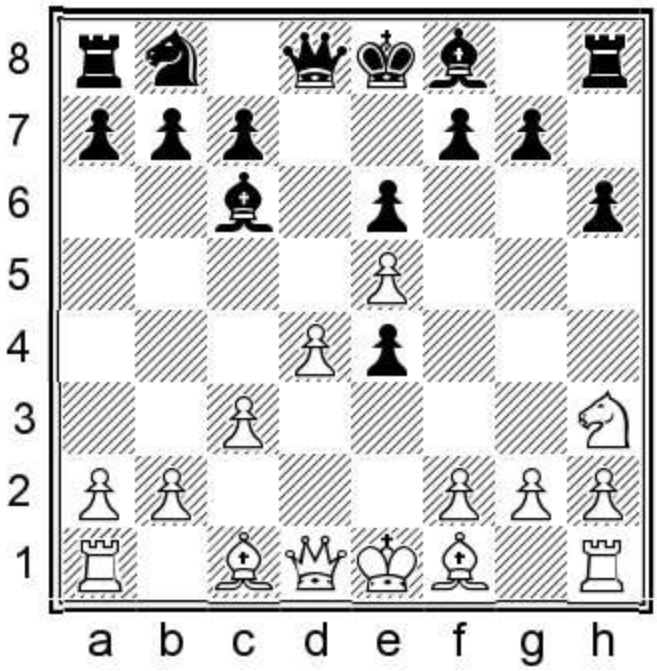
5.e5 Ne4



6.Bd3
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Not so bad, but it allows Black to ease his cramp by exchanging a pair of minor pieces without suffering struc-

tural damage.

6.Nxe4!N
I recommend this move, which makes Black pay a price for the exchange of knights.
6...dxe4 7.Ng5 Bc6
Black makes some sense of the development of the bishop to d7, but he will still struggle.
8.c3 h6
Otherwise Qg4 was coming.
9.Nh3±



A likely follow-up is Nf4 plus g2-g3 and Bg2; White is significantly better. An attempt to cut across White's plan is:
9...g5
But Black's structure gets ever weaker.
10.Qh5 Bg7 11.Be2
White plans 0-0 and f2-f4, followed by a serious kicking.

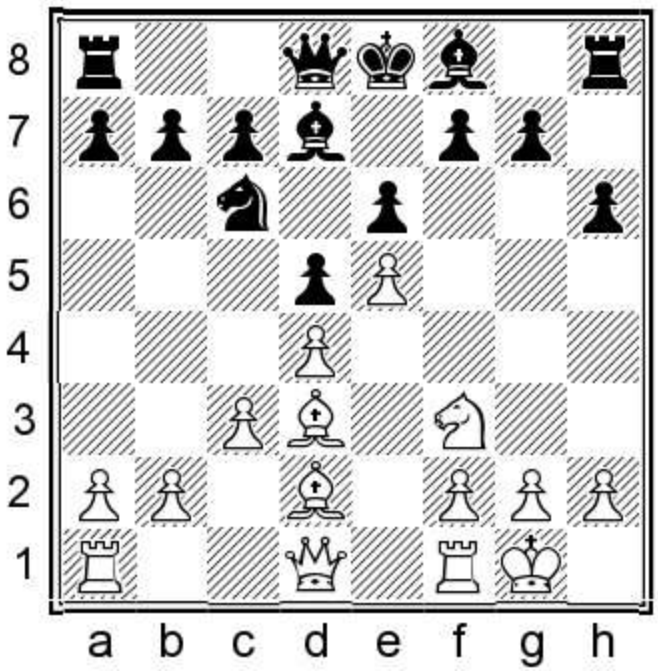
6...Nxd2 7.Bxd2
I will not annotate the rest of the game in depth, as it's not vital to our repertoire, but there are some fun moments later.

7...h6
This move feels slow to me. Instead I would go for 7...c5 when 8.dxc5 or 8.c3 both look like just a slight edge, which is why I prefer 6.Nxe4.

8.0-0 Nc6
The normal Frenchman's move was still
8...c5.

9.c3±
White has more space and faster development, which translates to a solid advantage.

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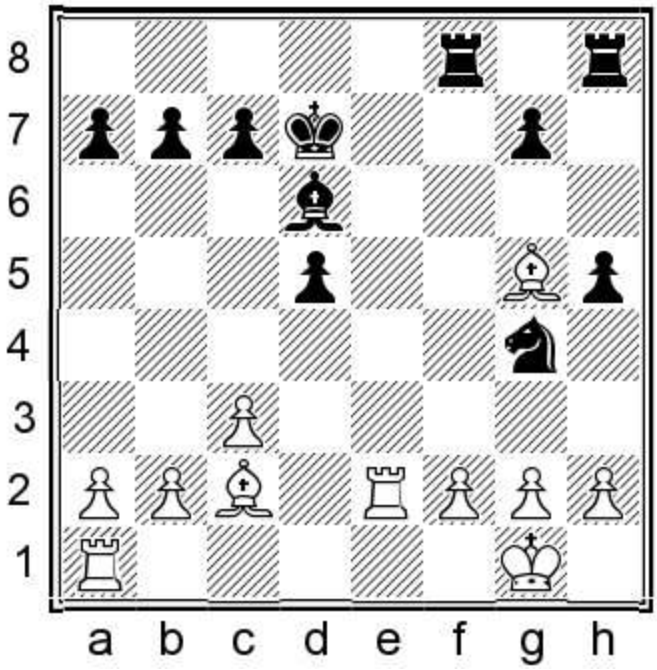
9...f5
Gaining space and wisely intending to castle long.

Going short with 9...Be7 10.Qe2 0-0?! was suicidal after the crude 11.Bc2! planning Qd3. For example: 11...f5 12.exf6 Rxf6 13.Qd3 Bd6 14.Rae1+– A mix of Qh7 and Ne5 will be deadly.

10.exf6
Also promising was 10.c4!? as the weakness on the f7-a2 diagonal justifies White's loss of tempo.

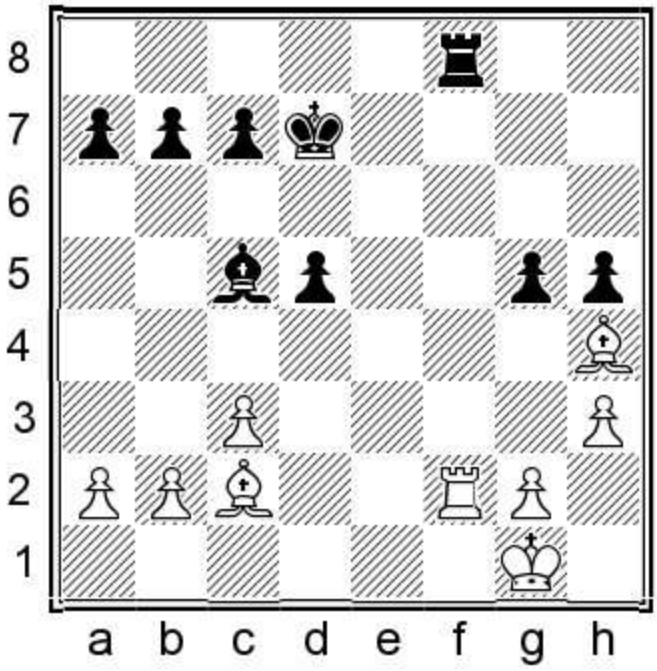
10...Qxf6 11.Re1 Bd6 12.Ne5 0-0-0 13.Nxd7 Kxd7 14.Qg4 Rdf8 15.Re2 h5 16.Qg5 Qxg5 17.Bxg5 e5 18.dxe5 Nxe5 19.Bc2 Ng4
A fascinating tactical moment.

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20.Rd1?!
Allowing Black to escape with a draw.

20.h3!
If the knight retreats, White has a simple two-bishops endgame edge, so the only move to worry about was:
20...Nxf2 21.Rxf2 Bc5 22.Raf1 Rxf2 23.Rxf2 Rf8 24.Bh4 g5



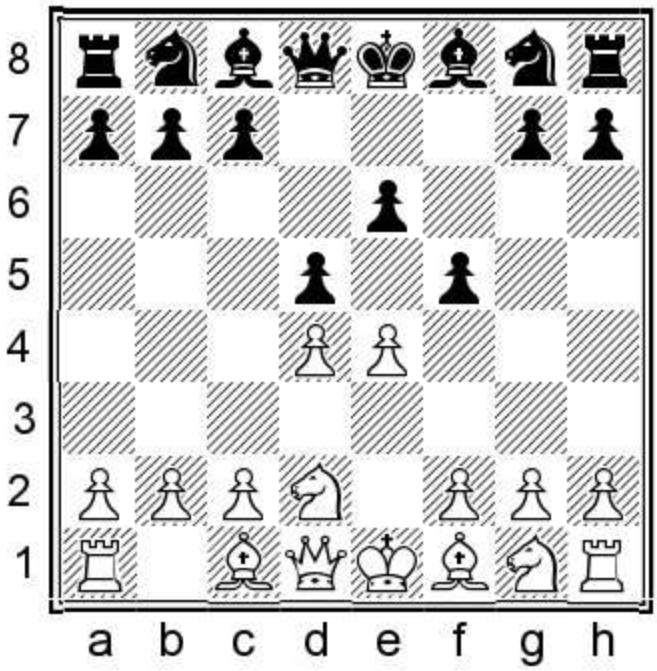
The nasty pin looks like it will solve all Black's problems, but there is a well-hidden flaw:
25.b4!
Probably the move Bruzon missed! The idea is that c5 is the only square from where the bishop enforces the pin and covers the f8-rook, and both tasks are
essential.

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25.Kf1 gxh4 26.Rxf8 Bxf8 leaves White drawing an opposite-coloured-bishop ending a pawn down.
And 25.Bg3 h4 would not gain White more than a draw either.
25...Bb6 26.Kf1 Bxf2
26...gxh4?? 27.Rxf8 and the rook is unprotected.
27.Bxf2±
One pawn is not enough compensation when a rook faces two lively bishops.

20...Bxh2† 21.Kf1 c6 22.c4 Bg3 23.f3 Nf6 24.cxd5 Nxd5 25.Be4 Re8 26.Bxd5 cxd5 27.Rxd5† Kc6 28.Rdd2 Rxe2 29.Rxe2 Bd6 30.Rc2† Kd5 31.Rd2†
½–½

G) 3...f5

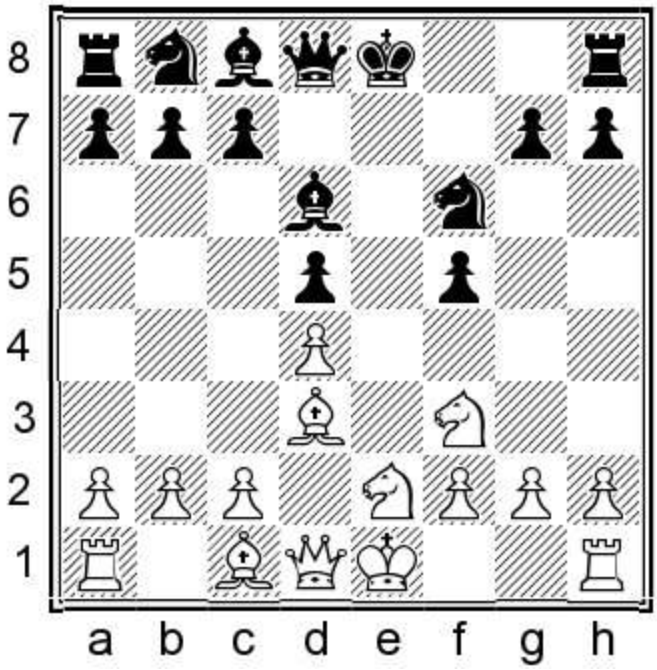


You may well be thinking there is no need to mention such an ugly move. I would like to agree, but it appears more than 300 times in my database and is not quite as bad as it looks, so some brief coverage is worthwhile.

4.exf5 exf5 5.Ndf3!
The traditional coherent plan of development in the Tarrasch: knights on e2 and f3, bishop on d3. Black hopes to sink a knight on e4, but it can be chased away, unlike our secure grasp of e5.

5...Nf6 6.Bd3 Bd6 7.Ne2
Black has a few possibilities, so we will just get a feel for typical play.

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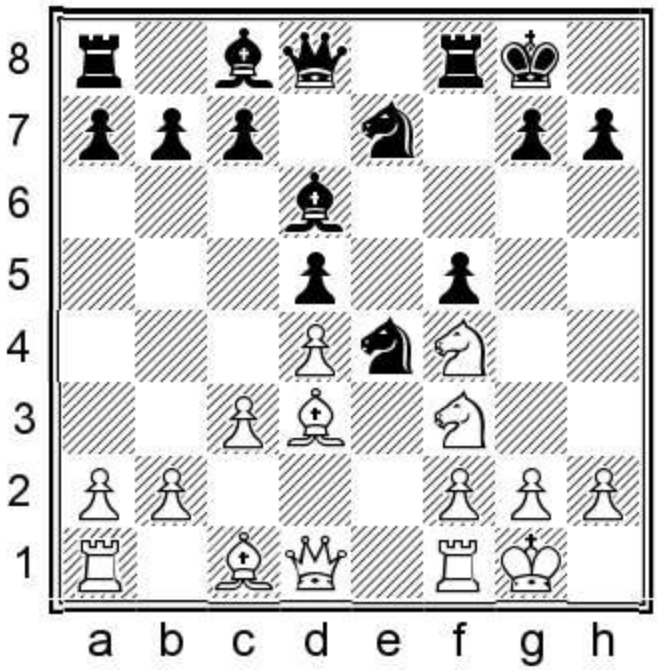
We will consider G1) 7...Nc6!?, G2) 7...0-0
and G3) 7...c6.

G1) 7...Nc6!? 8.c3

A perfectly normal move, but it’s worth understanding that ...Nb4 is not a positional threat, as it would weaken even further Black’s control of e5 in particular and the dark squares in general.

So also fine was: 8.Bf4!?N For example: 8...0-0 9.0-0 Nb4 10.Re1 Re8 11.Be5[2]

8...0-0 9.0-0 Ne4 10.Nf4 Ne7



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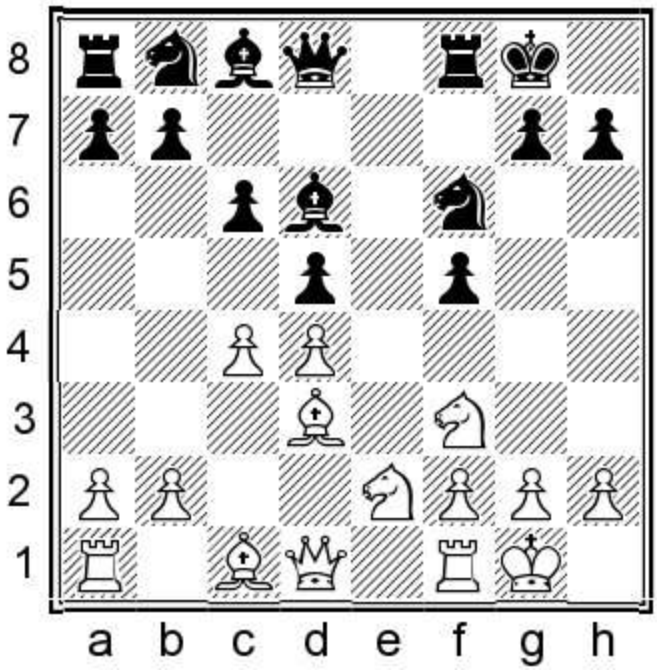
In Toth – E. Szabo, Salgotarjan 1980, White played 11.c4, which was worth a tiny edge, despite the loss of tempo in playing c2-c3-c4. Even better was the prophylactic:

11.Bc2!?N
The point is that the immediate 11.Ne5 would allow 11...c5 when Black has some play.

In contrast, after:

11...c5?! 12.dxc5 Bxc5 13.Bb3
The d5-pawn is doomed. So Black would have to select a less active 11th move, allowing White's plan of Ne5 and f2-f3.

G2) 7...0-0 8.0-0 c6 9.c4!



A fine direct plan. The only possible downside would be if Black could capture and exploit the IQP, but the following game shows that White's activity is the key factor.

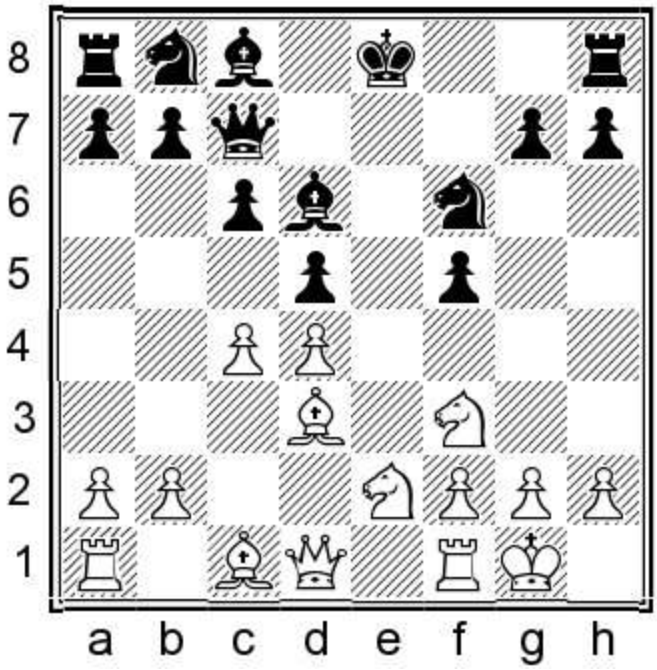
9...dxc4 10.Bxc4† Kh8 11.Ne5!?
Once again the direct option, though either minor piece to f4 was also excellent.

11...Nd5 12.Nf4 Bxe5 13.dxe5 Nxf4 14.Bxf4±
With the bishop pair and a chunky passed pawn. In C. Kindermann – Vengels, Ruhrgebiet 1996, White's clear advantage grew decisively after:

14...Qe7? 15.e6!+–

G3) 7...c6 8.0-0 Qc7 9.c4!

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Black’s delayed castling makes this advance even stronger than usual.

9...0-0
A wise choice, accepting the following loss of time, as 9...dxc4?! 10.Bxc4+– stops Black castling kingside, with a rapid rout to follow.

10.c5 Be7 11.b4±
In Ginsburg – Schmittdiel, Germany 2004, Black occupied the e4-square with his knight, but unsurprisingly it was later chased away by f2-f3, after White rerouted his f3-knight.

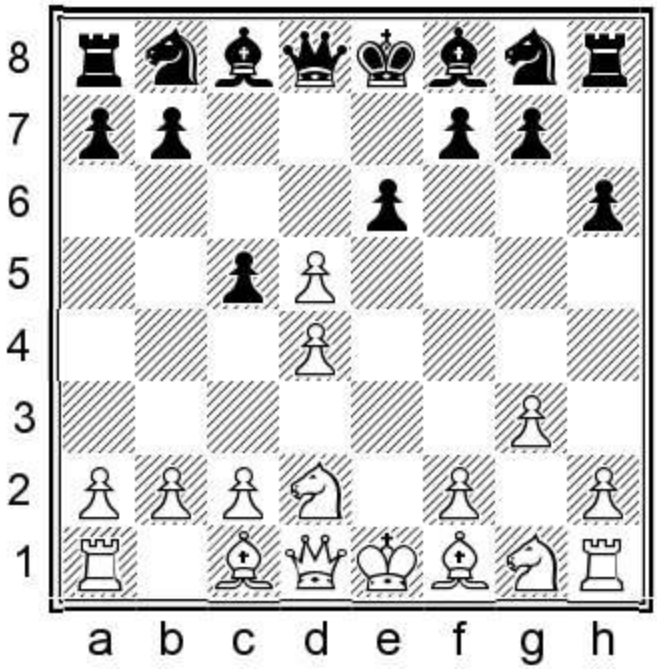
H) 3...h6

This is the Eingorn Variation and belongs up there with 3...Be7 and 3...a6 as a waiting move. Its major strength is that it is far from as bad as it looks!

4.Ngf3
When given time...

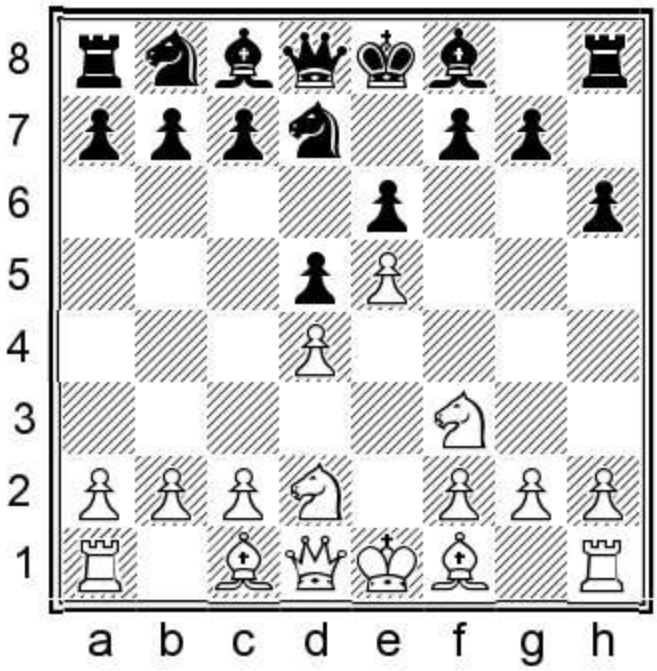
4.g3!?
This was another move I considered seriously. If you feel like a day-off from theory, with an unexplored position, then it’s fine. For example:
4...c5 5.exd5

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5...Qxd5
Or 5...exd5 6.Bg2N and wait for the f8-bishop to move before taking on c5, with a typical IQP position.
6.Ngf3 cxd4 7.Bg2
The d4-pawn will inevitably be retrieved. One game continued:
7...Nc6 8.0-0 d3 9.c3 Nf6 10.Re1 Qf5 11.Nb3 Be7 12.Nbd4 Nxd4 13.Nxd4 Qa5
Gvetadze – Hoang, Tbilisi 2011, continued with the obvious and good 14.Qxd3² but 14.Nc6!± was a strong shot, which would have been much easier to spot if there had been a pawn on c6.

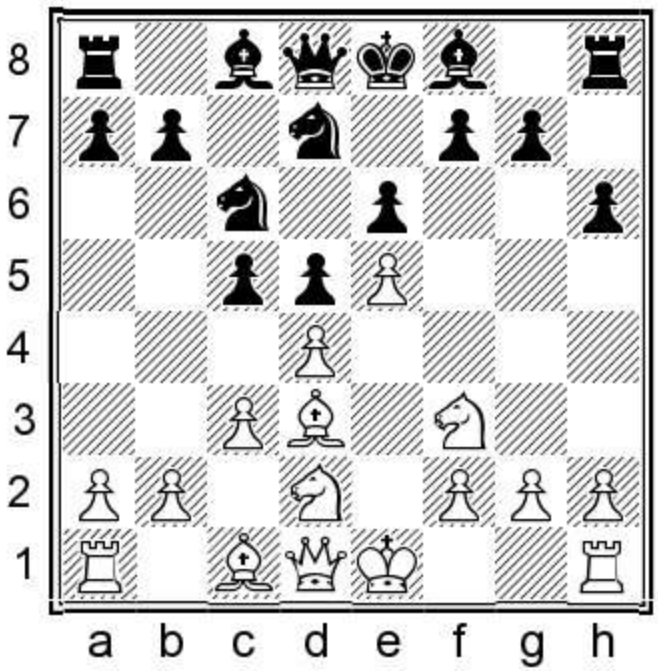
4...Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7



6.c4!?
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The thinking behind this dynamic approach is that White should open the position since Black lost a tempo on

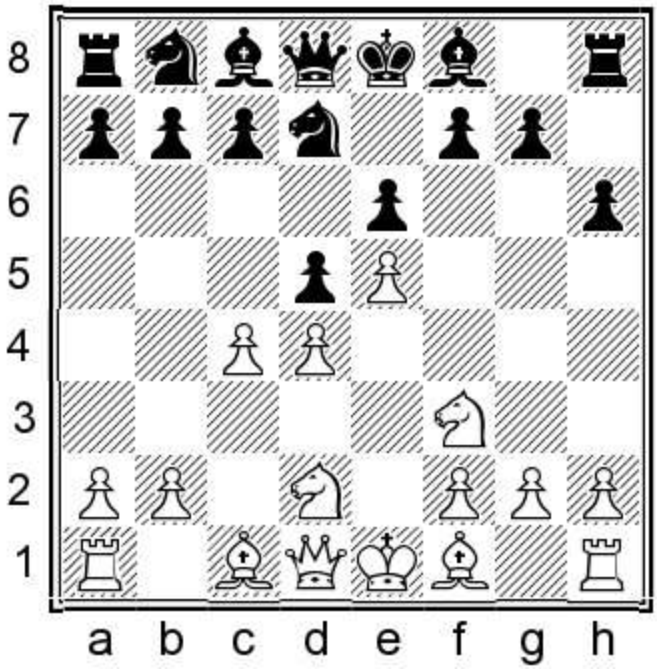
...h7-h6. It is by no means a straight refutation, but at least it gives an interesting game with serious chances of fighting for an advantage.

Instead the usual main line is:
6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6



8.a3
I actually managed to get an advantage against the line's inventor after 8.0-0 g5 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Nb3 Bb6 11. Re1 in Shaw – Eingorn, Bad Wiessee 2003, but in later games it has been confirmed that Black is OK in the complications after 11...g4!. Something would have to be found for White for me to recommend this, and I did not find it.
8...Qb6!
David Howell won a fantastic game against Nigel Short following 8...a5. However, I could not work out what to do against the text move. For instance:
9.0-0 cxd4 10.cxd4 a5!N 11.Re1 Be7!
What is White's next move? It is easy to improve Black's position, but White is seriously lacking in harmony. In short, I do not believe White has serious chances of playing for an advantage in this way. It would be easier to find ways he could be worse.

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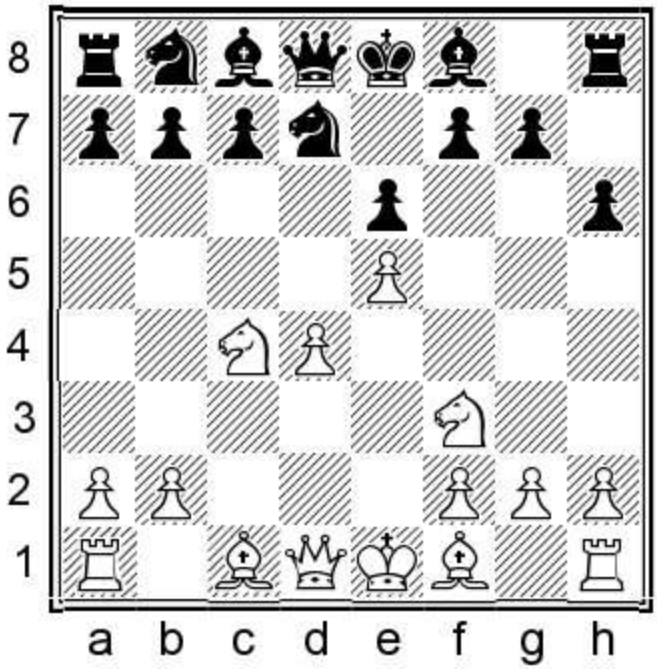
The three options to consider are
H1) 6...dxc4, H2) 6...Be7 and H3) 6...c5!.

H1) 6...dxc4

By far the most common move.

7.Nxc4
The other recapture is equally common and of similar strength. I chose to recommend the knight recapture as I feel White's position is easier to play in this line.
After 7.Bxc4 the critical position is probably the one after 7...Nb6 8.Bb3 Bd7 9.0-0 Bc6 which looks very much like a 3.e4 Nf6 line from the Queen's Gambit Accepted. If you are exclusively a 1.e4 player, then you might not feel so comfortable facing a QGA.

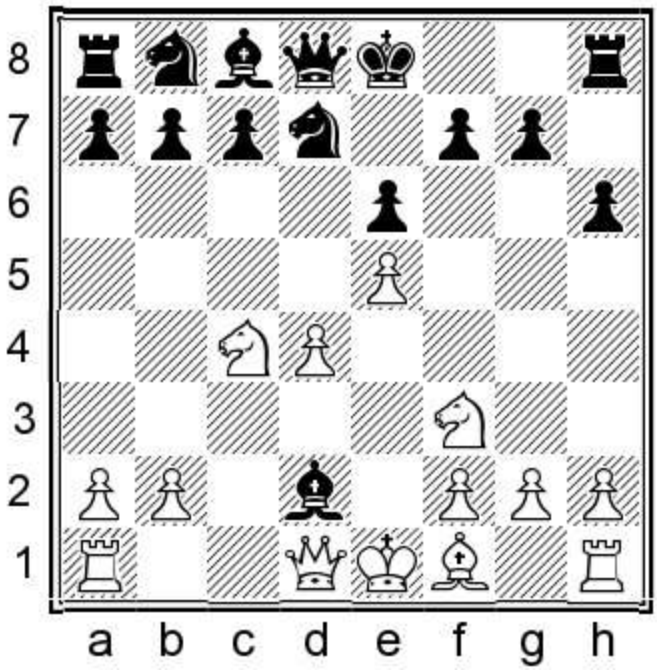
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7...Nb6
As played in 10 out of 11 games, so this is the move to expect.

7...Be7 was played in Chos – Kaasen, Moscow 2016, but does nothing to relieve Black's cramp. I suggest 8. Be3!² followed by a quick Rc1.

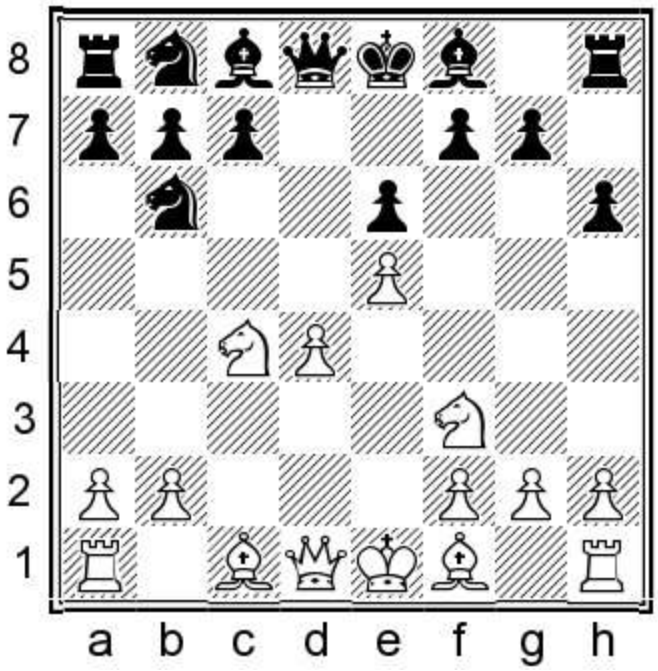
7...Bb4†!?N
I believe this untested move is Black's best try in the 6...dxc4 line. When you see the main line, the attraction of this check becomes clear.
8.Bd2 Bxd2†



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9.Ncxd2!?

A funny-looking move, but keeping pieces on the board is more significant in this structure than rapid development.
9.Qxd2 is far more natural, but after 9...Nc6! (the immediate 9...Nb6 allows 10.Na5!² with Rc1 on the way) Black plans ...Nb6 offering a freeing exchange; White's edge is tiny.
One sample line is:
9...c5
Or 9...0-0 10.Be2 would probably transpose, though White has the added option of 10.Bd3.
10.Nc4!? 0-0 11.Be2 cxd4 12.Qxd4²
White is still asking questions, though Black is certainly solid.



8.a3!
Preventing ...Bb4† which otherwise might have relieved Black's cramped position. I discovered this move was also given by IM John Watson some years ago. It has been played just once, and that game has no theoretical relevance, so we are in untested territory.

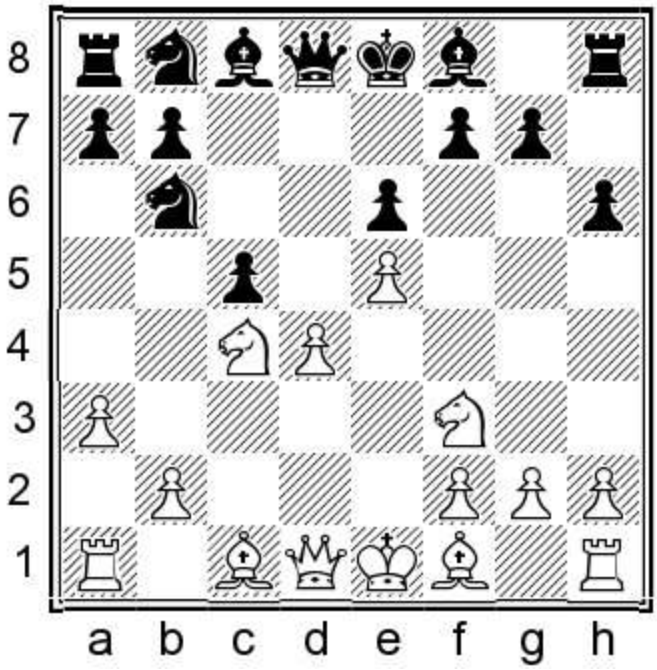
8.Nxb6 has been more popular, which is surprising as White has nothing after 8...axb6. For example 9.Bd3 Bb4† 10.Kf1 Bd7 11.h4 Bc6 12.Be3 Qd5 13.a3 Bb5 was perfectly comfortable for Black in Nemeth – Antipov, Budapest 2017.

8...c5
Black needs more than simple development. For example: 8...Nxc4 9.Bxc4 Nd7 10.Bd3 Be7 11.0-0 0-0 12. Qe2± is nasty for Black; he will soon need to move the f-pawn when White will capture on f6, shattering Black's structure.

Or 8...N8d7 9.Be3² with Rc1 as a likely follow-up.

The text move was Ivic – Besedes, Belgrade 2017, when I recommend:

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9.Be3!N
Developing and keeping the tension is the way to go.

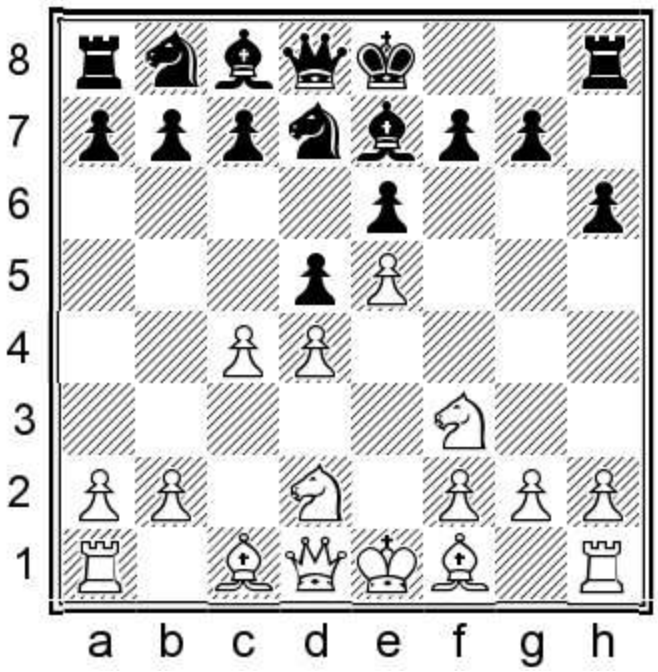
9.Nxb6 was the game, which should have been met comfortably by 9...axb6.

A natural continuation is:

9...Nxc4 10.Bxc4 cxd4 11.Nxd4!²
White has no reason to worry about the e5-pawn, as 11...Qa5†?! 12.b4 Qxe5 13.Rc1ƒ offers more than enough compensation due to White's development. In fact, this line looks like an example from a beginner's book about the perils of going pawn-grabbing with your queen in the opening.

H2) 6...Be7

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A sensible developing move. Note that if Black later plays ...c7-c5 there is some crossover into variation H3, when Black plays ...c5 and follows up with ...Be7.

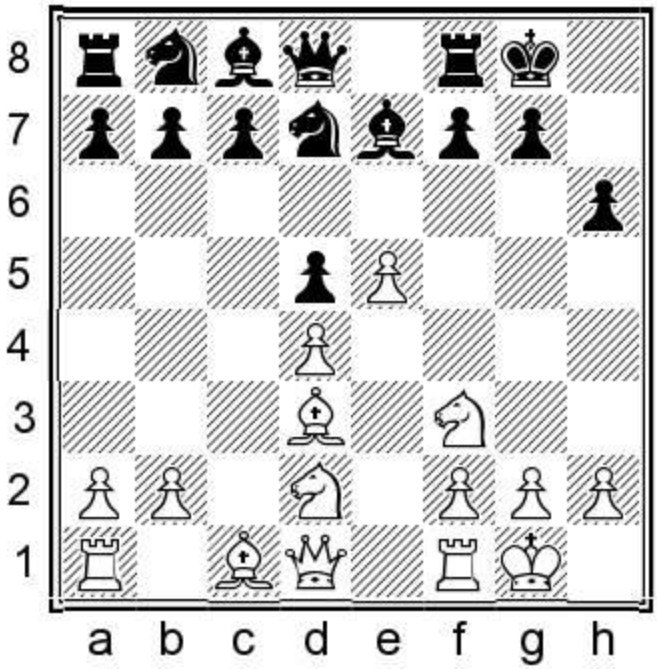
7.cxd5
Let's play directly.

Instead 7.a3 c5 8.cxd5 exd5 9.Qb3 Nc6 10.Qxd5 0-0© gave Black enough compensation in Aagaard – Haria, Helsingor 2015.

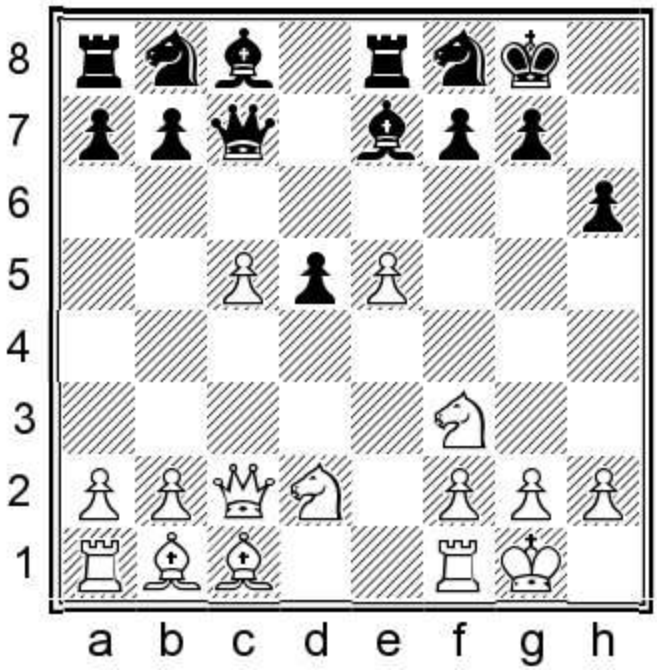
7...exd5 8.Bd3 0-0
8...c5 is covered on page 28 – see the note on 8...Be7.

9.0-0

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9...Re8
A natural alternative is:
9...c5
This is a vital move order; Black gets castled and plays ...c7-c5 without allowing any disruption with e5-e6 and Bg6†.
10.Bb1
Similar is 10.Re1 Nc6 11.Bb1 Re8 12.Qc2 Nf8 13.dxc5 Bg4 as in Draskovic – Stocek, Reykjavik 2015. White is a pawn up for the moment, but Black seems to have almost enough play for full compensation.
10...Re8 11.Qc2 Nf8 12.dxc5 Qc7

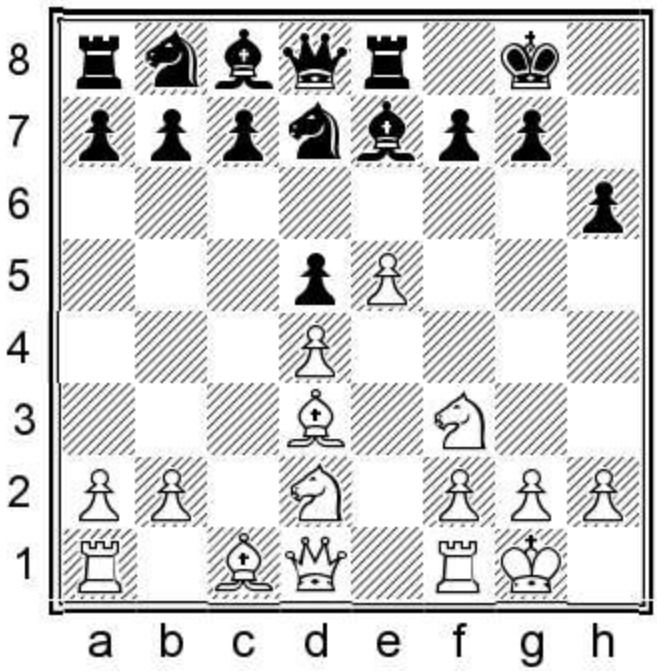


In Svidler – Nguyen, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011, White could have tried:
13.Nb3!?N 13...Bg4 14.Qc3

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Though Black looks to have reasonable play for the pawn.

After the text move White missed a chance to exploit his opponent's restrained approach.



10.Qb3!N
Making it harder for Black to play ...c5. He has hopefully spent too much time preparing it.

The game continued 10.Re1 and a draw was agreed in Jurkovic – Bukal, Sibenik 2006. Indeed, 10...c5 is about level.

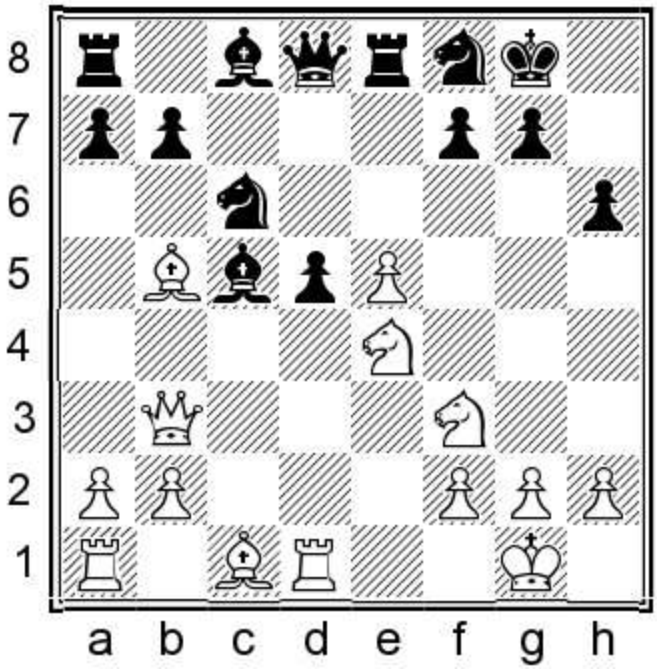
I also checked 10.Nb3N 10...c5 11.Nxc5 Nxc5 12.dxc5 Bxc5 13.h3 Nc6 14.Bf4 when any advantage for White is miniscule.

10...Nf8 11.Rd1!
Keeping an eye on d5.

11...c5!?
This is by no means forced, but if Black does not play this break, White is simply more comfortable from the opening.

12.dxc5 Bxc5 13.Bb5 Nc6 14.Ne4!
Forcing matters. Black has to give up the queen.

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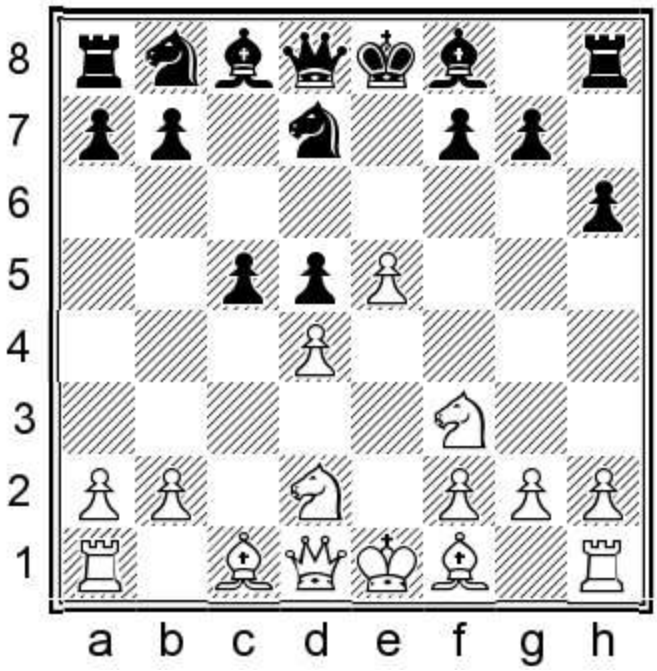


14...dxe4 15.Rxd8 Rxd8 16.Bxc6 bxc6 17.Ne1 Bd4 18.Qc2[2]
Black has compensation for the queen, but I would rather watch him try to prove it than have to prove it myself. I think White is playing for two results here.

H3) 6...c5!

This is the critical move, but White has several ways to fight for an advantage.

7.cxd5 exd5
At this junction White has two serious moves.

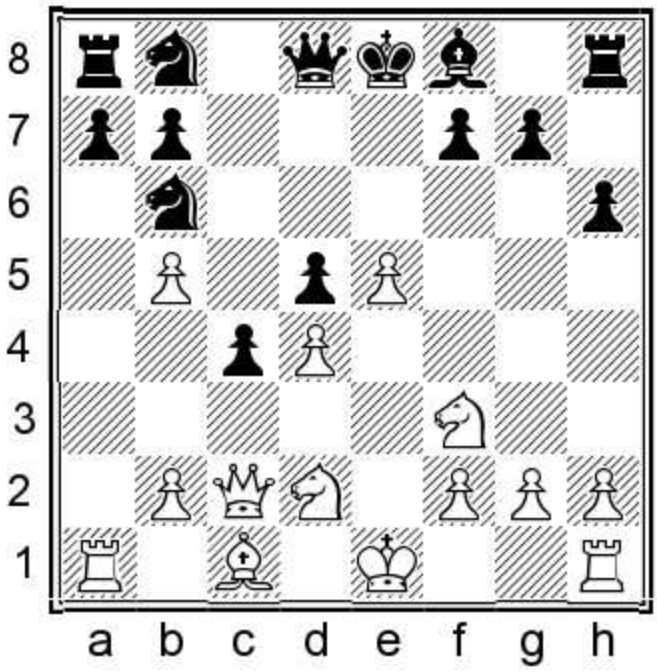


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8.Bd3

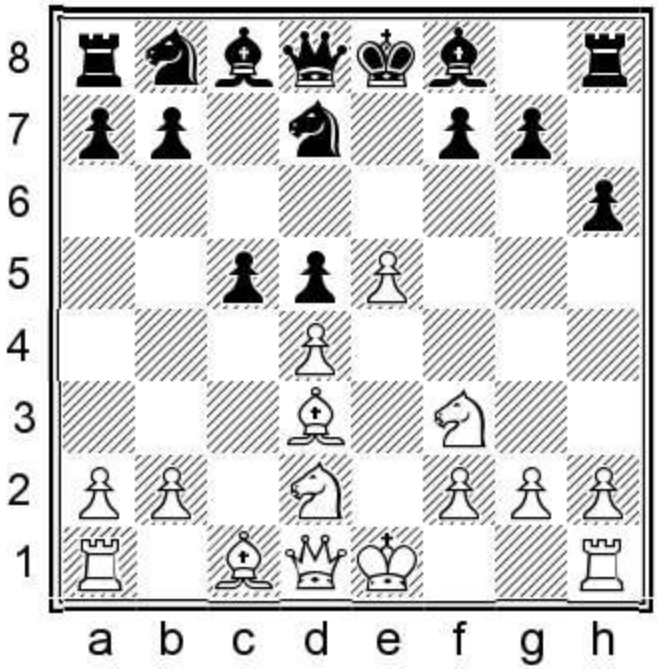
The most natural.

8.Qb3!?
This is evidently the extra option. It is quite peculiar, but also rather interesting.
8...Nb6
I do not believe Black should let White take on d5.
8...Nc6 9.Qxd5 Be7 (or 9...cxd4 10.Bb5 looks a tad better for White too) 10.e6! fxe6 11.Qxe6 cxd4 Black won in Dragnev – Torma, Budapest 2014, but after 12.Bb5!N Black is under a lot of pressure. In crucial lines, White will take on c6 and d4, winning a pawn. And another little point is that 12...Qb6 13.Nc4!± is bad for Black.
9.Bb5† Bd7 10.a4 c4 11.Qc2 Bxb5 12.axb5



This is all rather curious and should be checked in practice before any final conclusions can be made. But my analysis suggests White is better.
12...a6
12...Bb4 is a possible improvement. The simple 13.0-0 is my suggestion, with a murky position that appears slightly in White's favour.
13.e6! Qf6 14.exf7† Kxf7 15.Ne5† Kg8 16.Ng6 Rh7 17.Nxf8 Qxf8 18.Qg6 N8d7 19.0-0 axb5 20.Rxa8 Nxa8 21.Nf3 Nf6 22.Re1±
White won on move 65 in the computer game Stockfish – Hiarcs, CCRL 2010.

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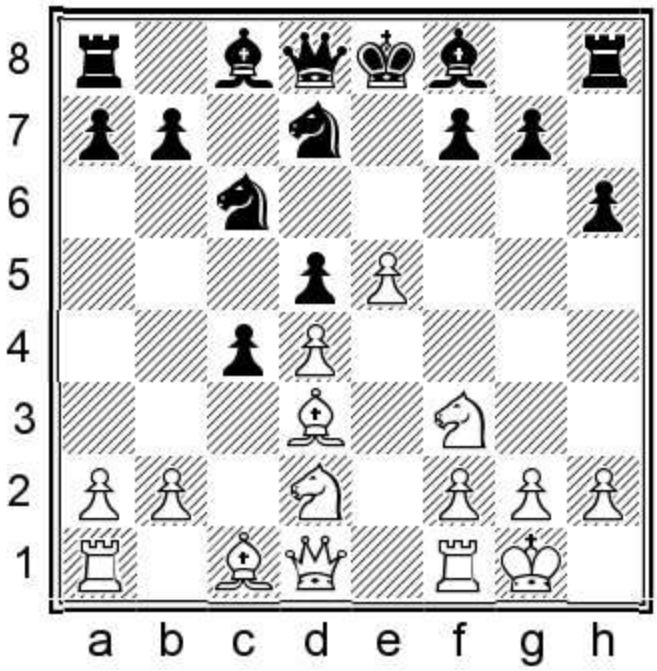


8...Nc6
Fast and direct.

8...Nb6?! gives White a simple path to an advantage. 9.dxc5! Bxc5 10.0-0 Nc6 This is M. Hendriks – Fast, corr. 2007. 11.Nb3!N 11...Be7 12.Nbd4 White is clearly better.

After 8...Be7 9.e6!? the line 9...fxe6 10.Bg6† Kf8 11.0-0 Nc6 transposes to the position after 11...Kf8 in the main line below.

9.0-0 Be7
Black intends to castle, with a likely transposition to the 9...c5 variation in the above 6...Be7 line.
9...c4 releases the tension in the centre, which I believe is in White's interests.



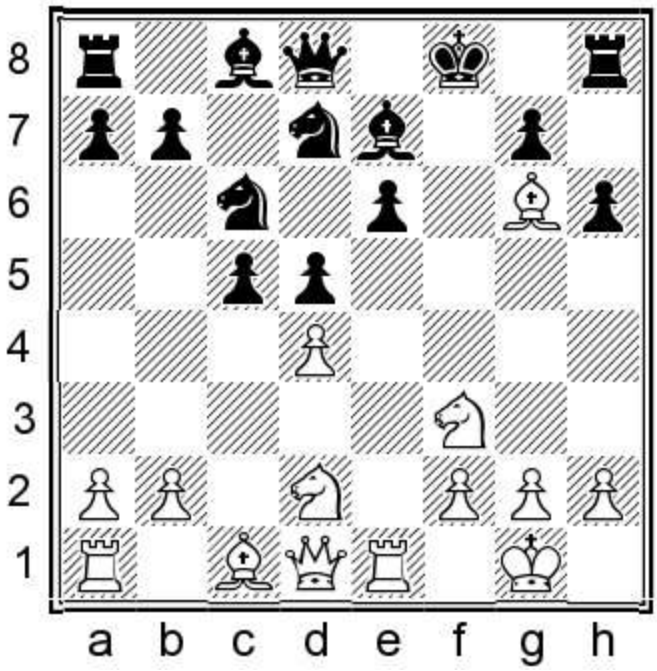
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10.Bc2 It also makes sense to put the bishop on b1. Both options have their advantages, but I like this square, keeping the dream of developing the a1-rook alive. 10...Nb6 11.h3 Be7 12.Re1 0-0 This was played in a computer game on the Internet that somehow ended up in our database. At this point 13.Nf1² seems a reasonable move.

10.e6!?
Harassing the black king before it can castle.

10.Re1 is also plausible, when 10...0-0 transposes to the Draskovic – Stocek game noted on page 26, but it's more critical to take the extra option Black has given us.

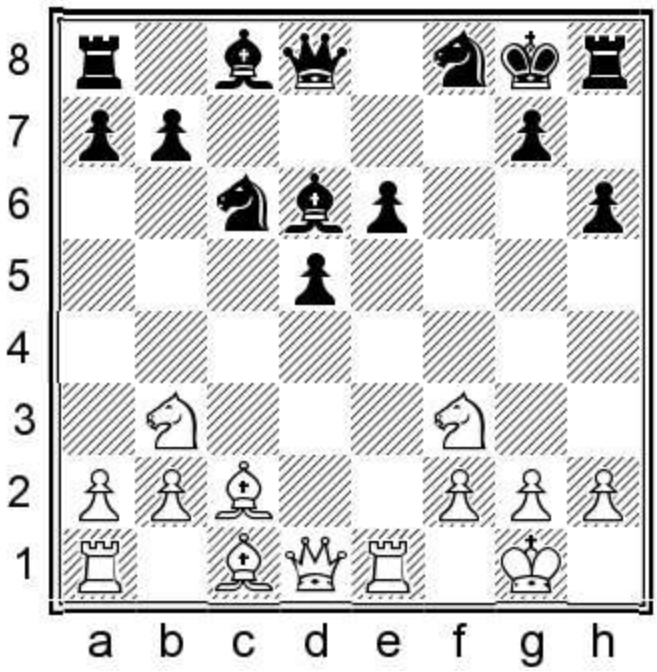
10...fxe6 11.Bg6† Kf8 12.Re1



12...Kg8
Planning to eject the irritating bishop with ...Nf8.
Instead after 12...cxd4 13.Rxe6² I like White's chances, although the position is messy. The main reason I like White is the following variation: 13...Nc5 14.Re1 Qd6 15.Nh4 Qf6 16.b4!!² With the tactical point: 16...Qxh4 17.Qf3† Qf6 18.bxc5 Qxf3 19.Nxf3 Bg4 20.Rb1!± Earlier the position was rather unclear, though not at this point.

13.dxc5 Nf8 14.Bc2 Bxc5 15.Nb3 Bd6

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Two games have reached this position, and I suggest varying with:

16.Bd2!N
Konnyu – Hoang Thanh Trang, Budapest 2010, and Heredia Serrano – Galyas, Budapest 2011, both continued 16.Be3 Qf6, but blocking the attack on e6 also allowed the option of 16...Nd7!?N followed by ...Nde5, which should be a positive development for Black.

One possible line is:

16...Bd7 17.Bc3²
I prefer White's prospects in this admittedly rather unclear position.

Conclusion

This chapter on Rare Lines is a gentle introduction to the French – we will see tougher challenges later.

A) 3...e5 has potential shock value, but if you remember 4.exd5 exd4 5.Bb5†!N then you are doing well.

B) 3...g6, C) 3...b6, D) 3...a5 and E) 3...Ne7 are all slow moves that can be met by 4.Ngf3, as our rule of thumb suggests. Black may achieve a solid position in some lines, but there is nothing here to worry White.

F) 3...Bd7 should objectively only be used as a transpositional device to reach the Fort Knox. We saw Rapport instead try an independent line and survive with a draw, but that was due to his strength as a player rather than the merits of the opening line.

G) 3...f5 looks repulsive but is not so weak. Still, after 4.exf5 exf5 5.Ndf3! Nf6 6.Bd3 Bd6 7.Ne2 White can be satisfied.

H) 3...h6 is a perfectly fine move that deserves better company than the other 3rd moves in this chapter. After 4. Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.c4!? the critical line to study starts with 6...c5!.

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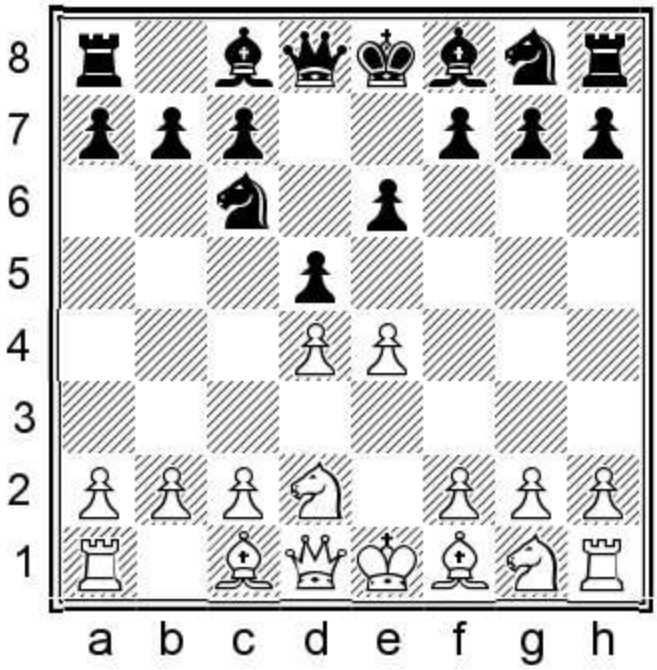
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Chapter 2 - Guimard

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6!? 4.Ngf3

4...g6 (4...dxe4; 4...Nh6; 4...Nge7; 4...e5?) Game 2 32

4...Nf6 5.e5 Nd7 (5...Ne4?!; 5...Ng4?!) 6.Nb3 36
6...f6 (6...a6; 6...b6) Game 3 36
6...Be7 Game 4 42
6...a5 7.a4 Be7 (7...f6; 7...b6) 8.c3! 45
8...b6 Game 5 45
8...0-0 Game 6 48
8...f6 Game 7 51
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6!?



The Guimard variation is tough to categorize – it is not unsound, but also not wholly respectable. But it is easy to identify the drawback of this line – Black has just blocked his standard ...c7-c5 pawn break.

4.Ngf3
This is the most natural move and must be best. In Game 2 we will deal with odd 4th moves for Black, as really only 4...Nf6 makes sense. Then following 5.e5 Nd7 6.Nb3 there is a split: we shall start by looking at Black's rare options 6...a6, 6...b6 and 6...f6 in Game 3. Then in Game 4 we will move on to the more usual 6...Be7, before finishing with a much more detailed look at the main line
6...a5 in Games 5-7.

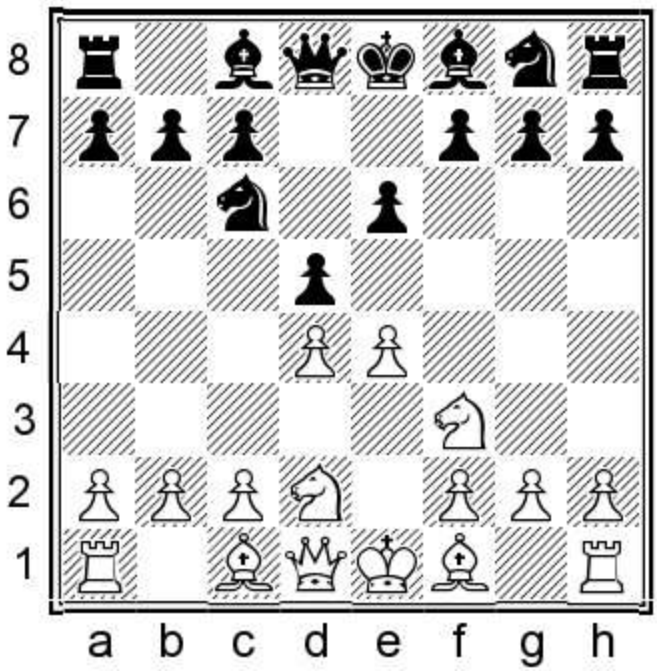
GAME 2

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Mladen Palac – Volodia Vaisman

Cap d'Agde 2002

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6!? 4.Ngf3
Note that 4.c3?! allows 4...e5 which has proven to be a reliable equalizer.

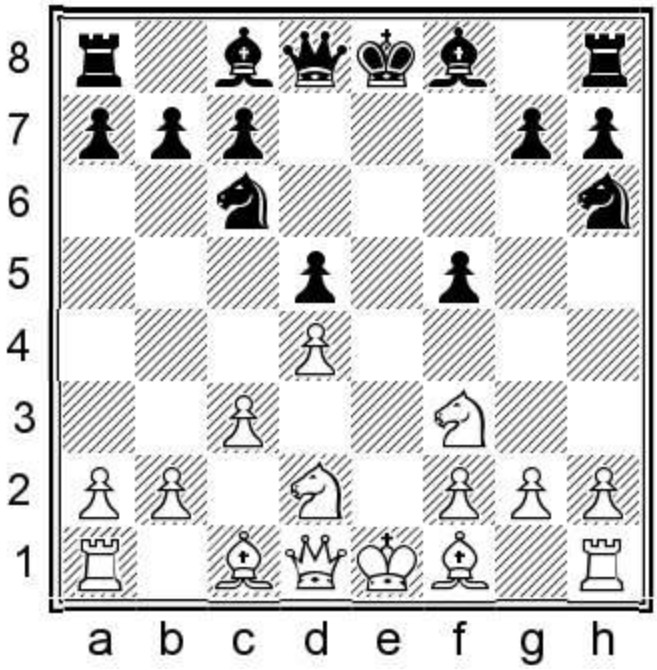


4...g6
You could make a desperate argument that the knight on c6 and bishop on g7 will combine to put pressure on d4, but after White plays c2-c3, Black's set-up looks clumsy.

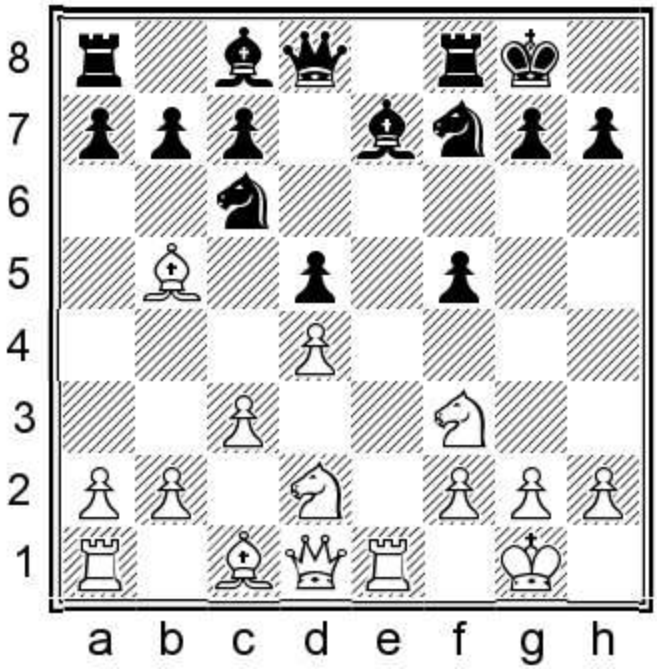
4...dxe4 feels inconsistent, as an early ...Nc6 is rarely the ideal development in the Rubinstein Variation. After 5.Nxe4 Nf6 6.Nxf6† Qxf6 7.Bd3 we have transposed to Game 32 of Chapter 10, where White gets an easy edge.

4...Nh6 5.c3 f5
This is one of the weirdest lines I have seen. It's not quite as bad as it looks, but White should have an easy advantage.
Also easy to meet is: 5...Be7 6.Bd3 (6.Bb5!? also looks good) 6...0-0 7.0-0 a5 8.a4 b6 9.Re1 Ba6 10.Bc2! Rc8 11.Nf1± Borisek – Teske, Berlin 2015.
6.exd5 exd5

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7.Bb5 Nf7 8.0-0 Be7 9.Re1 0-0
As in Safarli – Ponkratov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2013. But here I would recommend that White organizes his pieces slightly differently than he did in the game:

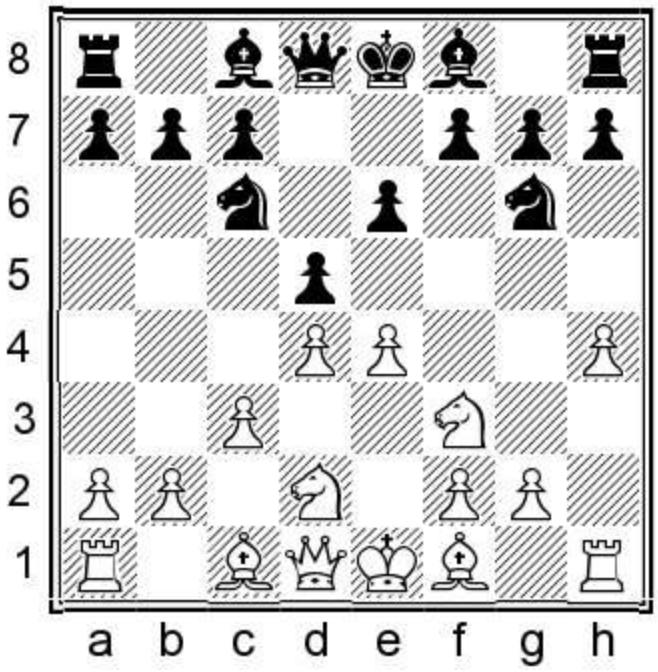


10.Nb3!N
10.Nf1 was the game.
10...Bd7
10...Re8 11.Bf4 would give White full freedom. After for example 11...a6 12.Bxc6 bxc6 13.Re3 White's advantage is huge. Note that 13...g5?! 14.Nxg5! Bxg5 15.Bxc7 Qxc7 16.Rxe8† Kg7 17.Qh5 is disastrous for Black.
11.Nc5
Not the only good move, but I like to win the two bishops as well as to dominate the dark squares.
11...Bxc5 12.dxc5 Nce5 13.Be2

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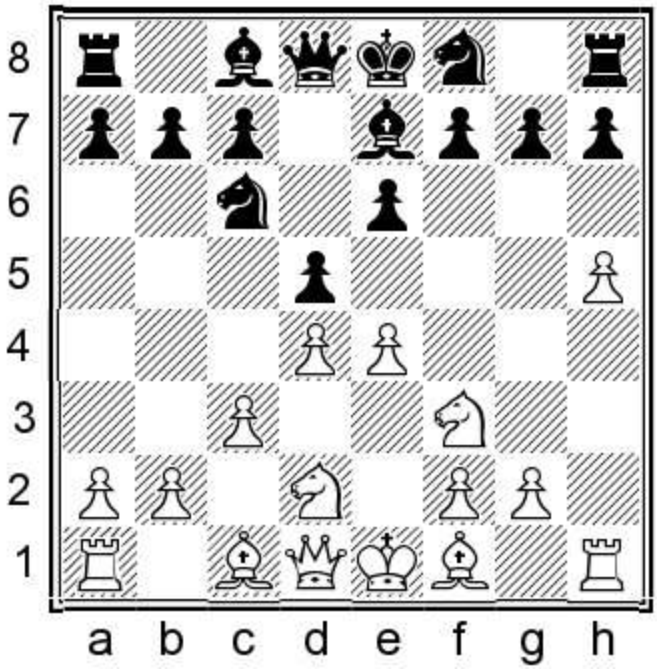
Or 13.Bf1!? Nxf3† 14.Qxf3 c6 15.Qg3± is also strong.
13...Nxf3† 14.Bxf3 c6 15.Qd4±
White has total control over the position and can play for a win almost indefinitely.

4...Nge7 5.c3 Ng6
This knight manoeuvre is slow and the knight is not especially well placed on g6. For example 6.g3 should provide White with an advantage, as would a number of other moves. But strongest by far is:
6.h4!

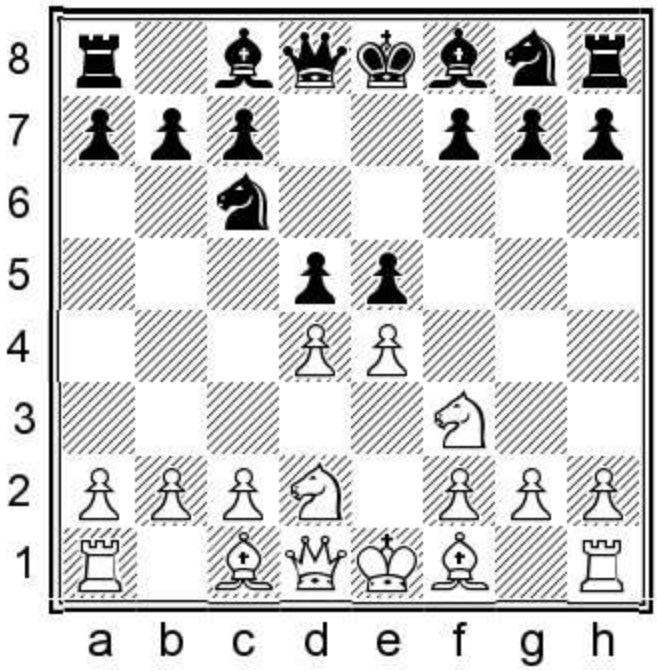


6...Be7
Or 6...h5 7.g3 is an improved version for White. The h4-pawn gives us control over the g5-square and the h5-pawn will be a big weakness, preventing Black from castling kingside as the rook needs to keep defending that pawn. 7...Be7 8.e5! Fixing the structure in an unpleasant way for Black. The knight on g6 is ridiculous. 8...b6 9.b4!? There are other ways to play the position; this one aims to avoid ...Ba6. 9...a5 10.b5 Na7 11.Bd3 c6 12. bxc6 Nxc6 13.Qe2± White won in Amanov – Homidan, Los Angeles 2013.
7.h5 Nf8

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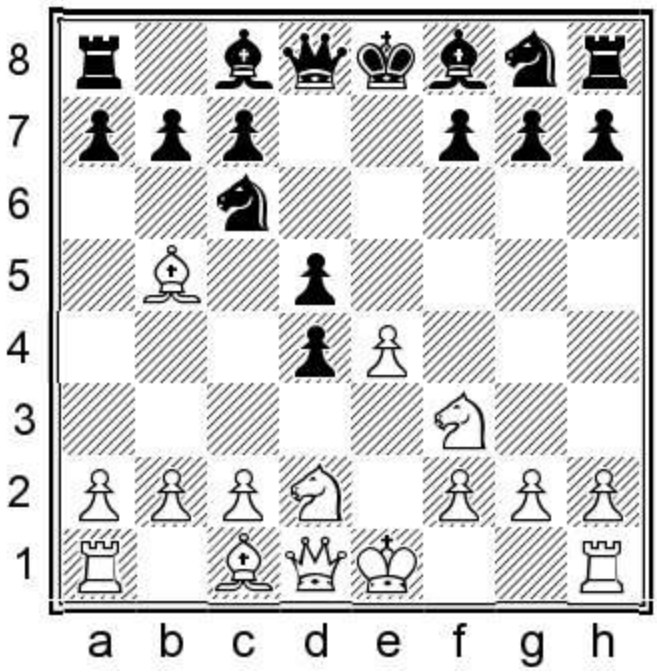
So far this is McShane – Crouch, Hove 1997, and now White could refine his approach with:
8.Bd3!?N
When after:
8...h6 9.b4 Nd7 10.e5 b6 11.Rh3±
White is better everywhere.
The final sideline gives us a chance to dust off the 19th century rule book for positional play (back when there were attacks and the foundations of attack, not the accountancy chess of the 21st century...) and see what happens when a player opens up the position while behind in development.
4...e5?



An excellent leveller when White has played 4.c3, but 4.Ngf3 is far more potent. The refutation of the premature break is rather instructive:

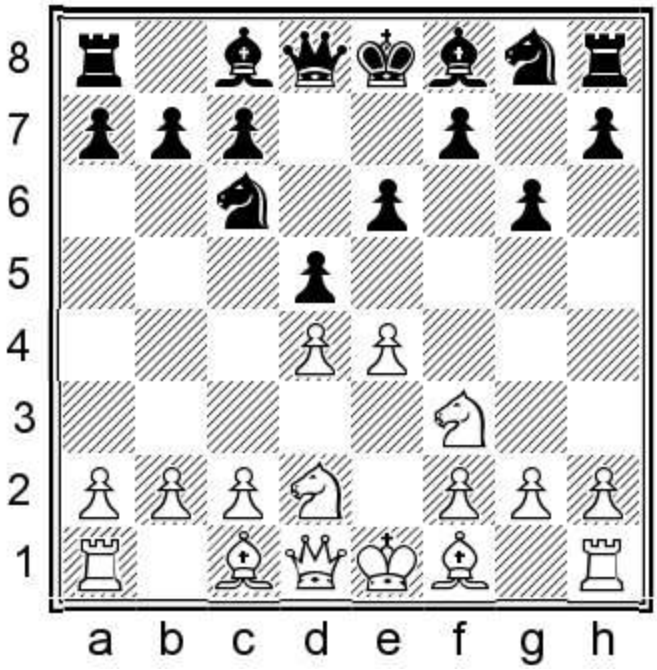
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5.Bb5 exd4
Instead 5...dxe4N 6.Nxe4 exd4 should of course be considered. White has a wonderful position after 7.Nxd4 Bd7 8.0-0!, based on 8...Nxd4 9.Qxd4± Bxb5?! 10.Qe5† and White wins at least a pawn.



6.0-0!!N
The classical style. White has a fantastic attack and Black's position is almost impossible to defend in practical play.
The move that has always been played is 6.Nxd4 which is also quite decent. After 6...Bd7 7.Nxc6 bxc6 8.Bd3² White had a pleasant experience in one game: 8...Bc5 9.0-0 Nf6 10.e5 Ng4 11.Nf3 h5 12.h3 Nh6 13.Qe2± Nf5? 14.e6! A few token moves were played before Black resigned in Fiorito – Feige, Villa Ballester 1997.
6...Be7
Instead 6...dxe4 7.Nxe4 Bd7 looks natural. But after 8.Re1 Be7 9.Nc5! Black is simply lacking a move! The immediate threat is Nxd7 followed by Ne5.
7.Re1±
For example:
7...Nf6
There are lots of other moves, but none of them is truly sufficient.
8.Nxd4 Bd7 9.Bxc6 bxc6 10.e5 Ne4 11.e6! fxe6 12.Nxe4 dxe4 13.Qh5† g6 14.Qe5 0-0 15.Nxe6 Bxe6 16. Qxe6† Rf7 17.Qxc6
White wins a pawn and should win the game with decent play.

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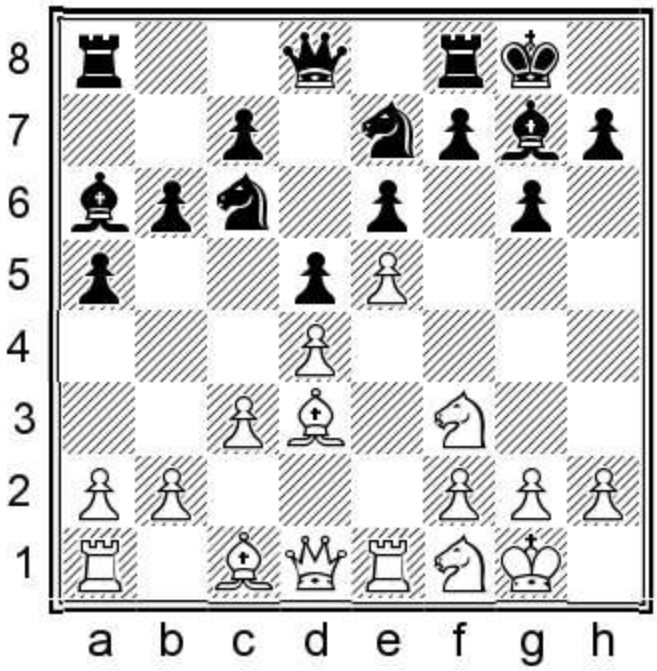


5.Bd3 Bg7 6.c3 Nge7 7.0-0 0-0 8.Re1 b6
Where else could the c8-bishop go?

9.e5!
Palac correctly judges that this structure is to his advantage.

9...a5 10.Nf1
Black's structure is a mismatch of different lines. He is not ready for ...c7-c5, while ...f7-f6 would lead to serious weaknesses on the dark squares. White has a big advantage.

10...Ba6



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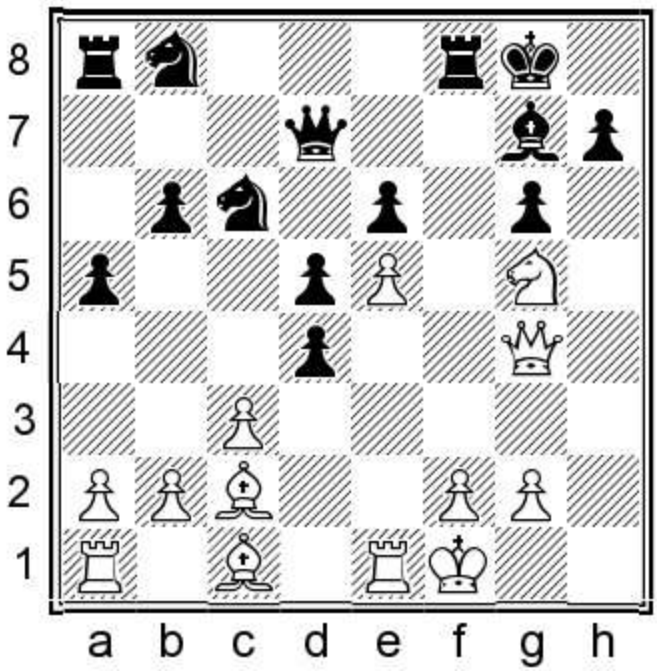
11.Bc2!
White does not want to exchange his strong bishop, which will participate in an attack on the kingside. Now the bishop on a6 runs the risk of becoming a total irrelevance. For this reason Black exchanges it, which has the downside of weakening the light squares all over the board. Playing worse positions can be a drag sometimes...

11...Bxf1 12.Kxf1 Nb8 13.h4!
White thematically aims to create weaknesses around the black king.

13...c5 14.h5 Nec6 15.hxg6
Palac is strong in tactics. I am sure he had calculated everything to a forced win here.
15.Ng5 followed by Qf3-h3 was absolutely devastating as well.

15...fxg6
Or 15...hxg6 16.Ng5 and Qg4-h4 is hopeless for Black.

16.Ng5! Qd7 17.Qg4 cxd4
Instead 17...Re8 18.Nxh7 is equally devastating.

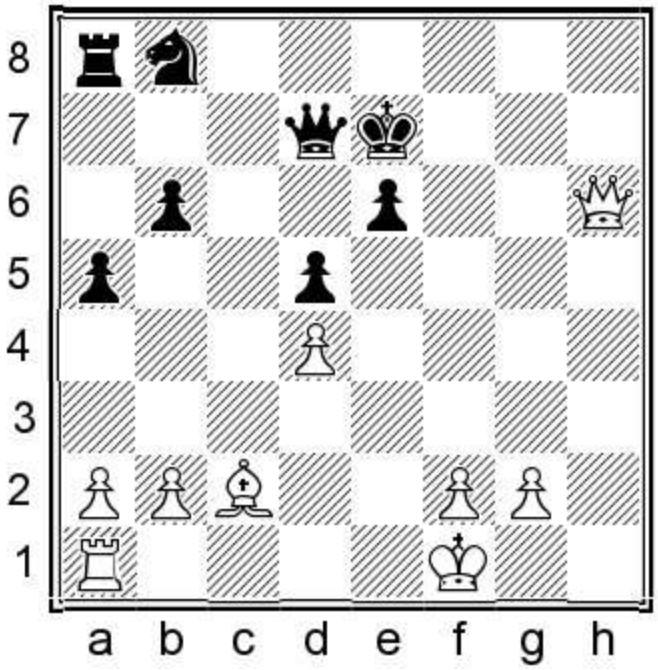


18.Nxh7!
The roof caves in.

18...Nxe5 19.Rxe5 Bxe5 20.Qxg6†
One of many winners.

20...Bg7 21.Nxf8 Kxf8 22.Bh6 Bxh6 23.Qxh6† Ke7 24.cxd4
Having won a pawn White continues to attack.

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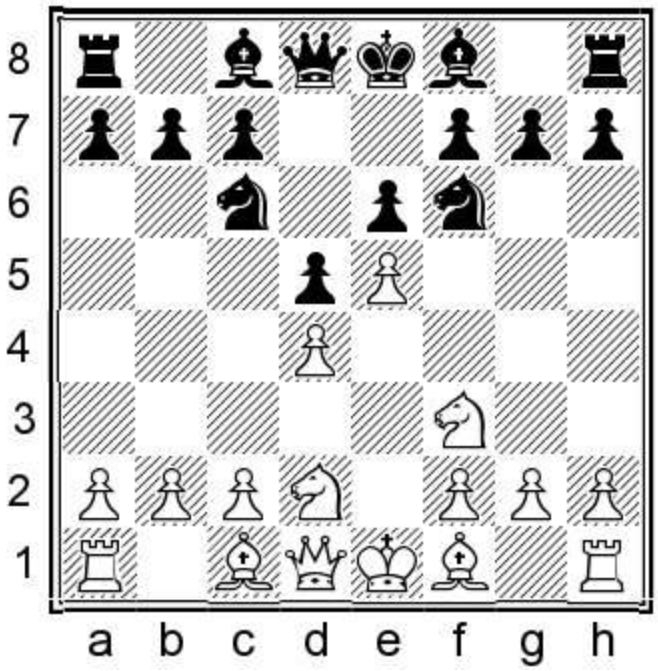


24...Qb5† 25.Kg1 Nc6 26.Re1 Nd8 27.Bf5 Qc6 28.Qg7† Kd6 29.Qf8† Kc7 30.Bxe6 Nxe6 31.Qe7† 1–0

GAME 3

A. Lion – Geert Verrijken
Antwerp 1997

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5



5...Nd7

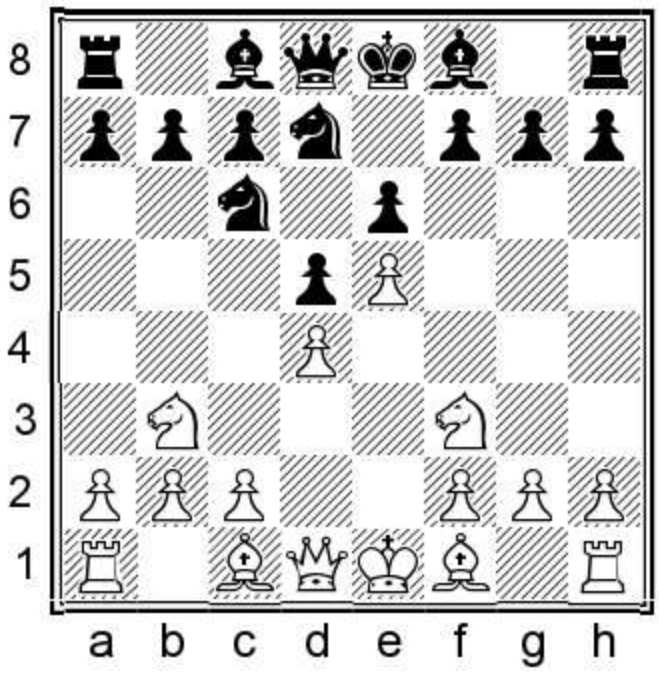
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This is what the Guimard variation is all about. The key idea is to get White to put the knights on d2 and f3 instead of e2 and f3, which is the ideal set-up in this structure. On the other hand the knight is not ideally placed on c6, blocking the c-pawn. Black is hoping to make up for this with a timely ...f6-break. As we shall see, this is not easy to achieve against accurate play.

5...Ne4?! does not make a lot of sense. One nice little move is 6.c3!? threatening to win a pawn. Black has been trying to make sense of it all with 6...f6, but White is simply better in a number of ways. As always, I prefer simple means. 7.exf6! Nxf6 8.Bd3 Bd6 9.0-0 0-0 10.Re1 Qe8 11.Nf1!± White will play Ng3, Qe2 and b2-b4 with an overwhelming position. After 11...Qh5 12.Ng3 Bxg3 13.fxg3! (of course Black was hoping for 13. hxg3?! Ng4÷) 13...Bd7 14.Bf4 Ne8? 15.Ng5+– Black soon resigned in Sonnberger – Thoma, Goetzis 1997.

The not very serious 5...Ng4?! 6.Nb3 Bd7 7.c3 f6 8.Nh4 f5 happened in Svidler – Aronian, Monte Carlo (rapid) 2006. 9.g3!N would have given an obvious advantage. For example: 9...Be7 10.h3! Bxh4 11.hxg4 Be7 12.Qf3 and Black has to make some unpleasant concessions, but even so, he will not be able to keep his position tenable forever.

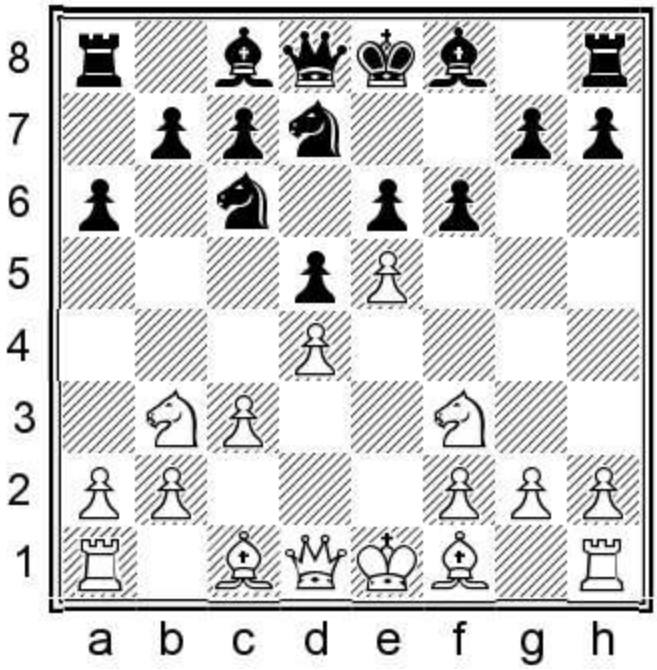
6.Nb3
From several options, I settled on this move, which, tied with 6.c3, has been the most popular in tournament play. The knight might look dubiously placed on b3, but no more so than the knight on c6. And long term our idea is to play Nc1 to e2 (or d3) then on to f4 and maybe even h5. Another key point is to quickly prepare Bc1-f4 so we can fight for control of the e5-square at any
moment.



6...f6
The third-most popular move, and understandably quite common, as the c6-knight blocks Black's other traditional French break ...c7-c5.

6...a6
This was a pet line of the colourful Swiss IM Werner Hug. Black's position is by no means unplayable, but a simple reply is effective when White is certainly better:
7.c3!? f6

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8.exf6
Another way to play is: 8.Bf4!? fxe5 9.dxe5 Be7 10.h4!? 0-0 11.g3 Qe8 12.h5 Rf7 13.Bd3² Carlson – Crane, USA 1984.
8...Qxf6 9.Bg5 Qf7 10.Bd3 Bd6 11.Bh4²
Heintze – Hegeler, Wuppertal 1990.

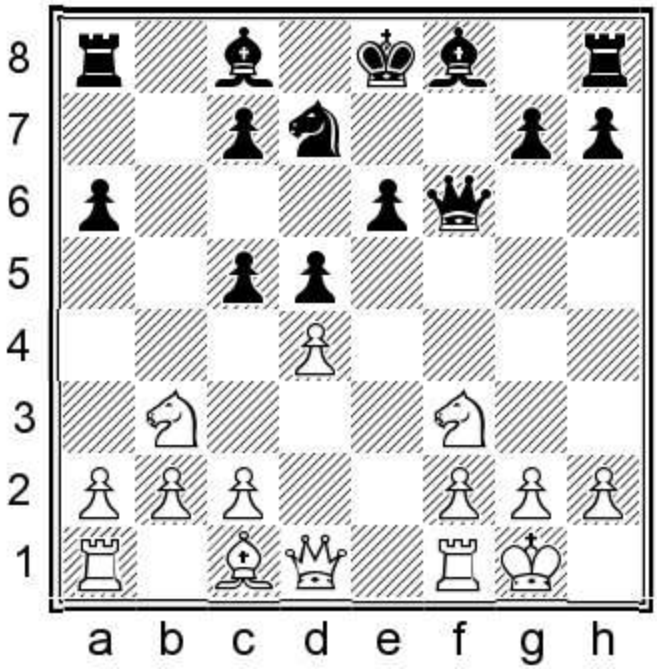
6...b6 A rare move, but it can transpose to an important main line we shall see later. 7.c3!? Again taking a simple approach. 7...Be7 8.h4!? Since Black's plan is likely to be
...a7-a5 and ...Ba6, let's leave our bishop on f1 and find other productive moves. 8...h6 9.Rh3 a5 10.a4 We have transposed to the fine game Shankland – Gluckman, Tromso (ol) 2014; see the note to Black's 9th move in Game 5.

7.Bb5
I am not so happy with this move in all Guimard positions, but here it works well.

7...fxe5
Black has a range of options.

7...a6 8.Bxc6 bxc6 9.0-0
White has a fantastic lead in development. Black will not be lucky enough to make use of his two bishops.
9...fxe5
More sensible than the usual move.
9...c5? By far the most commonly played move, but wholly unsound: 10.exf6 Qxf6

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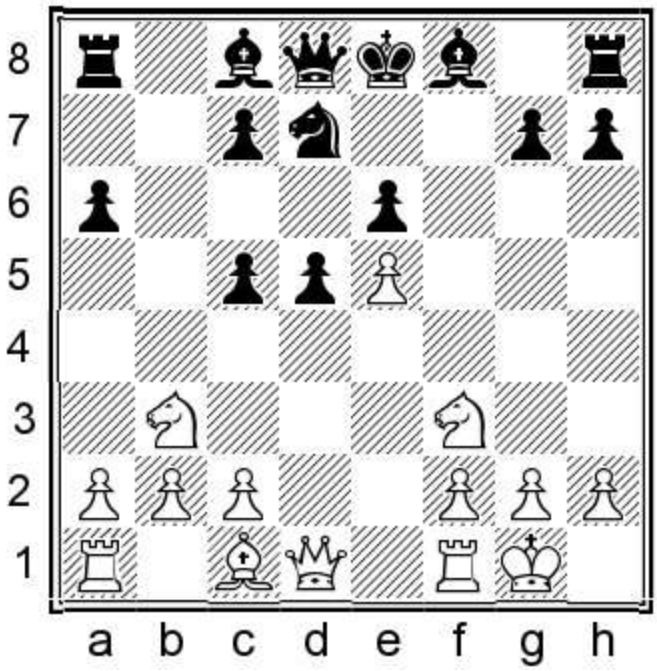


11.dxc5!N 11...Nxc5 (11...Bxc5 12.Bg5 Qg6 13.Re1± White threatens Qxd5 and 13...c6? is even more painful after 14.Qe2+–) 12.Re1 Ne4 13.c4 c6 14.Rxe4 dxe4 15.Bg5 White is already winning. For example: 15...Qxb2 16.Rb1 Qc3 17.Qd8† Kf7 18.Qc7† Kg8 19.Ne5 Ra7 20.Qb8 Rb7 21.Qxc8 Qxe5 22.Qxb7 Qxg5 23.Qxc6 Qg6 24.Nd2+–

9...a5 10.a4 changes matters slightly, but does not make a substantial difference to how we should place our pieces or to the evaluation of the position.

10.dxe5 c5

10...Be7 11.Nfd4 Nxe5 12.Re1 Ng6 13.Nxc6 Qd6 14.Nxe7 Qxe7 15.Be3± Ed. Lasker – Guimard, Mar del Plata 1949.

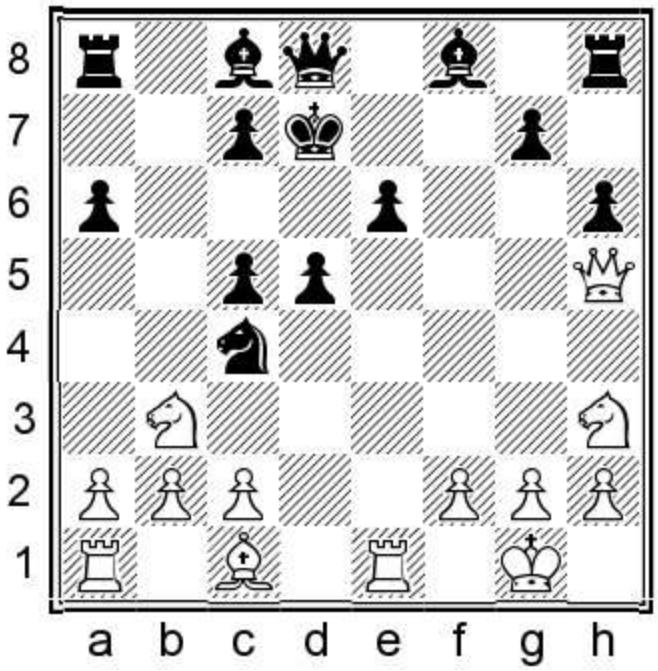


At this point I want to improve upon Koskinen – Vinje Gulbrandsen, Odense 1963, with:

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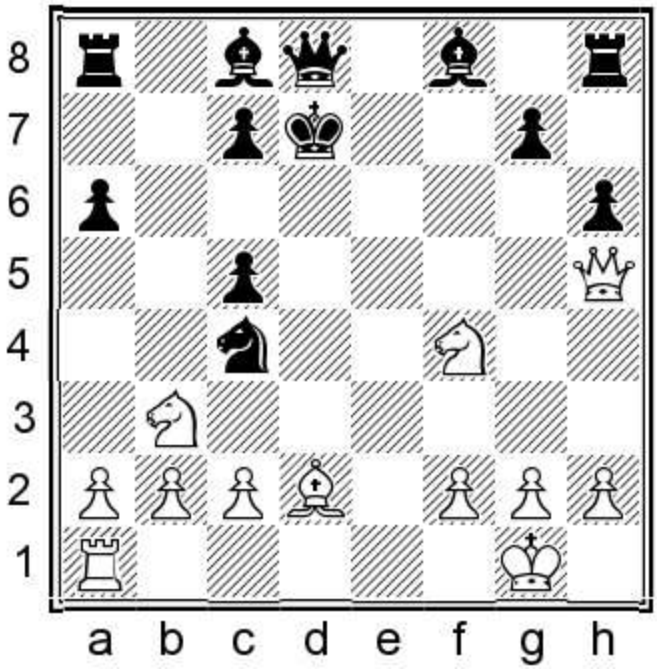
11.Ng5!?N 11...Nxe5

This is the critical line, but I don’t think it works.
11...Nb6 12.Qg4 Qe7?! (12...Nc4 is better, but after 13.f4± Black’s prospects are dire.) 13.Be3 d4 14.Nxh7! dxe3 15.fxe3 Bd7 16.Qg6† Kd8 17.Nxf8 Rxf8 18.Rxf8† Qxf8 19.Rf1 Qh8 20.Nxc5+–
12.Re1 h6
12...Bd6 13.f4+– and White wins a pawn for starters.
13.Nh3 Nc4
13...Qf6 14.Bf4 Ng6 15.Qxd5±
13...Ng6 14.Qh5 Qf6 15.Qxd5±
14.Qh5† Kd7



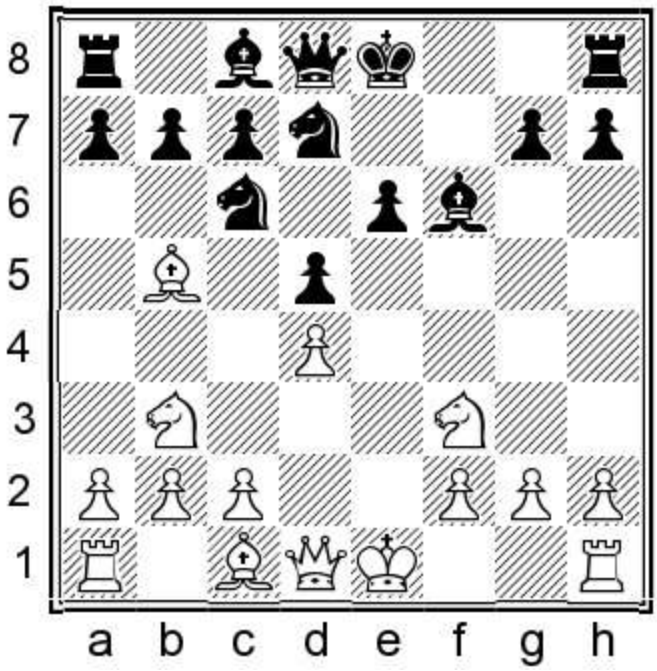
In olden times, one might have stopped here and claimed excellent compensation. But in fact White has a hay-maker if you look deeply enough.
15.Rxe6!! Kxe6 16.Nf4† Kd7 17.Qxd5† Ke8 18.Qh5† Kd7 19.Bd2!
Bringing the rook into the game and threatening Qf7† followed by Qxc4, now that White’s back-rank issues are gone.

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19...Nxd2
The greedy option is the real test.
Black could try 19...Bb7 but after 20.Qf5† Kc6 21.Qe6† Qd6 22.Qxc4 material is almost level, while Black's position is obviously repulsive. For example 22...Kb6 23.Be3 Qc6 24.Qc3+– followed by Na5.
20.Qd5† Ke8 21.Re1† Be7 22.Qh5† Kd7 23.Nxd2
Black is a rook up, but none of his pieces are playing and everything is lost. For example:
23...Kc6 24.Nc4 Kb7 25.Nd5 Kb8 26.Nxe7 Bb7 27.Qxc5 Re8 28.Qb4 Qd7 29.Ne5 Qb5 30.Qd4 Rxe7 31.Qd8† Ka7 32.Qxe7 Qxb2 33.c4 Rc8 34.Qxg7+–

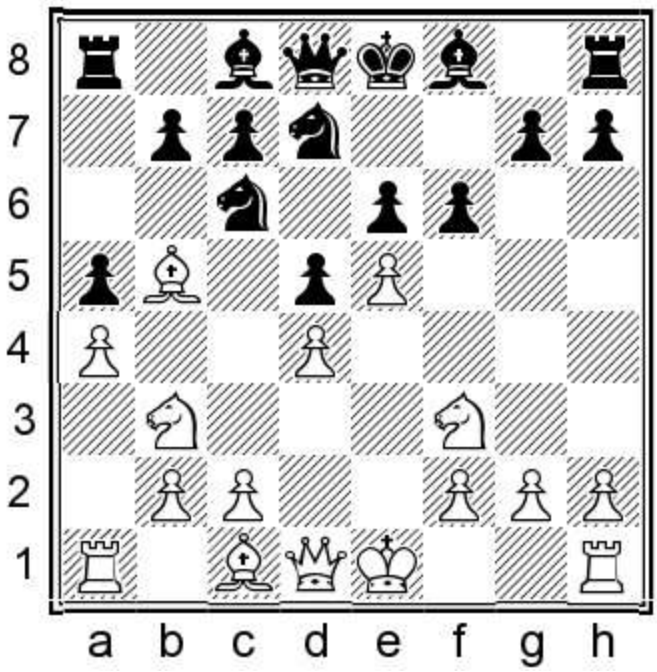
7...Be7 8.exf6 Bxf6



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9.0-0 (Instead 9.Bxc6 bxc6 10.Na5 would be misguided, as Black gets compensation after 10...Ba6!. White

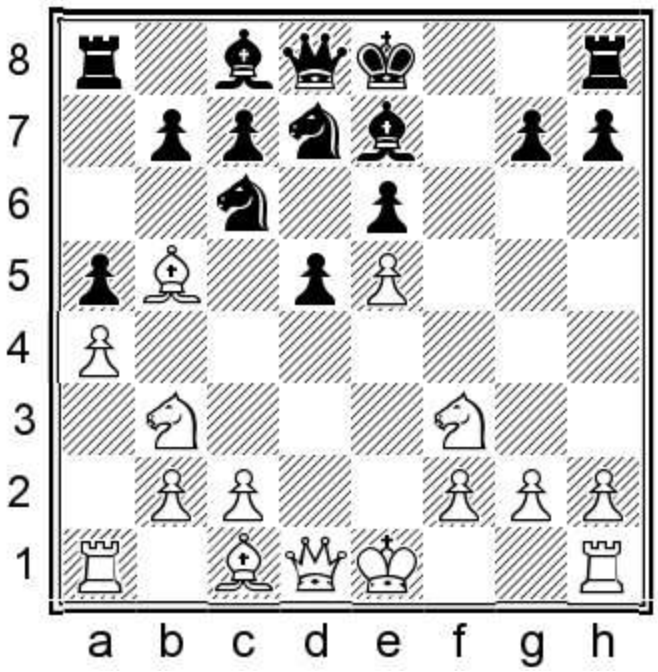
might still be better, but there is no reason to allow complications when a simple option is effective.) 9...0-0 10. Re1 Re8 11.Bf4± Grigoriants – Ubushiev, Kazan 2001.

7...a5 8.a4
The inclusion of these moves is a good idea for Black in many lines in the Guimard, but here it does not help to solve his problems.



8...fxe5
8...Be7?! 9.exf6 Bxf6 10.0-0 Qe7 11.Bf4± and White won by sticking to the program in Maki – Lehtivaara, Finland 2004.
8...Na7 9.exf6 Qxf6 10.Bg5 Qf7 11.Bd3 b6 12.0-0 Be7 (12...Bd6 13.Bh4!±) 13.Qe2± In Koch – Bruechner, Jena 1953, Rfe1 was coming, with the usual vicious bind.
9.dxe5 Be7
9...Nc5 10.Bg5 Qd7 11.Nbd4 Ne4 12.Be3± was fantastic for White in Morovic Fernandez – Beliavsky, Tunis 1985.

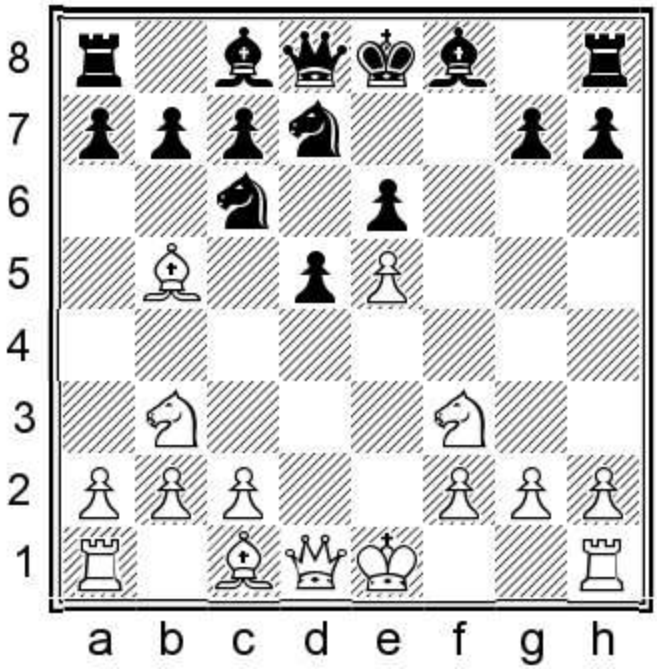
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10.Nbd4!
This is the knight that needs a better future.
White went wrong with a naive tactical approach in one game: 10.Nfd4?! Ndxe5 11.f4? (Because of the following tactics, White should have played: 11.Qh5†!N 11...Kf8 12.f4 Nxd4 13.fxe5 Nf5÷) 11...0-0!! A cold shower! 12.fxe5 Bb4† 13.Ke2 (Or 13.c3 Qh4† and Black wins back his piece.) So far we have followed V. Fedorov – Ilic, Bulgaria 1988. White actually won that game, but I doubt he would have done so if Black had played patiently with 13...Nxe5!N 14.c3 Bd6µ, when he would have enjoyed a prolonged initiative in the centre.
10...Ndb8
So far Vogt – Panchenko, Sukhumi 1970. Here White should play:
11.h4!N 11...0-0 12.Bd3²
With similar scenes to our main game.

8.dxe5

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8...Be7
Against 8...Nc5?! I recommend 9.Ng5!, the caveman approach (this is also how I would recommend approaching 8...Nb6?!). 9...Bd7 10.Bxc6 bxc6? (Black needed to play 10...Bxc6 but it's still ugly and bad after 11.Qg4±) 11.Qh5† g6 12.Qf3 Qe7 13.Nxc5 Qxc5 14.Qf7† Kd8 15.Qf6† 1–0 Tal – Vaganian, Dubna 1973.
8...Qe7?! 9.0-0 g6 10.Bg5 Qf7 In V. Shen – A. Zhou, Dallas 2008, logical would have been 11.c4N±.

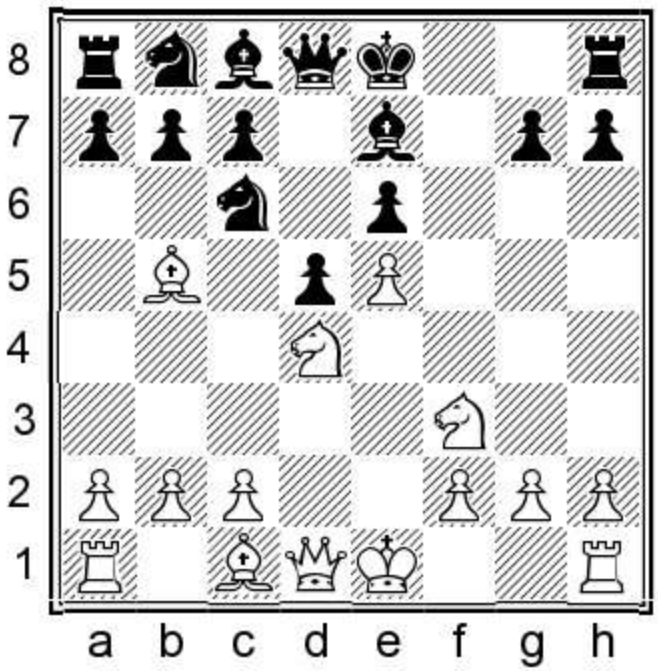
9.Nbd4!
As said above, this is the knight that needs to enter the game.

Again White should be careful not to fall for 9.Nfd4?! Ndxe5 10.f4?, which seemingly wins something; but the cost is too high after: 10...0-0!! 11.fxe5 Bb4† 12.Ke2 Nxe5µ where Black has a devastating attack.

9...Ndb8
The fact that Black has to play this move should make us happy. But now it is time to get organized before Black is allowed to untangle himself from the ball of yarn he is caught in.

9...Nxd4? 10.Nxd4 Kf7 as in Revell – Harrison, corr. 1983, is obviously bad, but could be difficult to refute without a computer. But with an engine we immediately see that White has: 11.Nxe6!!N 11...Kxe6 12.Qg4† Kxe5 (12...Kf7 13.e6† and White will soon be a piece up.) 13.0-0 White has a winning attack; the black king is too far out. For example: 13...Nc5 14.Qh5† (or various other checks) 14...Bf5 15.Re1† Ne4 16.f3

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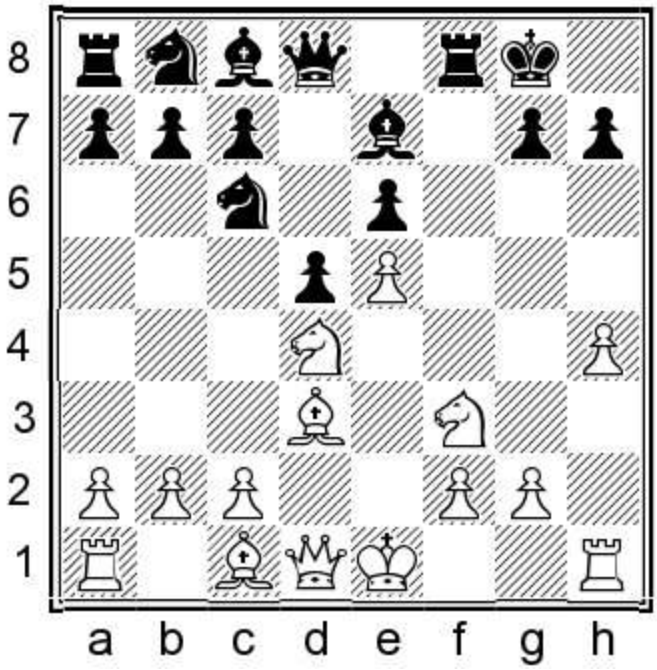
10.h4! 0-0
This is a move Black wants to play, but he needs to follow it up with total precision to avoid getting mated.

Also logical is 10...a6 11.Nxc6 Nxc6 when Black has untangled his knights, but is still worse. 12.Bd3 (less ambitious is 12.Bxc6† bxc6 13.Qd3 a5 14.Ng5²) 12...Nb4 13.Ng5! Nxd3† 14.Qxd3± The h7-pawn is impossible to save. For example: 14...Bxg5 15.hxg5 g6 16.Qxg6† hxg6 17.Rxh8† Kd7 18.Rxd8† Kxd8 19.Be3 The opposite bishops should not save Black, as White's rook will soon be hyperactive on the h-file.

11.Bd3
I like this idea, and not only because it contains a nice little trap.

The engine strongly advocates 11.Ng5!?N, but I am not convinced. After 11...Nxd4 12.Qxd4 c5 13.Qd3 Bxg5 14.hxg5 g6 15.Qh3 Qe7 White does look better, but the dark-squared bishop will find it hard to take advantage of the weakened dark squares. White would love to still have a knight.

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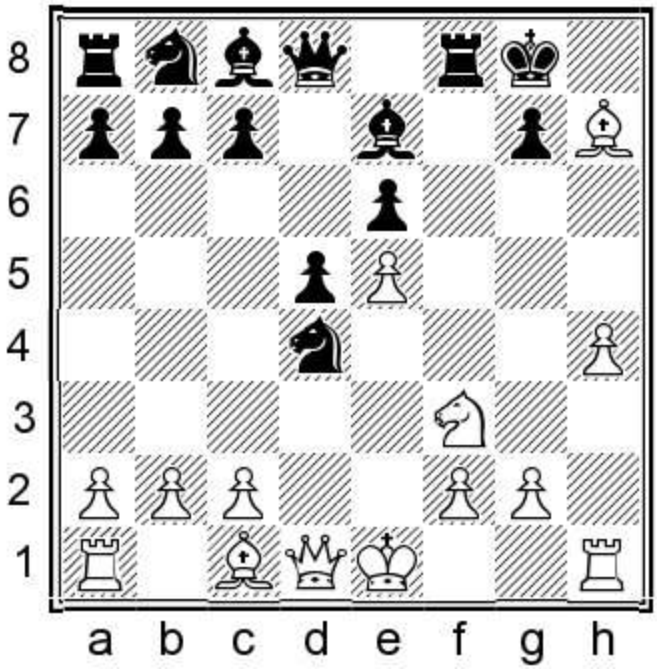


11...Nxd4?
This is a losing move, as it turns out.

Black should have played:
11...Qe8
But White is still better. The critical line seems to be:
12.c3! Nxd4 13.cxd4 Qh5
Or 13...c5 14.Qc2. I like this forcing option. (Also plausible is 14.Ng5 when after 14...Bxg5 15.hxg5 g6 16. dxc5 Nd7 it looks better for White, but it is another case where Black's apparently weak dark squares are not so easy to exploit.) 14...Qh5 15.Bg5 Rxf3 With e7 and c5 under threat, Black had little choice. 16.Bxe7 Rf4 17. Bxc5 Rxh4 18.Rxh4 Qxh4 19.0-0-0± White has the bishop pair and better development.
14.Rh3!±
White enjoys great prospects, on account of:
14...c5?! 15.g4!! Qe8
Or 15...Qxg4 16.Bxh7†! Kh8 17.Rg3 shows the point of the 14th move. After 17...Qh5 18.Bg6 the queen is trapped.
16.h5±
White has a great attacking position.

12.Bxh7†!!

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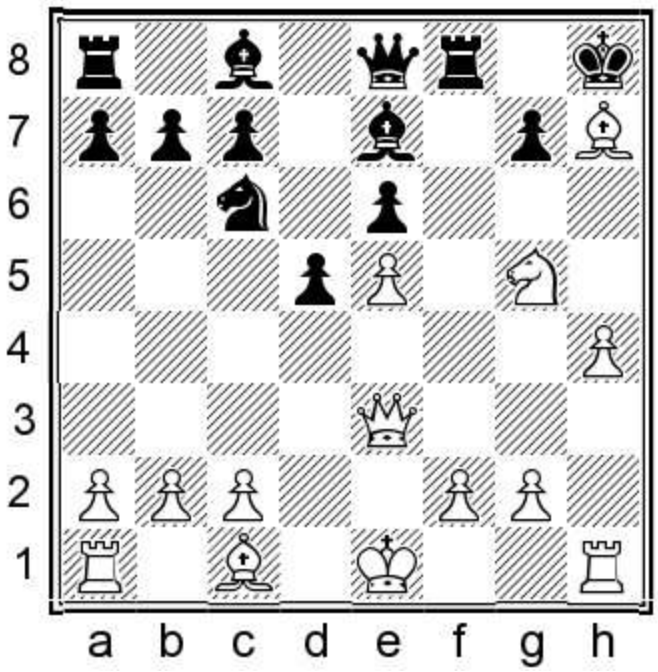
12...Kh8
Accepting the loss of a pawn.

The test would have been:
12...Kxh7 13.Ng5† Kg8
Instantly losing is 13...Bxg5 14.hxg5† and Qh5.
14.Qh5 Bb4† 15.Kf1
White is winning. The two main lines are:
15...Rf5
Or 15...Rxf2† 16.Kxf2 Qf8† 17.Kg1 Qf5 18.Be3 and 19.Rf1 with a winning position.
16.g4!!
The key move, and not so easy to see in advance. Further complications exist, but Black is losing the rook (and the exchange overall) on account of 16...Rxg5? 17.hxg5 and mate is near.

13.Ng5
Black does not have time to save the knight, as Qh5 or Bg6 would be too brutal.

13...Qe8 14.Qxd4 Nc6 15.Qe3
White has won a pawn for very little.

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15...b6 16.Qe2 Bc5 17.f4 Nd4 18.Qd3?!
18.Qd1! would have been more precise, preparing Bd3.

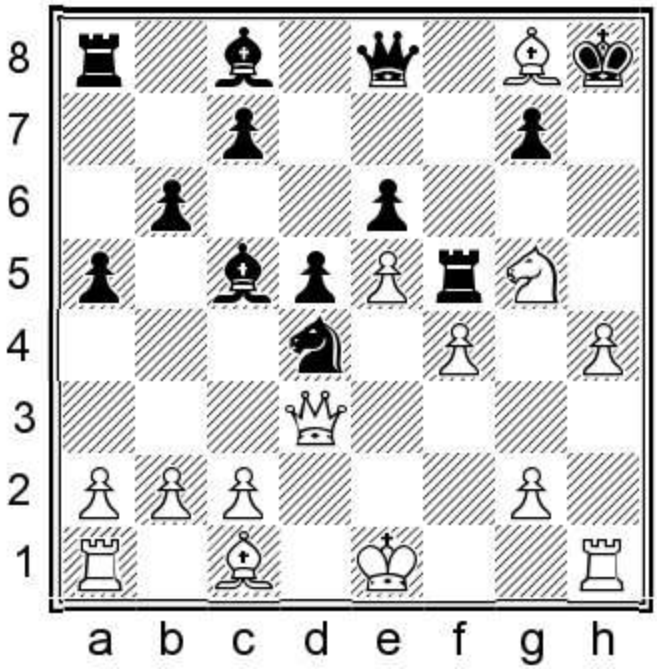
18...a5 19.Bg8!?
Although this is not accurate, it does not ruin anything.

19.Qd1! was still a good choice.

19...Rf5?
Black probably missed White's idea entirely.

After 19...Nf5 20.Bh7 Black could repeat the position, which would not help him much as White would then vary, or try 20...Ba6, where White holds on to a big advantage after 21.Qh3.

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20.Bf7!
White initiates the final assault.

20...Qf8 21.Qd1 g6 22.h5 Qh6 23.g4 Rxg5 24.fxg5 Qh7 25.Rf1
25.Kd2! would have won in one move – and gained a whopping 10 for artistry.

25...gxh5
White also wins in this somewhat complex variation: 25...Ba6 26.Rf6 Be2 27.Qd2 Nf3† 28.Kxe2 Nxd2 29. Bxd2 Rf8 30.Rh1 and the threat of 31.Rff1! decides.

26.g6 Qg7 27.Rf6 h4 28.g5
1–0

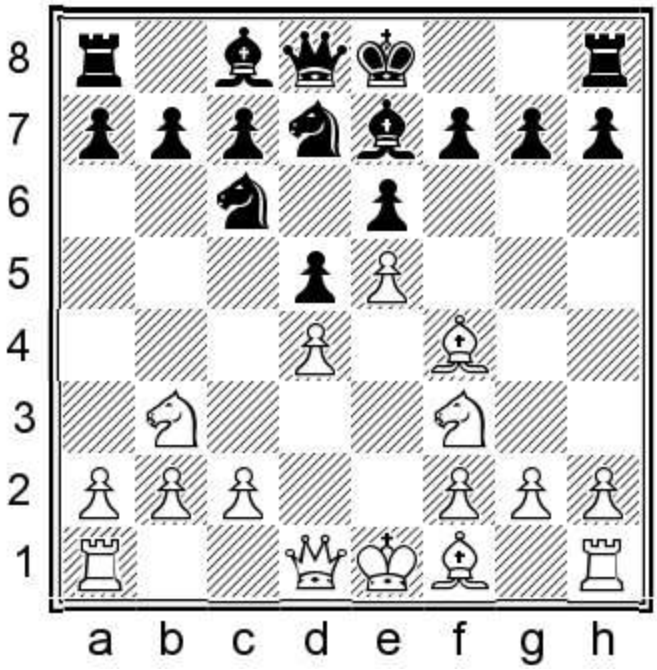
GAME 4

Thomas Luther – Kevin Goh Wei Ming
Petaling Jaya 2013

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nd7 6.Nb3 Be7!?
This is quite a tricky move with the idea of move-ordering us into the main lines (which we do not plan to play) after 7.Bb5 a5, for example. So, I have chosen a rare way of playing that prepares for Black's two main tries, ...a5 and ...f6.

7.Bf4!?

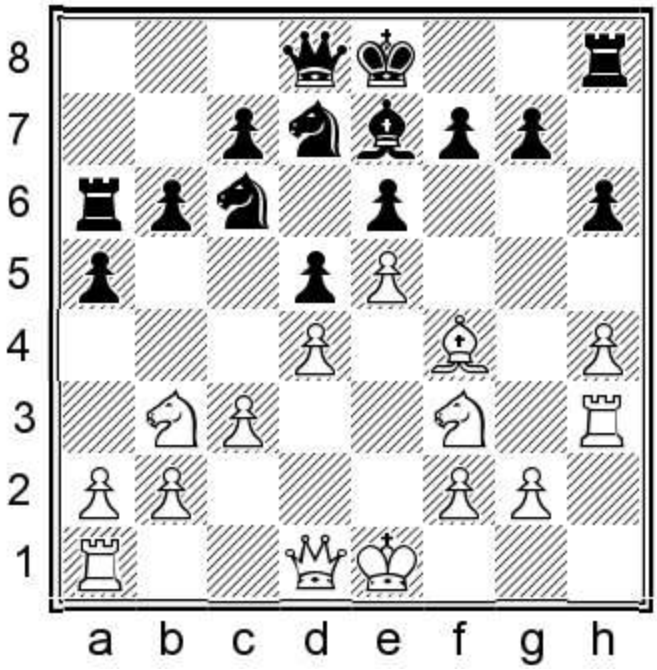
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7...f6
This does not work out well for Black. White is totally ready to take control over the e5-square.

7...a5
This is the critical test, but White has an enjoyable position all the same.
8.c3!
I am really not afraid of getting the knight pushed to c1, where it wants to go anyway.
8...b6
As claimed, not a problem is: 8...a4 9.Nc1! 0-0 (Or 9...Ncb8 10.Bb5 a3 11.b4 and if I was Black, I would be a little concerned.) 10.Bd3 f6 11.exf6 Bxf6 12.0-0² White has a pleasant position and might continue with a2-a3, Bc2 and Nd3.
9.h4!
Staying with the program.
9...Ba6 10.Bxa6 Rxa6 11.Rh3
11.a4!? could also be played, but Timman is clearly not worried about ...a5-a4.
11...h6

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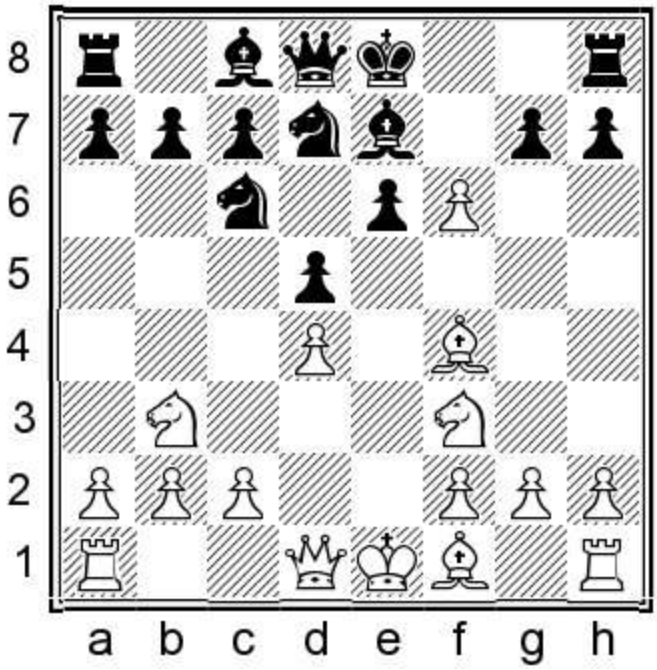


12.Rg3?!
Needlessly allowing some drama.
12.Kf1!?² might be a sensible novelty, avoiding any unnecessary tactics.
But strongest looks 12.h5!N with a slight edge.
12...Bf8
It's possible both players missed 12...g5!, when Black has managed to change the course of the game, even if White could still be better after 13.Be3!?.
13.h5 Ne7 14.Qe2 Qc8 15.a4²
White won in Timman – Drasko, Sarajevo 1984.

7...Ncb8 is recommended by the engine. Even if the two tempos are Nd2-b3, I would say it is obvious that White is happy to have them. Sure, it can be played, but we do not need to prepare for such lines.

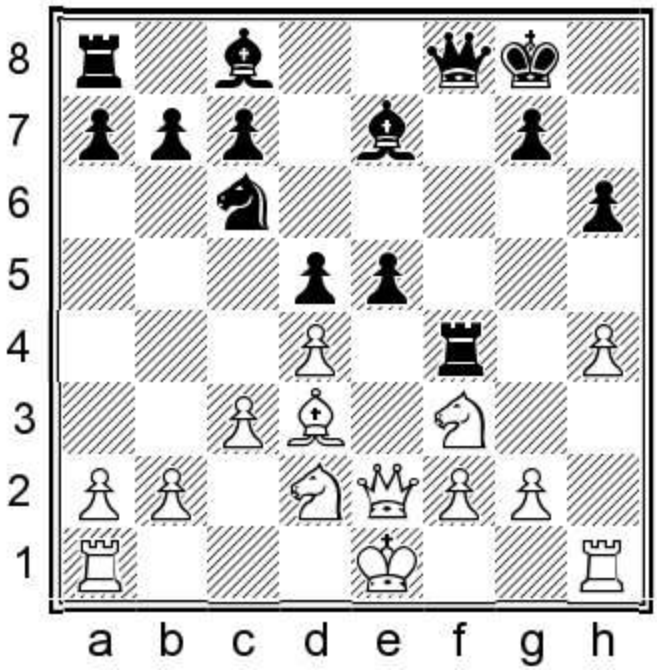
8.exf6

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8...Bxf6?!
This simply does not work. It commits Black to a set-up that only makes sense if the ...e5-break is later possible. And it's not.

8...Nxf6 9.c3 0-0 10.Bd3 This is also pleasant for White. One game continued: 10...Nh5 11.Bg3 Nf4 12.Bxf4 Rxf4 13.Qe2 Qf8 14.h4!² We will follow a little further, to see a typical idea. 14...h6 15.Nbd2 e5!? Schmidt – Groschup, corr. 1983.

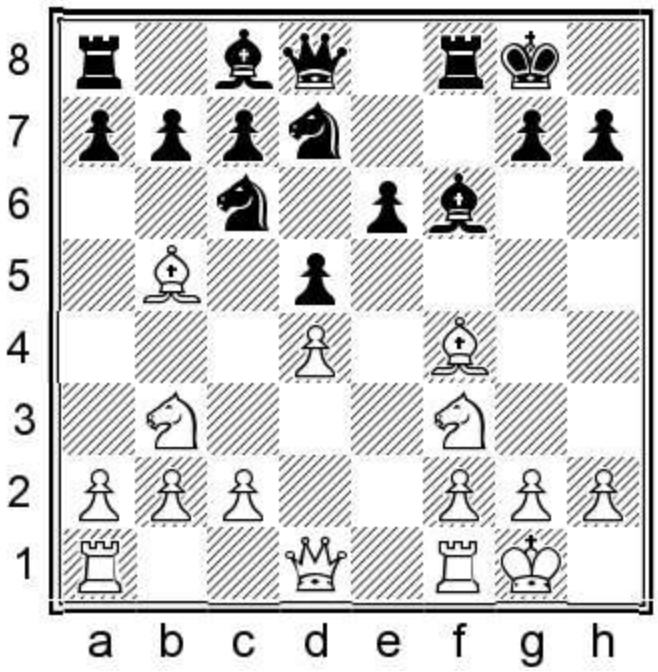


At this point White needs to improve. 16.Nxe5!N (in the game after 16.dxe5 Bg4!÷ White had lost control) 16... Nxe5 17.dxe5 Rxh4 18.Rxh4 Bxh4 19.g3 Be7 20.0-0-0±

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9.Bb5 0-0 10.0-0

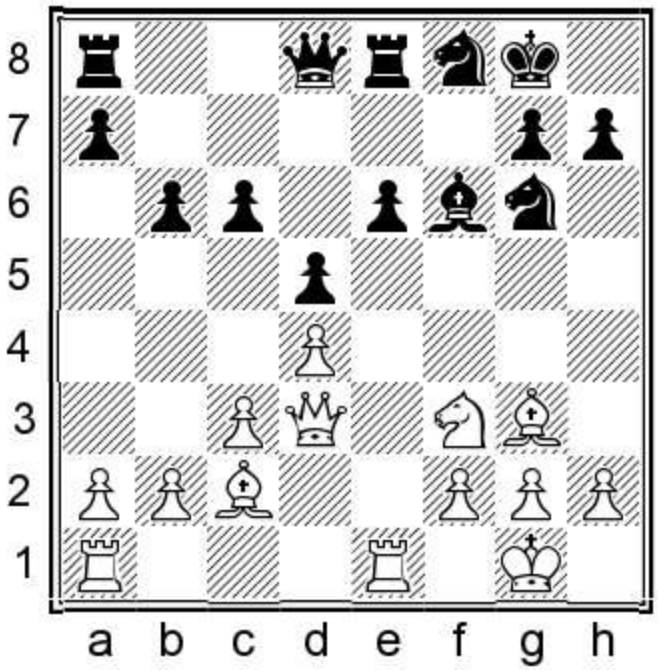
This is one of our dream positions. White has control over the e5-square and is better developed. Black is... well, Black is hoping White is going to mess up!



10...Ne7 11.Re1 Ng6 12.Bg3 Re8 13.c3 c6 14.Bd3
We just need to keep preventing ...e6-e5, while building up the pressure.

14...Ndf8 15.Bc2!
Preparing to include the knight on b3 in the game.

15...b6 16.Nc1 Ba6 17.Nd3 Bxd3 18.Qxd3±

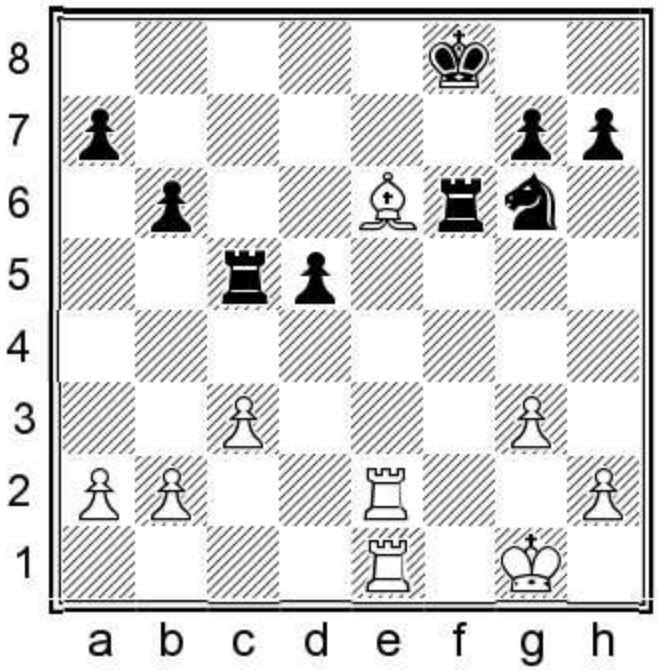


White has a lovely position, but this does not mean that it wins itself. Black decided to take a very defensive ap-

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proach in the game and was verging on lost for all of it, but also managed to show astonishing resilience. The game is an excellent illustration of the strain of defending a much-worse position that you can never hope to win. After many hours of stout defence, Black eventually blunders and loses the game to a one-mover.

18...Nh4 19.Nxh4 Bxh4 20.Re2 Bxg3 21.Qxg3 Re7 22.Rae1 Rf7 23.Re5 c5 24.Qe3 Rc8 25.Bd3 Qd6 26.g3 Rf6 27.f4 Rc7 28.Bf1 cxd4 29.Qxd4 Qc5 30.Qxc5 Rxc5 31.Bh3 Kf7 32.f5 exf5 33.Bxf5 Ng6 34.Be6† Ke7 35.R5e2 Kf8



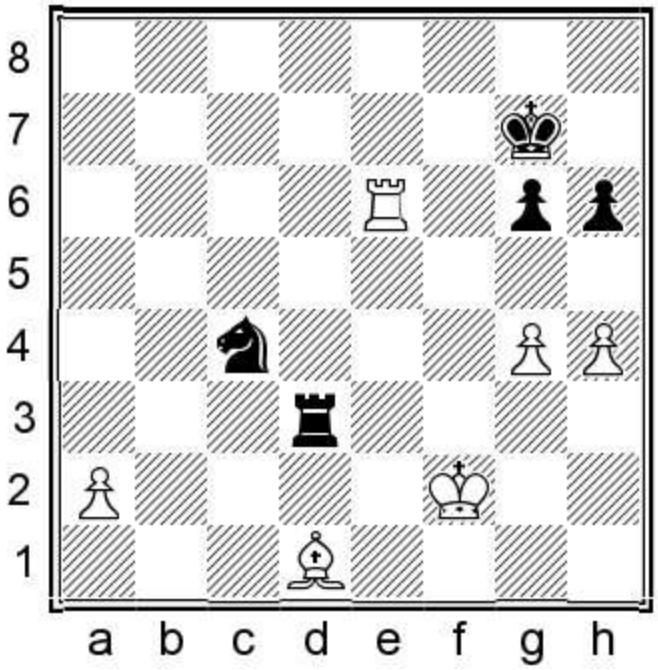
36.b4
I think this exchanges a few too many pawns without enough dividend.

White could instead have tried: 36.Bd7!? Rd6 37.Be6! when the following more or less forced line is very promising for White: 37...Ne7 38.Rf2† Ke8 39.Bg8! h6 40.Rf7 Rc7 41.Rxg7 Kf8 42.Rf7† Kxg8 43.Rexe7 Rxe7 44.Rxe7 d4 45.cxd4 Rxd4 46.Kf2± White has an extra pawn in the rook ending. Will it be enough to win? Not every time, but quite frequently. The game continues along a similar path, with White dominating, without having a clear way to win the game.

36...Rxc3 37.Bxd5 Rc8 38.Bb3 a5 39.bxa5 bxa5 40.h4 Nh8 41.Ba4 g6 42.Re8† Rxe8 43.Rxe8† Kg7 44.Ra8 Nf7 45.Rxa5
White has won a pawn, but Black will have some counterplay against the g3-pawn.

45...Rf3 46.Bb3 Nd6 47.Kg2 Rc3 48.g4 h6 49.Re5 Nc4 50.Re4 Nd2 51.Re7† Kf6 52.Re6† Kg7 53.Bd1 Nc4 54.Kf2 Rd3?
54...Nb2! 55.Bb3 Rh3² would most likely have saved the game.

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55.Rxg6†!
And suddenly it is all over. It is easy to imagine the horror on Black's face when he realized what he had done.

55...Kxg6
No better is 55...Kh7 56.Be2 and wins.

56.Bc2 Ne5 57.Ke2 Nxg4 58.Kxd3 Kf6 59.a4 Ke5 60.Bb3 Kd6 61.Ke4 Kc5 62.Kf5 Ne3† 63.Kg6 Kb4 64. Kxh6 Kxb3 65.a5 Nd5 66.a6 Kb4 67.a7 Nc7 68.Kg6 Kb5 69.h5
1–0

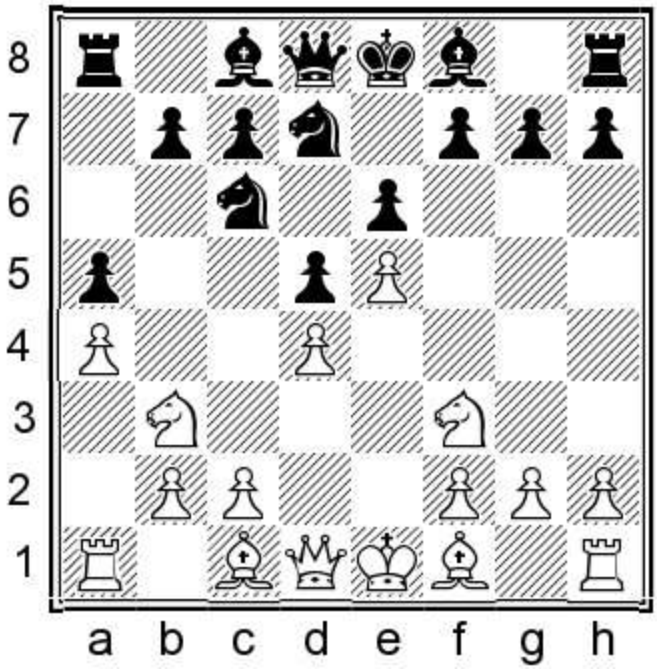
GAME 5

Oleg Korneev – Miguel Santos Ruiz
Roquetas de Mar 2015

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nd7 6.Nb3 a5
We have reached the main line.

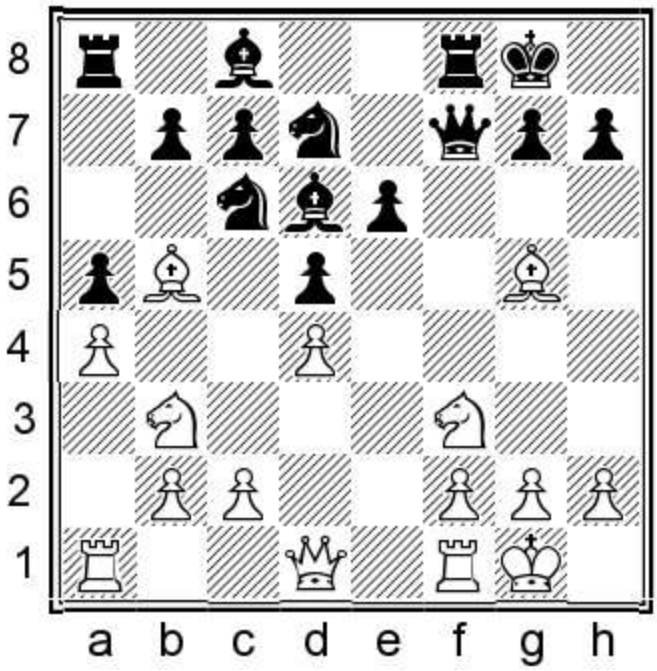
7.a4

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7...Be7
This move and 7...b6 are the most common, and often transpose to each other.

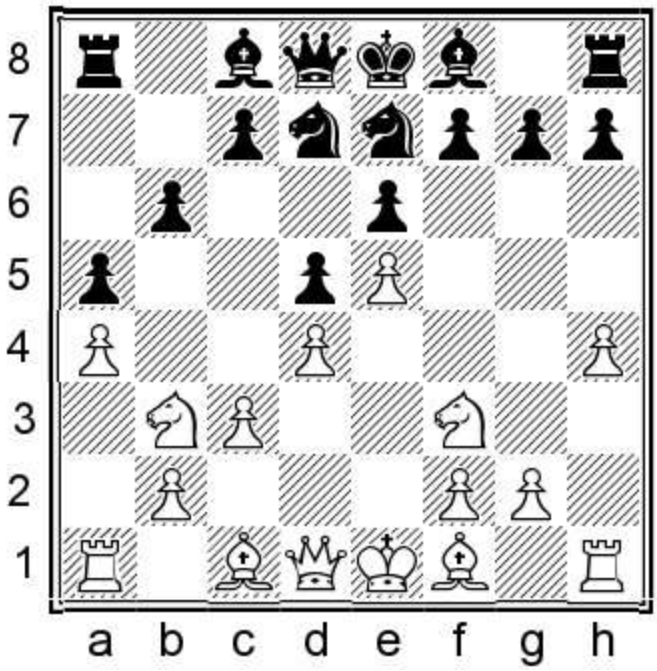
7...f6
This can of course be tried, but it does not really work. The main recommendation is 8.Bb5! transposing to 7...a5 8.a4 in the notes to Game 3 on page 39.
But also decent is:
8.exf6 Qxf6
8...Nxf6 as in Zhukov – Doroshkievich,
St Petersburg 2002, could be met by 9.Bb5!?N 9...Bd6 10.0-0 0-0 11.Re1² when White is looking good, though it would have been nice to get in Bf4 as well...
9.Bg5 Qf7 10.Bb5 Bd6 11.0-0 0-0



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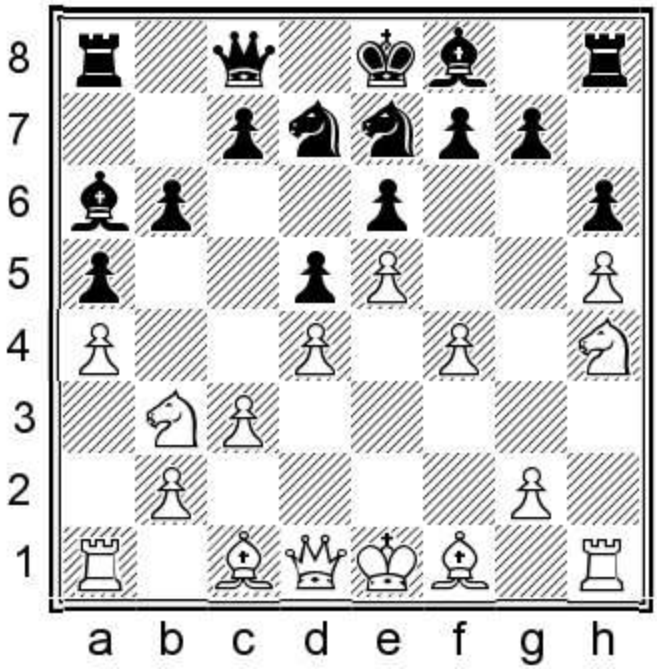
So far this is Zuther – Just, Leipzig 2009. Now I like:
12.Re1!N 12...Qh5 13.Bd2² Rxf3?!
This does not really work, but White has a pleasant position anyway.
14.Qxf3 Qxh2† 15.Kf1 Nf6 16.Qh3±

7...b6 8.c3
Here most alternatives will transpose to lines we will see elsewhere. An exception is the slightly odd knight move:
8...Ne7?!
I suggest that the right way to continue is the following reach for space on the kingside:
9.h4!



9...Bb7
9...Ba6N 10.Bxa6 Rxa6 11.h5 h6 12.Nh4 c5 13.f4² also looks great for White. Black's counterplay is an illusion. For example: 13...Nc6 14.Qg4! cxd4 (14...Be7 15.Ng6! fxg6 16.Qxg6† Kf8 17.0-0±) 15.Ng6 fxg6 (15...Rg8 16.f5±) 16.Qxe6† Ne7 17.hxg6 Qc7 18.Qf7† Kd8 19.Nxd4 Nc5 20.0-0± White is almost winning, as his pawns are rolling, while Black's kingside pieces are frozen.
10.h5 h6 11.Nh4 Qc8
11...c5 12.Bb5 Bc6 13.f4²
12.f4 Ba6

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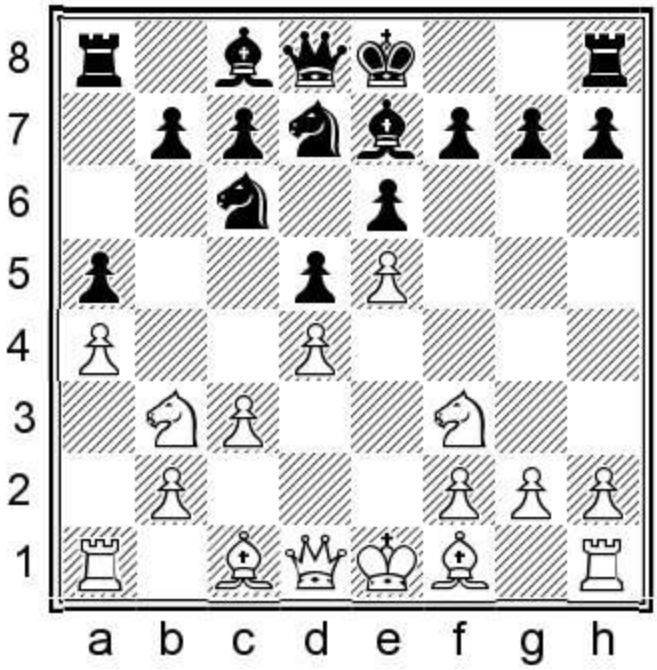


So far Bok – Zaragatski, Netherlands 2011. Here I like:
13.Qf3!?N 13...c5 14.f5 exf5 15.Bxa6 Qxa6 16.Nxf5 Nxf5 17.Qxf5 Be7 18.Rf1 Rf8 19.Be3 0-0-0 20.Rf3± Planning Kf2-g1 and Raf1, with a pleasant position.

8.c3!
This flexible move is nowhere close to being the most popular, but it reacts to Black's ideas very well. First of all, it improves White's structure in the centre and secondly it makes a move White will always benefit from, no matter what Black does next. Watson fails to consider it in Dangerous Weapons: The French.

8.Bb5 is the main move, but Black plays ...Na7 and ...c5 (often with ...b6 to support the c-pawn) and thus gains an important tempo on the bishop in order to create his counterplay. Lots and lots of games have been played there and although White has decent results, it does not look like something I want to recommend. Note that after 8...Na7 9.Bd3 b6 10.c3 Black can safely play 10...c5 threatening a pawn fork. In the next game we will see a similar-looking position where Black has castled and would love to play ...c7-c5, but it fails tactically. This makes a big difference.

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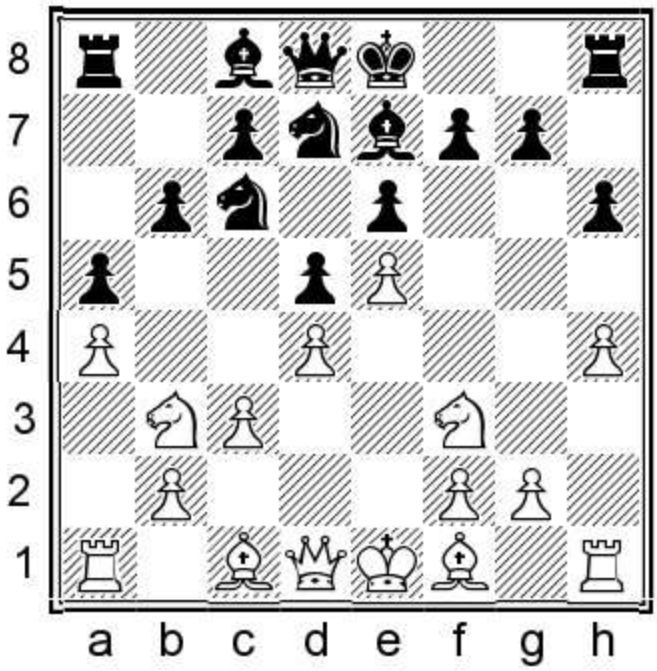


8...b6
8...0-0 and 8...f6 will be covered in the next two games.

9.h4!
An idea we have seen already: the f1-bishop can wait a moment as ...Ba6 might be played, while h2-h4 starts our kingside play.

9...f6?!
This does not work, but Black's position is not easy anyway.

9...h6

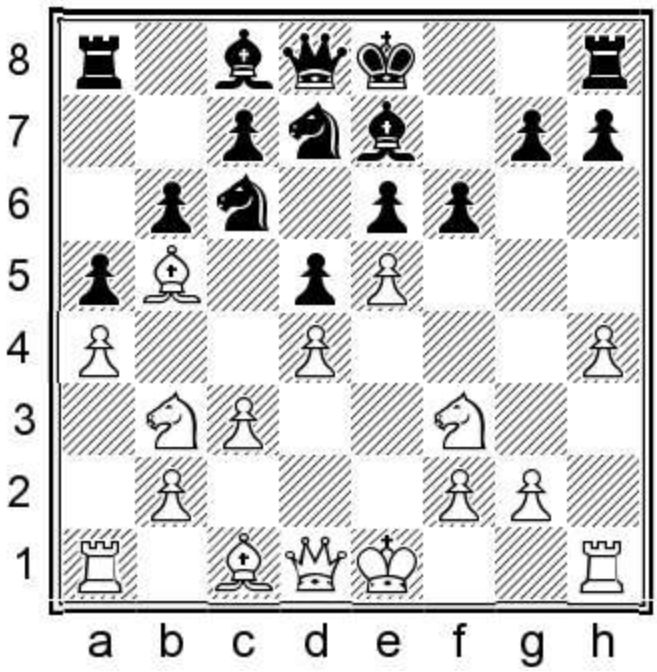


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This has been played in a few games and it is important to see how White should continue, not so much as something to memorize blow by blow, but as a general plan to remember and
repeat.
10.Rh3! Ba6 11.Bxa6 Rxa6 12.h5
Black should not be allowed any ...g5 tricks.
12...Ndb8
Having seen our main game, the US Board 5 gained a brilliant position on his way to winning gold on his board at the 2014 Olympiad: 12...Ra8 13.Rg3 Bf8 14.Kf1 Ndb8 15.Be3 Qd7 16.Nc1 Kd8 17.Nd3± White won on move 54 after lots of incidents, but here everything is awesome, Shankland – Gluckman, Tromso
(ol) 2014.
13.Rg3 Bf8 14.Rg4 Kd7 15.Bd2 Kc8 16.Nc1 Kb7 17.Nd3 Ra8 18.b4±
White dominates on both sides of the board, Kharlov – Borisenko, Samara 2011.

9...Ba6 10.Bxa6 Rxa6 11.h5 h6 as in Kuchynka – Pap, Pardubice 2009, would transpose to the notes right above after 12.Rh3!N.

10.Bb5



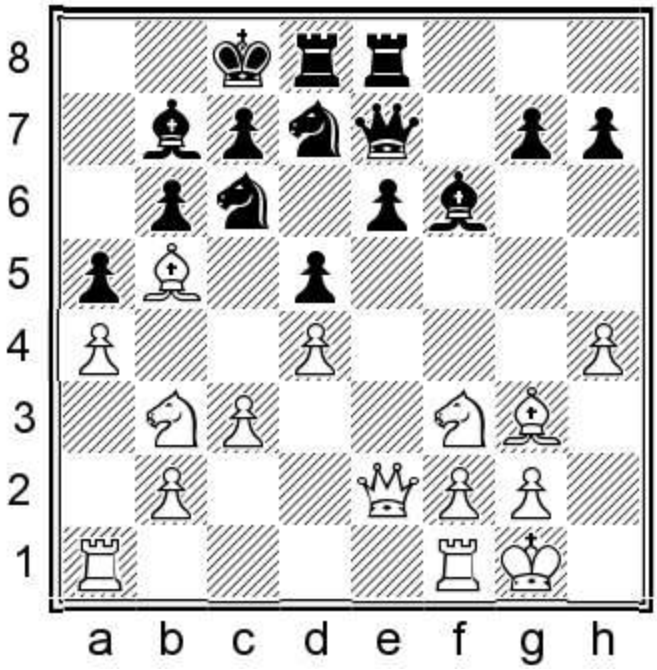
10...Bb7
I do not like the look of this, but 10...Na7 11.exf6 Bxf6 12.Bd3 is also fantastic for White. The key line is 12...c5 13.Ng5! Qe7 14.Nxh7 and White has won a pawn.

11.exf6 Bxf6 12.Qe2!
Korneev is playing this game almost flawlessly. The engine does not understand this, but I am right.

12...Qe7 13.Bf4 0-0-0 14.Bg3 Rhe8
14...h6 15.h5 is also great for White.

15.0-0

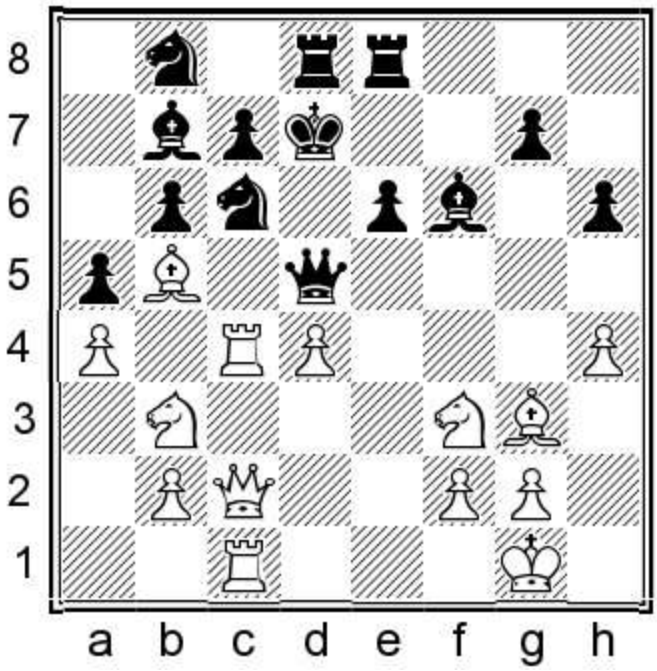
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15...Qf7
Black cannot free himself: 15...e5? 16.Bxc6 Bxc6 17.dxe5 Nxe5 18.Nxe5 Bxe5 19.Rfe1! The natural rook to put on e1, but there is also a tactical point, as we shall see. 19...Bd6 20.Qa6†! Bb7 21.Rxe7 Bxa6 If White had chosen 19.Rae1 then the f1-rook would now be under attack, but it's not, so... 22.Bxd6! cxd6 23.Rxg7 White wins easily.

16.Rfe1 h6 17.Rac1!
Opening a new front against the two weakest squares in the black position, c6 and c7.

17...Qh5 18.c4 dxc4 19.Rxc4 Qd5 20.Rec1 Ndb8 21.Qc2 Kd7



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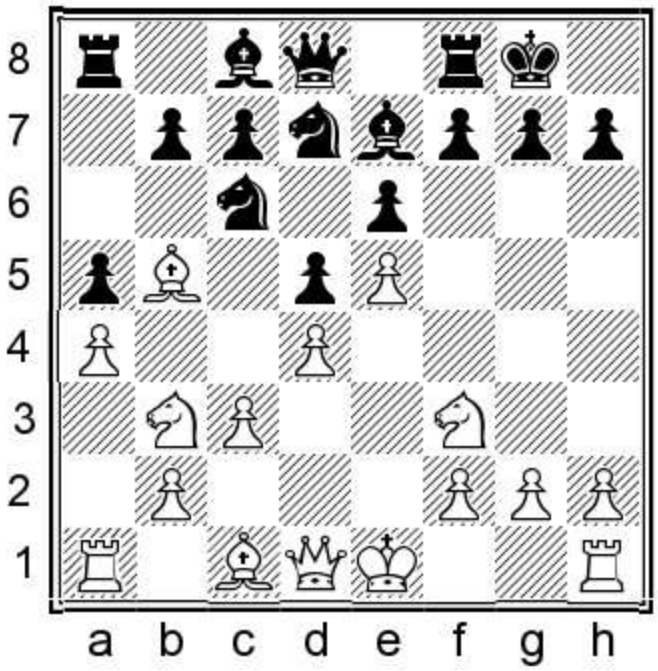
22.Nc5†!
One of many possible tactical wins. 22.Nxa5! bxa5 23.Rc5 was the same idea.

22...bxc5 23.Rxc5
1–0

GAME 6

Terry Godat – Istvan Sinka
email 2008

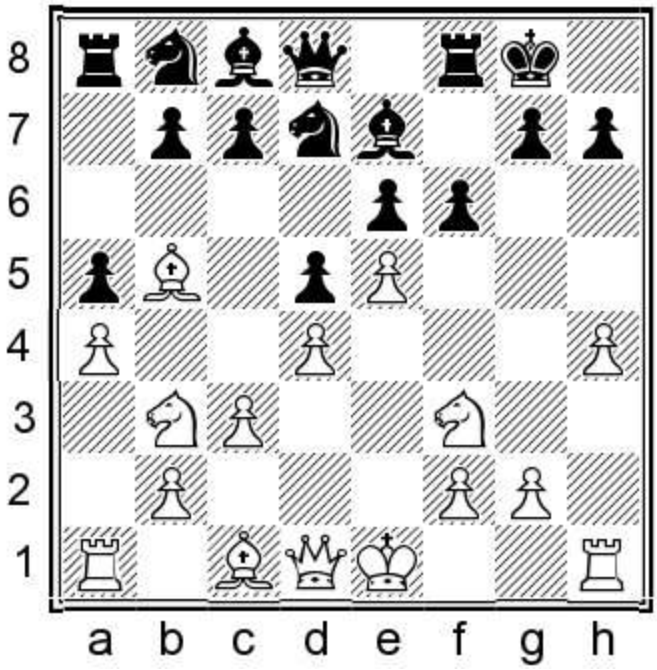
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nd7 6.Nb3 a5 7.a4 Be7 8.c3 0-0 9.Bb5
Now that Black has castled, this move works better.



9...Na7
The usual Guimard plan, but it's too slow in this case.

Black has also tried a rather curious retreat:
9...Ncb8 10.h4
This move is useful all over the place.
10...f6
This is forced.
After 10...b6 11.Ng5 h6 12.Bd3! c5 13.Bh7† Kh8 14.Bb1 Black lacks a good move – or even any move...

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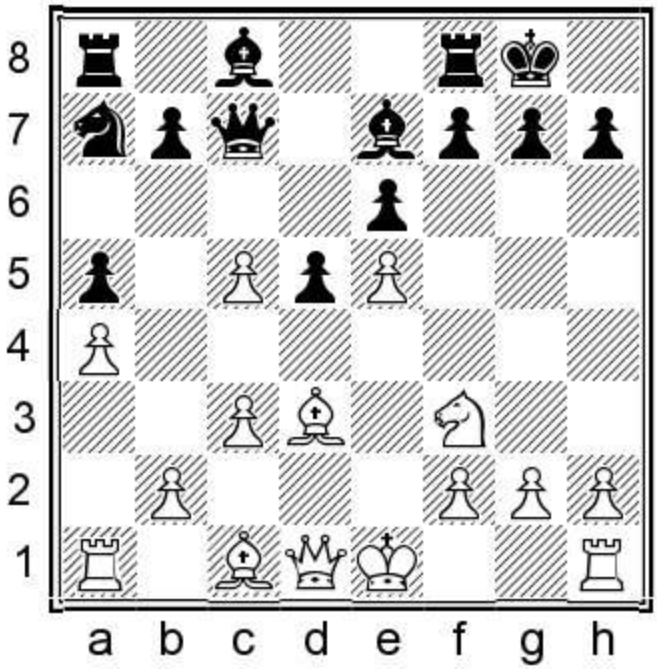
Here I propose a rather obvious novelty.
11.Bd3!N
11.Be3² was Trautmann – Selke, corr. 1981.
11...fxe5
Or 11...Qe8 12.Qc2 f5 13.g4!? and White has a great attack.
12.dxe5 Qe8 13.Ng5 Bxg5 14.hxg5 g6 15.f4
This looks awful for Black. White will find a job for his dark squared bishop eventually, and the b3-knight might one day land on f6 or h6.

9...f6 is the best move. White should play 10.exf6 Bxf6 11.Bf4, which transposes to the next game.

10.Bd3 b6
Trying to prepare ...c7-c5, but Black will not be in time.

10...c5
This also fails to equalize.
11.Nxc5 Nxc5 12.dxc5
Here we already see Black's problem. If he takes on c5 with the bishop, White takes on h7 with a winning attack.
12...Qc7

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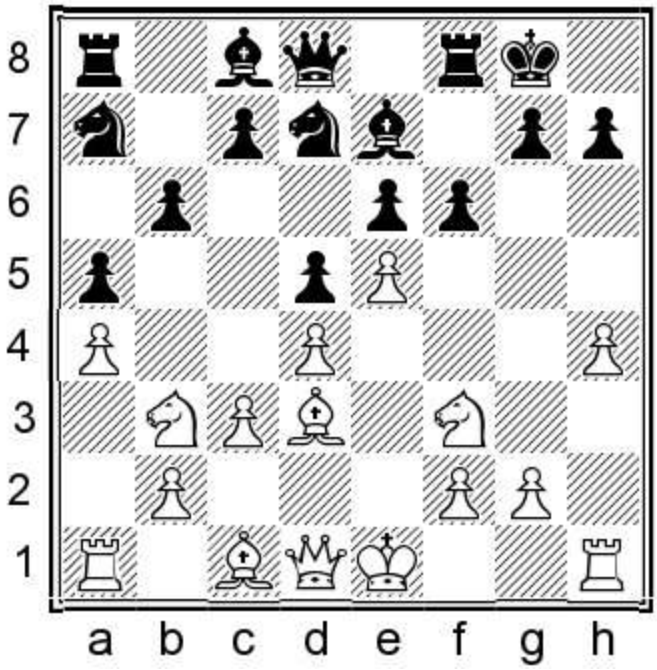
13.0-0
White plays simple chess.
Also strong is the more thematic 13.Bf4N 13...Nc6 14.h4! with a big advantage.
13...Nc6
Black resigns himself to being a pawn down. It's worth playing through the whole game, as White smoothly turns his bind into a stranglehold.
14.Re1 Rd8 15.Nd4 Bxc5 16.Bg5 Be7 17.Nb5 Qd7 18.h4 b6 19.Qg4 Bxg5 20.hxg5 Qe7 21.Re3 g6 22.Qf4 Qf8 23.Rh3 Qg7 24.Re1 Ba6 25.g4
Black resigned in McKenzie – Oppermann, corr. 2012. White is about to play Kg2, Reh1 and so on.

11.h4! h6
This allows a strong surge, but whatever he plays, Black is already almost lost! For a start, he needs to take measures against the direct threat of Bxh7†.

11...c5?
Ignoring White's threat.
12.Bxh7† Kh8
12...Kxh7 13.Ng5† Kh6 14.Ne4† Kg6 15.Qg4† Kh7 16.Qh5† and mate follows.
13.Ng5 g6 14.Nxe6 fxe6 15.Bxg6 Rf5
15...Kg7 16.Qg4+–
16.Bxf5 exf5 17.Qh5† Kg8 18.Qg6† Kh8 19.Qh6† Kg8 20.Qe6† Kh8 21.Bg5
1–0 Piippo – Kuusava, Finland 1986.

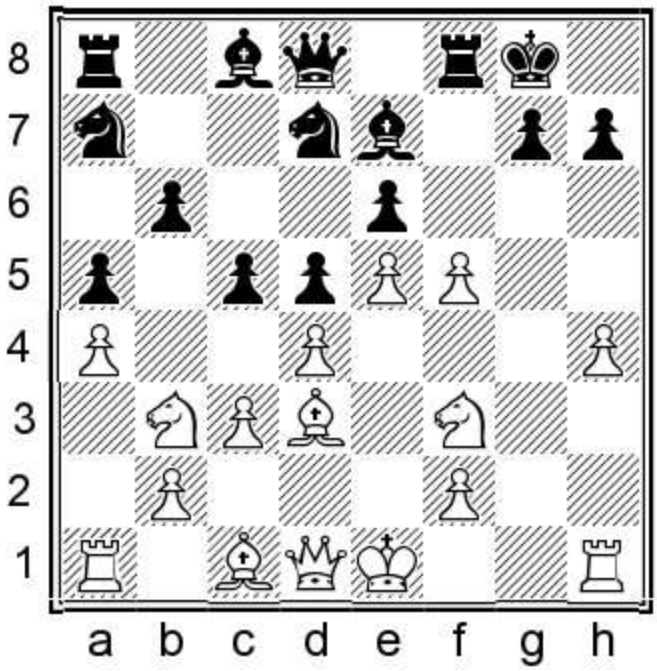
11...f6? does not do the trick. White wins with a standard combination that never gets old...

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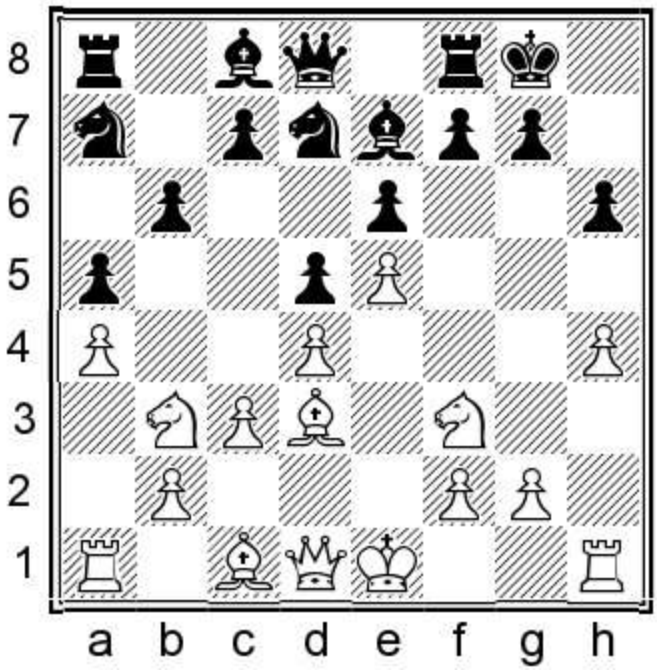
12.Ng5!! fxg5 13.Bxh7† Kxh7 14.hxg5† Kg8 15.Rh8† Kxh8 16.Qh5† Kg8 17.g6 Black is mated.

11...f5
This is what Black has to play. He is not losing by force, but his position remains deeply unpleasant. For example:
12.g4 c5
12...fxg4 13.Ng5 Bxg5 14.hxg5 g6 15.Qxg4 Qe7 16.Be3± looks amazing for White. I wish I could get such positions from the opening just once a year!
13.gxf5



13...c4
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13...exf5 14.Ng5 Bxg5 15.hxg5 is also big for White. Black does not have time for

15...c4? on account of 16.Qh5 with a winning attack. For example: 16...cxd3 17.Qxh7† Kf7 18.Rh6 Ke7 19. Rd6 and White does not miss his bishop at all.
14.Ng5 Bxg5
The best Black has is 14...Qe8 15.Bb1 exf5 16.Nd2± when he is not quite lost, but obviously struggling.
15.hxg5 Qe8
White is not bluffing with his piece sacrifices: 15...cxd3 16.Qh5 Rxf5 17.Qxh7† Kf8 18.g6 Nf6 19.exf6 Qxf6 20.Qh8† Ke7 21.Rh7+–
16.Bb1!
Black cannot afford to grab the piece:
16...cxb3? 17.f6 g6 18.Rxh7+–



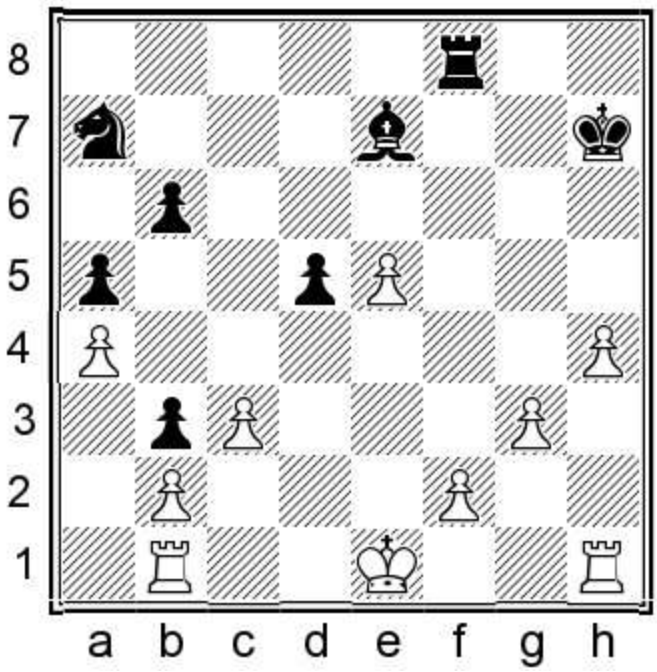
12.Ng5!!
White initiates a winning attack. As this is a correspondence game, we can safely believe that White had already seen the outcome of these complications.

12...c5
Or 12...hxg5 13.Bh7† leads quickly to mate.

13.Bh7† Kh8 14.Bb1 c4 15.Qc2 f5 16.Nxe6 cxb3 17.Qd2 Qe8 18.Nxg7! Qg6
No better is 18...Kxg7 19.Qxh6† Kg8 20.Rh3 and White wins.

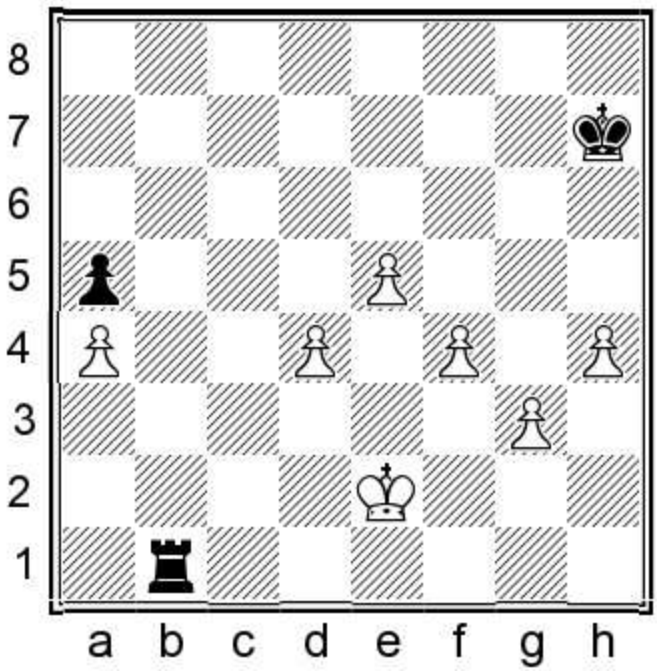
19.Qxh6† Qxh6 20.Bxh6 Nxe5 21.dxe5 Kh7 22.Nxf5 Bxf5 23.Bxf8 Rxf8 24.g3 Bxb1 25.Rxb1
White has three pawns and a rook against two minor pieces. He still needs to get coordinated, but essentially the struggle is over. In the old days, commentators would have accused Black of being a stamp collector, but in our time, all you get from playing extra moves is a higher electricity bill. In fact, Black managed to offer enough resistance to make the rest of the game spectacular. I know most readers are not looking for entertainment first in a book like this, but I think you should see this one till the end...

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25...b5 26.Ra1 b4 27.cxb4 Bxb4† 28.Ke2 Nc6 29.f4 Nd4† 30.Kd3 Bc5 31.Rac1 Nc2 32.Ke2 Nd4† 33.Kf1 Nc2 34.Rd1 Ne3† 35.Ke2 Nxd1 36.Rxd1 d4 37.Rf1 Bb4 38.Rf3 Bc3
Black tries to change the nature of the game, but the ending with five pawns against a rook is hopeless.

39.bxc3 Rb8 40.cxd4 b2 41.Rf1 b1=Q 42.Rxb1 Rxb1



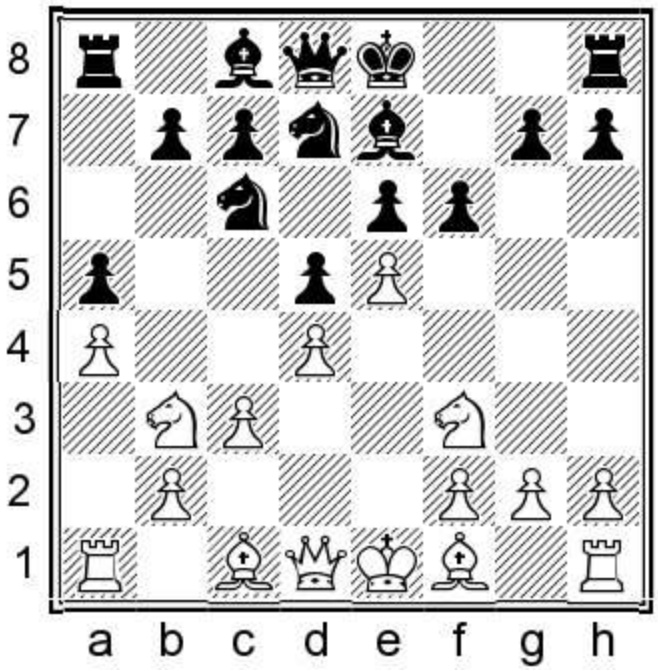
43.d5 Kg6 44.Kf3 Ra1 45.h5† Kf7 46.h6 Rh1 47.f5 Rxh6 48.d6 Rh1 49.e6† Ke8 50.g4 Rd1 51.d7† Ke7 52.g5 Rf1† 53.Kg4 Rd1 54.g6 Rf1 55.g7 Rg1† 56.Kf4
1–0

GAME 7

chesstouring.com

Tom Vananderoye – Manuel Ortiz
email 2011

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nd7 6.Nb3 a5 7.a4 Be7 8.c3 f6
This is the closest to a tenable variation for Black that I have found in the Guimard. It could be that 3...Nc6 is poor because it blocks the c7-pawn...



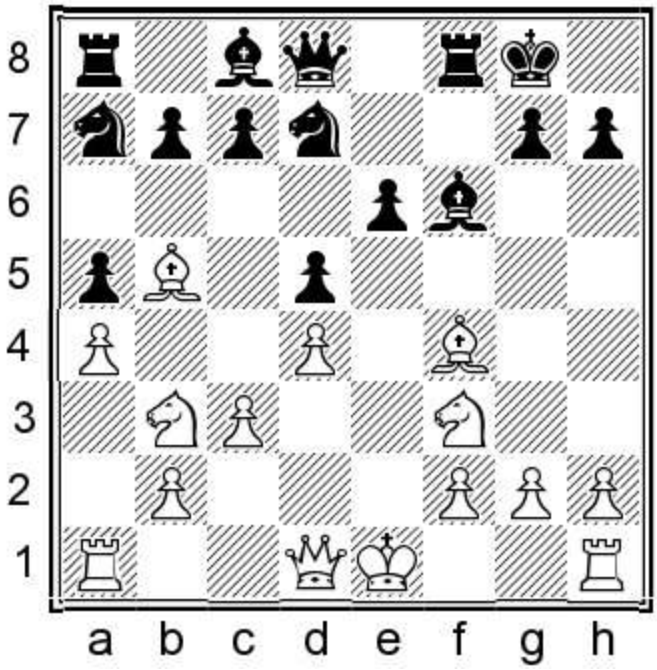
9.exf6 Bxf6 10.Bb5 0-0 11.Bf4
As said in the last game, this position can also arise after 8...0-0 9.Bb5 f6 10.exf6 Bxf6 11.Bf4.

11...e5!?
Black has many alternatives, but the text move is the critical test.

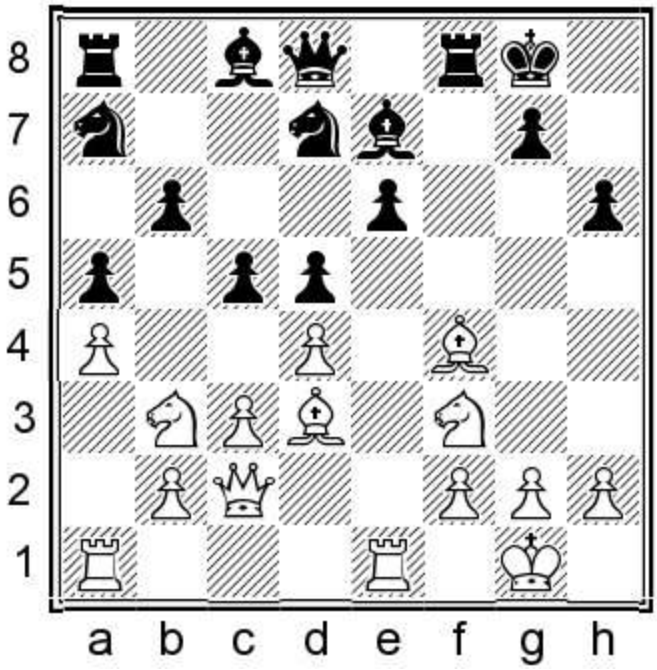
11...Bxd4?! is a tactic that does not work. After 12.Bxc6 Bxf2† 13.Kxf2 bxc6 14.Bg3 e5 15.Kg1± Black has compensation of course, but far from enough. The main problem is that White will be safe on the dark squares.

11...Na7

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12.Bd3!N
A not very difficult improvement over 12.Bxd7 Bxd7 13.Nxa5 b6 14.Nb3², which is also perfectly viable and led to a victory for White in Xiong – Yogesh, Philadelphia 2015.
12...b6 13.0-0 c5 14.Qc2 h6 15.Rfe1±
I really do not like Black's position; there are too many obvious problems for my taste. One interesting line goes:
15...Be7

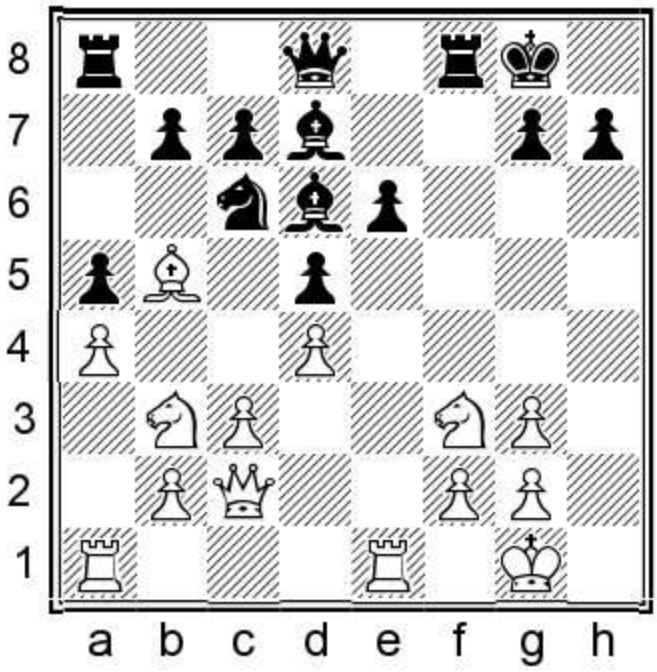


16.Rxe6!! Rxf4 17.Rae1 Bf8 18.Re8 Qc7
18...Qf6 19.R1e6 Rxf3 20.Bh7† Kh8 21.Rxf6 Rxf6 22.Bf5! and White wins.
19.Bh7† Kh8 20.R1e7 Qc6 21.Qg6 Qxg6 22.Bxg6

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Black has no defence against Rxd7, which leaves White a pawn up.

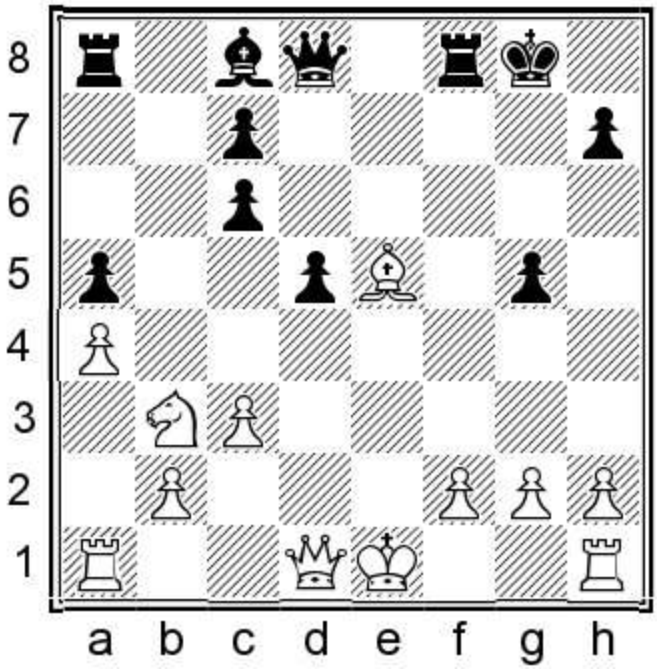
11...Be7
This move does not make a lot of sense; Black has lost a few tempos.
12.Bg3²
White is evidently better, though I do not wish to get embroiled in an argument over how much better that is.
12...Nf6 13.Qc2 Bd7 14.0-0 Nh5 15.Rfe1 Nxg3 16.hxg3 Bd6
Black is tempting White to change the nature of the game. At the moment White has clear control of the e-file and a generally freer game. Only a computer would want to go pawn grabbing at this point. And who would consult a computer during a game?



17.Re3!N
I also like 17.Nc1, but it makes sense to get the a1-rook into the game before rerouting the knight, as there is no doubt that it belongs on e1, while the knight might go to c5 in just one possible variation...
17.Bxc6?! Oh yes, I forgot. A correspondence player might ask a machine. 17...Bxc6 18.Rxe6 Qd7 19.Rae1 Bxa4 20.Ng5 g6 An engine might claim White is winning. But it is all a lie. After 21.Nxh7 Qxh7 22.Rxg6† White accompanied his last “postcard” with a draw offer, which was accepted in Glavas – Wingo, corr. 2007. After 22...Kh8 23.Ree6 Bxb3 24.Qxb3 Rfe8 25.Qxd5 Rxe6 26.Qxe6 Bf8 27.Rg4 Ra6 28.Qe5† Bg7 29.Qe8† Qg8 30.Qd7 Rc6 White is better, but things are not as clear as our digital friend would like to have us believe.
17...Qe8 18.Rae1 Qh5
Here is the moment when the knight can hop to c5.
19.Nc5! Bxc5 20.Bxc6 Bxc6 21.dxc5
White dominates.

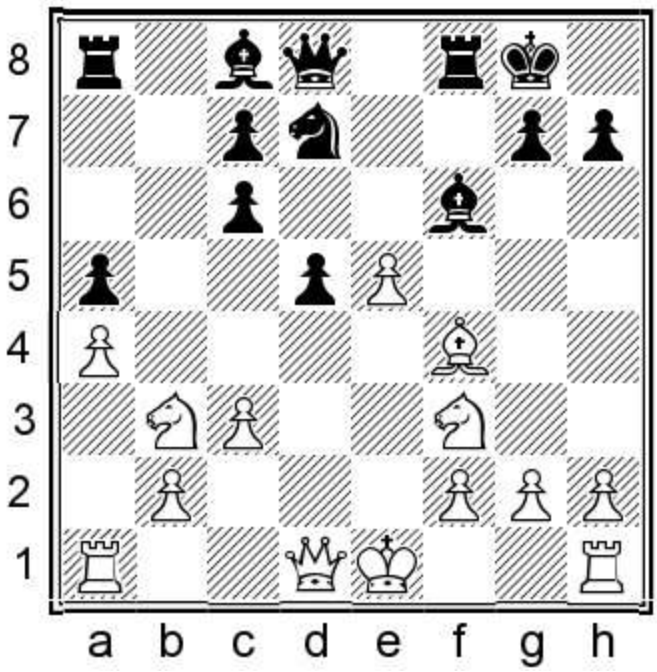
11...g5 12.Bg3 e5 looks too ugly to believe in. 13.Bxc6 bxc6 14.dxe5 Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Bxe5 16.Bxe5

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16...Qe7 (even worse is: 16...Re8 17.f4 gxf4 18.0-0 Rxe5 19.Rxf4±) 17.Qe2 Ba6 18.Qe3 Rae8 19.0-0-0 Qxe5 20.Qxe5 Rxe5 21.f3± White has a big advantage as was shown in a computer game between Komodo and Stockfish. Black held, but it did not look like it was going that way for a long time.

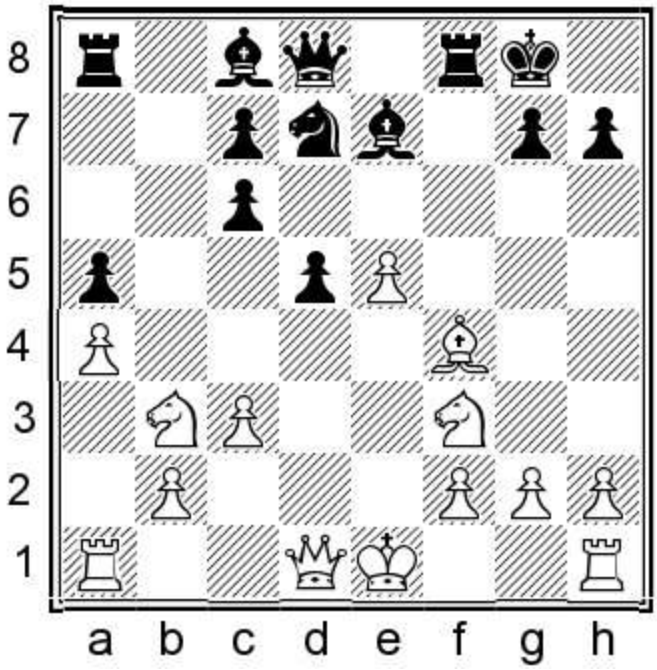
12.Bxc6 bxc6 13.dxe5



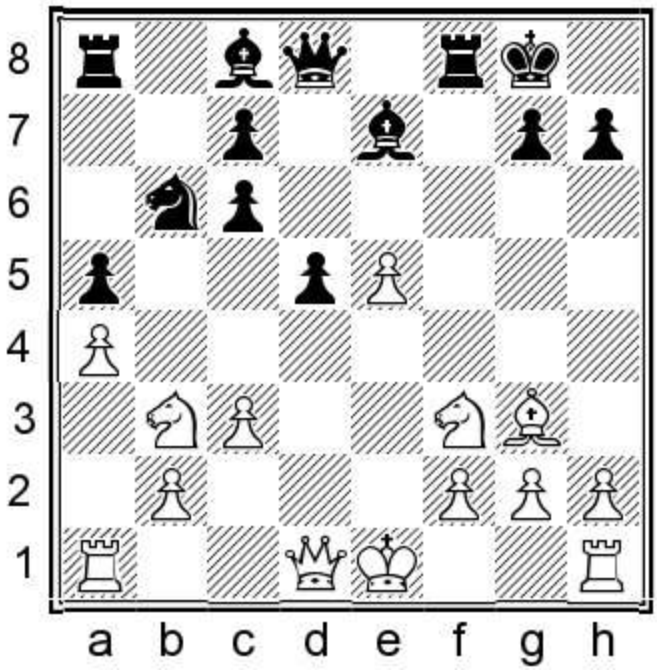
13...Qe8
The best way to exploit the e-file.

13...Be7
This feels like surrender, but there are a few tricks to note.

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14.Bg3
The one to avoid is 14.Be3?! Rxf3!³ which gave Black a big initiative on the light squares in Hueser – Eberl, corr. 2007.
14...Nb6
14...Ba6?! 15.Nxa5 does not really work out for Black, as the c6-pawn is so hard to defend. Black could try 15...Nc5! 16.Nxc6 Qe8 17.Nxe7† Kh8 but White has: 18.b4! This is the accurate move. In other lines the pawn is lost and the king less safe. 18...Nd3† 19.Kd2 Bc4 20.Bh4 Black's compensation for the massive material deficit is insufficient, though the game is by no means over.

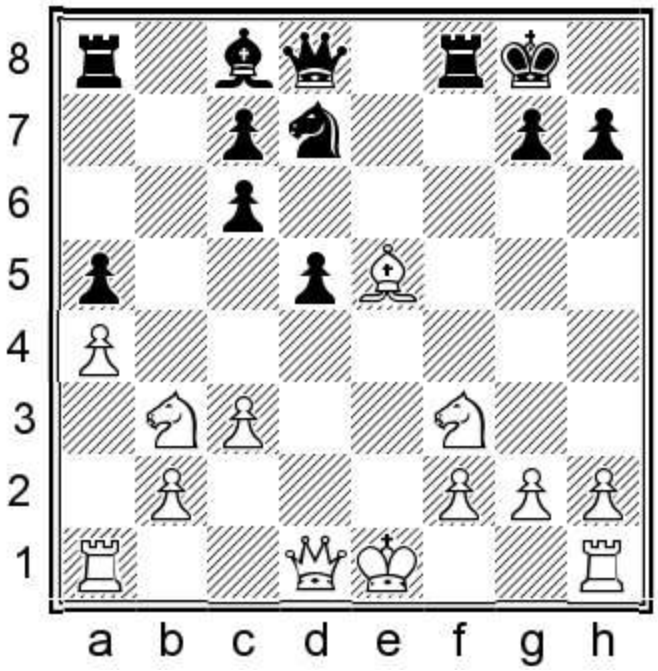


15.Nfd4
If you like to keep things simple, I recommend 15.0-0!?N 15...c5 16.Nbd2 Be6 17.b3² with an extra pawn and hope for the future.

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15...c5 16.Nc6 Qe8 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.0-0²
White eventually lost on time after having dominated his opponent and missed an ocean of wins in Bok – Johannessen, Oslo 2013.

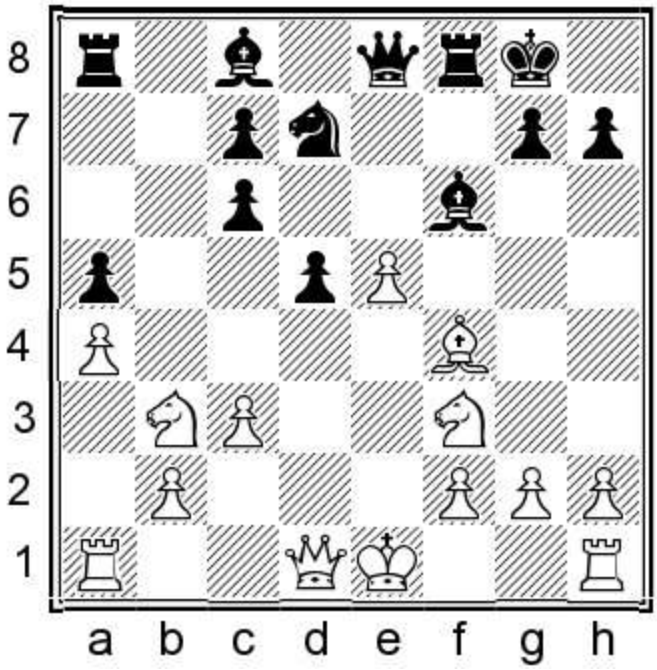
13...Bxe5
A similar idea to the game, but an inaccurate move order.
14.Bxe5



14...Qe7?!
This does not work, but there is no longer an ideal option.
14...Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Qg5 16.Nxc6 Black wants to play 16...Qxg2? but it fails to: 17.Qxd5†!+– So 16...Bb7 17.0-0 Bxc6 18.Nd4± is the best Black has, but White is simply a pawn up.
15.Qd4!
The tactics all work for White, as his king can safely castle long before the centre opens.
15...Rxf3
15...Rf5 16.0-0-0 Nxe5 17.Rhe1 Nxf3 18.Rxe7 Nxd4 19.Nxd4 Rxf2 20.Rxc7 Rxg2 21.Nxc6 Bg4 22.Rd2±
16.gxf3 Nxe5 17.0-0-0 Nxf3 18.Qf4±
Voropaev – Guenther, Germany 2015.

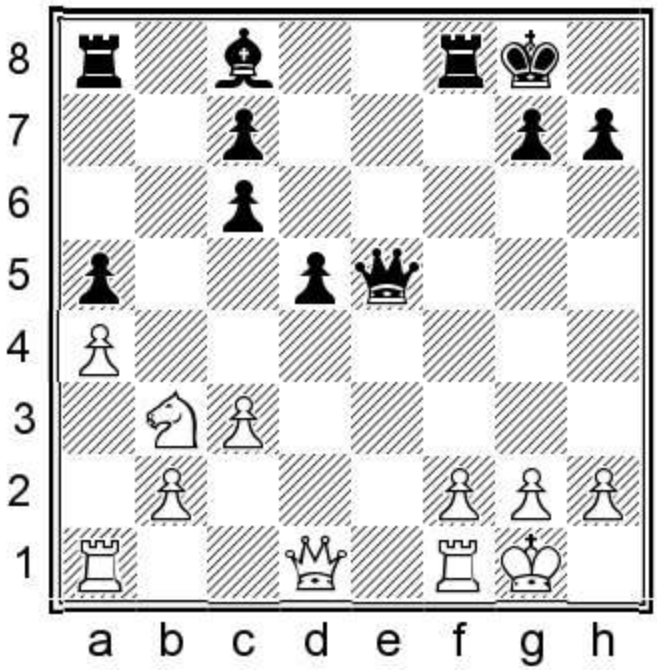
We have reached the critical position for the Guimard.

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14.Qd4?!
A greedy approach that leads to a bit of fun, but no advantage.

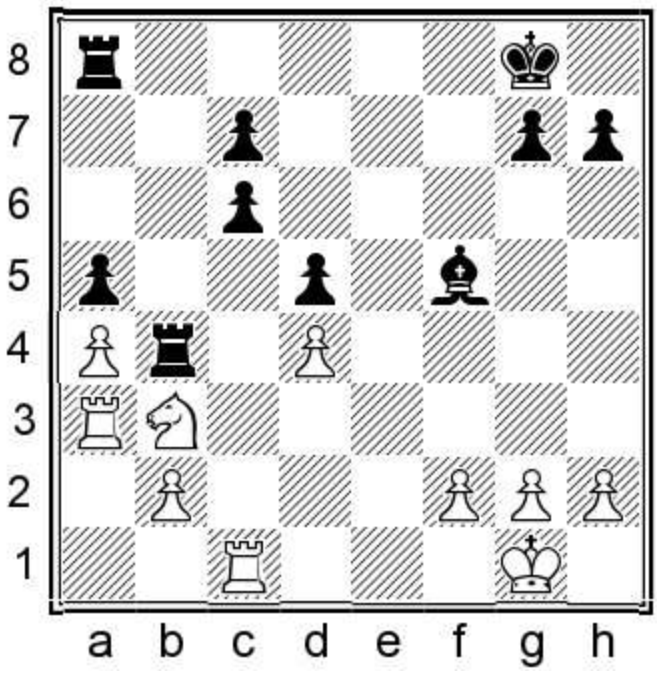
White should have played for a better structure with:
14.0-0!
A novelty when we first analysed it, but a recent game followed our analysis all the way to move 20.
14...Bxe5 15.Bxe5 Nxe5 16.Nxe5 Qxe5



17.Qd4!
White is looking for an advantage with a strong knight against an inefficient bishop.
White is also better after 17.Nc5 Rb8 18.Qd2 Qd6 19.b4², but I prefer the main line.
17...Qxd4

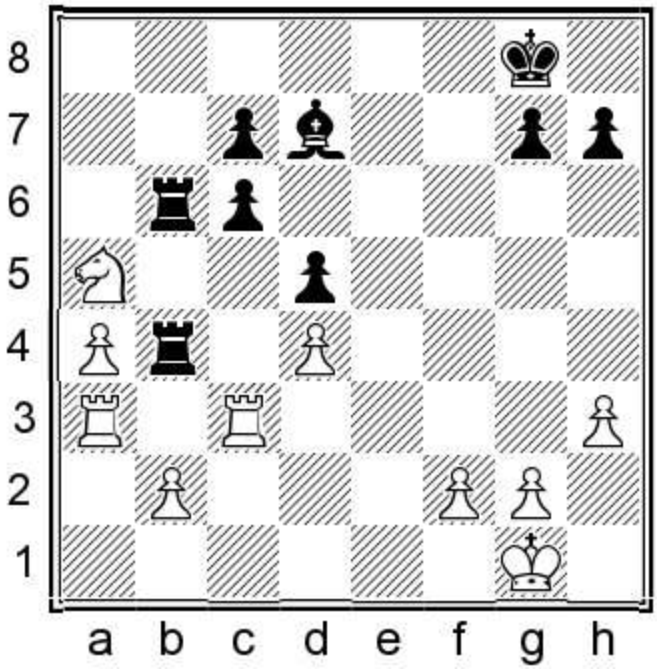
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The alternatives give White an even simpler path to an edge.
17...Qg5 18.f4 Qf6 19.Qxf6 gxf6 20.Nc5²
17...Re8 18.Qxe5 Rxe5 19.Nc5²
18.cxd4!
After 18.Nxd4 c5 I don't think White has any advantage.
18...Bf5 19.Rfc1 Rfb8 20.Ra3 Rb4



21.h3!N
This is the end of my serious analysis. White is better and Black is playing solely for a draw. If your opponent is reading this book, he will play something else. Still it is worth seeing a sample line, to get an idea of how White could make something more out of his advantage.
21.Rxc6?! Rab8 22.Rc3 c5!÷ was a mess in Pierrot – Santiago, Caba 2017, and Black later won.
21...Ra6
21...Rab8? worked in the above game, but here it fails to 22.Nxa5 and the knight goes on to c6.
22.Rc5 Rab6 23.Nxa5 Bd7
23...Rxb2 24.Nxc6 and White wins.
24.Rcc3!

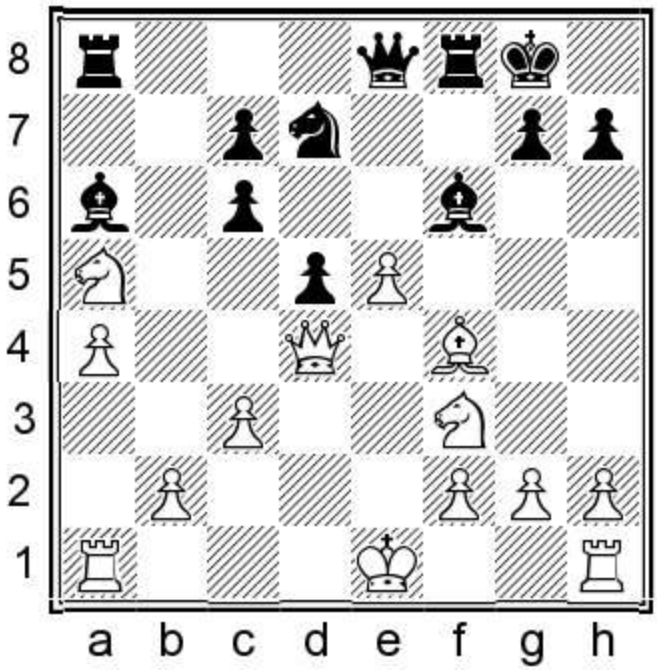
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24...Rxd4
24...Rxb2?! 25.Nb3 is even worse.
25.Nb3 Rd1† 26.Kh2 d4 27.Rf3 Be6 28.a5! Rb8 29.Nc5 Bd5 30.Rf4±
With the point 30...Rxb2? 31.Nd7! and White wins.

14...Ba6
White has lost the right to castle, leaving Black with sufficient compensation for the pawn. I will show a few fun lines in the rest of the game, but the relevant anti-Guimard opening preparation is all finished.

15.Nxa5

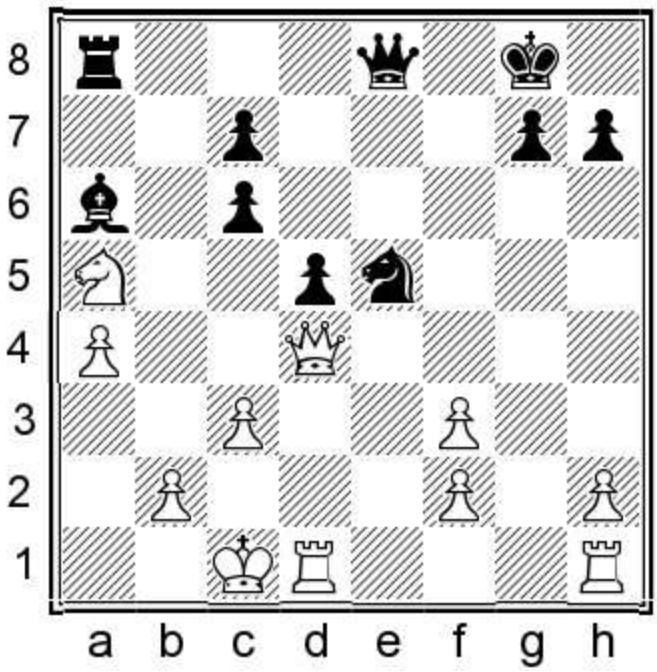


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15...Nb6

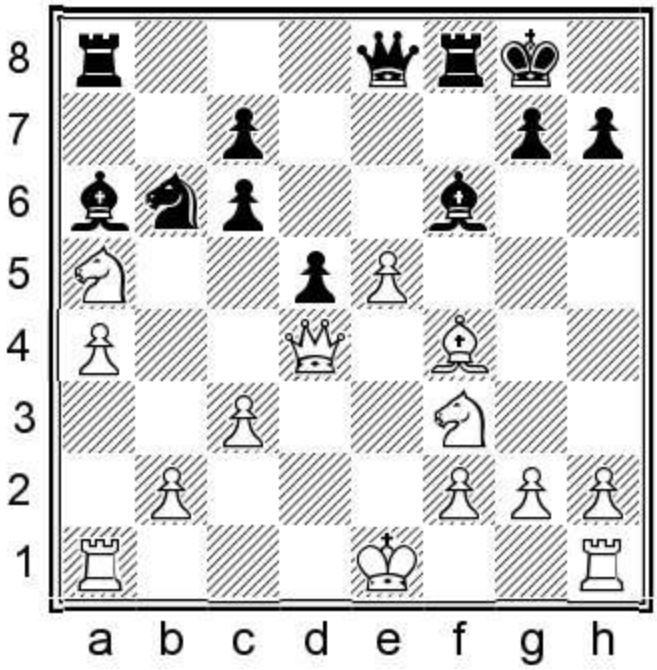
In this case, Black should not get flashy.

15...Bxe5? 16.Bxe5 Rxf3 17.gxf3 Nxe5
This could look like good compensation at a first glance. But actually White is much better after:
18.0-0-0



Black should take on f3 and accept that he is worse, as if he plays the tempting:
18...Be2
Then White wins with:
19.Nxc6!! Nxc6 20.Qxd5† Kf8 21.Qf5† Kg8
Or 21...Qf7 22.Qc5†! Ne7 23.Rd4 with a winning attack.
22.Rhe1 Rxa4 23.Qc2 Ra1† 24.Kd2
A confusing position, but basically the only thing that matters is the pin down the e-line.
24...Rxd1† 25.Qxd1! Bxd1 26.Rxe8† Kf7 27.Rc8 Bxf3 28.Rxc7†
White will win the endgame with decent play.

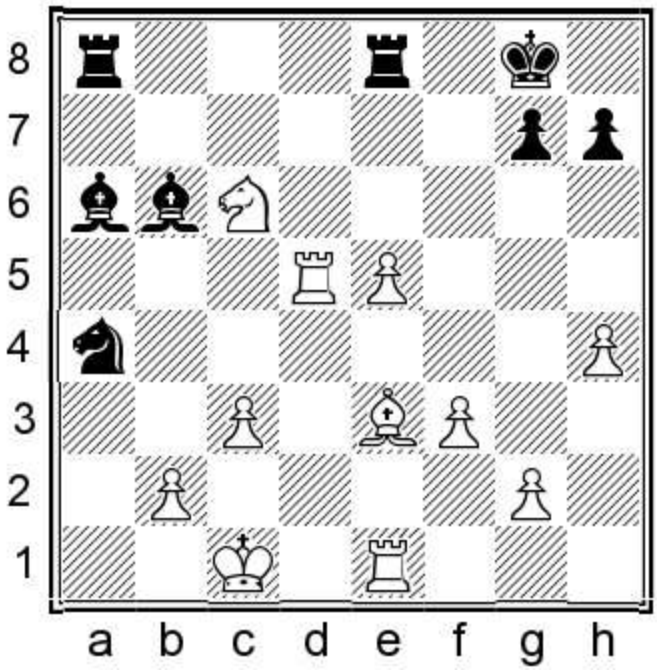
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16.h4
For some time I was wondering if White had a chance to be better after 16.Qe3N, but I came to the conclusion that the best line for both parties went: 16...Be7 17.Nd4 c5! 18.Ne6 (18.Ndc6?! Kh8© is dangerous for White. There is no safety to be found.) 18...Qg6 19.Nxf8 Rxf8 20.g3 Nxa4!! 21.Rxa4 Rxf4 22.Rxf4 Qb1† With a perpetual.

16...c5! 17.Qxc5 Be7 18.Qxc7 Qg6 19.Be3 Rxf3 20.0-0-0!
20.gxf3?? Qd3 and White is mated.

20...Bd8 21.Qc6 Rf8 22.Rhe1 Qxc6 23.Nxc6 Nxa4 24.Rxd5 Bb6 25.f3 Rfe8
Black has sufficient counterplay in this ending and in the end it was White who had to be careful.



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26.Bxb6 Nxb6 27.Rdd1 Nc4 28.Kc2 Bb7 29.Nd4 Nxe5 30.b3 Kf8 31.Ra1 Rxa1 32.Rxa1 Ng6 33.g3 Ne5 34. Re1 Bd5 35.c4 Nxf3 36.Rf1 Re1 37.Rxe1 Nxe1† 38.Kc3 Bg2 39.b4 Nf3 40.Nc2 Ke7 41.b5 Kd6 42.Kb4 Bh3 43.c5† Kc7 44.Ne3 Be6 45.Kc3 Kd7
½–½

Conclusion

The Guimard variation is reached after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nc6!? when we naturally choose 4.Ngf3. Game 2 dealt with deservedly rare Black 4th moves, before we moved on to the serious move 4...Nf6. Following 5.e5 Nd7 6.Nb3 there is a split. In Game 3 we saw
6...f6, 6...a6 and 6...b6, where White was happy in all cases. Game 4 features 6...Be7 when it would be easy to get tricked into a main line we do not intend to play; however, 7.Bf4!? is an excellent way to avoid any move-order problems.

The final three games of the chapter start with 6...a5 7.a4 Be7 8.c3!. Then 8...b6 as in Game 5 has ideas of ... Ba6, so the smart reply is 9.h4!, not spending a tempo moving the f1-bishop, as it might be exchanged anyway.

8...0-0 as in Game 6 may look a perfectly normal move, but it fixes the black king as a target, thus allowing 9. Bb5 when the standard Guimard response of 9...Na7 10.Bd3 b6 is met by 11.h4! when Black is already close to lost.

Game 7 covers 8...f6, which is the critical line of the Guimard. This is a forcing line which White should study with care, particularly the suggested improvement at move 14.

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Chapter 3 - 3...a6

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6 4.Ngf3

A) 4...Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6 8.0-0 59
A1) 8...g5!? 9.Nb3!! 60
A11) 9...g4? Game 8 61
A12) 9...h6! 64
A2) 8...Be7 9.Re1 66
A21) 9...b5 68
A22) 9...g5 70
A23) 9...cxd4?! Game 9 71
B) 4...c5 5.exd5 73
B1) 5...Qxd5 Game 10 74
B2) 5...exd5 6.Be2!? 76
B21) 6...cxd4 77
B22) 6...Nf6 Game 11 78
B23) 6...c4?! 7.0-0 Bd6 8.b3 81
B231) 8...cxb3 82
B232) 8...b5 9.a4 84
B2321) 9...Bb7 Game 12 84
B2322) 9...c3 Game 13 87
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6
This is only the sixth-most-popular option, but it has still been played over four thousand times in my database.

4.Ngf3
Black's last move does not rush us, so we certainly have time for this move, in accordance with the guidelines on page 6.

Black has two serious options: A) 4...Nf6 and B) 4...c5.

A) 4...Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3

6.c4 works fine against 3...h6, but here Black is better placed and after 6...c5 he should be fine. One key point is that the light squares on the kingside have not been weakened.

6...c5 7.c3 Nc6
Compared to the 3...Nf6 lines, Black has spent a tempo on ...a6, while White has placed his knights on d2 and f3 instead of the ideal set-up on e2 and f3. Overall, the difference favours White, as many of Black's critical tries against the Ngf3 set-up involve an assault on the d4-pawn, and that plan is riskier than ever when the non-developing move ...a7-a6 has been played instead of something more productive.

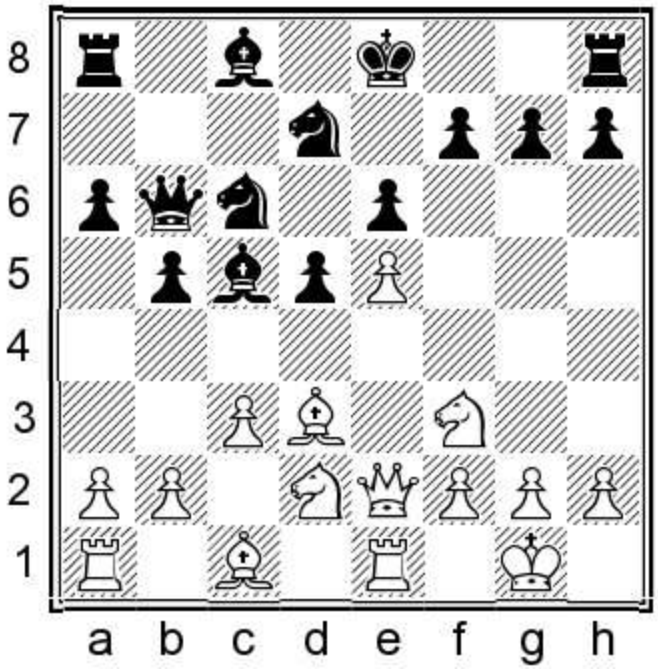
8.0-0
It is important not to confuse 8.a3 with the 9.a3!? line which is given on page 66 as a secondary option in variation A2. Here Black will transpose to a standard line, where the extra move ...a6 is quite useful: 8...Qb6 9.0-0 cxd4 10.cxd4 Nxd4 11.Nxd4 Qxd4 12.Nf3 Qa7! The queen is more comfortable on a7 than on b6; as an added bonus she can appear on b8 in the near future, so Black should be fine.

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After the text move, Black's most important options are A1) 8...g5!? and A2) 8...Be7.
Other moves are less challenging, for instance:

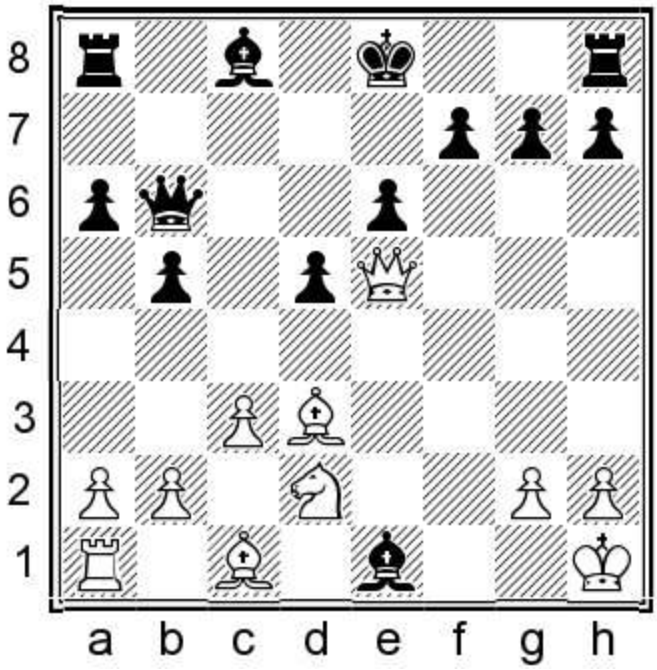
8...Qb6 9.dxc5 Bxc5 (9...Nxc5 10.Bc2 Be7 11.Nb3 Nxb3 12.axb3 Bd7 13.b4² was pleasant for White in Gerhardt – Windelband, Germany 2002) 10.Qe2 Qc7 11.Nb3 Ba7 12.Re1!² Having secured the e5-pawn, White had a fine position in Quesada Perez – Borges Mateos, Santa Clara 2011. (It is worth noting that 12.Bf4 f6! is annoying; for example, 13.Nbd4 Ndxe5 14.Kh1N 14...Bb8 and White can regain the pawn, but his advantage has gone.)

8...b5
This makes use of the ...a6 move but is rather slow. Watson covers it as a secondary option for Black in Dangerous Weapons: The French.
9.Re1 Qb6 10.dxc5 Bxc5 11.Qe2
White is in full control. For instance:



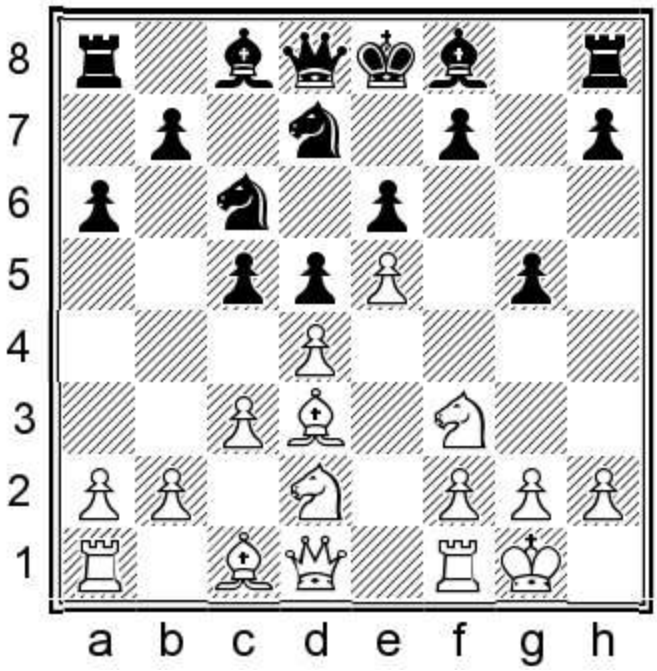
11...Ndxe5?
Watson wrote that this leads to "exciting play" but overlooked an outright refutation.
11...h6 occurred in Pleyer – Zunker, Langenwang 1994, when White missed an interesting opportunity: 12.b4!N (12.Nb3² is also fine) 12...Be7 13.Nb3 Followed by a2-a4, with promising queenside play.
Watson also briefly mentions 11...g5?! (my punctuation) but I don't see Black's idea after 12.Nb3, as 12...g4 13.Nxc5 gxf3? is impossible due to 14.Nxd7 and White wins.
12.Nxe5 Nxe5 13.Qxe5 Bxf2† 14.Kh1 Bxe1

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15.Qxg7!
Watson only considered 15.Qxe1 when Black is in the game, although even here White's strong minor pieces should prevail.
15...Rf8 16.Nf3 Bf2 17.Ng5 Bc5 18.Nxh7 Bb7 19.Bg5+–
With an overwhelming initiative.

A1) 8...g5!?



This lunge is thematic when the knights are placed on d2 and f3 – see variation E of Chapter 4 for instance. In this case, however, Black runs into some tactical problems, which is hardly surprising considering that he has spent a tempo on ...a6.

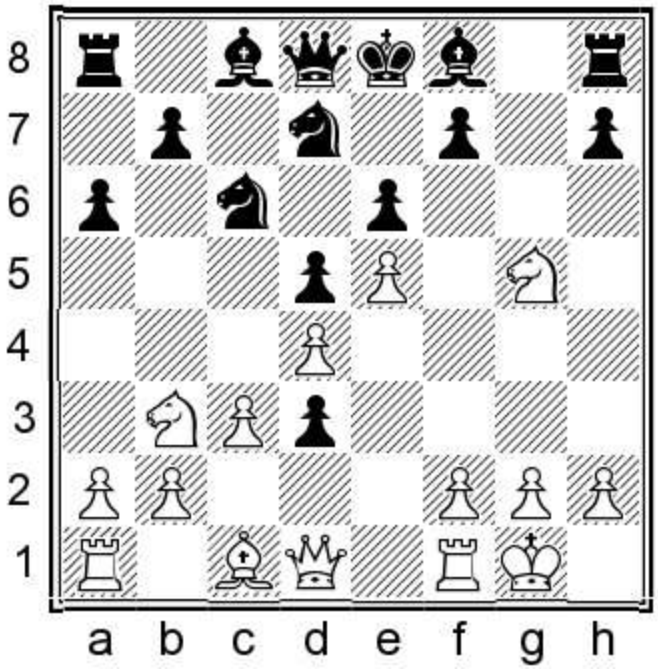
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9.Nb3!!
Maybe it is a bit much to give two exclams for a move that has become standard theory, but I really enjoy it and this is my book. By the way, Watson misses this idea in his Dangerous Weapons: The French coverage, although to be fair the move was not played until a few years after that book was published.

9.Bb1 has scored well but is not as strong.

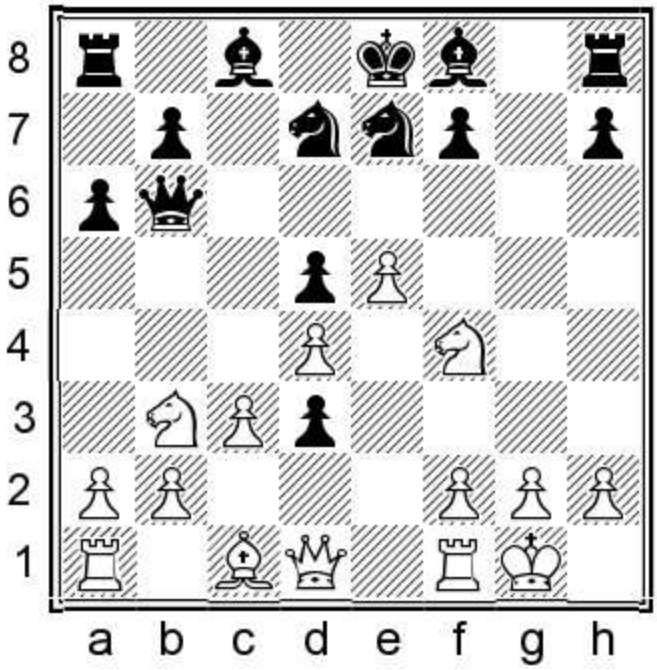
We will consider the principled but weak
A11) 9...g4? followed by the more resilient A12) 9...h6!.

9...c4?!
This has only been played once, with good reason, as White gets a wonderful attack:
10.Nxg5 cxd3
After 10...h6 11.Qh5 hxg5 12.Qxh8 cxd3 13.f4 White has a decisive attack. One threat is fxg5, which 13...g4 avoids at the expense of allowing the vicious 14.f5!.

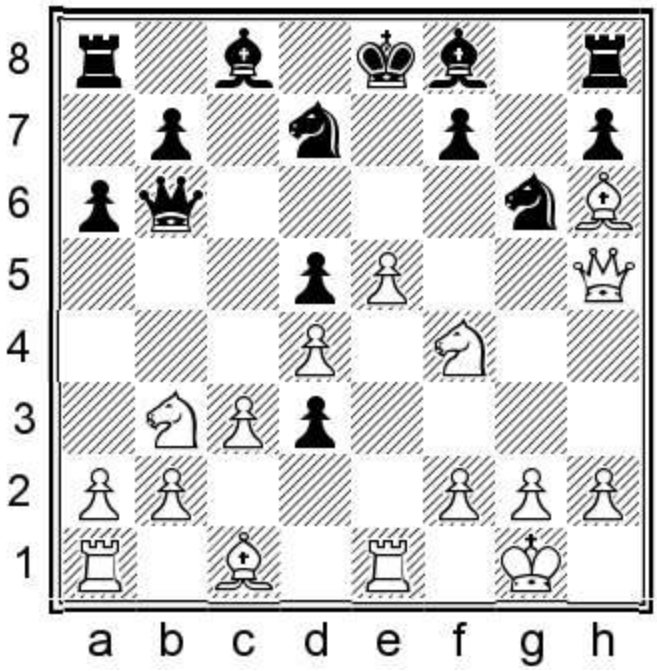


11.Nxe6!
The tactical justification for White's 9th move.
11...Qb6 12.Nf4 Ne7

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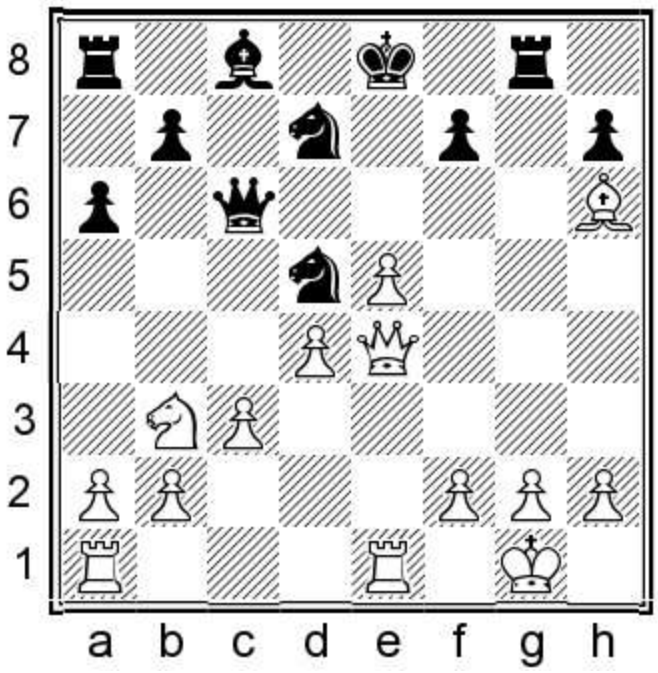
I analysed a while with the engines before I decided to recommend a line that varies from both the engines' choices and practical experience:
13.Re1!?N
This is not a surprising move at all and is what a practical player might have chosen over the board. White is contemplating
e5-e6 and has not yet decided how to take the pawn on d3.
13.Qxd3!?N² is also respectable for White, but not indecent for Black.
13.Qh5 was played in the game, which continued: 13...Ng6



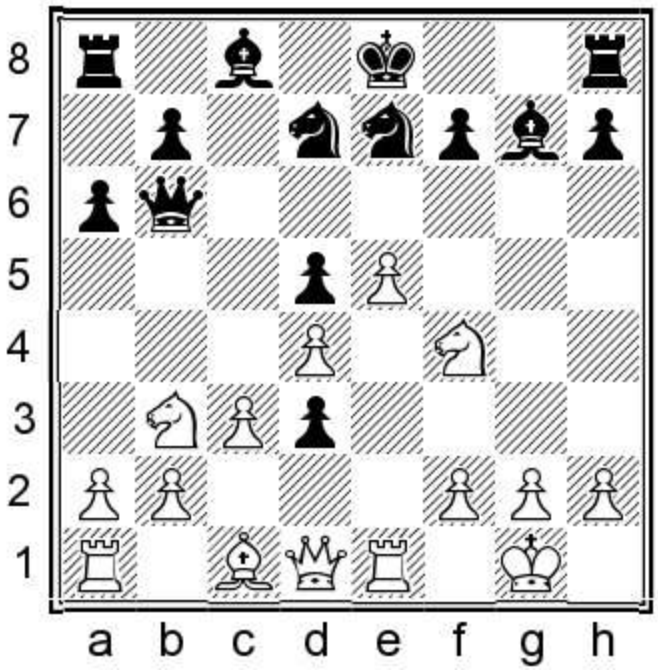
14.e6 (The engines suggest an improvement: 14.Nxd5!N 14...Qc6 15.c4! With the idea: 15...Qxc4 16.Qf3, This looks promising, but I would rather steer you towards a more human line, as Qd1-h5-f3 only looks natural to a machine.) 14...Nf6 15.Qf5 Be7 16.Nxd5 Nxd5 17.exf7† Kd8 18.Qxd5† Qd6 19.Qf3² This is unpleasant for

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Black, but he survived in Varberg – J. Williams, corr. 2011.
13...Bg7
This seems to be the only chance.
13...Rg8 14.Qxd3 leaves Black without a serious follow-up. 14...Bh6 15.Nxd5! Qc6 (15...Nxd5 16.e6 fxe6 17. Qxh7 and White wins.) 16.Bxh6 Nxd5 17.Qe4 Not the only good move, but very practical.
(17.e6 fxe6 18.g3± is a middlegame solution.)



17...Qxh6 18.Qxd5 Nb6 19.Qf3± With four pawns for the piece, White has great chances in the endgame.
13...Ng6? 14.Nxd5 Qc6 15.Qf3 would be a full tempo up on 13.Qh5 for comparison. 15...Ne7 16.c4 Qxc4 17. Nf6† and White has a winning attack.



14.Qxd3 0-0 15.Re3,

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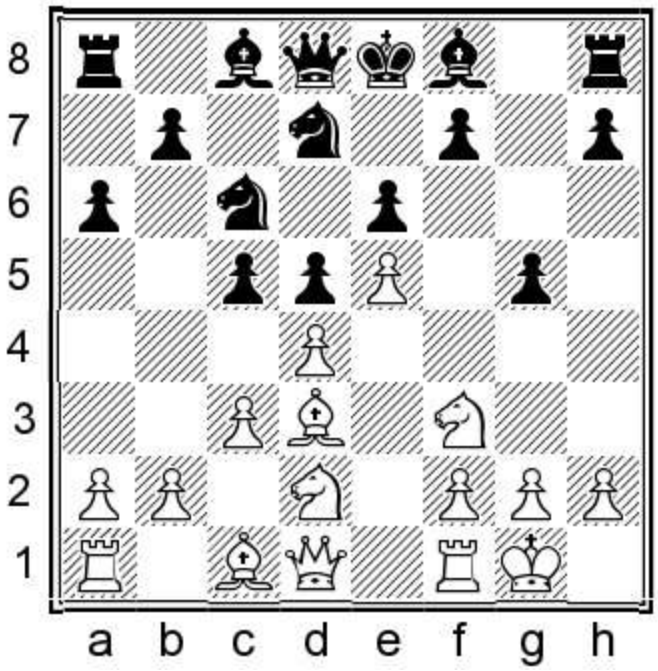
The attack continues, and White already has three pawns for the piece.

A11) 9...g4?

GAME 8

Aleksandar Kovacevic – Blazimir Kovacevic
Pula 2011

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6 8.0-0 g5!?

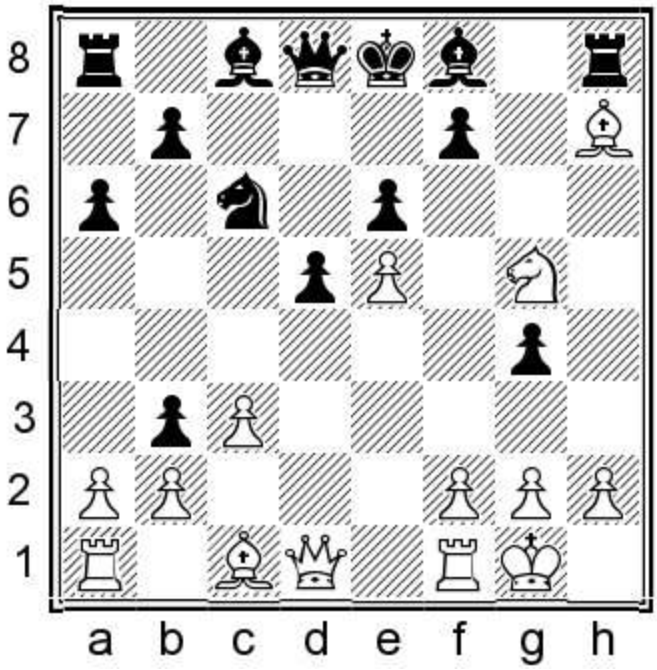


9.Nb3!! g4?
This is a damaging mistake.

10.Ng5 Rg8?!
This additional error compounds Black's problems.

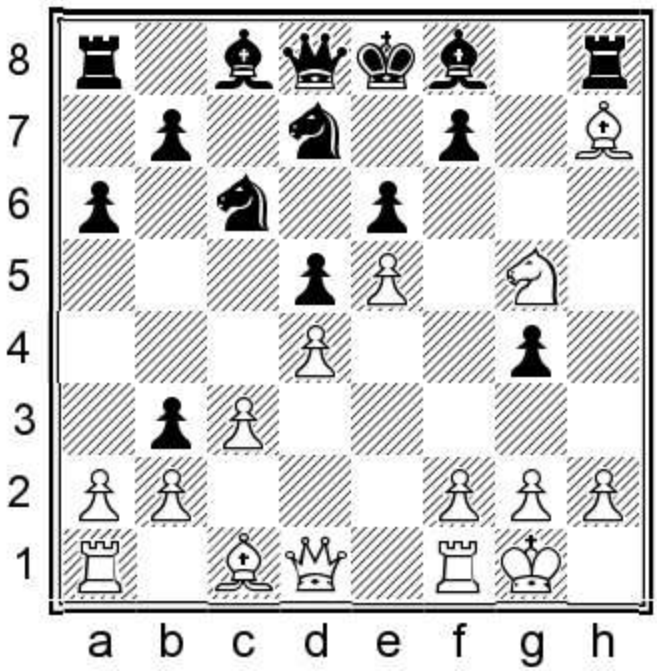
Another game continued 10...Ndxe5?! 11.dxe5 c4 12.Bxh7 cxb3 and now 13.Bf4 was good enough to maintain a decisive advantage in Breyther – Lindinger, Germany 2016, but an even more convincing winning line would have been:

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13.Re1!N Intending 13...Bg7 14.Qxg4 with the point that 14...Nxe5 is crushed by 15.Rxe5! Bxe5 16.Nxf7.

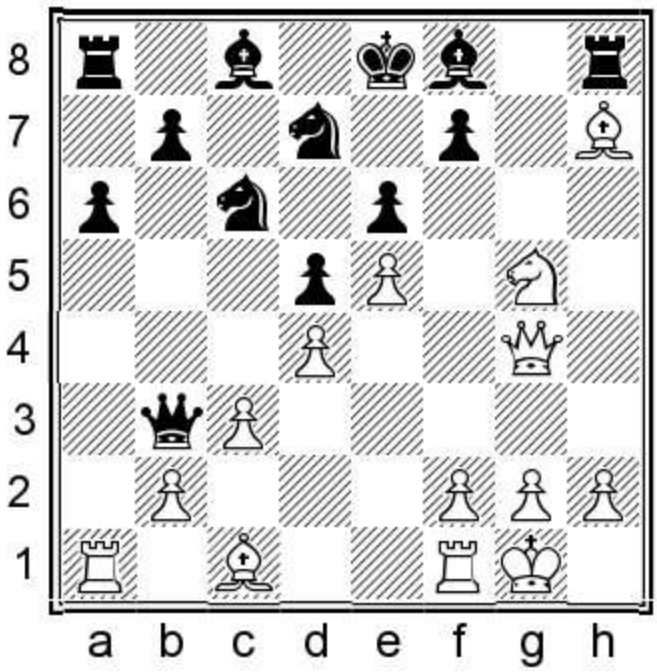
Black's best try is:
10...c4 11.Bxh7! cxb3



12.Qxg4!±
An important move to remember.
Black gets back into the game after 12.axb3? Ndxe5! 13.dxe5 Nxe5 with chances for both sides.
12...Qb6
Black does not have any truly satisfactory options.
12...Be7? 13.Nxf7 wins immediately.
12...Qa5 13.Qh5 Nd8 14.f4± was great for White in Eremin – Relyea, corr. 2013.

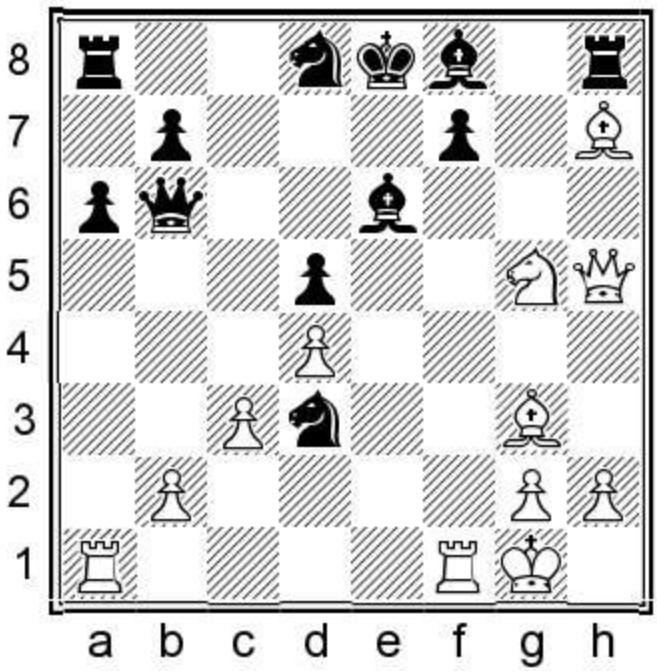
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12...Ndxe5 13.dxe5 Nxe5 14.Qe2 Qf6 15.axb3 gives White an extra pawn on top of everything else.
12...Qc7 13.axb3±
13.axb3 Qxb3
Although White went on to win the one game from this position, at this point he failed to make the most of his opening advantage. A big improvement is:

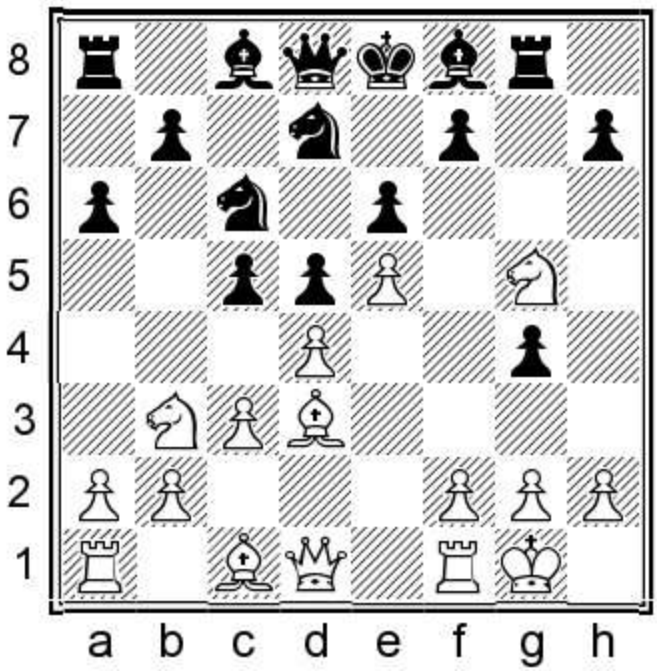


14.f4!N
Including more pieces and pawns in the attack makes a lot of sense, especially when it also prevents counter-sacs on e5.
14.Bg6? Ndxe5! 15.dxe5 fxg6 16.Nxe6 was the continuation of Nevednichy – Stojanovic, Kragujevac 2010, when the cold-blooded 16...Qc2!N would have given Black good chances of withstanding the attack and exploiting his extra piece.
14...Qb6 15.Qh5 Nd8 16.f5!
White needs to keep the intensity of the attack alive.
16...Nxe5 17.Bf4 Nd3 18.fxe6 Bxe6 19.Bg3

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Black is busted. For example:
19...Be7 20.Nxe6 Qxe6 21.Rf3
And White wins.



11.f4+–
Material is level and we have only played eleven moves, but it is already too late for Black: the attack is decisive.

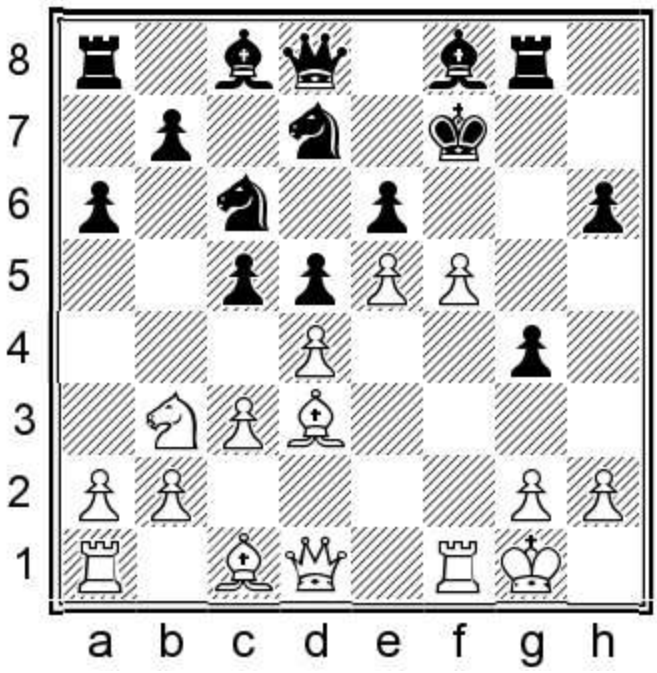
11...h6
11...h5 gives White several ways to proceed, the simplest being 12.Nxf7! Kxf7 13.f5 with immediate destruction.

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11...cxd4 is met by the intermediate 12.Bxh7.

12.Nxf7!
A standard device in this line.

12...Kxf7 13.f5



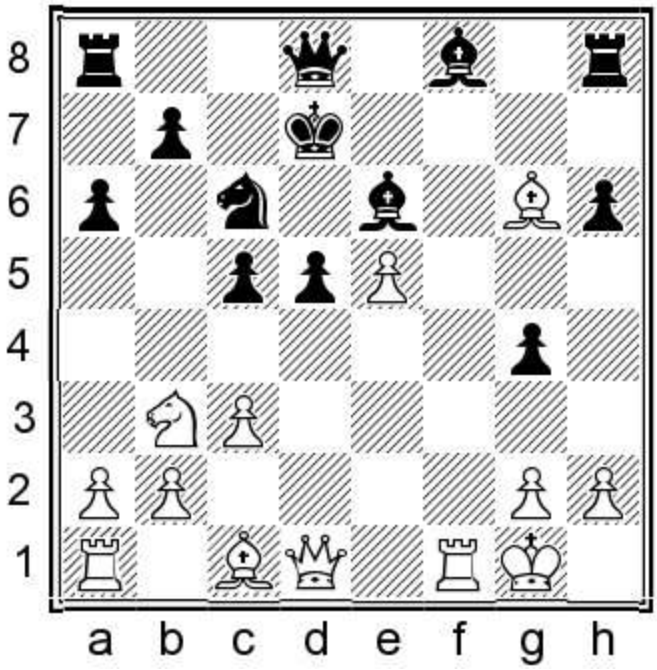
13...Ke8
After 13...cxd4 14.fxe6† Kxe6 15.Nxd4† Nxd4 16.cxd4 it might look as if things have calmed down a little, but actually Black's king is doomed in the middle of the board. A possible end is: 16...Qb6 17.Bh7 Rg7 18.Bxh6 Rxh7 19.Bg5 and White wins on account of 19...Qxd4† 20.Qxd4 Bc5 21.Rf6† Ke7 22.Rf2†.

14.fxe6 Ndxe5 15.dxe5
White could also win quickly with 15.Bh7! Rg7 16.dxe5 Rxh7 17.Qxg4 and the collapse of Black's position is imminent.

15...Bxe6 16.Bh7! Rh8
Or 16...Rg7 17.Bxh6 and wins.

17.Bg6† Kd7

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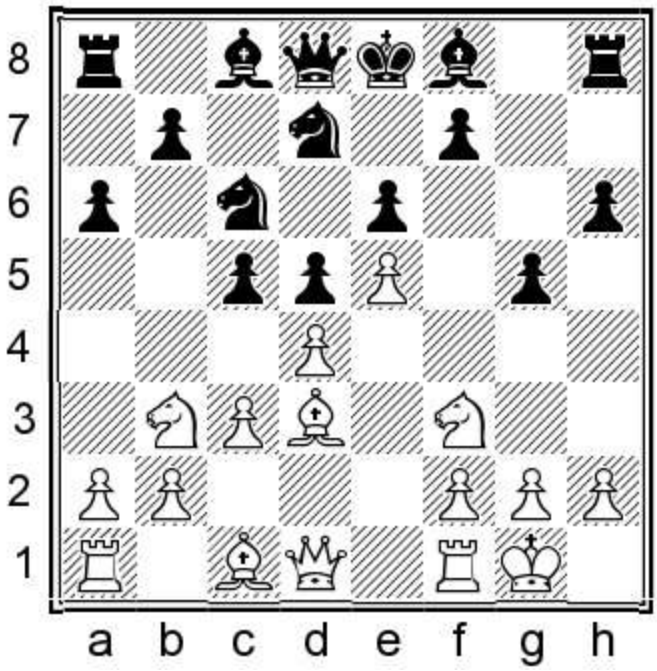


18.Bf7!
Eliminating the most important defender is the simplest route to victory.

18.Bf5 Bxf5 19.Rxf5 Kc7 20.Bf4 Kb6 21.Qxg4 was also winning for White in Roberson – Walton, England 2012, but Black defended with great tenacity and, when White missed a few direct wins, Black managed to scramble a draw.

18...Nxe5 19.Bxe6† Kxe6 20.Bf4
Black resigned. White wins in too many ways to count.
1–0

A12) 9...h6!

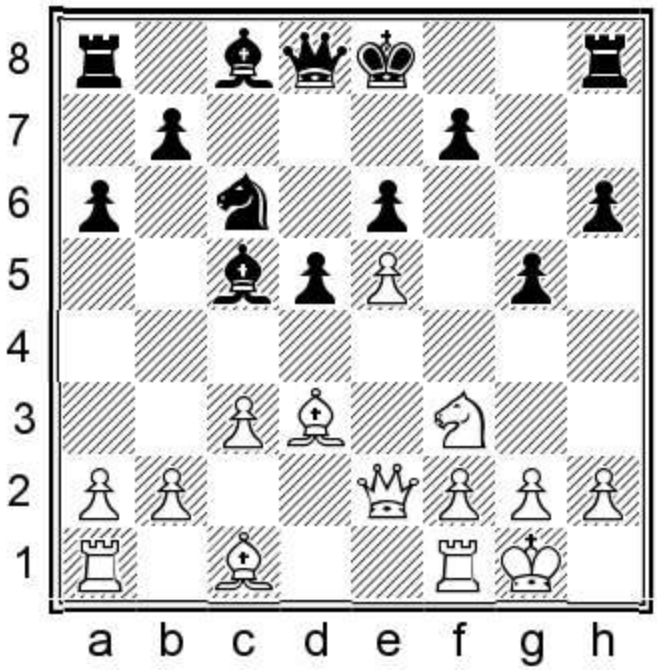


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This is the only serious way of playing the position. Black is defending not only the pawn, but also the g5-square.

10.Nxc5
A natural move, although 10.Be2!? also looks rather attractive for White.

10...Nxc5 11.dxc5 Bxc5 12.Qe2²
Not the only option here, but the most flexible one. White is not sure if his next move should be h2-h3, Re1 or Be3. But the queen seems to have no other good squares to go to.

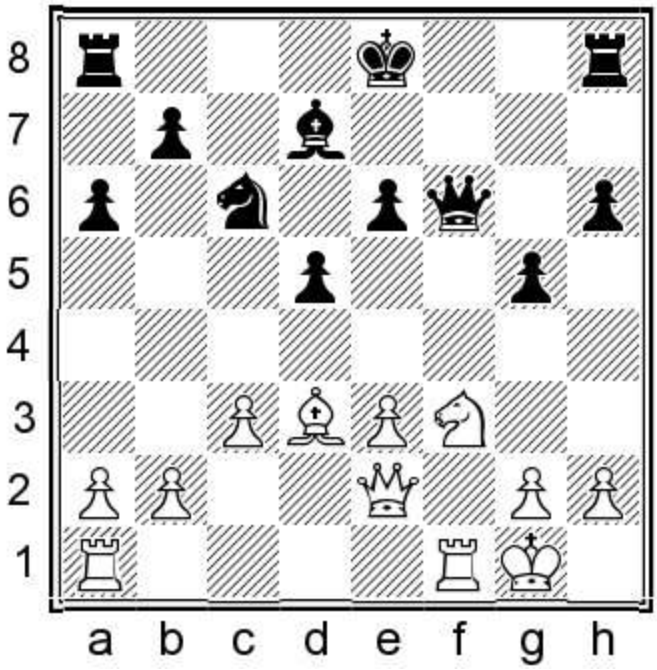


12...Bd7
Black has a number of other options:

12...g4N looks rather logical, but White is a little better: 13.Nd2 h5 14.Nb3 If Black retreats to b6 or a7, White plays 15.Be3 with a slight edge. And if 14...Bf8, White has 15.f4! gxf3 16.Rxf3² with a highly pleasant position.

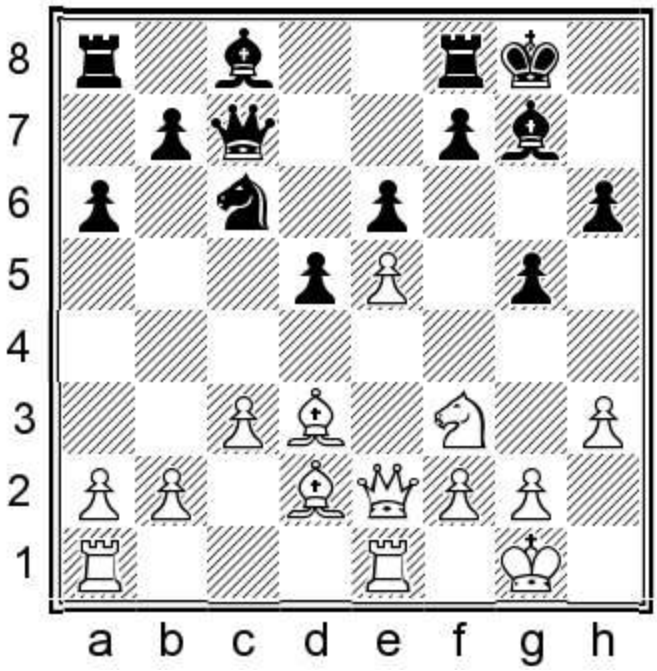
12...f5 13.exf6 Qxf6 14.Be3²
This also looks pleasant for White. Black should now lose time and retreat the bishop to d6, but in the game he erred with:
14...Bxe3?! 15.fxe3! Bd7
Deepak – Sharma, Bhopal 2013. White's play can be improved with:

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16.e4!N 16...0-0
16...Qe7 17.exd5 exd5 18.Bg6† Kd8 19.Qf2± leaves White with a better structure, while Black needs to spend time getting organized.
17.Bc2!
White has a big advantage. He can mix up Qd3, exd5 and Rad1 in any order and could easily win a pawn straight away.

I also considered:
12...Qc7 13.h3!²
This is the right moment to make this commitment, as Black no longer has the idea of ...f5 followed by ...Qxf6. Black's position is not easy to play and even a renowned expert on the French got into serious trouble:
13...Bf8 14.Re1 Bg7 15.Bd2 0-0

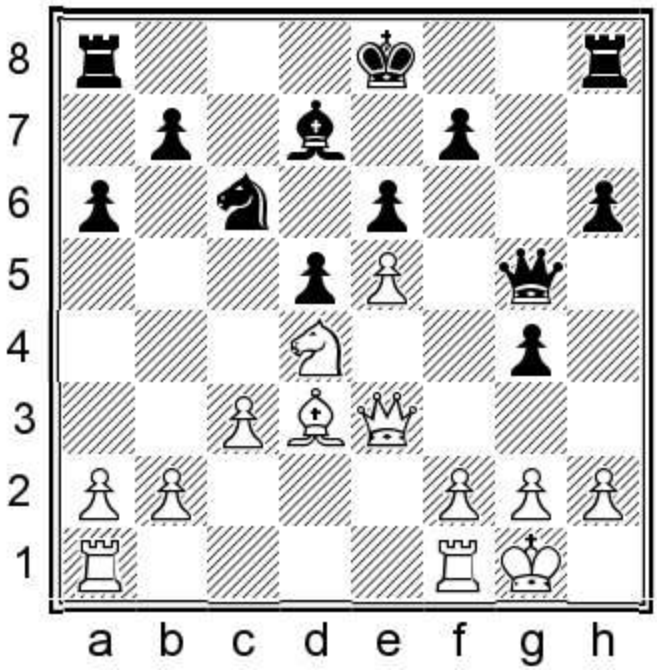


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J. Bennett – Volkov, Dubai 2014. With a rating gap of more than 550 points, White was surely happy with the draw he achieved in this game, but he might have achieved even more had he found the best continuation:
16.Rad1!N 16...Bd7 17.Bb1±
Black's position is most uncomfortable. For example:
17...f5 18.exf6 Rxf6 19.Qd3 Rf5 20.c4! Raf8 21.cxd5 exd5 22.Qb3
White is completely winning.

The text move was played in a correspondence game and is a decent try. White is not all that much better and more analysis and practical tests are needed. One suggestion is:

13.Be3 Bxe3 14.Qxe3 g4 15.Nd4 Qg5
This position was reached in Pheby – Van Schyndel, corr. 2013. At this point White should have played:

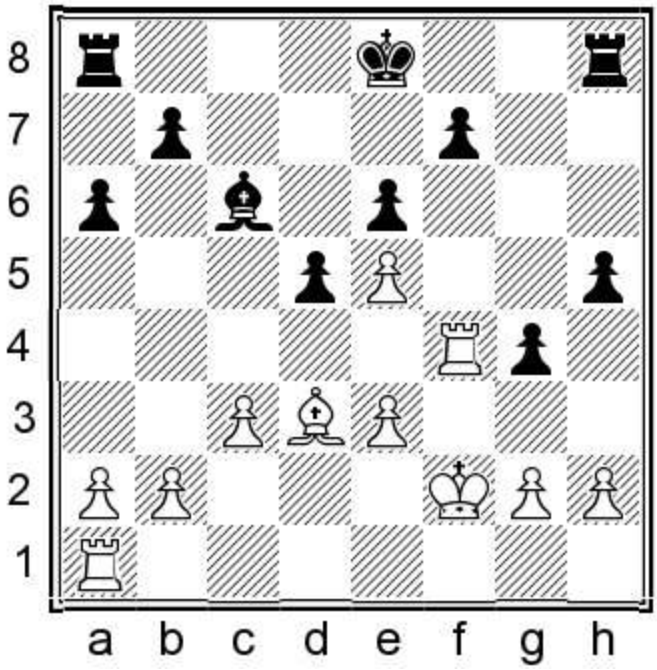


16.Nxc6!N 16...Qxe3
16...Bxc6?! 17.Qd4! followed by f2-f4 is great for White.

17.fxe3 Bxc6 18.Rf4!
Winning an important tempo.

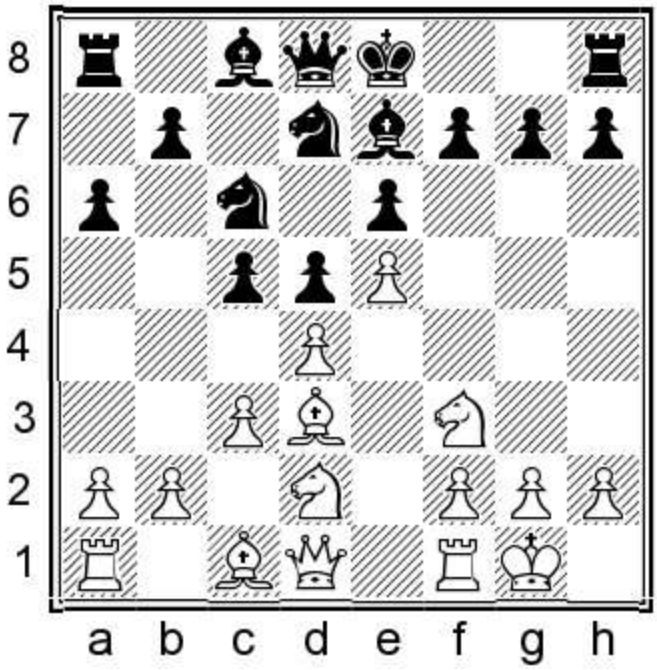
18...h5 19.Kf2!?
Or 19.Raf1 with the trick 19...Rf8?? 20.Rxf7! so instead forced is 19...f5 20.exf6², when Black will have to go through some inconvenience to get his pawn back.

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19...Rg8 20.Kg3 Rg5 21.Rf6²
White is playing for a win, but Black has decent chances to hold.

A2) 8...Be7



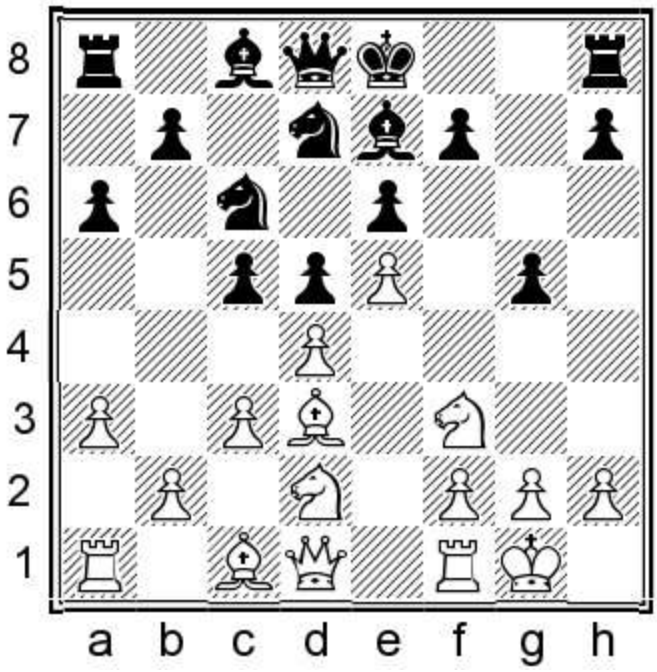
This is not as exciting as the previous option, but also not as weakening. This position could also be reached via 3...Be7 if Black decides to play 8...a6 (as noted on page 98), but that would be an unusual choice.

9.Re1
The most obvious and natural move, but I also looked seriously at a fine alternative.

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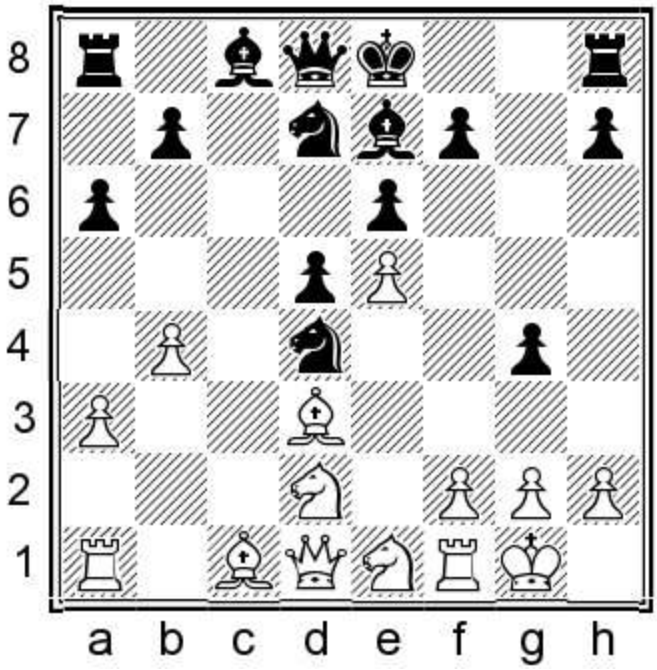
9.a3!?

This was recommended to me by Nikos Ntirlis as a way to bypass lots of theory. The concepts are clear: White is considering dxc5 followed by b2-b4 and c3-c4, as well as
b2-b4 immediately. Less immediately obvious is that leaving the e1-square clear for a knight retreat could be highly useful.
9...g5!?
After 9...Qb6 10.Re1 we have reached a position from the 3...Be7 line with the added moves Re1 for White and ...a6 for Black. This is certainly in White's favour.
IM John Watson gave the following line: 9...b5 10.b4 cxd4 11.cxd4 Nb6 12.Nb3 Nc4 "with the idea ...a5 leads to double-edged play". After 13.Nc5 a5 14.Rb1² I like White, with his extra space and active pieces; Black's c8-bishop is the worst minor piece on the board.

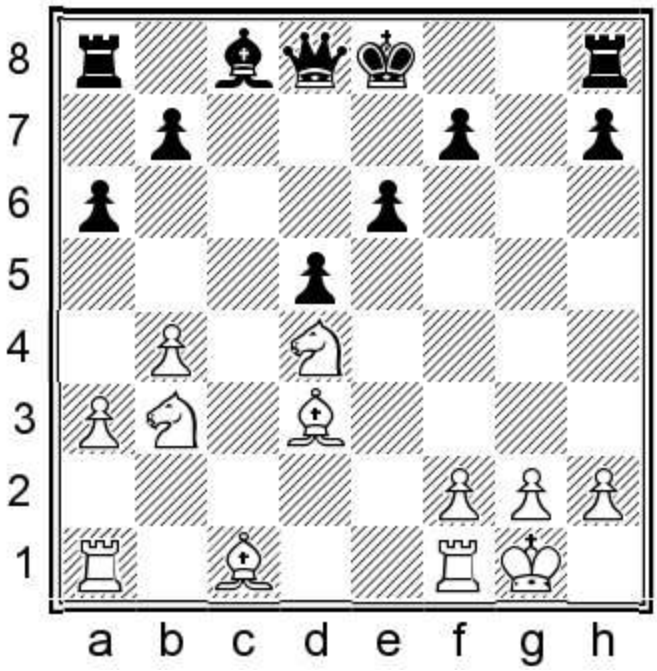


10.b4 cxd4 11.cxd4 g4 12.Ne1
IM Tom Rendle writes: "This is the point. With a rook on e1 the knight would've been trapped."
12...Nxd4
Instead 12...f5? 13.exf6 Nxf6 14.Nb3 0-0 was obviously excellent for White in Rendle – Karlsson, Gibraltar 2008, as the advance of the g-pawn has hurt only Black.
The text move is a better try, and was played in Reuker – Izrailev, Verden 2017, when White played 13.Bb2. An improvement is:

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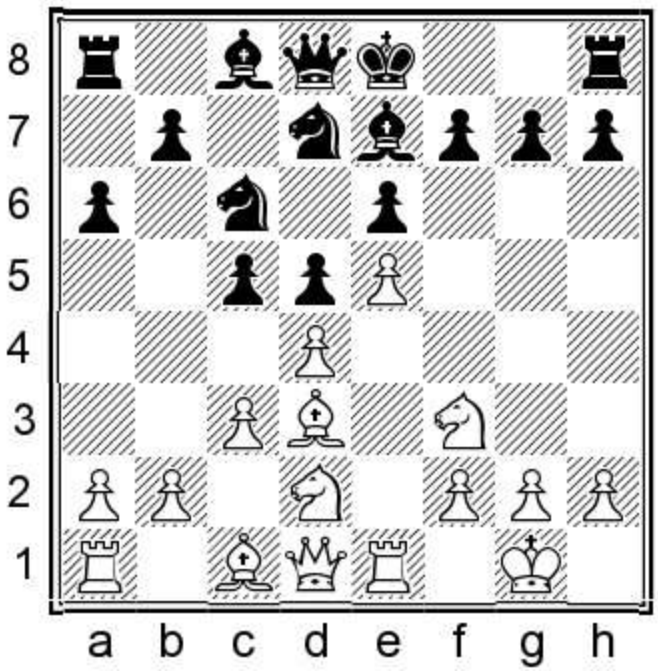
13.Qxg4!N 13...Nxe5!
Black has no choice, as 13...Nc6 14.f4 leaves him with an exposed king and tangled minor pieces.
14.Qxd4 Bf6
This would be scary if you landed here with White unprepared, but giving up the queen for three minor pieces works beautifully.
15.Nb3 Nf3† 16.Nxf3 Bxd4 17.Nfxd4!
Instead Rendle gave 17.Nbxd4 as better for White. I agree with the assessment, but I prefer taking with the other knight as
f2-f4 adds more pop to White's position. For example:



17...e5
Or 17...f6 18.f4± with a bind.

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18.Re1 f6 19.f4 e4 20.f5±
The minor-piece assessment is four stars against one duffer.



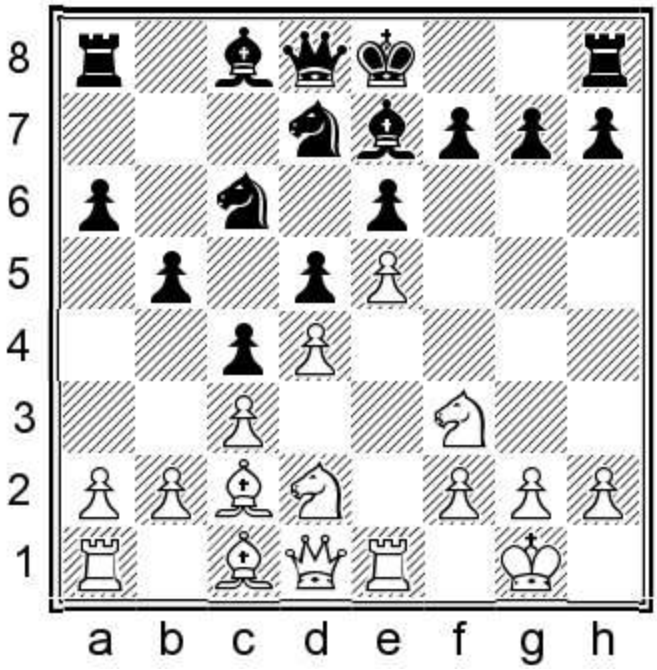
Black has tried several moves here. We will analyse the three most important of them, A21) 9...b5, A22) 9...g5 and A23) 9...cxd4?!, after first checking a few miscellaneous options.

9...Qb6 is well met by 10.dxc5 Nxc5 11.Bc2² as in Jansa – Mischustov, Germany 2002. Almost any move is possible, but none will solve Black's problems.

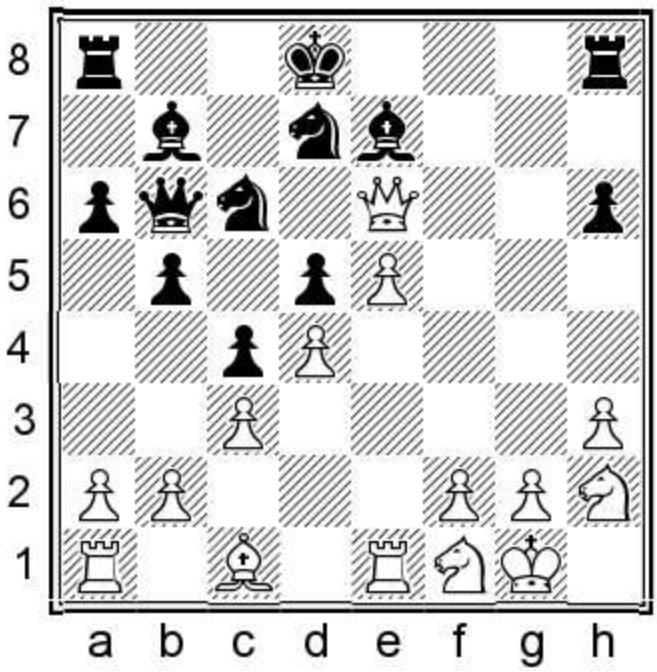
9...0-0 10.dxc5!? (10.Nf1!?) 10...Nxc5 11.Bc2 f5 12.exf6 Bxf6 13.Nb3 Nxb3 14.Bxb3 Bd7 15.Qd3² Louro – Herbst, email 2006.

9...c4 10.Bc2 b5
This reaches a thematic structure where White is a little better. Theory is not relevant, but I think the women's number one played really well in this game, so I want to share it:

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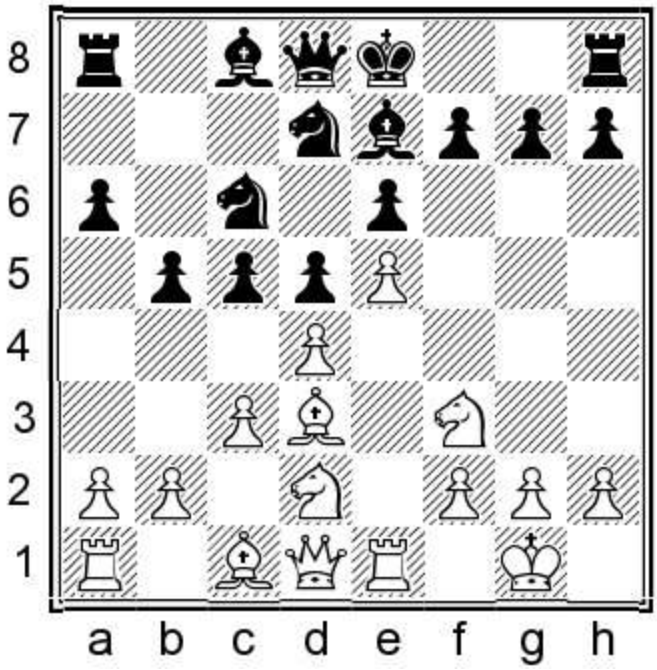
11.Nf1 Bb7 12.h3! h6 13.N3h2 Qb6 14.Qh5
14.Qg4!N is a marginal improvement although it might come to the same thing.
14...g6 15.Bxg6! fxg6 16.Qxg6† Kd8 17.Qxe6
White has three pawns for the bishop, plus a wandering king to harass.



17...Na7 18.Qf7 Nf8 19.f4 Rh7 20.Qh5 Qg6 21.Qxg6 Nxg6 22.f5 Nh4 23.f6 Bf8 24.e6 Bd6 25.Ng4 Kc7 26. Nxh6+–
The count reaches four. In Hou Yifan – Zhou Weiqi, Danzhou 2011, White soon won.

A21) 9...b5

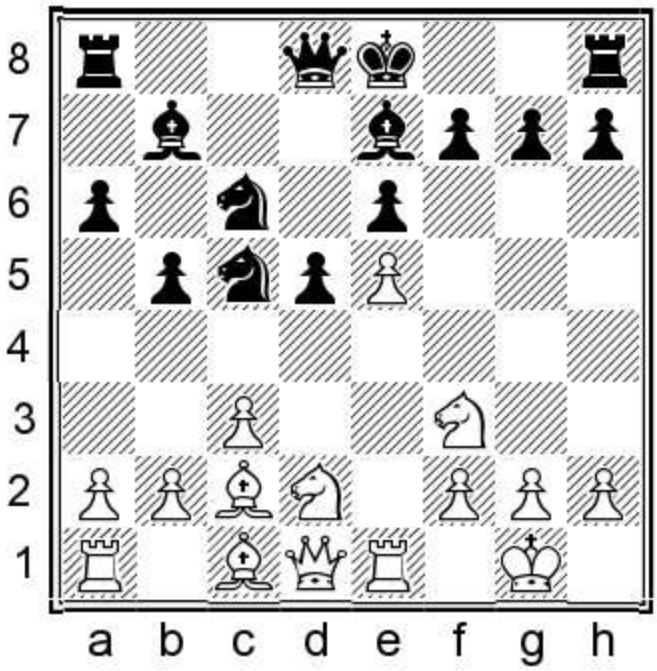
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This is a serious move. I favour an open approach against it:

10.dxc5!
10.Nf1 is the way a lot of the pros play the position. 10...Bb7 11.Ng3 h5! Without this idea I would certainly have recommended this system, as Black's counterplay on the queenside seems insufficient for equality. It's possible White can still find some advantage with 12.h3! but I prefer our main line.

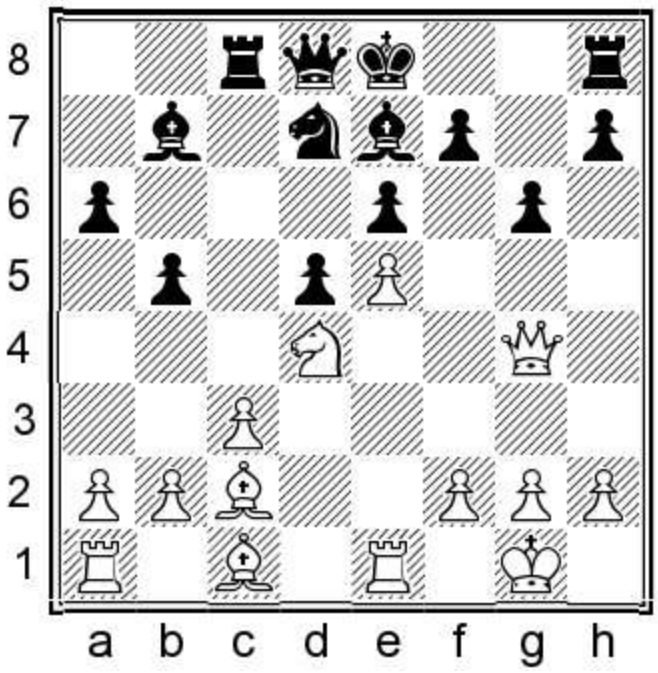
10...Nxc5 11.Bc2 Bb7



12.Nb3
White has a second logical continuation; both of them look attractive for White and each line teaches us something about the properties of the position, so I will include the alternative as well.

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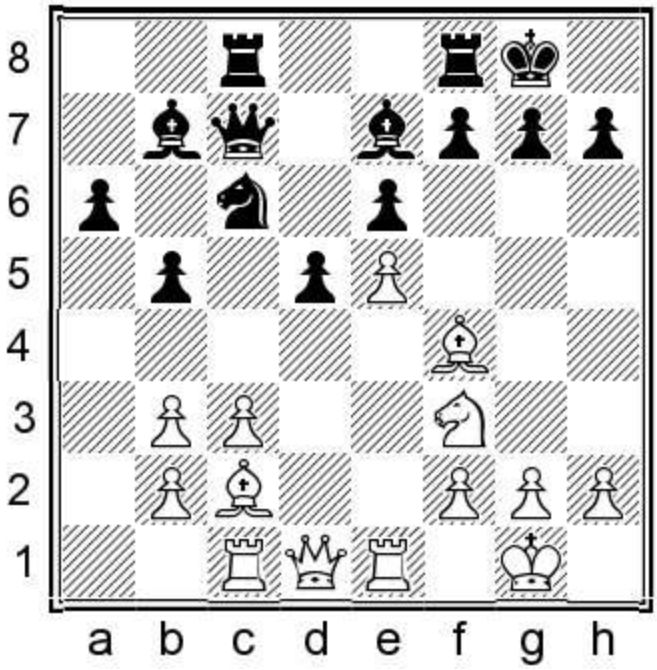
12.Nd4 Rc8 13.Qg4 g6 14.N2f3 Nxd4 15.Nxd4² White has good prospects on the kingside, and Black's next move made things a whole lot worse. 15...Nd7?? This was played in a game between two club players, Bleecke – Vlaming, Haarlem 2013. After his great play in the opening, White unfortunately missed the chance to end the game quickly with a standard combination:



16.Nxe6!N 16...fxe6 17.Bxg6† hxg6 18.Qxg6† Kf8 19.Bh6† Rxh6 20.Qxh6† Kf7 21.Qh7† Kf8 22.Re3 White wins.

12...Nxb3 13.axb3 Qc7 14.Bf4 Rc8 15.Rc1 0-0
White was generally a little better in Proeschold – Hagemann, Telgte 1992. Here Stockfish comes up with an amazing idea, leading to a long tactical sequence, which one cannot simply explain with words!

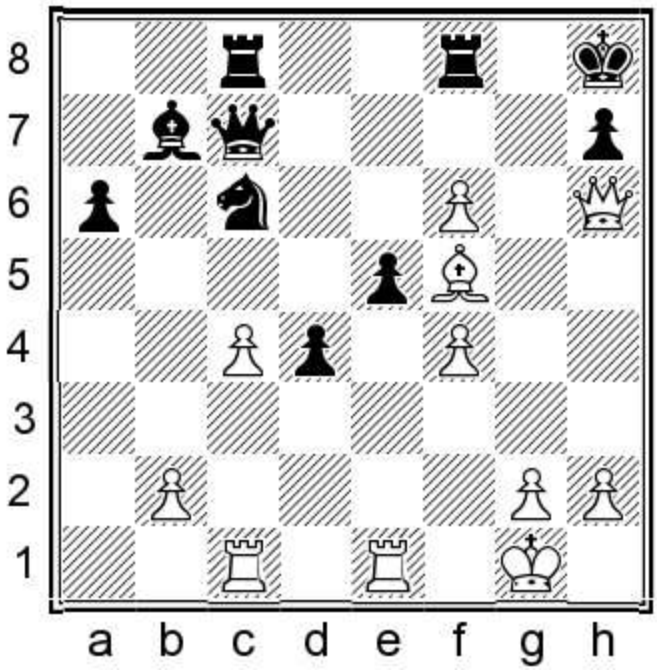
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16.Ng5!!N 16...Bxg5 17.Qh5! Bh6
The only test.

18.Bxh6 gxh6 19.Qxh6 f6 20.exf6 e5 21.c4!±
White has only two pawns for a knight, but Black's shaky king and our mighty pawn on f6 mean it is more than enough.
Note that White's compensation does not rely on one tactical line, as 21.Re3 and 21.Bf5 both look promising as well.

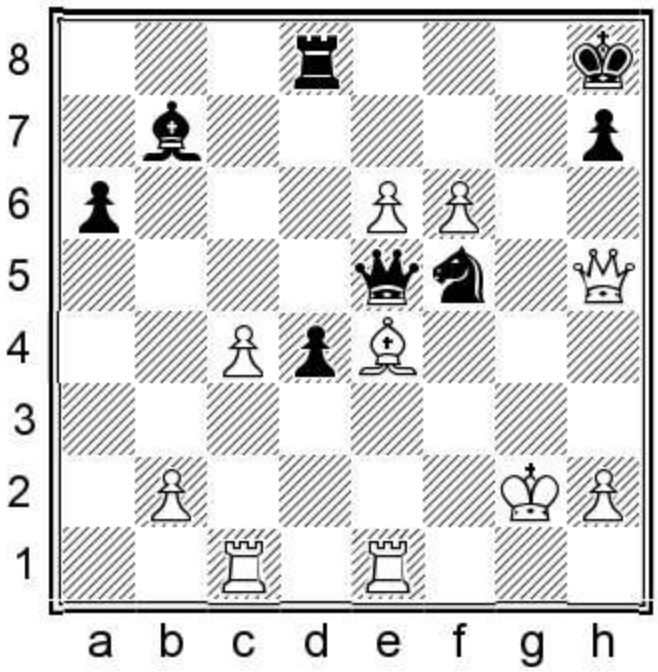
21...bxc4 22.bxc4 d4 23.f4! Kh8 24.Bf5



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24...d3

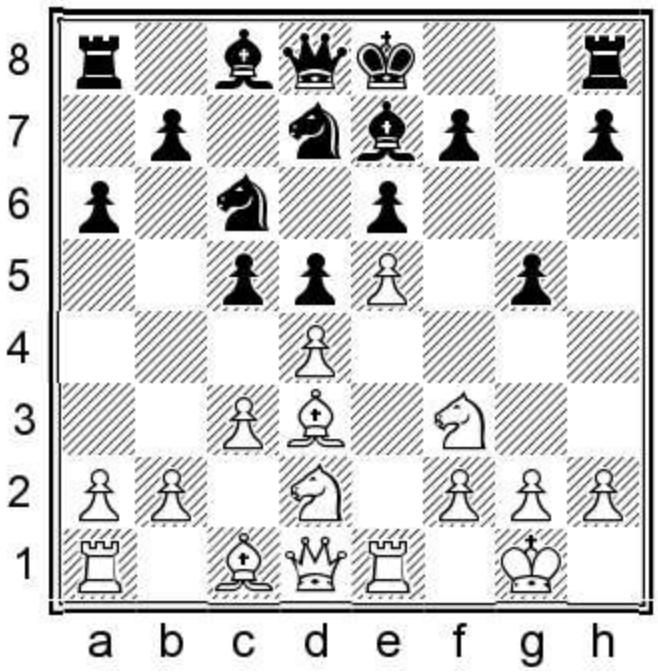
24...Rcd8?! looks natural, but loses to a line that is great fun: 25.fxe5 Rg8 26.e6! Rxg2† 27.Kxg2 Ne7† 28.Be4 Nf5 29.Qh5 Qe5



30.Bxb7! Ne3† 31.Rxe3 Qxh5 32.e7 Rg8† 33.Kh1 dxe3 34.Bd5 White wins with f6-f7.

25.Bxc8 Rxc8 26.Rcd1 Rg8 27.Rxd3 exf4 28.Rd5 Ne5 29.f7 Nf3† 30.Kh1 Qxf7 31.gxf3 Bxd5 32.cxd5± At the end of this long, forcing line, White has good winning chances.

A22) 9...g5

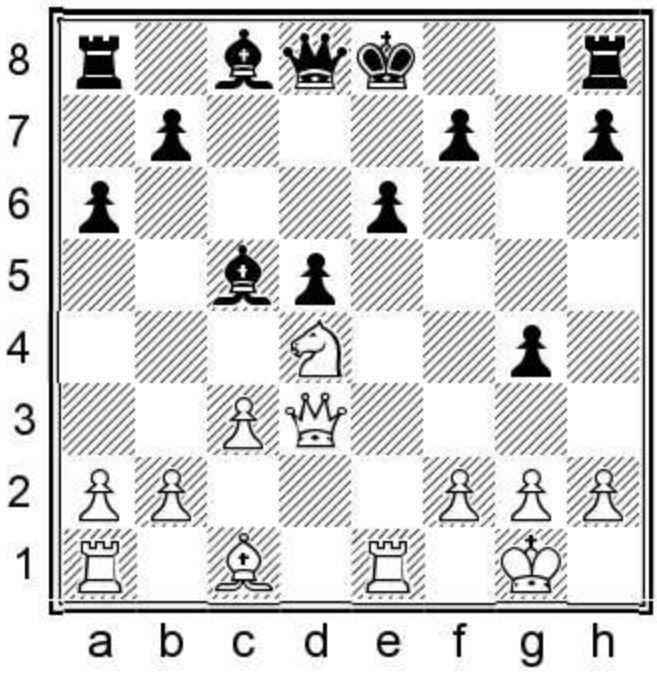


This lunge does not really work here, though it is not so bad.

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10.dxc5 g4 11.Nd4 Ncxe5 12.N2b3 Nxd3 13.Qxd3 Nxc5
After 13...Qc7 14.Bh6 Rg8 15.g3! Nf6 16.Bf4 Qd7 17.Rad1 White was dominating and won quickly in Korneev – Bartel, Evora 2006.

14.Nxc5 Bxc5
Shankland – Schneider, Internet 2008. White can improve with:

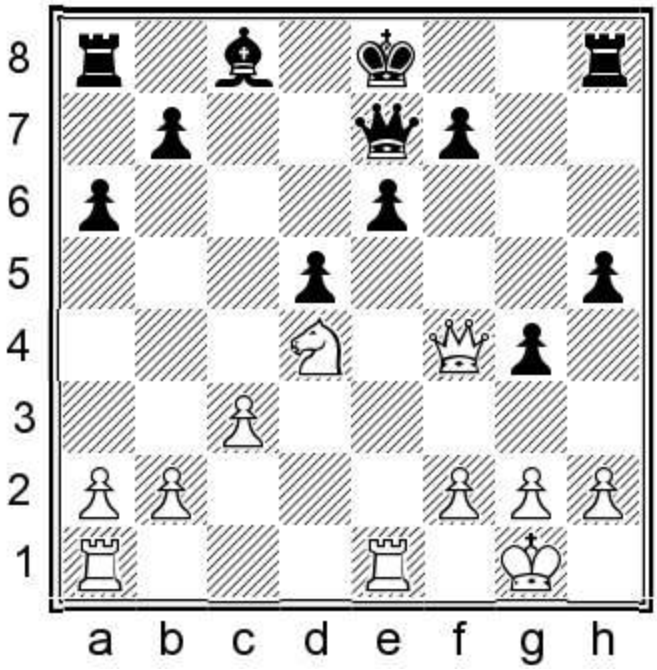


15.Qf5!N
Black's position is amazingly difficult.

15...Bxd4
A sad necessity. In a position like this, opposite-coloured bishops can be highly unpleasant for the defender.

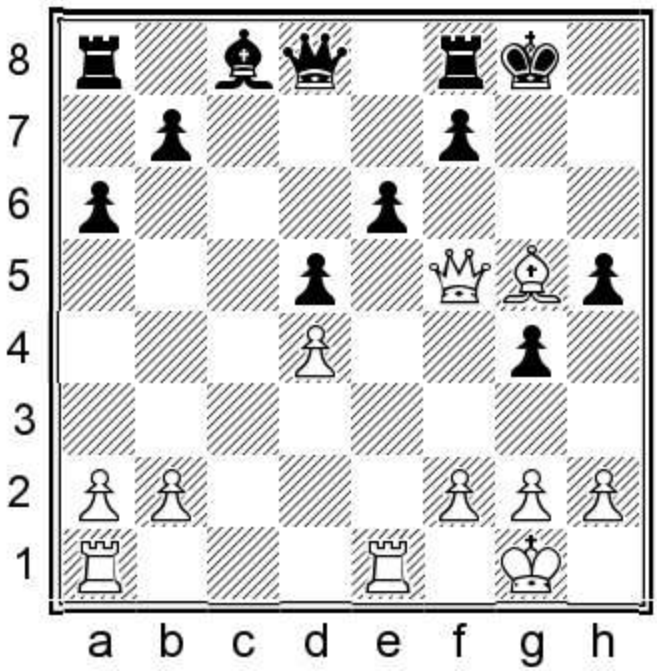
15...h5?! is worse. White has a strong attack after 16.Bg5 Be7 17.Bxe7 Qxe7 18.Qf4 when Black has to find only moves to survive:

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18...Bd7 (no better is 18...f6 19.Nf5 Qd8 20.c4±) 19.Nf5 Qf6 20.Nd6† Ke7 21.Qb4 Kf8 22.Qxb7 Rd8 23.Qc7 Threatening Nb7. 23...Be8 24.Rad1± White has a massive advantage.

16.cxd4 h5 17.Bg5 0-0!
Otherwise White wins quickly.



18.Qf4 f6 19.Bh4 Bd7 20.Rac1 Rc8 21.Rxc8 Bxc8 22.Rc1*f*
Black's position barely holds together and his extra pawn means very little.

A23) 9...cxd4?!

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This variation does not really work, but the reason why it doesn't is quite instructive, which is why I chose to

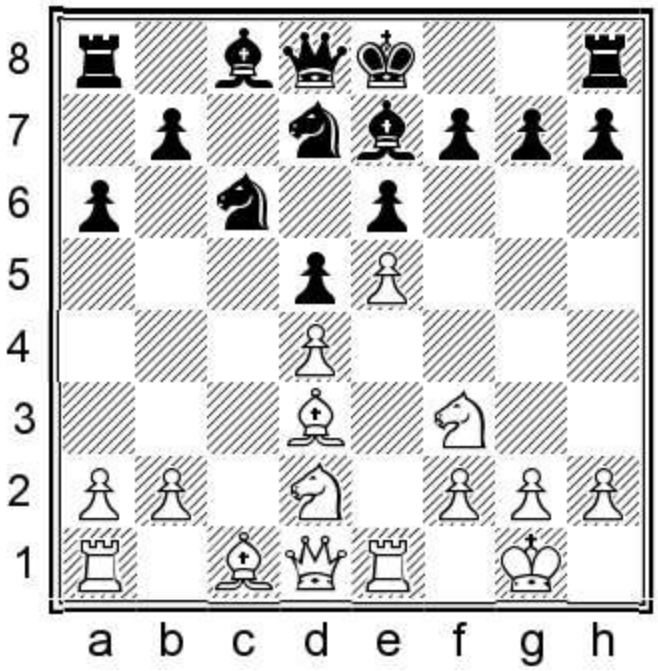
feature it in an illustrative game.

GAME 9

Oleg Korneev – Alfredo Gustavo Giaccio
Orense 2000

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5
This game actually continued 5.Bd3 c5 6.e5 but I have tweaked the move order for our purposes.

5...Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6 8.0-0 Be7 9.Re1 cxd4?! 10.cxd4



10...Qb6 11.Nb3 a5
This is the consistent move, although the fact that Black has lost a tempo with his a-pawn does not bode well for him.

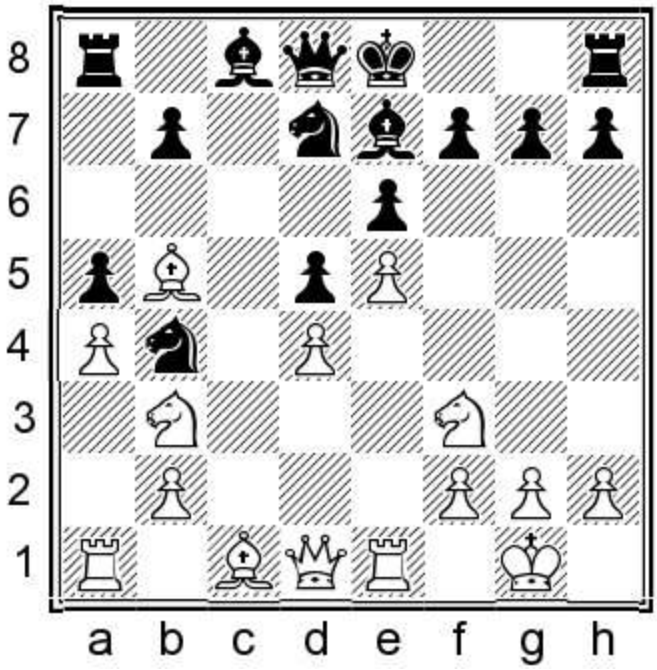
12.a4
White has easily secured the d4-pawn, leaving Black's pieces clumsily placed.

12...Qd8
The queen makes way for a later ...b7-b6 when the frozen bishop on c8 may one day come to life on a6.

12...Nb4 has been played in quite a number of games. Surprisingly, 13.Bb5!² is rare in this position. As far as I can see Black does not have a great alternative to transposing to our main game. For example: 13...0-0 14.Re3! with the idea Nf3-e1 and White will be ready to go for both the c-file and to play Qg4/h5 and attack on the kingside. Where and how Black is going to find counterplay is not clear to me.

13.Bb5 Nb4

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14.Nc5
Simple positional play from Korneev. White intends to exchange his poorly-placed knight for Black's best piece. The downside is that it takes quite some time, though White may have enough to spare.

14.Re3!N² is a useful novelty. White will continue with Ne1 and Rg3 or Rc3, with a fine position.

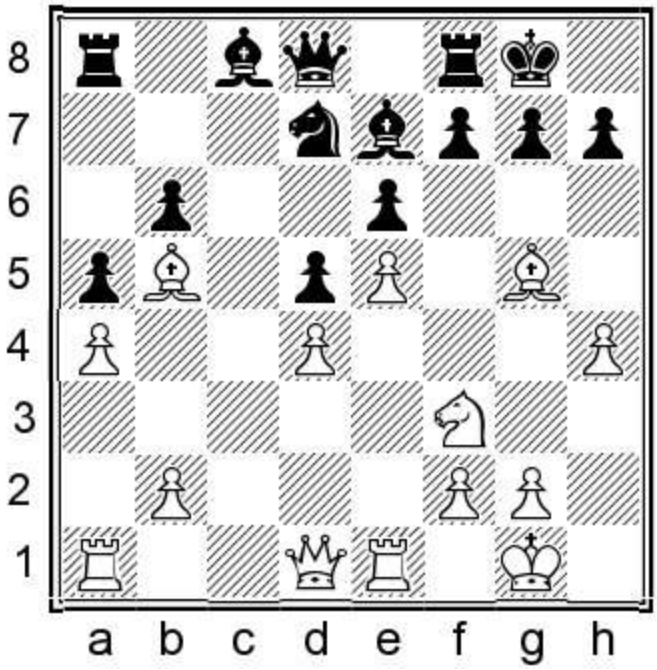
14...b6
Allowing White to carry out his plan.

14...Nc6! would have been the serious test. The key idea is that 15.Nd3 Na7 is less clear than I would desire.

15.Nd3!
I do hope you realized that by "Black's best piece", I meant the knight on b4, not the one on d7.

15...0-0 16.Nxb4 Bxb4 17.Bg5 Be7 18.h4²
The opening has been a success for White. All his pieces are superior.

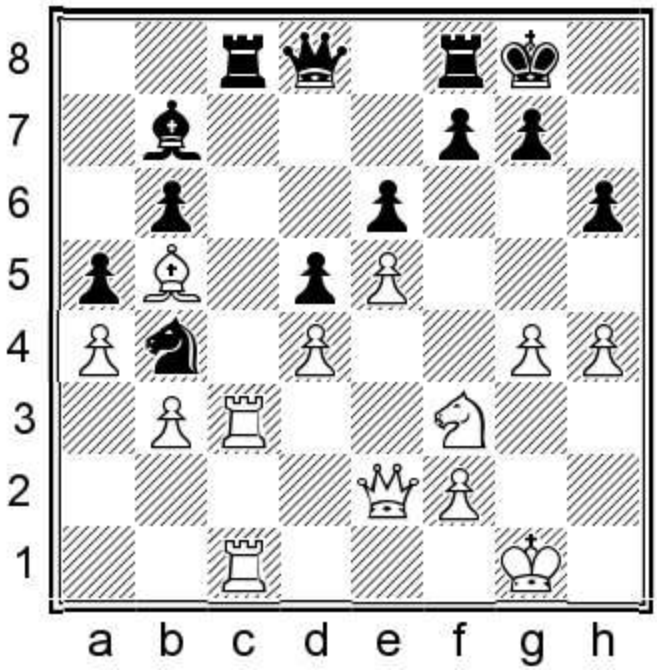
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18...h6 19.Bxe7 Qxe7 20.Rc1 Nb8 21.Re3!
Korneev makes his pieces play together beautifully.

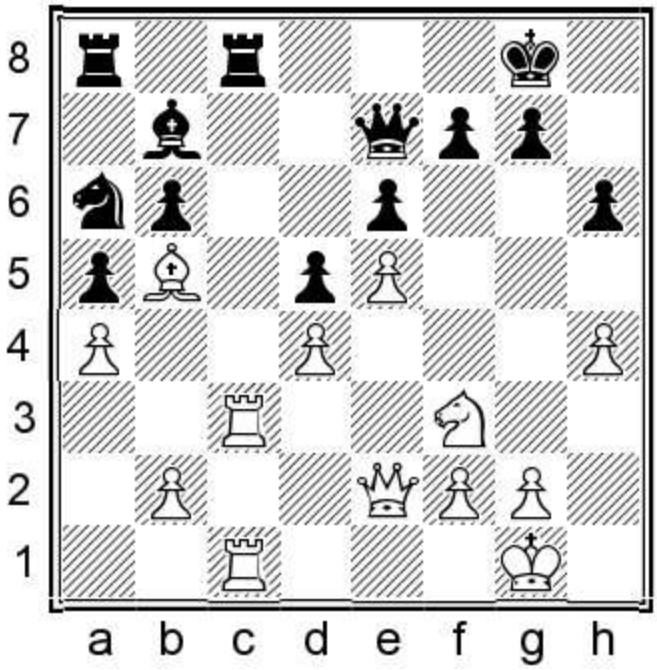
21...Bb7 22.Rec3 Na6 23.Qe2 Rfc8!?
Bartel offers to give two minor pieces for a rook, in return for contesting the c-file. Passive play was clearly very dangerous for Black, as White is ready to create serious problems for him.

23...Qd8 is the first choice of the engine, with the idea to solve Black's problems slowly, starting with ...Nb4. A good reply is 24.g4!, when White is making full use of his space advantage. The main line is: 24...Nb4 25.b3 Rc8



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26.g5! White has a serious advantage, mainly due to 26...h5 27.g6! and a white knight on g5 will cause a lot of

mischief.



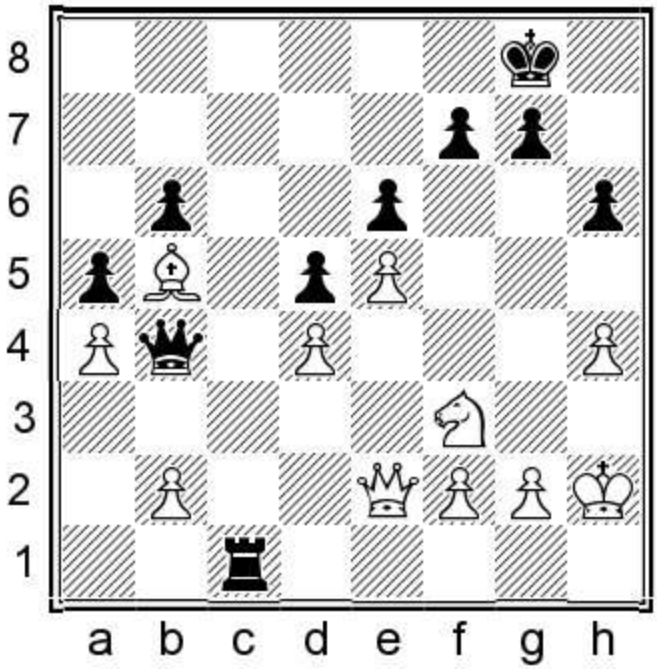
24.Rxc8†
Korneev simply cannot find it in himself to decline the offer.

For those who have read Jacob Aagaard's Attack & Defence, it will not come as a surprise that in a position where the centre is fixed and Black has weakened his kingside with
...h7-h6, White could go on the offensive with 24.g4!!, when Black has serious problems. The continuation might be: 24...Rxc3 25.Rxc3 Nc7 26.Bd3 Ba6 27.g5 Bxd3 28.Qxd3 Black is in agony and should be careful to avoid
28...h5? 29.g6!, when his position falls apart.

24...Bxc8 25.Rxc8†
25.Rc6 was another possibility, keeping Black under severe pressure.

25...Rxc8 26.Bxa6 Rc1† 27.Kh2 Qb4 28.Bb5

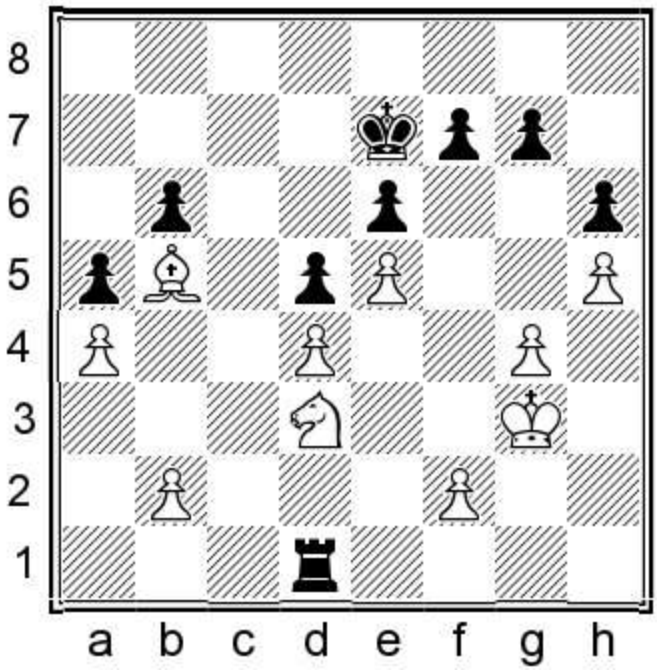
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28...Qb3?
After the stronger 28...Rb1 29.Qc2 Rxb2 30.Qc8† Qf8 31.Qc6 Rxf2 White retains the upper hand, but is not close to winning yet.

29.Ne1!±
Korneev plays the rest of the game with a smoothness you cannot help but admire.

29...Qd1 30.Qxd1 Rxd1 31.Nd3 Kf8 32.h5 Ke7 33.g4 Rd2 34.Kg3 Rd1
The rook has nothing to attack.

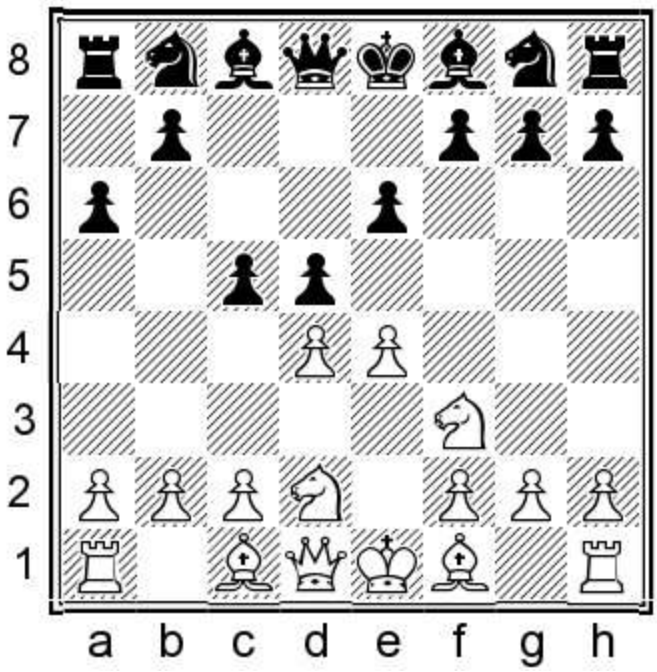


35.b4 axb4 36.Nxb4 Kd8 37.f4 Rb1 38.Nc6† Kc7 39.f5 exf5 40.gxf5 Rh1 41.Ne7
1–0

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Let us now move on to Black's other serious option on move 4, which is significantly more popular than 4... Nf6.

B) 4...c5



5.exd5
5.dxc5!? Bxc5 6.Bd3 is another popular way of playing. White has good chances of an edge after: 6...Nc6 7.0-0 Nge7 8.exd5 Nxd5 (or 8...exd5 9.Nb3² is a fairly standard anti-IQP position) 9.Ne4 Be7 10.c4 Nf6 11.Qe2² White looks slightly better.

The text move is consistent with our guidelines on page 6. Black may respond with B1) 5...Qxd5 or B2) 5... exd5. The former is unusual but not ridiculous, while the latter is played in the overwhelming majority of games in this line.

B1) 5...Qxd5

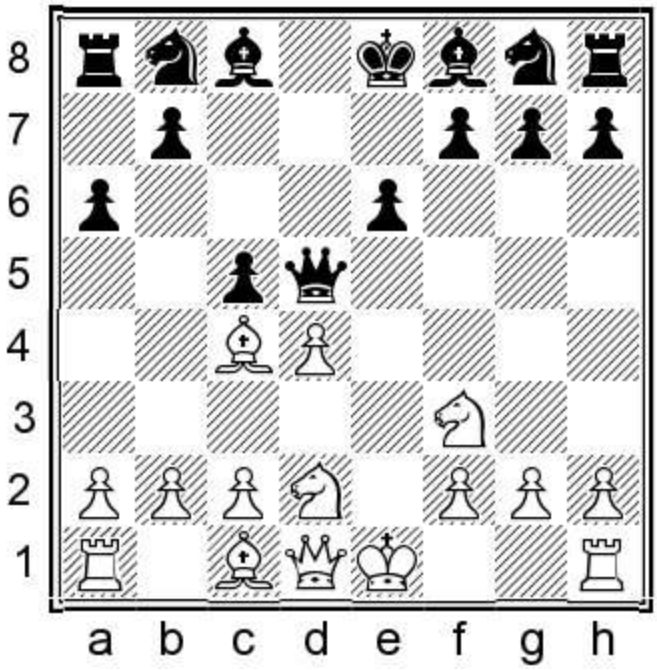
GAME 10

Vladimir Potkin – Gerard Welling
Bad Wiessee 2004

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6
The actual move order in this game was
3...c5 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.exd5 Qxd5 6.Bc4 Qc6 7.0-0 a6. I have modified it to fit with our repertoire and to discuss some of Black's alternative options.

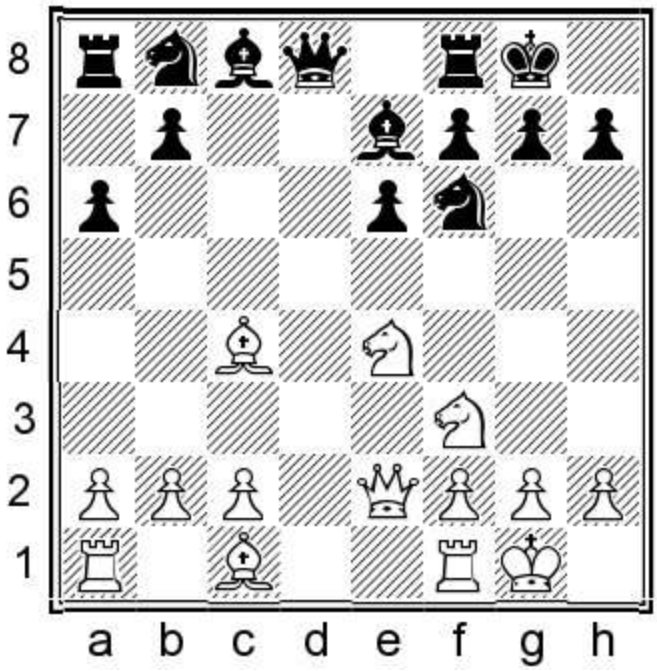
4.Ngf3 c5 5.exd5 Qxd5 6.Bc4

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6...Qc6!?
This rare variation is a serious option, but I believe that White remains slightly better.

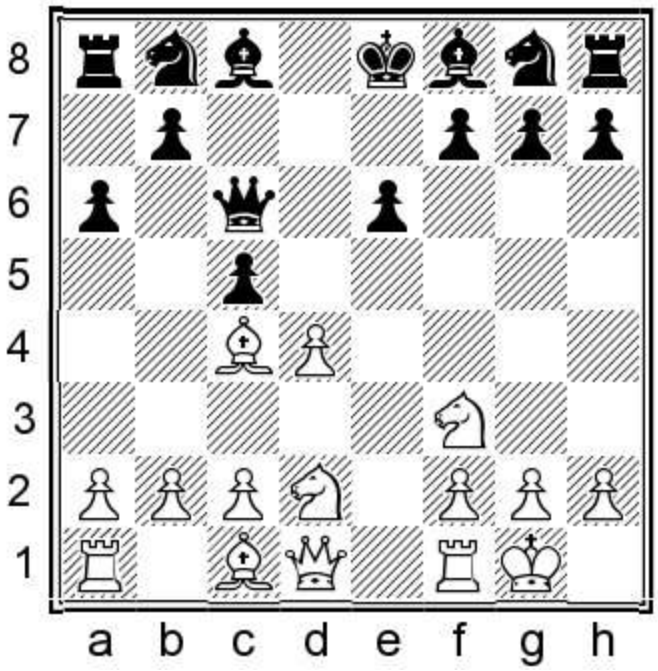
6...Qd8
This has been the usual choice. Black seems to be wasting too much time but his position is nowhere near as bad as one might think; he has a solid pawn structure after all. My suggestion is:
7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.Qe2 Nf6 9.0-0 0-0 10.Ne4 Be7
10...Nxe4 11.Qxe4 Nd7 is slightly inaccurate. White plays 12.Bd3N², when Black has to make a concession with
12...g6, as after 12...Nf6? 13.Qh4 he is truly suffering. For example: 13...h6? 14.Bxh6! and White has a winning attack.



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So far this is Bruzon Batista – Ramirez, Merida 2014. Here I would try:
11.Nxf6†!?N 11...Bxf6 12.c3²
The game has just started, but White's play is freer. In short, there is not really any theory on this line and it is unlikely there ever will be. White is a touch better and the game goes on.

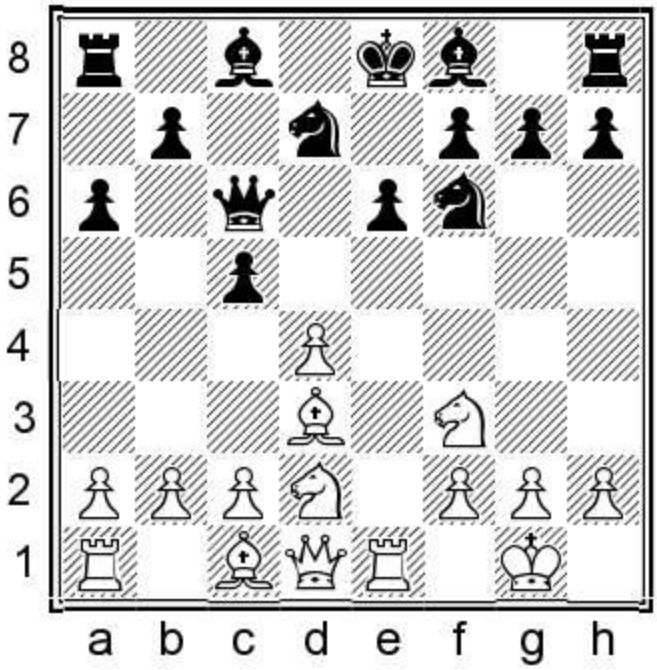
7.0-0
7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.Qe2 Nf6 transposes to a big line which is not covered in this book.



7...Nf6
With this move, we rejoin the main illustrative game.
No one has played 7...b5? which is wise, as it fails to 8.d5!!± exd5 (8...Qb6 9.dxe6 fxe6± is the only way to avoid losing by force, but it's awful) 9.Re1† Ne7 (9...Be7 10.Ne5 Qb7 11.Nxf7! and it is time to resign) 10.Ne5 Qd6 11.Ne4 One of several winners. 11...Qxe5 12.Bxd5 Ra7 (12...Qxd5 13.Nf6†+–) 13.Bxf7† Kxf7 14.Ng5† +–

8.Bd3 Nbd7 9.Re1

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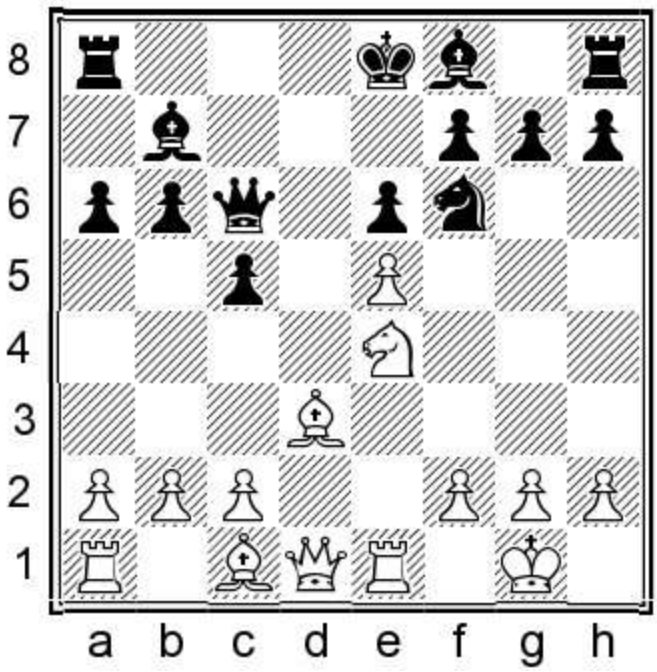


9...b6?!
This is a little slow; Black's priority should be to get his king into safety.

9...Qc7!?N
This is an interesting idea, when Black has a playable position. My recommendation is:
10.c3 Be7 11.Ne4 0-0
Again the slow 11...b6?! allows White to develop some initiative: 12.Ne5! Nxe5 (12...Bb7? 13.Nxf7!+– shows the threat) 13.dxe5 Nxe4 (Greed is not good: 13...Qxe5? 14.Qf3 Kf8 15.Nxf6! Qxe1† 16.Bf1 Bxf6 17.Qxa8 Ke7 18.Qa7† Bd7 19.Qxb6 Rd8 20.Qxa6±) 14.Bxe4 Bb7 15.Bxb7 Qxb7 16.Qa4† b5 17.Qg4²
12.Nxc5 Nxc5 13.dxc5 Bxc5 14.Bg5²
White is ever so slightly better.

10.Ne4 Bb7 11.Ne5! Nxe5 12.dxe5

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12...Nd7?!
A surprising choice, as the e4-knight is clearly superior to the one on d7.

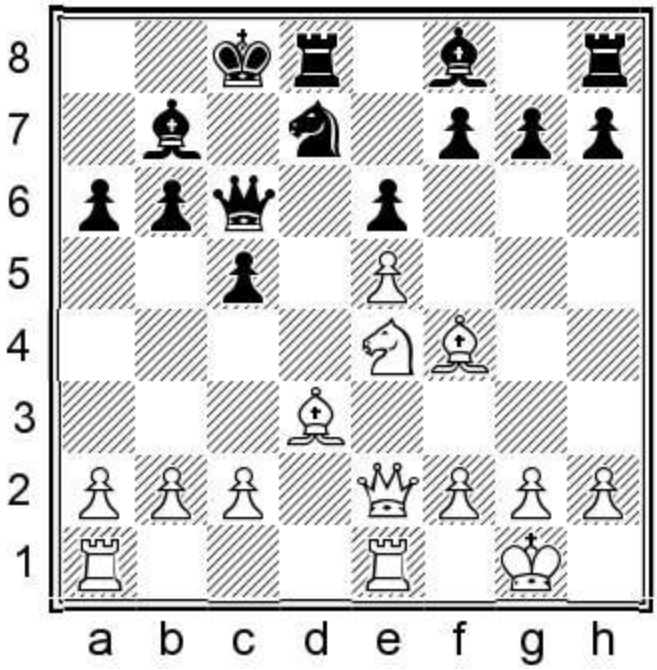
12...Nxe4 13.Bxe4 Qc7 14.Qf3² was just an edge.

13.Bf4±
Now White has a solid grip on the position, even though that grip does slip on the very next move.

13...0-0-0 14.Qe2??
I suspect I would also have played this natural-looking move, but Potkin is usually better than me at avoiding blundering material.

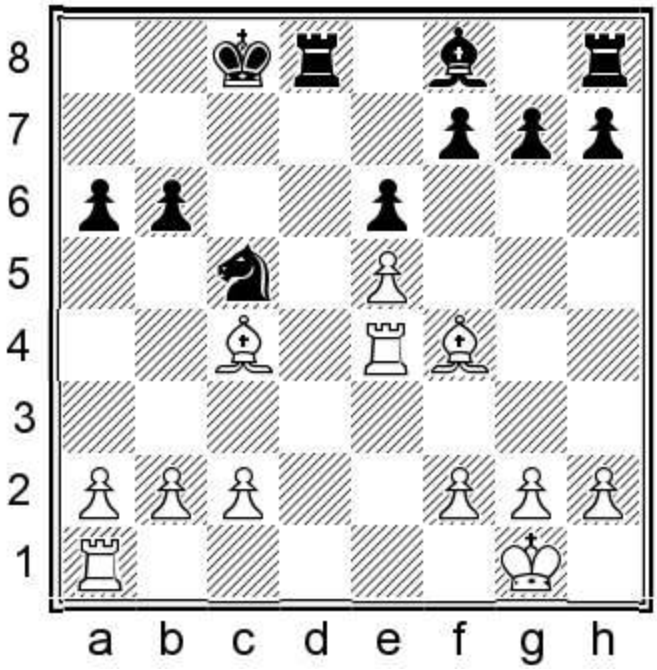
14.Qh5!N± would have avoided the tricks and kept a major plus.

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14...b5??
Black misses his big chance.

14...c4! 15.Bxc4 Qxe4 16.Qxe4 Bxe4 17.Rxe4 Nc5[3]



White must give up material, as he loses even more after: 18.Re2? Rd4–+ “LPDO” as Dr Nunn would say.

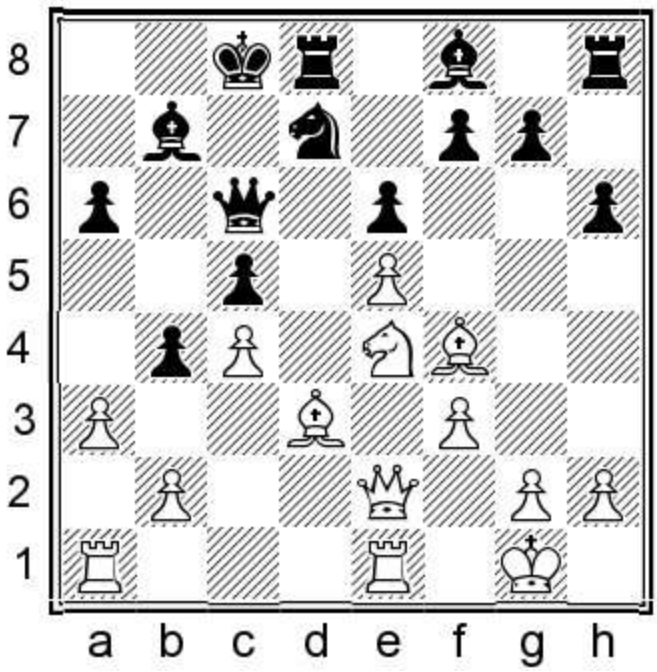
15.c4±
The game is back on its normal track.

15...b4
The queenside will not stay closed for long.

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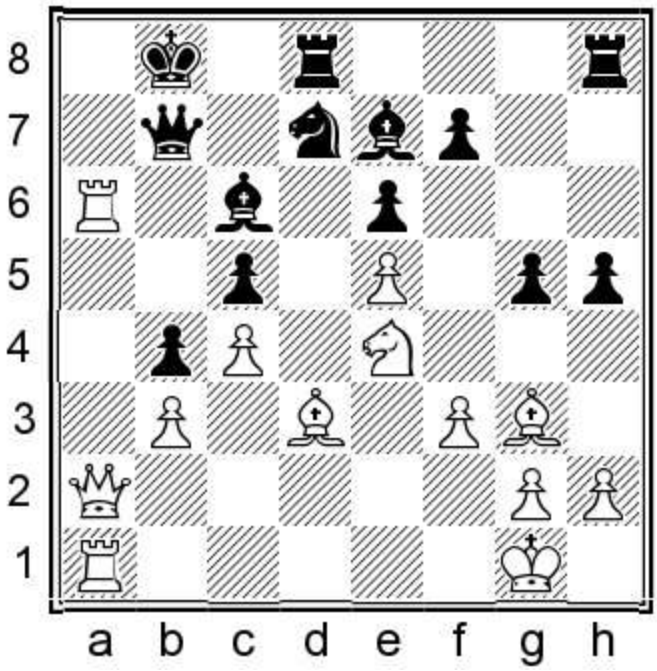
Black’s best way to avoid getting quickly mated was 15...bxc4 16.Bxc4 Qxe4 17.Qxe4 Bxe4 18.Rxe4± but the ending is no prize, as White’s bishop pair confronts Black’s weak pawns.

16.f3 h6 17.a3



The rest requires little comment. It is obvious the black king cannot survive with such a weak queenside structure, and Potkin does not give his opponent a second chance.

17...a5 18.axb4 axb4 19.Ra7 Kb8 20.Rea1 Qb6 21.R7a5 Bc6 22.Ra6 Qb7 23.b3 Be7 24.Qa2 g5 25.Bg3 h5



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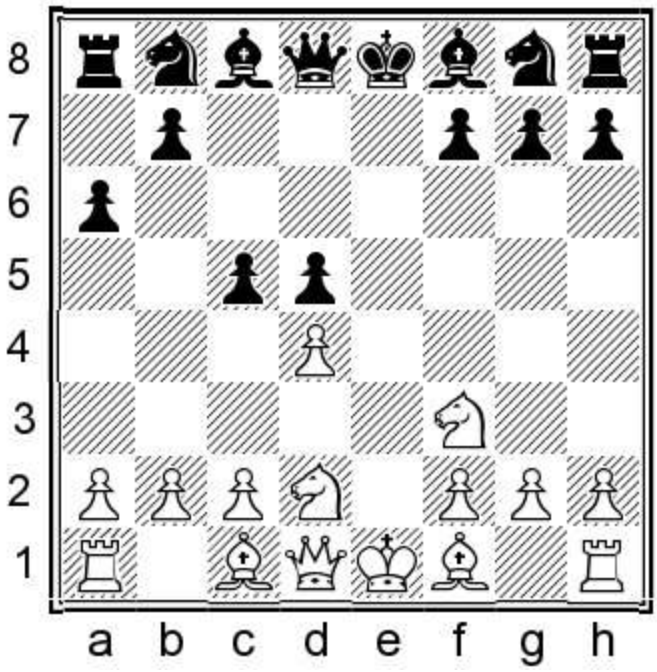
26.Ra7

Everything wins.

I would have gone for 26.Rxc6 Qxc6 27.Nd6 threatening mate in one, or Be4 if required.

26...Qb6 27.Nf6 Kc8 28.Be4 h4 29.Ra6
1–0

B2) 5...exd5



As mentioned earlier, this is the much more popular recapture. The resulting position can also be reached via the 3...c5 move order.

6.Be2!?
6.dxc5 is also decent, but sometimes you have to make a choice.

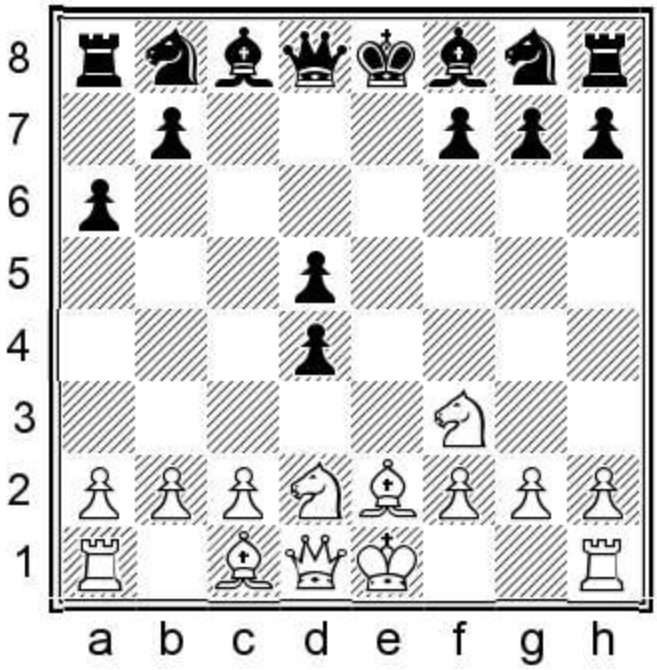
The text move may appear modest but it makes a lot of sense to delay dxc5 until Black has moved his dark-squared bishop. Moreover, if Black continues making pawn moves, White may build enough of a lead in development to justify a sacrificial attack. Perhaps this is why our move was the choice of such aggressive players as Geller and Tal.

We will consider B21) 6...cxd4, B22) 6...Nf6 and B23) 6...c4?!.

6...Nc6 7.0-0 is likely to transpose to one of the main lines. As usual, White waits with dxc5 until after the f8-bishop has moved.

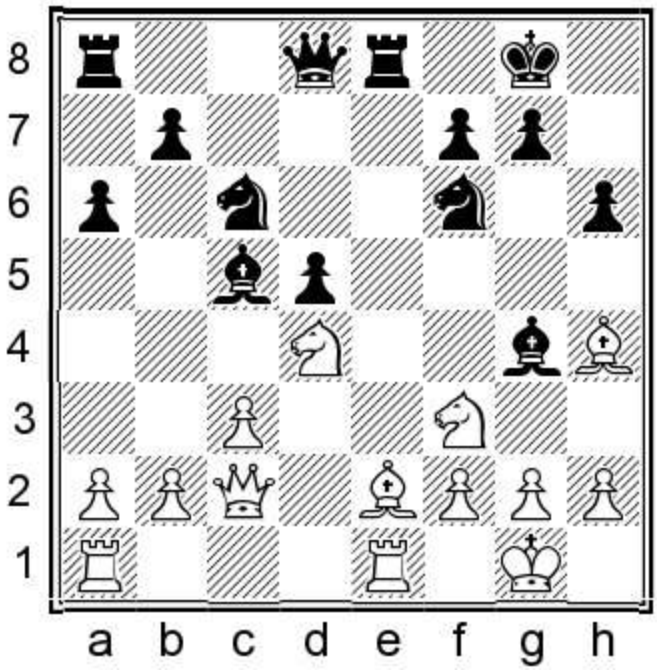
B21) 6...cxd4

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This leads to a small but fairly easy advantage for White. The combination of ...a6 and ...cxd4 is not absurd, but it's also not a great way for Black to get organized.

7.0-0 Bd6 8.Nb3 Ne7
8...Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nf6
This is the alternative set-up, when White is also a little better.
10.Bg5 0-0 11.c3 h6 12.Bh4 Re8 13.Re1 Bg4 14.Qc2
I also considered 14.Qb3 Nxd4 as in Fernandes – Spraggett, Santo Antonio 2000, when 15.Nxd4!?N 15...Bxe2 16.Rxe2 Rxe2 17.Nxe2 Qe7 18.Bxf6 Qxe2 19.Bd4 looks slightly unpleasant for Black.
14...Bc5
Berelowitsch – M. Gurevich, Hoogeveen 2001. Here I suggest:

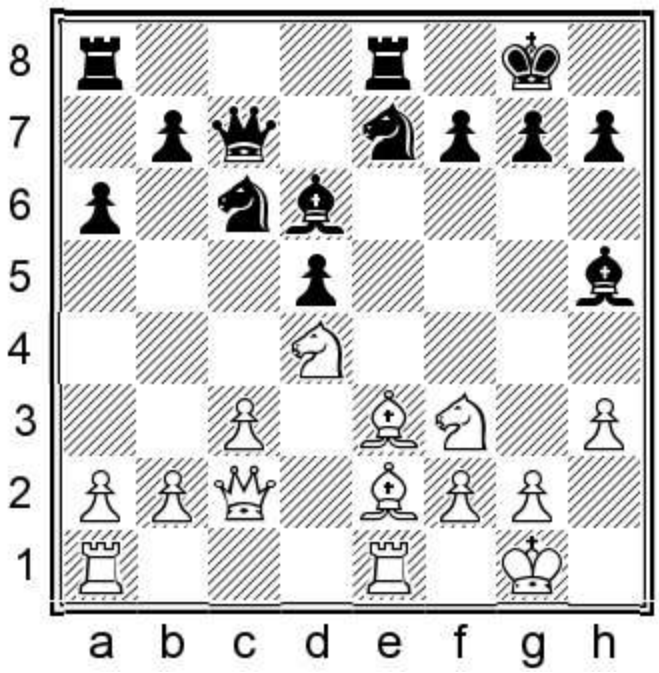


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15.Bd3!?N
With good prospects for White, for example:
15...Nxd4 16.Rxe8† Qxe8 17.Nxd4 Bxd4 18.cxd4²
White no longer has a structural advantage but the bishop pair is always nice.

9.Nbxd4 0-0 10.Re1 Nbc6 11.Be3
We have reached a position which has been evaluated as slightly better for White for decades. The model game will probably always be the following encounter between Svidler and Dreev.

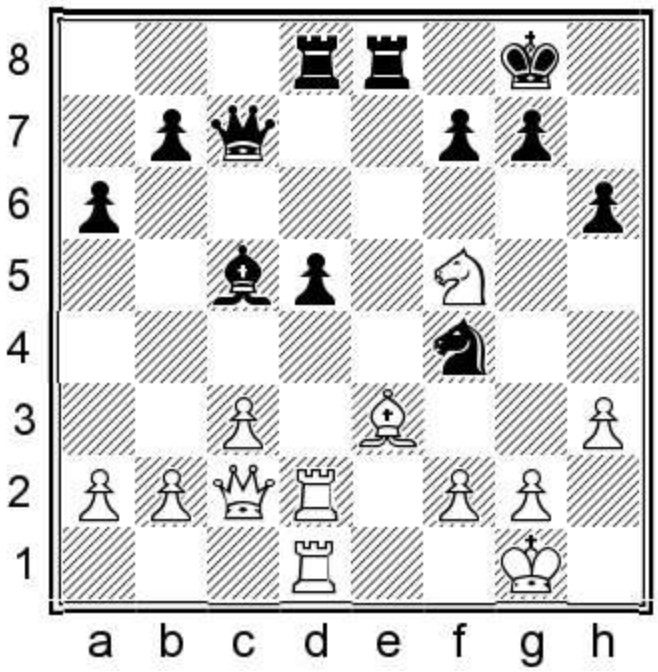
11...Bg4 12.c3 Qc7 13.h3 Bh5 14.Qc2 Rfe8
Or 14...Bg6 15.Bd3 Na5 16.Re2² followed by Rae1.



15.Bd3 h6 16.Nh4! Ne5 17.Be2 Bxe2 18.Rxe2²
White's advantage is maybe not so significant in objective terms, but it is long-lasting and Black has no targets for counterplay.

18...N7g6 19.Nxg6 Nxg6 20.Nf5 Bc5 21.Rd2 Rad8 22.Rad1 Nf4?
Blundering a pawn.

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23.Qa4! Bxe3 24.fxe3 Ne6 25.Rxd5
This was Svidler – Dreev, Novosibirsk 1995. Svidler controlled the conversion phase really well, but we don't need to see that.

B22) 6...Nf6

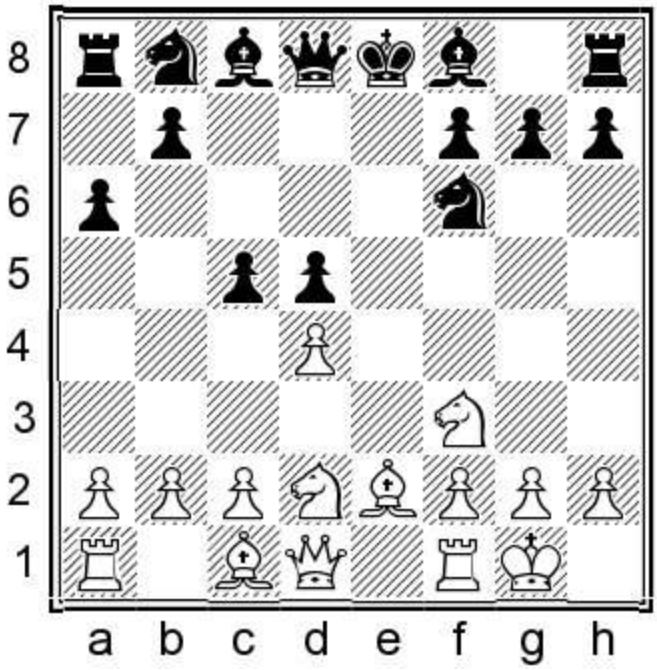
GAME 11

Emre Can – Jacek Szwed
Legnica 2013

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6 4.Ngf3 c5 5.exd5 exd5 6.Be2 Nf6
Normal development cannot be bad.

7.0-0

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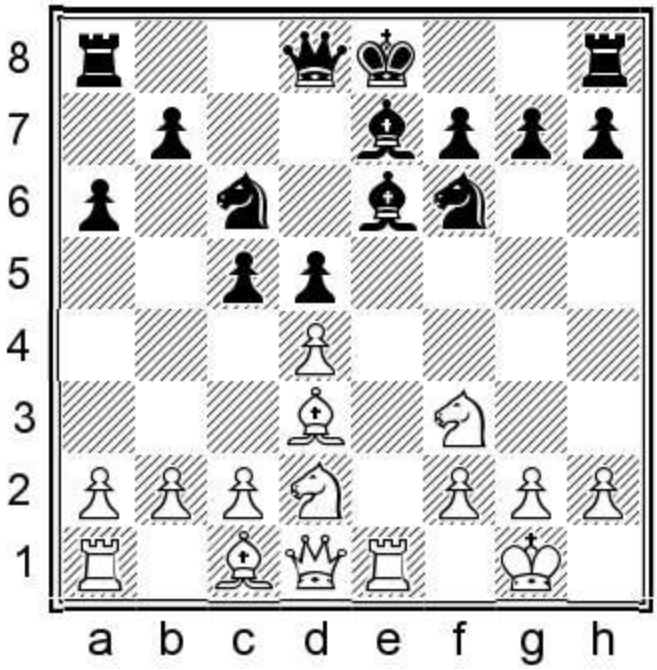


7...Be7
Now that the f8-bishop has moved, it’s time for White to take on c5.

After the extremely rare 7...Nbd7, I would propose 8.Re1!N as an improvement on the only three games in my database. (The engines like 8.c4, but I prefer to play against the isolated pawn.) 8...Be7 9.dxc5 Nxc5 10.Nb3 0-0 11.Be3² This is more pleasant for White according to my experience of similar positions.

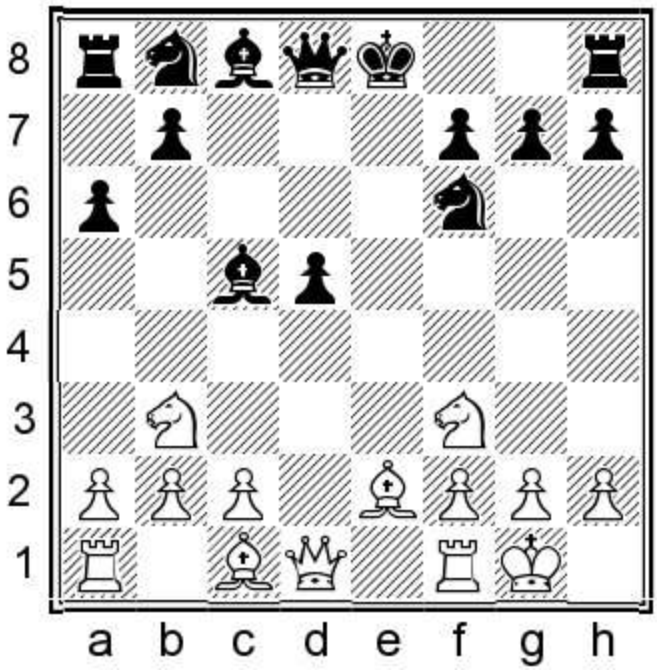
7...Nc6
This is an attempt to gain a tempo by playing the bishop from f8 to c5 in one move. But White has plenty of useful moves to play before dxc5 is required.
8.Re1 Be6 9.Bd3!? Be7
This is necessary, as Black needs to castle before bad things happen along the e-file.
Of course 9...c4? does not force a retreat: 10.Bf5±

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10.dxc5 Bxc5 11.Nb3
Yet another IQP position where anything can happen, but White starts with the slightly better chances. For example:
11...Bb6 12.Be3 Bxe3 13.Rxe3 0-0 14.h3 Qb6 15.c3 Rfe8 16.Qc2[2]
Tiviakov – Zvjaginsev, Sochi 2006.

8.dxc5 Bxc5 9.Nb3



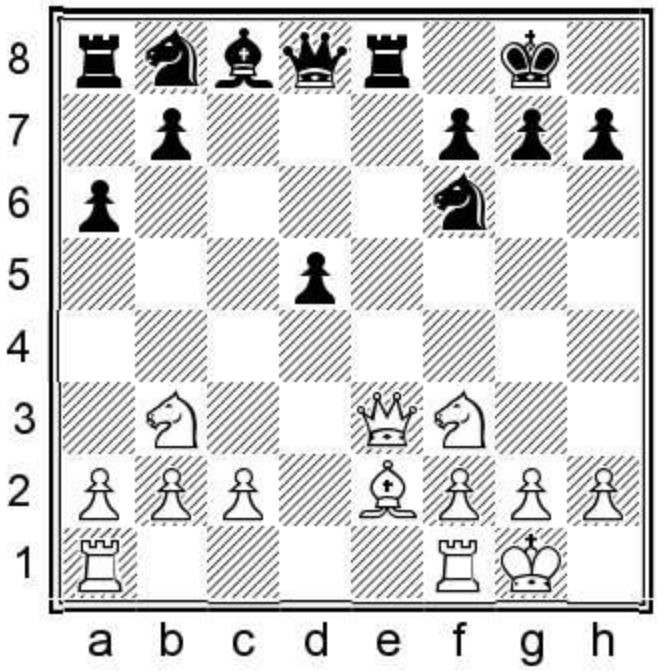
We have a slightly different position than in the classical isolated pawn variation with 3...c5 4.exd5 exd5 5. Ngf3 Nf6/Nc6. Black effectively has played 5...a6 and White has decided to put his bishop on the slightly less active e2-square. White should enjoy a pleasant game, although the advantage is not massive.

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9...Bb6
The computer evaluation is that Black is not much worse in this position. But if you look at the statistics, it becomes apparent that Black is struggling. The isolated pawn gives him some activity, but White is able to neutralize his greatest asset with the line played in the game.
9...Be7 preserves the dark-squared bishop, at the expense of placing it on a passive location. For example: 10. Re1 0-0 11.Bg5 Nc6 12.Nfd4² J. Polgar – Waelbers, Frankfurt (simul) 1999.

10.Qd3!? 0-0 11.Be3
Exchanging dark-squared bishops is a frequent plan for White in the Tarrasch. In the 3...Nf6 lines it's because there is a hole on e5, while here our eyes are on d4.

11...Bxe3 12.Qxe3 Re8

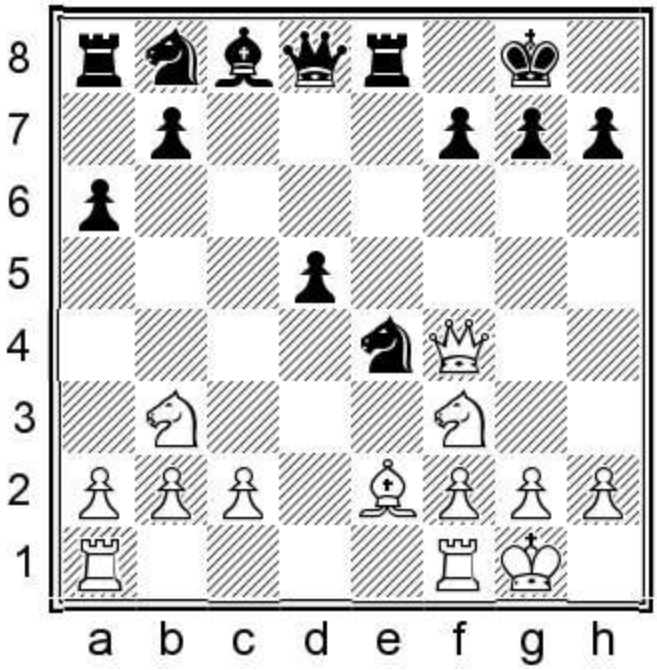


13.Qd2²
13.Qd3 has been played a few times as well, but the queen is frequently hit by ...Ne5, so I think the game continuation is more accurate.

13...Ne4
Instead 13...Bg4!?N 14.Rfe1 Nc6 15.c3 Qb6 16.Nfd4 leads to a typical position, where Black might think he is almost equal, but positional types like me would be happy with the outcome of the opening. Essentially there are such positions in all openings, where Black makes some concession in order to be a bit worse and hope to make a draw.

14.Qf4

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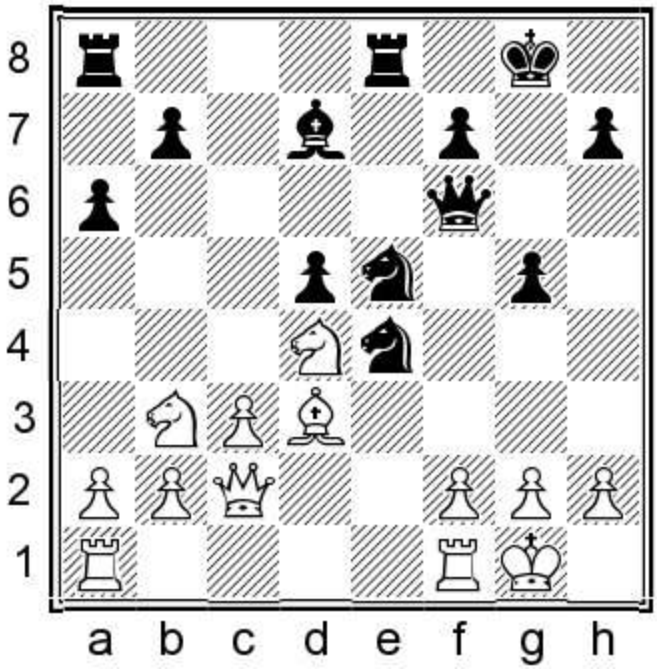
14...g5!?
Black tries to become active, but it does not truly undermine White's control over the d4-square.

14...Nc6 15.Rad1 Ne7 was close to equality in Andreev – Kanovsky, Teplice 2013, but White won this over-the-board game. Now, I am not a great expert on correspondence chess, but I think that a position like the one after 16.Ne5!?N 16...f6 17.Nd3² would also be unpleasant to defend for 50 moves against a strong correspondence player; someone who knows more about technique than picking the engine's first line.

15.Qc1 Nc6
Or 15...Bg4 16.c3 Nc6 17.Nfd4² and again I like White.

16.Nfd4 Qf6 17.c3 Bd7 18.Qc2 Ne5 19.Bd3²
White has the more pleasant position. The rest of the game is not so vital for our opening preparation, but there are a few interesting moments.

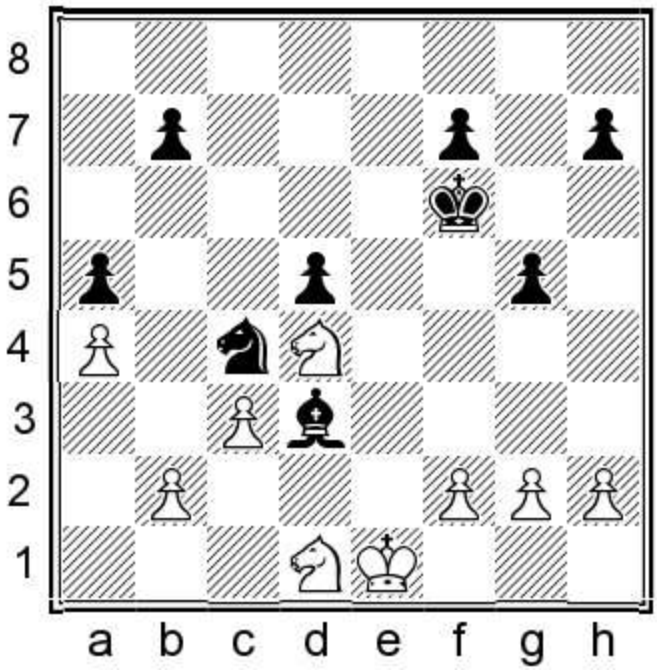
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19...Nc4?
This looks like a blunder.

20.Rae1 Rac8 21.Re2!?[2]
A case of mutual chess blindness? White could win a pawn with 21.Bxe4, as b7 is hanging at the end of the line.

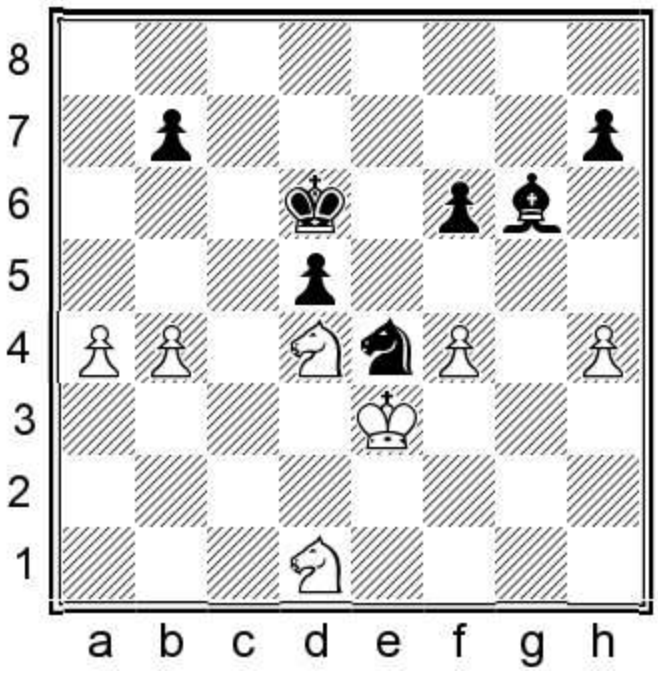
21...Kg7 22.Rfe1 Ned6 23.Nd2 Rxe2 24.Rxe2 Ne5 25.Nf1 Ng6 26.Bxg6 Qxg6 27.Ne3 Qxc2 28.Ndxc2 Nc4 29. Nd4 Re8 30.Nd1 Rxe2 31.Nxe2 Bf5 32.Nd4 Bb1 33.a4 a5 34.Kf1 Bd3† 35.Ke1 Kf6



After some mistakes from both sides, we have reached a typical ending. White is only marginally better, but it is quite difficult to play for Black in practice.

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36.b3 Nb6 37.Nb2 Be4 38.f3 Bg6 39.Kd2 Ke5 40.Ke3 f6 41.g3 Kd6 42.h4 Nd7 43.b4 axb4 44.cxb4 Ne5 45.f4 gxf4† 46.gxf4 Ng4† 47.Kd2 Nf2 48.Nd1 Ne4† 49.Ke3²
White is managing to keep his opponent under pressure. Black's next move is innocent-looking, but it violates the basic rule of not moving the pawns on the side of the board where you are weaker, and also has some serious tactical shortcomings.



49...b6?
49...Kd7 was called for, although Black is in danger here too.

50.Nb5†! Kc6?
Losing by force.

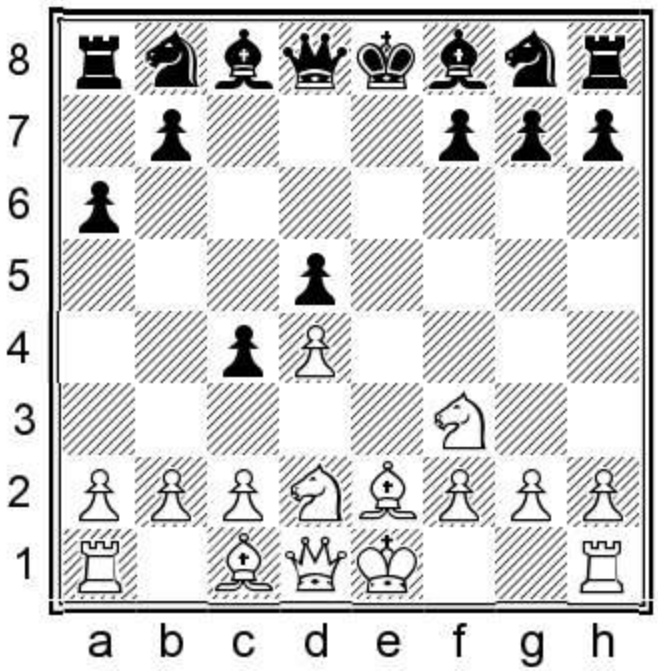
50...Kd7 was essential, even though 51.Ndc3 is still strong.

51.Ndc3 Ng3 52.Nd4†
This regrouping move with tempo is the problem with putting the king on c6.

52...Kd6 53.Ncb5† Kd7 54.a5 bxa5 55.bxa5 Ne4 56.a6 Kc8 57.Nc6 Be8 58.Ne7† Kb8 59.a7†
1–0

B23) 6...c4?!

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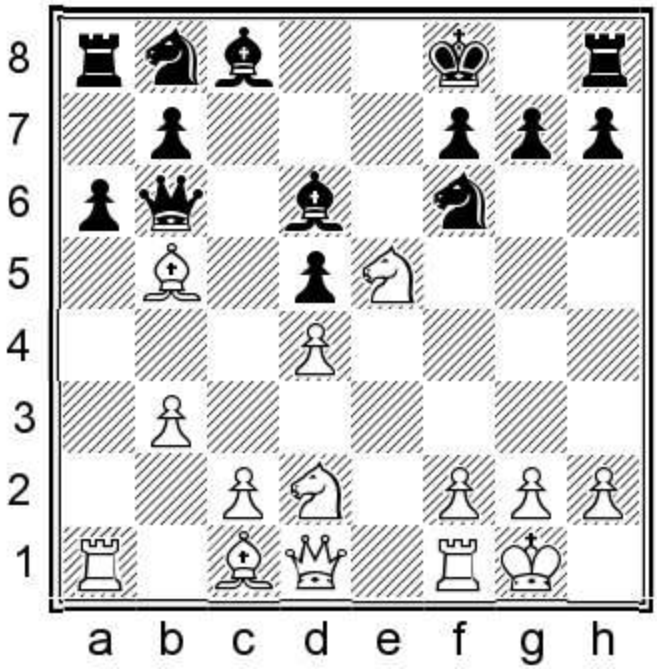


Despite being Black's most popular choice, and thus our main line, I consider this move a mistake. It strikes me as dangerous to only
move your pawns at a moment when the opponent is well developed in an open
position. Concrete analysis confirms this evaluation.

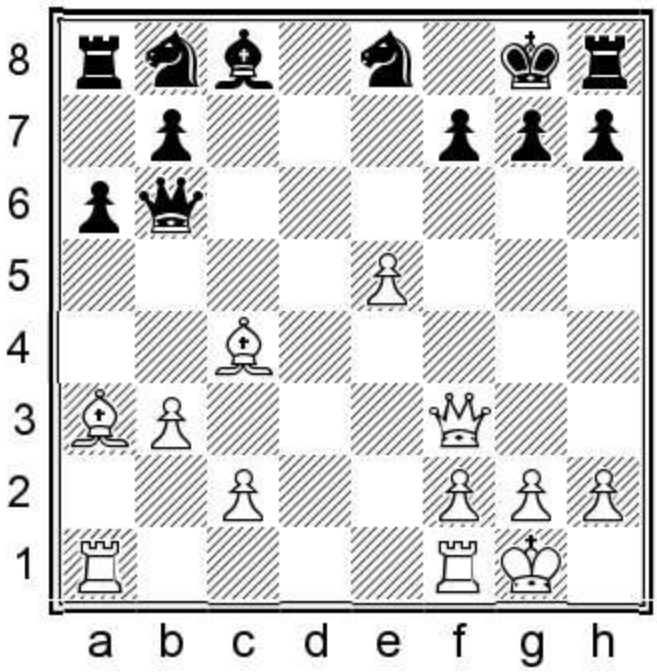
7.0-0 Bd6
The most flexible move, preparing ...Ne7 as well as quick castling. But as we shall see, Black has made too many pawn moves to fight for equality.

7...Nf6 8.b3 cxb3 9.axb3²
This is also slightly better for White. There is no need to analyse this in great detail, as Black has already accepted a slightly worse position in order to stabilize his centre. But we can have a quick peek at one game:
9...Bd6?! 10.Bb5†! Kf8 11.Ne5 Qb6
In Ponomariov – Drozdovskij, Artek 1999, White missed a big chance:

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12.Ndc4!!N 12...dxc4 13.Bxc4 Bxe5
13...Be6 14.Bxe6 fxe6 15.Nc4 and White wins due to Nxd6 and Ba3.
14.dxe5 Ne8 15.Ba3† Kg8 16.Qf3
White has fantastic compensation and Black is under great pressure. For example:



16...Be6 17.Bxe6 Qxe6 18.Qxb7 Qc6 19.Qe7 h6 20.Qf8† Kh7 21.Qxf7 Qg6 22.Qxg6† Kxg6 23.f4±
White has excellent winning chances in the endgame. This is not a forced variation, but it illustrates how desperate Black's situation can become.

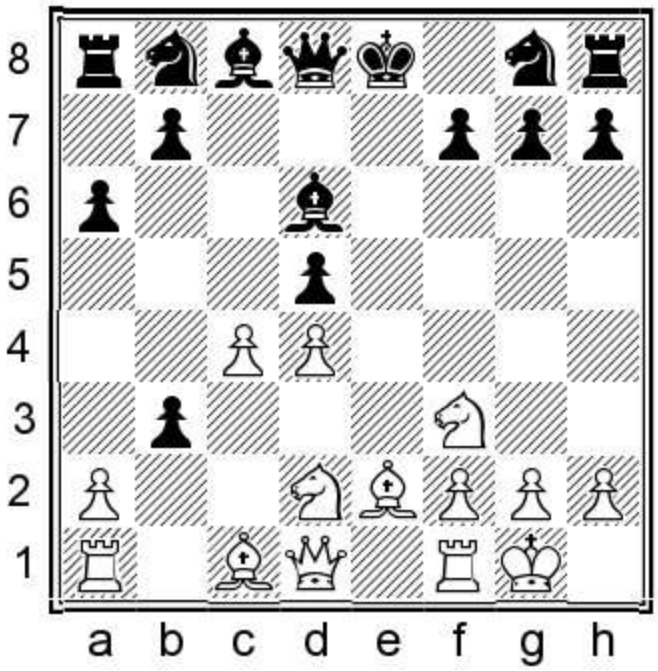
8.b3
Challenging the enemy pawn wedge. Black may react with B231) 8...cxb3 or
B232) 8...b5.

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B231) 8...cxb3

This should give White a slight edge if he simply recaptures with the a-pawn. But with Black having neglected his development, White can play more ambitiously with the following aggressive idea:

9.c4!

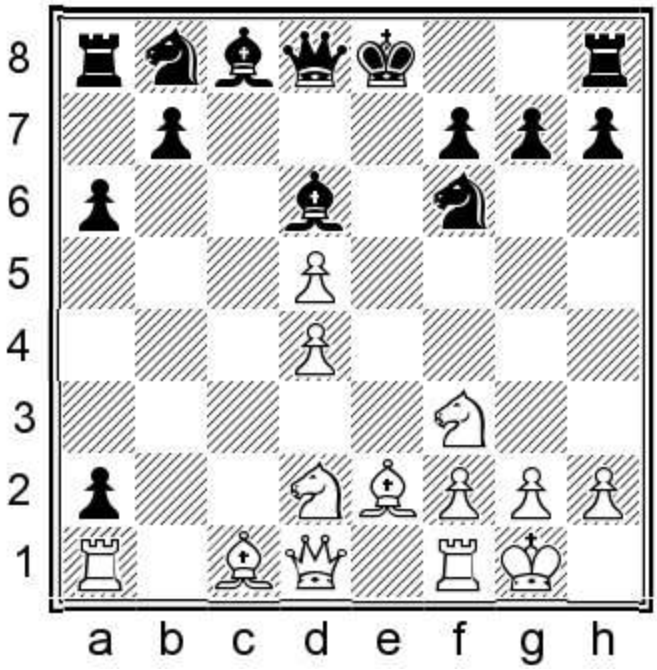


9...Ne7
This seems like Black's best defence.

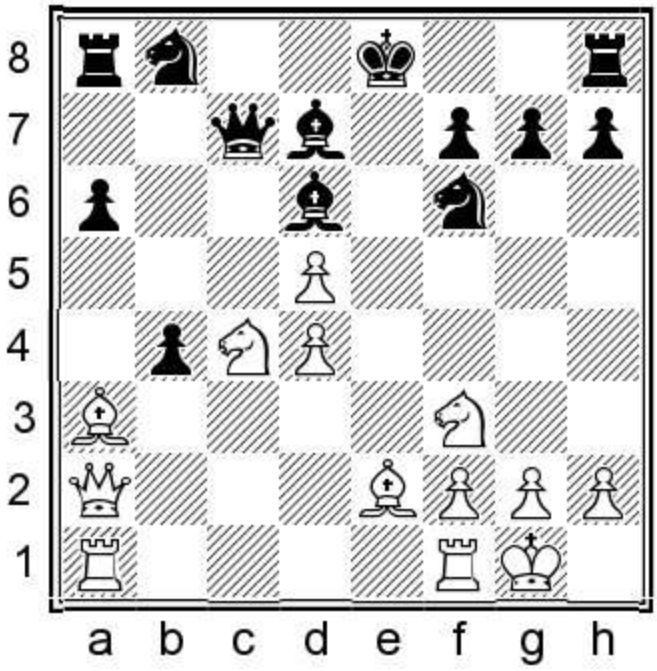
9...dxc4? 10.Bxc4 is immediately gone. For example: 10...Ne7 11.Ng5 0-0 12.Qh5 and Black will lose material.

I also checked:
9...bxa2
This looks too greedy for my taste.
10.cxd5 Nf6

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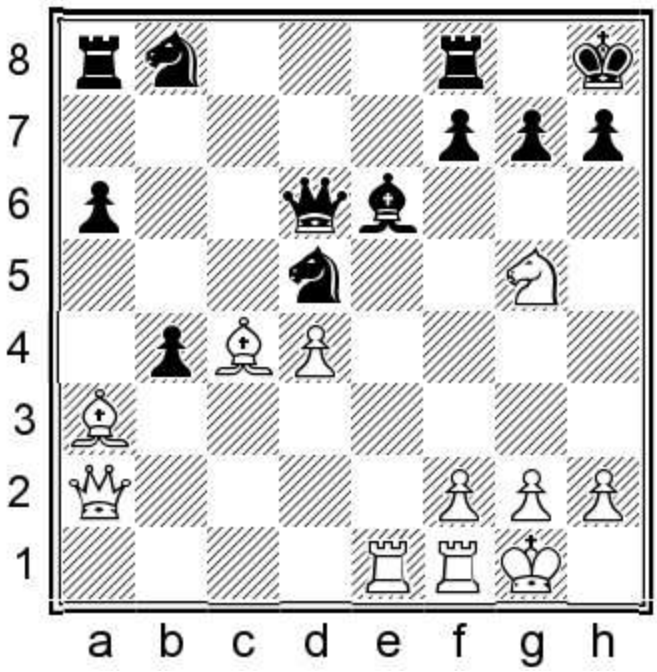
11.Qa4†! Bd7 12.Qxa2 b5
Black wants to prevent Nc4, but this looks pretty bad as well.
13.Ba3!
Black should not be allowed to castle in peace.
13...b4 14.Nc4 Qc7
So far Wilczek – Saule, corr. 2006. White has many ways to play for a win. I like the look of:



15.Rab1!N 15...Nxd5
15...bxa3? 16.Rb7! and White wins.
16.Nxd6† Qxd6 17.Bc4 Be6 18.Rbe1!
18.Rfe1? 0-0 19.Ng5 would throw away all the advantage, as the position after 19...Nc6 20.Nxe6 Nc3! is tenable for Black.

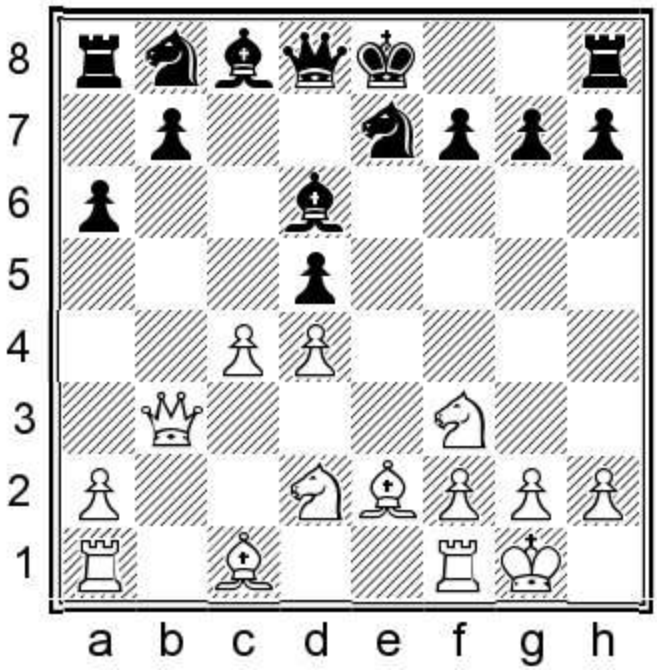
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18...0-0 19.Ng5 Kh8
Unlike the line above 19...Nc6?? is hopeless after 20.Nxe6 as 20...fxe6 21.Rxe6 is the end, and 20...Nc3 21.Qb3 changes nothing.



20.Bxb4!! Nxb4 21.Qb1 g6 22.Bxe6 fxe6 23.Rxe6 Qd5 24.Qxb4 Nc6 25.Rxc6 Qxg5
25...Qxc6 26.Qe7 and mate.
26.Rxa6
White wins.

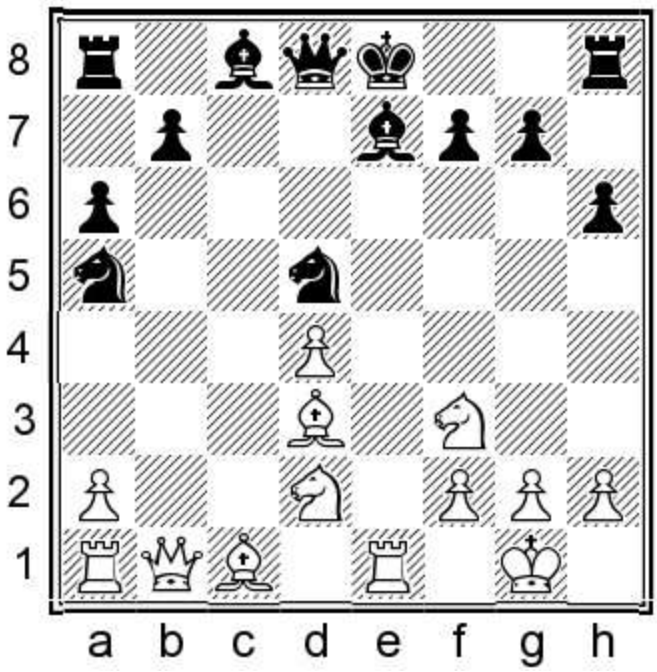
10.Qxb3
10.cxd5!?N is also strong.



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10...Nbc6 11.cxd5 Na5 12.Qb1 Nxd5?!
Black should take the chance to run away while he still can: 12...0-0 13.Ng5 Bf5 14.Bd3²

13.Bd3 h6 14.Re1† Be7
So far Solak – Kosic, Novi Sad 2009. Here I really like the look of:



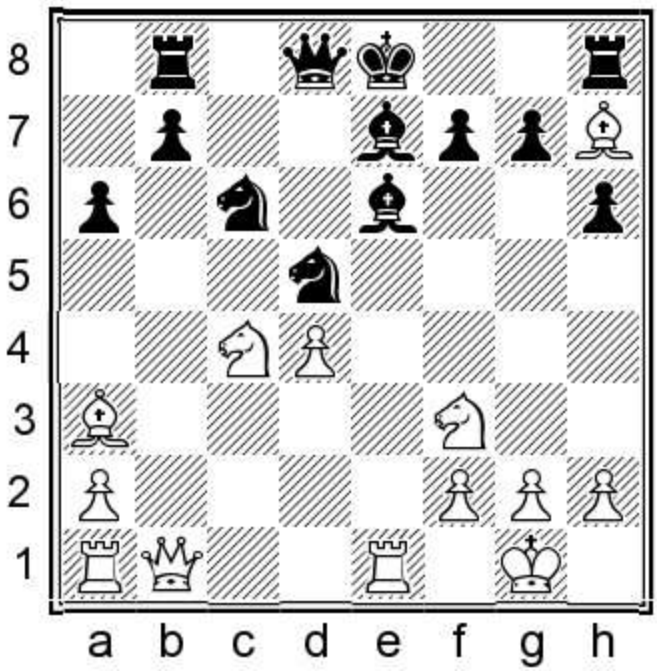
15.Bh7!N
Why should Black be allowed to castle?

15...Nc6
There are other moves of course, but the problems will not go away.

16.Ba3 Rb8 17.Nc4±
White is dominating. Here is one illustrative line to highlight the danger Black faces:

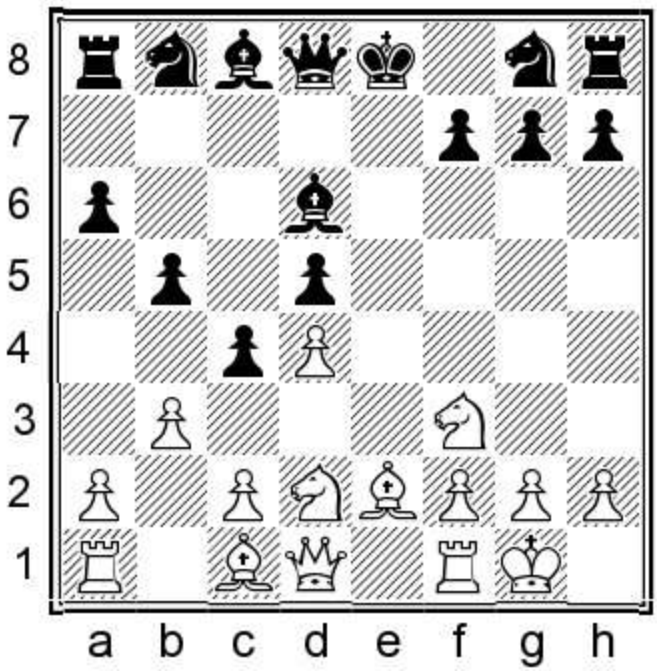
17...Be6?

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18.Rxe6! fxe6 19.Qg6† Kd7 20.Nfe5† Kc7 21.Qg3!+–
White is ready for Nf7, winning.

B232) 8...b5



Black is fighting logically to maintain his pawn wedge.

9.a4
Now we have a final split between two moves: B2321) 9...Bb7 and B2322) 9...c3.

B2321) 9...Bb7

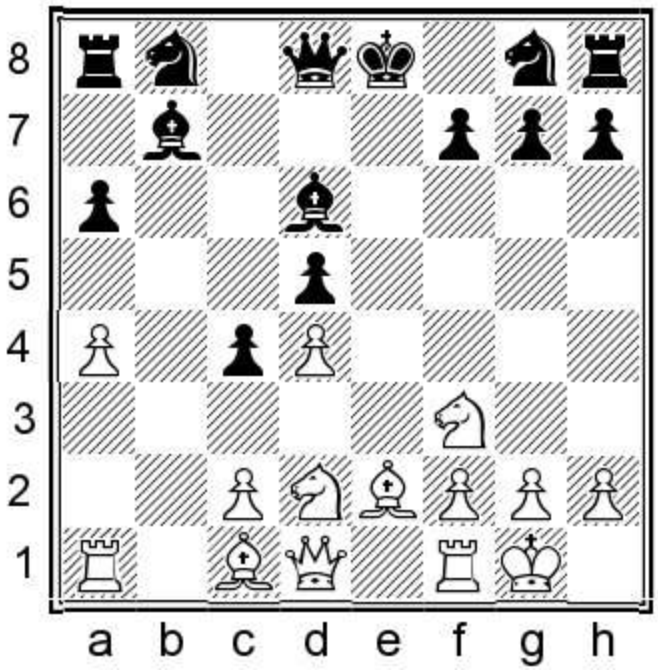
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GAME 12

Efim Geller – Alexey Dreev
New York 1990

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6 4.Ngf3 c5 5.exd5 exd5 6.Be2 c4?! 7.0-0 Bd6 8.b3 b5 9.a4 Bb7
Dreev continues to fight for the structural integrity of his position, but his strategy fails spectacularly.

10.bxc4 bxc4
Black would be okay at this point, if White were not in possession of a sledgehammer.

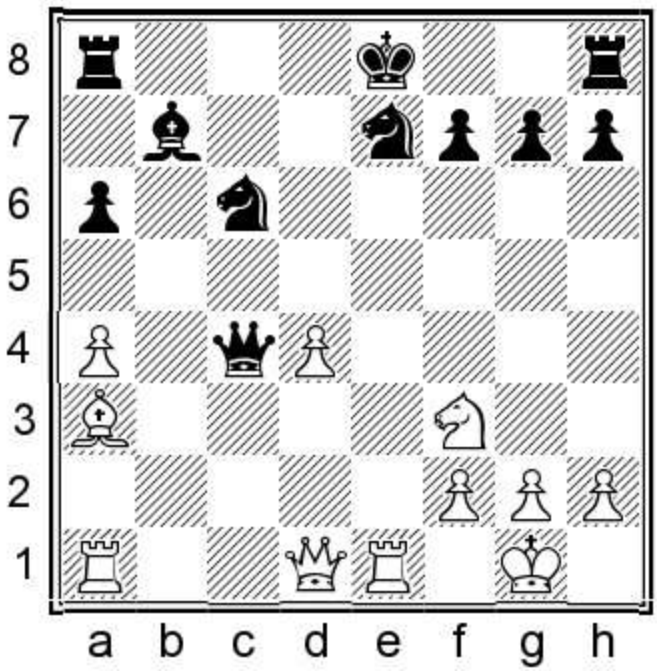


11.Bxc4!! dxc4 12.Nxc4
The structure as well as its integrity are gone. What Black is left with is a king in the centre. White's score from this position is 5/5, with the most recent game in July 2017, so there are still Black players stumbling into this line by accident. So remember this line well.

12...Be7
This retreat is forced.

12...Ne7?
This is hit hard by:
13.Nxd6† Qxd6 14.Ba3 Qd5?
Black could have offered more stubborn resistance with 14...Qd7 but it's still nasty after 15.Re1 Nbc6 16.Ne5 Nxe5 17.Rxe5 0-0-0 18.Rxe7 Qxd4 19.Qf1±.
15.Re1 Nbc6 16.c4 Qxc4

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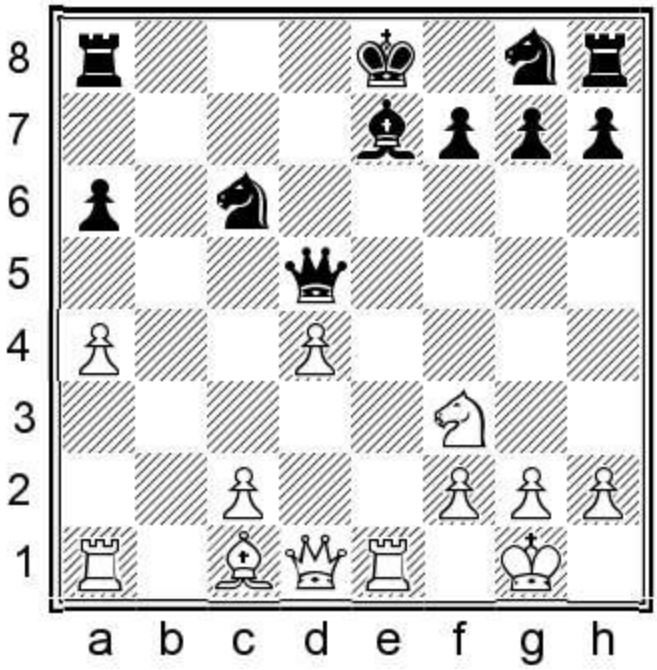
In Gerhardt – Koehler, corr. 1990, the efficient killer was:
17.Rb1!N
In contrast, 17.d5 0-0-0 would allow Black to stumble on, albeit in a lousy position.
17...Rb8
17...0-0-0 18.Bxe7+–
18.d5
Black's position is virtually resignable.

13.Re1
13.Rb1!? has also proven great for White in a few games, but Geller's path is fine so there is no reason to deviate.

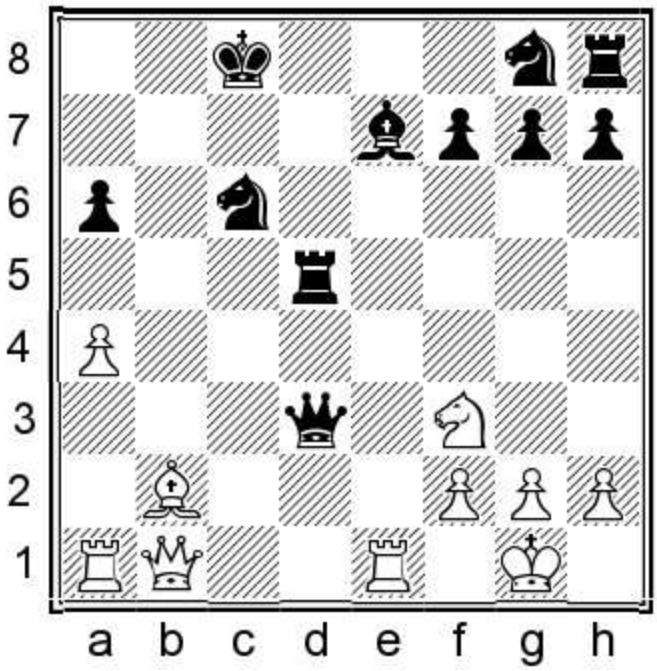
13...Qc7?!
Already the losing move.

Black had to go into the following variation, although it looks really dangerous.
13...Bd5 14.Ne3!
I believe this is the strongest. The f5-square screams for attention.
14.Nce5 also provides White with excellent compensation.
14...Nc6
14...Be4 15.Nd2 Bg6 16.Qf3 Ra7 17.Nd5± is also close to decisive already.
15.Nxd5 Qxd5

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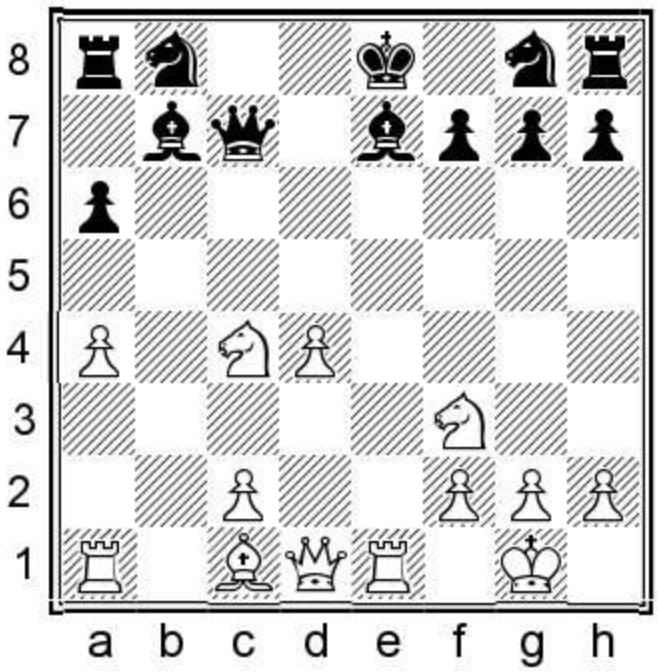
16.c4!!
White needs to keep high intensity in order to exploit his advantage.
16...Qxc4 17.d5 0-0-0
A sad reality, but this is the only move. White is close to winning by force:
18.Bb2 Rxd5
18...Qxd5? only makes things worse. White wins with: 19.Qc2 f6 20.Rad1 Qc5 21.Qe4 Kb7 22.Nd4 Qd5 23. Qb1 Ka8 24.Ne6 and everything hangs.
19.Qb1 Qd3



20.Qxd3
The most practical continuation, although White can also try: 20.Rc1 Qxb1 21.Raxb1 Kd7 22.Bxg7 Bf6 23. Rb7† Kd6 24.Bxh8 Bxh8 25.Rxf7± With two pawns and a rook for the two pieces, White is much better.

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20...Rxd3 21.Rac1 Kb7 22.Rxc6 Kxc6 23.Ne5† Kd6 24.Nxd3 f6 25.Nf4±
White will win a pawn soon enough and be very close to winning.



14.Rb1!
Geller keeps his pieces active. The direct threat is Rxb7 and Nd6†.

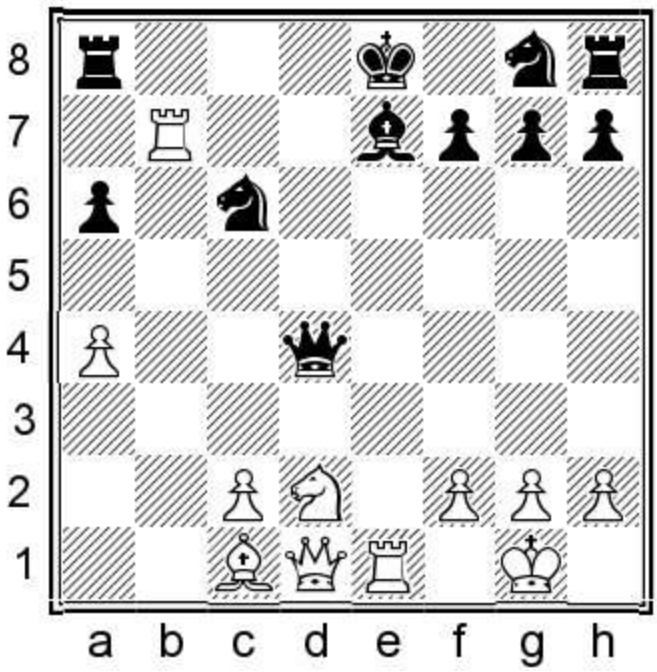
14...Qxc4 15.Rxb7 Nc6
Instead 15...Qc8 16.Rb3 Kf8 would avoid immediate losses. But after 17.Rbe3+– Black is of course defenceless.

16.Nd2
16.Rc7!? planning Ba3 also won.

16...Qxd4
This should have lost without any drama, but for a double blunder down the line.

But 16...Qd5 also does not hold. White wins with: 17.c4! Qd8 18.Ba3 with d4-d5 coming.

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17.Bb2 Qxa4 18.Re4?
A horrible oversight that could have spoiled everything.

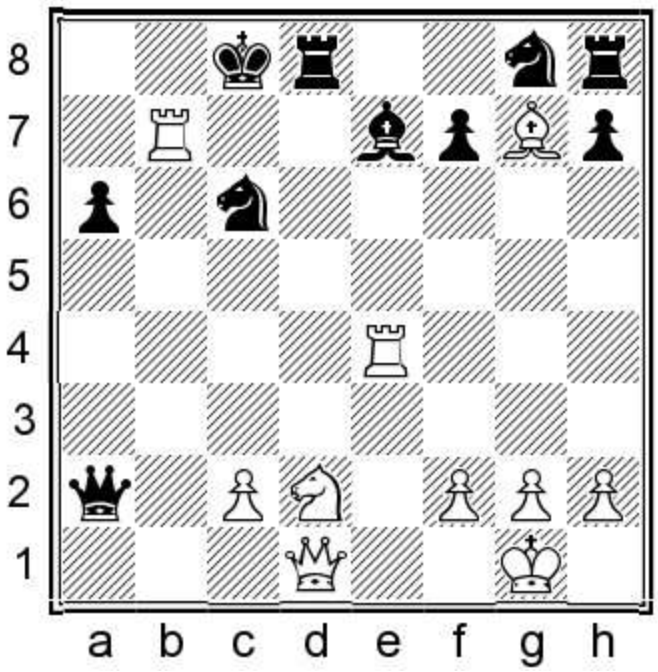
18.Bxg7 won simply, and would have been similar to what later happened in the game.

18...Qa2?
This loses without a fight.

Instead Black could play: 18...Qa5!! Probably both sides rejected this due to 19.Nc4? missing 19...Rd8!! turning the tables. The position is rather unclear after for example: 19.Bxg7 0-0-0 Yes, this is legal. 20.Rb1 Rxd2 21.Qf3 Qd5 With chances for both sides.

19.Bxg7 0-0-0

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20.Rb3 Bf6 21.Qg4† Kc7 22.Qf4† Kc8 23.Bxf6 Nxf6 24.Qxf6 Qxc2
Material is level; the bad news for Black is everything else.

25.Qf5†
1–0

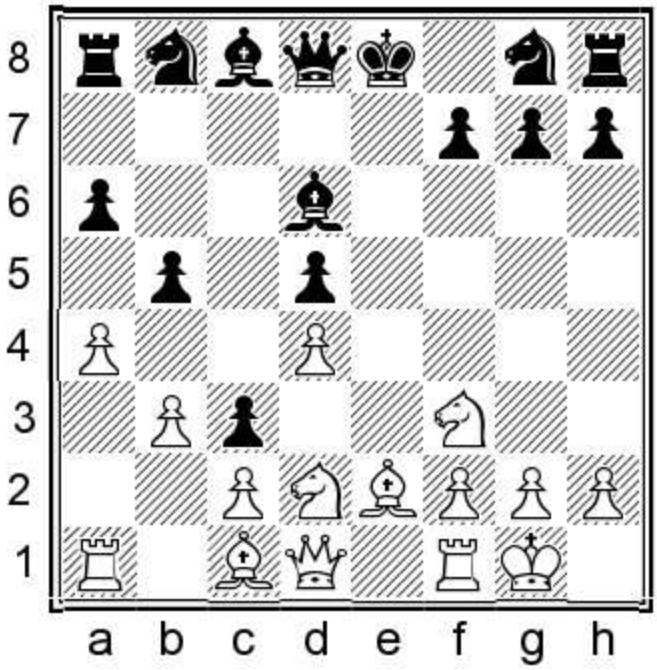
B2322) 9...c3

GAME 13

Josep Guevara Pijoan – Walter Baumann
Correspondence 2011

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 a6 4.Ngf3 c5 5.exd5 exd5 6.Be2 c4 7.0-0 Bd6 8.b3 b5 9.a4 c3
After Geller's demolition of Dreev, this was recommended as an improvement in several places. But the spirit of the position has not changed. White uses brute force to challenge his opponent's disregard for the classical principles of development.

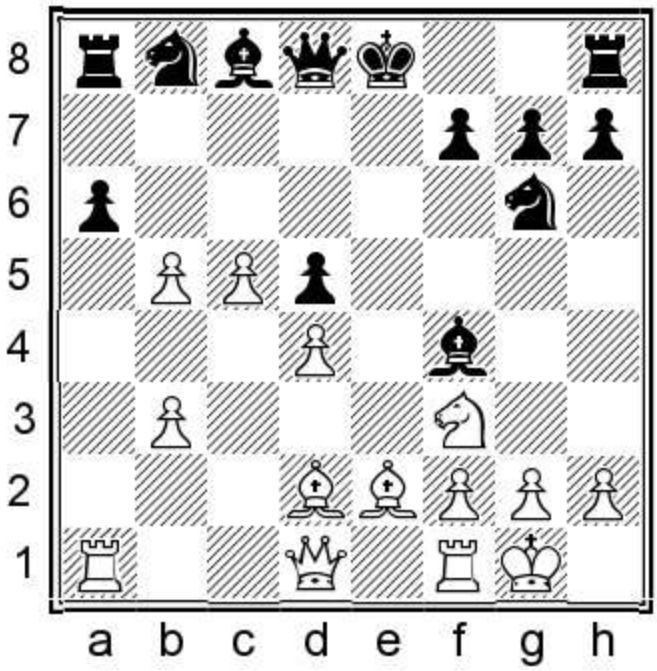
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10.axb5!
Once you know the Geller game, this piece sacrifice is not too difficult. The only negative thing I can say about it is that it does not quite win by force.

10...cxd2 11.Bxd2 Nf6
By far the most common of a range of options.

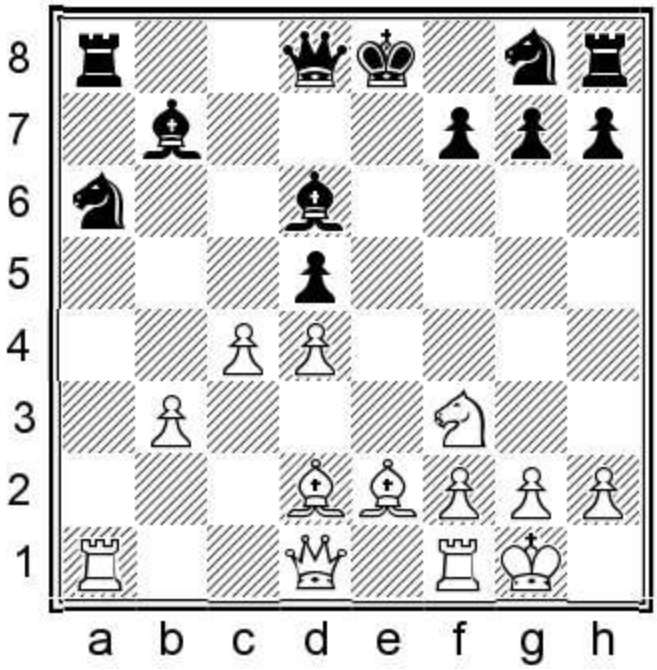
11...Ne7 12.c4 Ng6 13.c5 Bf4 was played in a game between two of my compatriots: Mannion – Buchanan, Scotland 1988.



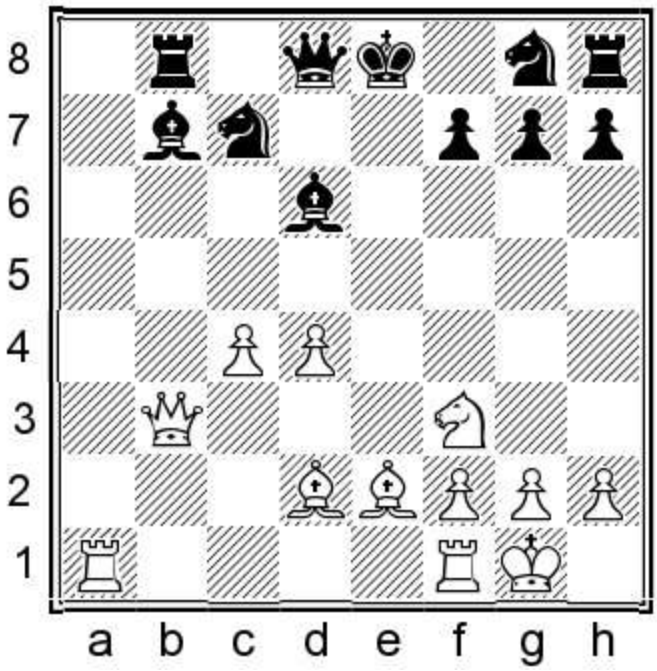
White has several paths to a great advantage: 14.b4N 14...0-0 15.Bc3!?± or 14.Bxf4!?N 14...Nxf4 15.Qd2 Nxe2† 16.Qxe2† Qe7 17.Qc2 0-0 18.c6± are just two examples.

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11...Bb7
This is a serious alternative. White should play:
12.bxa6 Nxa6 13.c4

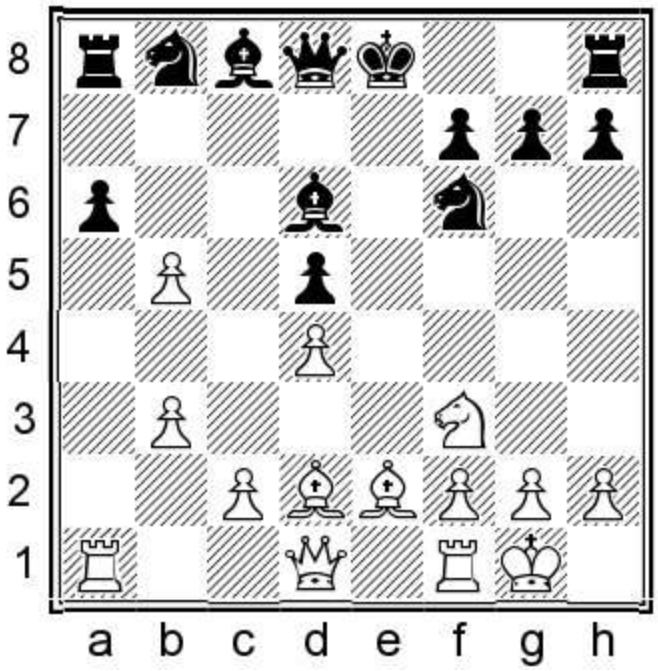


When I have looked at a number of possibilities:
13...dxc4
13...Ne7 14.c5 Bb8 15.Bb5† Kf8 16.Re1± is great for White as seen in some random computer game.
13...Nf6 14.c5 Be7 might needs a bit of refinement over a Rybka – Komodo game from a few years back. After looking a bit, I have come up with: 15.Ba5!N 15...Nc7 16.Bb5† Kf8 17.Bd3 g6 18.b4±
14.bxc4 Nc7 15.Qb3 Rb8



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16.c5!N
16.Rfb1?! Ne6 17.c5?? was awful and after 17...Bc6!³ White was fortunate that his opponent offered him a draw in Schoenthier – Heil, Germany 1984.
16...Bc6
16...Be7 17.Ne5 Bd5 18.Qa4† is crunching.
17.Qc2 Be7 18.Ne5
White wins.

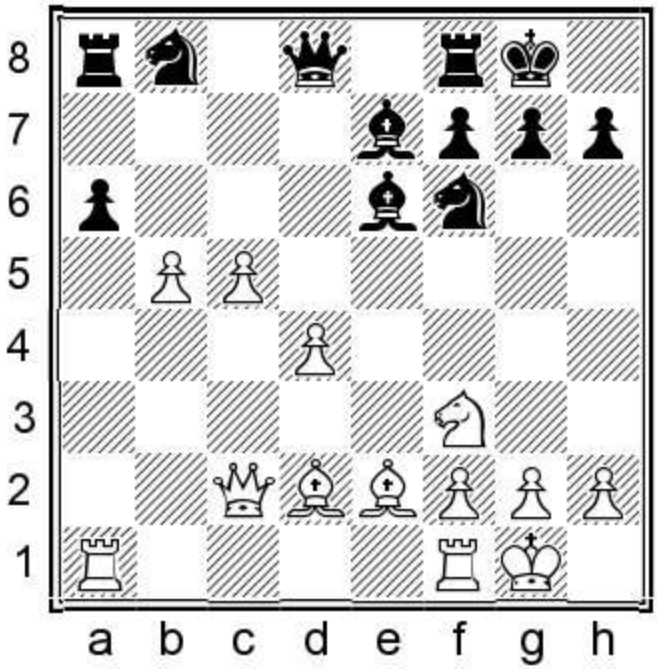


12.c4 0-0
Once again Black has various options, but nothing that changes the flow.

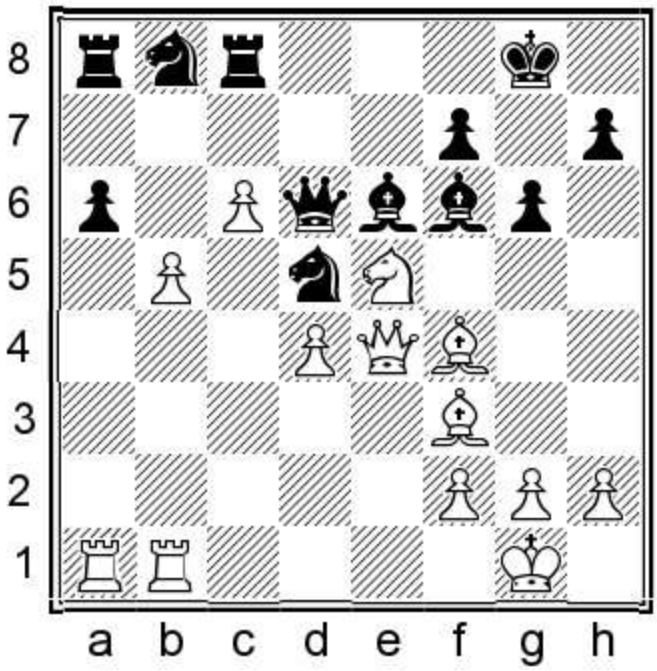
12...Nbd7? 13.c5 was immediately winning in Warwaszynski – Steudtmann, Rostock 1986, as if the bishop retreats then a6 drops.

12...dxc4
Predrag Nikolic has played this twice, with a win and a draw. It has the point that a later c4-c5 might offer Black control of the d5-square. For all that, White is much better if he plays accurately.
13.bxc4 0-0 14.c5 Be7 15.Qc2!
15.Re1 Be6 was less convincing in Kr. Georgiev – Nikolic, Elenite 1993.
15...Be6

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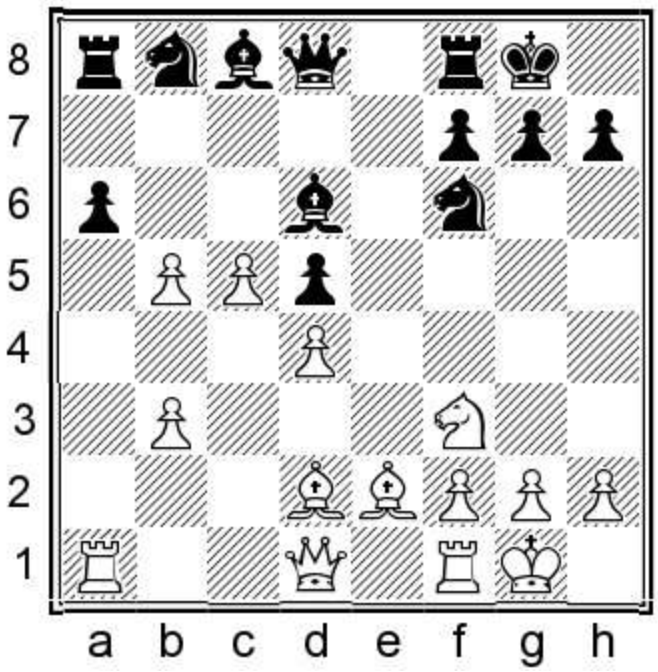
Solak – Nikolic, Palic 2014. At this point I like:
16.c6!N
16.Rfc1 Nbd7 was the game, when the knight had escaped from b8.
16...Qd6
Or 16...Bd6 17.Rfc1± when the b8-knight is frozen.
The following line shows how to build the pressure until Black's defence cracks.
17.Rfb1 Nd5 18.Ne5 Rc8 19.Qe4 g6 20.Bf3 Bf6 21.Bf4
With an overwhelming advantage. The main point is to be found in this fine variation:



21...Nc3?! 22.Nxf7!! Qe7 23.Qe3 Nxb1 24.Nd6 Nxc6 25.bxc6 Rcb8 26.Nb7
And White wins.

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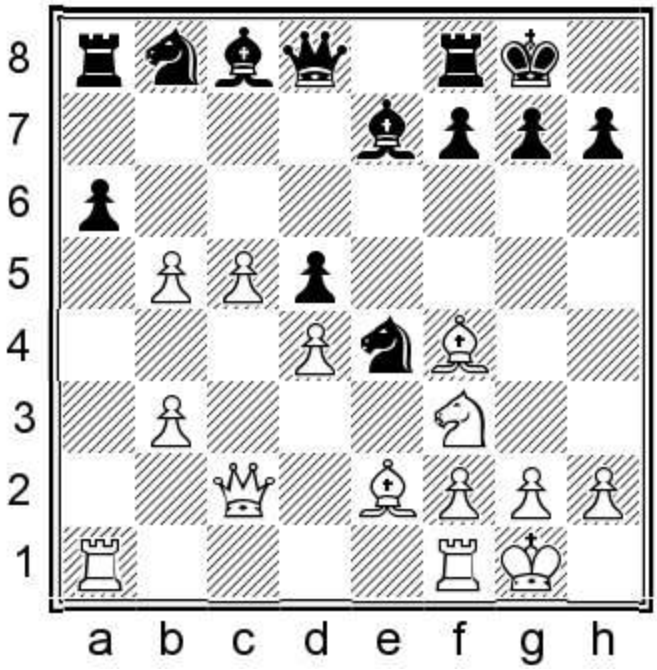
13.c5



13...Be7?!
Black's position is also poor after 13...Bc7 as played in some games, but it still should be tried. The main line should probably be: 14.Qc2!N (Instead 14.b6 Bxb6 15.cxb6 Qxb6 has been played a couple of times, but it cashes in needlessly quickly. In the line I suggest, we see a similar line except with added c-file domination.) 14...Bg4 15.h3 Bh5 16.b6 Bxb6 17.cxb6 Qxb6 18.Rfc1± Black has many problems, but less than in the game somehow...

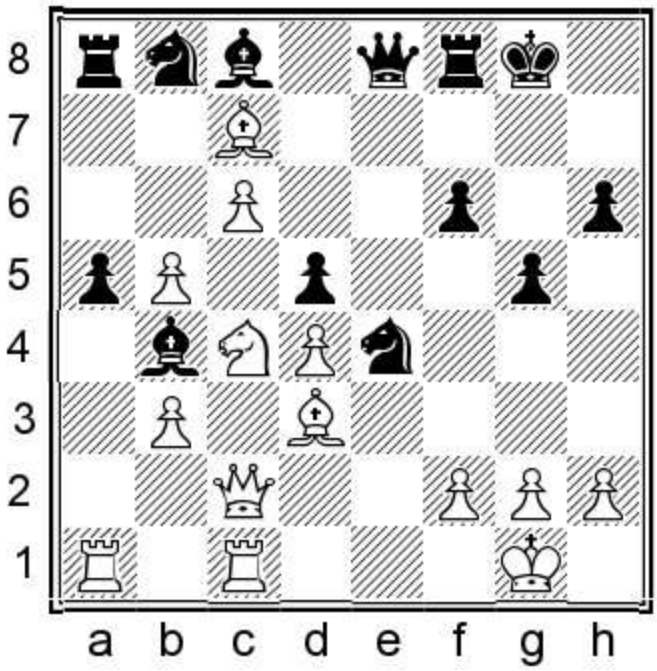
14.Qc2 Ne4 15.Bf4±
The opening is over and it has been a disaster for Black. His position is both objectively bad and difficult to play. White may only have two pawns for the sacrificed piece but those pawns are magnificent.

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15...Qe8
In another correspondence game Black tried: 15...g5 16.Be3 Kg7, but this does not make his position any more tenable. 17.Bd3 Be6 18.b4 and White was already winning in Kappes – Tanis, corr. 2008.

16.c6 h6 17.Bd3 Bb4 18.Rfc1 g5 19.Bc7 a5 20.Ne5 f6 21.Nc4
White is completely winning. Black now gives up a lot of material and the game goes into a technical phase. Black's only hope is that White blunders, which is not so likely in a correspondence game.



21...Nxc6 22.bxc6 Qxc6 23.Nb6 Qxc2 24.Rxc2 Be6 25.Nxa8 Rxa8
White is an exchange up; we can move swiftly through the rest of the game.

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26.f3 Nd2 27.Ra4 Nxb3 28.Rb2 Rc8 29.Bxa5 Bxa5 30.Rxb3 Bc3 31.Kf1 Rc7 32.Rb6 Bf7 33.Rxf6 Kg7 34.

Raa6 Bxd4 35.Rxh6 Rc3 36.Rh7† Kf8 37.Ra8† Ke7 38.Bg6
1–0

Conclusion

3...a6 should be met by 4.Ngf3, when the game will go in one of two radically different directions according to Black's next move.

First, we considered the blocked central structure after 4...Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7, when 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6 8.0-0 is our continuation. Although the position is complicated, with many possible lines, the fact that Black has spent a tempo on the non-essential ...a6 certainly boosts White's chances. This becomes especially clear when you compare the 3...Be7 variation, as analysed in Chapter 4. The idea of meeting 8...g5!? with 9.Nb3!! is a fine example of a dangerous attacking continuation, which is only possible because Black has wasted time on the queenside.

We then moved on to the more popular
4...c5, when 5.exd5 is our reply. Then 5...Qxd5 is unusual, but White has no more than a modest advantage against it. The great majority of games have continued with 5...exd5, when 6.Be2 leaves Black facing an important choice. I think his best bet is to head for a safe, albeit slightly worse, position defending an isolated pawn after either 6...cxd4 or 6...Nf6. If he gets too ambitious with 6...c4?!, he falls a long way behind in development. This may offer White possibilities to sacrifice a piece for a venomous attack against Black's uncastled king, as Games 12 and 13 so vividly demonstrated.

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Chapter 4 - 3...Be7

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Be7

4.Ngf3 Nf6 (4...dxe4; 4...c5) 5.e5 Nfd7 (5...Ne4) 6.Bd3 c5 (6...b6) 7.c3 92

7...b6 Game 14 93

The Main Line 7...Nc6 8.0-0 (8...a6!?; 8...c4?!) 97
A) 8...0-0 99
B) 8...cxd4 101
C) 8...Qb6 103
D) 8...a5 9.a4! (9.Re1!?) 106
D1) 9...0-0 107
D2) 9...Qb6!? 108
D3) 9...cxd4 Game 15 110
E) 8...g5 (8...h5 9.Re1 g5) 9.dxc5! 115
E1) 9...Ndxe5 (9...Ncxe5) 117
E2) 9...Nxc5 120
E3) 9...g4 10.Nd4 123
E31) 10...Ndxe5 123
E32) 10...Ncxe5!? Game 16 127

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Be7

This move has been known for a long time but it did not become popular until around the turn of the millennium, after Morozevich used it successfully against some of the top players in the world. It remains an important option and has been recommended in Black repertoire books by several notable authors, including McDonald, Antic & Maksimovic, Vitiugov and Williams.

4.Ngf3

4.Bd3 is a logical alternative, when 4...c5 5.dxc5 Nf6 is a major theoretical battleground.

4.e5 c5 5.c3 Nc6 6.Bd3 has become more popular in recent years and is a realistic try for an opening edge. Still, I prefer to follow our guidelines, as I like White's chances in the variations that follow.

4...Nf6

This is almost always played; I see no point in delving deeply into alternatives.

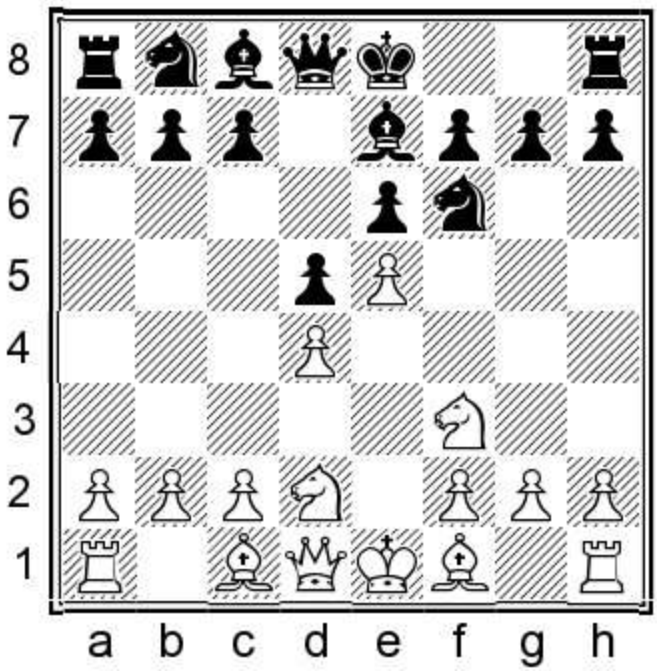
It is worth mentioning in passing that 4...dxe4 5.Nxe4 leads to the Rubinstein System of Chapter 10.

Likewise, 4...c5 will transpose to the 3...c5 lines: 5.exd5 exd5 (5...Qxd5 leads to a weird version of the 4...Qxd5 variation where Black has played ...Be7 too soon) 6.Bb5† Bd7 7.Bxd7† Nxd7 8.0-0 Ngf6 and we have reached one of the main lines of Chapter 7.

5.e5

5.Bd3 is another good move order; almost everyone continues 5...c5, when 6.e5 Nfd7 reaches our target position, having avoided Black's (admittedly minor) option given in the note below. You should be aware that 5...dxe4 6.Nxe4 transposes to a line of the Rubinstein which lies outside our repertoire.

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5...Nfd7
5...Ne4 is not ridiculous; compared with the somewhat dubious 3...Nf6 4.e5 Ne4 line, White is discouraged from exchanging on e4 because of the knight on f3. However, White gets an easy edge with simple development: 6.Bd3 Nxd2 7.Bxd2 c5 8.dxc5 (8.c3 is a good alternative but it seems logical to force Black's bishop to move again) 8...Bxc5 9.0-0 Nc6 10.Qe2²

6.Bd3 c5
Black can hardly do without this move. 6...b6 7.0-0 Ba6 has occasionally been played, but it just gives White an extra option: 8.Bxa6!? (8.Ne1 is perfectly fine; Black hardly has anything better than 8...c5, when 9.c3 transposes to Game 14 below) 8...Nxa6 9.Qe2 Followed by c2-c4, with a pleasant position.

7.c3
This is our main tabiya for the chapter. As you can see, White is playing the so-called Universal System (i.e. with knights on d2 and f3, rather than e2 and f3 as in Chapters 5 and 6), but with Black having committed to an early ...Be7. This isn't such a bad move, but I'm happy with the trade-off. Black has two main options from here:

7...b6 is a significant sideline which will be covered in Game 14.
7...Nc6 is the main line, when 8.0-0 leads to a whole host of options, as detailed on page 98.

GAME 14

Michael Adams – Damian Lemos
Gibraltar 2010

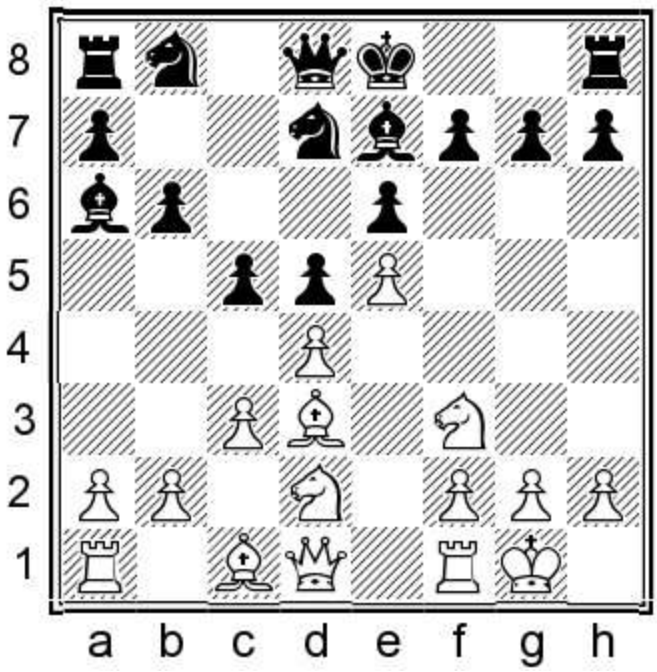
Mickey Adams has won several excellent games on White's side of this variation, and a number of them will be featured in this chapter.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Be7 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 b6
This move was approved by Psakhis and tested by numerous strong players over the years.

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8.0-0
8.Qe2 a5 9.a4 is the other main line, which Adams played several times before switching to the text move.

8...Ba6

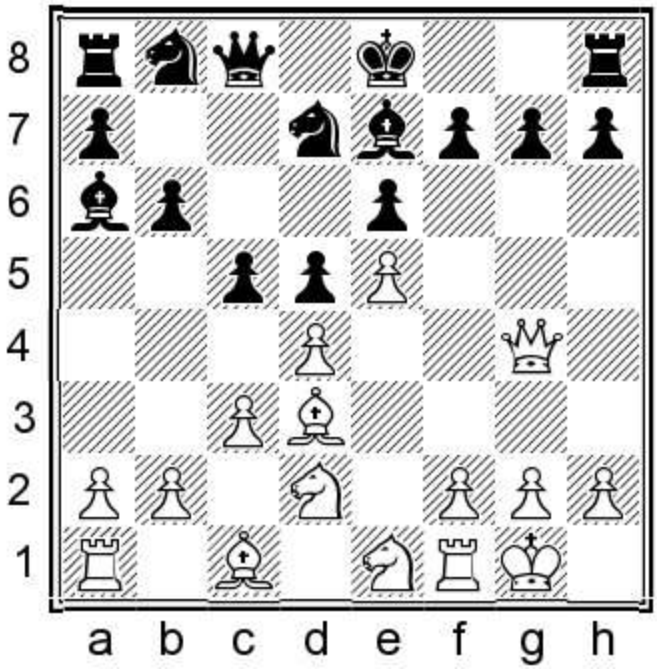


9.Ne1!
White's idea is simple: he allows the exchange of light-squared bishops in a way that improves his own knight, while also making way for the queen to go to g4, where it will provoke a concession on the kingside.
9...Bxd3
This has been the most popular choice so far. The reason for it is obvious: Black wants to develop his knight to c6. The drawback is that he helps to activate our knight in the process. Here are a couple of other options:

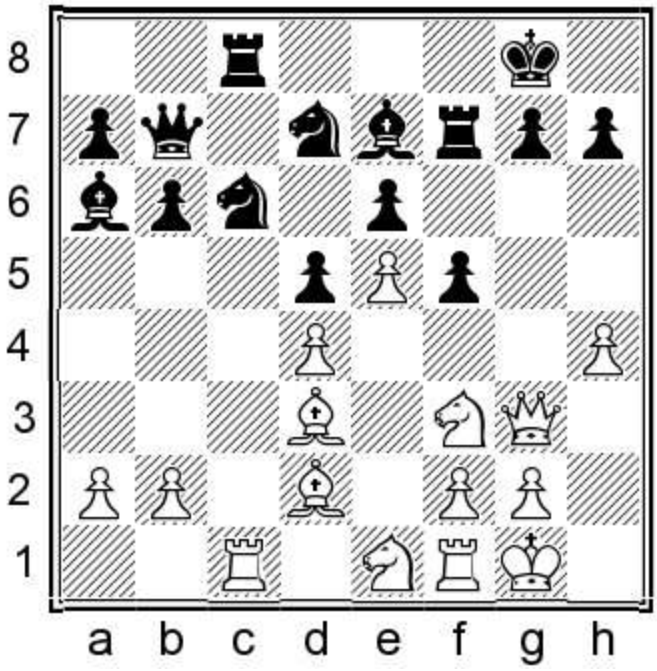
9...h5 prevents Qg4 but wastes time and weakens the g5-square. 10.Ndf3 Qc8 11.Bg5 Nc6 12.Nc2 c4 13.Be2 f6 14.exf6 gxf6 15.Bh4 Qc7 16.b3!, Black was under pressure in Yudin – Poghosyan, St Petersburg 2010.

9...Qc8
This move is more flexible, and possibly a better try for Black than the game continuation. I still like White's chances though.
10.Qg4

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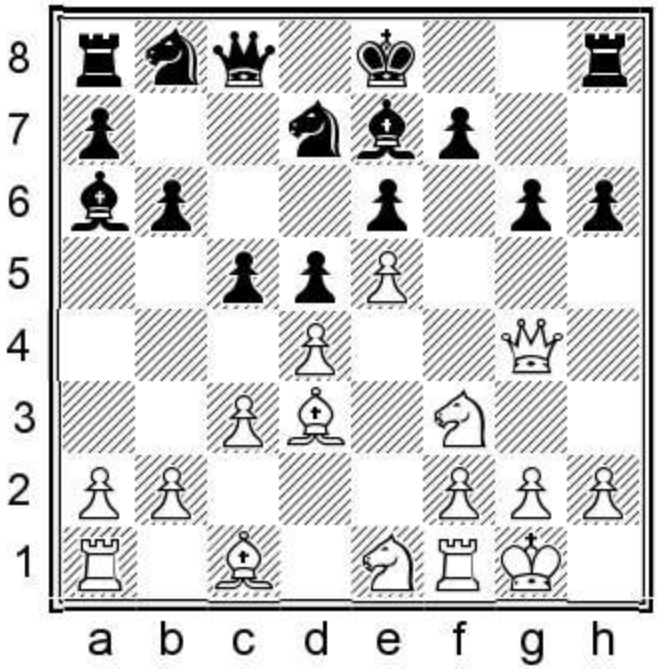


10...g6
10...0-0 gives White a clear target. 11.Ndf3 f5 12.Qg3 (12.exf6 Nxf6 13.Qh3 Ne4 occurred in Degraeve – Bricard, Belfort 2010, when 14.Be3N would have given White a modest edge. The text move is much more ambitious.) 12...Nc6 13.h4 cxd4 14.cxd4 Rf7 15.Bd2 Qb7 16.Rc1 Rc8 In Kalezic – Drasko, Subotica 2000, White took time out for the prophylactic a2-a3 and went on to win, but it would have been better to focus on the kingside:

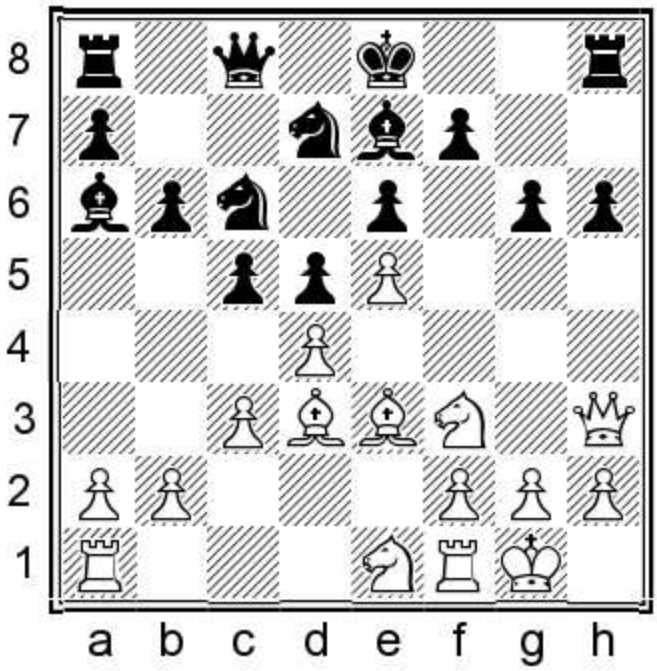


17.h5!N 17...Nd8 18.Bxa6 Qxa6 19.Rxc8 Qxc8 20.h6 g6 21.Nd3 Black is under unpleasant pressure.
11.Ndf3 h6!
After 11...Nc6?! 12.Bh6 Qb7 13.Qf4± White had complete control in Gorovykh – Poghosyan, St Petersburg 2009.
chesstouring.com
The text move covers some of the kingside weaknesses and leads to what may be the most critical position for

the future of the 7...b6 variation.



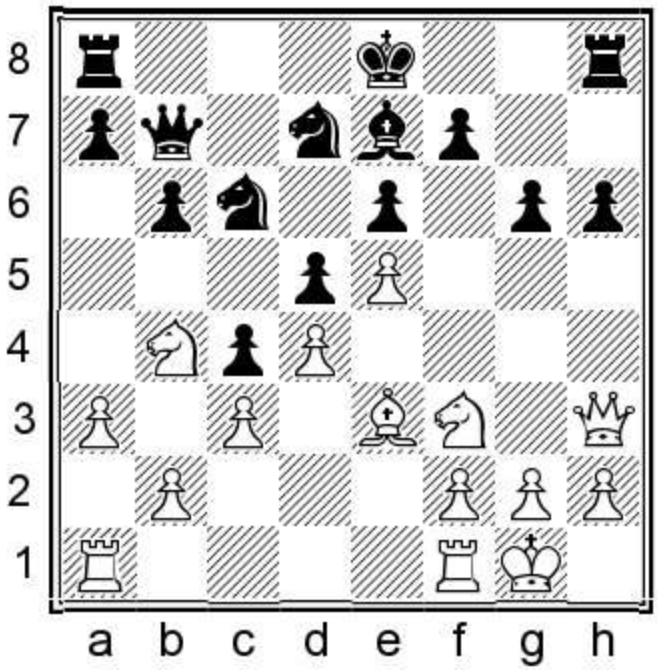
12.Qh3!?N
Here is a game fragment featuring logical play on both sides: 12.h4 Nc6 13.Be3 (13.h5 g5 is similar) 13...Qb7 14.h5 (14.a3!?N is suggested by the computer, but 14...Bxd3 15.Nxd3 c4 16.Nb4 h5 seems pretty solid for Black) 14...g5 15.Nh2 0-0-0 16.Qe2 Bxd3 17.Nxd3 c4 18.Ne1 f5„ Kryvoruchko – Vovk, Kiev 2011.
12...Nc6 13.Be3
Compared with the above game, having the queen on h3 may appear less aggressive than h2-h4, but it actually has a few advantages. The pin on the h6-pawn enables White to put a piece on g5, and White generally has more flexibility on the kingside.



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13...Qb7

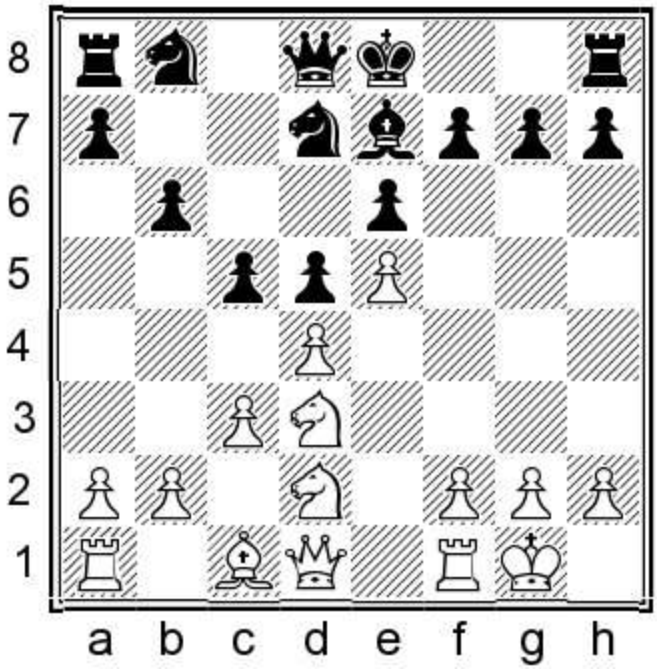
13...Bxd3 14.Nxd3 Qa6 15.Rfd1 c4 16.Nf4 is also promising for White, who can consider Nxe6 sacrifices in some lines, although I would suggest keeping this idea in reserve until an especially favourable moment presents itself. White can also prepare a timely b2-b3 to open the queenside, so king safety is also a concern for Black.
14.a3 Bxd3 15.Nxd3 c4 16.Nb4
16.Nf4 could also be considered; 16...Na5 17.Nd2 b5 looks like a logical response.
The text move reaches something similar to the 14.a3 line given in the comments to Kryvoruchko – Vovk above. The difference isn't huge, but it's enough to make life tricky for Black. For example:



16...Nxb4
This is one of the computer's top choices.
16...Ndb8 is an idea from the analogous line referred to above, but 17.Bg5! is a good answer, intending to trade bishops and target the weak dark squares.
16...0-0-0 is well met by 17.Nxc6 Qxc6 18.a4! and White will prepare b2-b3, as Black's knight will be too slow in reaching a5.
17.axb4 a5 18.bxa5 Rxa5 19.Qg3!?
Black has succeeded in trading some pieces but he still faces a challenge to get the h8-rook into play.

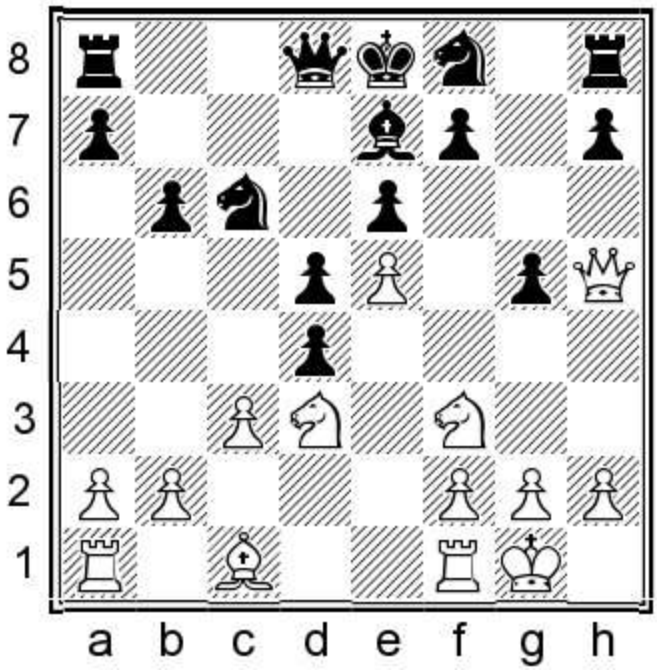
10.Nxd3

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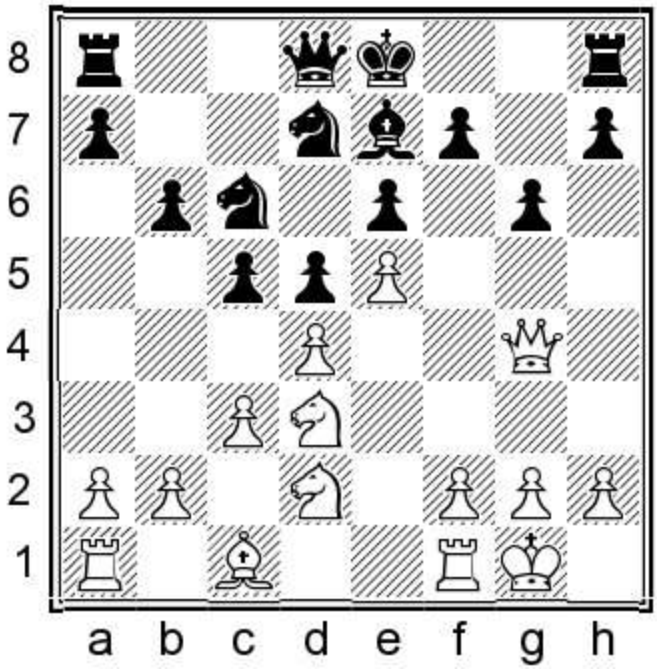
10...Nc6
10...c4?! gives White an easy game after 11.Nf4² intending Qg4.

11.Qg4 g6
11...g5?! is dubious as long as White reacts correctly: 12.Qh5! (12.f4?! looks tempting but 12...cxd4 13.f5?! Ndxe5 14.Nxe5 Nxe5 15.Qe2 dxc3! turned out well for Black in Asis Gargatagli – Larino Nieto, Montcada 2010) 12...cxd4 13.Nf3! Nf8



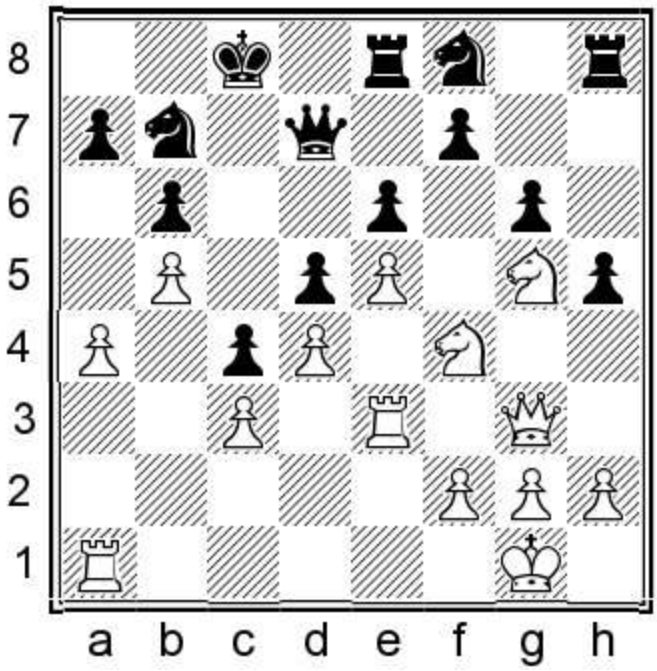
This was Tokhirjanova – Aitbayev, Tashkent 2011, and now 14.Bxg5N 14...dxc3 15.Rac1!± would have given White a serious advantage.

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12.Nf3 h5
Otherwise Bh6 would give White a powerful clamp on the kingside.

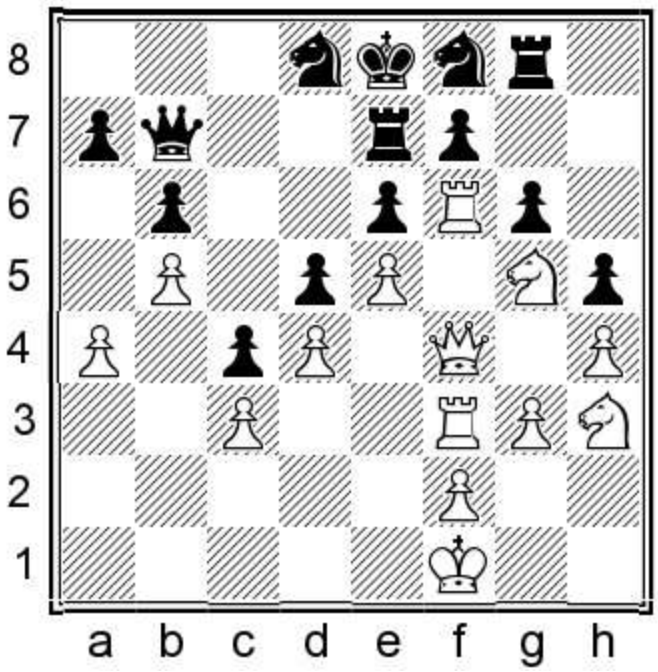
13.Qg3 c4
A couple of years after our main game, Adams had another opportunity to use his expertise in such positions:
13...Qc7 14.Bg5 0-0-0 15.b4 c4
Adams does not mind blocking the queenside as he is in control on the other wing.
16.Nf4 Rde8 17.b5 Nd8 18.Bxe7 Rxe7 19.Rfe1 Ree8 20.Ng5 Nf8 21.Re3 Qd7 22.a4 Nb7



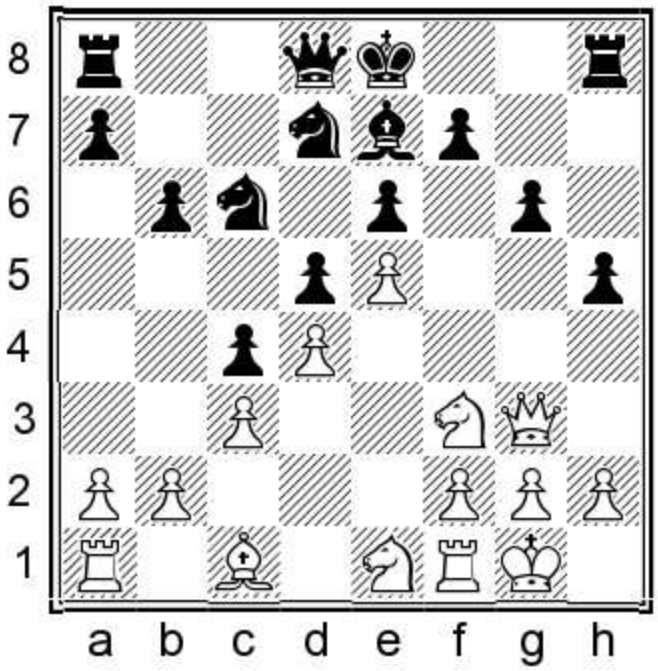
23.Rf3
Adams steadily improves his pieces and Paehtz is unable to stop him.
23...Re7 24.h4 Na5 25.Nfh3 Kd8 26.Rf6 Ke8 27.Qf4 Nb7 28.Re1 Nd8 29.Re3 Qc7 30.Rf3 Rg8 31.Kf1

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Perhaps Adams was short of time, but his position is so dominant that he has the luxury of shuffling back and forth over the next ten moves, as Black can do absolutely nothing.
31...Qd7 32.Kg1 Qc7 33.Kf1 Qd7 34.g3 Qb7 35.Kg2 Qc7 36.Kh2 Qb7 37.Qc1 Qc7 38.Kg1 Qb7 39.Qf4 Qc7 40.Kf1 Qb7



41.g4!
Having reached the time control, White takes action and Black's position soon collapses.
41...hxg4 42.Qxg4 Rh8 43.Nf4 Nd7 44.Nxf7 Rxf7 45.Rxf7 Nxe5 46.dxe5 Qxf7 47.Nxd5
1–0 Adams – Paehtz, England 2012.
14.Nde1

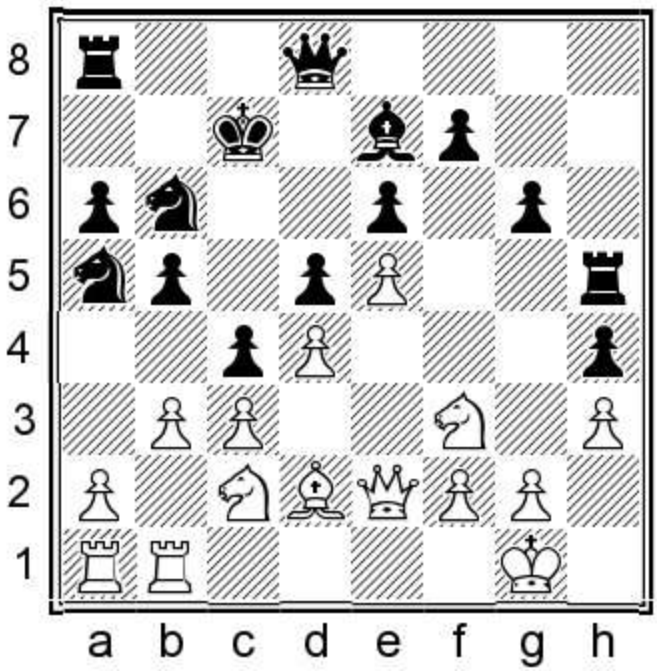


14...h4 15.Qg4 Rh5 16.h3 b5 17.Nc2 Nb6 18.Qf4 Rf5 19.Qe3 Rh5 20.Qf4 Rf5 21.Qe3 Rh5 22.b3

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White is not threatening to open the queenside straight away, but he creates a bit of tension there to keep Black occupied.

22...a6 23.Bd2 Kd7 24.Qe2 Na5 25.Rfb1 Kc7

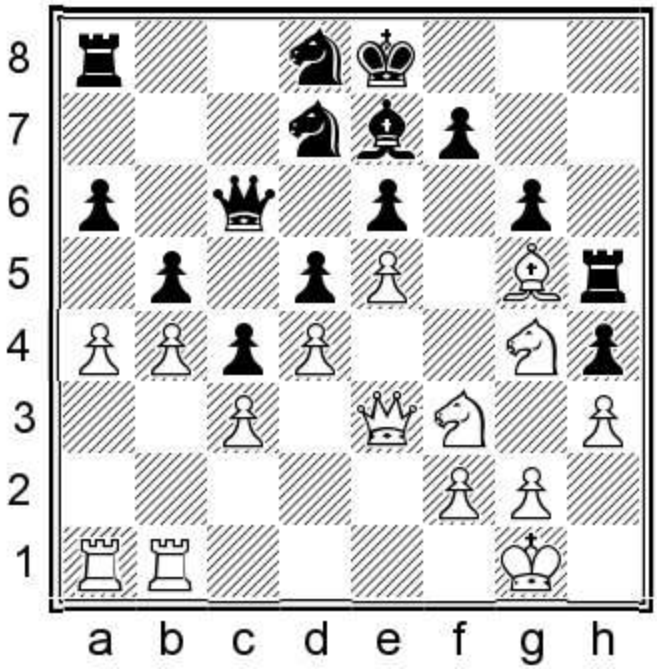


26.Ne3
Black is ready for action on the queenside, so Adams starts shifting pieces back towards the kingside.

26...Qd7 27.Bc1 Qc6 28.Ng4 Nd7 29.Bf4 Kd8 30.Qe3 Ke8 31.b4
Now that White is well placed to infiltrate on the kingside, he decides to close the queenside.

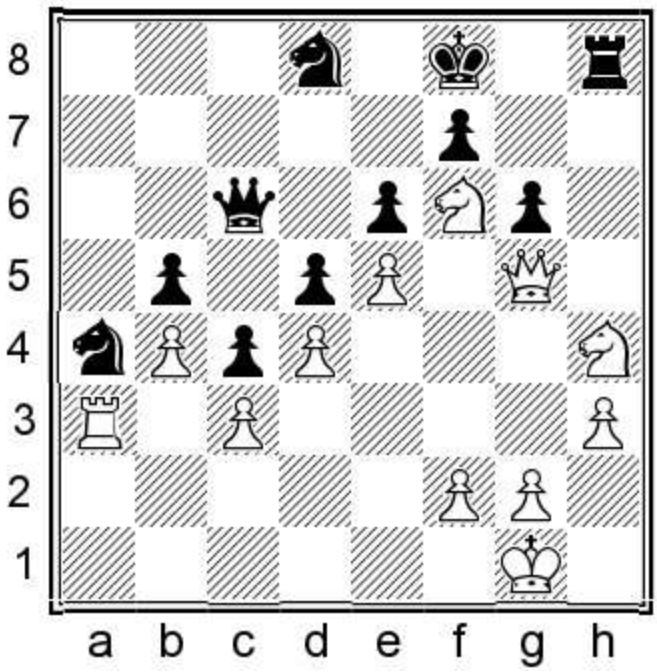
31...Nb7 32.a4 Nd8 33.Bg5
White is completely dominating and the defences soon crumble.

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33...Nb6 34.axb5 axb5 35.Bxe7 Kxe7 36.Nf6 Rh8 37.Qg5 Kf8 38.Nxh4
Having advanced to h4 on move 14, the pawn finally falls.

38...Rxa1 39.Rxa1 Na4 40.Ra3



40...Qc7 41.Nf3 Nc6 42.h4 Ne7 43.h5 gxh5 44.Nxh5 Nf5 45.Nf6 Ng7 46.g3 Qe7 47.Kg2
Black is a pawn down and is virtually paralysed, so he resigned. Both the main game and Adams – Paehtz (mentioned in the note to move 13) are superb technical games. In each game, White had the relatively small advantages of extra space and a couple of weak squares (f6 and g5) in the black position. The way Adams exploited those advantages has great instructive value, not only for the variation in question but for dealing with the French Defence in general. When it comes to the theory of the 7...b6 line, it seems to me that 9...Qc8 is Black's best bet, but I still think White has the easier game after my suggested improvement on move 12.

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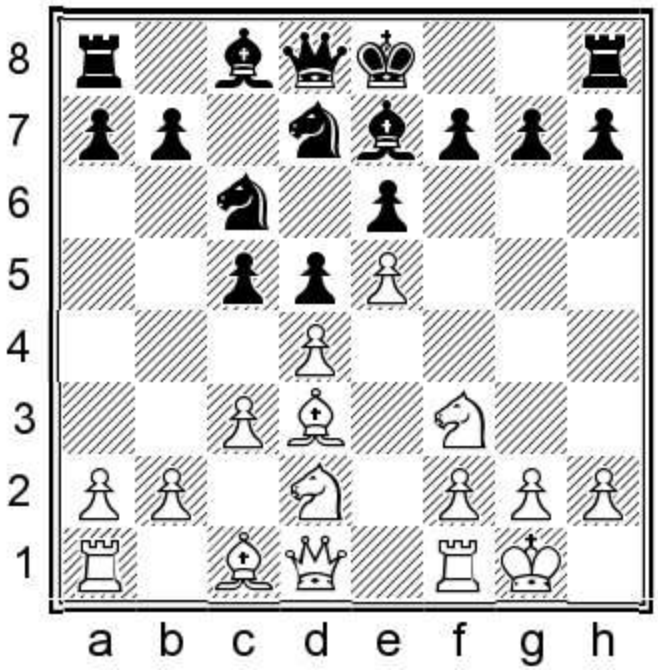
1–0

The Main Line

Most of the time Black develops his knight to c6 (instead of aiming for ...Ba6 as in the above game), as follows:

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Be7 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6
This position can also arise via the move order 3...Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 (or 5.Ngf3 immediately) 5...c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ngf3 (rather than 7.Ne2, as I recommend in Chapters 5 and 6) 7...Be7.

8.0-0



This is a major tabiya, with several options for Black. Before we investigate them, it's worth noting a few general points about the Universal System, and about Black's set-up with the bishop on e7. The main drawback of having the knights on f3 and d2 (as opposed to f3 and e2, as in Chapters 5 and 6) is that the d4-pawn is less securely defended. If Black plays ...Qb6 at any moment, White will either have to sacrifice the d4-pawn or resort to dxc5 to relieve the tension. Generally we will go for the latter option, aiming for fluid piece play. If Black starts with ...cxd4 and follows up with ...Qb6, we will defend the central pawn with Nb3, since ...c5-c4 will not be possible. In all these lines, the fact that Black has already played the slow move ...Be7 tends to help White. The bishop on e7 does have some advantages though, the main one being that it prepares active counterplay with ...g5!?. It is important for White to watch out for this move, especially in reply to Re1, as in that case the f3-knight has no safe squares and so Black will already be threatening to trap it with ...g4.

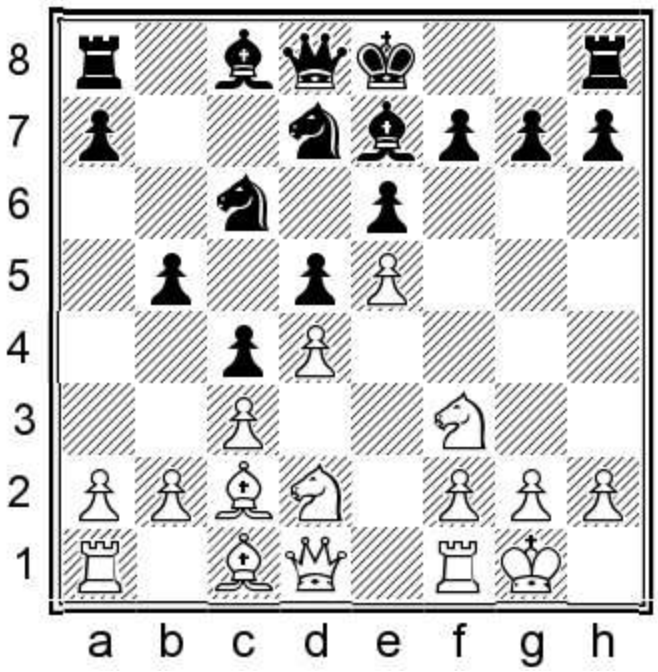
Black's main options are A) 8...0-0, B) 8...cxd4, C) 8...Qb6, D) 8...a5 and E) 8...g5. Before analysing them, let's check a few less common alternatives:

8...h5!? is closely related to 8...g5, so I have included it on page 116 in a note to variation E.

8...a6!? looks strange but was recommended by John Watson in Dangerous Weapons: The French. I have analysed this position via the 3...a6 move order in the previous chapter; see variation A2 on page 66.

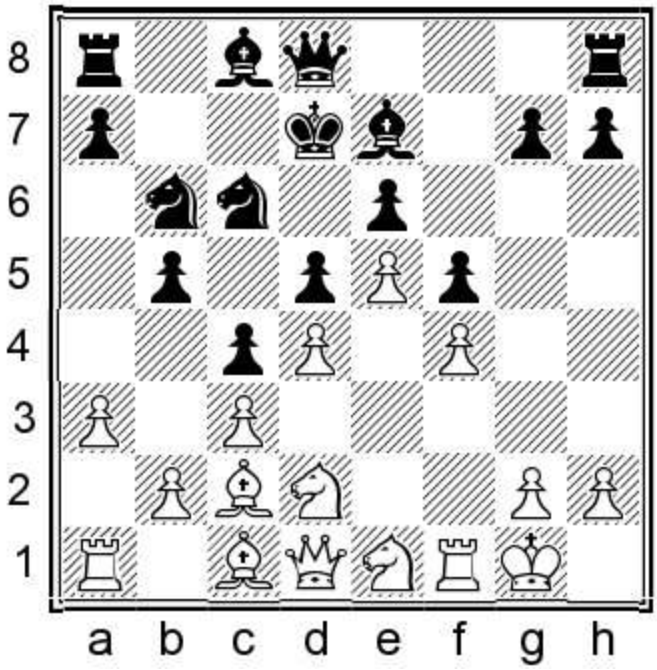
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White should be happy to see:
8...c4?! 9.Bc2 b5

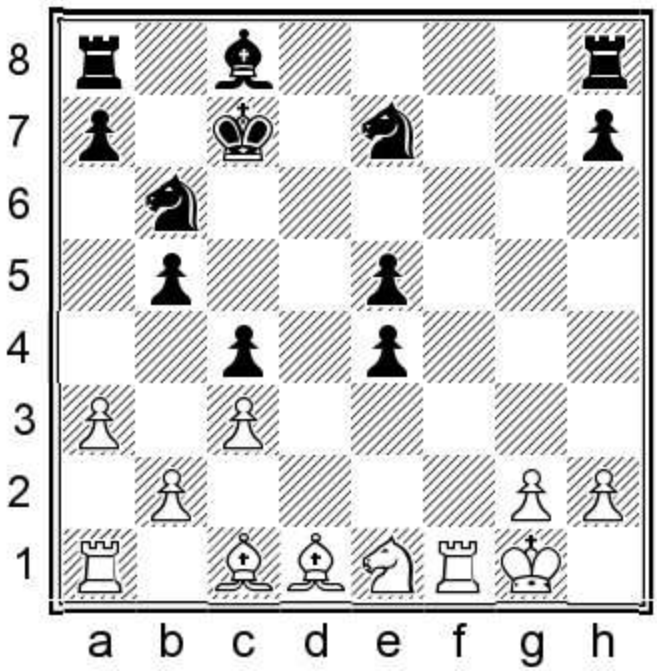


Black's plan would probably have seemed okay to Petrosian or Botvinnik as they were adept at outplaying their opponents in such blocked positions. However, today we know that it is strategically dubious for Black to take away the tension in the centre so early in the game, when White has the space advantage and no clear weaknesses.
10.a3 Nb6 11.Ne1!
Making way for the f-pawn.
11...Kd7
This is a typical device in such positions. It would obviously be risky to castle into the path of the coming pawn advance.
12.f4 f5
Black tries to take some space but is soon confronted with enormous difficulties.

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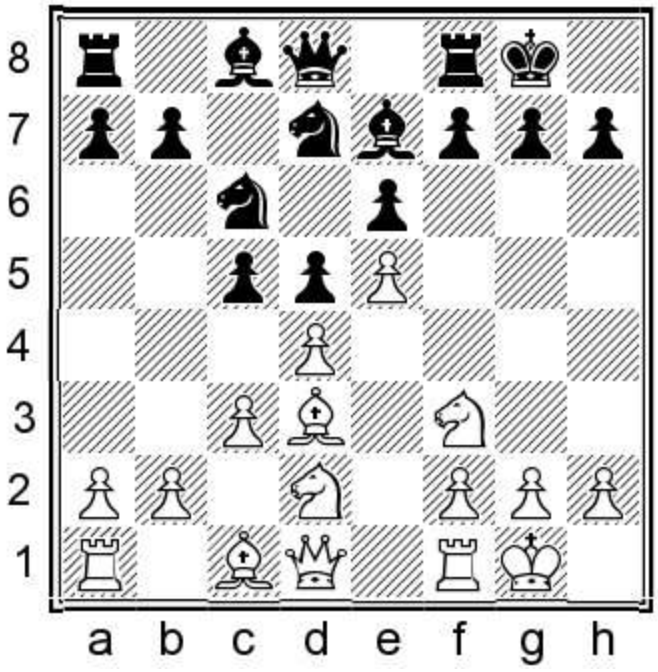
13.exf6 gxf6 14.f5 e5 15.dxe5 fxe5 16.Ne4!
The game opens up in White's favour.
16...Kc7 17.f6 dxe4 18.fxe7 Qxd1 19.Bxd1 Nxe7
So far White has done everything right, but here a simple improvement is:



20.a4!N
20.Bc2 Bf5 21.Bg5 is not bad, but Black was able to withstand the pressure and eventually draw in Bok – Seirawan, Netherlands 2011. The text move takes advantage of the fact that Black's rooks are not yet connected. The continuation might be:
20...a6 21.axb5 axb5 22.Rxa8 Nxa8 23.Bc2
White is clearly better, as now 23...Bf5? loses material after 24.Bg5.

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A) 8...0-0



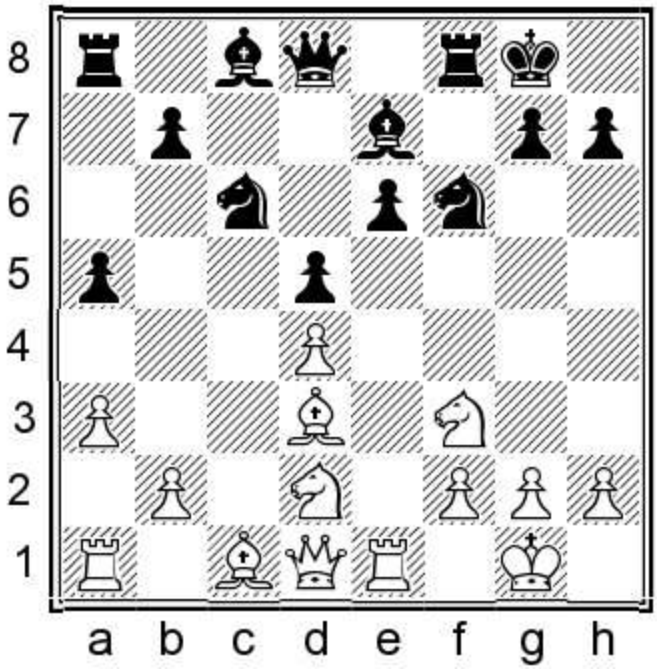
This move is playable but it gives White plenty of freedom to develop his pieces on good squares, unlike the main lines which pose more immediate problems.

9.Re1
9.Qe2 is a good alternative.

9...cxd4
9...Qb6 gives White a pleasant choice: 10.dxc5 is a simple solution, which can be played in the same manner as variation C; alternatively, 10.Nf1 is a convenient way of providing indirect defence to the d4-pawn.

9...f6 10.exf6 Nxf6
10...Bxf6 11.Rxe6 cxd4 12.cxd4 transposes to 11...Bxf6?! 12.Rxe6 in the notes to the main line below.
11.a3
This would be my choice, although 11.Nf1 is also sensible.
11...cxd4 12.cxd4 a5
White has a typical slight plus, and I think the best continuation is:

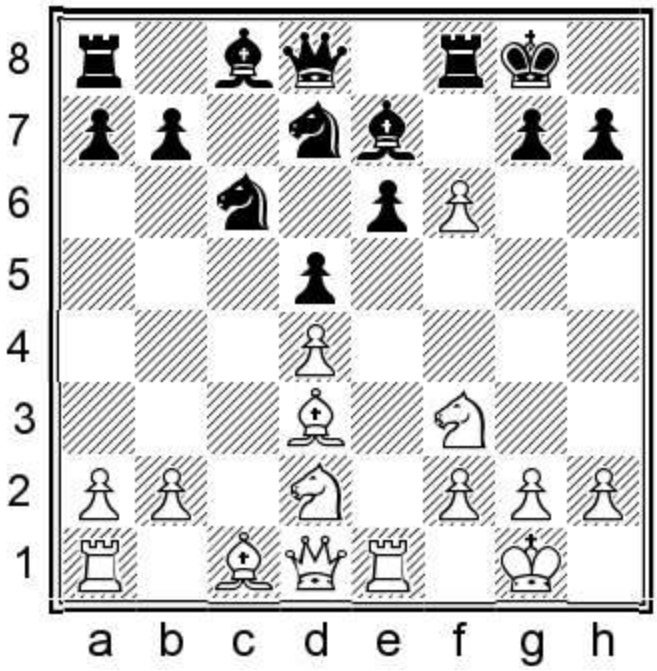
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13.Nf1N²
It is worth mentioning that the seemingly tempting 13.Nb1?! runs into 13...Ng4! 14.h3 Nxf2 15.Kxf2 Bh4† and Black's attack soon led to a perpetual in Krueger – Dutra Neto, corr. 2006.

10.cxd4 f6
This seems most consistent with Black's previous few moves. Other moves have clear drawbacks; for instance, it is rather late for 10...Qb6, as White can conveniently defend the d4-pawn with 11.Nf1, a move he would like to play anyway.

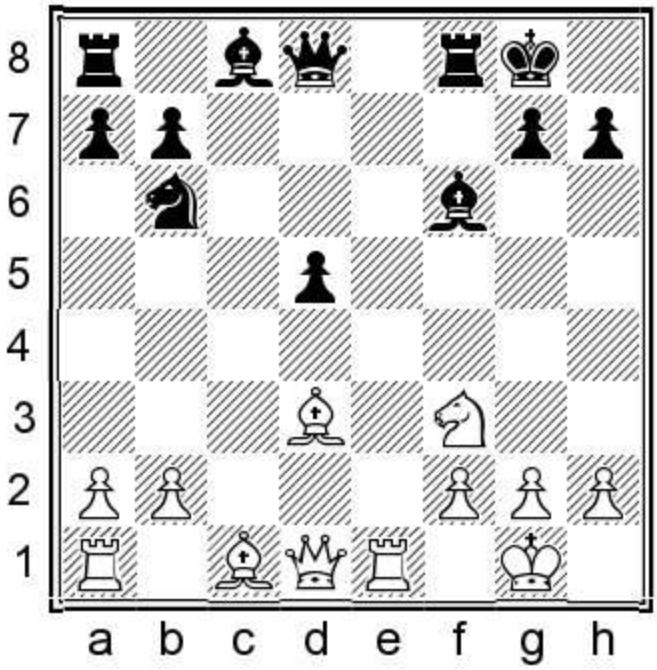
11.exf6



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11...Nxf6

11...Bxf6?! makes life easier for White. 12.Rxe6 Nb6 (12...Nc5 13.Rxf6 Nxd3 14.Rxf8† Kxf8 15.Nf1 gave White a safe extra pawn in Martins – Nascimento, Florianopolis 2017) 13.Re1 Nxd4 14.Nxd4 Bxd4 15.Nf3 Bf6 Black has restored material equality but his position remains problematic after:

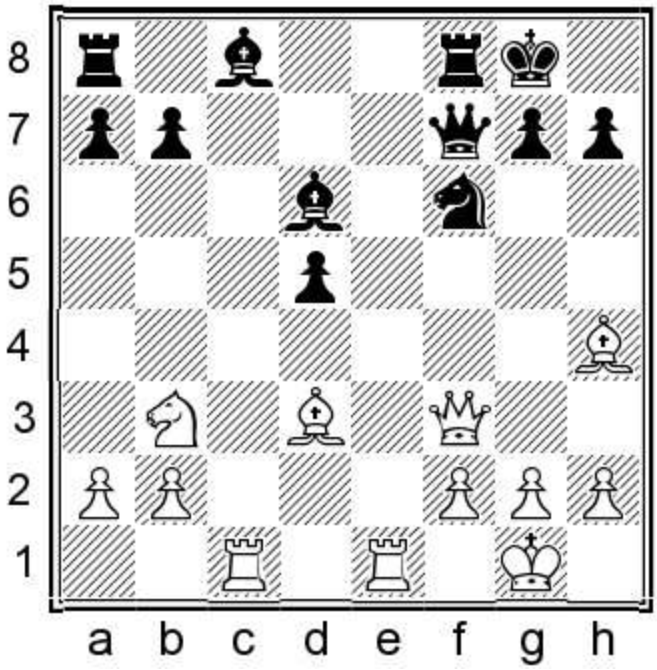


16.Qc2 h6 17.Bf4 Bg4 18.Ne5 Bxe5 19.Bxe5± Kornev – Rychagov, Kaluga 2003.

12.Nb3
12.a3 is also fine, and transposes to the 9...f6 line in the notes above. The text move is another good option, utilizing the fact that the ...c4 fork is no longer possible after Black has exchanged on d4.

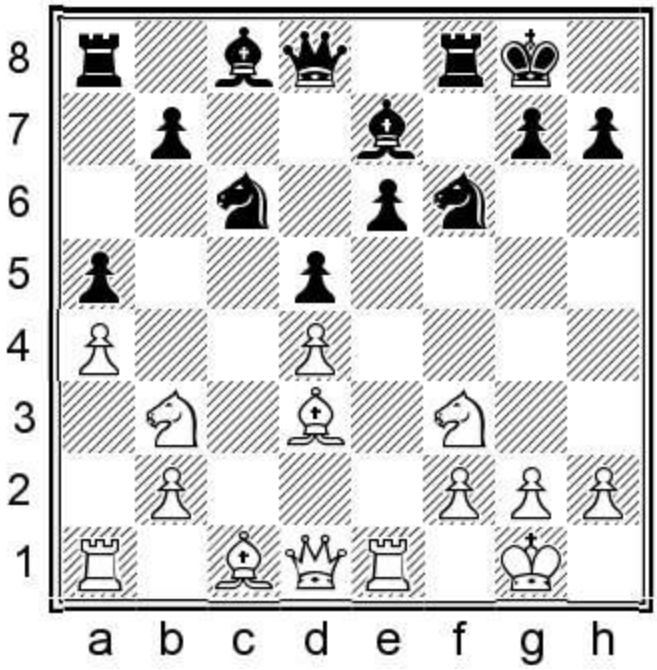
12...a5
12...Bd6 is similar to the positions from Chapter 5 but White's knight is more conveniently placed on b3 than on e2, as it defends the d4-pawn without blocking the rook on e1. A good example continued: 13.Bg5 Qc7 14. Bh4 e5 15.dxe5 Nxe5 16.Rc1 Nxf3† 17.Qxf3 Qf7 Now in Conquest – Aleman Alamo, La Laguna 2008, White had several good options but the simplest would have been:

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18.Bxf6N 18...Qxf6 19.Qxd5† Kh8 20.Qd4± With a safe extra pawn.

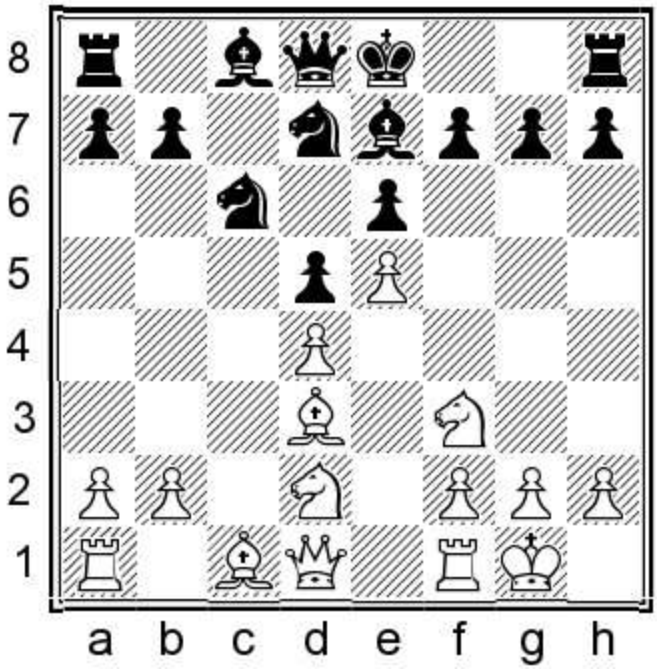
13.a4



13...Bd6 14.Bg5 Bd7 15.Ne5
White had a pleasant edge in Obukhov – Le Duigou, corr. 2014. (15.Nc5!?N looks like a promising alternative.)

B) 8...cxd4 9.cxd4

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Releasing the central tension is a slight concession on Black's part. True, White no longer has the option of dxc5, but he no longer needs it, as any attacks on the d4-pawn can be conveniently met by Nb3, since the ...c4 fork is no longer a concern.

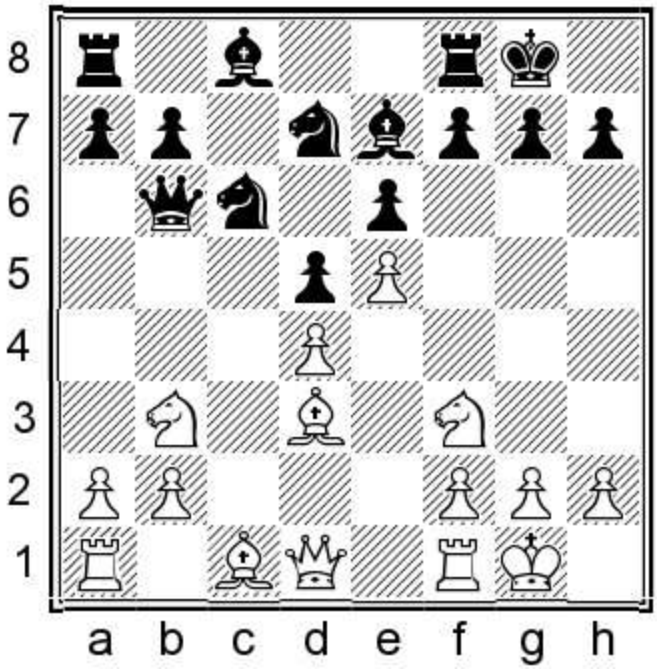
9...Nb6
I checked three alternatives:

9...0-0 10.Re1 leads back to variation A above.

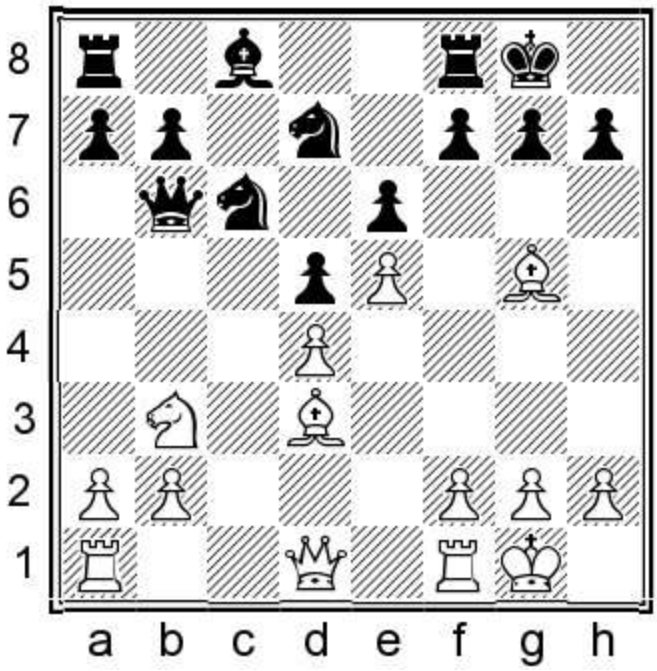
9...g5?! makes little sense here, as 10.Nb3 conveniently defends the d4-pawn while Black has only weakened himself on the kingside.

9...Qb6 10.Nb3 0-0?!
10...a5 11.a4 is mentioned under the 8...a5 move order – see the 10...Qb6 line in the notes to Game 15 on page 110.
The text move is a mistake which allows White a surprising attacking opportunity.

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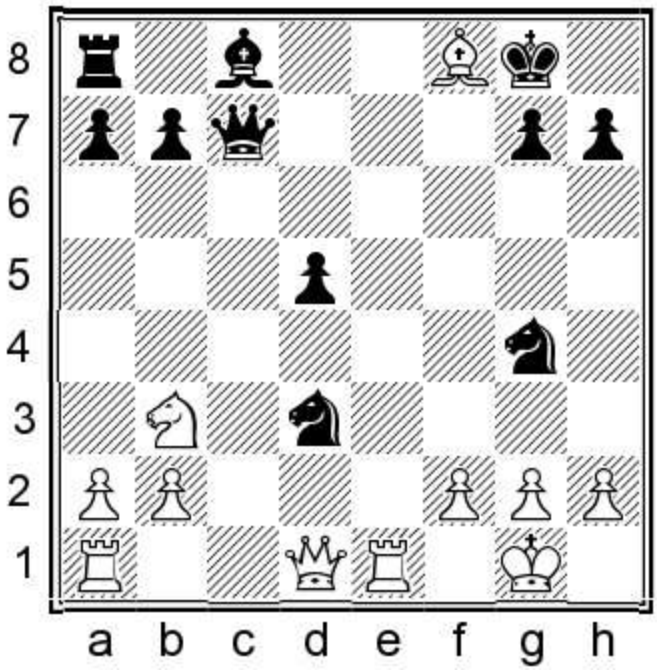
11.Ng5!
11.Be3 offers a pleasant positional edge but the text move is much stronger.
11...Bxg5
Other moves are unplayable:
11...g6? occurred in Jurcik – Ragger, Batumi 2006, when 12.Nxh7!N 12...Kxh7 13.Qh5† Kg8 14.Bxg6 fxg6 15. Qxg6† Kh8 16.Bh6 Rg8 17.Qh5 would have been winning for White.
11...h6? is met by 12.Nh7! Re8 13.Bxh6! gxh6 14.Qg4† Kh8, as in Guelgua – Escobar Barona, Jamundi 2009, and now 15.Rae1!N+– would have prepared Qf4 (or Qh5) with lethal effect.
12.Bxg5



12...f5
Black has to do something before the queen lands on h5.

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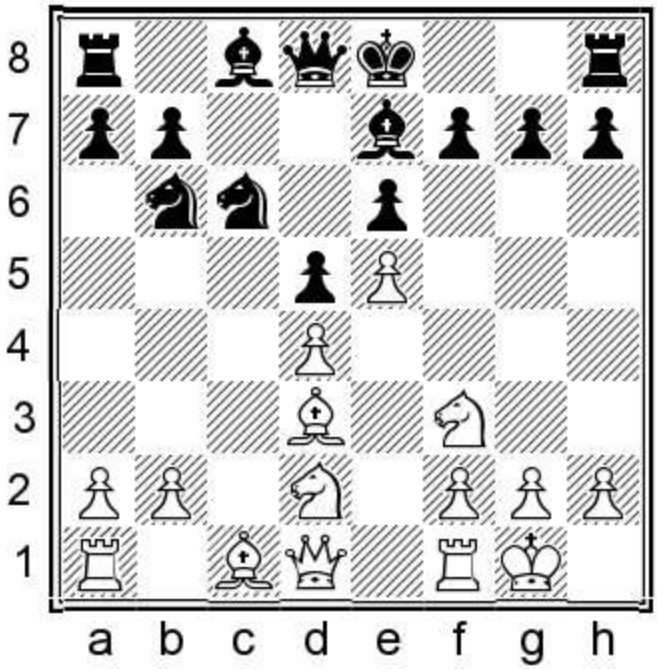
12...f6 13.exf6 is the same.
13.exf6
13.Be2!?± is a good option but opening the kingside is the simplest and most direct approach.
13...Nxf6 14.Re1 e5!?
A good practical try. Other moves would leave Black with a depressing version of a thematic Tarrasch structure due to the absence of his dark-squared bishop.
15.dxe5 Ng4 16.Be3 Qc7 17.Bc5 Ncxe5 18.Bxf8 Nxd3
Black is doing his best to create problems, but he does not have enough firepower to make a meaningful attack.



19.Qxd3 Qxh2† 20.Kf1 Kxf8
20...Qh1† 21.Ke2 Qxg2 would have resisted for longer, but the endgame after 22.Qf3 Qxf3† 23.Kxf3 Kxf8 24. Rac1 should not be too difficult to win.
21.Qxd5+–
Odeev – Orlov, Moscow 1997.

The text move introduces a set-up along the same lines as variation D22 of the next chapter on page 144. Here our knights are placed on f3 and d2 (rather than f3 and e2 as in the next chapter) so our plan will be a little different, but White is doing well either way. There is a reason why Black's set-up is rarely used by strong players these days.

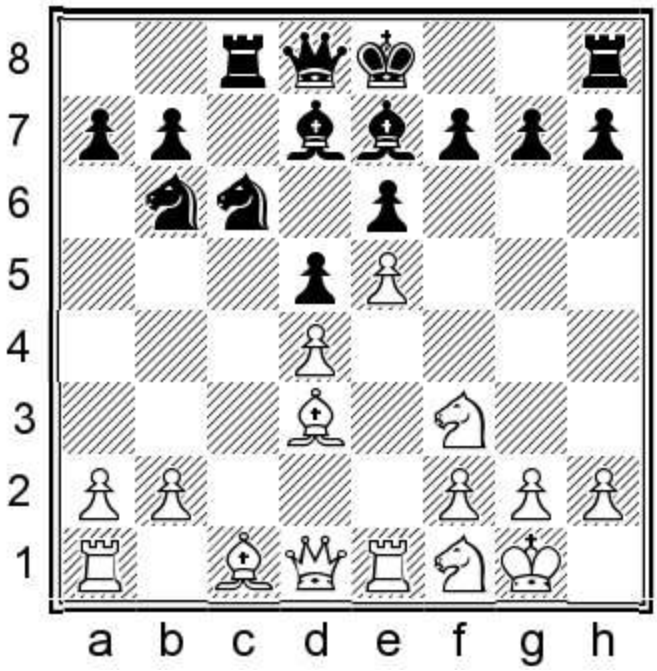
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10.Re1
10.a3 has been played several times but I would prefer to avoid creating targets on the queenside. Play might continue 10...a5 11.b3 a4 12.b4 Bd7 13.Bb2 Na7 14.Qe2 0-0 with the positional threat of ...Qe8 followed by ... Bb5.

10...Bd7 11.Nf1
White gets ready to deploy the knight on the kingside, while also freeing the c1-bishop.

11...Rc8



12.a3!
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Having made a few developing moves, we are now at the stage where it is worth taking control over the b4-

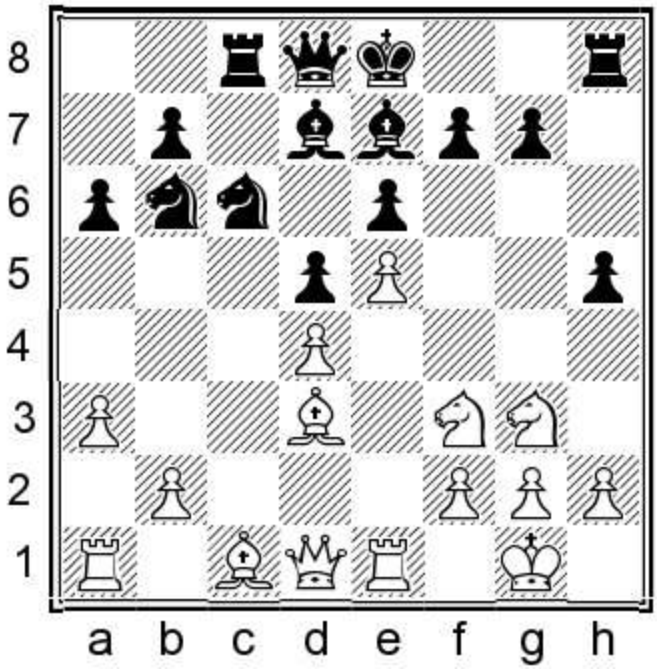
square. Compared with 10.a3 in the notes above, here White is much better placed to handle any ideas Black may try on the queenside.

12...a6
12...Na5 can be met by 13.b3, keeping the light squares under control.

12...a5 occurred in Huerta – Ordaz Flores, Merida 1997, when White should have played 13.Ne3N 13...a4 14. Bd2 with clearly better chances.

13.Ng3
13.Ne3N is a good alternative.

13...h5!?
This was played in Naiditsch – C. Maier, Tallinn (blitz) 2016. Black's last move prevents Nh5 and introduces the possibility of ...h4-h3. White's best reply would have been:

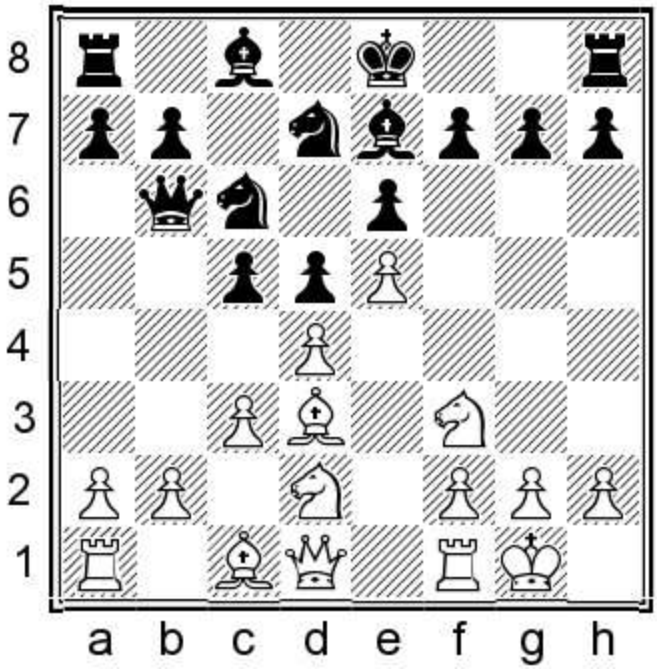


14.h3!N
Ensuring that the enemy pawn will not get to h3.

14...Na7 15.b3 Bb5 16.Bb1
White has clearly better chances. Black is not really getting anywhere on the queenside, and it is not clear where he will put his king or how he will get the h8-rook into the game. It should not be too difficult for White to guard the entry squares on the queenside while improving his position, for instance by manoeuvring the g3-knight to a better square, or by challenging for the open c-file.

C) 8...Qb6

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Unlike the previous variations, this move threatens a pawn and forces White to commit himself in one way or another. Fortunately, the following move provides an ideal solution.

9.dxc5!
The alternative approach is to offer a pawn sacrifice with a move like 9.Re1 or 9.a3, but my impression is that White tends to 'only' get fair compensation as opposed to a real advantage. Black also has the option of delaying the capture on d4, and I would rather not give him this additional flexibility.

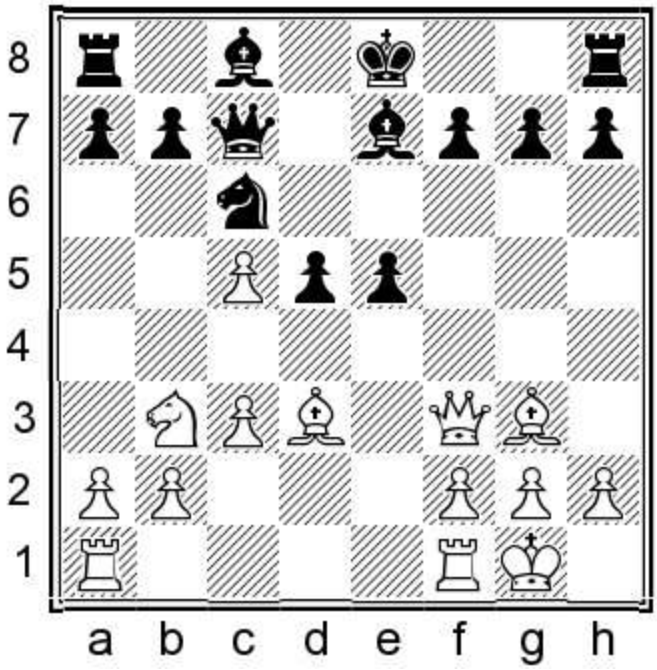
The text move forces the play and provides a relatively simple route to an advantage.

9...Nxc5
Other moves are no better:

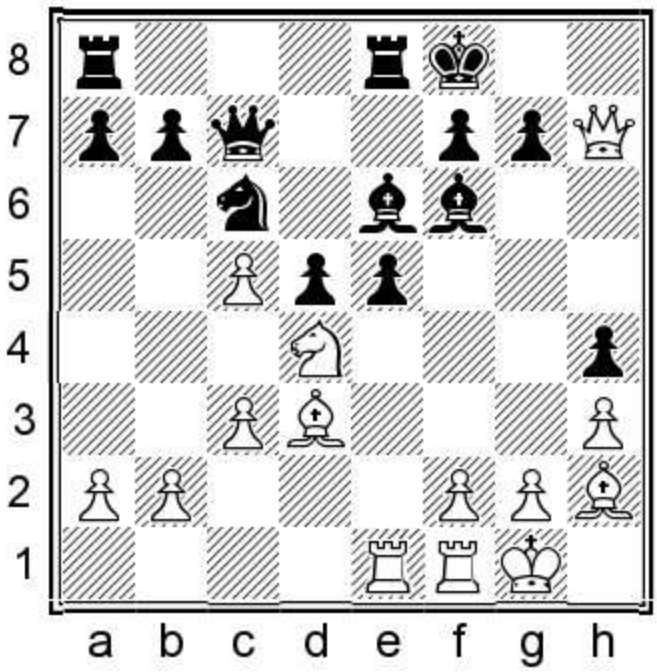
9...Bxc5 has been tried a few times but it seems odd to move the bishop for a second time. 10.Qe2 (10.b4!? Be7 11.Re1 may also be good for White but the simple approach works fine) 10...Qc7 11.Nb3 Be7 12.Bf4² Delchev – Markovic, Valjevo 2011.

9...Qc7
This way Black will capture on e5 rather than c5, which is positionally desirable but costs valuable time.
10.Nb3 Ndxe5
10...Ncxe5 11.Bf4 Nxf3† 12.Qxf3 is similar, but it seems preferable for Black to leave himself with a knight on c6 rather than d7.
11.Bf4 Nxf3† 12.Qxf3 e5 13.Bg3

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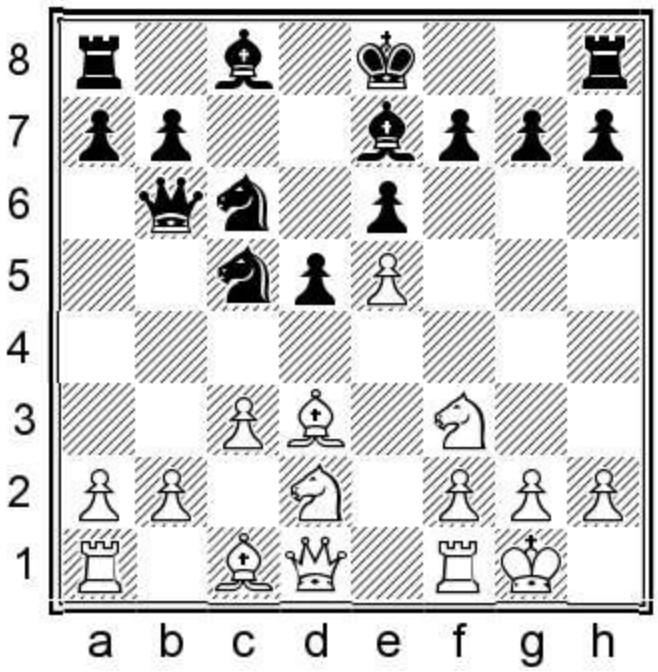


White has a useful lead in development and Black's centre is pretty unstable. A noteworthy game continued:
13...h5 14.h3 h4 15.Bh2 Be6 16.Rae1 0-0
Black's position was difficult anyway, and now his king becomes an easy target.
17.Nd4 Bf6 18.Qh5 Rfe8 19.Qh7† Kf8



20.Nb5 Qd7 21.f4 Ke7 22.f5+–
Black did not last much longer in Smerdon – Barua, Canberra 2010.

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10.Bc2
10.Nb3!? has been tried by a few strong players but keeping the light-squared bishop seems normal to me. After the text move, White has the easy plan of Nb3, after which his pieces will easily flow into the game.

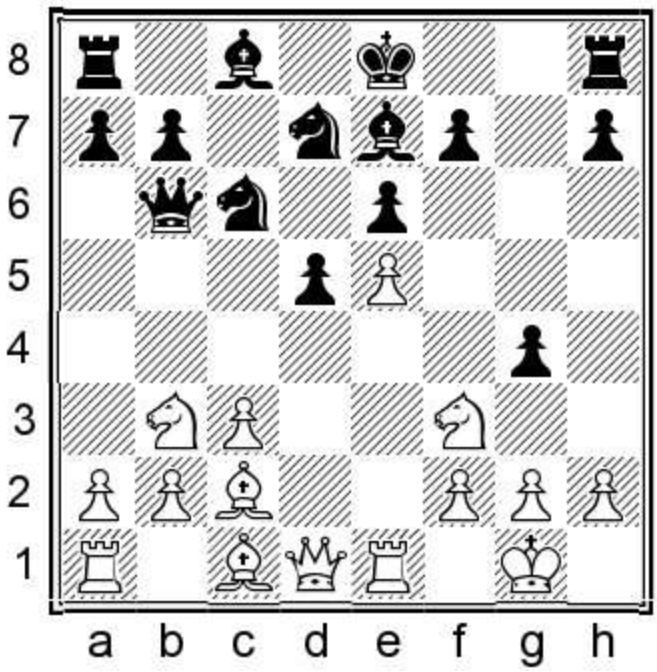
10...Qc7
Black attacks the e5-pawn but it is easily defended. Other possible continuations include:

10...g5 11.Nb3 g4 12.Nfd4 Nxe5 was a risky pawn grab in Behling – Raessler, email 2004. My suggestion would be 13.Bh6©, when White has a serious initiative for the sacrificed pawn.

10...0-0 11.Nb3 Ne4 (11...Nxb3 12.axb3 gives White an open a-file to add to his list of trumps) 12.Qe2 f5 13. exf6 Nxf6 This occurred in Cinar – Petraki, Sparti 1991, when 14.Bf4N² would have given White a nice grip on the central dark squares.

Finally, I also checked:
10...Nd7 11.Re1 g5!?
11...Qc7 12.Qe2 transposes to the 11...Nd7 line in the note to Black's next move in the main line below.
11...0-0 12.Nb3 gives White the usual easy advantage.
12.Nb3 g4

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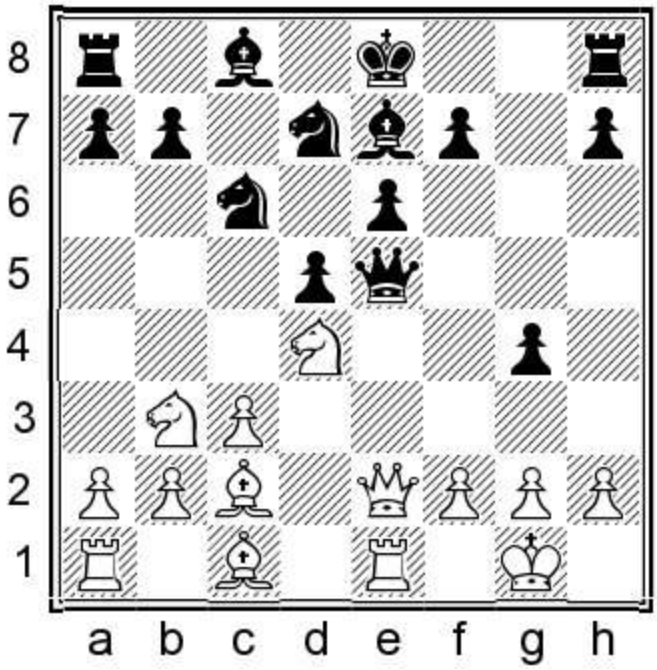


13.Nfd4!?N
13.Be3 has been played in a couple of games and is certainly a decent move. On the other hand, it blocks the e-file and I'm not sure if it helps White to drive the queen away from b6.
13...Ncxe5
13...Ndxe5?! 14.Nxc6 Nxc6 15.Qxg4 looks excellent for White.
The text move transposes to a later moment in the Behling – Raessler game referred to on the previous page. White has a few interesting ideas, including:
14.Bf4!?N©
14.a4!?© can also be considered. Either way, White has fine play for the sacrificed pawn, as he is well ahead in development and Black has problems finding a safe home for his king.

11.Re1 b6
11...0-0 12.Nb3 also gives White easy play.

Attacking the e5-pawn does not really work here: 11...Nd7 12.Qe2 g5 (12...b6 13.Nb3²/±) 13.Nb3 g4 14.Nfd4 Qxe5 Black hopes to gain time by threatening a queen exchange, but his own queen turns out to be misplaced after:

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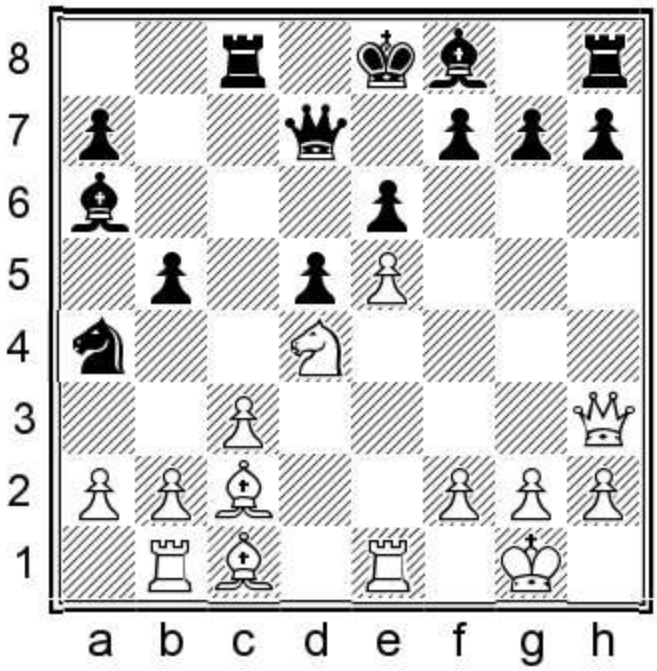


15.Qd1! Qh5 16.Bf4± Buerger – Sindelar, corr. 2009.

12.Nb3 Ba6 13.Nbd4
White enjoys a firm grip on the central dark squares. We will follow an older game in which White steadily increased his advantage.

13...Rc8 14.Nxc6 Qxc6 15.Nd4 Qd7 16.Qg4 Bf8
This can't have been a pleasant move for Black to make, but each alternative also involves an obvious concession of some sort.

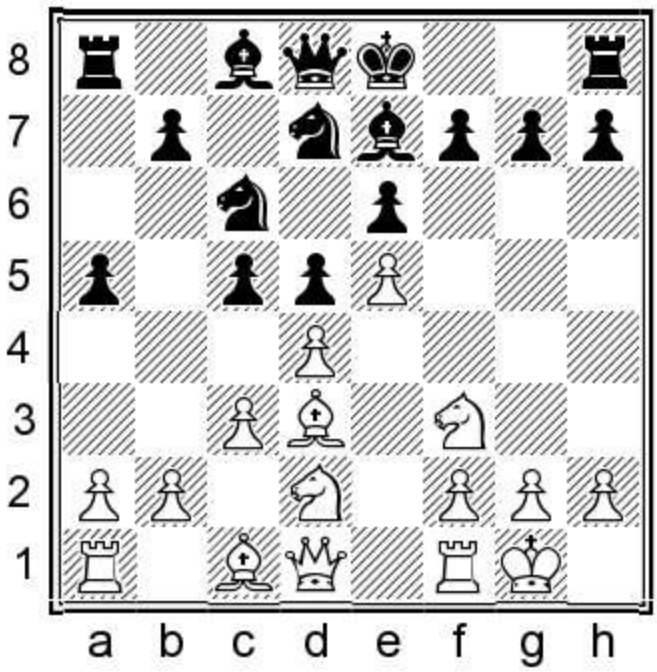
17.Qh3 Na4 18.Rb1 b5



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19.a3 Nb6 20.Kh1 Kd8 21.f4
White built up a huge advantage in Rashkovsky – Kapengut, Moscow 1963.

D) 8...a5



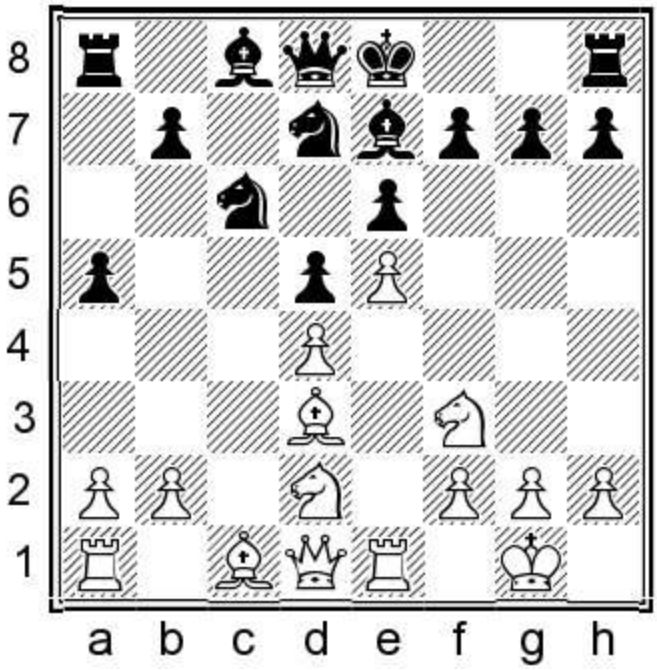
This move used to be favoured by Korchnoi and has been used by many other strong players, which has led to it becoming extremely popular in recent years. Black plays flexibly and forces White to decide whether or not to block the pawn with a2-a4, which will lead to mutual outposts on b4 and b5. Black also has the concrete possibility of ...cxd4 followed by ...Qb6, with the point that Nb3 will no longer be a valid reply due to ...a4.

9.a4!
This is White's best chance for an advantage.

I checked 9.Qe2, intending 9...cxd4 10.cxd4 Qb6 11.Qe3, but found that 11...Nb4 12.Bb1 Qc6 13.Qc3 b5! offers Black good counterplay.

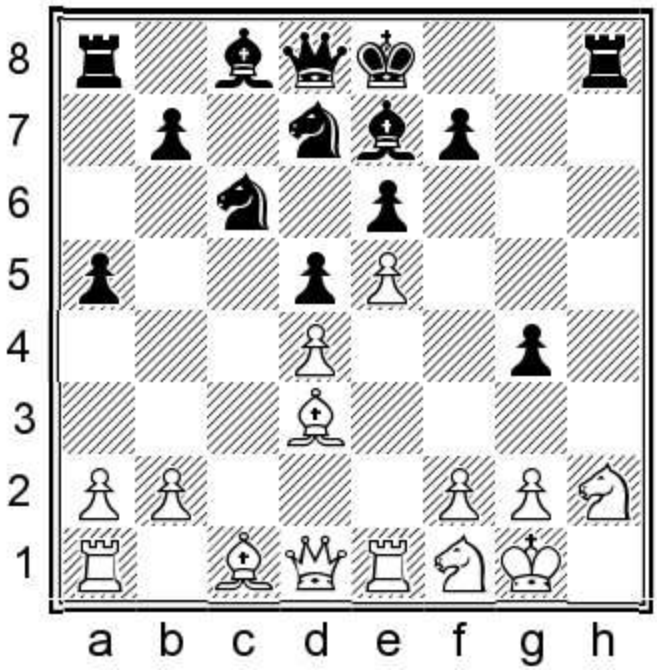
9.Re1!? cxd4 10.cxd4 is the most interesting alternative, which may appeal to some readers.

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I will show a few lines after a) 10...g5!? and b) 10...Qb6!:

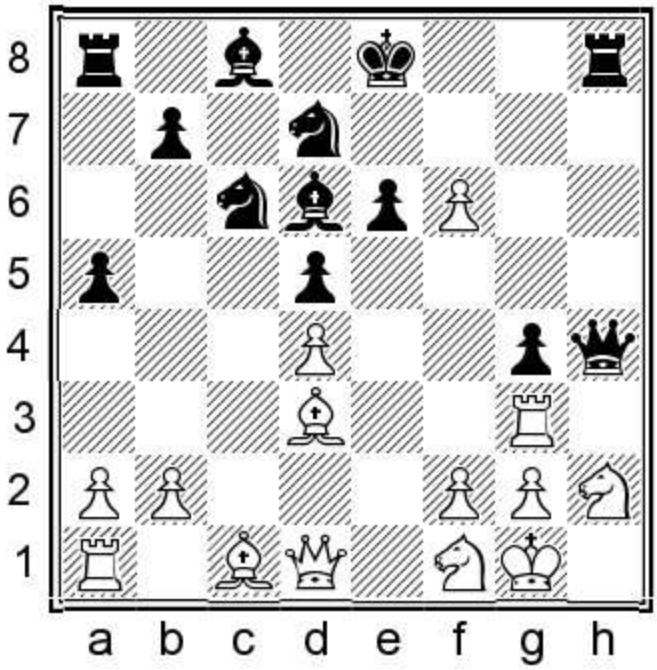
a) 10...g5!?
As I mentioned earlier, this move seems especially tempting for Black when the knight does not have the e1-square available. Instead he has to play h2-h3 to vacate the h2-square, but this enables Black to open lines against White's king. Despite all this, things actually turn out quite nicely for White as we shall see.
11.h3 h5 12.Nf1 g4 13.hxg4 hxg4 14.N3h2



14...Bb4
Vitiugov notes that 14...Nxd4 15.Qxg4 is better for White as his king is safer.
15.Re3 Qh4 16.Rg3 f5 17.exf6 Bd6
17...Nxf6 18.Bf4 was also good for White in Degraeve – Ganaus, Vienna 2011.

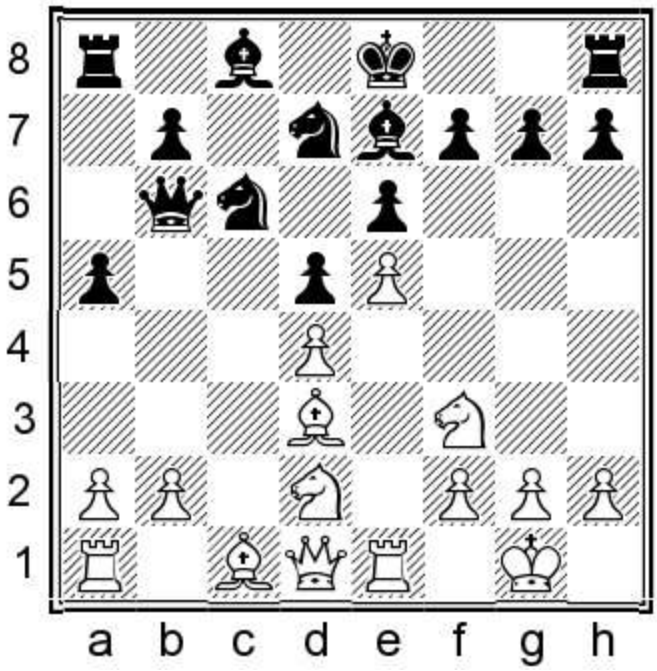
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Now White can improve on Botta – Williams, Samnaun 2008, by means of:



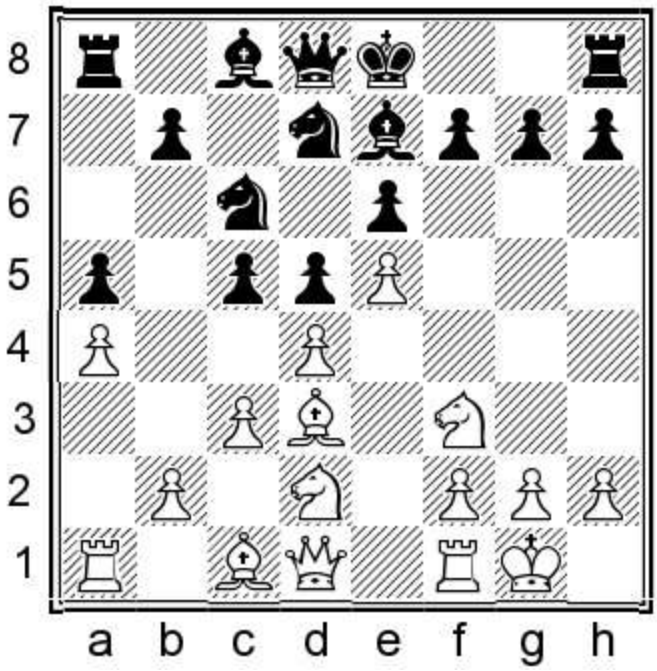
18.Qxg4!
This move was first suggested by Williams in his Killer French DVD, and was subsequently mentioned by Vitiugov.
18...Bxg3 19.Qg6† Kd8 20.Qxg3
White is clearly better at the end of this line from Vitiugov. (20.fxg3 Qxd4† 21.Be3 is given by Williams and also seems promising for White.)

b) 10...Qb6!
This seems like a better bet for Black. I believe White's best chance to cause problems is:



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11.a4!?
11.Nb1 is a well-known idea. Play continues 11...Nxd4 12.Nxd4 Qxd4 13.Nc3 when White has good compensation for his pawn, as Black has many weaknesses, bad piece coordination and the threat of Qg4 to worry about. That said, I was unable to find an advantage after 13...Qb6!, although the position remains full of life.
11...Nxd4
11...g5 can be conveniently met by 12.Nb3, as in Siefring – Van Enk, corr. 2008.
11...Bb4 was played in Haller – Welti, corr. 2009, and here I like 12.Re3!N, intending 12...Nxd4 13.Nxd4 Qxd4 14.Nb3 Qa7 15.Qg4 g6 16.Qf4! with an irresistible initiative for a pawn.
12.Nxd4 Qxd4 13.Nb3 Qb6 14.Be3
Black's position has proven reliable in correspondence games; nevertheless, White has some initiative for the pawn. Thus, although 9.Re1 would not be my own first choice, it's an interesting move which some readers may wish to consider.



Returning to my main recommendation of 9.a4!, there are three main options which we should consider: D1) 9...0-0, D2) 9...Qb6!? and D3) 9...cxd4.

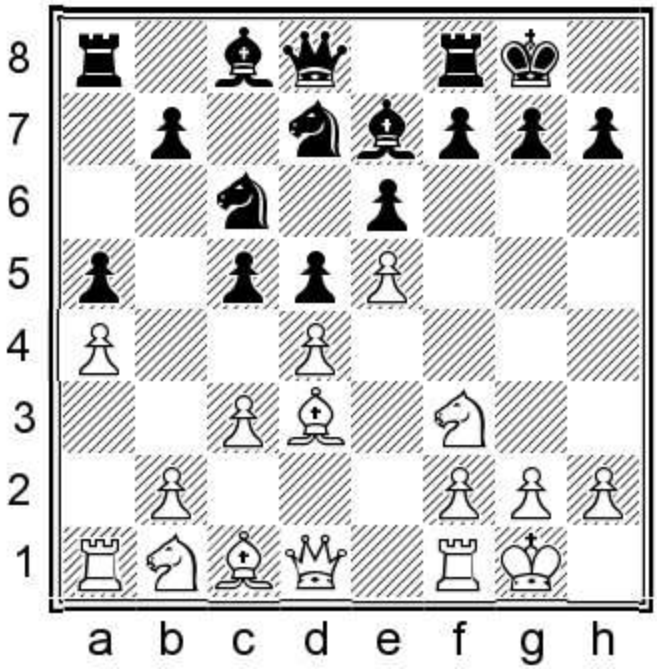
9...g5 has been tried in a bunch of games but 10.dxc5! is a good reply. There is little point in listing games and analysis, as play will proceed along the same lines as the 8...g5 variation, but White has an improved version due to the weakness of the b5-square.

D1) 9...0-0

This is not mentioned by Vitiugov, but Watson approves of it in his ChessPublishing annotations. Black evacuates his king before hitting White's centre with ...f6.

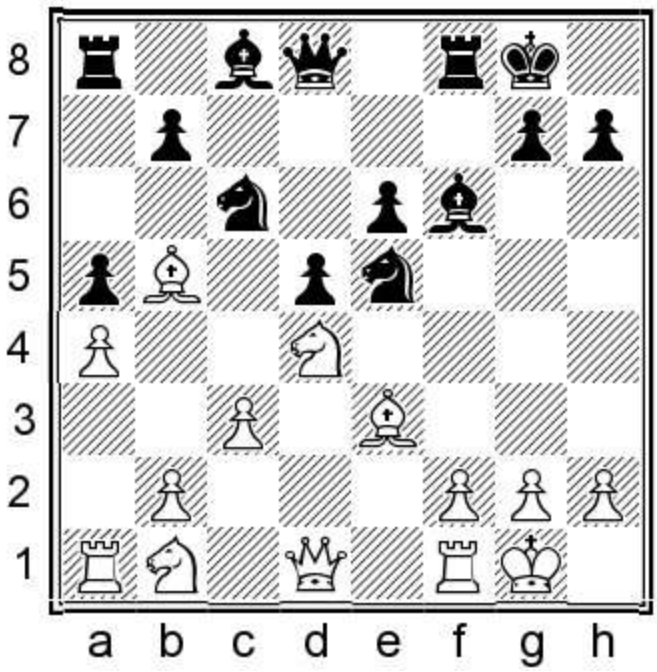
10.Nb1!
Watson points out that 10.Qe2 cxd4 11.cxd4 Qb6 12.Qe3 f6! 13.exf6 Nxf6 14.h3 Nh5! offers Black a pleasant position. The text move is a fairly recent invention and has still not been played in many games, but I like the look of it.

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10...f6 11.exf6 Bxf6
11...Nxf6 12.Na3 cxd4 13.cxd4 Bd7 14.Nb5 Nb4 15.Bb1² was pleasant for White in Hjorth – Fuhr, corr. 2012.

12.Be3 cxd4 13.Nxd4 Nde5 14.Bb5



14...Nxd4
I also checked 14...Bd7N 15.f4 Ng6 16.Nf3 Nce7 17.g3² and White has nice control over the central squares.

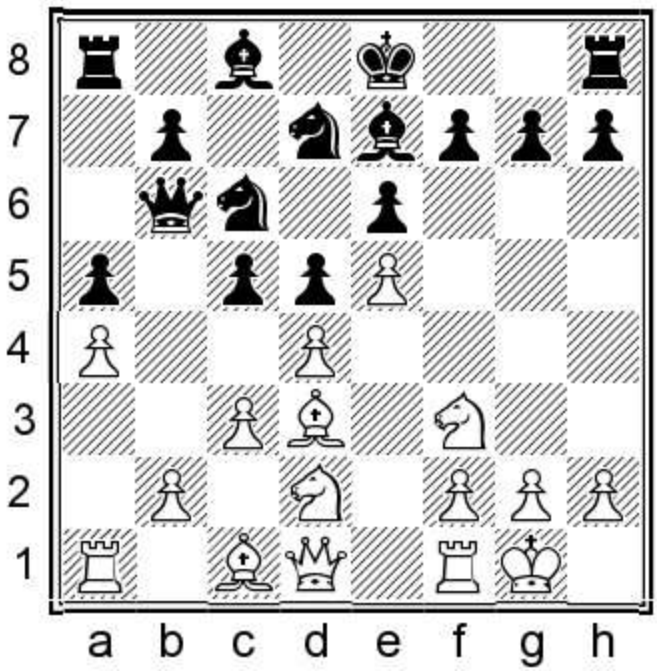
15.cxd4 Nc6
In the event of 15...Nf7 16.Nc3 Nd6 17.Bd3 White remains somewhat better.

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16.Nc3²

Romm – Galanov, corr. 2011.

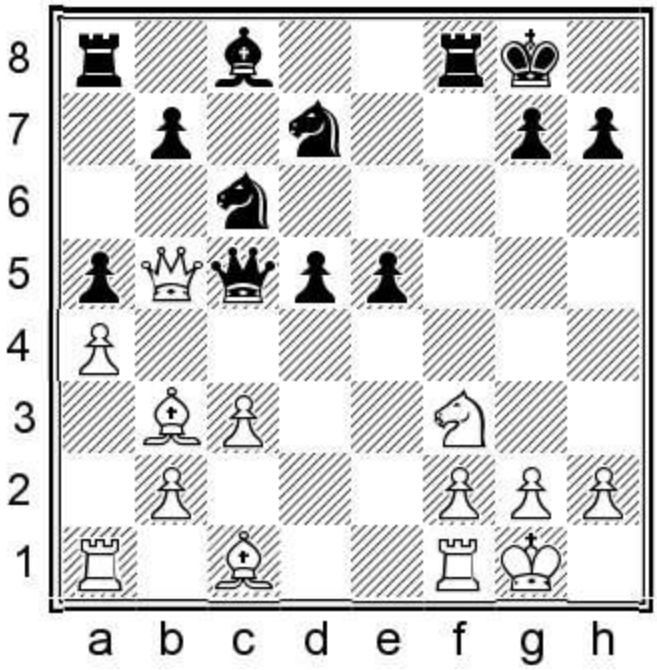
D2) 9...Qb6!?



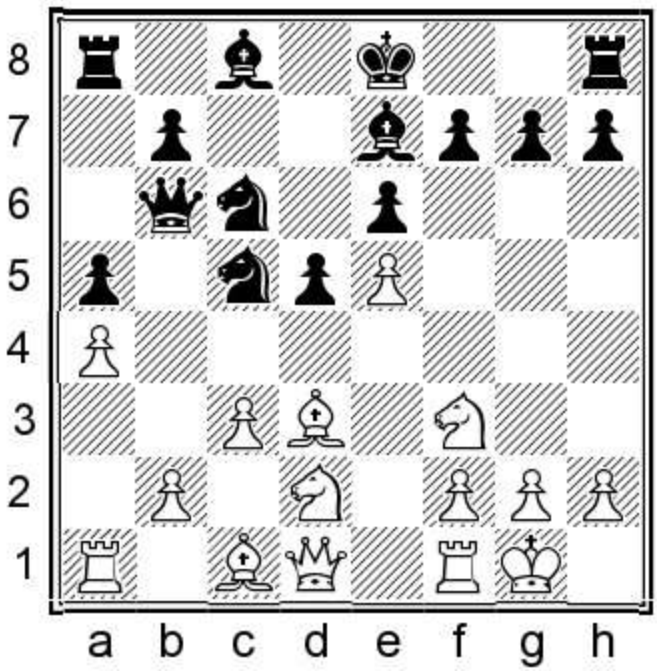
This is an interesting move since, compared with the 8...Qb6 line covered in variation C above, it is not clear who is more likely to benefit from the pawns on a4 and a5. White certainly has chances to make use of the b5-outpost; on the other hand, the plan of dxc5 followed by Nb3 will not work as well without the support of a pawn on a2.

10.dxc5 Nxc5
I also considered:
10...Bxc5 11.Qe2 f6
11...h6 12.Bb5 Qc7 13.Nb3²
11...0-0?! invites 12.Bxh7† Kxh7 13.Ng5† Kg6 14.Nc4! with an attack. Black isn't losing by force, but his position is dangerous and he fails to equalize even after perfect defence. My main line continues: 14...Qb3! (14...dxc4? 15.Qe4† wins quickly) 15.Qd3† f5 16.Qh3 Ndxe5 17.Nxe5† Nxe5 18.Qg3 Ng4 19.h3 e5 20.hxg4 fxg4 21.Nf3 and Black remains under pressure as his king has no shelter.
12.exf6 Nxf6 13.Bc2 0-0
I only found one game from here, which continued:
14.Nb3 e5?
14...Bd6 15.Be3 Qd8 16.Nfd4²
15.Qb5 Nd7 16.Nxc5 Qxc5 17.Bb3

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17...Rxf3?!
17...Qxb5 18.axb5 Ne7 would have lasted longer although Black is still much worse.
18.gxf3+–
Black had no compensation and soon had to resign in S.B. Hansen – Richter, Germany 2011.

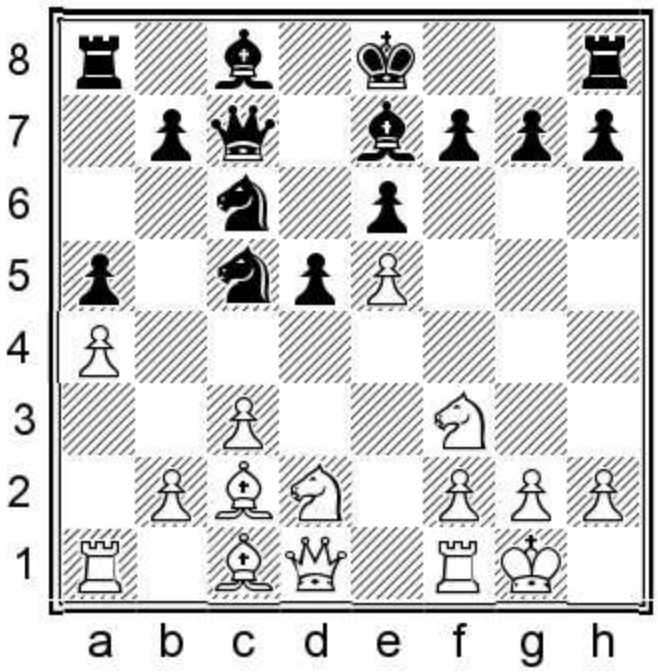


11.Bc2!?
11.Bb5 could certainly be considered, with Nb3 to follow. However, instead of occupying the b5-outpost so quickly, I would prefer to keep the bishop pointing towards the black kingside.

11...Qc7
Attacking the e5-pawn is the most forcing way to play.
11...0-0 is also possible. I suggest: 12.Re1 (12.Nb3 Nxb3 13.Bxb3 Qc7 14.Re1 b6 was double-edged in Mar –

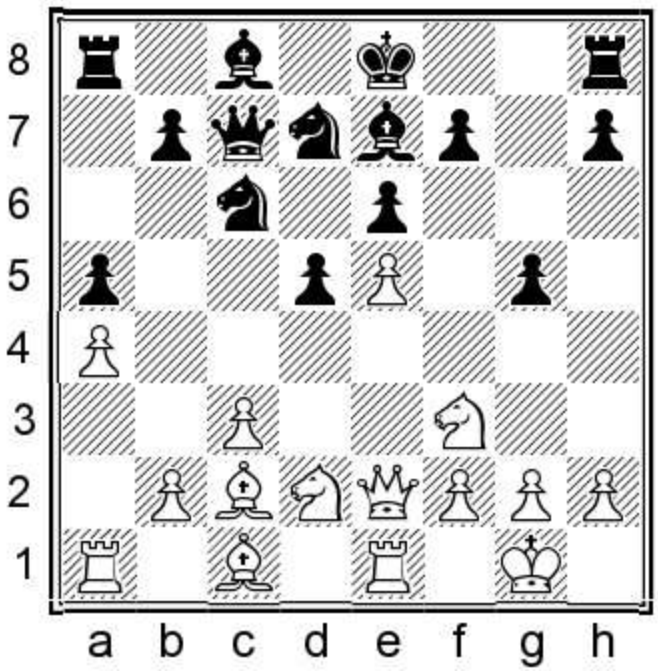
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Goczo, Budapest 2004) 12...Bd7 13.Nf1 Rac8 14.Be3 Qc7 This occurred in Granz – Dziedzina, email 2002, and now 15.Ng3² seems like the most promising way to build up on the kingside.



12.Re1 Nd7 13.Qe2 g5!?
After 13...b6 14.Nb3 Ba6 15.Qe3 0-0-0 16.Nbd4 White was clearly better due to his safer king in Fedorchuk – Giaccio, Lorca 2007.

The text move may not be objectively best, but it's an interesting move to analyse as it forces us to think carefully about the impact of the earlier pawn moves to a5 and a4.

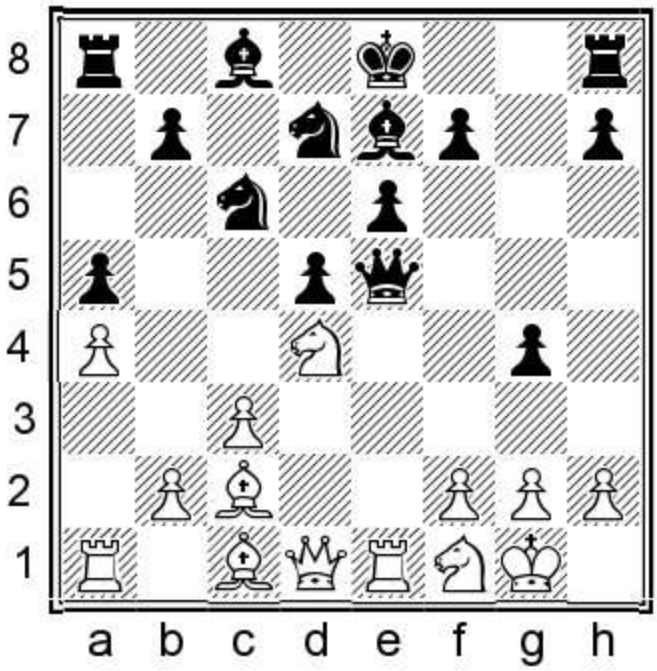


14.Nf1!N
White needs to improve on 14.h3? h5, as seen in Cioara – Vasiesiu, Bucharest 2000.

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On page 105, in the note beginning with 11...Nd7, we reached a similar position with the pawns still on a7 and a2. If we followed the same recipe we would continue 14.Nb3, but here things are not so clear after 14...g4 15. Nfd4 Qxe5 16.Qd1 Qg7!. In the other line White could have developed his initiative with Nxc6 followed by Na5, but here the same idea is not possible. Fortunately, the placement of the pawns on a5 and a4 works to White's advantage after the text move.

14...g4 15.Nd4 Qxe5 16.Qd1
Black's queen and g-pawn are under fire, and White's knight is poised to occupy the b5-outpost.



16...Qg7
16...Qf6 17.Nb5 is also great for White.

17.Nb5 0-0 18.Ng3!
Now we can see why the knight came to f1 instead of b3 on move 14.

18...Nf6 19.Nc7 Rb8 20.Bf4±
Black has too many coordination problems and weaknesses in his position.
D3) 9...cxd4

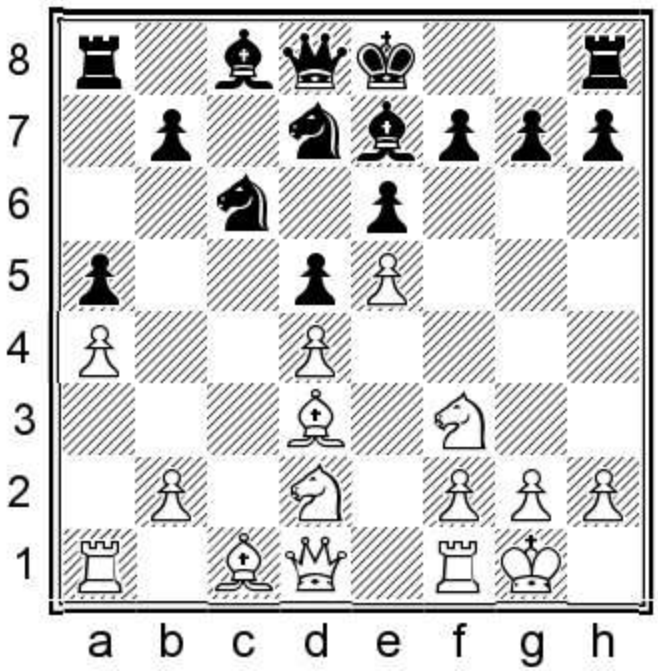
This has been Black's most popular choice. Let's see how Mickey Adams deals with it.

GAME 15

Michael Adams – Fabiano Caruana
Zafra 2009

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Be7 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.c3 c5 7.Bd3 Nc6 8.0-0 a5 9.a4 cxd4 10.cxd4

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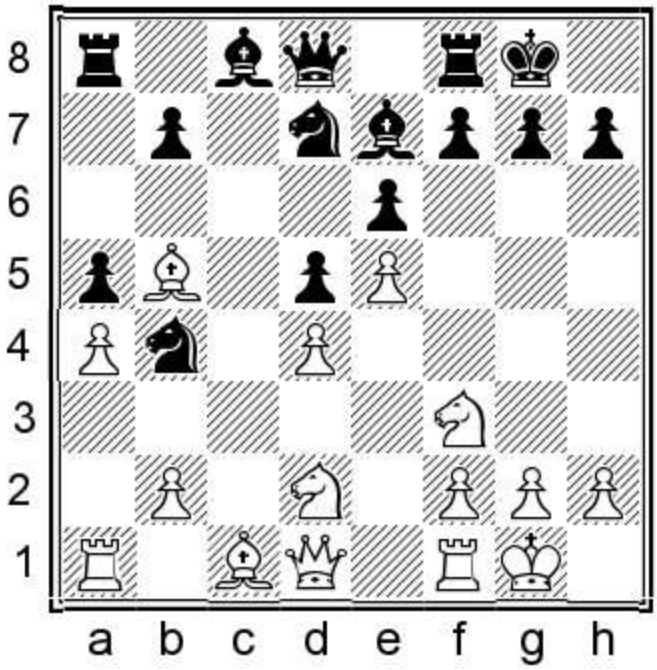
10...Nb4
Occupying the b4-outpost seems natural.

10...Qb6 11.Nb3 f6 12.Be3! gets White's pieces out quickly, and if 12...fxe5 13.Nxe5! 0-0 14.Rc1 White has a fine position.

10...Nb6 has been played a few times, with poor results. 11.Nb3 gives White good prospects on the queenside, for example: 11...Bd7 12.Nc5! Nxd4 13.Nxb7 Nxf3+ 14.Qxf3 Qc7 15.Nd6† Bxd6 16.exd6 Qxd6 17.Bf4 (17.b3!?N followed by Ba3 is also good) 17...Qe7 18.Qg3 White had more than enough play for a pawn in Karpatchev – Song, Cannes 2008.

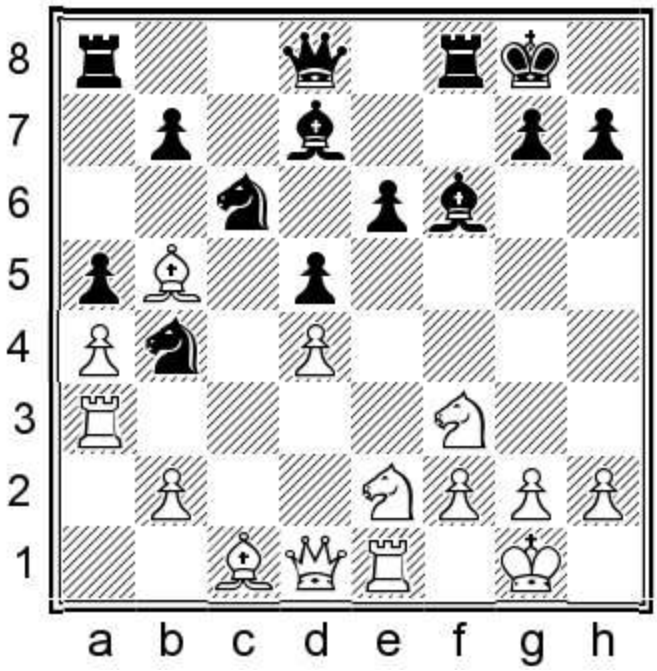
11.Bb5 0-0
11...b6 12.Nb1! is a nice manoeuvre which we also see in the main game. 12...Ba6 13.Nc3 0-0 14.Qe2 Bxb5 and now White has a choice. In Ni Hua – Cvek, Ohrid 2009, White played 15.axb5 and had a slightly more pleasant position, similar to the main game below. The engine prefers 15.Nxb5N² and assesses the position favourably for White, so take your pick.

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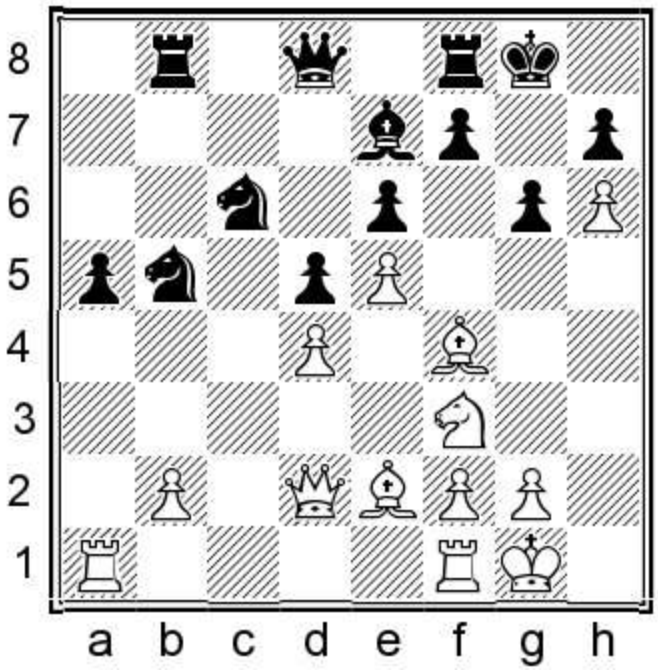
12.Nb1
12.Nb3!? Nb8 13.Bd2 N8c6 14.Qe2 has been tried in a few games, and is assessed by Vitiugov as slightly better for White. You may wish to investigate this further, but I find the text move a simple and logical choice. The fact that Adams has chosen the same move in two subsequent games reinforces my positive impression of it.

12...Nb6
A natural alternative is:
12...Nb8 13.Nc3 Bd7
This was tried against Adams in 2011.
Another game continued: 13...N8c6 14.Re1 f5 15.exf6 Bxf6 16.Ra3 Bd7 17.Ne2 Having failed to equalize, Black now ventures a dubious pawn sacrifice:



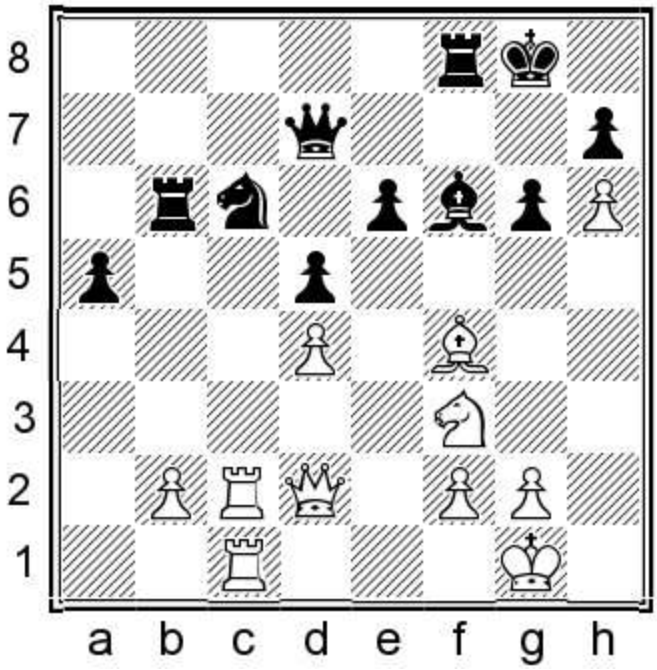
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17...e5?! 18.Bxc6 bxc6 19.dxe5 Be7 20.Nf4 Qb8 21.Nd4± Fedorchuk – Ulibin, Marrakesh 2010.
14.Bf4 N8c6 15.Qd2 Na7
Unlike the main game, Black avoids trading on b5 with his bishop and instead drives White's bishop away in order to open up the queenside.
16.Be2 Rb8 17.h4 b5 18.axb5 Bxb5
18...Nxb5 19.h5, is excellent for White, so Black decides to trade off his bishop.
19.Nxb5 Nxb5 20.h5 Nc6 21.h6 g6

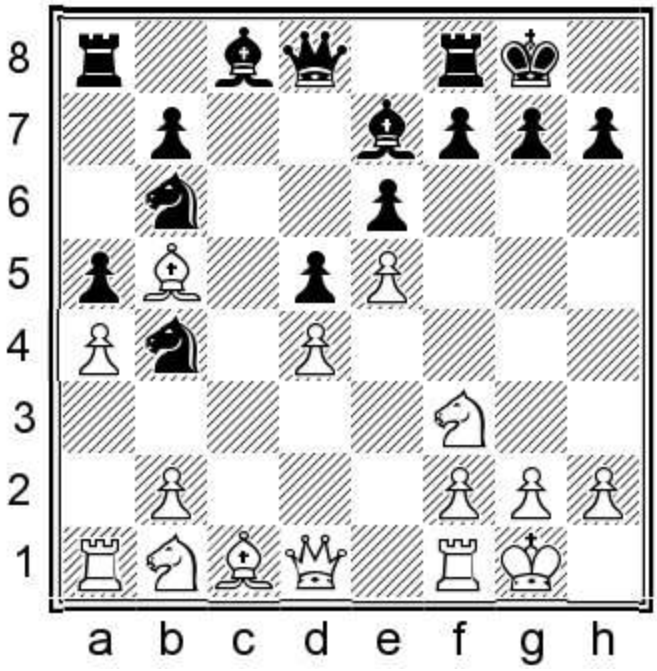


22.Bxb5!?
22.Rfc1 is excellent for White but Adams presumably decided to focus his attack on the dark squares, and reasoned that his light-squared bishop would not be needed.
22...Rxb5 23.Rfc1 Rb6 24.Rc2
24.Bg5!± was a bit more accurate but the text move does not spoil anything.
24...f6
24...Nb4 25.Rc3 Rc6 would have been more resilient although Black is still in difficulties.
25.exf6 Bxf6 26.Rac1 Qd7
Now in Adams – Holt, Los Angeles 2011, the most direct win would have been:

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27.Ne5!N
27.b3!N+– is the computer's favourite, but it's hard to explain such a move in human terms. The text is much easier to understand, as White simply intends to invade with a rook on c7.
27...Nxe5
27...Bxe5 28.Bxe5 Nxe5 29.Rc7 wins.
28.Rc7 Nc4 29.R1xc4 Qb5 30.Rc2 Rb7 31.Rc8+–



13.Nc3 Bd7 14.b3
14.Bf4 Bxb5 15.Nxb5 was also comfortable for White in Azarov – Podolchenko, Rogaska Slatina 2011, but Adams prefers to recapture with the a-pawn. The advantages of doing so will be discussed shortly.

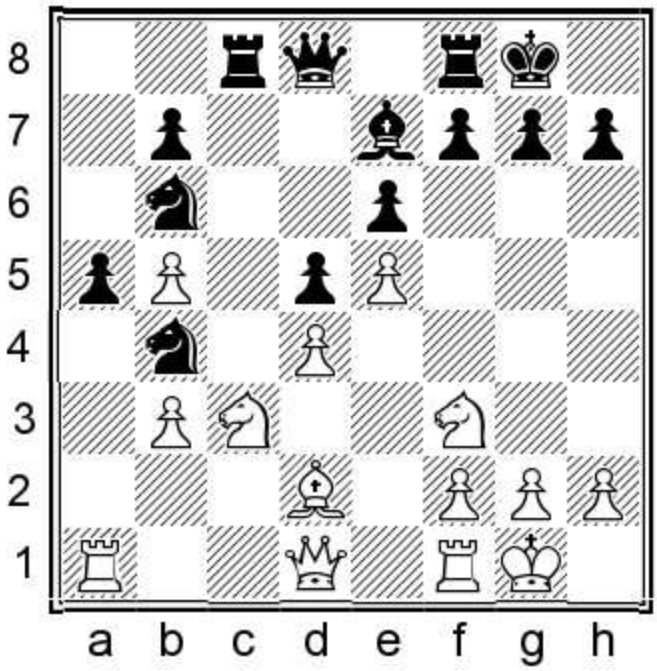
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14...Rc8 15.Bd2 Bxb5

15...Na8!?N 16.Rc1 Nc7 is another idea, when 17.Be2 resembles the Adams – Holt game mentioned earlier.

16.axb5

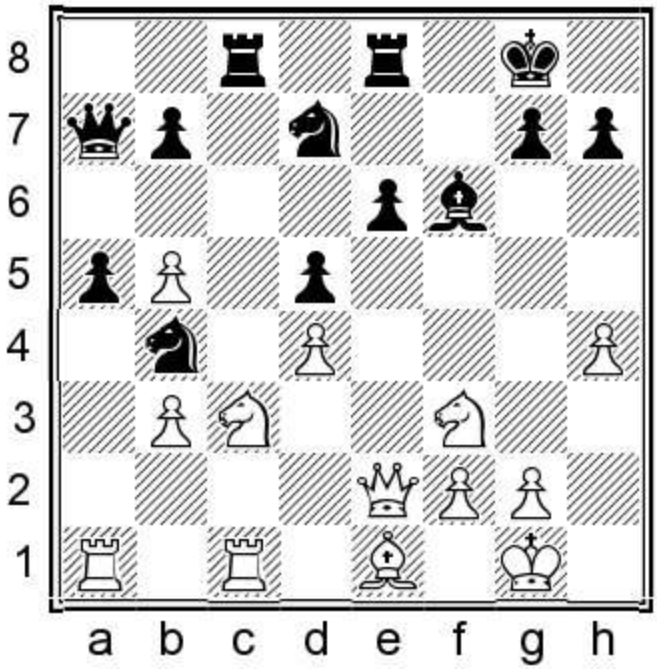
As a general rule, this should be our preferred way of recapturing on b5. True, White's queenside pawns are now doubled and isolated, but they are not terribly weak: the knight on c3 and queen coming to e2 will hold things together just fine. The main benefit of the axb5 recapture is that it improves White's control over the light squares. Moreover, the b4-knight is a problem for Black. It may appear to be well placed on a queenside outpost, but it also has no means of escape. As long as White keeps an eye on squares such as d3 and c2, the knight will look pretty but have nothing to do. Looking ahead, White's first task will be to complete development with Qe2 and Rfc1. He can then start to take some space on the kingside with moves like g2-g3 and h2-h4, followed by manoeuvring his pieces and probing for weaknesses.



16...Nd7 17.Qe2 Rc7

Another game continued: 17...Qb6 18.Rfc1 Qa7 19.h4 Rfe8 20.Be1 f6? Black tries to make something happen but runs into a tactical problem. 21.exf6 Bxf6

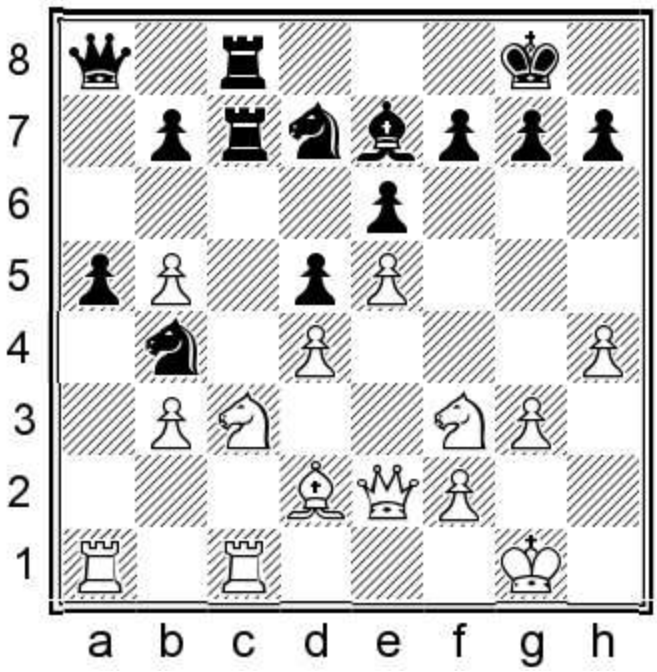
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22.Nxd5! exd5 23.Rxc8 Rxc8 24.Qe6† Kh8 25.Bxb4 b6 26.Qxd5+– Azarov – Fiebig, Rogaska Slatina 2011.

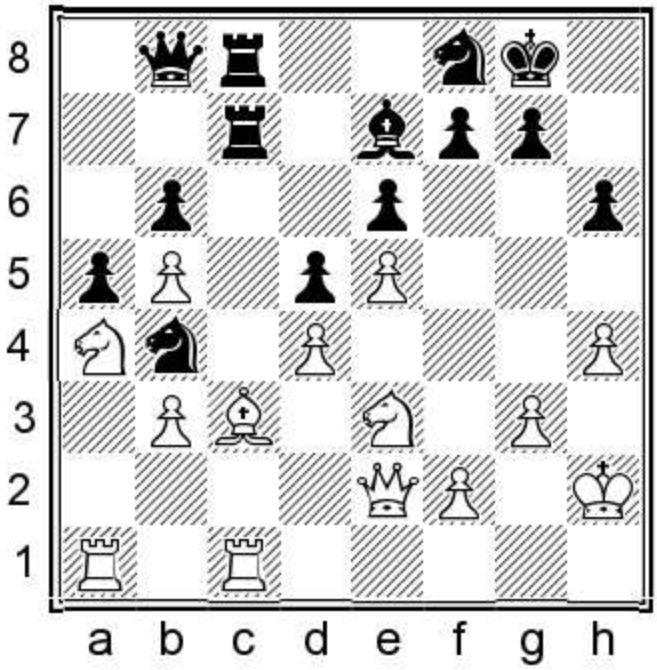
18.Rfc1 Qa8
Having developed all his pieces on good squares, Adams starts improving his position on the kingside.

19.g3! Rfc8 20.h4

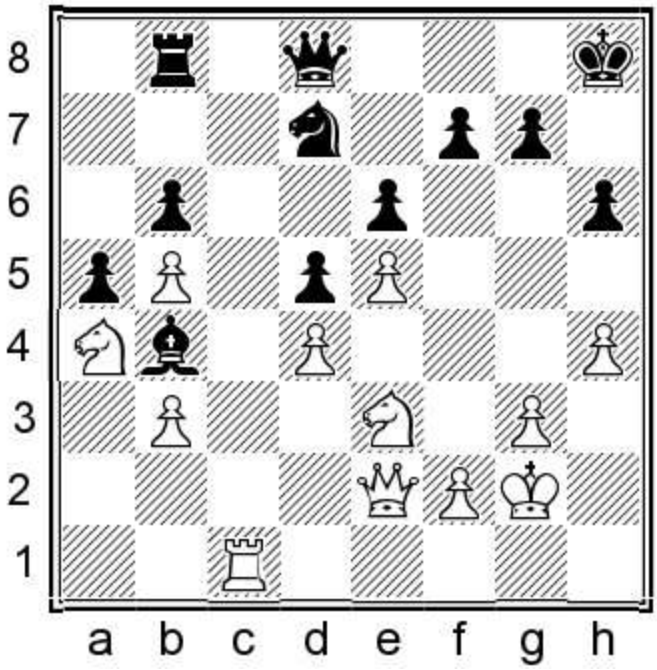


20...Qa7
A month later, Adams repeated the first 20 moves before his opponent deviated. Let's see what happened:
20...h6 21.Kh2 b6 22.Ne1 Nf8 23.Na4 Nd7 24.Bc3 Qb8 25.Ng2 Nf8 26.Ne3

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26...Kh8 27.Qd2 Qb7 28.Re1 Rb8 29.Rac1 Qc8 30.Qe2 Qd7 31.Bd2 Rxc1 32.Rxc1 Qd8 33.Kg2 Nd7 34.Bxb4 Bxb4



35.Rc6 Kg8 36.f4+–
The database game score from Adams – Bradford, Edmonton 2009, ends here with 1–0. It seems a little early to resign, but White is in total control and should soon be able to break through.

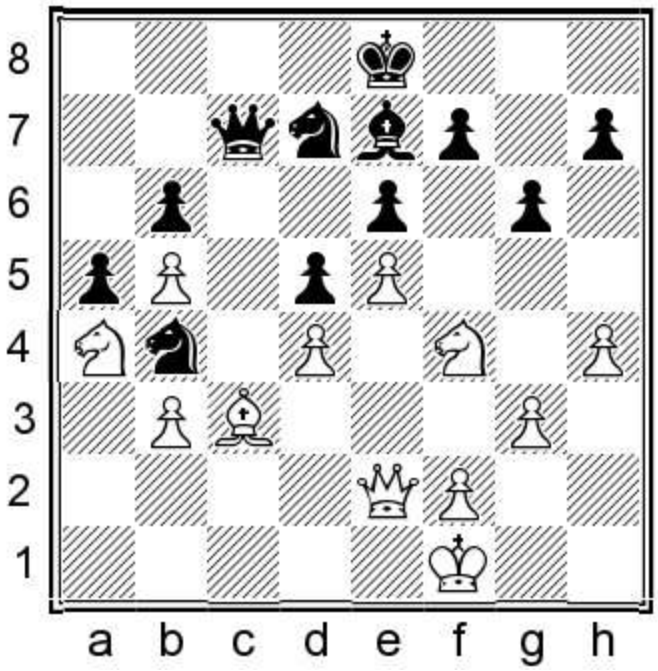
21.Kg2 Nf8 22.Qf1 Nd7 23.Na4 b6 24.Rxc7 Rxc7 25.Rc1 Qb7 26.Kh2 Qc8 27.Rxc7 Qxc7
Black's rooks were well placed on the open file, so it was logical to exchange them.

28.Nc3!
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Preventing the black queen from infiltrating. White still controls all the important squares on the queenside, and

the b4-knight remains stuck.

28...Qc8 29.Qe2 Qc7 30.Ne1 Nf8 31.Kg2 Nd7 32.Kf1 Nf8 33.Na4 Nd7 34.Bc3
White continues improving his position in small ways. Now the b4-knight does not have a single move available.

34...Kf8 35.Ng2 Ke8 36.Nf4 g6



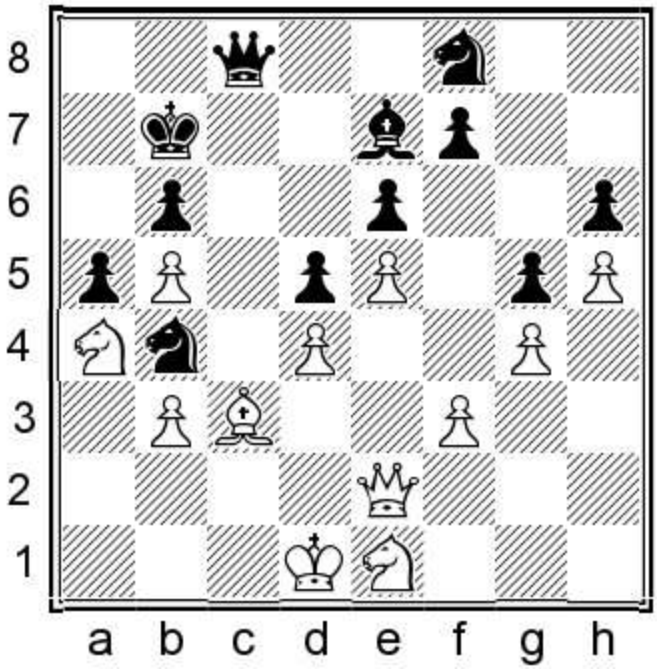
37.Ke1!? Kd8 38.Kd1
I'm not sure quite what Adams had in mind with this king walk, as the king doesn't go any further to the queenside. A possible explanation for the king on d1 is that it helps to control the c2-square, which gives White the option of rerouting his bishop via e1-f2 in the future.

38...Kc8 39.Nh3 h6
Black understandably wished to prevent Ng5, but this pawn move creates new weaknesses.

40.h5 g5 41.Ng1 Kb7
Caruana hides his king on the queenside. This is a sensible precaution against a mating attack on the kingside, but it also comes with a risk: if the queens are exchanged and White creates a passed pawn on the kingside, Black's king will be in no position to fight against it.

42.Nf3 Qc8 43.g4 Ka7 44.Ne1 Kb7 45.f3 Nf8

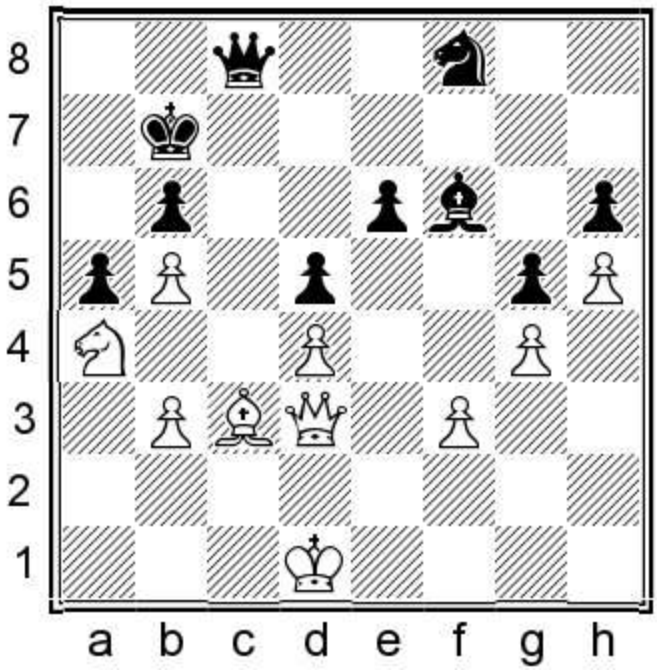
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46.Nd3!
After playing against the isolated knight for so long, Adams finally exchanges it. It would have been hard to make further progress on the kingside while continuing to control the necessary squares on the queenside to keep the knight from moving.

46...Nxd3 47.Qxd3 f5
Black makes a bid for freedom, rather than waiting for White to improve his pieces and prepare f3-f4.

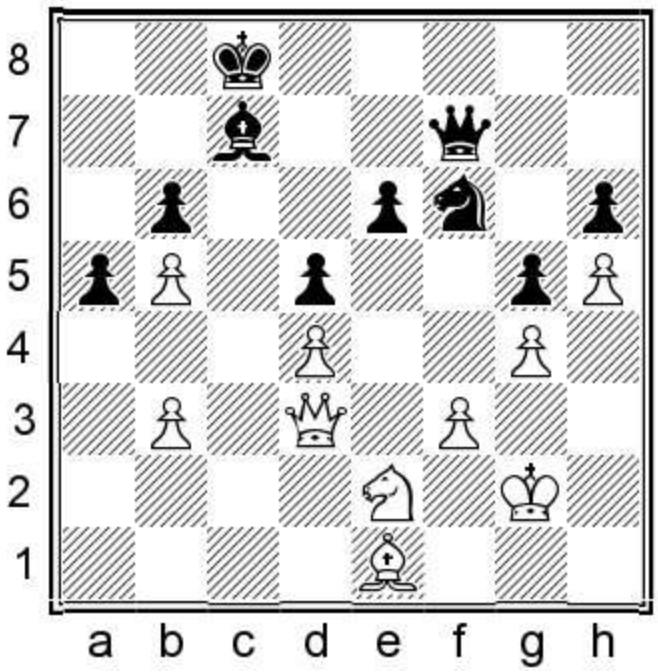
48.exf6 Bxf6
The position has changed considerably but White remains in control. His queen is excellent and his minor pieces will soon come to better squares. Black still has no counterplay in sight: he would like to free himself with ...e5 but it is hard to do so without creating serious weaknesses.



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49.Be1 Qc7 50.Nc3 Be7 51.Ne2 Bd6 52.Bd2 Qf7 53.Ke1! Nd7 54.Kf2 Nf6 55.Kg2
The king is not only perfectly sheltered here, but is also ideally placed to support a passed pawn on the kingside when White gets a suitable chance to create one.

55...Bc7 56.Be1 Kc8



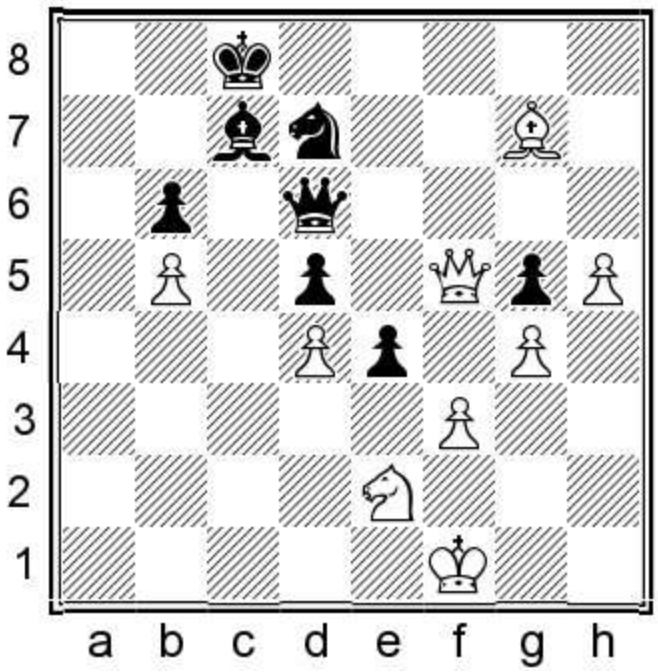
57.b4!
White appeared to be winding up for a kingside break, so it would have been easy to forget about the queenside. By exchanging these pawns, White improves the scope of his bishop and opens the a-file as a potential infiltration route for his queen.

57...axb4
57...a4 leaves the pawn on b4 where it blocks the bishop, but after 58.Qa3 followed by Qxa4 Black will be a pawn down with the white queen poised to invade.

58.Bxb4 Qd7 59.Bf8!
Finally Black's defences fail, as the h6-pawn is doomed.

59...Qd8 60.Bxh6 Qd6 61.Kf1 e5 62.Qf5† Nd7 63.Bg7 e4
Black tries to get some counterplay but there are no real threats, and the h-pawn is much too powerful.

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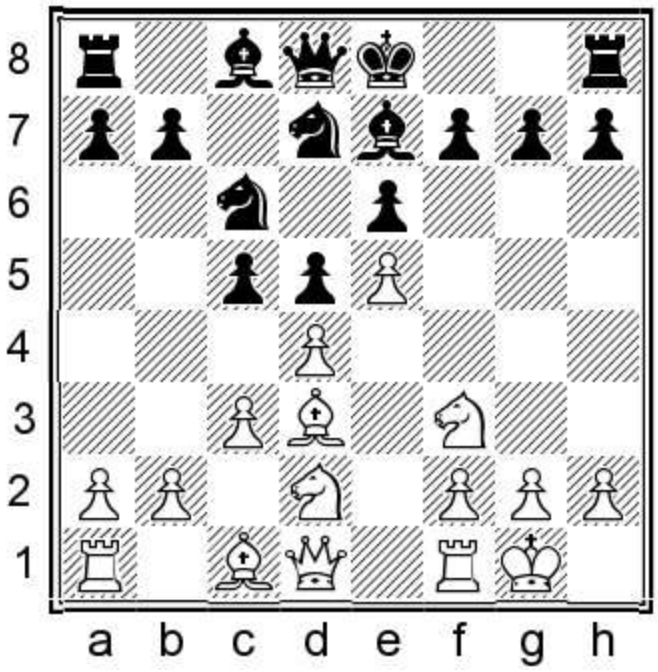


64.fxe4 dxe4 65.h6 Qe7 66.Qg6 Nf8 67.Bxf8 Qxf8† 68.Qf5†
Another excellent game by Adams, who is clearly someone we should look to emulate in these Tarrasch positions which involve manoeuvring the pieces while the centre remains blocked.
1–0

E) 8...g5

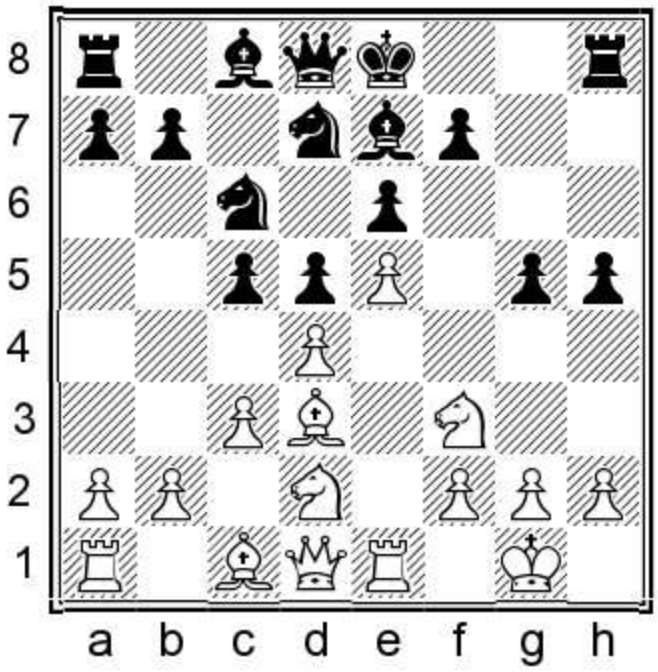
The ...g5 plan is a common theme in this set-up, so we should consider it carefully. Let’s briefly recap the opening moves:

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Be7 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6 8.0-0



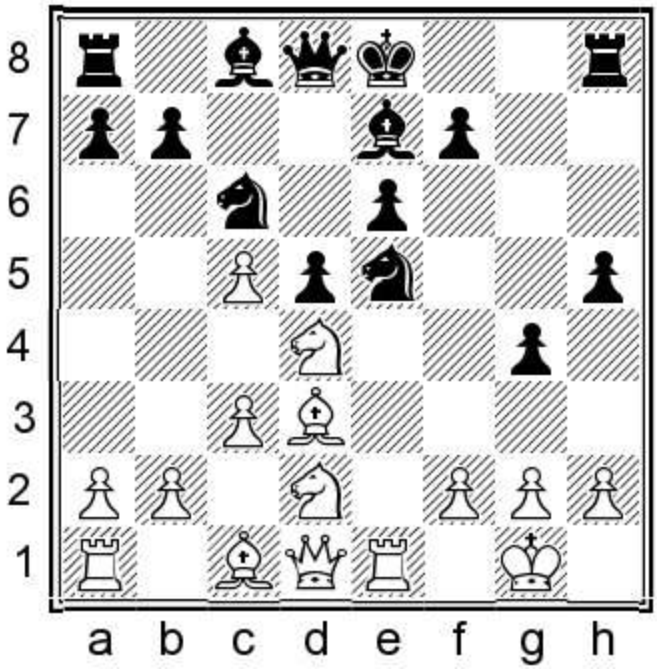
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8...g5
Occasionally Black starts by pushing his h-pawn as follows:
8...h5 9.Re1 g5
9...cxd4 10.cxd4 g5 gives White space to arrange his knights optimally as follows: 11.Nb3! Attacking g5. 11...g4 12.Nfd2 Qb6 Black should attack the d4-pawn, otherwise he will have weakened his kingside for nothing. 13.Nb1 a5 (13...Nxd4?? 14.Be3+–) 14.a4 Nxd4 15.Nxd4 (15.Be3?? now loses to 15...Qxb3 of course) 15...Qxd4 16.Nc3 Qb6 This occurred in Saltaev – Kotainy, Dortmund 2010, and now 17.Nb5N followed by Be3 would have given White great compensation for the pawn.

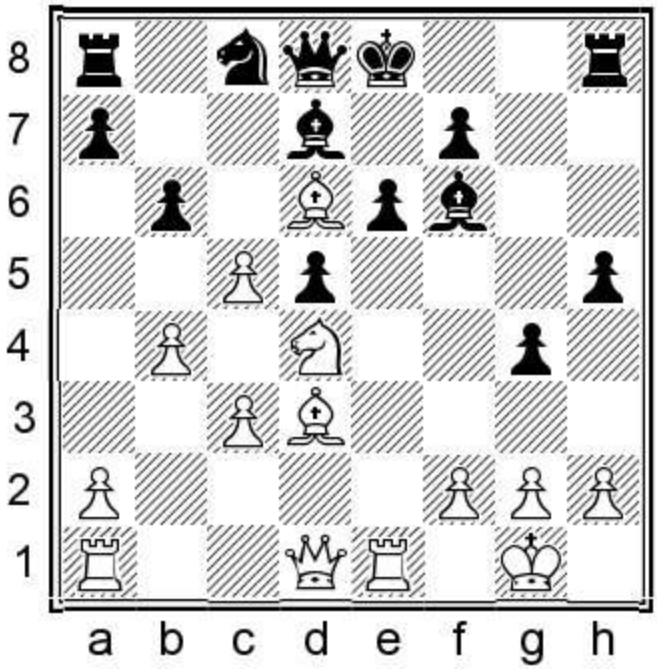


10.dxc5 g4
10...Nxc5 can be met by 11.Bc2N 11...g4 (otherwise White simply improves his position with the typical Nb3) 12.Nd4² and White is doing well.
11.Nd4 Ndxe5
11...Nxc5 12.Bc2² is the same as the note above. 11...Ncxe5 12.N2b3! is similar to the main line.

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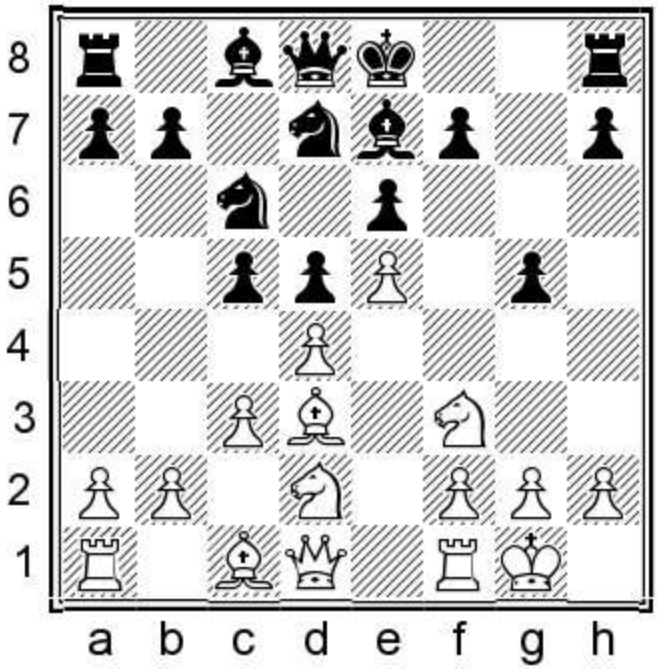
12.N2b3!
White has a promising position. The only game from here resulted in a miniature as follows:
12...Bd7 13.Bf4 Bf6 14.Nxc6 Nxc6 15.Bd6 Ne7 16.Nd4 b6 17.b4 Nc8?



18.Nxe6!
1–0 Ivanov – Figler, Washington DC 2004.

Now let’s consider the position after the much more common 8...g5.

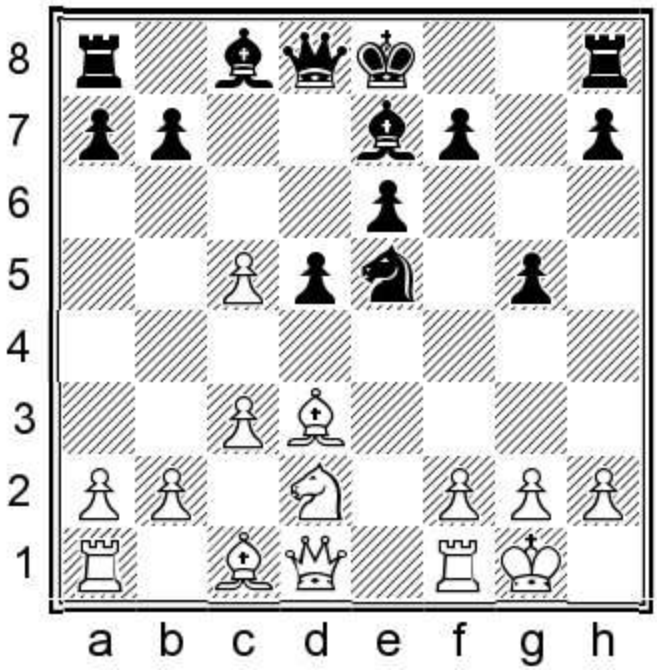
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9.dxc5!
Several other moves have been tried but I believe this to be the strongest. We will analyse E1) 9...Ndxe5, E2) 9...Nxc5 and E3) 9...g4.

9...Ncxe5 10.Nxe5 will obviously transpose to variation E1.

E1) 9...Ndxe5 10.Nxe5 Nxe5

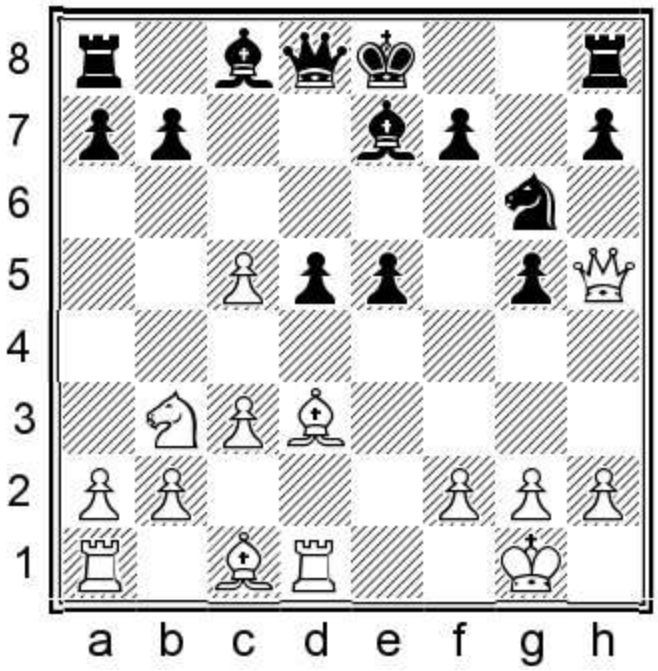


11.Nb3!
This simple move offers White excellent chances. There is no need to worry about losing the bishop pair – the main thing is to develop quickly and look for ways to exploit Black's weaknesses. White's dark-squared bishop will play an important role in this, whereas the one on d3 is more expendable.

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11...Qc7
Black is also under pressure after other moves:

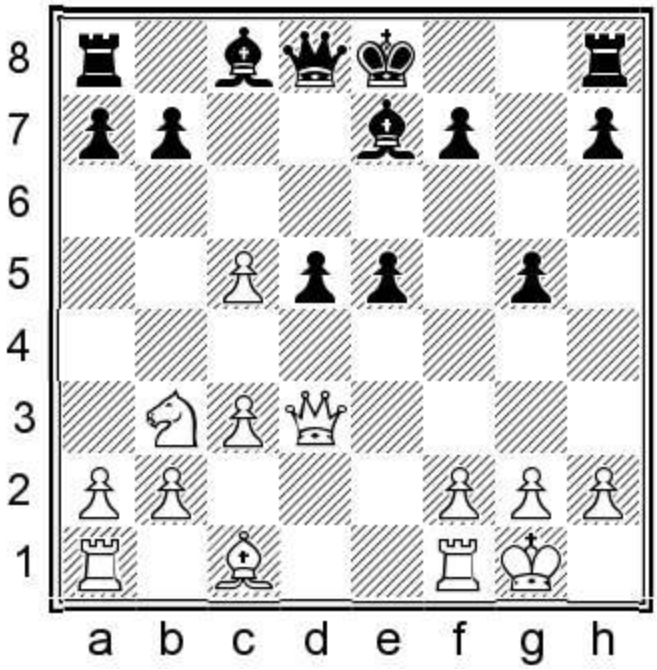
11...Ng6 was played in one game. I like the following line for White: 12.Qh5N 12...e5 Preventing f2-f4, but Black's ...e5 move often leaves his d-pawn vulnerable in this structure, and the present case is no exception. 13. Rd1!



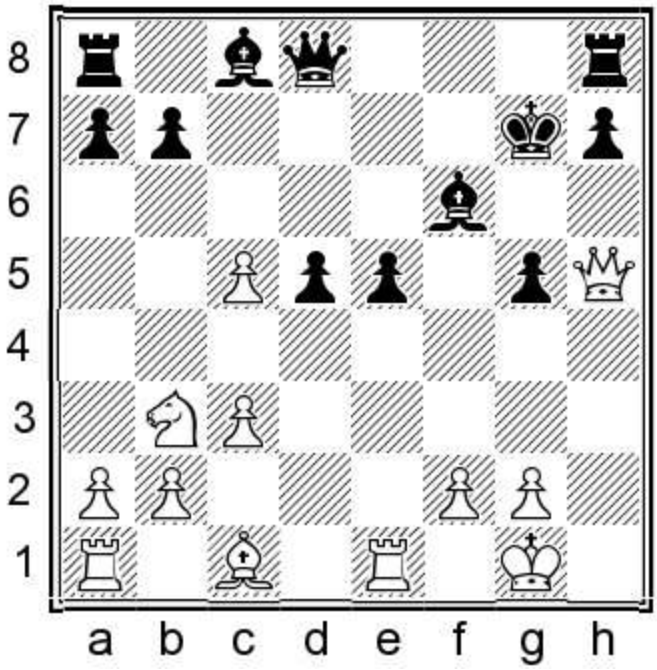
13...Be6 14.c4! Williams gives this line as something to avoid for Black, and I agree that White is doing well.

11...Nxd3 12.Qxd3 e5
This is an attempt by Black to use his central pawns as a barrier against the attack, while preparing to defend the d5-pawn with ...Be6. However, White can find new targets with:

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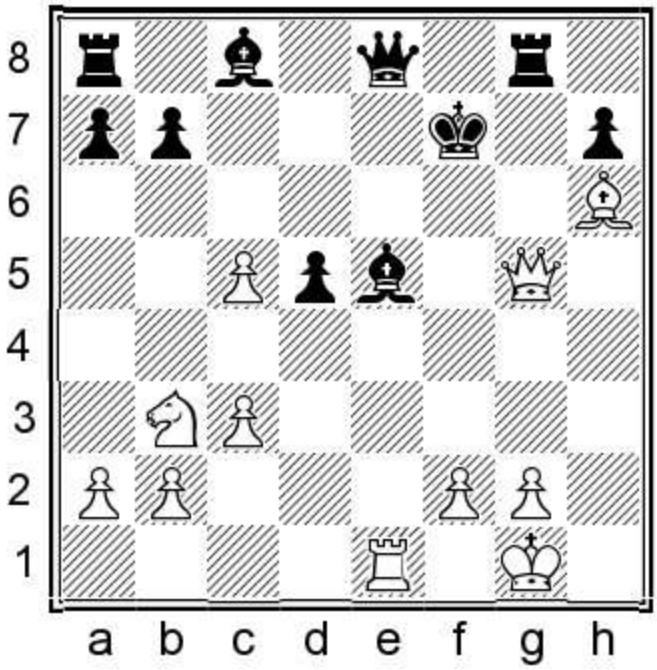


13.Qe2!
Practice has shown that Black is clearly worse. An excellent example continued:
13...f6 14.Qh5† Kf8 15.h4 Kg7 16.hxg5 fxg5 17.Re1 Bf6



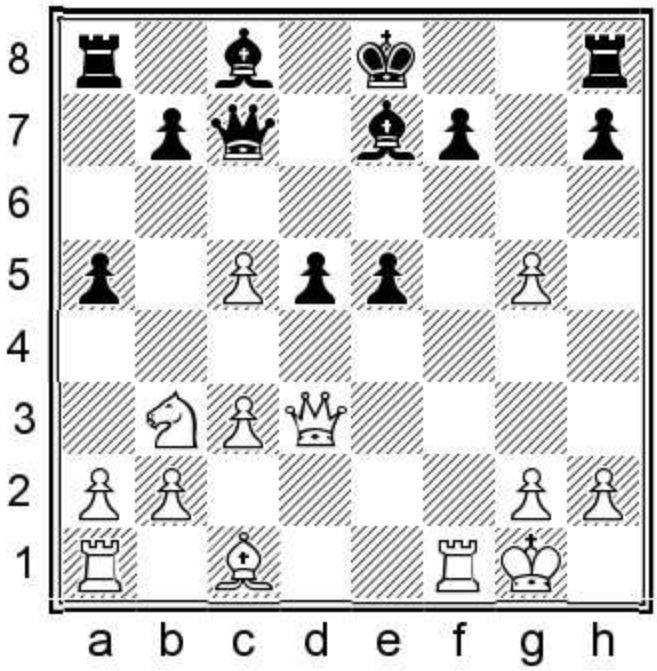
18.Rxe5!
This rook sac is devastating.
18...Bxe5 19.Bxg5 Qe8
19...Bf6 20.Bh6† Kg8 21.Re1 and it's all over.
20.Bh6† Kf6 21.Qg5† Kf7 22.Re1 Rg8

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23.Qh5† Kf6 24.Qh4† Kg6 25.Bf4 Bxf4 26.Rxe8 Rxe8 27.Qxf4+–
J. Degraeve – N. Pert, Montpellier 2003.

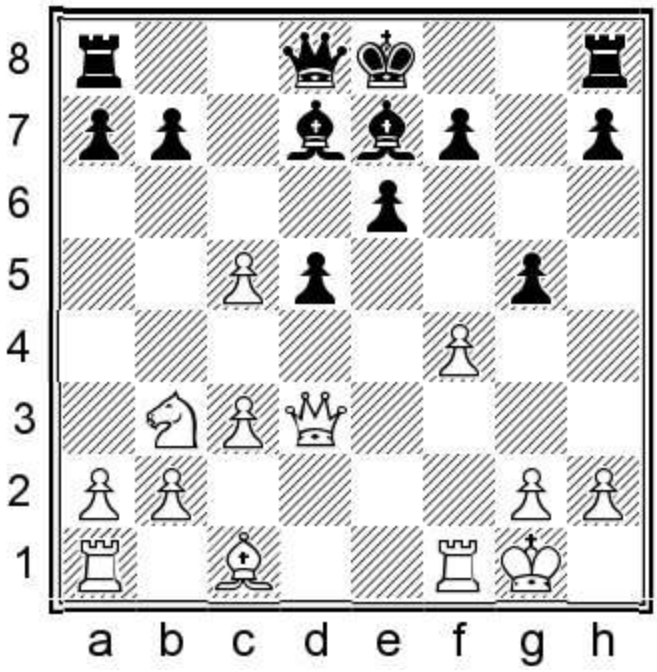
11...a5
This move has scored well for Black but it's hard to believe it can be much good.
12.f4 Nxd3
12...gxf4? 13.Bxf4 Ng6 occurred in Mamedov – Gaya Llodra, Palma de Mallorca 2009, when 14.Qh5, would have been the simplest way of developing White's attack.
13.Qxd3 Qc7 14.fxg5 e5



15.Qg3!?N
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15.Be3 Be6 16.Rae1 Rg8 was not so clear in Erenburg – Cordova, San Salvador 2016.

The text move looks excellent for White, as the e5-pawn comes under serious pressure. An illustrative line is: 15...a4 16.Nd4 Bxc5 17.Re1 0-0 18.Rxe5 Bd6 19.Bf4 Bxe5 20.Bxe5 Qb6 21.Rf1
White has a huge initiative.

11...Bd7 12.f4 Nxd3
So far, nobody has tried 12...gxf4 13.Bxf4 Nxd3 14.Qxd3 f6. Black is trying to hold things together with ...e5 but his king is too weak after 15.Bh6!, when the threat of Bg7 is hard to stop.
13.Qxd3



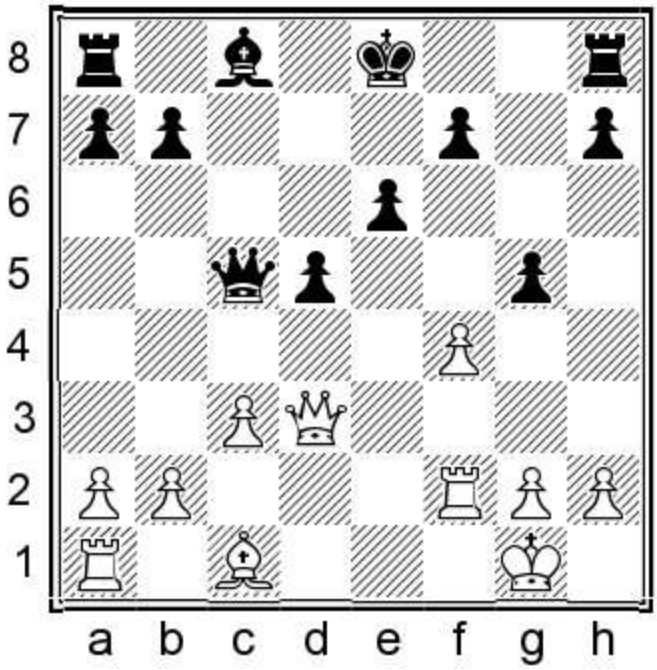
13...h6
13...g4 fails to keep the position closed after: 14.f5! exf5 15.Bh6 Be6 Black eventually prevailed in Sofronie – Volkov, Internet (blitz) 2005, but 16.Nd4!N 16...Qd7 (16...Bxc5? 17.Qb5† picks up the bishop) 17.b4 would have given White a crushing initiative.
Black can attempt to bring some life to his pieces with 13...b6!?N, but White has the pleasant choice between keeping everything under control with 14.Be3 or going all out for an attack with 14.fxg5!? bxc5 15.Qf3.
14.Be3 Qc7 15.Bd4±
White had a great position in Hracek – Stellwagen, Germany 2005.

12.f4
The usual downside of Black's ...g5 move is that it allows White to carry out this dangerous pawn break.

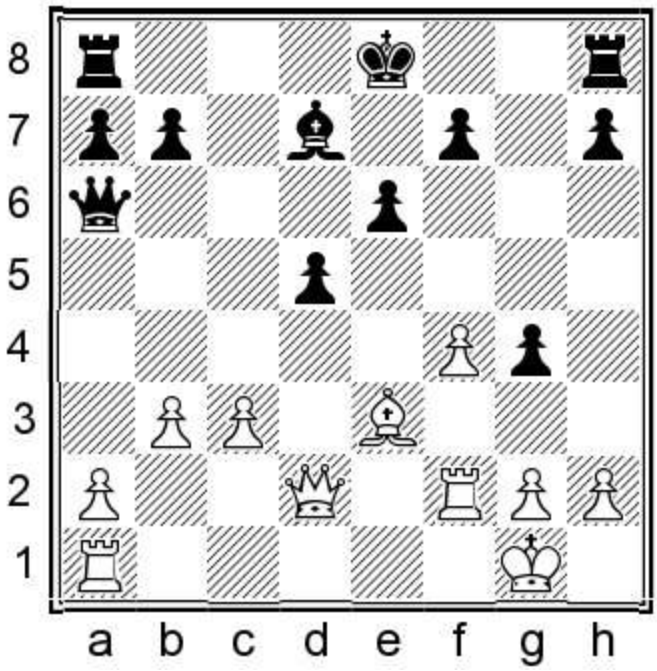
12.Bc2!? followed by f2-f4 also looks strong.

12...Bxc5† 13.Nxc5 Qxc5† 14.Rf2 Nxd3 15.Qxd3

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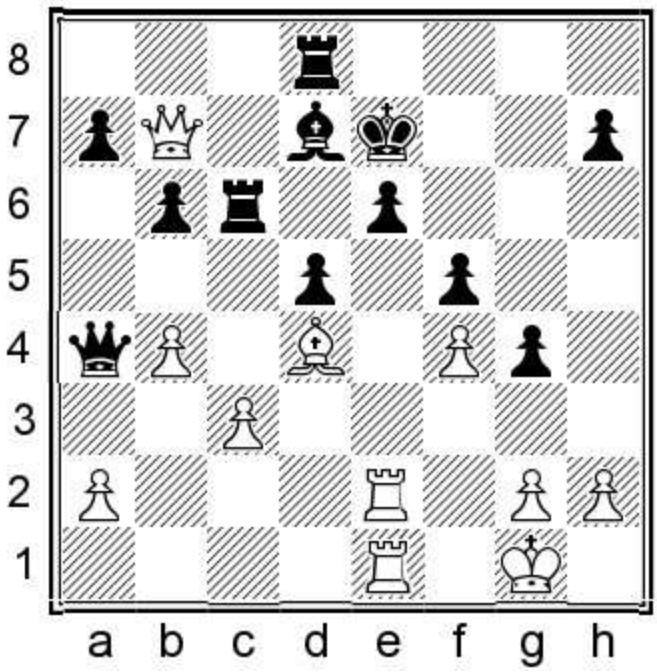


15...Bd7
The alternative is:
15...g4
This way Black tries to keep the position closed before sheltering his king on the queenside.
16.Be3 Qc4
16...Qe7 allows 17.Bxa7! 0-0 (17...Rxa7 18.Qd4 is an elementary fork) 18.Qd4 with Bc5 to follow.
17.Qd2
17.Qxc4 dxc4 18.Rd2 Bd7 19.Rd4 Bc6 20.Rxc4 f6 is only equal.
17...Bd7 18.b3 Qa6
For the time being Black is surviving, but he will suffer for a long time due to his unsafe king. The opposite-coloured bishops are a great help to White in this regard. We will follow a correspondence game in which Black was unable to solve his problems.



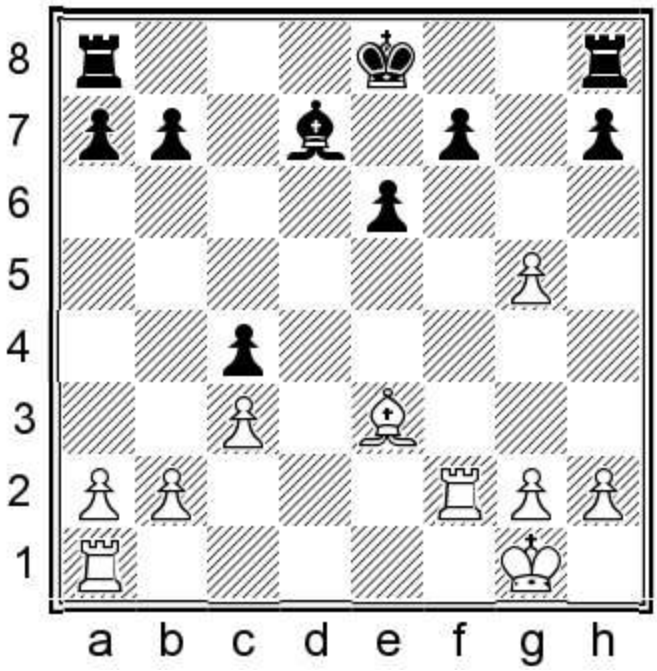
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19.Bd4
19.Qd4!?N 19...0-0-0 20.Qf6² is also good.
19...Rg8 20.Qe3 f5 21.Rc2 b6 22.Rac1 Rc8 23.Qe5 Qa3 24.b4 Qa4 25.Re2 Kd8 26.Rce1 Re8 27.Qd6 Rc6 28. Qb8† Ke7 29.Qb7 Rd8



30.h3! h5 31.hxg4 hxg4 32.g3
1–0 Stilman – Steamboat, corr. 2009. Black has no good defence against the coming rook invasion along the h-file.

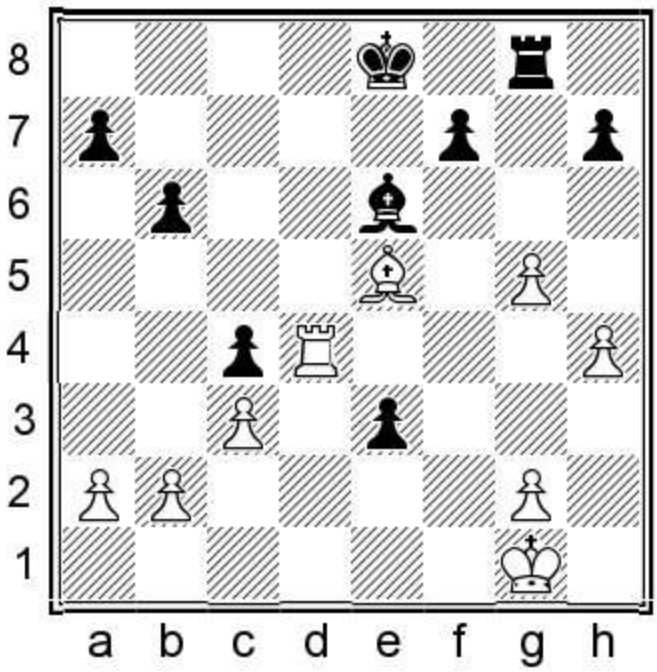
16.Be3 Qc4 17.Qxc4 dxc4 18.fxg5²
Black has succeeded in exchanging queens, but now finds himself in a joyless position without the consolation of an extra pawn.



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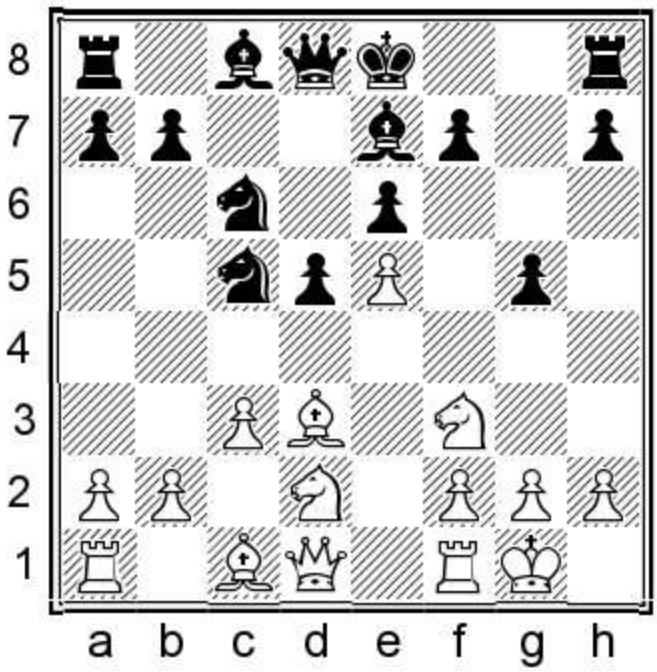
18...e5 19.Bc5 Rg8 20.h4 b6 21.Bd6 e4 22.Be5 e3 23.Rf4 Be6
Black has avoided a disaster on f7 but his e-pawn is doomed.

24.Rd4 Rd8 25.Rad1 Rxd4 26.Rxd4



26...f5 27.Kf1 Kf7 28.Ke2 Kg6 29.Kxe3
White went on to convert his extra pawn in Mamedov – Bartel, Novi Sad 2009.

E2) 9...Nxc5



10.Bb5!
10.Bc2 has been tried by some strong players. Black's most popular reply to it has been 10...g4 11.Nd4 Nxe5;

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this was the actual move order of Degraeve – Renet, which you can find on page 127 under the 9...g4 move order. However, Black does better to meet 10.Bc2 with 10...h5!, as recommended by Williams, when Black gets a good game.

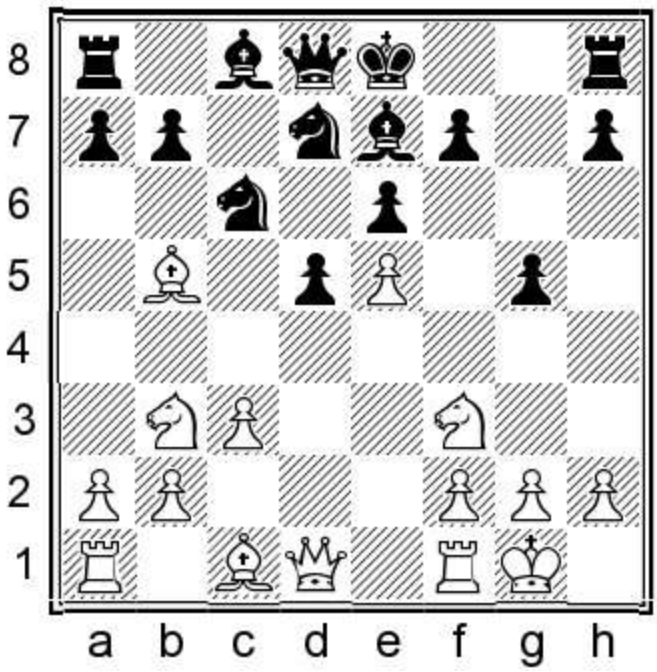
The text move is more problematic for Black, as we will see.

10...Qb6
Black has tried several other ideas:

10...Bd7 gives White a few good options. I like 11.Re1, intending 11...g4N 12.Nd4 Nxd4 13.Bxd7†² with a good game for White.

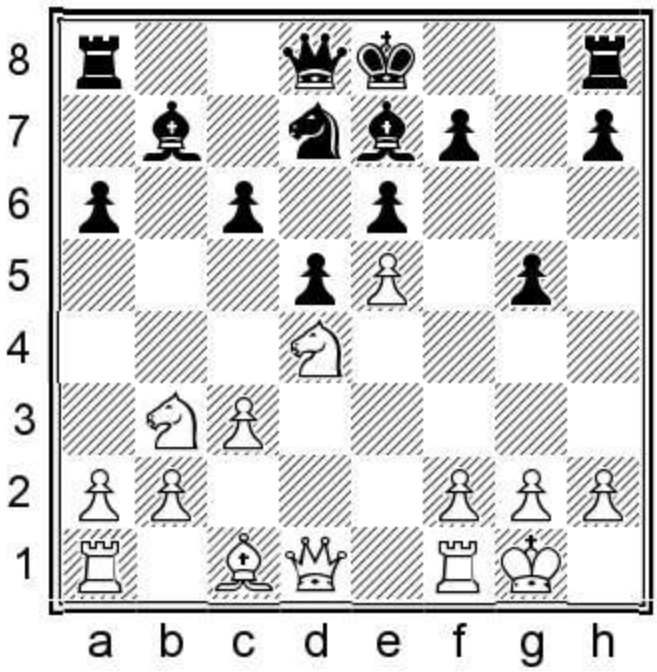
10...0-0 has only been played in one game, which is hardly surprising, as it's a strange way to follow the earlier ...g5. 11.Nb3N (11.b4 Nd7 12.Re1 was quite promising for White in Adams – Karttunen, Eilat 2012, but the text move is much simpler) 11...Ne4 12.Qe2² White has an easy advantage, as Watson points out in his ChessPublishing annotations.

10...Nd7 11.Nb3!
Most games have continued 11.Re1 but the text move is more challenging.



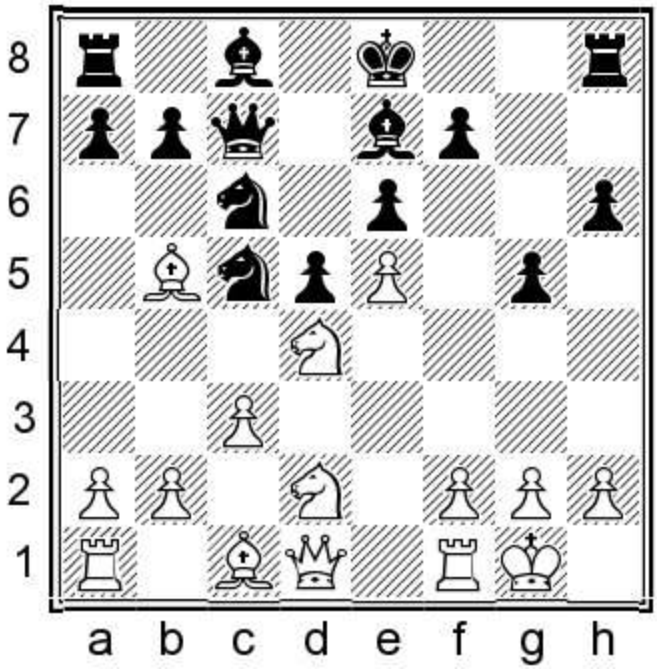
11...a6
11...h6 12.Nfd4 Ndxe5 13.f4 gave White a fine initiative for a mere pawn in Schroeder – Kotainy, Germany 2016.
12.Bxc6 bxc6 13.Nfd4!N
13.Nbd4 should offer White some initiative but the text move is stronger, as it makes way for the queen to go to h5 and for the f-pawn to advance.
13.c4!? led to a success for White in a correspondence game and is also promising, but the text move is more direct.
13...Bb7
Antic and Maksimovic reach this position in a note, with no comment or evaluation. Presumably the implication is that Black is okay, but I suspect he is already losing.

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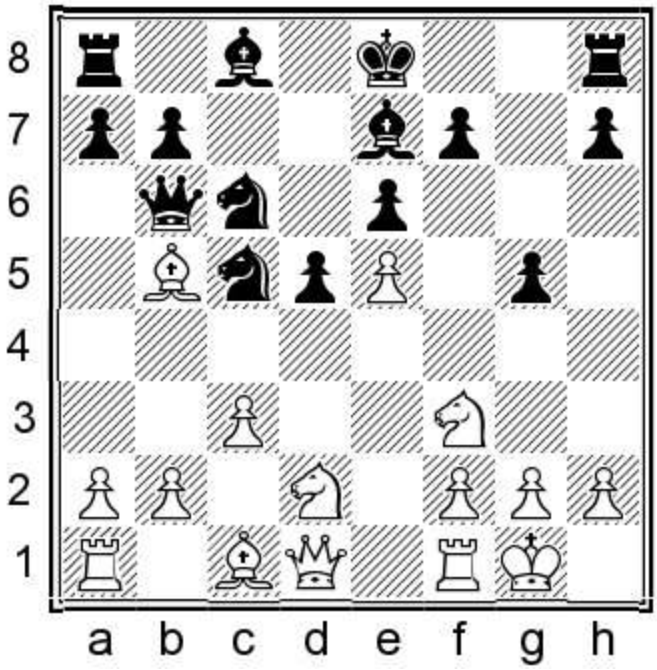


14.Qh5!
14.f4 also favours White but the queen move is stronger. The threat of Nxe6 forces Black's knight to retreat to a passive square.
14.Nxe6! fxe6 15.Qh5† Kf8 16.f4 Kg8 17.Qh6! is also most likely winning, but White does not have to sacrifice material to prove anything.
14...Nf8 15.f4 gxf4 16.Bxf4 Ng6 17.Bh6
White has a huge initiative and I doubt that Black can survive after best play.
10...h6
This has been Nakamura's choice and Williams likes it too.
11.Nd4!
This is not mentioned by Williams but it seems strongest and simplest to me.
11.Qe2 is also decent. 11...Qc7 was played in Howell – Nakamura, London 2009, and now Erenburg offers 12. Nb3N as an improvement. I like White's chances here too, but will focus on the text move as it leads to excellent attacking prospects.
11...Qc7
11...Bd7N may be safer but 12.Re1 Qc7 13.Qe2² looks like a safe edge for White.

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12.f4
White had a nice initiative in Kleinman – Thavandiran, Guelph 2011. (Another good option is 12.Qh5!?, improving the queen and intending f2-f4 next.)
Let's return to 10...Qb6:

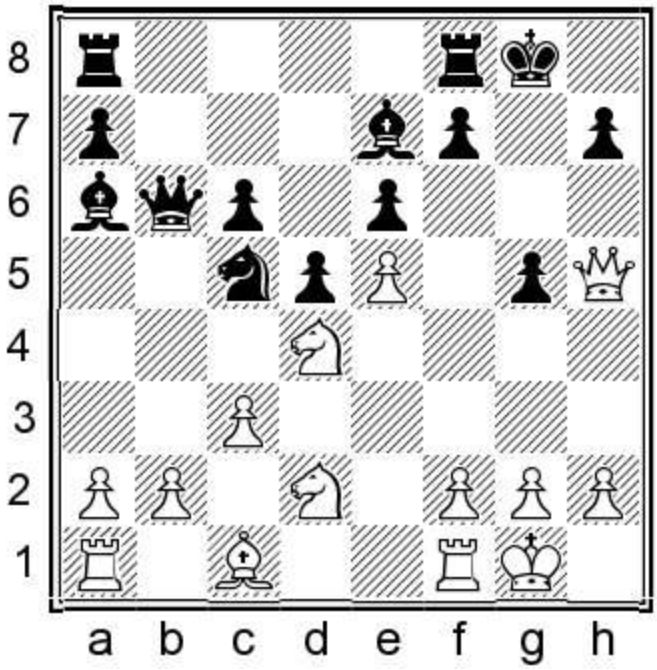


11.Nd4!
Simple and effective: White defends the bishop while clearing the way for his queen and f-pawn.

11...a6
This has been Black's usual reply.

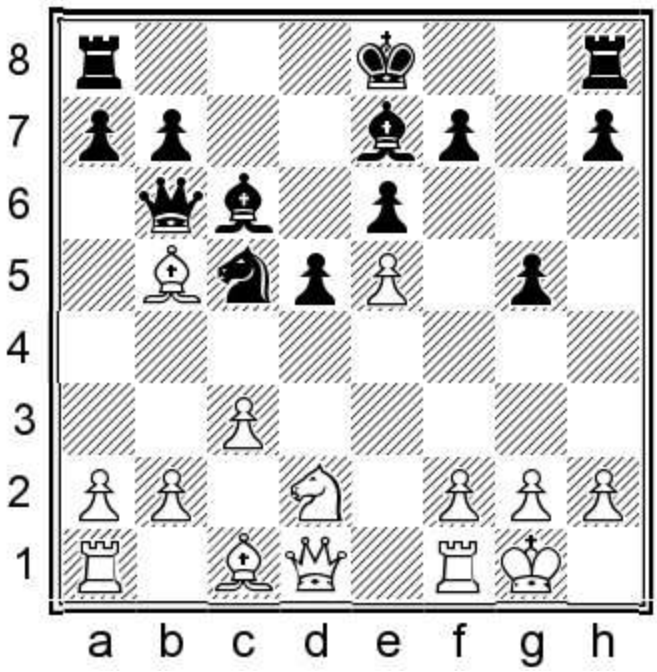
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11...0-0?! can hardly be the solution to his problems: 12.Bxc6 bxc6 13.Qh5 Simple stuff, putting the queen in

the kill zone and threatening f2-f4 and/or N2f3. 13...Ba6



14.b4! (14.N2f3!? is another good option, when 14...Bxf1 15.Bxg5 f6 16.exf6 Bxf6 17.Rxf1 gives White a dangerous initiative for the exchange) 14...Nd3 15.N2f3 Nxc1 16.Nxg5! Williams mentions this line, which sees White win a pawn while Black's king remains in danger.

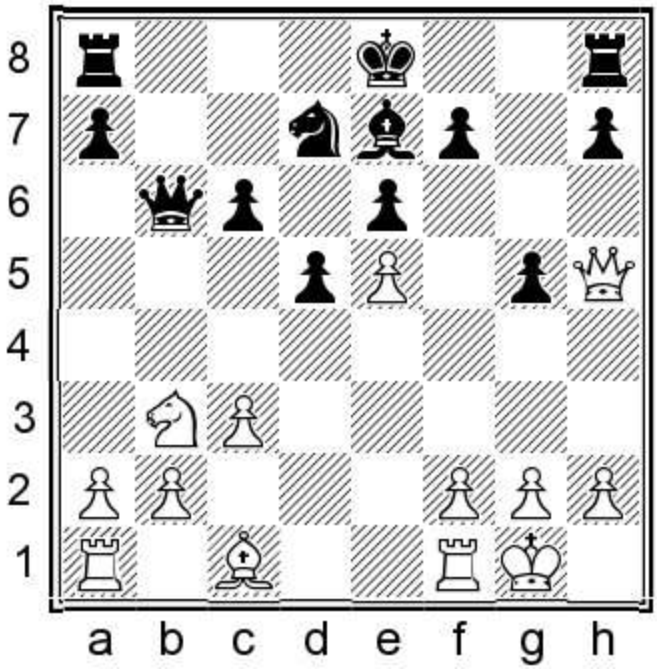
11...Bd7 12.Nxc6 Bxc6N
Black may as well exchange bishops.
12...bxc6 13.Be2 left him with a passive bishop on d7 in Ortiz Suarez – Ankit, Kolkata 2015.



13.Bxc6† bxc6 14.Nb3!
White wants to exchange knights, which will make it harder for Black to cover the weak squares in his position.

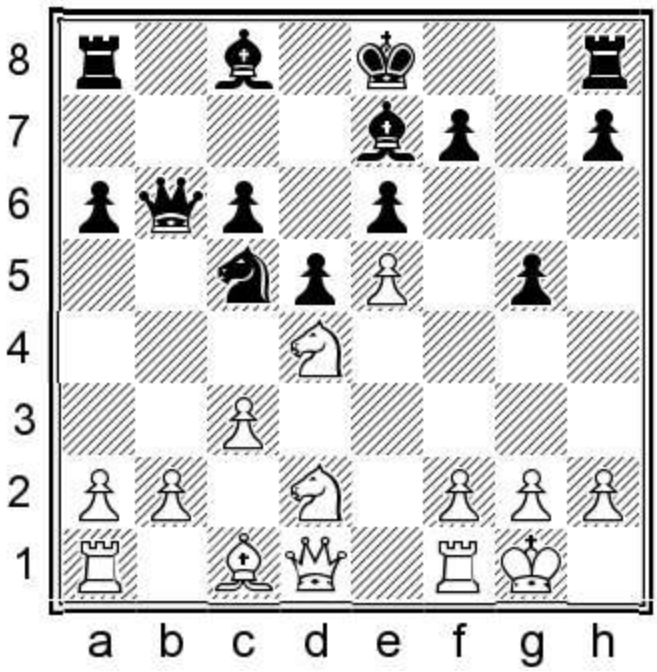
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14...Nd7 15.Qh5!
This move is often a pain for Black after ...g5 has been played.



15...Nxe5 16.Bxg5 Bxg5 17.Qxg5
At the end of this line from Williams, White is clearly better due to Black's difficulties in finding a safe haven for his king.

12.Bxc6† bxc6

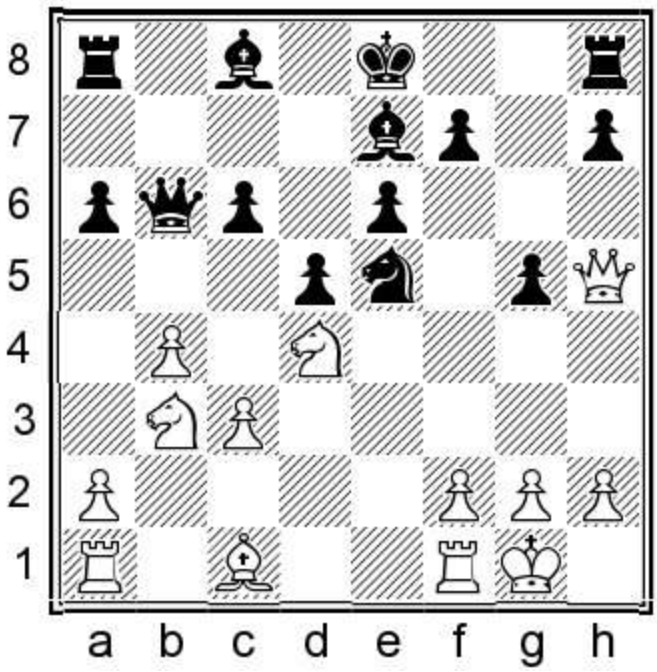


13.b4! Nd3!N
13...Nd7 14.Qh5 was excellent for White in Arizmendi Martinez – Herraiz Hidalso, Sant Lluis 2005.

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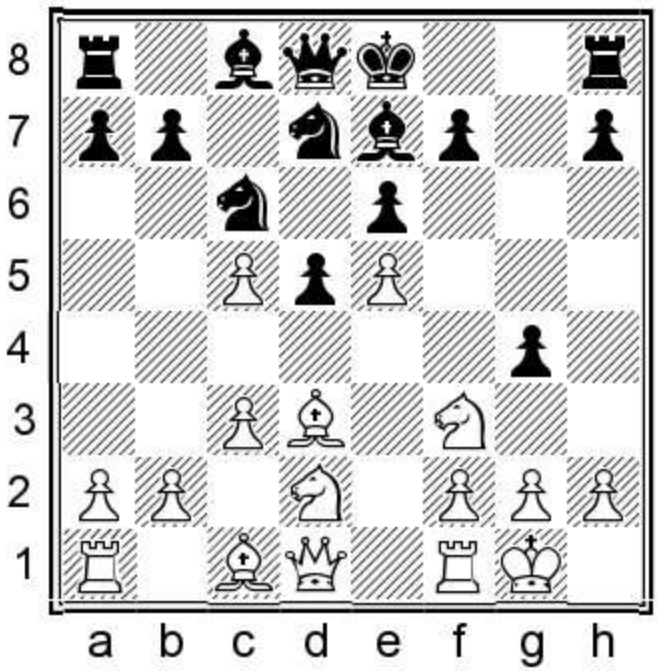
The text move is a better try but White still retains an advantage after:

14.N2b3 Nxe5 15.Qh5!
Yet again, this move is an important part of White's plan.



15...h6 16.Bxg5! Bxg5 17.f4!
At the end of this nice line from Williams, Black's position is starting to collapse.

E3) 9...g4



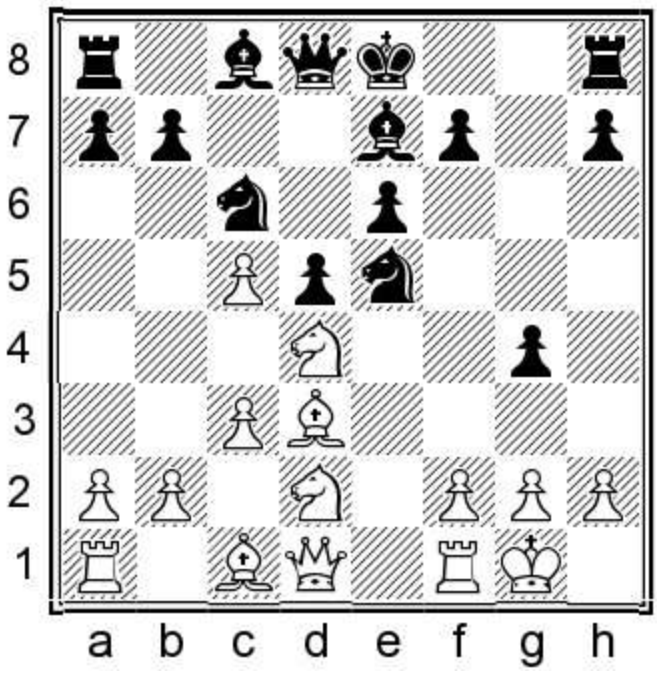
I think this is more accurate than the previous tries.

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10.Nd4
Now we have a final split between E31) 10...Ndxe5 and E32) 10...Ncxe5!?.

E31) 10...Ndxe5

This is Vitiugov's main line but he may have underestimated the danger Black is facing.

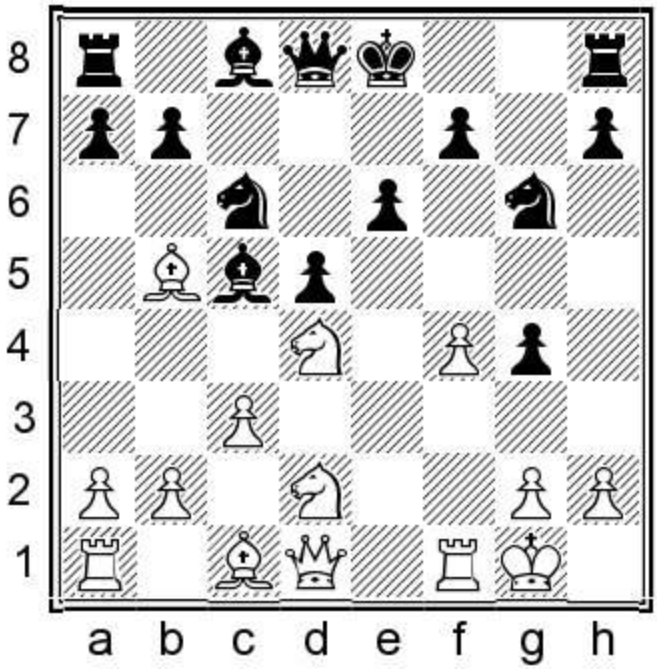


11.Bb5!
11.N2b3 resembles the approach which worked so well in variation E1 but a small (or should I say 'big'?) detail changes the evaluation: 11...Nxd3 12.Qxd3 e5! The d4-knight is attacked; both Vitiugov and Williams provide analysis demonstrating that Black is fine.

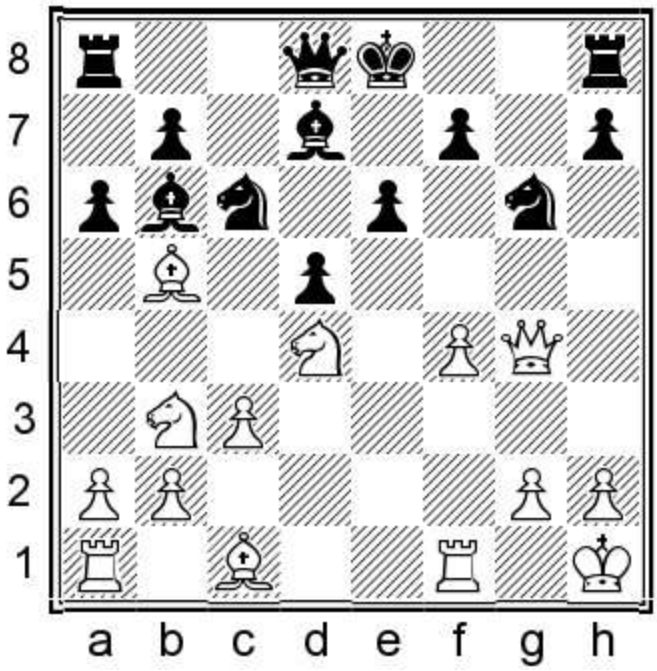
11...Bd7!
This is Black's best try.

White has excellent prospects after:
11...Bxc5 12.f4! Ng6!?
12...Qb6 13.fxe5 Qxb5 14.Qxg4 Qd3 15.Qg7 is better for White too.
12...gxf3 13.N2xf3 Bd7 14.Bxc6 Nxc6 15.Ng5 is also problematic for Black: 15...Qb6 (15...Rf8? 16.Nxh7 left Black in even worse trouble in Carlsson – Berg, Gothenburg 2005) 16.Nxf7 Nxd4 17.Nxh8 Nf5† (17...Nc2†? 18.Kh1 Nxa1 19.Bg5! catches Black's king in a mating net) 18.Kh1 0-0-0 19.Nf7 Black did not have enough for the exchange in Buczinski – Manny, email 2006.

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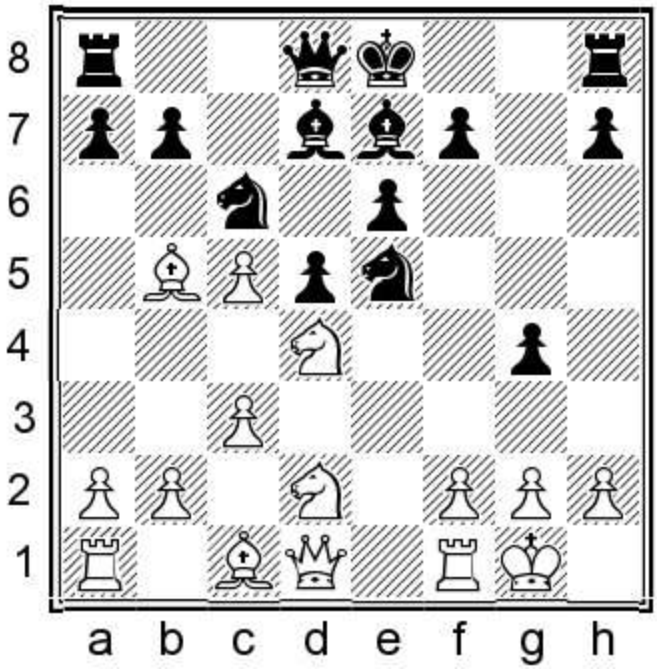
13.N2b3 Bb6 14.Kh1
14.Qxg4!?N deserves consideration too.
14...Bd7
I also considered 14...a6 15.Nxc6! Qh4!? but after 16.g3 Qh3 17.Be2 Nh4!? 18.Rg1 Bxg1 19.Qxg1 bxc6 20. gxh4 Qxh4 Black's attack runs out of steam and White is clearly better due to his domination of the dark squares.
15.Qxg4
15.f5!? was also dangerous for Black in Iordachescu – Balaian, St Petersburg 2012.
15...a6



Now in Chen Jing – Gong Qingyun, Jinan 2005, White should have kept the momentum going with:
16.Bxc6!N 16...bxc6 17.f5!

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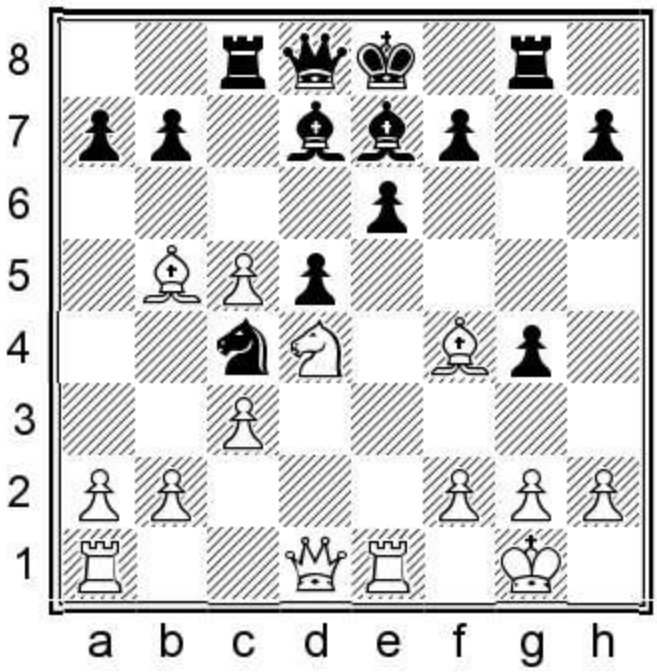
I would be surprised if Black could survive the attack.



12.N2b3 h5!
This seems like Black's best bet.

12...Rg8 is met by 13.Re1 when Black faces a difficult choice:

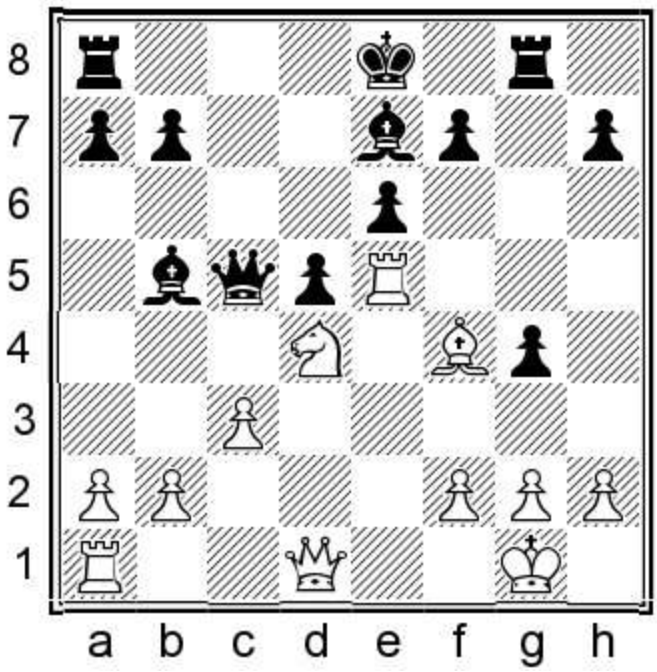
a) 13...Nc4 14.Bf4 Nxd4 15.Nxd4 Rc8 (15...Bxc5 16.Nxe6!+–) White continued with 16.b3 and went on to win in Smirin – Akobian, Minneapolis 2005, but he could have got things done more quickly with:



16.Rxe6!!N 16...fxe6 (16...Bxb5 17.Re2! Rxc5 [17...Bd7 18.Bd6 does not change anything] 18.b4 and White wins) 17.Nxe6 Qa5 (17...Bxb5 18.Nxd8+–) 18.Bxd7† Kxd7 19.Qxd5† Ke8 20.Nc7† and Black can resign.

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b) 13...Nxd4 14.Nxd4 Bxb5N (14...Nc6 occurred in Jacobson – A. Kumar, corr. 2014, when 15.b4N± would have been simplest) 15.Rxe5 Qc7 16.Bf4 Qxc5

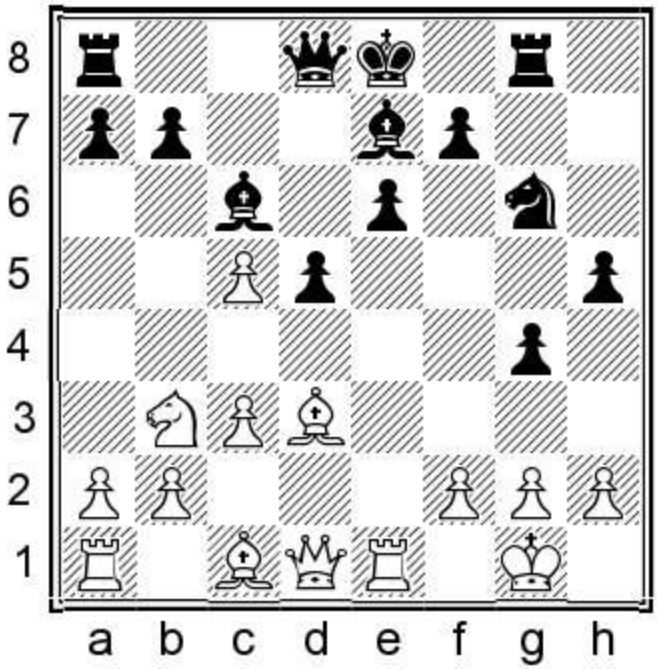


17.Rh5! The position is complicated, but Black's loose king remains the most important factor. A nice detail is 17...0-0-0?! 18.Rc1! when the threat of c3-c4 is hard to meet.

13.Re1 Nxd4
13...Nc4N looks quite sensible but Black's position still appears shaky after 14.Bf4!, when his king remains a concern. Play could continue 14...Rc8 15.Bxc4 dxc4 16.Nd2 Nxd4 17.cxd4 Bc6 18.Nxc4 Qd5 19.Ne3 Qe4 20. Bd6 when Black may be able to claim some compensation for his pawn thanks to his strong light-squared bishop, but I doubt that it is enough.

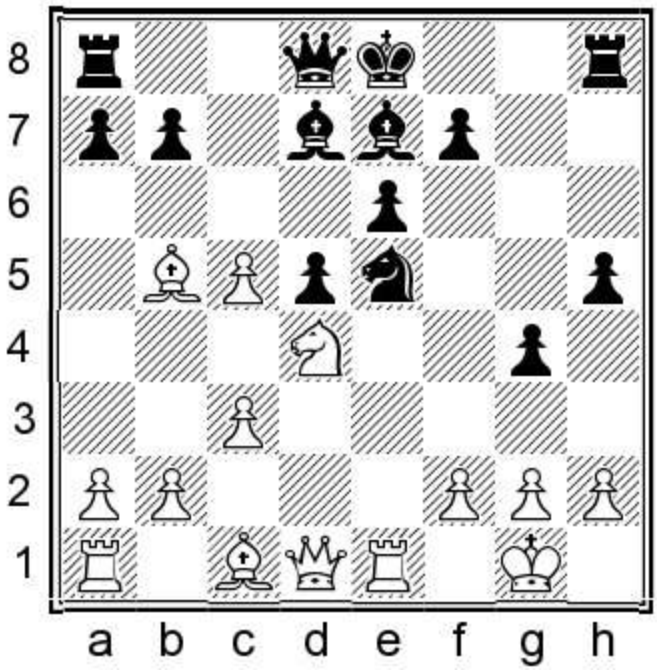
13...Ng6 is offered by Vitiugov as an interesting alternative but I don't see how Black can be satisfied after: 14. Nxc6 Bxc6 (14...bxc6 15.Bd3 Rg8 16.c4² is mentioned by Vitiugov) 15.Bd3 Rg8

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16.Qe2!N This move improves on a few existing games, as well as Vitiugov's analysis. An illustrative line is: 16...Qc7 17.Nd4! Nf4 (17...0-0-0? 18.b4 gives White a huge attack) 18.Bxf4 Qxf4 19.g3 Qf6 20.Bb5 Followed by b2-b4 and White is clearly better.

14.Nxd4!?
I also considered 14.Bxd7† Qxd7 15.cxd4, when 15...Nc6 and 15...Nc4!?N seem like Black's best tries. I would regard Black's position as slightly suspect due to the lack of a safe haven for his king, but it is not so easy proving anything against the engines.

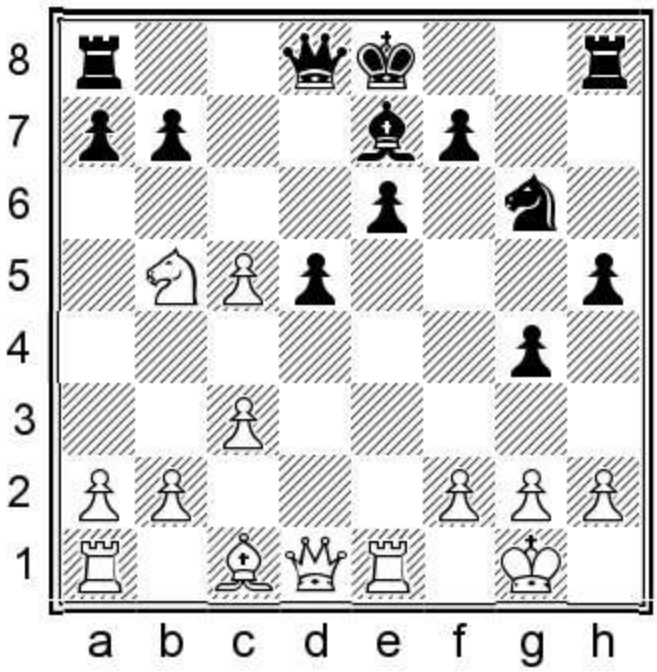


14...Bxb5 15.Nxb5
I decided to focus on this simple recapture.

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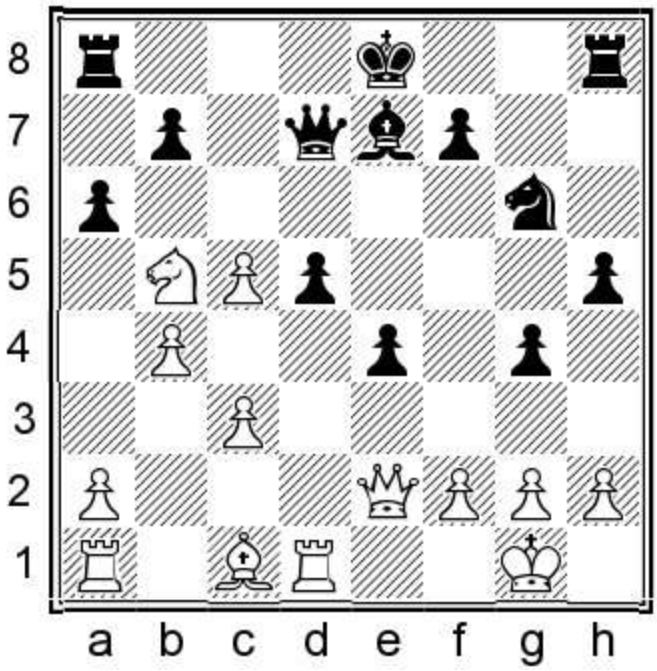
15.Rxe5 Bd7 occurred in Emms – Lalic, Southend 2001, and now the engine's suggestion of 16.Qe2!?N could be worth investigating, but one good option is enough.

15...Ng6



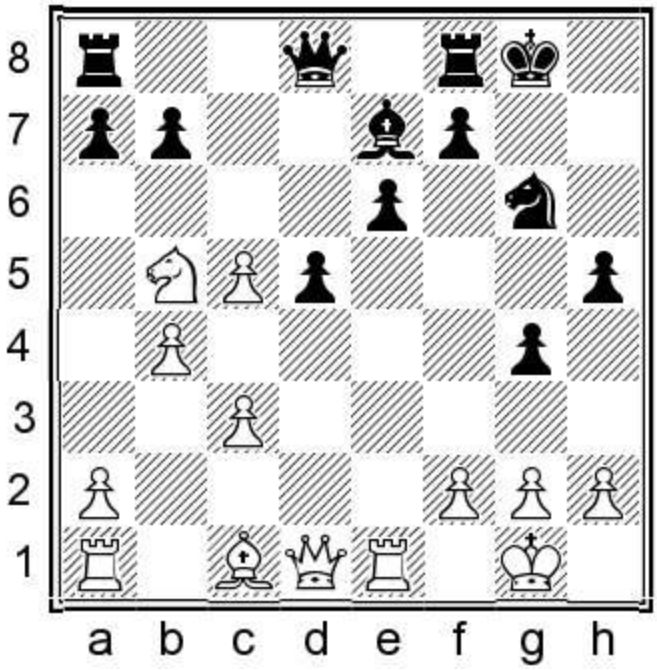
16.b4!
Vitiugov only mentions 16.c4 and 16.Qa4, but Williams points out that the text move is strong. White safeguards the important c5-pawn and intends to develop threats against Black's exposed king.

16...0-0!?
16...Qd7 17.Qd3 e5 18.Rd1 e4 19.Qe2 a6 is offered by Goh Wei Ming in his ChessPublishing annotations as satisfactory for Black. However, the Singaporean IM overlooked a finesse:



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20.Nd6†! Bxd6 21.cxd6 The point is that 21...Qxd6 is met by 22.c4! and White has a dangerous initiative.



17.Bh6 Re8 18.Qd3!
Williams evaluates this as better for White and I agree. Black's king is exposed and there is already a nasty threat of Rxe6.

E32) 10...Ncxe5!?

This has been a less frequent choice than the previous line, but it has recently become trendy and is Williams' primary recommendation.

GAME 16

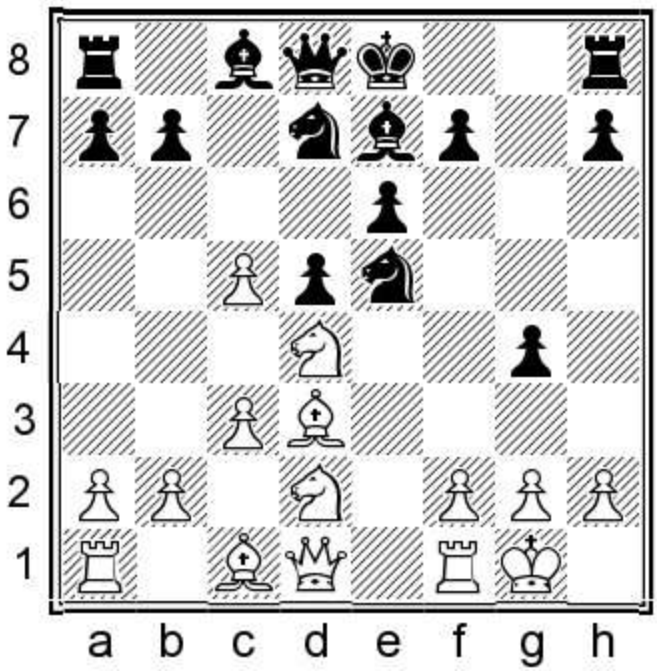
Jean Marc Degraeve – Olivier Renet
Montpellier 1993

I have fiddled the move order of this game to fit with our repertoire.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Be7 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 Nc6 8.0-0 g5 9.dxc5! g4
The game actually continued 9...Nxc5 10.Bc2 (10.Bb5! was my recommendation on page 120) 10...g4 (10...h5!? is more challenging) 11.Nd4 Nxe5, reaching our main line.

10.Nd4 Ncxe5!?

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Compared with the previous variation, I suppose the logic behind this choice is to keep the other knight on d7 in order to target the c5-pawn. I won't dwell on the conceptual side of things though, as the evaluation of such unbalanced positions will be determined by specific variations.

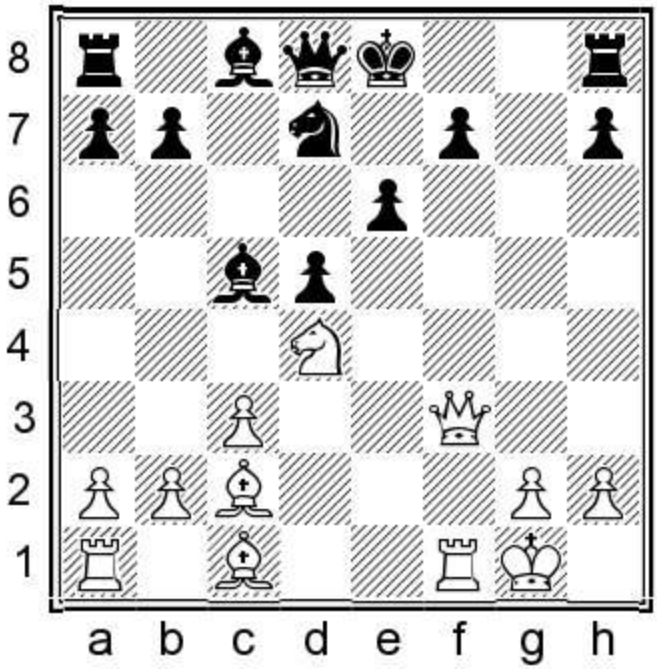
11.Bc2!
This has been a rare choice so far, but I believe it to be White's best solution.

11.Bb5 has been the usual choice. Play may continue 11...a6 12.Bxd7† Bxd7 13.f4, which is offered by Vitiugov as sufficient reason to reject Black's 10th move. However, Williams offers 13...Nd3!?N (13...gxf3 14.N2xf3 Ng6 has been played in some games) 14.b4 Nxc1 15.Rxc1 h5 and says that Black is okay, although 16.N2b3 and 16.f5!? both offer White interesting play. All this could be analysed in more detail, but I will concentrate on the move which I consider the most promising.

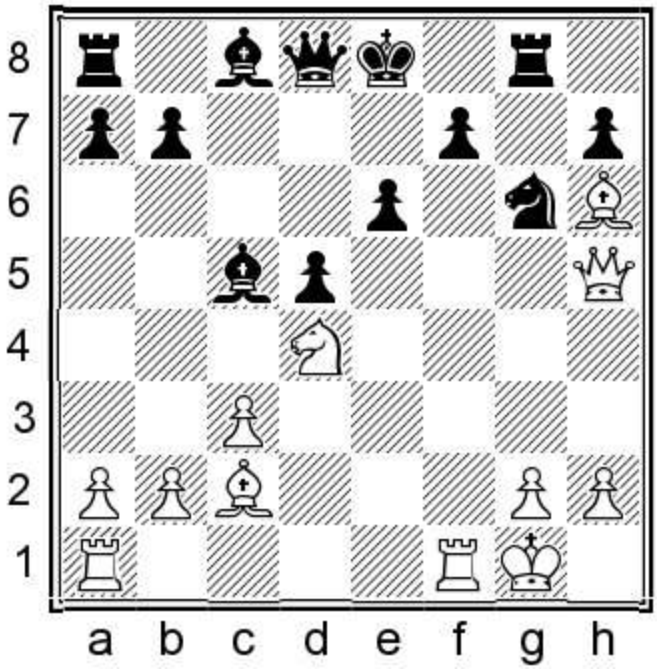
11...Nxc5
This is definitely Black's best try. With this move, we finally transpose back to Degraeve – Renet.

Weaker is:
11...Bxc5?! 12.f4! gxf3?!
12...Nc6 13.N2b3 Nxd4 14.cxd4 Bd6 15.Qxg4 is unpleasant for Black, as McDonald points out in his ChessPublishing annotations. The text move is even worse though.
13.N2xf3 Nxf3† 14.Qxf3
McDonald sums up the situation perfectly: "Black played the French and ended up facing the King's Gambit!"

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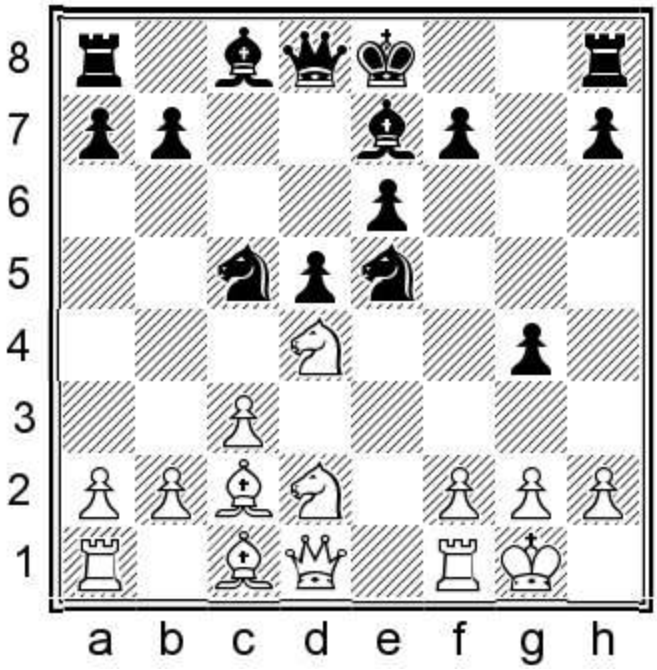


14...Ne5?
14...Qe7 is better although 15.Bf4 followed by Rae1 gives White an overwhelming initiative.
15.Qh5 Ng6 16.Bh6 Rg8



17.Rxf7!N
White was successful after 17.Bg5 in Lagerman – Alaguzov, Olomouc 2007, but McDonald points out that the rook sac would have won more quickly. The point is revealed after:
17...Kxf7 18.Bg5! Qd6
Black can survive for a bit longer by giving up his queen but his position would still be hopeless.
19.Qxh7† Kf8 20.Bxg6
With mate to follow shortly.

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12.Qe2!
Williams focuses on 12.f4, as does McDonald in his ChessPublishing analysis. Black responds with 12...Nc6 13.Qxg4 (or 13.Nxc6 bxc6 14.Qxg4 e5) 13...e5 when the position is unclear and double-edged. It's interesting that neither of these French Defence lovers took into account the move played by Degraeve in this much older game. White's idea is to postpone f2-f4 until a more favourable moment arises.

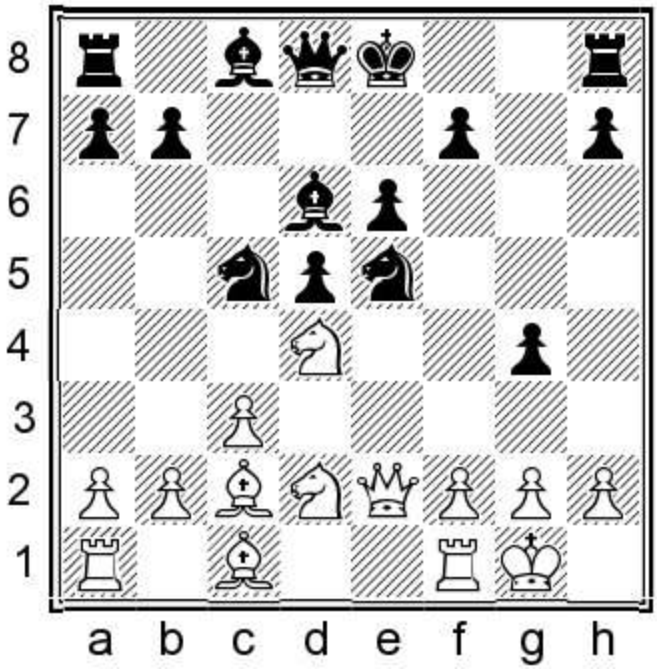
12...Bf6
This seems like the most logical move.

12...Ncd7?! runs into 13.f4! Nc6, and now both 14.N2b3 and 14.Qxg4 are great for White.

12...Ng6 occurred in Maatman – Trella, Netherlands 2015. White has a few interesting continuations but 13.f4!N*f* looks simplest, with fine prospects for White.

12...Bd6 was played in Boscolo – Burrows, Ortisei 2013, when White could have obtained excellent chances by borrowing an idea from the main game:

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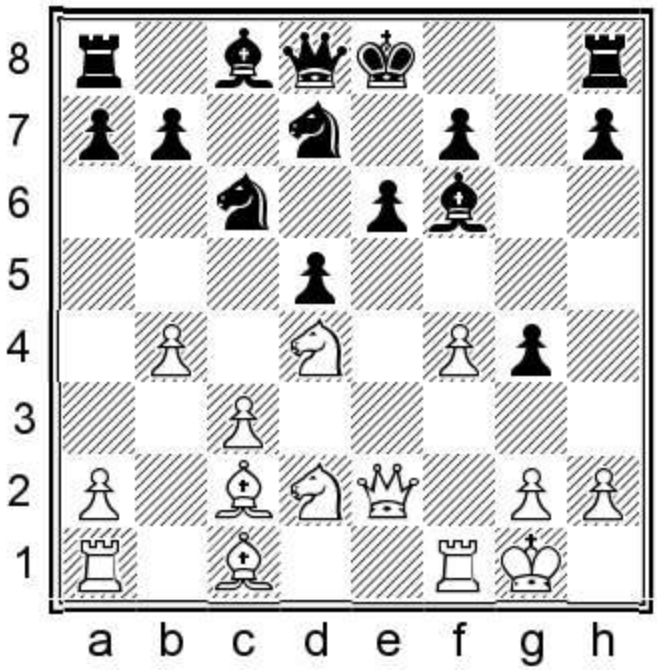


13.b4! Ncd7 14.f4 Nc6 15.Nf5f Black is under pressure.

13.b4!
13.f4 Nc6 is still nothing special for White.

13...Ncd7 14.f4!
However, having driven the other knight back to d7, it becomes a lot stronger.

14...Nc6
14...gxf3 15.N2xf3 Nc4 16.Bd3± is great for White.

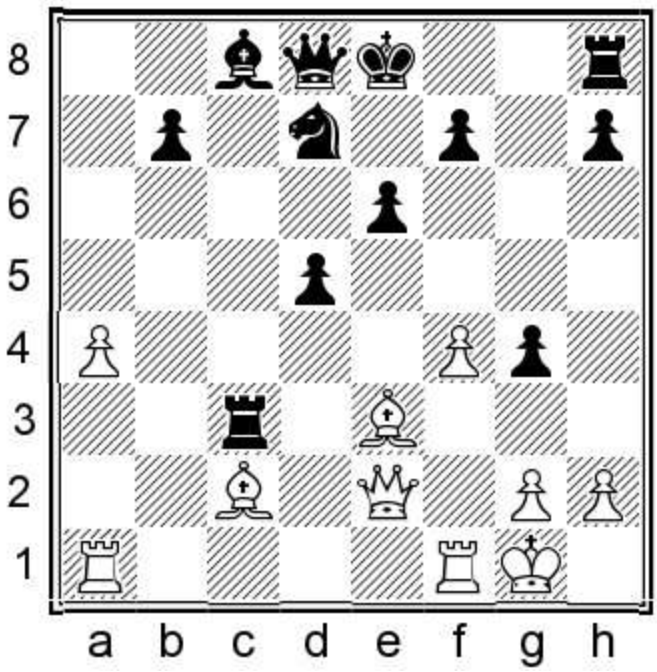


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15.N2b3 h5

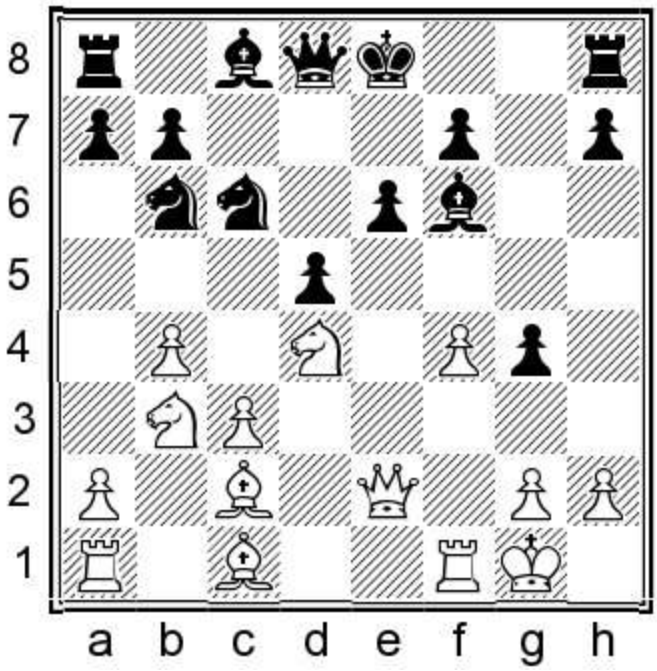
15...Nxd4 16.cxd4 h5 17.Be3 gives White more than enough play for a pawn. Play might continue: 17...Kf8 18.f5 A typical resource in this line. 18...e5 19.dxe5 Nxe5 20.Rad1[2]

I also checked 15...a5 16.bxa5 Nxa5 17.Nxa5 Rxa5 18.a4 Rc5 19.Nb5 Bxc3 20.Nxc3 Rxc3 21.Be3 when White has fantastic compensation for the two sacrificed pawns. e.g.



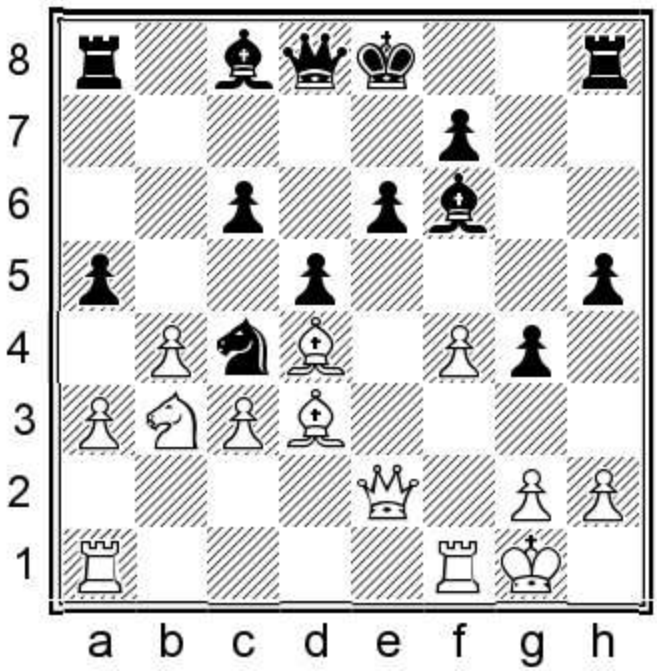
21...Qf6 22.Rad1 Rc4 23.Bd3 Rxa4 24.Qxg4 h5 25.Qe2 Ra8 26.Qf2 Rg8 27.Rc1± It will be hard for Black to keep his position together for much longer.

15...Nb6
Finally, this knight move is well met by:

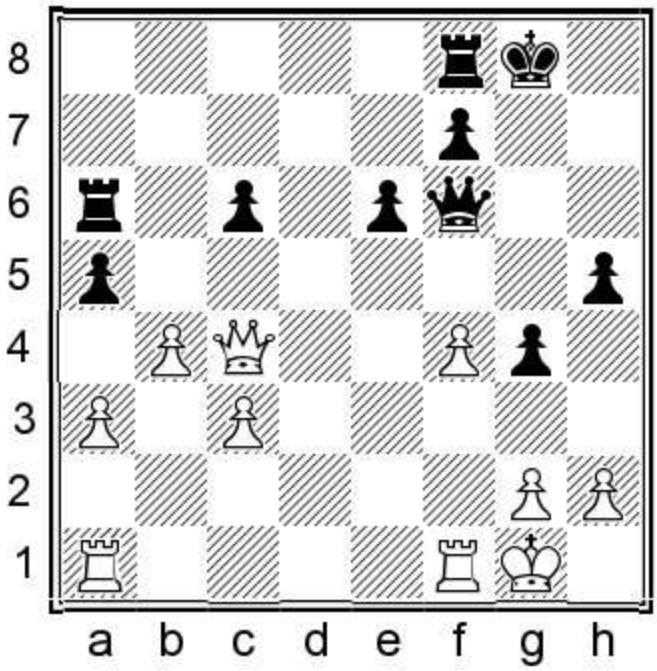


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16.Be3!
With the following idea in mind.
16...Nc4 17.Nxc6 bxc6 18.Bd4 a5 19.a3 h5 20.Bd3
White has a powerful bind on the central dark squares, and Black's extra pawn is hardly relevant at all. Here are a few sample lines:



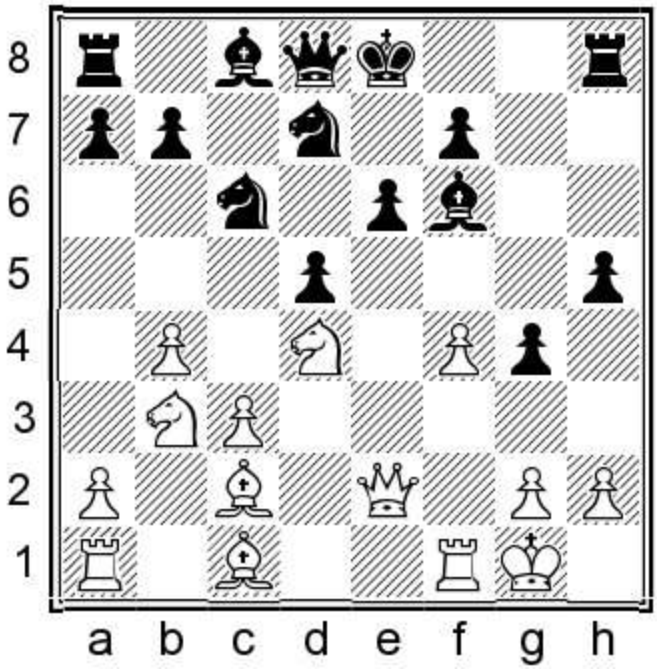
20...Ba6 21.Nc5
21.Bxf6 Qxf6 22.f5 is also promising: 22...e5 23.Nxa5 Nxa5 24.Bxa6 Nb3 25.Rab1 Nd2 26.Qxd2 Rxa6 27.Ra1 and White will push his passed a-pawn.
21...0-0 22.Bxf6 Qxf6 23.Nxa6 Rxa6 24.Bxc4 dxc4 25.Qxc4



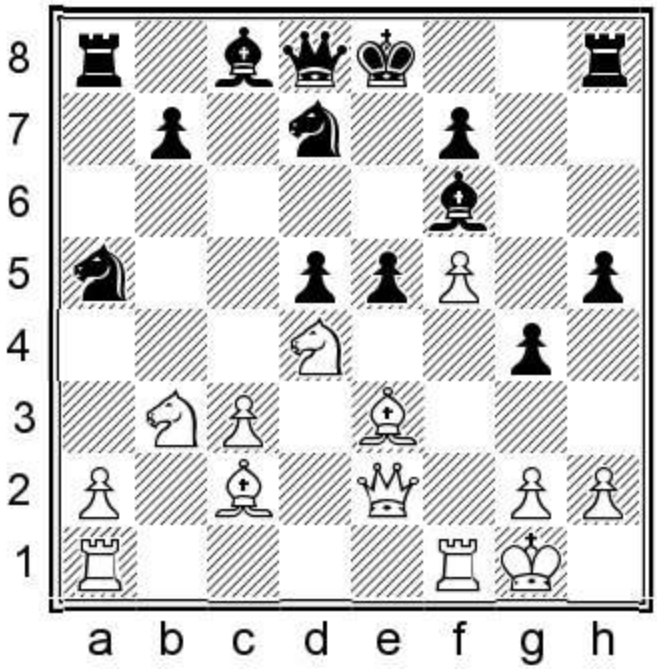
25...Rfa8 26.Rae1 axb4 27.axb4 Qd8 28.f5 Qd5 29.Qe4 Qxe4 30.Rxe4 exf5 31.Rxf5 Ra1† 32.Kf2±

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White has excellent winning chances in the endgame.



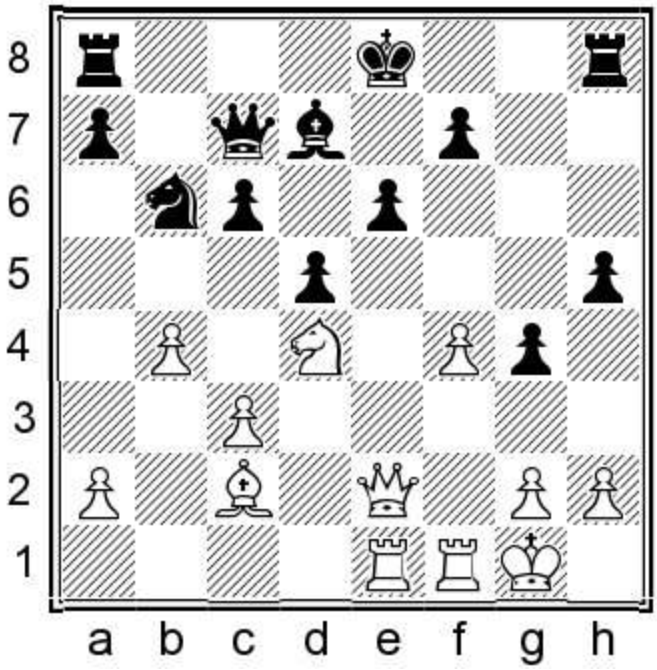
16.Be3 Nb6
Another nice line is: 16...a5 17.bxa5 Nxa5 18.f5! e5



19.Ne6! fxe6 20.fxe6 Nc4 21.Bg6† Ke7 22.exd7 Kxd7 23.Rfd1, Black’s king is terribly exposed.

17.Nxc6 bxc6 18.Bd4 Bxd4† 19.Nxd4 Qc7 20.Rae1 Bd7

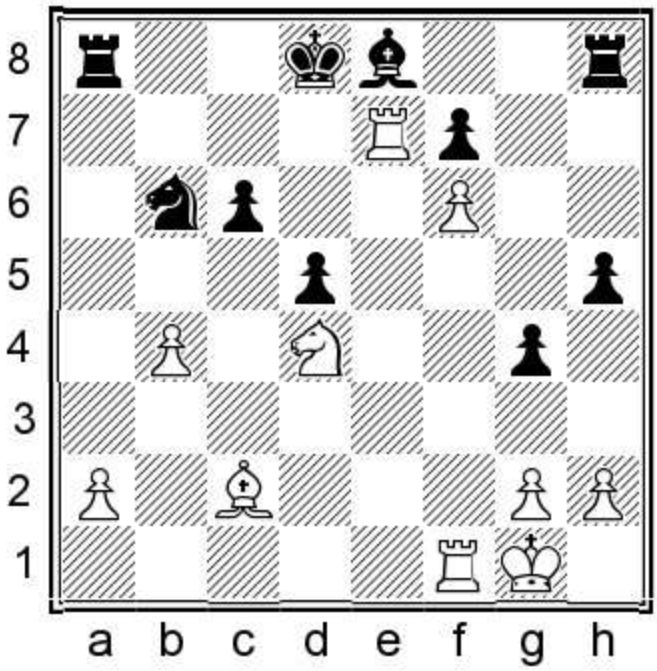
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21.f5
Once again, this typical resource causes big problems for Black.

21...e5
Renet decides to return his extra pawn, but White keeps a strong initiative even after the queens are exchanged.

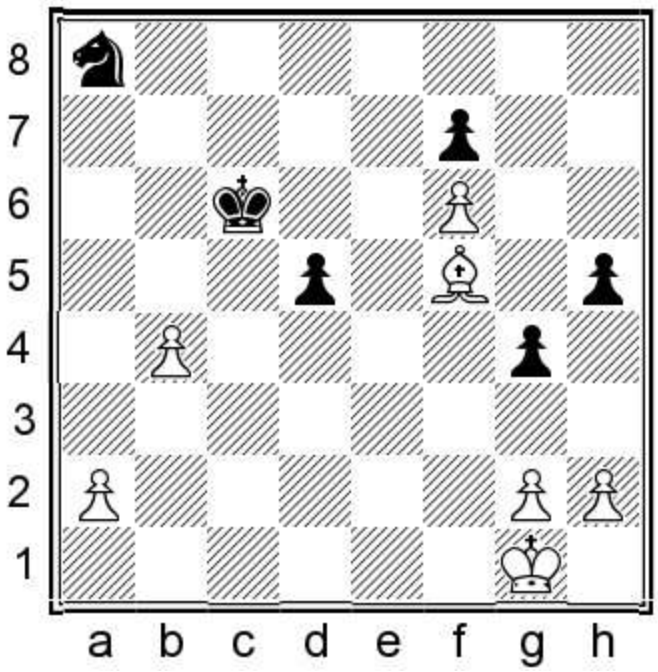
22.Qxe5† Qxe5 23.Rxe5† Kd8 24.f6 a5 25.Re7 axb4 26.cxb4 Be8



27.Rfe1 Nc8 28.Rxe8†!
A small combination to force a winning endgame.

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28...Rxe8 29.Nxc6† Kd7 30.Bf5† Kxc6 31.Rxe8 Nb6 32.Rxa8 Nxa8



33.Bg6!
A final finesse to make the win easy.

33...h4 34.Bxf7 Nb6 35.Be6
A beautiful game, and also an important one from a theoretical point of view. Keeping up to date with the most recent games is important, but sometimes older games can provide surprisingly effective solutions.
1–0

Conclusion

I recommend meeting 3...Be7 with 4.Ngf3, when the usual continuation of 4...Nf6 5.e5 Nfd7 6.Bd3 c5 7.c3 reaches a position rich in possibilities. Mickey Adams has achieved fantastic results with White and in general it's hard to go wrong by following his example; this was certainly true in Game 14 after 7...b6.

We then moved on to the main line after 7...Nc6 8.0-0, when Black has several options. 8...0-0 and 8...cxd4 are reasonably solid, but both moves generally allow White to consolidate his centre and keep an edge. 8...Qb6 is a natural French move but 9.dxc5! has proven an excellent response. 8...a5 has become extremely popular lately, but 9.a4! is a good reply which offers White good chances of an edge in all variations. In this arena too, Adams has produced some excellent games to light the way for the rest of us.

Finally we investigated the deeply complicated 8...g5, when 9.dxc5! is our move. This is one area where it is useful to memorize some (though certainly not all) lines, especially key details such as whether to move the bishop to b5 or c2 in this or that variation, as well as the optimal timing of the f2-f4 break. The good news is that White is in excellent theoretical shape according to my analysis, and even if he plays a few suboptimal moves, he tends to have a much safer king in most lines, which means Black is likely to have to solve more problems and with less margin for error.

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Chapter 5 - 3...Nf6 - Sideline

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 (4...Ne4?!; 4...Ng8) 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3

6...b6 Game 17 133
6...Nc6 7.Ne2
A) 7...f6?! 137
B) 7...Be7 138
C) 7...a5 140
D) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4 142
D1) 8...Qb6 142
D2) 8...Nb6 9.0-0 Bd7 10.Nf3 143
D21) 10...Nb4 143
D22) 10...Be7 144
D3) 8...Nb4 145
D4) 8...f6 9.exf6 147
D41) 9...Qxf6 10.Nf3 147
D411) 10...Bd6 148
D412) 10...h6 11.0-0 Bd6 12.Be3 0-0 13.Rc1 149
D4121) 13...e5?! 150
D4122) 13...Rf7 150
D4123) 13...Rd8 151
D42) 9...Nxf6 10.Nf3 Bd6 11.0-0 153
D421) 11...Qb6 12.Nc3!? 0-0 13.Be3 Bd7 14.Rc1 153
D4211) 14...Be8 155
D4212) 14...Rae8 155
D4213) 14...Qxb2?! 156
D4214) 14...Rac8 156
D422) 11...Qc7 Game 18 157

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6

3...Nf6 could very well be called the Old Main Line of the French Tarrasch. It is the most commonly played line with over 55,000 games in my database. Not surprisingly a large body of theory has developed, but I believe this is the mainstream defence White should be happiest to see. The main lines of 3...Nf6 are certainly not refuted, but the resulting positions tend to be easier for White to play; at least that has been my experience. When I started writing this book, I could claim I was unbeaten against 3...Nf6 in over 20 years of Tarrasch praxis. As we shall see, a game in 2016 spoiled that record, but 86% is still a respectable score.

4.e5 Nfd7

The obvious and best square for the knight, but in Game 17 we also consider other squares for the knight, as well as ...b7-b6 options.

5.Bd3

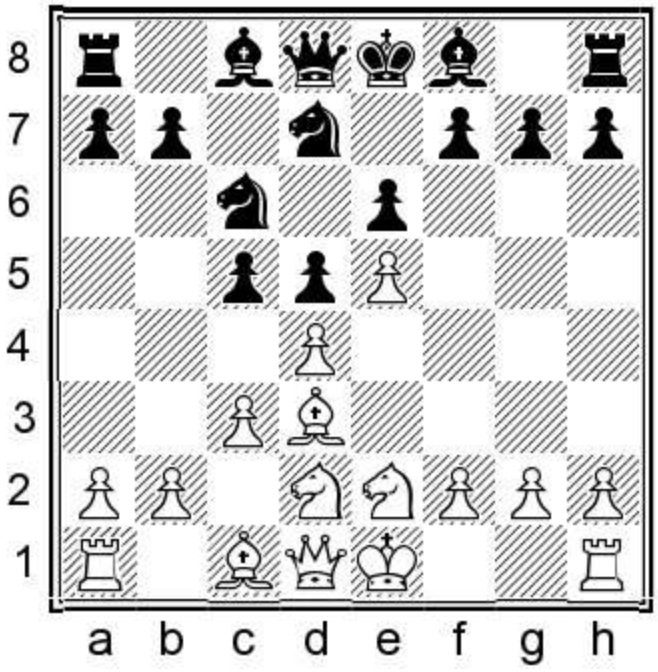
Another important option is 5.f4, but I recommend the more fluent developing plan.

5...c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2

Leaving the f3-square free for the other knight.

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7.Ngf3 is also promising, but leads to lines where White often sacrifices the d4-pawn.



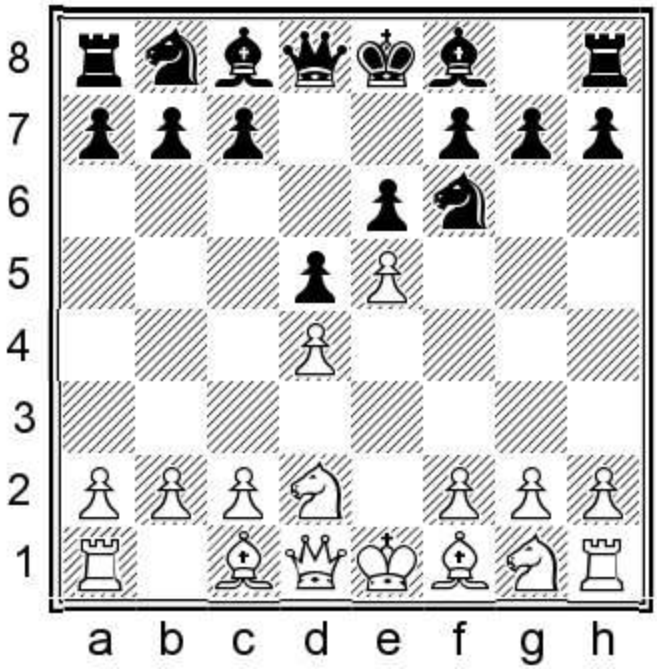
First we will consider the minor options: A) 7...f6?!, B) 7...Be7, and C) 7...a5. But the main move by far is D) 7...cxd4. Also sensible is 7...Qb6 but after 8.Nf3 the only line that really makes sense is 8...cxd4 9.cxd4, when we have transposed to variation D1.
Because of the blocked centre, Black could play some shuffling moves on the queenside without getting mated by force. So, for example, 7...Nb6, 7...Rb8 and 7...a6 are very occasionally seen, but they are not worth preparing for; simple development will give White an edge.

GAME 17

Wolfgang Brodda – P.B. Dhanish
email 2008

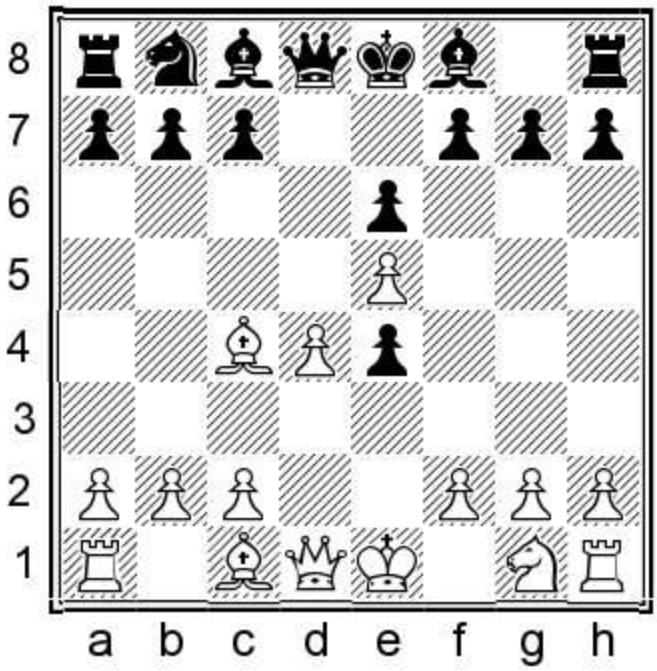
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5

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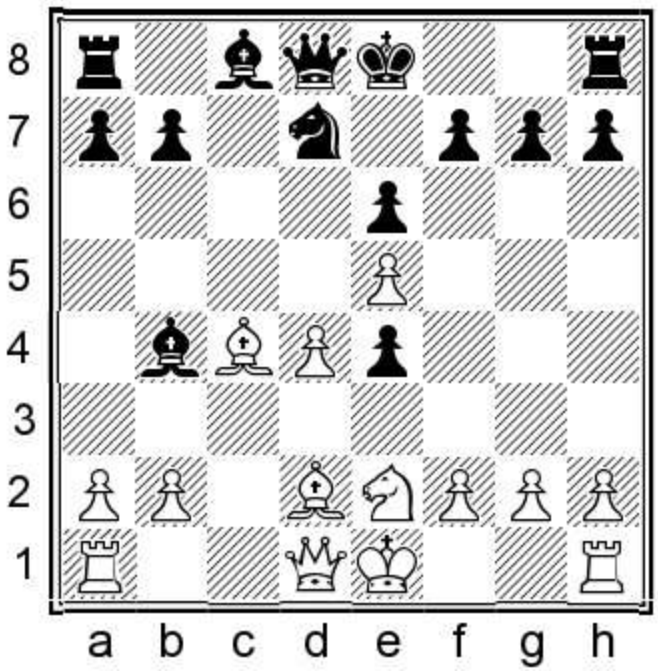
4...Nfd7
The normal move for good reason.

4...Ne4?!
A surprising move, but not a good one, as Black's structure is loosened.
5.Nxe4
The right choice, as the insipid 5.Bd3 allows Black to ease his cramp with 5...Nxd2 6.Bxd2 c5.
5...dxe4 6.Bc4!

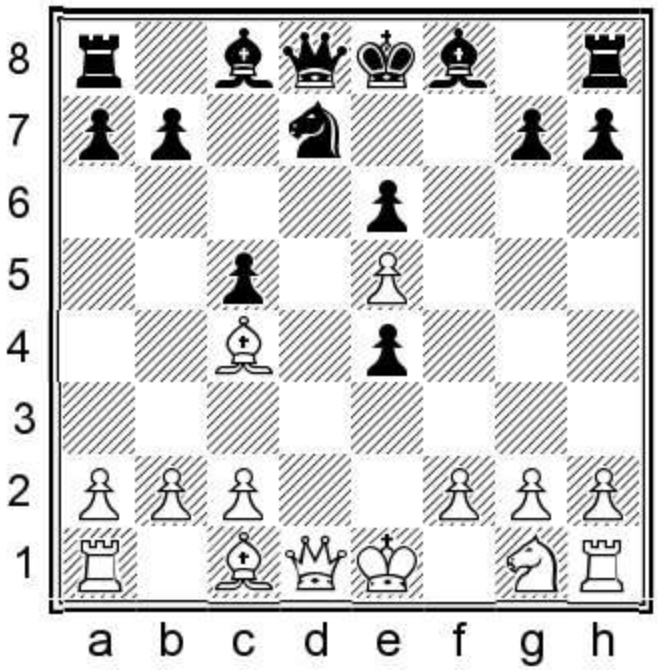


6...c5?!
This is the move Black wants to play, but 6.Bc4 is designed to prevent it; let's see how that works.
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Black has more sensible options, but no equalizer. 6...a6 7.a4 b6 8.Nh3 Bb7 9.Nf4 Nc6 10.c3 g6 11.0-0² Boid-

man – Vogler, Germany 1997, is the sort of thing Black should play, but it's still pleasant for White; Black's problems started with 4...Ne4.
6...Nd7 7.Ne2 c5 8.c3 This is as much knowledge as you need, but I will extend the line to illustrate some typical ways the game can develop. 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 Bb4† 10.Bd2



10...Bxd2† (10...Qa5 11.Nc3 Nb6 12.Bb3 Bxc3 13.bxc3 Bd7 In Olenin – Moskalenko, Yalta 1995, White had several fine options, but best looks: 14.Qg4N 14...Qa6 15.c4+–) 11.Qxd2 0-0 12.Rd1 Nb6 13.Bb3 Bd7 14.0-0 Bc6 15.Nc3² The weakness of the e4-pawn is the big story, as the following game continuation shows: 15...Bd5 16.Qe2 Qh4 17.g3 Qe7 18.Nxe4± Astrom – Clementsson, Helsingborg 1991.
7.d5 Nd7 8.dxe6 fxe6

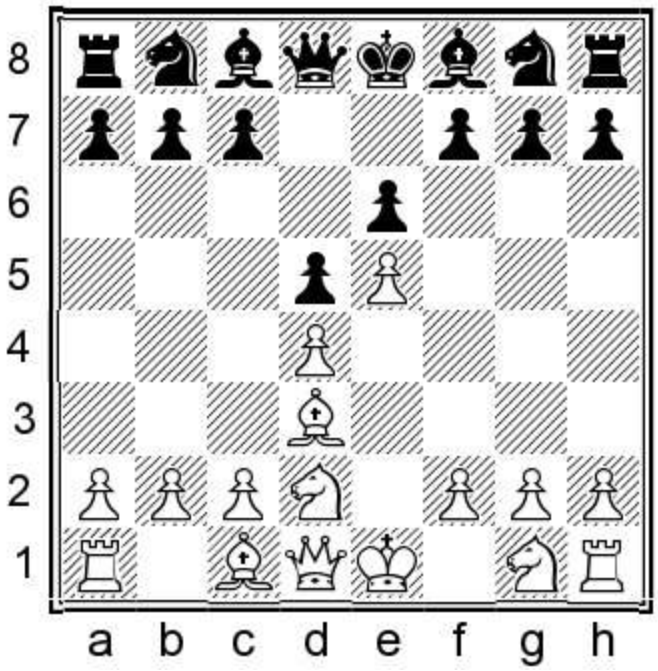


9.Nh3!

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A key idea.
9.Bxe6 Qe7 is much less convincing.
9...Nxe5 10.Qh5† Nf7
Even worse is 10...Ng6 11.Ng5 Qf6 12.Be3!N.
11.Ng5 g6 12.Qg4 Bg7 13.Bxe6 Ne5 14.Qh3±
Petrovic – Kepinski, corr. 2007.

4...Ng8
The blocked position allows Black to play such a slow move without getting blasted. But it stands to reason that White should have better chances.
5.Bd3

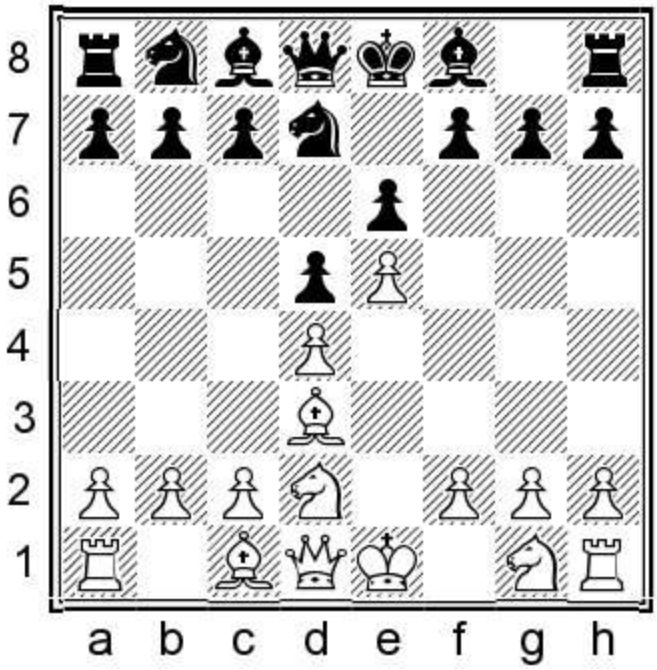


5...b6
5...c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 Bd7 8.0-0 Qc7² is a set-up Shabalov tried a few times, but White has an improved version of the Advance variation. For example: 9.Nf3 h6 10.Be3 c4 11.Bc2 0-0-0 12.b3 Na5 13.Nd2ƒ In Conquest – Shabalov, Gausdal 1991, White's queenside initiative was going well.
6.c3 Qd7 7.Qe2 a5 8.Nh3 Ba6 9.Bxa6 Nxa6 10.0-0 Ne7 11.Nf4²
Hübner – Weiss, Hamburg (blindfold simul) 1988, shows a typical example of this 4...Ng8 line; Black is solid but passive.

5.Bd3
The classical main line where White develops quickly and keeps his king secure.

The alternative is 5.f4 where White has more space, but slower development and a less secure king than in our lines.

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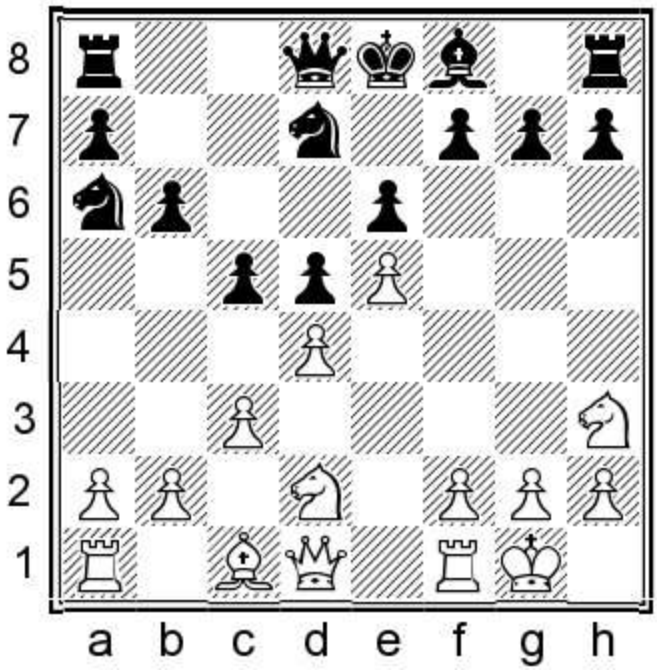


5...c5
The usual move.

Also legal is 5...b6 6.c3 Ba6 7.Bxa6 Nxa6 8.Nh3 with the ideas Qg4-Nf3-Nf4-Nh5, as in the main game. I cannot see how Black could play this in a meaningful way without ...c5, probably transposing to the main game.

6.c3 b6 7.Nh3
This knight location is an idea to remember against ...b6 lines and other systems where there is little pressure on d4. The queen lift to g4 adds potency to White's set-up while the knight reaches a fine post on f4 just as easily from h3 as it normally does from e2.

7...Ba6 8.Bxa6 Nxa6 9.0-0



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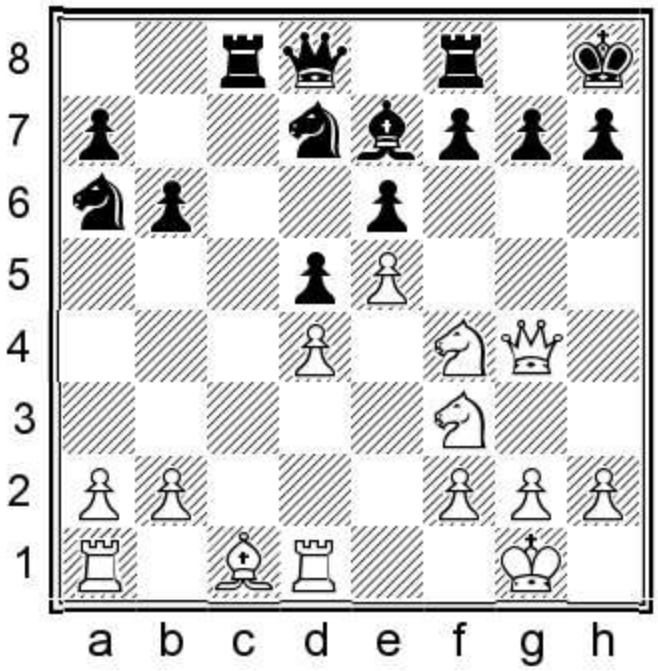
9...Be7
Black has a variety of possible plans, but White will probably choose a similar set-up in response to most. For example:

9...Nc7 10.Qg4 f5 11.Qg3 Qe7 12.Nf3 Qf7 13.Nf4 Be7 14.h4± Mostowik – Mroczek, corr. 2009.

Or 9...b5 10.Qg4 Nb6 11.Nf3² Margaritis – Tsangaris, Ano Liosia 2007.

10.Qg4 0-0 11.Nf3²
White's extra space and kingside play is worth an edge. Black's dream is an ending where White might have a bad bishop, but we are a long way from that.

11...Kh8 12.Nf4 Rc8 13.Rd1 cxd4 14.cxd4



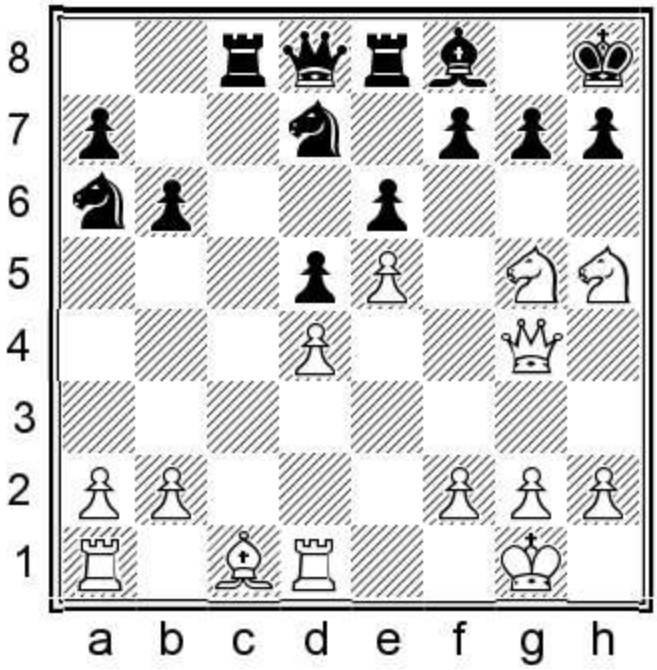
14...Re8?!
Black is planning to cover the vulnerable g7-square with ...Bf8, but he is leaving f7 and h7 too loose.
Better was 14...Nb4 but after 15.Nh5 Rg8² Black's position is no fun at all.

15.Nh5 Bf8
Following his plan, but allowing a vicious attack.

The inconsistent 15...g6± leaves Black in trouble but alive.

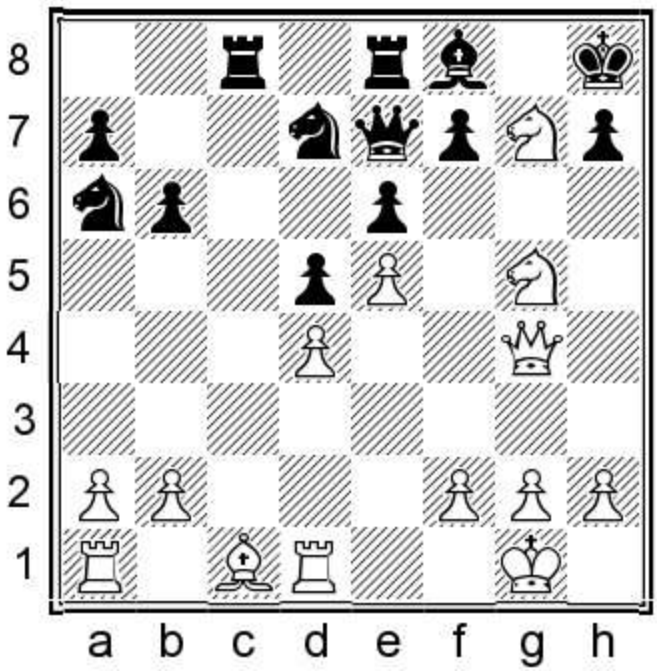
16.Ng5!

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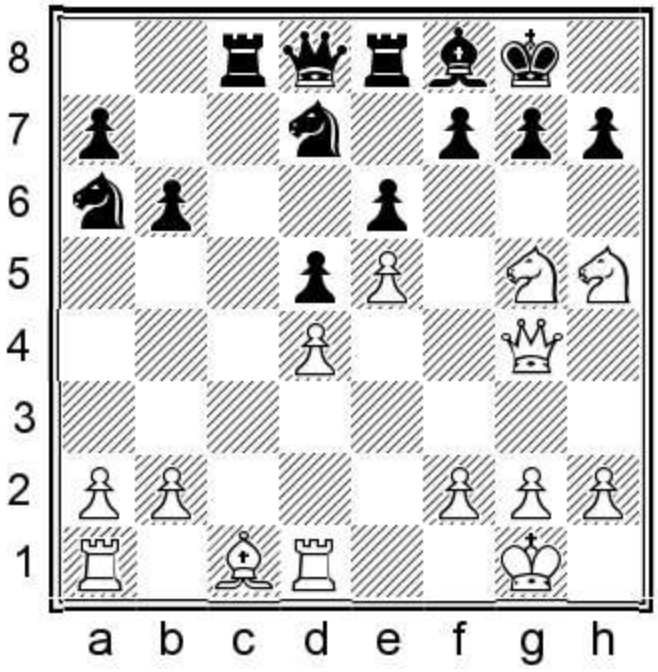
16...Kg8
No matter what Black does, something tactical and unpleasant will land on his head.

16...Qe7 17.Nxg7!
Often an attack will have one focal point, but in this case White is targeting f7, g7 and h7.



17...Bxg7
Instead 17...f5 might be a more worrying move to calculate over-the-board, but White has two effective replies: 18.Nxf5! exf5 19.Qxf5 gives three pawns for a knight, plus a continuing initiative. Or 18.Qe2 Bxg7 19.Qxa6 Rxc1 20.Rdxc1 Qxg5 21.Qxa7± with roughly level material, but White is pushing hard on the queenside.
18.Qh5 Nf8
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Or 18...Kg8 19.Qxh7† Kf8 20.Nh3! makes Bh6 a vicious threat, while allowing Nf4 if Black moves his f-pawn.

19.Nxf7† Kg8 20.Nd6±



17.Nxh7!!
A fine piece of calculation.

The lazy man’s move was 17.Rd3 when Black can avoid the worst with 17...f5.

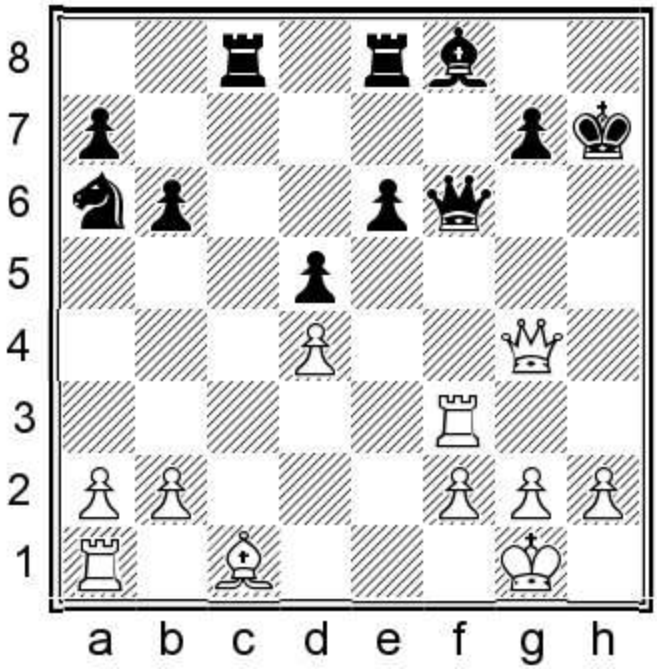
17...Kxh7 18.Rd3+–
There is no way out.

18...f5
Maybe the best practical try was 18...Rxc1† 19.Rxc1 g6 but when White finds 20.Rf3! it’s all over. For example: 20...Re7 21.Nf6† Nxf6 22.exf6 Rc7 23.Rxc7 Qxc7 24.Rc3+–

Or 18...Qc7 loses to routine moves: 19.Bf4 Qc2 20.Rh3 Kg8 21.Nf6† Nxf6 22.exf6+– With Qh4 coming soon.

19.exf6 Nxf6 20.Nxf6† Qxf6 21.Rf3

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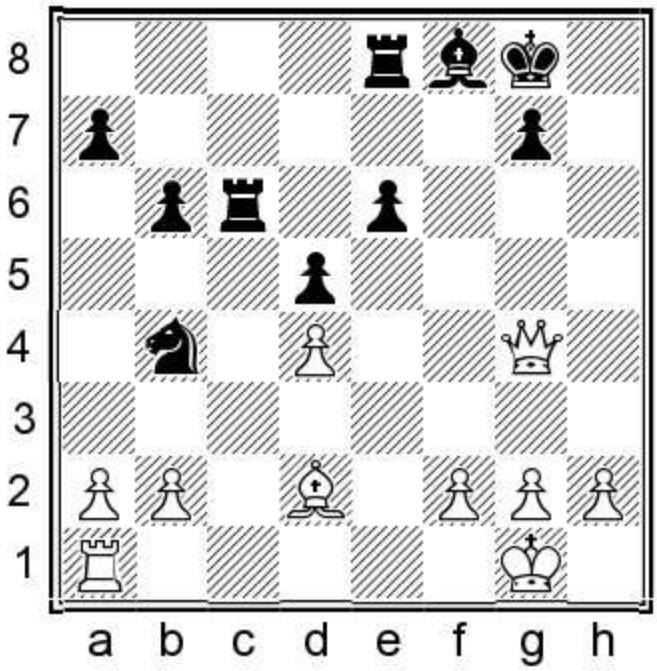


21...Qxf3
Giving up the queen renders Black's position resignable, but 21...Qd8 is mated after: 22.Qh5† Kg8 23.Qf7† Kh7 24.Rh3† Qh4 25.Rxh4#

And 21...Qe7 22.Bg5 is going the same way.

22.Qxf3
Black could have spared himself the rest; material down with a shaky king, his only hope is a major blunder, which rarely happens in email games.

22...Nb4 23.Bd2 Kg8 24.Qg4 Rc6



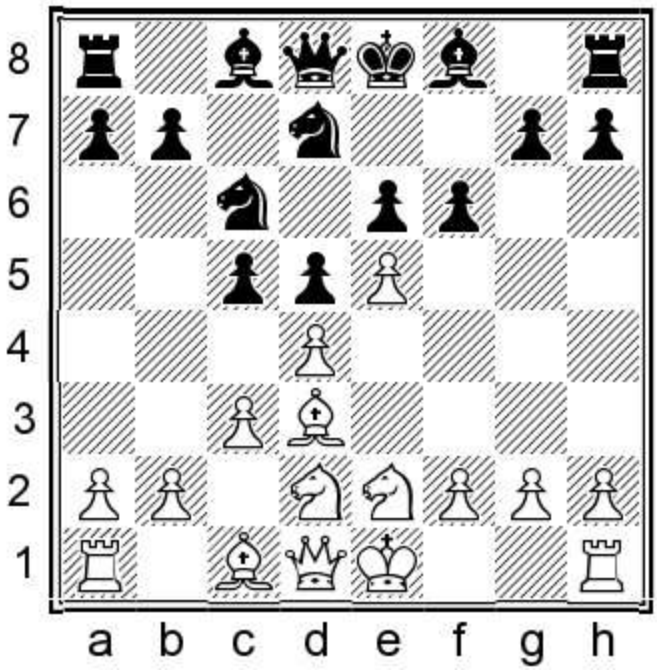
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25.h4
Securing White’s king while readying an h5-h6 tin-opener against the black king.

25...Nc2 26.Rd1 e5 27.Qd7 Rce6 28.dxe5 Rxe5 29.Bf4 R8e7 30.Qc8 Re4 31.Bg5
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Having seen 6...b6, it is time to start studying the usual line 6...Nc6 7.Ne2.

A) 7...f6?!

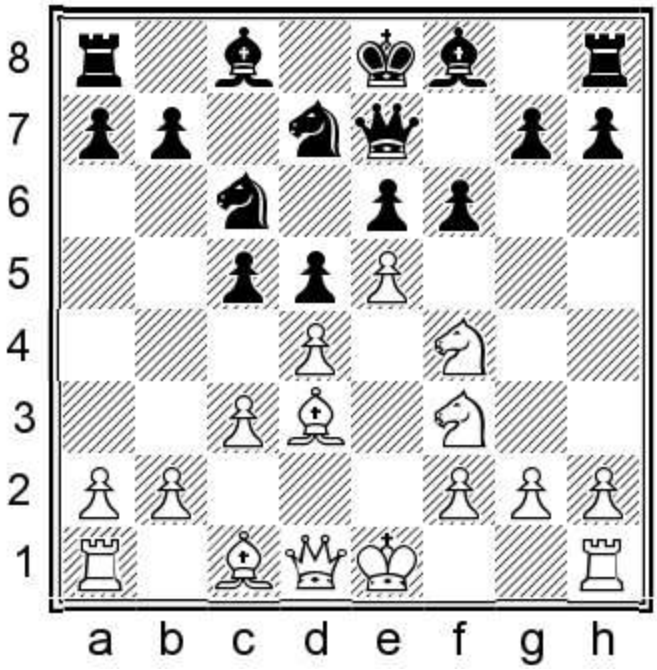


This is just a mistaken move order.

8.Nf4! Qe7
Black must play this, but obviously the queen is horribly misplaced.

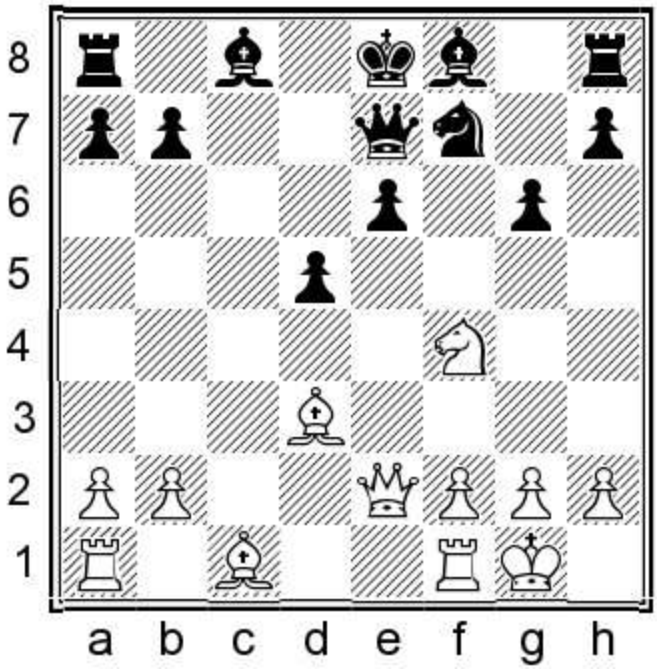
9.Nf3²
As in Haslinger – Jimenez Gonzalez, Seville 2013, and many other games.

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The only critical line to look at here is:

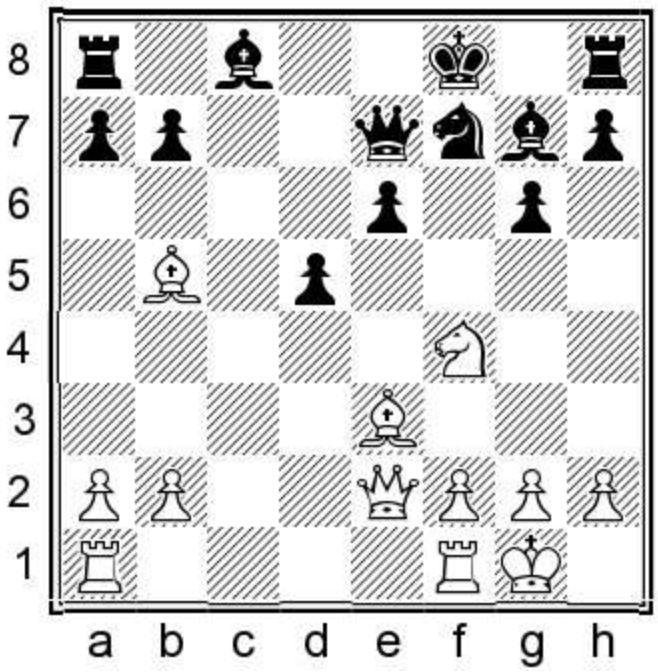
9...cxd4 10.cxd4 fxe5 11.dxe5 Ndxe5 12.Nxe5 Nxe5 13.Qh5† Nf7 14.0-0 g6 15.Qe2



15...Bg7
Black does not have time to stop the bishop check with: 15...a6?! 16.Re1 Nd8 Grachev – Radjabov, Baku 1999, was a clash between two future stars. Black later won, but only because White missed the instant winner 17. Qd1! as played in a couple of email games, which continued 17...Qd6 18.Nxd5! Qxd5 19.Bxg6† Kd7 20. Be8†!+– with a pair of king-hunt routs.

16.Bb5† Kf8 17.Be3

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Now 17...a6? was tried in C. Horvath – Hoang, Budapest 2002, when White missed: 18.Nxd5!!N 18...exd5 19. Bc5+–

Better is:

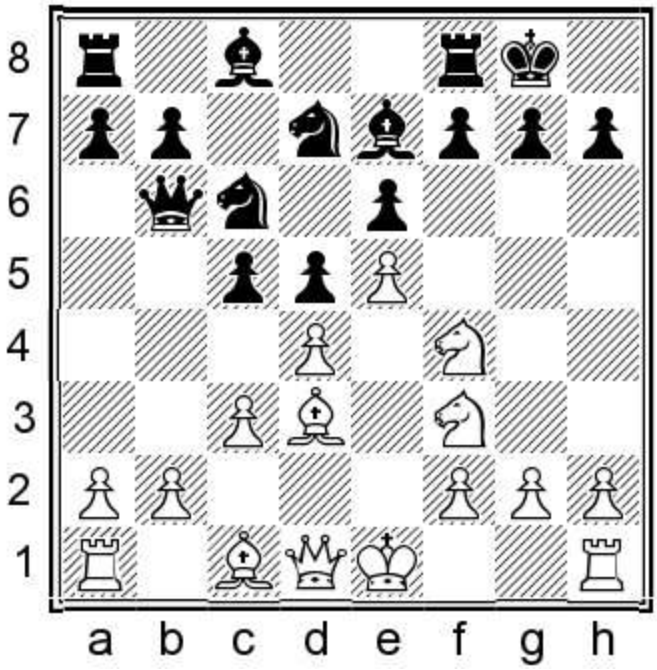
17...Bf6 18.Rac1 d4 19.Bd2 Kg7 20.Rfe1±
This has happened in a number of games. White has a perfect score and also a very big advantage in return for a puny pawn.

B) 7...Be7

A passive option. In the main lines, the plan of ...f7-f6, meeting exf6 with ...Nxf6, creates a much better square for the bishop on d6.

8.Nf3 0-0 9.Nf4! Qb6

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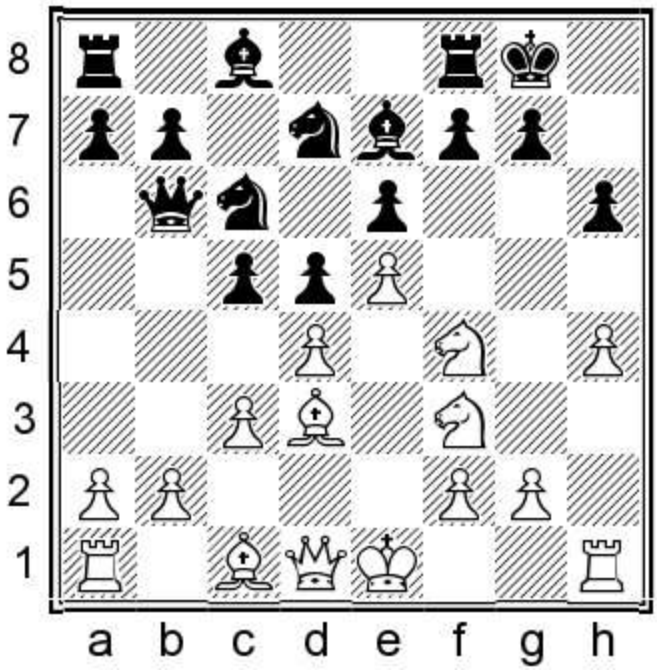


10.h4!?
This is the most promising variation, but certainly not for the faint-hearted.

10.0-0² as for example in Arnold – Coleman, Las Vegas 2011, is a nice and simple way for White to play. Black will have to shuffle his pieces around in not a lot of space, as his usual ...f7-f6 break is currently unavailable.

10...h6
So far this is Beekhuis – Kuhlenbaeumer, Germany 2007.

10...cxd4? was Seruga – Rantanen, Finland 1976, which could have ended immediately with the winning 11. Bxh7†N.



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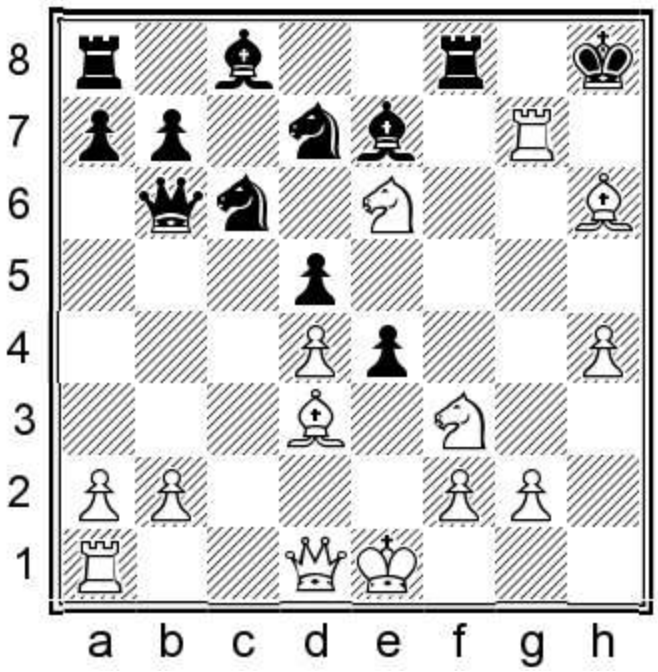
11.Rh3!?N
11.0-0N is also very promising, but we are going all-in.

11...cxd4
11...Kh8 12.Bb1 looks close to winning. Black has to do something immediately or White will be able to set up a winning attack, supported by his extra manoeuvring space.

12.cxd4 f6!? 13.Rg3!
This variation has a nauseatingly forced character, but it is critical, so it is worth including. I do not expect people to remember it in detail, but if you wish, you can go in this direction with the confidence that the win is there.

13...fxe5 14.Nxe6 e4
14...Rf7 15.Bxh6 Nf6 16.Nxg7 gives a winning attack.

15.Rxg7† Kh8 16.Bxh6

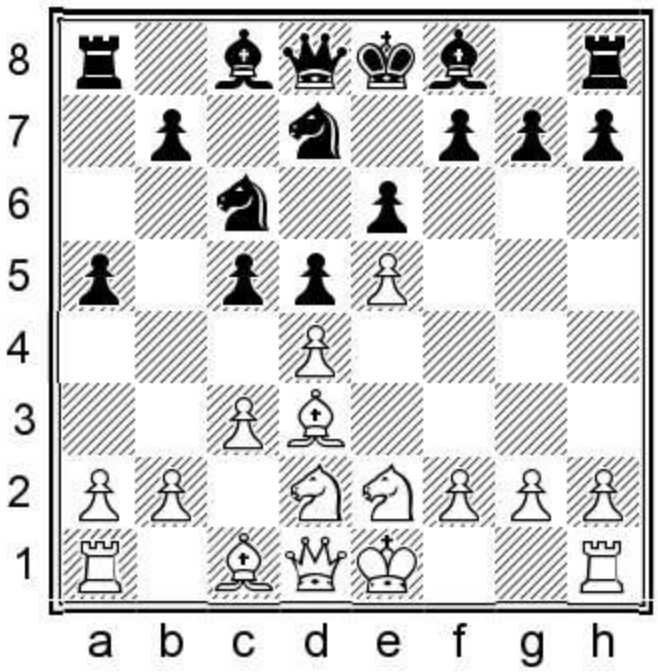


16...Nde5!?
No better is: 16...Rxf3 17.gxf3 Nde5 18.dxe5 Bxe6 19.fxe4 Nxe5 20.Rg2 Bg4 21.Be2+–

17.Nxe5! Nxe5 18.Qh5 Nxd3† 19.Kf1 Rxf2† 20.Kg1
Followed by 21.Rg3 with a mating attack.

C) 7...a5

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I lost to this move at the Baku Olympiad in 2016. Annoying, as Scotland lost 4–0 and it broke my unbeaten record with the Tarrasch against 3...Nf6. The database gives me +17 =4 –1. The damage in Baku was done just before move 40, but I did use a huge amount of time and energy in the opening trying to figure out what was happening in this line which I had never seen before. Black's main idea is ...a5-a4-a3, then meeting b2-b3 with ...cxd4 cxd4 when Black has a handy outpost on b4. We will cut across this idea.

8.0-0 a4 9.Nf3
Just keep developing smoothly as normal.

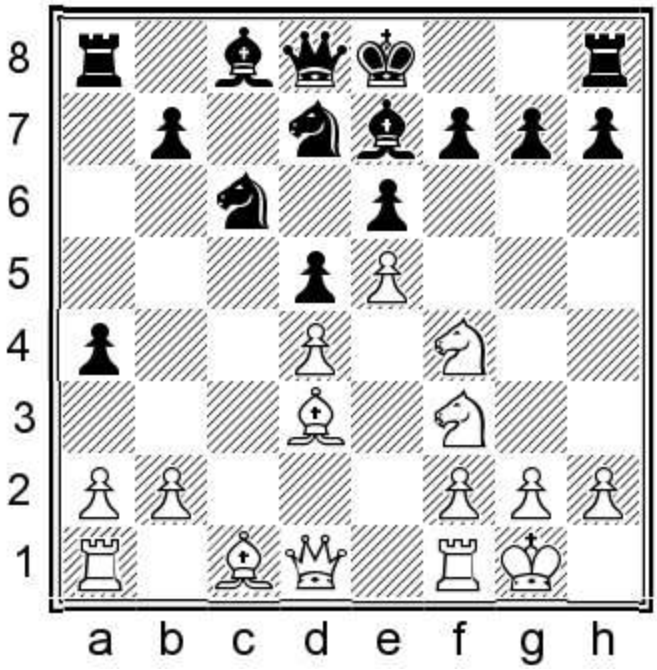
Instead I played 9.f4 a3 10.b3 when after 10...cxd4 11.Nxd4 Nc5 12.Bc2 Nxd4 13.cxd4 Na6 14.Nf3 Nb4= Black had the sort of game he wanted in Shaw – J. Gomez, Baku (ol) 2016.

9...Be7
Switching plans.

The consistent move is 9...a3 but we are ready: 10.bxa3! White's structure looks ugly, but Black's knights are denied stable advanced squares on the queenside. For example: 10...c4 11.Bc2 Bxa3 12.Qd2!? 0-0 13.Qf4² In Malachowski – Fien, Germany 2010, White had promising kingside play. Meanwhile the c8-bishop is bad, even by French standards.

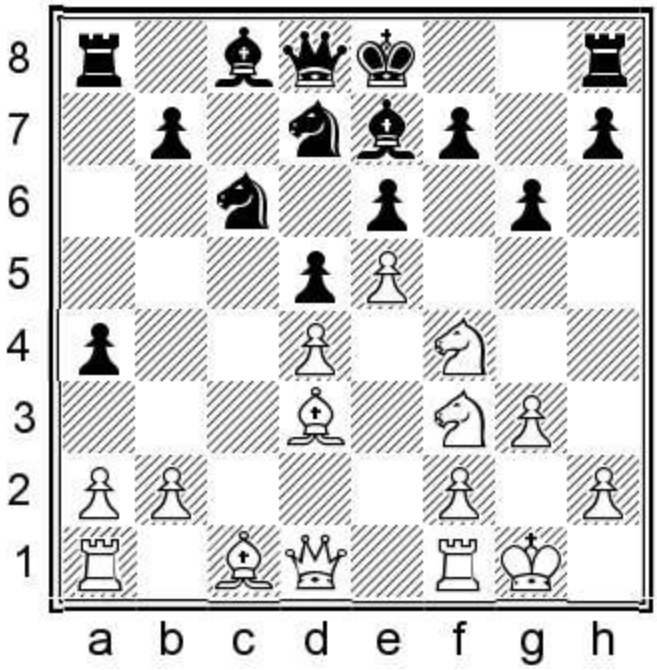
10.Nf4 cxd4 11.cxd4

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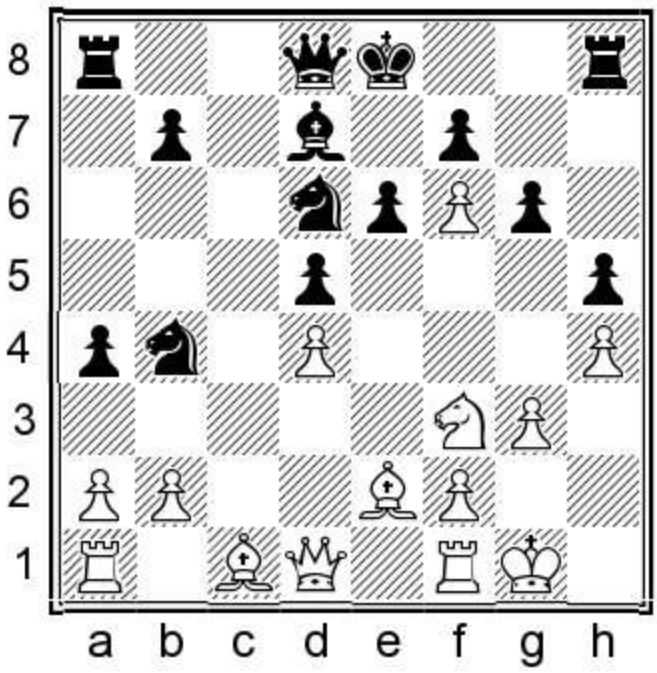
11...Nb6
One of two known moves.

11...g6
Stopping the move we shall see in the main line, but White has a clever plan:
12.g3!?



White wants to move the f4-knight “somewhere” to threaten Bh6, which Black will then usually prevent with ...h7-h6. By creating a square for the knight on g2, White plans the fine rerouter Ng2-e3-g4 hitting the weakened dark squares on f6 and h6. Remember this plan; in far too many games in this structure, White has shuffled around aimlessly.
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Let’s follow a game to see our plan in action:

12...Nb6 13.Ng2 h6 14.Ne3 Bd7 15.h4
Another benefit of g2-g3.
15...Nb4 16.Be2 Nc8 17.Ng4 h5 18.Nf6†!
An echo of the main line below.
18...Bxf6 19.exf6 Nd6
Instead 19...Qxf6? 20.Bg5 Qg7 21.Qd2 Nc6 22.Qf4± is a dark-square disaster.



20.Bf4!N
Instead after 20.Bg5 Qb6 Black was a little worse but hanging on in Godena – Roos, Cannes 1998.
The point of the novelty is that after:
20...Qb6 21.a3 Na6±
The black knight is misplaced and White has immense play after any sensible move.

The untested 11...a3?! 12.bxa3 Bxa3 loses a tempo. Afte13.Nh5!? 0-0 14.Qd2 White has the usual kingside play.

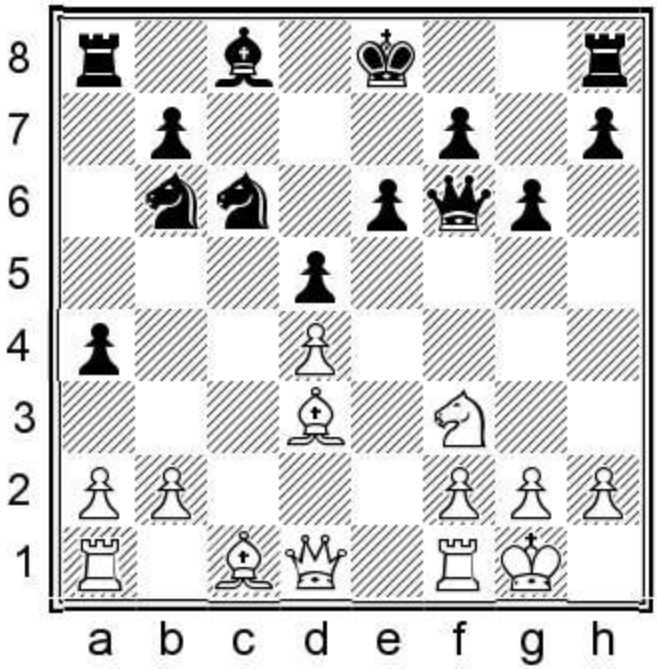
12.Nh5!
The obvious way to exploit the omission of ...g7-g6.

12...g6 13.Nf6†!
Giving up a pawn for dark-square dominance.

13...Bxf6 14.exf6 Qxf6
The pawn has to go at some point.

14...h6 has been tried, but after 15.Bf4 in Vosahlik – Krzyzanowski, email 2005, Black could find nothing better than 15...Qxf6 when 16.Qd2 gave White the usual superb compensation.

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15.Bg5
Reasonable, but I would prefer: 15.Bh6!? Black should fight for the dark squares with ...f7-f6 at some point, so let's not give him that move with tempo. For example: 15...Bd7 16.Rc1 Qe7 17.Re1 f6 18.h4*f*

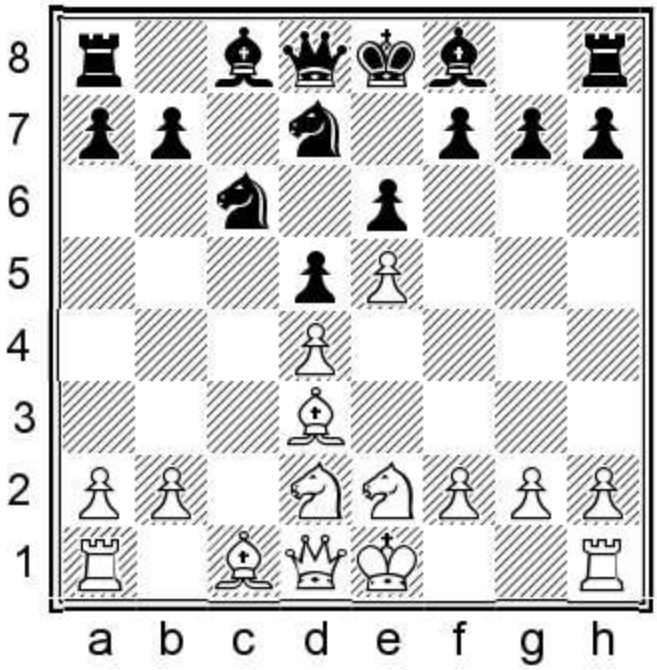
15...Qg7 16.Qd2 f6
Not bad, but perhaps even more principled was: 16...h6!?N For example: 17.Bf4 g5 18.Bd6 f6 19.Rfe1© Black has some worries, but is in the game.

17.Bh6 Qc7?!
More sturdy was 17...Qe7 though of course White still has play after 18.h4.

18.h4±
Ponomariov – Bunzmann, Lausanne 1999, was won by White after a prolonged period of messiness, but we have seen enough.

D) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4

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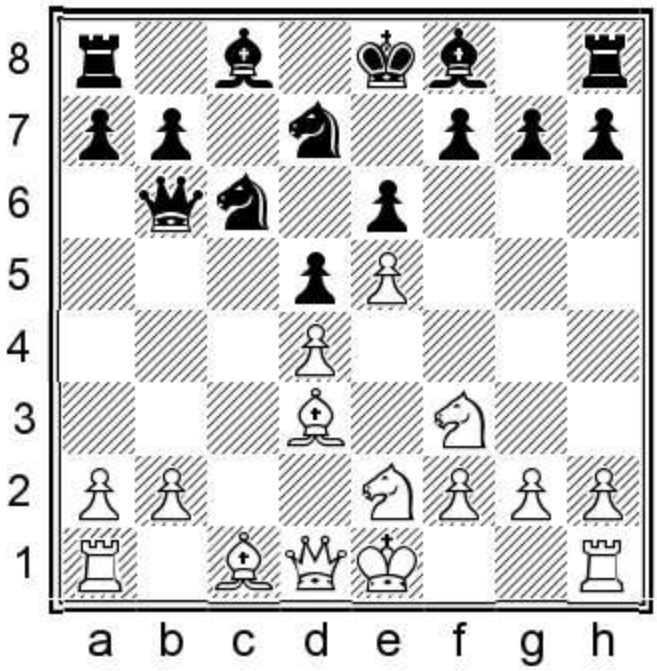


We will consider D1) 8...Qb6, as well as the two knight hops, D2) 8...Nb6 and D3) 8...Nb4, before we study the main line of D4) 8...f6.

D1) 8...Qb6

This can be an alternate route to the 11...Qb6 line (see page 153) but there are also a few sideline options.

9.Nf3
9.0-0 is an interesting gambit, but I am not convinced that it is the best way to play for an advantage. So, after deep analysis, I decided to go with the simple option: protect the pawn.



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9...Bb4†

Since exchanging dark-squared bishops is White's most common plan in the 3...Nf6 Tarrasch, this move creates an odd impression.

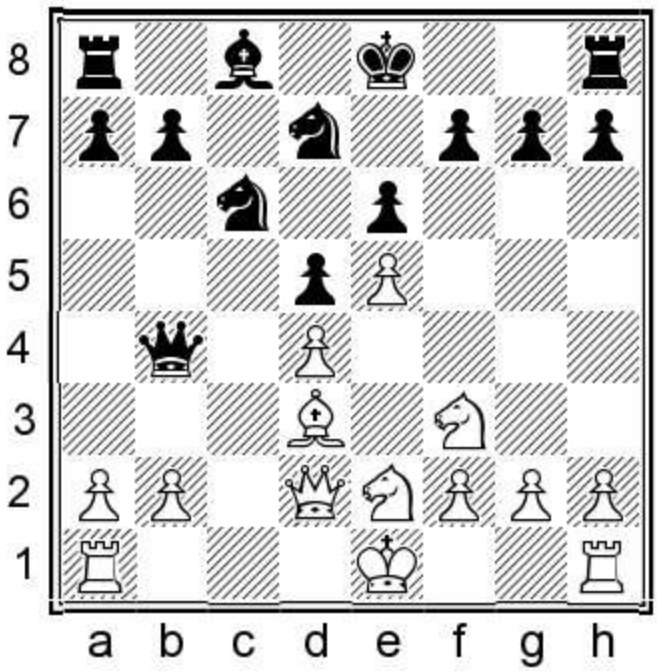
9...f6 is heading back to normal territory: 10.exf6 Nxf6 11.0-0 Bd6 is line D421 on page 153.

Other moves are of course possible, but there is nothing significant. For example: 9...Be7 10.0-0 leaves the e7-bishop passively placed, while 9...Nb4 10.Bb1 helps White more than Black, as a2-a3 is a useful move and it will land with tempo.

10.Bd2
As I said, White has no reason to avoid the bishop exchange, but if you are over-caffeinated and determined to attack, then 10.Kf1!? is fine, no doubt with h2-h4 to come.

10...Bxd2†
Black's aim is to hold a slightly inferior ending.
Instead 10...f6 11.exf6 Nxf6 12.0-0 0-0 13.Bf4² leaves the b4-bishop misplaced, just waiting to be nudged by the useful move a2-a3.

11.Qxd2 Qb4

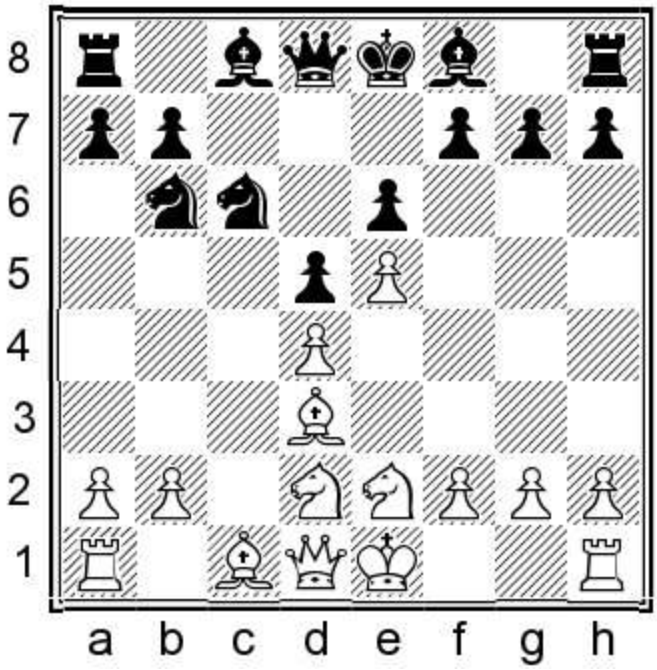


White has various ways to secure an endgame edge, but one high-class example was:

12.Rc1 Qxd2† 13.Kxd2 Nb6 14.b3 Bd7 15.Nf4 0-0 16.h4 f6 17.g3²
As in Korneev – Moskalenko, Barcelona 1999. If this position does not appeal to you, then 3.Nd2 is not the right move for you.

D2) 8...Nb6

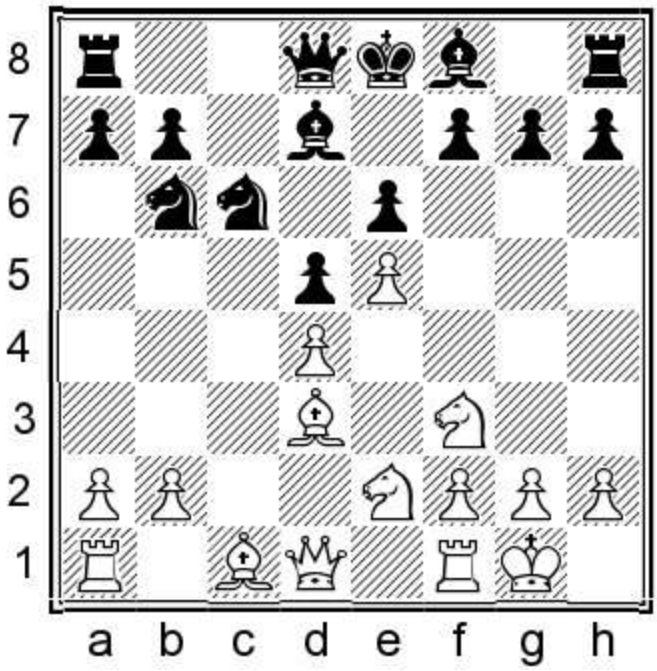
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This has been played almost one thousand times, but it's wildly out of fashion at GM level, and for good reason. By moving to b6 the knight makes room for the bishop on d7, but the downsides are that b6 is not a good square for the knight, and leaving the e5-pawn unchallenged means Black is vulnerable to a quick kingside attack if he castles short.

9.0-0 Bd7 10.Nf3
I like this fluid piece-play plan.

Unlike the 8...Nb4 line below, 10.f4 g6÷ is not so effective, as Black has not spent two tempos pushing his queenside pawns. So 11.g4 h5 12.f5?, which works so well in the other line, is missing the mark after: 12... hxg4µ



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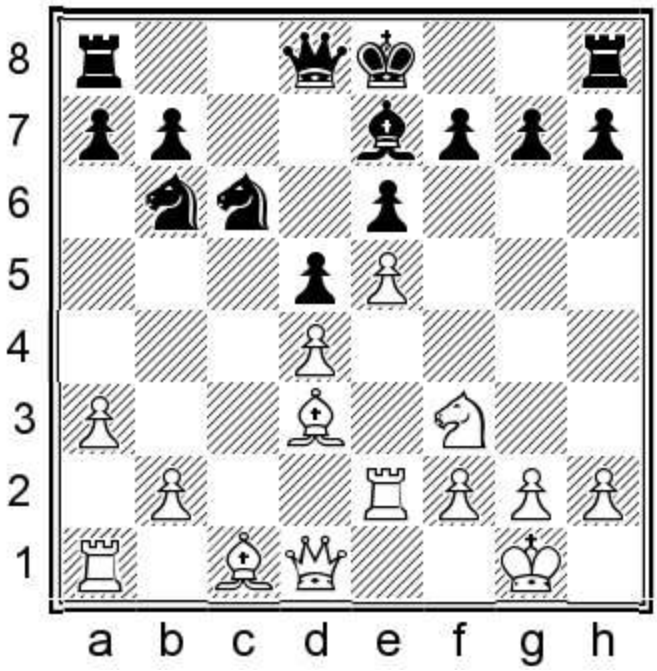
Black has two plans: place the d7-bishop on b5 after D21) 10...Nb4 or continue kingside development with D22) 10...Be7.

D21) 10...Nb4 11.Bb1 Bb5

This is the highpoint of Black's plan; it will all be backwards from now on.

12.Re1 Bxe2
Otherwise the b5-bishop might soon be sitting insecurely, hitting fresh air. For example: 12...Be7 13.a3 Nc6 14. Nf4² Bores – Novak, Czech Republic 1995.

13.Rxe2 Be7 14.a3 Nc6 15.Bd3
White has the bishop pair and more space.



15...Qd7
With White's bishops pointing kingside, Black's desire to castle long is understandable.

After 15...Rc8 16.Rc2 0-0 17.Be3 Qd7 18.Rac1 f5 in Z. Varga – Boros, Budapest 2010, the obvious and best approach was to keep the kingside open for our bishops: 19.exf6!N 19...Bxf6 20.Qe2²

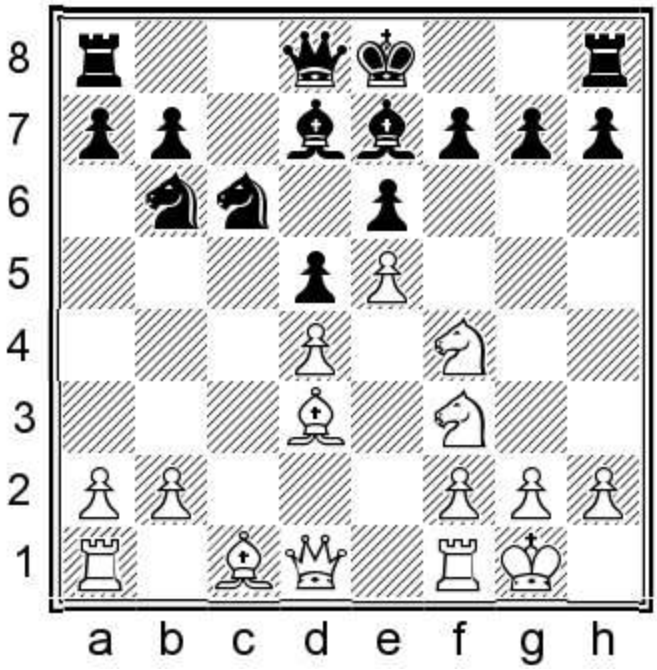
One high-class example continued:

16.h4 h6 17.h5 0-0-0 18.Rc2 Kb8 19.Bd2 Rc8 20.Rac1²
In Svidler – Hebert, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009, White was obviously better; Black's structure is solid, so it took a long grind before White secured the full point.

D22) 10...Be7 11.Nf4!

Also popular and effective is 11.a3!? but I much prefer to start our kingside play. The knight is heading for h5.

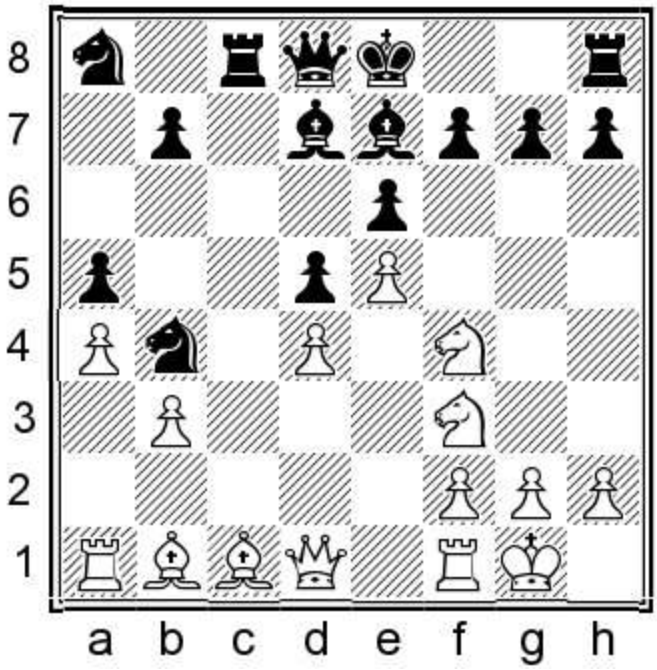
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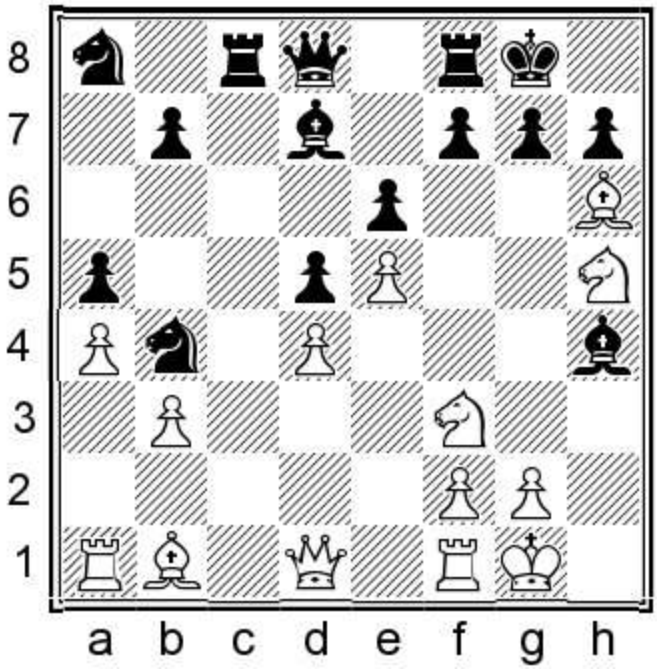
11...g6
Slowing down our knight, at the expense of long-term dark-square weaknesses.

11...a5
Judging that the knight hop to h5 is not yet a threat.
12.a4!?
An interesting moment. White gives away an outpost on b4, but claims denying Black's bishop access to b5 is more important.
Instead 12.Nh5!? g6 13.Nf6† Bxf6 14.exf6 Qxf6 15.Bh6!?N is an inferior version of a sac we have seen on page 141: ...Bd7 is a more useful move than ...a5-a4. For all that, the sac is still reasonable; White has good compensation.
12...Nb4 13.Bb1 Rc8 14.b3 Na8
Preparing ...b7-b5, but also acknowledging that 12.a4 was a good move.

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15.h4!N
The punchiest way to play the kingside attack.
15.Bd2 was also decent for White in Matulovic – Vaganian, Belgrade 1974.
The tactical justification of the novelty is:
15...Bxh4? 16.Nh5! Kf8
Instead 16...0-0?! loses directly to: 17.Bh6!+–



For example, 17...gxh6 18.Nxh4 Qxh4 19.g3. To prevent Qg4 mating, Black must give up his queen with 19... Qh3 20.Nf4 or 19...Qg5 20.f4.
17.Nxh4 Qxh4 18.Be3+–
The plan is simply g2-g3 followed by Qg4; there is no defence. For example, 18...f5 19.exf6 g6 20.Nf4 Qxf6 stops instant mate, at the expense of certain dark-square death after 21.Qd2.

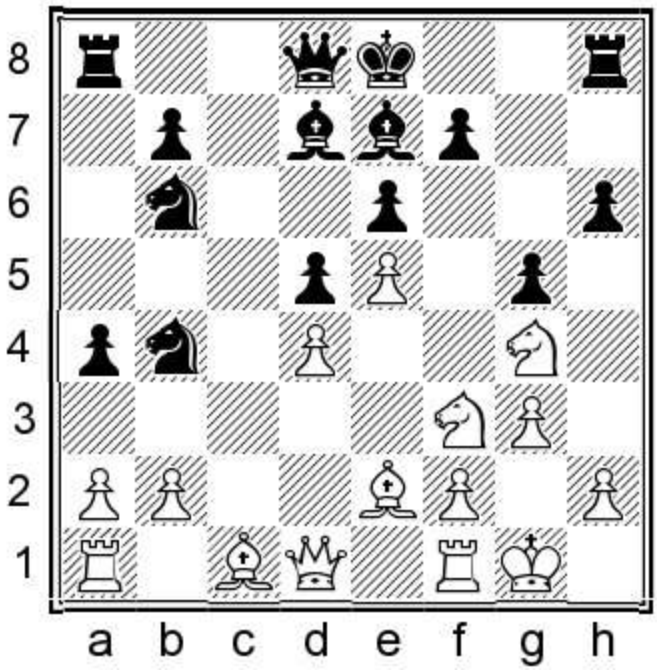
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12.g3!
A plan I love, and one we have seen before on page 140. When the f4-knight moves, White threatens Bh6, thus provoking ...h7-h6. By playing 12.g3, White allows the knight the ideal route g2-e3-g4, hitting all Black's sore points.

Much less convincing is 12.Nh3 h6 when the h3-knight has no better options than a meek return to f4.

We can follow a fine example of White's ideas:

12...Nb4 13.Be2 a5 14.Ng2 h6 15.Ne3 a4 16.Ng4 g5



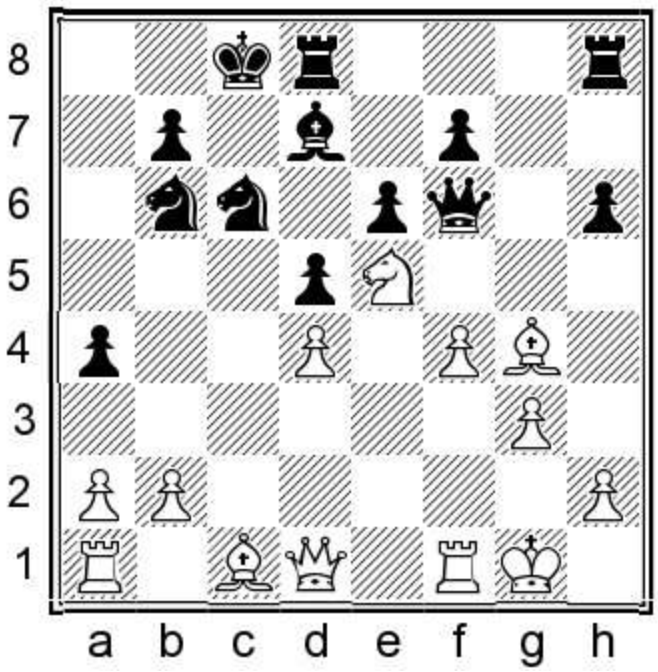
17.Nf6†!
Perfectly thematic to gain control of the dark squares, and rev up White's attack.

17...Bxf6 18.exf6 Qxf6 19.Ne5 Nc6 20.f4 g4
Desperation.

Instead 20...Nxe5 might have been sturdier, but it's still nasty after 21.fxe5 Qg7 22.b3± with ideas such as Ba3 and Bh5.

21.Bxg4 0-0-0

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In Godena – Votruba, Forli 1991, White could have capped his beautiful play with:

22.f5!+–
With one idea being 22...Qe7 23.Nxf7.

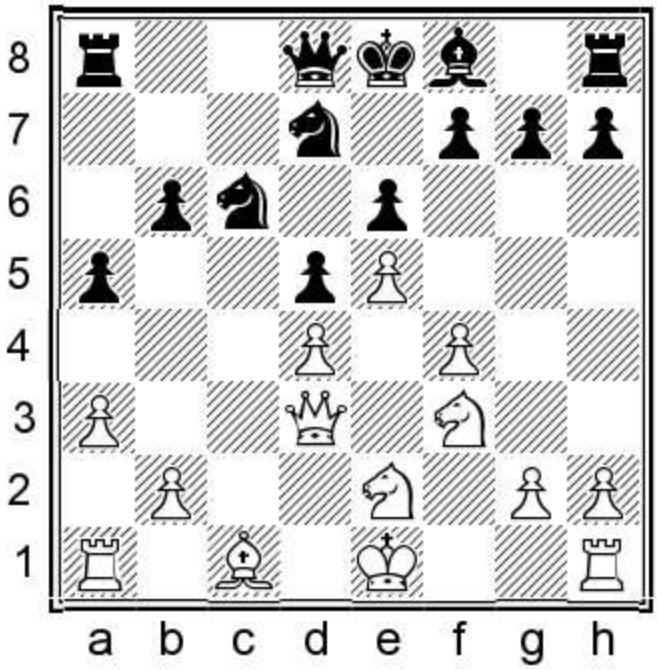
Instead White chose 22.b3 which is also good enough to win, but Black later escaped with a draw, helped by Michele Godena's severe time trouble (I am guessing, but it's a safe guess).

D3) 8...Nb4 9.Bb1 b5

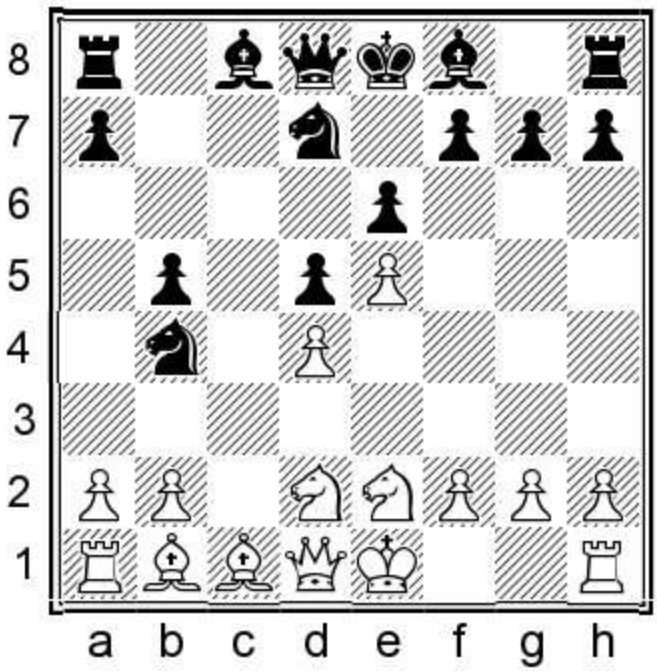
A specialty of the Slovakian master Karol Ruckschloss, who has well over twenty games with it in the database over the past few decades.

9...b6 Same pawn, very different idea; Black wants to get his bad bishop to a6. 10.a3 Nc6 11.Bd3 a5 12.f4 Ba6 13.Nf3 Bxd3 14.Qxd3 Black achieved his aim, but the time spent makes him vulnerable to an f4-f5 punch.

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For example, 14...a4? 15.f5+– was already decisive in Schlusnik – Torma, Hungary 1997, with Nf4 and 0-0 to come.
Black needs to cover f5 with a move such as 14...g6N but after 15.0-0± crude ideas of g2-g4 and f4-f5 are on the way. The exchange of bishops cost too much time, and left the d7-knight with no good options.



10.0-0 a5
Black is making excellent progress on the queenside, but ignoring the kingside.

11.f4!
In most 3...Nf6 Tarrasch structures I prefer more fluid piece play with 11.Nf3!? which is also fine here, but because Black has neglected his kingside we are justified in trying to blast him off the board with f4-f5.

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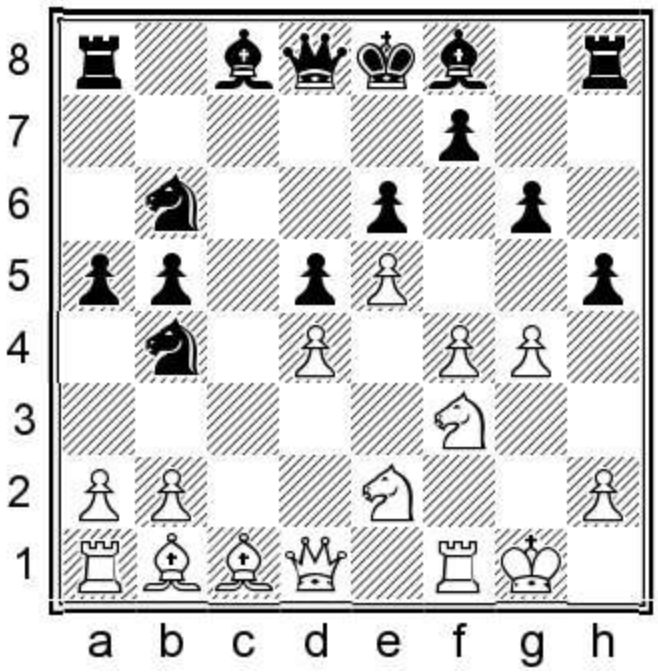
11...g6 12.Nf3
This is not a subtle moment: White plans g2-g4 and f4-f5.

12...Nb6
There are a couple of alternatives:

12...Be7 13.g4 h5 14.f5!N We will quickly become used to meeting ...h7-h5 with f4-f5 (14.h3 was the over-cautious continuation of Polak – Ruckschloss, Sala 1991). 14...hxg4 The only test of the break's soundness, but White has overwhelming play after 15.fxg6 gxf3 16.gxf7†+– when both 16...Kxf7 17.Rxf3† and 16...Kf8 17. Nf4 are hopeless.

12...h5 Stopping g2-g4, but at the high cost of allowing free access to the g5-square. 13.Ng5 (Or 13.f5!? gxf5 14.Bg5 is interesting, but there is no need to sacrifice.) 13...Qb6 14.Be3± In Pegoraro – Cavatorta, Bratto 2001, Black had to either tolerate the big knight on g5 or exchange his bishop for it, sacrificing the dark squares.

13.g4 h5



14.f5!N
It is unusual to find an obvious winning novelty for White in a position where Black has won every game.

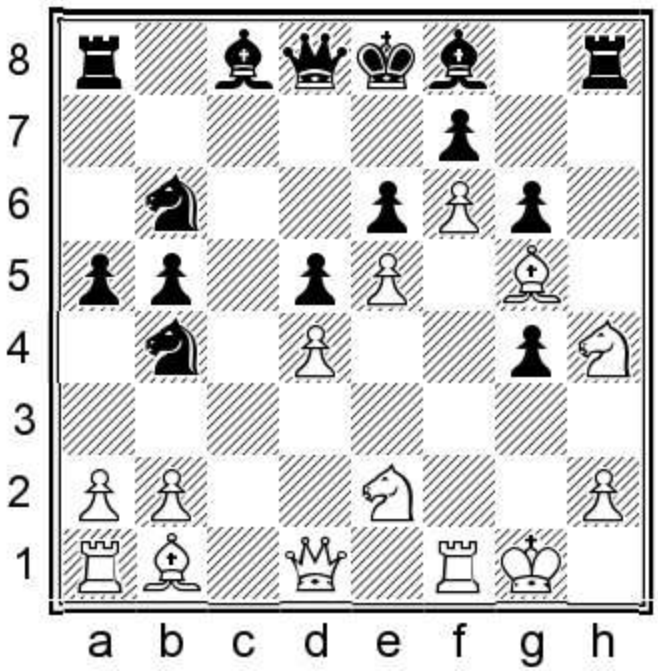
In three Ruckschloss games, firstly Oral – Ruckschloss, Czechoslovakia 1992, White played 14.h3 and Black won them all.

14...hxg4
As usual, this is the only test.

15.Bg5! Be7
No better is: 15...Qc7 16.fxg6 gxf3 17.Nf4!+– White is temporarily a piece down, but the threats are deadly, with gxf7† and Ng6 coming soon.
Note that instead 17.Rxf3? would allow Black to escape with 17...f5! 18.exf6 Qxh2† 19.Kf1 e5 when best play leads to a perpetual check.

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16.f6 Bf8 17.Nh4+–



For just one pawn, White has built a monstrous attack. A sac on g6 looks inevitable. For example:

17...Kd7 18.Nf4 Kc7
The black king escapes for now, but then:

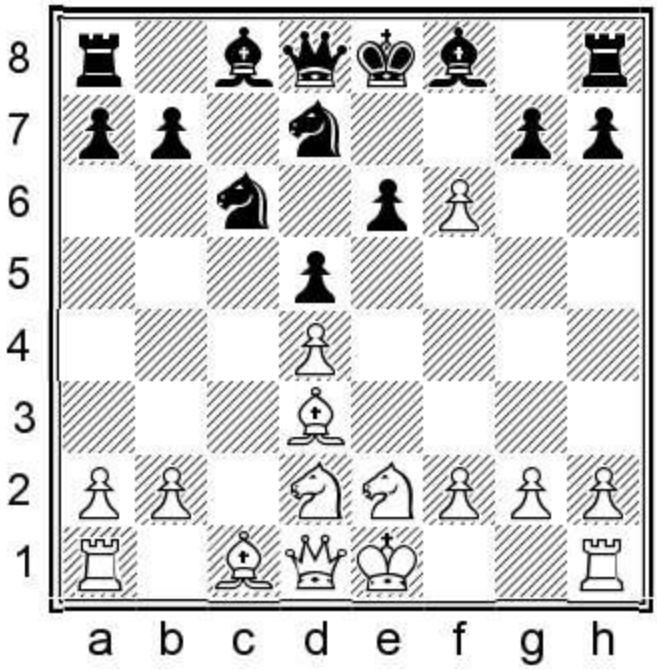
19.Qxg4 Rg8 20.Nfxg6
Except that is not even a sac, as Black cannot take it.

D4) 8...f6

An essential move at some point if the dark-squared bishop is going to find its only active square on d6. It does create a hole on e5 and a backward pawn on e6, which will feature in most of White's plans.

9.exf6

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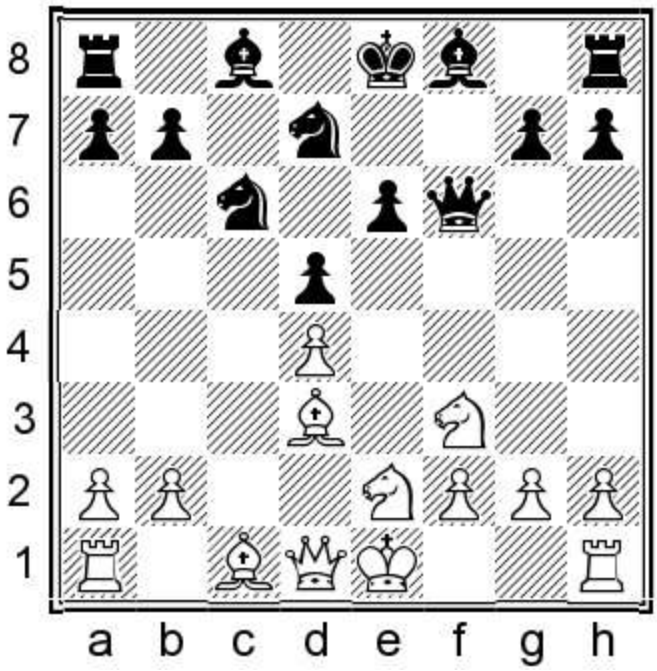


We need a further split: D41) 9...Qxf6 and the far more usual D42) 9...Nxf6.

D41) 9...Qxf6

The knight recapture is the main line and six times more common, but the queen recapture is worthy of close attention, as Black has a standard set-up that can give him active piece-play if White plays insipidly. Black's play usually starts with ...h7-h6 (to save the queen from harassment), followed by ...Bd6 and ...0-0.

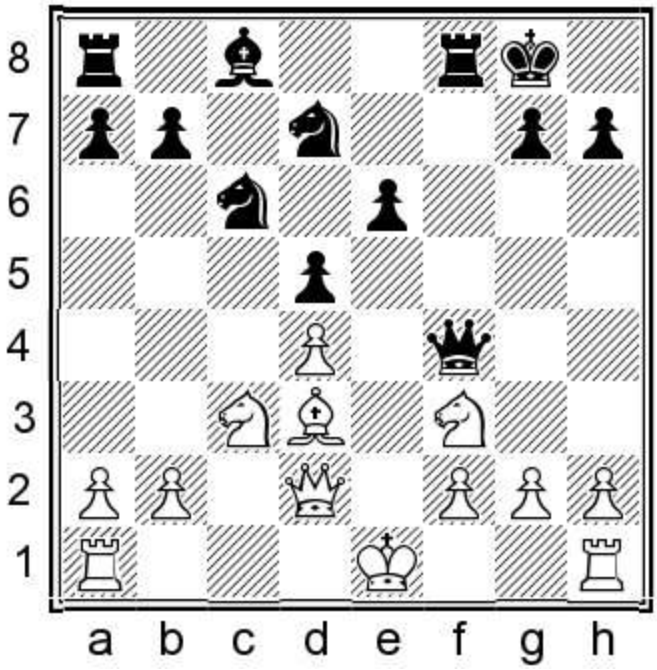
10.Nf3



We have reached a significant branching point. Black has two minor options, 10...Bb4† and 10...e5, and two major options, D411) 10...Bd6 and D412) 10...h6.

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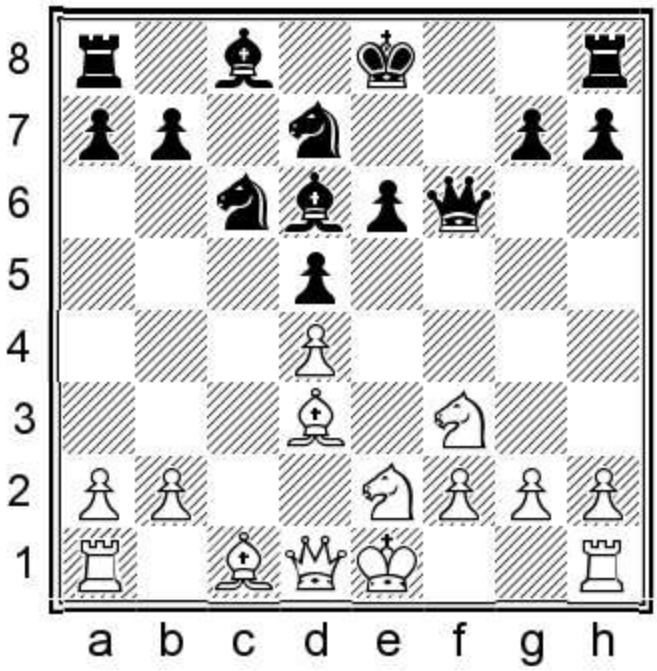
10...Bb4† is, to my eyes, just as illogical as the 9...Bb4† plan which we encountered in the earlier variation D1. Exchanging dark-squared bishops is White's desire. 11.Bd2 Bxd2† 12.Qxd2 0-0 13.Nc3 Qf4



In Berelowitsch – C. Braun, Eupen 2007, White could have simply headed for a pleasant endgame: 14.Qxf4!N 14...Rxf4 15.Rd1 Nb6 16.0-0 a6 17.Rfe1[2]

10...e5 11.dxe5 Bb4† is just a fancier version of the same unimpressive plan. 12.Bd2 Ndxe5 13.Nxe5 Qxe5 14. Bxb4 Nxb4 15.Bb5† Nc6 The ...e5-break offers Black easy development at the cost of a weak pawn on d5. White has various routes to an edge, but one logical path is: 16.Rc1 0-0 17.0-0[2]

D411) 10...Bd6

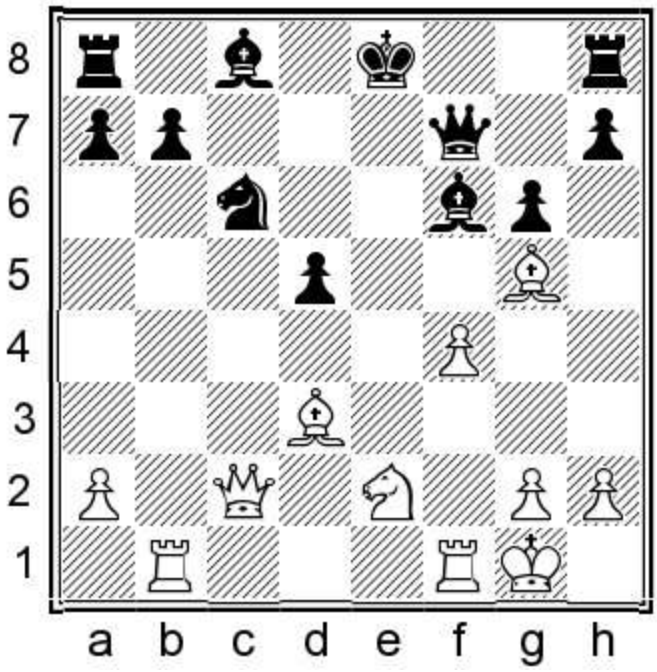


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Compared to 10...h6, White is offered an added option, and we will take it:

11.Bg5!
Gaining a tempo on the usual bishop-exchanging plan of Bg5-h4-g3.

11...Qf7 12.0-0 0-0
Now is not a good moment for Black's traditional ...e5-break:
12...e5?! 13.dxe5 Ndxe5 14.Nxe5 Bxe5 15.f4!
The most convincing continuation, as White has a convincing retort if Black takes on b2:
15...Bxb2?! 16.Rb1 Bf6 17.Qc2! g6



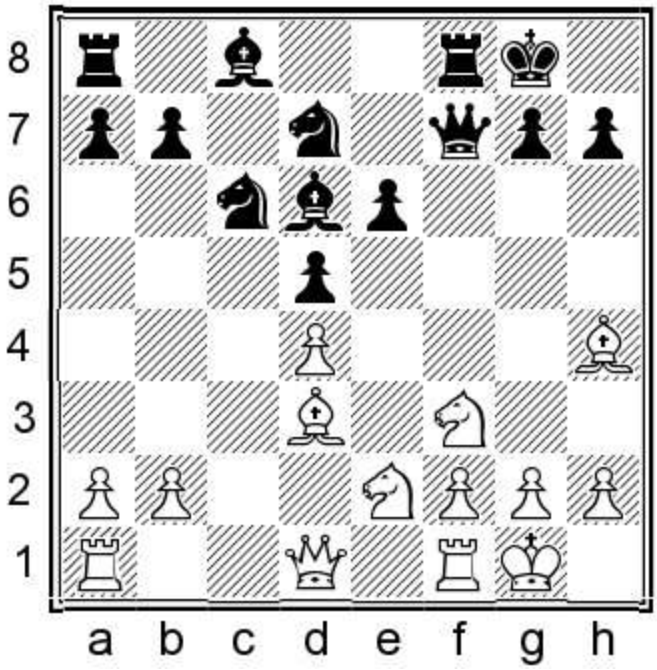
As in Schmittdiel – Hertneck, Germany 1993, when White has a choice of powerful novelties. The key is to find a way to blast open lines with f4-f5 before Black castles.

18.Bh6!N 18...Bg7 19.Bxg7 Qxg7 20.f5!±

18.Bxf6!N 18...Qxf6 19.f5!± Note that trying to keep lines closed with 19...g5? gets clattered by many replies, including: 20.Qc5 Ne7 21.Bb5† Kf8 22.Nd4+–

13.Bh4

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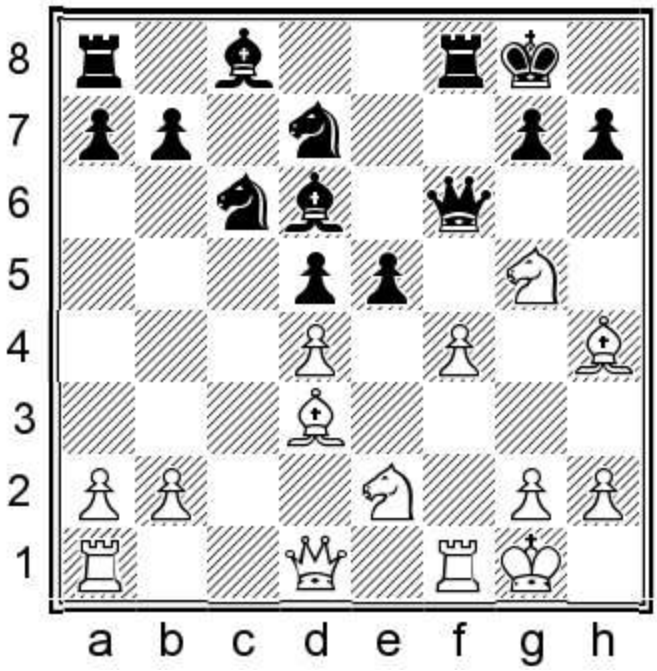


13...e5?!
The most common move and it has given Black a plus score, which shows how confusing the position is to an unprepared White player. So pay close attention to Lenic's 2017 refutation.

Black should prefer 13...Nf6 14.Bg3² as in Tiviakov – Juswanto, Jakarta 2014, though White has the traditional style of Tarrasch edge.

14.Ng5!
Less clear-cut is 14.Bxh7† Kh8 though it should also be good for White with precise play.

14...Qf6 15.f4!



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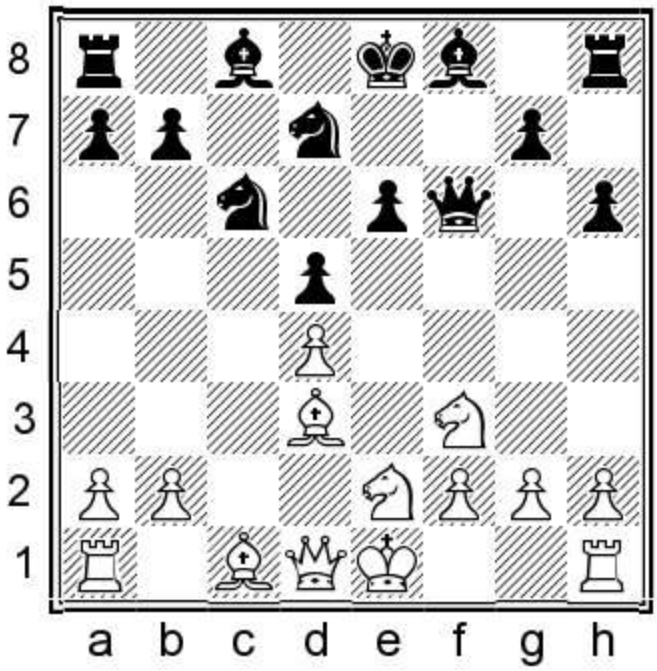
Killing Black’s dreams of kingside play, and leaving him with no good reply:

15...e4 16.Nxe4 Qxh4 17.Nxd6±

15...exd4 16.Bxh7† Kh8 17.Bc2±

15...exf4 16.Bxh7† Kh8 17.Bc2 Qh6 18.Nf3± Lenic – Repka, Austria 2017.

D412) 10...h6

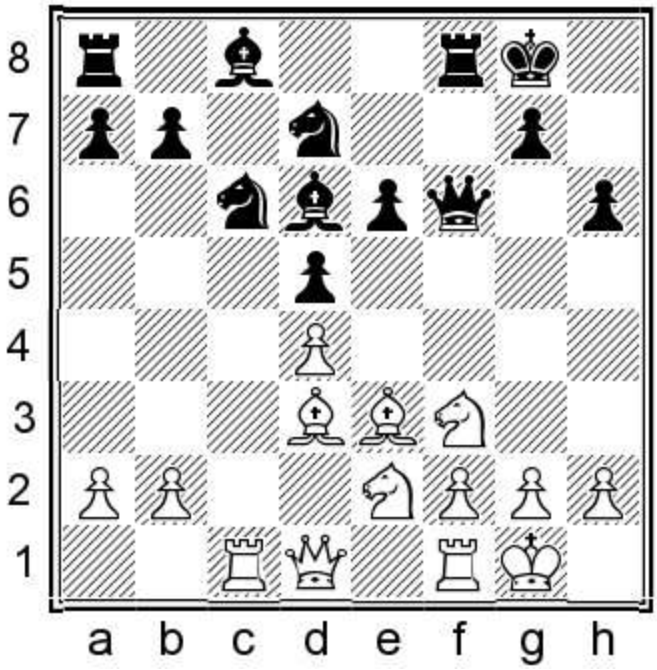


By far the most common move.

11.0-0 Bd6 12.Be3
More common is 12.Ng3, but I prefer the text move, as it keeps the possibility of a later Bf4.

12...0-0 13.Rc1
The most flexible developer.

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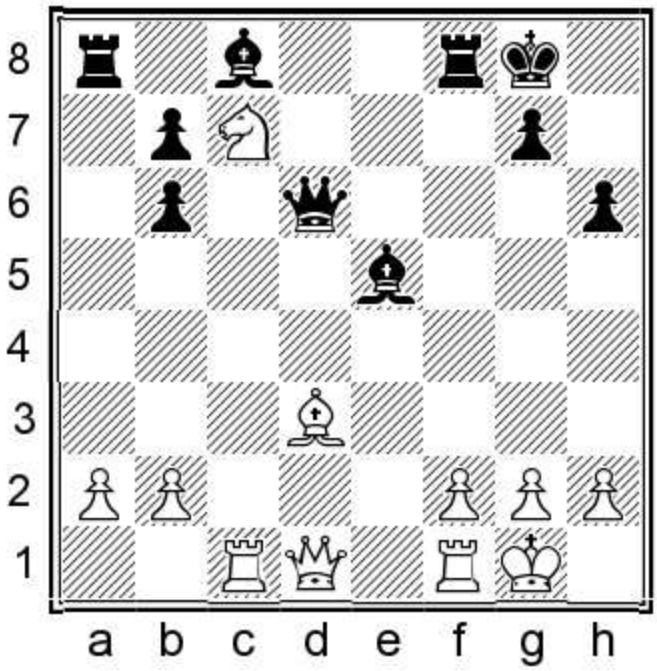


We need a further split: D4121) 13...e5?!, D4122) 13...Rf7 and the main line D4123) 13...Rd8.

D4121) 13...e5?!

Provoking a long forcing line that strongly favours White:

14.Nc3! Nb6 15.dxe5 Nxe5 16.Nxe5 Bxe5 17.Bxb6 axb6 18.Nxd5 Qd6 19.Nc7

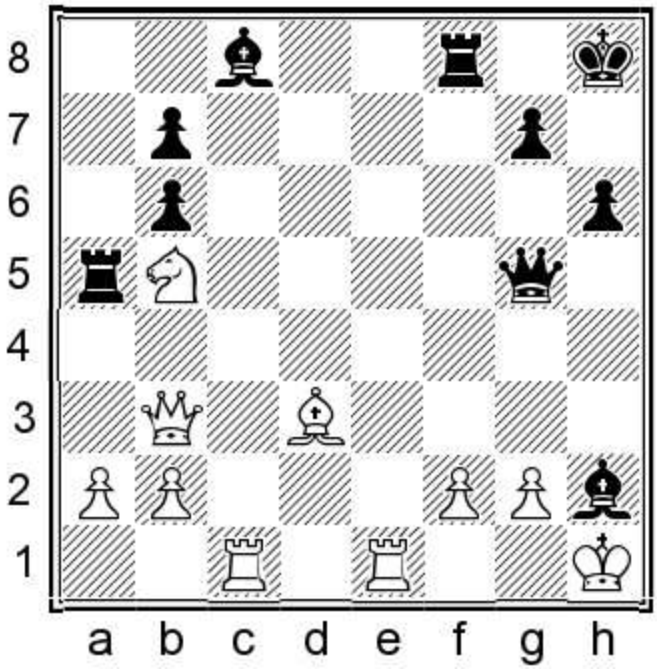


19...Bxh2†?!
The text move is losing, but 19...Ra5 20.Nb5± doesn't challenge White at all.

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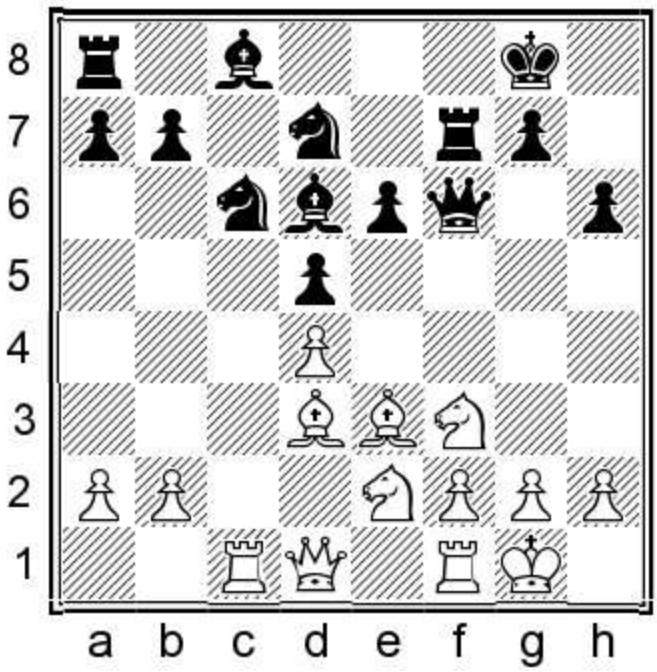
20.Kh1 Ra5 21.Nb5 Qe5 22.Re1 Qg5 23.Qb3† Kh8

So far this is Rooze – Claesen, Westerlo 2010.



24.Qb4!N
As there is no longer a check on h4, White can safely pick up the h2-bishop on the next move and win the game.
The game's 24.Qf7 Qf4 was also winning but in less easy to understand fashion.

D4122) 13...Rf7



Black plans the same development as in the main line below – ...Nf8, ...Bd7-e8 – with the difference that then ...Rc7 is necessary to create a path for the bishop. Since doubling rooks on the c-file is a sensible plan for Black, this all makes sense.

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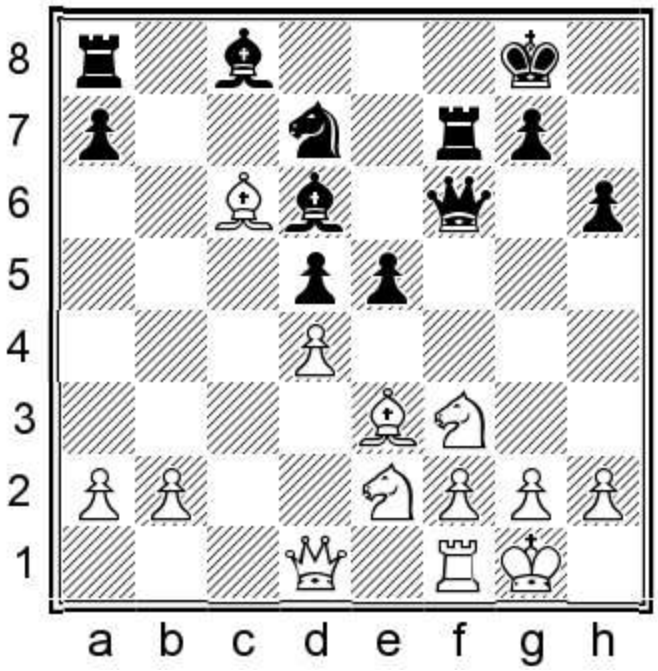
14.Bb5!?
Also possible is 14.Bb1 as in the main line, but after 14...Nf8 15.Qd2 Bd7 I want to have the move Bf4, but the f7-rook stops it.

14...e5
Allowing a long tactical line that ends in White's favour.

Safer is 14...Ne7 but then the f7-rook really is in the way.

We shall see that the sacrificial 14...Nb6 works with the rook on d8, but not here: 15.Bxc6 bxc6 16.Rxc6 Nc4 17.Nd2!² With the point that 17...Nxb2?? 18.Qc2 wins a piece as the d6-bishop is hanging.

15.Rxc6! bxc6 16.Bxc6



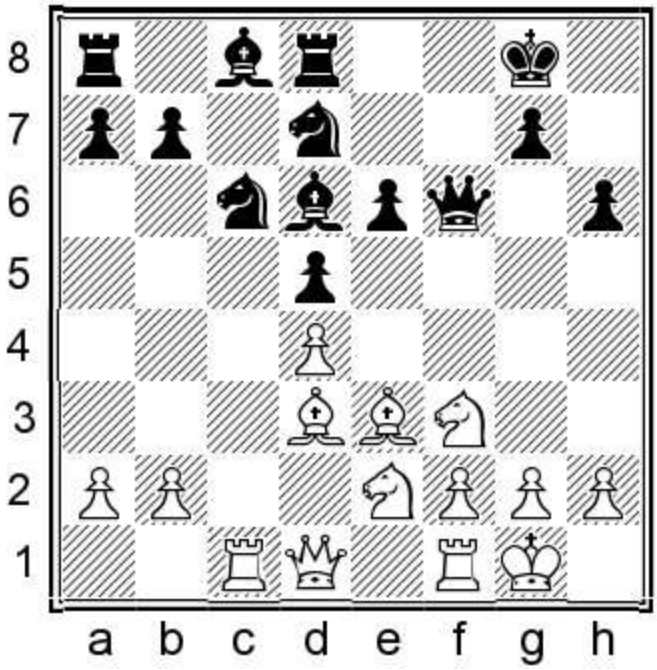
The threats on d5 and a8 regain the exchange, but the forcing play is just getting started:

16...e4 17.Ne5 Nxe5 18.dxe5 Qxe5 19.Bf4 Rxf4 20.Nxf4 Rb8 21.Qxd5† Qxd5 22.Bxd5† Kf8
Or 22...Kh8 23.Ng6† Kh7 24.Bxe4² and White keeps the extra material, though Black's bishops would make converting it tricky.

23.Ng6† Ke8 24.b3±
In Sengupta – Chakravarthi Reddy, Nagpur 2015, White had shown either great calculation or deep preparation.

D4123) 13...Rd8

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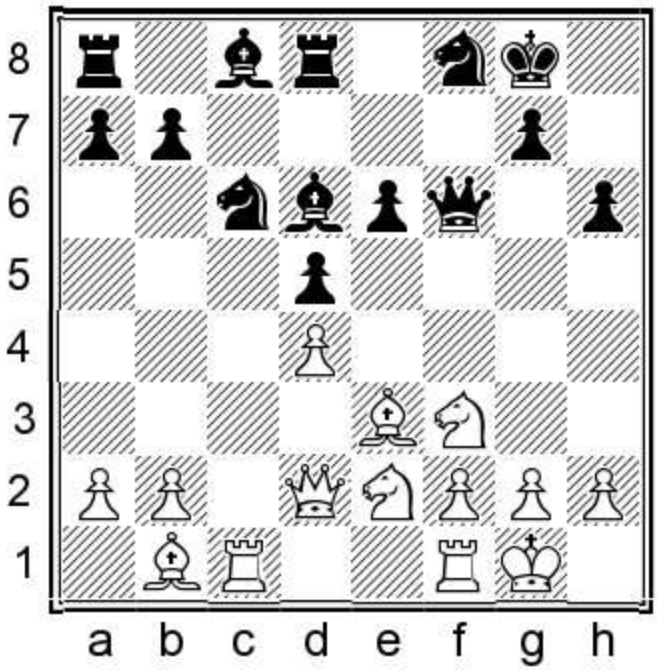


The usual choice. Black's idea is ...Nf8, disarming any Bb1-Qd3 mating dreams, followed by ...Bd7-e8 to g6 or h5.

14.Bb1
With the rook on d8, this is the right square for the bishop.

Instead 14.Bb5 is well met by 14...Nb6 as in Godena – Lanzani, Arco 1998, with the point that 15.Bxc6 bxc6 16.Rxc6 fails to win material after 16...Nc4! threatening ...Nxb2 or ...Bd7.

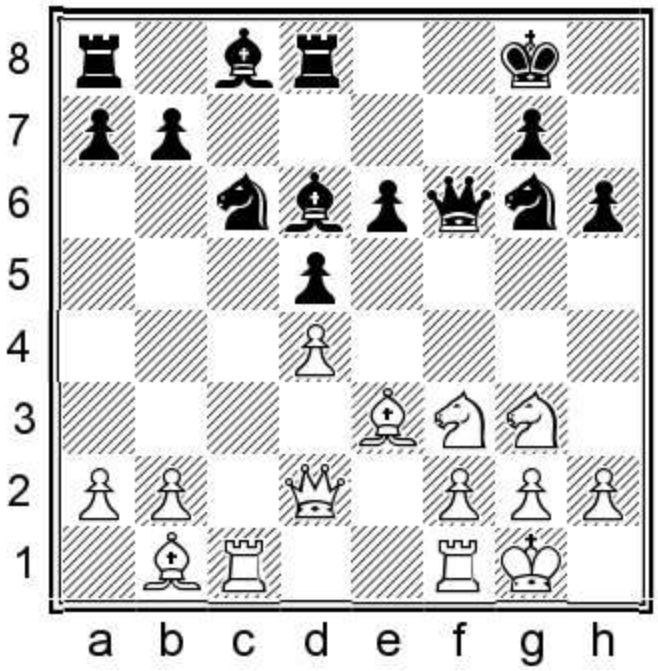
14...Nf8 15.Qd2
Planning Bf4 as we shall see dozens of times throughout this chapter and the next.



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15...Bd7
Getting on with his plan, and letting White do the same.

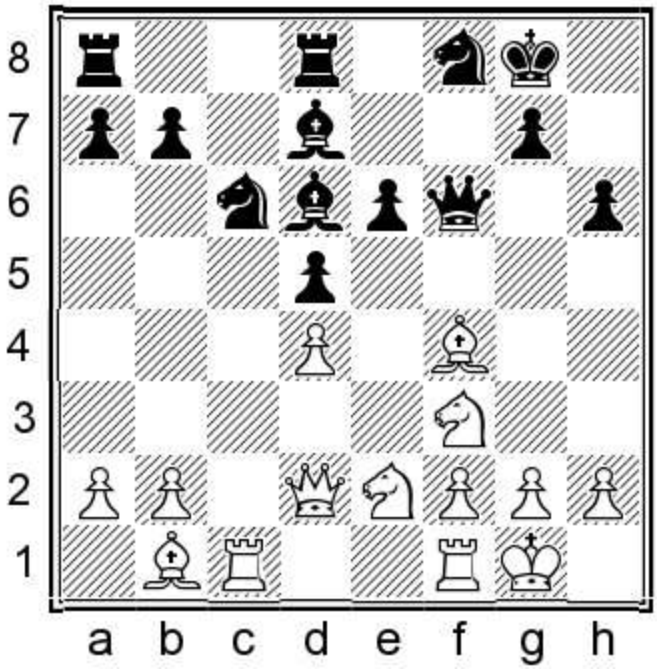
15...Ng6
Stopping Bf4, but the g6-knight becomes a target.
16.Ng3
Now Nh5 is a huge threat.



16...Nce7
Just to illustrate the threat: 16...Bd7?? 17.Nh5 Qf7 18.Bxh6! gxh6 19.Qxh6+– And Black could resign, as defending g6 would allow Ng5.
17.Rfe1 Bd7 18.Nh5 Qf7 19.Qd3²
Boruchovsky – Tarnopolsky, Kefar Sava 2010.

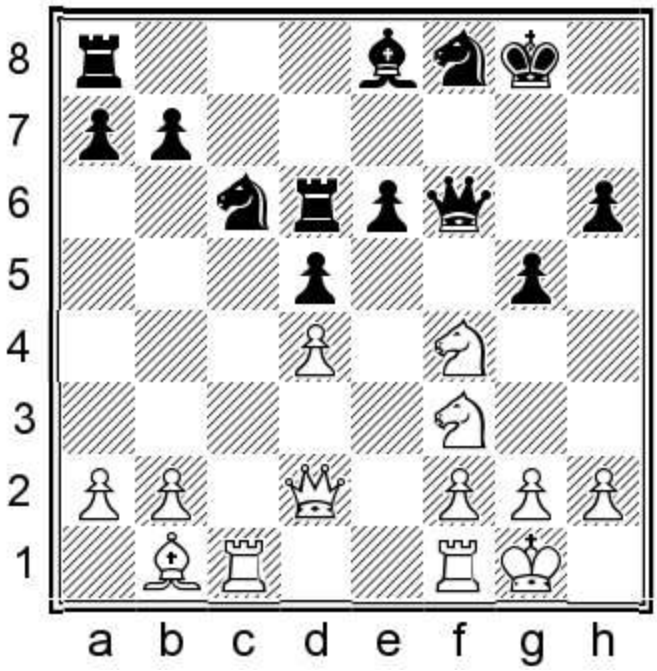
16.Bf4
As usual, exchanging these bishops emphasizes the weakness of e5.

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16...Be8
Similarly unpleasant for Black is: 16...Bxf4 17.Nxf4 Be8 18.Qe3 Rac8 19.g3² as in Dvoirys – Fakhretdinov, Omsk 1998.

17.Bxd6 Rxd6 18.Nf4 g5
A weakening lunge, but otherwise the e8-bishop would remain a spectator. So far this is Golubovic – B. Kovacevic, Pula 2000.



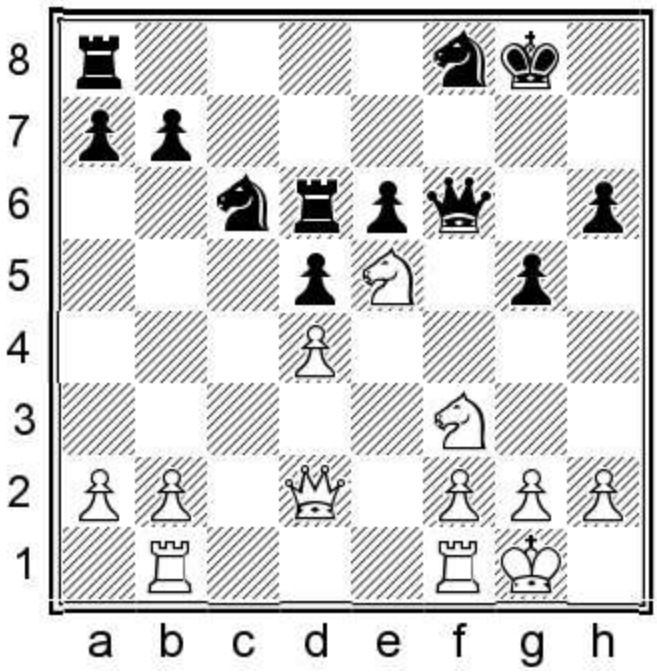
19.Nd3!N
The game went 19.Ne2 Bg6 when White's advantage was less pronounced than in our line.

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19...Bg6

Perhaps White chose 19.Ne2 because he was worried about 19...Nxd4 but after 20.Nfe5± White has the vicious f2-f4 coming, with Rc7 a handy move as well.

20.Nde5 Bxb1 21.Rxb1²

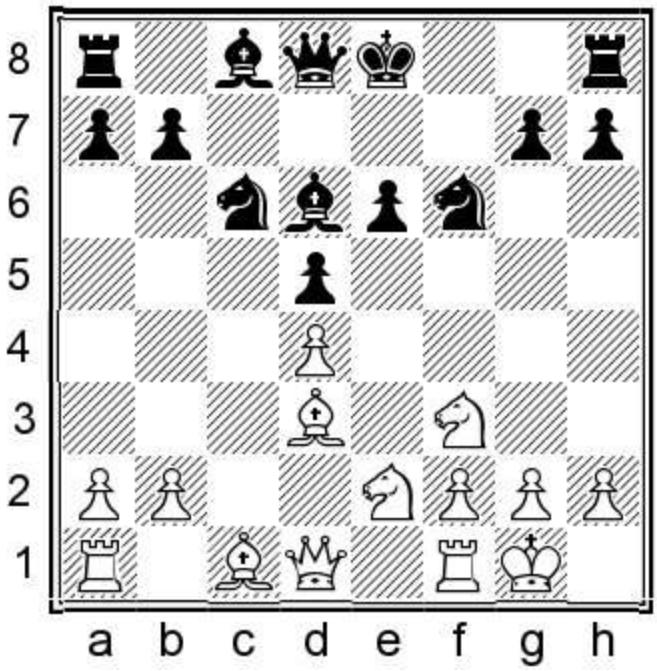


White has the safer king, more active pieces, and an unshakable grip on e5.

D42) 9...Nxf6

The following couple of moves are obvious and correct.

10.Nf3 Bd6 11.0-0

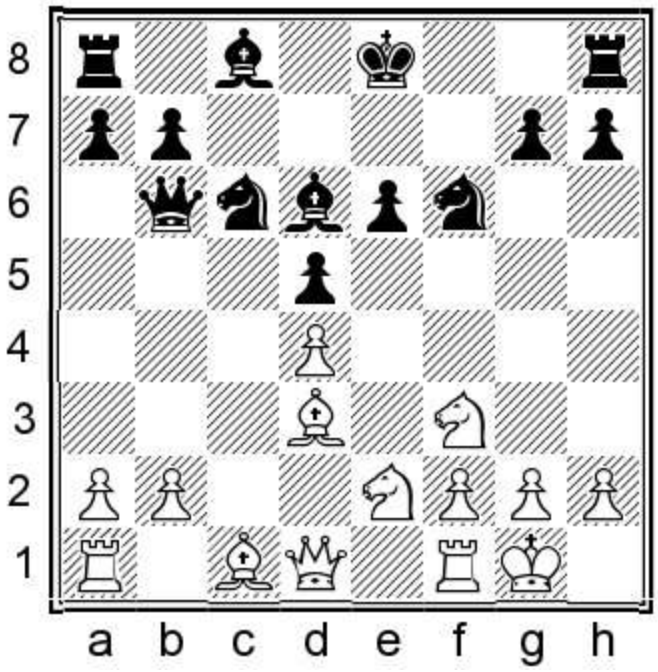


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A key tabiya in the 3...Nf6 Tarrasch, where there are three main options: we shall start with D421) 11...Qb6 before seeing D422) 11...Qc7 in Game 18. We will save the main line 11...0-0 for the next chapter.

D421) 11...Qb6

This is the least fashionable and, in my opinion, least challenging of Black's three main options. White's usual positional plan in the 3...Nf6 Tarrasch is to exchange dark-squared bishops with Bf4, so there is some logic in hitting b2 to discourage this idea. But in our main line we will see that the queen is a target on b6.



12.Nc3!?
The most common move and the approach I like best against 11...Qb6. White forgets about the Bf4 plan in favour of putting the bishop on e3, where it will be a constant nuisance to the black queen.

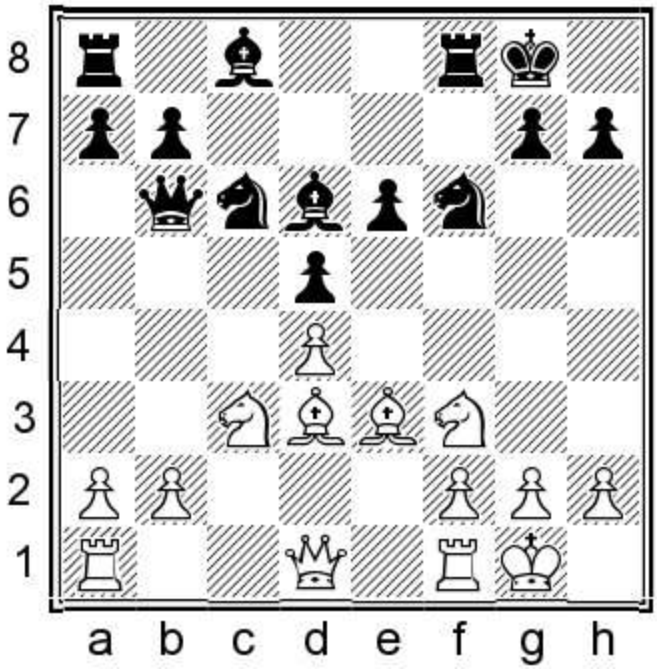
White can insist on the Bf4 plan with 12.Bf4 Bxf4 13.Nxf4 Qxb2 when he has compensation, but not a significant edge in my view.

Instead White can keep all his material and prepare Bf4 with 12.b3 0-0 13.Bf4. This is a simple and sensible backup option, but I think the main line is more testing for Black.

12...0-0
Black could start with 12...Bd7 but after 13.Be3 he has nothing better than transposing with 13...0-0.

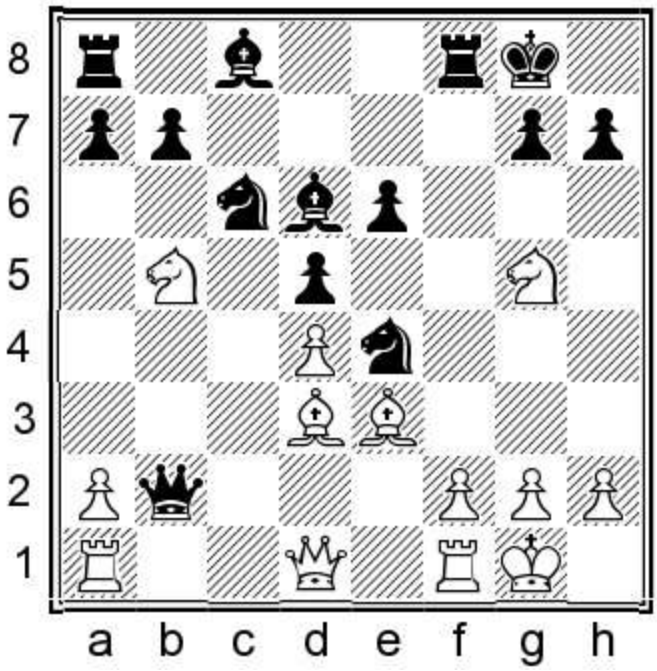
13.Be3
As I mentioned above, in this ...Qb6 line, e3 is our bishop's square. It kills Black's usual idea of an ...e6-e5 break, and later White may have Ne5 jumps, when taking the knight would spring an attack on the queen with dxe5. White needs to be ready each move for the possibility of ...Qxb2, but that is almost always a bad idea for Black.

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13...Bd7
Simple development is the right choice.

This is the worst possible moment to grab on b2:
13...Qxb2? 14.Nb5 Ne4
Or 14...Bb8 15.Rb1 Qxa2 16.Ra1 Qb2 17.Ra4!+– was winning in Manotas – Rosado, Barranquilla 1999.
15.Ng5
The lines that follow are rather complicated, but White should not complain about having a winning position while still in prep.



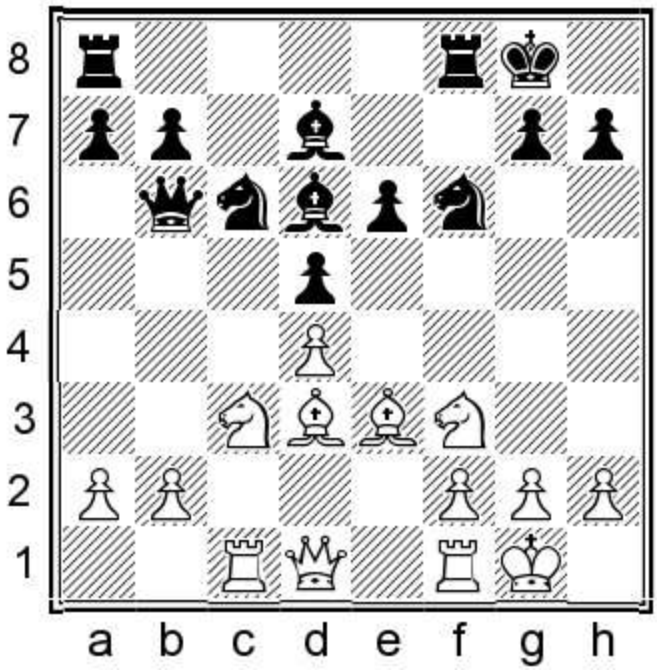
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15...Bf4

15...Nxg5 Cilento – Gallozzi, Italy 1986. 16.Bxg5N 16...Be7 17.Qh5 h6 18.Bc1 Qxa1 19.Bxh6+–
16.Rb1 Qxa2 17.Nxh7! Kxh7
17...Rf5 18.Bxf4 Kxh7 19.f3 Rxf4 20.fxe4 Rxf1† 21.Qxf1+– and White has a decisive attack.
18.Ra1 Qb2 19.Qh5† Kg8 20.Rfb1+–
Kroes – Ovchinkin, email 2011.

13...Kh8 14.Rc1 would be similar to the game.

14.Rc1
The most flexible move, as the other rook probably will go to e1, but the a1-rook certainly belongs on c1.



In this non-forcing position Black has various options. So let's see a few examples to gain a feel for the typical moves: D4211) 14...Be8, D4212) 14...Rae8, D4213) 14...Qxb2?!, and D4214) 14...Rac8.

D4211) 14...Be8

On the way to h5 as usual.

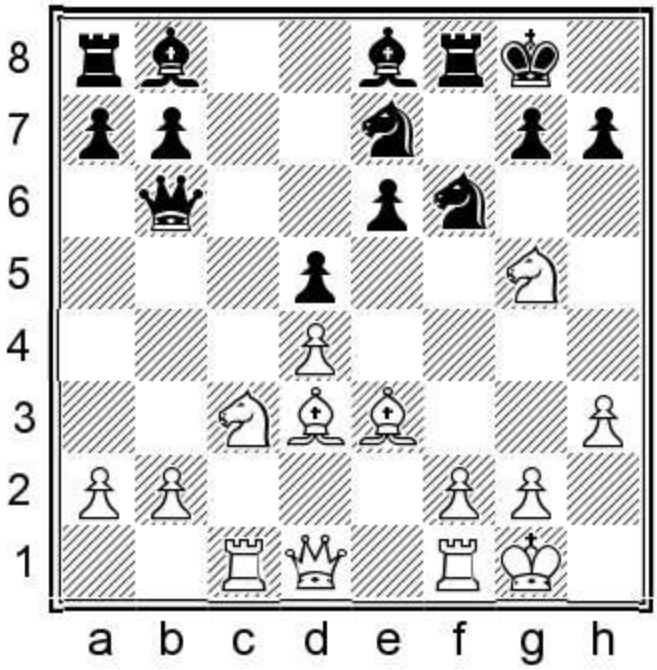
15.Ng5
Logically hitting what was just left undefended, while avoiding the pin.

Instead 15.Ne5?! finally allows a decent version of 15...Qxb2.

The untested 15.Qd2!?N is a simple and sensible alternative.

15...Ne7 16.h3 Bb8

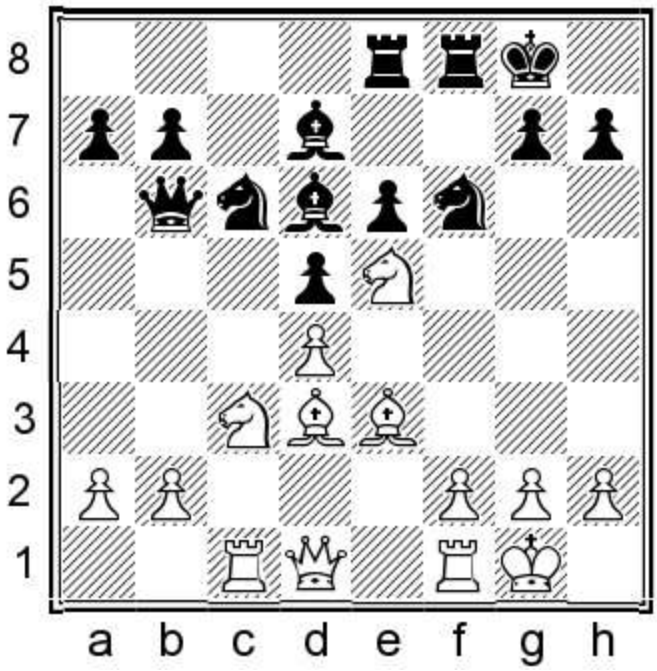
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So far this is Van Dijk – Newman, email 2002, and now I suggest:

17.Qd2!?N 17...h6 18.Nf3 Nf5 19.Rfe1²
White retains some pressure. Note that after 19...Nh5 20.Bxf5 neither recapture solves all Black's problems: 20...exf5?! 21.Qd3± or 20...Rxf5 21.Ne5².

D4212) 14...Rae8 15.Ne5

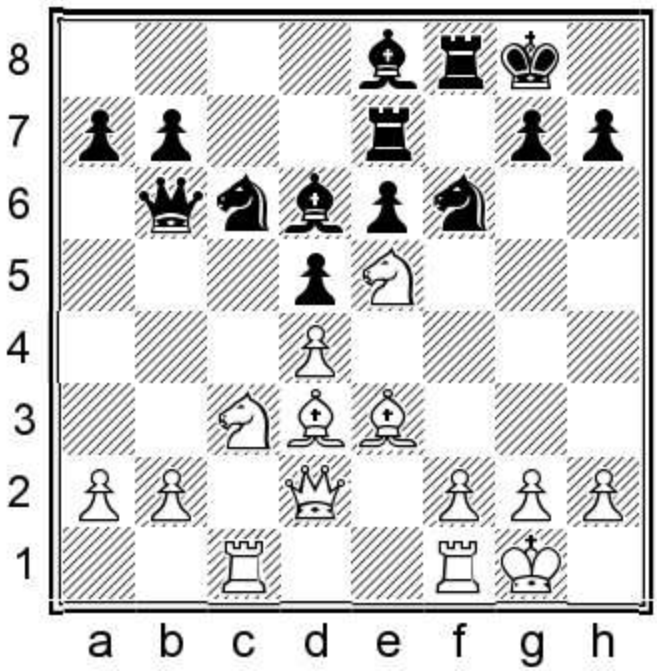


Business as usual.

15...Re7
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Instead 15...Qxb2? was refuted the first time it was played: 16.Nxd7! Perhaps the big knight taking the bad

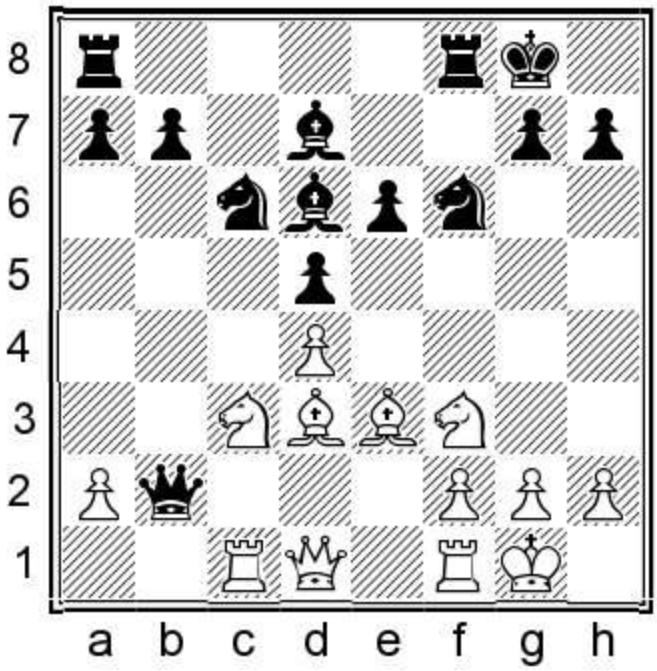
bishop is missable? 16...Nxd7 17.Nb5! Bb8 18.Bd2!+– In Groszpeter – Farago, Budapest 1978, the black queen was trapped, with Rc2 just one of the threats.

16.Qd2 Be8



17.Bb1[2]
In Torres – Roach, Thessaloniki (ol) 1988, White was in control.
I will also mention 17.f4!?N not because it is better than the game move, but just to mention another plan. With Black creating no threats, White could later consider grabbing all the kingside space with h2-h3 and g2-g4.

D4213) 14...Qxb2?!

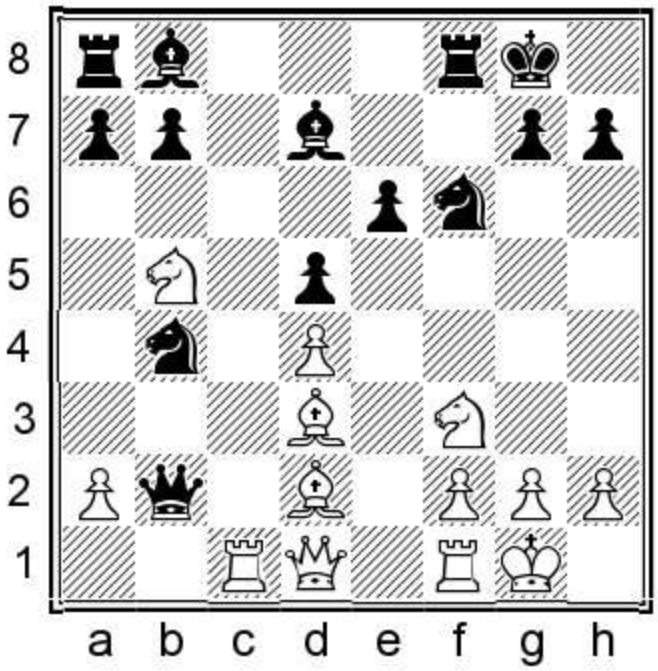


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The pawn grab is still unwise, but the bishop on d7 gives some extra resources, so White must react precisely.

15.Nb5 Bb8 16.Bd2!
Unlike in the 13...Qxb2 line, 16.Rb1 Qxa2 17.Ra1 Qb2= is now just a draw, as the queen-trap 18.Ra4? Nb4 19. Bc1? costs White a fatal number of pieces after: 19...Nxd3 20.Bxb2 Nxb2 21.Qc2 Nxa4 22.Qxa4 a6–+

16...Nb4

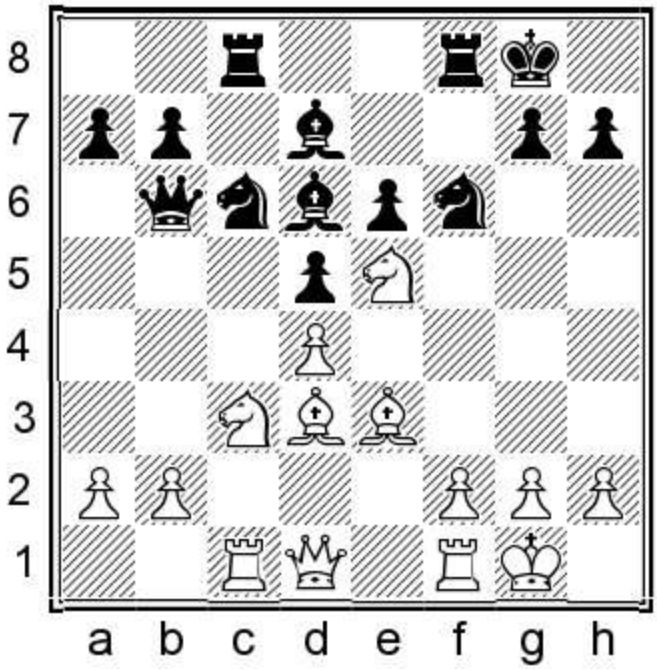


17.Bc3!N
I think this is a fraction better than the alternative as played in a couple of email games: 17.Rb1 Nxd3 18.Rxb2 Nxb2 19.Qe2 Nc4 Though even there, White had an edge.

17...Qxc1 18.Qxc1 Nxd3 19.Qb1 a6 20.Na3 Nf4 21.Bb4²
After the f8-rook moves, the active knight on f4 will soon be kicked away by g2-g3; White has an edge.

D4214) 14...Rac8 15.Ne5

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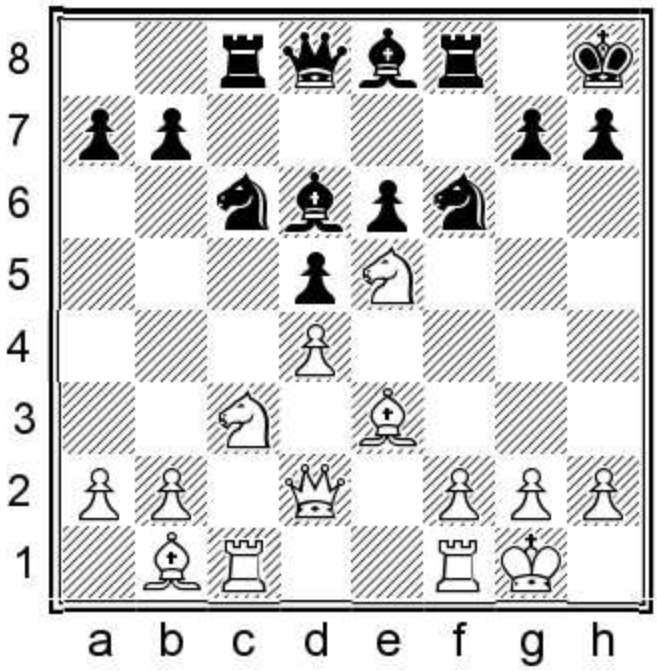


The standard idea, as mentioned above.

15...Be8 16.Qd2 Kh8
Threatening to take on d4, but defending against that is trivial.

16...Ne7 17.Rfe1[2] was Naumann – Kummerow, Dresden 2007, when White had a similar grip on the position.

17.Bb1 Qd8
An admission that 11...Qb6 has not worked, but what else could Black do? The line-up from e3 to b6 prevented Black relieving the central pressure. We have been following Sulskis – Zhang Zhong, Linares 2001, but now we should vary:



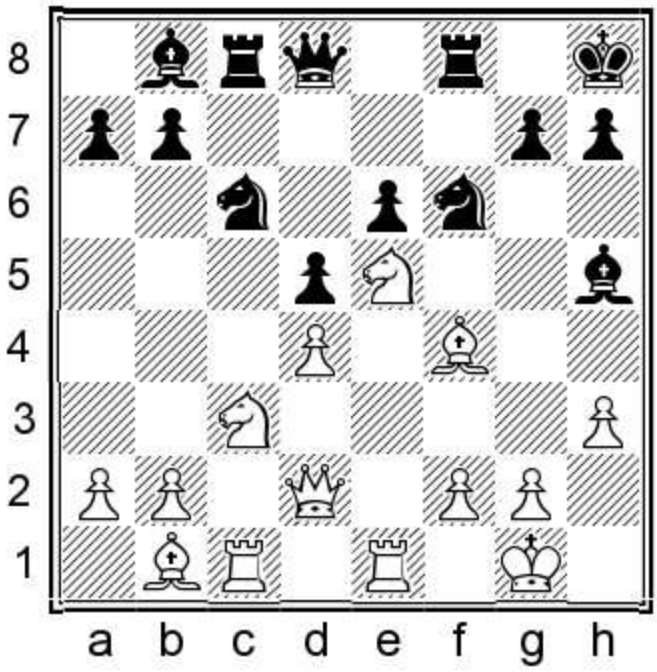
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18.Bf4!?N
Keeping perfect control of the position with every white piece finding a fine square.

18.f4 was the game, and is also sensible, but blocking our dark-squared bishop makes it harder to increase the pressure. Unlike the example at the end of variation D4212 where I like f2-f4, here the rook is more sensibly placed on c8 instead of e7.

A logical continuation is:

18...Bh5 19.h3 Bb8 20.Rfe1²



I want to stop here, as it is a perfect picture of how I recommend playing against 11...Qb6. It's easy to see ideas for White: maybe exchange on c6, then exchange dark-squared bishops, then press against the backward e-pawn, while Black suffers with his ineffectual bishop. Or maybe double on the e-file. Or...
But how about finding a productive plan for Black? There is no way to shake White's grip. The best the computer can suggest is exchanging two pairs of minor pieces on e5 then, after Rxe5, defending the e6-pawn with ...Bf7. That's grim.

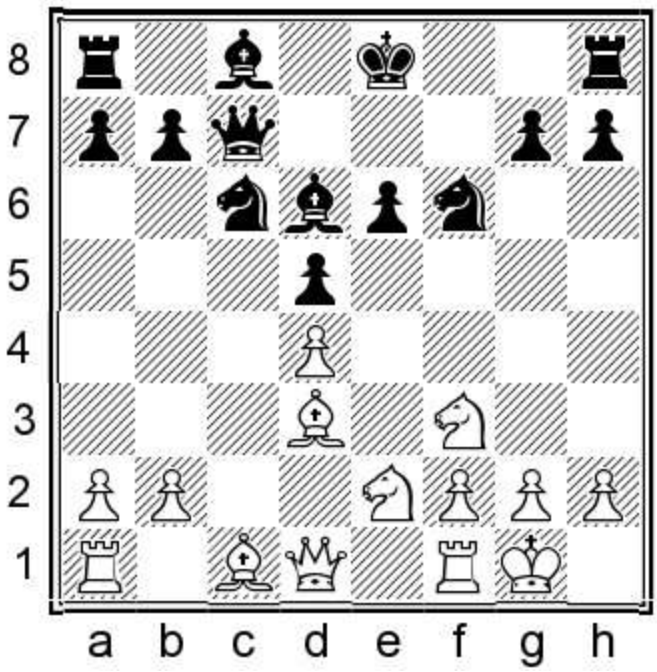
D422) 11...Qc7

GAME 18

David Navara – Bart Michiels
Wijk aan Zee 2015

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Nxf6 10.0-0 Bd6 11.Nf3 Qc7
Black's most popular option, but I believe that 11...0-0, which we shall see in the next chapter, is the more critical test.

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12.h3!?
This flexible move is designed to prevent ...Ng4, which is one of Black's key moves in many a line. It also frees the f3-knight for a later leap, which will be vital when we play against Black's standard plan of ...Bd7-e8-h5.

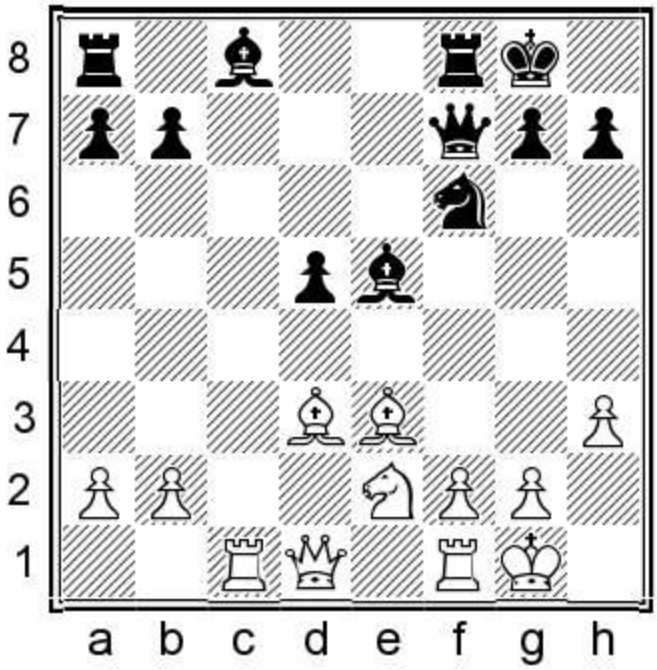
Far more common are 12.Bg5, 12.Nc3 and 12.g3.

12...0-0 13.Be3
A calmly effective move, which has been played by Adams, Howell and of course Navara.

13...Bd7
The usual move.

We should always keep an eye on the thematic break:
13...e5 14.dxe5 Nxe5 15.Nxe5 Bxe5 16.Rc1 Qf7

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17.Bd4

17.Bf4!?N may be even more effective in this particular position, but let's see the thematic line which shows why 13.Be3 is a logical prophylactic move against the ...e5-break.

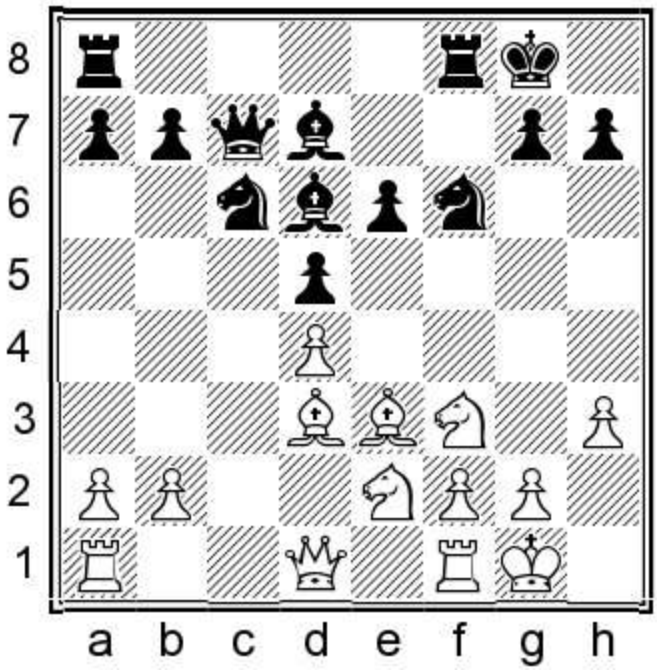
17...Bxd4 18.Nxd4 Nh5

Now instead of the defensive 19.Ne2 as in A. Kovacevic – Sipila, Novi Sad 2016, more active is:

19.Rc3!N 19...Nf4 20.Bc2²

Covering any sacs on h3, and leaving White comfortably better; the move Ne2 may well be played soon, but it's a different story when it challenges the f4-knight, compared to sitting on e2 waiting for something to happen.

13...a6 14.Rc1 Bd7 15.Re1 transposes to Howell – Williams, given below in the note to Black's 14th move.



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14.Re1!

This is the current fashion. It's a fine flexible move; whether Black plays for ...e5 or leaves his backward pawn on e6, our king's rook belongs on e1. I want to be open and say that I do not believe that White has a great advantage here, but his position is slightly preferable and, rather significantly, easier to play. In practical terms, I have been happy to seek out this type of positions for decades and will probably do so until the day I lose the power to push the pieces around (my style does not require that I lift the pieces).

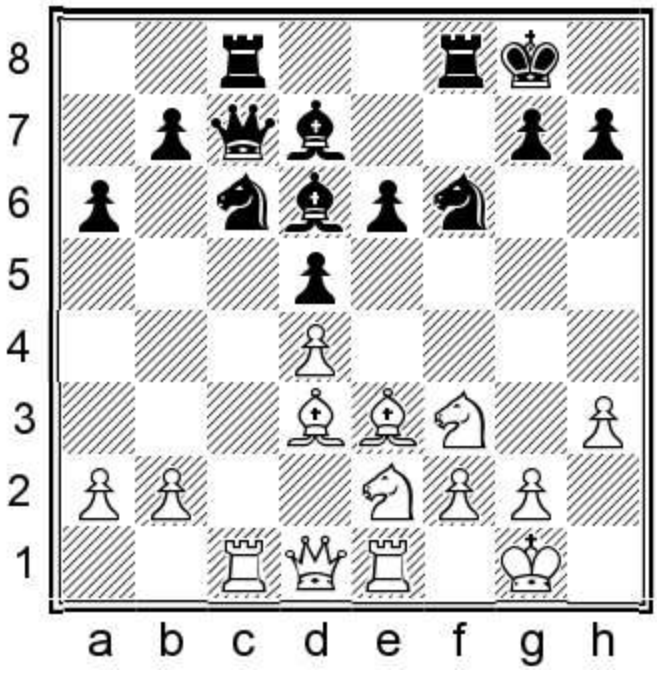
14.Rc1 Be8 15.Ng5 Qe7!÷ is given by John Watson in the 4th edition of Play The French. The key idea is revealed after 16.Nf4? Bxf4! 17.Bxf4 Ne4! 18.Qg4 Rxf4 and Black wins.

14...Be8
This is the darling of the engines and also the recommendation of Emanuel Berg in Volume 3 of his trilogy Grandmaster Repertoire – The French Defence. I will mention various alternatives. You certainly don't need to remember all that follows, but playing through the examples will show that certain themes are common. For example, the a1-rook is heading for c1; when ...Bh5 is threatened, Ng5 is a common way to stop it; the e2-knight often steps to c3, threatening Nb5, and so gaining a tempo for Na4-c5.

14...Qb6?! Donating a tempo or two to White's intended plan. 15.Nc3! a6 (The b2-pawn really is poisoned: 15...Qxb2?? 16.Na4 Qa3 17.Bc1! Qb4 18.Bd2 Qa3 19.Re3 and Bxh7† is a winning threat.) 16.a3 Rac8 17.Na4± In Musiolik – Wiesner, Hannover 2016, White had Rc1 and Nc5 on the way.

14...Rad8 15.Rc1 Qb8 16.Nc3 Be8 17.Ng5 Bf7 18.Na4² Rambaldi – Dgebuadze, Hilversum 2014, helpfully showed all White's standard ideas.

14...Rac8 15.Rc1 a6 (15...Be8 16.Ne5 Qe7 17.a3² Canibal – Pecka, email 2012.)

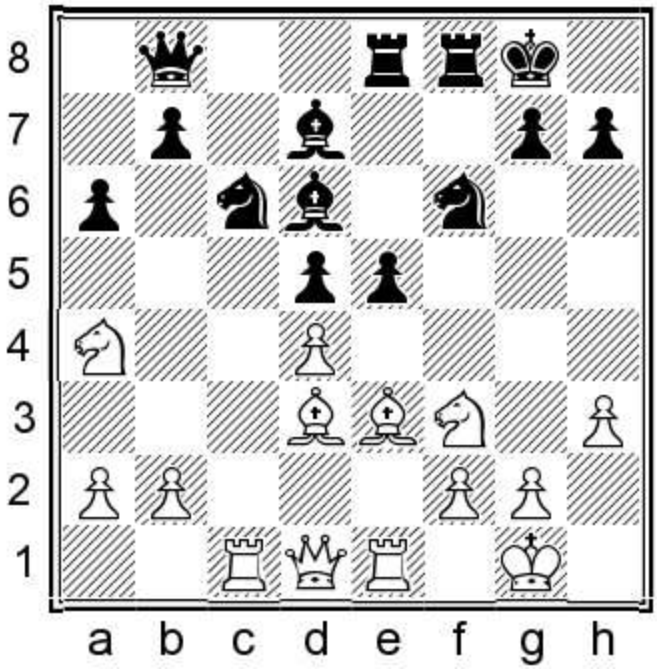


So far this is Huschenbeth – Bluebaum, Athens 2012, and now I suggest: 16.a3!?N 16...Be8 17.Ne5²

14...Rae8 15.Rc1 Qb8
Or 15...a6 16.a3 Nh5 may look active, but the precise 17.Qc2! forces a retreat with 17...Nf6 as in Ozbek – Aydin, Manavgat 2015, when the simple 18.Nc3² would have kept White's edge ticking over.
16.Nc3 a6 17.Na4 e5

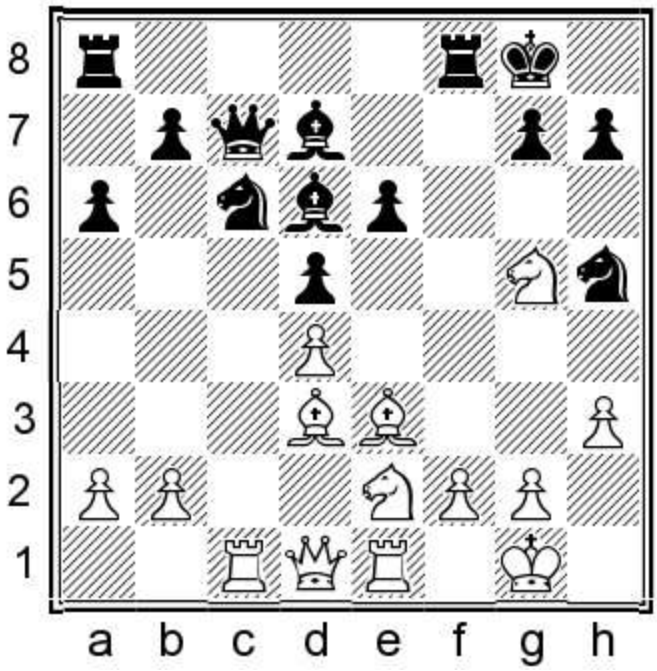
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This is quite a popular approach by Black: 17 players have tried it.



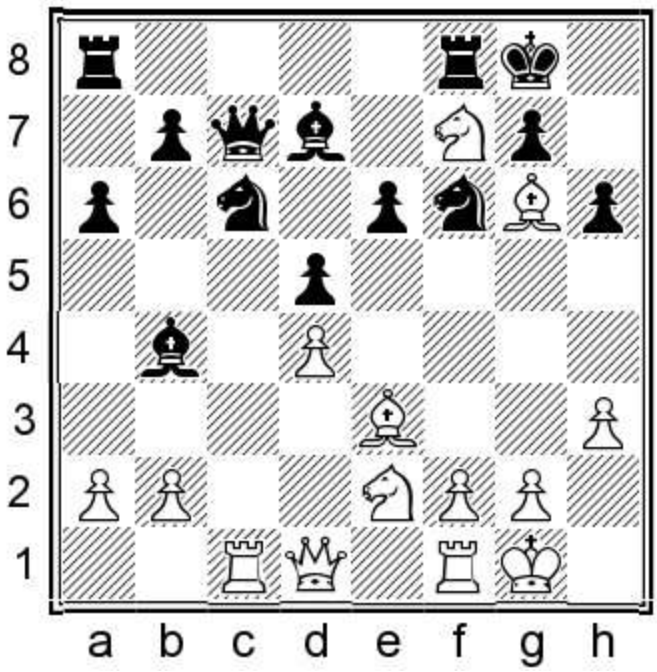
18.dxe5 Nxe5 19.Nxe5 Bxe5 20.Nc5 Bc8
The greedy 20...Bxb2?! offers White an array of promising options. One example: 21.Bxh7† Kxh7 22.Qc2† Kg8 23.Qxb2±
21.Qd2²
In Schroeder – Rathnakaran, Sharjah 2017, all White's pieces were well placed, while Black's IQP is a long-term weakness.

14...a6 15.Rc1 Nh5
Black is eyeing an exchange sac on f3, so it's time for the knight to make its usual hop:
16.Ng5



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16...h6?!
The tactics work well for White.
So Black should have retreated with: 16...Nf6 17.Bb1 h6 18.Nf3² Now the f6-knight is frozen in place by White's potential queen and bishop battery aimed at h7.
17.Bh7†! Kh8 18.Bg6 Bb4 19.Rf1 Nf6 20.Nf7† Kg8

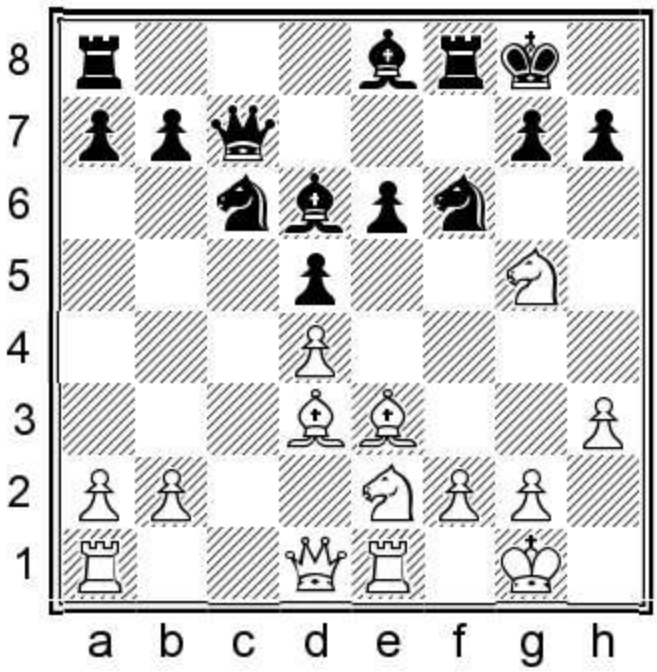


In Howell – Williams, London (rapid) 2015, the right path was:
21.Qb3!N 21...Ba5?!
This allows a flashy series of tactics.
But even 21...Be8 22.Ne5± is securely better for White.
22.Bf4 Qb6 23.Nxh6†! gxh6 24.Qg3 Ne7
24...Kh8 25.Qh4+–
25.b4! Bxb4 26.Bc7 Qa7 27.Be5+–
An impressive line, but the positional point is that after Black plays ...h7-h6, his kingside is all holes and hooks.

14...Nb4 15.Rc1
Just to show these are not only-moves, White could just as well play 15.Bb1 a6 16.a3 Nc6 17.Bd3² as in Adams – Harika, Isle of Man 2015.
15...Nxd3
15...Qa5 16.Qd2! b6 17.Bf4!² is a line given by Navara.
16.Rxc7 Nxe1 17.Rc3 Nxf3† 18.gxf3²
Krueger – Arnhold, email 2012.

15.Ng5
As mentioned above, we don't want that bishop annoying us from h5.

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15...Bf7
The other way to cover e6 is: 15...Qe7 16.Nf4 Bxf4 (16...Bd7 17.Rc1²) 17.Bxf4 Ne4 18.Bxe4 dxe4 19.Qg4 Nxd4 20.Rxe4 This was given by Navara. After the engine's choice, 20...Qf6, White plays 21.Be3 e5 22.Bxd4 exd4 23.Qe6† Qxe6 24.Nxe6± and White will enjoy himself trying to convert his extra pawn.

16.Rc1
Not mentioned by Berg, but a logical move.

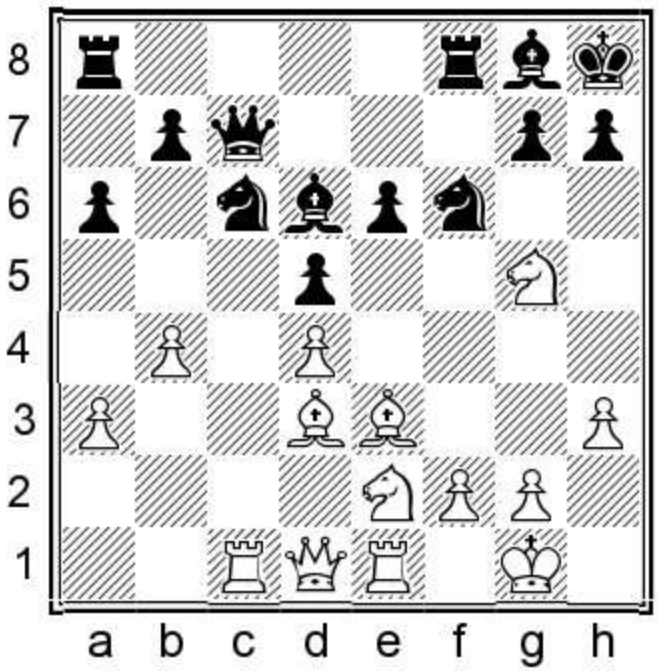
16.Qc2N 16...h6 17.Nxf7 Qxf7 18.Bg6 Qd7 is given by Berg as equal, but I like White after 19.Rac1 Ne7 20. Bd3, although it is arguably not more than in our main line. But to call this equal is a step too far for me. Black has problems to solve, and will have to address them for a while. To me, this is the definition of a slight advantage, much more than a 0.14 evaluation by Stockfish.

16...Kh8
As Navara explained: "Black is reasonably trying to avoid the weakening move ...h7-h6. Instead, he wants to retreat his bishop to g8 and only then drive away White's knight."
After 16...Rac8 as in Lane – Zelesco, Cammeray 2015, White could play: 17.Qc2!?N 17...h6 18.Nxf7 Qxf7 19. Bg6 Qd7 20.Qd2²
Navara had prepared the line: 16...h6 17.Nxf7 Qxf7 18.a3 Rac8 19.Bb1²

17.a3
I will not annotate the rest of the game in depth, as it ends in a sharp tactical fight; we have already seen the main themes of this line.

17...Bg8 18.b4 a6

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19.g3
This creates ideas of f2-f4 or Nf4, but it feels too loose to me.

I would prefer simply 19.Nf3² claiming that by chasing the bishop to g8, the knight has done its job on g5. For example: 19...Bf7 20.Qd2 Bh5?! 21.Ne5± strengthens White's bind.

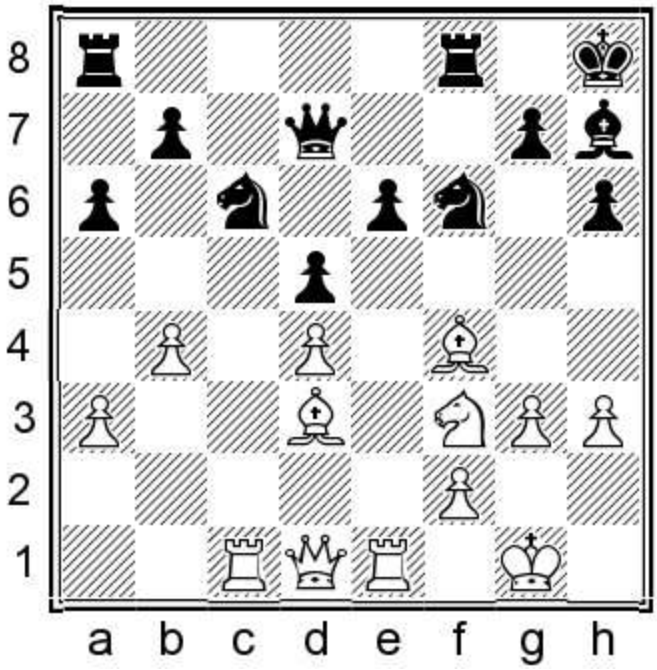
19...h6?!
Allowing a tactic.

Navara gave 19...Qd7 as best; the position looks messy and balanced to me.

20.Nf4 Bxf4
Of course 20...hxg5?? 21.Ng6† wins everything.

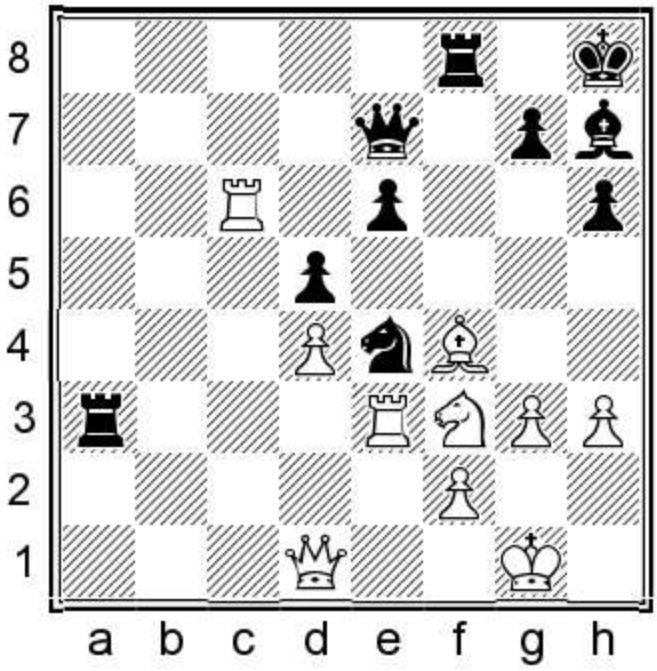
21.Bxf4 Qd7 22.Nf3 Bh7

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23.b5
This looks fine to me, but after the game the players preferred the following line: 23.Bxh7 Kxh7 24.Ne5 Nxe5 25.Bxe5 Rac8 26.Rxc8 Qxc8 27.Qb1† Kg8 28.Qg6²

23...axb5 24.Bxb5 Qe7 25.Bxc6 bxc6 26.Rxc6 Ne4 27.Re3 Ra7?
Surprisingly Black can grab the a3-pawn, so that's what he should do: 27...Rxa3!



Navara had relied on 28.Bd6?! to win material, but later realized 28...Qxd6! 29.Rxd6 Rxe3 30.fxe3 Nxd6= was a reliable fortress.
So instead 28.Rc7! would be correct, with an edge after: 28...Qb4 29.Be5 Nf6²

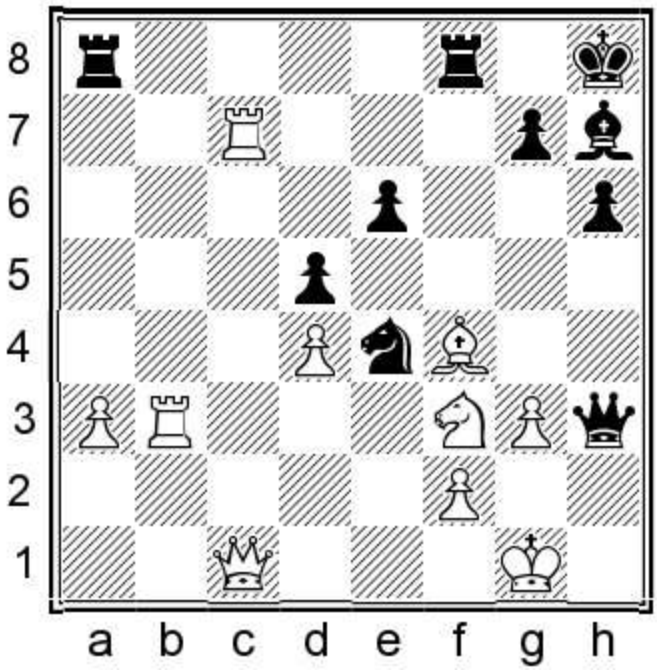
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28.Rb3±

White is a solid pawn up with active pieces; so it's close to winning.

28...Qf6 29.Qc1!
Working perfectly in three directions.

29...Qf5 30.Rc8 Ra8 31.Rc7 Qxh3?
Of course, Black desperately wants to grab this pawn to get at the enemy king, but it loses to everything. On the other hand, he had no good alternatives.



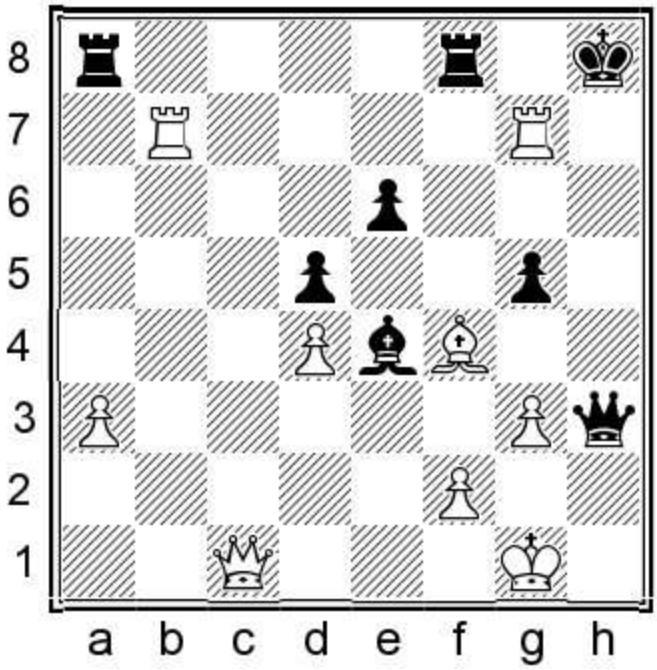
32.Rbb7+–
Also devastatingly winning were 32.Rxg7 and 32.Be5.

32...Ng5 33.Nxg5
The fastest way.

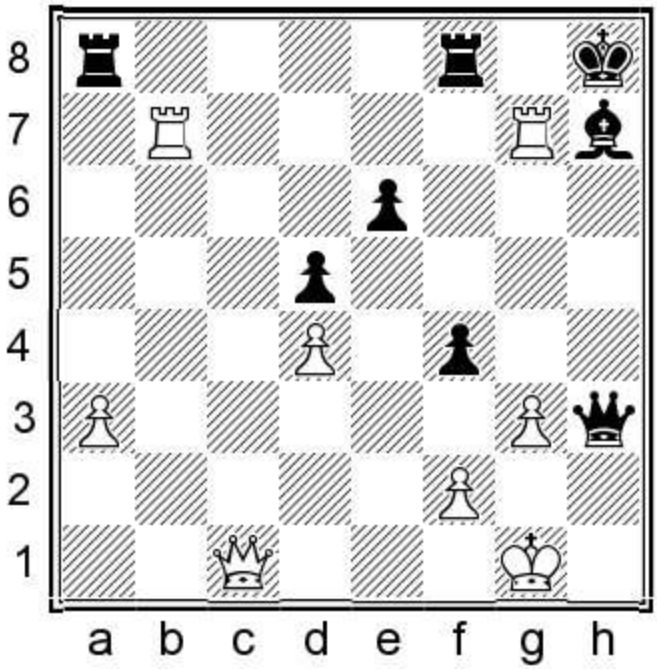
Also good enough was 33.Bxg5 with the point that after 33...Rxf3 White has the only-move: 34.Rc8†! Rxc8 (or 34...Rf8 35.Qc7) 35.Qxc8† Bg8 36.Rb8 There is no perpetual check after the sac on g3.

33...hxg5 34.Rxg7 gxf4
Navara pointed out that after 34...Be4:

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White needs to find the only winning, and non-losing, move: 35.Rh7†! And it's a quick mate after either 35... Qxh7 36.Be5† Kg8 37.Qxg5† or 35...Bxh7 36.Be5† Kg8 37.Qxg5†.



35.Qc7! Be4 36.Rg8†! Rxg8 37.Qe5† Rg7 38.Qxg7#
Navara: "I am thankful to my opponent for letting me demonstrate the final combination, as I rarely get an opportunity to finish a game in style."
1–0

Conclusion

In this chapter we covered a lot of ground after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3. Game 17 with 6...b6 was a comfortable start, as White's centre is under little pressure; this allows Nh3 ideas, keeping a

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route open to g4 for the queen.

The usual line starts with 6...Nc6 7.Ne2 when A) 7...f6?! is simply an error, as 8.Nf4! shows. B) 7...Be7 is sounder, but obviously passive. C) 7...a5 pains me, as I lost to it; a little knowledge would have helped me, such as the understanding that ...a5-a4-a3 is not a threat, as White can simply take on a3.

We get closer to the main line with D) 7...cxd4 8.cxd4, but first there are some minor options, starting with D1) 8...Qb6. This can act as an alternate move order to reach a sensible line if Black follows up with ...f7-f6, but independent lines with ...Bb4† are misguided: exchanging dark-squared bishops favours White.

We then considered the two knight hops D2) 8...Nb6 and D3) 8...Nb4, neither of which is a significant challenge for White. In the former line, Black develops sensibly but White keeps a positional plus. In the latter line, if Black spends a couple of tempos on queenside pawn moves, then White can go for a quick hacky plan with f2-f4-f5.
D4) 8...f6 9.exf6 heads closer to the serious lines, but first D41) 9...Qxf6 is a sharp diversion. White should remember a few key lines, as the play can be forcing. But if White is well prepared, the outcome should be favourable, with 10.Nf3 h6 11.0-0 Bd6 12.Be3 0-0 13.Rc1 a good starting point.

After D42) 9...Nxf6 10.Nf3 Bd6 11.0-0 we have finally reached the key tabiya of the 3...Nf6 Tarrasch. The three main lines are 11...Qb6, 11...Qc7 and 11...0-0, but we will save castling for the next chapter.

Against 11...Qb6 I recommend a controlled approach with 12.Nc3!? 0-0 13.Be3 Bd7 14.Rc1. There are many possible lines, and I showed a few, but it’s more important to understand the themes rather than memorize moves. For example, the line-up of e3-bishop against the queen on b6 discourages ...e6-e5 while allowing Nf3-e5 ideas. If you wish to be perfectly ready for everything, then there are various ...Qxb2 lines to remember, but they all work well for White.

11...Qc7 is the most important line in this chapter. I recommend 12.h3!? 0-0 13.Be3 Bd7 14.Re1! which might look mysterious the first time you see it, but I hope makes perfect sense once you have read this chapter. Of the various themes mentioned, a key idea is that ...Be8 is often met by Ng5, when hitting e6 prevents the threatened ...Bh5.

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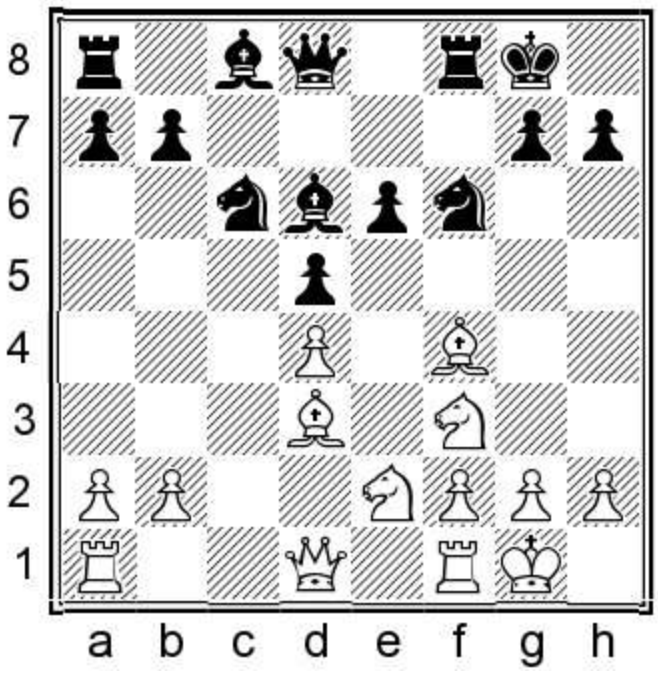
Chapter 6 - 3...Nf6 - Main Line

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Nxf6 10.0-0 Bd6 11.Nf3 0-0 12.Bf4

A) 12...Nb4 165
B) 12...Ne4 165
C) 12...Ng4 166
D) 12...Nh5 Game 19 167
E) 12...Bxf4 13.Nxf4 169
E1) 13...Qb6 170
E2) 13...Ng4 170
E3) 13...Qd6 14.g3! 171
E31) 14...e5 172
E32) 14...Ng4 172
E33) 14...Qb4 173
E4) 13...Ne4 Game 20 174

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Nxf6 10.0-0 Bd6 11.Nf3 0-0
This is the move in the French Tarrasch which demands the greatest theoretical knowledge from White.

12.Bf4
Of course we take the opportunity to exchange dark-squared bishops, as that's a key part of White's plan in the 3...Nf6 main lines. The break 8...f6 was essential to gain activity, but it left a hole on e5 which becomes even more of a problem if the dark-squared bishops disappear.



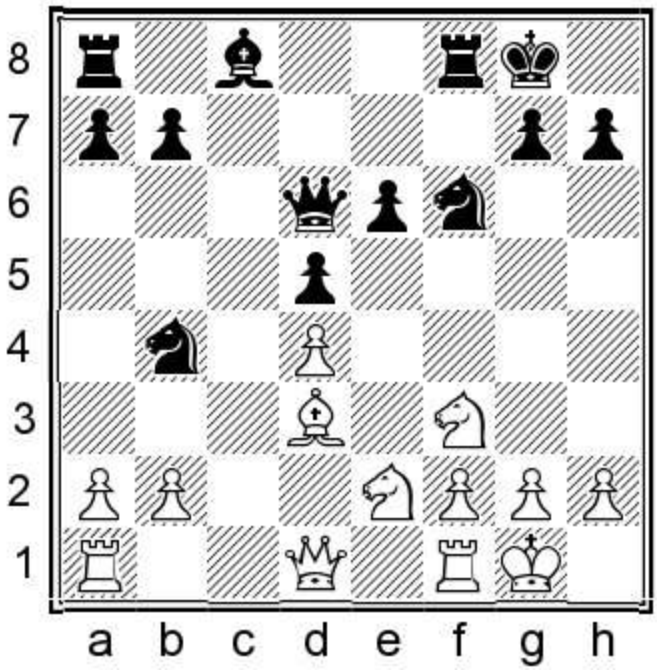
Black usually exchanges on f4, and frankly it's the only move I knew anything about before writing this book.

Most of Black's other options are unthreatening but a few are worthy of closer attention. So we will start with A) 12...Nb4 and B) 12...Ne4 before seeing the more serious C) 12...Ng4 and D) 12...Nh5. Once those moves are out of the way, we will move on to the big main line of E) 12...Bxf4.

A) 12...Nb4

This is a positional misunderstanding. After exchanging dark-squared bishops, White often looks to play Bb5xc6 to create a knight outpost on e5. So for Black to seek this exchange is misguided.

13.Bxd6 Qxd6

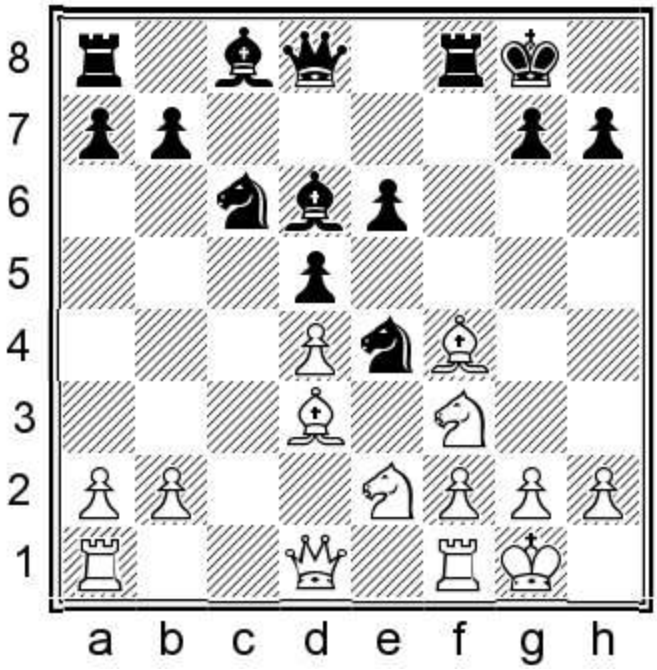


In Coenen – Bosbach, Mittelrhein 1993, White should have emphasized the above positional claim with:

14.a3!N 14...Nxd3 15.Qxd3 Bd7 16.Ne5²
With an excellent position.

B) 12...Ne4

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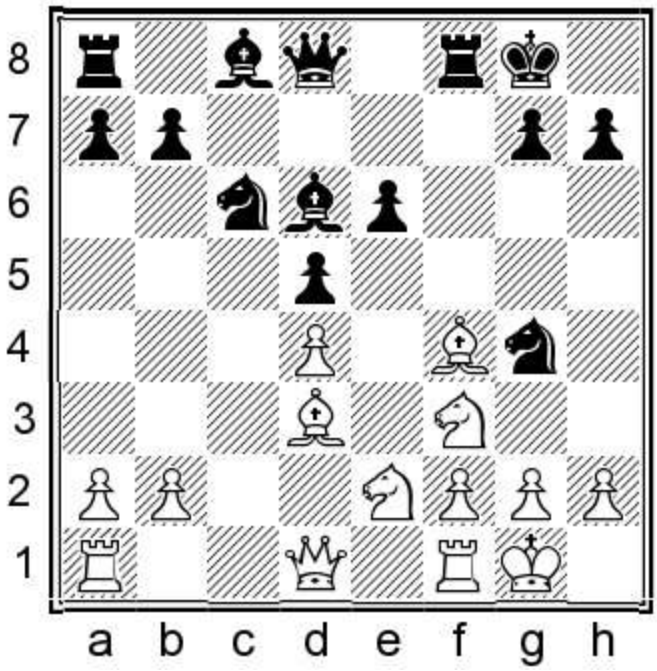
This does nothing to challenge White's control.

13.Bxd6 Qxd6
Or 13...Nxd6 but after, say, 14.Nc3² White is comfortable.

14.Ng3 Nxg3 15.hxg3
White has a niggling advantage. For example:

15...e5 16.dxe5 Nxe5 17.Nxe5 Qxe5 18.Qb3²
Bergauz – Weissbeck, Schwaebisch Gmuend 2015.

C) 12...Ng4



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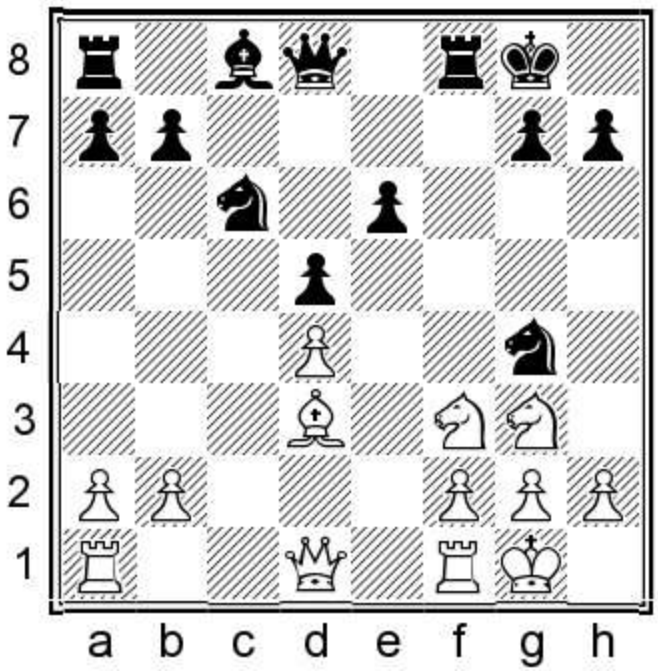
This move requires careful handling from White, as the plausible exchanging line leads to nothing.

13.Bg3!
Normally White is thrilled to exchange dark-squared bishops, but in this case keeping the tension stops Black breaking effectively.

Natural, popular and ineffective is: 13.Bxd6 Qxd6 14.Ng3 e5 15.dxe5 Ngxe5 16.Nxe5 Nxe5= This position has been played successfully with Black (reached via a different move order) by French experts Gleizerov and Ulibin. White has no pressure on the IQP, and the g3-knight is not ready to blockade it either. Black quite often manages to play ...Be6 and ...d5-d4, with good activity.

13...Bxg3
The central break no longer works: 13...e5 14.Qb3! Kh8 15.dxe5 Ngxe5 16.Nxe5 Bxe5 17.Rad1± In Sacerdotali – Scacco, email 2002, the IQP was in danger.

14.Nxg3

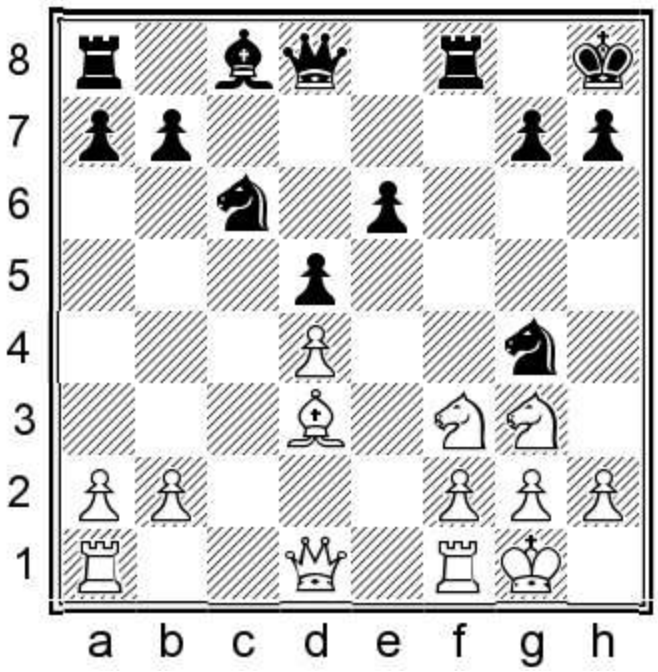


14...Kh8
In Biti – Pandurevic, Zagreb 2010, Black was ambitiously trying to keep the tension, but White is well in control.

The best Black has is 14...Bd7 15.Rc1² with a normal edge for White.

The break is now just a tactical blunder: 14...e5? 15.dxe5 Ngxe5 16.Nxe5 Nxe5 17.Bxh7†+–

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15.Bb5!N 15...Bd7 16.Re1 Qf6 17.Rc1±

D) 12...Nh5

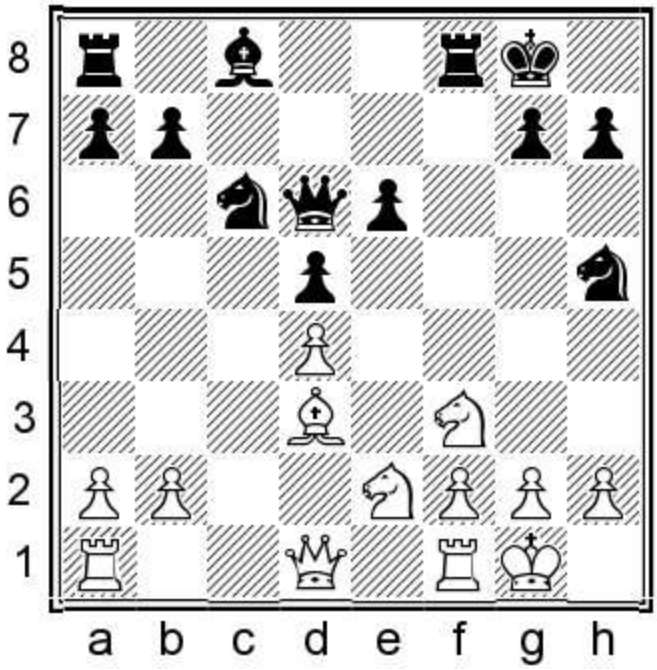
GAME 19

Sergei Tiviakov – Dimitri Reinderman
Wijk aan Zee 2012

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Nxf6 10.0-0 Bd6 11.Nf3 0-0 12.Bf4 Nh5
This was recommended by IM John Watson in the 4th edition of Play the French in 2012, although Watson also opined that variation E4 (Game 20) was enough for equality.

13.Bxd6 Qxd6

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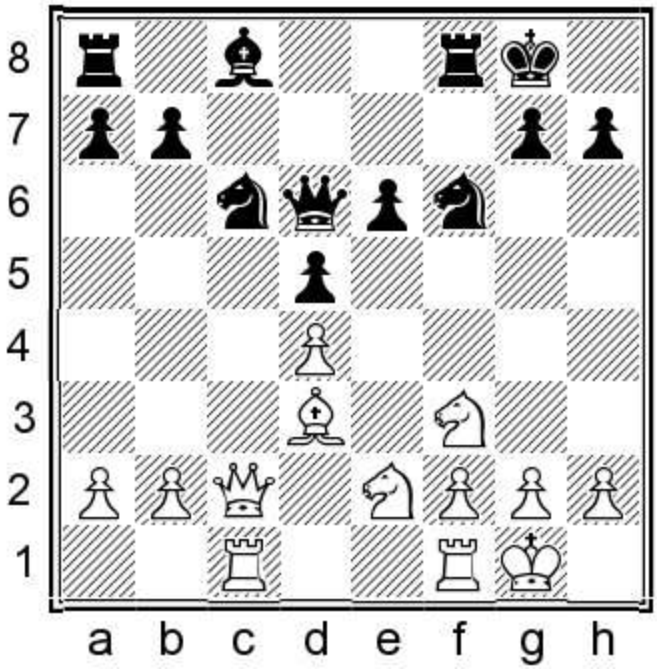


14.Qc2
More common are 14.Qd2 and 14.Ng3 but let’s attack that pawn.

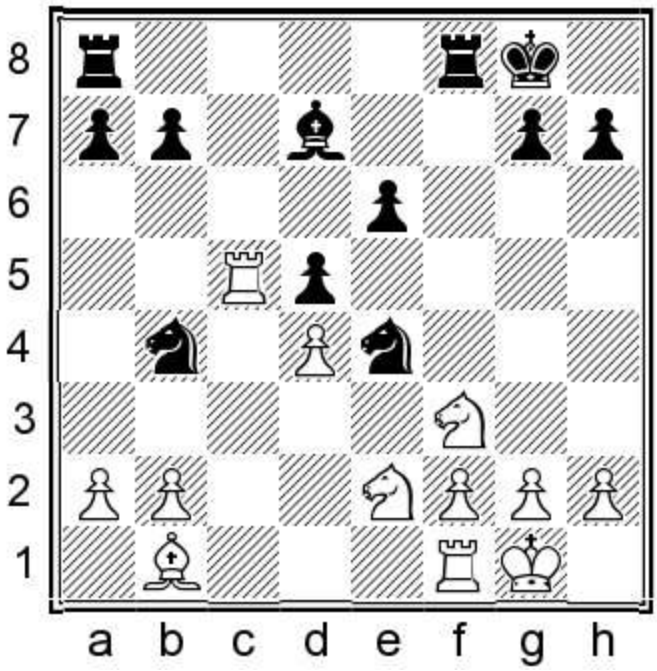
14...h6
It is tempting for Black to try to make use of the knight’s location on h5, but now the g6-square is weakened, which is highly significant as a white knight will soon land on e5.

Watson recommends:
14...Nf6
But does not include the most logical reply:
15.Rac1
My assertion is that White is simply better. He has managed to exchange the correct bishop and can improve his position slowly. Meanwhile the bishop on c8 is far from g6 and h5, where it could achieve something.
Playing as in the main line with 15.Bb5 is less clear here due to 15...Ng4.

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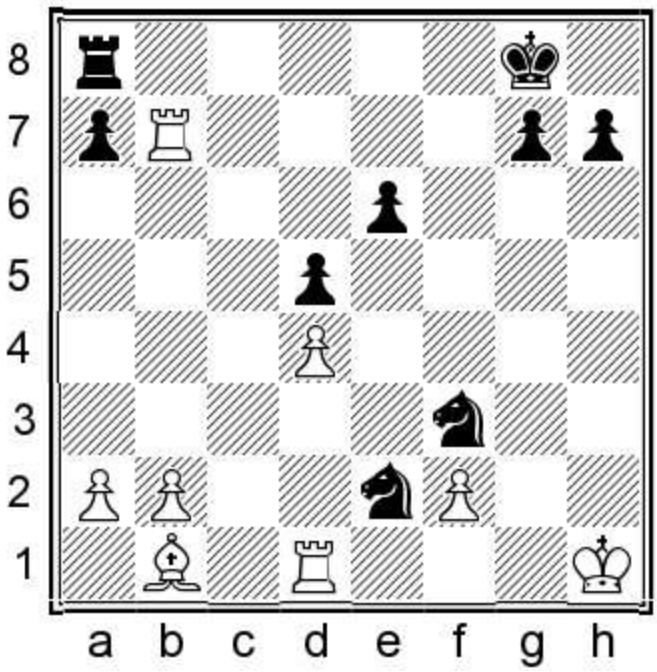
15...Bd7 16.Qc5
Also possible is: 16.Rfe1!? Rac8 17.Qd2²
16...Qxc5 17.Rxc5 Nb4!?
After 17...Rac8 18.Rfc1² in Aagaard – Brynell, Denmark 2013, White won a good technical game.
18.Bb1 Ne4!?
This was played in Fluvia Poyatos – Moskalenko, Spain 2004, and is certainly the critical moment for the entire 12...Nh5 variation. Thus, allow me to analyse the variation deeply, to prove that Black does not come anywhere close to equalizing.



19.Rc7!N 19...Bb5 20.Re1 Rxf3!?
Otherwise Black is just in trouble.
21.gxf3 Nd2 22.Rxb7!

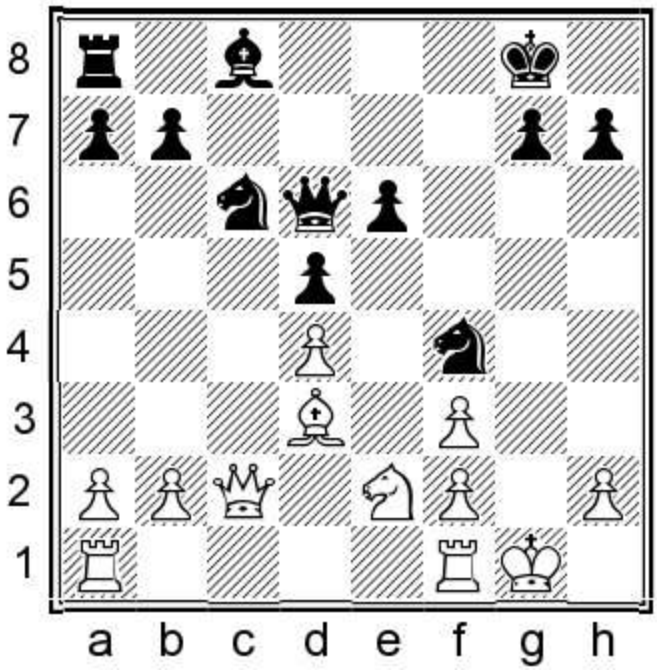
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It took some analysis to work out that this was the way to make serious progress.
Although 22.Kg2² is also worth an edge.
22...Nxf3† 23.Kf1 Nd3 24.Rd1 Nf4
24...Nxb2? 25.Rc1 Nxd4 26.Rcc7+–
25.Rxb5 Nxh2† 26.Kg1 Nf3† 27.Kh1 Nxe2 28.Rb7±



It is possible to analyse yet further, of course, but the forcing aspects of the position have reached their end, with an exchange up for White and a superbly placed rook. I believe this is a matter of good technique and White will be able to claim the full point. But obviously, there is a lot going on still...

14...Rxf3?! 15.gxf3 Black has scored 3/3 from here, which is bizarre, as it's a terrible version of the type of exchange sac we will see in the main line. For example, 15...Nf4 was Auvray – Adrian, Rennes 2010.

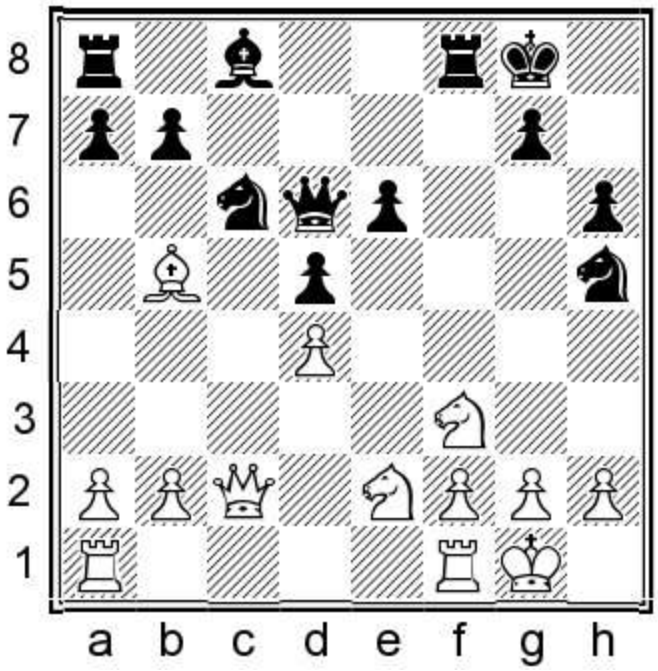


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Now simplest was: 16.Qd2!N± Evicting Black's only dangerous piece.

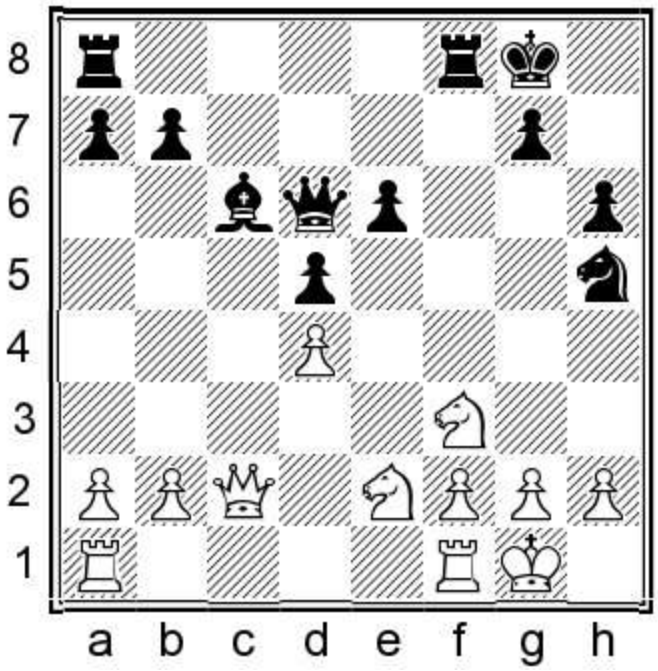
You will never be lucky enough to face: 14...g6?? 15.Bxg6 hxg6 16.Qxg6† Ng7 17.Ng5+–

15.Bb5!
Ensuring an outpost on e5 for the knight. When we note that the dark-squared bishops have already been exchanged, this is a Tarrasch player's dream scenario.



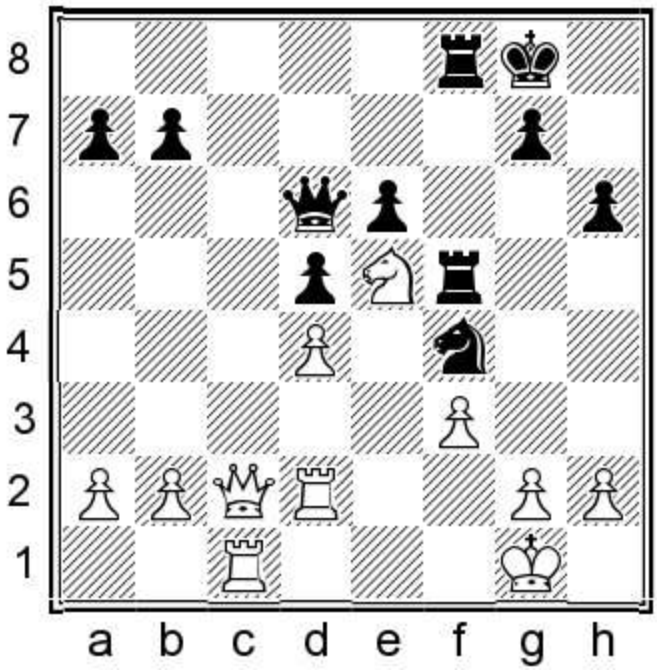
15...Ne7
Black has a difficult choice.

15...Bd7 16.Bxc6 Bxc6



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According to Watson: “The kind of position where White has an abstract edge, but Black stands solidly.” I would say: Black has a poor pawn structure and in return he is passive. Certainly I would not aim for such a position with Black. White has many options leading to an enduring structural advantage. It might not be an overwhelming advantage, but it will be hard to neutralize, and mistakes are simply easier to make when your position is worse...
17.Ne5 Bb5 18.Rac1²
18.Rfe1!?N 18...Bxe2 19.Qxe2 Nf6 20.Ng6 Rfe8 21.Rac1² is potentially even more unpleasant for Black.
I will extend the line to show typical play from a game:
18...Rf6?! 19.Rfe1 Raf8 20.f3±
Black will achieve nothing along the f-file.
20...Bxe2 21.Rxe2 Nf4 22.Rd2 Rf5
This was C. Graf – Niedermeier, Bavaria 2010, and now best was:



23.Kh1!N
To play g2-g3 without giving Black a check on h3.
23...Qd8 24.g3 Nh3 25.f4
White is winning, for instance:
25...g5 26.Qd3 gxf4 27.g4+–

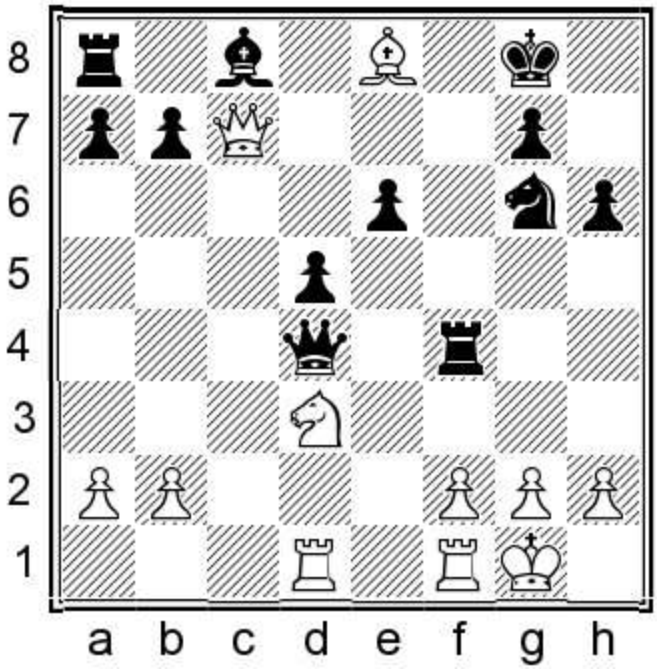
16.Ne5 Nf4 17.Rad1 Qb4 18.Nxf4 Rxf4?!
Perhaps missing a backward move.

Mandatory was 18...Qxb5 but after 19.g3± (or any other sensible move) White’s positional superiority is overwhelming.

19.Nd3+–
White’s knight will live to fork again. The rest is ugly for Black, though I sense White was enjoying himself.

19...Qxd4 20.Qc7 Ng6 21.Be8!
Traditionally it is Black who manoeuvres his bishop to e8 in the French.

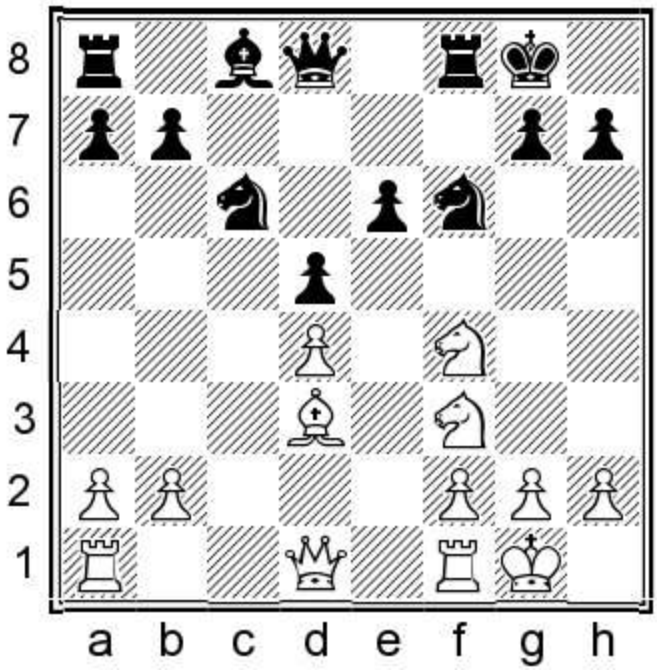
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21...Qc4 22.Qd6 Rf7 23.Qg3 Nh8 24.Ne5
Let's consider the fate of Black's queenside pieces: his knight is on h8, and the rook and bishop have not moved and never will. Things have not gone well for Black.

24...Qb4 25.Bxf7† Nxf7 26.Rc1 Nd6 27.Rc7 Ne8 28.Rf7 b6 29.Qg6 Qd6 30.Ng4
1–0

E) 12...Bxf4 13.Nxf4



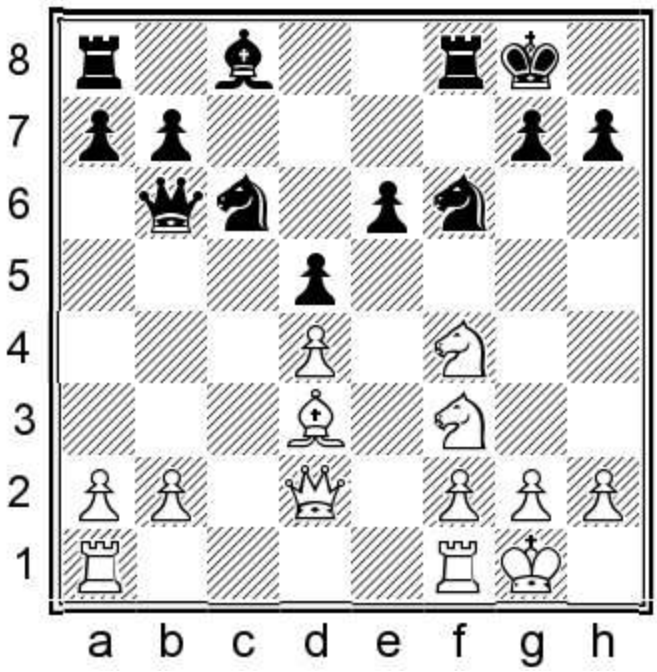
We will consider the sidelines E1) 13...Qb6, E2) 13...Ng4 and E3) 13...Qd6, followed by the most popular E4) 13...Ne4.

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E1) 13...Qb6

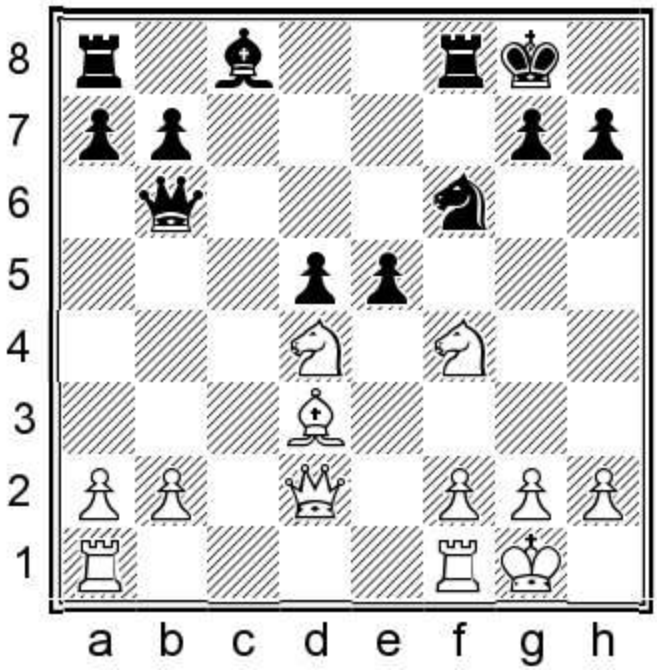
An unfashionable line, but not absurd; White should just have a normal edge.

14.Qd2



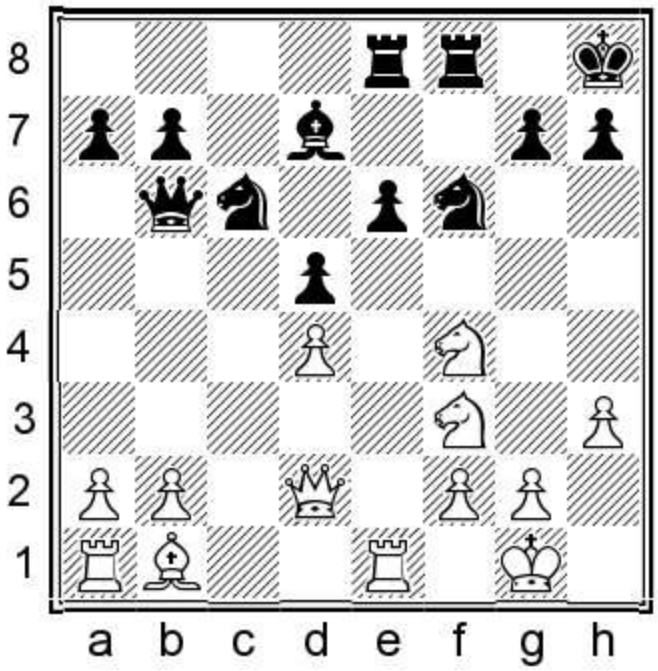
14...Kh8
The usual move.

But the critical test is the rare:
14...Nxd4 15.Nxd4 e5



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16.Nb5!N
Going for control and a better structure, rather than grabbing material.
Instead 16.Nxd5 Nxd5 17.Nf3 wins a pawn, but after 17...Nf4 Black has shown enough activity to draw every game so far, including Siigur – Kolcak, email 2011.
16...exf4 17.Qxf4²
White's next move will probably be Qd4.
15.Bb1 Bd7 16.Re1 Rae8 17.h3

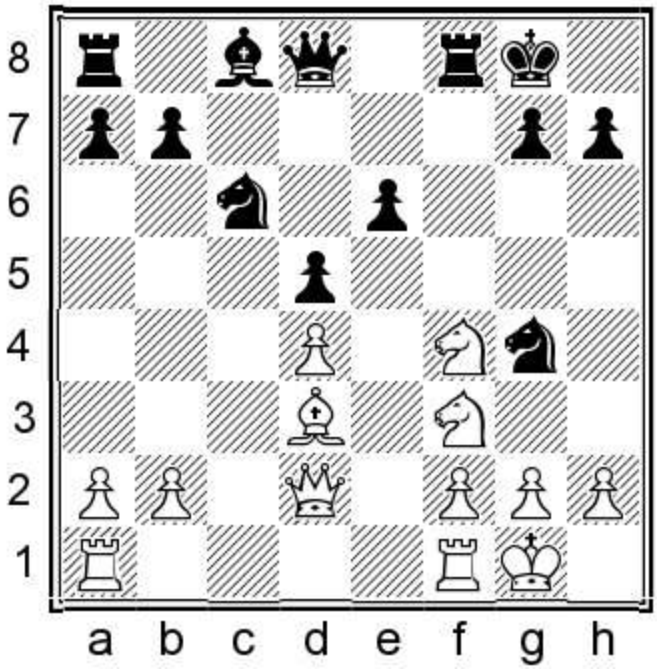


Yes, the rook looks stupid on a1, but Black has absolutely no way to improve his position, while White can slowly make improvements with b3, Qe3, Nd3 and so on. One example:

17...g5 18.Nd3 g4 19.hxg4 Nxg4 20.Nde5 Ncxe5 21.Nxe5 Nxe5 22.Rxe5²
V. Sokolov – Graudins, email 2006.

E2) 13...Ng4 14.Qd2

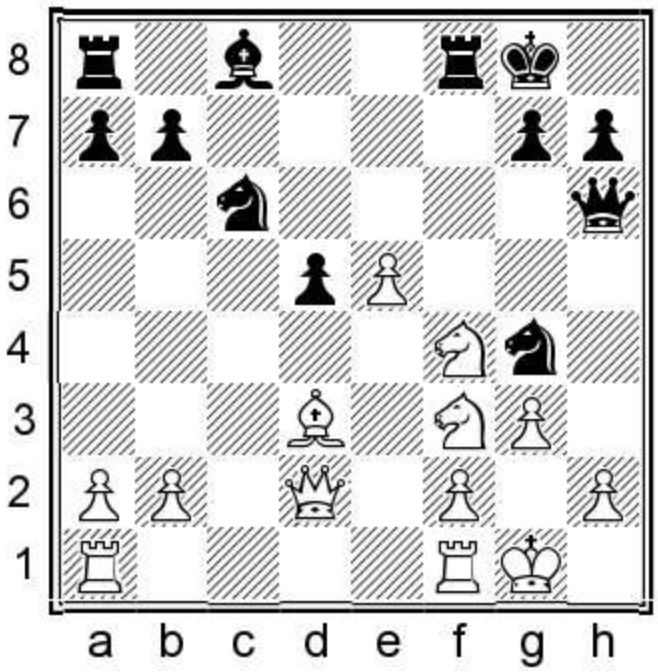
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14...Qf6
At first this looks like an active set-up, but in fact it’s always used as a way to reach an inferior ending that Black hopes to hold.

14...Qd6 15.g3
This is slightly different from variation E32, as in the current move order we do not have the chance to use the novelty I suggest. But White still has a plus.
15...e5!?
Trying to make something happen.
Simple development with 15...Bd7 16.Rfe1² allows White an easy edge.
16.dxe5 Qh6
Once again the critical test.
Recapturing on e5 is less than challenging for White. For example: 16...Ngxe5 17.Nxe5 Nxe5 18.Be4! d4 19. Rfd1 Rd8 20.Qe2 Kh8 21.Rac1² McKenzie – Morrell, email 2015.

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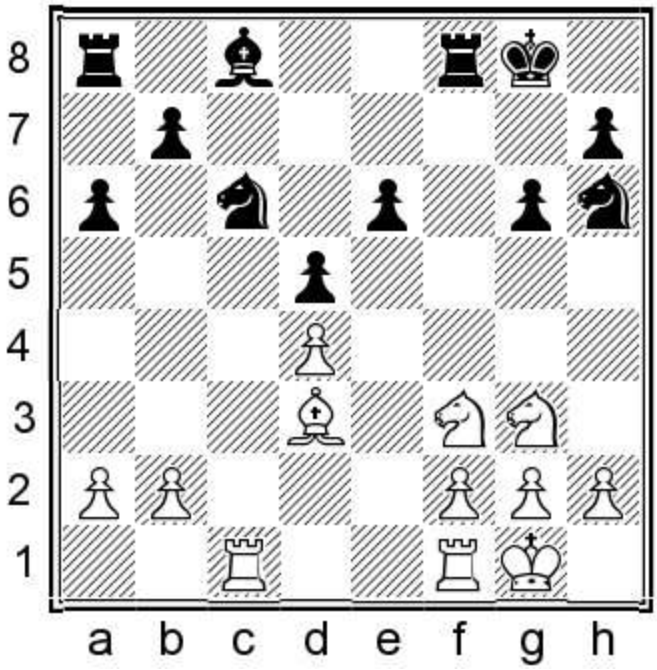
17.h4
Black's pseudo-attack is over; there is nothing better than taking on e5.
17...Ngxe5 18.Nxe5 Nxe5 19.Be2 Rd8
We have been following Korneev – Matamoros Franco, Linares 1994. One of various promising lines was: 20.Qd4!?N 20...Nc6 21.Qc5²
Keeping Black under pressure.

15.Nh5 Qh6 16.Qxh6 Nxh6 17.Rac1
The first thing White should know about such positions is that exchange sacs on f3 are usually ineffective; Black can pick up the pawn on d4, but White gets an unopposed rook on the seventh.

17...g6
A high-class example continued: 17...Nf5 18.Bxf5 Rxf5 19.Ng3 Rf7 (19...Rf8 is met by the same plan) 20. Rfe1² Akopian – Sadler, Tromso (ol) 2014. There are many possible lines like this for Black. Positions that are definitely tenable, but will still require accurate defence and be no fun whatsoever to play in practice.

18.Ng3 a6
One of those dodgy exchange sacs is: 18...Rxf3 19.gxf3 Nxd4 20.Kg2 Bd7 21.Rc7 Bc6 22.Ne2± Vosahlik – Kolar, email 2004.

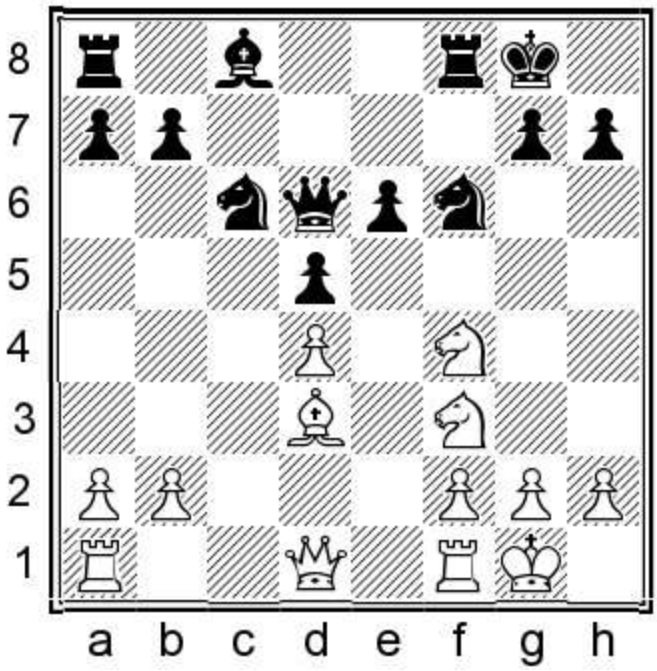
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19.Ne2N
19.Rfe1 has been played, but I like the new idea more.

19...Nf7 20.Rc5 Bd7 21.a3 Rac8 22.Rfc1²
Having placed his rooks optimally, White can think about preparing b4-b5.

E3) 13...Qd6



14.g3!
Keeping the knight active on f4.

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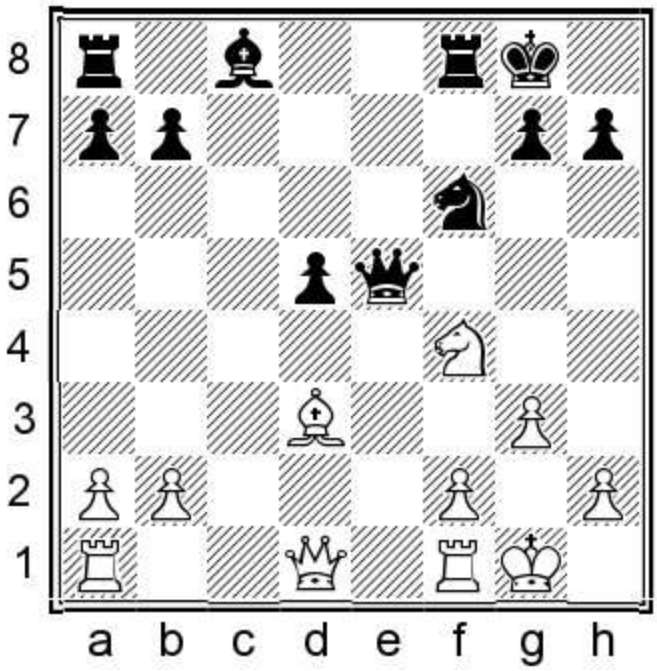
Instead 14.Ne2 Ng4 15.Ng3 e5 reaches the Gleizerov/Ulibin line mentioned above, and this in fact is the move

order they use.

Many moves are possible here, so memorizing everything is not practical, but I will offer a few lines to show typical play. 14...Bd7 is a minor option, but more serious are E31) 14...e5, E32) 14...Ng4 and E33) 14...Qb4.

14...Bd7 15.Re1 Rae8 16.Ne5 Re7 17.Rc1 g5 18.Nh5 Nxh5 19.Nxc6 bxc6 20.Qxh5 Rg7 21.Re5± Kotsur – Korniushin, Novokuznetsk 1999.

E31) 14...e5 15.dxe5 Nxe5 16.Nxe5 Qxe5



17.Bc2!
This subtle move has only been played once, but is rather venomous. A key threat is Qd3 followed by Nxd5.

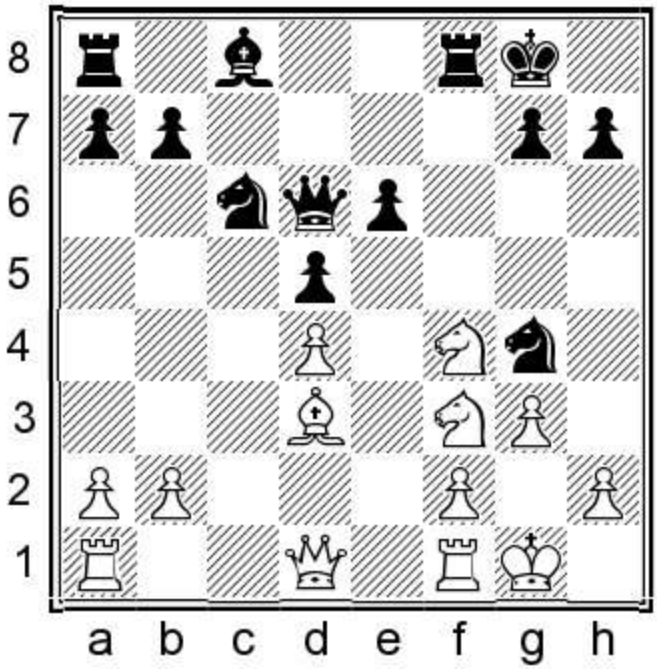
17.Qb3² has been played in a lot of games.

17...Kh8 18.Qd3 Qd6
18...Bd7? 19.Qxh7†!+– is a neat trick.

19.Rad1²
Bakajsa – Smolik, Teplice 2009.

E32) 14...Ng4

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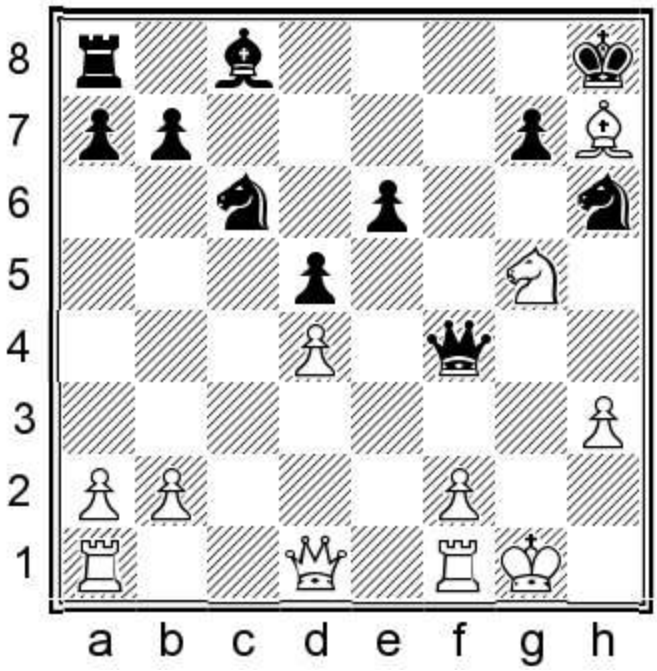


White could meet this move with 15.Qd2², which transposes to 14...Qd6 15.g3 in the notes on the previous page, but there is an even better move.

15.Ng5!N
This leads to major complications, but they are worth a look, as White is much better.

15...Rxf4!?
15...Nf6 16.Qb1 g6 17.Re1± is excellent for White, since 17...Nxd4? 18.Bxg6 is crunching.
16.Bxh7† Kh8 17.h3!
17.f3!? is also promising.

17...Nh6 18.gxf4 Qxf4



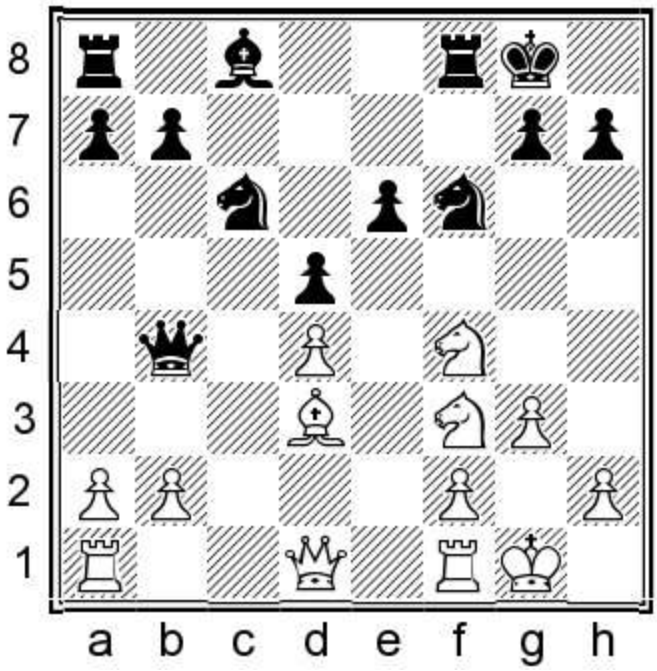
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19.Qc1!
19.Qh5!? is also decent.

19...Qxd4 20.Bb1 Bd7 21.Qc2 Nf5 22.Qe2 Qf6
No better is: 22...Nh6 23.Qd3 Nf5 24.Qxd4 Nfxd4 25.f4±

23.Qh5† Nh6 24.Qg6 Qxg6 25.Bxg6±

E33) 14...Qb4



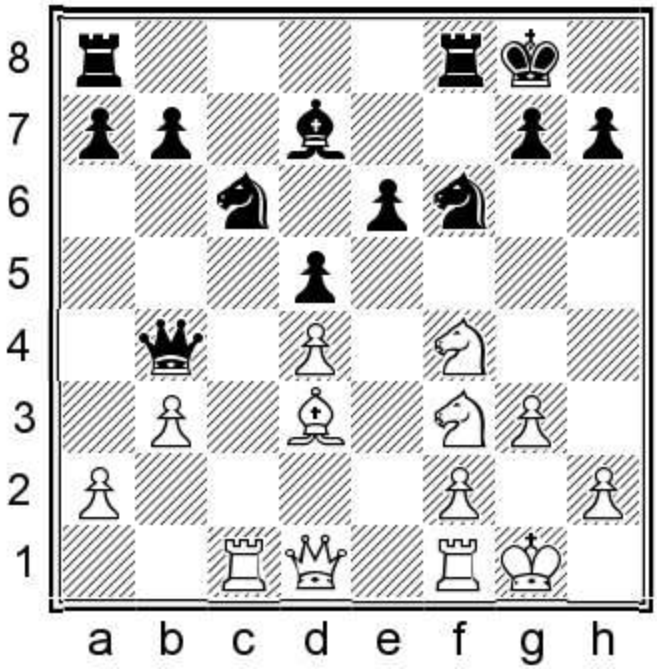
The line favoured by Gleizerov and Ulibin in this position.

15.b3
I prefer this, as Black players have repeatedly played inaccurately here.
15.Rb1² is also sensible.

15...Bd7
15...g6 16.Bc2²

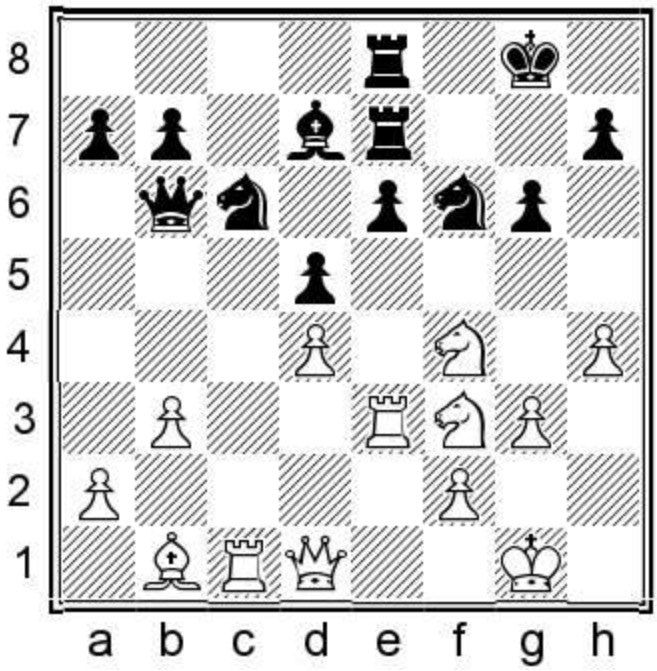
16.Rc1!
Freeing b1 for the bishop.

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16...Rae8
Or 16...Rac8N 17.Bb1 is the usual edge, which increases markedly after: 17...Nxd4 18.Qxd4 Qxd4 19.Nxd4 Rxc1 20.Rxc1 e5 21.Rc7±

17.Re1 Qb6
After 17...Kh8 18.Bb1 Qb6 19.Qd3 Nb4 20.Qd2± by transposition we have reached Nevednichy – Braun, Senden 2003.
18.Bb1 Re7 19.h4 Rfe8 20.Re3 g6

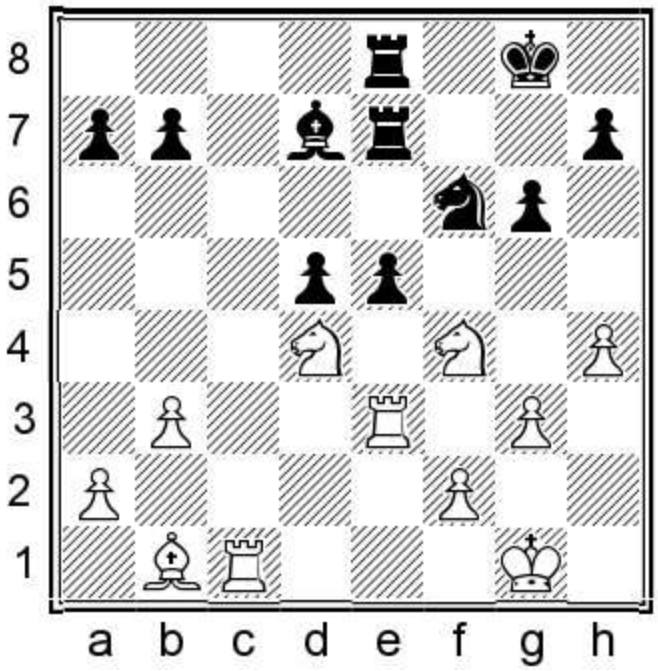


I could stop here in good conscience and claim an edge, but it is worth going deeper to understand what Black is trying to do, and how to stop it.

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21.Kg2!N
A useful move in general, but also with a specific tactical point.

Instead one GM game continued:
21.Qd2 Nxd4!
This exchanging tactic is Black's idea, and not the ...e6-e5 break which tends to drop the d5-pawn.
22.Qxd4 Qxd4 23.Nxd4 e5

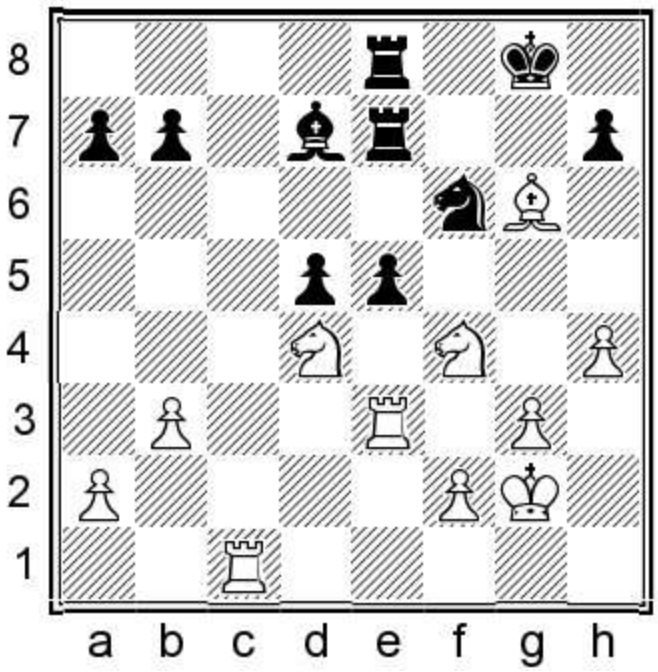


In Azarov – Danin, St Petersburg 2009, the move White wanted to play was:
24.Bxg6N
When the forcing line continues:
24...exf4 25.Bxe8 fxe3 26.Bxd7 exf2†
That's a check.
27.Kxf2 Rxd7
White could press with 28.Kf3² but the reduced material make a draw the most likely result.

21...Nxd4?
Unlike the line above, this more is no longer effective.
Instead 21...Kg7? 22.h5!+– shows that White's control can quickly morph into a vicious attack.
Black can avoid the worst with 21...Ng4 but after 22.Re1± White is obviously happy.

22.Qxd4 Qxd4 23.Nxd4 e5 24.Bxg6!

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24...exf4
Or 24...hxg6 25.Nxg6 Kf7 26.Nxe7 exd4 27.Ree1 Rxe7 28.Rxe7† Kxe7 29.f3±. Three connected passed pawns mean White is close to winning.

25.Bxe8 fxe3 26.Bxd7
Now since ...exf2 is not a check, Black loses a pawn. For example:

26...Nxd7 27.Nf5

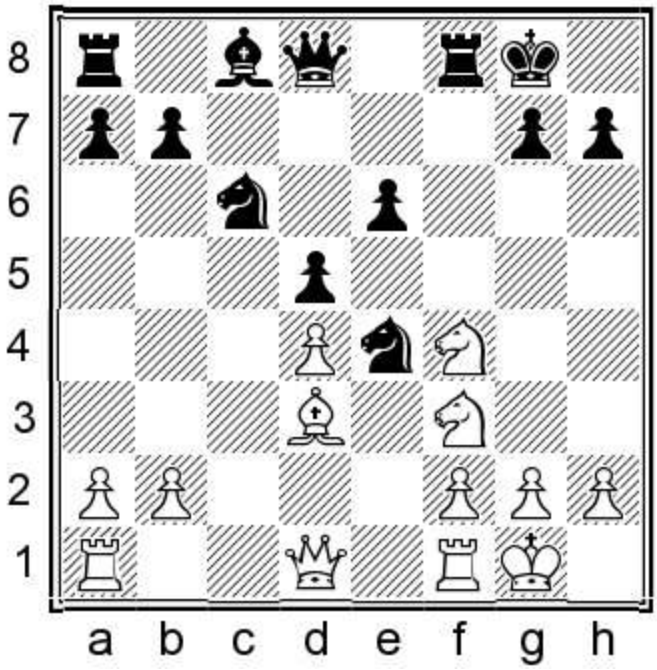
E4) 13...Ne4

GAME 20

Andrei Matsenko – Aleksander Rudakov
Budapest 2013

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 Nf6 4.e5 Nfd7 5.Bd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Nxf6 10.0-0 Bd6 11.Nf3 0-0 12.Bf4 Bxf4 13.Nxf4 Ne4
A vital tabiya in the Tarrasch.

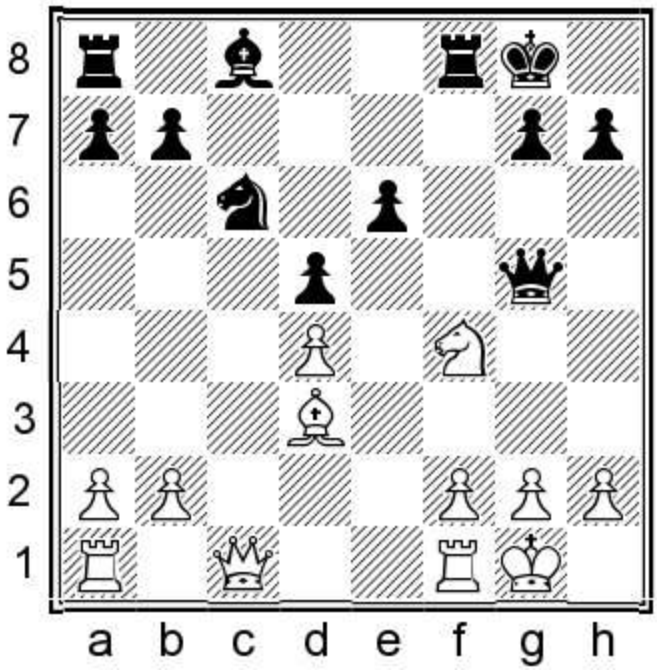
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14.Ne2!
This old main line is best, but White is often scared away from it because of the exchange sac that we will soon see.

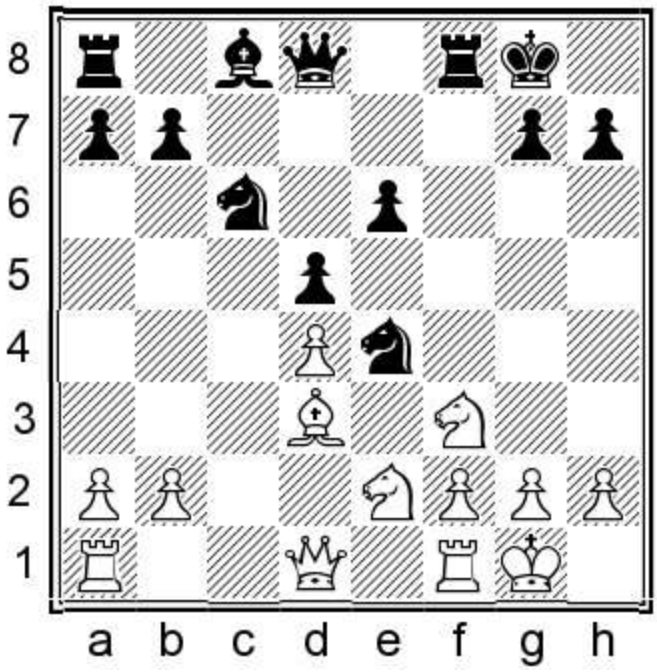
14.g3 avoids the exchange sac, but Black has a convincing leveller. 14...g5! 15.Nh5 Bd7 (And certainly not 15...e5? as I once played, trusting some old analysis I had seen in a book. 16.Nxe5 Nxd4 17.Qa4!+– In Kotronias – Shaw, Plovdiv 2003, White was already winning, but Vassilios's analysis continued for quite a few more moves.) 16.Ne5 Be8=

14.Qc1
This is the safe wimp-out line, but Black is fine.
14...Ng5! 15.Nxg5 Qxg5



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16.Ne2
Instead 16.Bxh7† Kxh7 17.Nxe6 Qf6 18.Nxf8† Qxf8 was once the big revelation in this line, but with a bit of knowledge, Black will equalize.
16...Qxc1
16...Qf6 is roughly level, but the text move is even more clinical.
17.Raxc1 a6
Preventing any Bb5xc6 ideas. I once managed to grind out a win from this position against an IM, but the truth of the position was shown by Moskalenko drawing effortlessly with Black against Korneev and Ivanchuk, despite being heavily out-graded; it should be an easy hold. The key plan is ...Bd7, ...Rac8, ...Na7, chop rooks, probably ...Bb5, shake hands.

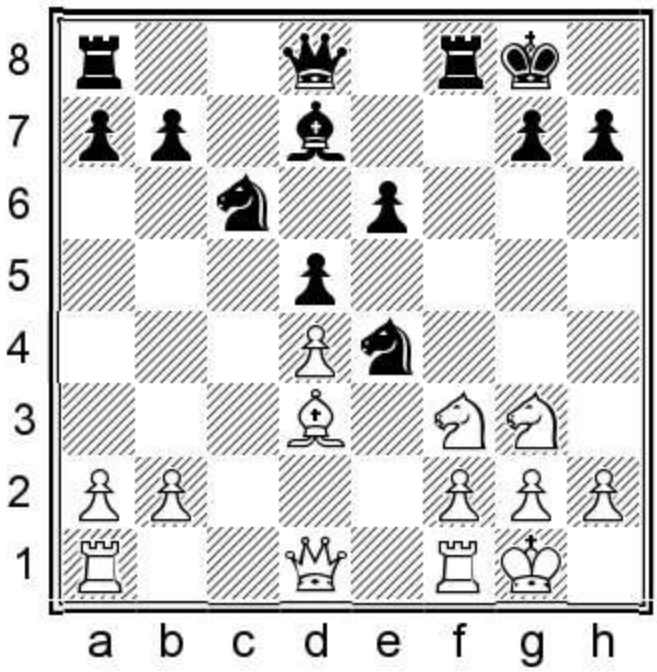


14...Rxf3
This exchange sac is the only challenging response, but we have it well covered.

14...Ng5 15.Ne5! An excellent option which did not exist in the related 14.Qc1 line; the g5-knight is awkwardly placed. For example: 15...Nxe5 16.dxe5 Qb6 17.Qb3 Qxb3 18.axb3 Nf7 19.f4² Siigur – Pucelj, email 2006.

14...Bd7
A rare but sensible move.
15.Ng3!?
Safe and solid.
The most common move is 15.Bxe4 but I don’t want to exchange my bishop for a knight unless I gain something tangible in return (an unchallengeable knight on an e5-outpost would be nice). More specifically, after 15...dxe4 16.Nd2 Qb6 I think Black is very close to equal.

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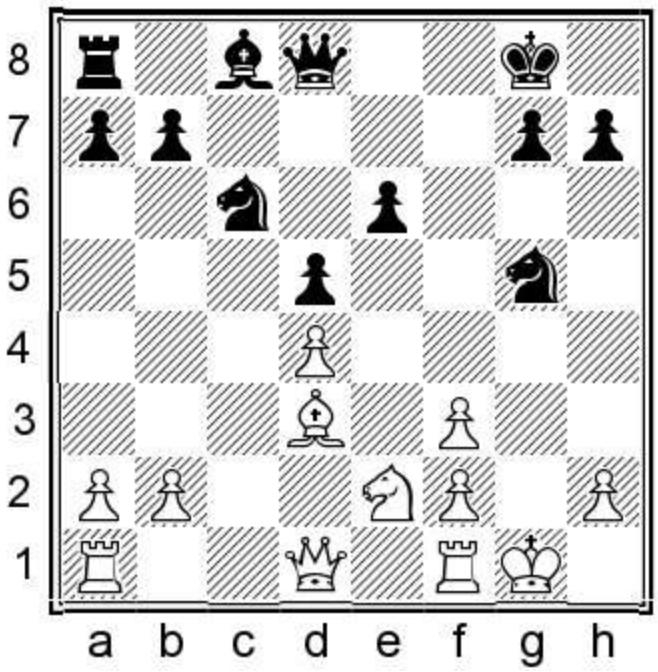
Now there are two moves to consider:

The only move to have been played is:
15...Nxg3 16.hxg3 Qb6
Arnold – Kindermann, Biel 1990.
Or 16...Qf6 17.Bb5 Nb8 18.Bxd7 Nxd7 19.Re1² Gdovin – Blecha, Czech Republic 1995.
17.Rc1!?N 17...Qxb2??
Black needs to settle for slight inferiority after something like 17...Be8 18.Qd2².
18.Rb1
This is clearly bad, but it's worth seeing further in the line just to emphasize that White's set-up has more pop than may at first be apparent.
18...Qa3 19.Rxb7 Qd6 20.Ne5! Nxe5 21.dxe5
And it's terminal wherever the queen goes. 21...Qc6 22.Qh5 h6 23.Qg6+– or 21...Qe7 22.Qb1 g6 23.Rc1+–.

15...Ng5!N is best, when 16.Ne5 Nxe5 17.dxe5 Nf7 18.Qe2² is White's best reaction. It's not much, but it's an edge.

15.gxf3 Ng5

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16.Kh1!
Defending the f3-pawn indirectly, while making sure ...Nh3 does not land with check.

The problem with the direct 16.f4 is that 16...Nh3† 17.Kh1 Qh4 hits two pawns. And after 18.Qe1 Nxf4 19. Nxf4 Qxf4= the d4-pawn is also going, when Black has enough material for the exchange.

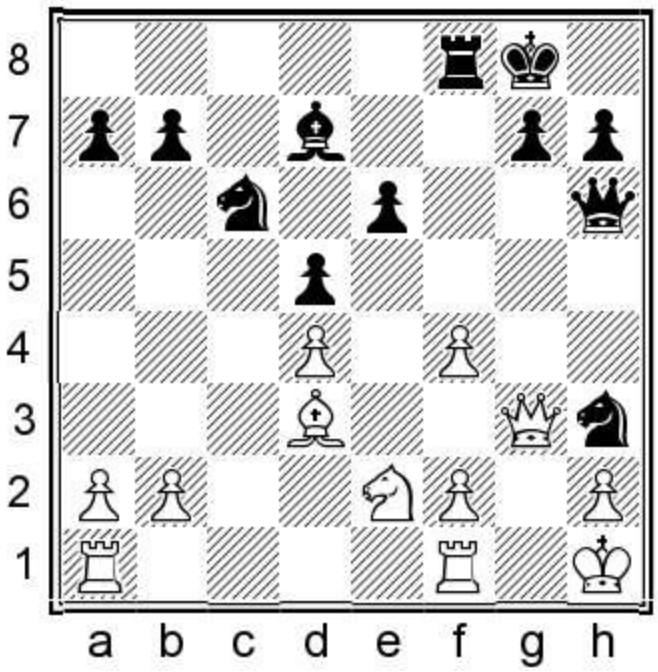
16...e5
The only challenging move.

16...Nxf3? Black does not believe me that the f3-pawn is indirectly defended. 17.Bxh7† Kh8 Clever, but not clever enough. 18.Ng1! Nxh2 19.Qh5 Nxf1 20.Nh3 Nd2 21.Ng5+– Surowiak – Walczak, Poland 1990.

16...Qf6?! is effectively refuted by 17.f4 when Black must retreat the knight with zero compensation, as advancing loses: 17...Nf3 18.Bxh7† Kh8 19.Qd3+– Roganovic – D. Varga, Herceg Novi 2006.

16...Nh3?! 17.Qc1!?N
White can reach similar lines with 17.Qd2, but going to c1 is more flexible.
17...Qh4 18.Qe3 Bd7 19.f4
Unlike the 16.f4 line above, White's pawns are defended and, despite appearances, the f4-pawn is not easy prey.
19...Rf8 20.Qg3! Qh6
Instead 20...Qh5 has ideas of ...e6-e5 and a later ...Rf3, so an active and precise response is: 21.Rac1!± White prepares Rc3, targeting the h3-knight, and refutes the ...e5-trick as follows: 21...e5? 22.dxe5 Nxe5 23.fxe5 Rf3 24.Qg2 Rxd3 25.Rc7!+–

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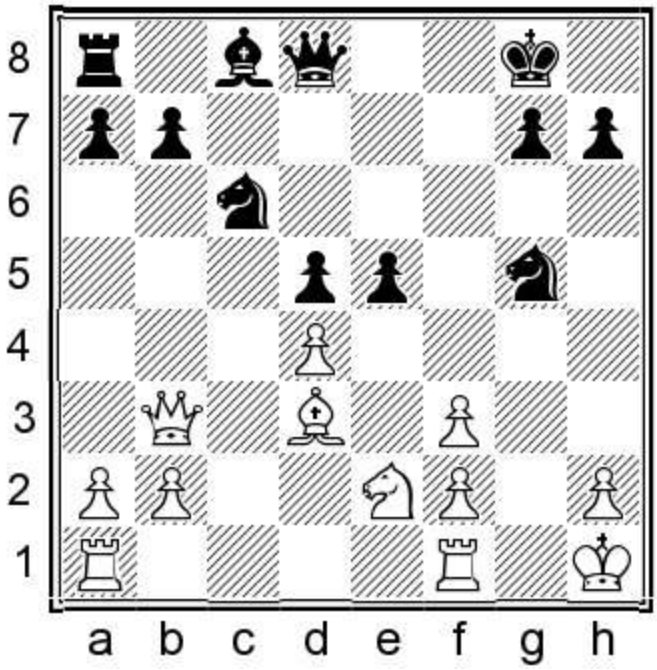


21.f5!
Cleverly transforming the h3-knight from an attacker into a target. Without this move, Black would have fine compensation.
21...Ng5
Not 21...exf5? 22.f4+– with the threat Rf3xh3.
In A. Rudolf – Savola, Jyvaskyla 2009, White could have secured her advantage with:
22.Rg1!?N

17.Qb3!
Rare but certainly the right choice. The pin is handy for a moment, while the queen will support the vital f3-square as soon as the d3-bishop moves.

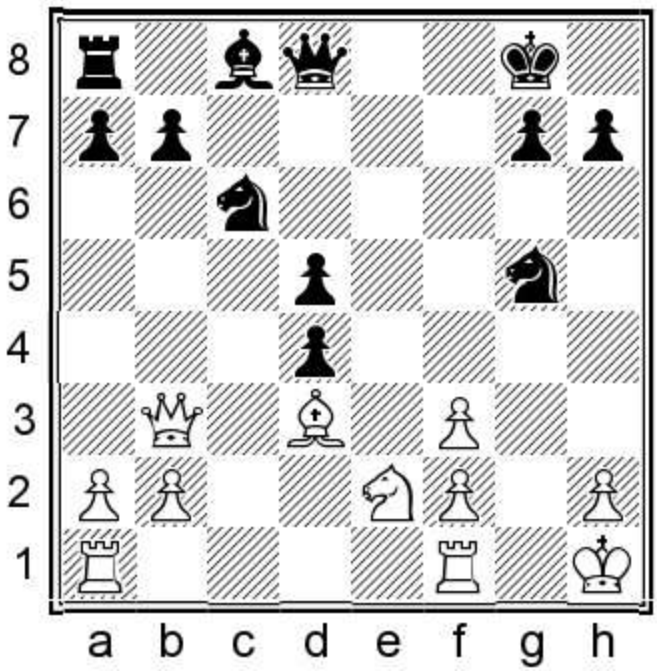
Many games have been played with 17.dxe5 Nxf3 18.Bxh7† Kh8 19.Ng1 Ncd4 20.Bd3 Bg4 21.Qc1 Qf8 22. Qe3 Qf7, but we now know that Black is absolutely fine.

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17...Kh8
As played in almost every game, and for good reason.

17...exd4
In Bobrov – Timokhovich, email 2002, White had a chance to knock the g5-knight backwards.

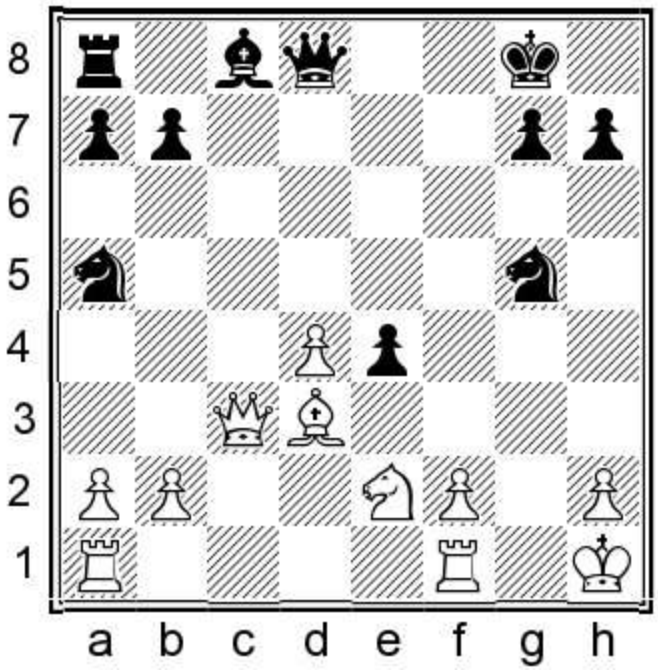


18.f4!N 18...Ne6
Black wants to go forward, but after: 18...Nh3 19.f5 Ng5 (If Black leaves his knight on h3, it will be rounded up. For example: 19...a5 20.f4 a4 21.Qa3 Qf6 22.Rf3+–) 20.f4 Nf7 Black has no compensation for the exchange, so I could stop here, but again I want to show what happens when White's rooks start firing: 21.Rg1 Kh8 22.Rg2 Nd6 23.Rag1 Nxf5 24.Bxf5 Bxf5 25.Qxb7 Ne7 26.Nxd4+–
19.Rac1

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As in the above line, thus far is far enough for prep, but I will offer a couple more illustrative lines of White's extra material in action.
19...Qd6 20.Rg1 Nc5
Or 20...Bd7 21.f5 Nc5 22.Rxc5! Qxc5 23.f6 g6 24.Bxg6 hxg6 25.Rxg6† Kf7 26.Rg7† Kxf6 27.Qg3 with a winning attack.
21.Bxh7†! Kxh7 22.Qg3 Ne6 23.Qg6† Kg8 24.f5 Qe5 25.fxe6 Bxe6 26.Ng3±

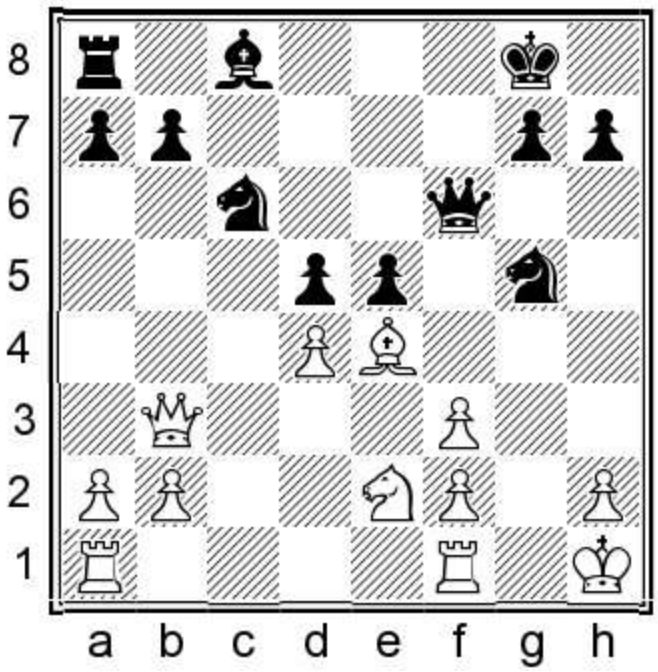
17...Na5 18.Qc3 e4 19.fxe4 dxe4



20.Bc2!N
Also decent is 20.Bb1 Bg4 21.Ng1 Be6 as in Mokrinsky – Kozlov, email 2003, and now: 22.Qg3N 22...Bd5 23.h4±
Black would love to land his bishop on the long diagonal, and savage the white king, but it will not happen:
20...Bg4
Another approach is 20...b5, but White can defend calmly: 21.Rg1 Bb7 22.Qe3 Nc4 23.Bb3 Nf3 24.Rg2± 21.Ng1 Be6 22.Qg3 Bd5 23.Nh3±

17...Qf6?! Recently played by a big expert on the French, but a surprising choice as White's reply is effectively a refutation: 18.Be4!± In what follows, Black tried to create complications but went rapidly downhill. You don't need to remember the following moves, but I will include them as a reminder that White has two rooks and he should use them aggressively.

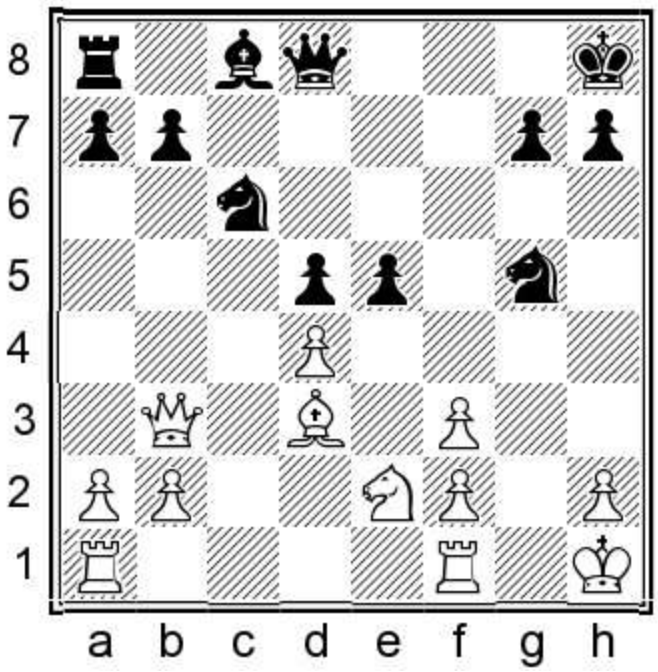
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18...Ne7 19.Nc3 Nxe4 20.Nxe4 Qf4 21.dxe5 Bd7 22.Rg1! Qxe5 23.Rae1! Bc6 24.Ng5 Qf6 25.Re6 Qf8 26. Rh6! gxh6 27.Ne6†+– Safarli – Volkov, Nakhchivan 2017.

17...Be6N
This looks like the sort of move someone will eventually try.
18.dxe5
A logical response, but 18.Rg1 or 18.f4 are also fine.
18...Nxe5
18...d4? 19.Bc4+–
19.Nd4
Now we need to blockade.
19.f4?? d4–+ is not pretty.
19...Qf6 20.Be2±
White is comfortably in control.

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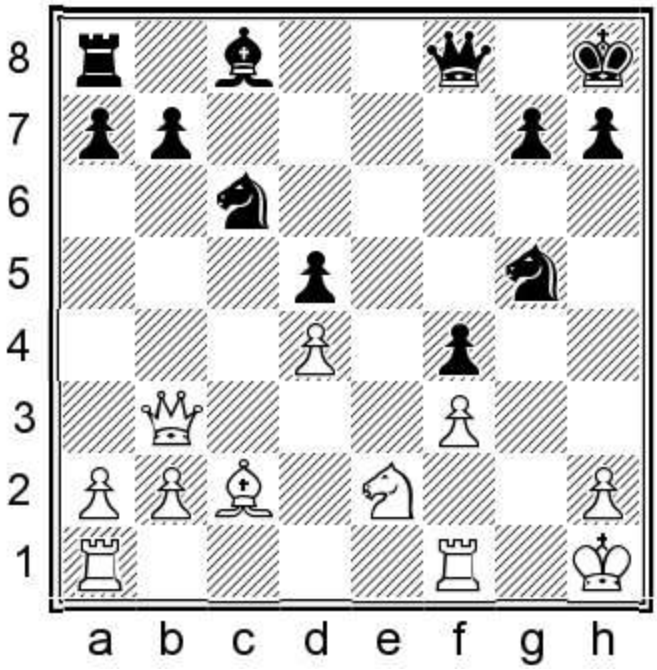
The following typical moves should be memorized.

18.Bc2 Qf8
The most common and best move.

18...Qf6?
This was tried in Hojjatova – Pustovoitova, Moscow 2016. It may look like a more active queen development, but there is a tactical problem:
19.dxe5!N
Black certainly does not want to exchange queens on f3, but the alternatives are no better:
19...Nxe5
Also not working for Black is: 19...Qxe5 20.f4! (and note the back-rank tactics are not essential, as even the simple 20.Qe3 secures a winning ending) 20...Qxe2 21.Rae1 Qh5 22.fxg5+–
20.f4 Bg4 21.f3+–
White wins a piece.

19.f4 exf4 20.f3±
This is our key set-up. Black has just a knight and a pawn for a rook, and his attack is over before it started.

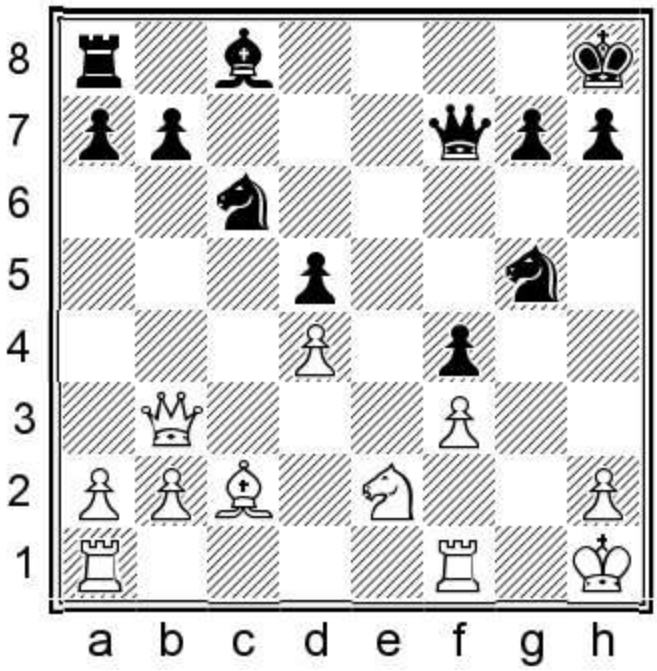
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20...Bh3
One of several moves Black can try. I will give plenty of detail in what follows, as a first impression might be that White is under attack and clinging on. In reality, White can comfortably repel all attempts, while his extra exchange can soon be put to offensive use.

20...Nb4 allows various responses, but let's see one logical continuation: 21.a3 Nxc2 22.Qxc2 Bh3 23.Rf2! Let's not blunder the f3-pawn. 23...Rc8 24.Qd2 Ne6 25.Re1± In De Toledo – Woznica, email 2006, the e2-knight was preparing to move – probably to g1 but c3 is also possible – when White's rooks will start playing.

20...Qf7 One of Black's better tries, covering d5 and remaining flexible about which piece will go to h3.



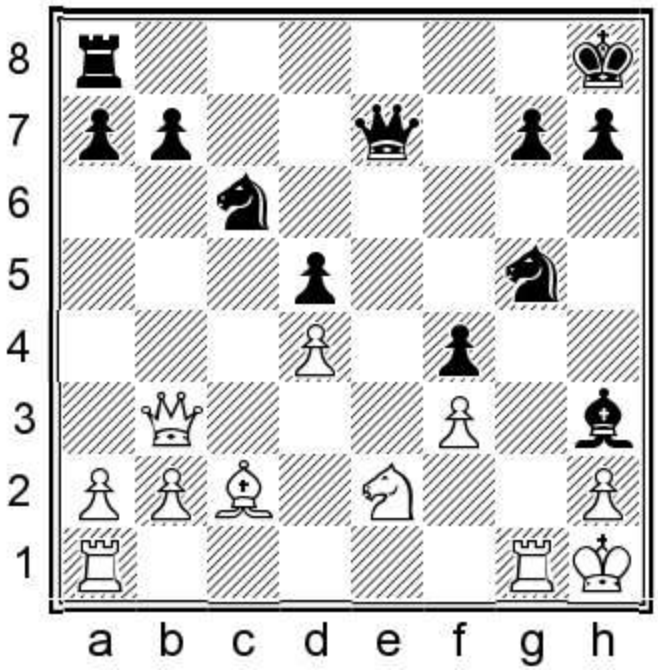
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21.Rf2!N I prefer this move. (But also reasonable is 21.Rg1 h6 22.a3² as in Aguilar Gomez – Bernad Suarez,

email 2007.) 21...Bh3 The following line secures an advantage with forcing play: 22.Rg1 h6 23.Qd3 Nb4 24. Qg6 Nxc2 25.Rxg5 Qxg6 26.Rxg6 Rf8 27.Ng1 Bf5 28.Rd6 Ne3 29.h4± Making some room for our king.

21.Rg1!
Also fine is 21.Rf2 but let's play as actively as possible.

21...Qe7?!
This is tactically unsound.
Even worse is: 21...h6? 22.Rxg5! hxg5 23.Qd3+–

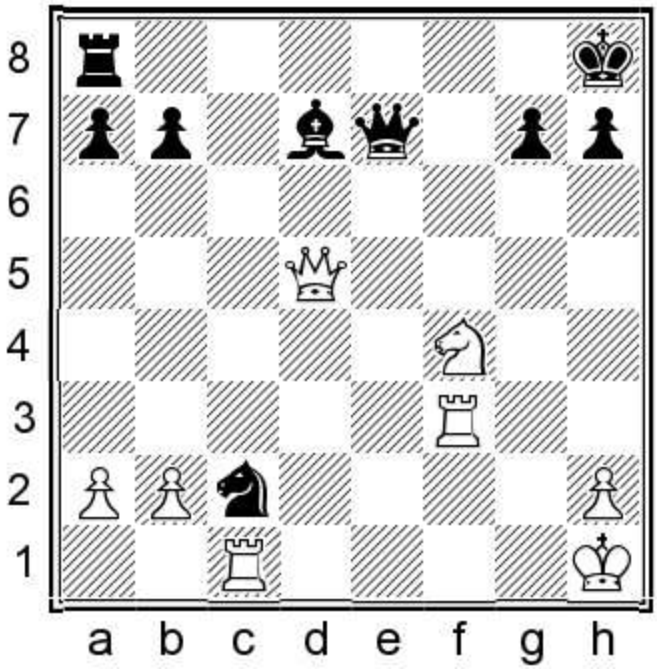
The best Black had was 21...Qf6 but 22.Qxd5 h6 23.Rad1± is simply an extra exchange.



22.Rae1
A safe and understandable choice over the board.

The following line allows scary-looking play, but it all works for White:
22.Nxf4!?N 22...Nxd4 23.Qxd5
23.Qd3 Nxc2 24.Qxc2± is also strong.
23...Nxc2 24.Rac1 Nxf3 25.Rg3 Bd7 26.Rxf3

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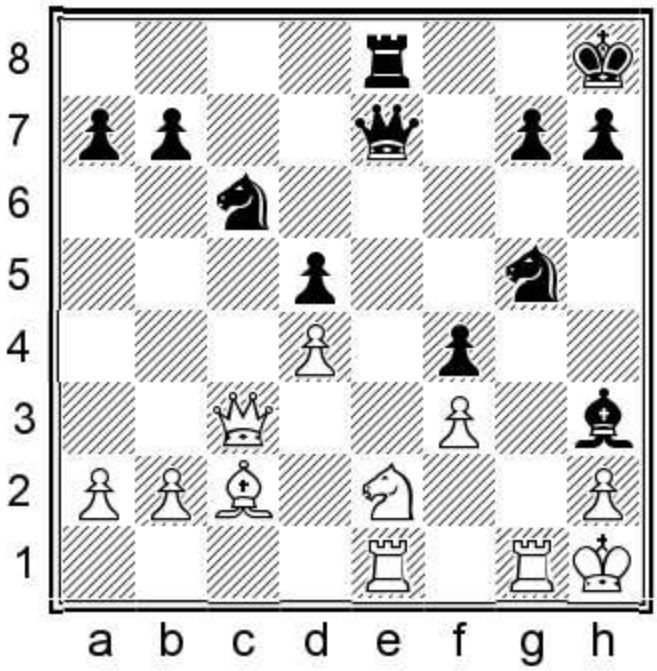


26...Rc8
White's play relies on that fact that 26...Bc6? is mated by 27.Ng6† hxg6 28.Rh3†.
27.Nd3 Bc6 28.Rxc2 Bxd5 29.Rxc8† Bg8 30.Rff8+–

22...Re8?
Misjudging who is attacking who along the e-file.

Black needed to play 22...Qf6 even though after 23.Qxd5 h6± he is an exchange down for negligible compensation: the white king is perfectly safe.

23.Qc3!+–
Now it's clear who is bossing the e-file; Black's position collapses.



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23...Qf6 24.Nxf4 Rf8 25.Rxg5 Qxg5 26.Nxh3 Qh4
Black is a bishop down, and could resign.

27.Ng1 Nxd4 28.Qb4 Qf6 29.Bd3 b6 30.Qe7 Qf4 31.Qe3 Qh4 32.Rc1 Kg8 33.Rc7
An excellent game by White: deep prep and drama-free conversion of his advantage.
1–0

Conclusion

11...0-0 is the absolute main line of the 3...Nf6 Tarrasch and leads after 12.Bf4 to a major branching point.

A) 12...Nb4 and B) 12...Ne4 are lightweight moves, but they did allow me to introduce White's standard positional plans in simple form.

C) 12...Ng4 often proves an effective weapon for Black, as taking on d6 feels like an automatic move, but it gives no advantage. They key is to start with 13.Bg3!. Instead D) 12...Nh5 is not so tricky: exchanging on d6 followed by Qc2, hitting h7, is enough for an easy edge.

E) 12...Bxf4 13.Nxf4 heads towards the main line, but first, of the minor options, one point to note is that E3) 13...Qd6 is best met by 14.g3!, keeping the knight active on f4.

By far the most important line to study in this chapter is E4) 13...Ne4, as in Game 20. We must allow a dangerous-looking exchange sacrifice, but we have it under control. This is a line where extensive memorization is essential, but if White has studied the lines in this chapter, he should be better.

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Chapter 7 - 3...c5 4.exd5 exd5

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3

5...Nf6 Game 21 183

5...Nc6 6.Bb5
6...Qe7†!? Game 22 189
6...cxd4 Game 23 193
6...Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 197
9...Bb6 Game 24 197
9...Bd6 10.Re1 0-0 11.Bg5 202
11...Qc7 Game 25 202
11...Bg4 12.Bh4 206
12...Qc7 Game 26 206
12...Re8 Game 27 209

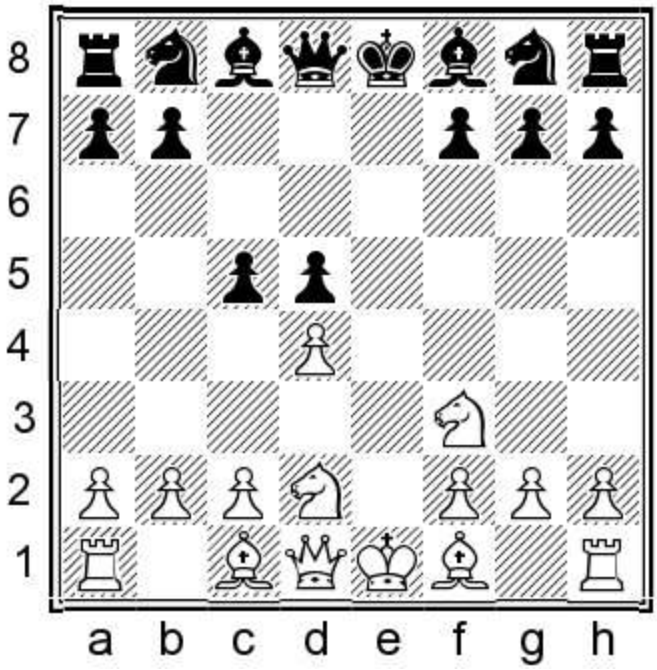
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5
That this pawn break is possible is the major downside of choosing to play the Tarrasch. Against 3.Nc3, 3...c5 is well known to be dubious, but in our case it's a major challenge. Still, it's not all doom and gloom, as White does have many interesting ideas.

4.exd5
I prefer this direct move, though there are also independent lines with 4.Ngf3.

4...exd5
The trendier line is 4...Qxd5, as we shall see in great detail in Chapters 8 and 9. However, the old-fashioned pawn recapture is solid and respectable. We can already see the possibility of an IQP, and that will be a key theme throughout this chapter.

5.Ngf3
This is a significant branching point.

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Firstly 5...a6 is a transposition to a line we covered via the 3...a6 move order in Chapter 3 – see page 76.

5...Nf6 is Game 21.

5...Nc6 leads towards the main line, and after 6.Bb5 we have another major branching point. Two interesting sidelines are 6...Qe7†!? (Game 22) and 6...cxd4 (Game 23).

But the usual line is 6...Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 when 9...Bb6 is less popular and is covered in Game 24. The true main line is 9...Bd6 which requires more detail: see Games 25-27.

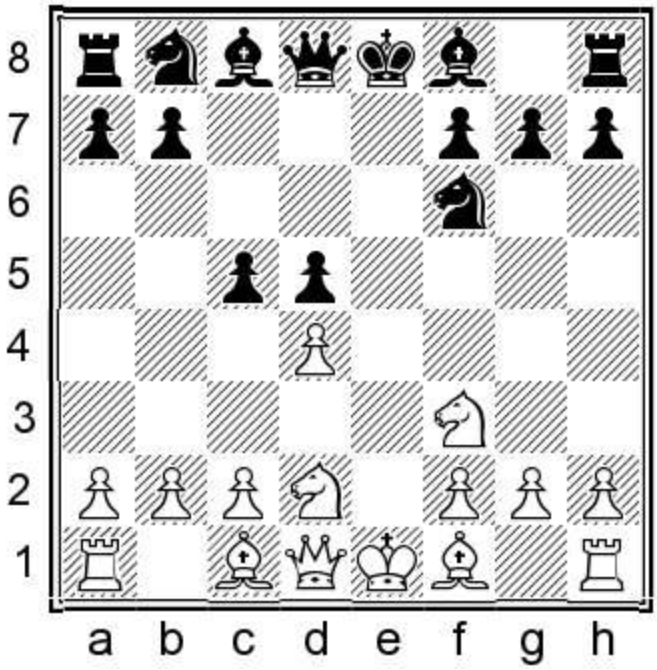
GAME 21

Sergei Rublevsky – Juraj Lipka
Ohrid 2009

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5
I recommend this move order, though in fact the game used 4.Ngf3 Nf6 5.exd5.

4...exd5 5.Ngf3 Nf6

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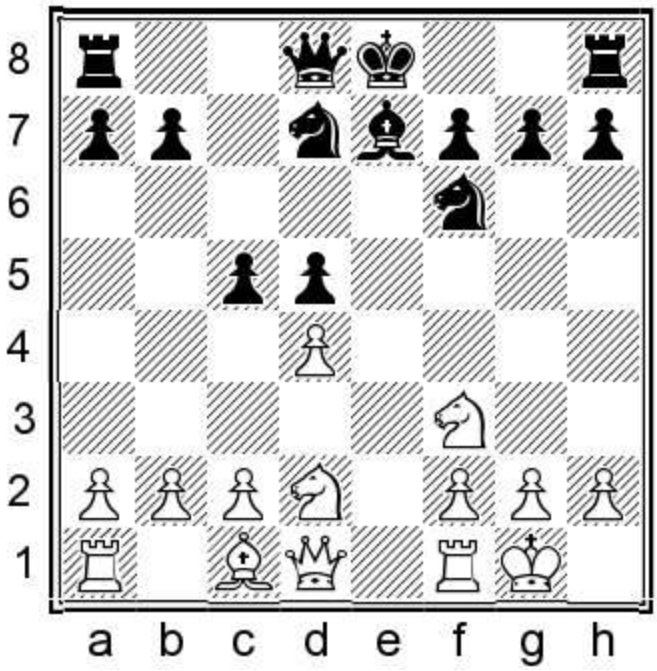


A perfectly sensible line, as castling kingside before a white rook lands on e1 should be uppermost in Black's mind.

6.Bb5† Bd7
Instead 6...Nc6?! 7.0-0 Be7 is a position Black should avoid, as White's e-file play against the uncastled king causes a concession of some form. After 8.dxc5 Black has a choice between two ugly options:
a) 8...Bxc5 9.Qe2† Be6 10.Nb3 Bb6 11.Nbd4 with quick and annoying pressure.

b) Or 8...0-0 9.Nb3 Ne4 10.Be3 when Black is struggling to regain the pawn. And even if he does so, his reward will be an unpleasant IQP position.

7.Bxd7† Nbxd7 8.0-0 Be7

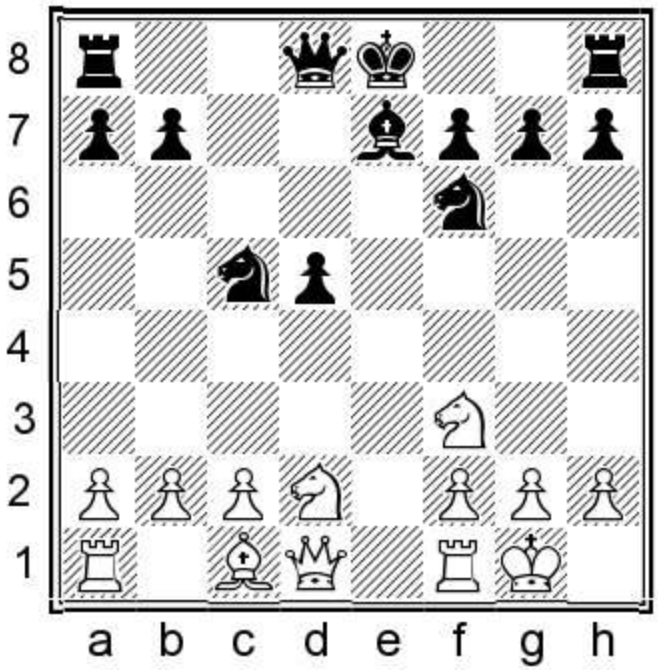


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9.dxc5
Once again I have taken liberties with the move order of the game, which was in fact 9.Re1 0-0 10.dxc5 Nxc5. This knight recapture is still most likely, but 10...Bxc5 is not absurd. For example, 11.Nb3 Bb6 12.Be3 Bxe3 13.Rxe3 Nb6. In Hoffmann – Knaak, Germany 1997, the black knight was heading for c4 with tempo. White may still be a touch better, but we can avoid this line entirely at no cost, so let's do so.

9...Nxc5
In this case, unlike the line above, 9...Bxc5? is absurd due to 10.Re1†.

This is the point where White should choose a set-up for his minor pieces. The white knights defend each other, which is another way of saying they are stepping on each other's toes.



10.Re1
My original intention was to recommend knights on d4 and d3, reached as follows: 10.Nb3 Nce4 11.Nfd4 White threatens Nf5 so most common is 11...Qd7 when White's play flows with tempo: 12.f3 Nd6 13.Nc5 After the queen moves (to c7 or c8) our knight drops back to d3, and we can follow up with b2-b3, when Black's two traditional outposts in this line, e4 and c4, are both covered. Simple, logical, effective, and we could move swiftly on to the next line.
Except, with hindsight, 11...Qd7 looks rather helpful, and lately strong Black players have migrated to the more effective: 11...Nd6! The d6-knight looks awkward just for a moment, but it stops Nf5 while later heading for the ideal c4-square, so it all makes sense. I think Black has few problems in this position, which is why I switched my recommendation.

10...0-0 11.Nf1!?
This is the set-up I believe is most promising. The usual plan would be Be3-d4 then Ne3, when the d5-pawn is perfectly blockaded, and White's three minor pieces work together in perfect harmony.

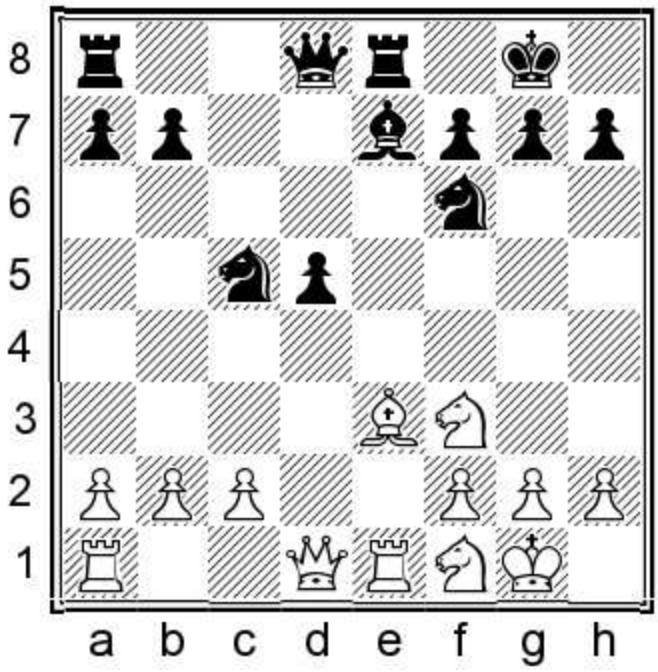
11...Re8

By far the most common move, but there are others, plus many transpositional possibilities.chesstouring.com
11...Nce4 12.Be3 The game can go any of a dozen ways from here, so let's briefly follow one high-class exam-

ple: 12...Rc8 13.c3 Bc5 14.Qb3 Qa5 15.Rad1² In Vachier-Lagrave – Barsov, Mulhouse 2011, the game was just starting, but White has an edge.

11...a5 is a plan we shall see more of below.

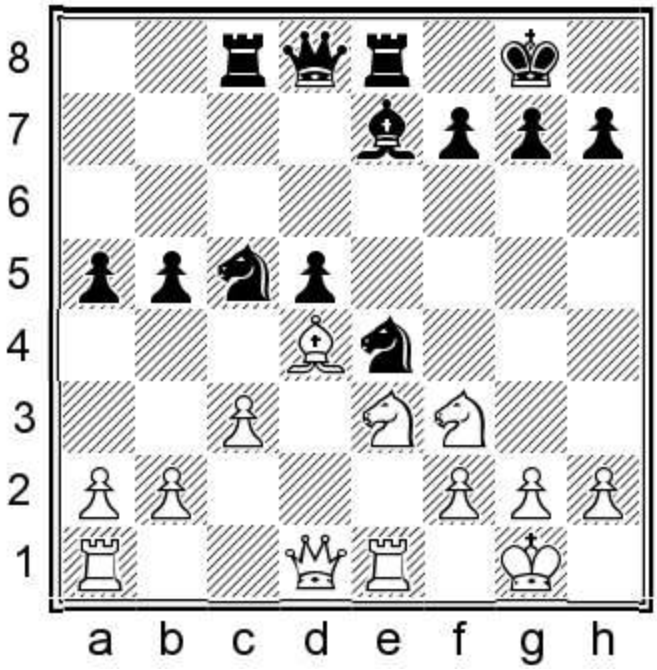
12.Be3
Black can play a huge range of moves here. For example, Nigel Short has reached this position four times, and played a different move each time (in case you are curious, 12...Rc8, 12...Ne6, 12...a6 and 12...a5 were Nigel's choices, with three draws and a loss).
This is the point to stop remembering theory moves, and start becoming familiar with standard plans.



12...a5
Advancing the a-pawn gains space and also seeks to create an outpost for a black knight. When the pawn reaches a4, White normally feels obliged to stop it going further by playing a2-a3, when the c4-square is weakened.

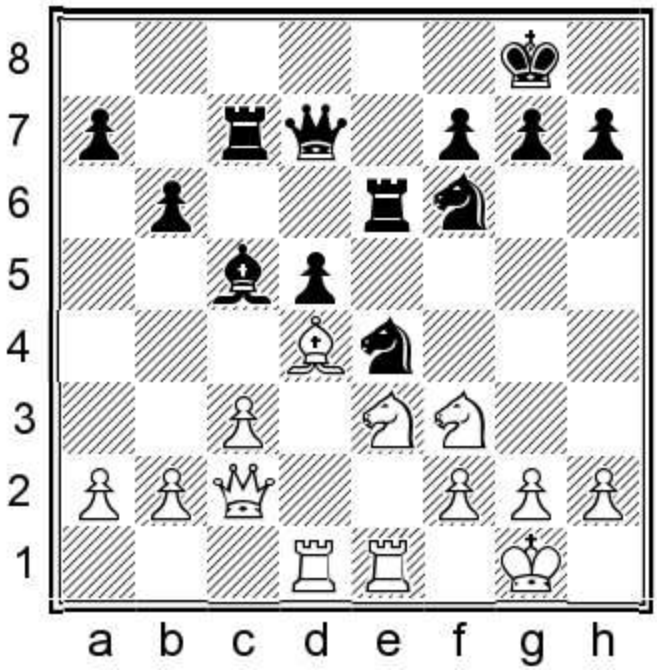
12...Rc8 13.c3 b5 14.Bd4 Nfe4 15.Ne3 a5

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In C. Balogh – Short, Warsaw 2013, a good plan was to prepare Rad1 with: 16.Qc2!?N There is nothing to fear from the rook on c8. For example, 16...b4 17.Rad1 bxc3 18.bxc3² And the d5-pawn is weaker than the one on c3.

12...Nce4
An active move, but often this knight is far less secure than it may appear. Let's see one brief game in full: 13.Bd4 b6 14.Ne3 Bc5 15.c3 Rc8 16.Qa4 Rc7 17.Rad1²
White has followed the usual plan: Be3-d4, Ne3, queen to somewhere, Rad1.
17...Qd7 18.Qc2 Re6?

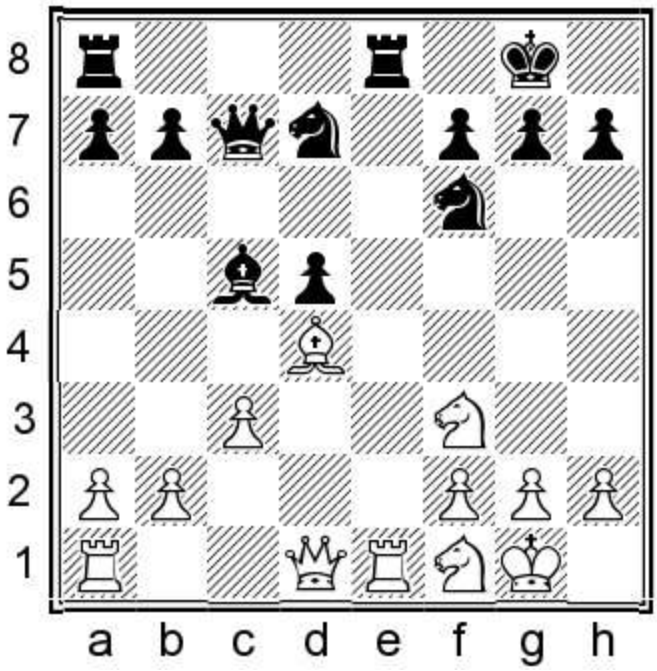


19.Nxd5!±
That's a pawn.

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19...Bxd4?
19...Nxd5 20.Rxe4 was the best Black had, a pawn down with a bad position.
20.Nxd4
That's the game. 1–0 Felgaer – Albarran, Buenos Aires 2005. The database shows dozens of examples of the d5-pawn dropping to Nxd5 shots, or even the occasional c3-c4, many of these tactics based on undermining the e4-knight.

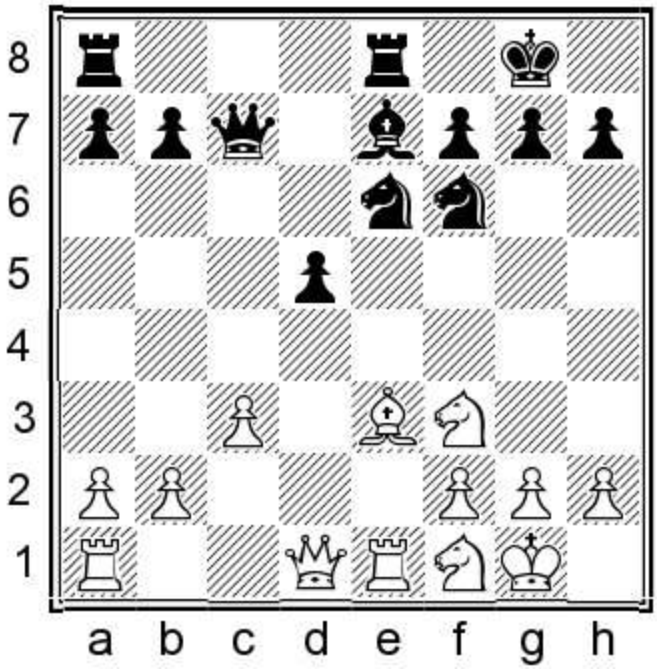
12...Qc7
A favourite of Pelletier.
13.Bd4 Ncd7
Black's interesting idea is ...Bc5 and ...Re4; usually Black tries to land a knight on e4, but using the rook also makes a lot of sense.
14.c3 Bc5



15.Rxe8†!?N
Mentioned as a possibility by Pelletier many years ago, but never tested.
Note that after 15.Ne3 Re4 White cannot win material with 16.Bxf6?! Nxf6 17.Nxd5 due to 17...Bxf2†! 18. Kxf2 Qc5† when Black was at least equal in Sebag – Pelletier, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2013.
15...Rxe8 16.Ne3²
I will admit it's not much, but I believe White is slightly better.

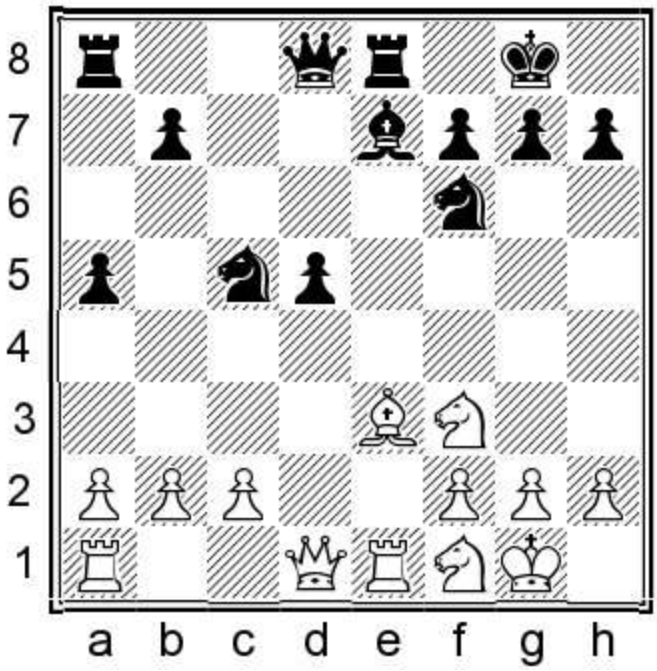
12...Ne6
A very rare move, but one of Black's better options as it discourages our usual plan of Bd4.
13.c3 Qc7

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14.Nd4!?N
Trying to clear a path for our bishop on d4.
Instead 14.Qb3 b6 15.Rad1 looks like our usual plan, but then 15...Bc5 as in Shomoev – Savchenko, Olongapo City 2015, reveals the point of the clever ...b7-b6: we cannot exchange bishops without allowing ...bxc5, improving Black's structure.

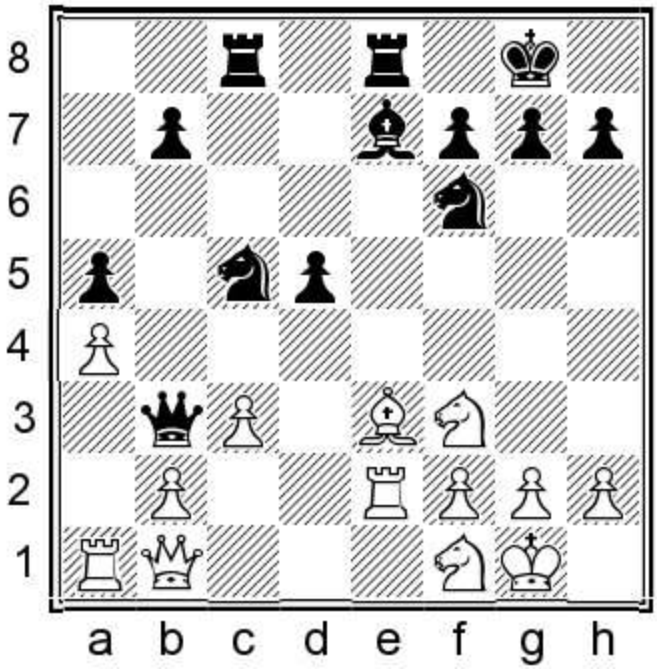
12...Qd7 13.c3 Ne6 as in Xiong – Nyzhnyk, Saint Louis 2016, is a similar idea to the line above. And again I suggest: 14.Nd4!?N



13.c3
The usual move, but not the only way.
13.a4 is also playable. For example, 13...Rc8 14.c3 Qb6 15.Re2 Qb3 was Vachier-Lagrave – Rozentalis, France

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2007, where White exchanged queens and quickly drew, but instead he could have tried: 16.Qb1!?N



The tactical justification is 16...Nxa4?? loses a piece to 17.Nd4 Qc4 18.Nd2.
So instead White can slowly repel the enemy from b3. For example, 16...Qc4 17.Nd4 Nfe4 18.Nd2 Nxd2 19. Rxd2 when White might slowly prepare Qc2, b2-b3 then Nb5. Note that if Black tries to hold onto the b3-outpost with 19...Nb3? then 20.Nxb3 Qxb3 21.Qd1!± wins the IQP.

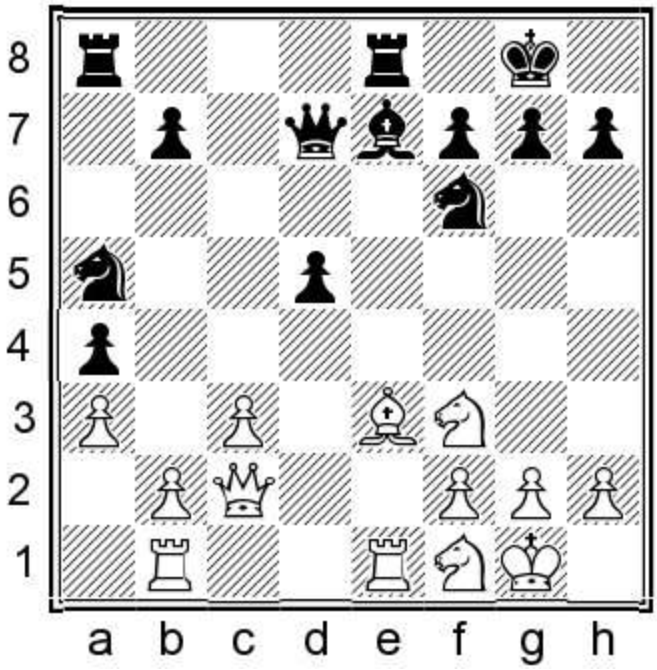
13...a4 14.a3
Otherwise after ...a4-a3 and b2-b3 the c3-pawn may become weak. Moreover, allowing an enemy pawn to the sixth rank can create tactical problems in a later ending.

14...Nb3
Yes, that's a good square, but we can challenge the knight easily.

Instead 14...Qa5 makes it possible for the a1-rook to reach a good square without first stopping on b1. For example: 15.Qc2 Rad8 16.Rad1 Qa6 17.Bd4² Sjugirov – Kokarev, St Petersburg 2009.

15.Rb1 Qa5
It's not a forcing position, so other moves are possible. For example 15...Qd7 16.Qc2 Na5 was Ponomariov – Dizdar, Bled 1999.

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White chose 17.Re2 and doubling on the e-file, but since there is already a rook on e8, I think it is more promising to eye the IQP: 17.Rbd1!?N Black is certainly solid, but White has enough pressure for an edge.

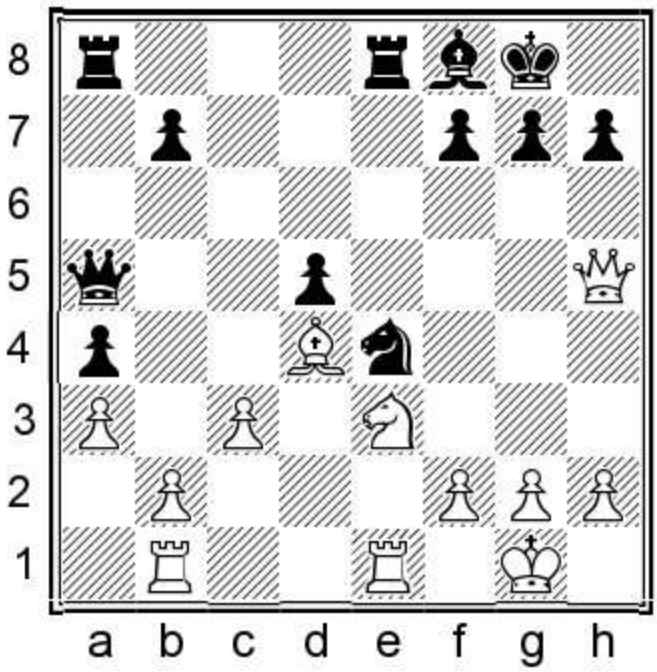
16.Nd4
Perfectly fine, but 16.N1d2!? was also an option.

16...Nxd4 17.Bxd4 Ne4 18.Ne3²
White's minor pieces are excellent, so it's time to find better squares for the queen and b1-rook.

18...Bf8 19.Qh5
The most active and ambitious approach, but it does allow Black a useful resource.

The steady but dull line was 19.Qc2 Rad8 20.Rbd1 with a long fight ahead.

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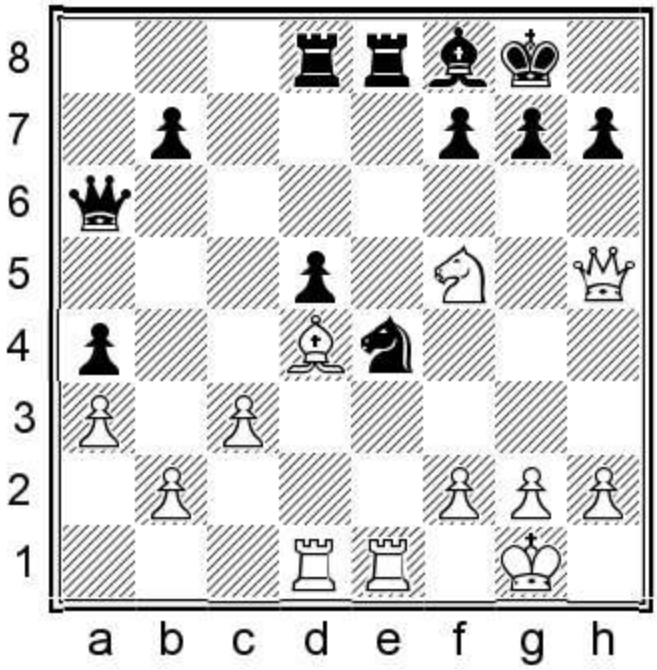
19...Rad8
Completely natural, but too slow.

It was essential to play 19...Nd2! 20.Rbd1 Nb3 eliminating the powerful bishop before it forces a concession on the kingside.
Then the forcing line is 21.Qxd5 Qxd5 22.Nxd5 Rxe1† 23.Rxe1 Nxd4 24.cxd4 Rd8 25.Nc3 Rxd4 when Black regains the pawn with a likely draw.
But of course entering that forcing line was White's decision. We could instead choose 21.g3!? maintaining the tension.

20.Nf5
Threatening Bxg7, as well as f2-f3 followed by Nh6†, so Black's reply is forced.

20...Qa6 21.Rbd1

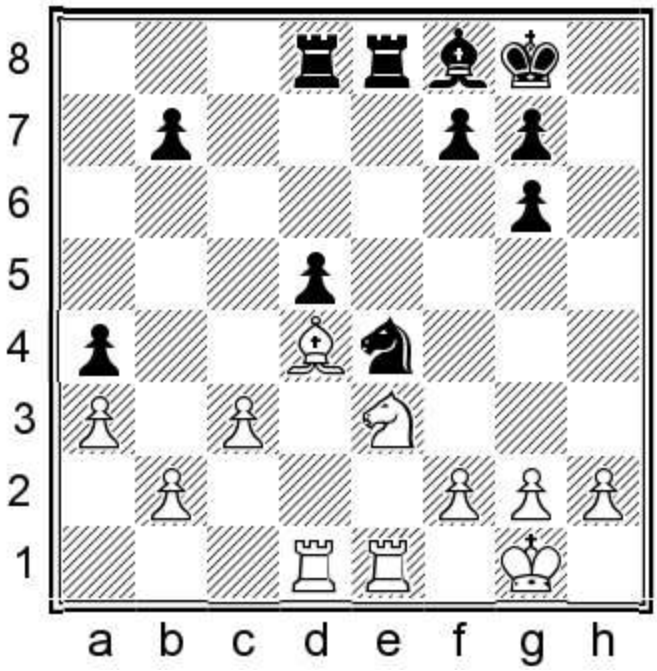
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21...Qg6
White is so active on the kingside that accepting an inferior ending is the attractive option for Black.

Instead 21...h6 22.h4!? would leave Black under considerable pressure.

22.Qxg6 hxg6 23.Ne3²
A standard IQP endgame where White can press forever.

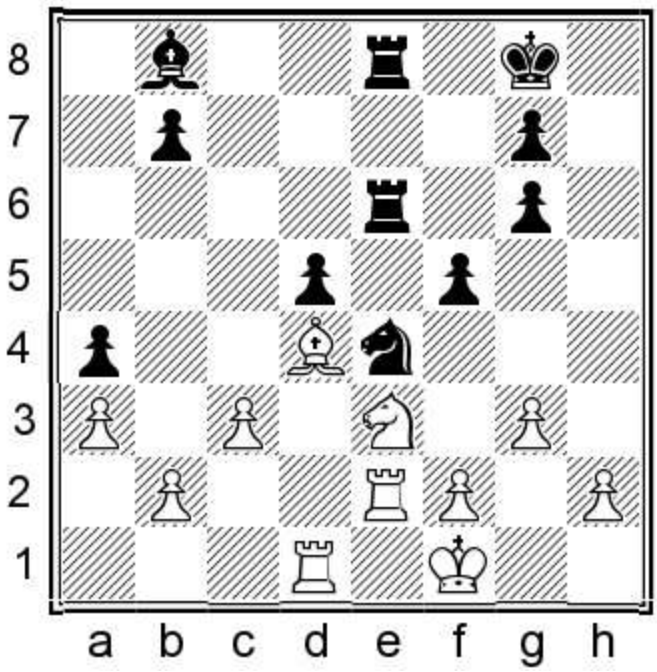


23...Re6 24.Kf1 Rde8 25.Re2 Bd6 26.g3 Bb8 27.Rde1 f5 28.Rd1
Tacking back to eye d5.

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Evicting the strong knight is a good idea, but 28.f3?! is clumsy execution: 28...Nxg3† 29.hxg3 Bxg3÷

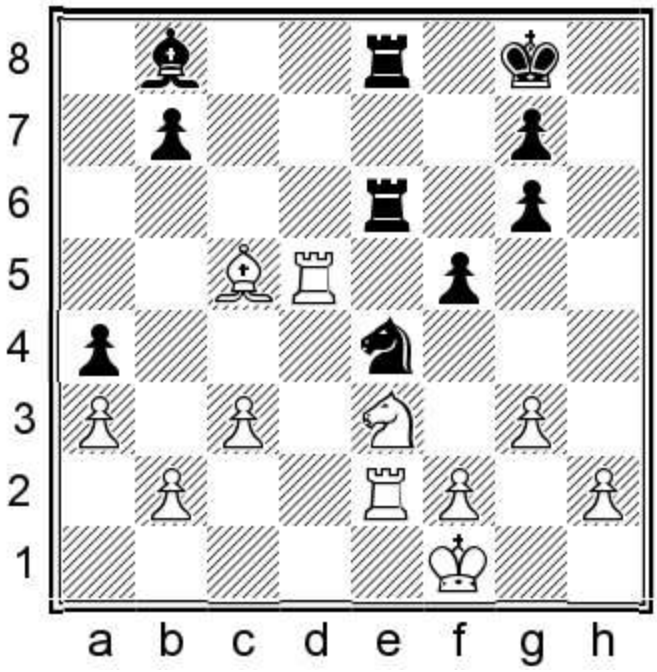
So instead 28.Nc2!? is good preparation for f2-f3. For example 28...b5 29.f3 and note that 29...Bxg3?! loses a piece if White calmly moves the e1-rook away somewhere. For example, 30.Rd1.



28...Nd6?!
Black is losing the thread.

More to the point was 28...f4 though White is still a little better after: 29.gxf4 Bxf4 30.Nxd5 Bxh2 31.Kg2 Bd6 32.c4²

29.Bc5 Ne4 30.Rxd5±



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As is traditional, the IQP has dropped off. Either Black was short of time or he felt the result was inevitable, as he rapidly comes unglued.

30...f4 31.gxf4 Bxf4 32.Bd4 Bxh2 33.Rd7 Nf6?
Either rook to the seventh was more sensible.

34.Rxb7
1–0

GAME 22

Vassilios Kotronias – Vadim Zvjaginsev
Legnica 2013

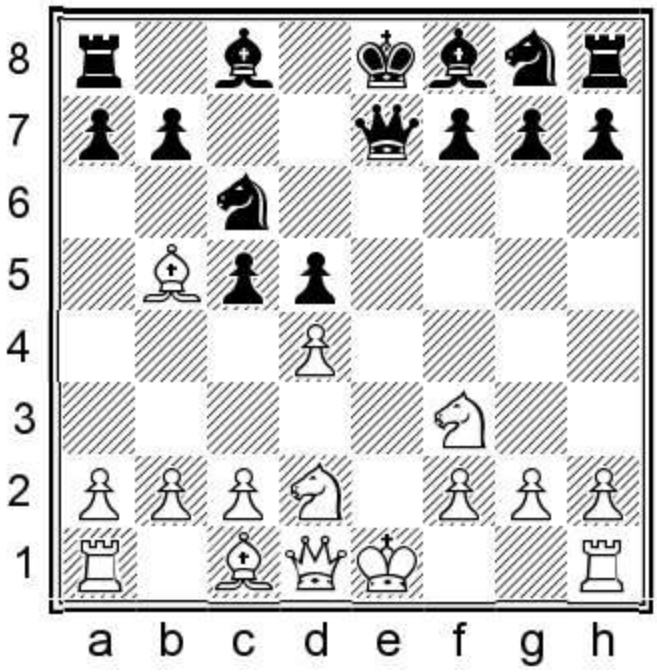
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 Nc6
As sensible a developing move as you will ever see.

6.Bb5
As we know from the start of this chapter, at this point Black can choose between several moves.

6...Qe7†!?
A clever move that has been played repeatedly, with great success, by Zvjaginsev.

We shall see 6...cxd4 in the next game, followed by several games about the main line 6...Bd6.

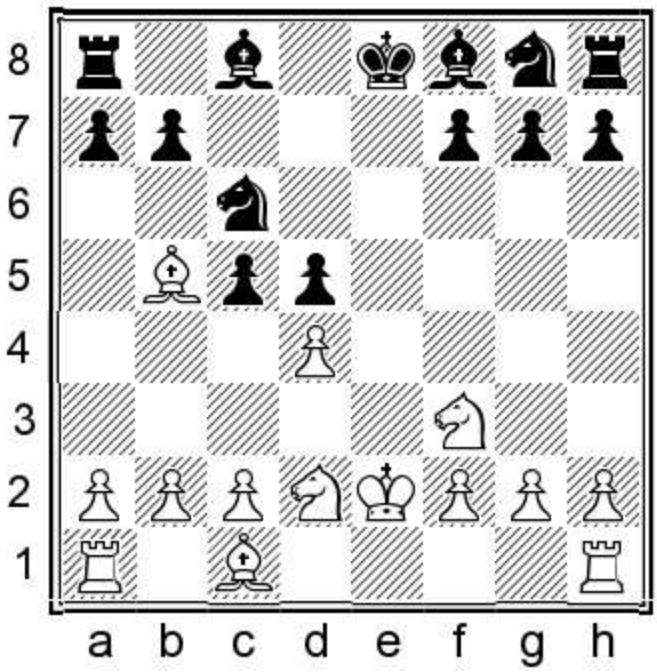
6...Nf6?! is a natural developer but it transposes to a dubious line we saw on page 183, in the note to move 6 of the previous game.



7.Be2!
In this particular position, White should keep the queens on.

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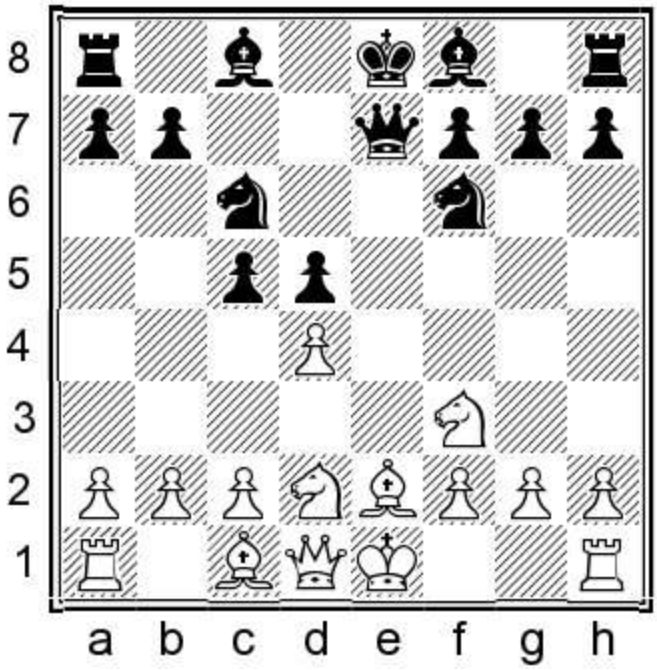
7.Qe2?!
The dubious sign is harsh, but I really dislike this move.
7...Qxe2† 8.Kxe2



8...a6!
This move is the problem.
If Black would helpfully play 8...cxd4?! 9.Nxd4 Bd7 10.N2f3 we would transpose to the next game where White has a pleasant endgame edge.
9.Bxc6† bxc6 10.Re1 f6!
Keeping a knight out of e5 and creating a good square for the king on f7. Black has the bishop pair and we have not managed to inflict an IQP as compensation. This line came to widespread attention when Zvjaginsev played it in 2013, though there was a previous game back in 2003 by my old friend, GM Paul Motwani. Black has scored well, with the most recent game Ponomariov – Harikrishna, Biel 2017, ending 0–1. That is a warning sign: if even Ponomariov struggles in a queenless technical position, then it is a position to be avoided.

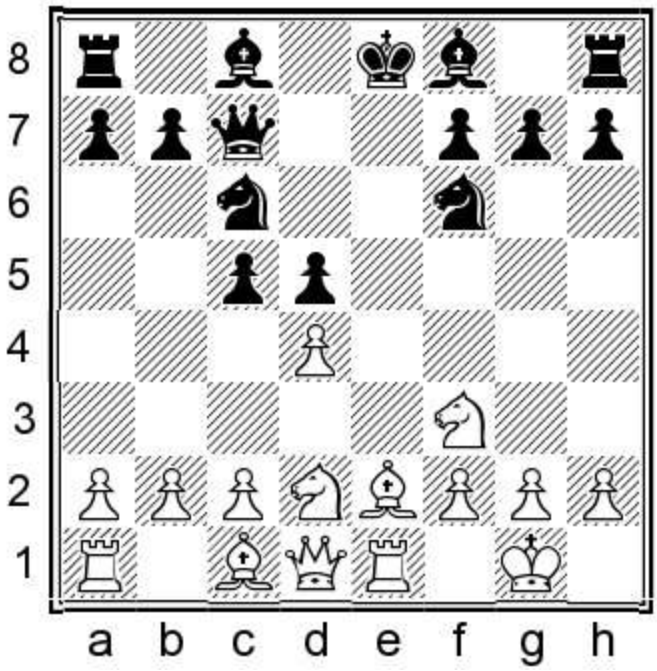
7...Nf6
7...Qc7 8.0-0 Nf6 transposes.

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8.0-0 Qc7
We can see the results of Black's check. The queen has taken two moves to reach c7, while the bishop moved twice to land on e2. So the tempos level out, while both e2 and c7 might not be the ideal locations for either piece. We are heading for an interesting position that is relatively unexplored, at least by the standards of IQP positions.

9.Re1
This is a story we will see in various guises: we want to delay dxc5 until after the f8-bishop has moved.
For all that, some good players have ignored the tempo-fight, and simply played 9.dxc5 Bxc5 10.Nb3 Be7 11. Bg5 with a normal anti-IQP game.

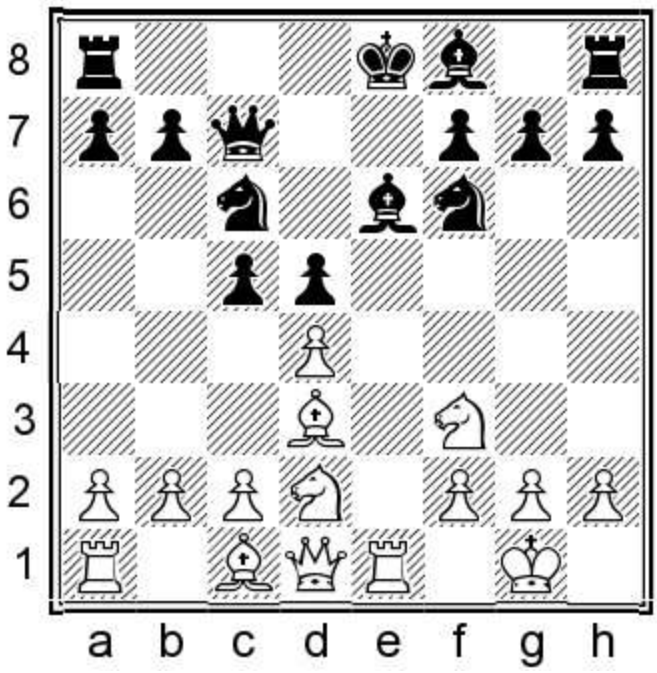


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9...cxd4

This exchange costs Black a tempo, but allows the f8-bishop an extra option.

9...Be6!?
Keeping the dream alive of playing the bishop from f8 to c5 in one leap.
10.Bd3!?
We can also fight for that tempo.

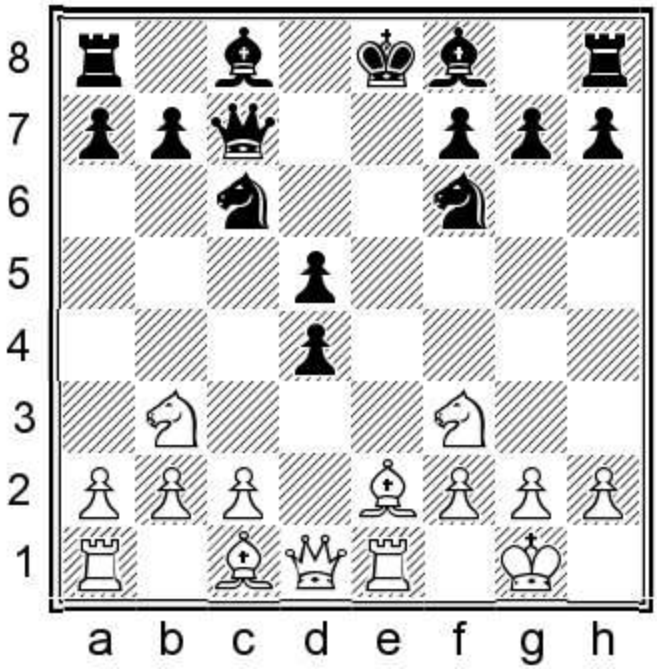


10...0-0-0
Intriguing; an IQP set-up with queenside castling is unusual, as having only two pawns in front of the black king leaves it potentially exposed.
10...c4?! is unwise as the d3-bishop does not need to retreat: 11.Bf5!*f*
10...Be7 gives up the tempo-fight, allowing 11.dxc5 Bxc5 12.Nb3² with a standard edge.
11.dxc5 Bxc5 12.Nb3 Bb6 13.Be3
In Kappes – Ohtake, email 2011, I would assess White's chances as slightly higher, but the position is not at all clear.

9...Be7?!
That's the loss of tempo we have been waiting for.
10.dxc5 Bxc5 11.Nb3 Bb6 12.c4!? Be6
In Boutteville – Pinson, Aix-en-Provence 1950, as Picard & Primel pointed out, the right path was:
13.c5!N 13...Ba5 14.Nxa5 Qxa5 15.Be3
White is clearly better. In addition to the bishop pair, White has the easy and effective plan of a2-a3 then b2-b4, with Nd4 to come.

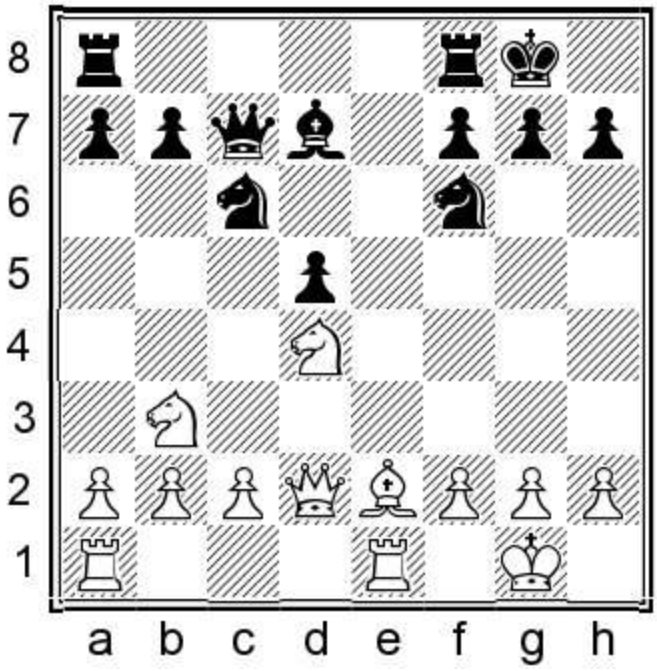
10.Nb3

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10...Bb4
Making use of the extra option, but an exchange of dark-squared bishops is fine by us.
I think Black should prefer 10...Be7 with yet another normal-looking IQP set-up after, for example, 11.Nfxd4 0-0 12.Be3² as in Socko – Moor, Graz 2015.

11.Bd2 Bxd2 12.Qxd2 0-0 13.Nfxd4 Bd7



14.Nxc6!?
Certainly not the only option.

14.Nc5!? was one option to keep pressing without changing the structure.

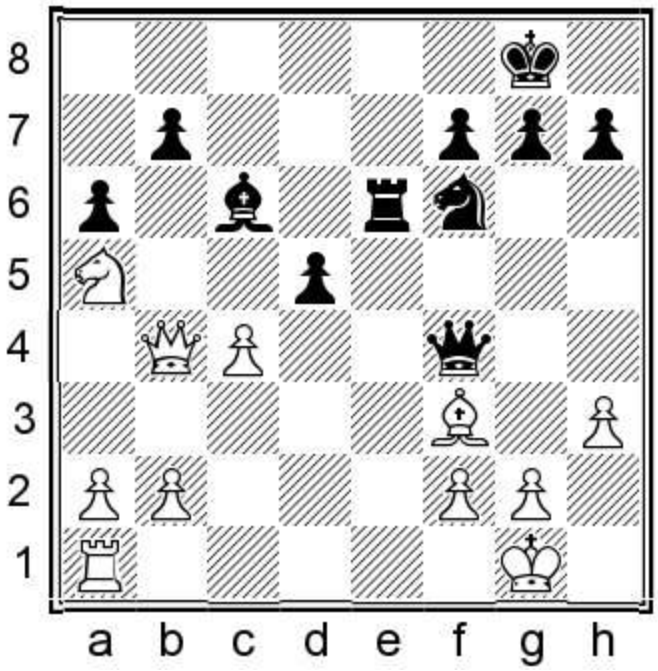
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14...Bxc6
This feels rather compliant to me.
After 14...bxc6 15.c4 Black will still end up with an isolated pawn, but the exchange of a pair of pawns eases his defence; an extreme optimist would also point out the d-pawn will be passed.

15.Bf3²
A standard anti-IQP edge. White should win some, draw more, but never lose. However, accidents will happen...

15...Rfe8 16.Qd4 a6 17.c3 Re7 18.Rxe7 Qxe7 19.Qc5 Qe5 20.Na5 Re8 21.h3 Re6 22.Qb4
In such positions White usually has several ways to press. For example, 22.Qb6!? targets the b7-pawn, as in the game, but cuts out the ...Qc7 defence. 22...Nd7 is no solution as 23.Qa7 is troublesome for Black.

22...Qc7 23.c4!? Qf4



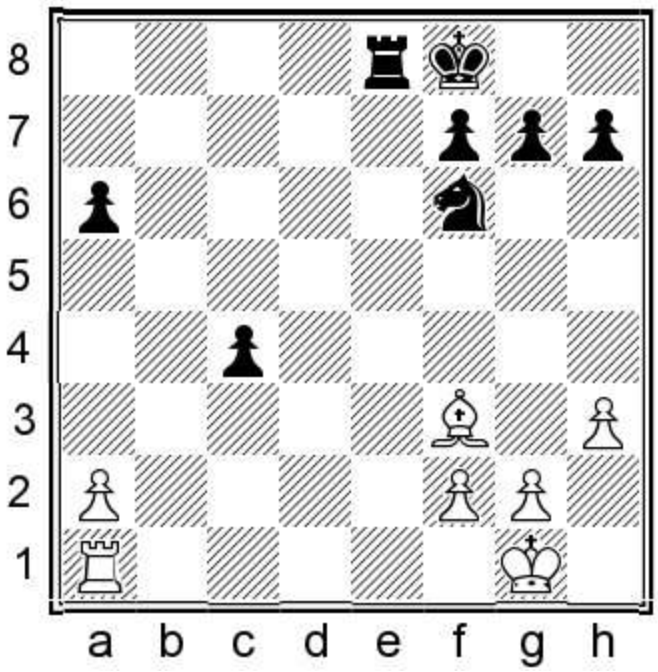
24.Nxb7
This move releases the pressure.

24.Rd1!?² would have kept White's edge niggling away.

24...Bxb7 25.Qxb7 Qxc4 26.Qb8† Re8 27.Qb3 Qc5 28.Qc3 Qxc3 29.bxc3 Kf8 30.c4
Bailing out towards a draw.

30...dxc4

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31.Bb7
Simpler was: 31.Rc1 Rc8 32.Bb7 Rc7 33.Bxa6 c3 34.Bd3=

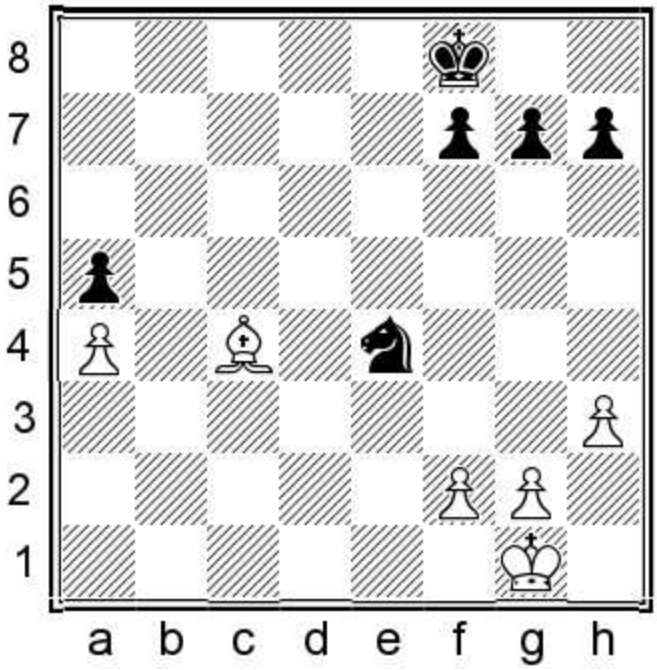
31...a5 32.Rc1
This should draw.

Also good enough was 32.Ba6 c3 33.Rc1 Ra8 34.Bc4 Rc8 35.Rxc3 Nd5 though White needs to have seen: 36. Rd3!=

32...Re2 33.a4 Re7 34.Ba6 Rc7 35.Rxc4 Rxc4 36.Bxc4
White has to be a little careful as the a4-pawn is a target, but we are well within a broad drawing margin.

36...Ne4

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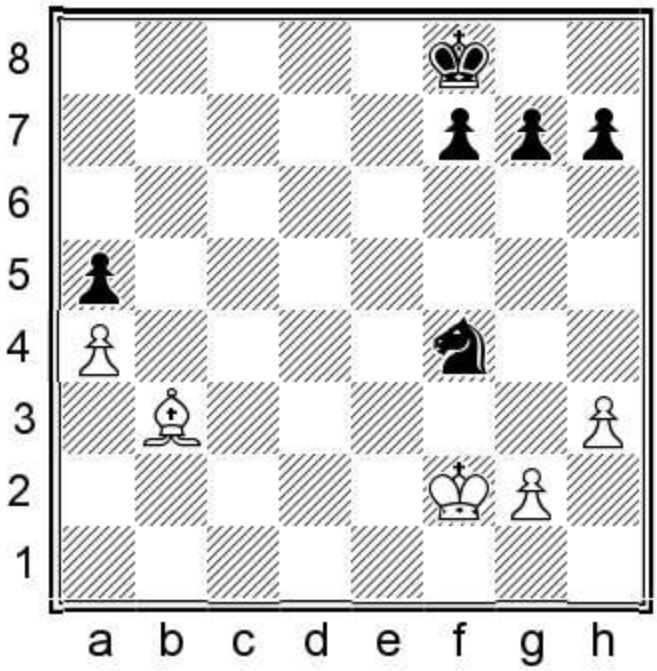


37.f4?
It is natural to put one's pawns on the opposite colour to the bishop, but the f4-pawn will not be there long.

After 37.f3 White should hold, as after 37...Nc3 38.Bb3 Ke7 39.Kf2= it helps that the f7-pawn would hang if the black king rushed towards the a4-pawn.

37...Nc3! 38.Bb3
After 38.Bb5? Nxb5 39.axb5 Ke7 Black queens and White doesn't.

38...Ne2† 39.Kf2 Nxf4



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40.Ke3?

Trying to win the a5-pawn and turn this into a race, but Black is miles ahead.

White needed to seek saving chances in a line such as: 40.Kf3 Ne6 41.Bd1 Ke7 42.Ke4 Kd6 43.h4 Kc5 44.h5µ

40...Nxg2†–+ 41.Kd4 Ke7 42.Kc5 Ne3 43.Kd4
Sadly after 43.Kb6 f5 44.Kxa5 f4 the f-pawn queens as the bishop is cruelly dominated.

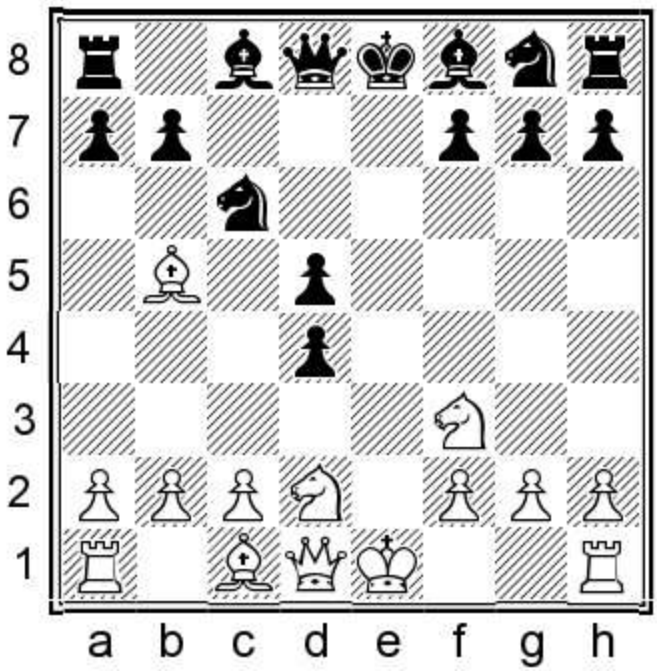
43...Ng2
The rest is just suffering before an inevitable result.

44.Kc5 f5 45.Bc2 Ne3 46.Bd3 h5 47.Kd4 f4 48.Ke4 g5 49.Be2 h4 50.Ke5 Kf7 51.Bh5† Kg7 52.Be2 Kg6 53. Bd3† Kh6 54.Be2 Nc2 55.Ke4 Kg6 56.Bg4 Kf6 57.Bd1 Ne3 58.Bf3 Nc4 59.Be2 Nd2†
60...f3 will follow. Chess can be painful.
0–1

GAME 23

David Howell – Nigel Short
London 2016

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 Nc6 6.Bb5 cxd4!?
Yet another clever idea for Black. It was first played by Botvinnik in 1941, was taken up by Korchnoi, and is a modern-day favourite of Short, so it has fine French pedigree.



7.Qe2†!
I decided this check would be our move, then checked other sources and was relieved to find the following opinions:
“Probably the best try for an advantage.” – Caruana
“The only way to pose problems.” – Marin

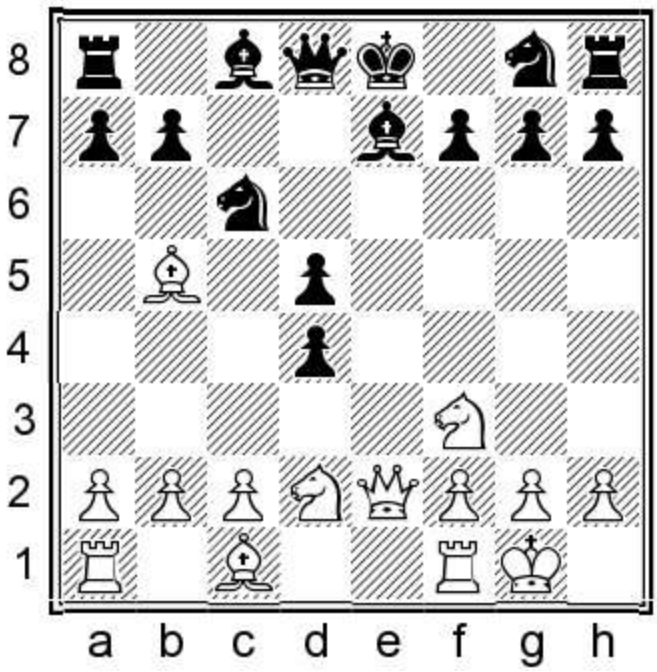
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To understand the point of 6...cxd4 we need to consider what happens if White simply castles. After 7.0-0 the natural continuation is 7...Bd6 8.Nb3 Nge7 9.Nbxd4, with the final move being needed as there is a pawn on d4 to retrieve. This transposes to a main line position normally reached via 6...Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 Bd6 10.Nbd4.
However in that main line position, we have better moves than 10.Nbd4, as we will see in Games 25-27. So now we can understand that 6...cxd4 is a devious attempt to trick the unwary into a lesser version of the 6...Bd6 line. But since we are wary, all Black will achieve is an unpleasant endgame.

I am less keen on 7.Nxd4 due to 7...Bd7 when 8.Qe2† can be met by 8...Be7 and Black will safely castle before White manages to play Re1.
For the record, the real move order of this game was 7.Nxd4 when instead of the troubling 7...Bd7, Black chose 7...Qe7† 8.Qe2 Qxe2† 9.Kxe2.

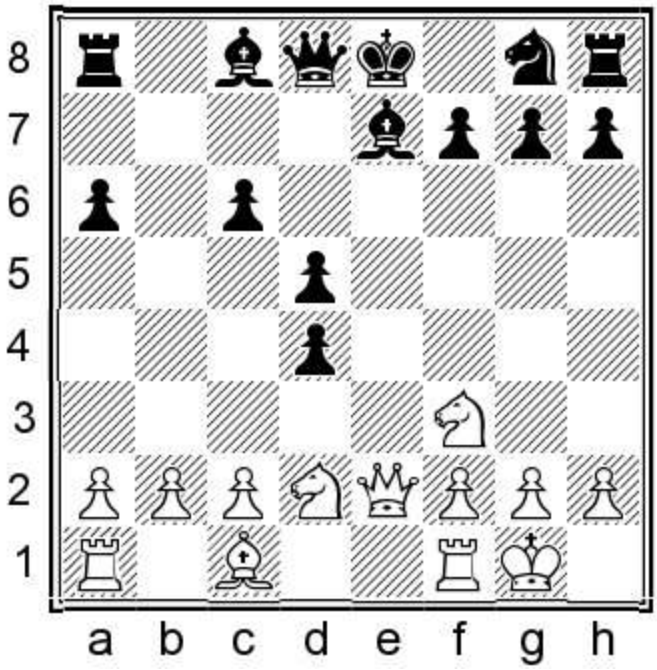
7...Qe7
Almost everyone agrees that this move is essential.

7...Be7
The one person who believes in this line is GM Anatoly Vaisser who has played it four times.
8.0-0
Black's problem is that he is struggling to castle as Re1 is coming.



8...a6!
Black wants to play ...Nf6 and ...0-0, without dropping the e7-bishop, and ...a7-a6 contributes to that plan by allowing ...Ra7.
8...Nf6 was played by Vaisser in his most recent game, but I think he made the right choice in his two earlier games. 9.Re1 Bd7 10.b3! Kf8 White can be happy with this achievement. 11.Bb2 Bc5 12.Bxc6 bxc6 White is spoiled for choice: 13.Nxd4² was Shirov – Gelfand, Moscow (blitz) 2007; 13.Bxd4 Bxd4 14.Nxd4² was Sebag – Vaisser, Nancy 2013; and best of all is 13.Qd3!N, planning Bxd4 and then recapturing with the queen.
9.Bxc6† bxc6

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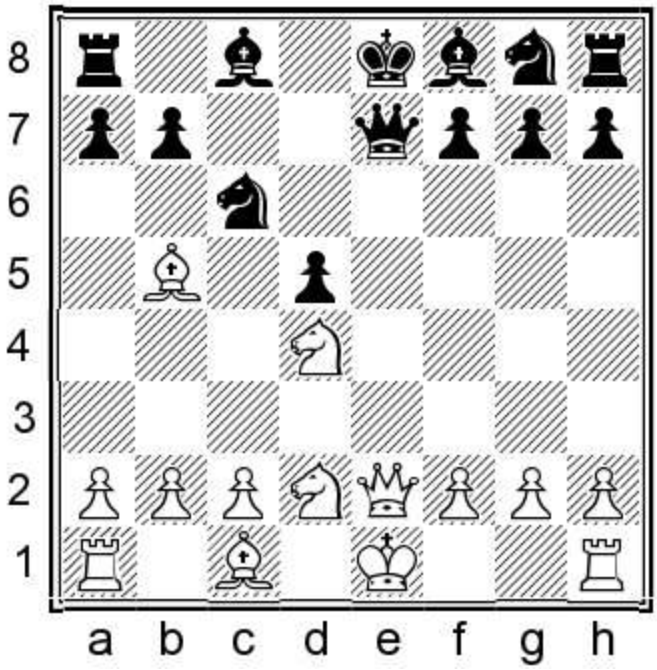


10.Re1!N
“An interesting idea, and perhaps the only try for an advantage.” – Caruana
10.Nxd4 c5 is fine for Black, as Vaisser showed by drawing both Kosashvili – Vaisser, Tel Aviv 1990, and Sulskis – Vaisser, New York 1998.
10...Ra7
White has many promising options, but I suggest the following bind-building line:
11.b4!? Nf6 12.Nxd4 Rc7 13.N2b3 0-0 14.Nc5²
White has no need to fear opposite-coloured bishops as there would be many other pieces remaining, including a beautiful knight on d4.

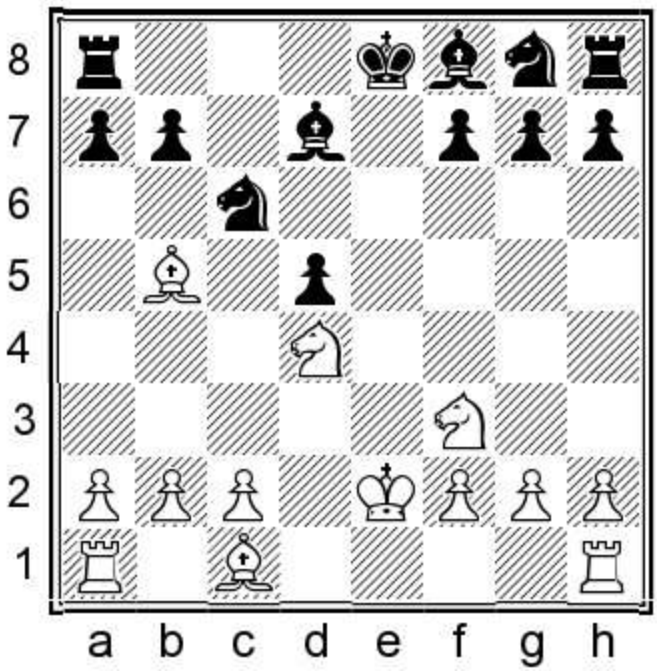
8.Nxd4
We will take an ending where White’s better structure is the difference.

Do not be tempted by 8.Ne5?! Bd7 9.Bxc6 bxc6 10.0-0. Since Re1 is threatened, and 10...f6 fails to 11.Qh5†, this at first looks superb for White. But one move shows it’s an illusion: 10...Kd8! There will be no checks on h5, and ...f7-f6 is coming. 11.Nb3 f6 So far this is Svidler – Dolmatov, Haifa 1995, and according to Dolmatov, Anand suggested 12.f4. White will certainly get some compensation for the piece, but it is not convincing. Call me conservative, but I will recommend the simple endgame edge rather than the risky piece sac.

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8...Qxe2† 9.Kxe2 Bd7 10.N2f3
This position has been tested in over 30 games, with White scoring 55%. This score would be higher were it not for two Korchnoi wins with Black from bad positions, including an infamous game against Hübner which we shall see below.



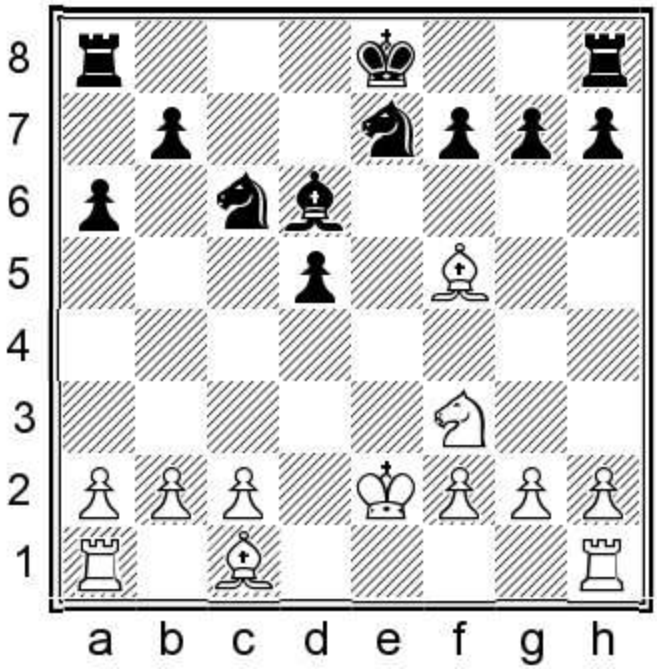
10...Bd6
One of many ways Black can try to hold a slightly worse ending. I will show a few examples:

10...Nxd4† 11.Nxd4 Bc5 12.Be3 Bxb5† (12...Bxd4 13.Bxd7† Kxd7 14.Bxd4 f6 15.Rhd1² Ravi – Dolmatov, Kolkata 1996) 13.Nxb5 Bxe3 14.Kxe3 Kd7 15.Rhd1 Nf6 16.f3² Smirin – Korchnoi, Biel 2002.

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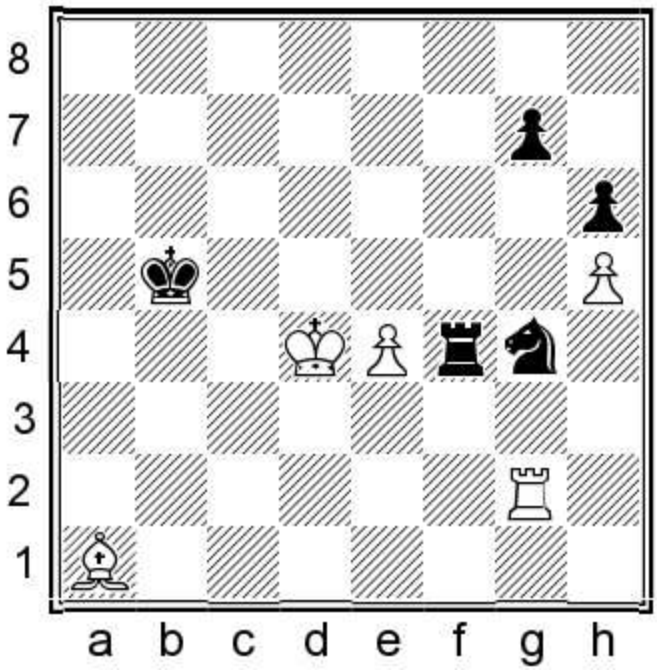
10...a6 11.Bd3 Bd6

A more recent example was: 11...f6 12.Nxc6!? bxc6 13.c4 Bd6 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.Be3² In Oleksienko – Zvjaginsev, Legnica 2013, Black eventually drew a rook ending a pawn down.
12.Nf5 Bxf5 13.Bxf5 Nge7
In Averbakh – Botvinnik, Moscow 1943, after 14.Bd3 Nb4 Black was OK. Instead I suggest:



14.Bh3!N²
The bishop may look odd on h3, but after a plan such as Rd1, Kf1, g2-g3 and Bg2, all will be normal again, with White's bishop pair pressing against the IQP.

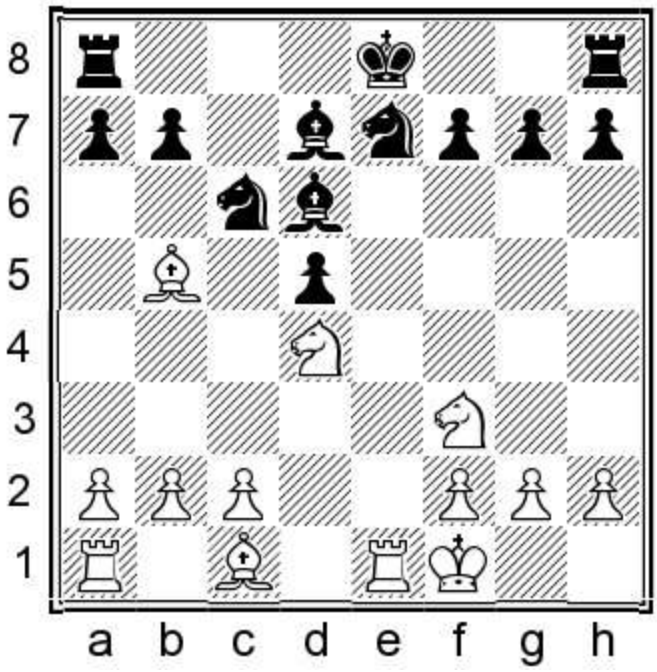
10...Nf6 11.Re1 Nxd4† 12.Nxd4² is yet another endgame edge. Over 50 moves later the following position was reached in Hübner – Korchnoi, Merano (7) 1980:



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White had been pressing all game, and just recently lost his extra pawn. So it should be just a draw, which would have left Hübner a point ahead in this Candidates final match and on track to meet Karpov for the World Championship. Instead... 63.Kd5?? Ne3† and White resigned. Korchnoi also won the next game, then Hübner withdrew without completing any more games. Has there been a more devastating blunder in chess history?

11.Re1 Nge7 12.Kf1²
Our misplaced king was the only problem and that was easily fixed, leaving White with a normal anti-IQP endgame edge.



12...a6 13.Bd3 0-0 14.c3 Rfe8 15.Be3
Finally varying from, and slightly improving on, the game Akopian – Lputian, Yerevan 1997, which continued: 15.h3 Nxd4 16.Nxd4 Nc6 17.Rxe8† Rxe8 18.Nxc6 Bxc6 19.Be3 Be5 20.Rd1 g6 21.Be2 Kg7 22.Bf3 Rd8 23.h4² White kept grinding away, and eventually won.

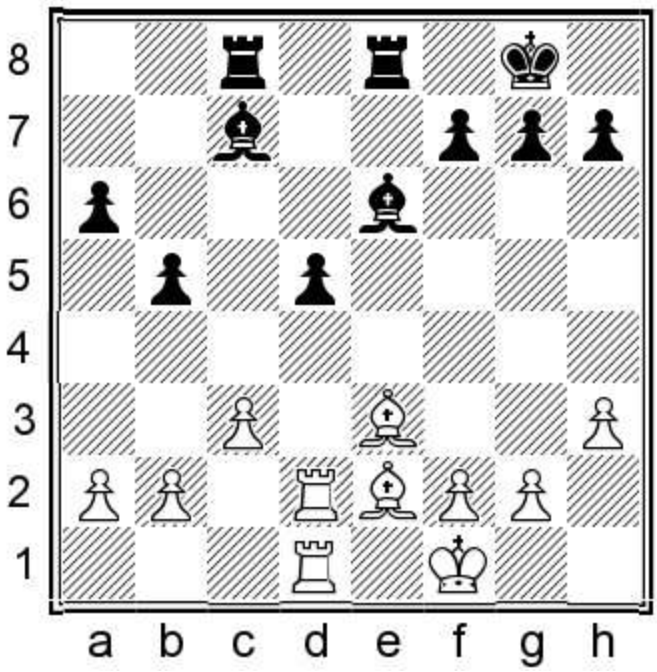
15...Nxd4 16.Nxd4 Nc6 17.Nf3 Ne5 18.Nxe5
White's 13th, 17th and 18th moves show a simple but important idea: we are happy to exchange some minor pieces, but only if it does not improve Black's structure.

18...Bxe5 19.Rad1 Rac8 20.h3 Be6 21.Be2 b5
When one sees the game continuation, it is tempting to criticize this move, but instead doing nothing is not appealing either.

22.Rd2 Bc7
The bishop looks better on e5, so a luft-making move such as 22...g6 would have been my choice.

23.Red1

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23...Rcd8?!
Now Black loses a pawn.

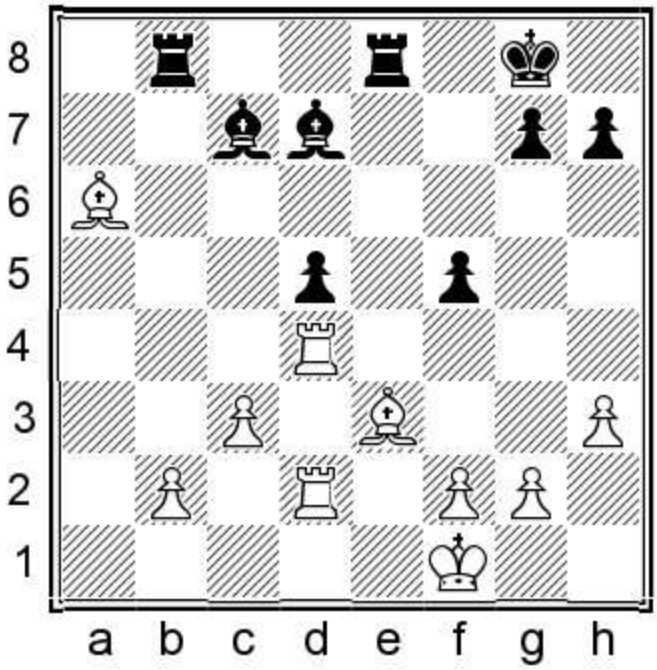
23...Rb8 discourages the plan that works so well in the game, and allows Black to meet 24.Bf3 with 24...d4 hitting a2. But if White makes the a-pawn safe with 24.a3! then the suffering continues.

24.a4! bxa4 25.Bxa6 Rb8 26.Ra1 f5 27.Rxa4±
A perfect model game, if we stopped right here.

27...Bd7 28.Rad4?
Falling for a well-hidden back rank trick.

28.Ra3 or 28.Ra1 would leave White a pawn up with the better structure.

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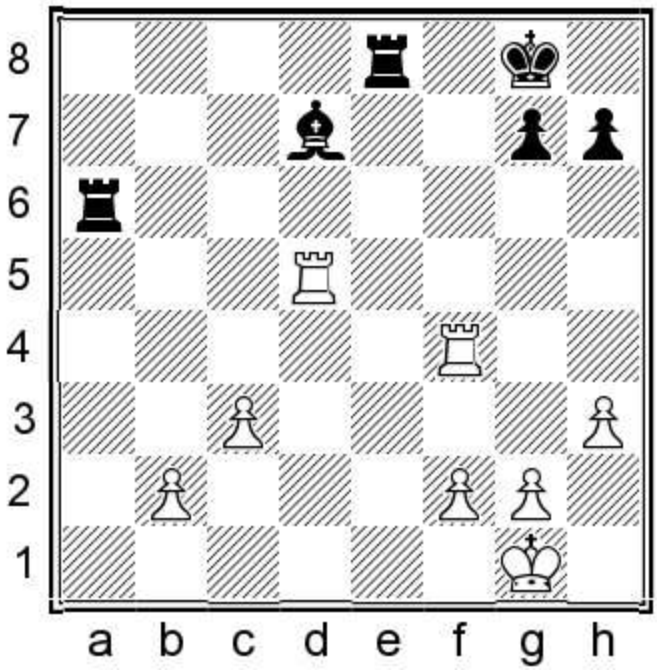


28...f4!
Short is sharp.

29.Bxf4 Bxf4 30.Rxf4 Ra8 31.Rxd5
There is nothing better.

The piece is lost in an even worse version after: 31.Be2? Ra1† 32.Rd1 Rxd1† 33.Bxd1 Bb5† 34.Kg1 Re1†–+

31...Rxa6 32.Kg1[3]
White has three pawns for the bishop, but the pawns are unable to advance effectively, so only Black can try to win.



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32...Be6 33.Re5 Rc8 34.Kh2 Rb6 35.Re2 h6 36.Rd4 Rc7 37.Kg3 Bf7 38.Red2 g6 39.Rd6 Rb3 40.Re2 Rcb7 41. Rdd2
White is totally tied up, but there is no way to increase the pressure; the bishop can race around the board, but that feeble little pawn on b2 will always be beyond its reach.

41...Kg7 42.f3 R7b6 43.h4 Be6 44.Kf4 Kf6 45.Rf2 h5 46.Rfe2 Bc4 47.Rf2 Bf7 48.Rfe2 Be6 49.Rf2 Bc8 50. Rd8 Bf5 51.Rdd2 Ra6 52.Rfe2 Ra4† 53.Kg3 Rb6 54.Rd8 Be6 55.Rdd2 Rc6 56.Rd8 Ra2 57.Rb8 Ra1 58.Rd2 Rh1 59.Rb4 Bf5 60.Rbd4 Rc7 61.Rd6† Kg7 62.R6d4 Rb7 63.Re2 Rb1
½–½

GAME 24

Eltaj Safarli – Boris Savchenko
Minsk 2014

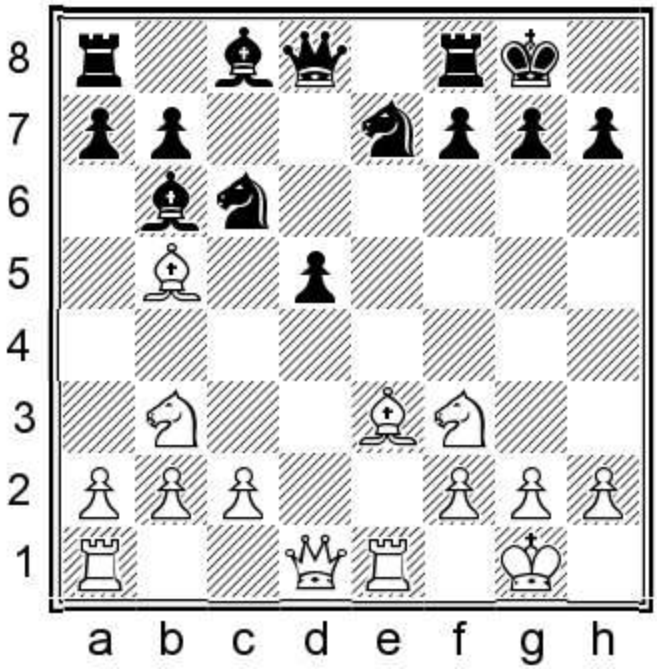
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 Nc6 6.Bb5 Bd6
We are on our way towards the main line of the 4...exd5 complex.

7.dxc5
This and White's next two moves are automatic and correct. The f8-bishop had moved, so it was time to take on c5 and inflict the IQP. Then we castle and take another free tempo with our knight move to b3.

7...Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 Bb6
Widely and fairly regarded as the poor relation of the main line with 9...Bd6, which we shall see in the next three games.

10.Re1 0-0 11.Be3
This plan is the reason for the low reputation of 9...Bb6. The exchange of dark-squared bishops favours White, and the exchange is far easier to achieve in this line than the main line we shall see next. For all that, any advantage White can force is likely to be small, and Black remains solid, with just the one weakness on d5.

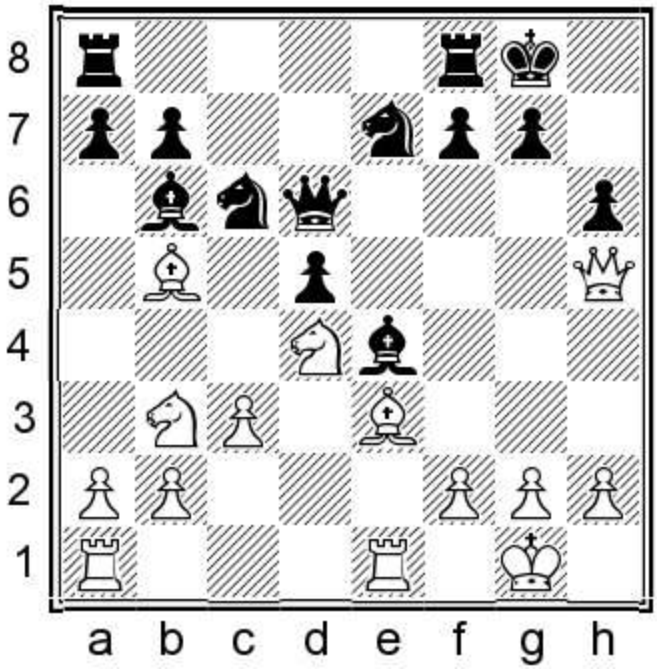
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11...Bg4
The main line, though the alternatives can lead to a similar style of play.

11...Bf5
A solid developing move, with the idea of installing the bishop on e4. The game could develop in dozens of ways, so this is a position to play, not remember deep theory. For example:
12.c3 Be4 13.Nfd4
Preparing to evict the bishop from e4.
Also promising is 13.Bc5!?.
13...h6
Or 13...Re8 14.f3 Bf5 15.Bf2² Miroshnichenko – Shtyrenkov, Alushta 2002.
14.Qh5
One of several possible locations for our queen, but certainly the one most likely to scare Black.
14...Qd6

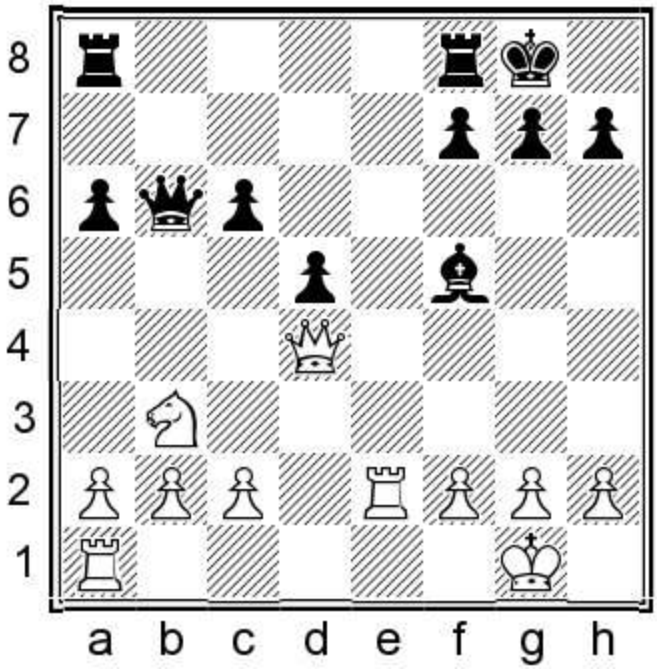
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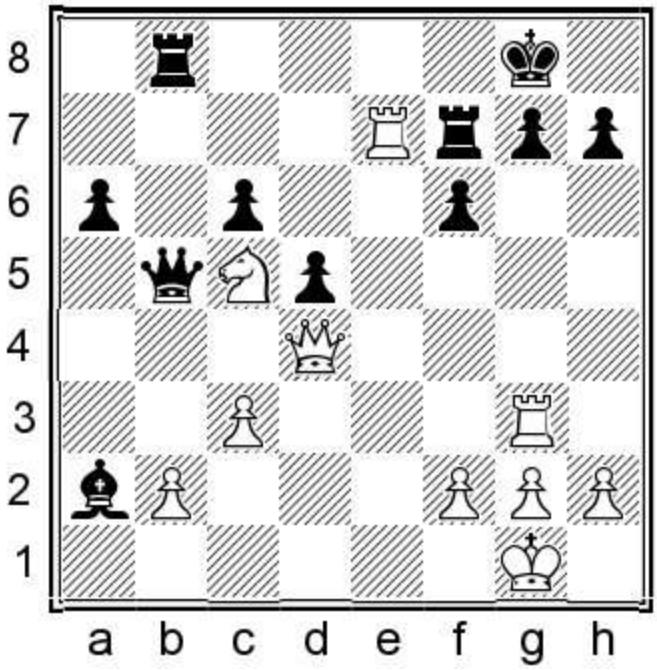
Now in Kindermann – Casper, Germany 2002, Psakhis's suggestion was:
15.Rad1!?
This looks simple and logical to me.

11...Bxe3 12.Rxe3 Nf5
This is an independent option.
There are many transpositional possibilities. For example, 12...Bg4 was the move order of the McShane – Korchnoi game mentioned below.
13.Re2
Or e1 or d3 or even c3 were also reasonable squares for the rook; it's that sort of position. We can follow a couple of games to get an idea of typical play:
13...a6 14.Bxc6 bxc6 15.Nfd4 Qb6
Or 15...Qf6 16.Nxf5 Bxf5 17.Qd4 Qg6 18.Qc3² was Gonzalez Vidal – Cordova, Medellin 2013.
16.Nxf5 Bxf5 17.Qd4²
Black could exchange queens and suffer in a long ending. Avoiding that and leaving a dominant queen on d4 is risky, as the game illustrated:

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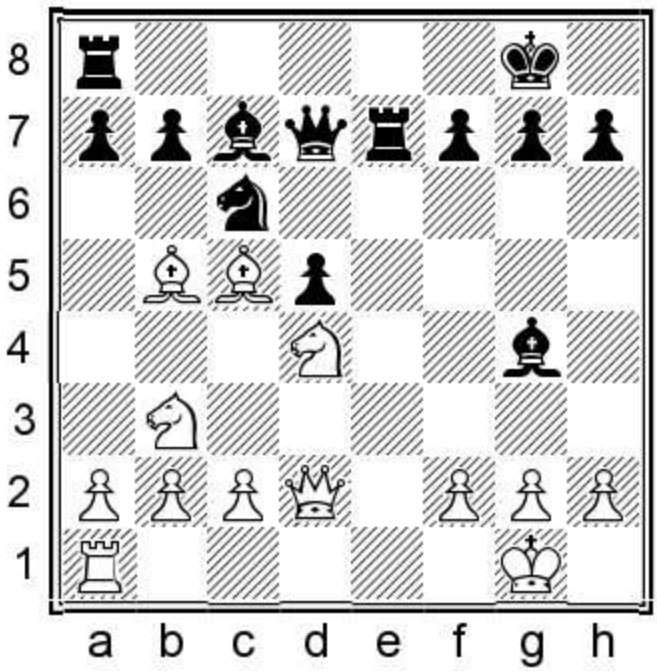
17...Qb5 18.Rae1 Rab8 19.c3 Bd3?! 20.Re3 Bc4? 21.Nc5!+– Bxa2
Saving the bishop but dropping his king.
22.Rg3 f6 23.Re7 Rf7



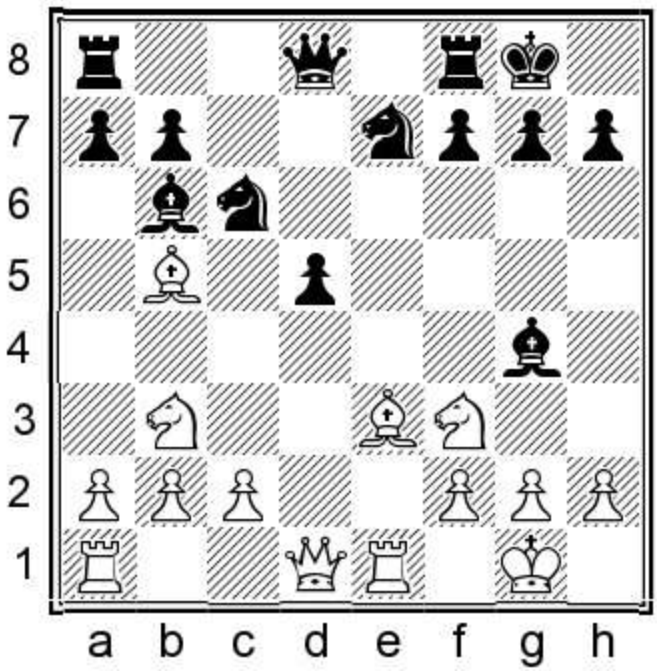
24.Qxf6!
In Jansa – Tisdall, Gausdal 1987, Black resigned rather than see: 24...Rxf6 25.Rgxg7† Kh8 26.Rxh7† Kg8 27. Reg7† Kf8 28.Nd7† Ke8 29.Nxf6† Kd8 30.Rh8#

11...Bc7
Avoiding the exchange of bishops looks logical, but it allows an annoying resource:
12.Bc5!
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If Black insists on keeping the dark-squared bishops alive, then he will remain pinned and under pressure. For

example:
12...Re8 13.Qd2 Bg4 14.Nfd4 Qd7 15.Rxe7!?
A neat tactic, though White would still have an edge after normal quiet play.
15...Rxe7



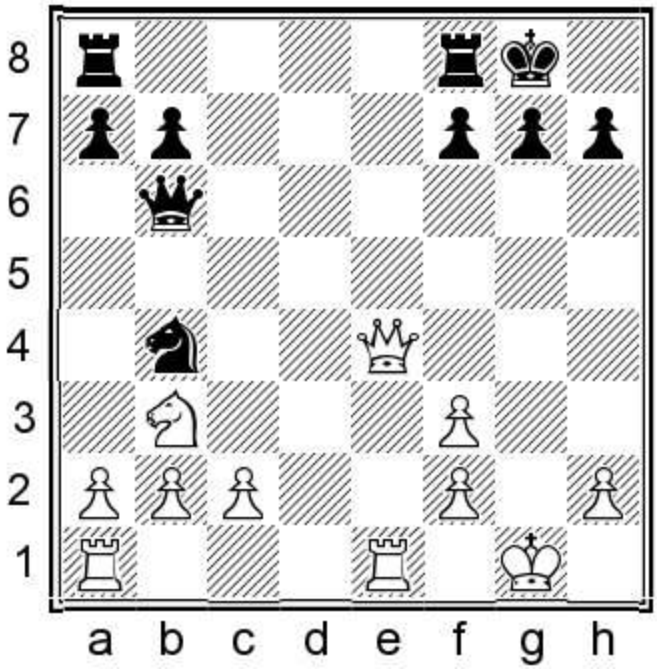
Now in Kruszynski – Kuhn, Bavaria 1996, after 16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.Bxc6 Qxc6 18.Bxe7² Black's bishops provided only partial compensation for the missing pawn.
Even better was the slight modification: 16.h3!N 16...Be6 17.Nxc6 bxc6 18.Bxc6 Qxc6 19.Bxe7±



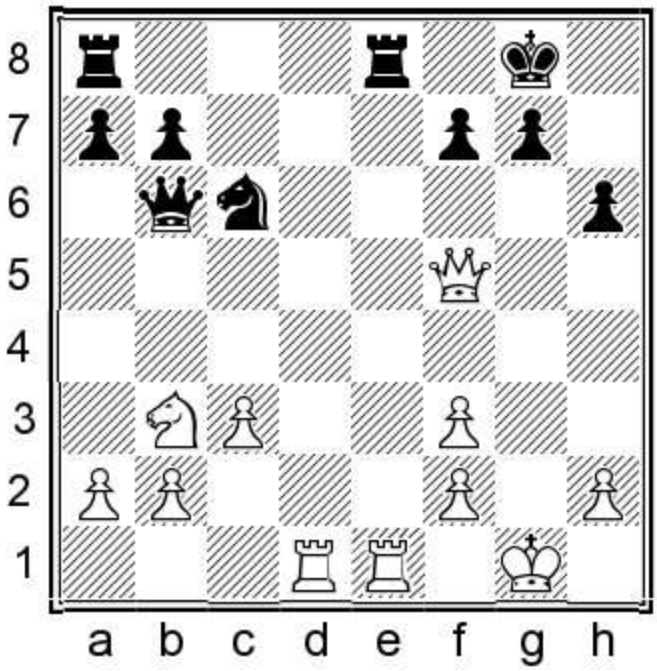
12.h3!
As we shall see, there is a specific tactical reason for making this pawn nudge.
Far more common is:

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12.Bxb6 Qxb6!
Of course we would be delighted to see 12...axb6.
Now White's consistent, and most commonly played, approach is to win a pawn with:
13.Bxc6 Nxc6 14.Qxd5 Nb4! 15.Qe4 Bxf3 16.gxf3

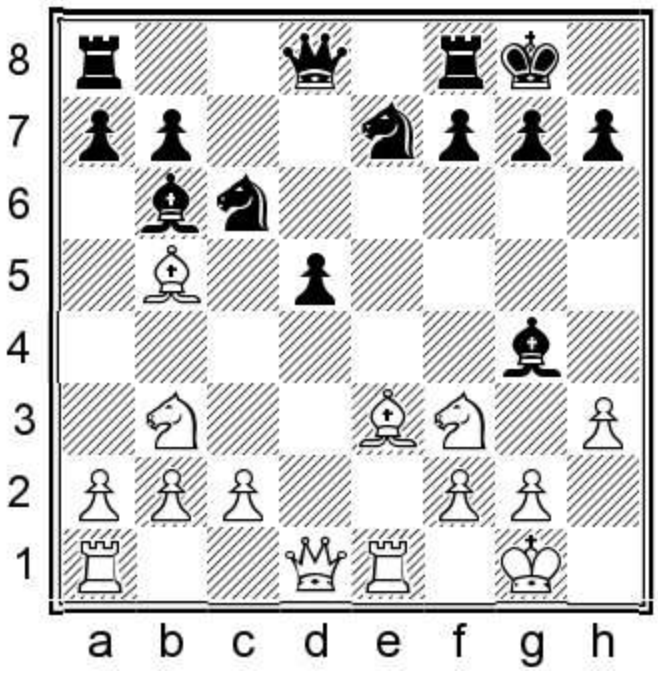


This position has been known since the game Karpov – Krogius, Kuibyshev 1970. The assessment in many old sources, influenced no doubt by Karpov's win, is that Black does not have enough compensation. I do not agree, and believe that can hold the balance if he stays active. A recent game continued:
16...h6 17.c3 Nc6 18.Rad1 Rfe8 19.Qf5
19.Qxe8† Rxe8 20.Rxe8† Kh7 is a sure draw, as the queen can harass the exposed king.
Here Black can improve with:



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19...Qa6!N
19...Rxe1†?! 20.Rxe1 Rd8 21.Kg2 caused White no problems at all in Safarli – Pavlovic, Zurich 2017, and he eventually converted his extra pawn.
The text move is far more nettlesome. For example:
20.a3 Qb6 21.Qc2 Ne5©
The black knight can cause trouble from c4, or maybe a hop via g6 might harry the white king.



12...Bxe3
This allows White to effortlessly escape the pin, but the same is true whatever Black plays.

12...Bh5?! is the move Black wants to play, keeping the pin intact, but there is a tactical problem after 13.Bxb6. Unlike the related line above, 13...Qxb6? drops a pawn for nothing after 14.Bxc6 Nxc6 15.Qxd5± as there is no time for ...Nb4 because the bishop is en prise.
So instead Black would have to play the positionally grim 13...axb6.

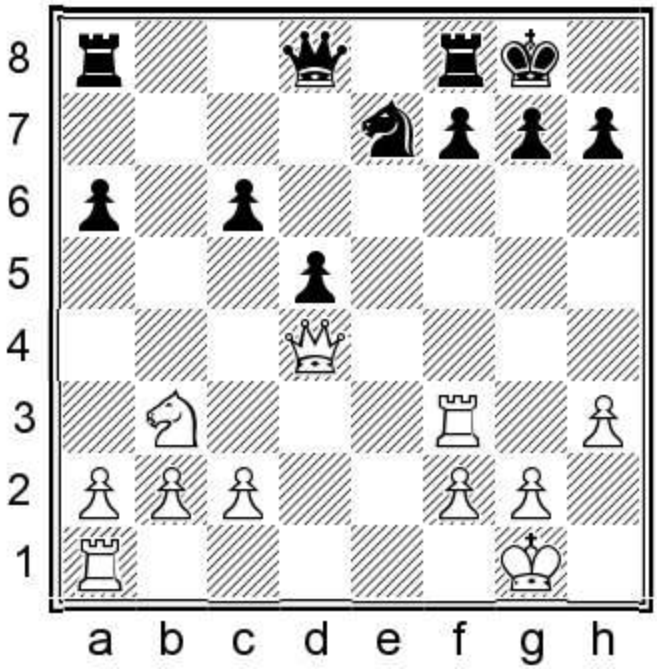
12...Bxf3 13.Qxf3² is another easy line for White.

13.Rxe3 a6
This simplifies into an unpleasant late middlegame.

More usual is 13...Bh5. For example: 14.Qd2 Bxf3 15.Rxf3 Qb6 16.a4 Rad8 17.Re1² In McShane – Korchnoi, Reykjavik 2003, Black suffered but later drew.

14.Bxc6 Bxf3 15.Rxf3 bxc6 16.Qd4!²
The switch from IQP to hanging pawns is not progress for Black, especially as White can get a grip of the dark squares. We do not need to analyse the rest of the game in depth. White can tack back and forth for hours, poking at Black's weakened structure.

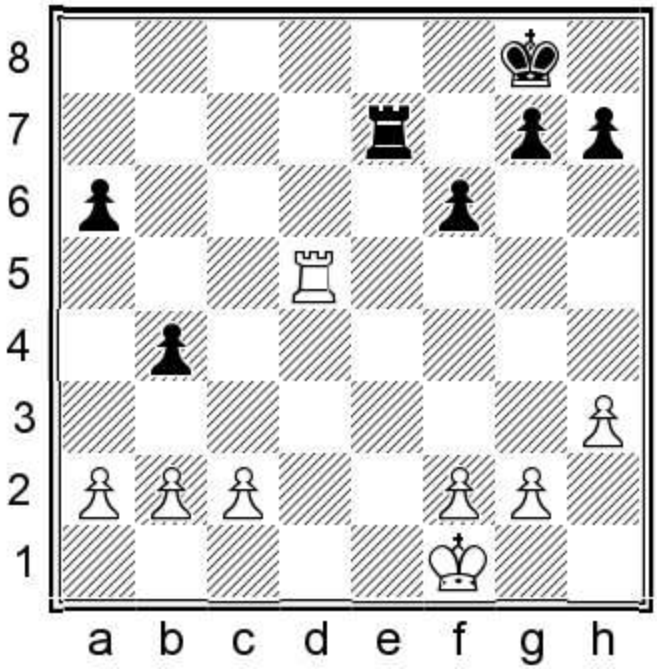
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16...Ng6 17.Re1 Qg5 18.Qe3 Qh4 19.Nd4 c5 20.Nf5 Qb4 21.Qc3 f6 22.Qxb4 cxb4 23.Rd3 Rfe8
Giving up the pawn rather than being tied down to a passive defence.

23...Rfd8 was the materialistic option, though White keeps pressing after, for example: 24.Rd4²

24.Rxe8† Rxe8 25.Rxd5 Ne7 26.Nxe7† Rxe7 27.Kf1±



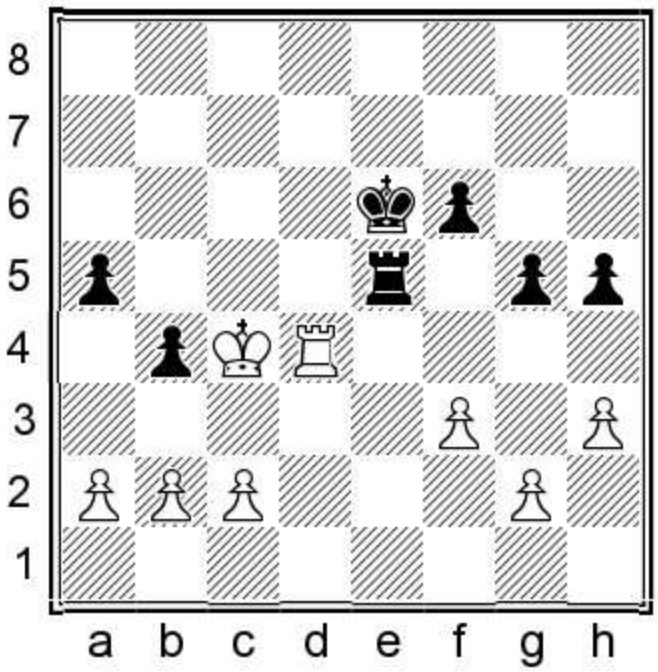
Similar endings are often seen in various 4...exd5 lines. The IQP drops off and Black clings on, hoping a rook ending will save him.

27...Rc7 28.Rd2 Rc5 29.Ke2 Kf7 30.Kd1 Ke6 31.Rd4 a5 32.Kd2 h5 33.Kd3 Rf5 34.f3 g5 35.Kc4
This works perfectly in the game, but perhaps the crude 35.c4 bxc3 36.Kxc3 was even more convincing.

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35...h4?
Killing any hope of counterplay for Black.

The only move worth trying was 35...Re5.



White can try 36.c3 or 36.Rd2, but the tempting pawn ending is not winning: 36.Re4? Rxe4† 37.fxe4 Ke5 38. Kd3 Kf4 39.c4 bxc3 40.bxc3 Kg3 41.c4 Kxg2 42.c5 g4 43.hxg4 h4 44.g5 fxg5 45.c6 h3 46.c7 h2 47.c8=Q h1=Q 48.Qg4† Kf2 49.Qf5† Kg3 50.Qxg5† Kf3 The tablebase is confident this is a draw, though over the board White would still have chances.

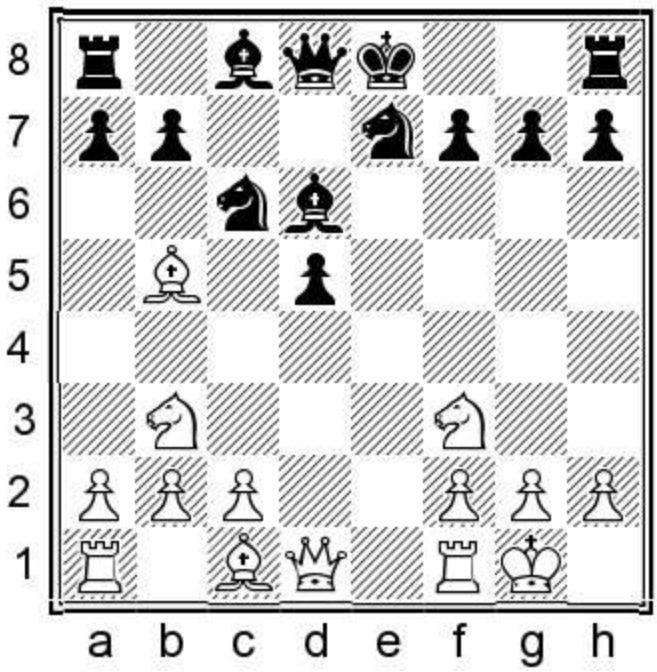
36.a3 bxa3 37.bxa3 Kf7 38.a4
Black resigned as 38...Ke6 39.c3 would place him in zugzwang. For example, 39...Ke7 40.Rd5 Rf4† 41.Kb5 and the a-pawn will decide.
1–0

GAME 25

Peter Acs – Antal Szittar
Hungary 1995

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 Nc6 6.Bb5 Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 Bd6
Unquestionably the main line of the 5...Nc6 variation.

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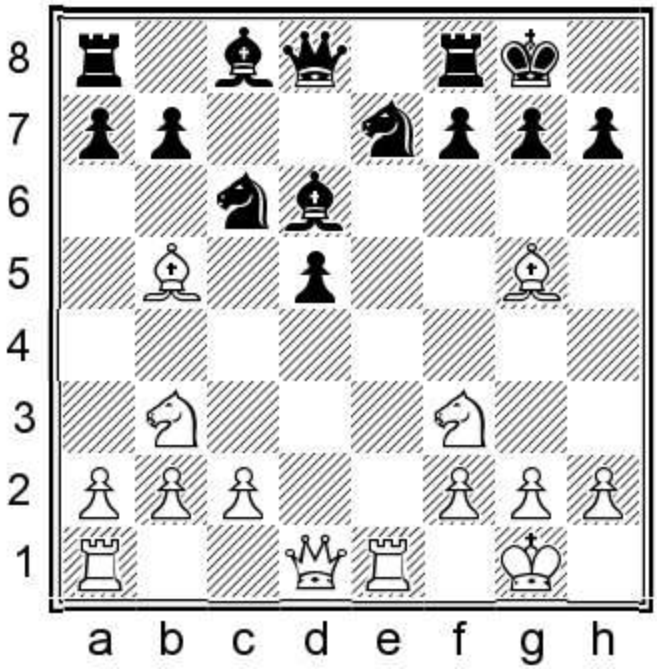
10.Re1
I like this flexible move; e1 is the right square for the rook, so we move it there at once, and delay a decision on the other pieces.

Probably the trendiest line of the moment is 10.h3 0-0 11.Bd3 but I prefer a more old-fashioned approach.

10...0-0 11.Bg5
This move was well-known in the 1970s, and was favoured by Karpov. The main idea is Bh4-g3 exchanging dark-squared bishops. So our plan is old and slow, but it is also logical and effective. We will play a controlled game, where Black must defend his IQP.

In similar style to the previous move, the trendy modern line is 11.Bd3 h6 12.h3. Then Black can choose between a lively active set-up with 12...Nf5 13.c3 Qf6 or a rock-solid dull line with 12...Bf5. The specialist in playing Black in the latter line is GM Andrey Rychagov, who has scored six draws and two wins. Rychagov was on the defensive for most of these games, but he defends very well.
By selecting 11.Bg5 I wish to deny Black the option of ambitious active play; he will be forced to try to draw a solid but slightly inferior position.

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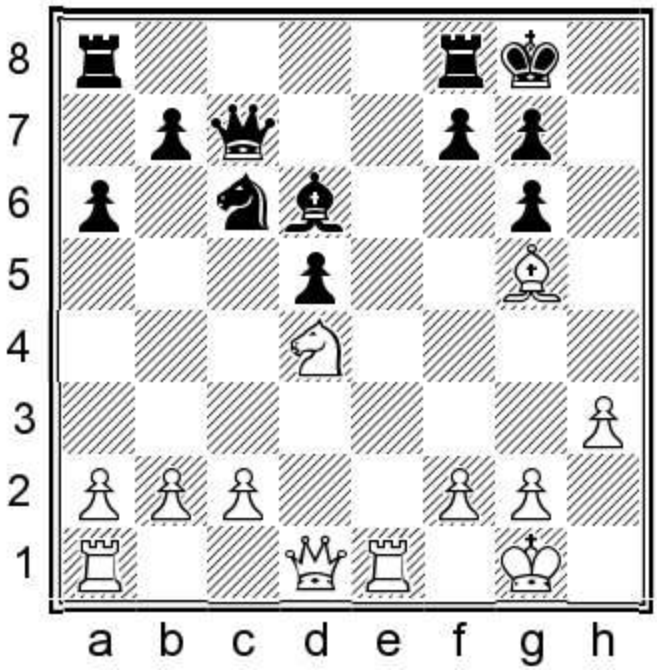


11...Qc7
The second most common move, cutting across our plan by preparing to meet Bh4 with ...Nf5.

The main line is 11...Bg4 as we shall see in the next two games.

There are a few minor lines worth mentioning:

11...a6 12.Be2 Bf5 (or 12...Qc7 13.Nbd4 Bg4 transposes to the game) 13.Nfd4 Bg6 14.Bd3 As usual, trading off a few minor pieces to leave Black bereft of counterplay and facing a long defensive task with his IQP. 14... Qc7 15.h3 Nxd4 16.Nxd4 Nc6 17.Bxg6 hxg6

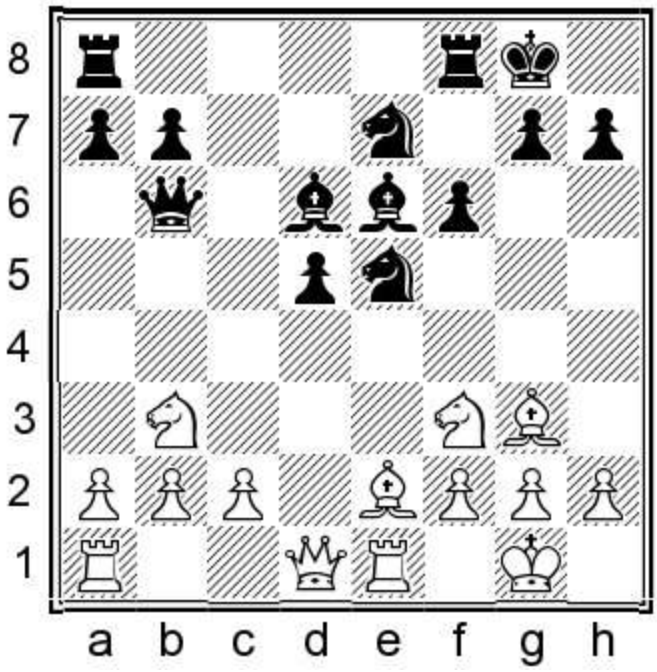


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In Anand – Yusupov, Riga 1995, White could have kept just enough tension in the position to trouble Black

with: 18.Nf3N²

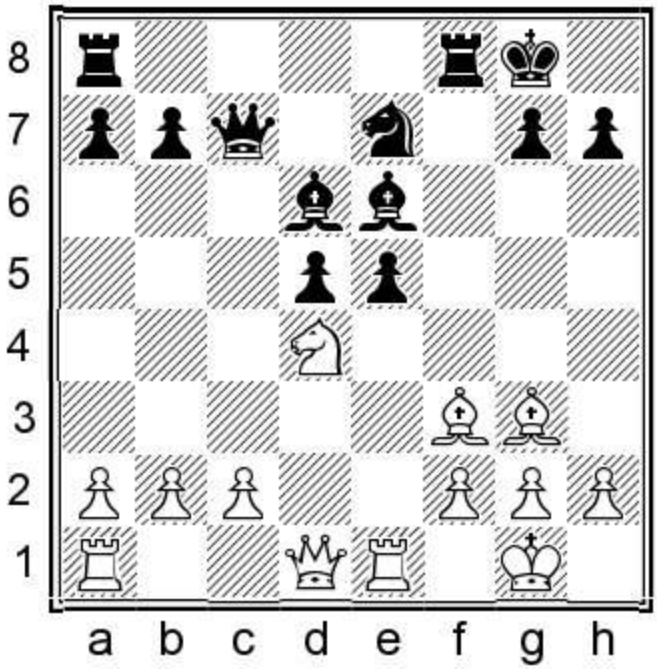
11...h6 is an odd move, as it just helps us to play our plan. For example, 12.Bh4 Bg4 13.Bg3² was Kasparov – Bareev, Cannes (rapid) 2001.

11...f6
This also seems to nudge our bishop where it was going anyway, but Black now has the option of putting up a roadblock on e5 to the bishop exchange.
12.Bh4 Qb6 13.Be2 Be6 14.Bg3 Ne5
It seems that taking on e5 would create a strong centre.

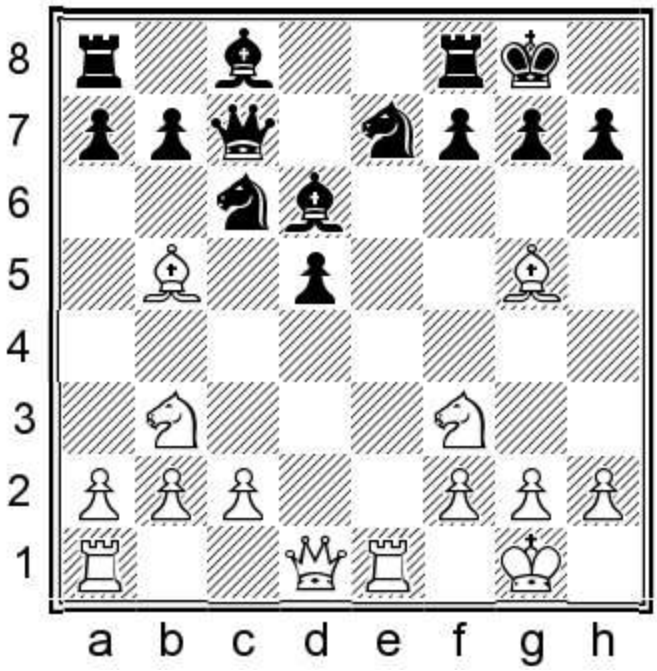


15.Nxe5!
Only two correspondence players have spotted that Black's centre can be destroyed by a tricky tactical line.
15.Nfd4 has been played in almost every game, including Gipslis – Korchnoi, Amsterdam 1976.
15...fxe5
I have no doubt this pawn recapture is the reason most White players avoided 15.Nxe5.
Black should prefer 15...Bxe5 though White has an easy standard edge after: 16.Bf3²
16.Bf3! Qc7
The best I can find for Black is: 16...Rad8N 17.Bxe5 Bxe5 18.Rxe5 Ng6 19.Rg5!² Black does not have enough compensation for the missing pawn. White's last move is important, because otherwise ...Nh4 might be annoying. Whereas, now after 19...Nh4?! 20.Qd4! Nxf3† 21.gxf3 Qc7 22.Re1± White is so active that the doubled f-pawns are not a problem.
17.Nd4!

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17...Bd7
Instead 17...exd4? 18.Rxe6 is disastrous. For example: 18...Bxg3 19.hxg3 Qc5 20.b4! Qxb4 21.Rb1 Qc5 22. Qe2 Nc6 23.Rxb7 1–0 Zanetti – Pezzaldi, corr. 1983.
18.Bxd5†
Another clever shot, but there is a calm alternative in 18.Bg4!? with continuing pressure.
18...Kh8
Or 18...Nxd5 19.Nb5 should eventually leave White a pawn up. For example: 19...Qc6 20.Nxd6 Nf4 (or 20... Qxd6 21.c4±) 21.Bxf4 Rxf4 22.Rxe5 Raf8 23.Qd5† Qxd5 24.Rxd5 Rxf2 25.Ne4!±
19.Ne6 Bxe6 20.Bxe6 Rf6
Now in Buse – Kaiser, corr. 1986, the database suggests White resigned, which had nothing to do with the position, as after 21.Bg4+– White is cruising to victory.



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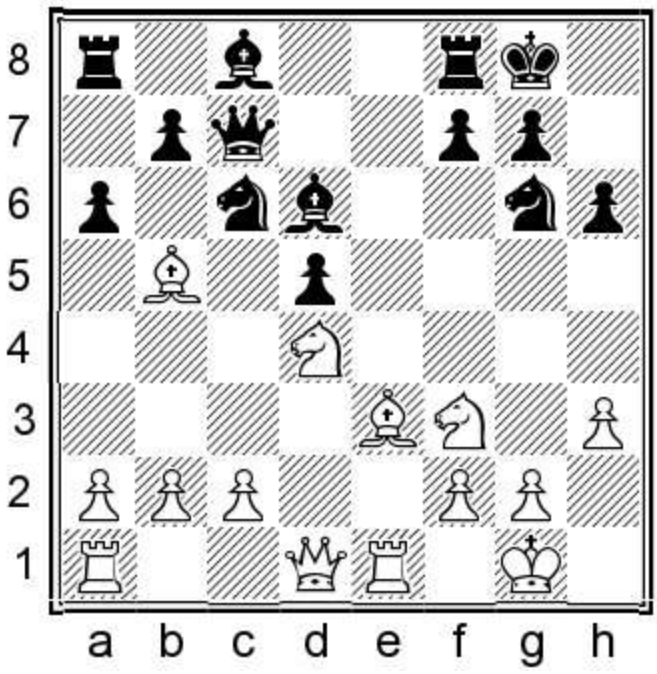
12.Nbd4!?
I mentioned in the 6...cxd4 line (see pages 193/4) that Nbd4 was not our strongest option on move 10, but the situation has changed to make it more favourable now. Firstly, we are renewing the idea of Bh4-g3, now that the ...Nf5 resource is covered. Secondly, with the queen now on c7, it is likely that Black will have to spend a move on ...a7-a6 after we relocate our b5-bishop, as Nb5 will be threatened.

The line that shows Black's idea is 12.Bh4 Nf5 13.Bg3 Nxg3 14.hxg3. Several strong grandmasters have chosen this line as White, but I believe Black's dark-squared bishop offers enough compensation for his weak d-pawn, especially when aided by ...Qb6. We can do better.

12.c3 is by far the most common move, but I believe the line I recommend will be easier to play with White.

12...Bg4
The most common move and the most natural. Please note that Black is threatening ...Bxh2†; I mention this obvious point only because I once allowed exactly that shot in a similar position.

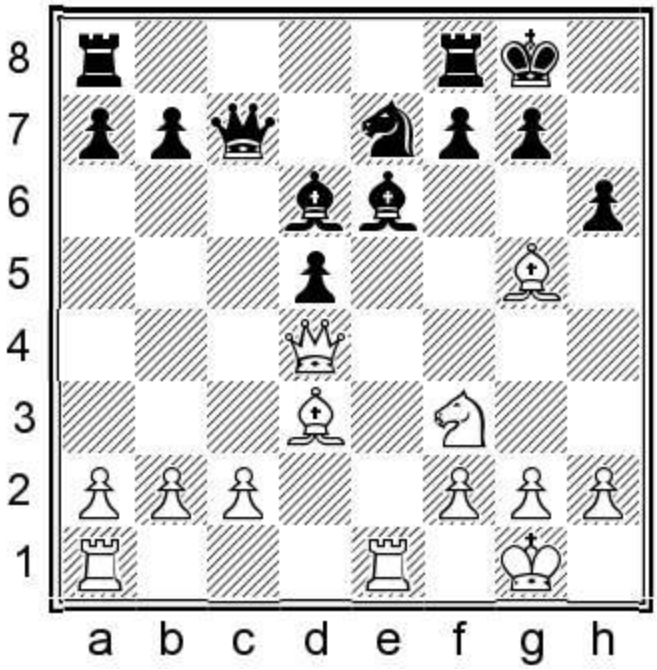
12...Ng6 Our plan of Bh4-g3 is prevented, but we have other ways to play. For example: 13.h3 h6 14.Be3 a6



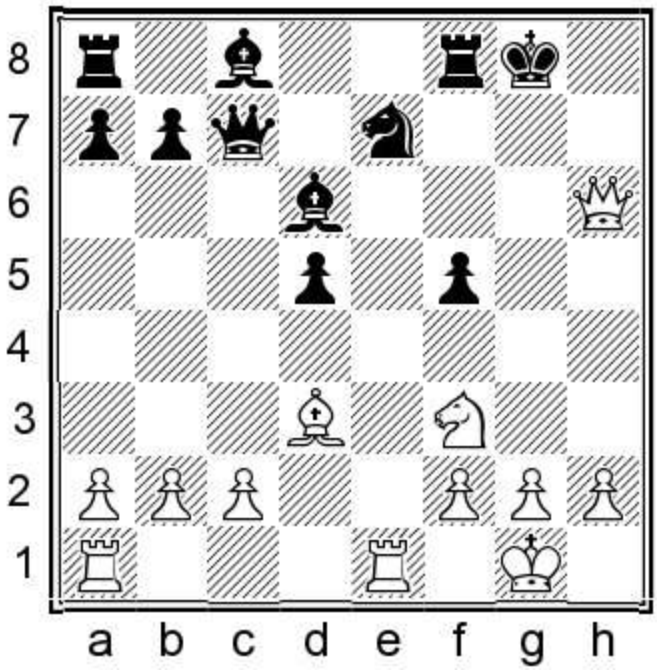
Now instead of 15.Ba4 as in Holmsten – Seppanen, Jyvaskyla 1999, I would prefer a more flexible retreat: 15. Bf1!?N Then typical play would be: 15...Re8 16.c3 Bd7 17.Qb3 Nxd4 18.Nxd4 Rad8 19.Rad1[2]

12...Nxd4 13.Qxd4
Let's not drop h2 with check.
13...Be6 14.Bd3 h6
A little too brave.
14...Rfe8 was safer, with an edge to White.

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15.Bxh6!?
Lively and strong, but not quite winning by force.
The dull option was 15.Bd2 with a normal edge.
15...gxh6 16.Qf6 Bc8?
The only way to keep Black's disadvantage manageable was 16...Qb6 or so the engine says. For example 17. Qxh6 Bf5 18.Qg5† Bg6 19.Rxe7 Bxe7 20.Qxe7 Qxb2 21.Rf1 and Black might escape with a draw.
17.Qxh6 f5
In Sigurjonsson – Uhlmann, Raach 1969, White was winning, but Black later escaped with the full point. It's the type of position where the gulf between human and computer analysis is at its greatest.

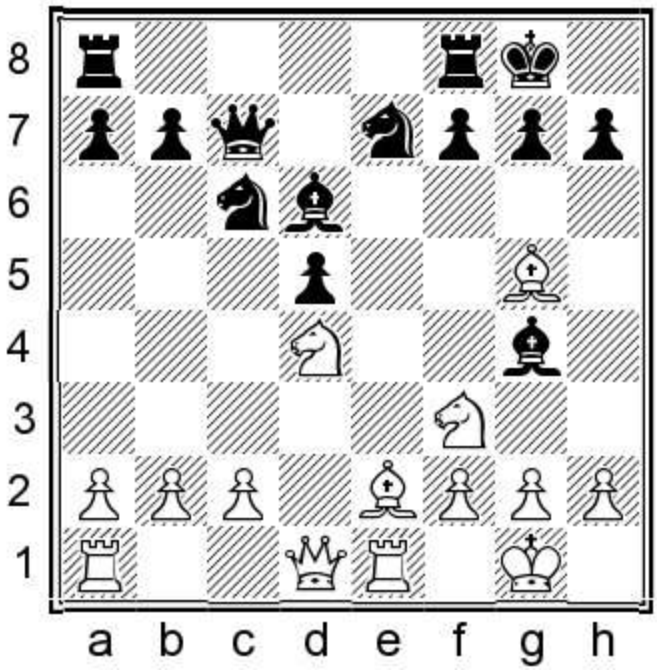


18.Qg5†!N
Or 18.Re3 is also good.

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18...Kf7 19.Qh5†
Black has various options, but all of them lose. One fun line is:
19...Kf6 20.g4! Rg8 21.g5†
The machine also loves 21.Kh1 but that's too weird for me.
21...Kg7 22.Qh6† Kf7 23.Qf6† Ke8 24.Re2+–
Black is tied in knots, with the pressure overwhelming. For example 24...Kd8 25.Rae1 and Black can barely move, while White decides to crash through with Nd4 or Ne5 or Qf7. If you wished to make it last, you could probably queen the h-pawn.

13.Be2

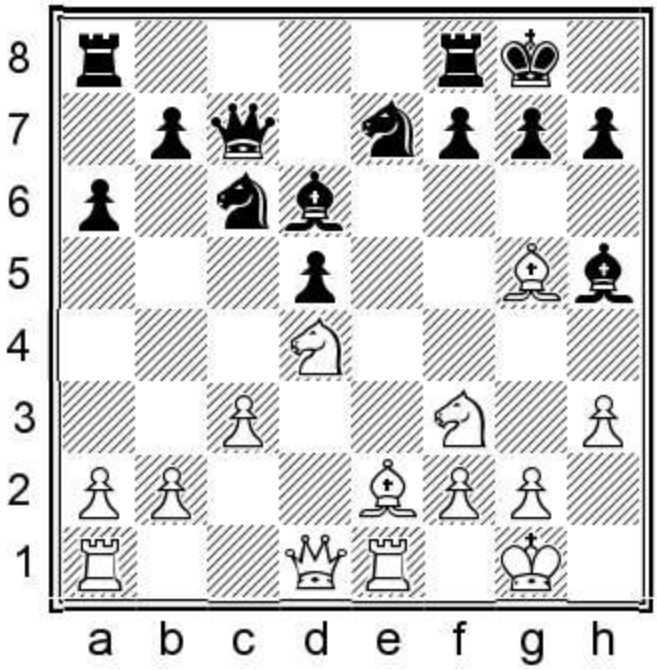


13...a6
There's that tempo I mentioned.

14.h3
A change of plan, as 14.Bh4 Ng6 15.Bg3 Nf4 prevents the desired exchange of dark-squared bishops. As in the line mentioned at move 12, exchanging our dark-squared bishop for a knight is not great progress in my opinion.

14...Bh5 15.c3²
Any number of moves are possible, so we are out of the opening and into the middlegame; I slightly prefer White for the usual pawn structure reasons.

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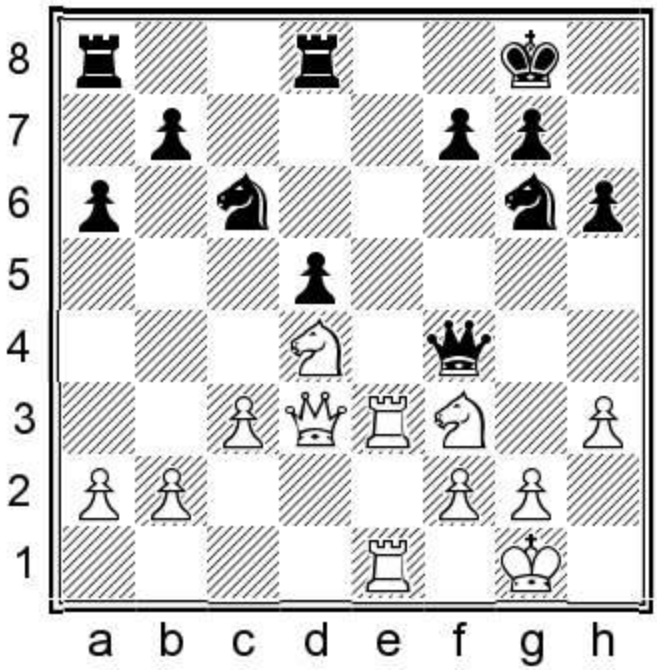


15...h6 16.Be3 Rfd8 17.Qd2 Bg6 18.Bd3
As ever, White takes the sting out of the position so the weak IQP becomes the dominant theme.

18...Bxd3 19.Qxd3 Bf4
This looks rather helpful for White, but it was tough to find an active plan.

20.Rad1 Bxe3 21.Rxe3 Qf4 22.Rde1 Ng6?!
Dropping a pawn to a standard tactical shot.

22...Qf6² would have continued the dour defence.



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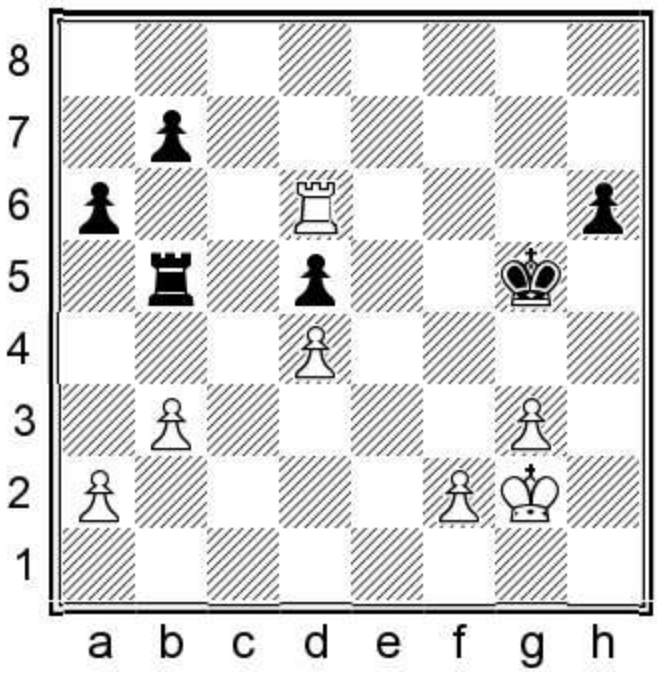
23.Ne6!

During my research I saw several games where similar shots landed after Black had played ...h7-h6.

23...fxe6 24.Qxg6 Qf5 25.Qxe6† Qxe6 26.Rxe6±
Acs converts his extra pawn impressively, but we do not need to analyse the rest in depth.

26...Rd7
On principle, Black's best chance should be 26...d4 27.Nxd4 Nxd4 28.cxd4 Rxd4, but White would still be optimistic.

27.h4 Rad8 28.Nd4 Nxd4 29.cxd4 Kf7 30.h5 Rc8 31.R6e5 Rc6 32.b3 Rf6 33.g3 g6 34.hxg6† Kxg6 35.Re7 Rxe7 36.Rxe7 Rb6 37.Rd7 Rb5 38.Rd6† Kg5 39.Kg2+–
White has made remarkable progress, with the black rook stuck passively far from our candidate queen.



39...h5 40.f4† Kg4 41.Kf2 a5 42.Ke3 a4
Or 42...Kxg3 43.Rg6† and the f-pawn races away.

43.bxa4 Ra5 44.Rg6† Kf5 45.Rg5† Ke6 46.Re5† Kd6 47.Rxh5 Rxa4 48.Rh6† Kd7 49.f5 Rxa2 50.Rh7† Kc6 51.f6 b5 52.f7 Ra8 53.Rg7 Rf8 54.g4
1–0

GAME 26

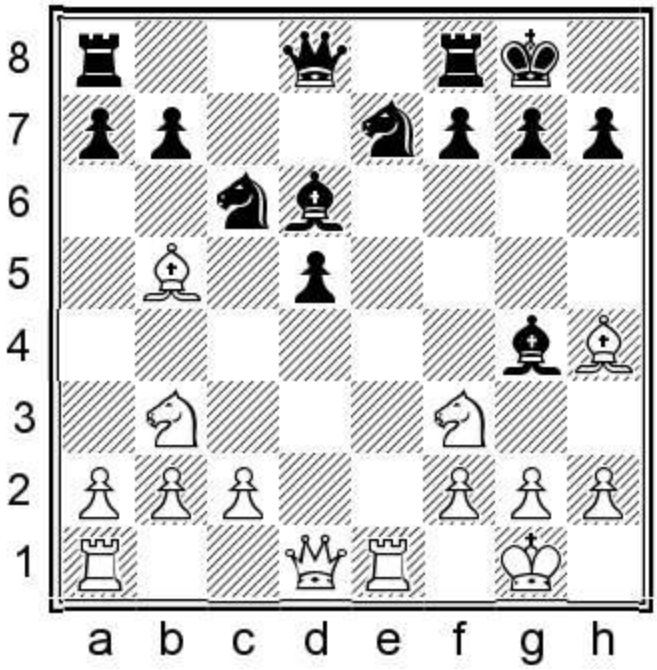
Alexandr Voyna – Carlos Leon Cranbourne
Correspondence 1994

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 Nc6 6.Bb5 Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 Bd6 10.Re1 0-0 11.Bg5 Bg4
The main line, though we shall see that this pin is not troubling for White.

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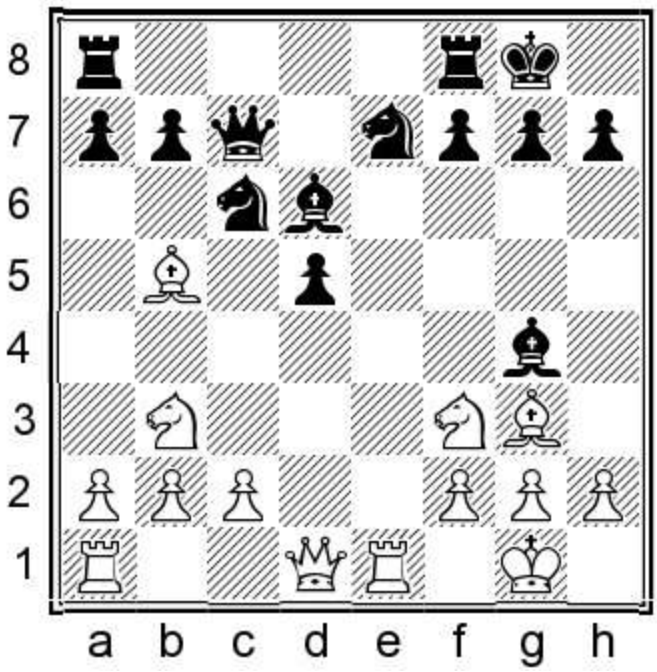
12.Bh4

On with our plan.



12...Qc7
Clearing d8 for a rook is quite natural, and this is the second most common move.
12...Re8 is the most common move, and we shall see it in the next game.

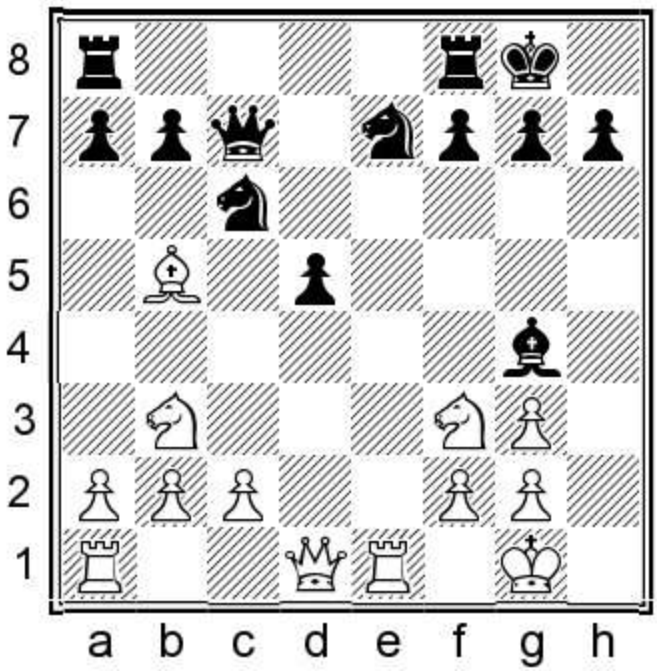
13.Bg3
Mission accomplished.



13...Rad8
Keeping the tension is the most combative.

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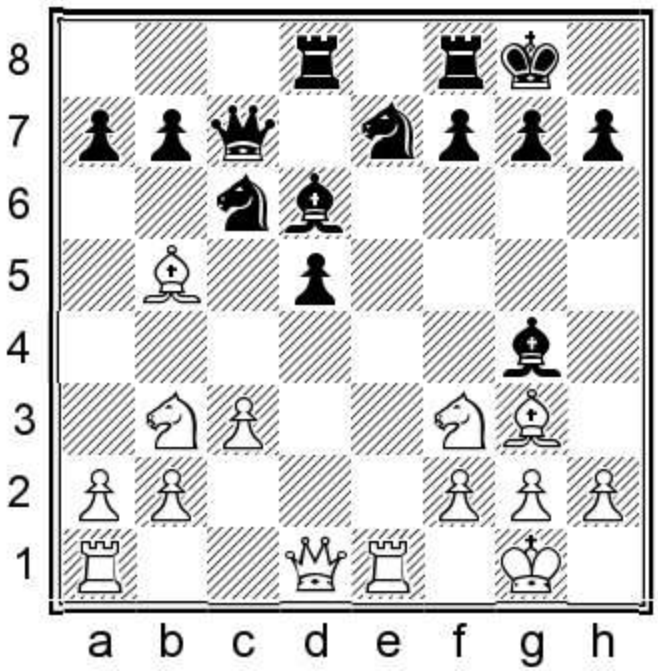
13...Bxg3 14.hxg3
The exchange on g3 helps White, as now the queen can simply step out of the pin without fearing ...Bxf3, as gxf3 leaves White with a strong and compact kingside structure. We shall briefly follow two examples:



14...Rfd8
Or 14...Rad8 15.Qd2 Bxf3 16.gxf3² was pleasant for White in P.H. Nielsen – Playa, Buenos Aires 1992.
15.c3
White has many options on most moves.
For example, 15.Qd2!? was also fine.
15...Rd6 16.Be2 a6 17.Nfd4
A common manoeuvre to reduce Black's activity to zero.
17...Bxe2 18.Rxe2²
Degraeve – Duffau, St Chely d'Aubrac 2009.

14.c3
This correspondence game follows an old Korchnoi game for many moves. This is a good test for our system as Black tries to play as aggressively as possible on every move, striving to avoid being forced to defend an inferior ending.

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14...Ng6 15.Bxd6 Rxd6 16.h3 Bc8 17.Qd2 Rf6 18.Nbd4 Nf4
There is no denying Black is playing energetically, but White has it all under control.

19.Bf1!
There will be no sacs on h3.

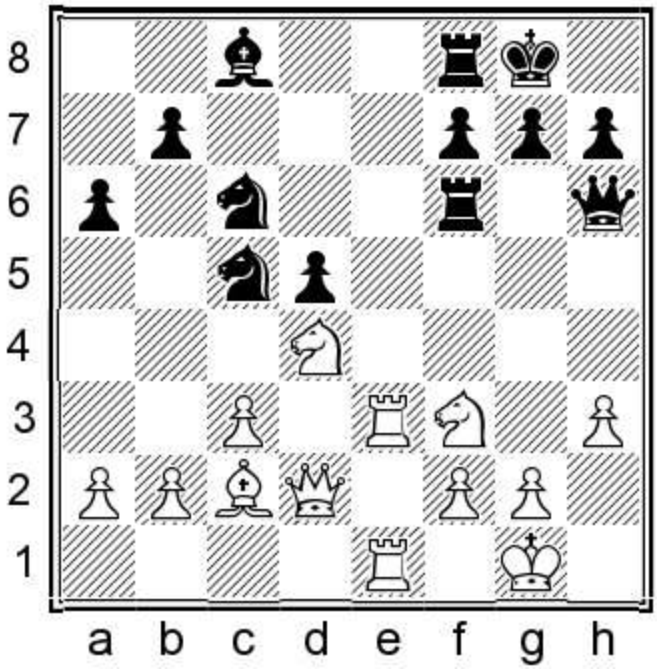
19...a6 20.Re3 Ne6 21.Rae1
An excellent set-up for White's rooks once there is no dark-squared bishop to land on f4.

21...Nc5
Probably Black's best drawing chance was 21...Nexd4 22.Nxd4 Nxd4 23.Qxd4² but it would lead to the sort of grim defensive task Black has been fighting all game to avoid.

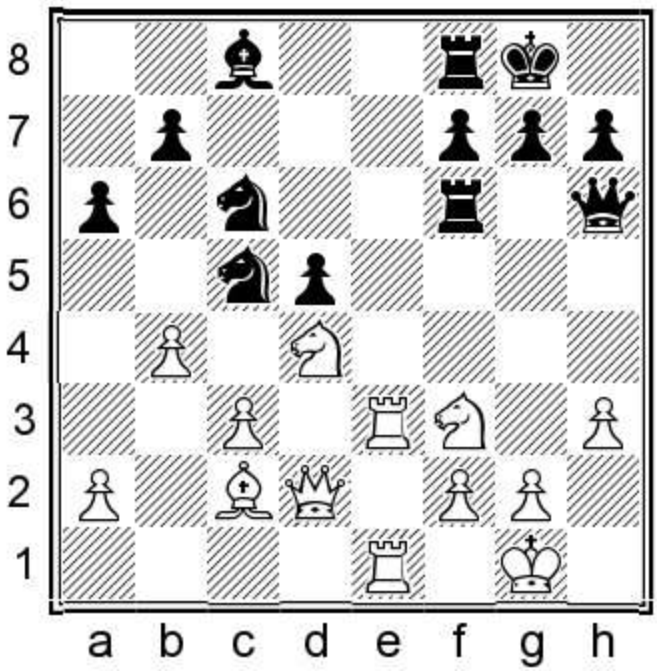
22.Bd3!
And there will be no knight invasions on e4 either.

22...Qf4 23.Bc2 Qh6
Black is trying hard to create some drama on the kingside, but White's well-coordinated forces have it all covered.

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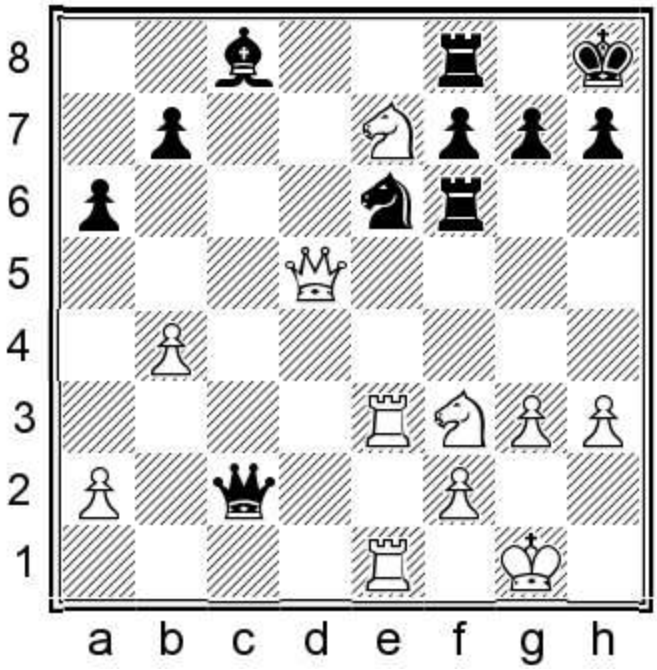


24.h4!
This move works well, but it’s too sophisticated for my tastes.
24.b4!
This is crude but effective, as the knight has no good squares. Objectively, 24.b4 is not stronger than 24.h4, but I prefer it as it limits Black’s options.

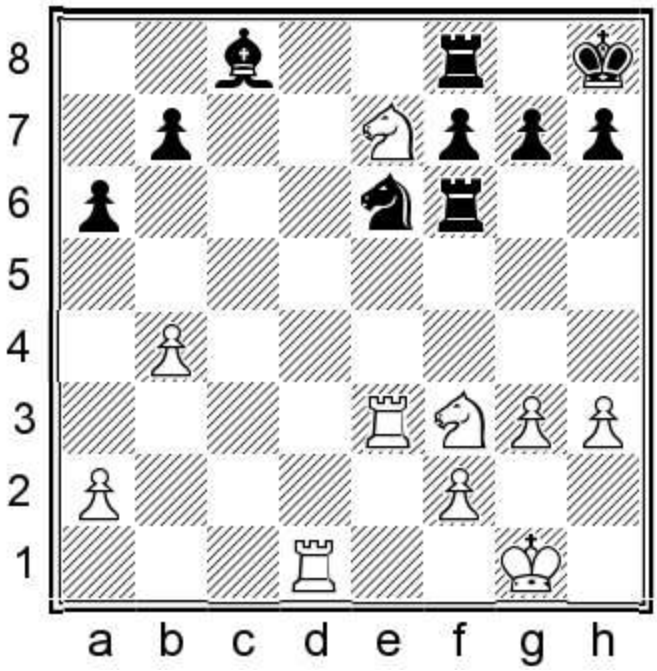


24...Ne6
Or 24...Ne4 25.Bxe4 dxe4 26.Rxe4± is just a pawn up.
24...Nd7?! is an even worse version of the main line after 25.Nf5 Qf4 26.g3+– with Qxd5 or Re8 to follow.
25.Nf5! Qf4 26.g3 Qc7 27.Qxd5±
White has won a good pawn. The following line wins it back, but at too great a cost.
27...Nxb4? 28.cxb4 Qxc2 29.Ne7†! Kh8

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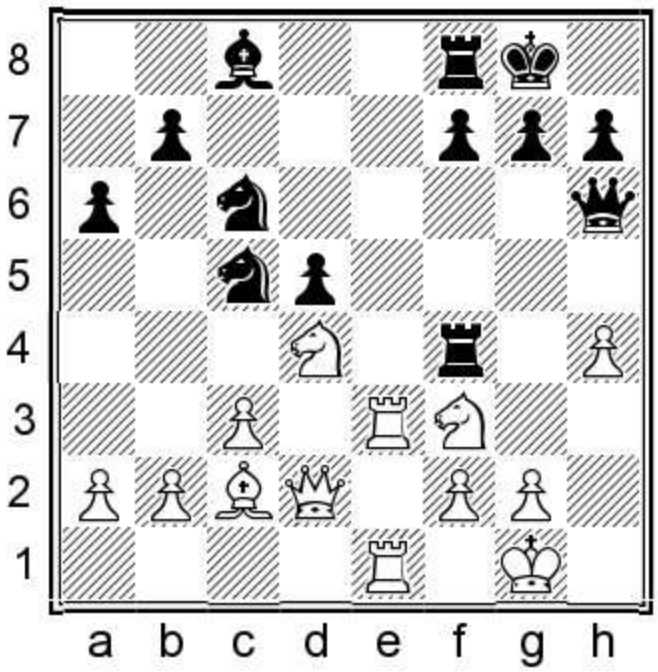
30.Qd1!
Eliminating Black's only active piece.
Note that 30.Qd3 Qxd3 31.Rxd3 is also good, but allows the added option of 31...Bd7 32.Rxd7 Rxf3 when Black is much worse but not lost as in the main line.
30...Qxd1
Black has no good alternative, as 30...Qxa2? 31.R1e2 Qc4 32.Rc2+– wins a piece.
31.Rxd1+–



Despite the level material, White's dominance gives him a winning ending. The immediate threat is Rc3, collecting the bishop, but a slow build-up with h3-h4 and Ne5 is also crushing. For example:
31...b5 32.h4 Bb7 33.Ne5 g6 34.Rd7 Ba8 35.Ra7
And Black's position collapses.

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24...Rf4



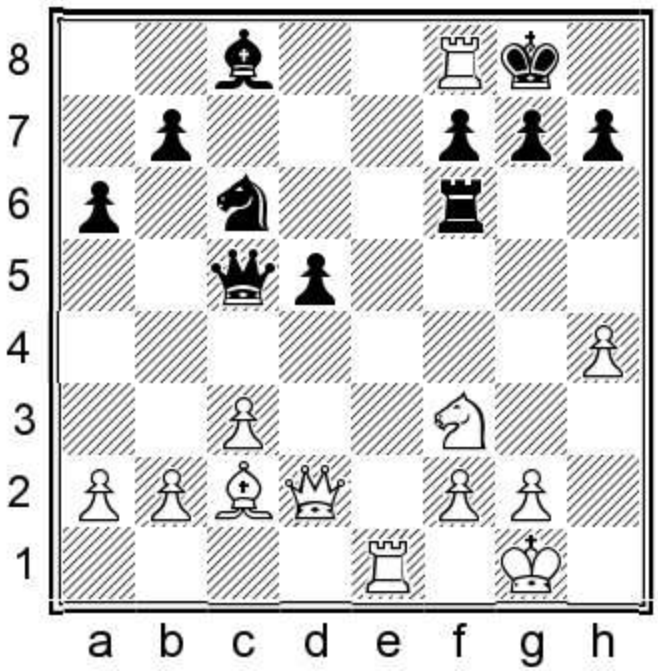
25.Nb3!±
Finally varying, with great effect, from the Korchnoi game.

The tempting 25.Re8?! allowed the maestro to escape with: 25...Rxh4! The game quickly ended in a draw after: 26.Qxh6 Rxh6 27.Ng5 Ne4 28.Nxe4 dxe4 29.R1xe4 Nxd4 30.Rxf8† Kxf8 31.Rxd4 ½–½ Rechlis – Korchnoi, Beersheba 1987.

25...Qd6
What else? The knight and d5-pawn were both under attack.

26.Nxc5 Qxc5 27.Re8! Rf6 28.Rxf8†

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28...Kxf8?
Now the game is immediately over.

Black needed to play 28...Qxf8 though after 29.Qxd5± White is simply a pawn up.

29.Ng5!+– Bf5 30.g4!
There is no sensible way to prevent Nxh7†.
1–0

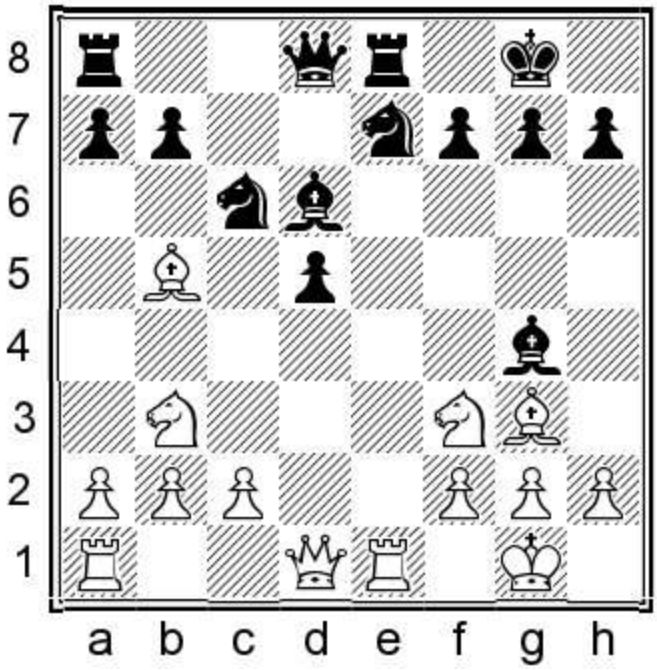
GAME 27

Sergey Fedorchuk – Rainer Buhmann
Oropesa del Mar 1999

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 Nc6 6.Bb5 Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 Bd6 10.Re1 0-0 11.Bg5 Bg4 12.Bh4 Re8
Finally, we have reached the main line of the main line of the 5...Nc6 complex.

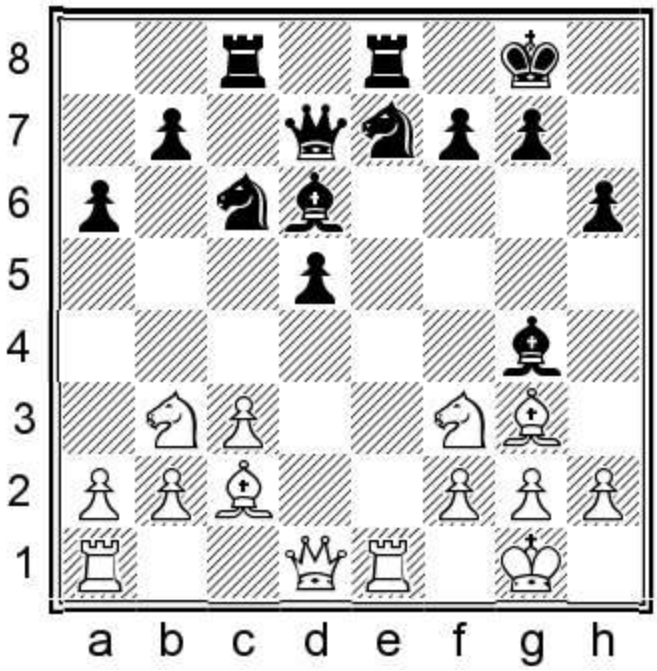
13.Bg3

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13...Bxg3
This is the usual move, freeing the black queen to take up an active post on b6, but there is an alternative.

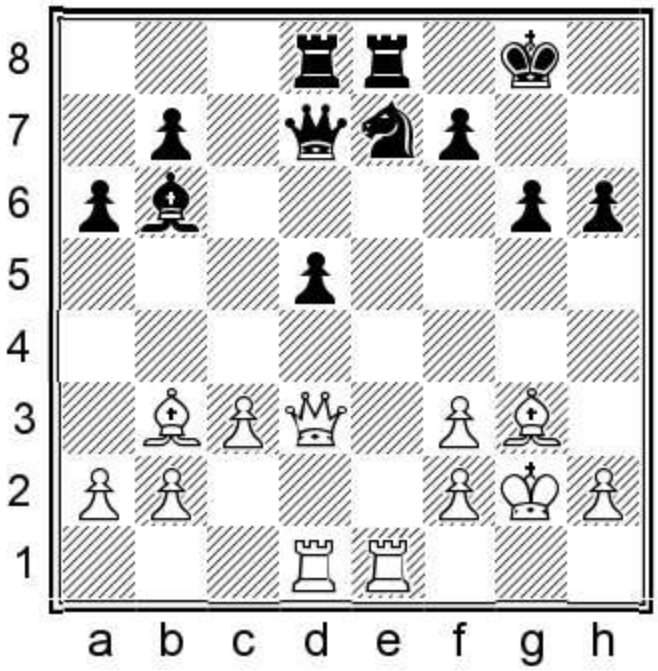
13...a6 14.Bd3
Threatening Bxh7† followed by Ng5†, which explains Black's next move.
14...h6 15.c3 Qd7 16.Bc2!
An excellent positional move. White enhances his grip on d4, while preparing a later Bb3, targeting the weak pawn.
16...Rac8



17.Nbd4!?
A fascinating plan, as White voluntarily accepts doubled isolated f-pawns.

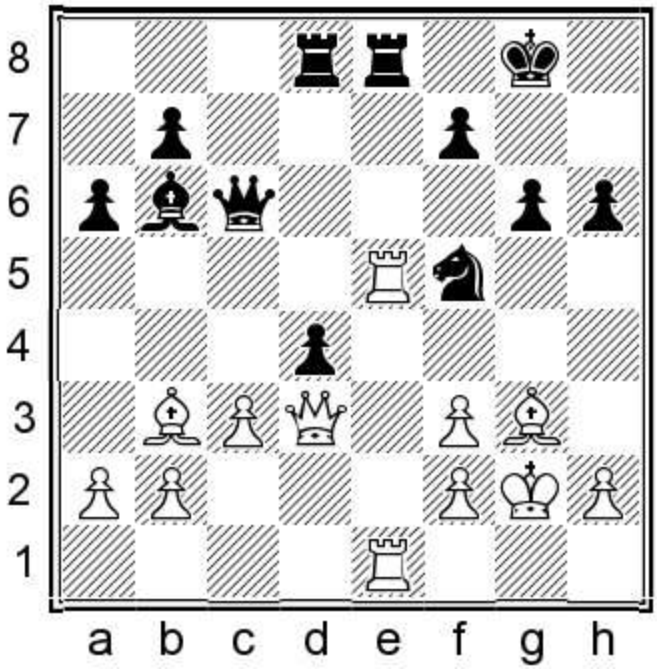
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More usual play would be 17.Qd3 Bf5 18.Qd2 Bxc2 19.Qxc2² as in Emms – Schaller, Germany 2001.
17...Nxd4 18.Qxd4 Bxf3 19.gxf3
We know from the notes to the previous game that if Black takes on g3 then our kingside structure is lovely. But if Black avoids that exchange, isn't our structure a problem? Apparently not.
19...Bc5 20.Qd3
White could have tried to cure his structure with 20.Qg4 but clearly he was not worried about it.
20...g6 21.Bb3 Rcd8 22.Rad1 Bb6 23.Kg2²



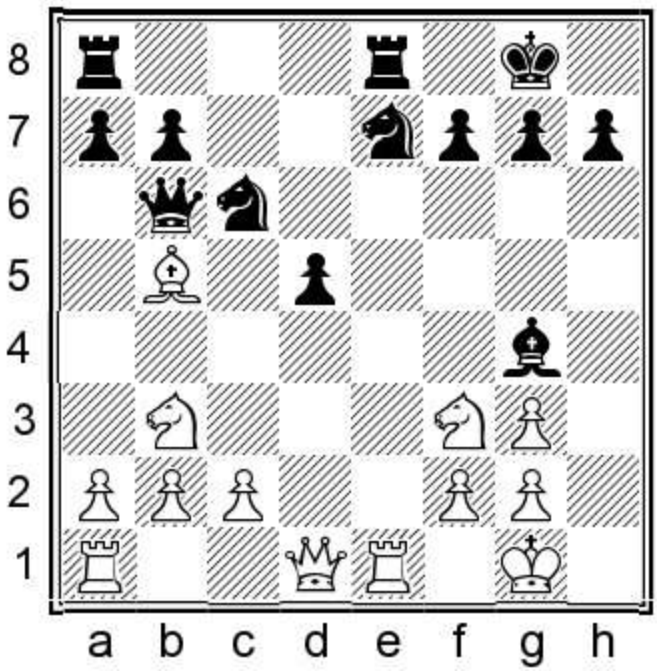
It's d5 that is the weakness, not White's kingside. Any knight move drops the pawn, so Black's pieces are clumsily stuck together. We might as well see the end of this game, as it's not far away.
23...Qc6 24.Re5 d4?! 25.Rde1!
The piece pressure is too hot to handle.
25...Nf5?
Black's best option was 25...dxc3 but even that loses material by force: 26.Qxc3 Qxc3 27.bxc3 Kf8 28.Ba4 Bc7 29.R5e4 Bxg3 30.Bxe8 Bd6 31.Ba4±

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26.Rxf5! gxf5 27.Qxf5
In L. Vajda – Blauert, Budapest 2002, Black resigned, knowing that his opponent had prepared 27...Rxe1 28. Qxf7† Kh8 29.Bh4! and Bf6† next.

14.hxg3 Qb6



15.a4
It is logical to wait for ...a7-a6 before retreating.

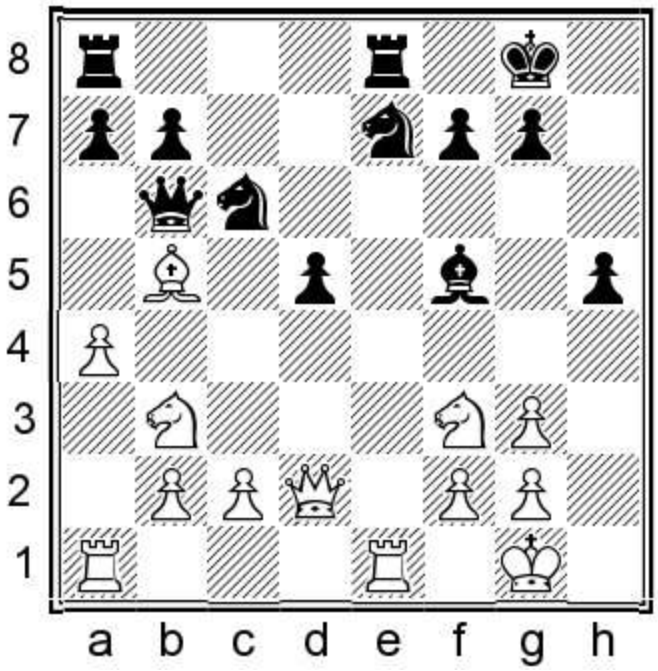
15.Bd3 would normally threaten Bxh7† in such positions, but it is long-established that in this particular position it is not so clear. 15...a5!? 16.Bxh7† Kf8! 17.Bd3 a4 18.Nbd2 Nf5 In the well-known game A. Sokolov – Vaganian, Minsk (6) 1986, Black had enough play for the pawn.

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Even in such a well-explored position, there is still fresh ground available. 15.Bf1!?N is logical, planning to unpin with Qd2, while 15...a5 16.a4 also does not trouble us.

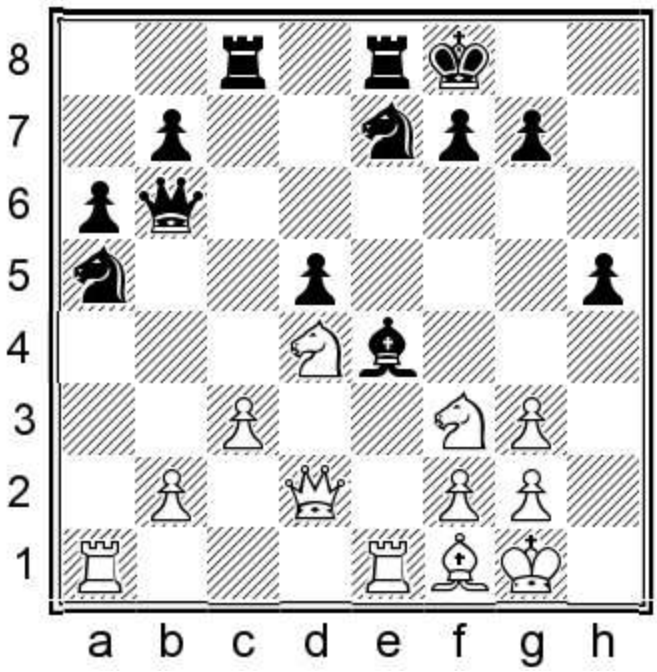
15...h6
Black has many possible moves.

15...h5 16.Qd3 Bf5 17.Qd2

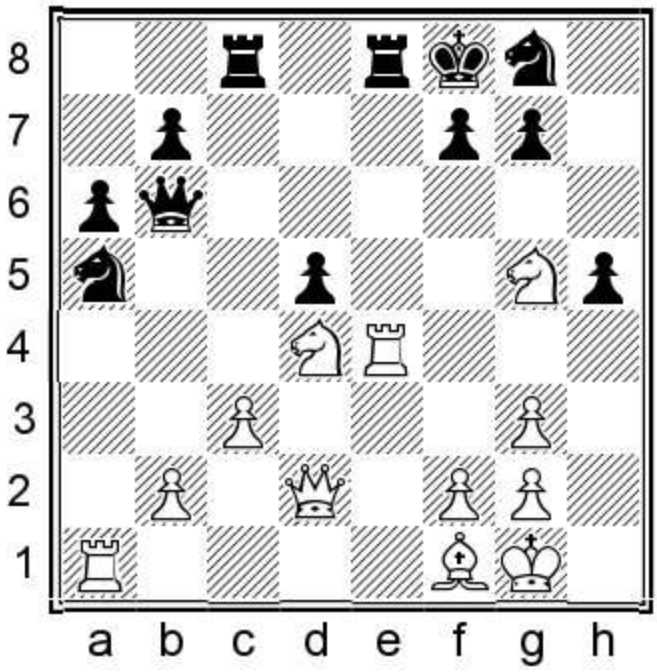


17...a6
After 17...Be4 18.Nfd4 Nxd4 19.Qxd4 Nc6 20.Qxb6 axb6 21.Re2² in Ivanchuk – Vaganian, Novgorod 1995, White ground out a long endgame win.
18.Bf1!?
Retreating to d3 has been tested, but it is illogical when instead White has a tempo move with Nd4 on the way.
18...Rac8 19.Nbd4 Be4 20.c3 Kf8 21.a5!?
Quiet moves were worth an edge, but this lively sac is sound.
21.b4!?N is a good alternative, with less forcing play.
21...Nxa5

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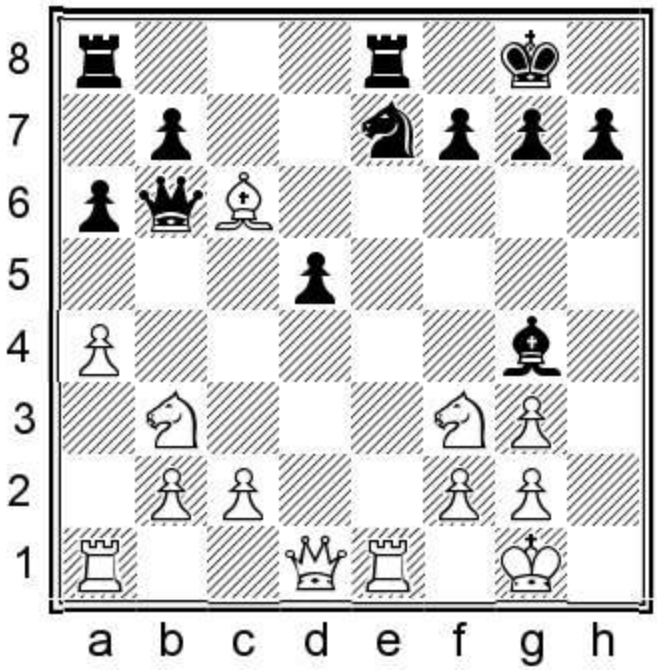


22.Ng5!N
Threatening Qf4.
Instead 22.Ne5 worked well in Anagnostopoulos – Lputian, Linares 1996, after 22...Kg8?! 23.Qf4 but the later game Herize – Perdomo Araujo, Valera 2012, showed a better defence in 22...Qc7! with the point that 23.Qf4?! would be well met by 23...Nec6.
22...Ng8!
Not an obvious move, but the engine gives it as the best defence.
Unlike the other line, 22...Qc7?? is impossible due to 23.Nde6†.
Instead 22...Bg6?! allows White to show some of his attacking ideas: 23.Qf4 Kg8 24.Bd3! Qf6 25.Rxe7! Rxe7 26.Bxg6 Qxf4 27.gxf4 Nc6 28.Nxc6 Rxc6 29.Bxh5±
23.Rxe4!



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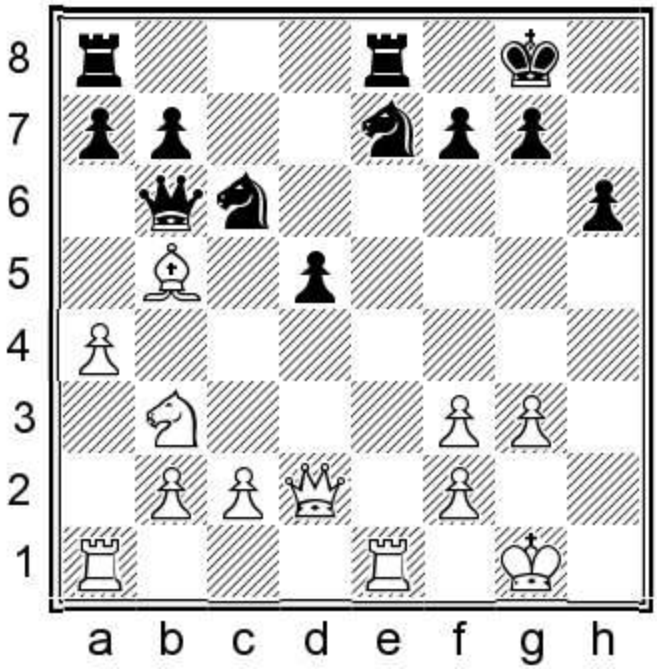
23...Rxe4
Black must offer to return the exchange at once.
Instead 23...dxe4?? 24.Nh7† Ke7 25.Nf5† Ke6 26.Nxg7† Ke7 loses to everything, including 27.Qg5† f6 28. Qd5 with Nf5 mate one of many threats.
24.Nh7†!?
24.Nf5!?² is also good. The main point is that there is no need to rush to take the material.
24...Ke8 25.Qg5²
White retains slightly better chances.
Another interesting line is:
15...a6 16.Bxc6!?
The bishop could easily retreat to d3, e2 or f1, but taking on c6 is tempting because the pawn recapture (‘strengthening the centre’) is positionally disastrous.



16...Bxf3
Black can make various captures, but White is better everywhere.
16...bxc6? 17.Qd4! shows one of the benefits of provoking ...a7-a6: the loose queen and bishop force Black to exchange. 17...Qxd4 18.Nfxd4± The b3-knight will soon land on c5, with a dominating position.
16...Qxc6 17.Qd2² is also pleasant for White.
17.gxf3 Qxc6 18.Nd4 Qb6 19.Qd2²
With a typical slight edge.

16.Qd2 Bxf3 17.gxf3

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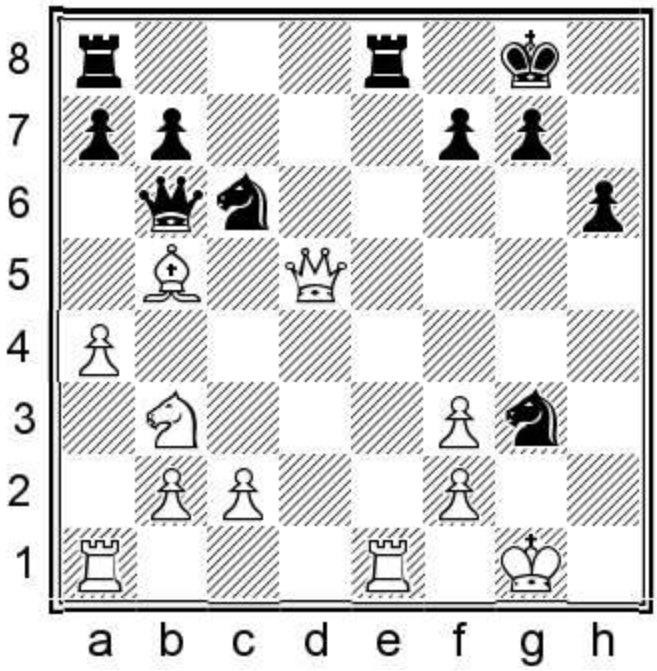


17...a6
Once again, Black has many options.

17...Red8 18.Bd3 Qc7 19.Kg2 Qd6 20.Re2 Kf8 21.Rae1² Emms – L.B. Hansen, Esbjerg 2000.

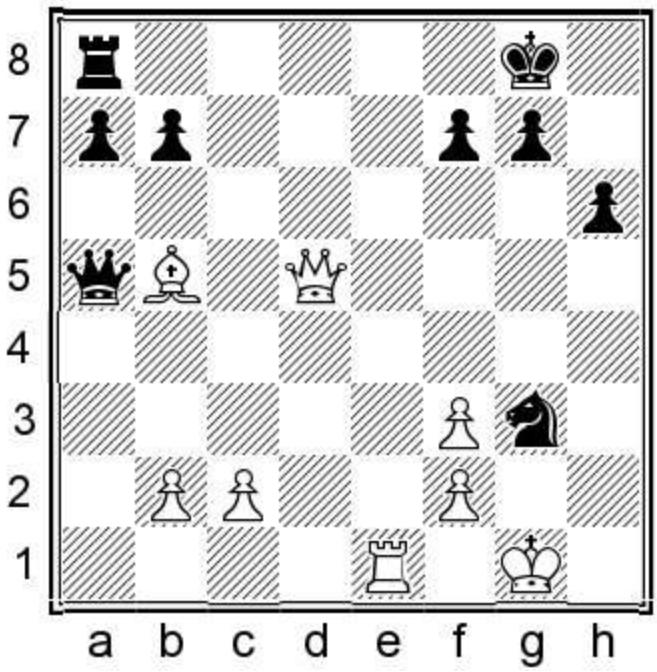
17...Rad8 18.f4 (18.Kg2!? was also possible, as in the Emms game) 18...a6 19.Bf1 Rd6 In Ivanchuk – Yusupov, Brussels (1) 1991, White had many pleasant options, but I particularly like 20.Re2!?² planning to double rooks and with Bg2 to come.

No one has been silly enough to try:
17...Nf5? 18.Qxd5! Nxg3?!



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As it fails in a couple of ways:
19.a5!+–
19.Kg2± is also good.
19...Rxe1† 20.Rxe1 Nxa5 21.Nxa5 Qxa5



22.Rd1!
22.Re7! also works, but that involves our king taking a walk to f4, so let's keep it calm.
22...Nh5!?
Or 22...a6 23.Bc4 Qxd5 24.Rxd5 Rc8 25.Bd3 and the knight is trapped.
23.b4! Qxb4 24.Qxh5
White wins with his extra piece.

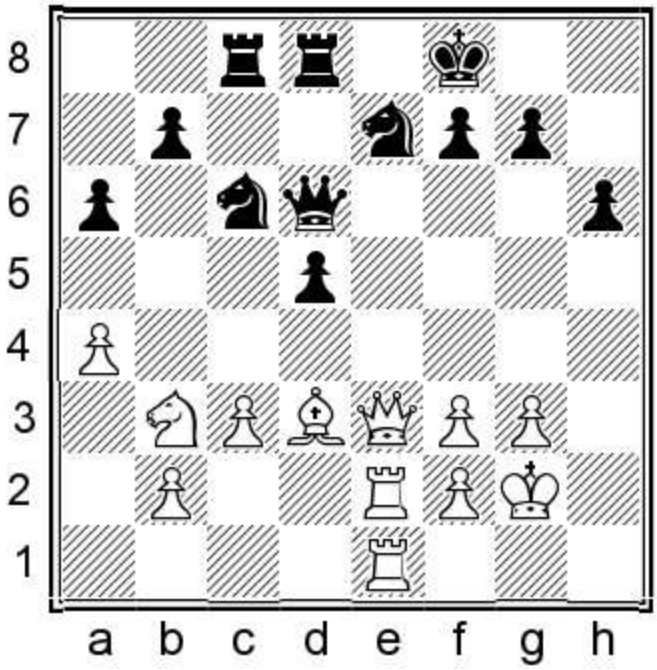
18.Bd3
White could just as well take on c6 or retreat to f1, with an edge in all cases.

18...Rac8 19.Re2 Qb4 20.Qe3
White is ambitious and wants a quick win, but objectively White should accept a small endgame edge with a move such as: 20.f4!?²

20...Kf8
A natural move, but Black could also have tried: 20...Ng6!? 21.Qxe8† Rxe8 22.Rxe8† Nf8÷ It looks awkward now for Black, but after ...g7-g6 and ...Kg7 the knight can hop out to e6. Meanwhile White's rooks are struggling to find a target.

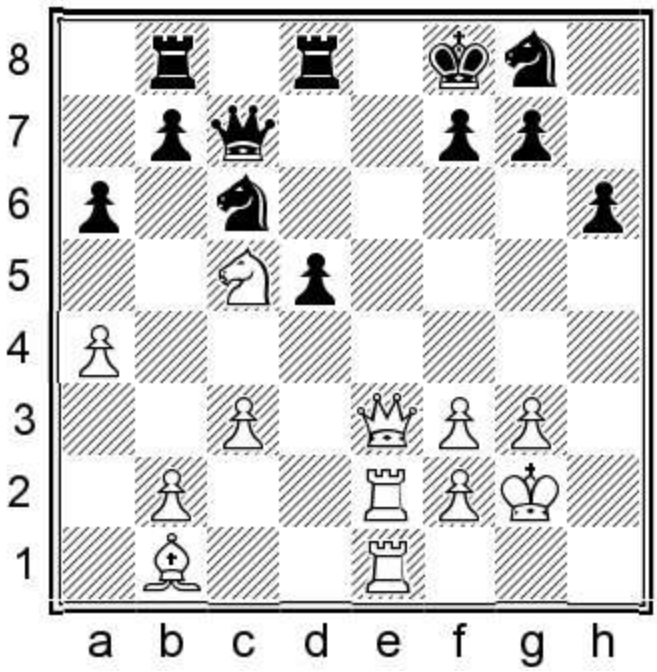
21.Rae1 Red8 22.Kg2 Qd6 23.c3²

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There should be a long fight ahead, but Black makes a series of retreats, leading to a pretty finish.

23...Qc7 24.Bb1 Rb8? 25.Nc5! Ng8?
To be fair, this retreat, heading for f6, makes perfect sense apart from one devastating reply:



26.Qf4!
Threatening the queen and Ne6†, and with the point that 26...Qxf4 allows 27.Re8† Rxe8 28.Nd7 mate!
1–0

Conclusion

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This chapter is our first look at 3...c5 and after 4.exd5 we start with 4...exd5, saving the queen recapture for the

next two chapters. Then 5.Ngf3 leads to a major branching point.

5...Nf6 as in Game 21 is a solid and respectable line, but the variation I suggest should see White pressing for an advantage against the IQP.

The path to the main line starts with 5...Nc6 6.Bb5, but first we need to be ready for two clever sidelines. 6...Qe7†!? (Game 22) should be met by 7.Be2!, as instead the endgame is fine for Black when he is not committed to the IQP. In contrast, 6...cxd4 (Game 23) commits Black to an IQP, so it's time for 7.Qe2†!, provoking an endgame.

The main line starts with 6...Bd6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nge7 9.Nb3 when 9...Bb6 (Game 24) is a suboptimal diversion by Black, which enables White to quickly prepare a favourable exchange of dark-squared bishops. The true main line is 9...Bd6 when I recommend the old-fashioned but effective 10.Re1 0-0 11.Bg5, with the idea Bh4-g3. If you are familiar with the ideas shown in the final three games of this chapter, then White should gain positional pressure. Naturally Black remains solid; main lines become main lines because they cannot be directly refuted.

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Chapter 8 - 4...Qxd5 - Sidelines

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4

A) 6...Qh5 216
B) 6...Qc5?! 217
C) 6...Qd8!? 218
D) 6...Qd7!? 219
E) 6...Qd6 7.0-0 225
E1) 7...Nc6 225
E2) 7...a6 226
E3) 7...Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 227
E31) 10...Bd7 11.c3 Qc7 12.Qe2 227
E311) 12...a6 229
E312) 12...Bd6 230
E32) 10...Be7 231

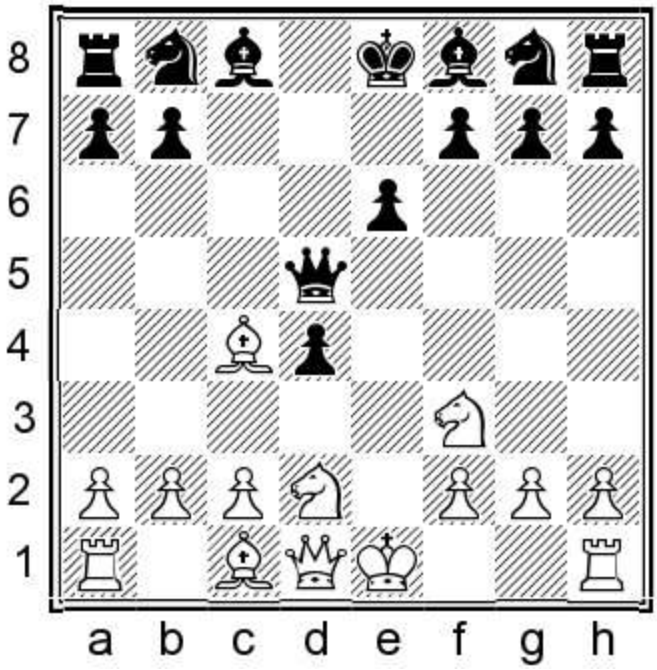
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5
This is arguably the most principled reply to the Tarrasch. Our 3.Nd2 avoided any Winawer style ...Bb4 annoyance at the expense of allowing 3...c5 and 4...Qxd5. After the inevitable exchange of White's d-pawn for Black's c-pawn, Black will be left with a solid structure and the only remaining central pawn. The good news for White is that Black is spending a lot of time on non-developing moves, so our play will be based on speedy action.

5.Ngf3 cxd4
The usual move by an overwhelming margin.

The problem with both 5...Nf6 6.Bc4 and 5...Nc6 6.Bc4 is that they give White additional options of dxc5 lines, without gaining anything for Black with this move order. After the latter, let's see one example: 6...Qd8 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.0-0 Nf6 9.Qe2 Qc7 10.Ne4! Be7 (Instead 10...Nxe4 11.Qxe4 threatens Bf4 so normal is 11...Bd6. Now a strong logical novelty is 12.b3!N with good play.) 11.Re1 (11.Rd1 is also fine, as in Guseinov – Mammadov, Baku 2015) 11...Bd7 12.b3 0-0-0 13.Bb2² Nunn – Levitt, London 1983.

6.Bc4

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Where should the queen go? The most common answer is to d6, but recently the merits of choosing d7 or d8 have also been appreciated. Other squares are rare oddities, but we shall briefly cover A) 6...Qh5 and B) 6...Qc5?!.

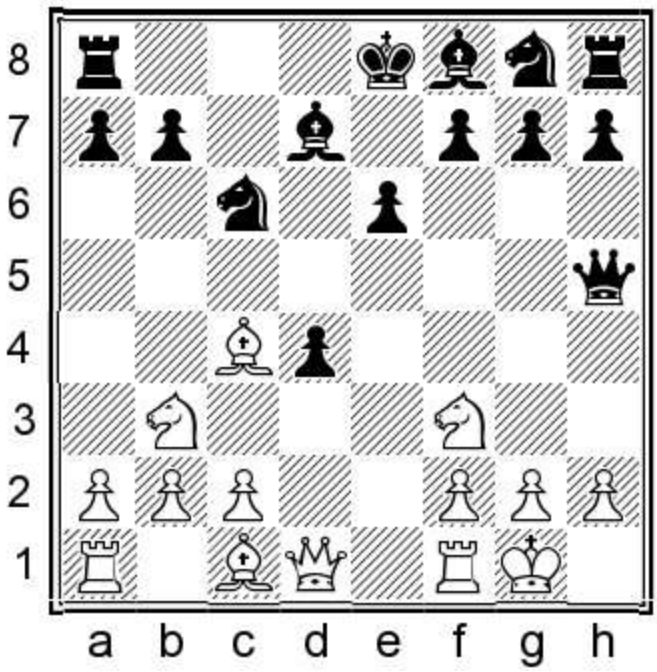
Then we have the more serious options, C) 6...Qd8!?, D) 6...Qd7!? and E) 6...Qd6. The latter is heading towards the absolute main line, though in this chapter we will look at early deviations, saving the main line for the next chapter.

A) 6...Qh5

A rare and weird-looking move, but not totally ridiculous. One sample line is enough in reply:

7.0-0 Nc6 8.Nb3 Bd7

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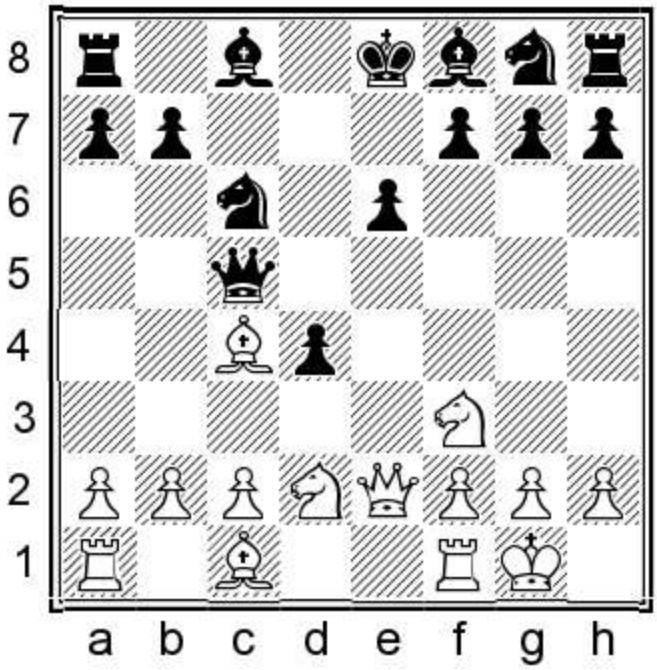
9.Nfxd4
Usually such endgame lines are a feeble reply in the 4...Qxd5 Tarrasch, but in this case Black must accelerate White's development.
If you would rather play a middlegame, then 9.Be2!? is logical.

9...Qxd1 10.Rxd1²
White has an improved version of the normal endgame lines (which, I repeat, we do not play).
B) 6...Qc5?!

A poor square as a later Nb3 is all but inevitable.

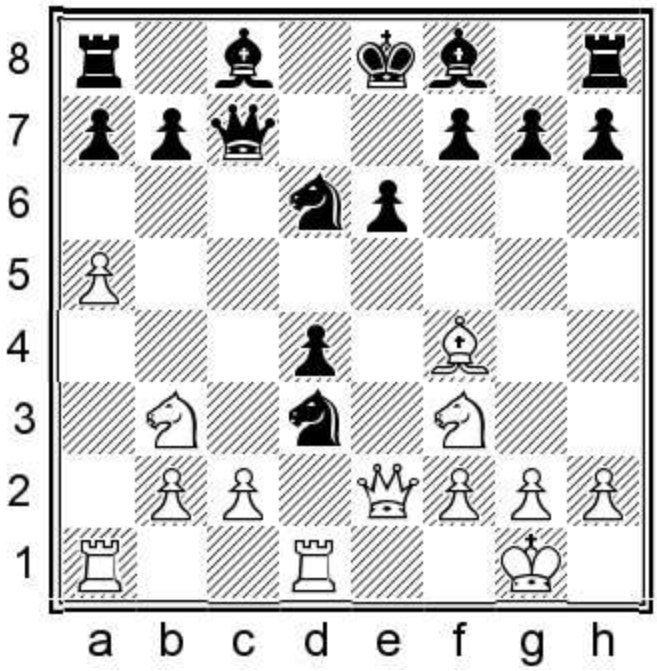
7.0-0 Nc6 8.Qe2
According to the old theoretical manuals, White was supposed to have an easy plan against all these sidelines (defined as queen moves other than 6...Qd6), namely the set-up with Qe2 and Rd1, after which Nb3 and Nxd4 follow, and at the end White takes with the rook. Today things are not so simple, but this set-up remains the critical test.

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8...Nf6
Sensible development, but it is also possible to anticipate the attack on the queen and retreat at once:

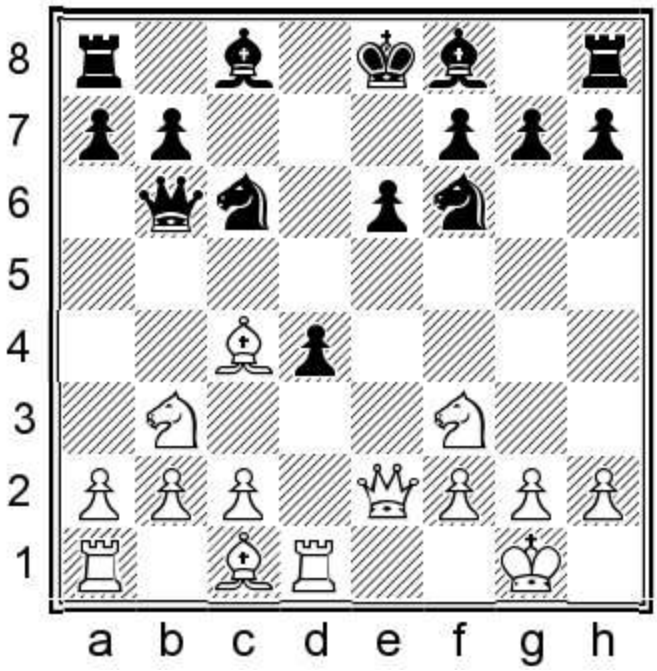
8...Qb6 9.Nb3
Now Black has a choice:
9...Nge7
9...Nf6 10.Rd1 transposes to the main line.
9...Be7 10.Rd1 Bf6 11.a4² The d4-pawn will not last long.
10.Rd1 Nf5 11.Bd3 Nd6 12.a4
We are rapidly learning that this advance is a key resource.
12...a6
Allowing the a-pawn to advance further would be disastrous. For example: 12...Nb4? 13.a5 Qc7 14.Bf4 Nxd3



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15.Rxd3!N A winning novelty (instead 15.Qxd3 Qc4! allowed Black to escape the worst in Kotronias – Popovic, Moscow 1989).
13.a5 Qa7 14.Ra4 Nb5
So far this is Beliavsky – Nikolic, Wijk aan Zee 1984, and now I suggest:
15.Nfxd4!N
This is even better than taking on b5, as in the game.
15...Nbxd4 16.Nxd4±

9.Nb3 Qb6 10.Rd1²
White will regain the pawn with a pleasant position.

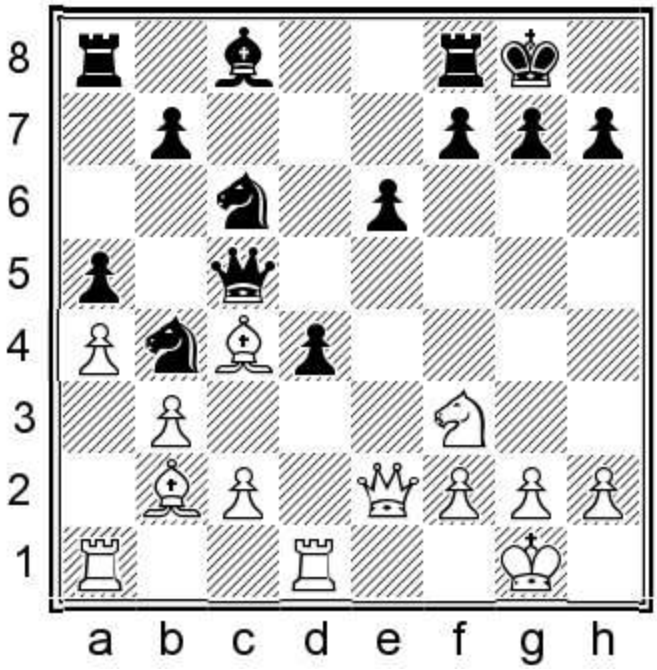


10...Bc5?!
The greedy approach is critical, but it does not work.
The more modest 10...Bd6 11.Nfxd4 Nxd4 12.Rxd4² allows White an easy edge.

11.a4
It’s that move again.

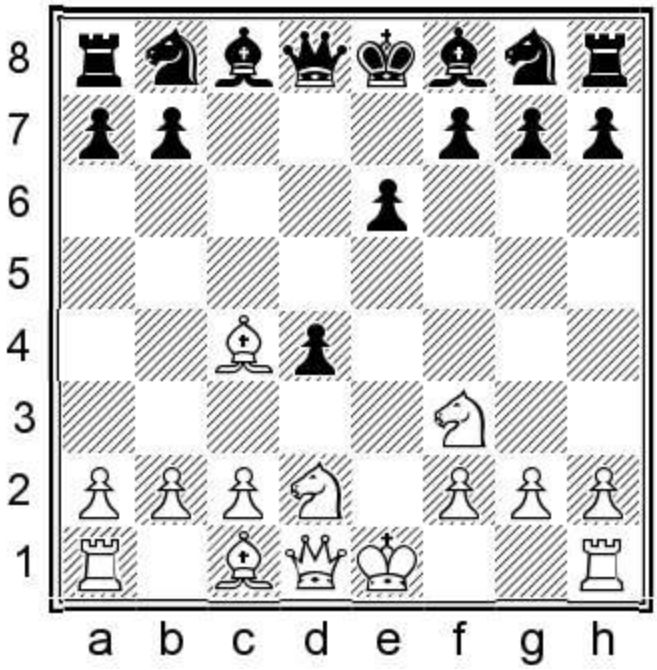
11...a5 12.Nxc5 Qxc5 13.b3 Nd5 14.Ba3 Ndb4 15.Bb2 0-0
Black is finally ready to play ...e6-e5, but it’s too late.

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16.Nxd4 Nxd4 17.Rxd4±
Keres – Stahlberg, Buenos Aires 1939.

C) 6...Qd8!?



I was surprised when I found out how strong this move is. Perhaps I should not have been, as I also like ...Qd8 in the Scandinavian more than most people.

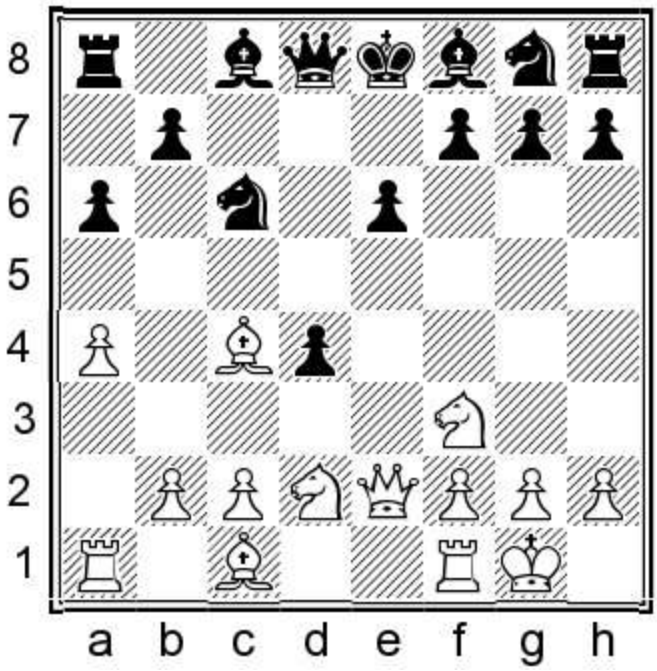
7.0-0 Nc6 8.Qe2
After plenty of analysis, we settled on this move as the most promising.

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It’s worth a brief glance at the alternative, to get an impression of Black’s ideas:

8.Nb3 a6! 9.Nbxd4
9.a4 Be7! (9...Nf6 10.Qe2 Bd6 11.Rd1 e5 12.Nbxd4 Nxd4 13.Rxd4 Qe7 transposes to the 6...Qd7 section – see page 223) 10.Qe2 Bf6 11.Rd1 Nge7 was fine for Black in Nemeth – Huber, Austria 2016.
I was also not satisfied with 9.Re1 Bb4! or 9.Bf4 Bd6!. These lines show the advantage of retreating the queen further than d6, where it does not block the f8-bishop.
9...Nxd4 10.Nxd4 Qc7
As long as Bf1 is not possible, we have been tricked out of our repertoire from Chapter 9.

8...a6 9.a4!?
The practical approach, which saves us a lot of space.
9.Rd1 b5 10.Bb3 Nf6 11.a4!? This seemed promising at first, until we discovered: 11...Bb7!N 12.axb5 d3! This move equalizes. The idea is seen in the variation: 13.cxd3 axb5 14.Rxa8 Qxa8!

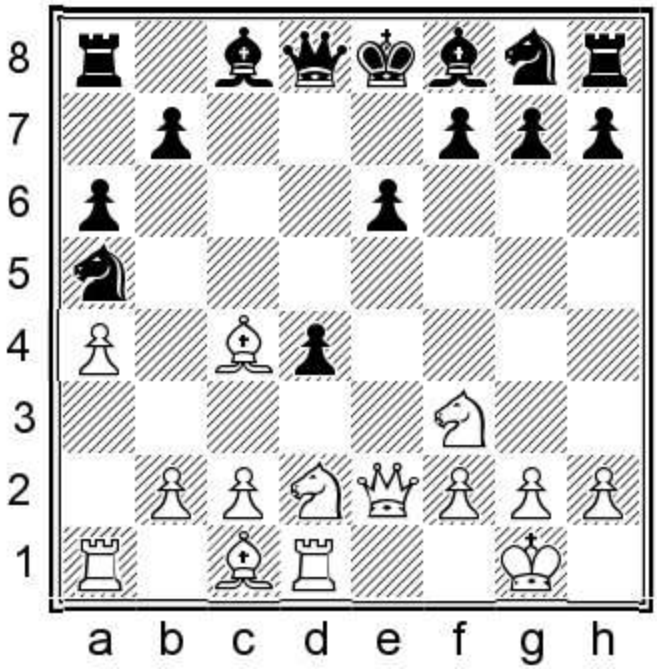


Returning to our recommended line, Black has a few options:

9...Nf6
This is the main line.

9...Na5?!
The problem with this move is that Black is not threatening to take on c4.
10.Rd1!

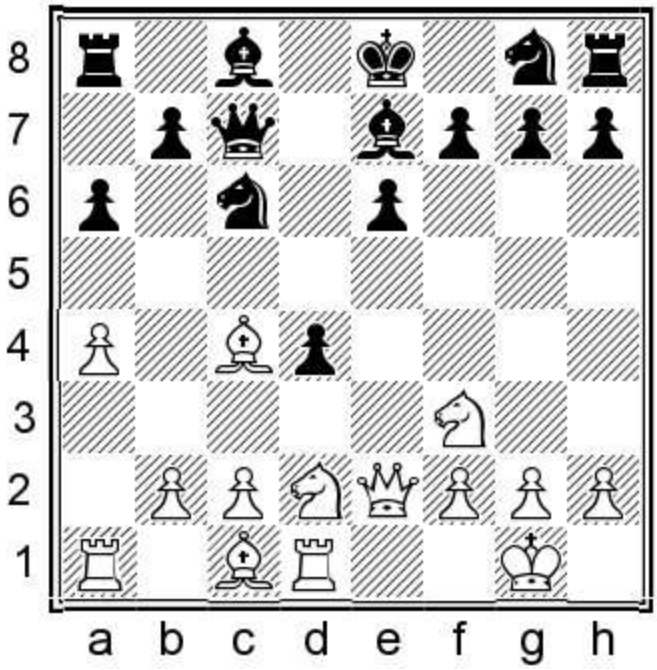
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10...Nf6
I should justify the previous claim: 10...Nxc4? 11.Nxc4 White's lead in development is decisive, especially with the black queen short of squares. For example: 11...Nf6 12.Rxd4 Qc7 13.Bf4+–
11.Nb3
Also promising is: 11.Bd3!? Be7 12.Nc4 Nc6 13.b3²
11...Nxc4 12.Qxc4 Bd7
In Movileanu – Bluebaum, Deizisau 2014, White took on d4 with his queen, but I would suggest White has a range of more promising options: 13.Ne5!? or 13.Bg5!? or 13.Rxd4!?. In every case, I prefer White.

9...Be7 10.Rd1 Qc7!?
A clever move order (so far used just once) that prepares ...e5.
Instead 10...Bf6 can be well met by: 11.Ne4!± This instructive line shows why it is good to leave the knight on d2 for a move or two. Note the difference compared with the 8.Nb3 line above.

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11.Nb3!?N
Offering Black the chance to be greedy.
Also logical is 11.Ne4!? Nf6 12.Nxd4 Bd7 13.Nf3 as in Pavlidis – Goumas, Achaea 2017, when White may have a tiny edge, but Black remains solid.
11...e5 12.Re1 Bg4 13.Bd5 f6 14.c3²
I like White's play. One point is:
14...dxc3 15.Qc4! Bxf3 16.Bxf3 cxb2 17.Bxb2*f*
White has more than enough compensation.

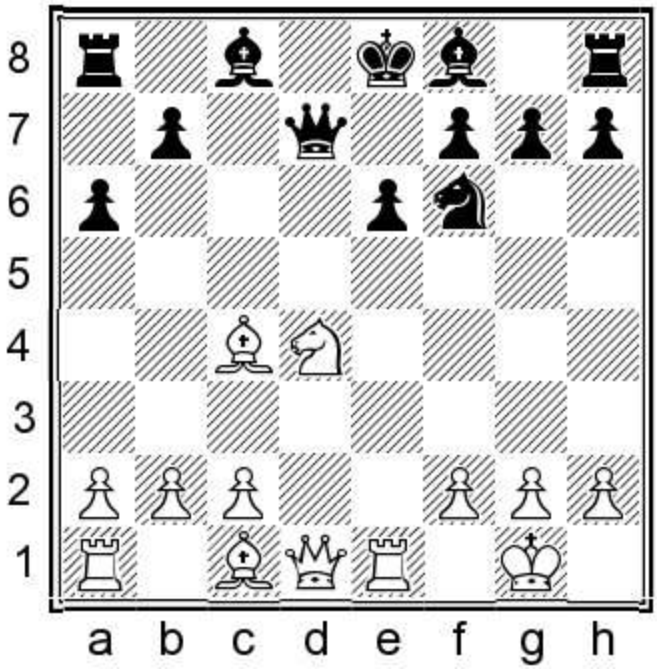
10.Rd1 Bd6 11.Nb3 e5 12.Nbxd4 Nxd4 13.Rxd4 Qe7
This transposes to a line we will analyse under the 6...Qd7 move order. White has no reasonable way to avoid this.

D) 6...Qd7!?

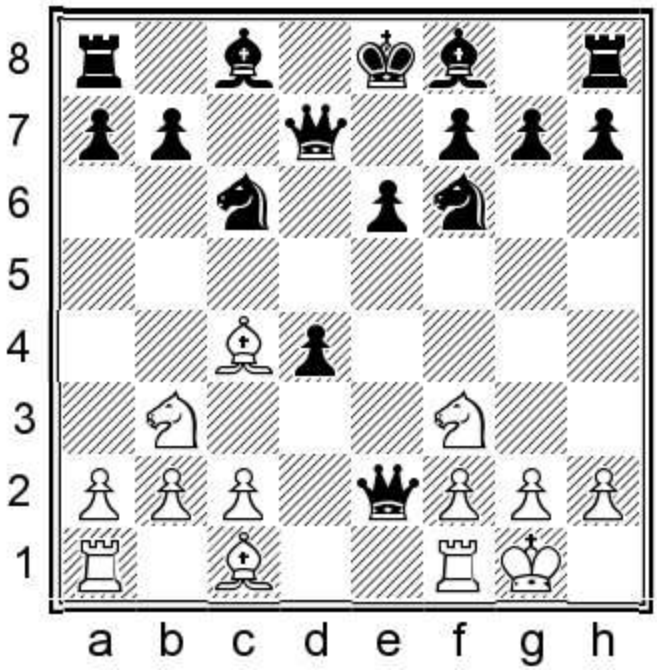
As will be clear by now, there are transpositional possibilities between 6...Qd8 and 6...Qd7, as the queen often slides to c7 or e7 later.

7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Qe2
If Black is aiming for the position after 13...Qe7 (see page 223), the simplest way to do so is from the 6...Qd8 move order. The reason is that now White has an extra option of heading for the absolute main line (see the next chapter):
9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 a6 11.Re1!?

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11...b5
11...Bc5 12.Be3²
Safest is 11...Qc7 12.Bf1 which transposes to our main line after 6...Qd6 and 10...a6, coverage of which begins on page 236.
12.Bb3 Bb7
And now White is slightly better after 13.Bg5 or 13.Bf4, while 13.Nxe6 is a dangerous sacrifice, although it only leads to a typical 0.00 engine evaluation.

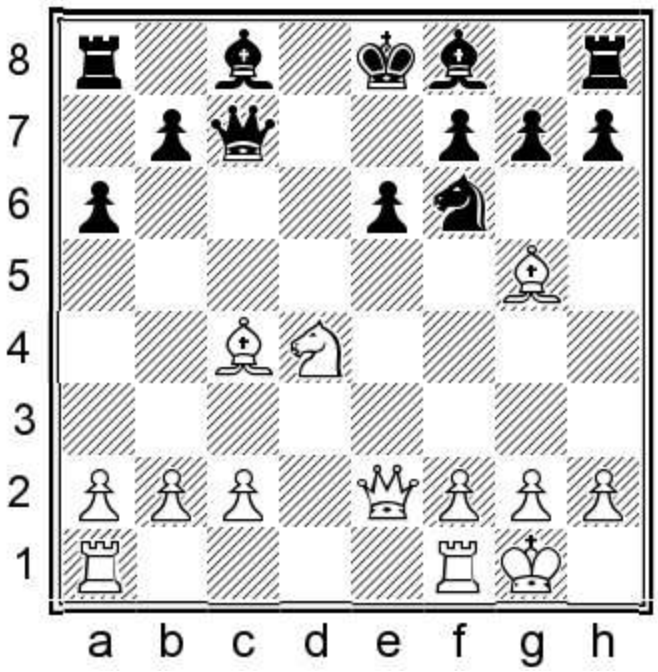


9...a6
By far the most common move.

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I also considered:

9...Qc7 10.Nbxd4 Nxd4 11.Nxd4 a6 12.Bg5



12...Be7
The safe but passive development.
Or 12...Bd6 13.Rfe1!? (Yes, 13.Nf5 is an option, but such chaotic forcing play is not a good practical choice against a rare sideline.) 13...0-0 14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Bd3² This transposes to a line that has scored excellently for White; there is some similarity to the game Zhou – Knott in the next chapter, see page 240.
13.Rfe1² 0-0 14.Rad1
White's more harmonious piece placement must count for something. I will offer a few examples:
14...b5
14...Bd7 15.Bh4 Rad8 16.Bg3 Qa5 17.c3 b5 18.Bb3 b4 19.c4² Wilczek – N. Muzyka, corr. 2008.
15.Bb3 Ra7
This occurred in K. Nikolaidis – Jeremic, Kavala 2007. I suggest:
16.c3!?N 16...Rd8 17.a4²

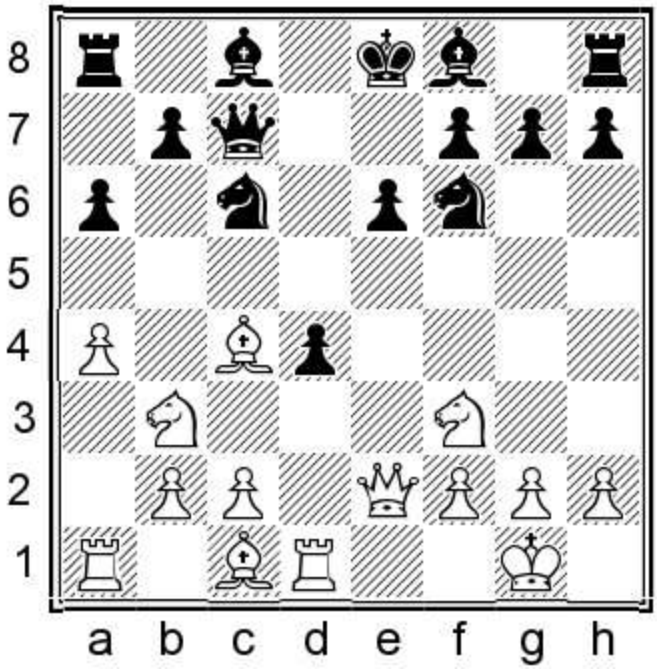
After 9...Bd6 10.Rd1 0-0 11.Nbxd4 Nxd4 12.Rxd4² the game could go all sorts of ways, so let's see one example: 12...Qe7 13.Ne5 Nd5 14.Bd3 f5 15.Bc4² Movsesian – Edouard, Wijk aan Zee 2013.

10.a4
Again, let's stop the ...b5 option.

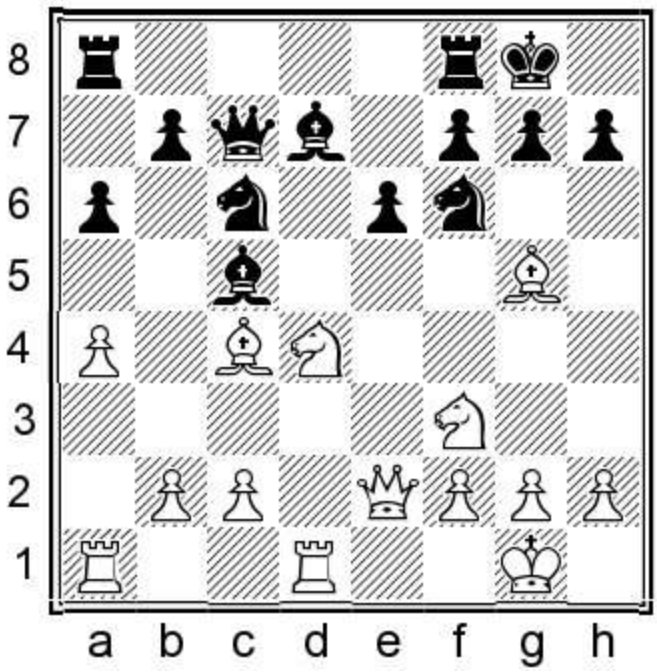
10...Bd6
There is a mass of possibilities and transpositions, so take the following as useful examples, rather than a list to memorize (with one exception that I will get to soon).

10...Qc7 11.Rd1

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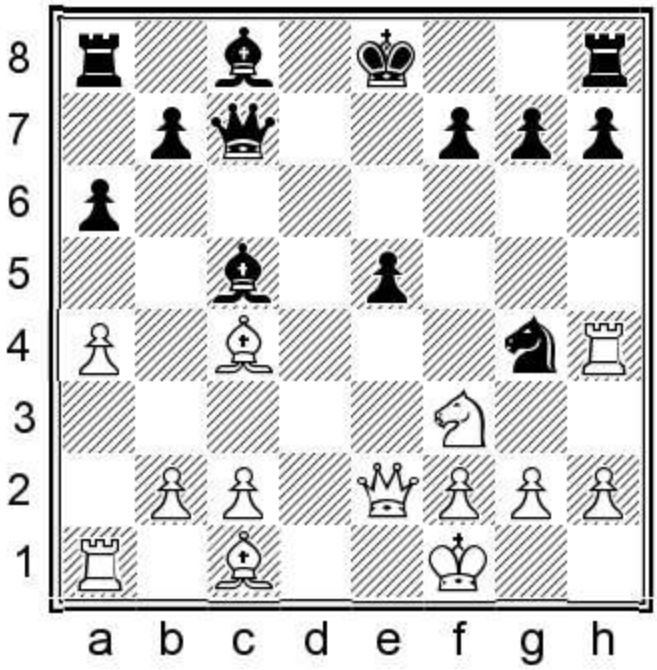


11...e5
This is the one to remember. It's not a good line, but the reason it fails is highly specific and would be tough to calculate over the board.
11...Bd7 12.Nbxd4 Bc5 (or 12...Nxd4 13.Rxd4!*f*) 13.Bg5 0-0 In D. Howell – E. Romanov, Jerusalem 2015, I would suggest:

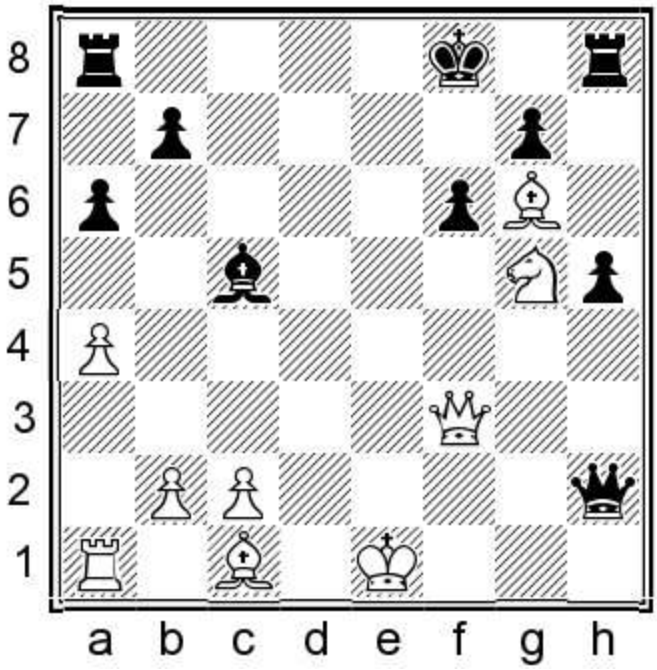


14.Nb3!?N 14...Be7 15.Bh4[2]
11...Bd6 12.Nbxd4 Nxd4 13.Rxd4 0-0 14.Bg5 e5 15.Rh4 Bf5 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.Bd3 Bg6 18.Rg4 Rfe8 In Shankland – Hambleton, Tromso (ol) 2014, 19.Be4!N was the way to secure an edge, almost certainly with Nh4 next.
12.Nbxd4 Nxd4 13.Rxd4 Bc5 14.Rh4 Ng4 15.Kf1!
This would be the scary part to make up, but White is in control.

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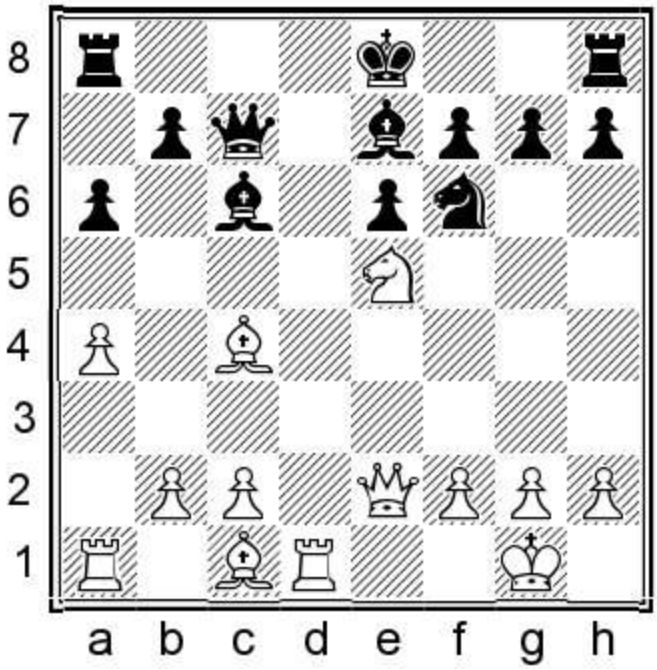
15...f6 16.Nd2 Nxf2 17.Rf4 Nh3 18.gxh3 Bxh3† 19.Ke1 h5
So far this is Ebeling – M. Andersen, Warsaw 2013, and now most convincing was:
20.Bd3!N 20...Bg4 21.Bg6† Kf8 22.Rf3 Bxf3 23.Qxf3 e4 24.Nxe4 Qxh2 25.Ng5±



It all makes sense in the end. For example: 25...Qg1† 26.Ke2 Rc8 27.Bf4! and since taking on a1 gets mated every which way, Black must play 27...Qg4 28.Rd1 and accept his inferiority.

10...Be7 As usual, this bishop placement is safe but not so active. 11.Rd1 Qc7 12.Nbxd4 Bd7 13.Nxc6 Bxc6 14.Ne5 The position is a touch more comfortable for White.

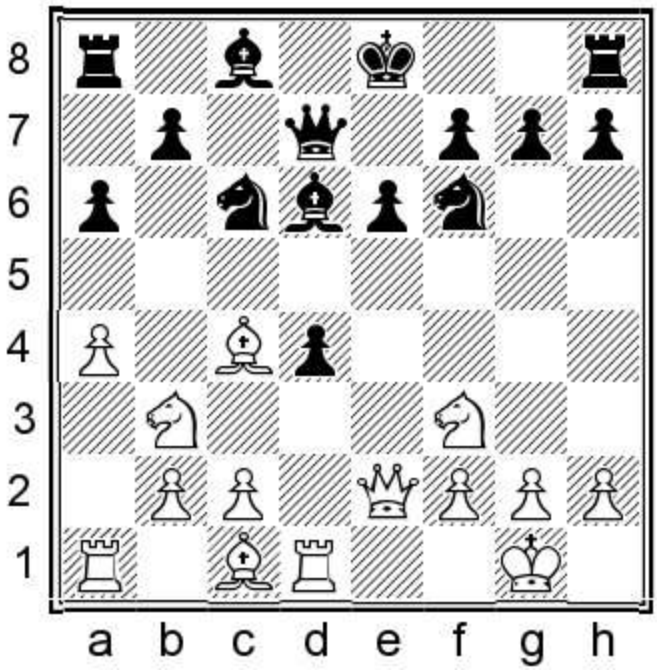
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For example: 14...Be4 15.Bf4² was Shankland – Krush, Las Vegas 2014, while 14...Bd5 15.Bxd5 Nxd5 16.c4 Nf6 17.Bf4± was Wei Yi – Zhou Weiqi, Danzhou 2013.

11.Rd1
We analysed in monstrous depth before settling on this move.

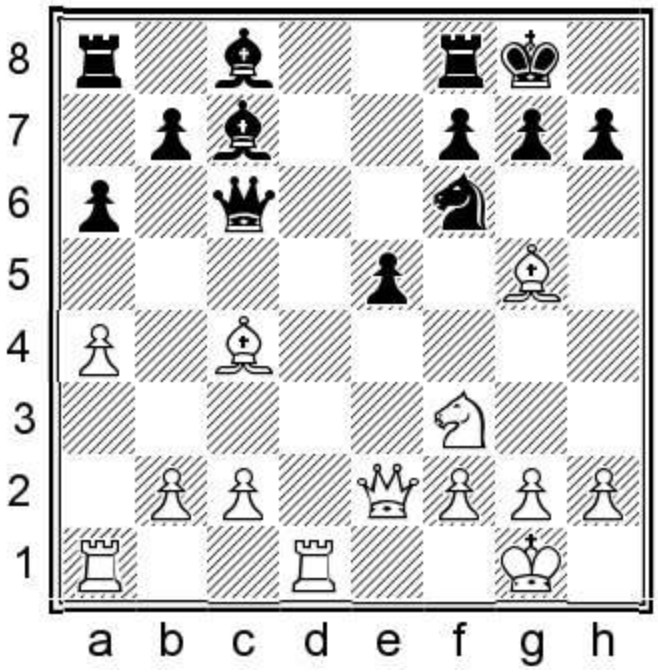
For example, 11.Bg5!? was tempting, but then 11...0-0 12.Bxf6 gxf6 13.Nbxd4 Ne7!N is a strong novelty, when we were unable to find even the slightest of edges; Black plans ...Ng6 and ...Kh8.



11...e5
The most common move, and the critical test.

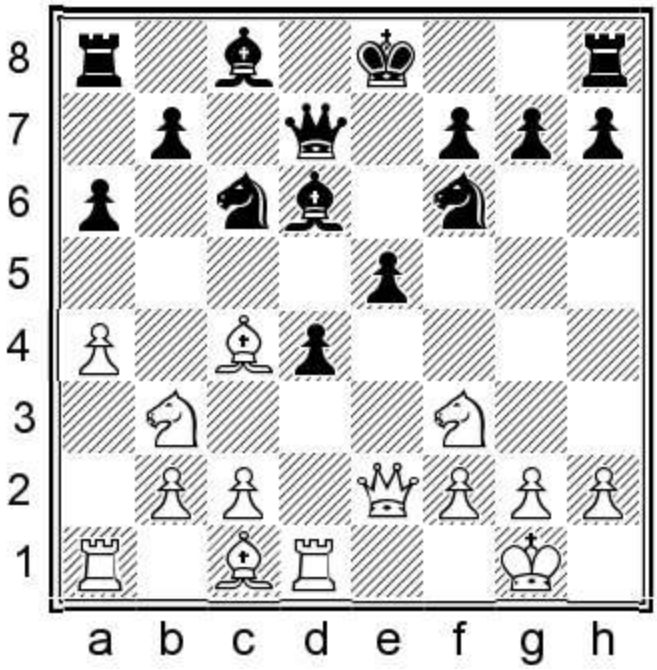
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11...0-0 12.Nbxd4 e5
12...Nxd4 13.Rxd4 Qc7 14.Bg5 reaches the game Shankland – Hambleton, Tromso (ol) 2014, as referenced on the previous page.
13.Nxc6 Qxc6
Making sense of the choice to go to d7.
14.Bg5 Bc7
This position has only been reached five times, but it is a decent equalizing effort; I believe White can expect only a tiny edge.



15.h3!?
Keeping the tension looks the most promising approach.
Instead 15.Bxf6 Qxf6 16.Bd5 has also been tried, but the following temporary sacrifice looks a fine leveller: 16...Bf5! 17.Bxb7 Rab8 18.Bxa6 (The way to play on was 18.Qxa6!?N 18...Qxa6 19.Bxa6 Rxb2 20.Rac1 though White still has to create a luft, so I like Black's drawing chances.) 18...Rxb2 19.Bd3 e4! 20.Bxe4 Re8 21.Qc4 Bxe4 22.Qxc7 Bxf3 23.gxf3 Qxf3= Black quickly landed a perpetual in Nisipeanu – Svane, Dresden 2017.
15...e4
Instead 15...h6 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 17.Bd5 was Tate – Lupulescu, Heraklio 2017, where if Black had tried 17...Bf5 18.Bxb7 Rab8 19.Qxa6 Qxa6 20.Bxa6 Rxb2 21.Rac1² White would have a slightly improved version of the endgame mentioned above, as the mutual luft was more needed by White due to Black's active rook.
16.Nd2
White has slight pressure. For example:
16...Bf5 17.Nf1 Bg6 18.Ne3 Bh5 19.g4 Bg6 20.Bb3²
Rodshtein – Edouard, Germany 2013.

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12.Nbxd4 Nxd4 13.Rxd4
Instead 13.Nxd4 Qe7 14.Nb3= is rather dull.

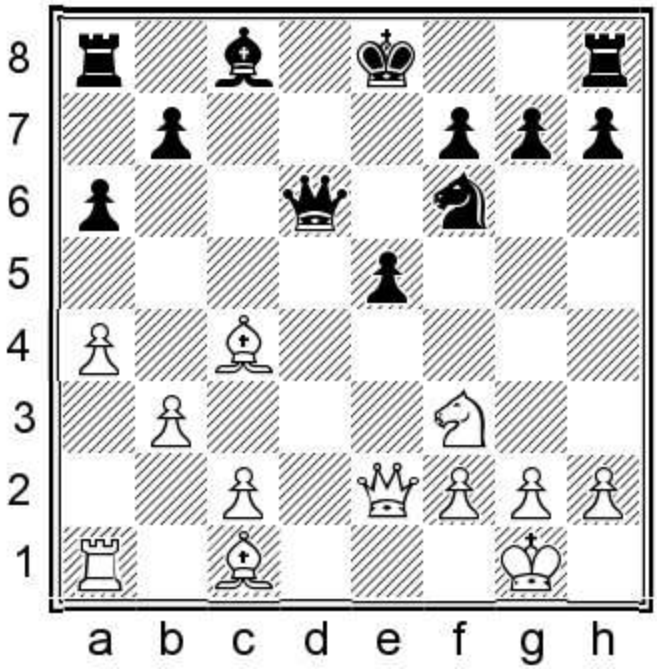
13...Qe7
Of course the queen could reach e7 from d7 or d8.

14.Rxd6!?
This exchange sac is not forced, and does not force an advantage, but it does demand extreme accuracy from Black.

14.Rh4 is one way to keep the material balance, but the following game looks like a convincing equalizer. 14... Bf5 15.Bg5 0-0 16.Bd3 e4 17.Bxe4 Rae8 18.Re1 Bxe4 19.Bxf6 Qxf6 20.Rxe4 Rxe4 21.Qxe4 Qxb2= B. Smith – Nyzhnyk, Philadelphia 2017.

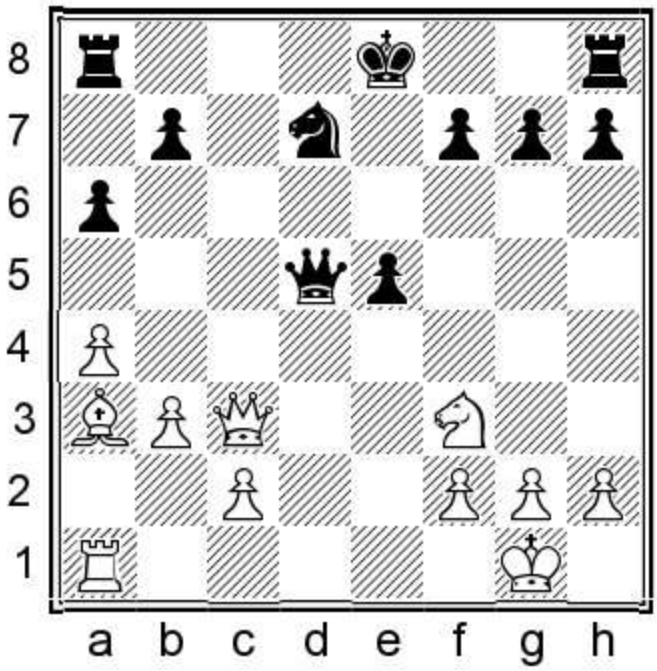
14...Qxd6 15.b3©
Naturally White's play is based on Ba3 and the dark squares.

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15...e4!
The most testing response.

15...Be6?! 16.Ba3 Bxc4
Otherwise Black is much worse.
16...Qc7 17.Bxe6 fxe6 18.Nxe5± White's pieces are dominant. For example, 18...0-0-0 is met by 19.Bb2, most likely followed by Nc4 and Be5.
17.Qxc4 Qc6N
Bailing out to an inferior ending is Black's best chance.
17...Qd5 18.Qc3 Nd7

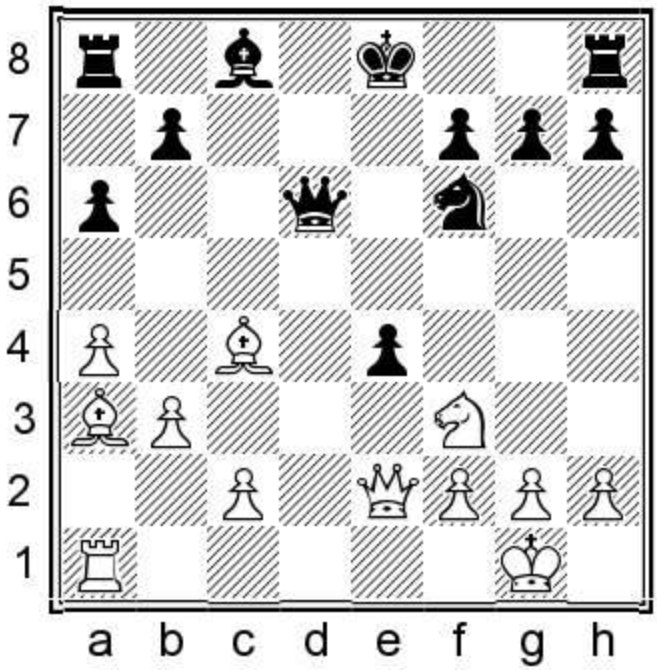


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In Movsesian – Grover, Reykjavik 2015, the right choice was: 19.Qe1!N The key is to prepare Rd1. 19...0-0-0

20.Rd1 Qe6 (Or 20...Qc6 21.Rd3!± is equally unpleasant. For example: 21...Kb8 22.Qd2 f6 23.Bd6† Ka8 24. Be7 winning back the exchange.) 21.Ng5 Qe8 22.Ne4± Black has nothing better than 22...Kb8 23.Bd6† Ka8 24.Bc7 when once again the exchange is recovered.
18.Qxc6† bxc6 19.Nxe5 c5 20.Nc4 0-0 21.Bxc5 Rfe8 22.Kf1!?²
It's bishop and two pawns against a rook, with the black rooks having no entry points.

15...Qc7 16.Ba3 e4 transposes to the note to Black's next move in the main line below.

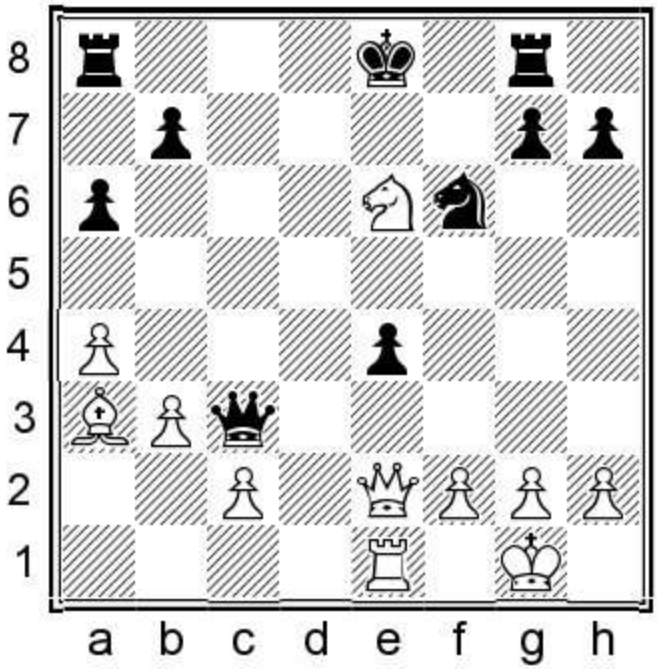
16.Ba3



16...Qf4
The only move to have been tested.

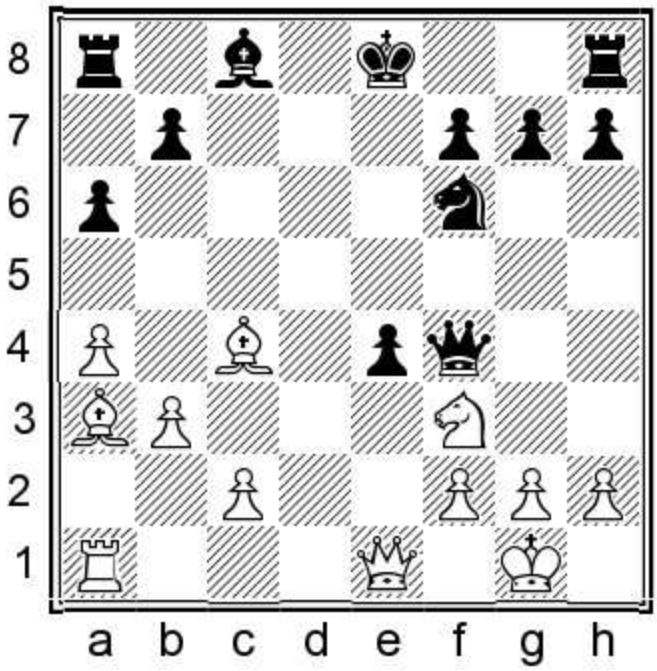
16...Qc7!?N
This novelty seems as good as the main line. What follows is of course untested analysis.
17.Re1 Be6 18.Bxe6 fxe6 19.Ng5 Qc3! 20.Nxe6 Rg8!

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We have seen enough to prove White has enough compensation. I will extend the line with a sample variation, though note we are a long way from a real game.
21.h3!? h6
21...g5 is a worse type of the same endgame: 22.Nc5 0-0-0 23.Nxe4 Nxe4 24.Qxe4 Rge8 25.Qf5† Kb8 26.Rxe8 Rxe8 27.Bc5 Qg7 28.Be3 Qa1† 29.Kh2 Qe5† 30.Qxe5† Rxe5 31.h4 h6 32.Kg3²
22.Nc5 0-0-0 23.Nxe4 Nxe4 24.Qxe4 Rge8 25.Qf5† Kb8 26.Rxe8 Rxe8 27.Bc5!
I think White has good practical chances in this endgame; engine versus engine must be a draw though.

17.Qe1!?
Black's position is highly dangerous after this move. We are in almost unexplored territory, as 17.Qe1 has only been tried in one email game.



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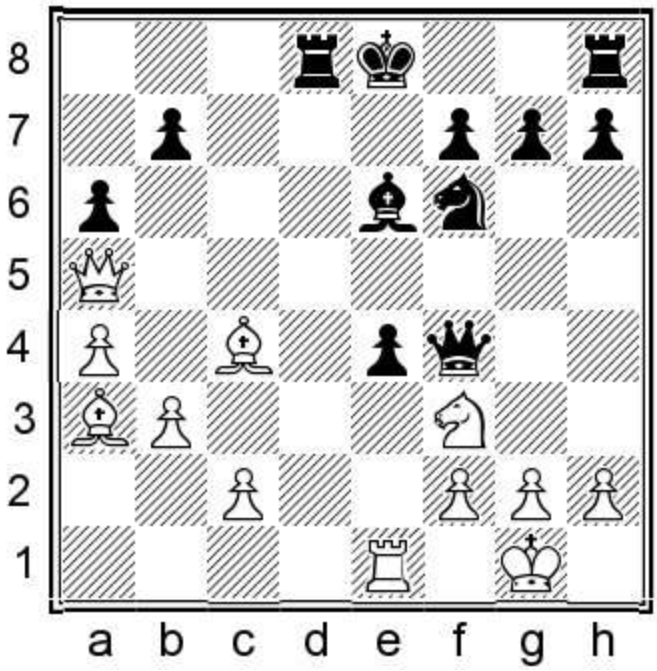
17...Be6!
The only move to avoid instant disaster.

18.Qa5 Rd8
Another only-move.

18...Rc8? 19.Ne5!± is nasty. For example, 19...b6 20.Qb4 Rc5 21.Nd3! and White wins back the exchange.

19.Re1!?
Keeping the game alive.

19.Qc5 forces a draw. 19...Nd5 20.Bxd5 Qf6! Black is hanging by a thread, but it all holds together. 21.Bc6† bxc6 22.Qxc6† Rd7 23.Qa8† Rd8 24.Qc6†=



19...Nd5
The best of a range of options.

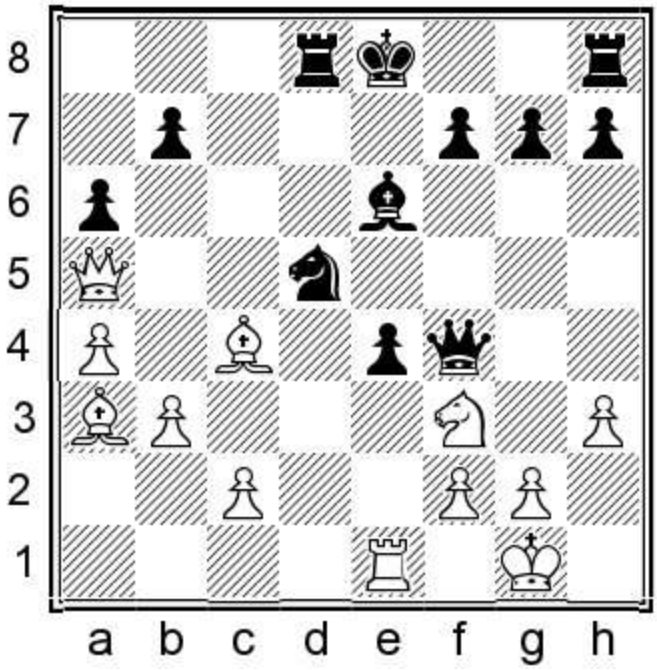
19...exf3 20.Qc5 Qd6 21.Qxd6 Rxd6 22.Bxd6 Kd7 23.Bxe6† fxe6 24.Rd1²

19...Rd7 20.Ne5²

19...Bxc4 20.bxc4 Rd7 21.h3±

20.h3©

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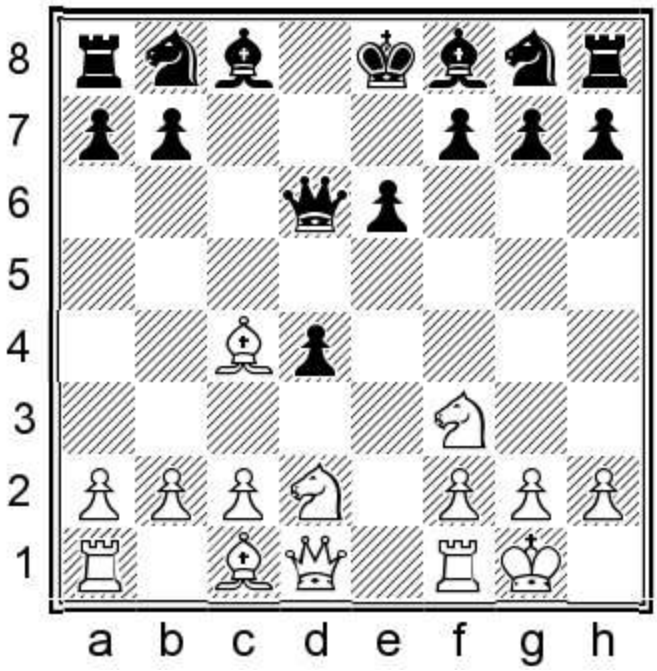


The game could go many ways from here, so the theory stops now. There is no doubt White has enough compensation, and I would certainly prefer to play White over-the-board, but it's also true that Black appears to hold with precise play. The engine settles on its favourite assessment of 0.00. Nichols – Hauser, email 2013, was a long, hard-fought draw.

E) 6...Qd6

This is the way to the main line, but there are a few diversions to check out first.

7.0-0



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First, we will look at two minor lines where Black does not play ...Nf6 and allows a strong Ne4!: E1) 7...Nc6

and E2) 7...a6.

E3) 7...Nf6 is far and away the most common and best move.

E1) 7...Nc6

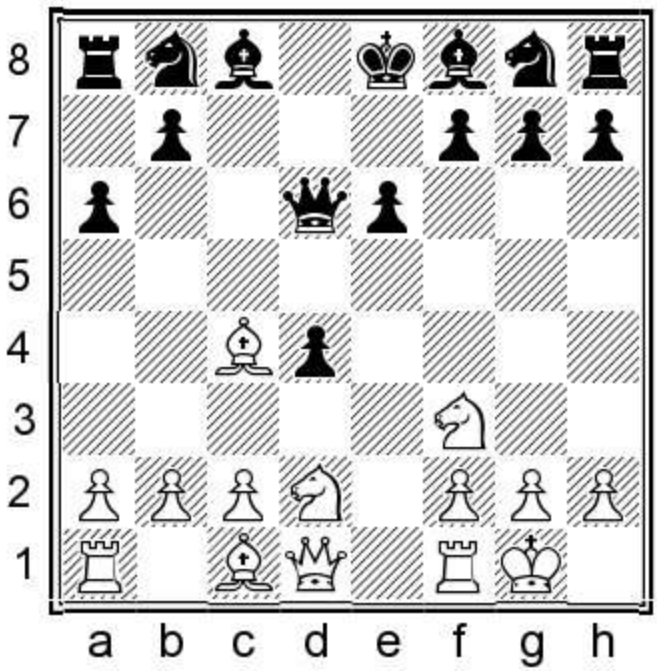
A mysterious move, as it allows White a strong extra option for no apparent gain.

8.Ne4! Qd8
Instead 8...Qb4 delays the fall of d4 just a moment, while misplacing the queen. Of many good options, simplest is 9.b3. For example, 9...Qb6 10.Bb2 and d4 is going.

9.Qe2
We are familiar with this set-up from the earlier sidelines. The rook will slide to d1, then we regain the pawn with a simple edge. For example:

9...Nf6 10.Rd1 Be7 11.c3 0-0 12.Nxd4 Nxd4 13.Rxd4 Qc7 14.Bb3²
Black is typically solid, but White is more active.

E2) 7...a6



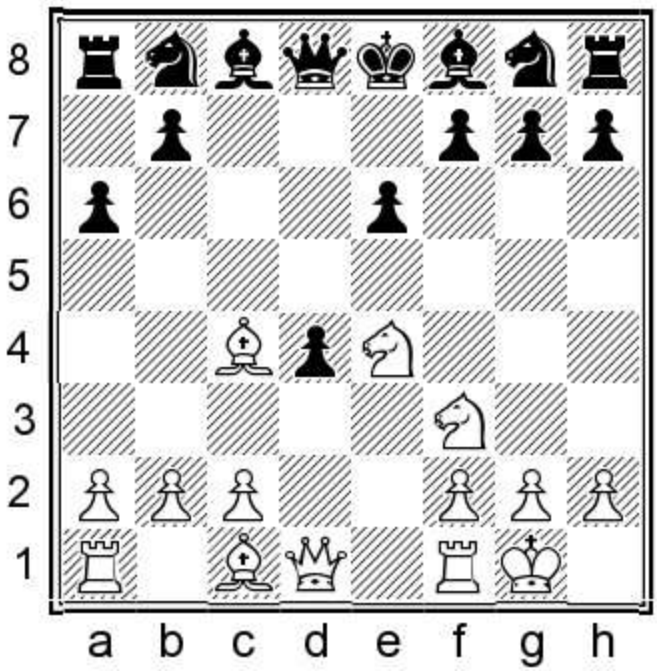
Precisely the same objection against 7...Nc6 is also true against this move.

8.Ne4!
This is obviously more threatening than 8.Nb3 Qc7, which would probably allow Black to escape to some sensible line.

8...Qd8
Black had an unenviable choice.

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8...Qc7 has been the most common, but 9.Qxd4! Nc6 10.Qc3± was a convincing reply in Emms – Sjodahl, Harplinge 1998. White was way ahead in development, and the pressure on g7 made it impossible for Black to catch up.



9.Ne5!N
A slower move such as 9.Qe2 would also be effective, but we can immediately go for the throat.

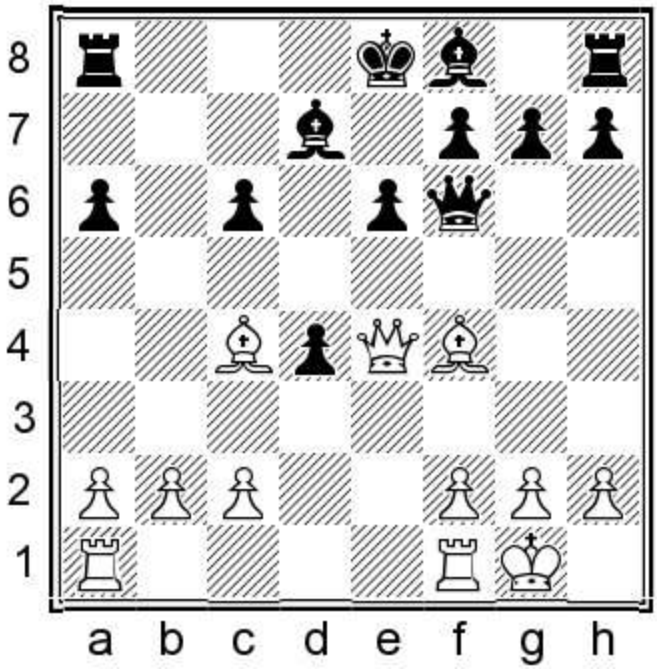
9...Nc6
Decision time: would you like a simple, easy advantage or a mad hack?

10.Nxc6!?
The calm choice.
10.Nxf7!? Absolutely not essential, but maybe you would like to have some fun with this sideline. 10...Kxf7 11. Ng5† Ke8 12.Bxe6, White has more than enough play for the sacrificed material.

10...bxc6 11.Bf4
11.Qf3 also looks superb.

11...Nf6 12.Nxf6† Qxf6 13.Qf3 Bd7 14.Qe4±
Material will soon be level, while Black's structural problems remain. For example:

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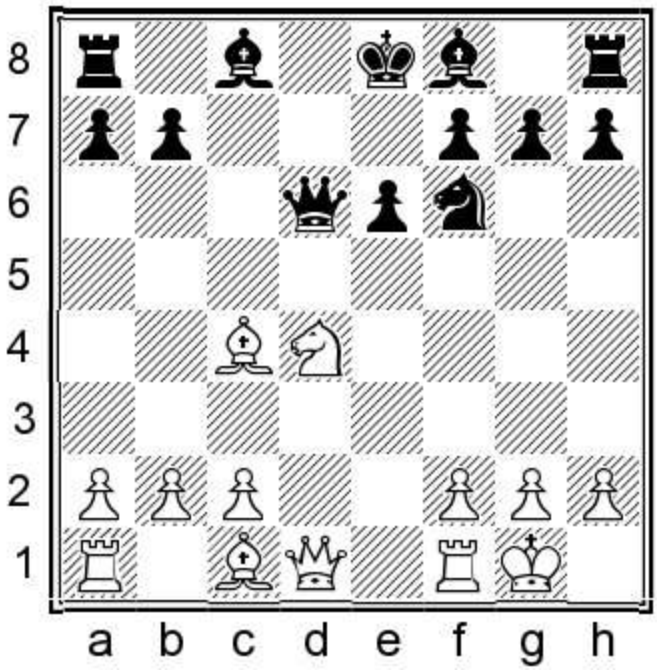


14...Bc5 15.Rad1 0-0 16.Be5
Regaining the pawn with a clear advantage.

E3) 7...Nf6

The sensible move, stopping any Nd2-e4 problems. With that option gone, White's next task is simply to retrieve the d4-pawn.

8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4
Naturally we have no interest in the dullness of 10.Qxd4.



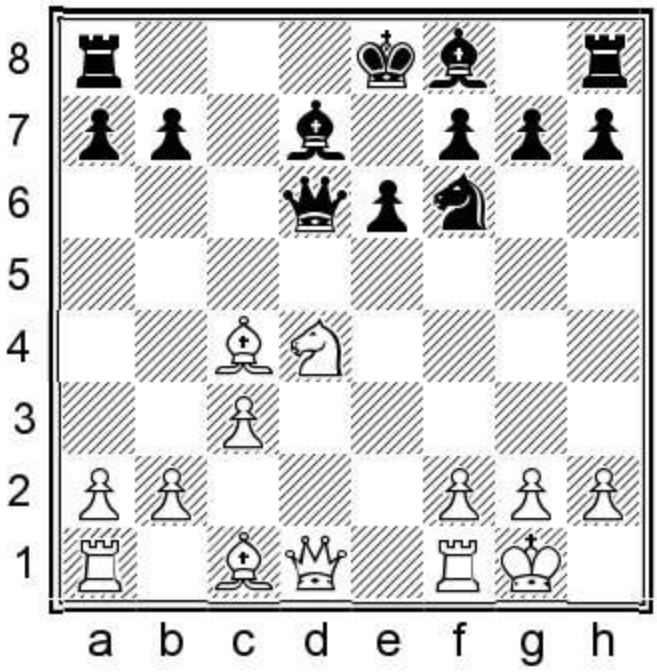
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At this important branching point, there are three significant options: two respectable sidelines in E31) 10...Bd7

and E32) 10...Be7, and the absolute main line 10...a6, which we will see in the next chapter.

E31) 10...Bd7 11.c3

The conventional wisdom used to be that if Black did not go for the established main line with 10...a6, then White plays b2-b3 and stands better. But I don't think that this is true. I prefer the solid 11.c3 which gives White good chances of a small edge.

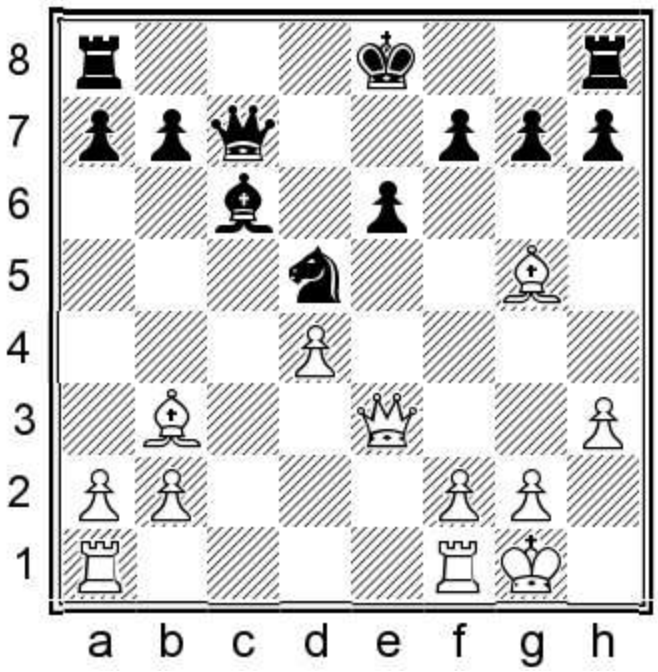
11.b3 0-0-0! leads to an unclear position after 12.Bb2 Qc7 13.Qe2 h5!. The idea is 14.h3 Ng4 with a mess, as seen in various games, most notably Svidler – Psakhis, Haifa 1996.



11...Qc7
Black retains the option of developing his bishop actively on d6, but of course it's not the only way:

11...Be7 12.Qf3 Qc7 13.Bb3
13.Ba6 e5! is complicated, but OK for Black.
13...Bd6 14.h3
Similar play can be found in the 10...Be7 variation on page 232.
14...Be5 15.Bg5 Bxd4 16.cxd4 Bc6 17.Qe3! Nd5

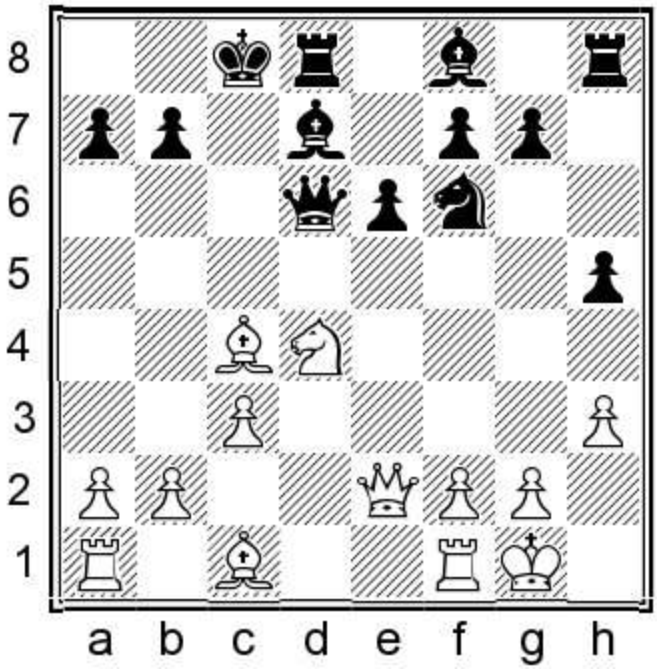
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18.Bxd5!N
White can keep the initiative in an opposite-coloured bishops middlegame.
18.Qe5 was immediately and understandably agreed drawn in Hort – Spassky, Tilburg 1978.
18...Bxd5 19.Rac1,
The power of White's initiative becomes evident when one tries to find a square for the black queen. White's ideas include Qg3, planning Rc7 while discouraging castling due to Bf6 or Bh6, or Qa3 stopping castling directly.

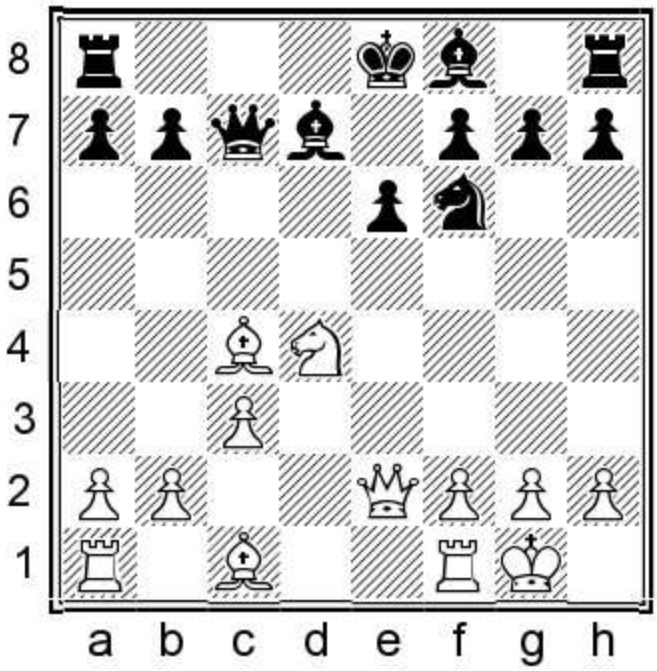
11...0-0-0?!
A sharp line, but it has been long-established that White's attack is faster.
12.Qe2 h5
Creating ...Ng4 ideas; this could work against an unprepared player, but it is basically unsound.
Somewhat similar is: 12...Qc7 13.a4 h5 14.Nb5 Bxb5 15.axb5 Ng4 16.g3 Bc5 17.Kg2 In Adams – Lautier, Biel 1991, Black's attack was stalled while White's was gathering pace. Probably the best Black has is bailing out into a bad ending with: 17...Qe5 18.h3 Qxe2 19.Bxe2±
13.h3!?
Not the only way, but an effective antidote.

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13...Ng4?!
We just prevented this move, didn't we?
More realistic is 13...Qc7 14.a4±, though White was well ahead in Poignot – Hug, Switzerland 2017.
14.hxg4 hxg4 15.f4!
The only move, but totally convincing.
15.g3?? Bc6–+ is Black's dream.
15...gxf3
Maybe slightly trickier is 15...Qe7 but 16.g3+– is good enough.
16.Nxf3+–
Black was out of bullets in Rogic – Sulava, Croatia 1992.

12.Qe2

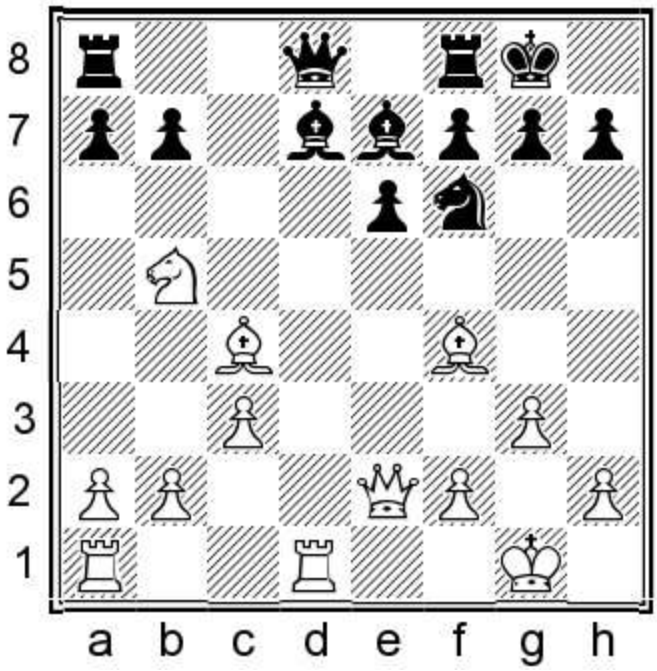


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We need a further branching. The two main options are E311) 12...a6 and E312) 12...Bd6, but there are a couple of sidelines to deal with first:

12...Rc8 13.Bb3 Bd6 14.g3 (less convincing is 14.h3 0-0 15.Rd1 when 15...Bh2† 16.Kh1 Bf4= is a standard idea for Black in many lines) 14...0-0 15.Bg5 Nd5 16.c4 Ne7 17.Rfd1² Mueller Alves – Borisovs, corr. 2008.

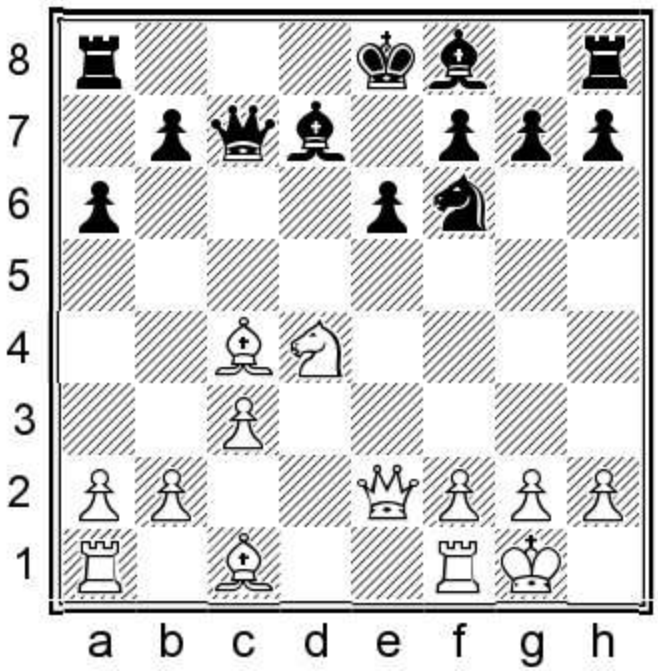
12...Be7 13.Nb5
Harassing the queen earns an edge.
13...Qb8
Instead 13...Qb6N is untested but looks as good a try as any. For example: 14.Be3 Bc5 15.Bf4 0-0 16.Bc7 Qc6 17.Be5²
14.g3 0-0 15.Bf4 Qd8 16.Rfd1²



White is a little better, while Black must play with precision to avoid immediate disaster:
16...a6?
Essential was 16...Qb6 17.a4² as in Braakhuis – Genzmann, corr. 2003.
17.Nc7 Rc8 18.Nxe6! fxe6 19.Bxe6† Kh8
In Adams – Glek, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 1996, the most convincing winner would have been:
20.Rd3! Qe8 21.Bxd7 Nxd7 22.Re3 Rxf4 23.Rxe7 Qg6 24.Rxd7+–

E311) 12...a6

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Preparing ...Bd6 without allowing Nb5.

13.g3
White is preparing Bf4, while discouraging 13...Bd6, as we will soon see.

Instead 13.h3 allows 13...Bd6 14.Nf5 Bh2† 15.Kh1 0-0= which is fine for Black, as 16.Nxg7?? Kxg7 17.g3 Bxg3–+ was totally unsound in Korneev – Fernandez Romero, Pamplona 2002. Possibly White had missed that 18.Rg1 is refuted by 18...Bc6†.

13...Be7
As so often, this bishop development is safe but passive.

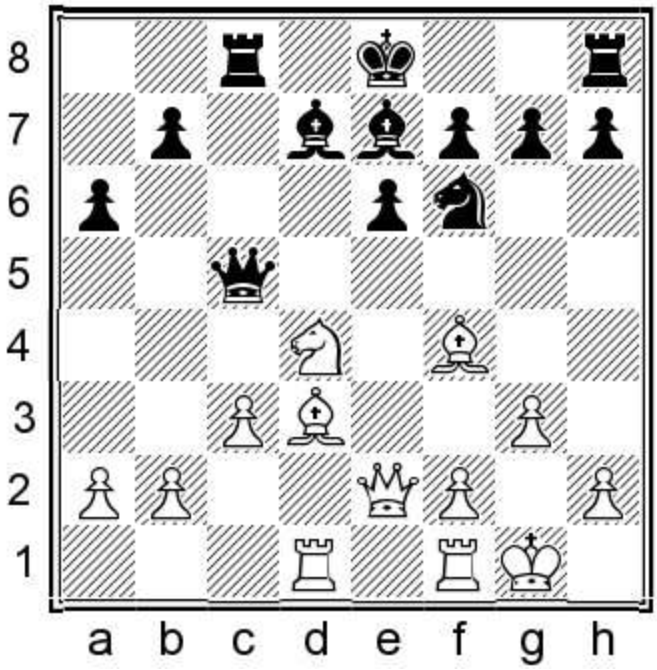
13...Bd6 is the move 13.g3 is designed to meet: 14.Nf5 0-0 And now no unsound sacs on g7, but instead 15. Nxd6 Qxd6 16.Rd1² with a simple bishop-pair edge, as in Socko – Naumkin, Moscow 2012.

13...0-0-0 14.Bf4 Bd6 15.Bxd6 Qxd6 16.Nf3² White plans Ne5 and a rook to d1. Black is solid but undeniably passive.

13...e5!? This has only been played three times, and all by the same player in email games. Despite that, it looks like one of Black's best tries. 14.f4!?N (14.Bf4 Bd6 15.Bxe5 Bxe5 16.f4 0-0 17.fxe5 Rae8 18.Rae1 Bg4= regained the pawn and left White with next to nothing in F. Hoffmann – Doren, email 2014.14...e4 15.f5÷ Artificially isolating the e4-pawn while limiting the d7-bishop's options. I like White's pieces, especially, the secure knight on d4, but I cannot claim more than an unclear position.

14.Bf4 Qc5 15.Rad1 Rc8 16.Bd3²
We could safely stop here, and claim an edge, but I will show a few more moves just as an example of how White's niggle endures even into an endgame.

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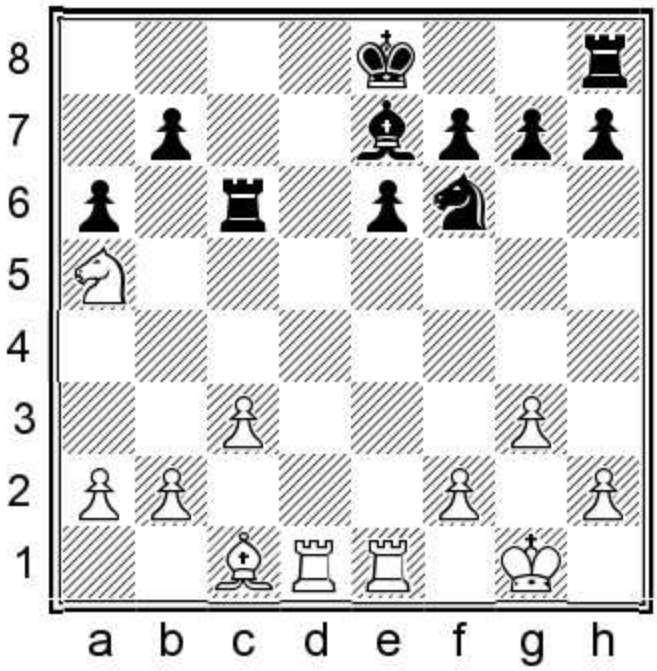


16...Qh5
The database claims Black played 16...Qe5, but the text move does not hang the queen, so I have changed the moves.

17.Rfe1 Qxe2 18.Bxe2 Nd5 19.Bc1²
It's just a temporary retreat; White's queenside majority will soon expand.

19...Ba4
Otherwise c3-c4. It seems that Black never fully manages to equalize.

20.Nb3 Nf6 21.Bf3 Bc6 22.Bxc6† Rxc6 23.Na5±
White has annoying endgame pressure, in similar style to our anti-Rubinstein line (see Chapter 10).

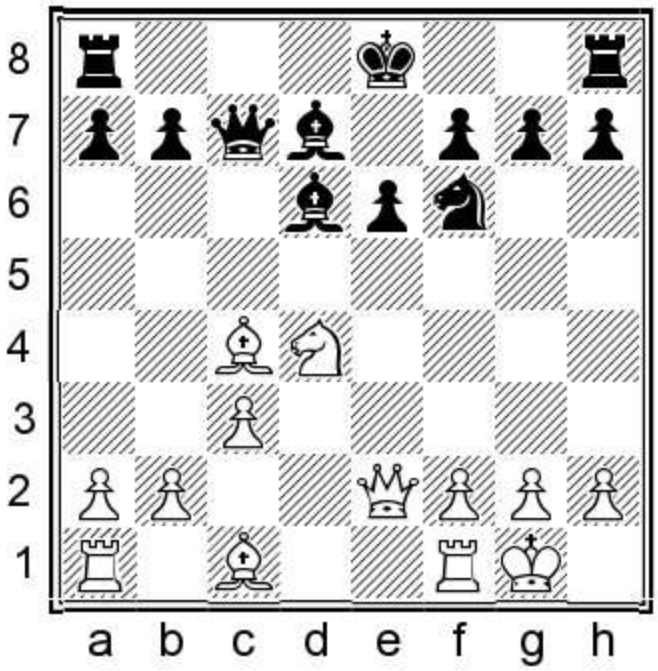


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23...Rb6
An awkward square, but 23...Rc7 24.Bf4 is also a problem.

24.b4 Nd5 25.Bb2±
In Bojkovic – Kononenko, Dresden 2007, White had the simple but effective plan of a2-a3 and then c3-c4.

E312) 12...Bd6

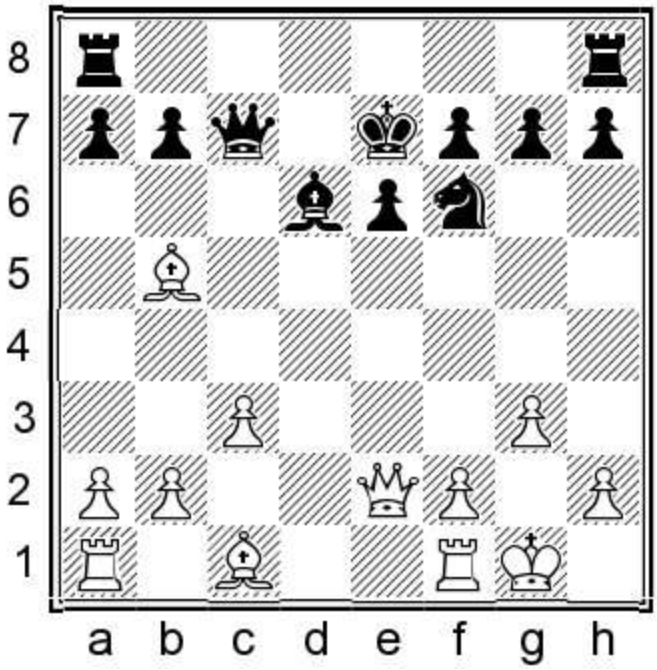


13.Nb5!
White secures the bishop pair and with that, a small long-term edge.
13.h3 allows the typical equalizing operation 13...Bh2† 14.Kh1 Bf4 which we have seen before.

13...Bxb5
The simple tactical point is that 13...Bxh2†?? 14.Kh1 leaves too many black pieces in danger. For example: 14...Qe5 15.f4! Qxe2 16.Bxe2+– winning material due to the threat of a knight fork on c7 and the hanging bishop on h2.

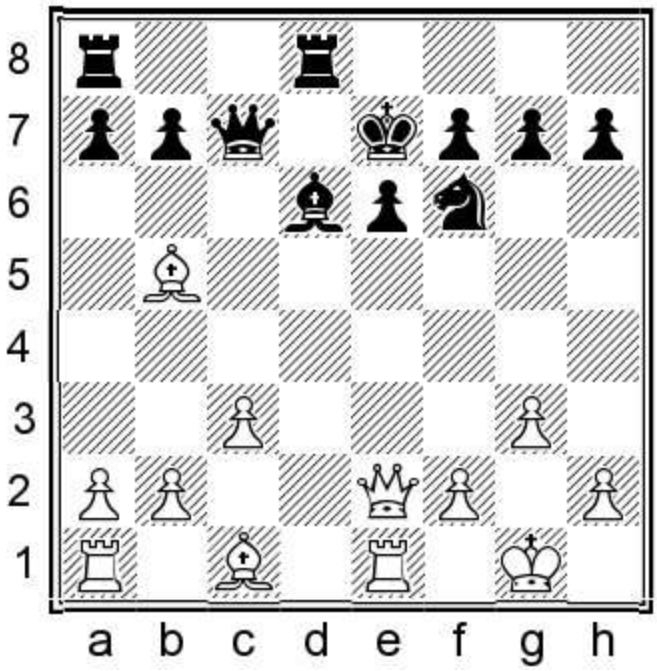
14.Bxb5† Ke7 15.g3²
If you remember to this point, then that's almost enough; just note the 15...h5 line below. I shall also offer a few other lines merely as examples of typical play.

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15...Rhd8
Or 15...a6 16.Ba4 Rhd8 17.Qf3 h6 18.Bb3 Rab8 19.Rd1² was Ivanchuk – Ehlvest, Manila (ol) 1992.
One tricky try is: 15...h5 16.h4!² Since the sac on g3 fails trivially, Black's attack is over and White will start his, probably with Bg5 next.
But note that 16.Bg5?! allows 16...h4!÷ when White must avoid 17.Bxh4? Rxh4 18.gxh4 In Peptan – Voronova, Calimanesti 1992, 18...Rh8? 19.Qc4! allowed White a chance to escape, but instead 18...a6!N first would have won directly. For example: 19.Ba4 Rh8–+ and White's position collapses.

16.Re1



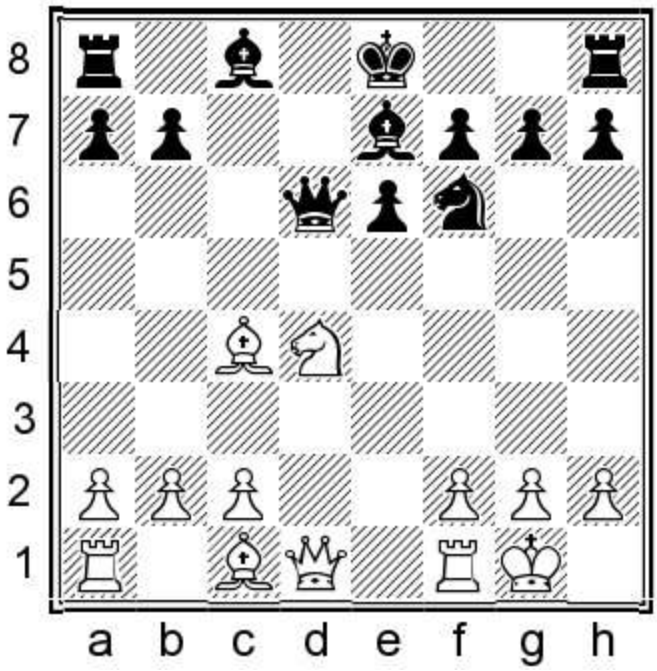
16...Kf8
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Instead 16...Rac8 17.Qf3 a6 18.Bf1 Qc6 19.Qxc6 Rxc6 20.Bg2² was A. Sokolov – Andersson, Clermont Fer-

rand 1989; even the great endgame expert could not hold Black's position.

17.Qf3 Qe7
Or 17...Qb6 18.Bf1 Kg8 19.a4!?² is similar.

18.a4!?²
A typical move in these lines, gaining some space, Adams – Seirawan, Bermuda (3) 2000.

E32) 10...Be7



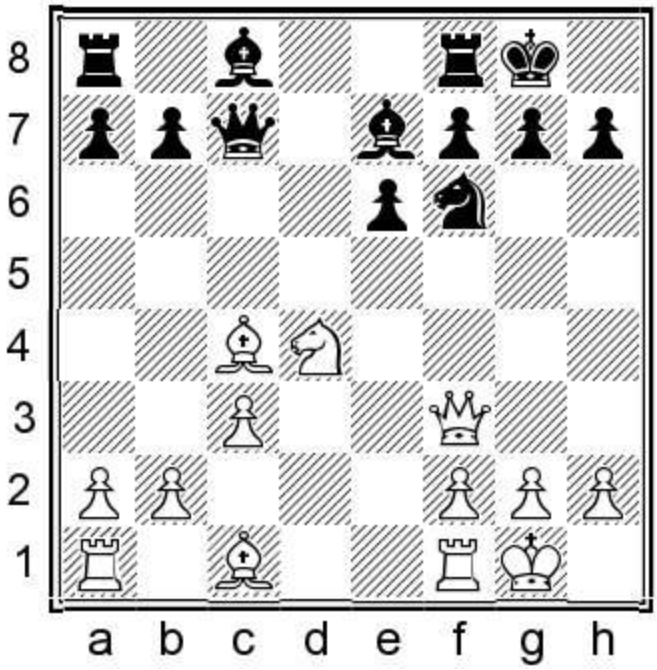
11.c3
Once again, I will recommend this move.

We also analysed 11.b3, but there was one line where we could not find an advantage: 11...0-0 12.Bb2 Qf4 13. Qe2 Bc5! 14.Rad1 b6 15.a3 a5 As in Fechner – Hummel, email 2012.

11...0-0 12.Qf3
Activating the queen while preparing Bf4.

12...Qc7

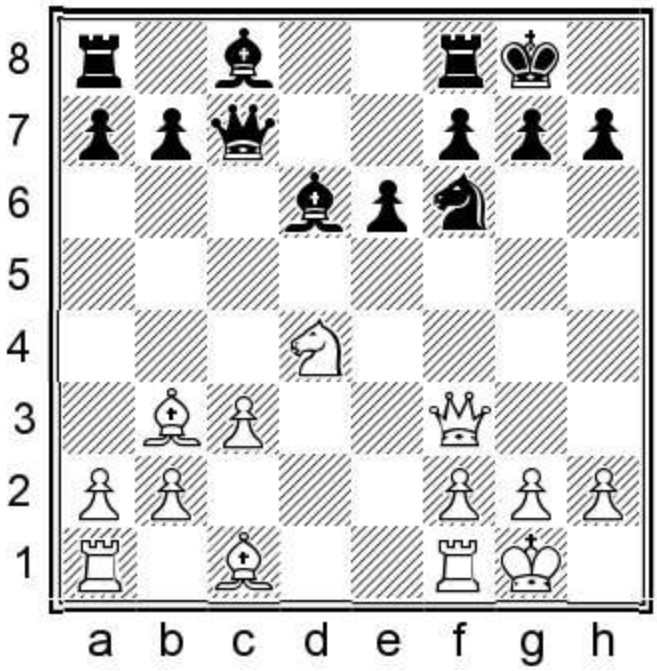
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13.Bb3!
It was a tough call, but we decided that the text move is more promising than 13.Bd3. For example, 13...Bd7 14.Re1 Rfe8 15.Bf4 Bd6 16.Bxd6 Qxd6 was solid for Black in Vallejo Pons – Giri, Beijing (rapid) 2011.

13...Bd7
By far the most common move.

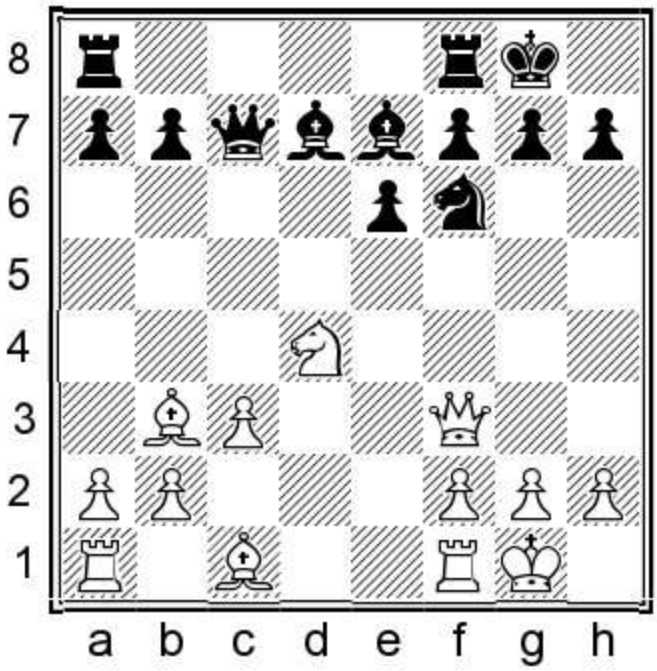
13...Bd6!?N
I think this may be Black's best move order, in similar style to the Hort – Spassky game (pages 237/8), although in practice this exact position remains untested.



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14.h3!
Sadly 14.Nb5 Bxh2† 15.Kh1 Qd7 16.Kxh2 Qxb5 does not offer enough compensation for an edge.
14.g3 Bd7 15.Bg5 Be5= looks rock-solid for Black.
14...Bd7
One of a range of reasonable moves, none of which quite equalize. For example:
14...Qa5 15.Rd1 Bc7 16.Bc2 Rd8 17.a4!²
14...Bh2† 15.Kh1 Be5 16.Bg5 h6 17.Bh4 Bd7 18.Rad1² White has slightly better prospects. For example: 18... Rfd8 19.Qe2 planning Rfe1 or f2-f4.
15.Bg5 Bh2† 16.Kh1 Be5 17.Rad1²
This is similar to the 14...Bh2† variation.

13...a6 would be met by 14.Bf4 in similar style to the main line.



14.Bf4!
Our analysis suggests this is White's best option.

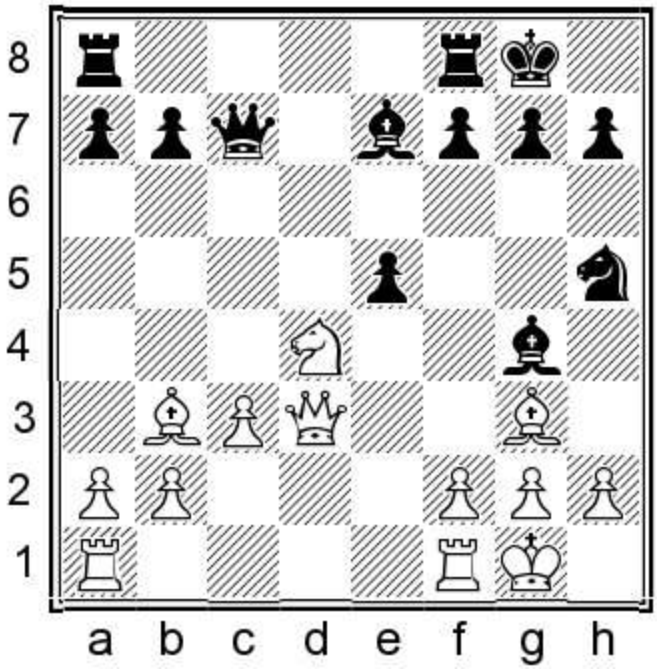
14.Bg5!? is offered by the engines as a decent alternative, but it looks too vague to me.

Also 14.Re1 Bd6= is perfectly fine for Black.

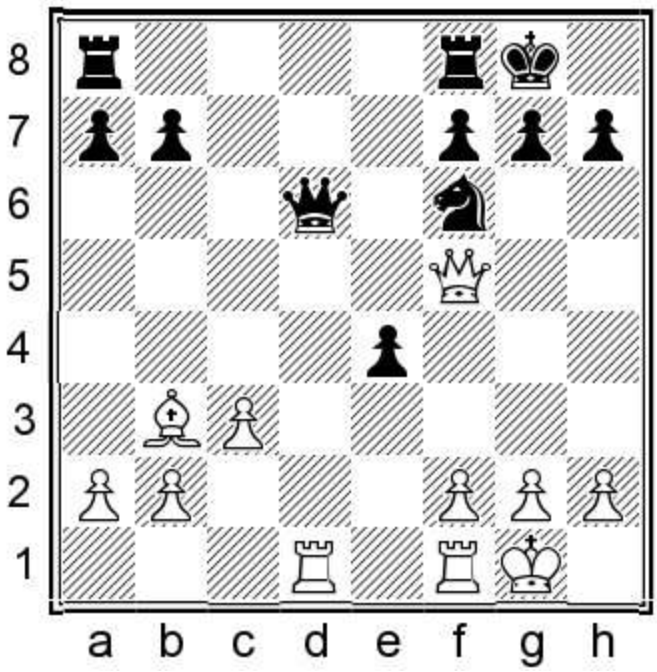
14...Qb6
Black chooses to leave his solid pawn structure unchanged.

14...e5 15.Bg3!
White's main idea is Nf5 next.
15...Bd6
Instead 15...Bg4 16.Qd3 Nh5 was tried recently.

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It is well met by: 17.Rfe1!N (but not 17.Nf5 Bxf5 18.Qxf5 Nxg3 19.hxg3 g6 which was rather drawish in Trigo Urquijo – Del Rio de Angelis, Zornotza 2017) 17...Bf6 18.Nc2 Rae8 19.Ne3 Be6 20.Bxe6 Rxe6 21.Rad1² The prospect of a Nd5 invasion keeps White's initiative rumbling along.
16.Nf5 Bxf5 17.Qxf5 e4 18.Bxd6 Qxd6 19.Rad1²



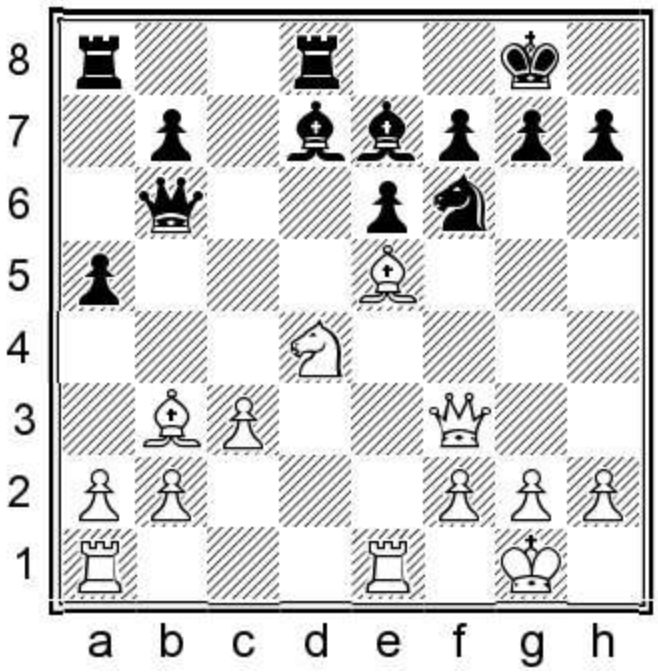
In Efroimski – Greet, Isle of Man 2015, White had mild pressure, but it proved troubling enough in the game.

15.Rfe1
A logical developer, but not the only good option.

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15.Be5!?N 15...Rac8 16.Rad1² is a logical suggestion by the engine.

15...a5 16.Be5 Rfd8



17.Qh3!?N
17.Qe2 was less to the point in Packroff – Vodicka, email 2014.

17...h5 18.Re2!²
This highly useful move covers both b2 and f2, allowing White to meet 18...a4 with 19.Bc2, and 18...Ng4? with: 19.Bxg7! Kxg7 20.Qxh5+–

Conclusion

After 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 we saw a range of queen moves.

6...Qh5 and 6...Qc5?! are both deservedly rare, though the former is not disastrous.

6...Qd8!? and 6...Qd7!? are both more serious moves, though again my preference is for the former option. We saw that both moves can lead to a wild exchange sacrifice line, where Black must play with exceptional accuracy to avoid being crushed. If Black plays perfectly, it appears possible to hold the balance, but that would be tough to do without computer assistance.
My objection to the 6...Qd7 line is that White has the extra option of steering the game towards the absolute main line of the 6...Qd6 variation (which we will see in the next chapter) using the 9.Nbxd4 move order, as explained on page 220.

6...Qd6 7.0-0 is heading towards the absolute main line, but first we saw two poor diversions, 7...Nc6 and 7...a6. Both needlessly allow the powerful 8.Ne4.
We finished the chapter by getting ever nearer the main line with 7...Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4. We will see the most important line 10...a6 in the next chapter, but 10...Bd7 and 10...Be7 are both serious moves. I suggest eschewing the traditionally recommended 11.b3 in favour of 11.c3. Both defences present a tough challenge, but I believe White can press for an advantage with the lines I suggest.

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Chapter 9 - 4...Qxd5 - Main Line

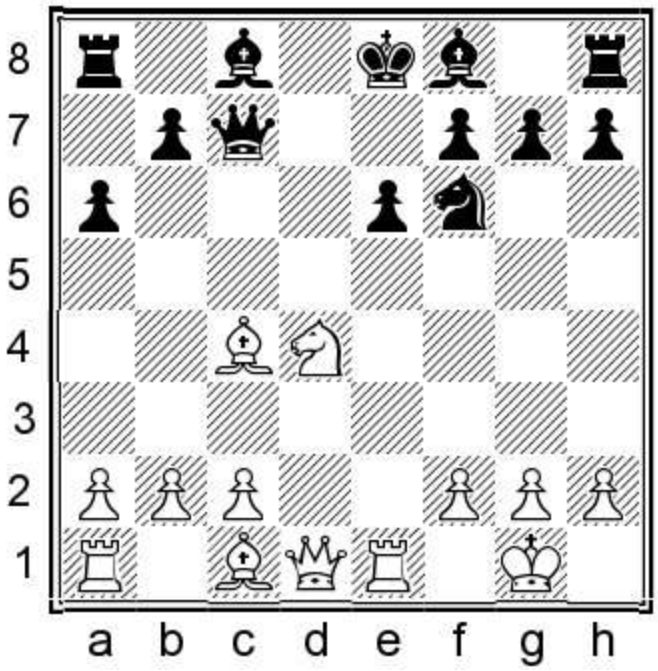
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 Qd6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 a6 11.Re1 Qc7 12.Bf1!?

12...Be7 Game 28 236
12...Bc5 Game 29 240
12...Bd6 242
13.Nf5!? Game 30 242
13.g3 Game 31 249

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 Qd6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 a6
After the sidelines of the previous chapter, we have reached the main line of the main line of the 4...Qxd5 Tarrasch.

11.Re1
The most common move and also the most principled.

11...Qc7
By far the most common move, and the only logical choice, as the point of 10...a6 was to prepare ...Qc7 and ideally ...Bd6 without allowing Nb5.

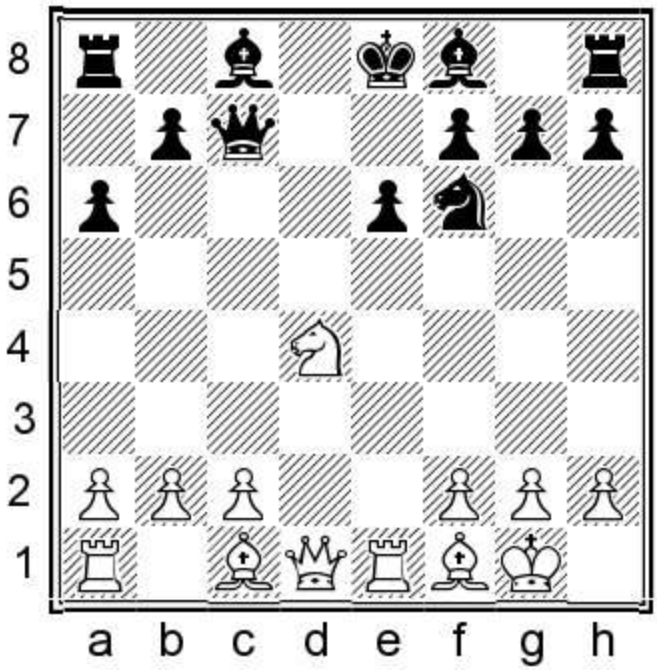


12.Bf1!?
This is the modern trend. From f1 the bishop keeps flexible; for example, it can re-emerge on g2 or d3, targeting the black king no matter which side it castles. 12.Bf1 has only been played 70 times, which makes it relatively unexplored compared to the many hundreds of games played with the following two moves:

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After 12.Qe2 White has had a tough time dealing with 12...h6!!, which seems to be against the general rules of opening play, until you realize that the bishop on c1 has no good squares to go to. This was recommended in Ntirlis & Aagaard's book Playing the French and later became a main line, played by Harikrishna, Nisipeanu and many other top GMs.

The old main line is 12.Bb3 which looks exciting the first time you see 12...Bd6 13.Nf5 Bxh2† 14.Kh1 0-0 15. Nxg7, but a French player will blitz out the theory: 15...Rd8 16.Qf3 Kxg7 17.Bh6† Kg6 18.c3 Nh5 Decades of analysis has failed to find anything more than equality.



We now need to cover a variety of options. 12...Be7 is solid and is analysed in Game 28. 12...Bc5 is rather rare, but we will see it in Game 29. 12...Bd6 is certainly the critical move, and we will see it in Games 30 and 31.

GAME 28

Vladimir Fedoseev – Santosh Gujrathi Vidit
Berlin (rapid) 2015

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 Qd6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 a6
I changed the move order of this game slightly to fit our normal route.

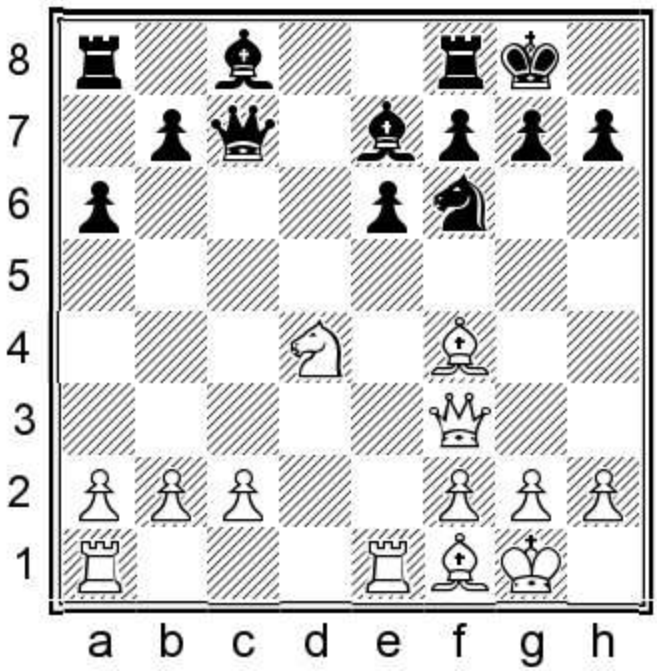
11.Re1 Qc7 12.Bf1!? Be7
This is the solid approach and certainly playable. But on the other hand, White is pressing for the advantage, while for Black, equality is the limit of his ambition.

Black can try a long-castling plan with 12...Bd7, but White is well placed to meet this idea with: 13.g3 0-0-0 14.Bf4 Bd6 15.Bxd6 Qxd6 16.Bg2² White has the safer king and better bishop. The following example shows how quickly Black's position can combust. 16...Nd5? 17.Qf3! Qb6 18.Rad1 Rhf8 19.c4 Nb4 20.Qb3+– White had a winning attack in Rayner – J. Burnett, Torquay 2013.

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13.Qf3
Clearing d1 for a rook and preparing to gain a tempo with Bf4.

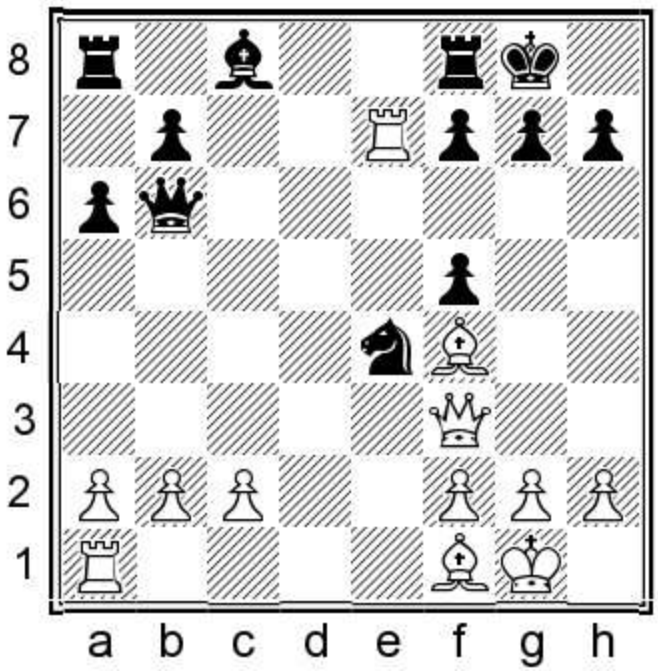
13...0-0 14.Bf4



14...Bd6
Almost always played, but the rare alternative looks at least as good.

14...Qb6!? 15.Nf5!?N
This must be the move Black players wish to avoid by putting their queen on c7, but it's not so clear.
15.Nb3 decentralizes a key piece, and 15...Bd7= led to a quick draw in Raja – Del Rio de Angelis, Zalakaros 2016.
15...exf5 16.Rxe7 Ne4!÷
The only move to challenge White. White does have the bishop pair and a rook on the seventh, but I don't see any clear path to an advantage.
The greedy 16...Qxb2?! 17.Be5 allows Black's kingside to be ruptured after 17...Qb4 18.Bxf6 gxf6² as 17... Qb6?! 18.Rd1! is even worse for Black, as he can barely move.

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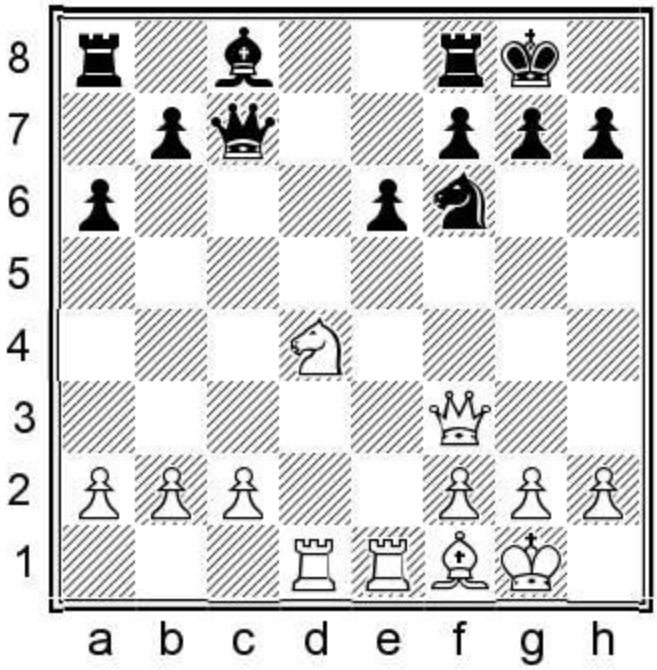
17.b3!?
17.Rb1!?÷ is the simple way to cover b2.
17.Bc4 Be6 18.Bxe6 fxe6= looks solid for Black, with ...Rf7 a defensive option if required.
17...Qf6 18.Re5
Without computer help, I would be scared White was dropping material, but apparently we are under control. For example:
18...g5 19.Bg3÷

15.Bxd6 Qxd6 16.Rad1
Now the black queen must make its fifth move of the game, while Black's dark-squared bishop was exchanged after ambling from f8 to e7 to d6. So much loss of time, but so little drama, as Black's solid structure keeps him safe.

16...Qc7
The usual move, but the alternative was recently played by Grischuk, so is worth a look.

16...Qb6 17.Qb3 Qc7
Black is making the reasonable claim that White's queen is not better placed on b3 than it was on f3.
Instead 17...Qxb3 18.axb3 Bd7 19.g3 Rfc8 20.Bg2² gave White an endgame edge in Sevian – Checa, Rockville 2016.
18.c4
18.Qg3 would transpose to 17.Qg3 in the note to the next move.
18...Bd7 19.Nf3 Rfd8 20.Ne5 Be8 21.Qe3
Karjakin – Grischuk, Paris (rapid) 2017, shows a typical position from this line with White trying to be better, but Black rock solid. White pressed all game, then blundered his queen.

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17.Re3
Maybe preparing to double on the d-file, but Black must also keep an eye on Rc3 ideas. There are a number of options of equal value, so this is a good point to start making things up.

17.c4 Bd7 18.h3 Rfd8 19.g4 Be8 20.g5 Nd7 21.h4 Rac8 22.Qe3 showed an ambitious space-gaining plan in Akopian – Meier, Istanbul (ol) 2012.
17.Qg3 is the transposition mentioned one move ago. White plays it safe; a typical continuation is 17...Qxg3 18.hxg3 Bd7 19.Nf3 Rfd8 20.Ne5. In three games White has scored two draws and one win, all against significantly higher-rated Black opposition. Idani – Sargissian, Dubai 2017, was the one White won.

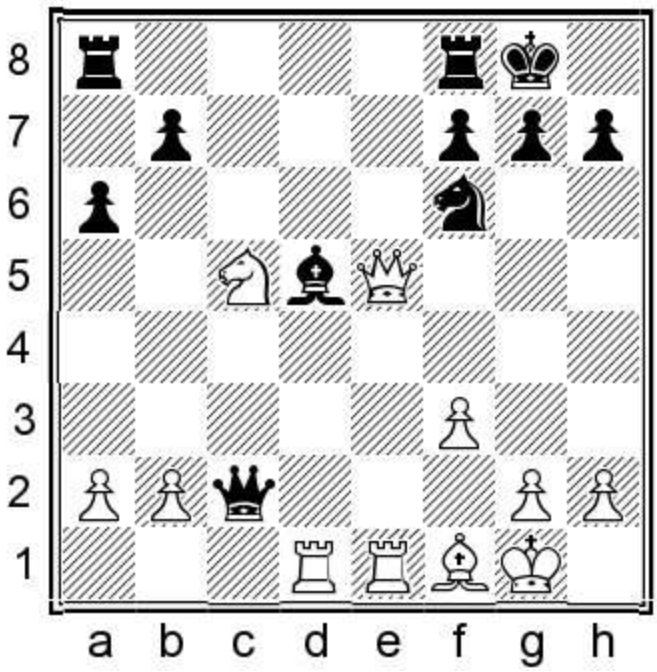
17...e5?!
The double threat of ...exd4 and ...Bg4 makes this a tempting advance, but White has a good response that leaves e5 under pressure.

More reliable was 17...Bd7N with a typical position for this line.

18.Qg3! Ng4 19.Ree1 Qc5 20.Nb3 Qxc2 21.f3
Not a bad move, but with queens still on, potential checks on the g1-a7 diagonal can be a useful resource for Black so better was: 21.h3! Nf6 22.Qxe5²

21...Nf6 22.Qxe5 Be6 23.Nc5 Bd5
The only move. 23...Bxa2?? allows a queen trap with 24.Bd3.

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24.Nd7!
Forcing a bishop-versus-knight scenario when White's advantage is permanent.
White needed to avoid 24.Rxd5? which is refuted by 24...Rae8! but not 24...Rfe8?? 25.Qf5!+– when the saving check on e8 wins for White.

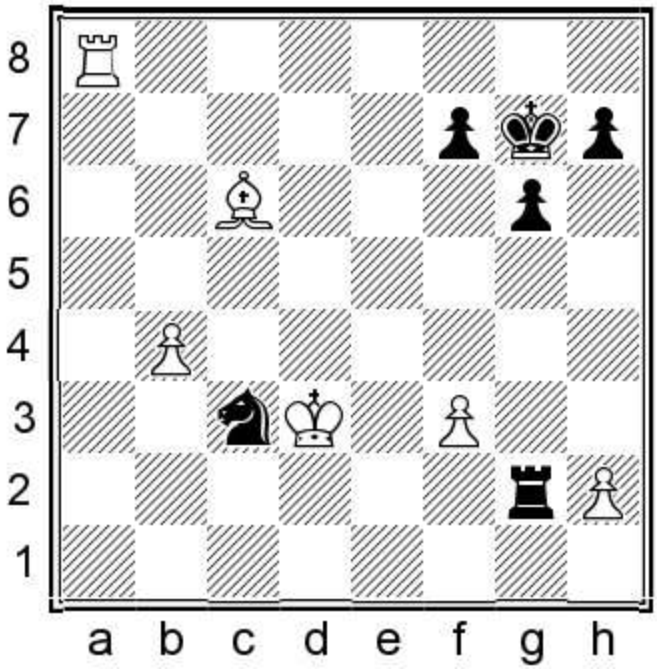
24...Nxd7 25.Qxd5 Qc5†?!
Heading for an unpleasant endgame.

Black would have had better saving chances after 25...Nf6. For example: 26.Qxb7 Rfb8 27.Qe7 Qxb2 28.Bc4 Qb6† Remember f2-f3. 29.Kf1 Ra7 30.Qe5²

26.Qxc5 Nxc5 27.b4±
I will not analyse the endgame in detail, except for a few points or particular interest. But note that White has a significant advantage with his more active rooks and bishop versus knight.

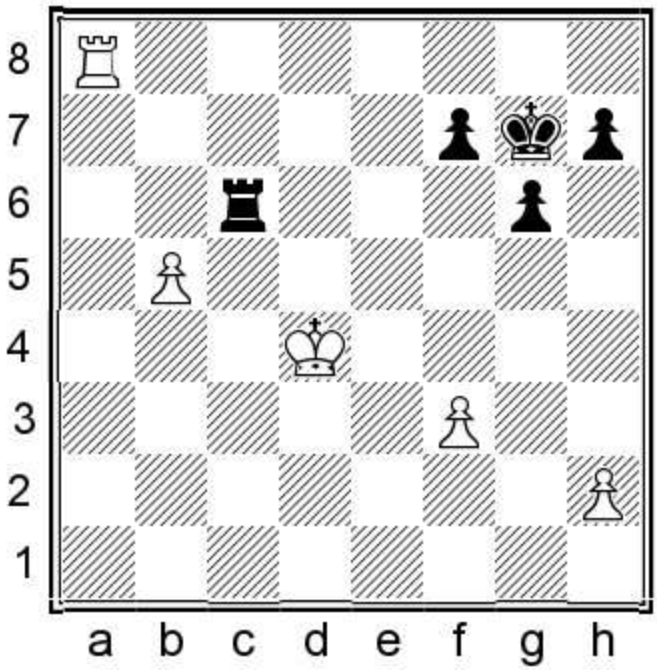
27...Na4 28.Rd7 b5 29.Rc1 g6 30.Rc6 Kg7 31.Rdd6 Rfd8 32.Rxa6 Rxd6 33.Rxa8 Rd1 34.Kf2 Rd2† 35.Ke3 Rxa2 36.Bxb5 Nc3 37.Bc6 Rxg2 38.Kd3

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38...Rg1
Allowing a lost rook endgame, but Black appears to be lost anyway. For example: 38...Na2 39.b5 Rxh2 40.Kc4 The following line is far longer than belongs in an opening book, but it's noteworthy to see how the knight can be exploited as a target to help advance the passed pawn: 40...Rb2 41.Ra3 Kf6 42.Bd5 h5 43.Kc5! Nb4 44.Bc4 h4 45.f4 Nc2 46.Rb3 Ra2 47.b6 Ra8 48.b7 Rb8 49.Bd5 Kf5 50.Rc3 Ne1 51.Re3 Nc2 52.Re2 Na3 53.Ra2 Nb1 54.Ra8+–

39.Kxc3 Rc1† 40.Kd4 Rxc6 41.b5
The b-pawn is too fast.



41...Rf6
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No better was 41...Rc2 42.b6 Rb2 43.Kc5 Kf6 44.h4 Ke6 (or 44...Kf5 45.Ra5 builds a bridge) 45.Kc6 Rc2† 46.

Kb5! Gaining a tempo compared to going to b7 at once, which would also win, but let's be precise. 46...Rb2† 47.Ka6 Ra2† 48.Kb7 Unlike on c2, on a2 the black rook is under attack so Black does not have a free move to make progress with his kingside advance. 48...Rb2 49.Ka7+–

42.Ra3 Kf8 43.Re3 Rf5 44.Kc4 Rf4† 45.Kc5 Rf5† 46.Kc6 Rh5 47.Re2 Rf5 48.Rf2 Ke7 49.b6 Rf4 50.Re2† Kd8 51.Rd2† Ke7 52.b7 Rb4 53.Rd5
White played the ending excellently, especially considering it was a rapid game.
1–0

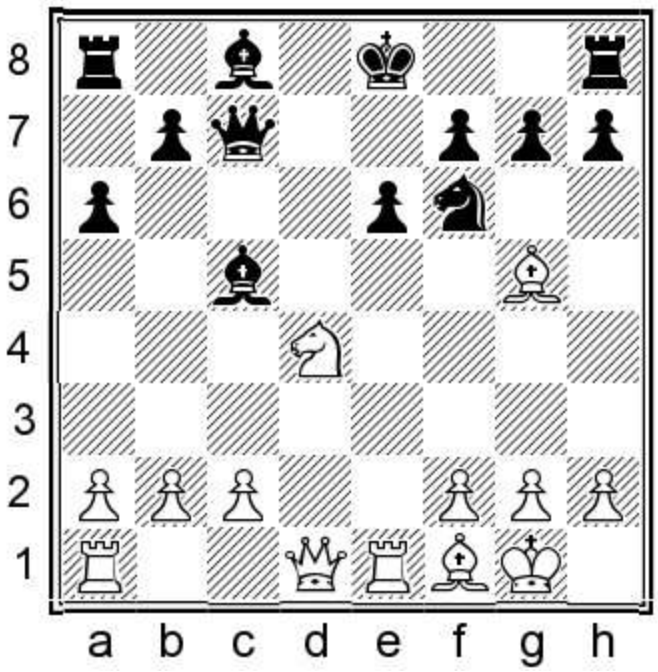
GAME 29

Yang-Fan Zhou – Simon Knott
Torquay 2013

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5
I changed the move order of this game to fit our repertoire.

4...Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 Qd6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 a6 11.Re1 Qc7 12.Bf1 Bc5
A rather rare move, but quite natural-looking.

13.Bg5!
This is the most direct and challenging option, even though Ivanchuk once played 13.c3.

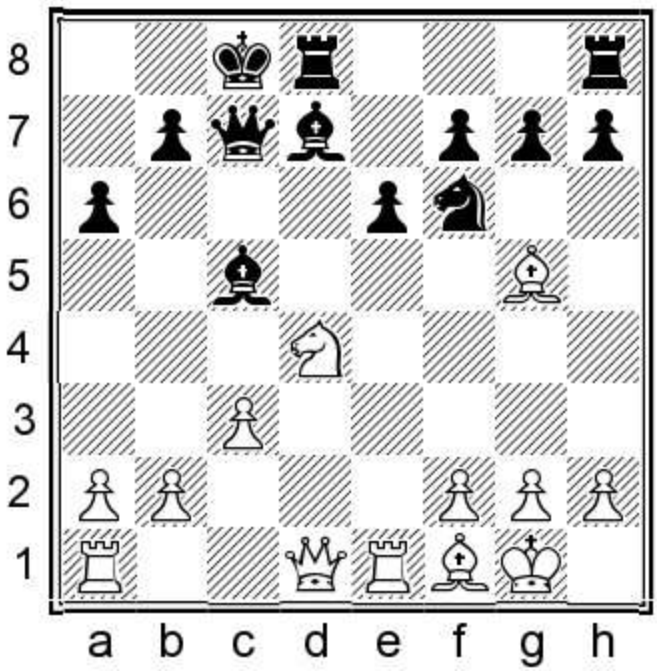


13...0-0?!
There are various positions in the French Tarrasch where Black can castle kingside, allowing doubled f-pawns, and be absolutely fine. But this is not one of them. In a couple of key lines, the f1-bishop popping up on d3 is a deadly resource.

Black should prepare to go long:
13...Bd7 14.c3 0-0-0

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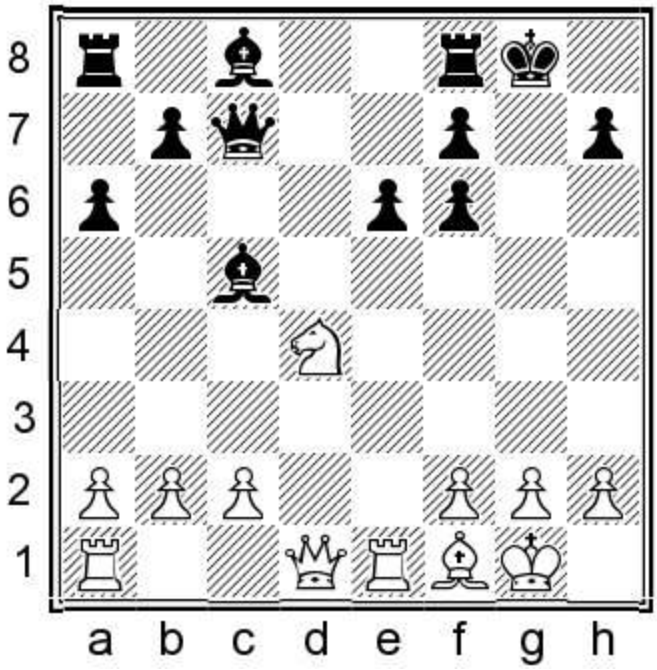
As in Almasi – Goganov, Stockholm 2016.
I am claiming Black should castle queenside, but the computer has a wacky suggestion: 14...h6!?N And after 15.Bxf6 gxf6 16.Qh5, threatening to take on e6, it nervelessly suggests 16...Kf8 with an assessment of equality. I am sure most humans would feel more comfortable with White after 17.Rad1.



15.Qf3!?N
A logical novelty, but not the only promising path.
15.b4!? was Almasi's choice and it is also sensible. After 15...Bd6 16.g3 e5 17.Nb3 Be6 18.Qe2 Kb8 19.Na5 Almasi had promising play, and later won.
15.g3!?N could also be investigated.
15...e5
Black can inflict an IQP with: 15...Bxd4 16.cxd4 Bc6 17.Qc3!² Black would love to exchange queens, but 17... Bd5?! just exposes the black king to even more air after: 18.Qd2±
16.Nb3
Keeping it simple.
16.b4!? is a messier and more aggressive reply; it might even be the best move.
16...Be7 17.Bh4²
White can keep building the pressure on Black's centre and queenside in controlled fashion.

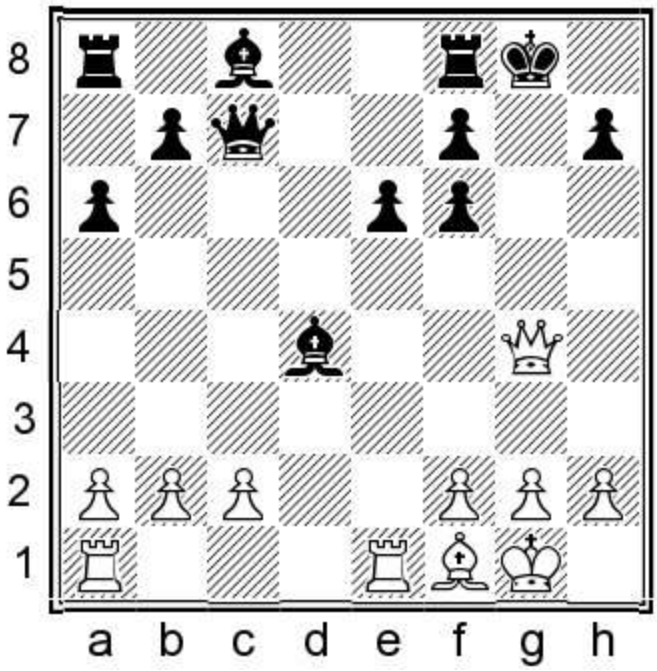
14.Bxf6 gxf6

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15.Qg4†
A reasonable move, but not the most precise.

15.Qh5!
This was a novelty when we first analysed it a few years ago, but it has since been played. Black's best chance is:
15...Kh8!N
15...Rd8 16.Re4±
15...Bxd4 16.Qg4†± was where our analysis had stopped.

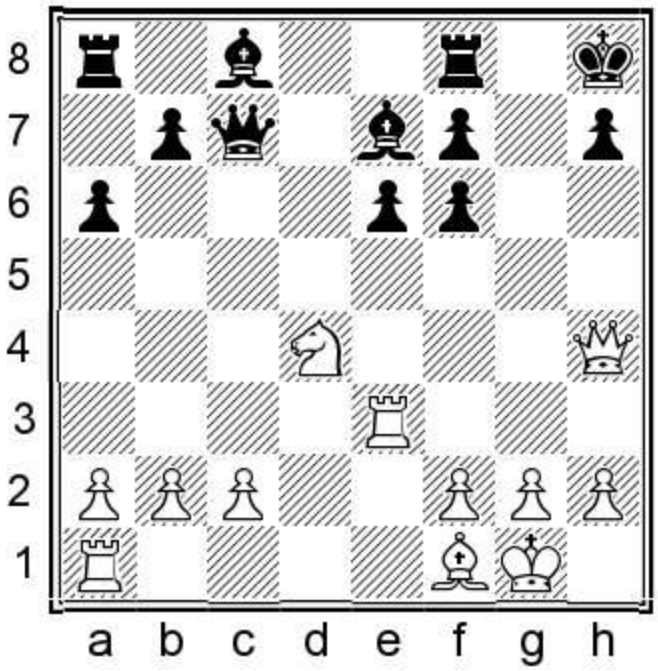


The game convincingly illustrated White's advantage: 16...Kh8 17.Qxd4 Qe7 18.Bd3 Rg8 19.Qh4 Rg7 20.Re5! Kg8 21.Rh5 Kf8 22.Rxh7 Rxh7 23.Qxh7 Qc7 24.Bg6 e5 25.Qh8† Ke7 26.Bxf7 1–0 Liu – Ning, Danzhou

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2016. White's play looked perfect all the way.
16.Re3 Rg8
Again the only chance, as 16...e5? loses after: 17.Bd3 f5 18.Rh3 f6 19.Nxf5+–
17.Rc3 Rg5 18.Qh4 Qe7 19.Re1²
Black has avoided immediate disaster, but is still under considerable pressure.

15...Kh8 16.Qh4 Be7 17.Re3

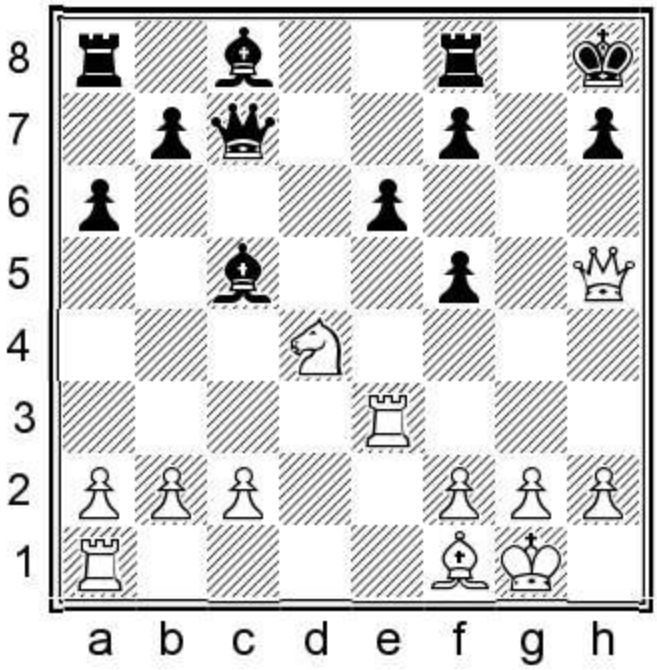


17...f5?
Based on a tactical oversight.

Black needed to play 17...Rg8 as in S. Kasparov – De Jong, Groningen 2015. 18.Qh5!?N 18...Rg7 19.Rd1 f5 20.g3² White has an edge, but Black is very much alive, which shows that 15.Qh5! really is the move to play.

18.Qh5 Bc5
Of course not 18...Bf6? 19.Rh3.

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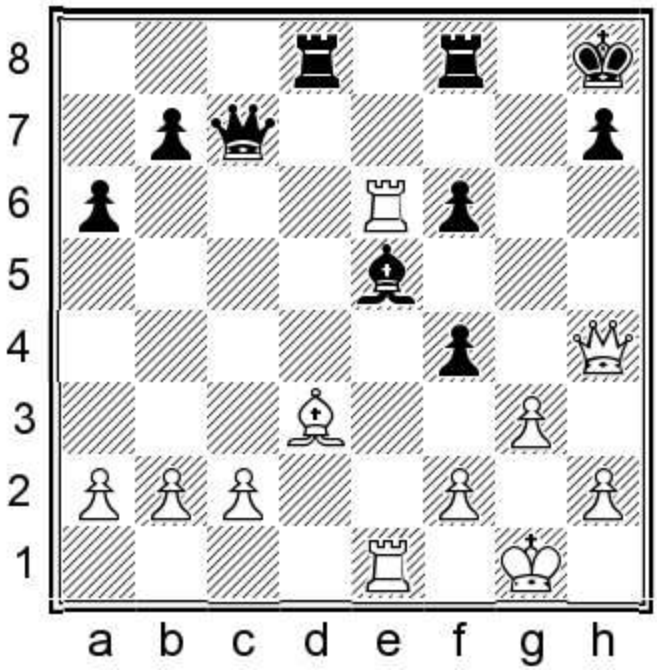


19.Qh6!
The stutter-step from h4 to h5 to h6 was easy to miss. The threat of Qf6† forces Black to wreck his own structure.
No doubt Black expected 19.Rh3 f6 which is not so clear.

19...f6 20.Nxe6 Bxe6 21.Rxe6
Black is a pawn down with his kingside a collection of weaknesses.

21...Bd4 22.Rae1±
Most moves will be good enough. One other effective possibility was: 22.c3 Be5 23.Bd3 f4 24.Be4+–

22...Be5 23.Bd3 f4 24.g3 Rad8 25.Qh4



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25...Rd4?
Allowing a tactic, but even a solid move such as 25...Rd7 leaves 1–0 as the near-certain result.

26.R1xe5 Rxd3
Or 26...fxe5 27.Re7 wins the queen and mates.

27.Re1
More direct was 27.Re7! when following 27...Rd1† 28.Kg2 Qc6† the checks run out after 29.Kh3 or 29.Re4.

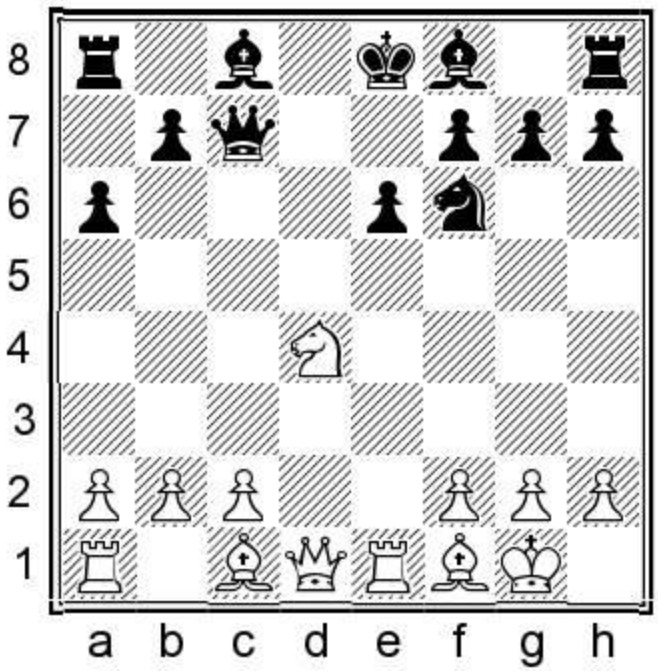
27...Rdd8 28.Re7 Qxc2 29.Qxf4 b5 30.Ra7 Rd1 31.Rxh7†
The d1-rook drops, leaving Black a couple of pawns down with an airy king.
1–0

GAME 30

Sam Shankland – Akshat Chandra
Saint Louis 2016

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5
Once again, I changed the move order to fit our repertoire.

4...Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 Qd6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 a6 11.Re1 Qc7 12.Bf1

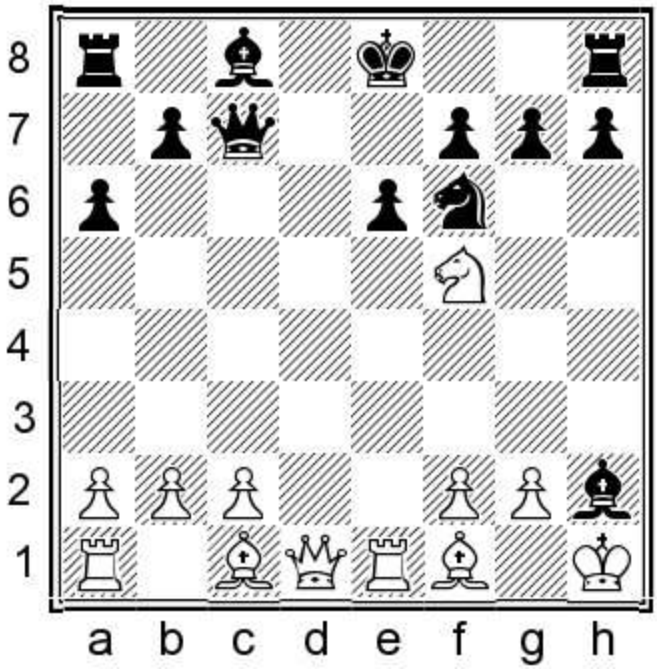


12...Bd6
Certainly the critical move. The bishop chooses its most active diagonal, hitting h2.

13.Nf5!?
The fun ambitious try. We will look at the much less forcing 13.g3 in Game 31.

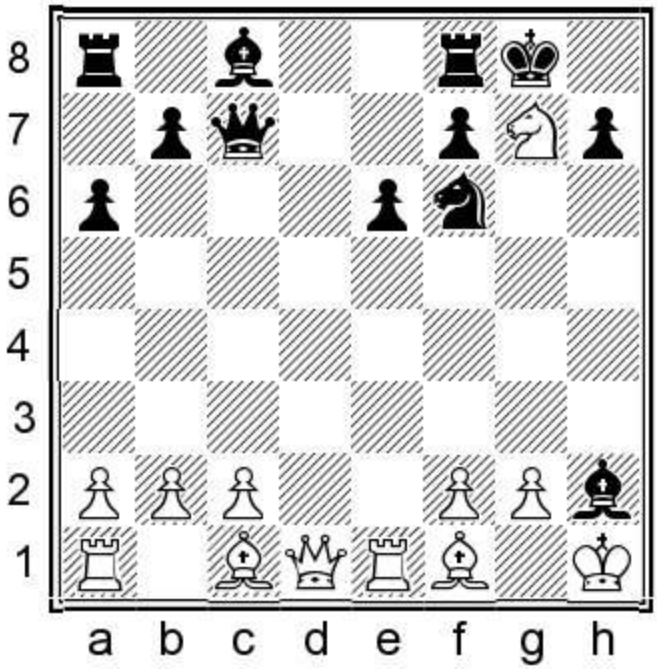
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13...Bxh2† 14.Kh1



14...Kf8!
The best, most testing, response.

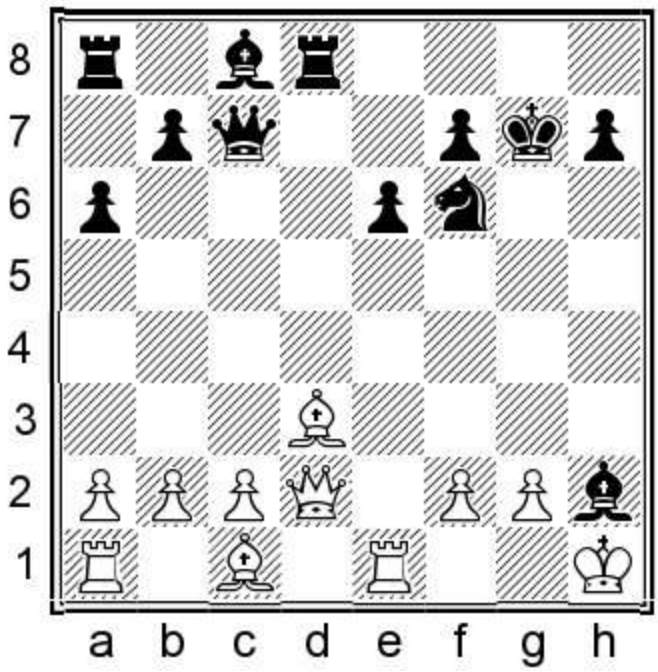
14...0-0 15.Nxg7!
A more effective version of the old main line; our bishop has better options on f1 than b3.



15...Rd8
15...Kxg7 16.Qd4! Threatening Bh6†. (unconvincing is 16.Qd2 Ng8!) 16...e5 (16...h6? 17.Bxh6†; 16...Rg8?! 17.Qh4 Be5 18.Qg5† Kf8 19.Qxe5±) 17.Qh4 Ng4 In Ni Shiqun – Nguyen, Sharjah 2014, White weakened her king position with 18.f3. The right way to regain the piece was: 18.Be2!N For example: 18...Bf4 19.Bxg4 Bxc1

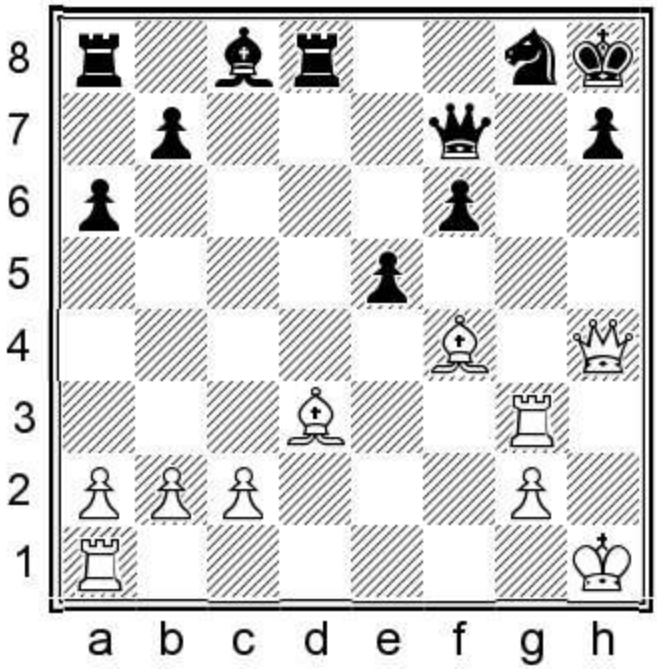
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20.Raxc1² White has the safer king.
16.Bd3 Kxg7 17.Qd2
White is threatening minor-piece-winning checks on g5 or h6.

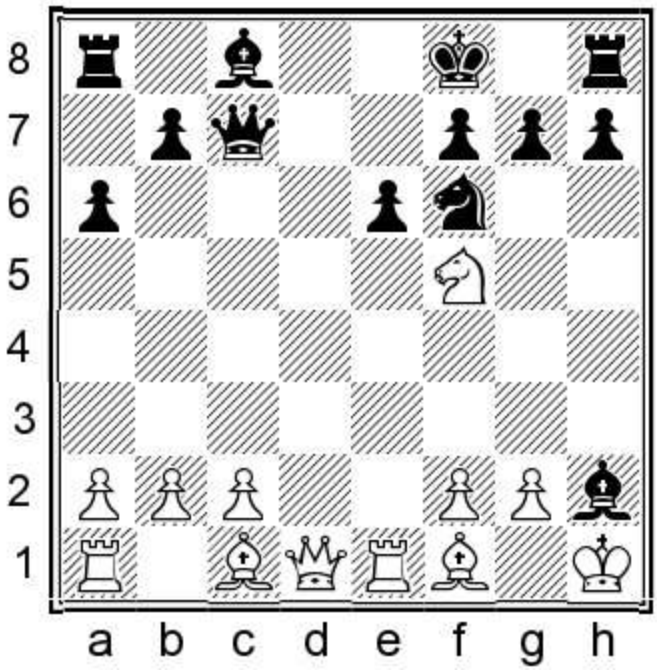


17...Ng8!N
17...Kf8?! accepts an ugly ending: 18.Qh6† Ke7 19.Qxh2 Qxh2† 20.Kxh2± Trzcinski – Lesavouroux, email 2013.
17...Bf4?! is also compliant: 18.Qxf4 Qxf4 19.Bxf4 Nd5 20.Bd2± Tomashevsky – Wang Hao, Huaian (rapid) 2016.
18.Qg5†
18.g3 Bxg3 19.Rg1© is also tempting.
18...Kh8
18...Kf8?! 19.Bxh7 Ne7 20.Qh6† Ke8 21.Qxh2 Qxh2† 22.Kxh2±
19.f4 f6 20.Qh4 Bxf4 21.Bxf4 Qg7
Not 21...e5? 22.Rxe5! with the point: 22...fxe5 23.Bxe5† Qxe5 24.Qxh7#
White has various options to keep the initiative. I will extend the line to show some typical ideas for both sides.
22.Re3!?
22.Be4²
22...e5 23.Rg3
23.Bxe5?! fxe5 24.Qxd8 Qh6† 25.Rh3 Bxh3 26.Qxa8 Be6† 27.Kg1 Qe3†=
23...Qf7

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24.Bxe5
The forcing option.
The more flexible 24.Be3 keeps lasting pressure after, say: 24...Be6 25.Bg6*f*
24...Rxd3
This exchange sac is common in many lines; in this case it is essential.
25.Rxd3 Bf5
Instead 25...fxe5 leads to a long line where Black must find only-moves every single time: 26.Rd8 b5 27.Rad1 Qf5 28.Qg3 Be6 29.R1d7 Qf1† 30.Kh2 Qf4 31.Qxf4 exf4 32.Rxa8 Bxd7 33.Rxa6 Kg7 34.c4!? bxc4 35.a4² The a-pawn is a dangerous asset.
26.Bd4 Bxd3 27.cxd3²
Even after Black's computer-aided precise defence, White's pressure nags on.



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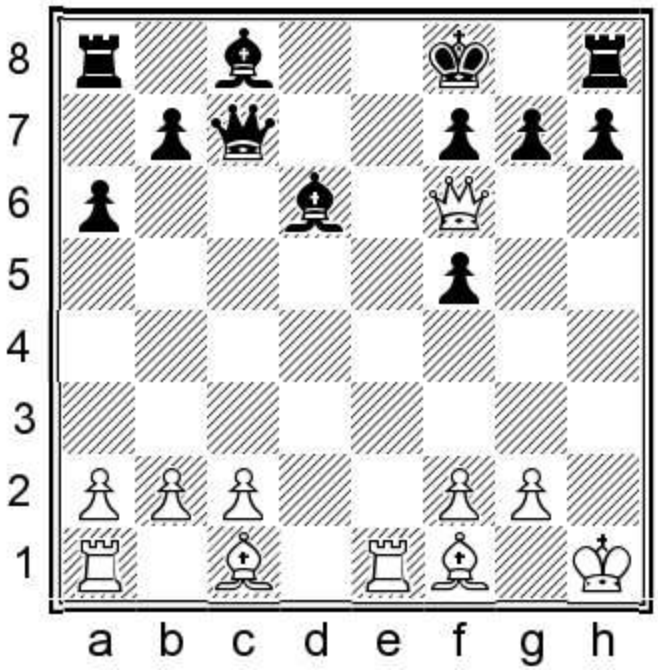
15.Qd4
The only promising move.

15.Nxg7? Kxg7 16.Qd4 h6!µ as in Uuriintuya – Munkhchuluun, Altai 2014, shows the value of leaving the rook on h8 to cover the h6-pawn against bishop sacs.

15.g3 is just a forced draw: 15...exf5 16.Bf4 Qb6 17.Be3 Qc7=

15...exf5 16.Qxf6
Not difficult to understand, but a pleasing move to play. Since taking the queen allows mate, and Bh6 is a threat, Black's choice is whether to push the h-pawn one square or two.

16...h6
Instead: 16...Bd6?

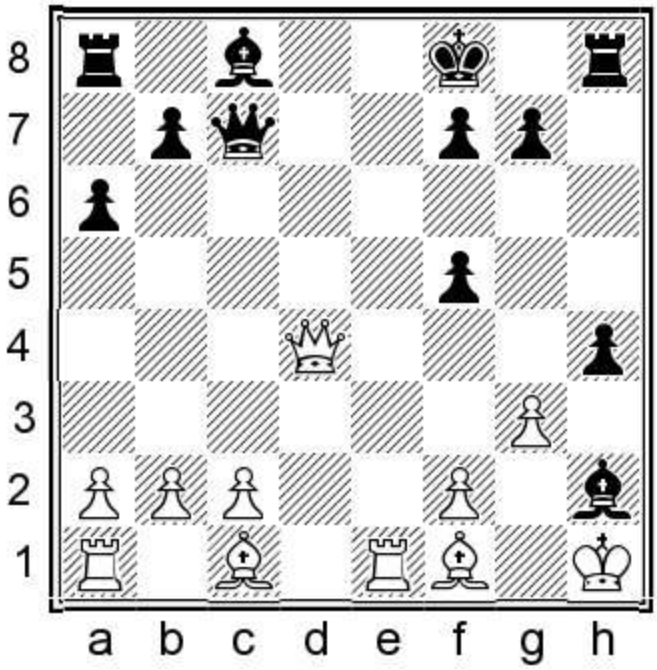


17.Bh6! proves my claim that Bh6 really is a threat. 17...Rg8 18.Rad1+– Black has to give away material to avoid mate. For example: 18...Be6 19.Rxe6 Bc5 20.Qe5 Qxe5 21.Rxe5 Bxf2 22.Rxf5 Solak – Ludwig, Biel 2013.

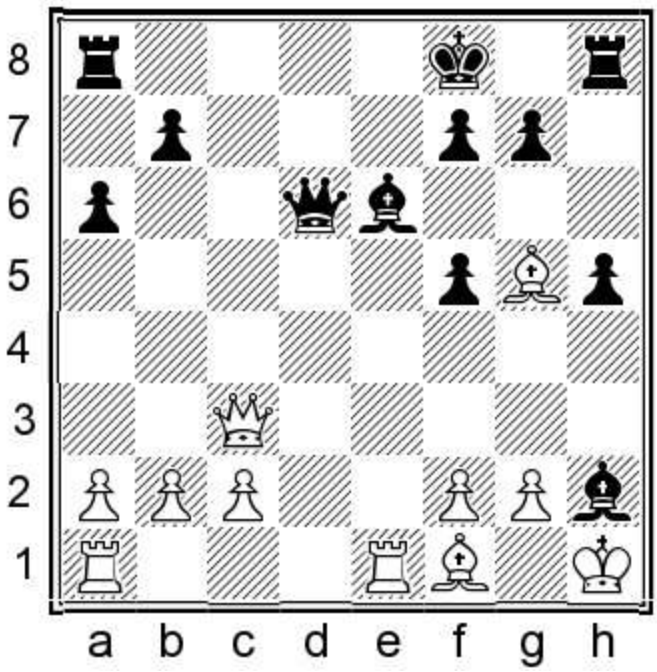
16...Rg8?! 17.Qd4 Bd6 18.Bc4² leaves the black king awkwardly placed.

16...h5 17.Qd4
The following lines need to be rather detailed; with both kings potentially exposed, precision is required.
17...Bd6
We analysed two other moves:
a) 17...h4 18.g3!! A shocking move; by blocking in the h2-bishop, White shows that he can use the h-file more effectively than Black. (Instead 18.Bc4 leads to equality after forcing play: 18...Be6 19.Bxe6 fxe6 20.Rxe6 Rd8 21.Qb4† Bd6 22.Qb3 h3! 23.gxh3 Qc5 Both kings are exposed, but there are many perpetuals and no mates. For example: 24.Kg2 Rxh3 25.Kxh3 Qxf2 26.Rxd6 Qf1† 27.Kh2 Qf2† 28.Kh3=)

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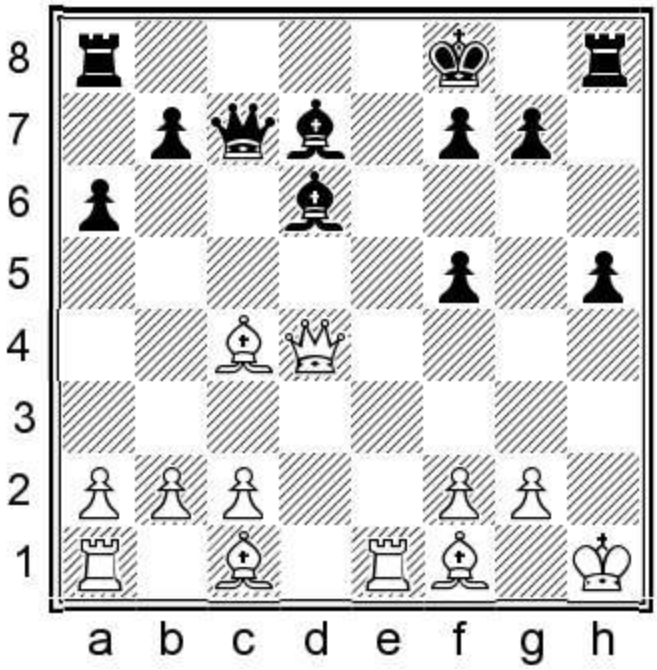


18...Bd7 (18...hxg3? 19.Qb4† wins easily) 19.Bf4 Qd8 (19...Bc6†? 20.Kxh2 hxg3† 21.Kxg3+–) 20.Qd6† Kg8 21.Re7 hxg3 22.Qxd7 g2† 23.Kxg2 Qxd7 24.Rxd7 Bxf4 25.Bc4 Rh2† 26.Kg1 Rf8 27.Rxb7²
b) 17...Qd6 18.Qc3! White has the safer king, so the queens stay on; also, avoiding the queen exchange leaves the h2-bishop awkwardly placed. 18...Be6 19.Bg5



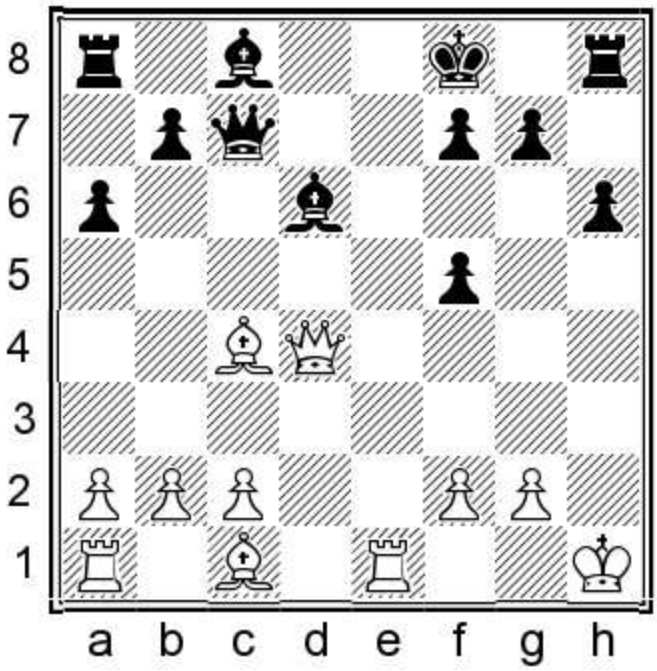
19...Rc8 (The attacking attempt along the h-file just misses: 19...h4 20.Bc4 h3 21.Bxe6 hxg2† 22.Kxg2 Rh5 Black must get creative. [22...fxe6? 23.Rad1 Qc7 24.Qxc7 Bxc7 25.Rd7± is horrible] 23.Be3 Kg8 24.Bxf7† Kxf7 25.Qb3† Kg6 26.Qxb7²) 20.Qf3 Be5 21.Qxb7² After Rad1 all White's pieces will be working.
18.Bc4 Bd7
Instead 18...Be6 19.Bxe6 Re8 20.Qd5² is an edge, which rapidly grows after: 20...Qe7? 21.Bg5+–

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19.Bd2
19.b3!? was a novelty when we first analysed it, but then it was tried in Kotronias – Aravindh, Stockholm 2018, which continued: 19...Re8 20.Bb2© Black later won, but not due to the opening, which looked promising for White.
19...Re8 20.Bc3 Rh7 21.Red1 Be6 22.Bxa6 Be7 23.Bb5 Rd8 24.Qe5 Rxd1† 25.Rxd1 Qxe5 26.Bxe5²
Canibal – Sowden, email 2011. White's majority should be more threatening than Black's.

17.Qd4 Bd6 18.Bc4©
Black now has some freedom of choice, but White's compensation is clear. One likely plan is b2-b3, Bb2 and Rad1.

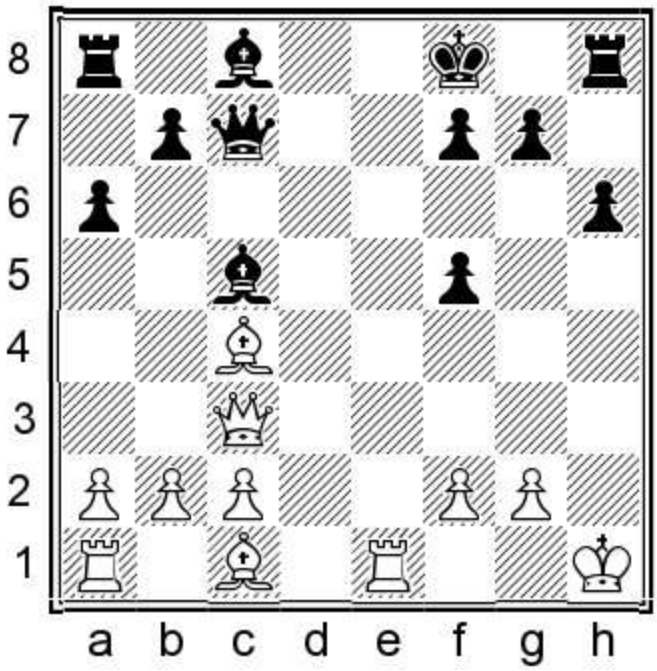


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18...Bd7

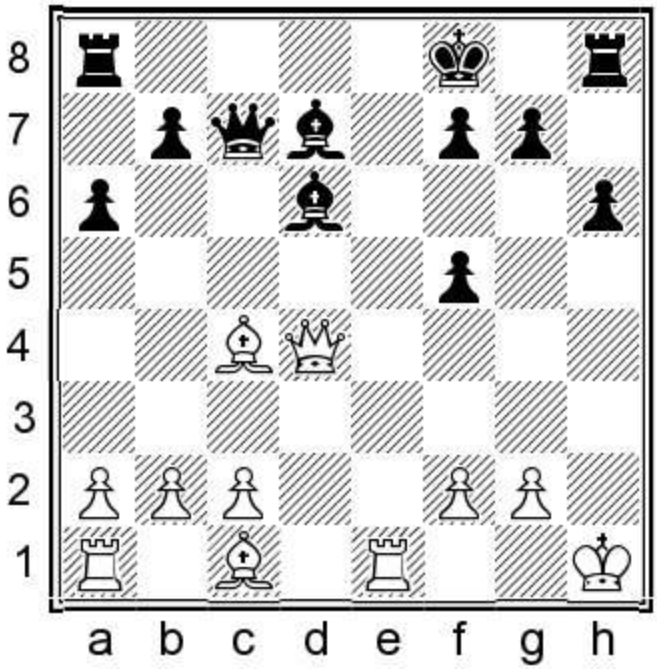
A natural alternative is blocking the c4-bishop with 18...Be6. The following line is certainly best play for both sides: 19.Bxe6 Re8 20.Qd5 Qe7 21.Qxf5 Qh4† 22.Kg1 Qh2† 23.Kf1 Qh1† 24.Ke2 Rxe6† 25.Qxe6 Qxe1†² As in Gudok – Davidov, email 2015, and a couple of other email games. The players facing computer-assisted defenders give it up as a draw, but after 26.Kxe1 fxe6 27.Be3 White has better chances in over-the-board play, due to his better structure. Yes, with accurate play Black should hold, but White can and should press on.

18...Bc5N
This untested move also looks a good equalizing try.
19.Qc3!?
Preventing Black from playing ...Kh8 to h7 to fix his shaky king and buried rook problems.
In contrast, 19.Qd5 allows an escape after: 19...Kg8! 20.Bf4 Qxf4 21.Qxc5 Bd7 22.Bxf7† Kh7=



19...Kg8?
Correct is 19...Bd7 when White can keep compensation in various ways. For example: 20.b3© planning Bb2 to encourage the awkward ...Rh7.
The tactical point behind White's play is that the text move is refuted beautifully:
20.Re8† Bf8
20...Kh7 21.Bxh6!+–
21.Bf4! Qxf4 22.Rxf8† Kxf8
22...Kh7 23.Rxf7+–
23.Qb4† Kg8 24.Bxf7† Kxf7 25.Qxf4+–

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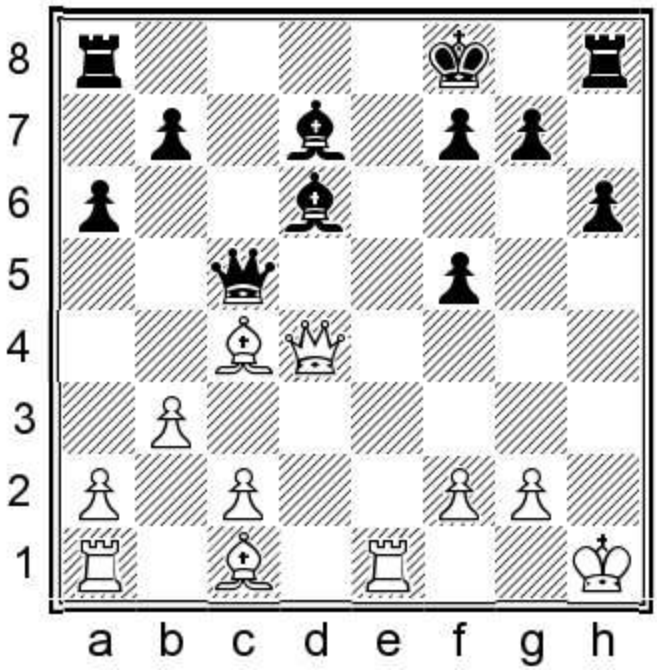


19.b3
Perfectly decent, but not the only path.

19.Bd2!?N 19...Qc5 20.Qd3 also looks promising. For example: 20...b5 21.Bd5 Bc6 22.Bxc6 Qxc6 23.Qxf5²

19...Qc5
Trying to disrupt White's queen and bishop battery before Bb2 lands.

Instead 19...Re8 20.Bb2 Rh7 21.Rxe8† Bxe8 22.Bd5² gives Black the traditional ugly rook.

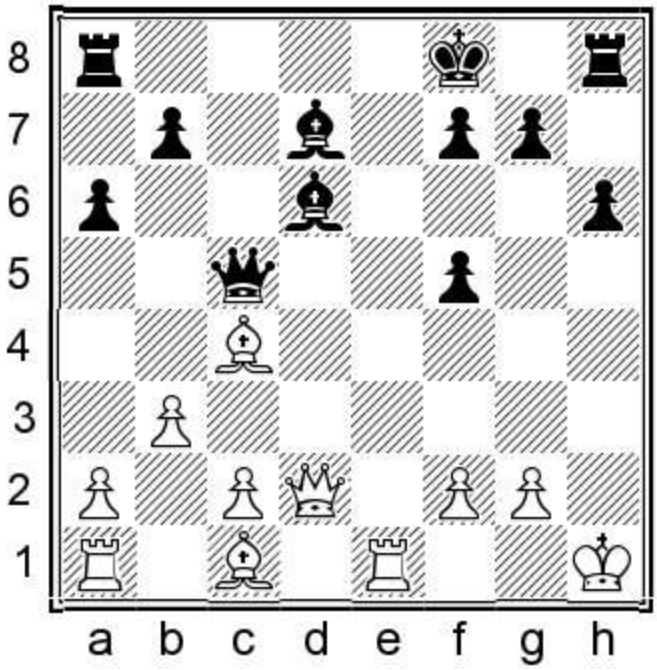


20.Qh4?!
From h4 the queen is unable to target Black's kingside effectively, as it cannot hit g7. There were two better op-

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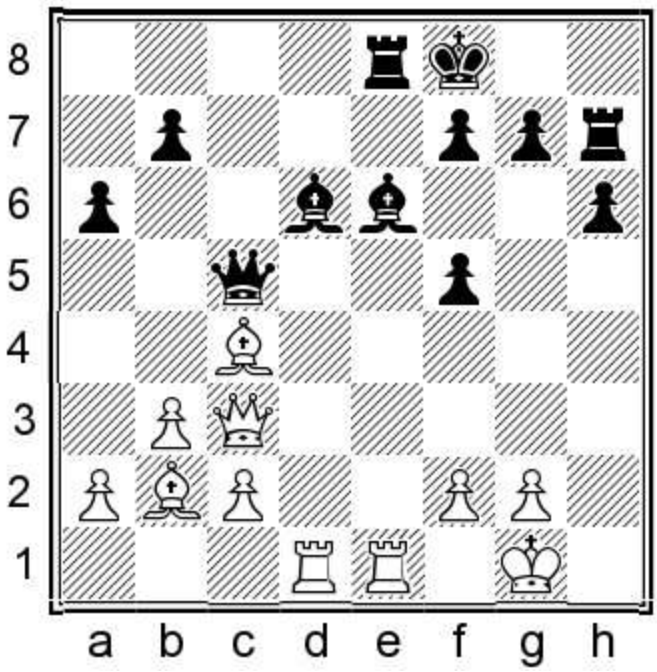
tions:

20.Qd2!N
A queen-and-bishop battery on c3 and b2 is likely.



Let’s see two key lines:

a) 20...Rd8 21.Bb2 Be6 22.Qc3 Rh7 23.Rad1 Re8 (23...Bxc4? 24.bxc4!+– The threats are a mix of Ba3 and/or Rxd6, while Black also has back-rank mate problems. There is no defence.) 24.Kg1*f*

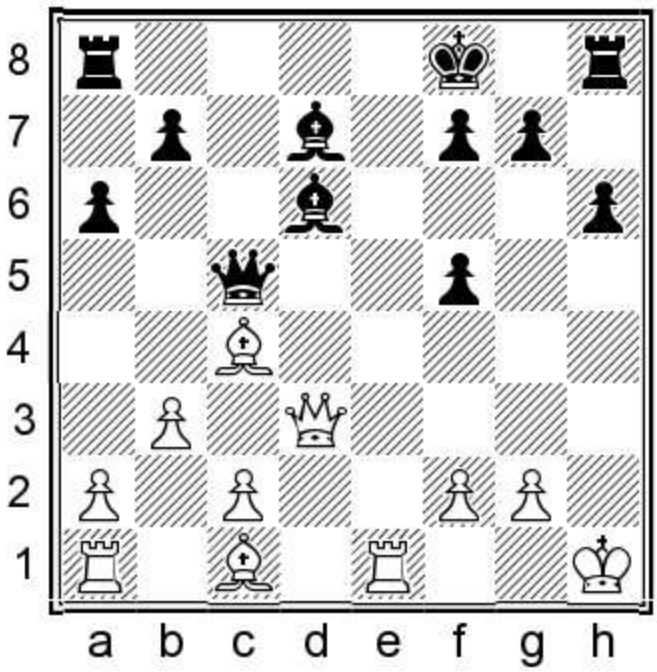


White has more than ample compensation, with Qf3 one idea to increase the pressure.

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b) 20...Bc6 21.Bb2 f4 22.Rad1 Bc7 23.Kg1 Qg5 24.Bd5 Bxd5 25.Qxd5 Qxd5 26.Rxd5 Black escapes to an ending a pawn up, but White has a huge advantage due to his activity. For example: 26...Rd8 27.Rxd8† Bxd8 28.Rd1 Bh4 29.Rd7±

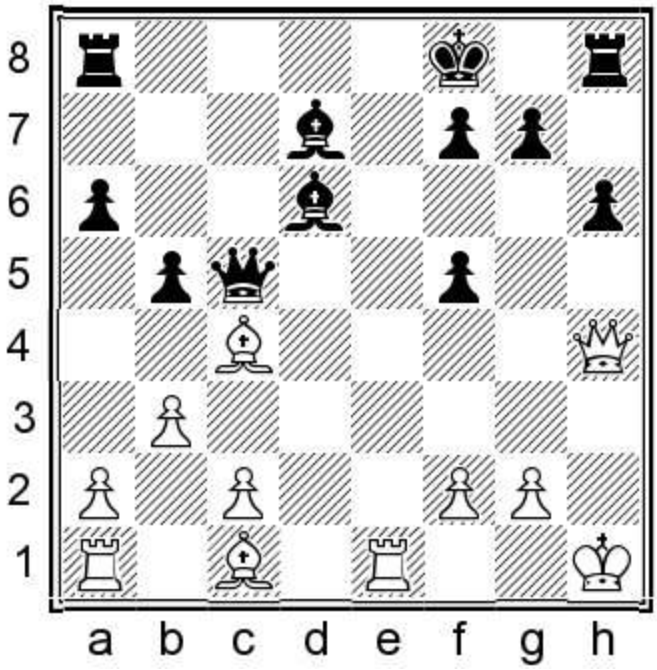
20.Qd3!?N



20...b5
20...Rd8?! 21.Bb2 b5 22.Rad1±
20...Bb5 21.Bxb5 axb5 22.Be3 Qe5 23.f4 Qf6 24.Rad1 Bb4 25.Rf1²
21.Ba3! bxc4
21...Qxa3? 22.Qd5 is of course the point.
22.Bxc5 cxd3 23.Bxd6† Kg8 24.Re7 Be6 25.c4²
The d3-pawn will drop, leaving Black hoping the opposite-coloured bishops will help him hold the draw.

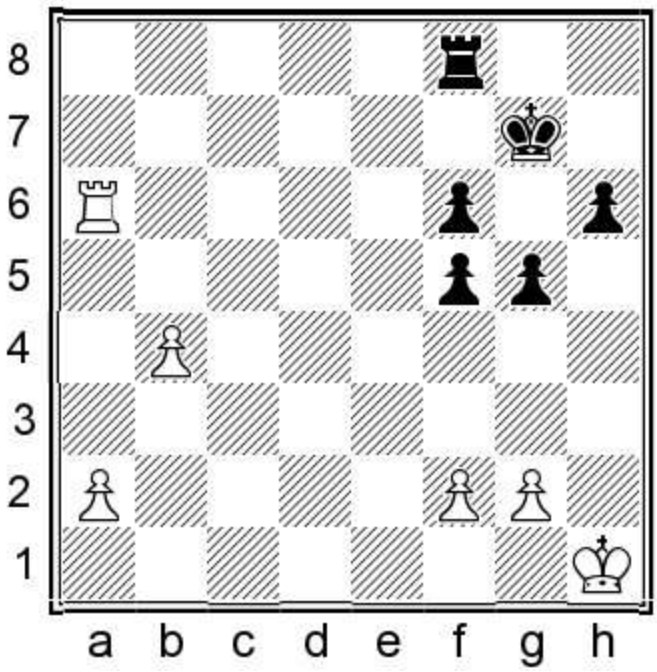
20...b5

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We will skip over the middlegame as irrelevant, but return for the equally irrelevant rook ending, as it's fun.

21.Be3 Qc7 22.Bd5 Bc6 23.Rad1 Kg8 24.Qh5 Bxd5 25.Rxd5 g6 26.Qd1 Bf8 27.Bd4 Rh7 28.Bf6 Qb6 29.Bd4 Qc6 30.Bb2 f6 31.Rd8 Rxd8 32.Qxd8 Rf7 33.Re8 Qxc2 34.Ba3 b4 35.Bxb4 Qc1† 36.Re1 Qc7 37.Qxc7 Rxc7 38.Re8 Rf7 39.Ra8 Kg7 40.Bxf8† Rxf8 41.Rxa6 g5 42.b4



A wild rook ending. The duelling majorities create lots of drama, though naturally the engine gives a calm 0.00.

42...Rd8
'Rooks belong behind passed pawns' and the old maxim works well enough here.

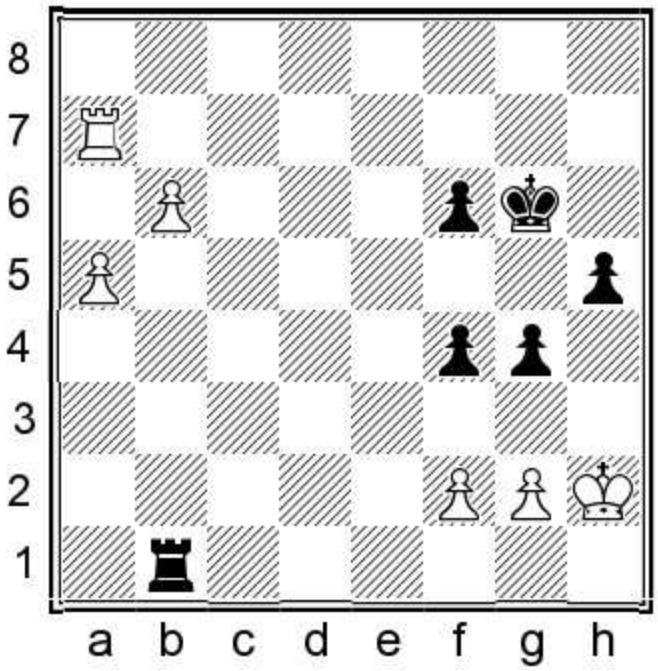
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But in such pawn races every tempo counts, and the crude 42...Rb8 43.a3 f4= slows White's pawns enough to

hold the draw. In fact, if White isn't careful then Black's fast-advancing kingside phalanx could create deadly threats.

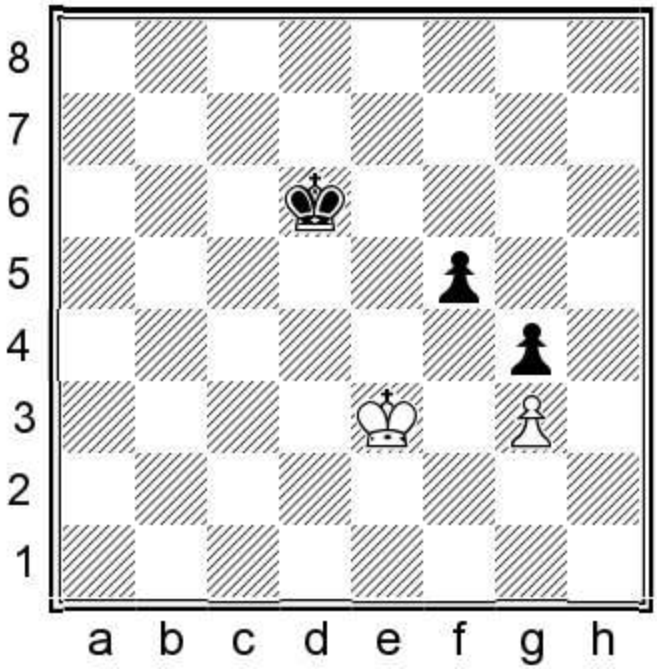
43.b5 Rd2?
A fatal loss of tempo.

43...Rd1† 44.Kh2 Rb1
Black would hold. For example:
45.b6 f4 46.a4 g4 47.a5 h5 48.Ra7† Kg6=



49.g3
The 'winning attempt' 49.b7?! requires White to play like a machine to hold the draw: 49...h4 50.g3! hxg3† 51. fxg3 f3 52.a6 f5 53.b8=Q! Rxb8 54.Rb7! Re8 55.Rb2 Re2† 56.Rxe2 fxe2 57.a7 e1=Q 58.a8=Q Qf2† 59.Qg2 Qxg2† 60.Kxg2 A drawn pawn ending. 60...Kf6 61.Kf2 Ke5 62.Ke3 Kd5 63.Kd3 Kc5 64.Ke3 (64.Kc3? f4) 64...Kd6

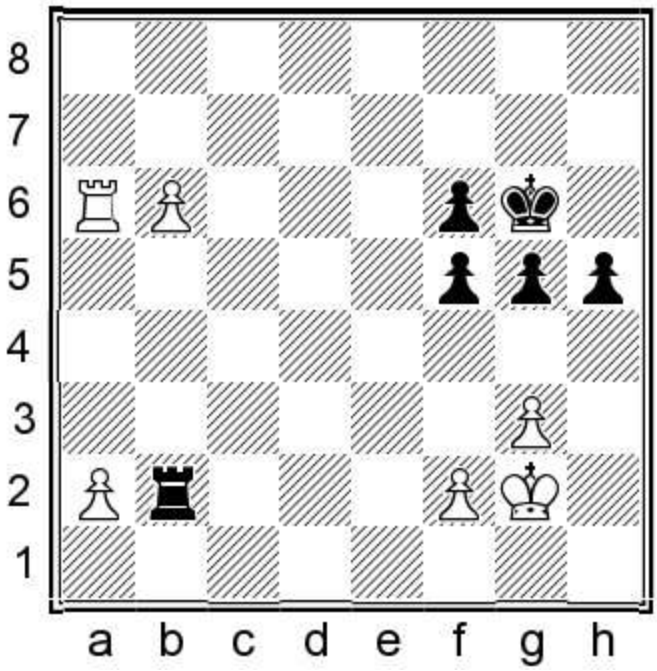
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It’s time for White to show his grasp of the distant opposition. 65.Kd2! (65.Ke2! also works; but what’s wrong with the old-fashioned near opposition? 65.Kd4? Ke6–+ and keeping the opposition with Ke4 is illegal.)
49...Rb2 50.gxf4 Rxf2† 51.Kg1 Rb2 52.b7 h4 53.a6 h3 54.Ra8 Rb1† 55.Kh2 Rb2† 56.Kg1=
44.b6 Rb2
Perhaps Chandra had hoped to play 44...Rxf2 but then spotted that 45.Ra3! forces through the b-pawn.

45.g3+–
The direct 45.a4! also worked.

45...Kg6 46.Kg2 h5
Shankland secures the win with perfect precision for the rest of the game.



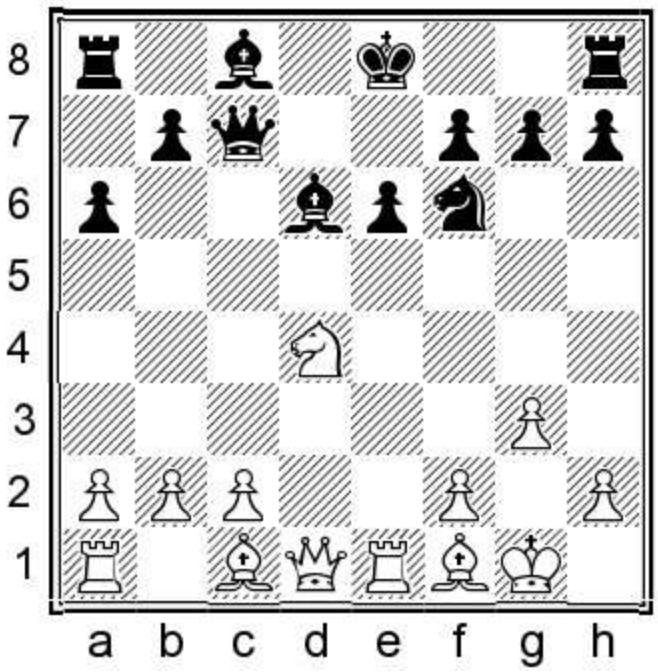
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47.a4 f4 48.gxf4 g4 49.a5 h4 50.Ra8! Kf5 51.Rh8 h3† 52.Kg3 Rb3† 53.Kh2 Rb2 54.a6! Rxf2† 55.Kg1 g3 56. Rxh3 Kg4 57.Rh8 Rb2 58.a7 Rb1† 59.Kg2 Rb2† 60.Kf1 g2† 61.Kg1 Kg3 62.Rg8† Kh3 63.a8=Q
1–0

GAME 31

Zoltan Almasi – Teimour Radjabov
Baku Olympiad 2016

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 Qd6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10.Nxd4 a6 11.Re1 Qc7 12.Bf1 Bd6 13.g3
Almasi made a revealing comment: "I remembered that something like Nf5 is good and is a possible move, but I could not remember the games and the exact lines. That is why I chose the text and not h3, because the bishop has a nice diagonal on h1-a8, which is not aggressive, but very human and still has the opportunity to fight for an advantage."
I will not go into much detail below; if you want a detailed line, play 13.Nf5 as in the previous game. 13.g3 is for days when you just want to play. Just so we are clear: I recommend doing your homework and playing 13. Nf5.



13...0-0
The most sensible choice; White has an easier task finding an advantage against the alternatives:

13...h6 14.Nf5 Bf8 15.Bf4± Lkhamsuren – Munkhchuluun, Govi Altai 2014.

13...Bd7 14.Nf5 Bf8 15.Bf4± Richterova – Jelinek, Frydek Mistek 2014.

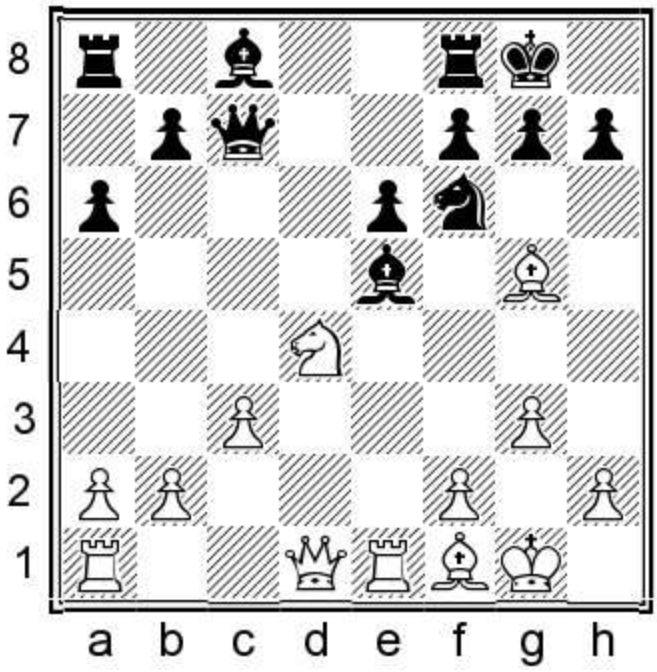
13...e5 can lead to sharp play: 14.Bg5 Ng4 15.h3 h6 One plausible line is: 16.Bd2 Bc5 17.hxg4 Bxd4 18.c3 Bb6 19.Be3 Bxe3 20.Rxe3 0-0 21.Bd3 f6 22.Qf3² It's not much, but I prefer White, with his safer king and impending queen-and-bishop battery.

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14.Bg5 Be5
Almasi: “This was a logical move, but there are a couple of lines, where Black had to choose between a sharp or worse position, which is not a happy thing to have to do in a team event.”

14...Be7 15.Qe2 h6 was Castiglione – Maccario, Castellaneta 1998, when I suggest the obvious: 16.Bf4N 16... Bd6 (16...Qb6 17.c3²) 17.Bxd6 Qxd6 18.Rad1 Qb6 Black appears to have been donating tempos freely, but the damage is not so great; Black’s solid structure enables him to develop slowly without getting blasted off the board. For example: 19.c4 Bd7 20.Nf3 Rfd8 21.Ne5²

15.c3

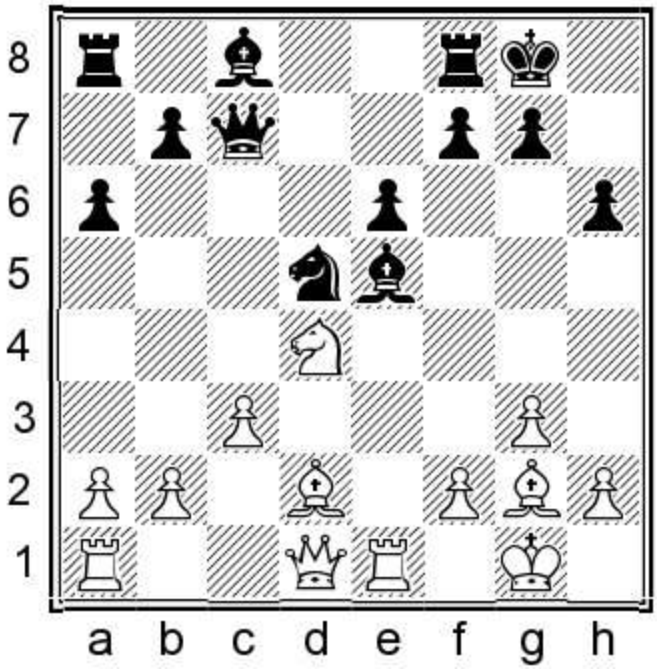


15...Nd5
I agree with Almasi that the critical line is 15...h6 16.Nf3 Bxc3 17.Rc1 hxg5 18.Rxc3. It appears roughly balanced, though ‘unclear’ is the safest verdict, which was also Almasi’s opinion.

16.Bg2
This looks as natural as Scottish rain, but it allows Black to inflict an IQP, so I prefer: 16.Qg4!? For example, 16...Bd7 17.Rad1² was pleasant for White in Pavlenko – Knudsen, email 2002.

16...h6 17.Bd2
Instead 17.Bc1 would avoid the IQP but it’s hardly an impressive move.

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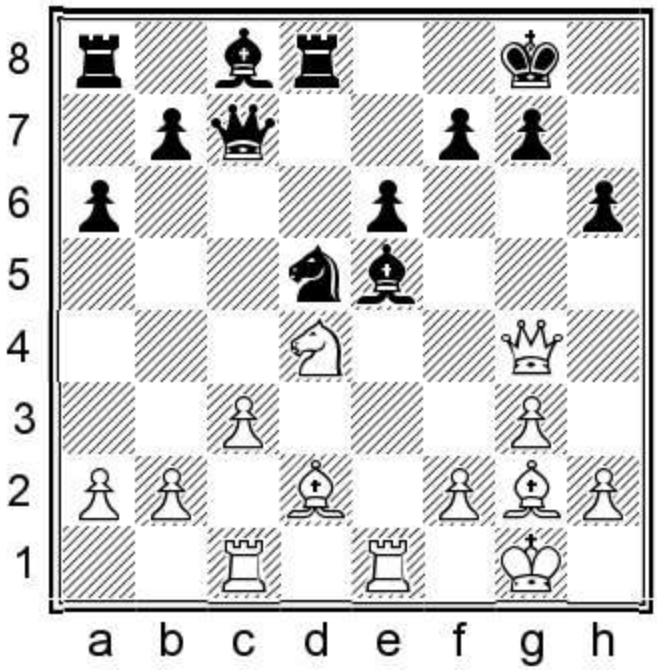


17...Nf6
Now the game continues on a path White will enjoy.

The IQP line was: 17...Bxd4 18.cxd4 Bd7 (18...b6 is similar) 19.Qg4 Now Almasi pointed out the tricky line 19...Bc6 20.Bxh6 f5÷ but if Black prefers a duller option, then safe is 19...Kh7 as the seemingly active 20.Bxd5 exd5 21.Re7 dribbles away to nothing after: 21...Rad8 22.Rae1 Qc6=

Also perfectly sensible is 17...Bd7÷ as in Gheng – Moran Nuque, Berlin 1994.

18.Qf3 Rd8 19.Rac1 Nd5 20.Qg4



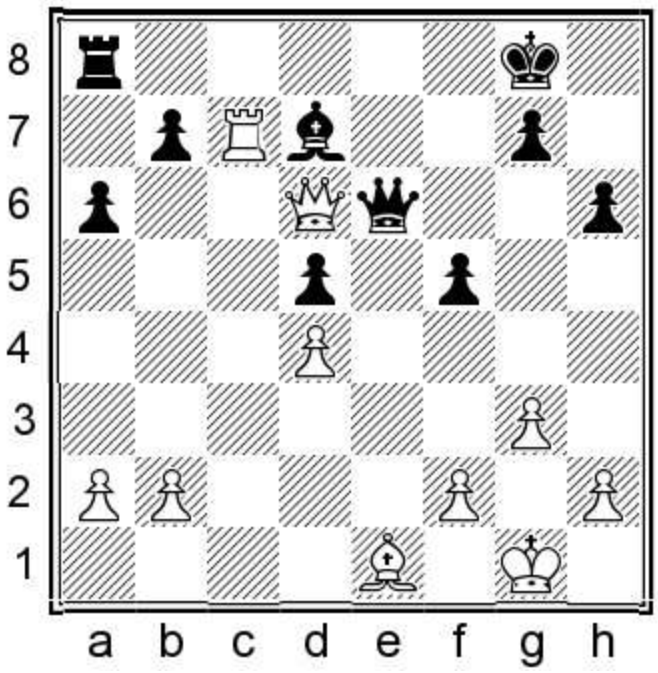
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20...f5?

A nasty weakener after which I will not analyse the game in depth.

As Almasi points out, correct was 20...Bf6 with the idea 21.Bxh6 e5 which seems to peter out to rough equality after: 22.Nf5 Ne7 23.Be4 Nxf5 24.Bxf5 Bxf5 25.Qxf5 Qb6 26.Be3 Qxb2=

21.Qe2 Bxd4 22.cxd4 Qf7 23.Qe5 Bd7 24.Bxd5 exd5 25.Rc7 Re8 26.Qd6 Rxe1† 27.Bxe1 Qe6

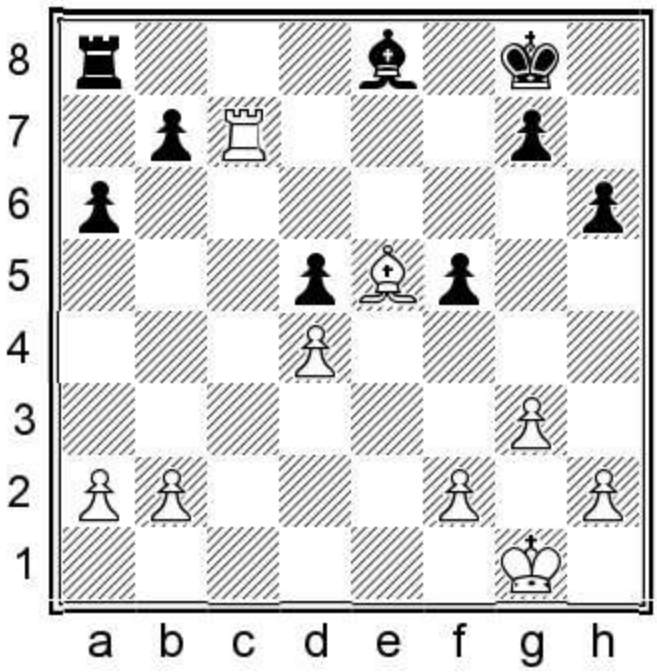


28.Bb4!
A precise continuation.

As Almasi explained, the natural 28.Qxd7 Qxe1† 29.Kg2 Qe4† 30.f3 looked promising as the checks run out after 30...Qe2†? 31.Kh3 Qf1† 32.Kh4 g5† 33.Kh5 Qxf3† 34.Kg6+– but 30...Qxd4! leaves White lacking a killer move.

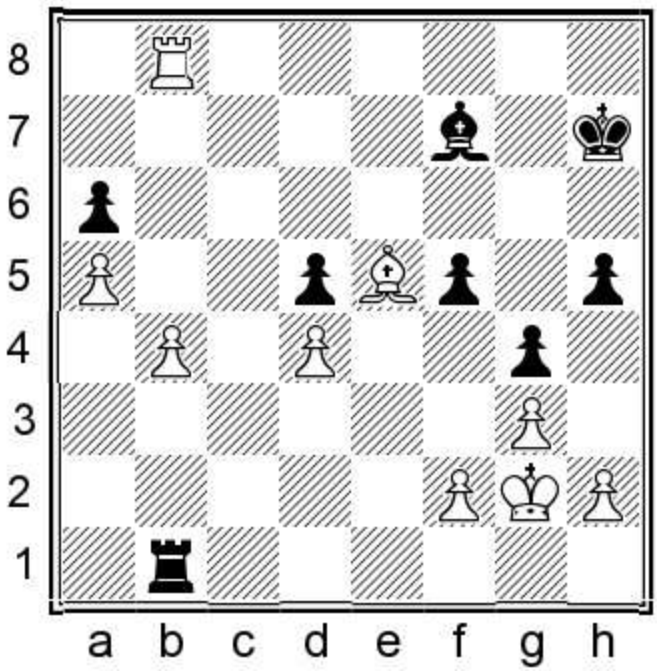
28...Qxd6 29.Bxd6 Be8 30.Be5±
As stark a contrast as one might wish to see of active rook and bishop versus passive rook and bishop. For all that, it’s notable how careful Almasi must be in the rest of the game to avoid drawing tricks based on the opposite bishops and his weakened kingside light squares.

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30...g5 31.Rg7† Kf8 32.Rxb7 h5 33.b3 Rc8 34.Bg7† Kg8 35.Bh6 g4 36.a4 Rc6 37.Bf4 Rc2
Black merely needs to transfer his bishop from e8 to f3.

38.Re7 Bf7 39.Rb7 Rb2 40.Rb8† Kh7 41.b4 Ra2 42.a5 Ra1† 43.Kg2 Rb1 44.Be5

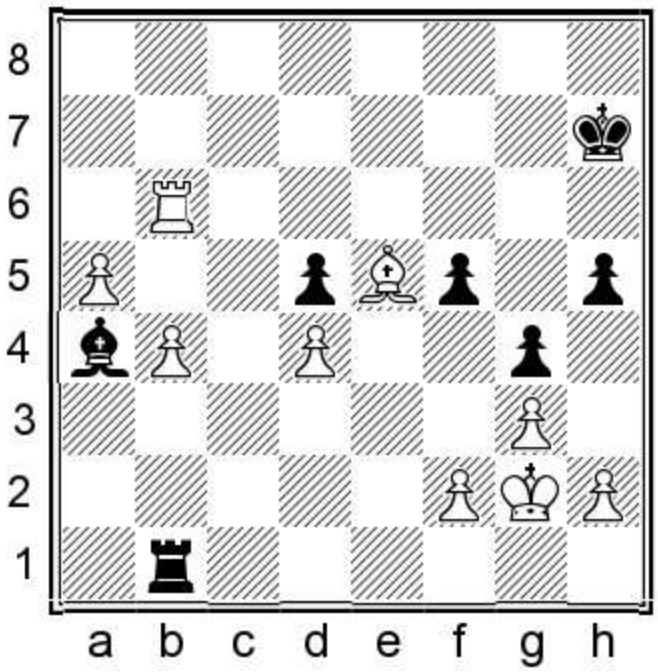


44...Be6
I would have been tempted to throw in the cheap trick 44...f4 and resign after 45.gxf4 but draw after 45.Bxf4? Bg6=.

45.Rb6 Bf7 46.Rxa6 Be8 47.Ra7† Kh6 48.Rb7!
Slowing the bishop's roll.
The dopey 48.a6? Bb5= would ruin all White's efforts.

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48...Ba4 49.Rb6† Kh7



50.f4!
Making room on f2, so ...Bd1-f3 is not a mating threat.

50...h4 51.gxh4 Rb2† 52.Kg1 Rb1† 53.Kf2 Rb2† 54.Ke1 Rb1† 55.Kd2 Rb2† 56.Kc1 Rxh2 57.Rb8 Rc2† 58. Kb1 Kg6 59.a6
1–0

Conclusion

After 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 Qxd5 5.Ngf3 cxd4 6.Bc4 Qd6 7.0-0 Nf6 8.Nb3 Nc6 9.Nbxd4 Nxd4 10. Nxd4 we saw the rarer 10th moves in the previous chapter, so in this chapter it was time for the main line 10...a6. In response I recommend 11.Re1 Qc7 12.Bf1!? which as we saw, is a lot punchier than its first impression may suggest. Black has three main replies.

12...Be7 is solid but effectively a concession, as the bishop's ideal square is d6. After 13.Qf3 0-0 14.Bf4 White is pressing.

12...Bc5 should be met by 13.Bg5! when we saw in Game 29 that Black should certainly not castle short. So Black should either castle long or try the computer-inspired weirdness of hiding on f8. Either way, I prefer White.

12...Bd6 is the most principled move. The most testing reply is 13.Nf5!? with immense complications. White has excellent practical chances, especially if you study my analysis with care, but Black may be able to hold with perfect play.
In contrast, 13.g3 is an option if White wishes to dodge a theoretical debate.

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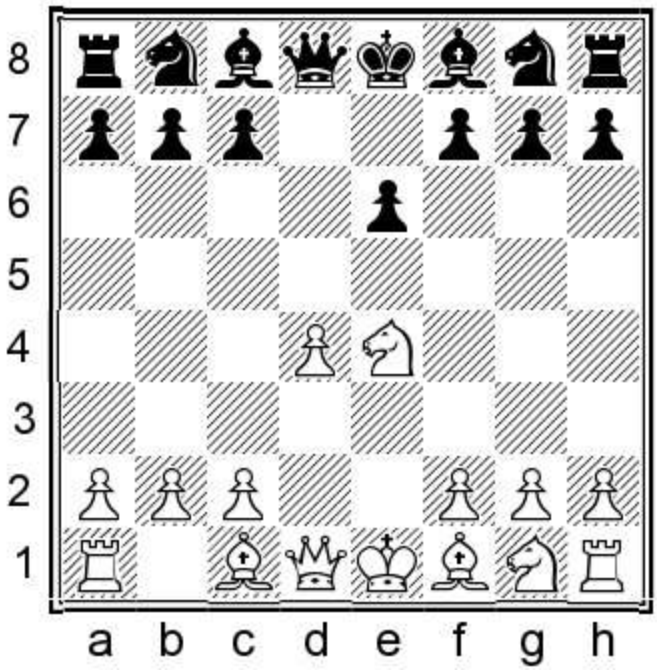
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Chapter 10 - Rubinstein

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4

A) 4...Qd5?! 254
B) 4...b6 256
C) 4...Nf6!? 5.Nxf6† 257
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D1) 7...c5 265
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7...c5 Game 34 270
7...b6 8.Bb5† Bd7 9.a4!? a6 10.Be2 Bc6 11.0-0 274
11...Bd6 Game 35 274
11...Be7 Game 36 281

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4



The 3...dxe4 variation is the place in the French where Negi's repertoire and this book's repertoire re-converge after 1.e4, as of course it makes no difference whether the knight reaches e4 via d2 or c3. Naturally, I have chosen different lines from Negi (with one tiny exception) to offer something fresh, rather than just do a lazy copy-and-paste.

4...Bd7 is the Fort Knox, which is worth a chapter of its own. See the next chapter, beginning on page 286.

This chapter is called ‘Rubinstein’ but before we get to the main event we shall consider a few rare 4th moves: A) 4...Qd5?!, B) 4...b6, C) 4...Nf6!? and D) 4...Be7. Then E) 4...Nd7 is the Rubinstein Variation, which is of course the main line in this chapter.

A) 4...Qd5?!

A strange Scandinavian/French hybrid.

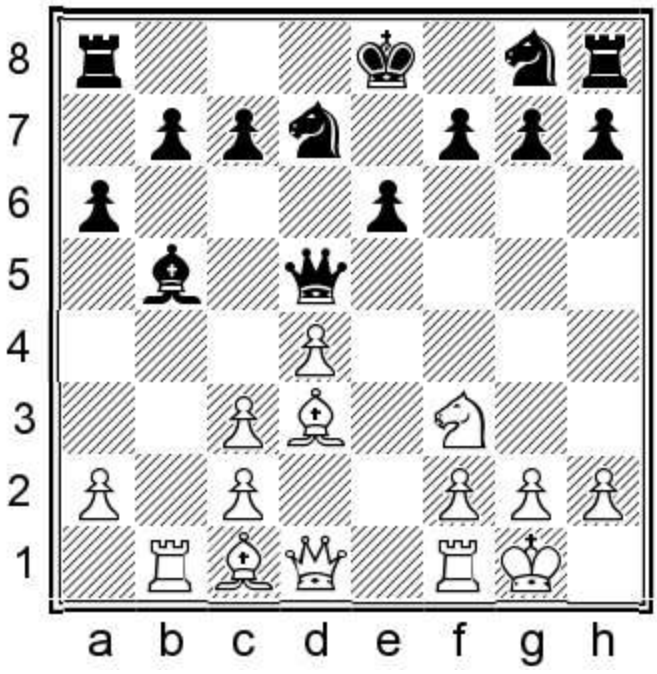
5.Nc3!?
5.Bd3 was Negi’s choice, which is of course also fine.

5...Bb4 6.Nf3
Black has a variety of options, but eventually we are likely to have the bishop pair and an initiative.

6...Nf6
The normal move, but the following two options are also worth a look:

6...b6 7.Be2 Bb7 8.0-0 Bxc3 9.bxc3 Nf6 10.c4 Qd6 In Takle – Arvola, Fagernes 2013, the direct 11.Ne5!N would have been strong. After 11...0-0 White can choose between 12.Bf4 and 12.Bf3, with excellent play either way.

6...Bd7?! Similar plans work well in other openings, with the Nimzo-Indian the classic example: Black plans to take on c3, followed by exchanging light-squared bishops, and seizing control of the c4-square. It’s the last part that is the problem here, as White will win the fight for c4. 7.Bd3 Bb5 8.0-0 Bxc3 9.bxc3 Nd7 10.Rb1 a6



In Razuvaev – Kuzmin, Baku 1972, White had many ways to make progress, but most direct was: 11.a4!N For example: 11...Bc4 12.Ba3 Ngf6 13.Nd2 Bxd3 14.cxd3± White’s next moves are likely to be Nf3 and c3-c4; Black is close to lost.

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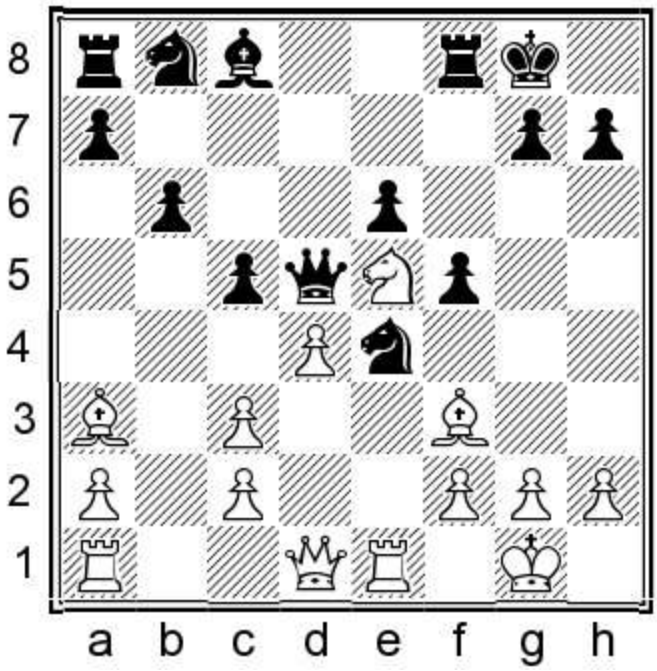
7.Be2!?

I like this rare move, with later ideas of Ne5 and Bf3.
Equally strong, but more than ten times as common, is 7.Bd3.

7...Ne4
The text move is the most testing of a few options:

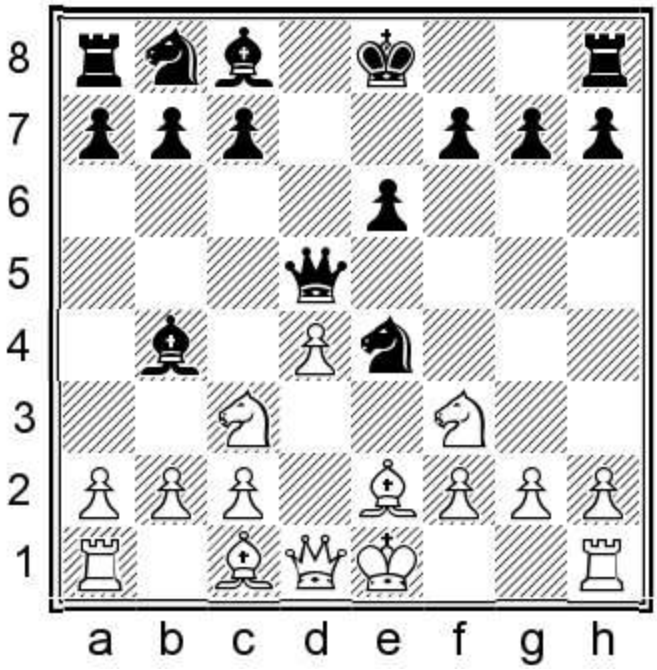
7...0-0 8.0-0 Qd8 9.a3 Be7 10.Ne5 Nbd7 11.Bf3² was pleasant for White in Lokander – J. Fries Nielsen, Copenhagen 2013.

7...c5 8.0-0 Bxc3 9.bxc3 0-0 10.Ba3²
For opening prep, we have seen enough, but we can follow a game by one of the greats of 19th century chess:
10...b6 11.Ne5 Ne4 12.Bf3 f5 13.Re1



13...Rd8?!
Better was 13...Bb7 14.c4 Qd6 but then 15.Rb1!?² is a cheekily effective move, based on the following tactics:
15...Nc3? 16.Bxb7! Nxd1 17.Rbxd1 Nd7 18.dxc5 Black must give up his queen. 18...Qxd1 (18...Qxe5 19.Rxe5 Nxe5 is a transposition) 19.Rxd1 Nxe5 20.c6! Rad8 21.Rxd8 Rxd8 22.Kf1 Nxc6 23.Bxc6+– Two bishops will outgun a rook in an ending.
14.Bxe4 fxe4 15.Qh5 Qb7 16.dxc5 Qe7 17.c6 Qxa3 18.Qf7† Kh8 19.Re3 g6 20.Nxg6†
1–0 Blackburne – Grimwood, Great Britain (simul) 1873.

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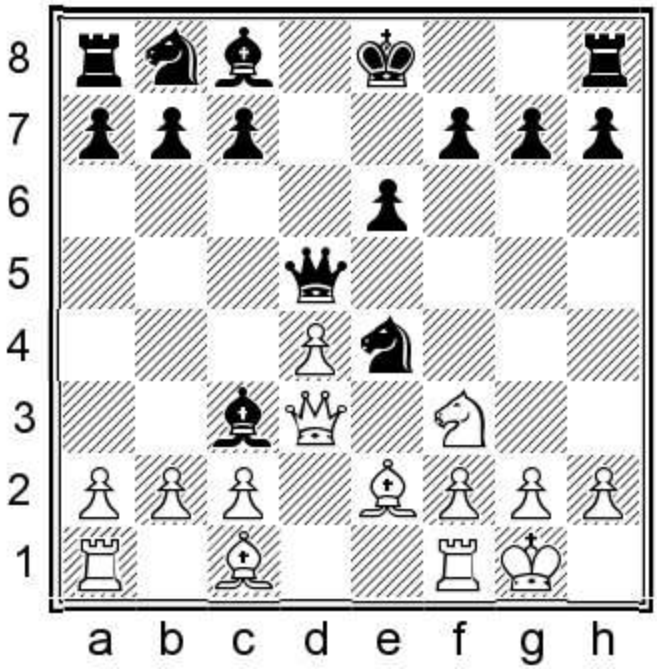
8.0-0!N
At first this seems to make no sense, as the knight fork on c3 will kill all White's compensation, but that fork will never land.

8...Bxc3
Aiming for the knight fork.

8...Nxc3 9.bxc3 Bxc3 10.Rb1 offers great compensation for White. 10...c5! The only way to avoid a rout. (The apparently cautious 10...0-0?? in fact drops a piece after 11.Qd3! Ba5 12.Rb5.) 11.Ba3 Bb4 12.c4 Qd8 13.Bxb4 cxb4 14.Rxb4[2]

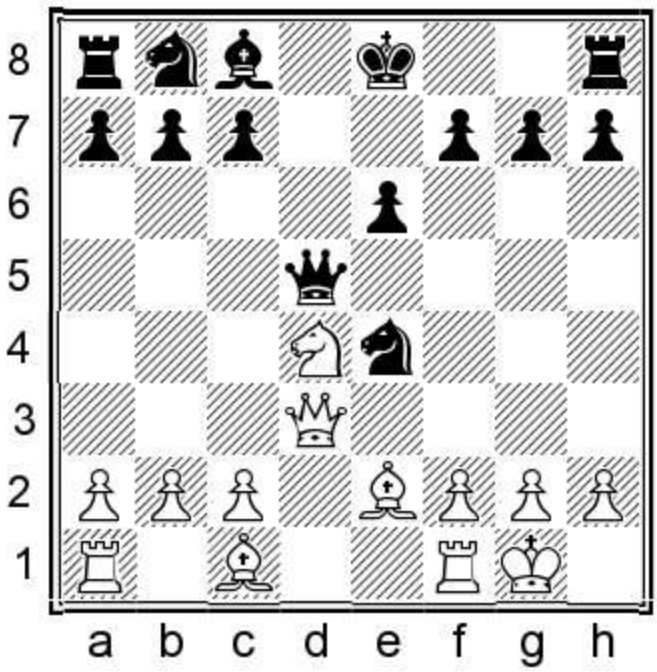
9.Qd3!
A computery move, but also a good one. White will regain one minor piece or the other, as the enemy queen can be kicked away.

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9...Bxd4
The best option. Trying to keep the extra piece fails: 9...Ba5 10.c4 Qf5 (even worse is 10...Qc6?! 11.Ne5) 11. Nh4 Nc5 12.Qg3 Qf6 13.dxc5±

10.Nxd4²

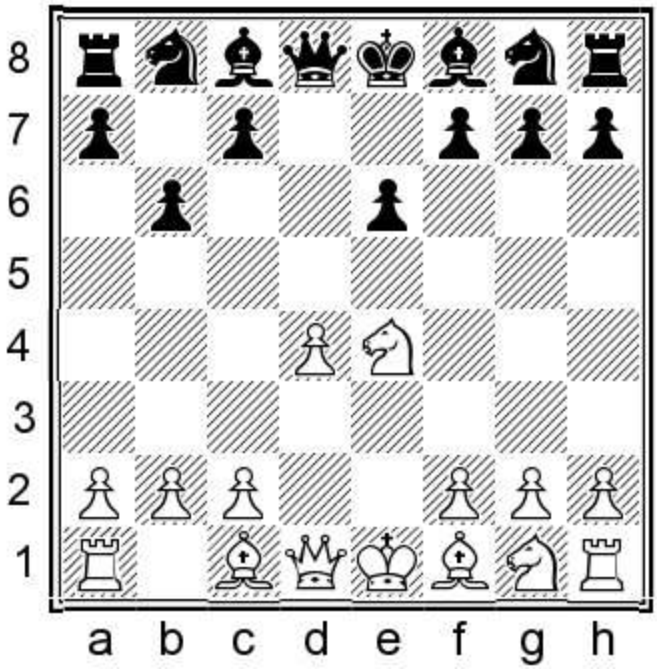


White has more than enough compensation, even if the queens come off. I will extend the line, in case anyone doubts the assessment. For example:

10...Nd6 11.c4 Qe5 12.f4 Qe4 13.Qxe4 Nxe4 14.Nb5 Na6 15.Bf3 f5 16.b3
White is doing well after either 16...0-0 17.Rd1² or 16...Bd7 17.Ba3².

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B) 4...b6



A rare and unappealing move. Carlsen did play it once, but just in an internet blitz game, where anything goes.

5.Nf3
Negi's choice was 5.Qf3!? which is also fine.

5...Bb7 6.Bb5†
A standard idea against ...b7-b6 ideas.

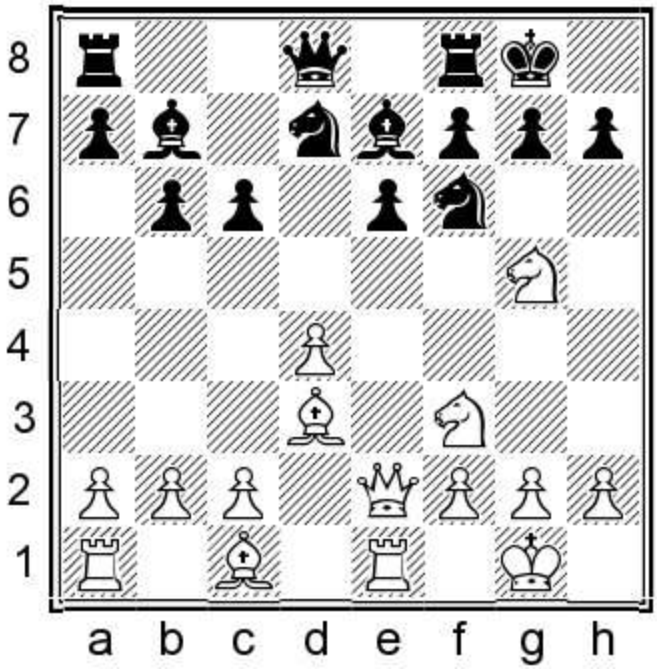
6...c6 7.Bd3²
This short line is sufficient knowledge against 4...b6; obviously White is a little better. But it's always useful to have a rough idea of typical play, so I will add a few illustrative lines:

7...Be7 8.Qe2 Nf6 9.0-0 Nbd7 10.Neg5!?
Playing in lively anti-Caro-Kann style; sacs on e6 or f7 are in the air.

10...0-0
Instead 10...Nd5? loses to 11.c4!, for example: 11...Nb4 12.Bxh7! Qc7 13.Bg6! was Solodovnichenko – Freitag, Senden 2008.

11.Re1

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11...c5
A thematic move, hoping White's attack is a bluff.

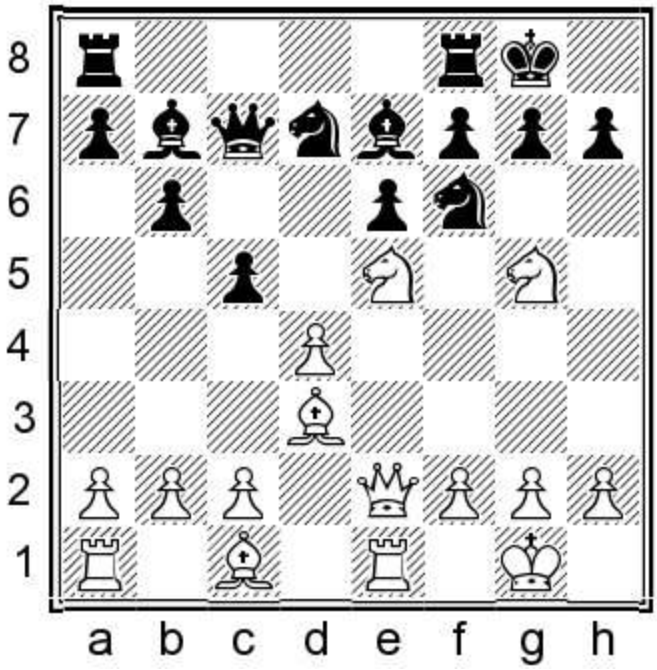
11...h6? takes the hope-it's-a-bluff approach to extremes: 12.Nxe6 That's so obvious it's not worth an exclam; we can quickly see a full game: 12...fxe6 13.Qxe6† Kh8 (or 13...Rf7 14.Bg6+–) 14.Nh4! Re8 15.Ng6† Kh7 16. Nxe7† 1–0 Kieninger – Tautvaisas, Oldenburg 1949.

11...Qe8N would show more awareness from Black about the danger, but a simple developer such as 12.Bd2!?*ƒ* is promising for White.

12.Ne5!
Objectively, 12.Nxe6 also works, but after 12...Bxf3 13.gxf3 fxe6 14.Qxe6† Kh8 15.Qxe7 Qc7 the position is difficult to play due to White's exposed king; the main line is far more practical.

12...Qc7

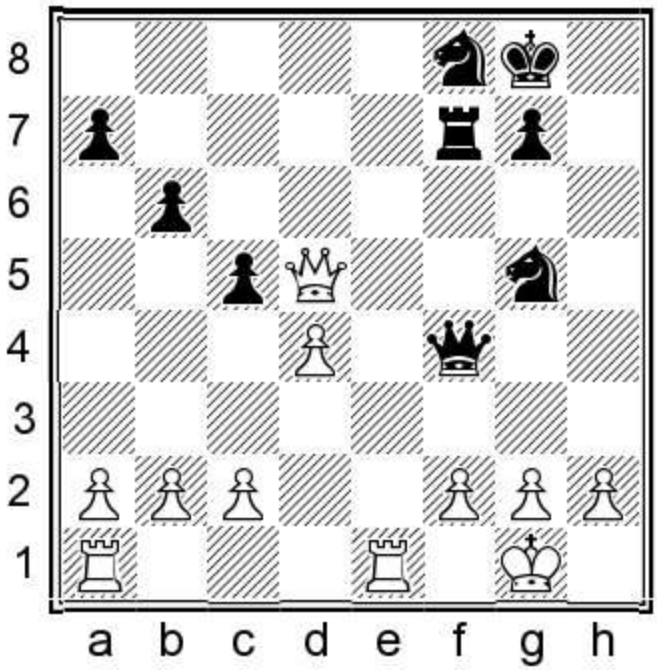
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At this point I suggest varying from Kolbe – Hund, corr. 1987, which continued rather slowly with 13.f4.

13.Nexf7!N 13...Rxf7 14.Qxe6 Bd5 15.Bxh7†! Nxh7
One of the problems with 15...Kf8? is that Black is not threatening to take our queen, so 16.Bg6!+– decides. The text move is Black's only way to continue resisting. The following line is forcing:

16.Qxd5 Bxg5 17.Qxa8† Ndf8 18.Bxg5 Nxg5 19.Qd5 Qf4
White has various good options, but one simple one is:



20.dxc5 Qxf2† 21.Kh1 Qxc5 22.Qxc5 bxc5 23.Re2±
Two knights against a rook and two pawns is an ugly matchup in the endgame, especially when the knights have no good outposts.

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C) 4...Nf6!?

GAME 32

Vassilios Kotronias – Danilo Canda
Dubai Olympiad 1986

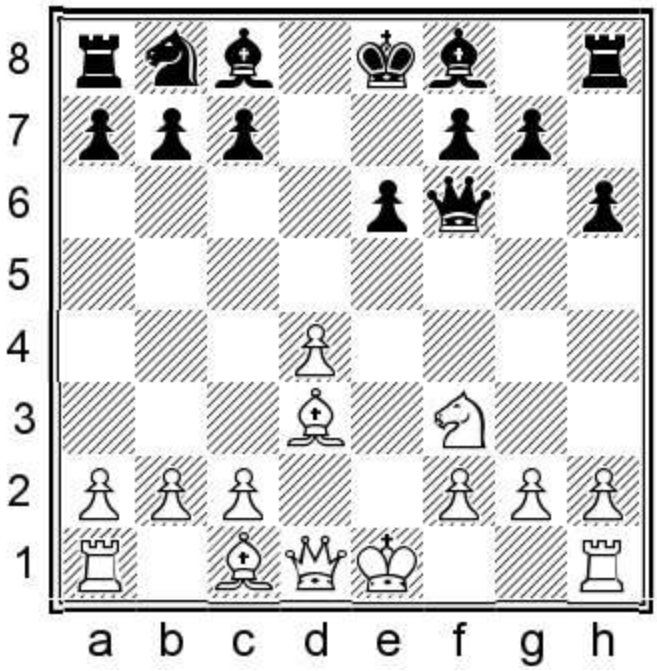
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nf6!?
Most of the 3...dxe4 lines are rather dull; Black often accepts a slight disadvantage but hopes his solid structure will save him. 4...Nf6 is an exception as it can lead to some fun lines.

5.Nxf6†
Negi's suggestion was 5.Bd3 with a likely transposition to his Rubinstein coverage. An efficient solution, but I don't recommend Bd3 against the main line of the Rubinstein, so we need to go a different way.

5...Qxf6
This line could work as a surprise weapon. However, if White is ready, then gaining an advantage is quite straightforward.

The more entertaining 5...gxf6!? will be seen next in Game 33.

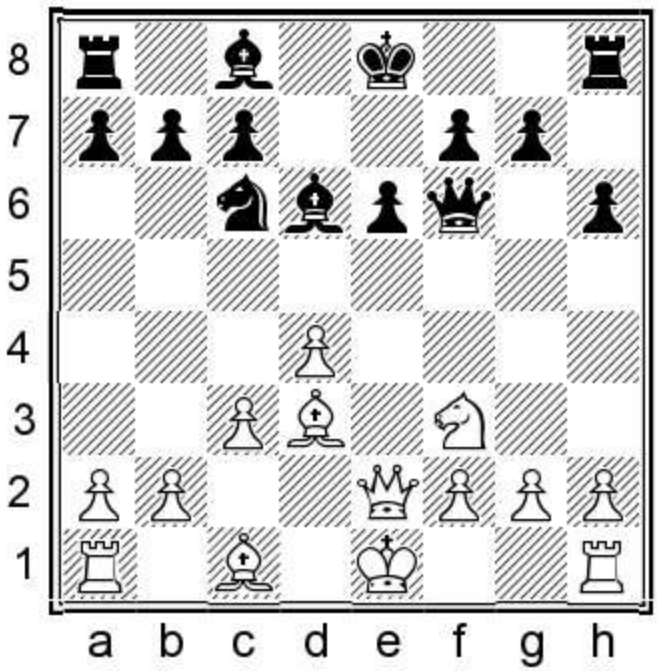
6.Nf3 h6 7.Bd3²
It would be tempting to stop here and say White is obviously better, but in fact we need to be ready for Black's main idea: if Black can later safely play an ...e6-e5 break, then the resulting symmetrical structure should be fine for him.



7...Nc6
The most testing line; by hitting d4 Black prevents a quick Qe2.

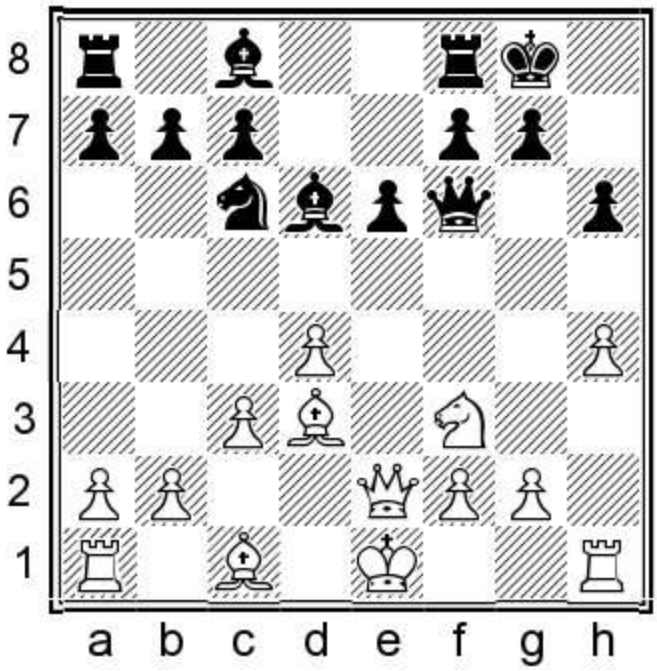
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7...Bd6
This gives White a chance to clamp down on the ...e5-break in simple fashion.
8.Qe2! Nc6
Or 8...Nd7 9.Bd2!? with the idea 9...e5? 10.Bc3.
9.c3



Black has a choice of which side to castle; whichever way he goes, we go the other, and then fire up the attack.

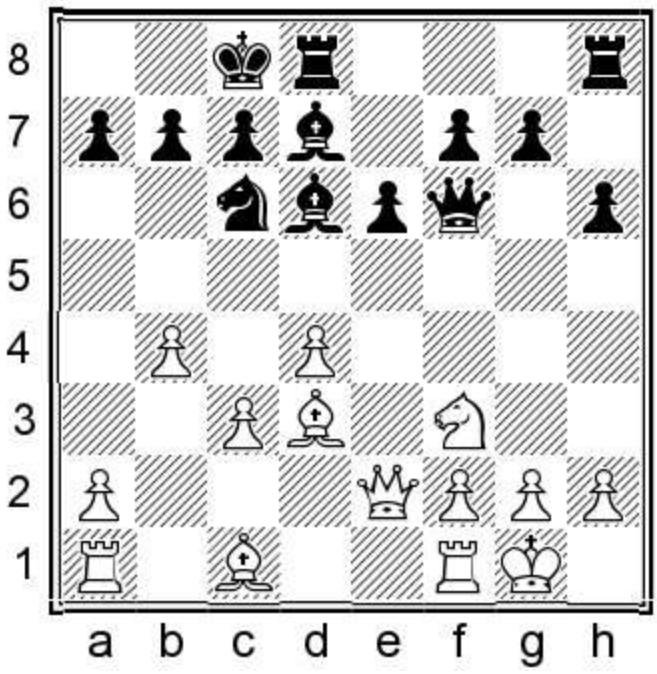
i) 9...0-0 10.h4!N
With the vicious threat of Bg5!.
Much less convincing is 10.g4 e5÷ threatening ...Bxg4.



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10...e5
Making an escape square for the queen on e6.
10...Re8 makes a square for the king on f8, but the attack is still too strong after: 11.Bg5! hxg5 12.hxg5 Qd8 13. Qe4, Black will not survive. For example, 13...Kf8 14.Rh7 is a good start.
Black's best try is 10...Qd8 but after 11.Be3, White plans to castle long, with a powerful attack; the pawn on h6 is a handy hook.
11.d5
Taking away the e6-square; hitting the knight is just a bonus.
11...e4
Giving up a pawn for nothing is the only way to avoid instant disaster.
There is no time for 11...Ne7? due to 12.Bg5!.
12.Qxe4 Qe7 13.0-0±

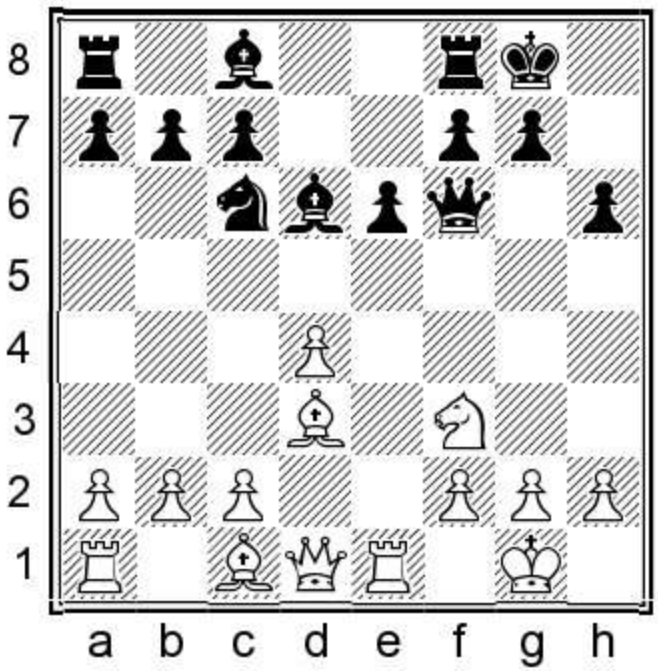
ii) 9...Bd7 10.0-0 0-0-0
Admittedly Black could choose 10...0-0 but then ...Bd7 was a feeble little move; 11.Re1 is comfortably better for White.
11.b4!±



This position was first played in 1867 and is still being tried today, but Black players should give it up, as White is much better. The first game is worth seeing in full, as White's play is ideal:
11...Ne7 12.Ne5 Nd5 13.Bd2 Nf4 14.Bxf4 Qxf4 15.g3 Qf6 16.a4 Bxe5 17.dxe5 Qe7 18.a5 f6 19.a6 Bc6?
Instead 19...b6 should have been an automatic move, even though Black is still in grim shape after any reasonable move, including 20.Be4.
20.axb7† Kxb7 21.b5 Be8 22.Be4† Kb8 23.Rxa7 Kxa7 24.Ra1† Kb6 25.Ra6† Kc5 26.Qe3† Kc4 27.Qe2† Kc5 Draw?
28.Qb2 Rd1† 29.Kg2
1–0 Mackenzie – Reichhelm, Philadelphia 1867. White was Captain Mackenzie, one of Scotland's best ever players. Mackenzie was educated at Aberdeen Grammar School, which trivia I mention because in the next century British Champions R.F. Combe and GM Jonathan Rowson attended the same school, though not at the same time as each other.

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8.0-0 Bd6 9.Re1 0-0
White needs to be aware that Black is ready for the ...e6-e5 break.



10.Be4!
Hitting the c6-knight means that the ...e5-break can only be played as a sacrifice.

10.c3?! is an example of what not to do: 10...e5! 11.dxe5 (or 11.d5 Ne7 12.c4 is a vital tempo slower than the 10.c4 option below) 11...Nxe5 12.Nxe5 Bxe5=

However, a good alternative is: 10.c4!? Rd8 (10...e5?! allows 11.c5 Be7 12.dxe5 Qe6 13.Bb1!?± with a crude but effective plan) 11.Be3 e5 12.d5² In Arango Arenas – Bejarano, Medellin 2016, we finally see a case where allowing ...e6-e5 is no problem; the point is that the knight must move to a bad square, as the usual retreat with 12...Ne7?? loses a piece after 13.c5.

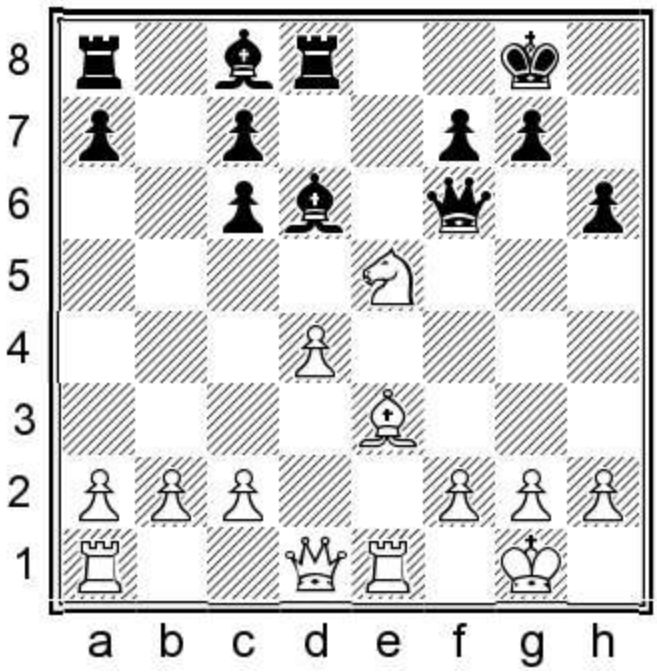
10...Rd8 11.Be3
I know it's getting repetitive but 11.c3?! e5 is one to avoid.

11...e5
Black seeks activity, even at the cost of a pawn.

Against calmer moves, White will simply expand. For example, 11...Ne7 12.c4 was Belkhodja – Chokbengboun, St Chely d'Aubrac 2002, or 11...Bd7 12.c4 as in Szabo – Van den Tol, Zaandam 1946. In both cases, White has more space and better coordination.

12.Bxc6 bxc6 13.Nxe5²
If you squint your eyes, it could be a Marshall Attack. Except in the real thing Black would probably have provoked g2-g3, and have his queen lurking menacingly on h3, so the game position is a cheap imitation.

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13...c5
Black hopes the bishop pair will offer him compensation, but it is not convincing, as White is both solid and active.

13...Bxe5 14.dxe5 Rxd1 15.exf6 Rxa1 16.Rxa1± leaves White with an extra pawn and the better structure, so the opposite-coloured bishops do not make this drawish.

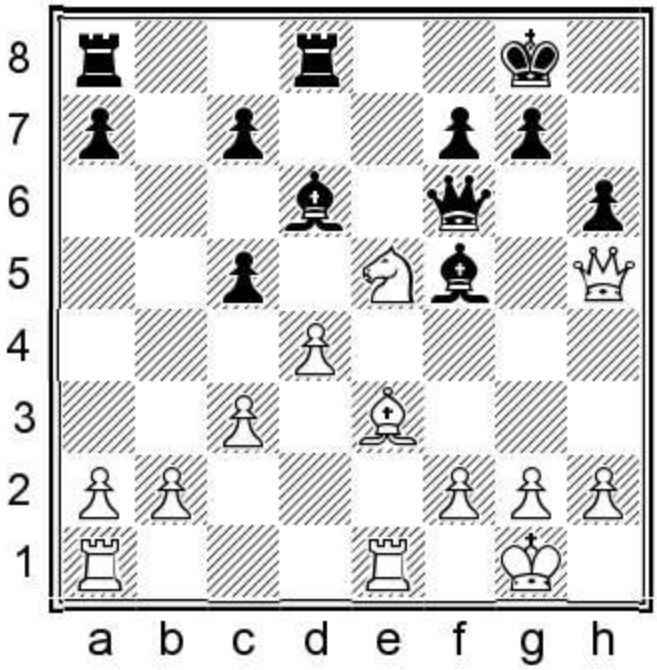
14.Qh5
The most active option, but even the dull 14.Qf3² is better for White.

14...Bf5?!
The bishop achieves little here.

Instead 14...cxd4 15.Bxd4 Bb4 might have offered more chances. For example 16.c3 Rxd4 17.cxd4 Bxe1 18. Rxe1 Bb7 is better for White, but at least the bishop is a fine piece.

15.c3

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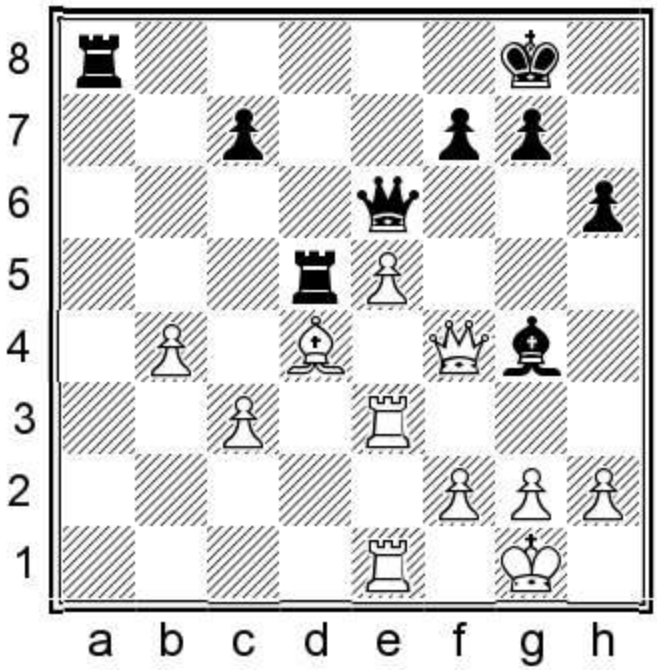
15...Bxe5?!
Dropping a second pawn.

Black should have kept the tension with a move such as 15...Re8, but after 16.Nc4± White is a solid pawn up.

16.dxe5 Qe6 17.Bxc5 Rd5 18.Qf3!
Keeping the material.

Black must have been hoping for 18.Bd4?! c5 when he wins the e5-pawn.

18...Rb8 19.b4 a6 20.Bd4 Re8 21.Re3 a5 22.a3 Bg4 23.Qf4 Ra8 24.Rae1 axb4 25.axb4



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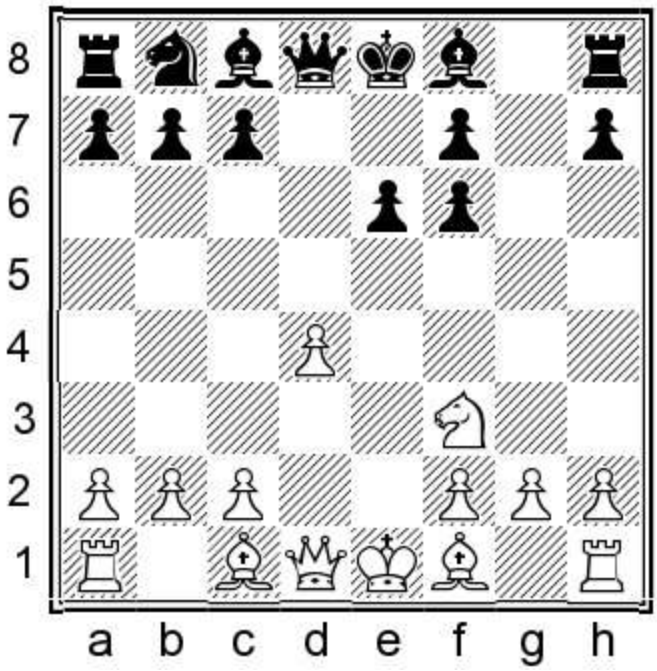
Black is two pawns down and has no productive moves. White has enough control to consider a bold plan such as h2-h3, g2-g4, Qg3, f2-f4-f5 then e5-e6. Black decided to avoid all that by resigning.
1–0

GAME 33

Dmitry Domanov – Alfredo Dutra Neto
email 2011

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nf6 5.Nxf6† gxf6!?
A move I was unaware of until I did my research for this book.

6.Nf3



6...Nc6!?
This rare move is the only way to make sense of Black's previous play. If Black can find a way to castle long, then the half-open g-file might be useful.

The following two moves are more common, but they are easily dealt with and require minimal knowledge.

6...b6 7.Bb5† The standard way to disrupt Black's fianchetto. 7...c6 8.Bd3² You do not need to know more about this line.

6...c5?! is the usual Rubinstein break, but it makes no sense when Black has zero development and is now struggling to find a safe location for his king on either side of the board. For example, after 7.Be3 cxd4 8. Nxd4± White has scored heavily, with for example A. Zhigalko – Filimoniuk, Warsaw (rapid) 2012, all over in 18 moves.

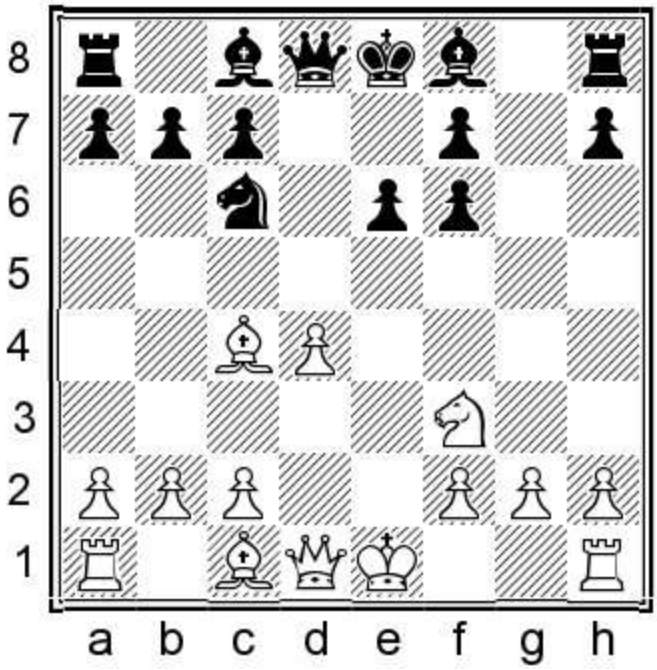
7.Bc4!
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It took quite some thought before I settled on this move as the best option. It is an active developer, so it makes

sense if Black castles long, but it also works well against the ...e6-e5 break, which is an annoying resource for Black in many lines. It is worth a quick review of the alternatives to gain a better grasp of the position.

7.Bf4 Black would like to play ...Qd6, to allow castling long, and maybe also go for an ...e6-e5 break, so this move looks perfectly logical, apart from one direct problem: 7...e5! The tactical justification is 8.dxe5 Qe7! 9. Nd4 Bd7 10.Nxc6 Bxc6 11.Qd4 Bg7 12.Be3 fxe5 13.Qg4 0-0 14.0-0-0 f5= Gregory – Santos Etxepare, email 2011.
So instead in Caruana – Rapport, Wijk aan Zee 2014, White tried 8.Be3, but I do not believe provoking the ...e5-break helped White. 8...Bg4÷ was the game while 8...Be6!? was also a promising option.

7.g3 looks logical, blocking the g-file, but 7...e5! is a good reply, when White did not have much edge in the high-class game Gusan – Szczepanski, email 2010.

7.Be3!? is an interesting alternative; the game could go in many ways, with one example being: 7...Qd7 8.g3 b6 9.Bg2 Bb7 10.0-0 0-0-0 11.c4*ƒ* White's attack looked a little faster in Aharon – Ivanisevic, Jerusalem 2015.



7...Qd6
To be followed by ...Bd7 and castling queenside. Black could play many other moves, so I will offer just a couple of examples:

7...Rg8 8.0-0 was De Vriendt – Paglino, corr. 1997, when 8...e5!?N looks messier than I would like, so instead I suggest 8.Bf4!N with the obvious tactical point 8...Rxg2?! 9.Bg3.

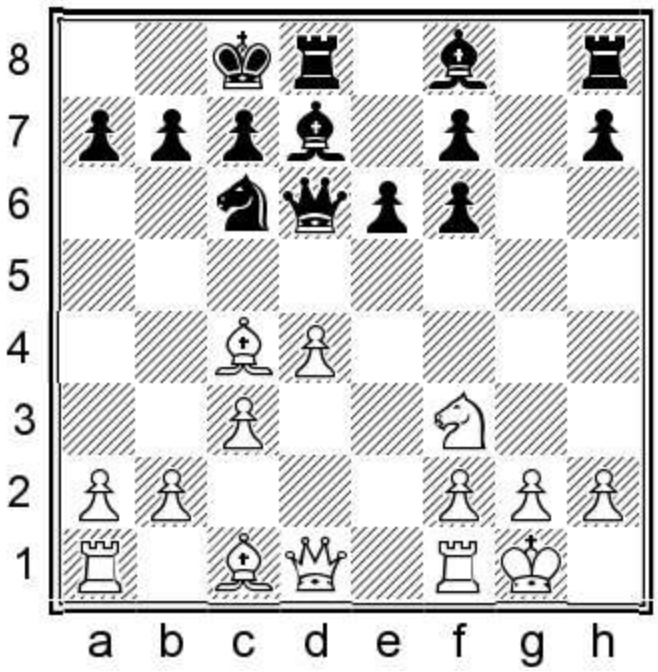
After 7...b6 as in Zidek – Wesolowski, Ostrava 2007, I suggest the simple 8.0-0N with the idea: 8...Bb7 9.d5! Na5 10.Bb5† c6 11.dxc6± Black's position looks shaky whether he goes for 11...Bxc6 12.Qe2 or 11...Nxc6 12. Nd4.

8.0-0 Bd7 9.c3!
Preparing a queenside pawn storm.

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Instead 9.Be3 is well met by 9...Ne7! 10.Bb3 Nf5 11.c4 c5÷ as in Heimann – Rapport, Deizisau 2014.

9...0-0-0



10.b4!
With opposite-sides castling, we should not hesitate.

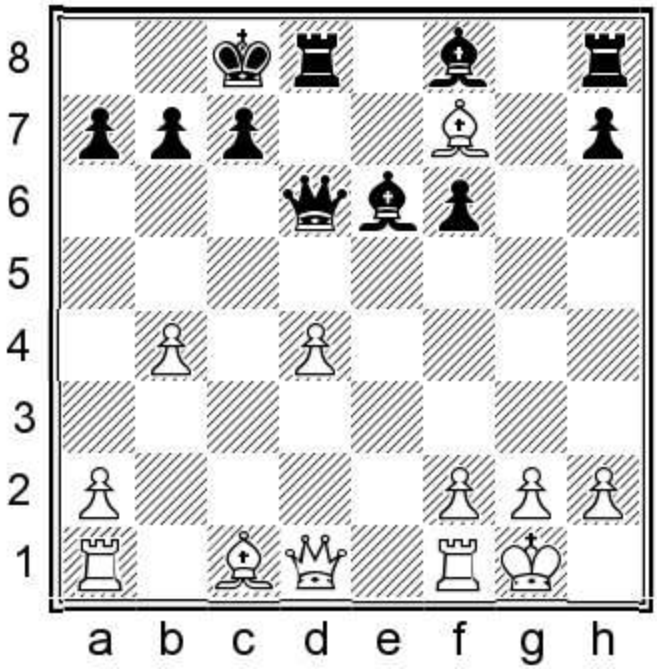
10.Qe2 Ne7 11.Nd2 Nd5 12.Ne4 Qe7÷ was less convincing in Naroditsky – E. Liu, Internet 2017.

10...e5
This is the thematic plan, but White is well prepared for it.

The less forcing 10...Rg8 11.a4 also looks promising for White, who is well ahead in the race.

11.Bxf7 exd4 12.Nxd4 Nxd4 13.cxd4 Be6
The logical attempt to make sense of Black's ...e5-break.

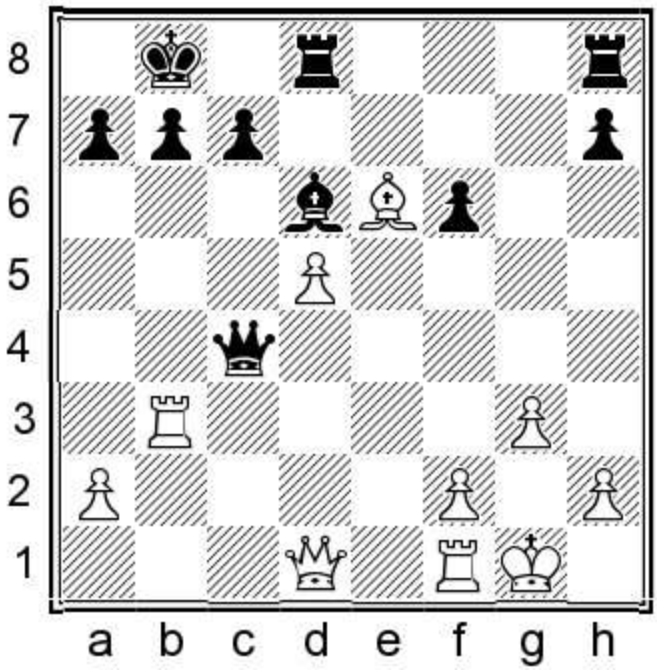
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14.Bf4!
Not caring about winning material, and correctly judging that White's light-squared bishop will be a star.

Instead after 14.Bxe6† Qxe6 White has an extra pawn, but his bishop is not as impressive as the one we shall see in the game.

14...Qxf4 15.Bxe6† Kb8 16.d5 Bxb4 17.Rb1 Bd6 18.g3 Qc4 19.Rb3±

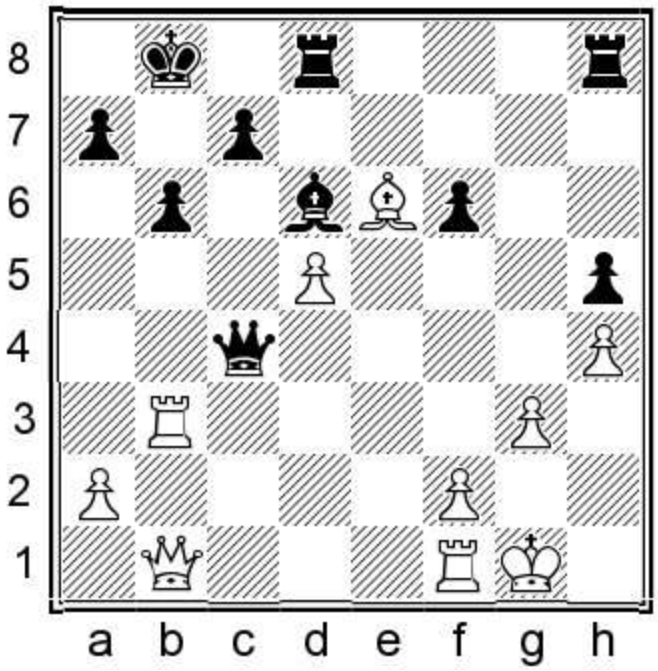


Let's assess the state of play: level material and opposite-coloured bishops, but there is a massive difference between the effectiveness of the bishops. White's bishop single-handedly prevents Black's rooks from activating, while the white rooks are free to find many beautiful locations.

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19...h5
With the benefit of lots of hindsight, this move fixes the pawn as a weakness, but it is tempting for Black to make some attacking gesture.

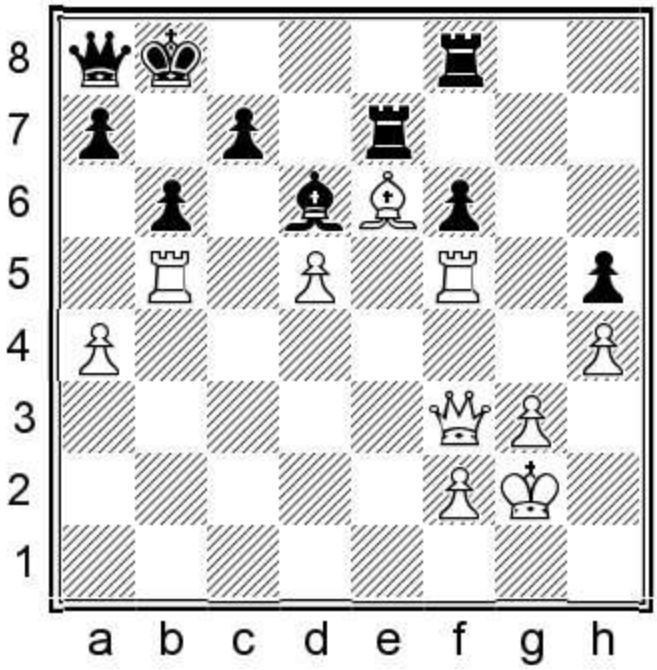
20.Qb1 b6 21.h4
To continue his kingside attack, Black would need to play ...f6-f5-f4, but White has too much control over f5 for that to be more than a dream. So Black's play is over, while White's is just beginning.



21...Rde8 22.Kg2 Qa6 23.Qc2 Re7 24.a4 Rd8 25.Rf3 Rf8 26.Rb1 Rg7 27.Rb5 Re7 28.Rf5
Compare and contrast the rooks. But as I said, it's the monster on e6 that makes it all possible.

28...Rh7 29.Qc4 Qb7 30.Qd3 Re7 31.Qf3 Qa8
This move is not as mad as it looks; when the king steps up to b7, the queen can find some air via e8. That such contortions are necessary shows just how dominant White's pieces are.

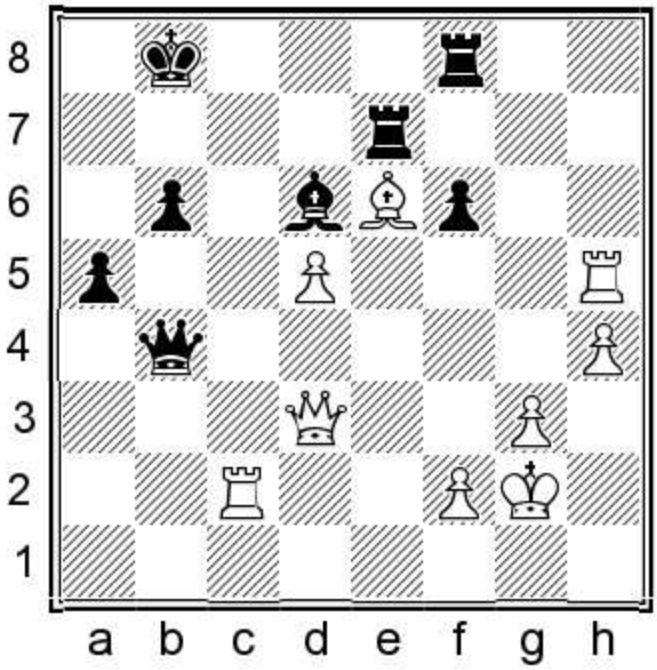
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32.Rxh5!+–
Correctly creating a passed pawn before the black queen can arrive to help.

Also promising, though less convincing, is 32.Rxf6 Rxf6 33.Qxf6 Kb7! when ...Qe8 might save the h5-pawn.

32...Kb7 33.a5 Qe8 34.Rb2 Qa4 35.Qe2 Ka8 36.Ra2 Qb4 37.axb6 cxb6 38.Qd3 a5 39.Rc2 Kb8

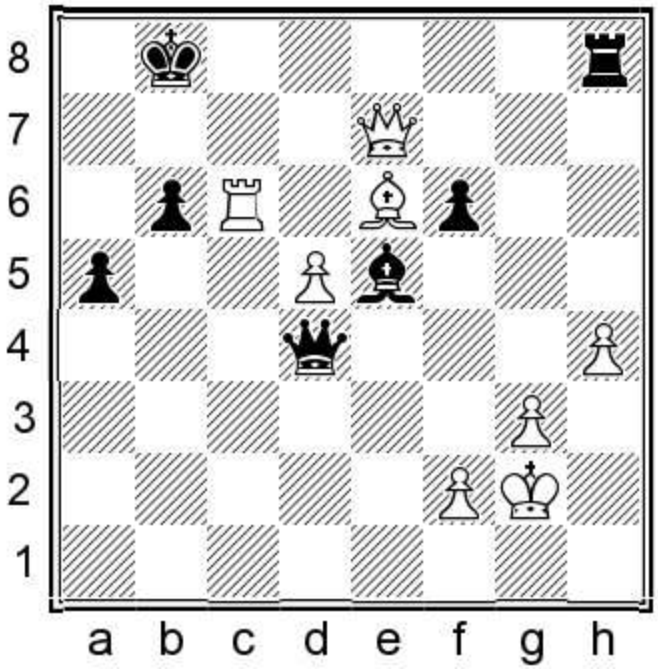


White could convert his winning advantage in many ways. The one he chooses is perfect for an email game, but an over-the-board player would never risk miscalculating such a tricky line.

40.Rh7 Rxh7 41.Qxh7 Qd4 42.Rc6 Rd8 43.Qg7 Be5 44.Qe7 Rh8
Now Black is threatening a perpetual with ...Qe4†.

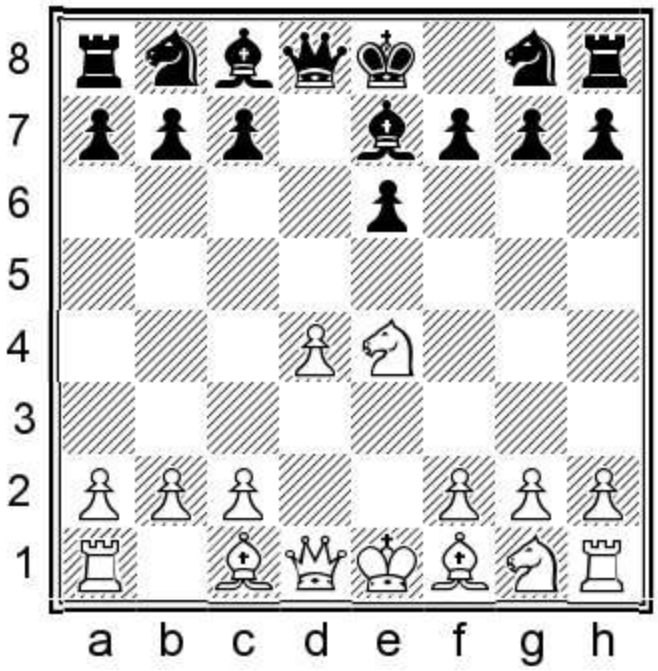
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Instead the immediate 44...Qe4† allows the king to escape after 45.f3 Qe2† 46.Kh3 Qf1† 47.Kg4 f5† 48.Kg5.



45.Bg4!
The only winning move.
1–0
And an email-game resignation. An OTB player would have wanted to see either 45...Qxd5† 46.Bf3 Qd8 47. Qe6! or 45...Qxg4 46.Rxb6† Kc8 47.Qb7† Kd8 when the only winner is 48.d6!, rather neatly quashing Black's dream of perpetual check.

D) 4...Be7



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A rather passive move in general, but irritating if White plans to use g2-g3 systems against the Rubinstein (and

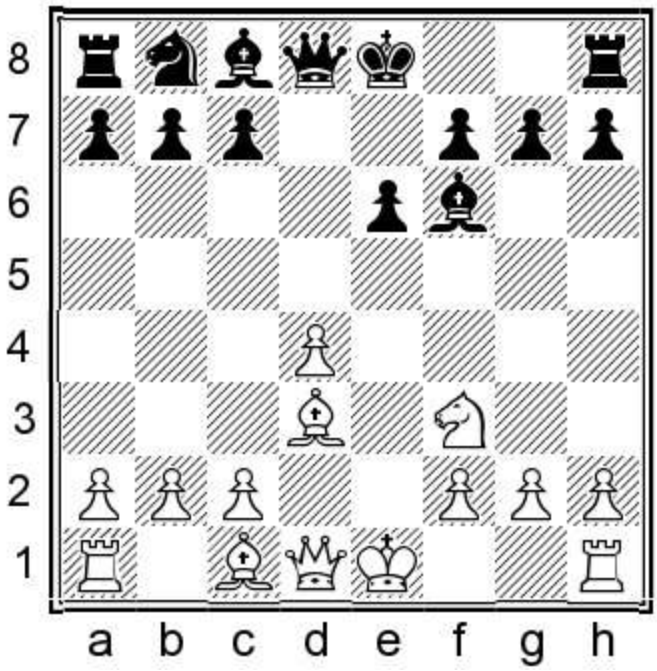
we do).

5.Nf3 Nf6
We will consider 5...Nd7 soon enough – see variation E1 on page 267.

6.Nxf6†
6.Bd3 is Negi's line.

6...Bxf6
In this one case, I will transpose into Negi's repertoire with:

7.Bd3



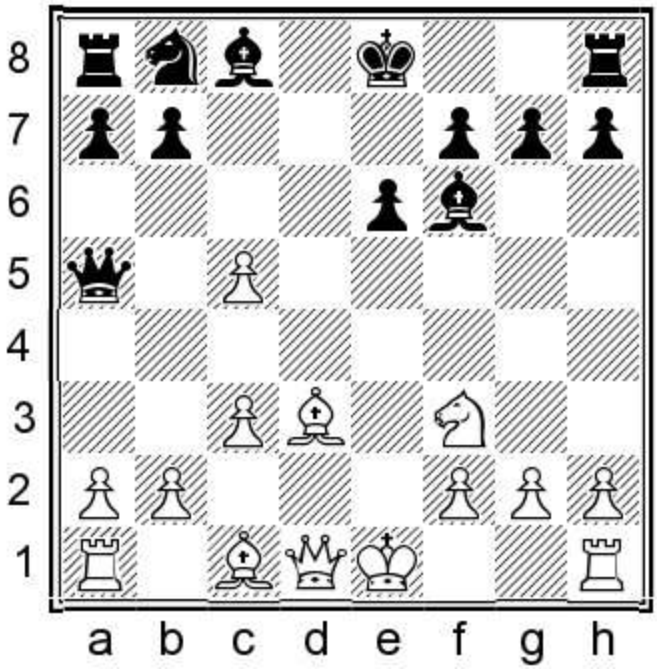
This is a tiny part of Negi's coverage as recapturing on f6 with the d7-knight is normal, and our move order has avoided that possibility. Two lines are worth a look: D1) 7...c5 and D2) 7...Nd7.

D1) 7...c5 8.dxc5

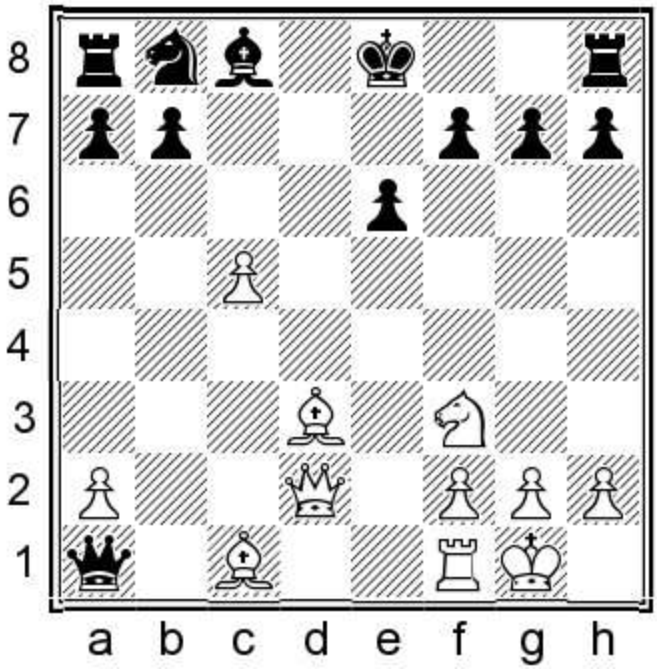
This was where Negi stopped. It is an open position where Black has spent his time developing one piece. Many lines are possible, but one key one is:

8...Qa5† 9.c3

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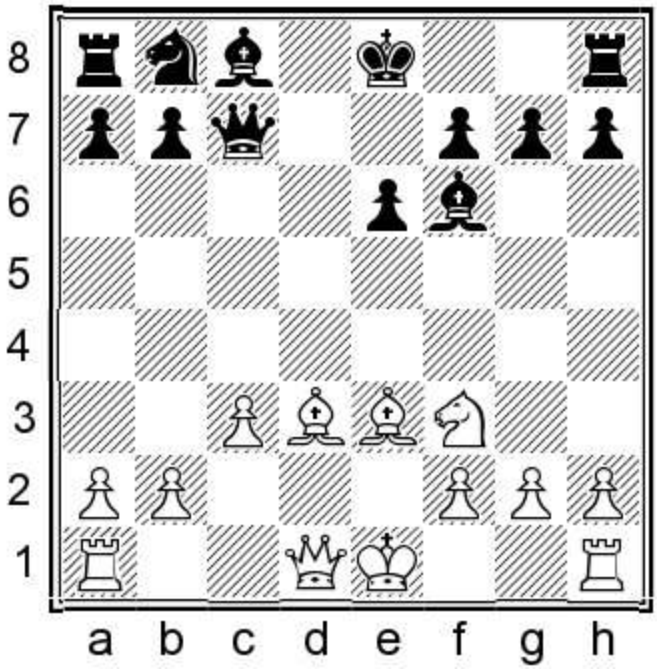
9...Qxc5
And not 9...Bxc3†? 10.bxc3 Qxc3† due to: 11.Qd2! Qxa1 12.0-0+–



With zero development and an endangered queen, Black is lost, though the justification of that assessment requires some details: 12...Nc6 (no better is 12...Qf6 13.Bb2 Qe7 14.Bxg7 Rg8 15.Qc3+–) 13.Qc2! (the threat is Bg5) 13...Nd4 14.Qa4† Bd7 (after 14...Nc6 15.Qa3! the black queen can choose to be trapped on a1 or on f6 after 15...Qf6 16.Bg5) 15.Qxd4 Qxd4 16.Nxd4+– In Hemsley – J.S Purdy, corr. 1992, the material count was not so bad for Black, but White's hyperactive pieces are the problem, with Bf4-d6 a key plan.

10.Be3 Qc7

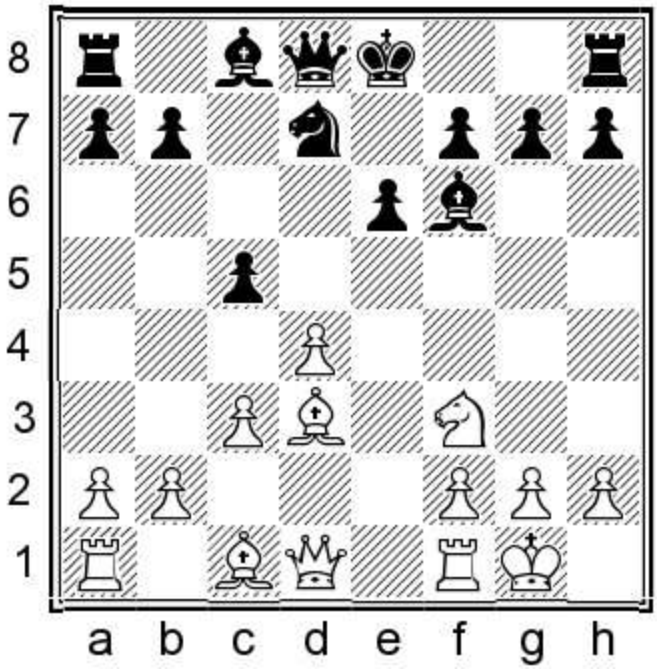
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In T.R. Hansen – Leer Salvesen, Norway 2010, a good plan was:

11.Ng5!N
With powerful kingside play.

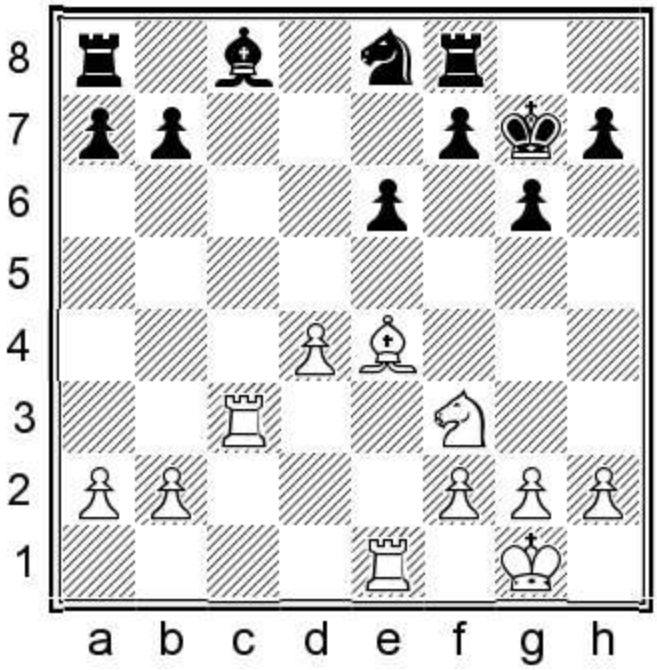
D2) 7...Nd7 8.0-0 c5 9.c3!



Accepting an IQP; as Negi explains, the d7-knight and f6-bishop are a strange mix for an anti-IQP position, so White has a good version. The classic example is:

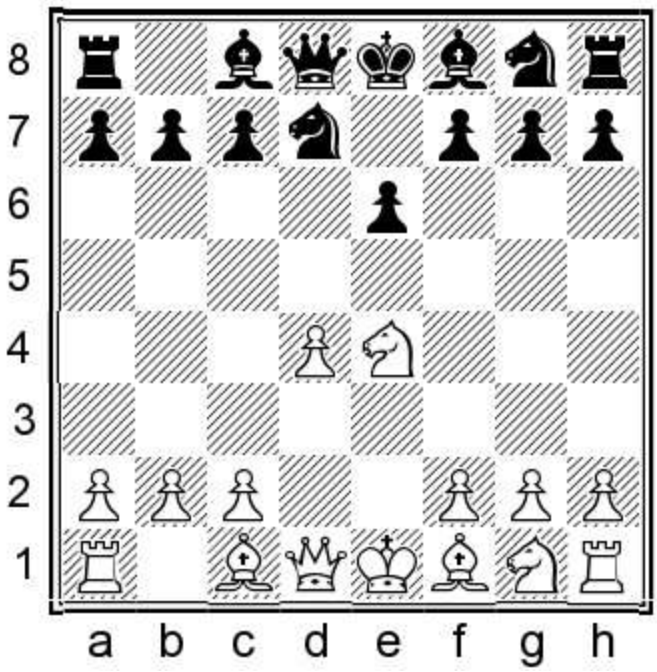
9...cxd4 10.cxd4 0-0 11.Qc2 g6 12.Re1 Nb6 13.Be4 Nd5 14.Bh6 Bg7 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Rac1 Nf6 17.Qc7 Qxc7 18.Rxc7 Ne8 19.Rc3²

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In Short – Harikrishna, Mumbai 2004, White had the sort of endgame pressure against b7 that we hope for in our usual g3 lines.

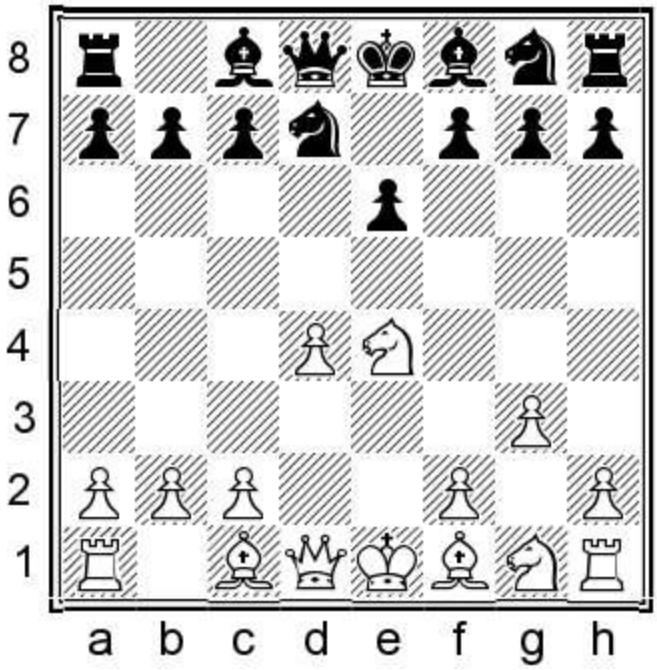
E) 4...Nd7



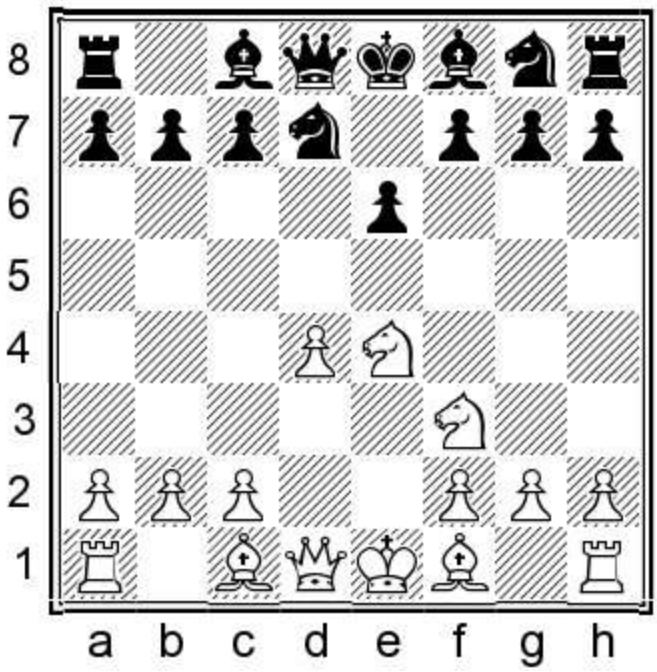
By far the most common move, and also the most solid. The modern specialist in the Rubinstein Variation is German GM Georg Meier.

5.Nf3
This seems like the most natural move. However, when you spot that my recommended main line involves g2-g3, it is reasonable to ask why we don't play 5.g3 at once.

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After 5...Ngf6 6.Nxf6† Nxf6 7.Nf3! we transpose to our main line (but note that 7.Bg2 e5!= is a reliable equalizer).
My problem with this move order is the added option of: 5...b6!? 6.Bg2 Rb8! This may look slow, but Black has the easy plan of ...Bb7 and ...Ngf6, which looks rock-like to me.



We will analyse E1) 5...Be7 followed by the main line of E2) 5...Ngf6.

E1) 5...Be7

I need a copy-and-paste from the earlier comment to 4...Be7: ‘A rather passive move in general, but irritating if White plans to use g2-g3 systems against the Rubinstein (and we do).’

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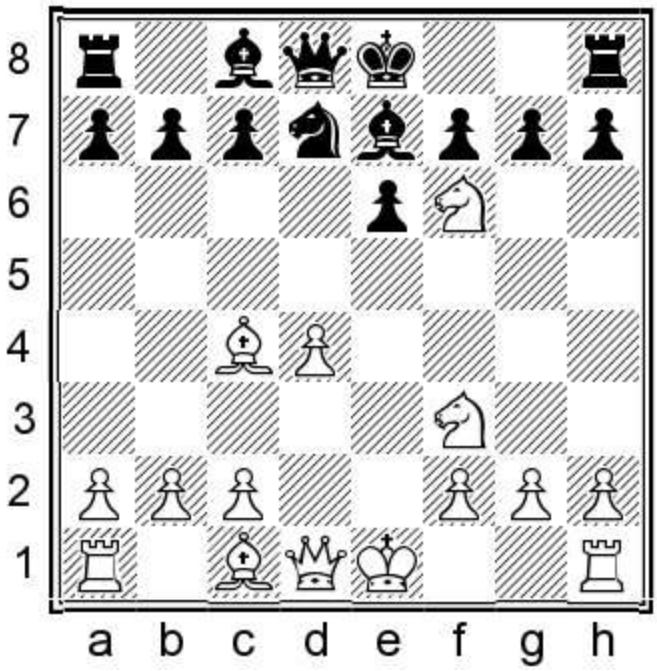
5...b6? is obviously bad after 6.Bb5, when Ne5 is the primary threat.

6.Bc4!?
This move is almost unknown but was played by Carlsen, so we are in respectable company.

6.Bd3 was Negi's choice, and is the main line with much theory, so I want to offer something different.

6.g3 is the type of move I want to play, but it does not work so well in this case. 6...Ngf6 7.Nxf6† Bxf6! (after 7...Nxf6 I happily reach a position from my recommended line) 8.Bg2 0-0 9.0-0 e5!= That is the problem. If we allow an ...e6-e5 break, then the symmetrical position is a likely draw. Some strong players have tried to press after 10.Be3, but I believe White's micro-initiative should fizzle to nothing if Black is moderately careful.

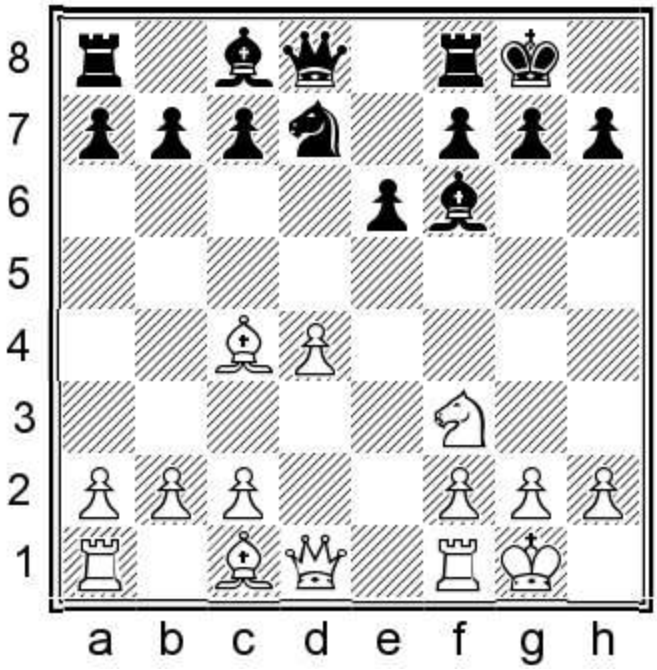
6...Ngf6 7.Nxf6†



7...Nxf6
The usual Rubinstein recapture, but it leaves the bishop development to e7 looking like a waste of time; Black needs to play the ...c5-break, and, after White takes it and Black recaptures, the black bishop will have taken two moves to reach c5.

7...Bxf6
This recapture tries to use the ...Be7 move, but Black's minor pieces are not well coordinated.
8.0-0 0-0
Instead 8...c5?! is premature: 9.d5! Nb6 10.Bb5† In Shanava – Aliakbarov, Nakhchivan 2014, Black moved his king to e7, which is of course awkward, as instead 10...Bd7 11.Bxd7† Qxd7 12.dxe6 fxe6 leaves White with the better structure and an edge after either 13.Qxd7† or 13.Qe2.

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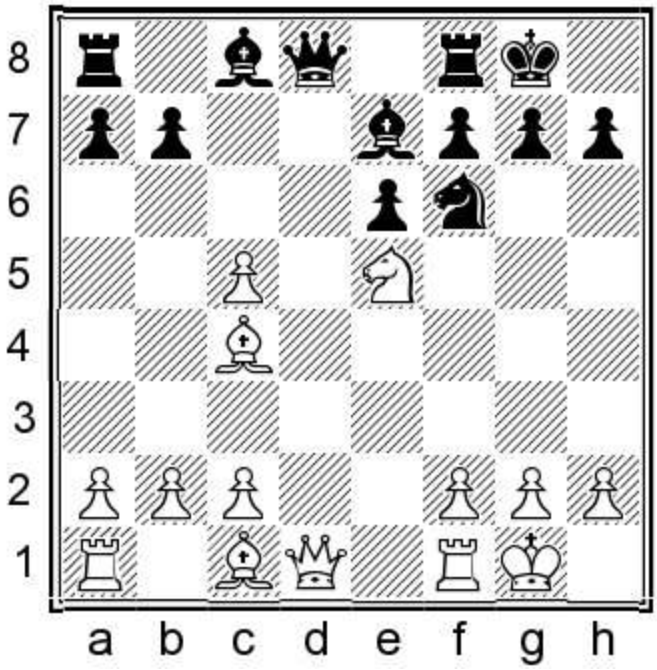
9.Bf4!?
An interesting way to exploit the bishop’s location on f6.
9.Qe2 c5 10.Rd1 is a more usual plan; Black’s structure is solid but White has good activity.
9...c5N
Never tested, but the usual Rubinstein plan.
10.Bd6 Be7 11.Bxe7 Qxe7 12.Re1²
Black is close to equality, but not quite there.

8.0-0 0-0 9.Ne5
Natural but certainly not the only path, as there are various other promising moves such as 9.Qe2 and 9.Bf4.

9...c5
Black has less freedom of choice; if he avoids the ...c7-c5 break, his position will be cramped and passive.

10.dxc5

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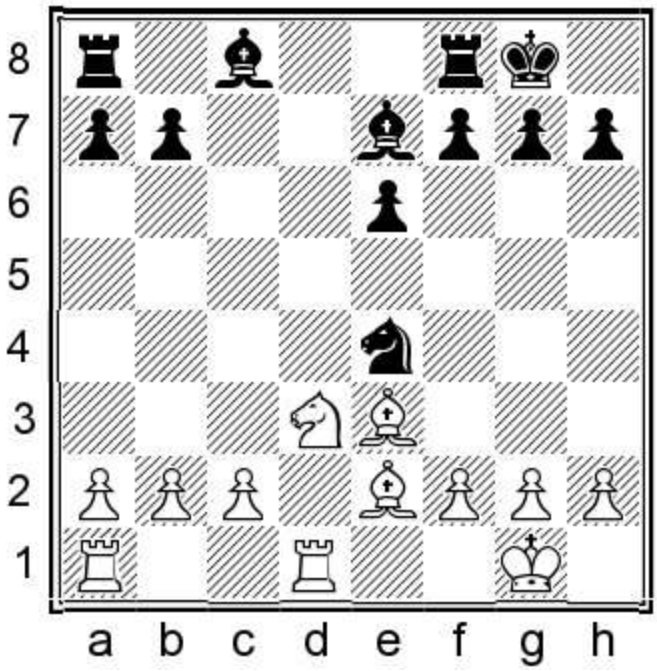


10...Qxd1
This helps White to develop, but avoiding the exchange of queens is no panacea.

10...Bxc5 11.Bf4!?N I like this untested move; giving Black another chance to accelerate our development by taking on d1, while also taking away the black queen's most natural square on c7. One sample line is: 11...b6 12.Qf3 Nd5 13.Rad1 Bb7 14.Qg3f Black might regret not exchanging queens.

11.Rxd1 Bxc5 12.Be2
In many Rubinstein endgame lines we will see that our light-squared bishop belongs on the long diagonal, eyeing the b7-pawn.

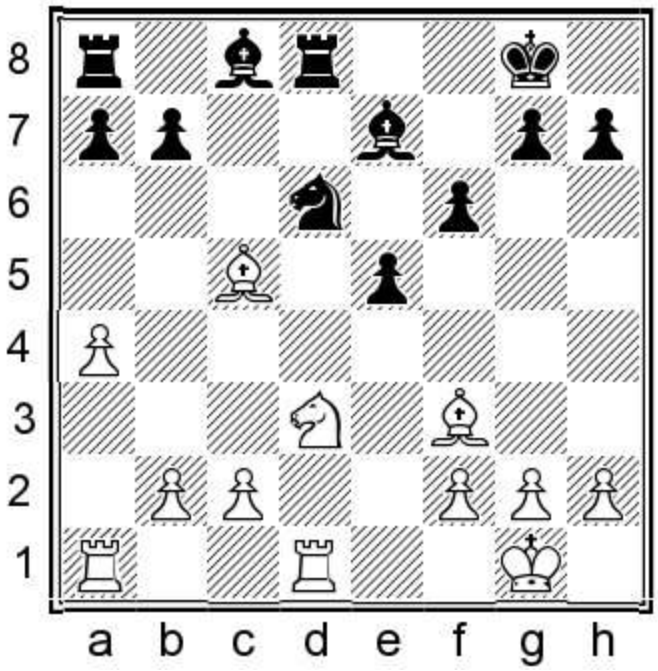
12...Ne4 13.Nd3 Be7 14.Be3[2]



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White has a pleasant position and you certainly don’t need to memorize any more than this. However, I will briefly mention a couple of high-class illustrative examples involving a) 14...f6 and b) 14...h6, plus a suggested improvement of c) 14...b6!?N.

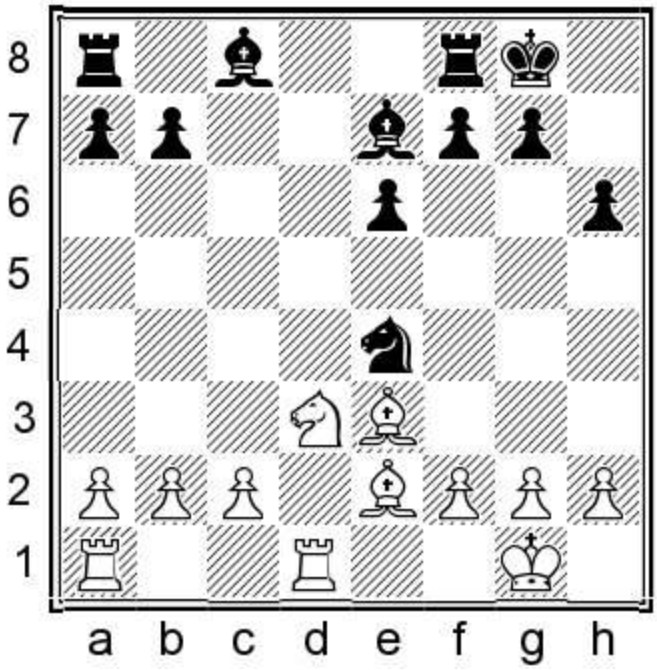
a) 14...f6 15.Bf3
15.a4!? was also an option, as in the Carlsen game below.
15...Nd6 16.Bc5 Rd8 17.a4 e5



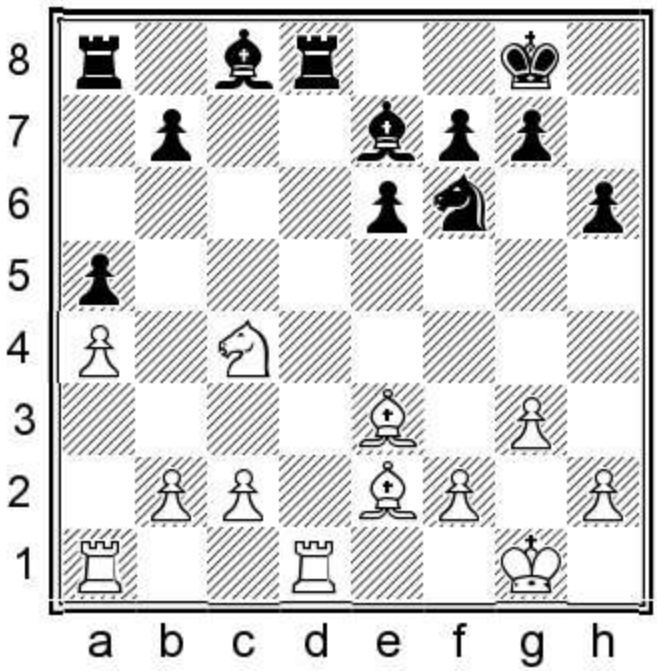
Now I recommend:
18.Nb4!N
Planning a knight incursion on d5, with a4-a5-a6 as a reserve plan.
18.a5 was also logical in Jones – Stupak, Gjakova 2016, but after 18...Kf7 White’s play flows less easily than the line above, as now if 19.Nb4 then 19...e4 is possible, as the e7-bishop is defended.

b) 14...h6

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15.a4!
The first step in a queenside attack; White simply plans a4-a5.
15...a5
Now White's knight can exploit the hole on b6, but 15...b6 16.a5± was also nasty.
16.g3 Rd8 17.Ne5 Nf6 18.Nc4±

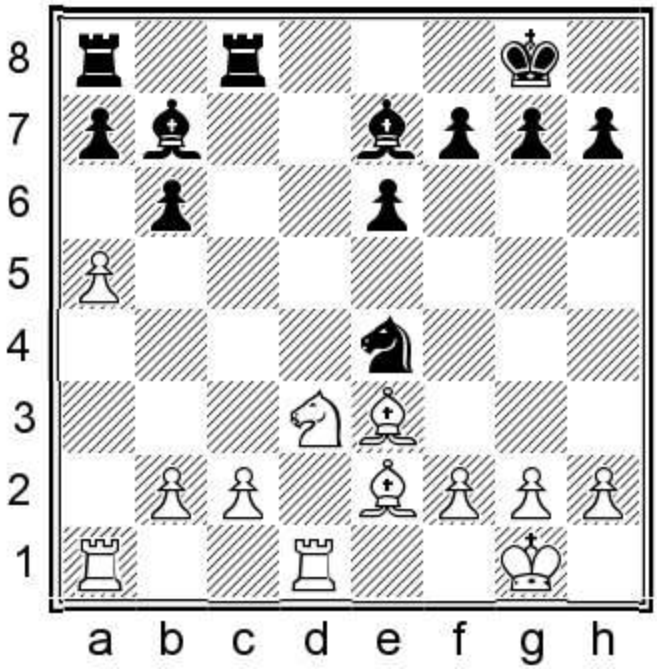


In Carlsen – Short, London 2010, the knight invasion on b6 was imminent.

c) 14...b6!?N
Suggested by Postny as Black's best option, which feels plausible, but Postny also pointed out White has an edge after:
15.a4 Bb7 16.a5 Rfc8

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I prefer keeping the tension with:



17.c3!?[2]
White's advantage feels weightier than after 17.axb6 axb6 18.Rxa8 Bxa8, which is how Postny's line continued.

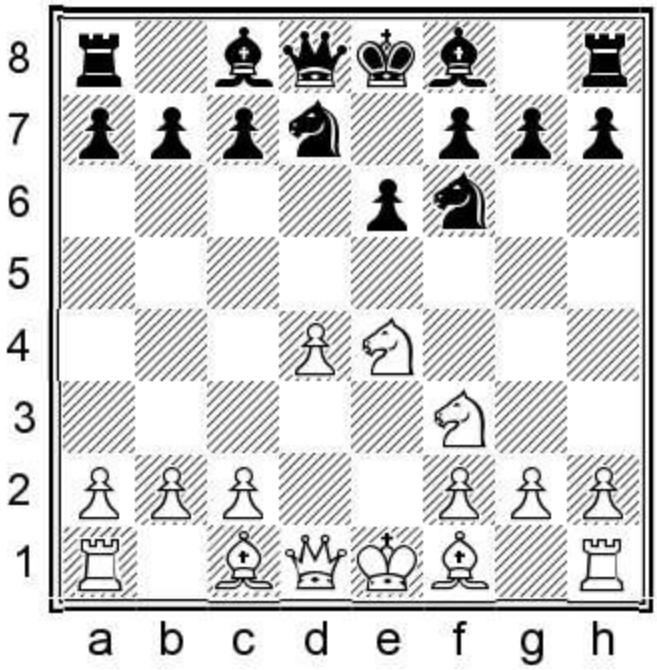
E2) 5...Ngf6

GAME 34

Dimitri Reinderman – Daan Brandenburg
Dieren 2015

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6
This is by far the most common move.

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6.Nxf6†
The other main line is 6.Bd3, which is what Negi chose.

6...Nxf6 7.g3!?
This is the eighth-most-popular move, a long way behind 7.Bd3 and 7.c3.

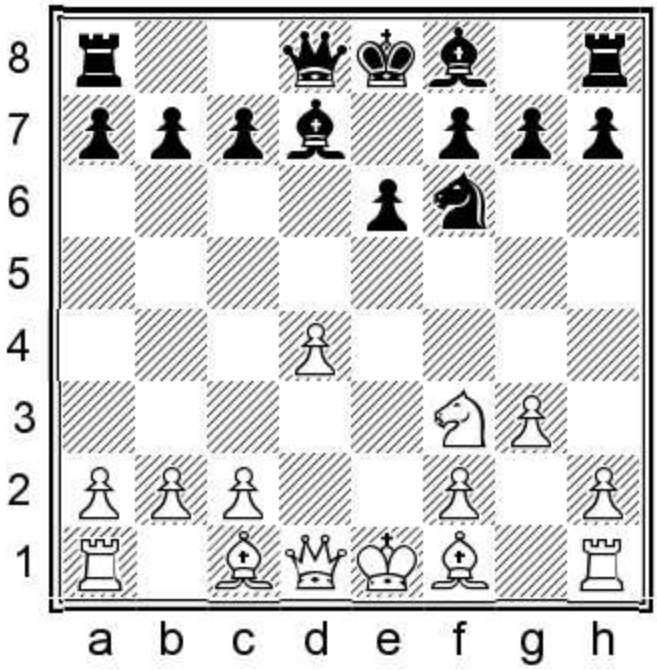
I selected 7.g3 as my recommended option due to its objective strength, relative lack of theory, and surprise value. The surprise value dipped when Nepomniachtchi chose this line against Meier in a must-win final round game in the European Team Championship in November 2017. However, I am sticking to my choice as that game (see page 281) at least suggests that the Russian team also like this line for White.

7...c5
This break is the usual Rubinstein plan, but 7.g3 is designed to make this scheme unpalatable. Our g2-bishop will be ideally placed to put pressure on Black's queenside.

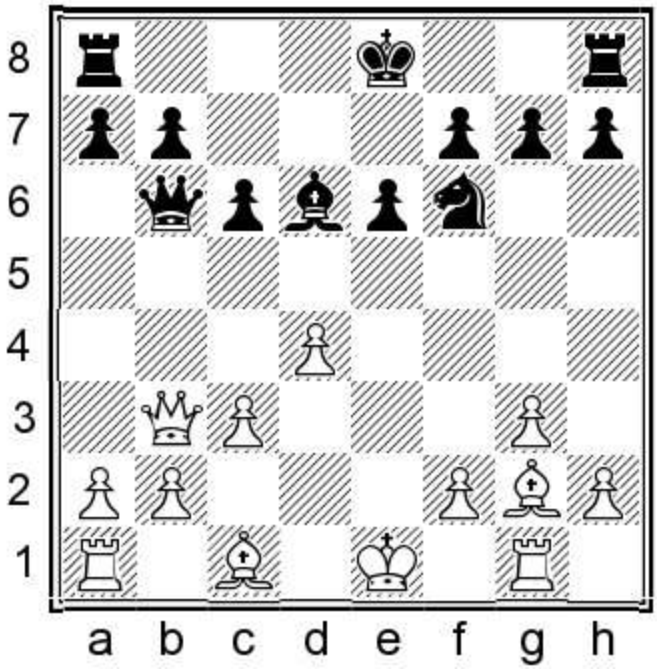
7...b6 is the main line – see Games 35 and 36.

7...Bd7!?
This has been played just four times, but one of them was by Rubinstein specialist Meier, so we will pay attention, even though that was just a blitz game.

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8.Ne5!?
Securing the bishop pair at the cost of some time and disruption.
Instead 8.Bg2 Bc6 looks solid for Black, though White should be a touch better.
8...Bc6 9.Nxc6 Qd5!
The only way to make sense of Black's position.
10.Rg1 Qxc6 11.Bg2 Qb6 12.c3 c6 13.Qb3 Bd6

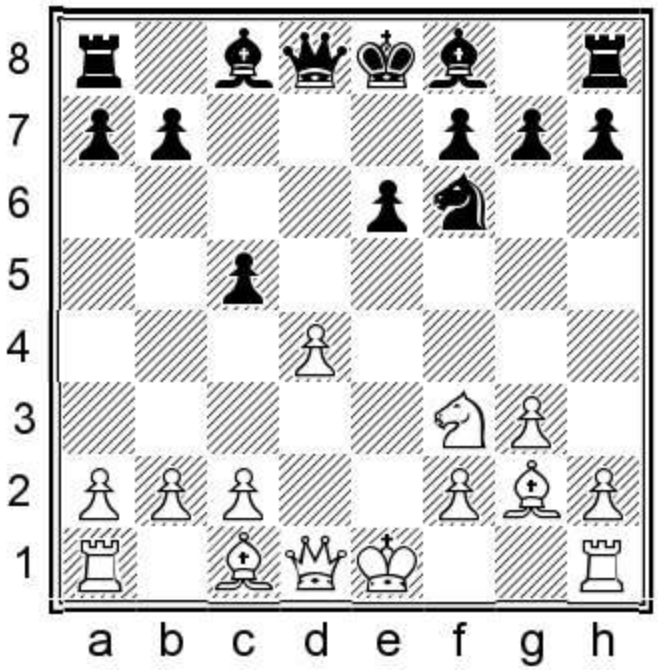


In Vallejo Pons – Meier, Berlin (blitz) 2015, White put his king on e2, where it proved rather exposed. Instead after:
14.Bf3!?N
White simply plans Kf1-g2 to neaten up his king position; Black is solid, but the bishop pair is worth a tiny edge.

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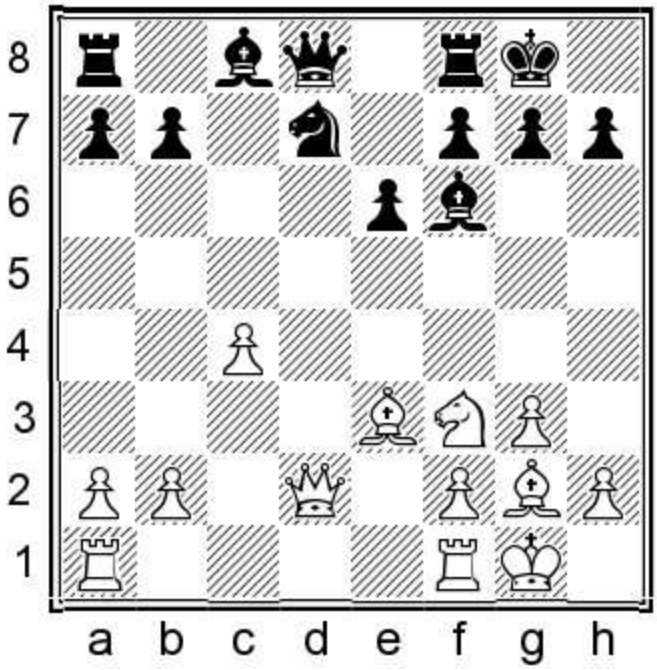
7...Be7 is a reasonable move but after 8.Bg2 Black has lost the option of ...b7-b6, leaving ...c7-c5 as his only active approach. 8...0-0 9.0-0 c5 transposes to the note to Black's next move in the main line below.

8.Bg2
Black faces a difficult choice between two lines, which generally result in an unpleasant ending and an inferior middlegame.



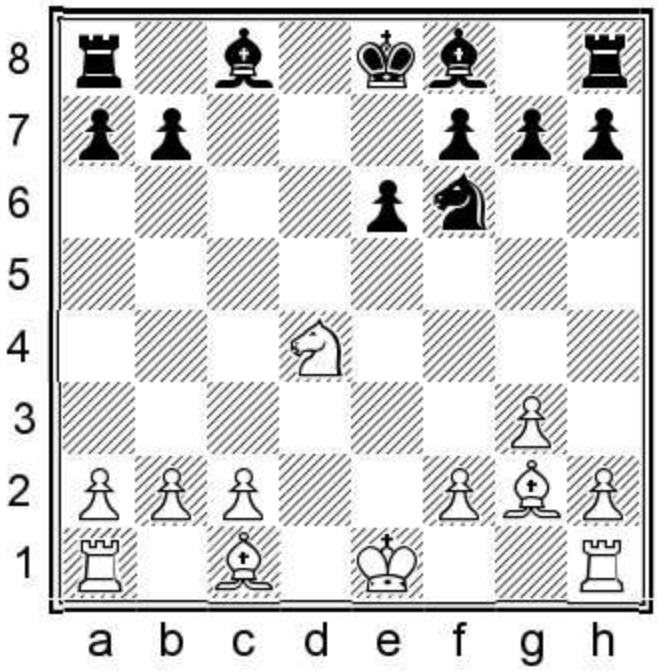
8...cxd4
This leads to an early queen exchange. The middlegame choice is:
8...Be7 9.0-0 0-0 10.c4!?
10.dxc5 is a good alternative, forcing Black to lose a tempo moving his bishop for the second time. 10...Bxc5 11.Ne5 Qc7 12.Qe2² was pleasant for White in Safarli – Abasov, Nakhchivan 2013.
10...cxd4 11.Qxd4 Nd7 12.Be3 Bf6 13.Qd2
I will include the full game to show what 'pressure against b7' looks like in practice:

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13...Ne5 14.Qxd8 Rxd8 15.Nxe5 Bxe5 16.Rad1 Bf6 17.Rxd8† Bxd8 18.Rd1 Bf6 19.b3 h5 20.h4 g6 21.c5 a5 22.Bg5!
Harassing Black's only effective piece.
22...Kg7 23.Rd6 a4 24.b4 Bc3 25.b5 Bb4 26.Be3 Rb8 27.Rd8 Ra8 28.c6 bxc6 29.Bxc6 Ba5 30.Re8
1–0
In Velicka – Corriguelas Armillas, Banyoles 2000, the a8-rook had managed to move to b8 then back to a8 again, while the c8-bishop never had a chance to move at all. They were dominated throughout the game by White's light-squared bishop.

9.Qxd4 Qxd4 10.Nxd4[2]
Black faces a grim defence against the queenside pressure; so far White has scored 78% over the course of sixty games. No further theory is needed, so what follows are a few typical examples.

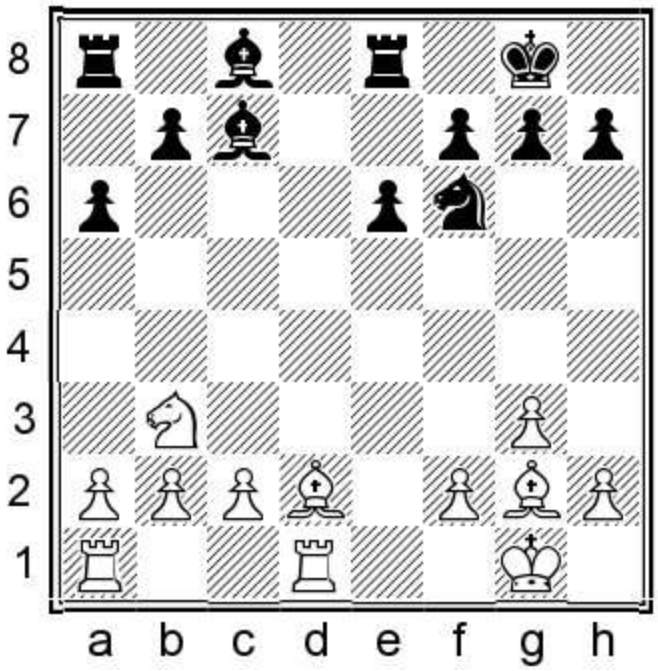


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10...Bc5
One of many possible moves.

After 10...a6 I like the unexplored 11.Bd2!?N; the a5-square is an appealing location for a white bishop or knight.
More usual is 11.Bf4 Nd5 12.Bd2 b5 13.a4 b4 as in Alekseev – Pridorozhni, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009, when it's not clear to me which side has gained from the inclusion of the pawn moves, but it might be Black, as I prefer to see the b-pawn fixed on b7 as a target.

Another example continued:
10...Bd6 11.0-0 a6 12.Rd1 Bc7 13.Bd2 0-0 14.Nb3 Re8

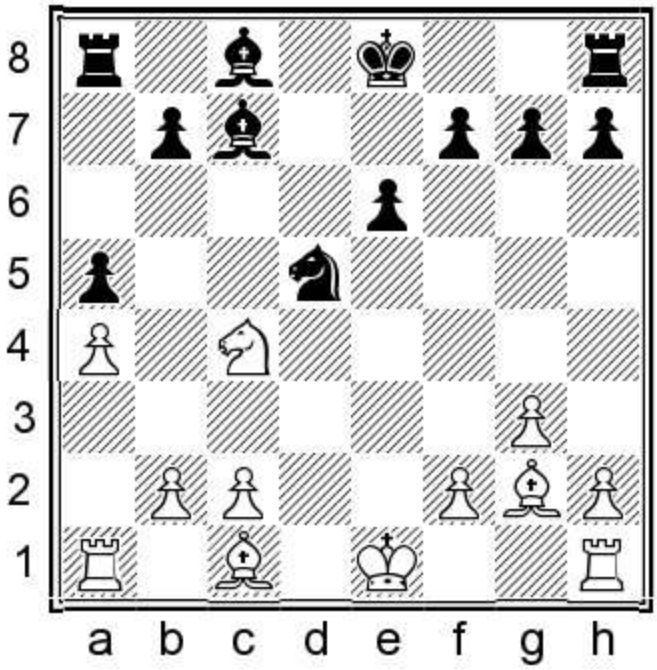


So far this is Kokarev – Gorovykh, St Petersburg 2009, and now I like:
15.Ba5!N
Removing Black's best defender and creating an ideal square for our rook on d6.
15...Bxa5 16.Nxa5±
A good example of White's aims in this line. The pressure can build after moves such as:
16...Rb8 17.Rd6 Kf8 18.c4
With c4-c5 and b2-b4 to come; it's a crush.

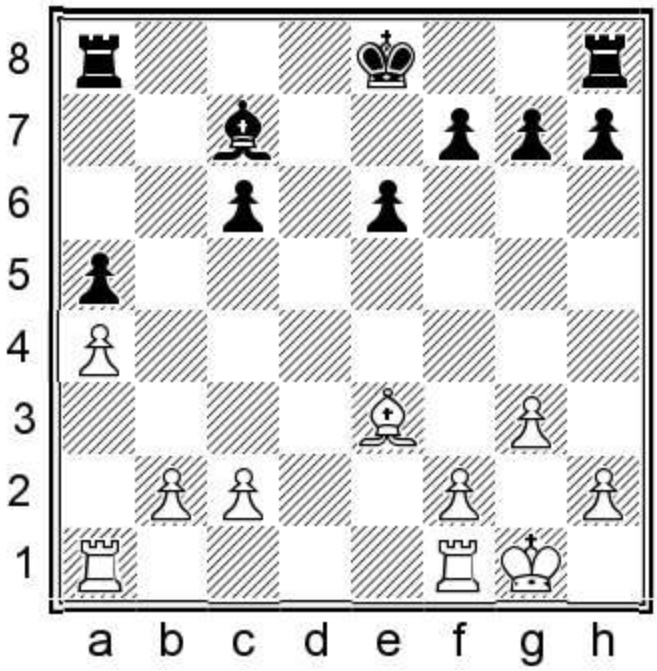
11.Nb3 Bd6
The other retreat is also possible.

11...Bb6 12.a4!? a5 13.Nd2
As usual, White has many ways to play. For example, 13.0-0 0-0 14.Bf4!?N with the idea: 14...Nd5 15.Be5 f6 16.Bd4 Bxd4 17.Nxd4²
13...Nd5 14.Nc4 Bc7
Perhaps Black should have chosen 14...Bc5!?N when 15.0-0 is just a slight edge.

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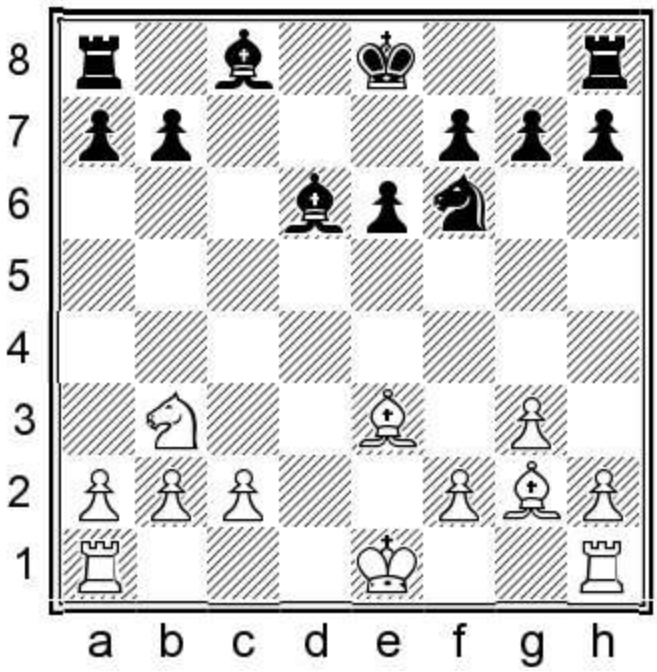
In Vallejo Pons – Huzman, Berlin (rapid) 2015, White chose the logical 15.b3, but I recommend dealing with Black's one good piece right now:
15.Ne3!?N 15...Nxe3
15...Nb4 16.0-0 is not a problem for White, as the plan of Rd1 and c2-c3 will evict the black knight.
16.Bxe3
One plausible line is:
16...Bd7 17.0-0
Of course 17.Bxb7?! Rb8 helps Black.
17...Bc6 18.Bxc6† bxc6



19.Rfd1²
Even the simple bishop ending could be difficult for Black, due to his fixed weakness on a5.

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12.Be3!
The bishop has no need to fear harassment from Black's knight.



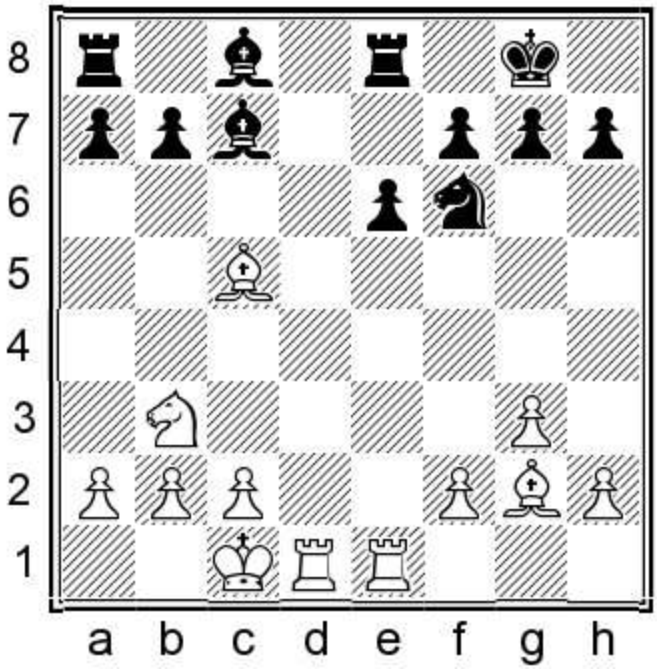
12...0-0
The sensible choice, as chasing the bishop is a good way to help create a miniature:

12...Ng4 13.Bd4 e5 14.Bc3 f6 That is the end of Black's pseudo-initiative; now White's real initiative fires into action: 15.h3 Nh6 16.0-0-0± White just needs to open the centre to make his lead in development decisive. For example: 16...Nf7 17.Bd5 Nd8 18.Rhe1+– In Vorobiov – Yagupov, Moscow 1997, the coming f2-f4 break was killing, while the immediate 18.f4!?N might have won even faster.

12...Nd5 13.Bd4 f6?! (the more cautious 13...0-0 was wiser, but White still has endgame pressure after the simple 14.0-0) 14.0-0-0± As in the line above, Black's hopping around has merely given White time to build pressure in the centre. For example: 14...Bd7?! 15.Rhe1 Kf7 16.Bc5!+– Gofshtein – Finkel, Tel Aviv 2002. White is winning a pawn, as there is no sensible way to stop a knight invasion on c5.

13.0-0-0 Bc7 14.Bc5 Re8 15.Rhe1

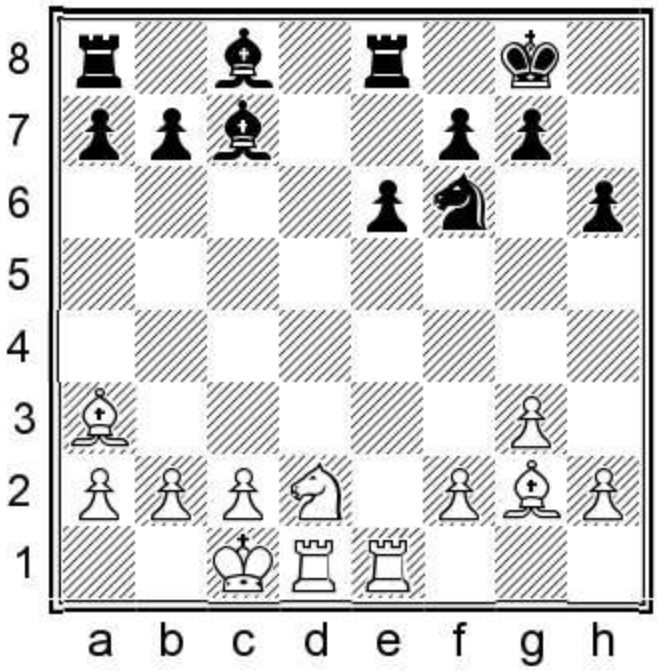
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15...h6
It is tempting to play 15...e5, trying to activate the c8-bishop, so a simple reply is: 16.h3!?[2] The new problem for Black is the e5-pawn might drop off, while Nd2-c4 followed by either minor piece to d6 might also be nasty.

16.Nd2
16.f4!N± was a fine way to tighten the grip; Black has no productive moves. We do not need detailed analysis of the rest of the game. Just note how painful it was for Black.

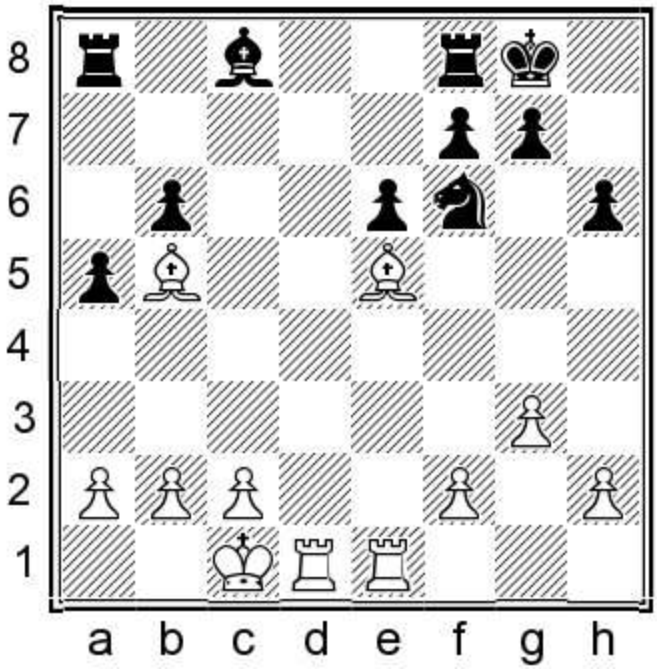
16...Nd7 17.Ba3 Nf6



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Such back-and-forward moves never look impressive, but the position is to blame; Black cannot get coordi-

nated.

18.Nc4 a5 19.Nd6 Bxd6 20.Bxd6 Ra6 21.Bf1 Ra8 22.Be5 b6 23.Bb5 Rf8

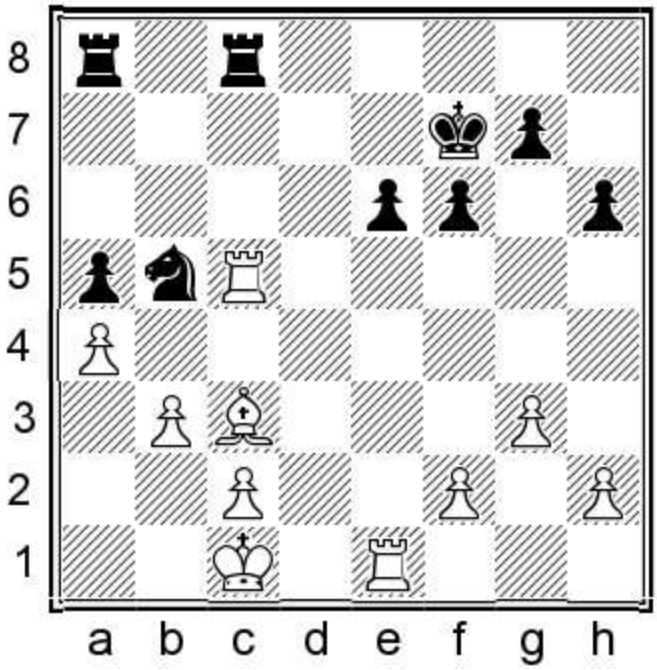


24.Rd6
Another way was 24.Bc6 Ra6 25.Bd6 Rd8 26.c4 with total dominance, but at this stage almost anything will do.

24...Ba6 25.Rxb6 Bxb5 26.Rxb5+–
Black is a pawn down with a hopeless position, but it’s fair enough to play on until the time control, hoping for a knight-forking miracle.

26...Nd5 27.a4 Rfc8 28.b3 f6 29.Bb2 Nc7 30.Rc5 Kf7 31.Bc3 Nb5

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A decent attempt to confuse White, but unfortunately for Black, rook takes b5 or c8 both win.

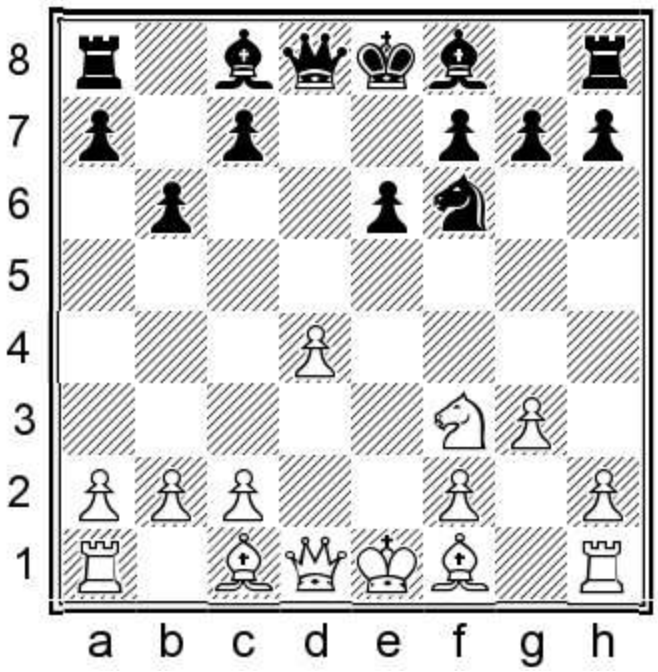
32.Rxb5 Rxc3 33.Rb7† Kg6 34.Rxe6 Rac8 35.Re2 h5 36.Kb2 R8c5 37.Rb5 Kf5 38.Rxa5 Rxc2† 39.Rxc2 Rxa5 40.Ka3
1–0

GAME 35

Sergei Zhigalko – Kirill Stupak
Minsk 2012

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Nxf6† Nxf6 7.g3!? b6
This is by far the most important line covered in this chapter. It is the soundest answer to our anti-Rubinstein weapon.

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8.Bb5†
A standard finesse in ...b7-b6 lines to misplace Black's would-be fianchetto bishop.

Instead after 8.Bg2 Bb7 Black is solidly placed, as natural attempts to be aggressive with Ne5 will exchange bishops and draw our king onto the long diagonal. For example: 9.0-0 Be7 (9...Bd6 is also fine) 10.c4 0-0 11. Ne5 Bxg2 12.Kxg2 c5 Any edge White has is tiny and likely to fade to nothing. Note that the white knight can invade on c6, but not settle there as an outpost.

8...Bd7 9.a4!?
A further finesse. By provoking ...a7-a6, White gains a fractionally better version of the lines after an immediate retreat to e2.

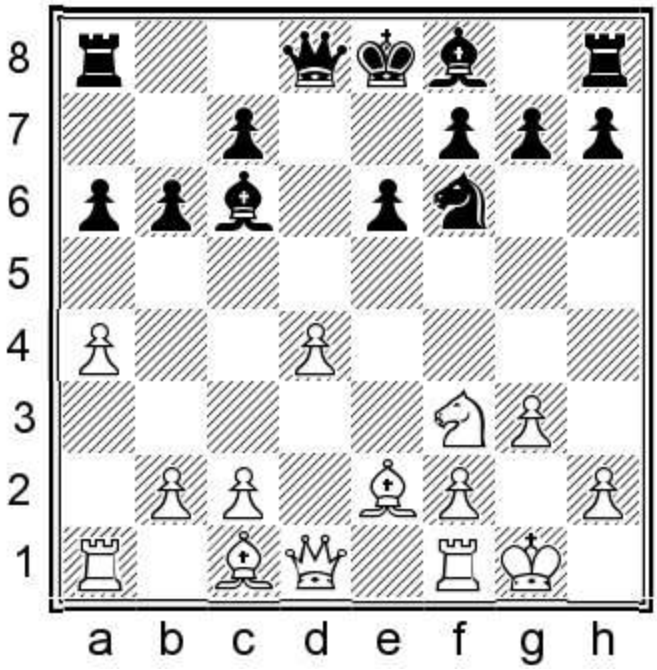
More common is 9.Be2 Bc6 10.0-0 Bd6 11.Ne5 Bxe5 12.dxe5. MVL has had four attempts with White from this position, three of them against Meier, but all were drawn. Of course, White has the bishop pair, but there is no black weakness to latch onto.

9...a6 10.Be2
We are in a little-explored position, with only eight games played at the time of writing.

10...Bc6
We can see the point of White's Bb5-e2 manoeuvre: the c6-bishop has reached its desired long diagonal, but it is vulnerable to a later Ne5.

11.0-0

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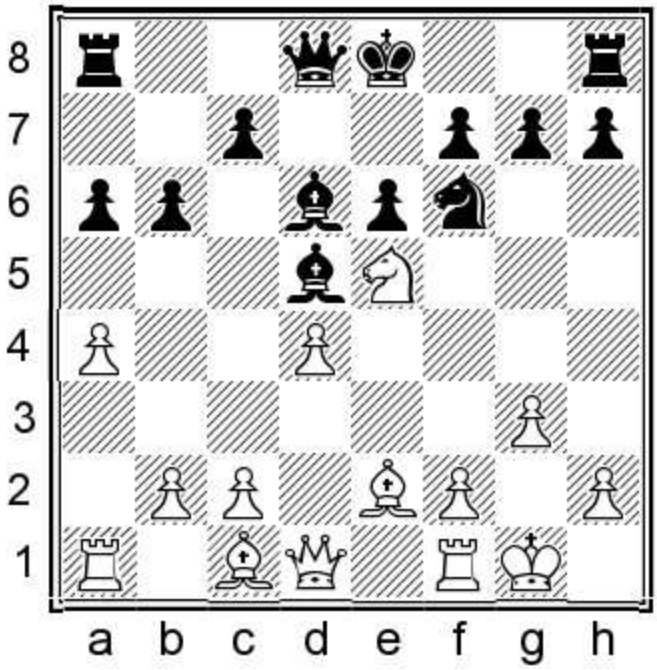
11...Bd6
Anticipating our natural plan of Ne5.
11...Be7 is the next game.

11...Bb7!?N should be met by 12.Ne5. Then 12...Bd6 transposes to the note on 12...Bb7N on the next page, while 12...Be7 transposes to Game 36 on page 281.

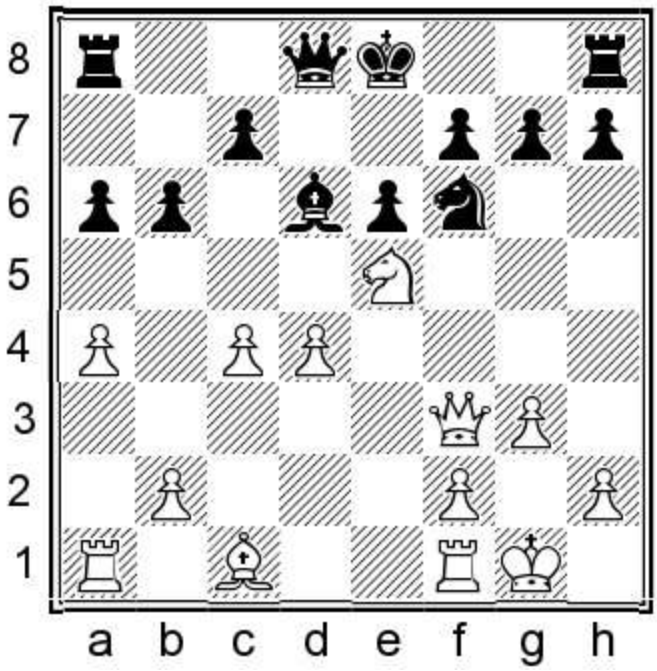
12.Ne5 Bxe5
The usual move, but not the only one.

12...Bd5
A good player tried this move, but I must admit I don’t understand why Black would want to provoke c2-c4 with tempo.

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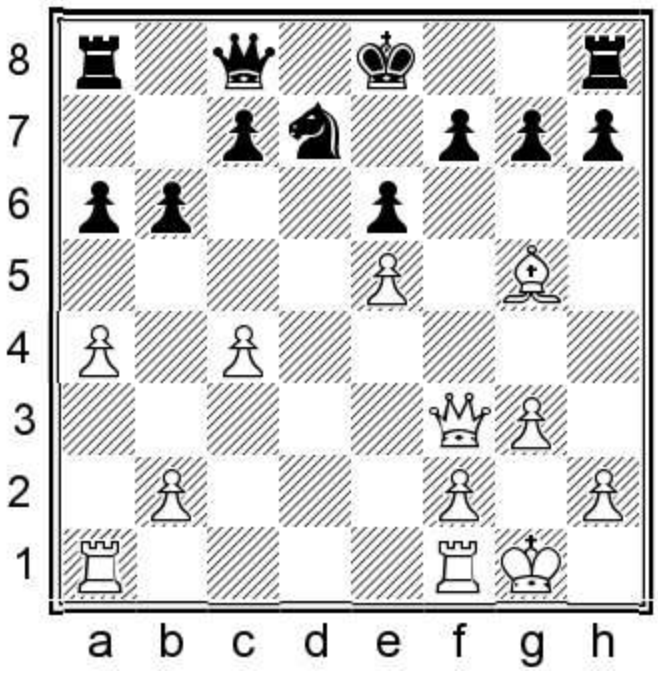


13.c4!N
Instead 13.Bf3 was Robson – Nyzhnyk, Saint Louis 2014. We shall see a little more of this game below.
13...Bb7
The most natural square.
13...Be4 has some point as the bishop being defended gives Black an extra option against Bf3 ideas. 14.a5!? So it makes sense to switch plans and eye a6. (14.Bf3 is still possible but after 14...Bxe5 15.dxe5 Qxd1 16.Bxd1 Nd7 White's pieces are temporarily passive. Even so, after 17.Re1² the bishop pair is the key factor.) A plausible sample line is: 14...0-0 15.Bg5 h6 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.Bf3 Bxf3 18.Nxf3² Black is under pressure on both sides of the board.
14.Bf3
Even here, 14.a5!? is a viable option.
14...Bxf3 15.Qxf3



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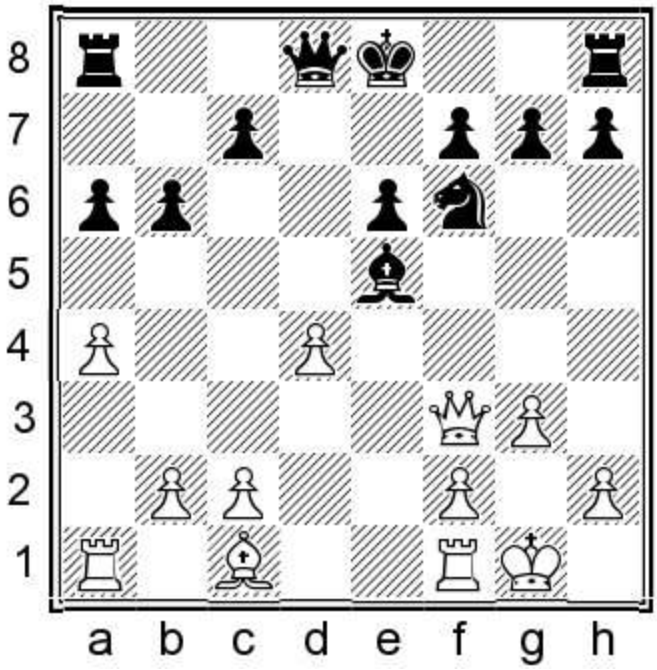
Compare and contrast this position with the harmless line mentioned in the note to move 8. The fact that White has been able to recapture with the queen rather than the king revs up his play, with invasions on c6 threatened.
15...Bxe5
This allows some tactics, but 15...0-0 16.Nc6± is a nasty bind.
16.dxe5 Nd7 17.Bg5! Qc8
Or 17...Nxe5 18.Qe4 f6 19.Rad1 Qc8 20.Bf4± and White will win back the pawn with an obvious advantage.



18.Rad1!
The most precise option.
Instead 18.Rfe1 h6 forces the bishop to retreat.
18...0-0
It is wise to castle before disaster strikes on d7. 18...h6? 19.Rxd7!+– is one obvious example.
18...Nxe5 19.Qe4 f6 transposes to the 17...Nxe5 variation.
19.Rfe1±
White is dominating. And note that 19...h6?! still does not force the bishop to retreat: 20.Bf6!

12...Bb7N
A perfectly sensible move but never played yet. The obvious reply is:
13.Bf3
But as usual 13.a5!? is a decent alternative.
13...Bxf3 14.Qxf3 Bxe5

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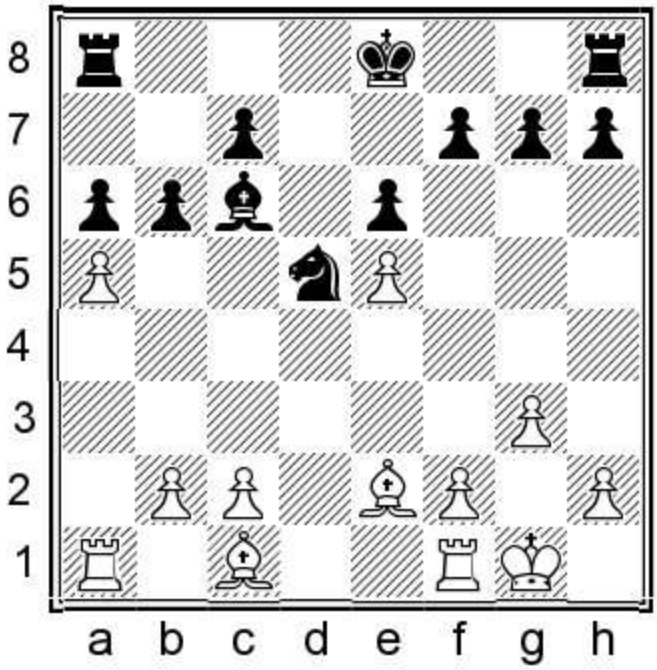
15.Qc6†!
Instead 15.dxe5 transposes to the Robson – Nyzhnyk game mentioned above, when 15...Qd5! did not give White much and led to a quick draw. If White tries 16.Qxd5 Nxd5= then the knight is well placed on d5; kicking it away with c2-c4 would give away other squares – b4 or d4, or on a really bad day, d3. The main game will show a much-improved version of this endgame, where White still has the bishop pair.
15...Nd7 16.dxe5 0-0 17.Re1²
If we are going to play a simplified position, let's try to do so with the knight on d7, not d5.

13.dxe5 Qd5
This seems the toughest test.
Instead 13...Qxd1 14.Rxd1 Nd7 15.Ra3!² gave White nagging pressure in Le Page – Groth, email 2014. Of course 15...Nxe5? is awful after either 16.Bf4 or 16.Rc3.

14.Qxd5 Nxd5
Langrock: "The insertion of a2-a4 and ...a7-a6 is no significant change compared to the main line 9.Be2." I disagree.

15.a5!
Now we see the advantage of 9.a4 over the immediate Be2: the a6-pawn is fixed on the same colour as Black's remaining bishop. Langrock obviously spotted the difference, but where we disagree is on its significance. I believe the analysis and games suggest Black faces a tough defence.

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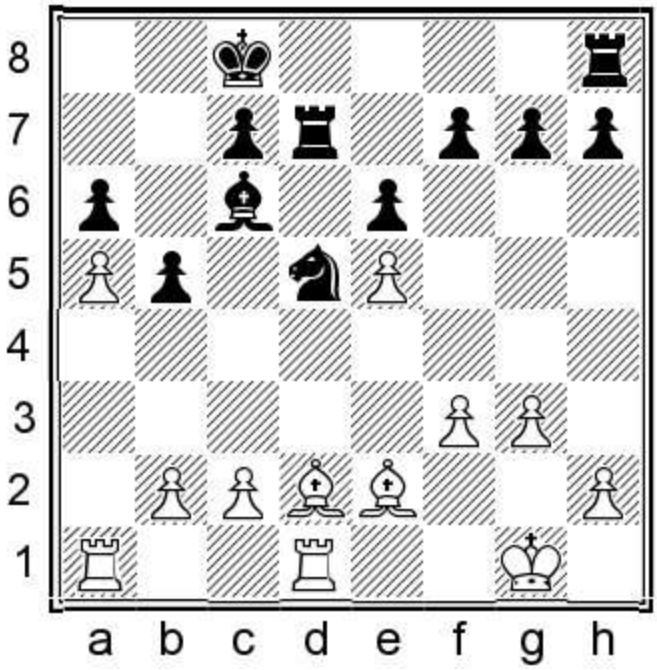
15...b5
White can also glimpse a potential entry square on c5, for much later in the ending. Langrock says: “Black’s light-square blockade will be tough to break.” I agree with that, but Black is committed to a grim fight for a draw, while White will press all day.

16.Bd2 0-0-0 17.Rfd1
Slow and steady is fine.

17.c4?! may look energetic, but all it does is cement Black’s light-square blockade. For example: 17...bxc4 18. Bxc4 Bb5 19.Bxb5 axb5 20.Rfc1 Kd7 21.Rc5 c6 22.Rac1 Rc8= The knight is untouchable, and White’s passed a-pawn is going nowhere.

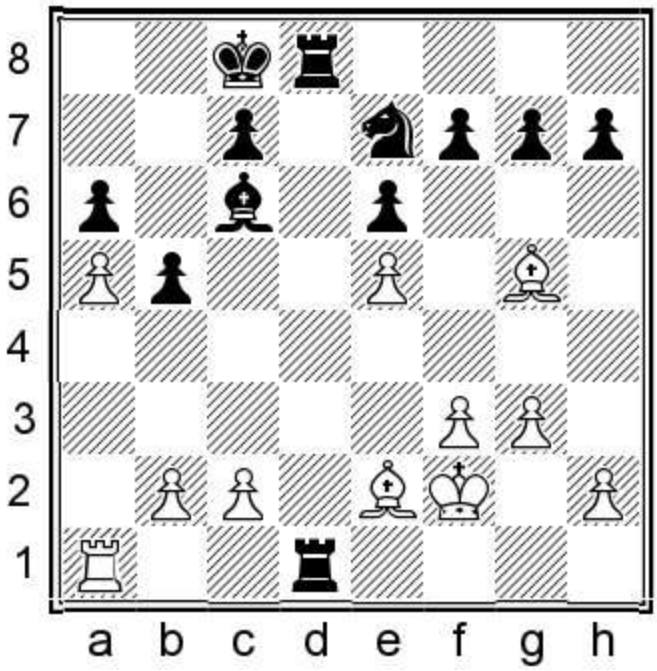
17...Rd7 18.f3

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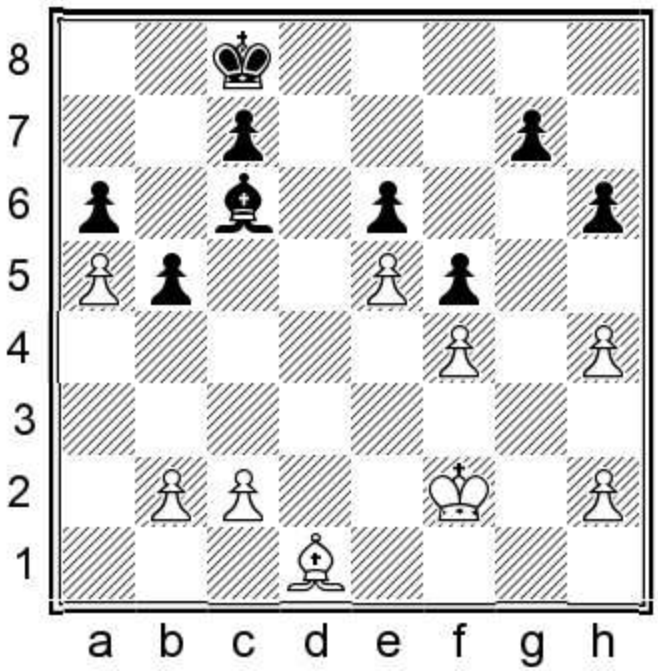
18...Ne7
Various options are possible at most stages in this endgame.

18...Rhd8
This led to an instructive game.
19.Kf2 Ne7 20.Bg5
Just to reiterate the point: White has alternatives including 20.Bb4!? or 20.Be3!?.
20...Rxd1



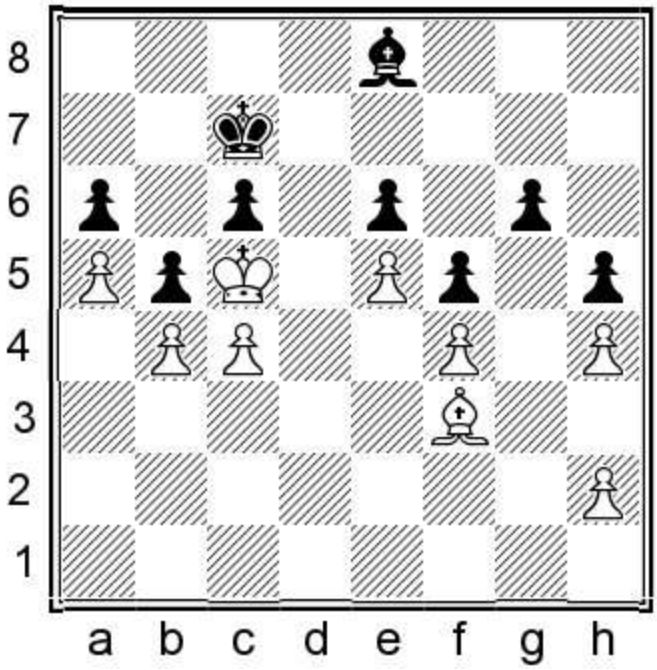
21.Rxd1?!
A natural recapture, but remarkably it allows Black to force a draw with a total blockade.
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21.Bxd1! keeps the pin on the knight, and would reach a similar position to the main game. For example: 21...

Rd7 22.Bxe7 Rxe7 23.Be2 Rd7 24.Ke3²
21...Rxd1 22.Bxd1 Ng6!
Pelletier has foreseen the final position of the game, and plays with total precision to reach it.
23.f4 h6 24.Bh4 Nxh4 25.gxh4 f5!



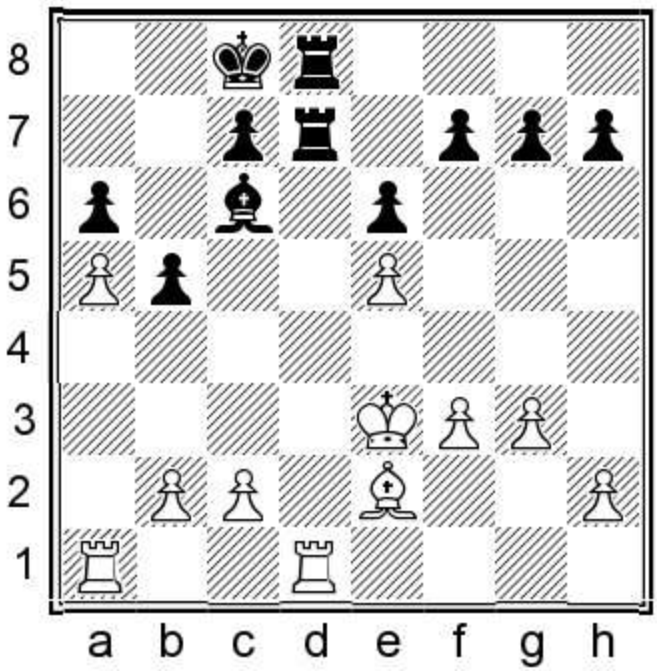
26.Ke3
26.exf6 gxf6 leaves Black as the only one who can create a passed pawn.
26.c4!? is the best practical try, before Black can answer this break with ...c7-c6. But Black can hold with precise play: 26...bxc4 27.Ke3 c3! Making sure there will be no later b4-b5 break, creating a passed a-pawn. 28. bxc3 If Black puts his bishop on b7, and shuffles his king between d7 and e7, then his pawns are defended, and I do not see a way for White to break the blockade. For example: 28...Kd8 29.Be2 Bb7 30.Kd4 Ke7 31.Bc4 Kd7 32.Kc5 Ke7=
26...Be8! 27.Kd4 c6!
A beautiful ugly move.
28.Kc5 Kc7 29.Bf3 h5!
And not 29...g6?? 30.h5! gxh5 31.h4+– winning by zugzwang.
30.c4 g6! 31.b4 ½–½

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Morozevich – Pelletier, Biel 2011. White has a picture postcard of positional domination, but no way through. 31...Bd7 would have been another only-move, but there was no doubt Pelletier was ready with it.

19.Bb4 Rhd8 20.Bxe7 Rxe7 21.Kf2 Red7 22.Ke3



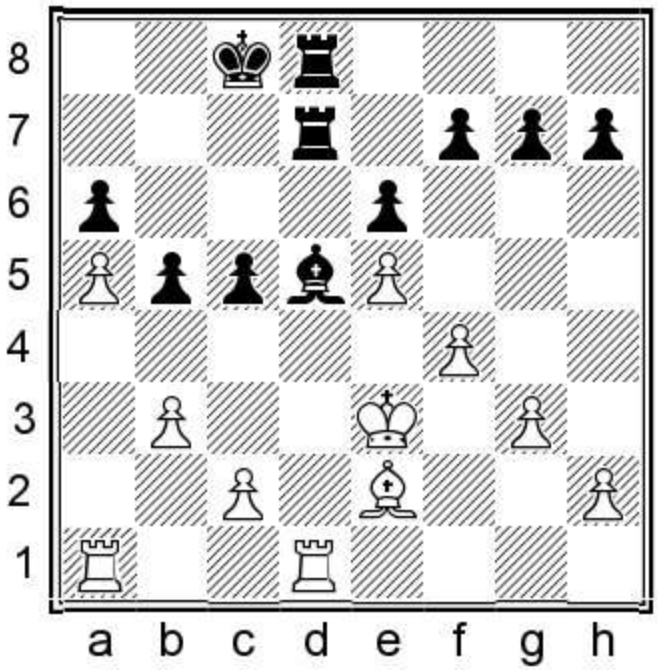
22...Bd5
Deciding to keep the rooks on. Traditionally rook endings are more drawish than bishop endings.

22...Rxd1 23.Rxd1 Rxd1?
23...Bd5 is correct and similar to the game.
24.Bxd1±
This is a very different bishop ending from the Pelletier game above. I suspect White is winning by force, but I

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will be conservative and claim only a big advantage. White's healthy kingside structure means we still have useful pawn breaks, so trying to blockade in Pelletier style would end in tears. For example:
24...f5 25.Kd4 Be8 26.f4 c6?! 27.Kc5 Kc7 28.g4! g6 29.gxf5 gxf5 30.Bf3 h6 31.b4
Zugzwang, as are most of the following positions. The most pleasing winning method is to force the black bishop to a8, then trap it. As follows:
31...Bd7 32.Bh5 Bc8 33.Be8 Bb7 34.c3 Ba8 35.Bf7 Kd7 36.Kb6 Ke7 37.Ka7+–

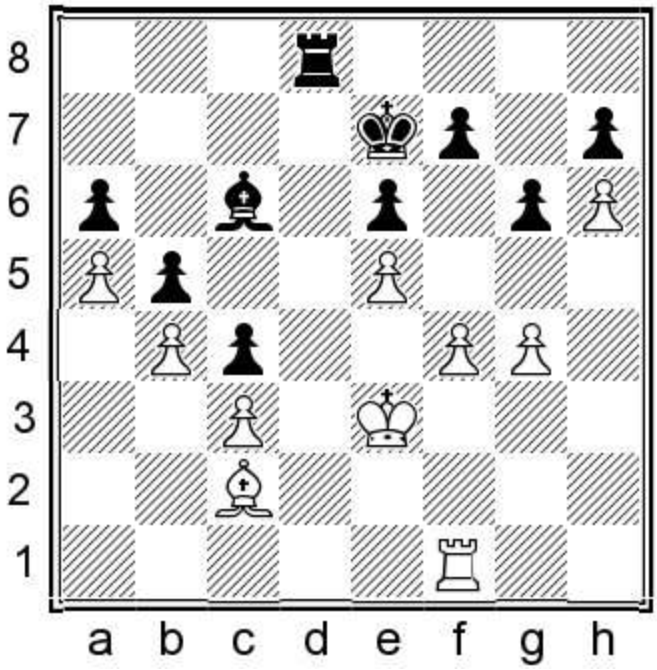
23.b3 c5 24.f4²
I will not attempt move-by-move coverage of this ending. White's plan of kingside expansion is clear enough.



24...Kc7 25.g4 g6 26.h4 Bc6 27.Rxd7† Rxd7 28.Bd3 Kd8 29.h5 Ke7
Trying to keep the position closed.
29...gxh5? is tactically unsound. 30.gxh5 h6 31.Rg1 Ke7 32.Rg7+– and the h6-pawn drops.

30.h6
That's a second weakness fixed, so we have a6 and h7 as targets. Black's only hope is keeping everything blocked, but White has the f4-f5 break in reserve.
30...Rd8 31.Rf1 Rg8 32.Rf2 Rd8 33.c3 Bb7 34.b4 c4 35.Bc2 Bc6 36.Rf1

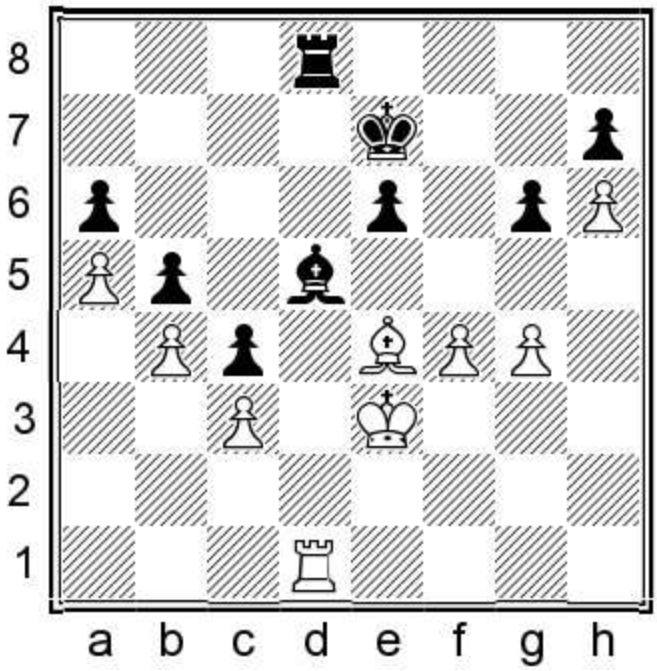
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36...f6?!
It is always tempting to “do something” but this move makes it easier for White to infiltrate.
I believe the best chances were offered by complete passivity, with for example 36...Bd5. A natural reply is 37.f5 when I expect White is winning, but he would still need to find a way in.

37.exf6† Kxf6 38.Rd1 Bd5
Black has no choice as 38...Rxd1 39.g5† Ke7 40.Bxd1+– is obviously hopeless; Bc2 will threaten to take on g6 so Black is too stretched to prevent the white king invading.

39.Be4 Ke7

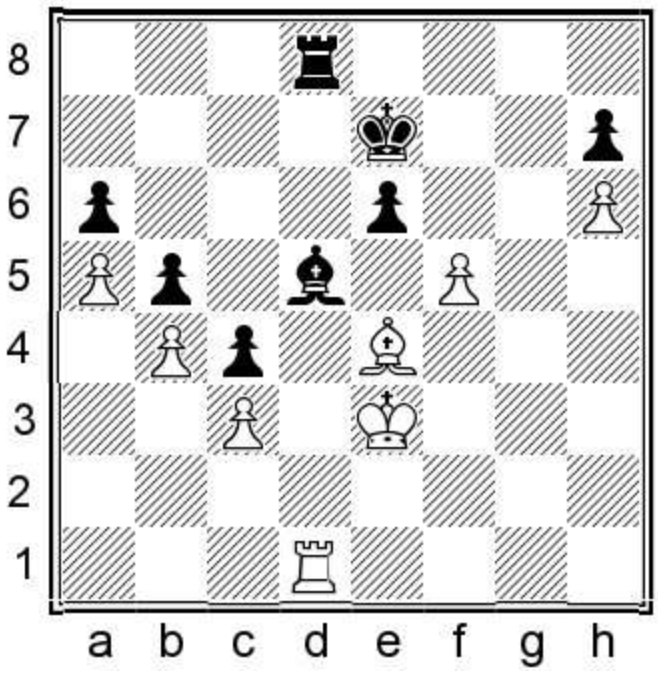


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40.Bxd5?

On the last move before the time control, White allows the win to slip away.

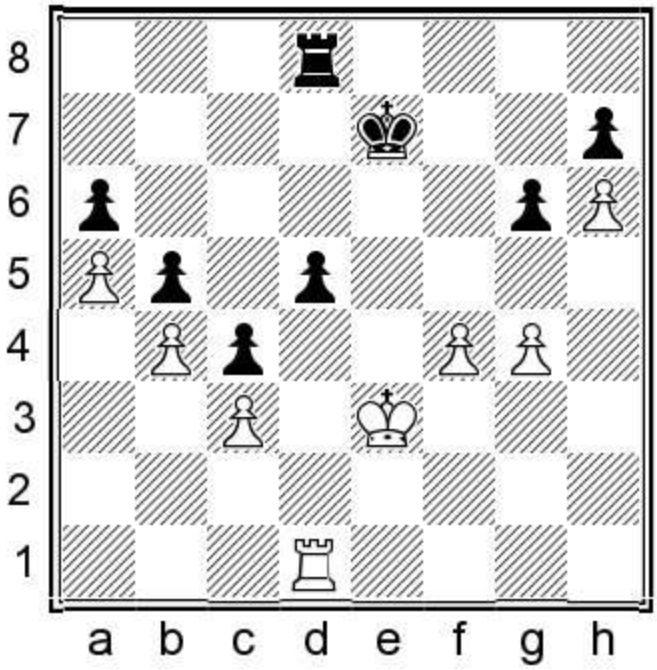
40.f5!+–
The break is perfectly timed because Black cannot take on e4, as we will soon see.
40...gxf5 41.gxf5
The threat is fxe6 followed by Bxh7, and what can Black do about it?



41...Rf8
The key tactical point is that 41...Bxe4? is refuted by 42.f6†! Ke8 43.f7†.
41...Rd7 42.Kf4! threatens fxe6, when ...Kxe6 will allows Bf5†. So the rook has to move, but then either d5 or h7 drops. For instance, 42...Rd8 43.fxe6 Kxe6 44.Bxh7 and White is winning.
42.Bxd5 exd5 43.Rxd5
The rook ending is hopeless. For example:
43...Rf6 44.Re5† Kf7
Or 44...Kd7 45.Kf4 Rxh6 46.Re3!, stopping counterplay before pushing the f-pawn.
45.Rc5 Rxh6 46.Ke4
One of many ways.
46...Rh3 47.Rc7† Kf8 48.Rc6 Rxc3 49.Rxa6
White's pawns are far too fast. In the rook ending, White benefits greatly from his space advantage – that is, his far-advanced pawns.

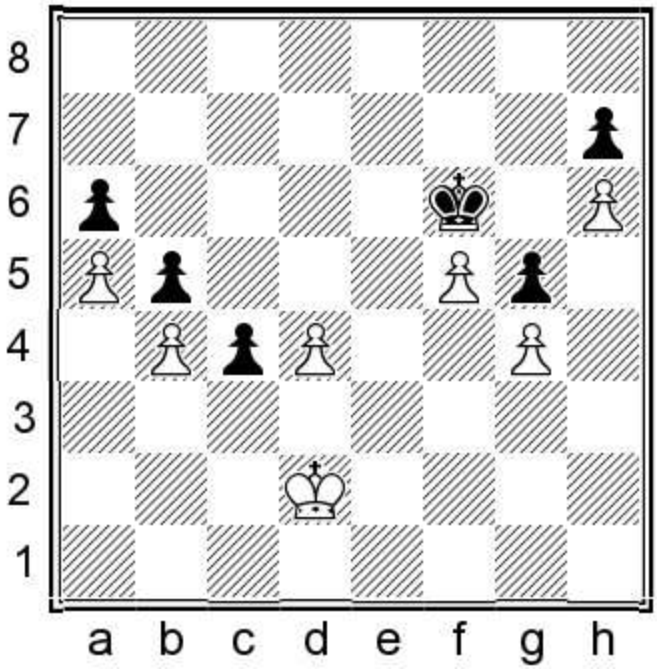
40...exd5

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41.Rf1
It is too late to avoid the draw. For example: 41.Re1 Kd6 42.Kf3 d4! 43.cxd4 Kd5 44.Re7 c3= The c-pawn is fast enough to save half a point.

41...Kd6 42.f5 g5 43.Re1 Re8† 44.Kd2 Rxe1 45.Kxe1 Ke5 46.Kd2 d4! 47.cxd4† Kf6
Both kings are tied to enemy passed pawns, so there is nothing to be done.



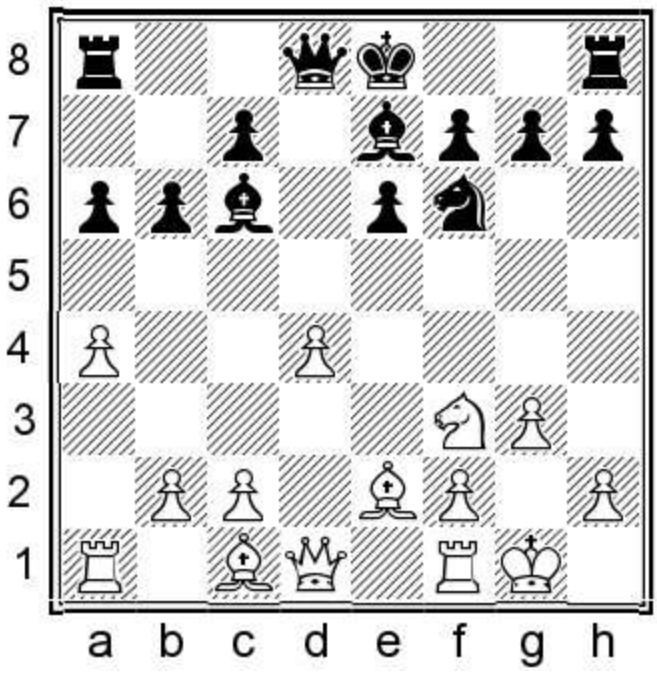
48.Ke3 Kf7 49.d5 Kf6 50.Ke4 Kf7 51.d6 Kf6 52.Kd4 Kf7 53.Kc3
½–½

GAME 36

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Ian Nepomniachtchi – Georg Meier
Crete 2017

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nd7 5.Nf3 Ngf6 6.Nxf6† Nxf6 7.g3 b6 8.Bb5† Bd7 9.a4 a6 10.Be2 Bc6 11.0-0 Be7

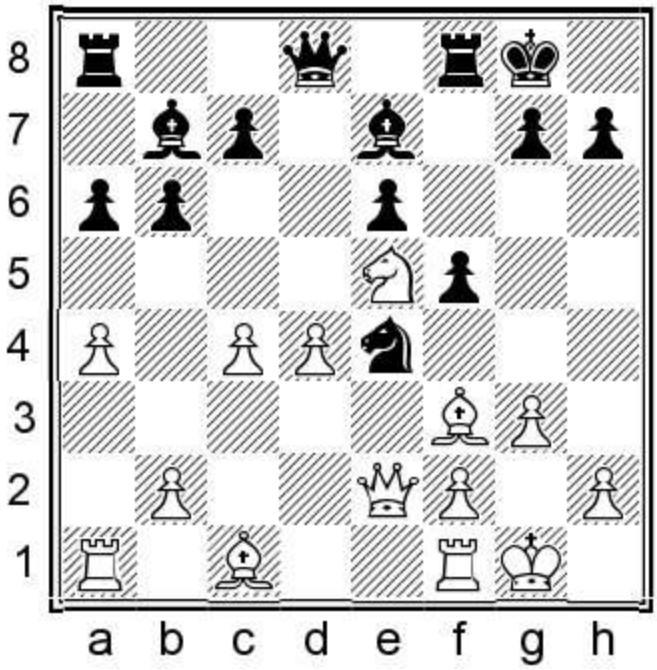


A different approach from the previous game; Black will allow the knight to settle on e5, at least for a couple of moves.

12.Ne5 Bb7 13.c4 Nd7
It is natural to challenge the big knight, but a high-class email game showed a radically different approach:

13...0-0 14.Bf3 Ne4!? 15.Qe2 f5

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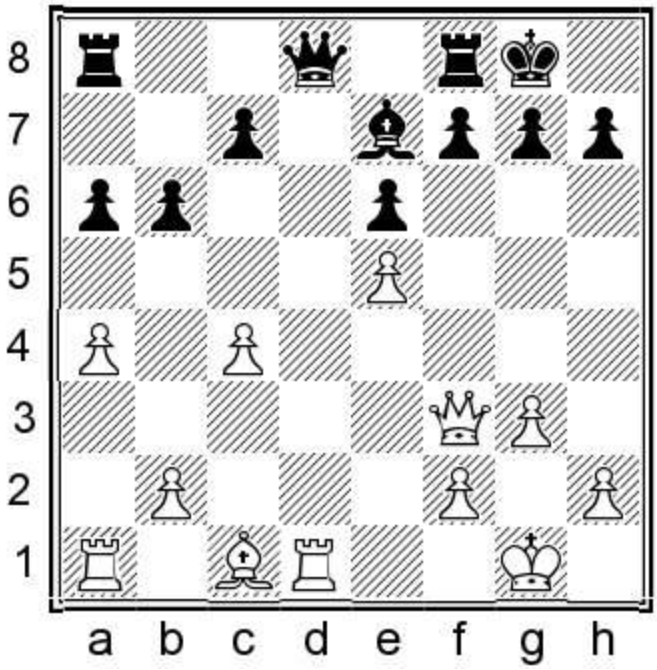


Black’s structure may look ugly, but digging that knight out of e4 is not easy.
But of course Black should avoid 15...Qxd4?! 16.Bf4± when a rook to d1 will cause all sorts of problems.
The game continued:
16.Bf4 a5 17.h4 Bf6 18.Bg2÷
In Langeveld – Szczepanski, email 2012, White had the more attractive-looking position, but making progress is not easy.
I suggest instead 18.Rfd1!?N as it feels a fraction more flexible, but my assessment remains the same – White’s position looks preferable, but I cannot see a clear way to prove an advantage.

14.Bf3
We continue with our usual plan.

14...Bxf3 15.Qxf3 Nxe5 16.dxe5 0-0 17.Rd1²
White has a space advantage and a slight initiative; Black is solid, in typical Rubinstein style.

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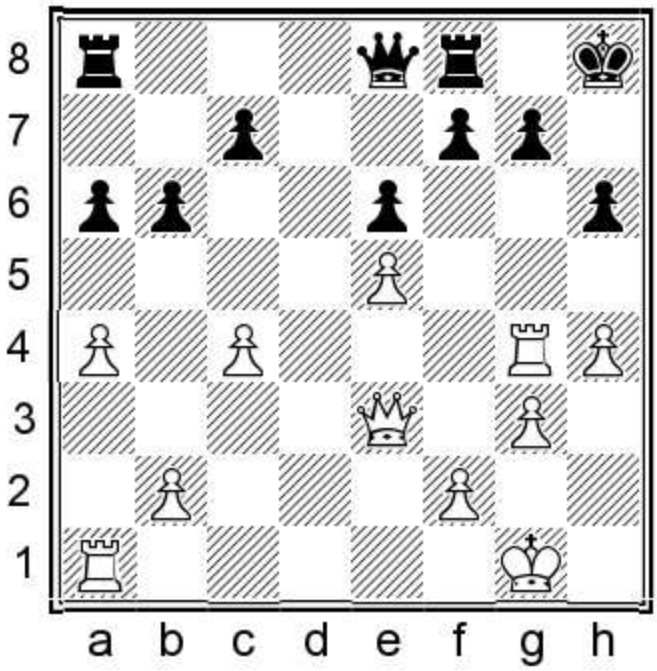


17...Qe8
It’s understandable that Black does not want to face a mighty queen on c6.

For example, 17...Qc8 18.Qc6 Rd8 19.Be3² and White’s pressure is enduring.

18.Be3 Bb4 19.h4
On almost every move, White has reasonable alternatives. For example: 19.Qg4!? Kh8 20.Qe4.
I will not attempt exhaustive analysis of the rest of the game, as we have seen more than enough for our opening preparation. However, I will highlight several interesting moments in the game.

19...h6 20.Rd4 Bc5 21.Rg4 Bxe3 22.Qxe3 Kh8



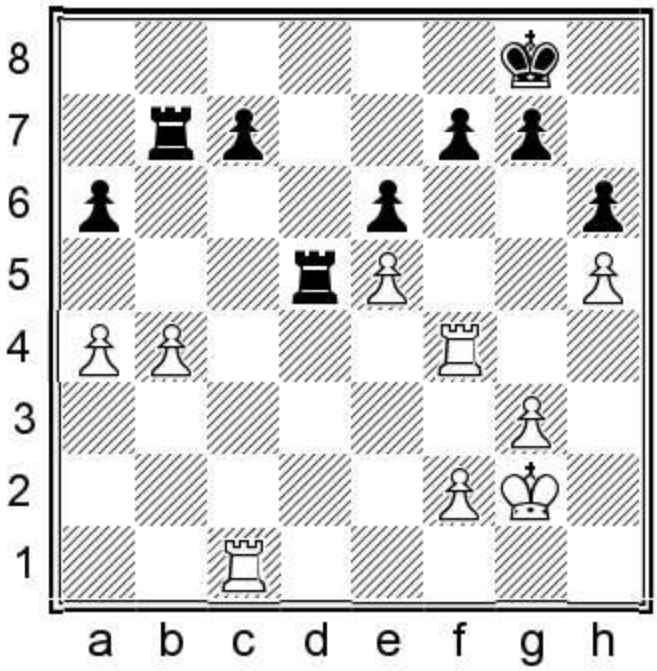
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23.c5
Forcing Black to make a decision, but White could instead have kept quietly pressing on with 23.Rd4!? Rd8 24.b3 Rxd4 25.Qxd4 Qe7 26.Rd1, simply controlling the only open file.

23...Qc6
I would have been tempted to try 23...b5!?. For example, 24.Rd4 bxa4 25.Rdxa4 Qc6 and White's edge seems to be fading away.

24.cxb6 Qxb6
Instead 24...cxb6 gives Black a healthier structure, but White has the initiative after 25.Rc1.

25.Qc3 Rfd8 26.Rc4 Rd7 27.Rc1 Rb8 28.b4 Kg8 29.h5 Qb7 30.Kh2 Qd5 31.Qe3 Qd2 32.Qxd2 Rxd2 33.Rf4 Rb7 34.Kg2 Rd5



35.Rc6
Allowing Black to reduce the number of pawns.

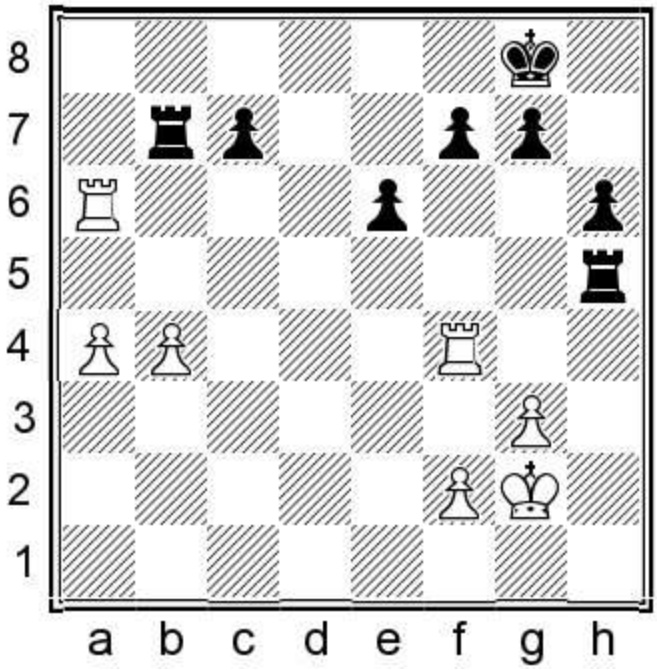
Another option was 35.Re4!? Kf8 36.Rc6 Ra7 37.Kf3² keeping more tension.

35...Rxe5!
Meier tries his only chance.

Instead 35...Ra7? 36.Rfc4 Rd7? is a textbook example of "don't go passive in a rook ending". After 37.Kf3 Kf8 38.Ke4 Ke8 39.f4 Kd8 40.g4+– Black is getting slowly crushed.

36.Rxa6 Rxh5

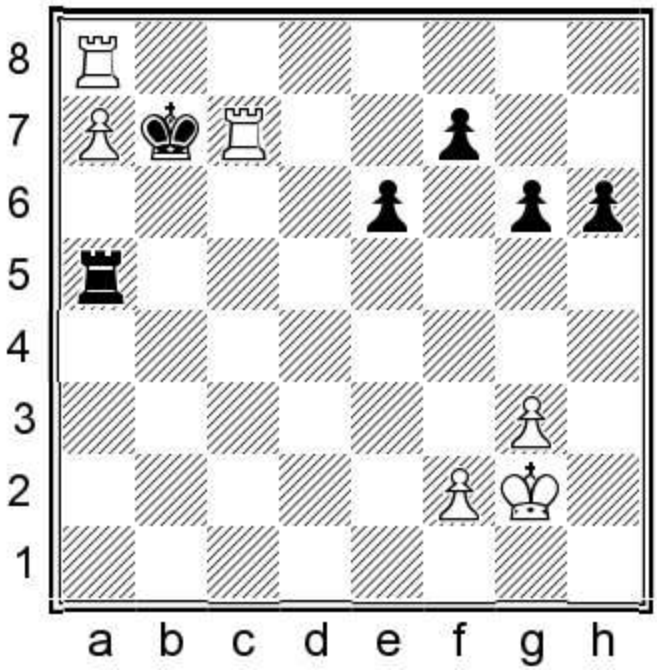
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37.b5
Another option was: 37.Rc4!? Rd5 38.Rac6 Ra7 39.a5 Rb5 40.Kf3[2]

37...g6 38.Ra8† Kg7 39.Re8 c6!
A great active move; it seems Black is over the worst.

40.bxc6 Rc7 41.Rc4 Kf6 42.Ra8 Ke7 43.a5 Kd6 44.Rd8† Ke7 45.Ra8 Kd6 46.Ra4 Kxc6 47.a6 Kb6 48.Rb4† Kc6 49.a7 Ra5 50.Rc4† Kb7 51.Rxc7†



51...Kxa8!
The right call.

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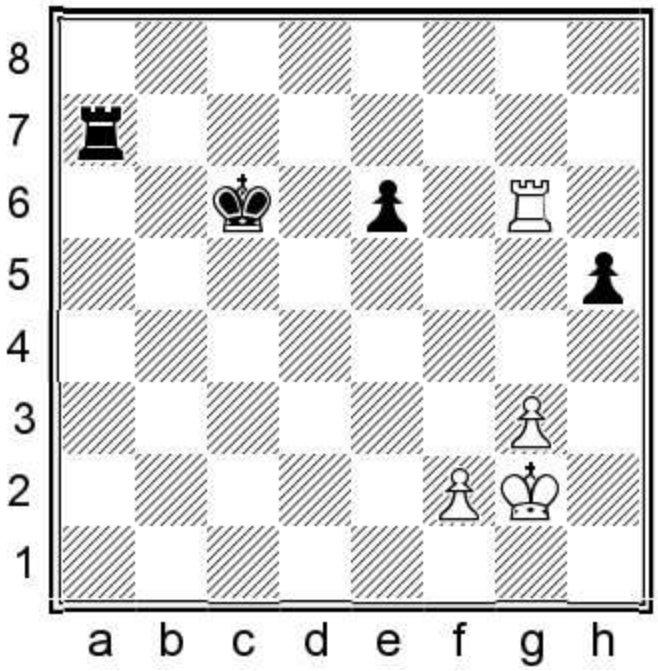
After 51...Kxc7?! 52.Rf8 Kb7 53.Rxf7† Kc6 the play would be similar to the game. The text move gives Black a better option later.

52.Rxf7 h5 53.Rh7 Rxa7
I cannot imagine anyone resisting playing this obvious move, but Black could ‘pass’ with his rook along the 5th, and hold even more comfortably.

For example, 53...Rc5. Now any king walks to f3 or h3 can be met by ...Rf5, so: 54.Re7 g5 55.Rxe6 Kxa7=
For all that, I know I would have played 53...Rxa7 as well.

54.Rh8†!
It’s still objectively a draw, but Black has problems to solve.

54...Kb7 55.Rh6 Kc6 56.Rxg6

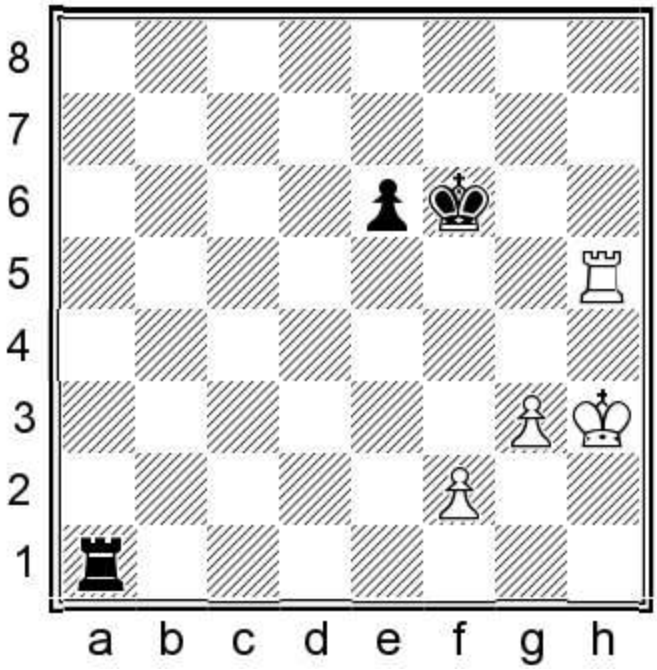


56...Kd6
The human move, but 56...h4! 57.gxh4 Kd6 was an even more secure draw, as the passed h-pawn is easily stopped.

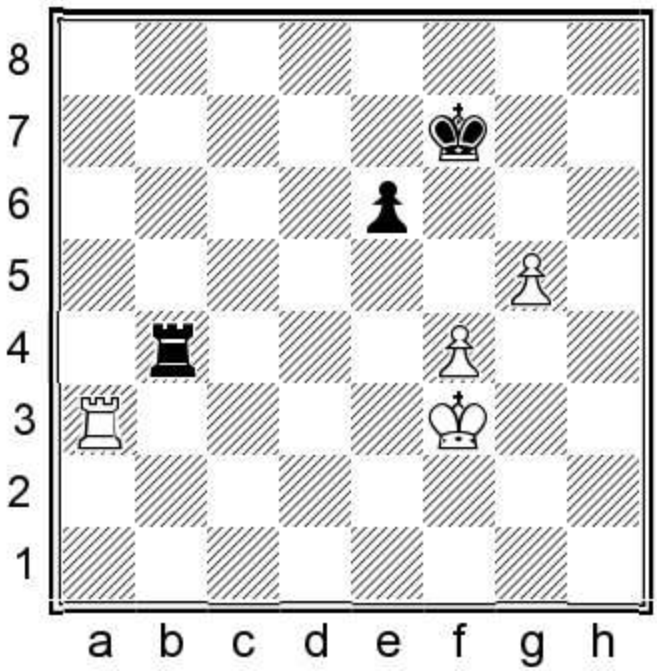
57.Kh3 Ra1
Or Black could “go active” with 57...Kd5 58.Rh6 e5 59.Rxh5 Ke4 when he should hold.

58.Rh6 Ke7 59.Rxh5 Kf6
White has won a pawn, but the tablebase confirms this is drawn with best play. I will skip over most of the rest; it’s the same story of White pushing, Black holding.

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60.Rh6† Kf7 61.Kh4 Re1 62.Kg4 Kg7 63.Rh5 Kg6 64.f4 Rg1 65.Re5 Kf6 66.Kf3 Rf1† 67.Kg2 Ra1 68.g4 Ra3 69.Kf2 Ra1 70.Re3 Rb1 71.Kf3 Rb5 72.Kg3 Ra5 73.Rb3 Ra1 74.g5† Kf5 75.Rb5† Kg6 76.Re5 Kf7 77.Re3 Ra4 78.Kf3 Rb4 79.Ra3
An excellent try that is rewarded.



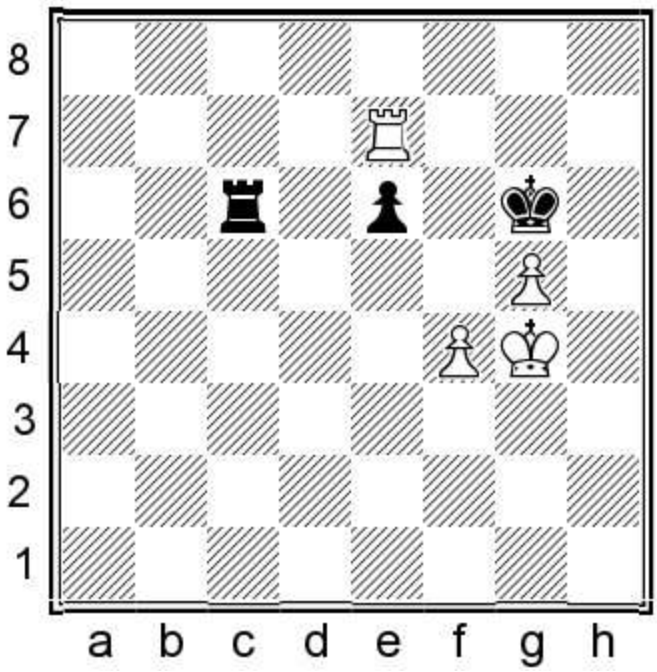
79...Rc4??
Black finally cracks and plays a “pass” move, when in fact White has a deadly threat.

79...Rb1 or 79...Kg6 or a few other moves would have left Black on target to save the draw.

80.Ra7†!+– Kf8
Black does not want to retreat to the back rank, but going forward is no better:

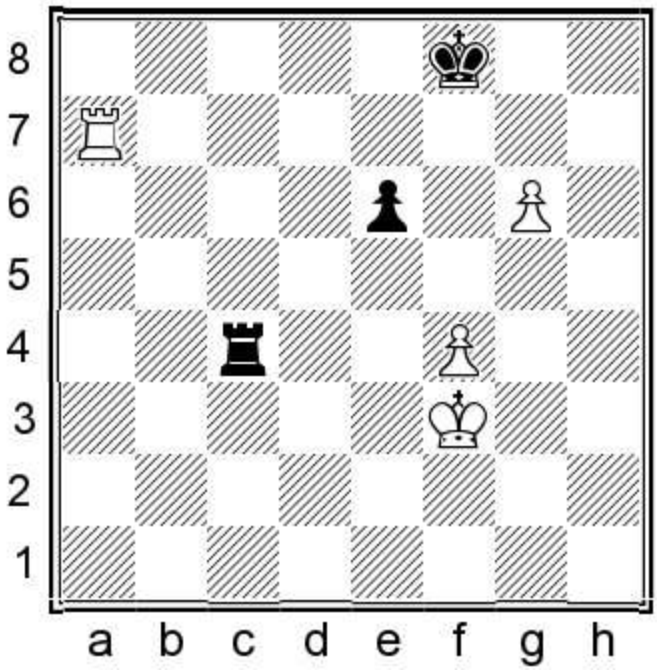
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80...Kg6 81.Re7 Rc6 (81...Kf5 82.Rf7† Kg6 83.Rf6†+– is a standard sequence in rook endings) 82.Kg4 wins easily enough:



Black has a depressing choice between letting the e6-pawn drop for nothing or allowing a winning pawn ending: 82...Ra6 83.Rxe6† Rxe6 84.f5† Kf7 85.fxe6† Kxe6 86.Kh5+–

81.g6!
The white king infiltrates to end the fight.



81...Rc1 82.Kg4 Rg1† 83.Kh5 Kg8 84.Kh6 Rh1† 85.Kg5 Rf1 86.Re7

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1–0

In the end, both players had cause to be unhappy: Meier fought remarkably hard for no reward, while Nepo's win was not enough to prevent Azerbaijan taking the team gold ahead of Russia.
As for the opening, White has a slight edge that he can use to press Black all day. It's easy to say that with perfect play Black should hold, but it's desperately difficult to do, as the game demonstrated.

Conclusion

This chapter started our coverage of 3...dxe4 when after 4.Nxe4 there is a major split.

A) 4...Qd5?! and B) 4...b6 are rare and not especially good moves. Against the former, my forcing line is probably overkill, but it's also fun.

C) 4...Nf6!? 5.Nxf6† leads to two options.
5...Qxf6 only makes sense if Black can later play an ...e6-e5 break. If White is wide awake, that break will never be playable.
I like the ambition of 5...gxf6!? – Black wants to castle long and create some drama. However the line I suggest in reply looks an effective solution. In particular, putting our bishop on c4 makes a good ...e6-e5 break hard to achieve.

D) 4...Be7 is rather passive, but is also a nuisance since it finagles us away from the g2-g3 lines we plan to use against the Rubinstein. Fortunately, 5.Nf3 Nf6 6.Nxf6† Bxf6 7.Bd3 is an effective solution.

With E) 4...Nd7 we finally reach the Rubinstein. After 5.Nf3 the reply E1) 5...Be7 again manoeuvres us away from our planned g2-g3 systems, but putting the bishop on c4 is no hardship.

E2) 5...Ngf6 6.Nxf6† Nxf6 is the main line, when I recommend the rare 7.g3!?. Then 7...c5 (Game 34) is the move our fianchetto is designed against – White gains excellent pressure against the queenside. The toughest test is 7...b6 when 8.Bb5† Bd7 9.a4!? provokes the weakening 9...a6. The final two games of this chapter showed White's pressure; we cannot refute the Rubinstein, but we can make Black suffer for a long time.

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Chapter 11 - Fort Knox

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bd7 5.Nf3 Bc6 6.Bd3

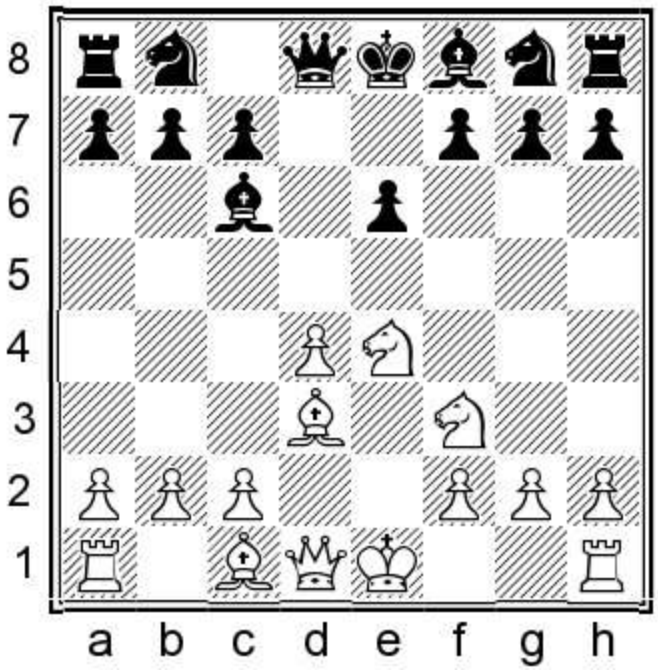
6...Nd7 (6...Bxe4?!, 6...Nf6?!, 6...Be7) 287
7.0-0 Ngf6 8.Ng3!? (8...Bxf3?!; 8...Bd6?!) 289
8...Be7 Game 37 292
8...g6 Game 38 296

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bd7

The Fort Knox variation received its name from English IM Andy Martin. The army base where the USA stores much of its gold reserves is famously secure, and that is the claim about Black's opening. Black's usual plan is to exchange his bishop via c6, then create a solid shell with ...c7-c6. With knights on d7 and f6, and the bishop developed traditionally on e7 or in more modern style on g7, Black will develop easily and castle kingside. And it's true that Black is usually safe from any early attacks, especially if he employs the fianchetto set-up. But White should not be despondent, as we will have the bishop pair and a space advantage. We may rarely win a miniature, but we should expect to have the better chances in a long, slow grind.

5.Nf3 Bc6 6.Bd3

White's last two moves cannot be wrong.



6...Nd7

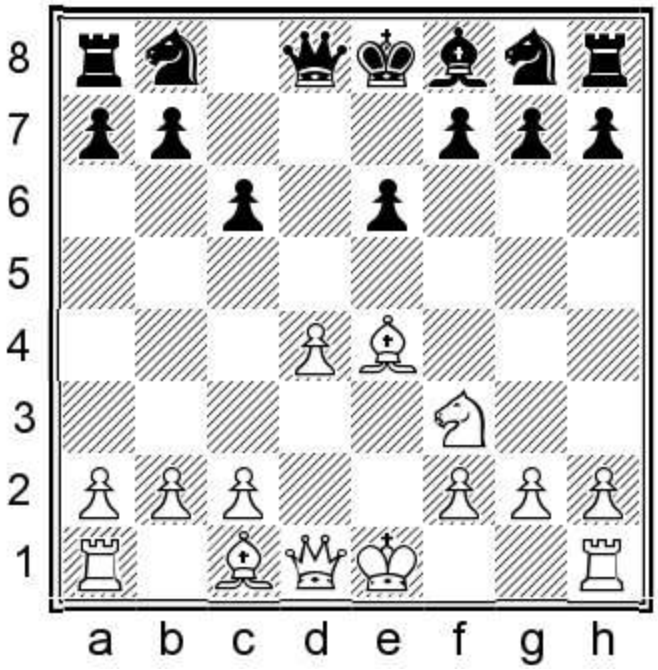
The usual move, preparing ...Ngf6.

After 6...Nd7 the key lines in this chapter are reached after 7.0-0 Ngf6 8.Ng3!? when the two main lines are 8...Be7 (Game 37) and 8...g6 (Game 38), but first we will consider rare deviations on the 6th and 8th moves.

6...Bxe4?!

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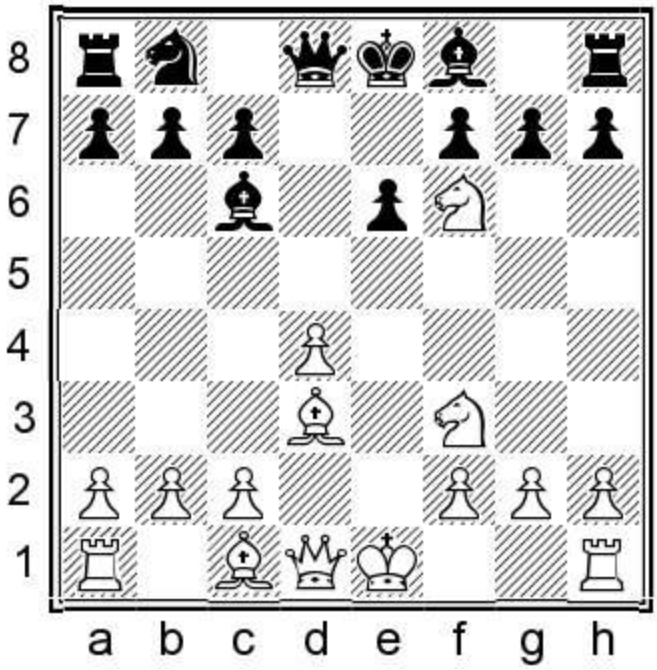
Exchanging this bishop for a knight is normal in the Fort Knox, but this version is premature.
7.Bxe4 c6



8.c3
I like this move, as it allows a retreat to c2, when a crude but effective queen-and-bishop battery is prepared. As usual when facing the Fort Knox, White has more than one pleasant option. For example: 8.c4!? Nf6 9.Bc2 Bb4† 10.Kf1 Nbd7 11.g3² was Short – Blouin, Gatineau (simul) 2011, when the king naturally steps to g2; White has more space and the bishop pair – a situation we will soon see is normal in this chapter.
8...Nf6 9.Bc2 Be7 10.0-0 Nbd7
Black's set-up is normal in the old main line (see Game 37) but in this case White has an effortlessly pleasant version, with his knight well-placed on f3; later we will see versions where the knight is on g3, which is generally a lesser square.
11.Re1 0-0 12.Qd3²
In Harikrishna – Kelecevic, Biel 2012, White had promising kingside play.

6...Nf6?!
An inferior move order as Black must accept a fractured kingside.
7.Nxf6†

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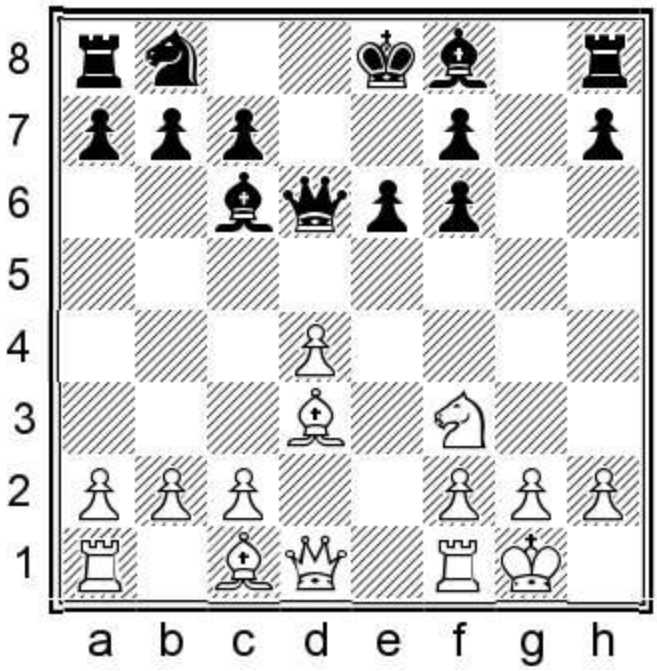
7...gxf6

Instead 7...Qxf6? is a queen-losing blunder, but it's a plausible trap, as there is one further finesse needed from White: 8.Bg5 Bxf3 9.Qd2! A standard trick in various openings, as the d4-pawn is toxic, so Black must try: 9... Bxg2 10.Bxf6 Bxh1 11.Bh4+– Materially, Black is OK, but White's lead in development is decisive, especially since 0-0-0 will land with tempo. This trap has been well known since the game Suetin – Zilberman, Kirovabad 1973, but it's still claiming victims.

8.0-0 Qd5?!

This active try can be stylishly refuted.

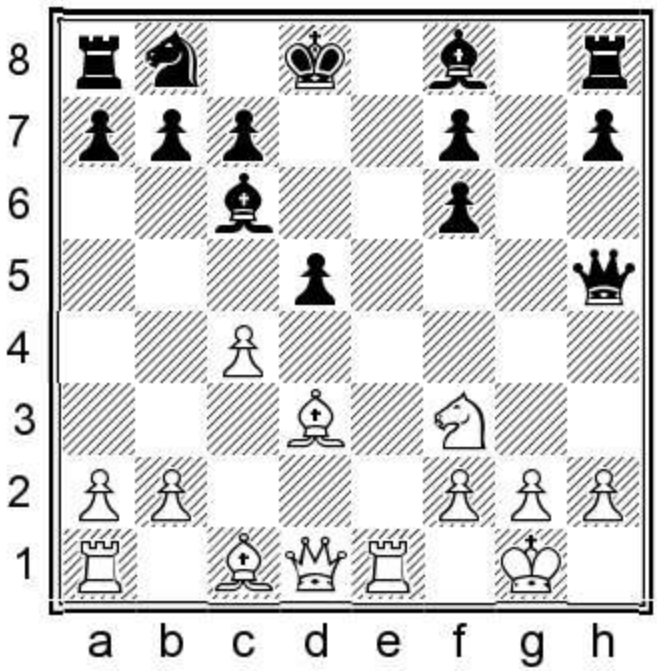
Black needs to try 8...Qd6 but he has an inferior version of the line covered in Game 33, beginning on page 261.



After 9.c3!?N 9...Nd7 10.b4± we can see Black is going to give away free tempos to White's pawn storm.

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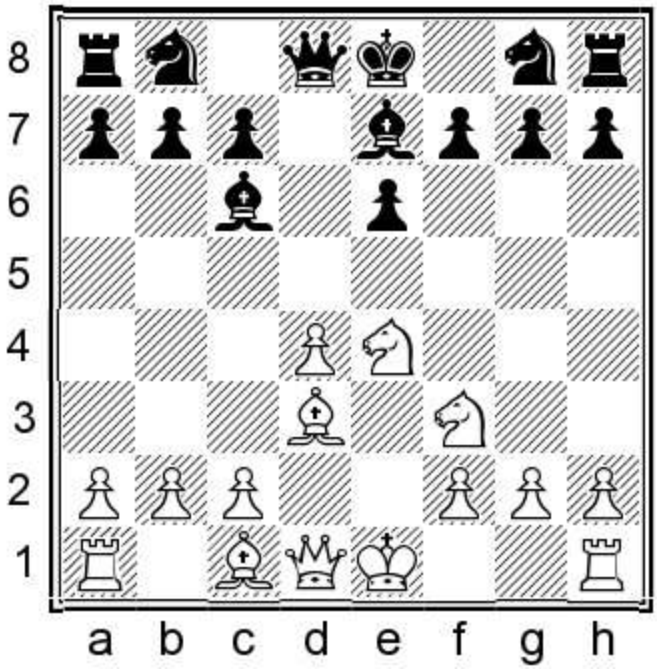
9.c4 Qh5 10.d5!
10.Be2! is equally effective, with d4-d5 next.
10...exd5 11.Re1† Kd8



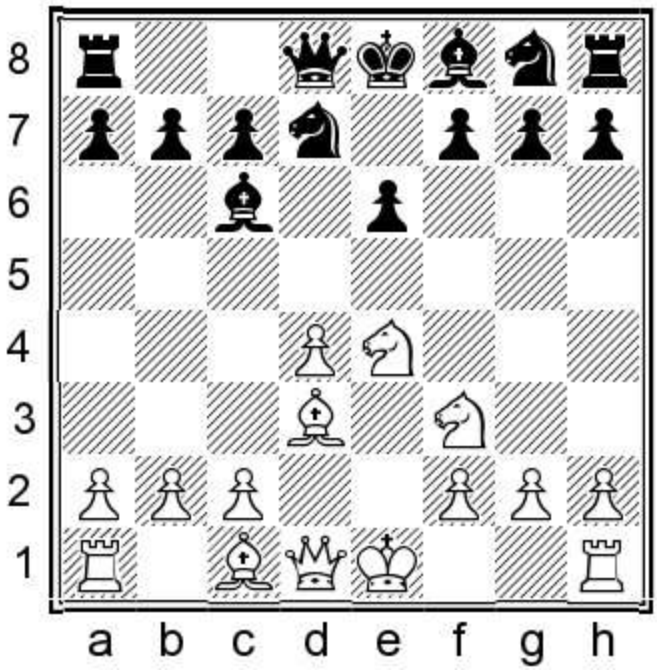
12.Ng5!?
Not the only good move, but forcing and effective.
12...Qxd1 13.Nxf7† Kc8
13...Kd7? 14.Bf5# would be nice.
14.Rxd1 Rg8 15.cxd5 Be8 16.Bf5† Bd7 17.Be6+–
Akopian – Karatorossian, Linares 2001.

6...Be7
This rare move can transpose to the old main line (see Game 37) but it also offers White some extra options along the way. I suggest simply transposing, but I will point out a few of the promising alternatives.

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7.0-0
7.Neg5!? was interesting in the recent game Leko – Vaganian, Biel 2017.
7...Nf6
Instead 7...Nd7 8.Re1 Ngf6 9.Ng3 transposes to Game 37.
8.Ng3
The transpositional line.
Instead 8.Nxf6†!? Bxf6 9.c3 Nd7 arguably misplaces Black's minor pieces – bishop on e7 and knight on f6 feels more harmonious. For example, 10.Re1 0-0 11.Bf4² was Pruijssers – Vedder, Vlissingen 2017.
8...Nbd7
We are back in the old main line.



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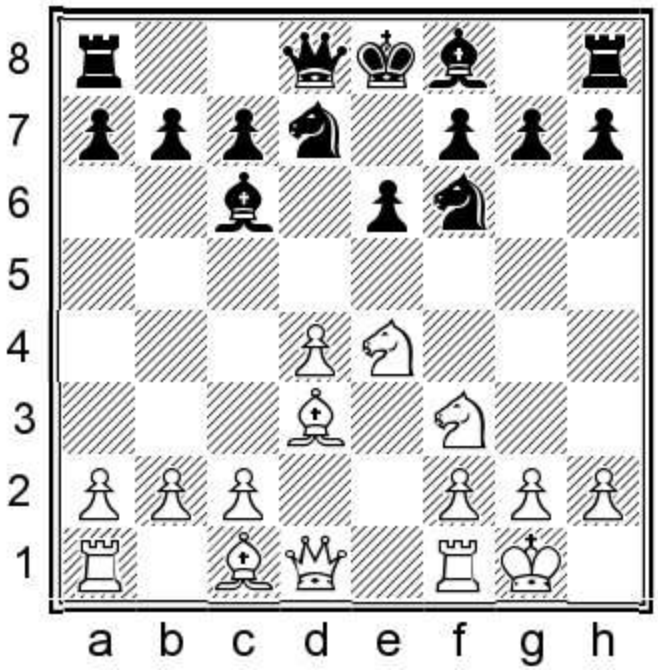
7.0-0

This simple move is my favourite.

Negi's line started with 7.c3, which is also sensible.

White should pay attention to the correct timing of the c2-c4 advance. For example, 7.c4 is tempting but premature. 7...Ngf6 8.Nc3 This square looks more attractive than g3, where the knight goes in our line, but there is a problem: 8...Bxf3 9.Qxf3 c5! An excellent equalizer (instead Fort Knox autopilot with 9...c6 would give White the easy edge we seek). 10.d5 Ne5 Our unopposed bishop disappears, and with it our advantage. For example: 11.Qe2 Nxd3† 12.Qxd3 exd5 13.cxd5 Bd6= Short – N.T.S. Nguyen, Istanbul (ol) 2012.

7...Ngf6

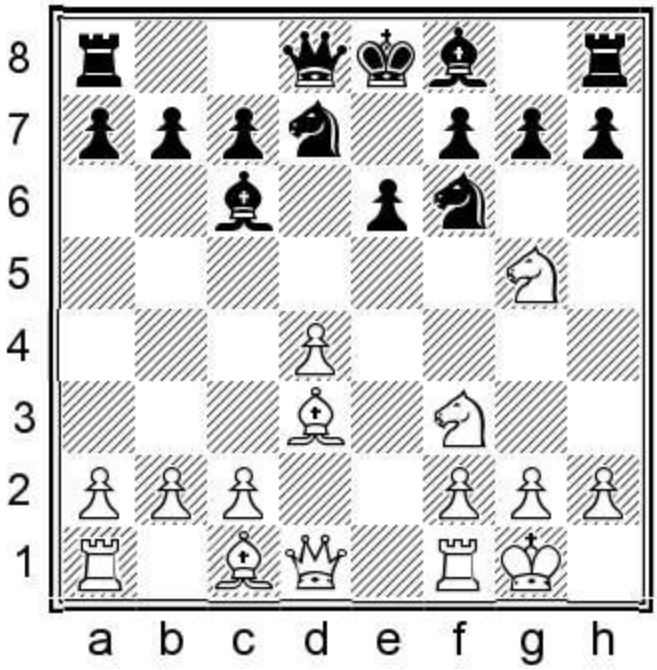


8.Ng3!?
The traditional main line and still the usual choice of top players. Moving the knight away from e4 prevents Black freeing his game with an exchange of two pairs of minor pieces. In fact, White is spoiled for choice about where the e4-knight should go.

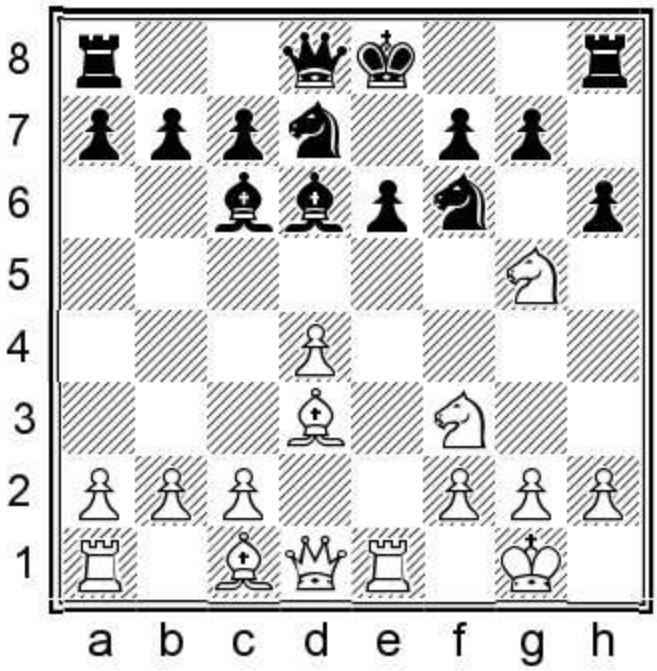
8.Ned2!? is also popular and effective, but I do not think it is as easy for White to play as the lines I suggest.

8.Neg5!?
I like this move a lot, as it forces Black to find (or have memorized) a narrow path to avoid getting blasted by a sac on e6 or f7. And even if Black plays all the right moves, White still gets a bishop-pair edge in a typical Fort Knox position.

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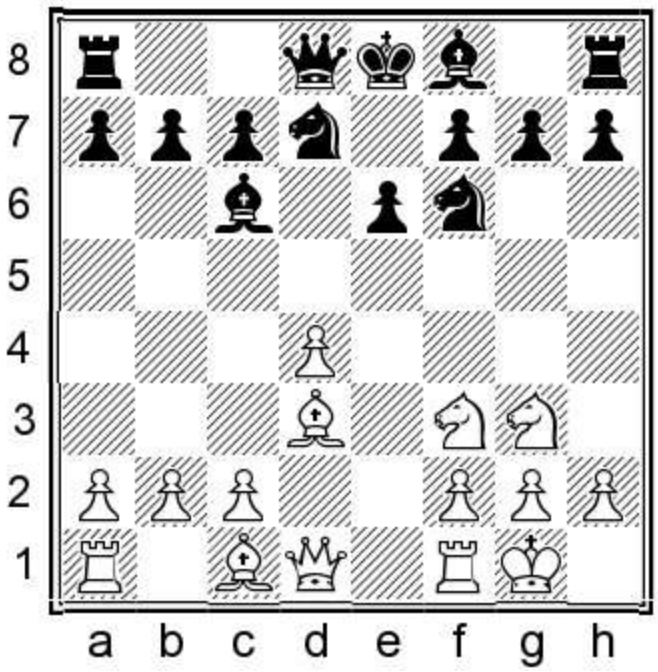
I will offer a brief outline of an alternate repertoire:
8...Bd6!
8...Bxf3?! 9.Qxf3 c6 10.Re1± leaves Black struggling to avoid a direct kill, and moves such as Qh3 will also be nasty.
8...Be7?! allows a sac for more than enough compensation: 9.Nxf7 Kxf7 10.Ng5† Kg8 11.Nxe6 Qc8 The most precise continuation is: 12.Re1 Bd6 13.Bf5!± The immediate ideas involve Nc5 and Bg5; White's play is too strong.
9.Re1 h6!
To play this move, Black needs to be brave or well prepared.
9...Bxf3?! 10.Qxf3± is already nasty, and was quickly decisive in the following example: 10...h6? 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Rxe6† Kf7 13.Bc4 Kf8 14.Qf5+– Howell – Arkell, Douglas 2015.
9...0-0 10.Ne5± is unpleasant as Black cannot take on e5.



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10.Nh3
The wise choice.
Instead 10.Rxe6† Kf8! is usually stated as a refutation of the sacrificial try, but note that 11.Rxd6 cxd6 12.Nh3 is not the worst-ever exchange sac; for the rook, White has a bishop and pawn, plus the enemy king is displaced. The engine settles on its favourite assessment of 0.00. For all that, 10.Nh3 is a more reliable choice.
10...Bxf3 11.Qxf3 c6 12.Nf4 Qa5
The text move is more precise than 12...0-0 13.Nh5 with decent kingside play.
13.c3 0-0²
Black has played with the utmost precision, yet I still claim an edge for White, so why is this not my recommended line? My objection is that Black has developed quickly enough that soon an ...e6-e5 break could get him close to equality. White's advantage is greater in the lines I recommend, but I could see 8.Neg5 as an effective practical weapon, so I think it is worth sharing some brief lines about it.

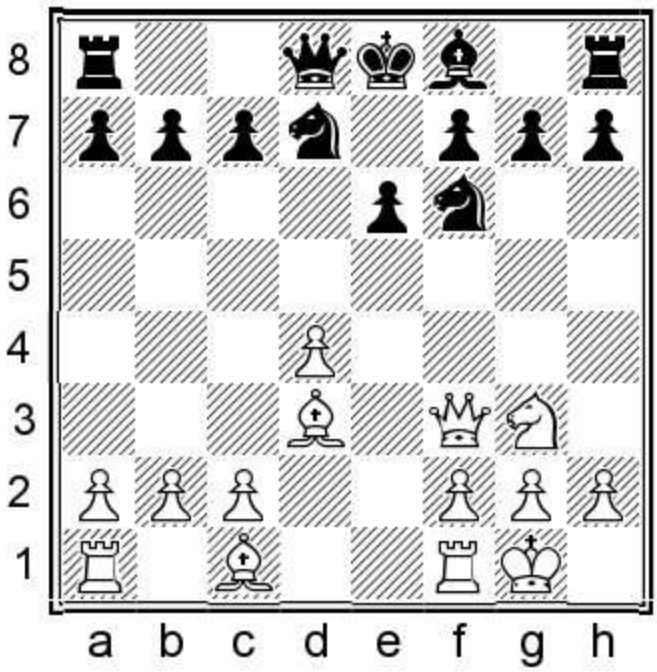
Instead a move such as 8.Qe2 allows Black an ideal version of the Fort Knox plan: 8...Nxe4 9.Bxe4 Bxe4 10. Qxe4 c6 White does not have his usual bishop-pair advantage; though it's worth noting that Black's Fort Knox dream position is still a fraction better for White.



This is an important branching point. We shall see two vital moves later: 8...Be7 is the old main line – see Game 37. 8...g6 is the modern preference, as featured in Game 38.
But we shall start with two weaker minor lines: 8...Bxf3?! and 8...Bd6?!.

8...Bxf3?!
A normal Fort Knox move, but played needlessly early.
9.Qxf3

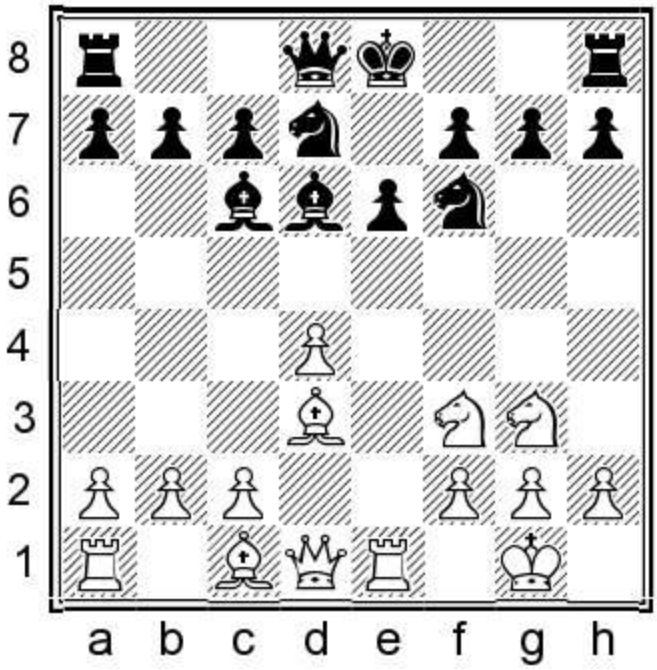
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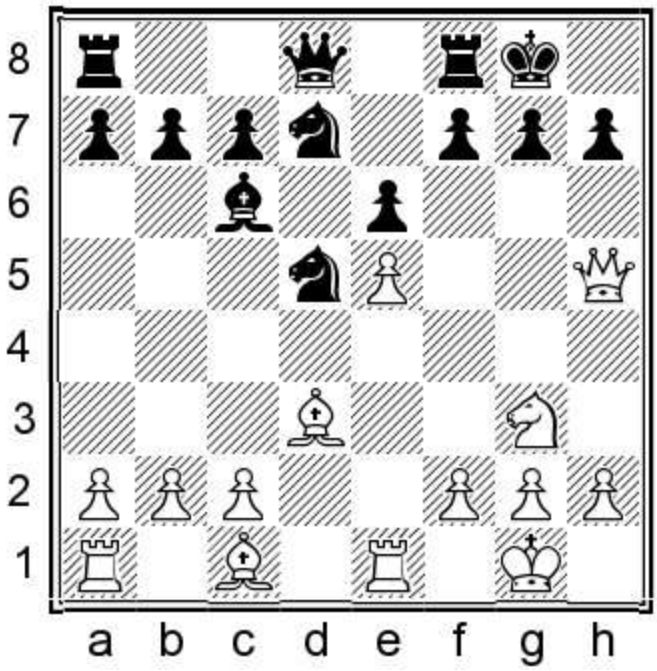
9...c6
Again the normal set-up. This position is frequently reached with Black to move, when White has chosen a Qe2 line, and thus lost a tempo on the way to f3.
9...c5?! makes no sense in this position. Of many good possible moves, I prefer 10.Ne4 Nxe4 11.Bxe4 cxd4 12. Bxb7 Rb8 13.Bc6±.
White has many useful moves, but one good and flexible option is:
10.Re1²

8...Bd6?!
Seemingly more active than the usual development on e7 or g7, but this move is rare for good reason – it makes Black vulnerable to a quick Ne5, which is an unpleasant resource when Black cannot safely exchange the knight.
9.Re1!
The most logical choice, supporting Ne5.

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9...0-0
Allowing White's plan, but still the best option, as the alternatives are even uglier.
9...Bxf3?! 10.Qxf3 c6 is normal Fort Knox style, but in a spectacularly bad version: 11.Nf5 Bf8 This is obviously a fiasco, with almost any move strong for White. One example is 12.Bf4±.
9...Bxg3?! 10.hxg3 0-0 allows Black to meet Ne5 by safely capturing, but Black has made a huge positional concession. For example 11.c4 Re8 12.b3 b6 13.Bb2 Bb7 14.Qe2 c5 15.Rad1± was obviously much better for White in Oparin – Rozentalis, Trieste 2013.
10.Ne5 Bxe5
If Black does not take, then at the very least White will have the option of taking on c6, securing the bishop pair and the better structure.
11.dxe5 Nd5 12.Qh5!
I am being generous with the exclam, as almost any hacky kingside move will do, such as 12.Qg4! or 12.Nh5!.



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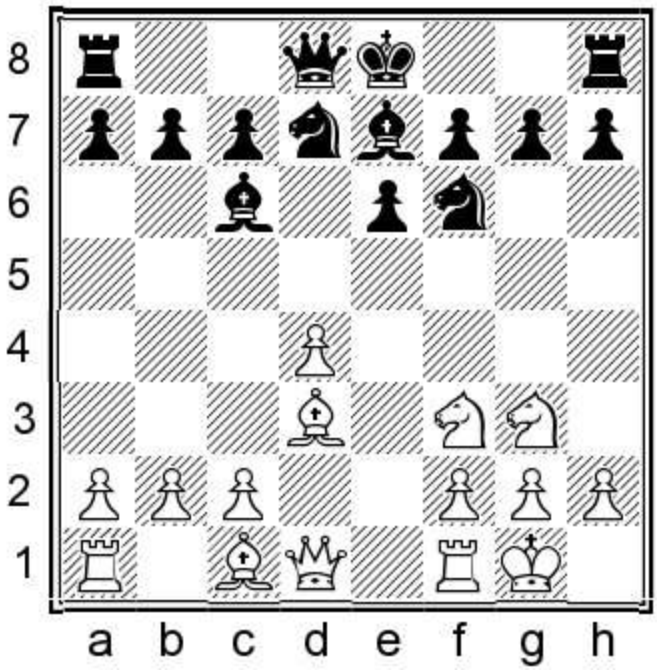
White is guaranteed an initiative and a superior structure. For example: 12...f5 13.exf6 N5xf6 14.Qg5± as in Rathnakaran – Mellema, Hoogeveen 2016, or 12...g6 13.Qh6 f5 14.exf6 Qxf6 15.Ne4± as in Audet Bouchard – Leveille, Quebec 2004.

It is time to study the two main lines.

GAME 37

Zhao Jun – Wang Yue
Xinghua 2013

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bd7 5.Nf3 Bc6 6.Bd3 Nd7 7.0-0 Ngf6 8.Ng3 Be7
This is the old main line, which has been knocked well out of fashion by the trendy 8...g6.

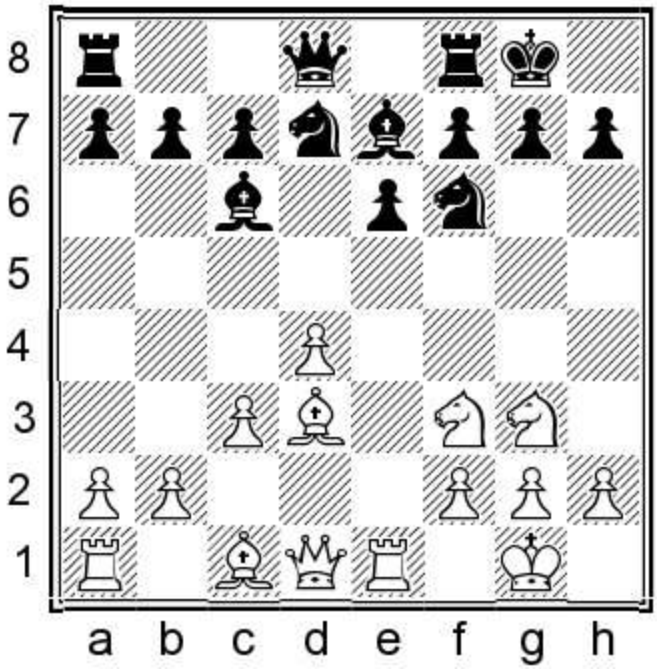


9.Re1!?
This simple move is my preference.

It is possible to play in many ways, including with 9.b3 as in the modern line (see the next game). But there is no tempo to be gained in the present version, and Black's king is less secure without the fianchetto bishop protecting it, so I prefer to keep our bishop on the c1-h6 diagonal, where it can be a direct threat. Typical development for White would be c2-c3 and Bf4, waiting for the exchange on f3 allowing Qxf3, then Rad1. Simple classical play.

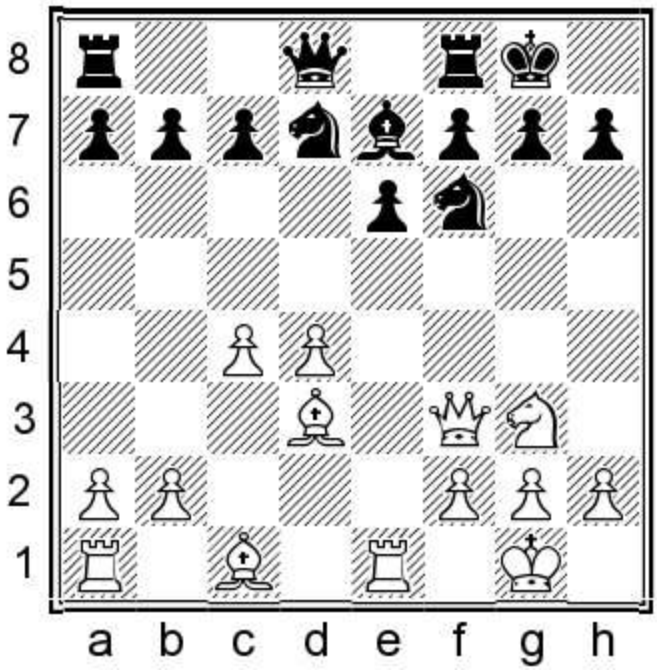
9...0-0 10.c3
This is the way to avoid needless drama.
Instead 10.c4 Bb4!? is a nuisance, as the rook going to e2 would allow Black to fracture our pawn structure. For example, 11.Re3 Ng4 12.Re2 Bxf3 13.gxf3 Ngf6÷ as in the high-level game P. Coleman – I. Brooks, email 2007.
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True, White could play 11.Rf1 but that is hardly a progressive move, and after 11...Bd6!? I would suggest

Black has gained from the sequence.
Our c-pawn may well go to c4 at some point, but we can choose a moment when it offers Black no counterplay.



10...Re8
One of many options for Black.

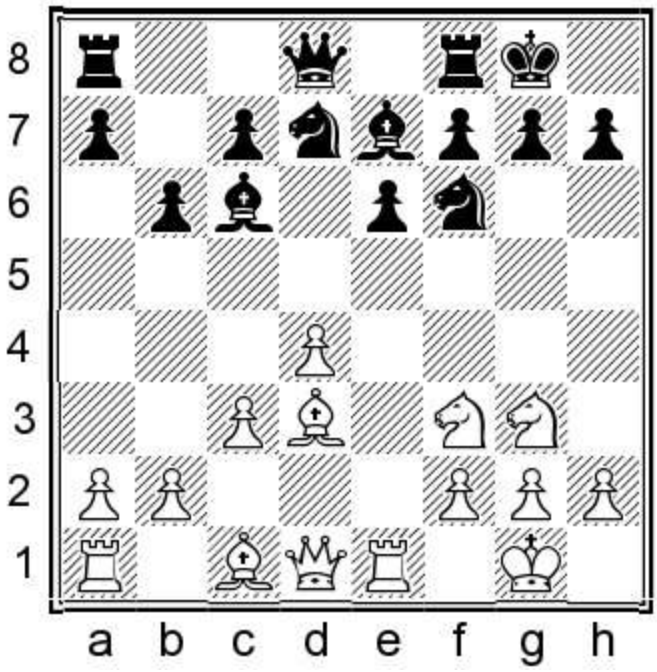
10...Bd5
Black prepares his ...c7-c5 break.
11.c4!
Perfectly timed.
11...Bxf3 12.Qxf3²



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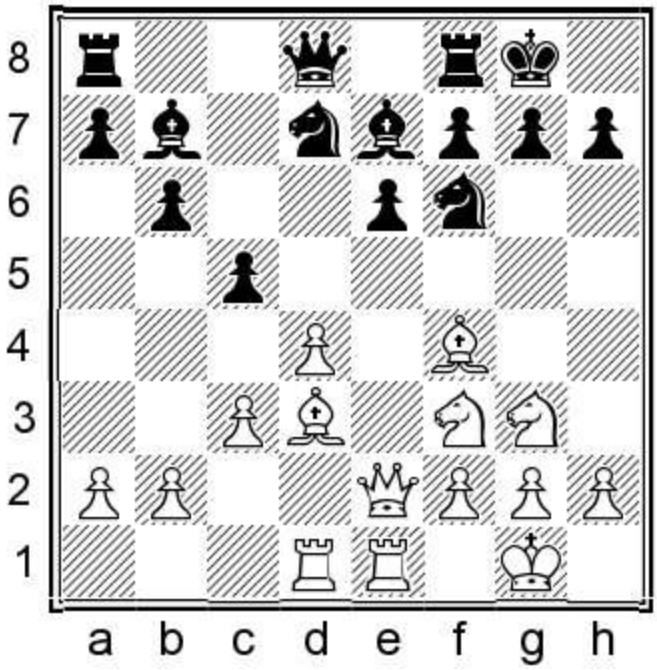
White has a pleasant edge no matter how Black continues:
12...c6
12...c5 13.d5! is excellent for White as ...Ne5 is impossible.
12...Bb4?! 13.Re2 now makes no sense at all for Black.
13.Bd2!? Re8 14.Bc3 Bf8 15.b4!? g6 16.a4 Bg7 17.Re2²
Nunn – Lobron, Novi Sad (ol) 1990, had taken a circuitous route to reach a similar type of position to the modern main line of the Fort Knox – see Game 38.

10...b6!?
Black plans to keep his light-squared bishop with ...Bb7 and ...c7-c5.



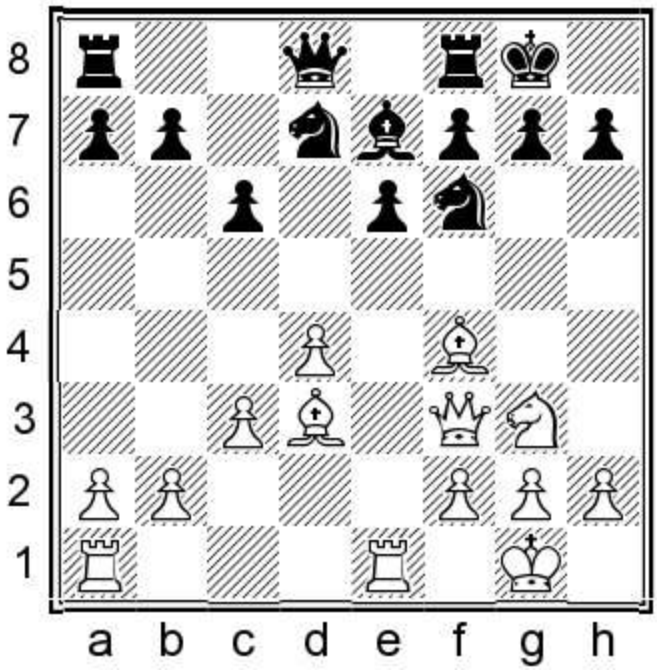
11.Bf4
The correct choice.
11.Ne5?! is often the move to punish slow play, but here it is ineffective due to: 11...Nxe5 12.dxe5 Qd5! A thematic idea which should be remembered. Play may continue 13.Bf1 Qxd1 14.Rxd1 Ng4 and Black already has the more comfortable position.
11...Bb7 12.Qe2
Now is the time for our queen to move, when taking on f3 would cost Black a tempo.
12...c5 13.Rad1!²
A less precise order is 13.dxc5 Nxc5 14.Bc2 as in T.L. Petrosian – Toufighi, Dubai 2007, due to 14...Nd5!N. If we retreat to d2 then the black queen can find a better-than-usual square on c7. And 15.Be5 f6 16.Bd4 Nf4÷ is not as clear as I would like.

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13...Bxf3
13...Qc8 was Van Huy Nguyen – Van Hai Nguyen, Hanoi 2009, when the way to keep the initiative was 14. dxc5!N and now either 14...Nxc5 15.Bc2 or 14...Bxc5 15.Ng5 h6 16.N5e4*f* favour White.
Unlike the line above, 13...Nd5 14.Be5! is simply pleasant for White, as 14...f6? is refuted by: 15.Bd6!+–
14.Qxf3 cxd4 15.Bb5*f*
Sorensen – J. Pedersen, Denmark 2002.

10...Bxf3 11.Qxf3 c6 12.Bf4!?[2]
Black has played in standard Fort Knox style, and we have a typical position. I will show a few moves from a classic example, to illustrate White's usual ideas.



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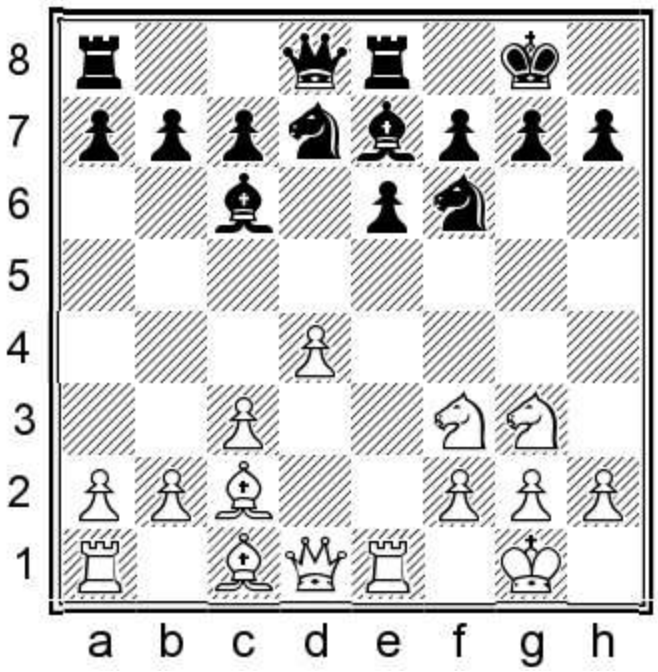
12...Re8 13.Rad1 Nf8 14.a3 Ng6 15.Bc1 Qc7 16.Ne4 Nxe4 17.Bxe4 Rad8 18.g3

Starting the plan of gaining space.
18...Rd7 19.h4 Nf8 20.Bf4 Qd8 21.b4
And why not gain space all over the board?
21...Bd6 22.Be3
One of White's advantages is the bishop pair, so he avoids the exchange.
22...a6 23.c4±
In Leko – Seirawan, Istanbul (ol) 2000, Black played the weakening 23...f5 and suffered for it, but the engine suggests it was Black's best move, which shows how difficult his position is. Leko's controlled expansion is an ideal example to follow.

10...a5 is one of several possible 'neutral' moves that I would suggest meeting with 11.Bf4.

11.Bc2!?
White's plans in this line are aimed at the kingside, so it is logical to prepare a queen-and-bishop battery.

Equally sensible is 11.Bf4.



11...Bf8
Black is considering a fianchetto to secure his king. It's certainly a loss of time, but the game will show that Black is right to be concerned about getting mated.
11...Bxf3 12.Qxf3 c6 13.Bf4² as in Tan – McMichael, England 2014, was a normal-looking Fort Knox position.

11...b6 is possible when 12.Bg5!? is logical, using a similar idea to the game.

12.Bg5!?
I mentioned that this bishop normally belongs on f4, but by first provoking ...h7-h6, White adds power to a Bc2-Qd3 battery.

The untested 12.Bf4!?N is also promising.

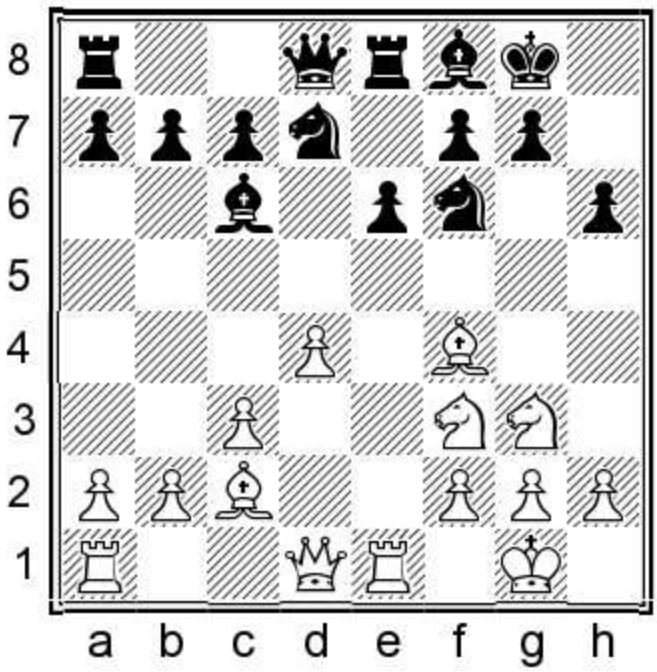
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12...h6

The move White was inviting, but an understandable choice.

After 12...g6 13.h4!? Black would be hard-pressed to avoid playing ...h7-h6 soon.

13.Bf4

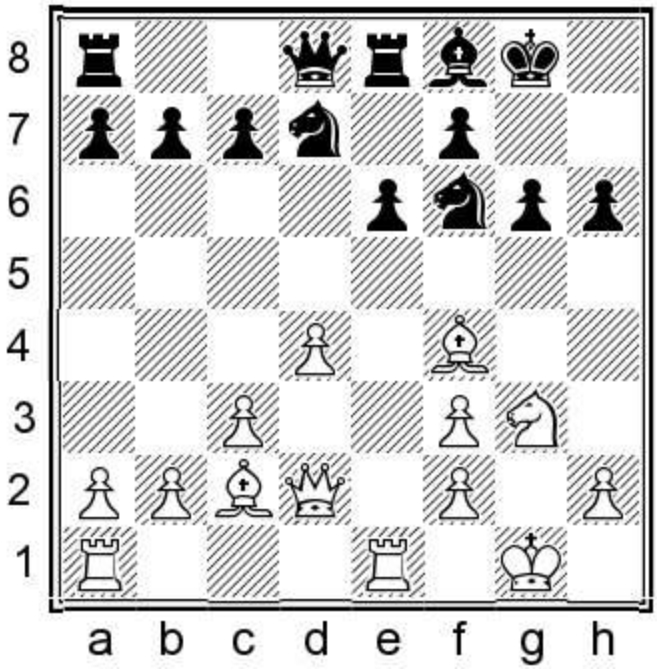


13...Bd5?!
Black will regret this slow move, which allows the f3-knight to reach e5.

13...Bxf3 14.Qxf3 c6 15.Re2!?² is a normal Fort Knox middlegame; White is better, while Black is solid.

The consistent follow-up to Black's 11th move was:
13...g6
When one intriguing possibility is:
14.Qd2!?
A creative idea, allowing his kingside to be shattered.
White could play in more usual style with 14.c4!?N which is particularly well timed as a ...Bb4 expedition does not fit with ...g7-g6.
14...Bxf3 15.gxf3²
White's attacking prospects are more significant than the doubled pawns, with the half-open g-file a fine resource.

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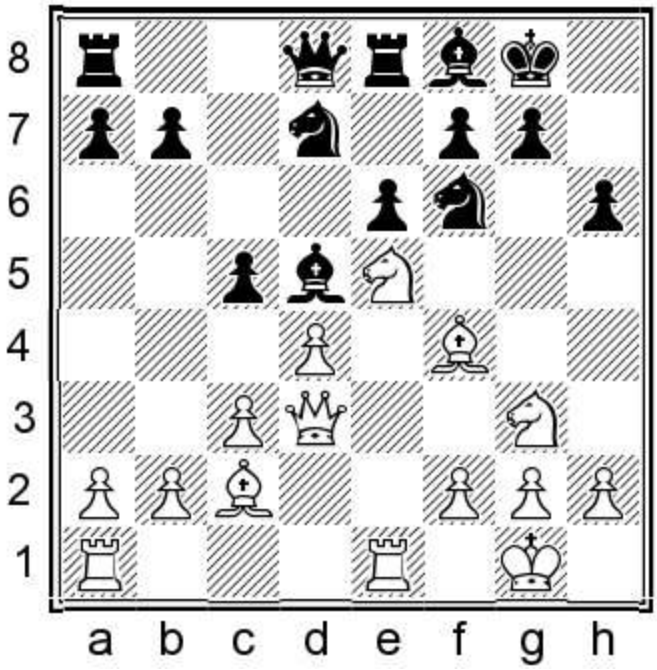
The game continued:
15...h5
Or 15...Kh7 16.h4 is also dangerous.
16.Bg5 Qb8 17.Ne4 Bg7 18.Kh1 c6 19.Rg1 Nxe4 20.fxe4±
In Khamrakulov – Suba, La Roda 2007, the plan of f2-f4-f5 was devastating.

14.Ne5! c5
In the Fort Knox, in general Black needs to be able to meet Ne5 with an immediate ...Nxe5, as the e5-knight is too strong to tolerate.

But in this case 14...Nxe5?! 15.dxe5 Nd7 16.Qg4+– is an overwhelming attack.

15.Qd3±

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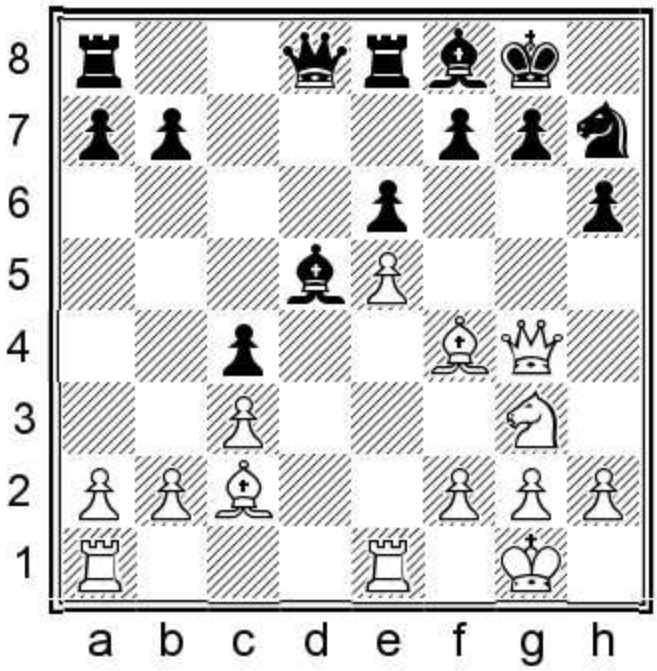


The plan of Qh7 mate is not subtle; White threatens Nxd7 ...Qxd7, Nh5, and is already close to winning.

15...Nxe5 16.dxe5 c4
The only try.

17.Qe2 Nh7
17...Nd7 18.Qg4 is similarly horrific.

18.Qg4+–
Now we see the value of having our dark-squared bishop eyeing h6. White will soon be attacking with queen, rook and three minor pieces, against a defensive force of two minor pieces; that’s not a fair fight.



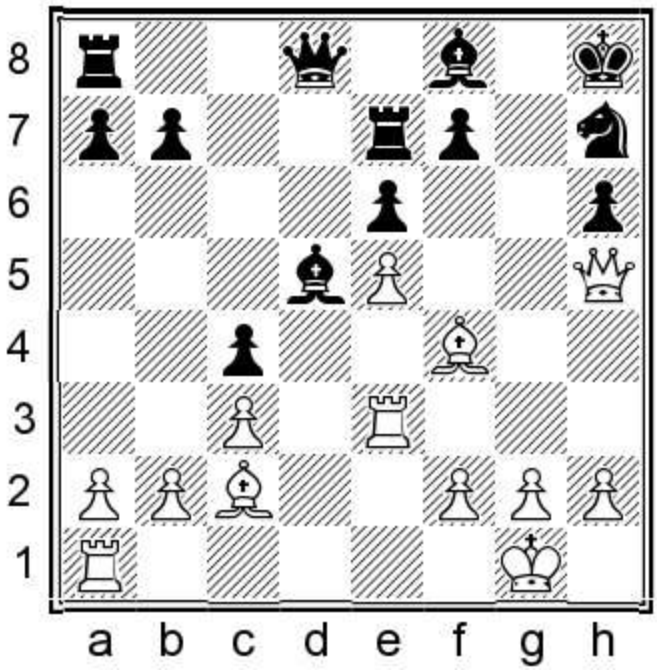
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18...Kh8
There is nothing better. For example, 18...g6 19.Nh5 Bg7 20.Bxg6! fxg6 21.Qxg6 Re7 22.Bxh6 and White will soon have a material advantage to go with the attack.

19.Nh5 g6 20.Re3!
Including all the pieces is the thematic choice, but even the simple 20.Nf6! was good enough to win, as Black cannot take twice on f6.

20...gxh5
Black might as well take the material; against slow play, White could play Rg3 and Bxg6 against most moves.

21.Qxh5 Re7



22.Rg3
Everything wins. For example, after 22.Rh3 one of the engine's top choices is 22...Bf3, which is a sign Black could call it a day.

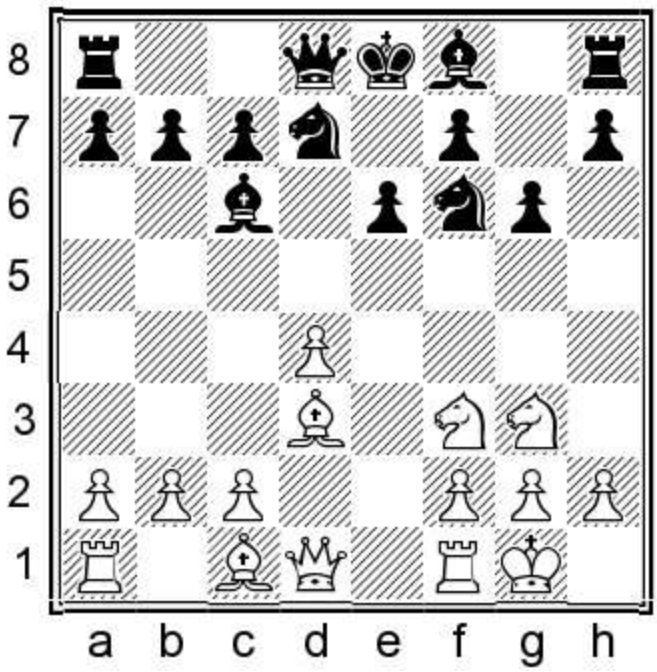
22...Rd7 23.Bxh7
Black resigned as 23...Kxh7 24.Qg4 is too easy. Wang Yue was rated 2706 and is normally one of the toughest players in the world to beat, so be assured that White's attacking chances in this line are potent.
1–0

GAME 38

Ivan Popov – Alexander Rakhmanov
Kaliningrad 2015

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bd7 5.Nf3 Bc6 6.Bd3 Nd7 7.0-0 Ngf6 8.Ng3 g6

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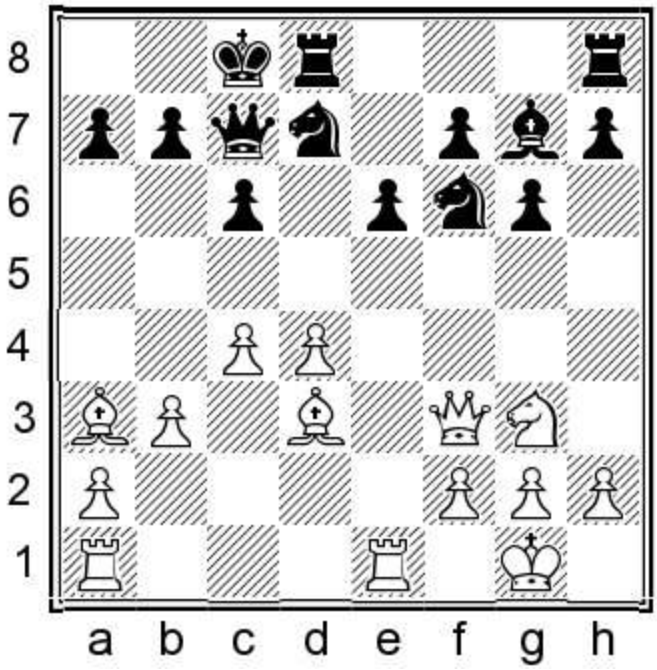


This move was popularized by Jobava in 2014, but Tiger Hillarp Persson played the first two games with it, in 2001 and 2002. With a bishop on d3 and a knight on g3, the blunting ...g7-g6 makes perfect sense.

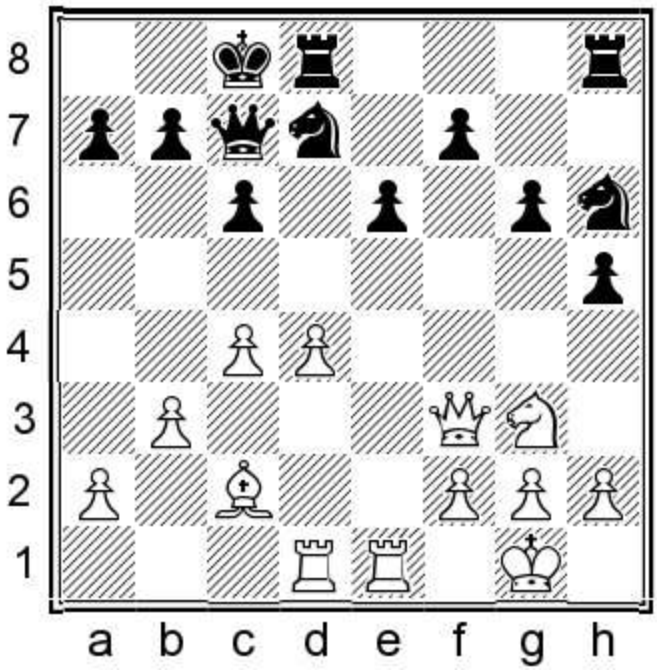
9.b3!
This precise move will gain us a tempo.
The direct attempt to refute Black's play is: 9.c4 Bg7 10.d5 exd5 11.Re1† Kf8÷ White has compensation for the missing pawn, but no clear route to an advantage. Note that Jobava has scored 2.5/3 with Black from this position.

9...Bg7 10.Ba3 Bf8
This is the only way Black can get his king to the kingside, though Black must be willing to accept a draw in this line.
If Black is determined to play for a win, then he can prepare castling long with:
10...Bxf3 11.Qxf3 c6
The problem is his king will not be secure on the queenside, with the advance of the c-pawn a definite weakening. For example:
12.c4 Qc7 13.Rfe1 0-0-0

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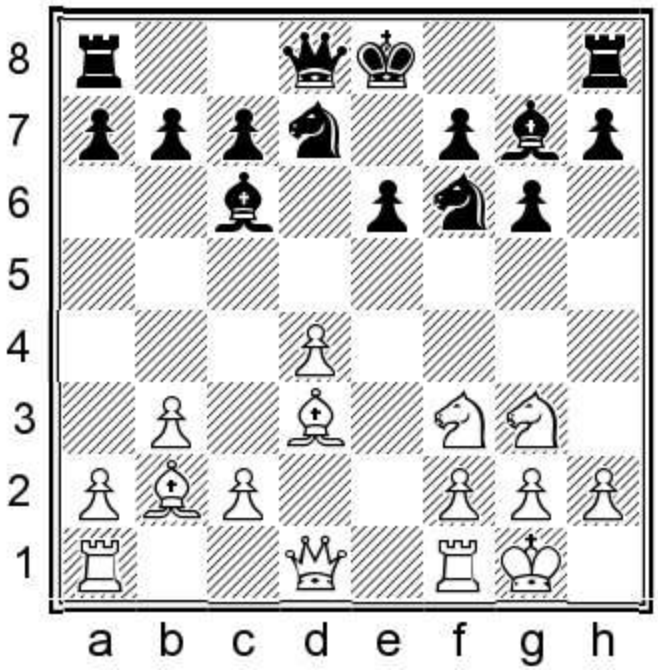
14.Rad1
I like this simple developer.
GM Danny Gormally suggested the following novelty: 14.Bb2!?N Leaving the rook on a1 to support a pawn storm. Gormally's sample line was: 14...Kb8 15.a4 h5 16.a5 h4 17.Ne2 h3 18.g3 a6 19.b4 It's an interesting idea, but 19...e5!÷ looks messy.
14...h5
White has at least two promising options:
15.Bc1!?
15.Bb2!? h4 16.Nf1 was also effective in Hübner – Wegerle, Germany 2015, as the knight can re-emerge on the excellent e3-square.
15...Ng4 16.Bc2 Bh6 17.Bxh6 Nxh6



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18.Ne4!N
Recentralizing, while also slowing down Black's pawn storm.
18.d5 was Solak – Jobava, Tromso (ol) 2014, where White was trying for tactics based on opening the c-file, but it was only enough for equality.
One sample line is:
18...Nf5 19.Qc3 Kb8 20.b4*f*

11.Bb2 Bg7



12.c4
Of course, we play for a win.

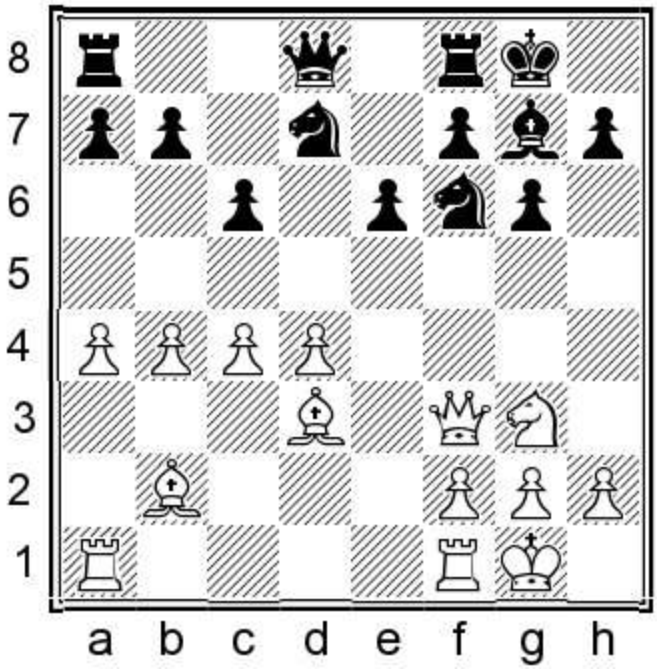
12.Ba3 is the move if you want a rest.

12...0-0 13.b4!?
I like this logical exploitation of the black bishop's absence from the f8-a3 diagonal. White gains space on the queenside, accepting that Black's kingside is invulnerable to any attacking attempts.

13.Qe2 or 13.Re1 are both fine, and worth an edge.

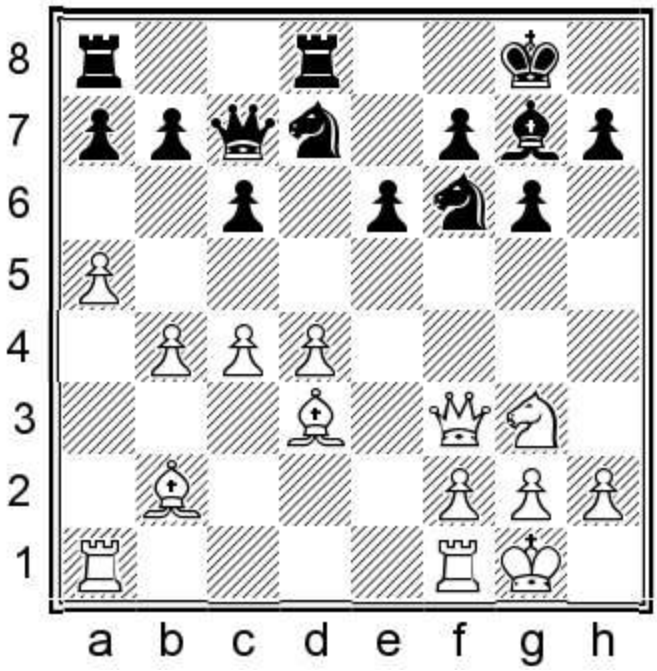
13...Bxf3 14.Qxf3 c6 15.a4
Continuing the obvious space-gaining plan. We should also bear in mind that Black's ideal break at some point would be ...b7-b5, trying to create an outpost for a knight on d5. Despite playing the main line against the Fort Knox, and all principled moves after that, we have reached a position that has only been tested four times.

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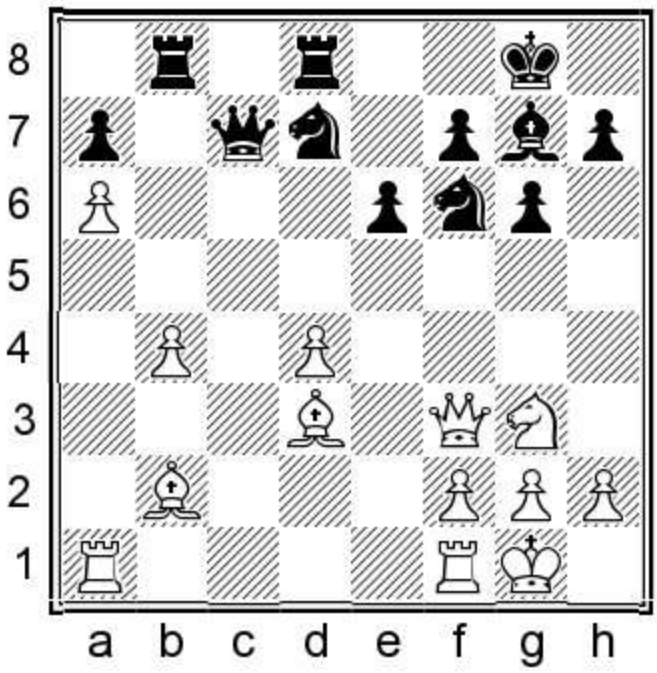
15...a6
I think this move is imprecise, as after a4-a5 Black will have no favourable pawn breaks, dooming him to long-term passivity.

15...Qc7
This was Rakhmanov's choice when he faced the line again, and I believe it is an improvement; Black keeps alive the dream of a later ...b7-b5 break.
16.a5 Rfd8
In the Duda game we will see below, Black played 16...a6 here, rather than using the game move order.



17.a6!?N
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This is the consistent follow-up, and the one I suspect those who played ...a7-a6 were worried about.

Instead 17.Be2 was Paravyan – Rakhmanov, Khanty-Mansiysk 2016. Paravyan is an occasional Fort Knox player, so we should expect him to know which lines are promising for White, which is encouraging for our 13.b4 line.
17...b6
This move is essential, but now the a6-pawn is a long-term asset for White.
17...b5?! is thematic but fails for tactical reasons. 18.cxb5 cxb5 19.Bxb5 Rab8 20.Bd3



The move Black wants to play is 20...Rxb4?! but it fails to: 21.Rfc1± Surprisingly, to me at least, Black loses the exchange as the b4-rook runs out of squares. For example, 21...Qb8 22.Bc3 Rb3 23.Bc4 Rb6 24.Ba5. So instead Black must remain a pawn down after a line such as 20...Nd5 21.b5.
After a normal move such as:
18.Rfd1
I prefer White, though Black's position is solid in typical Fort Knox style.

16.Rfe1
I suggest the immediate 16.a5!? which is likely to transpose to the game while avoiding the possibility mentioned below.

16...Qc7
A normal move, but now White engages his clamp, and Black never finds any activity for the rest of the game.

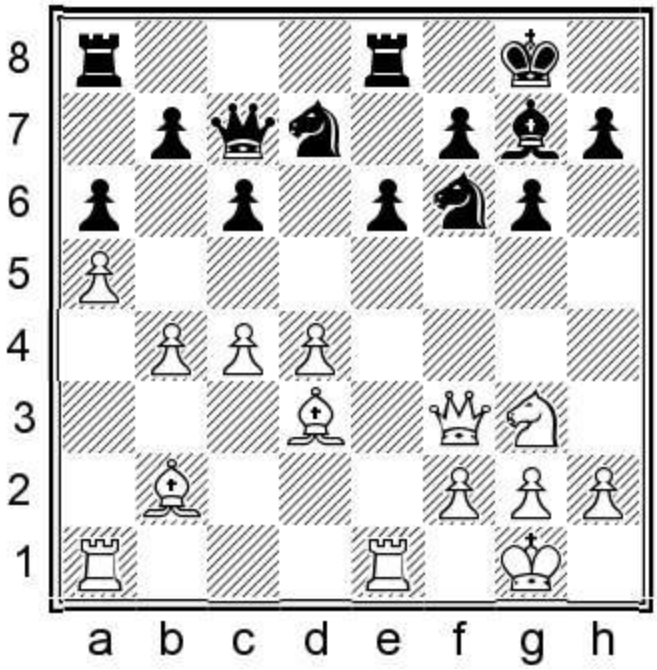
16...b5!? is rather desperate, but I think that attitude is justified. After 17.Qxc6 bxc4 18.Qxc4 Nb6 19.Qb3² I do not think Black has full compensation for the missing pawn, but he has some play and squares for his pieces, so this feels a better practical choice than the game.

17.a5
Now we are back on track.

17...Rac8
We are at a point where many moves are possible.

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17...Rfe8 is one example, when I recommend:



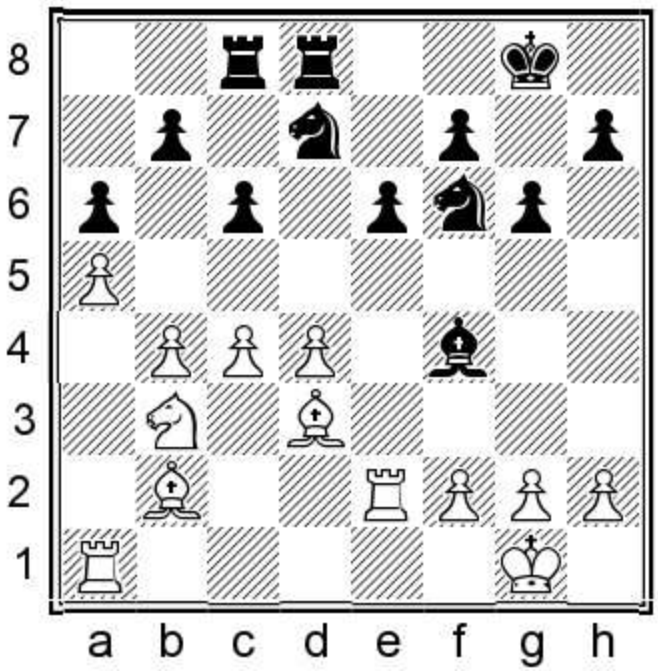
18.Bc2!N
With the idea of Bb3. It's useful to clear the d-file for a rook, but the bishop will also be beautifully located if Black tries an ...e6-e5 break and White replies c4-c5. And ...e5 is the only reasonable break Black has.
18.Re2?! works fine in the main game, but here it allows the awkward 18...Qd6! when Black is fine. 19.c5 Qd5 is a positional dream for Black, but 19.Bc3 e5! is also annoying as the d3-bishop is loose.
It is worth mentioning that 18.Qe2 led to an eventual victory for White in Nepomniachtchi – Duda, Heraklio 2017, but I like the suggested novelty even more.

18.Re2 Bh6
In this case 18...Qd6 19.Bc3 achieves nothing for Black, as we have e5 well covered.

19.Nf1 Qf4 20.Qxf4 Bxf4
The exchange of queens does not solve Black's problems, as he still lacks activity.

21.Nd2 Rfd8 22.Nb3

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White’s task over the next 20 moves is to gradually improve all his pieces, including the king, while taking as much space all over the board as allowed. There is no hurry, as Black is reduced to sitting and waiting. Popov gives an ideal demonstration of White’s plans.

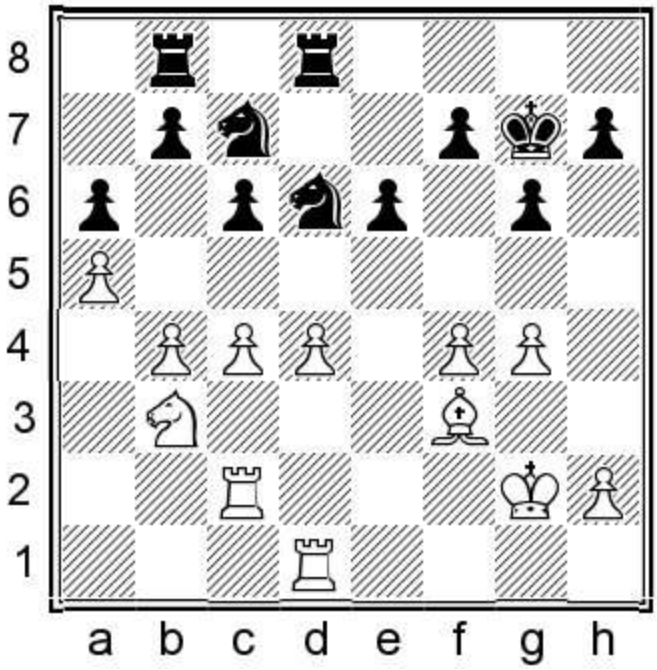
22...Bh6 23.Rd1 Ne8 24.g3 Bf8 25.Bc3 Bg7 26.g4 Bh6
Since move 20 this bishop has moved from f4 to h6 to f8 to g7 and now back to h6; it’s a symptom of Black’s lack of activity.

27.Kg2 Nc7 28.Bd2 Bxd2 29.Rexd2 Rb8 30.Be2 Nf6 31.f4
Slowly tightening the grip.

31...Ne4
Note that 31...b6? fails to 32.axb6 Rxb6 33.Na5+– and similar ideas work at many other points in the game.

32.Rc2 Kg7 33.Bf3 Nd6

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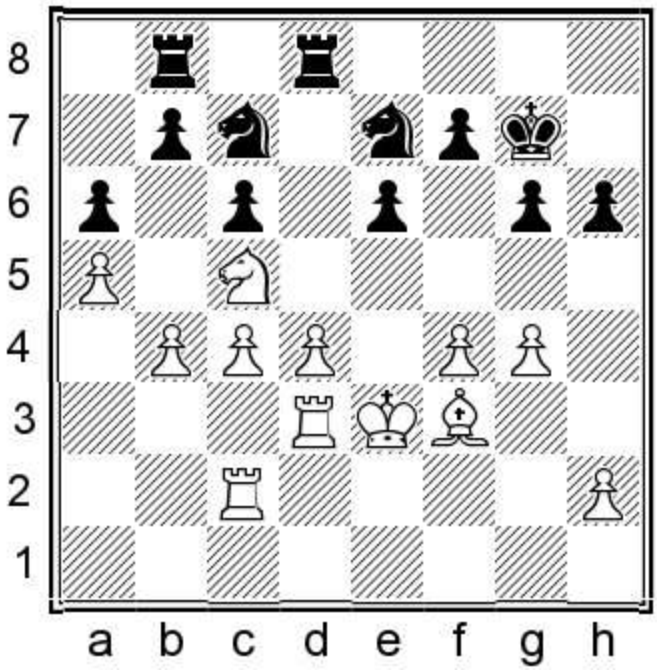


34.Rd3?!
This move is rather vague in purpose. I know I said White has plenty of time, but on d3 the rook is potentially vulnerable, as we shall see later.

34.Nc5! looks more to the point.

34...h6 35.Kf2
Popov decides that his king will be ideally placed on c3.

35...Nc8 36.Ke3 Ne7 37.Nc5



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37...Kf6?!

White’s misstep on move 34 gave Black one chance of activity: 37...g5!÷ was essential, when ...Ng6-f4, with tempo, would give Black’s position a much needed energy boost.

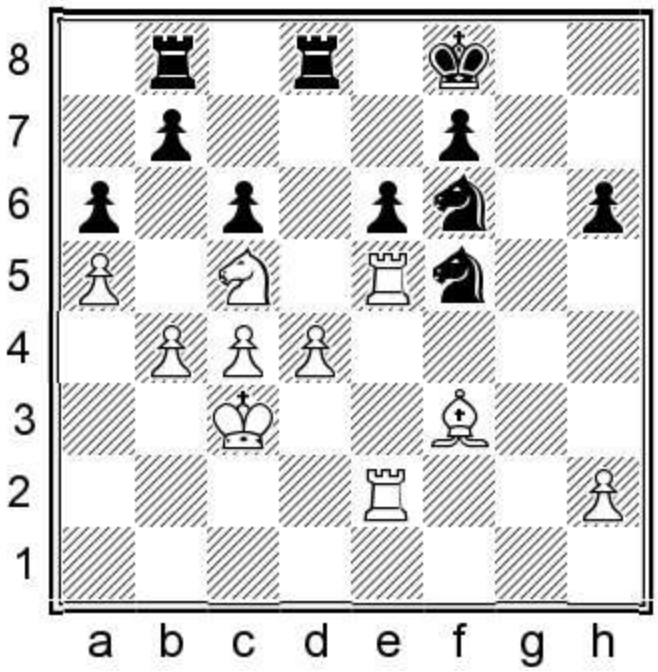
38.Rf2±
The game resumes its natural course.

38...Kg7 39.Kd2 Ne8 40.Kc3 Nd6 41.Re2
The rooks’ ideal location should be doubled on the e-file.

41...Kf8 42.Rde3 Ne8 43.Re5 Nf6
This allows a break, but it is hard to imagine Black could hold out indefinitely.

44.f5!
Now that White’s pieces have reached unimprovable locations, it is time for action.

44...gxf5 45.gxf5 Nxf5



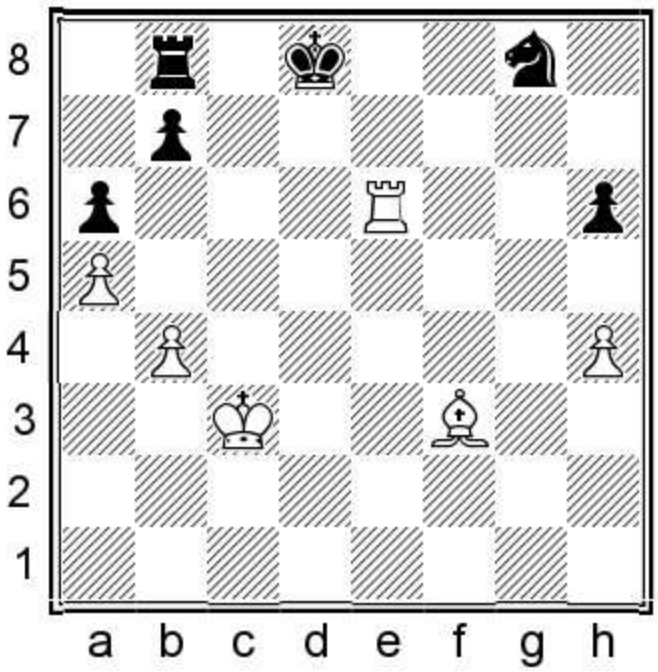
46.d5!+–
It’s a happy day when all the thematic breaks flow effortlessly.

46...cxd5 47.cxd5 Ng7
White was threatening to take on e6, and was using the simple tactical point 47...Nxd5† 48.Bxd5 Rxd5 49.Rxd5 exd5 50.Nd7†.

48.dxe6 Nxe6 49.Rxe6!
A pleasing move, but even the simple 49.Nxe6† fxe6 50.Rxe6 would have been good enough to win.

49...fxe6 50.Nxe6† Ke7 51.Nxd8† Kxd8 52.Re6 Ng8 53.h4
Beautifully emphasizing his domination; material is level for the moment, but Black’s position will inevitably collapse.

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53...Kc7 54.Rg6 Ne7
Or 54...Re8 55.Kd3 Rd8† 56.Kc4 and material starts dropping.

55.Rxh6 Rf8 56.Be4 Rf4 57.Kd3 Kd7 58.Ke3 Rf7 59.Rb6 Kd8 60.Rxb7
After 60...Nf5† any king move will do, so Black resigned. A lovely thematic game by Popov.
1–0

Conclusion

The Fort Knox variation is almost as secure as its name suggests, but White should be happy to see it, as gaining an edge is not so tough.
The rare lines we saw in the first section are deservedly rare, as White gains excellent chances.
After 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Bd7 5.Nf3 Bc6 6.Bd3 Nd7 7.0-0 Ngf6 8.Ng3 there are two main options.
8...Be7 is the old main line, against which I recommend a set-up with Re1, c2-c3 and the queen's bishop to f4 or g5. White has excellent prospects on the kingside, with Black's fortress not as secure as advertised.
The modern main line is 8...g6, when the precise 9.b3 gains a tempo with a Ba3-b2 finesse if Black is determined to castle short. When Black manages to castle short, his king truly is bulletproof, so I believe White's most logical plan is to expand on the queenside with a later c4, b4 and a4. White can expect an edge, but breaking Black's defences is likely to require a long grind rather than quick fireworks.

***

That brings us to the end of our coverage of the French Defence. In the remaining three chapters we turn our attention to the Sicilian, focusing on a variety of sidelines, leaving the most important systems to be covered in the Sicilian Main Lines volume.

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Chapter 12 - Sicilian - Rare 2nd Moves

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

A) 2...Qc7 303
B) 2...Qa5 304
C) 2...a6 3.c4! 305
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F) 2...Nf6 3.e5 Nd5 4.Nc3! 317
F1) 4...e6 317
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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3
In this chapter we will deal with the following assortment of rare second moves by Black: A) 2...Qc7, B) 2... Qa5, C) 2...a6, D) 2...b6, E) 2...g6 and F) 2...Nf6.

2...h6?! would not be so bad against an immediate 3.d4?!, but 3.Nc3 and 3.c3 are better options which make it hard for Black to justify his weird second move.

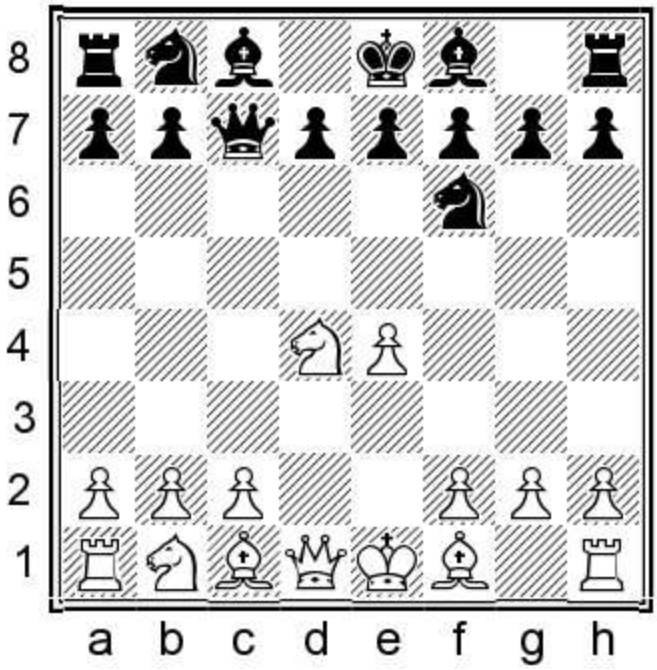
A) 2...Qc7

This move looks odd but there is nothing terribly wrong with it.

3.d4
3.c3 can certainly be considered, especially if you already have experience playing the 2.c3 Sicilian, as this is clearly an improved version for White. Nevertheless, I am happy to steer the game into our normal Open Sicilian structure.

3...cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6?
4...Nc6 transposes to variation A2 of Chapter 14 on page 360, while 4...a6 5.c4 will almost certainly transpose to the Kan – see the Sicilian Main Lines volume. The text move looks natural enough but White has a surprising resource which comes close to refuting it.

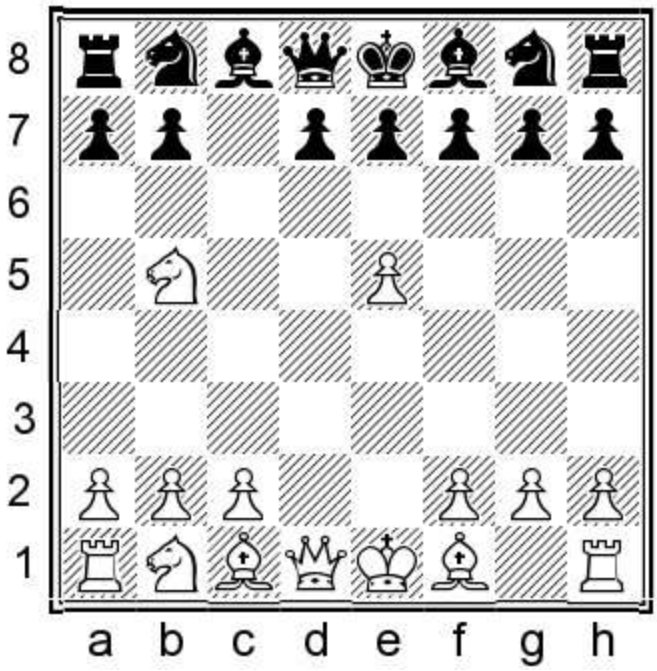
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5.Nb5!N
A major improvement over the usual 5.Nc3, after which 5...a6! will slowly transpose to a variation of the Kan which lies outside of the proposed repertoire.

5...Qe5
Black must strive to prevent e4-e5.

He fails to offer much resistance with:
5...Qd8?! 6.e5 Ng8
6...a6 7.Nd6†! exd6 8.exf6 Qxf6 9.Nc3 and White is winning.
6...Ne4 7.Qd4 wins at least a pawn after 7...d5 8.Qxd5+– (or 8.f3+–).



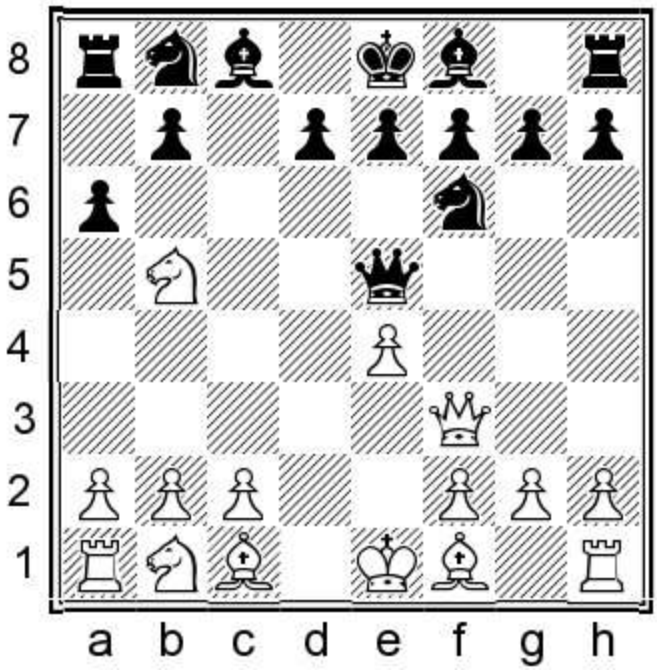
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7.Bg5!
Another energetic move, threatening Nd6†.
7...Qa5† 8.N1c3 Na6 9.Qd5! Qb4 10.0-0-0
White is completely winning.

5...Qa5† 6.Bd2 Qd8 is a slight improvement on the above line, as after 7.e5 Ne4 White is unable to plonk the queen on d4. Nevertheless, White still has a number of attractive continuations, 8.Be3 being one example.

6.Qf3! a6
6...Nxe4 runs into 7.Qe3! threatening f2-f4, and if 7...Na6 8.f3 White wins.

6...Na6 7.N1c3 followed by Bf4 is totally winning as well.
The text move forces White to show his hand, but it turns out that he is holding aces.



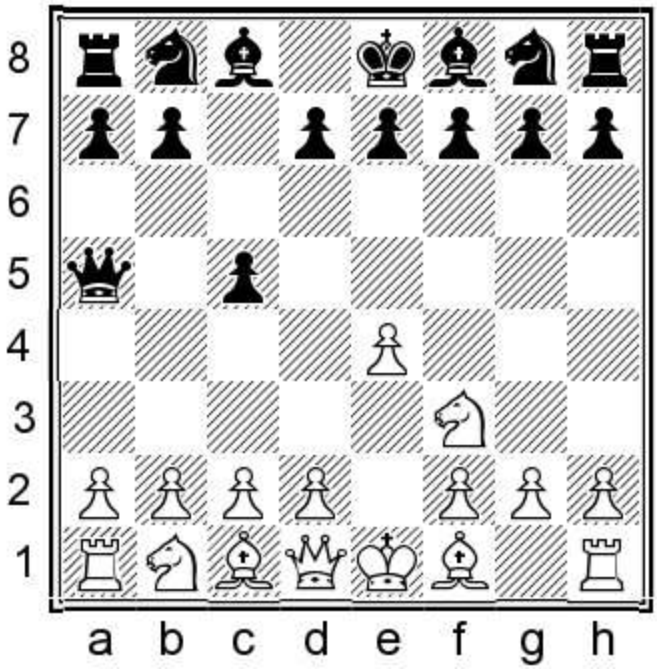
7.Bf4! Qxb2 8.Qb3! Qxa1
8...Qxb3 9.axb3 Kd8 10.Bc7† Ke8 11.Bb6 wins.

9.Nc7† Kd8 10.Nxa8
Black is completely busted. For example:

10...d6 11.Qb6† Ke8 12.Bc4 Nc6 13.c3+–
Black's queen is trapped.

B) 2...Qa5

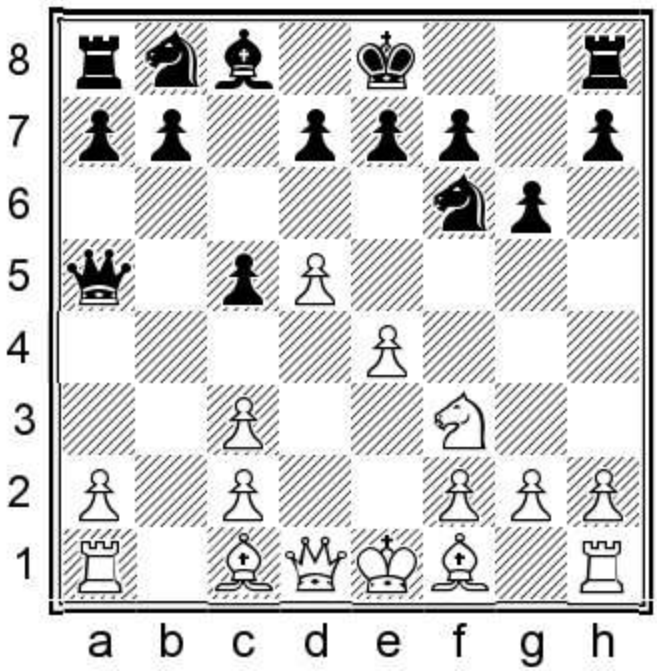
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This is obviously a substandard move; the only question is how best to expose it.
3.Nc3
I like this move: White develops a piece and may or may not follow up with d2-d4 next.

3...e6
Black might also try:
3...g6 4.d4 Bg7 5.d5!? Bxc3†
Otherwise White will have an excellent version of a Benoni.
6.bxc3 Nf6
6...Qxc3† 7.Bd2 Qg7 8.Bd3± gives White an overwhelming initiative for the pawn. 8...d6 9.0-0 Bg4 10.Rb1 b6 11.h3 Bxf3 12.Qxf3 Nd7 13.Bb5 Ngf6 14.Bc3 Rd8 15.e5 dxe5 occurred in Frhat – E. Schiller, Dos Hermanas 2004, when 16.Bxe5N 16...0-0 17.Ba1 would have left Black with an impossible defensive task.
The text move has been played in several games but no one has found the best reply.

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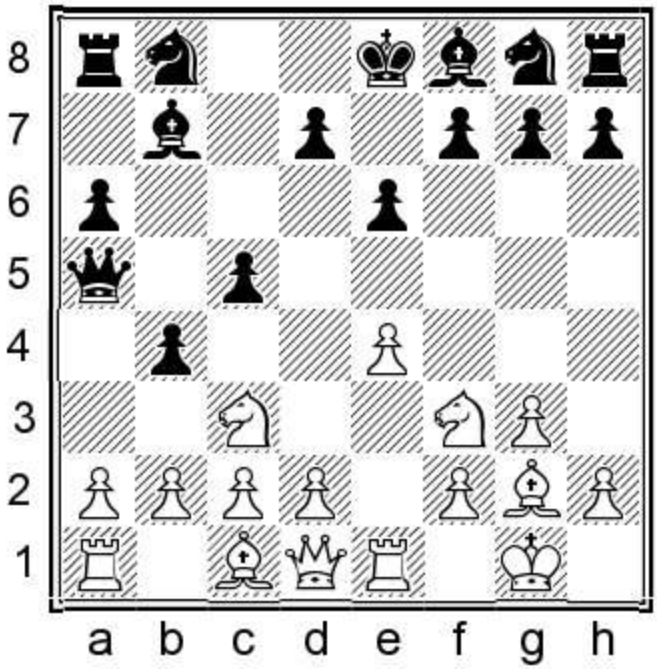
7.Bb2!N 7...Nxe4
7...d6 8.Nd2 0-0 9.a4²
8.Bd3 Nd6 9.0-0 c4!?
9...0-0 10.Qe2 Qd8 11.c4± gives White a huge initiative for the pawn.
10.Bxc4 Nxc4 11.Qd4 0-0 12.Qxc4²
White has fine attacking chances.

4.g3!?
This is a simple, non-theoretical path to an advantage. White develops his bishop to a good square and challenges Black to justify the eccentric position of his queen.

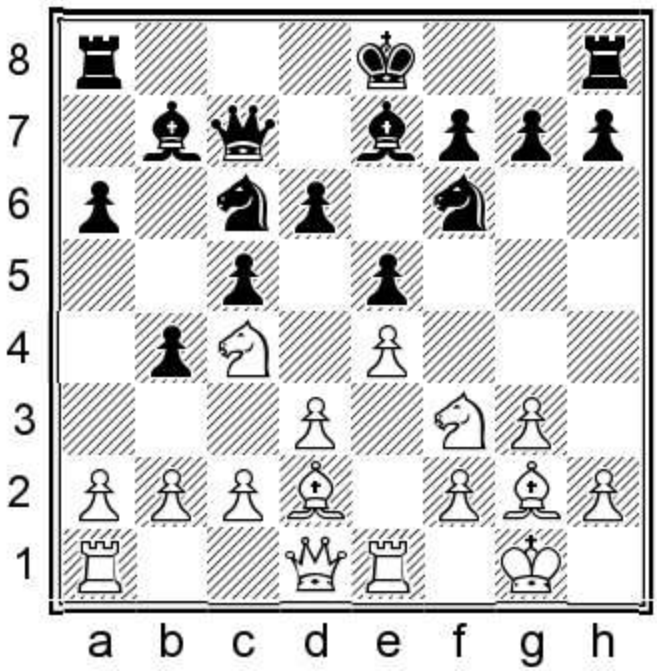
4...a6 5.Bg2 b5 6.0-0 Bb7 7.Re1 b4
7...d6 8.d4± leads to an Open Sicilian with a big development advantage for White.

After the text move I found a significant improvement.

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8.Nd5!N
The game continued with 8.Nb1 Nc6 9.d3 d6 10.Nbd2, with clearly better prospects for White. I will show a few more moves, as it is useful to see how White can increase his advantage by positional means, in case you reach a similar position where the tactical solution of the main line is not viable. 10...Qc7 11.Nc4 Be7 12.Bf4 e5 13.Bd2 Nf6



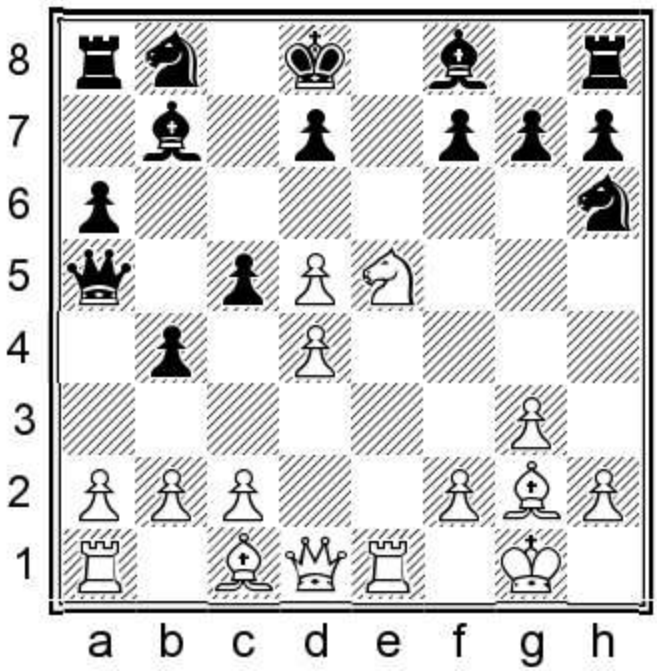
14.Nh4 (14.a3!? was also promising) 14...g6 15.Bh6 Bc8 16.Ne3 Rb8 This was Aleksic – Bellon Lopez, Cutro 1997, when 17.f4N± would have been most consistent with White's previous play.

8...exd5?!
This is the critical move to check, but it leads to even greater problems for Black.

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8...d6 is a better try, but after 9.d4± White has a dream position.

9.exd5† Kd8 10.Ne5 Nh6 11.d4



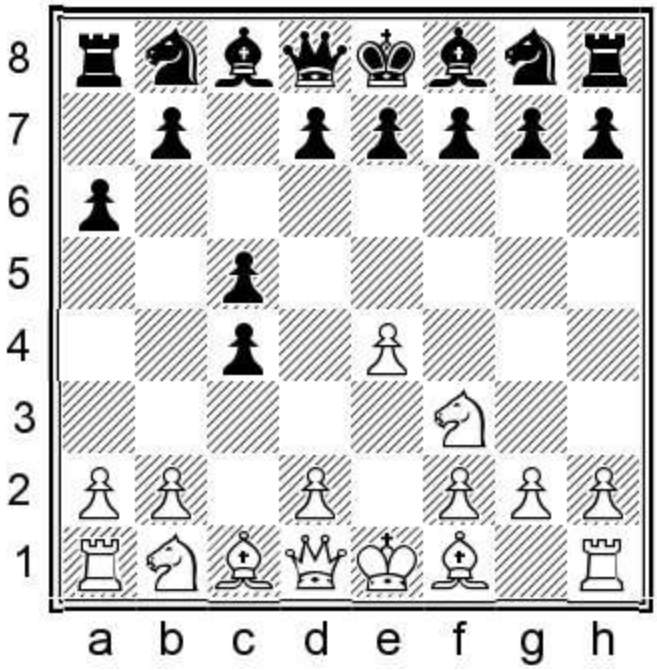
11...f6 12.Nc4 Qc7 13.Bxh6 gxh6 14.Qf3+–
Black's position is in ruins and he will soon suffer heavy losses.

C) 2...a6

This is the O'Kelly Variation – a respectable sideline, but we have a convenient way to meet it.

3.c4!
3.d4?! is well known to be inaccurate, while 3.c3 is decent, but requires quite a lot of knowledge of the different variations and structures which may ensue.

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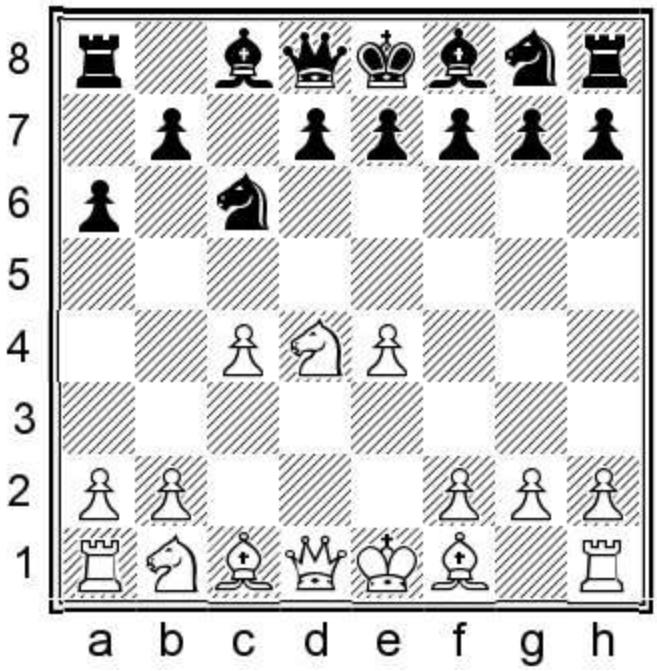
The text move is a practical choice which fits in well with the rest of our repertoire, bearing in mind that we will also go for a c2-c4 set-up against the Kan. Black has two main responses: C1) 3...Nc6 and C2) 3...d6.

3...e6 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 leads to the Kan, as covered in the Sicilian Main Lines volume.

C1) 3...Nc6

This was the main recommendation of John Emms in his O'Kelly chapter in Dangerous Weapons – The Sicilian.

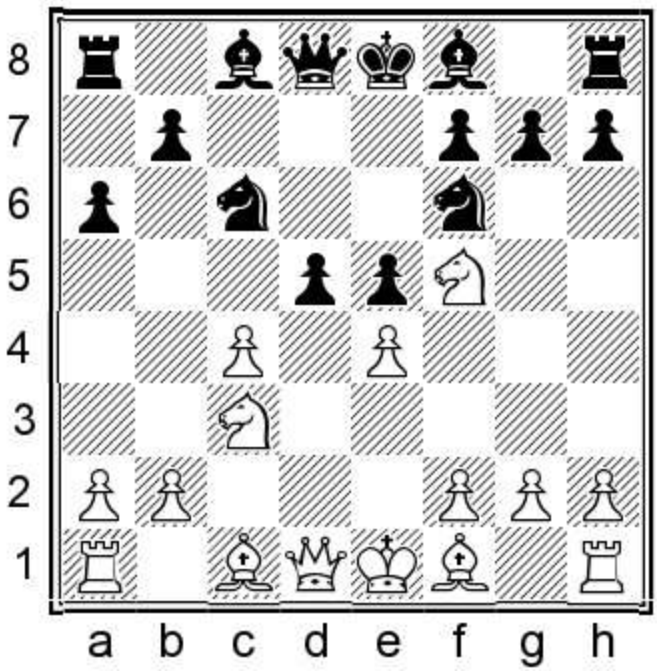
4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4
Emms mentions a few ideas for Black from here.



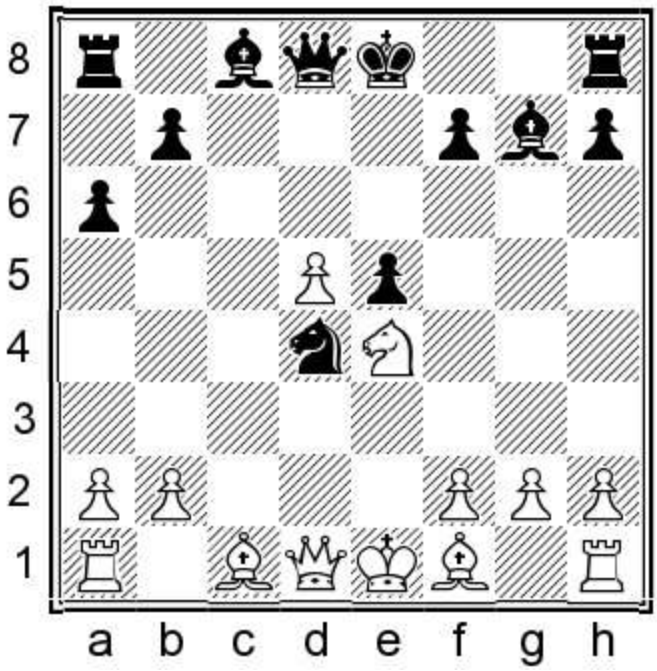
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5...e5
Playing in Kalashnikov fashion.

The alternative is:
5...Nf6 6.Nc3 e5 7.Nf5 d5!?
7...d6 8.Ne3 Be7² is more modest.



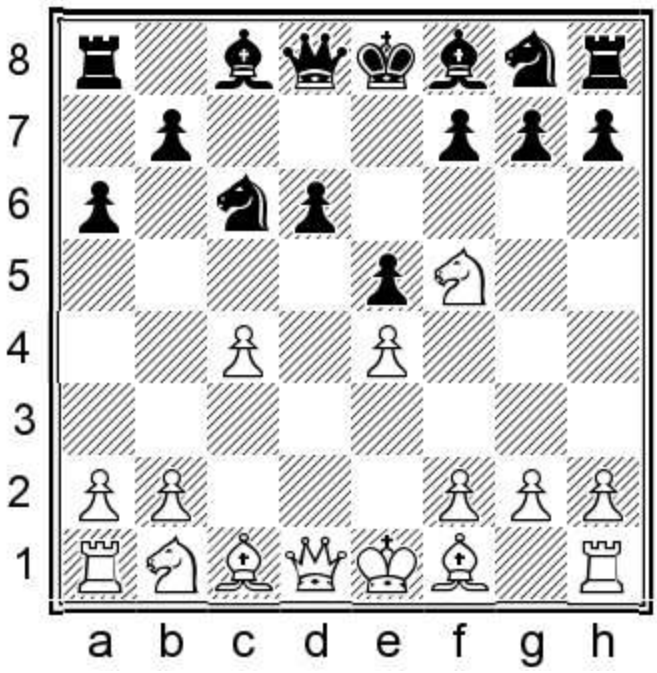
8.cxd5 Nxe4
The more common 8...Bxf5 9.exf5 Nd4 10.Bd3 Nxd5 11.0-0 Bb4 12.Be4 Nxc3 13.bxc3 Bxc3 14.Rb1 gives White a pleasant initiative with fine prospects on the light squares.
9.Nxg7† Bxg7 10.Nxe4 Nd4
Emms considers 11.d6 but I think White can improve with:



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11.Nc3 0-0 12.Bd3²
Black had a certain amount of activity in Gorbatov – F. Larsen, Hradec Kralove 2012, but I find it hard to believe it is full value for the sacrificed pawn.

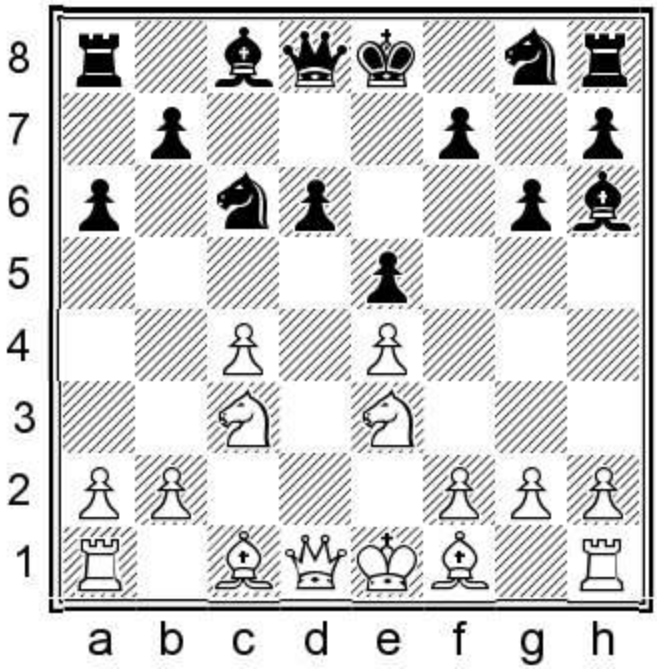
6.Nf5! d6
6...d5?! is not really viable in view of: 7.cxd5 Bxf5 8.exf5 Nd4 9.Nc3 Bb4 10.Bd3 Qxd5 11.0-0±



7.Nc3 g6 8.Ne3
White has a good version of a Kalashnikov, and many of the ideas from the relevant chapter (found in the Sicilian Main Lines volume) should be applicable here too. Here are a few brief lines.

8...Bh6!?
8...Bg7 9.Ned5 Nge7 10.Be3 Nxd5 11.Nxd5 Nd4 12.Bd3² is mentioned by Emms.

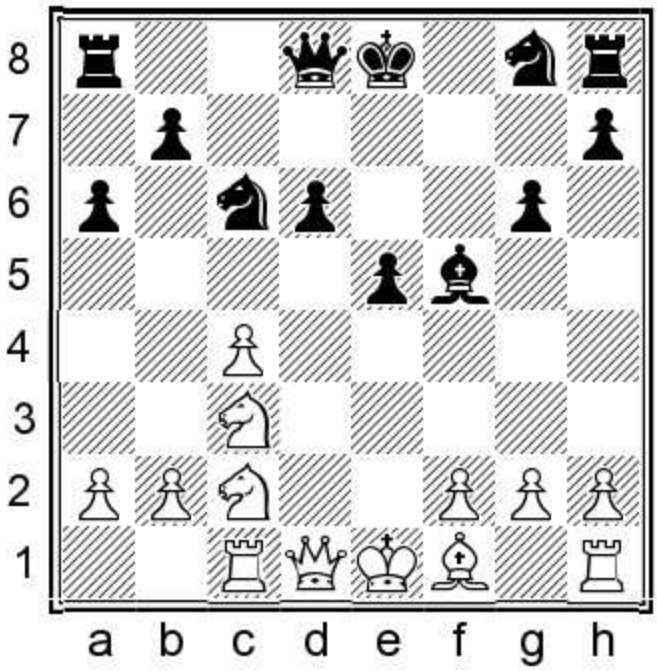
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9.Nc2!N 9...Bxc1 10.Rxc1
White should be better, although it is worth mentioning the following point:

10...f5 11.exf5!
It is best not to allow ...f4.

11...Bxf5
11...gxf5 12.Qh5† would be awkward for Black.



12.Bd3 Be6 13.0-0²
See the Kalashnikov coverage for more details about positions with this pawn structure.

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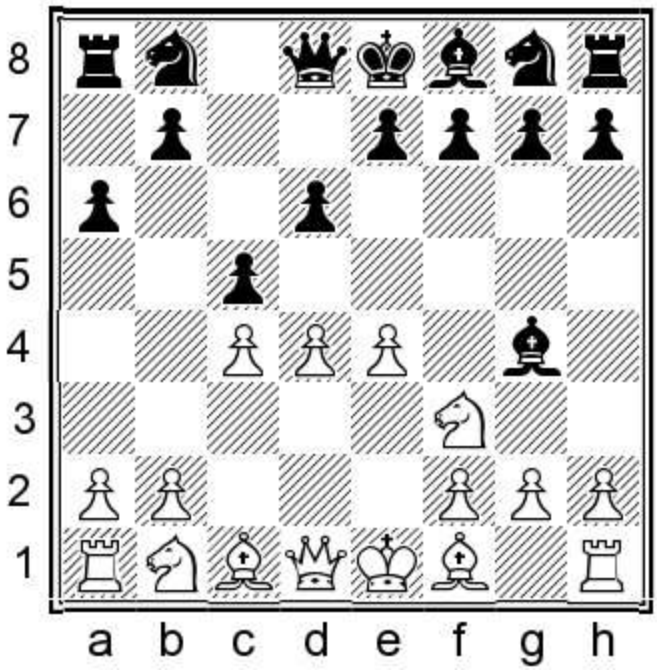
C2) 3...d6

GAME 39

Elena Sedina – Ekaterina Korbut
Biel 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 a6 3.c4 d6
The main idea of this move is to prepare the following bishop development.

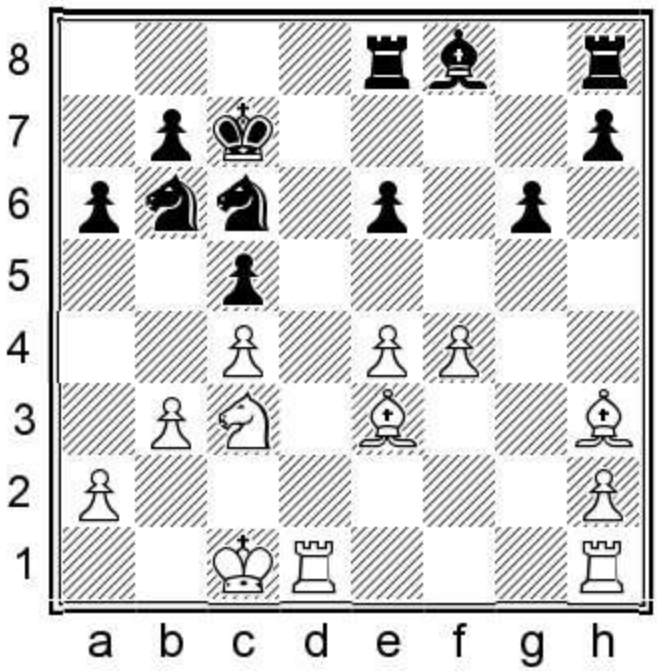
4.d4 Bg4
4...cxd4 5.Nxd4 gives us a good version of either a Kan or Accelerated Dragon. No further theoretical knowledge is needed, provided you know what you are doing in those systems.



5.dxc5!
5.d5 is a pretty good Benoni for White but the text move is a more suitable choice for 1.e4 players, and just a stronger move overall.

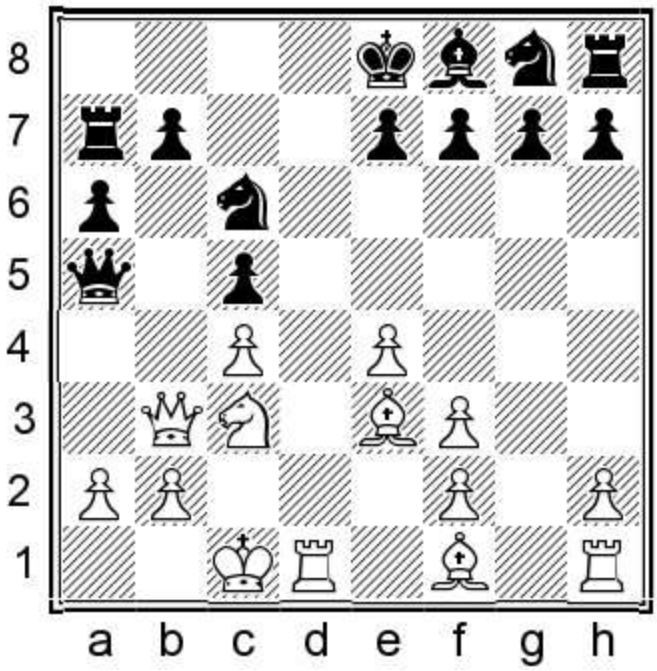
5...Bxf3 6.gxf3! Qa5†
6...dxc5 7.Qxd8† Kxd8 8.Be3 e6 9.Nc3 gives White excellent prospects, as his lead in development and two bishops are more significant than the doubled f-pawns and weak d4-square. A good example continued: 9...Nf6 10.0-0-0† Nfd7 11.f4 Kc7 12.f5 Nc6 13.fxe6 fxe6 14.Bh3 Re8 15.f4 Nb6 16.b3 g6

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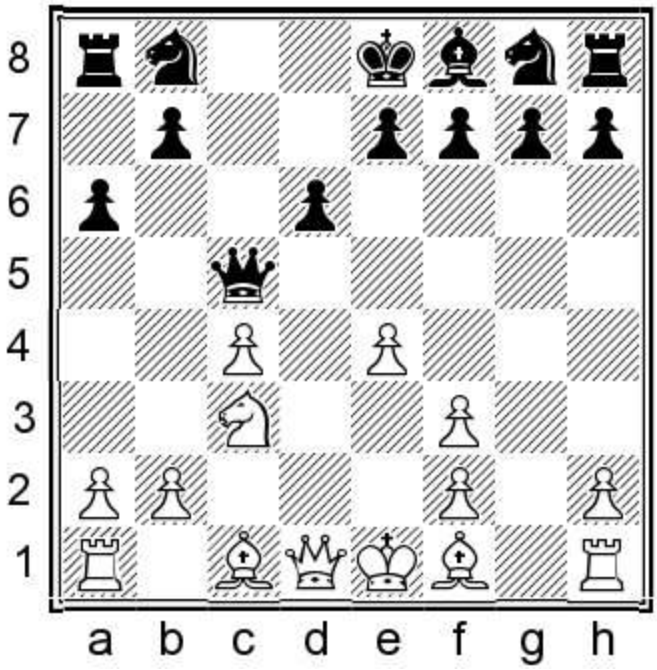
17.Rhf1 (17.f5!?± also looks problematic for Black) 17...Nc8 18.e5± With Ne4 coming next, White was clearly better in Roiz Baztan – Bauer, Donostia 2004.

7.Nc3 Qxc5
7...dxc5?! is positionally desirable but Black's position is likely to fall apart before he gets a chance to exploit the d4-outpost: 8.Qb3 Ra7 (8...Nd7 9.Qxb7 Rb8 10.Qc6 e6 11.Qa4 Qxa4 12.Nxa4+– D. Mastrovasilis – Ardeleanu, Dresden 2007) 9.Bd2 Qd8 10.0-0-0 Nc6 11.Be3 Qa5 In Steingrimsson – Tugui, Germany 2010, White could have maximized his advantage with:



12.f4!N 12...e6 13.Bg2 Nf6 (13...Be7 14.Rhg1+–) 14.e5 Nd7 15.Bxc6 bxc6 16.Ne4+– White is dominating and is likely to win material in the near future.

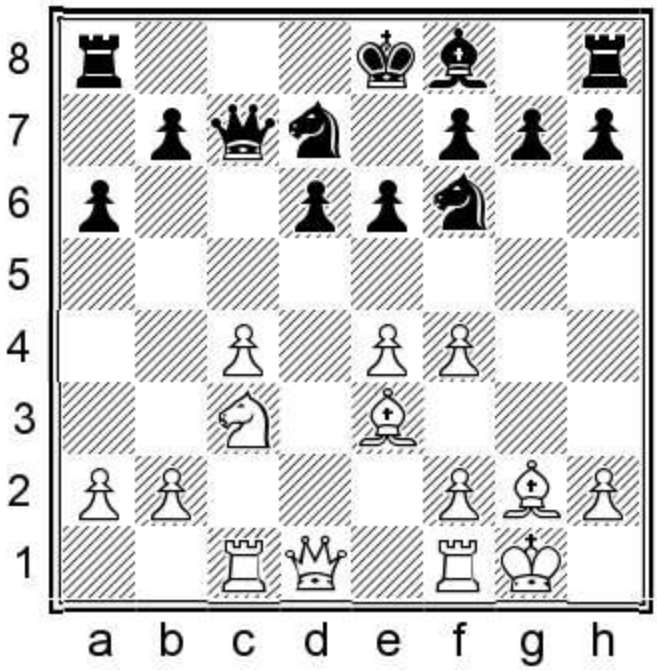
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8.Be3 Qc6 9.Bg2
It is hard for Black to live with White's lead in development.

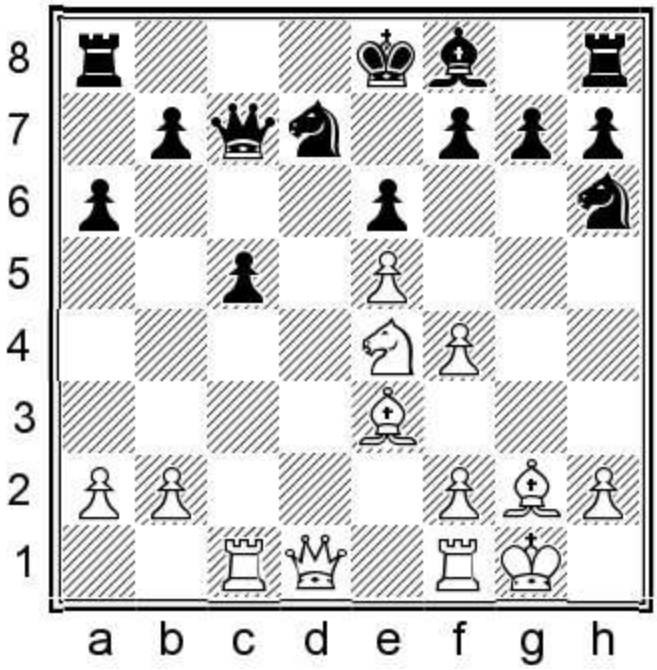
9...Nd7 10.Rc1 Ngf6 11.0-0± g5?
Black tries to control the dark squares but falls further behind in development.

11...e6 was saner but still poor for Black, especially if White finds the following idea: 12.f4! Qc7

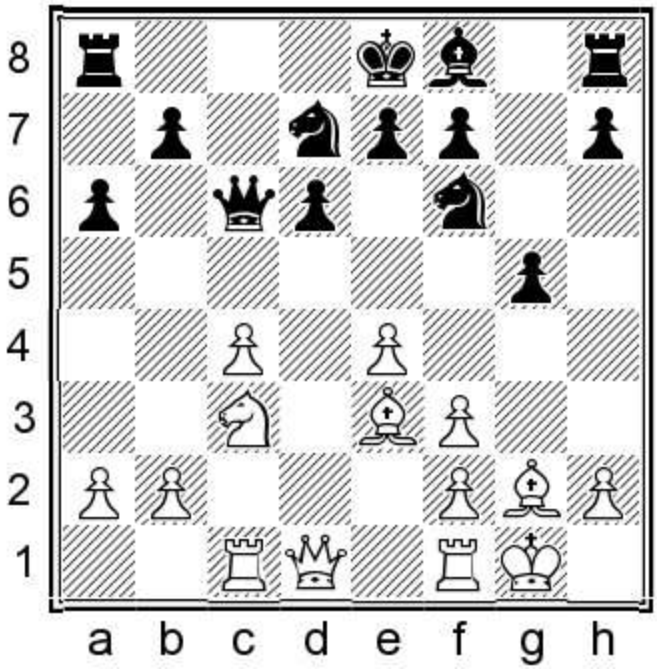


13.c5!! dxc5 (13...Nxc5? 14.b4 Ncd7 15.Nb5 wins immediately) 14.e5 Ng8 15.Ne4 Nh6 In Guid – Barle, Murska Sobota 2007, the best way to exploit White's advantage would have been:

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16.b4!N 16...c4 (16...Nf5 17.bxc5+–) 17.Qd4 Nf5 18.Rxc4! White is winning.

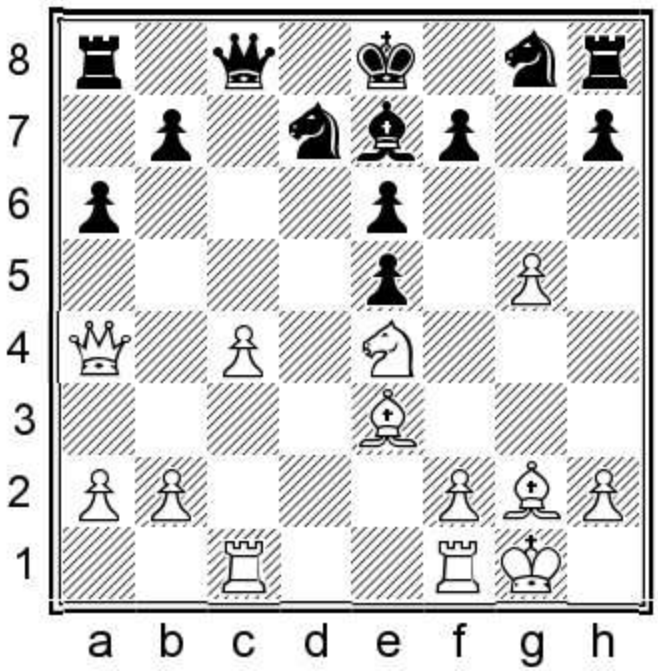


12.e5!
A devastating blow.

12...dxe5 13.f4 Qc8 14.fxg5 Ng8
It is hard to believe that White did not have to sacrifice material to obtain such an overwhelming position.

15.Qa4 e6 16.Ne4 Be7

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17.c5 Kf8 18.Rfd1
Not wanting to retreat the other knight to its starting place, Black resigned. Indeed, after 18...Nb8 19.Nd6 Bxd6 20.cxd6 her position swiftly collapses.
1–0

D) 2...b6

We should be happy to see this sideline, for reasons that will soon become clear.

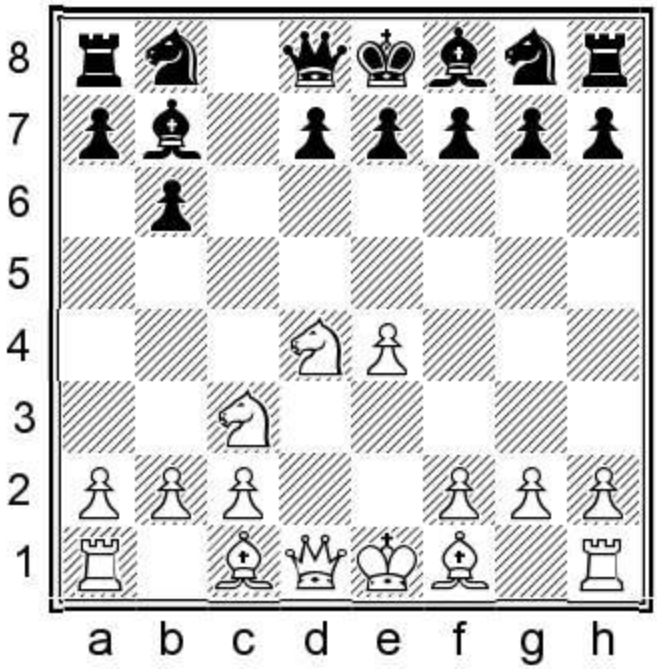
3.d4
There is no reason to refrain from the normal Open Sicilian treatment.

That said, 3.c4!? Bb7 4.Nc3 followed by d2-d4 can also be considered. This should lead to something similar to our set-up against the Kan, and could transpose to the relevant chapter in the Sicilian Main Lines volume.

3...cxd4
3...Bb7?! 4.d5 Nf6 5.Nc3± gives Black a rubbish Benoni position, as his bishop is poorly placed on b7.

4.Nxd4 Bb7 5.Nc3

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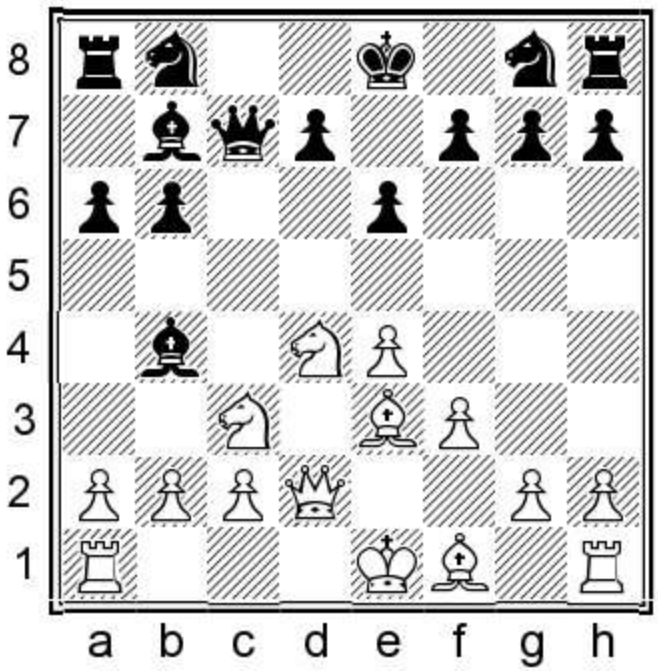
5...a6
This is the main line by far.

5...g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.Qd2 Nf6 8.f3 Nc6 9.0-0-0² gave Black a dubious version of a Dragon in S. Zhigalko – Abdulov, Baku 2014.

6.Be3
6.Bg5!? is an excellent alternative, intending Bc4, Qe2 and 0-0-0, with a vibrant attacking position. The text move is the easiest solution though: the English Attack is an important component of our repertoire, and here White has an improved version of it, as the early ...b6 does not work well against it.

6...e6 7.Qd2 Qc7 8.f3 Bb4
If Black reverts to a normal-looking set-up involving ...d6 and ...b5-b4, he will simply have lost a tempo compared to our coverage against the Najdorf.

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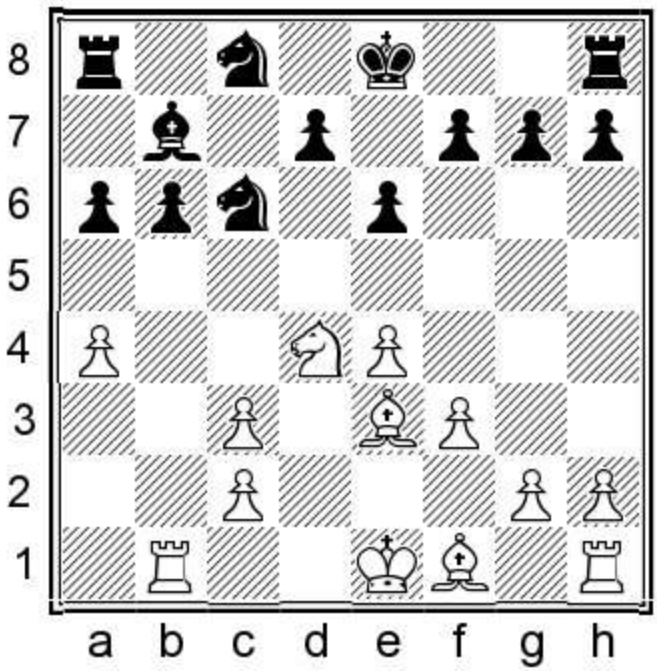
9.a3! Bxc3
9...Be7 10.0-0-0 b5 is an attempt to exploit the weakening caused by a2-a3, but after 11.Bf4 Qc8 12.Nb3 Nc6 13.Bd6± Black's counterplay came to a standstill in Karjakin – Balinov, Vienna 2003.

10.Qxc3 Qxc3† 11.bxc3
White's doubled pawns are not really weak and he has excellent chances to seize the initiative on the queenside, especially on the dark squares, thanks to his superb bishop on e3.

11...Ne7
11...d6 occurred in Giasi – Forster, Istanbul (ol) 2012, when 12.a4!N± followed by Rb1 would have been unpleasant for Black.

12.Rb1 Nc8 13.a4 Nc6

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14.Kf2!N
This is the most accurate, although 14.Nb3 d6 15.a5 b5 16.c4 bxc4 17.Bxc4± was also excellent for White in Fressinet – Bauer, Ajaccio (blitz) 2007. Either way, the general picture is that White's powerful dark-squared bishop and queenside pressure are far more important than his doubled c-pawns.

E) 2...g6

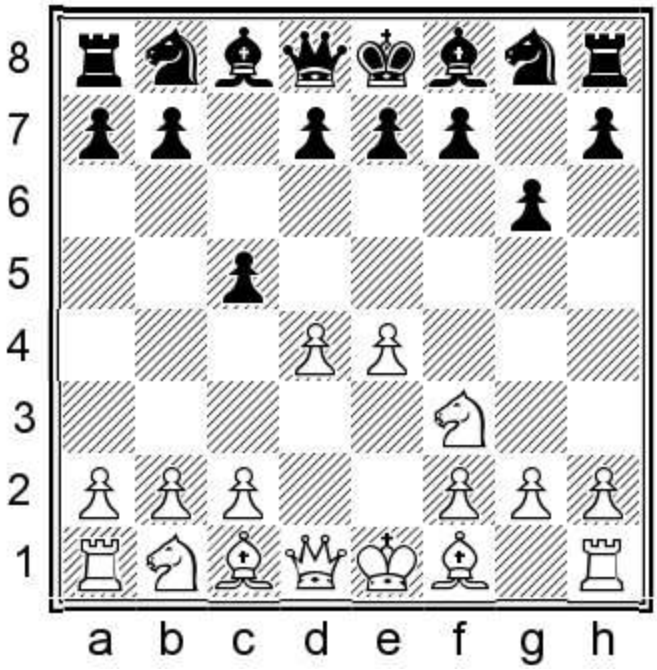
Often referred to as the Hyper-Accelerated Dragon, this is a pretty sensible move. Often it transposes to one of the more mainstream Dragon or Accelerated Dragon lines, but it can also lead to some independent paths which we will cover here.

GAME 40

Daniele Vocaturo – Colin Pace
Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 g6 3.d4
3.c4 Bg7 4.d4 invites a transposition to the Maroczy system, but there is quite a lot of theory to learn after 4...d6, 4...Nc6, 4...Qb6 and especially 4...Qa5!. Against the last move, it is surprisingly hard to find any advantage for White at all.

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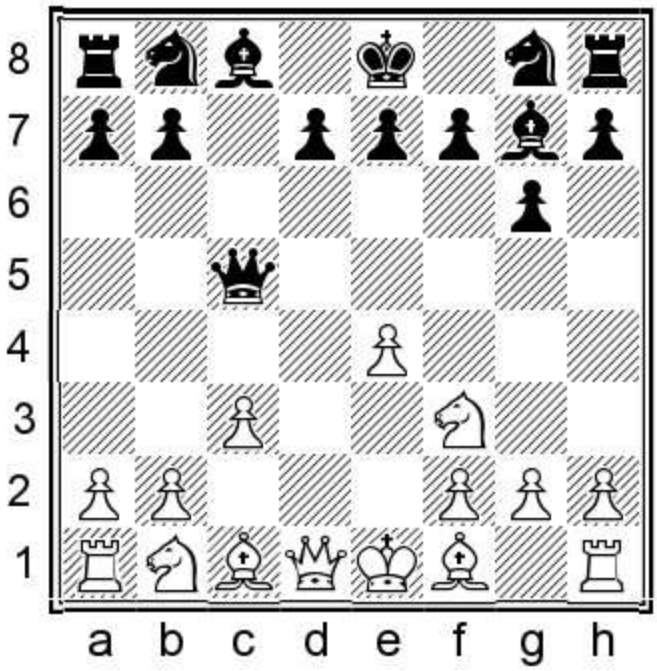


3...Bg7
3...cxd4 4.Nxd4 will transpose to one of the normal Dragon variants.

4.dxc5
4.Nc3 cxd4 5.Nxd4 Nc6 reaches a position which lies outside of our repertoire.

4.d5 is a viable option for players who have some experience with 1.d4 and are happy playing against a Benoni, but the text move is a better fit for our 1.e4 repertoire.

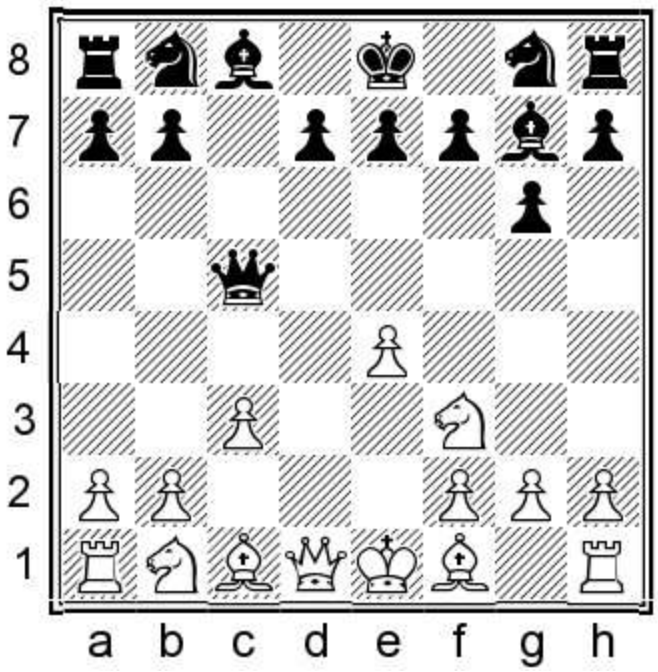
4...Qa5† 5.c3 Qxc5



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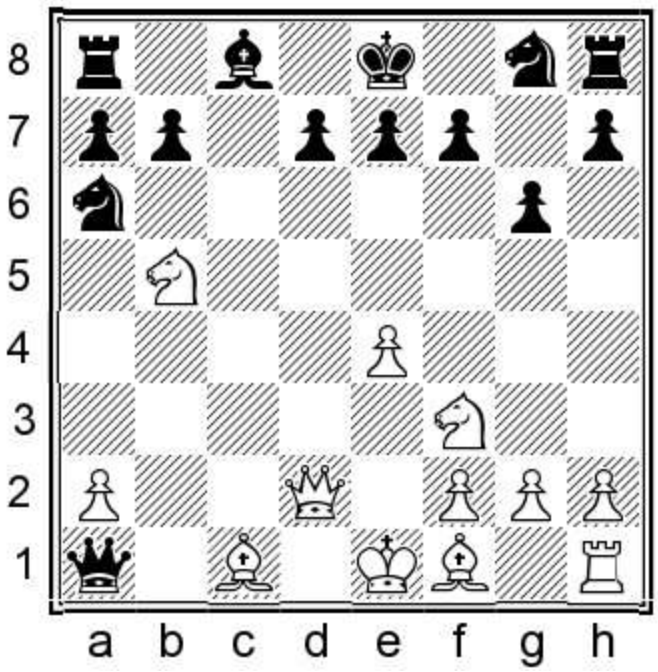
6.Na3!

This is well known to be the strongest move. Black has to be careful, as several plausible moves quickly lead to serious problems for him.



6...Nf6
This seems like Black's best chance to reach an acceptable position. Let's see how White deals with his other options:

a) 6...Bxc3†?? is the first move we should check but it quickly leads to a lost position for Black: 7.bxc3 Qxc3† 8.Qd2 Qxa1 9.Nb5 Na6



White has a choice of winning moves, so have a look at both and decide which one you prefer:

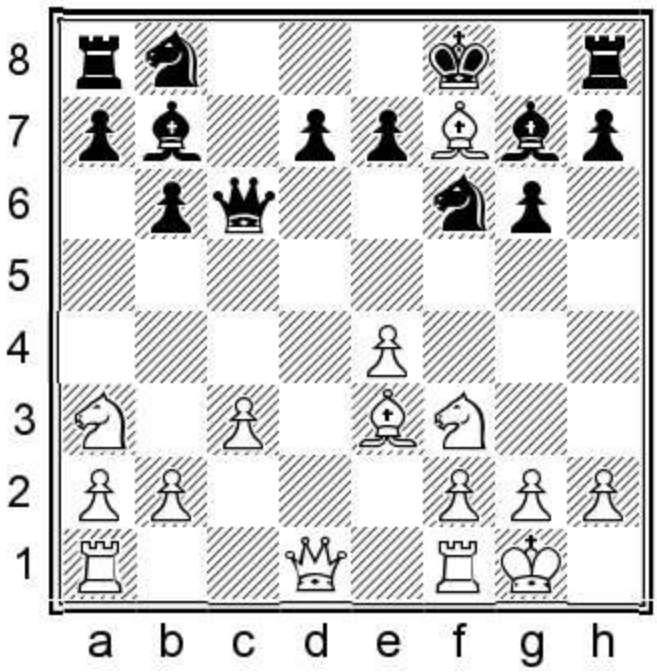
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a1) 10.Bc4! is a rare choice but the computer's favourite. 10...Qg7 (10...d6 11.Nc3+– gives White an even better version of the line below) This was Huerga Leache – Arbunic Castro, Madrid 2014, and now 11.e5!N gives White an overwhelming initiative.

a2) Although the above line is the most convincing when followed up correctly, 10.Nc3! seems like the easier choice for a practical player. Black has nothing better than 10...Nc5 11.Nd4! Nf6 12.f3, when he will have to make too many concessions to save his soon-to-be-trapped queen.

b) 6...Qa5?! 7.Nc4 Qc7 wastes too much time. White gets a clear advantage with: 8.Ne3! d6 9.Nd5 Qd8 10.Bg5 h6 11.Be3 Nf6 12.Nxf6† Bxf6 13.Be2 Nc6 14.0-0 Be6 15.Nd4 Bd7 16.Qd2 Bg7 17.Rad1± Tomczak – Weichhold, Poznan 2015.

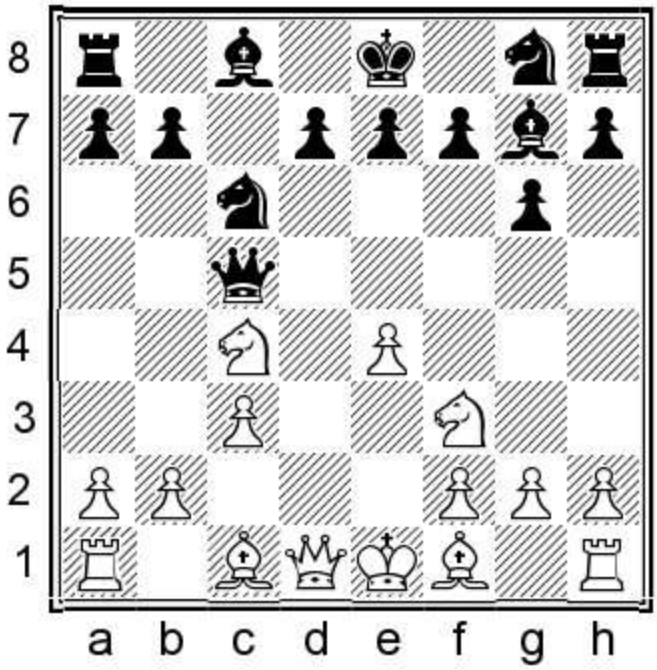
c) 6...b6?!
This leads to significant problems for Black after:
7.Be3 Qc6
No better is: 7...Qc7 8.Bc4!N 8...Nc6 (8...d6 9.Qd5; 8...Bb7 9.Qb3+–) 9.Nb5 Qb8 10.Qd5+–
7...Bxc3†N is the best try, although 8.Nd2! Bxd2† 9.Qxd2 Qa5 10.Qxa5 bxa5 11.Nb5 Na6 12.f3± is highly unpleasant for Black.
8.Bc4 Bb7 9.0-0 Nf6 10.Bxf7† Kf8



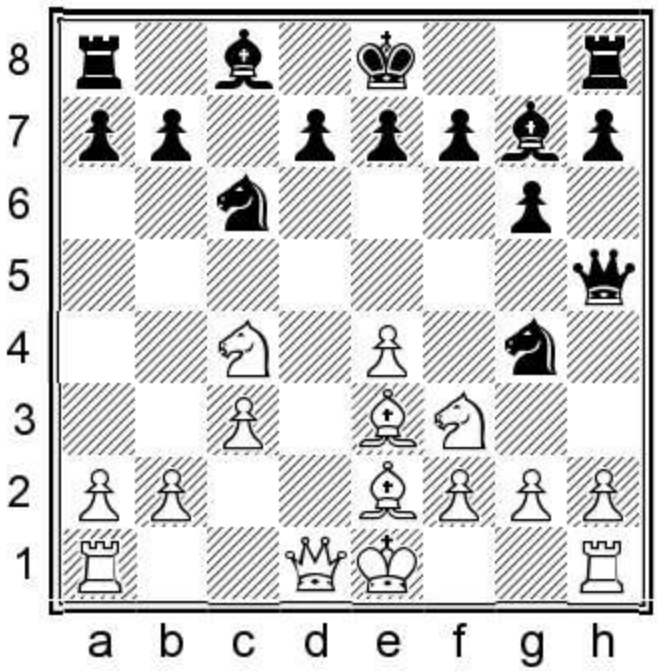
Now in Oliva Meneses – Hernandez Sanchez, Pocos de Caldas 2013, White's most accurate continuation would have been:
11.Bc4N 11...Nxe4 12.Re1+–
With an overwhelming initiative for a mere pawn.

d) 6...Nc6 7.Nc4!
The knight shows its versatility! Now Black's queen is liable to be chased around the board.

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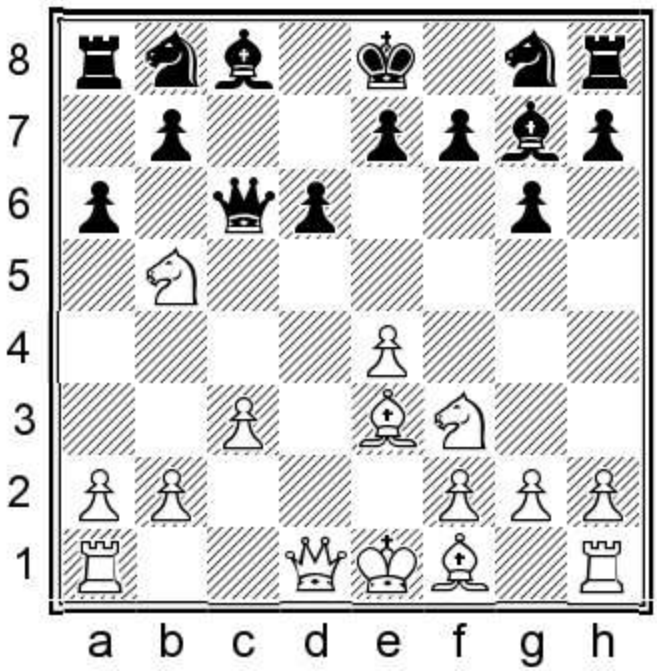


7...Nf6
7...Na5 8.Be3 Qc7 occurred in Saldano Dayer – Meza, Lanus 2010, when 9.Nxa5N 9...Qxa5 10.Bc4² would have given White a significant lead in development.
8.Be3 Qh5 9.Be2 Ng4



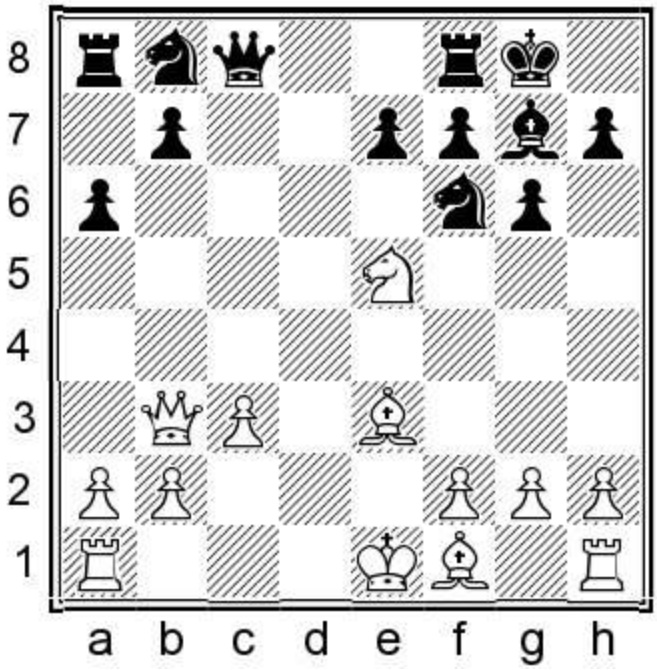
10.Bg5!?N
10.Bf4 Qc5 11.0-0 also gave White the upper hand in Larochelle – Gueorguiev, Montreal 2013, but I like the idea of provoking a weakening pawn move even more.
10...h6 11.Bc1 Qc5 12.0-0 Nce5 13.Nfxe5 Nxe5 14.Ne3 e6
This weakens some dark squares but if Black doesn't play it he will have a hard time coping with the knight coming to d5.
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15.f4 Nc6 16.Kh1±

e) 6...d6 7.Nb5 Qc6
7...a6 8.Be3 Qc6 transposes.
8.Be3 a6

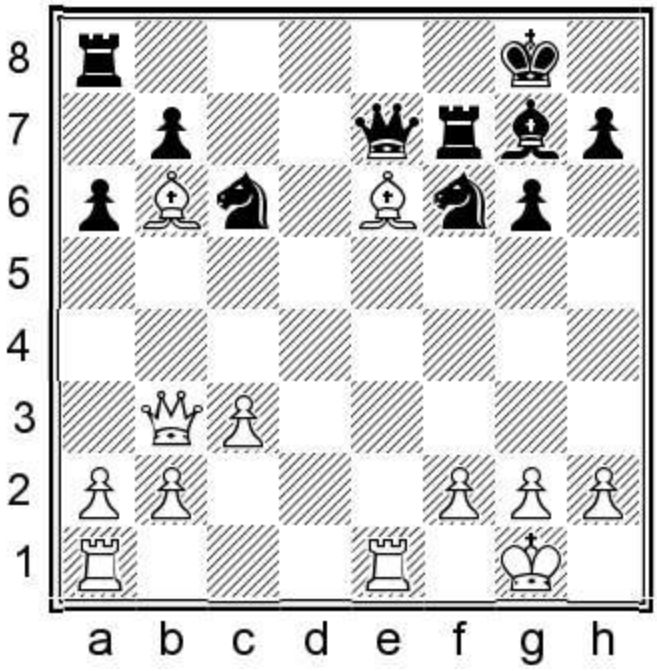


9.Na7! Qc7
9...Rxa7?! 10.Bxa7 Qxe4† is hardly sound. 11.Be2!?N (11.Qe2 Qxe2† 12.Bxe2 Nc6 13.Be3± was also good in Faure – Mondry, corr. 2012) 11...Nc6 12.Be3 Nf6 13.0-0 0-0 14.Re1±
10.Nxc8 Qxc8 11.Qb3!
If White developed in simple fashion, he would have a safe edge thanks to his bishop pair. However, it turns out that he can do even better.
11...Nf6
Another game continued: 11...Nc6 12.Ng5 Nh6 13.h4 0-0 14.f3± Borstnik – Skarba, corr. 2008.
12.e5 dxe5 13.Nxe5 0-0

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14.Nxf7! Rxf7 15.Bc4 e6
15...Qe8 was seen in Kovalev – Walentukiewicz, Litomysl 2004, when White could have forced a winning endgame with: 16.Bxf7†!N 16...Qxf7 17.Qxb7 Qd5 18.Qxd5† Nxd5 19.0-0-0 e6 20.c4 Nxe3 21.Rd8† Kf7 22. fxe3+–
16.Bxe6 Qc7 17.0-0 Nc6 18.Bb6 Qe7 19.Rfe1
White has a serious advantage and in the following game Black failed to offer much resistance:



19...Raf8?! 20.Rad1 Nh5 21.Rd7+–
Eisenbeiser – Bopp, Salzburg 2004.

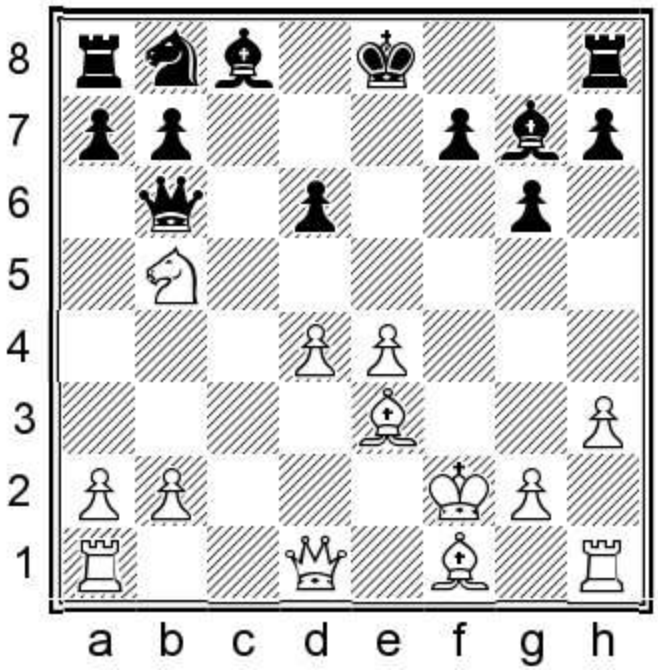
7.Nb5!
Now Be3 is a serious threat.

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7...b6?!
This used to be regarded as Black's best defence, until the strength of White's next move became clear. There are three other options to consider:

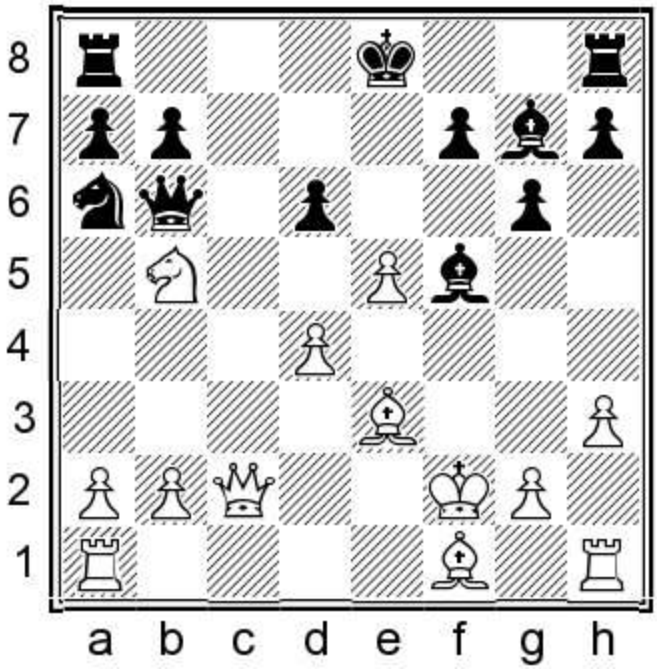
7...Nxe4? has not been played and is easily refuted after: 8.Be3 Qc6 9.Nfd4 Bxd4 10.cxd4! Na6 11.d5 Qf6 12. Bd3+–

7...Ng4?!
This is also bad on account of:
8.Nfd4!± d6 9.h3 Nxf2
9...Nf6 10.Be3 Nxe4 11.Ne6 was winning for White in Swinkels – Ghysels, Belgium 2005.
10.Kxf2 e5 11.Be3 exd4 12.cxd4 Qb6
White won quickly in Amin – Ibrahim, Cairo 2010, but could have played better at this point:



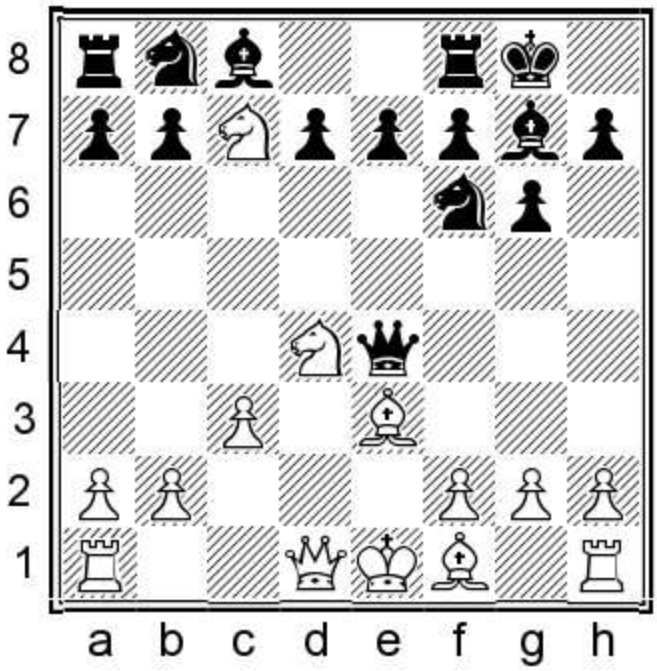
13.Qc2!N 13...Na6
13...0-0 14.Nc7 Bxd4 15.Re1 wins easily.
14.e5! Bf5
14...0-0 15.Nxd6 makes things easy for White.
14...dxe5 15.dxe5 Qe6 16.Nd6† Kf8 17.Bc4 Qxe5 18.Nxf7 Qf6† 19.Kg1+–

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15.Nxd6† Qxd6 16.Bb5† Kf8 17.Qxf5 Qb4 18.Qd7
White has a decisive advantage.

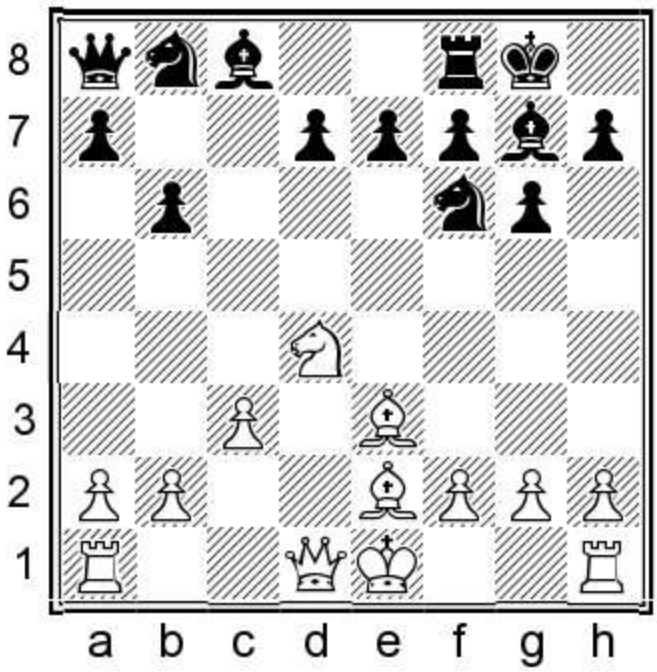
7...0-0!?
This is objectively the best defence but it enables White to win the exchange by simple means, which explains why it hasn't been a popular choice.
8.Be3 Qc6 9.Nfd4 Qxe4 10.Nc7



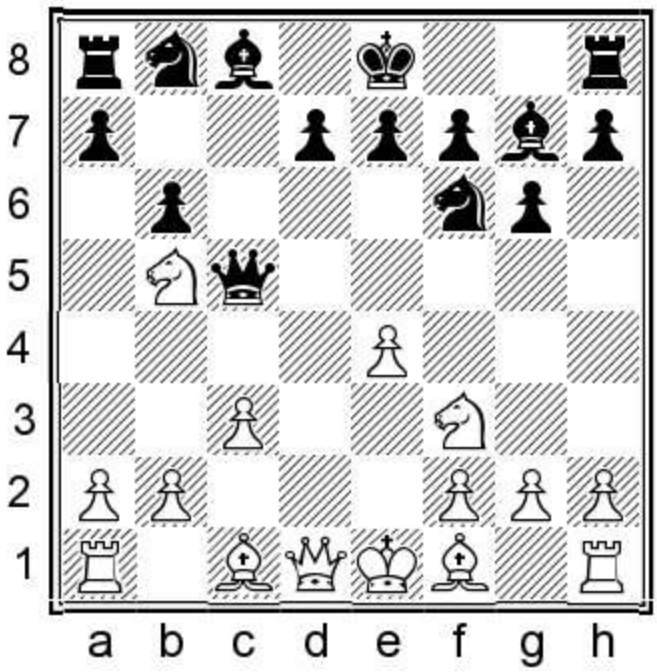
10...b6
10...Nd5!? is an ambitious move; it doesn't quite work, but White needs to find some accurate moves. 11.Nxa8 Nxe3 12.fxe3 Qxe3† 13.Qe2 Qg5 14.Nf3 Qa5 In Rodriguez Guerrero – A. Hoffman, Evora 2006, White should have continued: 15.Qb5!N 15...Bxc3† 16.Kf2 Qxb5 17.Bxb5 Bxb2 18.Rab1 Ba3 19.Nc7 e6 20.Bd3 a6 21.Rb3

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Bc5† 22.Ke2 d5 23.Rc1 Although the technical task will not be easy, White should ultimately be winning.
11.Be2
11.Qf3!? Qxf3 12.Nxf3² was also good in Schakel – Titzhoff, email 2012.
11...Qb7 12.Nxa8 Qxa8



13.Bf3 Bb7 14.0-0²
In Bruzon Batista – Malakhov, Yerevan 2000, Black had some compensation for the exchange, but not enough for equality.



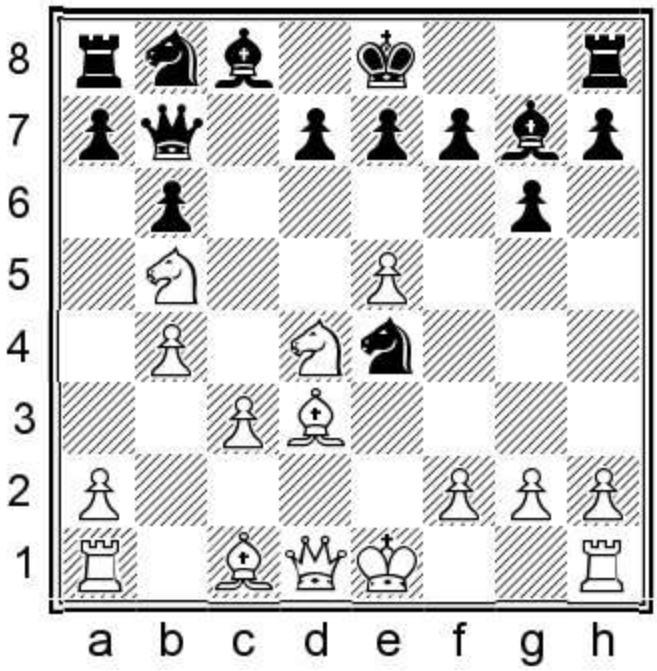
8.b4!
This is the key move which enables White to obtain an advantage by force.

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8.e5 Ng4 9.Qd4 used to be regarded as critical, but Black is okay after: 9...Nxe5! 10.Nxe5 (10.Qxc5 Nxf3† 11. gxf3 bxc5 12.Nc7† Kd8 13.Nxa8 Bb7 14.Be2 Bxa8 15.Be3 d6 gave Black excellent positional compensation for the exchange in Shaposhnikov – Malakhov, Moscow 2007) 10...Qxe5† (10...Bxe5? 11.Qe4! was nasty in Varnavski – Pasalic, Moscow 2011) 11.Qxe5 Bxe5 12.f4 a6 13.fxe5 axb5 14.Bxb5 Nc6 White did not have much of an advantage in Robatsch – Bilek, Havana 1965.

8...Qc6 9.e5 Ne4
9...Ng4 10.Nfd4 Qe4† 11.Qe2 Qxe5 12.f4± was hardly satisfactory for Black in Aharon – Arnaudov, Plovdiv 2012.

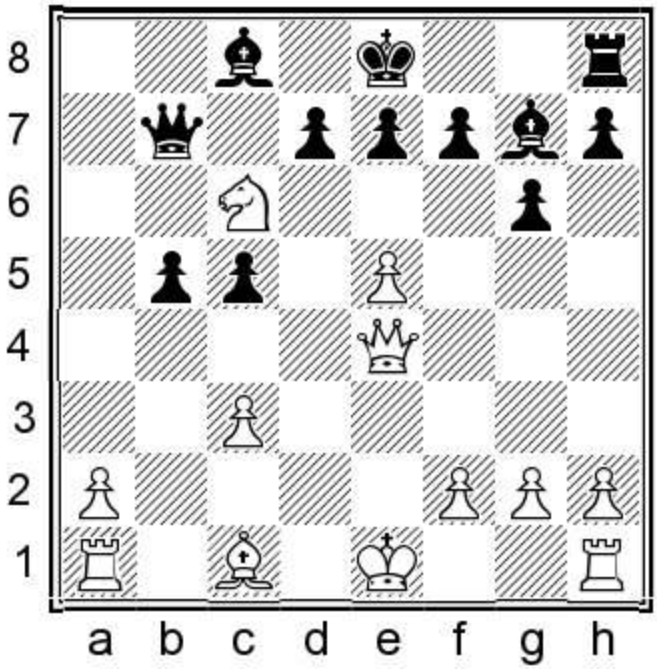
10.Nfd4 Qb7 11.Bd3



11...a6
Black also fails to solve his problems with: 11...d5 12.exd6 0-0 13.0-0 Nxd6 14.Nxd6 exd6 15.Bf4 d5 16.Re1 Nc6 17.Nb5 Qd7 18.Nc7 Rb8 19.Bb5 Bb7 20.Nxd5 Rbd8 21.c4± Khan – Simmelink, corr. 2014.

12.Qe2! axb5
White is also much better after: 12...Nc5 13.bxc5 axb5 14.Be4 Nc6 15.Qf3 Ra4 16.Nxc6 Rxe4† 17.Qxe4 bxc5

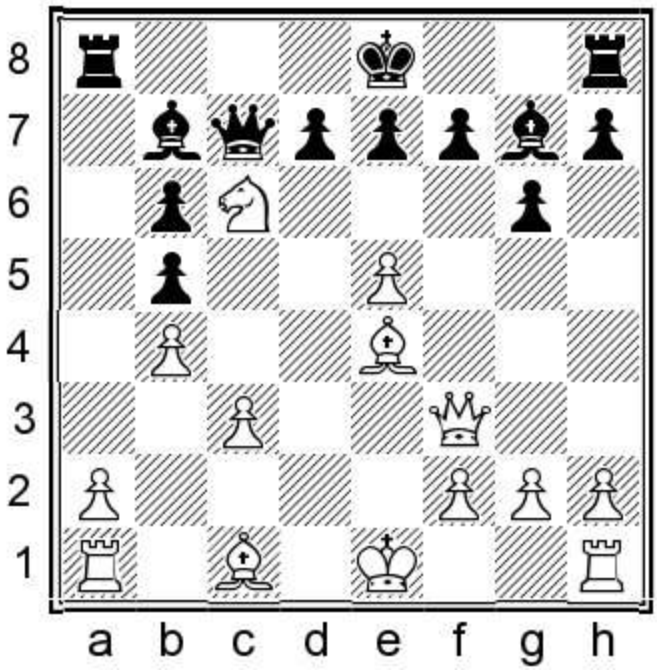
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18.Be3!?N (18.0-0 Qxc6 19.Qxc6 dxc6 20.Re1 was also good enough in Babic – Chazalette, corr. 2013) 18... Qxc6 19.Qxc6 dxc6 20.Bxc5 Bxe5 21.Bd4± The rest is a matter of showing good technique.

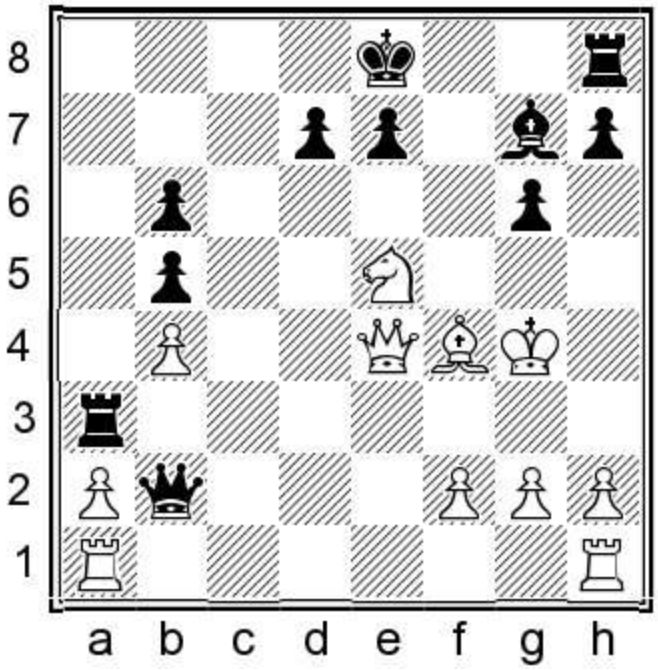
13.Bxe4 Nc6 14.Qf3
Should you reach this position, I recommend 14.f4!N 14...0-0 15.Nxb5 as the most accurate way to maintain a clear advantage.
The text move poses big problems, which gave White a relatively easy win in the game, but it gives Black a chance to resist with the help of a crazy computer line.

14...0-0?
14...Qc7!! was best, intending 15.Nxc6 (15.e6!² would be the right way to keep some advantage) 15...Bb7! and now my main line continues:



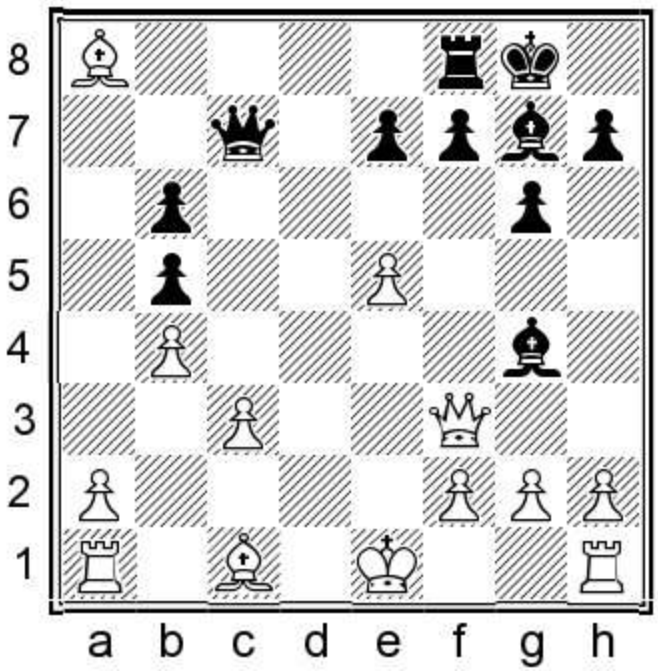
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16.e6! fxe6 17.Bf4 e5 18.Nxe5! Bxe4 19.Qxe4 Qxc3† 20.Ke2 Qb2† 21.Kf3 Ra3† 22.Kg4



22...h5† 23.Kg5 Bf6† 24.Kxg6 Rg8† 25.Kh7 Rh8† 26.Kg6 Rg8†= With a perpetual. There might be an improvement lurking somewhere in this fantastic line, but you can make life easier by going for the improvement noted at move 14.

15.Nxc6 dxc6 16.Bxc6 Qc7 17.Bxa8 Bg4
Perhaps Black was pinning his hopes on this resource, but White deals with it effectively.

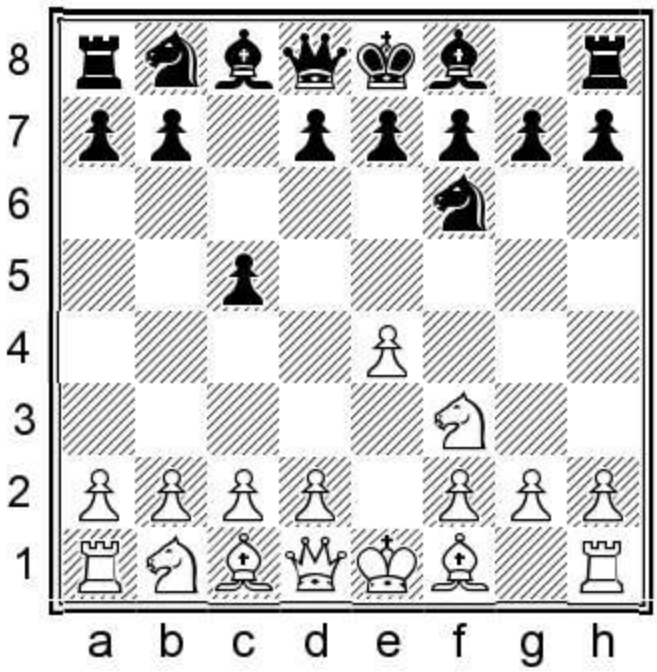


18.Qxg4! Qxc3† 19.Ke2 Qxa1 20.Bd5
Vocaturo easily consolidates with his extra piece and Black soon has to resign.

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20...e6 21.Bb3 Rc8 22.Qg5 Bxe5 23.Rd1 Bf6 24.Qe3 Rc3 25.Qd2
1–0

F) 2...Nf6



3.e5
Opinions are divided on how White should respond to the cheeky knight. 3.Nc3 is certainly a decent option but I am happy to take up the challenge of punishing Black's provocative second move.

3...Nd5 4.Nc3!
This forces Black to make an important decision. Retreating the knight to b6 or c7 would be an obvious concession, so I will concentrate on the two most important options of F1) 4...e6 and F2) 4...Nxc3.

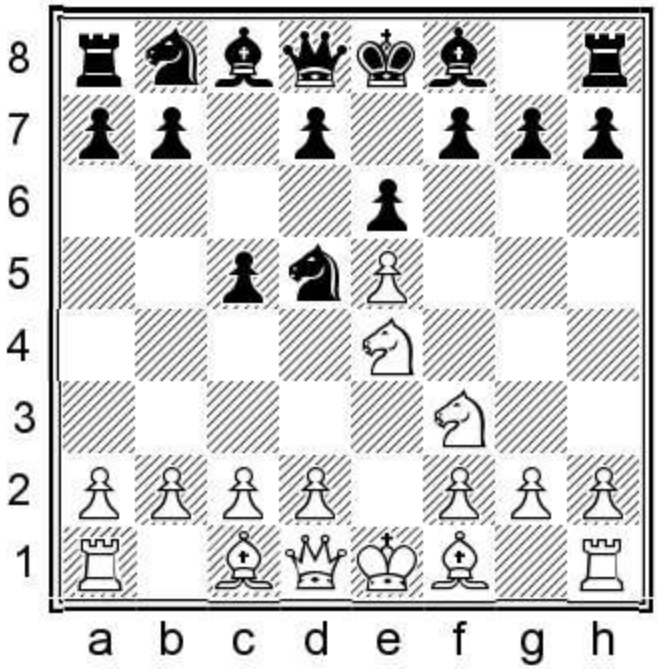
F1) 4...e6

Against this move, I believe the most practical solution to be:

5.Ne4!?
This offers White good chances of an opening edge, while requiring minimal theoretical knowledge.

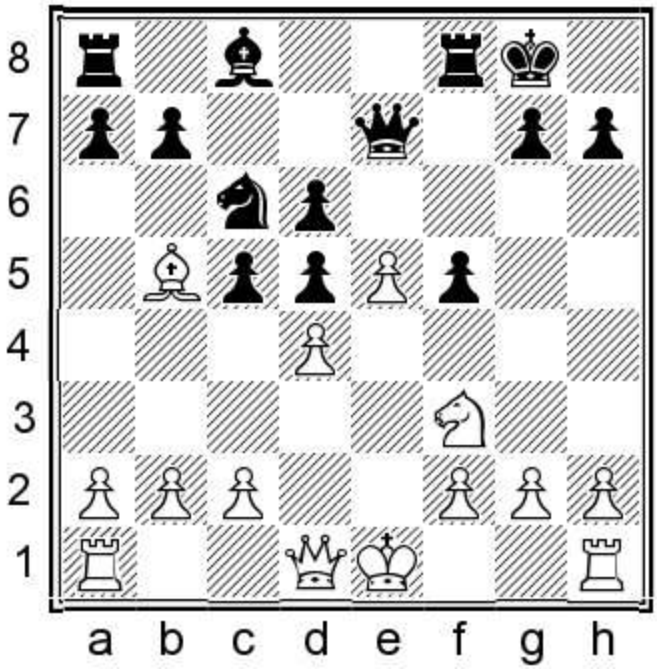
5.Nxd5 exd5 6.d4 is the maximalist approach; play may continue 6...Nc6 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.Qxd5 Qb6 (8...d6!? is another serious move) 9.Bc4! when White is undoubtedly better, but it takes a lot of complicated analysis to prove it. If we were playing a correspondence game, this would be the best attempt to refute Black's opening play, but for practical players I don't believe it makes sense to invest time and effort learning the finer points of such a double-edged line when the chances of encountering it are so small. Instead, the text move offers a pleasant position and can be learnt in five minutes or less.

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5...f5 6.Nc3
This is the idea: White does not mind losing time with the knight, as the ...f5 move weakens Black's position.

6...Ne7!?
6...Nc6 7.Nxd5 exd5 8.d4 offers White easy play. 8...d6 9.Bg5 Be7 10.Bxe7 Qxe7 11.Bb5 0-0 occurred in Ni Hua – Carlstedt, Helsingor 2011, when the most accurate continuation would have been:



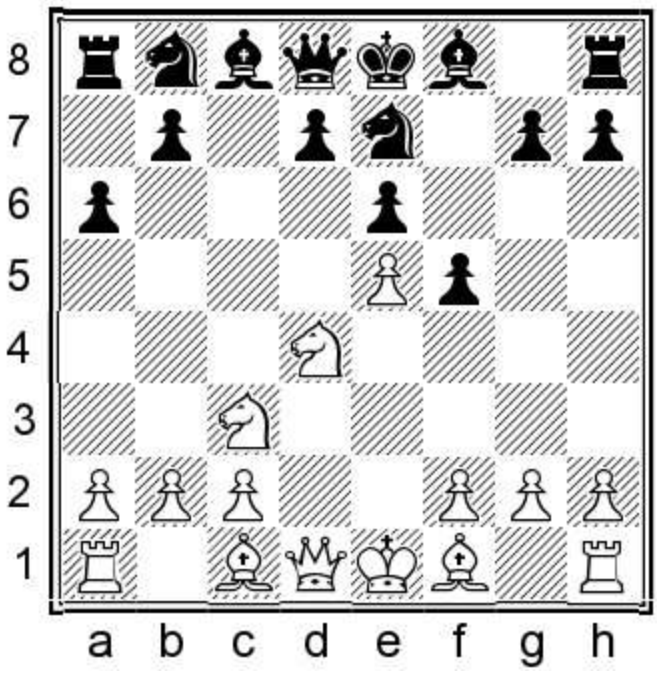
12.dxc5!N 12...Nxe5 13.0-0 Nxf3† 14.Qxf3 dxc5 15.Qxd5† Be6 16.Qe5² White enjoys a risk-free advantage.

7.d4
This seems natural, although 7.Nb5!? Nec6 8.b3!? may appeal to players with a creative streak.

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7...cxd4 8.Nxd4 a6
8...Ng6 occurred Schuele – Wittke, Bavaria 1999, when 9.f4!N would have been strong, for instance: 9...Qb6 (9...Nc6 10.Be3 d5 11.exd6 Bxd6 12.g3±) 10.Be3± and the b2-pawn is poisoned: 10...Qxb2 11.Ndb5 Bb4 12. Bd2+–

This position was reached in Rasmussen – Granberg, corr. 1976. I think White should have continued:

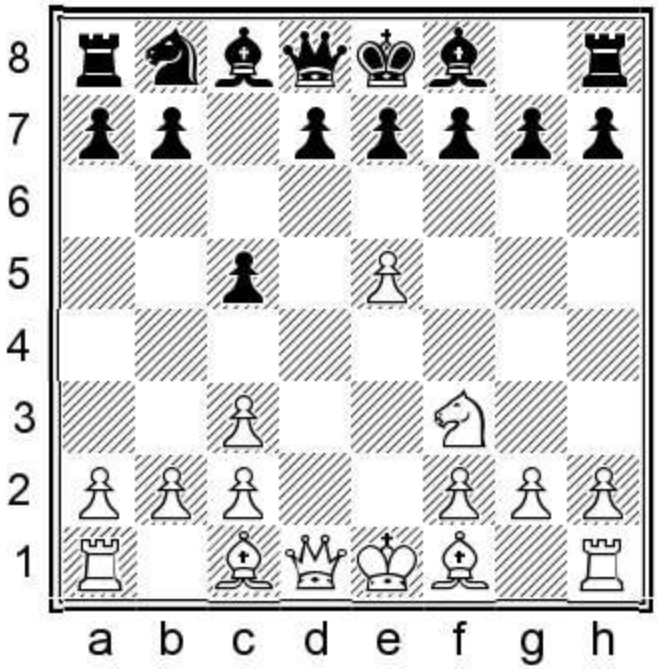


9.f4!?N
I prefer White's chances, but will end the analysis here as there are many possibilities and few forced lines. In the event of the natural 9...Nbc6, White has several decent moves including 10.Be2, 10.Be3, or even 10.Nb3!? to prevent the knight exchange and keep Black cramped.

F2) 4...Nxc3 5.dxc3

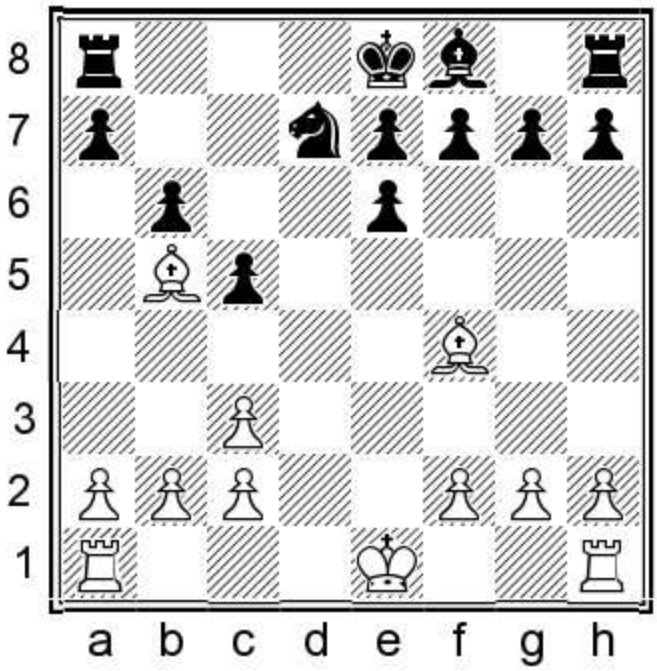
This used to be regarded as clearly better for White but it gained in popularity a few years ago, as a new plan emerged which yielded Black some impressive results.

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5...Nc6
5...d5 6.exd6 followed by Bf4 is comfortably better for White, with or without a queen exchange. White has easy development and no further theoretical knowledge is needed.

5...b6? was shown to be a losing move more than eighty years ago: 6.e6!! dxe6 (6...fxe6? loses even more quickly after 7.Ne5, as in Le Garrec – De Winne, France 1997) 7.Qxd8† Kxd8 8.Ne5 Ke8 9.Bb5† Bd7 10.Nxd7 Nxd7 11.Bf4



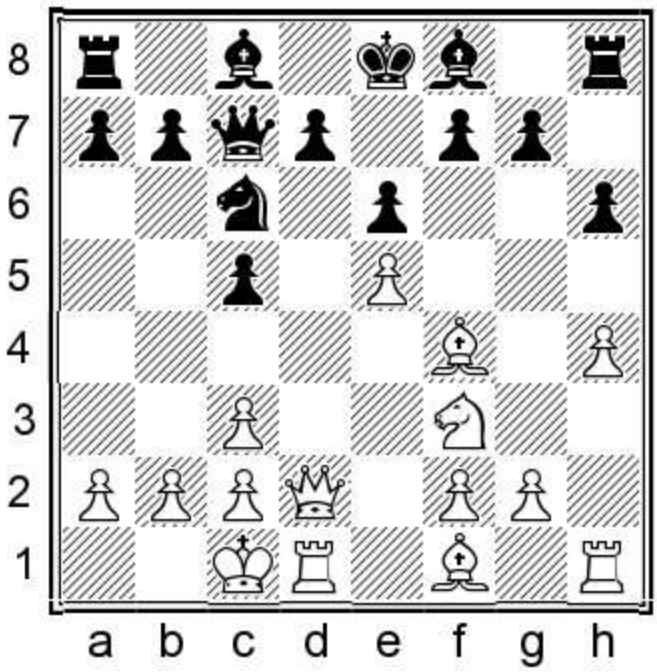
11...a6 12.Bc6 Rc8 13.Bb7 Rd8 14.Bc7 Rb8 15.Bxa6 Ra8 16.Bb5 Ra7 17.Bxb6 Rb7 18.Bxd7† Kxd7 19.Bxc5 Rxb2 Probably played as a joke... 20.0-0-0† 1–0 Rellstab – Schoenmann, Hamburg 1932.

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6.Bf4 Qb6!?

This is the big idea which has contributed to the recent resurgence of this line for Black.

Several games game continued with: 6...e6 7.Qd2 Qc7 8.0-0-0 h6 9.h4²



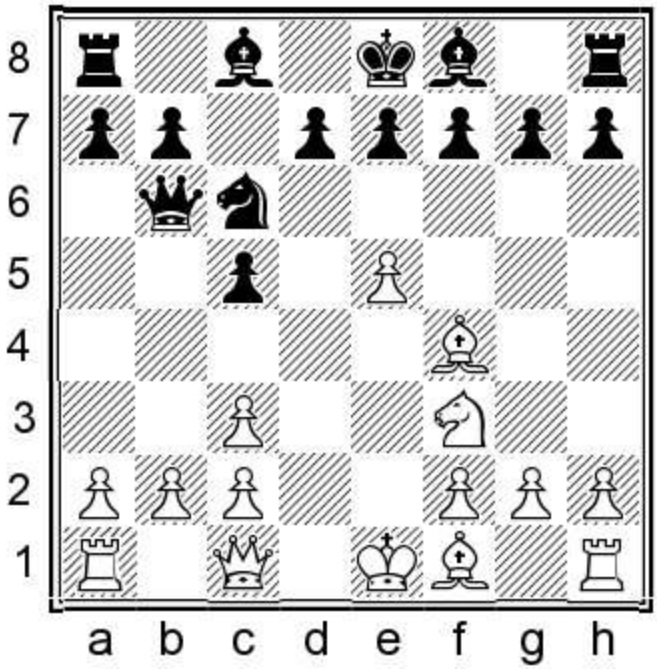
This is White's model set-up, which ensures him of a comfortable game. Black's position is solid but he suffers from a lack of space and counterplay, and there are not many players queuing up to defend his position these days.

7.Qc1!
Both of the obvious alternatives have drawbacks:

After 7.Rb1 Black will happily retreat his queen to c7, as White's extra move has done nothing apart from give up the right to castle queenside.

7.b3 has been the most popular choice but it weakens the queenside. 7...Qc7 8.Qd2 e6 9.0-0-0 It would be safer to prepare kingside castling instead. 9...a6! Black sets his plan in motion; here is a good example where White was unable to find a good way to meet it: 10.Qe3 b5 11.Kb1 c4 12.Be2 Bb7 13.Rd2 Ne7µ Maryasin – Rakhmanov, Teplice 2015. The inclusion of b2-b3 led to obvious problems on the queenside in this game.

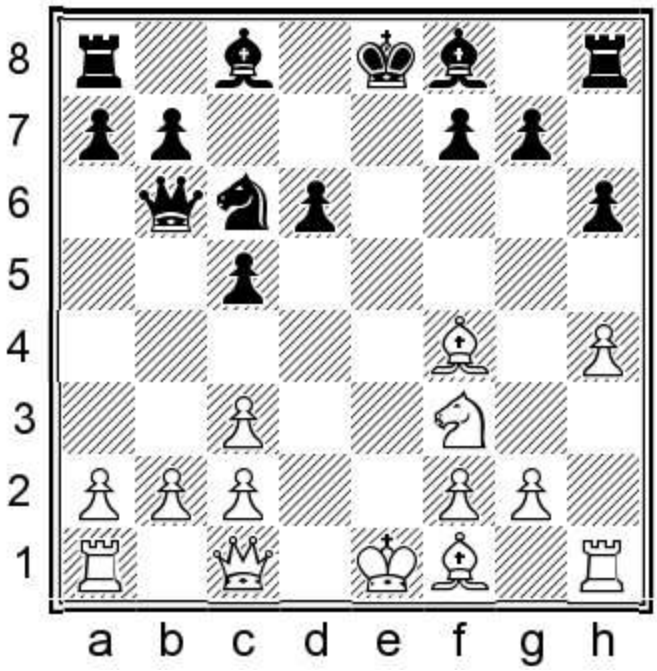
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Let’s stop to consider the situation with the queens on b6 and c1. Neither queen is particularly well placed, but neither player wants to be the first to move his queen away. Black wants to continue eyeing the b2-pawn; if he goes for a plan involving ...e6 and ...Qc7 (to prepare ...b6 and ...Bb7), White will simply play Qd2 and 0-0-0, just as in the 6...e6 line noted above. The problem for Black is that he doesn’t have so many useful developing/waiting moves: ...e6, ...Be7 and perhaps ...h6 are the obvious ones, whereas White can play h4-h5, Rh3, Be2/d3, and possibly Rg3 or g2-g4. Black will run out of useful ideas before White, and at some point he will have to decide how to develop his light-squared bishop.

7...f6!?
Challenging White’s central pawn seems like a logical idea.

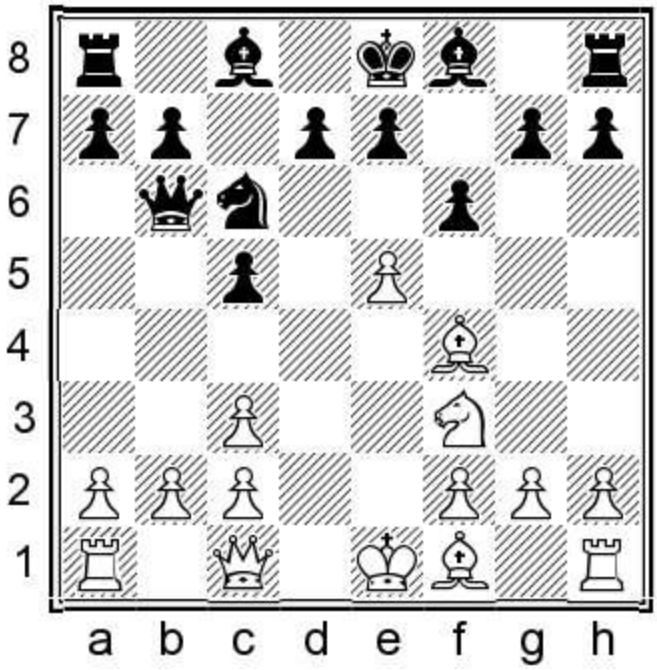
7...h6 8.h4 d5 9.exd6 exd6 was Rodshtein – Ipatov, Germany 2014. I suggest:



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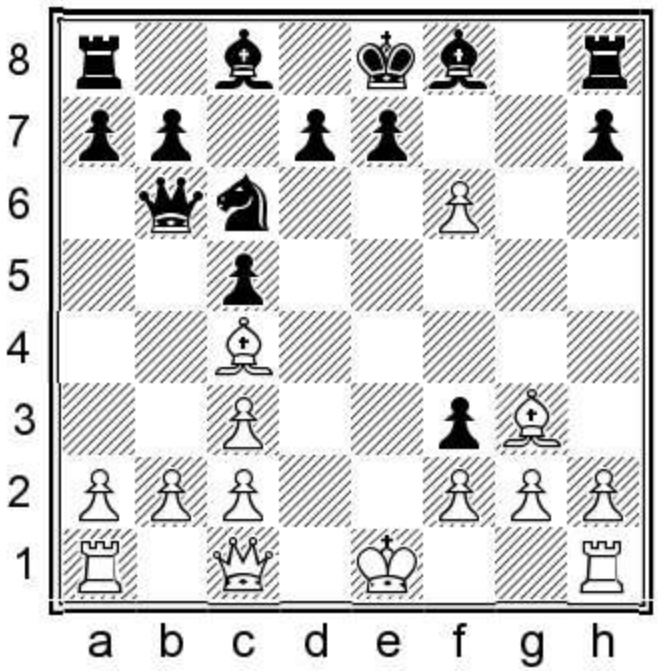
10.Qe3†N 10...Be6 11.Bc4 Qxb2 12.0-0 0-0-0 13.Bxe6† fxe6 14.Qxe6† Kb8 15.Qb3 Qxb3 16.axb3²

After the text move I found a promising new idea for White.



8.a4!N
I believe this to be the strongest move, although the game continuation can also be investigated:
8.Bc4!?
White maximizes his development while preparing to sacrifice material.
8...g5!
8...d6 9.exf6 gxf6 10.Qe3 gives White a serious lead in development, as Peter Heine Nielsen points out.
9.Bg3
9.exf6?! gxf4 10.Qxf4 Na5 11.fxe7 Bxe7 is a less promising version of the piece sacrifice.
9...g4 10.exf6! gxf3

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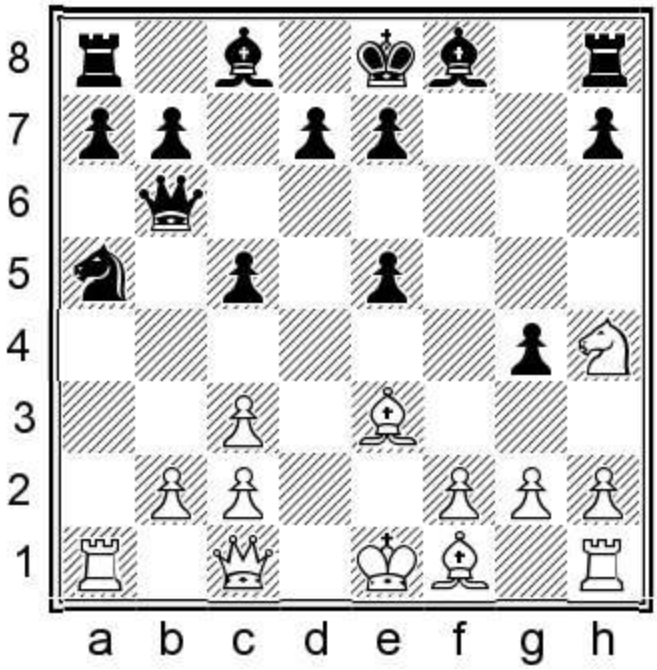
11.0-0!?N
11.Qf4 fxg2 12.Rg1 occurred in the game, when the critical continuation would have been: 12...h5!N (12...Na5? 13.f7† Kd8 14.Bd5 was too dangerous for Black in Carlsen – Grandelius, Stavanger 2016) 13.Rxg2 Kd8 14.fxe7† Bxe7 15.0-0-0 h4 16.Bxh4 Bxh4 17.Rg8† Rxg8 18.Qxh4† Kc7 19.Bxg8÷
11...Na5!
Both 11...fxg2? 12.Re1± and 11...e6 12.Qf4± are great for White.
12.f7† Kd8 13.Bd5 Qg6©
White has a lasting initiative for the piece, so you could certainly explore this as an alternative to my new suggestion, to which we now return.

8...d6
This seems like Black's most challenging continuation. Here are some other lines which demonstrate the effectiveness of White's plan, which involves speedy development and throwing in a4-a5 at a suitable moment to distract Black from the centre.

8...fxe5 9.Bxe5! gives White excellent prospects.

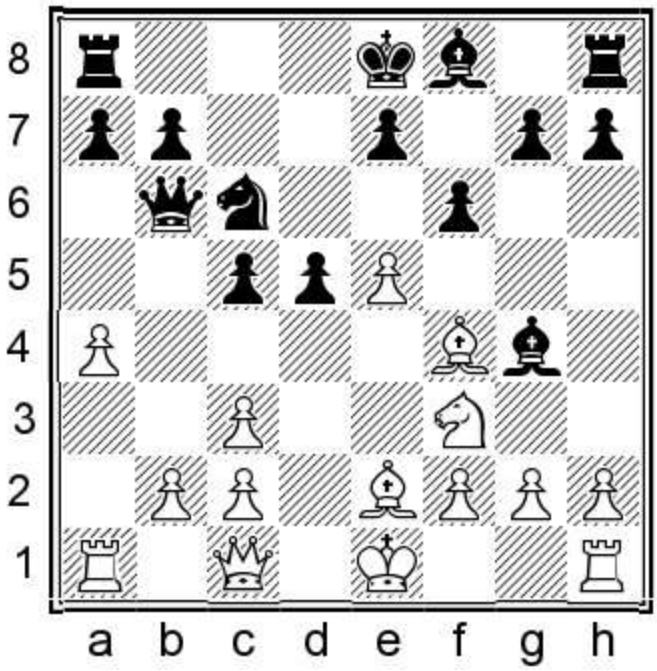
8...g5 9.a5! Nxa5 10.Be3 leaves Black with poor development and many weaknesses. Play may continue: 10...g4 11.Nh4 fxe5

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12.b4! Nc6 13.Bxc5 Qc7 14.Qg5 White has a dangerous initiative for a mere pawn.

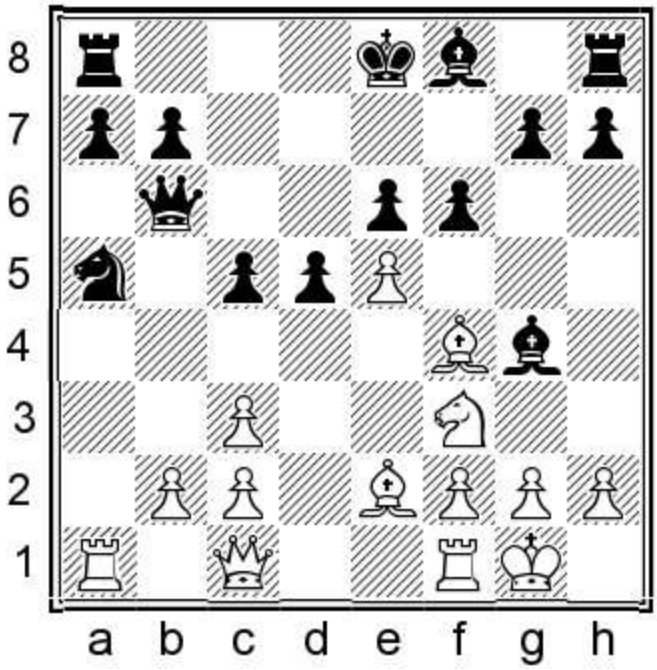
8...d5 9.Be2
9.exd6 is mentioned in the note to White's next move in the main line below.
9...Bg4
In the event of 9...g5 10.Bg3 g4 (10...h5 11.h3²) 11.a5! Nxa5 12.Nh4² Black's slow development and kingside weaknesses are more relevant than his extra pawn.



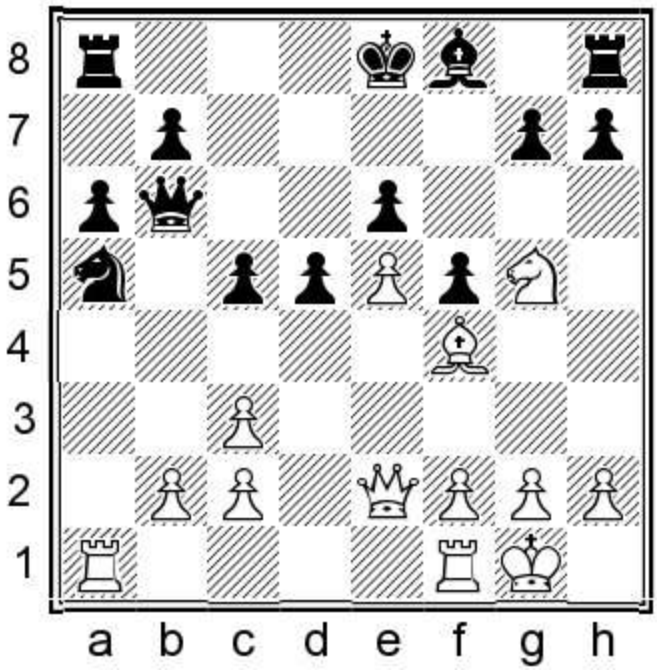
10.a5!?
Once again, we can sacrifice the a-pawn in order to lure Black's knight away from the centre.
10.Qe3!? is a decent alternative; for instance, 10...d4 11.cxd4 cxd4 12.Qd2 Qxb2 13.0-0 Qc3 14.Qd1© with good play for a pawn.

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10...Nxa5 11.0-0
11.Qe3 would be met by 11...e6.
11...e6
11...Nc6?! 12.Qe3±

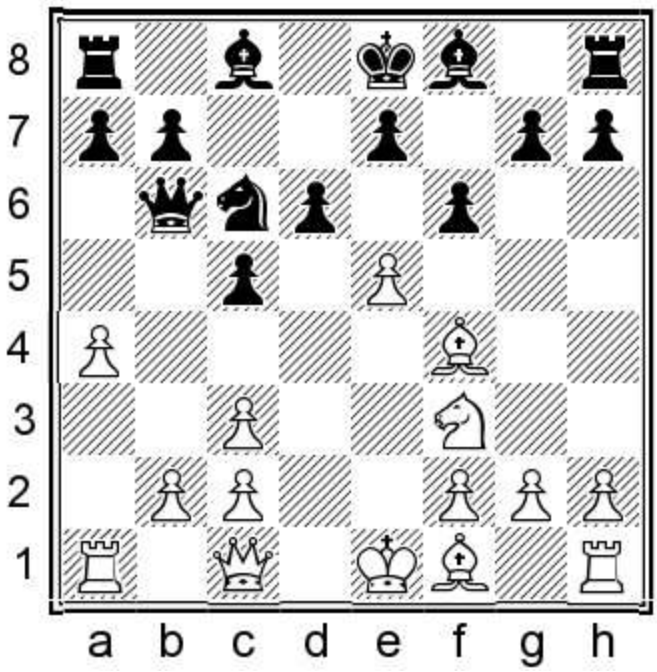


12.Qe1!?
12.Qe3 f5 13.b4 (13.Ng5 Nc4!) 13...Nc6 14.Rfb1 Bxf3 15.Bxf3 Nd8 16.Bg5² is a good alternative.
12...f5
12...Be7 also fails to equalize for Black: 13.exf6 Bxf6 (13...gxf6?! 14.Nh4!±) 14.b4 Nc6 (14...cxb4 15.Be3 Qd8 16.Nd4²) 15.Ng5²
13.Ng5 Bxe2 14.Qxe2 a6



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15.c4! Nxc4
15...dxc4 and 15...d4 are both strongly met by 16.Bd2.
16.b3 Na5 17.Bd2 Nc6 18.Nxe6²
White's initiative is worth more than a pawn.



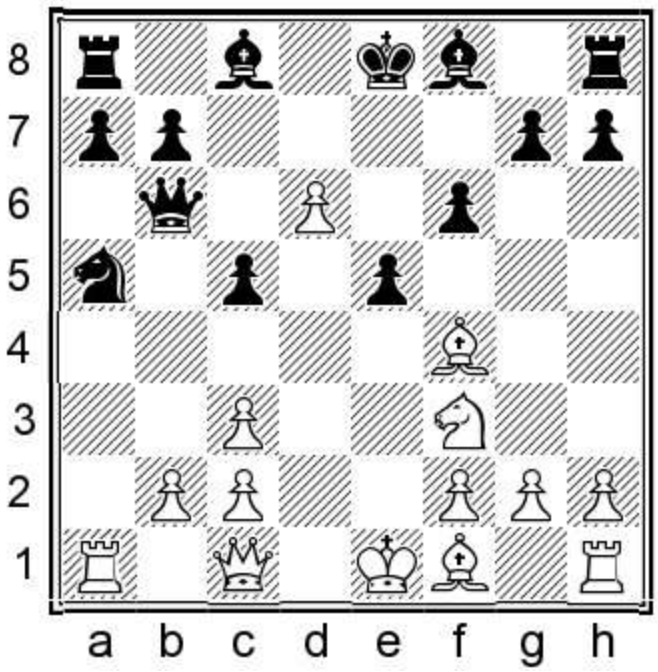
9.a5!?
Once again, this pawn sacrifice leads to promising play for White.

9.exd6 is a decent alternative which does not require learning any forcing variations. Black must reply with 9...e5 10.Be3 Bxd6, and now 11.Nd2! leads to a positional game where White should be able to utilize the c4- and (potentially) d5-squares to good effect.

9...Nxa5
9...Qd8 10.exf6 gxf6 11.a6 e5 12.Bh6² leaves Black with a position full of weaknesses.

10.exd6 e5

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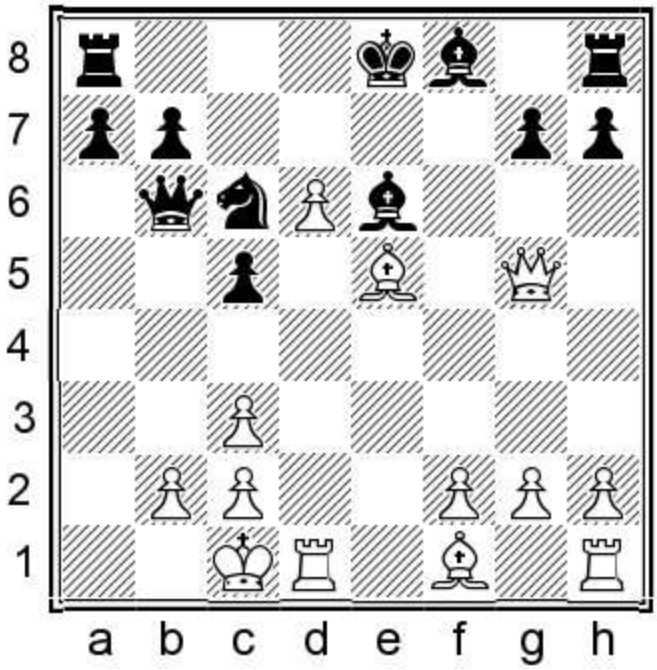
11.Nxe5!
This is the big idea behind White's 9th move.

11...fxe5 12.Bxe5©
White has excellent compensation for the piece, with a lasting initiative against Black's unsafe king.

12...Be6
12...Bg4? is refuted by 13.Qg5! Qxb2 14.Qxg4 Qxa1† 15.Kd2 Qb2 16.Qe6† Kd8 17.Bd3 and Black has no defence.

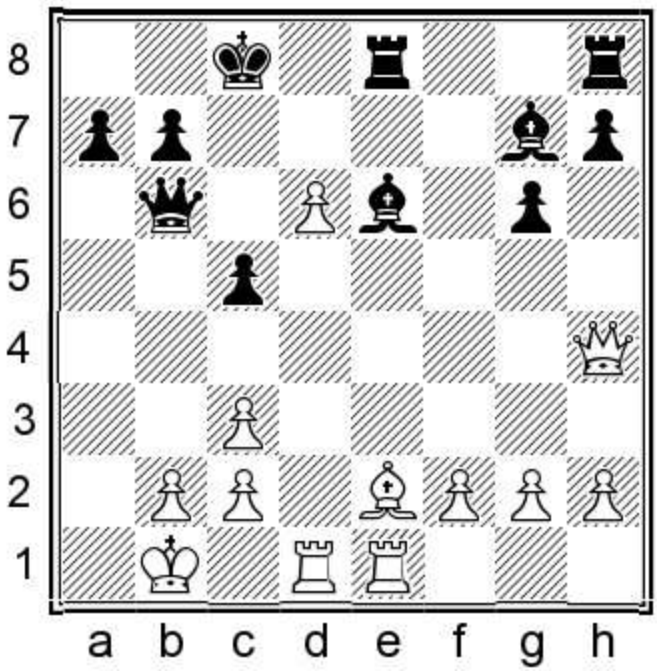
13.Qg5 Nc6 14.0-0-0!
I also considered 14.Bc4 Bxc4 15.d7† but found no more than a draw after: 15...Kf7! (15...Kxd7? 16.0-0-0† Ke8 17.Rhe1 Qa6 18.Bf6† Ne7 19.Bxe7 Qa1† 20.Kd2 Qa6 21.Re4 Be6 22.Bxf8 Rxf8 23.Ke3±) 16.Qf4† Ke7 17.Qh4† Kxd7 18.0-0-0† Ke8 19.Rhe1 Nxe5 20.Qxc4 Be7 21.Rxe5 Rd8 22.Rde1 Rd7 23.Rxc5 Rf8 24.Rc8† Rd8 25.Rc7=

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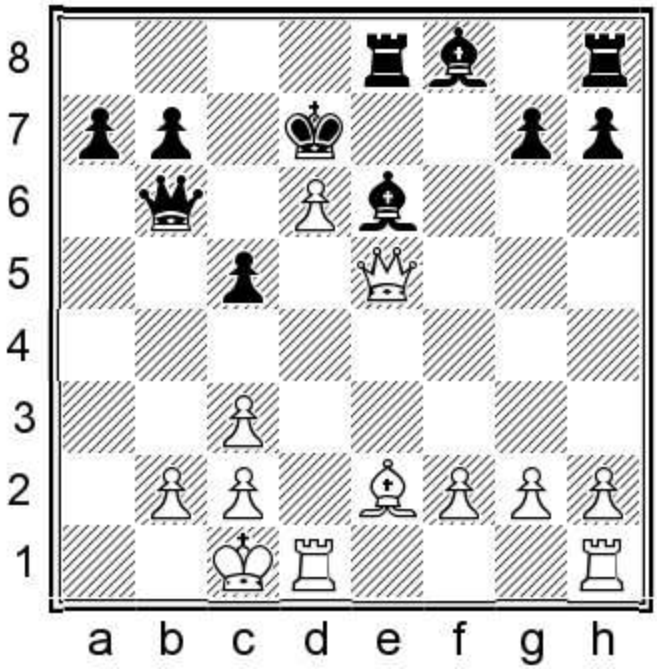
14...Kd7 15.Be2
White develops another piece and prepares to bring his second rook into play.

15...Nxe5 16.Qxe5 Re8
It is too early for 16...g6? in view of: 17.Kb1 Bh6 18.Rhe1 Rae8 19.Qf6 Kc8 (19...Rhf8 20.Qh4+–) 20.Qh4 Bg7



21.Bg4 Bxg4 22.Qxg4† Kb8 23.Rxe8† Rxe8 24.Qd7 Rg8 25.Qf7 Qd8 26.d7 Bf6 27.Qd5±

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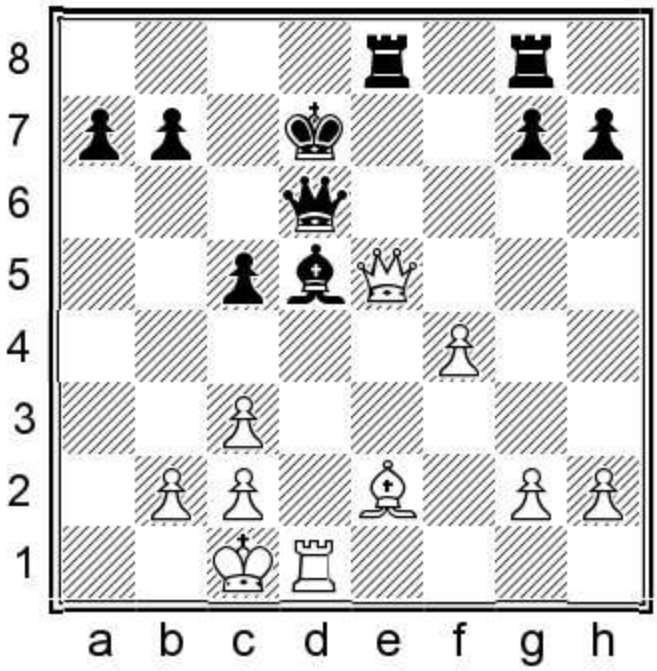


17.f4!
At first it may look as if White intends to advance his f-pawn, but the real purpose of this move is to block the h6-c1 diagonal, preventing Black from solving his kingside development problems with ...g6.

17...Rg8
17...Bxd6 is similar to the main line.

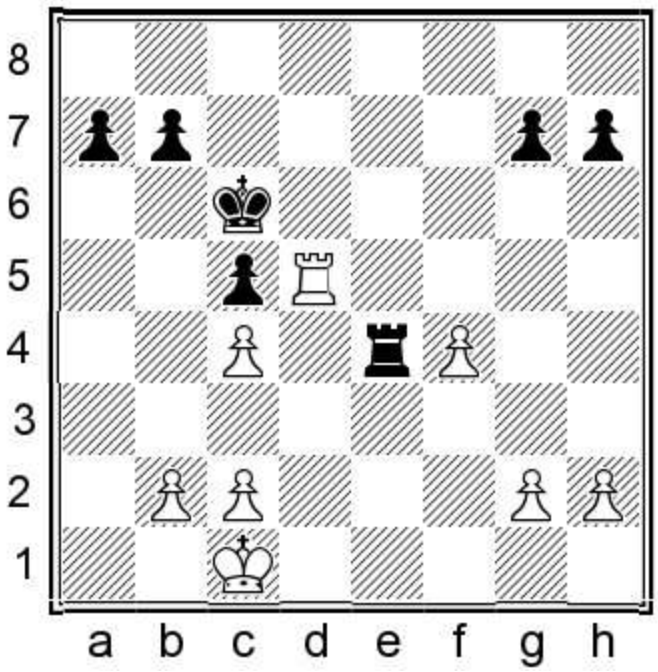
18.Rhe1 Bxd6
Black has nothing better, but now White gets to regain the sacrificed piece.

19.Rxd6† Qxd6 20.Rd1 Bd5



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21.Bb5† Kc7 22.Qxd6† Kxd6 23.Bxe8 Rxe8 24.c4 Re4 25.Rxd5† Kc6
After a mostly forced sequence, White can keep some winning chances with:



26.Rg5! g6 27.f5 gxf5 28.Rxf5 Rxc4 29.Rf6† Kd5 30.g3!
Intending Rb7 (or Rh6), winning a pawn. I won't attempt a final evaluation as I've probably already analysed too deeply, but it's fair to say that Black is under pressure and must fight for a draw.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with an assortment of rare lines. 2...Qc7 is okay when Black uses it to transpose to mainstream lines, but it could prove risky if Black tries to get too clever, as shown after my 5.Nb5!N idea. 2...Qa5 is another eccentric queen move, which is hard to justify after the logical response of 3.Nc3 followed by g2-g3.

2...a6 is a respectable move but after 3.c4! Black ought to transpose to the Kan. Instead, 3...d6 4.d4 Bg4 5.dxc5! offers White excellent chances, as Game 39 demonstrated. 2...b6, on the other hand, can be met by 3.d4, when White tends to get a good version of an English Attack.

Another pawn move, 2...g6, should also be met by 3.d4, when Black should settle for a transposition to a Dragon or Accelerated Dragon. Instead 3...Bg7 4.dxc5! gives White excellent chances, although White needs to know some precise details in order to make the most of his chances.

Finally, I suggest meeting 2...Nf6 with 3.e5 Nd5 4.Nc3!. Then 4...e6 5.Ne4!? offers White a practical, non-theoretical path to a good position, while 4...Nxc3 5.dxc3 also offers White excellent prospects, as long as he knows how to meet the ...Qb6 plan featured in variation F2.

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Chapter 13 - 2...e6 - Sidelines

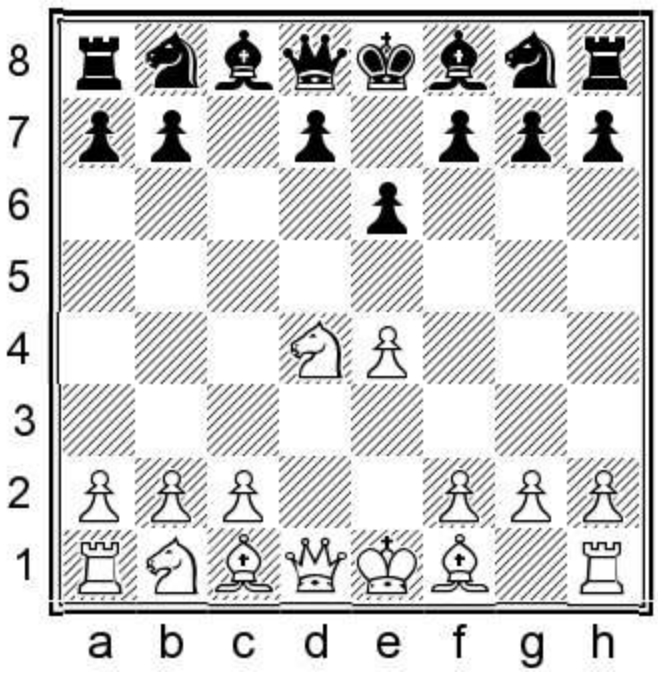
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

A) 4...Qb6 327
B) 4...Bc5 5.Be3 329
B1) 5...Nf6 330
B2) 5...Qb6 6.Nb5! Bxe3 7.fxe3 331
B21) 7...Qxe3†? Game 41 332
B22) 7...Nf6?! 337
B23) 7...Nc6?! 339
B24) 7...Ke7! 340
C) 4...Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.e5 342
C1) 6...Ne4? 343
C2) 6...Nd5 7.Bd2 Nxc3 8.bxc3 Be7 9.Qg4 347
C21) 9...0-0?! 350
C22) 9...g6 Game 42 353

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6
In this chapter, we begin our investigation into the Open Sicilian by considering a number of somewhat offbeat lines with the pawn on e6.

Sidelines after 2...Nc6 and 2...d6 will be analysed in the next chapter.

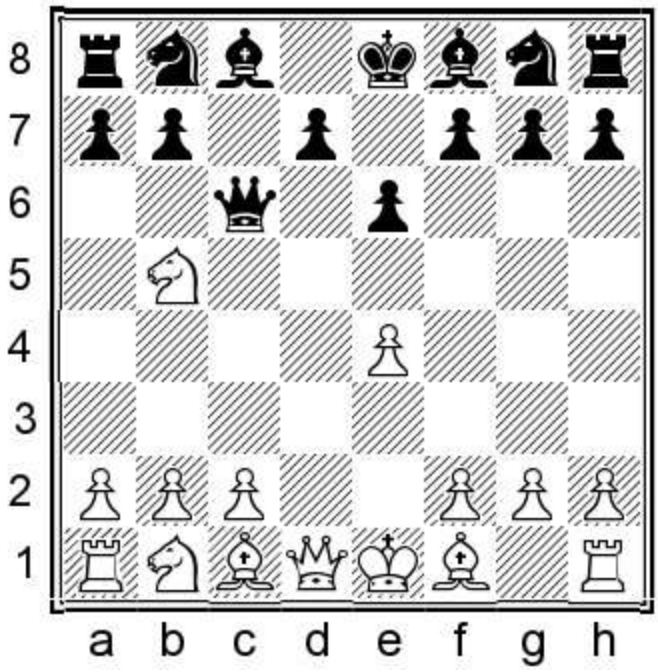
3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4



We will start with the rare moves A) 4...Qb6 and B) 4...Bc5, before checking some minor options after the most common C) 4...Nf6.

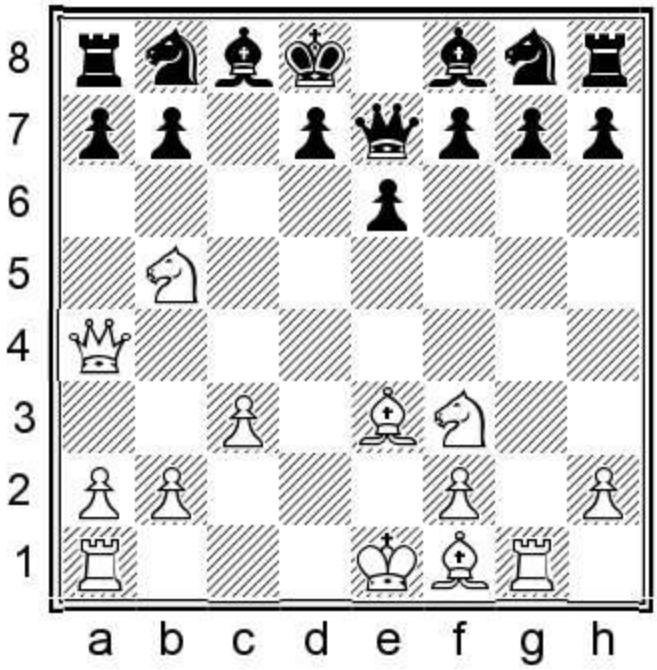
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Black would be ill advised to try:
4...Qc7? 5.Nb5!
This may look crude but Black will be forced to waste several tempos with his queen.
5...Qc6
5...Qe5 gives White a pleasant choice: 6.Be3 (6.Qf3!?N 6...Nc6 7.Qf4± is also excellent) 6...a6 7.f4 Qxe4 8. Nc7† Kd8 9.Qe2 Bc5 10.Nxe6† dxe6 (10...fxe6 11.Bxc5 Qxf4 12.Nc3+–) 11.Bxc5 Qxe2† 12.Bxe2 Nd7 13.Bd4 Ngf6 This was M. Perez Candelario – I. Khamrakulov, Navalmoral 2011, and now 14.Nd2!N 14...Ke7 15.0-0-0± would have given White a great advantage thanks to his powerful bishops, lead in development and safer king.

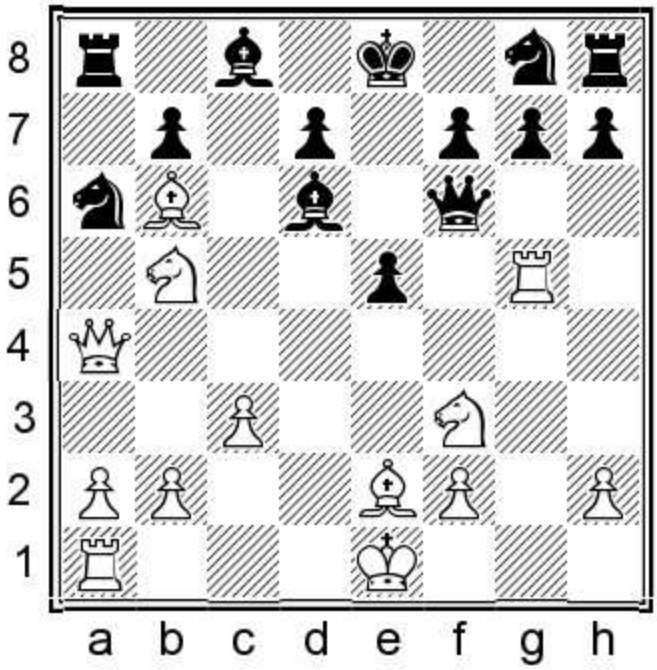


6.Bf4! Qxe4† 7.Be3
It is worth sacrificing a pawn while losing a tempo with the bishop, as Black will have to waste even more time with his queen.
7...Qe5
7...Na6 8.N1c3 Qh4 9.Qf3 was also great for White in Husum – A. Mueller, corr. 2015. White can pick up the pawn on a7 if he wishes, although in the game the plan of Ne4 followed by landing a knight on d6 proved even more inviting.
8.Nd2 Kd8 9.Nf3 Qh5 10.g4 Qxg4 11.Rg1 Qb4† 12.c3 Qe7 13.Qa4
You don’t need to know all the details of this line, as it’s obvious that White’s lead in development is worth much more than a pawn. Still, the following game is a nice illustration of White’s chances.

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13...Na6 14.Bxa7 Qf6 15.Be2 e5 16.Rg5 Bd6 17.Bb6† Ke8
Now the cleanest win would have been:



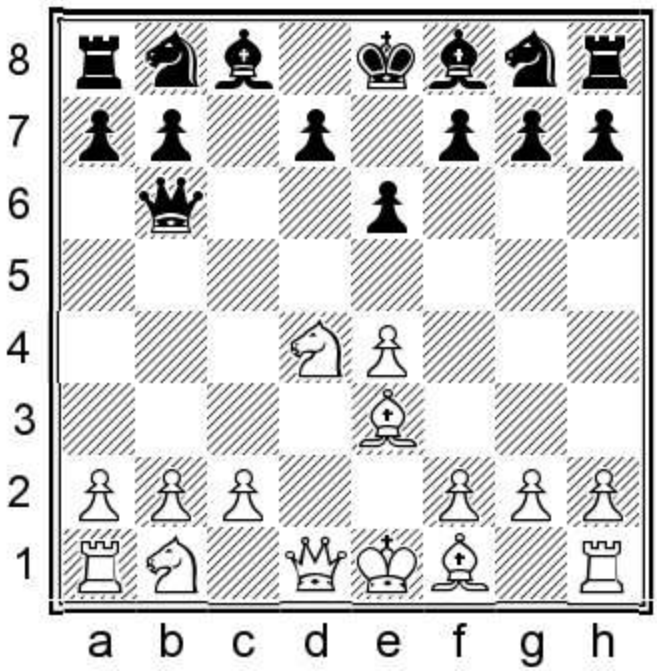
18.Rf5!N
18.Nxd6† Qxd6 19.Rxe5† Ne7 20.Bc5 Nxc5 21.Qxa8 was good enough for a slower victory in Fernandez Romero – Khamrakulov, Pamplona 2012.
18...Qh6 19.Qb3!+–
Black has no good way to defend f7.

A) 4...Qb6

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I suggest meeting this move with a dangerous gambit.

5.Be3!?
5.Nb5 is less convincing after 5...a6 6.Be3 Qa5†, although White should still be slightly better.
The text move is an ambitious pawn sacrifice, leading to a considerable lead in development for White.



5...Qxb2
5...Bc5 is a significant alternative which is covered later under variation B2.

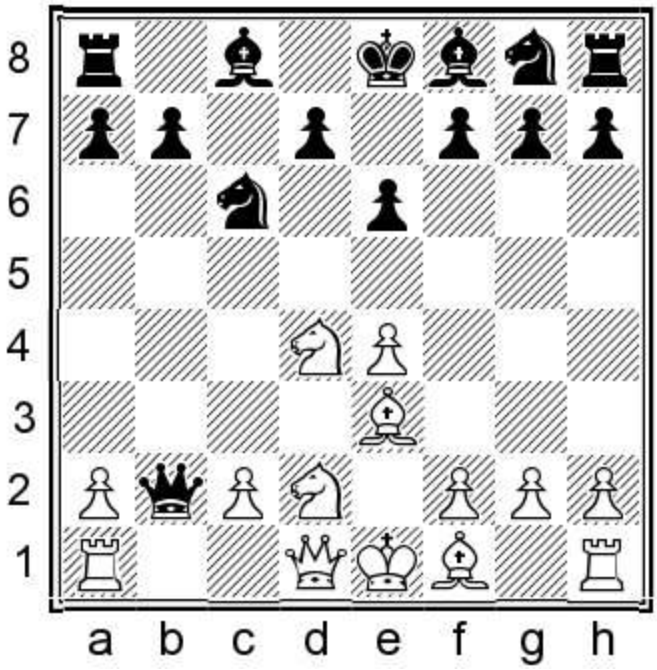
5...Nc6? 6.Nb5 is terrible for Black.

5...a6 is playable but, after the obvious 6.Nd2, the only move to make sense of Black's position is 6...Qxb2, which immediately transposes to the main line below.

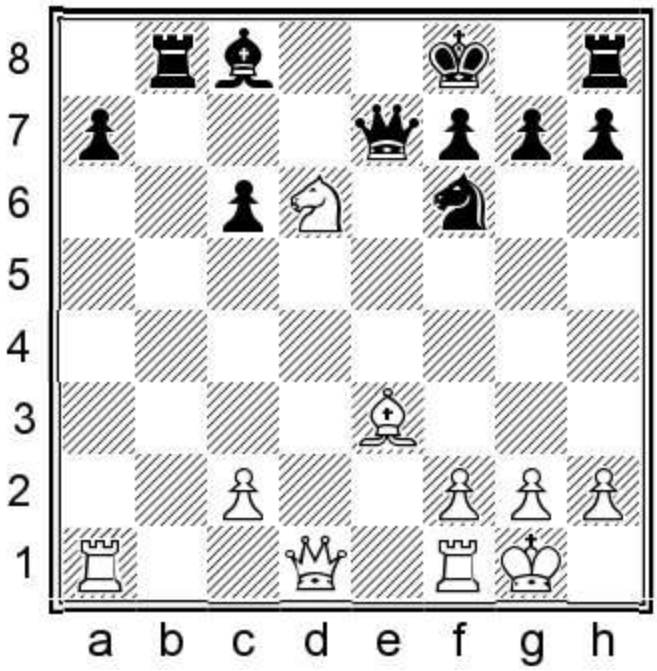
6.Nd2
Now Black has to worry about knight invasions via b5 and c4.

6...a6
Covering the b5-square looks normal. Black has also tried:
6...Nc6
In Fontaine – Giffard, France 1997, White missed the strongest continuation:

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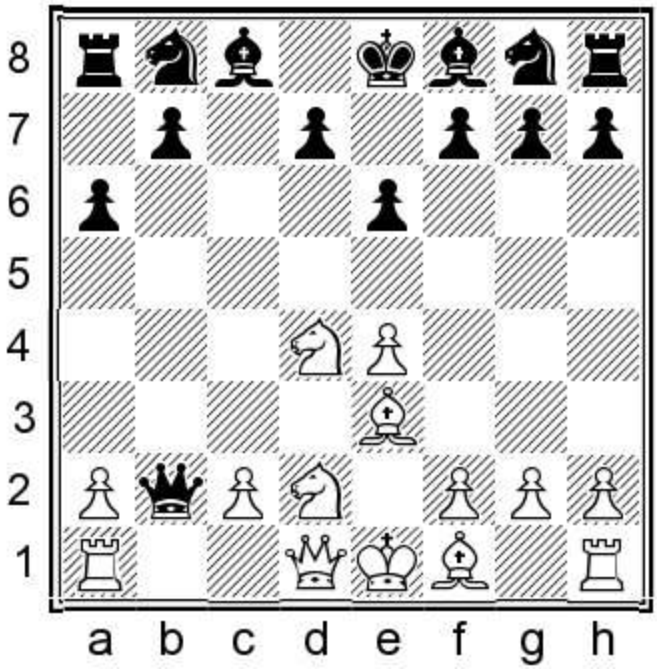


7.Rb1!N 7...Qxa2
7...Qc3 (7...Qa3 leads to the same thing) 8.Nb5 Qa5 9.c3! and White wins on account of the dual threats of Nc4 and Bf4.
8.Nb5 Qa5 9.Ra1 Qd8 10.Nc4 d5 11.exd5 exd5 12.Nb6 Rb8 13.Nxd5 Be7 14.Nxe7!
This is the most damaging of several tempting options.
14...Qxe7 15.Nd6† Kf8 16.Bb5 Nf6 17.Bxc6 bxc6 18.0-0+–
The invasion is about to begin. A cute illustrative line is:



18...a6 19.Bc5 Kg8 20.Nxc8 Qxc5 21.Qd8† Qf8 22.Ne7 mate!

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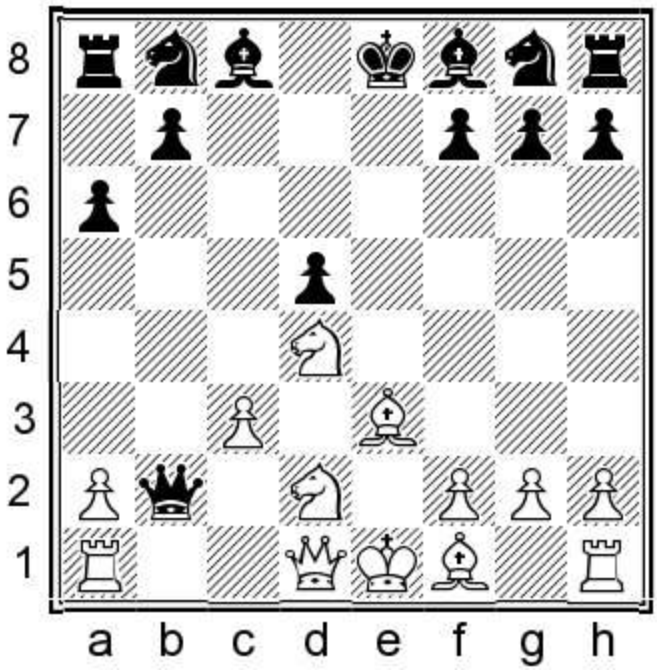


7.c3!
7.Bd3 Qc3 8.0-0 Qc7 9.Rb1© gave White decent play for the pawn in Wei Yi – Zeng Chongsheng, Xinghua 2014, but Black's position remained playable.

The text move is more troublesome for Black, as he no longer gets to shelter his queen on c3.

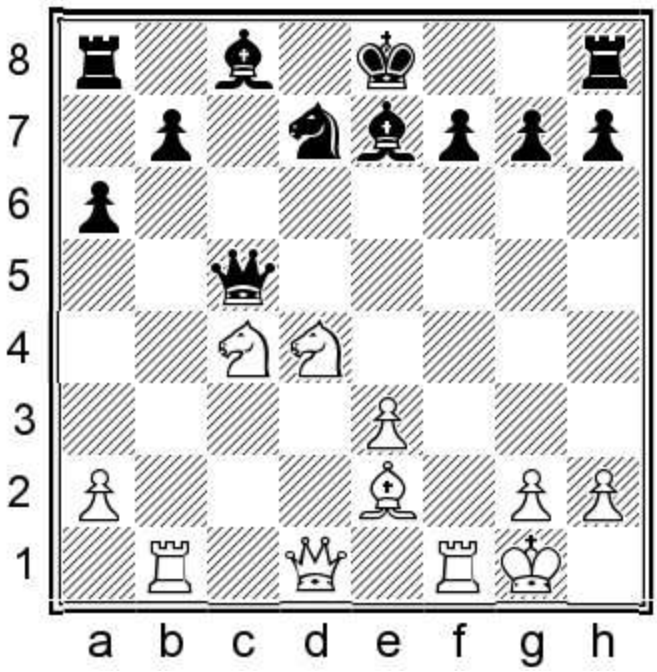
7...Qb6!N
This untested move is Black's best defence.

The one game on my database continued:
7...d5 8.exd5 exd5
In Thinius – Greiner, Jena 2007, White should have continued:



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9.Rb1!N 9...Qa3 10.c4!
White opens the position to exploit his lead in development.
10...Nf6 11.cxd5 Nbd7 12.Be2 Nxd5 13.Nc4 Nxe3 14.fxe3 Qc5 15.0-0 Be7
15...Nf6 allows 16.Nb6.



16.Nf5 0-0 17.Rxb7! Bg5
17...Rd8 18.Nxe7† Qxe7 19.Rc7 Rb8 20.Bf3 should be winning for White.
18.Rxd7 Bxd7 19.Qxd7 Rad8 20.Qb7 Rd5 21.Ng3 Bxe3† 22.Nxe3 Qxe3† 23.Kh1±
This wasn't all forced of course, but it's obvious that Black has a lot of problems in this line.

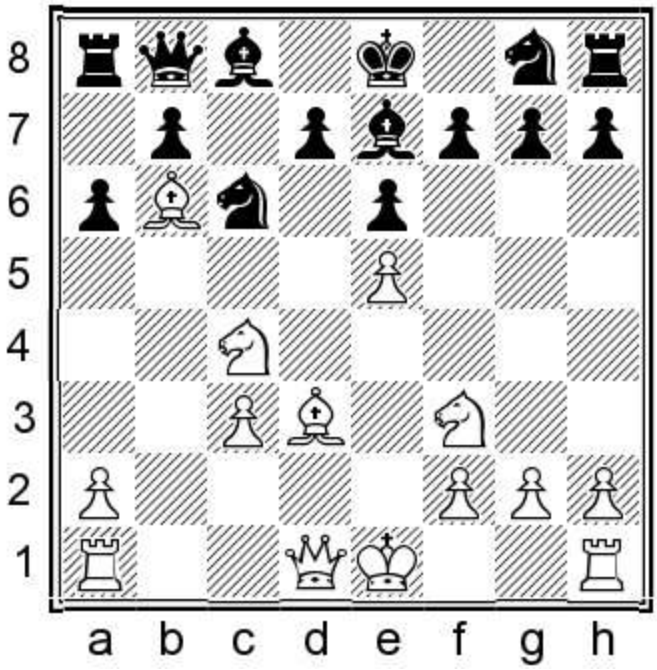
I also considered 7...Nc6N 8.Be2! Qxc3 9.Nxc6 dxc6 10.0-0 when White has superb play for the sacrificed pawns, for instance: 10...b5 11.Rc1 Qb4 12.Rxc6 Nf6 (12...Bd7 13.Rc2 Nf6 14.Nb3±) 13.Qc2 Bd7 14.Bf3! e5 15.Nb3±

8.Nc4 Qc7 9.Nf3!
White takes aim at the outpost on b6.

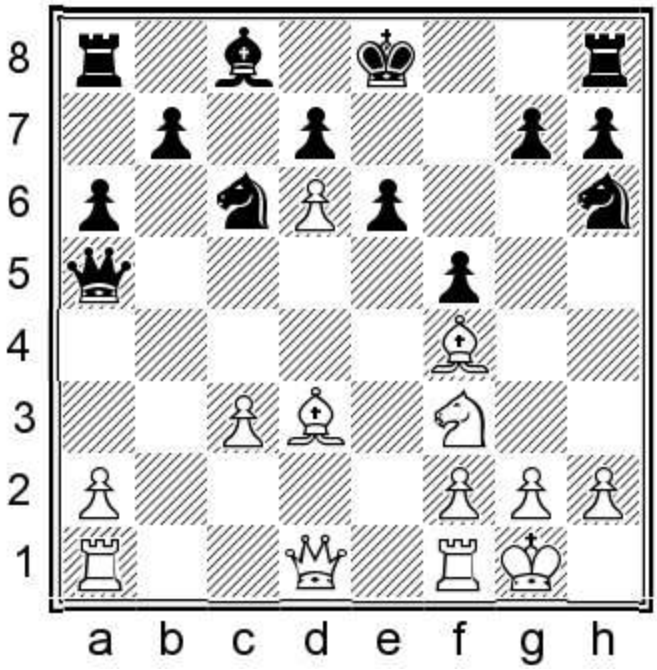
9...Nc6 10.Bb6 Qb8
10...Qf4 11.e5±

11.e5 Be7 12.Bd3
This is the obvious developing move, but 12.Be3!? is an interesting alternative. Either way, it is clear that White has promising play for the sacrificed pawn. Here is an illustrative line.

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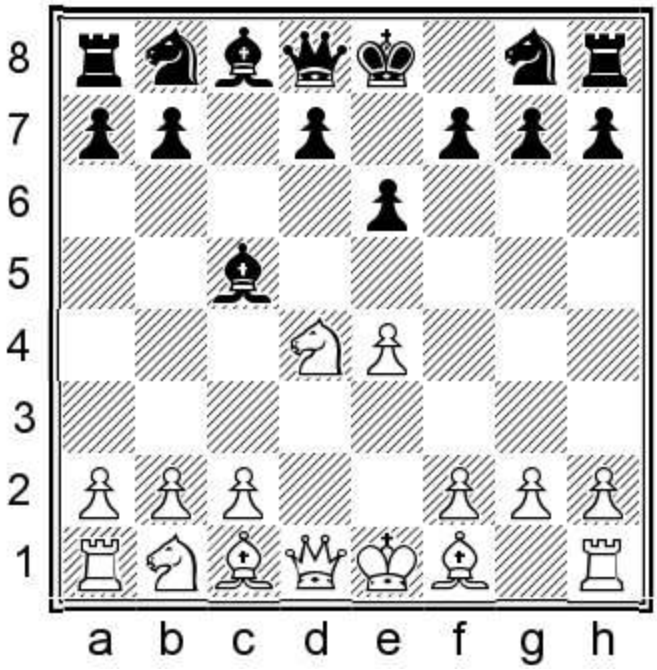
12...f6 13.Be3! Qc7 14.Bf4 Nh6 15.0-0 f5 16.Nd6† Bxd6 17.exd6 Qa5



18.Bxh6 gxh6 19.Qc1 0-0 20.c4²
White keeps the better chances.

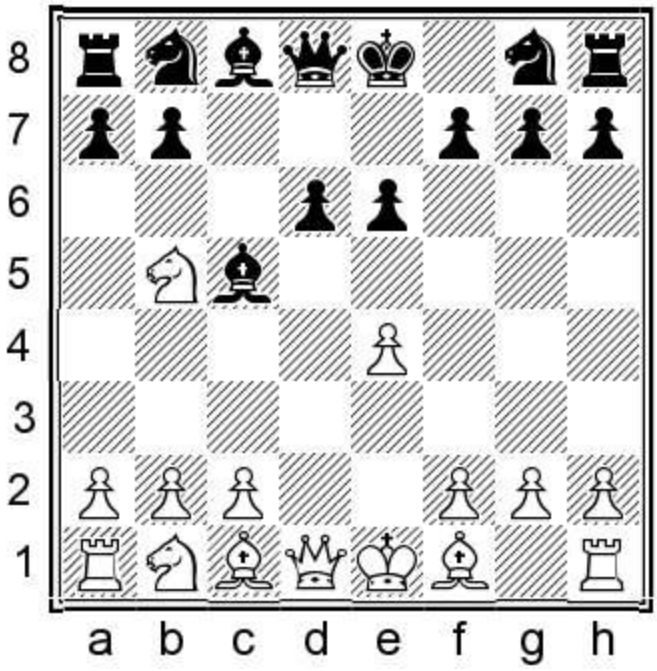
B) 4...Bc5

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There was a recent attempt to promote this variation in The Lazy Man's Sicilian, a translation and update by Steve Giddins of a previous book written by Broznik.

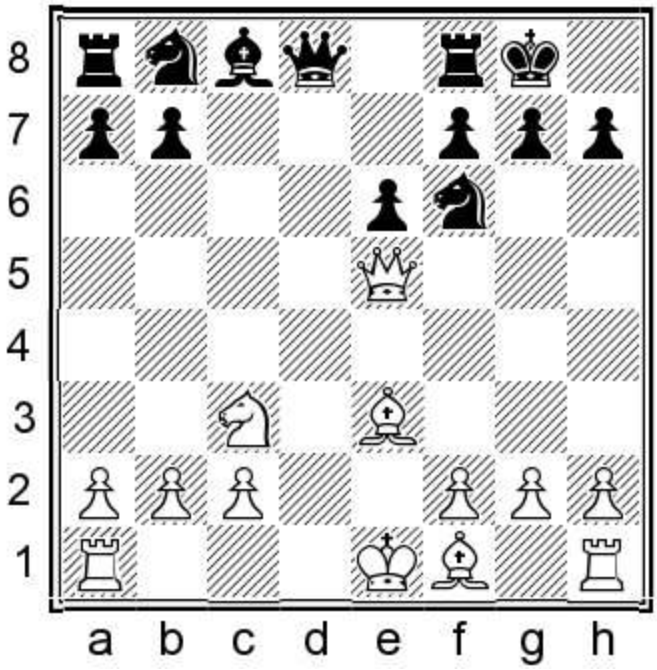
5.Be3
5.Nb5!? is an alternative move order, when 5...Qb6 will lead to variation B2 below. Black can deviate with 5...d6, as in Ninov – Epishin, Pamplona 2010.



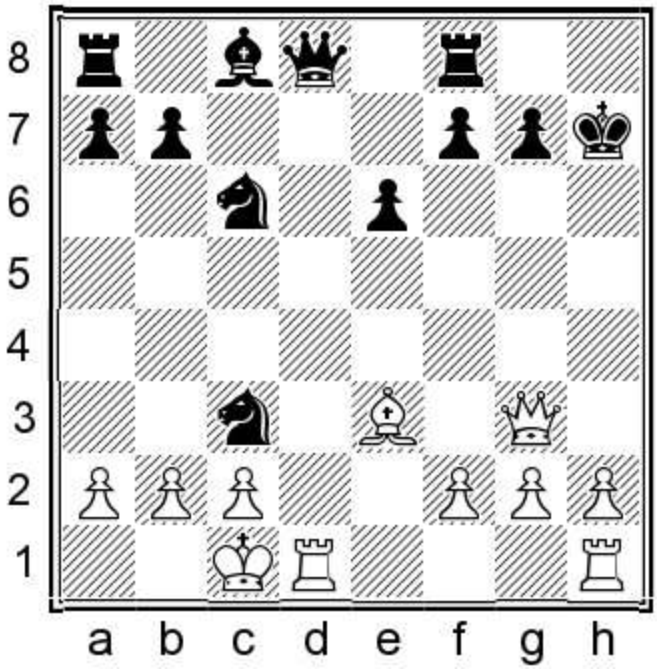
6.Bf4!N 6...Ke7 (6...e5 7.Be3±) 7.Nd2 a6 8.Nc3 Nf6 9.Bd3² would have given White the better chances.

We will analyse B1) 5...Nf6 followed by B2) 5...Qb6, the latter being Giddins' main recommendation.
5...d6 6.Nc3 Nf6?! 7.e5! Bxd4 8.Qxd4 dxe5 9.Qxe5 0-0 occurred in Popovic – Nestorovic, Herceg Novi 2001, when White missed the strongest continuation:

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10.Qg3!N 10...Nc6 11.Bd3 Nd5 12.0-0-0 Nxc3 (12...Qf6 13.Ne4 Qg6 14.Bc5±) 13.Bxh7† Kxh7



14.Qh3†! A final important detail, avoiding a nasty fork on e2. 14...Kg8 15.Rxd8 Nxa2† 16.Kb1 Rxd8 17. Kxa2±

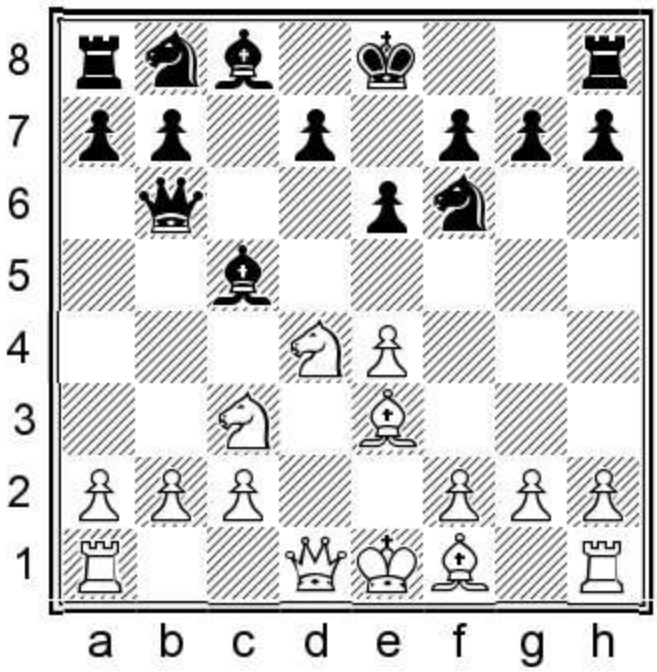
B1) 5...Nf6 6.Nc3 Qb6

6...d6?! was covered under the 5...d6 move order in the note above.

6...Bb4 is a Pin Variation with the extra move Be3 thrown in for White. 7.e5 (7.Ndb5!? is an interesting way to make use of the extra tempo: 7...Nc6 [7...Nxe4 runs into 8.Qg4 of course] 8.a3 Bxc3† 9.Nxc3 d5 10.exd5 exd5 11.Bc5 Be6 12.f3 Nd7 13.Bf2² Moreira – Andeer, corr. 2009) 7...Ne4? (7...Nd5 is better, when 8.Bd2 trans-

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poses to our coverage of the Pin Variation with one extra move played) 8.Qg4 Nxc3 This was Brulic – Rakocevic, Bar 2005, when 9.Qxg7N 9...Rf8 10.a3 would have been winning for White; compare the equivalent line of the Pin Variation, found in variation C on page 342.



7.Qd2 Nc6
7...d6?! gives White an easy route to an advantage: 8.Na4N 8...Qd8 9.Nxc5 dxc5 10.Nb5 Nxe4 11.Qxd8† Kxd8 12.0-0-0† Nd7 13.f3 Nef6 14.Bxc5±

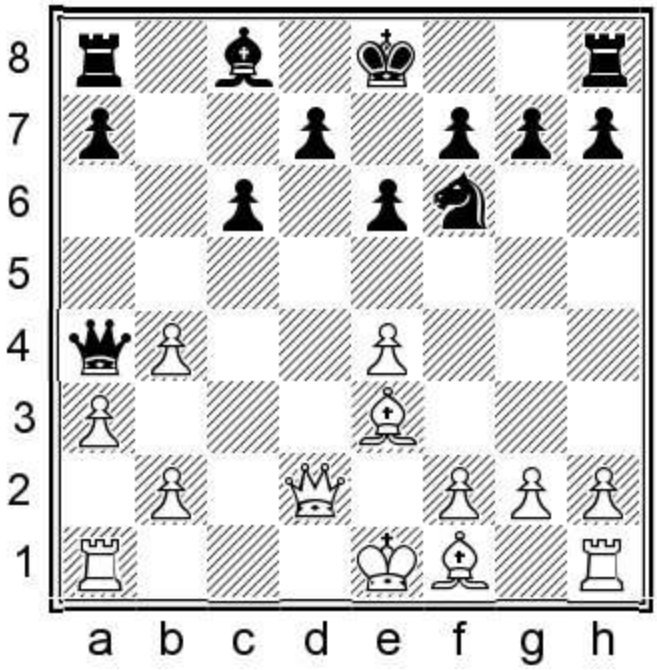
8.Na4
Now we see the major problem with Black's set-up with ...Bc5 and ...Qb6: his bishop will be eliminated and his dark squares permanently weakened.

8...Bb4N
This is Black's best attempt.

8...Qb4? 9.Nxc5 Qxc5 10.Nxe6 was a disaster for Black in D. Zhang – Gladstone, Victoria 2009.

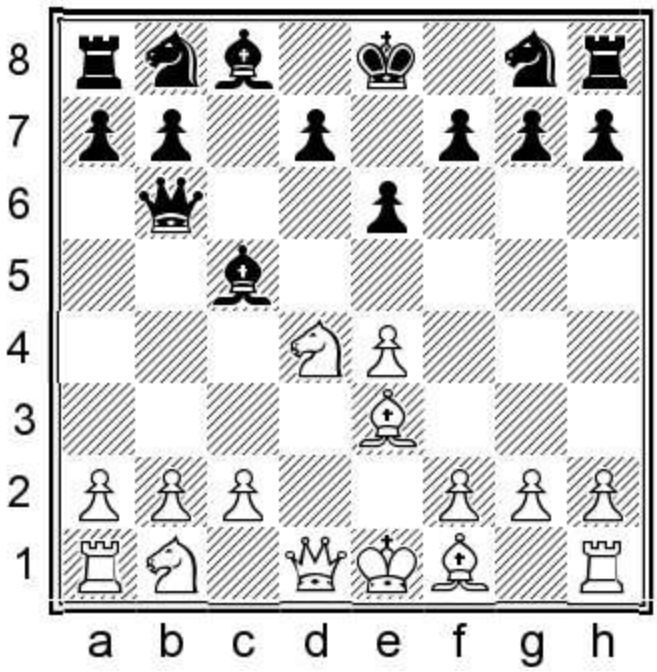
9.c3 Qa5 10.cxb4 Qxa4 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.a3

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12...Nxe4 13.Qd4 Nf6 14.Qc3±
White dominates on the dark squares and threatens to trap the queen with b2-b3, so Black has to give up his extra pawn.

B2) 5...Qb6

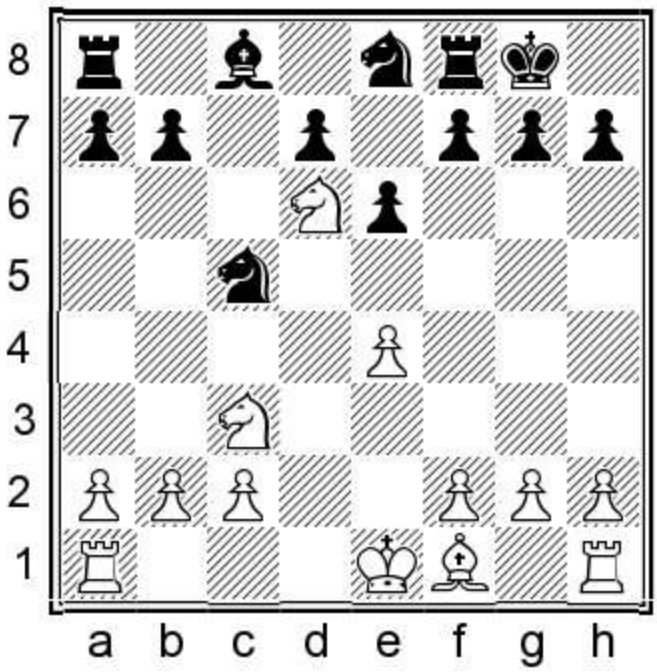


6.Nb5!
6.b4!? is another dangerous move which Giddins only briefly mentions. Play continues 6...Bxb4† 7.c3 Be7 and now I believe 8.Nb5!N to be best. I analysed this as well, and found that Black faces some difficult challenges, but I believe the text move to be even stronger.

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6...Bxe3

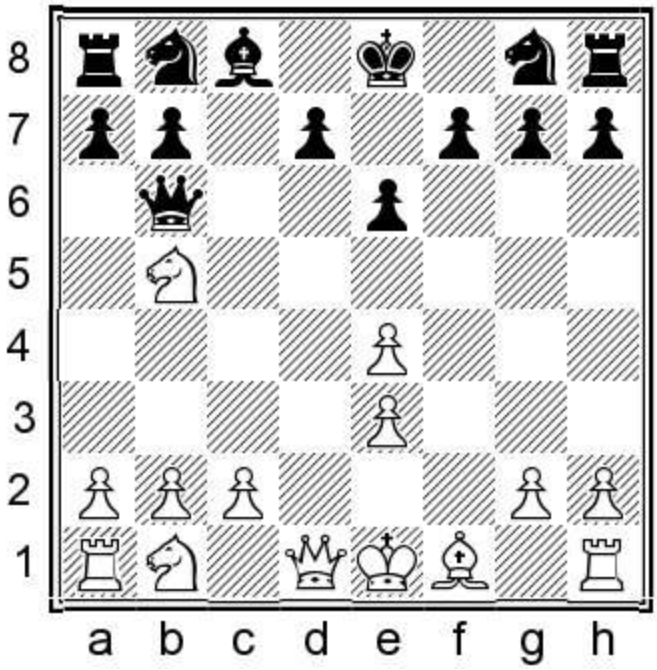
If Black does not make this exchange, he will simply be positionally worse.
6...Nf6
Giddins offers this move as a back-up line, though he admits that Black will have to defend a worse position for a long time.
7.Bxc5 Qxc5 8.N1c3
Obviously White must avoid the premature 8.Nd6†? Ke7 9.Nxc8† Rxc8 10.Bd3 Nc6 when Black is at least equal, if not better.
8...0-0
8...b6 is Giddins' suggestion, so that the king can come to e7 in the event of a queen exchange. The trouble is that White does not have to rush, and can simply develop with: 9.Be2 (9.a3!? is another sensible waiting move) 9...Ba6 (9...0-0 10.Qd6 is similar to the game noted below) 10.a4! Black is stuck in an unpleasant bind; I can't see why anyone would aim for such a position straight out of the opening.
9.Qd6 Na6
Neither 9...Qxd6 10.Nxd6 b6 11.0-0-0± nor 9...Qc6 10.Qxc6 Nxc6 11.Nd6 Ne8 12.Nxe8 Rxe8 13.Nb5 Rd8 14.Nd6 Nb4 15.Kd2± offers much relief for Black.
10.Qxc5 Nxc5 11.Nd6 Ne8
In Stellwagen – Ebert, Bielefeld 2006, White should have continued:



12.Nxe8!N 12...Rxe8 13.0-0-0 b6
Black has to develop his queenside somehow, and 13...a6? loses to 14.b4+–.
14.b4 Nb7 15.a3±

7.fxe3

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Now Black faces a choice between several unappealing options. B21) 7...Qxe3†? has been the most popular choice, and is the move which Broznik/Giddins spend most of their time on, but it's a terrible line for Black. B22) 7...Nf6?! is not quite as bad, but it's still a pretty poor choice. B23) 7...Nc6?! is another substandard option. And finally, B24) 7...Ke7! is Black's best, and perhaps only, chance to survive.

B21) 7...Qxe3†?

GAME 41

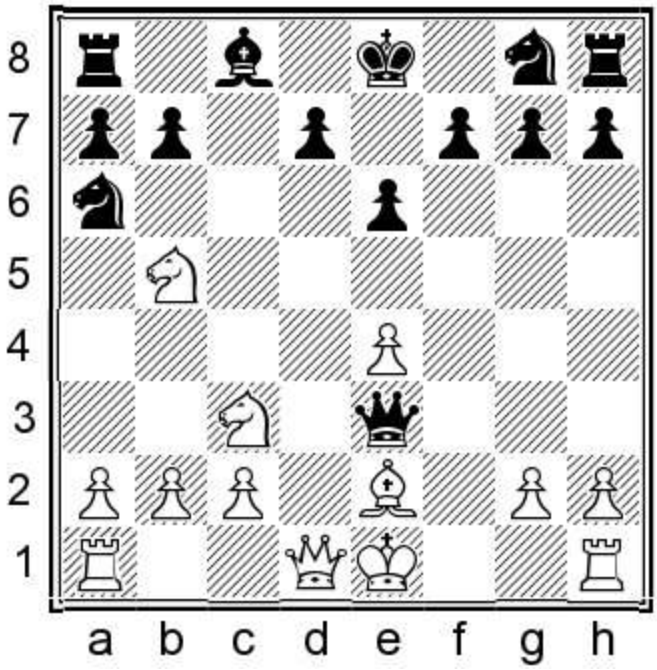
Soren Pedersen – Walter Baumann
email 2012

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Bc5 5.Nb5 Qb6 6.Be3 Bxe3 7.fxe3 Qxe3†? 8.Be2
In return for the sacrificed pawn, White has a big lead in development and an easy plan of attacking Black's king, which will obviously not be able to castle. Giddins tries to show that Black's position is viable but I suspect that he is already losing.

8...Na6
8...Kd8? is even worse, and after 9.Nd6 Nh6 10.Nd2 Nc6 11.N2c4 Qf4 12.Qd3 Black was well on the way towards an early defeat in Kurylo – Lacrosse, corr. 2001.

9.N1c3!
Some other moves have been tried but the text is clearly strongest. At the time of writing, White has scored 100% from here in seventeen games. Even if a defence existed for Black (which I don't believe it does), this ought to set some major alarm bells ringing.

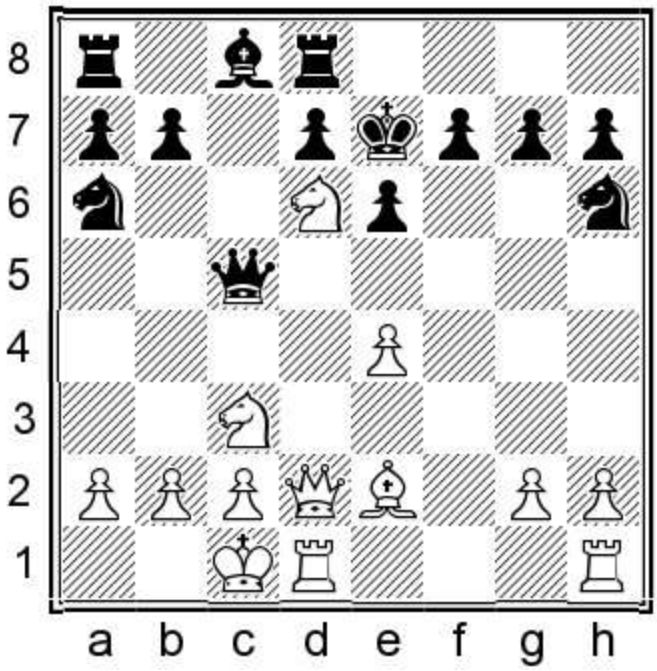
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9...Nh6
The weakness of the f7-square virtually forces Black to put a second knight on the rim. Here are some other possibilities:

9...d5 10.exd5 Nf6 11.dxe6 Bxe6 12.Nd6† Kf8 13.Nxb7±

9...Qc5 10.Qd2 Nh6 11.Nd6† Ke7 12.0-0-0 Rd8

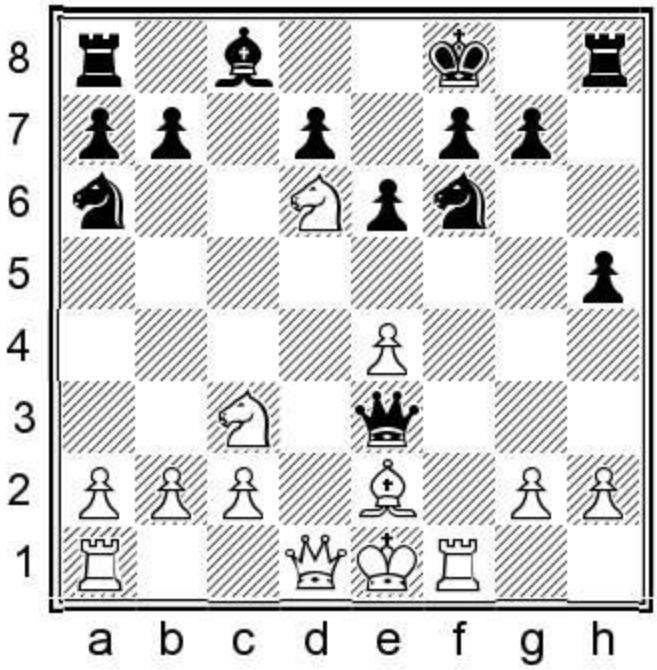


13.Nd5†! An elegant winning move, enabling the queen to come to g5 next. 13...Kf8 14.Qg5 f6 15.Rhf1 Nb4 16.Rxf6† 1–0 Paine – Robertson, email 2010.

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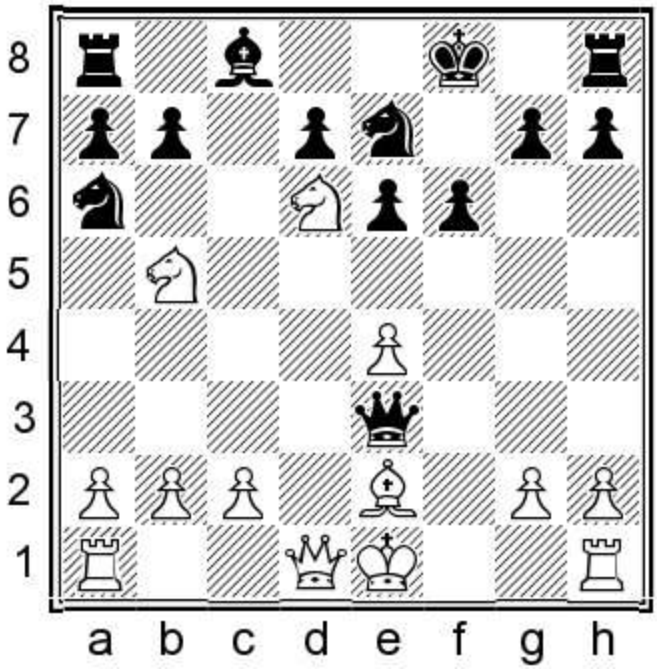
9...Nf6 10.Nd6† Kf8 11.Rf1 h5 occurred in Staniszewski – Ostrowski, Augustow 1996, when the simplest win-

ning continuation would have been:



12.Qd2!N 12...Qxd2† 13.Kxd2 White threatens e4-e5, and if 13...e5 14.Bc4+– he breaks through to f7 from another direction.

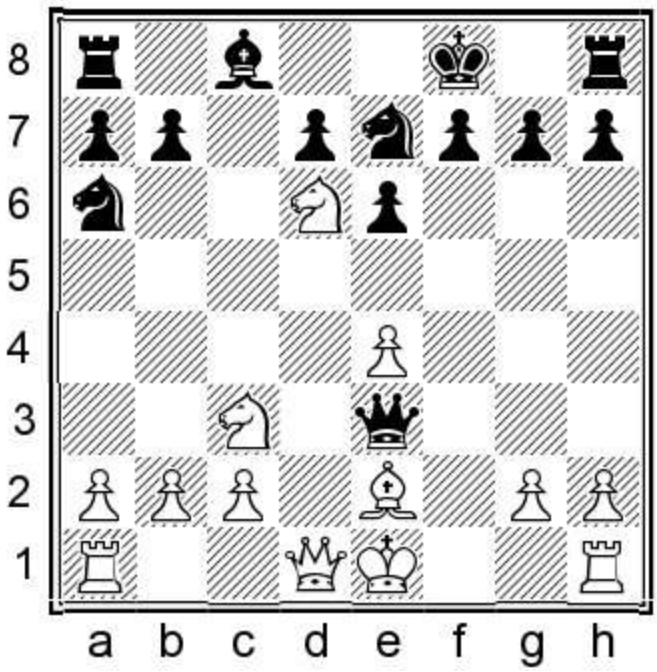
9...f6 10.Nd6† Kf8 11.Ncb5 (11.Nc4 Qc5 12.Qd2± was also excellent in Sherwood – Schild, email 2011) 11... Ne7



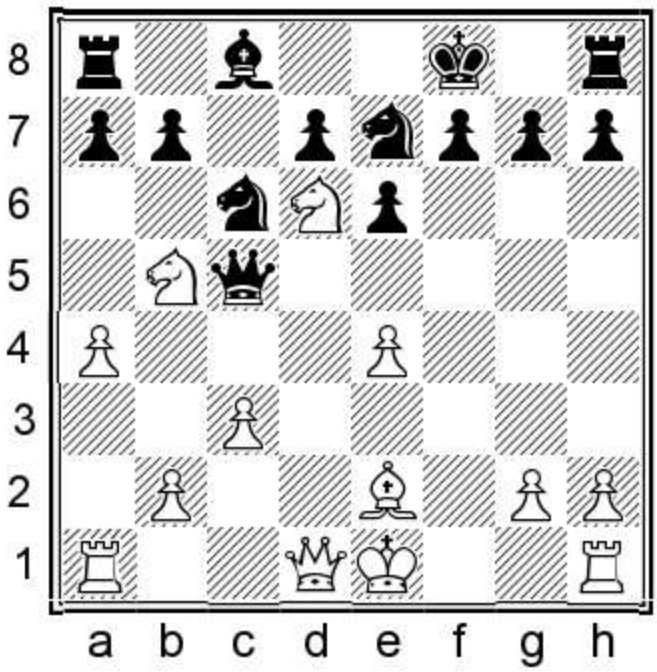
12.a4! A nice way of bringing the queen's rook into play. 12...Nc5 13.Ra3 Qf4 This occurred in A. Schmidt – Keller, email 2011, when 14.Rf1N 14...Qxh2 15.Qd4 Qh4† 16.g3 Qg5 17.e5 would have been the most direct winning line.

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Finally, 9...Ne7 10.Nd6† Kf8 occurred in Thorwall – Robertson, corr. 2010. Here White can borrow an idea from the above game with:



11.a4!N Once again, White intends to activate the rook via a3. 11...Nb4 (11...f6 12.Ncb5 h5 13.Ra3 Qf4 14.Rf3 Qe5 15.0-0+–) 12.Ncb5 Qc5 13.c3 Nbc6 Now the Ra3 plan will not work, but the pawn on c3 enables White to develop his initiative in another way:

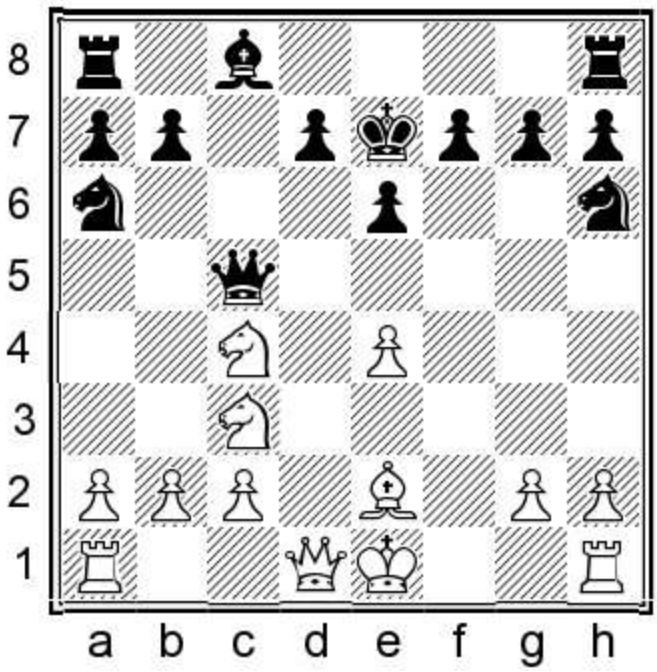


14.b4! Qe3 15.Nc4 Qxe4 16.0-0 f6 17.Nbd6 Qd5 18.Qe1+– Black is too far behind in development; White will soon break through.

10.Nd6† Ke7 11.Nc4!
It is useful to drive the black queen away while setting up the possibility of a queen check on d6.

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11...Qc5
11...Qg5 12.Qd6† Kd8 13.h4 Qe7 14.Qg3 f6 15.Nb5 e5 16.0-0-0+– gave White an overwhelming initiative in Dialfonso – Roe, email 2011.



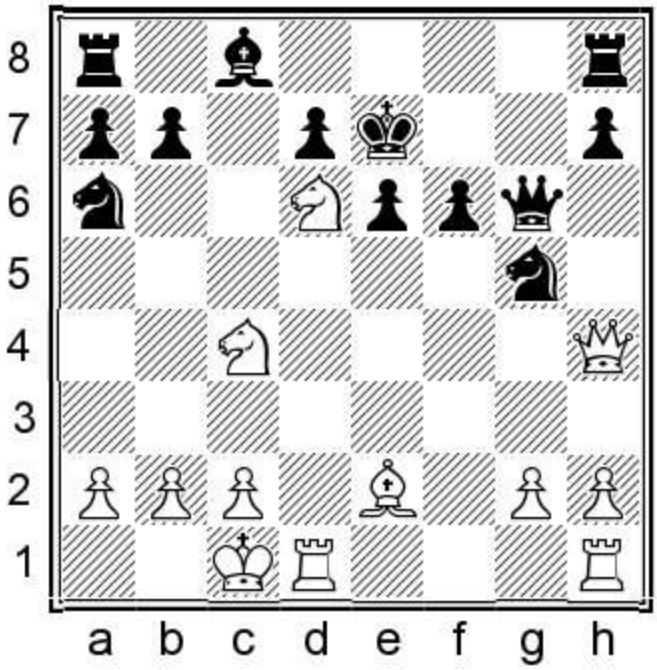
Despite White's 100% score and an engine assessment in the range of +1 to +2 (depending on which engine you use and how much time you give it), Giddins still argues that Black is okay.

12.e5
Giddins gives 12.a3?! (my punctuation) as his main line; even this slower move still gives White a near-decisive advantage but the details are not so relevant to us. The text move is much more incisive, as it sets up attacking ideas such as Qd2-g5(†) and Ne4.

12...f5
12...b5 13.Ne4 Qc7 (13...Qd5 14.Qc1!+–) 14.Ncd6 Bb7 15.Nxb7 Qxb7 16.Qd6† Ke8 17.0-0-0+– led to another massacre in Kraft – Ott, email 2008.

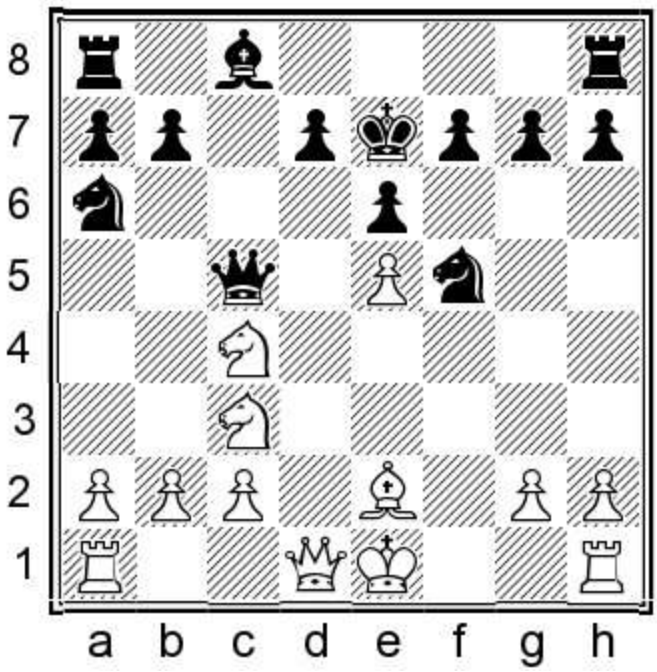
Another game continued: 12...f6 13.Qd2!? (13.exf6† also wins, as we can see in the main game) 13...Nf7 14. Ne4 Qd5 15.exf6† gxf6 16.Qf4 Qf5 17.Qh4 Ng5 18.Ned6 Qg6 19.0-0-0 Black's king is stuck in the centre and he is a long way from finishing development, so it is hardly surprising that the game was soon over.

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19...Nc5 20.Qd4 b6 21.Rhf1 Ba6 22.b4! Bxc4 23.Bxc4 Nf7 24.bxc5 1–0 Rattinger – Steinbrueck, corr. 2007.

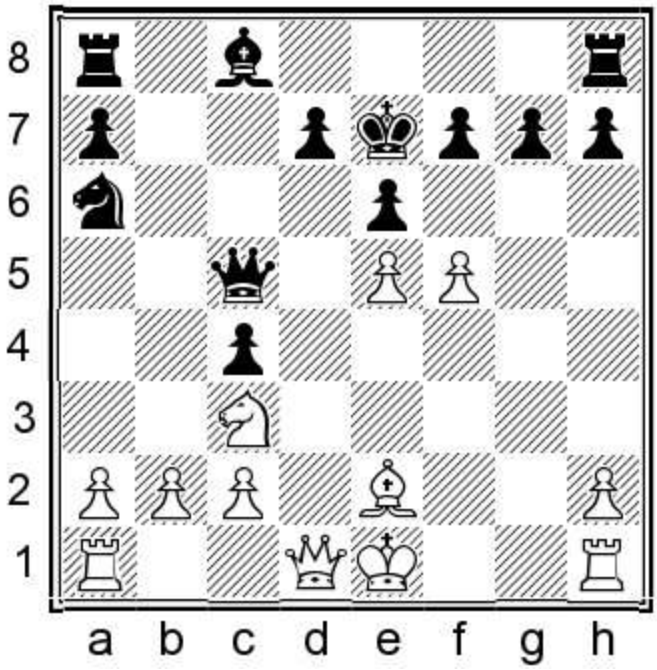
A final try for Black is:
12...Nf5



13.g4!
Giddins calls Black's last move "interesting" and mentions 13.Rf1 f6?, overlooking the fact that 14.Rxf5! exf5 15.Qd2 gives White an overwhelming attack. Black can do better on move 13, but the details are irrelevant as the text move is White's strongest.
13...b5
13...Nd4 14.Qd2! is also winning for White. 14...Qxc4!? appears tricky, but after 15.Qg5† Ke8 16.Qxg7 nothing works for Black, for instance: 16...Nxc2† 17.Kd2 Qd4† 18.Kxc2 Nb4† 19.Kb3 Rf8 20.Nb5 Qe3† 21.

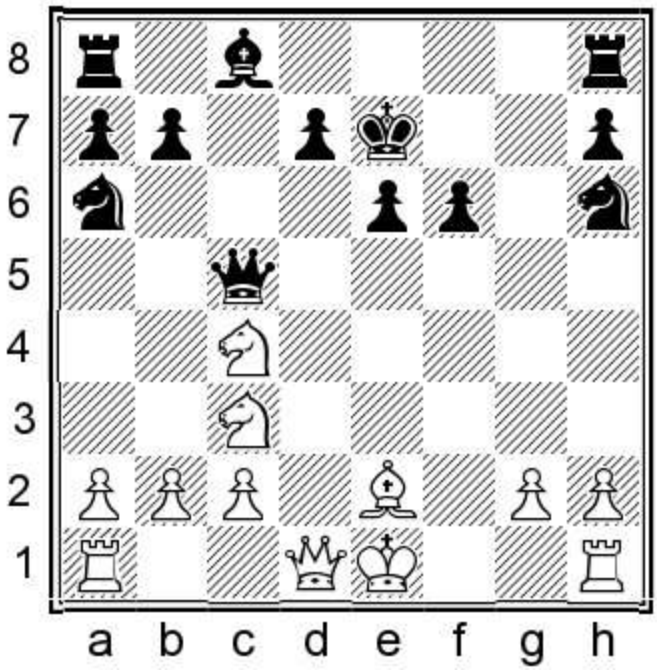
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Kxb4+–
14.gxf5
14.Nxb5 Nh4 15.Qd2± is strong but the text is even better.
14...bxc4



15.Qd2! Qxe5
15...h6 16.0-0-0 Rb8 17.Rhf1+–
16.0-0-0 Nc7 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.Rhe1+–
Black will soon go down, as his king is far too exposed.

13.exf6† gxf6

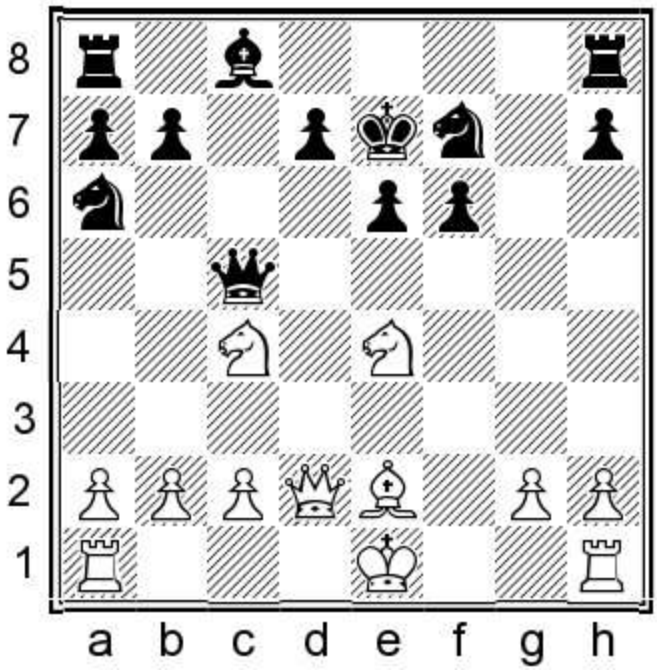


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14.Qd2!
Giddins only mentions the highly cooperative 14.Ne4? (again, the punctuation is mine) 14...Qd5 which he calls unclear. The game continuation is much stronger, as White increases his development advantage and avoids losing momentum.

14...Qg5
14...Nf5 15.0-0-0 followed by g2-g4 gives White a deadly attack.

14...Nf7 15.Ne4! gives Black a depressing choice:



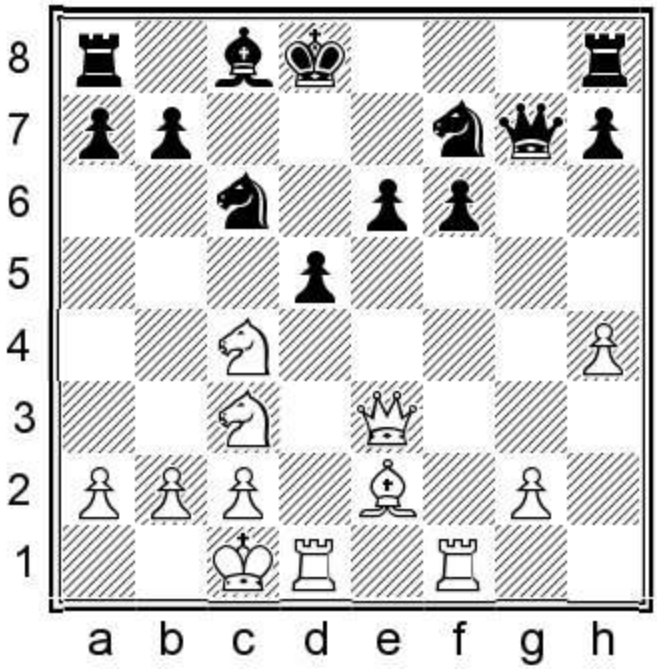
a) 15...Qd5 16.Qf4 f5 (or 16...Qf5 17.Qh4+– followed by Rf1) 17.Qh4† Kf8 and White can choose between 18.Ng5!+– and the flashier 18.Ned6!+–.

b) 15...Qf5 gives White at least two winning options: 16.Qd4! puts pressure on the f6-pawn and leaves Black without a good defence against Rf1. Alternatively, 16.Qe3! gives him the additional possibility of a nasty check on a3, as well as the obvious ideas such as 0-0-0 and Rf1.

15.Qd6† Kd8 16.h4 Qg7
For the moment Black is defending everything, but it's only a matter of time before White completes development and creates a second wave of threats.

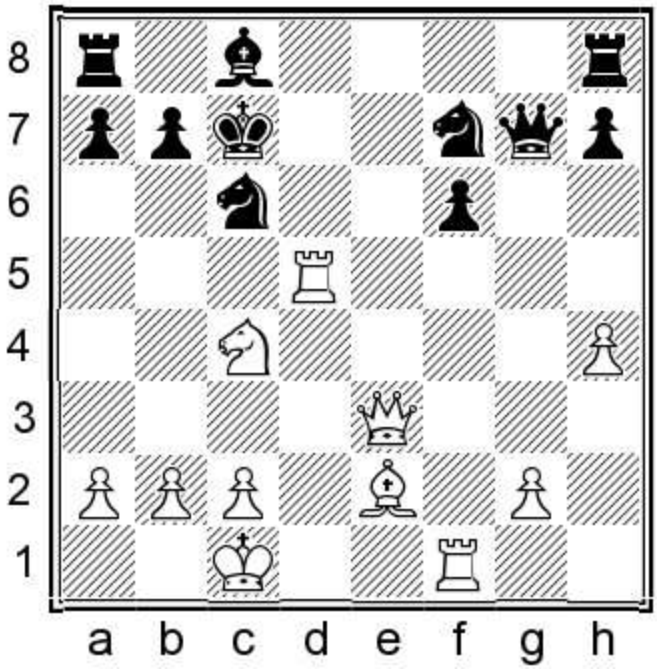
17.Rf1 Nf7 18.Qd4 Nb4 19.0-0-0 Nc6 20.Qe3 d5

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21.Nxd5!!
Considering the extent of White's development advantage, it should come as no surprise that the tactics work for him.

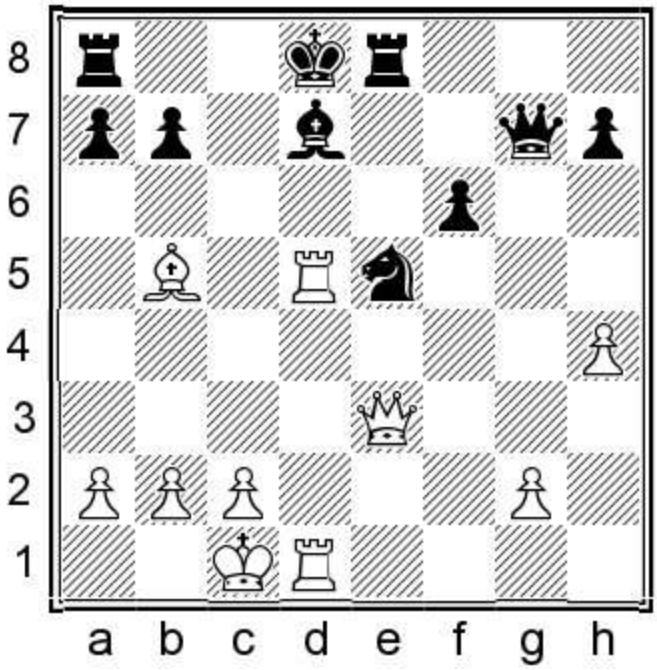
21...exd5 22.Rxd5† Bd7
22...Kc7 allows White to break through in fine style:



23.Rxf6!! Qxf6 24.Qg3† Nce5 25.Nxe5 Nxe5 26.Rxe5 Kd8 27.Rd5† Bd7 28.Bb5 Qh6† 29.Kb1 Qe6 Black is just about hanging on, but he will find himself in a losing endgame after: 30.Qg5† Kc8 31.Bxd7† Qxd7 32. Rc5† Qc7 33.b4+–

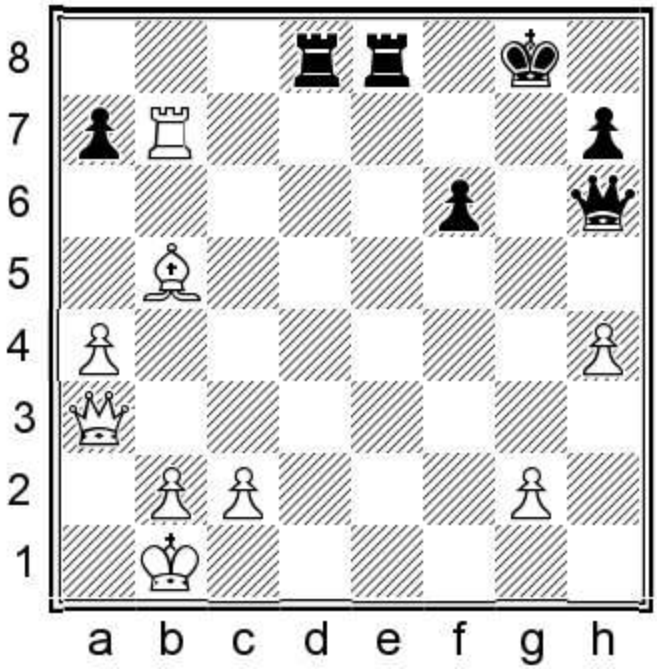
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23.Rfd1 Nfe5 24.Nxe5 Nxe5 25.Bb5 Re8



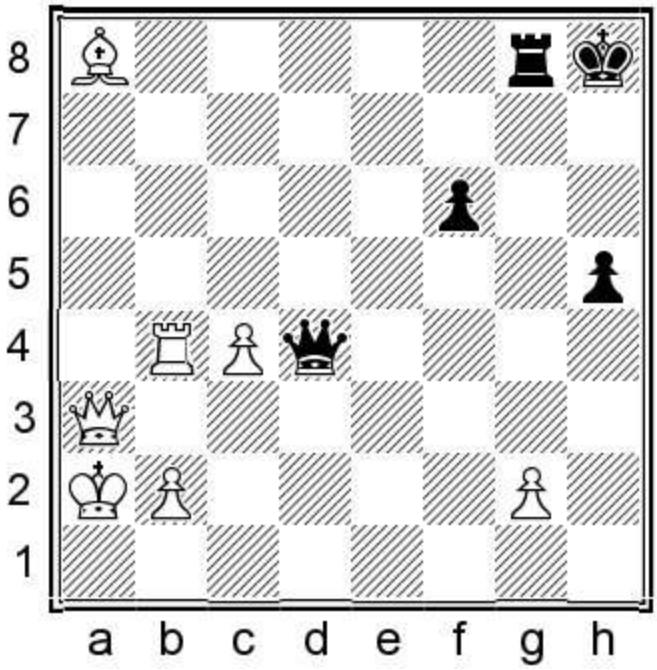
26.Rxd7† Nxd7 27.Qf3 Qh6†
27...Re7 28.Qxb7 Rc8 29.Ba6 wins.

28.Kb1 Ke7 29.Rxd7† Kf8 30.a4 Rad8 31.Qa3† Kg8 32.Rxb7
Black's king has survived the middlegame and material is roughly equal, but White is comfortably winning. His king is safer and the a7-pawn will soon fall, leaving White's a-pawn as the match winner.



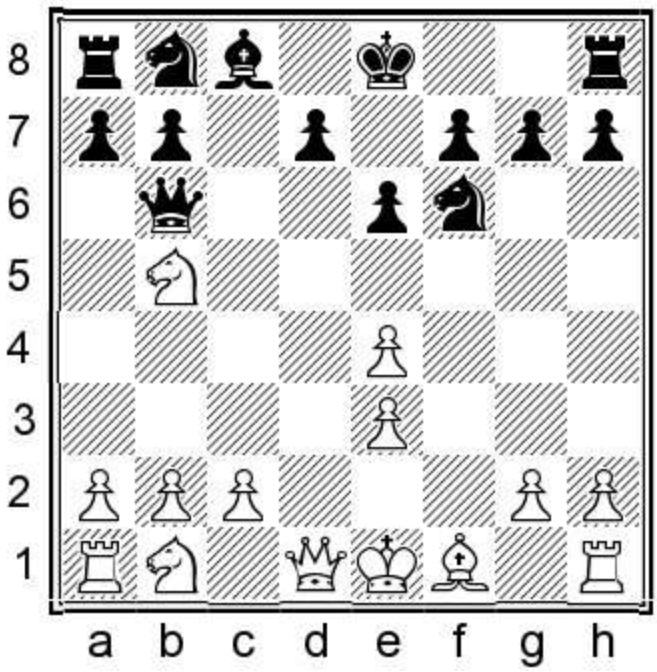
32...Re1† 33.Ka2 Re4 34.Rxa7 Rxh4 35.a5 Rh5 36.Rb7 Kh8 37.a6 Qd2 38.c4 Rg5 39.a7 Rgg8 40.Bc6 Qd4 41. Rb4 h5 42.a8=Q Rxa8 43.Bxa8
Black is a piece down and could have resigned here (or sooner), but he stumbles on for a few more moves.

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43...Rg7 44.c5 Qe5 45.Bf3 Qe6† 46.Rb3 Rc7 47.c6 Kg7 48.Qc5 h4 49.Ka3 Qe5 50.Qxe5 fxe5 51.Rb7 1–0
With 7...Qxe3†? dead and buried, let's move on to a slightly better (though still pretty awful) option.

B22) 7...Nf6?!



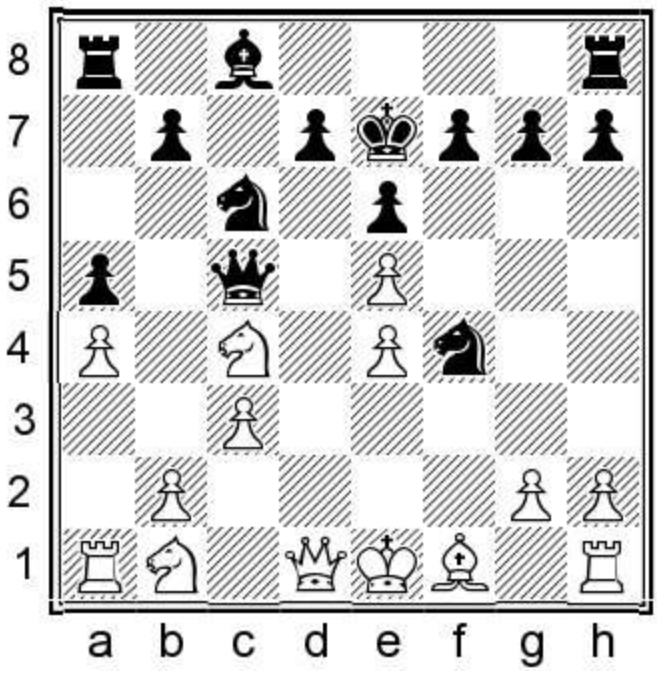
This leads to a position with equal material, where Black's unsafe king is far more important than White's doubled e-pawns.

8.Nd6† Ke7
After 8...Kf8N White can safely take the bishop: 9.Nxc8 Qxe3† 10.Be2 Nxe4 11.Qd3!±

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9.Nc4 Qc5 10.e5 Ne4
Black is in trouble after other moves as well:

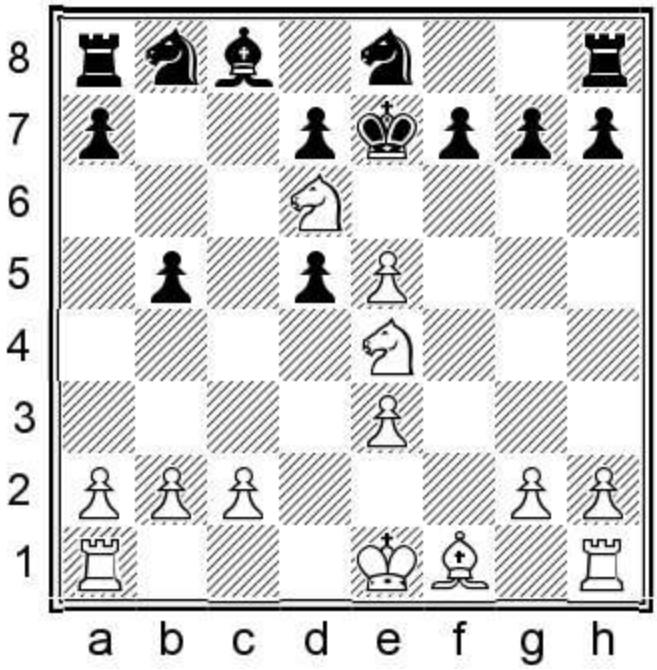
10...Nd5 occurred in Admiraal – Koppenhoefer, Budapest 2009, when 11.a4!N would have been an excellent move, simply stabilizing the knight on c4 before improving the position. Here is a nice illustrative line: 11... Nc6 12.c3 a5 13.e4 Nf4



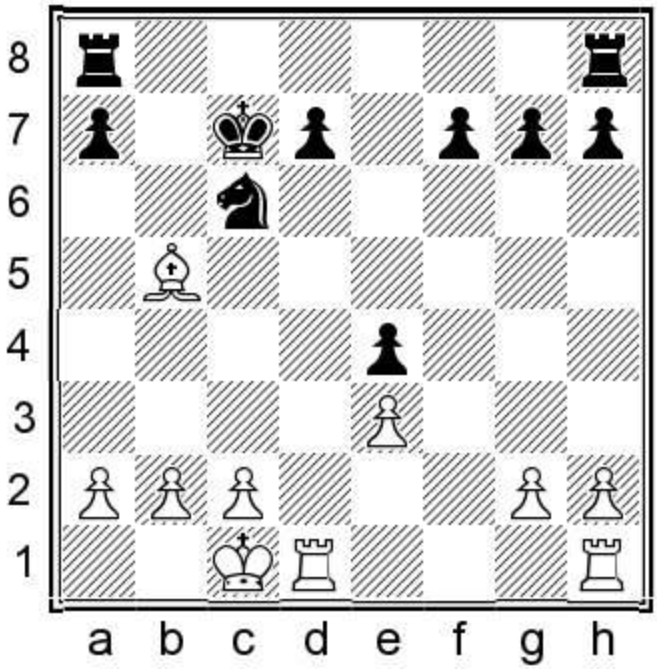
14.Qd6†! Not only safeguarding the e5-pawn, but also establishing a crushing bind on the queenside. 14...Qxd6 15.exd6† Kf8 16.g3 Ng6 17.Nb6 Rb8 18.Nd2 White should win with careful play, as Black's rook and bishop are paralysed on the queenside.

10...Ne8 11.Nc3 b5 12.Ne4 Qd5 13.Qxd5 exd5 14.Ncd6 also gives White a serious endgame advantage, as the following game demonstrates:

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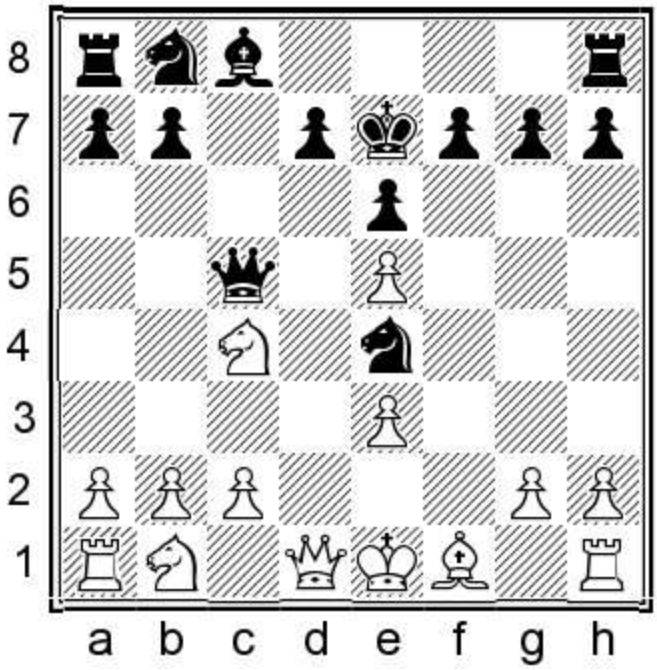
14...dxe4 15.Nxc8† Ke6 16.Bxb5 Nc6 17.Nd6 Nxd6 18.exd6 Kxd6 (18...Ne5 is met by 19.0-0-0 f5 20.Rd4 Ng4 21.Kd2±) 19.0-0-0† Kc7 Now in d'Ettorre – Caire, corr. 2007, White should have continued:



20.Rd5!N 20...Rad8 21.Rf1 f6 22.Bxc6 dxc6 (22...Kxc6 23.Ra5 Kb6 24.Rff5±) 23.Ra5 Kb6 24.Ra4 Rhe8 25. Rf4± White wins a pawn and, most likely, the game.

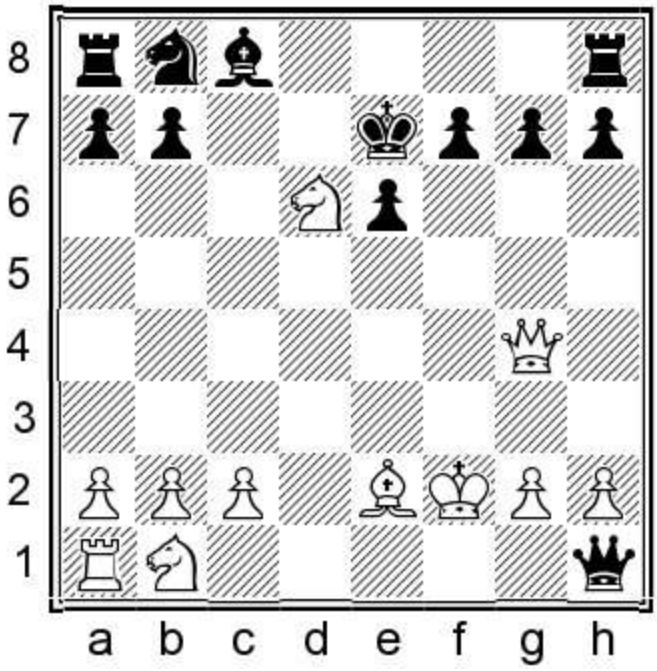
This position was reached in Ebert – Wahrenberg, Dresden 2007. Here White missed a chance to cause serious problems with:

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11.Qg4!N 11...d5
11...b5 is well met by 12.b4! Qc7 (12...Qxb4† 13.Ncd2! wins material thanks to the pin along the 4th rank) 13. Qxe4 bxc4 14.Na3 (14.Qxa8? leads to unclear play after 14...Qxe5 or even 14...Nc6!?) 14...Bb7 15.Qf4 with a decisive advantage.

12.exd6† Nxd6 13.Nxd6! Qxe3† 14.Be2 Qc1† 15.Kf2 Qxh1

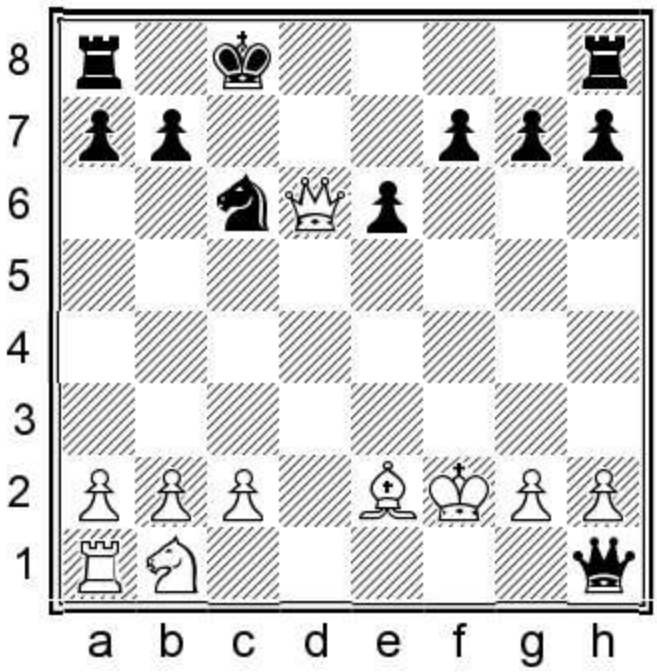


16.Qb4!
Black has no defence, as the following lines demonstrate.

16...Nc6
16...Kd7 17.Nxf7 Rg8 18.Bf3 Nc6 19.Qf4 Ke8 20.Nd6† Kd7 21.g4!+–

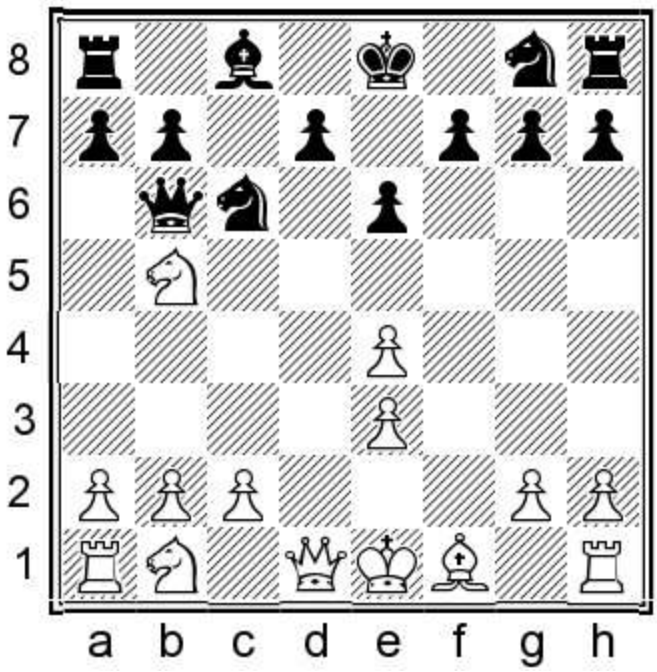
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17.Nxc8† Kd8 18.Qd6† Kxc8



19.Na3! Qxa1 20.Nb5
Checkmate is near.

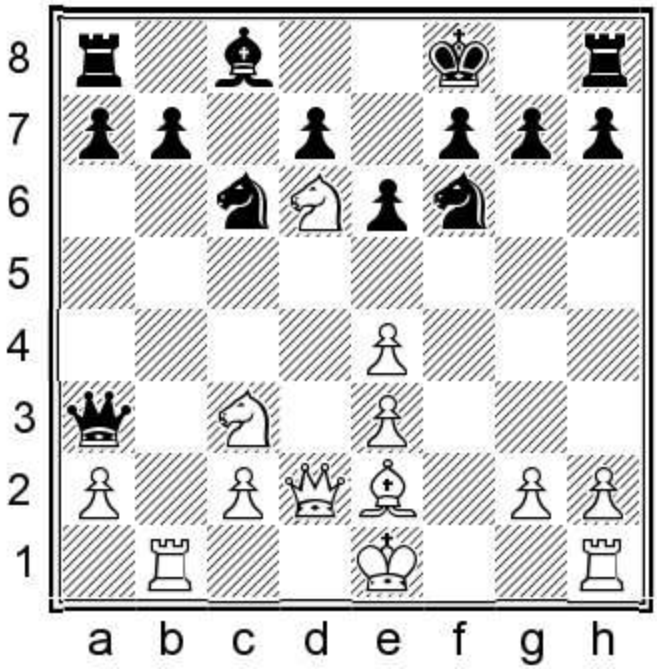
B23) 7...Nc6?!



Giddins offers this as a safer alternative to taking the e3-pawn. Of the two options, the text move is less suicidal for Black, but his position is still poor.

8.Qd2 Nf6 9.Nd6† Kf8 10.Nc3 Qxb2 11.Rb1 Qa3 12.Be2±

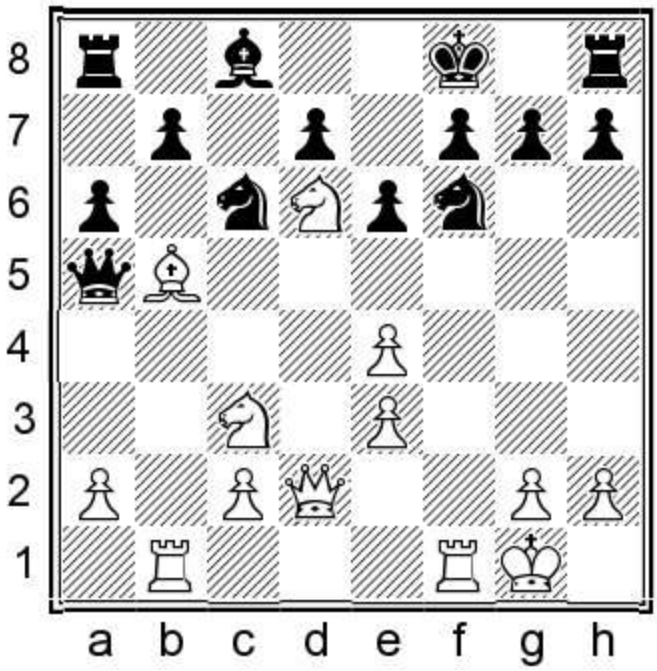
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Giddins says White has dangerous compensation though not necessarily an advantage. I can agree with the first part at least.

12...a6 13.0-0 h5
I'm not sure if Black intended to develop his rook on h6, or if he was simply making room for his king to come to h7. In any case, he will not be given a chance to organize his pieces effectively. Here are a few other possibilities:

13...Qa5 14.Bb5!! is a lovely idea:

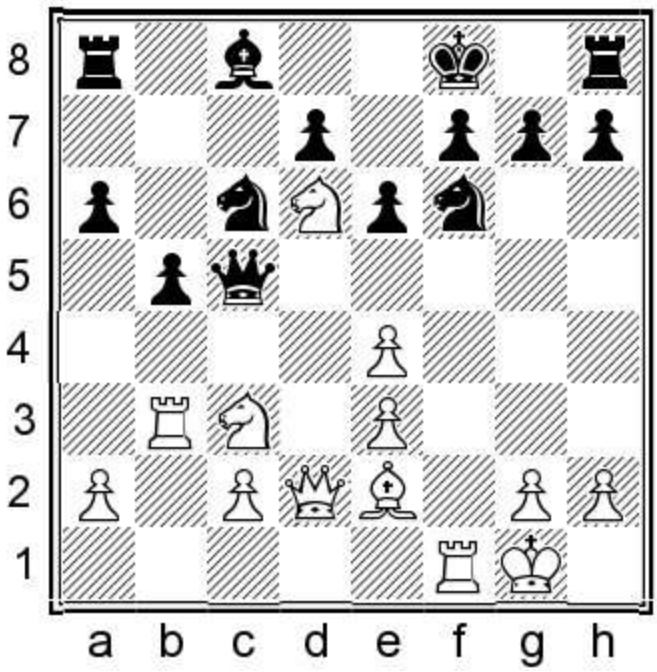


14...axb5 If Black does not take the bishop, White will exchange on c6, then play Nc4 and e4-e5, with a crushing attack. 15.e5! Nxe5 16.Rxb5 Qd8 17.Rxe5+– In Pyrich – Colombo, corr. 2013, White regained the piece

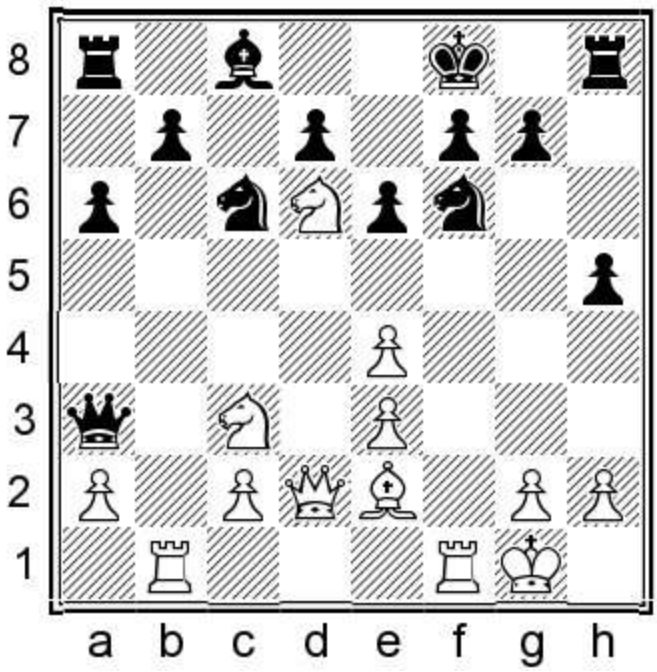
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while keeping a decisive initiative: one threat is Nce4; another is moving the rook away from e5 and forcing through e4-e5.

13...b5N runs into a similar tactical motif as the line above: 14.Rb3! Qc5



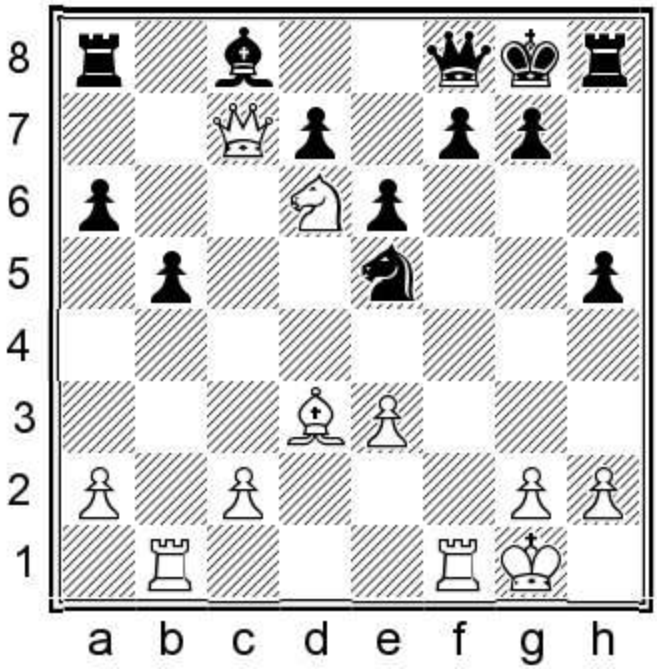
15.Ncxb5! Black is in trouble, as 15...axb5 is met by 16.Rxb5 followed by e4-e5.



14.Nc4 Qe7 15.e5 Ne8 16.Ne4±
White has a tremendous amount of activity, which is worth much more than a pawn or two. I will present a few more moves of a correspondence game, which shows how White can convert his advantages into something tangible.

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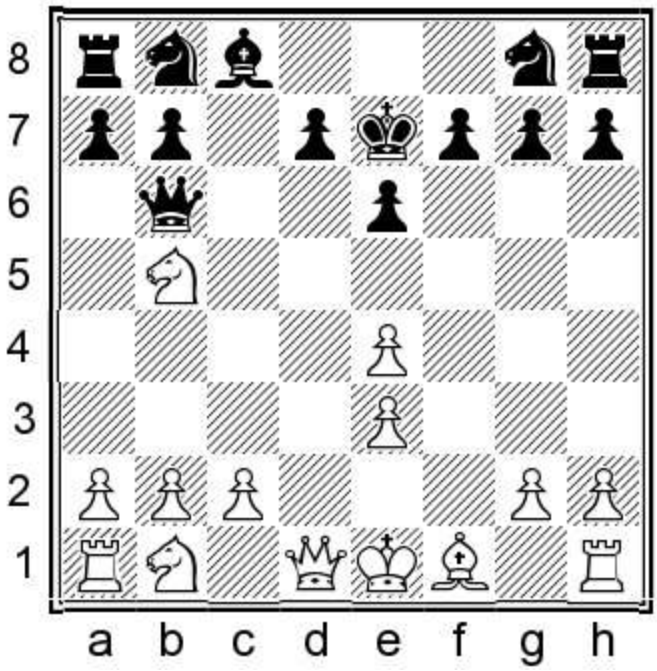
16...b5 17.Ncd6 Nxd6 18.Nxd6 Nxe5 19.Qa5 Kg8 20.Qc7 Qf8 21.Bd3
Black's queenside pieces are virtually paralysed and he will soon lose material.



21...f6 22.Be4 Ra7 23.Qb8! Nc6 24.Bxc6 dxc6 25.Rfd1 Re7 26.Qxc8 Qxc8 27.Nxc8
White successfully converted his extra piece in Langer – Colombo, corr. 2013.

B24) 7...Ke7!

Giddins mentions this move briefly, but does not recommend it. I believe it to be Black's only real chance of reaching a playable position, although he still falls well short of equality. So far, it has only been played in one game, Stange – Van Beek, Vlissingen 2002.

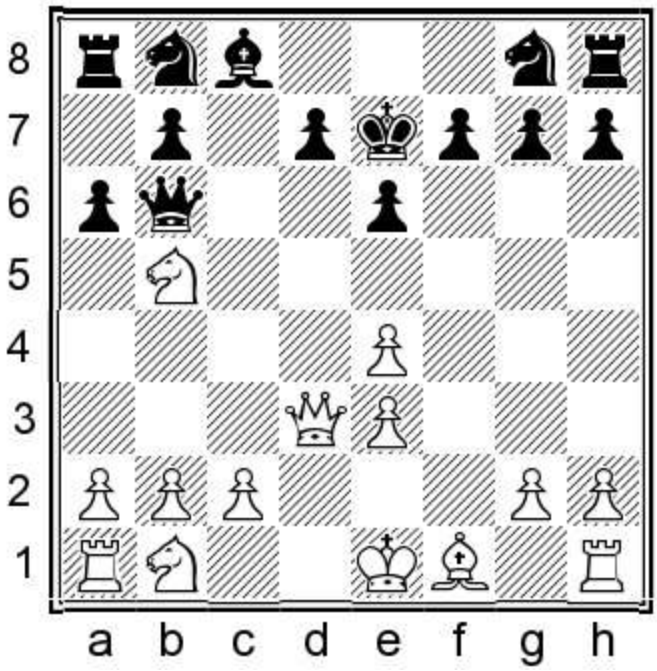


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8.Qd3!N
This is the strongest and most ambitious option.

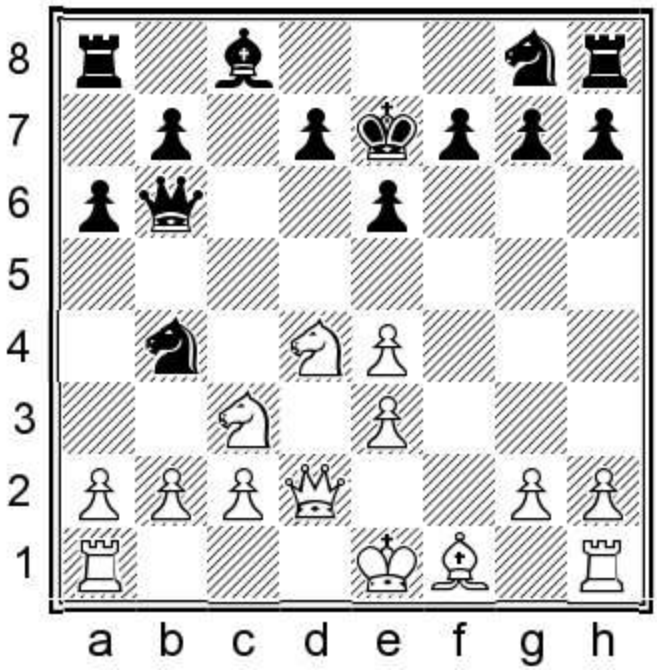
8.Qd4!?N 8...Qxd4 9.exd4 a6 10.N5a3² is a simple route to a positional edge.

8...Qc5
The reason for putting the queen on d3 (as opposed to d2, for instance) is revealed after: 8...a6?



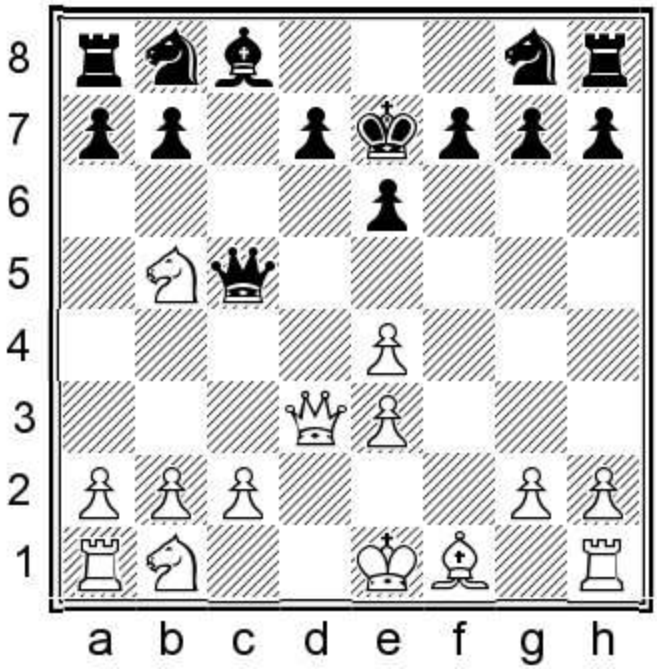
9.Qa3† d6 10.e5! and White is already winning.

8...Na6 9.N1c3 Nb4 10.Qd2 a6 11.Nd4± puts Black in a precarious position. For instance:



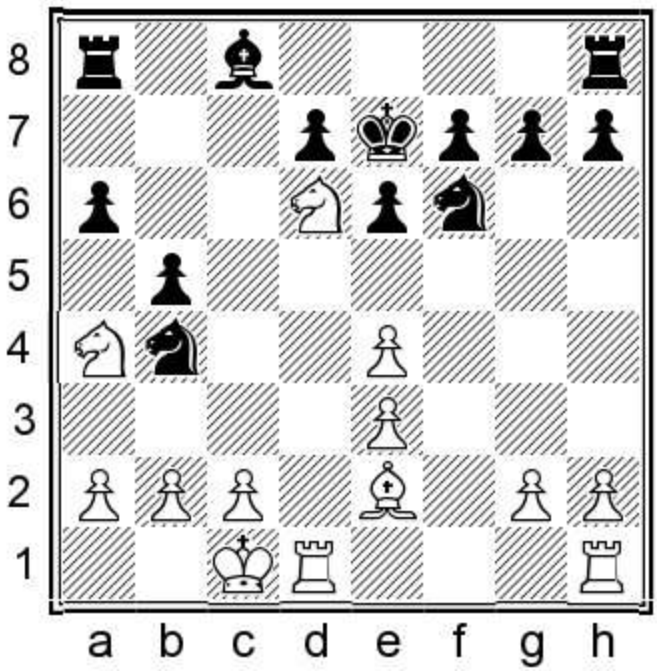
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11...d6? 12.a3! Nc6 13.Nf5†!+–



9.N1c3
9.e5 is mentioned by Giddins as an interesting option; White may well be better here too, but I prefer the plan of developing the knight and castling before deciding exactly how to attack.

9...Nf6 10.0-0-0 Nc6 11.Be2 Rd8
11...a6 12.Na4! leads to a favourable endgame for White: 12...Nb4 13.Qd6† Qxd6 14.Nxd6 b5

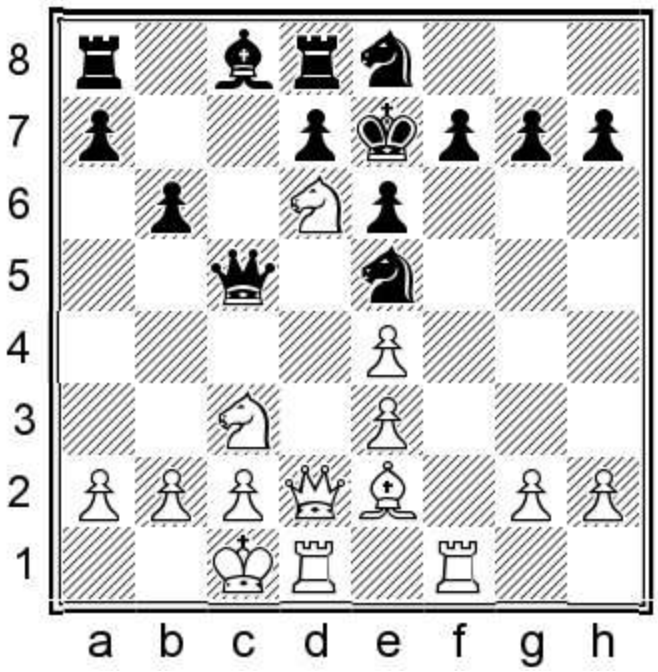


15.a3! Nc6 (15...Nxc2 is well met by 16.e5!± and if 16...Nd5 17.Rxd5! exd5 18.Nb6 White is winning) 16.Nb6 Rb8 17.Nbxc8† Rbxc8 18.Nxc8† Rxc8 19.Bd3 Ne5 20.Kb1 Nfg4 21.Rd2 Nxe3 22.h3± White will get to exchange his bishop for one of the knights, after which he will have good chances to convert his extra exchange.

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12.Nd6
12.Na4 Qe5 13.Qa3† d6 14.Nb6 axb6 15.Qxa8 Qxe4 gives Black reasonable play for the exchange.

12...Ne5 13.Qd2 b6 14.Rhf1 Ne8

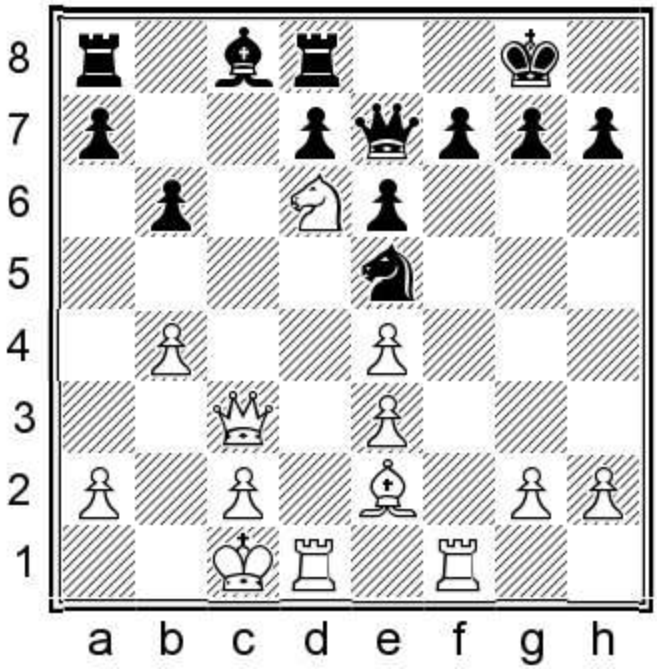


15.Nxe8!
15.Ncb5 Ba6 16.Nxe8 Bxb5 17.b4 Qc6 18.Bxb5 Qxb5 19.Nc7 Qc6 20.Nxa8 Rxa8 gives Black nice compensation for the exchange.

15...Kxe8 16.Nb5
White is clearly better, with the knight coming to d6 and Black's king still in the centre. You certainly don't need to memorize all of this, but since I've analysed this far, I will mention a few nice lines which illustrate White's attacking potential.

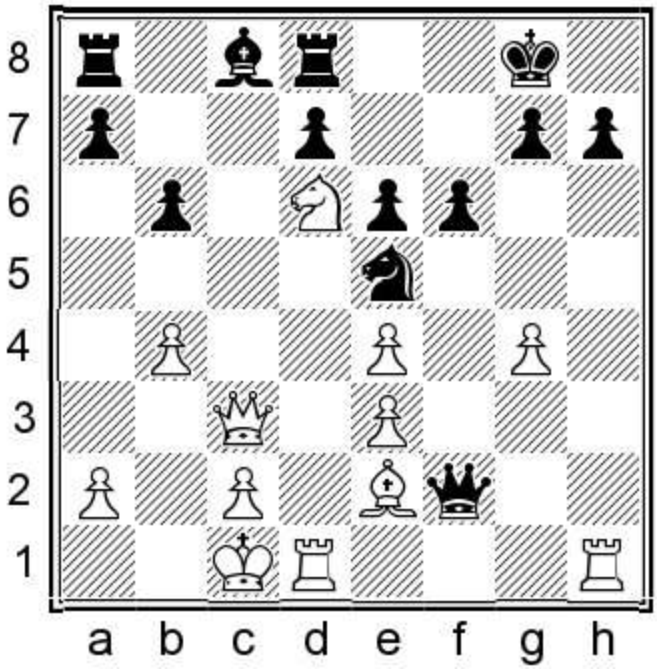
16...Kf8 17.b4! Qe7 18.Nd6 Kg8 19.Qc3

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19...Qg5?
19...f6 is better, though after 20.g4!± Black has not succeeded in getting his pieces into the game. Now he comes under a deadly attack.

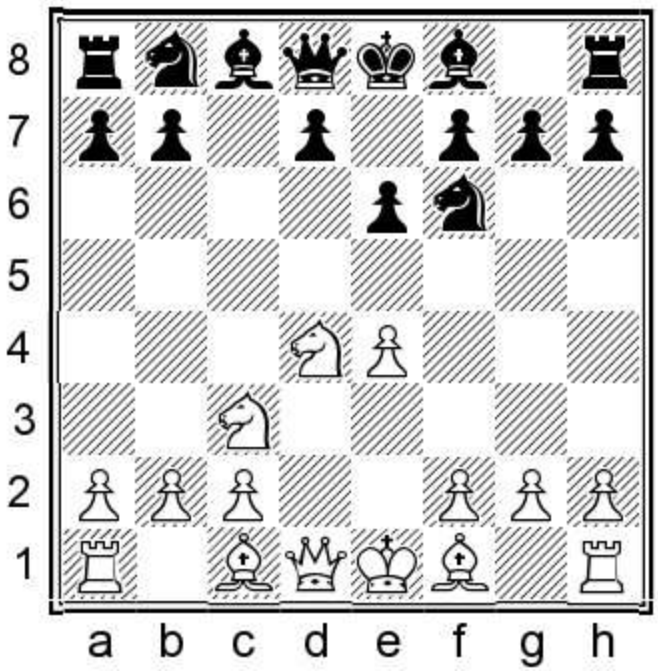
20.g4!+– f6 21.h4! Qxh4 22.Rh1 Qf2
22...Qg5 23.Rh5 Qg6 24.Rdh1 h6 25.g5! and White breaks through.



23.g5! Qxe2 24.gxf6 gxf6 25.Rdg1† Kf8 26.Rxh7 Qf2 27.Rhg7+–
White is winning; the easiest way to catch the black king is Qd4 (defending the knight on d6) followed by Rg8†.

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C) 4...Nf6 5.Nc3



5...Bb4
This is the Pin Variation. Other moves can be dealt with pretty swiftly:

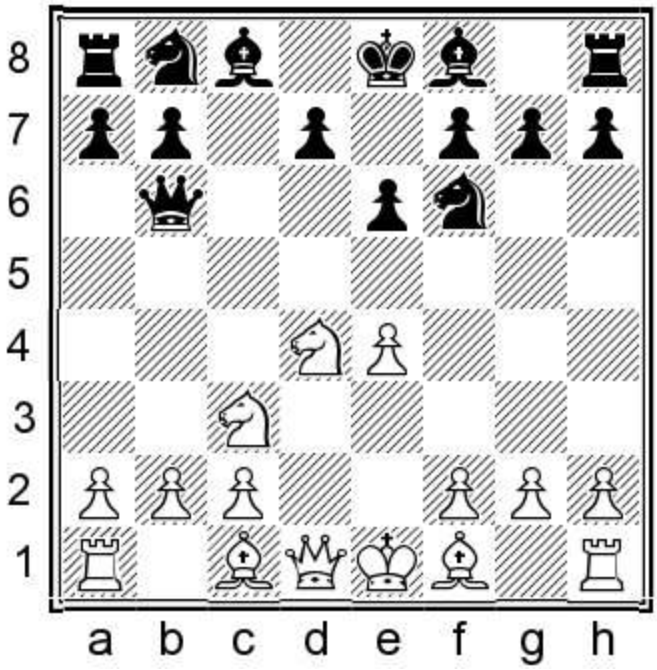
5...Nc6 and 5...d6 are mainstream systems, which will be dealt with separately in the Sicilian Main Lines volume.

5...a6? stops Nb5 but allows 6.e5±.

5...e5?! loses a tempo and can hardly be a good idea. 6.Nf5 (6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 is also strong; White is simply a whole tempo up on the Sveshnikov Variation, as covered in the Sicilian Main Lines volume.) 6...d5 This is the only real attempt to make sense out of Black's previous move, but a good answer is: 7.Bb5†! Nc6 8. exd5 Bxf5 9.dxc6 Qxd1† 10.Nxd1 0-0-0 11.Ne3 Black is a pawn down, with little compensation to show for it. 11...Be6 12.cxb7† Kxb7 13.Bc4± Dziedzina – Belter, corr. 2012.

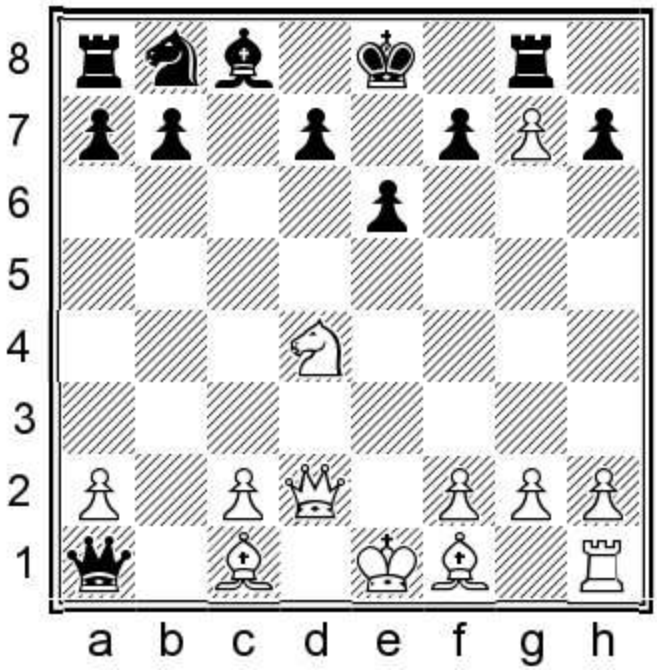
5...Qb6?!
This move has some tricky points to it and has scored quite respectably, but it can be considered refuted thanks to the following accurate response:

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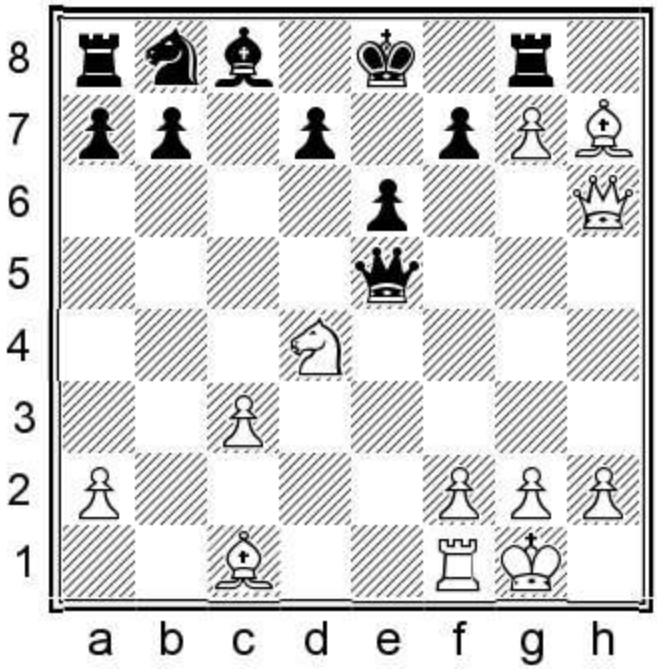
6.e5! Bc5 7.Ndb5! a6
7...Bxf2† 8.Ke2 Ng4 9.h3 Nxe5 10.Qd6 Qxd6 11.Nxd6† Ke7 12.Nxc8† Rxc8 13.Kxf2+– Akbaev – Blednov, Cherkessk 2014.
7...Nd5 8.Ne4 0-0 9.Nxc5 Qxc5 10.c4 a6 11.Qd4± Tomson – Blondel, corr. 2009.
8.exf6 axb5 9.Ne4±
White is clearly better and has scored 3/3 from here so far.

6.e5
We will now analyse C1) 6...Ne4? and C2) 6...Nd5.
6...Qc7? (6...Qa5? loses in the same way) 7.exf6 Bxc3† 8.bxc3 Qxc3† 9.Qd2 Qxa1 10.fxg7 Rg8 is losing for Black in view of the following line:



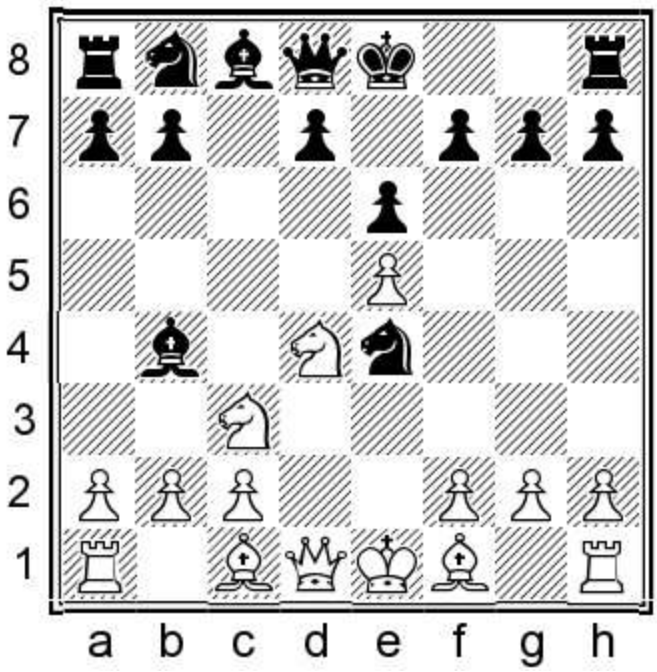
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11.c3! Qb1 12.Bd3 Qb6 13.Qg5 Qd8 14.Qh6 Qc7 15.0-0 Qe5 16.Bxh7



16...Qxg7 (16...Rxg7 17.f4+– Reinle – Becker, corr. 1935) 17.Bxg8 Qxg8 18.Nb5 Na6 19.Bg5 d5 20.Qf6 Kf8 21.Nd6+– Becker – Lambrechts, Maastricht 2009.

C1) 6...Ne4?

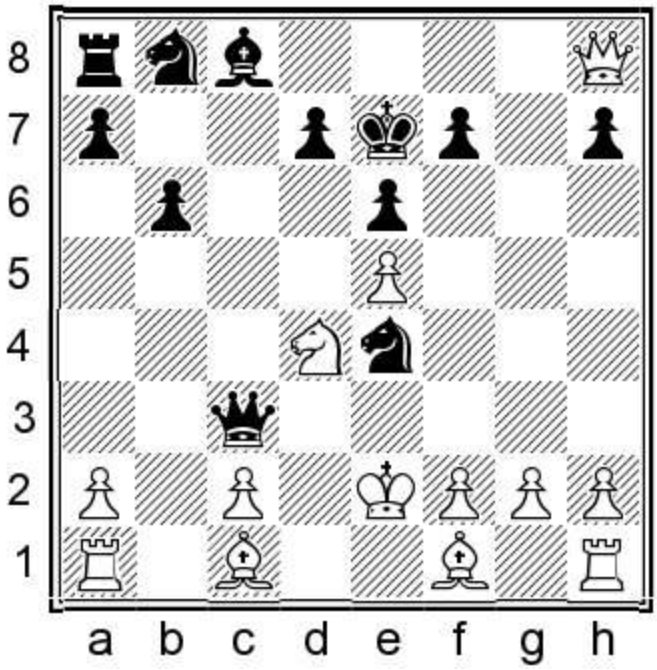


This move has been more or less refuted, although White needs to know some details along the way.

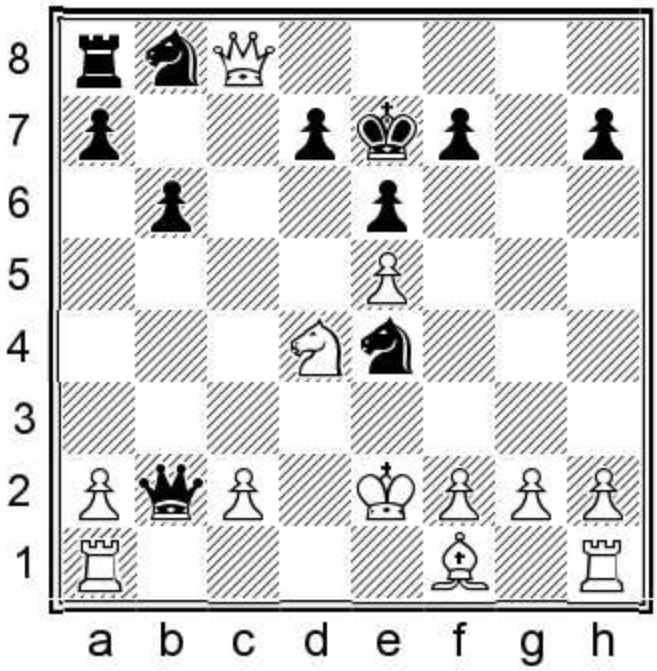
7.Qg4 Nxc3
Even worse is:
7...Qa5? 8.Qxg7 Bxc3†

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8...Rf8 9.Bh6 Nxc3 10.a3! Be7 11.Bd2+– was hopeless for Black is Florian – Forintos, Budapest 1959.
9.bxc3 Qxc3† 10.Ke2 b6 11.Qxh8† Ke7



12.Ba3†
12.Nb5!? is a faster winning line for purists and correspondence players; indeed, after 12...Ba6 13.a4 Black resigned in Quizhpe – Vujadinovic, email 2000. The continuation might be 13...Qxc2† 14.Kf3 Bb7 (14...Qxf2† 15.Kxe4! [15.Kg4 Nc6!=] 15...Bb7† 16.Kd3 Qf5† 17.Ke2 Qe4† 18.Kd1+–) 15.Kg4! Nxf2† 16.Kg3! Nxh1† 17. Kh4 Qf2† 18.Kh5 Bf3† 19.Kg5! h6†!?, when 20.Qxh6 wins easily – but not 20.Kxh6?? Qh4†. This is all fine, but there is always a slight danger of forgetting the analysis and making the wrong king move in a practical game. The text move is simpler and easy to understand.
12...Qxa3 13.Qxc8 Qb2
In Schatzle – Filartiga, Argentina 1975, White should have played:

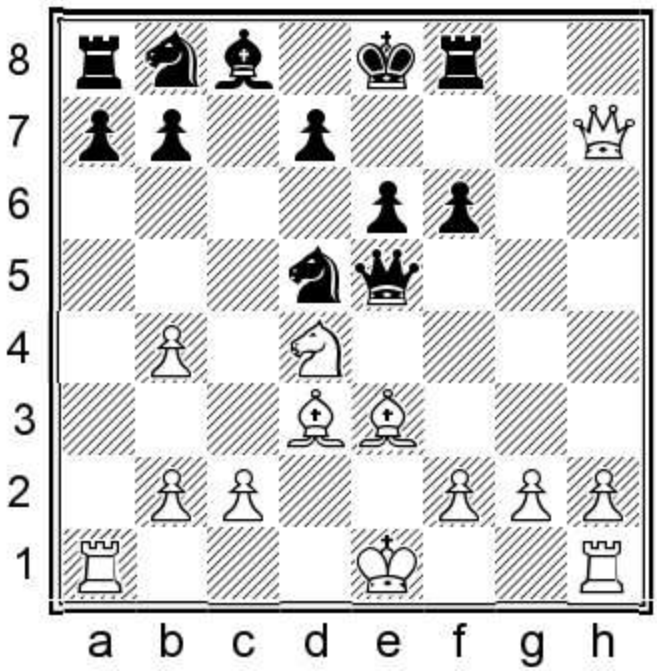


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14.Ke3!N 14...Qxa1 15.Kxe4 Qe1† 16.Kd3 Qxe5 17.Qb7
White is winning.

8.Qxg7 Rf8
At first glance the position looks messy, but practice and analysis has proved that White is much better.

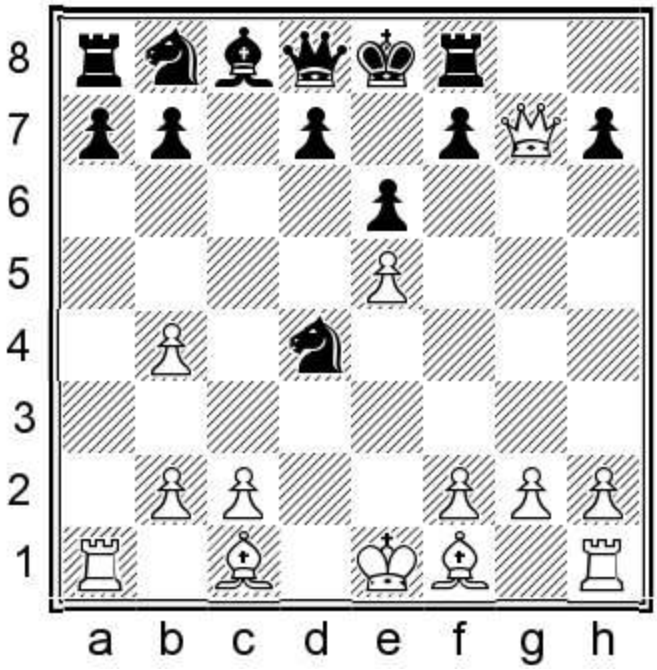
9.a3 Nb5†
This is the main line. Black has also tried:
9...Qa5 10.Bd3!
White's idea is simply to take on b4 and then castle.
10...f6
10...Nc6 11.axb4 Qxa1 was played in 2006 against our good friend (not to mention author of several fine Quality Chess books) Nikos Ntirlis. Unfortunately he did not keep a record of the name of his opponent, but Nikos tells me he played 12.0-0!? and won a nice game. At this stage, however, 12.Nb3!N is a simple route to a big advantage.
11.axb4 Qxe5† 12.Be3 Rf7 13.Qg8† Rf8 14.Qxh7 Nd5
In Matthey – Szegi, Sala 1994, White should have continued:



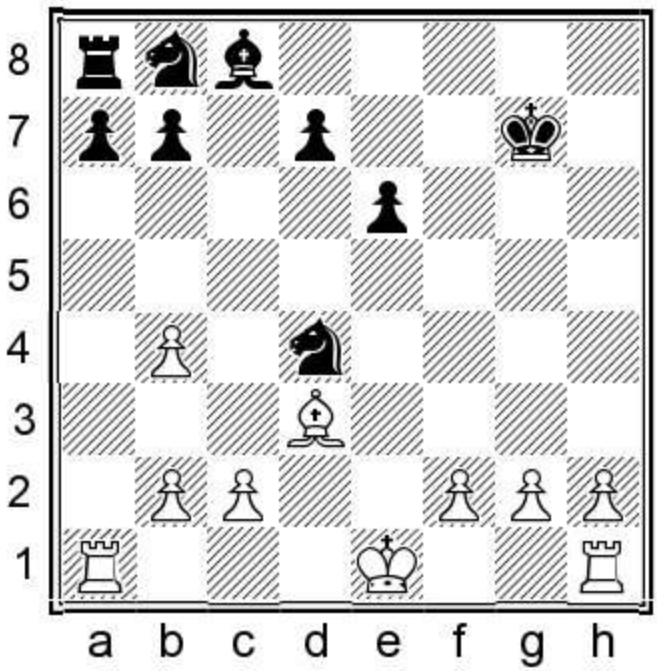
15.Bg6†!N 15...Kd8 16.Qg7+–
With decisive material gains.

10.axb4 Nxd4

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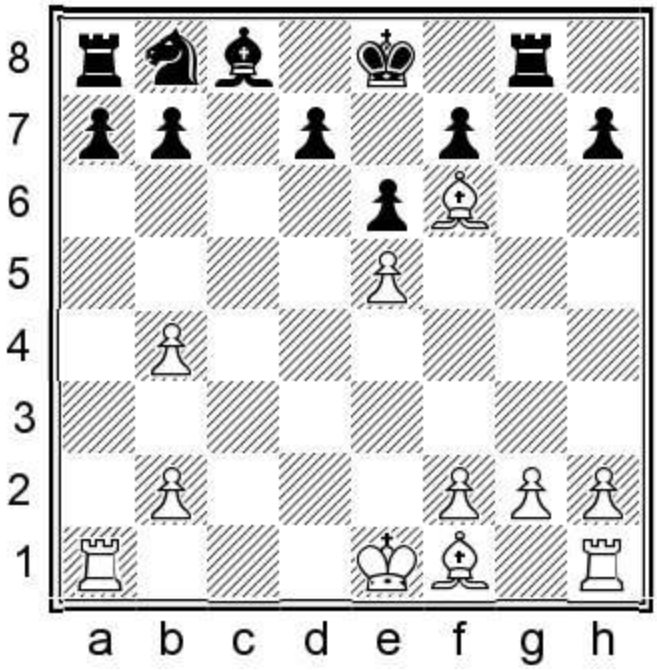
11.Bg5!
In case you reach this position and don't feel comfortable with the main line for whatever reason, you could keep in mind 11.Bh6!? Qe7 12.Bd3 as a simple reserve option. White will almost certainly end up in a favourable endgame with rook and two pawns versus two minor pieces, like in the following games: 12...f5 13. exf6 Qxf6 14.Qxf8† Qxf8 15.Bxf8 Kxf8 16.Bxh7 Kg7 17.Bd3



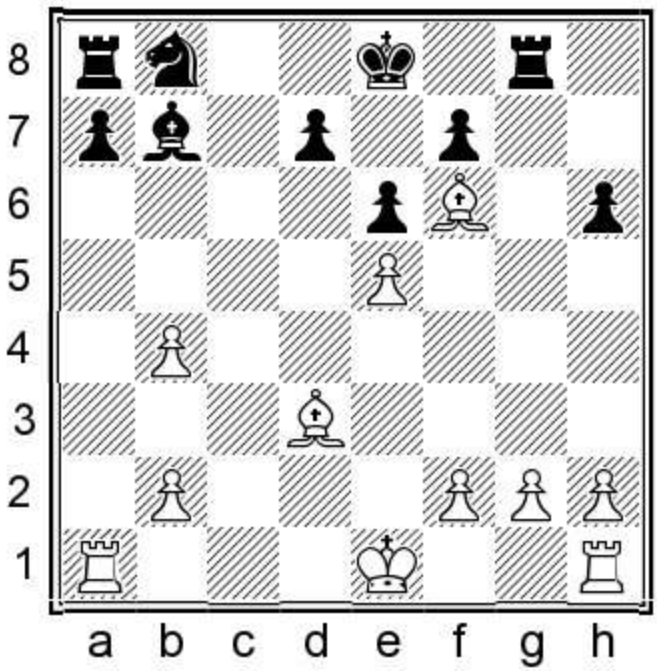
17...d5 (17...Nbc6?! 18.c3 Ne5 19.Be4 Ndc6 20.h4± E. Kouznetsova – C. Ross, Troisdorf 1999) 18.c3 Ndc6 19.f4² Barhudarian – Andreev, St Petersburg 2007.

11...Qb6 12.Bh6 Qxb4† 13.c3 Nf5 14.cxb4 Nxg7 15.Bxg7 Rg8 16.Bf6
This line has been recommended for White since forever, with good reason.

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16...Nc6
16...b5!? 17.Bxb5 Bb7 is an interesting attempt to mix things up, but White can secure a winning advantage with: 18.Bd3!N (18.Rc1?! Nc6² enabled Black to get back in the game in Pikula – Radulski, Mataruska Banja 1996) 18...h6 (18...Rxg2 19.Ke2 Nc6 20.Rhg1 Ne7 21.Rxg2 Bxg2 22.Rg1 Bd5 23.Rg7+–; 18...h5 19.Rg1 Nc6 20.f3 Nxb4 21.Bh7+–)



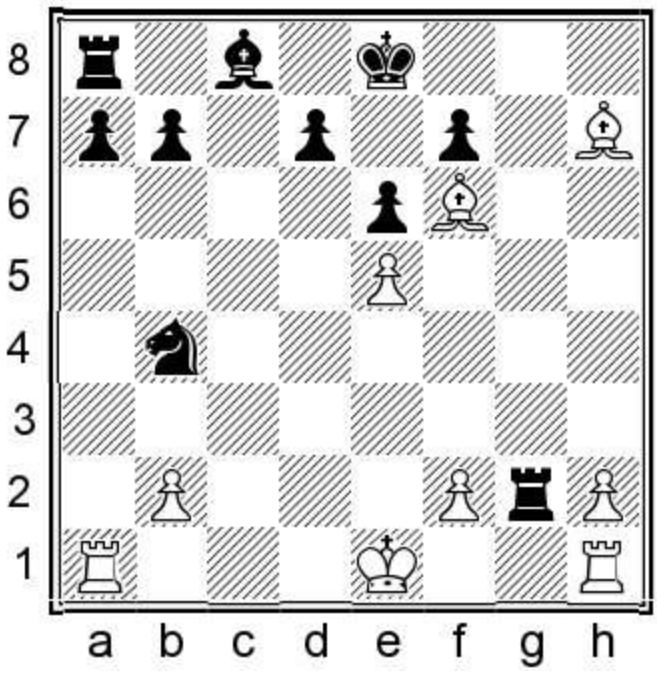
19.Rg1 Nc6 20.g4! Nxb4 21.Bh7+–

17.Bd3 h6
17...Rxg2 occurred in Domingo – Medearis, email 2011, when the simplest winning line would have been: 18. Bxh7!N 18...d6 19.Be4 Rg8 20.exd6 Nxb4 21.h4+–

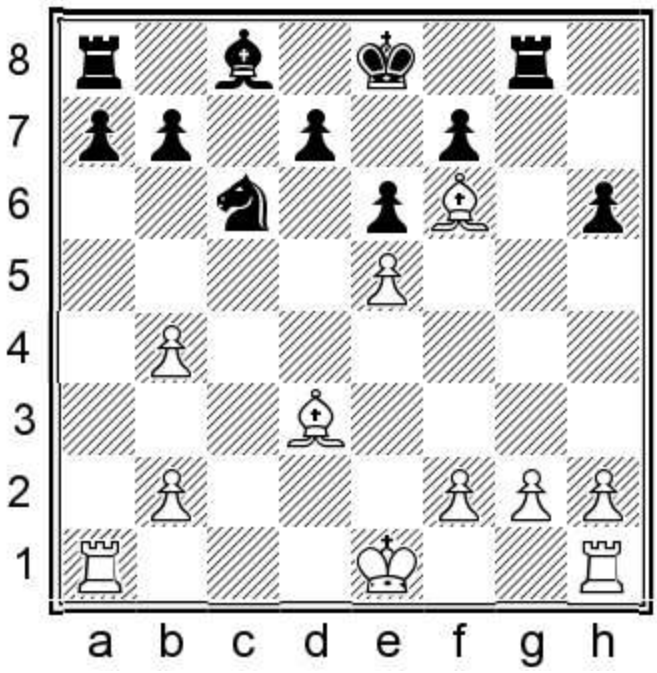
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17...h5 18.b5!N (18.0-0 Nxb4 19.Be4 Nd5 20.Bxd5 exd5 21.Rfc1 is less convincing, although White was still clearly better in Martinez – Agudelo, Bucaramanga 2008) 18...Ne7 19.0-0 and we have essentially the same kind of position as in the main line after 17...h6.

17...Nxb4 18.Bxh7 Rxg2 occurred in Mors – Van der Wall, Netherlands 1995. In a situation where everything wins, the direct plan of promoting the passed pawn makes most sense:



19.h4!N 19...Nd5 20.h5 Nxf6 21.exf6 d5 22.h6 Bd7 23.Ke2 0-0-0 24.Kf3 Rg5 25.Rag1 Rxg1 26.Rxg1 e5 27. Rg8+–



18.b5

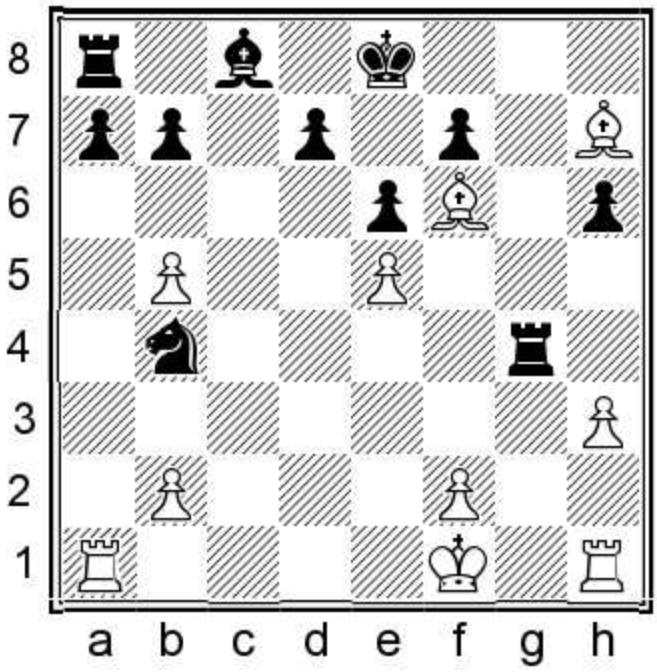
We could easily stop around here, as it's obvious that White is the clear favourite in the endgame, but I will

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show a few more details so that we can completely bury this line.

18...Nb4
18...Ne7 19.0-0 Nd5 occurred in Fajardo – Schinis, Thessaloniki (ol) 1988, when White could have obtained a winning advantage with: 20.Rfc1!N 20...a6 (20...d6 21.Rxa7! is a nice detail) 21.f3 Nxf6 Otherwise Bh4 comes. 22.exf6 Rb8 23.b6 d5 24.Rc7+– With complete domination.

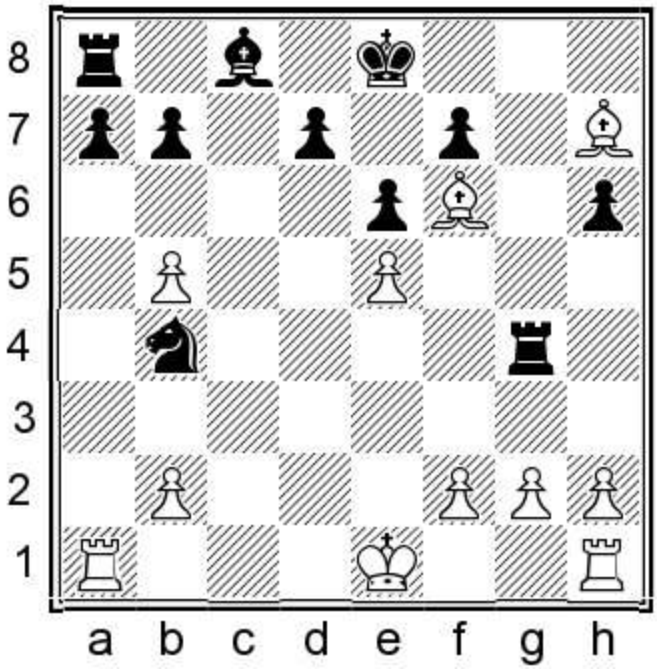
19.Bh7 Rg4
19...Rxg2 occurred in Leoni – Horbach, email 1999, when 20.Kf1!N 20...Rg4 21.h3 would have driven Black's rook away from the kingside:



21...Rc4 22.b3 Rc5 23.Rg1 Now Black can do nothing to stop the invasion. 23...d5 24.Rg8† Kd7 25.Rf8 Kc7 26.Rxf7† Bd7 27.b6† Kc6 28.Be7+–

This position was reached in Okara – Dvalishvili, Moscow 2006. Out of several good moves, my favourite is:

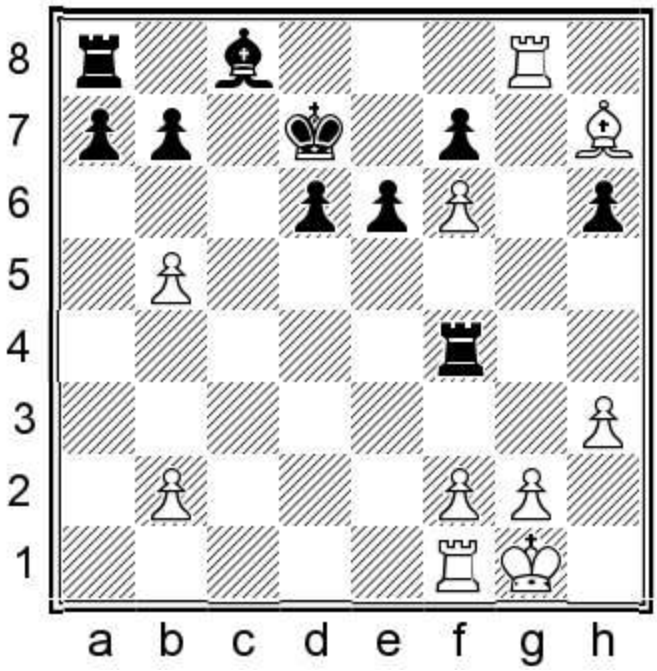
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20.Ra3!?N 20...d6
20...Nd5 21.Rg3 Rxg3 22.hxg3 d6 23.Rxh6 dxe5 24.Bxe5+–

21.h3! Rc4
21...Rxg2 22.Kf1 leaves Black's rook without a safe square.

22.0-0 Nd5 23.Rg3 Nxf6 24.exf6 Rf4 25.Rg8† Kd7



26.b6!
Opening up extra attacking possibilities on the queenside.

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26...axb6

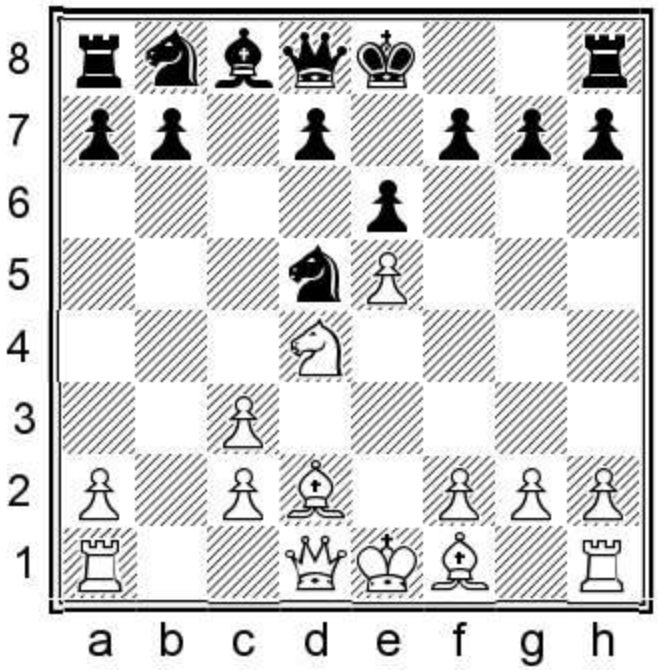
26...Rxf6 27.Bd3 a6 28.Rc1 wins.

27.Bd3 Ra5 28.Rf8 Rxf6 29.b4 Rd5 30.Bc4 Rh5 31.Rc1+–
White will pick up the bishop on c8, with an easy win.

C2) 6...Nd5

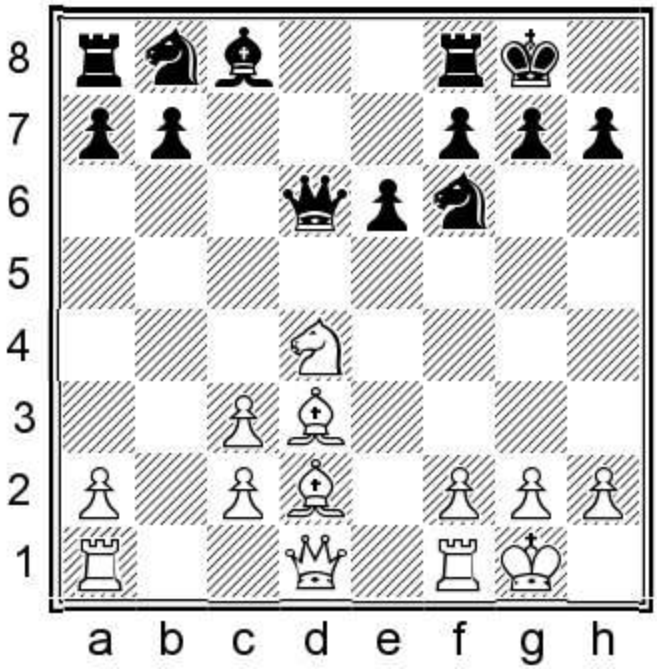
7.Bd2
7.Qg4 is an ambitious move which Negi recommends. The text move is also promising; I have chosen it partly for the sake of variety, and also to take into account the alternative move order noted on page 330, where the same position can arise with one extra move played.

7...Nxc3
7...Bxc3!? 8.bxc3

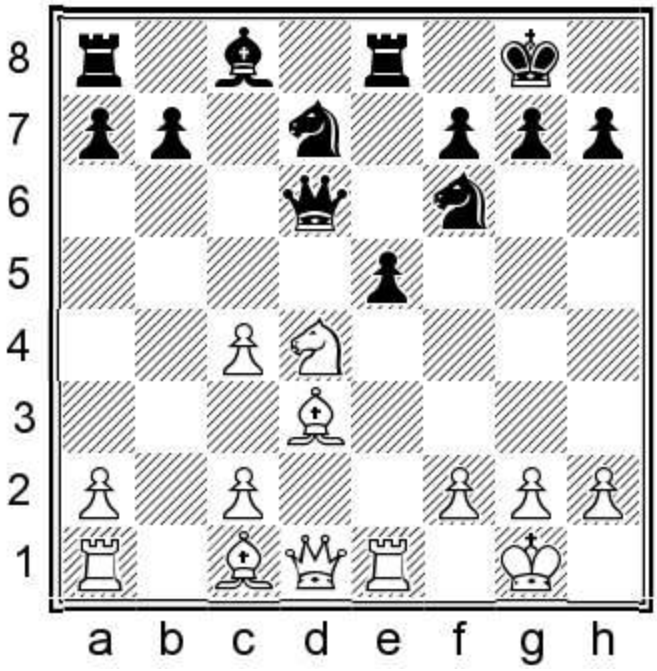


This is playable for Black, but he takes a clear risk when trading his dark-squared bishop for a knight.
8...0-0
8...Qc7 9.f4 a6 has been played, but it can hardly be a good idea for Black to delay his development while putting another pawn on a light square. 10.c4 Ne7 11.Bd3 d6 (11...Nbc6 occurred in Riazuelo – Brochet, France 2008, when 12.Nxc6!N 12...Qxc6 13.Qe2± would have been strong) 12.exd6 Qxd6 13.Nb3 Nbc6 14.0-0± Bd7?! 15.Bc3! Kf8 This was Amrein – Daroczy, Hajduszoboszlo 2000, when 16.Qg4!N 16...f6 17.Rad1 would have been winning for White.
9.Bd3 d6 10.exd6 Qxd6 11.0-0 Nf6
This was Li Chau – Yu Yangyi, Danzhou 2010. I like the following continuation for White:

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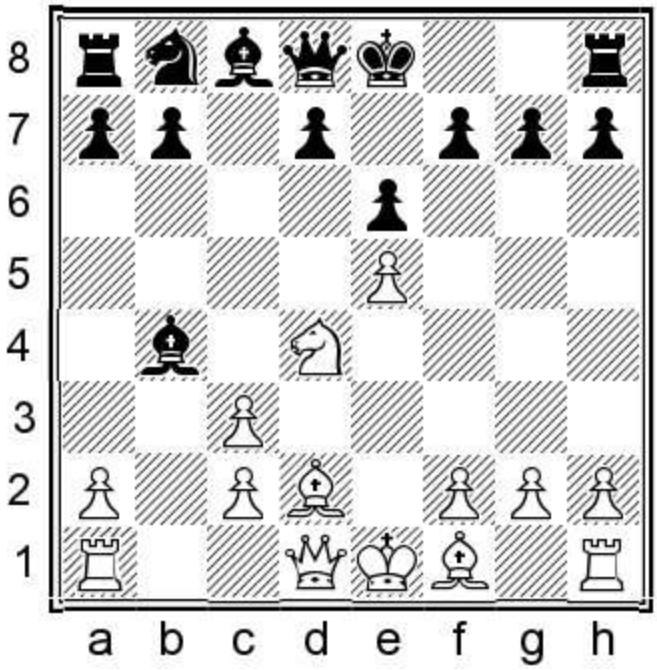
12.Re1!?N 12...Nbd7 13.Bc1!
The idea is to reposition the bishop on a3 or b2.
13...Re8!
13...Qc5 14.Nb5² makes things easier for White.
14.c4 e5
14...b6 15.Nb5 Qc6 16.Be2 Ne5 17.Qd6 Qxd6 18.Nxd6 Rd8 19.Rd1 Ba6 20.Bb2 Nfd7 21.a4±



15.Nf5 Qb6 16.Ba3 Nc5 17.Rb1 Qc6 18.Nd6²

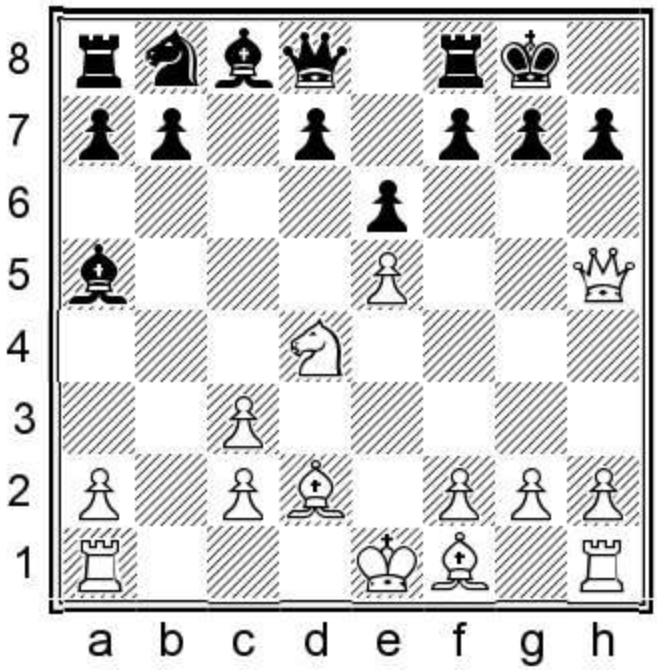
8.bxc3

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8...Be7
Two other moves deserve attention.

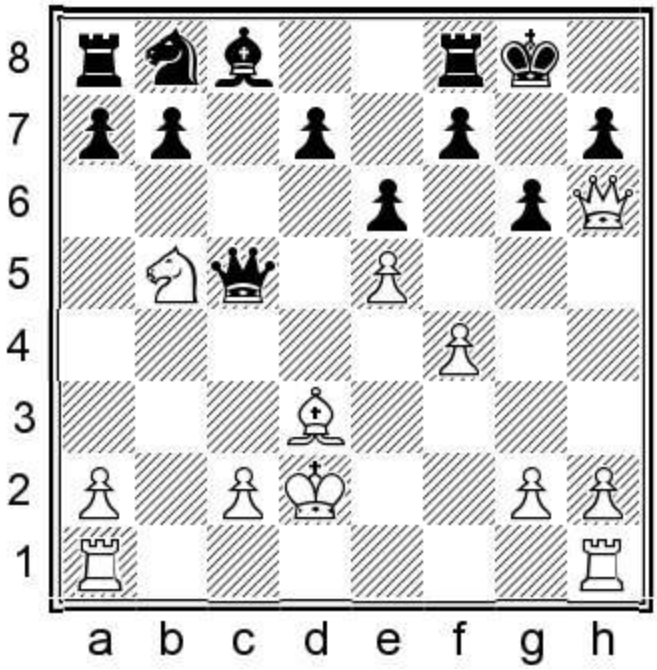
8...Ba5 9.Qh5!?
9.Qg4 is more common but I slightly prefer the text move.
9...0-0
9...Nc6 10.Nxc6 dxc6 11.Bd3² gives White easy play.



10.Bd3 g6 11.Qh6 Qc7
11...Nc6 12.f4± does not really challenge White's position. The text move wins a pawn but it turns out that the attack is too strong.
12.f4 Bxc3 13.Nb5 Bxd2† 14.Kxd2 Qc5

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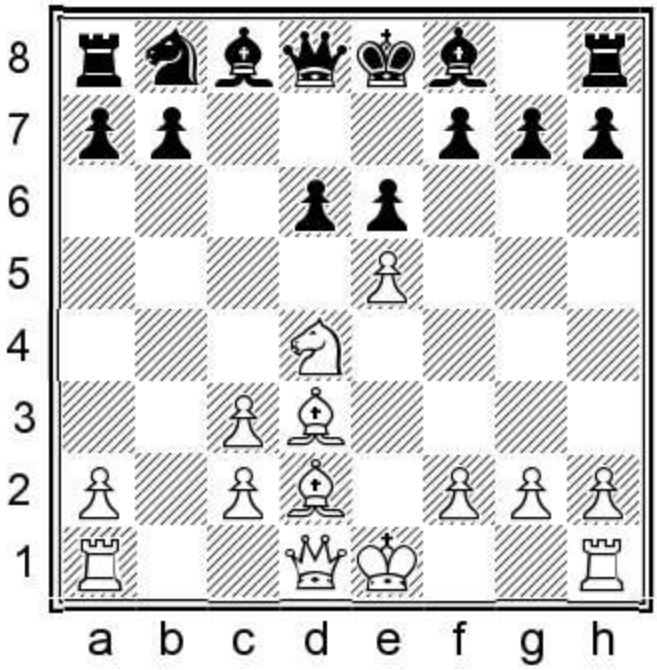
14...Qa5† 15.Ke2 Nc6 16.h4! and the attack decides.



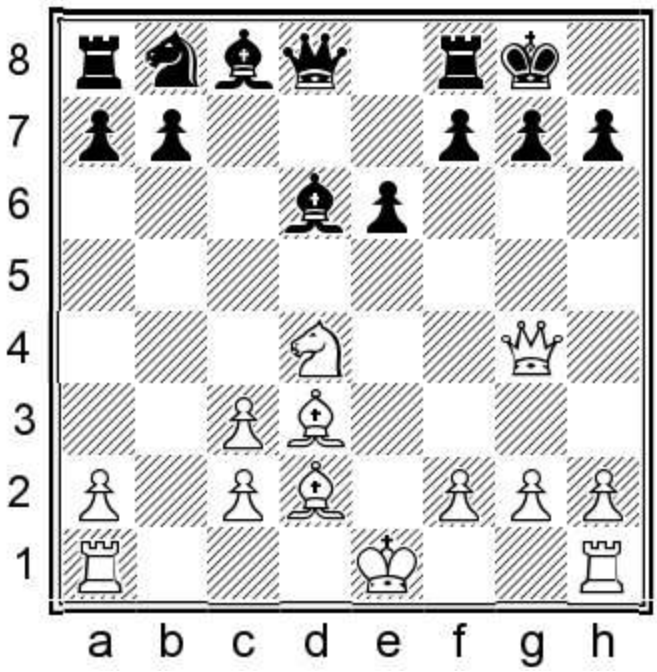
15.Raf1
15.h4!N 15...Qf2† 16.Kc1+– is even better, but the text move is also good enough.
15...Nc6 16.h4 Qb4† 17.Kd1 Rd8 18.h5 Qf8 19.hxg6 Qxh6 20.Rxh6
1–0 Figlio – Wegman, corr. 1999.

8...Bf8 9.Bd3
It is tempting to stop here, as it seems pretty obvious that White's huge lead in development should count for more than his doubled c-pawns. Chess is a concrete game though, so I will present a few lines to support this assessment.
9...d6
9...Nc6 10.Nxc6 dxc6 11.0-0 Qc7 12.Re1 Bd7 13.Qf3² was pleasant for White in Lakdawala – Serpik, Costa Mesa 2003.
9...a6 10.0-0 d6N (10...g6 11.Qe2N 11...Bg7 12.Bf4 0-0 13.Rfe1²) 11.exd6 Bxd6 12.Qg4 0-0? (12...Kf8 13.Rae1²) 13.Bh6 Qf6 14.Bg5 Qe5 15.f4 Qd5 16.Bh6 g6 17.f5! exf5 18.Bxf5 Bxf5 19.Rxf5 Qc4 20.Bxf8+–

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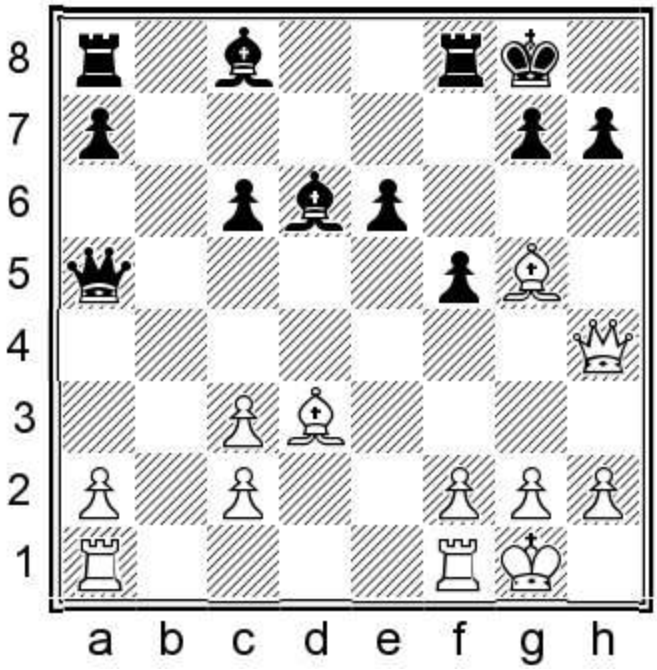


10.exd6 Bxd6 11.Qg4
11.Qh5 and 11.0-0 can certainly be considered as well.
11...0-0
Comp Sphinx Galaxy – Pouwels, Dieren 1988. Here White should have continued:

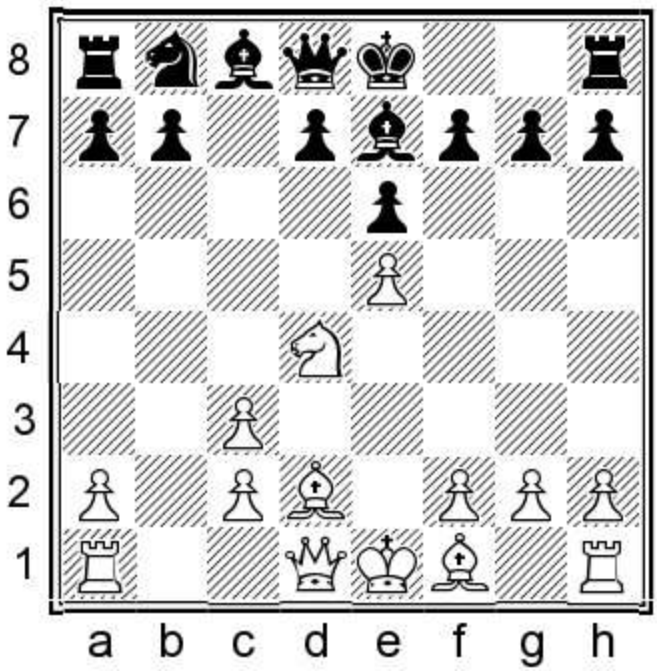


12.Bg5N 12...Qa5
12...f6? 13.Qh5 g6 14.Bxg6 Qe7 15.Bh6 wins.
13.0-0 f5
13...Qxc3? 14.Nb5 is terrible for Black.
14.Qh4 Nc6 15.Nxc6 bxc6

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16.Bc4 h6
16...Qxc3 17.Rad1*f*
17.Be7 Bxe7 18.Qxe7 Qxc3 19.Qc5 Qf6 20.Rfe1©
With ideas of Rad1-d6, a4-a5 and so on. White should be able to regain the sacrificed pawn pretty easily, while keeping the initiative.

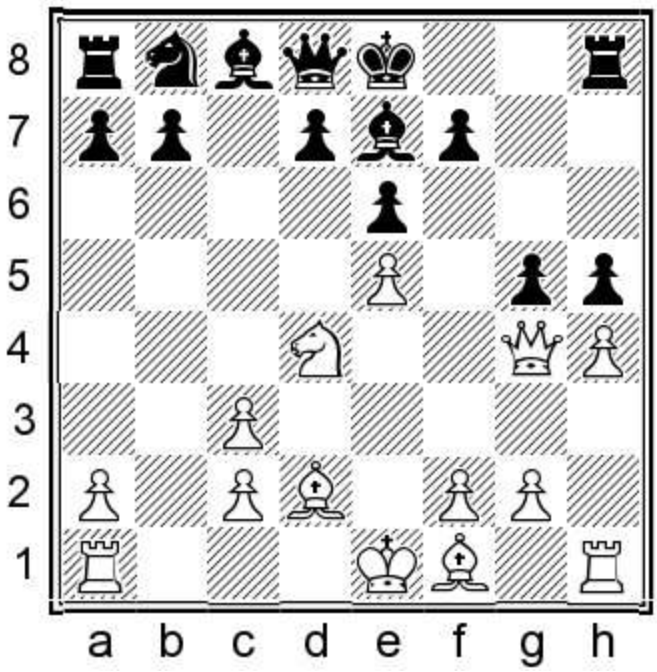


9.Qg4
We will analyse C21) 9...0-0?! and C22) 9...g6.

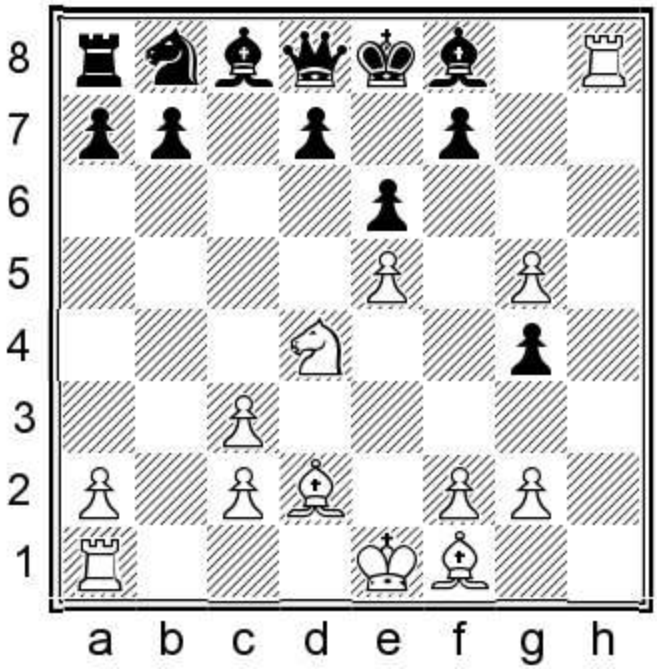
9...Kf8 10.Bd3 is similar to the 8...Bf8 line above, but here Black has the additional difficulty of arranging some kind of artificial castling.

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9...g5? is too weakening but it is worth taking a quick look at the refutation: 10.h4 h5N (10...Nc6 11.Nxc6 dxc6 12.hxg5 made things easy for White in Guimaraes – Schossler, Araruama 2010)



11.hxg5! (11.Qg3! g4 12.Nb5 also wins but the text move is prettier) 11...hxg4 12.Rxh8† Bf8



13.0-0-0! With the deadly threat of g5-g6. (The immediate 13.g6? would have allowed 13...Qc7!) 13...Qc7 14. Re1! and Black has no defence.

C21) 9...0-0?!

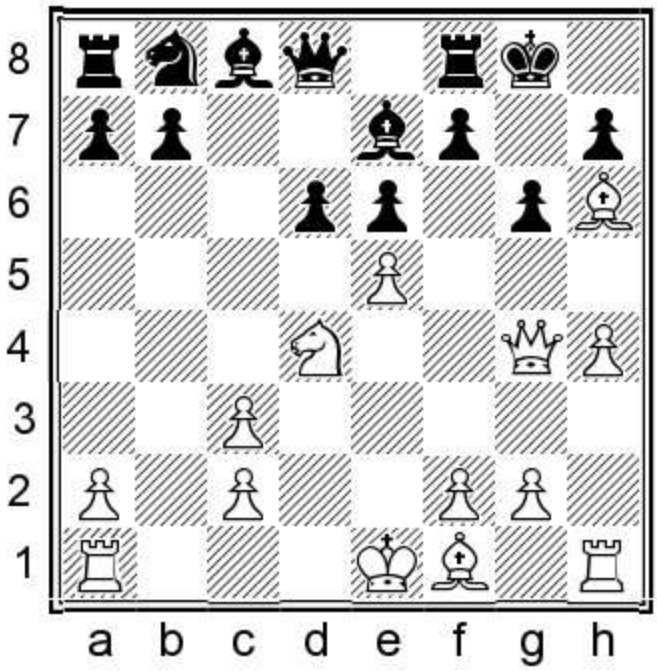
This is a popular move but it allows White to launch a huge attack with:

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10.Bh6 g6 11.h4!
But not 11.Bxf8 Bxf8, when Black has some compensation for the exchange and (more importantly) will not be mated on the kingside!

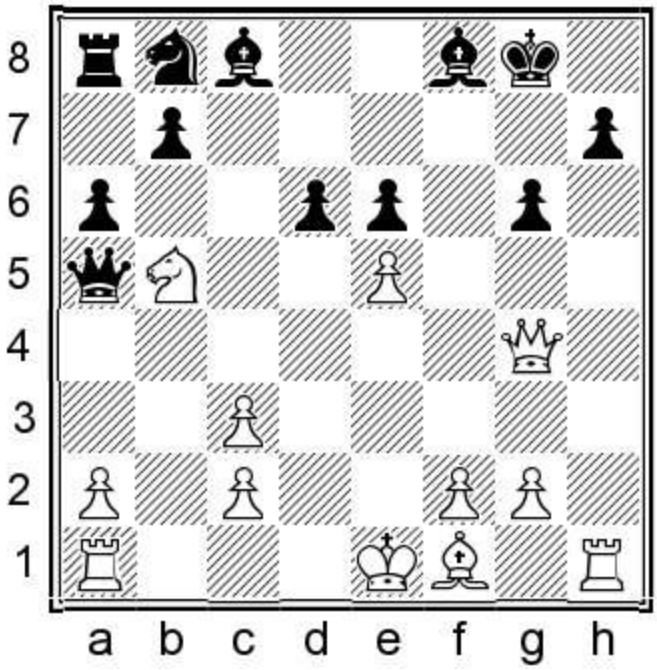
11...Qa5
This is Black's best try, as it forces White to spend a tempo defending e5.

11...d6?!
This makes things easier, as the following game demonstrates.

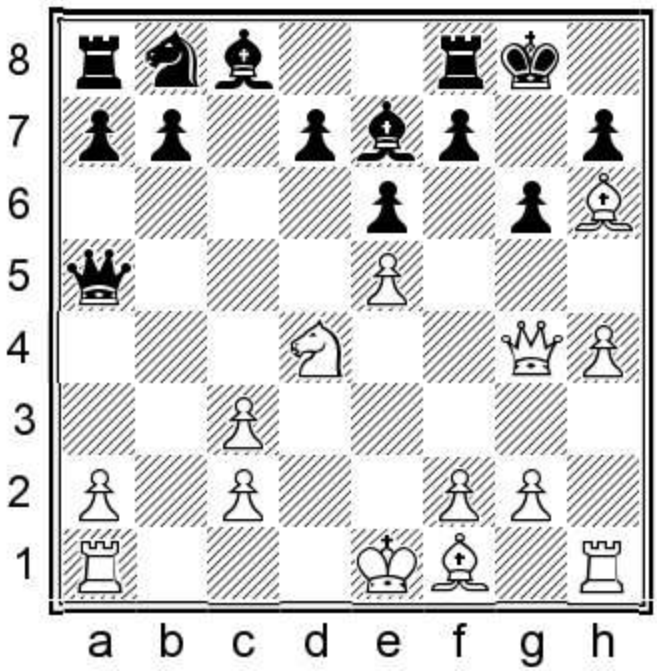


12.h5! Qa5
12...dxe5 13.hxg6 fxg6 14.Bxf8 exd4 15.Bxe7 Qxe7 16.Bd3 Bd7 17.Rb1 b6 18.cxd4 was winning for White in Klovans – Schein, Graz 1999.
13.Nb5
13.0-0-0!? also works.
13...a6 14.hxg6 fxg6 15.Bxf8 Bxf8
15...axb5 16.Kd2! Bxf8 17.Rxh7! wins in much the same way.

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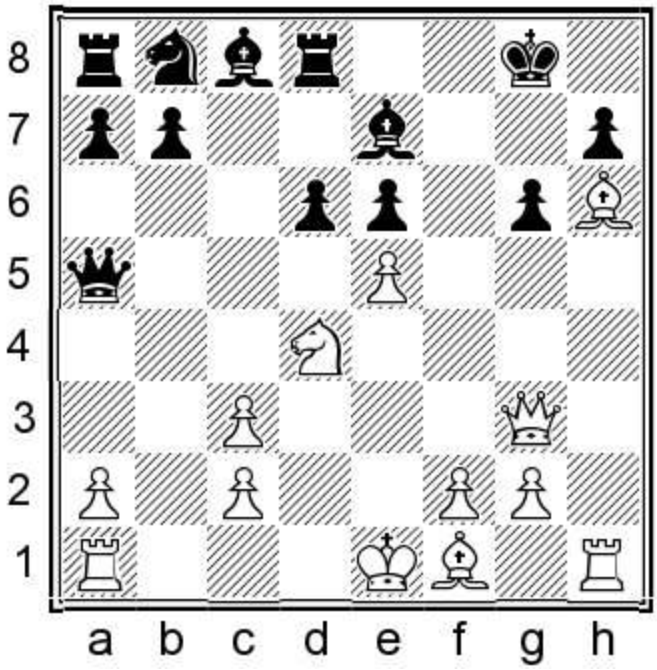
16.Rxh7!
Black resigned in Lalic – Sulava, Pula 1997. The finish might have been:
16...Kxh7 17.Bd3 Bg7 18.Qxg6† Kg8 19.Qe8† Bf8 20.Bg6 Kg7 21.Qf7† Kh6 22.Qh7† Kg5 23.Qh5† Kf4 24.g3#



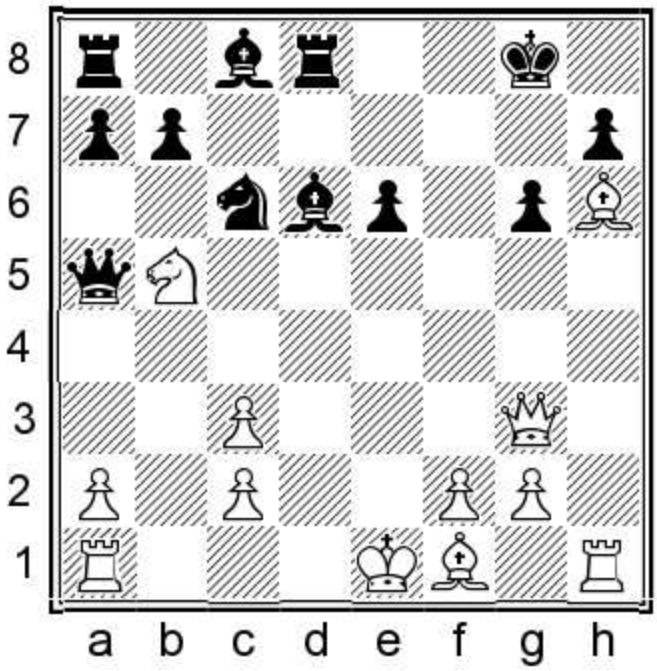
12.Qg3 d6
This seems like the best attempt to distract White from the kingside.

I also checked the slower alternative:
12...Rd8 13.h5 d6 14.hxg6 fxg6
14...hxg6 occurred in Narciso Dublan – Veiga Goy, Ponferrada 1997, when White could have won with 15. Nb5!N followed by Bg5 or Qh2.

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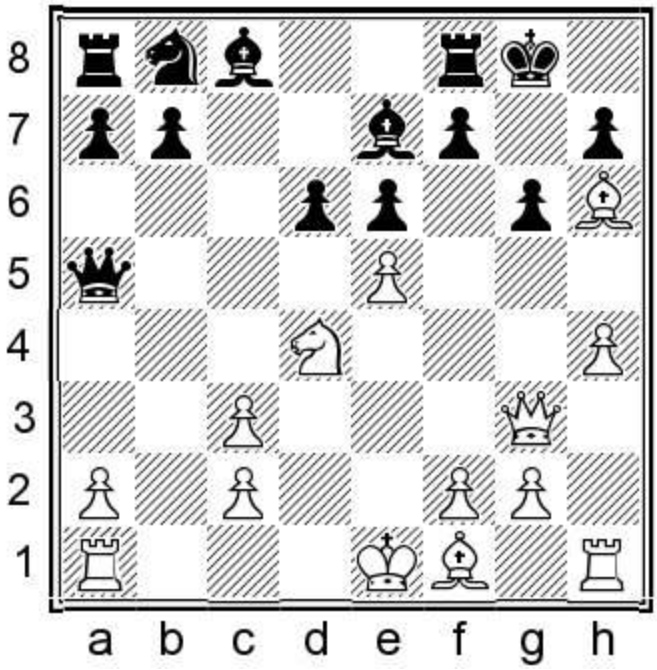


15.Nb5!N
The most accurate of a few winning moves.
15.Bf4 dxe5 16.Bxe5 Rd5 17.f4 Nd7 18.Bc4 Nxe5 19.Bxd5 Qxd5 20.fxe5 Qe4† 21.Kd2 was also good enough in Wedberg – Pokojowczyk, Copenhagen 1984.
15...Nc6
15...dxe5 16.Qxe5 Bf8 17.Bxf8 Rxf8 18.Bd3+–
16.exd6 Bxd6



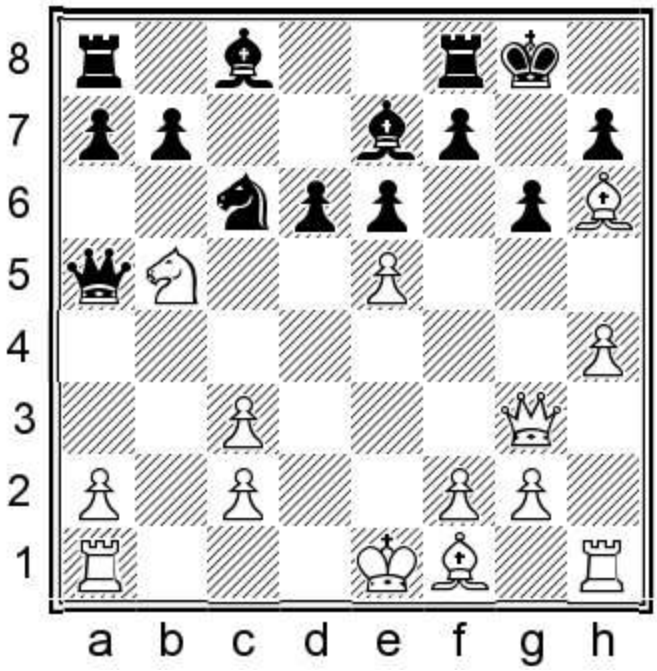
17.Qh3! Be5
17...e5 18.Bc4† Kh8 19.Bg5! wins in style.
18.f4
White is winning.

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13.Nb5
13.exd6 Bf6 14.Rd1 also looks strong.

13...Nc6
13...dxe5? gives White a choice between 14.h5 and 14.Qxe5!? f6 15.Qc7, either of which is winning.
13...Nd7 14.h5 dxe5? (14...Nxe5 transposes to our main line, and was the actual move order of the Czarnota – Sulskis game) White has several good options; the computer's favourite is 15.Rd1! a6 16.Bd3! winning.



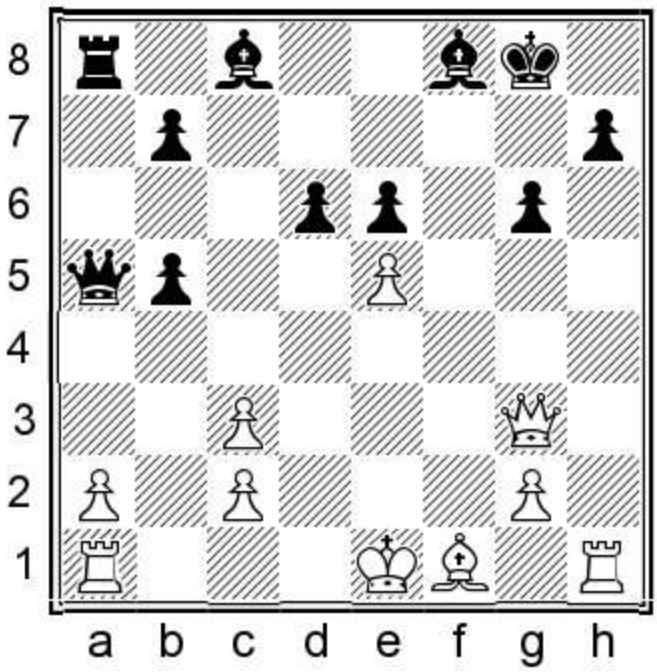
14.h5
14.Rd1!? is the top engine choice but the text move is easier for a human to understand.

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14...Nxe5

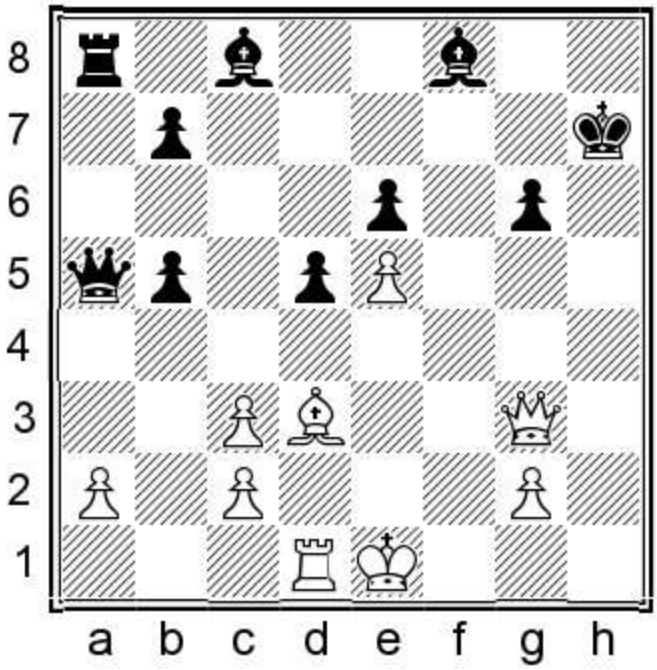
14...Bd7 15.exd6 Bf6 16.Bg5 is winning.

15.f4 Bd7
Black has also tried:
15...a6 16.fxe5 axb5 17.hxg6 fxg6 18.Bxf8 Bxf8

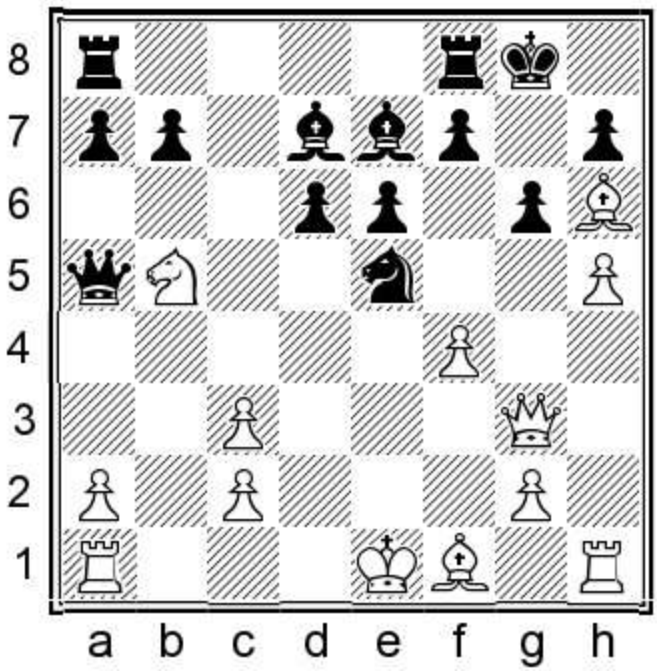


19.Rd1!
19.Rxh7? is premature; after 19...Kxh7 20.Bd3 Qxc3† 21.Kf2 Qd2† 22.Kf3 Qh6 White was lucky to be able to force a draw with 23.Rh1! Qxh1 24.Qxg6† in Garcia Pantoja – Otero Acosta, Santa Clara 2014.
19...d5?!
19...Bd7 would have kept the game going although White should be winning with careful play; 20.Be2 is one good option.
20.Rxh7!
Now it works!
20...Kxh7 21.Bd3

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21...Qc7
21...Qxc3† 22.Ke2 leaves Black defenceless.
22.Qxg6† Kh8 23.Qh5† Kg8 24.Ke2 Qg7 25.Rf1 Bd7 26.Bg6 Qh6 27.Rxf8†
1–0 Alonso Bouza – Alonso Garcia, Mondariz 2016.



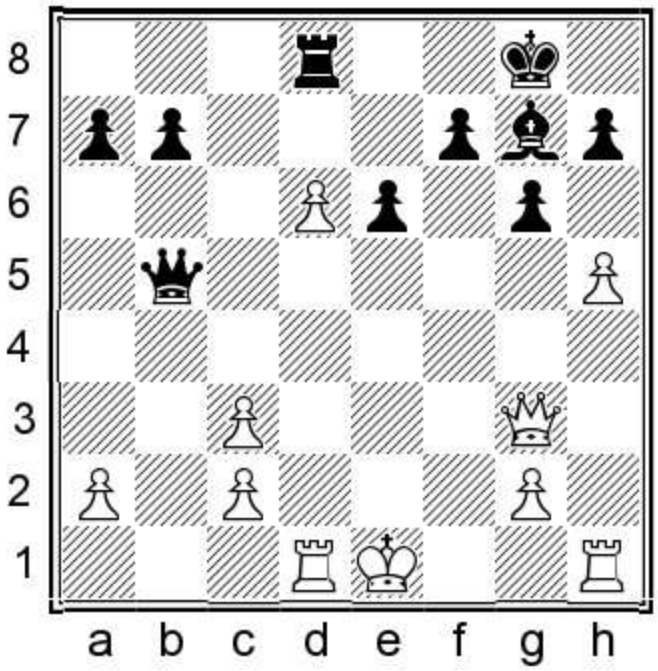
16.fxe5 Bxb5 17.Bxb5
17.Bxf8 Bxf8 18.hxg6 hxg6 is less convincing.

17.hxg6!?N is a computer suggestion, forcing Black to recapture with the f-pawn. 17...fxg6 (17...hxg6? 18. Qh3+–) 18.Bxb5 (18.Bxf8? Rxf8 gives Black nasty counterplay) 18...Qxb5 19.exd6 Bf6 20.Bxf8 Rxf8 (20... Rc8!? 21.d7!) 21.Rd1 I will leave it here; with computer assistance White is winning comfortably, but in a practical game he would still need to be careful due to his exposed king.

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17...Qxb5 18.Bxf8 Bxf8
18...Rxf8 19.exd6 Bg5 20.Rd1 was comfortably winning for White in S.B. Hansen – B. Sahl, Taastrup 1998.

19.exd6 Rd8 20.Rd1 Bg7
We have been following Czarnota – Sulskis, Warsaw 2005. I think the most accurate continuation would have been:



21.Rh3!?N+–
White's extra exchange and strong passed pawn should be enough for victory.

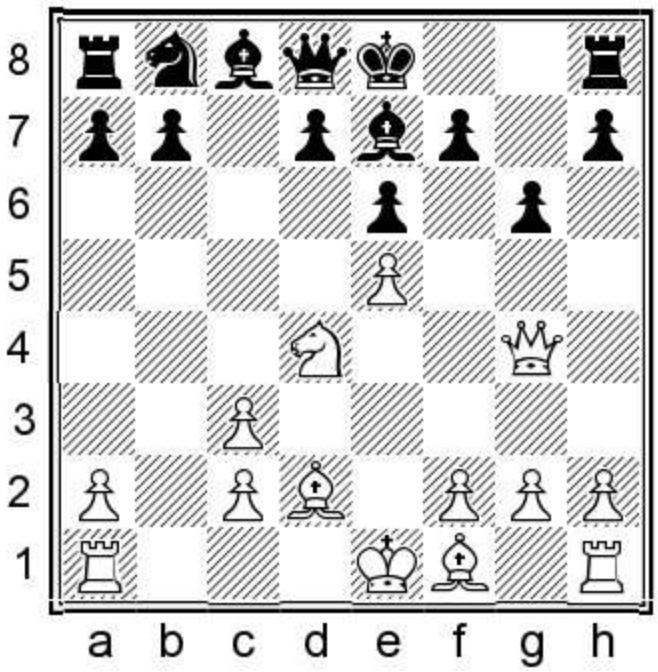
C22) 9...g6

GAME 42

Stane Korosec – Bogdan Osolin
Correspondence 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.e5 Nd5 7.Bd2 Nxc3 8.bxc3 Be7 9.Qg4 g6

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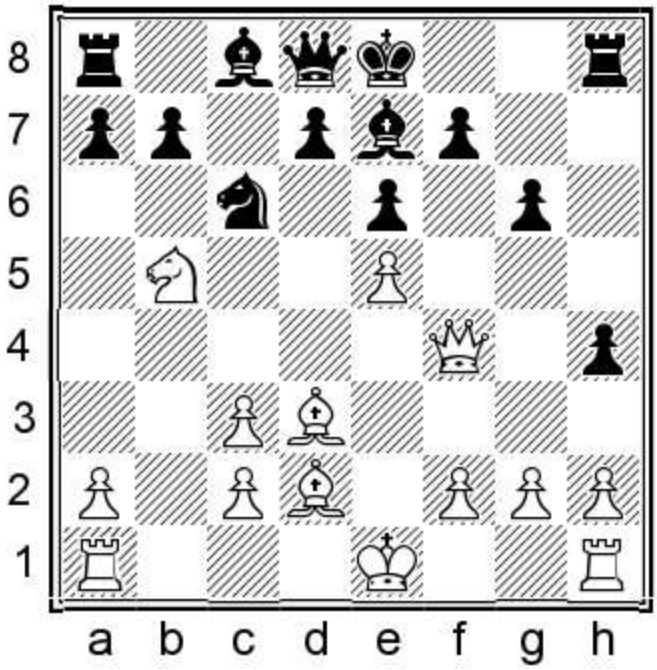
10.Qg3
This is a useful move as it defends the e5-pawn in advance, while preparing ideas such as Nb5, to invade on d6 and play on the dark squares, or h2-h4, when the reply ...h5 will not win a tempo against the queen.

10...Nc6
10...d6? 11.Bb5†! is awkward for Black: putting a piece on d7 would lose the d6-pawn, while 11...Kf8 12.Bh6† Kg8 13.Rd1± is also no fun for him.

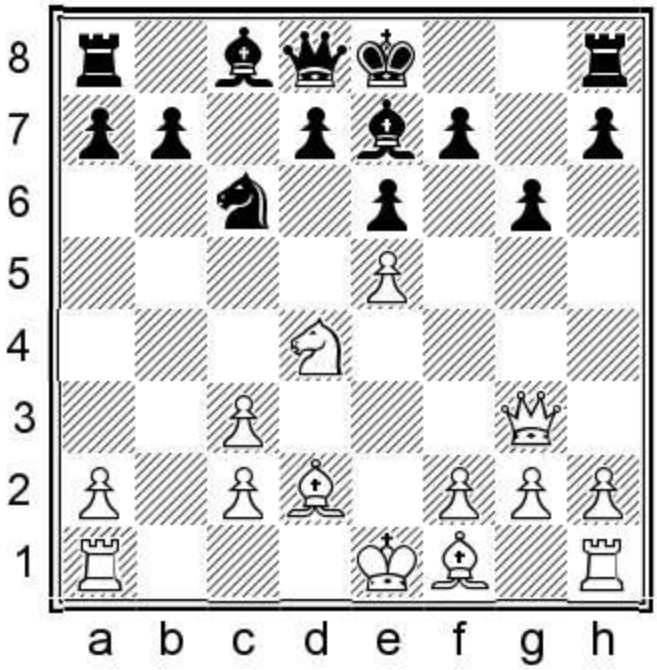
10...a6 was played in Jansen – Egenolf, Bad Homburg 2015, when 11.Bh6N² would have given Black problems castling.

10...Qa5 11.h4!² gave White a nice initiative in Vera – De Waele, corr. 2011.
10...h5!? is playable, but White keeps the upper hand after: 11.Nb5 h4 12.Qf4 Nc6 13.Bd3 (13.Nd6†!?N 13... Bxd6 14.exd6² is also good)

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13...h3 14.Rg1 hxg2 15.Rxg2 a6 16.Nd6† Bxd6 17.exd6 Qh4 18.a4² Kurgansky – Rihtaric, corr. 2011.

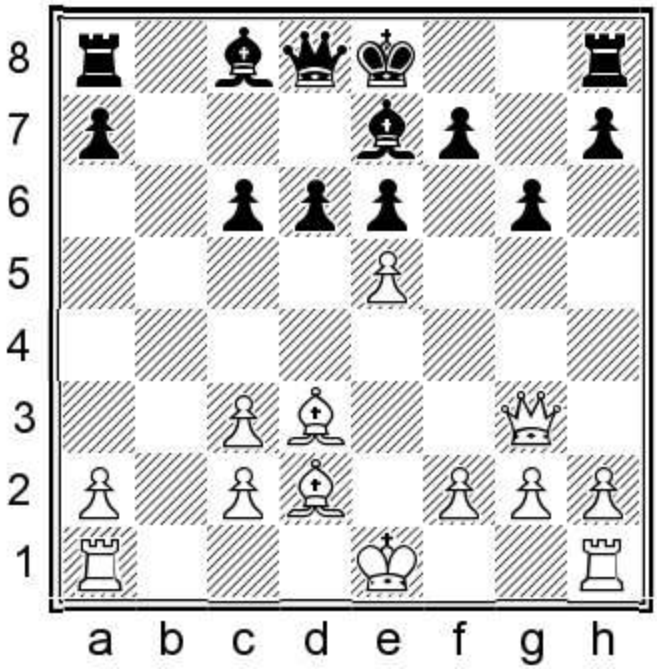


11.Bd3 Bh4
This move looks weird, but Black wants to prepare castling without allowing an immediate h2-h4.

11...0-0 12.Nxc6 bxc6 13.h4 Kh8 14.h5 g5 15.0-0² left Black with numerous weaknesses in Zabransky – Reede, corr. 2014.

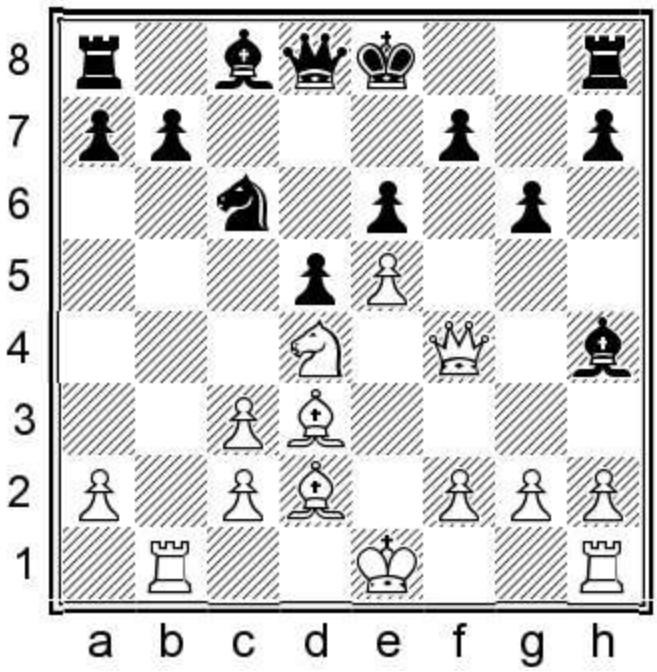
11...d6 12.Nxc6 bxc6 occurred in Salati – Chitescu, corr. 2008, when White should have continued:

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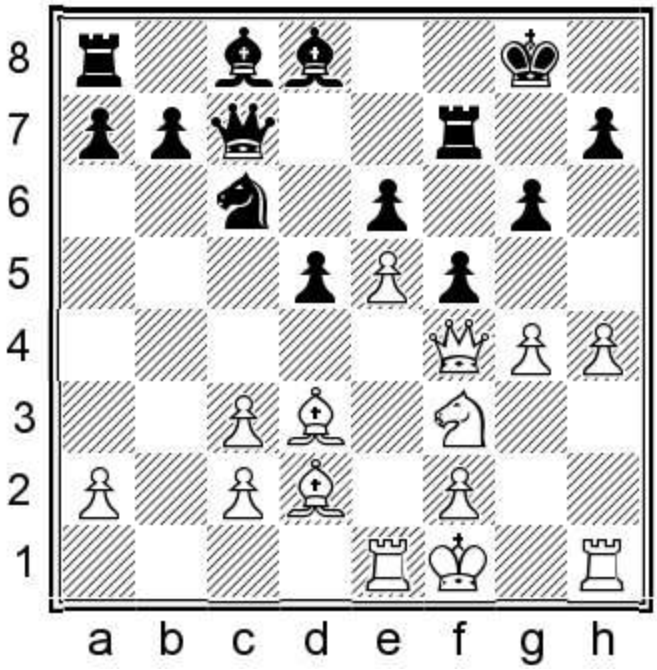
13.Bh6!N 13...Qa5 (13...dxe5 14.Bg7²) 14.exd6 Qxc3† 15.Ke2 Bf8 16.Bf4 Bg7 17.Rhe1 0-0 18.Kf1² White has the upper hand thanks to his strong passed pawn.

Black has also tried: 11...d5 12.Rb1 (12.0-0 0-0 13.Bh6 Re8 14.Rab1²) 12...Bh4 (12...0-0 13.h4²) 13.Qf4 This resembles the main game; here too, White soon built up a crushing attack:



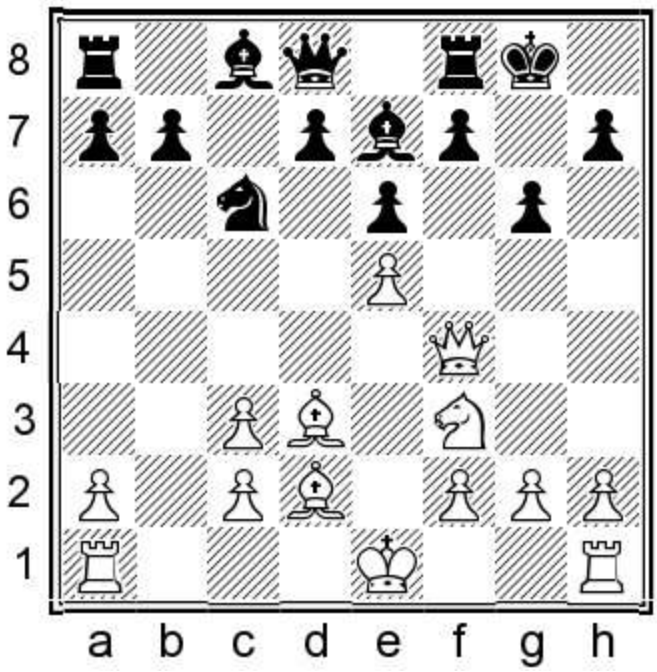
13...0-0 14.Nf3 Be7 15.h4 Qc7 16.Kf1 f5 17.Re1 Rf7 18.g4 Bd8

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19.Qh6! fxg4 20.h5! Rxf3 21.hxg6 Black resigned in Kunz – Mauer, email 2012. If 21...Kh8 then 22.Qh5! leaves him without a good defence.

12.Qf4 0-0 13.Nf3 Be7

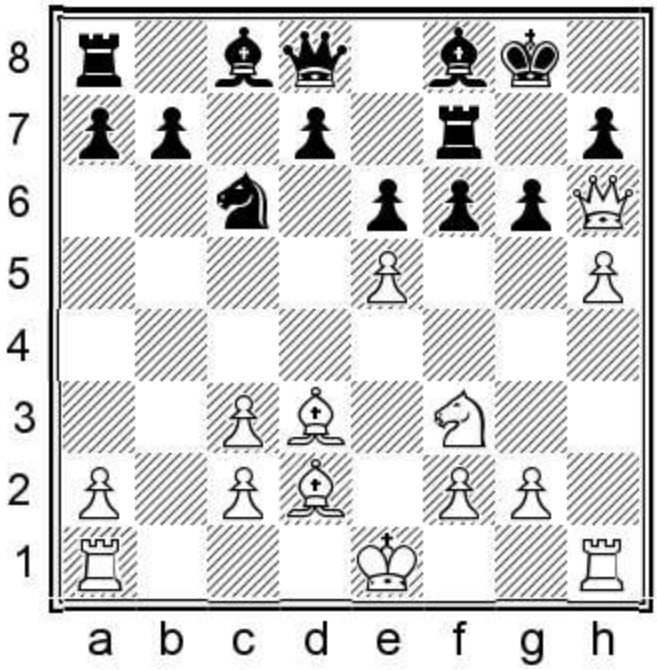


14.h4! f6?
This leads to disaster for Black.

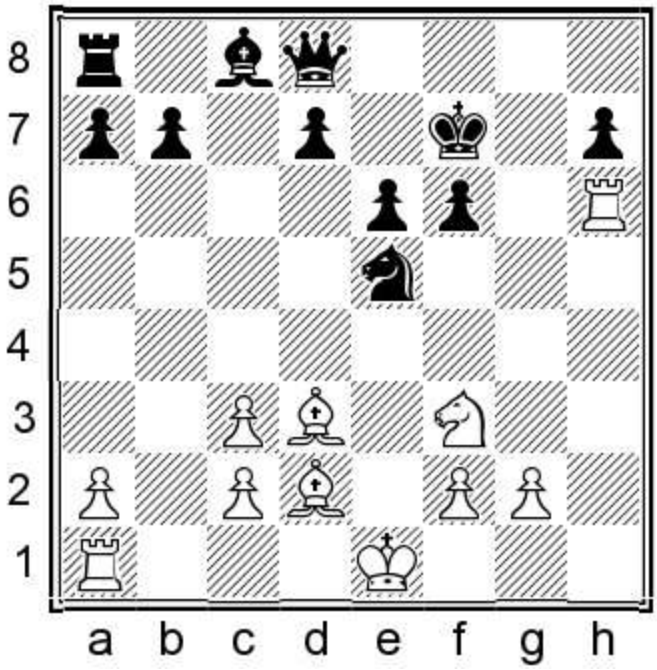
14...f5 is a better defence although 15.Qg3 still leaves Black with plenty to worry about on the kingside.

15.Qh6 Rf7 16.h5 Bf8
Now White breaks through in style.

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17.hxg6! Bxh6 18.gxf7† Kxf7 19.Rxh6 Nxe5
19...f5 is met by 20.Ke2, when the second rook joins the attack with decisive effect.



20.Rxh7† Kg8 21.Nxe5 fxe5 22.0-0-0
Black has no defence and so he resigned.
1–0

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with many sidelines, of varying quality. Beginning with the tabiya after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4, we started with 4...Qb6, when 5.Be3! is a dangerous pawn sacrifice which puts Black under early pressure.

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We then moved on to 4...Bc5, as advocated in the Broznik/Giddins book. 5.Be3 Qb6 is Black's main idea, but 6.Nb5! Bxe3 7.fxe3 forces Black to play a dangerous game with his king in the centre. Taking the pawn with 7...Qxe3†? is not only terribly risky from a practical perspective, but also most likely an objectively losing move. 7...Ke7! is Black's best chance to survive; but the fact that he has to resort to such a move (and still comes under pressure) is a strong indication that Black's entire opening scheme is faulty.

We then looked at the Pin Variation with 4...Nf6 5.Nc3 Bb4. This looks active, but after 6.e5 Nd5 (6...Ne4? is much worse) 7.Bd2 Nxc3 8.bxc3 White has an easy lead in development, with fine attacking chances in many lines.

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Chapter 14 - 2...Nc6 & 2...d6 - Sidelines<

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

A) 2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 (4...Nf6 5.Nc3 g6?!) 358
A1) 4...d5 358
A2) 4...Qc7 360
A3) 4...Qb6 5.Nb3 Nf6 6.Nc3 e6 7.Bd3 361
A31) 7...a6 362
A32) 7...d6 363
B) 2...d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 367
B1) 4...e5 368
B2) 4...Nf6 5.Nc3 369
B21) 5...e5 6.Bb5† 370
B211) 6...Bd7?! 370
B212) 6...Nbd7 372
B22) 5...Bd7 375

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3
In this chapter we will consider sidelines after A) 2...Nc6 and B) 2...d6. The volume of material is smaller than the previous chapter, but the average theoretical soundness of the lines in this chapter is higher.

A) 2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

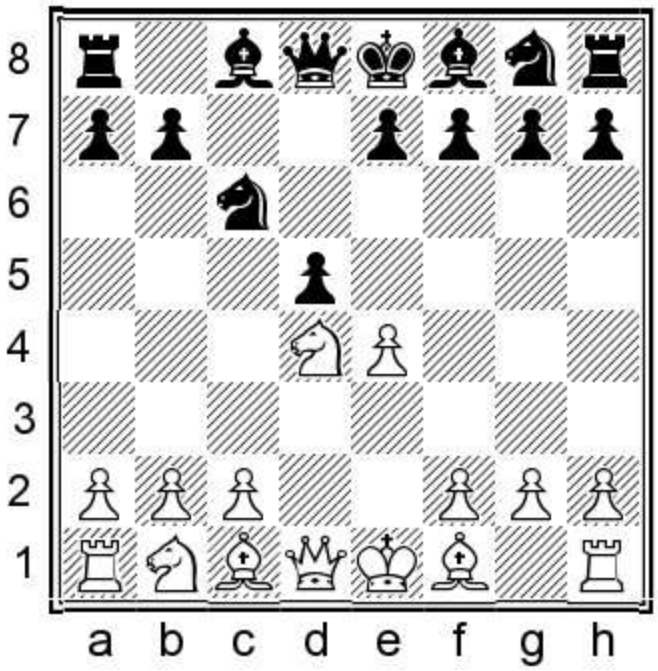
We will analyse A1) 4...d5, A2) 4...Qc7 and A3) 4...Qb6. There are other serious moves of course, which can be found in Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines.

An inferior option is:
4...Nf6 5.Nc3 g6?!
This move order combines elements of the Accelerated and 'normal' versions of the Dragon, but allows White to obtain an advantage by simple means.
6.Nxc6 bxc6
6...dxc6 is safer, but White gets a risk-free edge after: 7.Qxd8† Kxd8 8.Bc4 Ke8 9.e5 (9.a4² is also fine) 9...Nd7 (9...Ng4?! 10.f4 h5 11.h3 Nh6 12.Kf2± Cafferty – Wood, England 1959) 10.e6 fxe6 11.Bxe6² Adorjan – Diaz, Stockholm 1969.
7.e5 Ng8
7...Nd5? 8.Nxd5 cxd5 9.Qxd5 Rb8 is an attempt to sac a pawn for some initiative, but 10.e6! is a convincing refutation, based on 10...fxe6?? 11.Qe5 forking the rooks.
7...Nh5 has been played in a bunch of games but 8.Bc4 gives White an easy advantage.
8.Bc4 Bg7
8...Qc7 9.Bf4 Bg7?? 10.Bxf7†! was a disaster for Black in Popilski – Kamsky, Calgary 2016.
8...Qa5 9.0-0 Qxe5? (9...Bg7 10.Qf3±) 10.Re1 gives White an overwhelming initiative for the pawn.
9.Qf3 f5
Or 9...e6 10.Bf4 and White is clearly better.
After the text move White keeps the advantage after anything sensible, but I especially like the following continuation:
10.Bf4 e6 11.0-0-0 Qc7 12.h4 Rb8

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12...Bxe5 13.Bxe5 Qxe5 14.Bxe6+– Horvath – Kallai, Hungary 1993.
13.Qg3 Rb4 14.b3 Qa5 15.Nb1 Qxa2
J. Polgar – Bergsson, Reykjavik 1988.
16.h5N,
With a near-decisive kingside assault.

A1) 4...d5

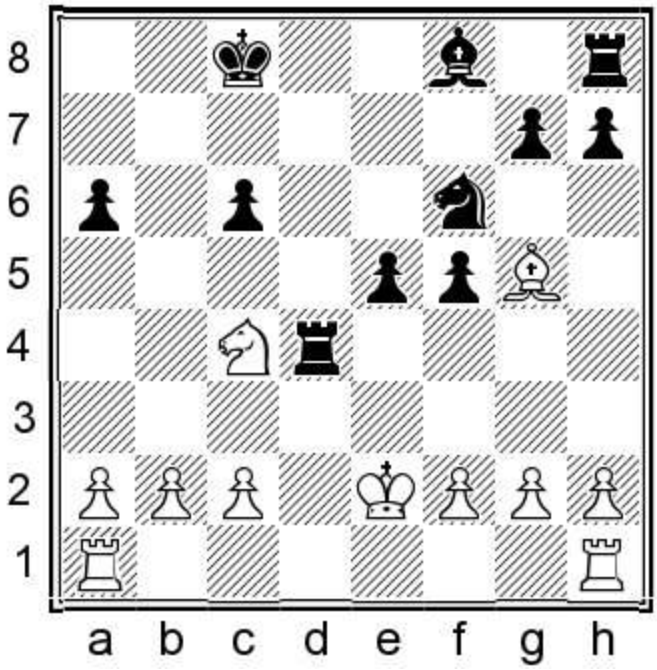


IM Richard Palliser recommended this in a chapter of Dangerous Weapons: The Sicilian. It is not terrible, but definitely not equalizing.

5.Nxc6!?
I have chosen this as my main recommendation, as I have a particular set-up in mind which offers White good chances to develop a middlegame initiative.

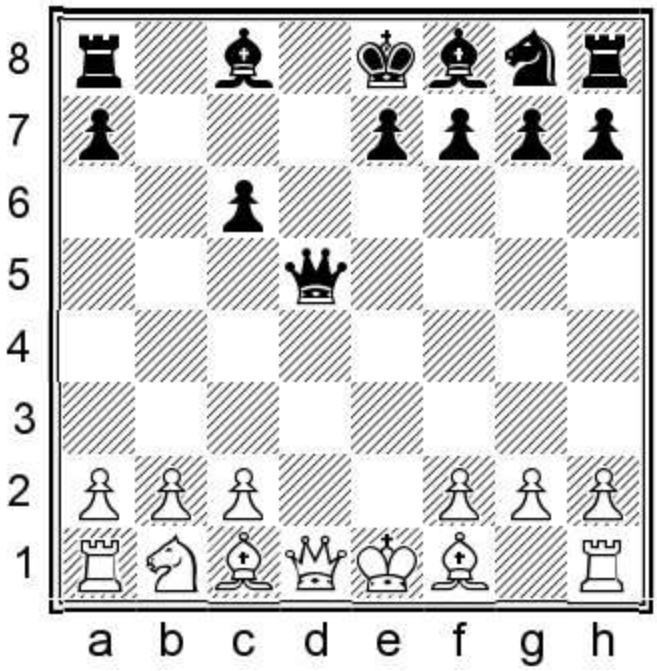
For players who are happy with a small endgame advantage, a nice alternative is:
5.Bb5 dxe4 6.Nxc6 Qxd1† 7.Kxd1 a6 8.Ba4 Bd7
This small tactical motif enables Black to restore material equality, but White will keep a positional plus.
9.Nc3 Bxc6 10.Bxc6† bxc6 11.Nxe4
White has a small but clear advantage thanks to the slight weakness of Black's queenside pawns.
11...f5
Other moves have been played, but the general picture is the same.
12.Nd2 e5 13.Nc4
13.c3!?N is also worth considering, with the idea of putting the king on c2.
13...0-0-0† 14.Ke2 Nf6 15.Bg5 Rd4
This occurred in Solodovnichenko – Todorov, France 2007. A simple improvement is:

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16.b3N
White keeps the upper hand thanks to his better structure. For example:
16...Bc5 17.Be3 Rd5 18.Rhd1²

5...bxc6 6.exd5 Qxd5
6...cxd5? 7.Bb5† Bd7 8.Qxd5+– wins a pawn for nothing, so Black once again has to compromise his queenside structure.

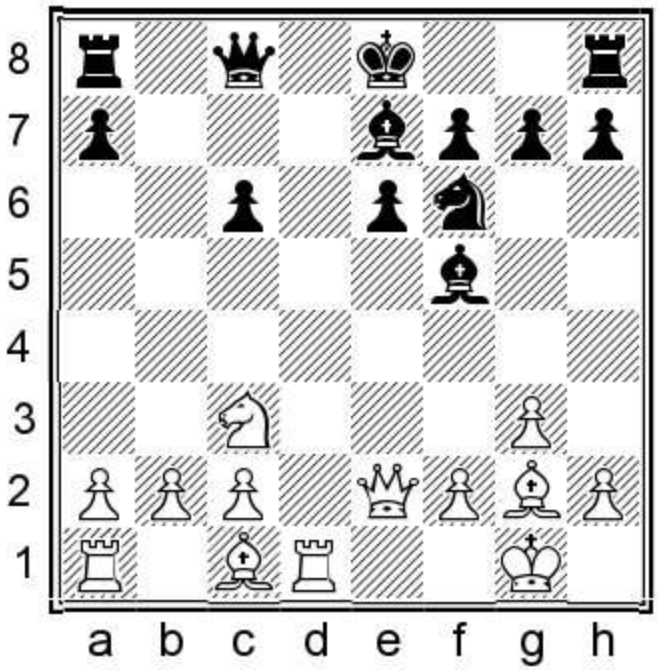


7.Qe2!?
A rare but dangerous move. White avoids a queen exchange and prepares to gain time with Nc3. His light-squared bishop will most likely be developed on g2, where it will help to put pressure on Black's queenside.

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7...Nf6
7...e5 8.Nc3 Qe6 9.g3 Bb4 10.Bg2 Ne7 occurred in Tari – Poulsen, Copenhagen 2013, when White should have continued: 11.0-0!N 11...0-0 12.Ne4 a5 13.Ng5 Qg6 14.Rd1 h6 15.c3 Bc5 16.Nf3²

7...Bf5 was recommended by Palliser but 8.Nc3 Qd7 9.g3! proved to be an effective reply in the following game: 9...e6 10.Bg2 Nf6 11.0-0 Be7 12.Rd1 Qc8 In Grandelius – Bern, Oslo 2008, White could have maintained his opening advantage in more than one way:



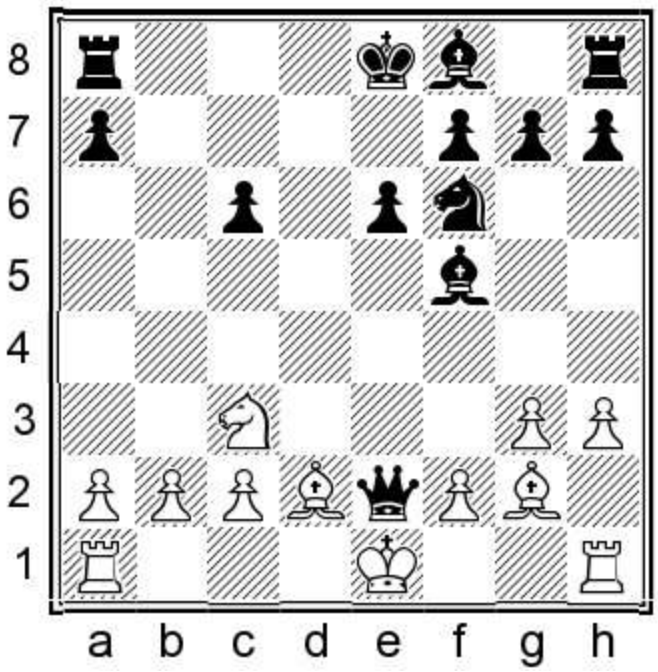
13.Rd4!?N Intending to activate the rook on the fourth rank. (The more straightforward 13.b3!?N 13...0-0 14. Bb2² is also good.) 13...Nd5 (13...0-0 14.Rc4 Rb8 15.b3 Rb6 16.Be3 Ra6 17.Rd1²) 14.Nxd5 cxd5 15.c4 0-0 16. Bf4² White is better in all cases.

8.Nc3 Qa5 9.Bd2!
It is worth comparing my main line to the following alternative: 9.Qf3 Nd5 10.Bd2 e6 and here I considered 11. Nxd5N 11...Qxd5 12.Be2 intending c2-c4. White is certainly for choice here, but only slightly. The problem is that White's better pawn structure becomes less relevant when there are no knights on the board. My recommended move is intended to avoid this scenario.

9...Bd7
9...Qb6 was played in Griffiths – Capaces, London 1994. Black is not really threatening to take on b2 at this stage, so 10.g3!N would have been logical, with an obvious edge for White.

10.g3 Bg4 11.Qe3 e6 12.Bg2 Qa6 13.h3 Bf5 14.Qe2 Qxe2†
We have been following A. Sokolov – Zozulia, Basel 2007. A simple improvement is:

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15.Nxe2N 15...Rc8
Black obviously cannot take on c2 because c6 hangs.

16.Nd4 Be4 17.0-0²
White has a pleasant edge, especially as he has kept his knight, which should prove useful in probing the opponent's weaknesses.

A2) 4...Qc7 5.Nc3

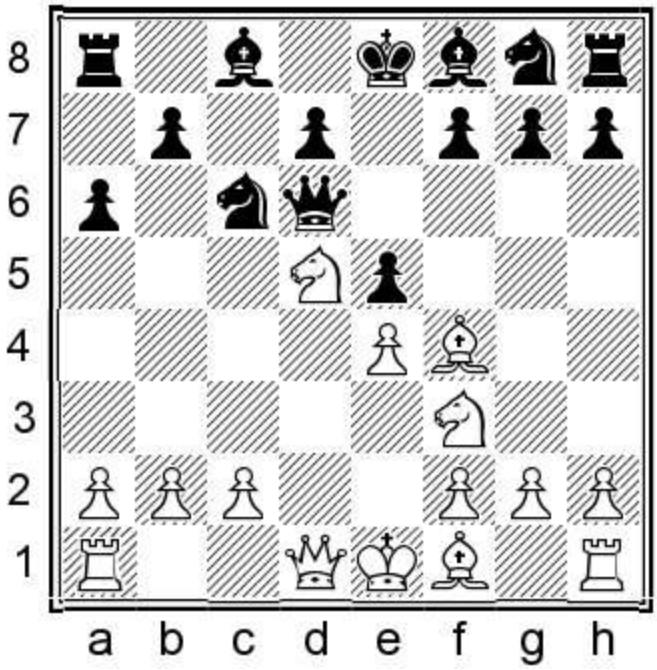
This is the simplest solution. Black must either transpose to a well-known line which fits in with our repertoire, or opt for a dubious move order which enables us to claim a bigger advantage.

5.Nb5 Qb8 is not as clear as some authors have suggested.

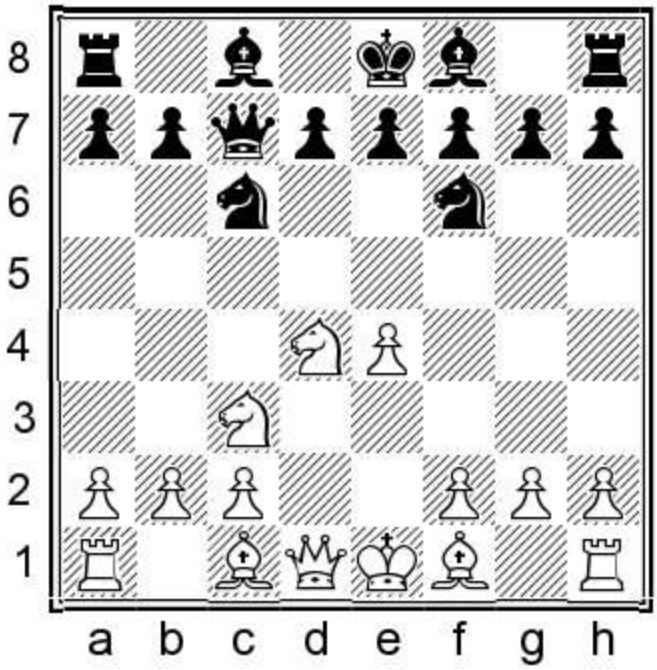
5...Nf6?!
5...e6 is Black's best move, leading straight to the Taimanov, as covered in the Sicilian Main Lines volume.

5...a6? is too much of a liberty, and Black is swiftly punished after: 6.Nd5! Qe5 7.Nf3 Qd6 (7...Qxe4† 8.Be3 Rb8 9.Ng5 Qe5 10.f4 Qd6 11.Bb6 Nh6 12.Nc7† 1–0 Piroska – Toth, Hungary 2002) 8.Bf4 e5

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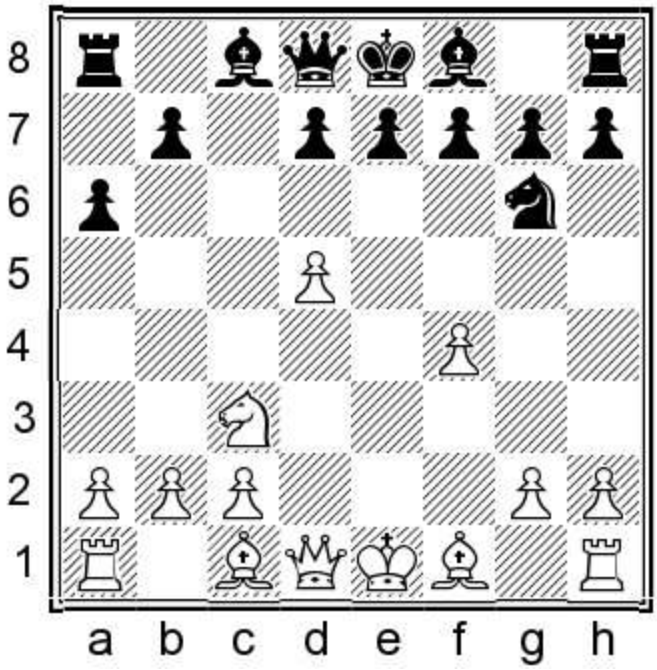
9.Nxe5! Nxe5 10.Qh5 Nf6 11.Qxe5† Qxe5 12.Bxe5 Nxd5 13.exd5+– Jovanovic – Fineboim, email 2013.



6.Ndb5!
Black already has difficult problems, as the other knight is coming to d5 next.

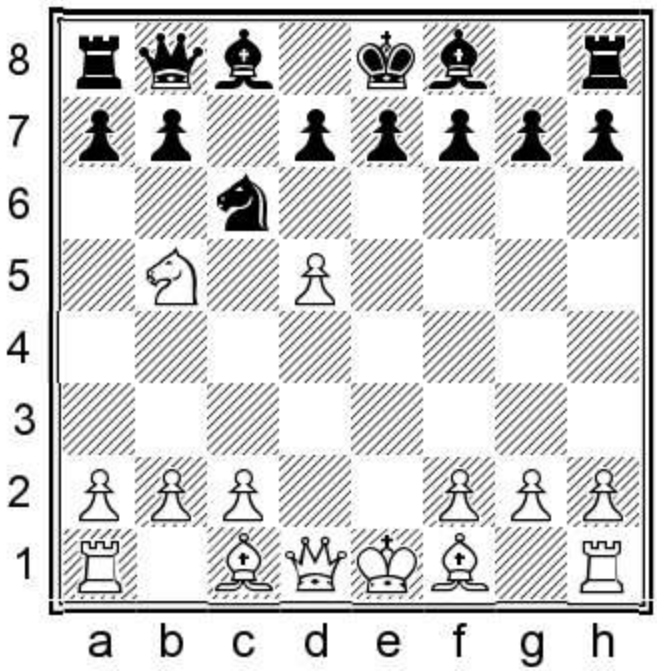
6...Qb8
Black also has a hard time after: 6...Qd8 7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5 a6 9.Nc3 Ne5 10.f4 Ng6

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11.Be3 (another good option is 11.Qd4 e5 12.fxe5 Qe7 13.Bf4 Nxf4 14.Qxf4 d6 15.e6 fxe6 16.dxe6 Qxe6† 17. Be2 Bd7 18.0-0-0± as in Cunha – Riha, email 2011) 11...d6 12.Qd2 Bd7 13.0-0-0± Berger – Badilles, Manila 1968.

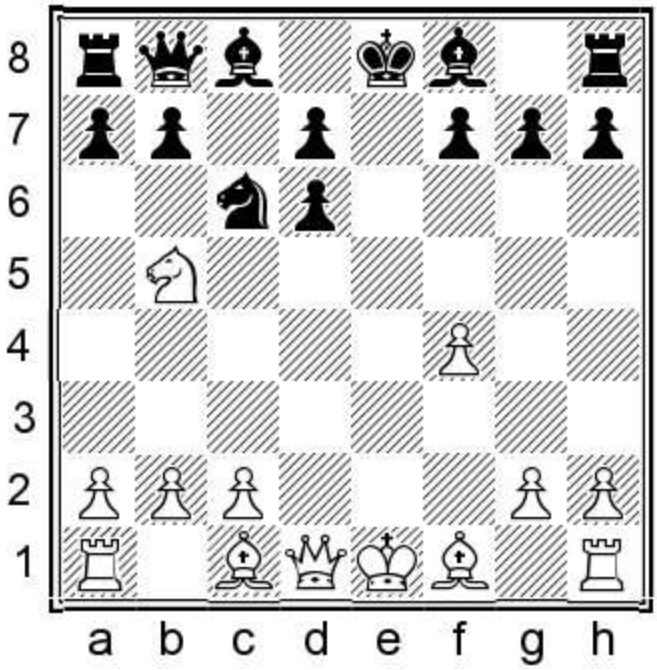
7.Nd5 Nxd5 8.exd5



8...Ne5 9.d6 exd6 10.f4
10.Nc3!?N± is also excellent for White.

10...Nc6

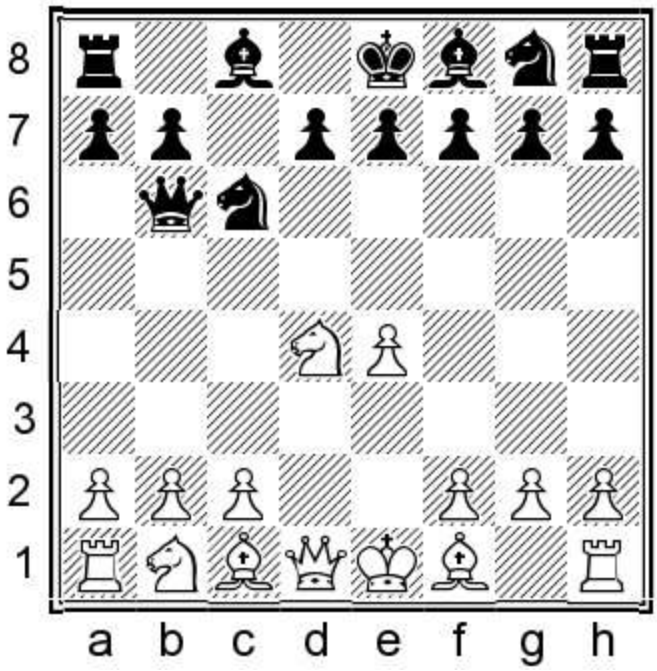
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11.Be3!N
This is even stronger than 11.Bc4, which has been played twice: 11...Be7 12.0-0 0-0 (12...a6 13.Nc3± Lisitsin – Troitsky, Leningrad 1938) 13.Re1 b6 14.Nc3 Bb7 15.Nd5 Re8 16.Qh5 Qd8 17.Nf6† 1–0 Hirsh – Behrmann, email 1996.

11...Be7 12.Nc3 0-0 13.Nd5 b6 14.Qg4±
Black's opening has been a total failure.

A3) 4...Qb6



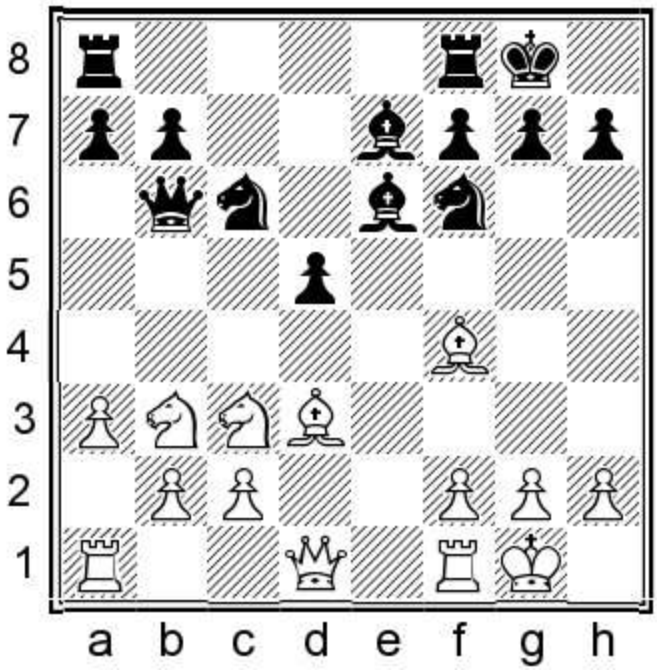
This is the Grivas Variation – one of the most respectable of the lines covered in this chapter. Black intends to put his queen on c7 later, having first driven White's knight away to the less active b3-square.

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5.Nb3 Nf6 6.Nc3
I also investigated 6.Bd3 and found some nice ideas for White in some lines, but was not completely satisfied after 6...d5! 7.exd5 Nxd5 8.0-0 g6!. White may be able to claim a slight edge somehow, but I find my recommended continuation more interesting.

6...e6 7.Bd3
White has tried several moves but I like this one. I analysed two main options: A31) 7...a6 has been the most popular move overall, but A32) 7...d6 has become trendy recently. Here are a few other options:

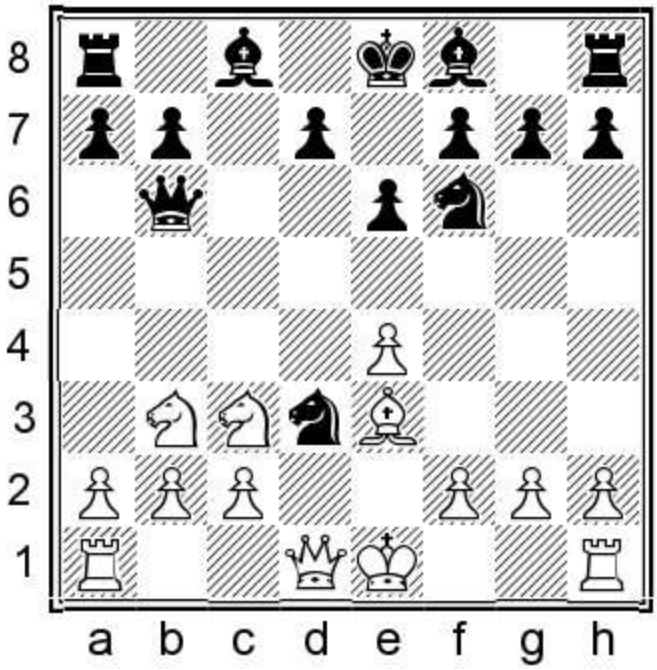
7...Bb4 8.Bd2 0-0 9.0-0 d5 10.exd5 exd5 11.a3 Be7 12.Bf4 Be6 occurred in Stean – Raaste, Nice 1974. A good continuation would have been:



13.Re1!?N 13...Rfe8 14.Na4 Qd8 15.Nac5 Bc8 16.h3²

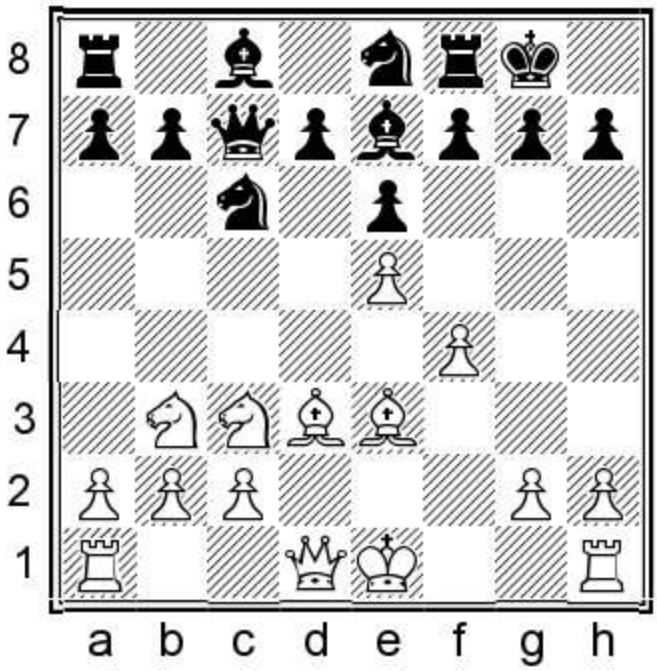
7...Ne5 8.Be3 Nxd3† was played in one game.

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My choice would be 9.Qxd3!N 9...Qd8 10.e5² with some initiative, although the game continuation was not bad either: 9.cxd3 Qa6 10.0-0 d6 11.a4 Bd7 Smirin – Kurajica, Sarajevo 2001, and now 12.a5!?N 12...Be7 13.Nd4 e5 14.Nc2² would have kept the better chances for White.

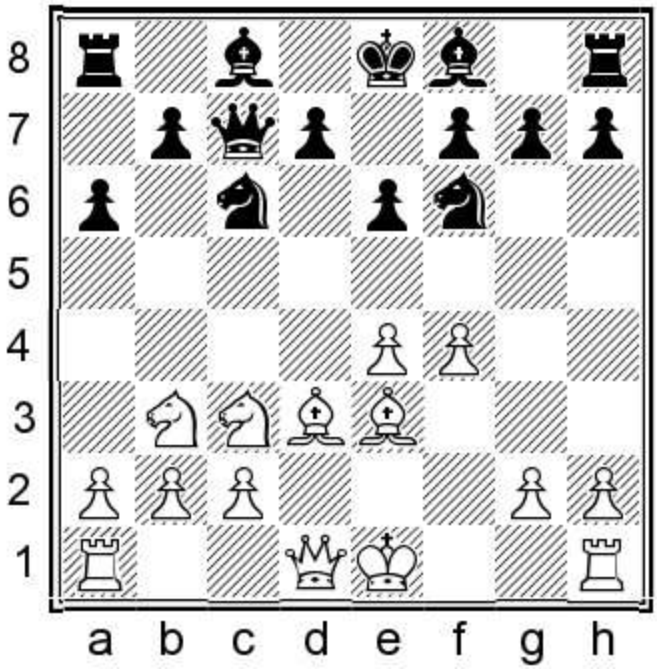
7...Be7 8.Be3 Qc7 9.f4 and now almost all games have continued 9...d6, reaching something similar to variation A32. A rare, independent alternative is: 9...0-0 10.e5 Ne8 (10...Nd5N 11.Nxd5 exd5 12.0-0 d6 13.Qh5 g6 14. exd6 Bxd6 15.Qh6 Re8 16.Rae1²)



11.Qh5 f5 (11...h6 12.0-0-0 d6 13.Nd4! Qa5 14.g4±) This was Klimov – Fominyh, St Petersburg 2002, when 12.0-0-0!N± would have been excellent for White.

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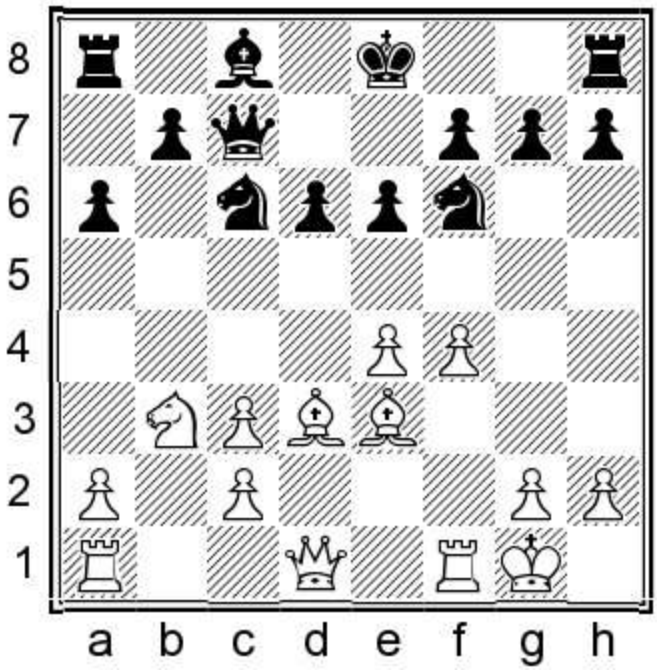
A31) 7...a6 8.Be3 Qc7 9.f4



9...Bb4
Most games have continued with 9...d6, which transposes to variation A32 below.

10.0-0
White should not fear the doubling of his queenside pawns – the dark squares are more important.

10...Bxc3 11.bxc3 d6
Black is following one of the thematic plans for this opening system, but I am not too impressed by this version of it.



12.Qf3 0-0
12...e5 13.f5 also favours White. After the text move I suggest a modest improvement:

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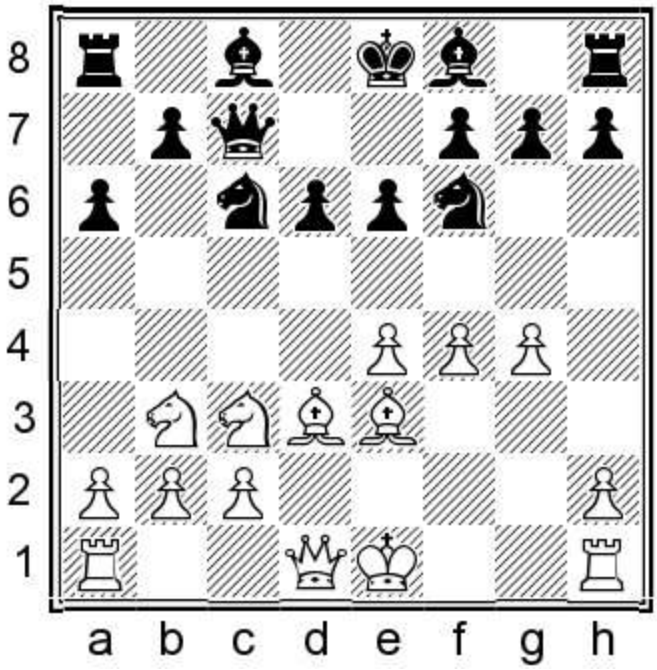
13.Qg3!?N 13...d5
13...Nd7 14.c4²

14.e5 Ne4 15.Bxe4 dxe4 16.Qf2! Ne7 17.Bc5²
White is better, thanks to his domination over the dark squares.

A32) 7...d6

As I mentioned earlier, this move order has become popular of late, although Black usually follows up with ...a6 anyway.

8.Be3 Qc7 9.f4 a6 10.g4!?
This has been a rare choice, played in just thirty games out of more than 500 from this position, the vast majority of which have continued with 10.Qf3. So why lunge forward with the g-pawn first?



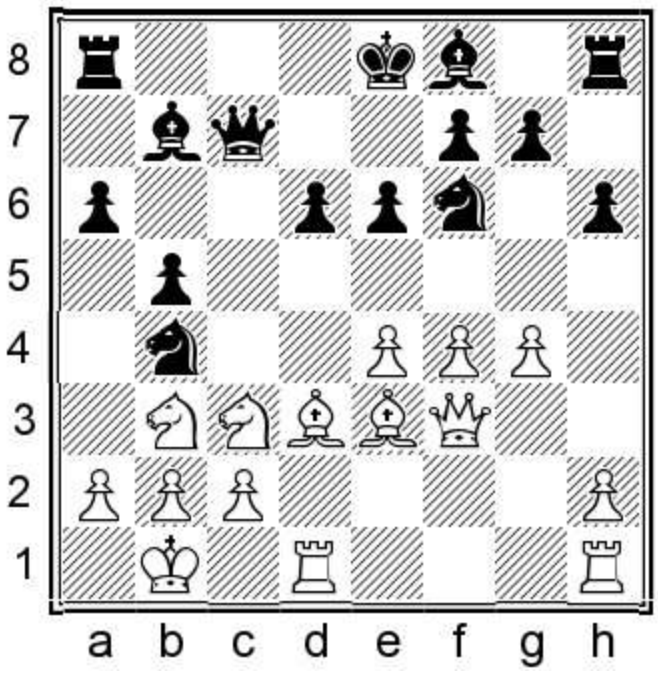
After looking through a lot of games in which White's queen went to f3, I realized that a timely ...Nb4 followed by ...Nxd3(†) is one of Black's most important resources. White generally recaptures with the c-pawn, leading to a situation where Black doesn't have much immediate counterplay, but he has a solid position with chances to make his bishop pair count in the long run.
Instead I want to put the queen on d2, keeping the c2-pawn securely defended, so that ...Nb4 can always be met by retreating the bishop to e2. Of course, we still want to advance on the kingside, so the grand plan is to play g4-g5 (using the support of the queen on d1), then Qd2, intending to retreat the bishop to e2 when necessary.

10...b5
I considered two other plausible continuations.

10...Be7 11.g5 Nd7 12.Qd2 b5 13.0-0-0 Bb7 14.Kb1² occurred in Leupold – Peschardt, email 2009. White has a promising position which resembles our main line – see page 366, where I discuss the difference between the two positions. Here Black's bishop has already moved to e7, which means that f5-f6 will come with a lot of force, as happened in the game.

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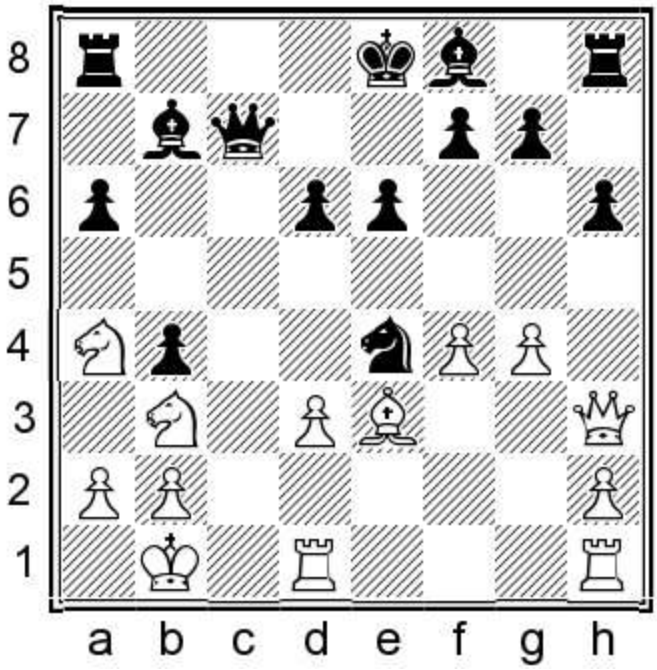
10...h6 11.Qf3
Here we make an exception, as we need to keep the g4-pawn defended. It’s not a problem though, as White has an improved version of the usual Qf3 set-up, as Black would not normally spend a tempo on ...h6.
11...b5 12.0-0-0 Nb4 13.Kb1 Bb7
In Tate – Markus, Novi Sad 2009, White could have created significant problems with:



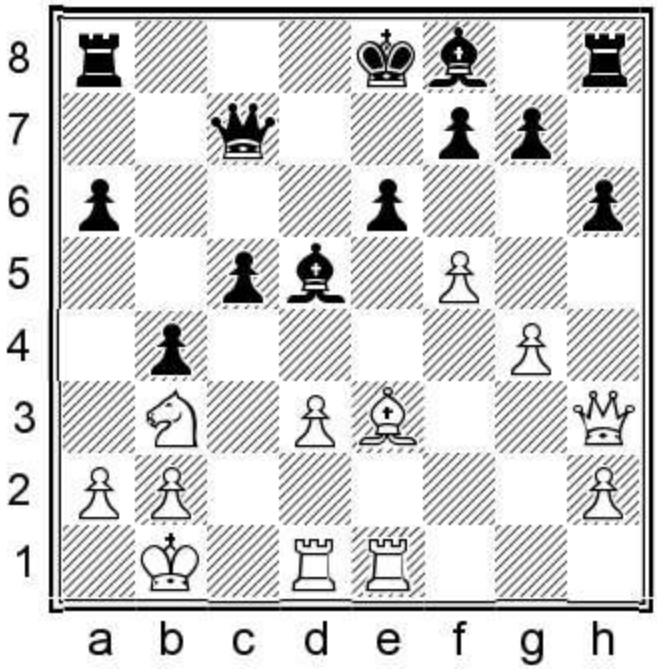
14.Qh3!N 14...Nxd3
14...d5 15.e5 Nd7 16.Rhf1± leaves Black with a dubious version of a French structure. White can improve his position with Ne2 and perhaps even a2-a3 to provoke an exchange on d3, which will be met by cxd3 of course.
15.cxd3 b4 16.Na4 Nxe4!?

Against other options, White has no trouble developing his initiative with moves like Rc1 or Nb6. The text move looks like a strong tactical strike, but White has an excellent way to meet it.

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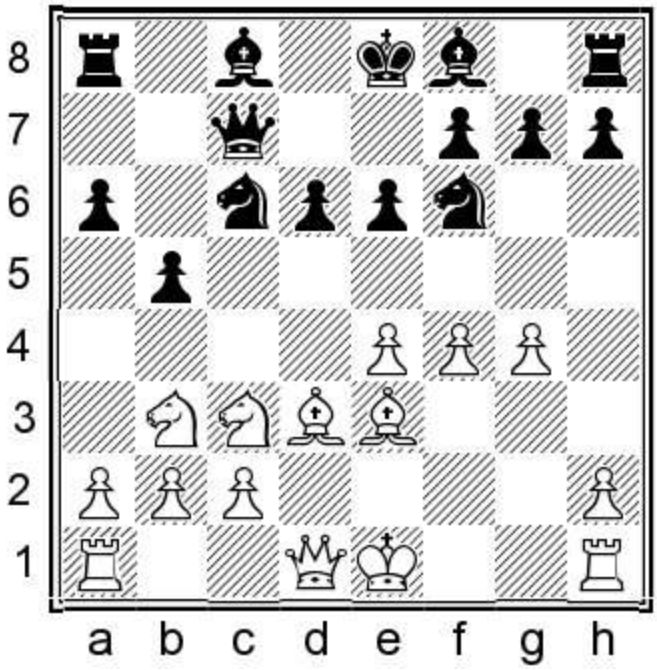


17.Rhe1!
White has built a huge lead in development.
17...Nc5
17...Nf6 18.Nb6 Rb8 19.Rc1 Qd8 20.g5 Nd7 21.g6 gives White a deadly attack.
18.Naxc5 dxc5 19.f5 Bd5
After 19...e5? 20.Rc1+– White breaks through on the c-file and will soon make further gains.



20.fxe6 Bxe6 21.Rc1 Rc8 22.Nxc5 Bxc5 23.Bxc5 Qxc5 24.Rxc5 Rxc5 25.Qe3±
White has every chance to make his material advantage count.

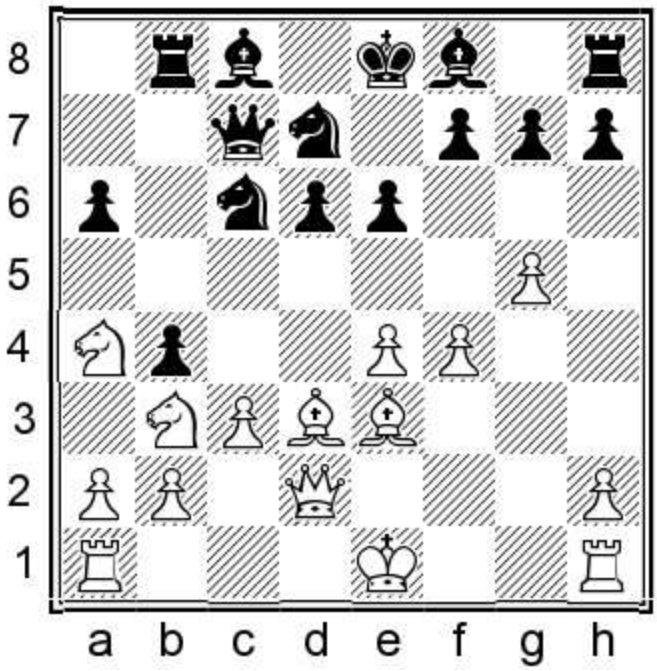
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11.g5 Nd7 12.Qd2
Continuing with the prescribed plan. Only ten games on my database have reached this position so it's a pretty fresh battleground, and so far Black has not shown a reliable path to equality.

12...Nc5
Two other moves have been tried.

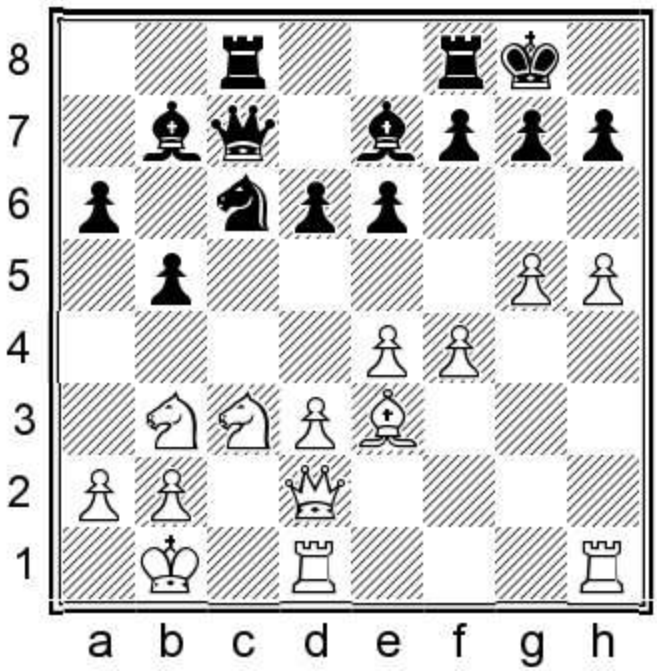
12...b4 13.Na4 Rb8 has only been tried in one game, which continued: 14.c3!? An interesting reaction to Black's early ...b4 advance.



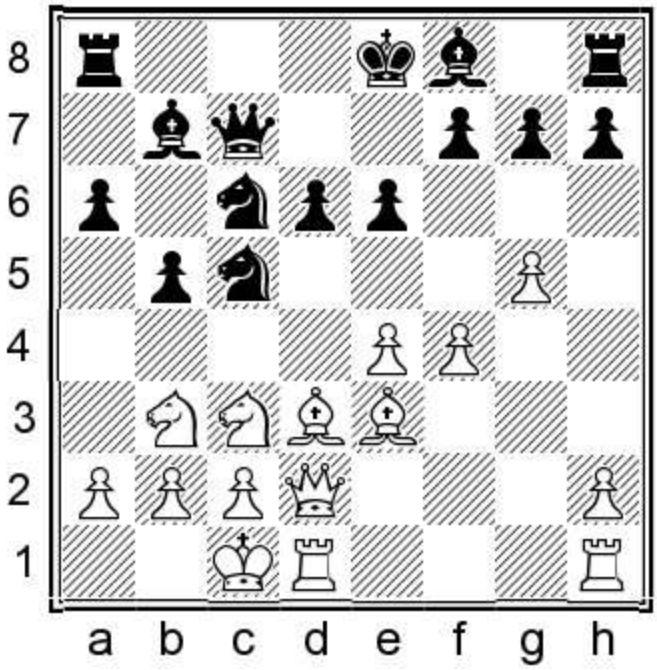
14...h6 15.g6! fxg6 16.Rc1 g5! 17.cxb4 gxf4 18.Bxf4 Qb7 19.0-0² White had somewhat better chances in this rather irregular position, Schlenther – Ingersol, email 2011.

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12...Bb7?!
This natural move has been the most popular choice, but it leads to problems for Black.
13.0-0-0 Nc5
13...Be7 14.Kb1 Rc8 15.h4 Nc5 16.h5 Nxd3 17.cxd3 0-0 occurred in Kulaots – Hernandez, Mallorca 2004.



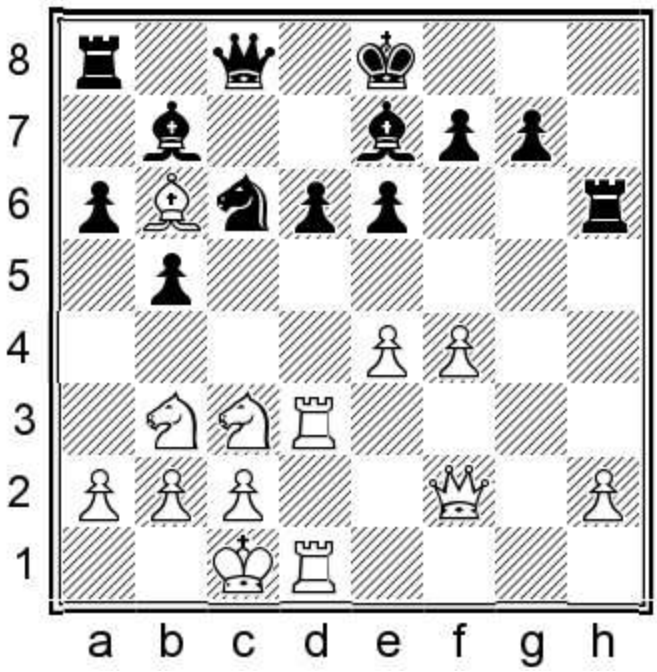
Now 18.g6!?N 18...Bf6 19.Rc1 h6 20.f5, would have given White a promising attack.



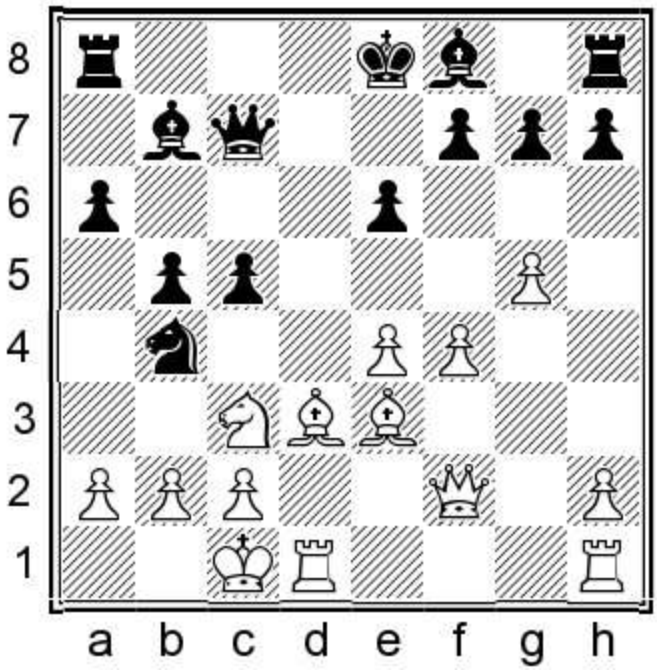
14.Qf2!
Earlier I talked about dropping the bishop back to e2 when attacked, so why are we now allowing it to be exchanged? The difference, compared with the explanation on page 363, is that here we are allowing the bishop to be traded for a well-placed knight on c5, rather than an otherwise misplaced knight on b4. Moreover, in this po-

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sition White can follow up with Bb6 (as in the next note below), which would not have been possible if Black has been left with a knight on d7.
14...Nb4
14...Nxd3† 15.Rxd3 h6 16.Bb6 Qc8 17.gxh6 Rxh6 18.Rhd1 Be7 occurred in Schranz – Middendorf, Germany 1988, when White missed a great opportunity:



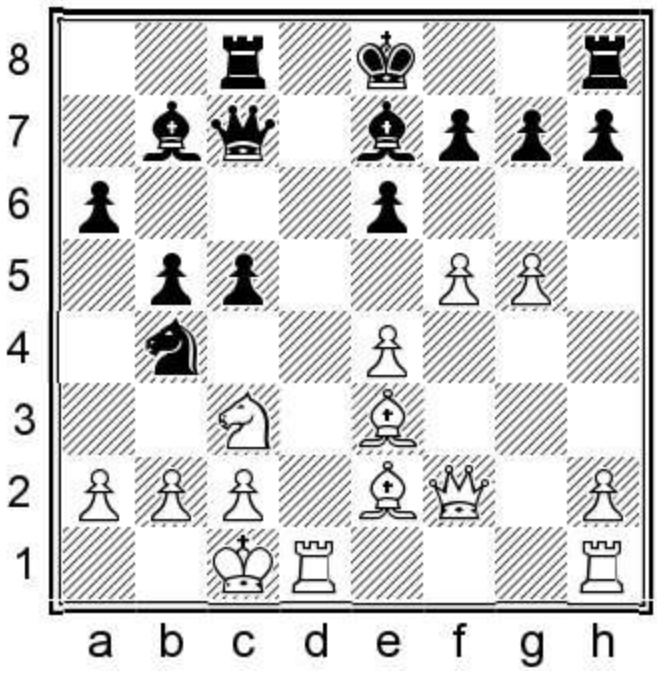
19.Rxd6!N 19...Bxd6 20.Rxd6± White has a powerful initiative for the small material sacrifice, which may soon become a decisive advantage, for instance: 20...Qb8 21.e5 Ne7 22.Rd8† Qxd8 23.Bxd8 Rxd8 24.Nc5 Bc8 25.N3e4 Nf5 26.b3+–
15.Nxc5 dxc5



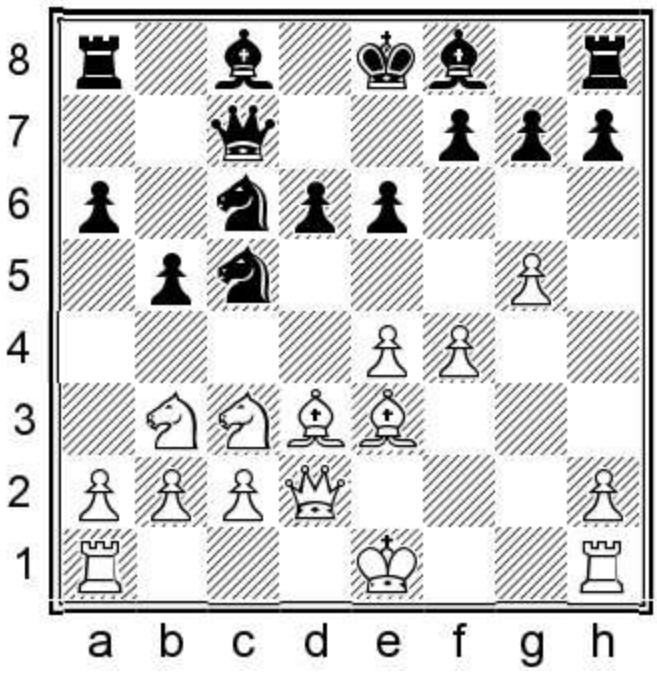
16.Be2!

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Once again, we avoid having this bishop exchanged for the mostly useless knight on b4.
16...Be7
16...Nxc2!? 17.Kxc2 b4 is an interesting attempt to change the flow of the game, but after 18.Nb1 Bxe4† 19. Kc1 Bxh1 20.Rxh1 Be7 (20...c4 21.Bb6 Qc8 22.Bf3 Rb8 23.Qd4+–) 21.Nd2± White keeps a big advantage.
17.f5! Rc8
17...exf5 18.a3! is horrible for Black.



18.Bg4 0-0 19.fxe6 fxe6 20.Bxe6† Kh8 21.Qg3
White had a decisive advantage, which he soon converted in Beliavsky – Gufeld, Sukhumi 1972.



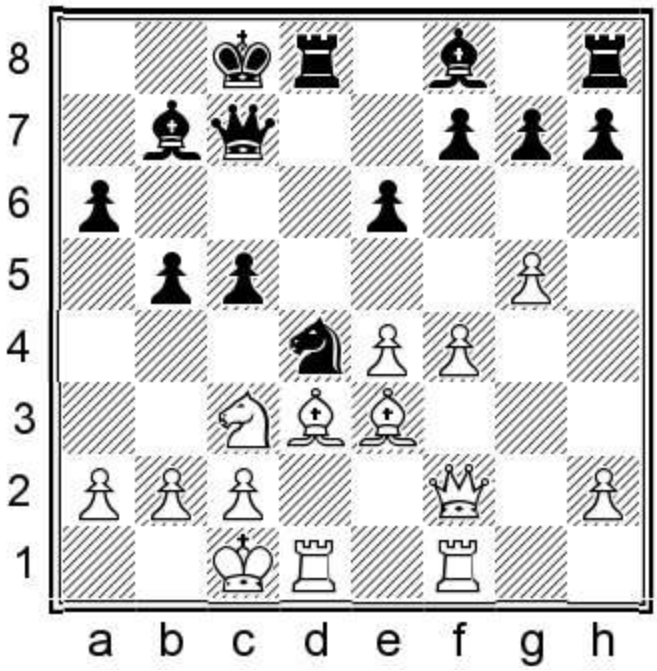
13.Nxc5 dxc5 14.Qf2 Bb7 15.0-0-0 0-0-0
The position is similar to that which occurred in Leupold – Peschardt, email 2009, as referenced on page 364.

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Here Black has yet to put his bishop on e7, and so f5-f6 is not such a great threat. Still, if Black wants to benefit from keeping his bishop on f8, then it remains to be seen how he will attempt to complete his development.

16.Rhf1
16.Kb1N is another possible move order: 16...Nd4 (16...Be7 transposes to Leupold – Peschardt, where 17.Rhg1 followed by f4-f5 was excellent for White) 17.Rhf1 and we reach the main line below.

16...Nd4
Here I found a useful improvement.



17.Kb1!N
17.e5 allows Black to develop comfortably with 17...Be7, since f5-f6 is no longer a problem. 18.Be4 Nf5 19. Bxb7† Kxb7 20.Ne4 Rxd1† 21.Rxd1 Rc8 22.Qf3 Kb8= Z. Almasi – Morozevich, Birmingham 2000.

17...Bc6
In the event of 17...Be7 White can consider 18.f5 immediately, although the computer likes the idea of throwing in 18.a4!? first.

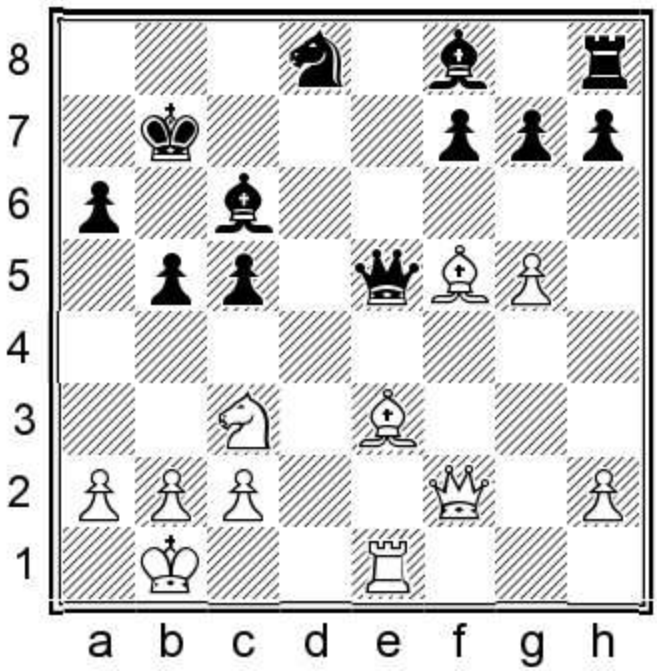
18.f5 Kb7
18...Bd6 could be considered, but after 19.Bxd4 cxd4 20.Qxd4 it is not clear how Black will justify his pawn sacrifice.

19.e5!
Slower moves are possible but I like this energetic approach.

19...exf5 20.Bxf5 Qxe5
20...Nxf5 21.Qxf5 Be7 22.Ne4 keeps Black under pressure.

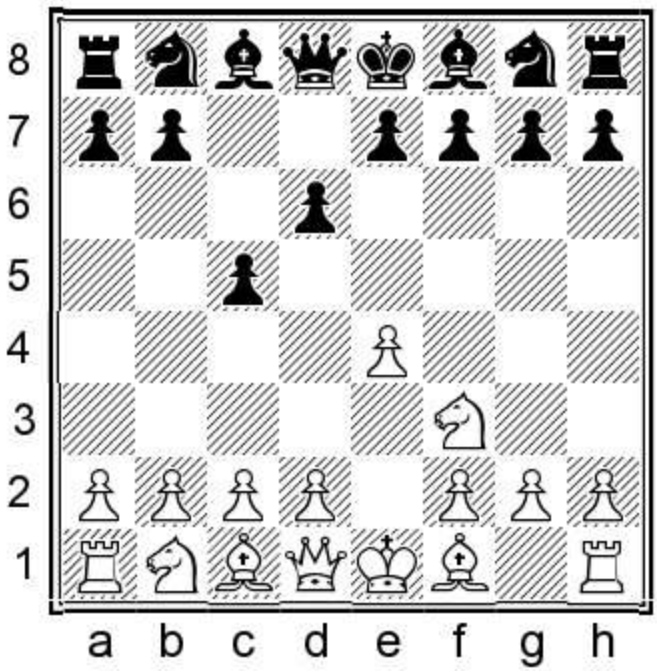
21.Rfe1 Ne6 22.Rxd8 Nxd8

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23.Bc1! Qc7 24.Bf4 Bd6 25.Bxd6 Qxd6 26.Rd1 Qe5 27.Bd7!*f*
White has more than enough play for the sacrificed pawn.

B) 2...d6

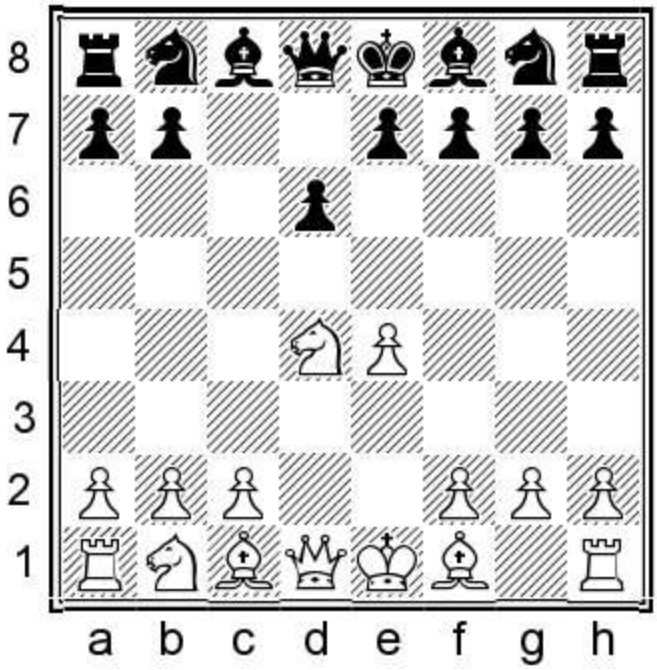


There are not so many important sidelines after this move.

3.d4 cxd4
3...Nf6 is a fairly popular move order but after 4.Nc3 we will almost certainly transpose to normal lines after an exchange on d4. Other moves do not require serious attention; for instance, 4...Nc6?! 5.d5 (or 5.dxc5) and White is obviously happy.

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4.Nxd4



We will analyse B1) 4...e5 and B2) 4...Nf6.

4...e6 gives White total freedom. 5.c4² seems easiest, with a position resembling our repertoire against the Kan, where Black has been deprived of some important possibilities involving the active development of his dark-squared bishop. In the likely event that ...a6 is played at some point, we could transpose directly to variation C1 of Chapter 2 in the Sicilian Main Lines volume.

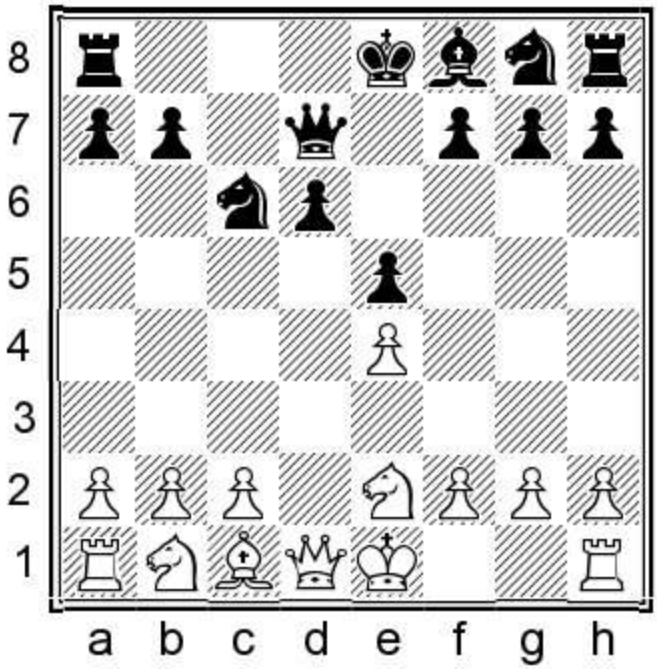
4...Nc6 also gives us a choice. There is nothing much wrong with 5.Nc3, with a likely transposition to some other part of our repertoire. The only major exception occurs after 5...e5!?, when 6.Ndb5 would lead to a variation of the Kalashnikov which lies outside of our repertoire, so White should retreat the knight to f3 or b3 instead. I would tend to prefer 5.c4, which is in keeping with one of the themes of our repertoire, which involves playing c2-c4 in most Sicilian variations where we are allowed to do so.

B1) 4...e5

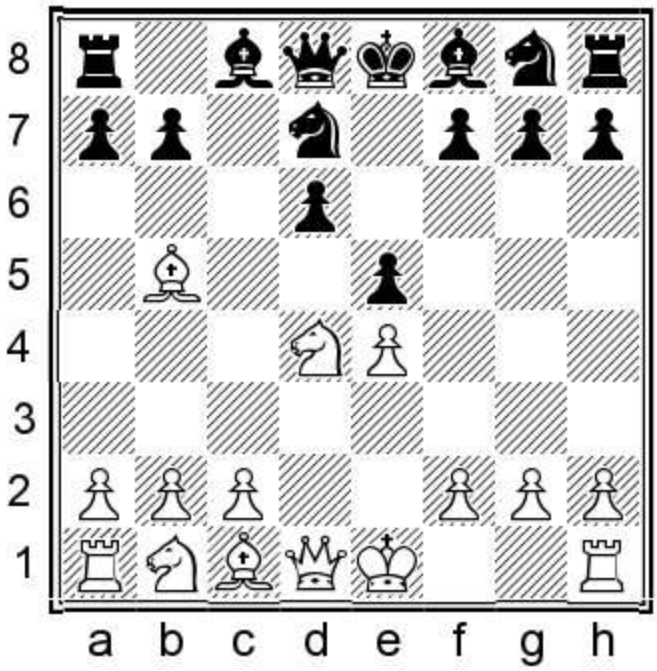
This resembles variation B21 and may transpose, but there are some independent paths.

5.Bb5† Nd7
Less challenging is:
5...Bd7 6.Bxd7† Qxd7 7.Ne2 Nc6
7...Qg4?! 8.Qd3 does not help Black, as 8...Qxg2? can be refuted outright: 9.Rg1 Qxh2 10.Qf3! (10.Qb5†) 10...g5 In Cherin – Mateo, Conegliano 2008, 11.Nbc3N+– would have been the most convincing of several winning continuations.

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8.Nbc3 Nge7
8...Nf6 is covered on page 371 – see 8...Nc6 in the notes to variation B211.
In Romon Poves – Maza Broto, Huesca 2010, White should have continued:
9.0-0N 9...Rd8
9...Rc8 10.Be3 g6 11.Qd2 Bg7 12.Rad1± is also great for White.
10.Nd5! Nxd5 11.Qxd5 Nb4 12.Qb3 d5 13.a3 Nc6 14.exd5 Qxd5 15.Qxb7 Be7 16.Qa6 0-0 17.c4±
With a safe extra pawn.

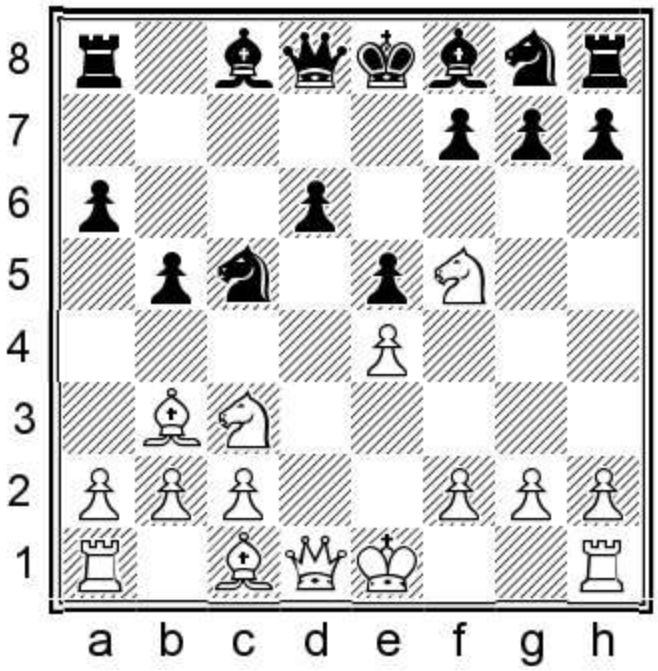


6.Nf5 a6 7.Ba4!
7.Bxd7† Qxd7 8.Nc3 is another idea, hoping for 8...Nf6 with an immediate transposition to variation B212. However, Black can improve with 8...Qc6! 9.Ne3 Nf6, reaching a position discussed in the note at the bottom of page 372, which I prefer to avoid.

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7...b5
7...Ngf6?! 8.Nxd6† Bxd6 9.Qxd6 Qa5† 10.Nc3 Nxe4 11.Qd5 Qxd5 12.Nxd5± was unpleasant for Black in Bartkus – Siikaluoma, corr. 2005.

8.Bb3 Nc5 9.Nc3
Not the only decent move, but the simplest.

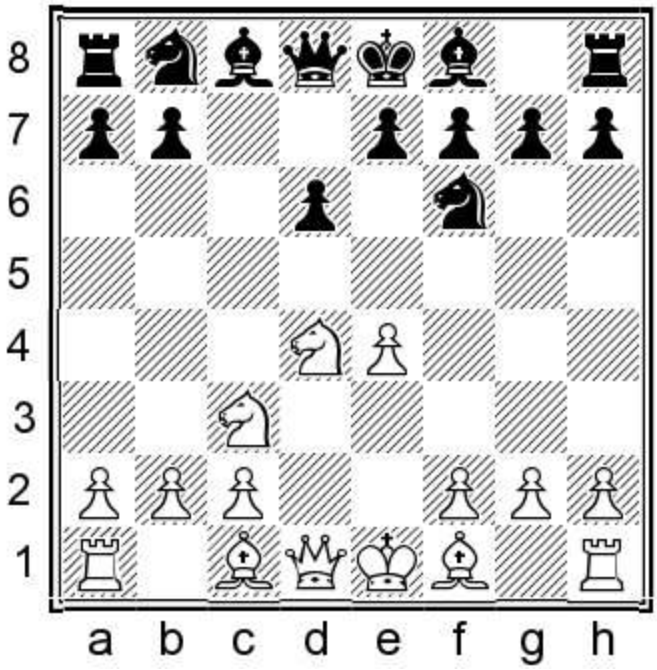


9...Nf6
9...b4?! hardly helps Black: 10.Nd5 g6 11.Nfe3 a5 12.Bc4!? Bg7 Khairullin – Zvjaginsev, Tomsk 2006. 13.a3N ±

10.Bg5 Bxf5 11.exf5 Be7 12.0-0 0-0 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Nd5±
White's superb knight and domination over the light squares gave him a clear advantage in Fajs – Lueddeckens, corr. 2007.

B2) 4...Nf6 5.Nc3

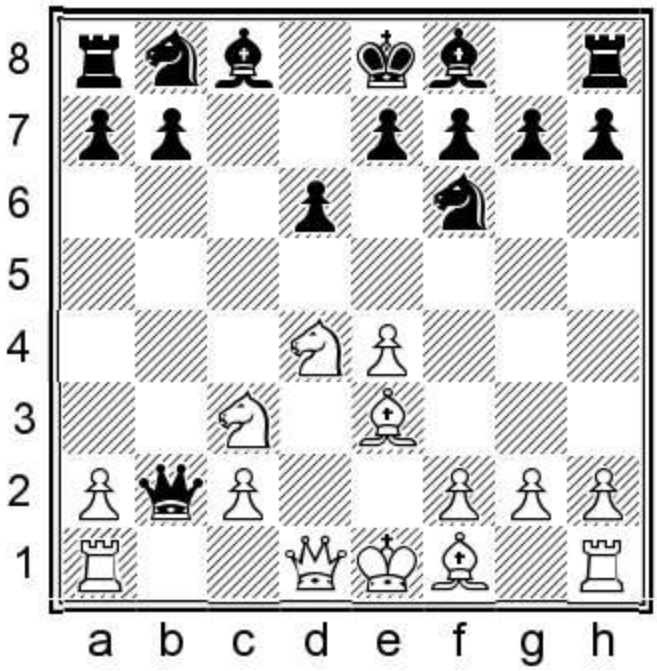
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In this popular position, there are two significant sidelines which we must consider: B21) 5...e5 and B22) 5... Bd7.

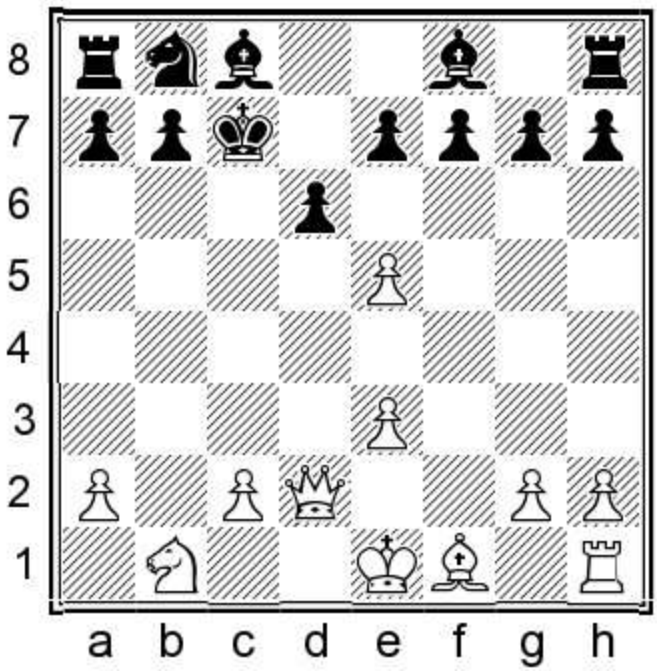
5...Nbd7 has been played in hundreds of games but after 6.Be3 the play will almost always transpose to some other part of our repertoire after 6...a6 or 6...g6.

A dubious alternative is:
5...Qb6?!
It is hard to see why anyone would choose this line with Black. A move like 6.f3 would be fine, but even more convincing is:
6.Be3! Qxb2
Otherwise what was the point of Black's previous move?

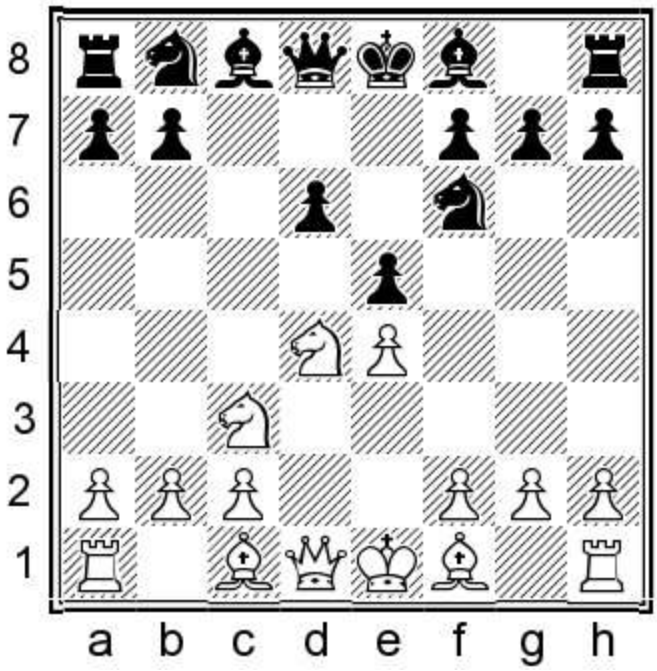


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7.Ndb5 Qb4 8.e5! Ng4
After 8...Ne4 9.Qd4 Qxd4 10.Bxd4 Nxc3 11.Nc7† Kd8 12.Nxa8 Nd5 13.Bxa7 Nc6 14.0-0-0 e6 15.c4 Black fails to trap a piece on the queenside, and White will win with his extra material.
9.Nc7† Kd8 10.Qd2! Nxe3 11.fxe3 Qb2 12.Rb1 Qxb1† 13.Nxb1 Kxc7



If it wasn’t for the position of his king, Black would have just about enough for the queen. As things stand though, his position falls apart.
14.Qa5† b6 15.exd6† exd6 16.Qd5
Black resigned in Ederer – Lauer, corr. 2012.
B21) 5...e5



6.Bb5†

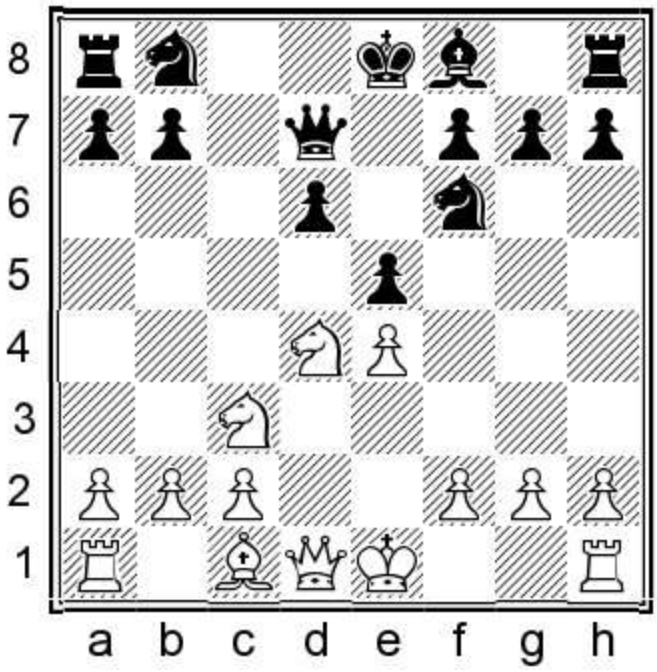
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This is the most popular reply, and clearly best in my view. There is a reason why 5...a6 is Black's most popular move!

I briefly considered 6.Nf5 Bxf5 7.exf5 d5 8.Bg5 but found 8...Bb4!N (rather than 8...d4 9.Bxf6, I. Johannsson – Gudmundsson, Reykjavik 1964, when 9...Qxf6N 10.Nd5 Qd6 11.c4 is slightly better for White) 9.Bxf6 gxf6÷ to be quite acceptable for Black.

We will analyse B211) 6...Bd7?! and B212) 6...Nbd7.

B211) 6...Bd7?! 7.Bxd7† Qxd7



8.Nde2!
This enables us to get a positional advantage by simple means.

8.Nf5?! allows 8...Nxe4! 9.Nxg7† Bxg7 10.Nxe4 d5 with unclear play.

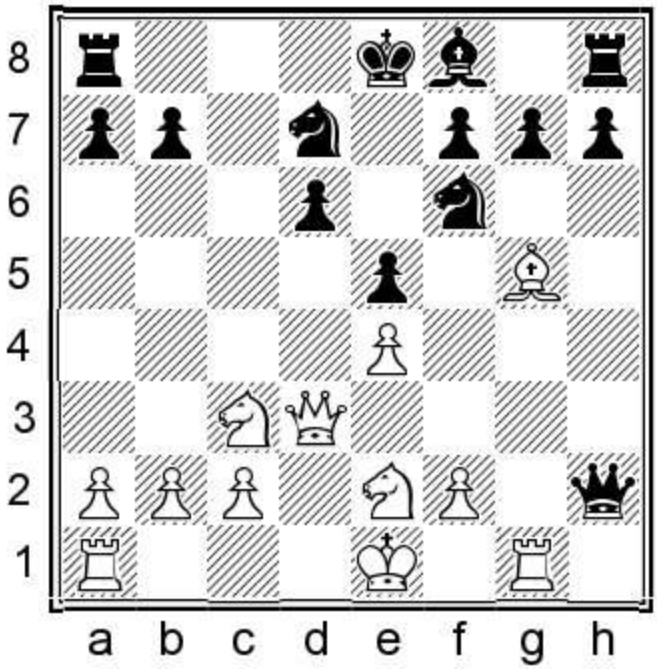
8...Qc6
Black has nothing better, for instance:

8...Be7 9.Bg5 0-0 10.0-0 Qe6 11.Bxf6 Bxf6 12.Nd5 Bd8 13.Qd3 Nc6 14.Rad1² gave White an easy positional edge in Grischuk – Grachev, Internet (blitz) 2006.

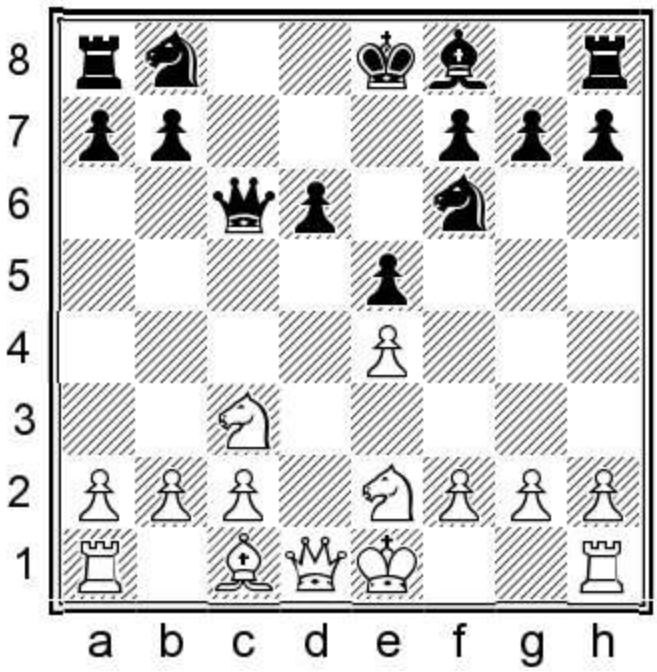
8...Nc6 9.Bg5! Be7 (I was amused to see the engine suggesting 9...Ng8 at a certain search depth; if that's the best Black can do, it tells you everything you need to know about his position.) 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.Nd5² Pliester – Van Ingen, Haarlem 2006.

Finally, 8...Qg4?! enables White to sac a few pawns to obtain a crushing initiative: 9.Qd3! Qxg2 10.Rg1 Qxh2 11.Bg5 Nbd7

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12.0-0-0!? (an excellent alternative is 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.Qb5† followed by taking on b7) 12...Qxf2 13.Be3 Qf3 14.Rg3 Qh5 15.Nb5± White's attack was worth much more than three pawns in Willemze – Ernst, Vienna 2003.



9.Ng3!
Having stabilized the centre, White has the easy plan of trading his bishop for the knight on f6 and then conquering the d5-outpost.

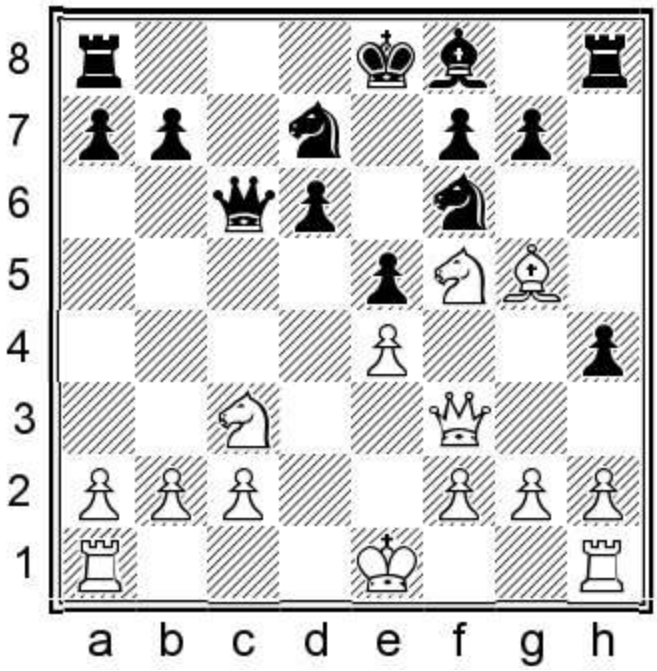
I also considered the rare 9.f3!? but found that 9...Nbd7! 10.Bg5 (or 10.Be3 b5) 10...b5 offers Black some counterplay.

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9...Nbd7

9...h6 prevents the bishop from coming to g5 but costs a valuable tempo. 10.0-0 Nbd7 occurred in Timmermans – Bosch, Vlissingen 2009, when 11.Qf3N would have been excellent for White. It is hard for Black to get castled, as ...Be7 will allow Nf5. If Black plays ...g6, then he still won't be able to put the bishop on e7 and castle because of the loose h6-pawn.

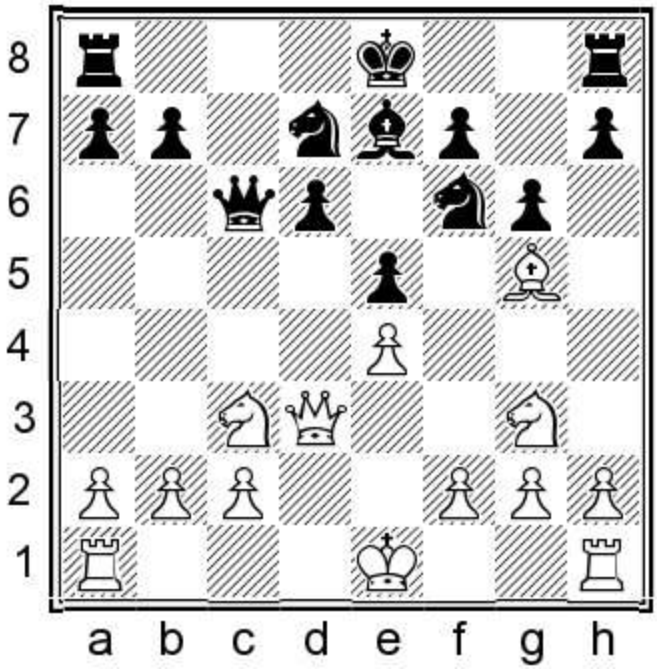
9...h5?!
This is a creative attempt but it only worsens Black's position.
10.Qf3 Nbd7
10...b5 11.a3 a5 was seen in Blazeka – Kovacevic, Bjelovar 2017, when White should have played 12.0-0!N, as there is no need to fear 12...b4?! 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.exd5 Qb7 15.axb4±.
11.Bg5! h4 12.Nf5



12...h3 13.g3 Nb6?
Blundering a pawn.
13...Nh7N is better although White maintains a clear advantage after 14.Bd2!, keeping the e3-square available for the knight.
14.Nxg7† Bxg7 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.Qxf6 Rg8 17.0-0-0+–
Kritz – Mikavica, Lausanne 2003.

10.Bg5 g6 11.Qd3 Be7
Here I would suggest:

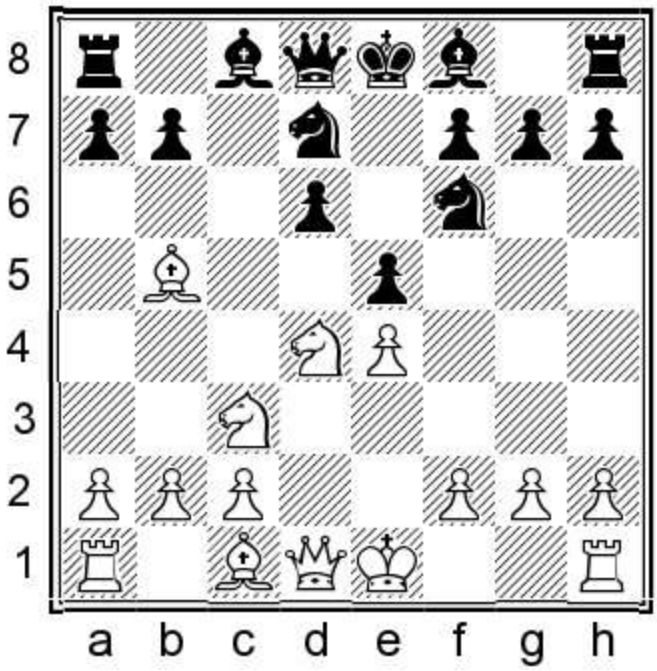
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12.0-0-0!?N
This seems most accurate, although 12.Bxf6 Nxf6 13.Nf1 certainly gave White the easier game in Inarkiev – Vachier-Lagrave, Warsaw (blitz) 2010.

12...Rc8 13.h4±
White has both a positional advantage and chances to develop a kingside initiative.

B212) 6...Nbd7



This is more complex and challenging than the previous line.

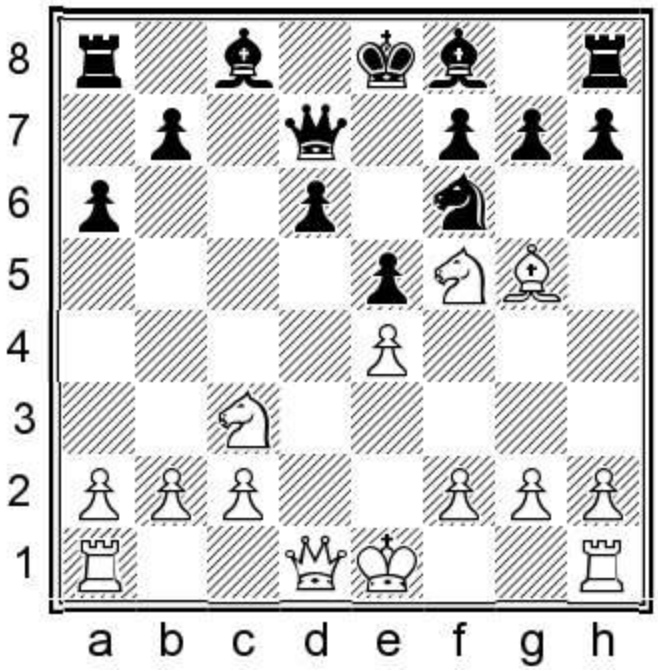
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7.Nf5! a6

7...Qc7? is poor. 8.Bg5 a6 9.Bxf6! gxf6 (9...axb5 10.Bxg7+–) This occurred in Hon – Turuncic, Finkenstein 1996, when 10.Bxd7†N 10...Bxd7 11.Nd5 Qd8 12.Qh5 would have been winning for White.

8.Bxd7†
8.Ba4 b5 9.Bb3 Nc5 transposes to variation B1. The text move also leads to some advantage, so feel free to choose whichever option you prefer.

8...Qxd7 9.Bg5!
9.Ne3 is the calm way to play but after 9...Qc6 I found no advantage. For instance, 10.Qd3 Be6 11.0-0 Rc8 12. Ncd5 Bxd5 13.exd5 Qc7 14.a4 g6 15.Ra3 Be7 16.Rc3 Qb8 17.Rxc8† Qxc8 18.f4 Nd7 and Black was not worse in Petersons – Karasek, corr. 2008.

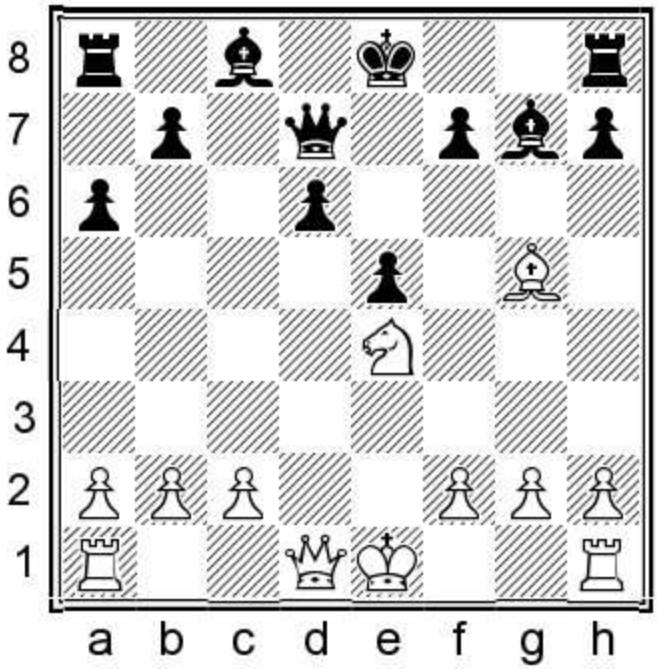


9...Nxe4!
This is the only serious try for Black.

9...Qc6? 10.Bxf6! Bxf5 11.exf5 Qxg2 (11...gxf6 12.Nd5 was a positional catastrophe for Black in Oral – Briestensky, Slovakia 1995) 12.Qd5! Qxd5 13.Nxd5 gxf6 14.Nc7† was winning for White in Prie – Zaninetti, Meudon 1992.

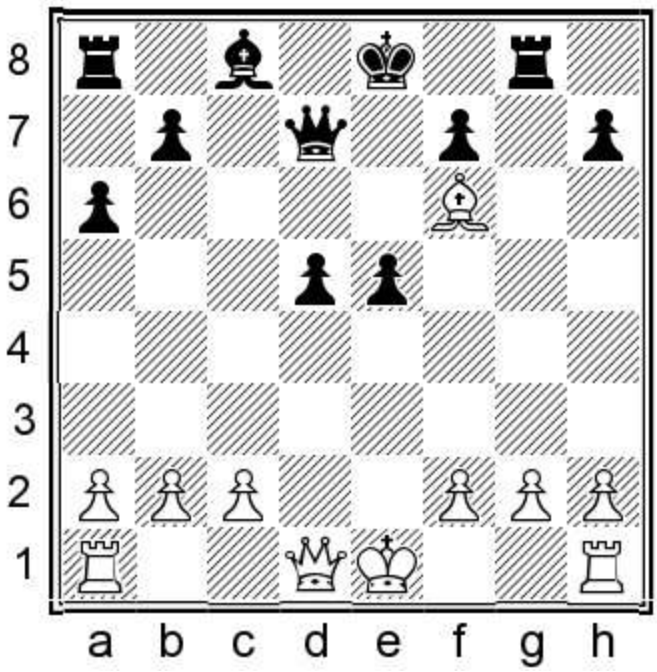
10.Nxg7†! Bxg7 11.Nxe4

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11...0-0!
Black's best chance is to sacrifice the d-pawn and play for compensation.

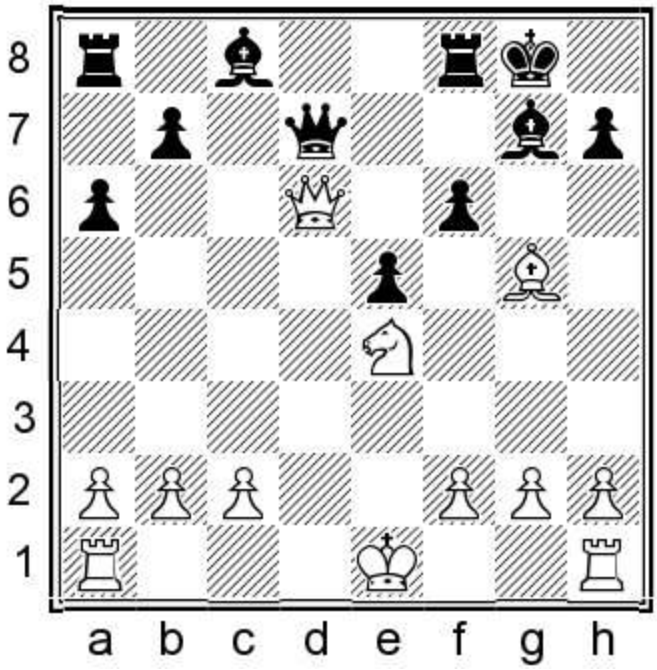
11...d5? is worse: 12.Nf6† Bxf6 13.Bxf6 Rg8 (13...0-0 14.Qf3± Schweber – Debarnot, Moron 1982)



14.0-0 e4 15.f3 Qh3 16.Qe2± Black had the more vulnerable king in Grinwis – Blittkowsky, Internet 2004.

12.Qxd6 f6!
12...Qf5?! 13.f3 Be6 14.0-0-0 Rac8 occurred in Cherniaev – Tsuranov, Vladivostok 1995, when 15.Kb1!N± would have left Black with no real play for the pawn.

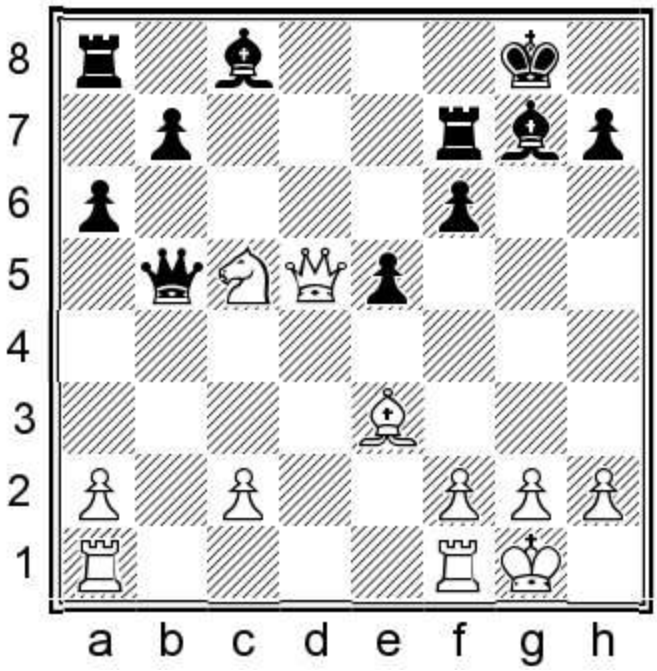
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13.Be3!?
13.Qxd7 Bxd7 14.Bd2 is a reasonable continuation, but after 14...Bc6 15.Nd6 Rfd8 16.Nf5 Bf8 17.0-0-0 Kf7© Black's bishop pair gives him realistic saving chances, and he went on to hold the draw in Vaindl – Arreaga Orozco, corr. 2000.

13...Qg4
13...f5?! 14.0-0-0! Qf7 15.Nc3± was excellent for White in Nepomniachtchi – Vernay, Belfort 2005.

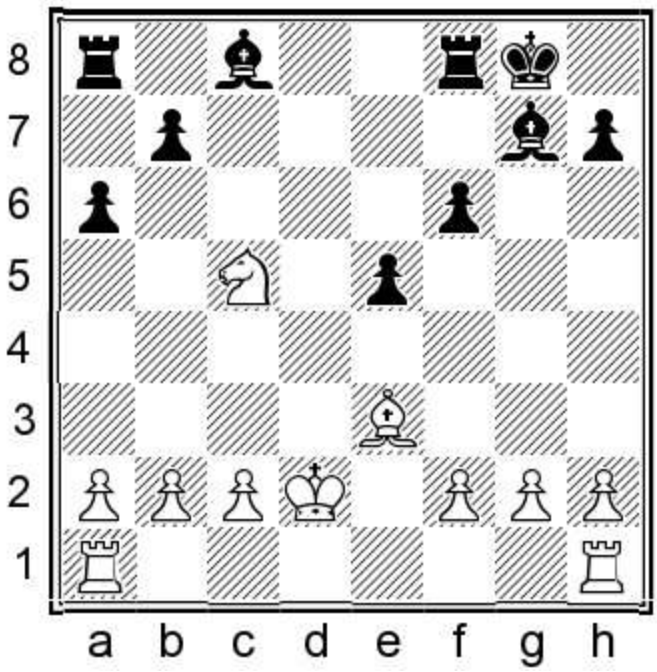
14.Nc5! Qb4† 15.Qd2 Qxd2†
The alternative is: 15...Qxb2 16.0-0 Qb5 17.Qd5† Rf7



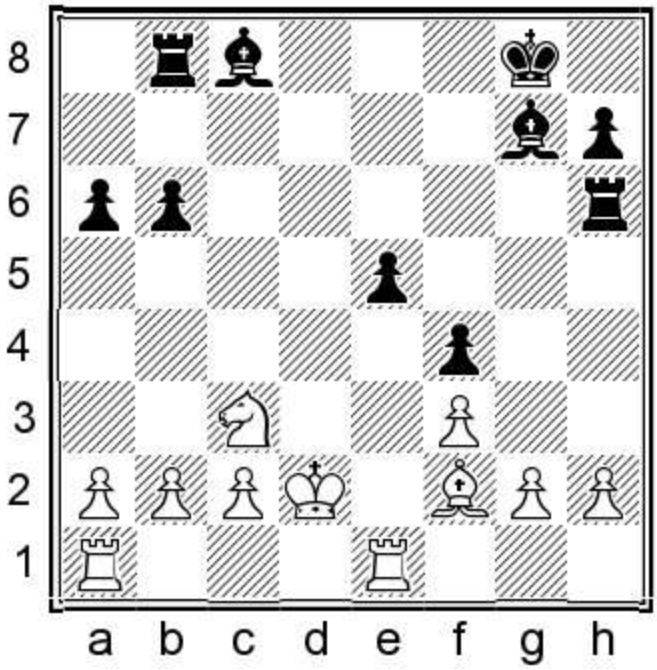
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18.Rfb1 Qc6 19.Qxc6 bxc6 20.Rb6² Black faced a difficult defensive task in Gabris – Kolanek, corr. 2010.

16.Kxd2
We have reached the same type of endgame as in the 13.Qxd7 line in the notes above, but this is an improved version for White.



16...Rd8†
16...f5 17.f3 Rb8 (17...b6 18.Na4²) 18.Rhe1 b6 19.Na4 f4 20.Bf2 Rf6 21.Nc3 Rh6

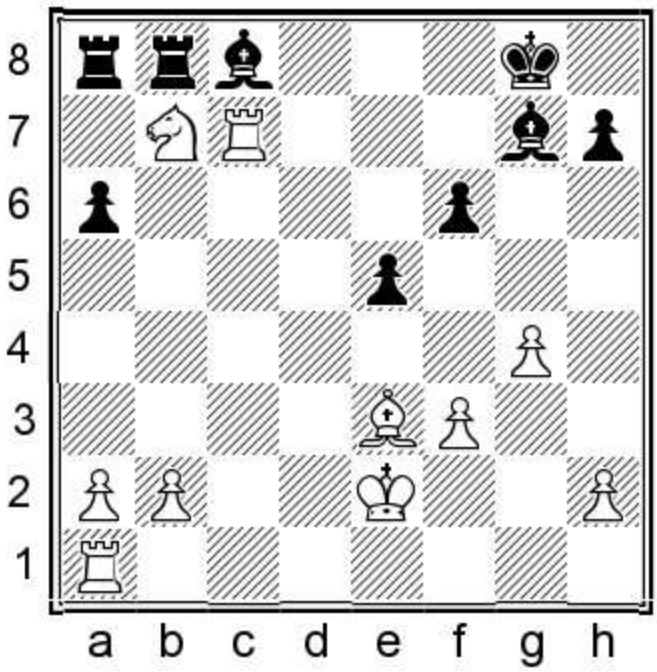


22.Rh1 Rd6† 23.Ke2 Rg6 24.g4 Rc6 25.Rhd1 Be6 26.Rd2± Ornek – Goldschagg, corr. 2007.

17.Ke2 Bf5 18.f3 Bxc2 19.Rhc1 Bf5 20.g4! Bd7 21.Nxb7
21.Nxd7 Rxd7 22.Rc3 offers White a miniscule positional edge but Black should be okay.

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21...Rdb8 22.Rc7 Bc8
In Hanzalik – Turczynski, corr. 2006, White should have continued:

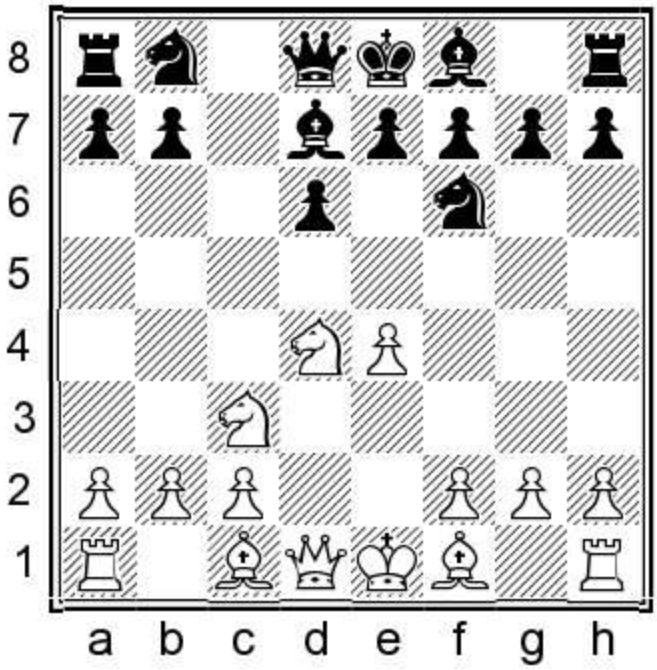


23.Nc5!N 23...Rxb2† 24.Kf1 Bf8
Otherwise Rd1 will be horrible to face.

25.Ne4 Bg7 26.Rd1 Be6 27.Rd6±
The analysis could be continued, but this is already more than you need to know to face this line with confidence. Black is under pressure and has to find 'only moves' at almost every turn, and it is still not clear if he can survive against accurate play by White.

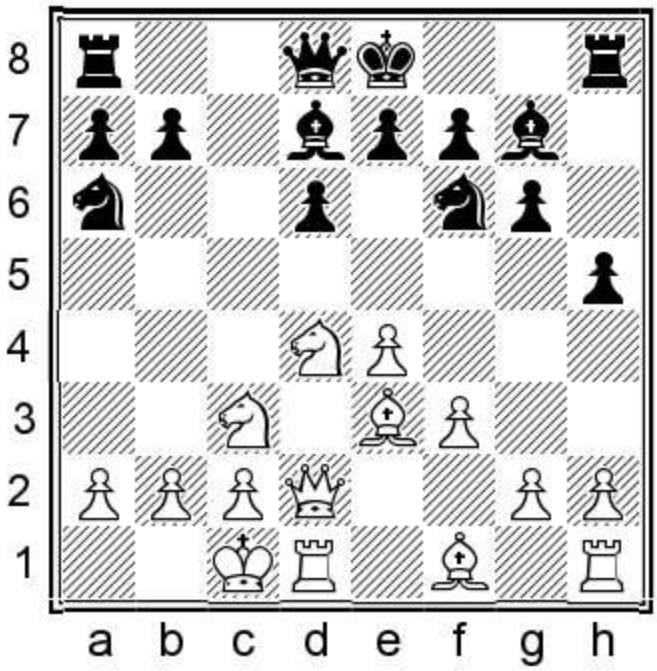
B22) 5...Bd7

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Sometimes known as the Kupreichik System, this is quite a respectable line. Depending on White's response, Black may either convert to a Classical set-up with ...Nc6 or try something different.

6.f3 e5
6...g6 7.Be3 is a Dragon, which is covered in the Sicilian Main Lines volume. Nevertheless, I will include an example here in which Black played very much in the spirit of the Kupreichik System, in terms of developing his queenside in a creative way. 7...Bg7 8.Qd2 h5 9.0-0-0 Na6!? (9...Nc6 reaches a position covered in the note on 8...h5 on page 276 of Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines)

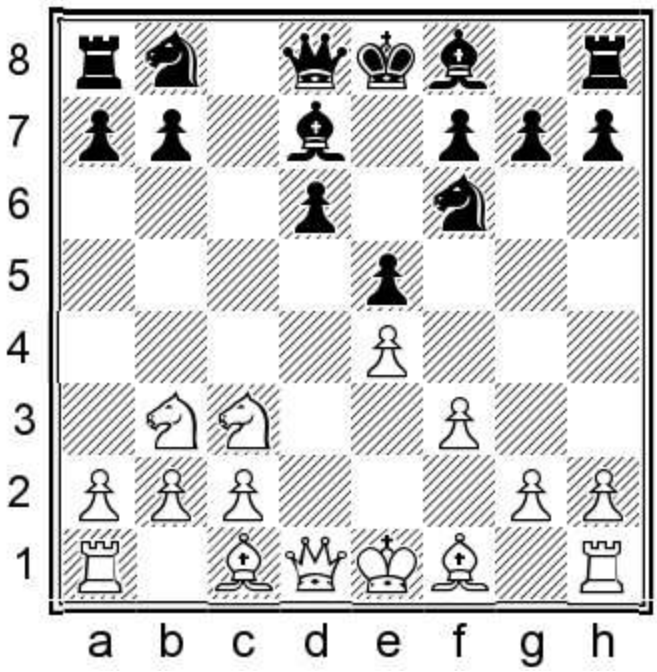


10.Kb1 Nc5 11.Qf2 Qa5 12.h3 Rc8 13.g3 Bc6 14.Rh2!? White had the better chances in Buettner – Koenig, corr. 2014. We could analyse this position in much more depth but it seems to me that Black's whole scheme is too obscure to justify spending much time on it. I will, however, just point out that the main idea of putting the

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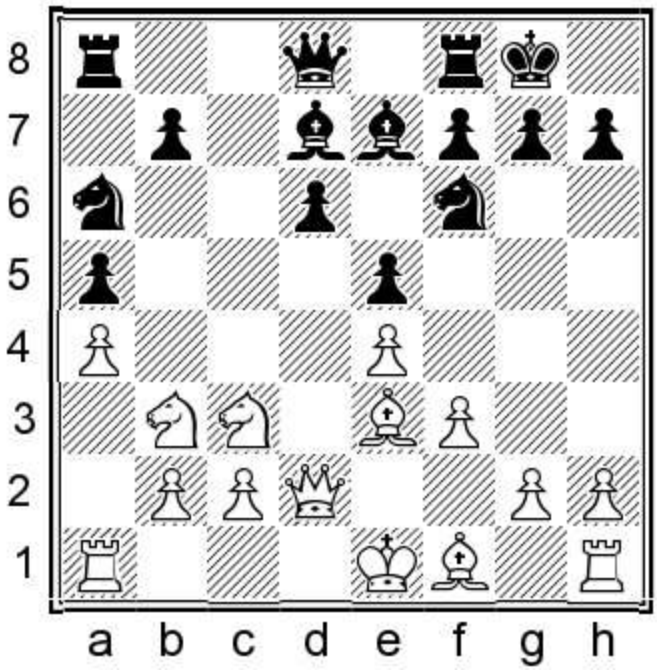
rook on h2 is not to prepare g3-g4 as I originally imagined, but rather to threaten e4-e5, when the position of the rook makes a crucial difference in some of the tactical lines that may follow.

7.Nb3



7...a5!?
It seems to me that this is Black's best option if he wishes to give this variation a unique flavour.

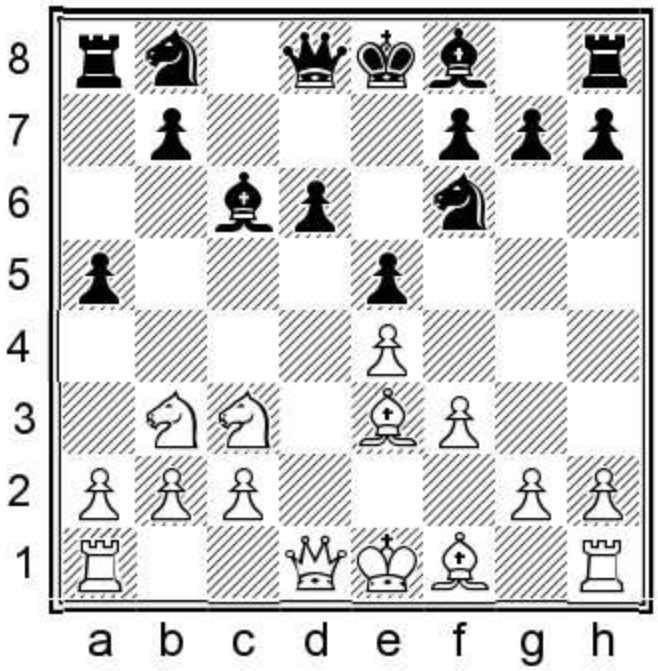
7...Be7 has been the most popular choice but it usually transposes to our Najdorf coverage in the Sicilian Main Lines volume. 8.Be3 0-0 9.Qd2 a5 I cannot find another way to justify Black's piece placement. His bishop is not well placed on d7, and if he reroutes it to e6 without playing ...a5, he will just be a tempo down on the Najdorf. 10.a4 Na6



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11.g4 Nb4 12.0-0-0 Black has nothing better than putting his bishop on e6, either immediately or after 12...Rc8 13.Kb1 Be6. In both cases, play transposes to our Najdorf coverage – see Chapter 11 of Playing 1.e4 – Sicilian Main Lines.

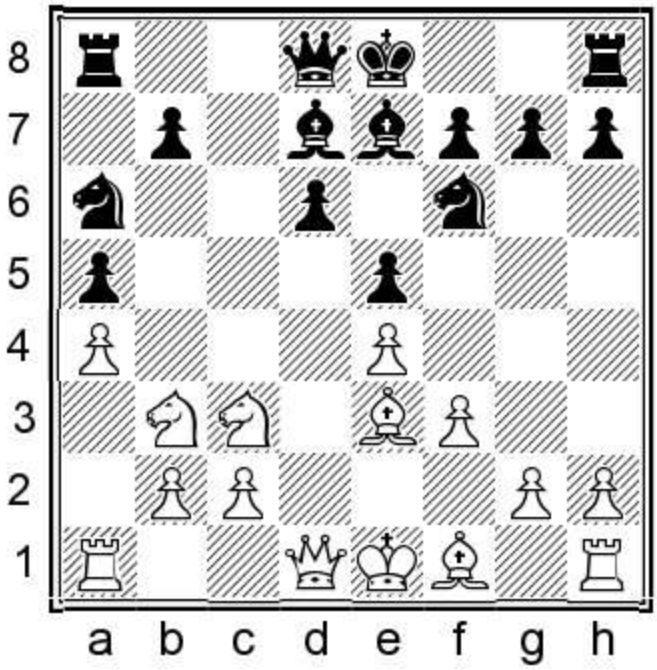
7...Bc6?! is a typical motif for the Kupreichik System but it doesn't really work here. 8.Be3 a5?! (8...Be7 is better although 9.Qd2 still gives White a favourable version of a normal English Attack) Here White can improve with:



9.Nd2!N (Best, although the straightforward 9.a4 Na6 10.Bb5 [10.Bc4!?] 10...Be7 11.Qe2 0-0 12.0-0 Nb4 13. Rfd1² also favoured White in Morozevich – Svidler, Moscow [blitz] 2009.) 9...d5 10.Nxd5 Nxd5 11.exd5 Qxd5 12.Nc4±

8.a4 Be7 9.Be3 Na6
Typical stuff for the Kupreichik System: Black tries to find a better route for his knight than the standard c6-square.

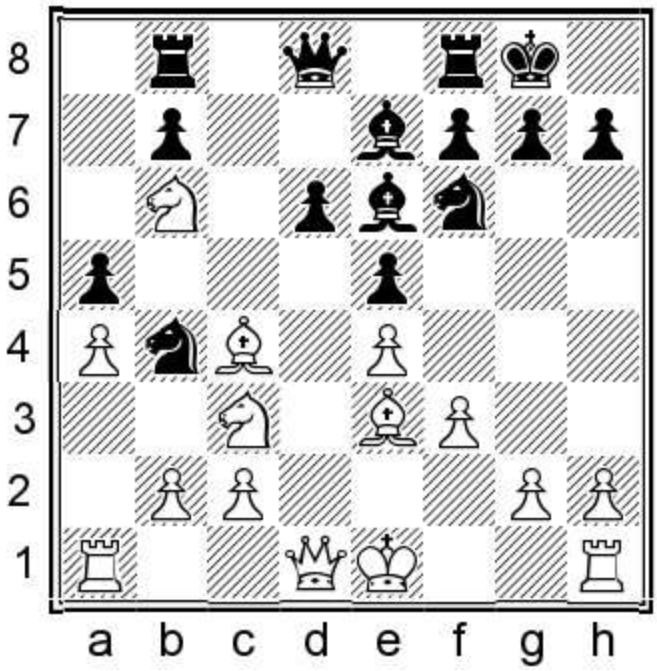
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10.Nd2!
I think this is the best move order, intending to go quickly with the knight to b6.

10...0-0 11.Nc4 Be6 12.Nb6 Rb8 13.Bc4
13.Bb5!?² is also decent.

13...Nb4
This position was reached in Obodchuk – Kupreichik, Vladimir 2007. My suggestion would be:



14.Qe2N²
Intending long castling. White has a pleasant advantage thanks to his control over the queenside and the d5-square.

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Conclusion

We began this chapter by analysing some sidelines after 2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4. Then 4...d5 is playable, but White has a pleasant choice between taking a small but enduring endgame advantage (as mentioned in the note on 5.Bb5) or heading for a favourable middlegame as in my main line. We then moved on to 4...Qc7 5.Nc3, when Black had better transpose to a Taimanov with 5...e6, otherwise he gets into trouble.

A more serious topic is the Grivas System with 4...Qb6. This is among the most respectable of the lines covered in this chapter, and it presents a serious challenge. I favour a set-up with 5.Nb3 Nf6 6.Nc3 e6 7.Bd3, intending Be3, f2-f4 and then, crucially, g4-g5 followed by placing the queen on d2, rather than the much more common f3-square. It seems to me that this plan deserves to be much more popular and I like White's chances after it.

We finished by considering a few options after 2...d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3. First there was 5...e5, when 6.Bb5† reminds us of why the Najdorf is so popular. White has better prospects after both of Black's playable moves, with 6...Nbd7 being the more challenging one to face.

Finally, the Kupreichik System with 5...Bd7 is a serious line to consider, but 6.f3 is a convenient choice which maintains compatibility with other parts of our repertoire. Black should really take the opportunity to transpose to one of the main lines in the Sicilian Main Lines volume, otherwise his attempts to play too creatively may land him in hot water.

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