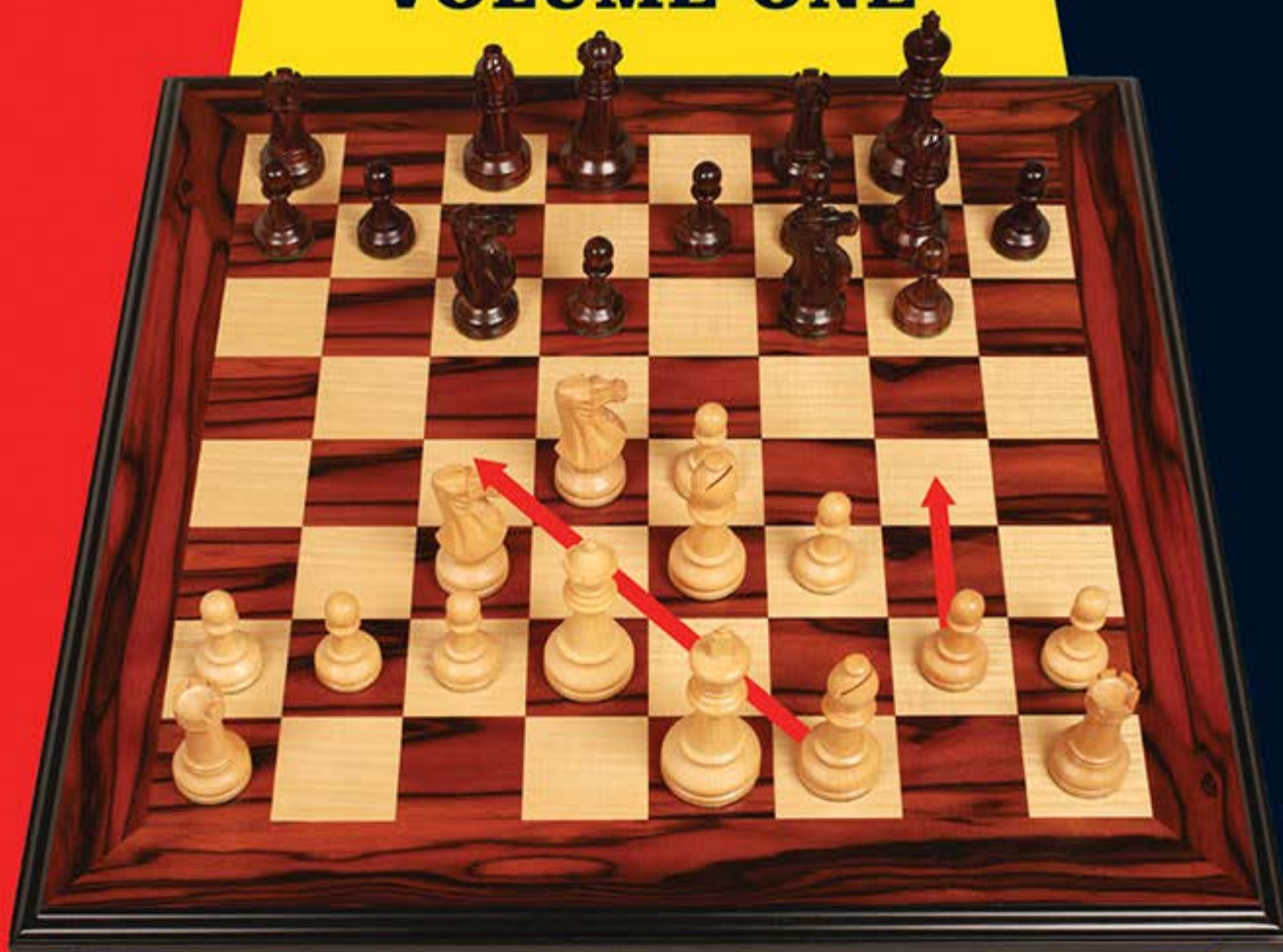


Grandmaster Repertoire

Gawain
Jones
**The
Dragon**
VOLUME ONE



Tired of bad positions? Try the main lines!

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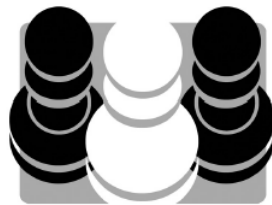
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Grandmaster Repertoire

The Dragon 1

By

Gawain Jones



Quality Chess

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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
<i>f</i>	with an initiative
÷	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
TM	only move
#	mate

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Preface

From Harry Golombek and B.H. Wood in the 1940s, through to the 1960s with players such as Peter Lee, Bill Hartston, Andrew Whiteley and David Levy, the Dragon has long been popular in the UK. During the Chess Revolution of the 1970s many of England's top players were frequent users, notably Jonathan Mestel, William Watson and our first Grandmaster Tony Miles. More recently Chris Ward, with his infectious Winning with the Dragon books, coupled with his coaching at elite youth events, inspired many of England's top talents to become Dragon exponents.

It is therefore no surprise that I have been playing the Dragon from a young age. I've enjoyed the complex battles and being able to attack White straight out of the opening. My quickest win with the Dragon was in 13 moves; how often does that happen in most defences?

Black's kingside fianchetto immediately sets the stage for a double-edged game. On the one hand, the pawn on g6 can become a hook for White's attack along the h-file. This caveman attack can be quite scary, hence Bobby Fischer's quote: "It's just a matter of throwing in a few sacrifices, then checkmate!"

However, it's not at all one-sided as the g7-bishop does a great job fighting for central control and targeting White's queenside. Often the game becomes sharp and White is forced to take risks. If White declines to get involved in the messy positions with opposite-sided castling then Black will generally be comfortable. His pieces coordinate well, his structure is sound and he has great long-term prospects. The only potential weakness in Black's camp is the d5-square, and that can usually be remedied. Having both the initiative and good long-term chances has always appealed to me. We can attack but we don't need to stake everything on it; if White survives the complications then we may still be able to count on a pleasant endgame.

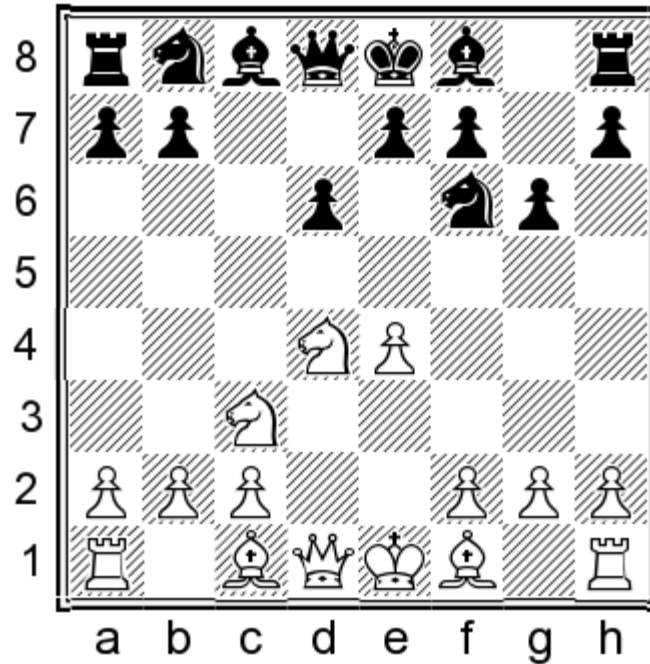
Amateur players often ask me whether the Dragon is still playable at high levels. It's true that a sizeable body of theory has developed, as with every opening in the computer era, but Black is still very much alive and kicking. I have used the Dragon as my main defence throughout my career and, when challenged, most of the elite have opted out of a theoretical duel. In producing this repertoire I have remained as objective and comprehensive as possible, not omitting any line I consider potentially dangerous, no matter how rare it might be. It is inevitable that improvements will be found at some point in the future, but I believe my recommendations will stand up to testing for a long time.

I would like to thank John Shaw for his patience and technical help; Richard Palliser, who has devoted so many hours trying to make my repertoire playable, not least in the Dragon; and my wife Sue, who has supported me and made it possible for me to complete this work. I hope you enjoy reading my book, and that you have fun and success counterattacking with the Dragon!

Gawain Jones

Move Order Guide

The Dragon is reached after the opening moves: **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6**



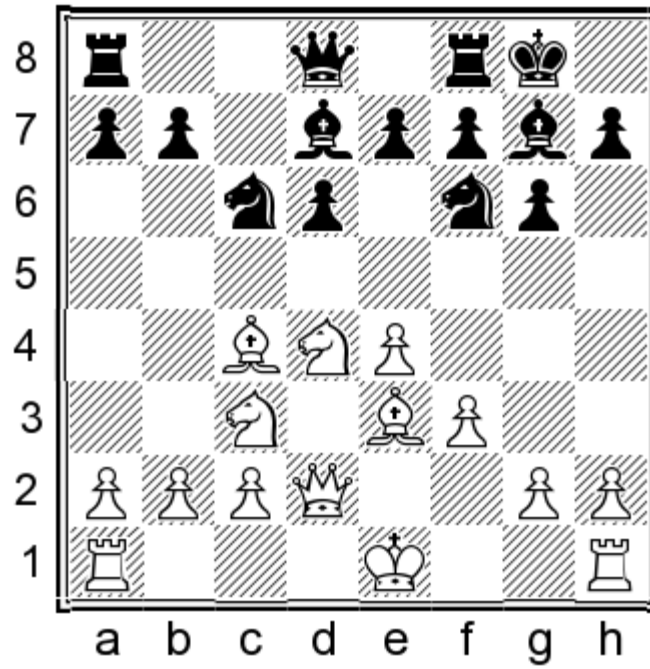
This will be the starting position of our repertoire. There are, of course, a number of ways for White to avoid the Open Sicilian, but to discuss them here would be to stray too far from our main topic, especially when books such as Experts on the Anti-Sicilian and Kotronias's forthcoming Beating the Anti-Sicilians offer dedicated coverage of these lines.

I will, however, draw your attention to another plausible route to the Dragon, which I have occasionally used in my own praxis: **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 g6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3** (5.e5? Qa5† wins a pawn) **5...d6**

The above move order has the advantage of avoiding 3.Bb5†, which is one of White's most popular anti-Sicilian weapons. However, it also opens up some other possibilities for the first player: 4.Qxd4 is a significant option; 3.c4 angles for a Maroczy Bind; and even 3.h4!? can be considered.

Overall the 2...g6 move order gives White more interesting ways to deviate from the Open Sicilian, so the traditional 2...d6 should be preferred by most players. However, if your repertoire happens to include the Accelerated Dragon (meaning that 3.c4 isn't a worry), and you are facing an opponent who plays both the Open Sicilian and 3.Bb5†, then you may consider 2...g6 to eliminate one of his preferred systems.

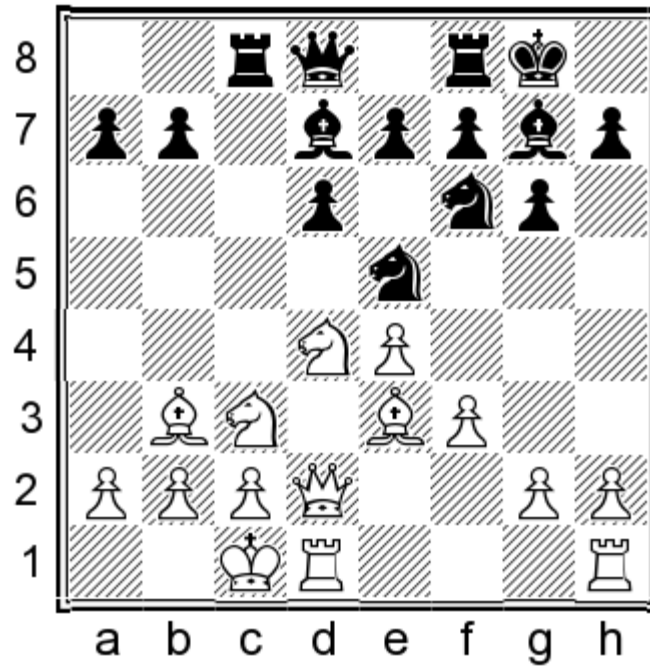
Moving on, the primary topic of the first volume is the following main line: **6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7**



After the most common **10.0-0-0**, I have recommended the Topalov Variation as our main weapon. The tabiya after **10...Rc8 11.Bb3 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5** is discussed in Chapters 7-9. This bypasses the myriad complications of the Soltis Variation, as well as the critical 12.Kb1 variation referred to below.

However, White can obstruct the above plan by altering his move order with 10.h4. It would be dangerous to allow the pawn to advance further, so I recommend **10...h5**. Then after **11.0-0-0 Rc8 12.Bb3 Ne5** we reach the Soltis Variation, with White having avoided the Topalov Variation.

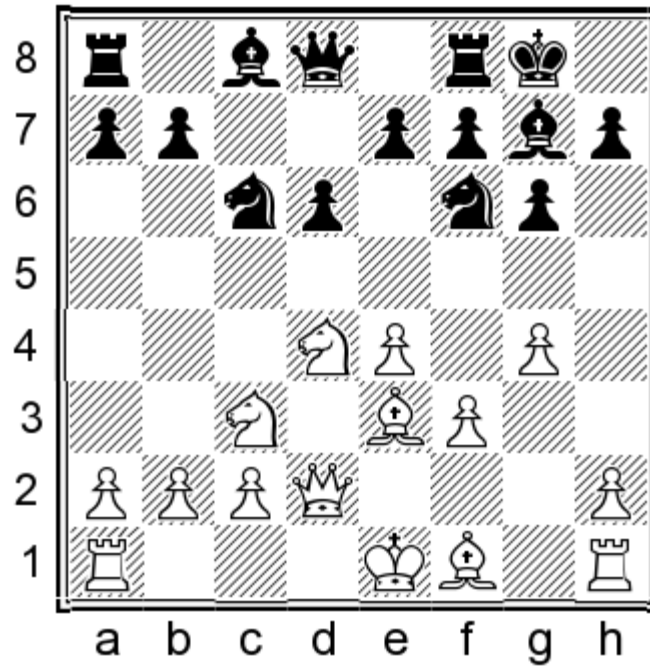
This isn't the end of the world for Black, as he too has avoided certain possibilities. Take the position after **10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5**:



From this position, **12.h4 h5** reaches the Soltis Variation. However, the most critical test is reckoned to be **12.Kb1**. Therefore, if White cuts out the Topalov Variation with the 10.h4 move order, he also sacrifices this important option which might have been available had he preferred 10.0-0-0.

Should you wish to play the Soltis Variation as your main choice, rather than the Topalov, I have also included the Burnett Variation in Chapter 10 as an interesting way to challenge 12.Kb1. This means that, whichever line you choose, you will have a complete repertoire. However, either move order will require you to be ready to play the Soltis Variation. That is why I have covered this first, in Chapters 1-6.

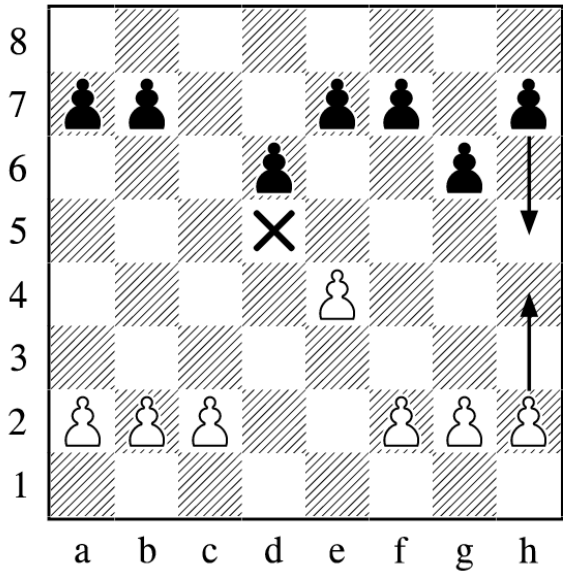
The final two chapters of this first volume are devoted to another important system: **9.g4**



I am recommending the established main line of **9...Be6**. This generally leads to a healthy game for Black, but you must be ready for a variety of position types, from quiet endgames to double-edged middlegames with unusual pawn structures, as found in the final chapter with **10.Nxe6 fxe6**.

Dragon Themes

Before getting down to the theory, we will examine a number of commonly occurring themes in the Sicilian Dragon. Let's start by considering the pawn structure, as this is what dictates the character of the position.

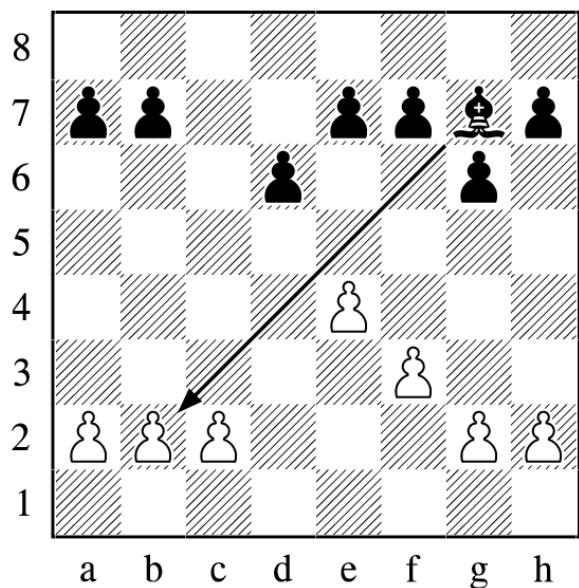


The Dragon is defined by the early deployment of Black's dark-squared bishop to g7. This speeds up Black's kingside development and gives him serious counterattacking chances, but it also has a couple of downsides. Black nearly always castles kingside, so White often tries to exploit the 'hook' on g6 by quickly advancing his h-pawn. Black's other potential problem is the d5-square. After developing his bishop to g7 Black does not really want to move his e-pawn, as the d6-pawn will then be weak. White can try to exploit this by moving the c3-knight to d5. This might be played as an attacking measure, to remove the defensive knight on f6, or it could be for positional gains: if Black elects to exchange knights then White will recapture with his e-pawn, intending to exert pressure along the e-file.

Despite these drawbacks, I believe the advantages of Black's set-up are enough to compensate for the risks. Black develops his dark-squared bishop more actively than in other variations of the Sicilian. The critical lines involve White castling queenside, after which the g7-bishop combines attack and defence, covering the dark squares while pointing at White's king, and the b2-pawn in particular. Black also has an extra central pawn and will generally be happy in the endgame.

I will now present what I consider the most important themes of this opening, with some lightly annotated games to illustrate the most important ideas.

1) The Dragon Bishop



We will start with a couple of games in which White completely underestimates the power of the g7-bishop.

Milenko Lojanica – Gawain Jones

Victoria 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 0-0 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0

10...Rb8!?

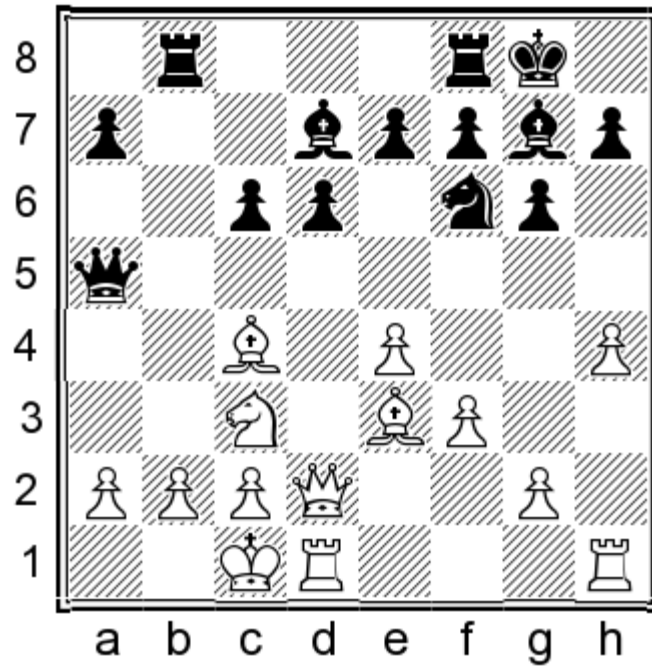
This move introduces the Chinese Dragon, an interesting and relatively new way of fighting against the Yugoslav Attack.

10...Rc8 is how I recommend playing in this book.

11.Nxc6? bxc6

As you will see in variation B3 of Chapter 12, this change in the pawn structure gives Black a nice position even when he has spent a tempo putting the rook on c8. Here White is really asking for trouble with the rook already on the b-file.

12.h4 Qa5



13.Nb1??

My opponent must have been worried about my attack and so decided a queen exchange would be his safest approach. However, the g7-bishop is now allowed into the game.

13...Nxe4!

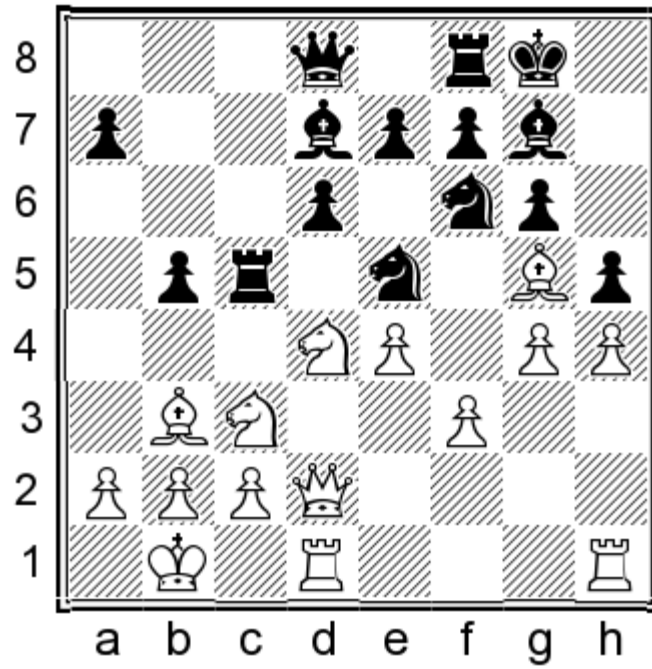
The mate threat on b2 will cost White his queen.

0-1

Ismet Burovic – Peter Schreiner

Zadar 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Bc4 Bg7 7.Be3 0-0 8.f3 Nc6 9.Qd2 Bd7 10.Bb3 Rc8 11.h4 h5 12.0-0-0 Ne5 13.Bg5 Rc5 14.Kb1 b5 15.g4



15...a5

15...hxg4 is my recommendation, as detailed in Chapter 1.

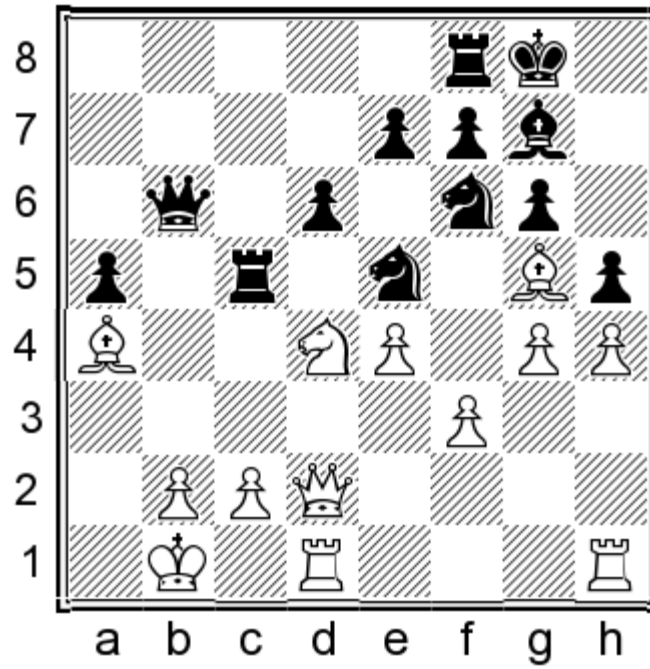
16.a4?

This simply accelerates Black's attack.

16.gxh5 and 16.Bxf6 are both much more critical.

16...bxa4 17.Nxa4 Bxa4 18.Bxa4 Qb6!

Black increases the pressure.



19.gxh5 Nxf3!

We should always be looking out for this blow. Black sacrifices a piece to open up the sleeping g7-bishop.

20.Qe3

White declines the piece.

Instead after 20.Nxf3 Nxe4 21.Qc1 Nc3† 22.Ka1 Nxa4 Black regains the piece and has an extra pawn together with his huge attack.

20...Nxd4 21.Rxd4 Ng4

White threw in the towel. Indeed, as Chris Ward notes, 22.Qd2 Rc4 would pick up a rook.

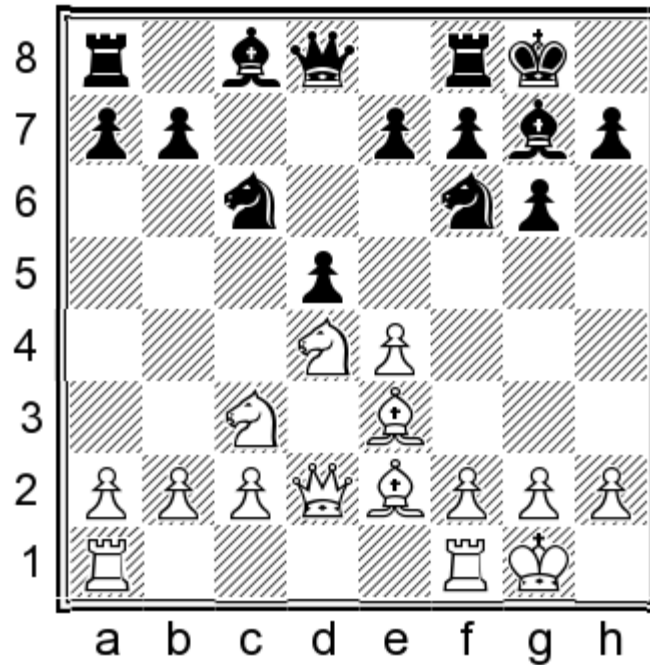
0–1

2) The ...d5 break

It is often said that if Black manages to counter in the centre with ...d5 in the Sicilian, then he has at least equalized. This is because White's main trump in the Sicilian is his extra space. In the Dragon, the ...d5 break also rids Black of any problems with the d5-square. This will be my recommended approach in many lines, particularly the 9.0-0-0 Yugoslav Attack and Classical Variation, both of which are covered in the second volume.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be2 Bg7 7.0-0 Nc6 8.Be3 0-0 9.Qd2 d5

Though it is not forced, I think this central break is the critical test of White's slower lines.



10.exd5 Nxd5 11.Nxc6 bxc6

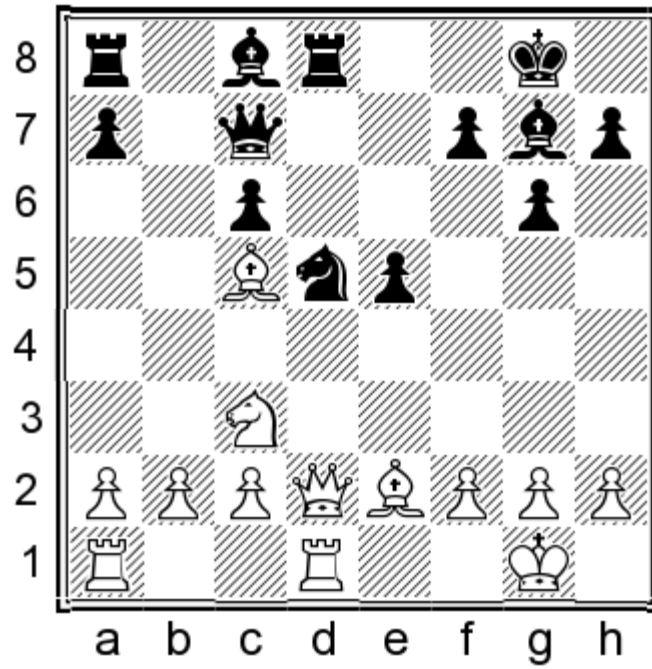
This is a common structure after our central break. Black's queenside pawns are split and White has an outpost on c5, but Black has sufficient counterplay down the b-file and in the centre.

12.Rfd1 Qc7 13.Bd4

White spends a tempo to try and block in the g7-bishop but it will only be temporary.

13...e5 14.Bc5 Rd8

This type of position is more usual with the white king on the queenside. His king might look more vulnerable there, but at least then White can try attacking on the kingside.



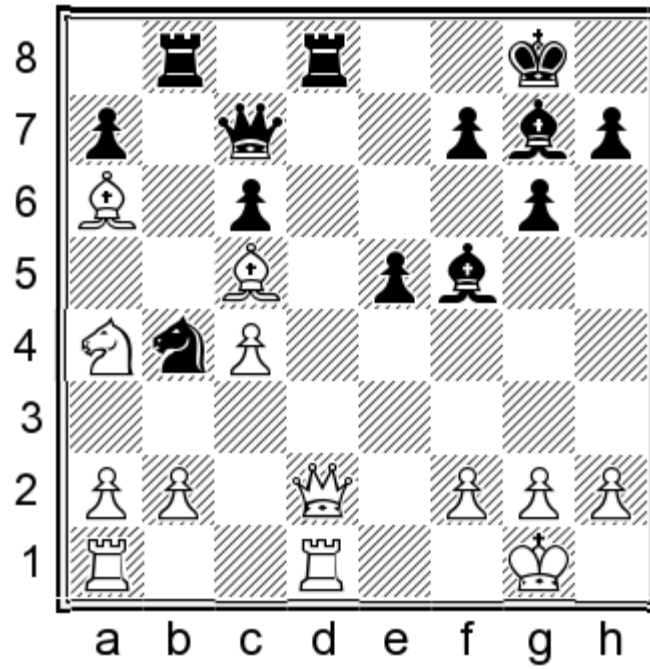
15.Na4?

My grandmaster opponent has trouble finding a plan. Black's position was already comfortable but now White gets into a lot of trouble.

15...Bf5 16.Ba6 Rab8 17.c4?

Going from bad to worse.

17...Nb4

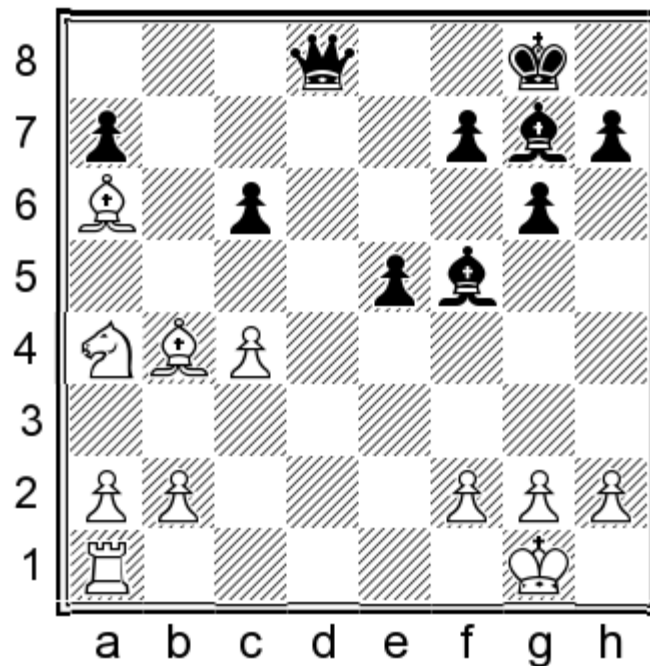


18.Qxd8†

18.Bd6 Rxd6 19.Qxd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Bf8 followed by taking on a6 leaves Black with two huge bishops for the rook.

18...Rxd8 19.Rxd8† Qxd8 20.Bxb4

Black's material advantage is enough to win slowly, but White's poor coordination and vulnerable kingside make the win easy.



20...Bc2 21.b3 e4 22.Re1 Bd4

3) Exchange sacrifices

If you want to enjoy your time playing the Dragon, you need to get used to sacrificing your rook for a minor piece. This can happen in many forms.

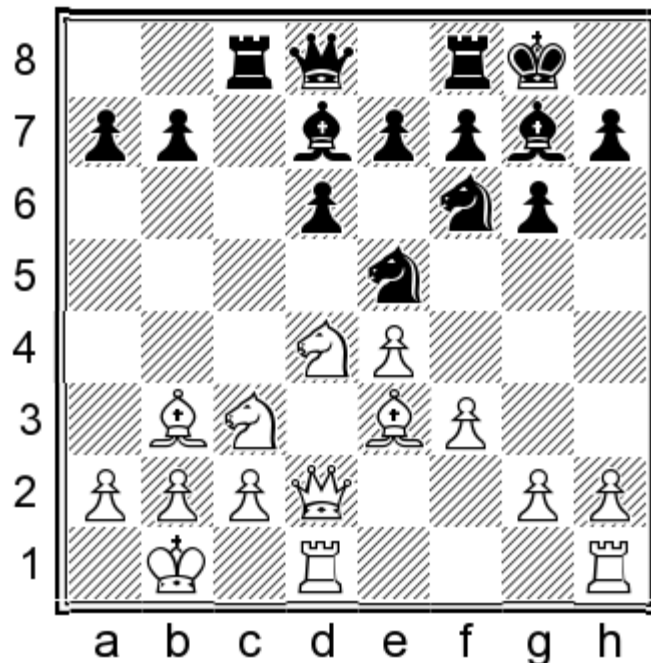
3.1) Sacrifice on c3

This is a common motif throughout the Sicilian and the sacrifice one generally thinks of first. Black damages White's structure and weakens his king's defences. I should point out that in the Burnett Variation (covered in Chapter 10) Black actually sacrifices the rook on c4, but the themes are extremely similar.

Vassily Ivanchuk – Magnus Carlsen

Bilbao 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 0-0 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.Kb1



12...a6!?

This little pawn move became fashionable a few years ago. I feel it must be too slow to be objectively best, but it's certainly interesting.

Later in the book I will recommend the more established 12...Nc4.

13.Rhe1

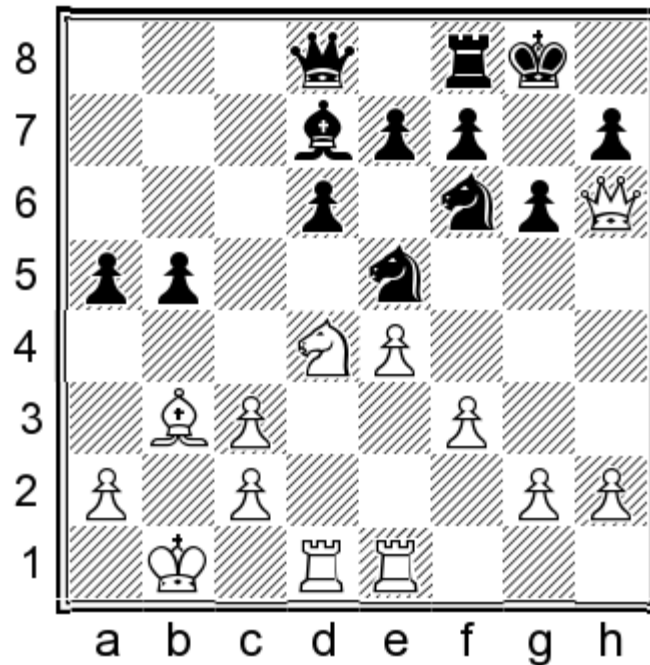
This is a solid move, but 13.h4 must be the critical test. In the Yugoslav Attack every tempo is vital.

13...b5 14.Bh6 Bxh6 15.Qxh6 Rxc3!?

The future World Champion cannot resist the thematic sacrifice.

16.bxc3 a5

Black does not even have a pawn for the sacrificed exchange, but White's king will be vulnerable for a long time. The b3-bishop is also short on squares.

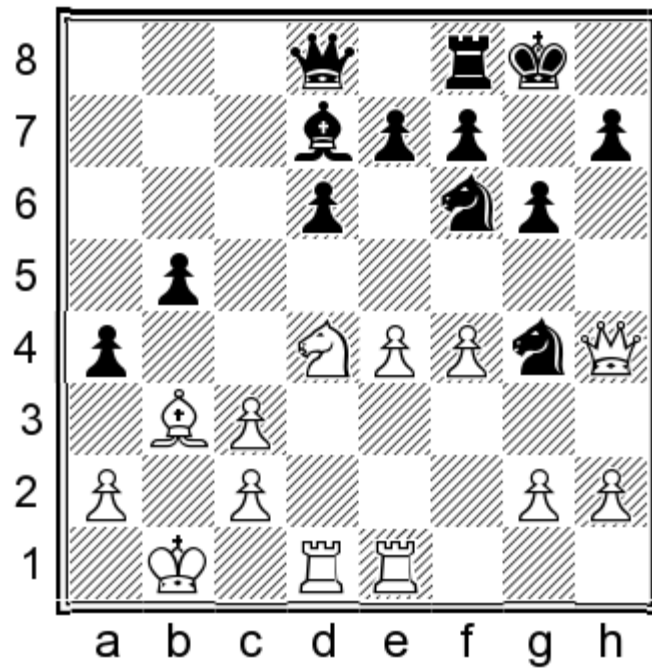


17.f4

Ivanchuk accepts the challenge of an extremely sharp game.

17.a3 Qc7 18.Qe3 Rc8 would give Black typical compensation.

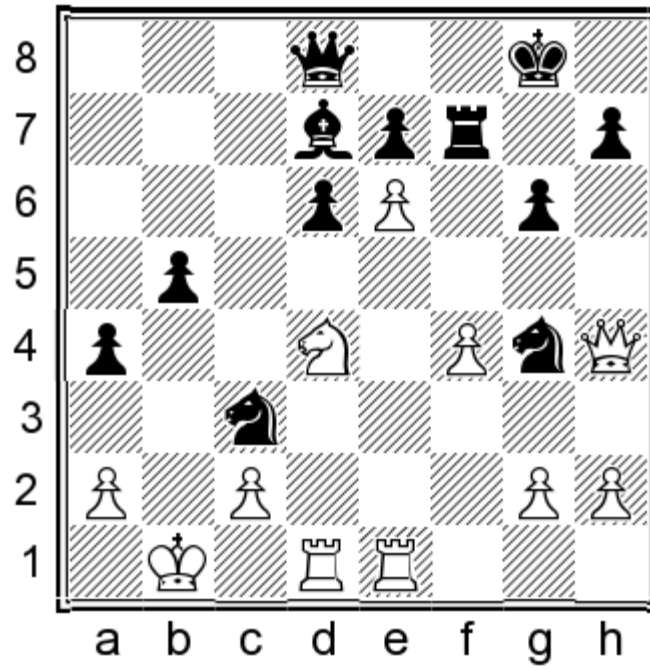
17...Neg4 18.Qh4 a4



19.Bxf7+!?

19.h3 is an alternative approach. 19...axb3 20.Nxb3 (20.cxb3 e5! gives Black good play, as mentioned by Ward.) 20...Nxe4 21.Rxe4 Nf6 Black has still not managed to pick up any pawns for the exchange but he has much the better structure and long-term pressure on the queenside. Meanwhile White's kingside attack has been halted.

19...Rxf7 20.e5 Nd5 21.e6 Nxc3+



22.Kc1

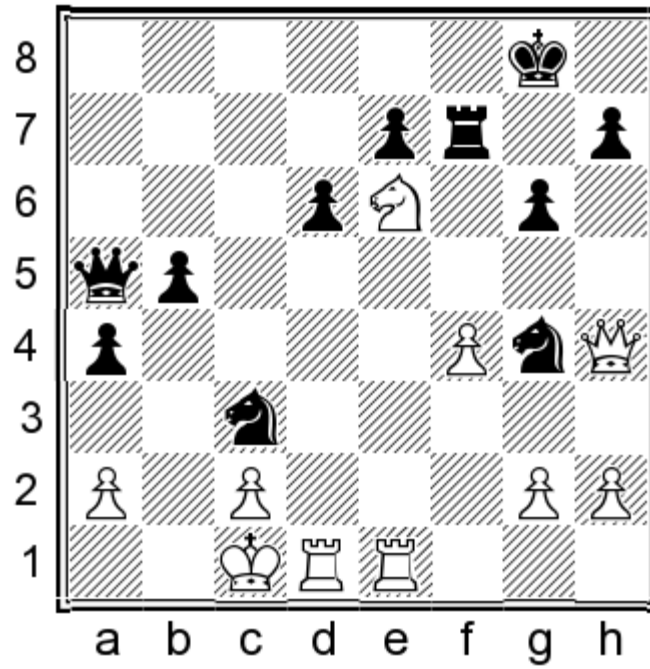
22.Ka1! was the critical test. After 22...Nf6! 23.exf7† Kxf7 24.Rd3 White has two extra exchanges in return for a pawn, but matters are far from simple. Following 24...Qc8 25.Qg3 b4 White will have to give back one exchange on c3 to slow Black's attack.

22...Bxe6

22...Nf6!? was still interesting.

23.Nxe6 Qa5

Ivanchuk now decides Black's attack is too strong and so forces the draw.



24.Qxg4 Nxa2† 25.Kb2 Qc3† 26.Kxa2 Qxc2† 27.Ka1 Qc3† 28.Kb1 Qb3† 29.Ka1 Qc3†

½–½

3.2) Sacrifice on g5

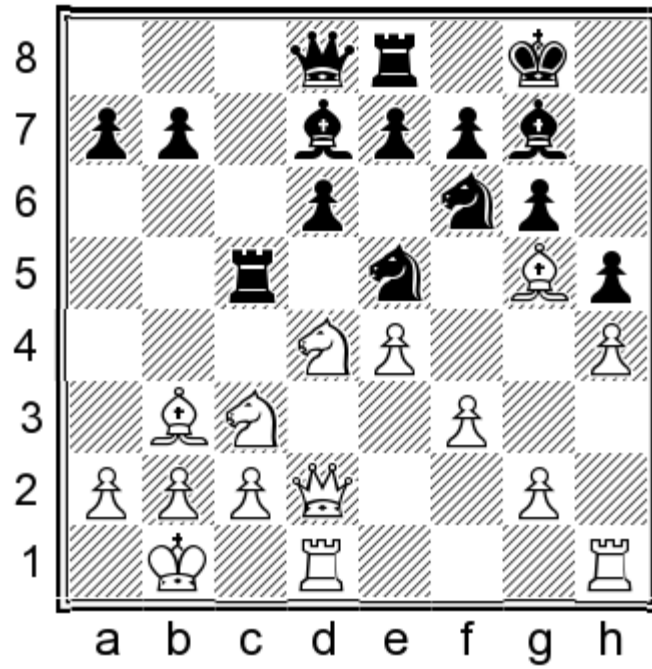
Whereas the sacrifice on c3 is aggressive, the present theme is a defensive idea. The Soltis structures are those with h2-h4 for White and ...h5 for Black. Once those moves have been played, White often puts his bishop on g5 in order to put pressure on the f6-knight and e7-pawn. Black puts his rook on c5 and gets ready to relieve the pressure by taking the bishop, often after White has already sacrificed a couple of pawns to open up lines. The sacrifice deflects White's f-pawn, preventing f4-f5 ideas, and gives Black a strong outpost on e5.

Teimour Radjabov – Magnus Carlsen

Baku 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 0-0 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.Bb3 Rc8 11.h4 h5 12.0-0 Ne5 13.Bg5 Rc5 14.Kb1 Re8

I actually recommend 14...b5 but the theme illustrated in this game is relevant to our repertoire.

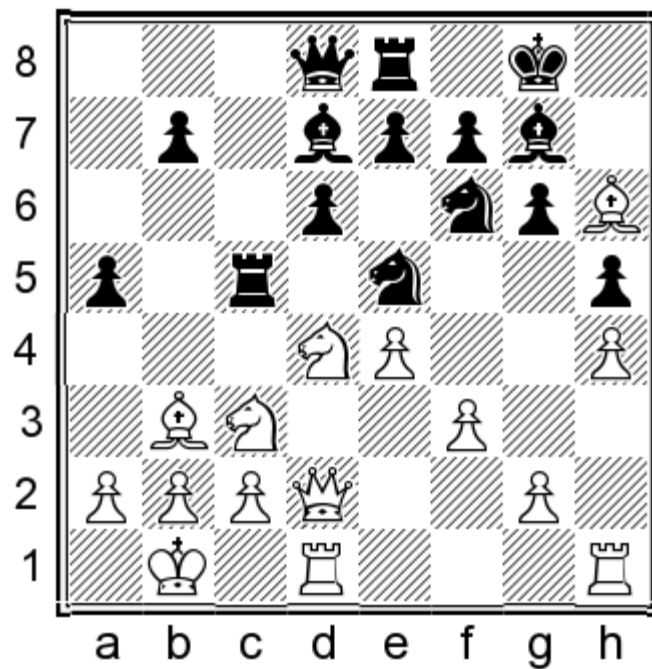


15.g4

This pawn break is one of White's ambitious attempts at refuting the Dragon.

Magnus continues to deploy the Dragon from time to time. A rapid game of his from last year continued:

15.Bh6 a5!?



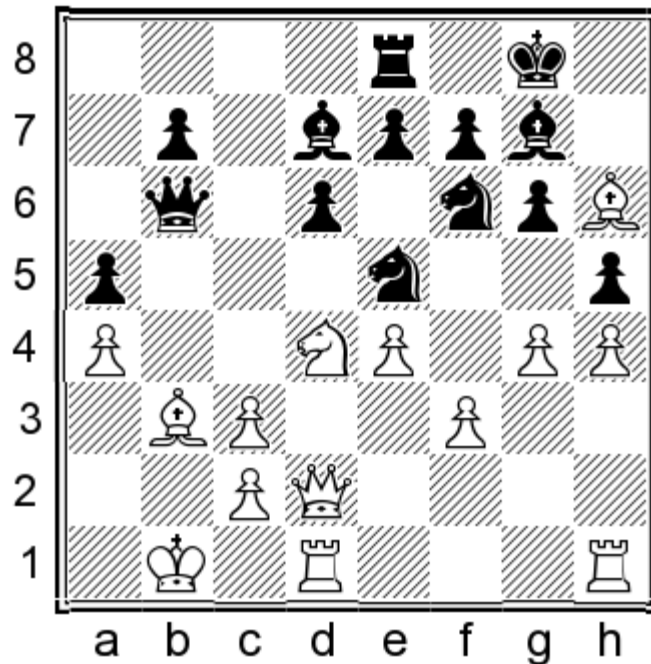
16.a4

Playing on the kingside with 16.g4 or 16.Bxg7 seems more critical.

16...Qb6 17.g4 Rxc3!

Again Magnus shows he has a soft spot for the exchange sacrifice.

18.bxc3



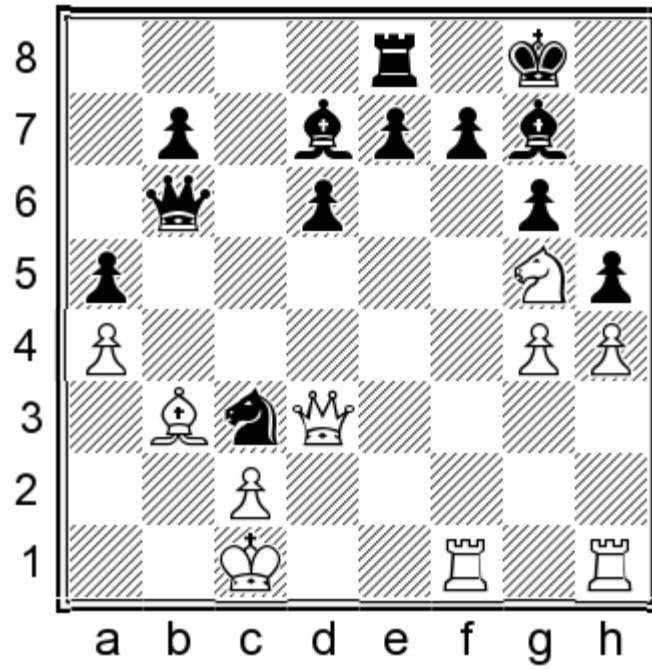
18...Nxf3!?

Investing another piece to open up the g7-bishop.

19.Nxf3 Nxe4 20.Qd3 Nxc3† 21.Kc1 Bxh6† 22.Ng5 Bg7! 23.Rdf1?

This wasn't one of those positions where one should avoid taking a pawn with check. After 23.Bxf7† Kh8 24.Qxg6 Black has nothing better than forcing a draw with: 24...Qe3† 25.Rd2 Ne2† 26.Kd1 Nc3†=

Here the engine declares a big advantage for Black after the calm:

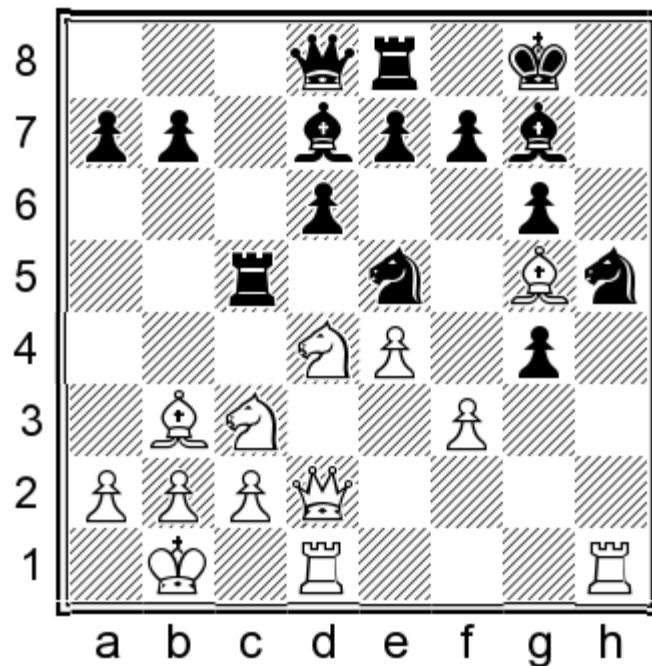


23...Bxg4!N

Magnus preferred the logical 23...d5, blocking out the b3-bishop, with a draw the eventual outcome in Karjakin – Carlsen, Dubai (rapid) 2014.

15...hxg4 16.h5 Nxh5

In Chapter 1 we will examine a similar position with our pawn on b5 and rook back on f8.



17.Rxh5!

White sacrifices everything to get at Black's king. This would be premature in the position with the rook still on f8, but here it is critical.

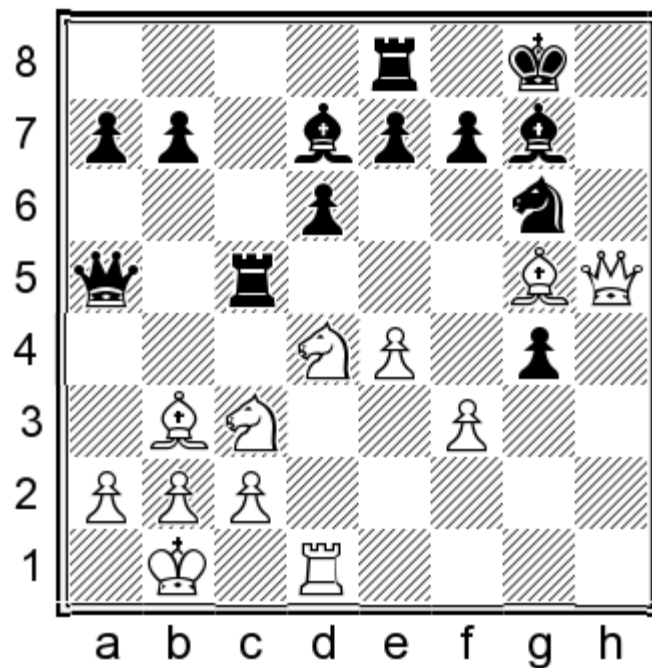
17.Nd5 is the main line in the analogous position arising after 14...b5, but here it does not make much sense as the e7-pawn is already defended.

17...gxh5 18.Qh2 Ng6

In the analogous position I recommend 18...Nxf3 but here there is a big difference. After 19.Nxf3 gxf3 20.Qxh5 then 20...Rxc5?? continues as per my recommendation in Chapter 1. (Instead Black must try either 20...e6 21.Nd5 f6 22.Bh6 Re7 or 20...Be6.) In the present position the f7-pawn is unprotected, so the simple 21.Qxf7† leads to mate.

19.Qxh5 Qa5

The immediate 19...Rxc5!? 20.Qxc5 e6 is also possible, and was in fact Eddie Dearing's recommendation in Play the Sicilian Dragon.



20.f4

An important detail is that 20.Qxc5? can be met by 20...e6!.

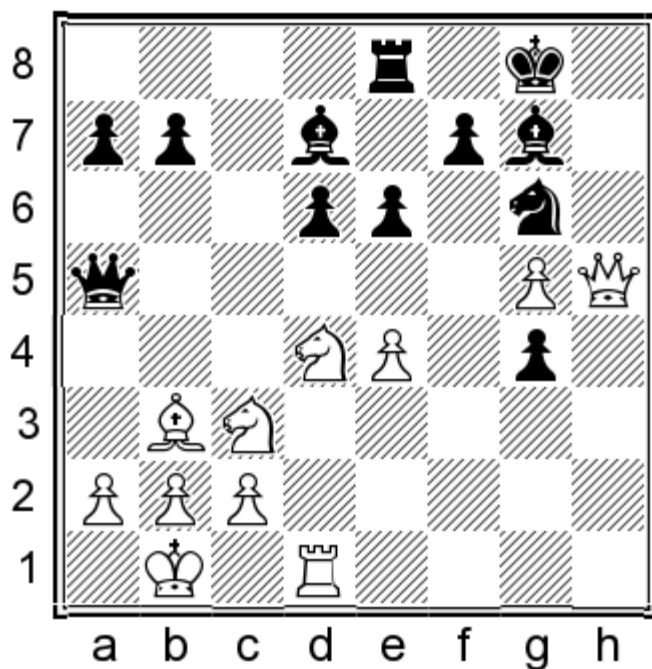
20...Rxc5!

Black sacrifices the rook to prevent f4-f5, thereby slowing down White's attack.

20...e6? would be a big mistake due to 21.f5!.

However, the alternative exchange sacrifice 20...Rxc3!? 21.bxc3 Qxc3 is interesting. The computer informs me that both 22.Bxf7† Kxf7 23.f5 and 22.f5 Ne5 23.Bxe7 lead to draws.

21.fxg5 e6

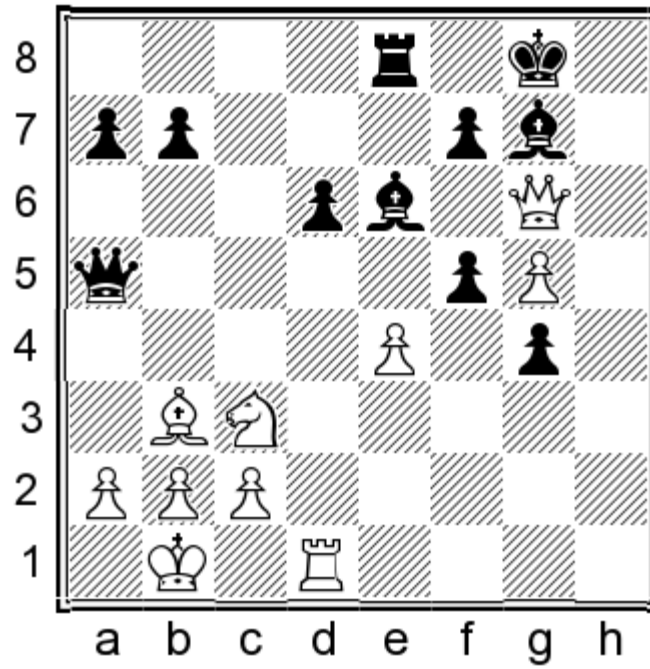


22.Nf5?!

Radjabov gets too ambitious.

22.Qxg4 should have been played but it does not put Black under any pressure; see Alvarez Sabor – Garcia Diez, email 2008.

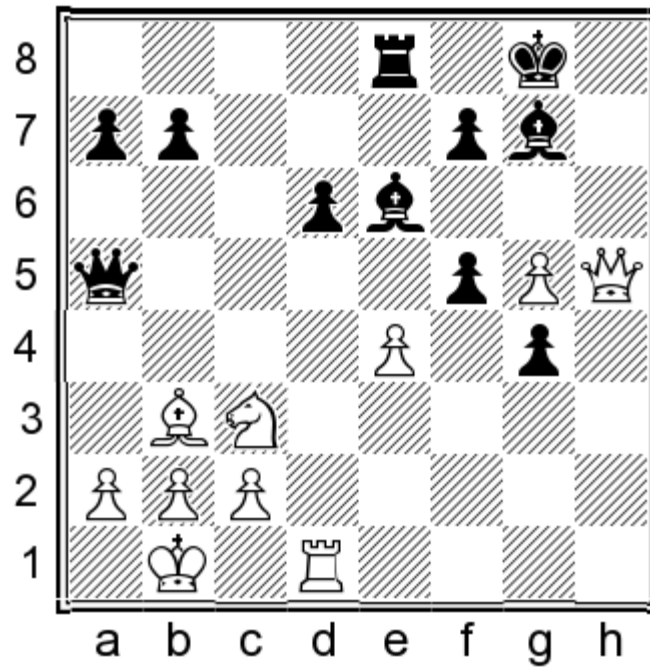
22...exf5 23.Qxg6 Be6!



24.Qh5

White is forced to retreat his queen.

24.Bxe6 Rxe6 25.Qxf5 Bxc3 26.bxc3 Qxf5 27.exf5 Re4 leaves White in a horrible endgame.

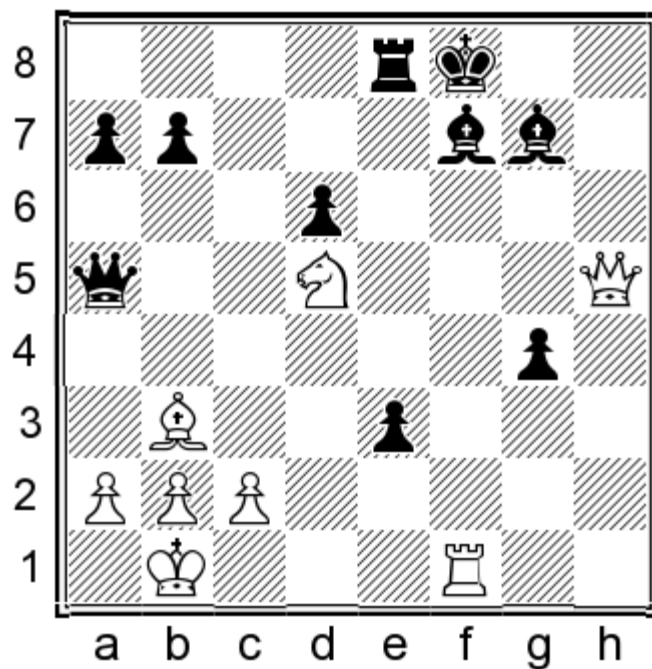


24...fxe4

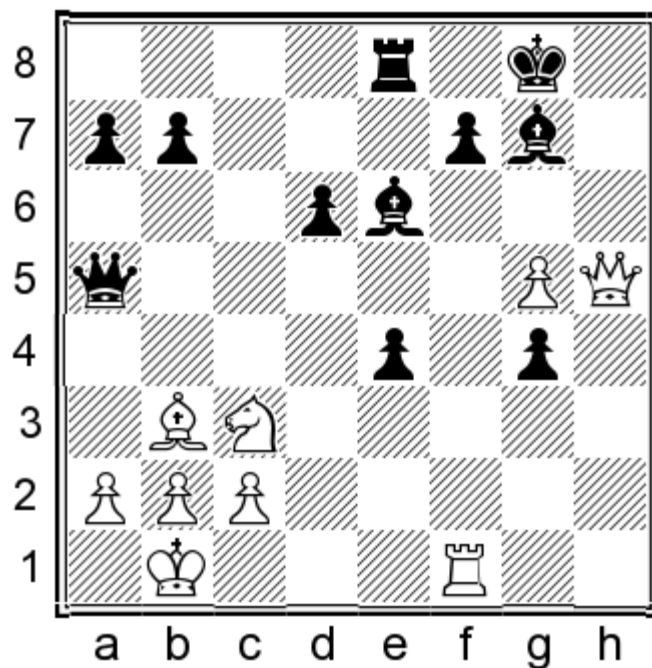
24...Qe5 also looks strong, utilizing the new outpost.

25.Rf1

Teimour should probably have tried 25.Nd5!?. The queen is blocked out on a5 and so White at least threatens g5-g6. Chris Ward shows that Black is still better after: 25...e3! 26.g6 Kf8!? (26...f5 also looks excellent; White simply cannot get around the g7-bishop.) 27.gxf7 Bxf7 28.Rf1



28...Qe1†! 29.Rxe1 Bxh5 30.Rf1† Bf7 31.Nxe3 Rxe3 32.Rxf7† Ke8 Thanks to the threat of mate on the back rank, Black has a clearly better endgame.



25...Qe5!

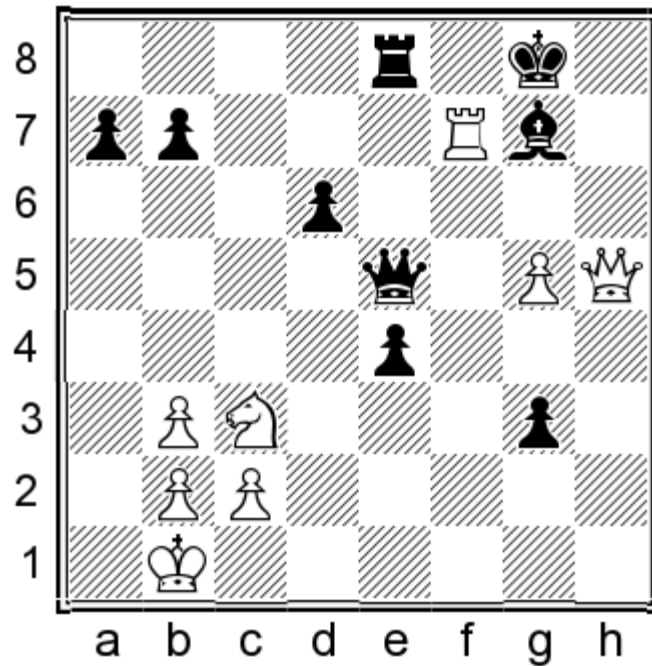
The queen takes up a dominating outpost. White needs to arrange g5-g6 to get his attack going, but the pin along the fifth rank makes that impossible.

26.Rxf7 Bxb3

26...Rf8 is also excellent for Black.

27.axb3 g3

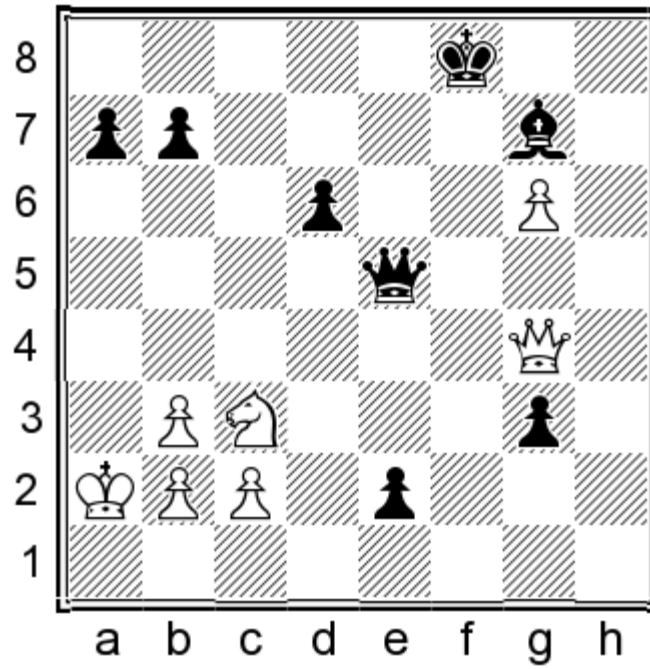
Black has an extra pawn – and a powerful one at that – as well as the better minor piece and a safe king.



28.Ka2 Rf8 29.Rxf8† Kxf8 30.Qg4 e3 31.g6 e2?

A rare slip from the World Number One.

Black should have preferred 31...Ke7, as Ward points out.



32.Qf3†?

Radjabov misses his chance.

32.Qd7! would have created enough threats to draw the game.

32...Ke8 33.Qf7† Kd8 34.Qg8† Kd7 35.Qf7† Qe7 36.Qf5† Kd8! 37.Qa5† b6 38.Qd5 e1=Q 39.Qa8† Kd7 40.Qb7† Ke8
0-1

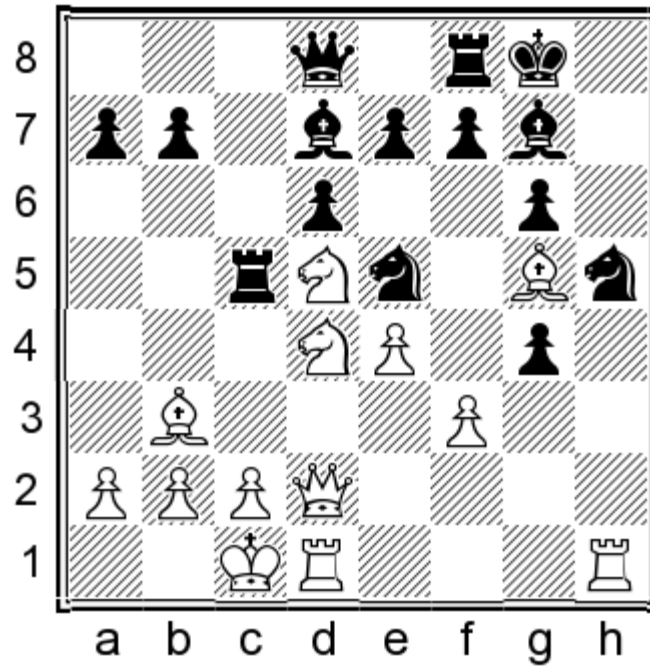
3.3) Sacrifice on d5

Like the previous example, this is a defensive measure. This time Black waits for the knight to jump to d5 from c3 before giving up the rook.

Krum Georgiev – Davorin Komljenovic

Biel 1989

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Bc4 Bd7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.h4 Rc8 11.Bb3 h5 12.0-0-0 Ne5 13.Bg5 Rc5 14.g4 hxg4 15.h5 Nxh5 16.Nd5



16...Rxd5!?

Black immediately gives the exchange in order to slow White's attack and kick-start queenside counterplay.

16...Re8 is my recommendation, examined in variation B4 of Chapter 2. We will probably still take on d5 but we'll wait for a few moves, generally until White has made his own exchange sacrifice on h5.

17.Bxd5 Qb6

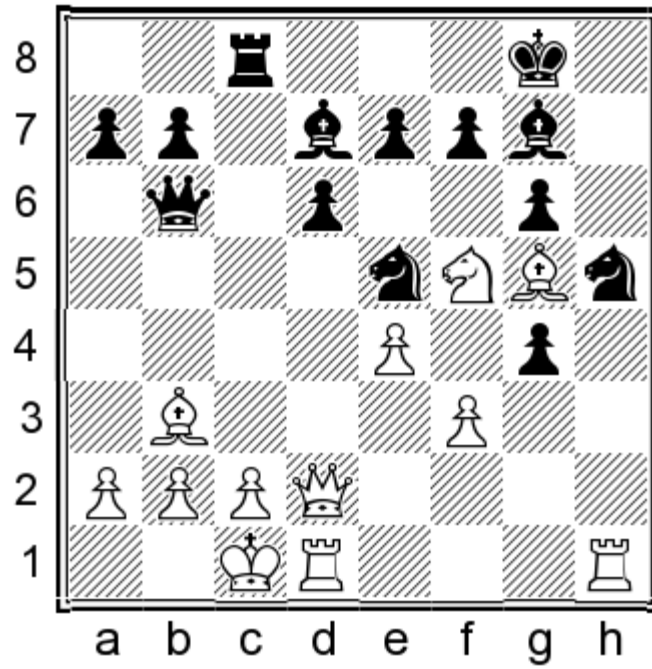
As we have seen already, the b2-pawn is a weak point in White's position.

18.Bb3

18.c3 is a safer move which blocks the long diagonal.

18...Rc8 19.Nf5?

This is a thematic try for White but here it fails, just as it did in the previous game.

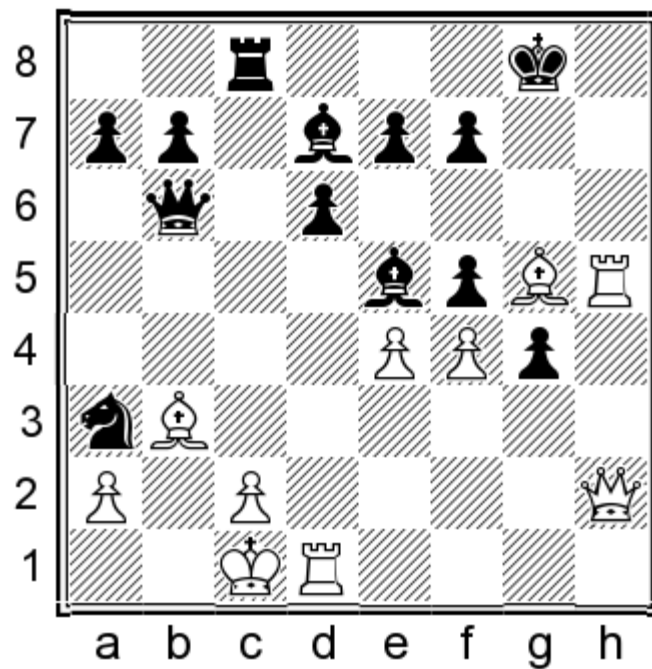


19...gxf5 20.Rxh5 Nc4

Black breaks through to b2.

21.Qh2 Bxb2† 22.Kb1 Be5 23.f4 Na3† 24.Kc1

Black finds a nice way to wrap up the victory.



24...g3! 25.fxe5

25.Qxg3 runs into 25...Rxc2†! 26.Bxc2 Qb2† when all of White's pieces start dropping with check: 27.Kd2 Qxc2† 28.Ke1 Bc3† 29.Kf1 Qxd1† 30.Kg2 Qe2† 31.Kg1 Bd4† 32.Kh1 Qxh5†–+

25...gxf2 26.Bxe7 Qxb3!

A pretty finish.

0–1

4) Preserving the dark-squared bishop

As we have already seen, the g7-bishop is Black's pride and joy, so White often attempts to exchange it by putting his bishop on h6. Sometimes Black's bishop is so powerful that he can simply drop it back to h8 and give up the f8-rook instead.

Vasily Panov – Vladimir Simagin

Moscow 1943

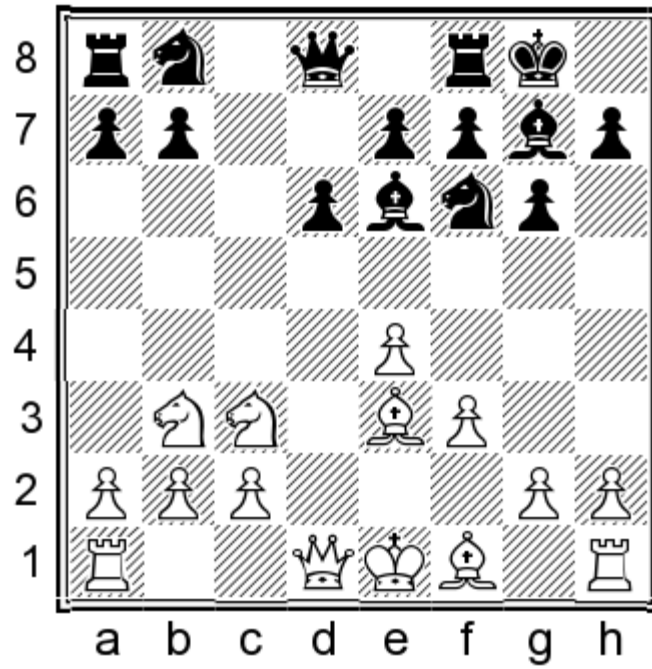
This is one of the earliest examples of a Yugoslav Attack.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Nb3?!

This retreat is premature but this opening was relatively unexplored at the time, and players were still experimenting with different set-ups.

8...Be6!?

Attempting to exploit White's move order.



9.Qd2 Nbd7

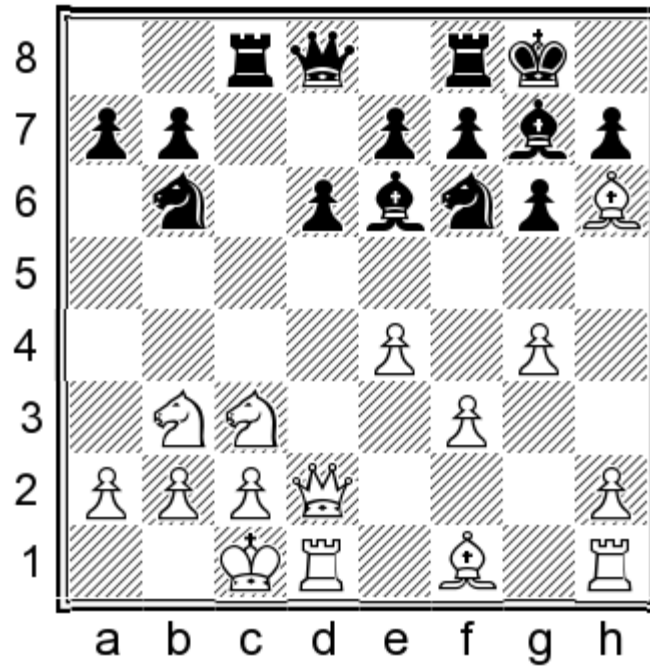
Simagin gets creative.

9...Nc6 is a more sensible square for the knight and will be examined in Chapter 13.

10.0-0-0 Nb6 11.g4 Rc8 12.Bh6?

This plays into Black's hands.

12.h4 would be a better way of exploiting Black's slow queenside play.



12...Bh8?

An interesting concept, but not the strongest exchange sacrifice available here.

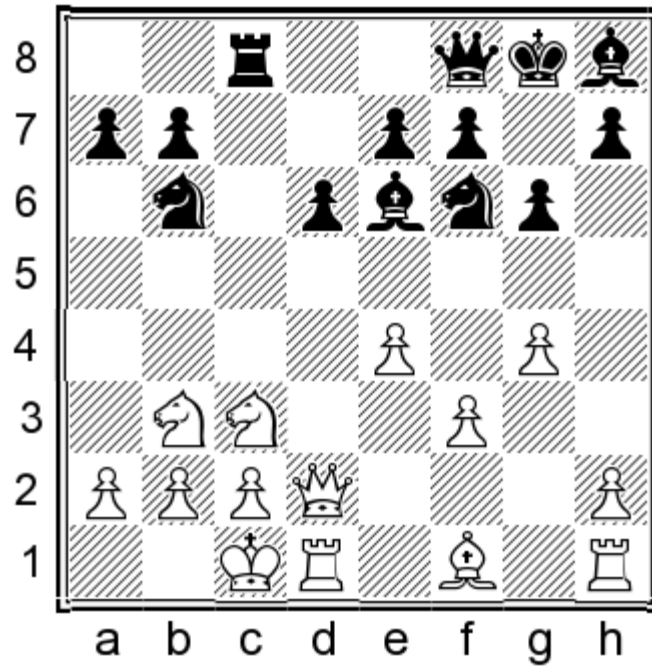
Most Dragon players have seen the theme so many times that their fingers would be itching to play 12...Bxh6 13.Qxh6 Rxc3! 14.bxc3 Qc7 with strong queenside play. The queen might look dangerous on h6 but, without any other pieces to support the attack, it is simply offside. In fact, White has to drop his queen back immediately in order to give the king some cover.

13.Bxf8

13.h4!? also looks dangerous.

13...Qxf8

White should be clearly better with the extra exchange, but it is interesting to see how he drifts. The dark-squared bishop gives Black good long-term counterplay.



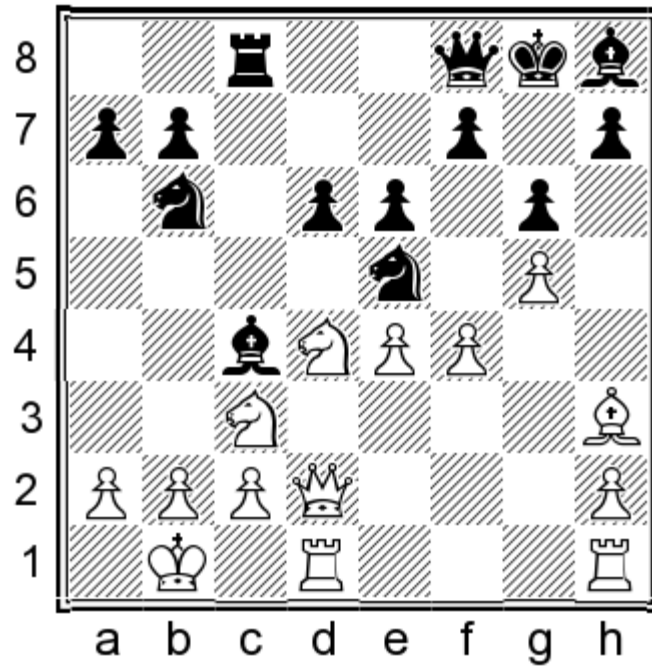
14.Nd4

White should probably keep attacking with something like 14.h4, rather than getting distracted by trying to consolidate the extra material.

14...Bc4 15.g5 Nfd7 16.Bh3?!

The computer does not mind this move but, with the h-file blocked, White will now struggle to create any attacking chances.

16...e6 17.Kb1 Ne5 18.f4



18...Nf3!

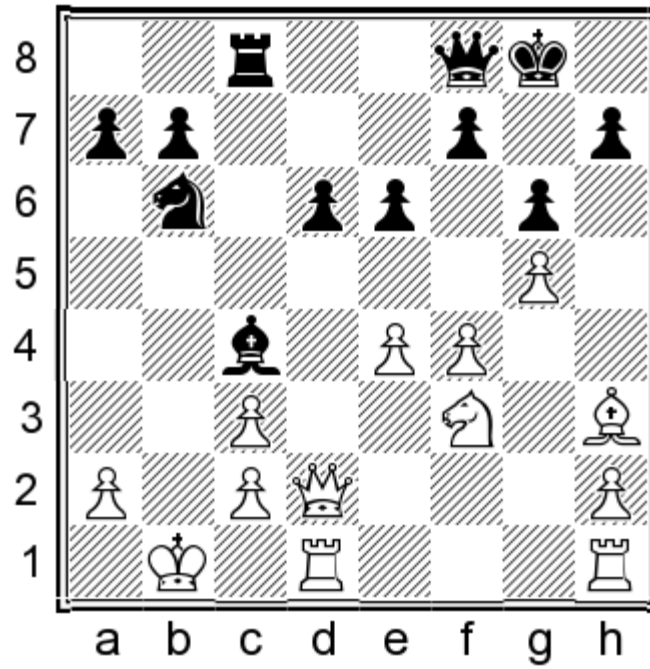
A wonderful sacrifice, giving up a whole piece to open the long diagonal. We have seen the theme of sacrificing a knight on f3 a few times already, but normally there is a pawn to capture on that square.

19.Nxf3 Bxc3 20.bxc3?!

The most obvious move, but now Black gets full compensation for the jettisoned rook.

20.Qxc3 Bxa2† 21.Kxa2 Rxc3 22.bxc3 d5 would also give Black sufficient counterplay.

20.Qxd6! should have been played. Black can win back the exchange with 20...Be2 but White emerges with an extra pawn after 21.Qxf8† Kxf8 22.Bg2 Bxd1 23.Rxd1.



20...d5!

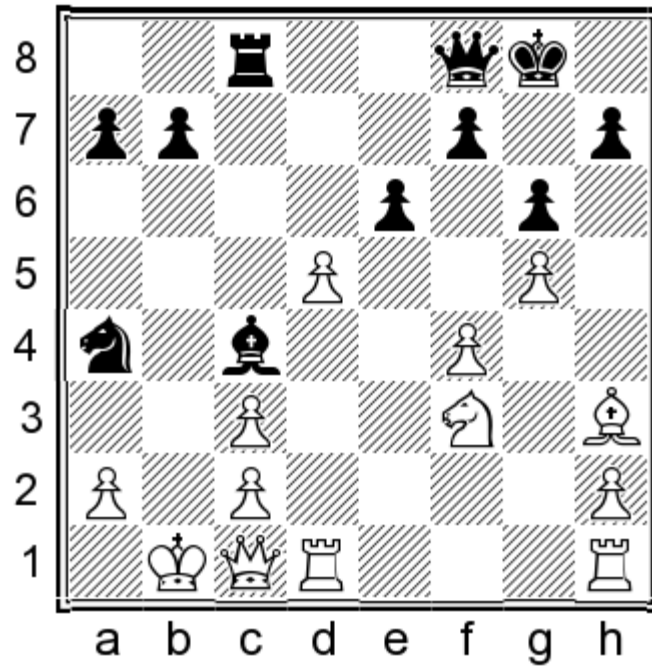
Opening a path for the queen.

21.Qc1 Na4

All of Black's pieces are now involved in the attack, while White's h1-rook and h3-bishop are mere bystanders.

22.exd5?

White cannot afford the time for this.



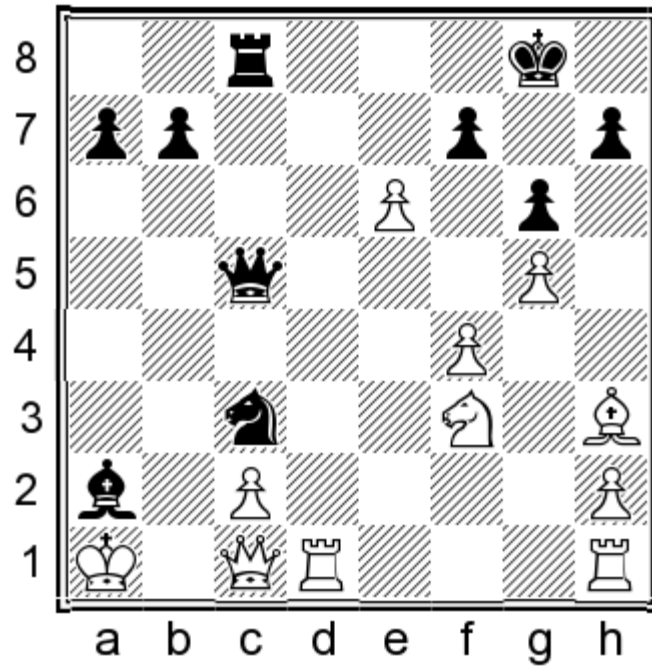
22...Bxa2† 23.Ka1

23.Kxa2? loses to 23...Nxc3† 24.Kb3 Qc5, for example 25.Qa3 Qc4† 26.Kb2 Nxd1† 27.Ka1 Qxd5 and Black wins.

23...Qc5!?

Simagin is enjoying leaving his pieces hanging but 23...Nxc3! was stronger.

24.dxe6 Nxc3



25.Rd4?

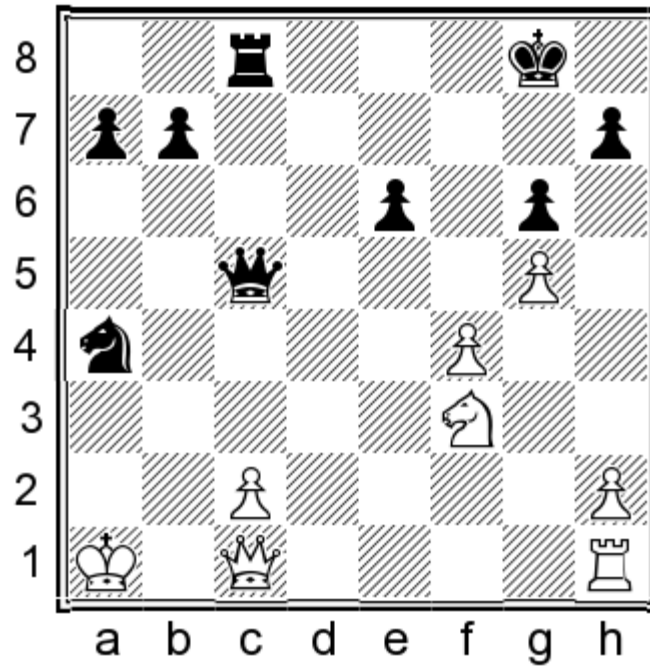
White could have saved himself with 25.e7!. The c8-rook is now attacked and the e7-pawn can annoy Black. The correct result appears to be a draw, for instance: 25...Qa5 26.Rd8† Kg7 27.e8=N† Kh8 28.Rxc8 Be6† 29.Kb2 Qb4† 30.Ka1 Qa5†=

25...Bxe6 26.Bxe6 fxe6

Panov now found that the rook on d4 doesn't actually help to defend his king. He tried the desperate:

27.Ra4 Nxa4

Black was now material up as well as having a huge attack, and the end was swift.



28.c4 Rd8 29.Ka2 Qb4 30.Re1 Rd3 31.Rxe6 Nc3† 32.Ka1 Qa5† 33.Qa3 Qxa3#

The next game features a theoretical line in which it has long been known that Black can happily give his rook for White's dark-squared bishop.

Claudio Gentile – Gawain Jones

Genoa 2003

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.0-0-0 d5 10.exd5 Nxd5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.Bd4 e5

This is the old main line.

12...Bxd4 is the modern move, and my proposed approach in the second volume.

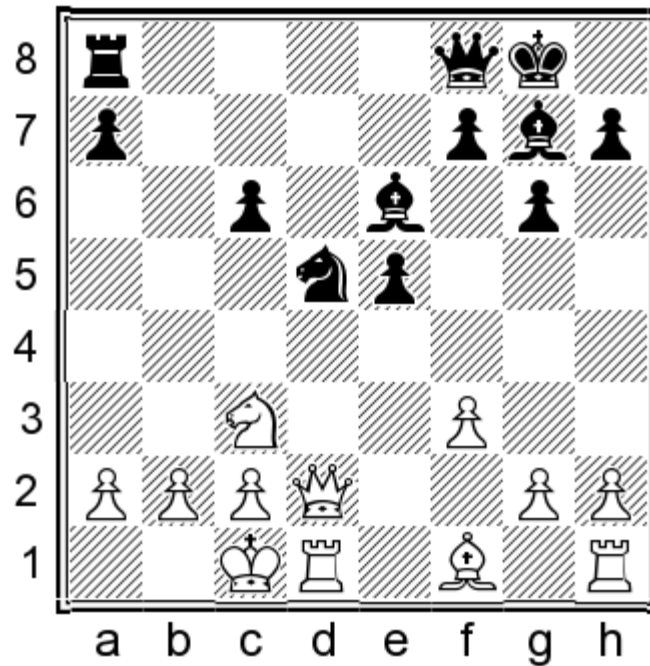
13.Bc5 Be6 14.Bxf8?!

My opponent can't resist the lure of a free exchange but now Black gets great play.

14.Ne4 is normal.

14...Qxf8

Black already threatens to win the queen with ...Bh6.



15.Nxd5

This repairs Black's structure but is the only way to slow Black's initiative.

15.Kb1 e4!N While other moves are also good for Black, I like this thematic approach. Black sacrifices a pawn to unleash his uncontested dark-squared bishop. White's position is already difficult, for instance 16.Nxe4 Rb8 17.b3 f5 18.Ng5 Qa3 19.c4 Nc3† with mate to follow.

15...cxd5 16.Qa5 Rb8

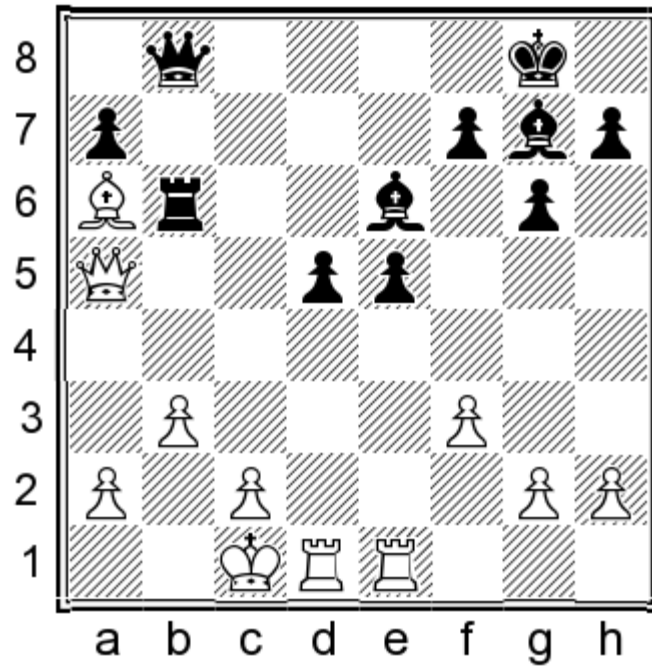
In return for the exchange Black has a lead in development, a strong centre and an extremely powerful bishop pair.

17.Ba6?!

White obviously wanted to complete development but this is a clumsy square for his bishop.

17...Rb6 18.Rhe1 Qb8 19.b3

A necessary but chronic weakening of the dark squares around White's king.



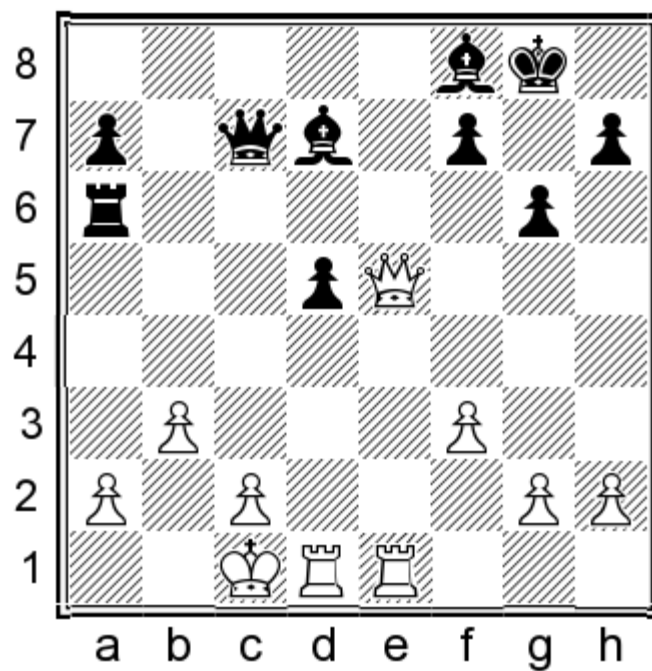
19...Qc7 20.Qa4

White now loses his bishop by force.

20.Bd3 would have saved the piece but 20...Bf8! is still winning, as White's dark squares are just too weak.

20...Bd7 21.Qa3 Bf8 22.Qb2 Rxa6 23.Qxe5

Here I chose the safe approach:



23...Qxe5

Instead 23...Qa5 is completely winning for Black, as 24.Rxd5 Qxa2 25.Rxd7 Re6! 26.Qc3 Rxe1† 27.Qxe1 Qa1† 28.Kd2 Bb4† picks up the queen. Nevertheless, my move was good enough to win without too many difficulties.

...0-1

5) The pawn sacrifice

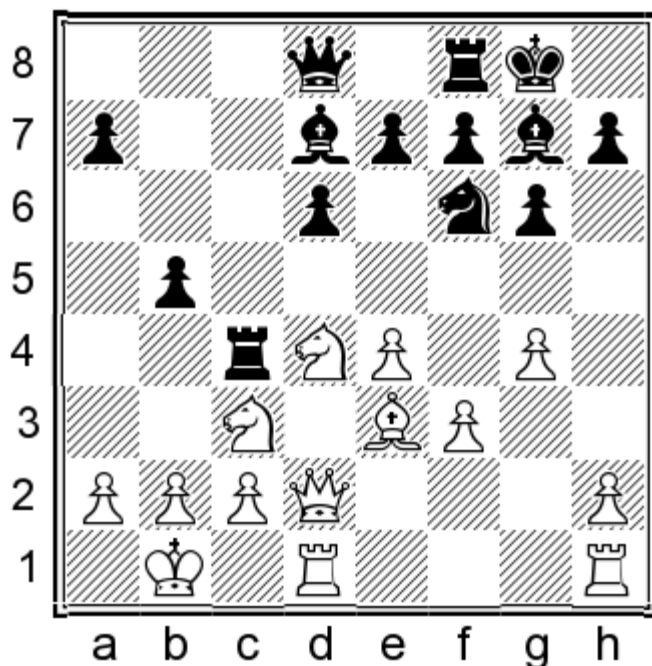
As well as the various exchange sacrifices we have examined, Black often gives a queenside pawn to open up lines towards White's king. This will be particularly relevant in the Topalov Variation, but for now I will show another line where it is risky for White to grab the pawn.

Andrei Shchekachev – Mikhail Golubev

Dimitrovgrad 1988

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Bc4 0-0 9.Qd2 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Na5 12.Kb1 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.g4 b5

This topical line is covered in Chapter 10.



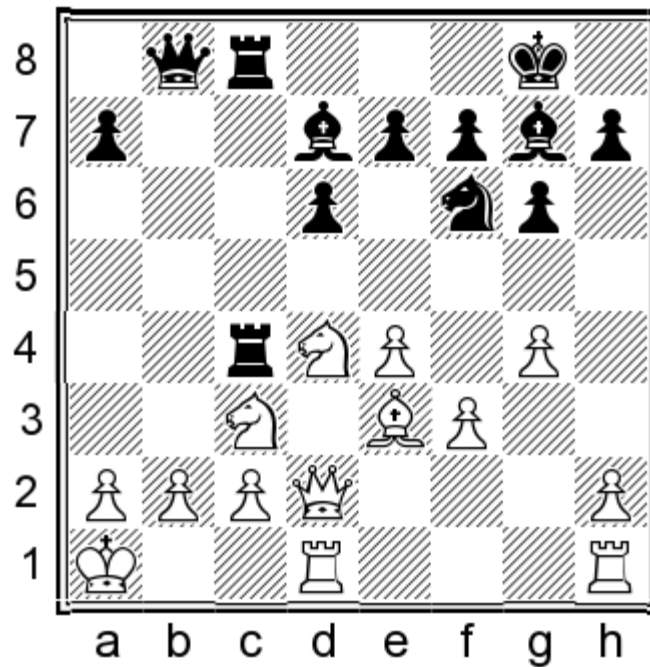
15.Ndxb5?!

The pawn is too hot. 15.b3 is the critical test.

15...Qb8 16.Nd4 Rfc8

At the cost of a pawn, Black has already brought all his pieces into the attack. Watch how White is never given a moment's respite.

17.Ka1



17...Bxg4!

Enterprising play! Again we see Black sacrificing to bring the g7-bishop into the game.

18.fxg4 Nxe4 19.Qe2

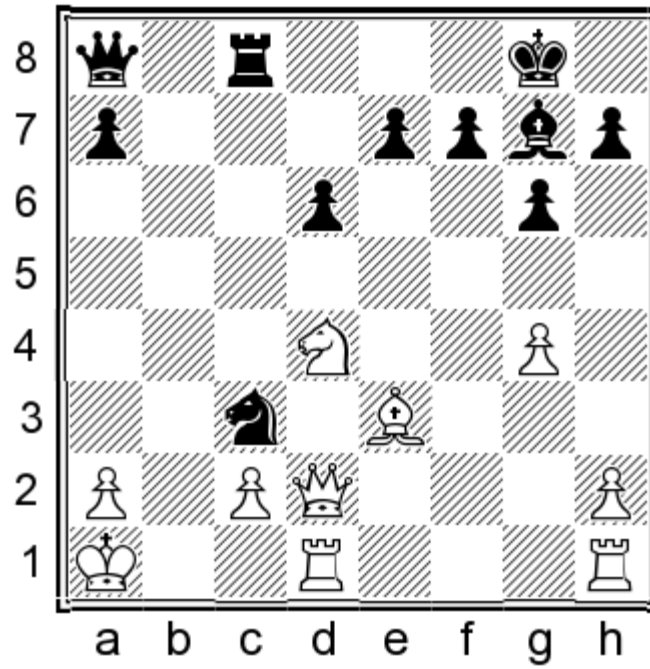
19.Nxe4 is better but 19...Rxc2 still favours Black. This is all covered in variation A of Chapter 10.

19...Rxc3

In Chapter 10 I give 19...Nxc3 as the main continuation, but both moves are strong.

20.bxc3 Nxc3 21.Qd2 Qa8!

The young Golubev is not interested in the d1-rook; he's going for mate! 21...Qb7! is an equally effective way to transfer the queen to d5.



22.Qd3 e5 23.Rdf1

Not the most resilient, but White was lost anyway.

23...exd4 24.Bf4 Qd5 25.Kb2 Rb8†

0–1

6) White's attack: "Sac, sac, mate"

Care has to be taken to prevent White from crashing through on the kingside. The following game, along with the above quote from the winner, became a famous example of what Black must avoid in the Dragon.

Robert Fischer – Bent Larsen

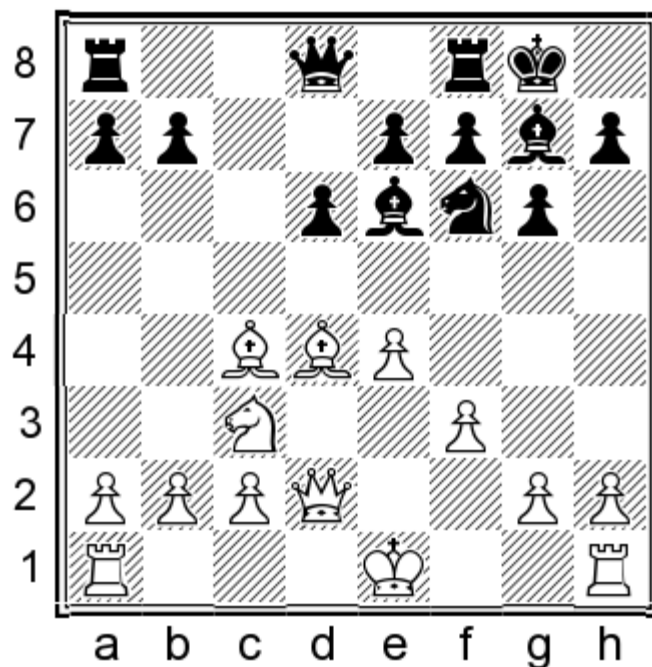
Portoroz 1958

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Nxd4

9...Bd7 is the normal way of playing.

10.Bxd4 Be6

This old line was actually resurrected recently by Hikaru Nakamura.

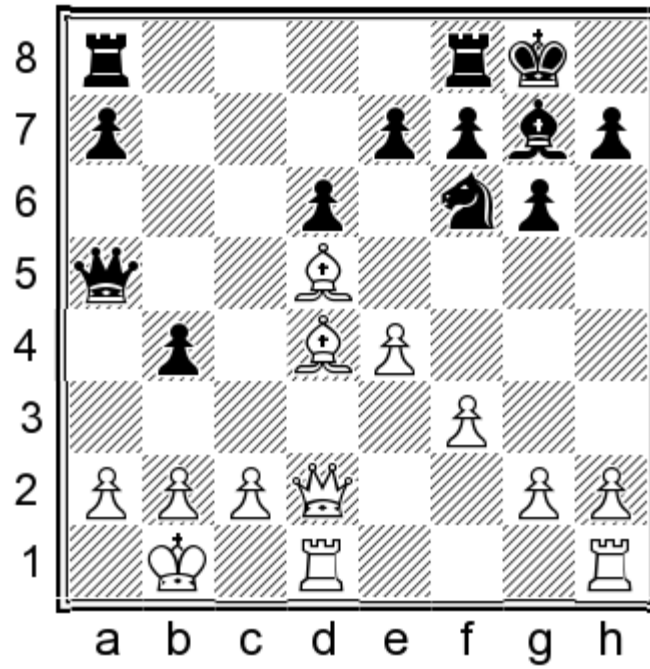


11.Bb3 Qa5 12.0-0-0 b5 13.Kb1 b4

13...Rfc8 is the modern interpretation.

14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.Bxd5

15.exd5! was Tal's improvement the following year. This is still considered better for White, and is the reason why 13...b4 is no longer played. After 15...Qb5 16.Rhe1 a5 17.Qe2 Qxe2 18.Rxe2 White has a small edge with his bishop pair and pressure down the e-file, even if my engine thinks this is playable for Black.



15...Rac8?

Larsen underestimates the strength of the light-squared bishop.

15...Nxd5! had to be tried. Various games have continued 16.Bxg7 Nc3†! 17.Bxc3 (17.bxc3 Rab8! was an important nuance in Fernandez Aguado – Lerch Gallemei, Spain 1992) 17...bxc3 18.Qxc3 Qxc3 19.bxc3 Rfc8= with sufficient play for the pawn.

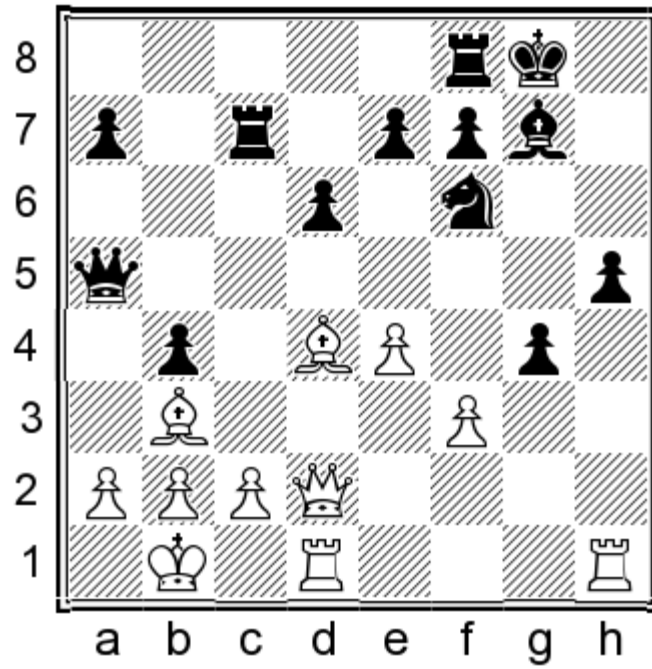
16.Bb3!

Fischer doesn't give Black a second chance. The b3-bishop does a great job both defending the queenside and setting its sights on Black's kingside.

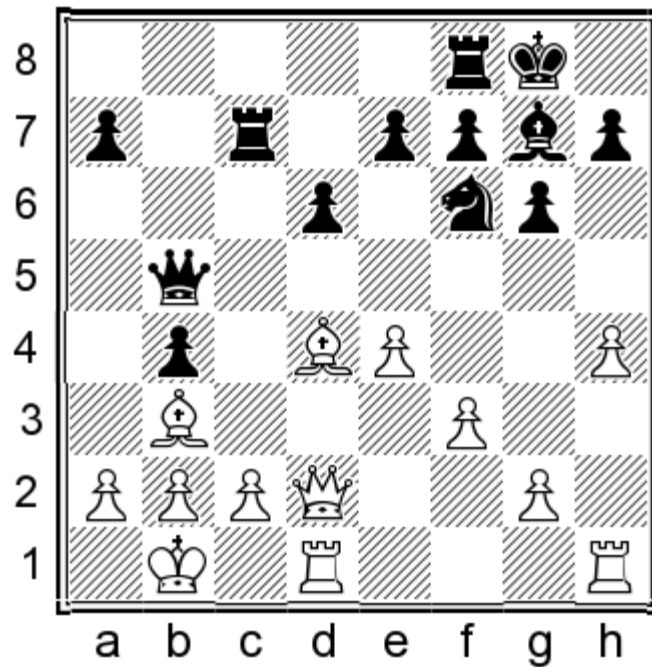
16...Rc7 17.h4 Qb5

Larsen prepares to push his pawn to a4 but his counterattack comes much too slowly.

17...h5 would be the usual way of slowing White's attack but Ftacnik shows that 18.g4! is dangerous. His line continues: 18...hxg4 19.h5 gxh5 (19...Nxd5 20.Bxg7 Kxg7 21.fxd5 is also terminal)



20.fxg4 hxg4 21.Rdg1 e5 22.Be3 Rd8 23.Bh6 White's attack is already mating, while Black has not produced any counterplay whatsoever.

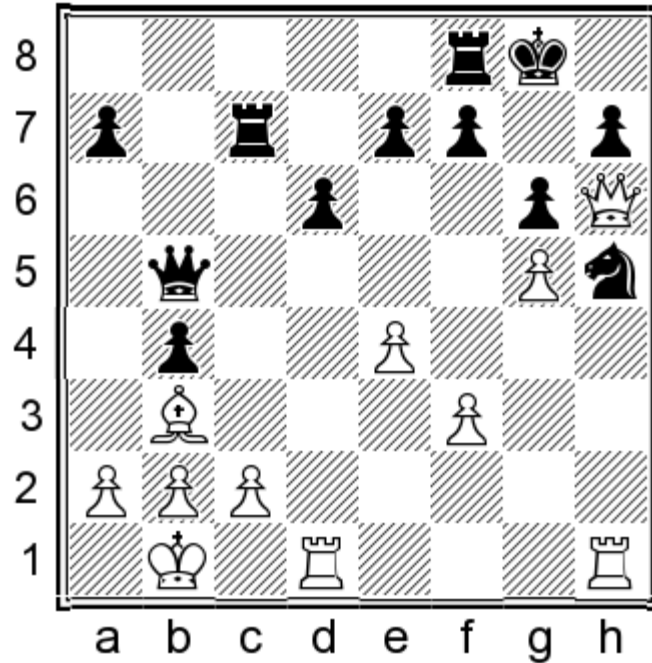


18.h5!

Offering a pawn to open the h-file.

18...Rfc8

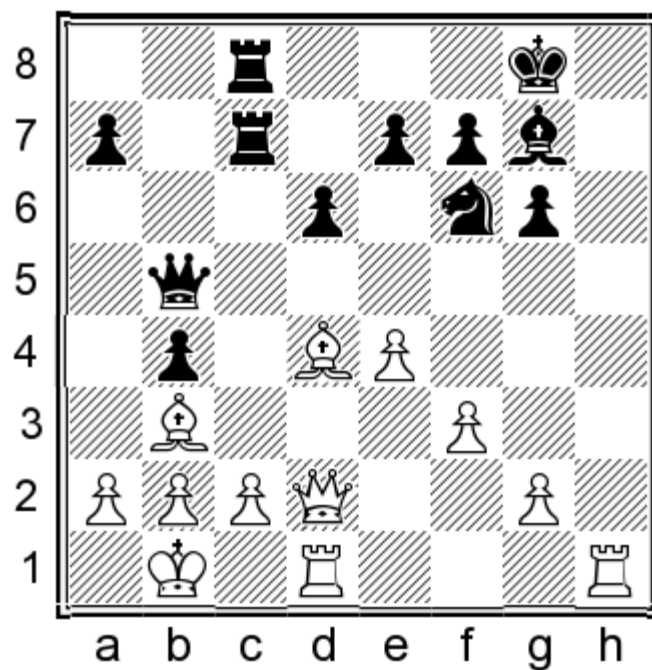
Actually the pawn was taboo: 18...Nxb5? 19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.g4 Nf6 21.Qh6† Kg8 22.g5 Nh5



23.Rxh5! gxh5 24.g6! hxg6 25.Qxg6+ Kh8 26.Qh6+ Kg8 27.Rg1+ is one particularly brutal possible finish.

19.hxg6 hxg6

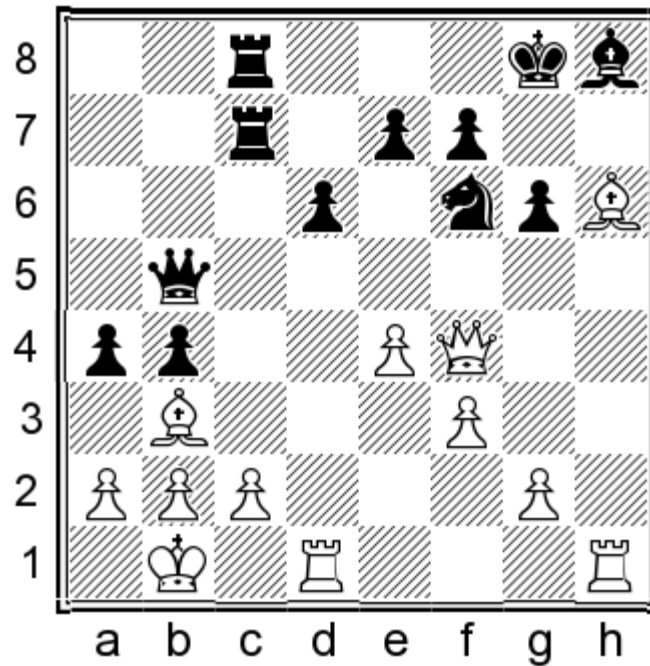
Here we see another way in which the b3-bishop makes its presence felt. Often Black prefers to recapture with the f-pawn to keep the h-file closed and his king more secure, but here it is impossible due to the pin.



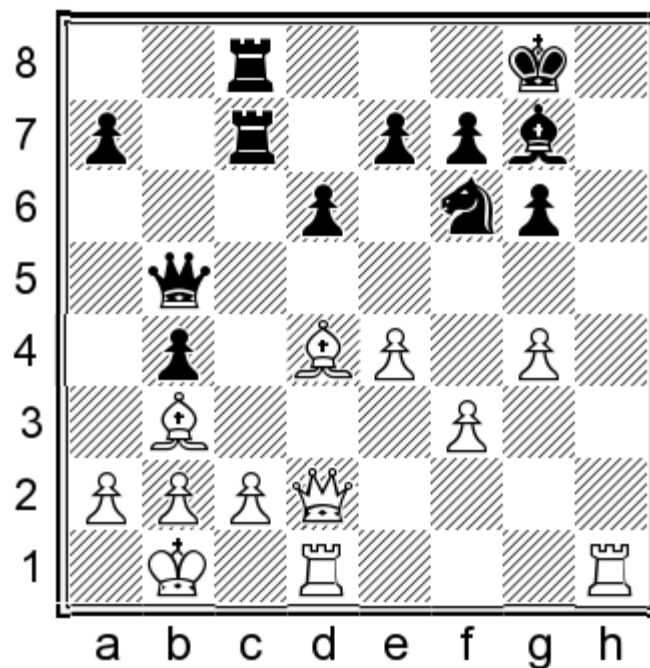
20.g4

Fischer continues his attack in the most natural way.

20.Be3!? is another interesting idea, intending to try and exchange dark-squared bishops. 20...a5 21.Bh6 Bh8 22.Qf4! (22.Bf8 Nh5! seems to just about cling on) 22...a4



23.Bf8! Rxf8 (23...Nh5 is no longer possible due to 24.Qxf7#) 24.Rxh8† Kxh8 25.Qh6† Nh7 26.Rh1 Black must give up his queen to prevent mate. 26...Qh5 27.Rxh5 gxh5 28.Bxa4 White has a large advantage in the ending.



20...a5 21.g5 Nh5 22.Rxh5!

Fischer doesn't miss the chance to get at Black's king.

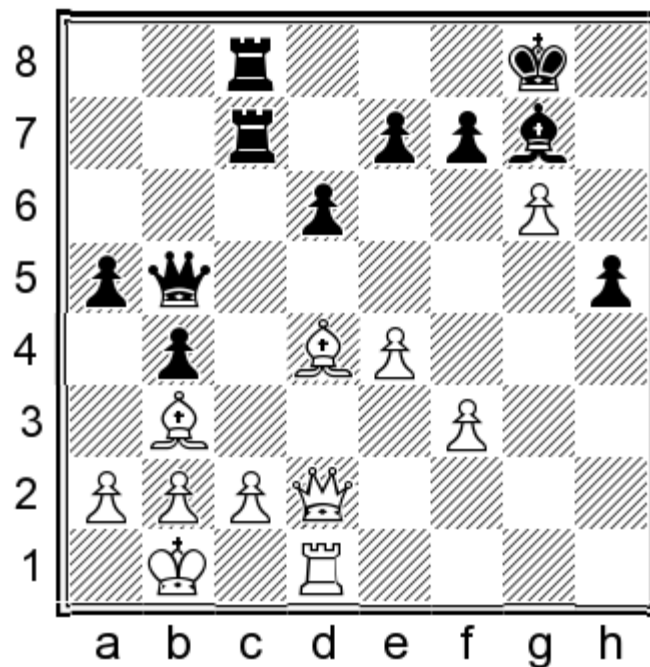
22...gxh5?!

After this final error, Larsen isn't given another chance.

22...Bxd4 had to be played but it isn't exactly a panacea: 23.Rh6! (23.Qxd4 gxh5 24.g6 looks tempting but 24...Rc4! is not so clear) 23...Bg7 24.Qf4! White keeps a powerful attack.

23.g6!

Fischer crashes through. The rest is hopeless.



23...e5 24.gxf7† Kf8 25.Be3 d5 26.exd5 Rxf7 27.d6 Rf6 28.Bg5 Qb7 29.Bxf6 Bxf6 30.d7 Rd8 31.Qd6†

1-0

7) Black's defensive measures

The above game shows how important it is to prevent White's kingside attack breaking through. That normally means meeting h2-h4 with ...h5. White often continues his attack with a subsequent g2-g4, intending to meet ...hxg4 with h4-h5. We have already seen this approach in a couple of games. Another important defensive idea is to play ...g5 to keep

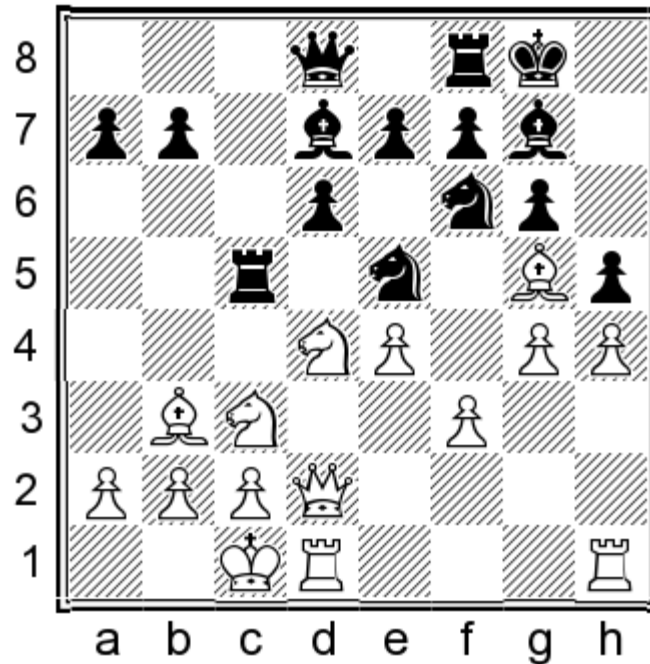
the kingside closed.

Vassily Ivanchuk – Veselin Topalov

Belgrade 1995

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 0-0 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.h4 Rc8 11.Bb3 h5 12.0-0 Ne5 13.Bg5 Rc5 14.g4

This used to be the main line but Black found sufficient defensive resources.



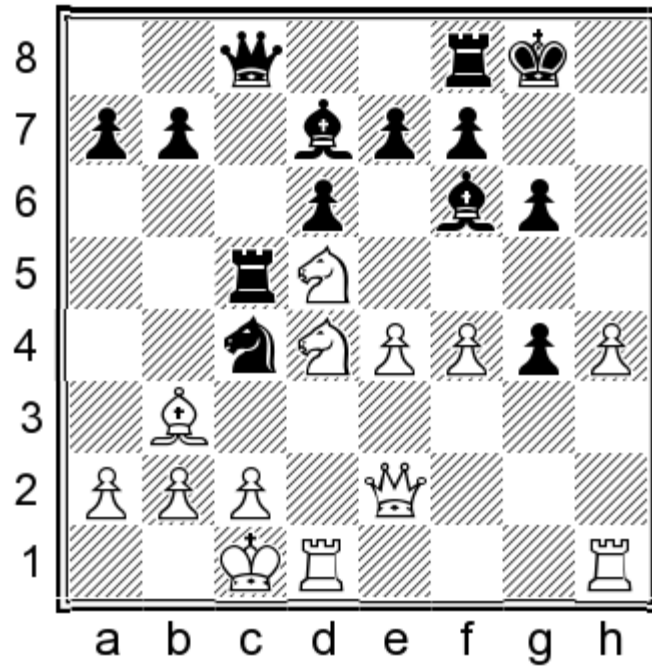
14...hxg4 15.f4 Nc4 16.Qe2 Qc8

On the other side of the board, Ivanchuk found the improvement 16...Na5!. See Chapter 2 for further details.

17.Bxf6

After 17.f5?! Topalov was able to reveal another point of the queen sidestep with 17...Nxb2! in Oll – Topalov, Moscow (ol) 1994.

17...Bxf6 18.Nd5



18...Rxd5!

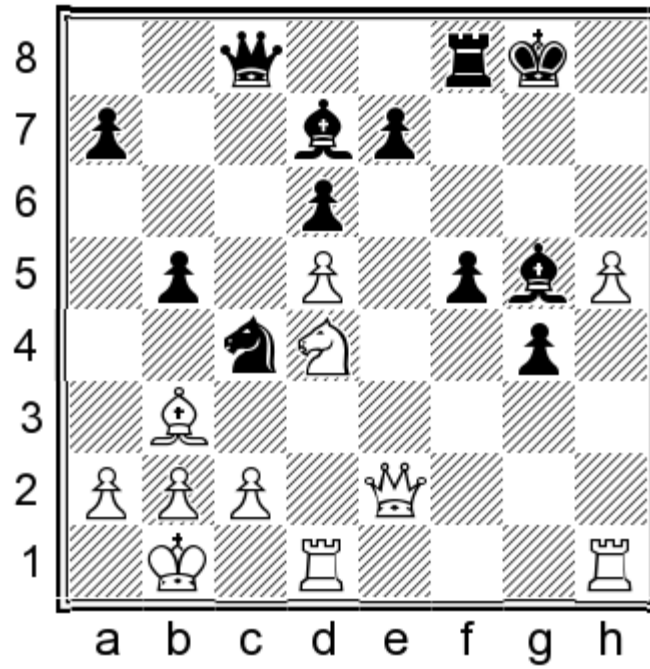
First we get a recap of one of our thematic exchange sacrifices.

19.exd5 b5 20.h5 g5!

And now this important defensive resource. White's h5-pawn gets in the way and prevents his pieces from infiltrating down the h-file.

21.fxg5 Bxg5† 22.Kb1 f5!

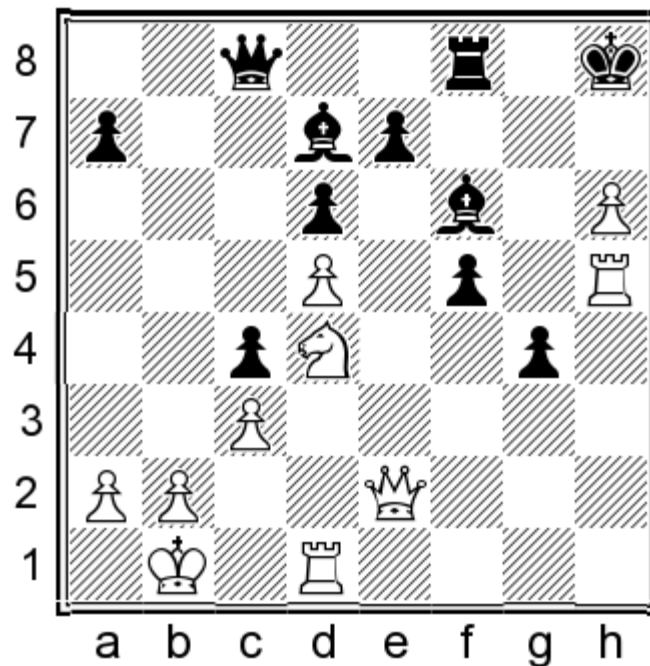
Pushing the pawns in front of one's king might look hasty, but Topalov has successfully judged that his king will be safe on the h-file.



23.Rd3

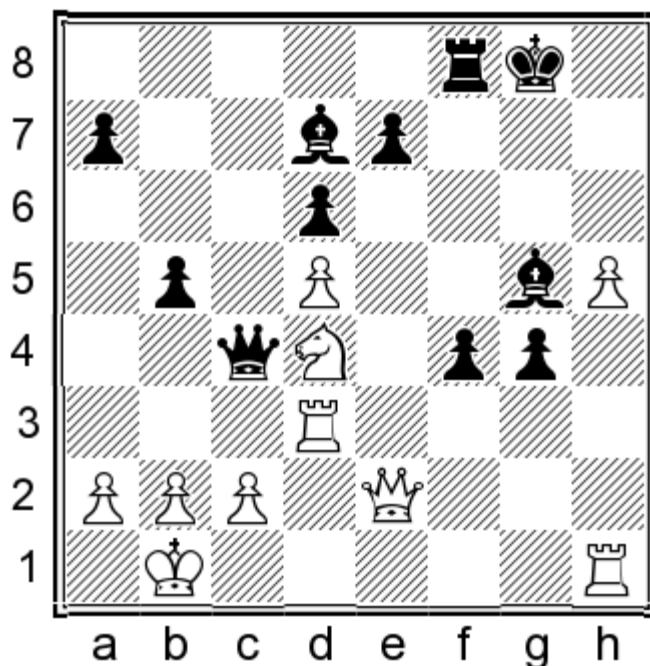
This move has been criticized but White's position is already difficult to play.

Schulz analyses: 23.h6 Kh8 24.Rh5 Bf6 25.Bxc4 bxc4 (25...Qxc4 26.Qxc4 bxc4 27.Nxf5 is incorrectly given as a clear advantage to White. In fact Black is still much better here, despite the material deficit, as after 27...Rb8 28.b3 Be8! 29.Rhh1 Bg6 30.Rhf1 cxb3 31.axb3 g3! he has great counterplay.) 26.c3



Now 26...Qe8 is a clear improvement on Schulz's line. Black's king is completely safe, the bishop pair is a long-term trump and the connected passed pawns will be extremely tough to stop.

23...f4 24.Bxc4 Qxc4



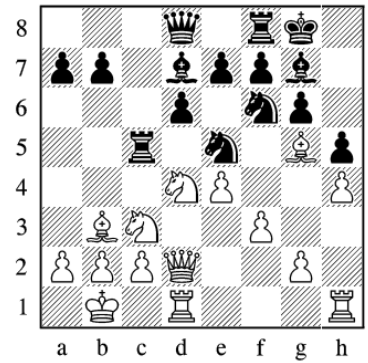
Ivanchuk, completely disgusted at his position, surprisingly resigned here. While resignation is clearly premature, Black certainly has an excellent position. Not only will White have to deal with the passed pawns, but Black can also switch to attacking on the queenside. With the king on h8 and bishop on f6, White will not be able to create any attacking chances of his own.

0-1

That concludes our discussion of the most important Dragon motifs. I hope this introduction will help you to make sense of the proposed repertoire, even when things become wildly complicated.



Soltis Variation



13.♙g5 ♖c5! 14.♔b1

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♙d2
♘c6 9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0 ♖c8 11.♙b3 ♘e5 12.h4 h5 13.♙g5 ♖c5! 14.♔b1
14...b5

A) 15.Nd5?!

B) 15.Bxf6

C) 15.Rhe1 a5 16.f4 Nc4! 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.e5 b4! 19.Ncb5 dxe5 20.fxe5 Nd5

C1) 21.e6

C2) 21.Qd3

D) 15.g4 hxg4

D1) 16.f4

D2) 16.h5 Nxh5

D21) 17.Rxh5?

D22) 17.fxg4

D23) 17.Rdg1

D24) 17.Nd5 Re8 18.Rxh5 gxh5 19.Qh2 Rxd5! 20.Bxd5 Qb6!

D241) 21.Qxh5

D242) 21.f4

D243) 21.Nf5 Bxf5 22.exf5 Qc5!

D2431) 23.fxg4

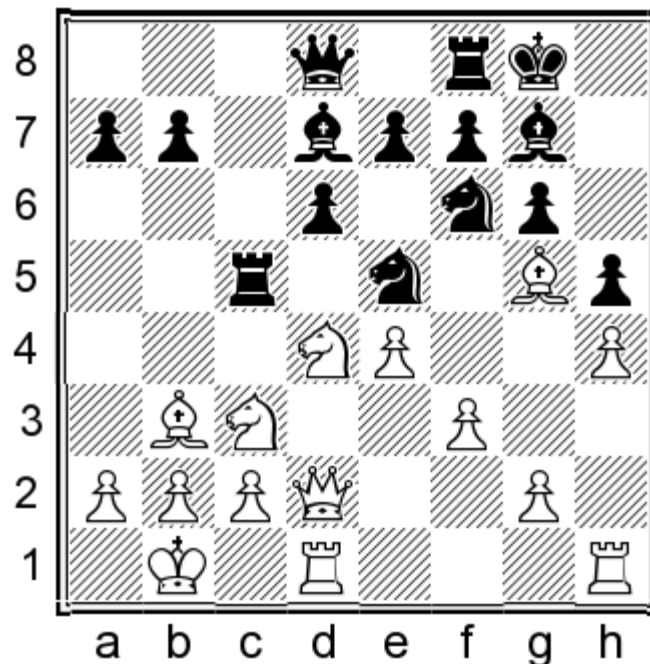
D2432) 23.Qxh5

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5 Rc5!

An important move. The rook is usefully placed here, both supporting the pawn break ...b5 and the a5-square so the queen can enter the game. The rook also prepares to sacrifice itself for a knight (or even on rare occasions for the bishop) that jumps into d5.

14.Kb1

This is the mainline of the entire Soltis Variation. The following lines are sharp and critical and so need to be studied carefully.



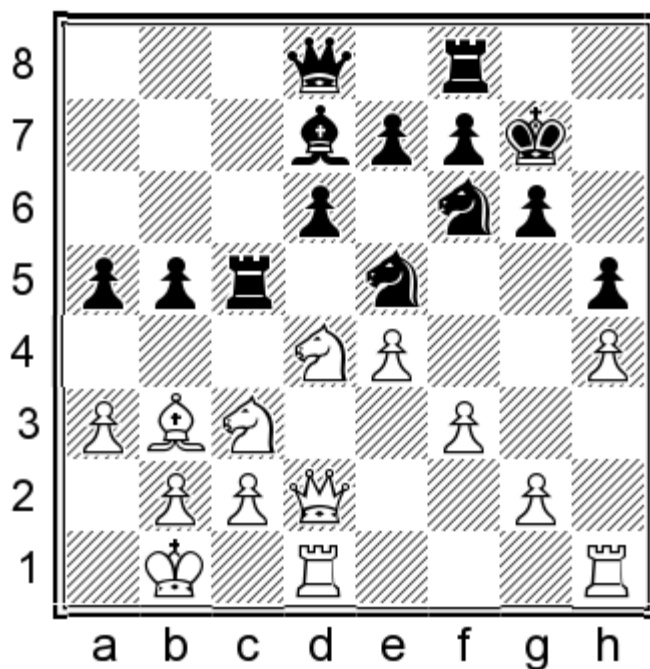
14...b5

Traditionally this has been Black's main try.

14...Re8 is the modern alternative but I don't see any reason not to follow the older lines. In fact, I believe this line became fashionable because of a move order issue; if White were to play 12.Kb1 most players react with 12...Re8. Then 13.h4 h5 14.Bg5 Rc5 would reach this position but with the rook already committed to e8.

Our first branching point of the chapter sees us consider A) 15.Nd5?!, B) 15.Bxf6, C) 15.Rhe1 and D) 15.g4.

15.Bh6?! This must be much too slow. 15...a5 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.a3 was seen in Andreev – Hermanov, Alushta 2005, and here there was no reason not to continue our queenside expansion with:



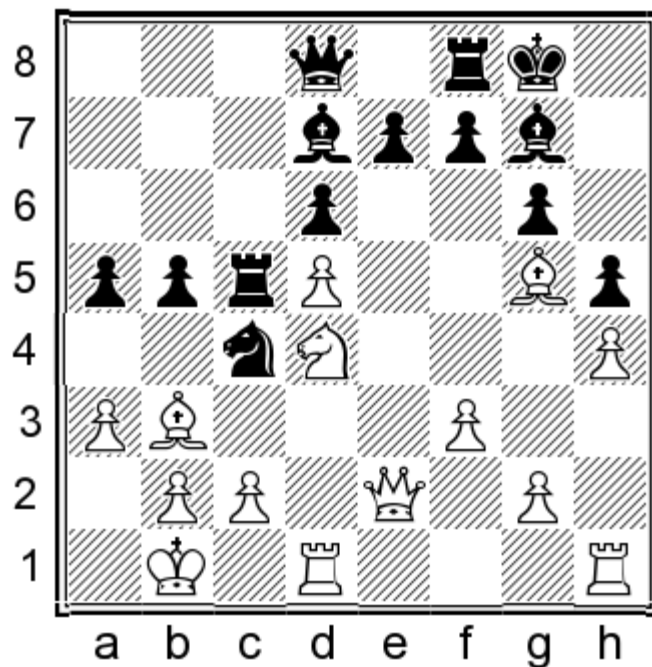
17...b4N 18.axb4 axb4 19.Na2 Qa5 20.Qxb4 Qa7!µ A typical manoeuvre with the queen.

A) 15.Nd5?!

This doesn't particularly challenge Black.

15...Nxd5 16.Bxd5

16.exd5 Blocking in the b3-bishop cannot be advised. Now Black's queenside play flows easily. 16...a5 17.a3 Nc4 18.Qe2 was Della Morte – Bertaccini, Villa Martelli 2013, and here I suggest:



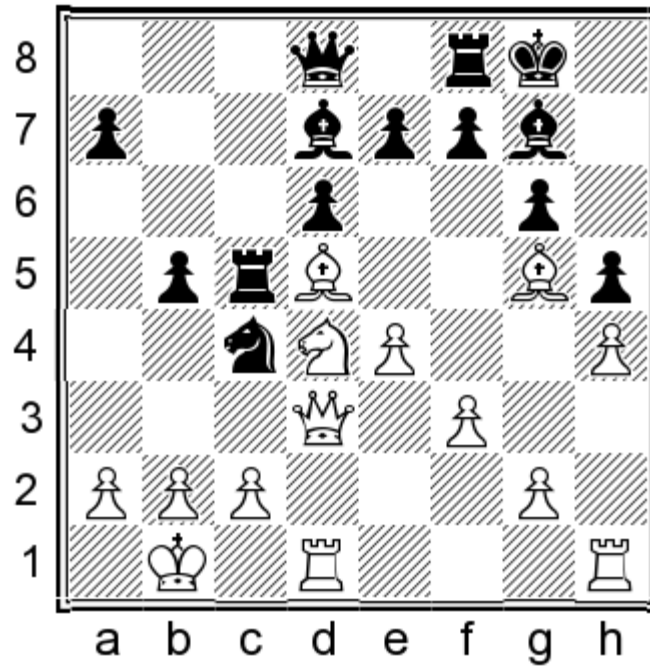
18...Qb6N Black has an overwhelming advantage. The d5-pawn is dropping if White does nothing and 19.Qxe7 (19.Bxe7 Re8 just drops the piece) 19...Rc7 20.Bxc4 (20.Qe4 Nxb2! 21.Kxb2 a4 22.Ba2 b4–+) 20...bxc4 21.Qe3 Rb8 22.Qc3 Rcb7 23.Bc1 Bf5 leaves White completely tied up.

16...Nc4 17.Qd3

17.Qf2?! The ill-advised choice of a player who became a GM the next year. 17...Qb6 18.g4 e5! An embarrassing pin. 19.gxh5 (19.Nb3 Rxd5! is the point) 19...exd4 20.h6 Be5 21.f4 d3! 22.h7† Kxh7 23.fxe5 dxc2† 24.Qxc2 Na3† 25.bxa3 Rxc2 Mrva – Cernousek, Slovakia 2004, was a powerful demonstration of Black's resources.

Meanwhile 17.Qe1?! was the choice of a future Super-GM but again it backfired horribly: 17...Qb6 18.c3 b4! 19.Bxc4 Rxc4 20.Nb3 bxc3 21.Rc1 Rfc8 0–1 Vitiugov – Nithander, Herceg Novi 2005. I doubt the Russian Super-GM has lost many worse games.

17.Bxc4 bxc4 18.Bh6?! M. Tan – Langerak, Rijswijk 2000. Here the position was surely crying out for 18...c3N, although 18...Bxh6N 19.Qxh6 Qb6µ would also have been strong.



17...Qc7!N 18.Bxe7 Rc8μ

Black's queenside attack is landing while White still hasn't started on the kingside. 19...Nxb2! is one nice threat.

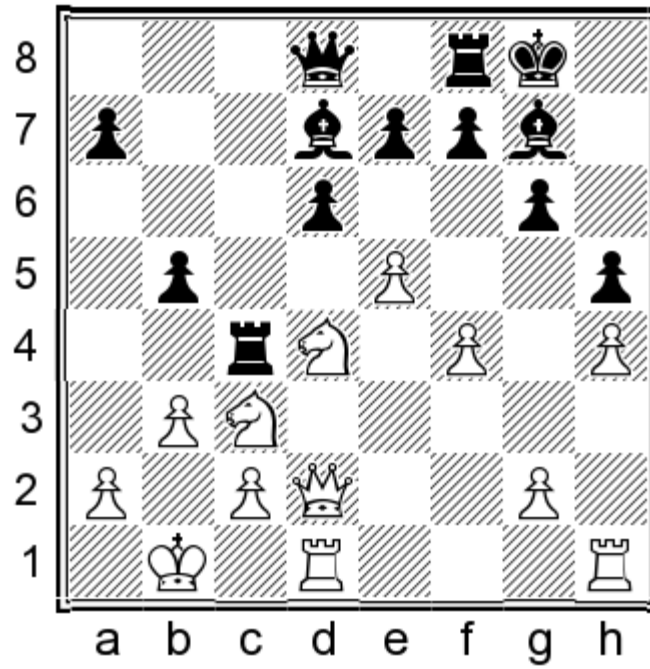
B) 15.Bxf6

White allows Black an uncontested dark-squared bishop. If White doesn't crash through immediately then he will be in deep trouble.

15...Bxf6 16.g4

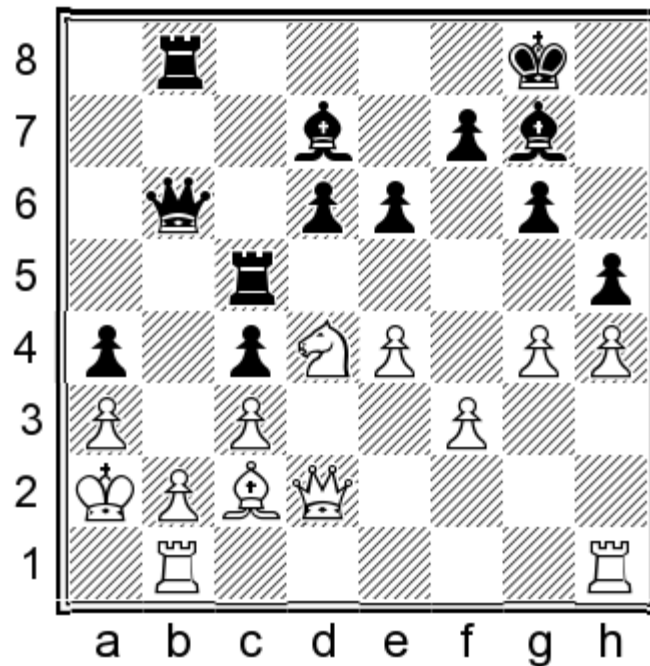
I think this is the only challenging continuation.

16.f4 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 (17...bxc4N also looks good for Black. White has to try 18.f5 but I think Black is faster with 18...Qb6.) 18.e5 Bg7 19.b3 Mannion – Kilgour, Troon 1990. Here Black should have brought the rook all the way back:

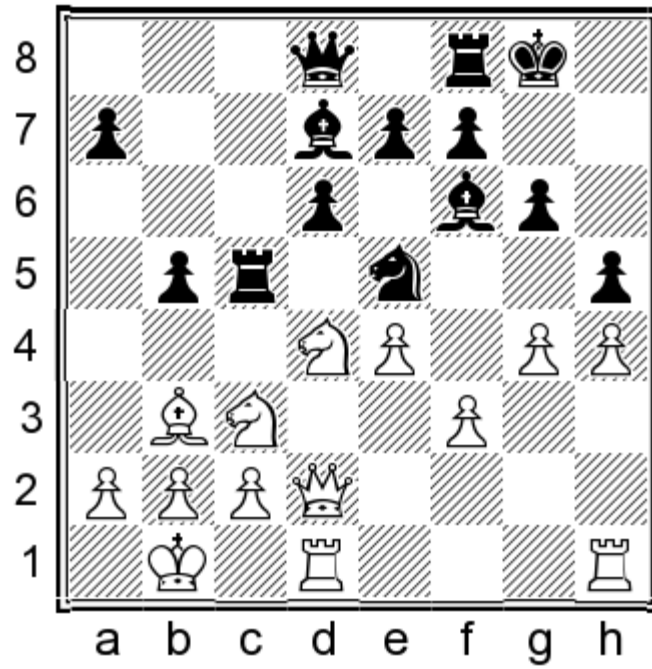


19...Rc8N Not allowing Ne4 with tempo. White's gained little for ceding the bishop pair.

16.Nd5 Bg7 17.g4 is at least a logical follow-up, but 17...e6 18.Ne3 a5 19.c3 a4 20.Bc2 Nc4 21.Nxc4 bxc4 22.a3 Qb6 23.Ka2 Rb8 saw Black's counterplay arrive quickly in M. Dizdarevic – Stojic, Sydney 2009. After 24.Rb1 Black should have found:



24...e5!N 25.Ne2 hxg4 26.fxg4 Bxg4µ White has little play to offset the pawn deficit.



16...hxg4 17.h5

17.Nd5

This is rare but I think it is a better move order as it isn't as easy to close up the kingside.

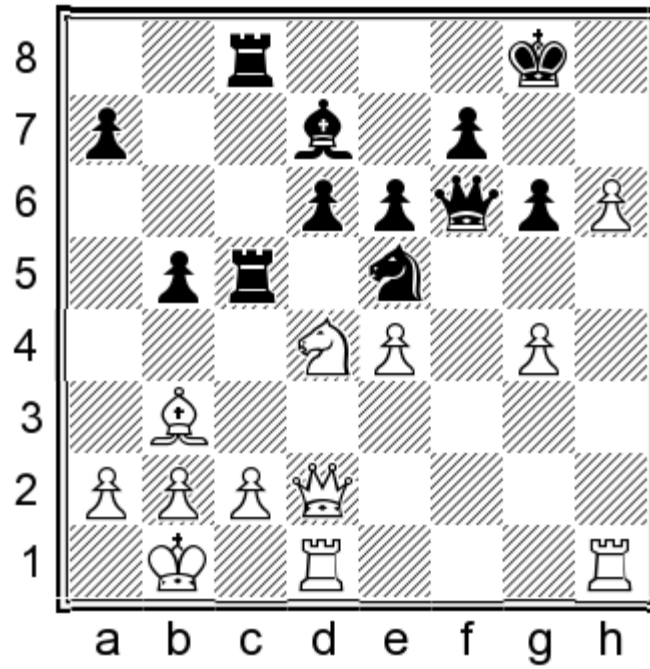
17...Bg7 18.h5 e6 19.h6

19.Ne3?!N 19...gxf3 20.hxg6 Qf6! wouldn't get White anywhere.

Nor would 19.Nf4N 19...Nc4 20.Qh2 g5.

19...Bf6 20.Nxf6† Qxf6 21.fxg4 Rfc8

I might have taken the opportunity to close up the kingside for good with 21...Kh7N.



22.g5 Qe7 23.h7† Kh8 24.Ne2 b4! 25.Qxd6 Qxd6 26.Rxd6 Bc6 27.Rh4 Nf3 28.Rg4 Rxd5 29.Rxd5 Nxd5

All of White's pawns were dropping in I. Zaitsev – Basin, Minsk 1983.

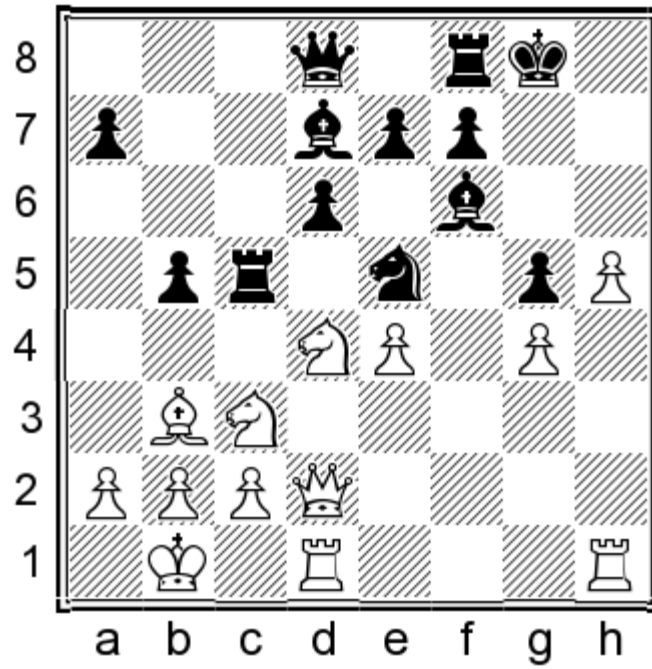
17...g5!

This is a strong move, closing up the kingside.

18.fxg4

18.f4 gxf4 19.Qxf4 e6! White's attack isn't getting anywhere as Black's king can hide safely in front of the h-pawn.

18.Nd5 has been tried a couple of times, but 18...gxf3! 19.Rdg1 (19.Rhg1 Kh7µ Nowak – Bensiak, email 2004) 19...Kh7µ looks excellent for Black.

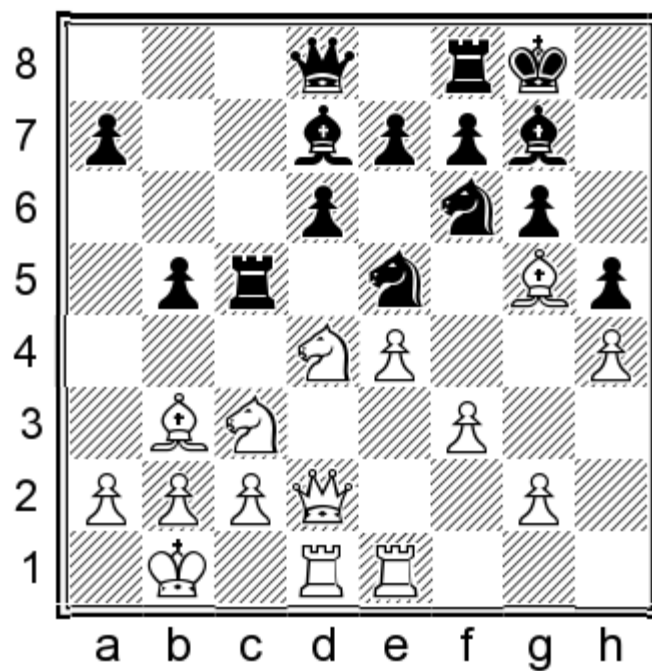


18...a5 19.Nd5 Rxd5! 20.Bxd5 e6

White's bishop was trapped in Soreghy – Gonzaga Grego, email 2011.

C) 15.Rhe1

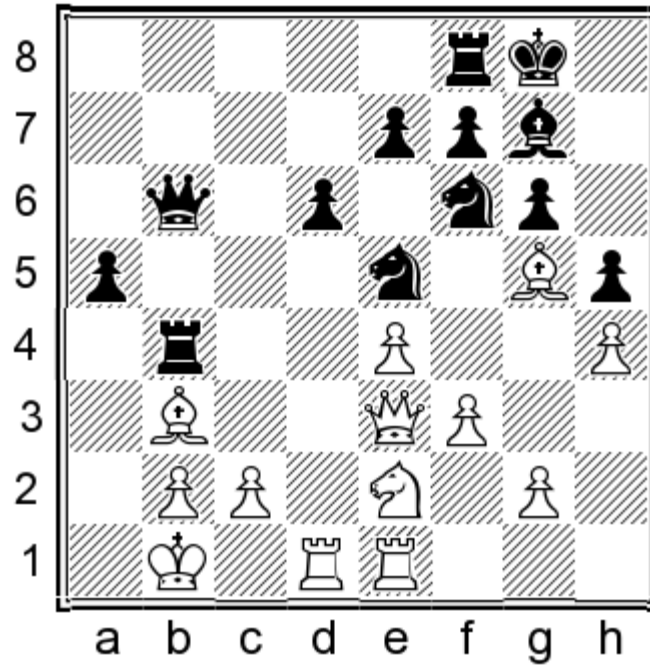
White is preparing to crash through in the centre but Black's queenside play is coming fast enough.



15...a5 16.f4

Now White needs to continue his plan of opening the centre as he doesn't have enough time to defend on the queenside.

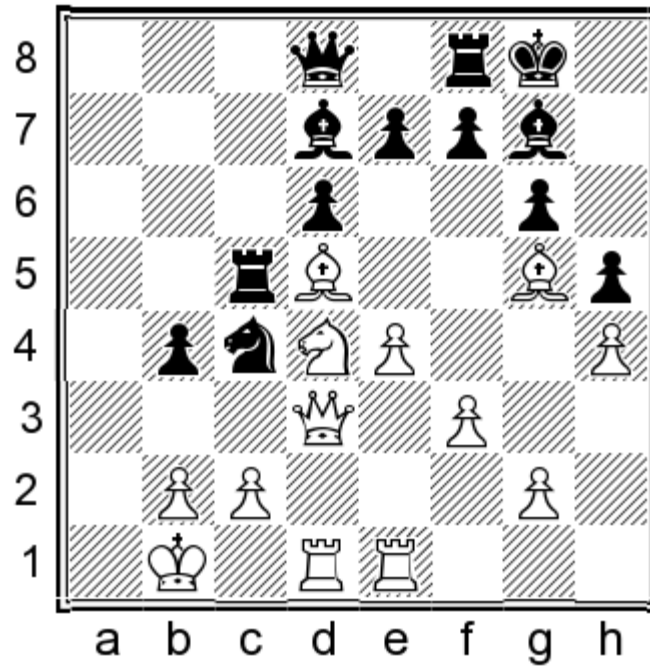
16.a4? is no good: 16...bxa4 17.Nxa4 Bxa4 18.Bxa4 Qb6 19.Qe3 Rc4 20.Bb3 Rb4 21.Ne2



21...Qb7 22.Rd4 a4 0-1 Yukhno – Levkovsky, Dnipropetrovsk 2003.

16.a3? b4 17.axb4 axb4 and now:

a) 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Bxd5 Nc4 20.Qd3 was Jahnz – Raabe, Pinneberg 1996, when best would be:



20...Qc7N Black's attack is coming far too quickly, for example: 21.Bxe7 Rxd5! 22.exd5 Ra8 23.c3 Nxb2! 24.Kxb2 bxc3† 25.Qxc3 Ra2† 26.Kxa2 Qxc3—+

b) 18.Na4 Correa – Delai, Sao Paulo 2011. Here the straightforward 18...Bxa4N 19.Bxa4 Qa5 20.b3 Nc4! is absolutely crushing.

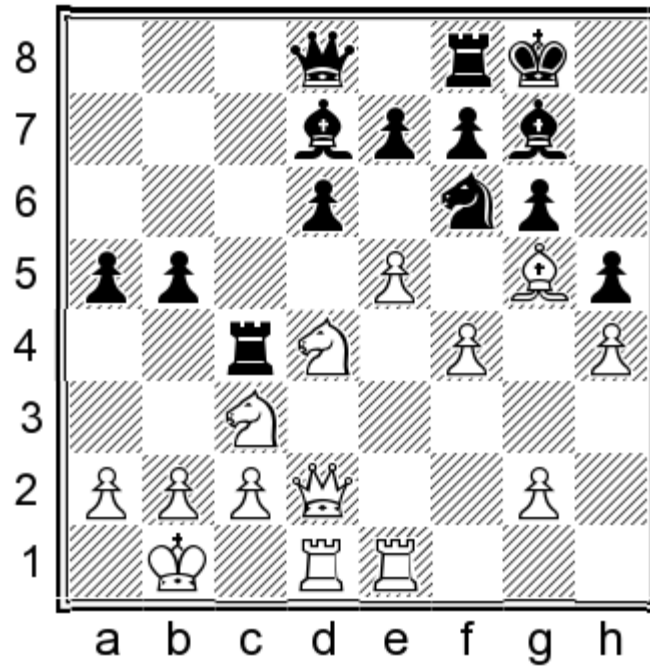
c) 18.Na2N is White's only way to remain on the board but 18...Qa5 19.Qxb4 Qa7! is extremely dangerous.

16...Nc4! 17.Bxc4

17.Qd3? Sidestepping with the queen is a common idea to retain the light-squared bishop but here it has no logic as 17...a4 forces the trade anyway (17...Ng4!?N is also interesting but unnecessary). 18.Bxc4 bxc4 Krenz – Peschel, Wuerzburg 1997. White couldn't afford to give Black an extra two tempos for his attack and he now ran into serious trouble down the b-file.

17...Rxc4 18.e5

As Vigorito mentions, 18.Ndxb5? would be a big mistake: 18...Bxb5 19.Nxb5 Qb6 20.Nd4 Ng4 gives Black a huge initiative.



18...b4!

Continuing our own attack. Try to remember this motif: with the bishop on g5 trapped in by its own pawns, Black doesn't need to move the f6-knight.

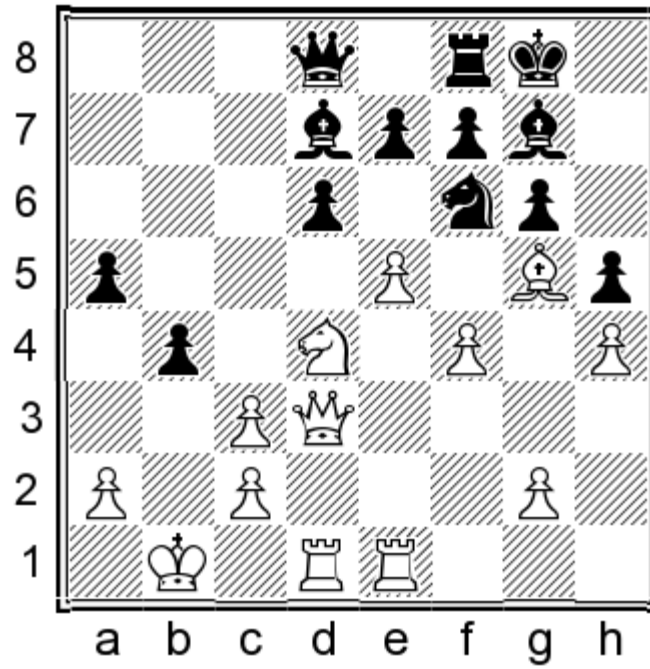
19.Ncb5

19.exf6?! cannot be advised. The g7-bishop, which was temporarily blocked, now wakes up. 19...exf6 20.Qd3 Rxc3! 21.bxc3 fxg5 22.cxb4 gxf4 23.b5 Qxh4µ Sandstroem – W. Taylor, email 2005. Black has two pawns for the exchange, a strong bishop pair and continued attacking chances against White's vulnerable king.

19.Qd3

This allows:

19...Rxc3! 20.bxc3



20...bxc3!N

20...Nd5 is reasonable for Black and has been played previously, but I think the immediate capture is even stronger.

21.Qxc3

21.exf6 exf6 is bad for White.

21.Nb5 Bf5 22.Qxc3 Ne4µ

21...Nd5 22.Qf3

22.Qb3 Qa8 leaves Black with a strong attack.

22...Qb6† 23.Nb3 Bc6

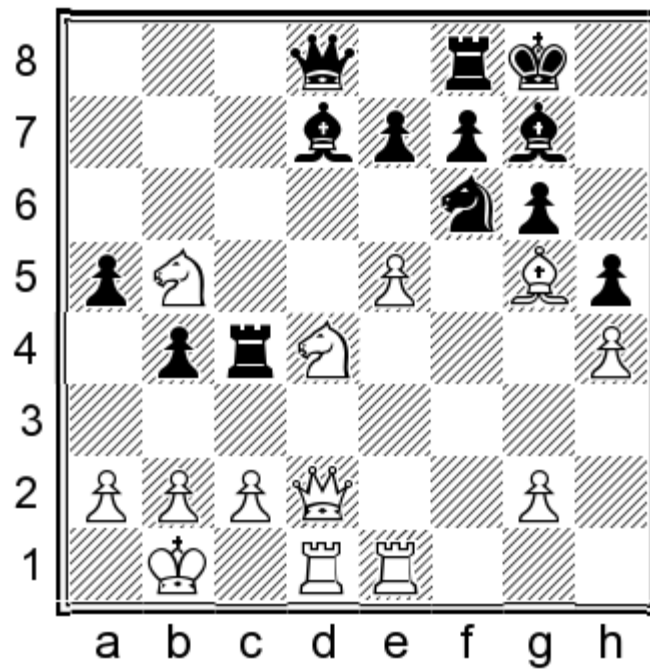
Black's attack is easily worth the sacrificed exchange and I think a lot more.

19...dxe5

Now that Black has the d5-square for his knight we can exchange on e5. White's knight on b5 is also rather short on squares.

20.fxe5

20.Nf3? An attempted improvement by the French GM but 20...Qc8! was a good response. Getting out of the pin attacks the b5-knight and also puts pressure on c2. 21.Na7 Qa6 22.fxe5 Bf5 23.exf6 Rxc2 24.Qxc2 Bxc2† 25.Kxc2 exf6 Santo Roman – Marin, Belfort 1995. White's opening idea has been a disaster. The material count may be roughly balanced with queen and two pawns versus rook, bishop and knight but the knight on a7 is still trapped and White's king is extremely open. Black is simply winning.



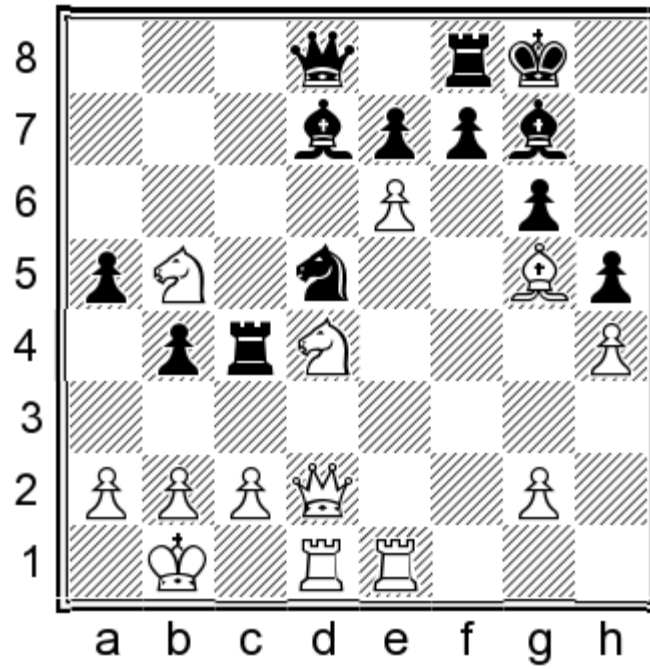
20...Nd5

Now White can try either C1) 21.e6 or C2) 21.Qd3.

21.Nd6? looks a tempting way to redeploy the knight but 21...Nc3†! is extremely powerful. 22.bxc3 bxc3 23.Qd3 Rxd4! 0–1 Florescu – Rogozenco, Sovata 2001.

C1) 21.e6

This hasn't been played in an over-the-board game but is White's only logical way to continue.



21...Bxb5

21...fxe6!?N

This is an interesting try if you wish to keep more life in the position.

22.Nxe6

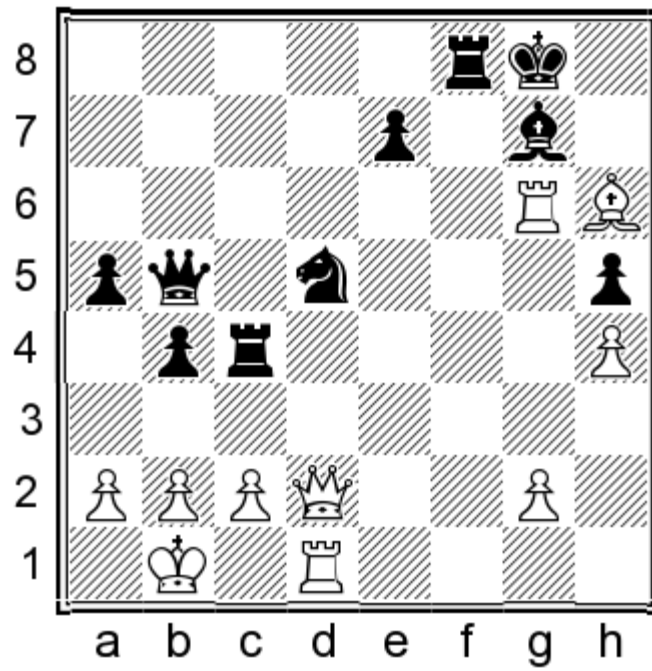
22.Qd3 Rc5 23.Qxg6 looks scary for a moment, until you see 23...Qe8! forcing the exchange of queens and leaving Black with a clear advantage: 24.Qxe8 Bxe8μ

22...Bxe6 23.Rxe6 Qd7 24.Rxg6

24.Qxd5 Qxd5 25.Rxd5 Rf1† 26.Bc1 Rxh4 The pin along the back rank regains the piece and leaves Black with the better prospects in the ending, for example: 27.a4 Rhh1 28.Ka2 Rxc1 29.Rxe7 Rhd1³

24...Qxb5 25.Bh6

White's kingside initiative seems to be enough for a draw:



25...Nc3†

25...Rg4!?

26.Ka1 Nxd1 27.Rxg7† Kh8 28.Rxe7 Re8

28...Ne3!? is also a draw: 29.Bxf8 Nxc2† 30.Kb1 Na3† 31.Ka1 Nc2†=

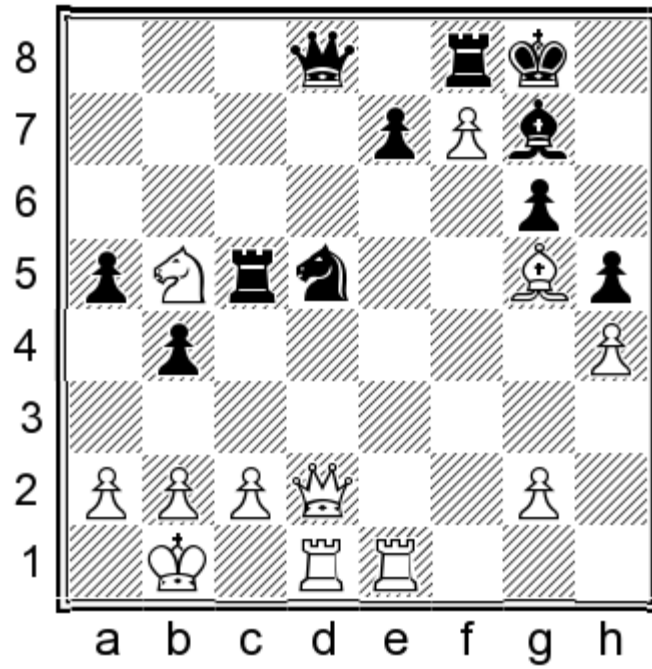
29.Qd6 Rxe7 30.Qf6† Kh7 31.Qxe7† Kxh6 32.Qf6†=

22.Nxb5 Rc5

This is Black's simplest route to equality. The following few moves are basically forced.

23.exf7†

23.Nd4 f6! 24.Bh6 Qb8³

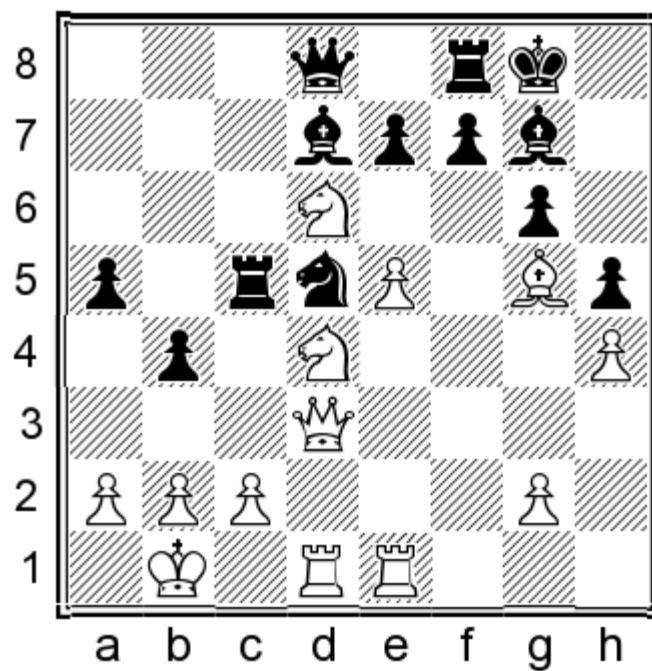


23...Rxf7 24.Nd4 Nc3†! 25.bxc3 bxc3 26.Qd3 Rd5 27.Qxg6 Rxd4 28.Rxd4 Qxd4 29.Qe6 Qb4† 30.Qb3

The tactics have blown themselves out and left an equal endgame, Barlow – Fester, email 1998.

C2) 21.Qd3 Rc5 22.Nd6

The correct move order if White wants to try and extricate the knight, but there is a strong reply:



22...Qb8!

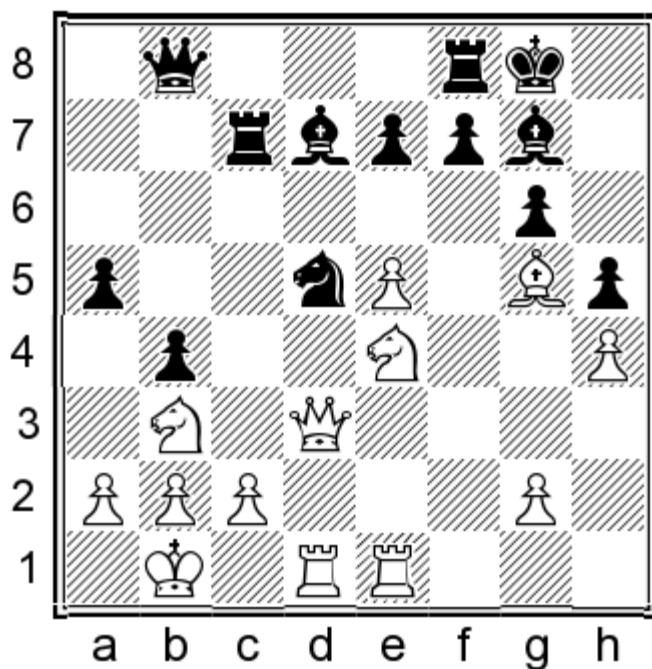
Black gets out of the pin and also has ideas of ...Nc3†.

23.Ne4

23.Nb3 Nc3† illustrates one of Black's ideas. 24.bxc3 Rxc3 25.Bxe7 Rxd3 26.Rxd3 was Van Kempen – Poli, corr. 1994, and now 26...Bg4N favours Black. White's king is still vulnerable and he'll have a tough time fighting Black's queen and bishop pair.

23...Rc7 24.Nb3

24.e6N had to be tried but Black is still on top after 24...fxe6 25.Bc1 e5 26.Nb3 Nf6³.



24...a4N

Improving on 24...Be6 in Santo Roman – Koch, Nantes 1993, when White escaped with a draw.

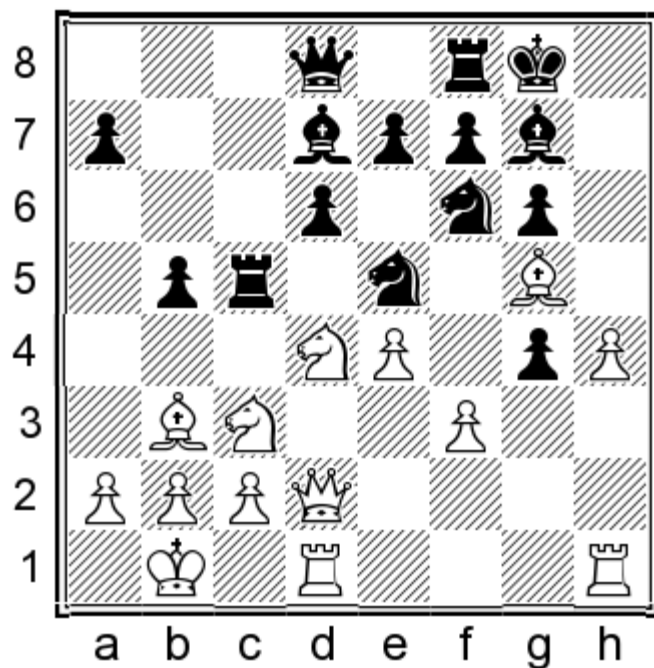
25.Qxd5

25.Nbc5 Nc3†!

25...axb3 26.cxb3 Be6 27.Qd4 Rfc8

Again Black's attack is just too quick.

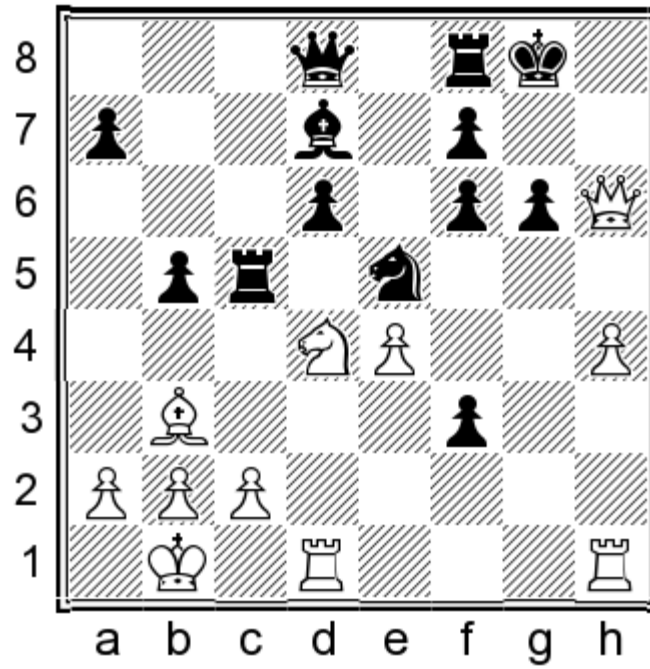
D) 15.g4 hxg4



We will check D1) 16.f4 before moving on to the critical D2) 16.h5.

16.Bxf6 Bxf6 transposes to variation B above.

16.Nd5!? N has never been played but it popped up as one of the engine's top choices, so I thought I should check it. An interesting line continues: 16...gxf3 17.Bxf6 (17.h5?! doesn't work out: 17...Nxe4 18.Qf4 Nxe5 19.Qxe5 Rxe5! 20.Bxd5 e6) 17...Bxf6 18.Nxf6+ exf6 19.Qh6



19...f2!? 20.Nf5 gxf5 21.Rhg1† fxg1=Q 22.Rxg1† Ng4 23.Rxg4† fxg4 24.Qg6† Kh8 25.Qh6†=

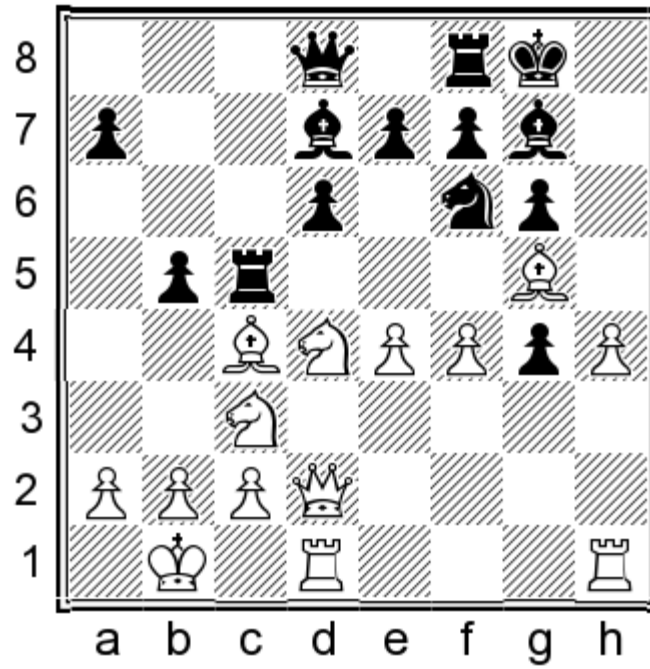
D1) 16.f4

In the 14.g4 Variation (see next chapter) this is the normal way to continue after sacrificing the g-pawn, but ...b5 is now a far more useful move than Kb1.

16...Nc4 17.Bxc4

17.Qd3 Qa8!?N This looks like an interesting idea. The queen gets out of the way of the f8-rook to allow doubling on the c-file while also putting pressure on e4. 18.h5 Nxh5 19.Nd5 Rxd5 20.exd5 Qxd5μ reveals another point.

17.Qe2 Nh5!? A neat way of exploiting the location of the white queen. 18.Rhe1 Qa5 19.Nd5 Rxd5 20.exd5 A. Forgacs – Vrban, Hungary 2001. Here 20...Ng3!N would have combined well with Black's 17th. 21.Qf2 (21.Qxe7 Bxd4 22.Rxd4 Nf5–+) 21...Nf5 22.Nxf5 Bxf5 Black has an overwhelming attack.



17...bxc4

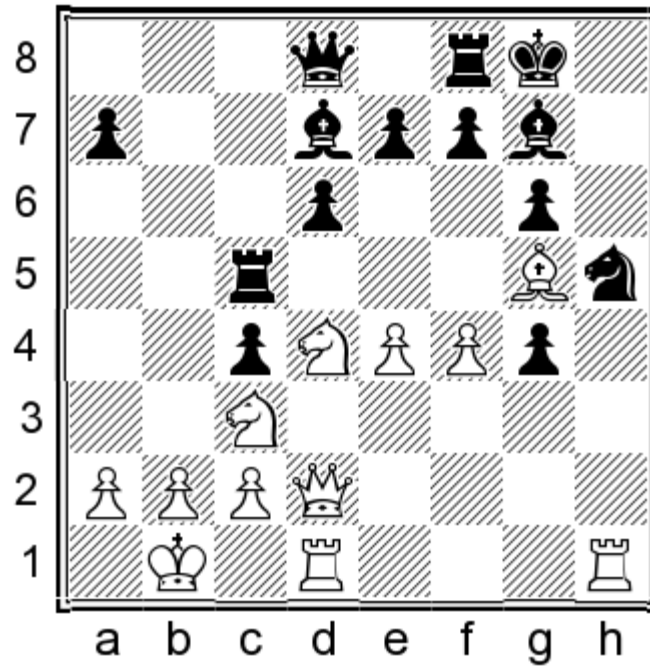
Recapturing with the pawn looks stronger to me here. The rook remains in control on the 5th rank and the b-file opens for counterplay. I will present a few sample lines:

18.f5N

18.e5 dxe5 19.fxe5 Nd5 20.h5 Qa5 21.Ne4 Qxd2 22.Bxd2 Rcc8μ

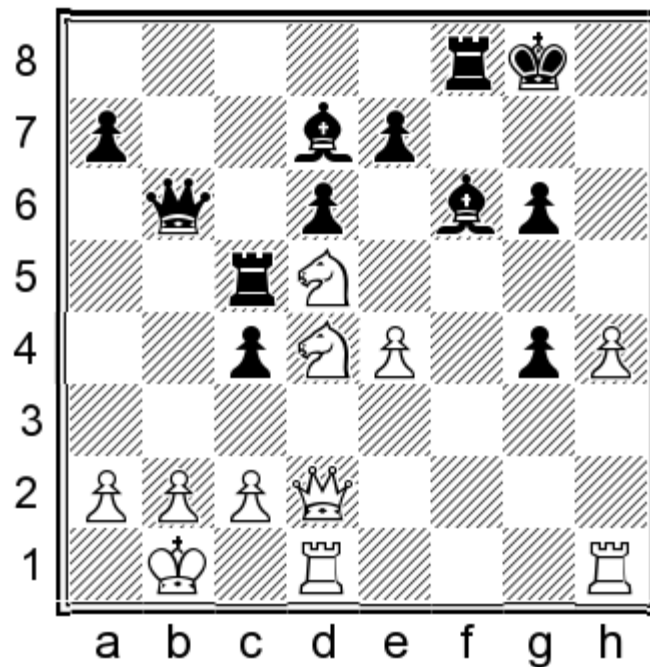
18.Bxf6 Bxf6 19.Nd5 was Smilek – Schmalz, Valasska Bystrice 2014, when 19...e6 was good enough to win for Black, though 19...Qa5Nμ may be even stronger.

18.h5 Nxh5



19.f5 (This position was actually reached by a different move order. There White tried 19.Rxh5 gxh5 20.f5, but after 20...Bxd4 21.Qxd4 f6 22.Bc1 Rf7 23.Rh1 Rh7 had little to show for the exchange and two pawns in A. Zaitsev – Kucherenko, Kharkov 2003.) 19...Qb6 20.Bxe7 Rb8

18...Qb6 19.fxg6 fxg6 20.Bxf6 Bxf6 21.Nd5

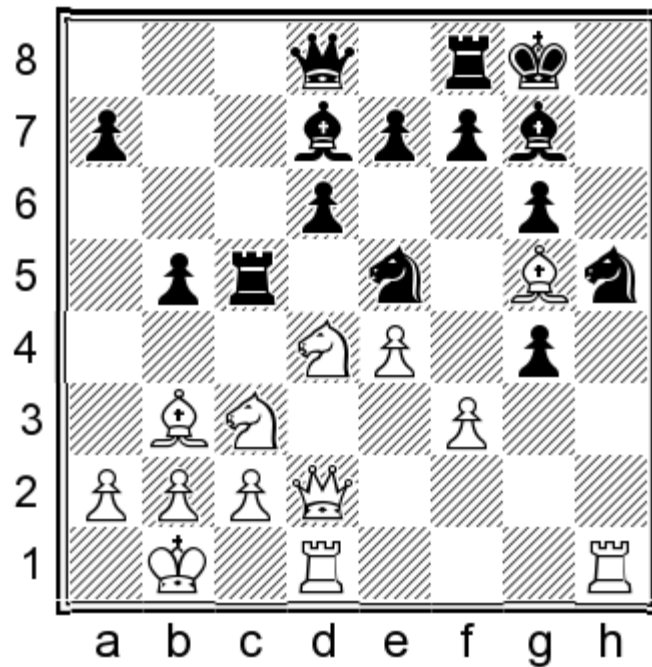


21...Rxd5! 22.exd5 c3 23.Qxc3 Rc8 24.Qd2 Bf5--+

D2) 16.h5

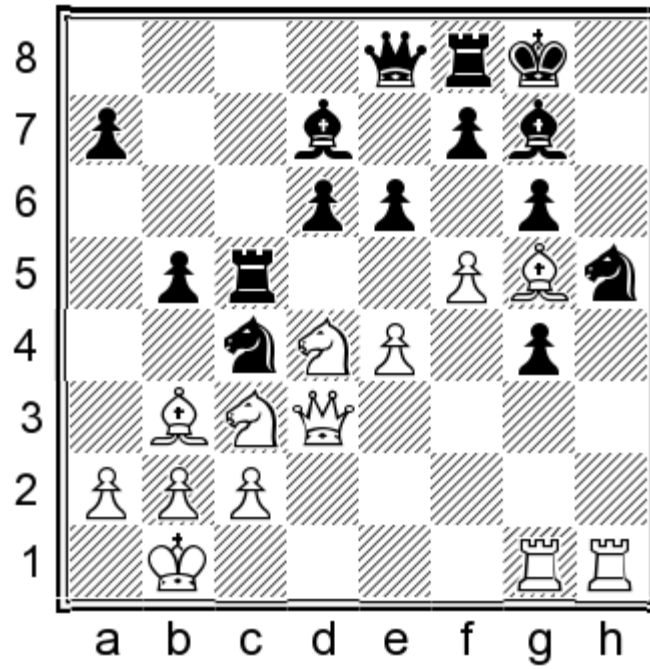
White is going route one.

16...Nxh5



White can try the crude D21) 17.Rxh5?, as well as D22) 17.fxg4, D23) 17.Rdg1 and D24) 17.Nd5.

17.f4?! has been tried here as well but 17...Nc4 should be good for Black. 18.Qd3 (18.Bxc4 bxc4 transposes to the note on 18.h5 in variation D1 above.) 18...Qe8! 19.f5 e6 20.Rdg1 Valentin – Aubert, Torcy 1991. Black's last couple of moves were strong but here he should have continued the plan with:



20...exf5N 21.exf5 Qe5! Black is winning.

If White tries 17.Bh6 then 17...e6!N is a good antidote. The b3-bishop is muffled and the black queen can now come to the king's defence.

D21) 17.Rxh5?

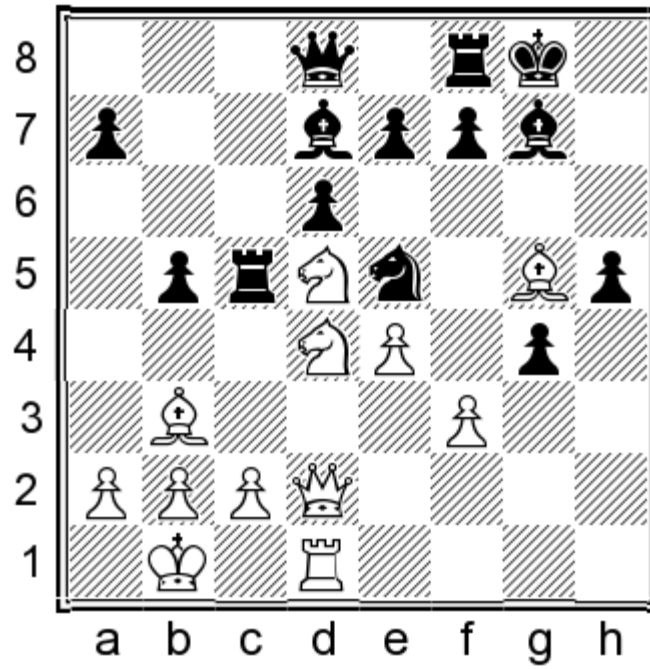
Giving the exchange immediately is an inaccurate move order.

17...gxh5

White has sacrificed the exchange and two pawns for the attack. Here the best way to defuse his initiative is to trade as many pieces as possible.

18.Nd5

18.Qh2 Nxf3! Not only does this grab another pawn but it trades material and leaves the g4-square available for our bishop. 19.Nxf3 gxf3 20.Nd5 (20.Qxh5N 20...Rxc5! 21.Qxc5 e6 is another common defensive theme. 22.Qh5 Qf6 White has been left with a two-pawn deficit and no attack.) 20...Rxd5! 21.Bxd5 Bg4 Potkin – Kargin, Moscow 2006. The kingside has been closed and White should have nothing at all to show for the three sacrificed pawns.



18...Rxd5!

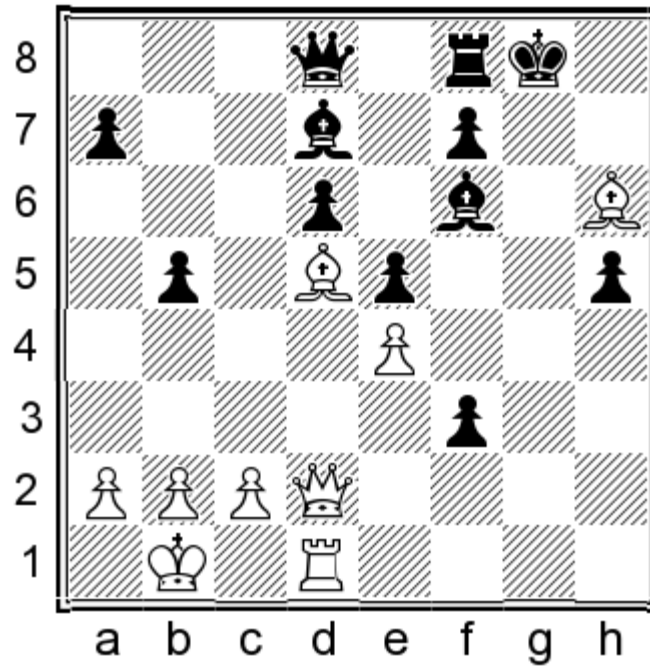
18...Re8 would transpose to variation D24 below.

19.Bxd5 Nxf3!

The same theme.

20.Nxf3 gxf3 21.Bh6 e5 22.Bg5 Bf6 23.Bh6

Here in Wan Yunguo – Emiroglu, Albena 2012, they simply repeated but, as I observed on ChessPublishing, Black has another possibility:



23...Bg4!N

Black is doing very well, for example:

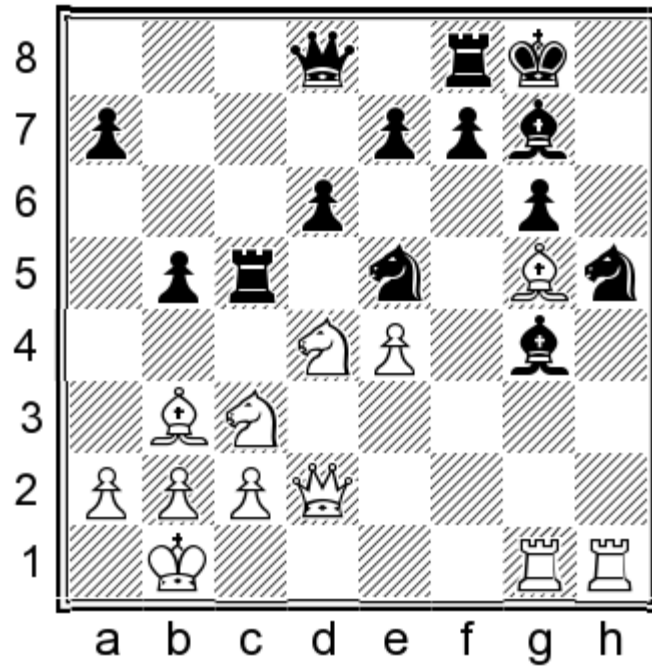
24.Bxf8 Kxf8 25.Qe3 Bg5 26.Qxa7 Qf6—+

D22) 17.fxg4

This is extremely rare but is sharp and forcing so should be checked.

17...Bxg4 18.Rdg1

Here I think the most accurate move order is:



18...Re8N

I've again looked at a few natural-looking lines:

19.Nd5

19.Bh6 e6 20.Bxg7 Kxg7 21.Ncxb5 Qd7 22.Nc3 Rh8³

19...a5 20.c3

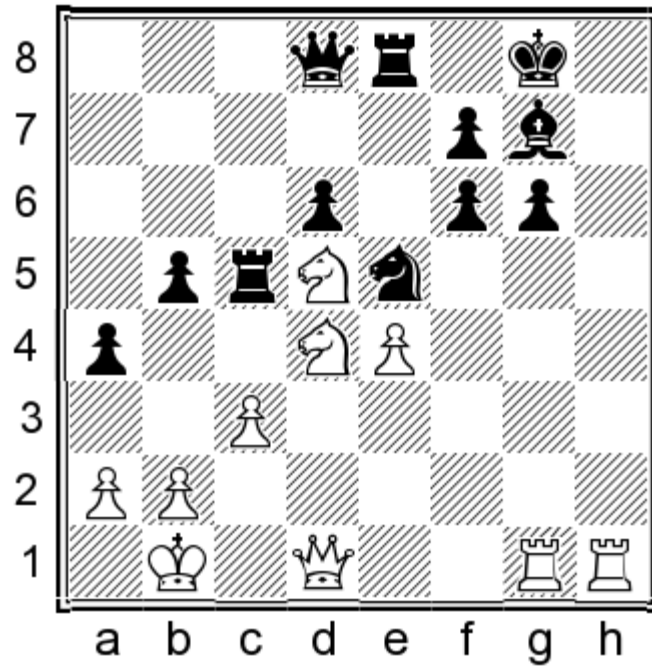
20.Ne3 a4 21.Bd5 Qb6÷

20...a4 21.Bd1

21.Bc2 a3,,

21...Bxd1 22.Qxd1 Nf6 23.Bxf6 exf6

If White does nothing, Black can follow up with capturing on d5 and ...f5. Therefore the critical continuation is:

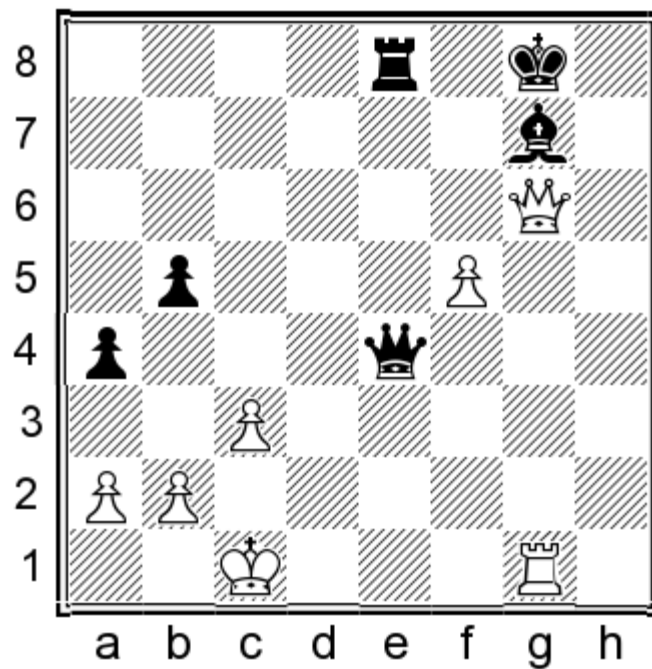


24.Nf5!? gxf5 25.exf5 Kf8 26.Qd2

White is threatening Rh8† followed by Qh6† mating.

26...Rxd5 27.Qxd5 Qc8 28.Qxd6† Kg8 29.Qxf6 Ng6 30.Rxg6 fxg6 31.Qxg6 Qa8 32.Rg1 Qe4† 33.Kc1

33.Ka1?? Qe1†

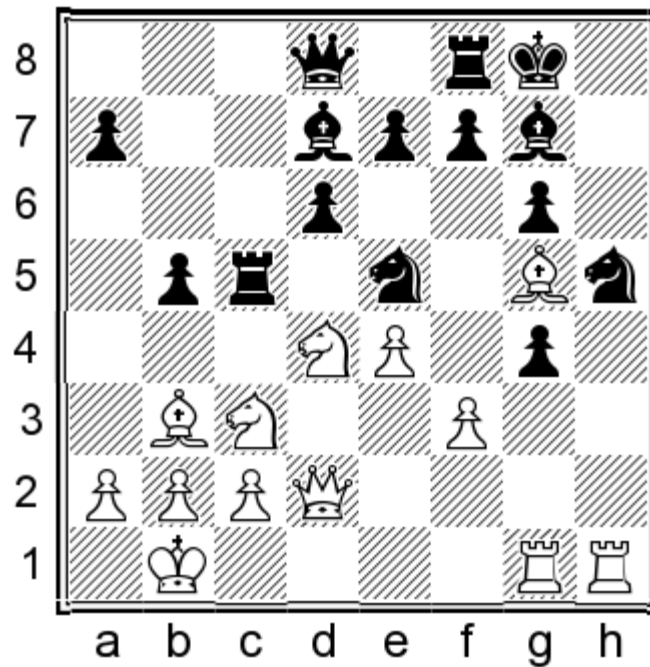


33...Qe3† 34.Kc2 Qe4† 35.Kc1=

The line might look unlikely but it shows interesting ideas for both sides.

D23) 17.Rdg1

As far as I can see, Gast – Zaremba, Parsippany 1999, is the only game to have featured this move, but again it's among my engine's first few choices and so needs checking.



17...Nc4N

This is sensible as the d4-knight is no longer so well defended.

18.Bxc4 Rxc4 19.Nf5!?

19.fxg4

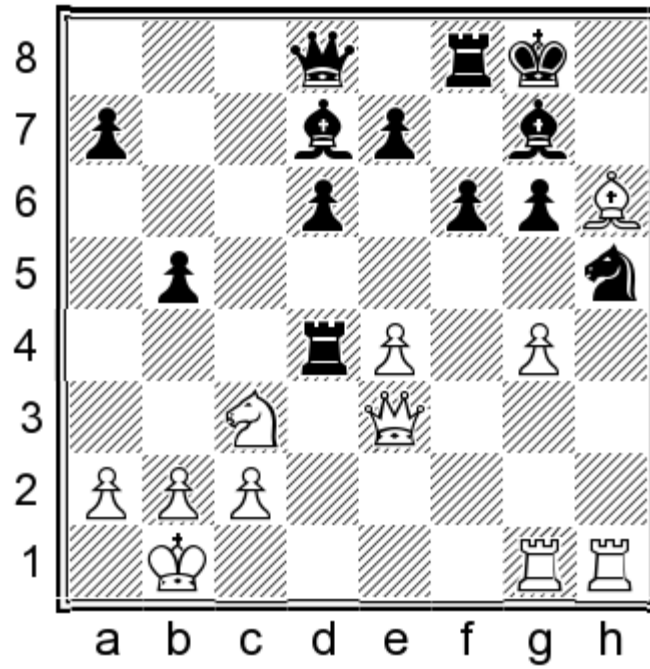
Another important line.

19...Rxd4 20.Qe3 f6!?

20...Bxg4 21.Rxg4 (21.Bh6 Qb6!) 21...f5÷ is unclear. The engine assesses with the helpful 0.00.

21.Bh6

21.Bh4 Rc4 22.gxh5 gxh5 23.Bxf6!? Rxf6 24.Qg5 Bg4 25.Rxh5 Qf8 26.Qxg4 Rf1† 27.Nd1 Rxe4!³ Black has successfully fought off White's initiative.



21...e5 22.gxh5 g5 23.Bxg5

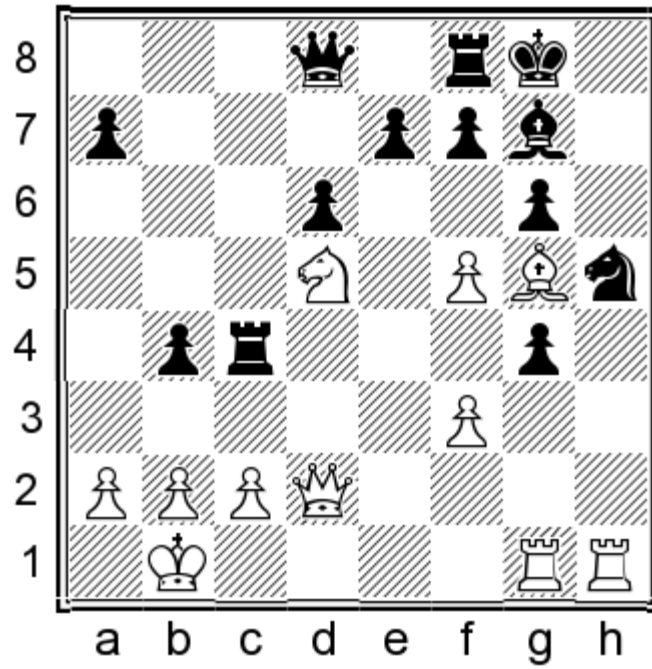
23.Bxg7 Kxg7 leaves the black king quite safe.

23...fxg5 24.Rxg5 Kh8 25.h6 Bf6 26.Rg7! Be6

The position is messy but Black controls a lot of the important squares so I think the best White can hope for from his attack is a perpetual.

19...Bxf5 20.exf5 b4 21.Nd5

21.Qe2 d5 22.Nd1 g3÷ is messy but seems okay for Black. 23.Bxe7 Re8 24.Qxc4 dxc4 25.Bxd8 Rxd8 26.fxg6 fxg6 and Black has good compensation.



21...Rd4 22.Qh2 g3 23.Nxe7† Qxe7 24.Qxh5! gxh5 25.Bxe7 Re8 26.Bg5 Be5 27.Rxh5 Kg7=

The game has liquidated into an equal endgame.

D24) 17.Nd5 Re8 18.Rxh5

18.fxg4 Bxg4 19.Rdg1 transposes to variation D22 above.

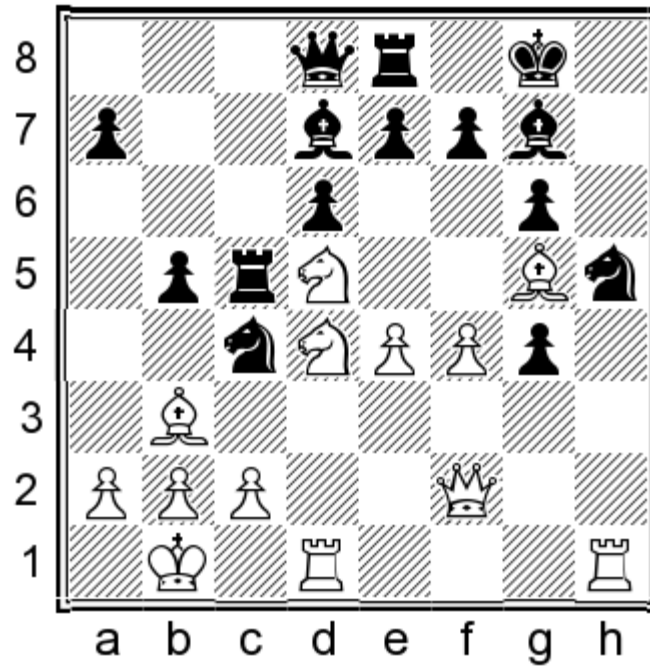
18.f4?!

In the 14.g4 variation White normally continues like this. However with ...b5 already played, Black gains an important tempo defending the knight.

18...Nc4 19.Qf2

19.Qd3 was S. Farago – Pham, Budapest 1998, and now 19...a5N 20.a3 Rxd5! 21.exd5 Qb6 would put Black on top.

After 19.Bxc4 Rxc4 20.Nf5!? Brekhov – A. Smirnov, Saratov 2008, 20...Rxe4N looks easiest. 21.Nxd6 Rd4 22.Qxd4 Bxd4 23.Rxd4 f6 24.Nxe8 fxg5–+



19...Rxd5! 20.exd5 Qb6

Black's position is already to be preferred and the following sequence increases his advantage:

21.Bxc4 bxc4 22.Qd2? c3! 23.Qxc3 Rc8 24.Qe3 Bf5

Black's pieces have become too active. White doesn't last long.

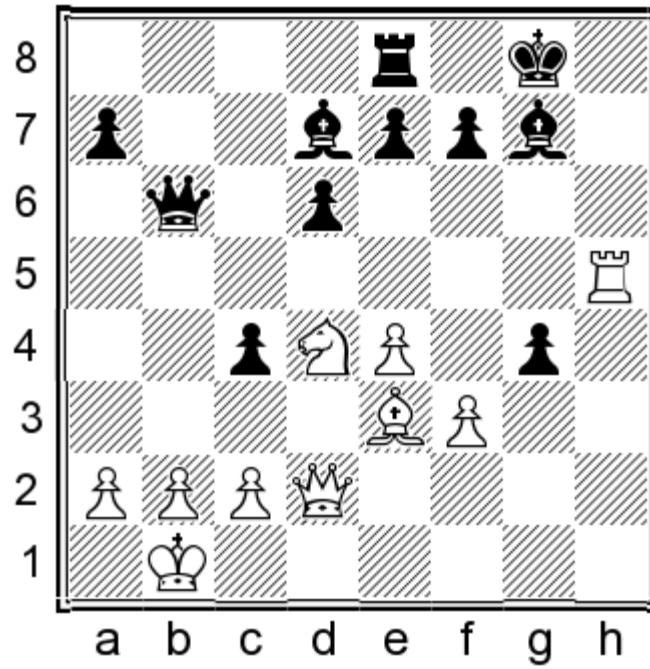
25.Rh2 Rc4 26.Rhd2 Bxd4 27.Qb3 Rb4

0-1 Corujedo Hernandez – Perez Soto, Cuba 2002.

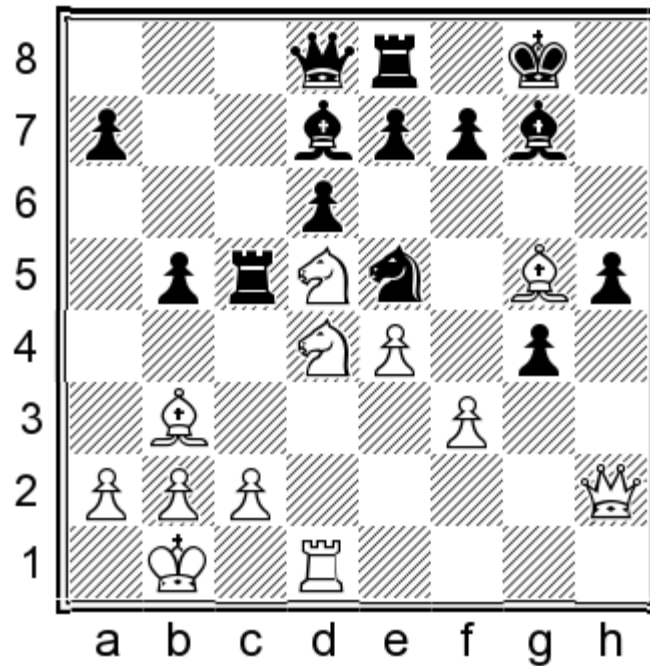
18...gxh5 19.Qh2

White is currently the exchange and two pawns down, but he has all his pieces in the attack and we need to deal with it accurately.

It's better for White to go with his queen first. Here 19.Rh1?! should be met in the same manner as the text move. 19...Rxd5 20.Bxd5 Qb6 21.Be3 Nc4 22.Bxc4 bxc4 23.Rxh5 In Ankerst – Kodric, Slovenia 1996, Black had so far defended well, but now instead of lashing out with 23...f5 he should have played the more usual-looking:



23...Rb8N 24.c3 gxf3 With the point 25.Nf5 Bxf5! 26.Bxb6 Bxe4† 27.Ka1 Rxb6³.



19...Rxd5!

Time to give back some of that extra material to slow White's attack.

20.Bxd5 Qb6!

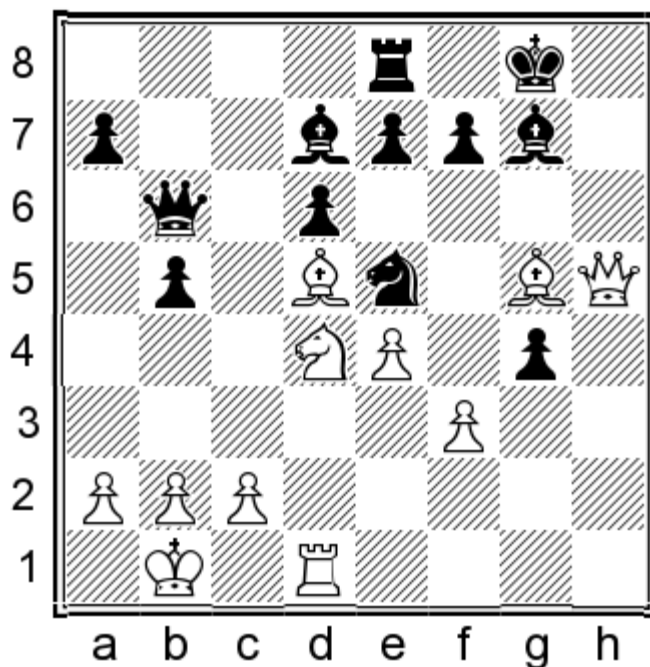
When I had this position I instead put my queen on c8, but this active square is better. From b6 the queen hits the knight and can go to c5, b7 or even f2 depending on how White continues to attack. In some lines it is very important that we

are controlling the g1-square. Now we are ready to kick the bishop back with ...e6.

We have reached an important junction, with White having three moves: D241) 21.Qxh5, D242) 21.f4 and D243) 21.Nf5.

D241) 21.Qxh5

This is probably the most logical move and is one of the critical lines.



21...e6 22.Bb3 gxf3 23.Nxf3

If White doesn't take the pawn immediately then we can use it to annoy him, for example:

23.Bh6 Bxh6

23...f2!? immediately can also be considered.

24.Qxh6 f2!

When this position was reached, White became rather overambitious with:

25.Nf5?

25.Qf6 should be preferred when 25...Qb7 (25...Bc6!?) 26.Rh1 f1=Q†! 27.Rxf1 Qxe4 28.Rg1† Ng6 29.Rf1 Ne5 30.Rg1† would be a possible draw.

25...exf5 26.Rh1 f1=Q†!

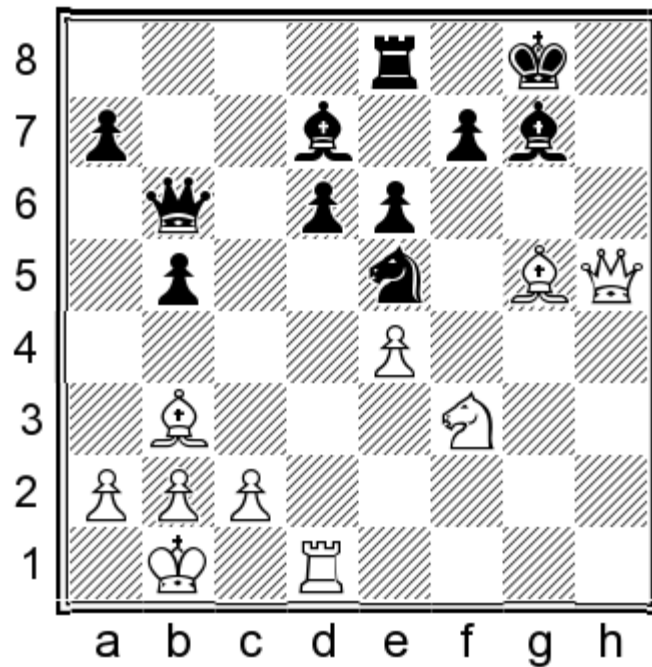
A vital deflection.

27.Rxf1 d5!

Now Black has time to bring the queen over to the king's defence – another useful facet of putting the queen on b6.

28.Qh5 dxe4

White's attack had disappeared completely in Ivanovic – Romero Holmes, Terrassa 1989.



23...Qf2!

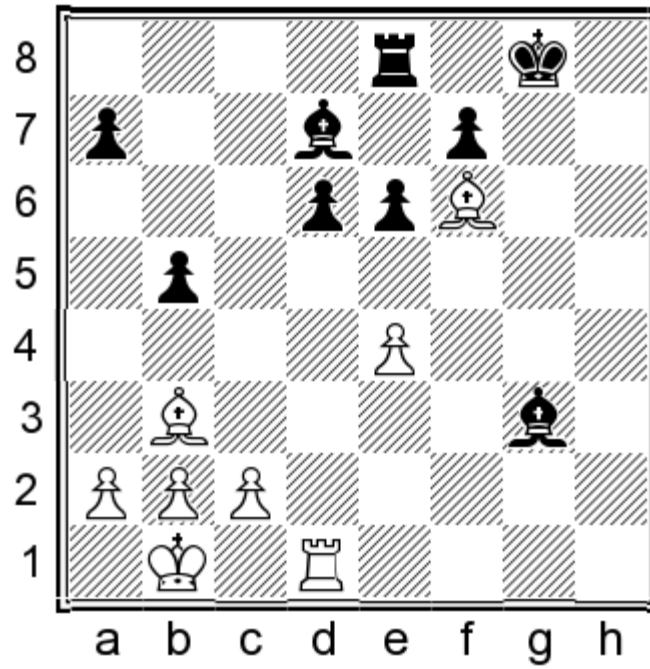
I think this is Black's only move to keep equality. By coming over to the kingside the black queen hassles White's pieces and controls some important squares.

24.Nxe5 Bxe5 25.Qg4

25.Bh6N 25...Qg2! looks risky but the queen and e5-bishop control enough squares to prevent White increasing the pressure, for instance: 26.Be3 Kf8 27.Bg5 Bc6 28.Rxd6 Bxe4 29.Bh6† Bg7 30.Qc5! Kg8 31.Rd1 Qf3 32.Rg1 Bg6=

25...Qg3! 26.Qxg3 Bxg3 27.Bf6

Despite having traded queens, White still has some pressure, and with it compensation for the pawn. We need to be accurate for another few moves.

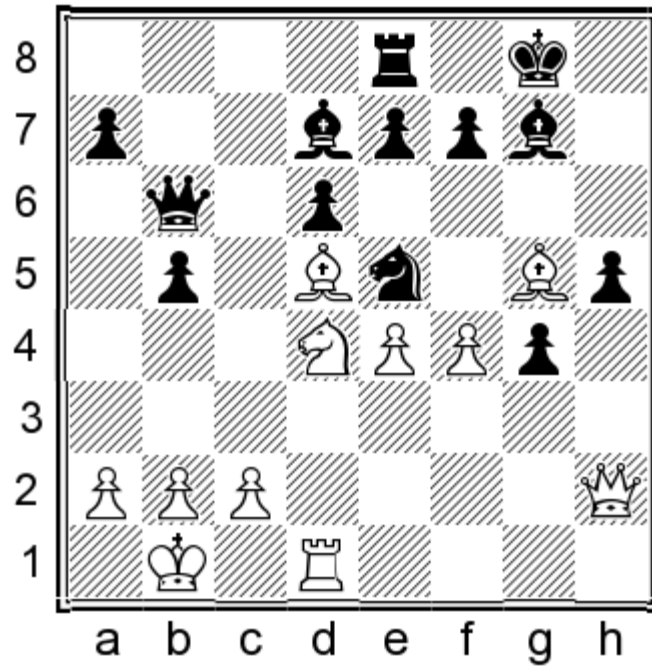


27...Kh7! 28.e5 Bc6 29.exd6 Kg6! 30.Be7 Rxe7! 31.dxe7 Kf6=

After a long sequence we've reached an interesting endgame. This has been played in a few correspondence games and it seems clear that Black has at least enough compensation. The e7-pawn is dropping and the two connected passed pawns are difficult to deal with.

D242) 21.f4

This is the rarest of White's tries here but also has to be dealt with accurately.



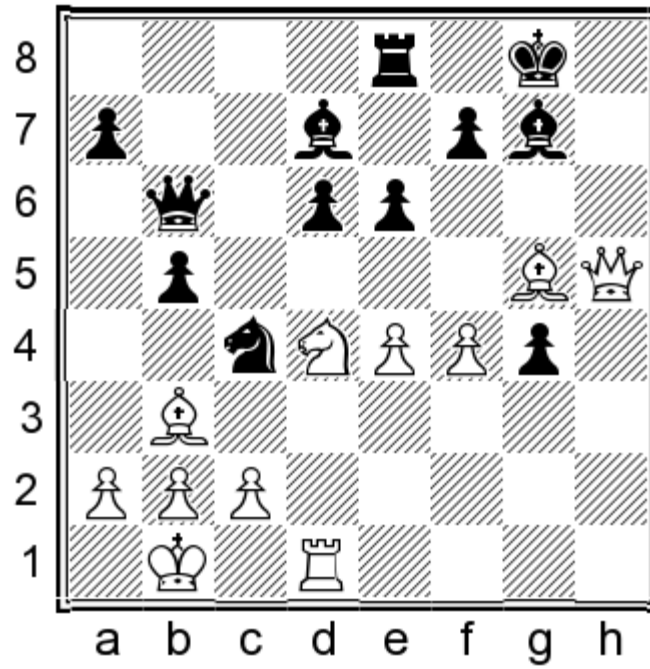
21...e6! 22.Bb3

22.f5? was played in Acuna Celada – Marcos Herrero, Madrid 2012, but here Black can simply play 22...exd5N with an extra piece.

22...Nc4 23.Qxh5

23.f5? was another curious f4-f5 blunder. In Cernousek – Sluka, Olomouc 2000, Black took on f5 but instead 23...Bxd4N is simply a piece.

This position has only been reached once, in G. Kiss – Pham, Budapest 1999, and doesn't seem to have been tried in computer or correspondence chess either. However I think the position is quite dangerous and so Black needs to be accurate.



23...Qb7!N

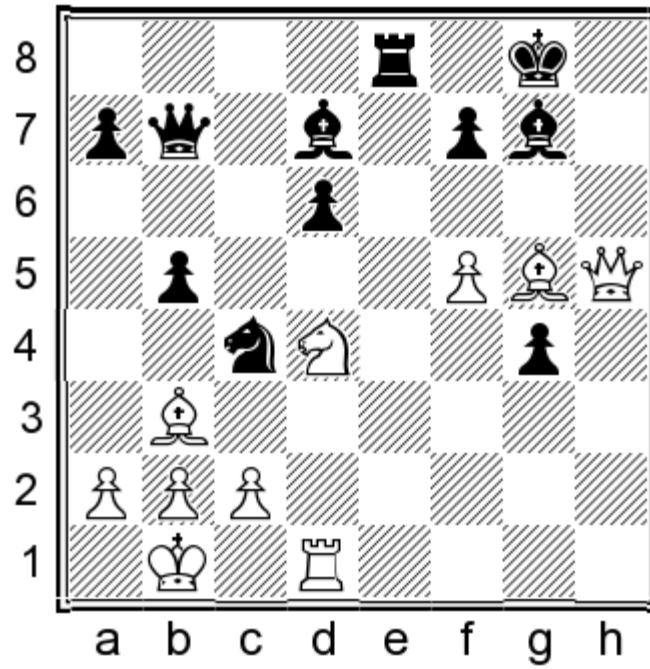
After studying the position in a lot of depth, I think this is best. The queen is finding a path to the kingside. The positions are sharp and so, even though it is very rare, I'd make sure you feel comfortable with the following variations.

23...Bxd4? loses to 24.e5!.

24.Bxc4

24.f5 exf5 25.exf5

25.Bh6 Qxe4 26.Bxg7 Kxg7 27.Qg5† Kh7= White has no more than perpetual; the black queen is extremely useful on e4.



25...Bxd4!?

25...Qd5 also looks fine.

26.Rxd4 Bxf5 27.Bc1

27.a4 Re1† 28.Ka2 Qh1! forces White to exchange queens.

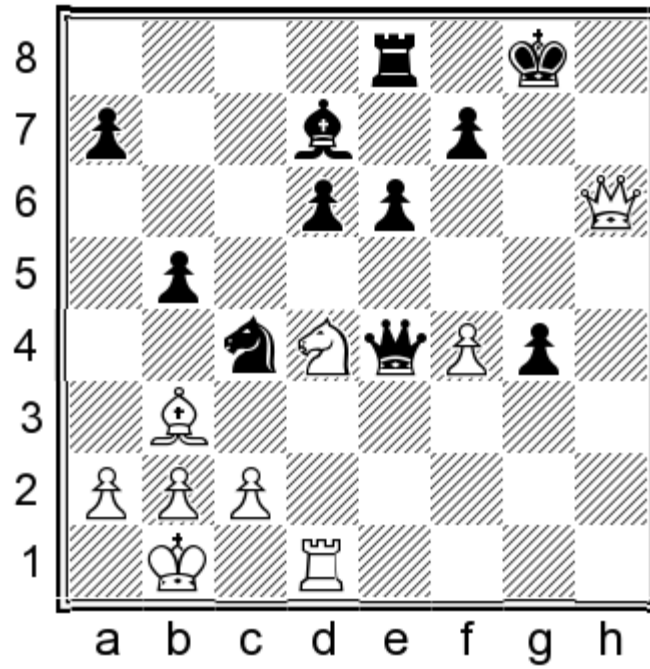
27...Bg6 28.Qxg4 Re4=

24.Bh6 Bxh6

24...Qxe4 25.Bxc4 bxc4 26.Bxg7 Kxg7 27.Qxg4† Qg6=

25.Qxh6 Qxe4

White should first play:



26.Bxc4

The immediate 26.f5? fails to 26...Qe3!.

26.Nf5!? exf5 27.Bxc4 bxc4 28.Qg5† Kf8 29.Qh6† Kg8 is also a draw.

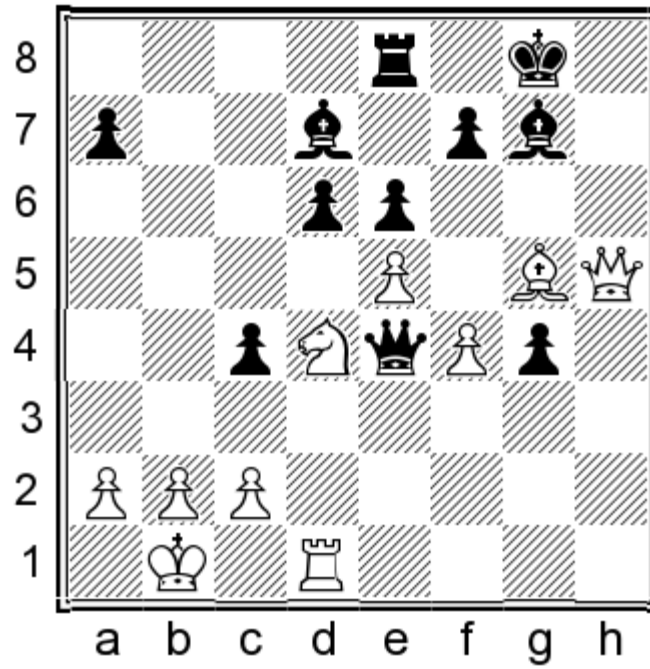
26...bxc4 27.f5

Only now can this be played, but again it is simply a draw:

27...exf5 28.Qg5† Kh7 29.Qh5† Kg7=

24...bxc4 25.e5 Qe4!

As we've just seen, this is an excellent square for the queen.



26.Qxg4

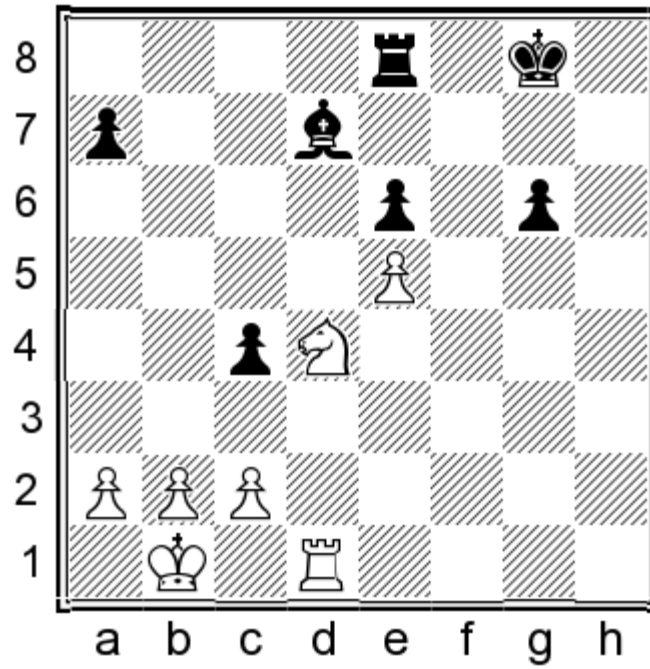
26.Bf6 Qg6 27.Qh4 g3 Remember to use the advanced kingside pawns to create counterplay. 28.Rh1 Kf8 29.Rg1 g2 30.Qh2 dxe5 31.Bxe5 Bxe5 32.fxe5 Qg4 33.Qh8† Ke7 34.Qf6† Kf8= with another draw.

26...dxe5 27.Bf6

27.Rg1 exd4 28.Bf6 Qg6 29.Qxg6 fxg6 30.Rxg6 Kf7 31.Rxg7† Kxf6 32.Rxd7=

27...Qg6 28.Qxg6 fxg6 29.Bxe5 Bxe5 30.fxe5

When I first reached this position I was concerned that Black might have to suffer with the four pawn islands, but I think he can generate sufficient counterplay with the passed g-pawn and pressure against the e5-pawn, for example:



30...a5 31.Rf1

31.Kc1 Rc8 32.c3 Rc5 33.Nf3 Bc6 34.Rd8† Kf7 35.Rc8 Ke7 36.Nd4 Kd7 37.Rg8 Rxe5 38.Rxg6 Bd5=

31...Kg7 32.Kc1 Rh8! 33.Rf6 Rh4 34.Nxe6† Bxe6 35.Rxe6 g5 36.Kd2 Re4=

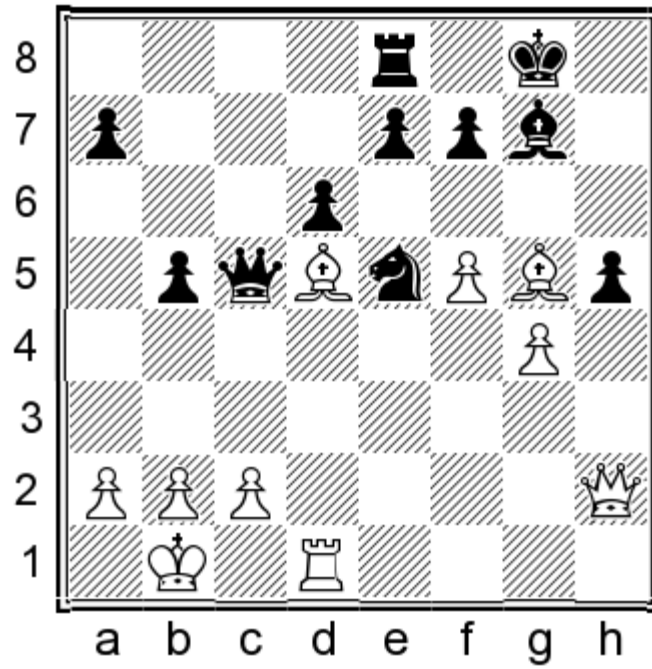
D243) 21.Nf5 Bxf5 22.exf5 Qc5!

This is Vigorito's suggestion and I agree it is the most accurate. We put some pressure along the 5th rank and prepare to get some counterplay on the c-file. The move has only been played once in over-the-board chess, but I believe it is an important defensive resource.

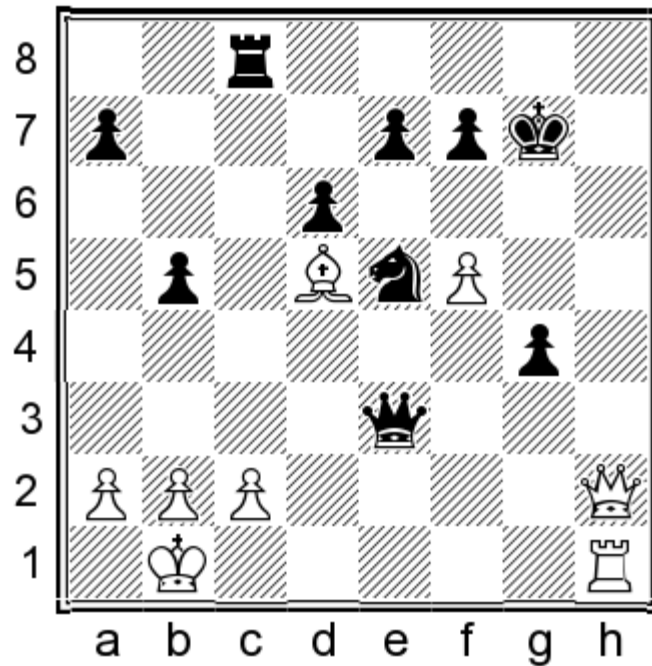
The final split of the chapter sees White choose between D2431) 23.fxg4 or D2342) 23.Qxh5.

D2431) 23.fxg4

This was Yakovich's suggested way of attacking.



23...hxg4 24.Bh6 Rc8 25.Bxg7 Kxg7 26.Rh1 Qe3!



This looks hairy but without dark-squared bishops, Black's king can actually be fairly safe if it's forced forwards via f6-g5-f4. The g-pawn promises decent counterplay while, with limited material, White struggles to create any mating nets. The e5-knight keeps Black's position together.

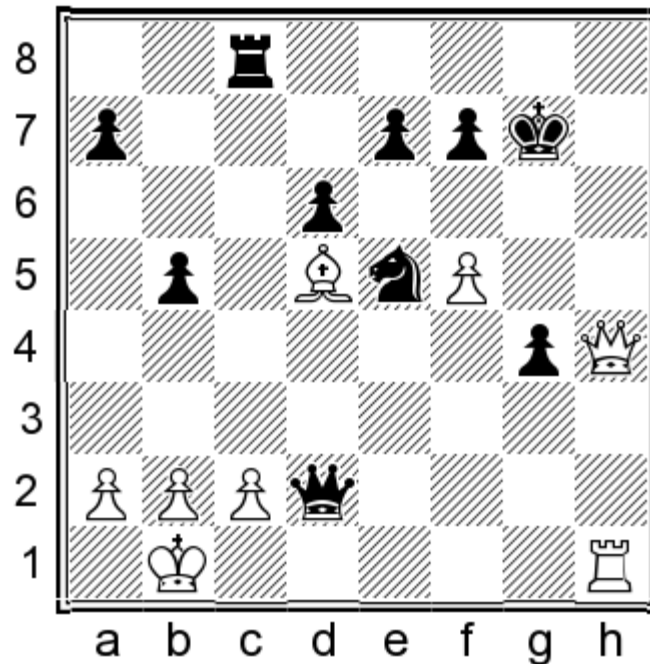
27.Qh7†

27.Qh4!?N

Yakovich's suggested novelty. Black's easiest is:

27...Qd2

Hitting the bishop and threatening a mate of our own.



28.Be4

28.f6†!? exf6 29.Qh7† Kf8 30.Qh8† Ke7 31.Qxc8 Qxd5 White has picked up the exchange but Black has far too many pawns and a monster knight on e5 holding the position together, so White still needs to take the draw with 32.Qc7† Ke6 33.Qc8† Ke7=.

28...Qf4

White doesn't have more than a draw, e.g.

29.Qh7†

29.a3 Rg8! We're now threatening to run our king to safety on the queenside and so 30.Qxe7 is forced. 30...Qxe4 31.Qg5† Ng6 32.Qh6† Kf6 33.fxg6 Rxc6 will likely be another perpetual.

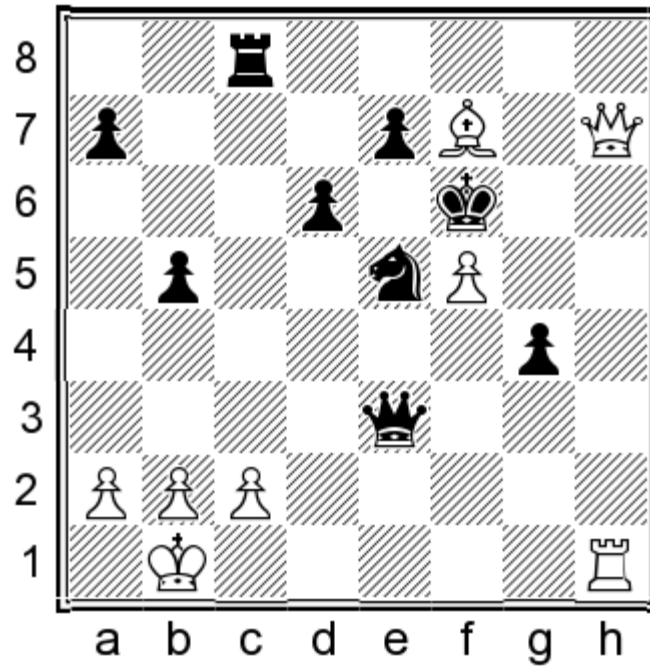
29...Kf6 30.Rh6† Kg5 31.Rh5†

31.Qg7†? Ng6 suddenly leaves White in a lot of trouble.

31...Kf6 32.a3 Qxe4 33.Qh6† Ng6=

27...Kf6 28.Bxf7!?

This is how a few correspondence and computer games have run.



28...Qd2!

Again this is a good way to create counterplay. Even without the f7-pawn, Black has sufficient resources to keep equality.

29.Bb3

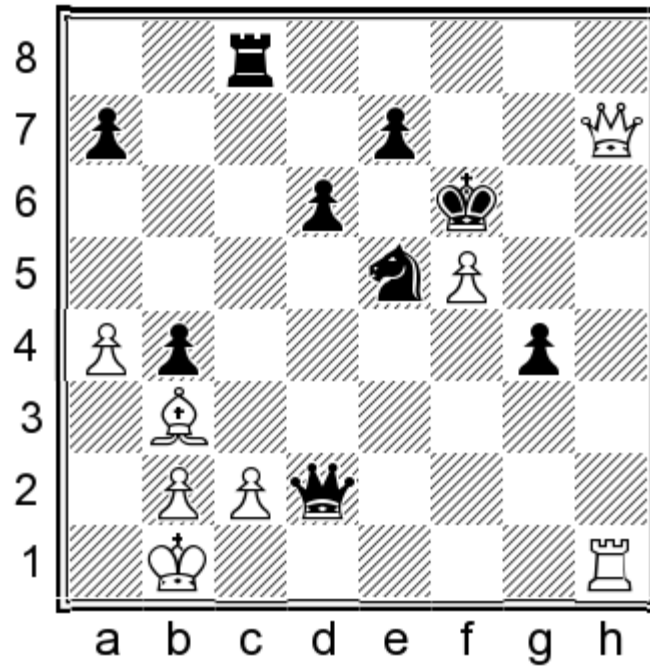
29.a3 was tried in a recent computer game, but with 29...Qxc2† 30.Ka1 Rc3! Black created perpetual threats of his own. The rest of the game is of course accurate but also interesting: 31.Qh8† Kxf5 32.Ba2 Rd3 33.Qf8† Ke4 34.Bb1 Qe2 35.Qxe7 Kf3 36.Rg1 Rd4 37.Qh4 Qf2 38.Qh1† Ke2 39.Rg2 g3 40.Ka2 Rd1 41.Rxf2† gxf2 42.Qe4† Kd2 White kept checking for another ten moves before the draw was agreed in don52 – mercure, engine game 2014.

29...b4!

Forcing White to make a concession on the queenside if he wants to create some luft for his king.

30.a4!?

White gave up winning chances immediately with 30.Rh6† Kg5 31.Rh5† Kf6 in Albano Rivares – Gonzalez Barcina, email 2011.

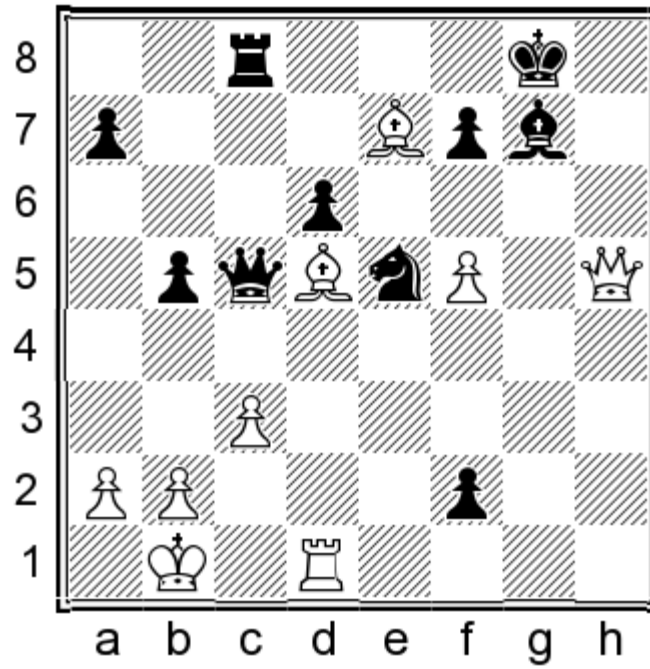


30...bxa3 31.bxa3 Rb8! 32.Rh6† Kg5 33.Rh5† Kf6 34.Ka2 a5! 35.Rh6† Kg5 36.Rh2 Qd1 37.Qh6† Kxf5 38.Rd2 Qg1 39.Re2 Rxb3 40.cxb3 Qa7

And here Pascual Perez – Ortiz, email 2009, was agreed drawn. These lines are of course sharp and I can see you feeling uneasy about the king running around the centre of the board. However, we know there's no mate there as long as we're accurate, and Black has decent counter-chances of his own.

D2432) 23.Qxh5 Rc8 24.c3 gxf3 25.Bxe7 f2!

It's important to use all the resources in the position.

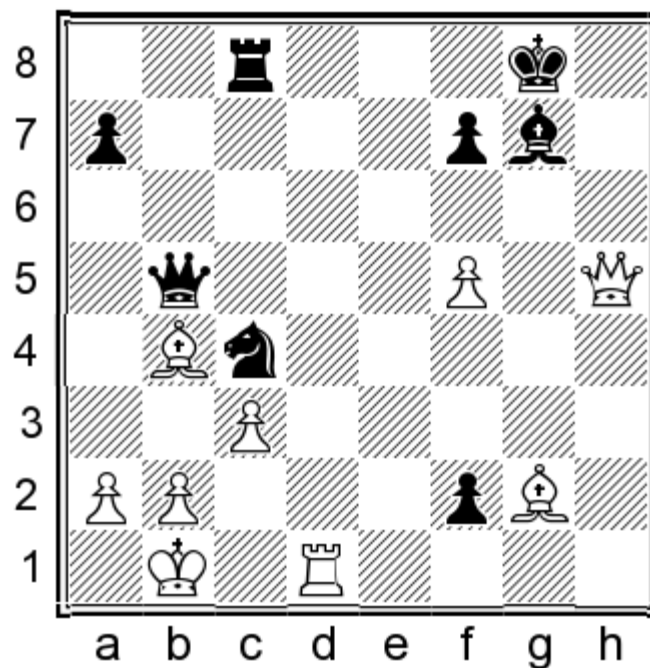


26.Bg2

Or 26.f6 Qxd5 27.Rxd5 f1=Q† 28.Rd1 Qf3 29.Qxf3 which was drawn here in Vera Ruiz – Serrano Salvador, corr. 2008.

26...Qe3

26...b4!?N looks like an interesting alternative: 27.Bxd6 (27.f6?? bxc3 and the engine informs me it's mate in 10) 27...Qb5 28.Bxb4 Nc4 We have sacrificed two pawns to open up lines towards White's king. Coupled with the advanced f-pawn I think Black has much the better practical chances. The engine thinks White should defend with:



29.Qg5! a5 30.a4! Qb6 31.Rd3 Qf6 32.Qxf6 Bxf6 33.Bd6 Nxd6 34.Rxd6 Kg7 This endgame should be a draw but White still needs to be a bit careful as the f2-pawn remains dangerous.

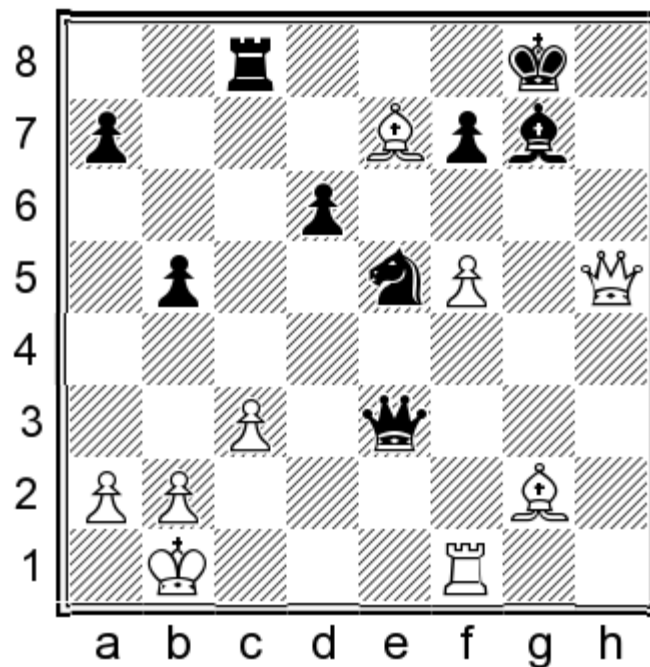
27.Rh1

27.f6!?N 27...Bh6 28.Bxd6 looks likely to reach a drawn endgame after 28...Rd8 29.Bxe5 Rxd1† 30.Qxd1 Qxe5 31.Qf3 Qe3 32.Qxe3 Bxe3=.

27...f1=Q†! 28.Rxf1?

This was a big mistake for a correspondence game, even in the pre-computer era.

Instead White had to play the unnatural-looking 28.Bxf1! when the game would end in repetition after: 28...Qe1† 29.Kc2 Qe4† 30.Kc1 Qe1†= Kuerten – Lovakovic, email 2000.



28...Nc4!-+

Suddenly all of Black's pieces are attacking and White has no defence. The game ended abruptly after:

29.Bg5 Qd3† 30.Kc1 Nxb2 31.f6 Rxc3†

0-1 Shorokhov – Pillhock, corr. 1990.

Conclusion

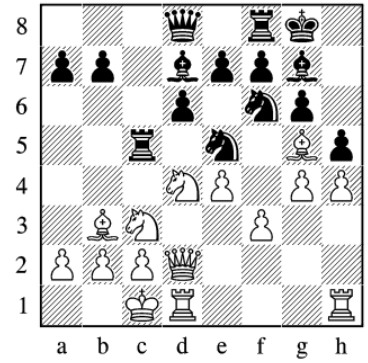
The lines examined here are among the most critical in the entire Dragon and so should be studied carefully. Black needs to be careful but I believe he has his fair share of chances. You need to remember the idea of meeting h4-h5 with ...g5, for example in the 15.Bxf6 line. This is an important defensive idea in Soltis structures. Remember too that the advanced pawns on the kingside do a good job both of defending Black's king and generating counterplay.

The mainline is extremely important to Black's wellbeing in the repertoire. You should get to grips with all three of White's options on move 21. Remember if 21.Qxh5 then the queen comes to f2, if 21.f4 then the queen comes to b7, and if 21.Nf5 then the queen should go to c5. Basically Black wants his queen to reach the kingside as quickly as possible.

The positions are so sharp that most White players shy away from them in over-the-board games and so the cutting-edge theory is in correspondence and engine games.



Soltis Variation



14.g4

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♚d2 ♘c6
9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0 ♚c8 11.♙b3 ♘e5 12.h4 h5 13.♙g5 ♚c5! 14.g4

14...hxg4

A) 15.Bxf6

B) 15.h5 Nxh5

B1) 16.Rxh5?

B2) 16.f4?!

B3) 16.Rdg1

B4) 16.Nd5 Re8

B41) 17.fxg4

B42) 17.Rxh5 gxh5 18.Qh2 Rxd5! 19.Bxd5 Qb6 20.Qxh5 e6 21.Bb3 gxf3

B421) 22.Bh6

B422) 22.Be3

B43) 17.f4 Nc4

B431) 18.Qe2

B432) 18.Qf2

B433) 18.Qd3

C) 15.f4 Nc4

C1) 16.Bxc4

C2) 16.Qd3 b5

C21) 17.h5?!

C22) 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.e5 dxe5 19.Ndxb5 Nxb2!

C221) 20.Qxg6†?

C222) 20.Kxb2

C23) 17.f5

C3) 16.Qe2 Na5! 17.e5 Nxb3† 18.Nxb3 Rxc3! 19.bxc3 Bc6

C31) 20.exf6

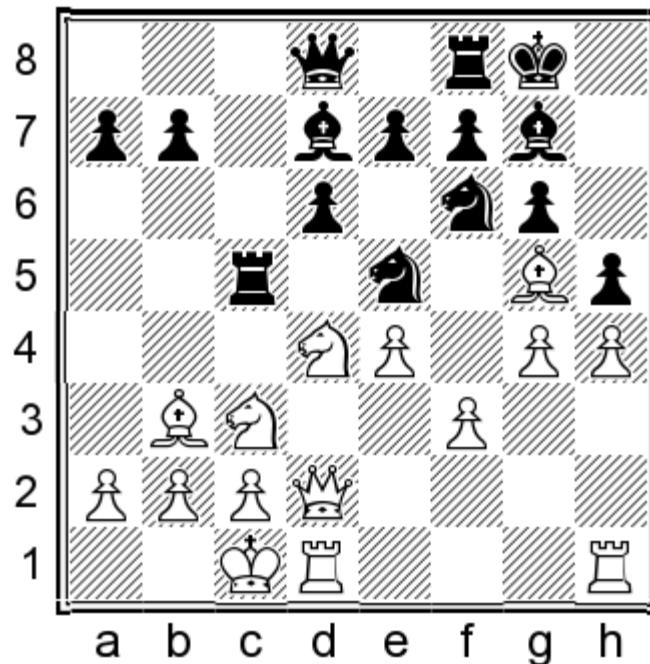
C32) 20.Rhf1 Ne4

C321) 21.Qc4

C322) 21.Qxg4

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5 Rc5 14.g4

Traditionally this was the main line, but Black figured out how to defend so White players have switched to 14.Kb1 in their bid for an advantage. The themes of both are similar but theory has decided it's in White's favour to include Kb1 and ...b5.



14...hxg4

We will examine A) 15.Bxf6 and B) 15.h5 before moving on to the main line C) 15.f4.

15.Rdg1!?

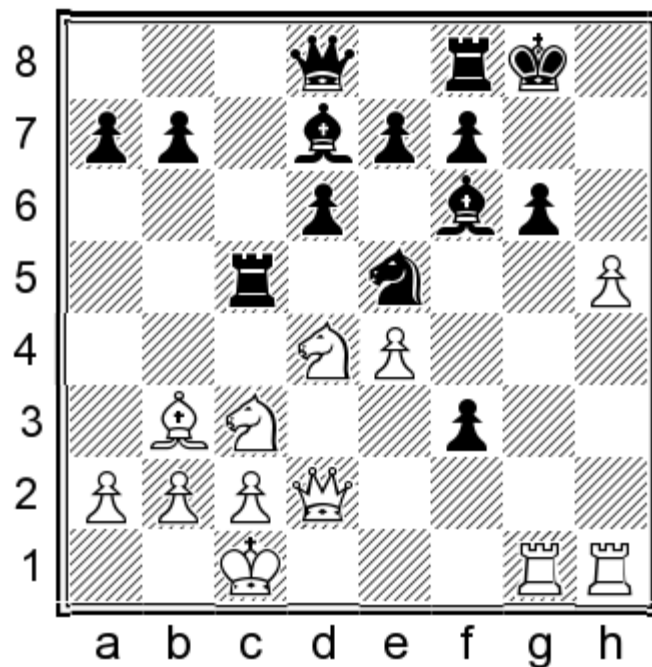
We always need to pay attention to moves that put all of White's pieces pointing at our king. Here I think the most accurate defence is:

15...gxf3 16.Bxf6

If White tries to smash through immediately with 16.h5 we have 16...f2! 17.Qxf2 Nc4 18.Qd2 Rxc5! 19.h6 (19.Qxg5 Bh6 exploits the location of White's king) 19...Rc5 20.hxg7 Kxg7.

16...Bxf6 17.h5N

17.Nxf3 e6 was seen in Maassen – Pillhock, corr. 1990. White's position continued to deteriorate and Black won a short time later.



17...g5! 18.Rxg5† Bxg5 19.Qxg5† Kh7

This may look scary but White can't bring any more of his pieces into the attack, for example:

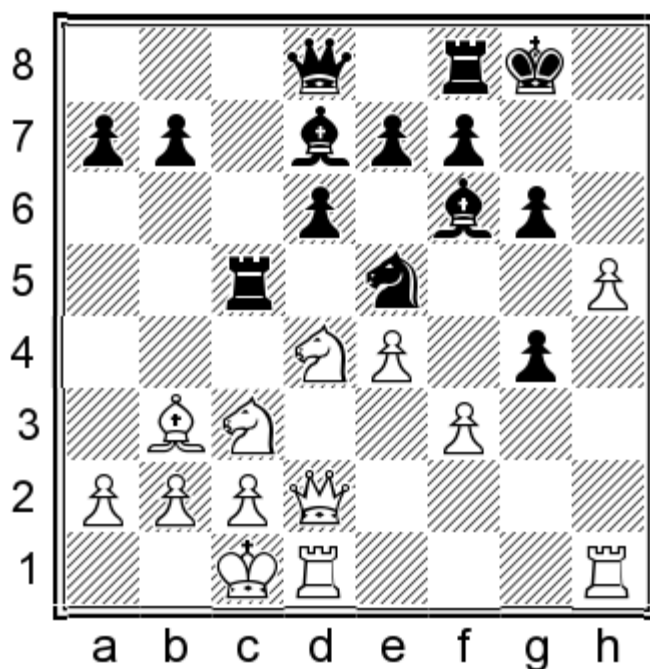
20.Nf5 Bxf5 21.Qxf5† Kh8 22.Qf4 f2! 23.Qh6†

23.Qxf2 e6

23...Kg8 24.Qg5† Kh7 25.Qf5† Kh8

A) 15.Bxf6 Bxf6 16.h5

16.f4 Nc4 will simply transpose back into the main lines examined via the 15.f4 move order. For 17.Qd3 b5 see variation C2217.Qe2 Na5 transposes to the note on 17.Bxf6 in variation C3. 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 transposes to the note on 17.Bxf6 in variation C1.



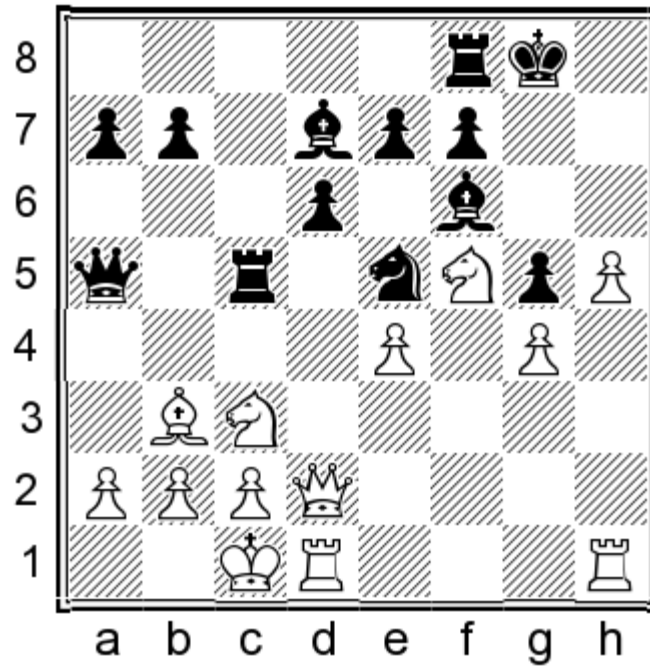
16...g5!

We've already seen this idea of closing up the kingside in a similar position with Kb1 and ...b5 included.

17.Nd5

17.f4? is much worse as the king is precariously placed on c1: 17...gxf4 18.Qxf4? (18.Nd5 occurred in Bartos – Ji. Houska, Czech Republic 2005, and now 18...Bg5N is simplest.) 18...Nd3†! 19.Rxd3 Bg5 Black picked up the queen in Niessen – Wellner, Porz 1989.

17.fxg4 Now the pawn storm on the queenside is a bit slower as we've not yet played ...b5, so I think the easiest is 17...Qa5 (17...Bxg4 grabbing the g-pawn is also okay) 18.Nf5 as in C. Halasz – Pal, Hungary 1997. Now an improvement is:



18...Bxf5N 19.gxf5 Nc4 20.Bxc4 Rxc4μ

17...gxf3

This still looks strong, even without the inclusion of the queenside moves.

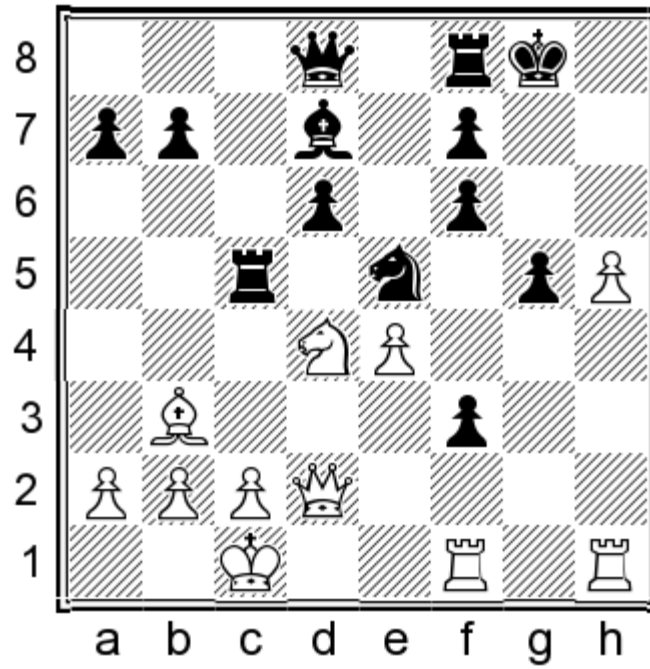
18.Nxf6†

18.Rdf1 e6 19.Nxf6† Qxf6μ Fiensch – Raty, corr. 1986.

18.Rhg1 Kh7! 19.Nxf6† exf6 20.Qe3 was Gaida – Maliszewski, Poland 1991. Here there was no reason to jettison the f3-pawn so 20...g4N should have been played.

18...exf6 19.Rdf1

19.Nxf3 Nxf3 20.Qxd6 Rc7 21.Rhf1 g4 and White hadn't got anywhere in Mularczyk – Raty, corr. 1986.

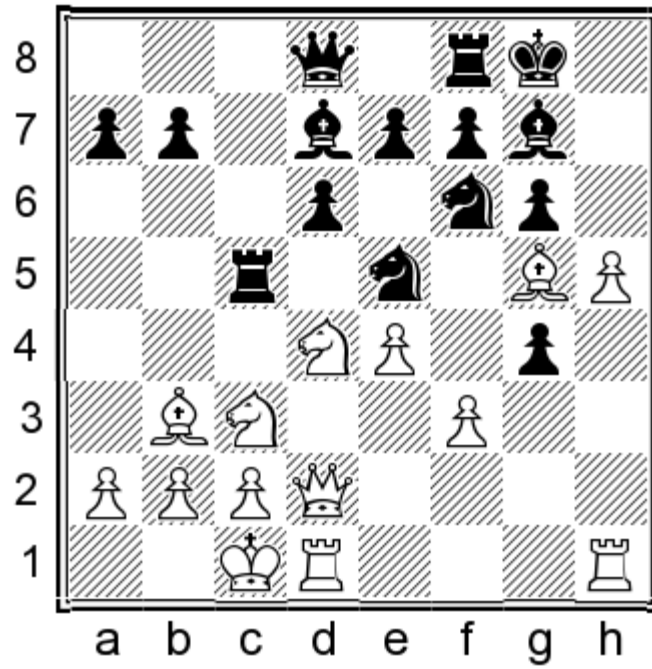


19...Bg4!? 20.Rhg1 Qd7 21.Qe3 Kg7 22.Kb1 Rh8

We have been following Chalupa – Novy, Czech Republic 2001. Black is two pawns up and h5 is dropping, while his king is perfectly safe.

B) 15.h5

This is White's other main try, playing in exactly the same manner as after 14.Kb1 b5. I'll try to flag up the differences between them.



15...Nxb5

As mentioned above, this split is almost identical to that on page 38 in Chapter 1: B1) 16.Rxb5?, B2) 16.f4?!, B3) 16.Rd1 and B4) 16.Nd5.

16.Bh6 e6! 17.Rd1 was Sasirekha – A. Gara, Szeged 1994. Here we should play 17...Nxf3!N 18.Nxf3 gxf3 19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.Qxd6 Rg5 21.Rd1 f2 with a big advantage.

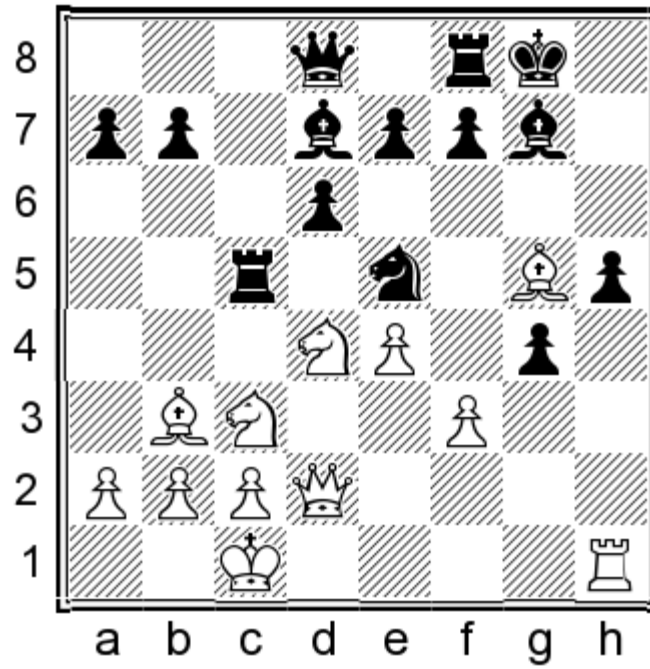
B1) 16.Rxb5?

Sacrificing the exchange before playing f3-f4 is nearly always a mistake.

16...gxf3 17.Nd5

17.Qh2?! allows 17...Nd3† or 17...Rxc3N, both of which are decisive.

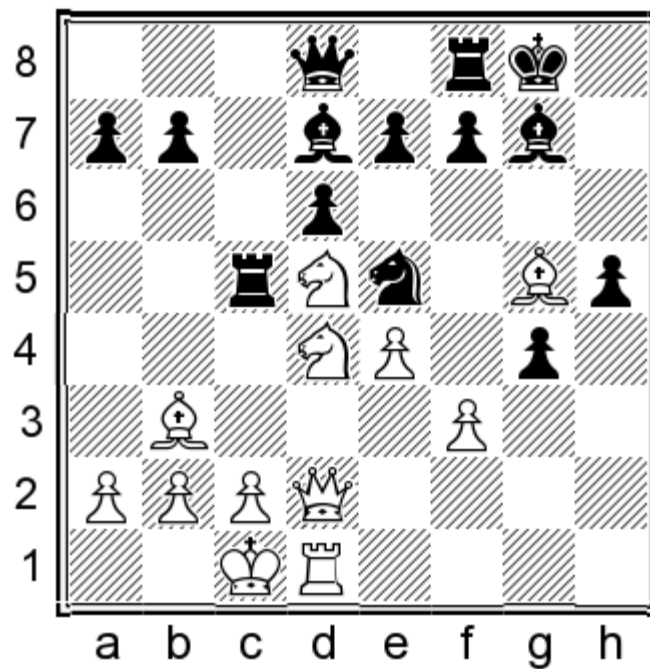
17.Rh1 was tried in Kiltti – Hallenberg, Espoo 1997, but White doesn't get anywhere after:



17...gxf3N 18.Rxh5 (18.Bh6 e6) 18...Qa5-+

17.f4 tries to rectify White's previous error but now Black can instead play 17...Nc6N. Remember, exchanging pieces is a good way to defuse White's attack.

The text was played against a young Shirov. He continued with the thematic:



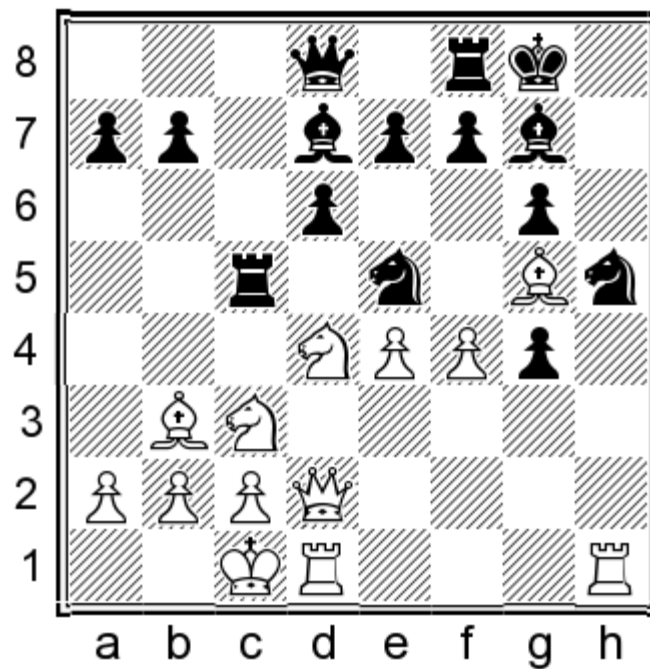
17...Rxd5 18.Bxd5 gxf3

There's also nothing wrong with copying our previous treatment: 18...Nxf3 19.Nxf3 gxf3 In Strowsky – Helstroffer, Cannes 2000, White tried 20.e5 (20.Bh6N 20...e5! is the important idea to remember) but after 20...Bg4! Black was just winning.

19.Nf5 Bxf5 20.exf5 Qd7 21.Qf4 Rc8 22.Kb1 Qb5--+

Rios Parra – Shirov, Tunja 1989.

B2) 16.f4?!

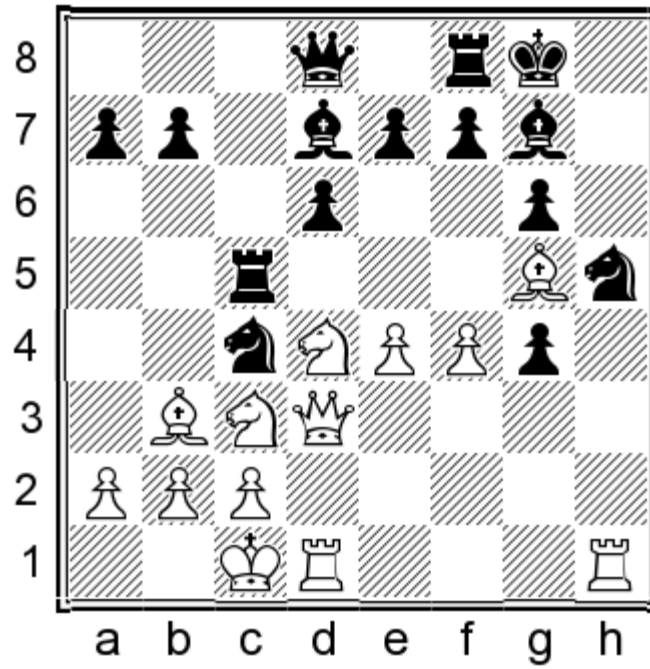


As in the 14.Kb1 variation, this is a flawed plan.

16...Nc4 17.Qe2

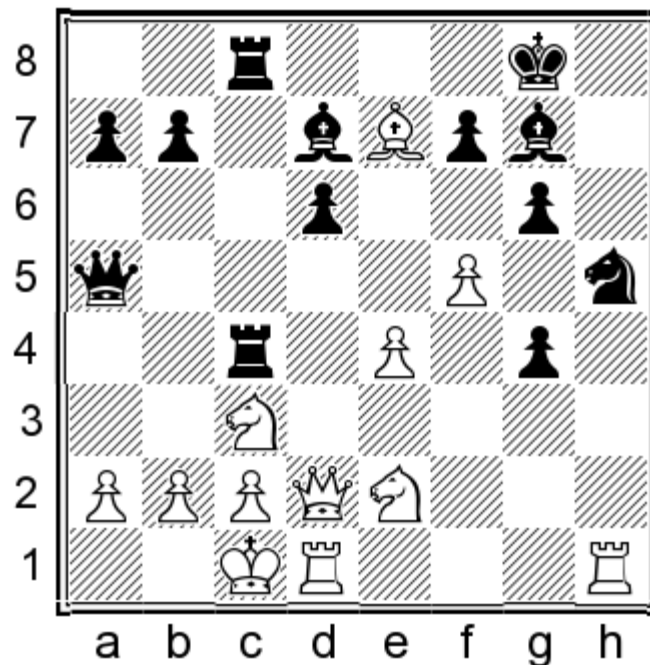
White's idea behind placing the queen on e2 is that he can play f4-f5 without allowing ...Ne5 to gain a tempo.

17.Qd3 gives us the option of transposing to 15.f4 with 17...b5, or copying Vigorito's suggestion in a similar position:



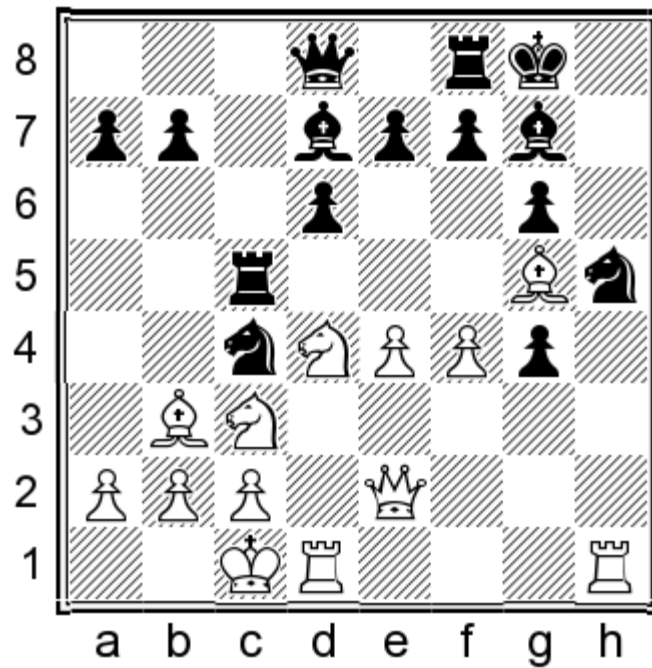
17...Rxc5!? 18.fxc5 Ne5 Black went on to win in Yanqing Yang – Ziji Zhang, Zhongshan 2014.

17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Nde2 There's very little positive one can say about White's position. He has sacrificed two pawns and given up his light-squared bishop and what he has received in return is nebulous. 18...Qa5! looks excellent for Black, for example: 19.Bxe7 Rfc8 20.f5



20...Rxc3! 21.Nxc3 Rxc3 22.Kb1 Ba4 23.Rc1 Qb4 24.f6 Nxf6 25.Bxd6 (Or 25.Qxc3 Qxc3 26.bxc3 Nxe4 and despite White's extra two rooks he is completely lost.) 25...Nxe4 26.Bxb4 Nxd2+ 27.Ka1 Rxc2 28.Rxc2 Bxc2 29.Bxd2 Be4+ Guizar – Schartner, corr 2001.

As mentioned in the above note to 17.Qd3, Vigorito suggests:



17...Rxc5!?

17...Na5!?N, playing like Ivanchuk did in the main line, also looks interesting.

18.fxc5 Ne5

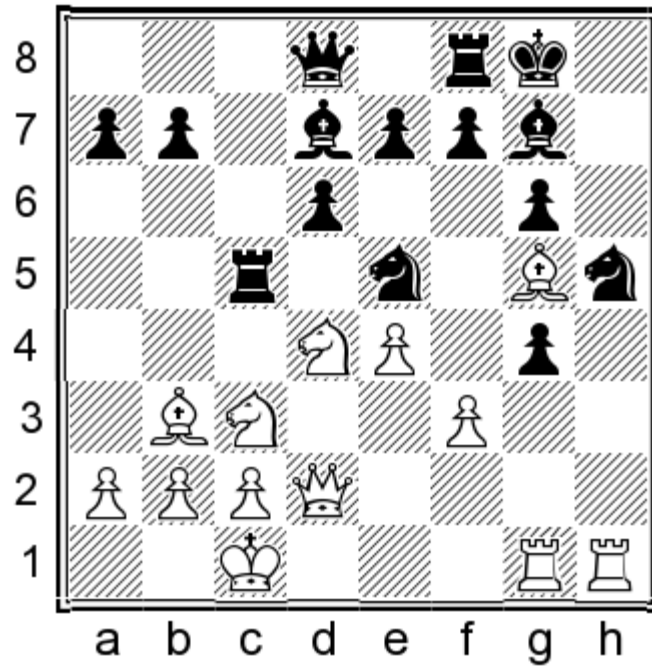
At the cost of an exchange, Black has a beautiful outpost for his knight. The only game to reach this position didn't last long.

19.Rxc5?! gxc5 20.Qh2 g3

0-1 Kaiumov – Serper, Soviet Union 1986.

B3) 16.Rdg1

This rare idea has only been played once, in Bordas – S. Farago, Budapest 1990, but again it needs to be taken seriously. I think we can try to play in the same manner as with Kb1 and ...b5 inserted.



16...Nc4!?N

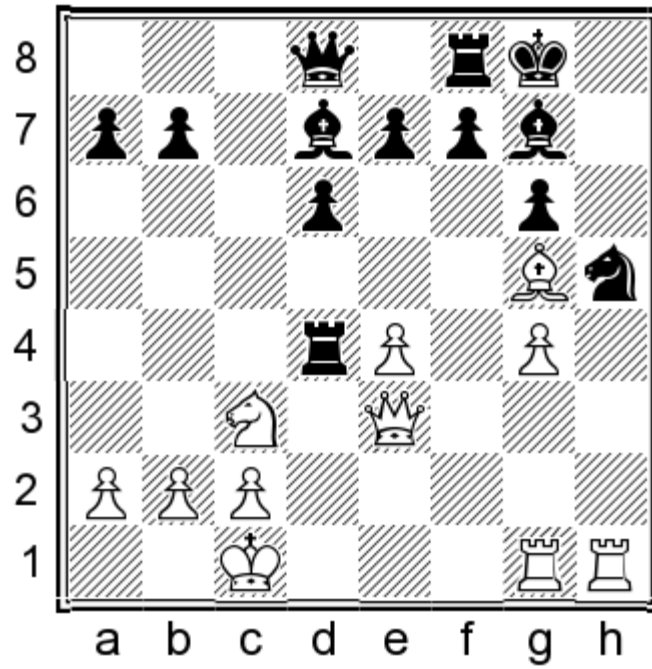
16...Qb6!?N 17.Bh6 Bf6 18.Be3÷

17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.fxg4

18.Nf5?! doesn't really achieve anything, as 18...Bxf5 19.exf5 Bxc3 20.bxc3 Qa5 leaves White's king too exposed.

18...Rxd4 19.Qe3

Now I like:



19...Nf6 20.Qxd4

Taking the rook is automatic but Black now gets strong counterplay.

20.Bh6!? Nxg4 21.Rxg4 Bxg4 22.Bxg7 Kxg7 23.Qh6† (23.Qxd4† f6µ) 23...Kf6 24.Qh4† Kg7= is just a draw.

20.Qh3!? Re8 21.Bh6 Bxg4 22.Rxg4 Nxg4 23.Bxg7 Kxg7 24.Qh7† Kf6 25.Qh4† Kg7= is another perpetual.

20.Bxf6 Bxf6 21.Qh6 looks dangerous but after 21...Re8 White can't get any further.

20...Qa5 21.Qd2

21.Nd5 Nxd5 22.Qxd5 Qa4,

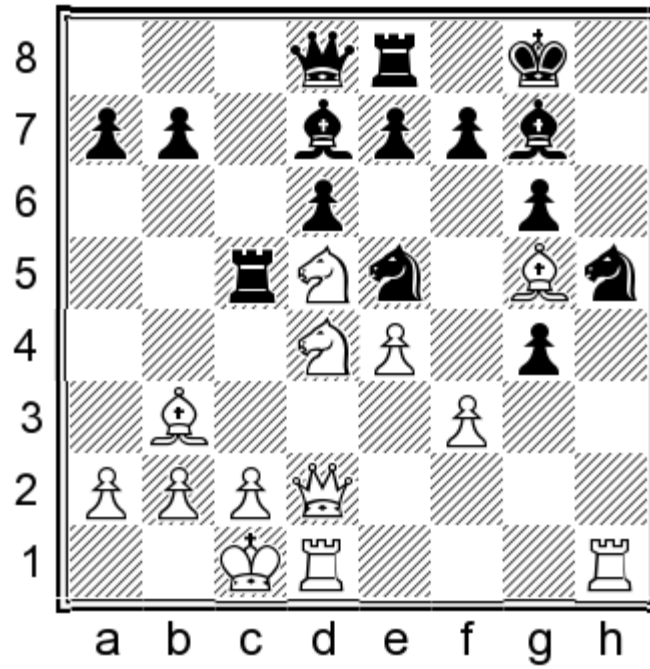


The immediate 21...Nxe4 should also be considered.

22.e5 Nxc4 23.Bxc4 Qxc4 24.Bxd6 Qd4=

Black has at least a draw as 26.Kd3?! d5! is extremely dangerous.

16...Rxd5!? is also possible immediately, but it makes sense to play in the same manner as we do after 14.Kb1 so we're less likely to get confused.



White's options again have a familiar feel: B41) 17.fxg4, B42) 17.Rxh5 and B43) 17.f4.

As usual 17.Bh6?! should be met with 17...e6!µ.

17.Nf5? was tried in a couple of games but the forcing 17...Bxf5! 18.exf5 Nxf3 19.Qe3 Nxg5 20.Qxg5 (or 20.fxg6 e6! 21.gxf7† Nxf7 22.Rxh5 exd5—+ Gibis – Gschwendtner, Germany 1994) 20...e6 is good for Black, Foukal – Novy, Klatovy 2004.

17.Nf4?! Qa5! Black's position was already pleasant but here White panicked and after 18.Nxg6? Qxd2† 19.Rxd2 Nxg6 20.Rxh5 Nf4 21.Bxf4 Rxh5 Black was completely winning in Correa – Petrova, Chotowa 2010.

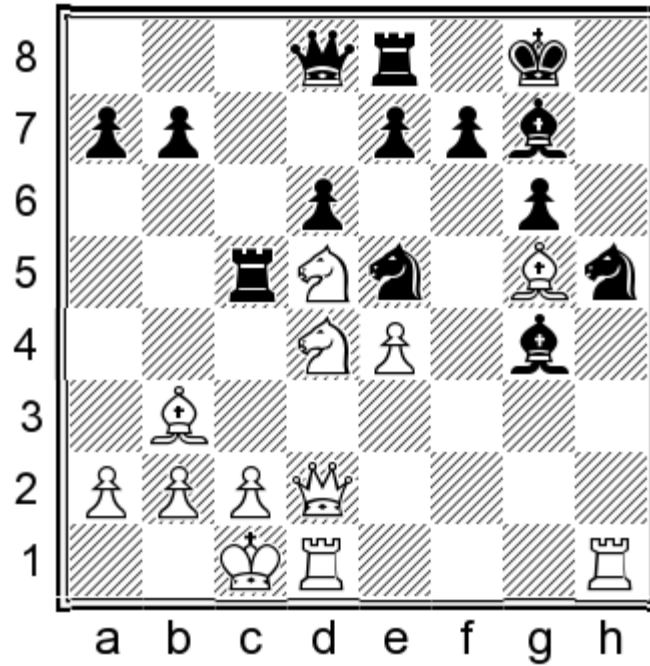
B41) 17.fxg4

This move is extremely rare. In fact the only game I could find to reach this position was agreed drawn immediately after Black's reply. However, the move is the engine's top choice and so should be checked. Play might proceed as follows:

17...Bxg4

½-½ Frolov – Kahn, Budapest 1996.

17...Nf6N is also worth considering.

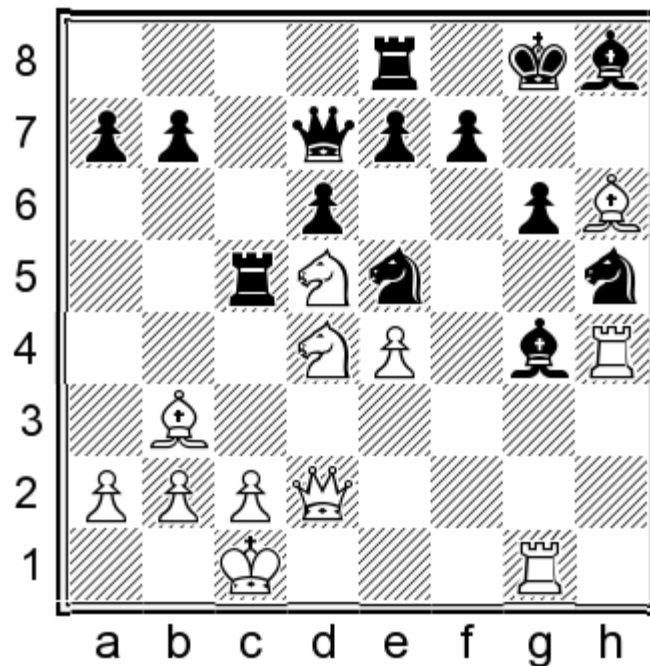


18.Rdg1N 18...Qd7 19.Bh6 Bh8

19...e6 also looks fine: 20.Bxg7 Kxg7 21.Ne3 Bf3 22.Nef5† (22.Rh3 Bxe4 23.Rxh5 Nd3† 24.Kb1 Rxh5 25.cxd3 Bc6÷) 22...exf5 23.Nxf5† Kg8 24.Qh6 Bxh1 25.Rxg6† Nxg6 26.Qxg6† Kf8 27.Qh6† Kg8=

20.Rh4

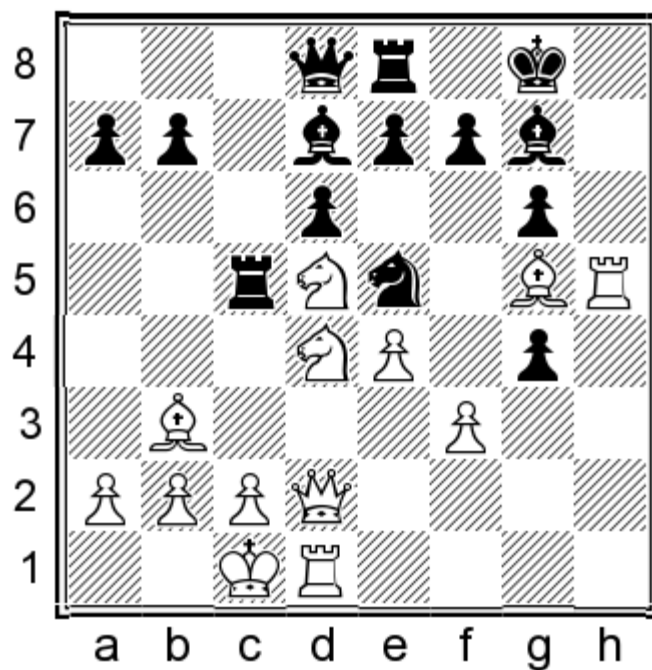
20.Ne3 Nf6 21.Nxg4 Nexg4 22.Rh4 d5! 23.exd5 Rxd5! 24.Bxd5 Qxd5 25.Nb3 Nxh6 26.Qxh6 Bg7³



20...e6 21.Nc3 b5 22.Rhxg4 Nxg4 23.Rxg4÷

B42) 17.Rxh5

This is White's other critical try but it's been defanged.



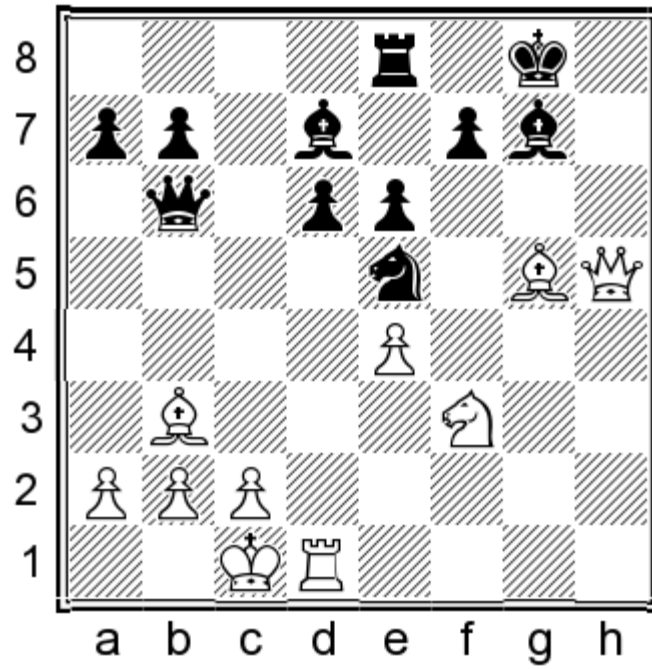
17...gxh5 18.Qh2 Rxd5! 19.Bxd5 Qb6 20.Qxh5

Of course 20.Nf5?? doesn't work here as b2 is undefended – a key difference between this position and 14.Kb1. There the b5-pawn would block Black's pressure on b2.

20...e6 21.Bb3 gxf3

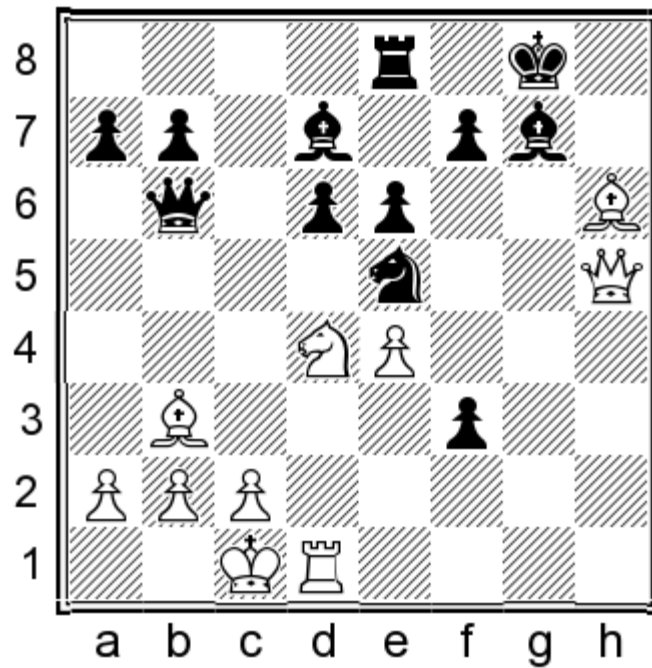
Now White has two main choices: B421) 22.Bh6 and B422) 22.Be3.

22.Nxf3?!N This was my main line in the 14.Kb1 variation but here White gets into trouble after:



22...Qc5! The big difference is that White cannot move his bishop from g5 due to ...Nd3† picking up the queen.

B421) 22.Bh6



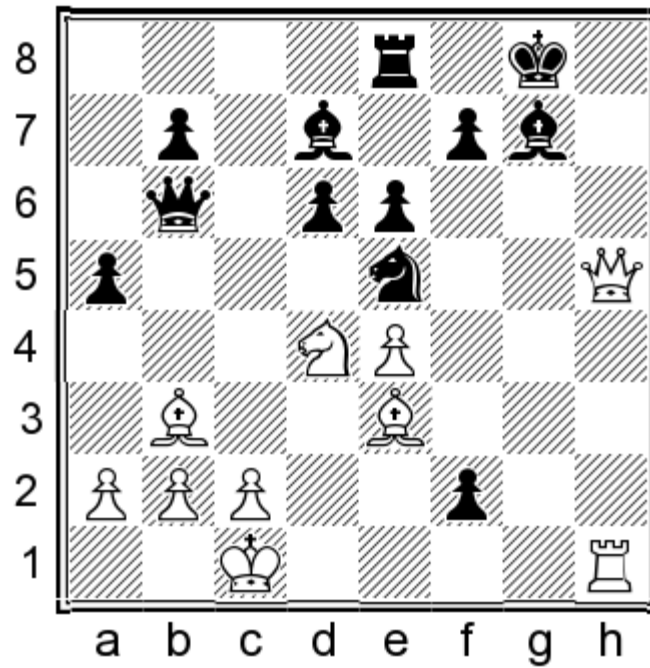
22...f2!N

I think this is a strong move. Dealing with the pawn costs White a few tempos and allows Black to get organized.

23.Bxg7

23.Qg5 Nd3†! 24.cxd3 Qxd4μ

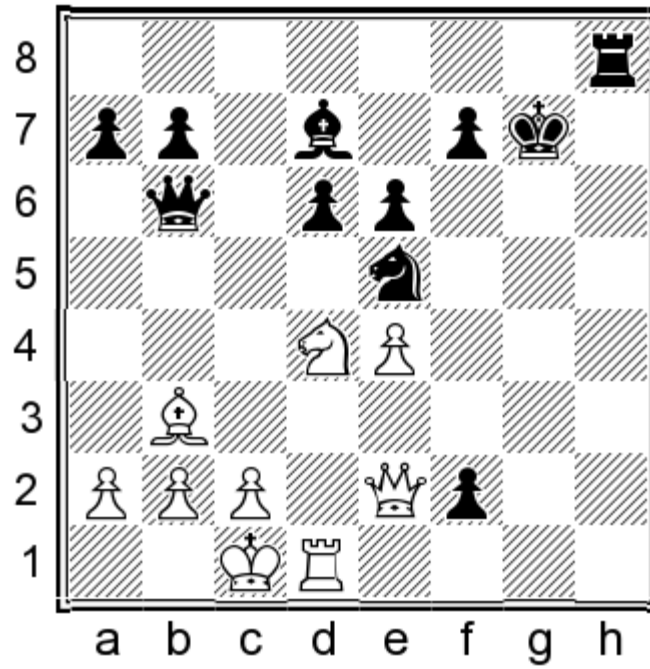
23.Be3 a5! Pointing out that the b3-bishop is short of squares. 24.Rh1 (24.Nf5 Qa6! 25.Nxg7 f1=Q—+; or 24.a4 Bxa4! 25.Bxa4 Nc4 26.Bb5 Nxe3 27.Bxe8 Qc7μ)



24...Qd8 Black gets time to bring the queen to f6, slowing down White's effort to win the f2-pawn. 25.Bxf2? Qf6 followed by 26...a4 wins a piece.

23...Kxg7 24.Qe2 Rh8

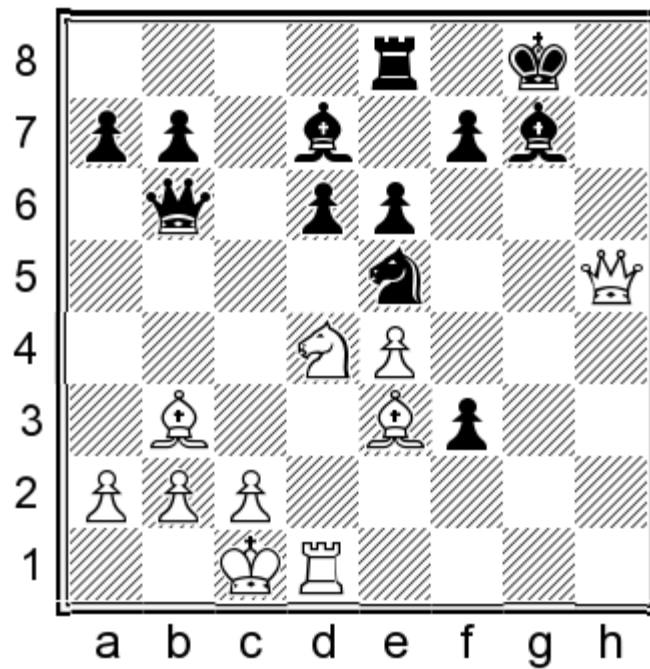
24...Bc6!?



25.Qxf2 Rh6³

The rook gives Black's king good protection while Black still has an extra pawn.

B422) 22.Be3



22...Qa5!?N

This was offered as an alternative by Vigorito and still doesn't appear to have been tried. It looks perfectly playable to me and I've added some possible variations.

22...Qd8

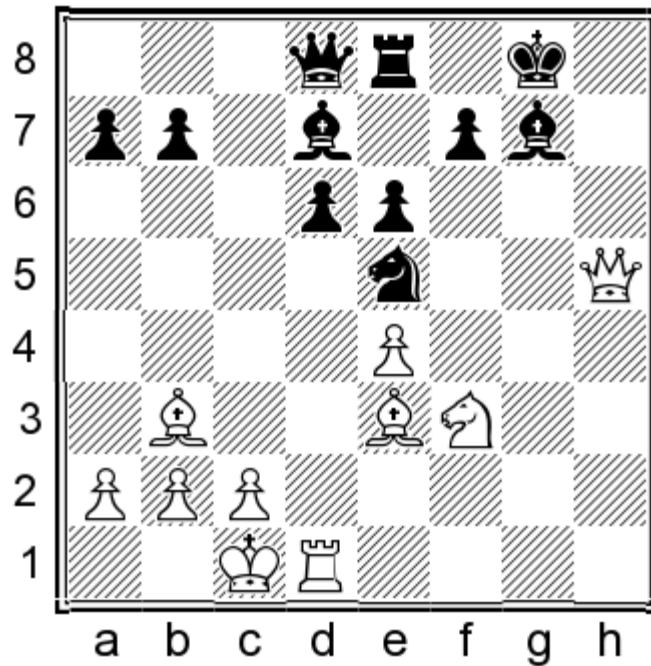
In practice Black has always dropped the queen back to here. The idea is to bring the queen to f6 to help support the king and create threats along the long diagonal.

23.Nxf3

This is White's best. He manages to restore material parity but he'll still suffer a little in the endgame.

a) 23.Bg5? Qa5! The bishop on g5 is caught in an awkward pin. 24.Qh4? (24.Kb1 Bc6N 25.Nxc6 bxc6 26.Bh6 Bxh6 27.Qxh6 Qc5µ) 24...Ng6 25.Qh5 f2-+ Farooqui – Sosonko, Malta (ol) 1980.

b) 23.c3?! Qf6! White now regrets not having taken that pawn on f3 as it's not so easy to round up. 24.Bc2 Qg6 25.Qh4 Qg4 26.Qh2 Qg2 27.Qf4 Qg4 28.Qh2 Qg2 29.Qf4 Ng4-+ Kaakinen – Froeberg, corr. 1991.



23...Nxf3 24.Qxf3 Qf6 25.Qxf6 Bxf6

Vigorito gives the following reference:

26.Bf4 Bc6 27.Rg1† Kf8 28.Bxd6† Be7 29.Bf4

This was apparently drawn in Marton Bardocz – Grima, corr. 2004, although I can't find the game. Black can continue here with:

29...Bc5

Black has a small edge thanks to the better bishops and the vulnerable e4-pawn, although White should be able to hold the draw.

23.Rh1

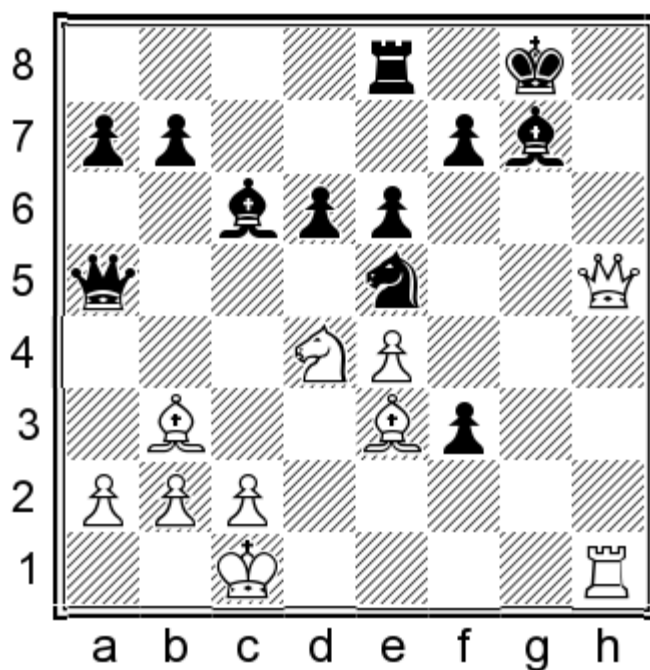
23.Kb1 Nc4! 24.Qxf3 Nxe3 25.Qxe3 Kf8 26.c3 Ke7µ Black's king is safe and he can now try to utilize his extra pawn.

23.Qh3 Bc6!? 24.Nxc6 bxc6 25.Qg3 Kf8

23.Rg1?? Nd3† This is of course the point behind putting the queen on a5.

23...Bc6

The following line is long and so almost certainly contains a flaw somewhere, but at any rate the position seems easier for Black. White struggles to create any meaningful threats whilst at the same time preventing Black from mating on e1 and stopping the f3-pawn from causing trouble.



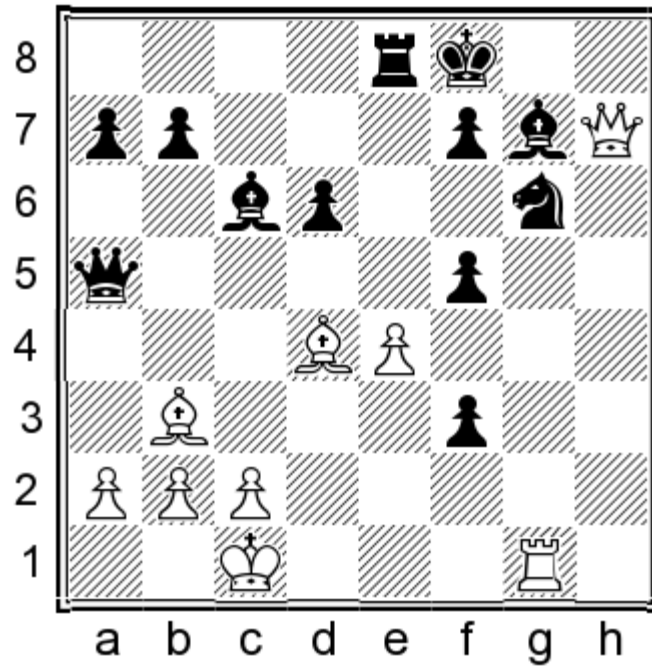
24.Qh7† Kf8 25.Rg1 Ng6 26.Nf5!

White's best practical try.

26.Nxf3 Bxe4³ or 26.Bh6? Qe5—+.

26...exf5 27.Bd4

27.Bxf7? Qe5—+



27...Re5! 28.Bxf7! f2 29.Bxf2 Rxe4 30.Qg8†

30.Qxg6? Qe5–+

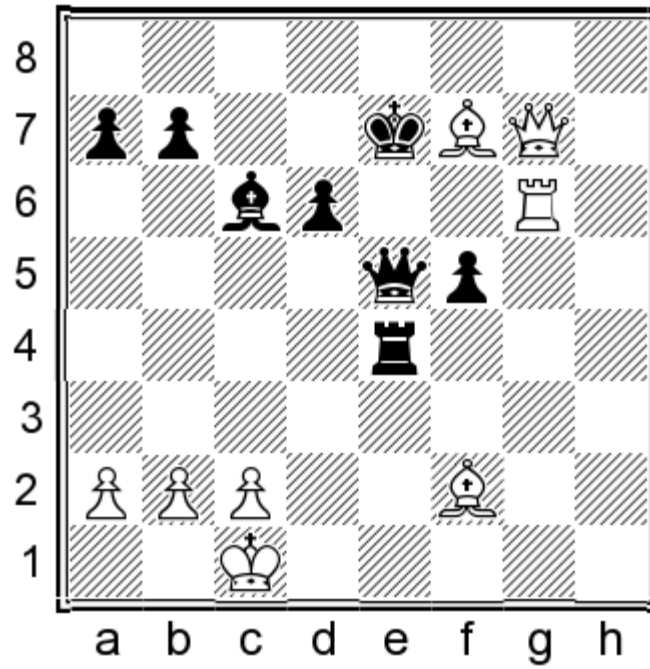
30.Rxg6?? Re1† 31.Bxe1 Qxe1#

30...Ke7 31.Qxg7

31.Bxg6 Bxb2†! 32.Kxb2 Qe5† 33.Kc1 Qf4† 34.Kb2 Rb4† 35.Kc3 Qxf2–+

31...Qe5 32.Rxg6

32.Qxg6?! Qf4†

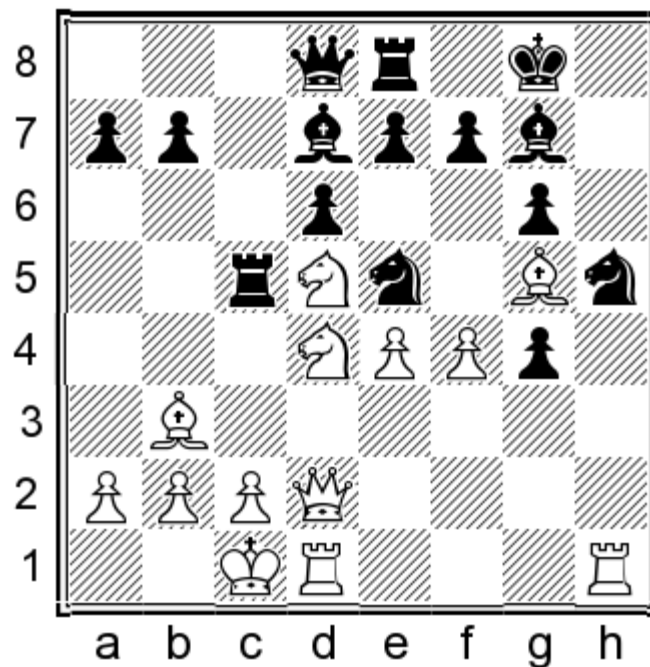


32...Re1† 33.Kd2 Re2† 34.Kd1 Qxg7 35.Bh4†! Kxf7 36.Rxg7† Kxg7 37.Kxe2

White should hold the ending.

B43) 17.f4

This used to be White's idea but, like 17.Rxh5, once Black had had time to study the variation it was discovered to be harmless and is now very rare.



17...Nc4

Now White needs to decide where to put his queen: B431) 18.Qe2, B432) 18.Qf2 or B433) 18.Qd3.

B431) 18.Qe2 Na5!?

I have a soft spot for this move. Black immediately gets rid of the b3-bishop after which White's attack is much less potent.

19.f5

19.Qe3 Nxb3† 20.Nxb3 Rxd5! 21.exd5 Qb6 The exchanges favour Black – even when the exchange down – as he has two good pawns, f4 is vulnerable and White's minor pieces are ineffectual. White tried to keep the queens on the board, but after 22.Qe1 Bf5 23.Rd2 Rc8 Black was obviously the one attacking in Albasa – Gonzaga Grego, email 2010.

19...Nxb3† 20.axb3

20.Nxb3 Rxd5! 21.Rxd5 Ng3 22.Qh2 Nxh1–+ Bartakke – Mari Arul, Chennai 2006.

20...Qa5 21.Kb1 Rxd5

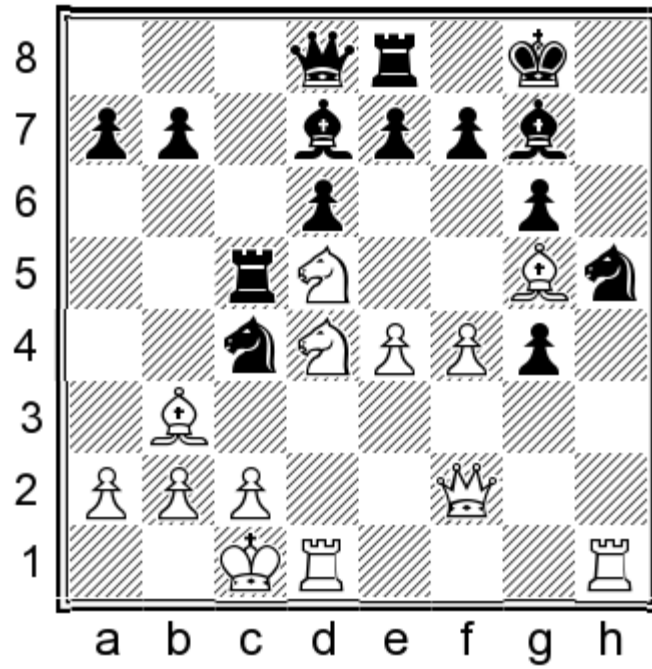
We've seen this motif enough times now that I don't feel we need yet another exclamation mark.

22.exd5 Qxd5 23.Qxg4 Bxd4 24.Qxd4 Qxd4 25.Rxd4 Ng3 26.Rh3

The game ends here claiming a White win. Either Black forgot to send his reply back or there was an input error, as Black is just winning, Guizar – John, corr. 1997.

B432) 18.Qf2

I suggest we play in the same style here too. However, as White's last didn't hit the knight we can take advantage of a more accurate move order:



18...Rxd5!

This hasn't been played in over-the-board chess but has scored well in correspondence.

19.exd5 Na5 20.f5

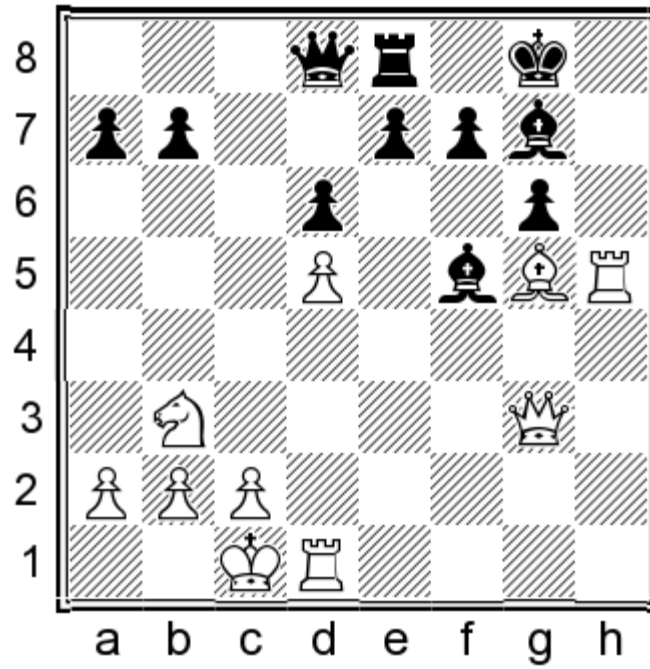
White's only aggressive option, as otherwise the g5-bishop is likely to be trapped for the rest of the game.

20...Nxb3† 21.Nxb3

21.axb3 Qa5 22.Kb1 Qxd5μ Eiben – Cardelli, corr. 1997.

21...Bxf5! 22.Rxh5 g3! 23.Qxg3

23.Qf3 Qc8! is Black's cunning idea, which both defends f5 and threatens mate on c2, so Black can pick up the rook for free.

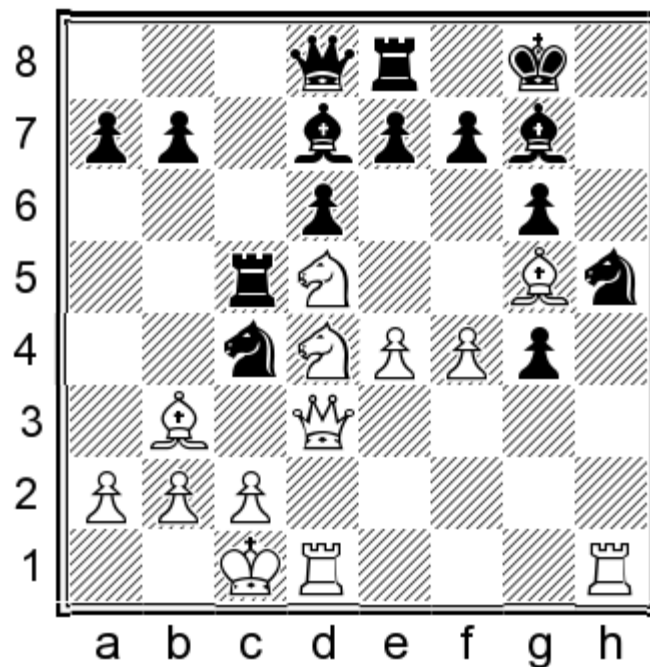


23...gxf5 24.Bh6 Bg6

Black won several moves later in Hempel – Noeth, email 2010.

B433) 18.Qd3

White's queen is more active here but the downside is that after f4-f5 we'll be able to return our knight to e5 with tempo. Therefore it makes less sense to put the knight on a5 now.



18...Qc8!

A rare move, but it appears to be promising for Black.

19.Rxh5

Or 19.f5 Rxd5!. We want to block in the bishop on b3. 20.exd5 Ne5 Now White has no pressure on f7. 21.Qe2 Bxf5 H. Koch – Goy, email 2007. White's attack has disappeared and the three pawns are far too much for the exchange.

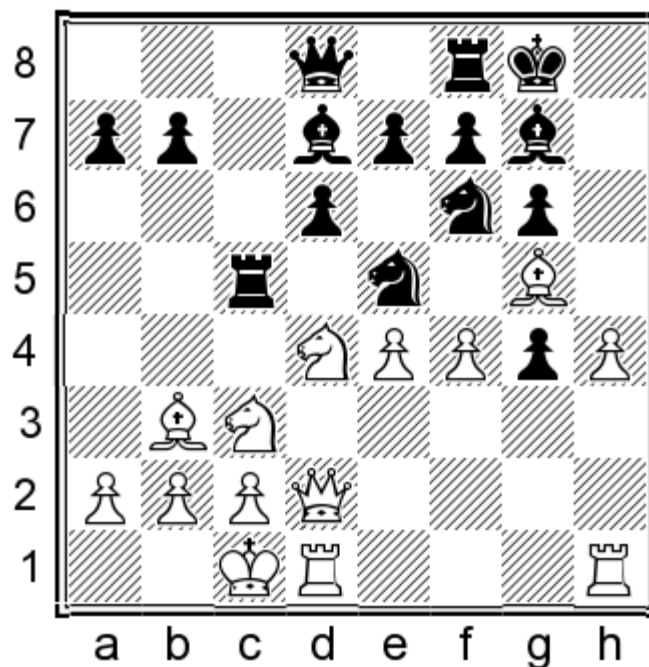
19.Nxe7† is probably the reason 18...Qc8 is so rare but as Vigorito points out 19...Rxe7 20.Bxe7 Nxf4 is good for Black, although after 21.Qf1 I'd prefer 21...Nh5 followed by ...Qe8.

19...gxh5 20.Nxe7† Rxe7 21.Bxe7 Qe8

After White drops back his bishop we can play either 22...b5 or 22...Na5, both of which leave Black with a clear extra pawn.

C) 15.f4

The main line. White pushes the knight away from the centre.



15...Nc4

White's options are C1) 16.Bxc4, C2) 16.Qd3 and C3) 16.Qe2.

C1) 16.Bxc4 Rxc4

Here Black has had to recapture with the rook but White still isn't in time to create any major threats.

17.e5

17.Qe2?! Rxc3! 18.bxc3 Qa5 is promising for Black.

17.Bxf6

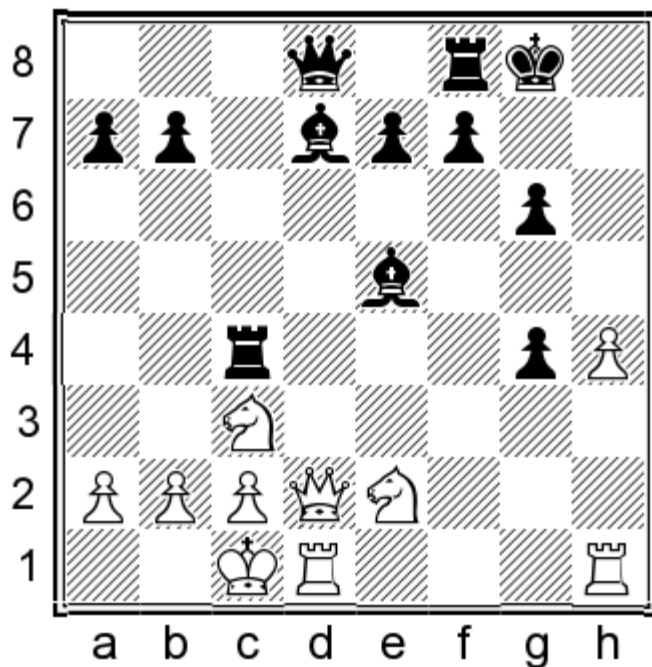
White is not in time to crash through.

17...Bxf6 18.e5

18.Nd5? worked well in Lazic – Mladenovic, Paracin 2009, but only because Black didn't play 18...Bxd4N. Why not take the piece? Black is winning: 19.b3 (19.Qd3 Bxb2†!? 20.Kxb2 Bb5) 19...e6 20.bxc4 Bc5! White's king is wide open.

18...dxe5 19.fxe5 Bxe5 20.Nde2

This was Pepino – Faraoni, Asti 1998, and now I like:



20...Rc7N 21.h5 e6 22.hxg6 fxg6 23.Qh6 Qe7 24.Qxg6† Qg7μ

17...Nh5

By blocking the h-file, White's attacking chances are lessened.

Black has another interesting choice: 17...b5!? Ignoring the kingside has worked well in practice. 18.Ndxb5 Bxb5 19.Nxb5 (19.exf6 exf6 20.Nxb5 fxg5 21.hxg5 Qb6 22.Qh2 Rfc8 23.Nc3 Rb8 24.Qh7† Kf8 25.Kd2 Qxb2 0–1 Froehling – Reschke, Wiesbaden 1992) 19...Ne4 20.Qd5 Qc8 21.Na3?! Rb4 22.Bxe7 Qf5! 23.Rhf1 Rada – Lanz Calavia, corr. 1998. After 23...Rc8N White is unable to deal with all the threats.

18.Qd3

18.Nd5 f6 simply picked up a piece in V. Rodriguez – Granara Barreto, Montevideo 1999: 19.exd6 exd6–+

18.exd6N can be met with either 18...Qb6 19.dxe7 Re8 20.Nde2 Bf5μ or 18...f6 19.Qe2 Rxd4 20.dxe7 Rxd1† 21.Rxd1 Qc8 22.exf8=Q† Bxf8μ.

18...Rxd4

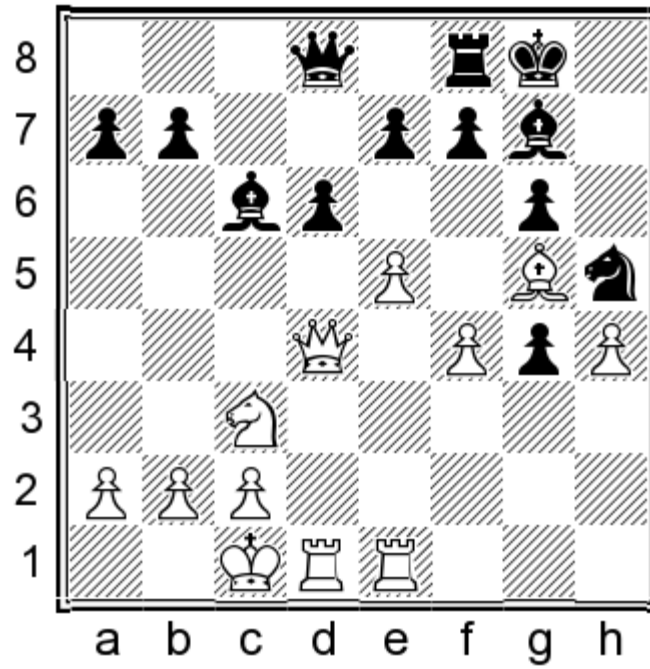
18...Qc8!?N is also good for Black.

19.Qxd4 Bc6

White's position doesn't look so bad but his main problem is the trapped bishop on g5. Should he move the f-pawn to try and extricate it, then the g7-bishop will become extremely powerful.

20.Rhe1

20.Nd5 f6! 21.Qc4 Kh8 22.f5 fxg5 23.fxg6 Rf4! 24.Nxf4 gxf4μ was Mueller – Marhun, corr. 1988. Black's minor pieces dominate the board.

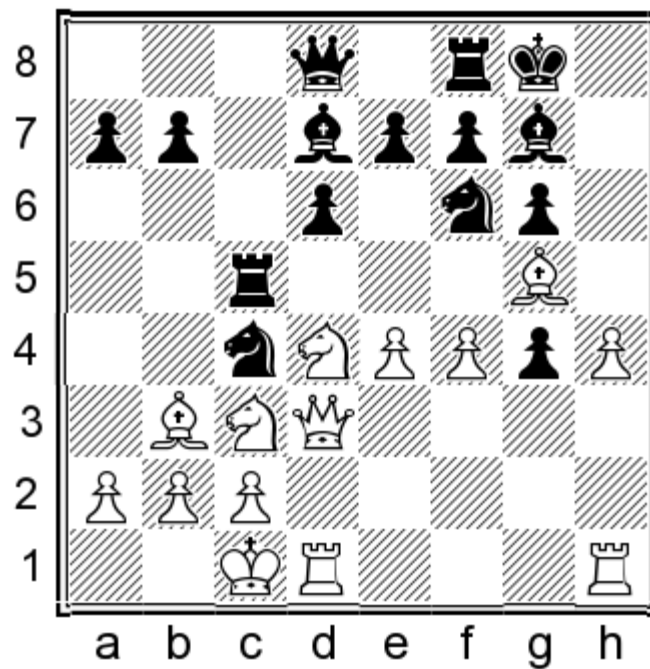


20...f6

Black picks up the g5-bishop with a decisive material advantage.

C2) 16.Qd3

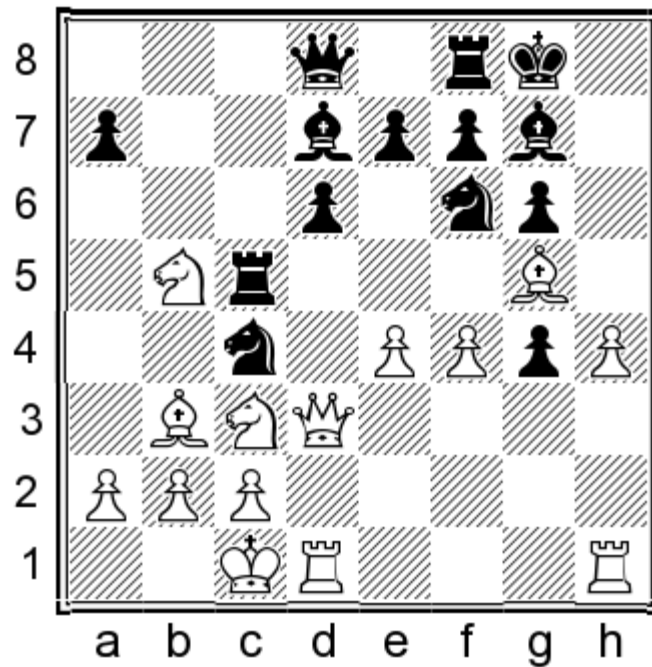
This is the more logical square for the queen but is actually rarer than 16.Qe2. I believe this is because White wants to continue with f4-f5 and doesn't want to allow Black to gain time with ...Ne5.



16...b5

White's main tries here are C21) 17.h5?!, C22) 17.Bxf6 and C23) 17.f5.

17.Ndxb5? allows a tactic you will see frequently in similar positions:



17...Nxb2! 18.Kxb2 Nxe4 19.Qxe4 Bxb5 20.Rd4 Bc6 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.Bxd5 Qa5 Black had a winning attack in Bendana Guerrero – Isaev, corr. 1988.

17.Kb1 would in fact transpose to variation D1 of Chapter 1 – see the note on 17.Qd3.

17.e5

This doesn't have any independent merit if Black replies with:

17...dxe5

17...Qc8!? is an interesting independent option for Black.

White should now transpose.

18.Bxf6

Instead 18.Ndxb5? is a big mistake. Whenever White plays this, clearing the long diagonal, you should check whether 18...Nxb2! works. Here it does: 19.Kxb2 e4 20.Qd2 Qb6! 21.Nd4 Rfc8 22.Nce2 a5 Black's attack was breaking through in Atri Sangari – Vescovi, Moscow (ol) 1994.

18...Bxf6

See variation C22 below.

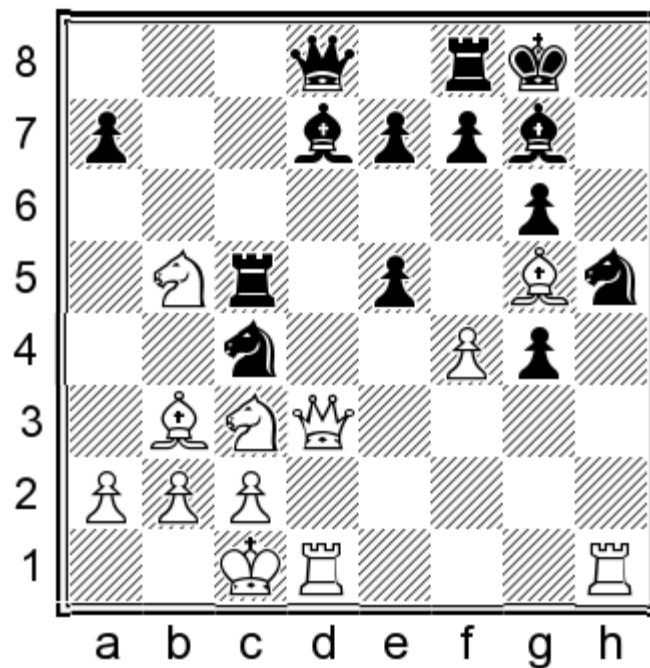
C21) 17.h5?!

This still doesn't work.

17...Nxb5 18.Nd5

18.f5? might look dangerous but Black has a trick: 18...Bxd4! 19.Qxd4 e5 20.Bxd8 exd4—+ A useful resource and well worth remembering.

18.e5 dxe5!? This liquidates into a pleasant endgame. (My engine tells me Black is winning after 18...Qb6N but the positions are more complex.) 19.Ndxb5 Jucker – Schendel, corr. 1989. Here both Dearing and Vigorito point out a strong continuation for Black:



19...exf4! 20.Bxc4 Rxc4 21.Qxd7 Qxd7 22.Rxd7 f3 The pawns overwhelm White.

18...f6!

White's pieces start to get pushed back and any attempts at sacrificing fail emphatically.

19.Bh4

No better is 19.Ne3 fxe5 20.Nxc4 bxc4 21.Bxc4+ d5! 22.Bxd5+ Rxd5 23.exd5 Nxf4—+ Jakirlic – Sirota, Melbourne 1998, or 19.e5 Rxd5 20.Qxg6 Be8 21.Qe4 Rxd4 22.Rxd4 fxe5—+ Zyla – B. Grabarczyk, Warsaw 1990.

19...e6 20.Ne3 Nxf4

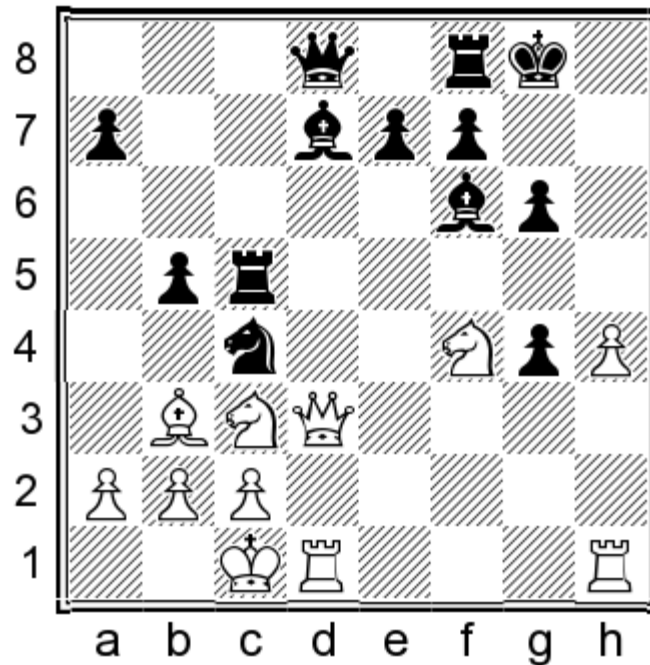
This position has been reached in a surprising number of correspondence games but Black should just be winning – we have three extra pawns after all.

C22) 17.Bxf6

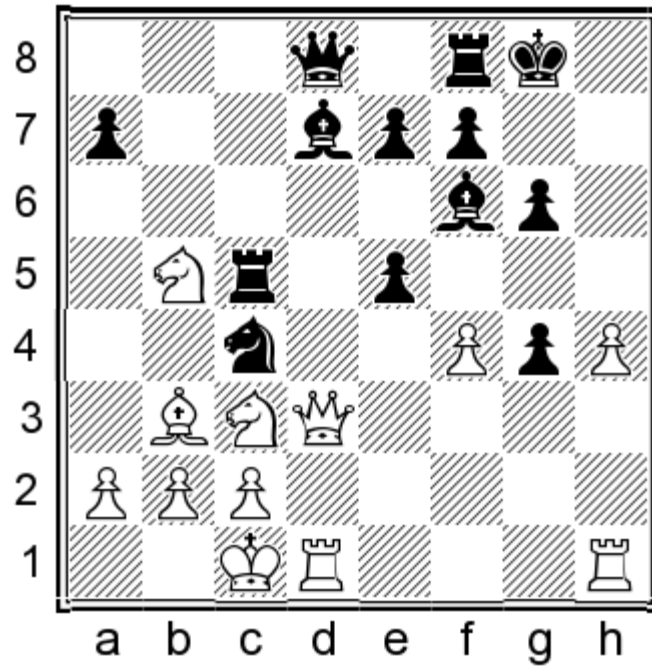
As is often the case when White trades off this bishop, he runs into trouble along the long diagonal.

17...Bxf6 18.e5 dxe5 19.Ndxb5

19.Nde2 exf4 20.Nxf4 (20.Qxd7 is analysed by Dearing: 20...Qxd7 21.Rxd7 f3 22.Ng3 Be5 23.Nge4 Here I'd prefer 23...Bf4+ [over his 23...g3] 24.Kb1 Re5—+.) The text occurred in Musil – Ji. Houska, Olomouc 2006, and now best is:



20...Qc7N 21.Nfd5 Rxd5 22.Nxd5 Bxb2+ 23.Kb1 Qe5—+



19...Nxb2!

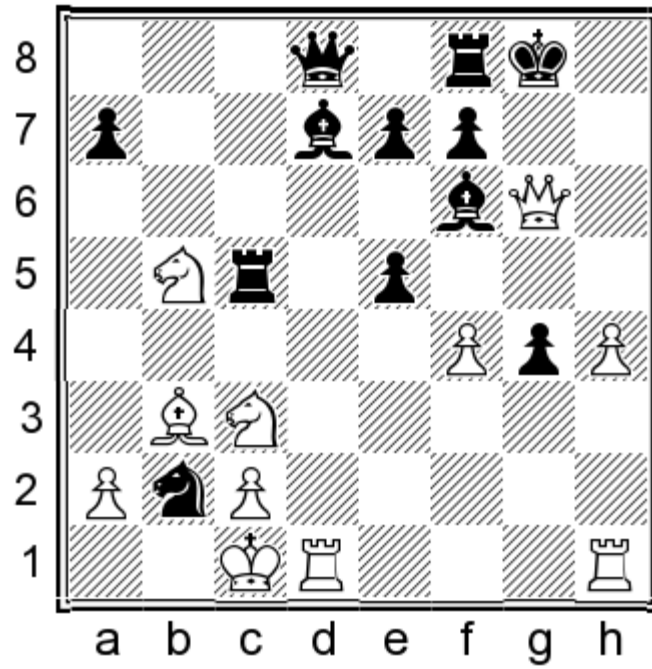
Black conjures up a fierce attack coupled with two strong connected passed pawns.

Now we should examine C221) 20.Qxg6†? before the more critical C222) 20.Kxb2.

Dearing also points out that 20.Qxd7? Nxd1! wins material.

C221) 20.Qxg6†?

Taking a pawn in front of your opponent's king with check is of course tempting, but here it just leaves White's pieces too loose.

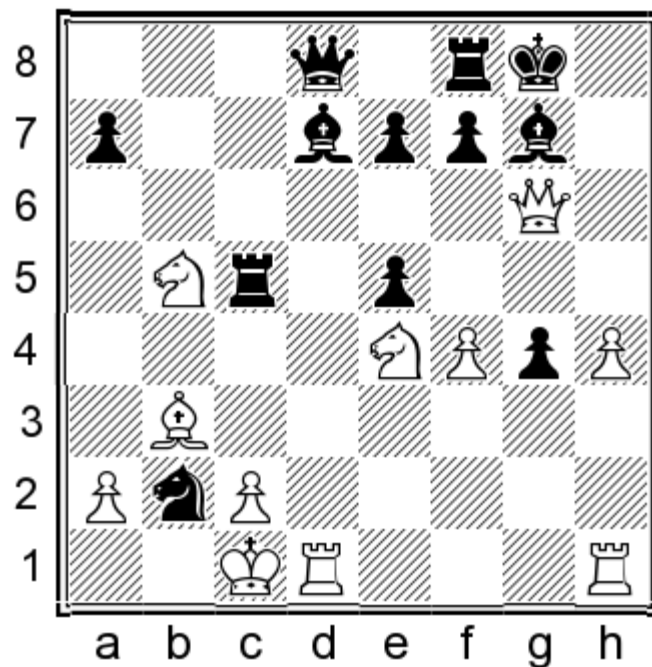


20...Bg7

White can't get any further on the kingside and he now has the impossible task of defending against Black's initiative.

21.Kxb2

21.Ne4



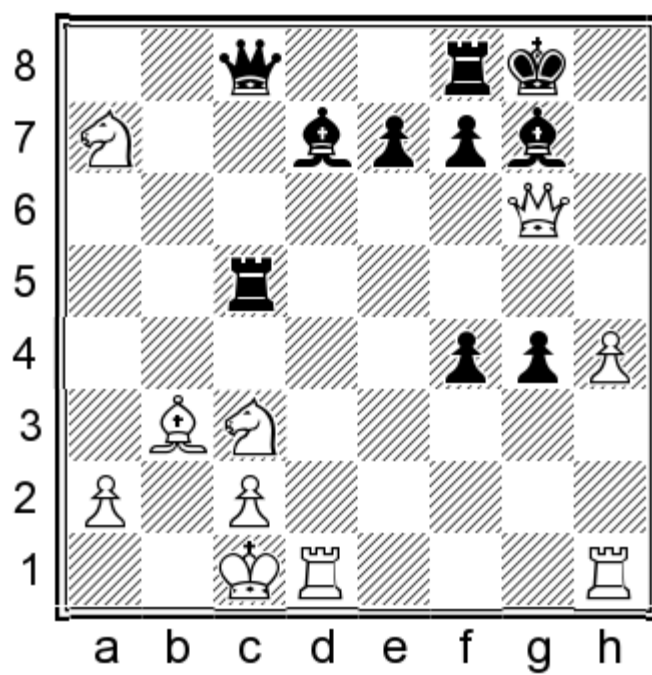
21...Rxc2†!N was pointed out by Golubev. (21...Rc4 was played in Diani – Casas, email 2011, and also worked well.) His line continues 22.Kxc2 Nxd1 23.Rxd1 Qc8† 24.Kb1 Bf5–+.

21.h5 Kh8! is given in various sources as winning for Black.

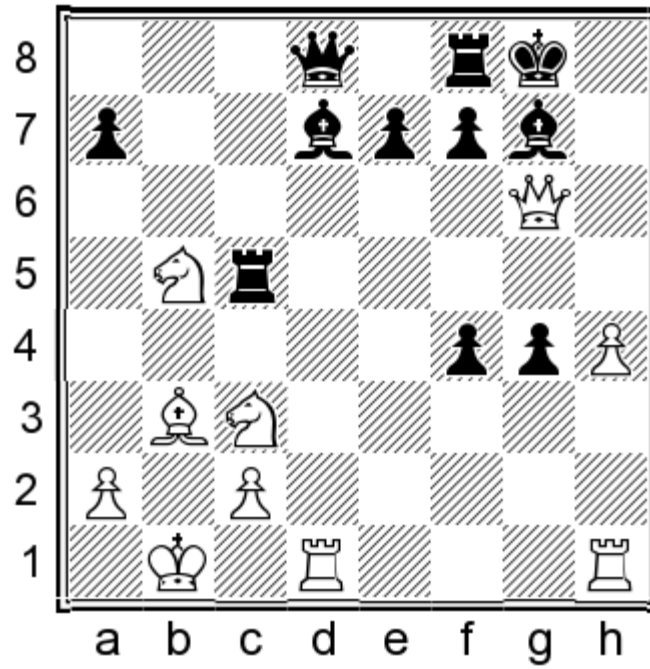
21...exf4 22.Kb1

22.Nd4 Qa5 23.Rd3 Rxc3! 24.Rxc3 Qb4! 25.Rd1 Qxb3† 26.axb3 fxg6 Again Black's pawn phalanx is too strong and White is still rather tangled on the long diagonal.

22.Kc1 Qc8 23.Nxa7 was Lavrentyev – Efremov, corr. 1996.



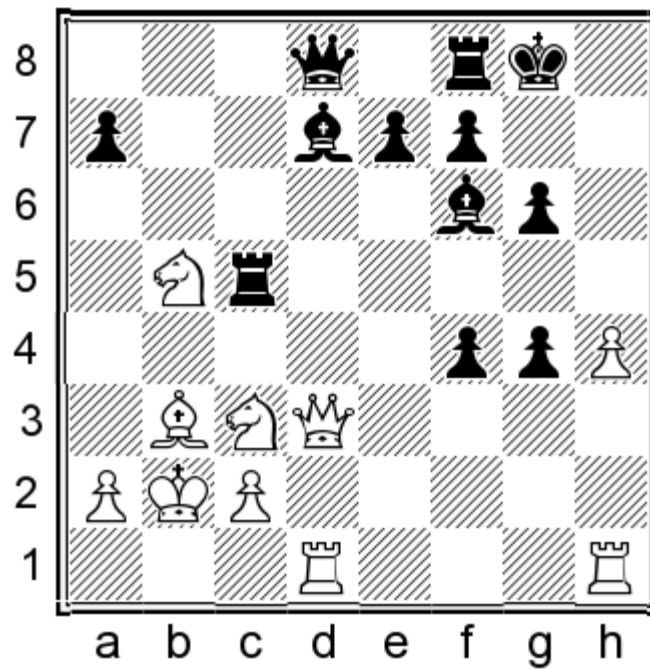
23...Qa8!N 24.Ne4 (24.Rxd7 Qxh1†) 24...Bf5 25.Qb6 Bxe4 26.Qxc5 Bxh1--+



22...Qa5 23.Rxd7 Rxc3 24.Qxg4 Qxb5 25.Rd5 Rxb3† 26.axb3 Qxd5 27.Rg1 Qe5

0–1 Delanoy – Moingt, Belgium 1993.

C222) 20.Kxb2 exf4



21.Kc1!

It looks strange to choose c1 over b1 but now the white king is closer to Black's connected passed pawns, which is important in the endgame.

21.Qxg6† Bg7 simply transposes to variation C221 above.

21.Kb1 e6 22.Qxd7 Qxd7 23.Rxd7 Bxc3 is another unpleasant endgame. Despite the extra piece the endgames are generally hopeless for White.

21...e6

Blocking the a2-g8 diagonal and so indirectly defending g6.

21...Kg7

This is recommended by both Dearing and Vigorito.

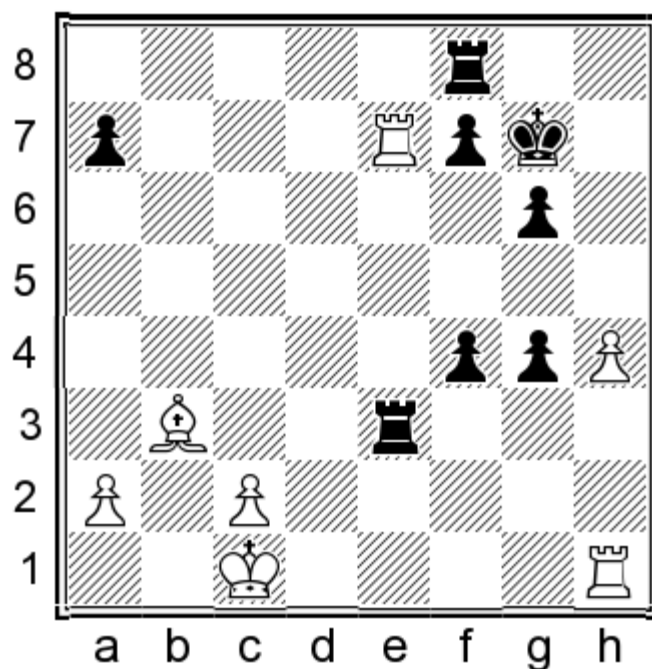
22.Qxd7 Qxd7 23.Rxd7 Bxc3 24.Nxc3 Rxc3 25.Rxe7

25.Kd2 Re3 26.Re1 Rxe1 was agreed drawn in A. Lopez – A. Peters, email 2004.

25...Re3

This is assessed as a clear advantage for Black by Dearing, probably based on the game Bernard – Habermehl, corr. 1992, which continued 26.Rxa7? f3 27.Kd2 Re2† 28.Kd3 g3 and the pawns were again too strong.

Instead White has to play:



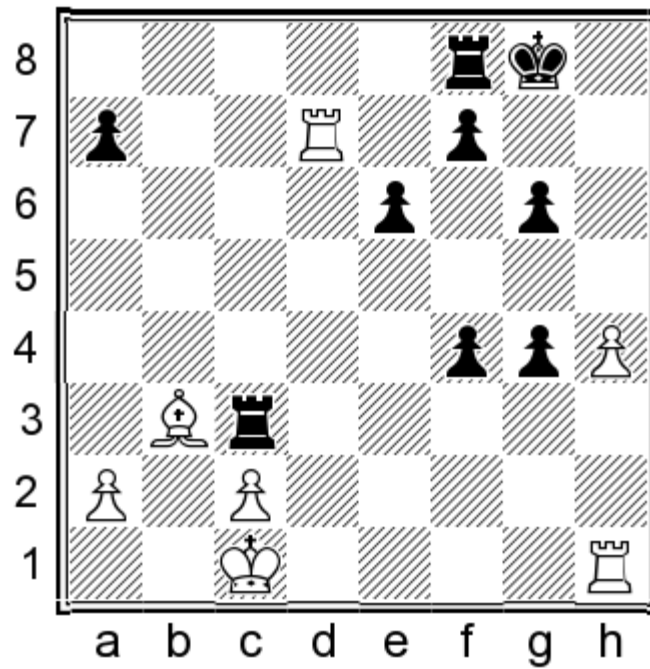
26.Rxe3N 26...fxe3 27.Kd1 f5 28.Ke2 f4 29.Bd5

White has good drawing chances.

22.Qxd7

One point of Black's previous move is that 22.Ne4N can now be met with 22...Bxb5! as the queen is defended. Following 23.Qxd8 Bxd8 24.Nxc5 White has an extra rook, but the pawns are still too strong after 24...g3.

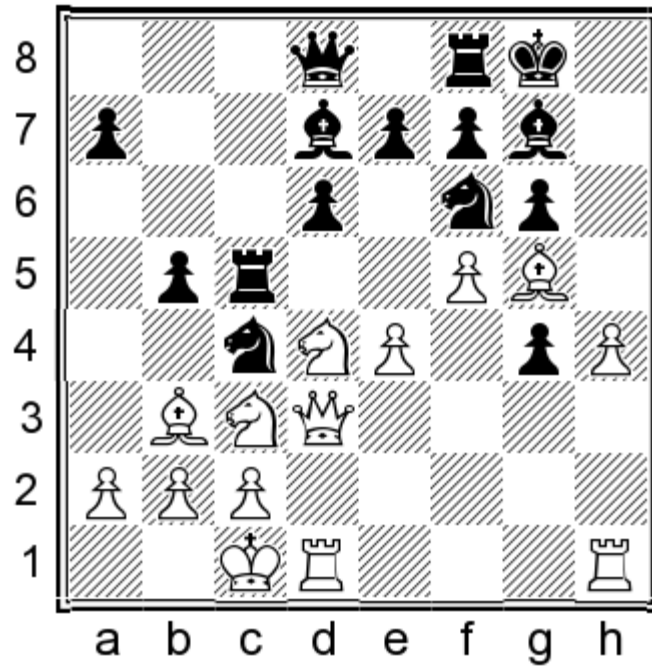
22...Qxd7 23.Rxd7 Bxc3 24.Nxc3 Rxc3



There has been quite a bit of correspondence action in this position with Black scoring +5 =2 -0. Obviously it is a very difficult position to defend.

C23) 17.f5

Black again has many good options but the most straightforward is:



17...gxf5 18.exf5

18.Nxf5? Bxf5 19.exf5 allows 19...Nxb2! 20.Kxb2 Rxc3! as pointed out by Vigorito.

18...Qc8

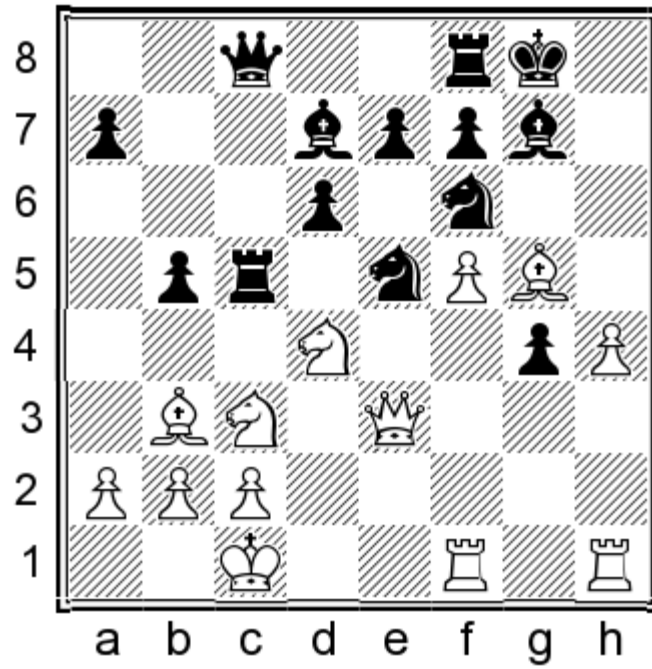
Black puts pressure on the f5-pawn and leaves the option of ...Ne5 whenever it's convenient.

19.Rdf1

19.Rhf1 Ne5 20.Qe3 Rxc3! (20...a5!?N might be even stronger) 21.Qxc3 Qxc3 22.bxc3 Rc8 leaves Black in a pleasant queenless middlegame.

19.Bxf6 Bxf6 20.Ne4 20.Rdg1N 20...Kh8μ defends comfortably as 21.Rxg4 allows 21...Ne5) 20...Bxd4 21.Qxd4 Rxf5μ Gonzalez Gil – Flor Trejo, email 2003.

19...Ne5 20.Qe3



20...a5N

20...Rxc3!? may also be considered.

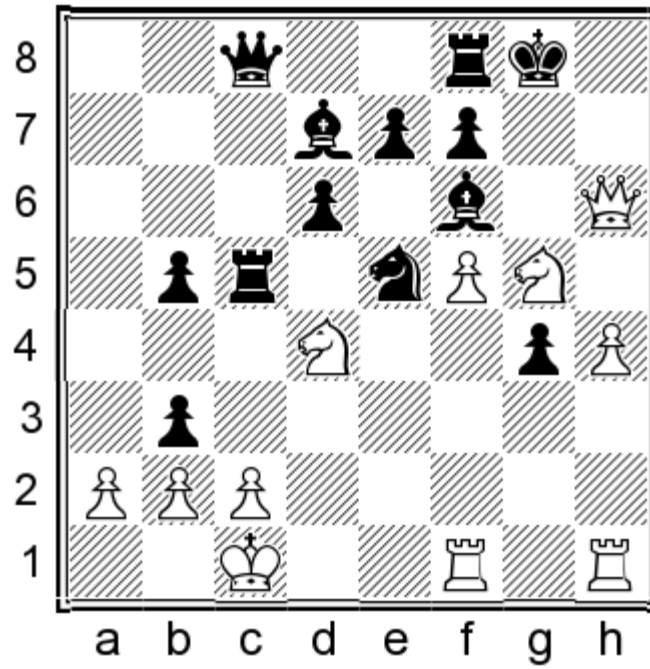
It's important to check the following line:

21.Bxf6

21.h5 Kh7!

21...Bxf6 22.Ne4 a4 23.Qh6 axb3 24.Ng5

It is looking rather scary for Black, but he is able to keep everything under control:



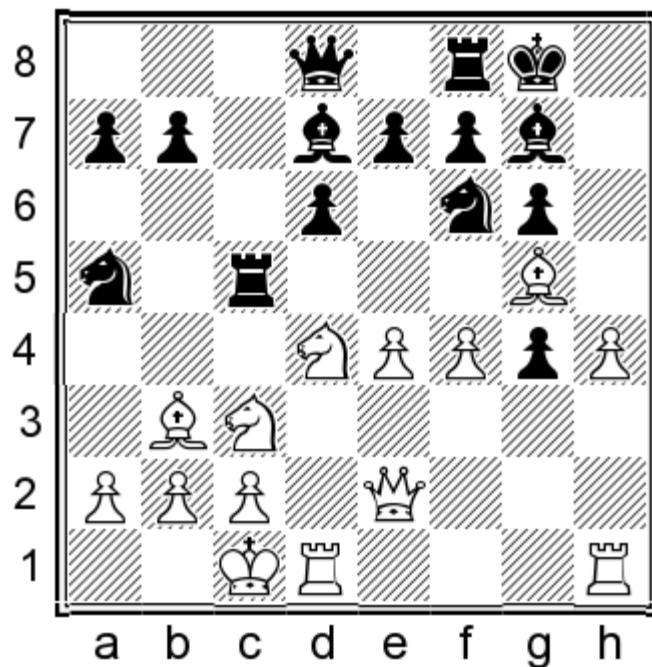
24...Rxc2† 25.Kd1 Rd8-+

C3) 16.Qe2

I spent a lot of time here because all the main options seem to be doing well for Black. In the end I decided to follow Ivanchuk, whose move doesn't allow White even equality.

16...Na5!

Ivanchuk's brainchild. It may seem strange to move the knight again but Black is getting ready to trade on b3 and sacrifice on c3.



17.e5

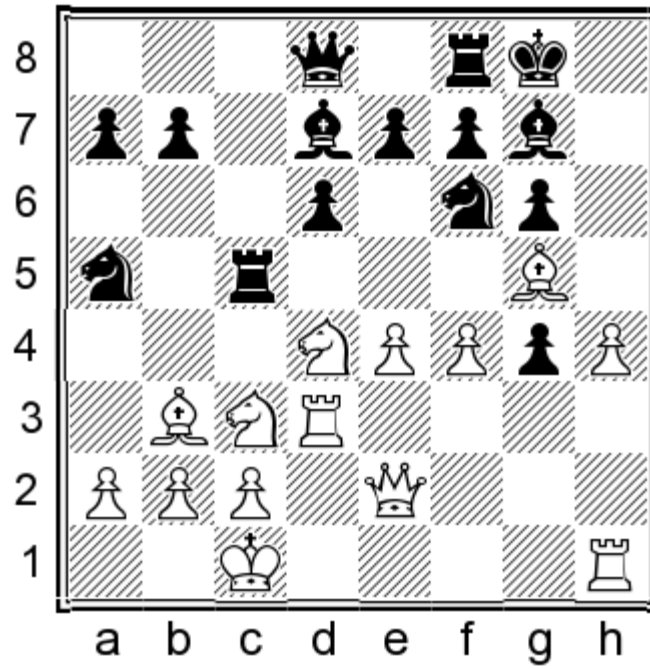
In practical games this has been played almost exclusively. It makes sense for White to try and exploit our loss of control of the e5-square but, as usual in this structure, Black can simply ignore the threat to the knight.

17.f5 Nxb3† 18.Nxb3 (18.axb3 was tested in Farkas – Yaroshenko, corr. 2005. Here I'd play 18...Qa5N with the idea 19.Kb1 Qa6µ. If White doesn't acquiesce to the queen trade he'll run into trouble on the a-file.) 18...Rxc3 19.bxc3 gxf5µ We've reached another position that has been seen in quite a few correspondence games and again Black is scoring well. White has the more vulnerable king and Black's bishop pair is useful.

17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.Qd3 (18.Nd5 e5! 19.Nxf6† Qxf6 20.fxe5 dxe5—+ Burr ridge – Ben Fredj, email 2012) 18...Nxb3† 19.Nxb3 Rxc3!/? (19...Rh5N might be even stronger) 20.bxc3 Qc7 21.h5 Qxc3µ Wernikiewicz – Berza, email 2006.

17.Qe3 doesn't change much: 17...Nxb3† 18.Nxb3 (18.axb3 Qa5 19.Kb1 Rfc8 20.Nde2 R8c6 gave Black a winning attack in Peng – Me, Calgary 2009) 18...Rxc3 19.bxc3 Nh7µ

17.Rd3 as played in T. Meier – Haas, Wuertemberg 2004, attempts to cut off our plan but it doesn't help:

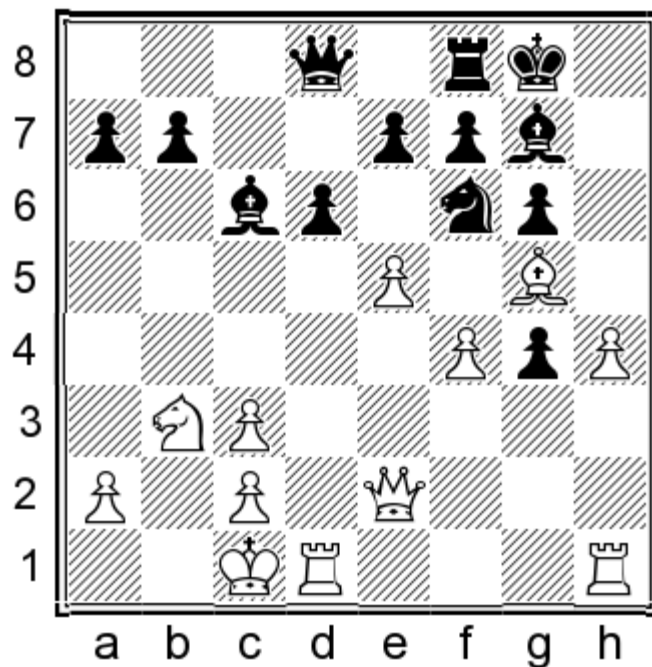


17...Nxb3† 18.Nxb3 Rxc3! 19.Rxc3 Nh5 20.Re3 Qb6µ We still threaten ...f6, and 21.Bxe7 Re8 22.Bg5 f6 doesn't help.

17...Nxb3† 18.Nxb3 Rxc3! 19.bxc3 Bc6

For the price of the exchange Black has one pawn, a safe king and good attacking chances. Meanwhile White's structure has been compromised and the bishop is still totally dead on g5. Black can actually win back the exchange by force here too.

19...Qc8!? is a good alternative plan.



Now C31) 20.exf6 is rarely played, while C32) 20.Rhf1 is more common.

20.exd6 has only occurred in one over-the-board game. 20...exd6 21.Rhf1 That game continued 21...Qc8, which worked well in Pogonina – I. Korobov, Nizhnij Novgorod 1999. Instead 21...Qe8!? is suggested by Dearing, giving Black a good ending after 22.Qxe8 Rxe8 23.Rxd6?! Ne4; and 21...Re8N looks even stronger.

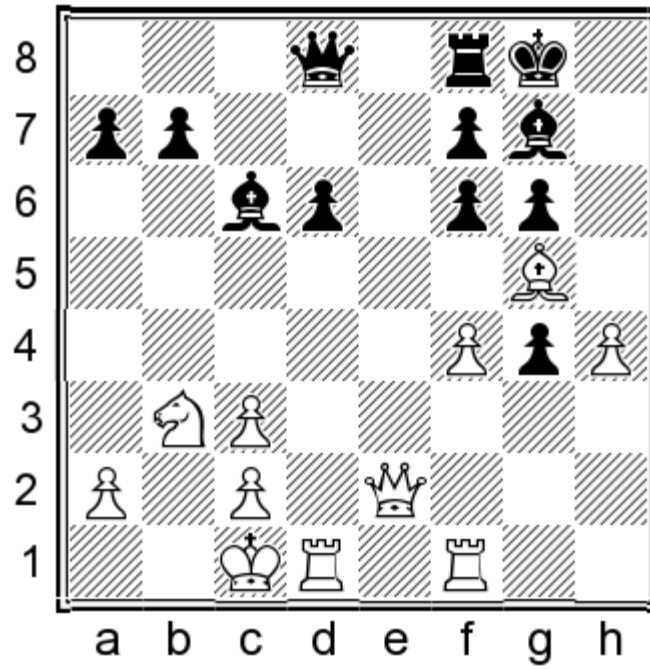
Perhaps White should try 20.Bxf6N but 20...Bxh1 21.Rxh1 exf6 22.e6 Qe7 23.Qxg4 f5!µ is excellent for Black.

C31) 20.exf6 exf6

As I wrote earlier, this trade is dangerous for White as the dormant g7-bishop comes to life.

21.Rhf1

21.Qxg4 Bxh1 22.Rxh1 fxg5 23.hxg5 Re8µ Vigorito suggests this is how White should try and play this variation and calls it unclear, but I think Black is a lot better. White doesn't really have an attack as the black king is quite safe on f8 while White's king is too vulnerable.



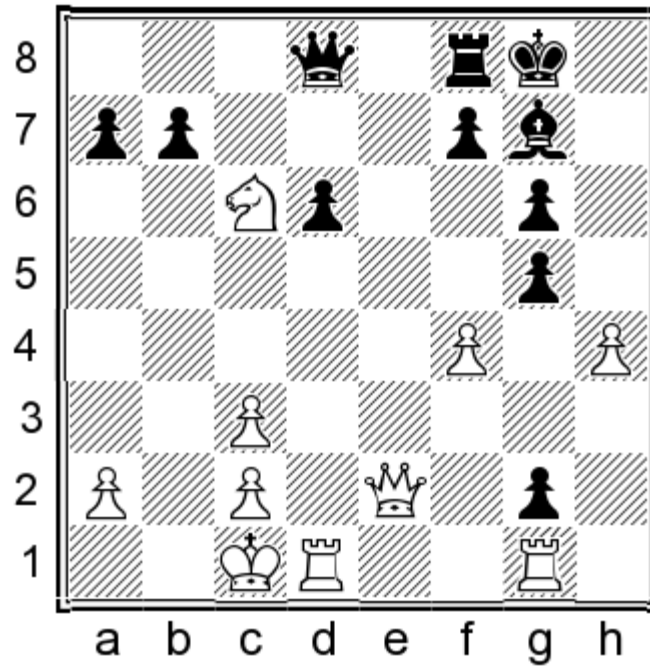
21...g3!?N

It seems a shame to give up that passed pawn and powerful bishop for a mere rook: 21...Bf3 22.Rxf3 gxf3 23.Qxf3 fxg5 24.hxg5 Qc7³ Garini – Ruiz Jarabo Pelayo, email 2006.

After the strong text move, play might continue as follows:

22.Nd4 g2 23.Rg1 fxg5 24.Nxc6

24.hxg5 Bxd4 25.cxd4 Qa5^μ



24...bxc6 25.Qxg2 Qb6 26.Qf3 gxf4

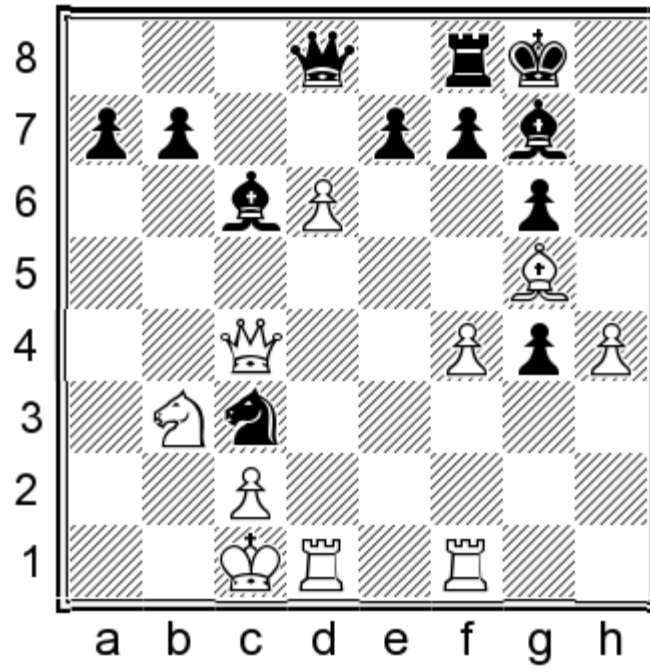
C32) 20.Rhf1 Ne4

Apart from the two forks on c3 and g3, Black also threatens ...f6 trapping the bishop. Even if all that fails, White will find it hard to protect his king.

Vigorito gives 20...Nd5 an exclamation mark, and it also looks good, but e4 feels a more natural square for the knight to me.

White must now decide between C321) 21.Qc4 or C322) 21.Qxg4.

21.exd6 Nxc3 22.Qc4 (the Almasi brothers offered the line 22.Qxe7 Nxa2† 23.Kb1 Nc3† 24.Kc1 f6 25.Qe6† Kh8—+) 22...Nxa2† 23.Kb1 Nc3† 24.Kc1 Bravo Sedamanos – Pelikian, Sao Paulo 1995. Here Black doesn't need to take the draw:

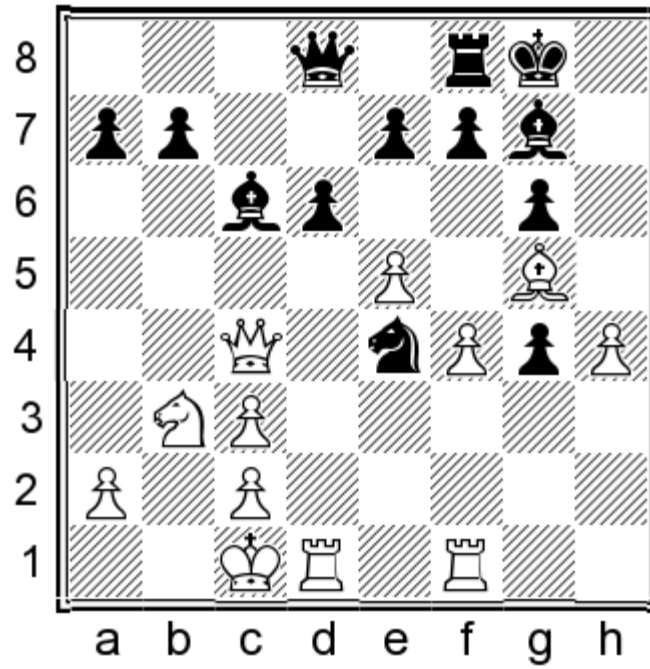


24...Bb5N 25.dxe7 Qxe7 26.Bxe7 Bxc4 27.Bxf8 Bxf8μ With a powerful position.

Meanwhile if White tries to defend with 21.Qd3 then 21...f6 simply picks up the bishop. 22.Nd4 Qa5! 23.Nxc6 Qa3† 24.Kb1 bxc6 25.Qxe4 Rb8† 26.Qb4 Rxb4† 27.cxb4 fxg5 was a crushing illustrative line given by the Almasis.

C321) 21.Qc4

This was played in the stem game, which continued as follows:

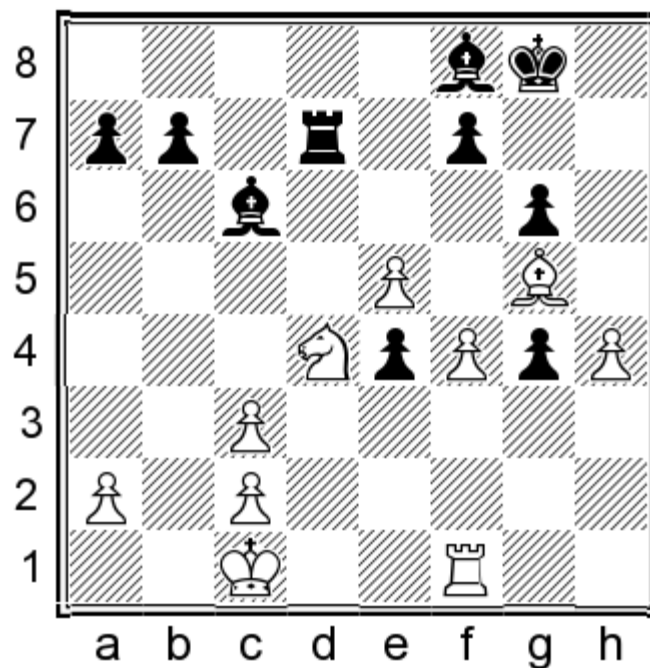


21...d5 22.Qxe4

Instead after 22.Qd4 f6 23.Rfe1 fxg5 24.Rxe4 gxf4 (Zoltan and Istvan Almasi wrote an article suggesting 24...gxh4 which is also winning.) 25.Ree1 Qb6 26.Rg1 g3 Black had a crushing position in jml26 – pinvoy, Internet 2012. The pawns proved too strong.

22...dxe4 23.Rxd8 Rxd8 24.Bxe7 Rd7 25.Bg5 Bf8 26.Nd4

This was Smirin – Ivanchuk, Paris 1994, and here I like:



26...e3!N

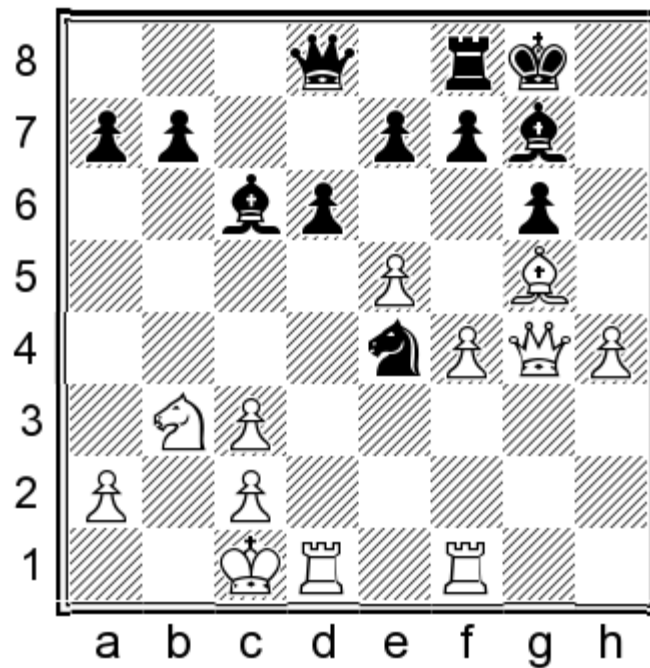
White struggles to stop both pawns, for example:

27.Re1 Ba3† 28.Kb1 g3 29.Rxe3 g2 30.Rg3 Rxd4 31.cxd4 Bb4!

White has no defence to ...Be1-f2.

C322) 21.Qxg4

White takes a pawn and cuts out one of the forks but now his king is rather bare.



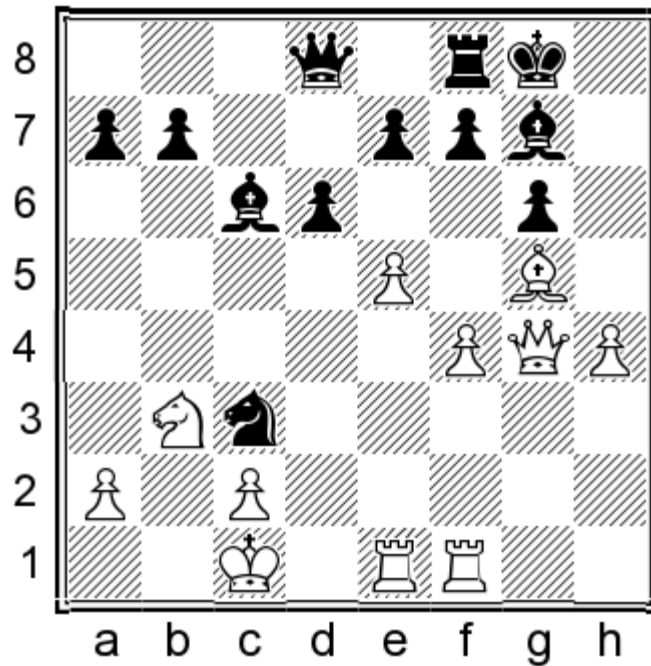
21...Nxc3μ

Black's attack is dangerous and even in correspondence games White has been unable to defend.

22.Rxd6

With 22.h5 White desperately tries to continue the attack, but 22...Nxd1 23.Rxd1 Qc8! 24.Qh4 Be4 25.Rd2 f6μ favoured Black in Abrahamyan – Kleinman, Berkeley 2011.

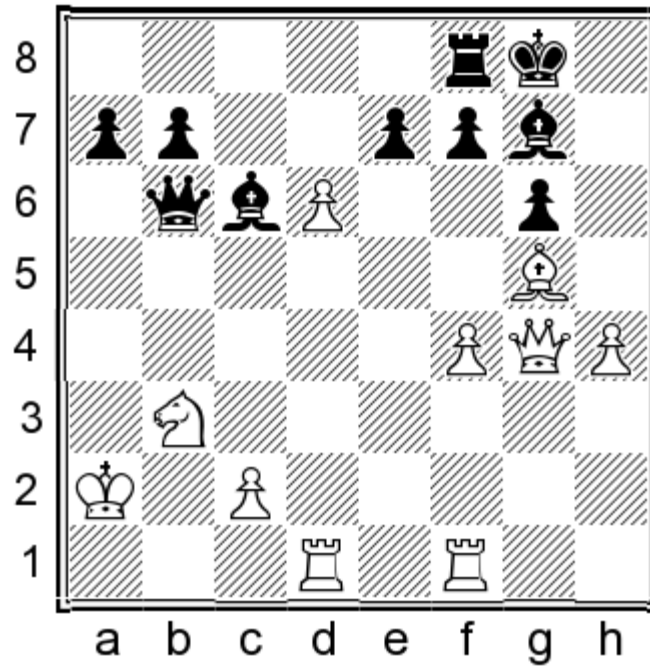
Against 22.Rde1 I think Black should play:



22...Bd5!?N With a dangerous attack. 23.f5 (23.h5 Qc7 24.hxg6 Nxa2† 25.Kb1 Nc3† 26.Kc1 fxg6µ) 23...Qc8 24.Bxe7 Nxa2† 25.Kb1 Qc3!µ

22.Rd2 Qc8! 23.f5 (23.Qxc8 Rxc8 24.Bxe7 is a lesser evil but 24...dxe5 25.fxe5 Bxe5 is a pretty miserable endgame.) 23...Bxe5 24.Bxe7 Nxa2† 25.Kd1 Re8 26.Bxd6 Bb2!? Setting up a mating net. 27.Bb4 Bb5 28.Rf3 Nxb4 29.Qxb4 Qc6 30.Qf4 Be5 31.Qg4 Bc3 32.fxg6 fxg6 33.Nc1 Ba4 34.Nb3 Bxb3 0–1 Schwenger – Mittermueller, email 2005.

Vigorito suggests that White should try 22.exd6 when he points out that Black has at least a draw, but in fact 22...Nxa2† 23.Kb1 Qb6! is just winning. 24.Kxa2 (24.f5 Be4!; or 24.dxe7 Nc3† 25.Kc1 Qe3† 26.Rd2 f5! White's queen is actually trapped and 27.exf8=Q† Bxf8 28.Qg1 Ba3 is mate.)



24...Qa6† 25.Kb1 Qa3 26.Rd4 Be4! With a crushing attack.

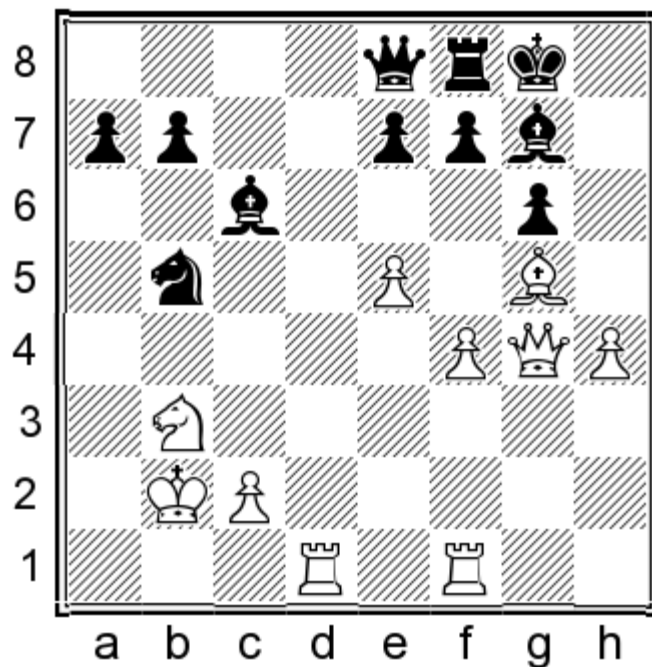
22...Nxa2† 23.Kb1 Nc3† 24.Kb2 Qe8

24...Na4† also worked well. 25.Ka3 (25.Kc1 Qe8 26.Rd4 f6 would be quite similar to 24...Qe8) 25...Qe8 26.Rd3 f6 27.Qe6† Qf7 28.Qxf7† Rxf7 29.Na5 Nb6 30.Rd8† Rf8 31.Rxf8† Bxf8 32.Nxc6 bxc6 0–1 Gomez Galan Areense – Simmelink, email 2006.

24...Qc7!?N is also worthy of consideration.

25.Rd4 Nb5 26.Rdd1

26.h5 didn't help White much. 26...Nxd4 27.Nxd4 Bd5 28.hxg6 fxg6 29.Rd1 e6µ Tanti – Santo, email 2009.



26...f6! 27.Qe6† Kh8 28.h5 gxh5 29.exf6 exf6 30.Qxe8 Rxe8 31.Bh4 f5† 32.Kc1 Nc3 33.Rde1 Ne2† 34.Kd1 Bb5 35.Rf3 Bc3

0–1 Van Essen – Skulason, email 2001.

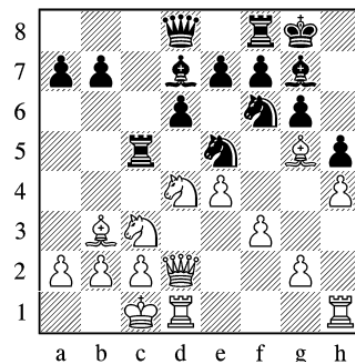
Conclusion

This was a long chapter and I apologize for the amount of theory, but it is quite critical to the viability of the Soltis Variation and the Dragon itself. Luckily the theory seems to have worked out in Black's favour and these lines are now extremely rare.

White has two principal ways of playing this variation. The 15.h5 lines result in similar positions to those in 14.Kb1, and you should study both carefully. Against 15.f4, Ivanchuk's 16...Na5! both looks good theoretically and is easy to play. The idea is to simply exchange on b3 and then sacrifice on c3 when White's attack is extinguished, giving us strong counterplay.



Soltis Variation



14th Move Alternatives

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2
Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rxc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5
13...Rc5

A) 14.Nde2?!

B) 14.Bxf6

C) 14.Rhe1 b5 15.f4 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4

C1) 17.Bxf6?!

C2) 17.e5

D) 14.f4 Nc4

D1) 15.Bxc4

D2) 15.Qd3 Ng4 16.Bxc4 Nf2 17.Qe2 Nxh1 18.Bb3

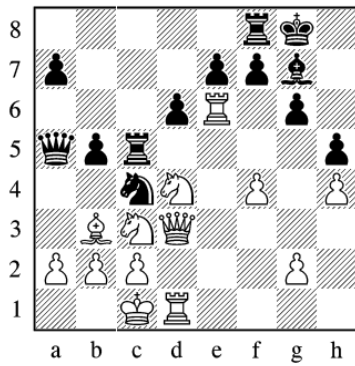
D21) 18...Qb6

D22) 18...Bg4 19.Nf3 Rxc3! 20.bxc3 Qa5

D221) 21.Rd3

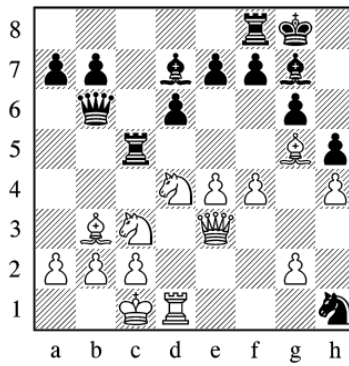
D222) 21.Rxh1

B) after 20.♞xe6



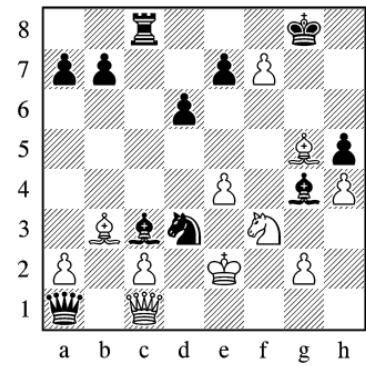
20...♞xd4!N

D21) note to 19.f5



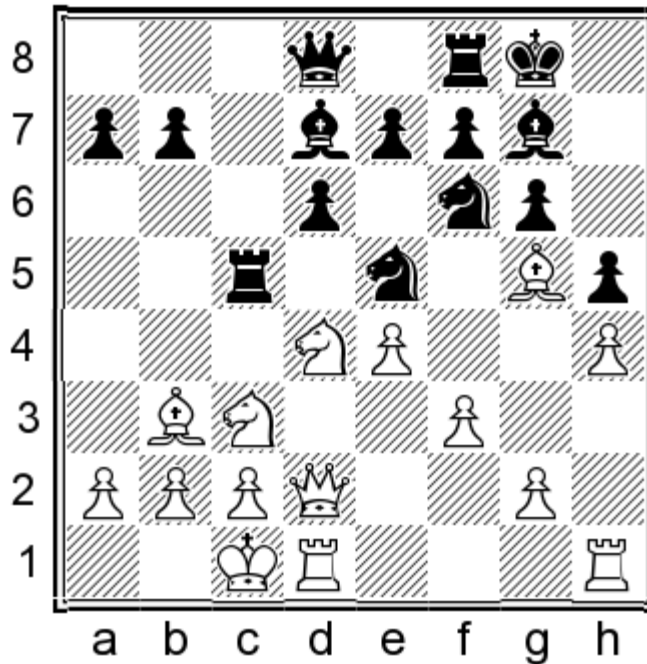
19...♞g4!N

D221) note to 23.♞b1!



28...♞g7!N

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5 Rc5



This chapter sees us focus on White's options at move 14: A) 14.Nde2?!, B) 14.Bxf6, C) 14.Rhe1 and D) 14.f4.

14.Bh6 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4 transposes to the next chapter, with both sides having lost a tempo.

14.Qe2?! White is trying to stop Black's ...Nc4, but now the thematic sacrifice 14...Rxc3!? is tempting. 15.bxc3 Qc7 16.Qd2 (16.Qe3 Rc8 17.Ne2 a5 18.a4 b5µ saw Black break through immediately in Abreu – Mestel, Mexico City 1978.) 16...Rc8 17.Rhe1 Karisik – Miom. Savic, Cetinje 2013. Here I would have followed the same plan as against 16.Qe3 with 17...a5N. Black has excellent compensation.

14.Nd5?!

White should only trade off these knights once he has already broken through on the kingside, as clearing the long diagonal makes the g7-bishop extremely powerful.

14...Nxd5 15.Bxd5

Or 15.exd5 a5 16.a3 as in Odeev – Blodstein, Voroshilovgrad 1989: 16...Nc4N 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Be3 Qb6μ

15...Qb6!

White already needs to be careful about his vulnerable b2-spot.

16.Bh6

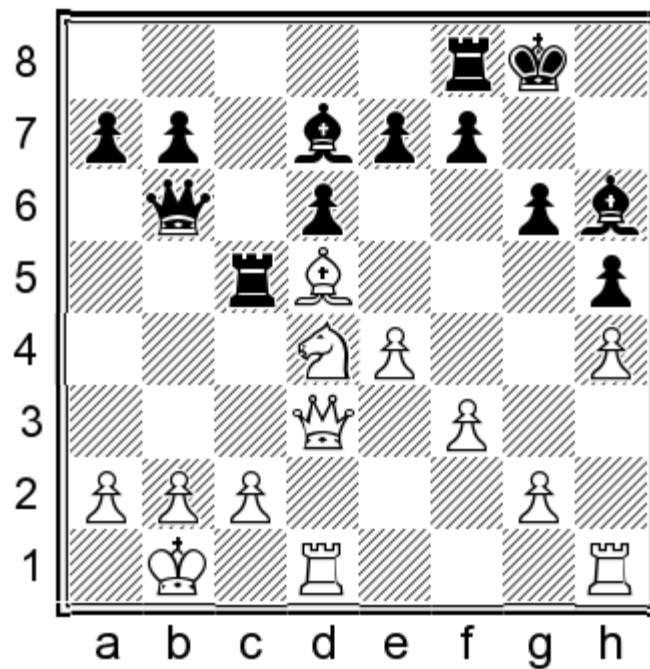
16.Bxe7 Rfc8 17.c3 was Juan – Taber, Dos Hermanas 2003. Now 17...Rxd5!N sees Black win material. 18.exd5 Nc4 19.Qe2 (19.Qc2 Ne3) 19...Qa6! 20.a3 Re8–+

16...Nd3†!

A neat way to maintain the bishop pair.

17.Qxd3 Bxh6† 18.Kb1

This was Martino – Felgaer, Argentina 2000. Black could have increased his advantage with:



18...e6N 19.Bb3 Rfc8μ

Black has an almost model Dragon position, and with the rook controlling the 5th rank White has no counterplay.

14.Rdg1!?

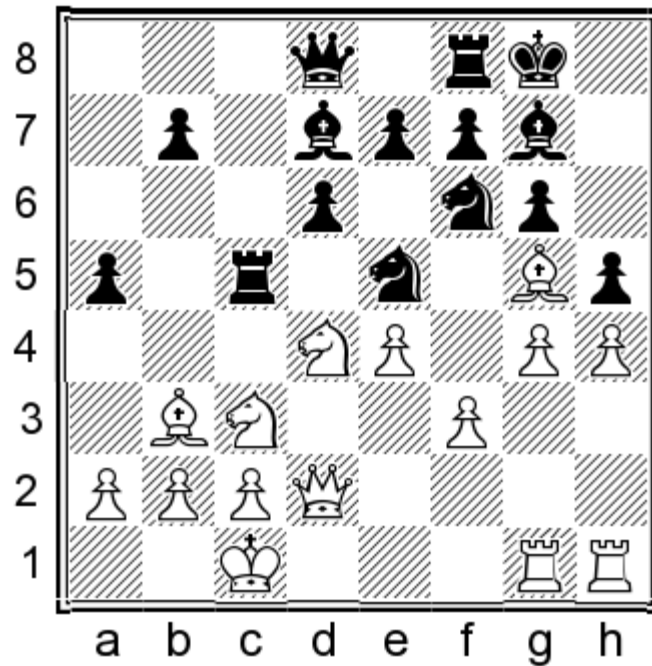
This move looks odd but the logic of preparing g2-g4 is clear.

14...a5!?

I think the main downside to White's last is that the d4-knight is now no longer well defended, and so we should try to exploit that.

15.g4?!

15.a4 Qb6N would again target the d4-knight. 16.g4 hxg4 17.h5 Nxh5 18.fxg4 Nxg4³



15...a4!N 16.Nxa4

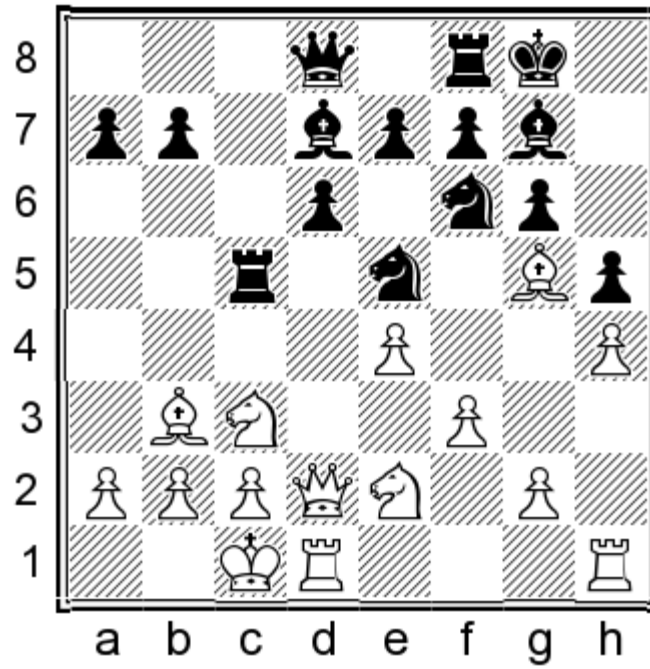
16.Bxa4 Bxa4 17.Nxa4 Rc4 18.Nc3 Qb6 19.Be3 Rfc8^μ

16...Bxa4 17.Bxa4 Nc4 18.Qd3 Qb6 19.Bb3 Rfc8

Black's position is well set up and White can't crash through: 20.Bxf6? Bxf6 21.gxh5 fails to 21...Nxb2!-+.

A)14.Nde2?!

This is a rather passive option and gives Black easy play.

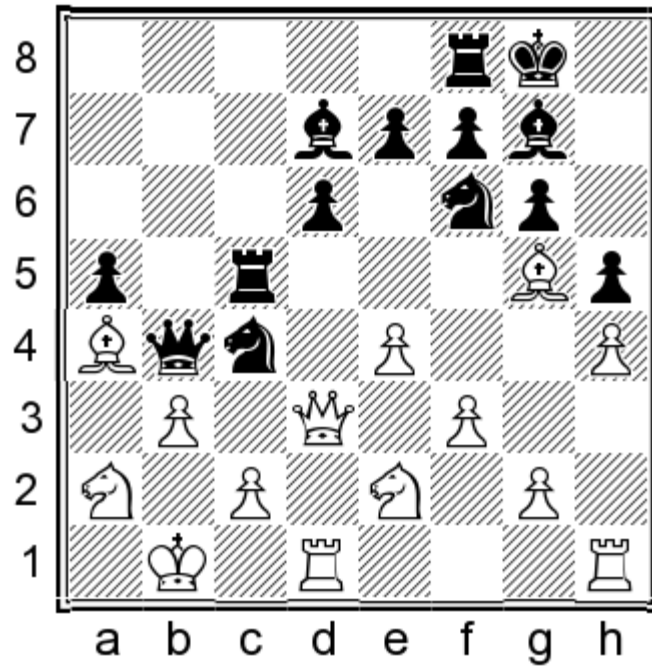


14...b5 15.Bxf6

At least here we see an idea coupled with dropping the knight back. White attempts to use the pin along the f-file but it doesn't really work.

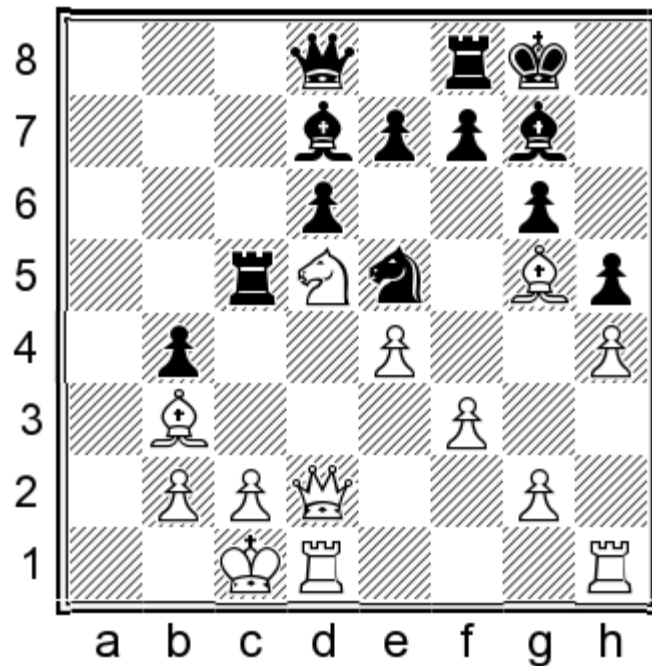
15.Be3 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4³ White has lost a lot of time with his Be3-g5-e3 manoeuvre and Black is extremely comfortable.

15.Kb1 a5 16.a4 bxa4 17.Bxa4 (17.Nxa4 Bxa4 18.Bxa4 Nc4 19.Qd3 Diaz Dalaglio – Villanueva, Buenos Aires 2004. The most accurate finish would be 19...Ng4!N 20.fxg4 Nxb2 21.Qb3 Qc7 with an overwhelming attack.) 17...Nc4 18.Qd3 Qb6 19.b3 Qb4 20.Na2 The game was allegedly agreed drawn here in Molander – Frisk, Finland 1996, but Black's position would be completely crushing after:



20...Qb8N One sample line could be: 21.Nac3 Bxa4 22.Nxa4 Na3† 23.Ka2 Rxc2† 24.Kxa3 Qb4#

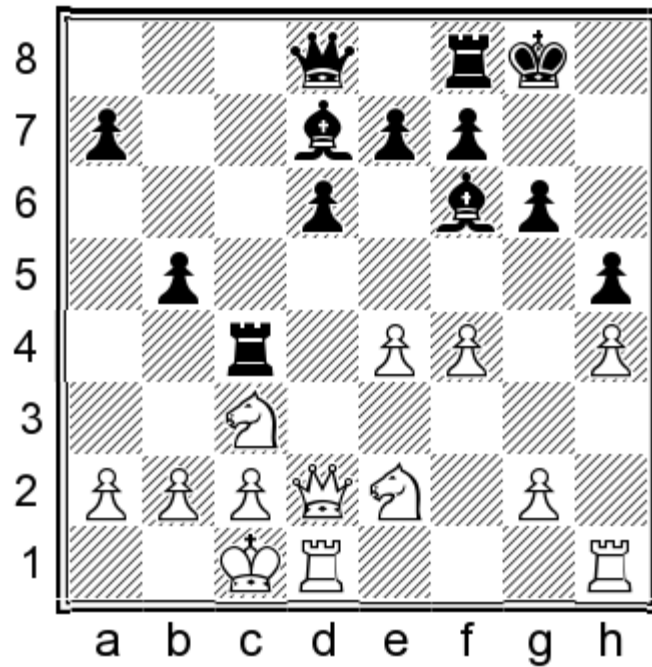
15.Nf4 Having a knight on d5 would be pleasant for White but there's simply not enough time. 15...a5 16.a3 b4 17.axb4 axb4 18.Ncd5 Nxd5 19.Nxd5



19...Qa5! 20.Nxe7† Kh7 21.Qxd6 Nxf3! 22.gxf3 Bc3! 23.bxc3 bxc3 24.Kb1 Ra8 Black had played a pretty game and scored a crushing win in De Rosa – Gaponenko, Ischia 2010.

15...Bxf6 16.f4 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4

17...bxc4N 18.e5 Bg7 19.exd6 e6! is also good for Black; White doesn't have a sensible way to deal with Black doubling on the b-file.

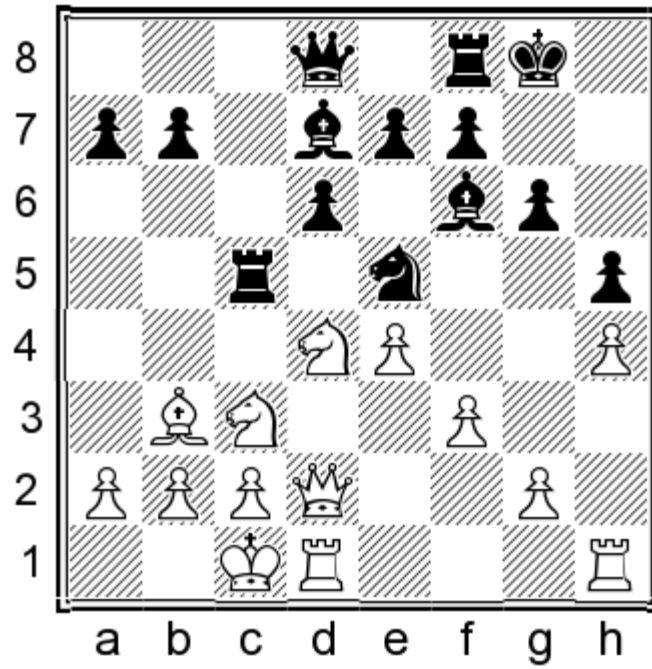


18.e5 Bg7 19.exd6 Bf5

A few White players have stumbled into this position but Black's score is overwhelming. Black's pieces are coordinating far too well, while White's extra pawn is irrelevant.

B) 14.Bxf6 Bxf6

Again we should compare this position to the one with the king on b1 and pawn on b5.



15.f4

15.Nd5 Bg7 16.Kb1 saw White trying to transpose to the aforementioned line (normally reached from a 14.Kb1 move order). Now 16...b5 would transpose to a good line for Black (see the note on 16.Nd5 in variation B of Chapter 1) while 16...a5!? 17.a4 Nc4 18.Qg5 e6 19.Qxd8 Rxd8³ also favoured Black in Serafimovic – Berza, email 1999.

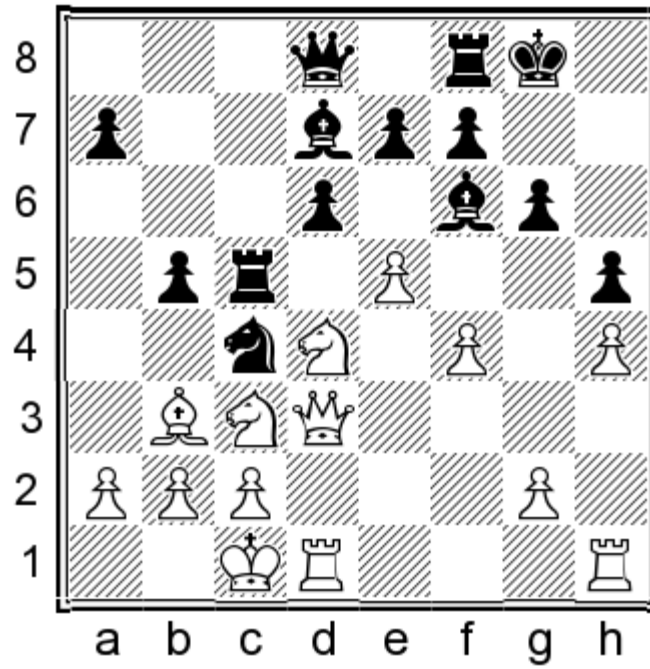
15.g4 hxg4 is another transposition, this time to variation A of Chapter 2.

15...Nc4 16.Qd3

Comparing the lines, White could try 16.Bxc4N but 16...Rxc4 17.e5 Bg7 is just good for Black.

16...b5 17.e5

Playing for a quick f3-f4 and e4-e5 is the only logical continuation after trading on f6.



17...Bg7 18.Rhe1

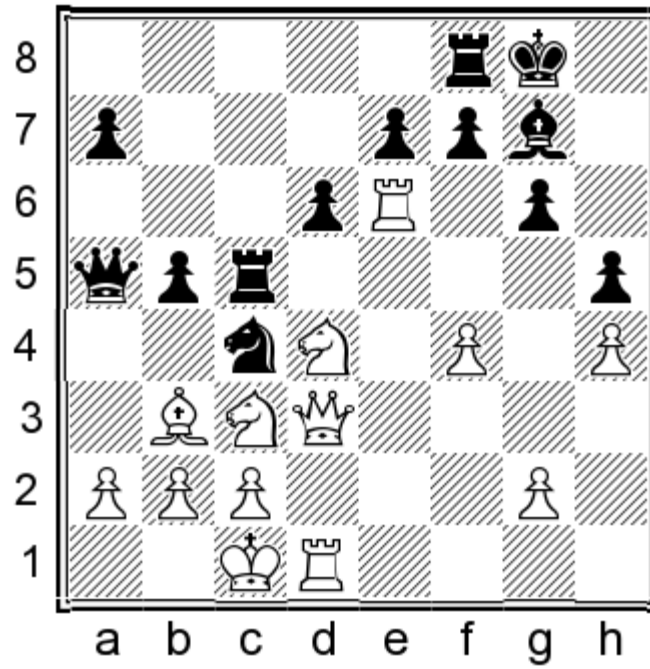
18.Ne4 Rc8 19.e6 was tried twice by an IM: 19...Bxe6 20.Nxe6 Bxb2† 21.Kb1 fxe6 22.Ng5 Rf6 23.Rhe1 In Pokojowczyk – Mestel, Malta (ol) 1980, 23...Qd7N 24.Nxe6 Kh8µ would have left White with the more vulnerable of the two kings.

18...Qa5 19.e6

19.Ne4 Rc7 didn't get White anywhere in Hausdorf – Amico, email 2008, as he decided to continue with 20.Nc3 when 20...dxe5 21.fxe5 e6µ was just good for Black.

19...Bxe6 20.Rxe6

As played in Pieper – Visetti, Aachen 1982, when Dearing observes that Black should have played:



20...Bxd4!N

Black has the better prospects.

C) 14.Rhe1

White declines to open up the h-file and will instead play for the e4-e5 break.

14...b5 15.f4

For 15.Kb1 see variation C of Chapter 1.

15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4

This position is similar to the one examined in the 14.Kb1 chapter. The only differences are the white king on c1 rather than b1 and Black's pawn still on a7 rather than a5. In general that favours Black as ...Qa5xa2 becomes an idea while ...b4xc3xb2 also comes with check.

Now C1) 17.Bxf6?! is nothing to fear, while C2) 17.e5 is more testing.

C1) 17.Bxf6?!

As always, giving up the dark-squared bishop is a big concession.

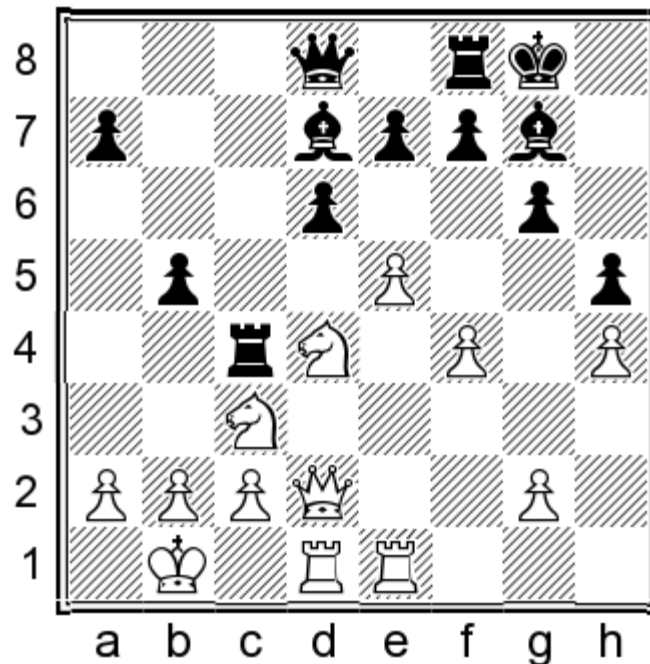
17...Bxf6 18.e5 Bg7 19.b3

This isn't a move that White wants to play as now he'll be vulnerable down the long diagonal.

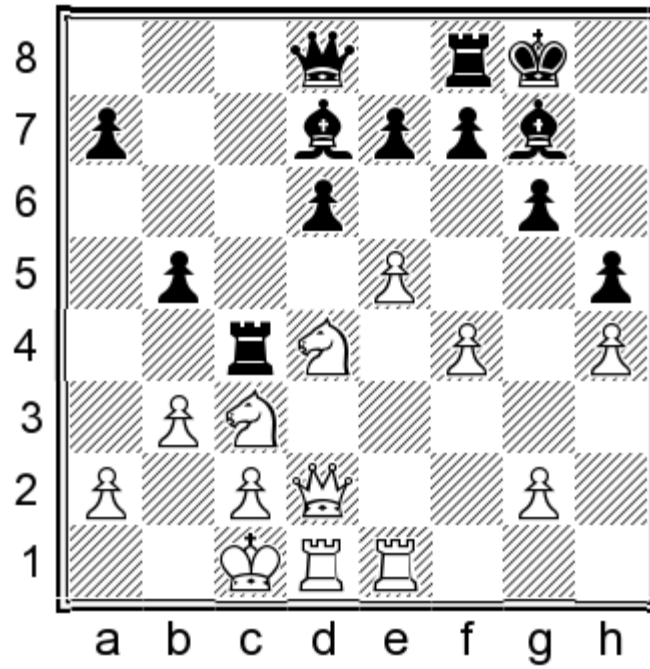
Surprisingly an Open Sicilian expert lost all sense of danger and played: 19.Ncxb5? Qb8 (19...Qb6!N would be even stronger) 20.Nc3 dxe5 21.fxe5 Bg4 22.Qd3 Rc5 (Evidently Miles wanted to avoid 22...Rfc8N 23.Nd5 but here Black should just be winning after 23...Kh7! 24.Nxe7 R8c5.) 23.Nf3 Nunn – Miles, London 1980. Now increasing the pressure on the queenside with 23...Rfc8!N would have left Black with a decisive advantage.

19.f5? b4! already wins material for Black. 20.Nd5 dxe5 21.Qg5 Kh7! White couldn't both move his knight and prevent ...Bh6 pinning the queen in Bargel – Civin, Cesky Brod 1996.

19.Kb1 was played in Farah – Seminara, Buenos Aires 1996, but if White wanted his king on b1 he should have played it earlier. Here I quite like:



19...Qa8!?N 20.b3 (20.Ncxb5 is still dangerous: 20...dxe5 21.fxe5 Bxb5 22.Nxb5 Qb8 23.Qd5 Rfc8 with a strong initiative) 20...dxe5! 21.Nde2 (21.bxc4 exd4 22.Nxb5 Bg4 23.Rc1 Rd8 is simply disgusting) 21...Rxc3 22.Nxc3 Bg4 23.fxe5 Bxd1 24.Nxd1 a5µ

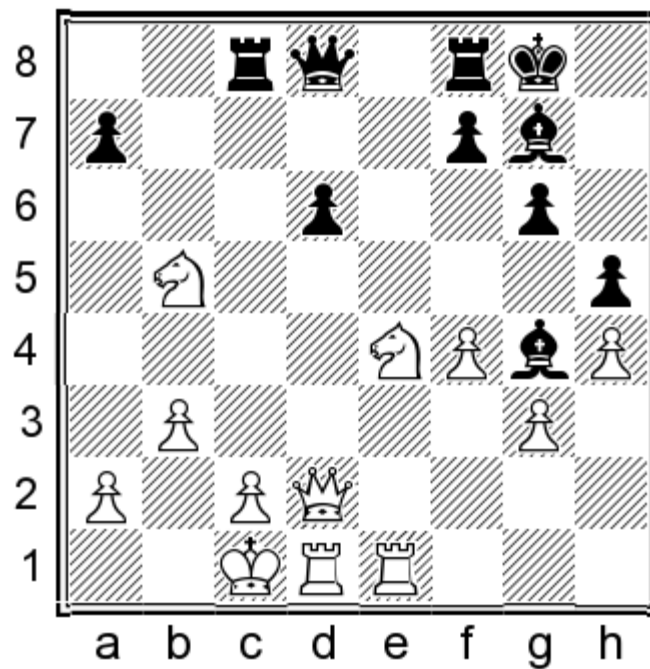


19...Rc5

19...Rc8!?N is possible too.

20.Ne4 Rc8 21.exd6 Bg4 22.Nxb5 exd6 23.g3

23.Nbxd6N 23...Rc6 24.Qd5 Qc7μ is also dismal for White.



23...d5! 24.Ned6

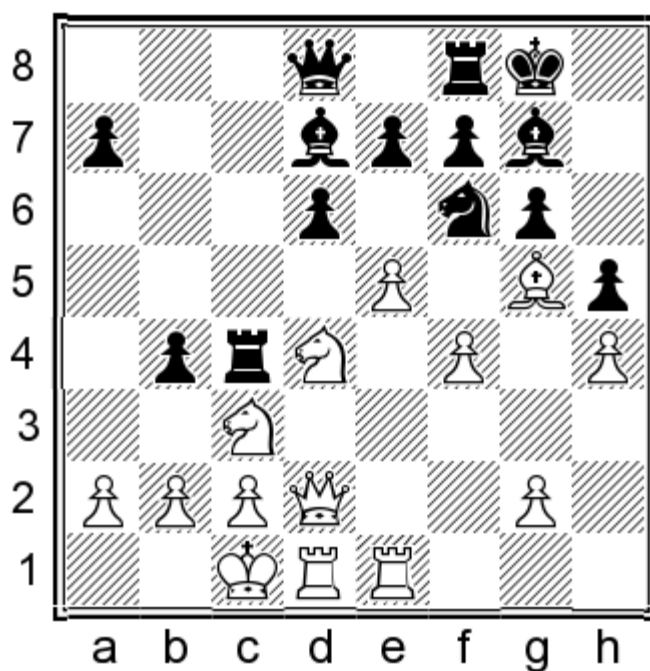
24.Qxd5 Qa5 was Black's point.

24...Rc5 25.b4 Rxb5! 26.Nxb5 Qb6 27.a4 Bxd1 28.Rxd1 Qa6 29.Qxd5 Qxa4

White wasn't able to defuse Black's initiative, even with many weeks of thinking time, in Lopez Garcia – Zimmermann, email 2005.

C2) 17.e5 b4!

We have seen this already. Black needn't move his knight as the bishop will be trapped on g5 anyway.



18.Qd3

18.exf6?!

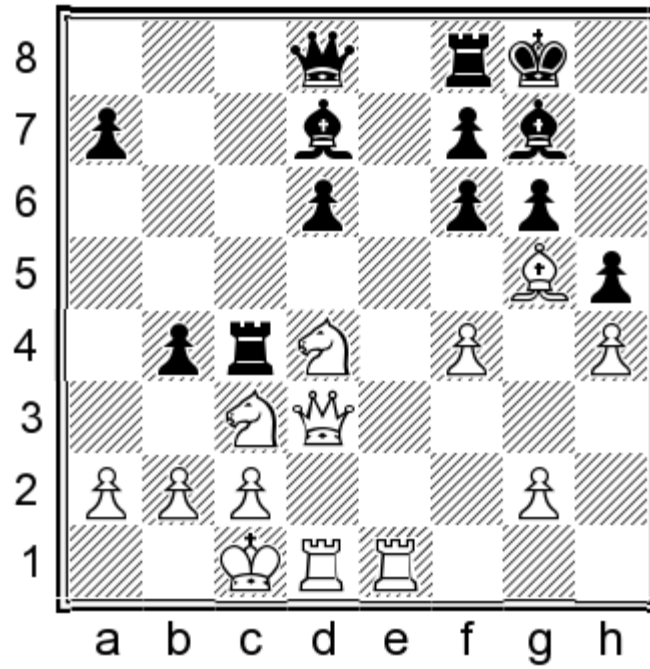
This allows Black to play:

18...exf6!

18...bxc3 19.Qd3 Rxd4 20.Qxd4 would transpose to our main line, but this is even stronger.

19.Qd3

19.Ne4?! fxe5 20.Nxe5 Rxd4 0–1 Benyovszki – Allen, email 2000.



19...Rxc3!

Here this is the stronger exchange sacrifice.

19...Rxd4 20.Qxd4 bxc3 is another transposition to our main line.

20.bxc3 fxg5

This version isn't quite as bad for White as the one with Kb1 and ...a5 thrown in, as the king is a bit more secure. Still, Black is to be preferred.

21.hxg5 bxc3 22.Qxc3 Qb6 23.Qd3 Bg4 24.Rd2

This was all played in the old correspondence game Dravnieks – Edelstein, corr. 1983, and now best is:

24...Qa5!N

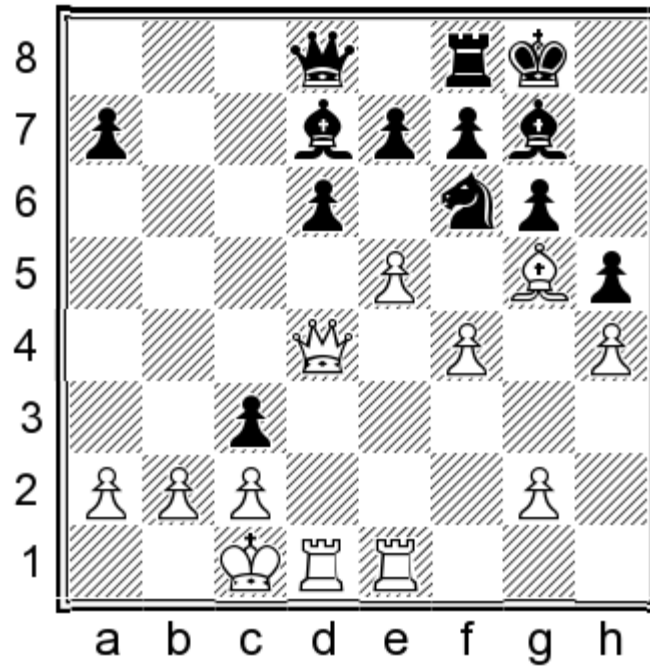
Black has a pleasant position.

18...Rxd4

Continuing the comparison, 18...Rxc3!? can also be played to keep more life in the position. However, it should be noted that on 19.bxc3 we should not play 19...Nd5. After 20.cxb4 Black couldn't recapture on b4 with the pawn in Mrdja – Capuano, Campobasso 1998.

Instead 19...bxc3!N 20.Qxc3 Nd5 21.Qb3 Qa5 leads to a complicated position.

19.Qxd4 bxc3

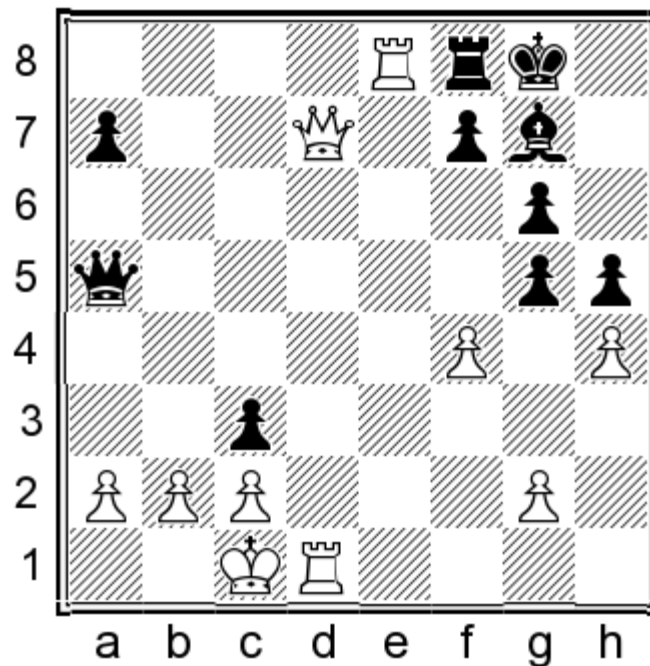


20.exf6

As White knows his bishop will be trapped anyway 20.Bxf6?! could be tried, but now 20...Qb8! looks like a good antidote: 21.Qxc3 exf6 22.exd6 f5 23.Qb3 Qc8 Black's bishop pair is too strong.

20...exf6 21.Qxd6 fxg5 22.Qxd7 Qa5 23.Re8!

White's only move: he has to try and exchange some pieces to give his king a fighting chance of survival.



23...Qxa2

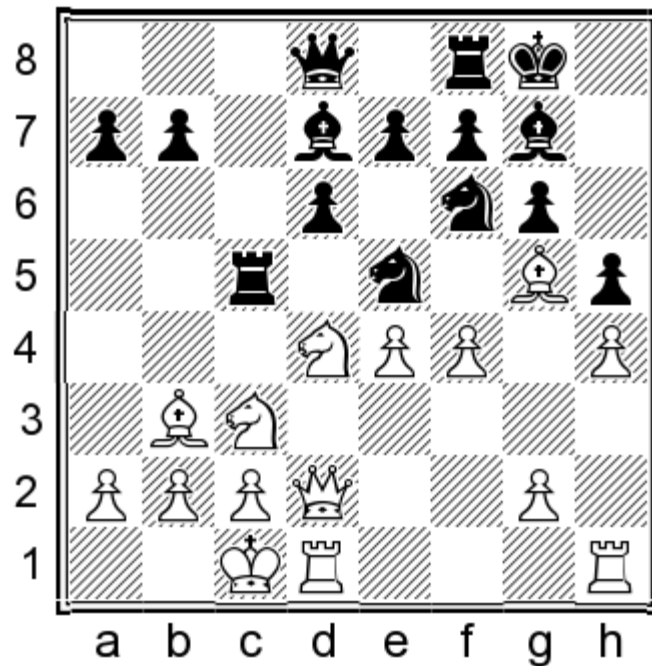
23...Qb4!? is also interesting, but should end as a draw with best play. 24.Rxf8† Bxf8 25.bxc3 Qxf4† 26.Kb2 was Musanti – Felgaer, Villa Ballester 2000, and now most accurate is: 26...Qb8†!N 27.Ka1 (27.Kc1 gxh4³ favours Black thanks to his strong kingside pawn mass) 27...Qg3 28.Kb2 Qb8†=

24.Rxf8† Bxf8 25.bxc3 gxf4

This position has been reached a few times and should be drawn. White's king is too vulnerable to try anything while Black can't make much progress with limited material.

D) 14.f4

This is the most critical line in this segment. Many strong GMs have essayed 14.f4 in the past but it has now been neutralized and is rarely seen.



14...Nc4

We will first examine D1) 15.Bxc4 before the more popular D2) 15.Qd3.

15.Qe2? just loses material to 15...Bg4, as 16.Nf3 allows 16...Nxb2! 17.Kxb2 Qa5. White had no way to defend his knight in Thiel – Aramil, Saint Paul 2000.

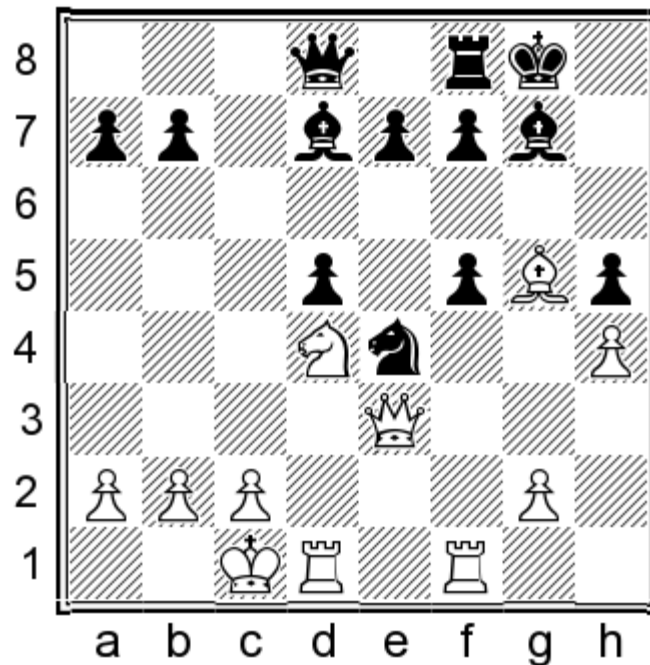
D1) 15.Bxc4

Capturing on c4 doesn't put Black under any pressure. This is due to the fact that e4-e5 doesn't really threaten anything with the bishop on g5 entombed by its own pawns.

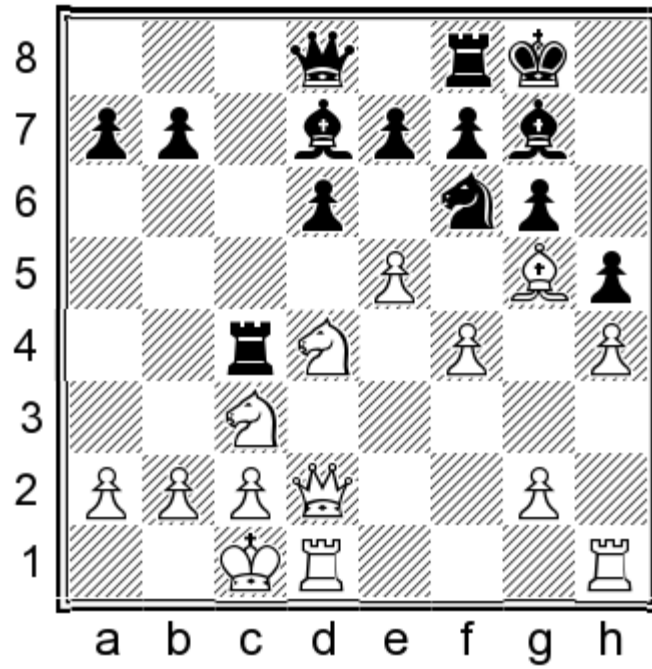
15...Rxc4 16.e5

Black can meet 16.Rhe1 with 16...b5, transposing to variation C above, while 16...Nh7!?N garnering the bishop pair also looks good for Black.

16.Qd3?! has been played a few times but 16...Rxc3! is a strong response: 17.Qxc3 (17.bxc3 Ng4!μ was suggested by Ziatdinov. White has too many holes in his position.) 17...Nxe4 18.Qe3 d5 White has to watch out not to lose his bishop and so tried 19.f5 gxf5 20.Rhf1 in Gorovkyh – Matlakov, Peterhof 2007.



Here 20...Qb6N would have been excellent for Black. The knight on e4 dominates the board and Black's two pawns outweigh the exchange. White can try grabbing the e7-pawn, but 21.Bxe7 Re8 leaves White in all kinds of pins. 22.Bg5 (22.Ba3 Bh6) 22...Nxe5 23.Qxe5 Kf8! White can't defend against both ...Bxd4 and ...Bh6.



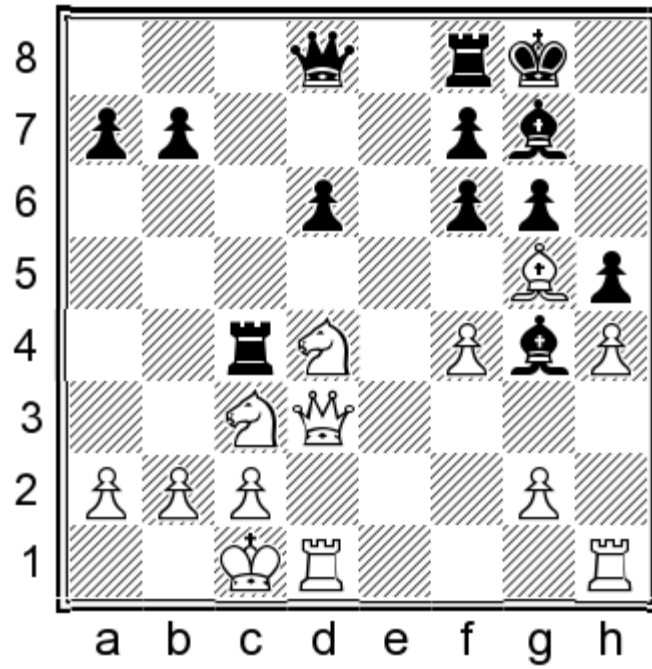
16...Bg4!

Black calls White's bluff and instead forces him to make some concessions of his own.

17.Qd3

This is probably White's best attempt to extricate himself.

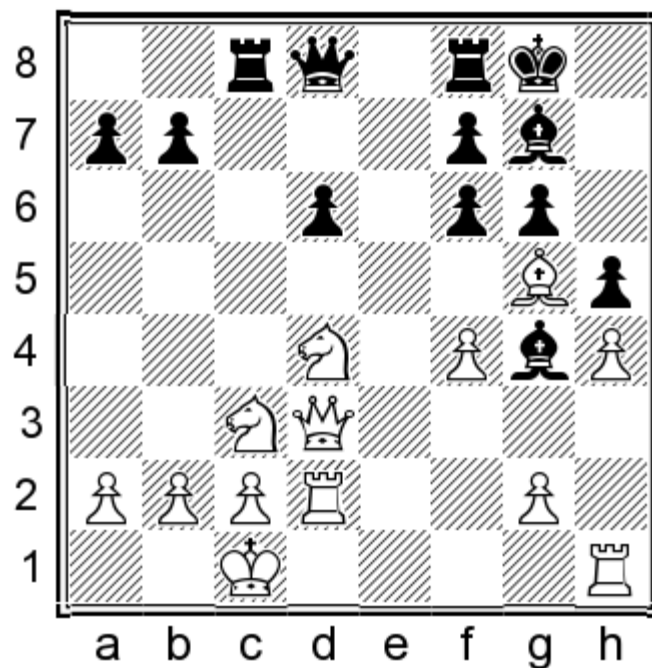
17.exf6?! Capturing the knight merely opens up the g7-bishop. After 17...exf6 18.Qd3 as in Foerderreuther – S. Zhou, Internet 2008, Black should have chosen:



18...Rxd4!N 19.Qxd4 fxe5 20.Qxd6 Bxd1 Black wins material.

17.Nf3?! was played in Arias – Henao, Bogota 1992, but it allows Black a more active square for his knight: 17...Ne4N 18.Nxe4 Rxe4 Black's rook is quite safe while the g5-bishop again looks ridiculous. 19.Qd3 (19.Qd5 Re2 or 19.exd6 Qb6) 19...Bf5µ

17...Rc8 18.exf6 exf6 19.Rd2

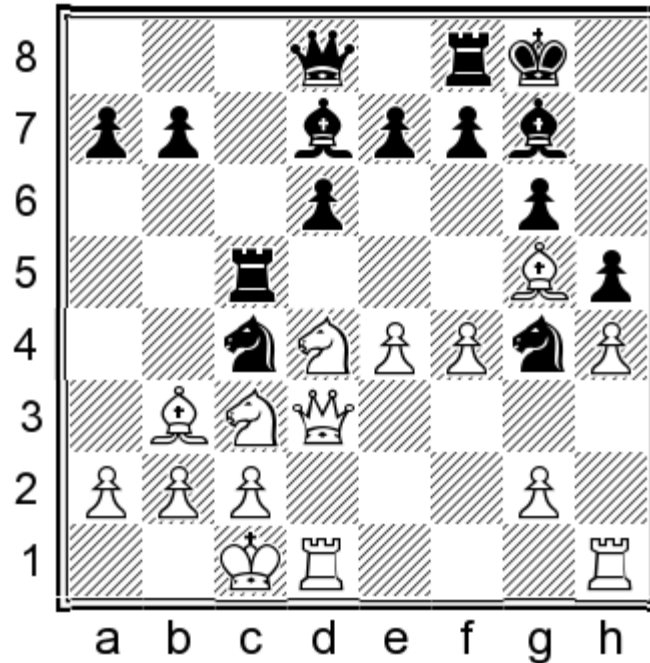


19...d5! 20.Qb5 fxg5 21.fxg5 Rc4 22.Nde2 Qe8! 23.Qxd5 Rc7 24.Qb3 Re7! 25.Nf4 Re1† 26.Rxe1 Qxe1† 27.Nd1 Re8μ

Black completely dominated in Torgersen – Haugen, email 2011.

D2) 15.Qd3 Ng4

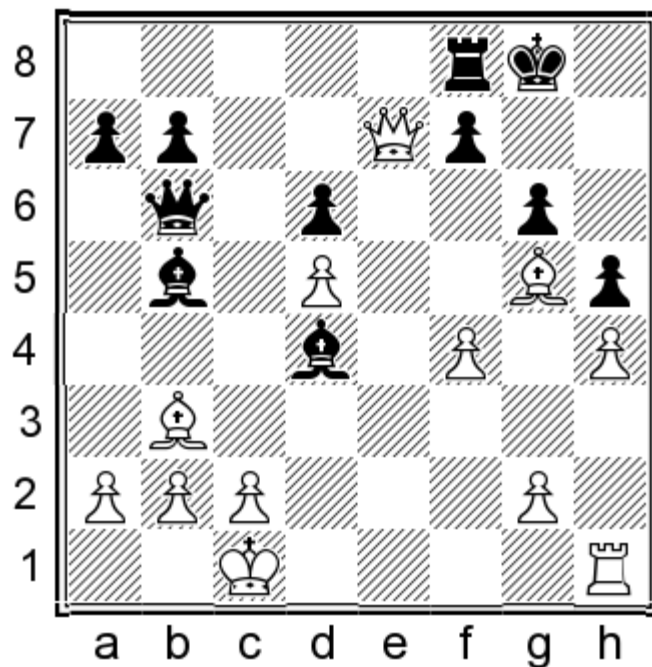
This has been established as Black's best. Instead of defending the c4-knight, Black prefers to create more threats.



16.Bxc4

White has to take the knight or his opening has failed.

16.Nd5?! Rxd5! 17.exd5 Nce3 Black's knights run rings around White's pieces. 18.Rde1 (18.Rd2N 18...Nf5 19.Nxf5 Bxf5 20.Qf3 f6μ is another idea; again White regrets his 14th move.) 18...Qb6 19.Rxe3 Nxe3 20.Qxe3 Bxd4 21.Qxe7 Bb5 Black's pieces are all so much more active than their counterparts.



White felt obliged to give up his queen with 22.Re1 Re8 23.Qxe8† Bxe8 24.Rxe8†, but after 24...Kg7 25.c3 Qb5! 26.Re4 Qf1† 27.Bd1 Bf2 it was clear Black was doing well in Collin – Montella, corr. 2003.

16.Rdf1?! White deals with the fork on f2 but now Black's queenside play comes much too quickly. 16...b5 17.f5 is White's only hope for counterplay, but here Black can play 17...gxf5N, as 18.Nxf5? (18.exf5 a5μ) fails to 18...Bxf5 19.Rxf5 Nxb2!.

16.Rhf1?! This move also prevents the f2 fork but allows a different one: 16...Nce3 17.Nd5? This didn't help. 17...Rxd5! 18.Bxd5 Nxd1 19.Rxd1 Mok – Konguvel, Yerevan (ol) 1996. Here there was no reason to avoid the winning 19...Nf2N.

16.Qe2?!

This is another attempt to deal with the fork on f2 but it leaves the white king exposed:

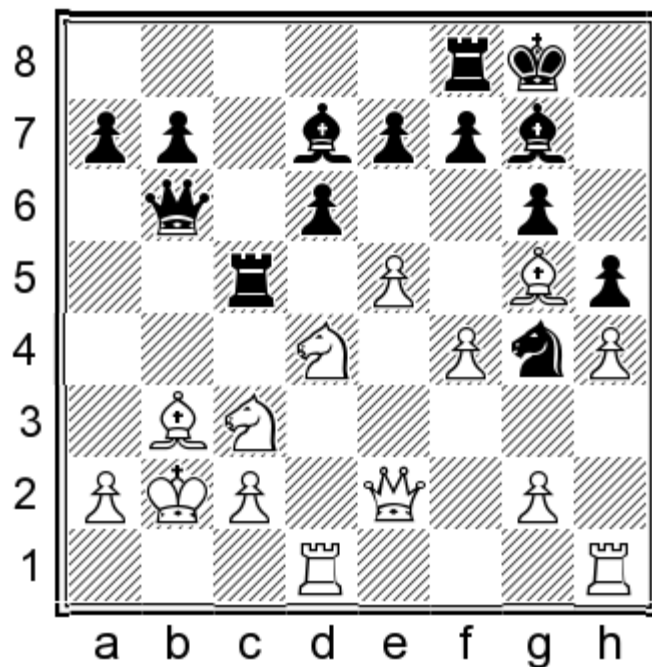
16...Nxb2! 17.Kxb2 Qb6!

Black's attack is dangerous. I've added in a couple of illustrative lines:

18.e5

a) 18.Bxe7N 18...Rxc3 (18...Rfc8 also looks good, with the pretty idea 19.Rh3 Nf2! 20.Qxf2 Bxh3) 19.Kxc3 Re8 20.Bg5 (20.Bxd6 Bb5! 21.Qd2 Rxe4 22.Rhe1 Rxe1 23.Qxe1 Qxd6μ) 20...a5μ White's king is too vulnerable.

b) 18.Rh3N 18...Rfc8! (18...Bxd4 19.Rxd4 Rxc5³ regains the piece but continuing the attack looks even stronger) 19.f5 Otherwise Black plays ...Nf2. 19...Rxc3 20.Rxc3 Bxd4 21.Rxd4 Qxd4μ



18...dxe5 19.fxe5 Rfc8 20.Ne4 Rxe5

Dearing gives this as Sigg – Flavio Pompeo, corr. 2002. I couldn't find the game, but Black's attack is far too strong.

16...Nf2 17.Qe2

17.Qf1? has been tried but now 17...Nxd1! just wins. The queen is tied down to defending c4 and 18.Nxd1 Bxd4 dropped the knight in Ramirez Medina – Blandon Villa, Barcelona 2013.

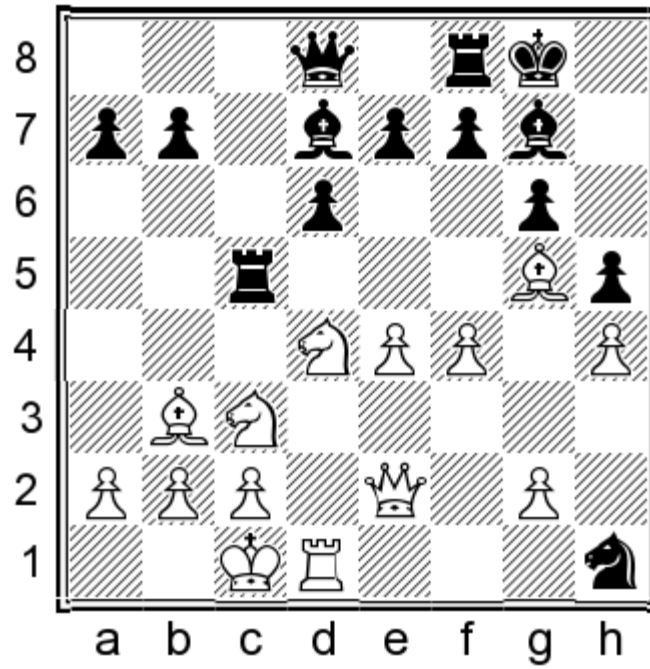
17...Nxb1 18.Bb3

Played almost exclusively. By dropping back the bishop, White's queen is now free to move.

As Vigorito points out 18.Nd5?! can be met with 18...Bg4!N. For example: 19.Nf3 Ng3 20.Qd3 Re8μ

18.Nf3? Ng3 19.Qd3 Bxc3 20.bxc3 is a line given by Mironenko and Bangiev. Here Dearing's suggested improvement 20...b5! 21.Bd5 Rxc3 is simply crushing.

18.f5 preventing the bishop coming to g4 was tried in Wegener – Rother, Germany 2008. Here 18...Ng3N 19.Qd3 Rxc4! (19...b5 is given by Bangiev, which is also good for Black) 20.Qxc4 gxf5 favours Black. White can try 21.Nd5 Re8 22.Nc7 but after 22...Nxe4 23.Nxe8 Qxe8³ Black's two pawns are again worth more than the exchange.



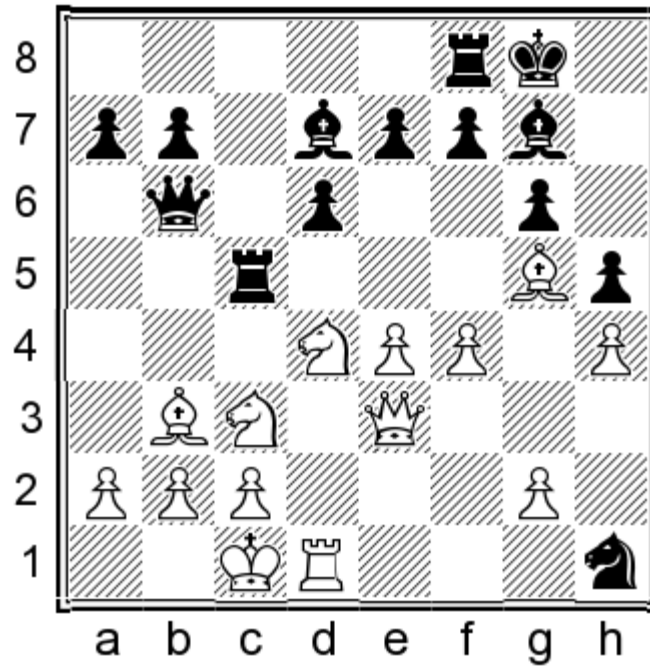
When this line was played against me in a rapid game I opted for the interesting D21) 18...Qb6, but I think D22) 18...Bg4 is Black's simplest response.

D21) 18...Qb6 19.f5

The critical test. Again White has to try and prevent the bishop coming to g4, even if that means ceding control of the important e5-square

19.Nf3 is the older move. Here I suggested 19...Ng3!N on ChessPublishing. 20.Qe1 Dearing ends the line here with an assessment of clear advantage to White but, as I gave previously, 20...Be6 21.Rd3 (White isn't in time to take the knight: 21.Qxg3? Bxc3 22.bxc3 Bxb3 23.axb3 Rxc3—+) 21...Bxb3 22.axb3 Rfc8 looks promising for Black.

19.Qe3 was tried in Weil – De Sa Nobrega, corr. 2000. Here I suggested:



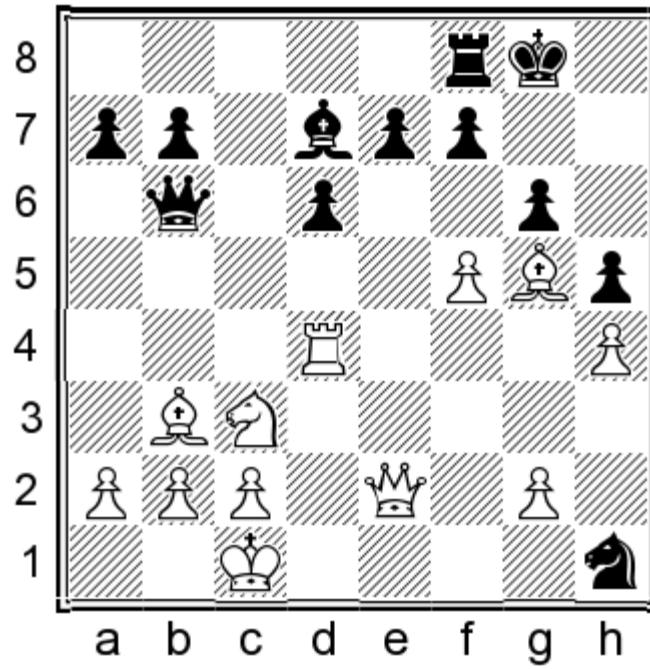
19...Bg4!N A powerful move, as 20.Rxh1 Rxg5! 21.hxg5 Bxd4 favours Black.

19...Bxd4 20.Rxd4 Rxf5

This is the point of ...Qb6.

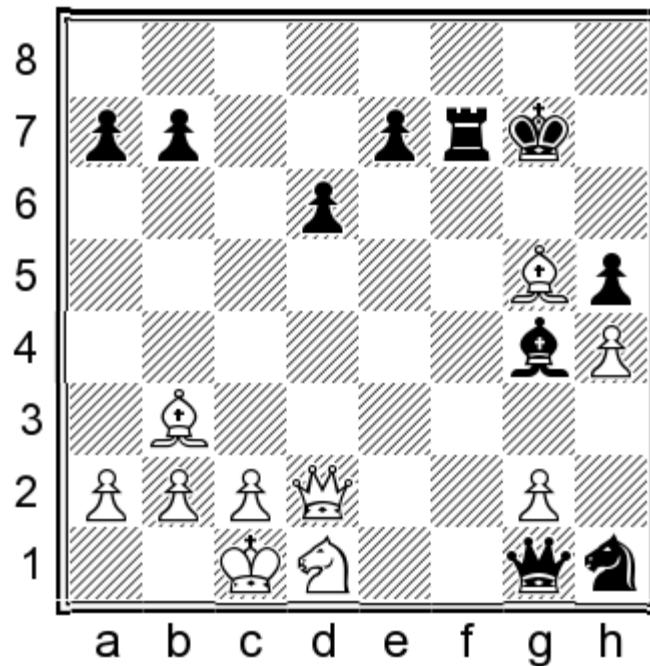
21.exf5

21.Rd1? Rxg5 22.hxg5 Bg4 23.Qe1 Bxd1 24.Nxd1 Qd4µ was good for Black in Schuermans – Decoster, Belgium 2005.



21...Qxd4 22.Qe1!?

22.fxg6 appears to run to a draw after: 22...Qg1† 23.Nd1 Bg4 24.gxf7† Kg7 25.Qd2 Rxf7! Golubev's suggestion – previously Black exchanged on d1 but then the ending is slightly unpleasant. Now White can't make progress as he's tied down to defending d1.



26.Bh6† (26.Bxf7 Kxf7 27.Qd5† e6 28.Qxd6 Nf2 was agreed drawn in Schranz – Barbarics, email 2007, as White has nothing better than perpetual.) 26...Kg8 27.Be3 Qxd1† Black works out that now the ending needn't be feared. (27...Qf1!?N looks possible) 28.Qxd1 Bxd1 29.Kxd1 a6 30.Bg5 e5 31.Bxf7† Kxf7 32.Ke2 Ng3† 33.Kf3 Nf1= Guizar – Berza, email 2008.

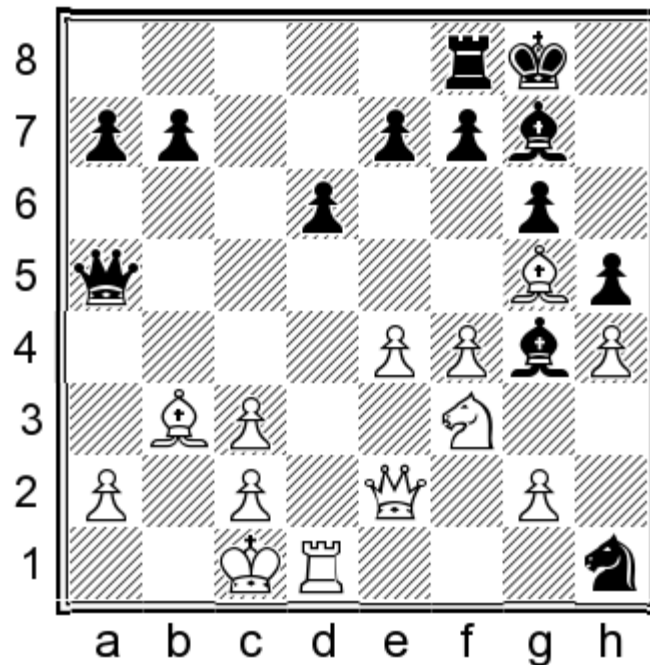
22...Bxf5 23.Qxh1

Macieja – Jones, Warsaw 2010. The forcing lines have ended and it is time to take stock of the position: Black has a rook and two pawns along with a good structure for the two minor pieces. The engines assess the position as equal, but I tend to prefer the two pieces – and indeed during the game I felt a bit uncomfortable. It's a matter of personal preference whether to choose this or 18...Bg4.

D22) 18...Bg4 19.Nf3 Rxc3!

With White's pieces distracted on the kingside we don't need to hesitate in our counterplay.

20.bxc3 Qa5



Now D221) 21.Rd3 has been tried, though D222) 21.Rxh1 is more common.

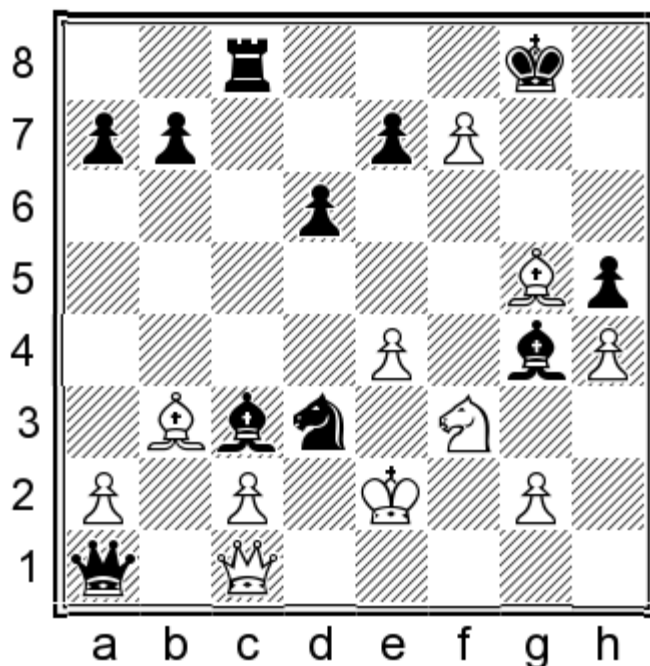
D221) 21.Rd3 Bxc3

Vigorito offers 21...Rc8!? as a possible alternative which the engines also assess as 0.00.

22.Qe3 Rc8 23.Kb1!

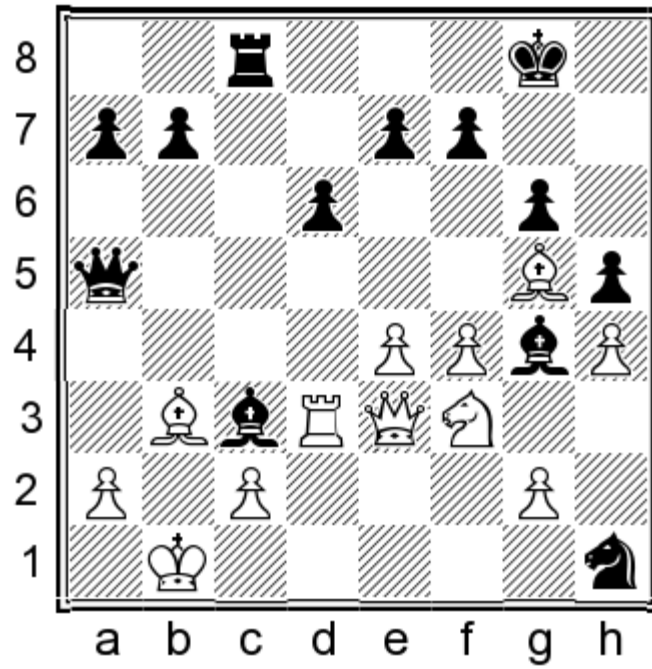
This has to be played.

23.f5?! Qa3† 24.Kd1 Qb2 Now Black has managed to infiltrate with his queen. 25.fxg6 Qa1† 26.Qc1 Nf2† 27.Ke2 Nxd3 28.gxf7† Eames – Snape, Birmingham 2005. Here Vigorito proposes the following improvement:



28...Kg7!N 29.Bh6† (or 29.Qxa1 Bxa1 30.cxd3 e6) 29...Kh7 30.cxd3 (30.Qxa1? Bxa1 31.cxd3 Kxh6) 30...Qxc1 31.Bxc1 Kg7µ Black has good winning chances.

Here my engine considers almost everything to draw, with the most forcing being:



23...Ng3

23...Be6!? 24.Bxe7 Bxb3 25.cxb3 Bb4 26.Bxd6 Bxd6 27.Rxd6 Qc7=

23...Rc7!?

24.Bxe7 Nf1 25.Qg1

A draw was agreed at this point in Ishemguzhin – Demchenko, corr. 2012.

Not 25.Qc1? Bxf3 26.gxf3 Nd2† 27.Rxd2 Bxd2 28.Qg1 Kh7 29.Bxf7 Qb4† 30.Bb3 Bxf4–+.

25...Ng3

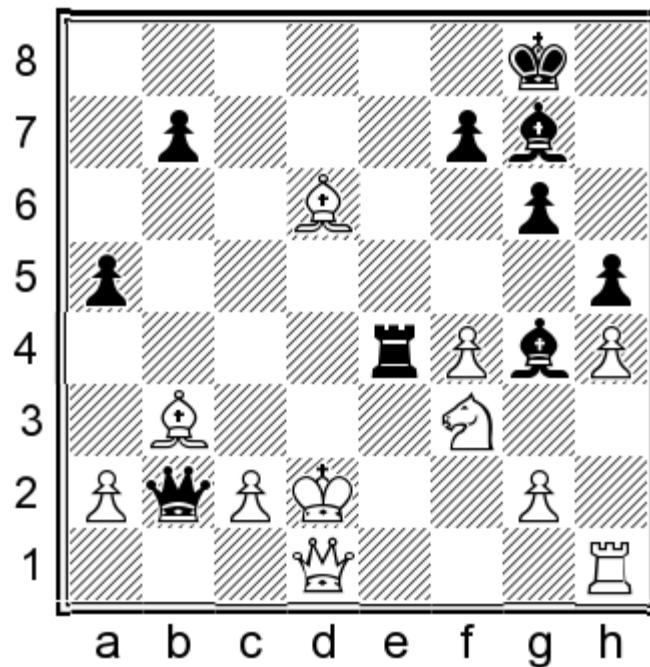
Now 25...Bxf3? would be a big mistake as 26.gxf3 Nd2† 27.Rxd2 Bxd2 allows 28.Qxg6†.

26.Qe3 Nf1=

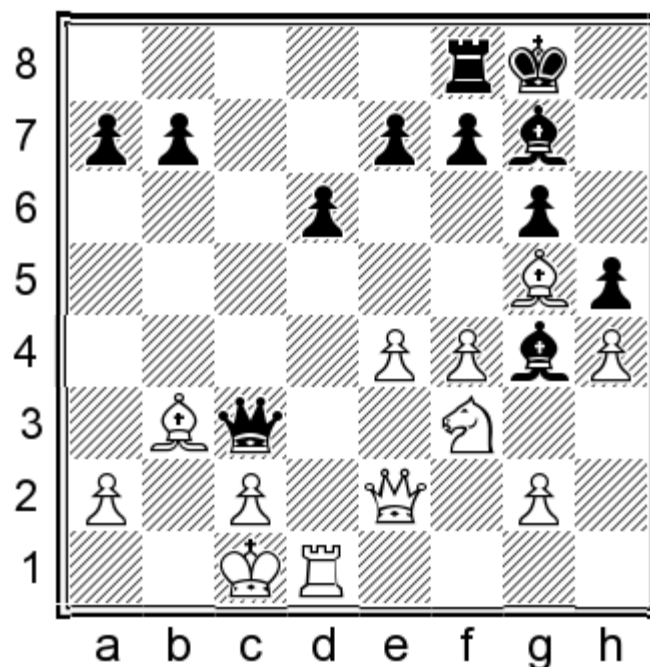
D222) 21.Rxh1 Qxc3 22.Rd1

White is wise to allow the perpetual.

Instead 22.Qd1?! was tried in T. Ernst – Asendorf, Hamburg 2005, but as Vigorito points out, 22...a5!N would be promising for Black. The line might continue 23.Bxe7 Qb2† 24.Kd2 Re8 25.Bxd6 Rxe4 when the only way to prevent immediate catastrophe is to play:



26.Qa1! Qxa1 27.Rxa1 Bxf3 (27...Bxa1 28.Bxf7† Kg7 29.c3 isn't so clear although Black should be a bit better with 29...Bxf3 30.gxf3 Re1!) 28.gxf3 Rd4† 29.Ke3 Rxd6 Black has a pleasant endgame with the better structure, and in particular White will struggle to defend the h4- and f4-pawns. The drawish tendencies of the opposite-coloured bishops will only emerge should White succeed in trading rooks.



22...Qb2†

22...a5!? was tried in Vetoshko – Bargan, Chervonograd 2008, and can be played if you're feeling in a combative mood.

23.Kd2 Qc3†

A draw was now agreed in Fenollar Jorda – Serrano Salvador, email 2008.

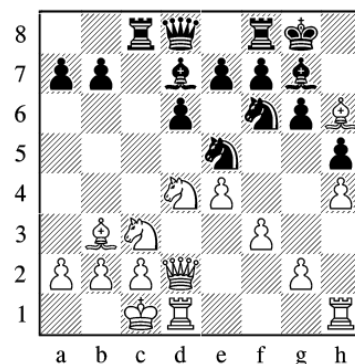
Conclusion

14.f4 is definitely the critical line in this chapter. It's useful to remember that we don't necessarily need to move the f6-knight after White plays e4-e5, as the bishop is often trapped on g5. 15.Qd3 is met by the strong 15...Ng4!, exploiting the big fork on f2. After the further 16.Bxc4 Nf2 17.Qe2 Nxh1 18.Bb3 I think 18...Bg4 is simpler than 18...Qb6, when White should probably steer the game towards a draw or risk being worse.

In a lot of these lines the key is figuring out the most precise time to sacrifice the exchange, either to open up White's king or to defuse his attack.



Soltis Variation



13.♘h6

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0
8.♙d2 ♘c6 9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0 ♖c8 11.♙b3 ♘e5 12.h4 h5 13.♙h6

13...♘c4! 14.♙xc4 ♖xc4 15.♙xg7 ♙xg7

A) 16.Rhe1

B) 16.Nd5 e5! 17.Nb3 Nxd5 18.Qxd5

B1) 18...Qc7

B2) 18...Rc6

C) 16.Kb1

C1) 16...Qb6!?

C2) 16...Qa5 17.Nb3 Qc7

C21) 18.Nd5

C22) 18.g4

D) 16.g4 hxg4 17.h5 Rh8! 18.hxg6 fxg6 19.f4 e5

D1) 20.fxe5 dxe5

D11) 21.Nb3

D12) 21.Nde2

D2) 20.Rxh8 Qxh8

D21) 21.Nb3

D22) 21.Nde2

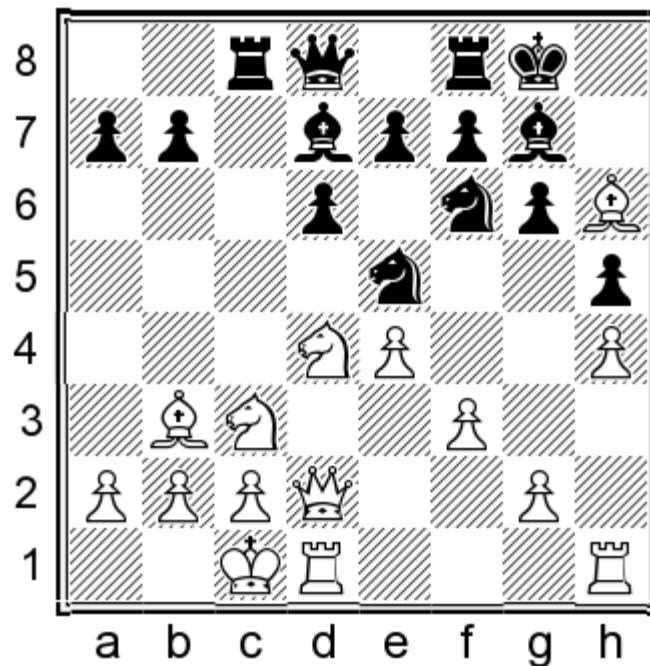
D3) 20.Nde2 Rxh1 21.Rxh1 Nxe4 22.Nxe4 Rxe4 23.fxe5 Rxe2! 24.Qxe2 Qg5†

D31) 25.Kb1

D32) 25.Qd2

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bh6

White aims to trade the dark-squared bishops immediately.



13...Nc4!

White is forced to exchange his light-squared bishop.

14.Bxc4 Rxc4

Now we threaten 15...Rxd4 so White is obliged to trade his other bishop as well.

15.Bxg7 Kxg7

White has four main tries here: A) 16.Rhe1, B) 16.Nd5, C) 16.Kb1 and D) 16.g4.

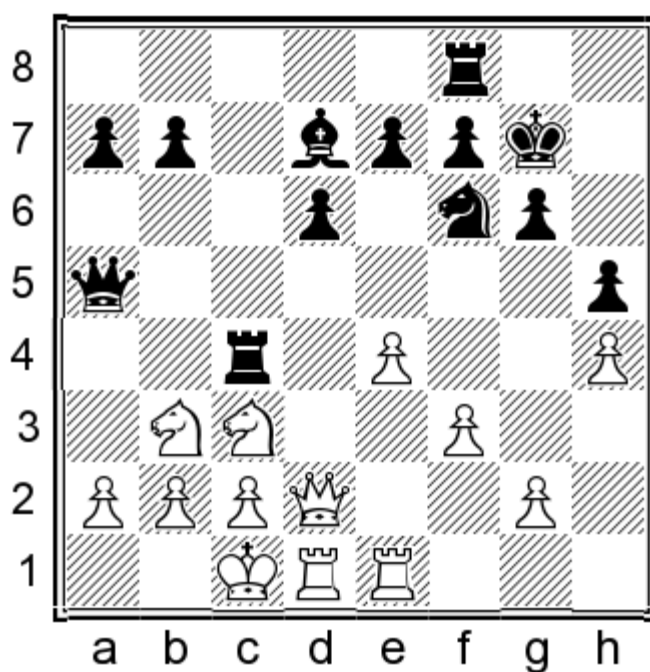
16.Nde2 doesn't put any pressure on Black. We can just play our typical queenside moves: 16...Qa5 17.Kb1 Rfc8 18.a3 Be6 19.Rhe1 Gabrielian – Bu Xiangzhi, Moscow 2012, 19...Qb6N 20.Rc1 Nd7³.

16.Qg5 is also seen from time to time but 16...Qc7N looks straightforward.

A) 16.Rhe1 Qa5 17.Nb3

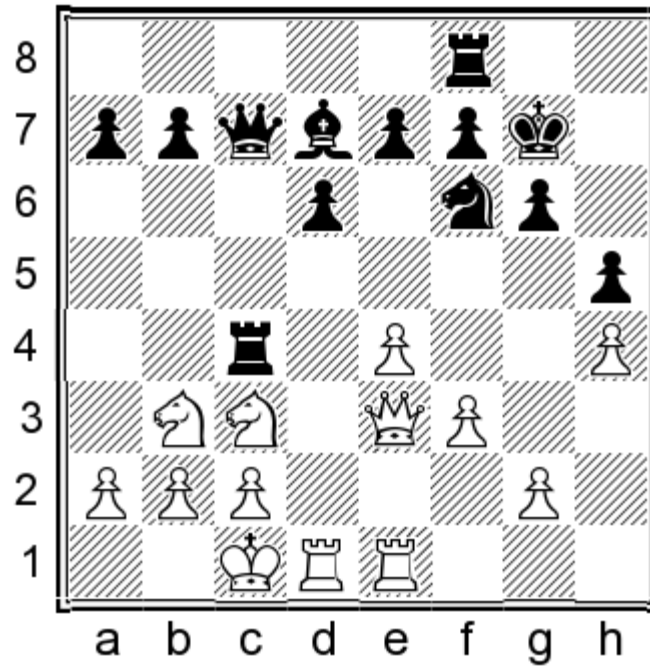
17.Kb1 transposes to 17.Rhe1 in the notes to variation C2.

Dearing gives 17.Re3 Rfc8 18.Rd3 a6 when Black is ready to advance on the queenside, while it's unclear what trebling on the d-file has achieved.



17...Qc7 18.Qg5

18.Qe3 was Steller – Hein, Gluecksburg 1988, provoking:

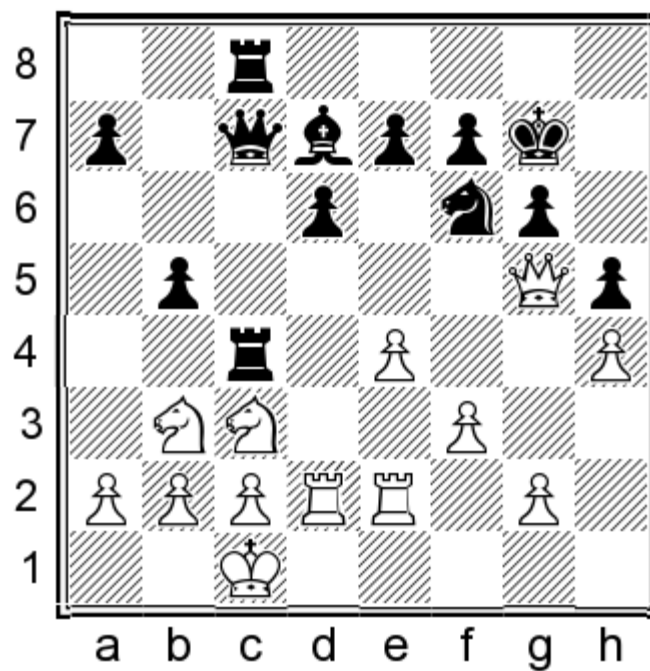


18...b5N 19.e5 dxe5 20.Qxe5 b4 21.Qxc7 Rxc7 22.Nd5 Nxd5 23.Rxd5 Rfc8= Black has nothing to fear.

18.Kb1 Rc8 has been seen a few times but Black is comfortable.

18...b5 19.Rd2 Rc8 20.Ree2

White's set-up was extremely awkward in Koskinen – Rinkis, Denmark 1996. Here I quite like:



20...e6N

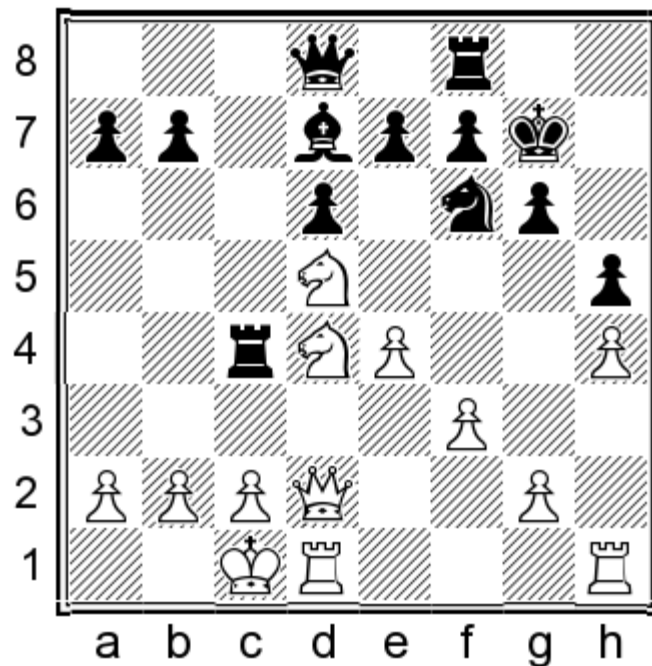
Taking control of the d5-square. White's pieces look ridiculous.

21.Nxb5 Bxb5 22.Qxb5 d5

Black has wonderful play for the pawn.

B) 16.Nd5

This is also a normal idea for White, but here it's not particularly effective.



16...e5!

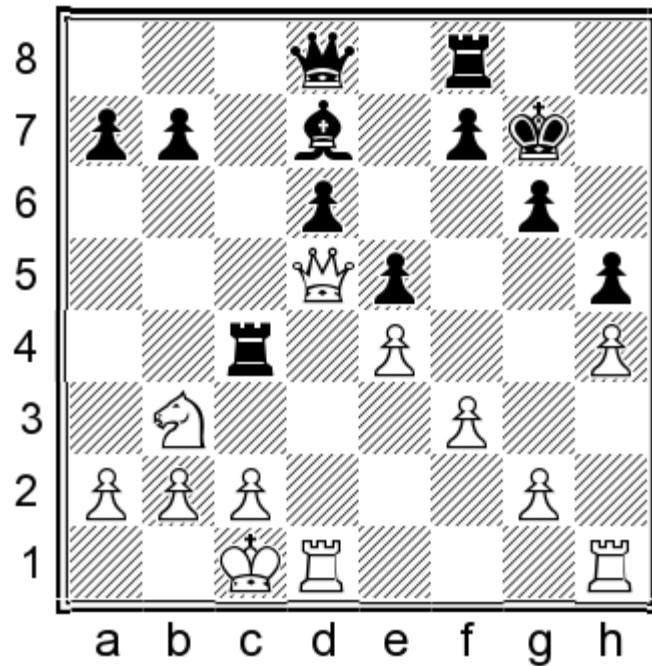
This is an important resource to remember. Once the g7-bishop has been removed, ...e5 becomes an important way to fight for the centre.

17.Nb3

17.Nxf6? loses immediately to 17...Rxd4.

17.Ne2 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Rc6³ is similar to the text continuation.

17...Nxd5 18.Qxd5



Black has two promising options in B1) 18...Qc7 and B2) 18...Rc6.

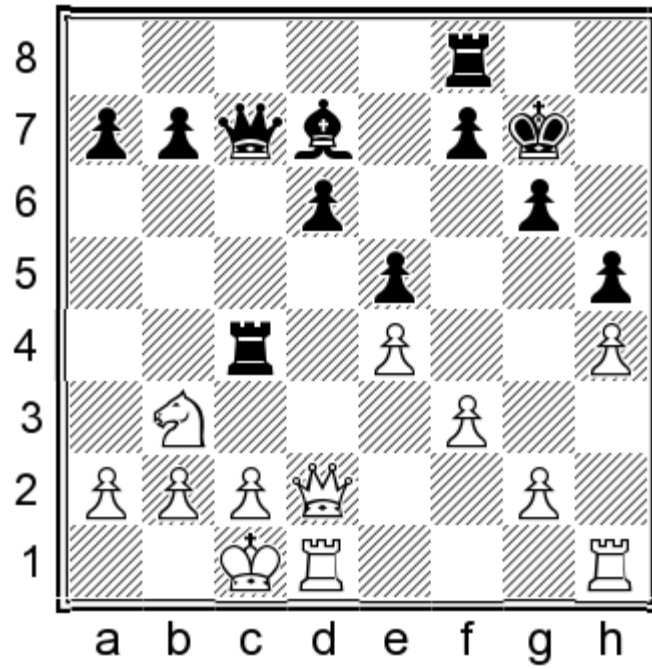
B1) 18...Qc7 19.Qd2

19.Rd2 Be6 20.Qd3 a5 21.Kb1 a4 22.Nc1 Rc8μ Siil – Kukk, Estonia 1999.

19.c3 Rc6 20.Kb1 Be6 21.Qd2 was Ivanovskis – Romanelli, Argentina 1995, and now Black should have chosen 21...a5N followed by ...a4-a3.

White's best hope is probably 19.Qxd6N, but still Black has the slightly better prospects in the ending after 19...Rxc2† 20.Kb1 Be6 21.Qxc7 Rxc7³.

The text was played in Vehi Bach – Komljenovic, San Sebastian 1993, and now I think Black should choose:



19...f5!?N

19...d5!?N is also interesting, with the idea 20.exd5 Bf5.

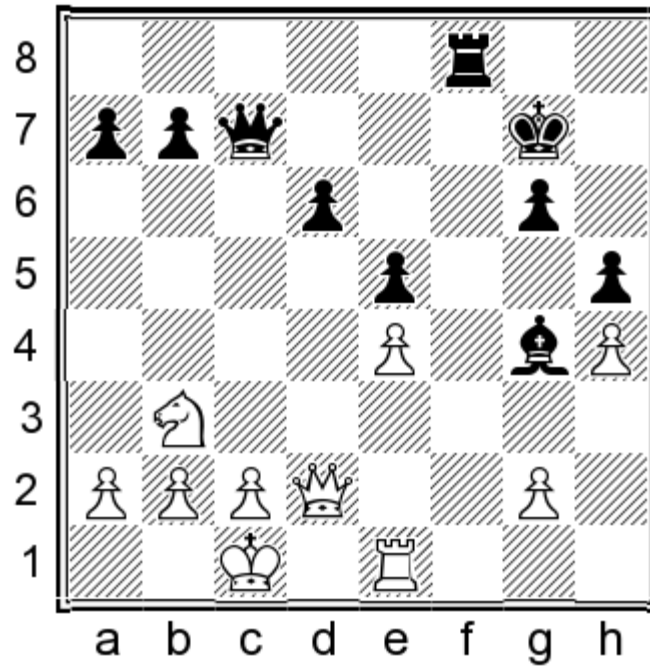
Black has completely taken over the centre of the board. One sample line continues:

20.Rhe1 fxe4 21.Rxe4

21.fxe4 Bg4

21...Rxe4 22.fxe4 Bg4 23.Re1

23.Qxd6? Qxd6 24.Rxd6 Rf1† 25.Kd2 Rd1†



23...Qb6

Black dominates.

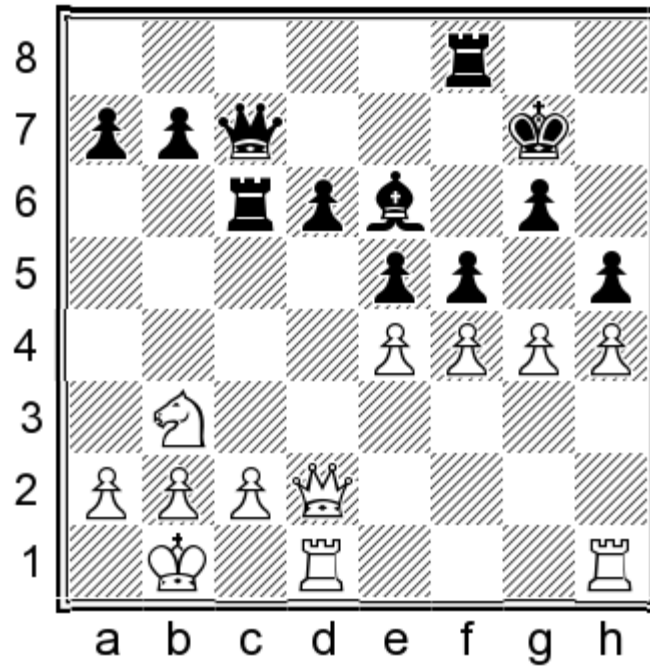
B2) 18...Rc6

It's understandable to feel uneasy about ceding the d5-outpost to your opponent, but here White can do little with it. White's main problem is that he lacks a good plan while Black can easily put pressure on White's king.

19.Qa5

19.g4?! This rarely works with Black's pawn on e5. 19...hxg4 20.h5 Qg5† 21.Kb1 Be6 22.Qd3 Bc4 23.h6† Kh7 Black was completely winning in Ashanina – Stephan, Avoine 2010.

19.Kb1 Be6 20.Qd2 f5!? This is an interesting idea; Black fights on both sides of the board. 21.f4 Qc7 22.g4?! Aesthetically pleasing, but it doesn't work:



22...fxg4 23.f5 Bxb3 24.axb3 Qe7 25.fxg6 Rf4!-+ D. Wells – A. Eckersley-Waites, Swansea 2006.

19...Be6N

This is suggested by Dearing. Black is better as 20.Qxa7? Qc7! leaves White in severe trouble; 21...Rxc2 and 21...Ra6 are both threatened.

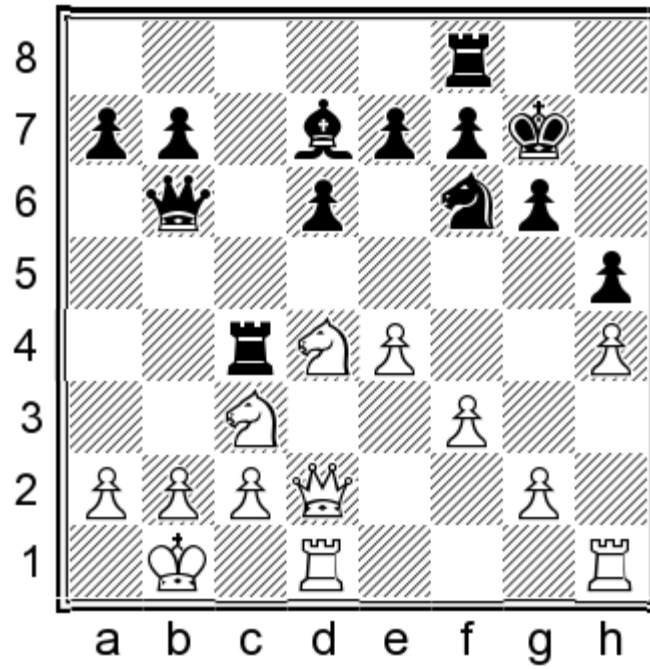
19...Qb8 was a more ambitious move that worked well in Ter Sahakyan – Abdyjapar, Al-Ain 2014. Black is better here too.

C) 16.Kb1

This is a more patient approach. Black can respond with **C1)** 16...Qb6!? or **C2)** 16...Qa5.

C1) 16...Qb6!?

This interesting sideline was suggested by Dearing and also looks fully adequate for Black. The point is not to allow White to gain a tempo with Nb3, while it's useful to be able to exchange queens with the exchange sacrifice on d4.

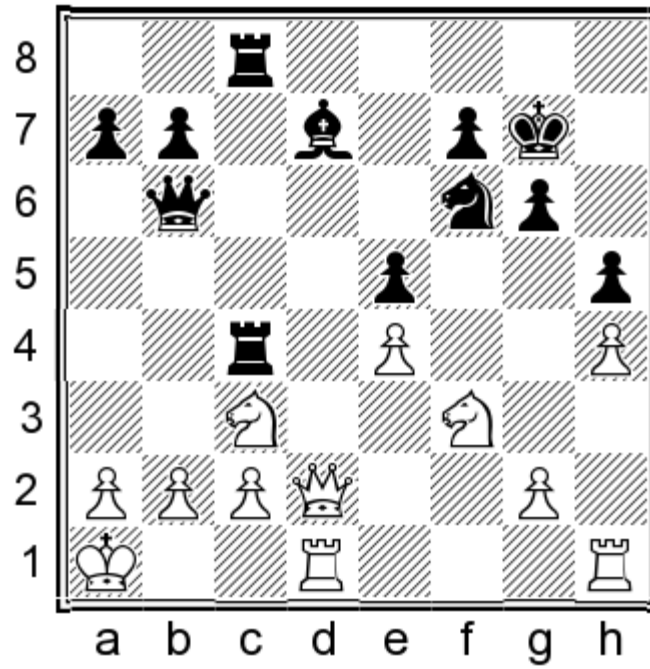


17.Nd5N

Perhaps this is the most sensible way to try and punish the queen's location.

17.g4?! The caveman approach isn't justified. 17...hgx4 18.h5 Rxd4! The exchange sacrifice is always an important defensive resource. 19.Qxd4 Qxd4 20.h6† (20.Rxd4 gxh5µ The bishop and two pawns outrank the rook here as the g-pawn is so strong.) 20...Kh7 21.Rxd4 gxf3 22.Kc1 g5 23.Kd2 g4 It was clear that the two pawns were again worth far more than the exchange in Hausmann – Rook, Germany 1990.

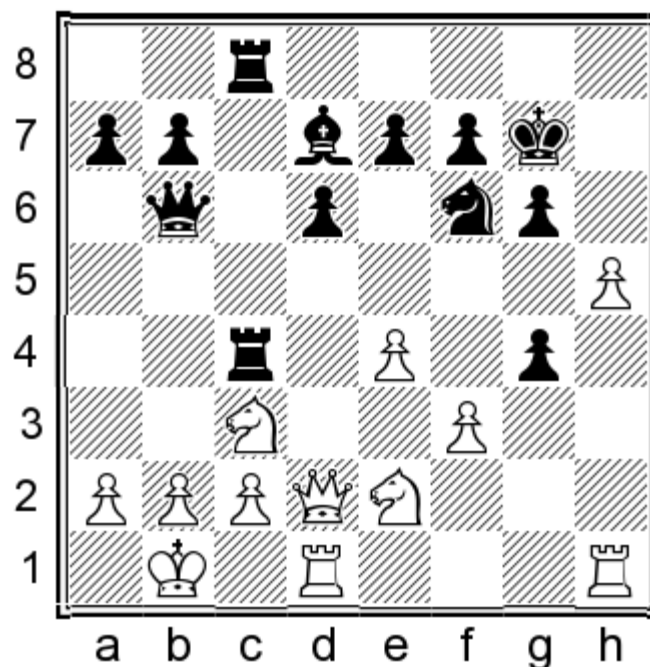
17.f4 e5! If possible, Black always wants to deal with f3-f4 like this. 18.fxe5 dxe5 19.Nf3 Rfc8 20.Ka1 Savidis – Korlotsidis, Petroupoli 2012. Here it was time for the move a Dragon player should be itching to play:



20...Rxc3!N 21.bxc3 Be6 22.Rb1 Qa6! (22...Qa5 23.c4! isn't so clear) 23.Rb2 Nxe4 Black has a fantastic position.

17.Rhe1 A slow approach which doesn't cause Black any problems. The simplest seems to be 17...e5 18.Nb3 Rc6= as in Staf – Sazon, email 2010. White has no way to increase the pressure on the d6-pawn and we can continue with ...Be6 and ...Rfc8.

17.Nde2 White prepares to play g2-g4 without allowing a queen exchange. 17...Rfc8 18.g4 hxg4 19.h5 Vilacoro Lavina – Perez Cameselle, Madrid 1998. Here Black should have kept the kingside closed with:



19...g5!N 20.Qxg5† Kh7÷ The h5-pawn is very useful in defending Black's king.

17...Nxd5 18.exd5 Rc5

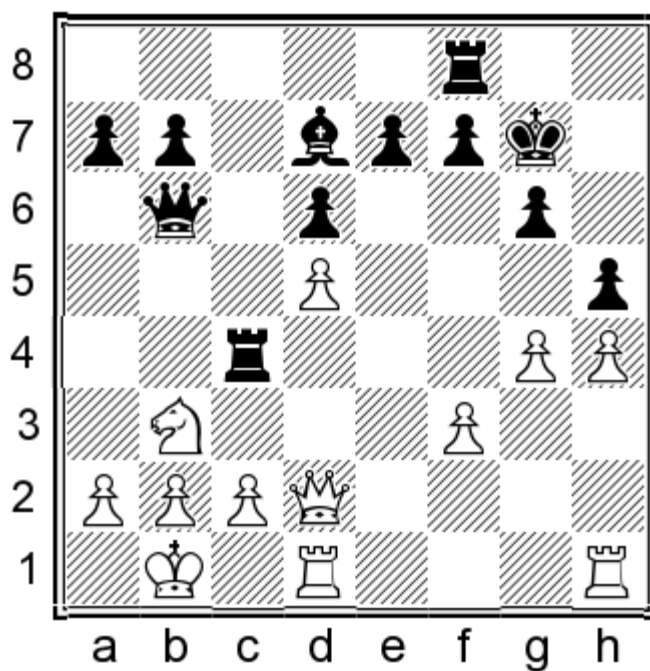
18...e5 is also possible, but after 19.dxe6 fxe6 20.Ne2 Black's structure is a bit loose. Ideally we'd want a dark-squared bishop here.

19.Nb3 Rc4

I don't think White has better than repeating here, for example:

20.g4!?

20.Rhe1 Re8= Black is solid. 21.g4? now doesn't work: 21...hxg4 22.h5 Bf5μ



20...hxg4 21.h5 Rxc2! 22.Qxc2

22.Kxc2?? Bf5† 23.Kc1 Rc8† loses immediately.

22...Bf5 23.Rd3 Rc8 24.Qd2 Qb5 25.Nc1

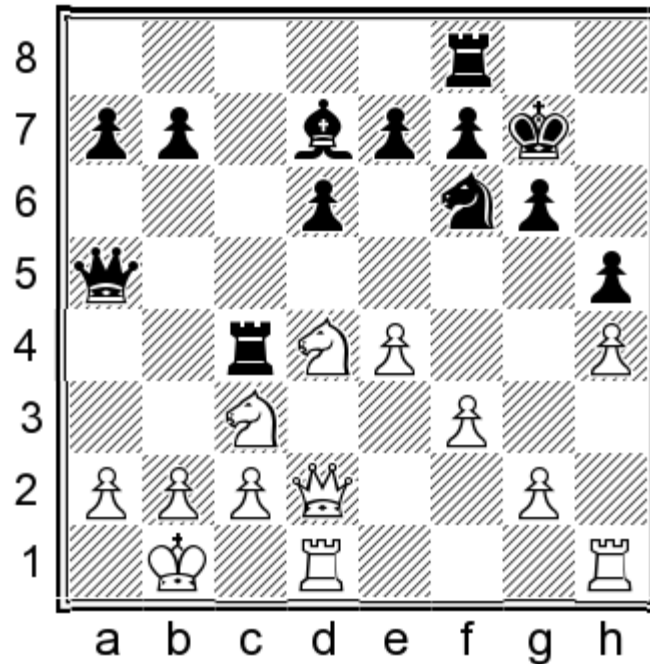
25.Rd1 Qxd3† 26.Qxd3 Bxd3† 27.Rxd3 gxh5 28.fxg4 hxg4 Black's three pawns are far more dangerous than White's knight here.

25...Rxc1† 26.Kxc1 Bxd3

We've arrived at a messy position but one where Black can't be worse. White's king is at least as vulnerable as Black's, and the bishop on d3 is powerful.

C2) 16...Qa5

The main line. I actually saw this position reached in the World Cup in Tromsø 2013, with the young talent Wei Yi playing Black against Super-GM Ian Nepomniachtchi. I watched with interest to see what White's idea was.

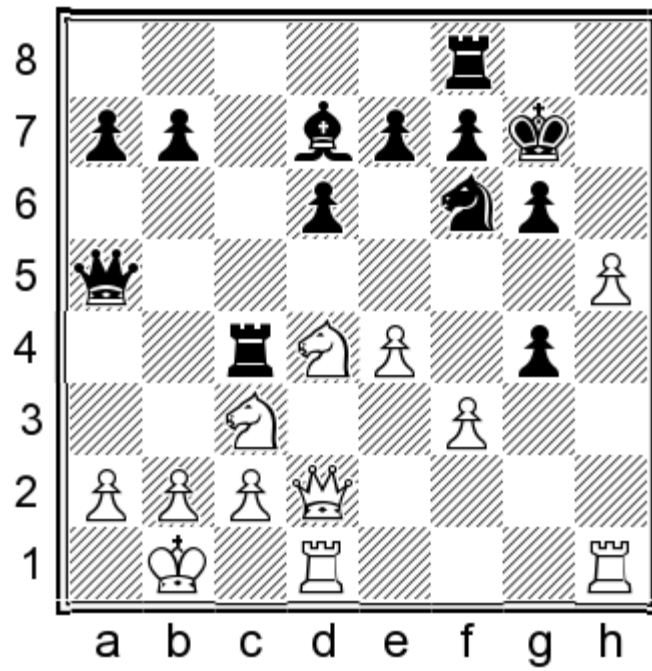


17.Nb3

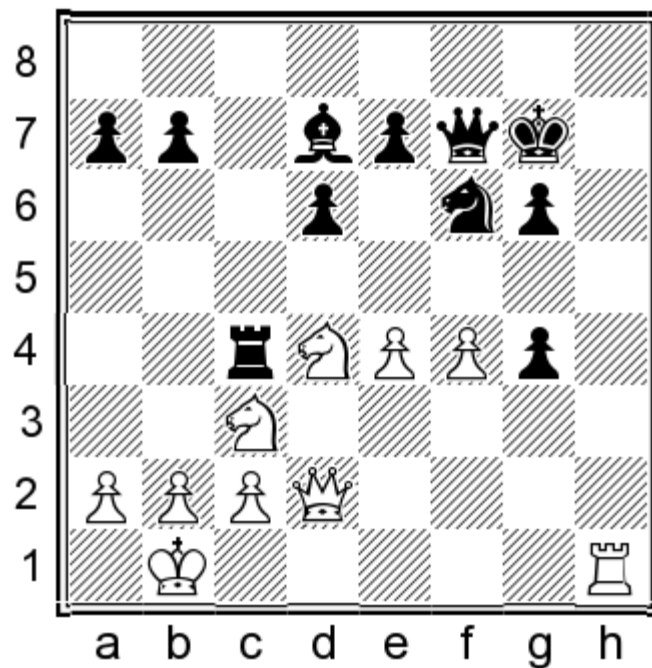
This move, forcing the black queen to move again, is the main line.

17.Nd5 is a move lacking in ambition. Following 17...Qxd2 18.Rxd2 Nxd5 19.exd5 Rfc8 20.Re1 Kf6= Black had comfortable equality and actually went on to win in Kalod – Maciejka, Presov 2000.

17.g4!? hxg4 18.h5 Here Black should defend as he would without Kb1 and ...Qa5 thrown in:



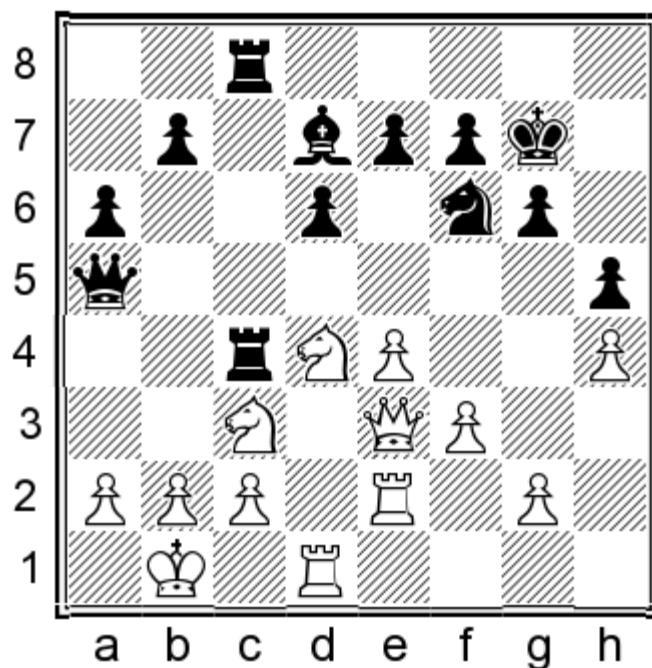
18...Rh8!N 19.hxg6 (19.Nb3 Qe5 20.f4 Nxe4! 21.fxe5 Nxd2† 22.Nxd2 Rd4 Again I'd prefer Black's huge clump of kingside pawns to the knight.) 19...Rxh1 20.Rxh1 fxg6 21.Nb3 (21.Qh6† Kf7 doesn't get White anywhere) 21...Qe5 22.f4 Qe6 23.Nd4 Qf7



The position may look a little dangerous but, with quite a few pieces exchanged and the black queen helping defend the king, Black is fine. Remember we also have an extra pawn here.

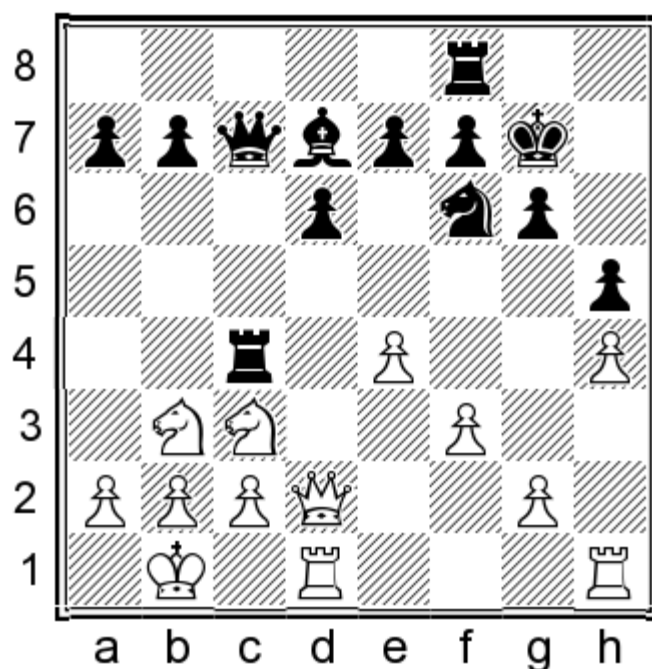
17.Rhe1 was Nepomniachtchi's choice. He evidently decided White doesn't have enough of an attack to mate, and so tried to sit on his less experienced opponent – but Wei Yi was more than up to the task. 17...Rfc8 18.Qe3 a6 A useful waiting move. (The problem is that 18...b5?! 19.e5! is awkward.) White is actually struggling to improve his position

here. He tried 19.Re2, when Black was completely fine after:



19...Qc5 Black went on to score an impressive upset in Nepomniachtchi – Wei Yi, Tromso 2013. However, as I previously suggested, 19...e5N looks rather good for Black. For example: 20.Nb3 Qc7 21.Red2 Rc6 We have our typical plan of expanding on the queenside. 19...Rxc3!?N also looks tempting.

17...Qc7



White can choose between C21) 18.Nd5 and the standard pawn break C22) 18.g4.

C21) 18.Nd5

This is slightly more challenging when the queens remain on the board.

18...Nxd5 19.exd5 Rc8

19...Qb6 20.g4 Rfc8 will transpose to our main line.

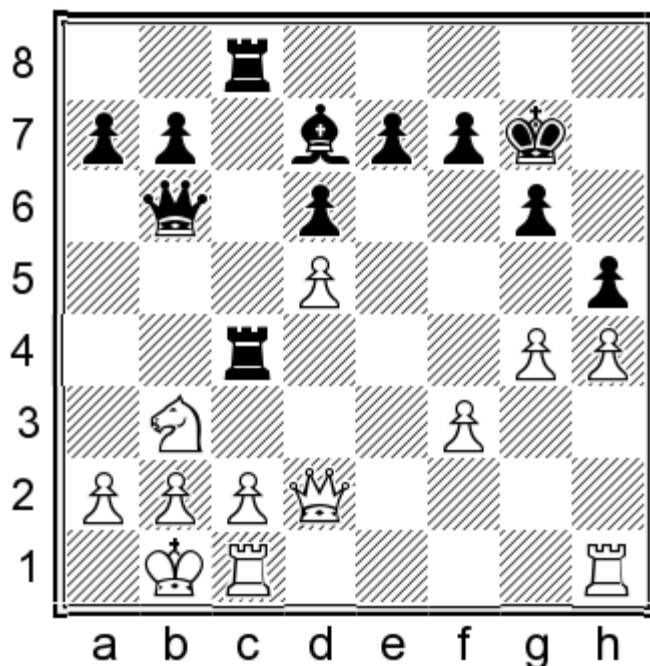
20.Rc1

After 20.Nd4N Black has enough dynamic play to justify the slight weakening of his structure with 20...e5!?. For example: 21.dxe6 fxe6 22.g4!? (22.Qg5 Qd8=) 22...e5 23.Nf5† Bxf5 24.gxf5 Rxc2 25.Qg5 Rxb2† 26.Kxb2 Qc3† 27.Kb1 Qc2† 28.Ka1 Qc3†=

The solid 20...Rc5 21.Rhe1 Qd8 22.Qe2 Rxd5 23.Qxe7 Qc7 is also fine.

20...Qb6 21.g4

We have been following Hossain – Henrichs, Bad Wiessee 2008. Here I like:



21...e5!N

21...Rh8N is also possible, as 22.Qe2 Bb5 23.Qxe7?! runs into trouble: 23...Re8 24.Qg5 Re5 25.Qd2 hxg4³

22.dxe6

22.gxh5 Bf5! is bad for White.

22...Bxe6 23.gxh5 Bf5

Black has enough counterplay against the c2-pawn.

24.hxg6

24.Na1 defends the pawn but is passive. 24...Rb4 would force White to repeat, while 24...gxh5 is stronger. The bishop does a good job of defending our king.

24...Bxc2†

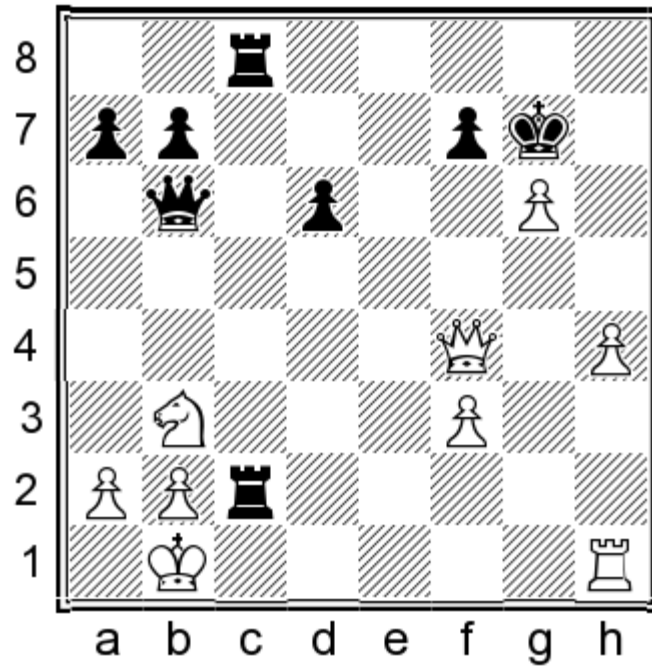
24...Rxc2 and even 24...fxg6!? can both also be considered.

25.Rxc2

25.Ka1 Ra4—+

25...Rxc2 26.Qf4

26.Qg5 Qf2 27.gxf7† Kxf7= White has no more than perpetual as he can't bring any of his other pieces into the attack.

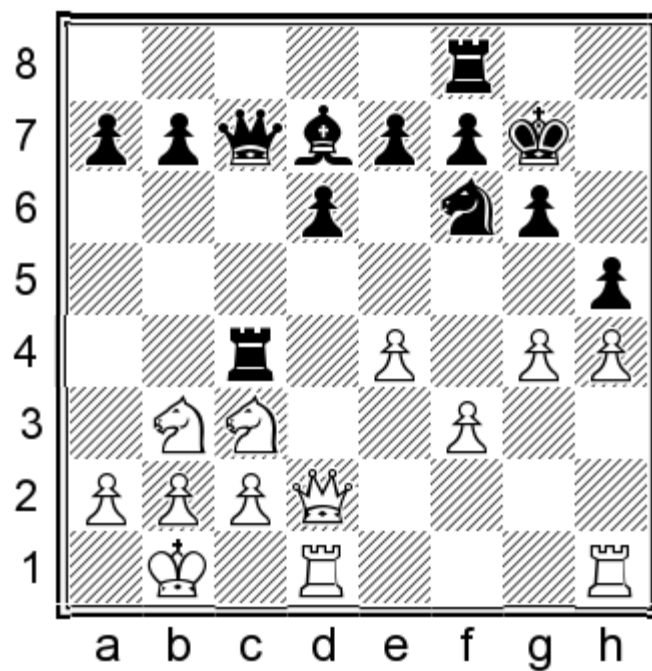


26...fxg6 27.h5 Rg2 28.h6† Kg8 29.h7† Kg7 30.h8=Q† Rxh8 31.Rxh8 Rg1† 32.Nc1 Kxh8=

And again White has to be happy with the perpetual.

C22) 18.g4

As Kasparov observed when discussing this structure, without this break White can't hope for any advantage.



18...hxg4 19.h5 Rxc3

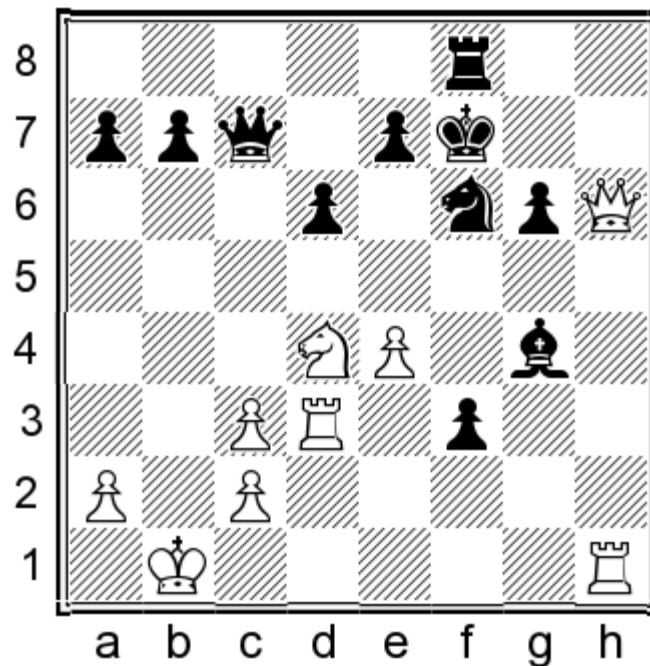
Again we utilize the defensive exchange sacrifice. It's important that we get to keep our f6-knight to defend the king.

20.hxg6

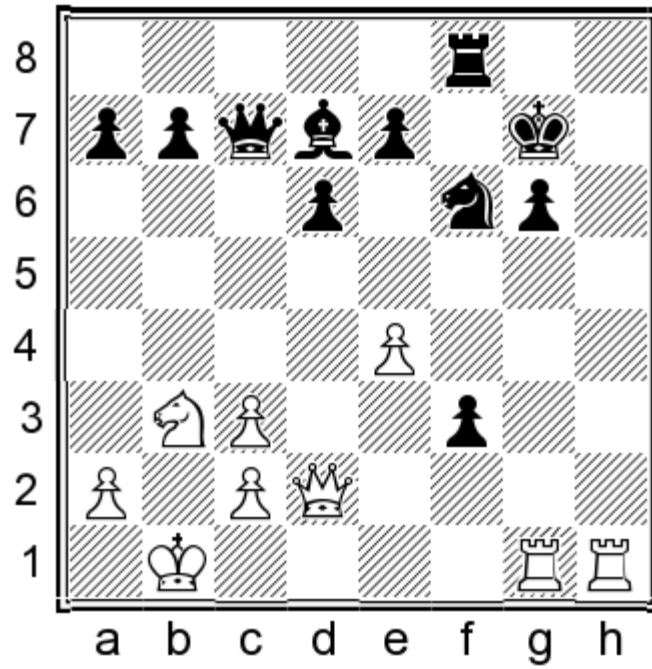
20.bxc3 gxf3 21.hxg6 fxg6 simply transposes.

20...fxg6 21.bxc3 gxf3 22.Rdg1

22.Qh6† Kf7 23.Rd3 Bg4 24.Nd4 This position was reached in the game Z. Ivanovic – Elison, email 2005, and now an interesting try is:



24...Rg8N The idea is that after 25.Nxf3 we can run with the king. 25...Ke8 26.Re1 Bxf3 27.Rxf3 Nd7÷ An unclear position has arisen. The knight is going to be strong on e5 and our king should now be safe. In fact with such a strong outpost and White's bad structure, the endings will be good for Black.



22...Kf7

Preparing to run the king to the safety of the centre.

22...Rg8!? as played in Aroshidze – Loetscher, Baku 2002, also looks interesting.

The only game to reach this position continued as follows:

23.Qg5?!

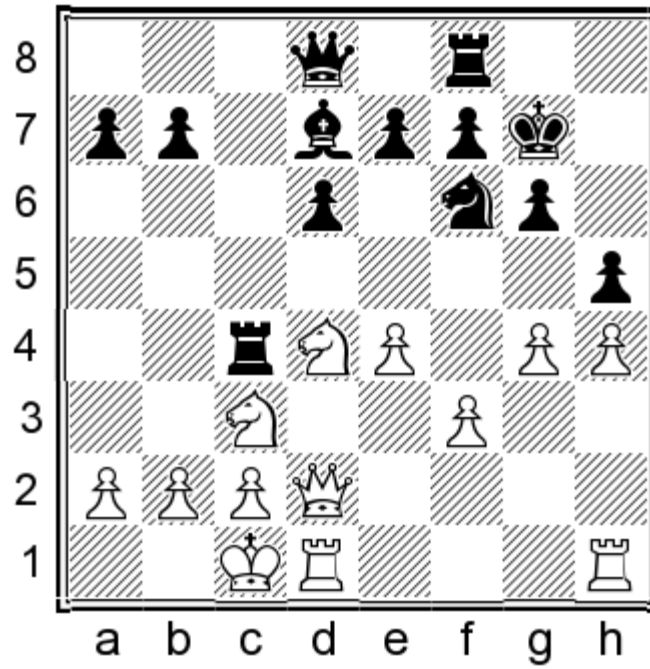
23.Rg3N is better, when 23...Bg4 24.Qg5 Bh5 25.Rxh5 gxh5 26.Qg6† Ke6 looks like a draw after 27.Qf5† Kf7 28.Qg6†.

23...Rg8 24.Qf4?! Qxc3 25.Rf1 Bg4

Black had far too much material for the rook in De la Iglesia – Enjuto Velasco, Madrid 2001.

D) 16.g4

The logical continuation of White's 13th move – he wants to mate!

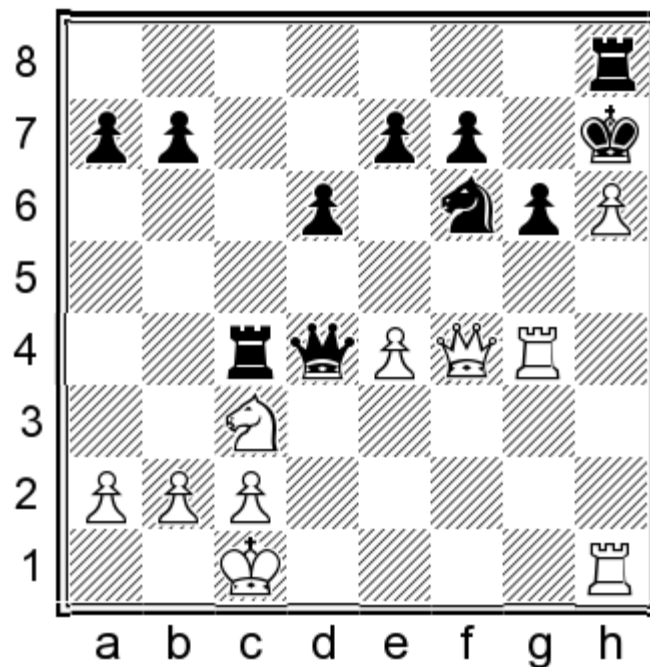


16...hxg4 17.h5 Rh8!

It's important to remember this method of defending your king, which is one of the reasons White's attack is generally more dangerous if he can keep his bishop on h6 for a little longer.

18.hxg6

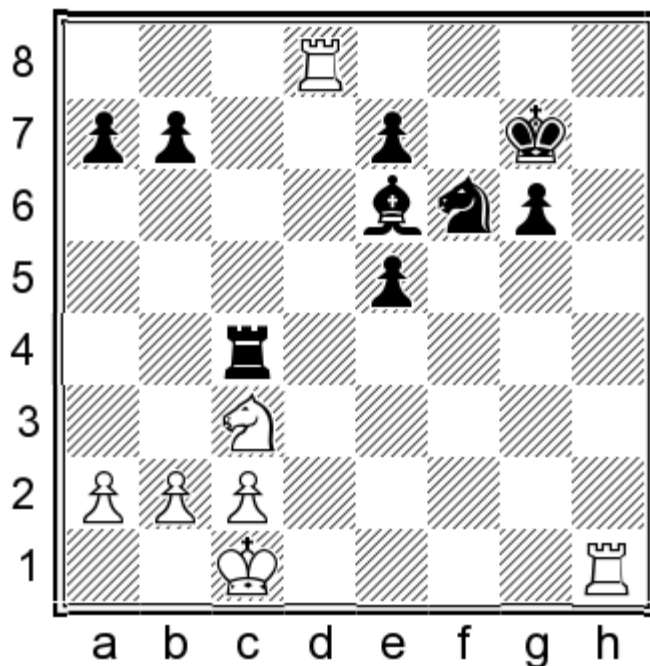
18.h6†? Closing the kingside can hardly be recommended; Black's king is completely safe on h7. 18...Kh7 19.fxg4 Bxg4 20.Rdg1 (or 20.Rdf1 Qa5 21.Nb3 Qe5→ Oijala – Jouhki, Mikkeli 1999) 20...Qb6 21.Qf4 Qxd4 22.Rxg4 Adam – Feletar, Szombathely 2003. Here the most accurate would be:



22...Rxc3!N 23.bxc3 Qxc3 24.Kb1 Rc8 25.Rg2 Rc4 Black has an overwhelming attack.

18...fxg6 19.f4

19.fxg4 Bxg4 20.e5 forces Black to give up the exchange but unfortunately for White after 20...dxe5 21.Ne6† Bxe6 22.Qxd8 Rxd8 23.Rxd8 the endgame doesn't favour him.



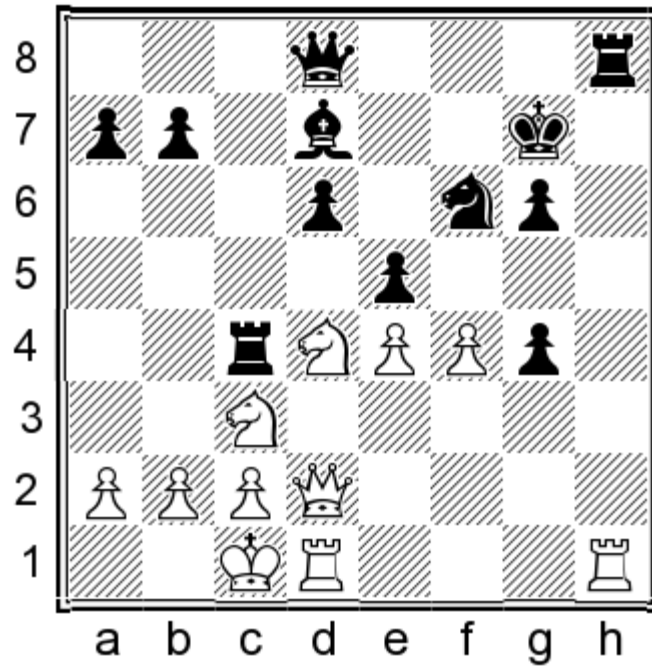
In fact, after 23...g5N I prefer Black's pawns.

19.e5? is a far worse version of the positions seen after 20.fxe5. 19...dxe5 20.Ne6† Bxe6 21.Qxd8 Rxd8 22.Rxd8 gxf3 and Black is winning easily.

19...e5

The thematic central counter.

19...Rxh1!? 20.Rxh1 Qf8 is an alternative way of playing the position.



White has three continuations at this point: D1) 20.fxe5, D2) 20.Rxh8 and D3) 20.Nde2.

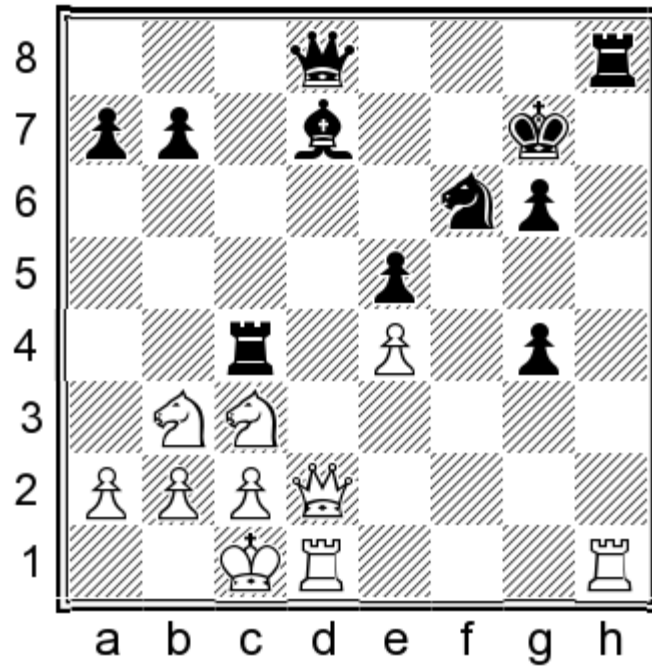
D1) 20.fxe5 dxe5

We immediately reach another branching point, with White's options being D11) 21.Nb3 and D12) 21.Nde2.

21.Ne6† This is the same tactic as we saw after 19.fxg4. White wins the exchange, but Black gains two pawns and has scored fantastically well after 21...Bxe6 22.Qxd8 Rxd8 23.Rxd8 Nxe4³. The g4-pawn is extremely powerful.

D11) 21.Nb3

I think we should continue in the same manner as against 21.Nde2 in variation D12, namely:



21...Rh3!

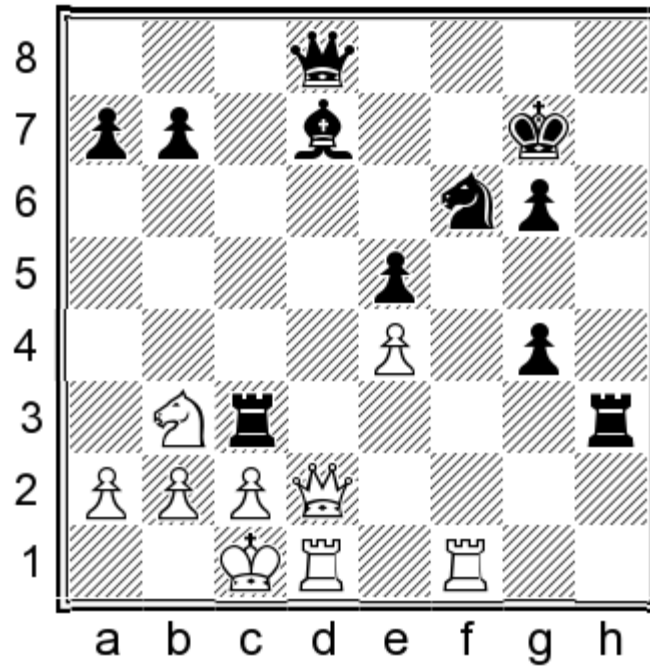
Reaching a rather similar position. A few correspondence games have continued as follows:

22.Rhf1

22.Qd6N seems to me the only way to try and gain from putting the knight on b3. 22...Qe8 23.Nc5 However here Black can play 23...Rxxh1 (23...Rd4!? is also interesting) 24.Rxxh1 Qf8 25.Ne6† Bxe6 26.Qxe6 Rxc3! 27.bxc3 Qa3† 28.Kb1 Qc5 with good pressure.

22...Rcxc3!

A strong exchange sacrifice. It's illustrative to see how quickly Black won:



23.bxc3 Qe7 24.Qg5 Bc6 25.Kb2 Rh5 26.Qe3 Nxe4 27.Na5 Nf6 28.Nxc6 bxc6 29.Rfe1 e4 30.c4 Rf5 31.Ka1 g5 32.Qb3 Kg6

0–1 Febland – Simmelink, email 2006.

D12) 21.Nde2 Rh3!

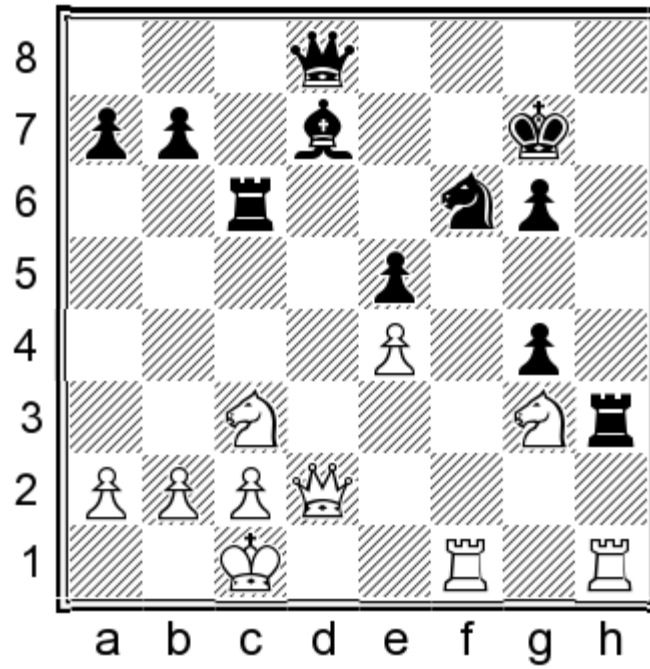
A nice idea, which blockades the h-file and slow White's attack. As always in this line, the extra pawn on g4 is very useful. White has tried various moves, but nothing is overly convincing.

22.Rhf1

White's idea is to capture on f6.

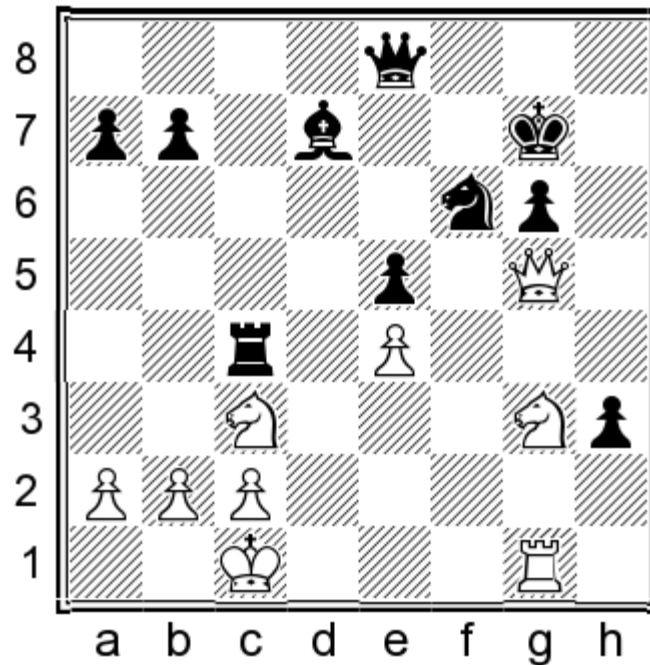
22.Qd6?! This is just a shot in the dark. 22...Qe8! 23.Rhf1 Rf3 24.Rh1 b5 25.Kb1 b4 26.Nd5 Nxe4µ Stjazhkina – Styazhkina, Palanga 2012.

22.Rdf1 Rc6 23.Ng3 was Bilguun – Froewis, Vienna 2012, and now best would have been:



23...Qe7N White doesn't have any way of increasing his attack and so is clearly worse.

22.Qg5 In practice this has been White's most common move but I don't think it should particularly challenge Black. 22...Qe7 23.Rxh3 gxh3 24.Rg1 Qe8 25.Ng3 Prandstetter – Kalod, Czech Republic 1999. A strong continuation for Black is:



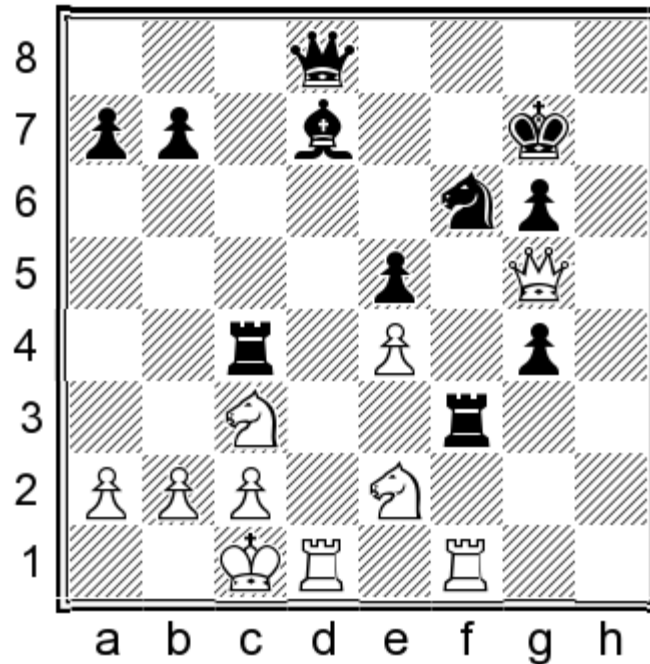
25...Nh7!N 26.Qe3 (26.Nh5† Kh8 27.Qxg6 Qxg6 28.Rxg6 h2 29.Ng3 Rc6 and Black's h-pawn wins the day) 26...Qf8 27.Nd5 (27.Nh5†?! again doesn't work as 27...Kh8 28.Rxg6 Qf1† 29.Nd1 Rd4 is crushing) 27...Rc6µ Black has fought off White's attacking intentions and can now start working on converting his extra material.

22...Rf3

22...Rc6!? also looks reasonable if White seems intent on a repetition. 23.Rxf6 Rxf6 24.Qxd7† Qxd7 25.Rxd7† Rf7 26.Rxf7† Kxf7 was a roughly level ending in Hausdorf – Walczak, email 2007.

23.Qg5

23.Rh1 Rh3 simply repeats.

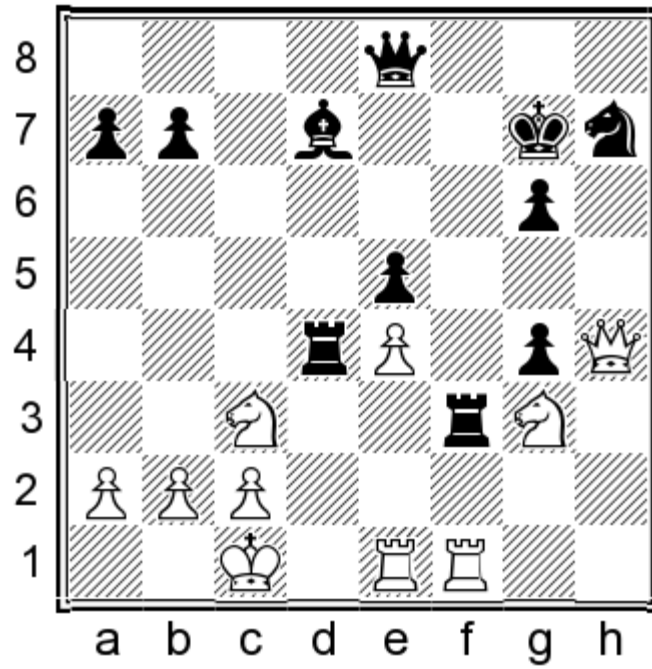


23...Qe8 24.Ng3 Rd4 25.Rde1

After 25.Rxf3?! Rxd1†! 26.Nxd1 gxf3 Black was clearly better in Khachiyan – Brodsky, Yerevan 1996.

25...Nh7 26.Qh4

Antemia – L. Komljenovic, Germany 2008. Here Black has lots of moves that maintain the balance, but I'd opt for:



26...Qf7N

One sample variation could be:

27.Rh1

27.Nd5 Rxd5!? 28.exd5 Qf4† 29.Kb1 Nf6 with dynamic equality.

27...Kg8

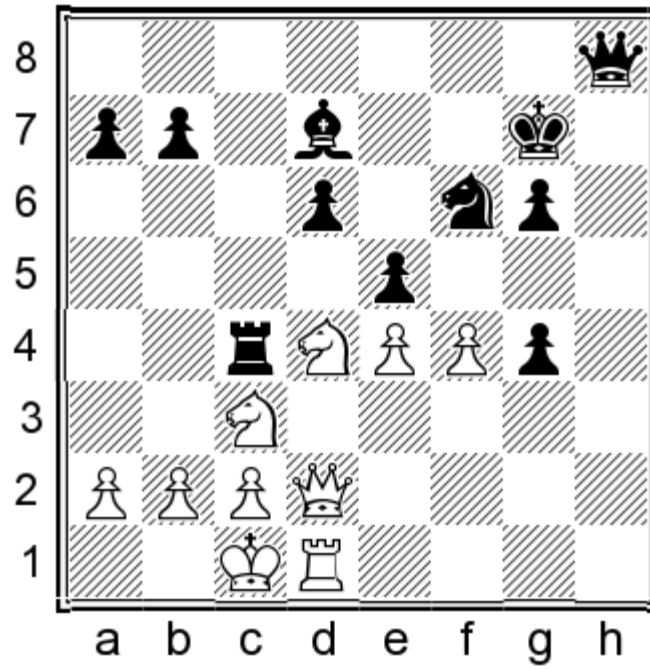
White doesn't have anything better than repeating.

28.Qd8† Qe8 29.Qh4 Qf7=

D2) 20.Rxh8

This move is rare in over-the-board games, but correspondence players have tried it from time to time.

20...Qxh8



White again has to decide where to put his knight: D21) 21.Nb3 or D22) 21.Nde2

D21) 21.Nb3 Qf8

Vigorito gives this his mark of approval and it has been played almost exclusively in the correspondence encounters.

However, 21...Rxc3!? also looks interesting. After 22.Qxc3 Black has to find 22...Qh6!, picking up the f4-pawn, as in Mocnik – Danculovic, email 2006.

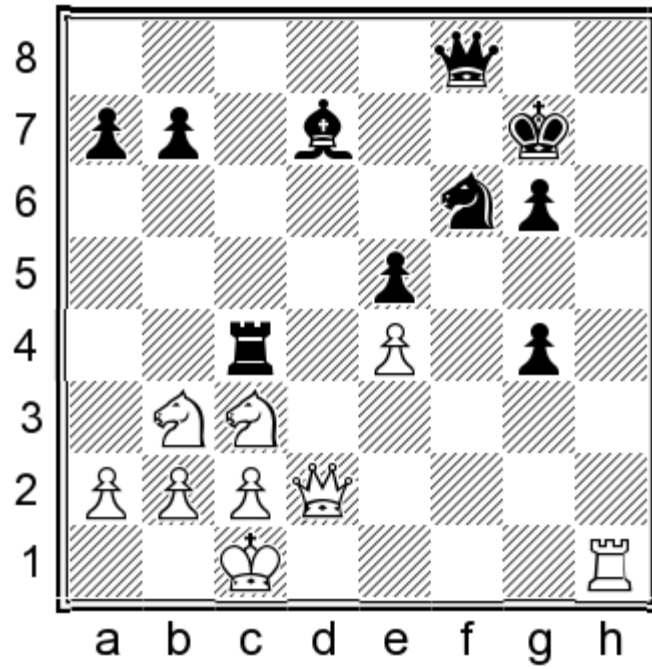
22.fxe5

22.Qxd6? Qxd6 23.Rxd6 Bc6 This endgame has been reached a couple of times, but Black is simply winning: again the g4-pawn is just too strong.

22...dxe5 23.Rh1

23.Qg5 was Hinriksson – Heikkinen, Finland 1992. Here 23...Qe7N is given by an anonymous annotator and looks like an improvement. Black has good control over the position.

23.Qe3 b6 24.Rf1 Posylek – Greene, corr. 1997 (24.Qg5 Qe7 is an improved version of the 23.Qg5 line.) 24...Rc6!N White's compensation for the pawn has dried up completely.

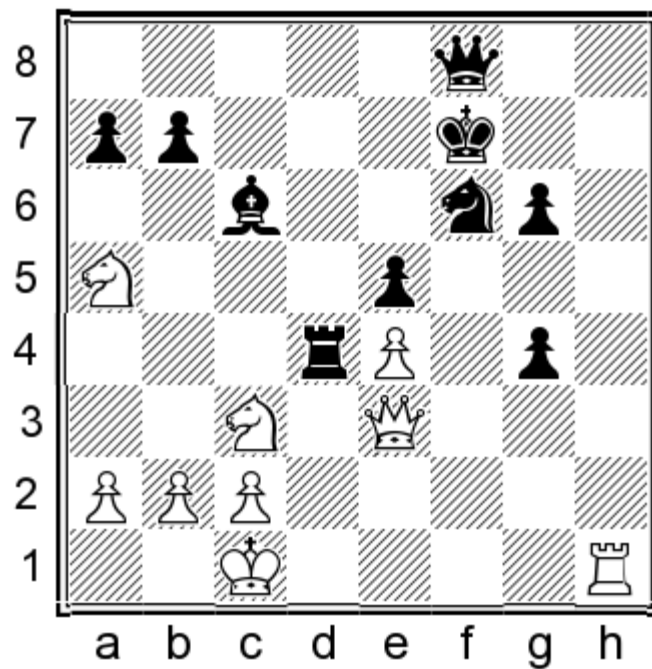


23...Bc6!

We don't need to worry about h6; it's just a check.

24.Na5 Rd4 25.Qh6† Kf7 26.Qe3

Here I see no reason not to bag another pawn:



26...Bxe4!N

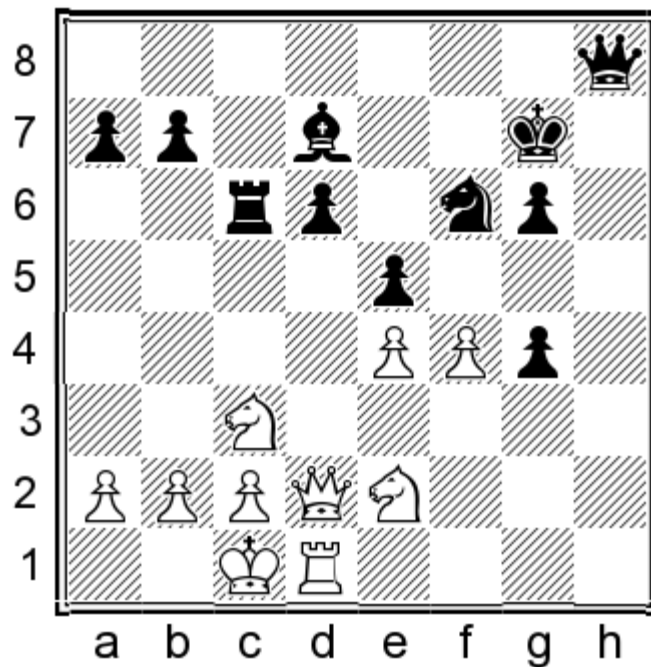
The arising endgame will favour Black.

27.Nxe4 Rxe4 28.Qxa7 Qe7 29.Qxb7 Qxb7 30.Nxb7 Ra4

White's three connected passed pawns look dangerous but our advanced g-pawn trumps them.

D22) 21.Nde2 Rc6

21...Qf8!?N also looks decent for Black, for example: 22.fxe5 (22.Qxd6? As usual the queen trade fails miserably. 22...Qxd6 23.Rxd6 Bc8µ) 22...Nxe4 23.Qd5 (23.Nxe4 Rxe4 24.exd6 Qf2µ) 23...Qf7 24.Qxb7 Bf5 25.Qxf7† Kxf7 26.exd6 Nxc3 27.Nxc3 Ke8 Despite the pawn deficit Black has the better chances, although it should probably be a draw.



22.Qe3

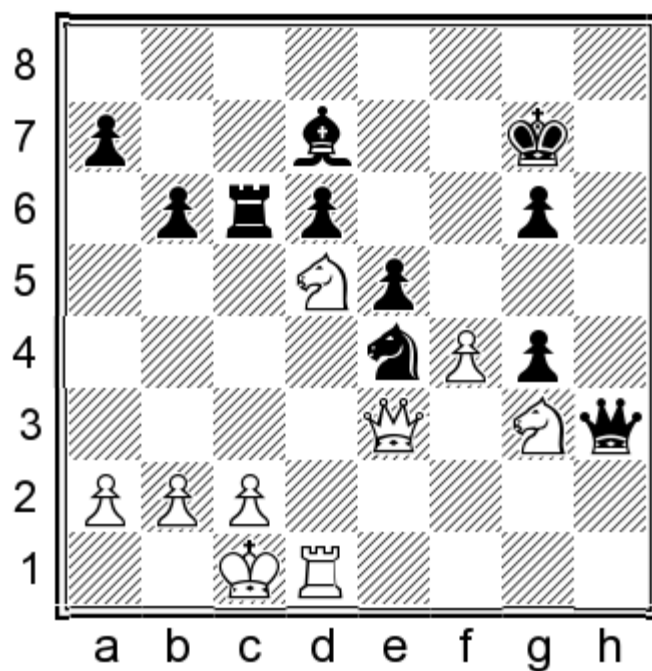
22.fxe5 dxe5 23.Kb1 Qh3 24.Qe1 Qe3 25.Qh4 Be6 26.Rd3 Qc5 27.Rd8 Rc8! was good for Black in Bortnik – Traut, email 2003. It's only one check on h8.

22...b6 23.Nd5

Vigorito suggests 23.fxe5 as an improvement, although his continuation of 23...dxe5 24.Nd5 Be8! favours Black.

23...Qh3 24.Ng3 Nxe4!

It's worth giving the piece for two pawns to exchange into an excellent ending.



25.Nxe4 Qxe3† 26.Nxe3 exf4 27.Nd5 Bf5

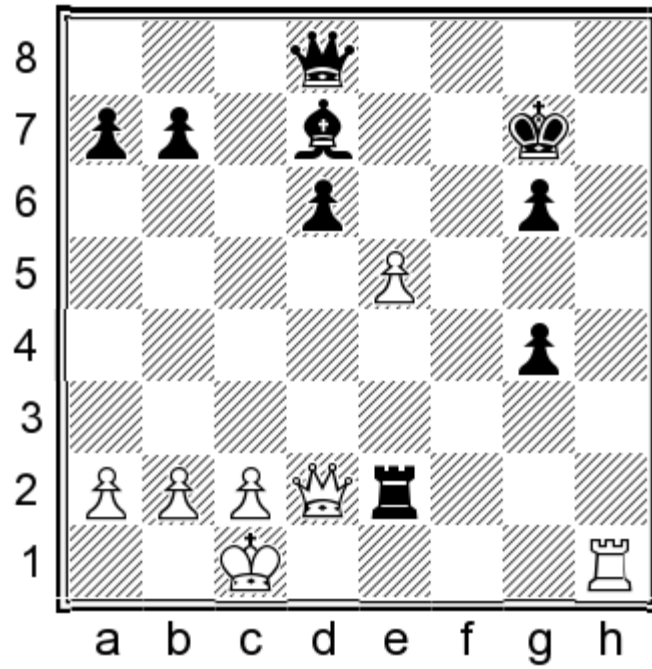
Koch – Dahlstroem, email 2007. Black's three pawns are too strong for the knight.

D3) 20.Nde2 Rxh1 21.Rxh1 Nxe4 22.Nxe4

As Dearing observes, 22.Qd3? loses at once to 22...Rxc3! 23.Nxc3 Nf2.

22...Rxe4 23.fxe5 Rxe2!

Another important defensive exchange sacrifice. This slows down White's attack and allows us to bring our queen over to improve the king's protection.



24.Qxe2

24.Qh6†

Since the first game back in 1971 it has been established that this merely leads to a draw, for example:

24...Kf7 25.Qh7†

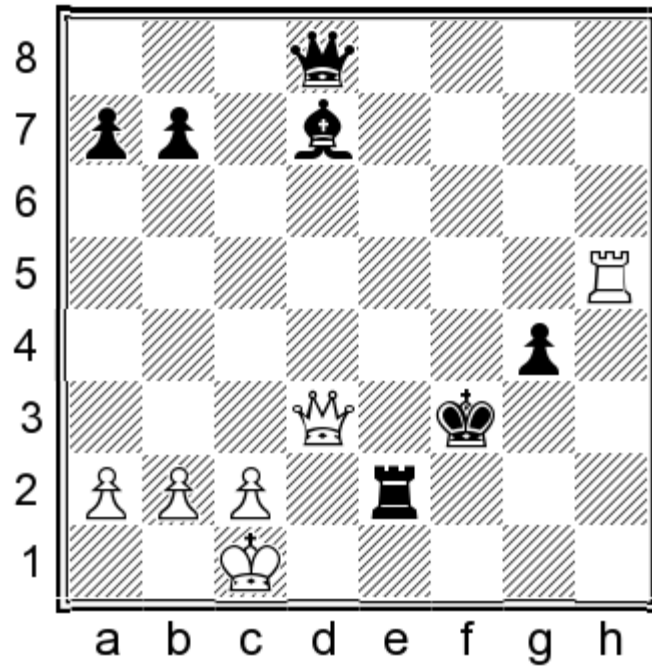
Or 25.Qf4† Kg7 26.Qh6†= with an immediate draw, as given by Vigorito.

25...Ke6 26.Qxg6† Kxe5

Black's king may look vulnerable but it can run and try to hide in front of the g-pawn.

27.Rh5† Kf4 28.Qxd6† Kf3 29.Qd5† Kf4 30.Qd4† Kf3 31.Qd3†

31.Qd5† Kf4 32.Qd4† ½–½ Gal – Nizynski, corr. 1989.



31...Re3 32.Qf1†

32.Qd1† ½–½ Burlak – Takeuchi, email 1996.

32...Kg3 33.Qg1† Kf4 34.Qf2† Ke4 35.Qg2† Rf3 36.Qe2† Re3 37.Qg2†

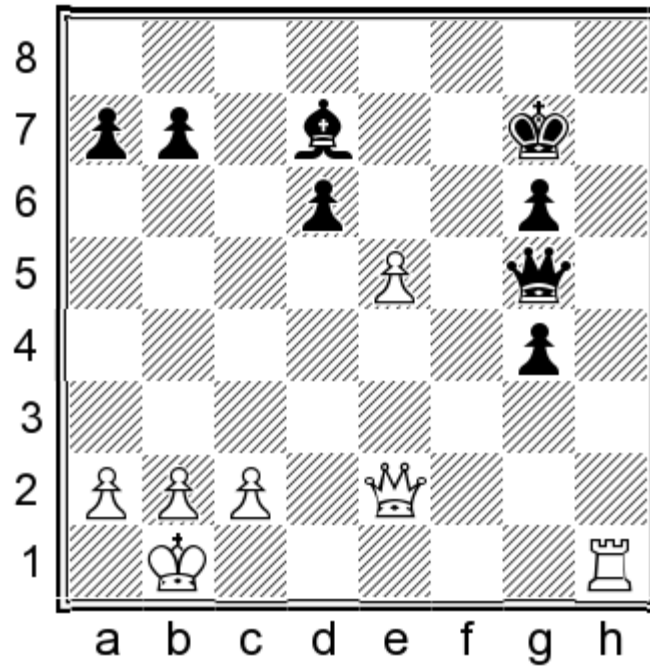
½–½ Valverde Toresano – Onder, email 2000.

24...Qg5†

White can try D31) 25.Kb1 or exchanging queens with D32) 25.Qd2.

D31) 25.Kb1

This is White's more ambitious try but in fact I think Black has the better prospects.



25...Bc6!

This is an important intermezzo. First of all we improve the location of our bishop before capturing on e5.

26.Re1

26.Rg1 Bf3 A strong idea, rerouting the bishop and preventing White's queen from invading. 27.Qf2 (As Vigorito observes 27.Qxf3?? loses immediately to 27...gxf3 28.Rxg5 f2 which is, of course, Black's point.) 27...dxe5 28.Qxa7 g3 29.Qc5 was agreed drawn in Hudak – Piccirilli, email 2006, although it was rather premature. With 29...g2N Black can press forever.

26...dxe5

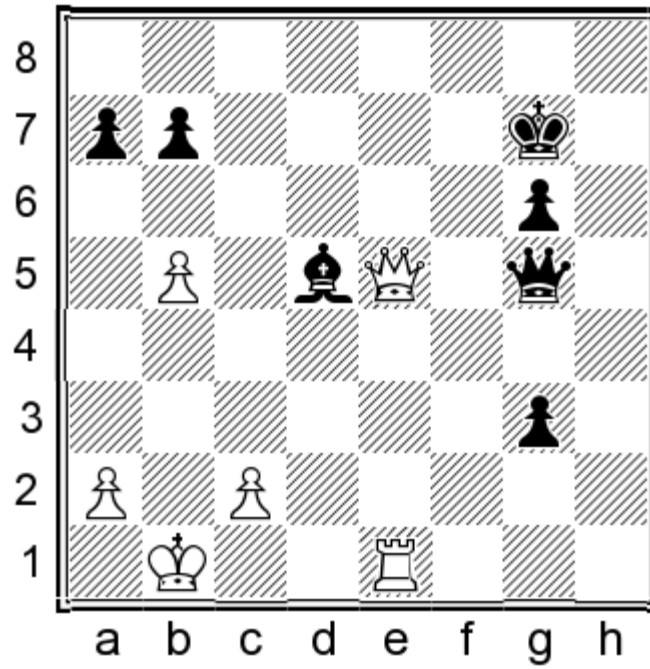
Black's king is now completely safe and, with two pawns for the exchange, Black is certainly better with the always-powerful g-pawn.

27.b4

27.Qxe5†N 27...Qxe5 28.Rxe5 Kf6 29.Re3 Kf5 is dangerous for White.

27...g3 28.b5 Bd5 29.Qxe5†?

Now this move simply loses.



29...Qxe5 30.Rxe5 g2 31.Re1 Kf6 32.Rg1 Ke5

0–1 Cilloniz Razzeto – Rivas Maceda, email 2007.

D32) 25.Qd2

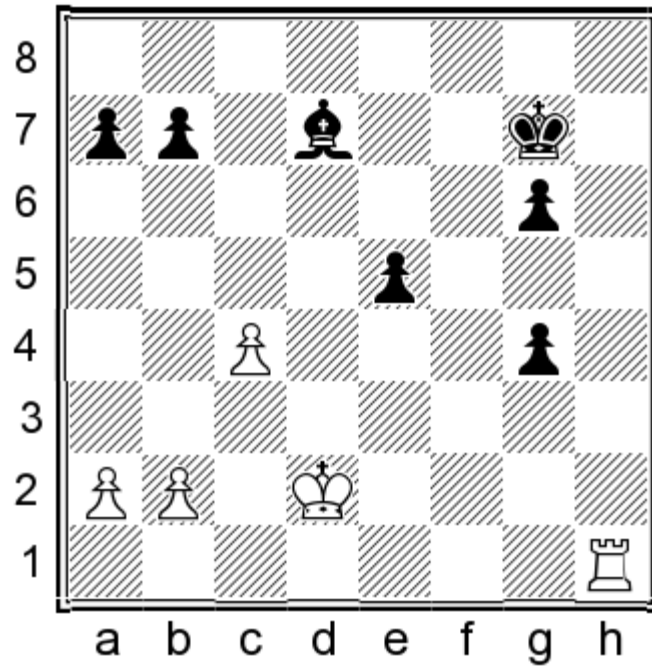
This move has been seen in various correspondence games.

25...Qxd2† 26.Kxd2 dxe5

The consensus is that the arising endgame is merely a draw. Some examples:

27.c4

27.Ke3 Bc6 28.Rg1 Bf3 29.a4 Kf6 30.a5 Ke6 31.c4 Kd6 32.b4 a6= B. Gonzalez – G. Evans, email 2005.



27...Bc6

27...Kf6 28.b4 Be6 29.Rc1 Kg5 30.Ke3 Kh4 31.Rh1† Kg3 32.Rg1† ½–½ Schueppel – Drake Diez de Rivera, email 2006.

28.Rg1 Bf3 29.Ke3 Kf6 30.b4 Ke6 31.Rc1 e4 32.b5 g3 33.c5 Kd7 34.c6† Kc7 35.a4 g2 36.cxb7†

½–½ Helmreich – G. Evans, email 2007.

36...Kxb7 37.a5 g5 38.Kf2

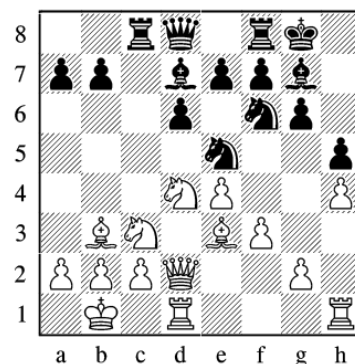
½–½ Wharrier – Amico, email 2008.

Conclusion

All Yugoslav Attack positions are sharp and 13.Bh6 is no exception – although the critical line is quite narrow. Nepomniachtchi's 16.Kb1 doesn't look too challenging, and so you should focus more on 16.g4. It's important to remember 17...Rh8! fighting for control of the h-file. White has various ways to win the exchange with e4-e5, but Black always has good compensation. 23...Rxe2! is very important to remember, and White should probably take the perpetual on offer. Instead, the ending with queen, bishop and five pawns versus queen, rook and three favours Black.



Soltis Variation



13. ♖b1

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8. ♔d2
♘c6 9. ♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0 ♖c8 11. ♙b3 ♘e5 12.h4 h5 13. ♖b1

13... ♘c4! 14. ♙xc4 ♖xc4

- A) 15.b3
- B) 15.Nde2 b5
- B1) 16.Bd4?!
- B2) 16.b3 Rc8
- B21) 17.Bd4?!
- B22) 17.Nd5
- B3) 16.Bh6 Qa5
- B31) 17.g4
- B32) 17.Bxg7
- C) 15.Nb3 Qb8!?
- C1) 16.Bg5
- C2) 16.Bd4
- C3) 16.Bh6
- D) 15.g4 hxg4 16.h5 Nxh5
- D1) 17.fxg4

D2) 17.Rdg1 Nf6 18.Bh6

D21) 18...Nxe4 19.Nxe4 Bxd4 20.Be3 Be5 21.Bf4 Bg7 22.Qh2

D211) 22...f6

D212) 22...f5N

D22) 18...Rxd4!

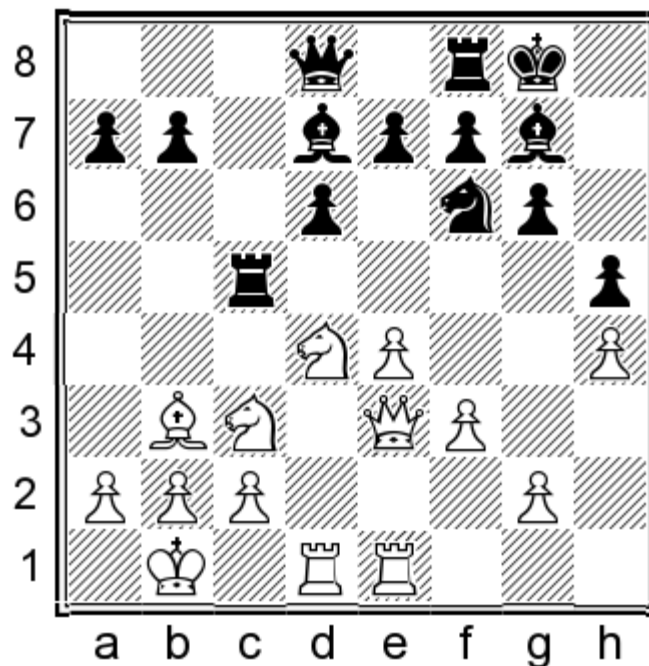
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Kb1

With this move we see another line which used to be popular, but is seen pretty rarely these days. In contrast to the Soltis variations examined earlier, White isn't trying to mate Black and instead is hoping for a slight positional edge. The king is more usefully placed on b1 – for instance it deters ...Qa5 ideas. However, these days White normally plays the king move before touching his h-pawn as White wants to play with g2-g4 instead.

13...Nc4 14.Bxc4

It's generally considered difficult to mate the black king without removing the bishop from g7. Therefore if White has the choice, he will nearly always give the light-squared bishop for the knight.

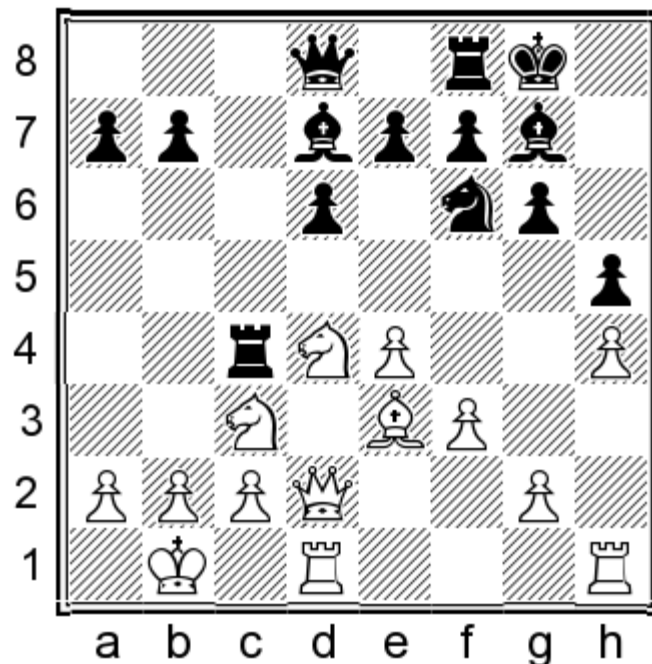
14.Qe2 Nxe3 15.Qxe3 Rc5 16.Rhe1 In the game Pritchett – Miles, Torquay 1982, Black chose to sacrifice a pawn with 16...b5, but instead I think a more reliable continuation is:



16...Qc7N Black prepares to treble on the c-file and play ...b5 safely. White's previous move only really looks logical coupled with an e4-e5 break or with 17.Nd5?!, but here 17...Nxd5 18.exd5 a5! 19.a4 b5μ would leave White with deep

problems.

14...Rxc4



Now White has a variety of options. Firstly we will examine what happens if White hits the rook with A) 15.b3, which is not as weakening as it may appear. White would like to exchange dark-squared bishops, so his two main lines involve dropping back the d4-knight so the bishop is free to move: B) 15.Nde2 and C) 15.Nb3. Finally, although White had seemed to initiate a more positional encounter, we will need a solution to the aggressive D) 15.g4.

15.Bh6?? has been played surprisingly often but simply allows 15...Rxd4.

15.Nd5?!

This is premature as the pressure on d4 will be annoying. Dearing's suggestion is best:

15...Nxd5 16.exd5 Qb6!

White will find this awkward to meet.

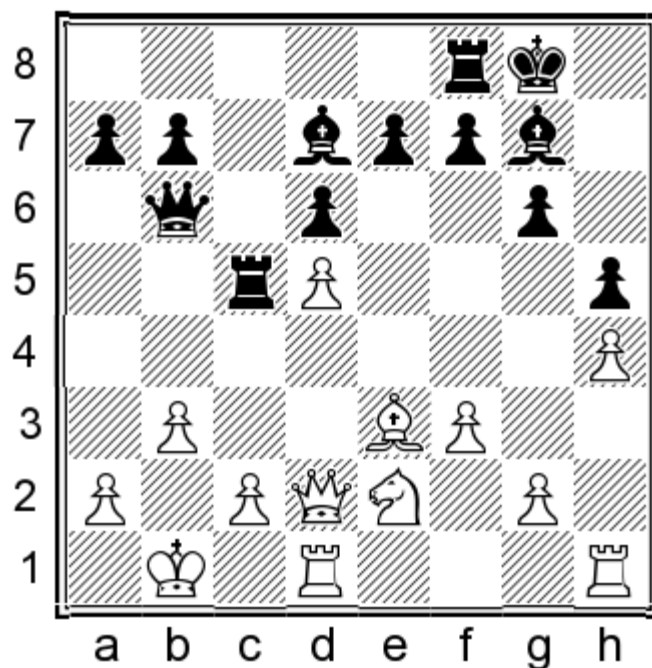
17.b3

17.Nb3 Qa6!N After ...Rfc8 and ...Ra4 White's king won't last long.

17.c3 Qa5µ The attack is again too dangerous. White even struggles to hold onto his d5-pawn as the logical 18.Nb3?? loses immediately to 18...Bf5† 19.Ka1 Qxa2† 20.Kxa2 Ra4#.

17...Rc5! 18.Ne2

Mueller – Berch, email 2003. Now White is winning the exchange but his dark squares will be too vulnerable.



18...Bf5!N 19.Bxc5 dxc5µ

Black threatens both ...c5-c4xb3 and ...Qf6.

15.Rdg1

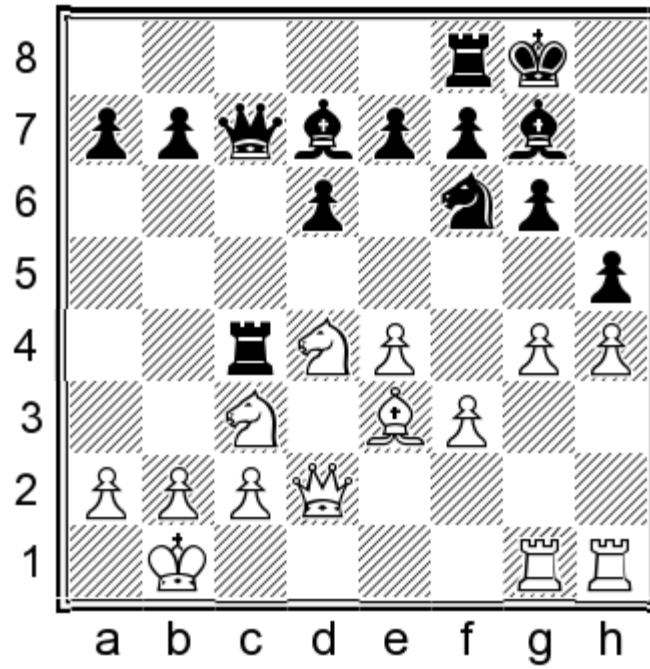
White transparently prepares g2-g4.

15...Qc7 16.g4

White's only logical follow-up.

16.Nce2 Ehltting – Hellwig, Dortmund 1999, allows Black to take over the centre completely with 16...e5!N 17.Nb3 d5!µ as 18.exd5? loses to 18...Rxc2 19.Qxc2 Bf5.

Acunzo – Perilli, Italy 1985, and here I think it's time for:



16...Rxc3!N 17.bxc3

17.Qxc3 is even worse. 17...Qxc3 18.bxc3 hxg4µ At least one more pawn is also dropping.

17...hxg4 18.h5 Rc8 19.hxg6 fxg6³

Black has a typical Dragon counterattack.

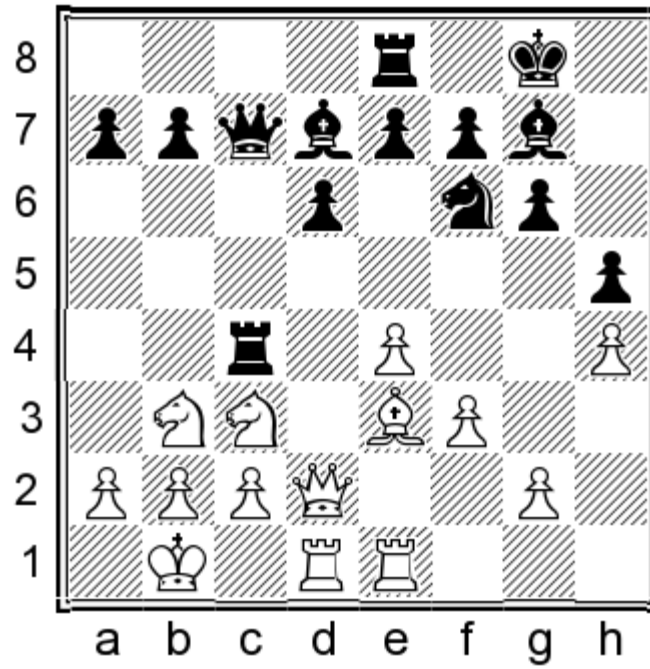
15.Rhe1

This isn't a particularly challenging move. White gives up on any kingside intentions and simply develops his final piece.

15...Re8

White's last didn't threaten anything, so I think we should play this semi-waiting move. It's generally useful in the Dragon to have the e7-pawn defended. Black now has ideas of ...Qa5 without having to worry about Nd5, and a later Bh6 could be met by simply dropping the bishop back. A couple of examples continued:

16.Nb3 Qc7



17.Bd4

17.Qd3 b6 18.Bd4 Qc8 Black gets out of the way of a Nd5 fork. 19.Nd2 Rc6 20.Rc1 Eroee Inrico – Pharaomum, engine game 2014. Here I'd prefer 20...Qb8N so that we can try expanding on the queenside. White still hasn't actually found a plan.

17...Be6 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 a5! 20.Re2 a4 21.Nc1 a3

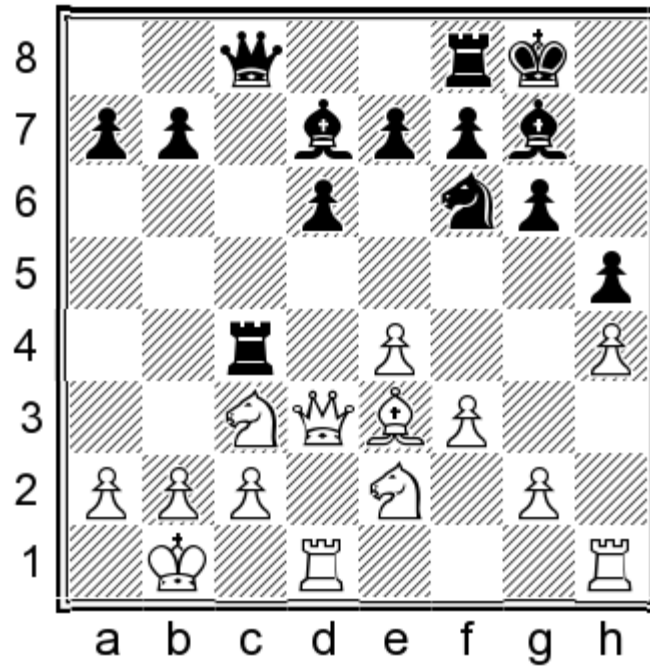
In Dervishi – Malakhov, Genoa 2000, Black had quickly taken a strong initiative. White is in a lot of trouble as 22.b3? loses to 22...Rxd4 23.Qxd4 Nxd5 24.Qxd5 Qc3.

15.Qd3

This is another nothing move from White. Dropping the rook back is fine, but I prefer:

15...Qc8 16.Nde2

16.Nb3 was Zurita Galisteo – Barrero Garcia, Seville 2003. Here Black should prepare ...b5 with 16...a6N, as the immediate 16...b5 allowed 17.Na5 when the b-pawn can't be defended.



16...b5 17.Nf4

17.b3 This doesn't force the rook to move as Black can play 17...Qb7. Limp – Caldeira, Sao Paulo 1997, continued 18.Bd4 Rxd4 19.Nxd4 b4 20.Na4 when Black would have been doing well had he played the logical 20...Bxa4N 21.bxa4 Rc8µ.

White prepares to put one of his knights on d5, so it makes sense to play:

17...Re8

Lanka – Borge, Groningen 1997, continued:

18.Ncd5 Nxd5 19.Nxd5 e6 20.Nf4 d5!µ

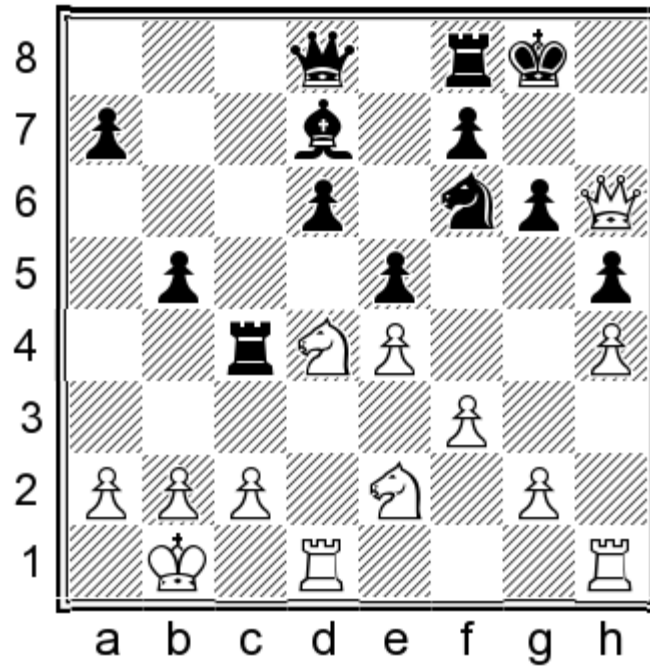
Black has a comfortable position.

15.Nce2 b5 16.Bh6

16.c3 was played in the old game Tseshkovsky – Gufeld, Daugavpils 1978, but White's play wasn't convincing. 16...Qb8 17.Nb3?! Rfc8 18.Nec1 Here Black has lots of promising paths, but Dearing's suggestion of 18...b4µ is certainly very good for Black.

16...Bxh6 17.Qxh6 e5!

This is a typical idea once the dark-squared bishops are exchanged.



18.Nf5!?N

This is mentioned by Hindenburg Melao. I think White has enough for a draw but no more.

18.Nb3 Be6 19.Qd2 Rc6 Black's pieces coordinate well, Vescovi – Braga, Sao Paulo 1999.

18...gxf5 19.Rh3!

Melao examines 19.Qg5† but neglects to mention 19...Kh7 when Black is better, for example: 20.Rxd6 Rg8! 21.Qxf6 Qxf6 22.Rxf6 Be6! 23.exf5 Kg7³

He also gives 19.g4? as interesting, but White is getting nowhere after 19...hgx4 20.Ng3 Ne8!.

19...f4 20.Qg5† Kh7 21.Rxd6

Black has a couple of different approaches, but the simplest is:

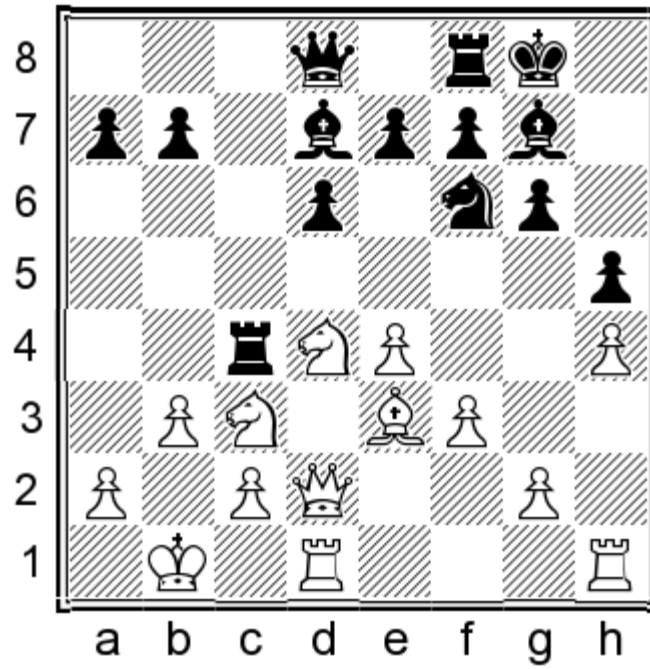
21...Rc6 22.Rxc6 Bxc6 23.Qxe5 Qd1† 24.Nc1 Bd7

White will have to deliver perpetual after something like:

25.Qxf6 Bxh3 26.gxh3 Qxf3 27.Qf5† Kg7 28.Qg5† Kh7 29.Qf5†=

A) 15.b3

White creates a hole in front of his king but it's useful to push the rook back. This used to be considered too weakening but is in fact one of White's better ways to try and find an edge.



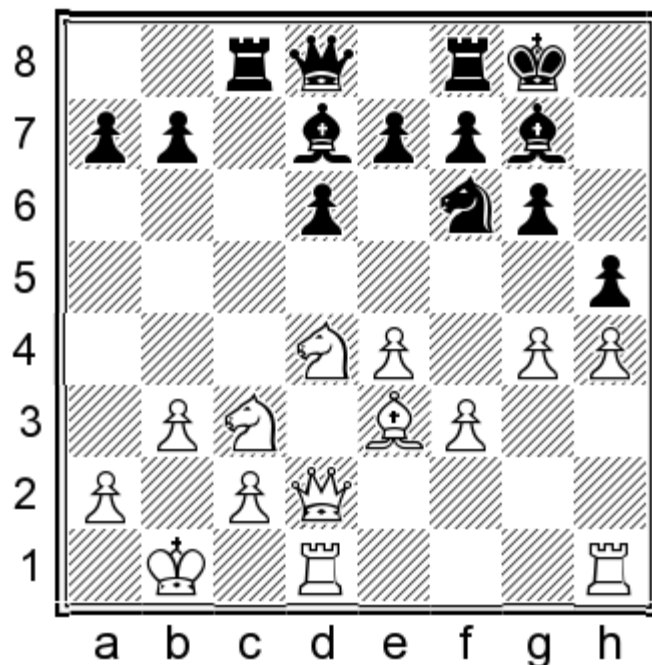
15...Rc8

15...Rc5? would be a better square in principle but here it fails to 16.Ne6!.

16.Nd5

16.Nde2 b5 transposes to variation B2 on page 110.

16.g4!? As far as I can see this move has only been played once, in the game Marwan – Otchiyev, Tehran 2008. I spent quite a long time trying to find a good way to hang onto the material, but forcing Black's rook back appears to favour White in those positions. In the end I decided on a different approach, exploiting the weakness White just created on the queenside.



16...Qa5!N Not allowing White his attack. Now the pressure on White's knight forces him to exchange queens. 17.Nd5 Qxd2 18.Nxe7† Kh7 19.Rxd2 (19.Bxd2 is similar: 19...Rce8 20.Bf4 Rxe7 21.Bxd6 Rfe8 22.Bxe7 Rxe7 23.g5 Ne8÷) 19...Rce8 The knight is trapped, so White has to try: 20.Bf4 Rxe7 21.Bxd6 Rfe8 22.Bxe7 Rxe7 Another interesting imbalance. I think Black's bishop pair has a lot more potential than White's rook and two pawns. The position is probably equal but I'd much prefer to play as Black.

16...Nxd5 17.exd5

With the knights exchanged, White's attack on the kingside will come quite fast.

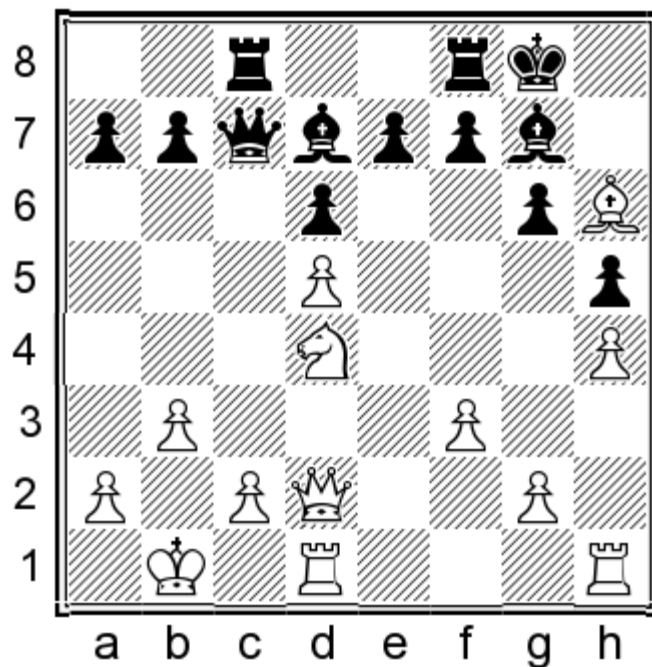
17...Qc7

Black's safest response.

18.Bh6

18.c4? This was the only move covered by Dearing, but now 18...b5! smashing open White's king works well. 19.cxb5 Qb7 20.Bh6 Qxd5 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.Qb2 Kg8µ Murey – Kudrin, Beersheba 1984.

18.g4N This always needs checking, but here 18...hxg4 19.fxg4 Qc3 is safe. An important idea is revealed after 20.Qe2 Bb5!=.



18...Bf6!?N

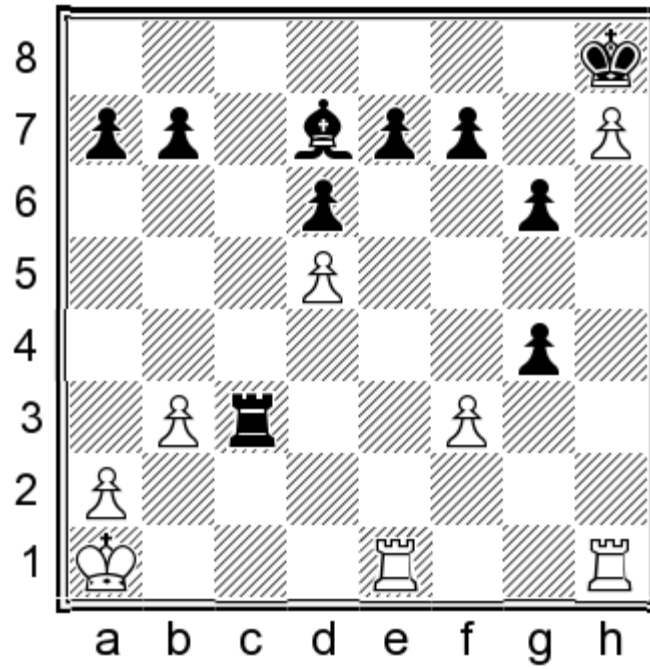
Instead in Todorovic – Ristic, Vrnjacka Banja 2010, Black continued 18...Qc3 19.Bxg7 Qxd2 20.Rxd2 Kxg7 21.Re1, when White eventually ground out the full point after 21...Rfe8. However, I think with 21...Kf6!N, keeping the rook free, Black should have been fine. A possible continuation would be 22.c4 a6 23.a4 b5!=, although these positions aren't much fun so I prefer my suggestion.

We offer the exchange, but Black will be able to exploit that weakness in front of White's king. This is how the game might proceed:

19.Bxf8

19.c4 b5! 20.Bxf8 Kxf8 21.cxb5 Qb6© White's king looks precariously placed.

19.g4!? also needs checking of course, but I don't think Black has cause to worry. 19...hxd4 20.h5 Bxd4!? The most concrete approach. 21.Qxd4 Qxc2† 22.Ka1 Qc3† 23.Qxc3 Rxc3 24.Bxf8 Kxf8 Here the only line we need to examine is 25.h6 Kg8 26.h7† Kh8 27.Rde1! but again Black's counterplay comes in time:



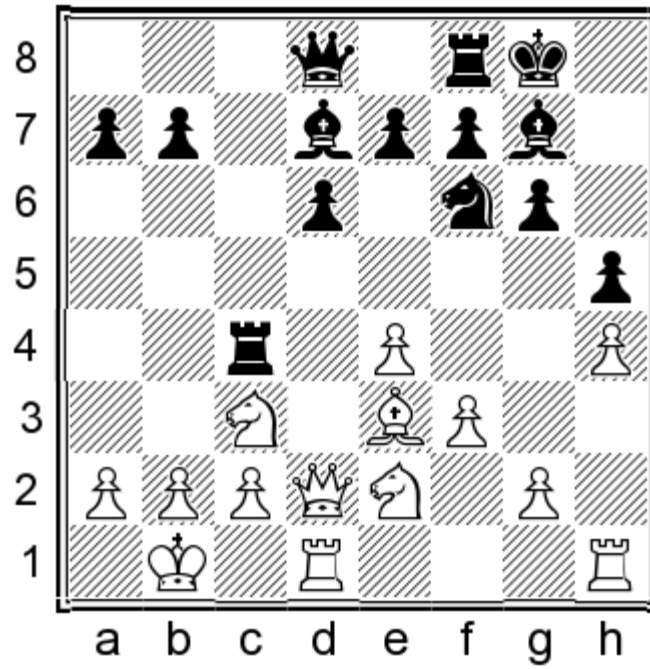
27...g3! 28.Rxe7 g2 29.Rg1 Bh3 30.Rxf7 Rc2 31.Re1 Re2 32.Rxe2 g1=Q† 33.Kb2 Qd4† 34.Ka3 Qc5† With a draw.

19...Kxf8 20.Rhe1 Qc5 21.c4 Kg7

Black's structure is sound and White's king is loose. Black will follow up with ...a6 and ...b5 with strong pressure.

B) 15.Nde2

Comparing White's two main lines, 15.Nde2 defends its companion on c3 and in some cases White will want to continue with Nf4 and try and stick a knight on d5. 15.Nb3, meanwhile, controls the a5-square and makes e4-e5 a more serious threat.

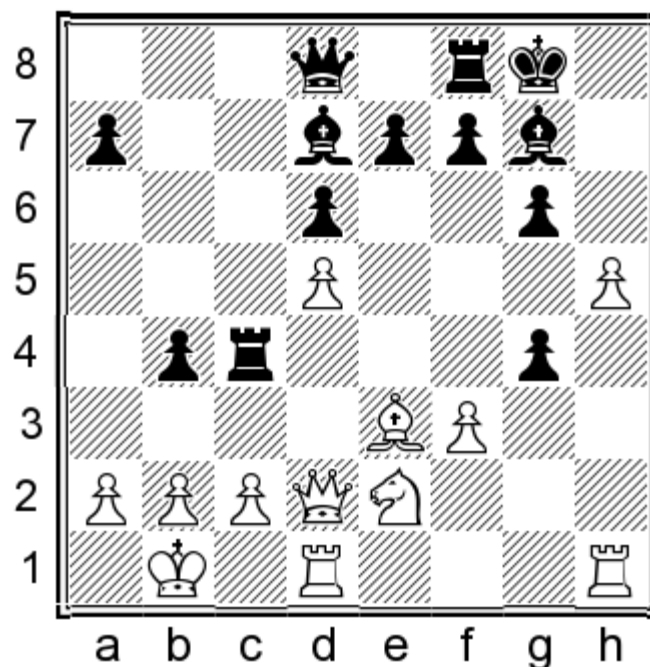


15...b5

We will follow in Kasparov's steps.

Again White has a wide range of choices. We will follow an instructive game by Tiviakov after B1) 16.Bd4?!, before moving on to B2) 16.b3 and B3) 16.Bh6.

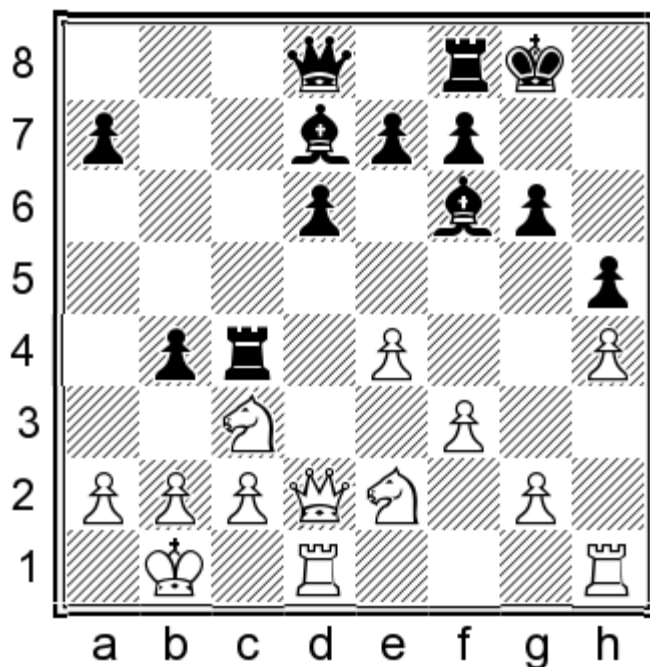
16.g4?! This always needs checking, but here it doesn't work. I think the simplest refutation is: 16...b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 hxg4 19.h5 Thus far we have followed Y. Hernandez – Lozano Martin, Malaga 2001. Now Black's strongest is:



19...Qa5N 20.hxg6 Bf5! 21.Nd4 Bxg6μ We've seen Black's bishops occupy these spots before. They successfully combine defending their own king and putting pressure on White's.

16.Nd5?! Black doesn't have the ...Qb6 motif we saw after 15.Nd5, but this is still premature. After 16...Nxd5 17.exd5 Saborido Bua – Cubero Ferreiro, La Coruna 1999, I like Dearing's suggestion of 17...Qa8!?N. The pressure on d5 prevents White from playing Bd4. We'll continue with ...Rfc8 and ...Bf5.

16.Bg5?! b4 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 This position is more normally reached by the bishop going via d4 before capturing on f6, but this move order bypasses Tiviakov's 16...e5.

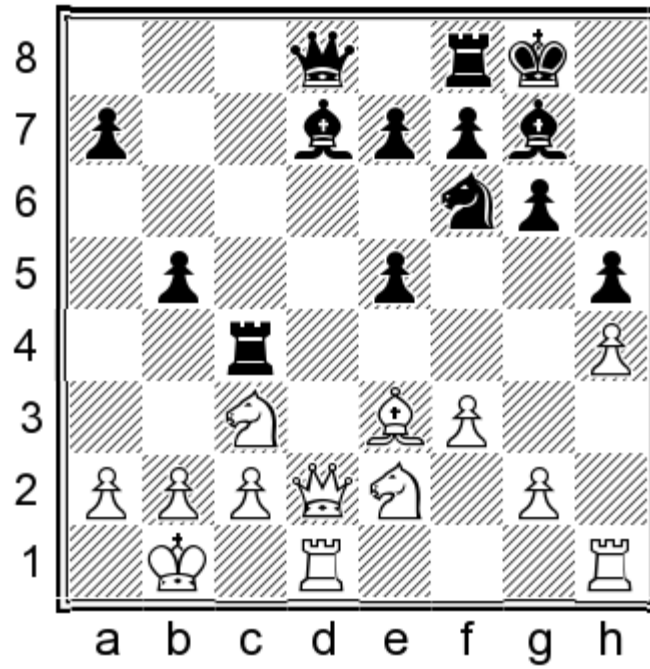


18.Nd5 Bg7 19.Nxb4 (19.b3 This has been played in a couple of engine games but it's obviously not a move a human would want to play, as White has chronic weaknesses on the dark squares. After 19...Rc5, and whichever way White chooses to capture on b4, Black will play ...a5 followed by ...a4 exploiting the hook on b3.) Black would have good play for the pawn with any normal move, as he has the bishop pair and open lines to attack along. However, he has an even stronger reply: 19...Bxb2! 20.Kxb2 Qb6 Black will regain the piece with a continuing attack.

16.e5?!

I can imagine being worried by this move during a game, but it doesn't work.

16...dxe5



17.Bg5

17.Ne4 Nxe4 18.fxe4 Figiel – Karpik, Naleczow 1986. Here Dearing observes that Black can play 18...Rxe4!N, when he continues 19.Qd3 (19.Qxd7 Qxd7 20.Rxd7 Rxe3+ 19...Qa8 20.Nc3 Rd4! 21.Bxd4 exd4 22.Nxb5 e5 and Black completely dominates. White won't be able to stop the pawns' advance.

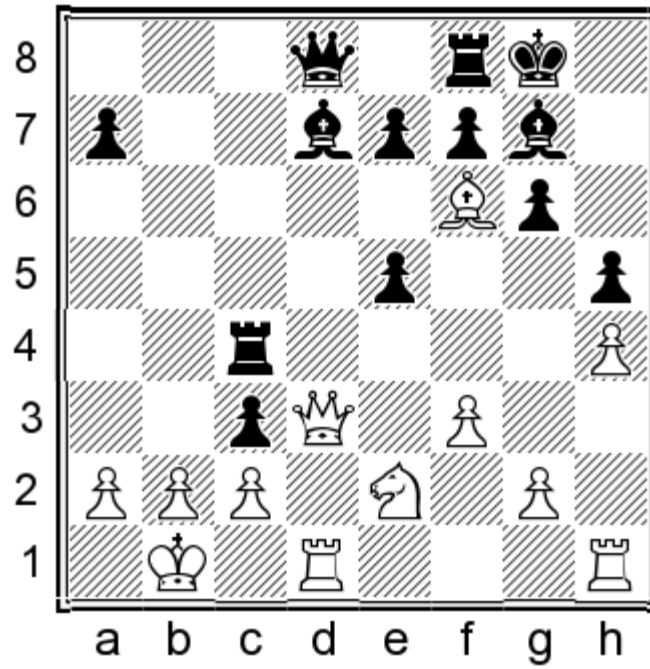
17...b4 18.Bxf6

18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Qxd5 Rc7μ was a clear extra pawn in Rettore – Bonaccorsi, Saint Vincent 1999.

18...bxc3 19.Qd3?

We have been following Roger – Majcher, France 2001.

19.Qxd7 can be answered with 19...Qb8! 20.Nxc3 exf6³ but was still a better try.



19...Qb6!N 20.b3

20.Nxc3 Rb8 21.b3 Rd4—+

20...exf6 21.Qxc4

21.Qxd7 Rc7—+

21...Bb5 22.Qe4 f5—+

Black wins the other knight and the game.

16.Nf4

This was one of White's ideas behind dropping the knight back to e2 but it doesn't really impress.

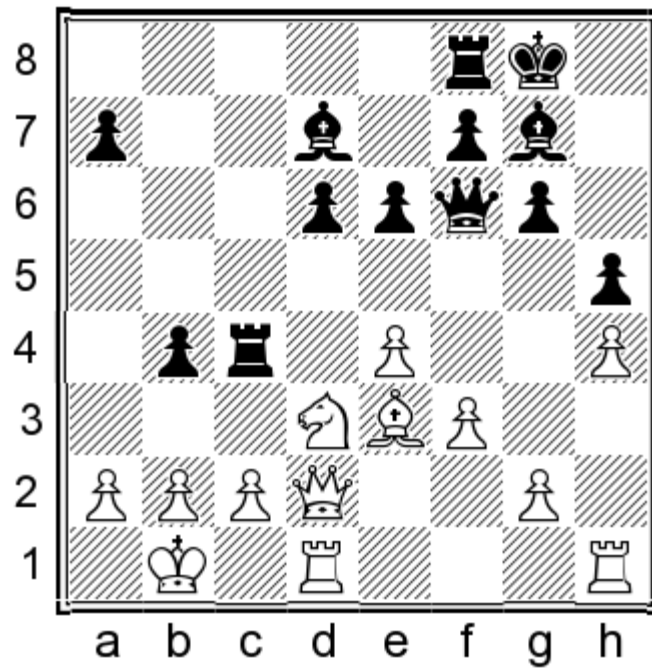
16...b4 17.Ncd5 e6

There is also nothing wrong with the more popular 17...Nxd5 18.Nxd5 Be6=.

18.Nxf6†

18.b3 This is really asking for trouble along the long diagonal. 18...Nxd5 19.Nxd5 exd5 20.bxc4 dxc4 21.Qxd6 (21.Bh6N 21...Bxh6 22.Qxh6 Be6© also gives Black good compensation) 21...Qa5 22.Bd2? White cracks. (He had to contest the long diagonal with 22.Bd4, although Black still has good compensation after 22...Bxd4 23.Rxd4 Be6; 22.Qxd7?? loses at once to 22...b3! 23.cxb3 cxb3 24.axb3 Qa1† 25.Kc2 Qc3† 26.Kb1 Qb2#) 22...Ba4! 23.Bxb4 Bxc2† 24.Kc1 Qxa2 25.e5 Bh6† 0–1 Lukasiewicz – Bednarska, Konin 1990.

18...Qxf6 19.Nd3



19...Rfc8N

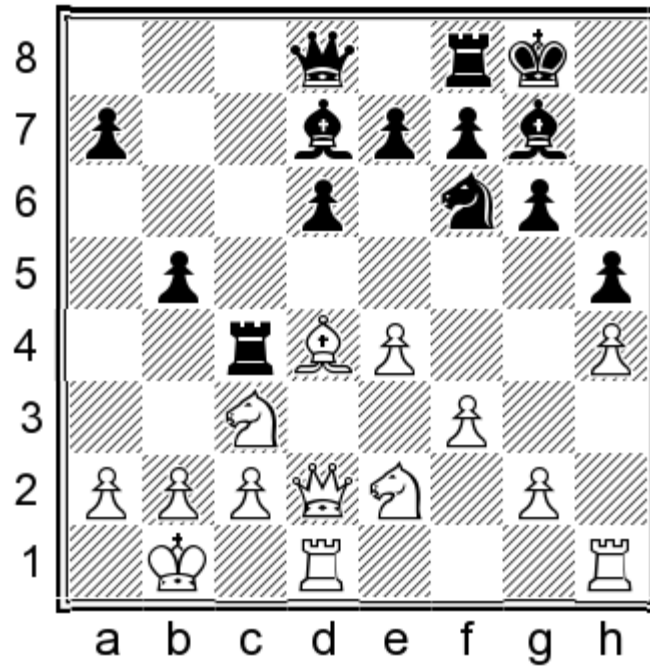
White's manoeuvre Nd4-e2-d3 has not impressed, and he should now wimp out with:

20.Bg5

20.Rc1 Qd8³

20...Qd4 21.Be3 Qf6=

B1) 16.Bd4?!



16...e5!

This strong idea was first played by Tiviakov. Black's play is too fast for White to exploit the temporary weakening of the structure.

17.Be3

17.Bxa7?!N The pawn is too hot, for example: 17...b4 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Qxd5 (19.exd5 Qa5) 19...Be6 20.Qb5 Qa8 21.b3 Qxa7! 22.bxc4 Rb8 23.Qc6 Bf8!-+

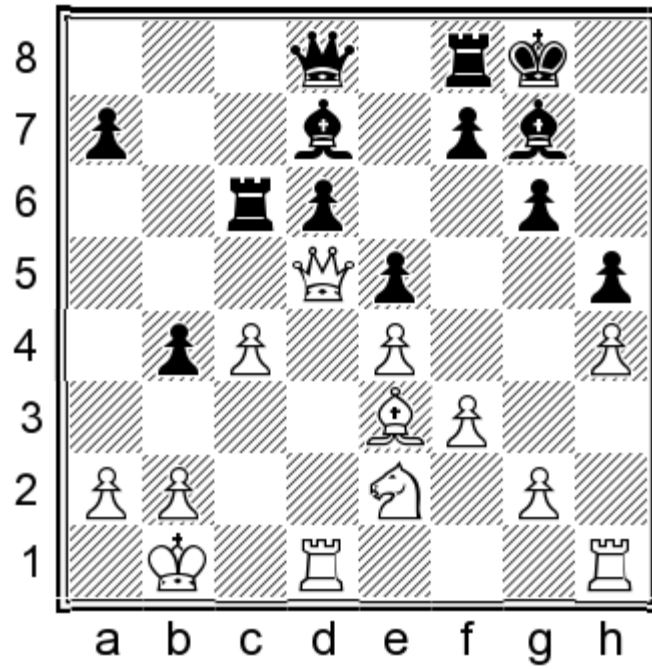
17...b4 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Qxd5 Rc6

If White were able to reroute his knight from e2 to d5 he would be happy, but here the knight is blocked out of play. Black has a simple plan of combining attacking down the c-file and playing ...a5-a4.

20.c4

The future World Champion tries to grab some space and prevent Black from ever breaking with ...d5.

20.Qd2 Qa5 21.c4 Rxc4 22.Qd5 was Yudasin – Lahav, Israel 1996. After 22...Bb5N Black is clearly better.



20...Qc7 21.b3

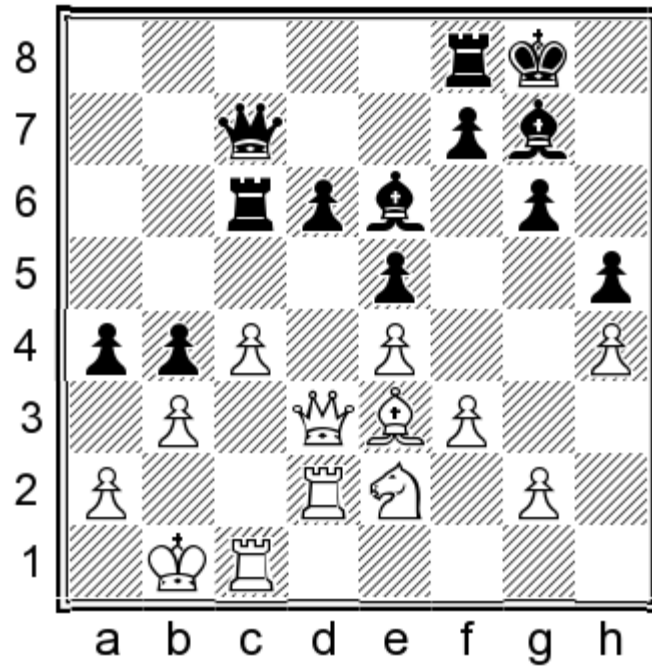
Notes attributed to ChessBase continue 21.c5 Be6! 22.cxd6 Qb7 23.Qd3, when after 23...Rd8 Black will regain the pawn with a pleasant position.

21...a5 22.Rd2

22.c5 still doesn't work: 22...Qa7μ

22...a4 23.Rc1 Be6 24.Qd3

Up until now this has been Anand – Tiviakov, Tilburg 1992. After impressively dynamic play the Dutch GM should have continued:



24...Ra8N

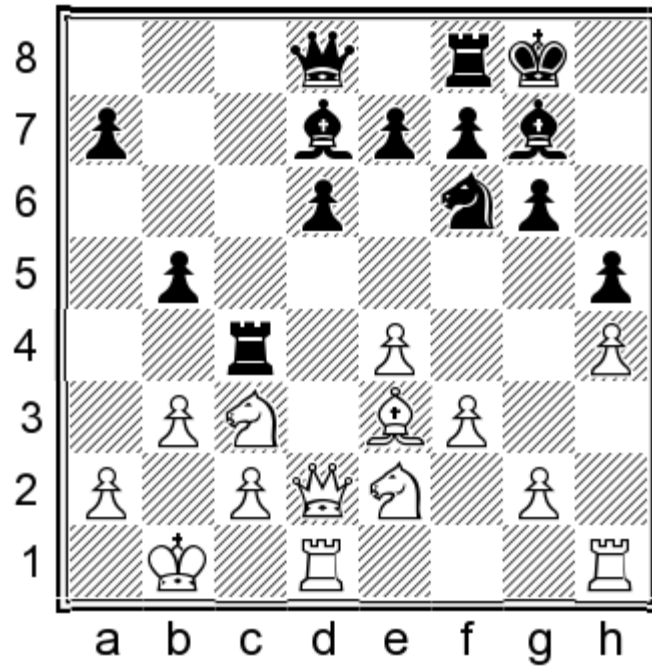
Black will continue by playing on the a-file. White is in a lot of trouble, for example:

25.Rcc2 Qa5 26.Nc1 Bf8

White can barely move!

B2) 16.b3

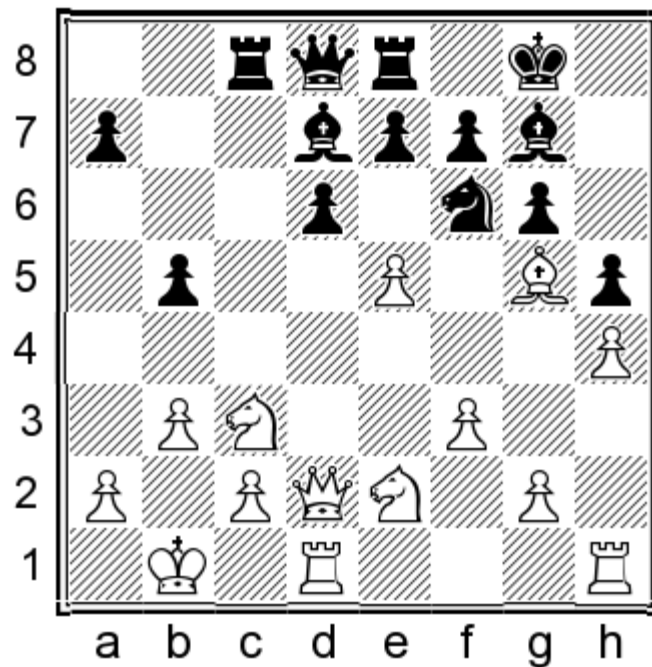
As we have already discussed, this forces Black to retreat his rook but creates some holes around the white king.



16...Rc8

Now Black should be able to punish B21) 17.Bd4?!, while B22) 17.Nd5 leads to an exciting battle.

17.Bg5 Re8 18.e5 Rook – Authier, email 1999. Black can now exploit the location of White's bishop with:



18...Nh7!N 19.exd6 Nxc5 20.dxe7 (20.hxg5 exd6 21.Qxd6 Bf5 gives Black fantastic compensation for a mere pawn.) 20...Qxe7 21.Qxd7 Qxd7 22.Rxd7 Bxc3 23.Nxc3 Rxc3 24.hxg5 Re2µ With good winning chances in the ending. Black's rooks are so active.

17.Bh6

This is a better approach, and I advocate playing as we would in the main line with:

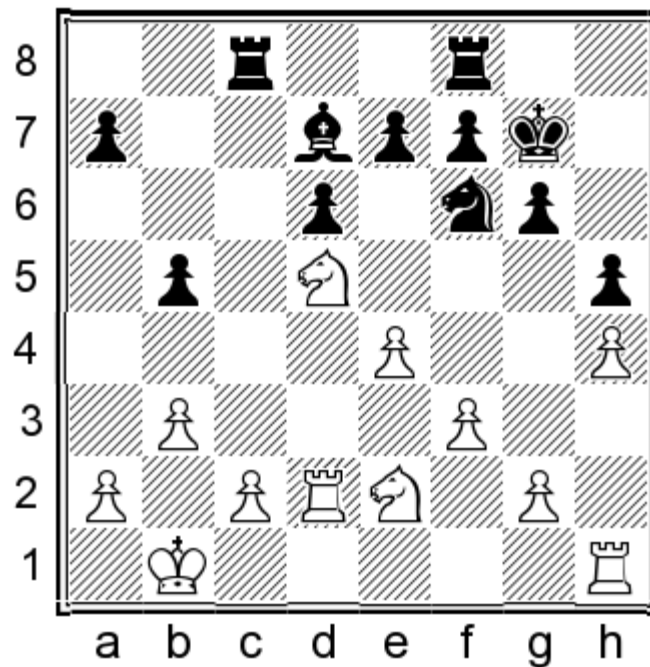
17...Qa5 18.Bxg7

18.Nd5N is the critical test of Black's previous, but after 18...Qxd2 19.Nxe7† Kh7 20.Bxd2 Rce8 21.Bb4 Rxe7 22.Bxd6 Ree8 23.Bxf8 Bxf8÷ I would be happy with the bishop pair. We've examined a similar endgame in the note to White's 16th move in variation A earlier in the chapter.

18.g4? would fail to 18...Bxh6 19.Qxh6 Rxc3.

18...Kxg7 19.Nd5 Qxd2 20.Rxd2

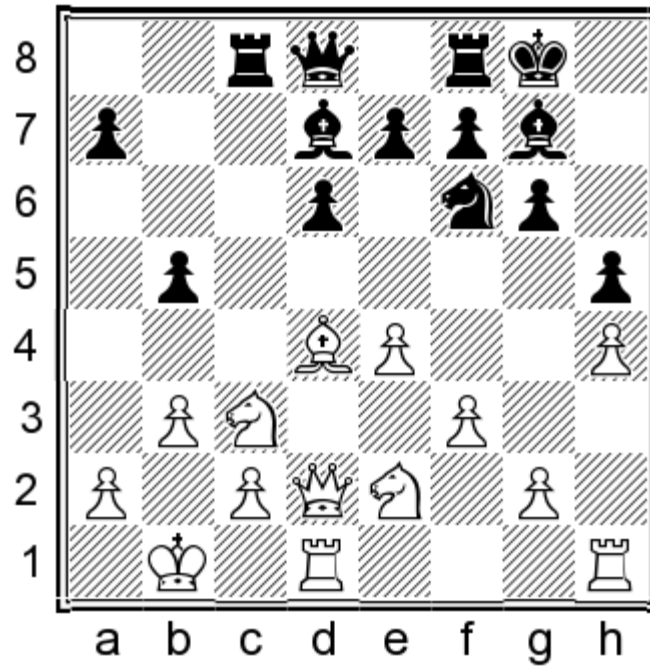
In Poehlmann – Sciupokas, corr. 1987, Black got overly creative and kept the knights on the board – eventually going on to lose. Exchanging knights is simply equal:



20...Nxd5N 21.exd5 b4=

B21) 17.Bd4?!

This is usually where White puts his bishop but I think it has a serious flaw:



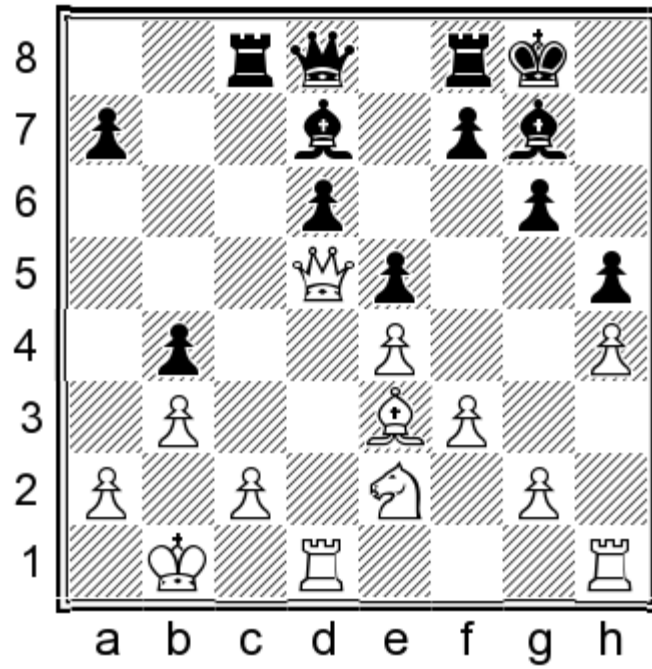
17...e5! 18.Be3

Taking the pawn is asking for trouble: 18.Bxa7 Qc7 19.Be3 b4 20.Nd5 Nxd5 21.exd5 Qa5 I gave this on ChessPublishing and wrote: “And Black will soon follow with ...e4 with a great initiative.” Black is in fact completely winning.

18...b4 19.Nd5 Nxd5 20.Qxd5

20.exd5 Qa5³ again leaves White in trouble along the long diagonal.

This far was reached in Trim – Yore, USA 1995. Here I recommended:



20...Rc6N

Black wants to play along the c- and a-files.

21.g4

An attempt by White to gain counterplay, but it doesn't seem sufficient.

21...Qf6! 22.Rdf1

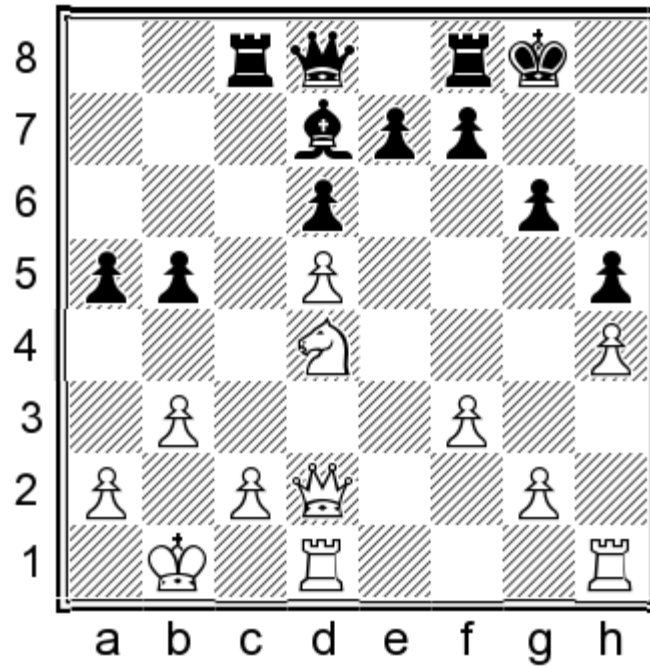
22.gxh5 Qxf3

22...Rfc8 23.gxh5 Rxc2

The position favours Black.

B22) 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 a5 19.Bd4 Bxd4 20.Qxd4

20.Nxd4 was played in Duppel – Pogonina, Halkidiki 2000.



Black should immediately target the weak d5-pawn with 20...Rc5N. White cannot really defend the pawn so should go on the offensive. 21.g4 (21.Ne2 Bf5 22.Nc3 a4µ or 21.Qg5 e5!µ) 21...Rxd5 22.gxh5 Rxh5 However, with the active rook on h5 I don't believe in White's attack, for example: 23.Ne2 Bc6 24.Ng3 Rc5 25.h5 g5³

20...a4

We now get a classic race. Whose attack will crash through first?

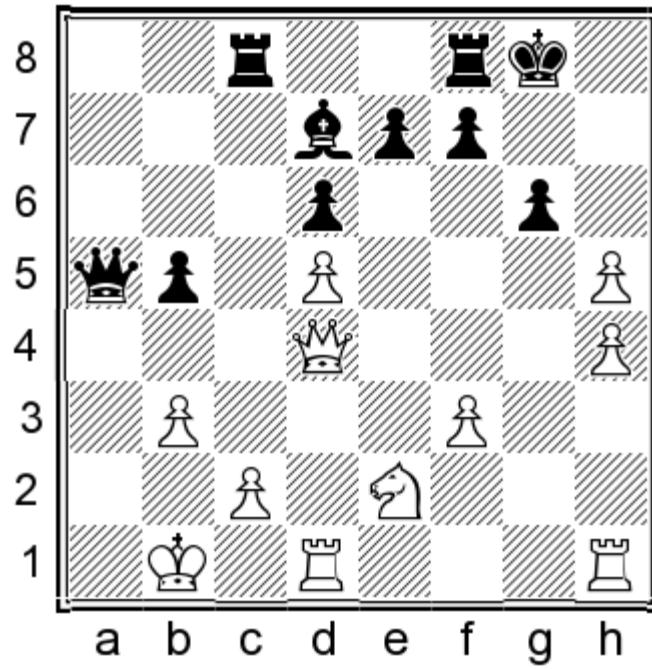
20...Qc7 21.Rd2 Qc5= Horvat – Brkic, Pula 2001, is a sensible alternative.

21.g4 axb3 22.axb3?!

22.cxb3 was better but White was obviously concerned about opening up the b1-h7 diagonal. Now he won't really be able to capture on h5 as ...Bf5† will be too painful, so his attack is slowed down. After 22...Qa5 the position is roughly level.

22...Qa5 23.gxh5

Poli – Kratochvil, email 2008. Here Black has a cunning manoeuvre:



23...Rc7!N

The point will soon become apparent.

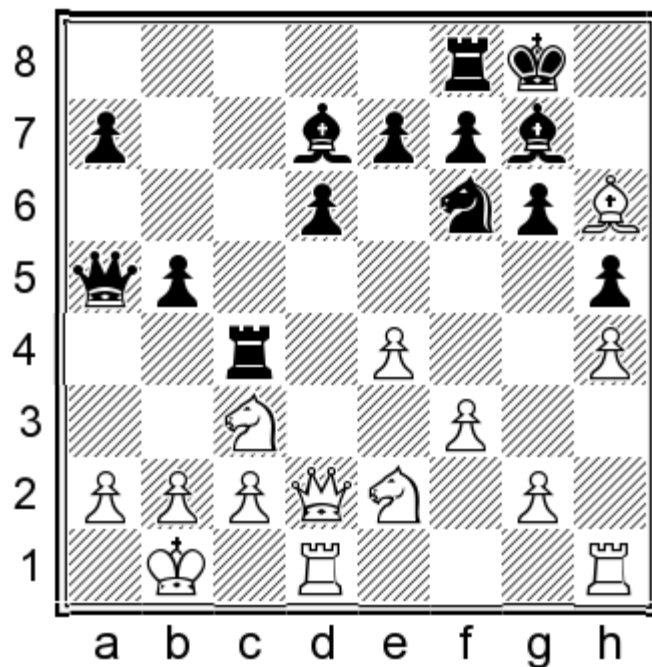
24.hxg6 Bf5 25.Rd2

Black can now play his next move in one go:

25...Ra8!

Despite the pawn on g6, Black's attack has arrived first.

B3) 16.Bh6 Qa5



As usual B31) 17.g4 is an aggressive continuation, while White follows a more positional path with B32) 17.Bxg7 – which was Anand’s choice against Kasparov in Game 11 of their World Championship match.

17.Bg5? was a bizarre move played the first time this position was reached. White simply cannot give Black so much free time to develop his queenside attack. I include the game as Black won quite instructively: 17...b4 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.Qxd5 Rc5 20.Qd3 Be6 21.Nc1 Qa4 22.Bxe7 Rfc8 23.Rd2 Bc3 24.Bxd6 Bxa2† 25.Nxa2 Ra5 26.Kc1 Qxa2 27.Kd1 Qxb2 28.Bf4 Bxd2 29.Kxd2 Ra3 0–1 Suetin – L. Szabo, Leningrad 1967.

17.Nd5

This knight jump should always be calculated before playing the queen to a5.

17...Qxd2 18.Nxe7† Kh7 19.Bxd2 Nxe4

Black’s clearest route to equality.

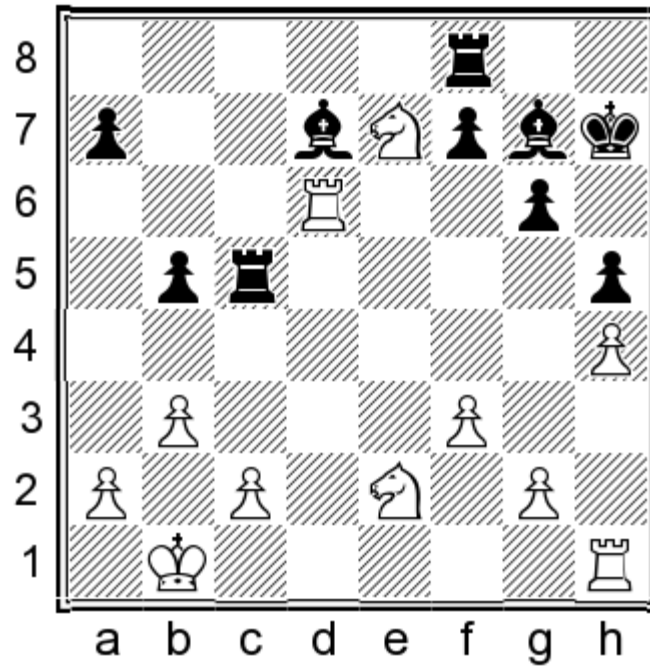
19...Re8 would reach a similar ending to one we have already examined in the notes to variation A. 20.b3 White needs Black’s rook to be on a dark square. 20...Rc7 21.Bf4 Be6 22.Bxd6 Rxe7 23.Bxe7 Rxe7÷ Krotofil – Flitsch, corr. 1995.

20.b3 Nxd2† 21.Rxd2 Rc5 22.Rxd6N

Taking the pawn must be critical.

The game Arencibia Rodriguez – Marin, Andorra 1995, continued 22.Ng3?! Re8 23.Nd5 Bc6 24.Nf4 b4³ and Black had a pleasant edge.

Now on ChessPublishing I suggested:



22...Re5 23.Rxd7 Rxe2 24.g4 Re8 25.Nc6 Rc8 26.Rd6 Bf8=

B31) 17.g4

This is probably White's last chance if he wants to play aggressively. This time Black should take the material on offer.

17...hxg4 18.h5 gxf3 19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.hxg6 fxg6 21.Qh6†?!

This check simply forces Black's king to a safer spot.

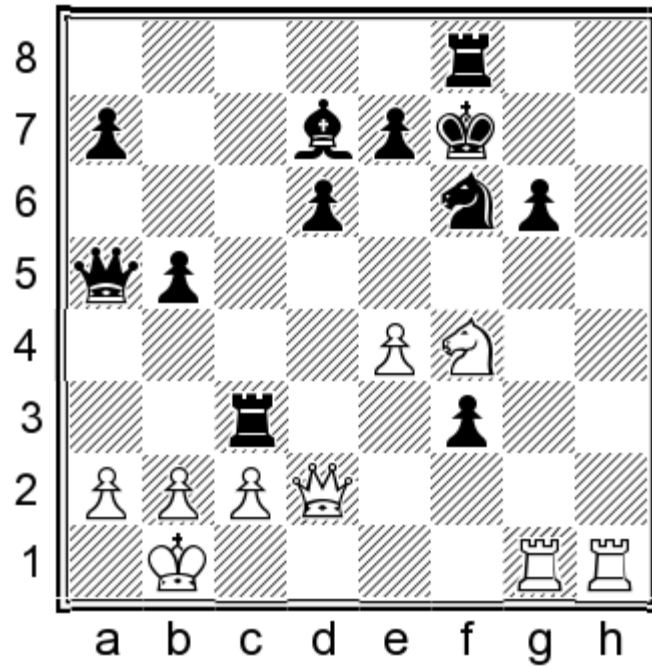
21.Nd4!?N is suggested by Chris Ward. He continues 21...b4 (21...f2!? and 21...Bg4!? are also considered) 22.Nd5 Nxd5 23.exd5 Qxd5 when he describes the position as 'murky'. Actually I think only White can be worse. 24.Rde1! e6 25.Qh6† Kf7 26.Nxf3 Ke8 27.Qxg6† Kd8 28.Ng5 e5³ The black king has found relative sanctuary while Black still has that extra pawn.

21.Rdg1

I found one correspondence game on my database that continued in this manner.

21...Kf7 22.Nf4 Rxc3

22...Rg8!?N looks an interesting alternative, for example: 23.Nfd5 b4 24.Nxf6 bxc3 25.Rh7† (25.Qf4 Qe5! works out well for Black after 26.Qxe5 dxe5 27.Nxd7 Ke6³ or 26.Rh7† Rg7 27.Qxe5 dxe5 28.Nxd7 Rxe4³) 25...Kxf6 The following is an interesting line, and like almost all interesting computer lines, it appears to be a draw: 26.Qf4† Qf5! 27.e5† dxe5 28.Qxc4 Be6 29.Qh4† g5 30.Qh6† Qg6 31.Qh2 Qf5 32.Qh6†=



23.Nd5 Be6 24.Qg5 Bxd5

24...Ke8!?N 25.Nxc3 Qb6 looks a reasonable way to proceed if Black is not satisfied with the draw.

25.Qxg6†

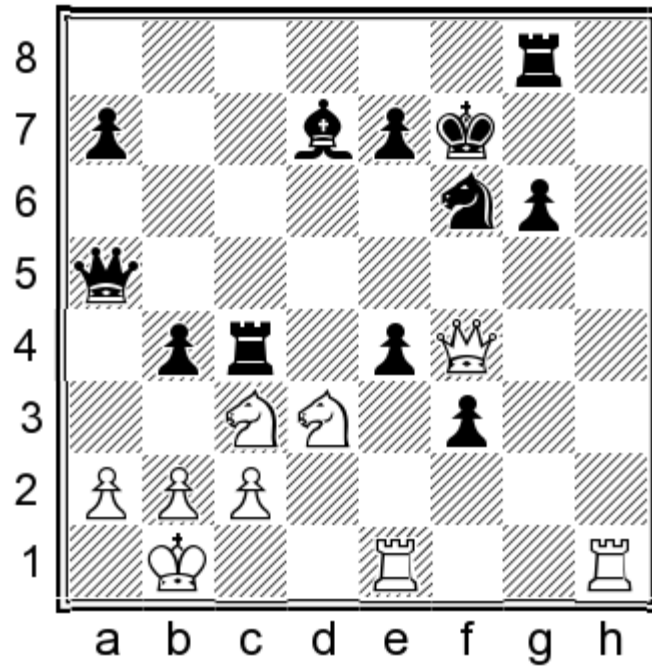
A draw was agreed in Llorente Alvarez – De Oliveira, email 2009.

21...Kf7 22.Nf4 Rg8

Black already stands well here, and White only compounded the situation:

23.e5?! dxe5 24.Nd3 b4 25.Rde1 e4 26.Qf4

This was the route of Gudyev – Diani, corr. 1998, when simplest would have been:

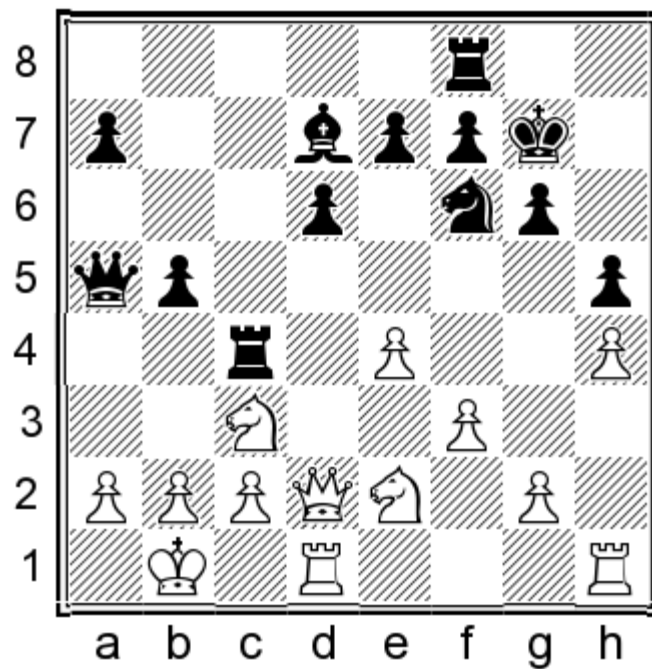


26...Qf5N 27.Ne5† Ke6 28.Qxf5† Kxf5 29.Nxc4 bxc3

Black has a decisive advantage.

B32) 17.Bxg7 Kxg7

White has succeeded in trading dark-squared bishops, but in return Black has grabbed some space on the queenside and is pretty active.

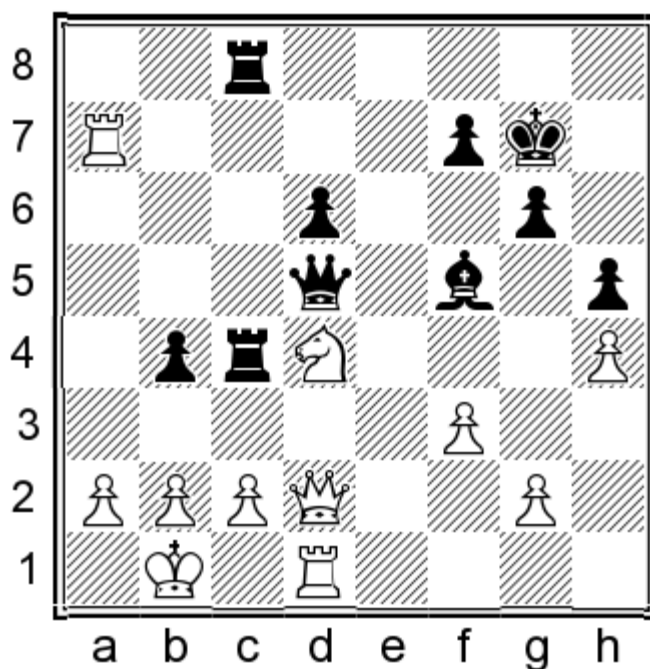


18.Nf4

18.g4 will simply transpose to variation B31 above after 18...hgx4 19.h5 gxf3.

18.Nc1N is apparently an old suggestion by Gufeld, but 18...Rfc8 19.Nb3 Qb6³, as suggested by Dearing, feels far easier for Black.

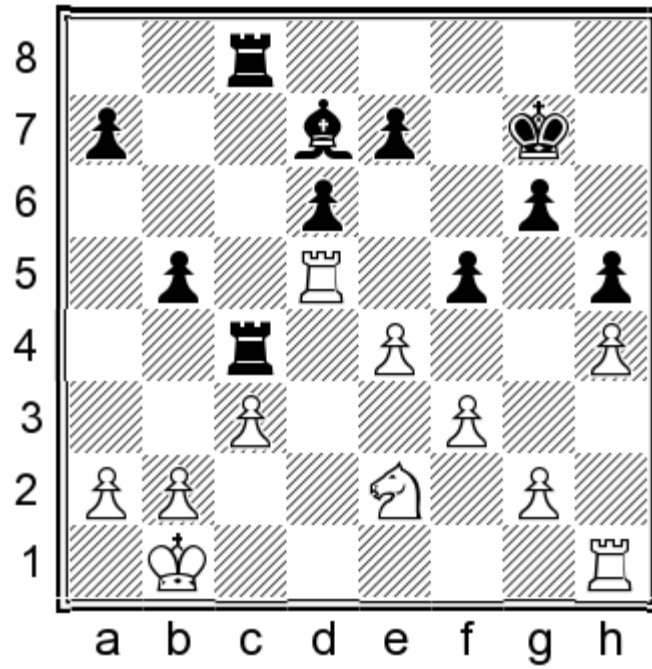
18.Rhe1 There can't be anything wrong with centralizing White's final piece but it doesn't put any pressure on Black either. 18...Rfc8 19.Nd4 b4 20.Nd5 Nxd5 21.exd5 Qxd5 22.Rxe7 Bf5 23.Rxa7 A logical series of moves led us to this position in Marcotulli – Granara Barreto, email 2003, and here the most accurate is:



23...Bxc2†N 24.Nxc2 Qc5 25.Ne3 Qxa7 26.Nxc4 Rxc4=

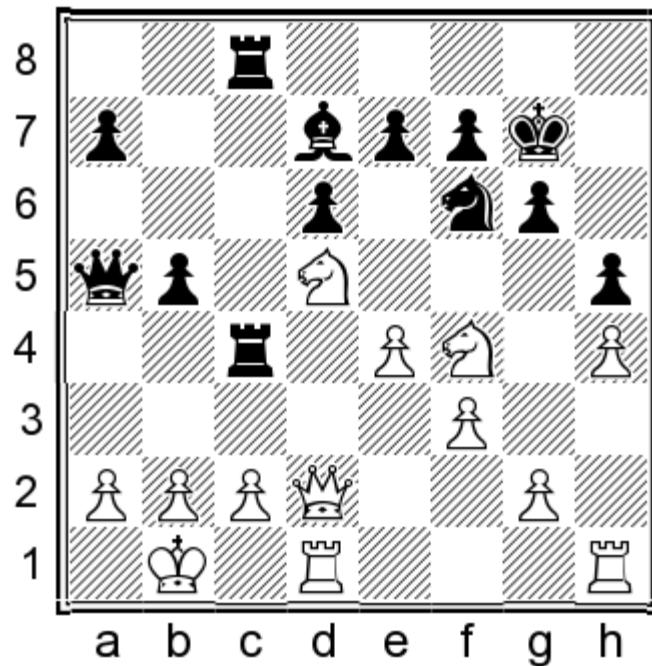
18.Qg5 Prol Medeiros – Braga, Sao Paulo 1999. In certain variations the queen can be annoying on g5, pinning the b5-pawn, but here Black can simply ignore it: 18...Rfc8N 19.e5 dxe5 20.Qxe5 Qd8!? (Dearing suggests 20...Be6 21.Qxb5 Qc7 with decent pressure for the pawn.) 21.Ne4 Kg8! White can't utilize the pin along the d-file. The engine tries to trap the rook with 22.b3 (22.g4 Nxe4 23.fxe4 R8c5³) 22...Rxc2 23.N4c3, but after 23...R8xc3 24.Nxc3 Rxc3 25.Rh2 Rxh2 26.Qxh2 Qa8³ Black is certainly not worse.

18.Nd5 is simply a slightly worse version of the main line, as White would prefer to have a knight on d5 after the exchanges. 18...Qxd2 19.Rxd2 Nxd5 20.Rxd5 (20.exd5 Rfc8 21.g3 a5 22.c3?! b4³ Dion – Jobe, email 2000) 20...Rfc8 21.c3 f5! Even with the queens exchanged Black still wants the initiative.



22.b3 R4c5 23.Rxc5 Rxc5 24.exf5 Bxf5+³ Black had a slight advantage in the ending with the more active pieces in Abdel Aziem – Hakki, Cairo 2003.

18...Rfc8 19.Ncd5



19...Qxd2

With this move Kasparov offered a draw: Black has completely solved any opening problems. As it turned out, Anand soon blundered and Black won easily.

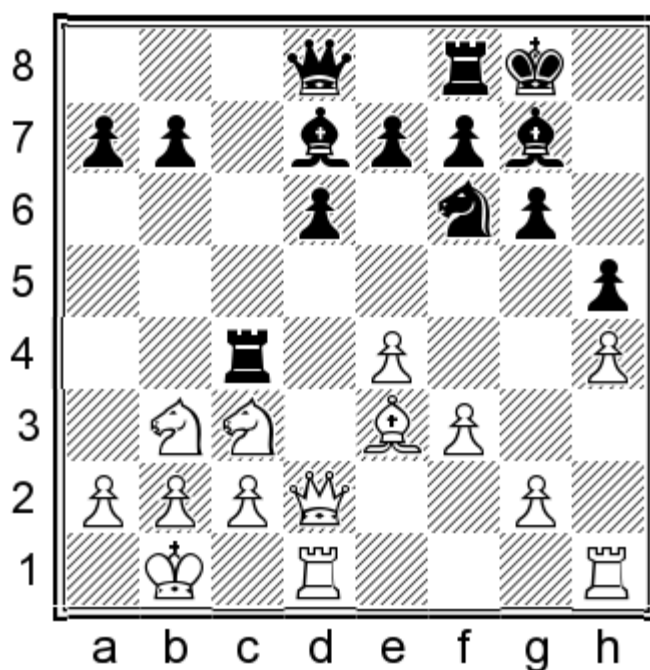
19...b4!? has only been played once, but is an interesting approach should you want to keep more play on the board. The game continued: 20.Nxe7 Rxc2 21.Qxd6 b3 22.axb3 Rxb2† 23.Kxb2 Qc3† 24.Ka2 Rc5 25.Qxc5 Qxc5 26.Ned5 Nxd5 27.Rxd5 Qf2† 28.Ka3 Bc6 29.Rg5 Here it's given as a White win in Abdulla – Robinson, Kemer 2009, but with 29...Qd2N Black is certainly not worse.

20.Rxd2 Nxd5 21.Nxd5 Kf8=

Anand – Kasparov, New York (11) 1995.

C) 15.Nb3

White's other main line and Karjakin's choice fairly recently. Even though that was a blindfold game we should take his preparation seriously.



15...Qb8!?

This was an interesting and rare approach from the highly theoretical Danish GM, and second to Magnus Carlsen, Peter Heine Nielsen. The idea behind White's last is generally to play Bd4 and Nd5 without allowing the black queen to come out to a5. By putting the queen on b8 instead of the more standard c7, Black needn't worry about the knight jumping into d5.

We will pay closest attention to C1) 16.Bg5, C2) 16.Bd4 and C3) 16.Bh6.

16.g4

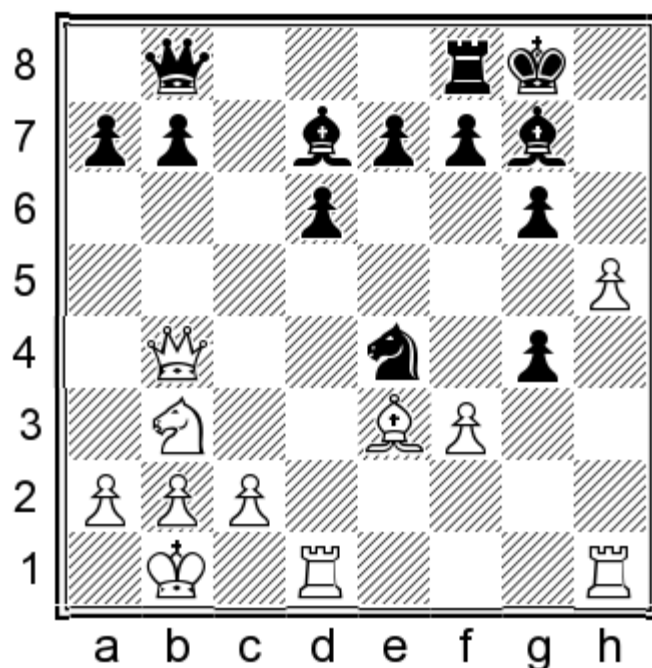
In all Soltis positions this pawn sacrifice has to be carefully checked.

16...Rxc3!

It's important to get rid of that knight before it jumps into d5.

17.Qxc3 hxc4 18.h5 Nxe4 19.Qb4

19.Qe1N 19...gxf3 Here Black's kingside looks solid enough. Once the bishop gets to f5 Black controls most of the important squares: 20.hxc4 (20.Qh4 Bf5 21.Nd4 Qc8³) 20...fxg6 21.Qh4 Bf5³



19...Ng3 20.Rhg1 Nxh5 21.fxg4 Nf6 22.g5 Nh5

With a fairly balanced position. The knight is a bit offside but blocks up the kingside entirely. Material is roughly level, and Semrl – Ham, corr. 2012, was eventually drawn.

C1) 16.Bg5

White has ideas of taking on f6 and jumping the knight into d5, while we also need to watch out for e4-e5 ideas.

16...Rfc8!?

Ignoring what looks like White's bigger threat.

17.e5

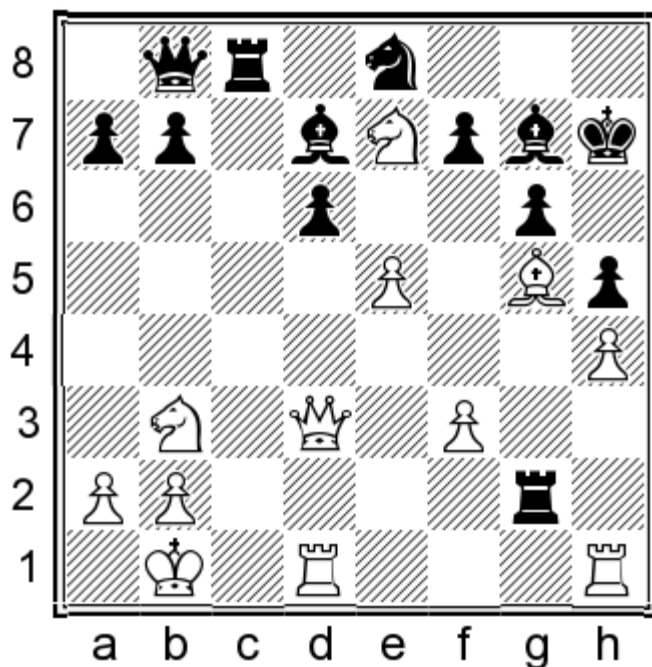
17.Bxf6?!N 17...Bxf6 18.Nd5 doesn't really work here, as Black has 18...Rxc2 19.Nxf6† (19.Qxc2 Rxc2 20.Kxc2 Kg7³) 19...exf6 20.Qxd6 Qxd6 21.Rxd6 Be6³.

17...Ne8

17...Rxc3!?N 18.bxc3 Ne8 could also be considered.

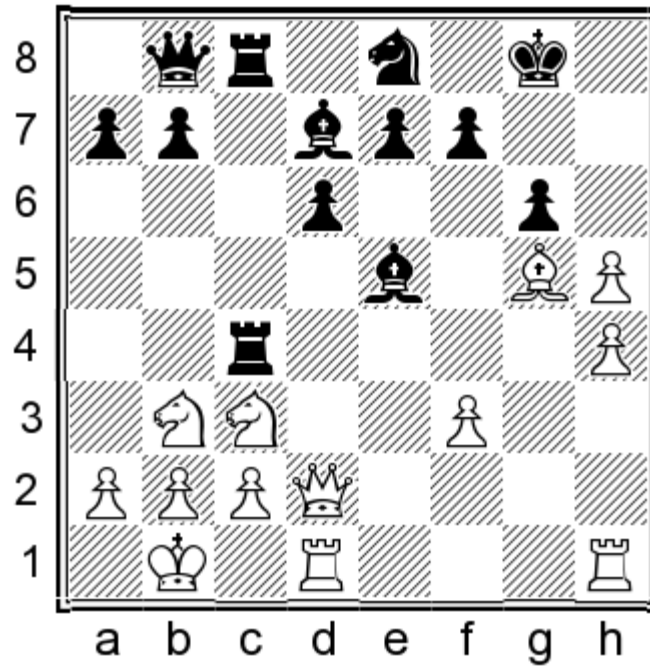
18.g4

18.Nd5N 18...Rxc2 19.Nxe7† Kh7 20.Qd3 Rxc2 Our rook on g2 proves extremely irritating for White.



An interesting fantasy variation runs: 21.f4 Rcc2 (21...dxe5!?) 22.Nd2 Rxb2†! 23.Kxb2 dxe5 24.Qxd7 exf4† 25.Kc1 Qe5 26.Rdg1! White's only move to prevent immediate carnage. 26...Qa1† 27.Kc2 Qc3† 28.Kd1 Qa1† 29.Kc2 Qc3† with a draw.

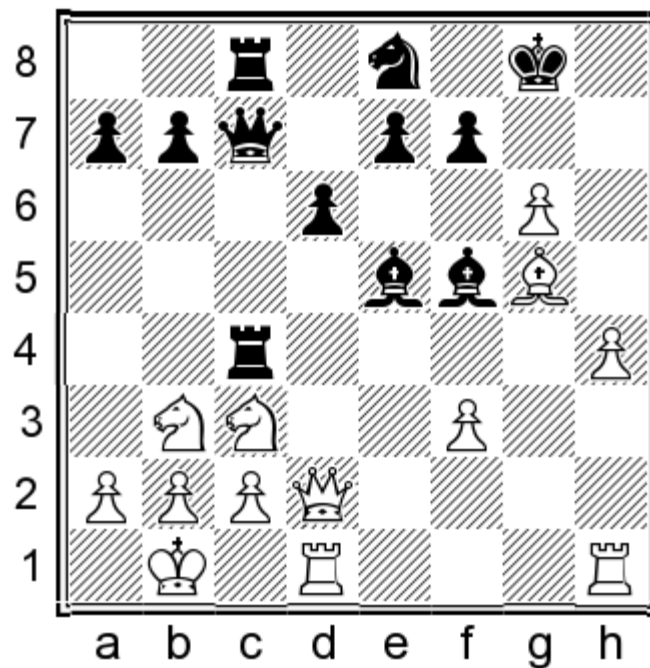
18...Bxe5 19.gxh5



19...Rxc3!?N

I prefer this more direct approach in practical play.

In Kusmierek – Sciallero, email 2009, Black was successful with 19...Bf5 20.hxg6 Qc7!. A rather scary move to make if you haven't got many days to analyse!



21.gxf7+ Kxf7 22.Rhe1 Rxc3 23.bxc3 Bxc3 24.Qf4 e6 25.Re2 Be5 26.Qc1 Qc4 Black was completely dominating.

20.bxc3 Bxc3 21.Qc1 Bf5

Black has a strong initiative which looks to more than compensate for the exchange.

22.hxg6 Qc7!

A neat idea, borrowing from the one employed in the game.

C2) 16.Bd4

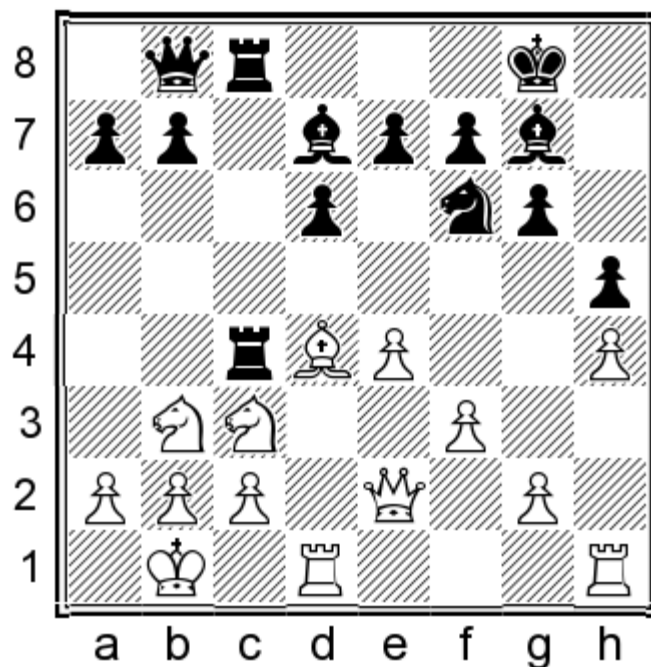
White's usual continuation, but with the queen on b8 it lacks any bite.

16...Rfc8 17.Qe2

17.Na5? Nxe4! 18.Nxe4 Rxd4 was simply losing for White in Brzozka – Veinger, Russia 2002.

17.Rhe1 prepares to break in the centre but we can actually ignore it with 17...b5N, as 18.e5?! b4 19.exf6 Rxd4! 20.Qxd4 Bxf6µ is excellent for Black.

17.Qe3N This would be an improvement on Karjakin's play. On ChessPublishing I recommended: 17...b5 18.e5 (18.Bxa7? The pawn is too hot. 18...Qa8 19.Na5 R4c7 20.Bb6 Rxc3 21.bxc3 Be6 gives Black an extremely strong attack.) 18...Rxd4! 19.Rxd4 (19.Nxd4 b4!³) 19...dxe5 20.Rd2 Be6© Black has great compensation.



17...e5!

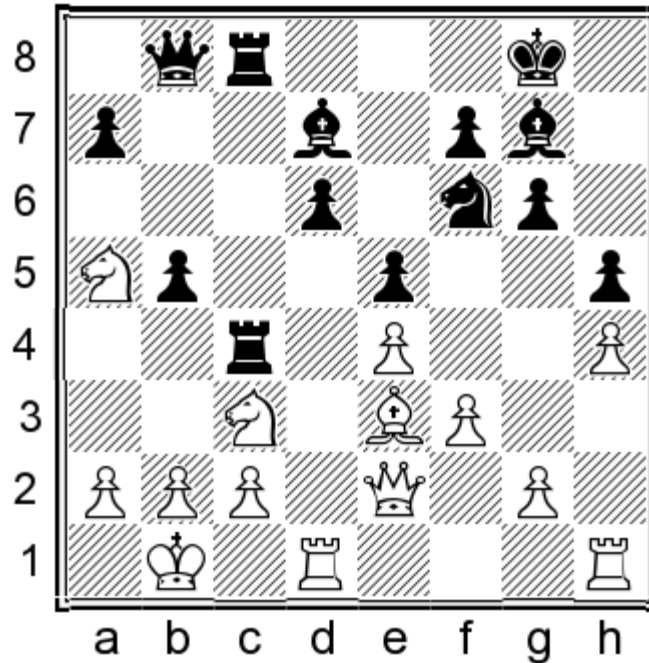
This move needs to be carefully judged in the Dragon. On the one hand it blocks in the g7-bishop, but here Peter Heine

has correctly judged that gaining time and taking control of the centre is more important. The real question is always whether White will be able to sit on the d5-outpost forever. Here his pieces aren't so well coordinated – especially that knight on b3 – so Black will likely be able to break with ...d5, when the g7-bishop will find a new lease of life.

18.Be3 b5 19.Na5

This move doesn't slow up Black's attack but in any event White is unable to stop 19...b4.

As I gave on ChessPublishing, 19.Rc1 b4 20.Nd1 d5 would give Black a strong initiative.



19...b4! 20.Nd5

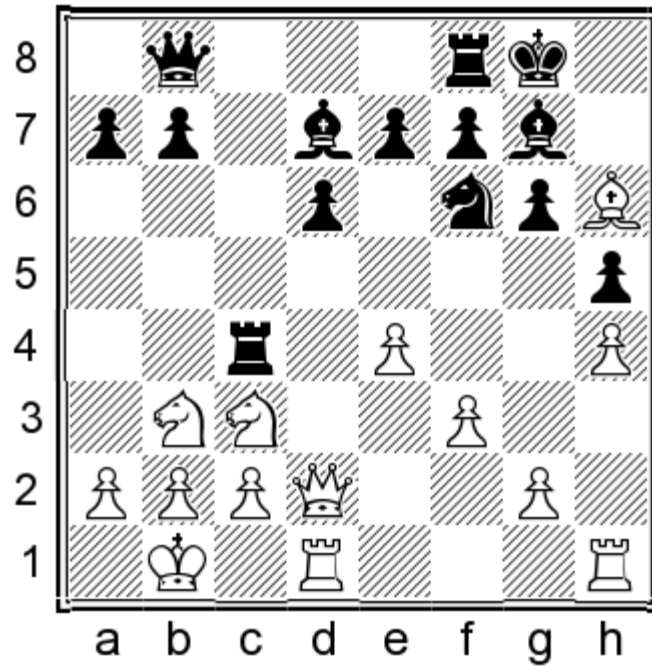
20.Nxc4 wouldn't have saved White. 20...bxc3 21.b3 Bb5! Strangely that knight on c4, which looks quite stable, is indefensible. Peter Heine gives: 22.Ka1 Bxc4 23.bxc4 Qb2#

20...Rxc2

Black broke through and didn't have any problems converting the full point in Karjakin – P.H. Nielsen, Beijing (rapid) 2011.

C3) 16.Bh6

This looks fairly critical.



16...Rfc8N

This was Peter Heine's own suggestion on his DVD and feels more reliable to me.

16...b5

I found two correspondence games which reached this position.

17.g4 hxg4 18.h5 gxf3 19.hxg6 fxg6 20.Nd5

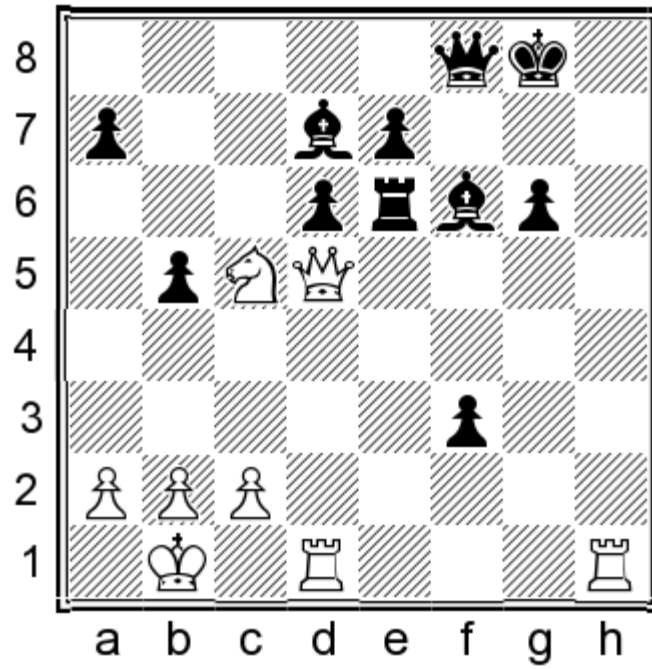
20.Rdg1 looks scary but 20...Bg4 seems to hold on, and was indeed drawn in Marturano – Fasano, corr. 2014.

20...Rxe4 21.Nxf6†

21.Bxg7N 21...Kxg7 22.Qh6† Kf7÷ is another dangerous-looking position, but Black does currently have a few extra pawns.

21...Bxf6 22.Qd5† Re6 23.Bxf8 Qxf8 24.Nc5!?

24.Qxf3N 24...Re5 is another double-edged position but, with the bishop pair and two pawns for the exchange, Black will be more than okay unless White can somehow find a way through.



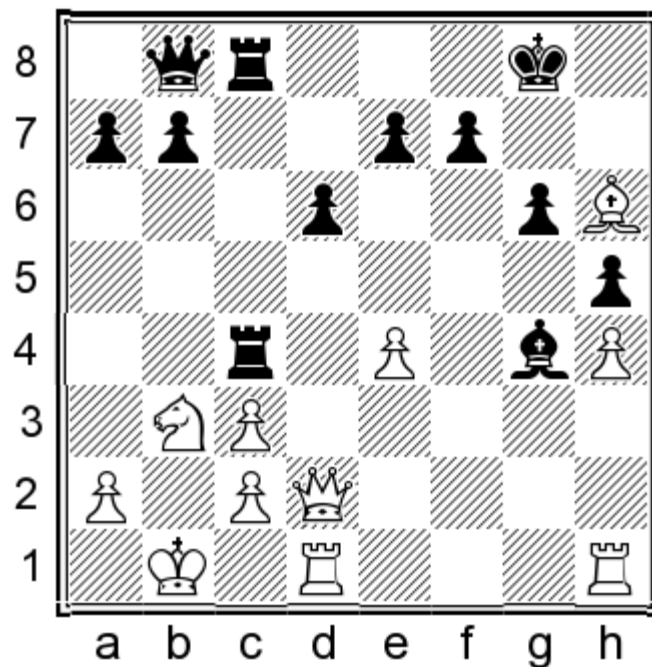
24...dxc5 25.Qxd7 Re5 26.Qh3 Bg7 27.Qh7† Kf7 28.Rhg1 Re6 29.Qh3 Qa8 30.Rdf1 Rf6 31.Rg3=

After an interesting fight the game liquidated into a drawn ending in Ljubicic – Haugen, email 2011.

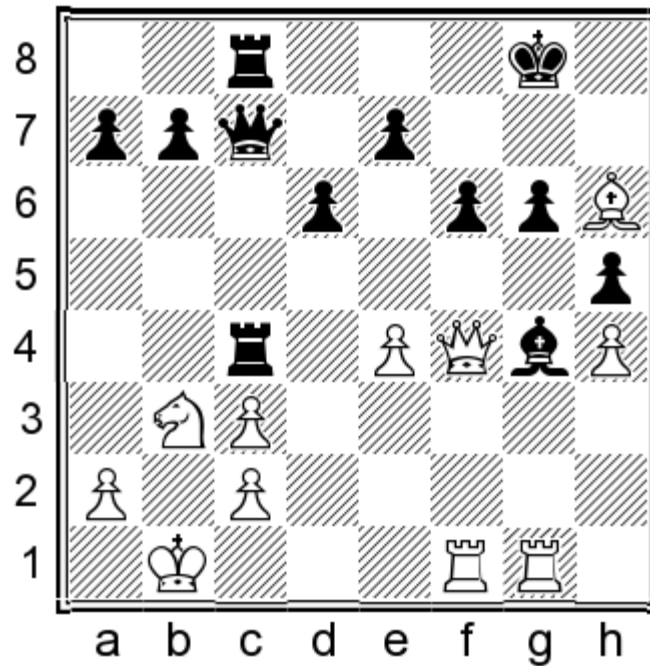
17.Bxg7

After examining 17.g4 you'll see why White might improve by exchanging on g7 immediately.

17.g4 Nxe4! This is Peter Heine's big idea. By doubling rooks on the c-file Black has put pressure on c2, so White is now forced to recapture with the pawn: 18.fxe4 Bxc3 19.bxc3 Bxg4



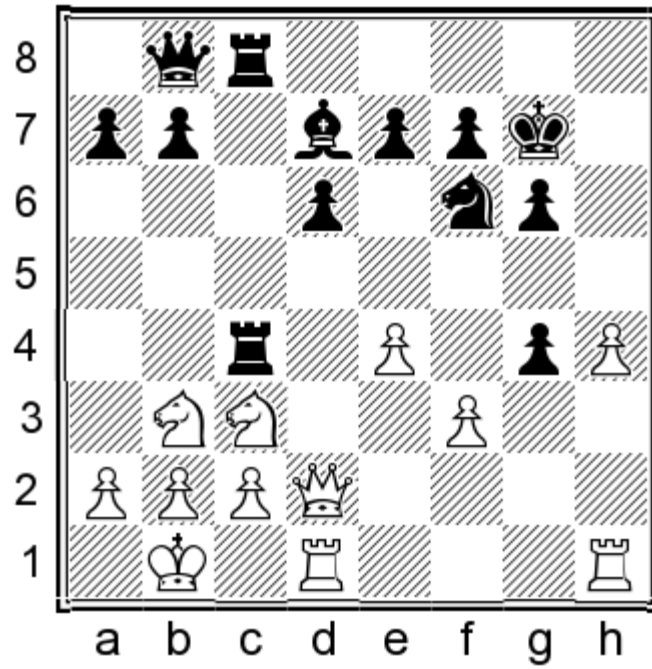
Black has two pawns for the piece and will pick up a third. The chief question revolves around whether White can exploit Black's weak dark squares, and it doesn't seem that he can. The analysis continues 20.Rdf1 Qc7! 21.Qf4 f6 and Peter Heine leaves it here. Now the dark squares are covered, White's only attempt to break through to Black's king is an exchange sacrifice on g4. Therefore we should check 22.Rhg1; however Black has at least a draw with:



22...Rxc3 (22...Kh7!? and 22...Qc6 could also be tried.) 23.Rxg4 Rxb3† 24.axb3 Qxc2† 25.Ka1 Qc3†=

17...Kxg7 18.g4 hxg4

I see nothing wrong with Peter Heine's idea, but 18...Rxc3!? also looks interesting to me. One sample line could run: 19.bxc3 hxg4 20.h5 gxf3 21.hxg6 fxg6 22.Qh6† Kf7 23.Rhg1 Rg8 24.Rdf1 Bc6 25.Nd2 Qd8 26.Nxf3 Qb6† 27.Ka1 Qc5÷ Black has a reasonable position.



19.h5 Rh8 20.Nd5

20.hxg6

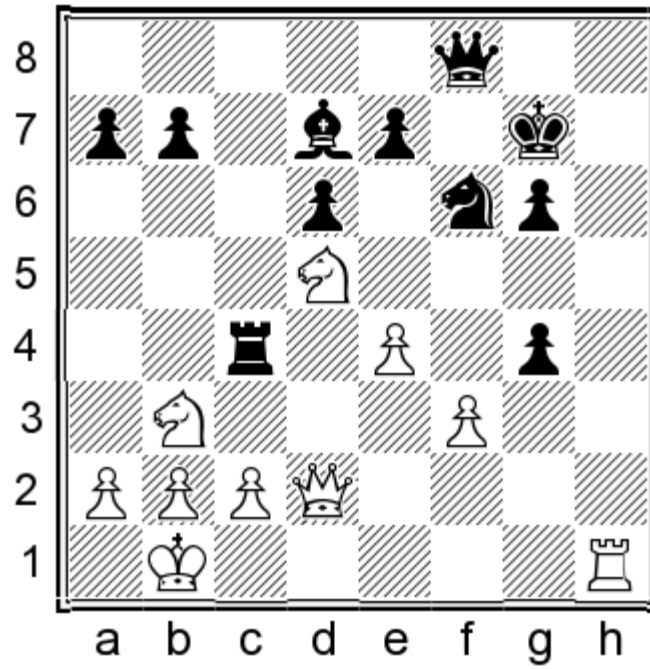
This also needs checking of course, but Black has enough resources.

20...fxg6 21.Nd5 Rxh1

21...gxf3 also defends. Generally if there are two sound lines then the attack can't be so strong. 22.Nxf6 exf6 23.Rxh8 Qxh8 24.Qxd6 Bg4 25.Qe7† Kh6÷ The bishop on h5 will keep the king safe.

22.Rxh1 Qf8

Black again controls enough squares to prevent White from any mating ideas.



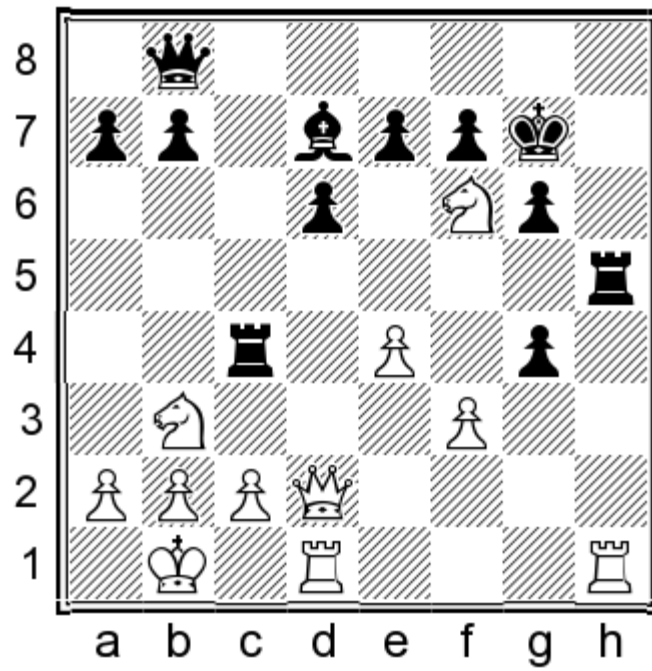
23.Qh6† Kf7 24.Qg5 Nxd5 25.Qxd5† Be6 26.Qxb7

26.Rh7† Kg8 27.Qxe6† Kxh7 28.Qxc4 wins a piece, but after 28...Qxf3 Black's g4-pawn is worth at least enough for the knight and so White will need to force perpetual.

26...gxf3 27.Nd2 Rc5 28.Nxf3 Kg7 29.Nd4 Bg8 30.Qxa7 Re5=

20...Rxb5 21.Nxf6

My engine pops up with: 21.e5!? dxe5 (As I wrote above, Black's position appears to be sound enough for two viable lines. Here 21...Nxd5 also works: 22.Rxb5 Nf4! 23.Rhh1 Bf5 24.Nd4 dxe5 25.Nxf5† gxf5 26.fxf4 fxf4÷ Black has three pawns for the piece and adequate defensive resources.) 22.Nxf6 Rxb1 23.Rxb1 Kxf6 24.Qxd7 gxf3 White will probably have to exchange either the rooks or queens to win the advanced f-pawn. Black will have the better chances in the ending with his four uncontested kingside pawns.

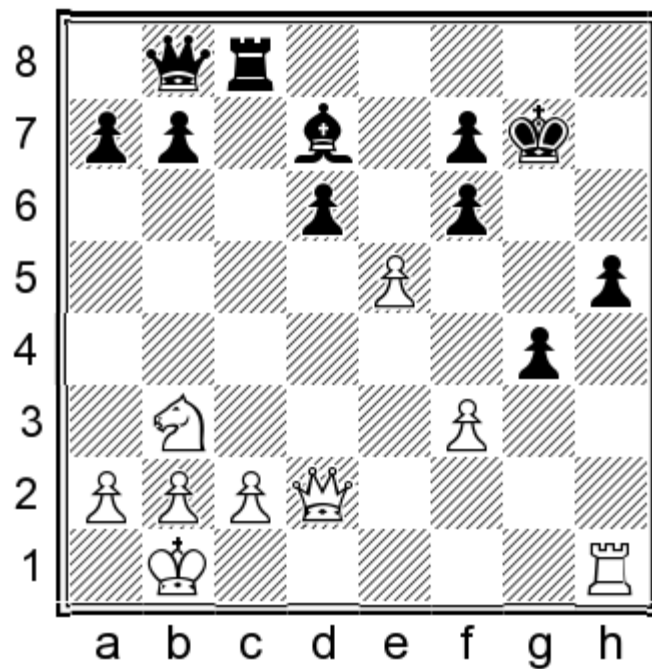


21...exf6 22.Rxh5 gxh5

This is where Peter Heine leaves the line. We should check a little further:

23.Rh1 Rc8! 24.e5!

24.Rxh5 Rh8³

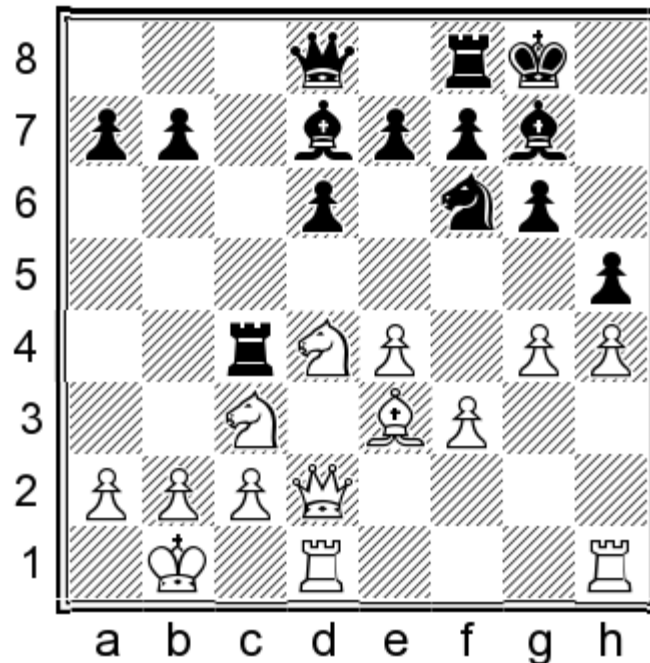


24...Rh8 25.exf6† Kxf6 26.fxg4 Bxg4³

This looks safe for Black. We have two extra pawns and it doesn't look like White is that close to delivering mate.

D) 15.g4

This move briefly flickered into fashion a few years ago but was quickly dropped. However, it probably has the most bite of any of White's options. I believe it's rareness stems from the fact that with 13.Kb1 White has already declared he wants a quieter game than is usually seen in the Soltis Variation.



15...hxc4 16.h5

16.f4? There's little logic to this move when Black has already exchanged the knight from e5. 16...Qc7 17.h5 was played in Espejo – Vila Dupla, Seville 2000, when Dearing's suggestion of 17...Rxc3!N 18.Qxc3 Qxc3 19.bxc3 Nxe4 would have been totally crushing.

16.Rdg1?! Zhou – Luanchen, Zhongshan 2014, was a dangerous but not quite sound attempt. Here taking the second pawn was rather too hot. Better was: 16...Qa5N (16...e5N also looks like a decent defence) 17.h5 (17.Nb3 Qh5μ) 17...gxh5 18.fxg4 Nxe4! 19.Nxe4 Qxd2 20.Nxd2 Rxd4 21.gxh5 Rg4μ

16...Nxh5

16...gxh5!?

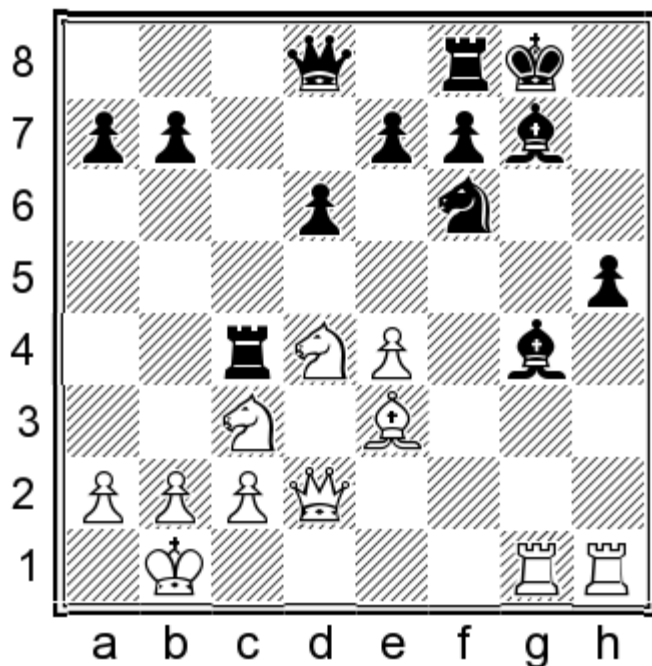
This is rare but looks to be another interesting option. In this precise position it seems important to have a knight on f6 to control the d5-square.

17.fxg4

17.Nd5 was tried anyway in Serra Olives – Truyols, Palma de Mallorca 1991, but Black can defend with 17...e5!N.

17.Bh6?!N 17...Rxd4! This typical trick still works. I thought I had to check Black could escape after 18.Qg5 Rxd1† 19.Nxd1 Ne8 20.Qxh5 but now both moves with the f-pawn are winning.

17...Bxg4 18.Rdg1

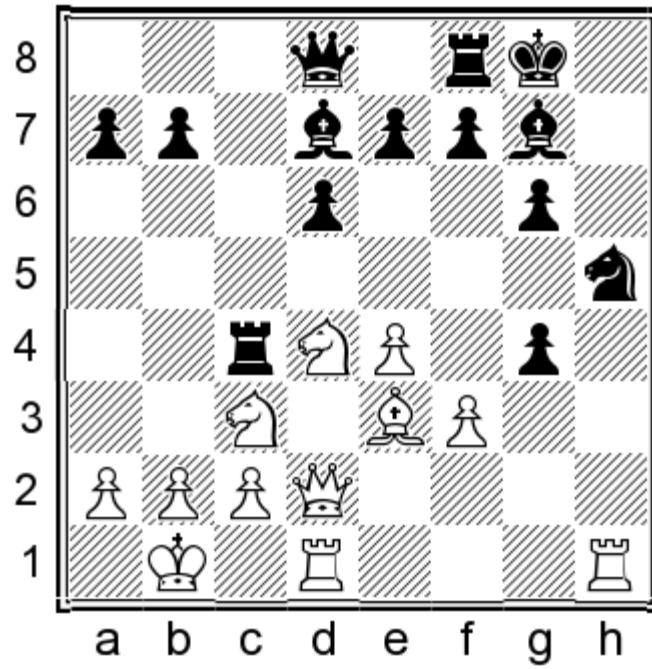


18...Qc8N

Covering the f5-square.

18...Rxc3 19.Qxc3 Nxe4 20.Qd3 as played in Bilguun – Munkhbayar, Ulan Ude 2013, would also have been fine had Black continued: 20...Nc5N (20...d5? 21.Bh6! Bxh6 22.Rxh5 was seen in the game) 21.Qd2 f5=

19.Nd5 Re8 20.Qd3 b5÷



D1) 17.fxg4 needs to be taken seriously, but I think D2) 17.Rdg1 is White's critical follow-up.

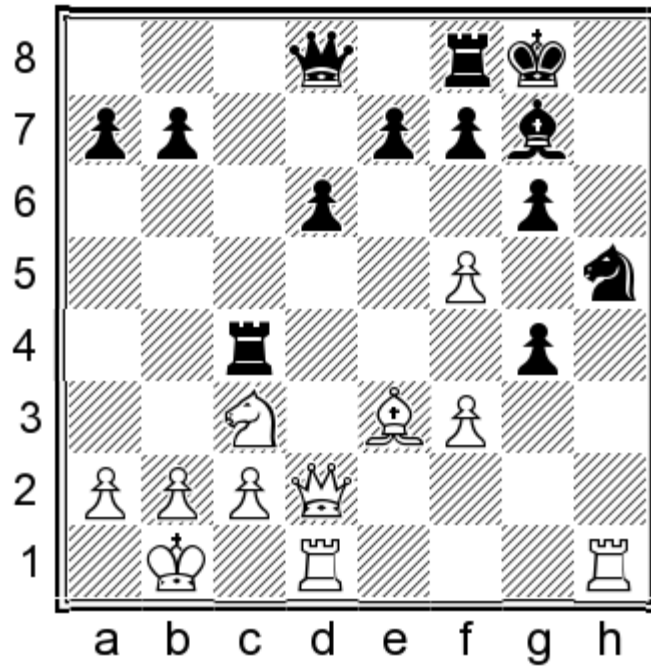
17.Rxh5? has been seen occasionally, but here White has no justification in giving the exchange.

17.Nf5?!

This one isn't particularly scary.

17...Bxf5 18.exf5

Black has many good options but the strongest appears to be:



18...Bxc3N

I suggested this move on ChessPublishing and it still looks good.

18...Qa5 is also promising. 19.Nd5 19.Qd5N is necessary, but Black is still better after 19...Qxd5 20.Nxd5 gxf3 21.Nxe7† Kh7³.) 19...Qxd2 20.Nxe7† Kh7 21.Rxd2 Kanli – Lund, Rogaska Slatina 2011. Here my suggestion of 21...gxf3!N is clearly better for Black. I gave: 22.Rdh2 Bd4 23.fxg6† (23.Bxd4 Rxd4 24.f6 Kh6 25.Rxh5† gxh5 26.Nf5† Kg5 27.Nxd4 f2µ The f- and h-pawns are stronger than the knight.) 23...fxg6 24.Rxh5† gxh5 25.Rxh5† Kg7 26.Bh6† Kf7 27.Rf5† Ke6! 28.Bxf8 f2 Again the advanced f-pawn is worth more than White's extra piece.

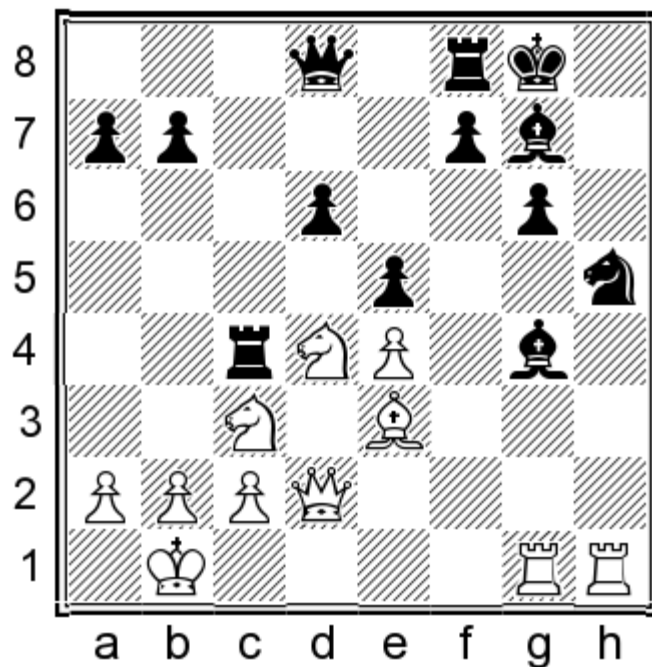
19.bxc3 Qa5 20.Bd4 Qb5† 21.Kc1 Qxf5 22.fxg4 Qxg4 23.Rdg1 Qf3

Black will give up the exchange on d4 followed by trading queens with an extremely promising endgame.

D1) 17.fxg4 Bxg4 18.Rdg1 e5

Black immediately fights back in the centre.

18...Qd7 is also possible. Guizar – Fleetwood, corr. 2000, continued: 19.Rh4 (19.Nd5N 19...Rfc8÷) 19...Nf6 20.Bh6 Nxe4! 21.Nxe4 Rxd4 22.Qc1 Rxe4 23.Bxg7 Kxg7 24.Qh6† Kf6 25.Qxf8 Here 25...e5N looks better for Black. His king has adequate protection and he will soon be able to start advancing his pawns.



19.Nf5!

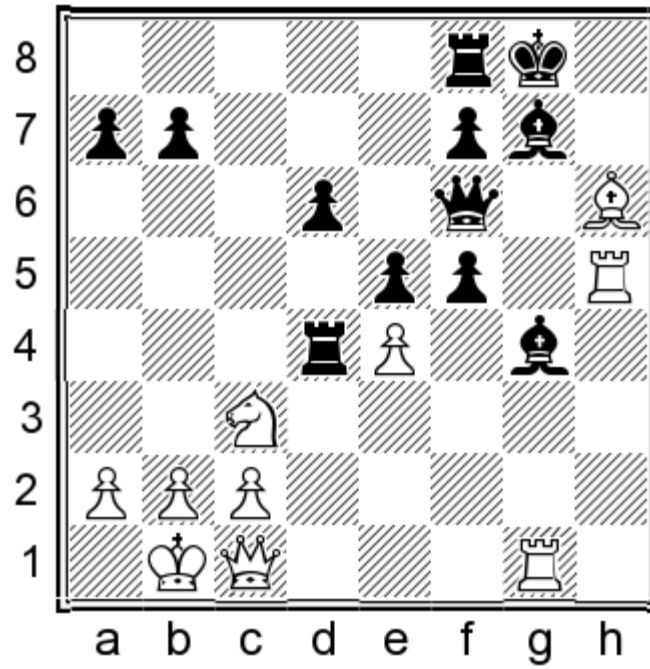
This is White's only way to keep the balance.

19.Ndb5?! Bf3! 20.Qd3 (20.Rh3 Bxe4 With the e-pawn gone Black's defence is rather easier. 21.Rxh5 was tried but White's attack was floundering. 21...gxh5 22.Nxd6 Rxc3! 23.Rxg7† Otherwise Black was about to cover with 23...Bg6. 23...Kxg7 24.Bh6† Kh7→ Zvan – Starcic, Kranj 1999) 20...Rxc3 21.Nxc3 Bxh1 22.Rxh1 a6µ White is able to win back the d-pawn but will still be a clear pawn down, Piorun – Robson, Chennai 2011.

19...gxf5 20.exf5!N

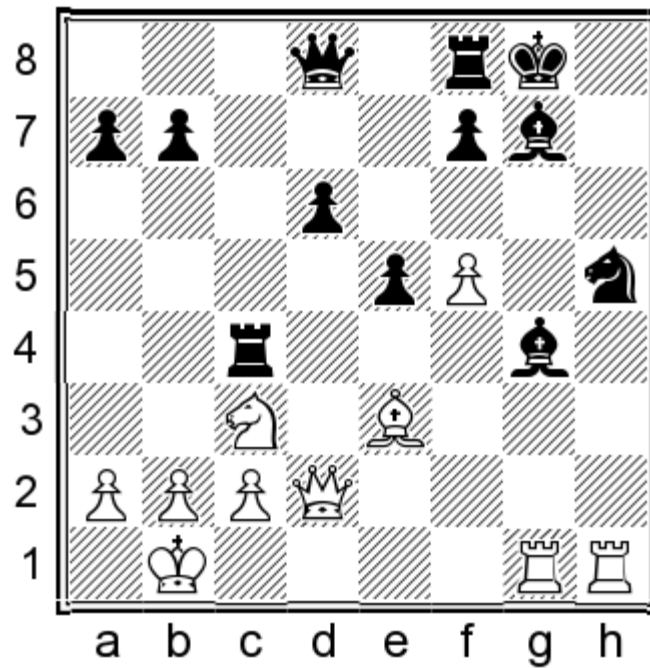
This was my suggestion for White on ChessPublishing.

20.Bh6?! was played the only time this position was reached, but 20...Rd4 21.Qc1 Qf6 was better for Black. Here White had to try 22.Rxh5N (Instead 22.Bxg7?! Nxg7 23.Nd5 Rxd5 24.exd5 was Cabrera Ladron de Guevara – Batista, Havana 2013, when 24...e4N would just have been winning. Black will follow up with ...Qe5, ...f6 and ...Kf7 with a rock solid position.)



22...Bxh5 23.Rxg7† Qxg7 24.Bxg7 Kxg7 25.exf5 Rf4! 26.Qg1† Bg6! 27.fxg6 fxg6 28.Nd1 Rf1 29.Qg4 Rh1μ

White has a dangerous initiative for the piece. I think the most pragmatic defence is:



20...Bxf5 21.Rxh5 Bg6

The bishop does a good job defending the black king.

22.Bh6

It is important that Black can defend against this move with:

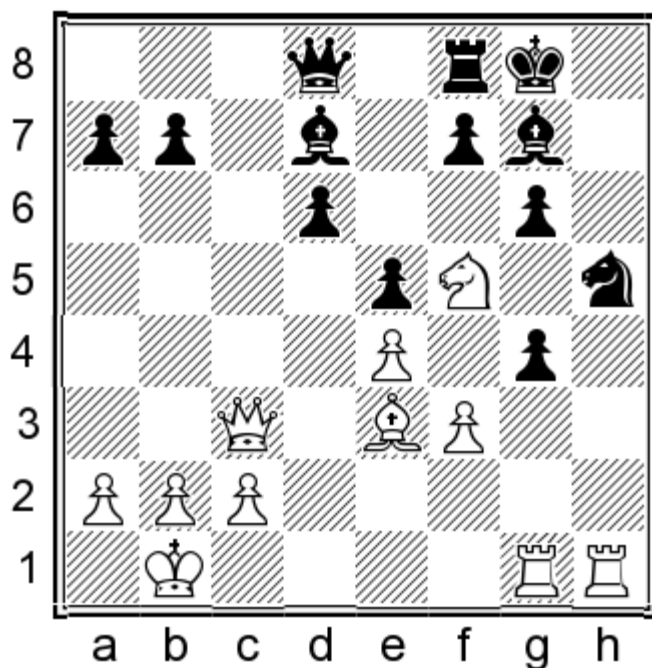
22...Rh4! 23.Bg5 Rd4!³

D2) 17.Rdg1 Nf6

This move feels unnatural as we're accustomed to the knight being used to blockade the h-file. Here, however, I believe it's more important to fight for control of d5.

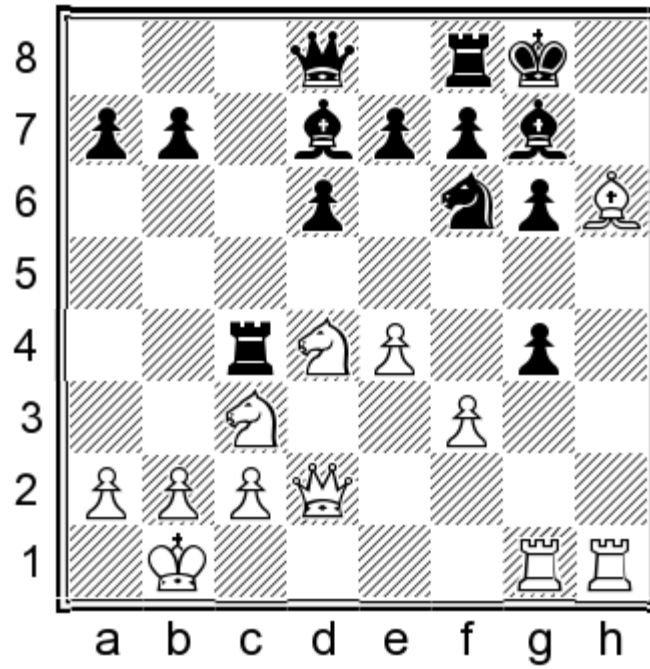
17...Qc8 has been Black's most common response but I don't trust it.

17...Rxc3!?N is interesting though. For example: 18.Qxc3 e5! 19.Nf5!? (19.fxc4 appears to just be a draw: 19...exd4 20.Bxd4 Nf6 21.Rf1 Nxe4 22.Qh3 f6 23.Qh7† Kf7 24.Rh6 Nd2† 25.Kc1 Nxf1 26.Qxg6† Kg8 27.Qh7†=)



19...gxf5 20.Rxh5 f4 21.Bf2 (21.Bxa7 g3 Black's pawn structure makes pleasant viewing!) 21...Qc8÷ (21...g3? 22.Bxg3)

18.Bh6



Some fantastic variations arise after D21) 18...Nxe4, although D22) 18...Rxd4! is more pragmatic.

D21) 18...Nxe4

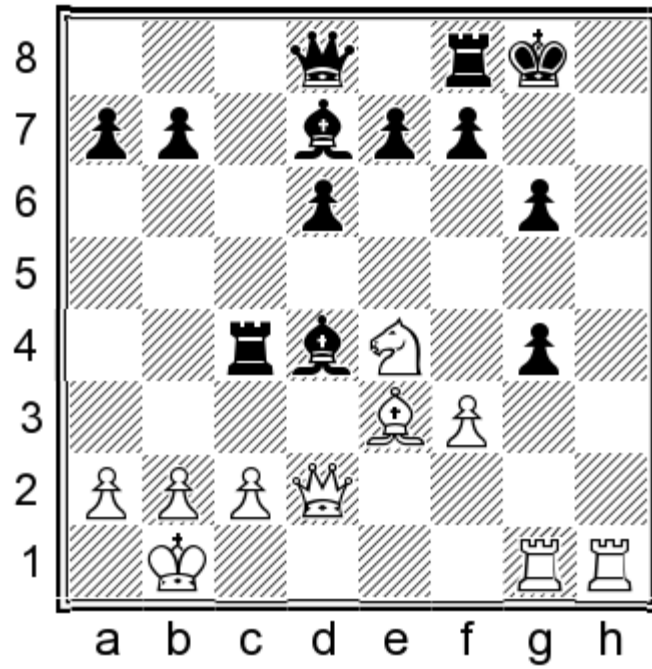
Black's position looks a bit hairy in this variation, but as far as I can see there's nothing fantastic for White. Black has more defensive resources than are immediately apparent.

19.Nxe4

19.fxe4 doesn't challenge Black. 19...Bxd4 20.Be3 Be5 21.Bf4 Bxf4 22.Qxf4 Rxc3! Here White should bail out with: 23.Qh6! (23.bxc3?! f6 24.Qh6 Qb6† 25.Kc1 Kf7 26.Qh7† Ke8 The king escapes to safety and so Black is a lot better.) 23...Rh3 24.Rxh3 gxh3 25.Rxg6† fxg6 26.Qxg6† With a draw.

19...Bxd4 20.Be3

20.Bxf8 Qxf8 21.b3 Bxg1 22.bxc4 Qd8! is an important idea.

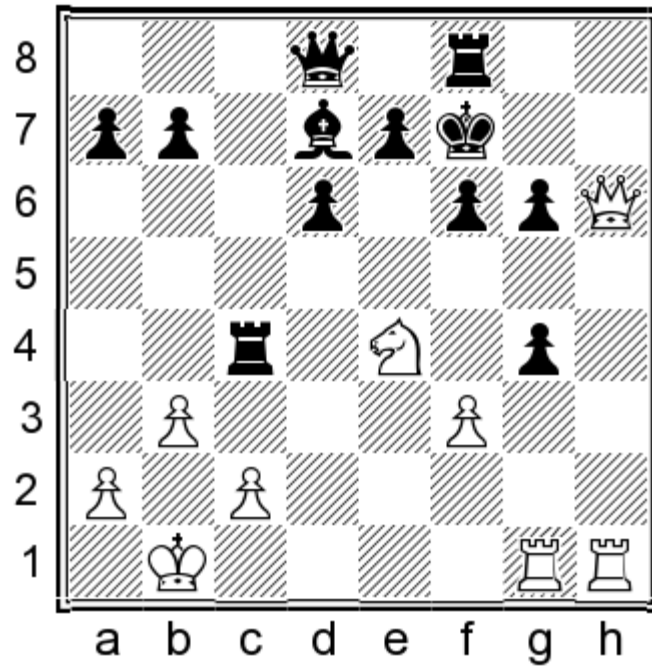


20...Be5 21.Bf4 Bg7 22.Qh2

This position soon transposes to a couple of correspondence games after D211) 22...f6, but the exciting D212) 22...f5N must also be considered.

D211) 22...f6 23.Bh6 Bxh6 24.Qxh6 Kf7 25.b3

25.Qh7† Ke6 26.Rxg4 Kd5 Here on ChessPublishing I wrote “[this] looks insane but possibly the king will run to safety via c6-c7 and to b8.” Stockfish is certainly happy with Black’s position!

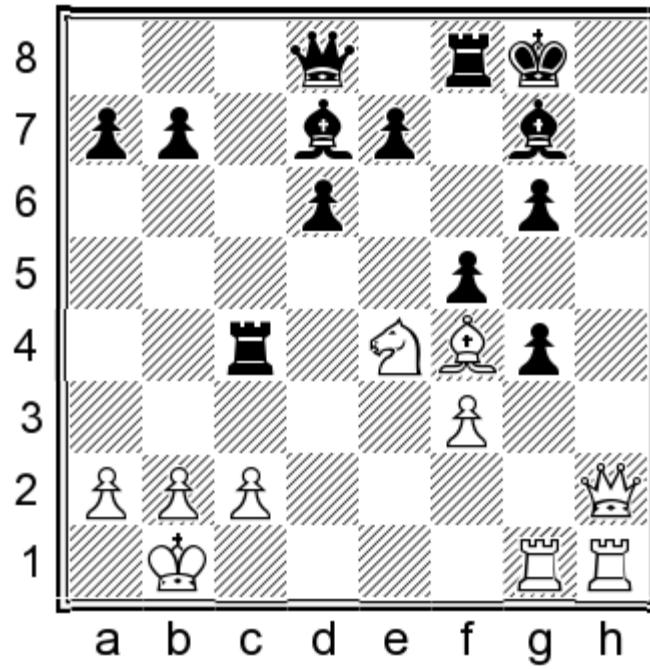


25...Rxe4 26.Qh7† Ke6 27.fxe4

The king looks rather precarious on e6, but in fact it's hard for White to attack it without any minor pieces. The position is about balanced and the game was eventually drawn in Grego – Sogin, corr. 2013.

D212) 22...f5N

This was a move I analysed on ChessPublishing. The following line is so fascinating I thought I would share it here as well.

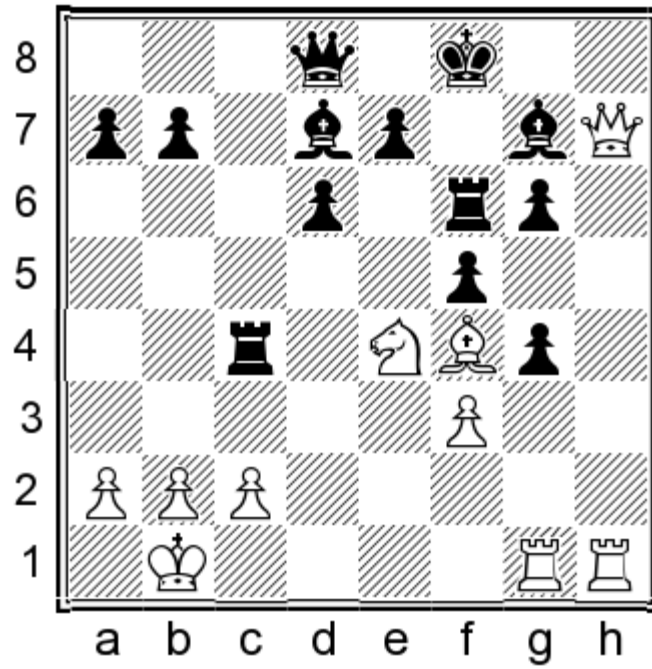


23.Ng5!?

23.Qh7† Kf7 24.Rh6 (24.Ng5† Kf6μ doesn't get White anywhere) This is another dangerous-looking position, but with 24...Qb6! White doesn't appear to have more than a draw after 25.Qxg6† Kg8 26.Qh7†=. Instead, 26.Bc1 Rxc2! 27.Kxc2?! Rc8† would deprive White of the draw. Black is doing rather well, as 28.Kb1? Rxc1† is catastrophic.

23...Rf6 24.Qh7† Kf8 25.Ne4!

White's only move not to be clearly worse. These positions are so sharp that they are near impossible to play accurately without having done a lot of work on them beforehand. That means the better-prepared player will have a big advantage.



25...Rxc2!?

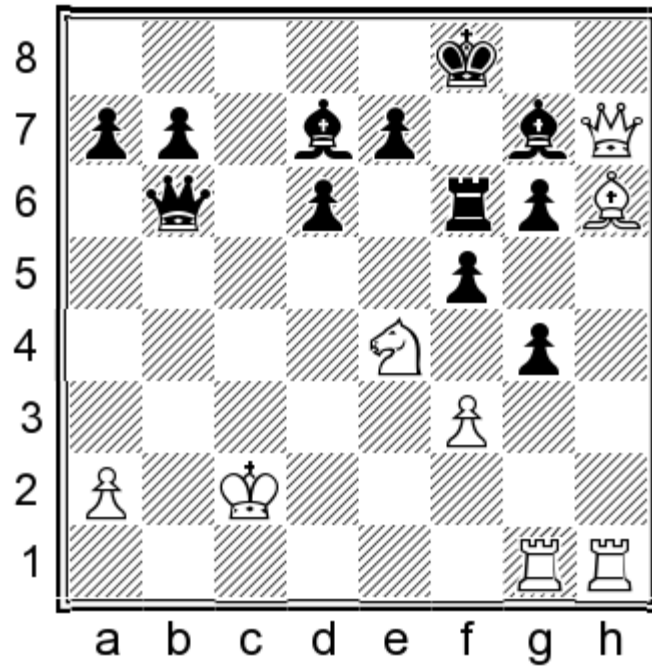
25...fxe4 26.Bh6 Kf7 27.Qxg7† Ke6 28.Rxg4 Kd5! may also survive but this isn't so much fun.

26.Bh6!

26.Kxc2? fxe4 27.Bh6 Qc7†! Opening up the back rank for Black's king to scurry to safety. 28.Kb1 Bxh6 29.Qxh6† Ke8μ

26...Rxb2†! 27.Kxb2 Qb6† 28.Kc2

28.Kc1 is also very sharp: 28...Qc6†! 29.Kd1 Qd5† 30.Ke1 Qa5† 31.Kf2 White's only way to play for more than the draw. 31...Qxa2† 32.Nd2 Qg8 33.Bxg7† Qxg7 34.Qh8† Qg8÷ Black has a lot of pawns for that rook!



28...Ba4†!

Necessary for Black's counterplay.

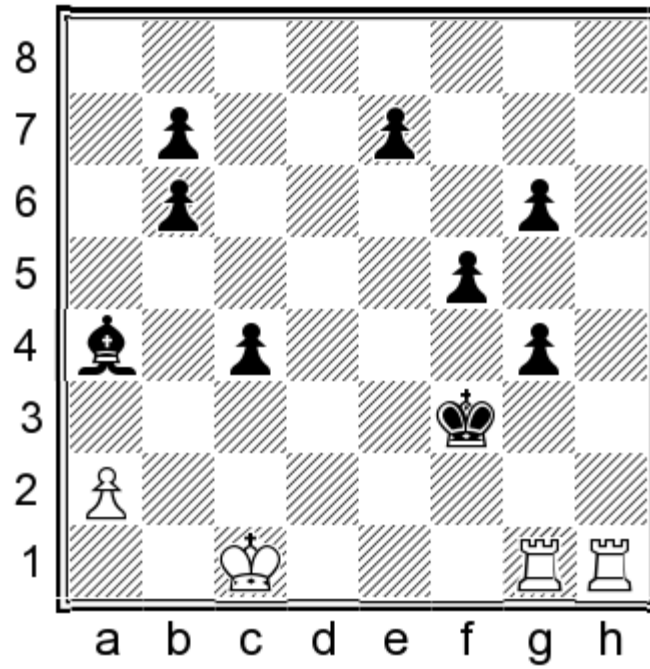
29.Kc1 Bxh6†

29...Qc6†? wouldn't work anymore due to 30.Kb2 Qc2† 31.Ka3 and White will successfully block the checks.

30.Qxh6† Kf7 31.Qh7† Ke6 32.Qg8† Ke5 33.Qc4!?! d5! 34.f4†! Kxf4 35.Nxf6† dxc4 36.Nd5† Kf3

36...Kg5 was actually the move I gave on ChessPublishing, but perhaps f3 is a better square for the black king.

37.Nxb6 axb6



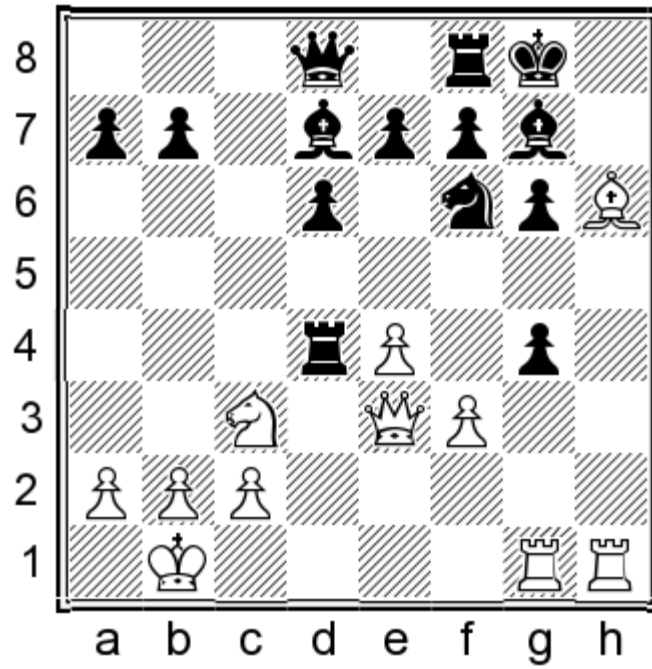
Black has bishop and six pawns for the two rooks, an imbalance I don't think I'd ever seen before. The engine slightly prefers White but the pawns are very dangerous. I would be happy to take Black here.

D22) 18...Rxd4!

After that interlude we'll return to more practical chess! This is Black's simplest response, which has been tried by some well-prepared correspondence players.

19.Qe3!

Black's idea can be seen after: 19.Qxd4N 19...Bxh6 20.Rxh6 Qb6! 21.Qxb6 (21.Qd1 Rc8µ would see Black attacking) 21...axb6³ Without queens on the board, Black has the better chances.

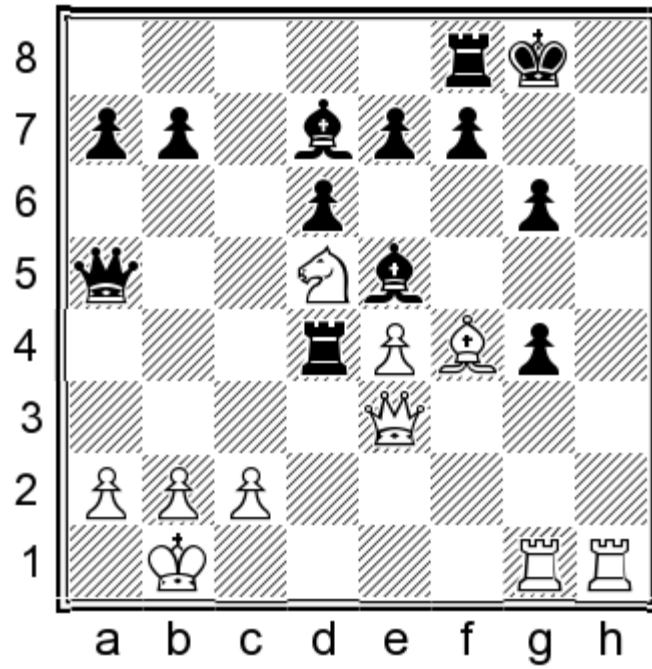


19...Nxe4!

This move was a novelty when I first analysed this position, but it has since been tested in a correspondence game. 19...Qb6? 20.Bxg7 Rd1† 21.Nxd1 Qxe3 should have lost immediately in Papadopolous – Koutsidis, corr. 2013, had White thrown in the killing intermezzo 22.Bxf6!N.

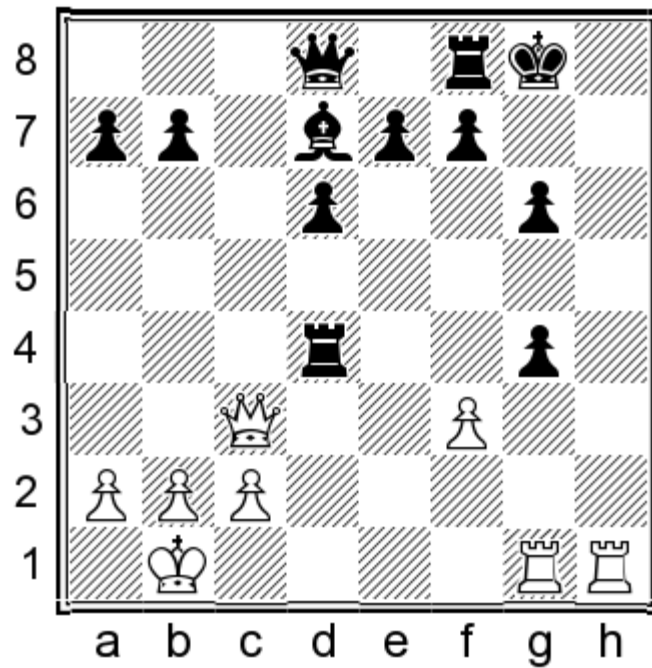
20.Bxg7

20.fxe4 Be5! looks good for Black. 21.Bf4 (21.Bxf8 Qxf8μ) 21...Qa5 22.Nd5



22...Qxd5!? I have a soft spot for queen sacrifices, and this is a rather good one. After 23.exd5 Rxf4 Black has two bishops and three pawns for the queen and a completely secure king.

20...Nxc3† 21.Qxc3



21...e5! 22.Bxf8 Qxf8

Black has fought off White's first wave and looks completely fine to me. A draw was the final outcome in Cvak – E. Campbell, corr. 2014.

Conclusion

This is another line which has probably seen its heyday. With 13.Kb1 White is attempting to play positionally, but the game can quickly spark into life.

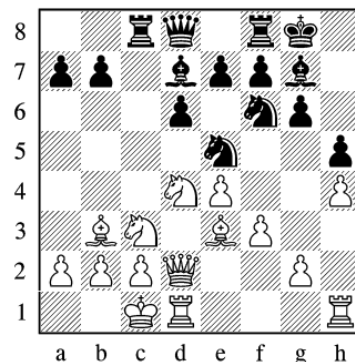
The two established main lines are 15.Nde2 and 15.Nb3. Against the former, Kasparov's treatment looks like straightforward equality, while 19...b4!? can also be investigated.

15.Nb3 is probably more interesting, when I like Peter Heine Nielsen's 15...Qb8. His analysis seems to hold up and he scored a nice victory against Karjakin.

15.g4 should also be checked, as this looked like it might become fashionable a few years ago. I've given Black various options on how to face this, depending on your own preference and amount of time available to study the line.



Soltis Variation



13th Move Alternatives

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 g6 6.♕e3 ♕g7 7.f3 0-0
8.♔d2 ♗c6 9.♖c4 ♖d7 10.0-0-0 ♜c8 11.♙b3 ♞e5 12.h4
12...h5

A) 13.Nd5

B) 13.Rhe1 Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4

B1) 15.Kb1

B2) 15.Nb3

C) 13.Rdg1

D) 13.g4 hxg4

D1) 14.f4?!

D2) 14.h5 Nxh5

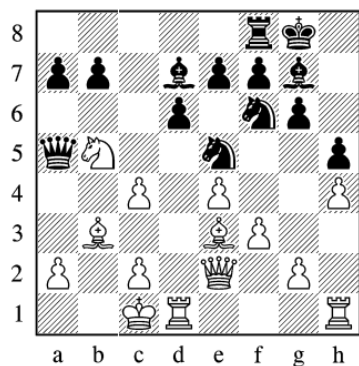
D21) 15.Rdg1?!

D22) 15.Bh6 Kh7!

D221) 16.Bg5

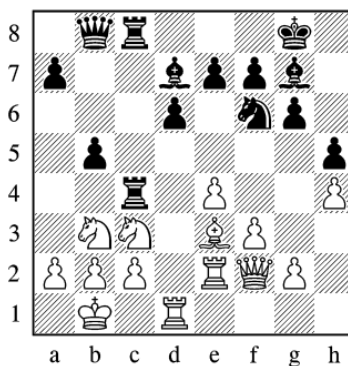
D222) 16.Bxg7

note to move 13



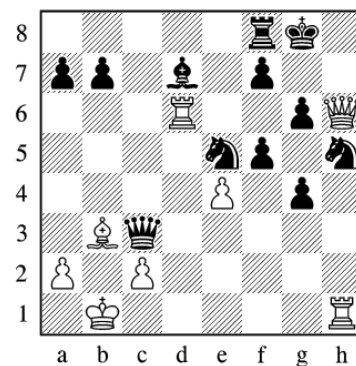
16...♖xc4!N

B1) after 20.♖e2



20...a5!N

D21) note to 20.fxc4

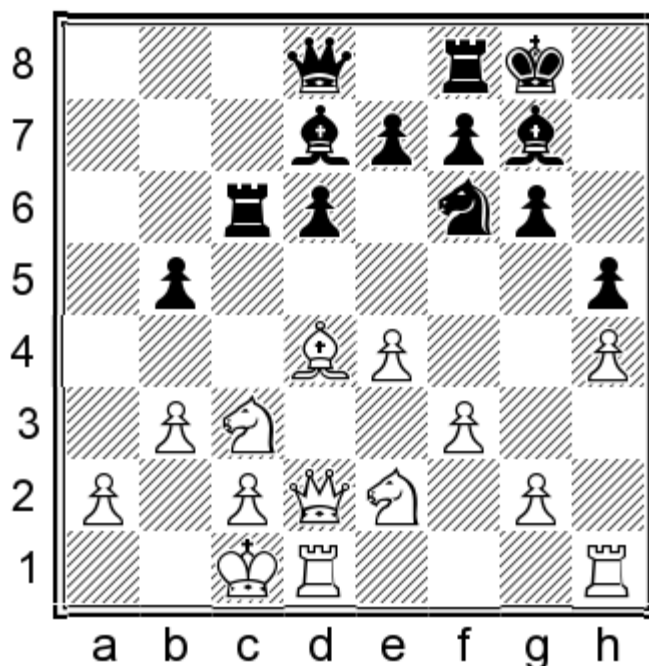


23...♖c4!N

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5

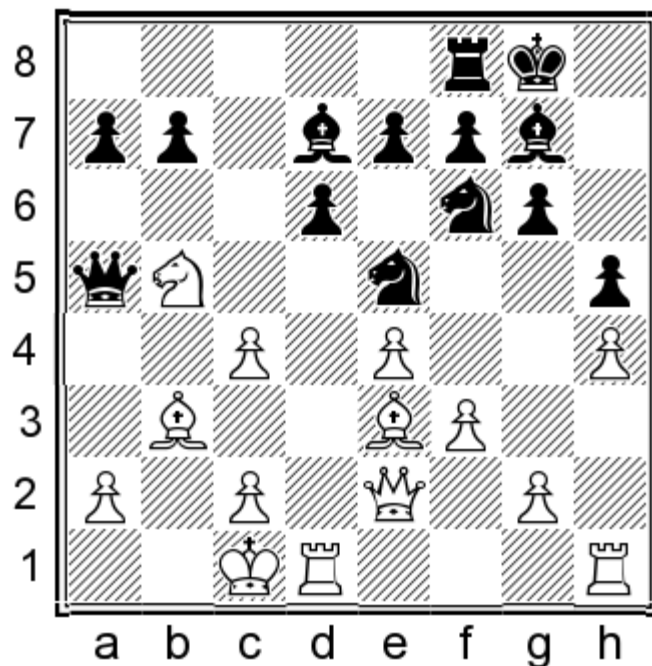
White's rare 13th move alternatives aren't particularly dangerous, but for the sake of completeness we should cover A) 13.Nd5, B) 13.Rhe1 and C) 13.Rdg1, before moving on to the critical D) 13.g4.

13.Nde2?! b5 14.Bxa7 Taking the pawn must be the main idea behind dropping back the knight, but again White will regret swallowing the poisoned offering. (After 14.Bh6 a5 Black's queenside play comes far too quickly. 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.a3 b4 17.axb4 axb4 18.Na2 Ra8 19.Qxb4 was Djondras – Stratmann, Hessen 1999, and now best is 19...Nc6N 20.Qd2 Qb6μ when Black's attack is obviously more than enough compensation for the pawn.) 14...Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4 16.b3 Rc6 17.Bd4 This was Wantiez – Tkachuk, Germany 2009, when best would have been:



17...Qa8N 18.Kb1 Rfc8μ Again Black's pressure is overwhelming.

13.Qe2 A Dragon player struggles to resist a temptation as strong as this! 13...Rxc3!? 14.bxc3 Qc7© (14...b5!?N) Black has full compensation for the exchange – in the shape of attacking chances and the better structure. It's likely Black will snaffle at least one pawn too. 15.Nb5?! Qa5 16.c4 J. Nielsen – Harwood, Koge 2010. Here Black has a strong breakthrough:



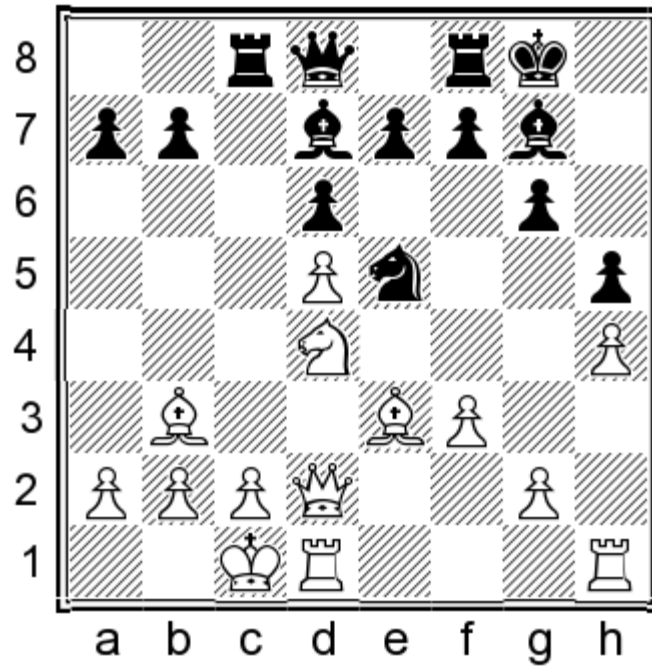
16...Nxc4!N 17.Bxc4 Bxb5 18.Bxb5 Qa3† 19.Kd2 Qb4†! 20.Kc1 Nxe4—+

A) 13.Nd5

For this exchange to be in White's favour he needs to already have broken through on the kingside. Now it's White's king which will be more vulnerable, while the bishop on b3 also finds itself short on squares.

13...Nxd5 14.exd5

14.Bxd5 If White takes with the bishop I like continuing in the same vein with: 14...a5N 15.a3 b5³ Black has pleasant attacking chances.

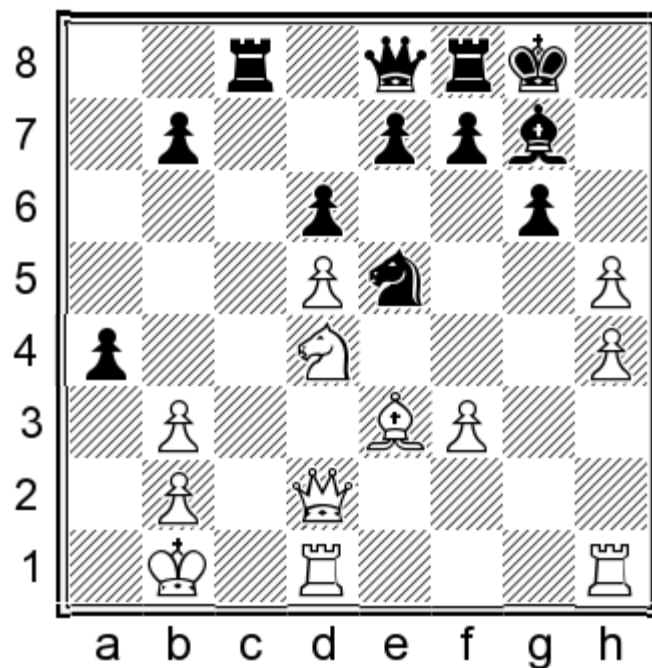


14...a5! 15.a4

15.a3 was Al. Filippov – Dmitrienko, Novosibirsk 2003, and here the most accurate looks to be 15...Qc7N. Black prepares to recapture on c4 with the queen and can counter 16.Bh6 with 16...Nd3†!.

15...Qe8 16.Qxa5

16.g4 A desperate return to attacking on the kingside. 16...Bxa4 17.Kb1 Bxb3 18.cxb3 a4 (18...hxg4N is also good for Black) 19.gxh5 Asgari – Ghaem Maghami, Tabriz 2011. Now I like the following pretty move for Black:



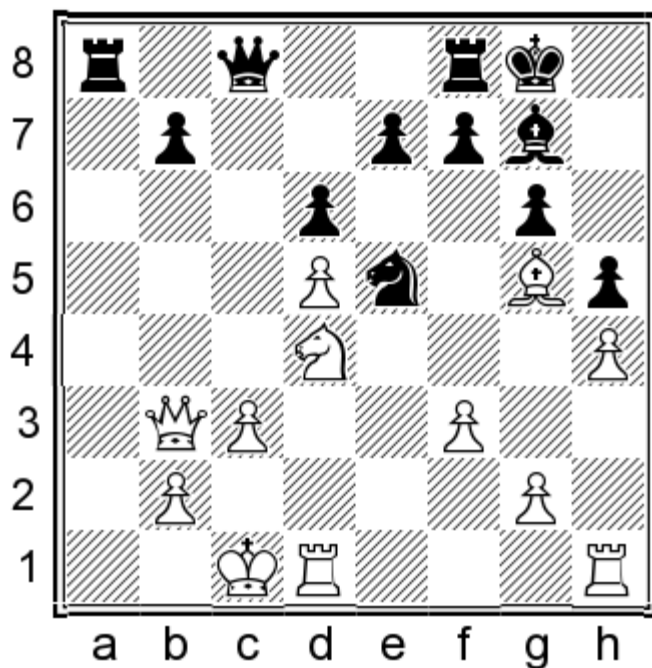
19...Qd7!N White has to watch out for checks on f5, and his king is just too exposed. For example: 20.hxg6 fxg6 21.f4 (21.Ne6 axb3—+) 21...Nf3! 22.Nxf3 (22.Qd3 axb3!) 22...axb3! White is unable to defend against ...Qa4-a2# whilst at the same time stopping ...Qf5† being terminal.

16...Ra8 17.Qb4 Bxa4 18.c3 Bxb3 19.Qxb3 Qc8

Black obviously has a pleasant position, but in both games to reach this position White failed to offer the best resistance.

20.Bg5?

Allowing a nice trick:

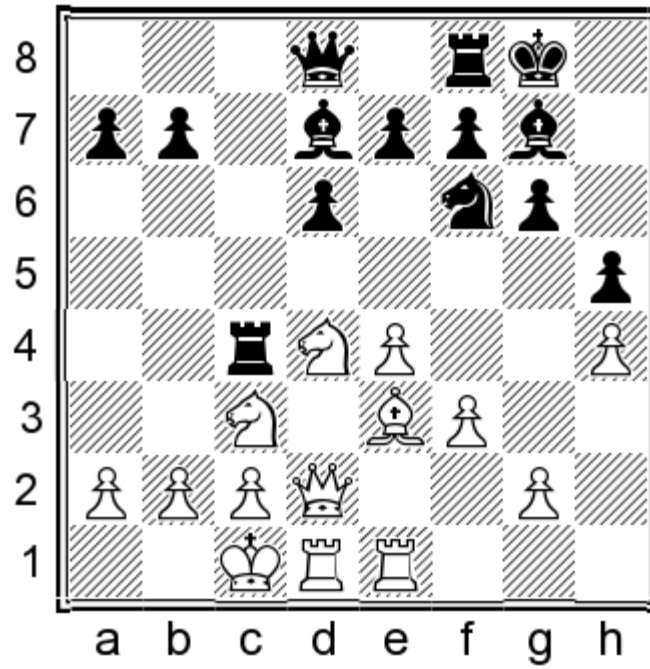


20...Nd3†! 21.Kd2 Nf2—+

B) 13.Rhe1

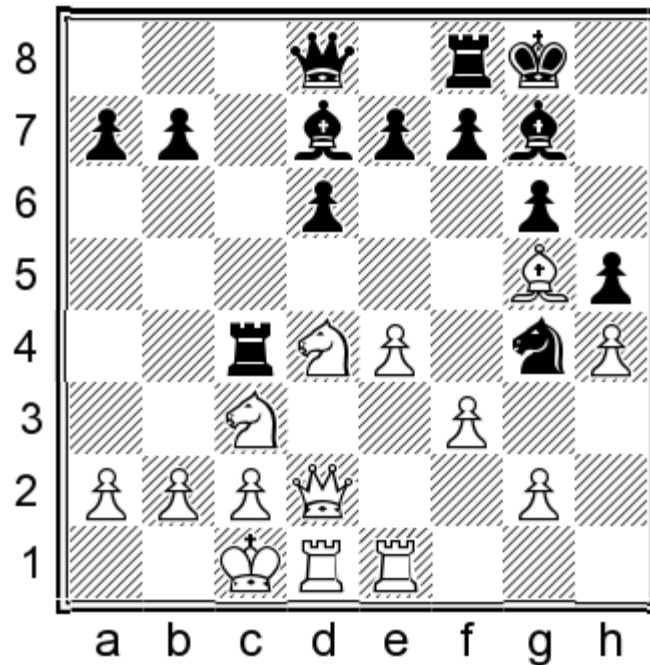
Completing development can't be wrong, but now White is unlikely to open up Black's kingside.

13...Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4



White can now choose between B1) 15.Kb1 and B2) 15.Nb3.

15.Bg5 The d4-knight is now loose, and we can exploit it with 15...Ng4!.



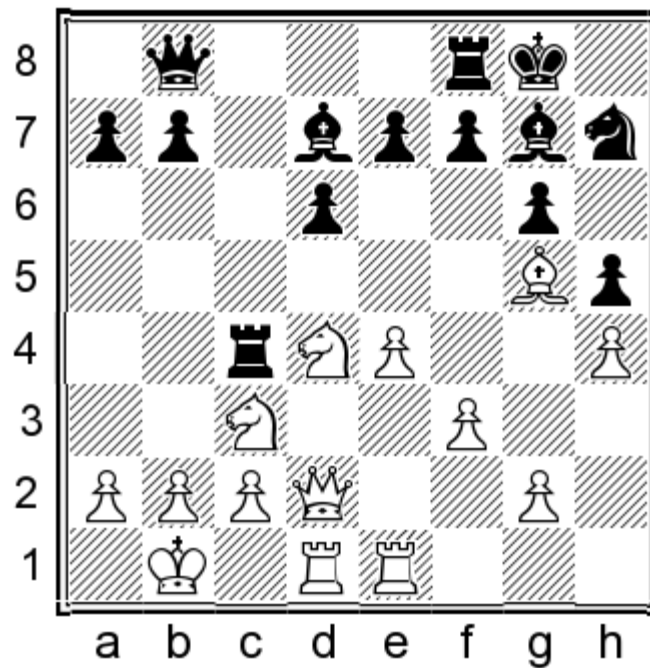
16.Nde2?! was now tried in Khakimov – Umirgaliev, Samara 2002. (16.Nb3 would have been better, but 16...Rxc3! 17.bxc3 Ne5© is still much easier for Black.) Here perhaps Black simply overlooked that 16...Nf2N picks up the rook. White can try to complicate matters with 17.Nd5, but 17...f6! 18.Nxf6† exf6 19.Qd5† Kh7 20.Qxc4 Nxd1 (20...fxg5!?) 21.Bd2 Nxb2 22.Kxb2 f5† favours Black.

B1) 15.Kb1 Qb8

Black gets out of any potential e4-e5 problems and prepares ...b5.

16.Bg5 Nh7!?

Black doesn't have to repeat and could just start with 16...Rfc8.

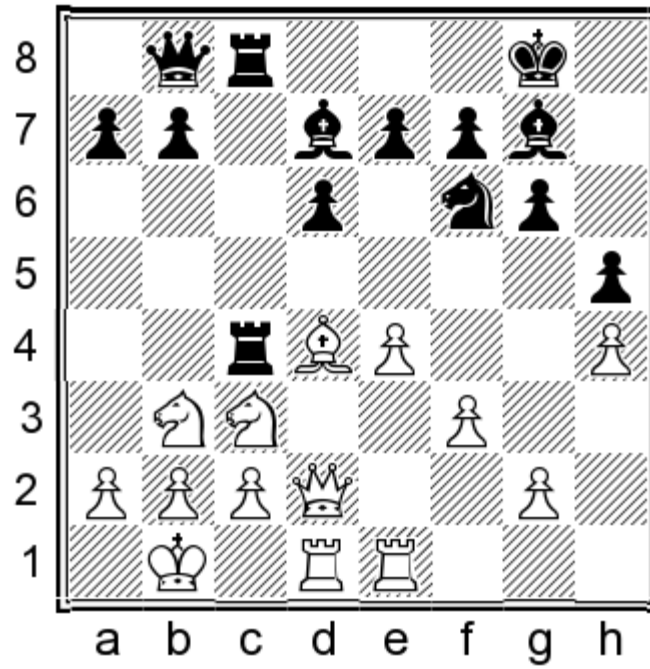


17.Be3 Nf6 18.Nb3 Rfc8

Black is already very comfortable.

19.Qf2

19.Bd4 occurred in Escobar Forero – Delgado Ramos, Havana 2008. Now Black needn't worry and can just carry on with his thematic queenside play:

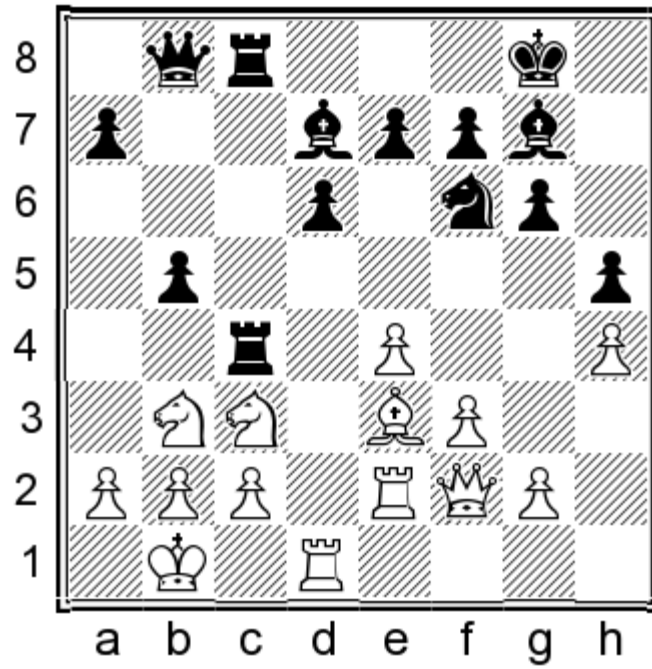


19...b5N One possible continuation could be 20.Bxf6 Bxf6 21.Nd5 Rxc2 22.Nxf6† exf6 23.Qxd6 Qxd6 24.Rxd6 Be6 which can only favour Black.

19...b5 20.Re2

20.Bxa7N 20...Qa8μ As usual, the a7-pawn is too hot to grab.

We have been following Gonzalez Galvan – Martinez Martin, Ronda 1997. Now the strongest is to continue offering the a-pawn:



20...a5!N 21.Nxa5 Rxc3! 22.bxc3 Qa8 23.Nb3 Be6 24.Bc1

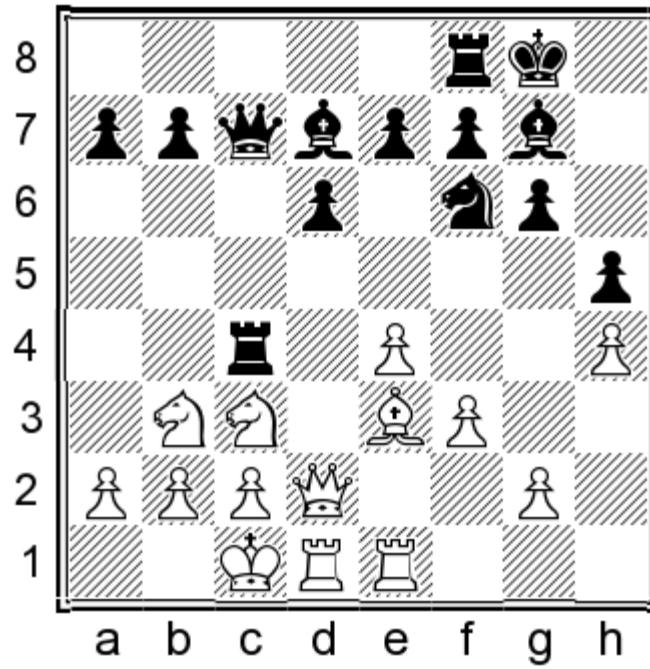
24.Bd4 Qa3-+

24...Nd7μ

Black has a powerful initiative.

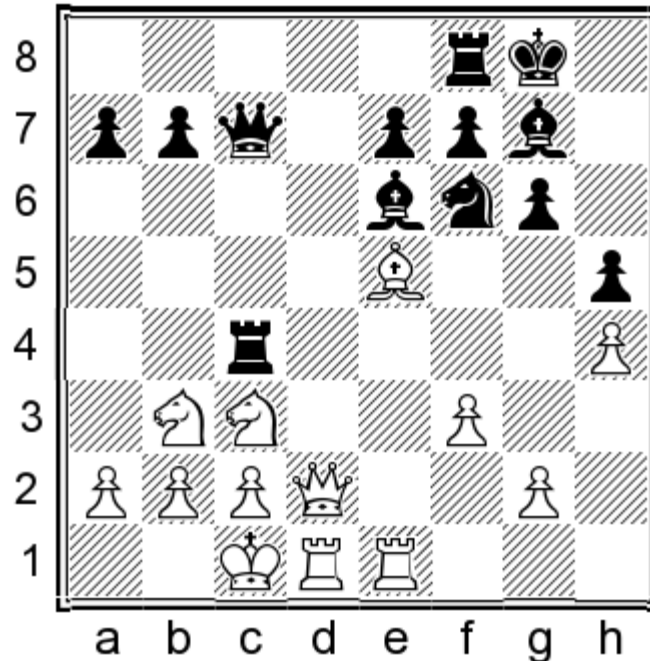
B2) 15.Nb3 Qc7

15...Qb8N could also be considered here.



16.Bd4 Be6 17.Kb1

17.e5 This thrust at least makes some sense of White's last. 17...dxe5 18.Bxe5 Here 18...Qb6, as played in Joachim – D. Muse, Germany 1999, was fine but Black had a better continuation:



18...Ne4!N 19.Bxc7 (19.Rxe4 Bxe5) 19...Nxd2 20.Bg3 Nxb3† 21.axb3 Rcc8=

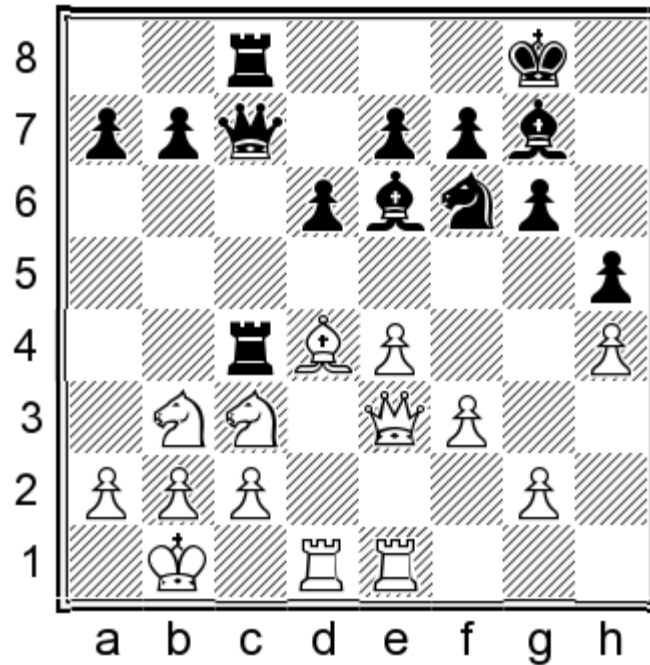
17.Qd3 The only point to this move that I can see is to prepare White's next, but there is a serious flaw: 17...Rc8 18.Nd2? Rxd4! 19.Qxd4 Nd5 20.Qd3 Nb4 21.Qe3 Nxa2†→ Black converted the full point shortly afterwards in Devangi – Swapnil, Balaguer 2008.

17...Rc8

The main problem with White's position is that he lacks a plan. It is difficult to play decent moves if you cannot see an ultimate goal.

18.Qe3

18.e5?! fails to a tactic we have already seen: 18...dxe5 19.Bxe5 Ne4! 20.Bxc7 Nxd2† 21.Nxd2 R4xc7µ Green – Vallejos, email 2001.

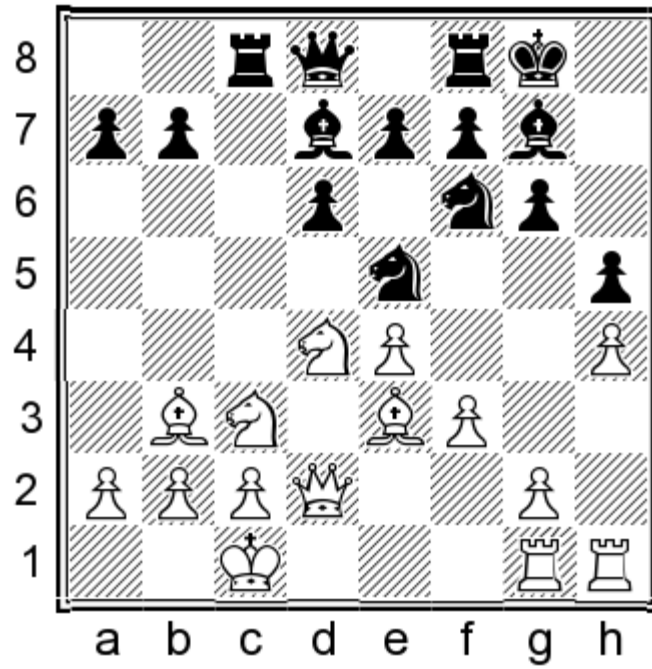


18...b6 19.e5 dxe5 20.Bxe5 Qb7=

With an eventual draw in Hallengren – Mezera, email 2003.

C) 13.Rdg1

We've already seen this move played in almost all positions, so it's logical to look here too.



13...Qa5 14.Kb1

14.g4 hxg4 15.h5 (15.Bh6 as seen in Guimaraes – Del Rey, Algarve 1998, was an odd mix of plans. Dearing suggests 15...Bxh6N 16.Qxh6 Rxc3 17.bxc3 Qxc3–+ when Black has broken through first.) Now 15...Nxb5 would transpose to a position examined in variation D21 below, while 15...Rxc3!? also looks good.

14.Bh6?! was tried in Iatrino – Galdelli, Rome 1997, but is again a rather odd mix of plans. Dearing's 14...Bxh6N 15.Qxh6 Rxc3 16.bxc3 Qxc3µ is a good antidote.

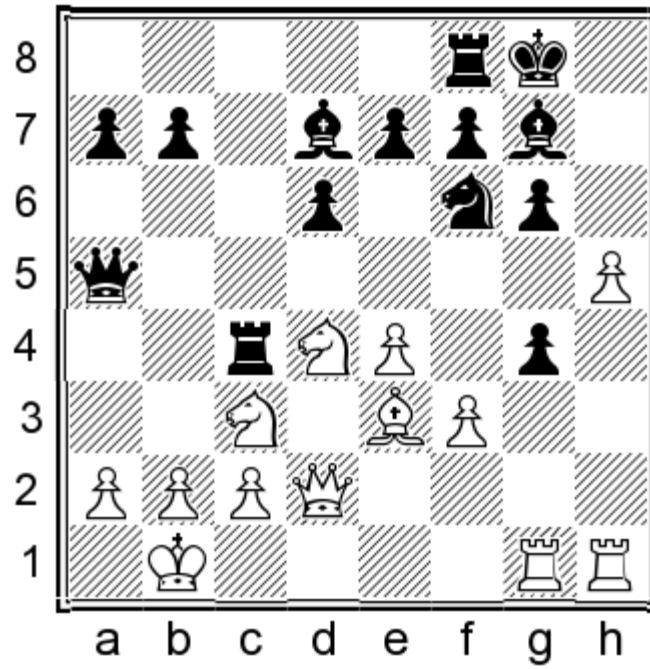
14...Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4

This position could be reached by the 13.Kb1 move order. There I recommend putting the queen on c7, but the queen being on a5 doesn't change so much.

16.Nb3

16.g4 hxg4 17.h5

Now Black should play:



17...gxf5!N

17...Rxc3 would follow the suggested line with the queen on c7. Here, however, the pin on the rook allows White a strong reply: 18.h6! Bh8 19.h7†! Nxf7 This was Schulze – Percze, email 2002, when 20.Rxf7N 20...Kxf7 21.Rh1† looks rather dangerous. For instance: 21...Kg8 (21...Kg7 could be better, but I still prefer White after 22.bxc3) 22.Nf5! Rxe3! (22...Bxf5 23.Qh2 and suddenly it's mate) 23.Nxe7† Kg7 24.Qxa5 Rxf3 The position is still far from clear, but White is probably to be preferred due to Black's lack of coordination.

18.fxg4

18.Nb3 Qe5 19.Bf4 Qe6µ The queen is quite safe here.

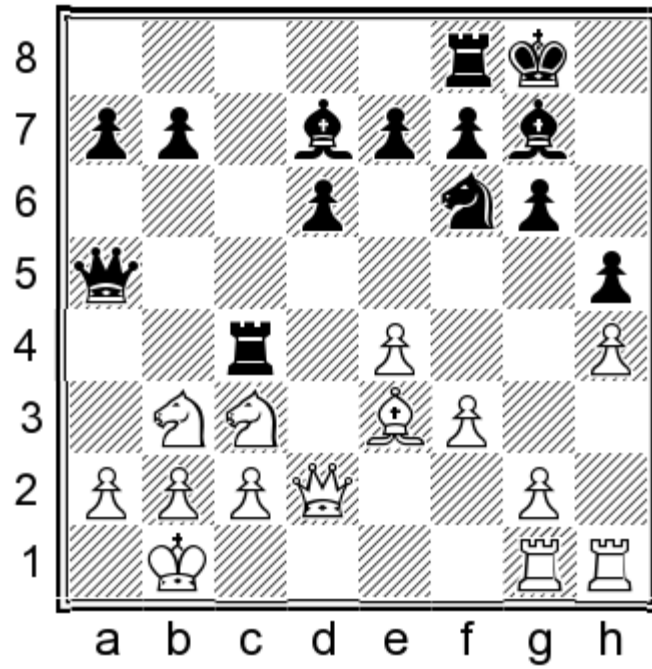
18...Nxe4!

This time Black is the one able to use the pin.

19.Nxe4 Qxd2 20.Nxd2 Rxd4 21.gxf5

21.Bxd4 Bxd4 22.Rg2 hxf4—+

21...Rg4µ



16...Qc7

The position is extremely similar to the one examined via 13.Kb1 and 15.Rdg1 in the previous chapter. The only difference is the knight has dropped back from d4 to b3.

17.Bd4

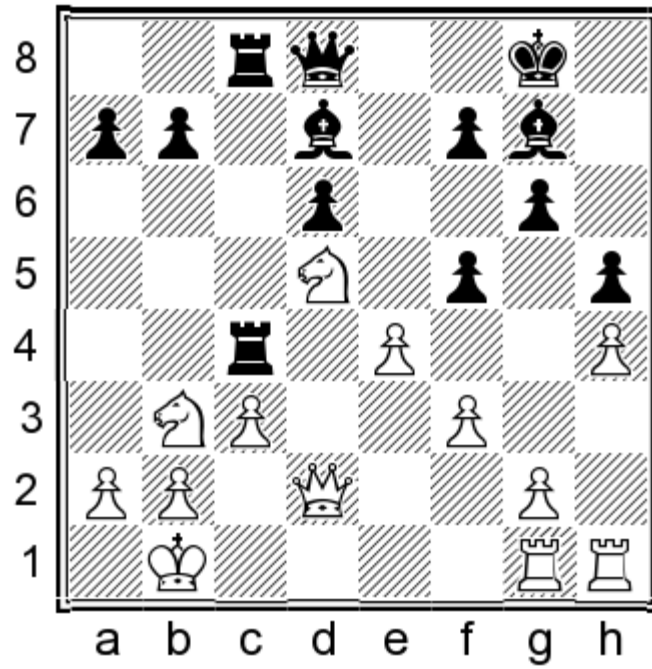
I think this is the only way White can try to exploit the change.

17.g4 Rxc3! 18.bxc3 hxg4 is the same recipe, Stoenescu – Rene, Paris 2006.

17...Rc8 18.Bxf6

18.g4?!N would allow 18...e5! 19.Be3 Rxc3!μ.

18...exf6 19.Nd5 Qd8 20.c3 f5³

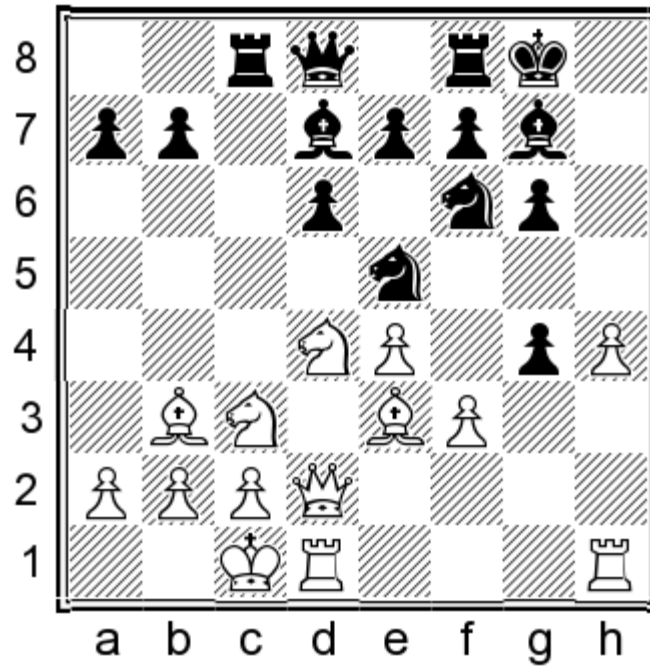


Black quickly remedied his structural defect in Z. Ivanovic – Isaev, email 2005.

D) 13.g4

White's most direct approach. Were this good for White, this entire variation would be in trouble.

13...hxg4



White can push forward with either D1) 14.f4?! or D2) 14.h5.

14.Rdg1 Qa5 transposes to the note on 14.g4 in variation C above.

14.Bg5 would be an odd move order. It's not entirely clear what White is trying to avoid as 14...Rc5 would transpose to Chapter 2. 14...Nh5!?N, blocking the h-pawn, and 14...Nh7!?N could both also be analysed.

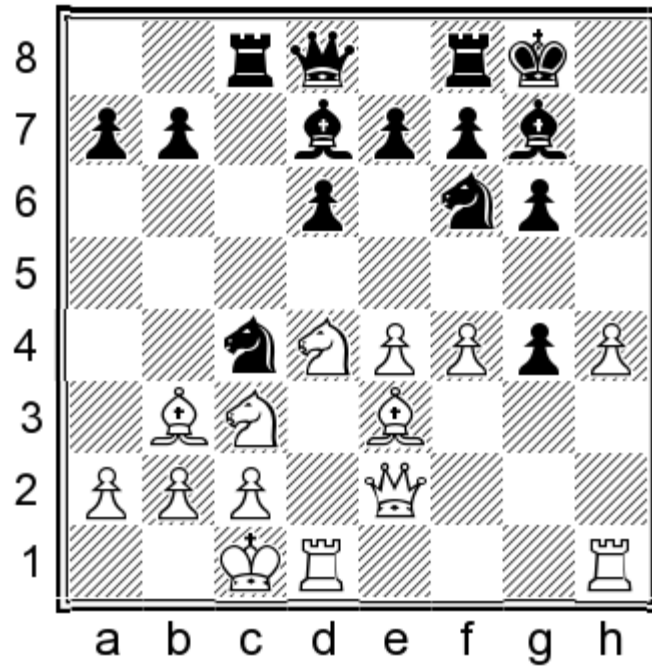
14.Bh6 This is another slightly odd mix of plans. The safest continuation looks to be 14...Nh5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.f4 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Nd5 e5µ Rohde – Soltis, New York 1977.

D1) 14.f4?!

Compared to line C of Chapter 2, this is a much worse version for White as the bishop on e3 puts no pressure on Black at all.

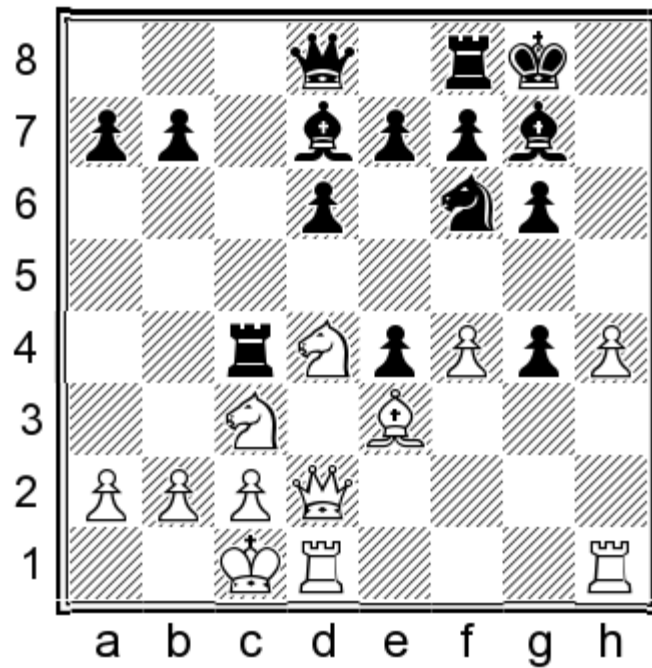
14...Nc4 15.Bxc4

15.Qe2 If White moves his queen I think the simplest is:



15...Nxe3 16.Qxe3 Here I quite like 16...Bh6!?, for example: 17.Kb1 e5 18.Nde2 exf4 19.Nxf4 Rxc3 20.bxc3 Nh5

15...Rxc4



16.e5

16.h5 Nxh5 transposes to the note on 15.f4?! in variation D2 below.

16.f5 Rxc3 (16...gxf5N also looks strong) 17.Qxc3 Nxe4 18.Qd3 gxf5 19.h5 Qa5 20.a3 e5 Black's huge mass of pawns are worth more than the exchange. 21.h6 Bf6 22.Nb3 Cervera Procas – Flores Escuin, Zaragoza 1998. Here Dearing's suggestion of 22...Qb5N, forcing the queens off the board, would just be winning.

16...Nh5

By blocking the h-pawn, White's attack grinds to a halt.

17.Qd3

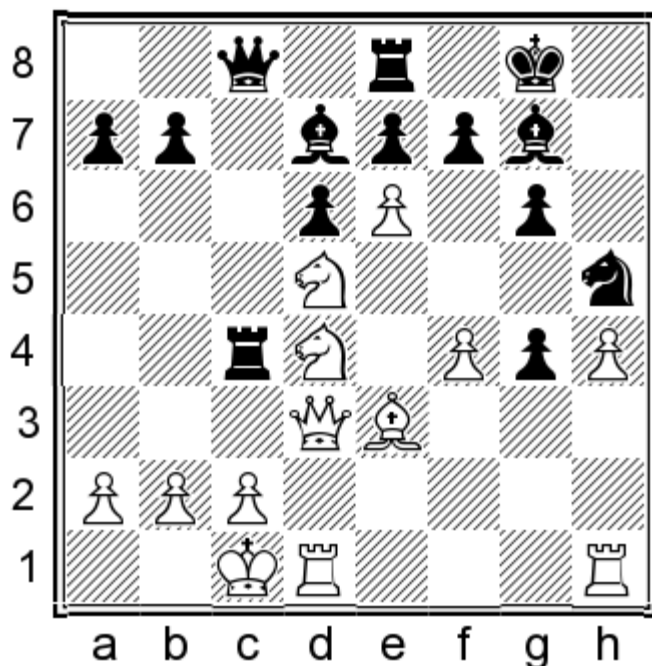
Against 17.e6N Chris Ward offers 17...fxe6 18.Qd3 Qc8 19.Qxg6 Nxf4 20.Qxg4 e5—+.

17...Qc8 18.Nd5

18.exd6 exd6 19.Ncb5 Bxb5 20.Nxb5 This far was reached in Maryasin – Litvinov, Minsk 1981. Here Dearing recommends 20...Nxf4N 21.Bxf4 Rxf4 22.Nxd6 Qc6 which is simply winning.

18...Re8 19.e6

Nguyen – Pham, Thua Thien Hue 2000. Here Black took with the bishop, which still left him with an excellent position, but there is a more accurate continuation:

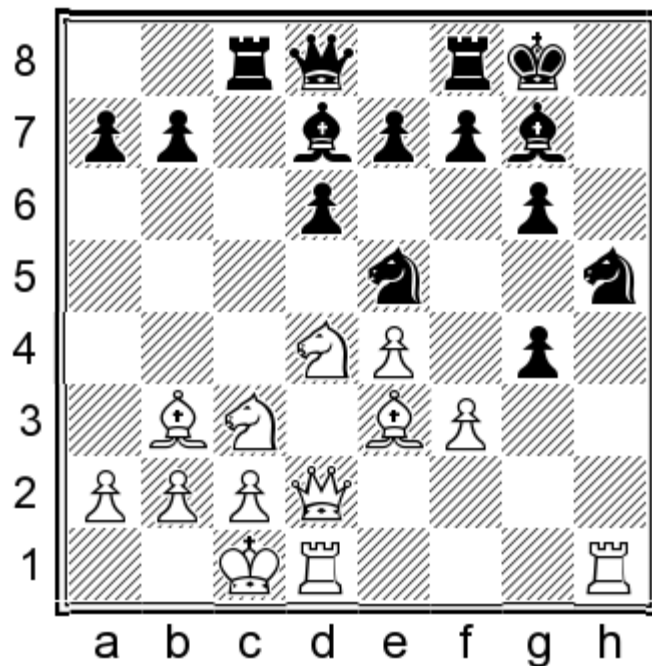


19...fxe6N 20.Qxg6

20.Nc3 Nxf4! 21.Bxf4 Rxd4

20...exd5 21.Qxh5 e5--+

D2) 14.h5 Nxh5



I don't think White can justify his material deficit after D21) 15.Rdg1?!, but D22) 15.Bh6 is a sterner test.

15.f4?! Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.f5 Qa5 18.Kb1 Rxc3 19.bxc3 Rc8 is simply very good for Black.

15.Bg5

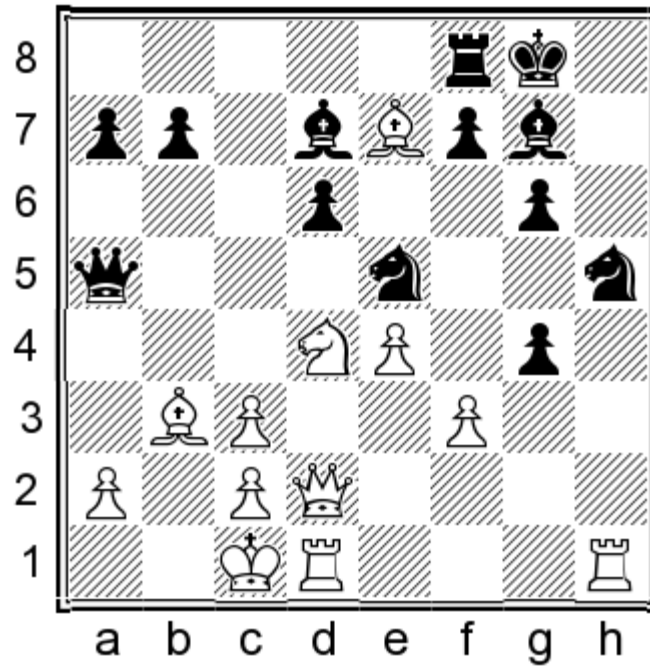
This again is a strange time to put the bishop on g5.

15...Rxc3!?

15...Rc5 would transpose to variation B of Chapter 2.

16.bxc3 Qa5 17.Bxe7

In Zagorsek – Fraser, Budva 2013, Black had so far played with fine sacrificial spirit. I think he should have kept it going with:



17...Rc8N 18.Bxd6 Nc4

Black is currently the exchange down but has strong pressure – even if the queens get exchanged. Some possible lines are:

19.Bb4

19.Bxc4 Rxc4,

19...Nxd2 20.Bxa5 Nxb3† 21.axb3

21.Nxb3 Ng3 22.Rh2 Bc6© White's pawns are starting to drop.

21...gxf3 22.Nxf3 Bg4 23.Rd3 Nf4 24.Re3 b6

24...Ng2= would draw immediately.

25.Bb4 Ne2†! 26.Kd2 Ng3 27.Rg1 Nxe4† 28.Rxe4 Bxf3

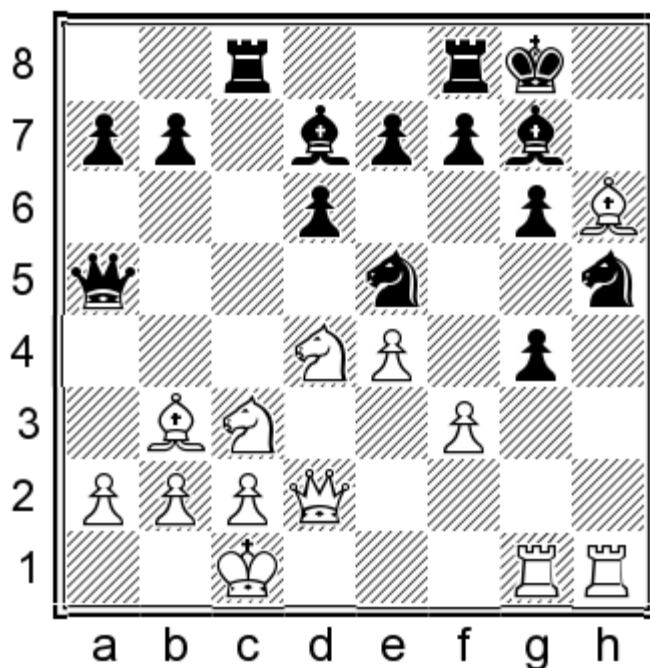
Black has one pawn for the exchange and the c3-pawn looks like it will also drop. I would prefer to have the two connected passed pawns.

D21) 15.Rdg1?! Qa5

15...Rxc3!? is a decent alternative.

16.Bh6

16.Kb1?! as played in Rian – Celis Chang, Singapore 2007, is too slow. 16...Rxc3N 17.bxc3 Rc8 looks strong for Black.



16...Rxc3! 17.bxc3

17.Bxg7 was tried in the first game to reach this position, but Black successfully refuted White's plan. 17...Rxc2† 18.Kxc2 Rc8† 19.Kd1 Qxd2† 20.Kxd2 Kxg7 21.fxg4 Bxg4 De Firmian – Kudrin, Gausdal 1982. The three pawns for the exchange give Black a decisive advantage.

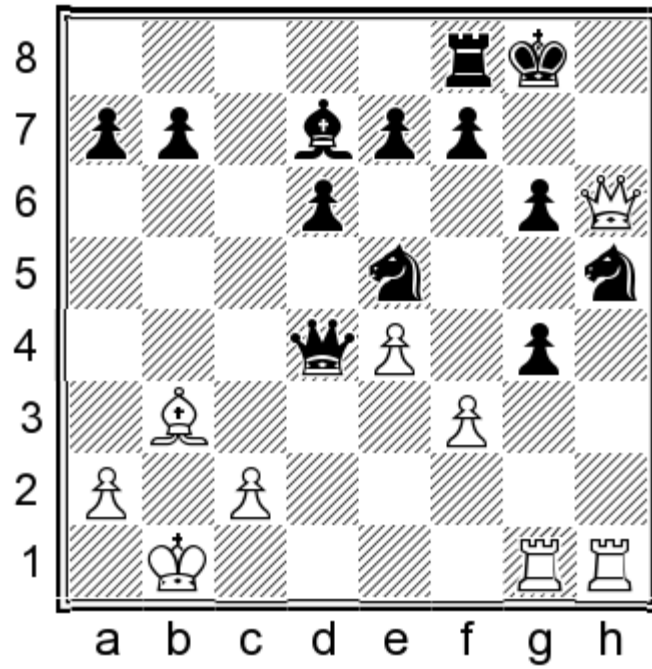
17...Bxh6 18.Qxh6 Qxc3 19.Kb1

Another reason for White playing an earlier Kb1.

As Chris Ward points out, 19.Rxh5? loses to 19...Qa1† 20.Kd2 Qxd4† 21.Kc1 Qa1† 22.Kd2 Nxf3† 23.Kd3 Qd4† 24.Ke2 Nxg1† 25.Kf1 gxh5.

19...Qxd4

Black has a large material advantage – two pieces and three pawns for the rook – and can afford to give some back to defuse White's initiative.



20.fxg4

The immediate 20.f4? fails to 20...Qe3–+.

20.Rd1?

The rook is really going the wrong way, ceding some of the pressure on Black's king.

20...Qc3

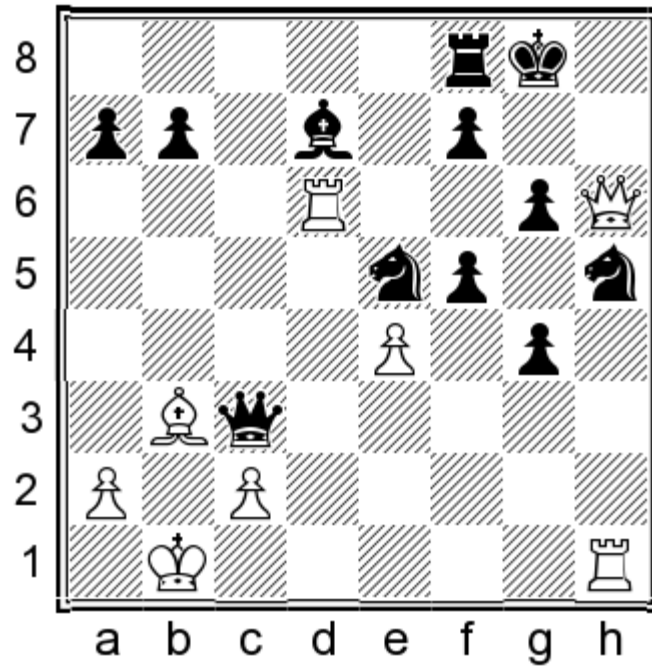
At this point even 20...Qxd1†N 21.Rxd1 gxf3 is good for Black.

21.f4 e6! 22.f5

22.fxe5 Qxe5 would still leave Black with a large material advantage. White's attack has disappeared, and the queen on e5 does a wonderful job.

22...exf5 23.Rxd6

Kariz – Barth, Bela Crkva 1983. Here Ward observes that Black missed a winning combination:

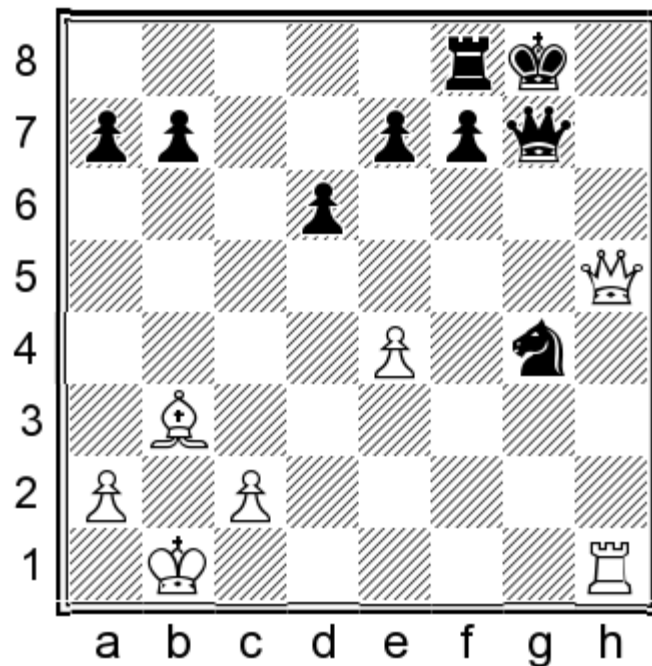


23...Nc4!N 24.Bxc4 Qb4† 25.Bb3 Qxd6 26.Rxh5 Qd1† 27.Kb2 Qd4† 28.c3 Qg7

Black will have four extra pawns in the ending.

20...Bxg4 21.Rxg4 Nxg4 22.Qxg6† Qg7 23.Qxh5

This position has been reached twice, and in both games Black played 23...Nf2 which seems to force a draw. Some annotators have instead suggested the following move, which must be better for Black:

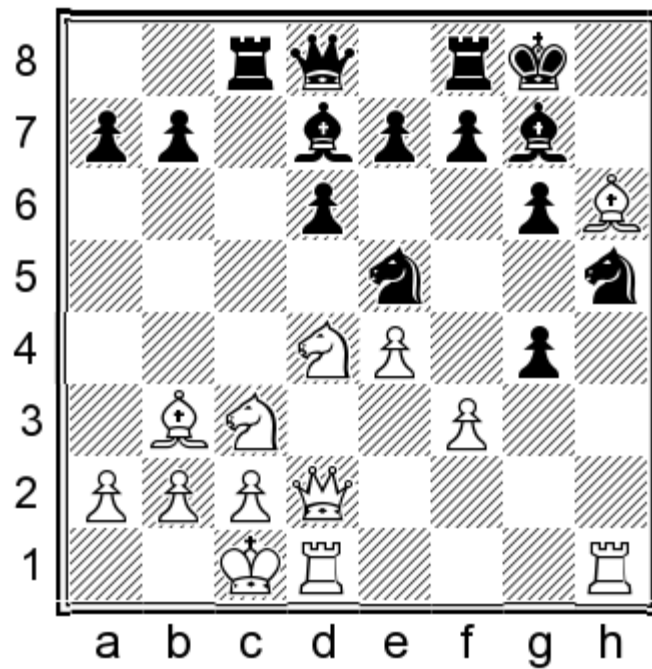


23...Ne5

White has some pressure, but not enough for the two pawns. The queen and knight adequately defend the black king and the bishop on b3 is rather shut out of the game.

D22) 15.Bh6

Here I've decided to recommend a rare continuation:



15...Kh7!

Black immediately puts the question to the h6-bishop.

15...e6

This has been established as the main line, and is the reason no one plays this for White anymore, but I don't think matters are so clear. The most common continuation is:

16.Rdg1 Qf6 17.Bxg7 Qxg7 18.fxg4 Nf6 19.g5 Nh5

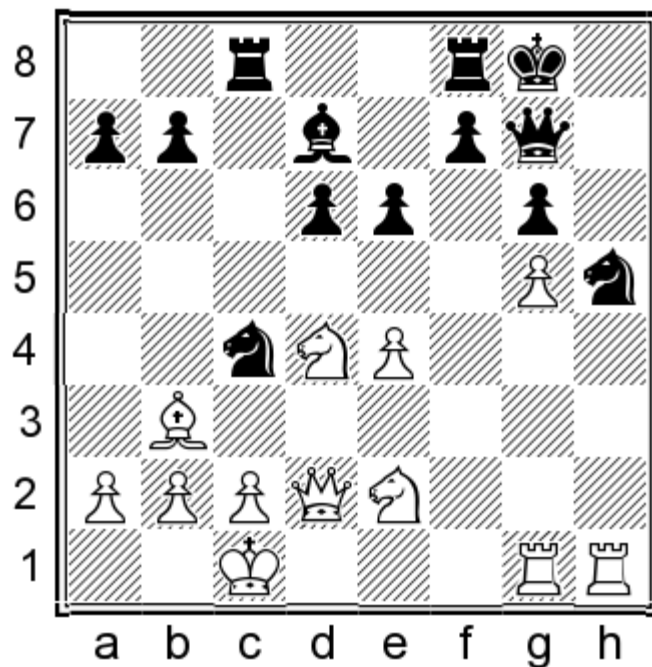
Here White has tried a lot of different approaches, but the most dangerous seems to be:

20.Nce2!

White's idea is simply to exchange the h5-knight and then penetrate down the h-file. It's not easy to see a good remedy.

20...Nc4

Here everyone has moved their queen, when Black is doing well. However, I think White has better.



21.Bxc4!N

As far as I can see this has never been played, but it is actually the most critical.

21...Rxc4

The game J. Polgar – Kaidanov, in their Sicilian Theme Match in 2010, had a very similar position to this, but with Black's rook on e8 and the white king on b1. That is a favourable version for White, but I think this is also extremely dangerous. The engine initially prefers Black but can't find a plan. White's position is solid, and it's not easy to see how to utilize the extra pawn.

22.b3! Rc5 23.Ng3 Nxg3 24.Rxg3 Rfc8 25.Kb1

So Black manages to gain a tempo on the Polgar game, but Rgh3 is still a looming threat.

Vigorito points out the immediate 25.Rgh3?? loses to 25...Rxc2+!! 26.Nxc2 Qa1#.

25...e5

Black covers the h3-square, but after White's next I don't trust Black's position at all.

26.Ne2

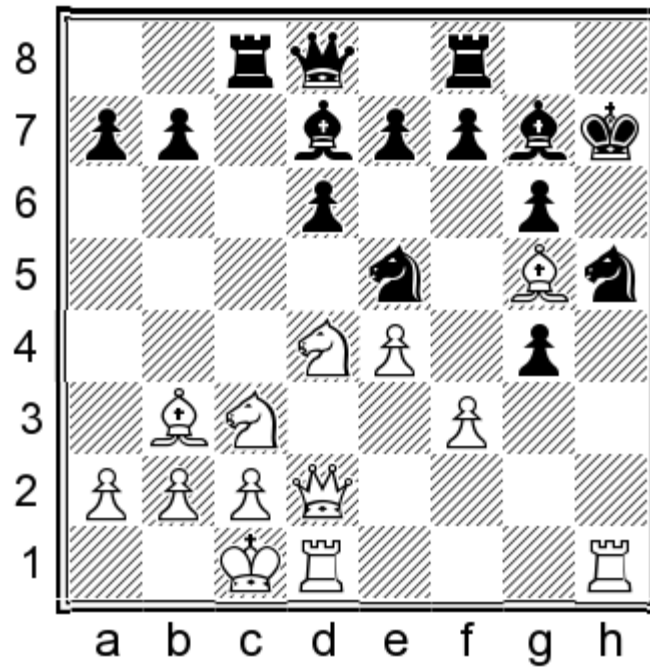
If we manage to avoid being mated White will still have good positional compensation for the pawn.

A relatively recent grandmaster clash continued D221) 16.Bg5, while D222) 16.Bxg7 is more common.

16.Rxh5?N is much too optimistic, and Mekhitarian gives the line: 16...gxh5 17.Rh1 Rh8! Again challenging the h-file is key. 18.Rxh5 Kg8 19.Qg5 Rxh6 20.Rxh6 Qb6+–

D221) 16.Bg5

This was played in an interesting fight between Mekhitarian and Fier in 2012, which the White player subsequently annotated. It's interesting to compare this position with variation B of Chapter 2. There we would have reached this position after 15 moves, with the black rook on c5 and king back on g8, but with White to move. We would probably prefer to have the king back on g8, but I feel the extra move must be more important.



16...Rxc3!

Black has a lot of alternatives but this feels the most thematic.

17.bxc3 gxf3 18.Nf5 Bxf5 19.exf5

We will follow Mekhitarian's analysis for a couple more moves:

19...Qd7N

I think is a strong improvement. Mekhitarian – Fier, Americana 2012, continued 19...Qc7 and was eventually drawn.

20.Qf4

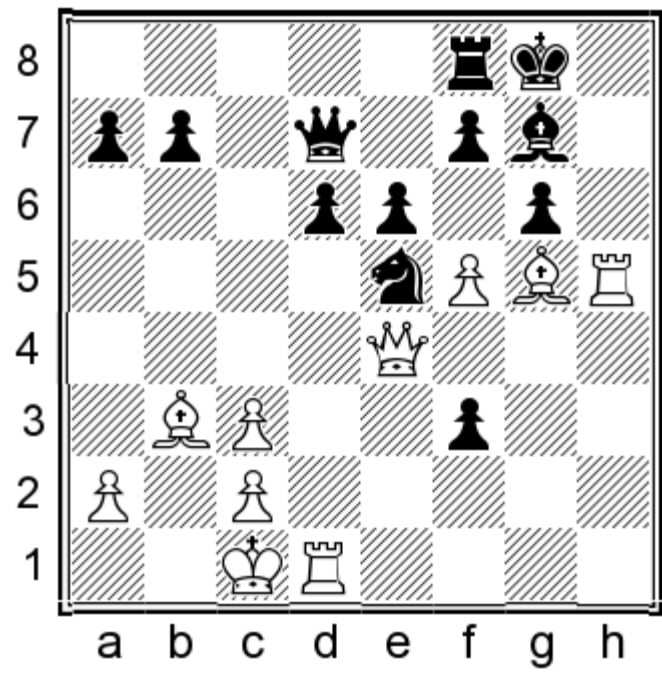
Certainly White's most dangerous approach.

After leaving my computer a long time to consider the position it found nothing for White and wanted to play 20.Kb1,

but 20...Qxf5 21.Bxe7 Rc8 22.Bxd6 f2µ is much better for Black.

20...Rh8!

Mekhitarian also mentions this, although his main line of analysis continues: 20...Kg8 21.Qe4 e6 22.Rxh5

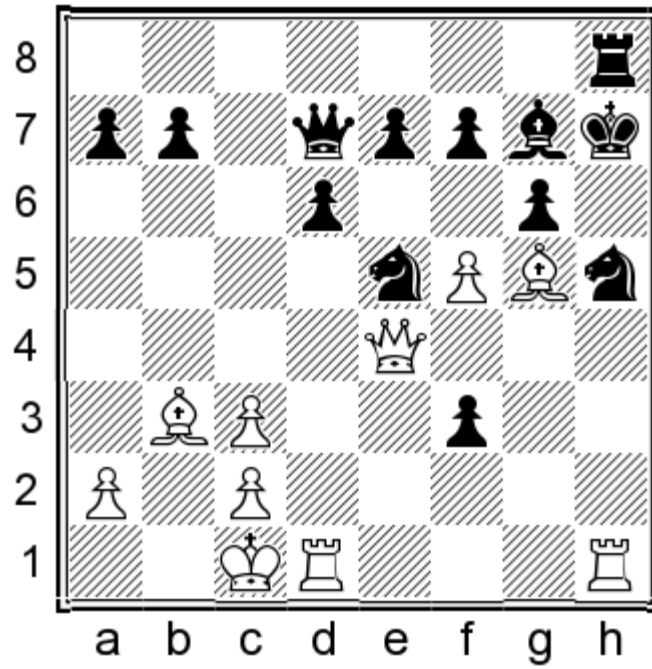


22...gxh5 (22...exf5 23.Rh8†!! is a fantastic find. 23...Bxh8 24.Qh4 Bg7 25.Rh1 Re8 26.Bf6+–) 23.f6÷ These positions feel rather murky so I think we should steer away.

Instead I think 20...Rh8! is strong. Black was getting into trouble on the h-file in the previous line so it makes sense to cover it.

21.Qe4?!

I think Black was doing well anyway, but it's important that this move can be met with:



21...gxf5! 22.Rxh5† Kg6

Black is winning.

D222) 16.Bxg7

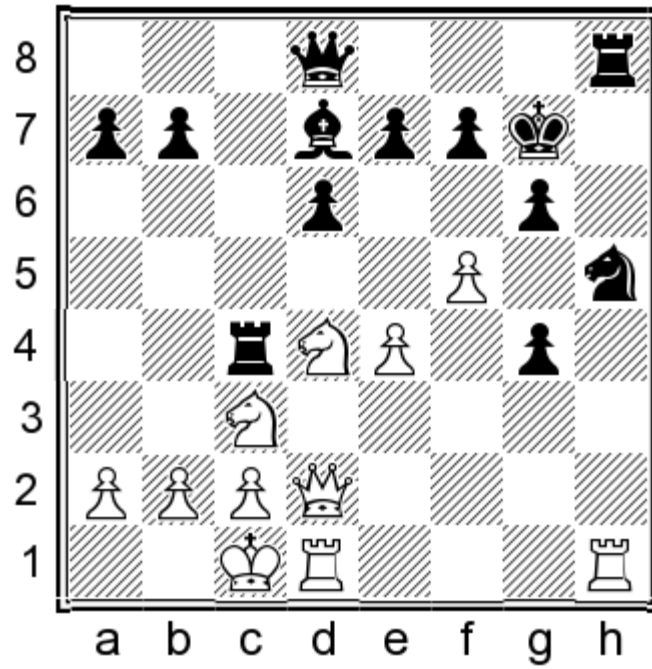
In practice this has been the most popular, but with the bishops exchanged I think Black can withstand the pressure.

16...Kxg7 17.fxg4

17.Rxh5? has been White's most common try, but Black can easily defend: 17...gxh5 18.Qg5† Ng6 19.Nf5† Bxf5 20.exf5 e6!µ Black is doing extremely well. If White takes on h5 then Black can trade queens on h4, and exchanging on d8 will leave Black with rook and three pawns for the two minor pieces.

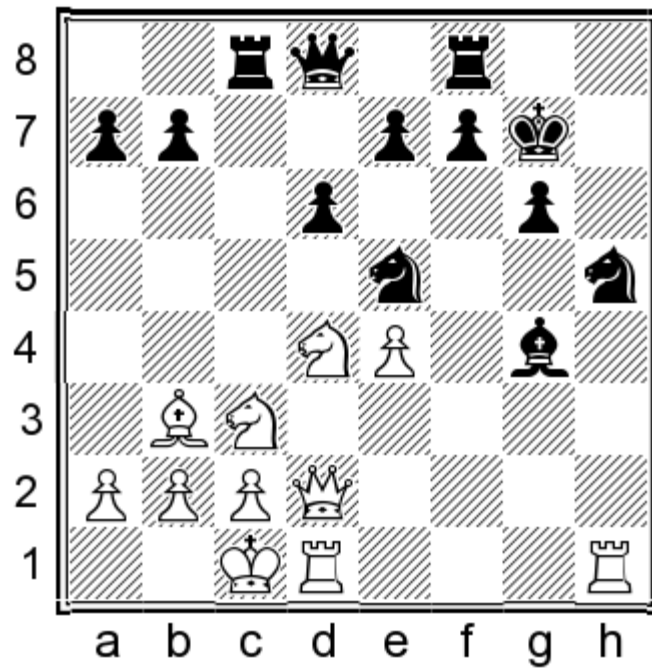
17.Qg5 doesn't impress particularly, but in Foniak – Zakhartsov, Dagomys 2009, matters became much worse for White after 17...Rh8 18.f4? f6! 19.Qh4 Nxf4 20.Qg3 g5–+.

Mekhitarian has obviously analysed this variation in some detail. In his annotations he also gives 17.f4N 17...Nc4 18.Bxc4 Rxc4 19.f5 Rh8³ but remarks that he thinks it's unlikely White has enough compensation. I continued the line:



20.Nd5 e5 21.fxe6 fxe6 22.Ne3 Ra4 Black is comfortably on top, as 23.Nxg4? fails to 23...e5.

17...Bxg4



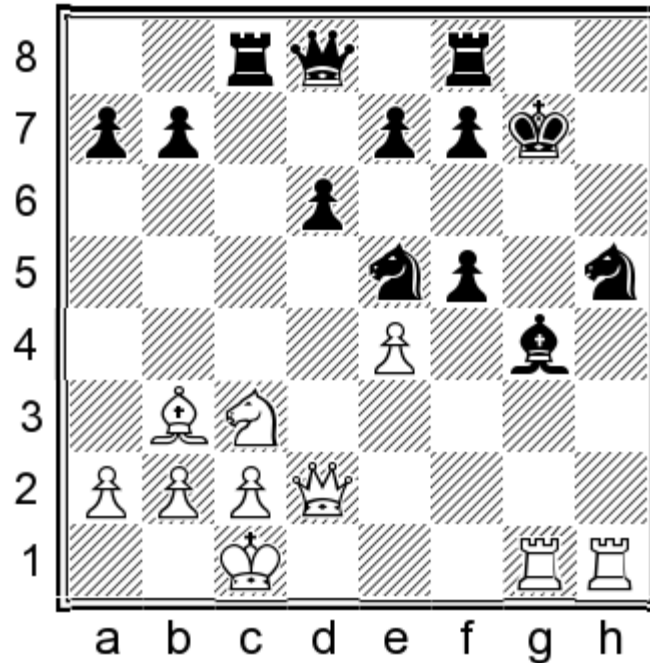
18.Nf5+!N

I think this could well be White's most dangerous continuation, but Black doesn't need to be worried.

Instead Garcia Ramos – Navarro Diaz, Cullera 2012, didn't last long: 18.Rdg1?! Rh8µ 19.Nd5 e6 20.Nf4? Nxf4 21.Qxf4? Nd3† 0–1 Oops!

18...gxf5 19.Rdg1!

19.Qg5† The immediate check is tempting but doesn't work well: 19...Ng6 20.exf5 Bxd1 21.Bxf7! (21.Kxd1 e6! 22.Qxh5 Rh8–+ or 21.Rxd1 Nhf4–+) 21...Rxf7 White is currently a rook and two pieces down, so Black can afford to lose all his minor pieces to give him time to beat off the attack. 22.Qxg6† Kf8 23.Nxd1 (23.Kxd1 Qb6! 24.Rxh5 Qd4†–+) 23...Qc7! The mate threat allows Black time to activate his queen: 24.c3 Rg7 25.Qxh5 Qc5µ



19...Rh8

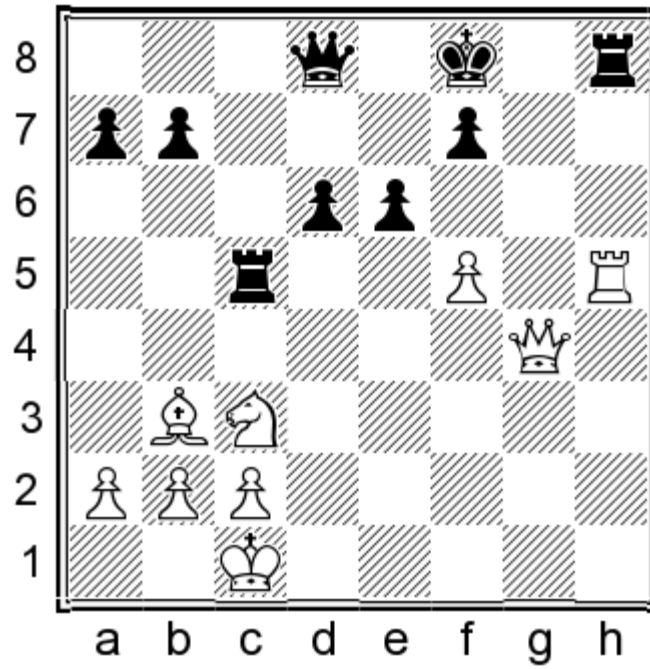
19...e6!? 20.Rxh5 Rh8 21.Rxh8 Qxh8 22.exf5 Qh6 23.Qxh6† Kxh6 is likely to be drawn.

20.Qg5†

20.exf5? Qg8! 21.Nd5 Kf8–+

20...Kf8 21.exf5 e6! 22.Rxg4 Nxg4 23.Qxg4 Rc5! 24.Rxh5

24.fxe6 Qg5† 25.Qxg5 Rxg5 26.exf7 Rh6³ or 24.Qd4 Rh6³.



24...Rxf5 25.Qxf5 Rxf5³

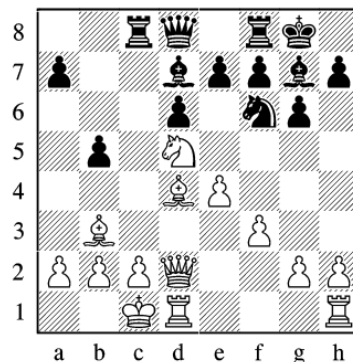
The attack has dissipated and the rook and two pawns outweigh the minor pieces. Obviously that was a long line so there might be some mistakes, but Black also has the safer 19...e6.

Conclusion

Of the variations examined here 13.g4 is definitely the most critical. It was tried in the early days of the Soltis Variation when people were trying to prove the Dragon lost by force. White players stopped playing this after having bad results in the 15.Bh6 e6 line. However, I don't think that line is completely without venom. Instead 15...Kh7 looks like a good option where I haven't found a way for White to reach equality, although the positions are of course still very sharp.



Topalov Variation



13. Nxd5 – The Main Line

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Bc3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2
Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5 13.Nd5

13...Nxd5 14.Bxg7! Kxg7

A) 15.Bxd5 a5

A1) 16.h4

A2) 16.a3

B) 15.exd5! a5 16.a3

B1) 16...Qb6

B2) 16...Kg8!

B21) 17.g4?!

B22) 17.h4 b4 18.axb4 axb4

B221) 19.Qd4

B222) 19.Qe3!?

B223) 19.Qxb4

B224) 19.h5

B23) 17.Rhe1 Rc5

B231) 18.g4

B232) 18.Re3! b4 19.axb4 axb4 20.Qxb4 Qa8

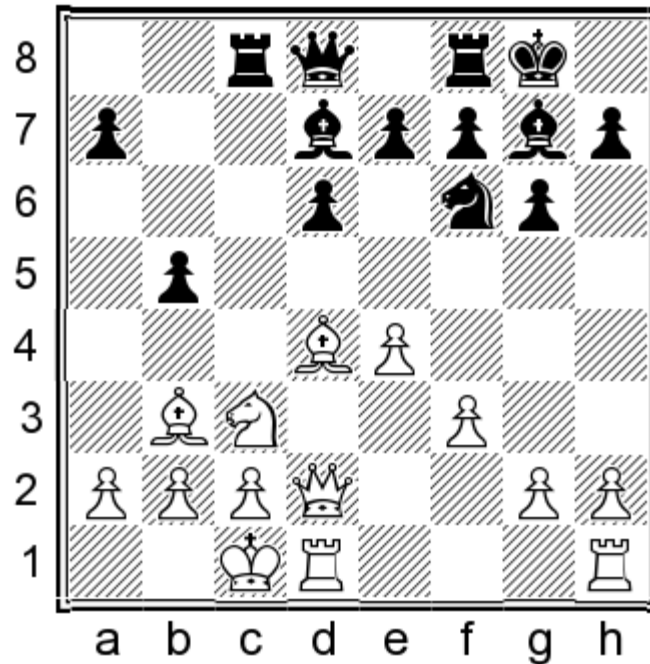
B2321) 21.Bc4 Bf5 22.Ra3 Qc8 23.b3 Qc7

B23211) 24.Ra6!?

B23212) 24.Qd2

B2322) 21.Kd2

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5



This is the Topalov Variation. It was introduced in 1996 by the future world champion against Short. Topalov drew that game and only repeated the idea once more, losing to Shirov five years later.

Black has exchanged a pair of knights in order to gain time to advance his queenside pawns. Black's plan is straightforward: he will push his a-pawn next and either trap the b3-bishop or open lines towards White's king. White has two main plans. He can play slowly, exchanging the remaining pair of knights and dark-squared bishops, with the intention of stifling Black's counterplay and exerting pressure, either along the e-file or with h4-h5. Alternatively, he can leave the bishop to its fate and go straight for Black's king.

13.Nd5

The positional approach is the main line. White trades knights in order to forestall Black's plan of trapping the b3-bishop.

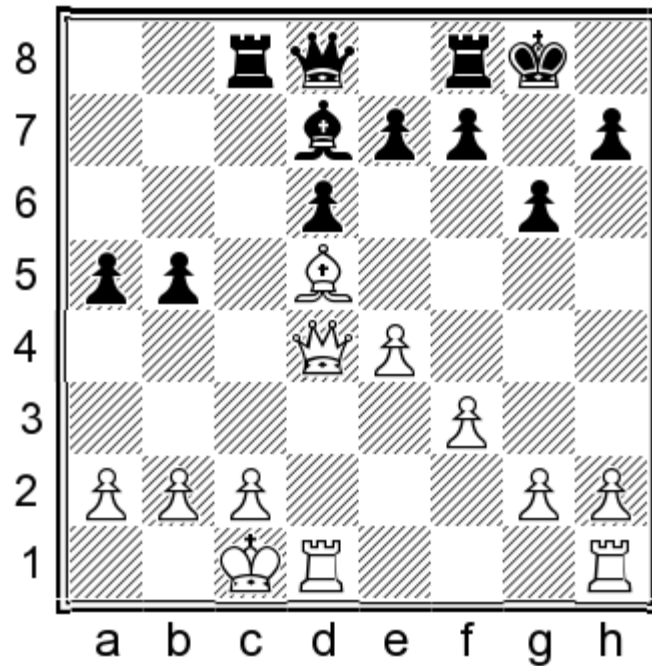
The sharp 13.h4 is the subject of Chapter 8.

Other moves will be dealt with in Chapter 9.

13...Nxd5 14.Bxg7!

It is useful for White to force the black king to the exposed g7-square.

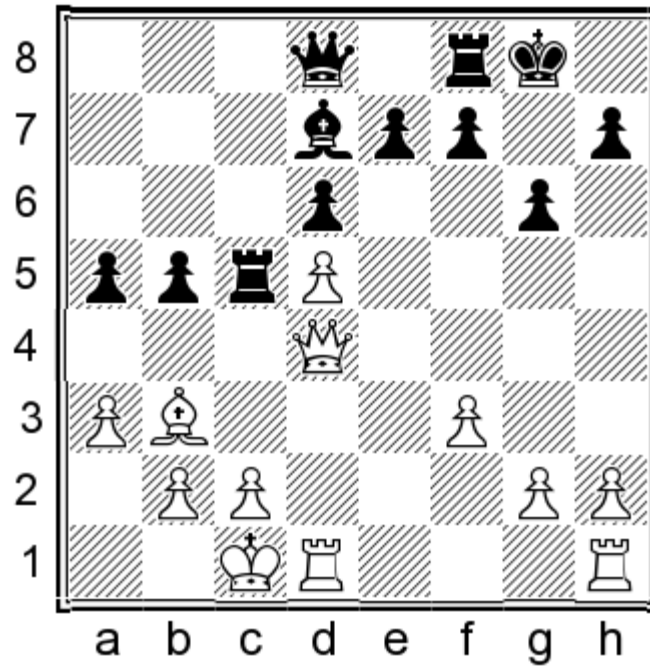
14.Bxd5 is harmless: 14...Bxd4 15.Qxd4 a5 (15...Qc7 was seen in the stem game Short – Topalov, Novgorod 1996, but the text move is more ambitious.)



This is similar to variation A. The only way White can try to exploit his queen's location on d4 is to play 16.e5, but after 16...Bf5 17.Rd2 e6 18.Be4 Bxe4 19.fxe4 dxe5 20.Qxe5 Qb6 21.h4 Rfd8³ Black was more than comfortable in Gutierrez – Siewert, email 2004.

14.exd5 Bxd4 15.Qxd4 a5 16.a3 Rc5

Comparing this position to the main line in variation B2, it is clear that Black has gained. As we will see, Black is often happy to retreat the king to g8 of his own volition, so the net effect is that White has wasted time moving his queen to d4. It is not clear if the queen is particularly better placed here than on d2.



17.g4

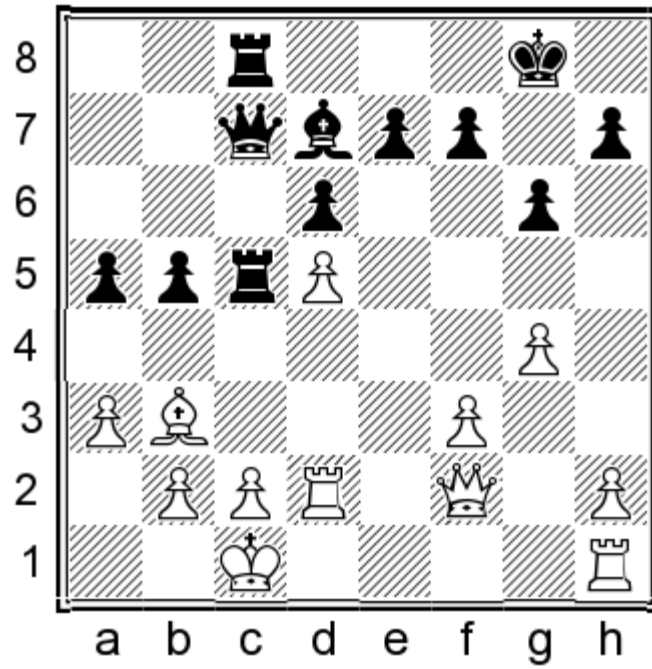
17.Rhe1N does not appear to have been played. A sample line is: 17...Qc7 (17...b4!? 18.axb4 axb4 19.Qxb4 Qa8 is an alternative plan; the position is the same as in Karjakin – Shirov in variation B231 except the pawn is back on g2; I don't think that changes the assessment.) 18.Rd2 Bf5! 19.g4 a4 20.gxf5 axb3 21.c3 Rc4 22.Qd3 b4 23.axb4 Rxb4 Black has good attacking chances.

17...Qc7 18.Rd2

After 18.c3? b4! Black crashes through: 19.axb4 axb4 20.Kd2 (20.Qxb4 Rb8 wins the bishop) 20...bxc3† 21.bxc3 This was Deshetres – Yun, Montreal 2010, and now after 21...e5!N 22.dxe6 Bxe6–+ White's king is too vulnerable.

18...Rc8 19.Qf2

In I. Filipovic – Bertusi, Sibenik 2008, Black overlooked a strong idea:



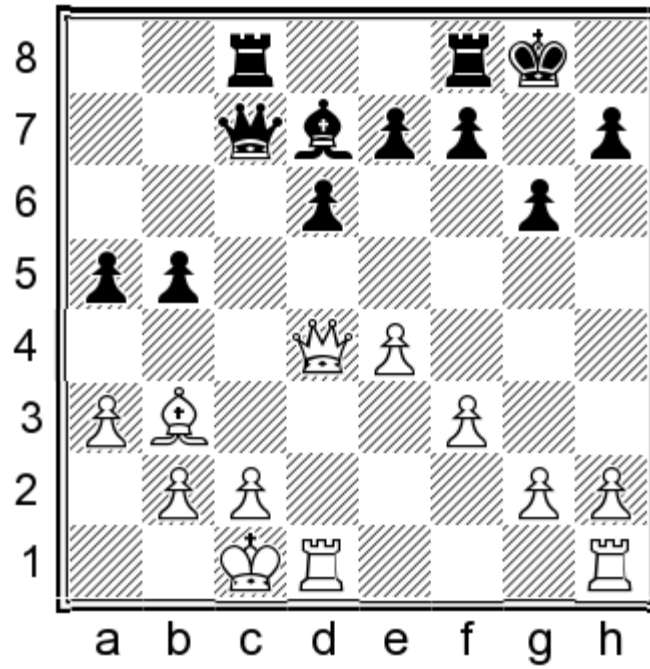
19...a4!N 20.Ba2 Qb6!μ

White must take time out to stop ...Rxc2†, which gives Black time to force through ...b4 on the next move.

14...Kxg7

It is worth checking A) 15.Bxd5, but the critical option is B) 15.exd5!.

15.Qxd5 seems strange and the simple 15...a5 16.a3 Kg8 already looks good for Black; the threat is ...Be6. 17.Qd4 Qc7 (17...Be6!? also looks decent)

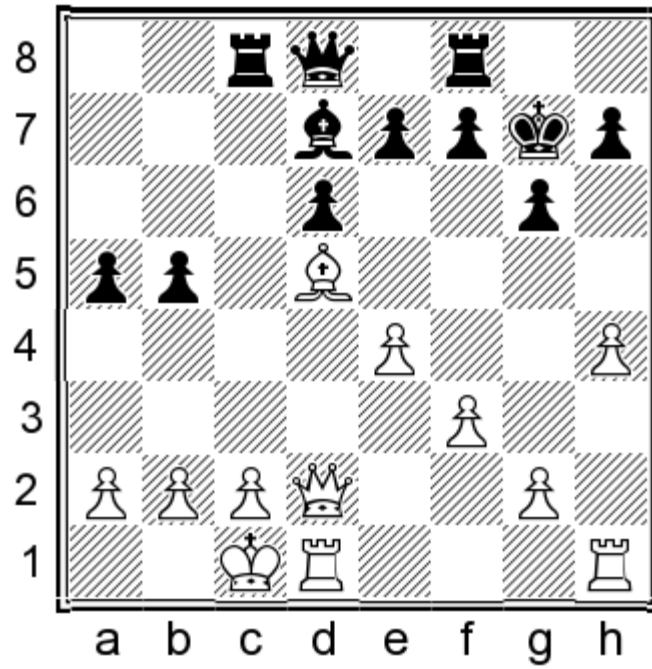


White was forced to deal with the threat of ...a4, when the prospect of mate on c2 means that the bishop is lost. However, 18.a4?? bxa4 19.Bxa4 e5! was not the way to do it; White resigned in Ortiz Perez – Natalicchio Escalante, Las Palmas 2009.

A) 15.Bxd5 a5

White's bishop is close to being trapped, so he must make an important choice between **A1)** 16.h4 and **A2)** 16.a3.

A1) 16.h4



White leaves his bishop to its fate and stakes everything on a kingside attack.

16...e6

Both 16...h5 and 16...h6 are playable if Black wishes to avoid the forced draw in the main line.

17.h5

17.Bb7 Rb8 18.Ba6?!

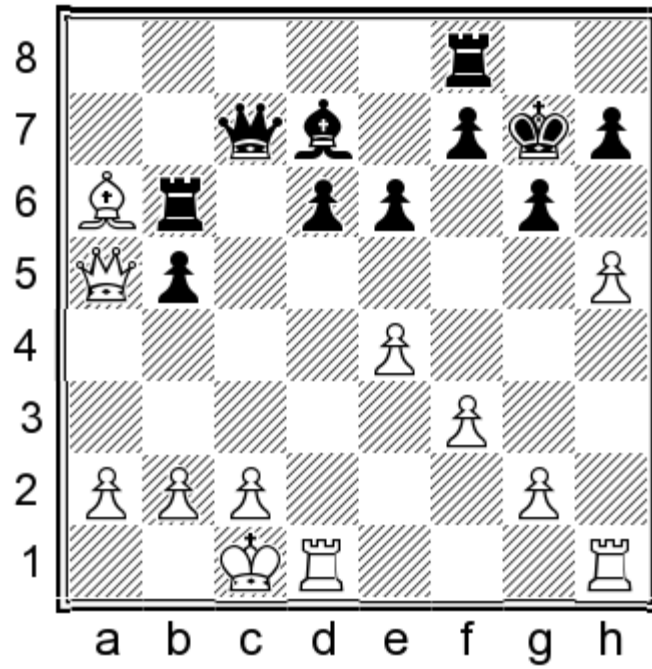
18.Bc6N uses a little tactic to retain the bishop but 18...Bxc6 19.Qc3† Kg8 20.Qxc6 Rb6 21.Qc3 b4 is still comfortable for Black.

18...Rb6 19.Qxa5?!

White had to throw in 19.h5 g5 before playing 20.Qxa5 but after 20...Qc7 Black is still better; the white bishop will inevitably be lost.

19...Qc7 20.h5

In Nussbaumer – Gimenez Aguirre, Prague 2012, Black transposed to the above note with 20...g5. Instead he could have obtained a winning advantage with:



20...Ra8!N

Intending to defend along the seventh rank as follows.

21.hxg6 fxg6 22.Qd2 Be8! 23.Qh6† Kg8--+

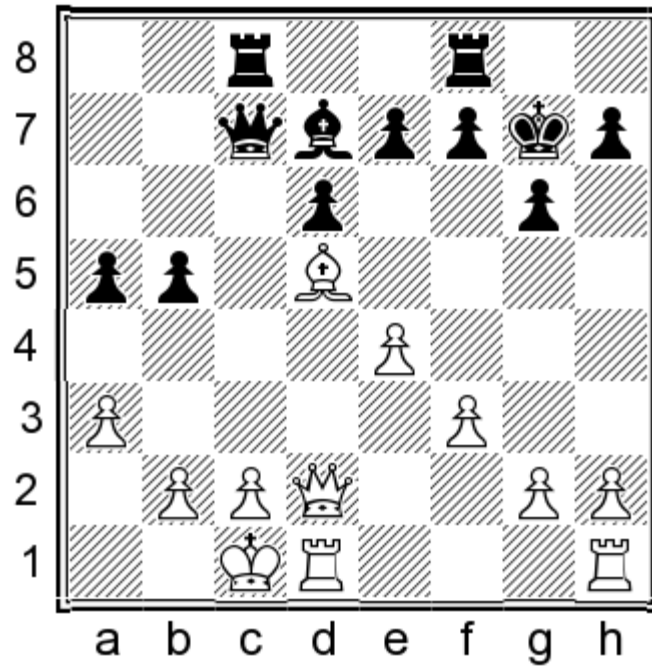
17...exd5 18.hxg6 hxg6 19.Qh6† Kf6 20.Qh4†

This is the more accurate check and forces an immediate draw.

20.Qf4†? Ke7! allows Black to play on and after 21.Qg5†?! Ke8 22.Qg3? Qc7 he was winning in Paredes Bustamante – Menzi, Kemer 2009.

20...Kg7 21.Qh6†=

A2) 16.a3 Qc7



17.h4

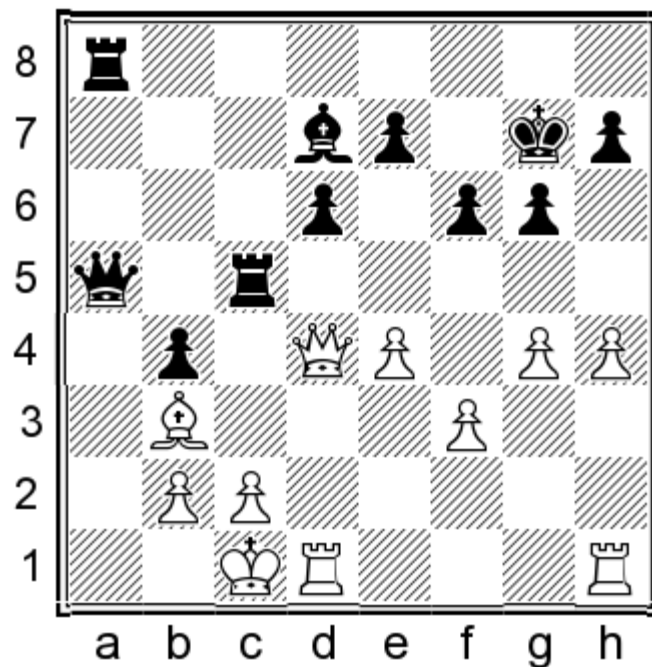
17.Kb1?!

With Black's attack already underway, White cannot afford a waiting move.

17...b4 18.axb4 axb4 19.Bb3

19.h4 is too slow, which is hardly surprising after White has lost a tempo with his king. 19...Qa5 20.h5 Ra8! 21.c3 bxc3 22.Qxc3† Qxc3 23.bxc3 Rfb8† Black had a clearly better ending in S. Farago – Citak, Budapest 2007.

19...Qa5 20.Qd4† f6 21.h4 Rc5 22.g4 Ra8 23.Kc1



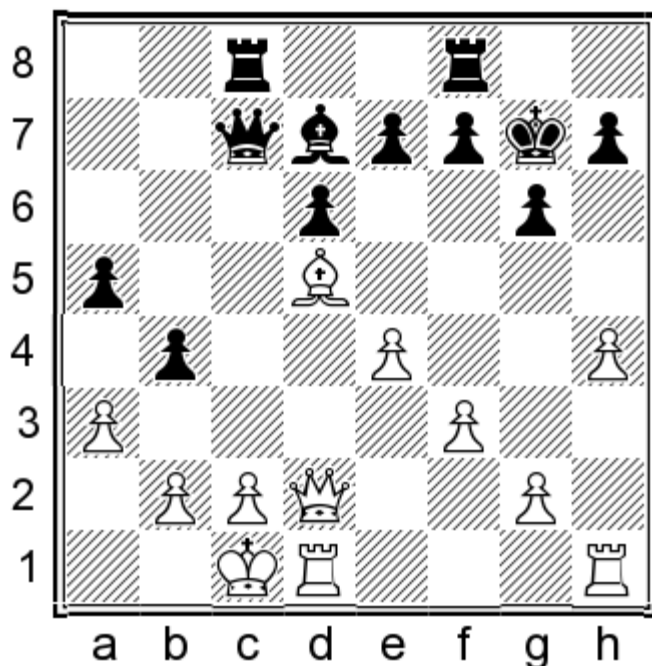
23...Ba4 24.Kd2 Bxb3 25.cxb3 Rac8 26.Ke3 Qb6 27.Ke2 Rc2† 28.Ke3 R8c5

0–1 Ortiz Suarez – Gashimov, Ourense 2009. A smooth victory from the sadly missed Azerbaijani Super-GM.

17...b4

The most forcing continuation.

Again it is possible for Black to play more slowly with 17...h6 or 17...h5 18.g4 Rh8.

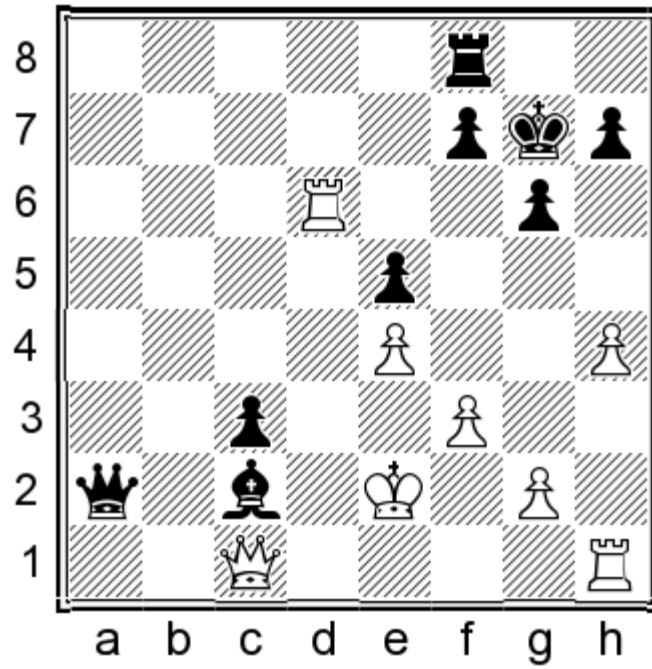


18.axb4?!

18.h5!N was necessary. Black has several playable moves but the most ambitious is: 18...g5!? (18...bxa3 leads to an immediate draw after 19.hxg6 axb2† 20.Kb1 hxg6 21.Qh6† Kf6 22.Qh4† Kg7 23.Qh6†=) 19.axb4 axb4 20.Qxg5† Kh8 21.Bb3 Be6 22.Qe3 Bxb3 23.Qxb3 Qa5 Black has good compensation for the pawn.

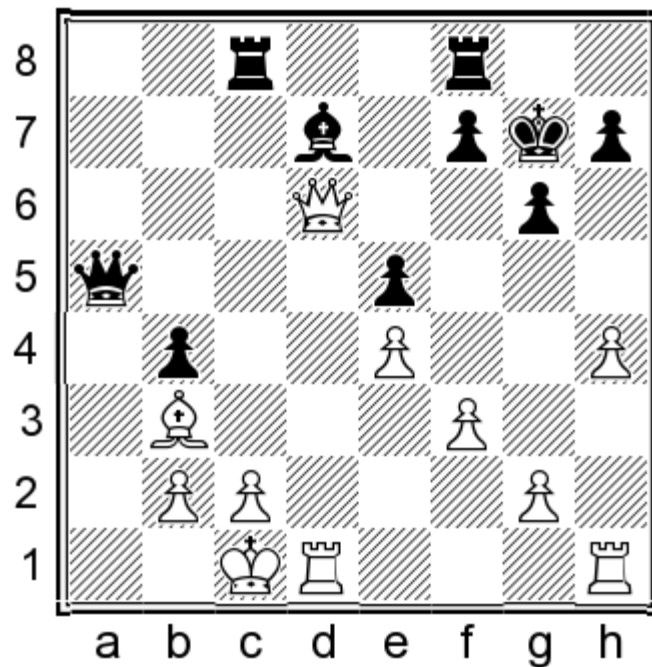
18...axb4 19.Bb3 Qa5 20.Qd4† e5! 21.Qxd6

21.Qe3?! allows Black to smash through: 21...Rc3! 22.bxc3 bxc3 23.Ba4 Bxa4 24.Rd5 Qb4 25.Kd1 Qb1† 26.Qc1 Bxc2† 27.Ke2 Qa2 28.Rxd6



So far Black had done everything right in J. Geller – Halyavskiy, Moscow 2006. At this point, as I observed on ChessPublishing, 28...Ba4†!N would have been totally crushing as after 29.Ke3 Bb5! White cannot defend against the mate threats on both e2 and a7.

Returning to the main line, I found an improvement over Q. Zhou – Yun, Toronto 2011.



21...Bc6!N

Black's attack is coming faster, for example:

22.Qe7

22.h5 Rfd8 23.h6† Kg8 24.Qf6 Qa1#

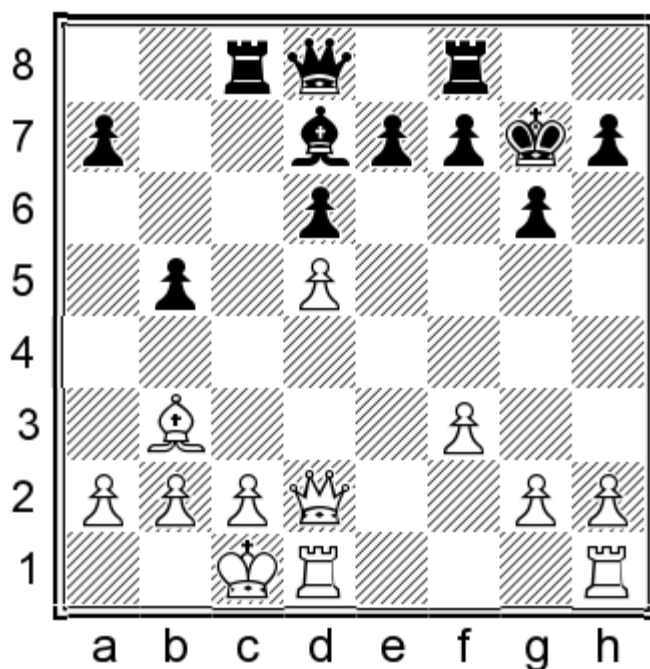
22...Rce8 23.Qg5

23.Qd6 Rd8 24.Qxc6 Qa1# is the same motif.

23...Rd8

The mating net is formed.

B) 15.exd5!



This capture is the only way to put pressure on Black. It may seem counterintuitive to block in the bishop but White can try to generate play down the e-file as well as on the kingside.

15...a5 16.a3

16.Qd4†?! might seem tempting but after 16...Kg8 we have transposed to the note on 14.exd5 in the beginning of the chapter. As we will soon see, there are good reasons for Black to retreat his king anyway.

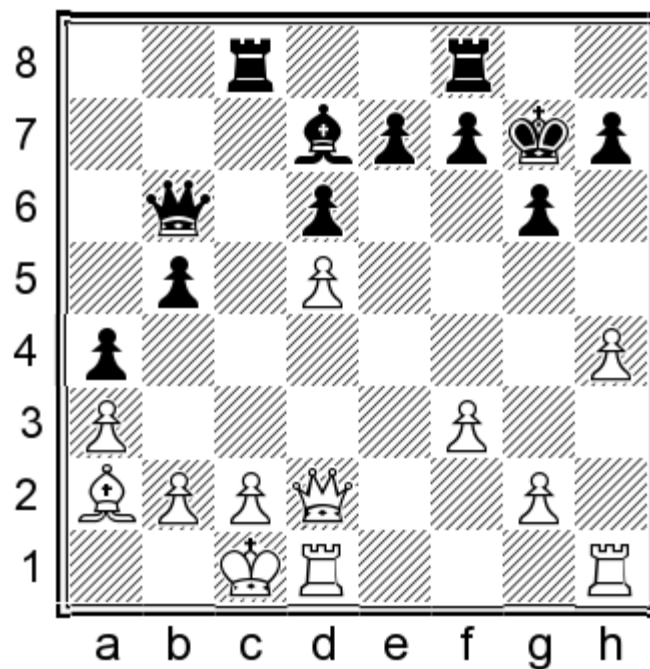
Should you not wish to sacrifice a pawn, B1) 16...Qb6 is a possibility which has been seen in a lot of correspondence games. However, I think White can claim an advantage if he is accurate. For that reason, B2) 16...Kg8! will be my main

recommendation. Incidentally, this move is not considered in De la Villa's repertoire book.

16...b4?! has historically been the most popular move. However, it is now considered premature, so I will not devote any more space to it.

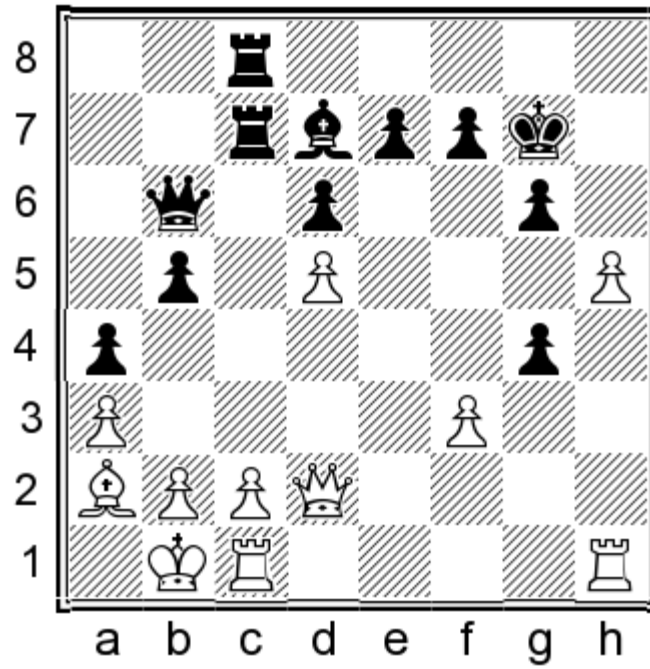
B1) 16...Qb6 17.Rhe1

17.h4? is a serious error: 17...a4 18.Ba2 Keler – Bayram, Konya 2012. As Ward observed, Black missed a great chance here:

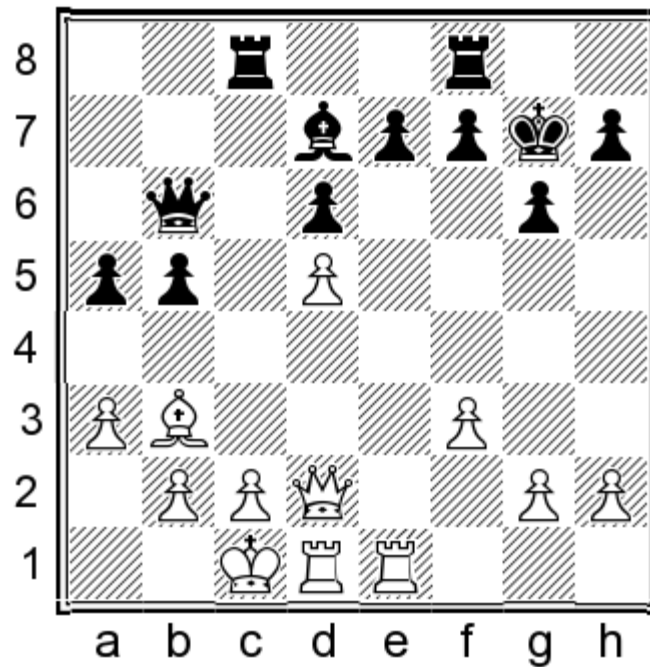


18...Rxc2†!N 19.Qxc2 (19.Kxc2 Bf5† 20.Kc1 Rc8†–+) 19...Rc8 20.Qxc8 Bxc8 Despite the approximate material equality, Black is close to winning. White's king is vulnerable and his pieces lack coordination. Black can combine threats against the king with an attack on White's kingside pawns.

17.g4 covers the f5-square, avoiding the tactical problem seen in the above line, but it fails to put any pressure on Black. The following game was accurately played by both sides: 17...Rc7 18.Kb1 Rfc8 19.Rc1 h5!? 20.h4 a4 21.Ba2 hxg4 22.h5



22...Rxc2! 23.Rxc2 Bf5 24.hxg6 Bxc2† 25.Ka1 Rh8 26.Re1 (26.Rxh8?? Qg1†) 26...Bxg6 27.Qc3† Kg8 28.Qc8† ½–½
Sebi chess – Gora, Internet 2006.



17...Rfe8 18.g4

Rogozenko assesses the situation as clearly better for White. I do not believe Black's position is that bad, but it is true that he is struggling for counterplay. It is hard to achieve anything on the queenside, so Black usually tries fighting back on the kingside with a timely ...f5.

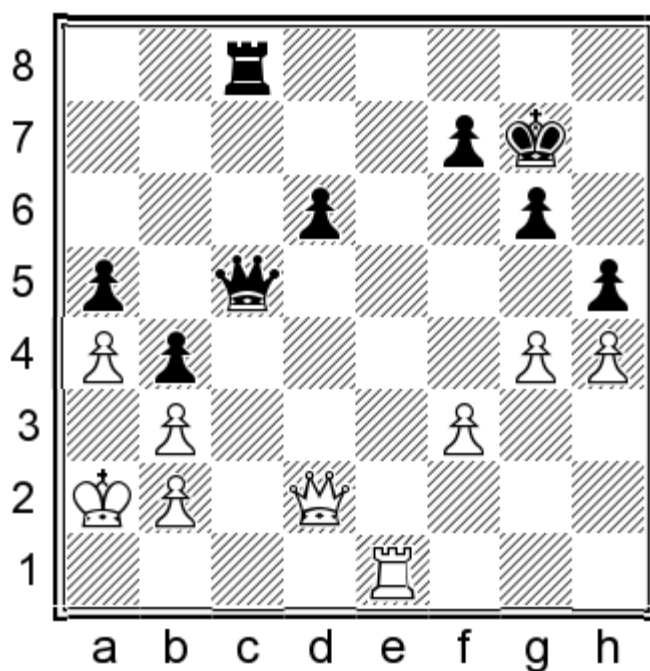
18...Rb8!?

It looks odd to move the rook off the semi-open c-file but we are now threatening to break through on the b-file.

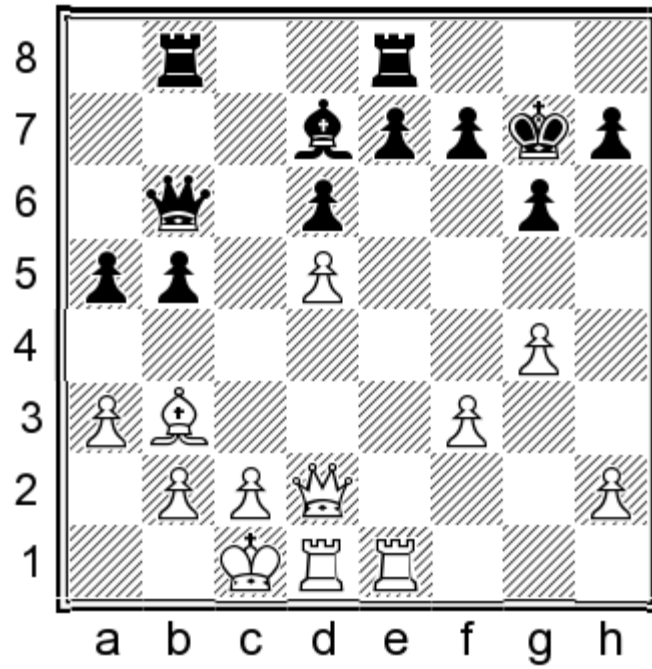
Black has to be careful, as the thematic 18...b4?! gives White two good replies:

a) 19.axb4 axb4 20.Qd4† Qxd4 21.Rxd4 Rb8 22.Kd2 g5² occurred in suj_shredder8 – erdo, engine game 2012. Black may be able to hold the endgame but it is a pretty depressing one for him, as he will always have to keep an eye on the vulnerable e7- and b4-pawns. Black would much prefer to have a pawn on a5 instead of b4 in order to obtain counterplay along the b-file.

b) 19.a4 also favours White as Black will struggle to do anything on the queenside. Black's difficulties were well illustrated by the following game: 19...Qc5 20.Kb1 e5 21.dxe6 Bxe6 22.h4 Bxb3 23.cxb3 Rxe1 24.Rxe1 h5 25.Ka2±



Anand – Tiviakov, Wijk aan Zee 2001. White's king is absolutely safe and he can proceed to attack Black's king while maintaining pressure against the d6-pawn.

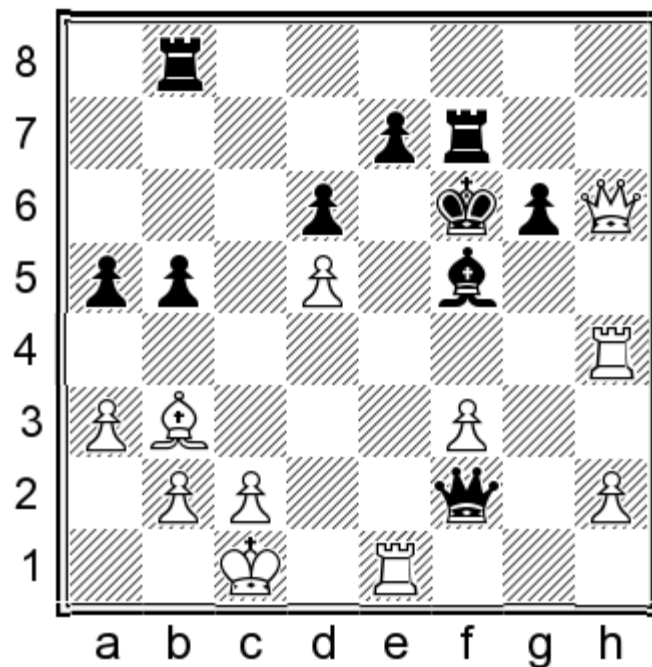


19.Re4!

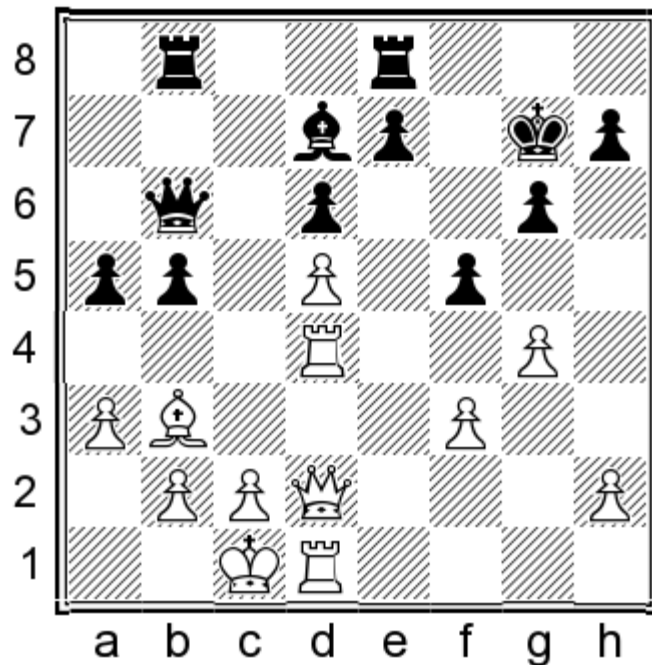
19.h4N 19...a4 20.Ba2 b4 21.axb4 Qxb4 22.c3 Rec8= grants Black sufficient counterplay.

19...f5!? 20.Rd4

20.gxf5N 20...Bxf5 21.Rh4 is a direct approach that needs to be checked, but the bishop on f5 does a good job defending the king and Black actually has several ways to defend. One sensible line runs: 21...Rf8 22.Qh6† Kf7 23.Qxh7† Kf6 (23...Ke8!÷) 24.Re1 Rf7 25.Qh6 Qf2 The black king may look strange on f6 but White's king is actually in more danger. A logical finish might be:



26.Rhe4!? Bxe4 27.Rxe4 Qf1† 28.Kd2 Qf2†= With a perpetual.

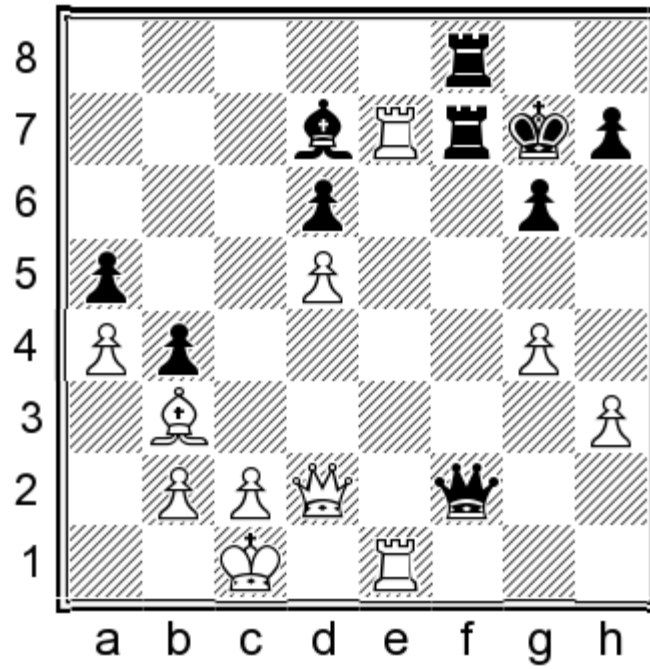


20...b4 21.a4 fxg4 22.fxg4 Rf8 23.Re1 Rf7 24.Rde4 Rbf8

White's pressure against the e7-pawn gives him a slight advantage. On the other hand, the b3-bishop is rather misplaced. We will follow a correspondence game in which Black managed to obtain a drawing endgame by sacrificing the e-pawn.

25.h3 Qf2!? 26.Rxe7

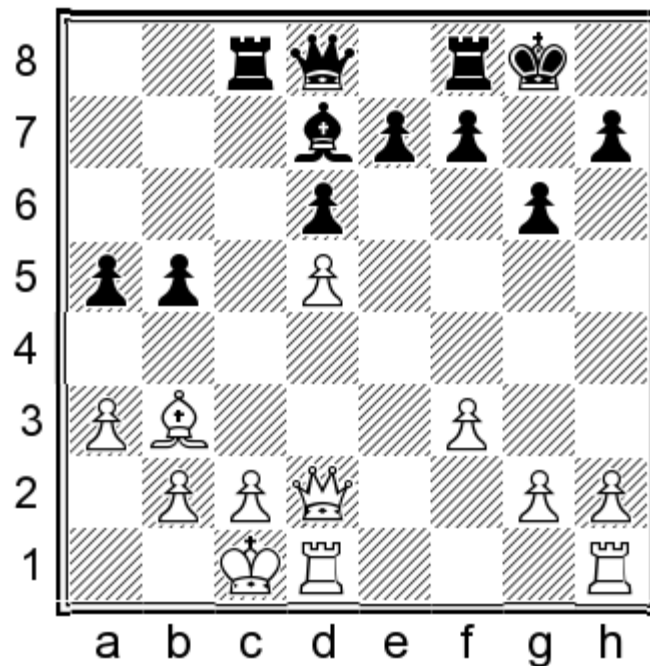
26.Qd3!? is another idea.



26...Qh4 27.Qe3 Kg8 28.Rxf7 Rxf7 29.Kb1 Qf2 30.c3 Qxe3 31.Rxe3 bxc3 32.Rxc3 h5 33.Bc2 hxc4 34.hxc4 g5 35.Rc4 Rf1† 36.Ka2 Rf2 37.Ka3 Rf3† 38.b3 Rg3 39.Rc7 Bxc4

The g-pawn proved enough of a nuisance that White had to take the draw in Winkler – Olesen, email 2007. Although 16...Qb6 still seems to hold up at correspondence level, there is no denying that Black is under pressure, so I would suggest playing the move below, as I have done myself.

B2) 16...Kg8!



This line suddenly became popular after Shirov used it to easily hold Karjakin in 2009, but perhaps the credit should go

to a young Vocaturo, who played it against Karjakin five years earlier. It looks strange to move the king without any prompting but it's actually a subtle waiting move. Black postpones the sacrifice of his b-pawn to see whether White intends to play for mate along the h-file or positional pressure along the e-file.

We will analyse B21) 17.g4?!, B22) 17.h4 and B23) 17.Rhe1. The last two moves have been tested in a similar number of over-the-board games, but the rook move has been the leading choice in correspondence and engine praxis.

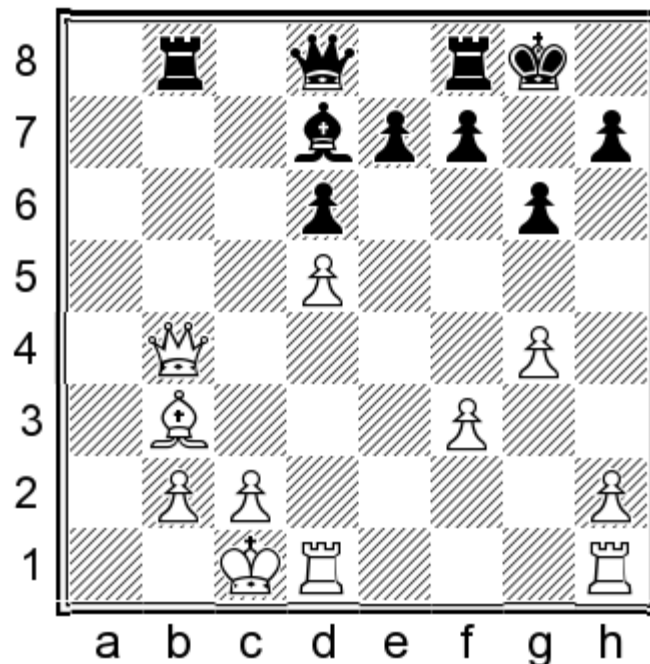
B21) 17.g4?!

Controlling the f5-square is generally useful for White but, with kings on opposite flanks, he never has enough time.

17...b4

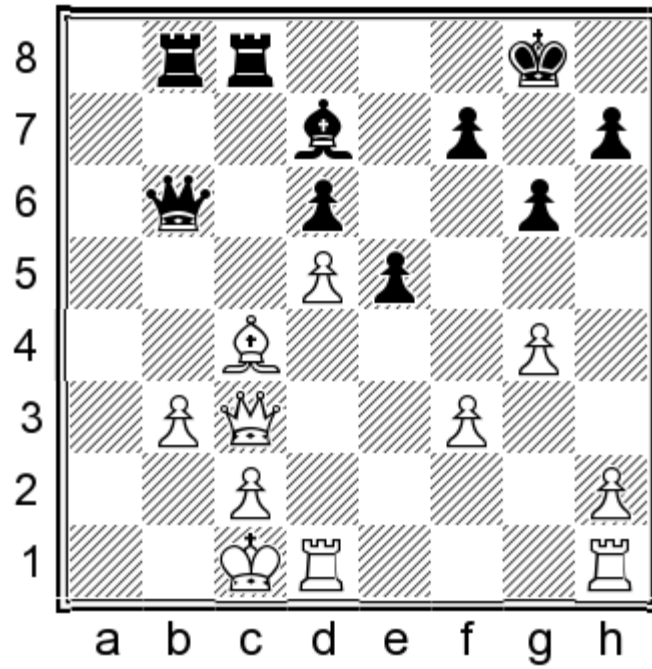
17...f5!?N is an interesting way of fighting back on the kingside, but there is no reason to deviate from the main line.

18.axb4 axb4 19.Qxb4 Rb8



20.Qd4?!

The rarer 20.Qc3 is a lesser evil but Black still has fabulous compensation: 20...Qb6 21.Bc4 Rfc8 22.b3 e5! In the following correspondence game, White did well to cut his losses and bail out to a slightly worse endgame:



23.dxe6 Bxe6 24.Qd4 Bxc4 25.Qxb6 Rxb6 26.bxc4 Rxc4³ White was able to hold in Kachkin – Baklanov, email 2006.

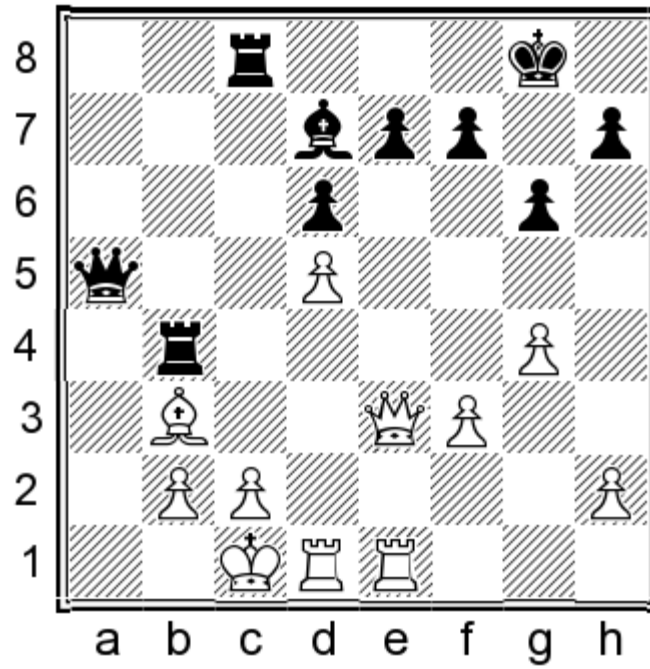
20...Qa5

Black's initiative is far too powerful. You can see how detrimental the lost tempo (g2-g4) is to White's position.

21.Rhe1

21.Bc4 Rb4 22.b3 e5! 23.dxe6 Bxe6 24.c3 Rxb3 25.Bxb3 Bxb3 was winning for Black in Palladino – Sgherri, email 2010.

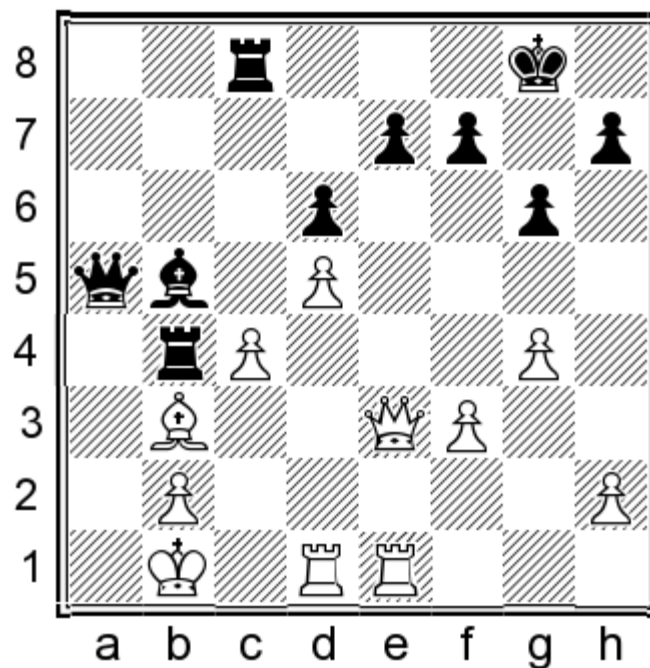
21.Qc3 Rb4 22.Rhe1 Rc8 23.Qe3 was seen in Jahncke – Koepke, Internet 2009, and here I found a killing novelty:



23...Bb5!N The point is to stop the white king from escaping to the kingside. 24.h4 Qa1† 25.Kd2 Qxb2 26.Rb1 Rd4†–+

21...Rb4 22.Qe3 Rc8 23.Kb1 Bb5 24.c4

In Rahimov – Vakhidov, Tashkent 2007, Black captured the pawn with a good position, but he missed something even stronger.

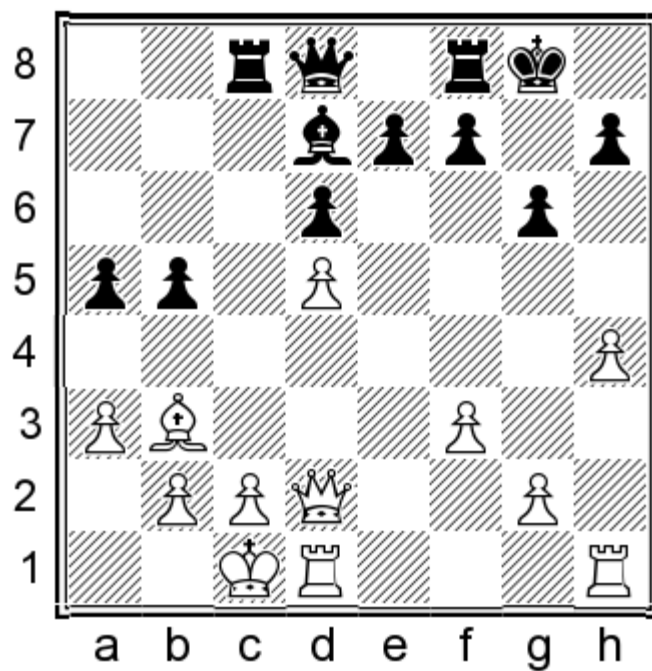


24...Ba4!N

Instead of being distracted by a meaningless pawn, Black goes straight for the white king and wins at once.

25.Bxa4 Qxa4 26.Qc3 Ra8—+

B22) 17.h4



This is the more forcing of the two main options.

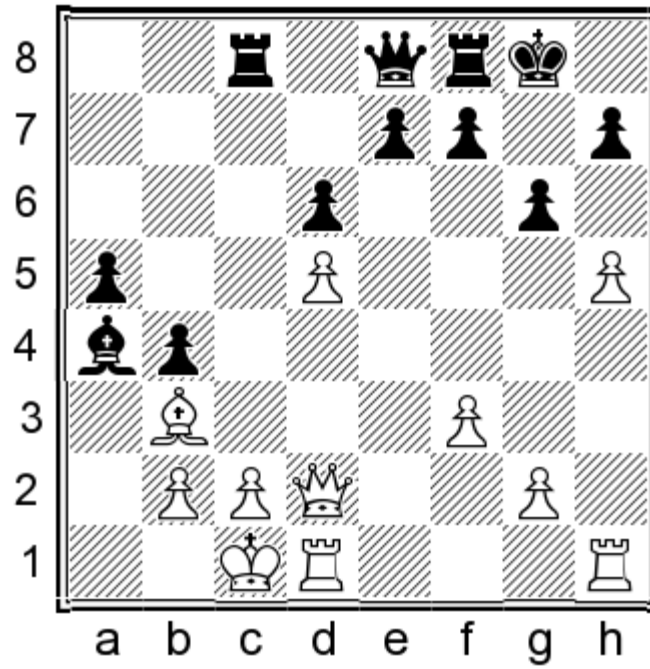
17...b4 18.axb4

In a few games White has instead opted to decline the pawn and sacrifice one of his own instead:

18.a4 Qe8

18...f6!? is an alternative plan, when 19.h5 g5 20.f4 led to balanced play in Groot – Ressler, email 2009. It seems likely that the game will end in some sort of perpetual but there is a lot of play left.

19.h5 Bxa4



20.hxg6

I gave the following line on ChessPublishing: 20.Qh6 g5! An important resource; by sacrificing the g-pawn, we keep the kingside closed. 21.Qxg5† Kh8 22.Qe3 Bxb3 23.Qxb3 Qb5 24.Kb1 Rc7 25.Qe3 Rg8 26.g4 Qc5=

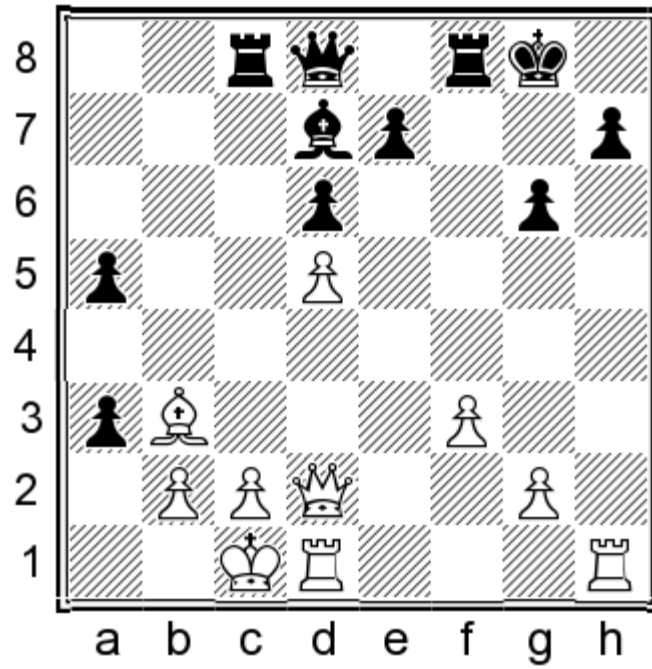
20...fxg6 21.Rxh7!

White's attack arrives just in time but it is only enough for a draw.

21...Kxh7 22.Rh1† Kg7 23.Qh6† Kf7 24.Qf4† Kg7 25.Qh6†

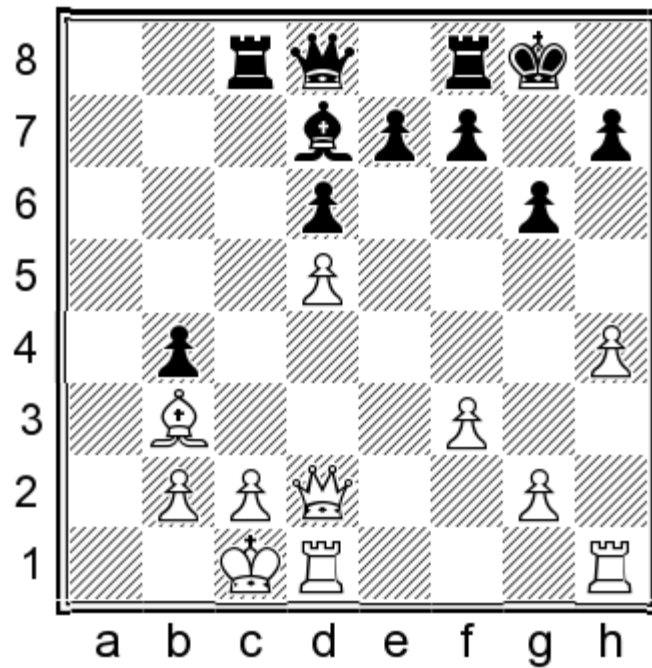
½–½ Djukic – Roganovic, Cetinje 2010.

18.h5N gives Black a choice. 18...bxa3 (My engine also gives 0.00 evaluations for 18...a4 and 18...Bf5.) As I observed on ChessPublishing, the game will probably end in the same type of draw as in the line above. 19.hxg6 fxg6



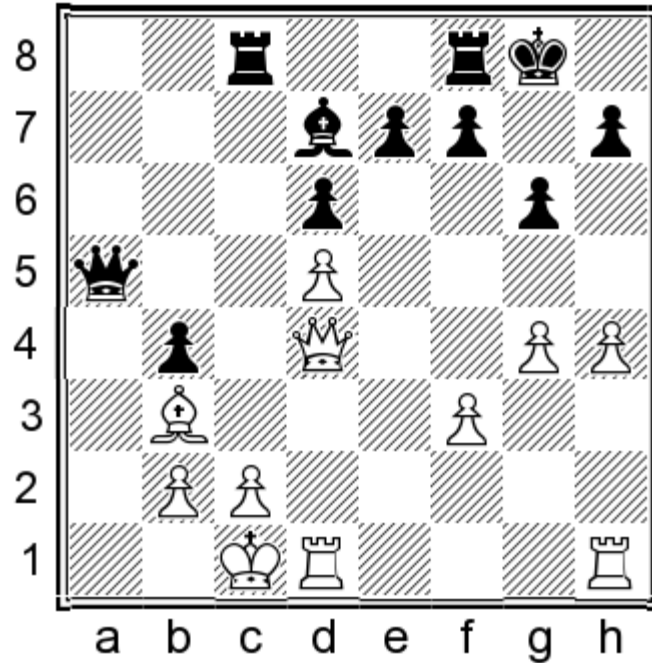
20.Rxh7! Kxh7 21.Rh1† Kg8 22.Qh6 Kf7 23.Qh7† Kf6 24.Qh4†=

18...axb4



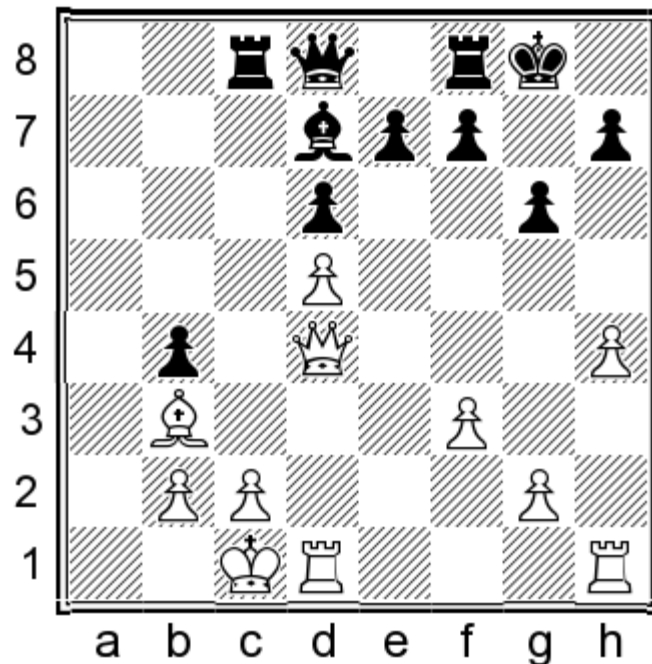
We have reached an important branching point where White may consider B221) 19.Qd4, B222) 19.Qe3!?, B223) 19.Qxb4 or B224) 19.h5.

19.g4?! reverts the bishop from coming to f5 but every tempo matters. 19...Qa5 20.Qd4



20...Rc3!? The rook is immune and so Black picks up a pawn, as both ...Qa1xb2 and ...Rxf3 are threatened. (On ChessPublishing I gave 20...e5N 21.dxe6 Bxe6µ when Black has a strong initiative; both options are clearly better for Black.) 21.Kd2 Rxf3 22.Rdf1 Rg3 23.Rhg1 Rxg1 24.Rxg1 e5µ Mullon – Gonzalez Vidal, Arinsal 2011.

B221) 19.Qd4



19...Bf5!

An important move which highlights one of the reasons for retreating the king on move 16. Now White has to deal with the threat of ...Bxc2.

19...Qa5 is the main move but I think White has some pressure here, which is why I am keen to avoid this position with all of our move orders.

20.Kd2

White won the first two games from this position, but Black's position is fine after:

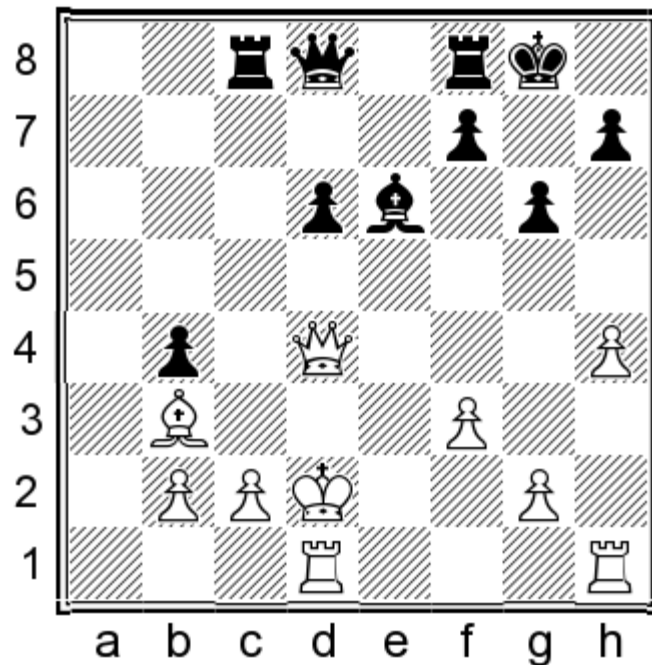
20...e5!

I suggested this important improvement on ChessPublishing, and it was subsequently tested in a correspondence game.

21.dxe6

In the event of 21.Qxb4 h5³ White is rather vulnerable on the dark squares.

21...Bxe6



22.Bxe6

22.Ke2N 22...Bxb3 23.cxb3 Rc2† 24.Rd2 Qe7† 25.Kf2 Rxd2† 26.Qxd2 Rc8 is equal. Perhaps White should already be thinking about bailing out in this way.

22...fxe6 23.Rde1

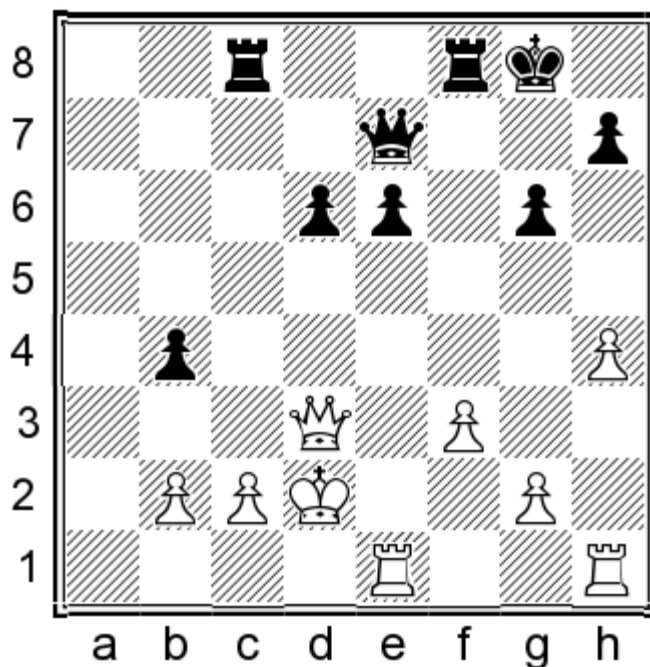
With such a loose king White can hardly hope for an advantage. As we will see, Black has a few ways to handle the position, indicating that White's play is not a critical test of the Topalov Variation.

23...Qc7 24.Qd3 Qe7!?N

This slight improvement would force White to play accurately to retain equality.

24...Rf4!?N is also fine, but one good line is enough.

24...Rf6 was played in the game. The remaining moves look strange but are backed up by deep computer analysis. 25.h5 Qa5 26.hxg6 b3† By this point my engine evaluates several of Black's options as 0.00, but White has to walk a narrow line. 27.c3 Qg5† 28.Kd1 h5!? 29.g4 hxg4 30.g7 Rf5 31.Rh8† Kxg7 32.Qd4† e5 33.Qa7† Kxh8 34.Rh1† Kg8 35.Qh7† Kf8 36.Qb7 Rc7!? 37.Qxc7 Rf7 38.Qc8† Ke7 39.Qc7† Ke6 ½–½ Senzacqua – Speisser, corr. 2013.



25.Re4!

This looks like the most accurate. White attempts to get some counterplay.

25.h5?! Qg5†µ is the point of Black's last move.

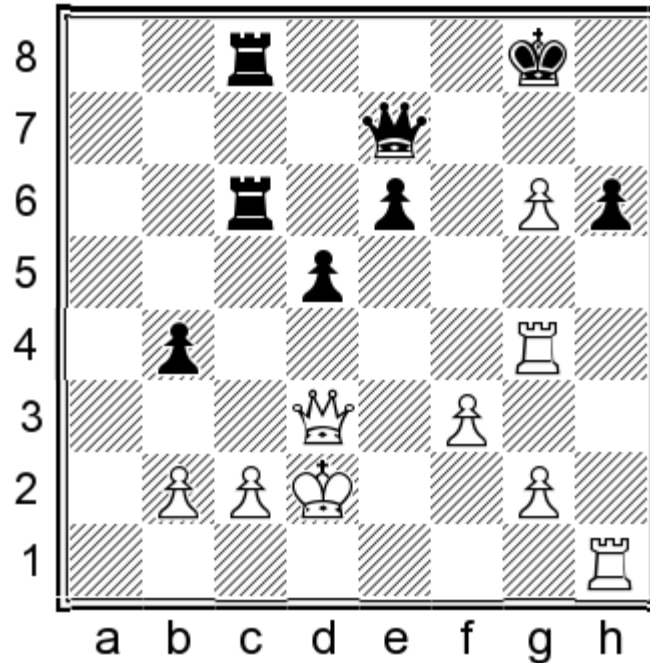
25.Qe4 Rf5! 26.Qxe6† Qxe6 27.Rxe6 Rd5† 28.Ke3 (28.Kc1? loses to 28...b3 29.c3 Ra8 30.Kb1 Rda5–+) 28...Rxc2³ Black will end up with an extra pawn in the endgame.

25...d5 26.Rg4

26.Qxd5? Rfd8 wins for Black.

26...Rc6 27.h5 Rfc8 28.Rc1

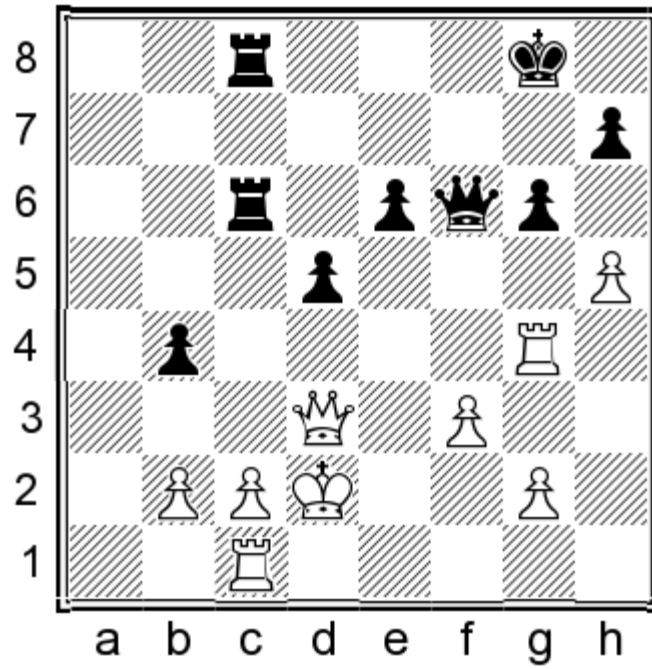
28.hxg6 can be met by a surprising counter: 28...h6! (28...Rxc2† 29.Qxc2 Rxc2† 30.Kxc2 Qc5† 31.Kd3 hxg6 should be a draw)



29.Rxh6 Qa7! 30.Qd4 Rxc2† 31.Ke3 Qxd4† 32.Rxd4 Kg7 33.Rdh4 Rxb2 Black has the better prospects in the endgame, but White should probably hold. An accurate continuation is 34.Rh7† Kxg6 35.R4h6† Kf5 36.g4† Ke5 37.f4† Kd6 38.f5 and it looks like a draw.

28...Qf6

Black could also opt to keep the game double-edged with 28...Qd6!?.



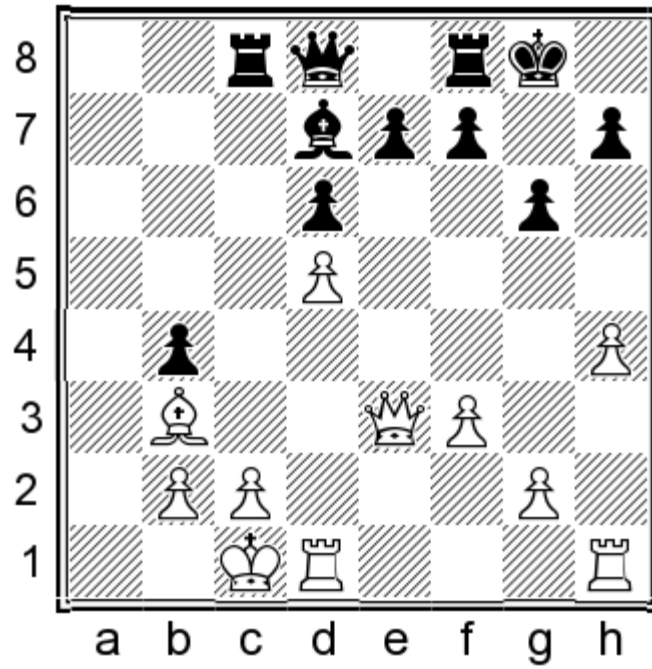
29.Qd4

29.hxg6 h5! 30.Rxb4 Qg5† 31.Kd1 Qxg2 is trickier for White.

29...Qxd4† 30.Rxd4 Rb6

The endgame is equal.

B222) 19.Qe3!?



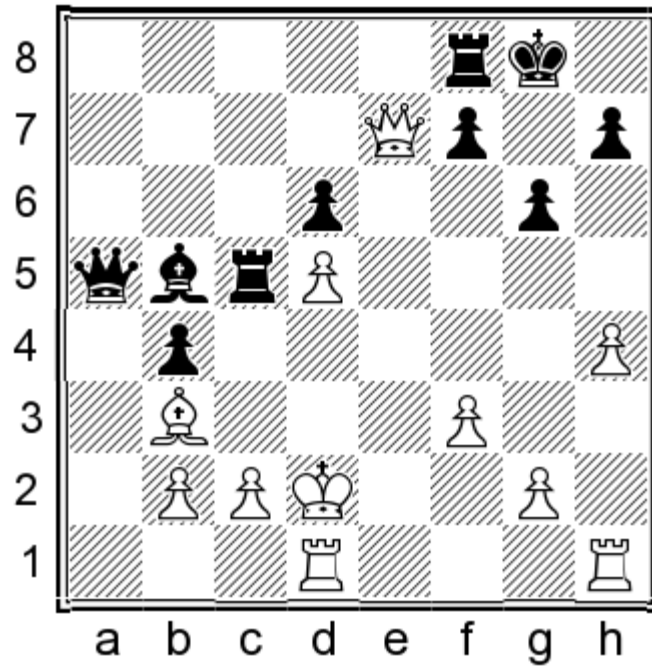
The queen defends the b3-square, nullifying our ...Bf5xc2 plan, while also giving the king an escape square.

19...Qa5 20.Kd2 Rc5 21.Qxe7?!

White should have preferred 21.h5N, when 21...Bf5 is similar to variation B224 below.

21...Bb5!N

21...Bf5 22.Ra1 Qb5 23.Ra7 was Ortiz Suarez – Wang, Arlington 2014, and here Black missed a tactical shot: 23...Bxc2!N 24.Bxc2 Rxd5† 25.Kc1 b3 with a dangerous attack. The text move looks even stronger though.



22.Qxd6

This is the obvious move to consider.

22.h5 Re8 23.Ra1! Qb6 24.Qa7 Qd8!µ is a useful idea to remember: the queen can often infiltrate White's position via the g5-square.

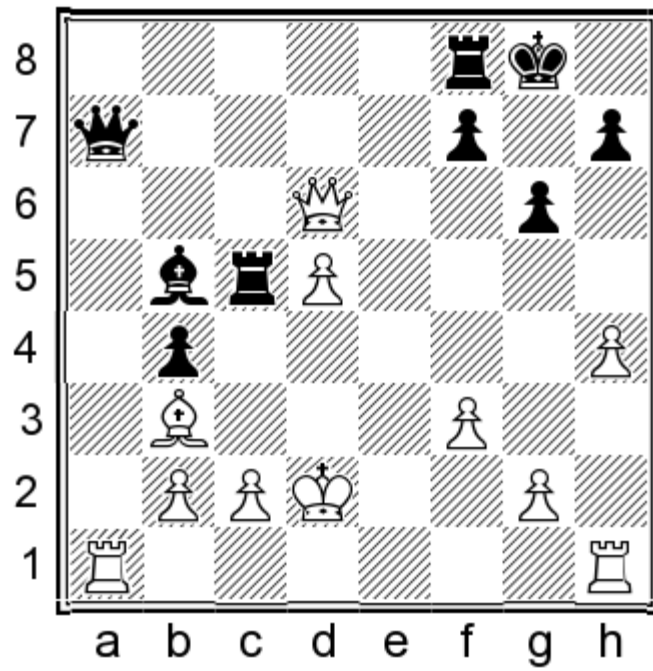
22.Ra1 looks like White's best chance, although he is still struggling after 22...Qb6 23.Qa7 Qd8!.

22...Qa7!

White's king is suddenly vulnerable, for example:

23.Ra1

23.Rhe1 Rfc8µ



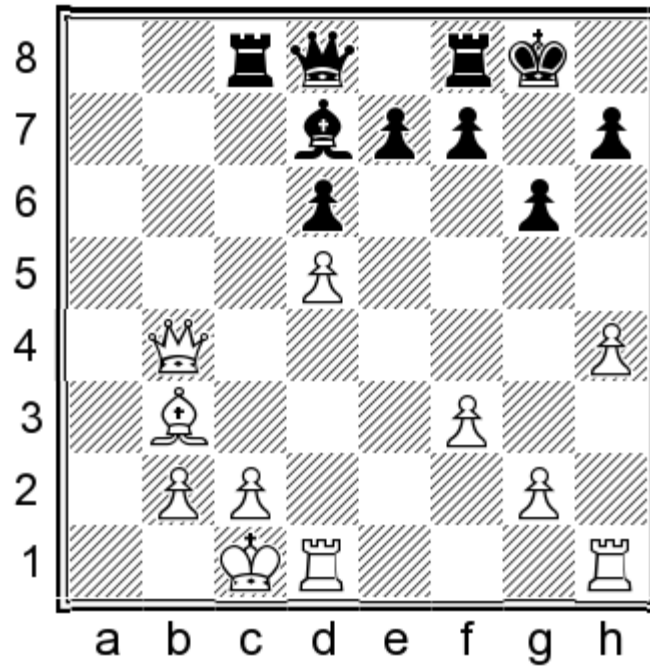
23...Rxc2†! 24.Kxc2

24.Bxc2 Qf2† 25.Kc1 Rc8–+

24...Qf2† 25.Kb1 Bd3† 26.Kc1 Rc8† 27.Qc6 Rxc6† 28.dxc6 Qe3† 29.Kd1 Bb5

Black is winning.

B223) 19.Qxb4



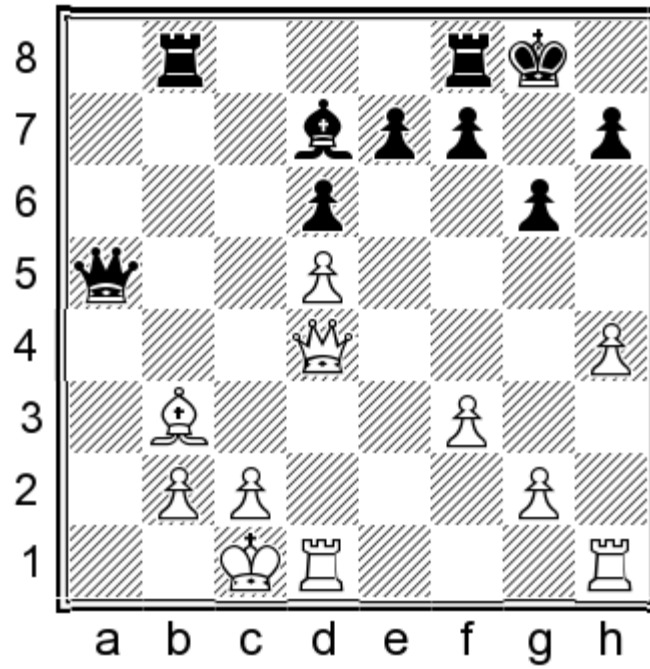
Taking the pawn is risky here, and Black has achieved a huge score against it. We will start with a typical regrouping plan.

19...Rb8! 20.Qd4

20.Qc3 Qb6 21.Rd4?! Rfc8 22.Rc4 occurred in B. Socko – T.L. Petrosian, Internet (blitz) 2004. Had this been played at a longer time limit, Black would probably have found 22...e5!N with an excellent position, for example: 23.h5 Ra8 24.Rxc8† Rxc8 25.Bc4 Qf2μ

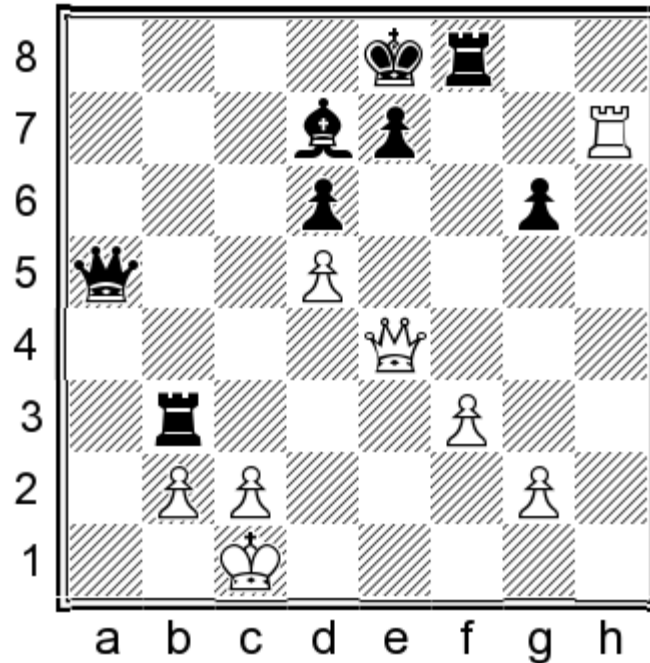
20...Qa5

White's position is already difficult.



21.Qc3

21.h5? White does not realize what grave danger he's in. 21...Rxb3! 22.hxg6 (22.cxb3 Rc8† 23.Kb1 Bf5†–+) 22...fxg6 23.Rxh7 Kxh7 24.Rh1† Kg8 25.Rh8† Kf7 26.Rh7† Ke8 27.Qe4



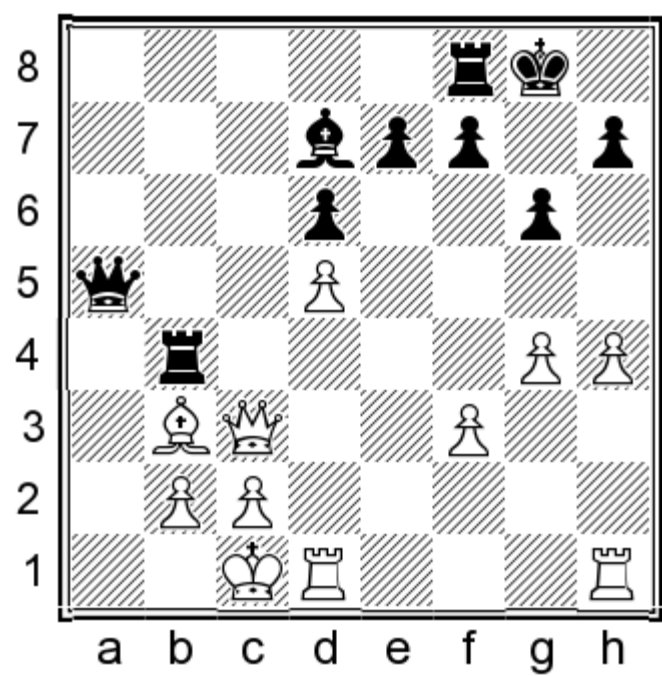
27...Qa1† 28.Kd2 Rd3†!–+ Schuh – Hahn, Germany 2012. A beautiful example of deflection.

21...Rb4 22.g4?

22.Bc4N 22...Rc8 23.b3 is suggested by Catalin Navrotescu but 23...e5!³ works well. The last move is often desirable

for Black in this variation, not least because the blocking of the long diagonal makes his king much more secure.

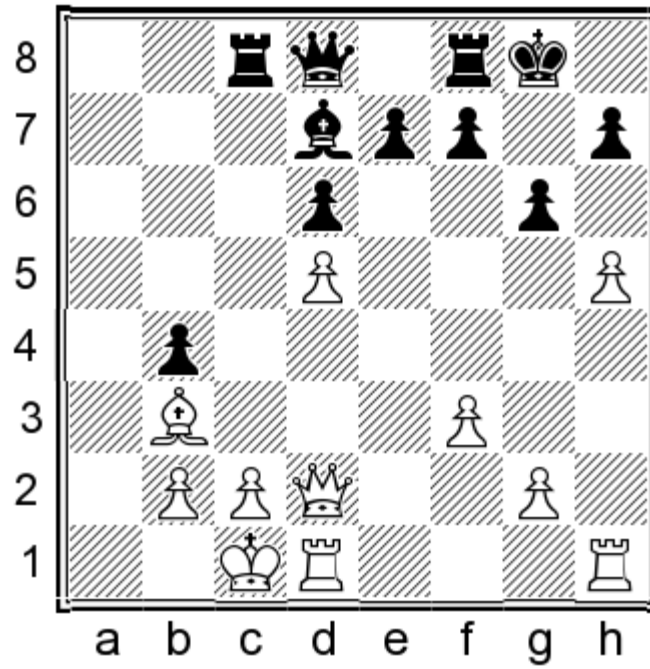
The text move allowed Black to mop up quickly.



22...Rc8 23.Qe3 Qa1† 24.Kd2 Qxb2 25.Ke1 Bb5 26.Rh2 Rxb3

0–1 Meurs – Mostertman, Agneaux 2012.

B224) 19.h5



19...Bf5!

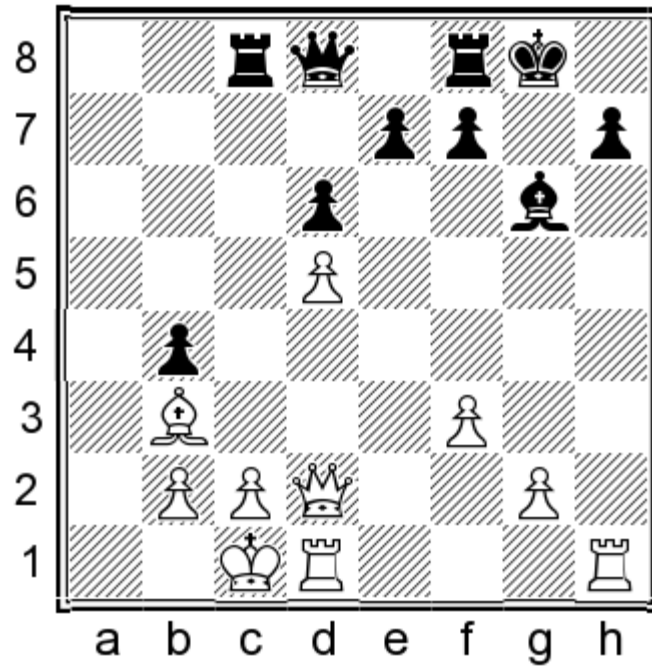
The bishop comes to the defence of its king while also threatening to take on c2.

19...Qa5 is criticized by Pavlovic as he too is trying to avoid the position after 20.Qd4. With accurate play I believe Black should be okay but the position isn't so much fun, as White will run his king to relative safety on the kingside.

20.Qxb4

White could also consider:

20.hxg6 Bxg6



21.Qd4N

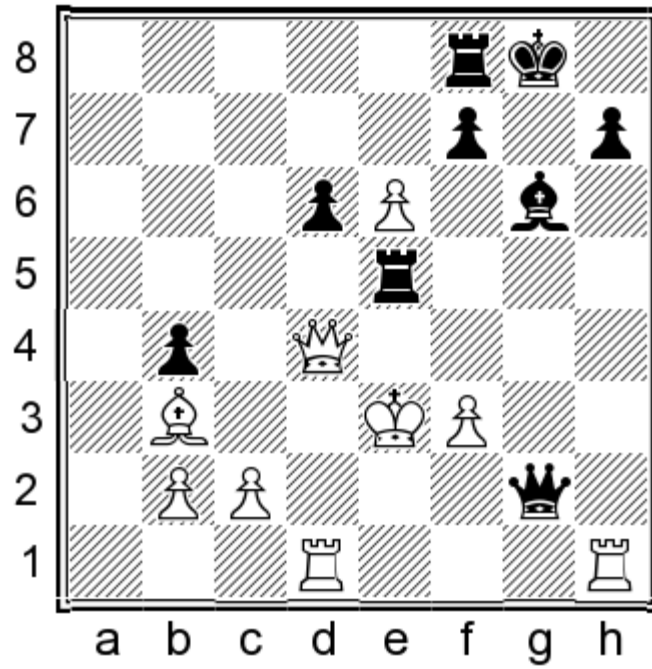
21.Qxb4 occurred in D. Ledger – R. Pert, Hastings 2011, and here I would continue with the normal queenside shuffle:
21...Rb8N 22.Qc3 (22.Qd4?! e5! 23.dxe6?! Rxb3!µ) 22...Qb6=

21...Rc5! 22.Kd2 e5

22...Qc8!?N is another interesting approach.

22...Qb6 is given an exclamation mark by Pavlovic, but I prefer to play ...e5 whenever possible in these lines. Here it might lead to a drawn endgame after an exciting sequence:

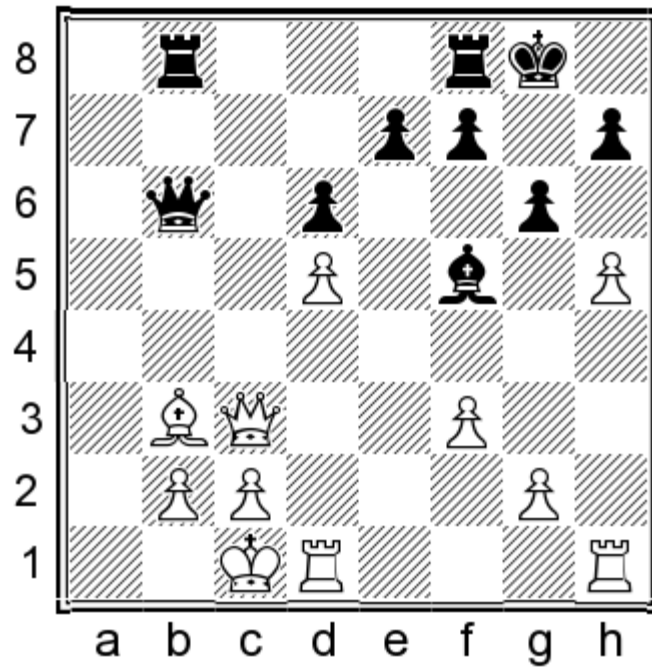
23.dxe6 Qg5† 24.Ke2 Qxg2† 25.Ke3 Re5†



26.Qxe5! dxe5 27.Rdg1 Qxg1† 28.Rxg1 fxe6 29.Rg5! Kf7 30.Rxe5 Re8=

20...Qc7

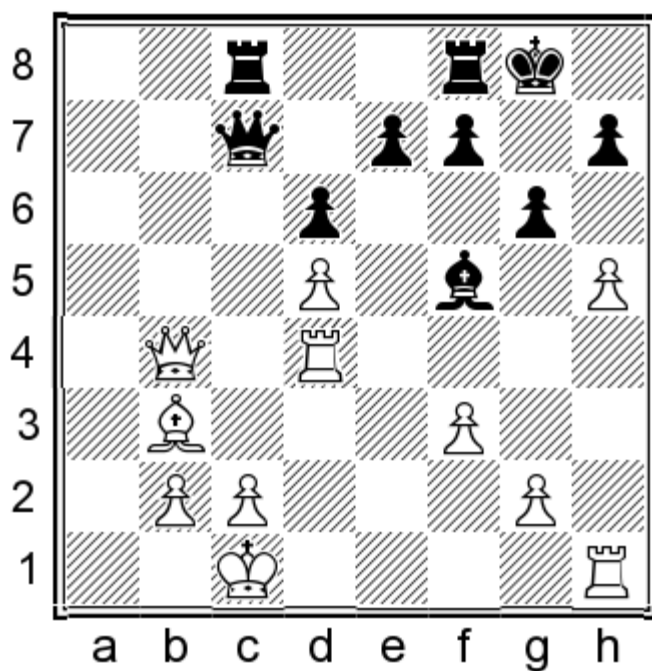
20...Rb8N 21.Qc3 Qb6



This is not so clear with the h-pawn still on the board, as White can try to annoy us with 22.h6.

21.Rd4

We have been following S. Kaplan – Kostopoulos, Kavala 2011. Black has more than one possible improvement:



21...Qa7!N

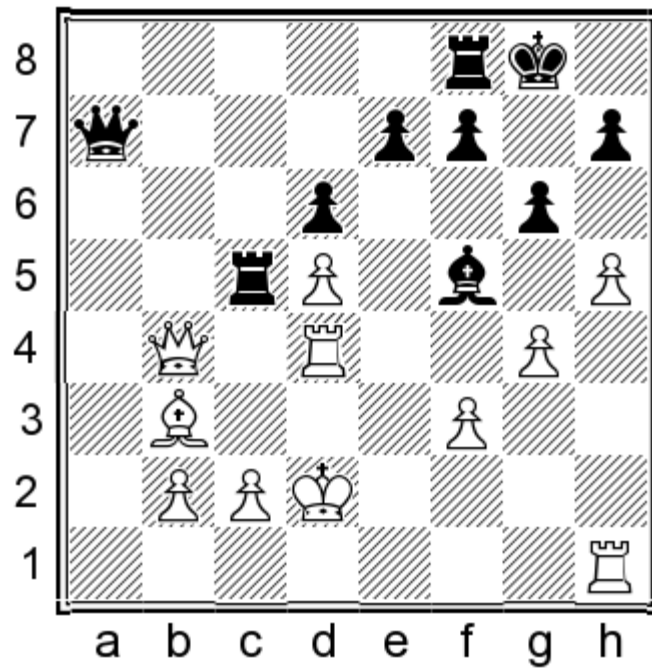
21...gxh5!?N was a suggestion of mine on ChessPublishing, but the queen move is trickier.

22.Kd2

After 22.Qa4 Qc5 White's pieces are quite awkwardly placed; he cannot repeat with 23.Qb4? as we have 23...Bxc2!
24.Qxc5 dxc5.

22...Rc5 23.g4

23.hxg6 Bxg6÷

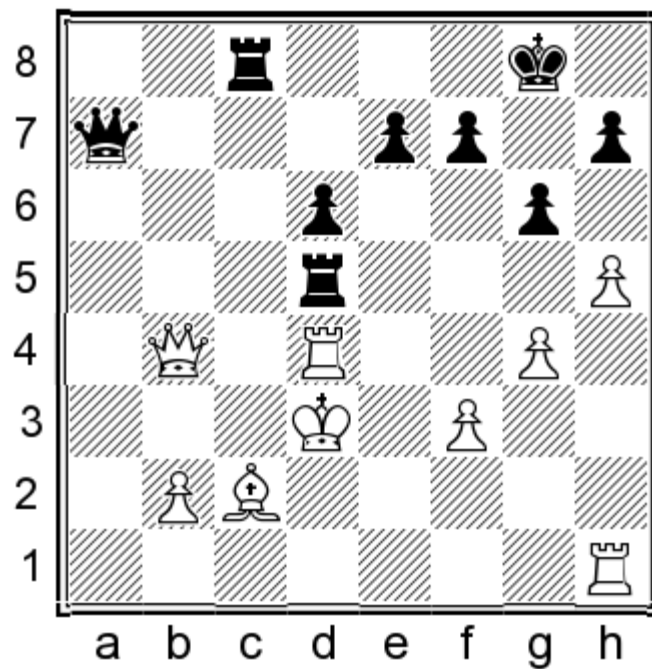


23...Rb8 24.Qa4 Ra5 25.Qc4 Rc8 26.Qb4

After nudging the queen around for a few moves, we now have the nice tactic:

26...Bxc2! 27.Bxc2 Rxd5! 28.Kd3

28.Rxd5? Qf2† 29.Kd1 Qxc2† 30.Ke1 Qc1† 31.Rd1 Qe3† 32.Kf1 Qxf3†--+



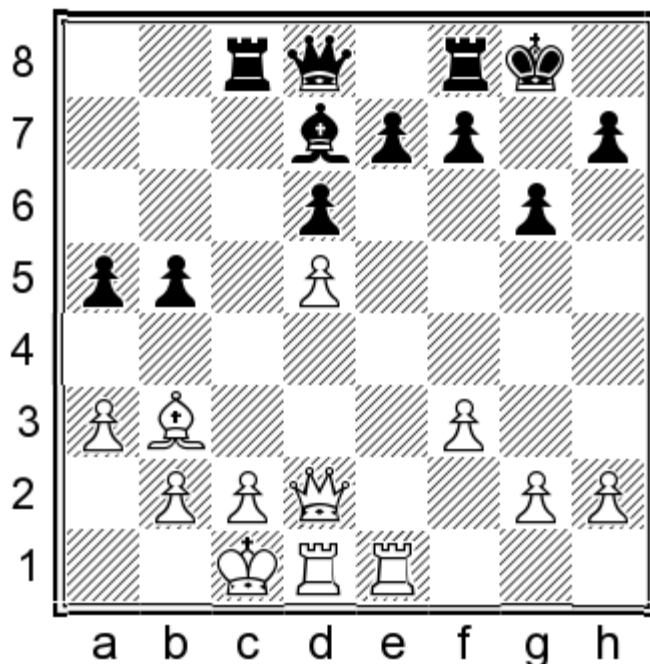
28...Rxd4†

28...Qa6†!? 29.Kd2 Rb5 is also possible if you wish to continue attacking.

29.Qxd4 Qxd4† 30.Kxd4 Rxc2³

Black's extra pawn gives him some winning chances in the ending, although we do need to watch out for White's passed b-pawn.

B23) 17.Rhe1



17...Rc5!

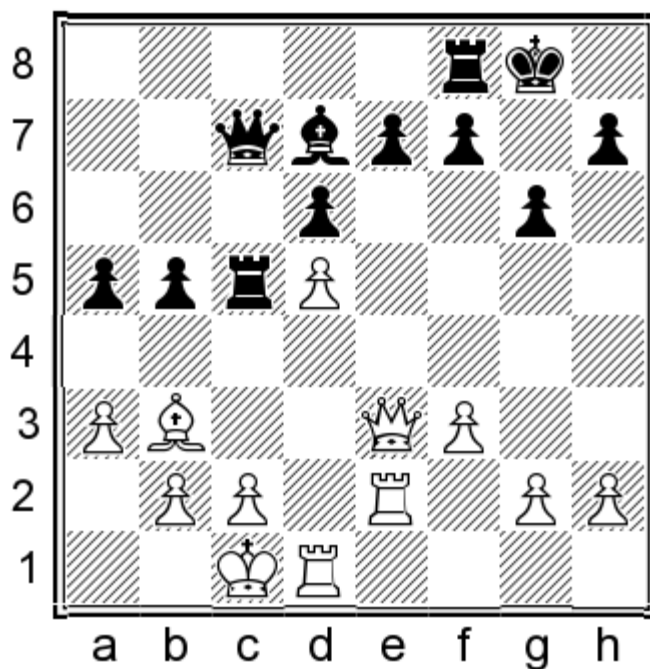
When I reached this position I muddled up my move order and played the immediate 17...b4. I subsequently got into some trouble in J. Polgar – Jones, London 2012, although I managed to draw in the end.

The rook move – which is not mentioned in Khalifman's repertoire book – is stronger. Since White has committed to a slower plan, we can spend a tempo strengthening our position before sacrificing the b-pawn.

We will start by analysing B231) 18.g4, which was Karjakin's attempt against Shirov, before moving on to B232) 18.Re3!. The latter move was favoured by Leko and Ganguly, both noted theoreticians, and I consider it the critical test of the Topalov Variation.

18.Kb1 b4 19.axb4 axb4 20.Qxb4 Re8 21.g4 Qa8 gave Black typical compensation in the Internet game, hugodave – wolfgang baller.

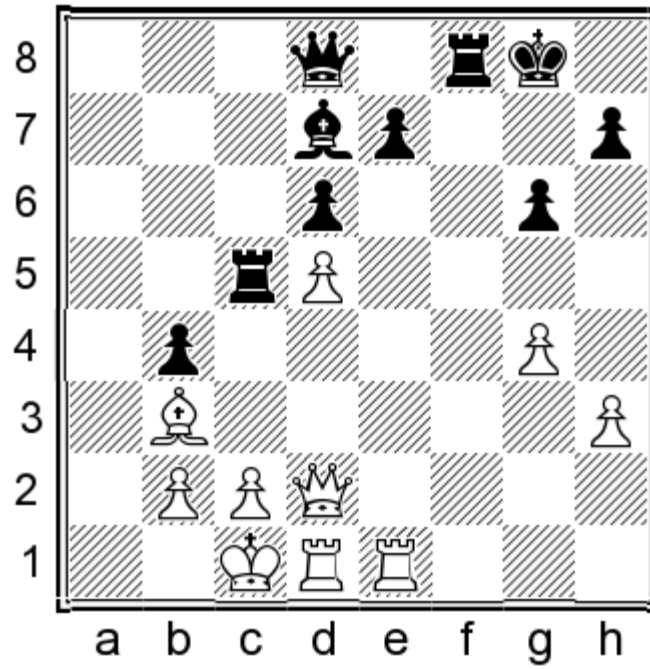
18.Qe3 was the sensible choice of a GM in a recent game. 18...Qc7 19.Re2 In Aroshidze – Oliva, Barbera del Valles 2014, Black's most straightforward equalizing plan would have been:



19...Re8N 20.Rd4 e5 21.dxe6 Bxe6 22.f4 (22.Re4 d5 23.Re5 Rc8=) 22...Bd7 23.Qd3 Rxe2 24.Qxe2 a4 25.Bd5 Bf5 26.Rd2 h5 27.h3 Qc8= Black's pressure against c2 compensates for the vulnerable d6-pawn.

B231) 18.g4 b4

18...f5!? is another interesting plan and one that the engines have been trying. Black will still ultimately give up his b-pawn but first he wants an open file for his other rook. 19.h3 fxg4 20.fxg4 b4 21.axb4 axb4



22.Qxb4 (22.Qe3 didn't get White anywhere either: 22...Ra5 23.Kd2 Bb5 24.Ra1 Rxa1 25.Rxa1 Rf7 26.Re1 Qa8 27.h4 Bd7 28.g5 Qa6= newton296 – solidor, engine game 2012.) 22...Rf3 23.Kb1 Qa8 24.Qd4 Ra5 25.c3 Ra7 Practice has demonstrated that Black has enough pressure for the sacrificed pawn; see, for instance, Houdini 2.0 – Houdini 2.0, engine game 2011.

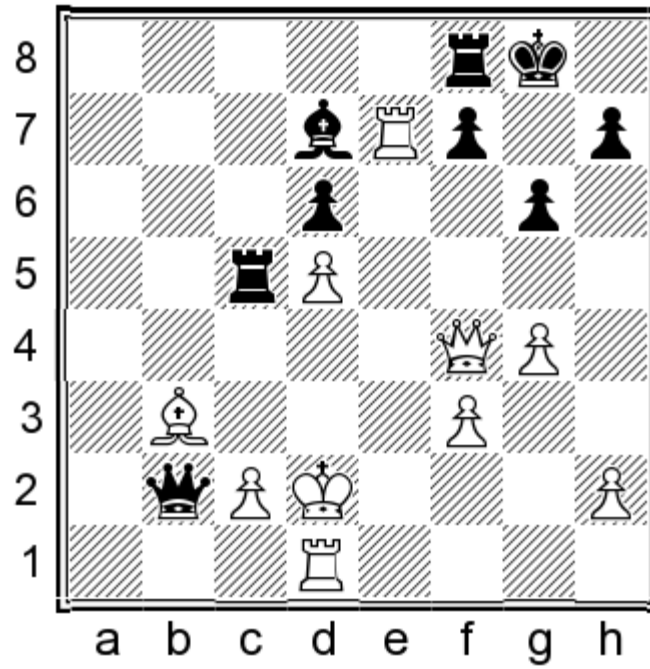
19.axb4 axb4 20.Qxb4 Qa8

Black's pressure down the three queenside files compensates fully for the sacrificed pawn.

21.Kd2

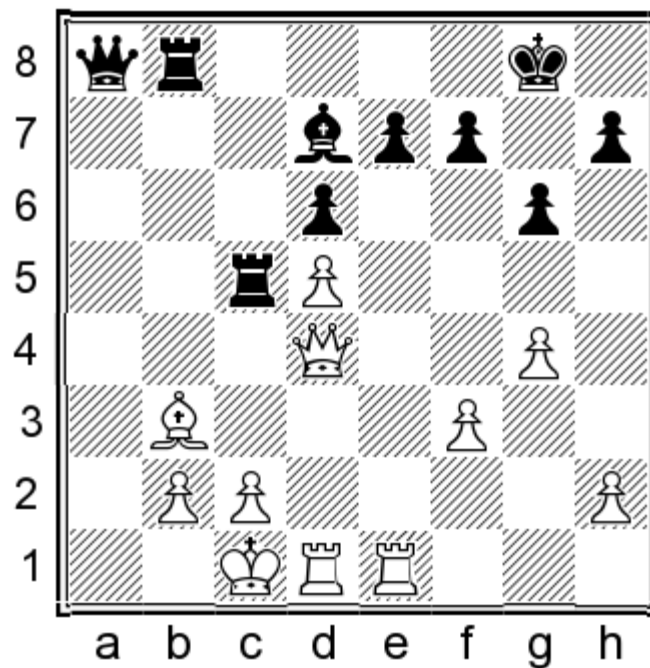
21.Rd3 Qa1† 22.Kd2 Qxb2 23.Qd4 was already agreed drawn in Pineda – M. Silva, email 2012.

21.Rxe7N is a more I previously considered critical but evidently players have decided it is too dangerous. On ChessPublishing I gave: 21...Qa1† 22.Kd2 Qxb2 23.Qf4 (23.Rxd7? loses to 23...Rxc2†! 24.Kd3 Rfc8 with mate to follow)

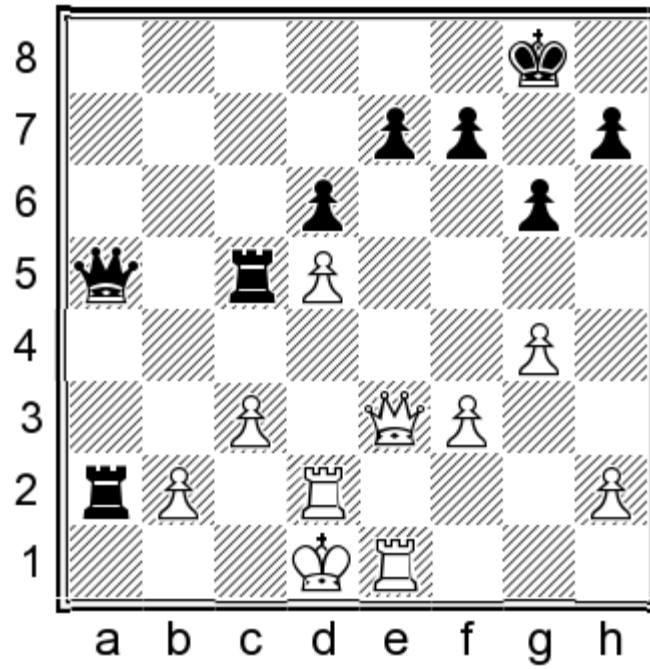


23...Bb5 24.Ke1 Rc3 25.h4 Bc4! The engine gives this as equal but in practice the position is likely to be trickier for White with his king roaming the open board. 26.Bxc4 Qb4 Black regains the bishop and is likely to pick up the c-pawn.

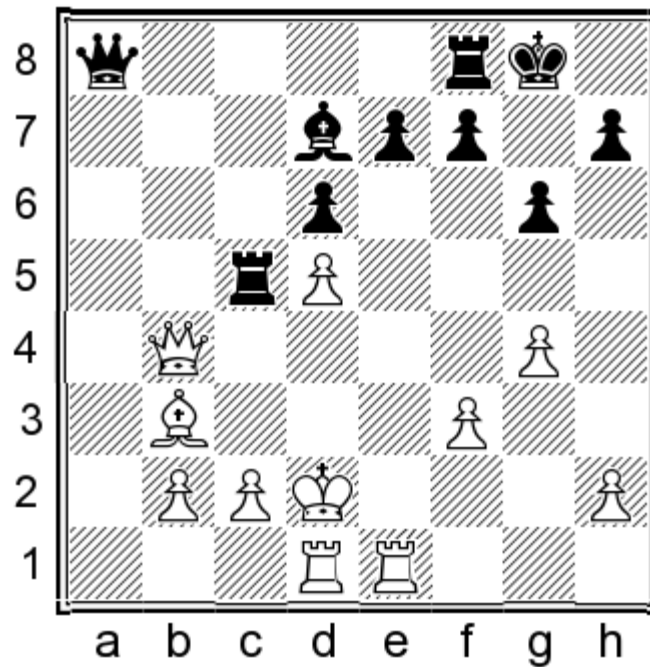
Another game continued: 21.Qd4 Rb8



22.Rd3 Qa1+ 23.Kd2 Qa5+ 24.Kd1 Rb4 25.Qe3 Ba4 26.Bxa4 Rxa4 27.c3 Ra2 28.Rd2 In Moreno Tejera – Asis Gargatagli, Navalmoral 2012, Black took the d5-pawn but it would have been more accurate to play:



28...Rb5!N Forcing White to open the second rank. 29.b4 Qa4† 30.Ke2 Rxd5--+ The vulnerability of White's king will be the deciding factor.



21...Rb8

21...e5!?

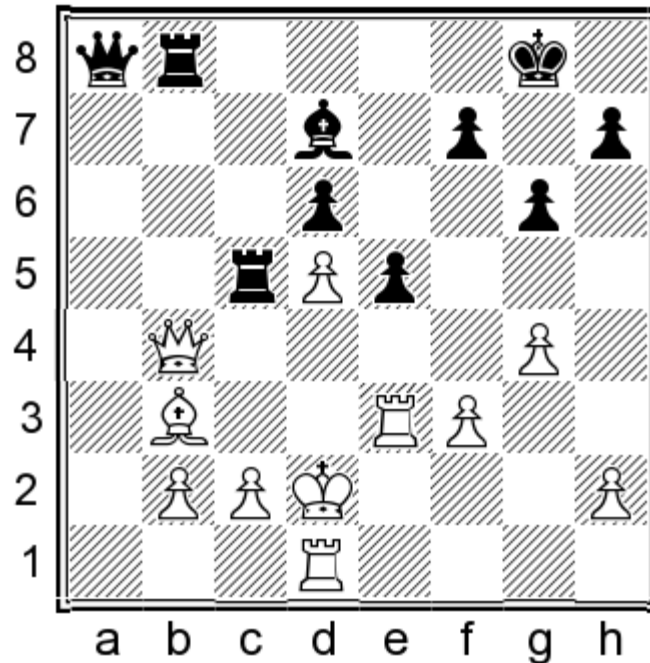
The runner-up in this year's Women's World Championship chose this move, presumably to keep more life in the position against her lower-rated opponent. The game continued:

22.Re3?!

22.Ra1!N looks to be White's best, but Black still has good counterplay following 22...Qd8 23.Rxe5 Qf6 24.Re4 Qxf3 25.Qd4 Bb5.

22...Rb8

22...Qa7!N followed by ...f5 would have been promising for Black.



23.Qa3?

23.Ra1! was necessary, with rough equality after 23...Rxd5† 24.Rd3 Rxd3† 25.cxd3 Qb7.

Now in Umudova – Pogonina, Batumi 2012, Black could have won with:

23...Ra5!N 24.Qxd6 Rxb3! 25.Rxb3 Rxd5†

With decisive material gains.

22.Ra1

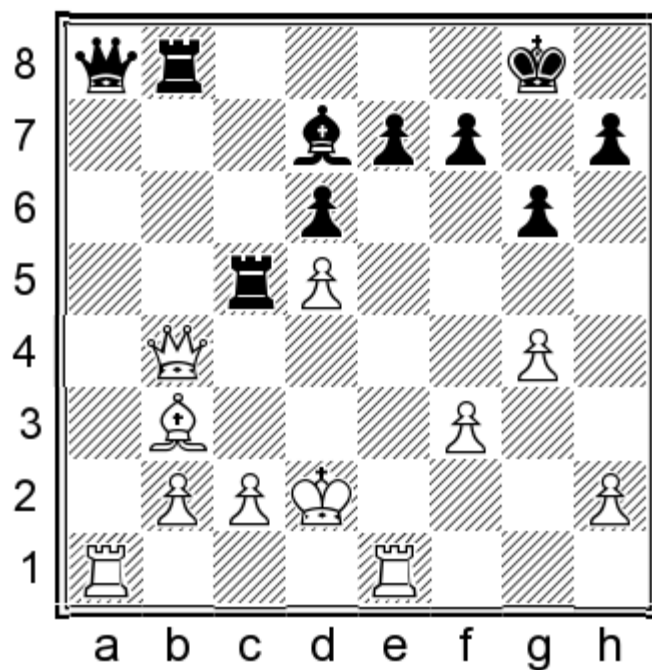
Karjakin wisely steers the game towards a draw.

22.Qd4? loses the queen to 22...Rxb3!, just as we saw in the previous note.

22.Qe4?! Qa5† 23.Ke2 e5! 24.Kf2 f5! would grant Black a huge initiative, as I noted on ChessPublishing.

22.Qf4 is White's best try if he wishes to prolong the game but his position is precarious. After 22...Rxb3! 23.cxb3

Qxd5† 24.Ke2 Qxb3 Black has good compensation for the exchange, as I noted on ChessPublishing.



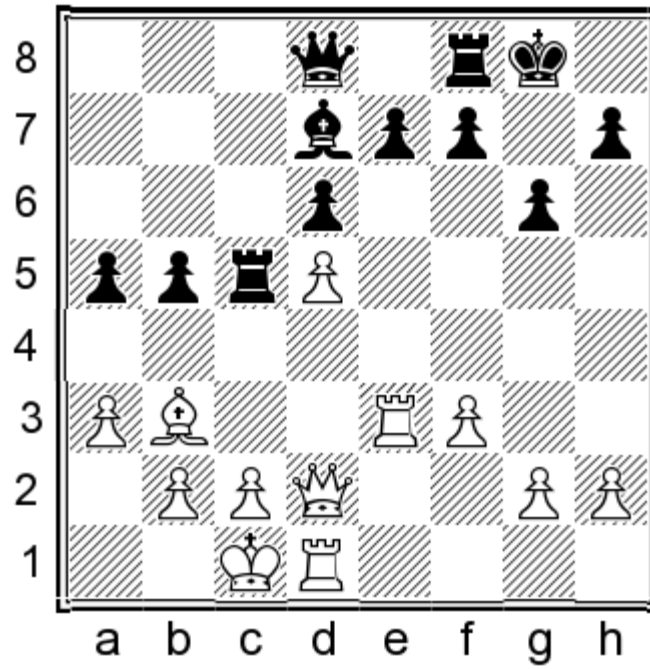
22...Rxd5†

22...Qxd5†N 23.Bxd5 Rxb4 24.Bb3 is also equal, but enables Black to keep the game going if he wishes.

23.Ke3 Re5† 24.Kd2

½–½ Karjakin – Shirov, Bilbao 2009. White has to accept the draw as 24.Kf2? allows 24...Qxf3†! 25.Kxf3 Rxb4μ.

B232) 18.Re3!



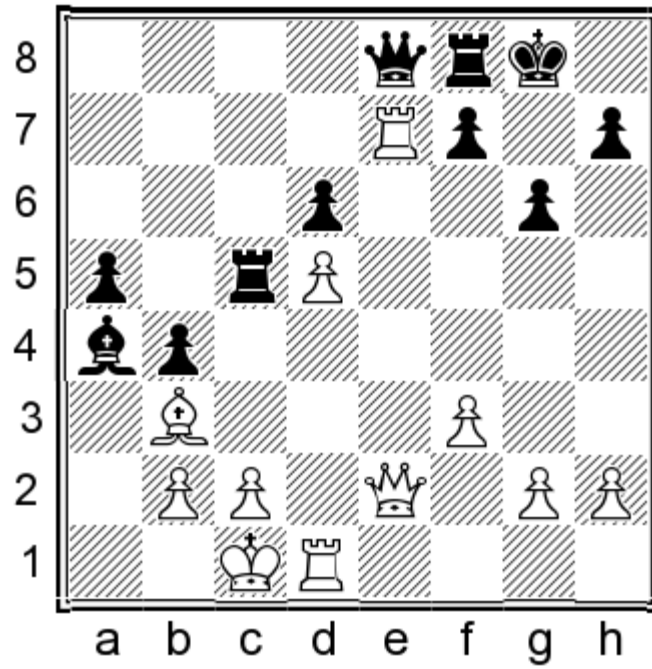
White prepares to double on the e-file, while the rook also does a good job protecting the bishop once the b-file is opened.

18...b4

Black should not delay his counterplay any longer.

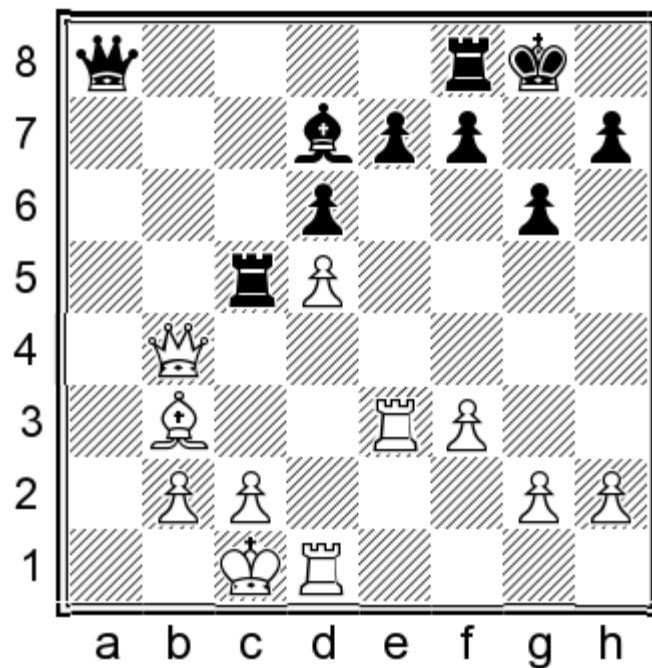
19.axb4

19.a4!?N As we saw in the notes to variation B22, White can also decline the pawn offering. Pavlovic offers the following: 19...Qe8 20.Qe2 (20.Rde1? Bxa4 21.Rxe7 Qxe7 [Pavlovic gives 21...Qb5 which also looks good for Black] 22.Rxe7 Bxb3μ) 20...Bxa4 21.Rxe7



21...Qxe7! 22.Qxe7 Bxb3 23.Rd2 Rfc8 24.Kd1 Rxc2 25.Rxc2 Rxc2 26.Ke1 Rc5 27.Qxd6 Rxd5 Pavlovic's line results in what should be a drawn ending.

19...axb4 20.Qxb4 Qa8



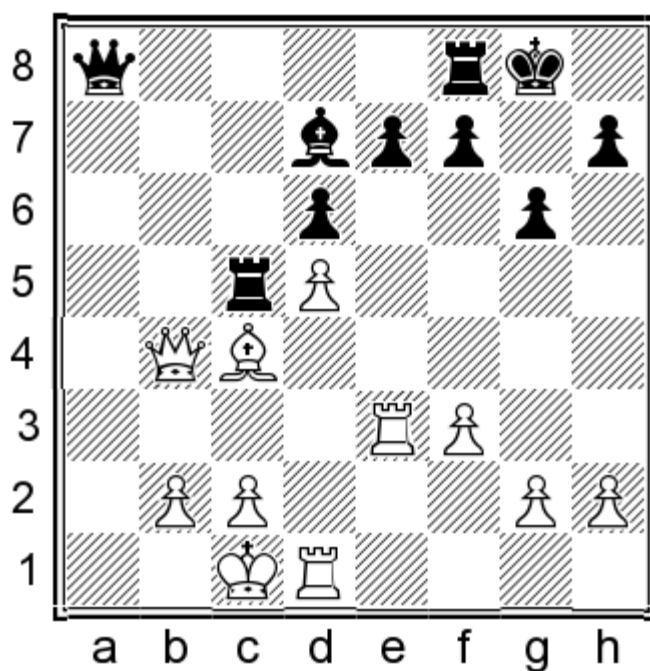
The position is similar to variations B21 and B223, but this is a better version for White. The e3-rook covers the third rank and gives some cover for his king. White has two major plans: he may either run his king over to the kingside or try and consolidate its safety on the queenside. Black should be patient and keep up the pressure, almost in the style of the Benko Gambit.

B2321) 21.Bc4 is one critical option but the main line is B2322) 21.Kd2.

Pavlovic notes that 21.Rxe7?! Qa1† 22.Kd2 Qxb2 gives Black good counterplay.

21.Qd4 Rb8 22.Rxe7 (22.Kd2 transposes to variation B2322) is simply a forced draw: 22...Rxb3 23.Rxd7 Qa1† 24.Kd2 Qa5† 25.Kc1 Qa1† ½–½ Seyb – Fedorovsky, Wunsiedel 2012.

B2321) 21.Bc4



White clears the third rank for a rook swing and attempts to block the c-file.

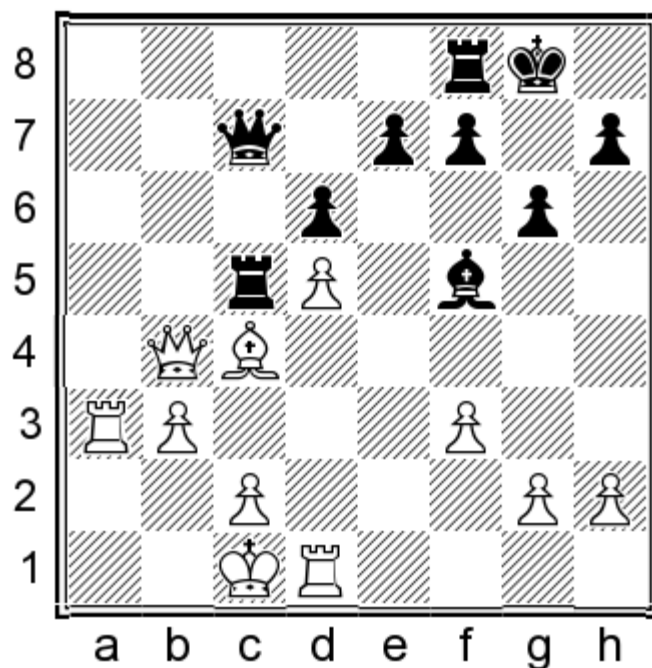
21...Bf5

21...Rb8? would now fail to 22.Ra3±.

22.Ra3

The e-pawn is still distinctly poisoned: 22.Rxe7? Rfc8 23.Rd4 Qa1† 24.Kd2 Qg1 25.Qc3 Ra5μ Kover – Walter, email 2010.

22...Qc8 23.b3 Qc7



Comparing this to the positions under variation B2322, White now has control of the a-file. However, the a3-rook might prove to be misplaced if we can arrange a suitable break in the centre. We have reached a final branching point where White can choose B23211) 24.Ra6!? or B23212) 24.Qd2.

B23211) 24.Ra6!?

This was seen in an email game which we will follow for a few moves.

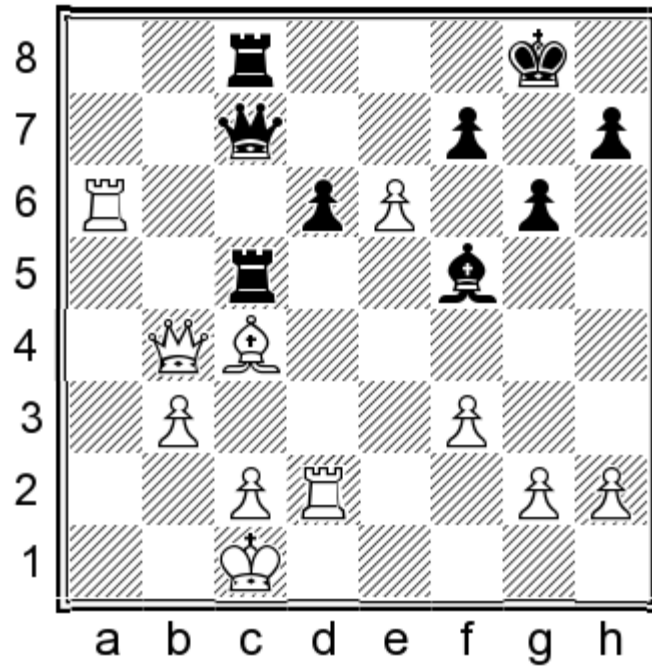
24...Rb8

Also interesting is:

24...Rc8!?N 25.Rd2

25.g4 Rb8! It is useful for Black to have encouraged White to create a few holes on the kingside. 26.Qa4 Bd7 27.Qa2 Bb5 28.Bxb5 Rxb5 29.Rc6 Qb8 30.Rxc5 dxc5©

25...e6 26.dxe6



26...d5!

You should always be on the lookout for this idea.

27.e7!

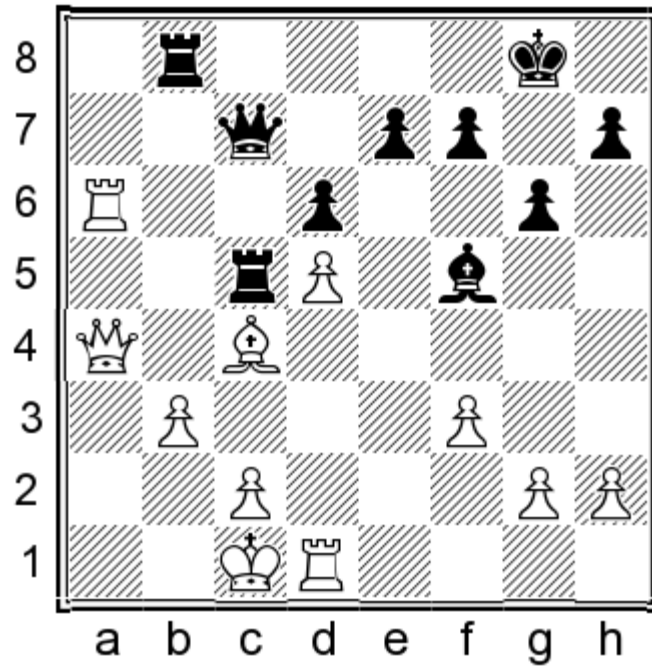
An extremely messy position! Best play seems to be:

27...Re8 28.g4 Bxc2 29.Rxd5 Rxd5 30.Bxd5 Bd3† 31.Rc6 Qe5©

The e7-pawn will drop and I think White's king is too exposed for him to be able to exploit the extra pawn.

25.Qa4

Here I would like to recommend an improvement.



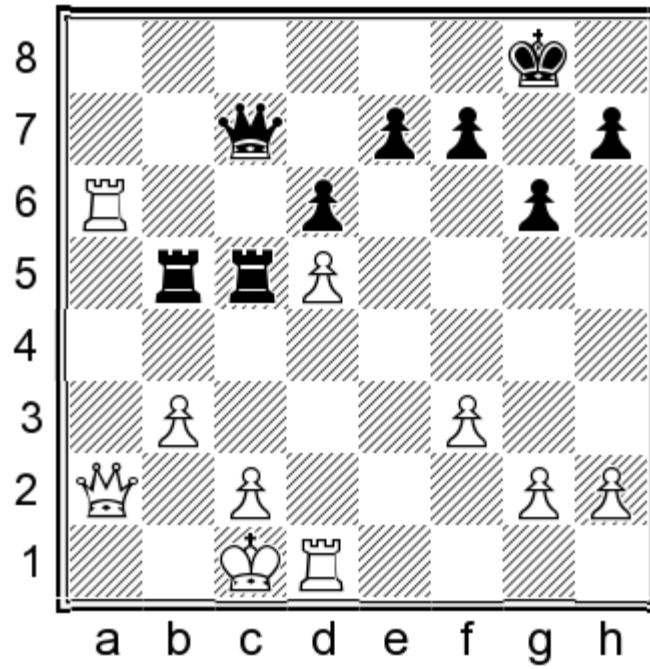
25...Bd7!N

25...e5 led to a quick draw: 26.dxe6 Bxe6 27.Ra7 Qc8 28.Qa6 $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ Van der Haak – Coplin, email 2009. The problem is that 26.Rc6!N looks to favour White: 26...Qd8 27.Rxc5 Ra8 (27...dxc5 28.Qa1!) 28.Rc6! Rxa4 29.bxa4 Perhaps Black has enough play here too but I would be worried about the passed a-pawn.

26.Qa2

26.Qa1 looks more natural but now 26...e5! works well for Black.

26...Bb5 27.Bxb5 Rbxb5



28.Rc6!

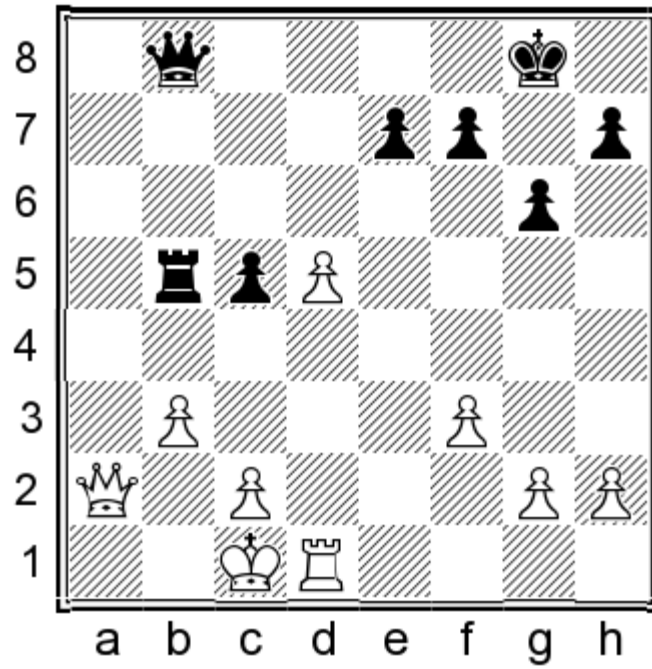
28.c4 Ra5 29.Ra8† Kg7 30.Rxa5 Rxa5 31.Qb2† f6©

28...Qb8!

28...Rxc6 29.Qa8† Kg7 (29...Rb8 30.Qxc6 Qa5) 30.Qxc6 Qxc6 31.dxc6 Rb6 32.c4 Rxc6 33.Kb2² should probably be a draw but Black will have to suffer.

29.Rxc5 dxc5!

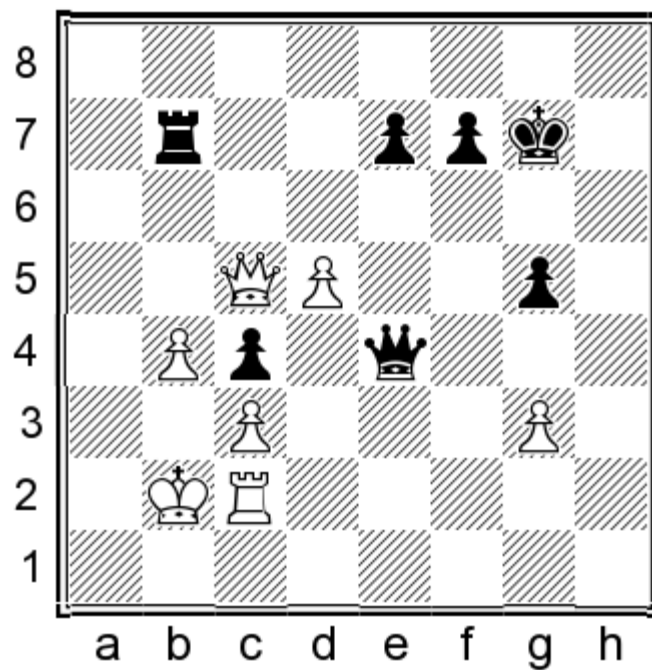
Opening up lines for the queen and ensuring that the b-pawn is no longer passed.



30.Qa4 Rb4 31.Qa5 Qe5 32.Kb1 Qe2 33.Rc1 Qe3 34.Kb2 Kg7

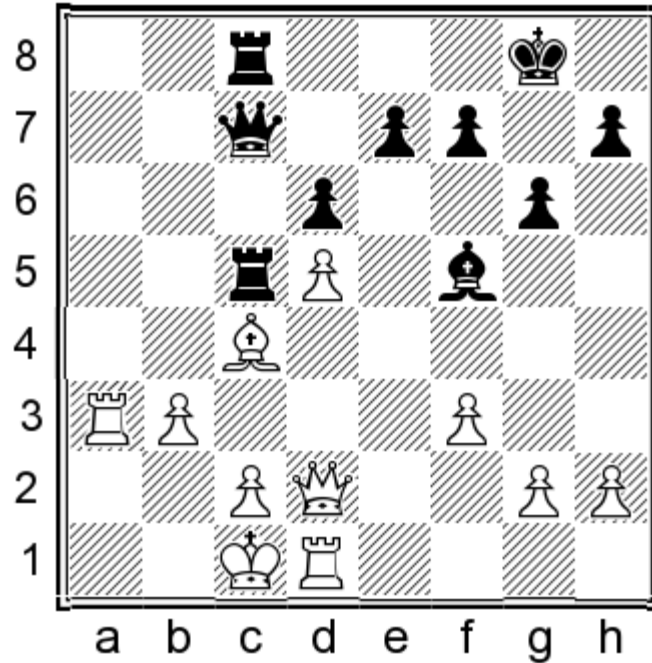
Black's pieces are a lot more active than their counterparts, so I think Black should draw without too many difficulties. One potential line runs:

35.g3 g5 36.c3 Rb7 37.Rc2 c4 38.b4 Qxf3 39.Qc5 Qe4 40.h4 h6 41.hxg5 hxg5



42.d6 f6 43.dxe7 Rxe7=

B23212) 24.Qd2 Rc8

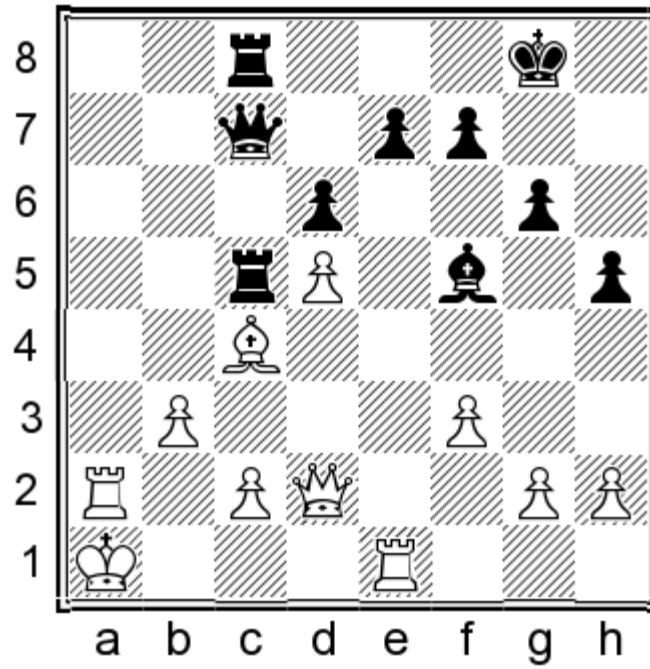


We have reached another fairly typical position for this line. White has kept his extra pawn and defended against the immediate threats. However, it is not easy for him to make any progress as Black has so much pressure. I think in a perfectly-played game the result would be a draw and in an over-the-board game Black would have good practical chances.

25.Qd4

Other moves do not change the assessment:

25.Kb2 Rb8 26.Ka1 h5 27.Ra2 Rc8 28.Re1 At this point, rather than keeping passing, Black decided to liven things up:



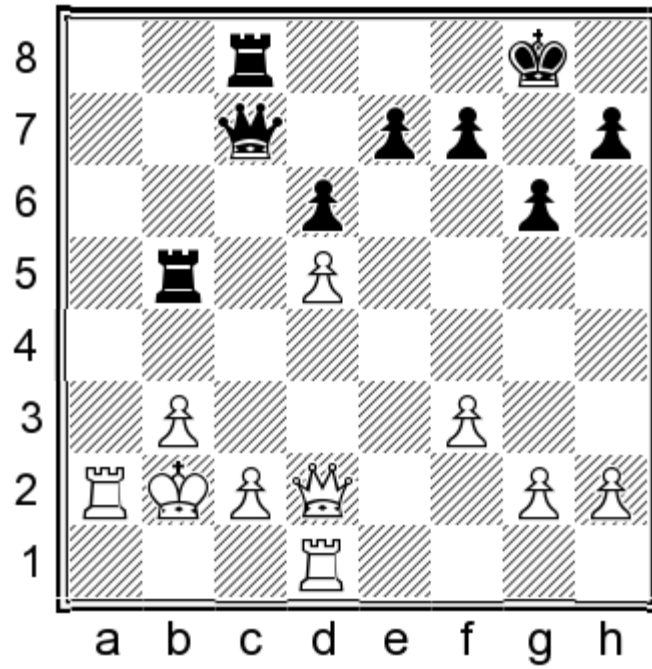
28...Rxc4!? 29.bxc4 Qxc4 30.Ra3 Qc5 31.Ra5 Qc7 32.Rd1 Kh7 33.Ra3 Qc5 34.Ra2 e5 35.dxe6 Bxe6© Black had enough pressure to hold the draw fairly comfortably in the Internet game, dead_in_thewater – eroe inrico, even if the game did last 245 moves!

25.Ra4 Bd7 26.Ra2 Bb5

Trading bishops is a double-edged decision. White's bishop was not doing much on c4 but it was blocking the c-file and preventing our counterplay. Now we can try putting pressure on both c2 and d5.

27.Bxb5 Rxb5 28.Kb2

28.Qd3 was seen in derecho – the_godfather, engine game 2013, and now I recommend 28...Qb6N to keep White's king on the queenside.



28...Rc5 29.Kb1 Rc3 30.Re1 Qb7 31.Re4 R8c5 32.Rd4 Qb5 33.Qe1 Kg7 34.Rd2

Nightingale – Rook, corr. 2012. Here Black should have kept waiting with:

34...Qb7N

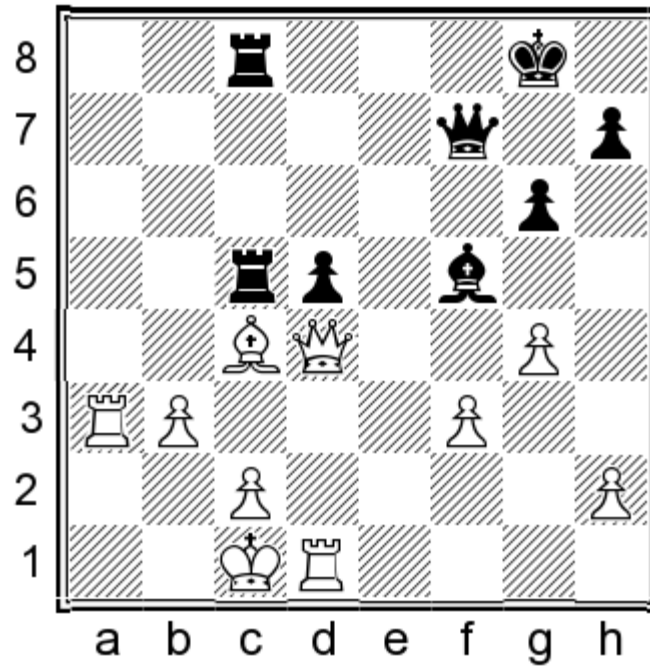
White has not made any progress in the past few moves; I think the position is probably just a draw.

25...e6 26.dxe6 d5!

Fighting to open the c-file.

27.exf7† Qxf7 28.g4

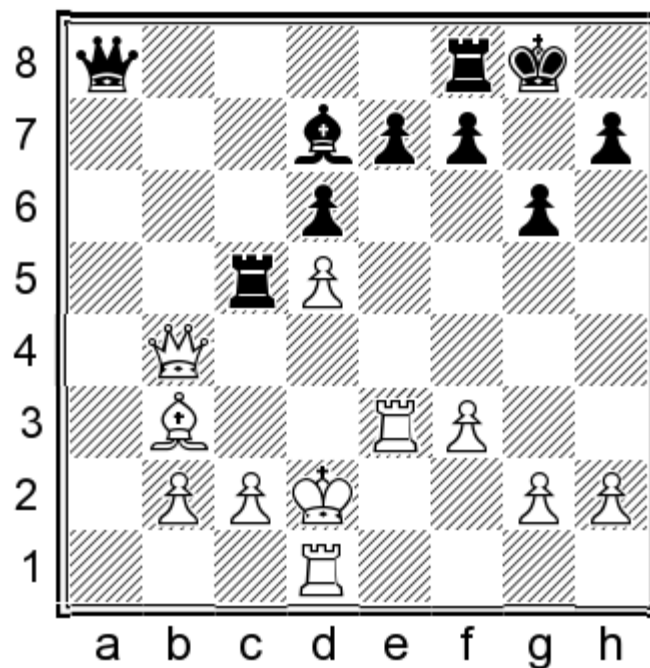
28.Bd3? allows 28...Rxc2†!.



28...Bxc2 29.Kxc2 Rxc4+ 30.bxc4 Rxc4+ 31.Qxc4 dxc4

This position has been reached in some engine games, all of which were drawn. There simply aren't enough pawns left for White to have any significant winning chances.

B2322) 21.Kd2



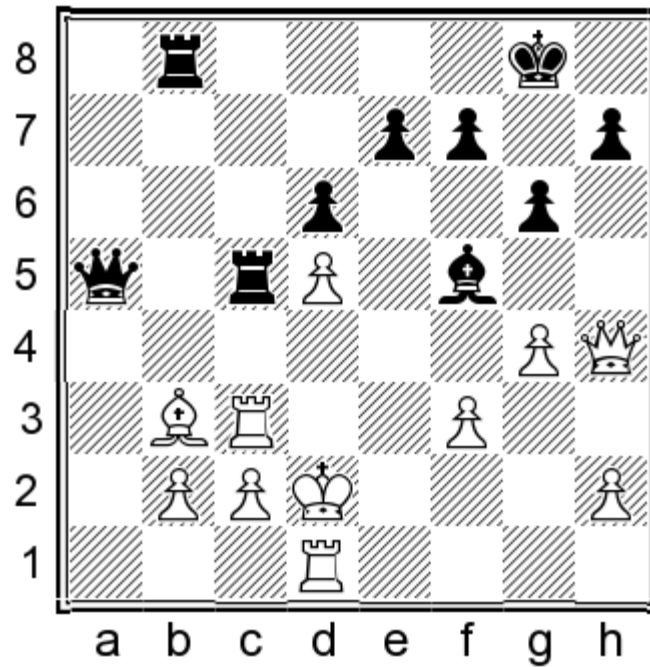
This time White decides on running his king.

21...Rb8 22.Qd4

This is the best square for the white queen, both defending the d5-pawn and preparing to trade a pair of rooks with Rc3.

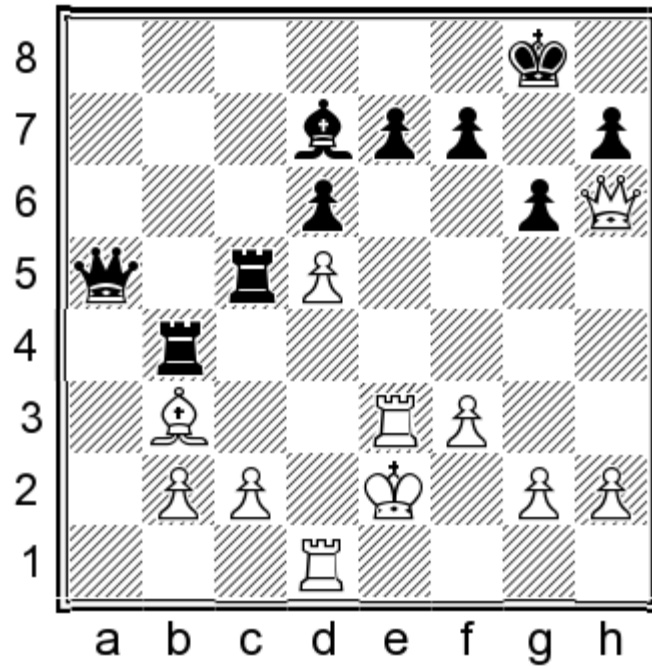
22.Ra1? would allow the idea we saw in Karjakin – Shirov with 22...Rxd5†!.

22.Qh4 Bf5 23.Rc3 Qa5 24.g4? This position was seen recently in Pacher – Baumegger, Vienna 2015, when Black missed a great opportunity:

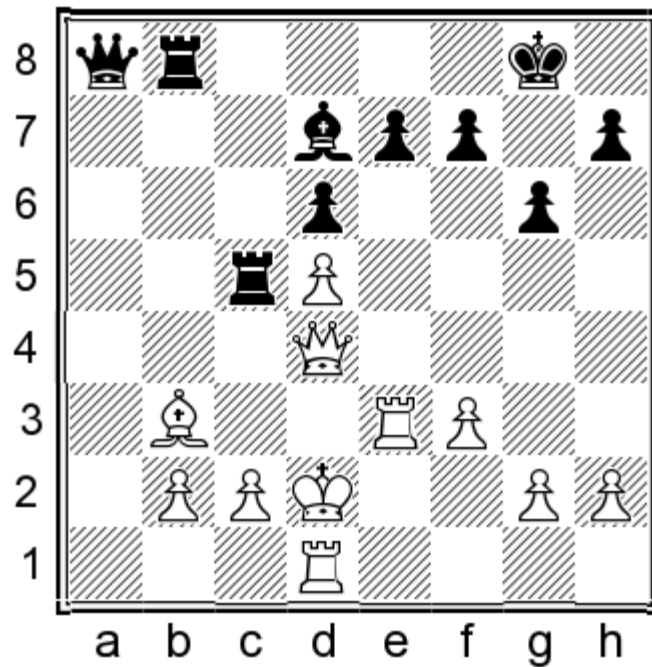


24...Bxc2!N 25.Kxc2 Qb4 White has no way to defend his bishop, so Black crashes through. This game is a good indication of the practical difficulties facing White; he must constantly be on his guard against various tactics.

22.Qf4 Qa5† (As I previously indicated on ChessPublishing, 22...Bf5!?N also looks fine for Black, as 23.Rxe7 Qa5† 24.Ke2 Qd8! forces White to repeat: 25.Ra7 [25.Re3? Bxc2–+] 25...Qb6 26.Re7=) 23.Ke2 Rb4 24.Qh6



24...Qa7 25.Re1 This was Schwarz – Loetscher, Germany 2012, and here Black could have regained material while keeping a good position with 25...Ba4!N.



22...Qa5†!

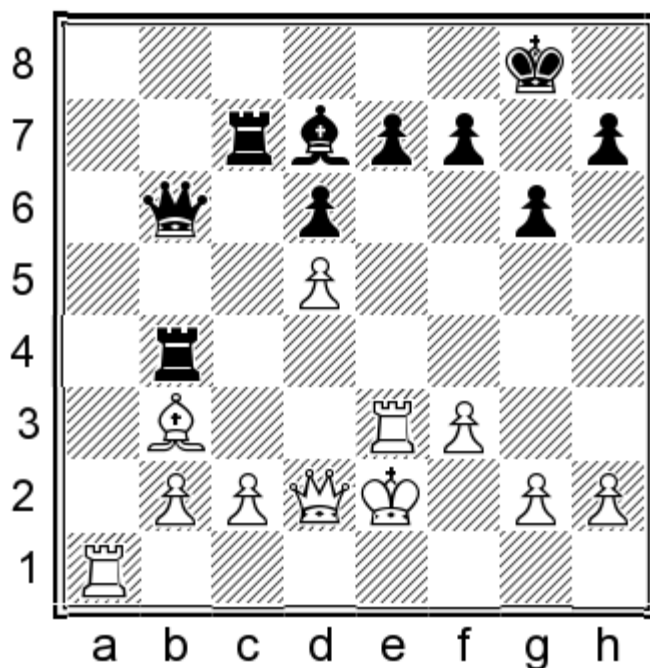
This check prevents White from trading a pair of rooks.

23.Ke2

23.Rc3? loses to 23...Rxb3! 24.cxb3 Rxd5.

23...Rb4 24.Qd2 Qb6 25.Ra1 Rc7

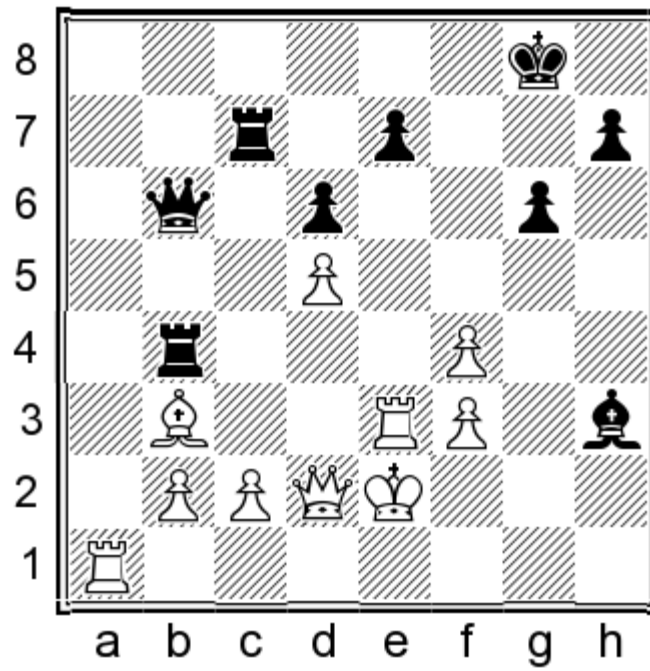
25...Rc8 was played in Ganguly – Konguvel, Dresden 2012. Black held on for a draw in that game, but I think guarding the e7-pawn is more important than worrying about the back rank.



26.Kf1

White continues his king's odyssey.

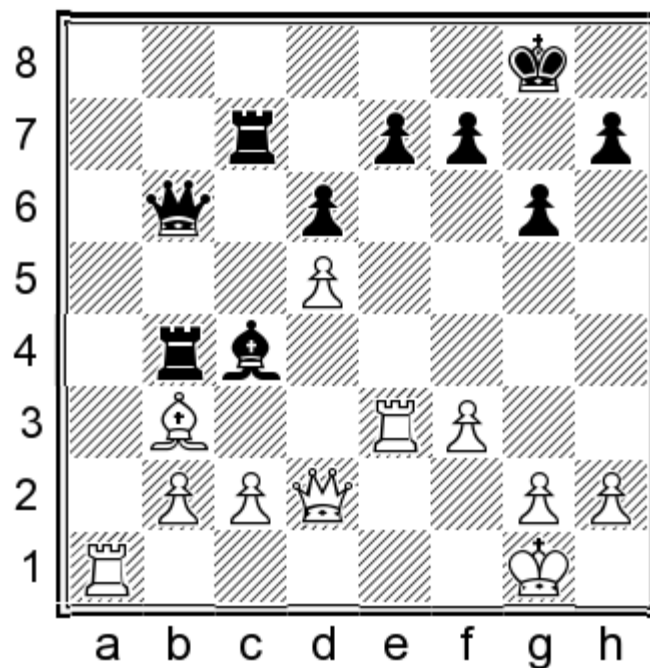
26.h3!? is an odd move, somewhat typical of engine chess! Here Stockfish flashes up 26...f5!N which looks to give Black good counterplay, for example: 27.g3 f4 28.gxf4 Bxh3÷



White's structure is ugly and we can now count on long-term counterplay with the passed h-pawn, as well as pressure against White's king.

26...Bb5† 27.Kf2

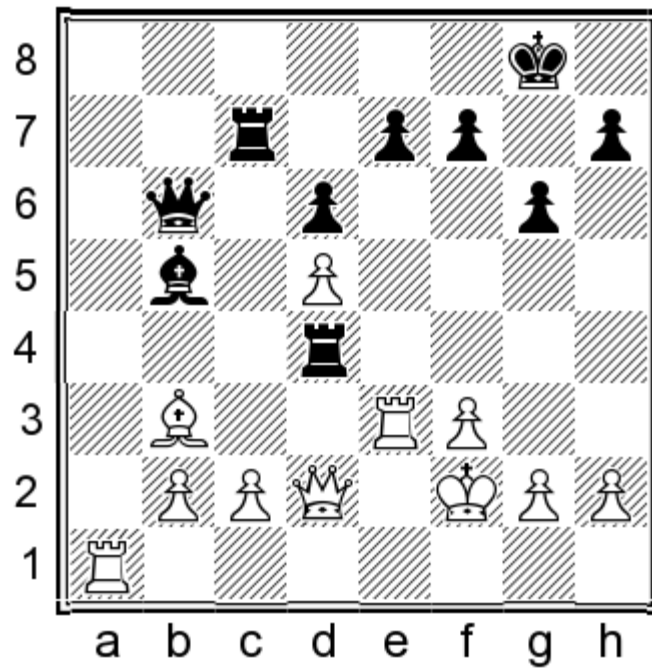
27.Kg1?! N is almost a successful completion of White's plan but 27...Bc4! solves all of Black's problems:



28.Bxc4?! (28.Ra3 is better but 28...Rb5! still regains the pawn) 28...Rcxc4µ White's problem is that the rook on e3 is no longer defended by his king, so both the b2- and c2-pawns are hanging.

27...Rd4

Continuing to hassle White.



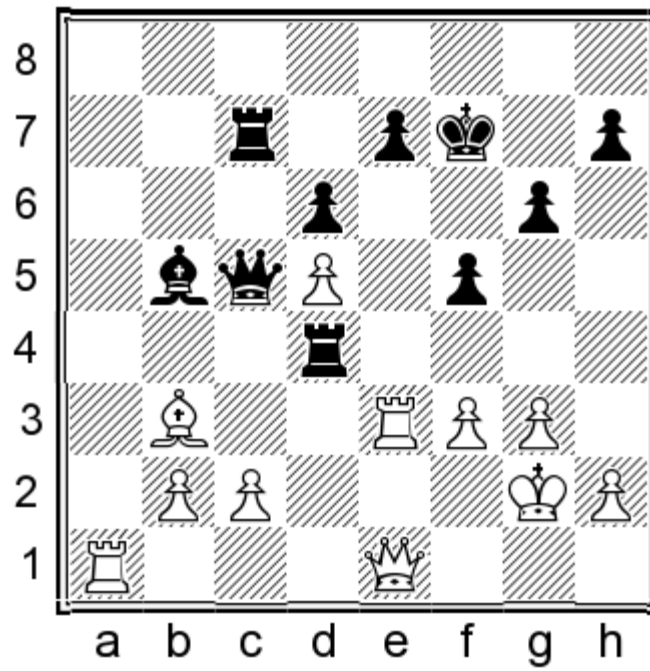
28.Qa5 Qc5 29.Qe1 f5!?

This is the most active approach, striving to keep the initiative.

29...Bc4 is also possible. After 30.Bxc4 Rxc4 31.c3 Rb7 32.Qd2 Rb3 Black will just try to sit on the position and prevent White from mobilizing his extra pawn.

30.g3 Kf7 31.Kg2

31.Rd1N 31...Ba6 32.f4 h5!? 33.h4 Bb5= also grants Black sufficient play. White may have kept his extra pawn but he has no way to utilize it.



31...Bc4!

The d5-pawn is dropping.

32.Bxc4

32.Rc3 Qxd5= does not change much.

32...Rxc4 33.c3 Qxd5 34.b3 R4c6 35.c4 Qd4 36.Rd1 Qc5

½–½ Riccio – Ham, corr. 2012.

Conclusion

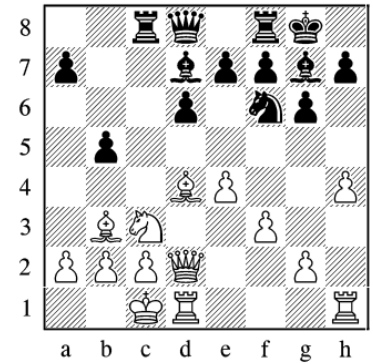
We spent a while in the early part of the chapter getting acquainted with some typical ideas and seeing some of the problems facing Black in the 16...Qb6 variation. Having done that, we focused on the more promising 16...Kg8!, when White has two major options.

17.h4 is an aggressive choice but Black's queenside play generally arrives quickly. Remember that our bishop is usefully placed on f5, where it guards our own king while putting pressure on White's. Watch out for ...Bxc2 ideas!

The main line is 17.Rhe1. If White knows his theory he can reach a position with an extra pawn, but he will remain under some pressure. It is hardly surprising that most human players have declined to play this way, as one slip from White can leave him in a lost position. Even in engine-versus-engine games Black has scored a few wins, although most have been drawn. From a theoretical perspective I don't think Black should have to suffer too much to hold the draw, and in a practical game I would rate his chances as equal.

Chapter 8

Topalov Variation



13.h4

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Nxd4 12.Be3xd4 b5 13.h4

13...a5

A) 14.Bxf6?!

B) 14.e5

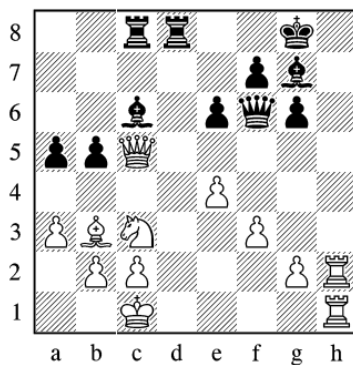
C) 14.a3

D) 14.h5 a4 15.Bxf6 Bxf6!? 16.hxg6 e6! 17.e5! Bg7! 18.Rxh7 Bxe5 19.Rdh1 fxg6

D1) 20.Bd5!?

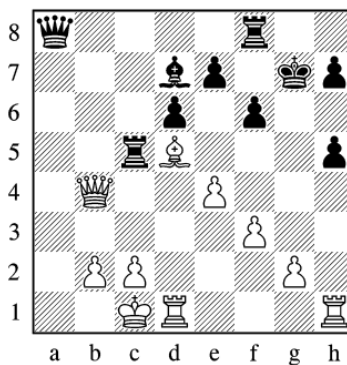
D2) 20.Nd5!?N

A) after 21.Qc5



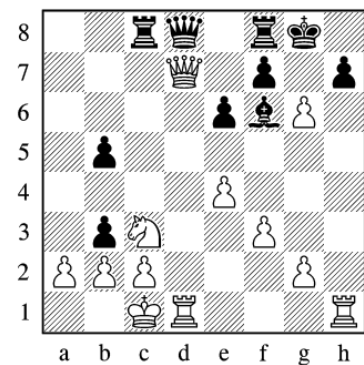
21...Qd5!N

C) note to 16.Na2



22...Qa1†!N

D) note to 17.e5!



18...Qxd7N

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Nxd4

12.Bxd4 b5 13.h4

This is White's most aggressive approach. The race is on!

13...a5

We will examine four main options, the last of which is by far the most critical: A) 14.Bxf6?!, B) 14.e5, C) 14.a3 and D) 14.h5.

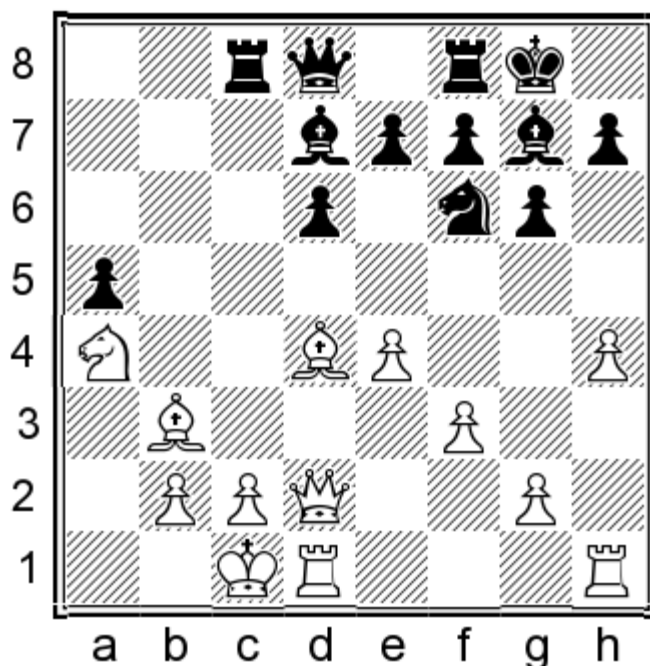
14.a4?

This has been seen surprisingly often but it is simply a blunder.

14...bxa4 15.Nxa4

Normally White continues blindly with this recapture.

One strong GM realized his mistake and tried to change the course of the game with: 15.Ba2 a3 16.h5 axb2† 17.Kxb2 Ortiz Suarez – Ibarra Chami, Villahermosa 2014. Here Chris Ward suggests the sensible 17...Be6N giving the possible continuation: 18.Bxe6 fxe6 19.hxg6 hxg6 20.Qg5?! Rc4 21.Qxg6 Rxd4! 22.Rxd4 Qb6†–+



15...Bxa4! 16.Bxa4 Rc4

Only here does White discover his dilemma.

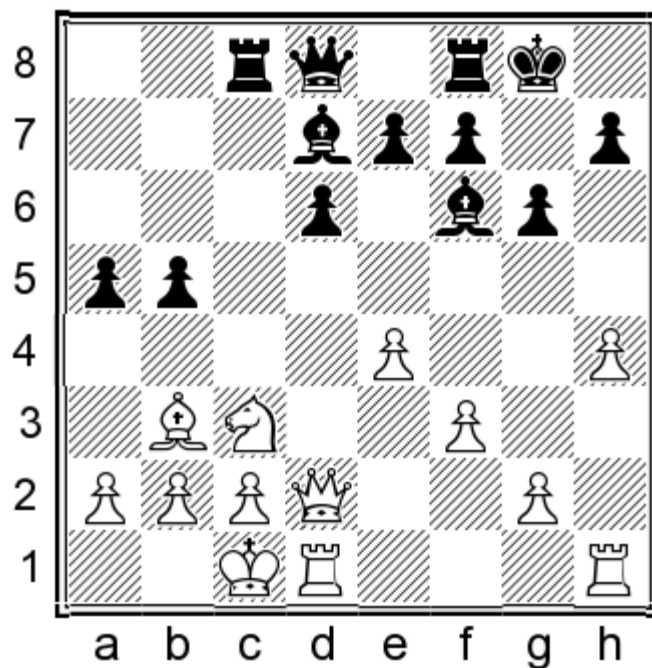
17.Bb3

17.Bxf6? makes matters even worse: 17...Bxf6 18.Bb3 Qb6 19.Qd3 Rd4 20.Qe2 a4 21.c3 axb3 22.cxd4 Rc8† 23.Kd2 Rc2†–+ Rudolf – Fruebing, Budapest 2006.

17...Nxe4

Black wins a pawn while keeping an excellent position.

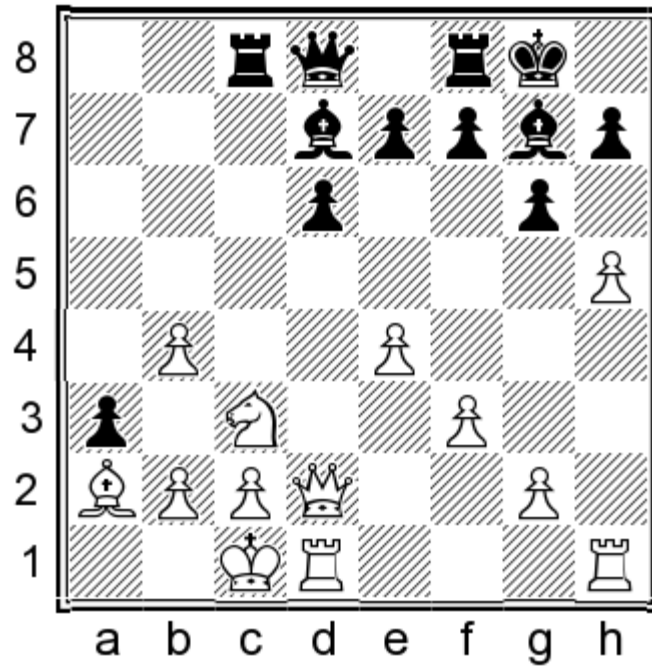
A) 14.Bxf6?! Bxf6



As always in the Dragon, if White cannot achieve anything tangible then it is a mistake to give Black an uncontested dark-squared bishop.

15.h5 Bg7! 16.hxg6

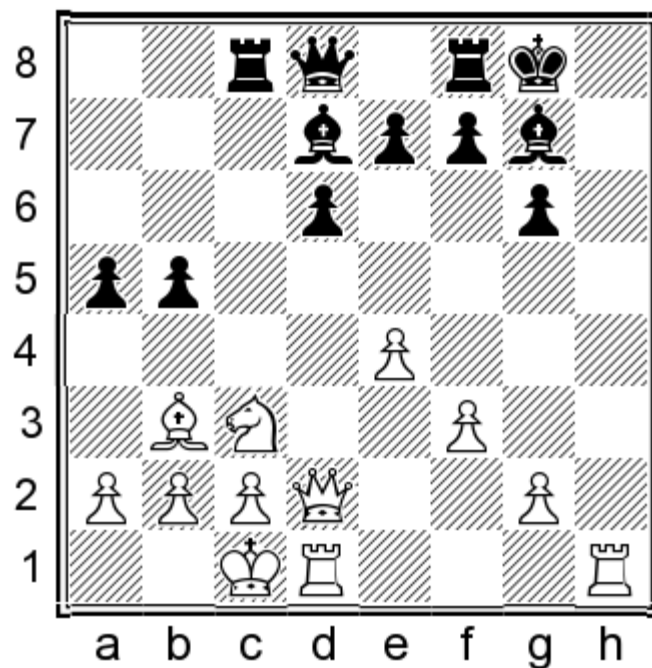
After 16.a3 a4! 17.Ba2 b4! 18.axb4 a3 Black succeeds in breaking through:



19.Kb1 axb2 20.hxg6 hxg6 21.Qg5 e6 22.Qxd8 Rfxd8 In gorni – grujov, engine game 2013, the b2-pawn was definitely a strength rather than a weakness.

16...hxg6

White can set up a mating threat along the h-file but Black can just sidestep with the f8-rook and remain quite safe.



17.Rh2

The alternative is:

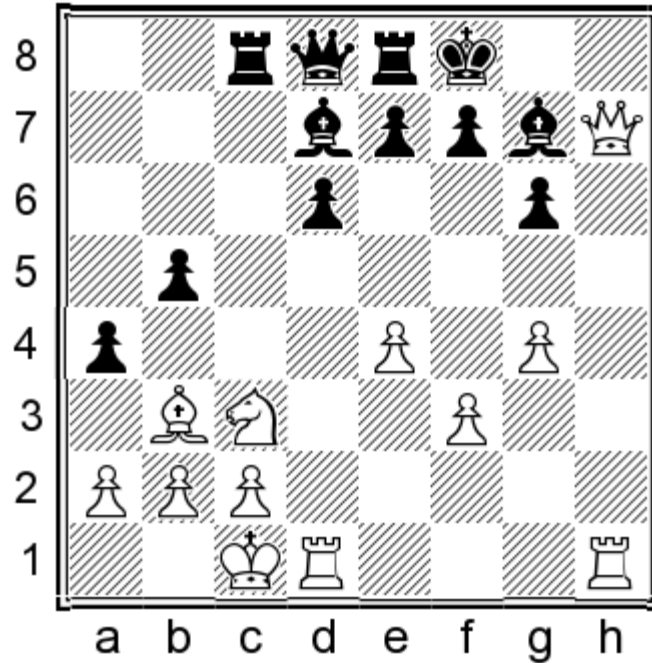
17.g4 a4

17...Rxc3!?N looks simpler: 18.bxc3 a4 19.Qh2 (19.Bd5 Qc7 20.e5! Rc8³) 19...Re8 20.Qh7† Kf8 21.Bxf7 Kxf7 22.Rh6 Qb6 23.Qxg6† Kf8μ

18.Qh2 Re8 19.Qh7†N

This is White's only chance. Instead 19.Nd5? simply allowed Black to take on b3 in Oberweis – Kulhanek, Kemer 2007.

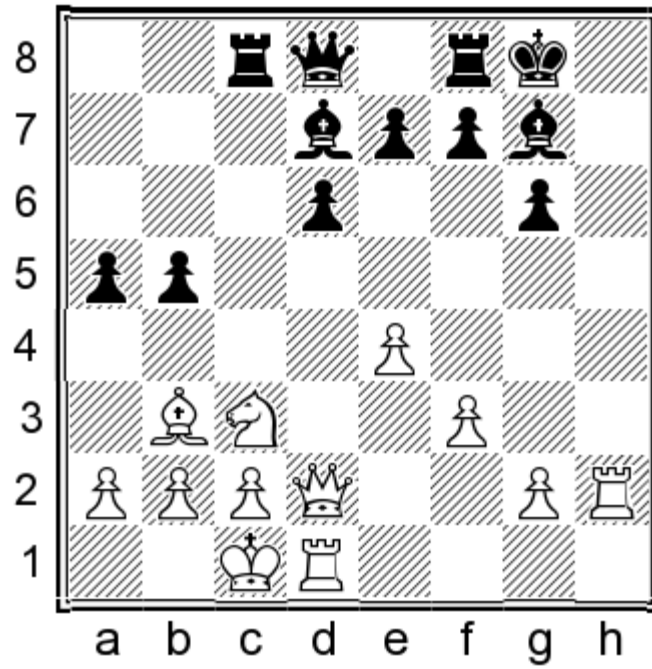
19...Kf8



20.Bxf7! Kxf7 21.Rh6

White's initiative looks dangerous but can be defused with a series of accurate moves:

21...Rg8! 22.e5! dxe5 23.Ne4 Qb6! 24.Ng5† Kf8 25.Rxg6 Qe3† 26.Kb1 Qe2 27.Rc1 Qc4!μ

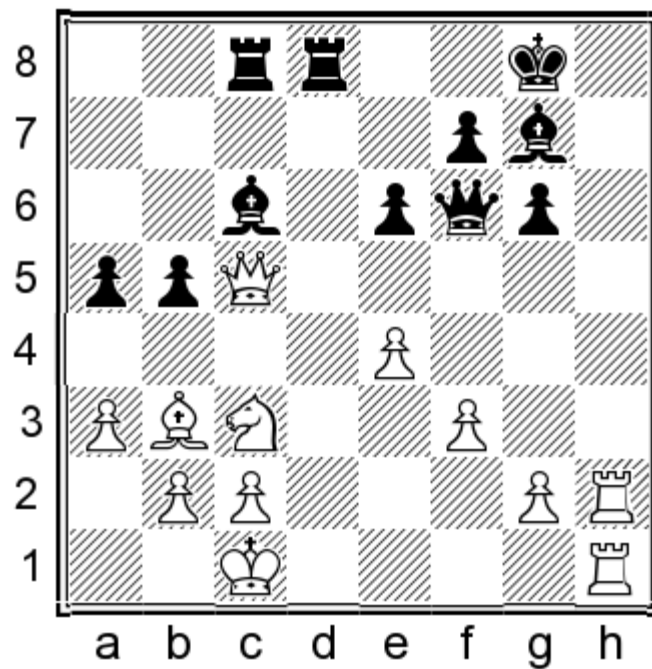


17...e6! 18.Qxd6 Qf6

Black cleverly uses the potential fork on f4 to prevent White from taking on d7.

19.Rdh1 Rfd8 20.a3 Bc6 21.Qc5

In Halvax – Neubauer, Linz 2011, Black could have crowned his previous fine play as follows.

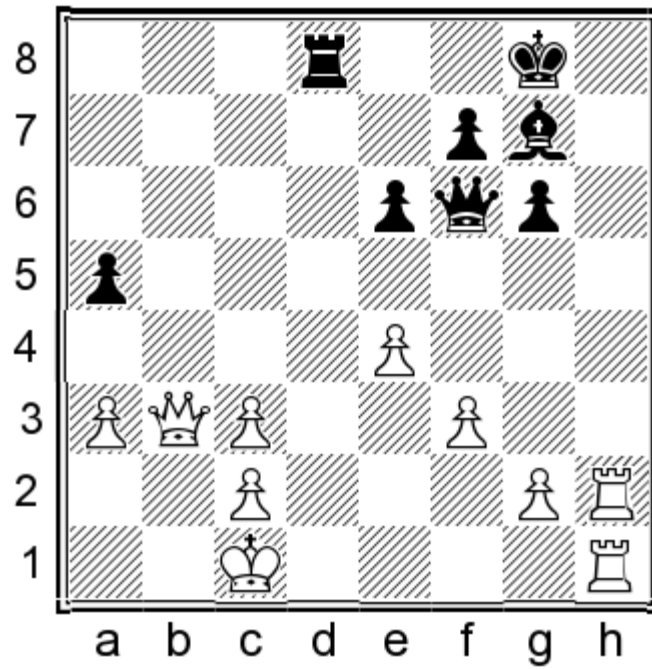


21...Bd5!N 22.Qxb5

22.Qe3 Bxb3 23.cxb3 b4 wins.

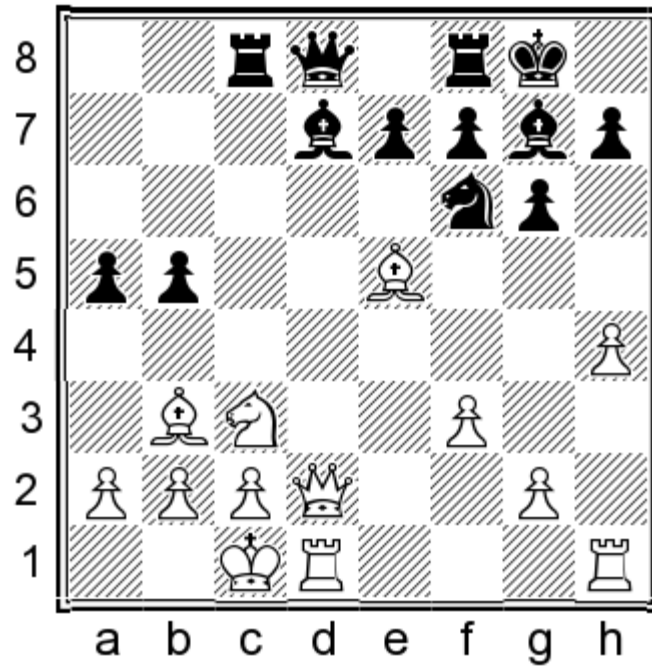
22...Bxb3 23.Qxb3 Rxc3! 24.bxc3

24.Qxc3 Qf4† also wins the queen.



24...Qf4† 25.Kb1 Rb8–+

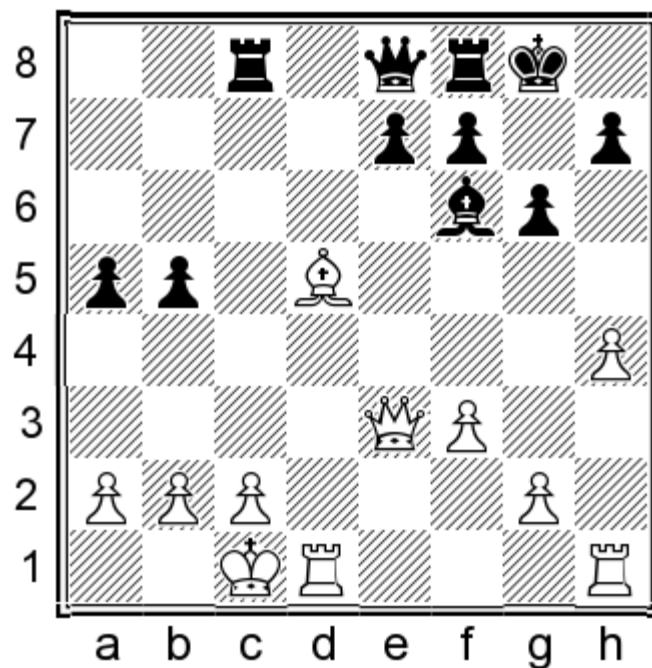
B) 14.e5 dxe5 15.Bxe5



This has a lot of similarities to 13.e5 (variation B of the next chapter) and likewise should not trouble Black.

15...Bc6 16.Qe3 Qe8 17.h5

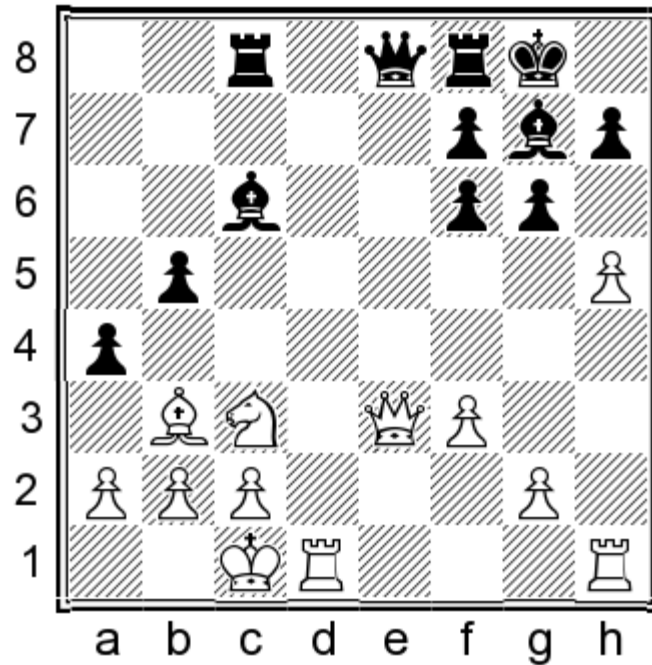
In one game White played aggressively with: 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Bxd5 The opposite-coloured bishops have the potential to make both attacks more potent but Black's will arrive first:



19...e6 20.Be4 Qe7 21.h5 This position was reached in Olsarova – Malikova, Frydek Mistek 2009. Had Black found 21...a4!N followed by ...Qb4, she would have been doing excellently.

17...a4 18.Bd5

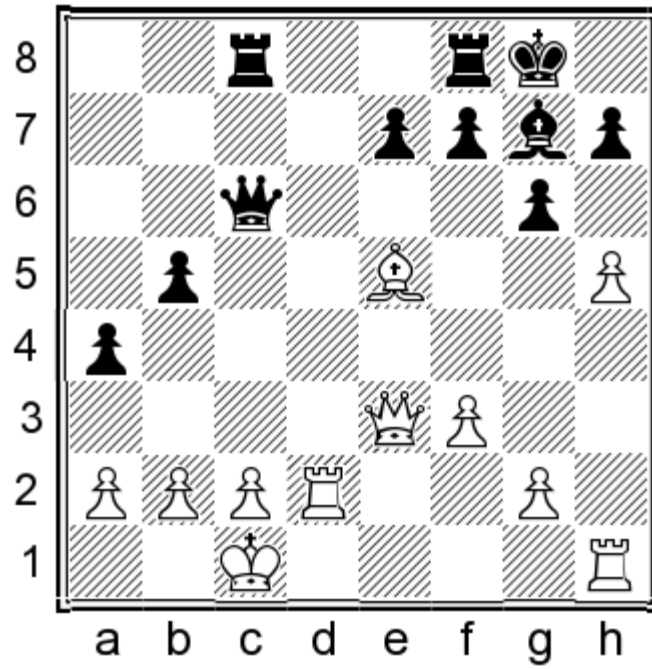
18.Bxf6 was tried in Demidowicz – Zakoscielna, Szklarska Poreba 2007. Now that White's attack is one tempo closer, Black should instead recapture with the pawn: 18...exf6!N



19.Qxe8 Rfxe8 20.Bd5 Bxd5 21.Nxd5 (21.Rxd5 f5³) 21...Re2³ Black has the better prospects in the ending.

18...Bxd5 19.Nxd5 Nxd5 20.Rxd5 Qc6 21.Rd2?

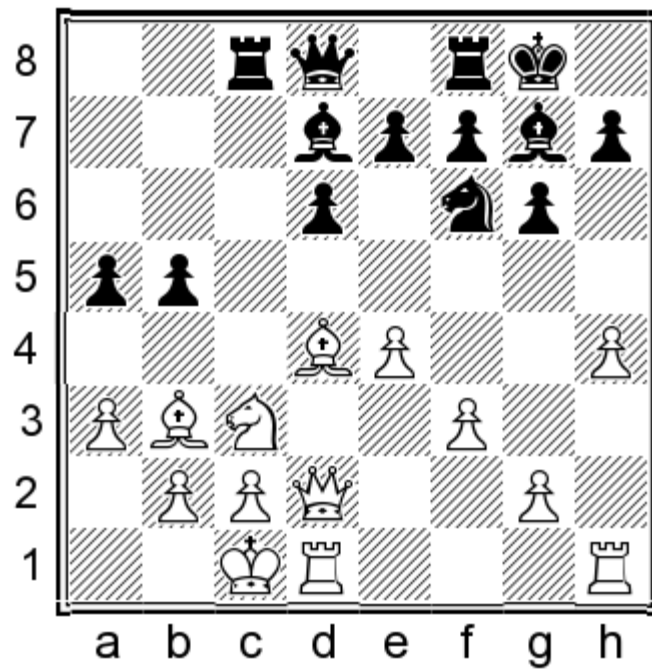
21.Qd3 was necessary although White is the one fighting to hold the balance.



21...Qe6! 22.Re2 Qxa2

White's opening had clearly been a failure in Lo Presti – Tristan, Mar del Plata 2008.

C) 14.a3



This is likely to transpose to the previous chapter, but there are a few independent possibilities to consider.

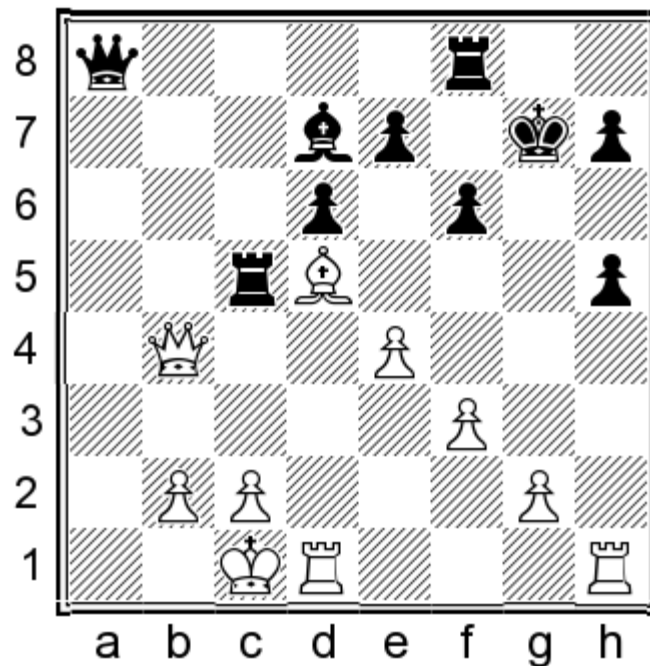
14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.Na2

16.Nb1? places the knight on a terrible square; it puts no pressure on b4 and has no route of escape. Several games have continued 16...Qa5 17.h5 Ba4 18.Bxa4 Qxa4 when Black already has a decisive attack.

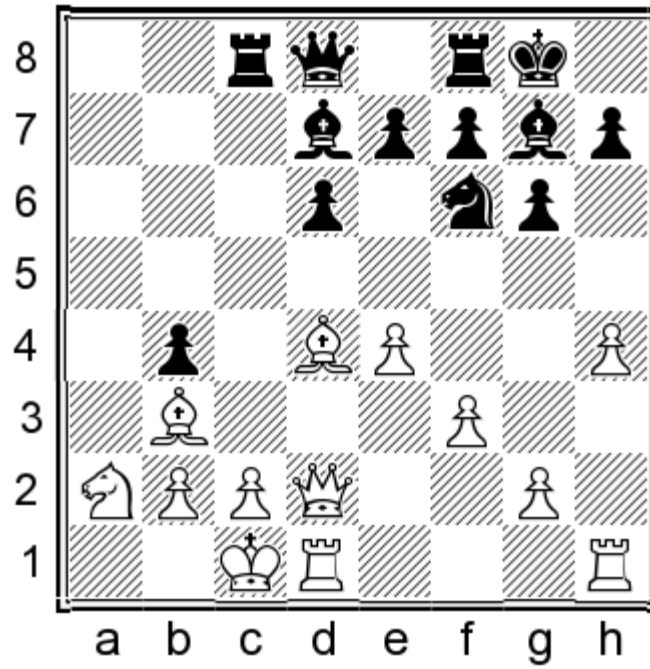
16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 gives White a choice of recaptures:

a) 18.exd5 has been the more popular and higher-scoring move, but after 18...Kg8! we immediately transpose to variation B22 of the previous chapter. (18...Qa5 is less accurate as we may want to go for a plan with ...Bf5.

b) White has recaptured with the queen in a few games, but it is not particularly promising: 18.Qxd5 Rc5 19.Qd4† f6 20.h5 gxh5 21.Qxb4 Qa8 22.Bd5 Now in Dzaja – Havas, Topusko 2012, Black should have played:



22...Qa1†!N 23.Kd2 Qa7³ Black has the more pleasant position.



16...Be6

I like the idea of eliminating the bishop which is holding White's queenside together.

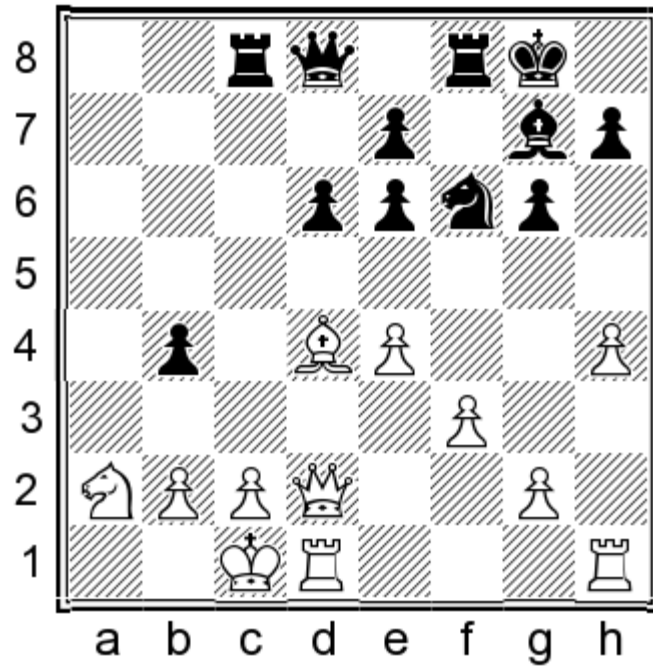
16...Rb8!? also works well, and was the choice of Australian GM David Smerdon in a recent correspondence game.

17.Nxb4 Qa5 18.c3 Rfc8 19.Kb1 h5 20.Rc1 e6 21.g4 hxg4 22.h5 gxh5 23.Bxf6 Bxf6 24.fxg4 Rxc3 25.bxc3 Rxb4 ½–½ W. Fischer – Smerdon, corr. 2015. Black has at least a perpetual and I am sure in an over-the-board game Dave would have kept playing.

17.Bxe6

17.Kb1 was played in Oparin – Nechaev, Vladivostok 2014, and here the straightforward 17...Bxb3N 18.cxb3 Ra8 19.Qxb4 Qd7 20.Nc3 Rfb8 21.Qc4 Qb7³ would have given Black a good position.

17...fxe6



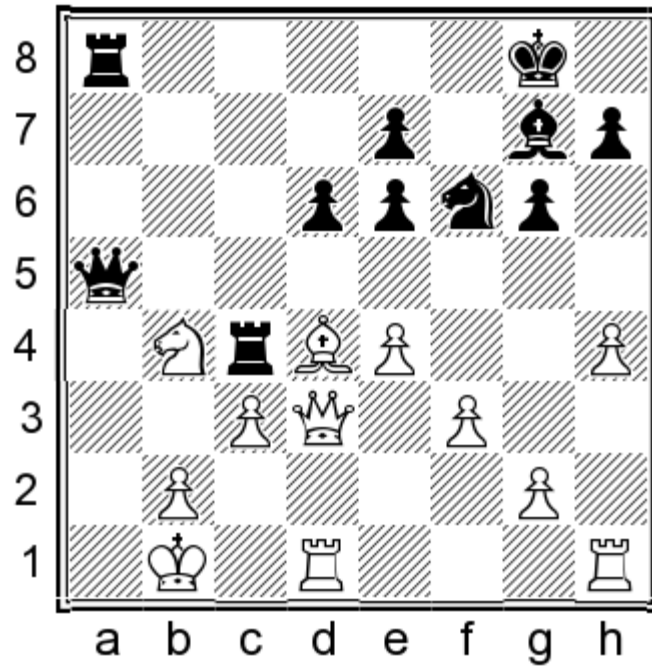
18.Nxb4?!

White has to try 18.Kb1N although Black will have great compensation for the pawn after either 18...Ra8 or 18...b3!?.

18...Qa5 19.Kb1 Rc4 20.c3 Ra8

Black's attack is playing itself.

21.Qd3



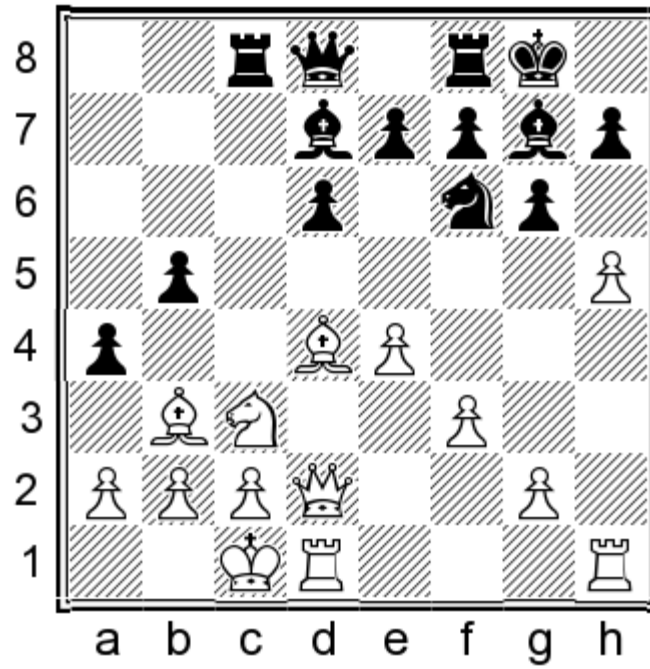
21...Rxd4! 22.cxd4

22.Qxd4 Nd5 23.Qxg7† (23.Qc4 Qa1† 24.Kc2 Ne3†) 23...Kxg7 24.exd5 exd5 isn't much better.

22...Qxb4--+

Black had a favourable material imbalance as well as the initiative in Zenishchev – Payne, email 2001.

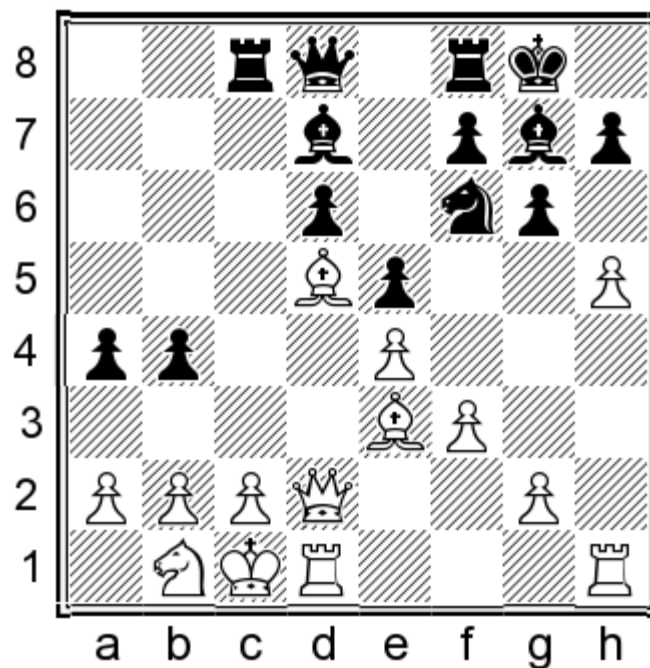
D) 14.h5 a4



This position is the gateway to the sharpest lines of the Topalov Variation. Each side ignores the other and hurls its pawns towards the opposing king.

15.Bxf6

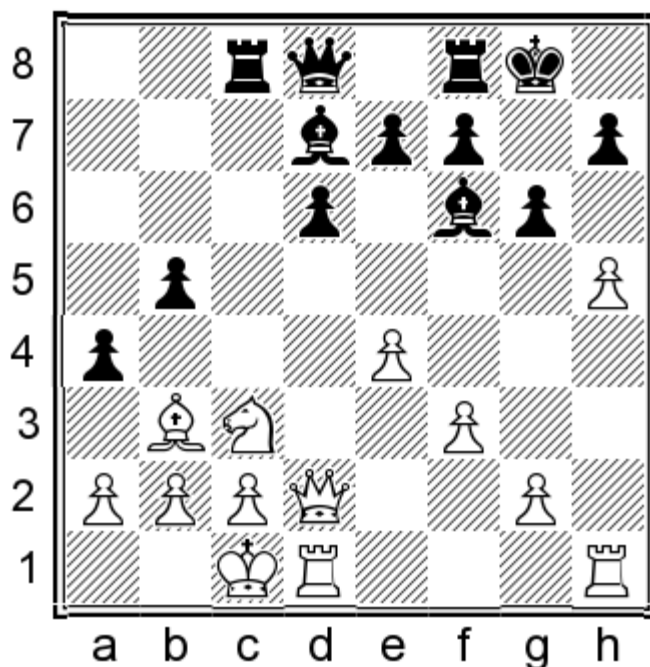
15.Bd5?! allows Black to gain time for his attack: 15...e5! 16.Be3 b4 17.Nb1



17...Nxd5 (On ChessPublishing I offered 17...Qc7N which is also promising for Black. After 18.hxg6?! I actually overlooked that Black could play the immediate 18...Nxd5! 19.gxh7+ Kh8 20.exd5 Bf5 21.c3 Qc4 with a winning attack.) 18.Qxd5 Rc6! Black obtained a powerful attack by trebling on the c-file in Novikov – Matinyan, Sochi 2007.

15...Bxf6!?

15...exf6 has traditionally been the main line but the text move is a promising deviation which I used successfully against Judit Polgar. The next few moves must be remembered carefully, as accurate play is needed to withstand White's attack.



16.hxg6 e6!

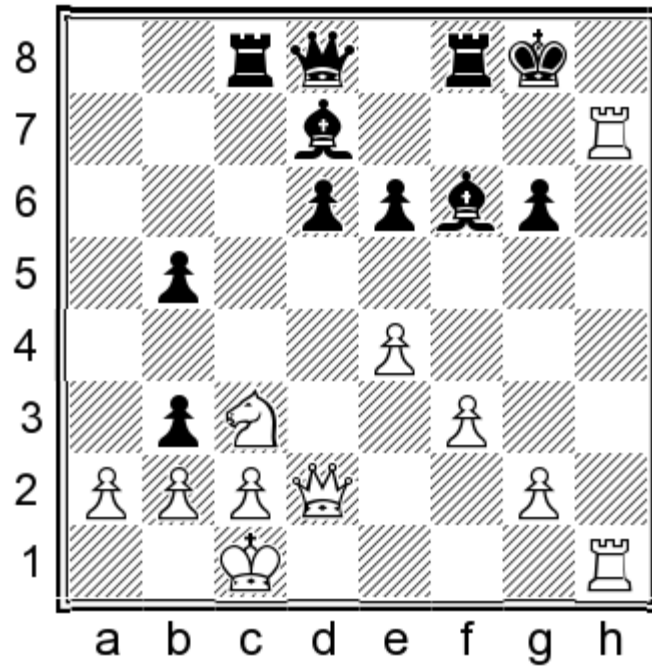
This strong move blocks the b3-bishop and takes control of the d5-square. More importantly, it also prevents White from playing 17.Qh6 due to 17...Bg5†. The ensuing positions are quite unlike anything else in this book. It looks as though White has a souped-up version of his normal kingside attack but Black has various defensive resources, often involving the c1-h6 diagonal. Let's also not forget that White's bishop is trapped.

17.e5!

This is not only the most energetic move; it is also the only way for White to maintain the equilibrium.

17.Kb1? was played in Oatshotse – Mmoneng, Gauteng 2011, and now the simple 17...fxg6!N would have kept the h-file closed and allowed Black to defend with a rook on f7 if needed. After 18.Qxd6 axb3 19.Qxd7 Qxd7 20.Rxd7 b4! White must give up a piece for nowhere near enough compensation.

17.Rxh7?! is too ambitious: 17...axb3 18.Rdh1 (18.Qxd6 is better but, as Chris Ward observed, after 18...bxa2 19.Nxa2 Qc7 the piece is stronger than the pawns.) 18...fxg6



19.axb3 (19.Rh8† is a common theme to force a draw but here 19...Bxh8 20.Rxh8† Kf7! 21.Rh7† Ke8—+ sidesteps the perpetual.) 19...Be8 20.Kb1 Rf7 21.Rxf7 Kxf7—+ White's attack had been neutralized in Escobar Forero – Kiewra, Barcelona 2012.

17.Qxd6!?

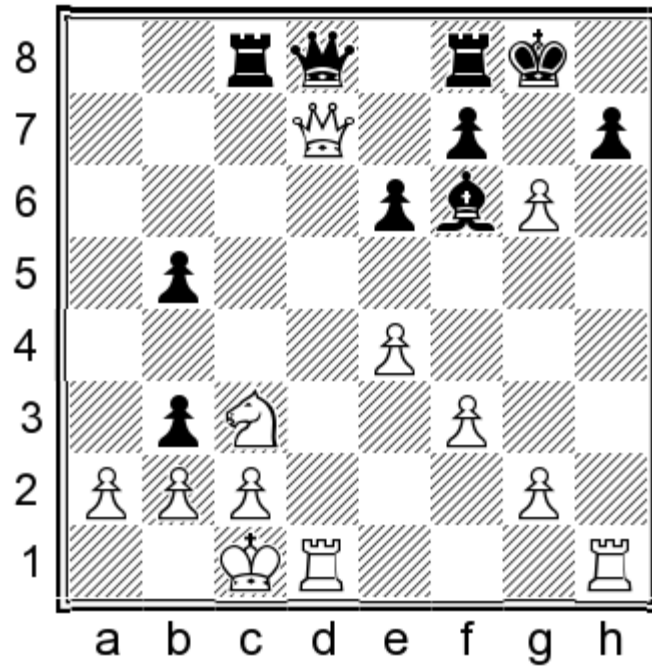
This is the best of the alternatives, but Black still gets the upper hand with accurate play.

17...axb3 18.Qxd7

18.Qh2? h6!—+ is another useful defensive idea to remember, Rieger – Schmidrathner, Oberwart 2012.

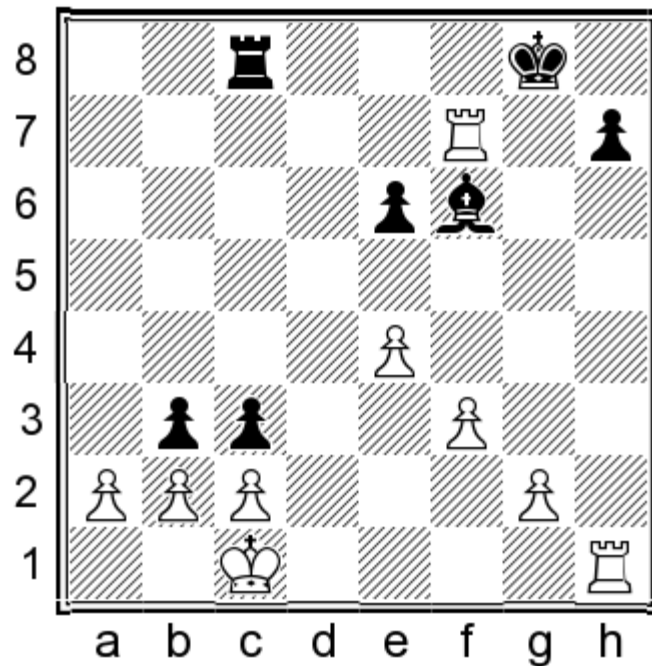
18.axb3N 18...hxg6 19.Kb1 (19.Qxd7? Qa5 is too dangerous) 19...Rxc3! 20.Qh2 Re8 21.e5 Bg7 22.bxc3 Qc7μ Black's king is completely safe and he can now focus on his own attack.

The text move was played in Salazar – Castrillon Gomez, Duran 2011. Here Black can claim some advantage after trading queens:



18...Qxd7N 19.Rxd7 b4! 20.gxf7+ Rxf7 21.Rxf7 bxc3!!

A beautiful move.

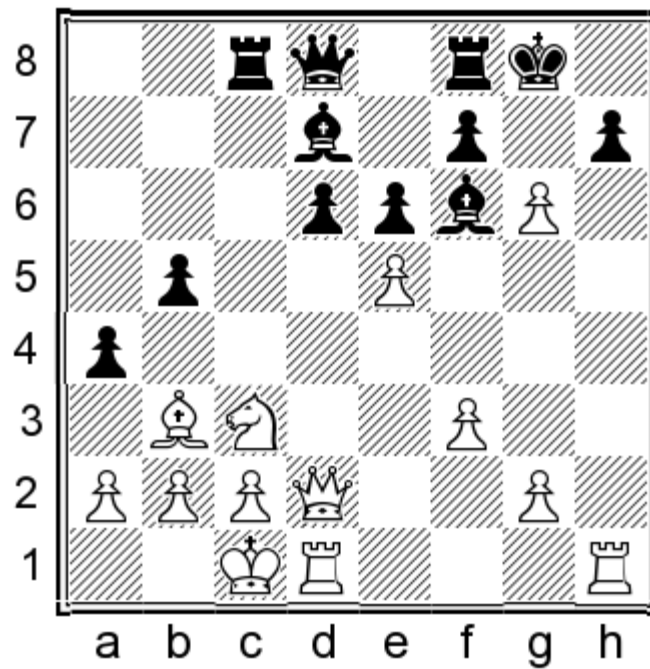


22.bxc3

22.Rxf6? bxa2 wins immediately.

22...b2+! 23.Kxb2 Kxf7 24.Rxh7+ Kg6³

The endgame should be a draw, but White will have to suffer a while. It is not so easy to force the exchange of the e6-pawn and, even if White succeeds in doing so, the endgame with rook against rook and bishop is not trivial to hold.



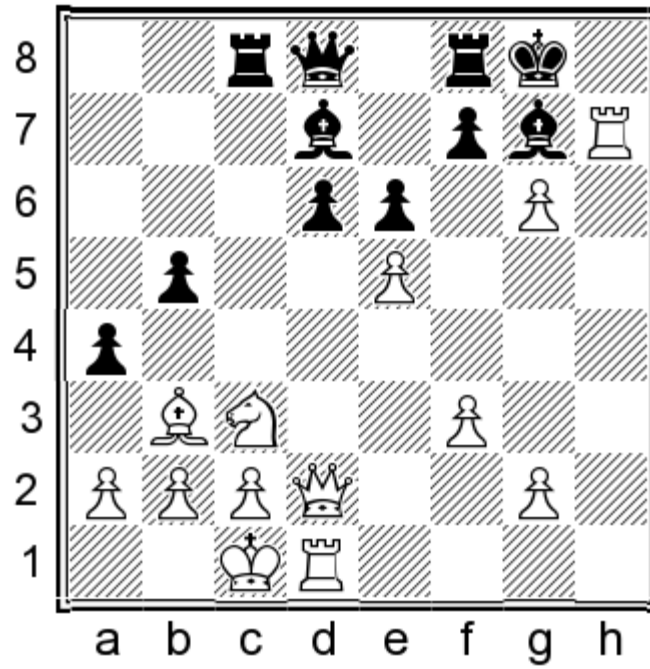
17...Bg7!

17...Bxe5?? is impossible as Black no longer has the fork after 18.Qh6.

17...Bg5 is also playable but I do not like it as much as the text move. 18.f4 fxg6!N (18...axb3? was played in Aroshidze – Kiewra, Barcelona 2012, but now, as Chris Ward observed, 19.g7! would have been strong.) 19.fxg5 axb3 20.axb3 I think White should be a little better. A sample line continues 20...Ra8 21.Rhf1 Rxf1 22.Rxf1 b4 23.Nb1 dxe5 24.Qxb4 Qxg5† 25.Qd2² when Black's e-pawns are rather ugly.

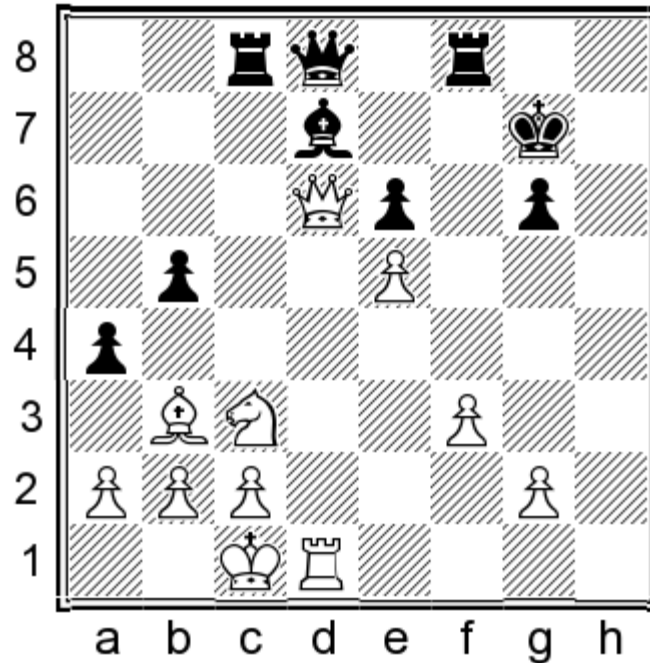
18.Rxh7

18.Qxd6?!N 18...Qg5†! favours Black after 19.Qd2 (19.Kb1? axb3 20.Qxd7 bxc2† 21.Kxc2 b4—+) 19...Qxd2† 20.Rxd2 Be8³ as given by Ward.



18...Bxe5

18...fxg6!? is playable, but 19.Rdh1 gives Black nothing better than transposing to the main line with 19...Bxe5. White can also try 19.Rxg7+!? Kxg7 20.Qxd6, reaching a position that I gave as good for White on ChessPublishing.



However 20...Rf7! looks like a draw with best play: 21.Bxe6 Qg5+ 22.Kb1N (22.Rd2 Rc6 is no improvement for White, and Black eventually prevailed in Afloarei – Stanescu, corr. 2014.) 22...Rc6! 23.Bxf7 Rxd6 24.Rxd6 Kxf7 25.Rxd7+ Ke8=

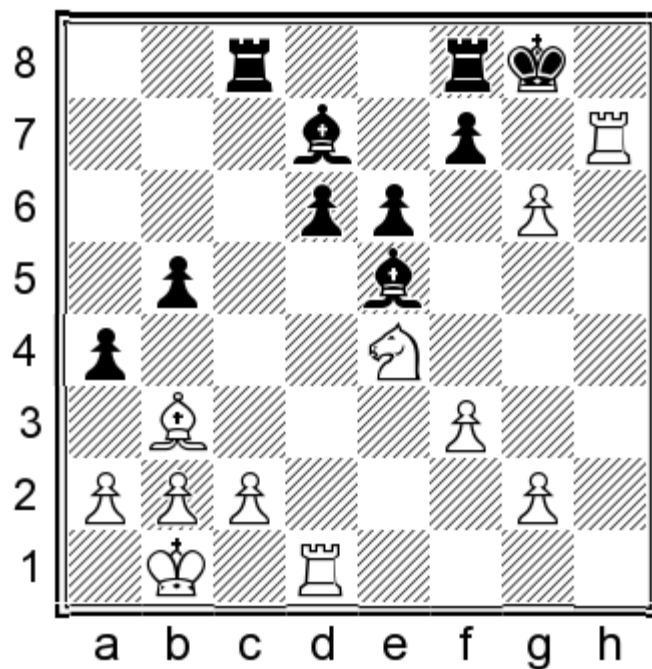
After the text move White has quite a few different routes to a draw, all utilizing the idea of sacrificing both rooks for

the e5-bishop. However, I don't think he has anything better.

19.Rdh1

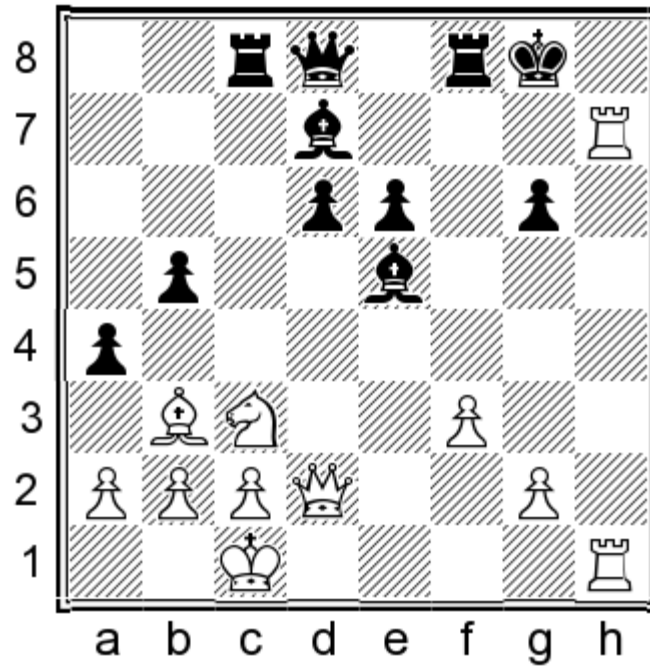
19.Bd5 fxg6 20.Rdh1 is another transposition.

19.Qh6N 19...Qf6! 20.Ne4 Qf4† 21.Qxf4 Bxf4† 22.Kb1 Be5 is another line given by Ward.



White can get three pawns for the piece with 23.Bxa4 bxa4 24.Nxd6 Bxd6 25.Rxd6. His drawing chances are good, but after 25...Bb5 Black should still be preferred.

19...fxg6

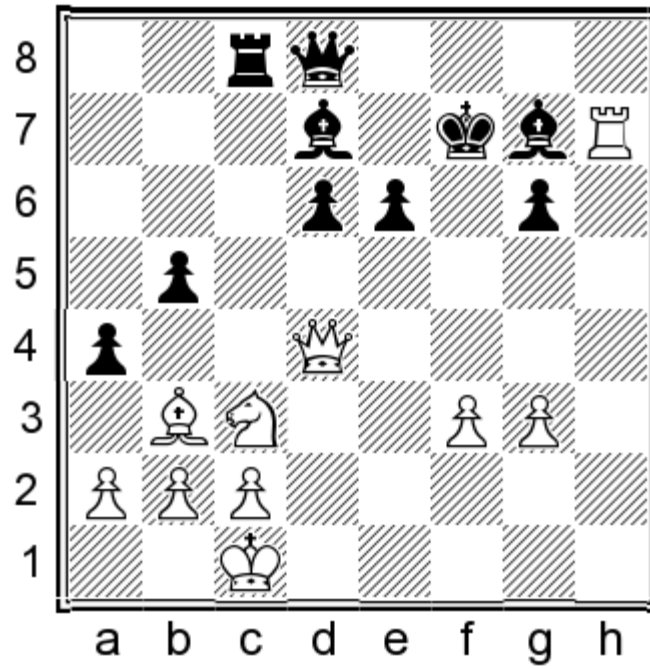


This is the main tabiya of the 15...Bxf6 line. White has many possible moves but most of them involve taking the same perpetual with Rh8†. According to my engine's readout, White has no less than eight drawing possibilities!

The two most interesting moves are D1) 20.Bd5!? and D2) 20.Nd5!?N.

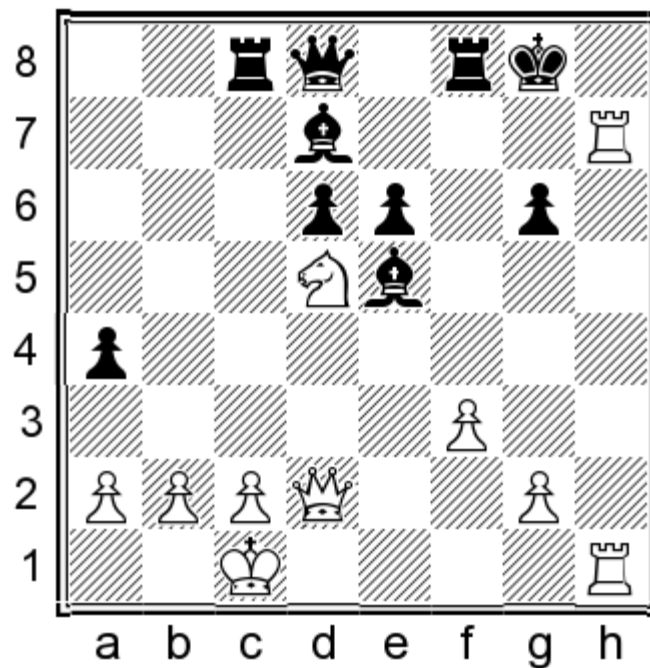
In the first over-the-board game to reach this position, White decided to take the draw immediately: 20.Rh8† Bxh8 21.Rxh8† Kxh8 22.Qh6† Kg8 23.Qxg6† Kh8 24.Qh6† ½–½ Fusco – Tristan, Buenos Aires 2011.

I decided to check 20.g3!?N as it was Stockfish's ninth suggestion! However, 20...Rf7! looks good for Black: 21.Rxf7 Kxf7 22.Rh7† Bg7 23.Qd4

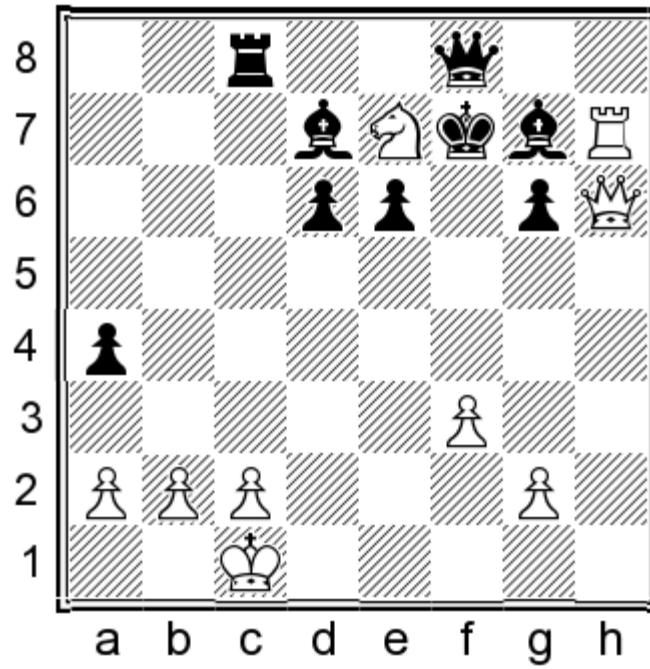


23...Qg5+! 24.f4 Qf6 25.Qxd6 Rd8³

I also wanted to see if White could try: 20.Bxa4N 20...bxa4 (20...Rxc3!? also seems to draw immediately) 21.Nd5?! (White should take the draw with 21.Rh8+)=)

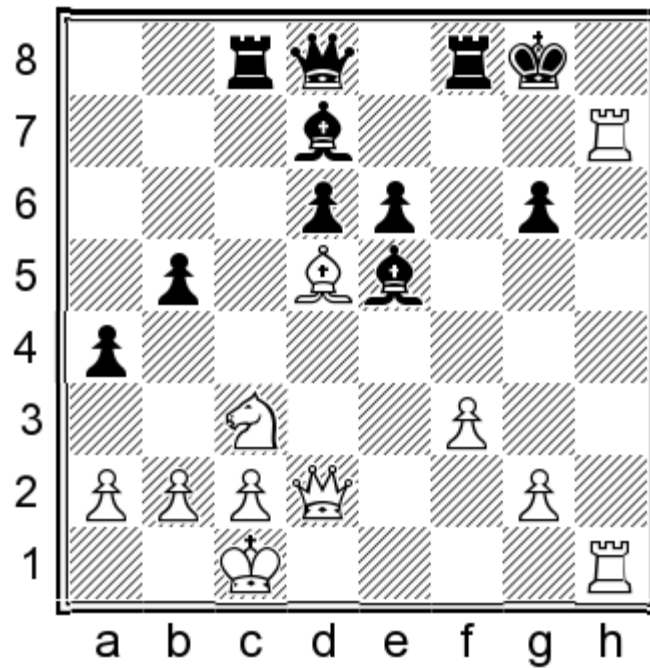


However, it turns out that the calm 21...Rf7! gives the king more than enough protection. My analysis continues:
22.Rxf7 Kxf7 23.Rh7+ Bg7 24.Qh6 Qf8 25.Ne7



25...d5!! The king needs to be able to run to d6. 26.Qg5 a3! 27.b3 Rc3 28.Qh6 Be8 29.Qg5 Rc7 30.Qf4† Kxe7 31.Qxc7† Bd7μ Bizarre stuff, but good for Black in the end.

D1) 20.Bd5!?



This was Judit Polgar's choice against me. White saves the bishop by tactical means.

20...Rf7!

I decided I would breathe easier without an enemy rook on the seventh.

21.Rxf7

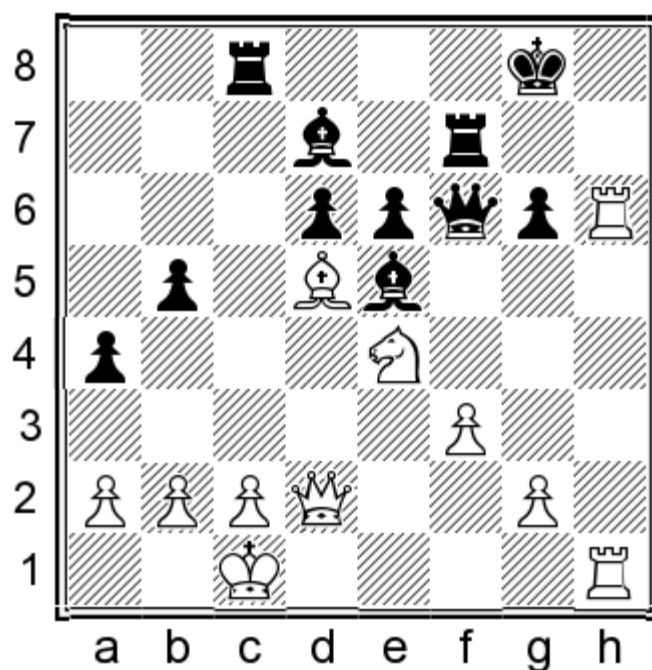
21.R7h6!?N

Retaining the rooks is also interesting.

21...Qf6

21...Bf4?? 22.Rh8† Kg7 23.R1h7† wins.

22.Ne4

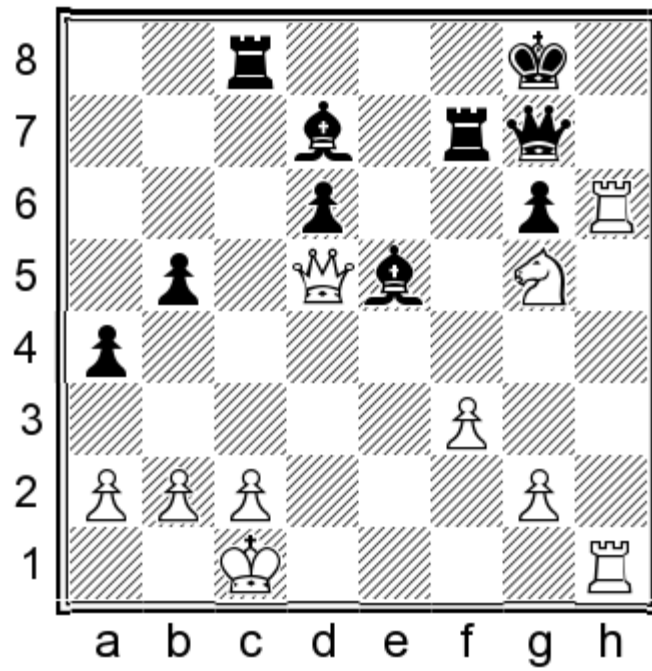


22...Qg7

This is the most concrete continuation although 22...Qf5!? is also playable.

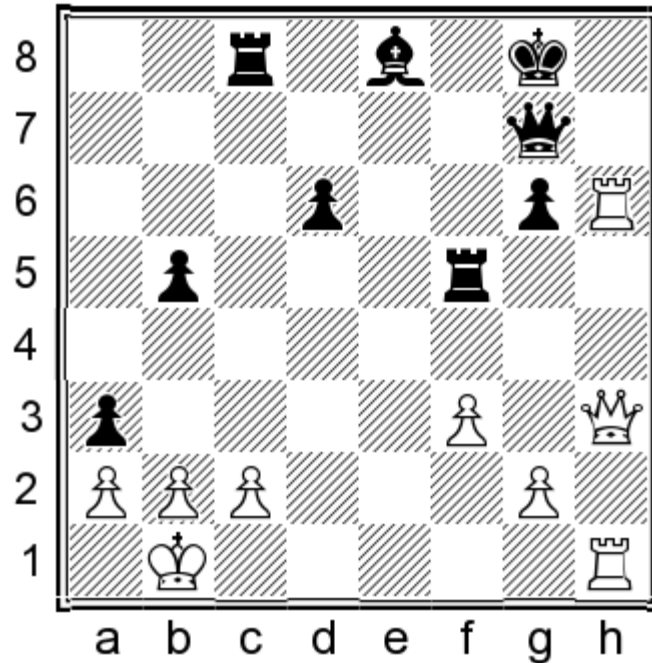
23.Ng5 exd5 24.Qxd5

24.Rh7 gives Black more options, although it's still a draw: 24...Qxh7 (24...Bf4 and 24...Bxb2† are both also given as 0.00) 25.Rxh7 Bf4!? (25...Rxh7 26.Qxd5† Kh8 27.Nxh7 Bf5! 28.g4 Bf4† 29.Kd1 Bxc2† 30.Ke2 Bb1= is also a draw, as the white king cannot escape the checks on c2 and c1) 26.Rh8† (26.Rxf7 Bxd2† 27.Kxd2 Bf5 28.c3 a3! 29.bxa3 d4! favours Black as 30.cxd4? Rc2† 31.Ke3 Rxc2 32.Kf4 Rxc2—+ picks up the knight.) 26...Kg7 (26...Kxh8?? 27.Nxf7† Kg7 28.Qxf4) 27.Rh7† Kg8= An amusing finish.



24...Bf4†! 25.Kb1 Bxg5 26.Qxg5 Rf5! 27.Qg3! Be8 28.Qh3 a3!?

Not all of these moves are completely forced, but neither side has any more than a draw along the way. The finish might be:



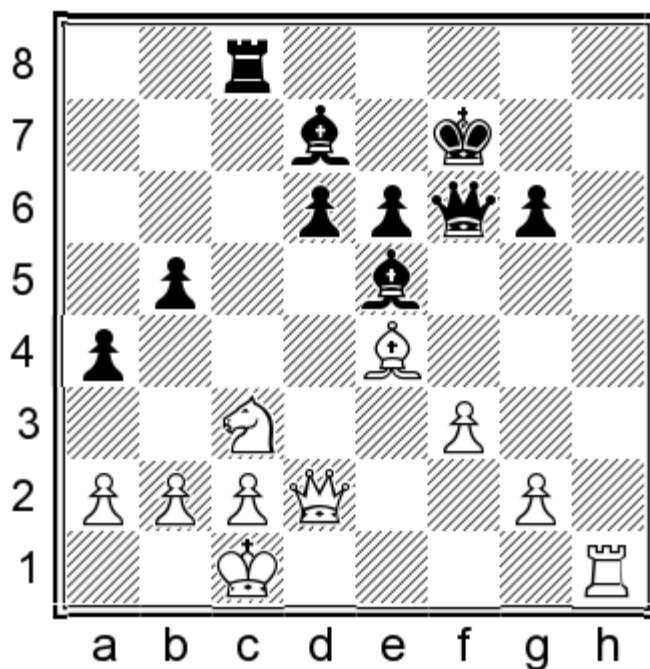
29.Rh8† Kf7 30.bxa3

30.Rh7? Rh5!–+

30...Qc3 31.Qh7† Qg7=

21...Kxf7 22.Be4 Qf6

The position has stabilized and we can take a time-out. White's pieces have been repulsed and we are left with a dynamically equal middlegame.

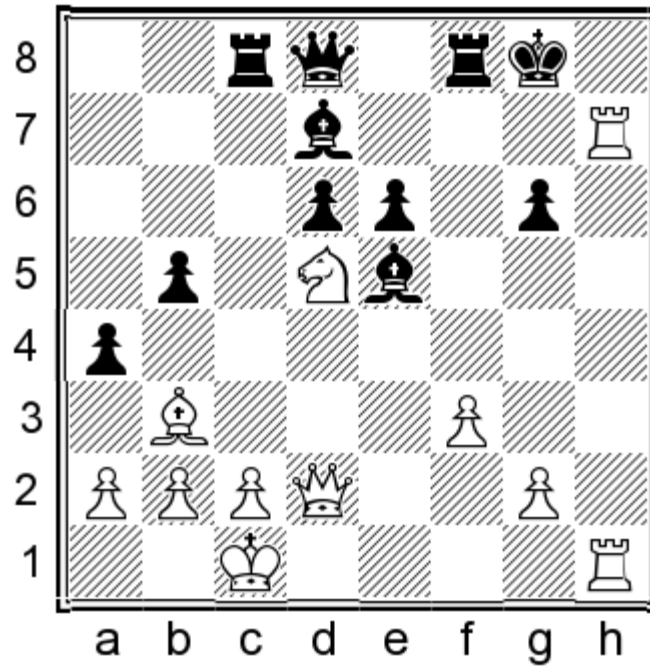


23.Kb1=

23.Rh7†? Kg8 24.Rxd7? is obviously still not playable as Black has 24...Bf4.

The text move was played in J. Polgar – Jones, London (rapid) 2013. During the game I was feeling quite confident but in truth the position is still balanced. However, the bishop pair and central pawns make Black's position somewhat easier to play, and I went on to win.

D2) 20.Nd5!?N



Chris Ward and Daniel King had fun analysing this move in the commentary room during my game with Judit.

20...axb3

This is the obvious reply, although Black can also ignore the bishop and simply exchange off White's most aggressively placed piece:

20...Rf7 21.Rxf7

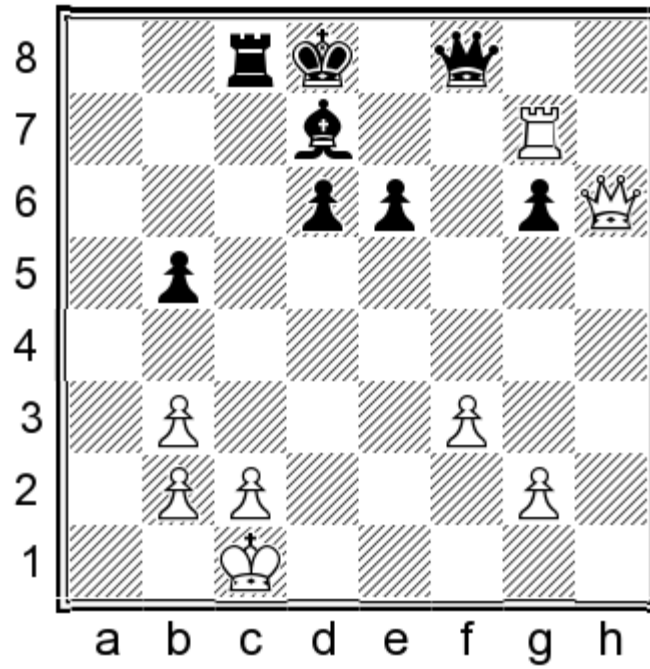
21.Qh6?! Rxh7 22.Qxh7† Kf8 looks scary but the e5-bishop keeps everything under control: 23.Qxg6 Be8! 24.Qxe6 Bf7 25.Qh6† Bg7 26.Qf4 axb3 27.axb3 Kg8μ

21...Kxf7 22.Rh7† Bg7 23.Qh6

23.Qd4 Qf8 24.Qf6† Kg8 25.Qxg6 axb3 26.Rxg7† Qxg7 27.Nf6† Kf8 28.Nh7† Kg8 is another draw.

23...Qf8 24.Ne7 axb3 25.axb3 Kxe7 26.Rxg7† Kd8

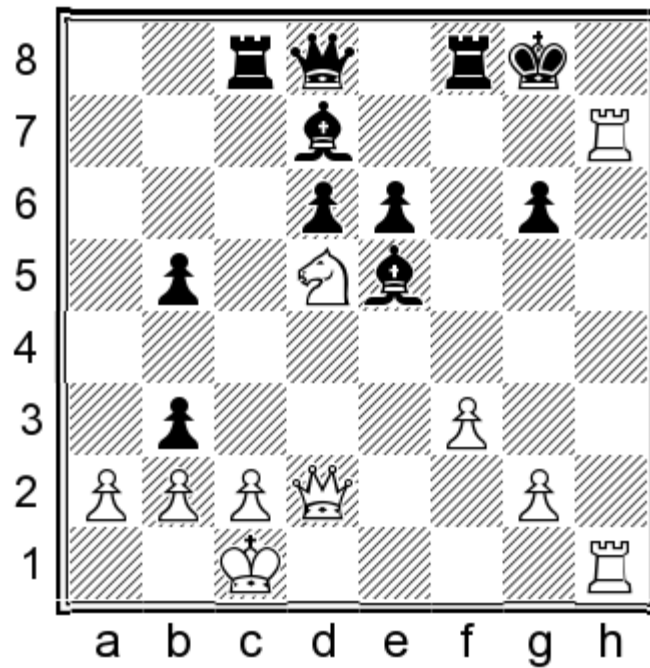
It looks like Black is running away but White can still hold.



27.Qh7!

Creating a drawing mechanism.

27...Qf4† 28.Kb1 Be8 29.Ra7 Qf6 30.Qb7 Bc6 31.Qh7=



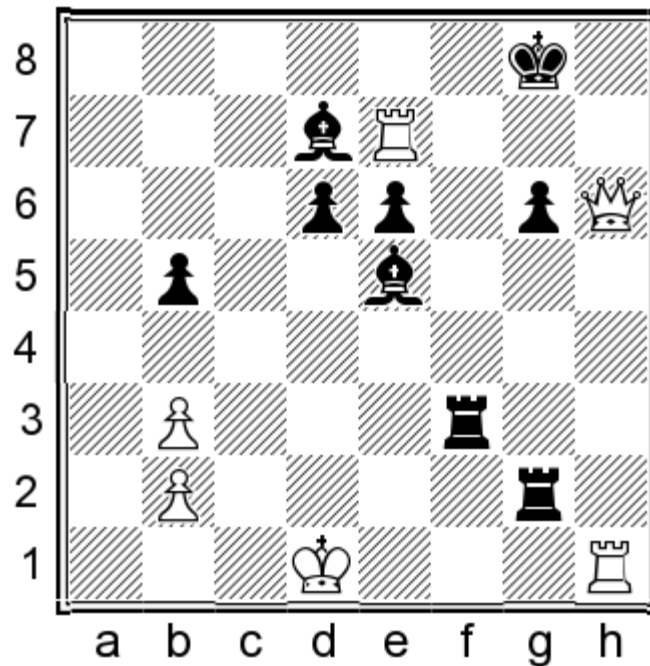
21.Qh6 Rxc2† 22.Kd1 Rxc2 23.Ne7† Qxe7 24.Rxe7 Rxf3

A completely crazy position! Black has something close to material equality, with two bishops and three pawns for the queen. Both kings are exposed but I think White has to be more careful.

25.axb3

The b3-pawn was too dangerous to be left on the board.

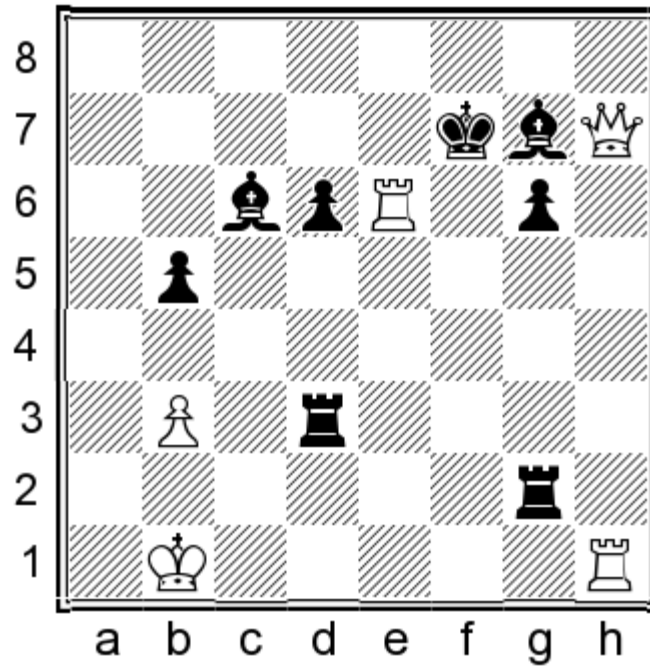
One pretty line from Chris continues 25.Rxd7?? Rd3† 26.Kc1 (or 26.Ke1 Bg3† 27.Kf1 Rf2† 28.Ke1 Rxb2† 29.Kf1 Rd1#) 26...Bxb2† 27.Kb1 bxa2† 28.Kxa2 Ra3† 29.Kb1 Ra1 mate!



25...Bc6

Chris ends his analysis here, mentioning that the engine regards it as completely equal. A logical continuation would be:

26.Rxe6 Rd3† 27.Kc1 Bxb2† 28.Kb1 Bg7 29.Qh7† Kf7



30.Re7† Kxe7 31.Qxg7† Ke6 32.Qg8† Ke5 33.Re1† Kf4=

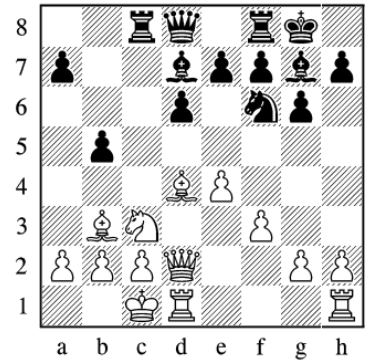
Black has enough pieces guarding his king that the game is likely to end in perpetual, potentially performed by either side.

Conclusion

13.h4 is an aggressive approach but after 13...a5 Black's attack is just as dangerous. The main line with 14.h5 leads to sharp play but the rare 15...Bxf6!? seems like a fully adequate solution, leaving White with nothing better than a draw. It will be interesting to see how the theory of this rare move develops; for now though, I see no problems for Black.



Topalov Variation



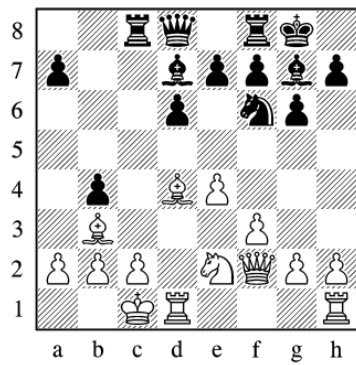
Other 13th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♘f6 5.♗c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♙d2
 ♗c6 9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0 ♗xd4 12.♙xd4
 12...b5

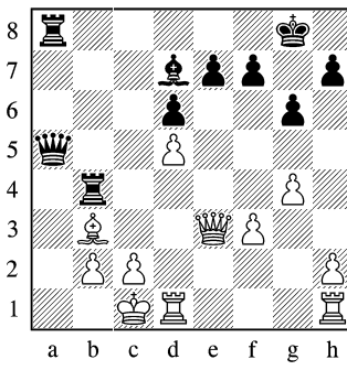
- A) 13.g4
- B) 13.e5 dxe5 14.Bxe5 Bc6
 - B1) 15.Qe3
 - B2) 15.Qxd8
- C) 13.a3
- D) 13.Bxa7 b4
 - D1) 14.Ne2
 - D2) 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Qa5
 - D21) 16.Bd4?!
 - D22) 16.Qe3

note to move 13



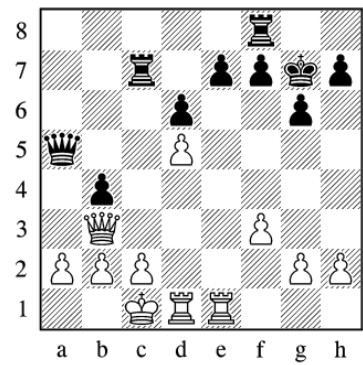
14...♔c7!N

C) after 23.♔e3



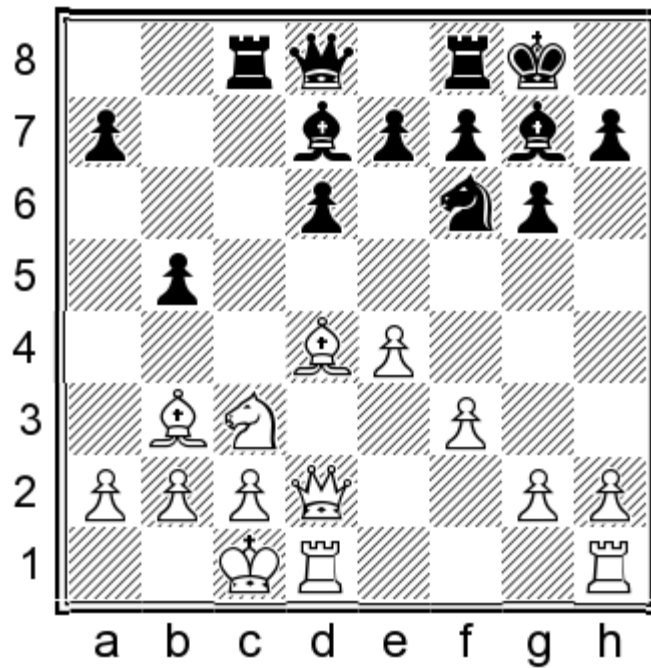
23...♔b5!N

D22) note 20.♔d4



20...♔c5!N

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.0-0-0 Bd7 10.Bc4 Rc8 11.Bb3 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5

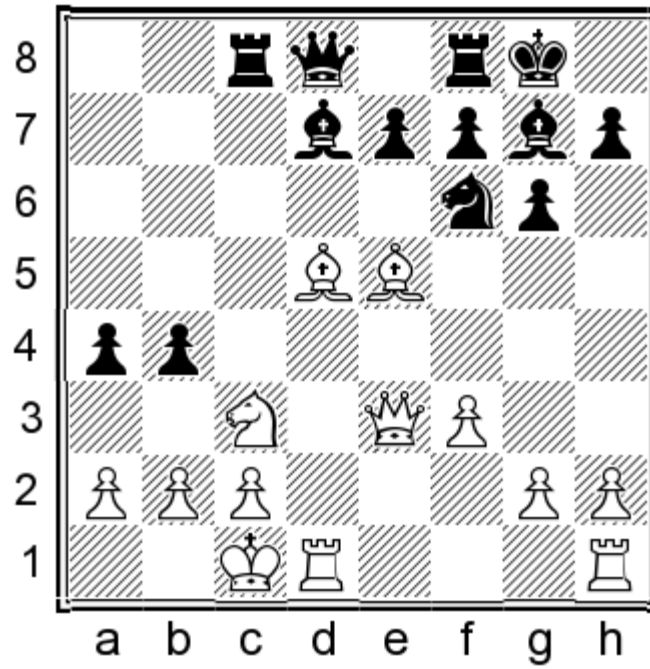


We have spent the last two chapters examining 13.Nd5 and 13.h4. In this chapter we will round up White's remaining options against the Topalov Variation, the four main ones being A) 13.g4, B) 13.e5, C) 13.a3 and D) 13.Bxa7.

13.Kb1 a5 is likely to transpose to variation C after 14.a3.

Instead 14.a4? bxa4 15.Nxa4 Bxa4 16.Bxa4 Rc4μ is a trap we've seen already, while 14.Nd5? would simply lose material after 14...a4!N.

13.Qe3 a5! It looks like White's last move prevented this but his queen turns out to be unfortunately placed. 14.e5 (14.Bb6N 14...Bh6!μ) 14...dxe5 15.Bxe5 a4 16.Bd5 b4



White found nothing better than 17.Bxf6 in Gaulupeau – Guerin, Paris 2010, but after the simple 17...Bxf6N 18.Ne4 Bg7–+ Black’s initiative is obviously too strong.

13.Qf2

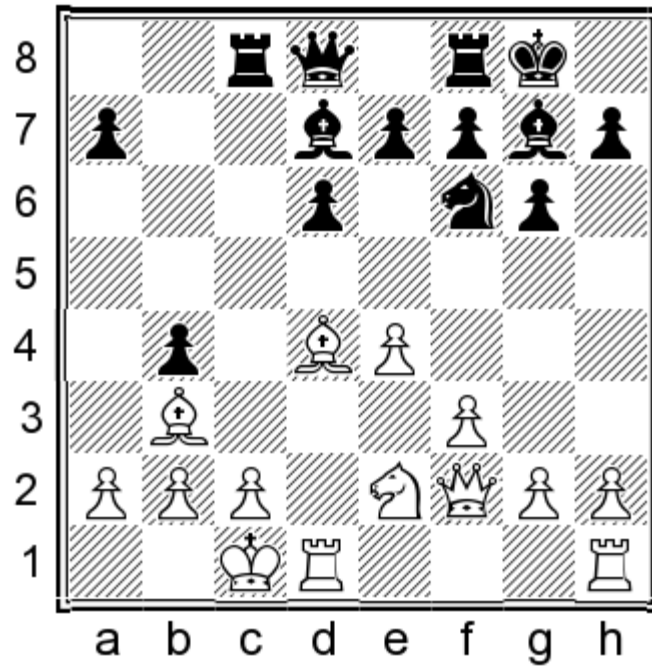
White is lining up pressure on the a7-pawn but it is hard to understand the logic when he could just take it immediately.

13...b4 14.Ne2?!

This is the usual follow-up but now the queen is misplaced.

14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.exd5 was seen in M. Lopez – A. Martinez, Santa Cruz 2010, and now the normal 16...a5N is pleasant for Black.

Perhaps White should try 14.Bxf6N although 14...bxc3 (both recaptures on f6 are also fine) 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Qxa7 cxb2† 17.Kxb2 Ra8 18.Qd4† f6 offers Black good compensation.



14...Qc7!N

Black will follow up with ...a5, with excellent prospects on the queenside. Note that White cannot grab the a-pawn:

15.Bxa7? Be6 16.Rd2 Bxb3 17.axb3 Ra8--+

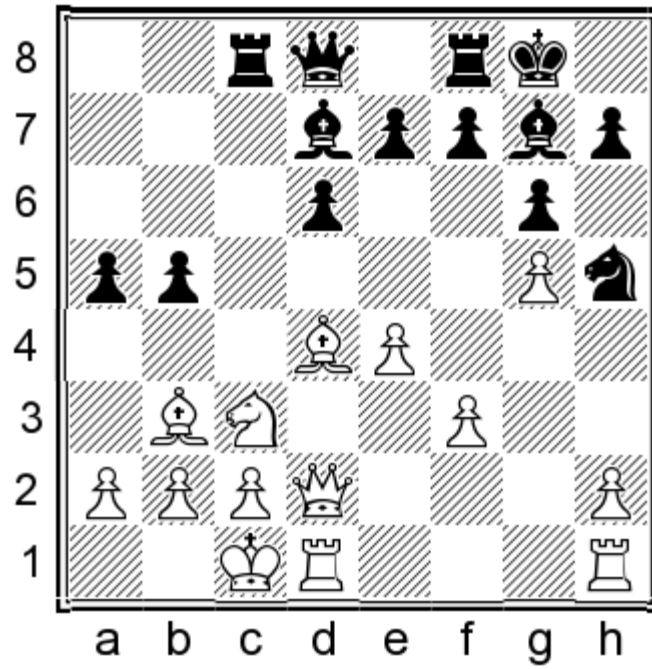
A) 13.g4

This pawn advance never puts any pressure on Black in the Topalov Variation.

13...a5 14.g5

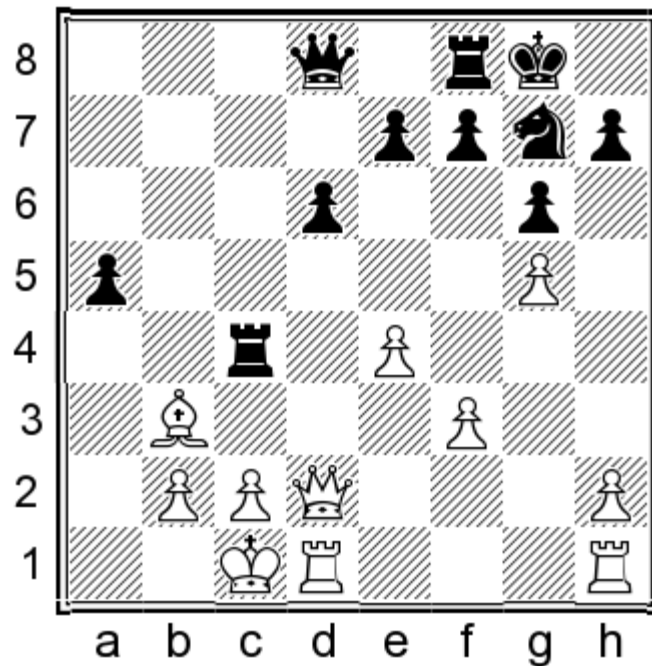
14.a3 b4 gives White an inferior version of variation C of Chapter 8, as g2-g4 is less useful than h2-h4.

14...Nh5



15.Bxg7

Another game continued: 15.a4?! bxa4 16.Nxa4 Bxa4 17.Bxa4 Rc4 18.Bxg7 Nxg7 19.Bb3



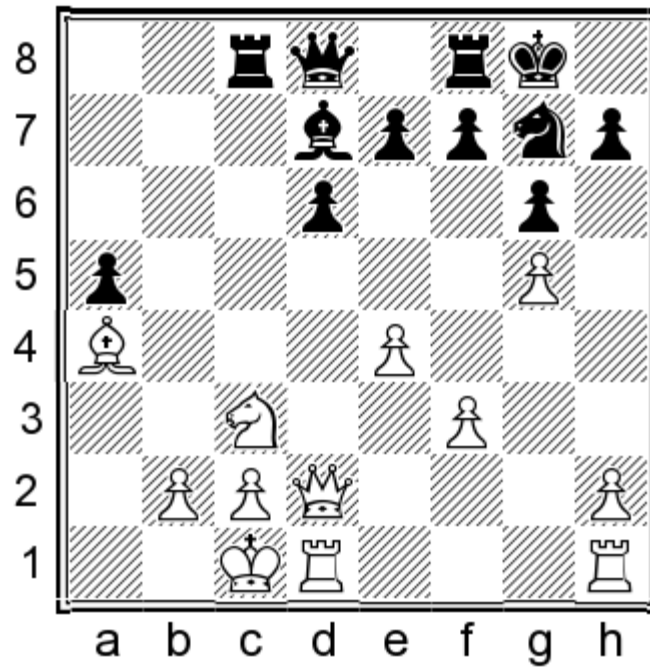
This was Gonzalez Roca – Gashimov, Ourense 2009, another game by the much-missed elite GM. Here I think the most accurate continuation is 19...Rc5N, intending to attack with ...Qb6, ...Rb8 and ...a4. Moreover, if White survives the onslaught then his weak kingside structure may give him problems in a future endgame.

15...Nxg7 16.a4?!

16.a3 should be preferred although Black is still doing well.

16...bxa4 17.Bxa4

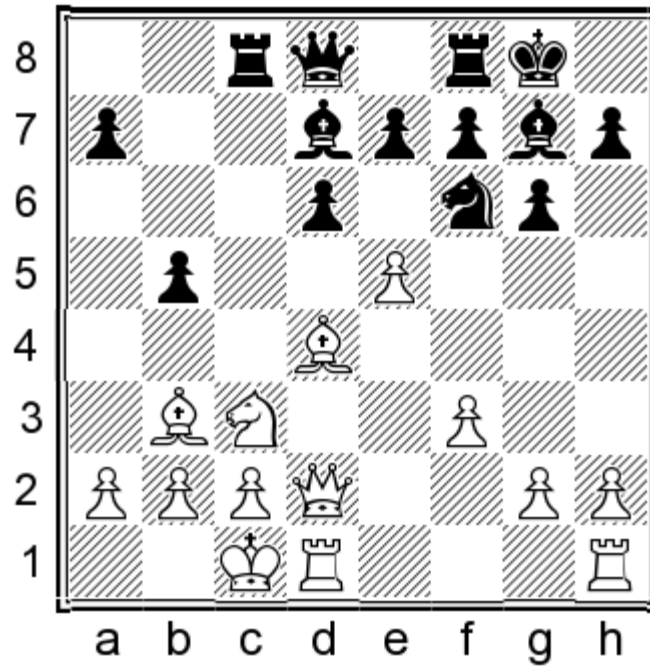
17.Nxa4 was seen in Ahmed Holi Ali – Ankit, Dubai 2013, and now 17...Bxa4N 18.Bxa4 Qb6 is similar to the Gashimov game above.



17...Rxc3! 18.Bxd7 Rc5 19.Ba4 Qb6

Black's queenside initiative was already decisive in Somborski – Roganovic, Sombor 2009.

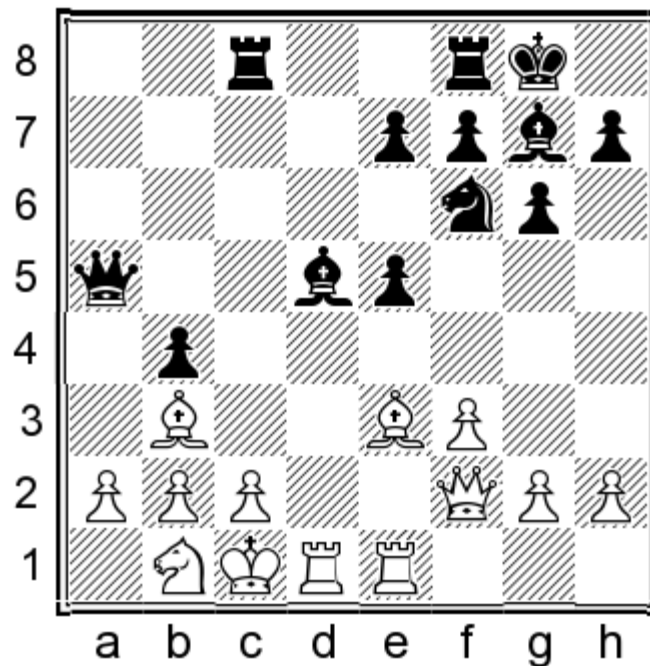
B) 13.e5



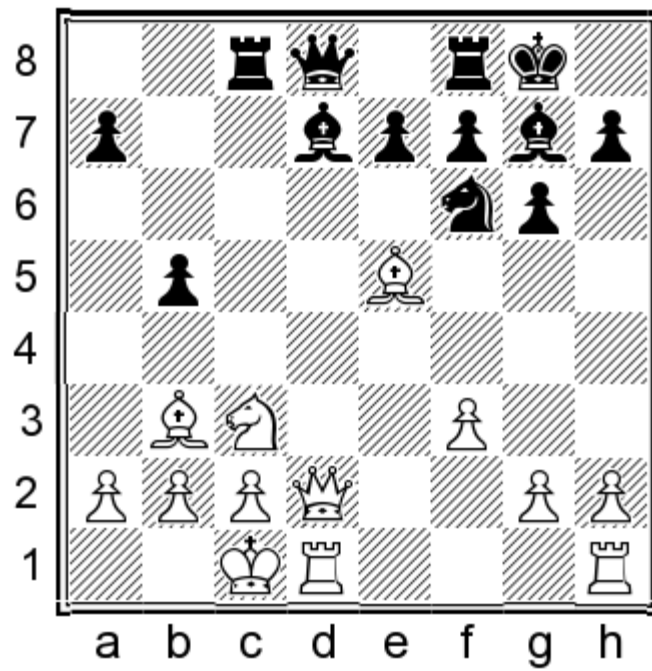
The immediate central break does not put much pressure on Black.

13...dxe5 14.Bxe5

14.Bxa7?! I can see some logic behind first giving the e-pawn and only then capturing on a7, but Black can reopen the long diagonal whenever he wishes. The following game featured logical play on both sides: 14...Qc7 15.Be3 Bc6 16.Qe2 Qa5 17.Rhe1 b4 18.Nb1 Bd5 19.Qf2



This was Epstein – J. Shahade, Denver 1998, and here 19...Bxb3!N 20.axb3 Nd5-+ would have been crushing, as White's position is terribly passive.

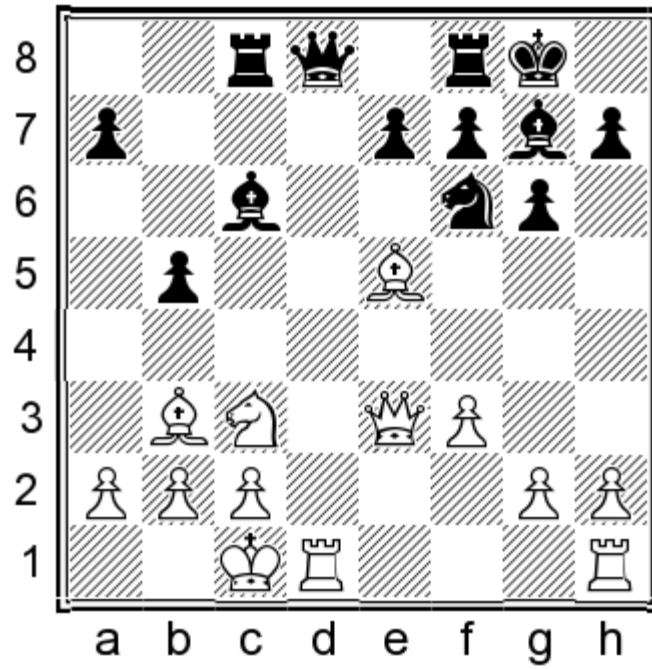


14...Bc6

From this position White may try B1) 15.Qe3 or B2) 15.Qxd8. The latter is more prudent, as Black's attack is coming quickly.

15.Qg5 Qb6 reaches a position where Black has scored 6/6 so far. The following game illustrates the play rather nicely: 16.Bd4 Qb7 17.h4 a5 18.a3 b4 19.axb4 axb4 20.Nb1 Qa6 21.h5 Ba4 22.Bxa4 Qxa4 23.Rd2 Rfd8 Black was winning in Esenov – Smerdon, Dresden 2008.

B1) 15.Qe3



Compared with the note above, Black can no longer put the queen on b6, but he still has excellent chances.

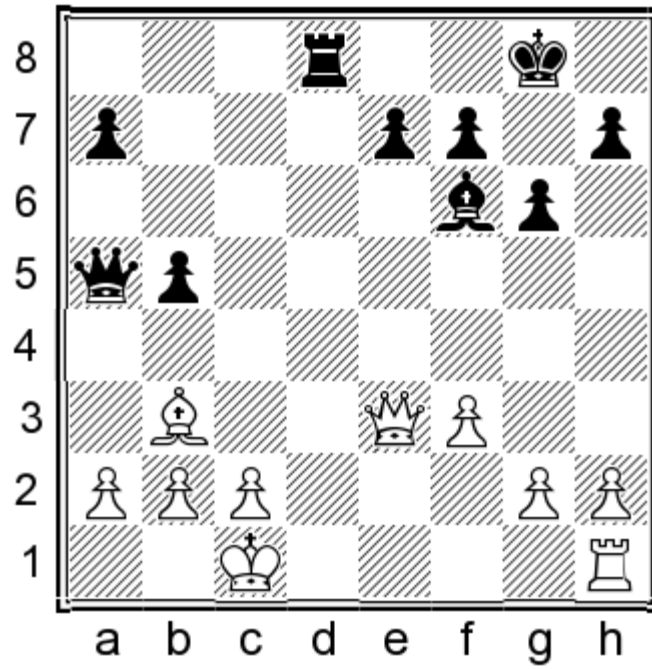
15...Qa5 16.a3

Black has a crushing score against most other moves.

16.Kb1 b4 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Qc7 20.h4 Rfd8µ has been seen a few times. Black is dominating the opposite-coloured-bishop middlegame, as he can block in the b3-bishop with ...e6 whenever he chooses.

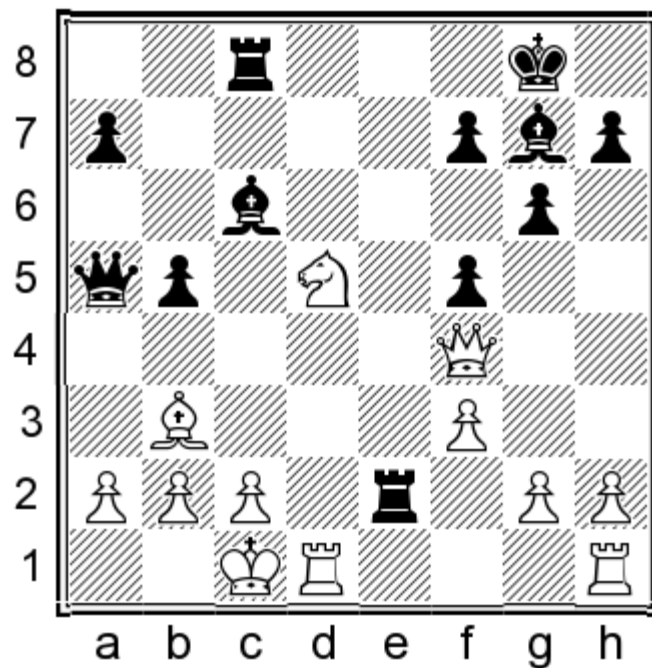
16.h4 b4 17.Bxf6 (17.Ne2 gives Black a pleasant choice between 17...Ba4µ as played in Y. Zhao – Perelman, Aurora 2013, and 17...Ng4!?N 18.fxg4 Qxe5µ) 17...Bxf6 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Qc7µ is similar to the note above.

16.Bxf6?! Even future GMs are not immune to ceding the dark squares! 16...Bxf6 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.Rxd5 Rfd8 19.Rxd8† Rxd8



20.f4 Qc7 21.c3 b4 22.Rd1 Rxd1† 23.Kxd1 bxc3 24.bxc3 Bxc3μ Neiksans – Vocaturo, Balaguer 2010.

16.Bd4 was played against a Dragon expert and White did not last long: 16...Rfe8 17.Bxf6?! exf6 18.Qf4 f5 19.Nd5 Re2μ It is worth seeing the remaining moves:

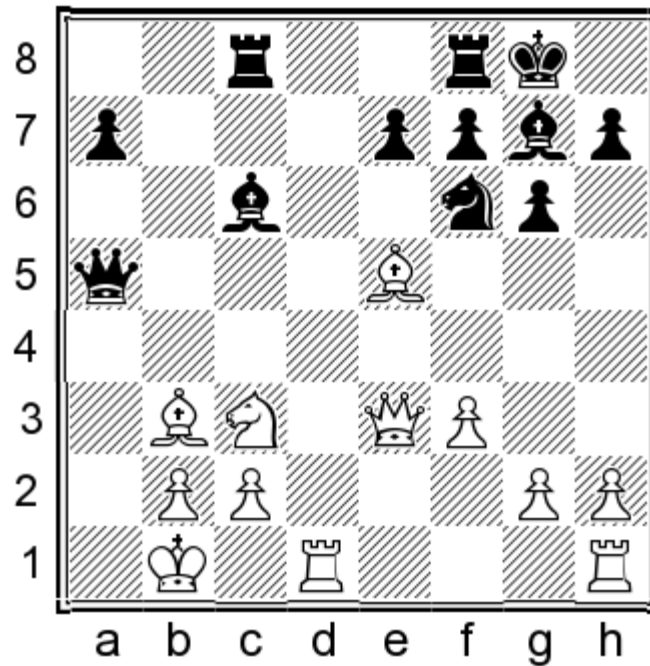


20.g4? Bxd5 21.Rxd5 Rexc2†! 22.Bxc2 Qxa2 23.Rxb5 Qa1† 24.Kd2 Qxh1 25.Qg3 Rd8† 26.Ke2 Qc1 27.Bd3 Re8† 28.Kf2 f4 29.Qg2 Qe1# Bertholee – Tiviakov, Netherlands 2000.

16...b4 17.axb4 Qxb4

17...Qa1†N is an easy route to equality if Black wants it: 18.Kd2 Qxb2 19.Nd5 Nxd5 (19...Ne4†!? 20.Qxe4 Bxe5÷) 20.Bxb2 Nxe3 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.Kxe3 With a level ending.

18.Kb1 Qa5



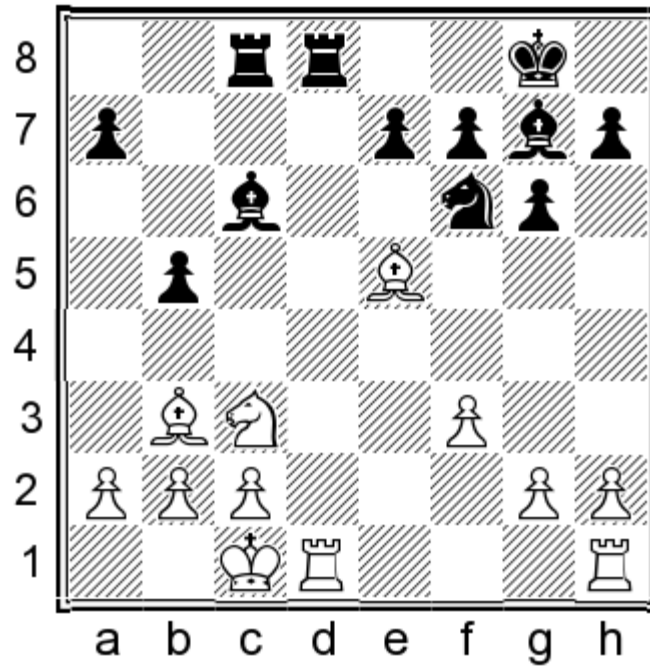
19.Bxf6?

I don't know why so many players are eager to give up the dark-squared bishop in this line. White should prefer something like 19.Rhe1N with approximate equality.

19...Bxf6 20.Nd5 Bxd5 21.Rxd5 Qc7 22.Rhd1 Qxh2μ

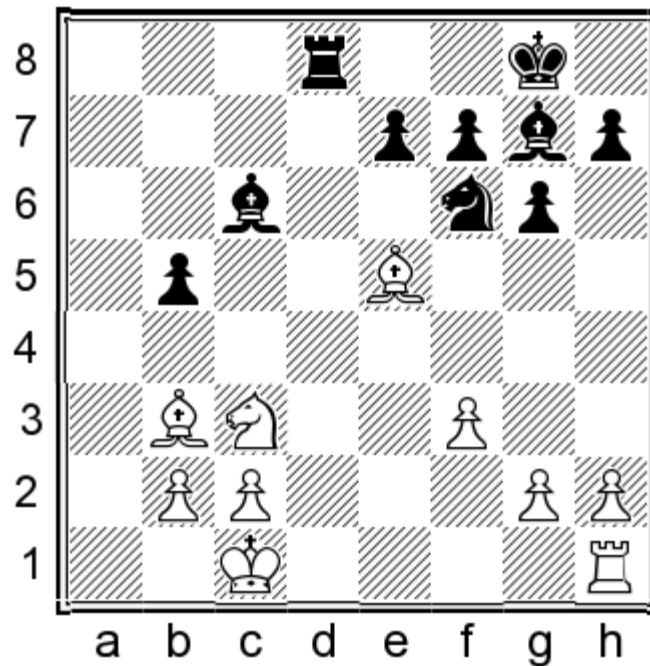
Padilla – Cordova, Lima 2002.

B2) 15.Qxd8 Rfxd8



16.Rxd8†

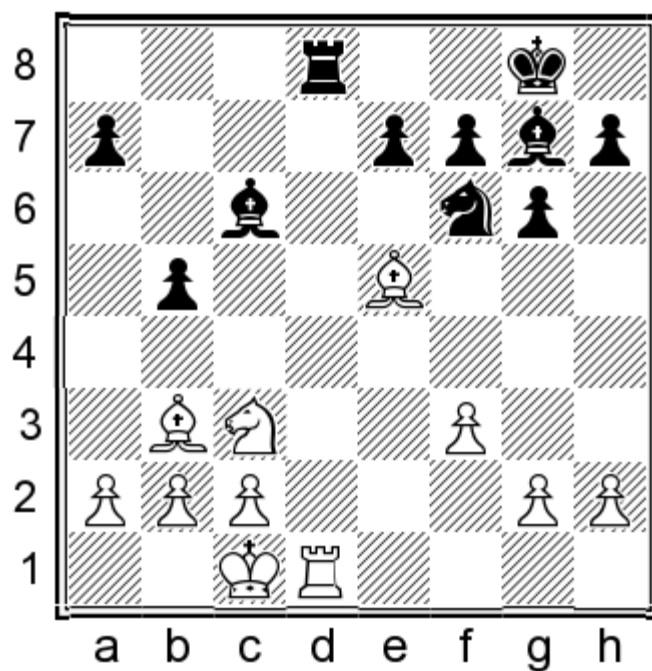
White has also tried chipping away at Black's queenside immediately: 16.a4 a6 (This is the simplest reply, although 16...bxa4!? 17.Bxa4 Bxa4 18.Nxa4 Bh6† 19.Kb1 Nd5 20.Bd4 Ne3 is also possible if you would prefer some imbalance in the position; see Baramidze – Polzin, Austria 2006.) 17.axb5 axb5 18.Rxd8† Rxd8



19.Rd1 Bh6† 20.Kb1 Rxd1† 21.Nxd1 The endgame is equal, although Aroshidze – Svetushkin, Kusadasi 2006, is a nice example in which Black managed to grind out a win.

16...Rxd8 17.Rd1

White is simply chopping wood but he has to be careful in the endgame, as Black has the more mobile pawn majority and the b3-bishop might find itself shut out of play.

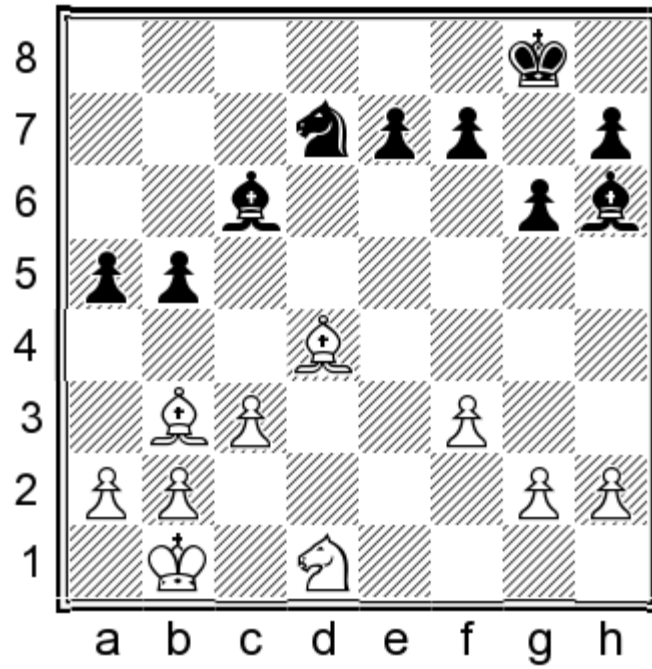


17...Bh6†! 18.Kb1 Rxd1† 19.Nxd1 Nd7 20.Bd4 a5 21.c3

21.c4 b4! favours Black.

White's best seems to be 21.Nc3 e6 22.a4 b4 with balanced play.

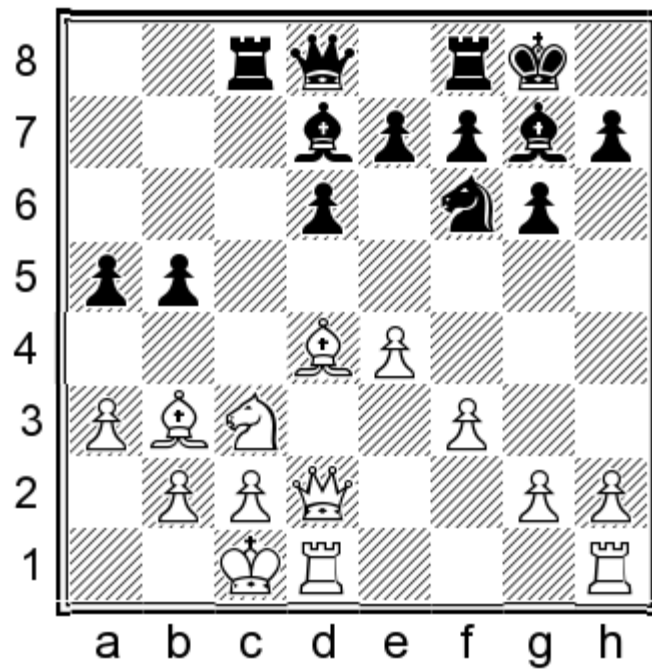
In N. Mamedov – Kudrin, Moscow 2005, Black could have fought for the advantage with:



21...Bf4N 22.h3 a4 23.Bc2 f5!³

White's pieces are rather passive.

C) 13.a3 a5



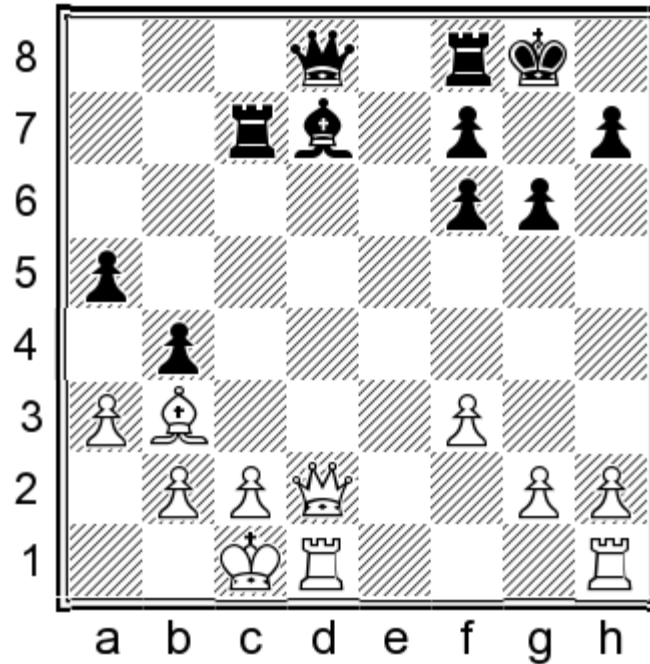
14.Kb1

White adopts a defensive approach, hoping to soak up the pressure and eventually exploit his extra pawn (after ...b4).

14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.exd5 transposes to variation B of Chapter 7.

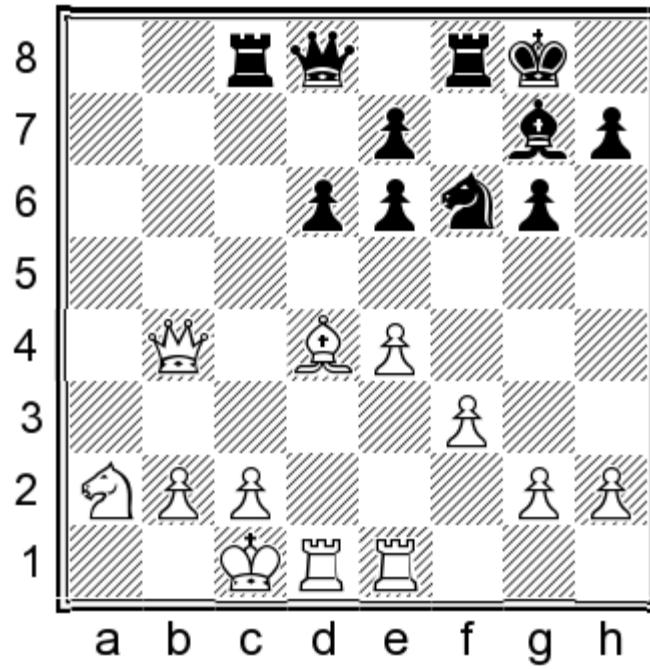
14.h4 leads back to variation C of Chapter 8, although it may well transpose again to variation B22 of Chapter 7 after 14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.exd5 Kg8.

14.e5 has a lot of similarities to 13.e5 and likewise should not trouble Black. 14...dxe5 15.Bxe5 Here we don't have to worry about the pressure on the d7-bishop and can just get on with it on the queenside. 15...b4 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Ne4 Rc7 18.Nxf6† exf6

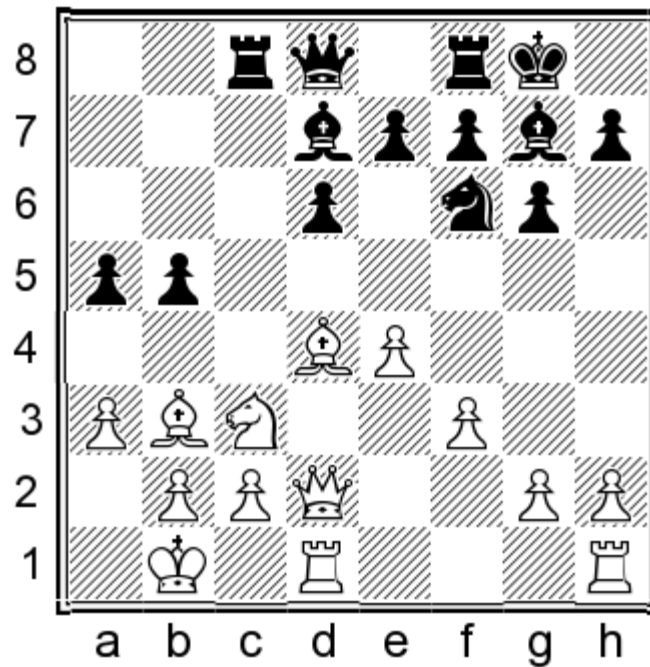


19.a4 Qc8 20.Rhe1 Be6 21.Bxe6 fxe6= rated rko – el-shaddai, engine game 2012.

14.Rhe1 is a rare approach among humans, but the positions resemble those in the main line (after 14.Kb1). 14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.Na2 Be6 17.Bxe6 fxe6 18.Qxb4 Here I like the human approach of:



18...Nd7!?N 19.Bxg7 (after 19.Qb3 Nc5 20.Bxc5 Rxc5 21.Qxe6† Kh8 White may be two pawns up but Black has a vicious initiative) 19...Kxg7 20.Re3 Rb8 21.Qc4 e5 Black has full compensation.

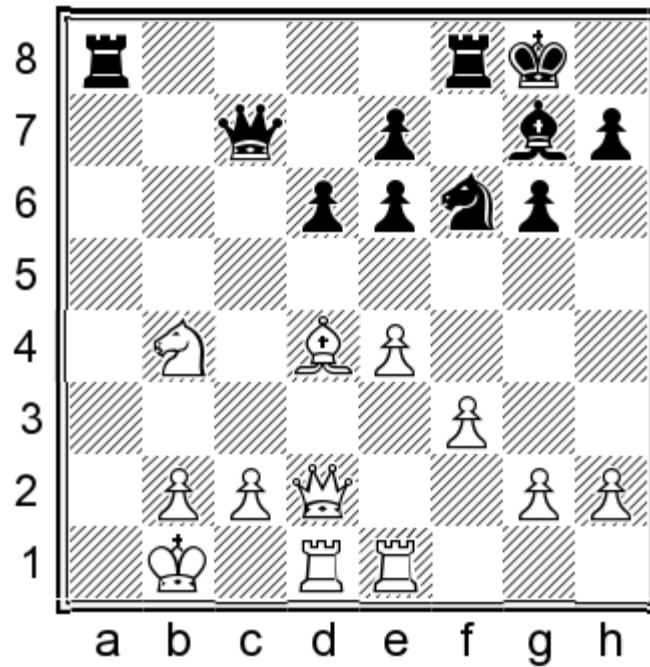


14...b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.Na2

16.Nd5 does not make any sense here as the b4-pawn isn't dropping. 16...Nxd5 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.exd5 This position could actually be reached via the 13.Nd5 move order, but with White having made the strange decision to play Kb1 rather than capturing the b4-pawn. Black will get strong play down the a-file. (18.Qxd5?! Kg8μ is even worse for White.)

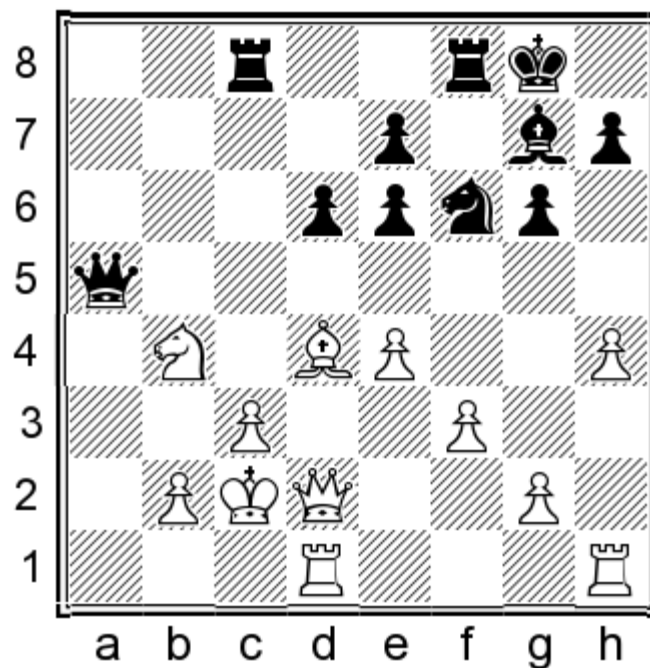
16...Qc7 17.Nxb4

17.Rhe1 is one of those curious moves that engines pick up on and play in lots of games, yet it remains almost untouched in tournament play. 17...Be6 18.Bxe6 fxe6 19.Nxb4 Ra8 Black has good compensation. One example continued:

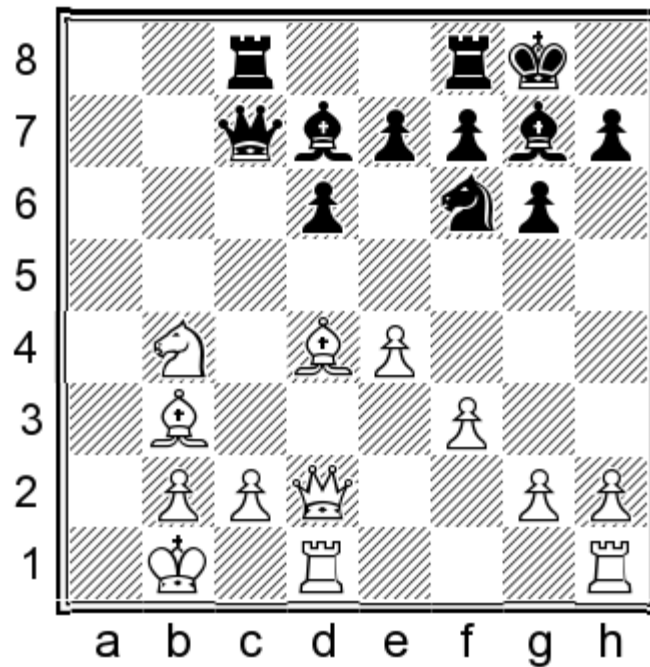


20.c3 Nd7 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.b3 Ra5 23.Kb2 Rfa8 24.Ra1 Nc5 25.Rxa5 Rxa5 26.h4 Qa7 27.Rb1 h6 28.g4 e5= Trembecki – P. Nagy, email 2009.

17.h4 was tried in another correspondence game. Black can proceed with the same plan: 17...Be6 18.Bxe6 fxe6 19.Nxb4 Ra8 20.c3 Qa5 21.Kc2 Rac8



22.Kb3 I can't imagine many players being happy having to put their king on such a square! 22...Nd7 23.Bxg7 Kxg7 24.Ra1 Qb5© Olofsson – Grigoryev, email 2009.



17...Ra8

Black's queenside play obviously gives him fantastic compensation for the pawn. Finding the right defensive moves in a practical game would be difficult, and even in engine games Black has the upper hand.

18.Nd5?!

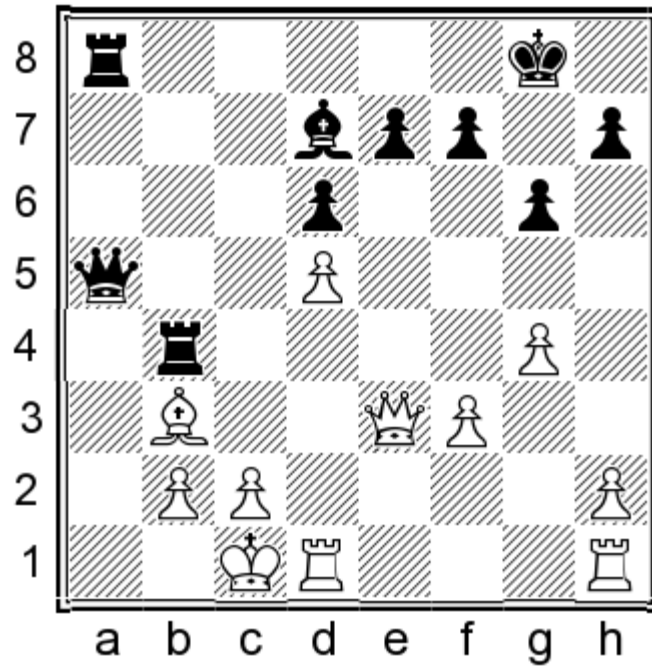
Not the best move, but it was played in both of the over-the-board examples on my database.

18...Nxd5 19.exd5

19.Bxd5 Bxd4 20.Qxd4 Ra4 21.Qc3 Qa7µ Hong Xing – Sun Fanghui, China 2013.

19...Bxd4 20.Qxd4 Rfb8 21.g4 Qa5 22.Kc1 Rb4 23.Qe3

In Sulc – K. Saric, Djakovo 2006, Black should not have been in a hurry to check on a1 and take on b2. A stronger move (though by no means the only winning continuation) would have been:



23...Bb5!N

Preventing White's king from fleeing to the kingside. A similar motif can be found earlier on page 154.

D) 13.Bxa7

This can be compared with the lines in Chapter 7 where Black gives up a pawn on the queenside. The structure is slightly different but the general evaluation is the same: Black obtains full compensation.

13...b4

White sometimes tries D1) 14.Ne2 but the main line is D2) 14.Nd5.

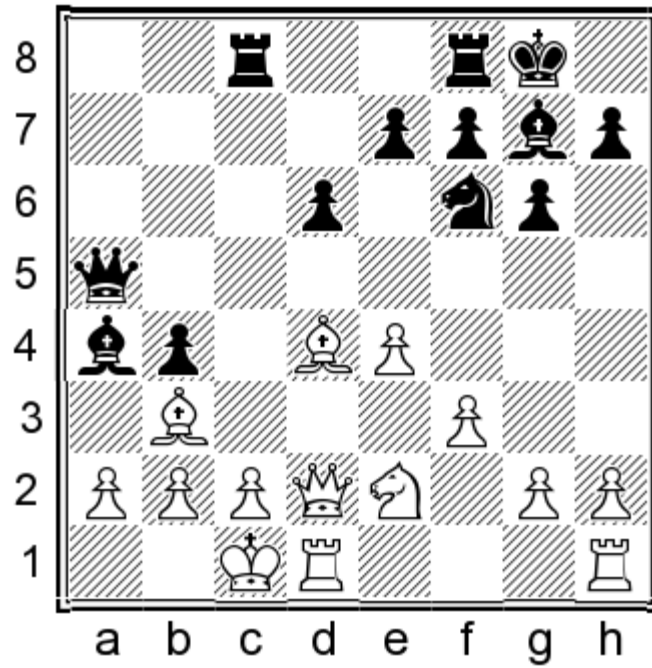
D1) 14.Ne2

Keeping the knights on the board does little to challenge Black.

14...Qa5 15.Bd4 Ba4

Black's queenside play is coming fast.

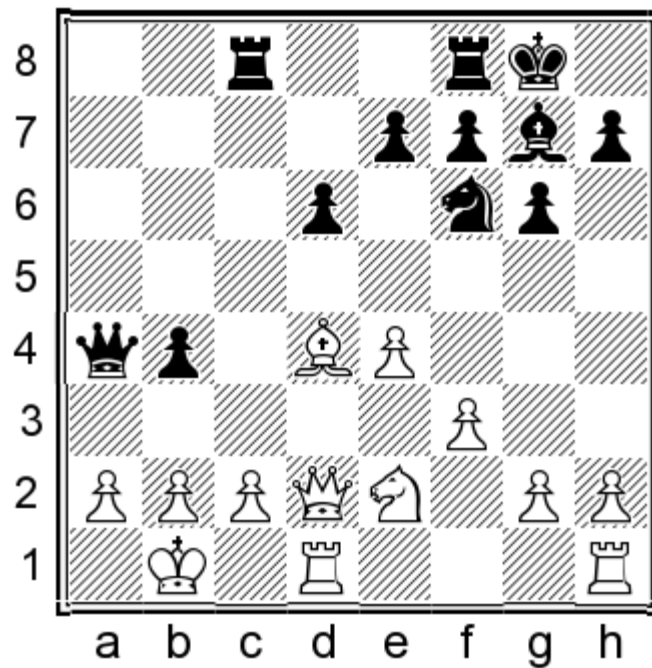
15...e5!? 16.Be3 d5 is also interesting and is likely to transpose after 17.exd5 Ba4 18.Kb1 Bxb3 19.cxb3. This was the actual move order of the game quoted at the end of the variation.



16.Kb1!

The only way to keep the balance.

16.Bxa4?! Qxa4 17.Kb1



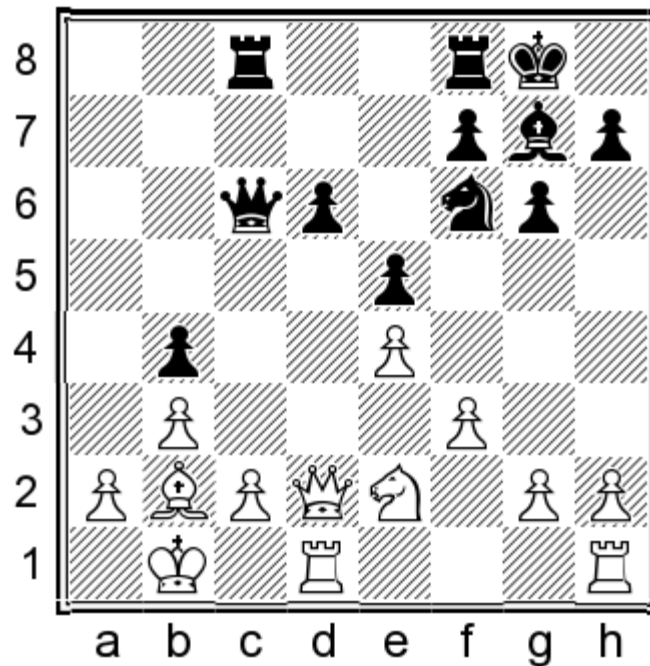
17...e5!

With the e2-knight misplaced, Black has enough time to expand in the centre.

18.b3

18.Be3 d5! 19.exd5 Nxd5 20.Qxd5 (20.Bg5?N loses to 20...e4! as Pavlovic observes. The finish might be: 21.fxe4 Bxb2! 22.exd5 Ra8–+) 20...Qxc2† 21.Ka1 Qxe2 22.Qd2 Rc2 23.Qxe2 Rxe2µ Black had a great endgame in Limberg – Alonso Moyano, Sao Paulo 2004.

18...Qc6 19.Bb2



19...d5! 20.Bxe5

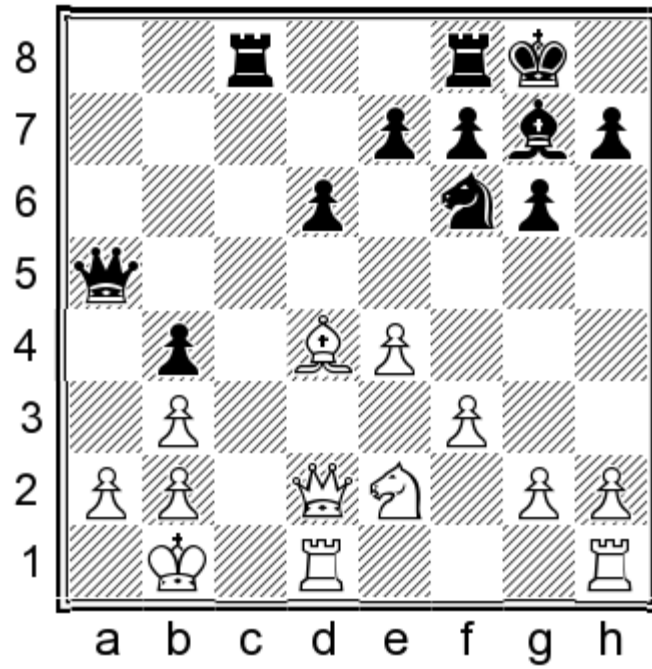
Leaving Black's centre intact is even worse: 20.Ng3 Rfd8 21.Qe2 Qc7 22.Rd3 d4 23.Qd2 Bh6! 24.Qd1 Ra8 25.Ne2 Qa5–+ Black was dominating in Gulbas – Zelbel, Belgium 2012.

20...dxe4 21.Bb2 exf3 22.gxf3 Nd5 23.Bxg7 Kxg7 24.Qxd5 Qxc2† 25.Ka1 Qxe2³

White's loose king and fragile kingside pawns gave Black the upper hand in Schut – Tikkanen, Wijk aan Zee 2012.

16...Bxb3 17.cxb3

Now we can execute a familiar central break.

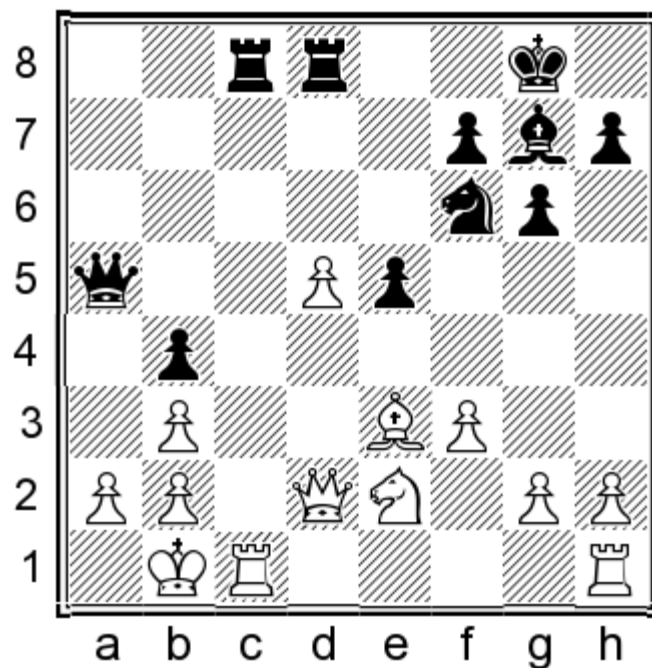


17...e5

17...Ra8 is a decent alternative. White can cling onto the pawn but Black maintains good pressure. 18.Nc1 (Instead 18.a4 bxa3 19.Qxa5 Rxa5 20.bxa3 Rxa3= is simply a level ending.) 18...Rfc8 Peters – Moskow, Los Angeles 2010.

18.Be3 d5 19.exd5 Rfd8 20.Rc1

20.d6N is another try, when 20...Bf8 21.Rc1 Ra8 22.a4 Rxd6 23.Qc2 Nd5 again provides good compensation for the pawn.



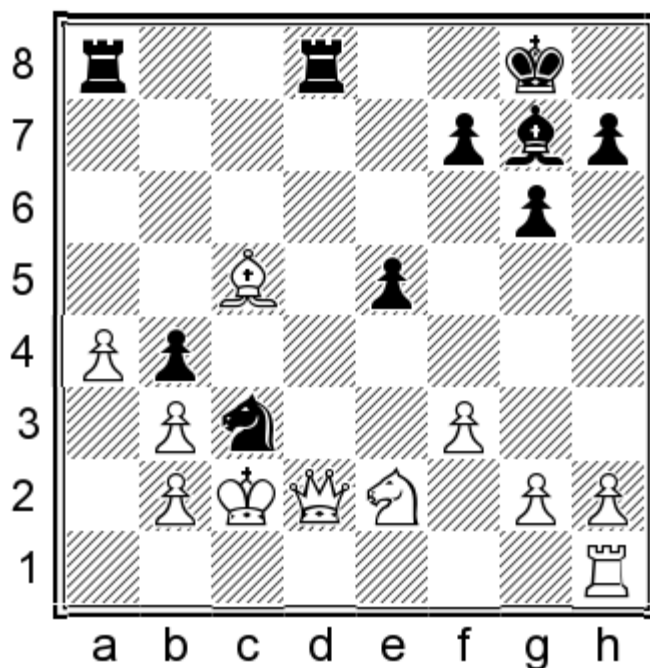
20...Ra8!?

20...Nxd5N is reasonable but the text move keeps things more complex.

21.a4 Nxd5 22.Rc5 Qxc5 23.Bxc5 Nc3† 24.Kc2?

Now Black wins material by force.

24.Qxc3N 24...bxc3 25.Nxc3 Rd2 would arrive at a double-edged but roughly level ending.

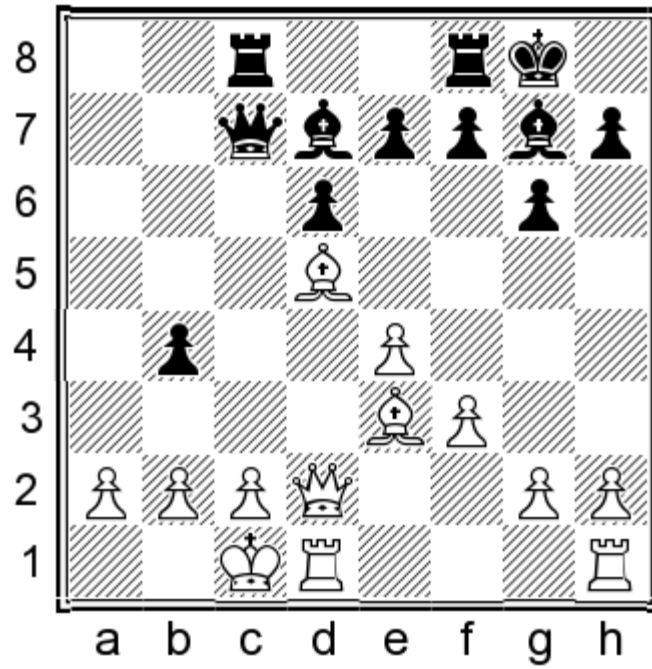


24...Rxd2† 25.Kxd2 Rd8† 26.Ke3 Bh6† 27.Kf2 Nxe2 28.Kxe2 Rd2† 29.Ke1 Rc2—+

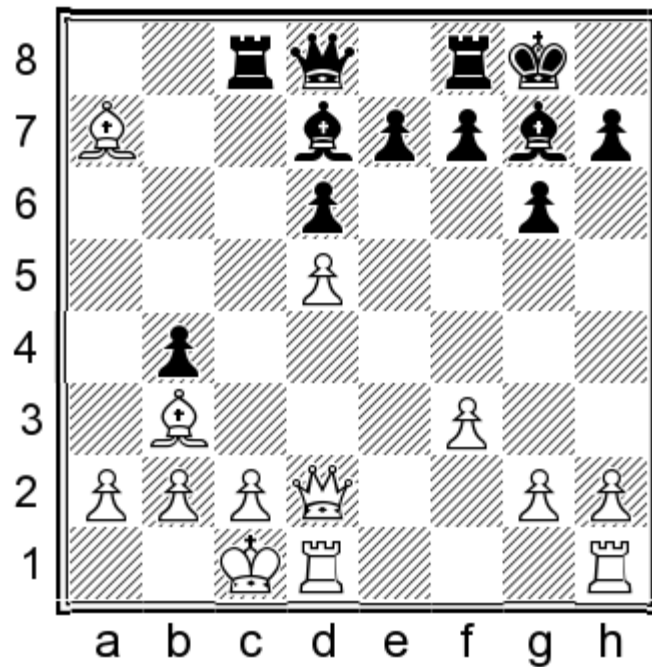
Palencia – J. Garcia, Mislata 2011.

D2) 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5

15.Bxd5?? actually loses at once. 15...Qc7! The pressure along the c- and a-files will be too much for White. 16.Be3



16...Ba4! Forcing White to open the long diagonal as well. 17.b3 (17.Bb3 Bxb3 18.axb3 Ra8 19.Qxb4 Rfc8--+) 17...Bb5--+ Lazov – Mladenovic, Skopje 2013.

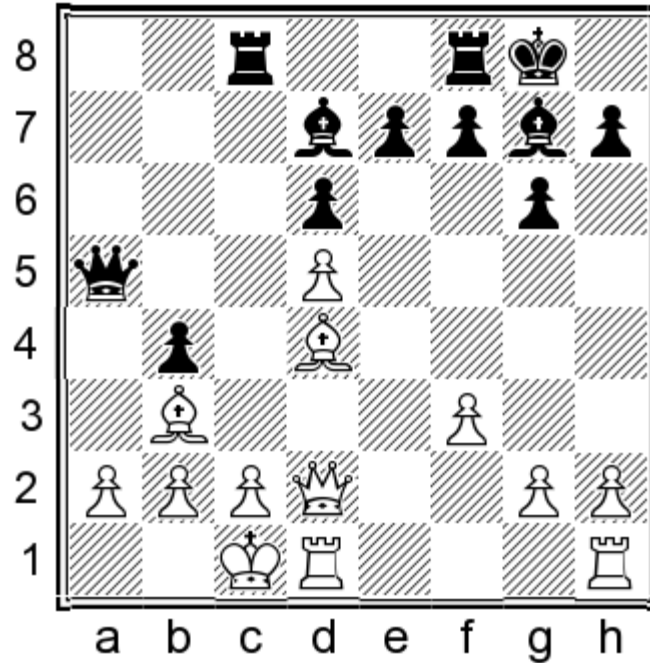


15...Qa5

White can address the attack on his bishop with D21) 16.Bd4?! or D22) 16.Qe3.

D21) 16.Bd4?!

The immediate bishop retreat gives us an additional option.



16...Rxc2†!

A pretty shot. Black gets good compensation regardless of how White recaptures.

16...Ba4 should transpose to variation D22 after 17.Qe3. Instead 17.Bxa4? Qxa4 18.Bxg7 was played in Huynh Mai Phuong – Hoang Xuan Thanh, Can Tho 2001, when both players overlooked the crushing 18...b3!N.

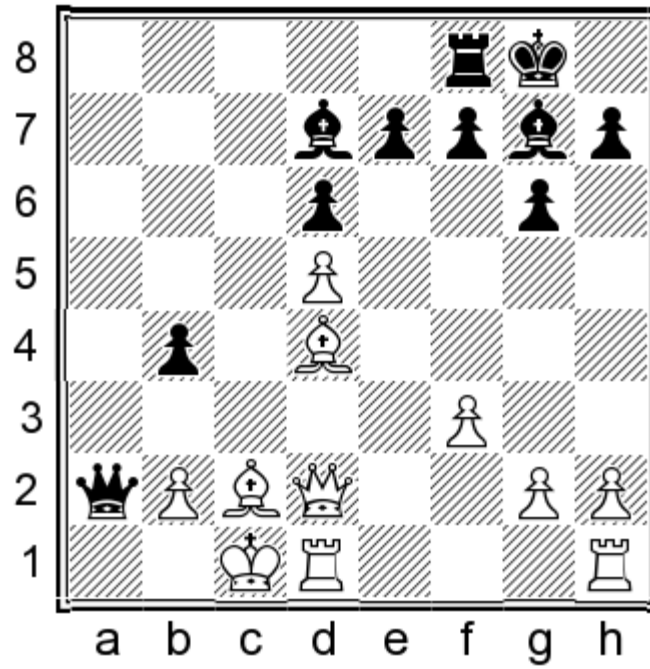
17.Bxc2

17.Kxc2? loses immediately to 17...Bf5† 18.Kc1 Rc8†.

17.Qxc2 This is White's safest path. 17...Rc8 18.Qxc8† Bxc8 White has a slight material advantage with two rooks for the queen but Black has the stronger light-squared bishop, safer king and can play on the dark squares. 19.Kb1 Bf5† 20.Ka1 h5 21.Bxg7 Kxg7= Perdomo Abad – Natalicchio Escalante, Gran Canaria 2009.

17...Qxa2

At the moment Black only has one pawn for the rook but White will have to give up a lot of material to fend off the attack. The first threat is 18...Qa1† so White has to move his queen.



18.Qf2

18.Qe3 might be a slightly lesser evil but, as Pavlovic commented, Black can play in the same way. 18...Rc8 19.Kd2 Rxc2†!N 20.Kxc2 Qc4† 21.Kd2 Bxd4 The queen is better placed on e3 than f2 but Black's initiative still has plenty of power.

18...Rc8

White is already in trouble.

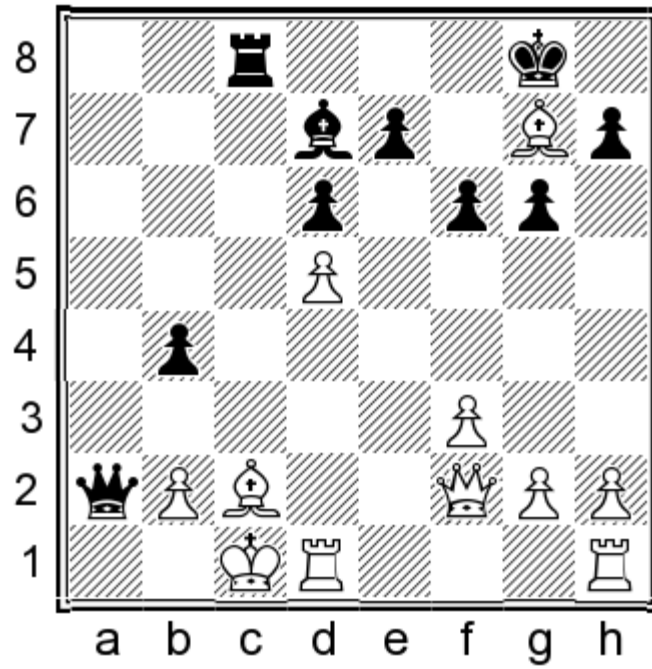
19.Kd2

The best chance to survive seems to be:

19.Bxg7N 19...f6!

Renewing the threat of ...b3.

19...Kxg7 20.Qd4† gives White a crucial tempo to defend.



20.Kd2!

20.Bh6? b3 is crushing.

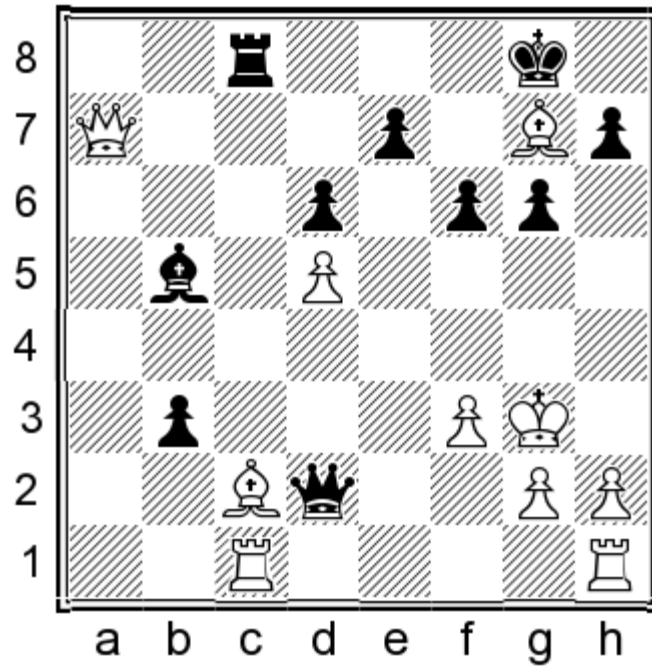
20...Qxb2 21.Rc1 b3 22.Qa7!

The position is crying out for a mate but White just about clings on. Nevertheless, Black is still much better.

22...Qc3†

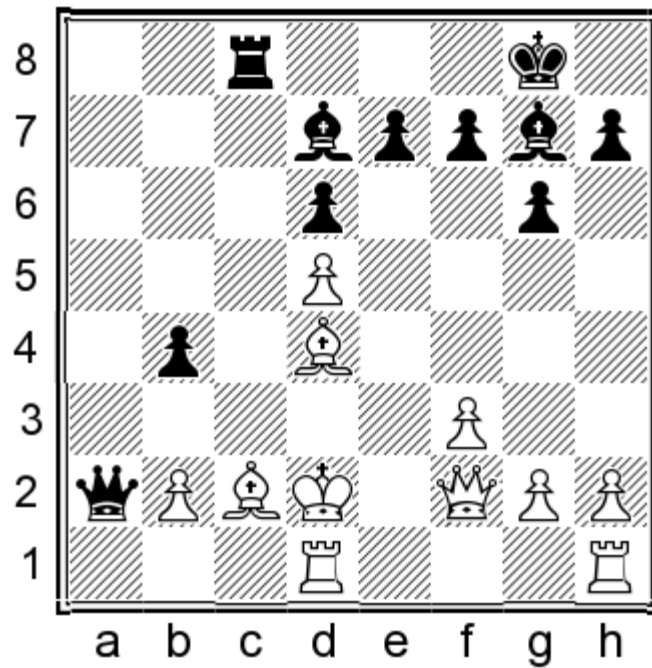
22...Rxc2† 23.Rxc2 bxc2 24.Rc1 Qb4† 25.Kxc2 Ba4† 26.Kd3 Qa3† 27.Kd4! Qxc1 28.Qxe7 With queen and bishop versus the lone king you'd think there must be a mate, but it transpires that White can escape into a drawn ending.

23.Ke2 Bb5† 24.Kf2 Qd2† 25.Kg3



25...b2! 26.Bxf6! bxc1=Q 27.Rxc1 exf6 28.Bxg6! Qg5† 29.Kf2 Qh4† 30.Ke3 Rf8!μ

At the end of a long, weird line, Black will pick up the bishop as White's king is too exposed.



19...Rxc2†!

The second rook also sacrifices itself on c2!

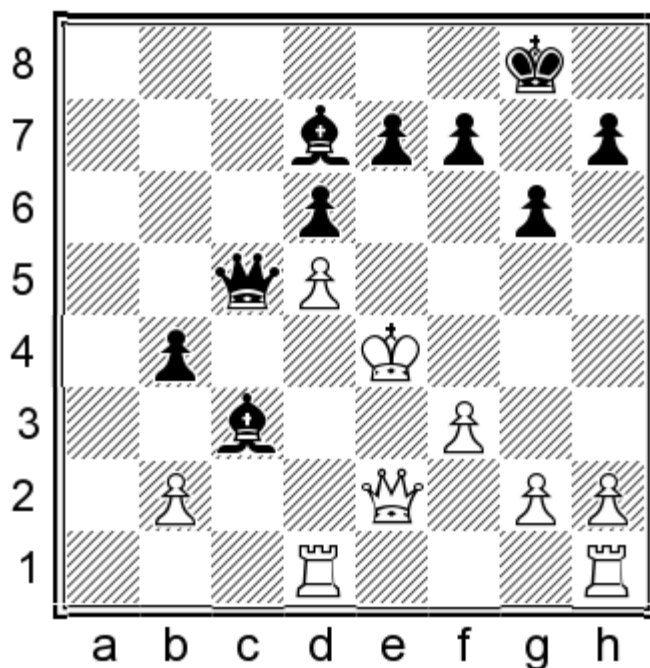
20.Kxc2 Qc4† 21.Kd2 Bxd4

Two players have found themselves on the wrong side of this brilliancy.

22.Qe2

After 22.Qf1 Bc3†! White already felt compelled to resign in Anarkulov – Vakhidov, Tashkent 2011. He could have played on a little longer, but after 23.bxc3 Qxc3† 24.Ke2 Bb5† 25.Kf2 Bxf1 26.Rhxf1 b3 Black has too large a material advantage.

22...Bc3†! 23.Ke3 Qc5† 24.Ke4



24...Bf5†

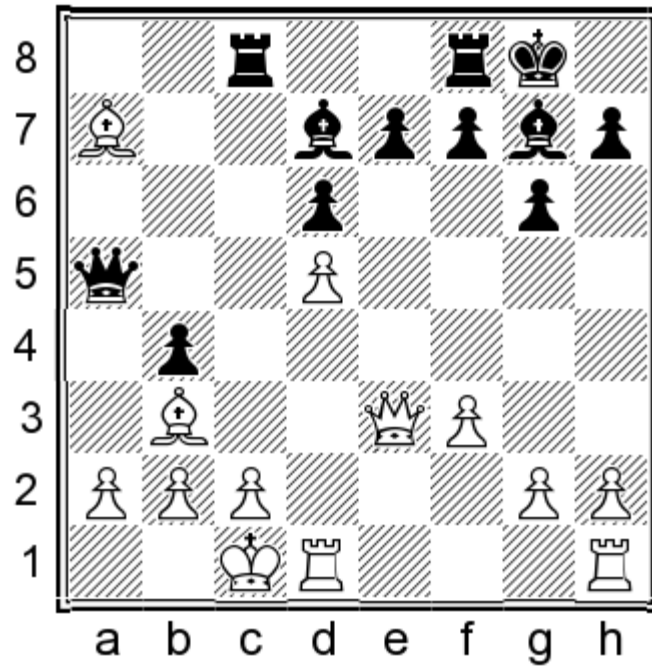
Apparently 24...f5† is mate in eight.

25.Kf4 Be5† 26.Kg5 f6† 27.Kh4 g5†

0–1 Bakre – Kadziolka, Pardubice 2004. An impressive GM scalp.

D22) 16.Qe3

This is obviously the safer of the two options.



16...Ba4 17.Bd4 Bxb3

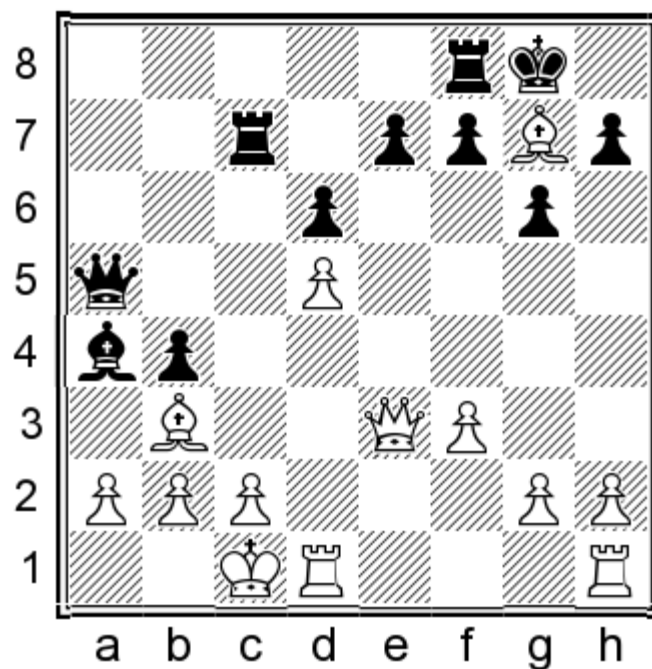
17...Rc7!?

This is an interesting move order but it should simply transpose.

18.Bxg7

The trick is that 18.Bb6?? is refuted by 18...Bxb3! 19.axb3 Bxb2+! with a decisive attack.

18.Kb1 Bxb3 19.Qxb3 transposes to 19.Kb1 in the notes to the main line.



18...Bxb3!N

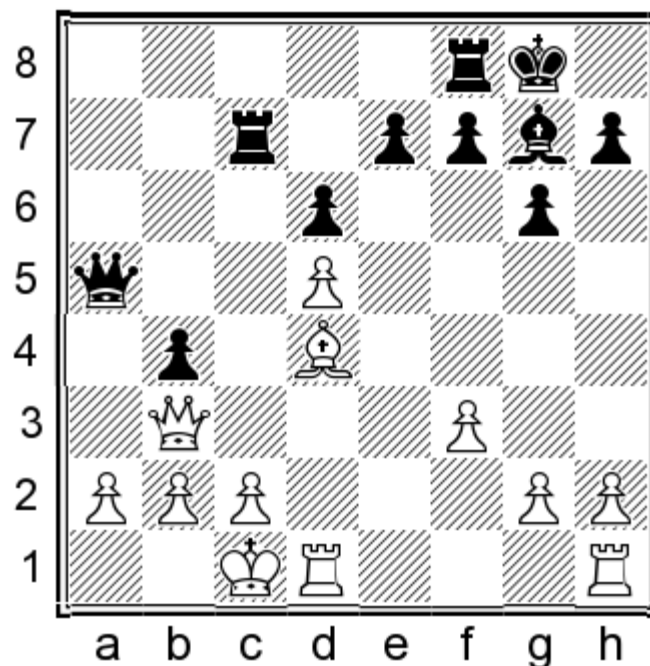
It's important to get the move order right. 18...Kxg7 has been played a few times but White has the strong novelty 19.c4!N, closing up the queenside as 19...bxc3? fails to 20.Qd4†.

19.Qxb3 Kxg7

We have transposed to the main line.

18.Qxb3 Rc7

Our plan is to pressure White along the a- and c-files. The queen on b3 does a useful defensive job but is rather misplaced for anything aggressive. Accurate play from both sides will generally lead to something of an impasse where neither side can do much.



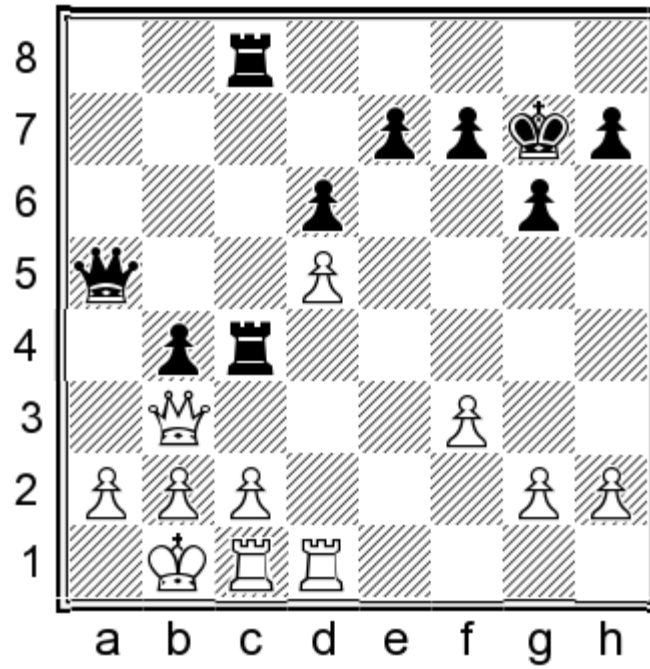
19.Bxg7

19.Kb1 Rfc8 20.Bxg7 Kxg7 21.Rc1

21.Rd2 Ra8 22.Rhd1 was seen in john7bits – jamwan, engine game 2012. Here 22...Rca7!N 23.c3 bxc3 24.Qxc3† Qxc3 25.bxc3 Rc7 26.Rc2 Ra3 reaches a drawn ending, as we have enough pressure against White's weak pawns that he cannot make progress.

21...Rc4 22.Rhd1

The position after 22...R8c5 23.Re1 was agreed drawn in Frander – Torma, Hungary 2012, but I prefer:



22...Qc5N

White has succeeded in defending his material but it will be difficult for him to make any progress. The game might continue:

23.Qd3 Kg8

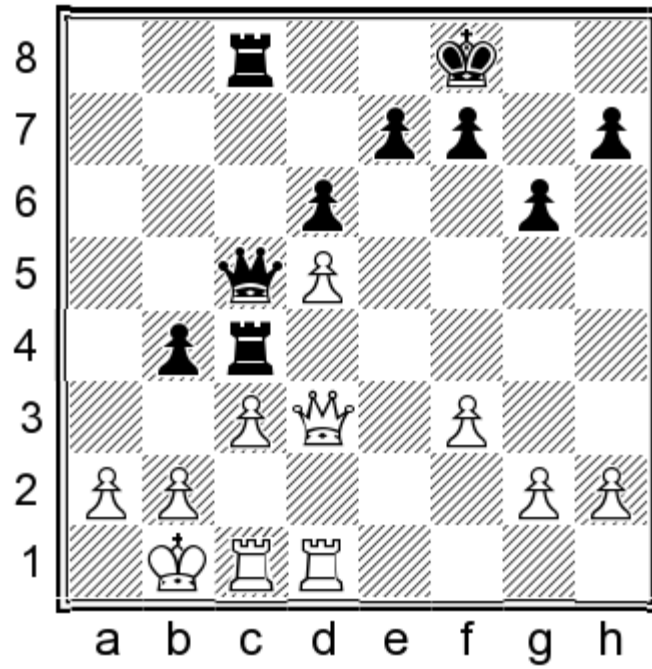
Black gets out of the way of an annoying check on d4.

24.c3!?

With the rooks this way round you have to be aware of this idea. White is trying to trade into a favourable ending with a strong passed a-pawn. However, Black can defend easily with:

24...Kf8!

Bringing the king one square closer for the upcoming rook-and-pawn endgame. White has to waste a move to force the queen exchange.



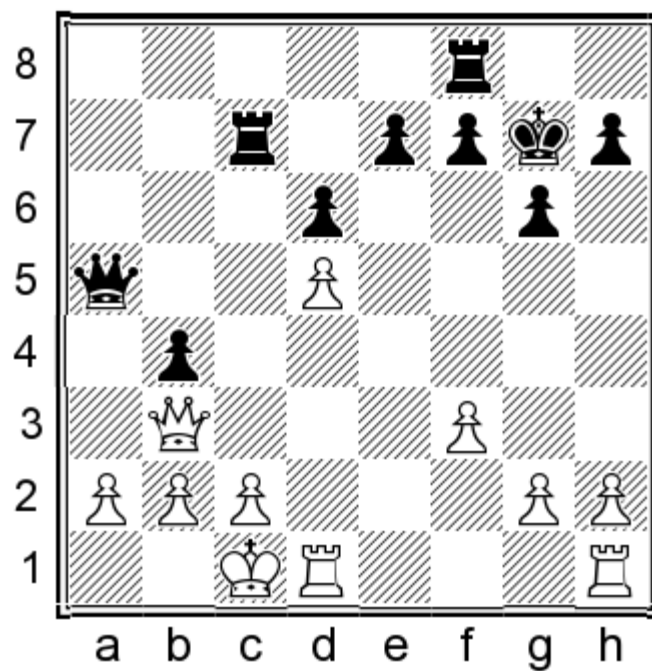
25.Qd2 bxc3 26.Rxc3 Rxc3 27.Qxc3 Qxc3 28.bxc3 Rxc3

The extra tempo means that Black is fine, for instance:

29.Kb2 Rc5 30.a4 Ke8 31.Kb3 Kd7 32.Rd4 e6=

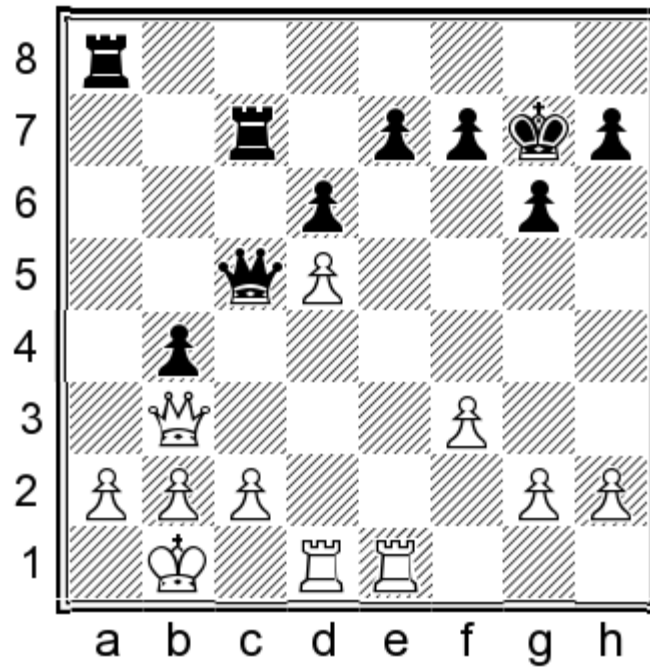
19...Kxg7

White now has a choice between hitting the b4-pawn and centralizing his king's rook.



20.Rd4

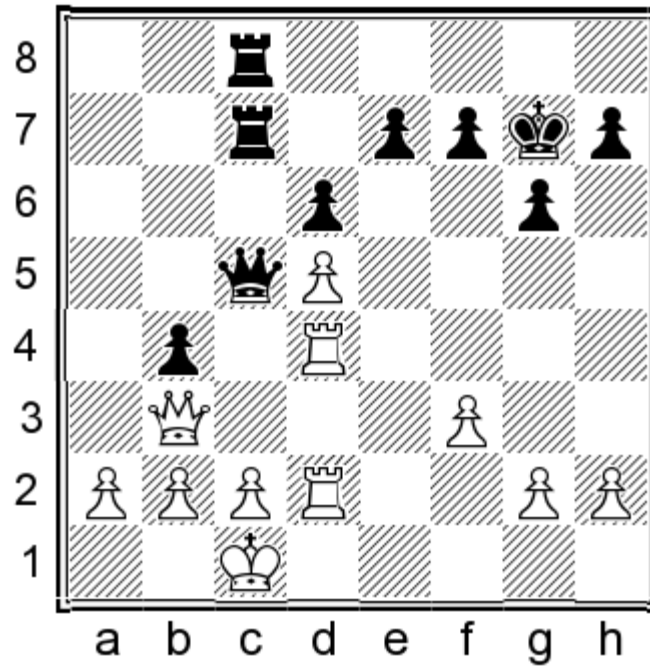
20.Rhe1 has been White's most common path but it allows Black to start his regrouping without delay: 20...Qc5!N
(20...Ra8 is the right idea, but playing it immediately allows 21.Re4! as in J. Shahade – T. Kosintseva, Bled [ol] 2002)
21.Kb1 (now 21.Re4 allows 21...Qf2) 21...Ra8



Black is threatening to treble on the a-file. 22.Re2 Rca7 23.c3 is therefore logical but after 23...bxc3 24.Qxc3† Qxc3 25.bxc3= we reach a similar position to one covered under 19.Kb1. White's queenside pawns are too vulnerable to make any progress.

20...Rfc8 21.Rhd1 Qc5 22.R1d2

We have been following Huber – Reeve, Red Deer (2) 2003. Now I would put pressure on the a-file with:



22...Ra8N 23.g4

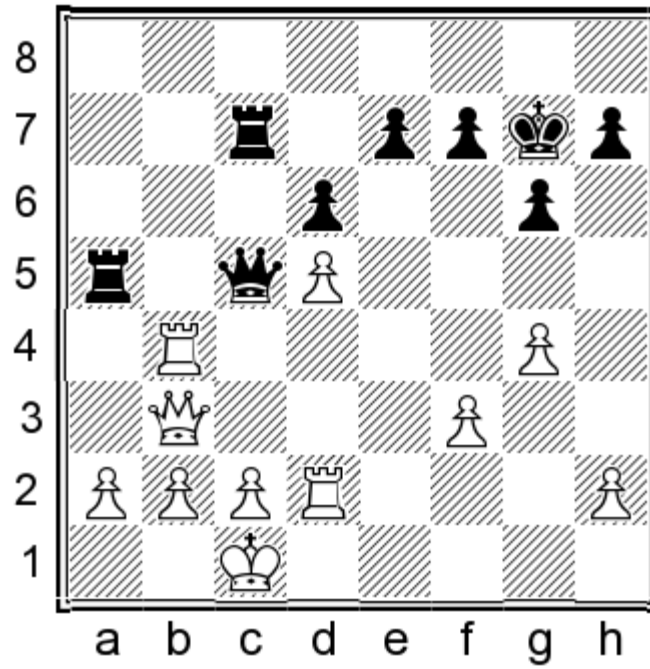
23.Rxb4?! Qg1† 24.Rd1 Qxg2 If anyone is better, it is Black.

23...Ra5 24.Rxb4

Now White can take this pawn without dropping his g-pawn.

24.Kb1 Rca7 25.Qxb4 Rxa2 26.c3 Qc8© offers Black good counterplay, as White's king is about to be forced on a march.

If White tries to sit then we can start a plan of trebling on the a-file, for instance: 24.h4 Qa7! 25.Kb1 Rc8 26.h5 Ra8=



24...Rxa2 25.Qxa2 Qxb4©

It will be difficult for White to hold on to his extra pawn while also keeping his king safe. Black has full compensation which should last a long time, provided he does not allow a queen exchange.

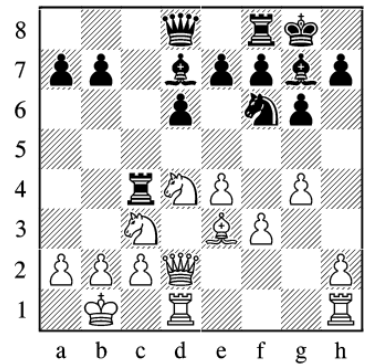
Conclusion

Neither 13.e5 nor 13.a3 is especially challenging; my recommendations are theoretically fine and have produced excellent practical results for Black.

13.Bxa7 b4 is more interesting. Sacrificing a pawn for long-term pressure against White's queenside is one of the defining themes of the Topalov Variation, so this scenario should not worry us at all. If White errs with 16.Bd4?! then you can unleash a spectacular rook sacrifice on c2. Even after the correct 16.Qe3, Black's activity and queenside pressure always offers good value for the missing pawn.

Chapter 10

Yugoslav Attack



Burnett Variation

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2
Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.Qb1 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.g4
14...b5

A) 15.Ndxb5?!

B) 15.g5

C) 15.h4!? h5

C1) 16.Nd5

C2) 16.gxh5 Nxh5

C21) 17.Nde2

C22) 17.Nce2

D) 15.b3! b4!?

D1) 16.Nce2?!

D2) 16.bxc4 bxc3 17.Qxc3 Qc7

D21) 18.Bc1

D22) 18.Kc1

D23) 18.Ka1

D24) 18.g5 Nh5

D241) 19.Ka1

D242) 19.Kc1

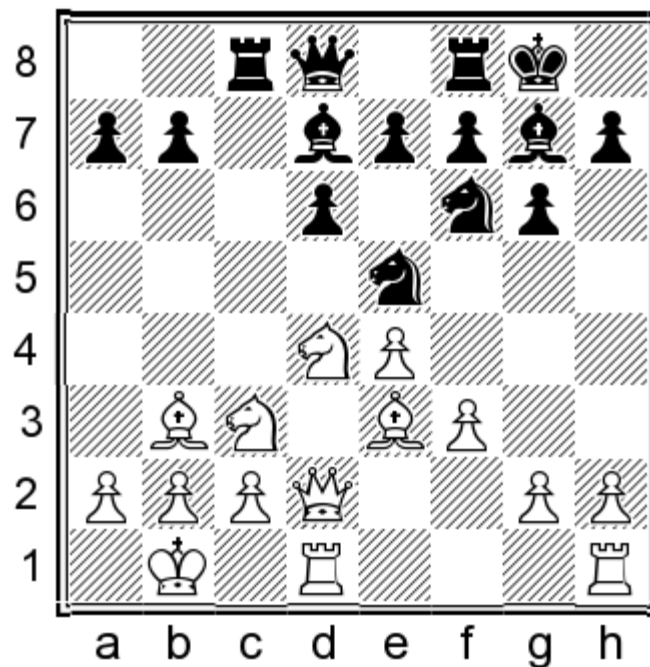
D25) 18.h4 h5

D251) 19.gxh5!?

D252) 19.g5

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.Kb1

This king sidestep is arguably the most critical test of the Dragon. Black can avoid it with the Topalov Variation, but I would like to show you an interesting way of battling against it. I can't promise that every variation that follows will be completely sound, but Black's set-up is a lot of fun and a good practical weapon.



12...Nc4 13.Bxc4

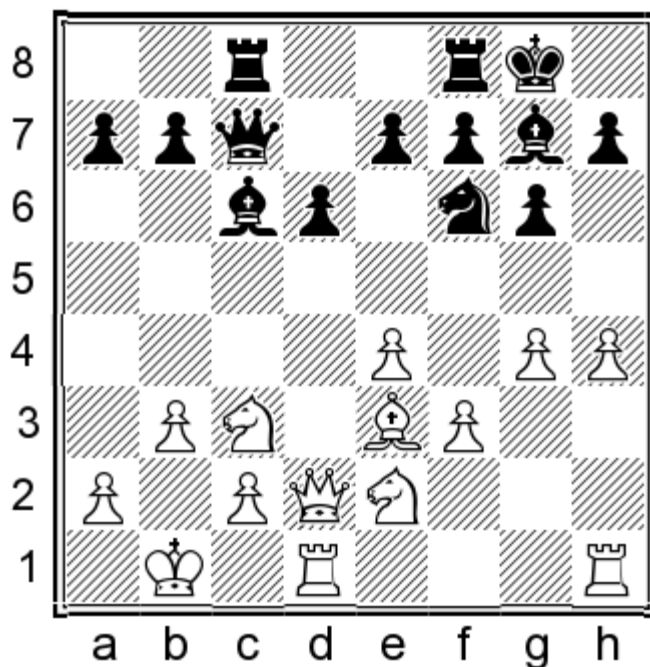
13.Qe2?! Giving up the dark-squared bishop is generally not a good approach. 13...Nxe3 14.Qxe3 Qb6! The threat of ...e5 costs White another tempo. 15.Qd2 Rc5N Black will double on the c-file, probably followed by sacrificing on c3 and pushing the a-pawn.

13...Rxc4 14.g4

14.h4 h5 transposes to Chapter 5.

14.Nb3 Here I would copy Peter Heine Nielsen's idea in a similar position and play 14...Qb8N, when 15.h4 (15.g4 Rfc8 doesn't look at all challenging) 15...h5 transposes to variation C of Chapter 5.

14.b3 is rather premature. 14...Rc8 15.g4 Qc7 16.Nde2 (16.Ncb5 Qb8 17.g5 Nh5 18.c4 a6 19.Nc3 b5 gave Black good counterplay in Leonori – Robbiani, Italy 1998) 16...Bc6 17.h4



Ferrer – Marin, Ubeda 1996. Here I would get on with the queenside counterplay with 17...b5N 18.h5 b4 when Black's attack is the faster.

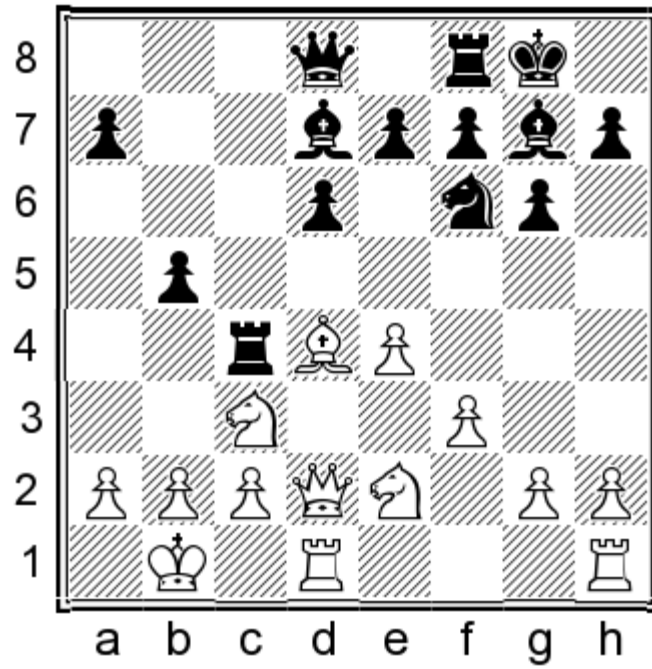
14.Nde2 b5

Black is already comfortable. A couple of examples:

15.Bd4?!

15.g4?! b4 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Qa5 18.Bh6 Walter – Khanukov, Eckernfoerde 2010. 18...Rfc8N 19.Bxg7 Rxc2! 20.Qh6 Rxe2—+

The text move has been played in a few games, including Shabalov – Jayawardena, Ravana 2009. In that game Black went wrong and eventually lost against his much higher rated opponent, but at this point he could have obtained a fine position with:

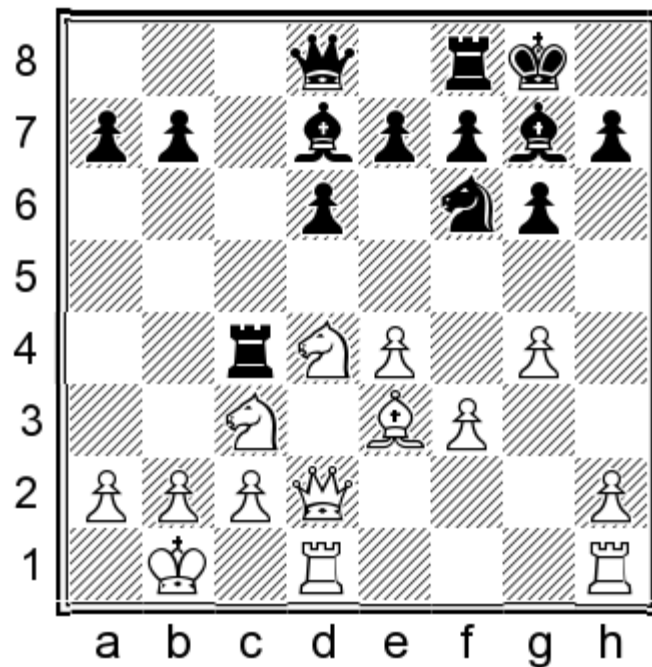


15...e5!N 16.Be3

16.Bxa7? is far too dangerous: 16...b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Be6 19.Qxd6 Qa8—+

16...b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Rc6³

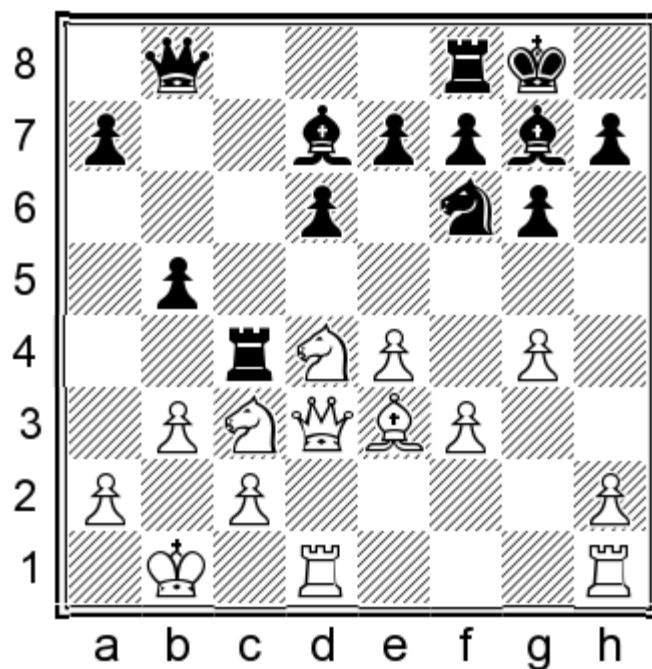
Intending ...Qc7 with excellent chances on the queenside.



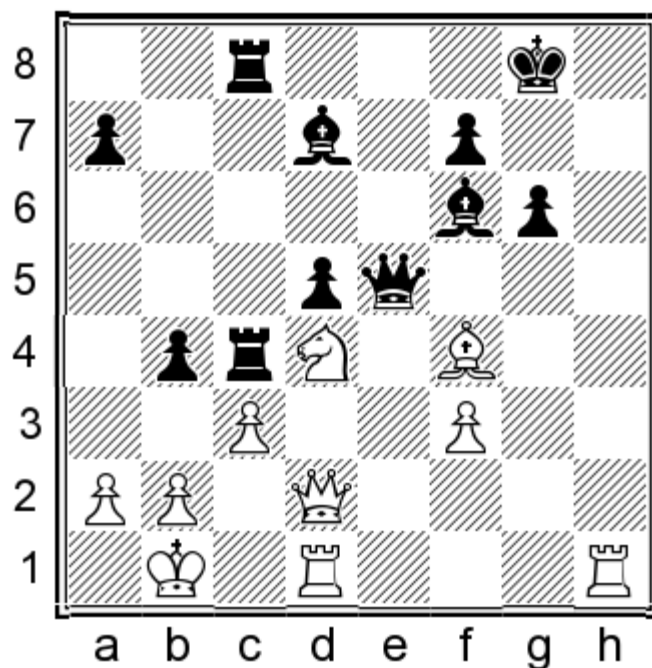
14...b5

Several other moves have been tested, but the text is the most challenging. We will analyse A) 15.Ndxb5?!, B) 15.g5, C) 15.h4!? and D) 15.b3!.

15.Qd3 is a curious move; White prevents ...b4 but it's not entirely clear what his plan is. 15...Qb8! 16.g5 (As Chris Ward points out, 16.b3?N could be met with:



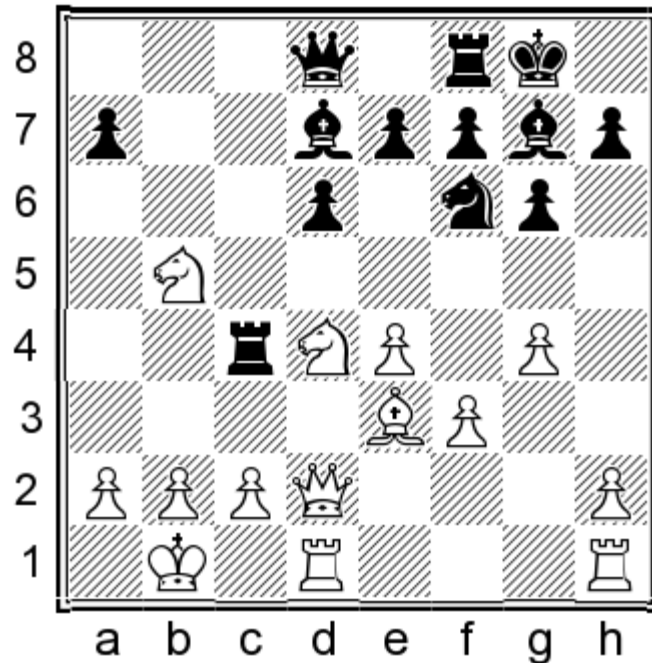
16...Rfc8! as the rook isn't actually attacked.) 16...Nh5 17.Nd5?! e6 18.Nf6† White didn't want to accept he had just lost a couple of tempos, but now he just loses a pawn. I'm leaving the rest of the game in simply for entertainment – Fedorov plays beautifully! 18...Nxf6 19.gxf6 Bxf6 20.h4 Rfc8 21.h5 d5! 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.exd5 exd5 24.Qd2 Qe5 25.c3 b4 26.Bf4



26...Qf5†!! 27.Nxf5 Bxf5† 28.Ka1 bxc3 29.bxc3 Rxf4! 30.Rc1 Rxf3 31.Kb2 d4 32.c4 Rb8† 33.Ka1 d3† 34.Rc3 Rf2! 0–

1 Lanka – Fedorov, Kishinev 1998.

15.Ncxb5!?N Several players have captured with the other knight, but the present way actually reduces Black's options slightly, so it is strange that nobody has tried it yet.



15...Bxb5! (15...Qb8 is questionable here due to 16.Na3! Ra4 17.Ka1 Rc8 18.c3 and White may be able to claim an edge) 16.Nxb5 This position has been reached several times via the 15.Ndxb5 move order but, as we will see below, Black does not have to exchange on b5 in that line. 16...Qb8 17.Nd4 Rfc8 18.b3 Nd7 The position was interesting and fine for Black in Rudnev – D. Miroshnichenko, Voronezh 2007.

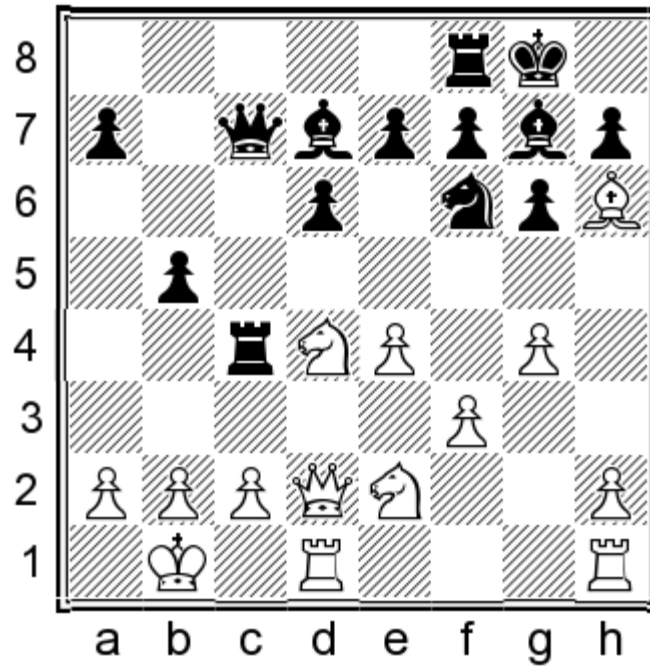
15.Nce2

This move was once played by Karpov so it must be given some respect, though it was only in a blitz game.

15...Qc7 16.Bh6?!

16.h4N is better, although Black is fine after 16...Rc8 17.h5 e5 18.hxg6 fxg6 19.Nb3 Rxc2.

In Karpov – Sosonko, Brussels (blitz) 1987, Black could have obtained an excellent game with:



16...Bxh6! N 17. Qxh6 Rc8

17...e5 18. Nf5 Bxf5 19. gxf5 Rxc2 20. Nc3 Rxc3 21. bxc3 Qxc3 is equal, but Black can play for more.

I can see why Sosonko might have been scared at bringing White's queen so near his king, but White does not have time to threaten anything.

18. c3

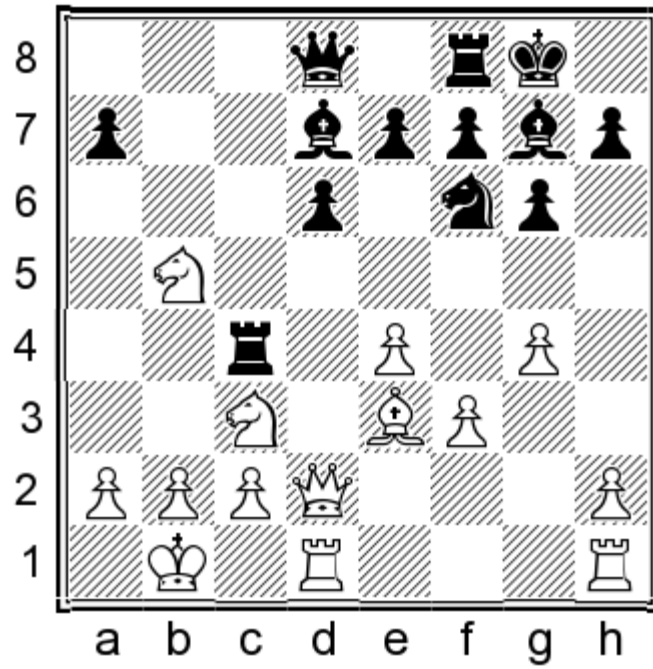
18. Ng3?! b4 19. Ngf5 gxf5 20. gxf5 Kh8

After 18. Nf5!? Black can probably accept the sacrifice and withstand the attack with precise play, but 18...Bxf5 19. gxf5 Qc5³ is a simpler route to an advantage.

18...b4 19. cxb4 Qb7³

White is under pressure on the queenside.

A) 15. Ndxb5?!



Capturing the pawn is considered dangerous for White, and this seems like the worse of the two ways to do it.

15...Qb8!

15...Bxb5 16.Nxb5 transposes to 15.Ncxb5! N above but, when the d-knight takes on b5, Black does not have to exchange it.

16.Nd4

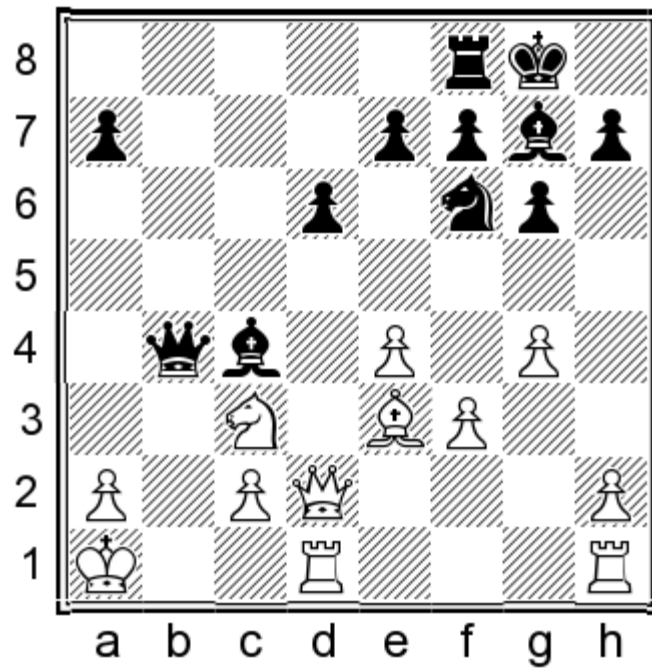
White has tried a few different approaches, but none of them appeal.

16.a4? a6 17.Na3 Bildat – Pont Font, Internet 2004. Here the most accurate finish would have been 17...Nxe4!N 18.fxe4 (18.Nxe4 Qxb2#) 18...Rxc3–+ when White obviously cannot survive the onslaught.

16.e5?! dxe5 does not really help White, and 17.Nxa7?! only makes things worse. 17...e4 18.g5 occurred in Stoffers – Jacobs, email 2001, and now 18...Nd5!N 19.Qxd5 Rxc3+ would have given Black both a dangerous attack and an extra piece, as the a7-knight cannot escape.

16.b3 Bxb5! 17.bxc4 Bxc4† 18.Ka1 Qb4

Black has excellent compensation for the exchange.



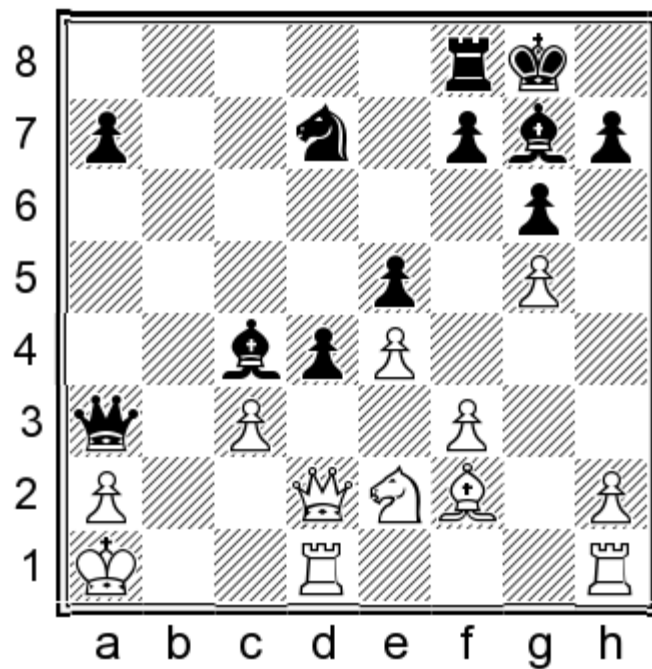
19.Bd4 e5! 20.Bf2 d5 21.g5

21.Nxd5N hardly helps: 21...Nxd5 22.exd5 e4† 23.Bd4 Qa3 24.c3 Bxd4 25.cxd4 exf3³

21...d4 22.Ne2

We have been following Dantas – Pott, email 2005. Here I would prefer:

22...Qa3N 23.c3 Nd7



24.cxd4

Opening up the long diagonal towards the king is a sad decision for White to make, but there is nothing better.

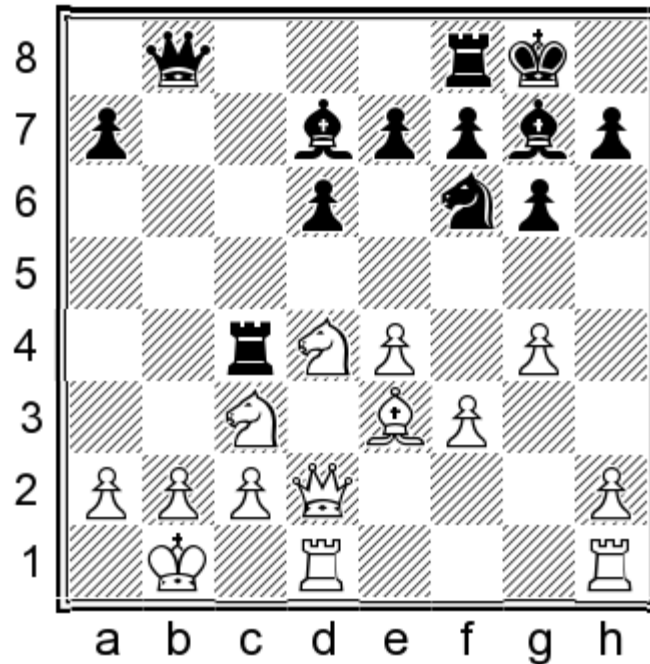
In the above game Black had chosen the a4-square for the queen, but then 24.Rb1 defended. In the present position the same move would be too dangerous after 24...Nc5μ.

24...exd4 25.Bxd4 Nc5 26.Nc1 Rd8

Too many pins!

27.e5 Bxe5 28.Bxe5 Rxd2 29.Rxd2 Qa5 30.Rhd1 Nb3† 31.Nxb3 Qxe5†³

White faces an unpleasant endgame.



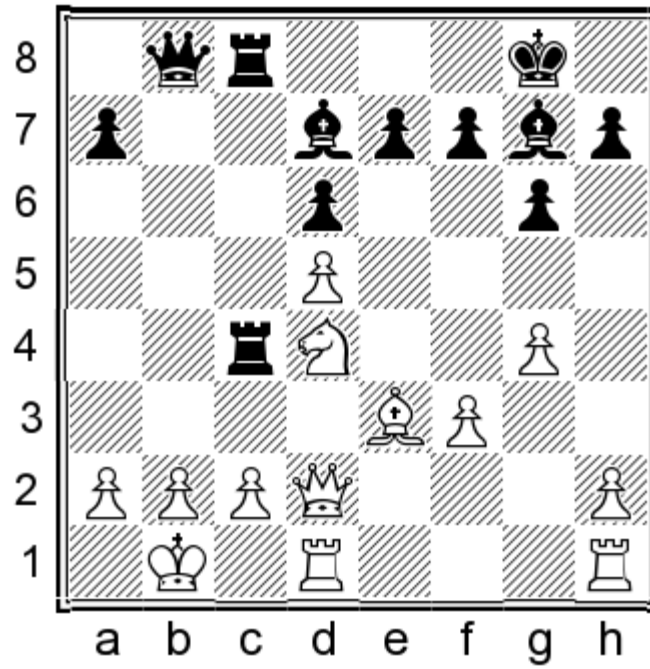
16...Rfc8

At the cost of a pawn Black has an extremely strong attack. Meanwhile White's kingside offensive is yet to get out of the blocks.

17.Ka1

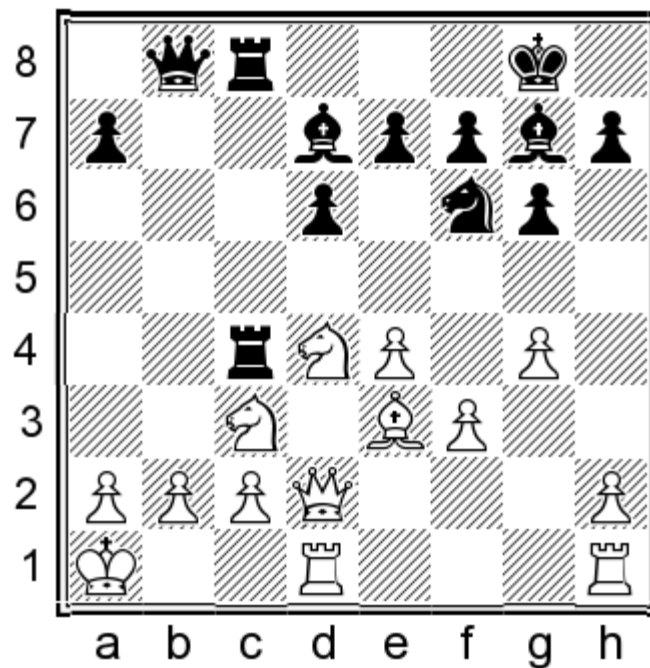
White's alternatives run into knockout blows.

17.Nd5? Nxd5 18.exd5 occurred in Holloway – Zhou, Internet 2007, and here Black missed:



18...Rxc2!N 19.Qxc2 Rxc2 20.Kxc2 Qb7--+ White's pawns will start to drop off while he tries to defend his king.

17.Nde2? Beijerinck – Van Meegen, Venlo 2009. 17...Bxg4!N 18.fxg4 (18.e5 Bxf3 19.exf6 Bxf6 does not help) 18...Nxe4 19.Qc1 Bxc3 White is busted.

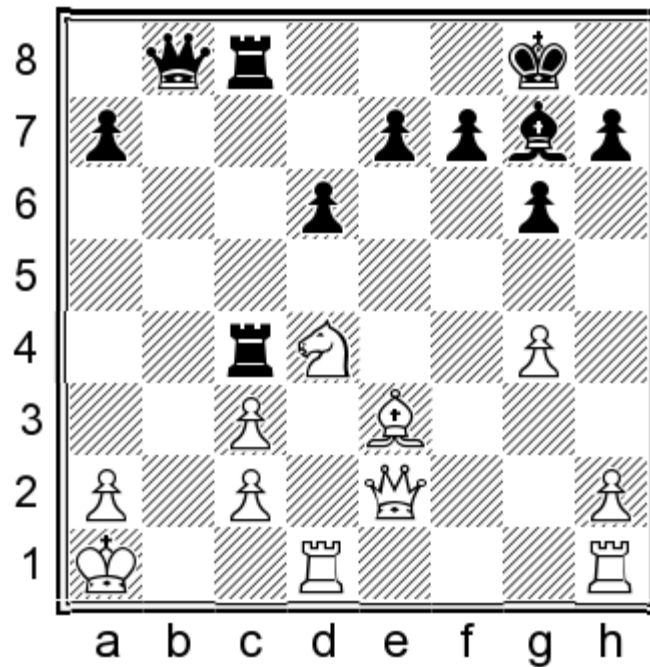


17...Bxg4!

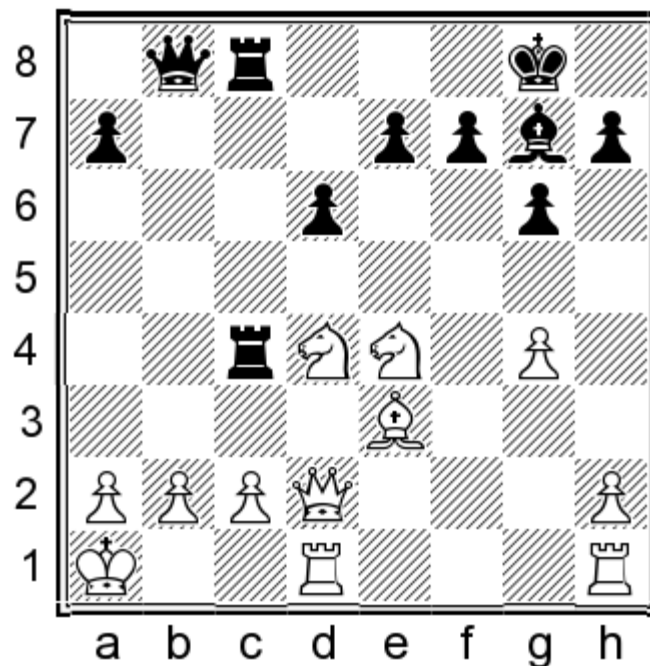
It comes anyway!

18.fxg4 Nxe4 19.Nxe4

Declining the knight brings White no joy: 19.Qe2?! Nxc3 (19...Rxc3 also worked extremely well in Shchekachev – Golubev, Dimitrovgrad 1988, as covered in the thematic introduction) 20.bxc3 Here I found a strong nuance to improve on Richardson – Nesis, corr. 1984:



20...Qc7!N Black threatens both to capture on c3 and to play ...Qa5, targeting the a2-pawn. 21.Rd3 (21.Rd2 Qa5--+) 21...Rxc3 22.Rb1 e5--+ White dies on the long diagonal.



19...Rxc2!

The point of the combination becomes clear: White will have to give up his queen to prevent mate.

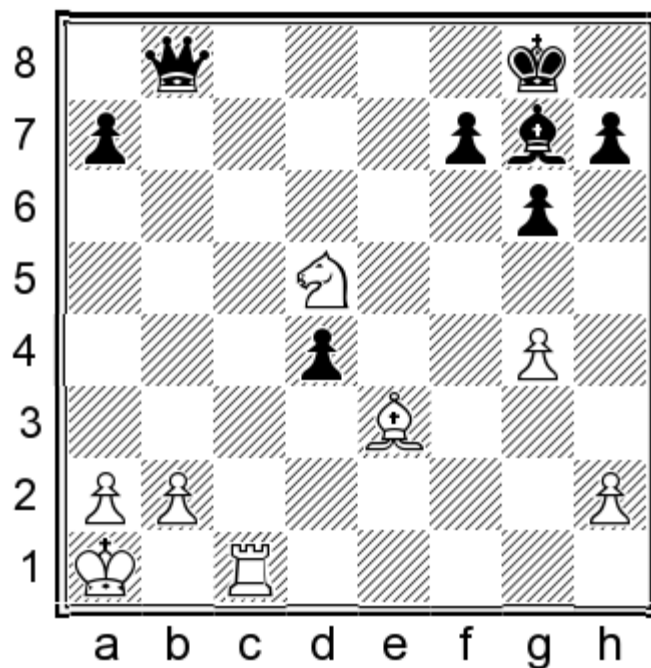
20.Qc1

20.Rb1 Rxd2 21.Nxd2 e5—+ Oim – Nesis, corr. 1988. Black's pawns will roll inexorably forward.

20...Rxc1† 21.Rxc1 d5 22.Nc3 e5!?

22...Bxd4N 23.Bxd4 e5 24.Bf2 Qb7μ is a fine alternative.

23.Nxd5 Rxc1† 24.Rxc1 exd4



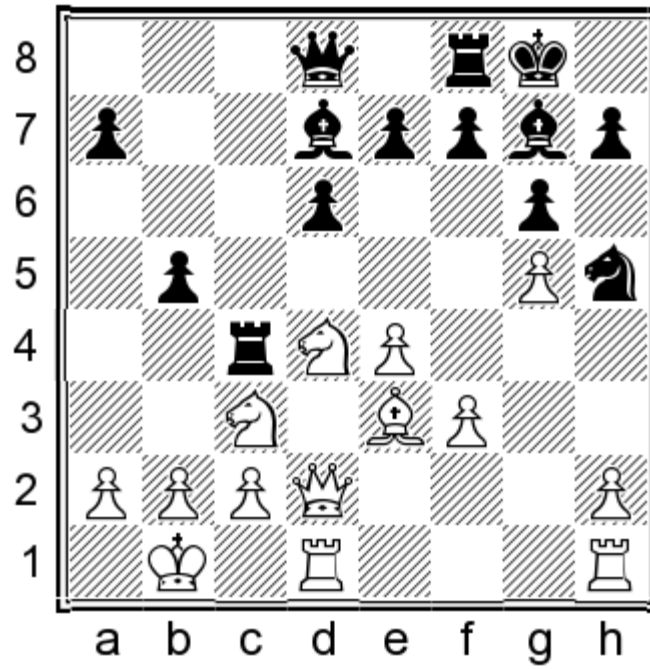
25.Bxd4

25.Ne7†N 25...Kf8 26.Bg5 is a better try, although the ending is still highly unpleasant for White.

25...Bxd4 26.Rc8† Qxc8 27.Ne7† Kg7 28.Nxc8 f5—+

White regained the queen but was left in a lost ending in Mathlopoules – Le Bled, corr. 1997.

B) 15.g5 Nh5



White intends to make progress on the kingside by bringing one of his knights to g3, but Black has enough resources to counter this plan.

16.Nde2

16.b3 b4 17.bxc4 bxc3 18.Qxc3 Qc7 transposes to variation D24.

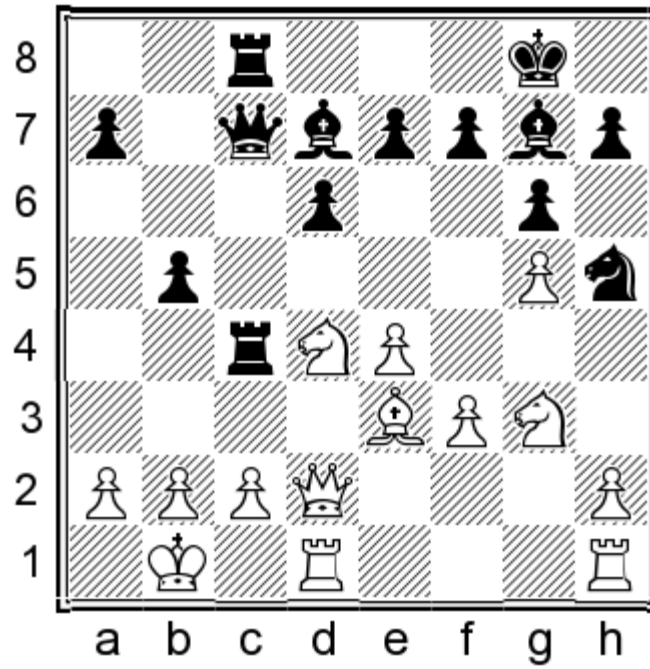
Obviously bringing the other knight is a significant alternative:

16.Nce2 Qc7 17.Ng3

17.b3 Rc5 18.Ng3 Here I don't think Black needs to fear the open h-file and can happily play: 18...Nxc3!N (18...Rc8 has been played a couple of times and is also adequate) 19.hxc3 Rc8 20.Qh2 (20.Rc1 Rc3³) 20...Kf8 Now 21.Qxh7?! only misplaces the queen, and after 21...Rxc2 Black's attack is more relevant.

17...Rc8!

When White has not made the weakening move b2-b3, I think it is better to keep the h-file closed.



18.Nxh5 gxh5N

In Roberts – C. Davies, Cardiff 1997, Black opted to take on d4 and c2 immediately. Although this is also playable, I would prefer to retain the dark-squared bishop and keep the threat in reserve.

19.c3 d5!³

Black has excellent play.

16...Be6!?

Black could also play more slowly with something like 16...a5N as 17.Ng3? Bxc3 18.bxc3 Qc8 is far more dangerous for White than for Black. After the text move we will follow a rapid game which Black won in great style.

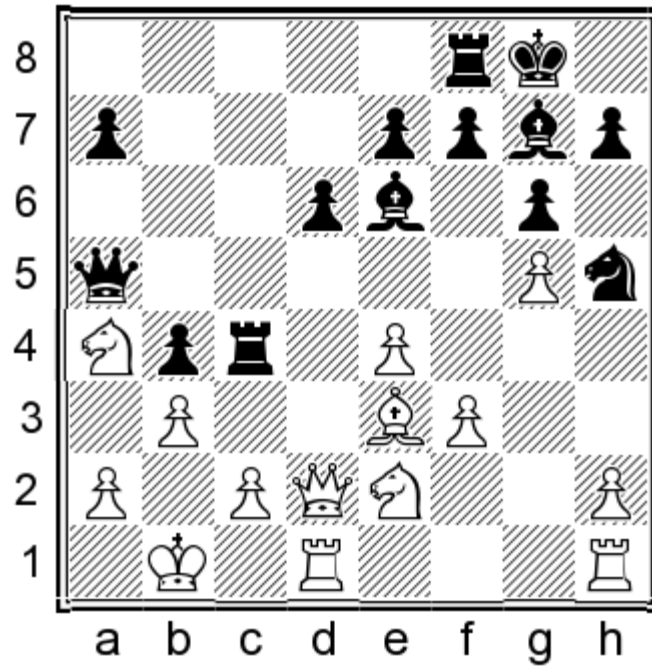
17.b3

Mikhalevski gives 17.Nxb5N 17...Bxb2! 18.Kxb2 Qb8 19.Qa5 a6! 20.Qxa6 Rb4† with a strong initiative.

17...b4! 18.Na4

18.Nd5N is better. 18...Bxd5 19.exd5 Bc3 is suggested by Mikhalevski. Play continues 20.Nxc3 bxc3 21.Qd3 Rc7 when the position is quite messy. It seems a shame to have given away the dark-squared bishop, but the c3-pawn is a thorn in White's side. White's kingside structure will also give him some problems later in the game.

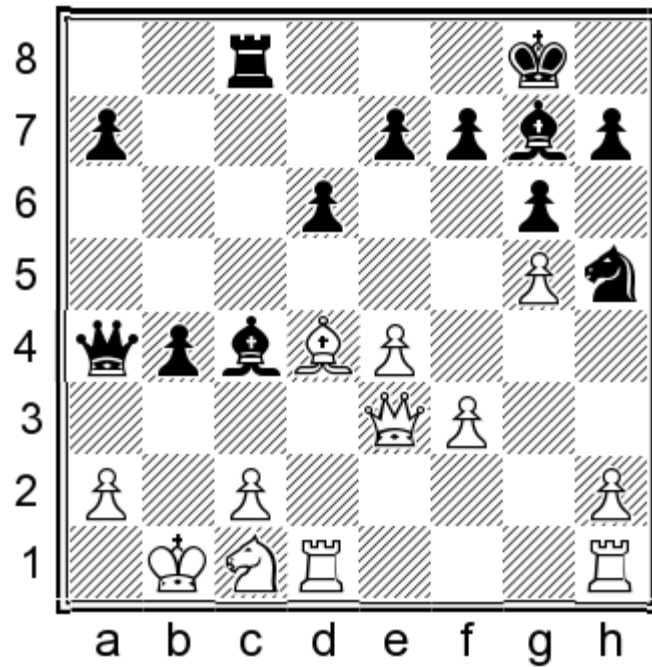
18...Qa5!



19.bxc4?

Black was already doing well, but this was suicidal.

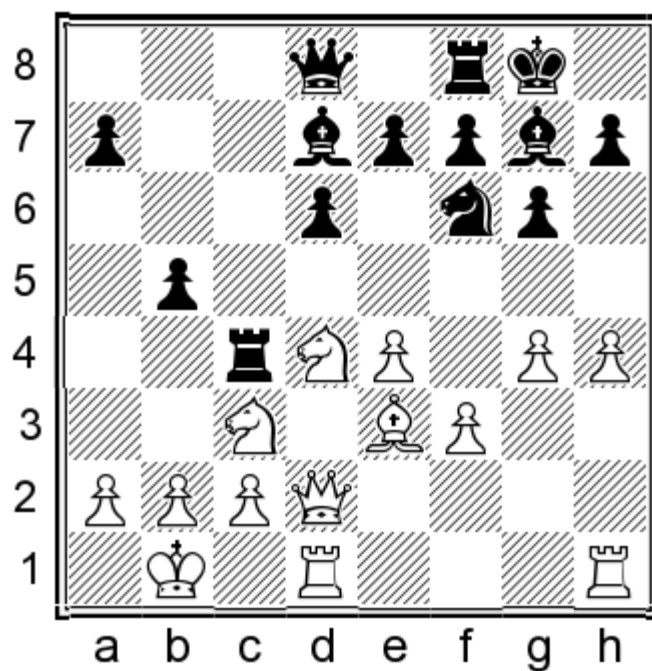
19...Bxc4 20.Bd4 Qxa4 21.Nc1 Rc8 22.Qe3



22...Bxa2† 23.Nxa2 Qxc2† 24.Ka1 b3 25.Rd2 b2†!

0–1 Gofshtein – V. Mikhalevski, Ramat Aviv (rapid) 1999.

C) 15.h4!?

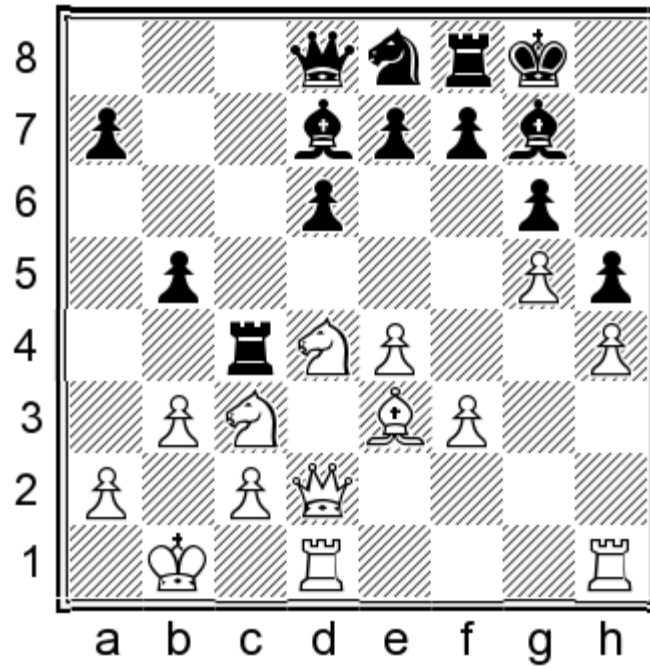


As Black has been struggling to find a suitable response to 15.b3, the sidelines have been rather neglected. Of those, the present option is definitely the sharpest. There's still a lot of unexplored material here.

15...h5

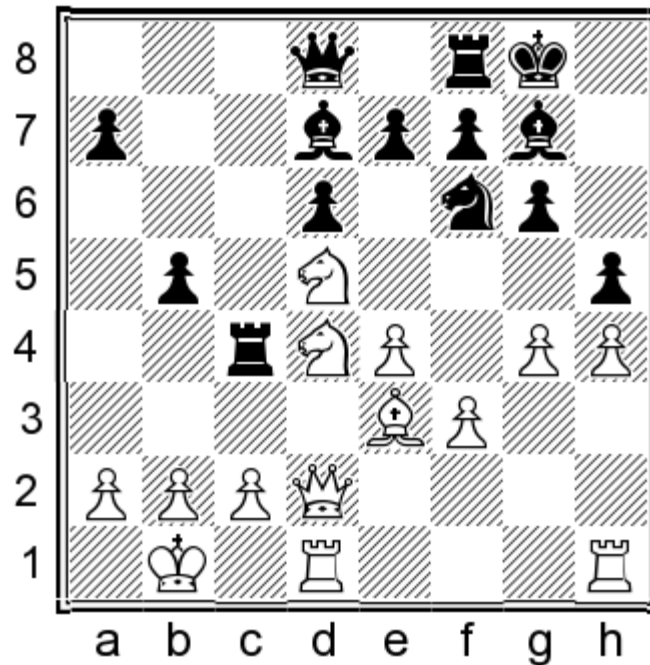
This move has been dismissed by most analysts, including me, in the past. However, White's attack will become dangerous if he gets to play h4-h5, so I think blocking it is the best approach. White's two main replies are C1) 16.Nd5 and C2) 16.gxh5.

It is worth mentioning the alternative: 16.g5 Ne8 17.b3N (17.Ndxb5 Qb8 18.Nd4 Nc7 promises Black good play for the pawn)



Previously I described this position as “probably a good version of 15.b3 for White.” However, I overlooked the crucial difference that after 17...Rc5! White can no longer win material with 18.Ne6 fxe6 19.Bxc5 dxc5 as the c3-knight is now hanging. Following 20.Nxb5 Qb8! 21.Qxd7 Qe5³ Black has a dangerous initiative.

C1) 16.Nd5



This approach has been played a few times and needs checking; if White can get rid of the f6-knight then our kingside will become vulnerable.

16...e5!N

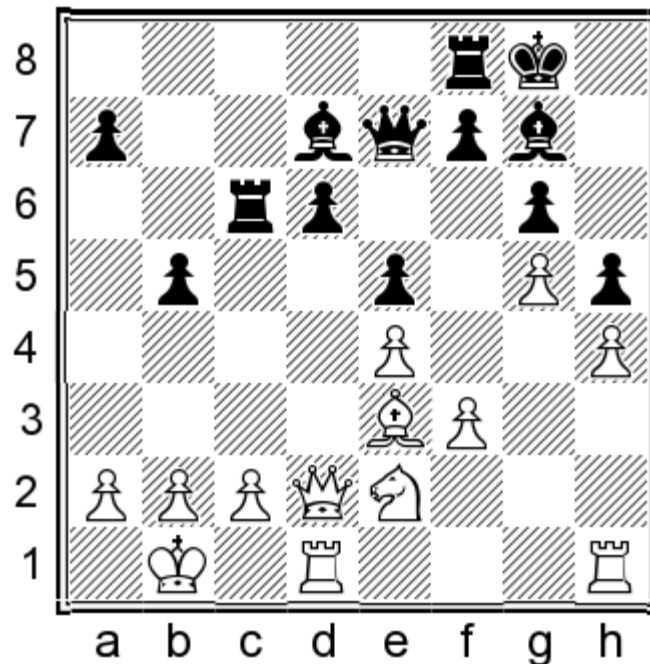
This is my top choice, although an interesting alternative is 16...Nxd5 17.exd5 as in Csolto – Kral, Slovakia 1999, and now 17...Qa8!N 18.gxh5 Qxd5 19.hxg6 fxg6 with unclear play.

17.Nxf6†

17.Nb3 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 Be6 19.Qxb5 hxg4= is fine for Black.

17...Qxf6 18.g5 Qe7 19.Ne2 Rc6

White has the d5-square but I don't think he can do much with it, for example:



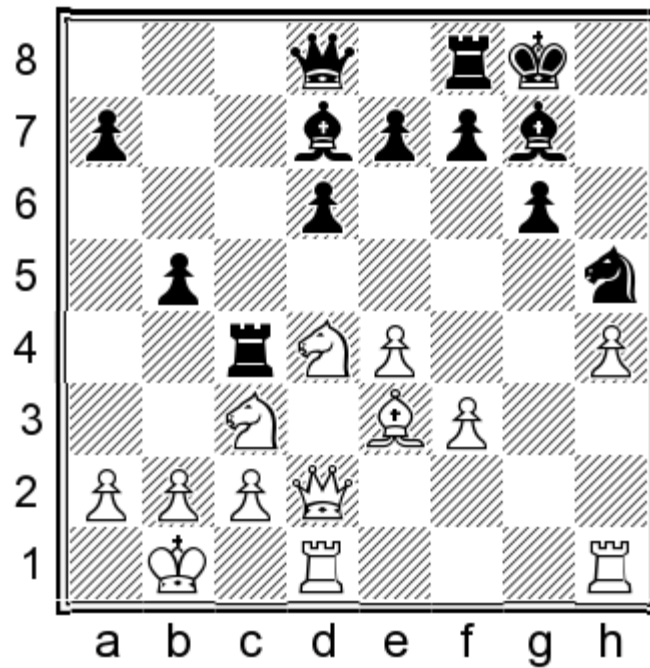
20.Nc3 Be6 21.Nd5

21.Nxb5? is asking too much of the white position: 21...Rb8 22.Nc3 Qb7 23.b3 Rbc8 24.Nd5 Rxc2 25.Qxc2 Rxc2 26.Kxc2 Bxd5 27.Rxd5 Qa6µ White cannot prevent the queen from infiltrating.

21...Bxd5 22.Qxd5 Rfc8

Black's position is not at all disastrous. True, we have the wrong bishop, but White cannot make progress on the kingside without unleashing it. Meanwhile, Black can creep forwards on the queenside.

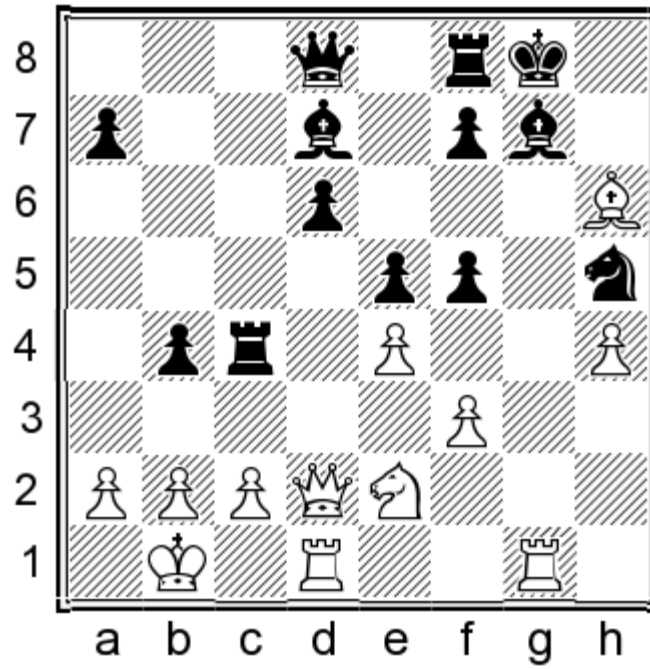
C2) 16.gxh5 Nxh5



Opening the kingside is undoubtedly White's most dangerous approach. White can choose between C21) 17.Nde2 and C22) 17.Nce2.

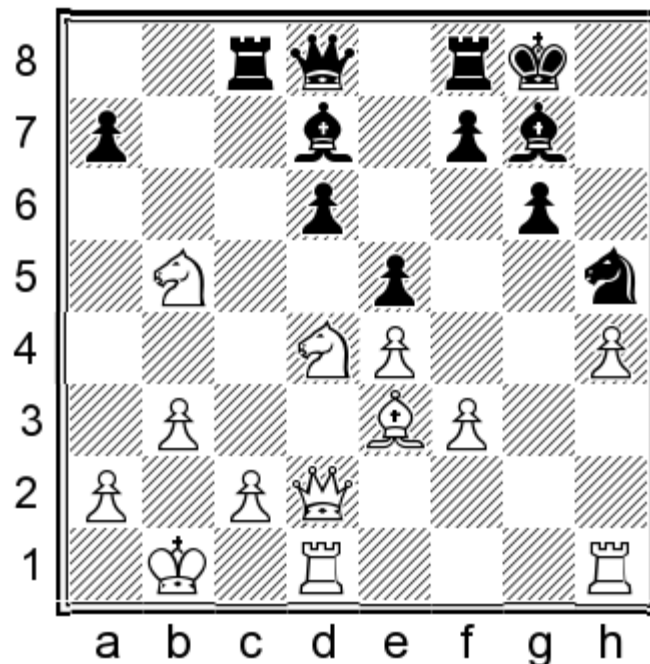
17.Ndxb5?! was played in T. Ernst – T. Karlsson, Stockholm 2001. A glance at variation C21 below reveals the interesting fact that Ernst had switched sides from over a decade earlier. However, his pawn grab was too greedy, and 17...Qb8!N 18.Nd4 Rfc8 19.Ka1 Qb7 would have put White under heavy pressure.

17.Rhg1!? is a sensible move, and 17...b4 18.Nce2 was seen in Krzywkowski – Plichta, Kowalewo Pomorskie 2008. Here I think Black should defend dynamically with 18...e5!N, when 19.Nf5!? is critical. (19.Nb3 Qf6! reaches a complicated position.) 19...gxf5 20.Bh6



20...Kh7! 21.Bxg7 Nxg7 22.Qxd6 fxe4 White has some attacking chances, but Black has adequate resources. The critical continuation is: 23.Qxe5 (23.fxe4 Rxe4 24.Nc1 Nf5 25.Qxd7 Qxd7 26.Rxd7 Nxh4=) 23...Rg8 24.Rd5 Rc6! 25.Qxe4† f5 26.Qd4 Rc7÷

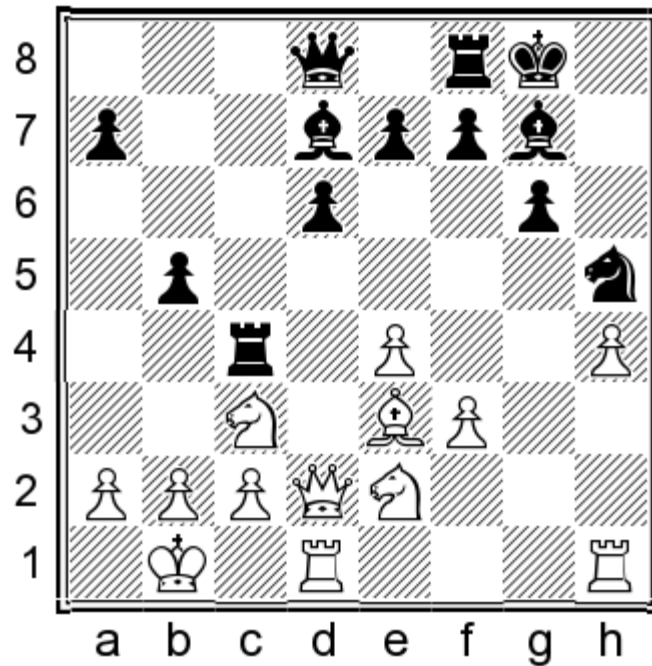
17.b3N Engines wish to play this move, forcing the rook to retreat, but humans have not felt so bold. It is hard to live with the chronic weakness along the long diagonal. 17...Rc8 Black gets good play if White decides to grab the pawn: 18.Ncxb5 (18.Ndxb5 Qa5 19.Nd5 Qxb5 20.Nxe7† Kh7 21.Nxc8 Rxc8 22.Qxd6 Be6÷) 18...e5



19.Nf5 (19.Nxd6 exd4 20.Bxd4 Bxd4 21.Qxd4 Rc7÷) 19...Bxb5 20.Nxd6 a6 21.Nxc8 Qxc8÷ We have another complicated material imbalance, but I like Black's chances. White's king is not entirely safe, and Black might even

consider ...f5 at some point.

C21) 17.Nde2



White has scored heavily with this knight retreat, but I think the statistics are rather misleading.

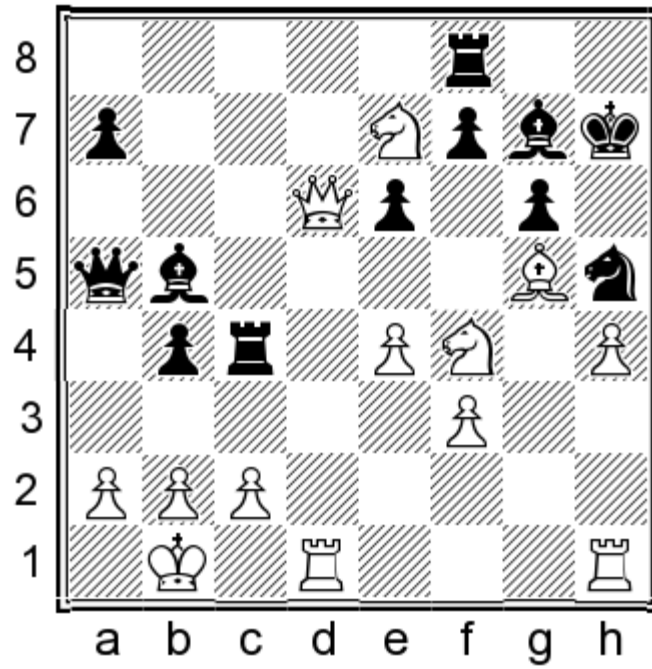
17...b4! 18.Nd5 e6 19.Bg5 Qa5 20.Ne7† Kh7 21.Qxd6

Here I found a significant improvement over De Firmian – T. Ernst, Lugano 1989.

21...Bb5!N

Black is doing well. The knight on e7 is trapped, and Black's attack is coming much faster than White's. A nice illustrative line is:

22.Nf4

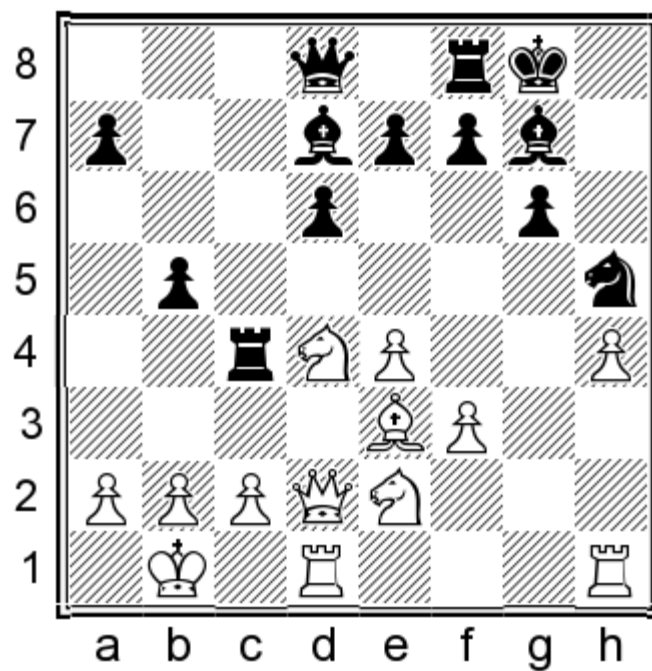


22...Rxc2! 23.Kxc2 Be5! 24.Qd2

24.Qxe5 Ba4†-+

24...Qxa2 25.Qxb4 Ba4† 26.Kd2 Bxd1 27.Nxh5 Rb8μ

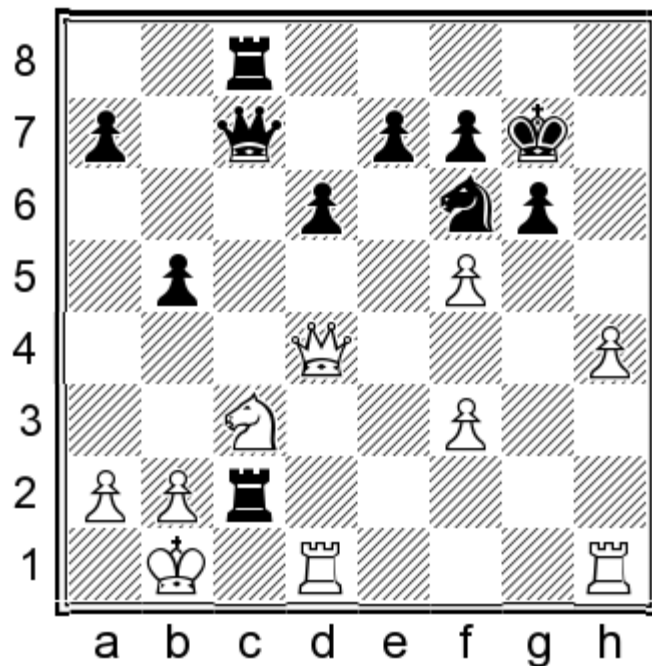
C22) 17.Nce2



This is White's other main move and possibly the better knight to retreat.

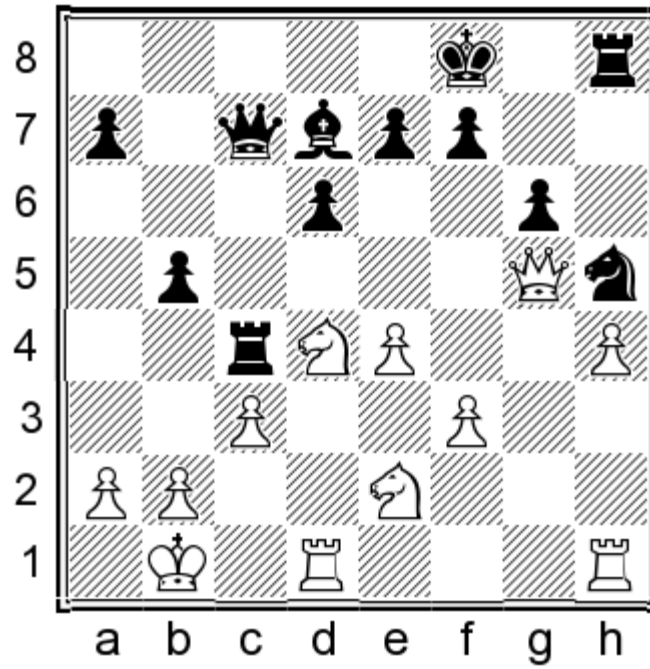
17...Qc7 18.Bh6 Rc8 19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.Rc1

Another game continued: 20.Nf5†?! Bxf5 21.exf5 Rxc2 22.Qd4† Nf6 23.Nc3



In Nilsson – Welin, Stockholm 1980, Black got scared and gave back the material on c3, but the simple 23...Rg2N would have been excellent for him.

20.c3N looks sensible, but Black has decent play after: 20...Rh8 21.Qg5 Kf8 (21...Qd8!? 22.Nf5† Bxf5 23.exf5 Rc5 24.Nd4 e5! also looks fine)



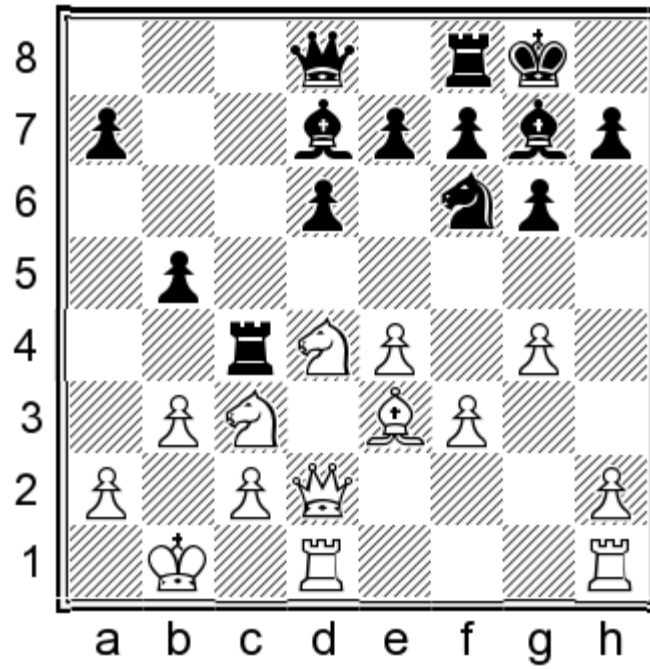
22.Nxb5 Qb6 23.Nbd4 Rc8©

Returning to the main line, this position was reached in Pogonina – Sudakova, Elista 2002. At this point I would take the opportunity to control some squares on the kingside with:

20...Rh8N 21.Nc3 Qc5=

Black has a perfectly healthy position.

D) 15.b3!



This is supposed to be the refutation of Black's last move, but we have an interesting sacrificial resource which is not mentioned in De la Villa's book.

15...b4!?

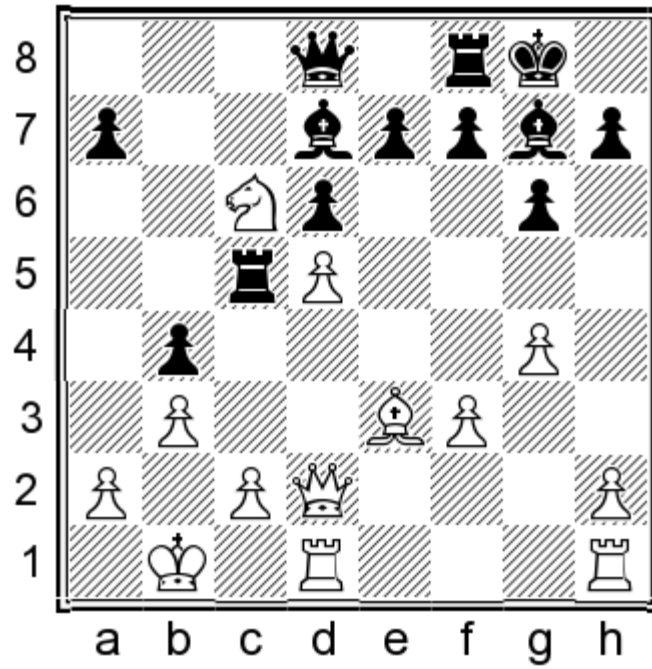
Nielsen refers to this as the Stoczek Variation but I prefer Dearing's nomenclature, as the Scottish brothers Walter and Andrew Burnett appear to have been the first two players to play it. Black sacrifices the exchange and a pawn in order to open up lines towards White's king.

Black's problem is that the natural 15...Rc5? allows 16.Ne6!.

15...Rc8 has been tested extensively, but after 16.Ndxb5 Black does not have sufficient play for the pawn.

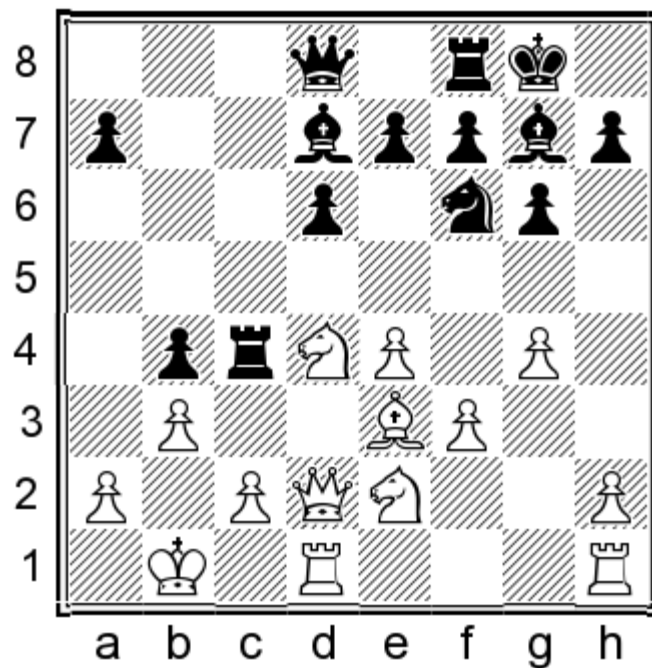
D1) 16.Nce2?! has been played several times, but the main move is of course D2) 16.bxc4.

16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Rc5 18.Nc6 (18.Ne6!?N is checked by Nielsen, who recommends: 18...Bxe6 19.Bxc5 Bxg4 20.fxg4 dxc5÷ White is the exchange for a pawn up, but has definite issues along the long diagonal.)



This was Zharov – Bezotosniy, Moscow 2009, and here 18...Rxc6!N would have been the right way to give up the exchange. 19.dxc6 Bxc6 20.Rhf1 Bc3© Black has fine compensation.

D1) 16.Nce2?!



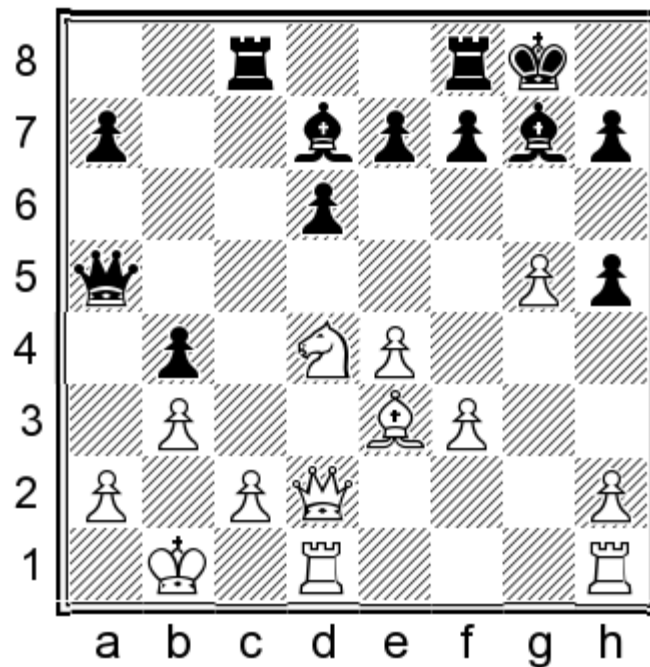
In the stem game White wimped out with this move, and perhaps your opponents will do the same if they feel scared.

16...Rc8 17.Qxb4?!

White wins a pawn but accelerates Black's attack.

17.Ng3 Qa5 18.h4 e5 19.Nde2 Rc6 20.g5 occurred in Studer – Lokander, Al-Ain 2013, and now 20...Rfc8!N 21.Rc1 Ne8³ would have favoured Black.

17.g5N 17...Nh5 18.Ng3 is a typical plan which is always worth checking, but this time 18...Qa5! is strong: 19.Nxh5 gxh5



Black's kingside looks ugly, but White has no attacking chances to counterbalance Black's strong queenside pressure. 20.f4 (20.a4 Rc3µ) 20...Bg4µ

17.Bh6N was apparently considered as an improvement in the Fraser – Burnett post-mortem. I think the simplest reply is 17...Bxh6 18.Qxh6 Kh8= when Black is comfortably placed. It is worth adding that the caveman approach 19.h4?! is well met by 19...e5 20.h5 Qe7!³ when Black defends adequately.

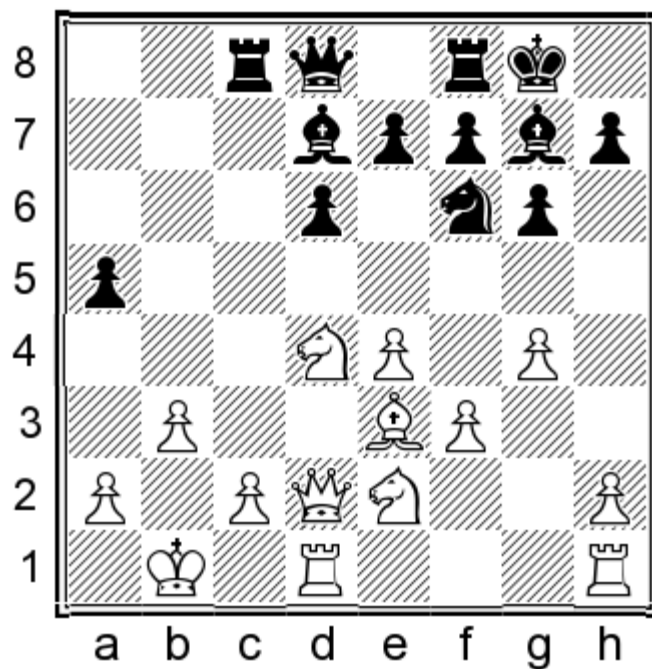
17...a5

One of the original Burnett games continued: 17...Qc7 18.g5?! Nh5 19.c4 a5! 20.Qe1 a4 21.Ng3? axb3 22.axb3 Ra8 (22...Rb8!N would have been immediately decisive, for example 23.Kc2 Rxb3! 24.Kxb3 Rb8† 25.Kc3 Bb5 26.Qf1 Qa5† 27.Kc2 Qa2† 28.Kc3 Rc8 and White is powerless in the face of all those pins.) 23.Rd2? Qa7 24.Rb2? Bxd4 0–1 Fraser – A. Burnett, Glenrothes 2003.

18.Qd2

18.Qa3N 18...Qc7 19.c4 Qb7 20.Ka1 a4³ is also unpleasant.

This position was reached in Sipos – Budai, Budapest 2003. Here Nielsen points out the improvement:



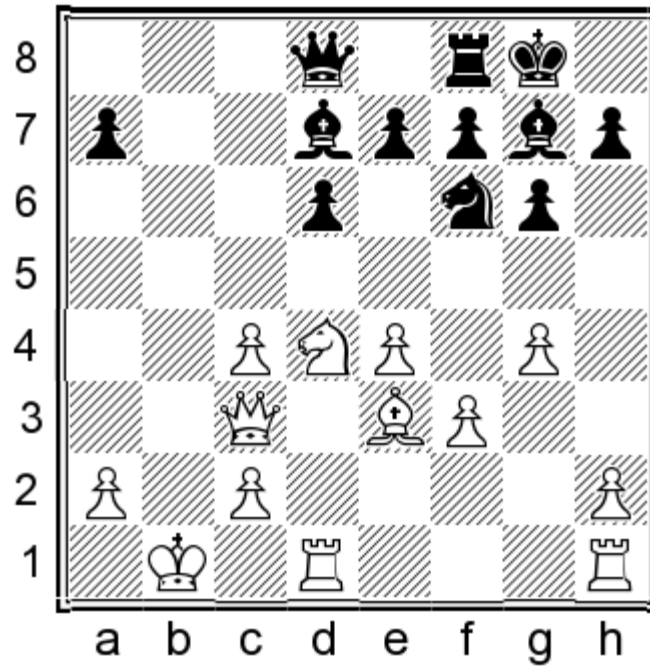
18...e5!N

White has nothing better than:

19.Nf5 gxf5 20.gxf5 d5! 21.Rhg1 Kh8

White has insufficient play for the piece.

D2) 16.bxc4 bxc3 17.Qxc3



Taking the exchange must be critical.

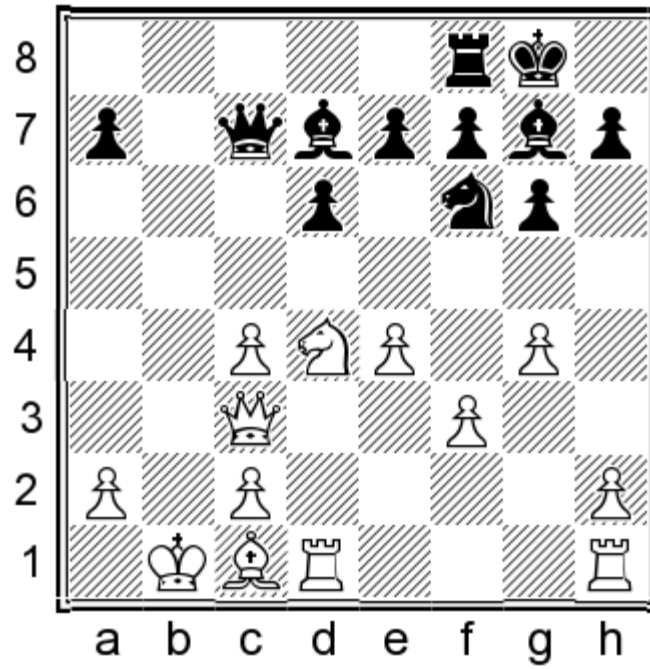
17...Qc7

So where exactly does Black's compensation arise? First of all White's king is now rather vulnerable; Black can attack down both the open b-file and the long diagonal. The queen on c3 defends the c4-pawn but feels rather loose, while the c4-pawn is likely to drop off whenever Black wishes.

Black has two major plans. We should always consider the ...d5 break, exploiting the location of White's queen to open the centre. If the black knight can go via d5 and exchange itself for the e3-bishop, we should obtain great play on the dark squares. If the ...d5 plan is not suitable, there are a few alternative ways to reroute the knight. Moving the d7-bishop to either a4 or e8 and following up with ...Nd7-e5/b6 is quite usual.

A common problem for White is finding a plan. He has tried several moves; we will analyse D21) 18.Bc1, D22) 18.Kc1, D23) 18.Ka1, D24) 18.g5 and D25) 18.h4.

D21) 18.Bc1



When I tried this variation my opponent had a long think before playing this logical move. White reroutes the bishop to give his king some cover, while attempting to fight for the long diagonal.

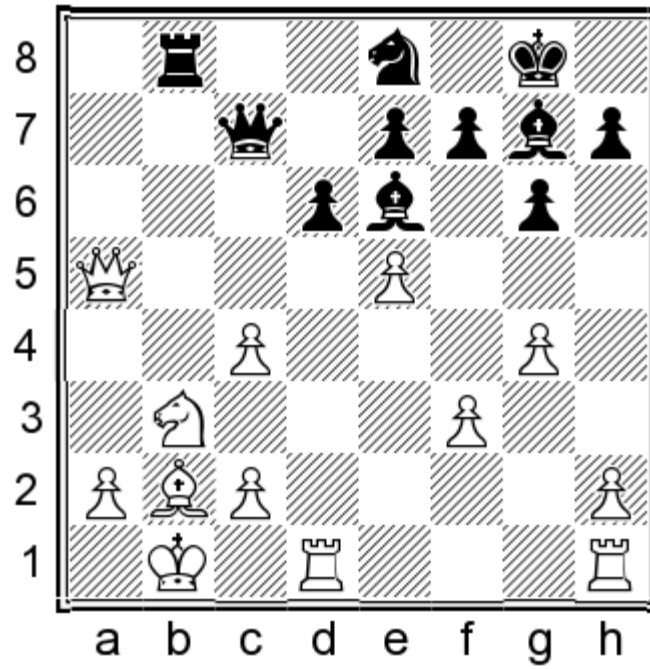
18...Rb8†N

18...d5?! was my overambitious try in Greet – Jones, Torquay 2009.

18...Be6N was my suggestion on ChessPublishing. In the event of 19.Nxe6?! (19.Bb2 Rb8 transposes to 18...Rb8† below) 19...Rb8† 20.Bb2 fxe6 Black has a strong initiative and White's king is seriously exposed.

The rook check is Nielsen's recommendation. His line continues as follows.

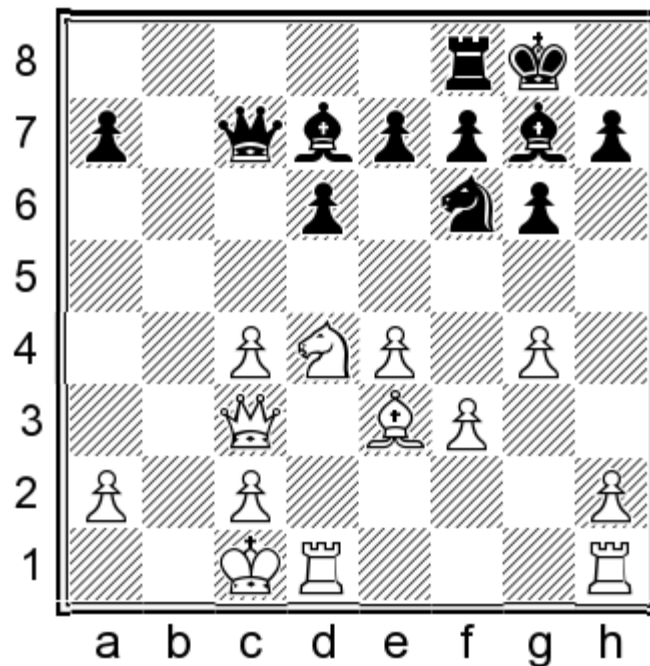
19.Bb2 Be6 20.Nb3 a5! 21.e5 Ne8 22.Qxa5



22...Rxb3! 23.Qxc7 Rxb2† 24.Kxb2 Bxe5† 25.Kb3 Nxc7 26.a4 Kf8÷

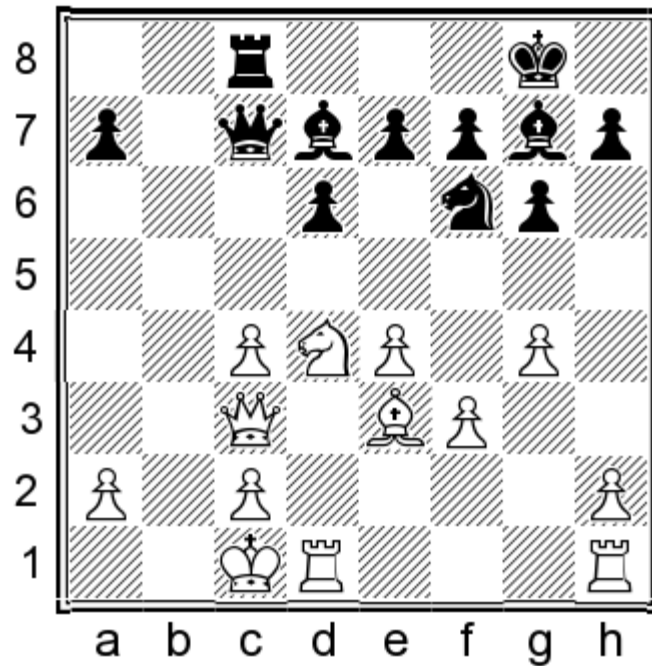
An intriguing endgame has arisen. White has a slight material advantage, with two rooks and a pawn against three pieces, but Black's minor pieces coordinate beautifully and White's pawn structure is compromised. I would be happy playing Black.

D22) 18.Kc1



White decides to run his king back towards the centre. However, doing so immediately allows Black to do without the check on b8, as White has already made his decision.

18...Rc8

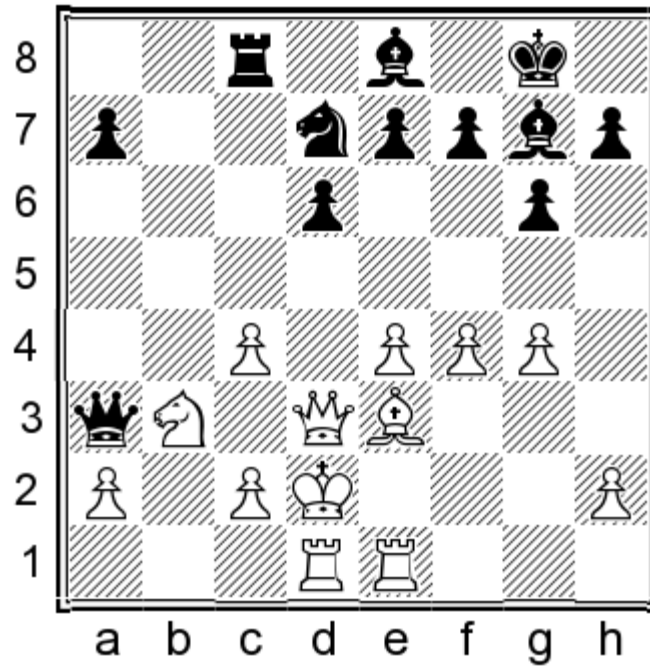


19.h4

19.g5N 19...Nh5 transposes to variation D242.

19.Qd3 was played in two of the three games to reach this position. I presume White was scared about the pins along the c-file and the long diagonal, but 19...Ba4!N is a strong reply, preparing ...Nd7 to activate the knight while gaining time against the queen. My engine already assesses the position as equal, a sure sign that Black has powerful compensation.

19.Rhe1 Be8! is a thematic idea to make way for the knight to be rerouted. 20.Qd3 Qa5 21.Nb3 Qa3† 22.Kd2 Nd7 23.f4



This was Perske – Van Heirzeele, Lüneburg 2014, and here 23...Qa4!N would have put White in some trouble.

19...h5

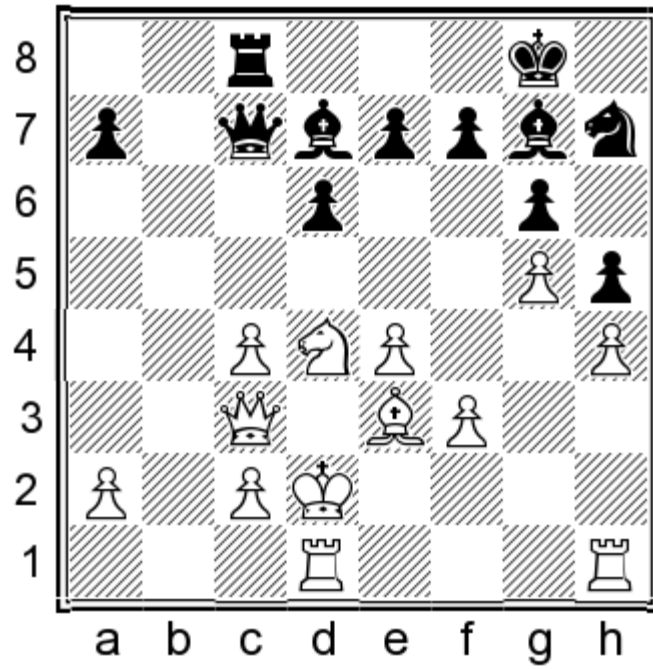
Blockading the h-pawn is Black's safest way of playing.

20.g5 Nh7

The knight is temporarily sidelined, but will come back into the game via f8. Meanwhile the closing of the kingside should favour Black.

21.Kd2

21.Rd3N was the suggestion of Van Delft and Ris, after which I suggested the logical 21...Nf8 on ChessPublishing. It is not clear how White should continue, while Black still has many useful moves. 22.f4?! would be good for White in principle, but in this particular position it allows 22...Bc6!µ.



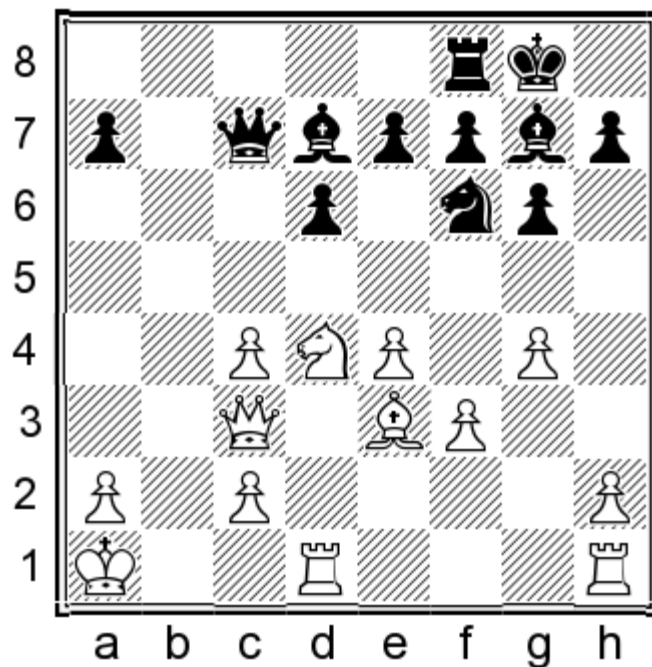
21...Be6!

Black exploits the fact that the queen would now hang with check, should White take on e6.

22.Ke2 Bxc4† 23.Kf2 Nf8

Black ultimately overpressed and lost, but at this point he had excellent compensation in Bok – Cheparinov, Biel 2011.

D23) 18.Ka1



Another logical contender. This time White decides his king will be safest in the corner.

18...Rc8 19.Rb1

This is the most natural continuation, and the only move to have been tried in over-the-board games.

19.Qd3 is a natural choice to get out of two pins, but the typical reply of 19...Ba4! prepares to bring the knight to d7 and hit the queen with tempo.

19.h4 can be met dynamically with 19...d5! (there is also 19...h5 with a normal position) 20.g5 Ne8 21.exd5 Nd6 22.h5 gxh5! 23.Rxh5 Bf5³ and Black's pieces coordinate wonderfully.

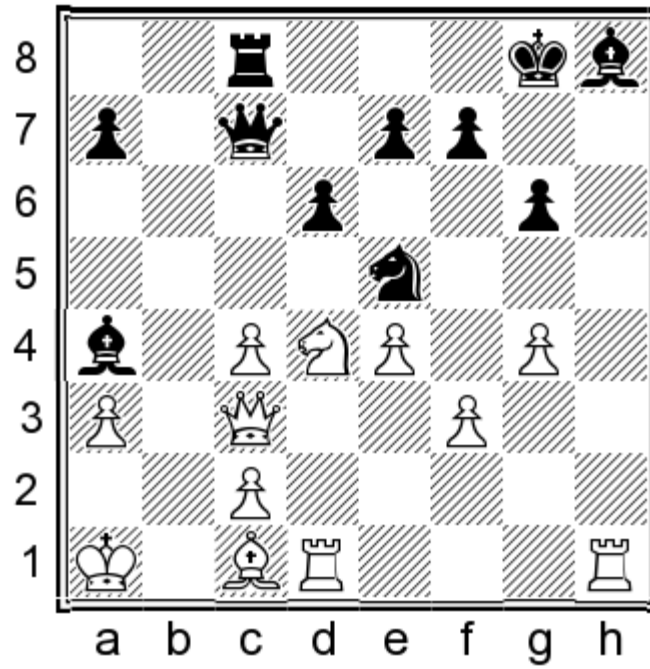
19.a3?

This was tried in one email game. I don't see a lot of sense to it, although I remember when analysing this line many years ago it was the type of move that engines liked to suggest.

19...Ba4

19...d5N also looks like a good solution. After 20.g5 Ne8 21.exd5 Nd6 White has to find 22.Bf4! Nb5 (22...Qc5!?) 23.Bxc7 Nxc3 24.Ba5 Nxd1 25.Rxd1 Rxc4 26.c3 in order to maintain rough equality.

20.h4 Nd7 21.h5 Ne5 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.Bh6 Bh8 24.Bc1



24...Bf6!N

This improvement gives Black excellent chances. Instead the game proceeded with the horrible blunder 24...Nxc4?? allowing 25.Rxh8† Kxh8 26.Ne6† 1–0 Schumacher – Cowling, email 2009.

19.g5N

As far as I am aware, White has not played this precise move order, but of course there are some potential transpositions.

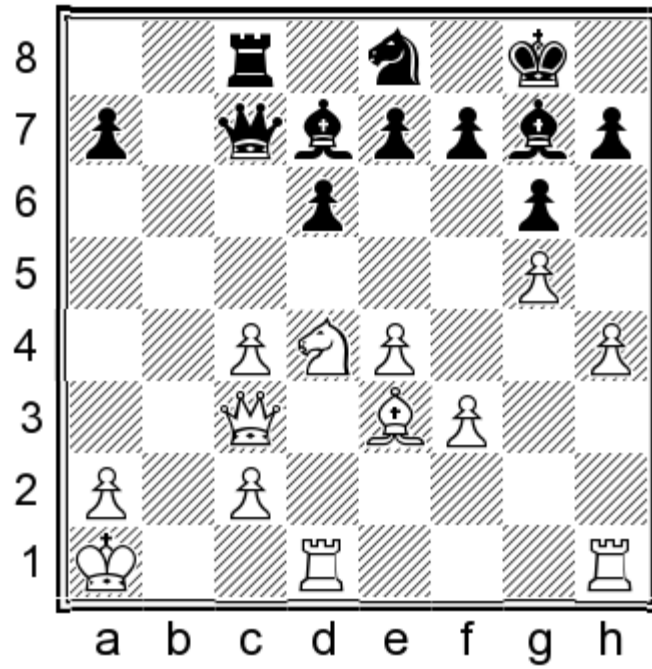
19...Ne8

This is Nielsen's suggestion, and it certainly makes sense once we have developed our rook. Black prepares to break with ...d5.

19...Nh5 is also possible of course.

20.h4

20.Rd3 gives Black many good options, but an aesthetically pleasing one is 20...d5 (20...Be6³ is also sensible) 21.exd5 Bb5!³.



20...d5!

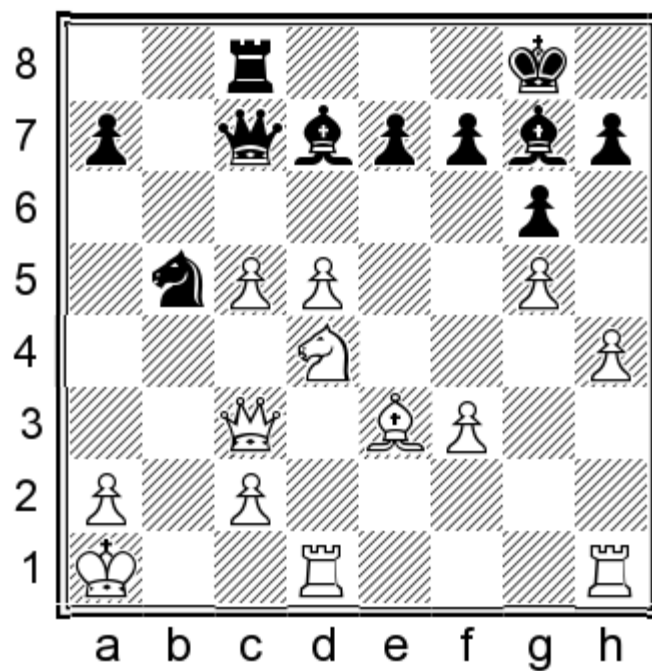
A typical idea, vacating the d6-square for our knight to jump back into the game.

21.exd5

21.h5?! dxe4 22.fxe4 gxh5!µ

21...Nd6 22.c5 Nb5

White has no good square for his queen.



23.Nxb5

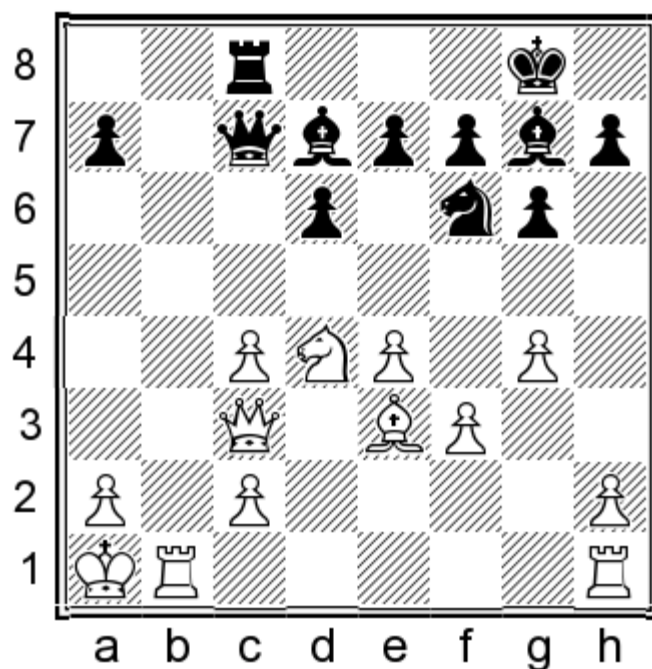
23.Qd3?? Qxc5—+

23.Qb4? a5μ

23.Qc4? Na3 24.Qc3 Qxc5 25.Qxc5 Rxc5μ

23...Bxc3† 24.Nxc3 Bf5÷

Nielsen gives a similar line without h2-h4 and ...Rc8. The position is messy but dynamically equal.



19...d5N

This was my suggestion on ChessPublishing.

19...Be8 has been played in all four games, and has scored well. By now you must recognize Black's plan of vacating the d7-square for the knight.

20.g5

In the event of 20.e5 Qxe5 21.c5 Qc7© Black's central pawns are ready to roll.

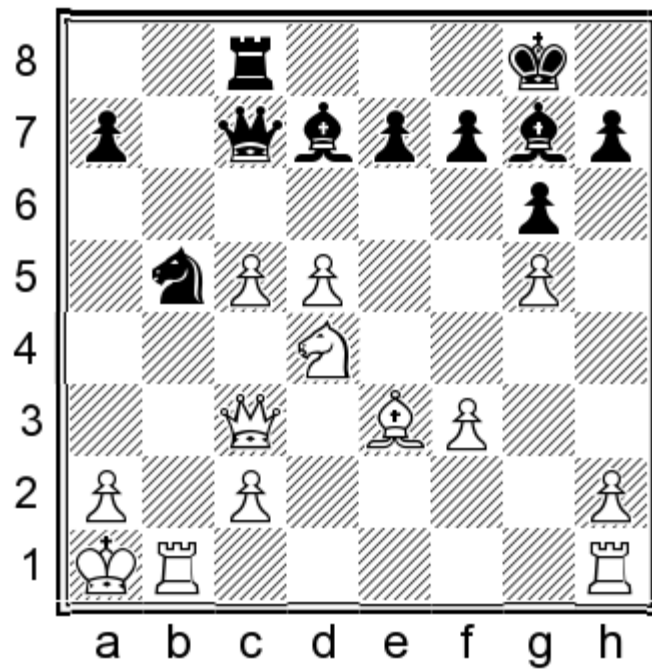
20...Ne8 21.exd5 Nd6

Another typical manoeuvre for this variation.

22.c5

22.Rb4?? a5 wins.

22...Nb5



23.Rxb5!

23.Qb4? Qe5 is disastrous for White.

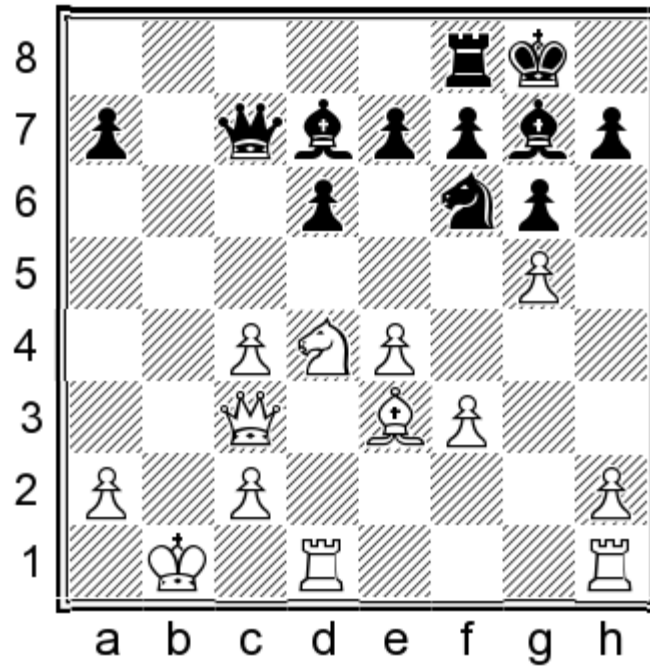
23...Bxb5 24.Rb1

24.c6 Qd6³

24...Be2!³

For the moment White still has a material advantage, but the pawns on f3, d5 and c5 all look likely to drop.

D24) 18.g5



In over-the-board games this has been seen the most often. White immediately forces us to make a decision regarding our knight. However, on a positive note, we're now extremely unlikely to get mated down the h-file.

18...Nh5

Black obviously has another option with the knight, but the text move seems better to me. The knight looks a little misplaced but it will try to come back into the game via the f4-square. In fact, the game will revolve around that square to a great extent, as White's most logical plan involves advancing with f3-f4 in order to prepare e4-e5.

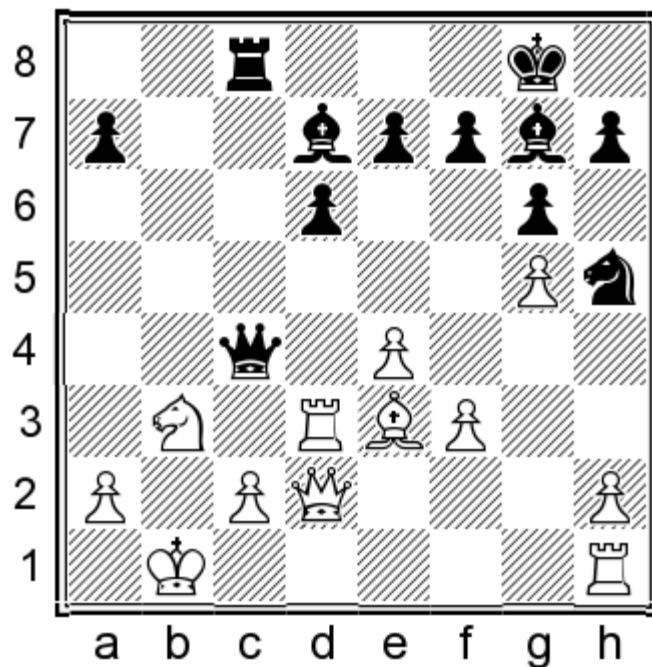
Most game have continued with either D241) 19.Ka1 or D242) 19.Kc1.

19.Rd3 Rc8

19...a5!?N

20.Qd2 Qxc4 21.Nb3?!

21.Rb3N should have been preferred, but Black still has good compensation after 21...a5 or 21...d5.



21...Bc3!N

21...a5!? was played in Haznedaroglu – Sluka, Olomouc 2007, but the text move, which I suggested on ChessPublishing, seems more precise.

22.Qd1

22.Rxc3 Qxc3 23.Qxc3 Rxc3 reaches a level endgame.

22...Qb5 23.Bd4 Bxd4

23...Bb4 24.Bb2 Nf4 25.Re3 Ng2 26.Rd3 Nf4= is an amusing repetition if Black wants a draw.

24.Rxd4 Qxg5=

Black is doing fine.

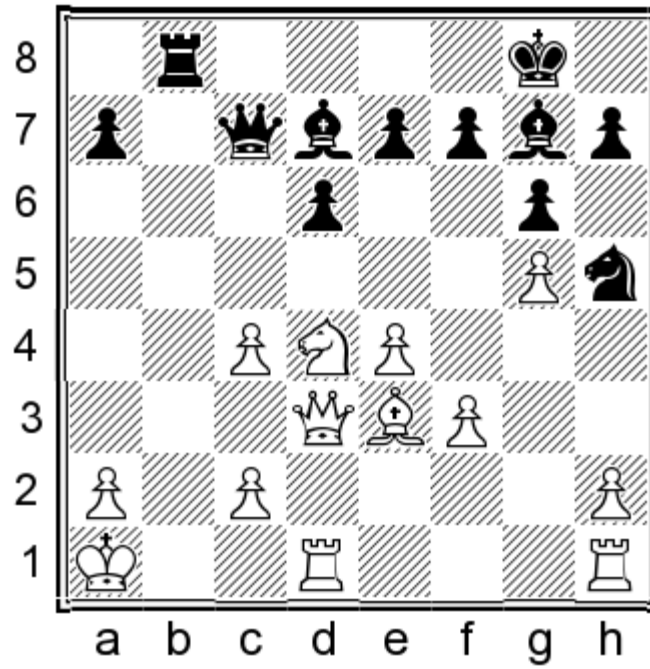
19.Qd3 Rb8†

19...Be6!?N is another interesting way of playing the position. After 20.Nxe6 fxe6 21.Bd4 Nf4 22.Qd2 Bxd4 23.Qxd4 e5 24.Qe3 Ne6© White has succeeded in exchanging both of Black's bishops, but White's structure is really ugly. The knight can start jumping around and picking off the stray pawns.

20.Ka1N

20.Kc1?! occurred in Kuchynka – Olsar, Stare Mesto 2009. It is always hard for White to decide which way to go with the king, but on this occasion going towards the centre looks wrong. On ChessPublishing I recommended 20...Be5N, preparing to bring the knight on h5 back into the game. My engine already favours Black.

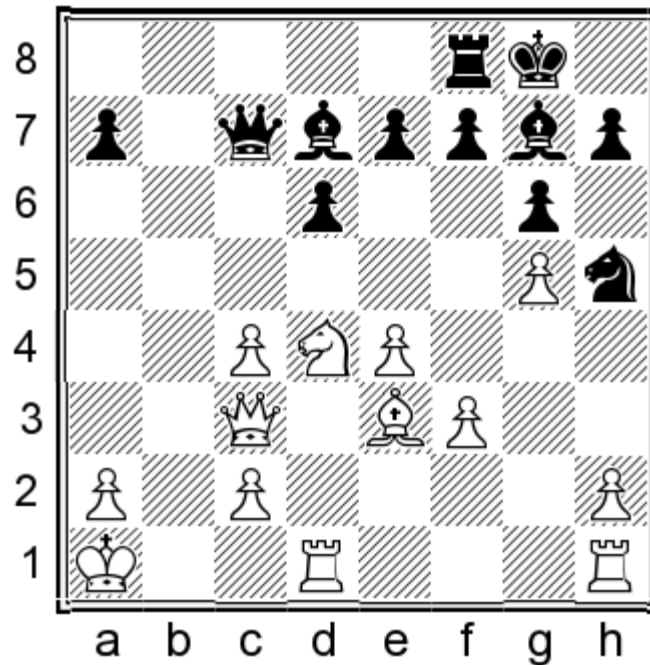
20.Nb3N 20...a5 21.c5 d5!÷ is another possible direction.



20...Rb4 21.Rb1 Rxc4 22.Rb8† Bc8 23.Rb2 Nf4÷

Black has succeeded in activating his knight, and has good counter-chances.

D241) 19.Ka1



As we have already seen, the question of where to put the king represents a major dilemma for White in this variation. On the one hand the a1-square looks more natural, as the king gets away from the centre while allowing the rook to come to b1. However, it is hard for the king to feel comfortable while being stuck in the firing line of the Dragon bishop.

19...Be6

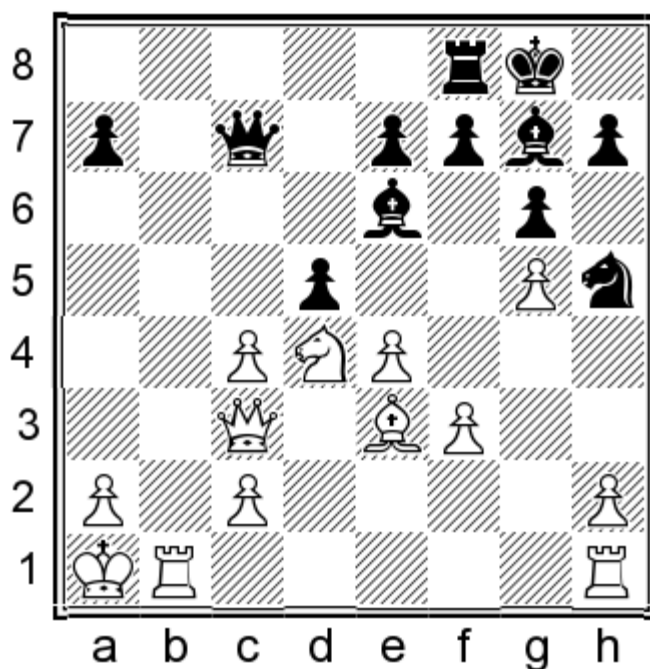
This is Peter Heine Nielsen's suggestion on his DVD. Black attacks the c4-pawn while preparing ...d5.

19...Bh3 has been seen in correspondence play. Black tries to misplace White's rooks before returning to e6. 20.Rhe1 Rc8 21.Rb1 Bg2 "This is annoying for White," says Vigorito, but after 22.Qd3 Bxf3 23.Rb2 Bg4 24.Reb1 White is the one holding a slight initiative.

20.Rb1 d5!

Black opens up lines for his pieces and is now ready to bring the errant knight back into the game. In this variation we are obviously not worrying too much about material – the initiative is key.

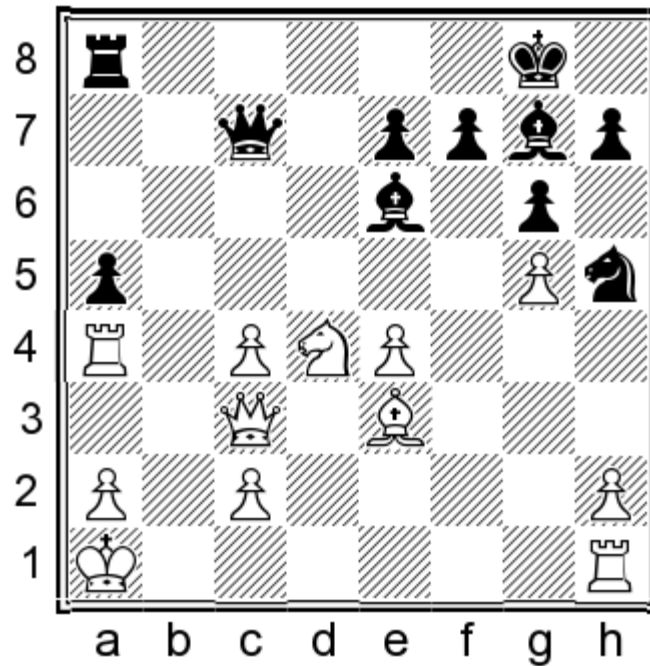
20...Bxc4N would allow White enough time to consolidate with 21.Rb4 Rc8 22.Rhb1, as Khalifman pointed out in his 2009 book. However, the text move is a serious improvement which was played the following year.



21.Rb2

This was played in the only game to reach this position. It makes sense for White to try and dampen the power of the g7-bishop.

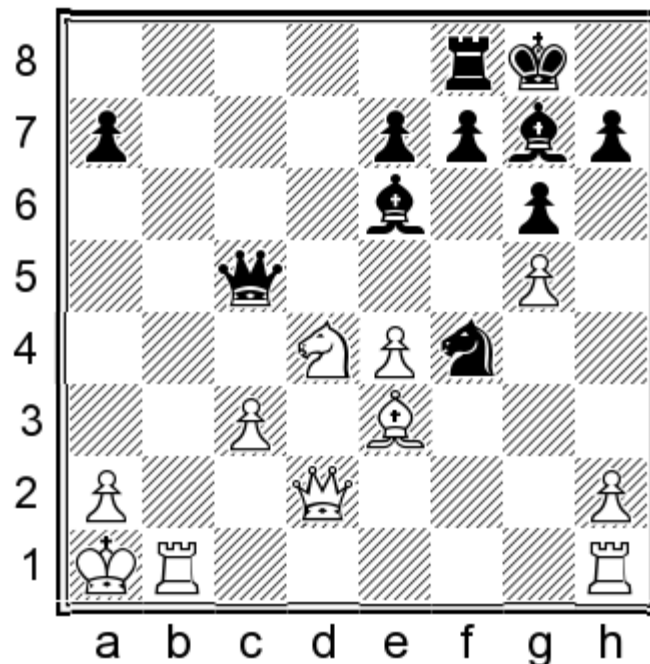
21.Rb4N is a human move, and the main line given by Peter Heine. His analysis continues: 21...dxe4 22.fxe4 a5! 23.Ra4 (23.Rb5 Nf4 also gives Black dangerous counterplay) 23...Ra8



The Danish grandmaster mentions that Black is threatening ...Bd7. The game might continue 24.c5 Bd7 25.Ra3 a4 26.Rb1 Bc6÷ when the rook looks rather stupid on a3, while Black is about to pick up the e4-pawn and probably the one on c5 too. I think Black has good chances.

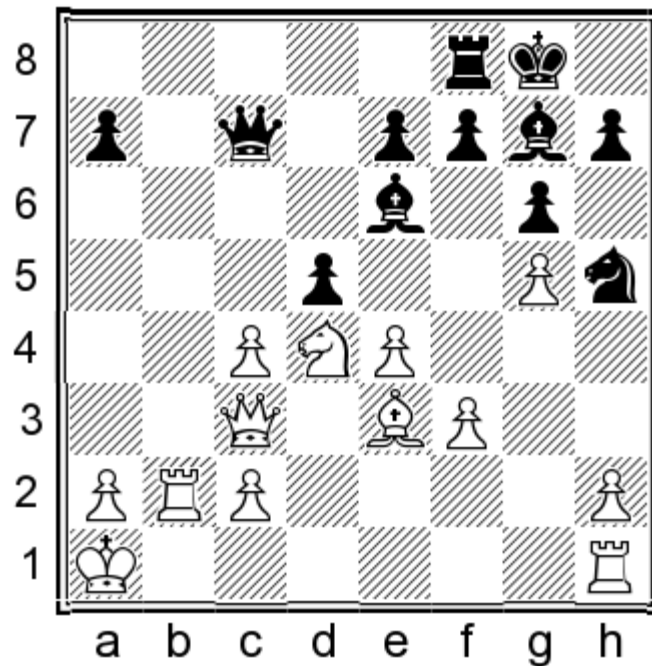
21.c5N is the computer's suggestion, but after the logical 21...dxe4 22.fxe4 Nf4 23.Rb2 we have transposed to the main line below.

Instead 23.Qd2?! is initially offered by my engine, but it runs into a problem: 23...Qxc5 24.c3



24...Bxa2!! White is in serious danger, for example: 25.Kxa2? Qa5† 26.Kb2 Rb8† 27.Nb3 Qa4 28.Qc2 Nd3† 29.Qxd3

Rxb3† 30.Kc1 Rxc3† 31.Qxc3 Bxc3--+

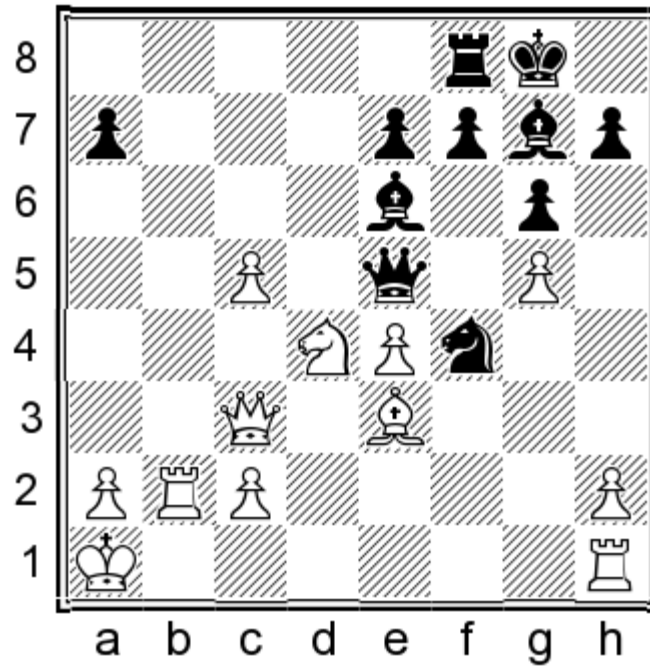


21...dxe4 22.fxe4 Nf4

22...Bxc4!?N could also be played, but Black continues with his non-material approach.

23.c5 Qe5

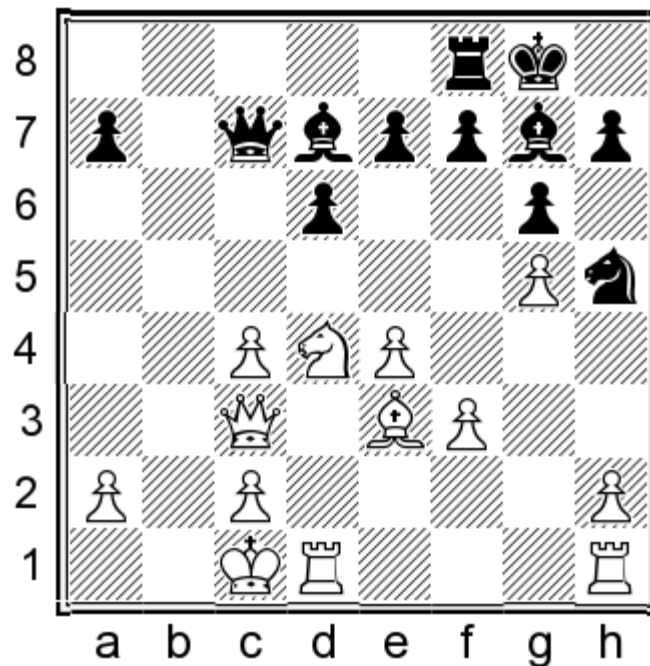
It's time to take stock of the position. Currently White still has an extra pawn and exchange. However, the exchange of Black's d-pawn for White's f-pawn has left White with an ugly structure, and the e-pawn is dropping immediately. The knight has become active and the bishops are both pointing at White's king.



24.Qd2 Qxe4 25.Rhb1 Bd5 26.Rb8 Be5 27.Rxf8†

The players agreed a draw here in Anderson – Mason, email 2010. As this was a correspondence game we can be fairly confident about the quality of the moves, so the result must be considered an encouraging sign for Black's exchange sacrifice.

D242) 19.Kc1

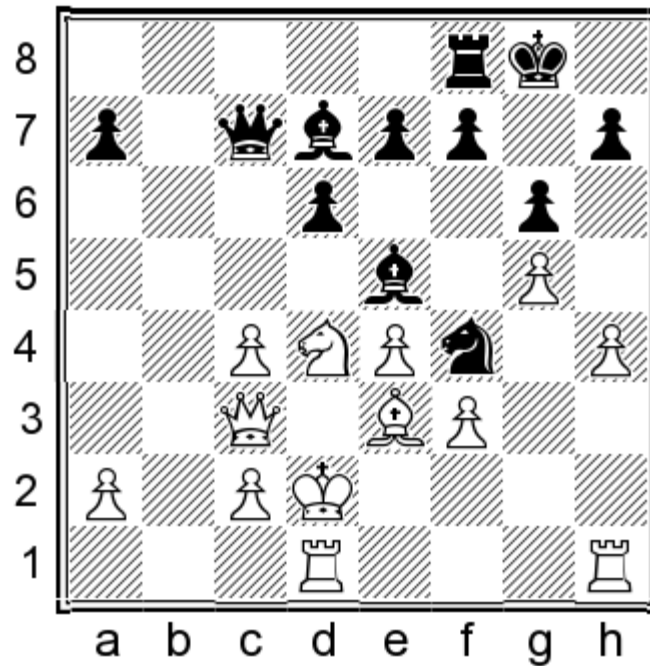


This was White's choice in the highest-rated game to have been played in the Burnett Variation so far.

19...Rc8

My engine already indicates that Black is fully equal.

19...Be5!? is a good alternative, wasting no time in bringing the h5-knight back into the game. 20.Kd2 (both 20.Rhf1 Nf4³ and 20.Qd3 Rb8³ are pleasant for the second player) 20...Nf4 21.h4 At this point in Havlikova – Sluka, Olomouc 2008, Black got too ambitious with 21...f5?!. My recommended improvement on ChessPublishing is:



21...Be6!N The c4-pawn will drop, leaving Black with beautiful coordination. Meanwhile White's pieces look rather scattered.

20.Qd3

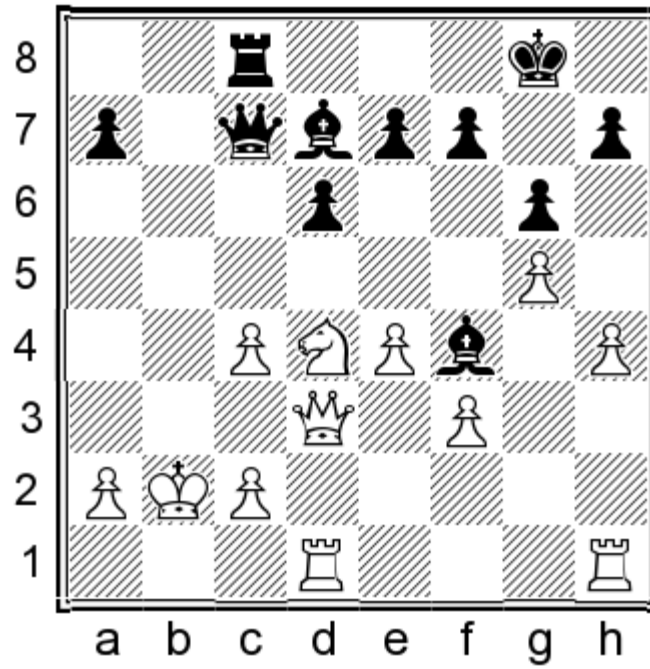
White would like to play 20.f4N but there are too many pins: 20...Bg4! 21.Rd2 Bf3 22.Re1 Bxe4³

20...Be5 21.h4 Nf4

21...Qa5 22.Kb1 Be6 23.Nb3 Qa4 24.Bc1 Bxc4 was agreed drawn in Khlopov – Morcin, email 2011. However, Black has a strong initiative and really should have played on.

22.Bxf4 Bxf4† 23.Kb2

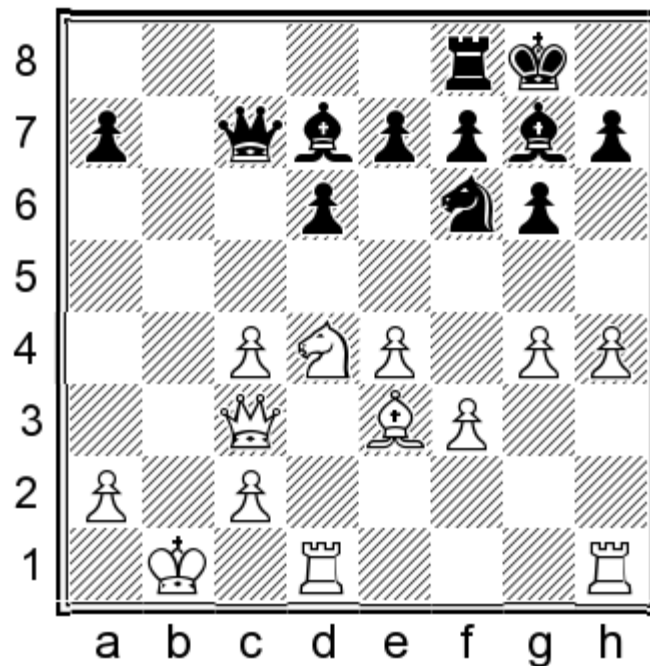
We have been following B. Socko – Stoczek, Germany 2006, the first GM outing for the Burnett Variation. Black's strongest continuation would have been:



23...Rb8+!N 24.Ka1 Rb4©

This is a typical way to reroute the rook; Black wants to win the c4-pawn without allowing a queen exchange. In the ensuing position, Black's two bishops will be no worse than White's rook and knight.

D25) 18.h4

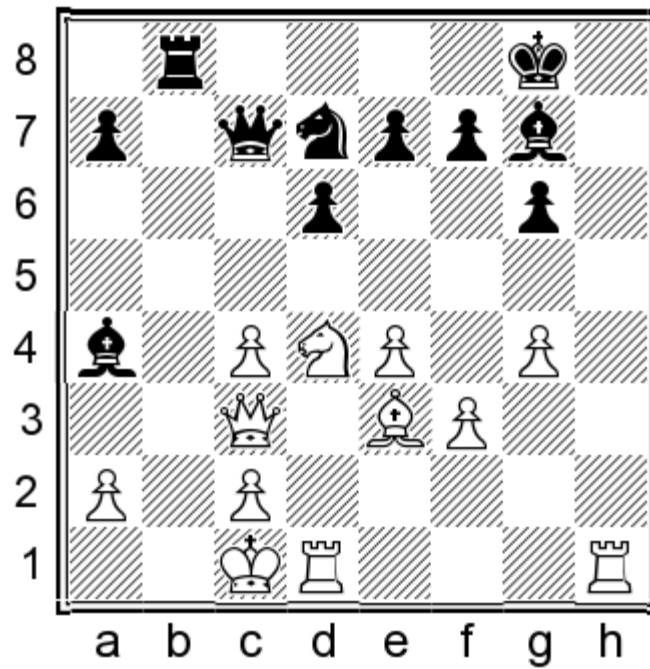


This is suggested by Van Delft and Ris, and apparently Benjamin Bok also proposed it as an improvement over his game with Cheparinov. White does not bother consolidating his extra material, but instead wishes to carry on attacking.

18...h5

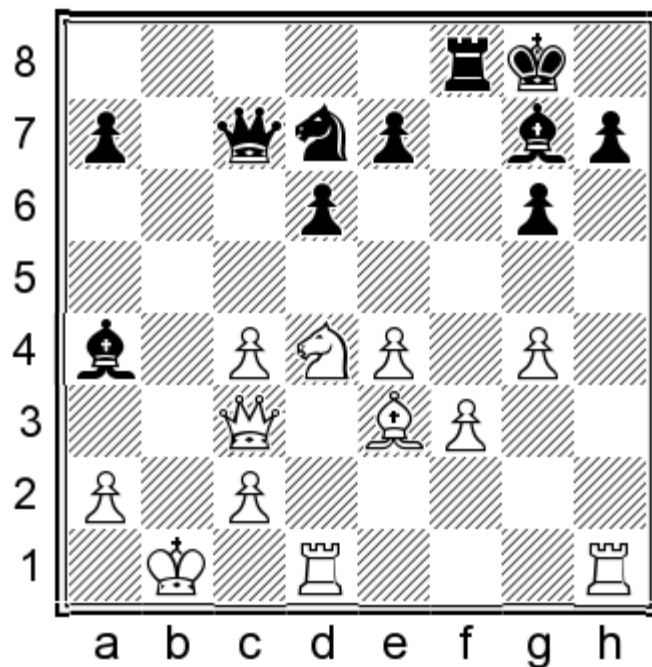
This is the safest way. First we aim to cut out White's kingside play, and only then prove our compensation.

18...Rb8† was suggested by 'Swiss_Dragon' on the ChessPublishing forum, but I couldn't make it work: 19.Kc1 Ba4 20.h5 Nd7 21.hxg6 hxg6



22.Rh3! Rc8 23.Rdh1 Qxc4 24.Qxc4 Rxc4 25.Nb3² Pijl – Schroeder, email 2011.

18...Ba4 is one of Nielsen's recommended approaches, and in principle it's the way I would like to play. However, a problem arises after: 19.h5 Nd7 20.hxg6 fxg6



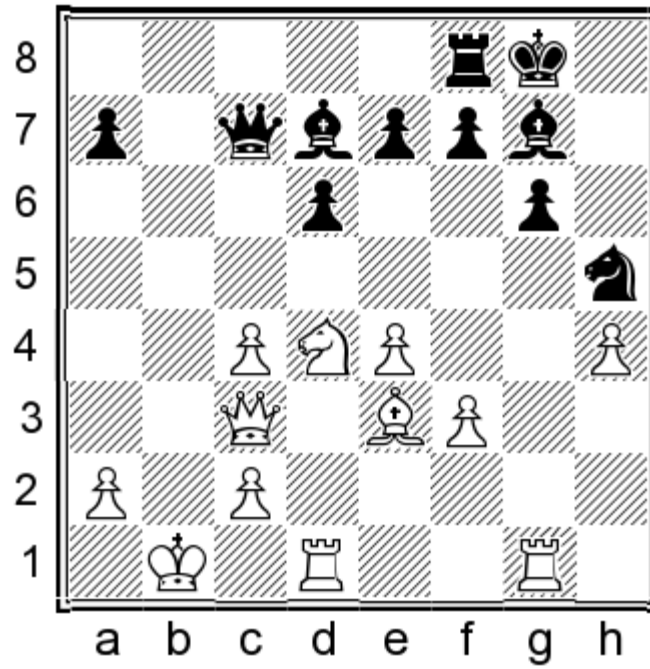
21.Kc1! I could not find a good way to proceed from here. (21.Bh6 is the only move looked at by Nielsen.) 21...Rxf3 was tried in Salvado – Flitsch, corr. 2013, but 22.c5!N followed by Qc4(†) seems strong for White. One could argue that a typical opponent over the board would be unlikely to find (or have prepared) all these moves, but I don't think it's worth the risk.

18...d5!?N is the other line suggested by Nielsen. It is also interesting, but I will focus on the move I prefer.

White may continue with D251) 19.gxh5!? or D252) 19.g5.

D251) 19.gxh5!? Nxh5 20.Rhg1

This interesting way of playing has been recommended by Van Delft and Ris. White has a straightforward idea of putting the rook on g5, and it took me a while to find a defence with which I was happy.

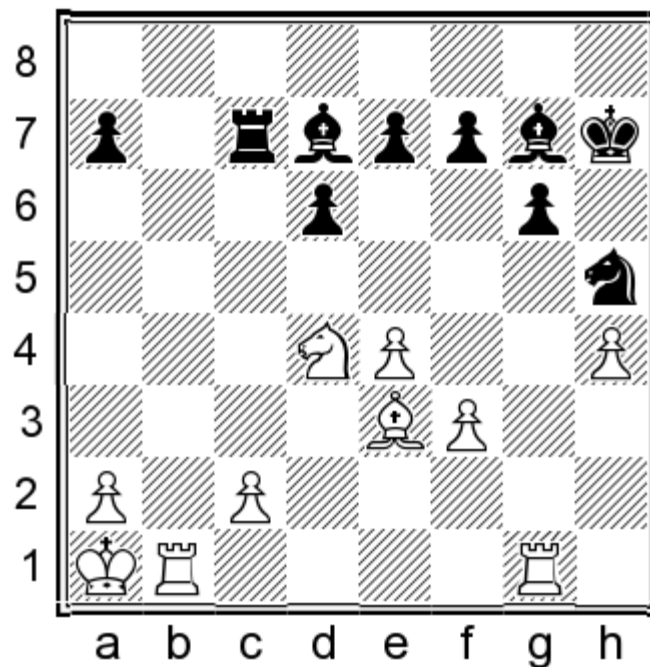


20...Rc8!N

I eventually concluded that this is the most accurate.

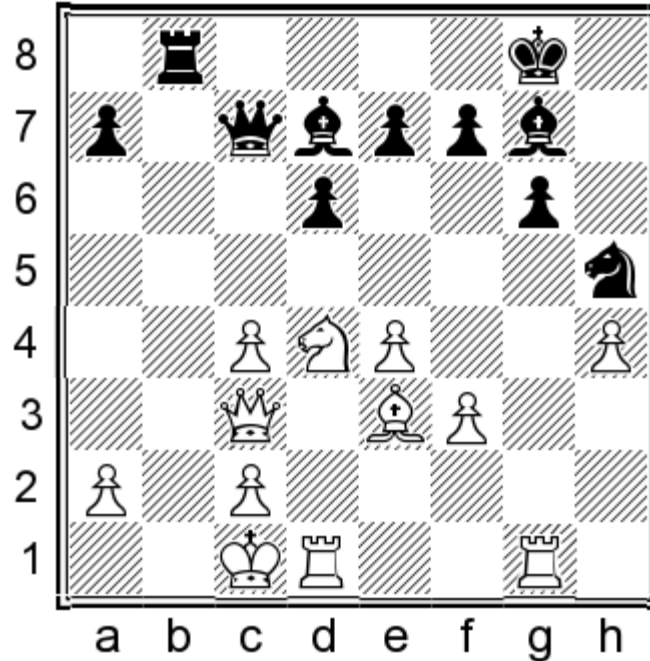
20...Rb8† worked well in one game, and it is worth checking both king moves:

a) The game continued: 21.Ka1 Rb5! An aesthetic way to reroute the rook and prevent White's plan 22.Rb1 (22.Rg5 Rc5!) 22...Rc5 23.Qb3 Rxc4 24.Qb8† Kh7 25.Qxc7 Rxc7 Despite the queen exchange, Black still has excellent play:



26.Rgd1 f5!? 27.exf5 gxf5 28.Rb2 Nf6 29.Ne2 Bc6 30.Rf1 Nd5 31.Bd4 e5 Black obtained the upper hand in Harf – Haumann, email 2008.

b) 21.Kc1!N



This suggestion of Van Delft and Ris is more annoying. 21...a6 22.Rg5 The rook does a fine job on the fifth rank. Now we have to watch out for the idea of giving the rook for either the knight on h5 or, in the event that we play ...Be5, the bishop. White's last move also prepares c4-c5.

21.Rg5!

Continuing the plan that was annoying me in similar positions. Here, though, I think Black can defend without too many problems.

21...Bf6 22.Ra5

22.Rxh5?! gxh5 doesn't get White anywhere, as after 23.Rg1† Kh7 Black's king is safe enough.

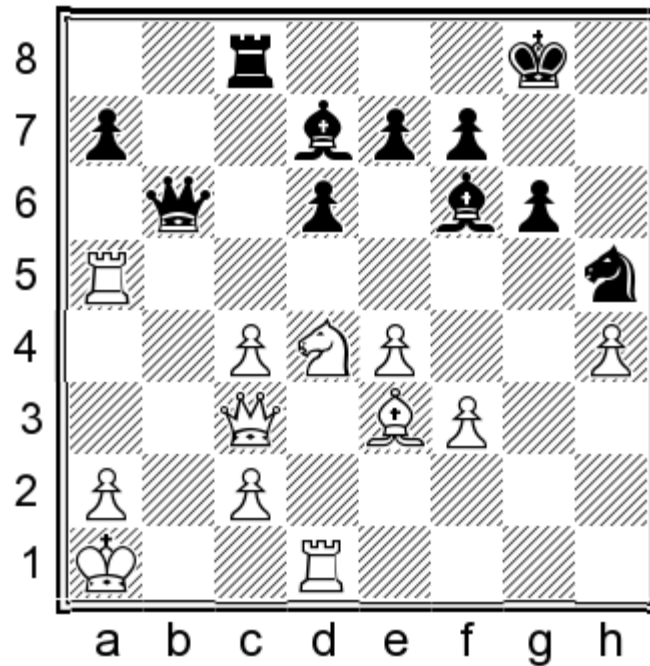
22...Qb6†!

Adding further pins to the position.

23.Ka1

This is the engine's preference, but now we will always have counterplay along the long diagonal.

23.Kc1 Ng3 24.Kd2 can be met by the quiet 24...a6! (24...Rxc4 is also playable) with the point that 25.Ra3 d5! gives Black a dangerous initiative.



23...Ng3!?

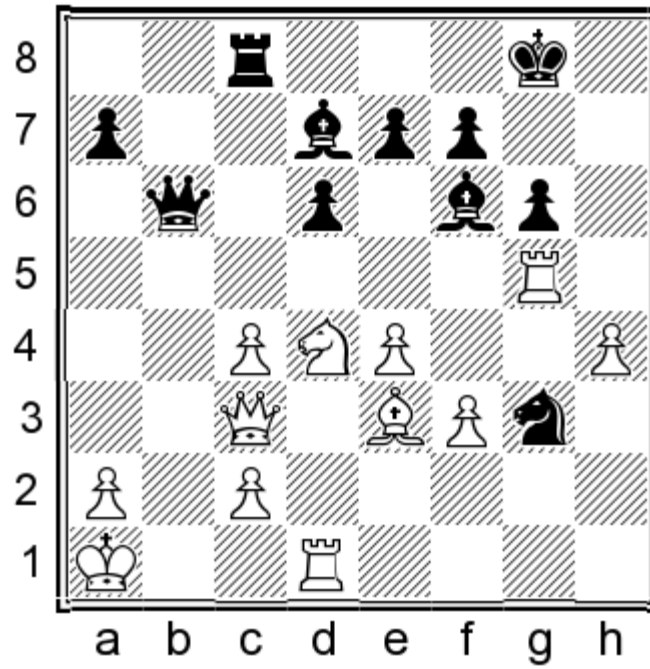
23...Rc5 24.Ra3 Qc7 also offers long-term pressure.

24.Rg5!?

I think this is quite a human idea, attempting to give back the exchange to regain the initiative.

24.Re1? Rxc4 25.Qxc4 Qxa5

24.Ra3 Be6 25.Qa5 Qxa5 26.Rxa5 Bxc4 is quite similar to the main line below. White probably has some small edge after 27.c3 (not 27.Rxa7?! Be2), but after 27...a6 I think Black's position is completely playable.



24...Be6!

The position is still tricky for White as his pieces look rather misplaced.

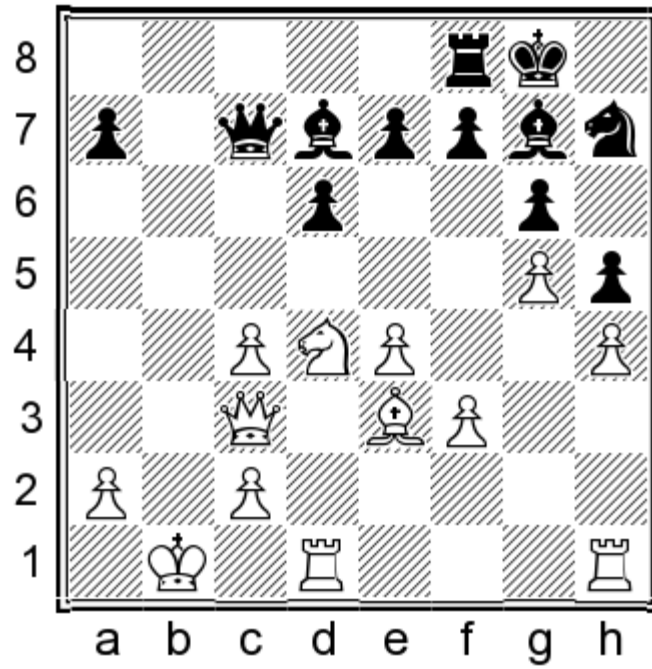
25.Qb3

25.Rxg3? Rxc4 26.Qb2 (26.Qa3 Rxc2–+) 26...Rb4 27.Qa3 Qc5 gives Black an overwhelming attack.

25...Ne2 26.Qxb6 axb6 27.Rg2 Bxc4÷

White has played extremely accurately, managing to trade queens and retain the extra exchange. However, matters still aren't clear, as he is caught in some awkward pins while Black has good squares for all his pieces. My engine assesses the position as around equal.

D252) 19.g5 Nh7



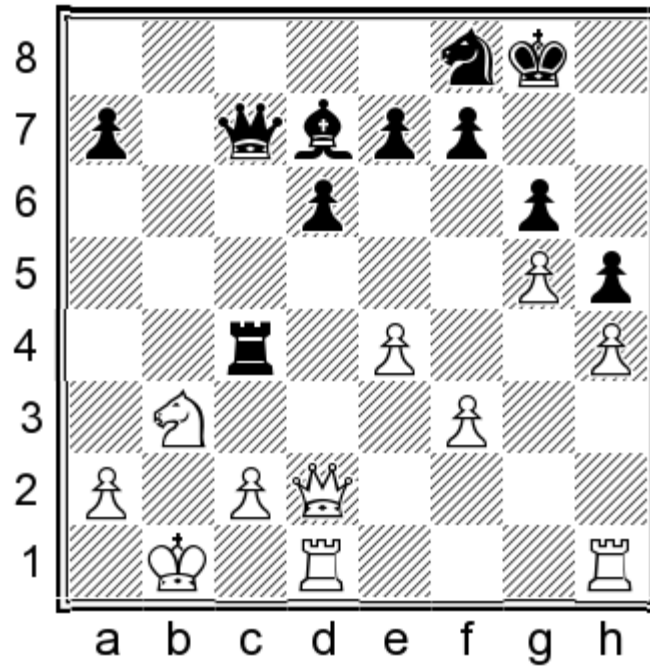
We saw a similar position already in Bok – Cheparinov, which started with 18.Kc1. The knight may look misplaced on h7 but it will reroute via f8. With the kingside closed, it is not easy to determine how White should continue.

20.Ka1

20.Kc1 Rc8 transposes to the aforementioned Bok – Cheparinov game; see variation D22.

20.Rd2 was tried in Roberts – Gonzaga Grego, email 2008. I'd go for 20...Rb8†N 21.Ka1 Nf8 22.Rb1 Rc8÷ with typical pressure.

20.Qd3 Rb8† 21.Nb3 Nf8 22.Bd4 Bxd4 23.Qxd4 Rb4 24.Qd2 Rxc4 White has survived the first wave while retaining the extra exchange. However, his king's safety is a long-term issue, and it is not easy to improve his position. The following computer game is a good illustration:



25.Rhe1 Ra4 26.Qf2 Rb4 27.Kb2 Ne6 28.Qd2 Ra4 29.Ka1 Nd8!? 30.Re3 Nc6 31.Qc3 Be6 32.Rb1 a5 33.Qd2 Ne5 34.Rc3 Qb8 35.Qe1 Qb6 36.f4 Nc4 37.Rd3 Na3 This was asterix_2006 – idontknow, engine game 2012. It is clear that Black has been outplaying White, although White did manage to hold the draw in the end.

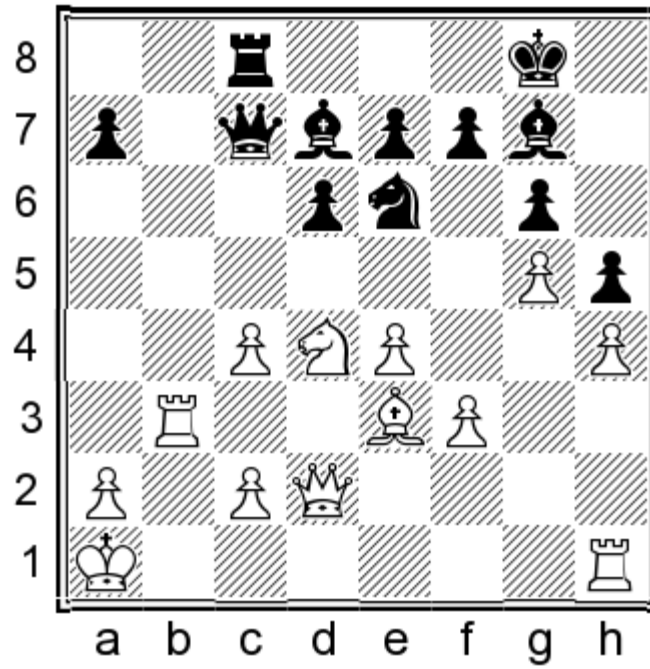
20...Rc8 21.Rb1 Nf8

Continuing to improve our pieces. Despite the material deficit, we don't need to rush anything in this variation, as White's problems are long-lasting.

21...Qxc4?! 22.Qxc4 Rxc4 23.Rhd1 Rxc2 is the wrong idea; Black has regained two pawns, but the resulting endgame is slightly better for White.

22.Rb3 Ne6 23.Qd2

This was seen in Hedman – Carlsson, Malmo 2012. Here there's nothing wrong with simply grabbing the loose pawn:



23...Qxc4N 24.c3 a5

Black has full compensation for the exchange. A sample line is:

25.Rhb1 Nc5 26.Rb8 Rxb8 27.Rxb8† Kh7,,

Conclusion

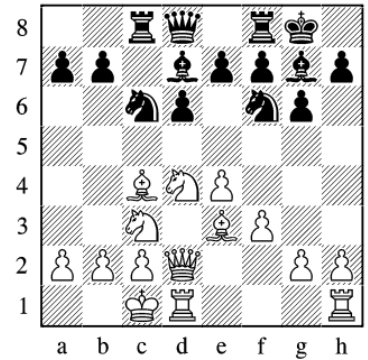
12.Kb1 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.g4 has been a major problem for Black in recent years. However, the exchange sacrifice with 14...b5 15.b3 b4 offers Black good practical chances, and I have not been able to find anything like a refutation. Black gets good long-term compensation, based not only on attacking the exposed white king, but also on White's terrible pawn structure.

Of the alternatives, 15.h4 is definitely the most dangerous. This line has not been looked at in detail for some time, but perhaps if the exchange sacrifice catches on, White players will move to investigate the fresh positions there.

Finally, let me remind you not to worry if playing so far behind on material isn't for you. With the proposed repertoire in this book, you can avoid the 12.Kb1 line by choosing the Topalov Variation (see Chapter 7) against 10.0-0-0.

Chapter 11

Yugoslav Attack



Minor Lines after 10.0-0-0

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7
7.f3 0-0 8.♚d2 ♘c6 9.♙c4 ♙d7 10.0-0-0

10...♖c8

A) 11.Be2 a6 12.Kb1 b5 13.g4 Nxd4!? 14.Bxd4 e5

A1) 15.Bf2

A2) 15.Be3

B) 11.Bb3 Ne5

B1) 12.Bh6?!

B2) 12.g4?! b5!

B21) 13.h4?!

B22) 13.a3

B23) 13.g5 b4! 14.Nce2 Nh5

B231) 15.f4

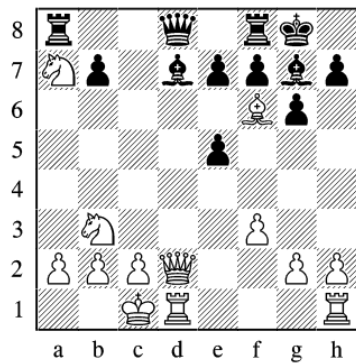
B232) 15.Ng3

B3) 12.Bg5!? Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.e5! dxe5 15.Nde2 Rc7 16.Bxf6

B31) 16...Bxf6

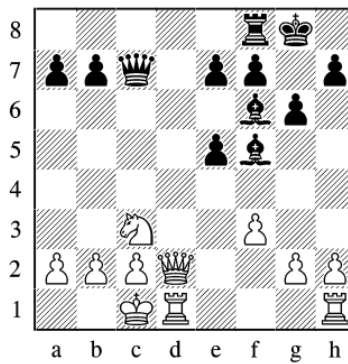
B32) 16...exf6

B3) note to 15.♘de2



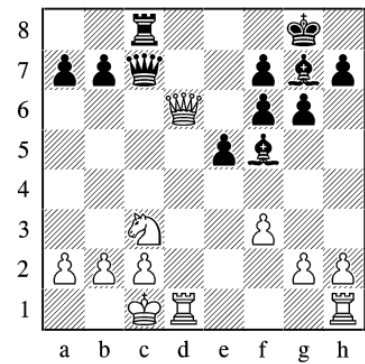
18...exf6!N

B31) after 19.♘c3



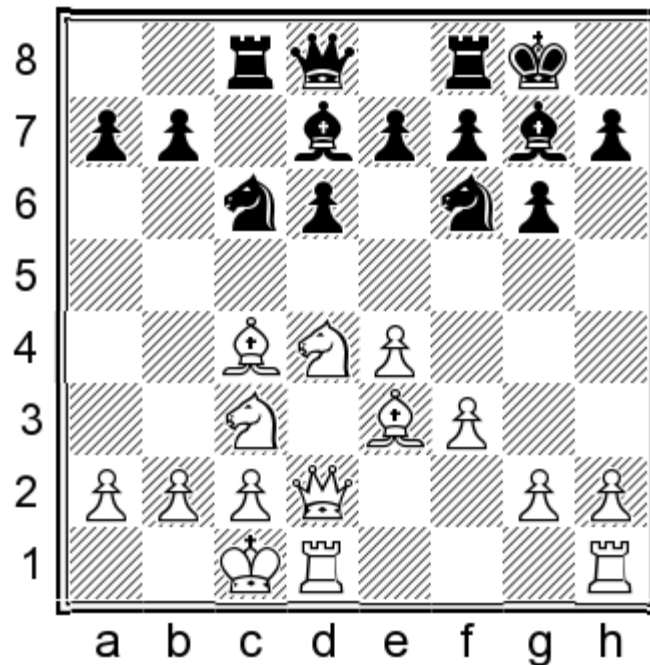
19...e4!?N

B32) after 20.♙d6



20...♙xd6N

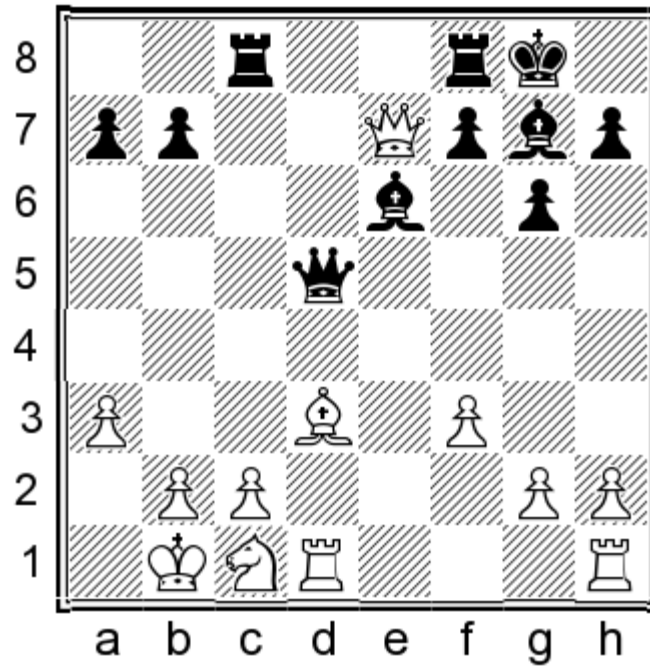
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.0-0-0 Rc8



In this standard position we will examine the unusual A) 11.Be2 followed by some sidelines after the usual B) 11.Bb3.

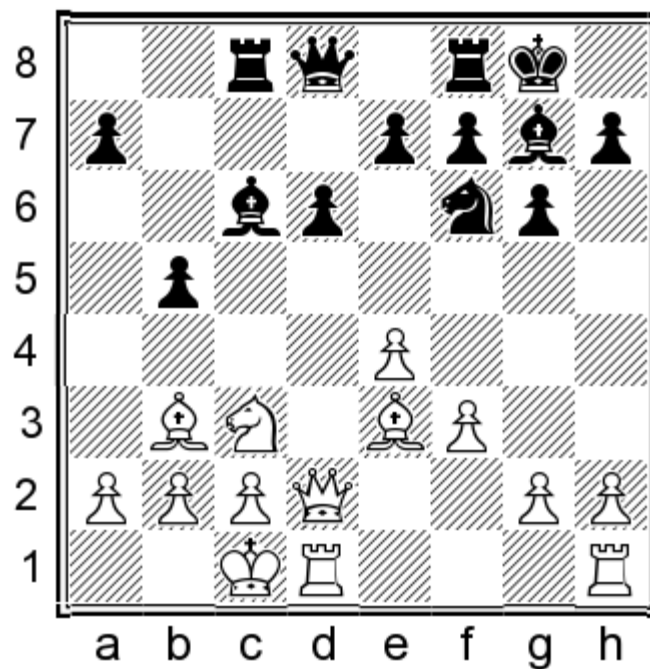
In a surprising number of games White hasn't noticed the threat: 11.h4?? Nxd4 12.Qxd4 Ng4-+

11.Bd3?! The bishop is unfortunately placed here. 11...d5! 12.exd5 Nb4 Black regains the pawn with a strong initiative. We could stop here, but I will include a nice illustrative game: 13.Kb1 Nfxd5 14.Nxd5 Nxd5 15.Ne2?! Surely White had to hold on to his dark-squared bishop. 15...Nxe3 16.Qxe3 Qa5 17.Qxe7 Be6 18.a3?! Qd5 19.Nc1



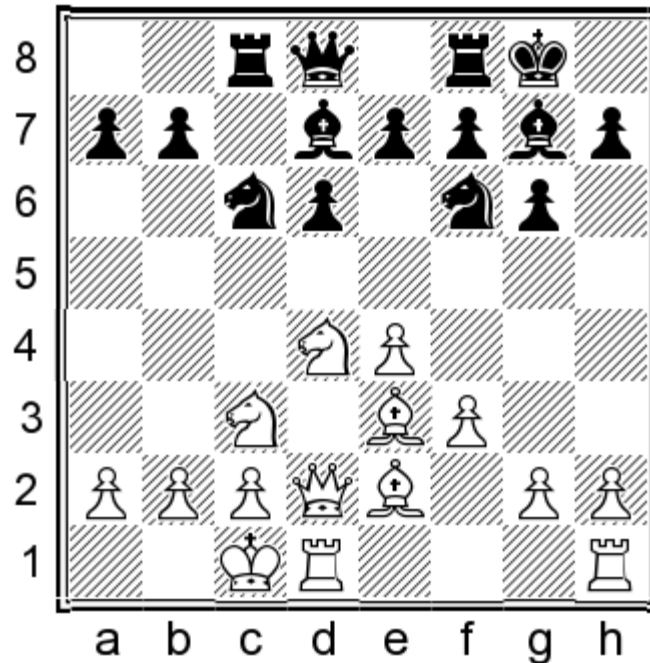
19...Bxb2! 20.Bxg6 (20.Kxb2 Qe5† 21.Kb1 Ba2†! 22.Kxa2 Qxe7–+) 20...Qa5 21.Bd3 Bg7 22.Qh4 h6 0–1 Ventimiglia – Makarczuk, email 2001.

11.Nxc6 Bxc6 12.Bb3 b5 (12...a5!? is also interesting) reaches a Topalov Variation where, instead of Black exchanging on d4, White has exchanged on c6. This favours Black, as the bishop does a good job controlling the d5-square, and e3 is generally a worse square than d4 for the white bishop, as Nd5 no longer forces the trade of bishops.



13.Bxa7 b4N 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Qa5 16.Qe3 Ba4 We have transposed to variation D22 of Chapter 9 – see page 193.

A) 11.Be2



Retreating the bishop along the f1-a6 diagonal appears to lose a tempo but White's argument is that, with the bishop on d7, the ...d5 break is harder to achieve. This rare move gives a lot of fertile ground to explore, but Russian GM Boris Savchenko has tried it a few times.

11...a6

This has generally been Black's preference in correspondence and engine games. With White's bishop on a rather passive square, Black can afford to spend a tempo preparing ...b5.

11...d5!?N

This was a possibility I mooted on ChessPublishing. Critical looks to be:

12.Nxc6

12.exd5?! Nb4 regains the pawn with a decent position: 13.d6 Qa5!μ

12.Nxd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Bf5 15.c4 Qxd5 16.Bxg7 Qxd2† Originally I thought White was marginally better, but Black should be fine.

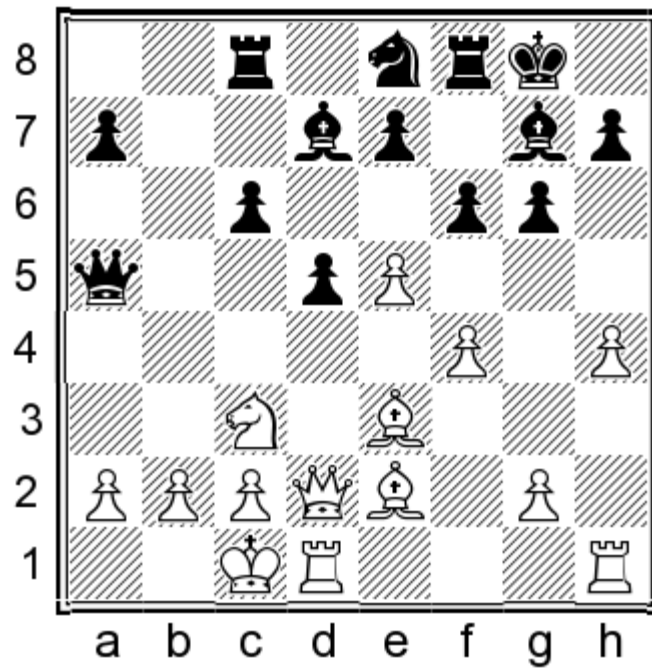
12.Kb1 dxe4 13.fxe4 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Be6 also looks okay for Black.

12...bxc6 13.e5 Ne8 14.f4 Qa5 15.h4

15.Qe1 Qc7÷

15...f6

Thus far I gave on ChessPublishing. Here I wrote “with a messy position” and suggested there should be some practical testing. A possible continuation is:



16.h5 Rb8 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.Kb1 fxe5 19.fxe5 Bxe5 20.Bd4 Bxd4 21.Qxd4 Nf6 22.b3 Qb4

The position remains unclear.

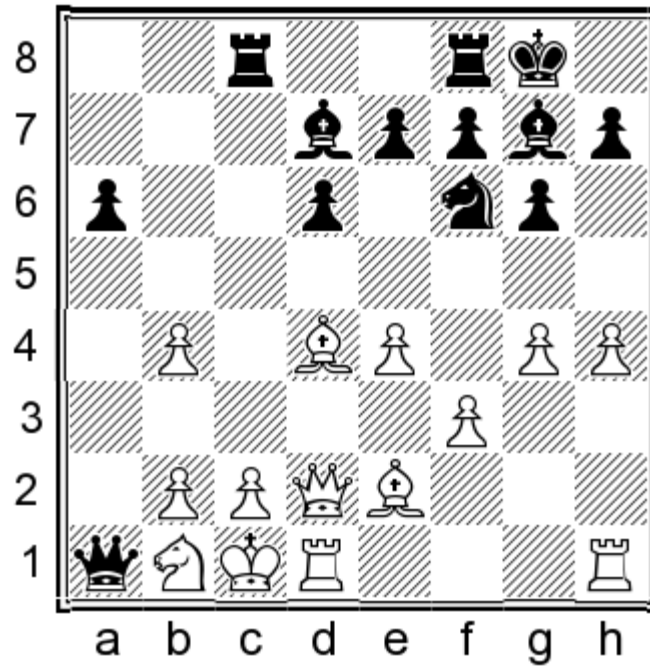
12.Kb1

12.g4 b5 13.h4

13.Kb1 transposes to the main line. The text move is riskier.

13...Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Qa5 15.a3 b4 16.axb4 Qa1† 17.Nb1

This is an extremely dangerous way of playing for White, and I can see only engines being happy to defend.



17...Be6N

This looks like a good option.

17...e5!? 18.Bc3 d5 19.exd5 e4 20.g5 e3 21.Qe1 Nh5 22.Bxg7 Nxg7 was another extremely messy position that was later drawn in Matei – Grego, corr. 2012.

18.Qe3 Qa4 19.Nc3

19.Bc3 d5!? 20.e5 d4! 21.Rxd4 Nd5 gives Black a strong initiative.

19...Qxb4 20.h5 Rb8÷

Black has excellent counter-chances.

12.h4 Nh5!?

This looks peculiar, but it highlights another flaw with White's 11.Be2. Now Black will be able to exchange off the light-squared bishop.

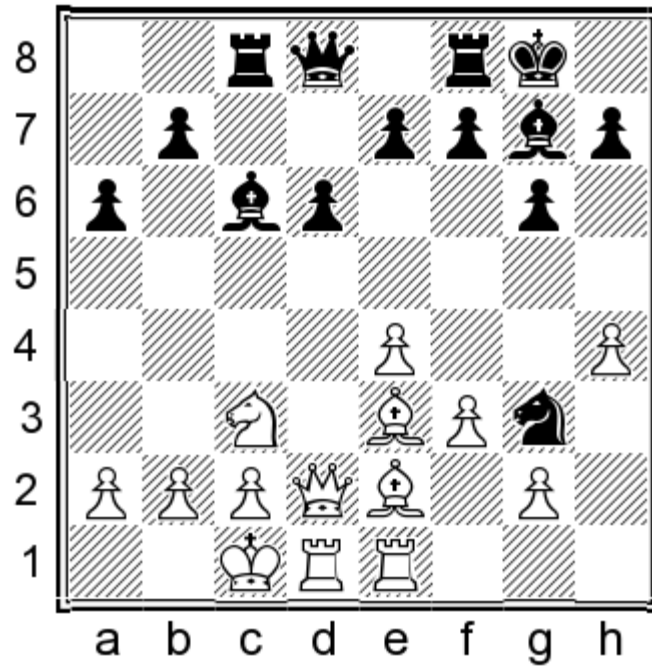
12...b5 is fine as well. 13.Nxc6 was Kajumov – Oganyan, Anapa 2009, and now 13...Bxc6N is logical. 14.Nd5 (Attacking with 14.h5?! does not work: 14...Nxb5 15.g4 Ng3! 16.Rh3 b4 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.exd5 Nxe2† 19.Qxe2 e6) 14...Bxd5 15.exd5 Re8= The position resembles the note to White's 13th move in the main line below.

13.Rhe1 Ng3 14.Nxc6

In Rissanen – Kapusta, email 2009, Black rushed to exchange on e2, but I would prefer:

14...Bxc6N

Black is doing fine, for example:



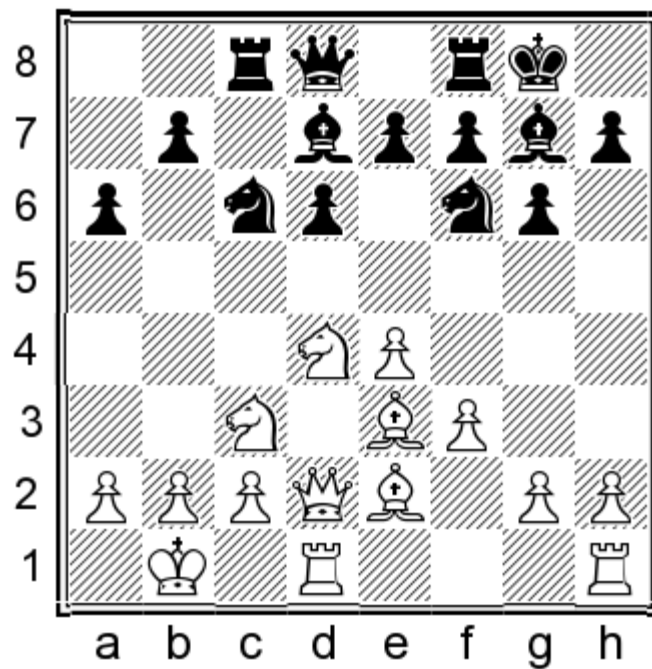
15.Bh6

15.Bc4 b5 (15...Bxe4!?) 16.Bb3 a5=

15.Bd3 Bxc3! 16.Qxc3 Bxe4³

15...Bxh6 16.Qxh6 e6 17.Bd3 Qf6 18.Qg5 Nh5

With equal chances.



12...b5 13.g4

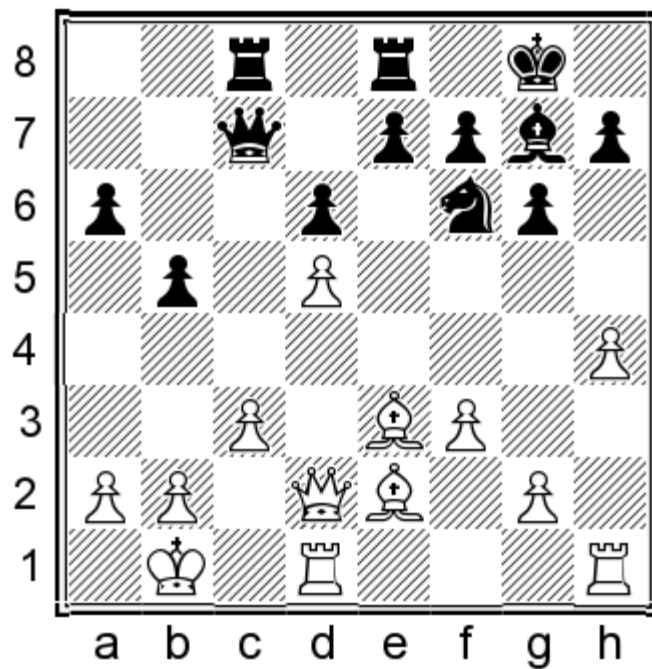
White's alternative way of playing is:

13.Nxc6 Bxc6 14.Nd5 Bxd5 15.exd5 Qc7

Black will combine pressure down the c-file with opening the e-file.

16.c3 Rfe8 17.h4

This position was reached in Efremov – Nilsson, corr. 2011. Here I would play:



17...Qd7N

Preparing to open the e-file. A couple of sample lines continue:

18.h5

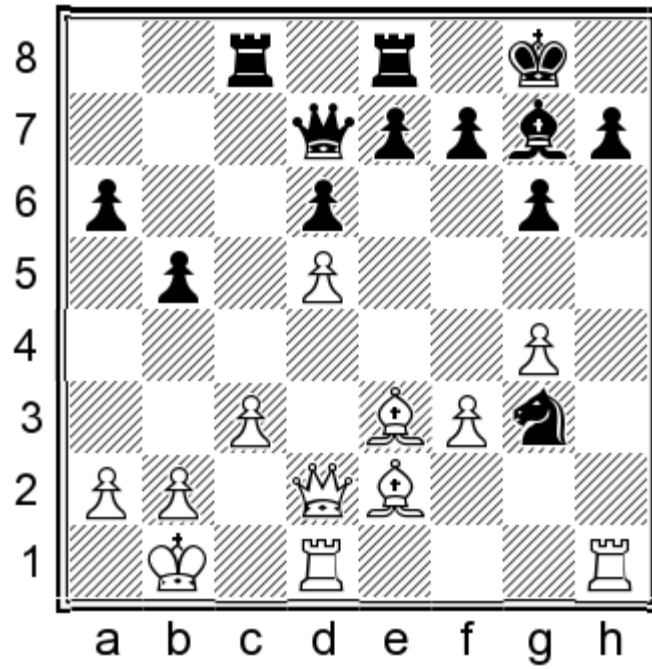
18.g4 e6 19.Bh6 Bxh6 20.Qxh6 b4! gives Black good counterplay. White cannot keep the queenside closed with 21.c4? as 21...exd5 favours Black.

18...Nxh5 19.g4

19.Bd3 Nf6÷

19...Ng3

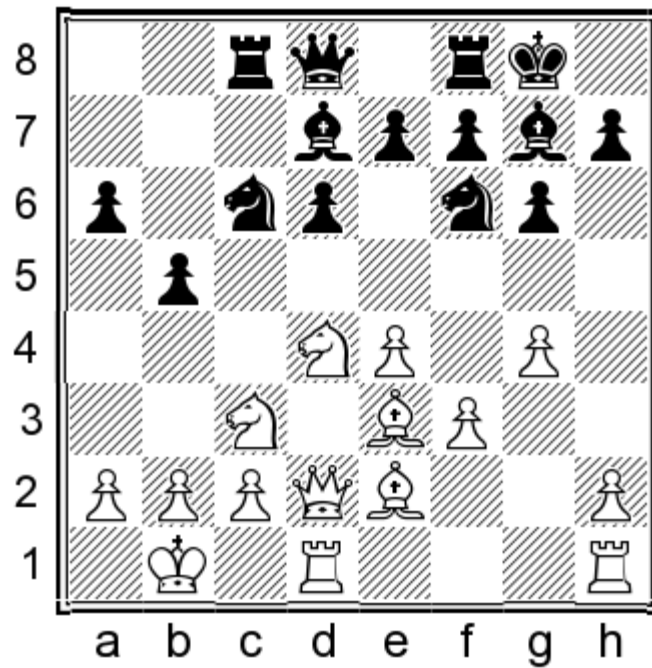
19...Nf6 is also possible.



20.Bd3

20.Rh3 Nxe2 21.Qxe2 b4 22.cxb4 Qa4³

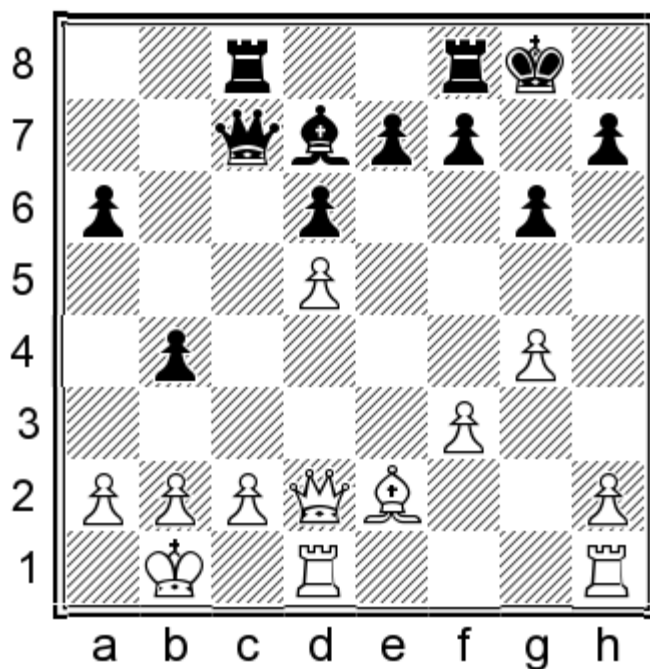
20...Nxe2 21.Rxe2 Qb7 22.Qh2 h5 23.gxh5 Qxd5 24.Qe2 b4÷



13...Nxd4!?

This leads to a fascinating, double-edged position.

13...b4 is a solid alternative which leads to a quieter game: 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Nxd4 16.Bxd4 Bxd4 17.Qxd4 Qc7 18.Qd2



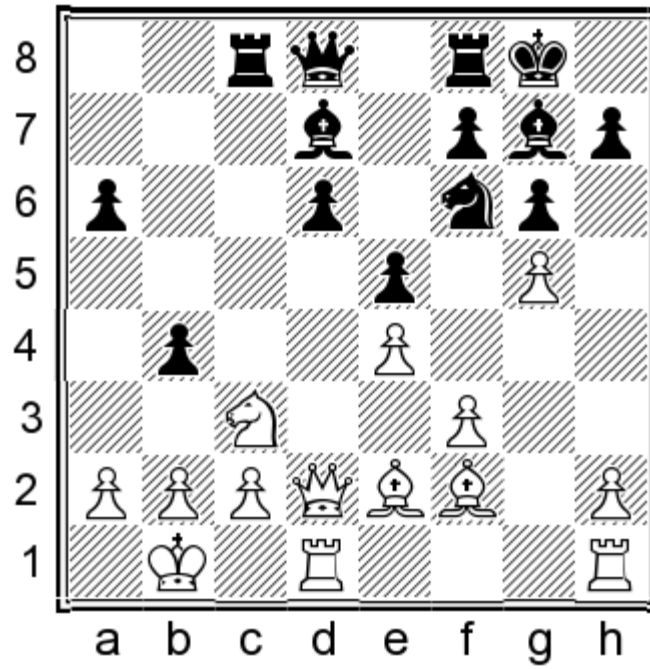
18...f5!? Black fights for counterplay. He could sit passively, but that would allow White to build an attack on the kingside. 19.h4 (19.g5 f4 20.Bd3 Bf5 21.h4 Qc5 22.Rhe1 Rc7 23.Bxf5 Rxf5 24.Re4 a5= crawly – nikolay15, engine game 2012.) 19...fxg4 20.h5 Bf5 21.Bd3 Bxd3 22.cxd3 gxh5 23.fxg4 Rf7 24.gxh5 Qb6 25.Qg2† Kh8= crawly – crgiorgio, engine game 2013.

14.Bxd4 e5

This looks anti-positional, but the point is to follow up with ...b4, when the c3-knight only has the d5-square available.

We will analyse A1) 15.Bf2 and A2) 15.Be3. The moves are similar, but there are some subtle differences which I will point out.

A1) 15.Bf2 b4 16.g5



16...bxc3

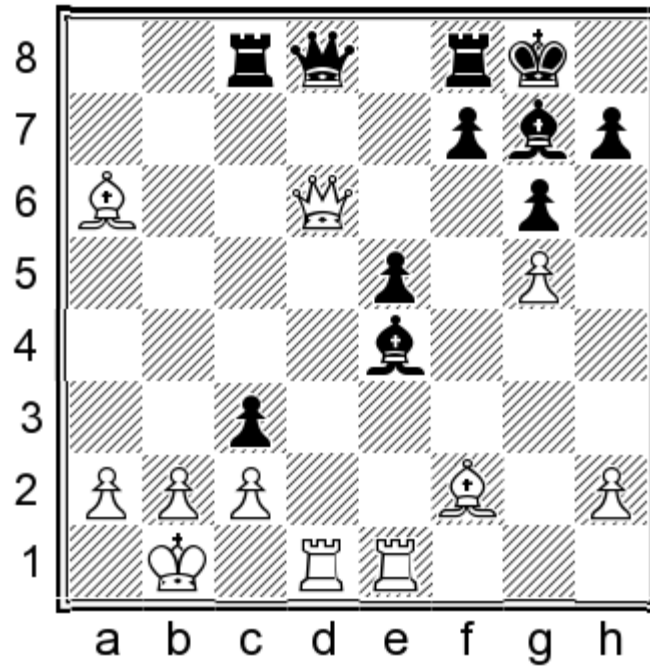
16...Rc6!?N looks to be an interesting alternative. After 17.Na4 Nh5 18.Qxb4 Nf4 19.Bf1 Qxg5 20.Qb7 Rxc2 21.Kxc2 Bxa4† 22.b3 Bb5© Black has decent compensation for the exchange.

17.Qxd6 Nxe4 18.fxe4 Bc6

18...Qa5!?N is an untested attempt to exploit the location of the bishop on f2. 19.Rd5 (19.Qxd7?? loses to 19...Qb4 20.b3 Qa3) 19...Bb5÷ With a complicated position.

19.Bxa6 Bxe4 20.Rhe1

As far as I can see, the possibility of attacking the bishop in this way is the point behind putting the bishop on f2.



20...Bxc2†!?N

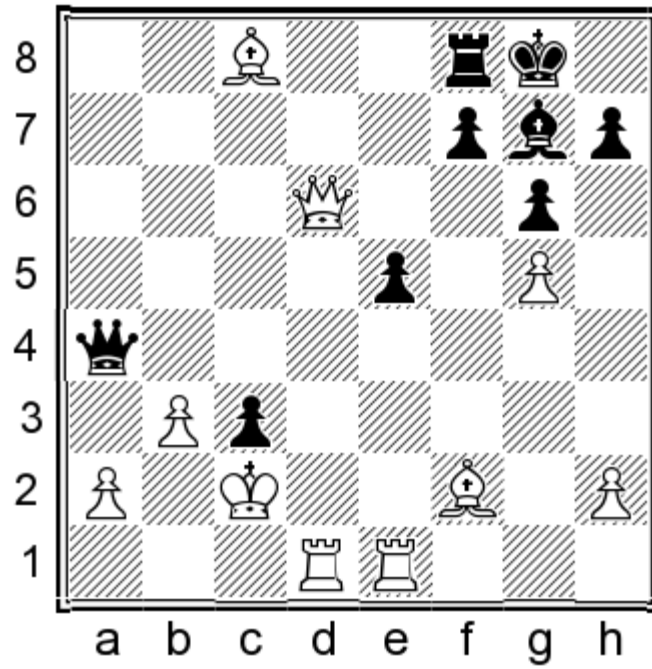
I would be extremely tempted to try this sacrifice, although 20...Bf5!?N also leads to interesting play.

21.Kxc2 Qa5

Black has given up a whole rook but will pick up a few pawns, while his c-pawn is extremely powerful and White's king is walking around in no man's land.

22.Bxc8 Qa4† 23.b3

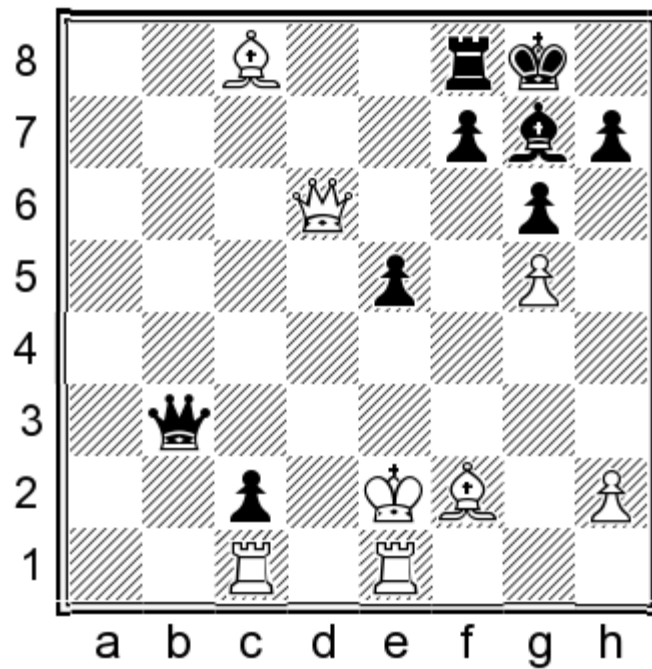
23.Kxc3 Rxc8† 24.Kd3 Bf8 25.Qxe5 Rc6÷ Black will at least pick up the queen for his rook.



23...Qxa2† 24.Kd3 c2

24...Rxc8 25.Qd7 Rb8 also leads to unclear play.

25.Rc1 Qxb3† 26.Ke2



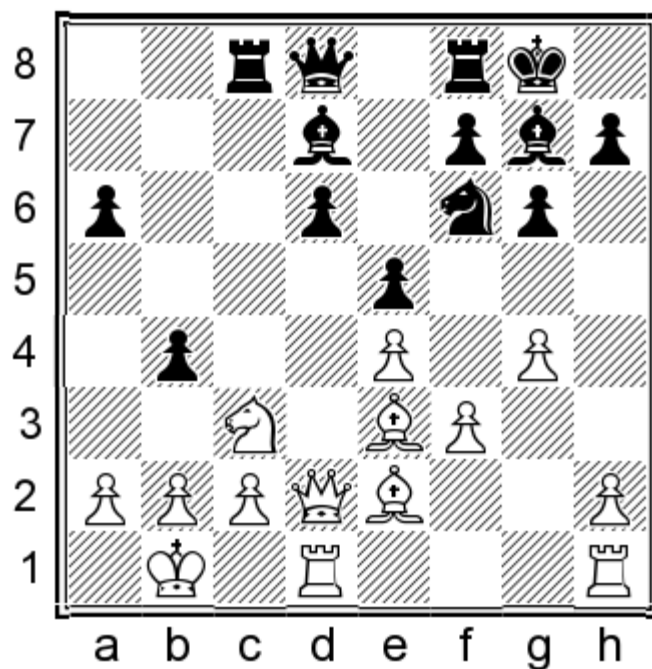
26...e4! 27.Kf1 Rxc8 28.Rxe4 Qb5† 29.Re2 Bb2 30.Be3 Rc4!

Provoking a weakening of White's kingside.

31.h3 Rc8!÷

The position remains complicated but dynamically balanced.

A2) 15.Be3 b4



16.g5

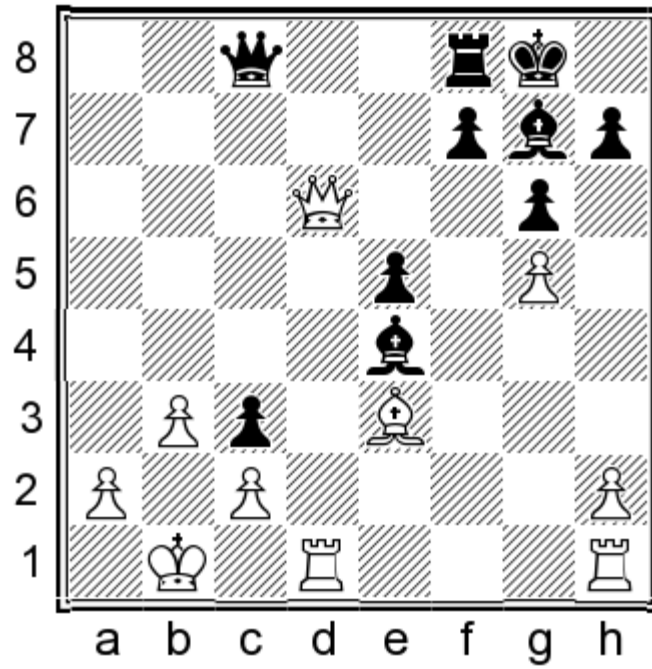
16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 is not at all dangerous: 17...f5N This looks natural, grabbing space in the centre. After 18.h4 f4 19.Bf2 e4! 20.fxe4 Ba4 21.Bd3 Qf6 22.Qc1 b3³ Black has a strong initiative.

16...bxc3 17.Qxd6 Nxe4 18.fxe4 Bc6!

Continuing the sharp debate.

19.Bxa6 Bxe4 20.Bxc8 Qxc8 21.b3

White's position may be playable for an engine, but it looks extremely dangerous to me. At every turn White must watch out for sacrifices on c2, opening up his king.



21...Qa8!N

This looks like the most threatening practical try. I've added in some potential lines. You should note that White's moves are almost all forced, and the slightest error might see him fall into a mating net.

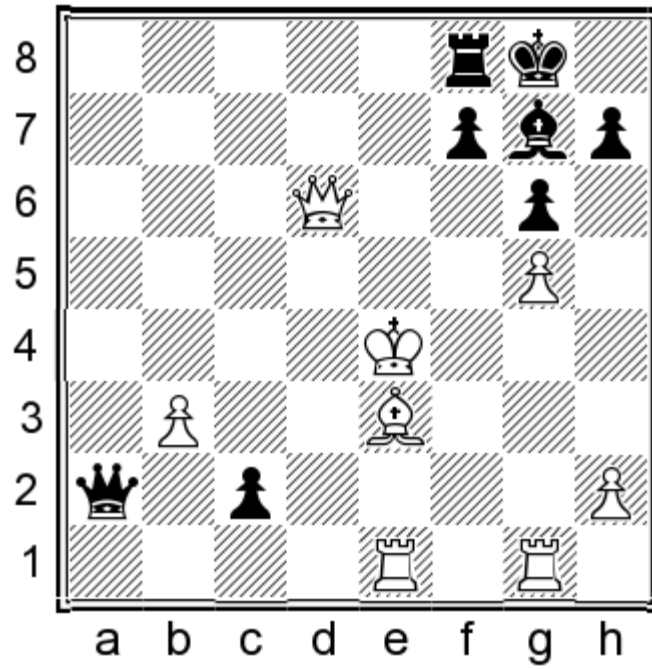
22.Rhf1

22.Rhg1 Bxc2†!?

22...Rb8 and 22...Rc8 also look interesting.

23.Kxc2 Qxa2† 24.Kd3 e4†! 25.Kxe4 c2 26.Rde1

26.Rd5 Re8† 27.Kf3 Rxe3† 28.Kxe3 Qxb3† 29.Kf2 c1=Q 30.Rxc1 Qb2† 31.Rd2 Qxc1 looks like another draw.

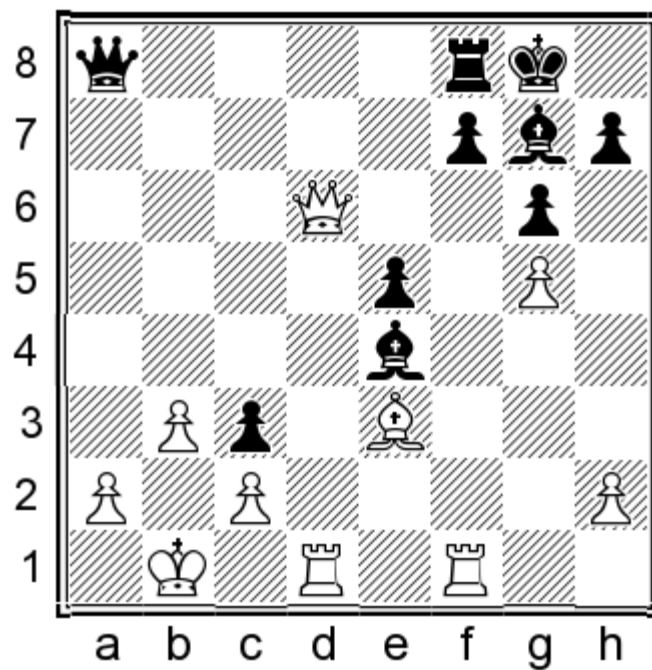


26...Qa8†! 27.Kf4 Rd8 28.Qc7 Rd5! 29.Kg4

29.Qxc2?! Rf5† 30.Qxf5 Qb8† 31.Kg4 gxf5†μ

29...Rd3

Black has an extremely dangerous attack and my engine, after some time, decides the position is equal. Practically I would, of course, take Black.



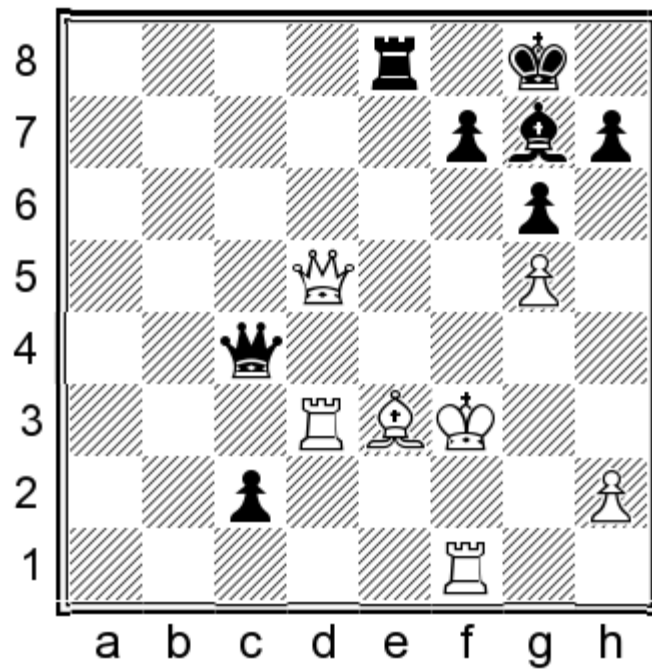
22...Bxc2†! 23.Kxc2 Qxa2† 24.Kd3 e4†

24...Qxb3!? could also be considered.

25.Kxe4 c2 26.Rd5

26.Rde1 Qa8† 27.Kf4 Qg2! maintains the balance.

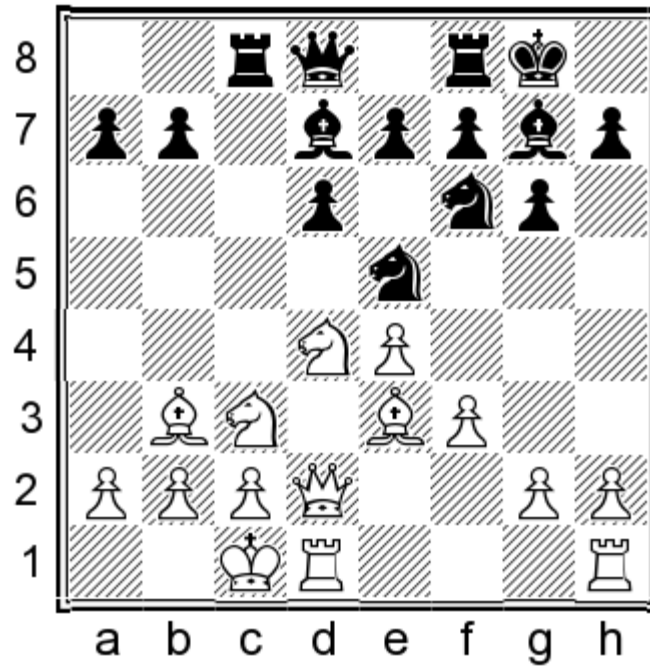
26...Re8† 27.Kf3 Qxb3 28.Rd3 Qc4 29.Qd5



29...Rxe3† 30.Kxe3 c1=Q† 31.Rxc1 Qxc1†

The endgame must be drawn.

B) 11.Bb3 Ne5



In the remainder of the chapter we will examine three sidelines from this popular position: B1) 12.Bh6?!, B2) 12.g4?! and B3) 12.Bg5!?.

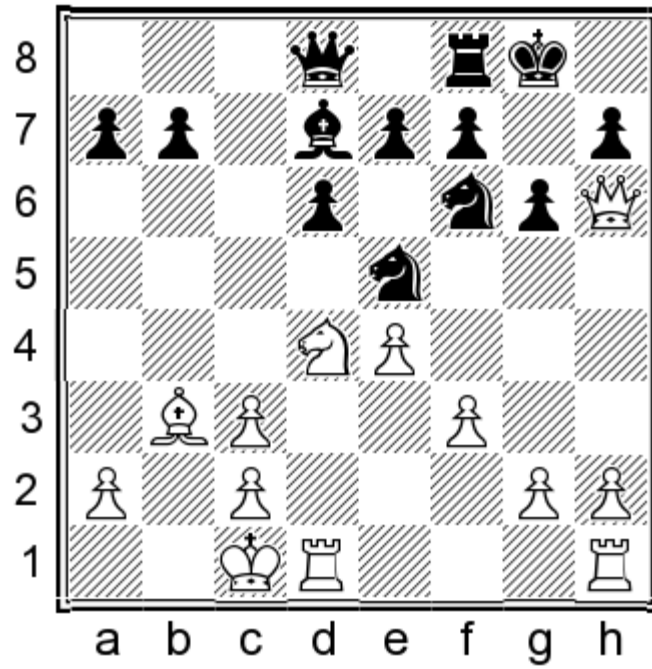
12.Qe2?! covers the c4-square but allows 12...Rxc3! 13.bxc3 Qa5 when Black has typical Dragon compensation.

B1) 12.Bh6?!

If White wishes to play this way then he should start with 12.h4, as examined in Chapter 4. Here White's attack is slower, and so we can play thematically.

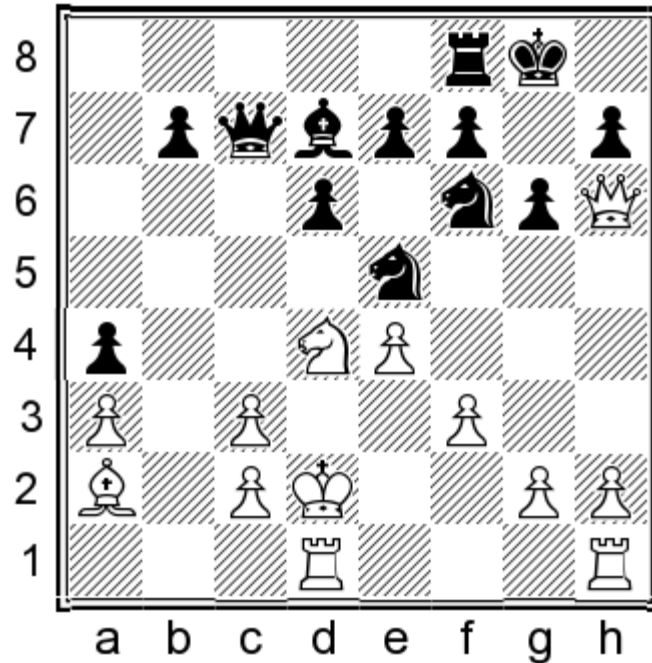
12...Bxh6 13.Qxh6 Rxc3! 14.bxc3

Compared to the position with h2-h4 and ...h5 inserted, the g6-pawn is now much better protected and so White doesn't have any f3-f4 ideas. In an old game Korchnoi showed a good approach.



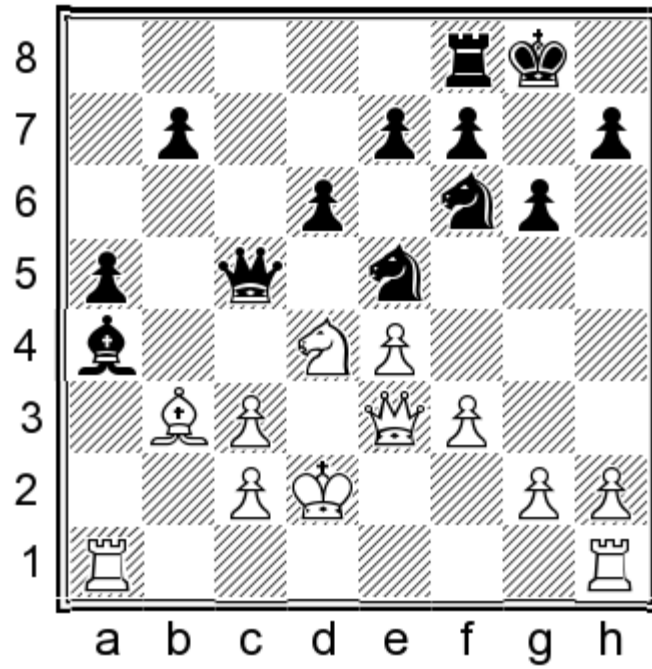
14...a5! 15.a4

15.a3 has also been tried. A game involving a young David Navara continued: 15...Qc7 16.Kd2 a4 17.Ba2 Navara – Ptacnikova, Czech Republic 1998. At this point Iceland's top female player missed a tactical shot:



17...Neg4!N 18.fxg4 (18.Qg5 Nf2μ) 18...Nxe4† 19.Kc1 Qxc3 With a powerful attack.

15...Qc7 16.Qe3 Qc5 17.Kd2 Bxa4! 18.Ra1

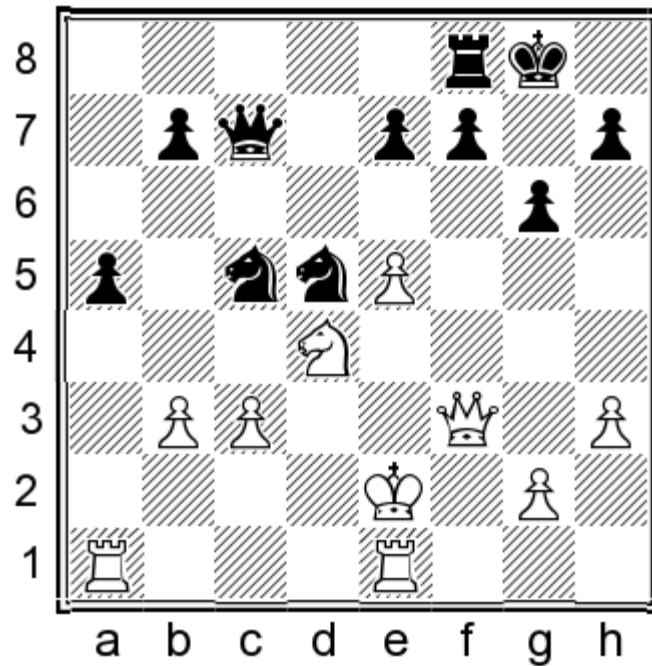


18...Bxb3!?

18...Bd7³ is a good alternative, but the Old Man of Chess chooses to improve his opponent's structure in order to gain a tempo for his attack.

19.cxb3 d5! 20.h3 dxe4 21.fxe4 Ned7 22.Ke2 Qc7 23.Rhe1 Nc5 24.e5 Nd5 25.Qf3

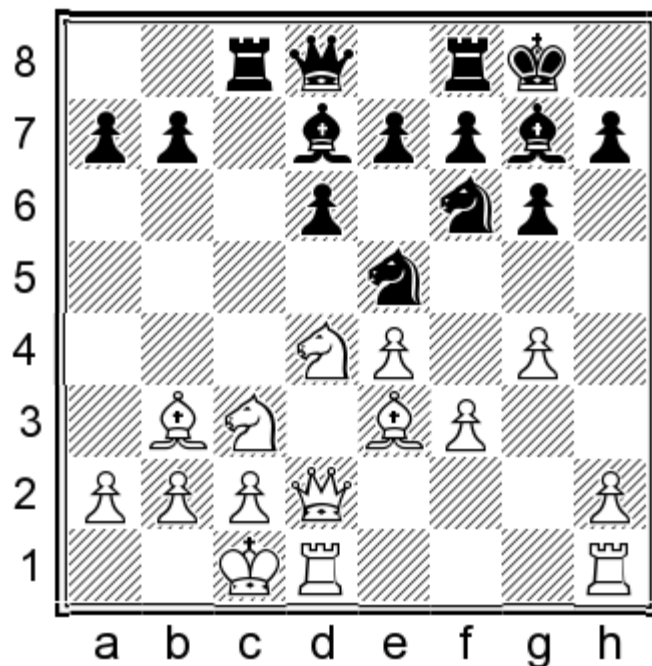
Now in Geller – Korchnoi, Moscow 1971, Black should have played:



25...Ne4!N

With a decisive advantage.

B2) 12.g4?!



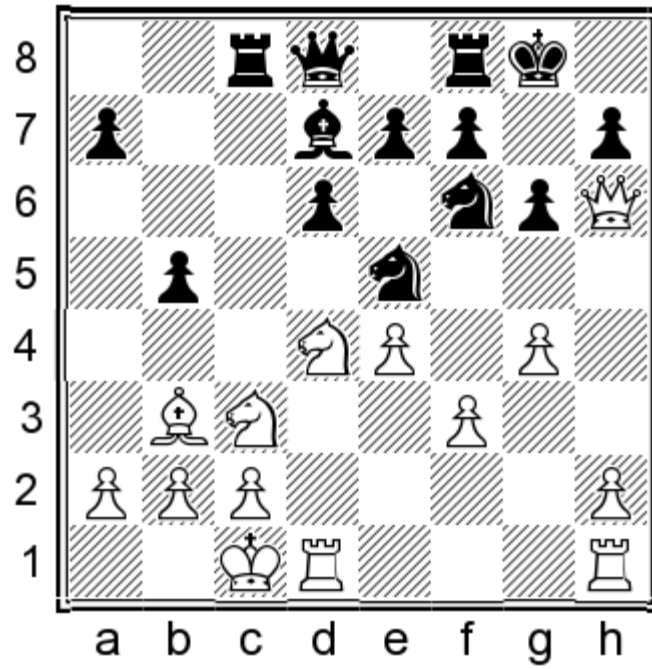
Generally g2-g4 does not work very well if Black can immediately start his counterattack.

12...b5!

Exploiting the weakened f3-pawn. White's main responses are B21) 13.h4?!, B22) 13.a3 and B23) 13.g5.

For the sake of completeness, it is worth mentioning that 13.Ncxb5?! fails to 13...Nxf3!N.

13.Bh6?! is too slow. In general in the Dragon, the moves g2-g4 and Bh6 don't combine very well, although you do have to watch out for some Nf5 ideas. 13...Bxh6 14.Qxh6



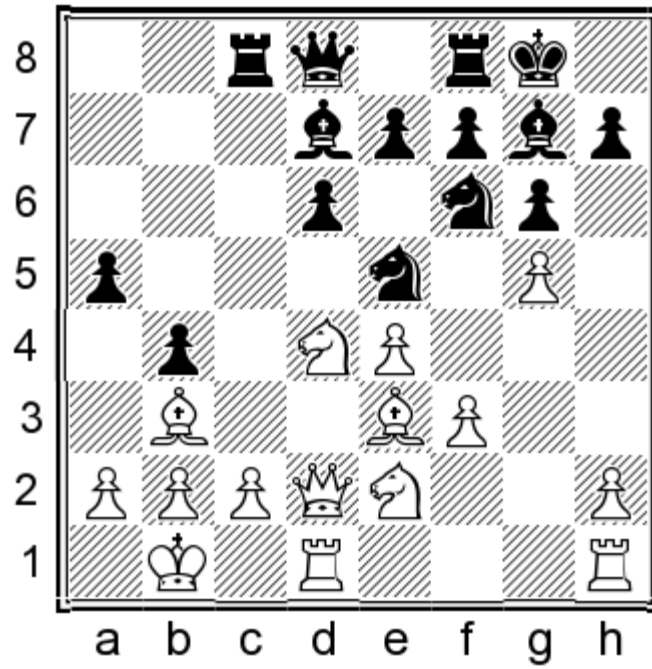
Here the simple 14...a5N looks strongest: 15.a3 (15.Ndxb5 a4 16.Bxa4 Qa5 17.Qe3 Bxb5 18.Bxb5 Rxc3 19.Qxc3 Qxb5) 15...b4 16.axb4 axb4 Black has his typical attack.

White is also struggling after:

13.Kb1 b4 14.Nce2

14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.Bxd5 e6 16.Bb7 (16.Bb3 a5—+) 16...Nc4 17.Qe2 Nxe3 18.Qxe3 Rc4 19.Ba6 Rxd4 20.Rxd4 Qb6 was winning for Black in Lapinski – Moranda, Leba 2006.

14...a5 15.g5



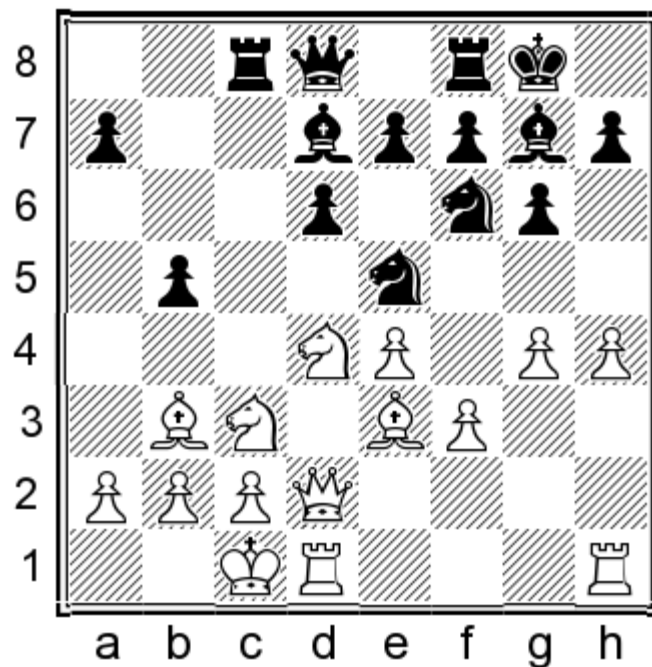
15...Nxf3!?N

The sacrifice looks extremely tempting, although 15...Nh5 is also good of course.

16.Nxf3 Nxe4 17.Qd3 Nc5 18.Bxc5 Rxc5μ

Black already has two pawns for the piece and open lines for his bishops, while the b3-bishop is, as usual, extremely short of squares.

B21) 13.h4?!

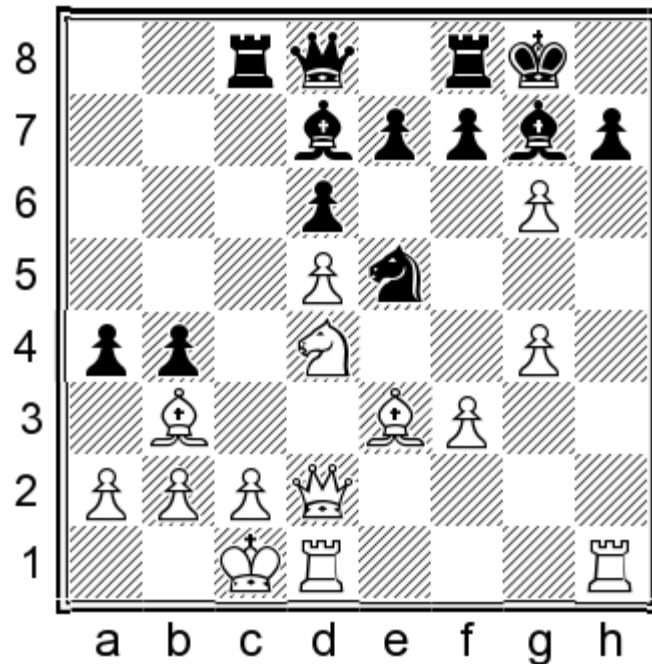


This is more hopeful than anything else; White's attack is far too slow.

13...b4 14.Nce2

14.Nb1? a5 is already winning for Black. In the Topalov Variation I mentioned how poor a square b1 was for the knight in this structure.

14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 (After 15.Bxd5 e6 16.Bb3 a5 White has problems with his b3-bishop and is already dropping material.) 15...a5 16.h5 a4 17.hxg6



17...axb3 (17...fxg6N 18.Qh2 h5! 19.gxh5 Nxf3 20.Nxf3 Rxf3-- is even more accurate) 18.Qh2 This was Romano – Elitropi, Bergamo 2007, and now Black could have won with: 18...h6N 19.Bxh6 Nxf3! (19...bxa2 20.Bxg7 a1=Q† is also good enough, but there is no need to make it messy.) 20.Nxf3 Rxc2†--

14...a5

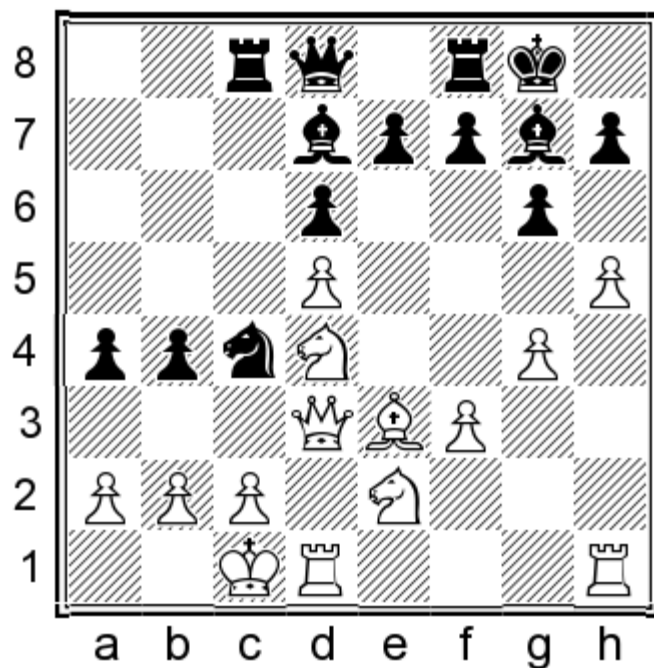
If we compare this to the Topalov Variation, the bishop is worse placed on e3 than d4, the knight is well-placed on e5 and White's c3-knight has already been pushed back to e2. It's clear that White has an inferior version, and he is already in deep trouble.

15.h5

15.g5 Nh5 16.f4 Ng4 17.Bg1 a4 18.Bd5 e6 19.Bb7 Rc7 20.Ba6 Qa8 21.Bd3 b3 22.a3 bxc2 23.Bxc2 Qxe4-- Murray – Bourached, Bunratty 2013.

15...a4 16.Bd5 Nxd5 17.exd5 Nc4 18.Qd3

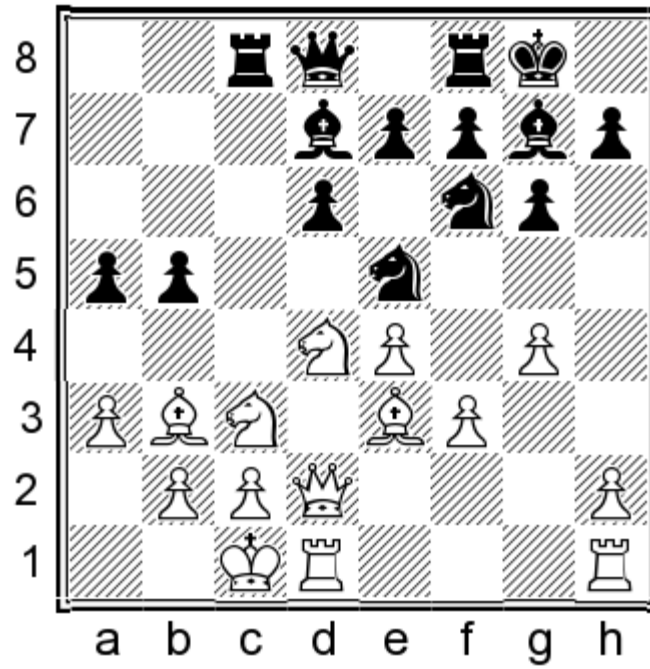
In Toenniges – T. Ernst, Bad Wildbad 2002, Black opted to win the exchange with 18...a3 19.b3 Nb2, but he missed something even stronger.



18...b3!N

White simply cannot cope with all the threats.

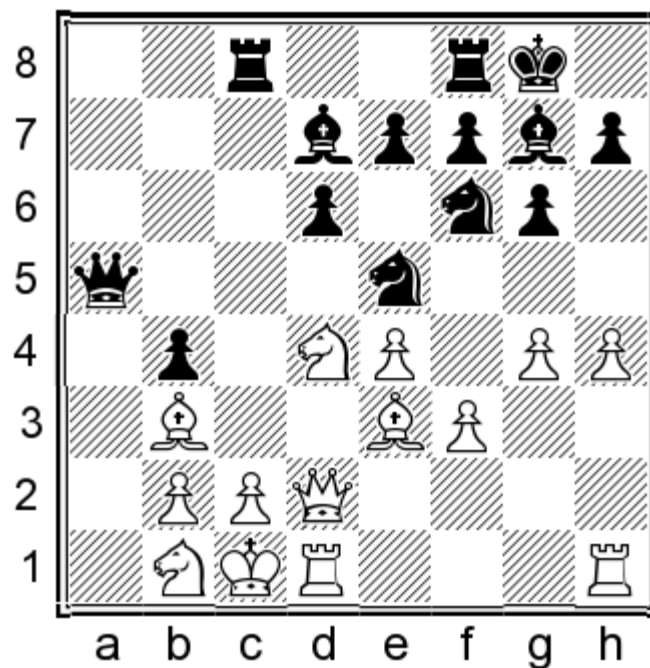
B22) 13.a3 a5



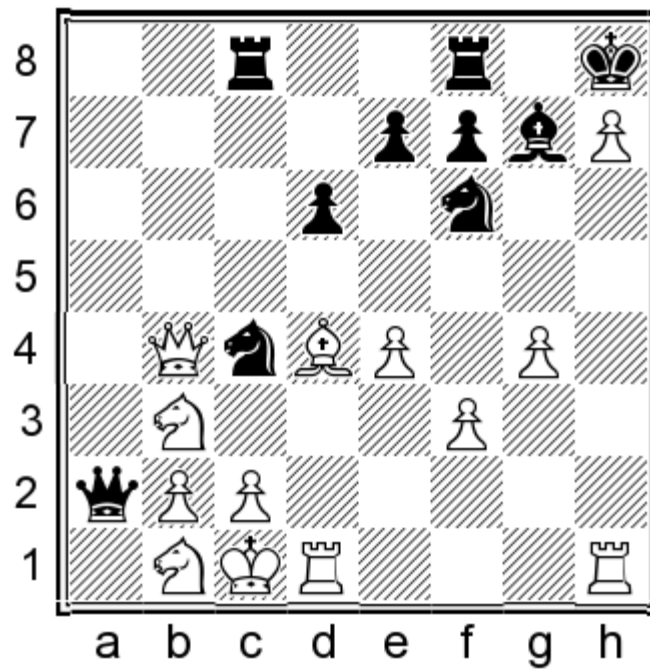
Throwing in these two pawn moves does not change much; Black's attack is still coming much more quickly.

14.g5

14.h4 b4 15.axb4 axb4 16.Nb1 (16.Na2 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4) 16...Qa5 In the Topalov Variation we examined similar positions with the d4- and e5-knights exchanged. Here Black is still doing excellently, for example:



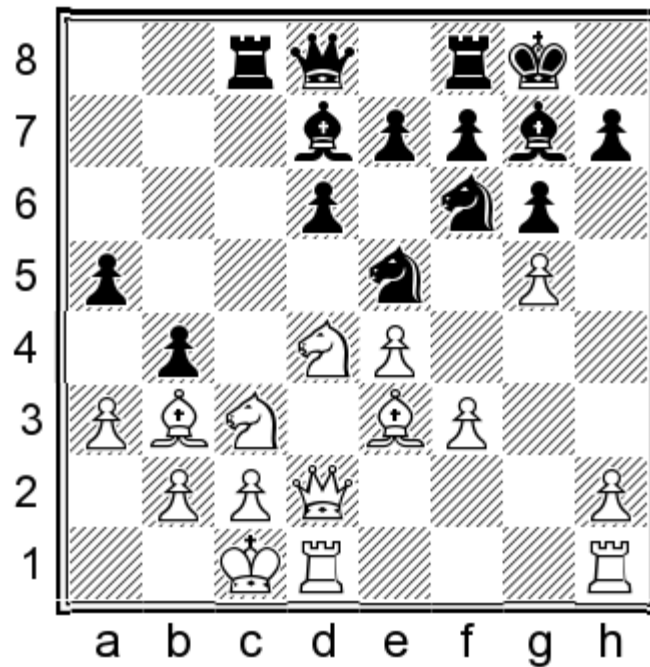
17.h5 Ba4! 18.hxg6 Bxb3!N The strongest continuation. Black can afford to sacrifice a pawn or two in front of his king as his attack on the queenside is immediately decisive. 19.Nxb3 Qa2 20.gxh7† Kh8→+ White cannot deal with the threats to both b2 and b3. An attractive finish might be: 21.Qxb4 Nc4 22.Bd4



22...Nd5!! 23.exd5 Qxb2+! 24.Bxb2 Bxb2#

14...b4

14...Nh5 is also strong; the mutual a-pawn moves favour Black. However, we may as well be consistent.

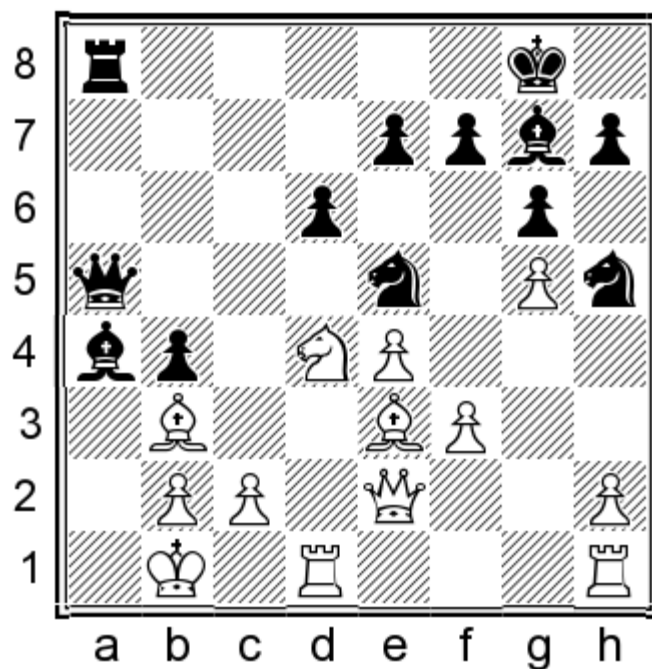


15.axb4 axb4 16.Na2 Nh5 17.Kb1 Ra8 18.Bd5?!

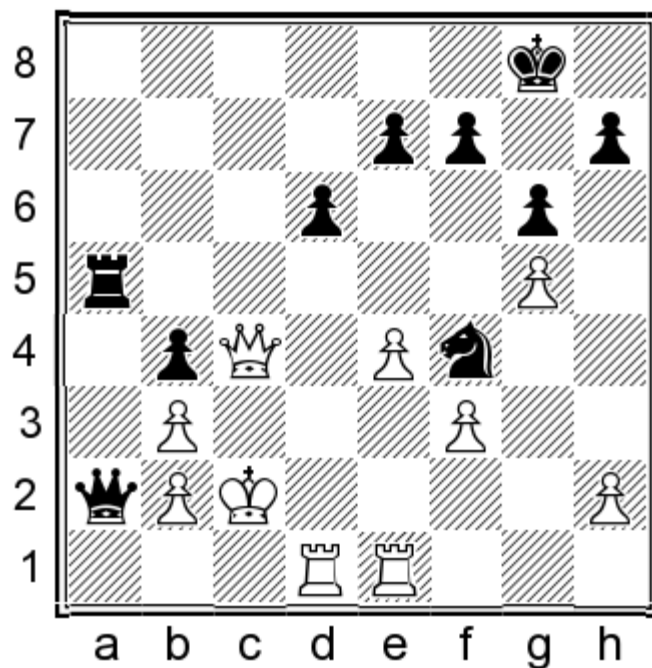
18.Nxb4 is better, although 18...Qa5 19.Na2 Qa6 maintains serious pressure.

18...Rxa2! 19.Bxa2 Qa5 20.Bb3 Ba4 21.Qe2 Ra8

Black obviously has fantastic compensation for the exchange. It is instructive to see how he converted that to something tangible.



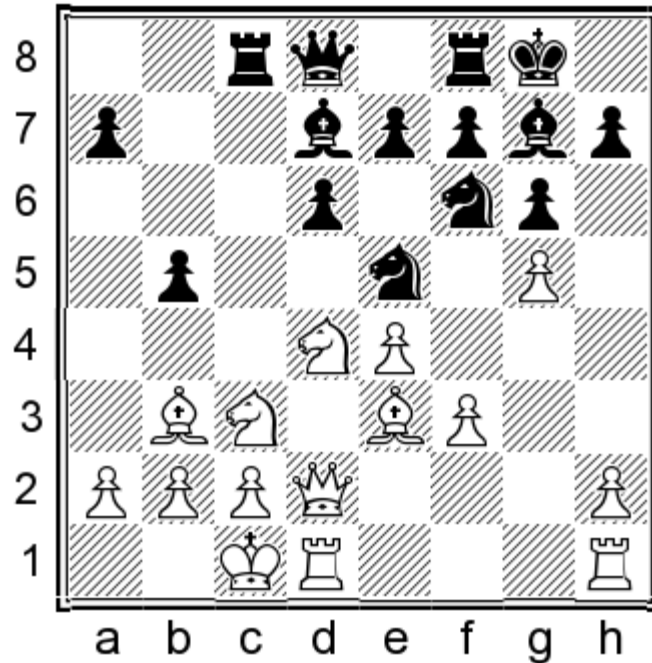
22.Kc1 Nc6 23.Qc4 Nxd4 24.Bxd4 Bxd4 25.Qxd4 Nf4 26.Rhe1 Bxb3 27.cxb3 Qa2 28.Qc4 Ra5 29.Kc2



29...Ng2! 30.Re2 Rc5 31.Qxc5 dxc5 32.Rxg2 c4

Material is now roughly equal but the combination of White's weak pawns, in particular the one on f3, and his exposed king meant it wasn't too difficult for Black to secure the full point in Deneuille – Matisson, email 2008.

B23) 13.g5



This is White's only logical continuation.

13...b4!

Magnus Carlsen's choice, which seems to refute White's opening play.

14.Nce2

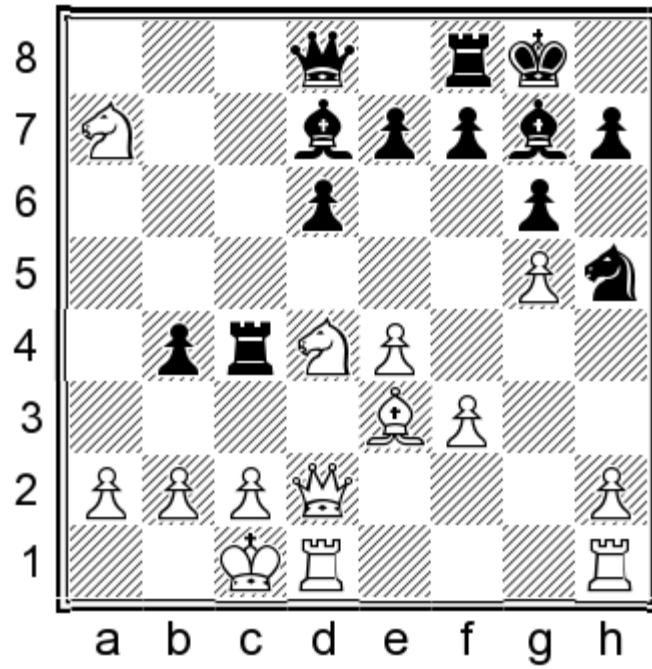
No better is:

14.Ncb5 Nh5 15.Nxa7

White has won a pawn, but his knight is now caught horribly offside.

15...Nc4! 16.Bxc4 Rxc4

Black has typical compensation thanks to his strong attack coupled with White's trapped knight on a7.



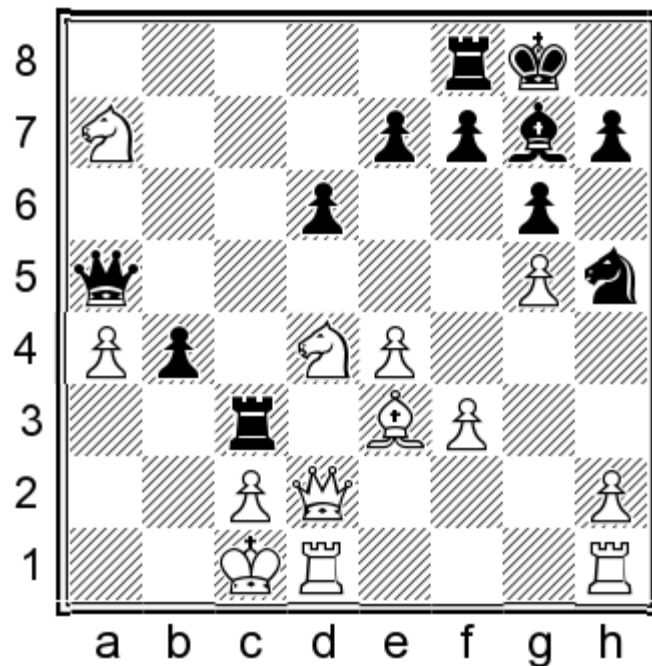
17.b3

Trying to close the queenside.

Another game continued: 17.Qd3 Bxd4! Ensuring that the a7-knight is cut off permanently. 18.Bxd4 Qc7 19.Be3 Ra8 20.Rhe1 Nf4 21.Bxf4 Rxa7 0–1 Garcia Diez – Carrettoni, email 2006.

17...Rc3 18.a4 Bxa4! 19.bxa4 Qa5

The piece sacrifice gives Black a huge attack.

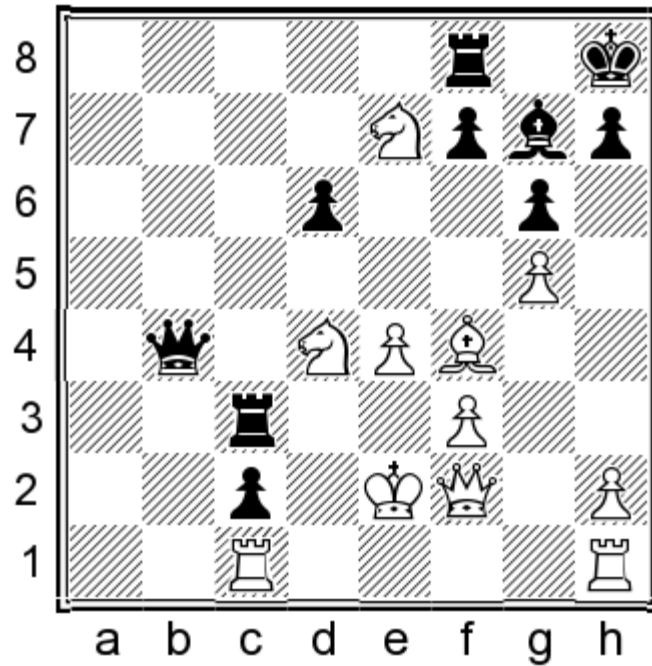


20.Nac6

20.Nab5 Qxa4 21.Nxc3 Qa3† 22.Kb1 bxc3 wins.

20...Qxa4 21.Nxe7† Kh8 22.Qf2 b3 23.Kd2 Qb4 24.Ke2 bxc2 25.Rc1 Nf4† 26.Bxf4

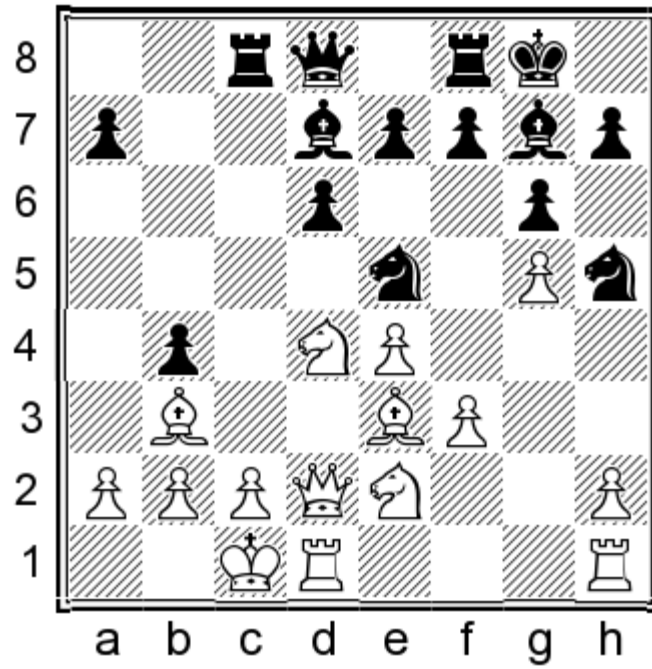
Now in Goncharov – Schilling, email 2008, the simple recapture would have done the trick:



26...Bxd4N 27.Qg2 f5!—+

Black has a decisive attack.

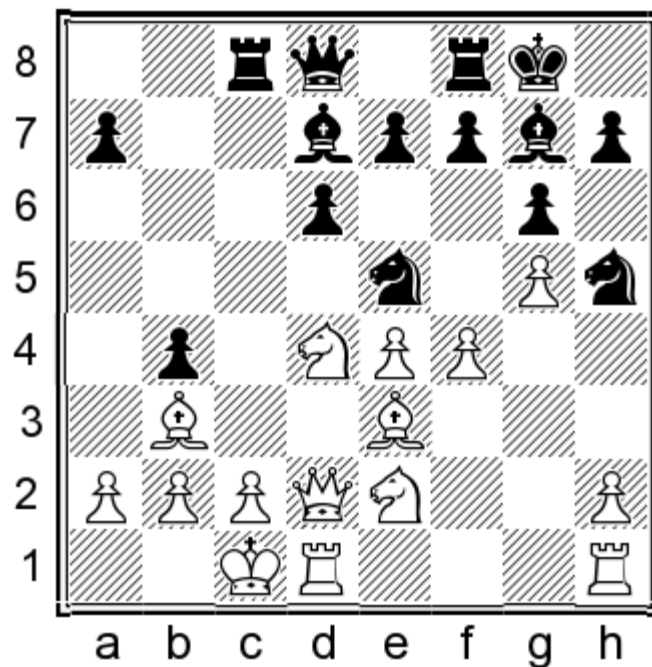
14...Nh5



Black has great chances from this position, but it is still worth checking some of the details. We will analyse B231) 15.f4 and B232) 15.Ng3.

15.Qxb4? is assessed by Boensch as clearly better for White, but after 15...a5! 16.Qa3 a4! Black is winning material and the game: 17.Bd5 e6 18.Bb7 Nc4 19.Qc3 Nxe3 20.Qxe3 Rb8 21.Ba6 0-1 In Vanek – Gschwendtner, Czechoslovakia 1988, White resigned before Black could play 21...Qb6.

B231) 15.f4



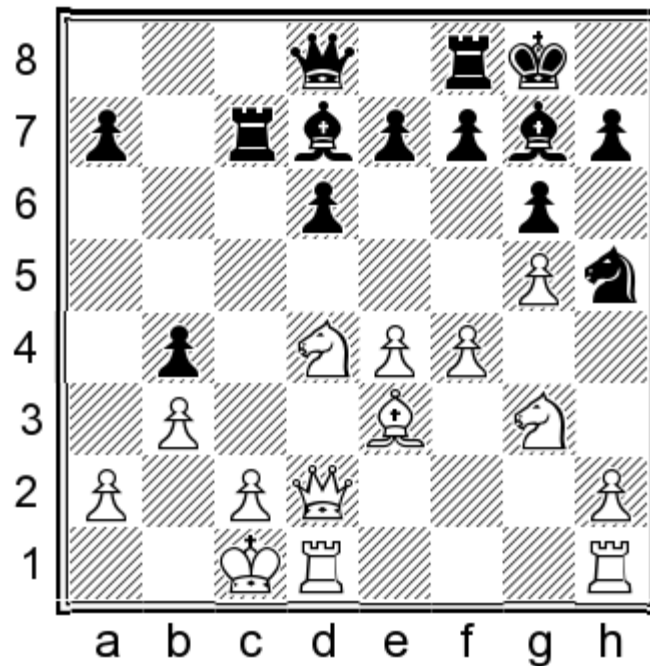
This was Judit Polgar's try in her game against Magnus Carlsen. However, it should be mentioned that it was only a rapid game; I doubt that she would have chosen this line in a standard game.

15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.b3

17.Qd3 Qc7 18.f5 Rc8 19.Kb1 occurred in the more recent game Stachanczyk – Boudriga, Tromso (ol) 2014. Here I like the thematic 19...a5!N when Black has a great position. White cannot even force a structural concession with 20.Ng3 in view of 20...Nf4μ.

17...Rc7 18.Ng3

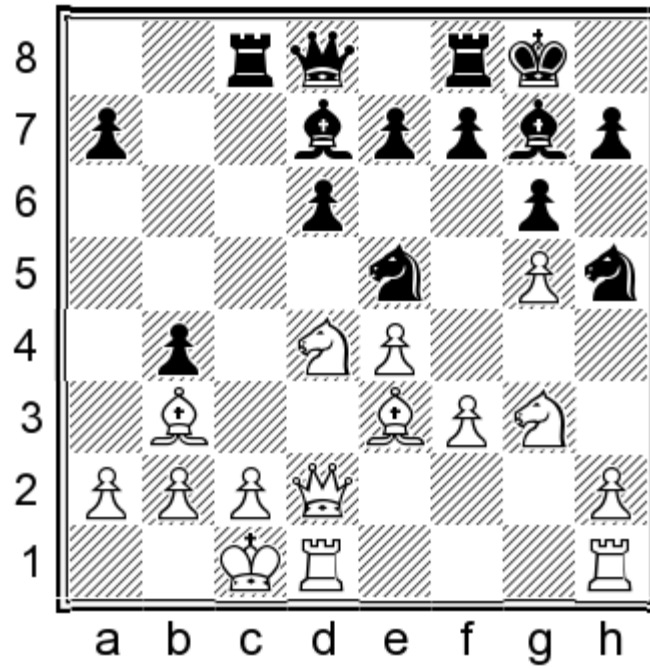
In J. Polgar – Carlsen, Mainz (rapid) 2008, Magnus continued ignoring White's kingside intentions. However, I am sure that in a long-play game he would have chosen:



18...Bg4!N

Keeping complete control. In an absolute sense, Black is already winning.

B232) 15.Ng3



This has been White's most common choice, hoping to get play along the h-file.

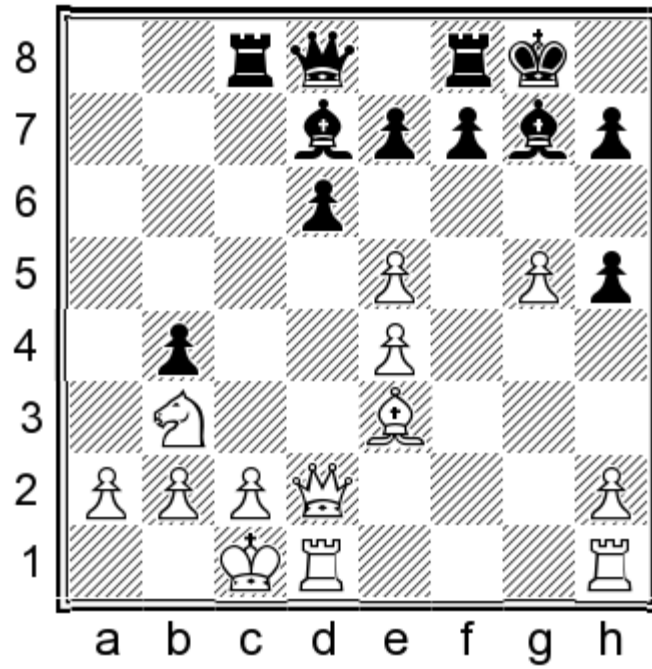
15...a5! 16.Nxh5 gxh5

Black has allowed his kingside to be fractured but White's attack has been slowed, while Black is about to crash through.

17.f4

17.Nf5 was punted in another game: 17...a4 18.Bd5 b3!? (The immediate 18...e6N is also strong) 19.axb3 e6 20.Nxd6 exd5 21.Nxc8 Qxc8 22.f4 Nf3 23.Qxd5 Be6 24.Qd3 axb3 25.c3 Bc4 26.Qb1 Qg4 0–1 White threw in the towel in Overgaard – Bekkesletten, email 2008.

17...a4 18.fxe5 axb3 19.Nxb3



19...Be6!

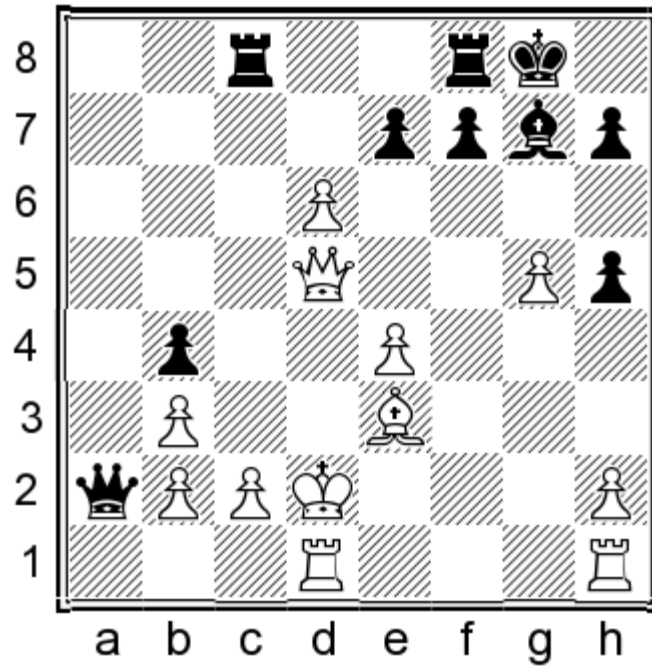
19...Bxe5 has been the most popular move, when Black is also doing well. However, the text move is even stronger.

20.exd6

20.Qxb4N 20...Qc7 21.Qc3 Qb8μ

20...Bxb3! 21.axb3 Qa5 22.Qd5 Qa2 23.Kd2

Now in Hardy – Percze, email 2004, the most accurate continuation would have been:



23...e6!N 24.Qd3 Bxb2 25.d7

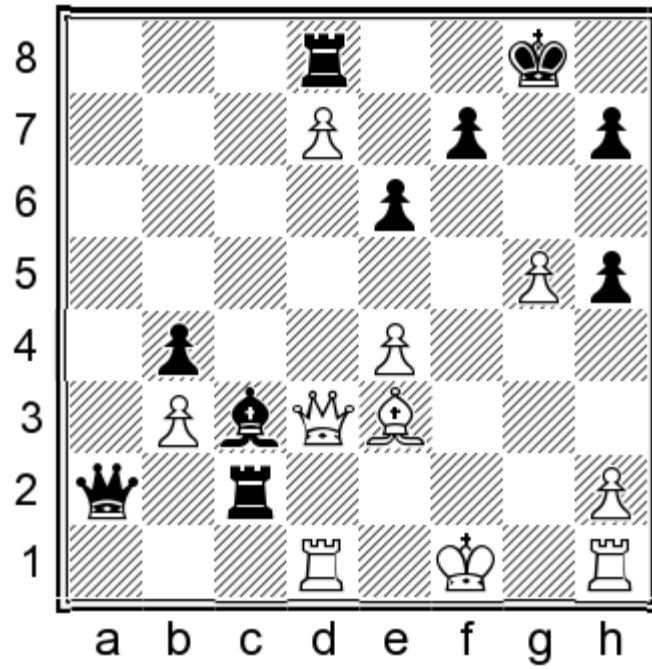
25.Ke2 Rc3 26.Qd2 Qa8 27.d7 Qxe4 is also crushing, for example: 28.d8=Q Qg2† 29.Bf2 Qf3† 30.Ke1 Qxh1† 31.Ke2 Qe4† 32.Kf1 Rxc2–+

25...Rxc2†! 26.Ke1

26.Kxc2 Ba3# and 26.Qxc2 Bc3† 27.Kd3 Qa6# are quicker routes to the same result.

26...Bc3† 27.Kf1 Rd8

White is completely tied down.

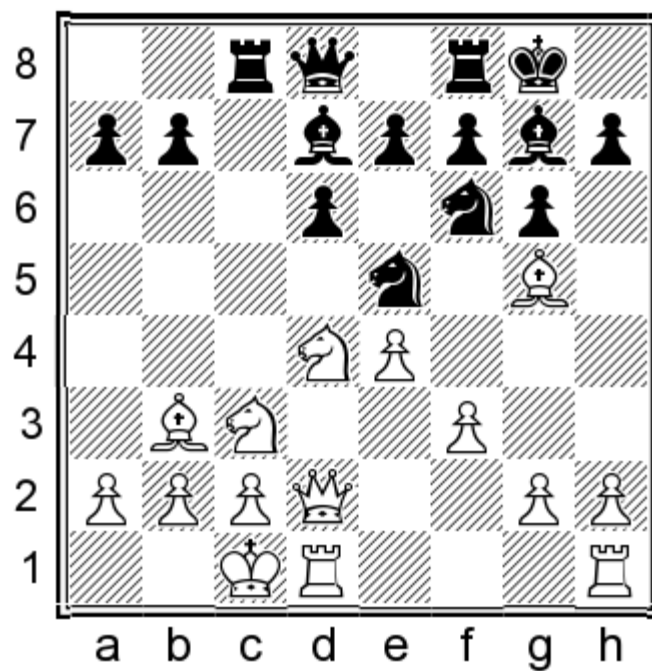


28.Bb6 h4-+

White's last move didn't actually threaten anything:

29.Bxd8? Rf2† 30.Kg1 Rg2† 31.Kf1 Qf2#

B3) 12.Bg5!?



This is the most interesting of the sidelines examined in this chapter. Moving the bishop again looks peculiar, but remember it's the main move with 12.h4 h5 inserted. White puts pressure on the e7-pawn and has ideas of f3-f4 and e4-e5.

12...Nc4 13.Bxc4

13.Qe2?! would be a strong move in the analogous position after 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5 Nc4, but here it runs into a series of sacrificial blows: 13...Nxb2! 14.Kxb2 Rxc3! 15.Bxf6 (15.Kxc3 Qa5† 16.Kb2 Qxg5 picks up the bishop, which would not be possible with a pawn on h4) 15...Rxb3† 16.axb3 Bxf6 Black had more than enough play for the exchange in Westerinen – Tarjan, Torremolinos 1974.

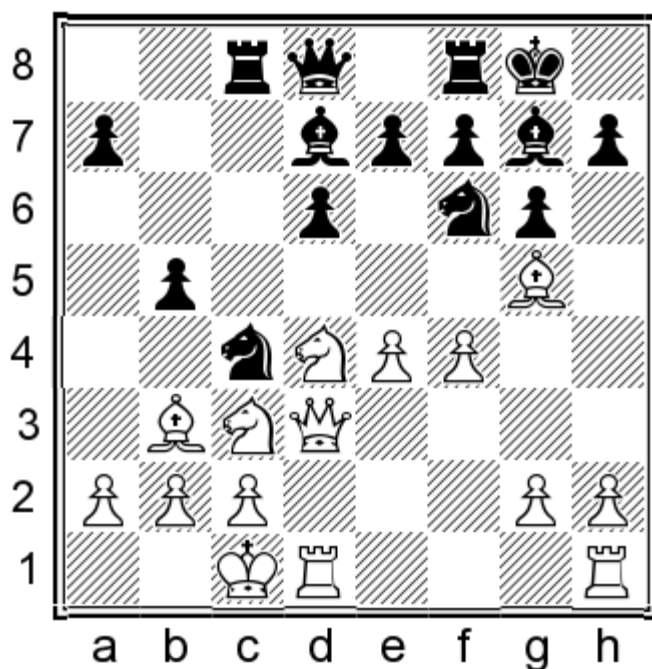
13.Qd3

This move might feel more logical when there is no bishop to capture on e3. However, it is hard for White to achieve much with the c4-knight dominating the position.

13...b5 14.f4

In the event of 14.Rhe1 I like 14...e6!?N. Black takes control of the d5-square and is ready to expand on the queenside.

Now in Mnatsakanian – Cebalo, Bad Zwischenahn 2008, Black missed a strong possibility:



14...b4!N 15.Nd5

15.Nce2 Na5μ

15...Nxd5 16.Bxc4

16.exd5 Na5μ

16...Ne3!?

16...Nb6 is also good.

17.Bxf7† Rxf7 18.Qxe3 Qc7 19.Rd2 Qc4³

13...Rxc4 14.e5!

This is White's big idea. The pin along the d-file is rather annoying. Alternatives lead nowhere:

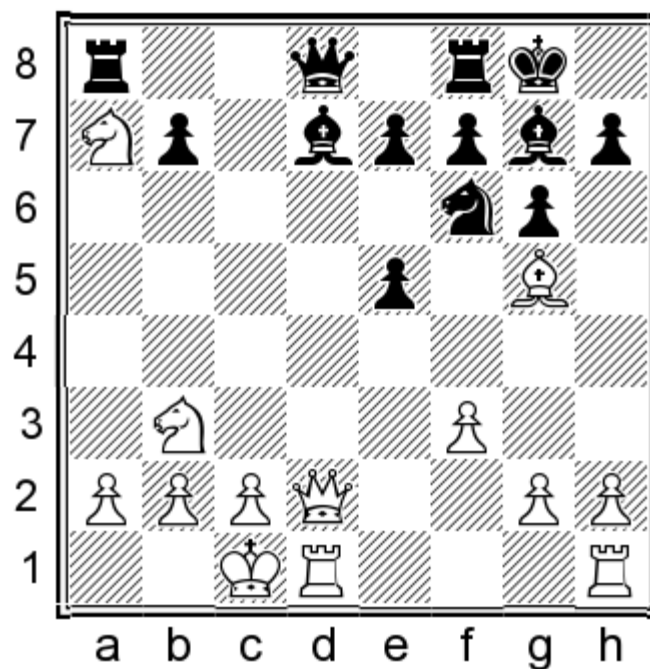
14.Nde2 Qa5 is comfortable for Black.

14.Nb3 Be6 15.e5 Ne8 is fine for Black: 16.Rhe1 (Attempting to exploit the pin with 16.exd6?! Nxd6 17.Nb5 runs into 17...Qb6 18.Nxd6 exd6—+ with a decisive attack) 16...Qc7 17.Nb5 Qb6 18.Na3 Rc7 19.Be3 Qa6 20.exd6 Nxd6 21.Nc5 Qb6 Black had nothing to worry about in Brustman – Batceceg, Novi Sad 1990.

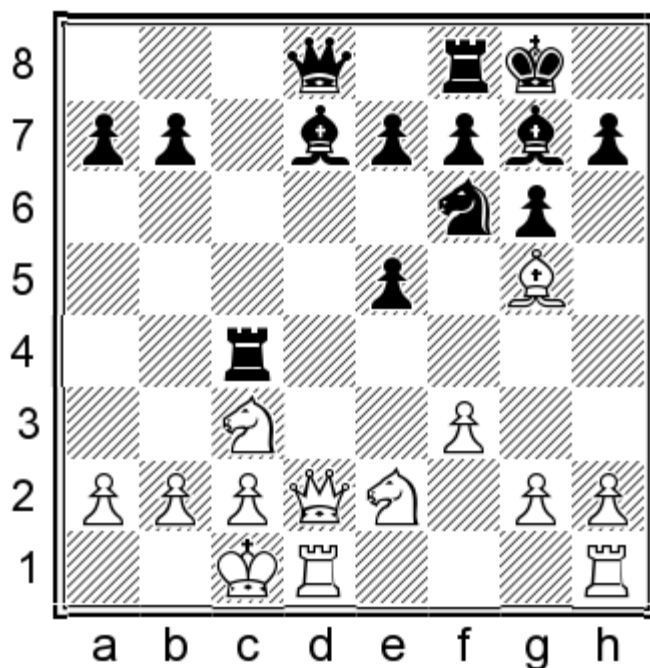
14...dxe5 15.Nde2

This looks like the more challenging retreat.

The alternative is: 15.Nb3 Rc7 16.Nb5 (16.Bxf6 exf6 17.Nb5 is similar to the main line, but the knight isn't on such a good circuit on b3 as on e2. 17...Bf5 18.Nxc7 Qxc7 19.Kb1 Rc8 20.Ka1 Be6³ Niedermaier – W. Schmidt, Bad Neustadt 1986.) 16...Rc8 17.Nxa7 Ra8



18.Bxf6 Here I prefer: 18...exf6!N 19.Qxd7 Qb6 20.Nb5 Rfd8 21.Qc7 Rxd1† 22.Rxd1 Qxb5³ Material is level, but I think it will be easier for Black to utilize his extra f- and e-pawns than for White to start advancing the pawns in front of his king.



15...Rc7 16.Bxf6

Going after the a-pawn is unimpressive:

16.Nb5 Rc8!

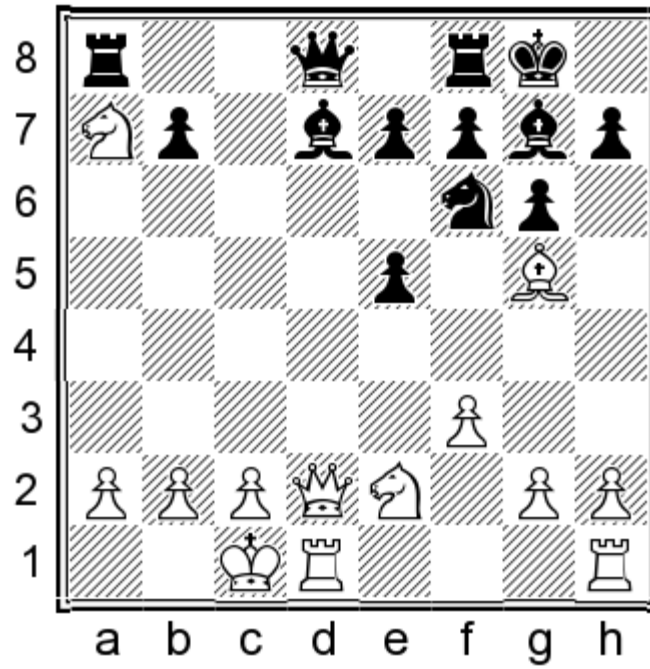
In all the over-the-board games Black has sacrificed the exchange here with 16...Bf5, but the text move is just excellent for Black.

17.Nxa7

17.Bxf6 Bxb5μ

17...Ra8

17...Rc5N is also strong; after 18.Bxf6 Bxf6 19.Qxd7 Qb6μ Black regains the piece with a fine position.



18.Bxf6 exf6 19.Qxd7 Qa5 20.Nb5 Rfd8 21.Qxb7?

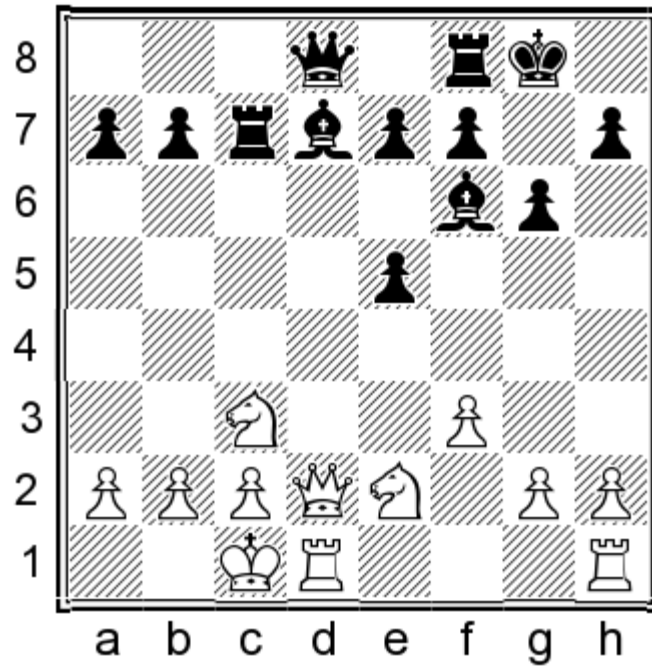
21.Qc7 is better, although Black is still for preference after 21...Bh6† 22.f4 Rxd1† 23.Rxd1 Qxb5³.

21...Bh6† 22.f4 Rdb8 23.Qc6 Rxb5 24.Qc4 exf4

Black was winning in Niewold – Evans, email 2008.

Returning to the main line, it is worth examining B31) 16...Bxf6 and B32) 16...exf6. Both moves are playable, but they lead to different types of positions.

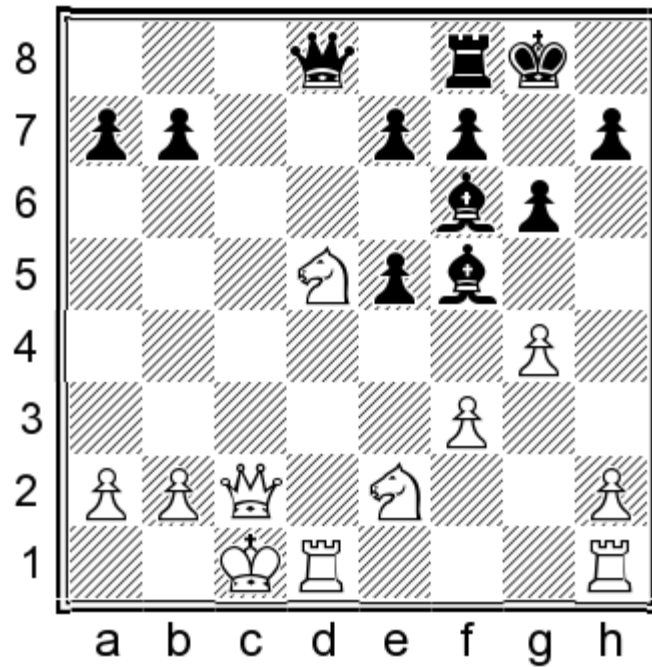
B31) 16...Bxf6



The more aggressive option.

17.Nd5 Bf5 18.Nxc7

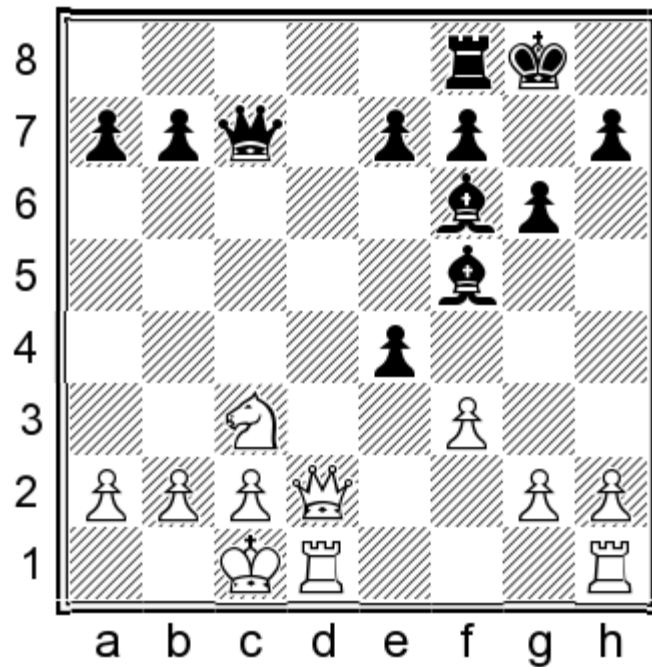
18.g4? Rxc2† 19.Qxc2



19...Bg5†! This move must have been overlooked. 20.Kb1 Bxc2† 21.Kxc2 Qc8† 22.Kb1 e6—+ Black soon won in M. Hansen – Borge, Tastrup 1992.

18...Qxc7 19.Nc3 e4!?N

19...b5 has been played, but I like this suggestion by Chris Ward. Black offers another pawn to open up lines for his bishops.



20.Nd5

White goes after the strong dark-squared bishop.

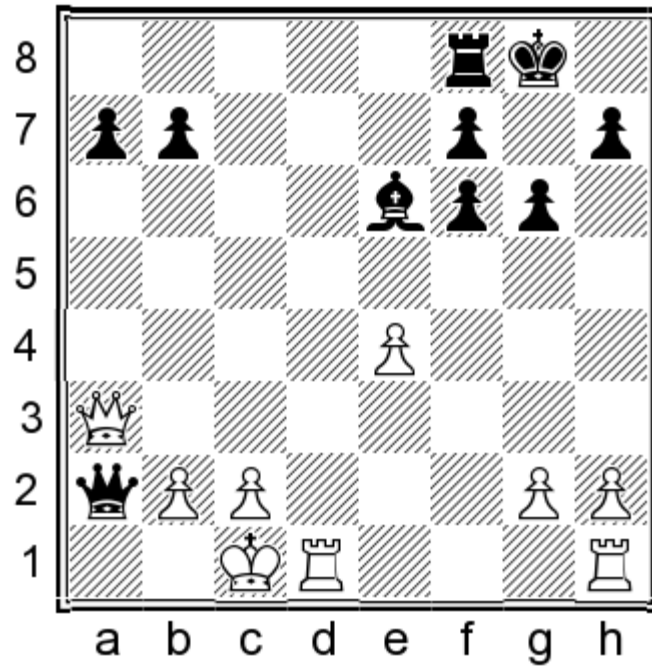
The only move Chris examines is 20.fxe4. His analysis continues 20...Bxc3 21.Qxc3 Qxc3 22.bxc3 Bxe4 when the endgame looks balanced. White still has a slight material advantage, but it will be hard to exploit it due to his fractured queenside. Meanwhile Black has a powerful bishop and a potentially strong passed e-pawn.

20.Nxe4 is more critical, but Black can obtain good counterplay: 20...Bxe4 21.fxe4 Qe5 22.Qb4 a5 23.Qb6 Rc8© White will have to take care over the long diagonal. One might well argue that the dark-squared bishop is worth a rook.

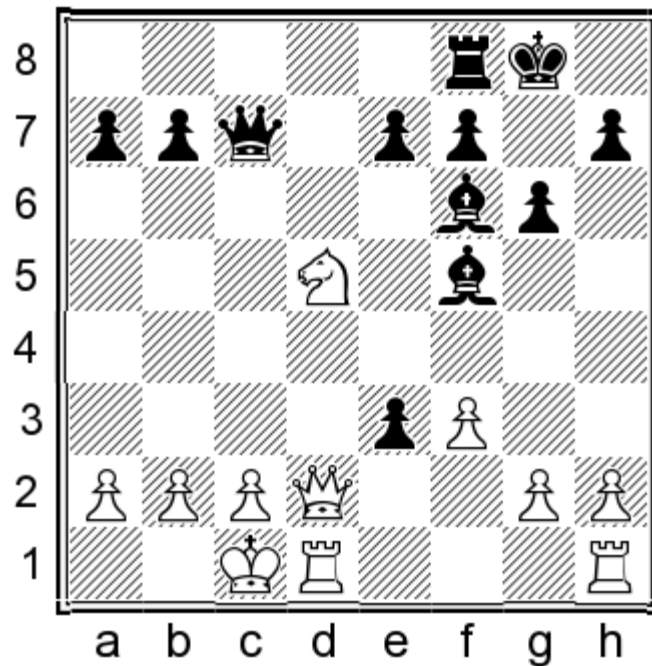
20...e3!?

Black jettisons the pawn to deflect White's knight.

20...Qc4 21.Nxf6† exf6 22.Qd5 Qa6 23.fxe4 Be6 24.Qd6 Qxa2 25.Qa3



25...Qxa3!? (there is also 25...Qc4 26.Rhe1 Rc8 when Black continues to have pressure for the exchange) 26.bxa3 Rc8²
 White should be a little better thanks to his material advantage. However, I don't think it's enough to win. The e6-bishop is protected and controls some important squares, in particular preventing White from taking the seventh rank. Having four pawn islands will make it tough for White to create a passed pawn, and without a passed pawn he cannot win.



21.Nxe3

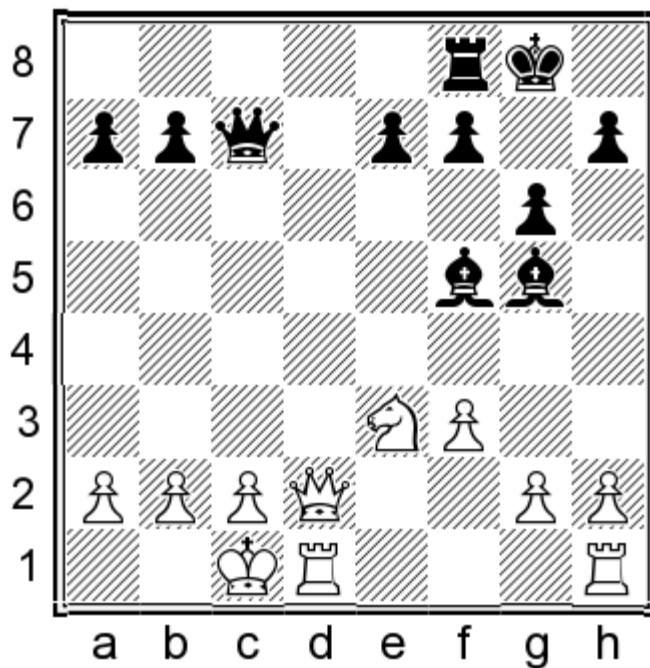
After 21.Nxf6+?! exf6 22.Qc3 Qe7 Black has a huge pawn and an attack along the c-file looming.

21.Nxc7 exd2† 22.Kxd2 Rc8 23.Nd5 Rxc2† 24.Ke3 Rxb2 is a level endgame.

21.Qe2!? is interesting. However, with 21...Qa5 22.Nxf6† exf6 23.Qxe3 Qxa2 24.Qa3 Qc4 Black still has good compensation.

21...Bg5

The two bishops coordinate well and put White in an awkward pin. One possible continuation is:



22.Rhe1 Rc8 23.c3 Be6 24.Kb1 Qxh2 25.g4 Qg3÷

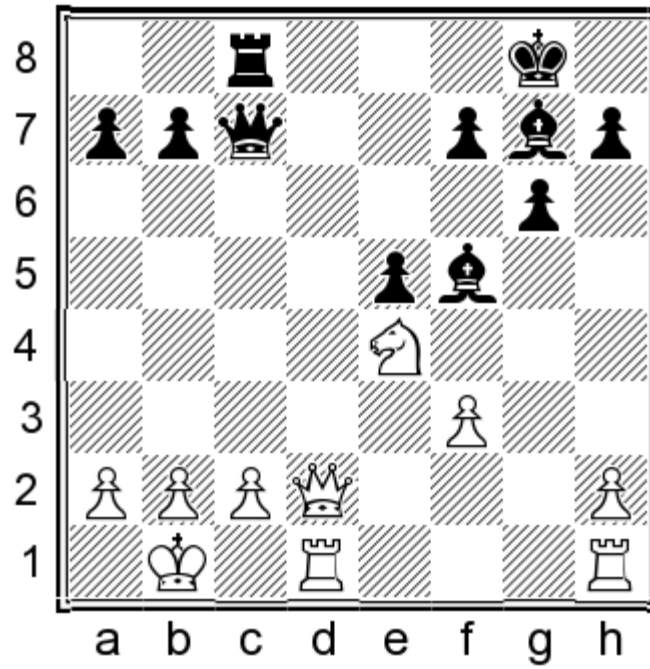
Or even 25...Qxd2 26.Rxd2 Kg7÷.

B32) 16...exf6



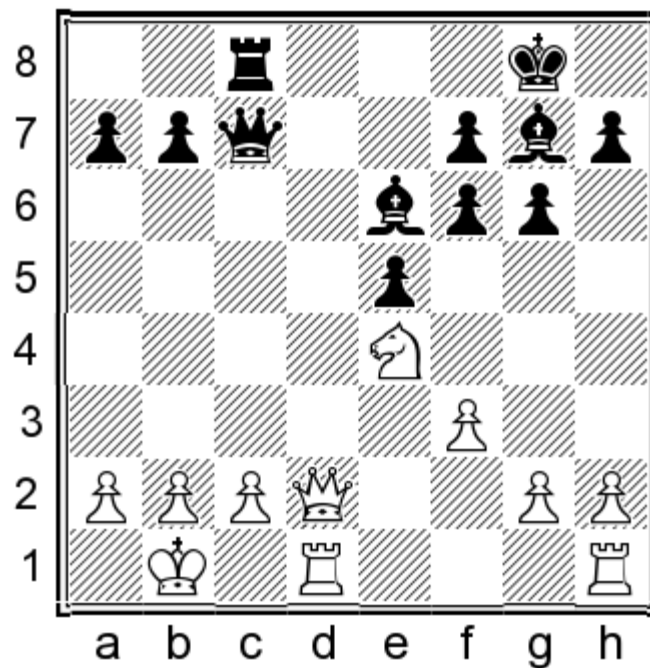
17.Nb5 Bf5! 18.Nxc7 Qxc7 19.Nc3 Rc8 20.Qd6

20.g4 Be6 21.Kb1 f5 22.gxf5 Bxf5 23.Ne4 occurred in Guseinov – Moranda, Cappelle la Grande 2006.

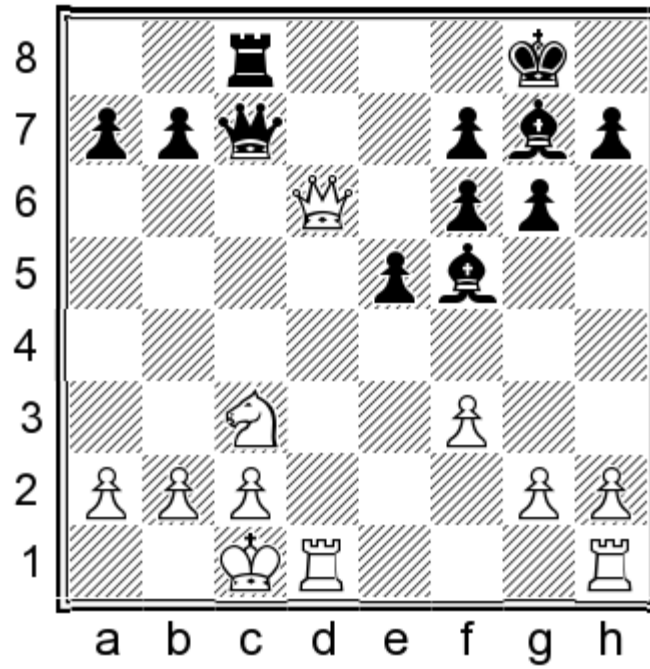


Here I suggest 23...b5N when Black has good counterplay, and the chances are roughly balanced. I would like to add that h2-h4 should be met by ...h5 (rather than ...h6) to keep the c1-h6 diagonal open.

20.Kb1 Be6 21.Ne4 was played in Kindermann – Ki. Georgiev, Dortmund 1991.



Here I would start to open up the path of the g7-bishop with 21...f5!N, for example: 22.Nd6 Rb8 23.h4 e4 24.fxe4 fxe4 25.Qe3 b5³ The d6-knight looks pretty but is not targeting anything, while Black's bishops make an impressive sight.



20...Qxd6N

20...Qc4 21.Qe7! is rather annoying, so Black should acquiesce to the queen exchange.

21.Rxd6 Bf8! 22.Rd5

22.Rxf6 Kg7= traps the rook and so regains the material.

22...Be7 23.Rhd1 Kg7

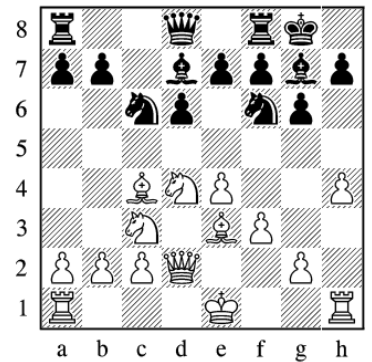
We have reached a complicated ending. White has a slight material advantage, but two bishops and a pawn aren't much worse than rook and knight. Black's plan is to drop his bishop back to e6 followed by advancing the f- and e-pawns. It will not be easy for White to keep control of the position.

Conclusion

The only dangerous line looked at in this chapter is 12.Bg5!?. At first this move looks strange, but it has a few points. I think the exchange sacrifice is the simplest way to play against it. The critical moment comes on move 16 when you have a choice between the aggressive 16...Bxf6 or playing the endgame with 16...exf6, both of which offer Black good counter-chances.

Chapter 12

Yugoslav Attack



10.h4 – Minor Lines

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7
7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.h4

10...h5

A) 11.Nxc6

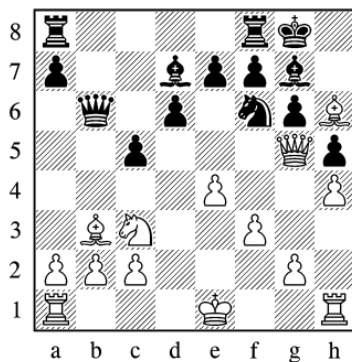
B) 11.Bb3 Rc8

B1) 12.Nd5

B2) 12.g4

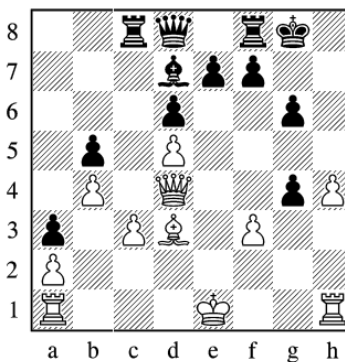
B3) 12.Nxc6!?

A) note to 13.Bxg7



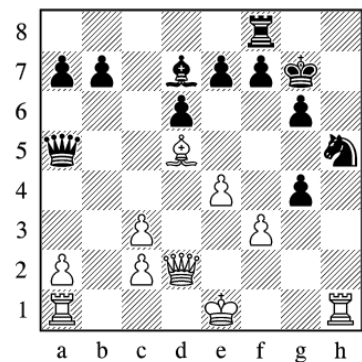
14...c4!N

B1) after 20.Bd3



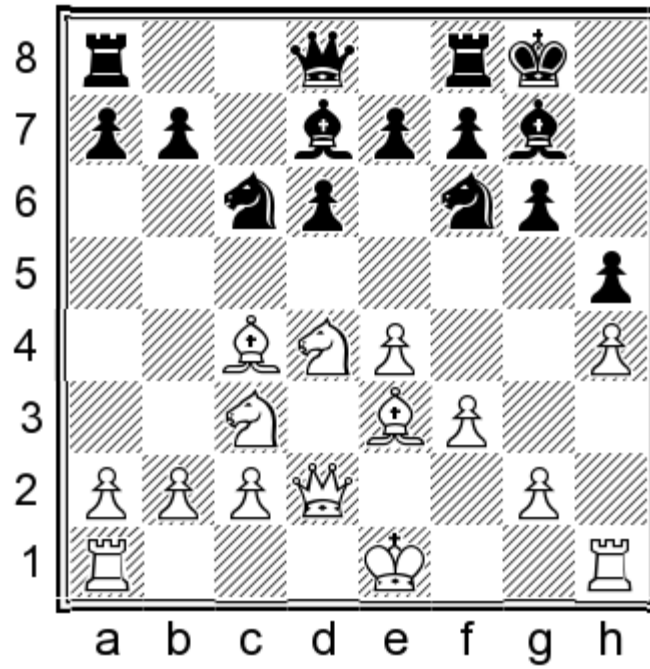
20...e5!N

B2) after 18.bxc3



18...f6!N

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7 10.h4 h5



I spent a while considering other move orders, but both Kasparov and Carlsen chose to play this way. Generally this position will just transpose to the Soltis Variation. White's only other option that we need to take seriously is the knight exchange on c6. We will start with the immediate A) 11.Nxc6 before considering the more flexible B) 11.Bb3.

By far the most common continuation is 11.0-0-0 Rc8 12.Bb3 Ne5, which takes us back to the Soltis Variation.

11.Nde2 Rc8 12.Bb3 – see 12.Nde2 in the notes to variation B.

11.g4 is an aggressive attempt, but White isn't going to deliver mate without the use of his a1-rook. 11...hxd4 Here 12.0-0-0 was played anyway, when 12...Ne5 13.Bb3 Rc8 transposes to variation D of Chapter 6. (13...Nh5!? was an interesting independent option in Travkin – Le Ruyet, Pardubice 2013.)

A) 11.Nxc6 bxc6

I think if White really wants to play this way he would do better to wait for Black to commit his rook to c8. Not many humans want to give Black an extra central pawn and control over the d5-square, which is often the main weakness in Black's position in the Dragon. It is no coincidence that many of the game references in this chapter are from the engine domain.

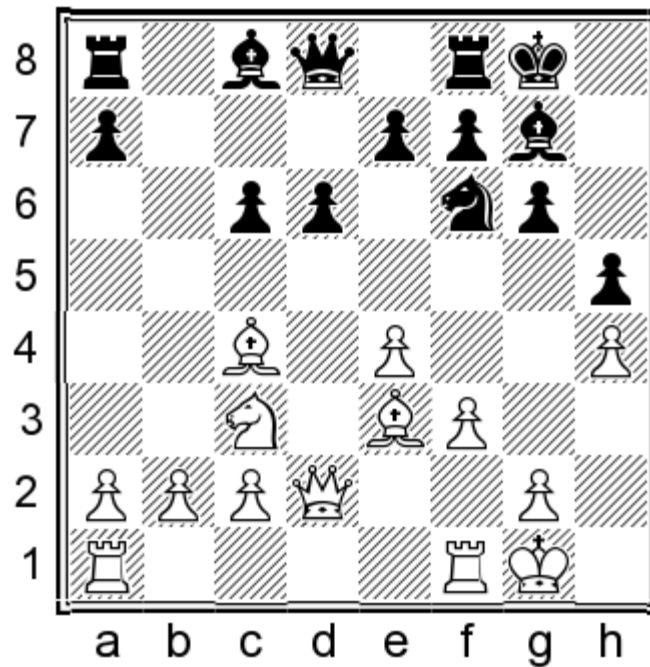
12.Bh6

Exchanging the dark-squared bishops is a natural plan for a human player. Since 11.Bh6?? would have dropped

material, the present line is White's fastest way to achieve his goal.

12.0-0-0 gives Black more than one decent option: 12...Qa5 (12...Qc8 13.Bh6 Be6 This plan of trading light-squared bishops always looks reasonable to me. 14.Bxg7 Kxg7= el-shaddai – jml26, engine game 2013.) 13.Kb1 Rfb8 14.Bb3 Be6= wizzardpower – gamestar, engine game 2012.

12.0-0 After choosing to play the Yugoslav Attack and even getting as far as playing h2-h4, I can't imagine many people then being happy to castle kingside. Computer chess at work again... 12...Bc8!? (12...Qc8N 13.Rfd1 Be6= looks a completely viable plan here too.)



13.Rad1 Qc7 14.Bd4 Nd7 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.b3 Qa5= wizzardpower – saf_21, engine game 2012.

12.Bb3

This is an odd move order to adopt.

12...Qc7

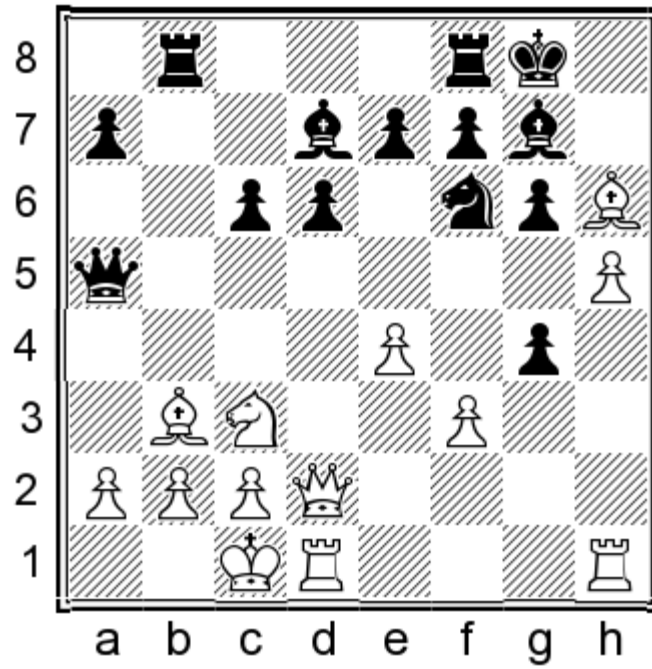
12...Rc8 transposes to variation B3, but it would be an odd choice via this move order.

Yet again 12...Qc8!?N 13.0-0 Be6 is fully playable.

13.Bh6 Rab8 14.g4!?

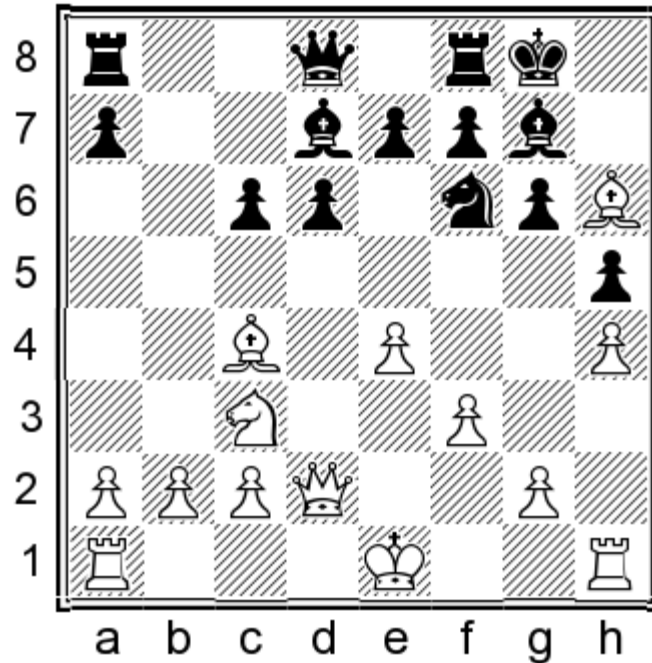
Suddenly the game becomes sharp.

14...Qa5 15.0-0-0 hxg4 16.h5



16...Rxb3!? 17.cxb3 gxf3 18.b4 Qxb4 19.hxg6 fxg6 20.Rdg1 Ng4

daami – jml26, engine game 2012, was a mess. As usual in all-engine games, the complications eventually resulted in a draw.



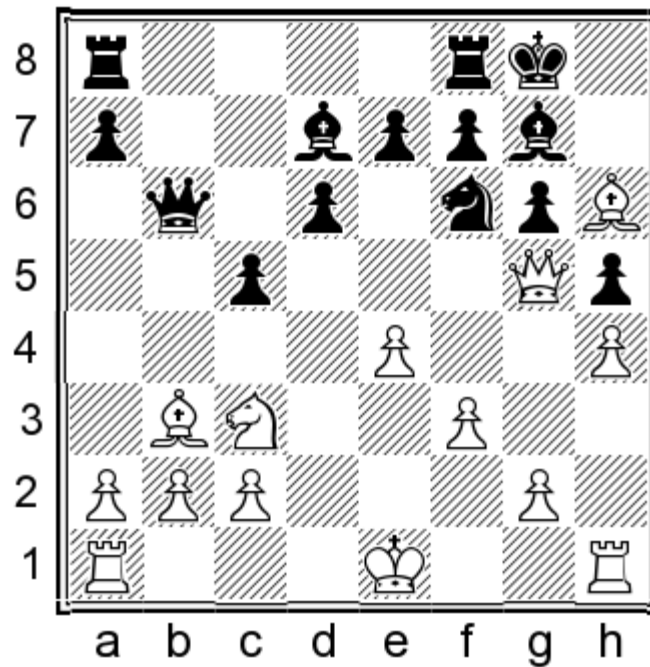
12...Qb6

It makes sense to take control of the dark squares that White has just vacated.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, 12...Qc8N also looks playable.

13.Bxg7

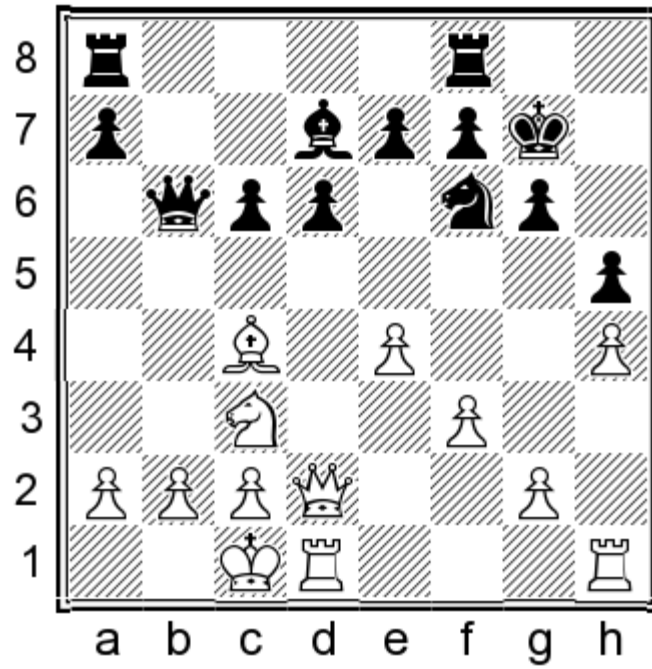
13.Bb3 c5 14.Qg5? was an aggressive attempt seen in Hooker – Lange, USA 1996. White is trying to mate Black immediately, but his idea contains a flaw which both players overlooked:



14...c4!N 15.Bxc4 Qxb2 16.Kd2 Rfc8 Black wins material. Perhaps White had his hopes set on 17.Qxg6 but 17...Nxe4†! 18.Nxe4 Qd4† 19.Ke1 Qxa1† 20.Ke2 Rxc4 wins.

13...Kxg7 14.0-0-0

14.b3?! I can imagine White being afraid of committing his king to the queenside due to the semi-open b-file, but leaving it in the centre is even worse. 14...Rad8!? 15.Na4 Qc7 16.Bd3 d5³ Black successfully took over the centre in Maguire – A. Burnett, Glasgow 1997.



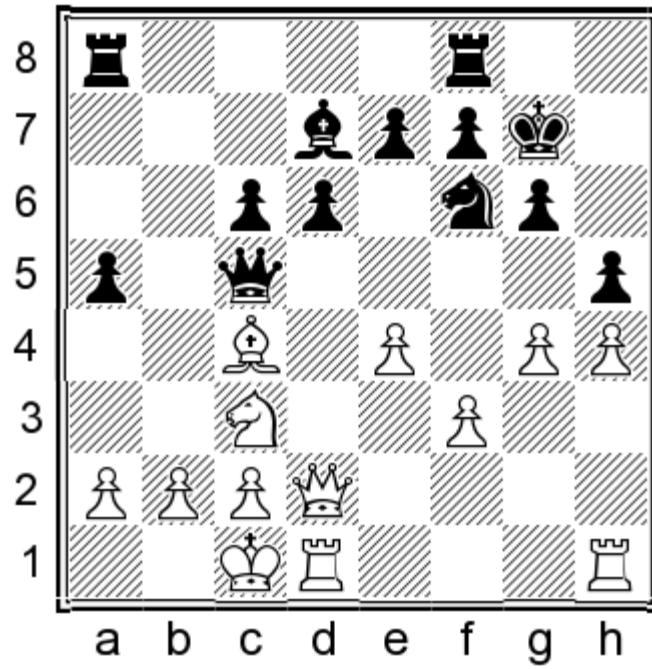
14...a5

14...Rab8N 15.Na4 Qb4= is a playable but dull alternative.

15.g4!?

Now the game starts heating up.

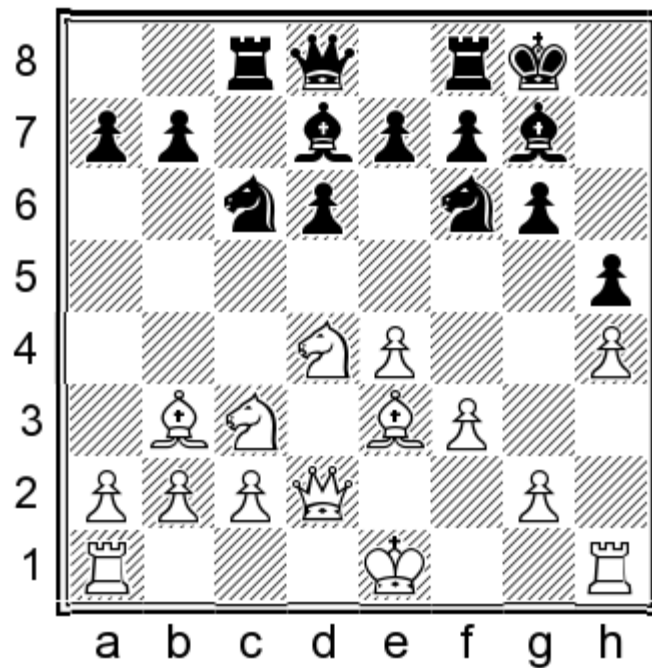
15...Qc5



16.e5!? Qxe5 17.Rhe1 Qc5 18.g5 Ng8 19.Bb3 Bf5³

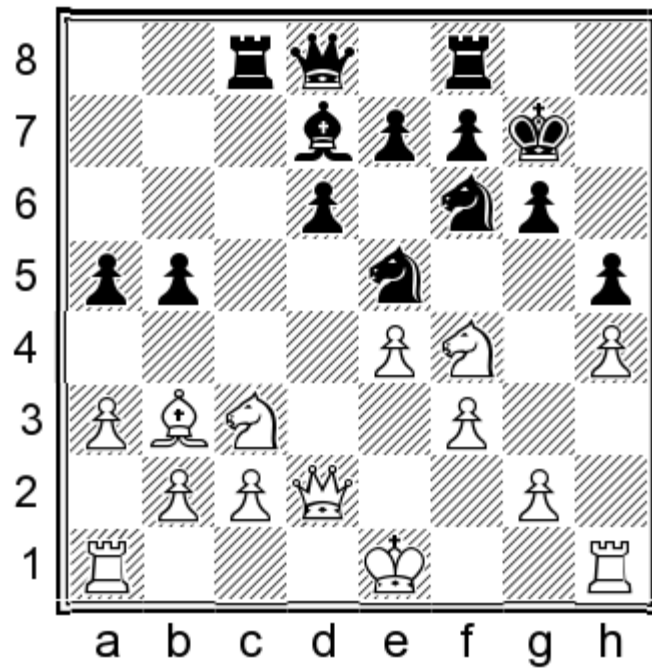
Momeni – Hakki, Dubai 1996. White has grabbed some space, but Black has picked up a pawn and his king is quite safe.

B) 11.Bb3 Rc8



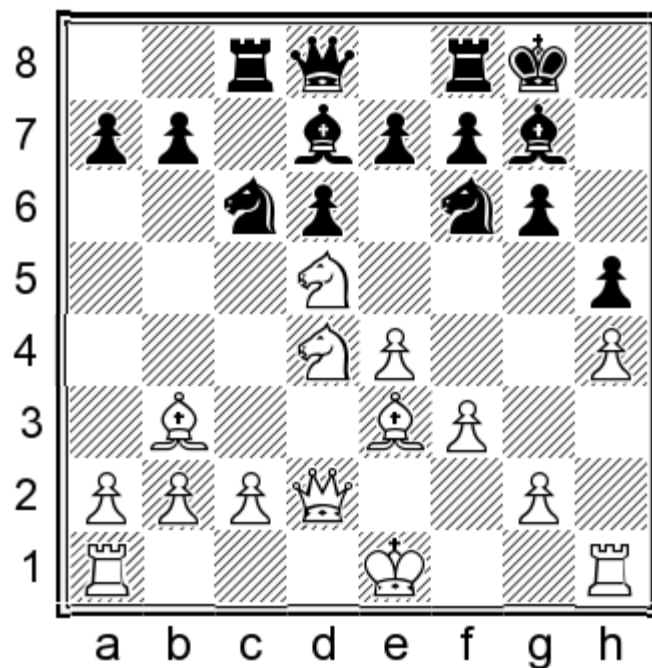
12.0-0-0 would of course transpose to the Soltis Variation, but we should also consider B1) 12.Nd5, B2) 12.g4 and B3) 12.Nxc6!?.

12.Nde2 is a slow set-up that doesn't create any problems. 12...Ne5 13.Bh6 b5 14.a3 a5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.Nf4



This position was reached in G. Kuzmin – Rashkovsky, Vilnius 1980. Here there was no need to rush with 16...Nc4, and Black could instead have started with 16...Re8!N. White has got himself into yet another of those positions where it is not easy to see what his plan might be.

B1) 12.Nd5



This has been played from time to time, but it strikes me as premature.

12...Nxd5 13.exd5 Nxd4

13...Ne5!? also looks comfortable.

14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.Qxd4 a5

Black's play is free-flowing and already White is somewhat on the back foot.

16.c3

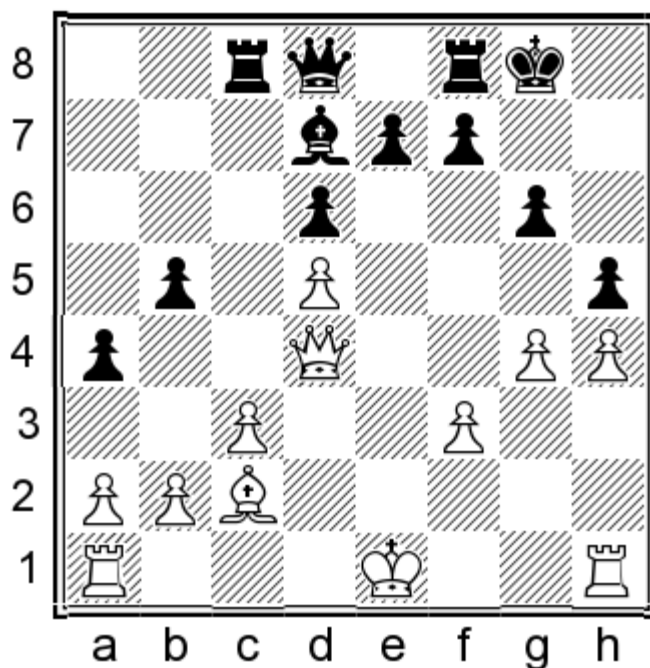
16.a4N does not prevent 16...b5!.

16...b5 17.g4

White tries to get some play of his own.

17.a3N is suggested by Georgiev, when 17...e5 18.dxe6 Bxe6 19.Bxe6 Re8 will be around level, wherever White chooses to put his king.

17...a4 18.Bc2



18...a3! 19.b4?!

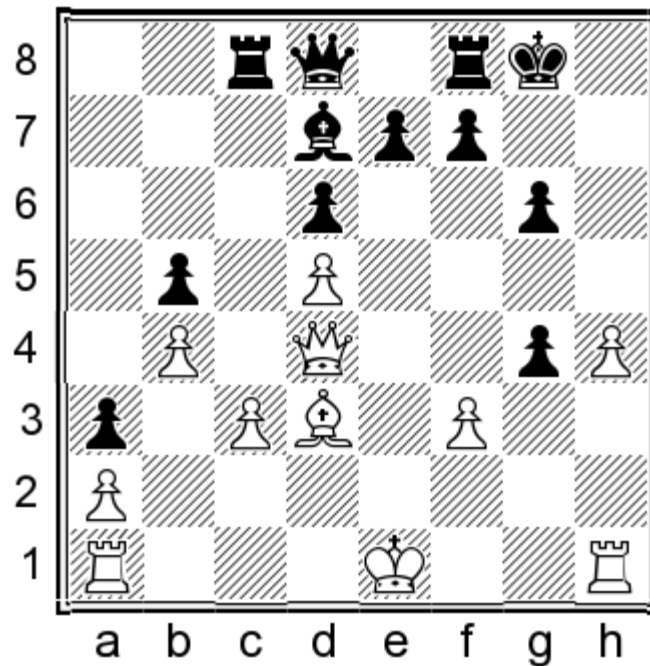
19.b3 was necessary, when Georgiev gives 19...Qc7 20.Kd2 hxg4 21.h5 Qc5³.

19.gxh5 axb2 20.Rb1 is also mentioned by Georgiev, but 20...Qa5! improves on his analysis. 21.Rxb2 (21.Kd2 Rc4 22.Qe3 b4–+) 21...Rxc3 22.0-0 Qa3 23.h6 Qc5μ

19...hxg4 20.Bd3

20.h5N 20...e5! 21.dxe6 Rc4!μ forces White to drop back.

We have been following Malisauskas – Ki. Georgiev, Biel 1993. Here I would opt for:



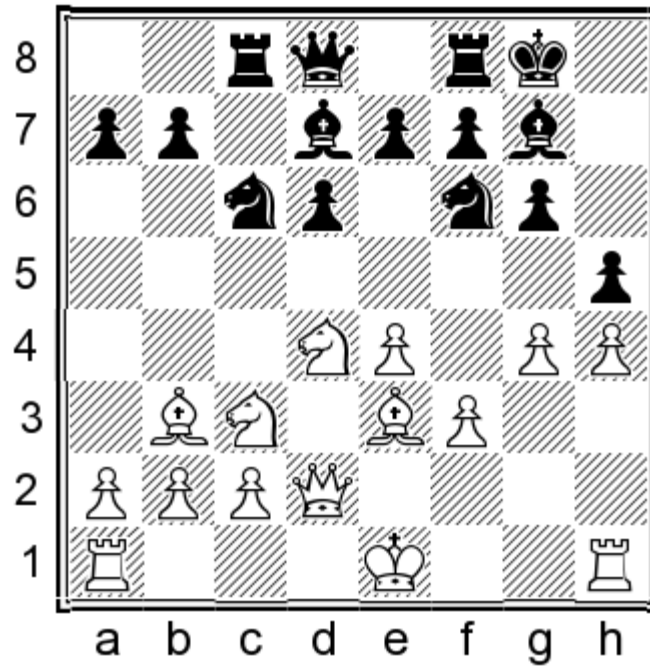
20...e5!N

20...Bf5!?N is an interesting suggestion of the computer.

21.dxe6 Re8μ

Black is set to retake the initiative.

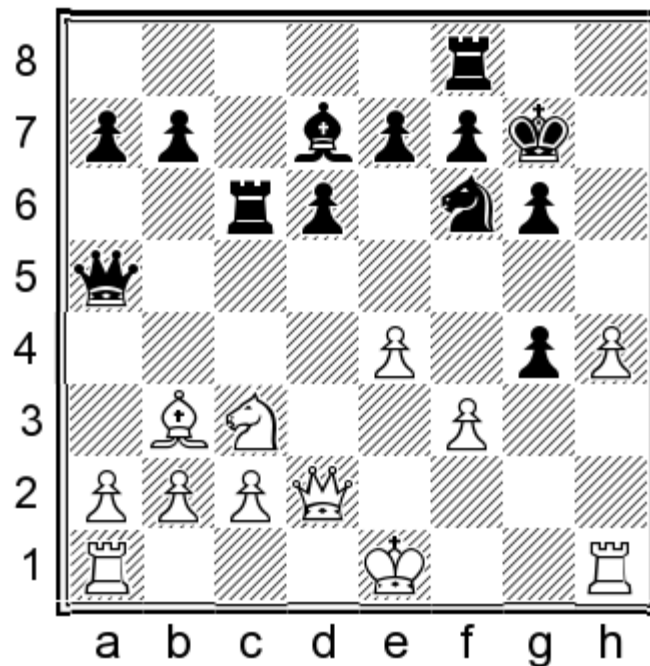
B2) 12.g4



Another aggressive attempt, but if White wants to play this he should first exchange on c6. This move was once tried by the strong French GM Romain Edouard, so I had to check it for my match against him, but I still don't know what his idea was.

12...hxg4 13.h5!?

13.Nxc6 can be met by 13...bxc6, transposing to the note on 13.g4 in variation B3 on the next page. However, Black can also play for more with 13...Rxc6, which worked well in the following game: 14.Bh6 Qa5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7



16.h5 Rh8 17.h6† This was Scherber – Babar, Sueder 1996, and here I would have preferred 17...Kh7!N with a big

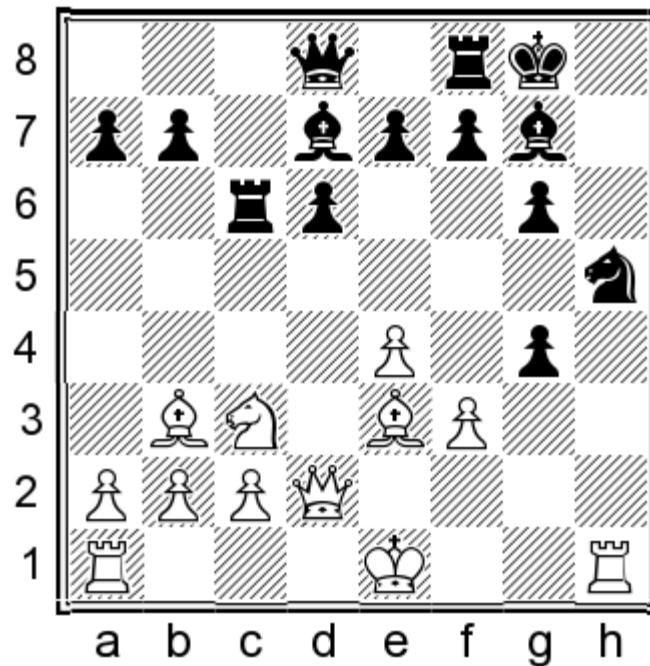
advantage; Black's king is totally safe.

13...Nxh5 14.Nxc6

14.0-0-0 Ne5 transposes to variation D2 of Chapter 6.

14...Rxc6

White's play feels far too optimistic to me, as Black has active pieces as well as a material advantage.

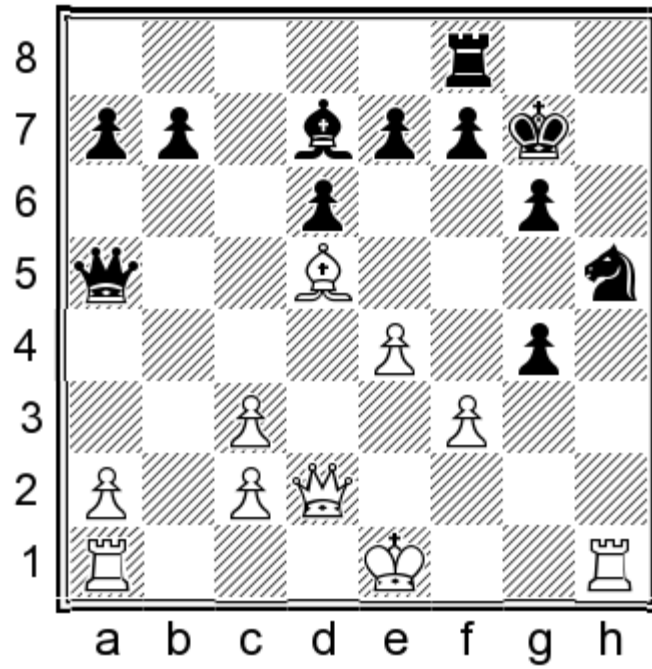


15.Bh6 Qa5 16.Bxg7

White would like to bring his second rook into the game, but 16.0-0-0N allows the typical 16...Rxc3! 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.bxc3 g3μ.

16...Kxg7 17.Bd5 Rxc3 18.bxc3

Edouard – Cvitan, Switzerland 2014.

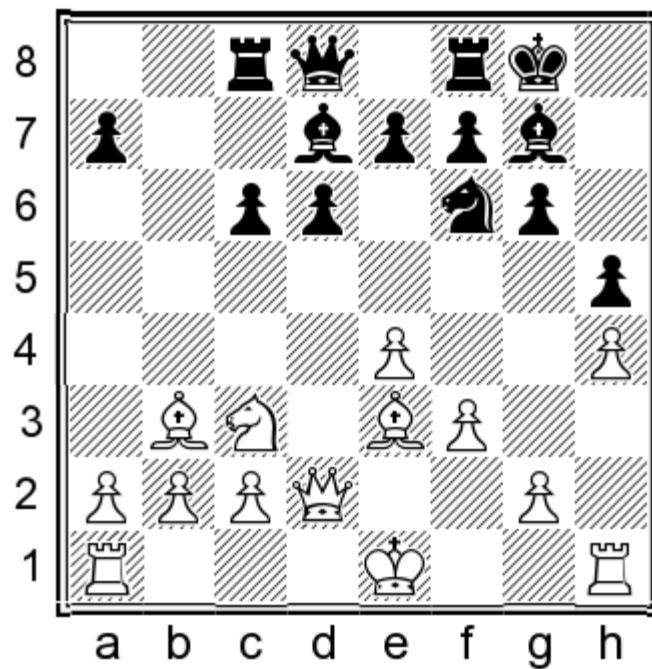


18...f6!N

During my preparation I decided that this move was the most accurate. I see no way for White to break through, and actually it seems to be Black who has the safer king. A sample continuation is:

19.fxg4 Bxg4 20.Rh4 f5µ 21.exf5? Rxf5!-+

B3) 12.Nxc6!? bxc6



This was Anand's doomed attempt in the 1995 World Championship match. Exchanging on c6 is a double-edged decision. Black's structure improves but White is hoping to slow down his queenside play and, if he can provoke ...c5, play on the light squares c4 and d5. If White's strategy is to work, he will have to prevent Black from breaking in the centre.

13.Bh6

Anand logically exchanges the dark-squared bishops.

13.Rd1 is an attempt to play positionally. (Compare 13.0-0 below.) 13...Qc7N (13...Qa5N 14.0-0 Rfd8= is also fine) 14.0-0 Rb8 I want to prevent White from cementing control of the light squares. 15.Bg5 Bc8!? 16.Rfe1 Ba6= This looks a decent rerouting to me.

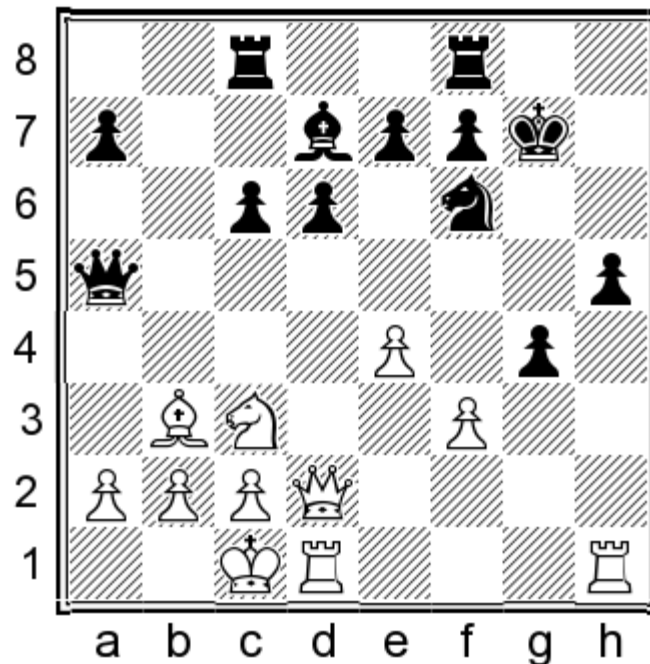
13.g4!?

This direct attempt only appears to have been tried in a single email game.

13...hxc4

13...c5!?N 14.Bc4 Be6!? (14...Rb8 15.Bh6 Rb4 16.Bb3 a5 also looks reasonable) 15.Bxe6 fxe6÷ is an interesting alternative. Of course my engine reckons everything is 0.00 here!

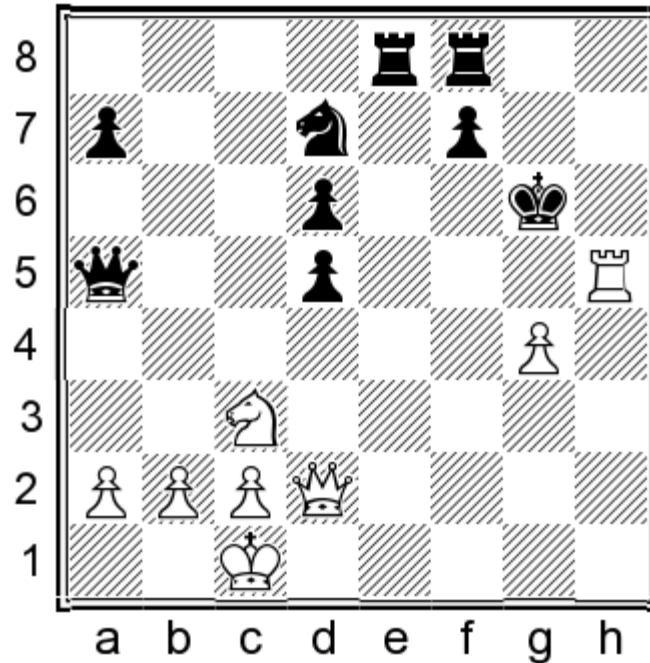
14.0-0-0 Qa5 15.h5 gxh5 16.Bh6 Kh7 17.Bxg7 Kxg7



18.e5! Qxe5 19.Rde1 Qa5 20.Rxe7 Rce8 21.Bd5!

Threatening a deadly check on g5, but Black has a defence.

21...Kg6! 22.Rxd7 Nxd7 23.fxg4 cxd5 24.Rxh5



24...f6! 25.Qh6† Kf7 26.Qh7† Ke6 27.Qf5† Ke7 28.Rh7† Rf7 29.Qxd5 Qxd5 30.Nxd5† Ke6 31.Nc7† Ke7

At this point a draw was agreed in Sikorsky – Joppich, email 2010. A completely crazy game, but it all appears sound.

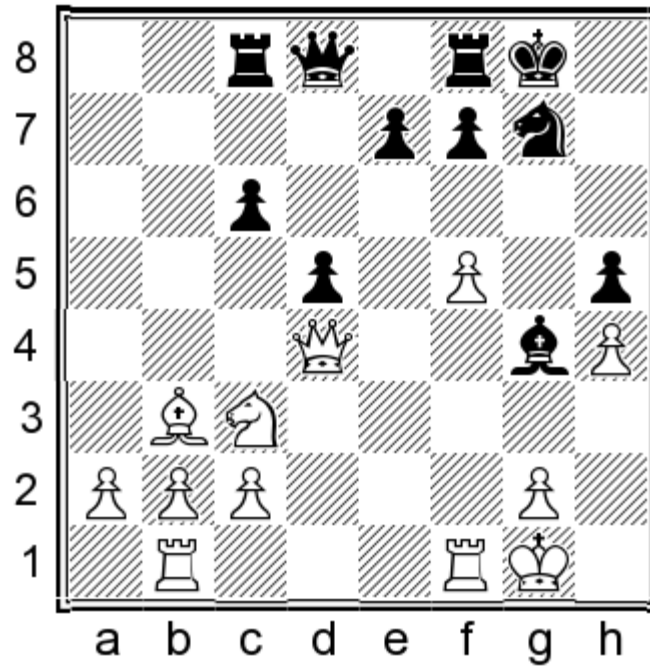
13.0-0!?

This is a rather intriguing way of playing that a few engines have adopted. White isn't trying to do anything drastic, but rather to play positionally. In some positions White has e4-e5 threats, but in general he simply wishes to manoeuvre his pieces around until Black can do nothing. As I mentioned earlier, this is computer chess style!

13...Ne8!?

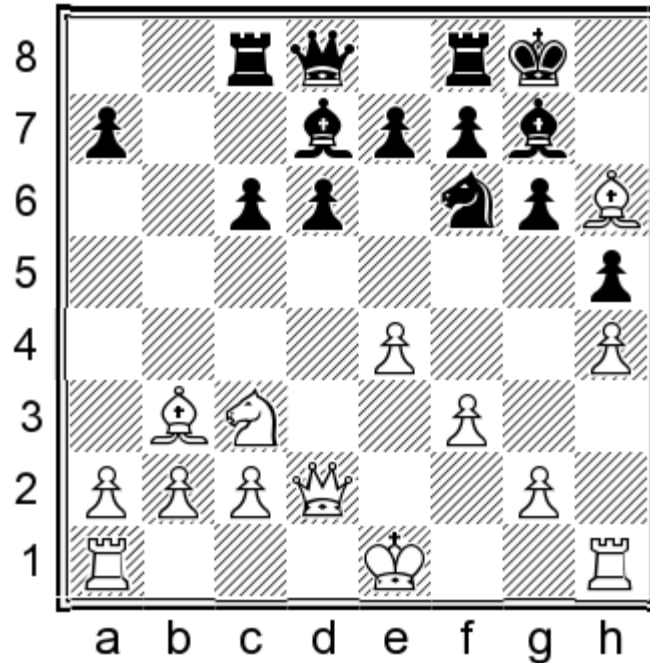
Most games have seen 13...c5 but I like not to cede control of the d5-square yet. After White has castled kingside there is no need to rush things.

14.Rab1 Nc7 15.f4!? Bg4 16.f5 gxf5 17.exf5 d5 18.Bxa7 Ne8!? 19.Bd4 Bxd4† 20.Qxd4 Ng7



21.f6 Nf5 22.fxe7 Qxe7 23.Qf2 Qxh4 24.Qxh4 Nxh4=

The endgame was about equal in firefather – jetro, engine game 2012, but I slightly prefer Black, as his minor pieces are active and the bishop on b3 is stuck out of play.

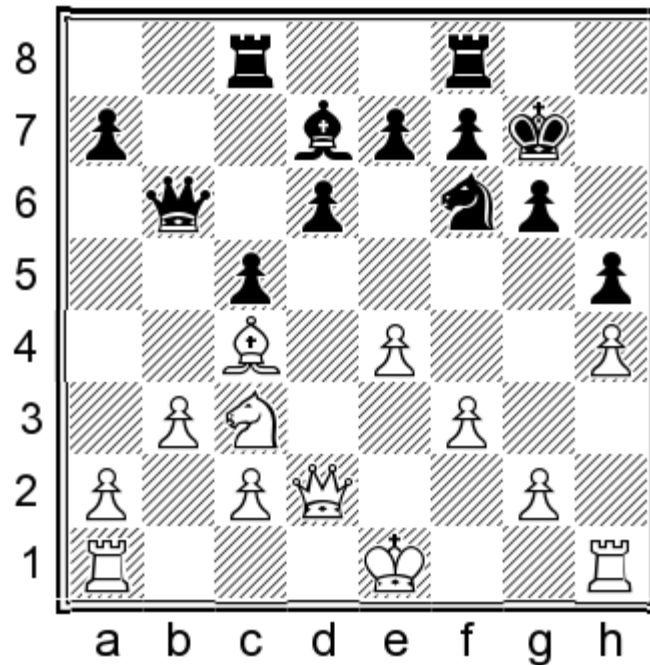


13...c5!

In the present position Black should speed up his queenside counterplay, as White might still try to crash through with g2-g4.

14.Bc4 Qb6 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.b3

16.Rb1 e6 17.0-0 Rcd8 18.Qe3 Bc6 19.b4 d5! favoured Black in Trani – Bartosik, email 2002. Even in a correspondence game, preventing Black from liberating his position is not easy.



16...Be6!

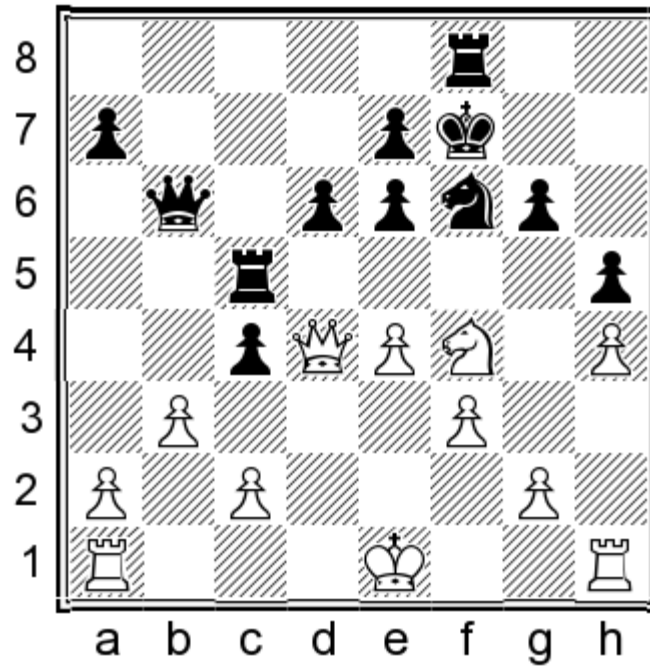
Fighting for the d5-square.

17.Nd5?!

Anand does not want to give up control of the centre, but perhaps he had overlooked the strength of Black's 18th.

17.Na4 Qc7 18.Bxe6 fxe6 19.0-0 d5 was agreed drawn in Klapp – Marxen, email 2007. It's rather early to abandon the fight, but Black has certainly solved any opening problems.

17.Bxe6 fxe6 may look like an ugly structure for Black, but it has some major advantages: Black has good control of the d5-square, play down the f-file and is ready to expand in the centre. Similar themes will be discussed in more detail under 9.g4 in Chapter 15, but for now I will mention a game where Black handled the position successfully: 18.Ne2 c4 19.Qd4 Rc5 20.Nf4 Kf7



21.Nh3 e5 22.Ng5† Kg8 23.Qe3 cxb3 24.Qxb3† Qxb3 25.cxb3 Rfc8³ Peled – Poli, email 2003.

17...Bxd5 18.exd5 e5!

Kasparov takes his fair share of the centre while presenting White with a dilemma.

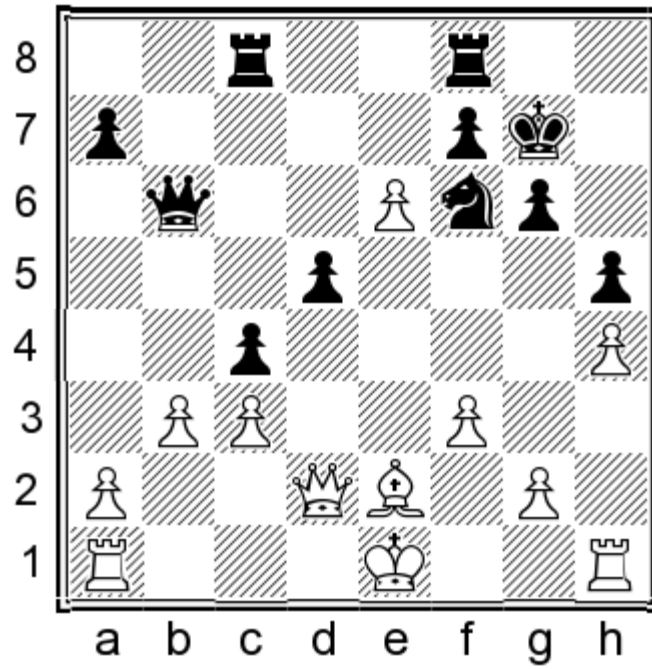
19.dxe6?!

I can imagine that Vishy really didn't want to take that pawn, but also didn't want to suffer in a bad-bishop-versus-good-knight position where Black is free to expand on the kingside with ...f5. It feels like a dream King's Indian!

19.0-0 Nd7 20.f4 f5 21.Qc3 Kh7 22.a3 Rce8³ is a good illustration of the kind of thing Anand was presumably scared about, De Almeida – Lilleoren, email 2006. However, the move played leads to worse suffering for White.

19...d5! 20.Be2 c4 21.c3?!

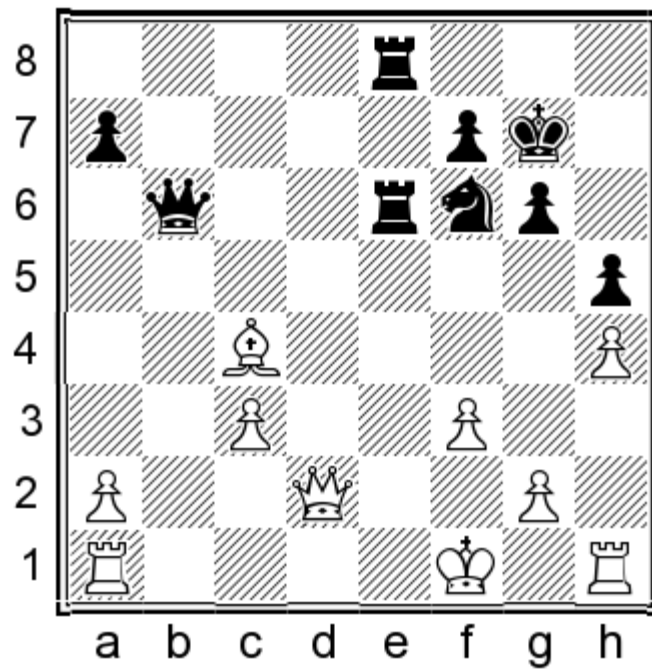
Kasparov suggested 21.Rd1N as an improvement, but 21...fxe6 is still more than comfortable for Black.



21...Rce8!

Black has a clear advantage, and Kasparov ends the game efficiently.

22.bxc4 Rxe6 23.Kf1 Rfe8 24.Bd3 dxc4 25.Bxc4



25...Ne4!

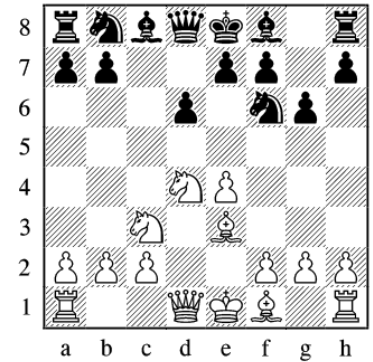
0–1 Anand – Kasparov, New York (13) 1995.

Conclusion

Most of the time White plays 10.h4 simply as a route to the Soltis Variation, whilst avoiding some of Black's options such as the Topalov Variation and the Chinese Dragon. Of the independent options, taking on c6 is definitely the most critical. Anand suffered a terrible blow against Kasparov in their World Championship match, and I think that indicates how difficult those positions are to play for White.

Chapter 13

Yugoslav Attack



Early Deviations

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Bg5
6...Bg7

A) 7.Qd2 Ng4

A1) 8.0-0-0

A2) 8.Bg5 h6 9.Bh4 Nc6 10.Nb3 Be6

A21) 11.Be2

A22) 11.0-0-0

B) 7.f3 0-0

B1) 8.g4

B2) 8.Bc4 Nc6

B21) 9.Qe2

B22) 9.Bb3

B3) 8.Qd2 Nc6

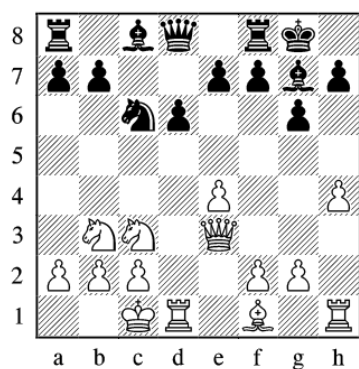
B31) 9.Nb3

B32) 9.Bc4 Bd7

B321) 10.g4

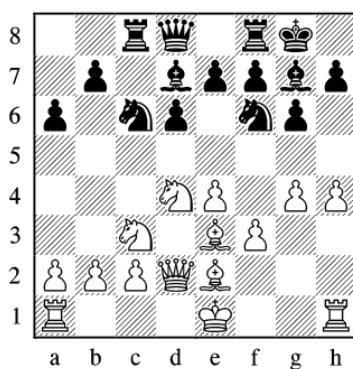
B322) 10.Bb3

A1) after 11.h4



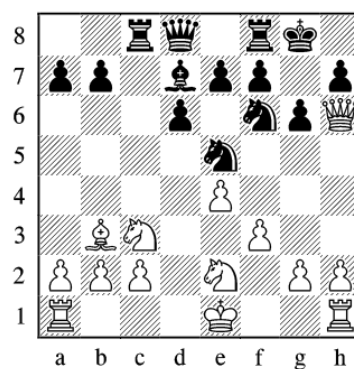
11...♞b6!?N

B321) after 12.h4



12...d5!N

B322) note to 11.g4



13...b5!N

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7

In this chapter we will deal with the rare A) 7.Qd2, followed by various sidelines after B) 7.f3.

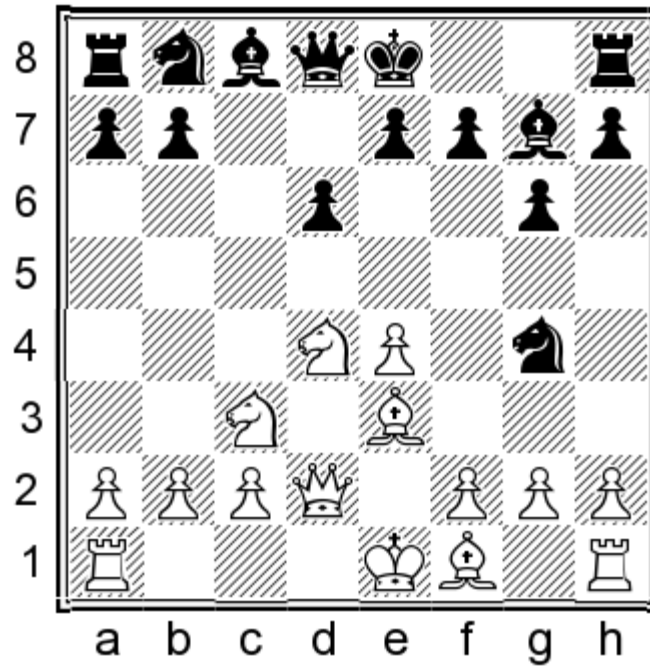
7.h3 is covered under 6.h3 Bg7 7.Be3 – see Chapter 19 of Volume 2.

Also 7.Bc4 leads to the Chapter 17 of Volume 2.

A) 7.Qd2 Ng4

White's move order gives Black this additional option.

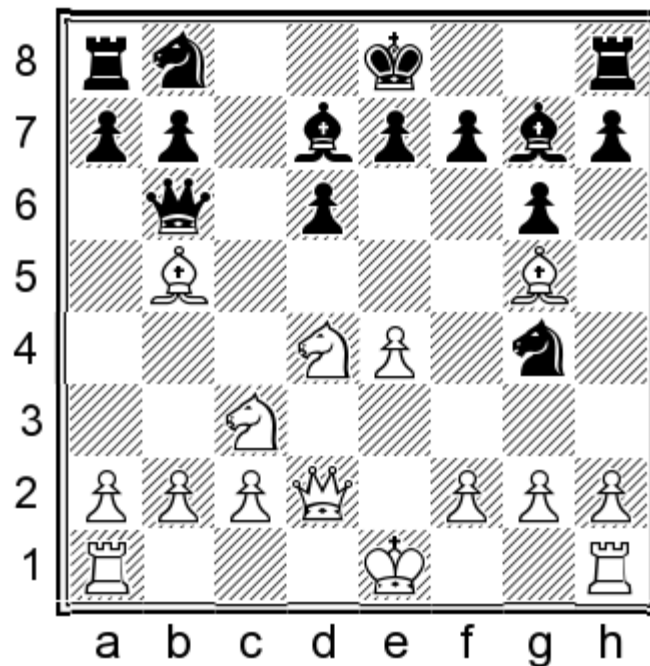
7...Nc6 is likely to transpose back to the main lines after 8.f3. If White refuses with 8.0-0-0 then 8...Ng4 favours Black, as shown in variation A1 below.



White may react with A1) 8.0-0-0 or A2) 8.Bg5.

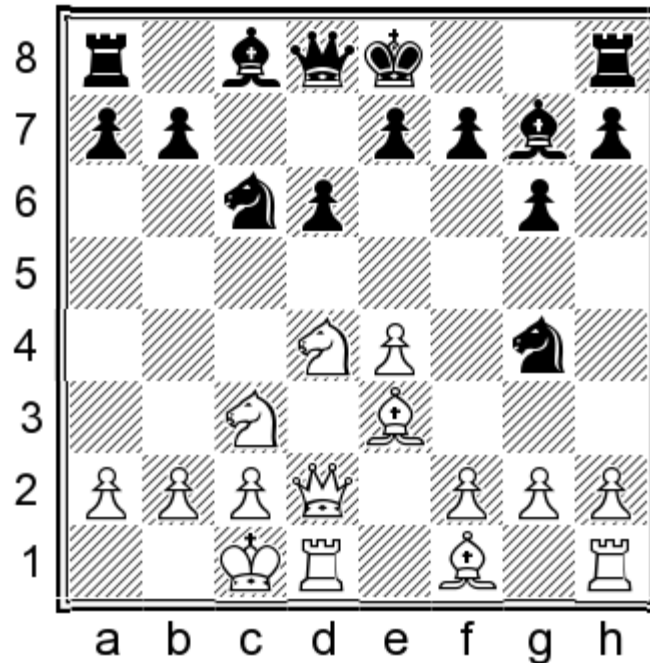
8.Bf4? Bxd4! 9.Qxd4 e5 saw Black win material in Duart Costea – Uberos Fernandez, email 2008.

8.Bb5† Throwing in this check does not challenge Black. 8...Bd7 9.Bg5 (9.Bxd7† Nxd7 10.0-0 Nxe3 11.Qxe3 0-0³ Black has a small edge due to his uncontested bishop) 9...Qb6!†N This looks an interesting way to exploit the loose nature of White's position.



10.Rd1 (10.0-0-0 Qxd4 11.Qxd4 Bxd4 12.Rxd4 Nxf2 13.Rf1 Ng4³) 10...Nc6 11.Bxc6 bxc6 12.h3 f6!? 13.Bf4 Ne5 14.b3 Nf7³

A1) 8.0-0-0 Nc6



There is nothing wrong with exchanging on e3 immediately, but it is worth maintaining the tension for another move, if only to give White the chance to make the mistake given in the next note.

9.Nb3

9.Nxc6 bxc6 10.Bd4? Bh6 is even worse for White.

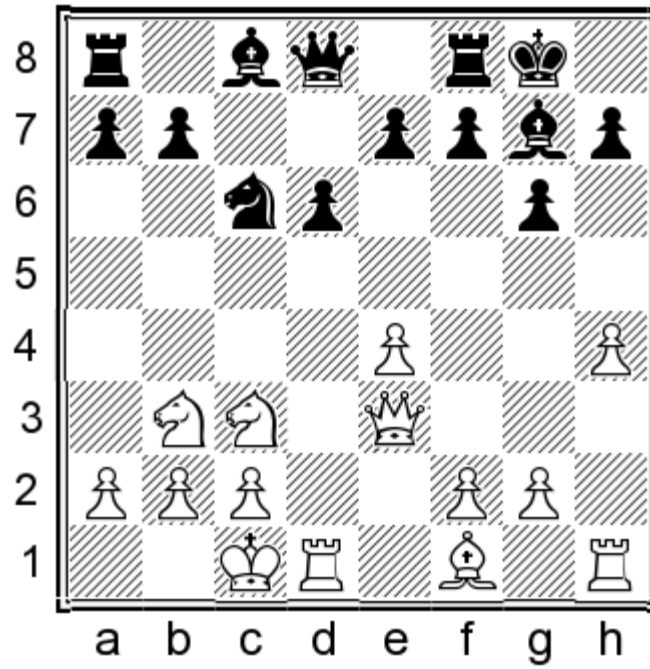
9...Nxe3 10.Qxe3 0-0

Black should be slightly better here; he just needs to be slightly careful without the f6-knight defending his kingside.

10...Qb6!?N seems playable, but it seems logical to castle before committing to a plan.

11.h4

11.f4 a5³ saw Black with the much faster attack in P. Schmidt – Delgado Ramirez, Internet 2009.



11...Qb6!?N

I like this novelty, which either leads to a positional advantage without queens, or to a gain of time for Black's middlegame attack.

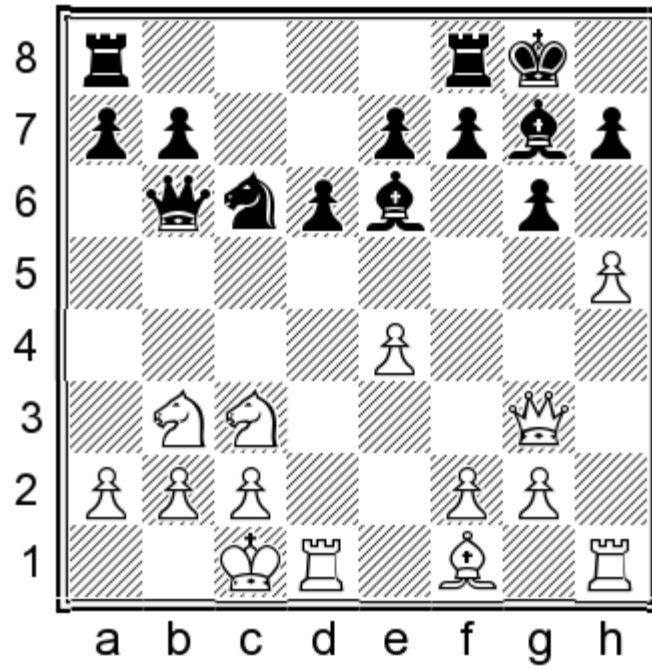
12.Qg3

12.Qxb6 axb6 13.Nd5 Rxa2³

12...Be6 13.h5?

This is the only scary move, but Black is much faster.

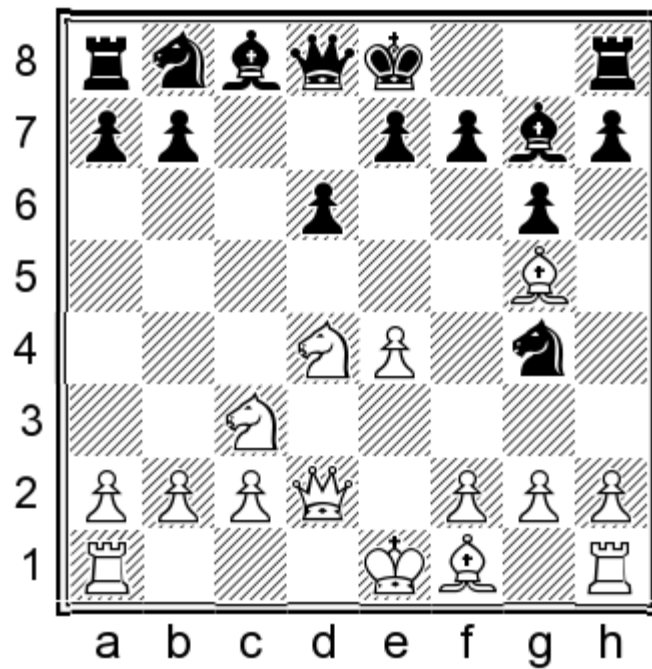
13.Nd5 was necessary, although 13...Bxd5 14.exd5 Na5³ leaves Black with a pleasant edge.



13...Rfc8 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.Qh4 Nb4-+

White has just one check while Black, with almost all his pieces pointing at White's king, has a decisive attack.

A2) 8.Bg5



This is the only critical test. White refuses to cede control of the dark squares without a fight.

8...h6

It seems most accurate to hit the bishop immediately, so that it will be forced to go to h4.

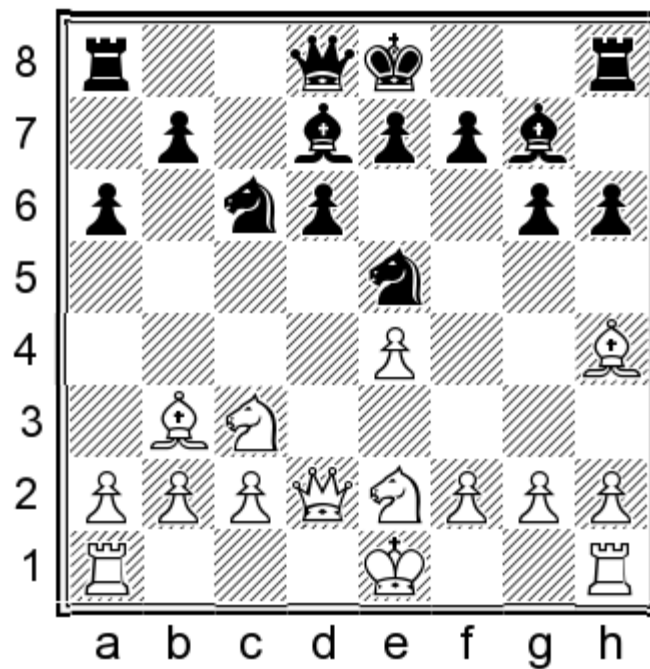
9.Bh4

This line resembles the 6.Be3 Ng4 variation of the Najdorf. Comparing the positions, if Black continues with ...g5 then he will have lost a tempo – although ...a6 is not the most useful move in any case. A more significant point is that, with the g7-bishop already developed, Black can gain time against the d4-knight.

9...Nc6 10.Nb3

10.Nxc6 bxc6 11.h3 (11.Bc4 Ne5 12.Bb3 Ba6³) 11...Ne5N This natural move has not been played. Perhaps Black has been worried about 12.f4 but 12...g5!, borrowing an idea from the Najdorf, gives Black a clear advantage.

10.Bb5 also fails to put any pressure on Black. 10...Bd7 11.Nde2 This is the only justification I can see for White's previous move, but it fails to impress. 11...a6 12.Ba4 Nge5 13.Bb3



13...Na5! 14.f4 Nec4 The position was already more pleasant for Black, and 15.Qd3? Nxb2μ was simply an extra pawn in Bortot – Ralle, France 2005.

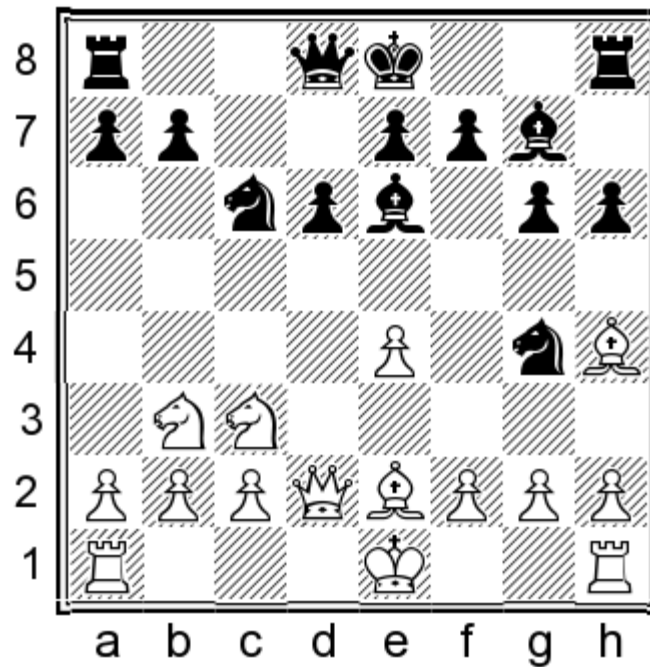
10...Be6

Now that White's knight has been forced to retreat, Black can develop the bishop to its most active square. White has

two contrasting ways of handling the position: he can either revert to some sort of Classical Variation with A21) 11.Be2 followed by castling kingside, or he can continue playing in the spirit of the Yugoslav Attack with A22) 11.0-0-0.

11.f3 Nf6 12.0-0-0 0-0 gives rise to a rather unusual-looking Yugoslav Attack where Black's attack should at least match White's, as the bishop on h4 feels rather misplaced. 13.Bxf6N 13...Bxf6 14.Qxh6 is given by Schulz, but 14...Qb6³ gives Black fantastic compensation.

A21) 11.Be2

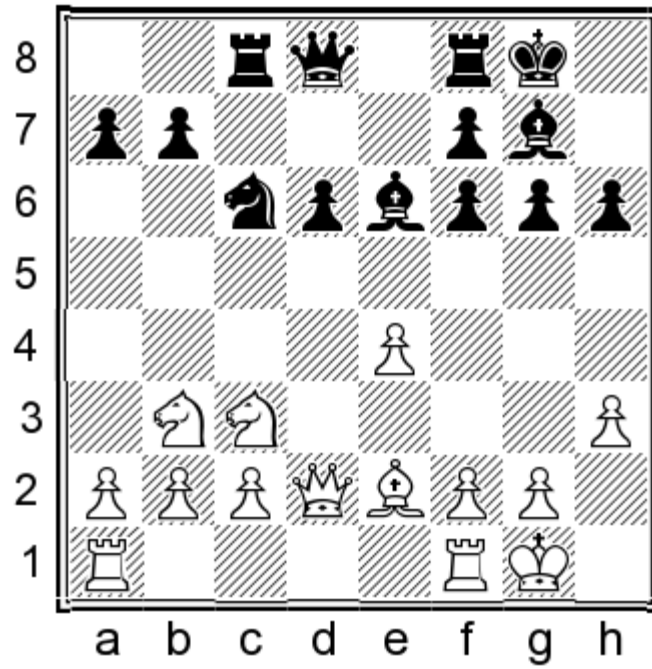


This is the safer option, but Black can still keep the game sharp.

11...Rc8 12.0-0 g5!?

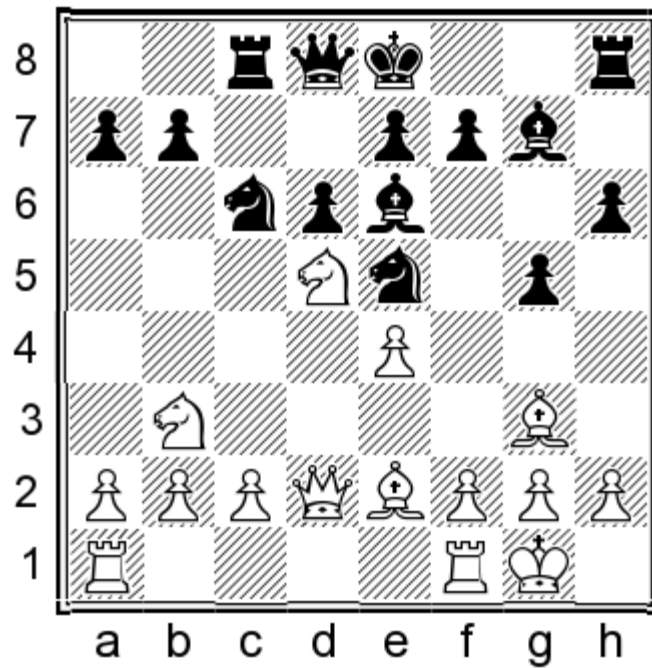
The GM decides to put pressure on his lower-rated opponent immediately.

Black can also play more calmly with 12...0-0, for instance: 13.h3 Nf6 14.Bxf6 exf6 (14...Bxf6!? 15.Qxh6 Qb6 16.Qd2 Nd4 17.Bg4 Qb4 gives Black strong pressure in return for the pawn)



15.Rad1 f5 16.exf5 Bxf5 17.Nb5 d5 Black is fine.

13.Bg3 Nge5 14.Nd5



14...Ng6

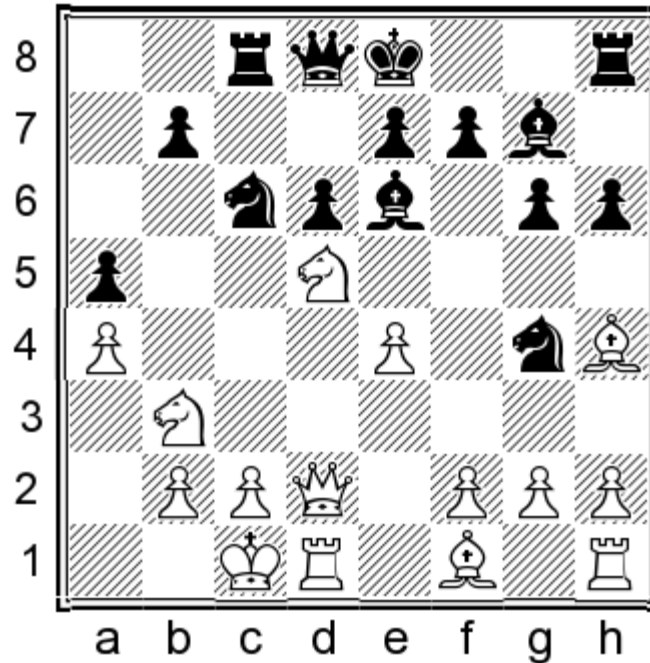
14...g4!?N 15.f4 gxf3 16.gxf3 h5÷ reaches another messy position.

15.c3 h5 16.f3 Nce5÷

The position was complex and double-edged in Anakidze – Shanava, Tbilisi 2010.

A22) 11.0-0-0 a5 12.a4 Rc8 13.Nd5

These natural moves occurred in Rytshagov – Salmensuu, Finland 1995. Here I would prefer the simple move:



13...0-0N

Black's queenside attack comes rather quickly.

14.Kb1 Bxd5!? 15.exd5 Nb4 16.c3 Qd7! 17.Bb5

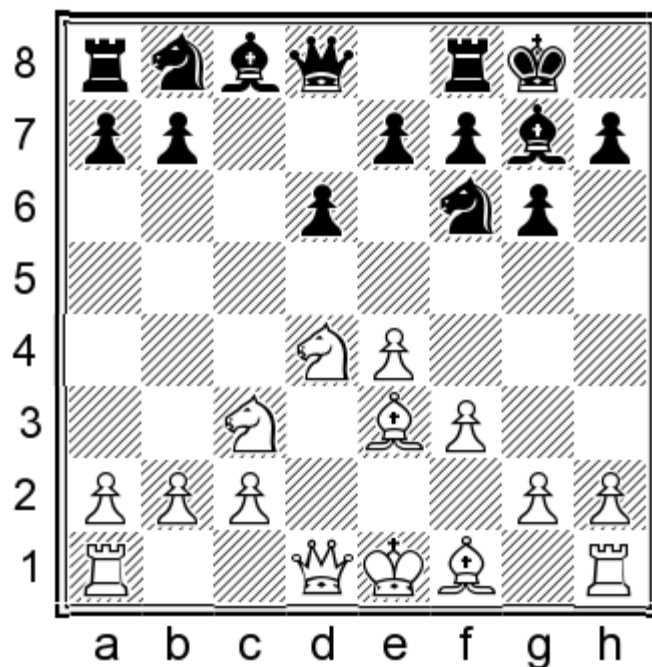
17.cxb4 Qxa4 18.Nxa5 b6 19.Nc4 Rxc4 20.Bxc4 Ra8 gives Black a dangerous initiative. White has to try 21.Rc1 but Black is for preference after 21...Ne5³.

The text is more sensible, and should lead to a draw.

17...Qf5† 18.Ka1 Nc2† 19.Ka2 Nb4† 20.Ka1=

White should settle for the repetition, as 20.cxb4?! Rc2 21.Qd3 Rxb2† 22.Ka3 Qe5 gives Black a strong attack.

B) 7.f3 0-0



This is the main starting position for the Yugoslav Attack. The remainder of the chapter will discuss various set-ups after B1) 8.g4, B2) 8.Bc4 and B3) 8.Qd2.

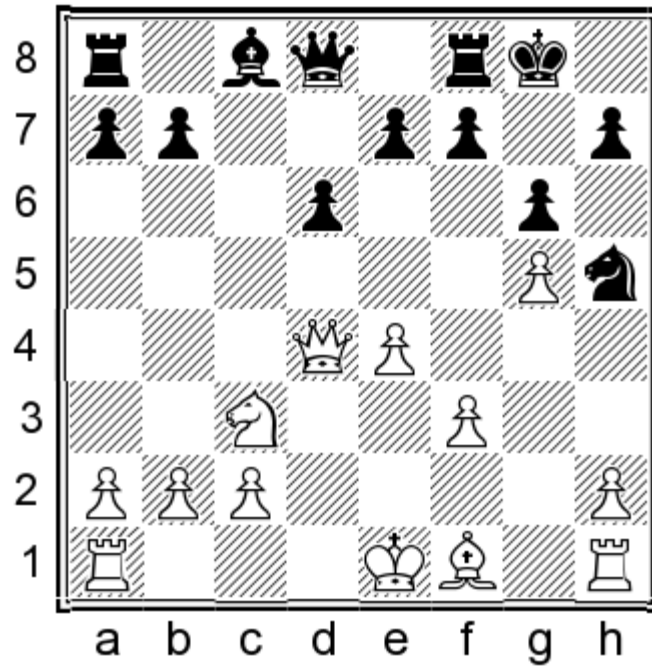
B1) 8.g4 Nc6

8...d5!? is an experimental alternative, but the natural developing move works fine.

9.h4?!

White should really play 9.Qd2, transposing to the 9.g4 variation as covered in the next two chapters.

9.g5?! cedes control of a couple of important squares and leaves White with an inflexible structure. 9...Nh5 10.Qd2 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Bxd4 12.Qxd4



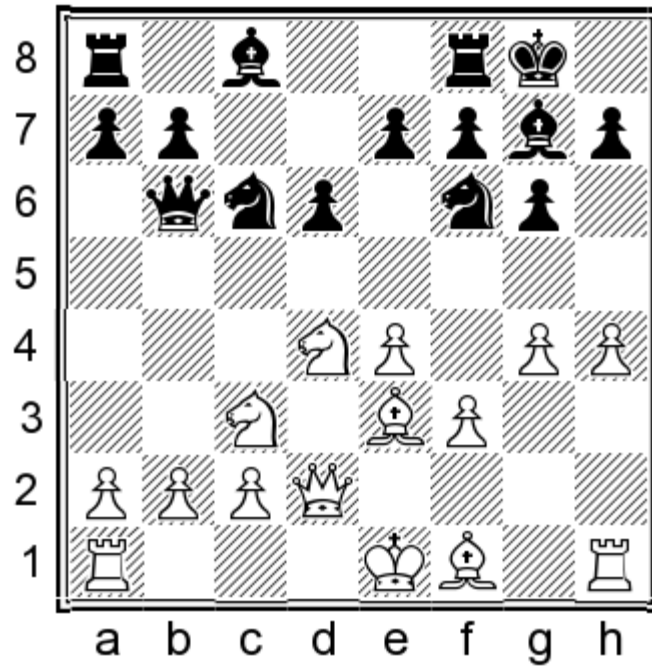
This position was reached in M. Schlosser – Pisk, Austria 2010, and now 12...Be6N 13.0-0-0 Qa5³ would have been simplest.

9...Qb6!

Successfully exploiting White's hasty kingside pawn storm.

10.Qd2?

10.Na4N has to be tried, although 10...Qa5† 11.Nc3 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 e5 13.Be3 d5! 14.g5 d4³ still favours Black.



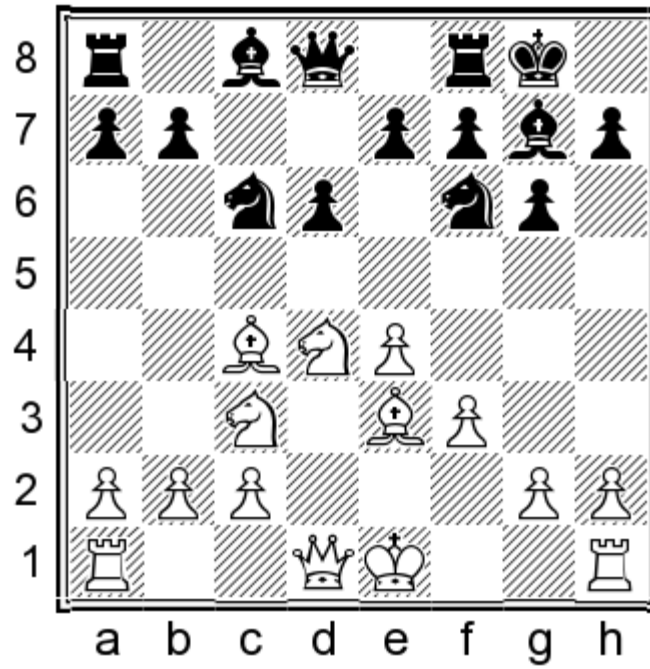
10...N_xg4!

White's position just collapses.

11.Na4 Nxd4 12.Nxb6 Nxf3† 13.Ke2 Nxd2 14.Nxa8 Nxe3 15.Kxd2 Bh6 16.Bd3 Bg4

0–1 Leakovic – Cebalo, Vinkovci 2007.

B2) 8.Bc4 Nc6



Now 9.Qd2 leads to the big main line, but White can also try the sidelines B21) 9.Qe2 and B22) 9.Bb3.

9.0-0 is an odd choice with f2-f3 on the board. This position will be discussed under the 6.Bc4 move order – see the note with 8.f3 on page 269 of Volume 2.

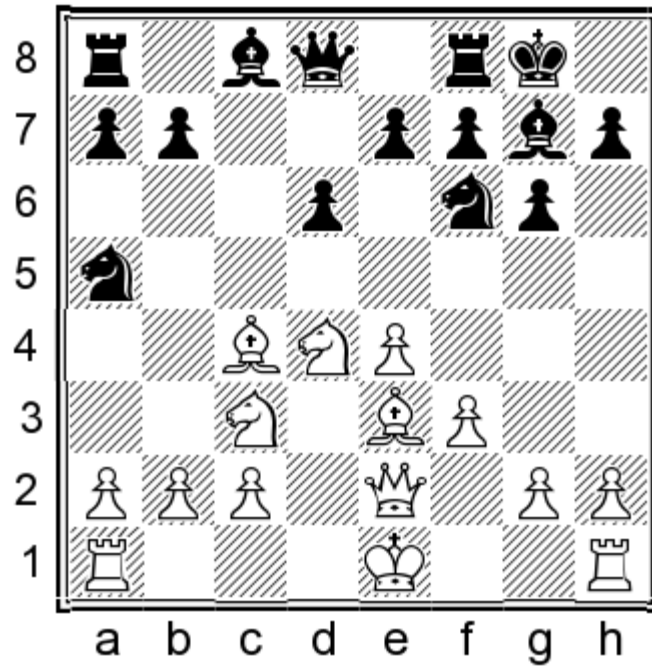
B21) 9.Qe2

This is a speciality of the creative Swedish GM Jonny Hector. Instead of playing for Bh6 and mating Black, White normally plays slowly with kingside castling. From e2 the queen controls the c4-square, and White hopes to make e4-e5 work at some point.

9...Na5

Harassing the bishop makes sense, as it can no longer drop back to e2.

Black can also start with 9...Bd7. One possible continuation is 10.0-0-0 Na5 11.Bb3, transposing to variation B22.



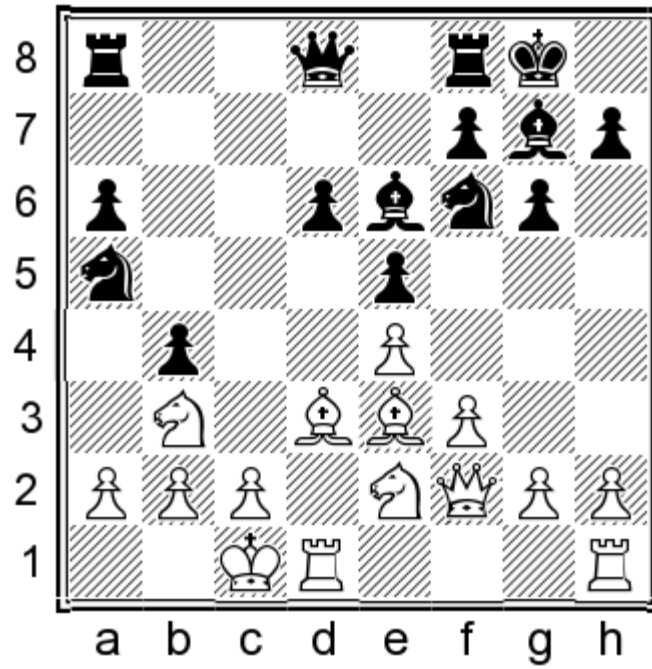
10.Bd3

If White allows the bishop to be traded then obviously he cannot hope for anything at all.

10...a6 11.0-0

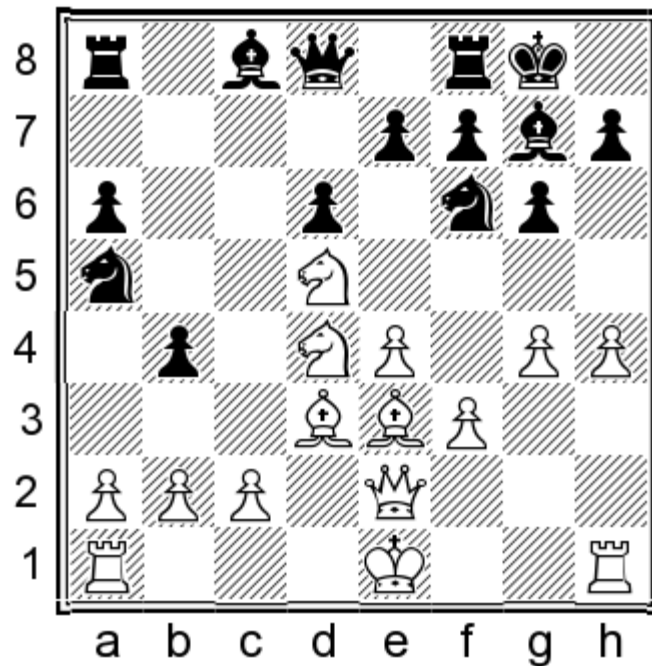
Trying to play more aggressively backfires, as the white queen is not well placed to support a kingside attack. A couple of examples:

11.0-0-0 b5 12.Qf2 b4 13.Nce2 e5! 14.Nb3 Be6

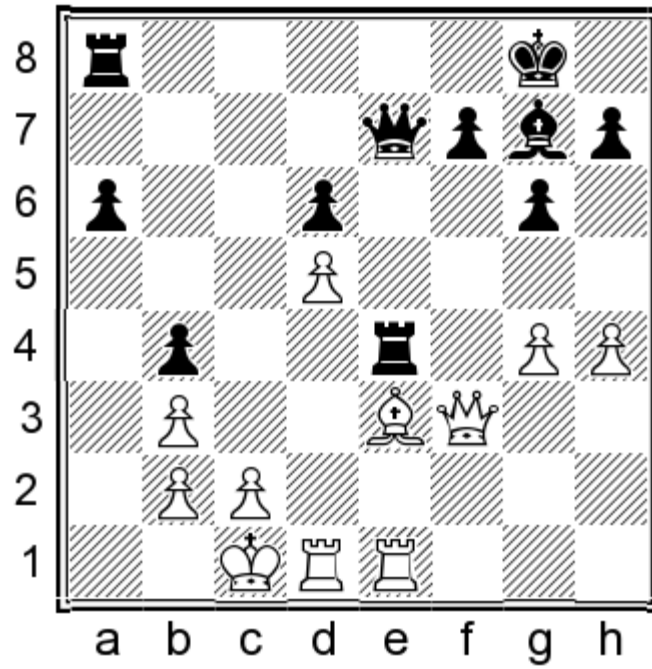


15.Kb1 Nxb3 16.cxb3 a5 17.Bb5 Qb8 18.Ba4 d5μ The Dragon expert had taken control in Berkvens – Tiviakov, Zwolle 2000.

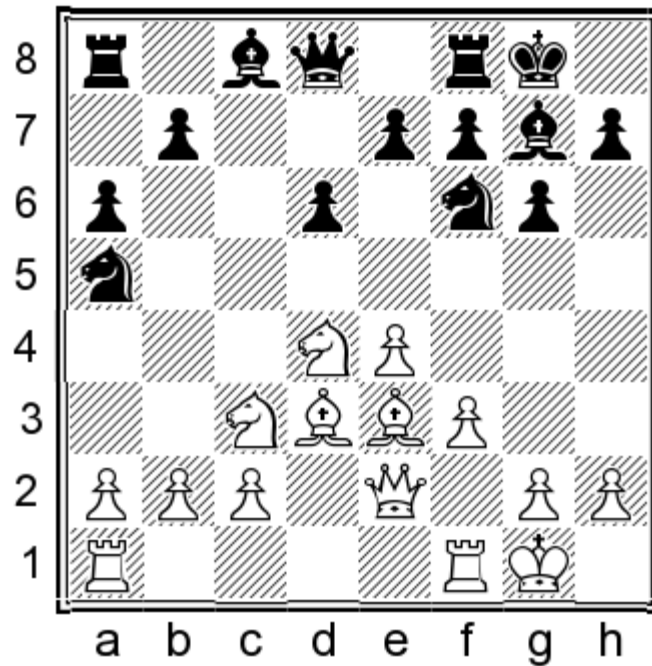
11.g4 b5 12.h4 b4!? (12...h5N also looks comfortable for Black) 13.Nd5



13...e5! 14.Nb3 Nxd5 15.exd5 e4 16.Bxe4 Re8 17.0-0 Nxb3† 18.axb3 Bxg4 19.fxg4 Rxe4 20.Qf3 Qe7 21.Rhe1 In Wollenweber – Rogozenco, Bargteheide 2012, the GM playing Black had at least two good continuations, the simplest being:



21...Qe5N (21...f5!?N) 22.Bd4 Qf4† 23.Qxf4 Rxf4μ With good winning chances in the endgame.

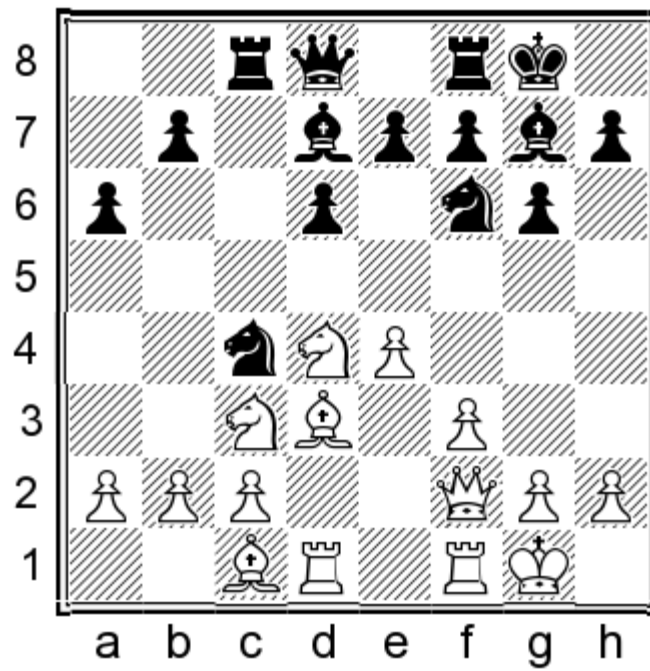


11...Bd7

Hector has been happy to play this with White, but objectively Black is no worse, and I think the position is easier for Black to play.

12.Qf2

Another game continued: 12.Rad1 Rc8 13.Qf2 Nc4 14.Bc1



14...b5 (14...Qb6!N would be my choice. Black threatens to move his f6-knight, unleashing an attack on the d4-knight, and 15.Nb3 Qxf2† 16.Rxf2 b5³ is more than okay for Black.) 15.Rfe1 Qb6 16.Bf1 e6³ Hector – Zelbel, Nuremberg 2012.

12...Qc8

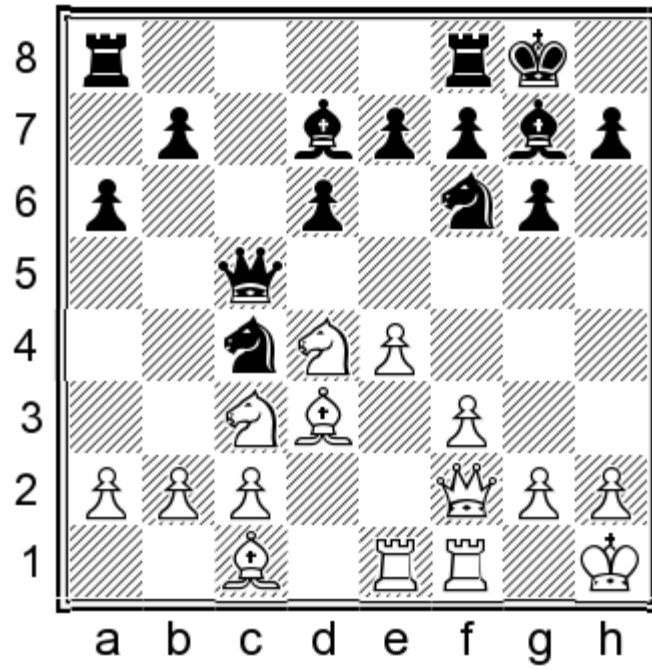
White's last move did not threaten anything, so 12...b5N is also completely fine.

13.Rae1 Nc4 14.Bc1 Qc5

14...b5 15.Nd1 Ne5 16.Be2 occurred in mario de monti – crgiorgio, engine game 2013, and now 16...d5N looks promising. White's last few moves make a strange impression, while Black has simply played logical moves focusing on the centre.

15.Kh1

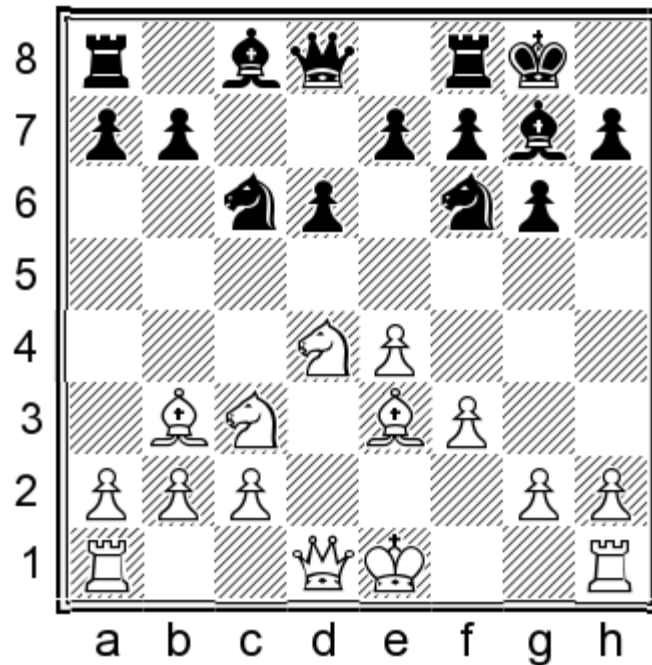
This position was reached in Hector – Ward, Copenhagen 1998. Here I would have played:



15...b5N

I like Black's position.

B22) 9.Bb3



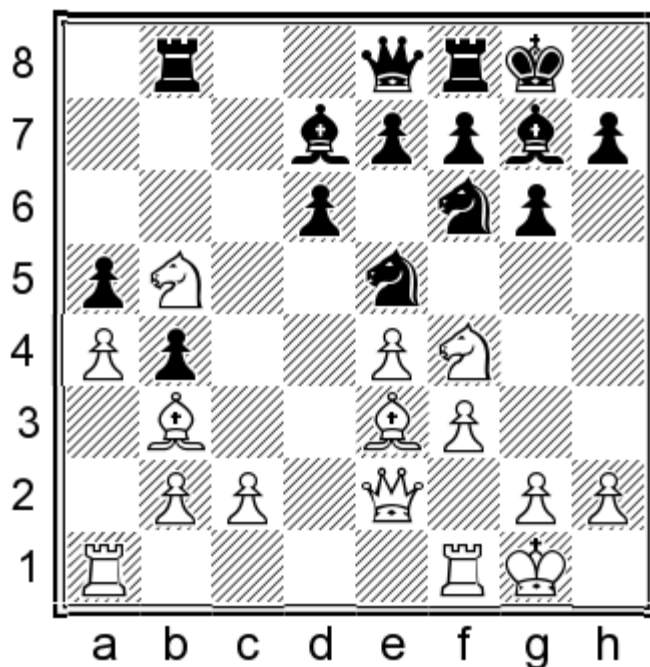
This position has mostly occurred via an Accelerated Dragon move order. In that variation, the possibility of a quick ...d5 means that, if White desires a Yugoslav Attack, he is virtually forced to play an early Bc4-b3 before f2-f3. There are ways for Black to try and exploit the premature Bb3 move, but I am content to head for normal Dragon pathways. In this section we will deal with a few rare lines where White avoids putting his queen on d2.

9...Bd7 10.Qe2

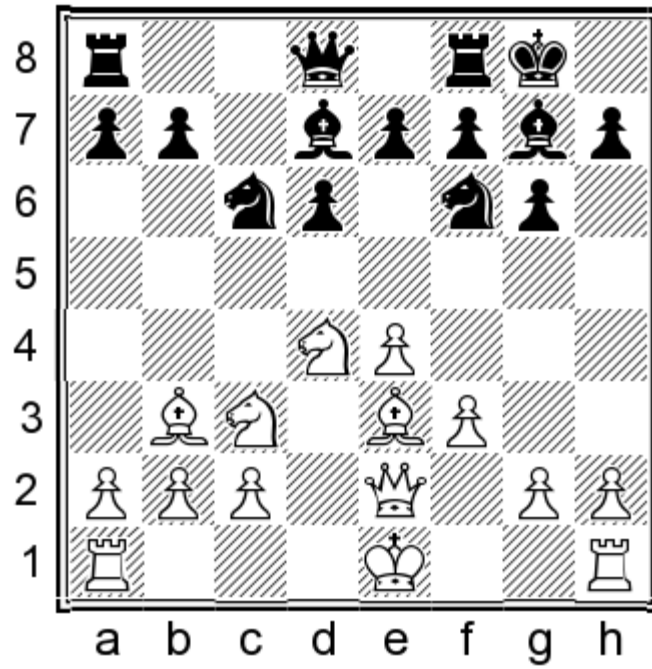
10.h4 h5 11.Qd2 transposes to variation B of Chapter 12.

In the event of 10.g4 I like 10...a5!?N 11.a4 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 Be6 with balanced chances. Black's play is designed to exploit White's early bishop retreat and the weakening of the f3-pawn.

10.Nde2 is rather slow, and Black has a choice of good continuations. 10...Rb8 This makes sense now that White has taken his eye off the b5-square. (10...Na5 is also sensible, hoping to make use of the bishop pair.) 11.0-0 b5 12.Nf4 a5 13.a4 b4 14.Nb5 Ne5 15.Qe2 Qe8



16.Nc7 Qd8 17.Nb5 In Bologan – Ki. Georgiev, Debrecen 1992, Black shunned the repetition with 17...Qc8!? and eventually scored the full point.



10...Na5

Putting the knight on a5 makes sense whenever the bishop cannot drop back to e2.

11.0-0-0 a6

11...Rc8 is also sensible; Black is not threatening to put the knight on c4, but the exchange sacrifice on c3 could be tempting.

12.Qd2

This makes a strange impression. Surely wasting a tempo with Qe2-d2 can't be beneficial, as both ...a6 and ...Na5 are useful moves.

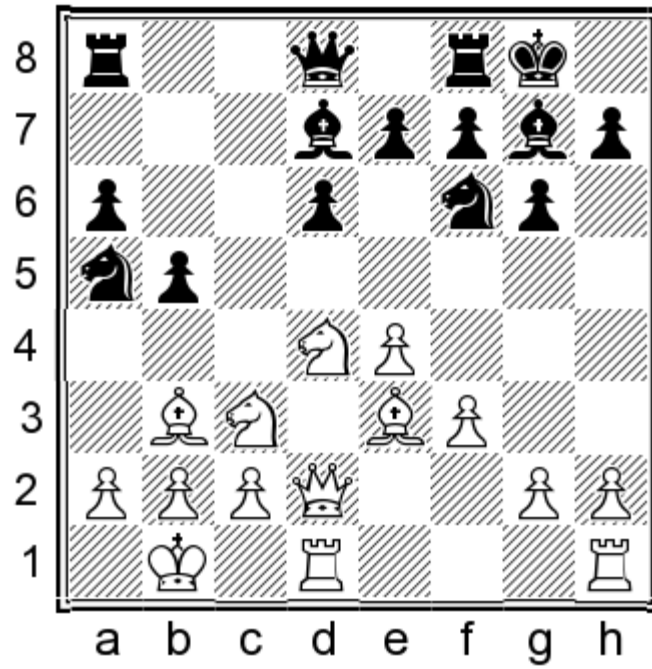
However, White's other queen moves also fail to impress: both 12.Qf2 b5³ and 12.Qd3 b5 13.Kb1 b4N 14.Nd5 Nxb3 15.Nxf6† Bxf6 16.cxb3 a5³ favour Black.

12...b5

This seems like the most obvious way to use the extra tempo.

13.Kb1

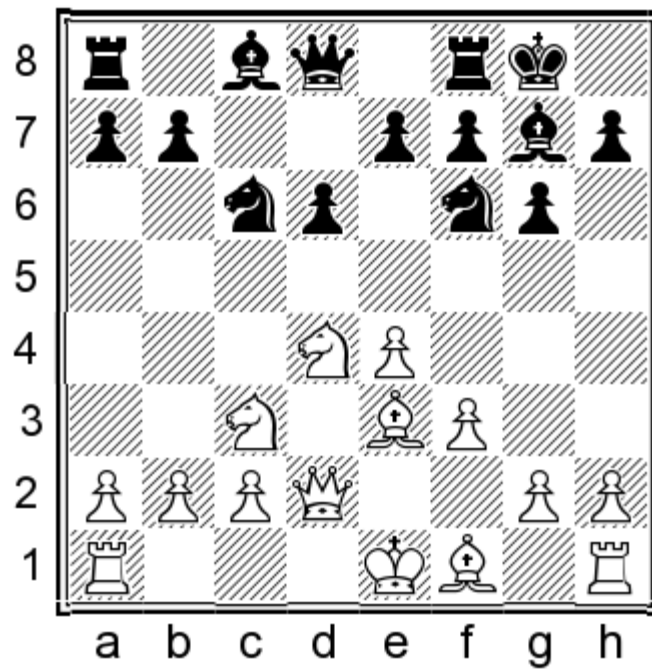
Now in S.B. Hansen – B. Larsen, Aars 1995, the most logical continuation would have been:



13...b4N 14.Nd5 Nxb3 15.Nxf6† Bxf6 16.Nxb3 a5³

The queenside pawns are rolling, while White's attack has not even started.

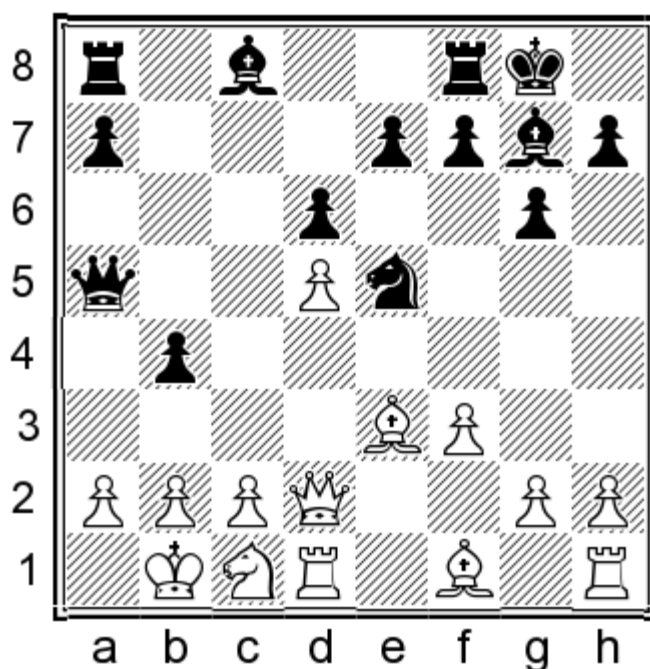
B3) 8.Qd2 Nc6



Here we will analyse the weird-looking B31) 9.Nb3 followed by sidelines after B32) 9.Bc4.

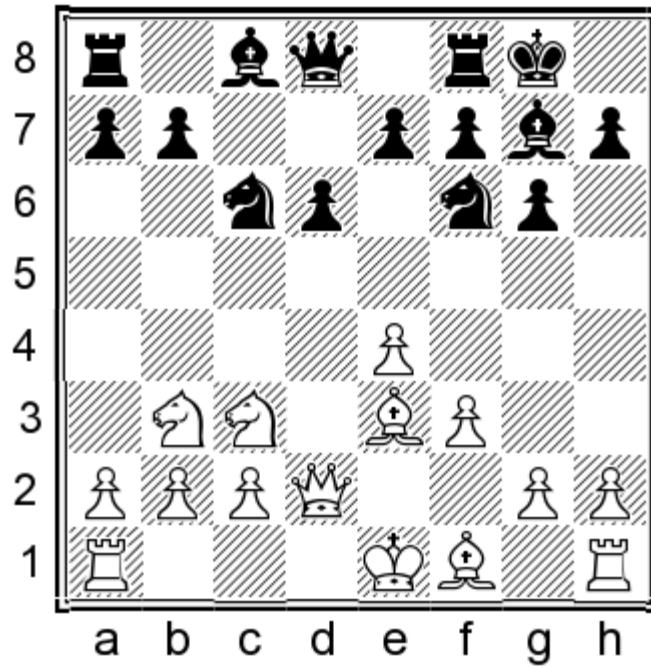
9.Nxc6?! does not make much sense. The only reason I can see for it is if White intends to continue 9...bxc6 10.Bh6, but the simple 10...Bxh6 11.Qxh6 Qa5³ is promising for Black.

9.Nde2 seems unnatural with the bishop still on f1, so it is hardly surprising that this move has been played overwhelmingly by computers rather than humans. 9...b5!? I like this approach, immediately exploiting White's strange last, although of course there are other good moves. 10.0-0-0 (10.Nxb5 d5 11.0-0-0 dxe4 12.Qxd8 Rxd8 13.Rxd8† Nxd8 is at least equal for Black) 10...Qa5 11.Kb1 b4 12.Nd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Ne5 14.Nc1



This position was reached in A. Vajda – F. Nemeth, Felix Spa 2007, and here 14...Qc7!N is strong. The queen makes way for the a-pawn and applies pressure along the c-file. 15.Bh6 Bxh6 16.Qxh6 Bf5 17.Bd3 Nxd3 18.Nxd3 Rfc8³

B31) 9.Nb3



This development pattern is more usual in the Classical lines examined in the second volume. In the present position White loses some time for his attack, and the knights can sometimes be hit by advancing queenside pawns.

9...Be6

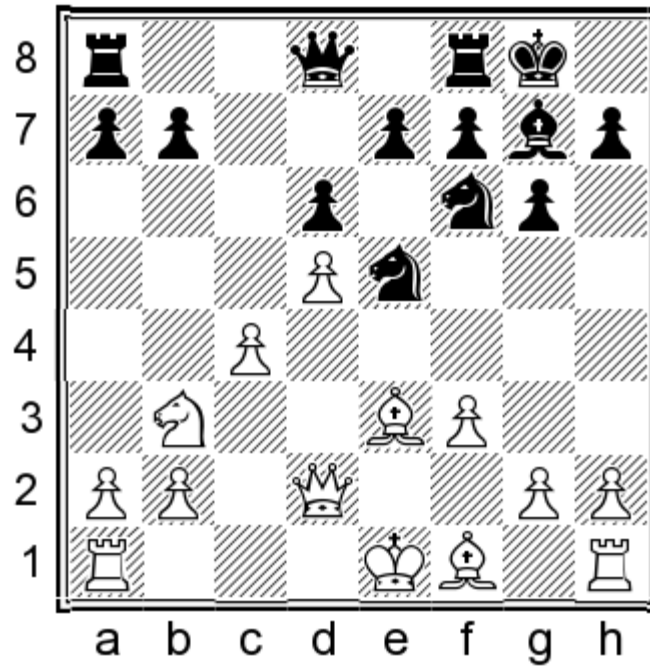
With the e6-square no longer under White's control, this makes the most sense to me. However, Black has a viable alternative in 9...a6, just as in the Classical.

10.0-0-0

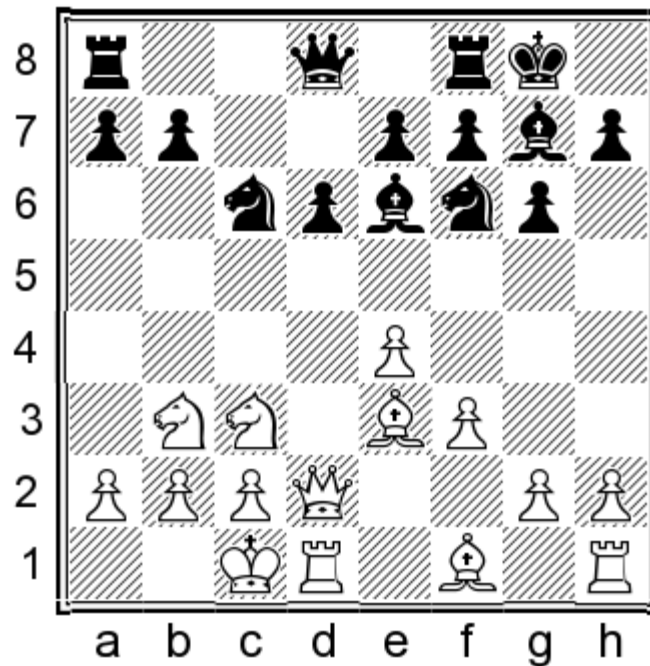
10.Bh6?! has been played often but leaves the dark squares too loose. 10...Bxh6 11.Qxh6 Qb6!N 12.0-0-0 a5µ

10.Be2 does not have much logic here, unless White has decided to switch back to kingside castling. Black can play any normal queenside move or 10...d5, which equalizes at once.

10.Nd5?! As a general rule, exchanging the knight on this square is only really useful for White when his attack is already close to breaking through. Here it just loses time. 10...Bxd5 11.exd5 Ne5 12.c4 (12.0-0-0?! proves to be too optimistic after 12...Qc7 13.Kb1 a5N) If White could catch up on development while keeping his structure intact then he might claim a positional advantage, but Black can spoil his plan:



12...Rc8 13.Rc1 Now in Nonnenmacher – Herrmann, Bad Pyrmont 1949, Black missed the opportunity to destroy White's structure with 13...b5!N 14.cxb5 Rxc1† 15.Nxc1 Qa8³ when Black regains the pawn with the more pleasant position.

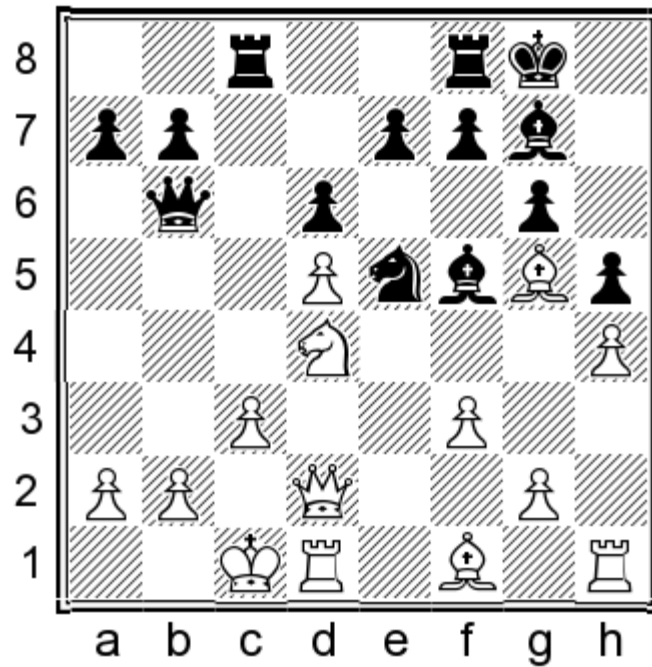


10...Ne5

We have a strange version of a 9.Bc4 Yugoslav Attack. Black should not rush to play ...Nc4, as then he would be two tempos behind (due to Bxc4 coming directly as opposed to Bc4-b3xc4). However, White is also at risk of losing two tempos if he gets tempted to return his knight to d4.

11.Bh6

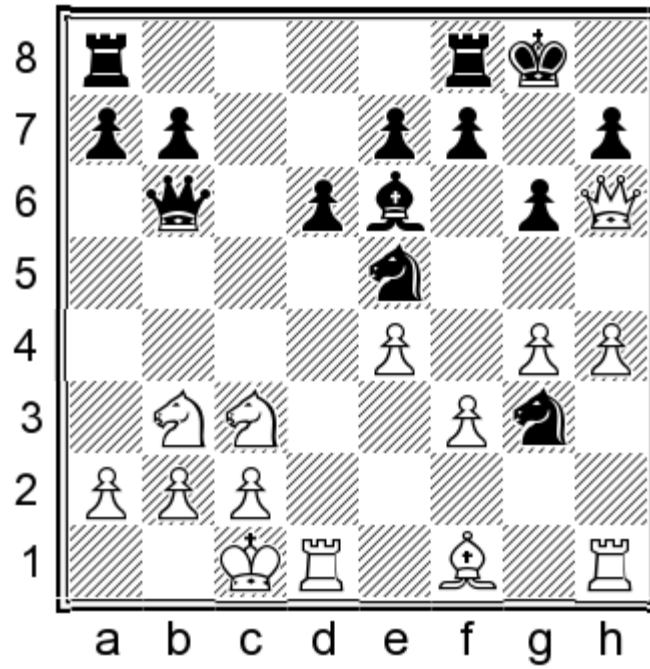
11.h4 h5 12.Bg5 Rc8 13.Nd5?! A mistake, but it was hard to see how White should continue. 13...Nxd5 14.exd5 Bf5 15.Nd4 Qb6 16.c3



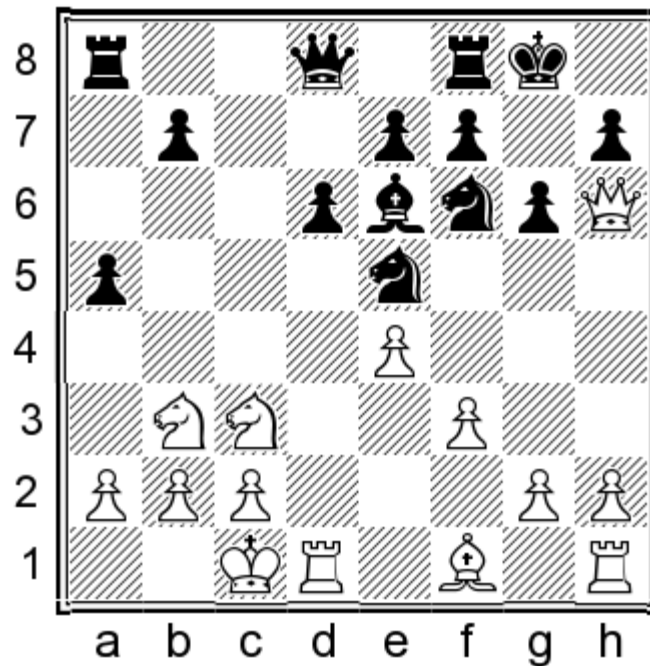
This position was reached in Smolak – Sypien, Rudnik 2000, and here Black missed 16...Rxc3†!N 17.Qxc3 Rc8 with an overwhelming advantage.

11...Bxh6 12.Qxh6 a5

12...Qb6N is a thematic move once the dark-squared bishops have been traded. A possible continuation is: 13.h4 Nh5!? Again utilizing the weaker dark squares. 14.g4 Ng3

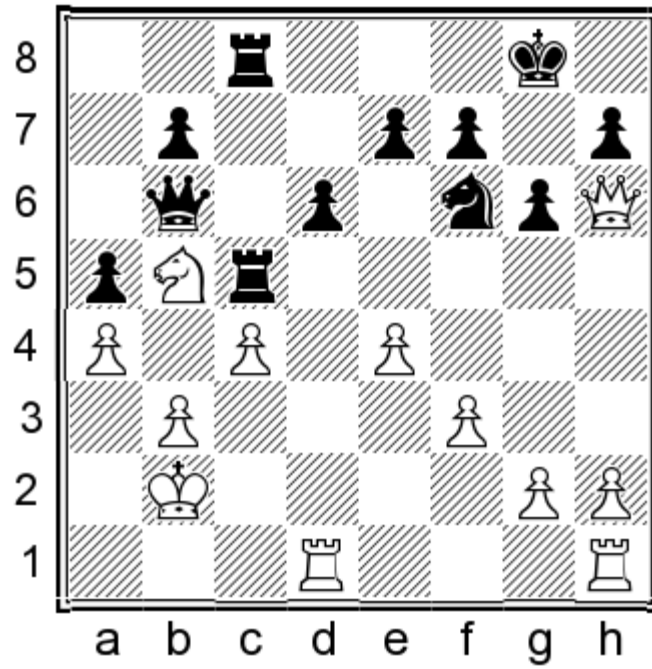


15.Rh2 (15.Rh3 Qf2! 16.Nd2 [16.h5? Nxf1 17.hxg6 Qe3+-] 16...f6³ White's attack gets nowhere.) 15...Nxf3 16.Rg2 Nxf1 17.Rxf1 Ne5 18.h5 f6³ With such a powerful knight on e5, Black's kingside should be fine, and the king can always run into the centre if necessary.



13.a4 Qb6 14.Nd4 Rfc8 15.Ndb5 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Bxc4 17.b3 Bxb5 18.Nxb5 Rc5 19.Kb2 Rac8 20.c4

This series of logical moves was played in Alonso – P.H. Nielsen, Cappelle la Grande 1998. The Danish GM failed to capitalize with:



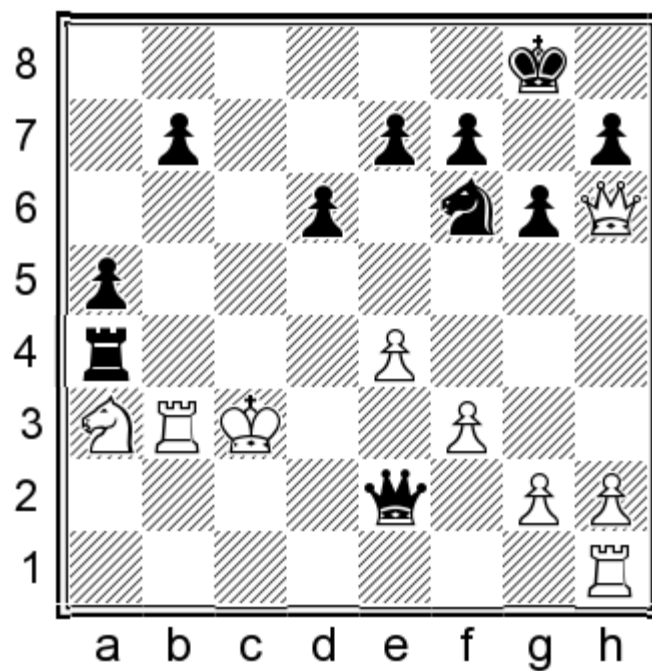
20...Rxc4! N 21.bxc4 Rxc4

Black exploits the exposed white king to recoup the material with interest, as the following line demonstrates.

22.Rd3

22.Ka2 Qc5!μ

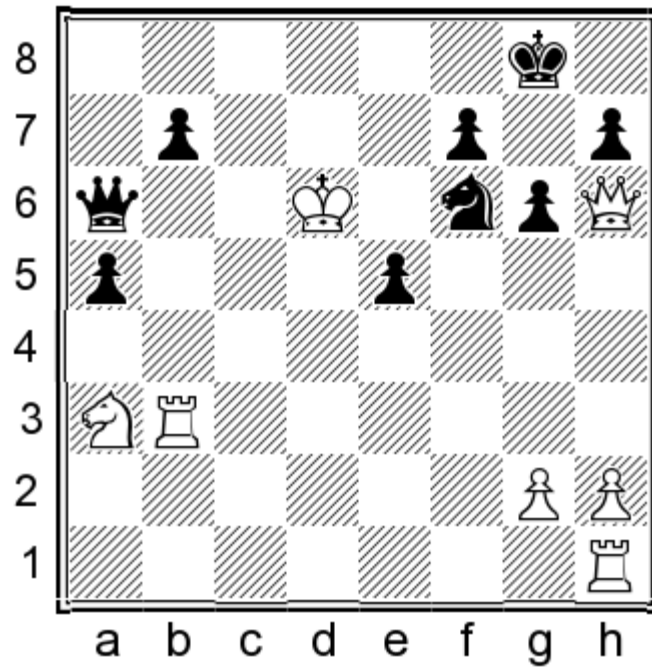
22...Rxa4 23.Rb3 Qf2† 24.Kc3 Qe2! 25.Na3



25...Rxe4! 26.fxe4 Nxe4†

White can only prevent mate by giving his queen.

27.Kd4 e5† 28.Kd5 Nf6† 29.Kxd6 Qa6†



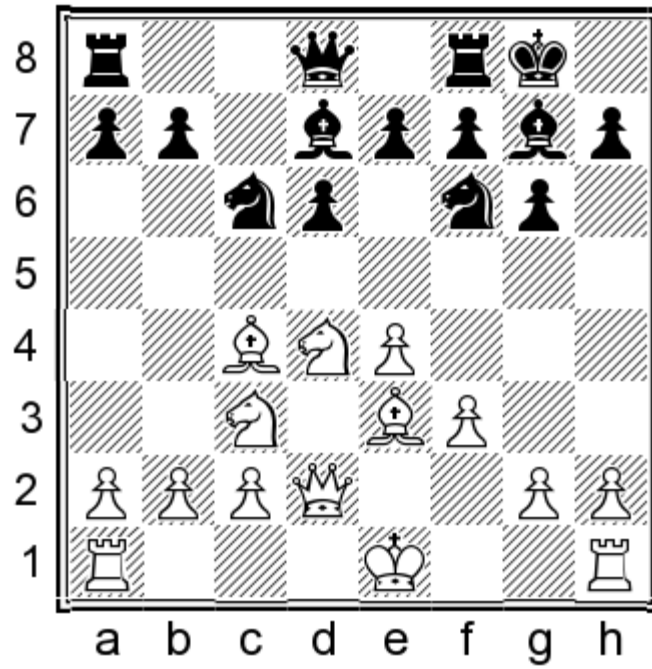
30.Kxe5

White must allow the fork, as 30.Kc7 Qc6† 31.Kb8 Nd7† 32.Ka7 Qa6 is mate.

30...Ng4† 31.Kd4 Nxh6

Black wins easily.

B32) 9.Bc4 Bd7

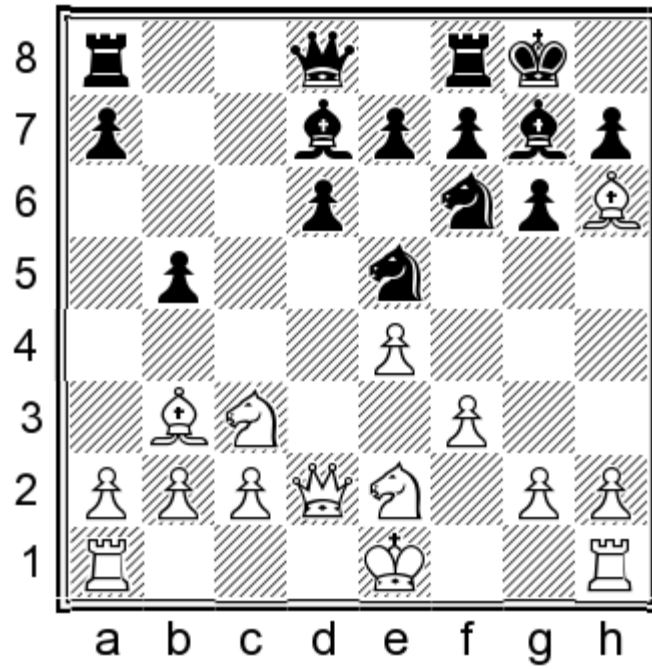


In the final branch of the chapter we will deal with any sidelines arising after this most popular tabiya. Two such options are B321) 10.g4 and B322) 10.Bb3.

10.0-0-0 was covered in the first eleven chapters.

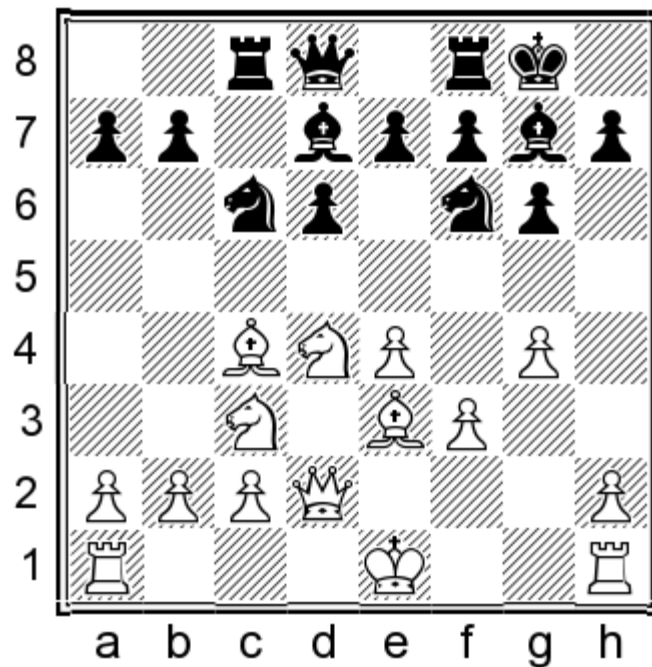
10.h4 was covered in Chapter 12.

10.Nde2 makes a bit more sense now that the light-squared bishop has been developed, but it still fails to put pressure on Black. 10...Ne5 (10...Na5!?) 11.Bb3 b5 12.Bh6?! Exchanging these bishops when White's king is still in the centre is nearly always a mistake.



12...b4 13.Nd5 Bxh6 14.Qxh6 Nxd5 15.Bxd5 Rc8 White is already in some trouble. In one game he tried 16.h4 Rxc2 17.h5, but after 17...g5! 18.Qxg5† Kh8 Black had a decisive advantage in Ziatdinov – Kudrin, Toronto 1998; his king is quite safe, while its white counterpart is vulnerable in the centre.

B321) 10.g4 Rc8



11.Be2

This retreat looks strange, but it was tested in a game between two of China's top GMs.

11.Bb3 is covered in variation B322 below.

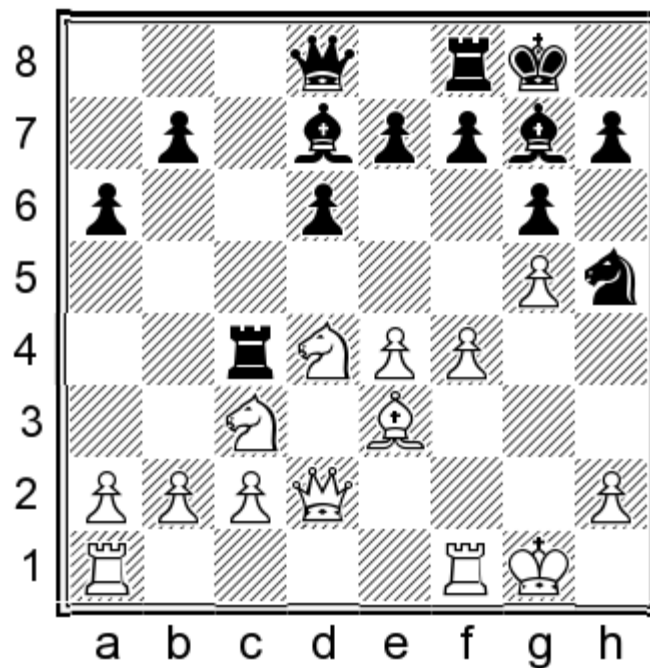
11...a6

11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 Qa5 eventually resulted in a well-contested draw in Yu Yangyi – Wei Yi, Danzhou 2013, but I would prefer to keep more tension in the position.

12.h4

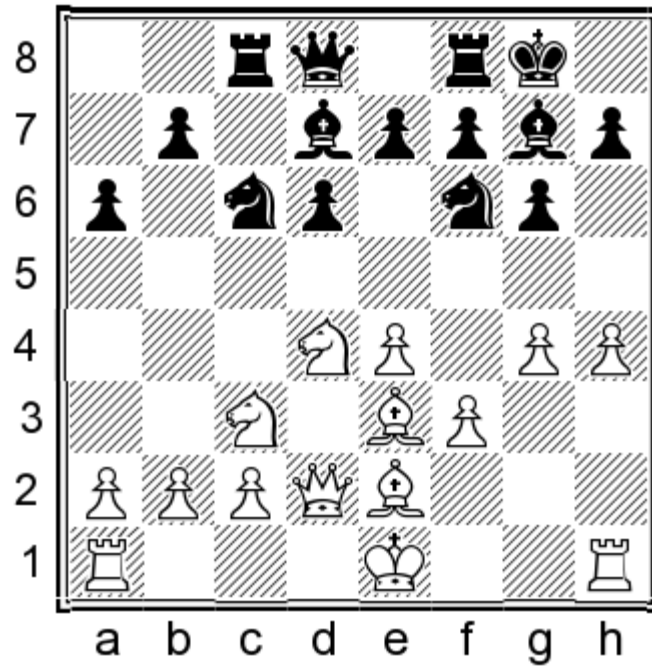
12.0-0-0 b5 13.Kb1 was examined in variation A of Chapter 11, via the move order 11.Be2 a6 12.Kb1 b5 13.g4.

12.0-0 is an odd move when White has already played the committal 10.g4. However, in a correspondence game perhaps White felt there was no danger. 12...Ne5 13.g5 Nh5 14.f4 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4



16.f5 Be5 17.Rad1 e6!³ Black was already taking control in T. Hansen – Myakutin, email 2005.

In Sanchez Comesana – Corrales Jimenez, Havana 2011, Black went for the obvious 12...b5, but I like the following idea even more.

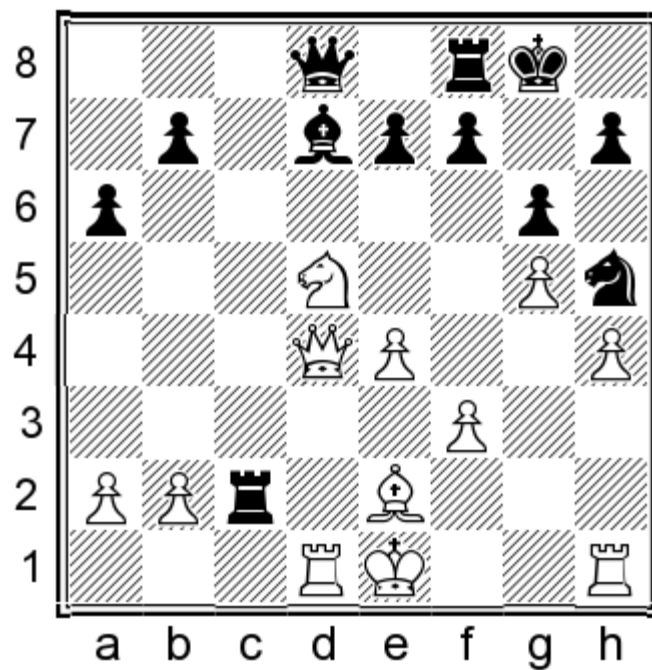


12...d5!N

This break is not essential, but it is tempting when White has been wasting so much time. I will present a few sample lines.

13.exd5

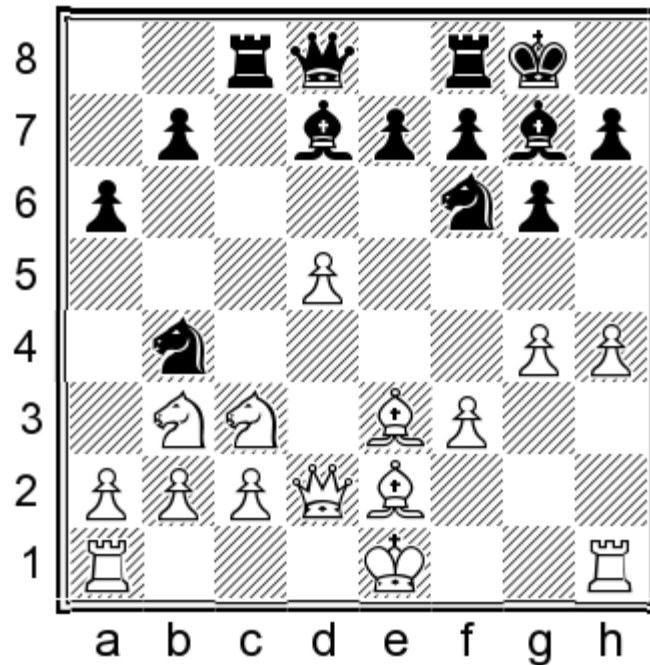
13.g5 Nh5 14.Nxd5 Nxd4 (14...Ng3!? 15.Rh2 Nxe2 16.Rxe2 Ne5 also gives Black good compensation) 15.Bxd4 Bxd4 16.Qxd4 Rxc2 17.Rd1



17...e5! 18.Qxe5 Re8 19.Qd4 Qb8 With White's king stuck in the middle, Black has a strong initiative and full compensation for the pawn.

13.0-0-0 dxe4 14.g5 Nh5 15.fxe4 Ng3 16.Rhg1 Bxd4 (16...Qc7!?) 17.Bxd4 Nxd4 18.Rxg3 (18.Qxd4? Rxc3!) 18...e5
The position is balanced.

13...Nb4 14.Nb3



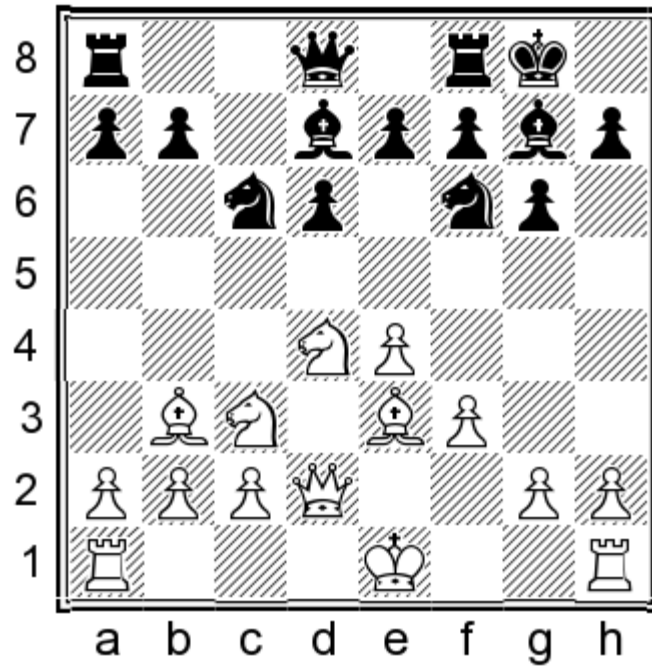
14...Bxg4! 15.fxg4 Rxc3!

The combination is pretty, but it is hardly surprising that such ideas are lurking in a position where White has hurled his pawns forward while neglecting to castle.

16.Qxc3 Nfxd5 17.Qd2 Nxe3 18.Qxd8 Nbxc2† 19.Kf2 Rxd8³

White has escaped to an endgame, but Black still has an initiative at no material cost.

B322) 10.Bb3



Just like the earlier variation B22, the present position normally arises via an Accelerated Dragon move order where White plays an early Bc4-b3 out of necessity.

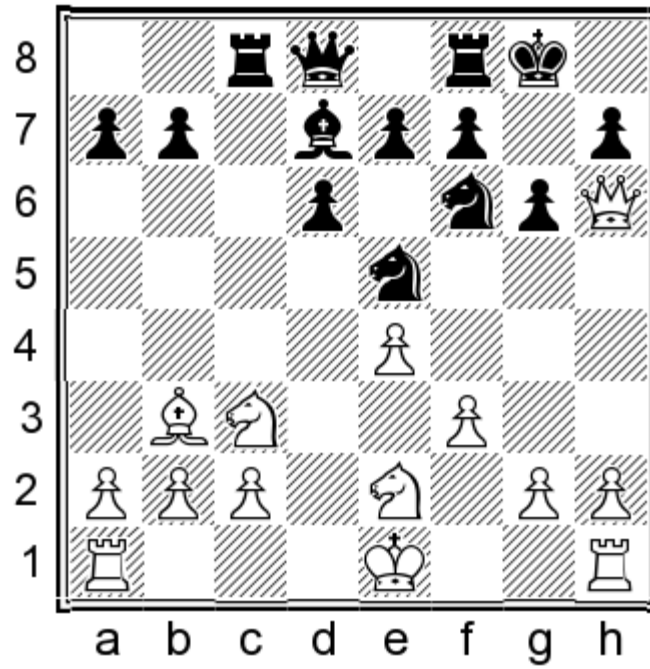
10...Rc8

White's move order gives us the extra possibility of 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5, but I am happy to stick to our normal formula.

11.g4

11.h4 and 11.0-0-0 have been covered earlier in the book, while 11.0-0 is a harmless sideline covered briefly on page 269 of the second volume. Apart from those moves I considered two other sidelines:

11.Nde2 This is a better time to drop back the knight than on move 10, as at least now our rook is committed to c8. Nevertheless, Black is still comfortable. 11...Ne5 12.Bh6 Bxh6 13.Qxh6 occurred in Malisauskas – Raudas, Klaipeda 1990, and here I propose:

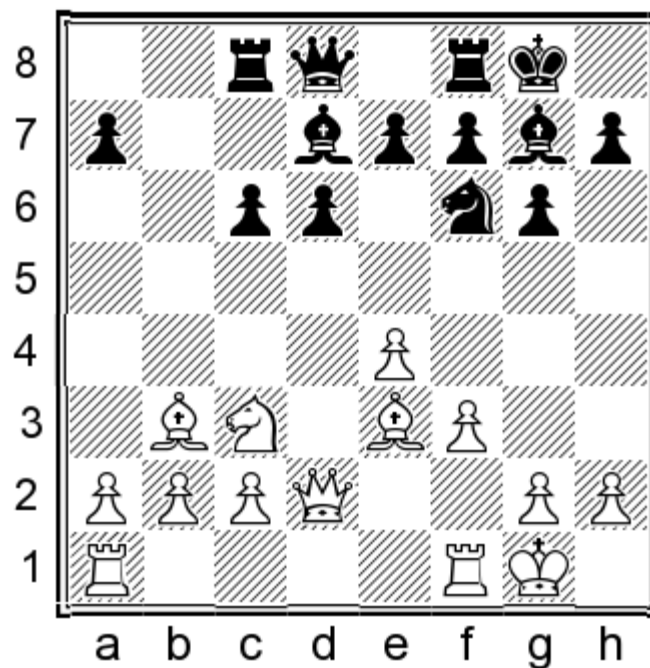


13...b5!N Black has a promising position and White's kingside attack isn't getting anywhere, for instance: 14.h4 b4 15.Nd5 Nxd5 16.exd5 (16.Bxd5 Rxc2 17.h5 g5! is a motif we have seen previously) 16...f6!µ

11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.0-0

12.h4 h5 takes us back to variation B3 of Chapter 12, and 12...c5!? can also be considered.

12.Bh6 Bxh6 13.Qxh6 was seen in Eynard – Cosulich, Recoaro Terme 1967. Here I recommend 13...Qb6N followed by ...c5 – the normal approach once the dark-squared bishops are exchanged.



In Chapter 12 we encountered a similar position with h2-h4 and ...h5 inserted. It seems strange, but the present version may actually be a slight improvement for Black, as the g6-pawn is securely defended.

12...c5

12...Ne8!?N would follow my suggestion in the analogous position.

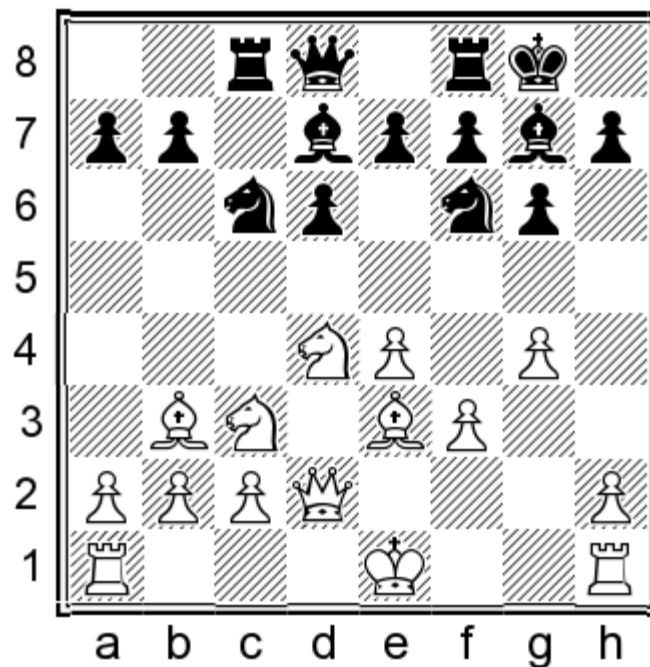
13.Bc4 Be6!

An important difference that comes from having the pawn on h7. Now the g6-pawn will be comfortably defended after the following exchange.

14.Bxe6 fxe6 15.Rab1 Qa5 16.Qe2 Nd7=

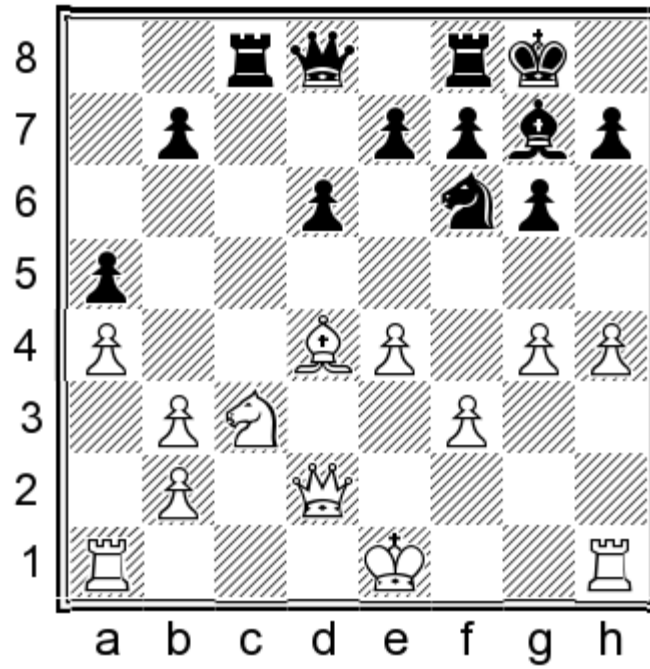
Black was fine in robotman – fischerfanatic, engine game 2012.

After the text move, Black used a plan that I suggested earlier in a position where White had combined Bc4-b3 with g2-g4.



11...a5 12.a4 Nxd4 13.Bxd4 Be6! 14.h4 Bxb3 15.cxb3

At this point I would like to deviate from Meijers – Rogozenco, Dieren 2001.



15...Qd7N

15...h5!?N is also interesting. One possible continuation is 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.gxh5 Qb6÷ with a messy position.

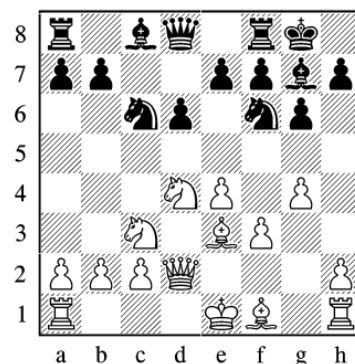
16.h5 Qe6! 17.Bxf6 Qxf6 18.Ke2 Qe5³

Conclusion

Most of the lines examined in this chapter are extremely rare for a good reason. White has many ways to reach an equal position but most are far easier for Black to play, and thematic Dragon ideas usually work well. Normally an early Bc4-b3 is just a move order idea by White to avoid certain lines (for example the Chinese Dragon), but with our repertoire we have no such issues.

Chapter 14

Yugoslav Attack



9.g4 without 10.♘xe6

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6
6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♙d2 ♘c6 9.g4

9...♙e6

A) 10.g5?!

B) 10.h4 d5!

B1) 11.h5?!

B2) 11.0-0-0

B3) 11.e5!?

B4) 11.g5

C) 10.0-0-0 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Qa5

C1) 12.g5

C2) 12.h4

C3) 12.Kb1 Rfc8 13.h4?! Rxc3! 14.Qxc3 Qxa2† 15.Kc1

C31) 15...Bxg4

C32) 15...Qa1†

C4) 12.a3 Rab8

C41) 13.h4 b5

C411) 14.h5?! b4

C4111) 15.hxg6!?

C4112) 15.Nd5

C412) 14.Nd5

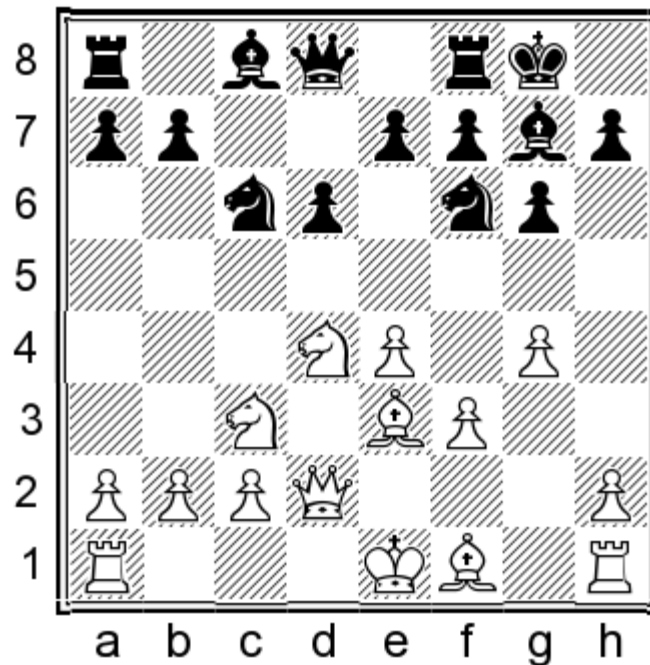
C42) 13.Kb1 Rfc8

C421) 14.g5

C422) 14.h4

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.g4

This line has an interesting history. Initially it was played as a positional approach, attempting to create a bind. That strategy was subsequently defused by Black, but more recently the interest has switched to White's capturing on e6 (after Black's next move) and initiating a double-edged tactical fight.



9...Be6

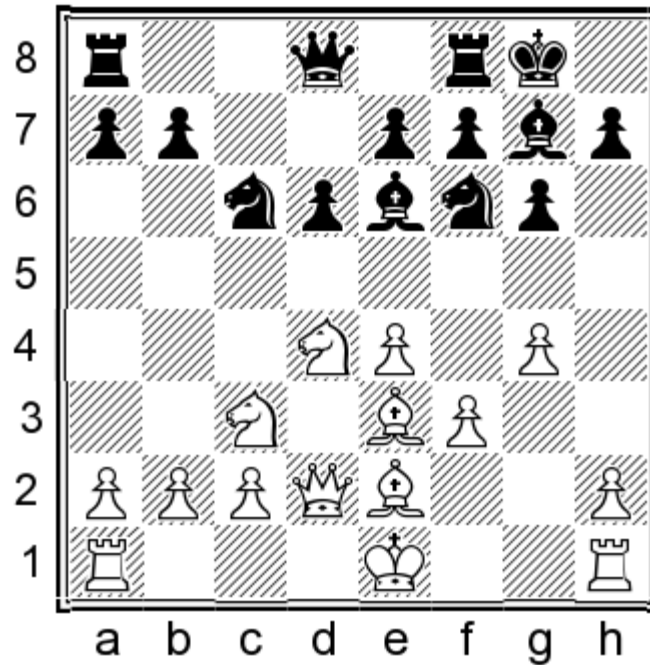
Black can avoid the Nxe6 plan by inserting 9...Nxd4 10.Bxd4 and only then playing 10...Be6. Then 11.0-0-0 would transpose into variation C below but 11.h4! is more dangerous, as Black's counterplay isn't so easy with White's king still in the centre. Alternatively, 11.Nd5 was Karpov's choice for a small edge.

This chapter will cover A) 10.g5?!, B) 10.h4 and C) 10.0-0-0.

10.Nxe6 is covered in the next chapter.

10.Be2

Neither side can afford to waste a tempo in the Yugoslav Attack, and this move does not feel at all critical. I think we should counter it with the typical central break:



10...d5!?N

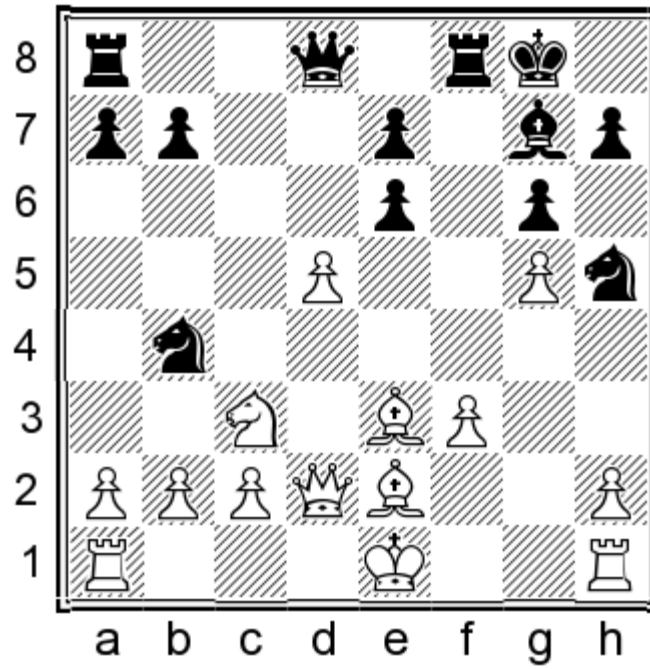
Exploiting White's leaving his king in the centre. I like Black's chances, for example:

11.g5

11.exd5 Nxd4 (11...Bxd5 is also fine) 12.Bxd4 Nxd5 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.0-0-0 Nf6 15.Bd3 Qa5 16.h4 Nd5 17.Nxd5 Qxd2† 18.Rxd2 Bxd5=

11...Nh5 12.Nxe6 fxe6 13.exd5 Nb4!?

13...Bxc3 14.Qxc3 exd5 15.0-0-0 Nf4= also looks acceptable.



14.Rd1

14.0-0-0? Qa5! is too dangerous.

14.dxe6?! Qa5 also looks risky; there is no sanctuary for White's king.

14...Bxc3

14...Qa5!? is another idea.

15.Qxc3 Nxd5 16.Qe5 Qd6 17.Qxd6 exd6=

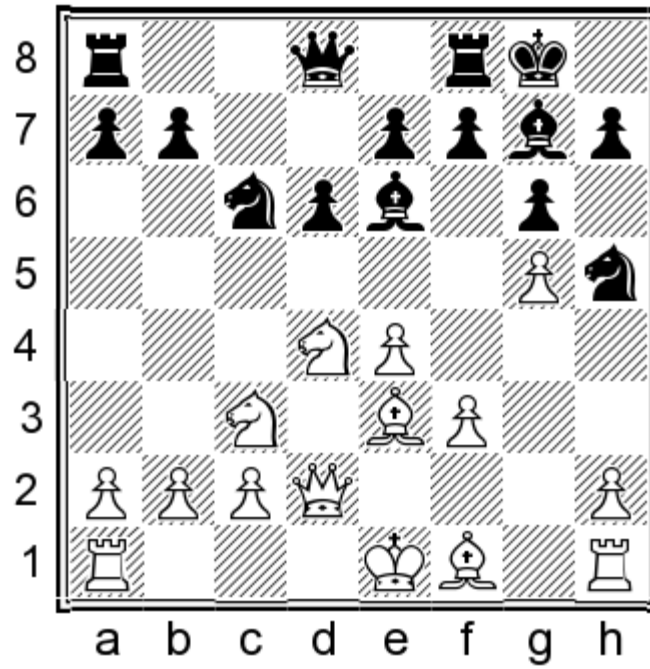
White has the bishop pair, but his kingside structure is compromised and Black has a strong outpost on f4. The chances are balanced.

A) 10.g5?!

This is always a committal decision. White forces the knight to move but blocks the c1-h6 diagonal, which severely limits his kingside possibilities. White also has a long-term problem with his kingside structure, as the f4-square may become a fantastic outpost after an exchange of bishops, and White's kingside pawns might also become vulnerable.

10...Nh5

The database indicates that Black has scored 9/9 from this position!



11.Be2

This has been tried a couple of times, but we can exploit White's weak dark squares.

11.0-0-0 Qa5 12.Kb1 Nxd4 13.Bxd4 Bxd4 14.Qxd4 Qxg5μ leaves Black a clear pawn up.

11.Nd5 occurred in Moncayo Romero – N. Kosintseva, Athens 2001, and now 11...Bxd4!N 12.Bxd4 Bxd5 13.exd5 Nxd4 14.Qxd4 Qa5† 15.c3 e5!μ illustrates White's potential problems: her dark squares are terribly weak.

11.Nxe6

This move tends not to combine well with g4-g5, as White struggles to deal with the open f-file.

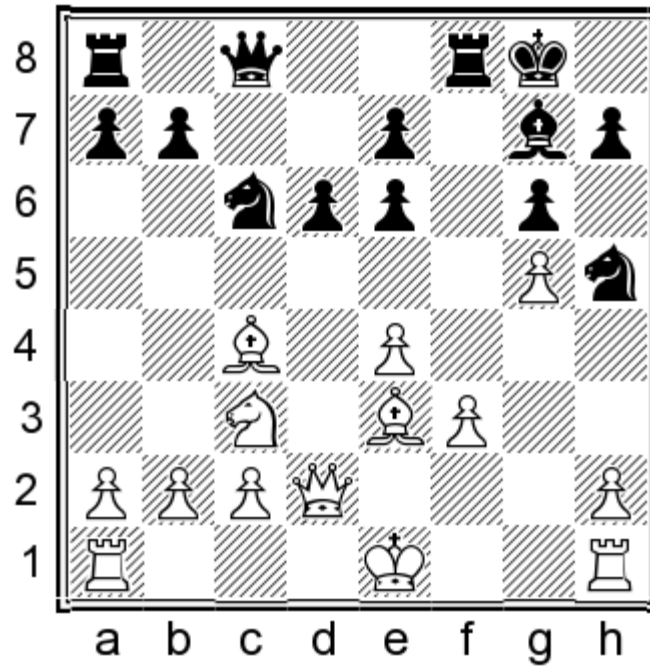
11...fxe6 12.Bc4

12.Bh3 was seen in Kofidis – Gavrilidis, Peristeri 2010, and now 12...Qd7N is simplest. Black will bring the c6-knight to c4 via either e5 or a5, with an excellent position.

After the text move Black can improve on Eu. Levin – Rust, Philadelphia 2000.

12...Qc8!N

White is under pressure across the board, for instance:



13.0-0-0 Na5

13...Rxf3 is also possible, but there is no need to allow White any counterplay with 14.Be2.

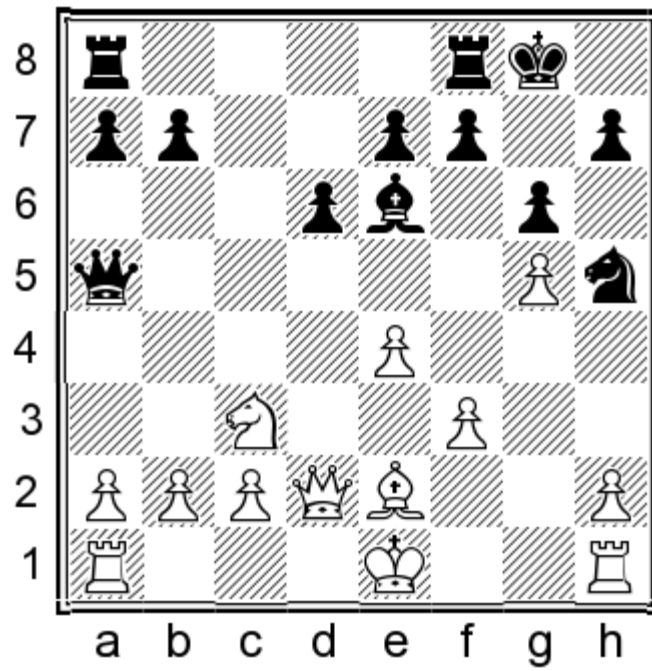
14.Be2 Nc4 15.Bxc4

15.Qd3 Nxe3 16.Qxe3 Bxc3 17.Qxc3 Qxc3 18.bxc3 Nf4 is disgusting for White.

15...Qxc4 16.Rhf1 Rac8

11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 Bxd4 13.Qxd4 Qa5 14.Qd2

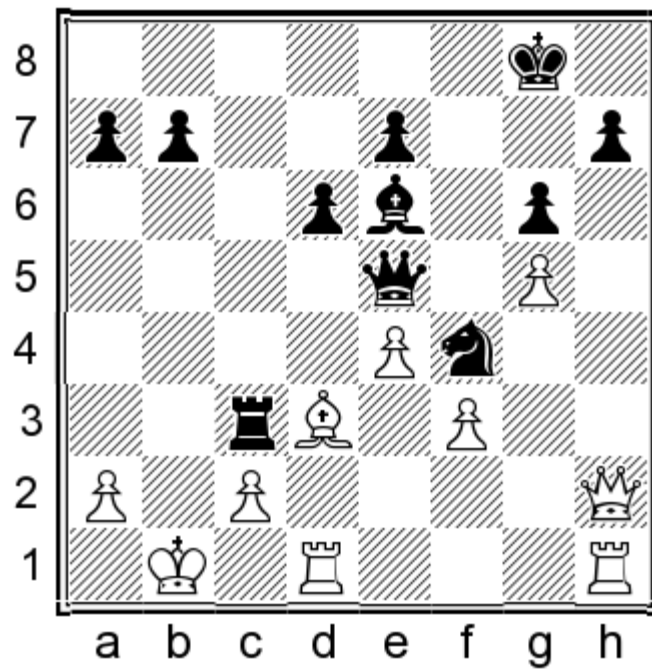
Another one-sided game continued: 14.h4 Rac8 15.a3 Nf4 16.Rh2 Rc7 17.0-0-0 Rfc8 18.Bd3 18...Rxc3! 19.bxc3 Rxc3 20.Qb4 Qe5 White did not last long in Knox – Mestel, Clacton-on-Sea 1974.



14...Qe5!

A beautiful square for the black queen, supporting the knight's arrival on f4.

15.0-0-0 Rac8 16.Kb1 Rc5 17.h4 Nf4 18.Bd3 Rfc8 19.h5 Rxc3 20.bxc3 Rxc3 21.hxg6 fxg6 22.Qh2



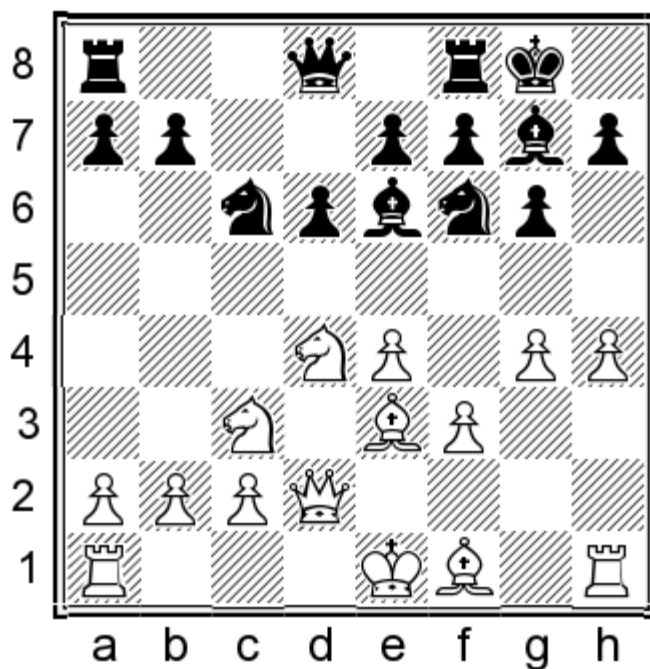
22...h5! 23.gxh6 Kh7

Black's attack is unstoppable.

24.Qh4 g5 25.Qe1 Nxd3 26.Rxd3 Qb5† 27.Kc1 Qxd3

0–1 Trapl – Barczay, Decin 1978.

B) 10.h4



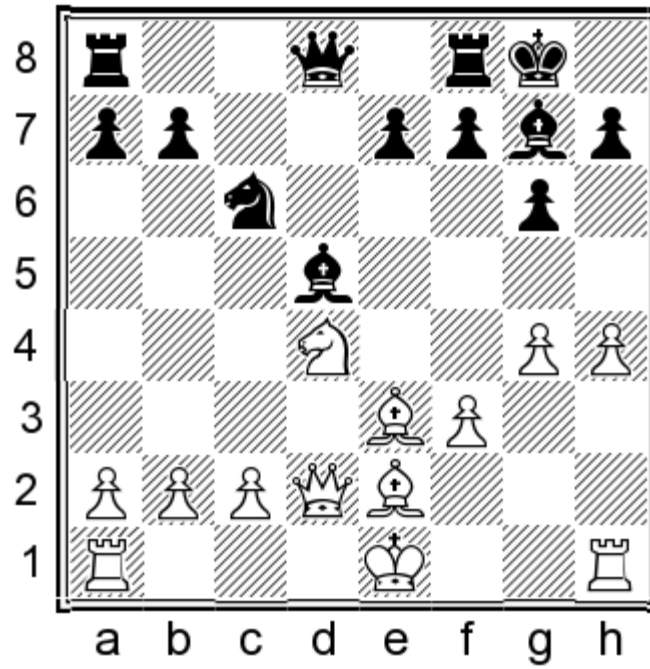
This optimistic move allows us our thematic Dragon break.

10...d5!

White has tried several responses, the main ones being B1) 11.h5?!, B2) 11.0-0-0, B3) 11.e5!? and B4) 11.g5.

11.Nxc6?! bxc6 12.g5 fails to 12...Nxe4! 13.fxe4 d4 14.Bxd4 Bxd4 15.0-0-0 Be5µ and Black's bishops completely dominated in Duca – Jianu, Eforie Nord 2009.

11.exd5 is another odd mix of plans. 11...Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Bxd5 13.Be2 Czarnota – Smokina, Chisinau 2005. Here Black missed a great chance with:



13...Qc7!N 14.0-0-0 Rfd8 Black is already winning as there are too many threats. For example, 15.h5 loses to both 15...Bxa2 and 15...Nxd4 16.Bxd4 Bxd4 17.Qxd4 Bxf3.

11.Nxe6?!

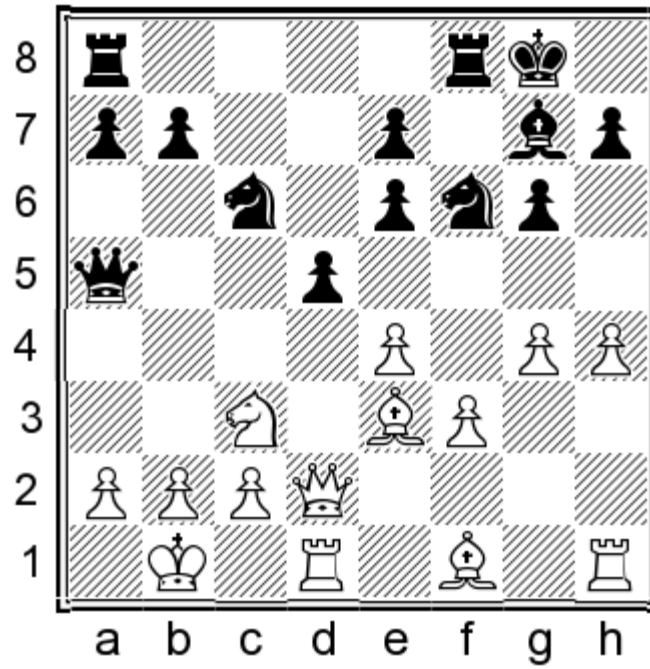
This is a lot worse than on the previous move. White's h2-h4 is ineffectual as he is unable to hold his centre.

11...fxe6 12.0-0-0 Qa5!

12...d4 13.Bxd4 Nxd4 14.Qxd4 Qxd4 15.Rxd4 Nxg4 liquidates to an endgame where Black is at least equal, but the attack on the queenside is even more promising.

13.Kb1

After 13.exd5 Nxd5! 14.Nxd5 Qxa2 Black already had a decisive attack in Ramalho – Guimaraes, Lisbon 1999.



13...d4!

Now this move is even stronger than on the previous turn.

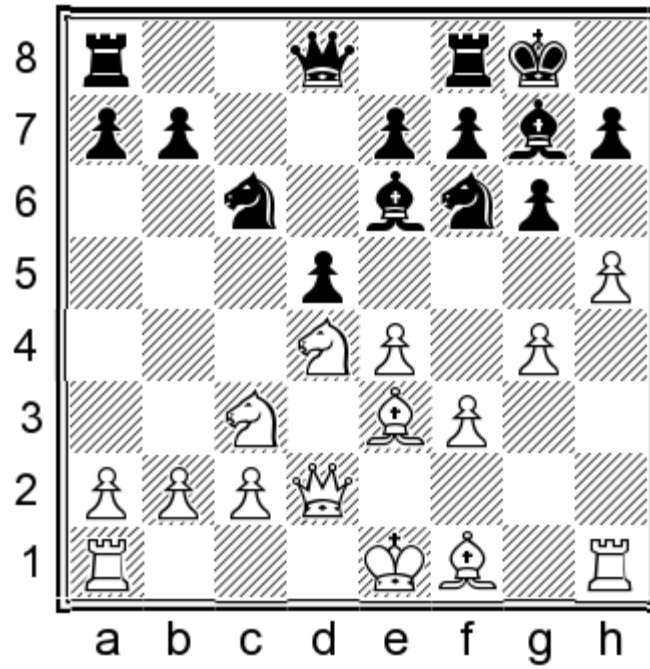
14.Bxd4

In Infante – Vera Insfran, Bogota 2003, Black should have played:

14...Rad8!N

Winning material.

B1) 11.h5?!



This is too optimistic; with the centre about to be opened up, White's flank attack is not going to work.

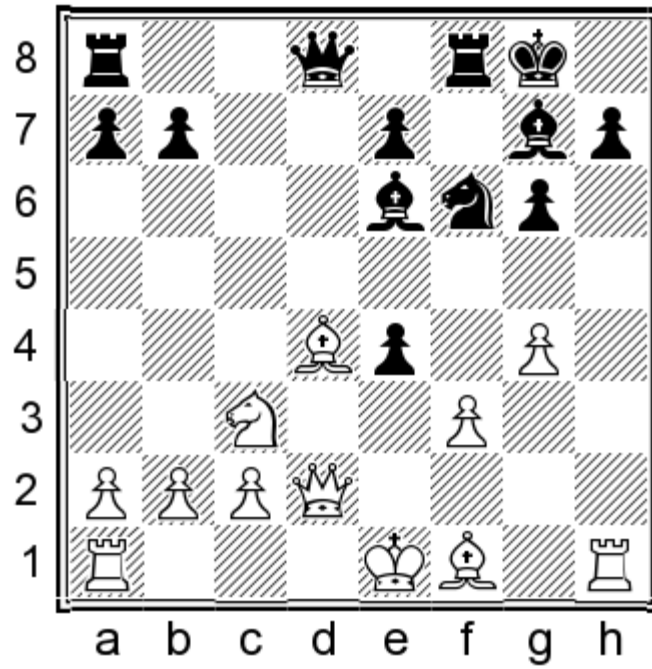
11...Nxd4

The immediate 11...dxe4N is also good.

12.Bxd4 dxe4 13.h6

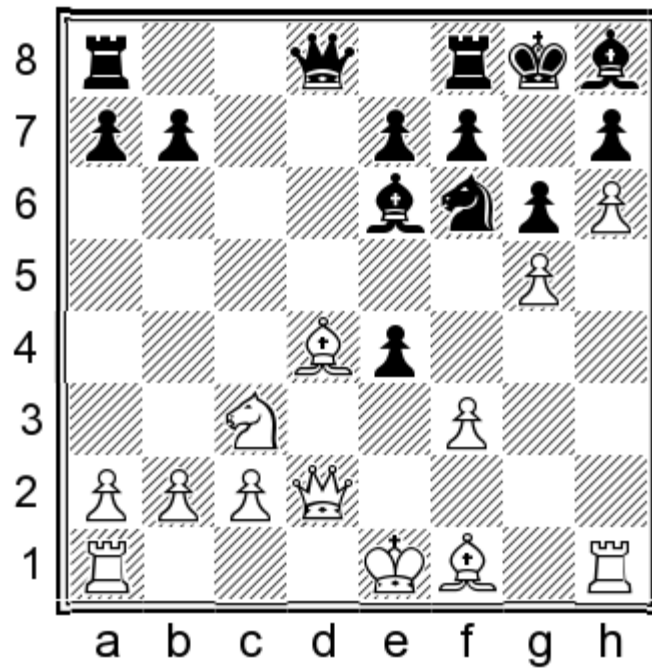
13.0-0-0 transposes to the note on 13.h5?! in variation B2.

13.hxg6 fxg6! Other things being equal, it is generally safer to keep the h-pawn as a protector of Black's king. In the present position it is definitely the better option, as the open f-file is important while the light-squared bishop keeps the a2-g8 diagonal secure. A good example continued:



14.0-0-0 exf3 15.Qh2 Qd6 16.Be5 Qc5 17.Bxf6 Rxf6 18.Kb1 h6 White's attack had completely stalled and Black was winning in Natri – Stisis, Kallithea 2002.

13...Bh8 14.g5



14...e3!

A useful finesse, deflecting White's bishop.

15.Bxe3

15.Qxe3? is refuted by 15...Ng4!.

15...Nd5 16.Bd4 Nxc3 17.Bxh8

17.Bxc3 was seen in Lebedev – Le Bled, email 2002, and now 17...Qxd2† 18.Kxd2 Bxc3† 19.Kxc3 Rac8† 20.Kd2 Bd5 21.Rh3 f6³ reaches a promising endgame for Black, as White's kingside pawns are all weak.

17...Qxd2†

17...Kxh8!? is playable, but Black does not need to look for an improvement.

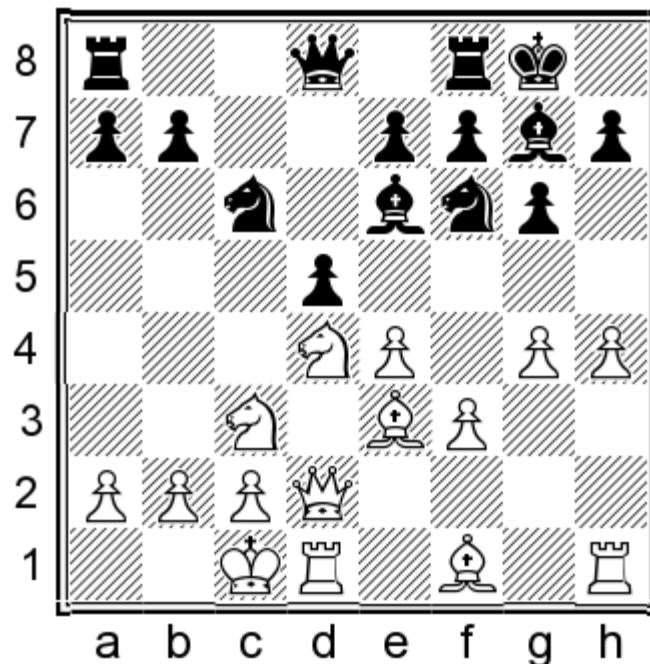
18.Kxd2 Nxa2 19.Bd4 Rfd8 20.c3 Nb4 21.Bb5 Bf5 22.Ra4

This position was agreed drawn in Van der Wiel – Miles, Utrecht 1986, but the English GM could have played on.

22...Nc2

Black has an extra pawn and good winning chances.

B2) 11.0-0-0



This can be dealt with in the same way as the previous line.

11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 dxe4 13.g5

White needs to come to terms with the fact that his attack is almost always slower than Black's in these lines. Therefore it makes sense for him to try and exchange pieces.

13.Qe3 is a more aggressive approach, but keeping the queens on the board is risky. 13...Qa5 14.g5 Nh5 15.Bxg7 Nxg7 16.Qxe4 Nf5³ Black's knight holds his kingside together, Giurgiu – Simmelink, email 2006.

13.h5?!

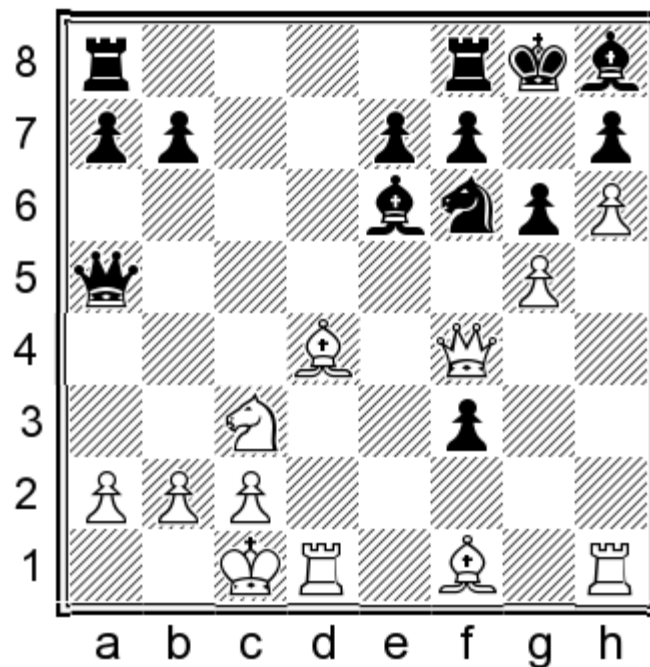
This is similar to 11.h5?! and, likewise, far too optimistic.

13...exf3 14.Qf4

14.hxg6 fxg6 in an exact transposition to 13.hxg6 fxg6 14.0-0-0 exf3 in the notes to variation B1 above.

14...Qa5 15.h6 Bh8 16.g5

Now in Motylev – Klimentov, Briansk 1995, Black's strongest continuation would have been:



16...Nh5!N

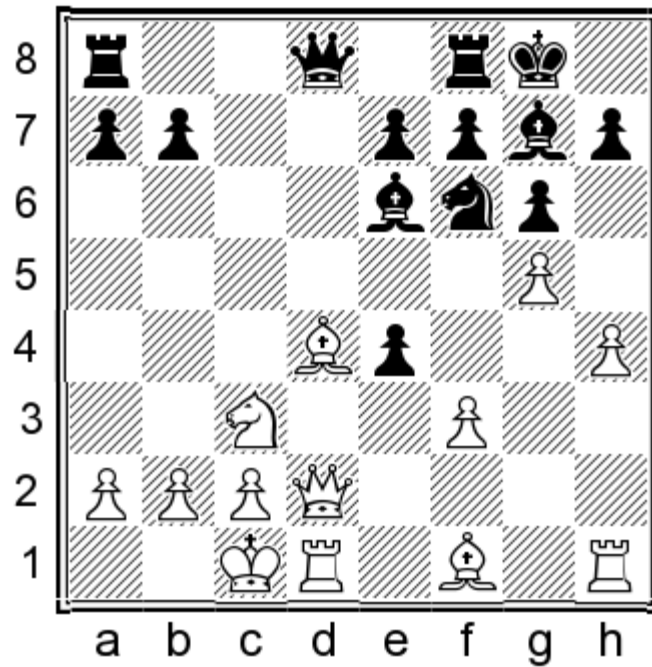
Probably rejected because of the exchange sacrifice, but White cannot break through.

17.Rxh5

White has no choice, as 17.Qxf3 Bxd4 18.Rxd4 Qxg5† is easy for Black.

17...gxh5 18.Bxh8 Kxh8 19.Bb5 Qb6!

Black takes control of d4 and, more importantly, defends the bishop, thus enabling himself to close the long diagonal with ...f6 next. Black should be able to convert his material advantage.

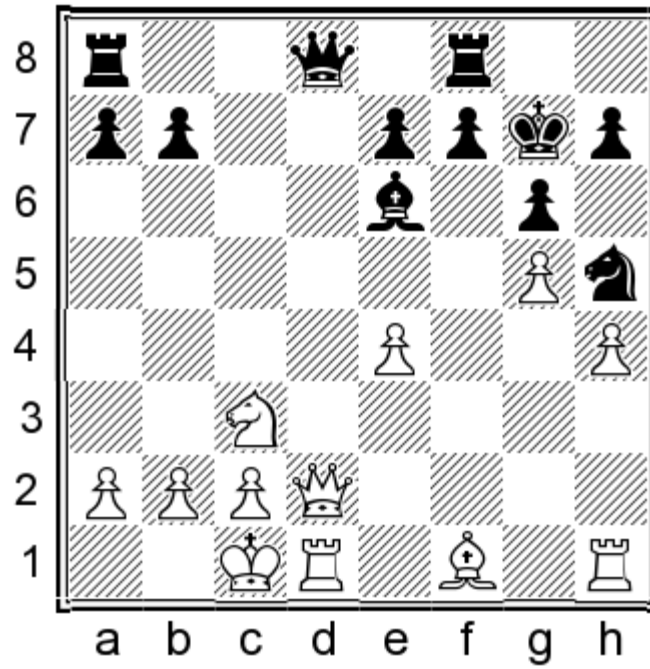


13...Nh5 14.Bxg7

14.fxe4 is similar. 14...Bxd4 15.Qxd4 Qxd4 (avoiding the queen exchange with 15...Qc7!? is also completely playable, Grabner – Gerhards, email 2008) 16.Rxd4 Rfd8 17.Ra4 Ng3 In this equal position a draw was agreed in Pascual Perez – Gonzaga Grego, email 2008.

14...Kxg7 15.fxe4

15.Nxe4 Rc8³



15...Qxd2+

This leads to a harmless endgame but, here too, Black can also keep the queens on with 15...Qa5!? as in Kupreichik – Can, Serpukhov 2009.

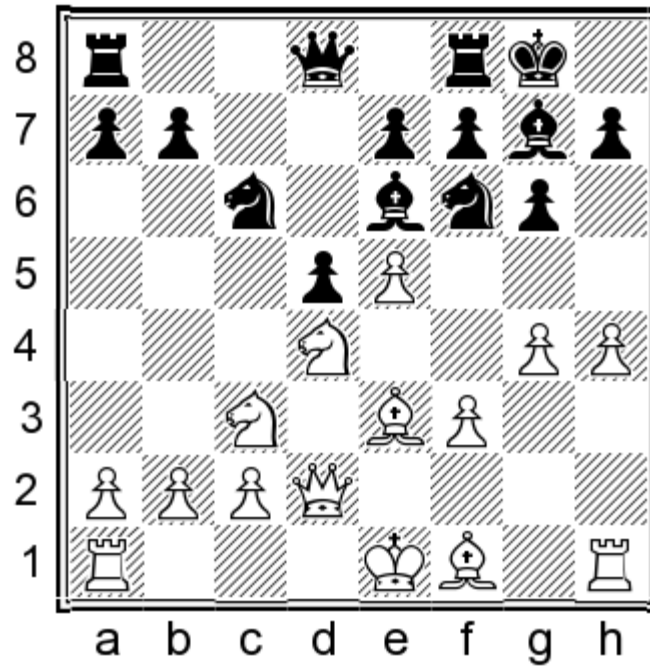
16.Rxd2 Ng3

16...f6!?N also looks tempting; I would definitely prefer to be Black, as White's kingside looks vulnerable.

17.Rg1 Nxf1 18.Rxf1 Rad8=

Romizin – Zakharov, email 2006.

B3) 11.e5!?



This interesting sacrifice is perhaps White's most challenging continuation.

11...Nxe5

Grabbing the pawn seems critical, although Black has a fully playable alternative:

11...Nd7

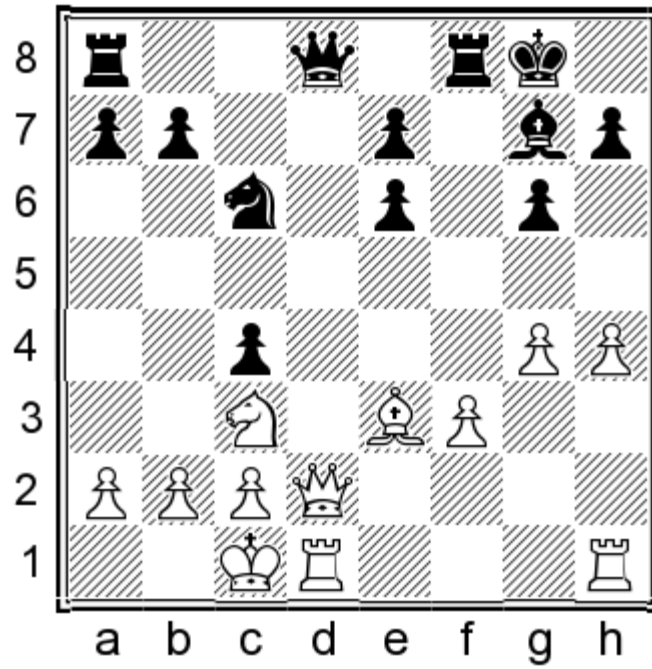
This is the safer, less complicated option.

12.0-0-0

12.f4?! Bxg4 13.Be2 Bxe2 14.Qxe2 h5 15.0-0-0 e6³ White did not have a lot to show for the sacrificed pawn in Vera Ruiz – Sgherri, email 2011.

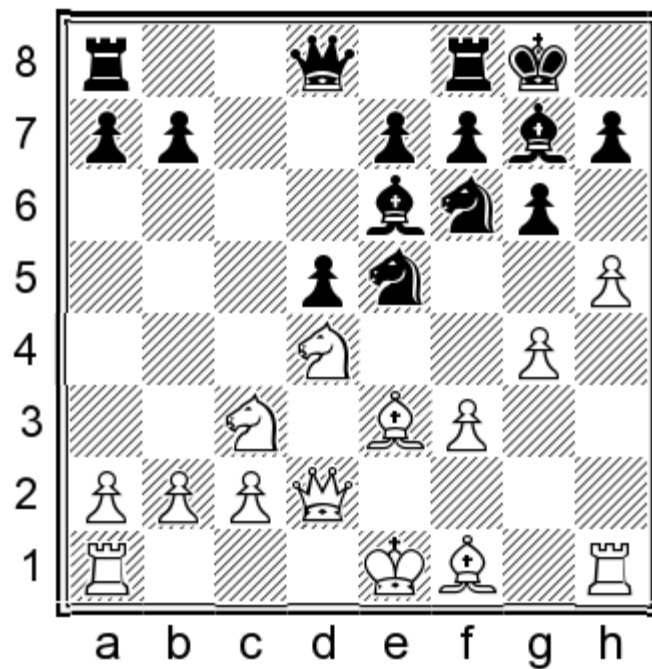
12.Nxe6N 12...fxe6 13.f4 would be great for White if he had time to consolidate, so it's important that we have 13...Ndxe5! 14.fxe5 d4 15.0-0-0 Bxe5 when Black is not worse.

12...Ndxe5 13.Be2 Nc4 14.Nxe6 fxe6 15.Bxc4 dxc4



16.Qe2 Qa5 17.Qxc4 Bxc3 18.bxc3 Qe5 19.Rhe1 Rxf3 20.Bd4 Qd5 21.Qe2 Raf8 22.Kb2 Na5 23.Qxe6† Qxe6 24.Rxe6
 Black had slightly the better of the endgame in Chupin – Berza, email 2004.

12.h5



12...Nxf3†!

This piece sacrifice to open the centre is an important detail. Since White has not castled, simply attacking on the queenside will not produce results in time.

13.Nxf3 Bxg4 14.Bg2

14.h6!?N

This move retains the h-pawn, but Black still has decent chances after:

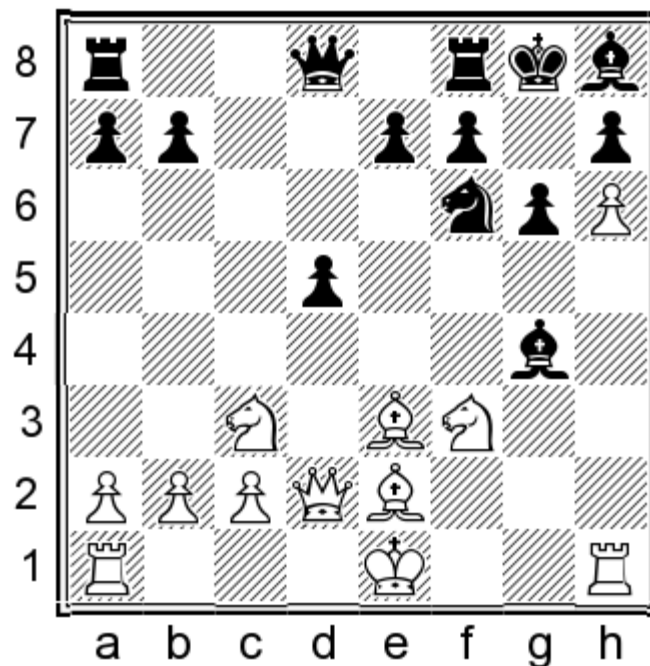
14...Bh8

14...Ne4 15.hxg7 Nxd2 16.gxf8=Q† Qxf8 17.Nxd2 is highly unclear. Generally I prefer the pieces to the queen, but here it is not so easy for White to coordinate.

15.Be2

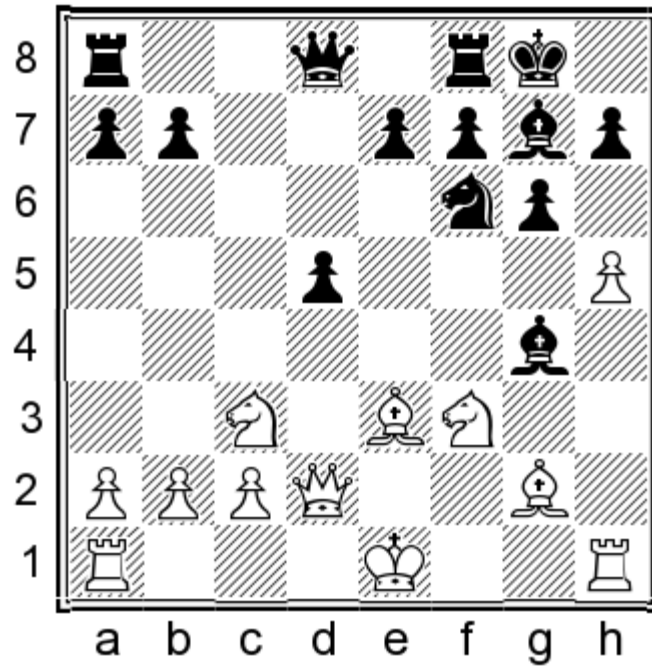
15.Qg2 Rc8³ looks awkward for White, as 16.0-0-0?! Rxc3! 17.bxc3 Qa5 is really asking for trouble.

15.Ne5 Bf5 is also unclear.



15...e5! 16.Nxe5 Bxe2 17.Qxe2 Re8 18.Nxf7 Qe7 19.Nxh8 Qxe3 20.Qxe3 Rxe3† 21.Kd2 Re6 22.Rae1 Rae8

The complications have resulted in a level ending.



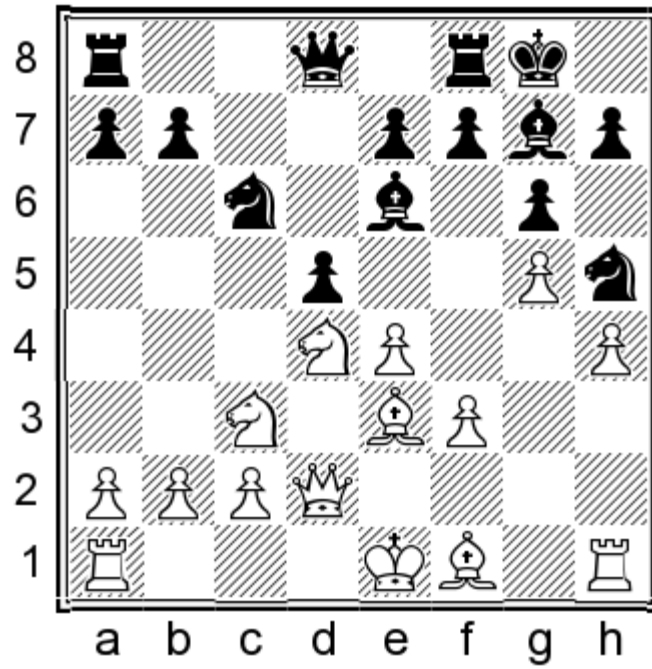
14...Bxh5

14...Nxh5!?N 15.Rh4 f5 16.0-0-0 e6÷ is an alternative approach that looks fun for Black.

15.0-0-0 Rc8 16.Nxd5 Nxd5 17.Qxd5 Qc7 18.Qe4 Bg4!

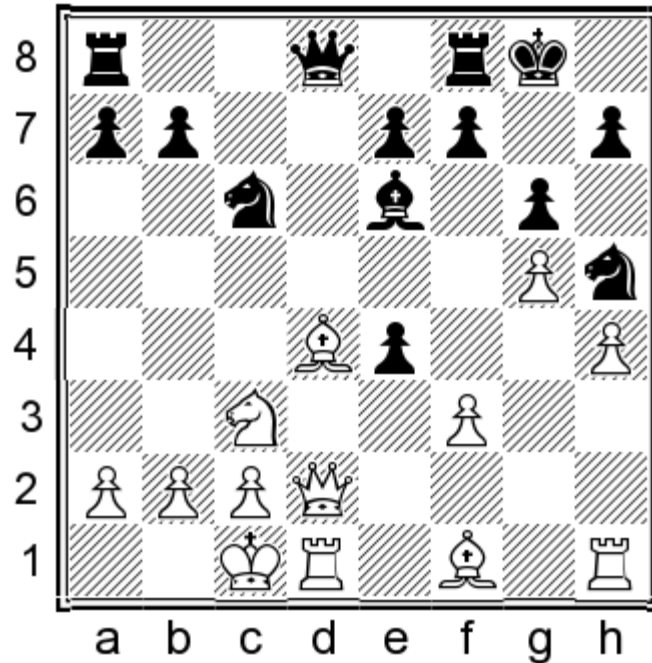
Black had a dangerous initiative in Kobese – Wu, Hastings 2006.

B4) 11.g5 Nh5



12.Nxe6

12.0-0-0 Bxd4N was a suggestion of mine on ChessPublishing. (Black can also transpose to variation B2 with 12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 dxe4) 13.Bxd4 dxe4



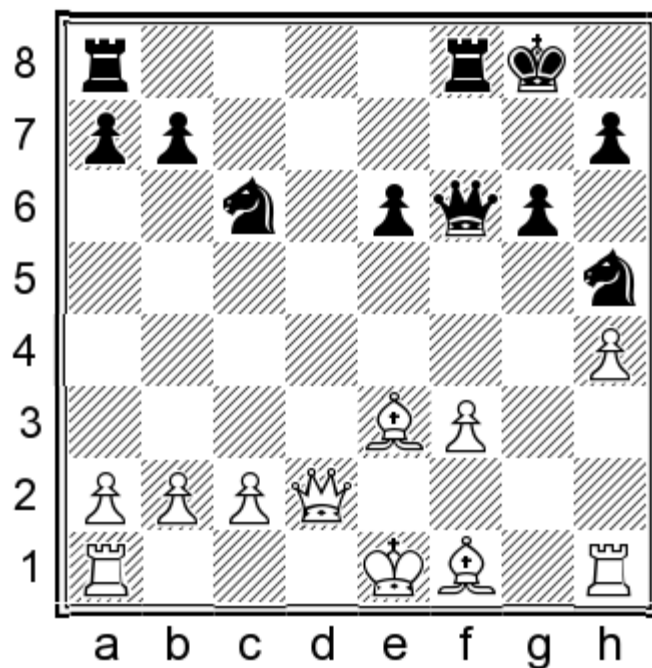
14.Nxe4 (14.fxe4 Qa5 leaves Black with much the stronger attack) 14...Nxd4 15.Qxd4 Qa5µ Black is extremely comfortable.

12...fxe6

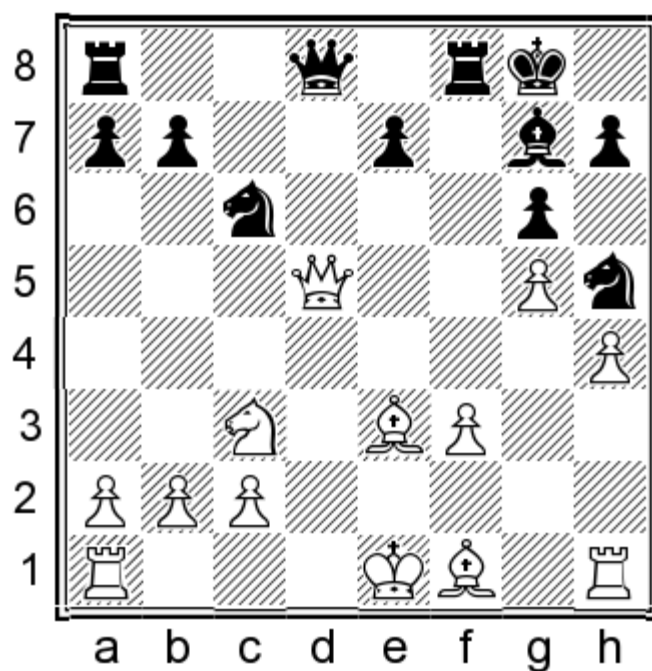
Tony Miles assessed this as a clear advantage to Black. While I think that's an exaggeration, Black is certainly doing well.

13.exd5 exd5 14.Qxd5†

Likewise 14.Nxd5 fails to cause problems: 14...e6 15.Nf6† (15.Nc3 Qa5³) 15...Bxf6 16.gxf6 Qxf6



17.0-0-0 Rad8 18.Bd3 Ne5 19.Kb1 Nxd3 20.cxd3 Qxf3 21.Bxa7 Nf4³ Black is more active and has the safer king. The dark squares around his king look vulnerable but White lacks the coordination to exploit them.



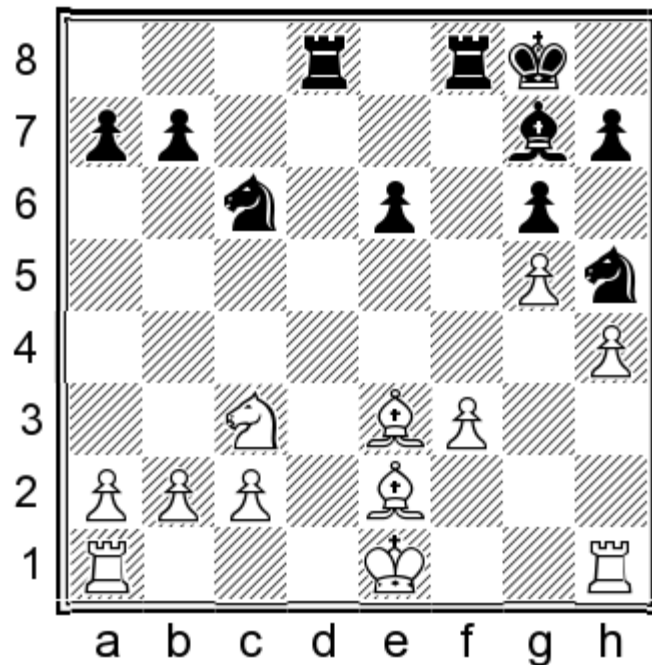
14...e6! 15.Qxd8

As I noted on ChessPublishing, 15.Qxe6†?! Kh8µ ensures Black of an excellent game; White's king is stuck in the centre, while ...Rf8-e8 is a big threat.

15...Raxd8 16.Be2

16.Rh3 is the other way to defend the f-pawn but 16...Nb4 17.Rc1 b6 promises Black at least enough compensation, as he is much more active. White won't be able to hold on to his extra pawn as he tries to get his pieces to interact with each other.

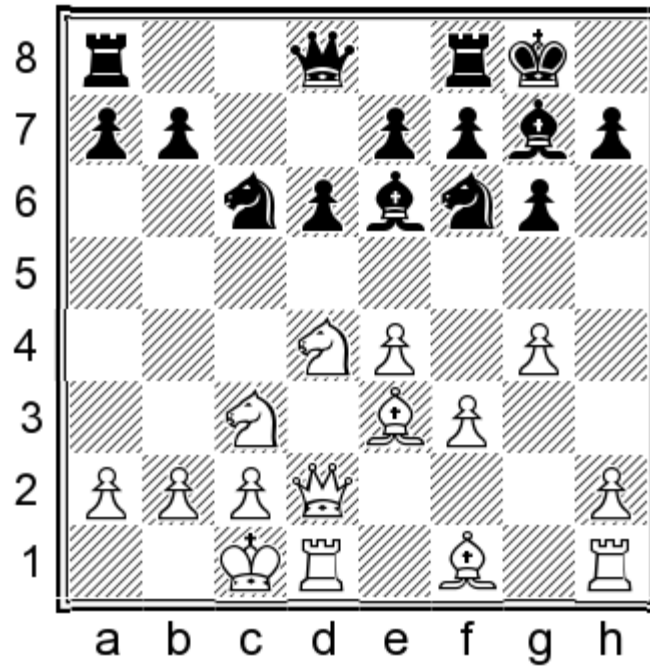
Fernandez Cardoso – Oliva Castaneda,
Havana 2010.



16...Nd4N 17.Bxd4 Rxd4

Black has dangerous play on the dark squares.

C) 10.0-0-0

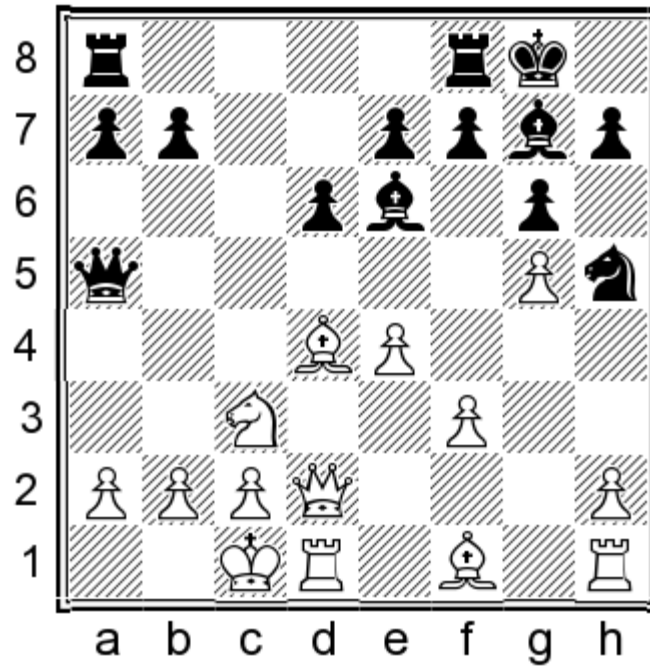


This is how White used to play this line, but nowadays it's not considered to give Black any problems. The trouble for White is that his attack is less potent than Black's, so he will be forced to trade queens.

10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Qa5

From here we will analyse C1) 12.g5, C2) 12.h4, C3) 12.Kb1 and C4) 12.a3.

C1) 12.g5 Nh5



As I wrote earlier, g4-g5 is always a committal decision. Sometimes it is White's best, but that normally applies when the centre is fluid and White can gain something tangible from forcing our knight to move. Here White gets to exchange bishops but I don't think that is enough to offset the long-term problems.

13.Bxg7

13.a3? simply dropped a pawn after 13...Bxd4 14.Qxd4 Qxg5†µ in Daugherty – Phillips, email 2003.

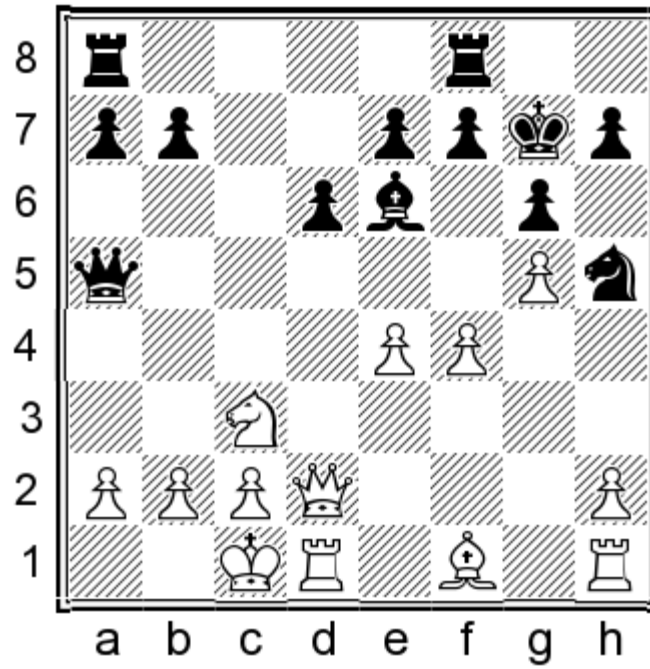
13...Kxg7 14.f4!

This is somewhat risky, but it is the consistent follow-up to White's 12th move. Other moves give Black easy play:

14.Kb1 Rac8!N White will likely have to grovel in an unpleasant endgame after something like 15.Nd5 Qxd2 16.Rxd2 Bxd5 17.Rxd5 Nf4³.

14.Nd5 is also asking for a lot of suffering: 14...Qxd2† 15.Rxd2 Bxd5 16.exd5 f6³ Pekarek – Tupy, Czech Republic 2004.

14.a3 Rac8N is comfortable for Black. White can still try 15.f4 but 15...Rxc3! 16.Qxc3† Qxc3 17.bxc3 Nxf4 gives Black great compensation for the exchange.



14...Bxa2 15.Be2 Rac8 16.Bxh5

16.f5!?N may be more accurate but Black seems to be okay. 16...Kg8 17.Bxh5 (17.f6 Rxc3 18.fxe7 [18.Qxc3 Qxg5† 19.Qd2 Nf4³] 18...Rxc2† 19.Qxc2 Re8=) 17...Bc4! 18.Qe3 gxh5 19.Rhg1 Qa1† 20.Kd2 Qa5 The position is messy but Black's chances are not worse, for instance: 21.g6 fxg6 22.fxg6 Qe5³

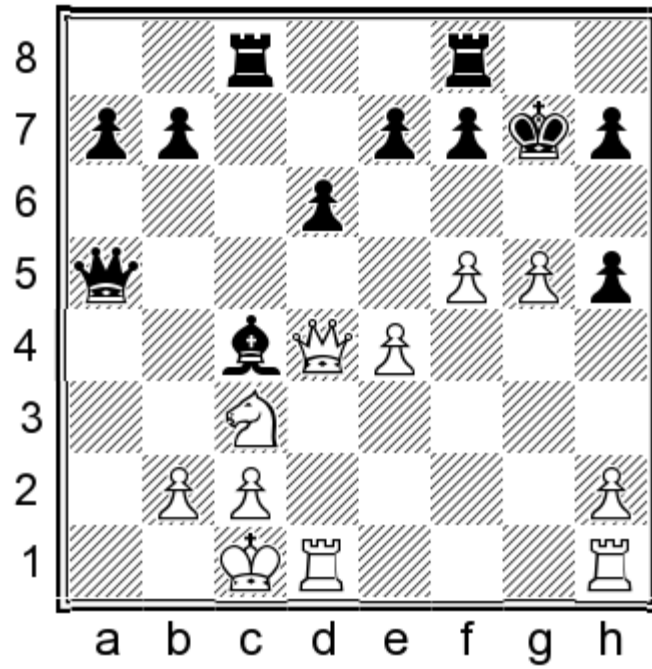
16...gxh5 17.f5 Bc4

Black's kingside might look ugly but actually it is not easy for White to attack. Meanwhile we are a pawn up and our queenside intentions are clear.

18.Qd4†

18.f6†N 18...Kg8! 19.fxe7 Qa1† 20.Nb1 Rfe8³ also favours Black.

Now in Schiappoli – Di Giulio, Napoli 2008, Black should have continued:



18...Kg8!N 19.Rhg1 b5

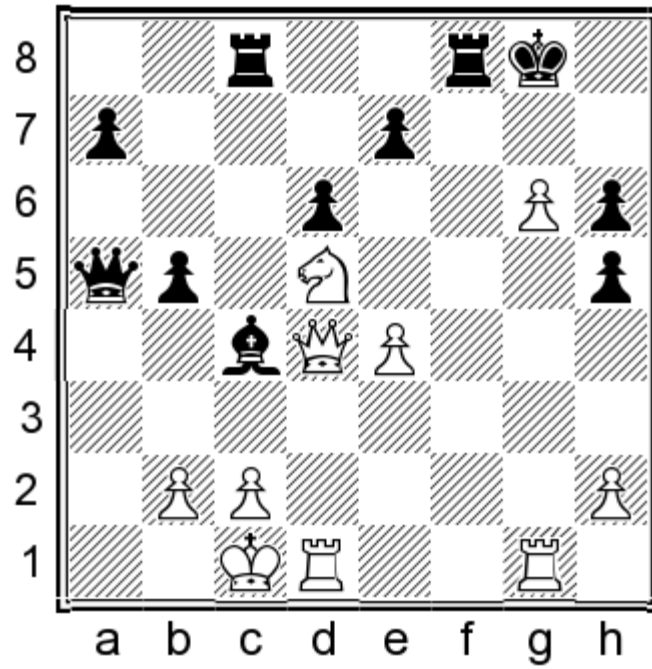
Black's queenside play is coming fast.

20.g6 fxg6 21.fxg6 h6!

Keeping the kingside closed.

22.Nd5

22.g7 Rf7μ does not help White.

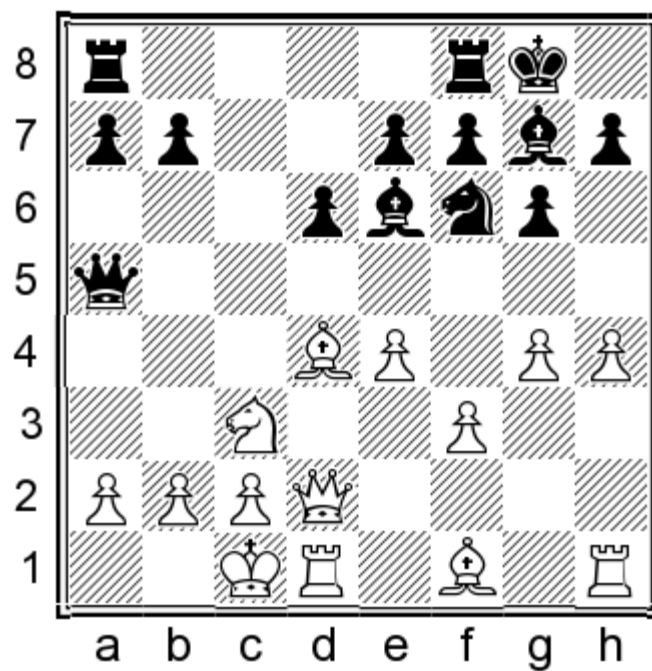


22...Bxd5 23.Qxd5†

23.exd5 Qa1† 24.Kd2 Qa4!³ trades the queens.

23...Kg7 24.Qd4† Rf6 25.e5 dxe5 26.Qxe5 Qc7³

C2) 12.h4



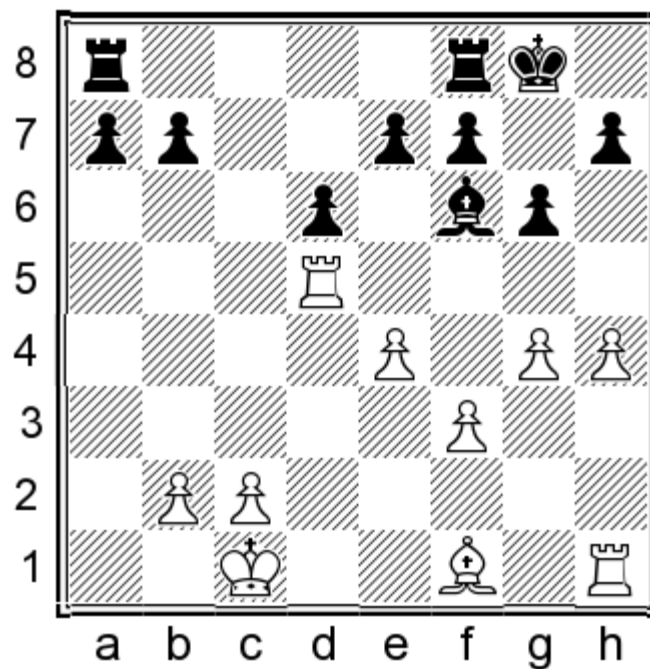
This is another aggressive but risky approach. White bets everything on his kingside attack, but the loss of the a2-pawn ensures that his own king will never be safe.

12...Bxa2 13.h5

White has to plough on.

13.Nd5? has no logic to it at all. 13...Qxd2† 14.Rxd2 In Taborsky – Kuljabin, Klatovy 1999, 14...Nxd5N 15.exd5 Rac8µ would have left Black with a clear extra pawn.

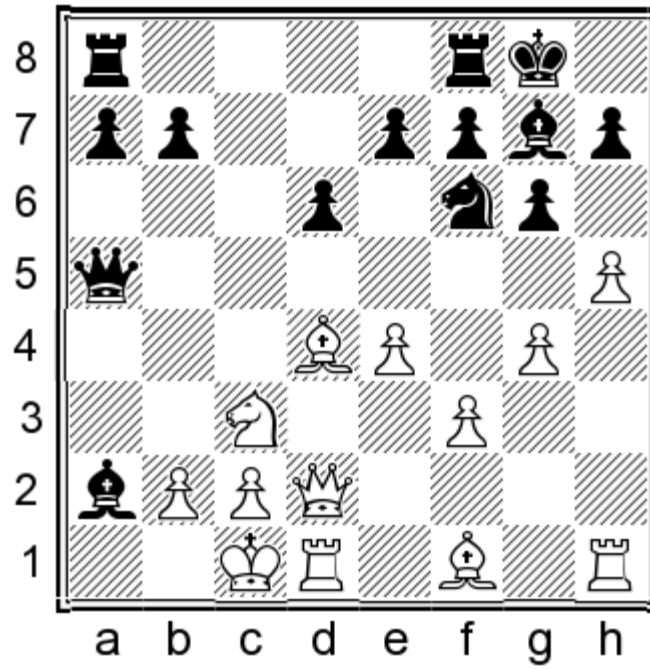
13.Bxf6? is similarly inconsistent; it is too late for White to back out of the complications. 13...Bxf6 14.Nd5 Qxd2† 15.Rxd2 Bxd5 16.Rxd5



This was Al Khalidi – Firas, Baghdad 2013, and now 16...Be5!Nµ would have claimed the f4 outpost, leaving White doomed to be tortured for the rest of the game.

13.Nxa2? Qxa2 accelerates Black's attack. 14.Qb4 Rfc8 15.Qxb7 In Coppini – Nazarenus, Budapest 1995, the most accurate route to the win would have been:

15...Nxg4!N 16.fxg4 (16.Bxg7 Ne3!–+) 16...Bxd4 17.Rxd4 Rab8–+



13...Rac8!N

I think this is the correct rook. The one on f8 will become developed if White chooses to exchange on g6.

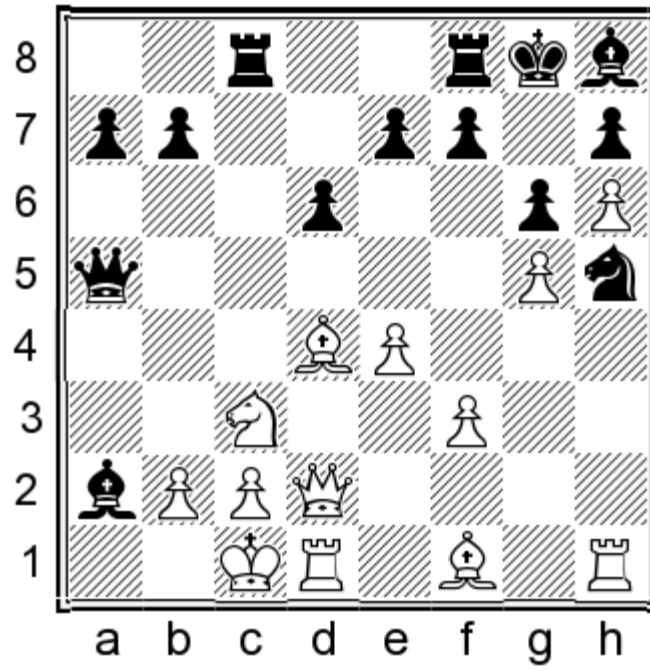
14.h6

This is generally how engines like to continue. This can be explained by the positive effect of extra space on its evaluation function.

A human opponent is more likely to try and crash through. However, after 14.hxg6 fxg6 15.Be2 Be6 16.Kb1 b5!³ I don't see what White is doing.

14...Bh8 15.g5 Nh5

I examined this position carefully and failed to find a way through for White.



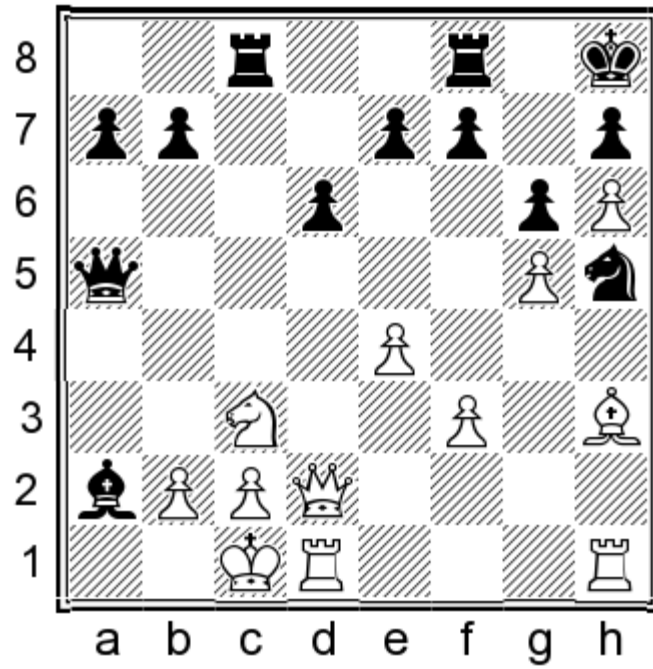
16.Bxh8

16.f4 e5! is clearly better for Black.

16.Rxh5? The exchange sacrifice has to be checked but we don't need to fear it. 16...gxh5 17.Bxh8 Kxh8 18.f4 (18.Qd4† f6) 18...f6µ The long diagonal is closed and we can follow up by sacrificing back on c3, resulting in an endgame with at least one extra pawn. (The immediate 18...Rxc3? is not so clear as White can throw in 19.Qd4†!.)

16...Kxh8 17.Bh3

After 17.f4 f6 18.Bh3 Rc6! Black has the scarier attack as well as the extra pawn. For instance, if 19.Bg4 Bg8 20.Bxh5 Qa1† 21.Nb1 Ba2 Black wins.



17...Rc6! 18.Bd7

18.Bg4 e5! blocks the long diagonal and enables us to concentrate on our own attack.

18...Ra6 19.f4 Qc5³

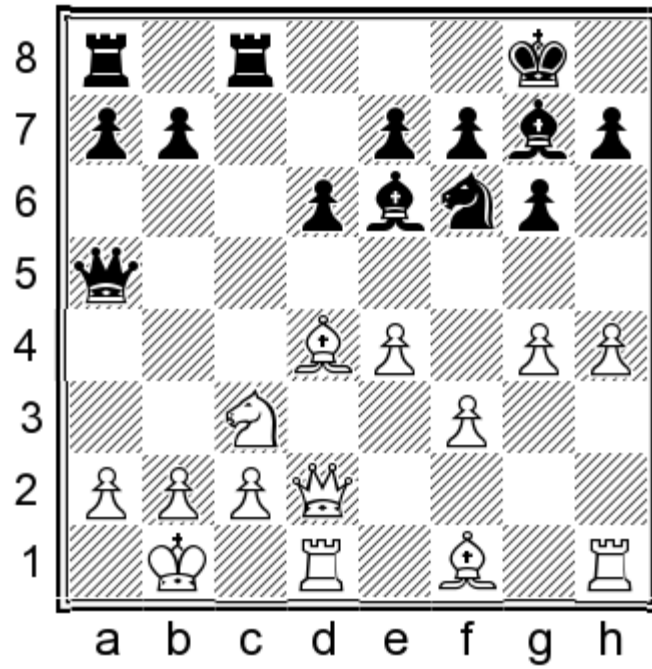
C3) 12.Kb1

This is normally just used as a different move order to reach the main line, but there are a few unique White tries.

12...Rfc8 13.h4?!

This is highly risky.

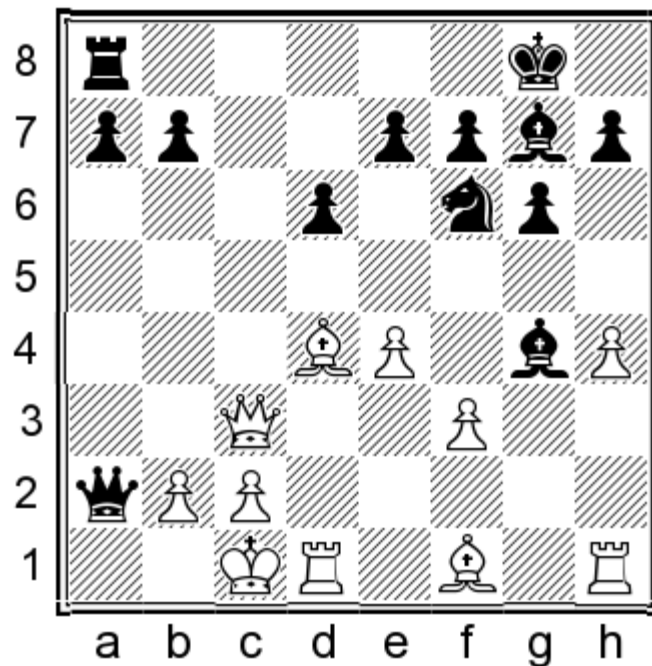
13.a3 Rab8 transposes to variation C42.



13...Rxc3! 14.Qxc3 Qxa2† 15.Kc1

We now have a pleasant choice between heading for a promising ending with C31) 15...Bxg4 and keeping the queens on the board with C32) 15...Qa1†.

C31) 15...Bxg4



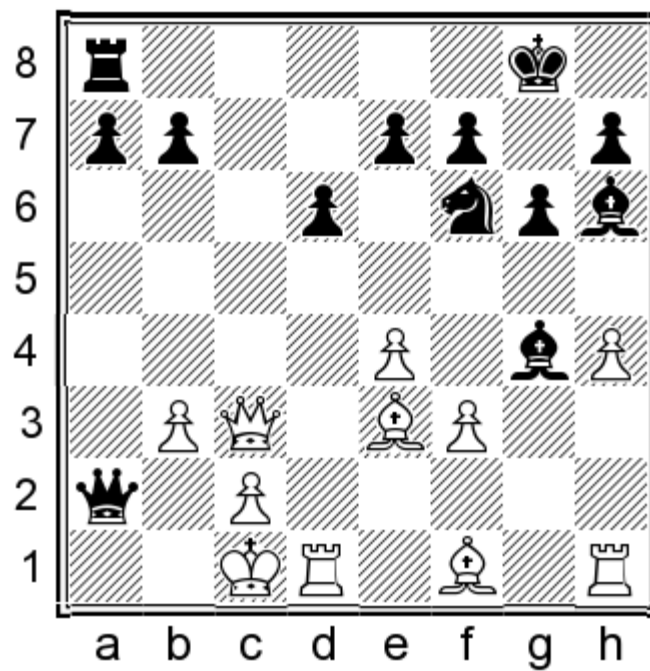
Although I referred to this move as leading to an endgame, White needs to be extremely accurate to reach that stage. In many games he has failed to do so, as you can see from the following game references.

16.fxg4!

Taking the bishop is the only way to survive. I checked six other moves, many of which lose quickly due to a devastating check on h6.

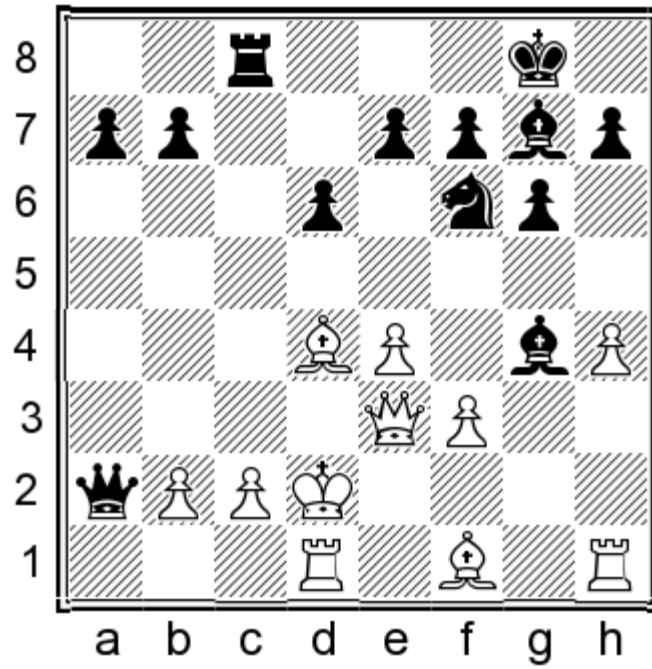
a) 16.Re1? In Drogovoz – Menzi, Budva 2013, Black could have won with: 16...Rc8!N 17.Qd3 Bh6† 18.Be3 (18.Kd1 Bxf3†! 19.Qxf3 Qb1† 20.Ke2 Qxc2#) 18...Bxf3 19.Bxh6 Bxh1–+

b) 16.b3? Bh6† 17.Be3



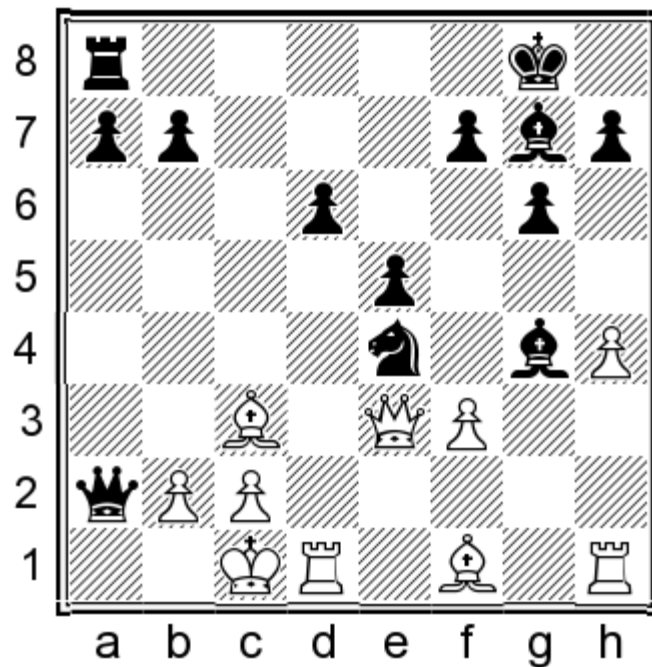
17...Nxe4! This is a key tactical motif. 18.fxe4 Bxe3† 19.Rd2 Rc8 Black had a crushing attack in Leite – Nidl, Ceske Budejovice 2014.

c) 16.Kd2? Rc8 17.Qe3



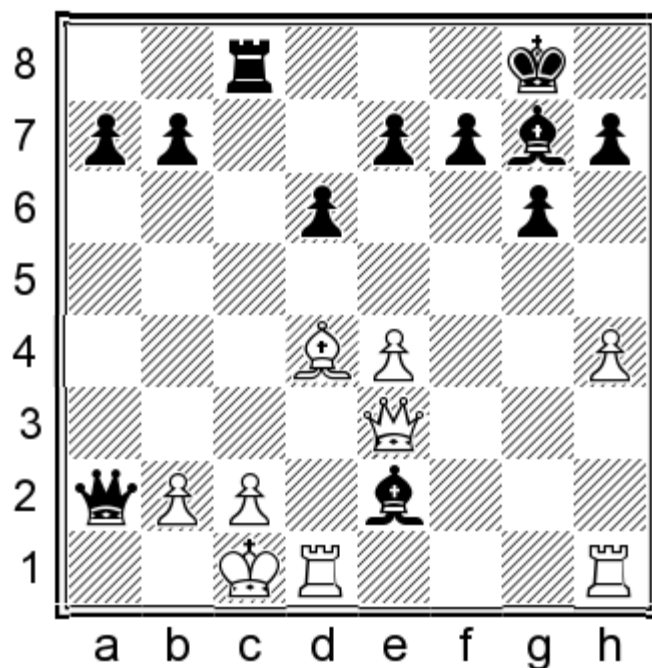
17...Nxe4†! 18.Qxe4 Bf5 19.Qe3 Rxc2† 20.Ke1 Qa5† 21.Bc3 Bxc3† 22.bxc3 Rxc3 23.Qd2 Qe5† 24.Be2 Rc2 0–1
Dorenberg – Riemersma, Enschede 1992.

d) 16.Qe3? looks like a sensible way to cover the c1-h6 diagonal, but 16...e5! 17.Bc3 Nxe4! again leaves White defenceless:



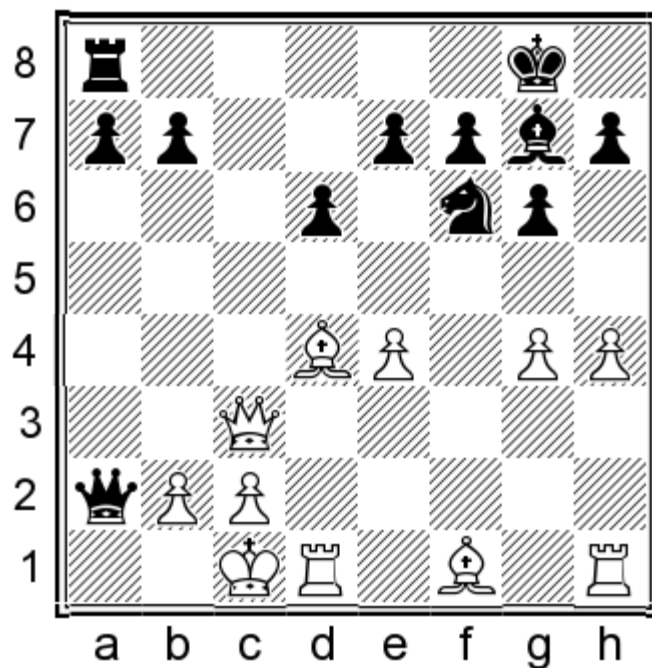
18.b4 Nxc3 19.Qxc3 Bh6† 20.Rd2 Rc8 0–1 Lopez Gonzalez – Belezky, Seville 2005.

e) 16.Be2? Rc8! 17.Qe3 Nxe4! 18.fxe4 Bxe2



19.Rde1 (19.Qxe2 Bxd4 20.Rxd4 Qa1† 21.Kd2 Qxh1--+) 19...Bxd4 20.Qxd4 This occurred in Exposito Garcia – Alberdi Vinas, Spain 1991, and now 20...Rc4!N 21.Qe3 Qa1† 22.Kd2 Qxb2 would have yielded an overwhelming attack.

f) 16.Bc4?! Bh6† 17.Be3 Bxe3† 18.Qxe3 Qxc4 19.fxg4 Nxg4 This time there is no immediate mate, but after 20.Qf4 Rc8 21.c3 h5 Black again had a decisive advantage in Luukkonen – Vasilev, Siofok 1996.



16...Qa1† 17.Kd2 Nxe4† 18.Ke1

18.Ke2 Nxc3† and 18.Ke3 Qxd1 are both hopeless.

18...Nxc3 19.Rxa1 Bxd4

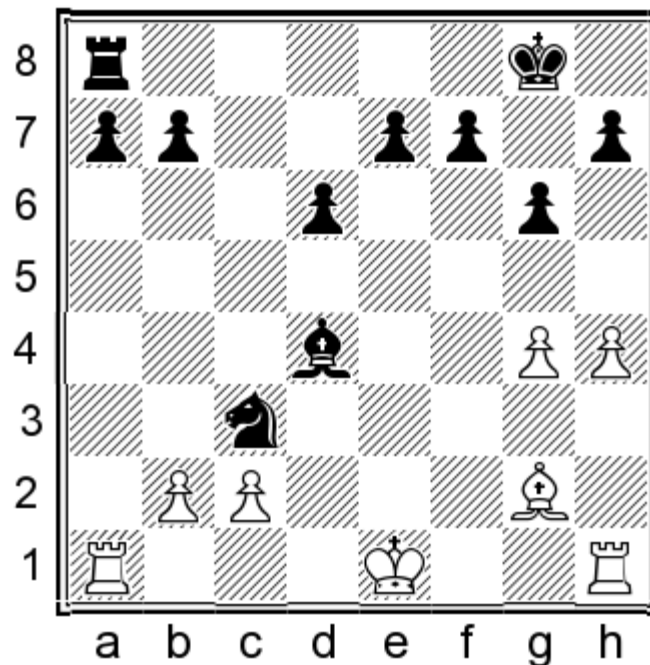
The knight is defended tactically due to the loose rook on a1. Black currently has three pawns for the exchange but White can exploit the precarious nature of the knight to obtain good drawing chances.

20.Bg2!

White attacks the b7-pawn and also prepares to take on c3 now that the a1-rook will be defended.

20.Bd3?! allows Black to regroup. 20...Nd5 21.Rb1 Ne3µ Vanlerberghe – Carmes, Auxerre 1996.

Attacking the knight immediately fails to get anywhere as we have another nice trick: 20.Ra3 Nd5 21.Rd3 Nb4! The threat of a fork on c2 means that the bishop is defended. 22.Rb3 Nxc2† 23.Kd2 This occurred in Ribeiro – Clavijo, Cienfuegos 1996, and here 23...Rc8N gives Black promising chances in the ending.



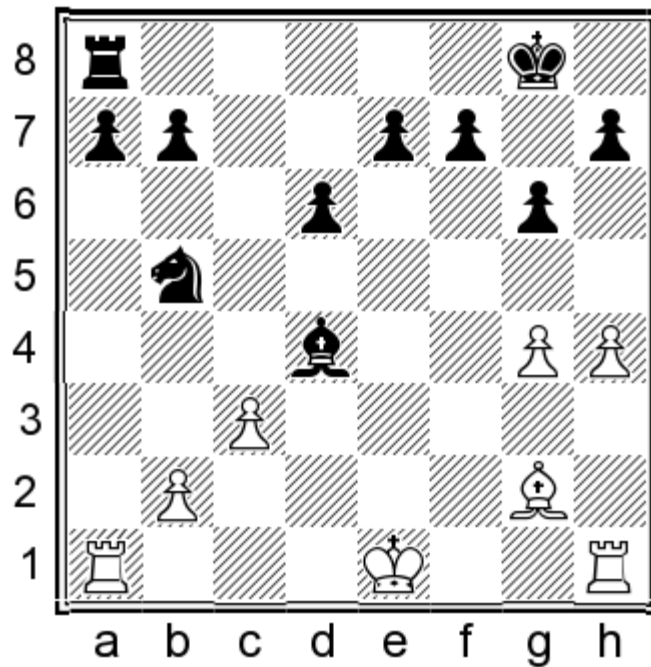
20...Nb5

20...Rc8!?N looks an interesting idea, again defending c3 tactically. 21.bxc3 Bxc3† 22.Kf2 Bxa1 23.Rxa1 Rxc2† This may well be a draw as Black's queenside pawns are dropping off, but White will still have to work for it.

21.c3!

21.Kf1?! had no real logic and allowed Black to defend his pawn with 21...Rb8³ in Dabrowska – Shishkin, Polanica Zdroj 1994.

21.Rh3 was played in Hedrera – De Zan, Argentina 1995, and now after 21...Bb6N 22.Bxb7 Rb8 23.Bg2 e6³ the endgame looks unpleasant for White. He is outgunned on the dark squares and will struggle to slow the advance of Black's central pawns.



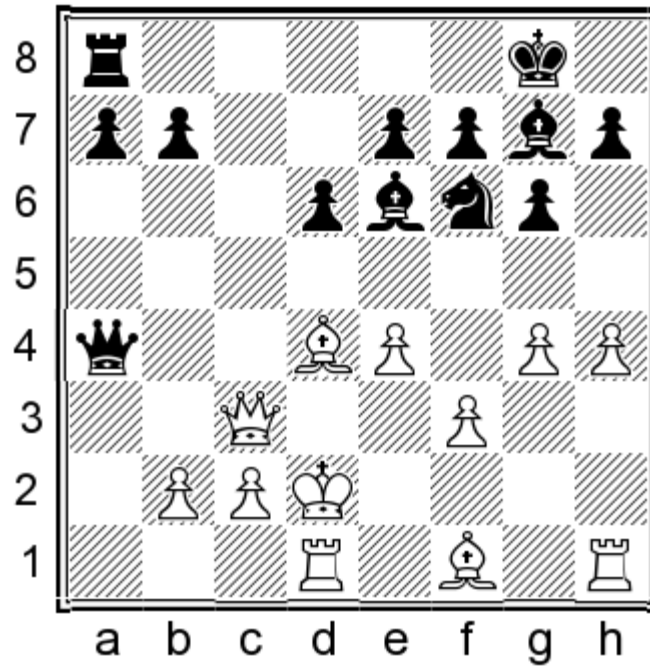
21...Bb6!N

21...Nxc3 was played in Kozlowski – B. Grabarczyk, Slupsk 1989. After the knight was taken Black triumphed with the pawn mass against the bishop, but White missed 22.Rh3!N which is rather annoying.

22.Bxb7 Rd8

White has a slightly improved version of the position we saw after 21.Rh3 above, as his pieces are somewhat better coordinated and Black is a little slower to advance his centre. Nevertheless, I would still opt to play as Black here.

C32) 15...Qa1† 16.Kd2 Qa4



This time Black retains the queens and once again forces White to play accurately.

17.Ke3!N

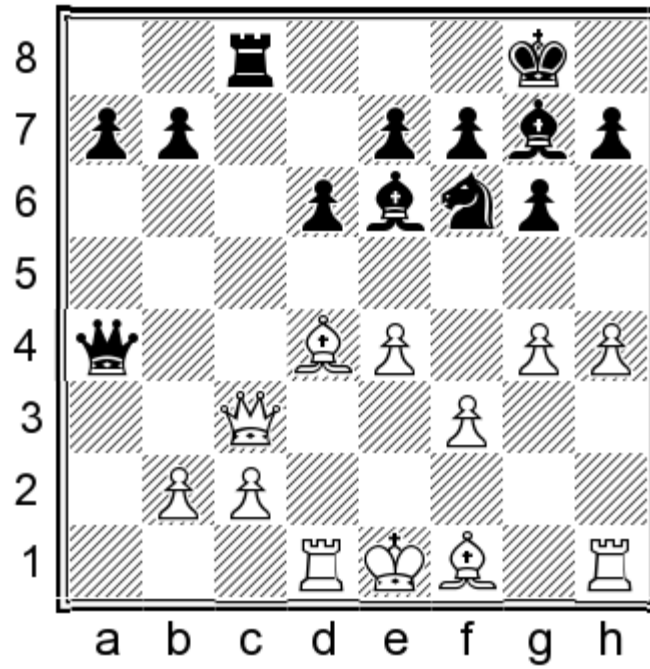
I believe this is White's only way to get close to equality.

17.e5? has been played a couple of times but it just loses. 17...dxe5 18.Bxe5 In Rohackova – Hrabovsky, Dunajska Streda 1999, the simple 18...Nd5N would have won material.

17.Kc1?! Rc8 18.b3 Rxc3 19.bxa4 Rxf3μ is another excellent endgame for Black.

17.b3?! Nxe4† 18.fxe4 Qxd4† 19.Qxd4 Bxd4 gave Black a big advantage due to White's vulnerable pawns in Orsini – Dragojlovic, Castel di Sangro 2007.

17.Ke1 is a better try but after 17...Rc8 Black still has the upper hand:



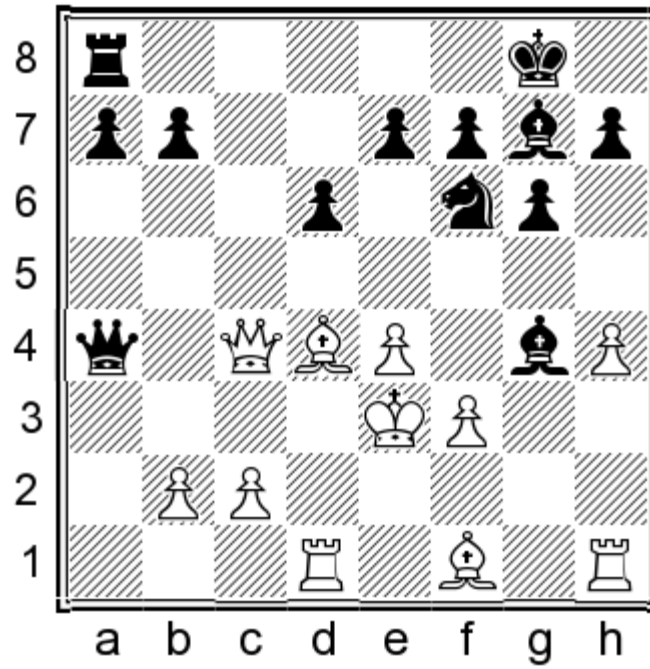
18.b3? (18.Qd3N is necessary but Black still has the better ending after 18...Rxc2 19.Qb5 Qxb5 20.Bxb5 a6³) 18...Rxc3 19.bxa4 Rxf3 20.Bd3 Nxc4µ Jose Queralto – Lecha Gonzalez, Spain 2004.

17...Bxg4

17...Rc8!? 18.Qd3 d5 is an interesting alternative.

18.Qc4!

After 18.fxg4 e5!µ Black regains the piece with a dangerous attack.



18...Qd7 19.Qb5!

19.Bxf6 Be6! 20.Bh3 Bxc4 (20...Bxf6!? is possible if you still want to play for mate) 21.Bxd7 Bxf6 Black has the better ending with the two pawns for the exchange.

19...Qxb5 20.Bxb5 Be6

White has managed to trade off the queens and is only a little worse in the ending. However, this is hardly an endorsement of 13.h4?!.

C4) 12.a3 Rab8

This is Black's most accurate move order, preparing ...b5 without delay. White may respond with C41) 13.h4 or C42) 13.Kb1.

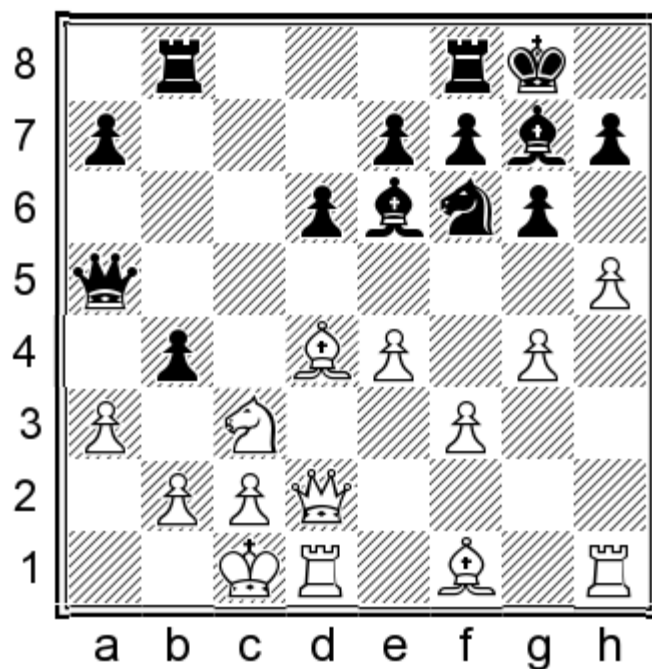
C41) 13.h4

White pushes ahead with his kingside attack, but he would be ill-advised to challenge Black to a race.

13...b5

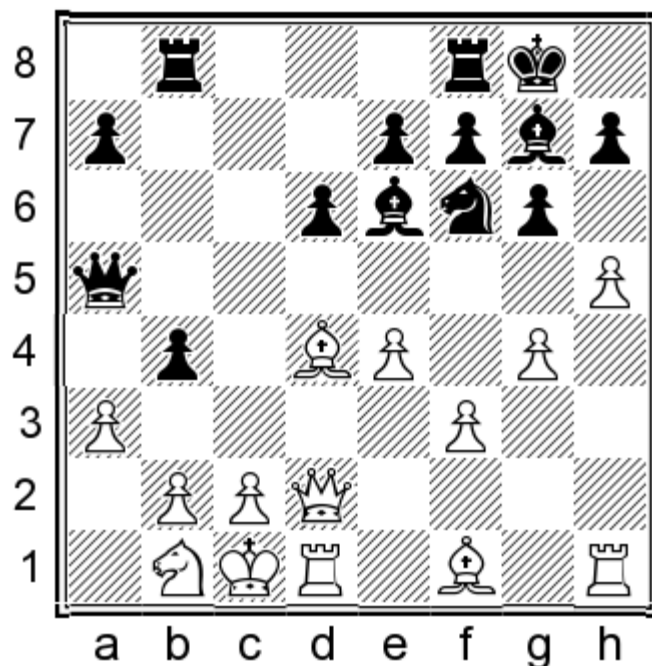
We will check the optimistic C411) 14.h5?! followed by the more reasonable C412) 14.Nd5.

C411) 14.h5?! b4

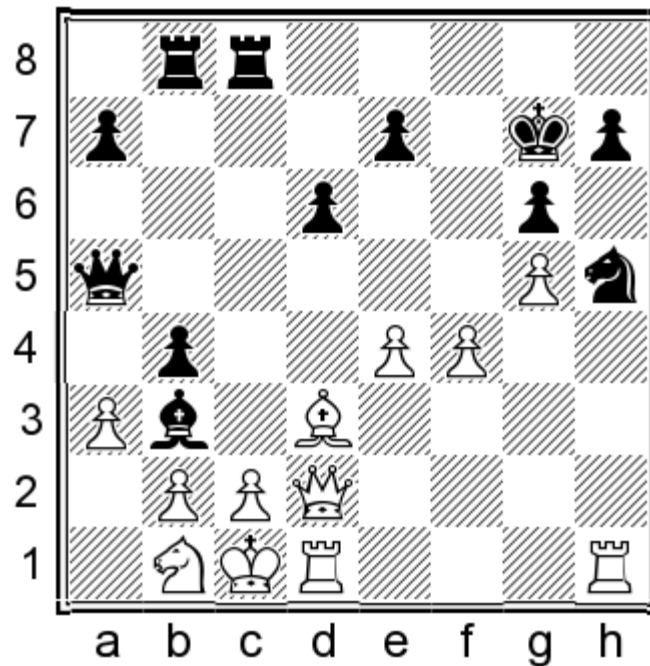


Black is the first to create a threat. White's two main tries are C4111) 15.hxg6!? or C4112) 15.Nd5.

15.Nb1?! is too passive.



15...Rfc8! 16.hxg6 fxg6 (16...hxg6µ also looks safe and excellent for Black) 17.g5 Nh5 18.Bxg7 Kxg7 19.f4 Bb3 20.Bd3 Now in Popescu – Dumitrache, Creon 2000, Black missed a pretty way to continue:



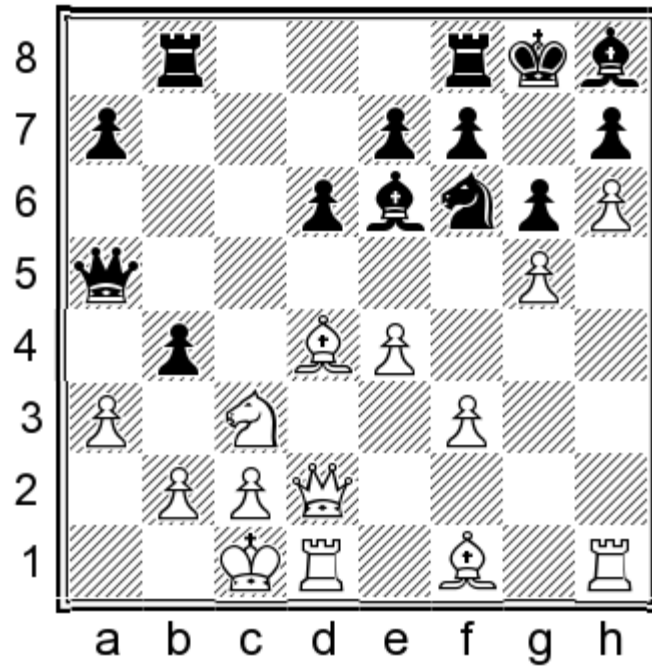
20...Bxc2!N 21.Bxc2 b3 Obviously our queen is taboo due to the mate on c2, and 22.Nc3 bxc2 23.Kxc2 (23.Qxc2 Nxf4+) 23...Qa4† leaves us with a dangerous attack.

15.h6

I think a lot of Black players breathe a sigh of relief when they see this move, as they no longer have to worry about being mated on the h-file! True, we still have to watch out for mates from a knight on e7, but that can only happen if we are extremely careless.

15...Bh8 16.g5

16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5 was seen in Meszaros – Porat, Szombathely 2004, and now 17...Rfc8!N gives Black a dangerous attack, while it is hard to see where White's counterplay lies.

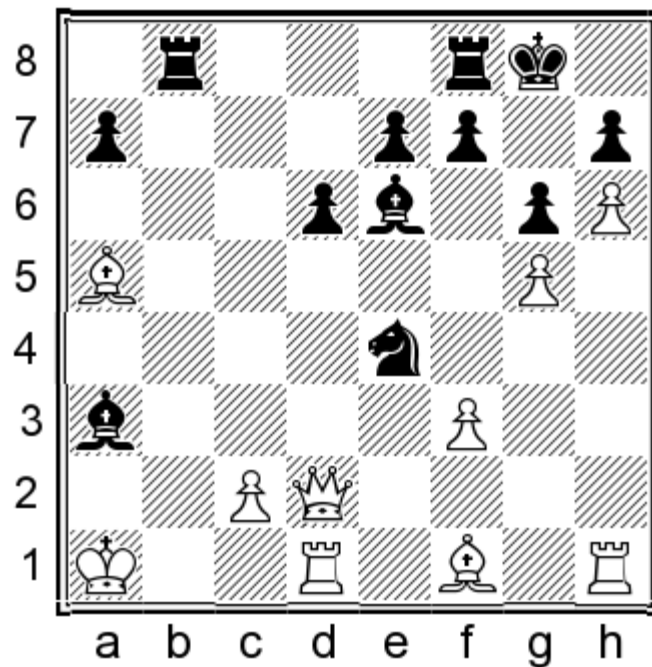


16...bxc3 17.Bxc3 Nxe4! 18.Bxa5?

18.fxe4 is necessary, but 18...Bxc3 19.Qxc3 Qxc3 20.bxc3 Rfc8 is a horrible ending for White.

18...Bxb2† 19.Kb1 Bxa3† 20.Ka1

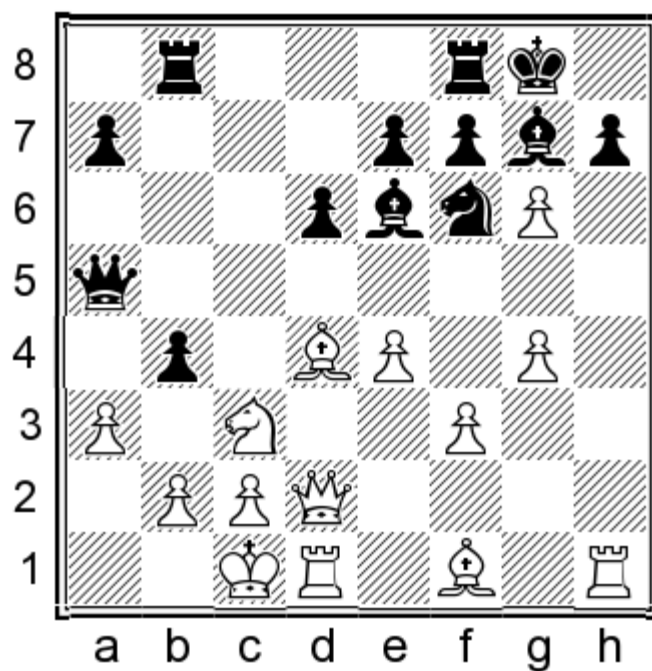
In Belec – Cernousek, Strmilov 2005, Black took the queen and won easily, but there is actually a forced mate.



20...Bb2†!N 21.Kb1 Bc3† 22.Kc1 Ba2

White cannot stop the rook from delivering mate on b1.

C4111) 15.hxg6!?



This has only been tried in a single correspondence game.

15...hxg6

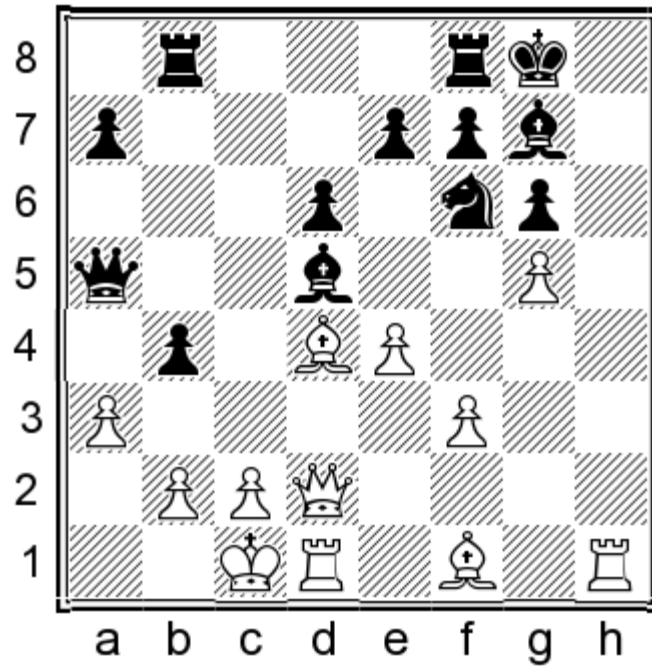
15...bxc3N 16.Bxc3 Qb6 17.gxh7† Kh8 is messy.

However, 15...bxa3!?N looks a tempting alternative, and after 16.gxh7† Kh8 17.b3 Rfc8 Black has the more dangerous attack.

16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.g5

17.exd5 Qxd5 18.axb4 Qa2 19.Qd3 Rxb4 leaves White in trouble.

In Bericat – Pesce, corr. 1990, Black played 17...Nh5 and drew quickly, but he missed something more powerful.



17...Nxe4!N 18.Qh2

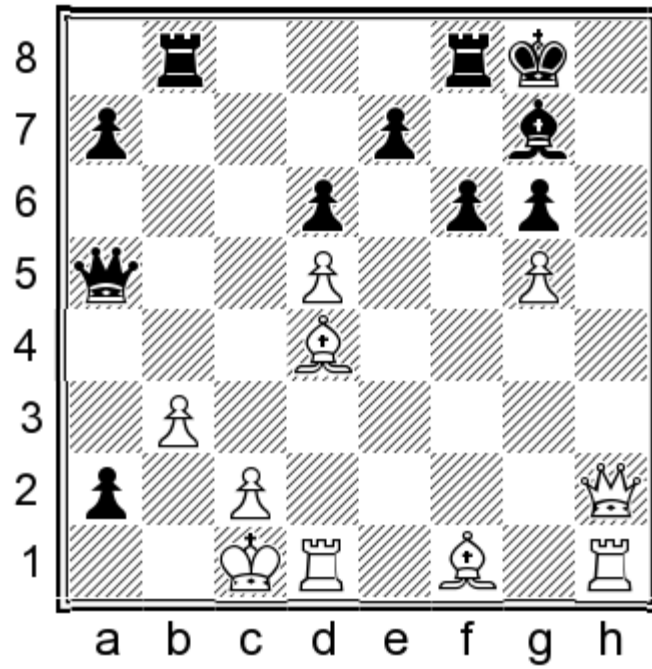
18.fxe4? Bxe4 19.Bxg7 Kxg7 20.Rh4 Qe5—+ doesn't get White anywhere.

18...f6

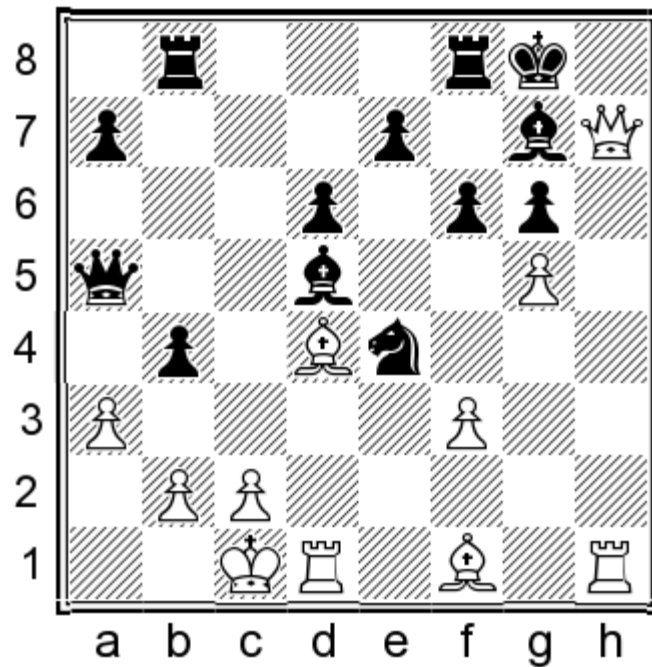
The position is extremely complicated but we can defend against White's threats while keeping a strong attack of our own.

19.Qh7†

No better is: 19.fxe4 bxa3 20.b3 a2 21.exd5 (21.Kb2 Bxb3! 22.cxb3 Rxb3†! 23.Kxb3 Rb8† 24.Kc2 Qa4†—+)



21...a1=Q† 22.Bxa1 Qxa1† 23.Kd2 Qd4† 24.Bd3 f5 Black will follow up with ...Kf7, keeping an extra pawn as well as the safer king.



19...Kf7 20.Rh6 Ke8!

The king runs to safety.

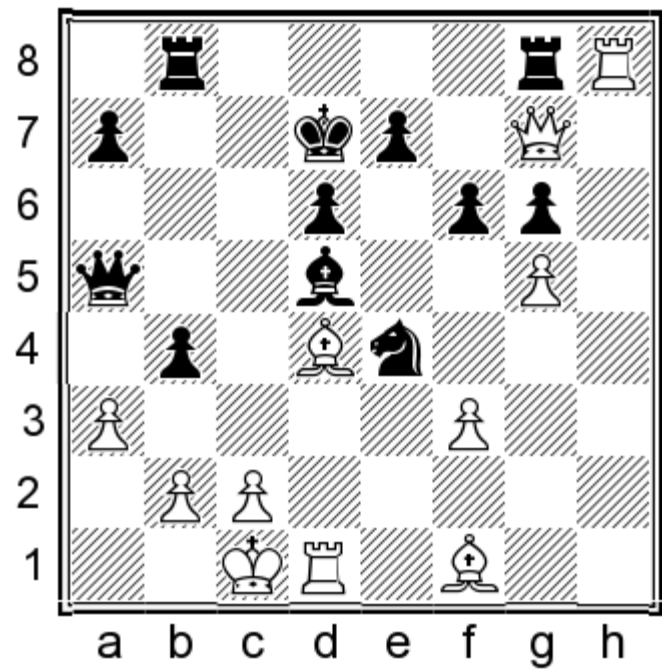
21.Qxg7

21.Qxg6† doesn't work either: 21...Rf7 22.fxe4 bxa3 23.exd5 a2 24.b3 a1=Q† 25.Bxa1 Qxa1† 26.Kd2 Qd4† 27.Bd3

Qf4† 28.Ke2 f×g5—+

21...Rg8 22.Rh8 Kd7

Black’s king has escaped and White has run into trouble with his queen.

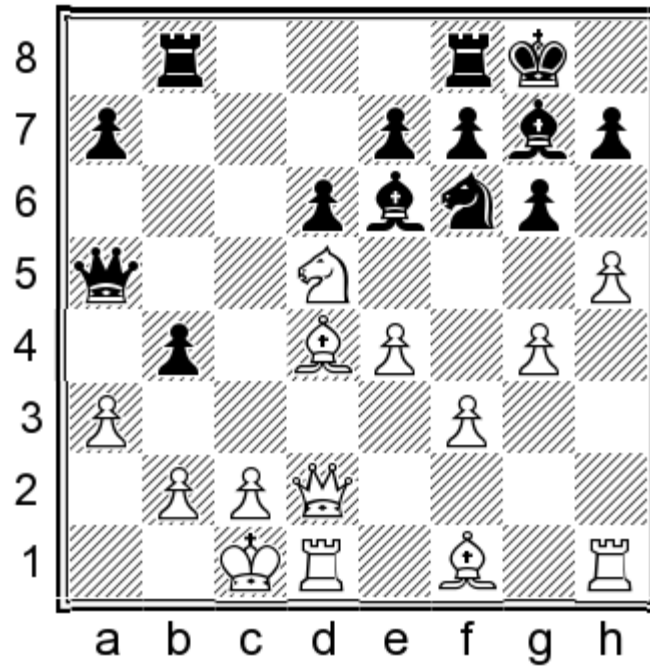


23.fxe4

This is White’s best try, but Black keeps a big advantage after:

23...Rxg7 24.Rxb8 Bxe4μ

C4112) 15.Nd5



This move comes too late to exchange queens, and White soon falls into trouble.

15...Bxd5 16.exd5 Qxd5 17.axb4

White regains the pawn temporarily, but material turns out to be the least of his concerns.

17...Qa2!

White does not have a satisfactory defence.

18.c3

18.b3? was refuted elegantly in the following game: 18...Rfc8 19.hxg6 Rxb4! 20.gxf7† Kf8 21.c3 Qxb3 22.Qh2 Rxd4 0–1 Wolf – W. Schmidt, Germany 2006.

18...Rfc8

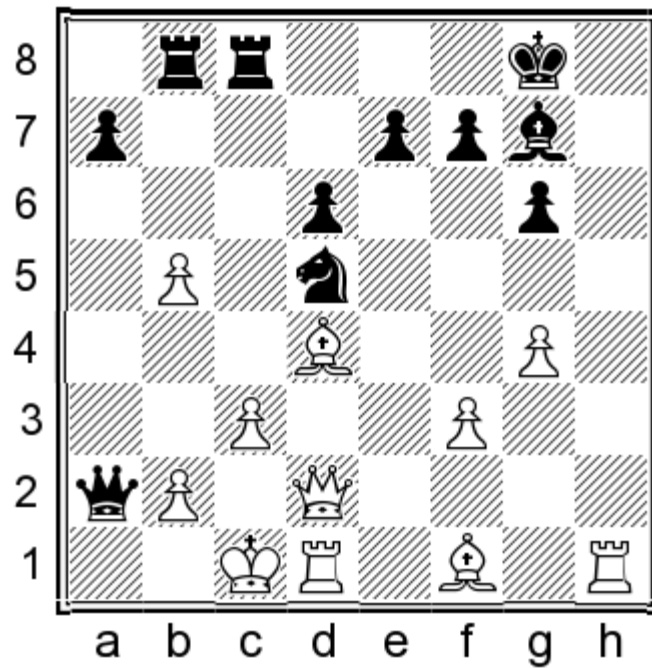
Black brings his last piece into play.

19.hxg6 hxg6 20.b5

White tries to keep the queenside as closed as possible.

20...Nd5!

The knight joins the attack with deadly effect. The finish might be:

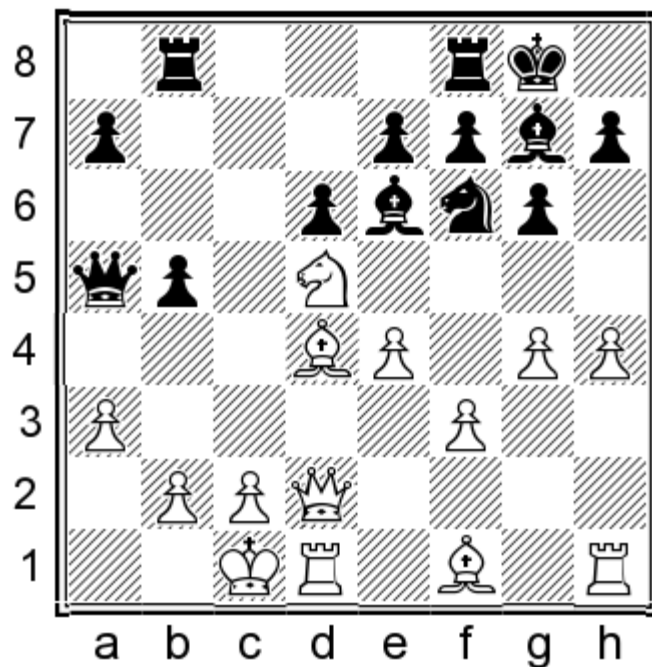


21.Bxg7

21.Qc2 e5 22.Bg1 Bf6! also gave Black a mating attack in Muhren – P. Littlewood, Ghent 2004.

21...Qa1† 22.Kc2 Nb4† 23.Kb3 Qa2† 24.Kxb4 a5#

C412) 14.Nd5



This is White's last opportunity to exchange queens, and he is well advised to take it.

14...Qxd2† 15.Rxd2 Bxd5

Our perfect endgame in the ensuing structure would see us play with the knight versus White's light-squared bishop, while controlling the f4- and/or e5-squares.

16.exd5

This position might not look terribly interesting but, while it's true that it is equal and most computer battles have ended in draws, more than half of the over-the-board encounters have ended decisively.

16.Bxf6 is an extremely unambitious approach by White, and after 16...Bxf6 17.Rxd5 b4 18.axb4 Rxb4 the position is simply equal.

16...Nd7!?

This was the choice of a young Levon Aronian and it looks sensible to me; the a7-pawn is not really hanging.

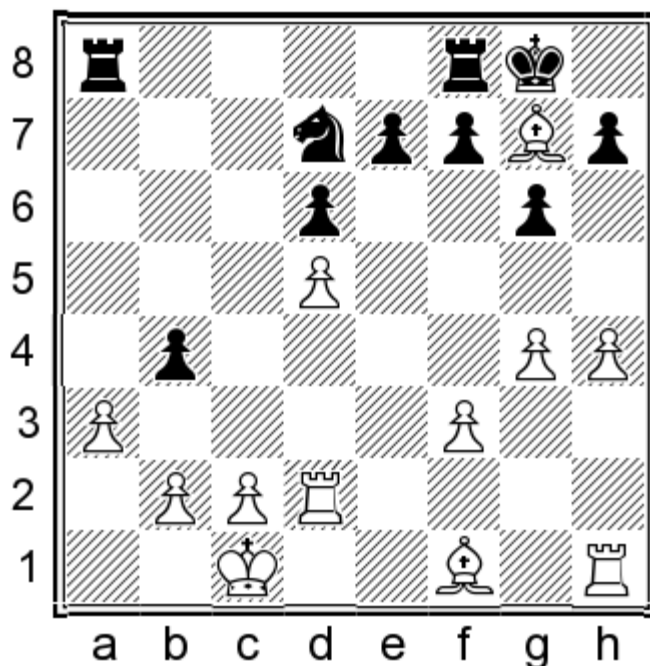
The more common 16...a5 is also completely fine for Black.

17.f4

17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Bg2 b4 19.Re1 bxa3 20.bxa3 Rfe8³ occurred in Swathi – Swapnil, Aurangabad 2011, and shows how

the position is easier for Black to play. Black can slowly prepare to play down the b- and c-files.

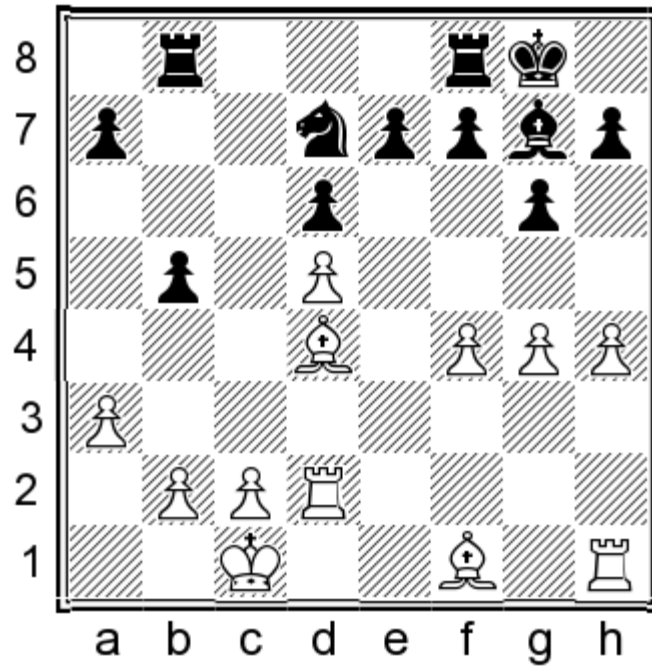
After 17.Bxa7 Ra8 18.Bd4 b4 the potential mate on a1 enables Black to regain the pawn with slightly better chances.
19.Bxg7



19...bxa3!? (19...Kxg7N also looks interesting, as White cannot hold onto his extra pawn: 20.Rd3 Ne5 21.Rb3 bxa3 22.bxa3 Ra5 23.c4 Rc8 24.Rc3?! Rxd5µ) 20.Bd4 a2 21.b3 a1=Q† 22.Bxa1 Rxa1† 23.Kb2 Rfa8 24.Bg2 R1a2† 25.Kc1 Ne5 ½–½ Koronowski – Karasek, email 2009.

17.g5!?N has not yet been played but is a more aggressive approach: White wants to open up the h-file and deliver mate. With such reduced material this should not be possible but, to be on the safe side, I would throw in 17...h5 when the kingside is completely blocked.

17.Kb1 a5 18.g5 is another way for White to build up on the kingside: 18...b4 19.a4 Bxd4 20.Rxd4 Nc5 21.h5 Nxa4 22.Rdh4 This may look scary, but 22...h6! defuses White's attack and the game was soon agreed drawn: 23.hxg6 hxg5 24.gxf7† Kxf7 25.Rh7† Ke8 26.Rg7 ½–½ Domanov – Svartbo, email 2008.

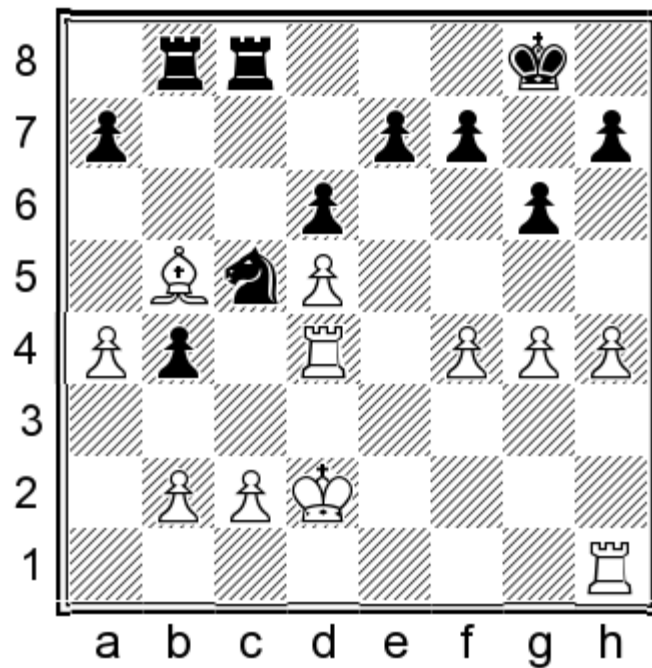


17...b4

17...Nc5 was Levon's choice and is also perfectly fine for Black.

18.Rh3

Another game continued: 18.a4 Bxd4 19.Rxd4 Rfc8 20.Bb5 Nc5 21.Kd2 (21.Rxb4? Nd3† is a pretty way of using both pins)

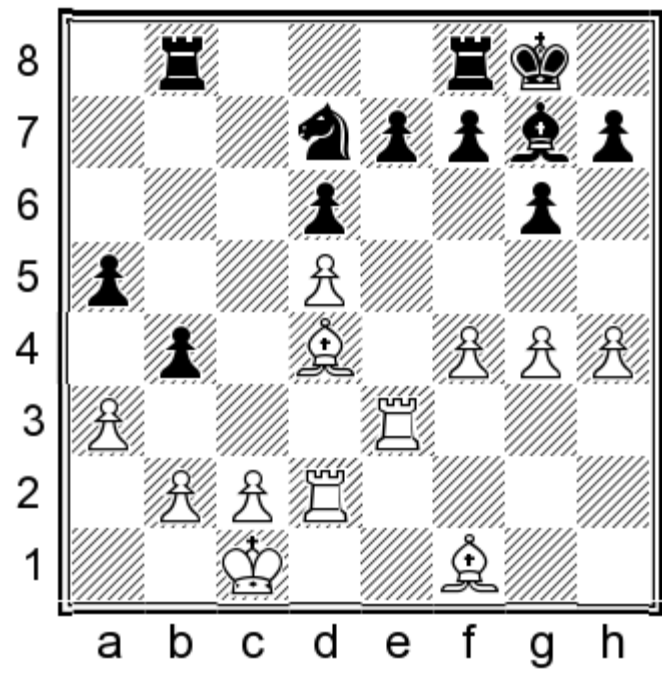


21...a6 (Playing on the kingside with 21...f5!?N looks like an interesting alternative) 22.Be2 a5 23.Rg1 Rc7 24.Bb5

Rbc8 25.f5 Nd7 26.Bxd7 Rxd7 27.fxg6 hxg6 28.Kd3 Rc5 29.Rg2 ½–½ Drake Diez de Rivera – Ljubicic, email 2009.

18...a5 19.Re3

We have been following Abhishek – Swapnil, Visakhapatnam 2011. Here I think the most accurate is:



19...bxa3N

A sample line is:

20.Rxa3 Rfc8

20...Nc5!? could also be considered.

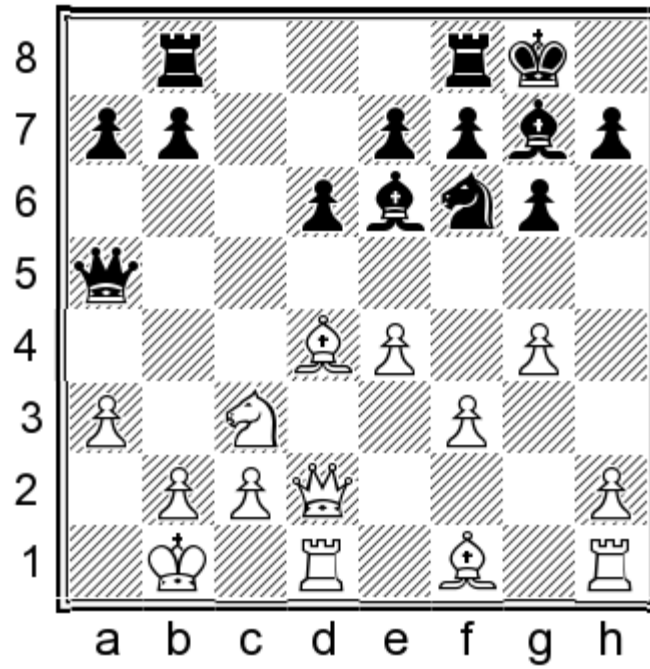
21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.Rxa5 Rb4 23.Rf2

23.Ra7 allows 23...Rxf4!.

23...Nf6 24.g5 Ng4 25.Rf3 Nh2 26.Rf2 Ng4=

With a repetition.

C42) 13.Kb1

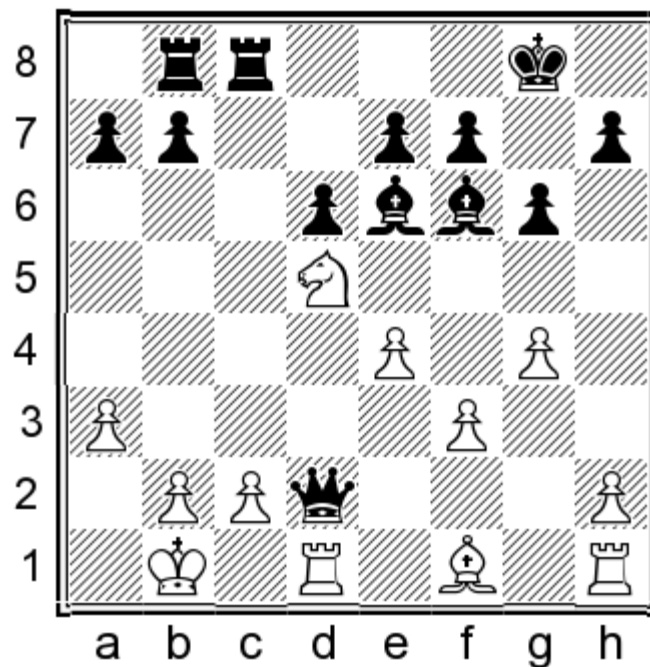


This sidestep is typical when the queen has gone to a5.

13...Rfc8

Black develops his final piece and prepares to push the b-pawn. Now C421) 14.g5 has been quite popular, and C422) 14.h4 has been the most common move of all.

14.Bxf6?! is not White's best route to the endgame. 14...Bxf6 15.Nd5 Qxd2 (Black can also keep the queens on the board with 15...Qa4!? since e7 is now defended. Following 16.Nxf6† exf6 17.Bd3 a5 18.Qf4 b5 19.Qxf6 b4 20.Qd4 Qc6 Black had strong play for the pawn in Postolachi – Seegert, Kemer 2009.)



16.Nxf6† Kg7!³ An important move to remember in the Dragon. Black maintains the integrity of his structure and has a slight advantage in the ending.

14.Ne2

This was once played by a young Magnus Carlsen.

14...Qa4!?

14...Qxd2 15.Rxd2 a6= also gives Black nothing to worry about.

15.g5

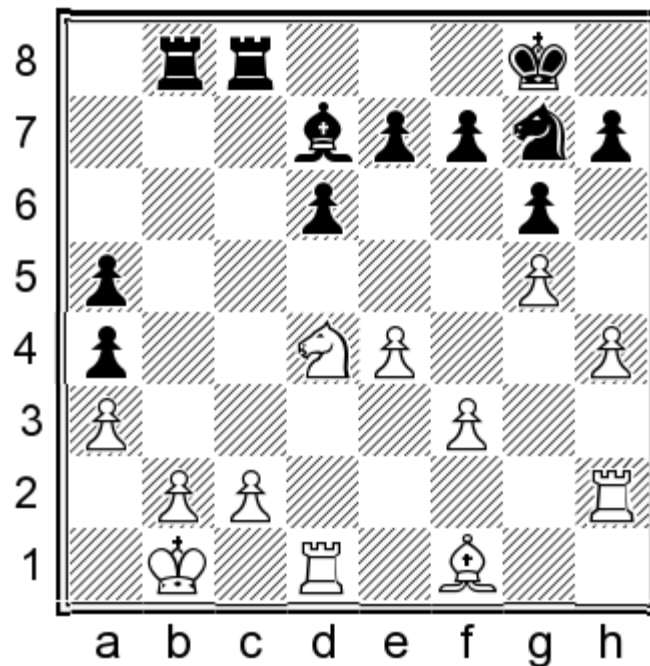
White should probably admit that his last move was not the most challenging and simply repeat with 15.Nc3 Qa5.

15...Nh5 16.Bxg7 Nxg7 17.Nd4 b5 18.Qb4 18...Bd7!

Improving over 18...Qa6 as played in Carlsen – Snarheim, Asker 2003.

19.h4 a5 20.Qxa4 bxa4 21.Rh2

In Agopov – Carlsson, Porto Carras 2011, Black could have obtained the better chances with:



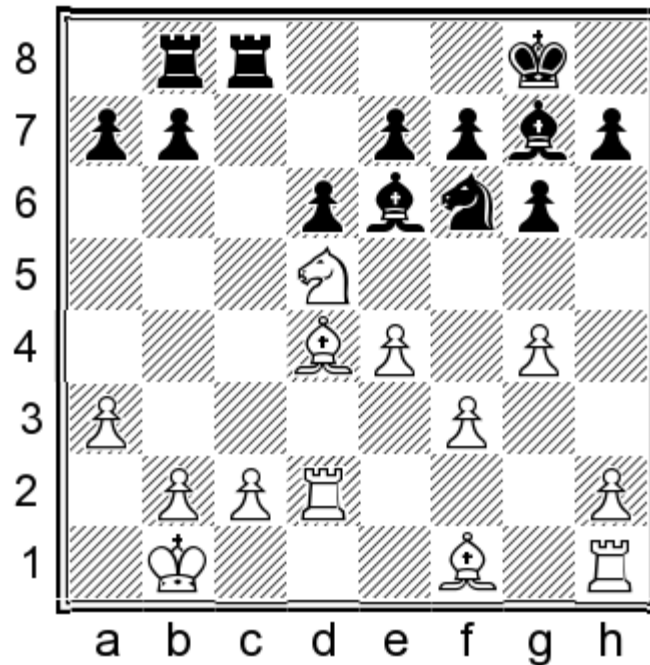
21...Nh5!N

The doubled a-pawns may look ugly but they offer Black good prospects along the b-file. On the other flank, Black has achieved the desired control over the f4-square.

14.Nd5

This is similar to the main line, but the positioning of the pawns on h2 and b7 means that Black can equalize immediately.

14...Qxd2 15.Rxd2



15...Nxd5

If you wish to keep more life in the position then 15...Bxd5 is a playable alternative.

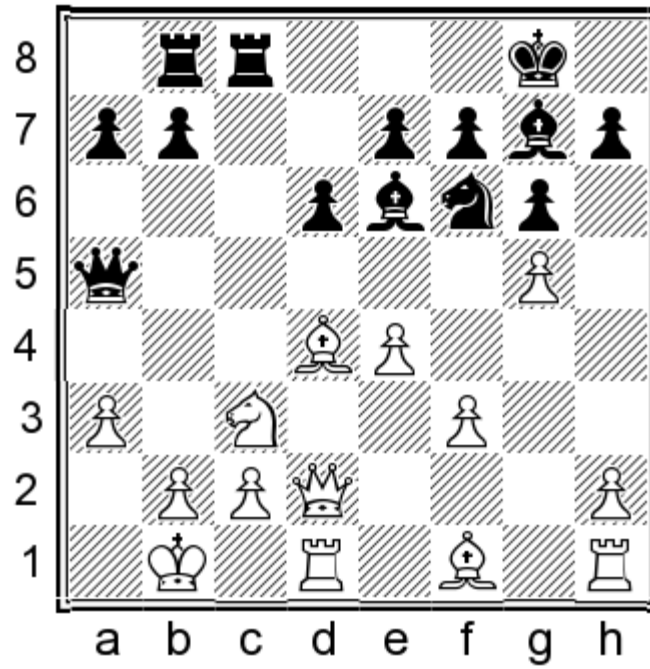
16.Bxg7

We see the difference between this and variation C422 after 16.exd5? which no longer works, as after 16...Bxd5 17.Bxg7? Bxf3 there is no Rh3, so Black is simply two pawns up.

16...Ne3!

At this point a draw was agreed in Anand – Kasparov, New York (15) 1995. Some other games have been played on from this position, but White has no advantage in the ensuing opposite-coloured-bishop endgame. If you prefer to avoid this type of endgame then 16...Kxg7 17.exd5 Bd7 is playable, although White may be able to claim the smallest of advantages.

C421) 14.g5



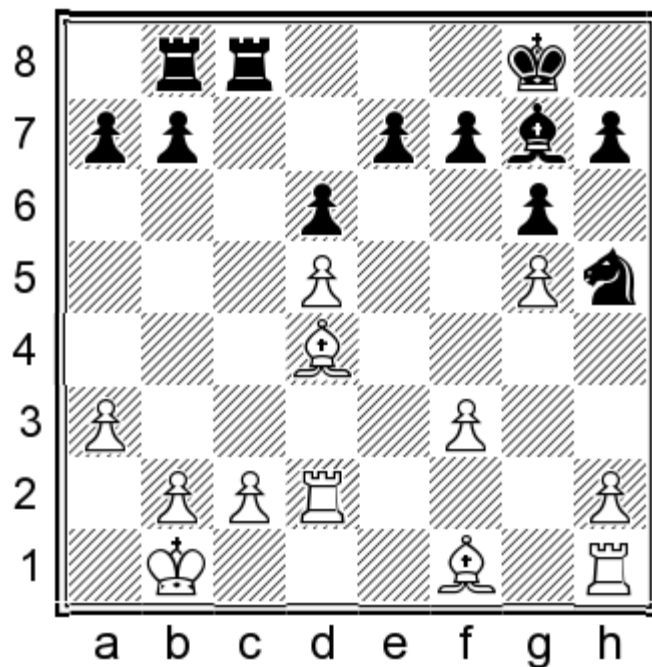
I am normally critical of this move, but this is one of the better times to play it. White's idea is to force the trade of the e6-bishop for the knight on d5, after which he will aim to exert pressure against e7.

14...Nh5 15.Nd5

15.Bxg7?! is the wrong idea. 15...Kxg7 16.Bd3?! (16.Qd4† is better but I still like Black after 16...Qe5!N 17.Qxe5† dxe5 when the change in the structure cements our control over f4.) 16...b5 17.Ne2 b4µ Black had a strong attack in Sukandar – Nguyen Duc Hoa, Jakarta 2012.

15...Qxd2 16.Rxd2 Bxd5 17.exd5

Opening the e-file is something of an achievement for White, but it does not offer him any more than equal chances.



17...a6 18.Bh3

18.Rg1 was the choice of Anatoly Karpov. It may look a little strange, but White has ideas of developing the rook to g4, where it controls the important f4-square and prepares to swing over to the queenside. I would like to recommend 18...f5!?N as a way of cutting across White's plan. Black is completely fine and will generate counterplay along the h-file.

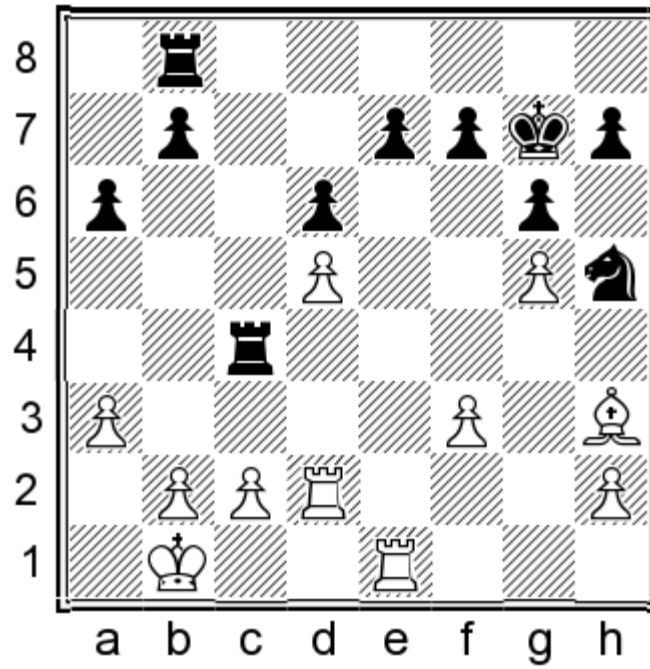
18.Be3 has also been tried but after 18...Be5 Black's control over the f4-square promises him at least equal chances. 19.Rg1 was played in Nedoma – Borowiec, email 2007, and now 19...f6!N would have been good.

18...Rc4 19.Bxg7

Retaining the bishop pair with 19.Bb6 did not really work out in the following game: 19...Be5 20.Ka2 Rh4 21.Bd7 h6! Black has already started to take over. White tried 22.Bf2 Rxh2 23.Rxh2 Bxh2 24.gxh6 in Maggiora – Rusak, email 2006, and here I think 24...Be5!N is the most accurate. The h6-pawn is weak and looks likely to drop within a few moves.

19...Kxg7 20.Re1

We have been following Shytaj – Ki. Georgiev, Spoleto 2011. Here I would take the opportunity to play:



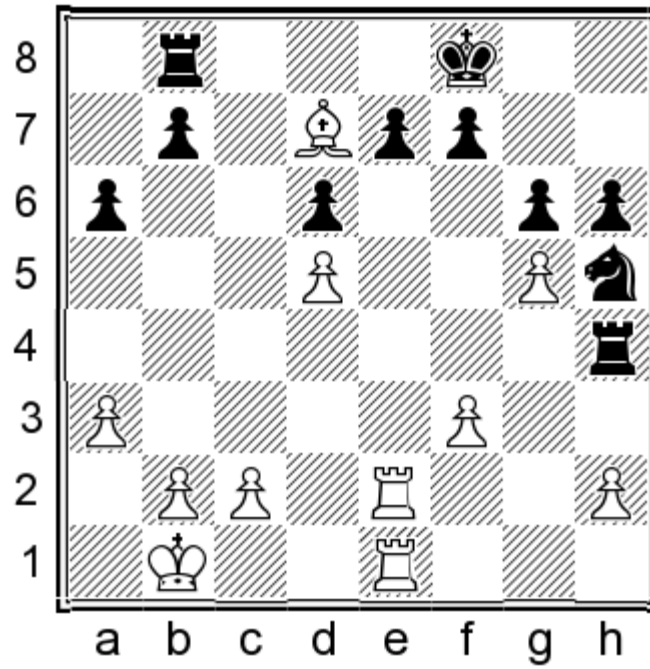
20...Rh4!?N

White's bishop does not have many squares.

21.Bd7

The alternative is: 21.Bg4 Kf8 22.Rde2 Nf4 (22...Re8 23.Bd7 Nf4 24.Re4 Rd8 25.Rxe7 Ne6 26.Rxf7† Kxf7 27.Bxe6† is another complicated ending that looks roughly equal) 23.Rxe7 h5 24.gxh6 Rxh6 The threat of ...f5 forces White to move his bishop again, with a roughly level position.

21...Kf8 22.Rde2 h6!



23.gxh6

23.Rxe7 hxg5 24.Re8† Rxe8 25.Rxe8† Kg7 is complicated, but I think Black's pawns are faster. An illustrative line is: 26.Bc8 Rxh2 27.Bxb7 f5 28.Bxa6 g4 29.fxg4 fxg4 30.Re1 g3 31.Bd3 Rf2 32.a4 g2 33.a5 Nf4 34.Bb5 (34.a6 Nxd3 35.cxd3 Rf1–+) 34...Rf3! 35.a6 Rh3 36.a7 Rh1–+

23...Nf6 24.Rxe7 Rxh2

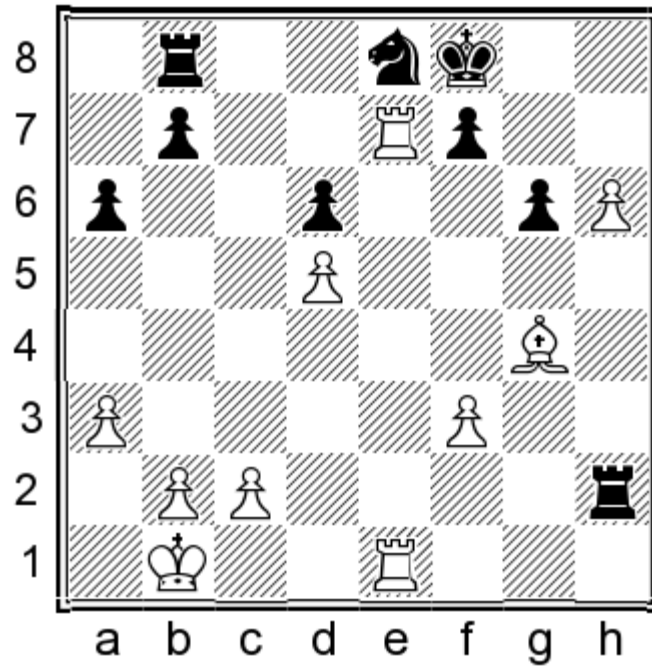
Black will regain the h6-pawn and White will have to take care to avoid being dominated on the dark squares. His best bet is to aim for some counterplay against our queenside pawns.

25.Bg4 Ne8

25...Nxd5!? 26.Rd7 f5!? is a slightly risky winning attempt; Black traps the bishop but White gets a couple of pawns plus active rooks. (26...Rxh6 27.Rxd6 Ne7 is level.) 27.Rh7! Kg8 28.Rg7† Kh8 29.Rxg6 fxg4 30.fxg4 The position remains messy.

25...Rxh6 26.Rc7! leads to another double-edged endgame after 26...Nxd5 27.Rc8† Rxc8 28.Bxc8 b6 29.Bxa6 when the position is balanced but all three results are possible.

The text move is the safer option, controlling c7 and thwarting White's plan. His best reply seems to be:



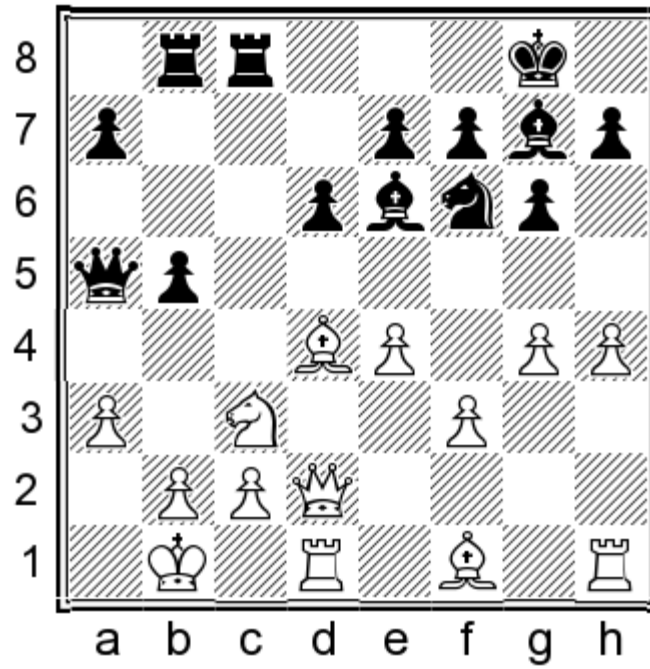
26.Bd7

26.Rd7?! Rxh6 27.Ree7 f5µ and the bishop is trapped.

26...Nf6

Repeating the position. Should you encounter this variation over the board, you can always repeat once before deciding whether to play on with one of the lines mentioned above.

C422) 14.h4 b5



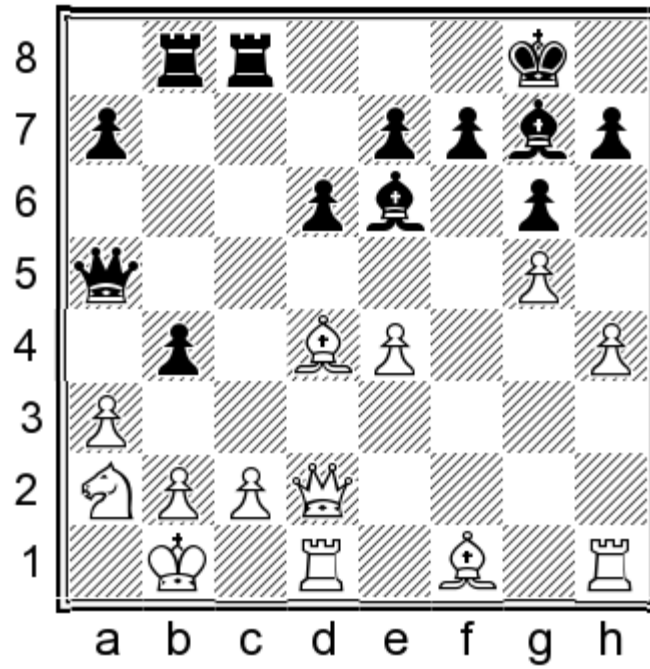
15.Nd5

Black's attack is coming fast, so White had better trade queens while he still can.

15.h5? b4 needs no further analysis; Black's attack is much stronger.

15.Nxb5? has been tried a few times but it is a poor decision. 15...Rxb5 (even 15...Qa4!? looks good, but there is no reason to deviate from the main line) 16.Bxb5 Qxb5 17.h5 a5 Sepehrkhoui – Ghari Zadeh, Tehran 2001. Material may be roughly equal but Black's minor pieces are far more effective for attacking purposes.

15.g5?! allows the typical 15...b4! with a dangerous attack, for example: 16.Na2 Nxe4! 17.fxe4



17...Bxd4!N (17...Bxa2† 18.Kxa2 Bxd4 19.Qxd4 was the move order of the game, but White did not need to take on d4.) 18.Qxd4 Bxa2† 19.Kxa2 We have transposed to the game, and after 19...bxa3 20.b3 Rxc2† 21.Ka1 Rxb3 White could not survive the onslaught in Tello Nunez – Guerrero Olmos, Mondariz 2003.

15.Bxf6?

This tends to be harmless at the best of times, and here it comes too late.

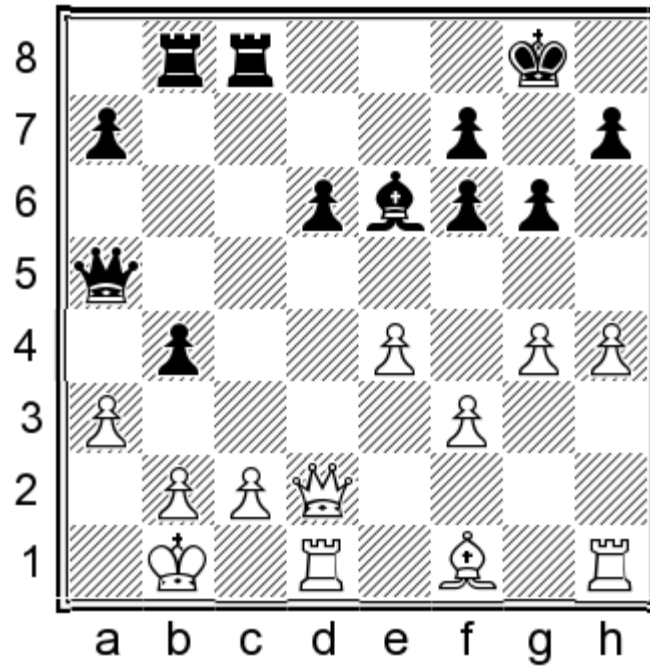
15...Bxf6 16.Nd5 b4!

I see no way for White to defend his queenside.

17.Nxf6†

17.g5? Bc3! was already resignable in Goncharov – Kabanov, Omsk 2001.

17...exf6

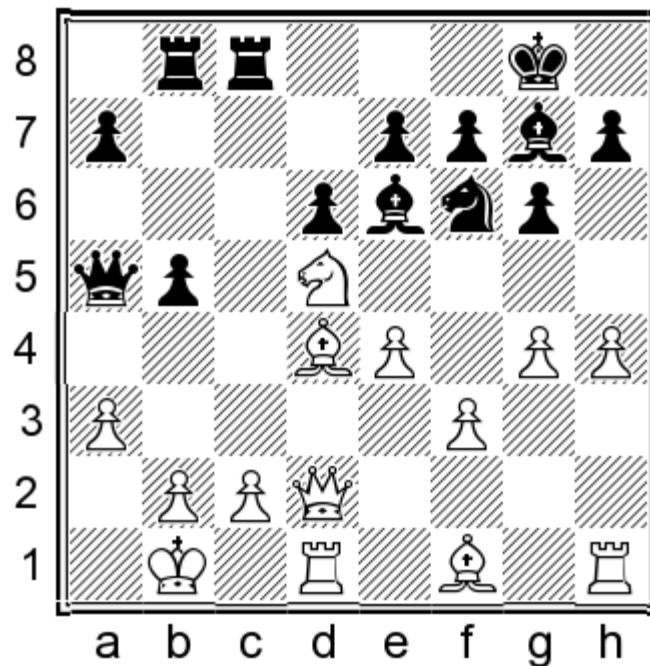


18.b3?!

18.Rh2 seems like the best try, and was played in M. Schmidt – Pollmueller, Passau 1998. Nevertheless, after 18...Rb6!N, defending the d-pawn and preparing ...Rc3, I doubt that White can prevent our attack from crashing through.

18...Qxa3 19.Qc1 Bxb3! 20.Qxa3 Bxc2† 21.Ka1 bxa3

Black won easily in Livshits – Parkanyi, Budapest 1999.



15...Qxd2 16.Rxd2

16.Nxf6† is absolutely nothing for White, and after 16...Bxf6 17.Rxd2 Bxd4 18.Rxd4 Black has slightly the better of the ending.

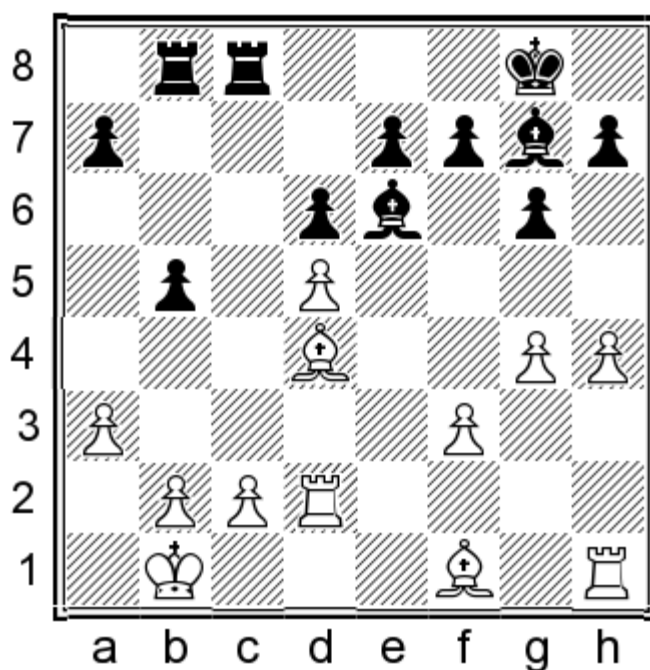
16...Nxd5

Black prepares an ambitious piece sacrifice to reach a double-edged endgame.

If you don't feel like giving up a piece then 16...Bxd5 is a solid alternative, although White may be able to claim a tiny edge.

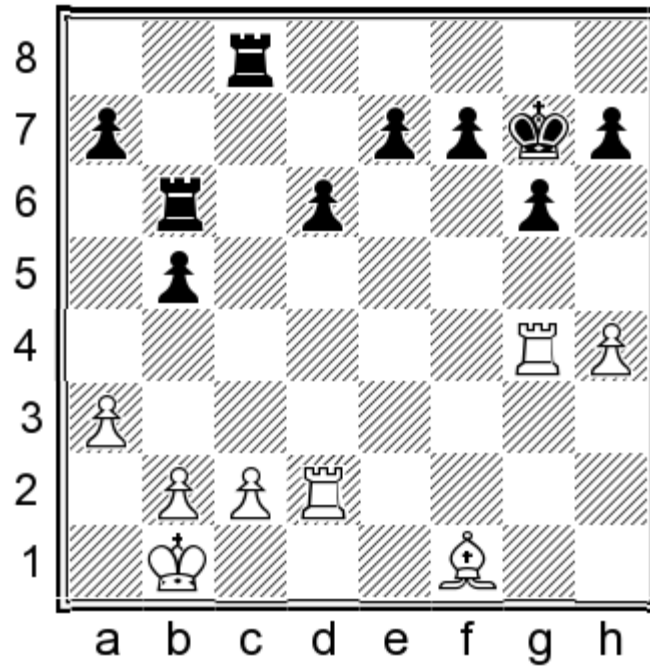
17.exd5

17.Bxg7 can be met by the familiar 17...Ne3 18.Bd4 Nxf1 19.Rxf1 a5 with an equal ending. In fact Vishy Anand switched colours from his earlier draw with Kasparov and another quick draw was agreed after 20.e5 in J. Polgar – Anand, Dortmund 1997.



17...Bxd5!? 18.Bxg7 Bxf3 19.Rh3 Bxg4 20.Rg3 Kxg7 21.Rxg4 Rb6

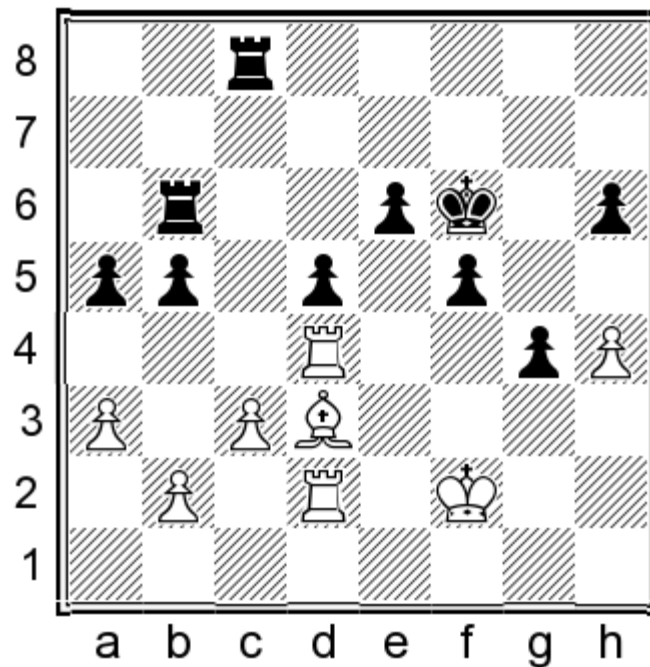
This position has been reached a few times in computer battles, as engines tend to value the piece over the three pawns. Results, however, have been positive for Black, and I think White has a tough job preventing our straightforward plan of advancing the central pawns. The point of Black's last move is to overprotect d6 in order to advance the e-pawn.



22.Re4

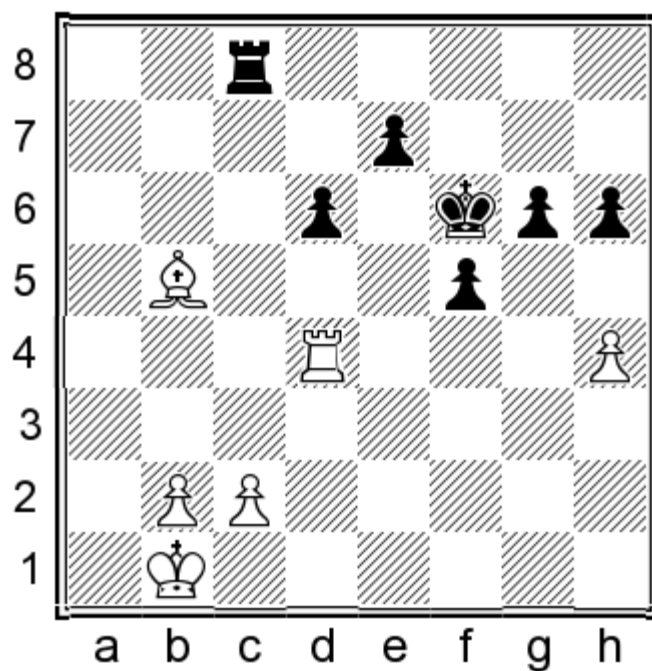
Another couple of examples also worked out fine for Black:

22.Rf2 e6 23.Rd4 f5 24.Kc1 Kf6 25.Rfd2 d5 26.Kd1 h6 27.c3 g5 28.Ke1 g4 29.Bd3 a5 30.Kf2



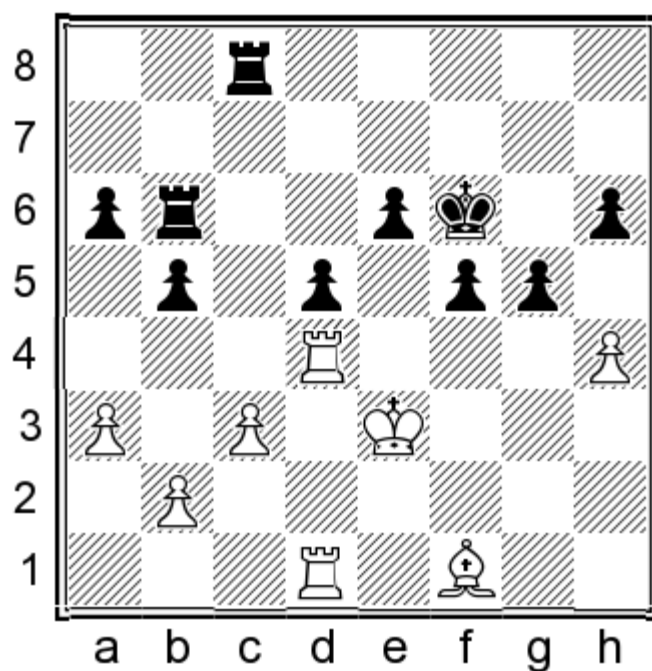
30...b4! 31.cxb4 axb4 Four connected passed pawns! 32.a4 Rc1 33.a5 Rb8 34.a6 Ke5 35.Bf1 f4 36.Rd1 Rc2† 37.R4d2 b3 38.h5 Rbc8 The a-pawn gives White some counterplay but it is clear that Black was the one pressing in don007 – fwcc2, engine game 2012.

22.Rd5 a6 23.Rgd4 f5 24.a4 Kf6 25.axb5 axb5 26.Rxb5 Rxb5 27.Bxb5 h6



White has managed to win a pawn but, with a pair of rooks exchanged, it will prove even harder to slow down Black's pawn avalanche. After 28.Rd5 Black correctly evaluated that the ending after 28...Rc5!? 29.Rxc5 dxc5 was drawn, nitropower – elk, engine game 2013.

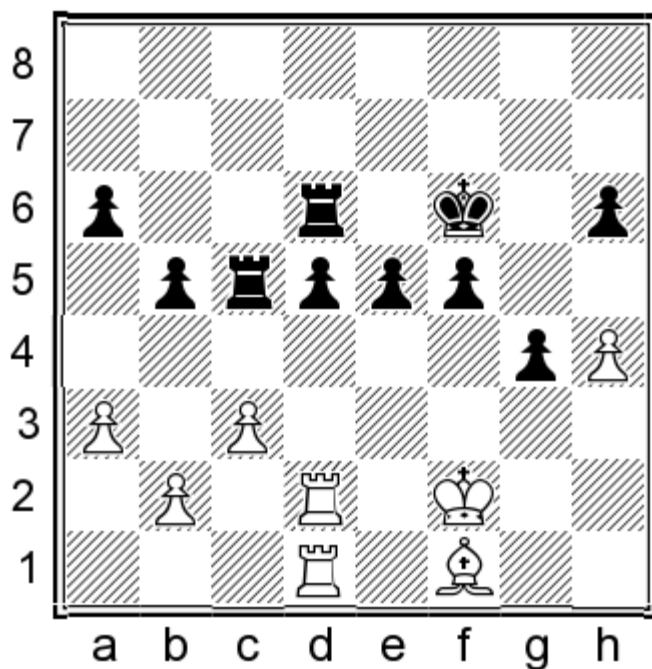
22...e6 23.c3 d5 24.Red4 f5 25.Kc1 h6 26.Rd1 g5 27.Kd2 a6 28.Ke3 Kf6



Around here my engine still evaluates the position as slightly better for White. In reality, however, there is little he can do but wait, while Black can simply prepare the gradual advance of his pawns. I will leave the rest of the game as an indication of how you might go about winning such an endgame.

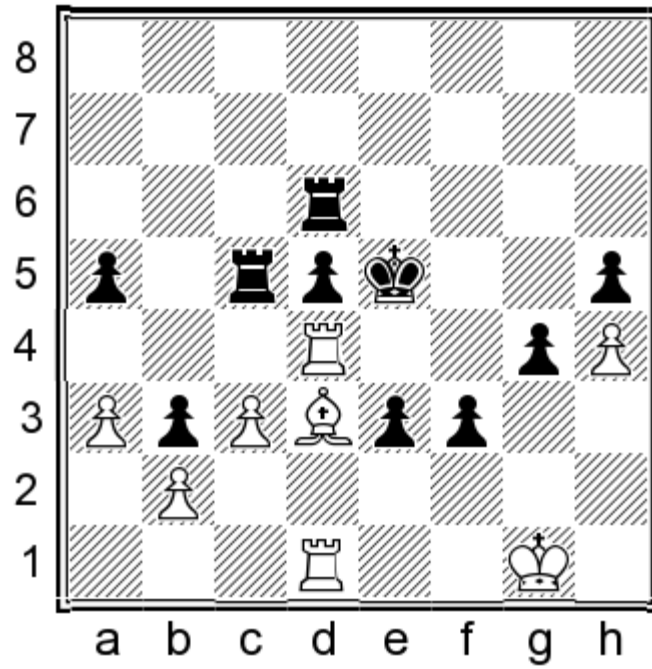
29.Be2 Rd8 30.Rh1 Rbb8 31.Rb4 Rg8 32.Rd1 g4 33.Kf2 Rgd8 34.Rbd4 Rd6 35.Bf1 Rbd8 36.Bg2 Rc8 37.Bf1 Rc5 38.R4d2 e5

Having strengthened the position as much as possible, Black inches ahead.

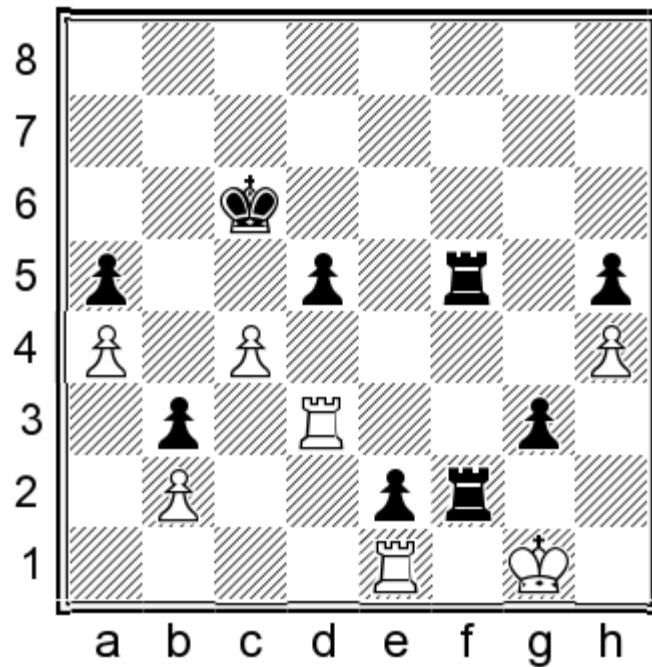


39.Bd3 Rc8 40.Bb1 Rcd8 41.Kg3 h5 42.Kg2 e4 43.Rd4 Ke5 44.Re1 a5 45.Kf1 Rb8 46.Red1 b4 47.Ba2 b3 48.Bb1 Rc8 49.Ra4 Rc5 50.Kg1 f4 51.Rad4 e3 52.Bd3 f3

White will soon have to give up his bishop, leaving Black with a winning rook ending.



53.Kh2 Rdc6 54.Bf1 Re6 55.Kg3 e2 56.Bxe2 fxe2 57.Re1 Kd6 58.Kf2 Rc7 59.Rd2 Rf7† 60.Kg3 Re3† 61.Kh2 Rf2† 62.Kg1 g3 63.c4 Re5 64.a4 Kc6 65.Rd3 Ref5



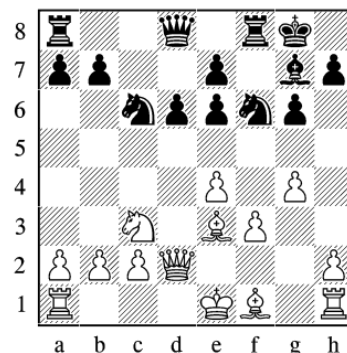
The remaining moves are not interesting; in vodkamaster21 – fwcc2, engine game 2012, White gave up his rook for the e2-pawn and was mated on move 77.

Conclusion

9.g4 is a serious option but, with the help of the lines I have presented, I hope you will be happy to take it on. This chapter mainly focused on the old main line of 10.0-0-0. This is a sound continuation, but it does not really put Black under pressure. Black's attack is generally the faster of the two, so White is virtually forced to trade queens and enter a level ending. However, in most variations we can still reach double-edged positions, and I think Black has good chances to play for the whole point. In the next chapter we will deal with a more modern interpretation of White's 9th move.

Chapter 15

Yugoslav Attack



10. ♖xe6

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 g6 6. ♕e3 ♕g7
7.f3 0-0 8. ♖d2 ♘c6 9.g4 ♕e6 10. ♘xe6

10...fxe6

A) 11.Bc4

A1) 11...d5

A2) 11...Qc8!?

B) 11.0-0 Ne5 12.Be2 Qc8

B1) 13.Bh6

B2) 13.Kb1

B21) 13...Nfd7

B22) 13...Nc4

B3) 13.h4 Nfd7

B31) 14.h5!?

B32) 14.f4 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Qxc4 16.e5 Rad8

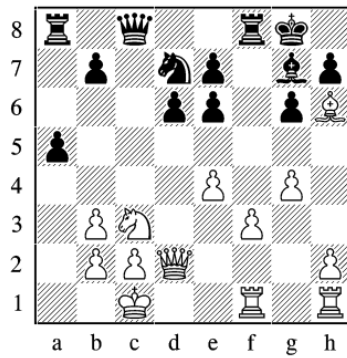
B321) 17.exd6 Nf6!

B3211) 18.Qd4

B3212) 18.Qg2

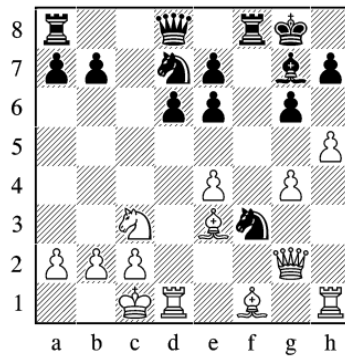
B322) 17.h5

A2) after 16.♔h6



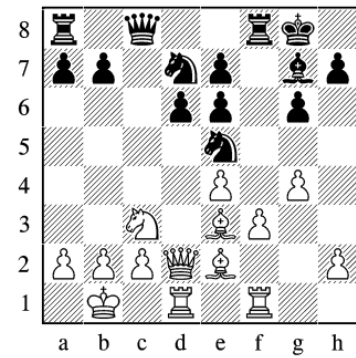
16...♕xc3!N

B) note to 12.♕e2



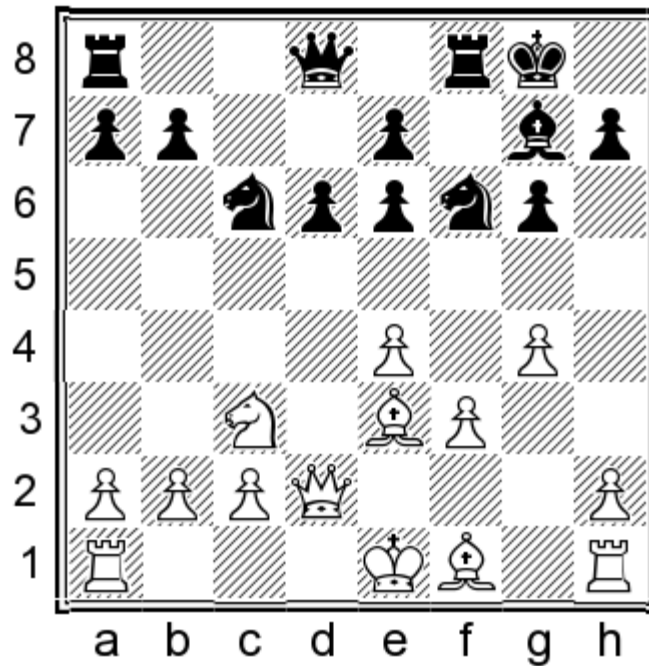
14...♖c8!N

B21) note to 14.f4



14...♘b6!N

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.g4 Be6 10.Nxe6 fxe6

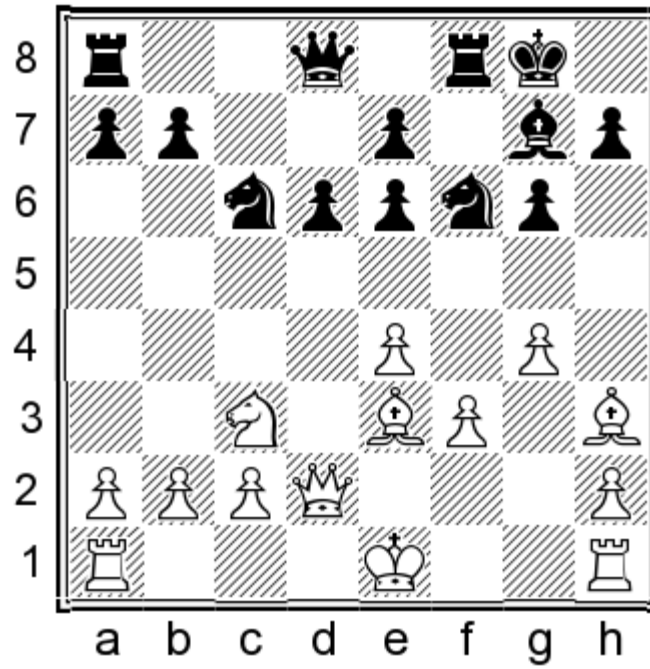


Historically this move was criticized as it was thought the exchange favoured Black, on account of his play down the semi-open f-file and control of the d5-square. However, the change in the pawn structure also leaves Black's kingside slightly more vulnerable, and in recent years White has sought to exploit this by developing a quick attack.

White's two main options are A) 11.Bc4 and B) 11.0-0-0.

11.h4?! d5 transposes to the note on 11.Nxe6?! in variation B of the previous chapter.

11.Bh3



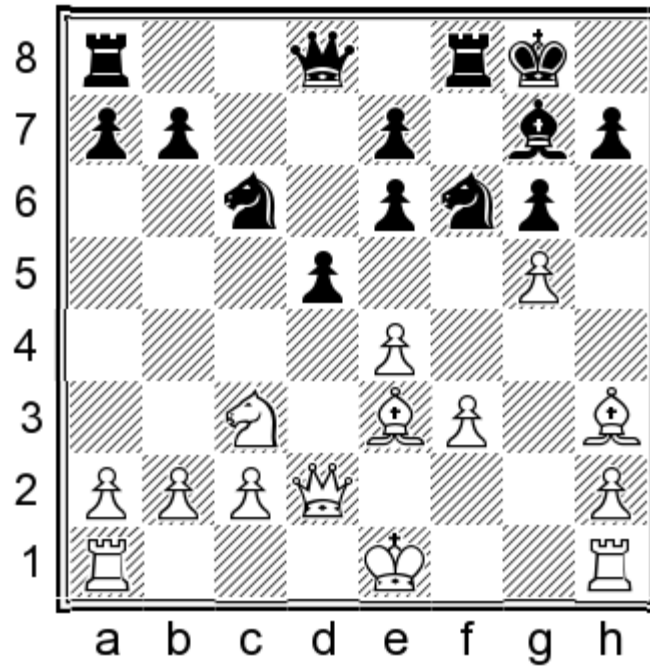
This odd-looking move has been used repeatedly by Chambers in correspondence play but, unsurprisingly, it hasn't caught on. White's idea is evidently to target e6, but the bishop gets in the way of his h-pawn and therefore slows his attack. White also relinquishes control of the important c4-square.

11...d5!N

11...Ne5 has been played most often, and also looks to favour Black. However, I believe that the text move virtually refutes White's idea.

12.g5

12.0-0-0 does not prevent 12...d4! 13.Bxd4 Qxd4 14.Qxd4 Nxd4 15.Rxd4 Nd5! when the ridiculous bishop on h3 gives White problems. 16.Rdd1 Ne3 17.Rdg1 Rxf3 18.Rg3 Rxc3 19.hxc3 Bxc3 20.bxc3 g5!µ White has a truly hideous ending.



12...d4! 13.gxf6 Rxf6

Black regains the piece and keeps the better chances. It should be noted that grabbing the exchange backfires on White:

14.Bg5?! dxc3 15.Qxd8† Rxd8 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Bxe6† Kg7

Black has a clear advantage.

A) 11.Bc4

Targeting the e6-pawn looks logical, but the bishop will not be able to remain on its active post. Black can exploit the weakness on f3 with A1) 11...d5 or, in analogy with the main line, play A2) 11...Qc8!?.

A1) 11...d5 12.exd5 Ne5 13.Be2 Nxd5 14.Nxd5

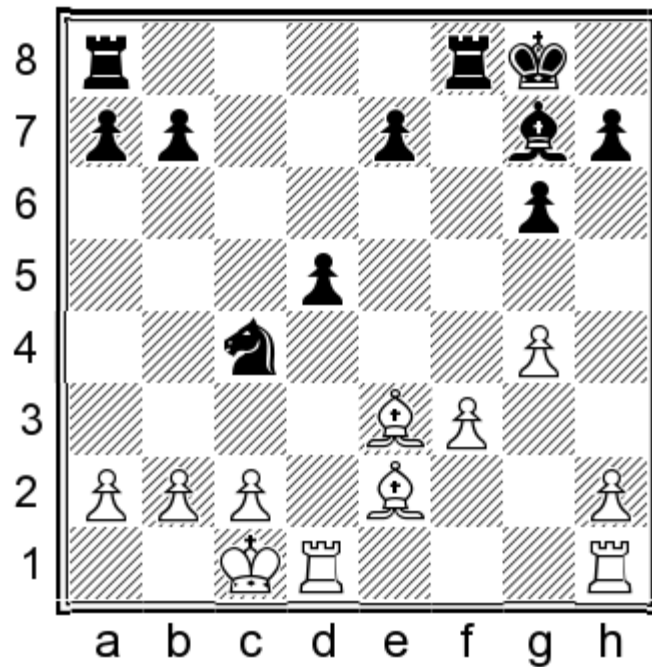
14.0-0-0?! Nxf3 15.Bxf3 Rxf3 gave White nothing for the pawn in Benyovszki – Berkley, email 2000.

14...Qxd5

The lack of a safe location for White's king forces him to trade queens.

14...exd5!? is also playable if you wish to keep the queens on the board.

15.Qxd5 exd5 16.0-0-0 Nc4



17.Bd4 Bh6† 18.Kb1 Nd2† 19.Ka1 e6

With a level endgame, Varga – Porat, Budapest 2005.

A2) 11...Qc8!? 12.Bb3

12.0-0-0?! Na5N 13.Be2 Nc4 is good for Black.

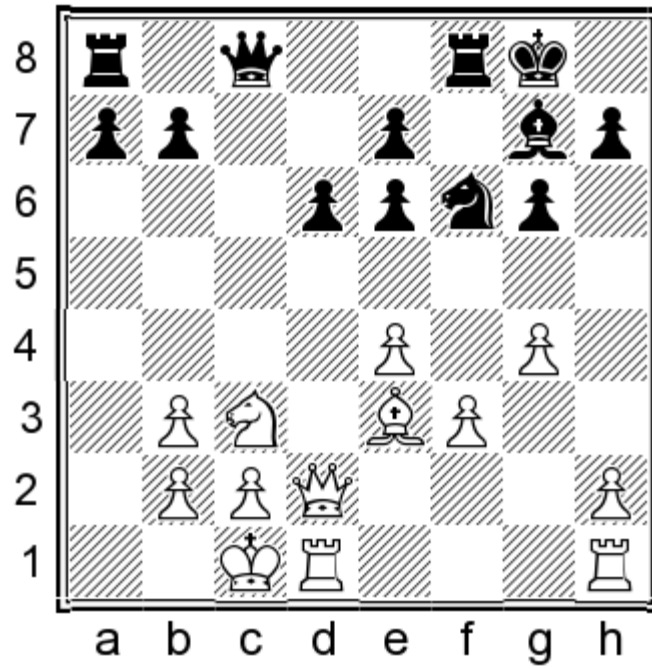
12...Na5 13.0-0-0

13.0-0 was tried once but hardly looks threatening. 13...Nxb3 14.cxb3 Varga – Palkovi, Budapest 1997. Here I like 14...Nd7N 15.Rac1 Ne5, rerouting the knight to an active square. 16.Kg2 Qd7=

13...Nxb3† 14.axb3

Recapturing this way looks logical, but White has to watch out for the plan of opening the a-file.

14.cxb3 Nd7 15.Rhf1 b5 16.Kb1 has been played, and now 16...Bxc3!?N 17.bxc3 a5 looks tempting; I think Black has the faster attack.



14...Nd7 15.Rdf1

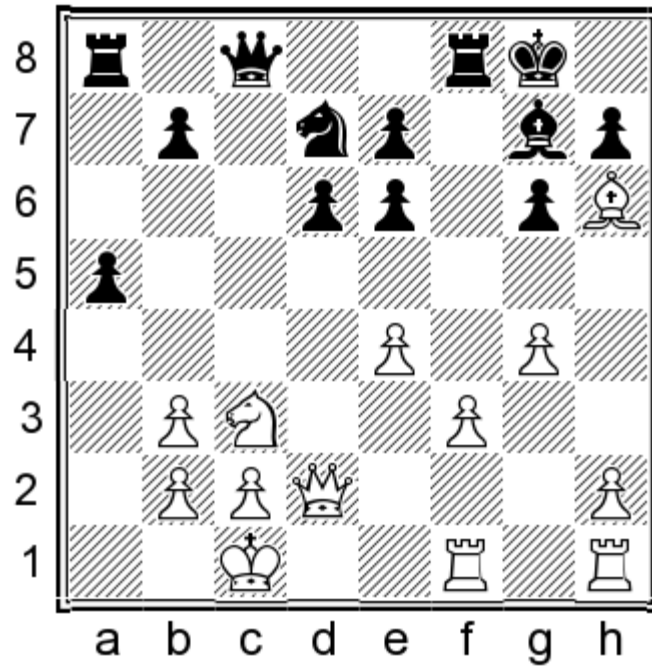
15.Bg5 was tried fairly recently in Gieben – Hertel, Groningen 2014, but the simple 15...Rf7N favours Black.

15...a5

The immediate 15...Bxc3!?N also looks strong.

16.Bh6

Now in Zinchenko – Tukhaev, Evpatoria 2006, Black could have obtained a fine position with a somewhat counterintuitive move:



16...Bxc3!?N

Giving up the Dragon bishop works well here.

17.bxc3

17.Qxc3 is safer although 17...Qxc3 18.bxc3 Rfc8 19.Kb2 a4³ favours Black.

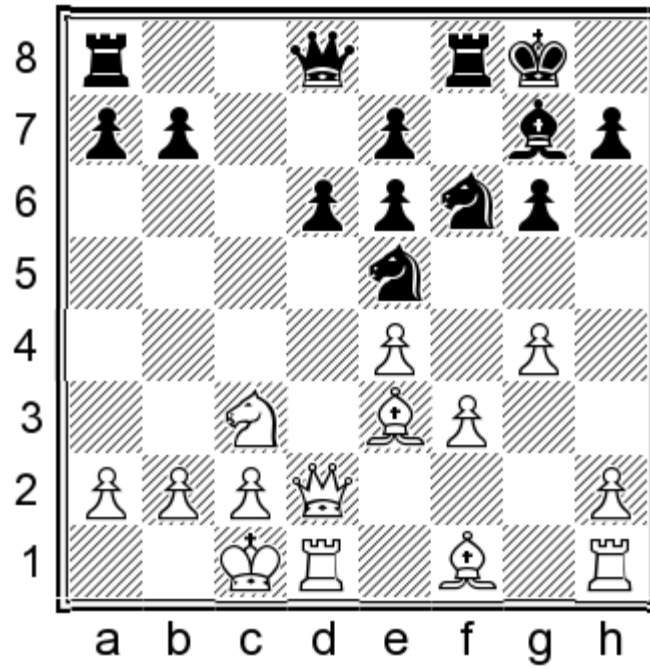
17...Rf7

Black's attack is much faster, for example:

18.h4 a4 19.h5 axb3 20.cxb3 Qc5 21.hxg6 hxg6

White's attack has stalled while Black's is just getting underway. The computer already evaluates the position as winning for Black.

B) 11.0-0-0 Ne5



12.Be2

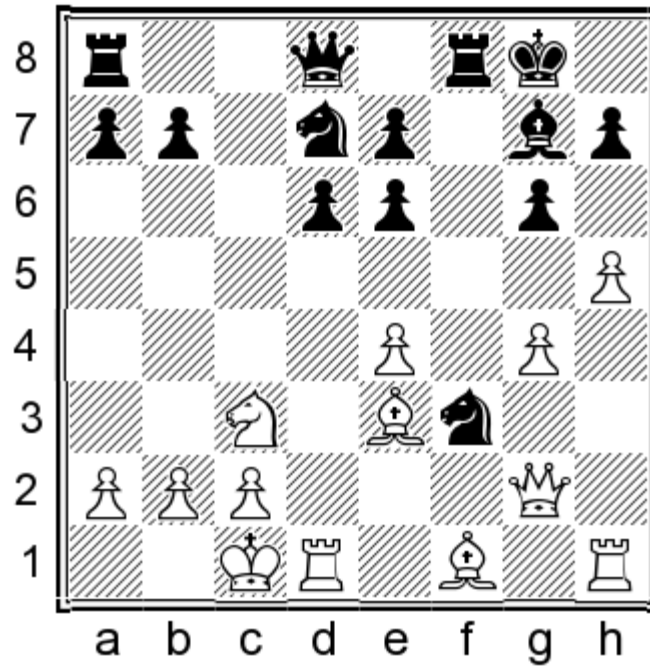
12.h4!?

This has only been played a couple of times but needs to be taken seriously. White simply abandons the f-pawn and gets on with his attack.

12...Nxf3 13.Qg2 Nd7 14.h5

Trying to kick back the knight with 14.Rh3 does not work: 14...Nde5! 15.Be2 The f3-knight may be trapped, but Black's counterplay overruns White. 15...Qa5! 16.Bxf3 Nc4µ Despite White's extra piece, he is in huge trouble. All his pieces are bunched on the kingside and he will find it tough to defend against ...Nxb2.

After the text move I recommend ignoring the kingside and getting on with our counterplay.



14...Rc8!N 15.hxg6 Qa5!

White is in trouble:

16.Qh3

16.gxh7† Kh8 17.Rh3 Nde5—+ Black's king is nicely protected by the h7-pawn while White is powerless against the attack on the opposite flank.

16...hxg6 17.Rd3

17.Qh7† Kf7 18.Bh6 Rg8 doesn't get White anywhere.

17...Rxc3 18.Rxc3 Qxa2μ

Black's attack has landed first.

12...Qc8

In the past few years this has become the main line. The queen may look strange, but it combines attack and defence by preparing ...Nc4 while guarding the e6-pawn.

12...Rc8 used to be the main line but White has caused some problems with 13.Nb5! a6 14.Nd4, hitting the vulnerable e6-pawn.

12...Qa5 is also playable; I have tried it a couple of times but would now prefer the text move.

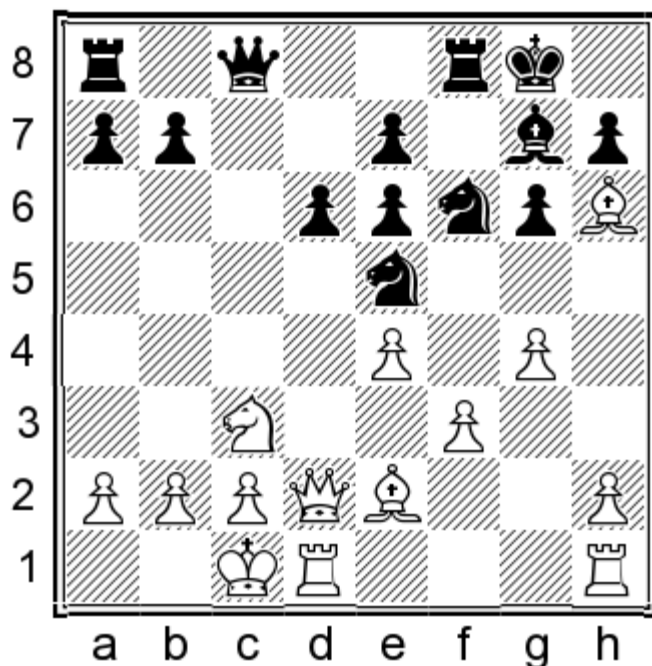
White's three most important tries are B1) 13.Bh6, B2) 13.Kb1 and B3) 13.h4.

13.g5?! Nh5 is similar to the 10.g5 line I investigated at the start of the previous chapter. Yet again, I don't approve of prematurely pushing the g-pawn. 14.Rhf1 was seen in Goebel – Koepke, Nuremberg 2012, and now 14...Nc4N would have been comfortable for Black.

13.Bd4 has been tried in a few correspondence games but it's hard to believe that White has better than repeating after 13...Nc6. I suppose White's idea is to play 14.Bg1, when a future ...Nc4 won't fork queen and bishop, but the bishop looks rather passive on g1. 14...Nd7 15.Rf1 Nce5 16.Bd4 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Qxc4 18.Bxg7 Kxg7= resulted in a typical position for this line in Strengell – Soederberg, email 2009.

13.Rhe1 was a surprising positional approach seen in a GM battle. 13...Nc4 (13...a6!?N would ask White exactly what the point was of his previous move) 14.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.Bd4 Bartel – Sebenik, Biel 2014. Here I would play 15...Nd7N with another normal, balanced position.

B1) 13.Bh6



The bishop avoids being hit by a future ...Nc4 but now the queen can develop via c5.

13...Bxh6 14.Qxh6 Qc5 15.h4

15.Rhf1 was played by a strong GM in Smirin – Antipov, Yerevan 2014, but it looks too slow; after 15...Nc4N I prefer Black.

15...Rac8

Black has lots of different options but this looks quite sensible; we are simply preparing ...b5.

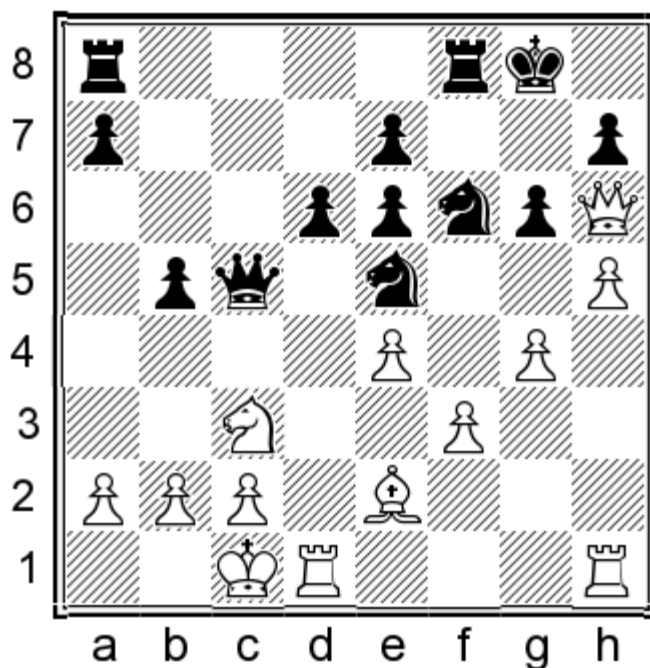
15...b5!?N

I suggested this on ChessPublishing, and I still find it a reasonable move.

16.h5

This must be critical.

Black's idea is always to meet 16.Nxb5 with: 16...Nxf3! 17.Bxf3 Qxb5 18.g5 Nxe4! 19.Bxe4 Rab8 Despite White's extra piece, he has to allow the draw as his queen is so bad, for example: 20.b3 Qe5 21.Bd3 Qa1† 22.Kd2 Rf2†!? 23.Ke3 Qe5† 24.Kxf2 Qf4† 25.Ke2 Qg4† 26.Ke3 Qg3†= White has nowhere to hide from the checks on the dark squares.



16...b4!

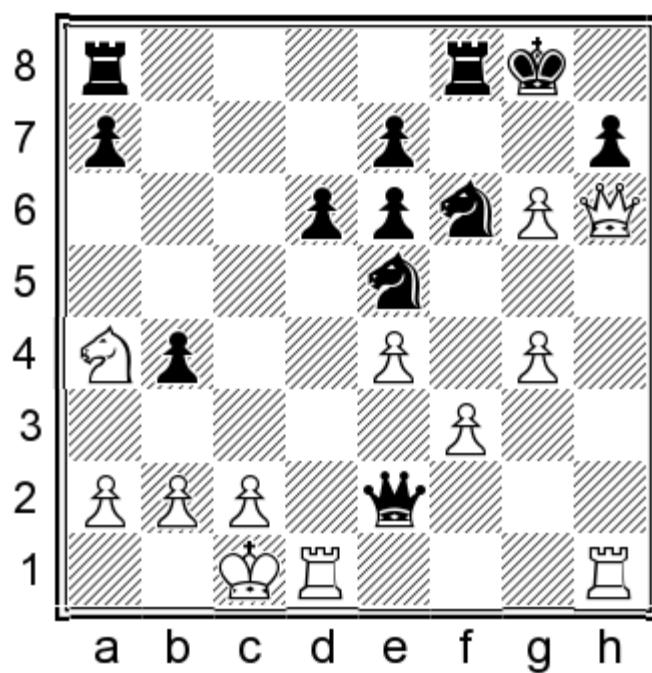
On this occasion we cannot use the defence 16...Nf7?! 17.Qd2 g5 as the b-pawn hangs: 18.Nxb5±

17.Na4 Qf2 18.hxg6!?

The line I gave on ChessPublishing continued 18.Rde1 gxh5 19.Rhf1 Qh2 20.gxh5 (20.Rh1 Qf2=) 20...Kh8 with an unclear position.

18...Qxe2

This seems likely to end in a draw. Our queen is powerful on the second rank, hitting c2, and so White has to try and hit it away.



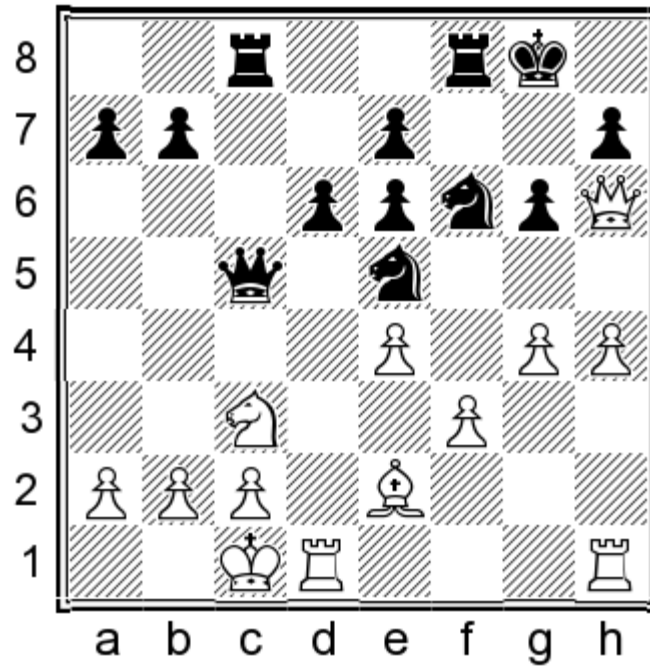
19.Rde1 Qf2

19...Qb5? 20.g5+-

20.Re1

20.g5 Rac8 21.Kb1 Nxc6 22.gxf6 Rxf6 23.Qxh7† Kf8 looks respectable for Black, as the king can run to its hiding hole on d7.

20...Qe2 21.Re1=



16.h5

16.Kb1N 16...b5 17.Qd2 transposes to 16.Qd2 below.

16.Qd2!?N

This has not been played but I think it needs considering. The queen wasn't doing so much on h6 and so it drops back to defend the c2-pawn.

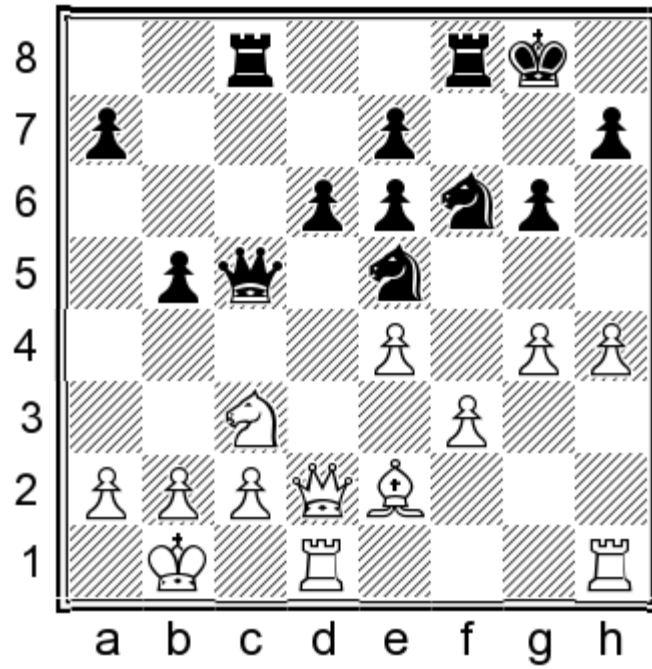
16...b5

16...h5!? is my engine's choice but it looks risky to me, despite the '0.00' evaluation.

17.Kb1

17.Nxb5 Nxf3!³ is always Black's point when the pawn goes to b5 in these positions.

17.h5 gxh5 18.gxh5 (18.g5 is also possible but I think Black's counterplay is fast enough after 18...Nfd7; we threaten both to take on f3 and to play ...b4.) 18...Kh8 We have transposed to the note to White's 18th move in the main line.



17...b4 18.Na4 Qc6 19.b3 h5!?

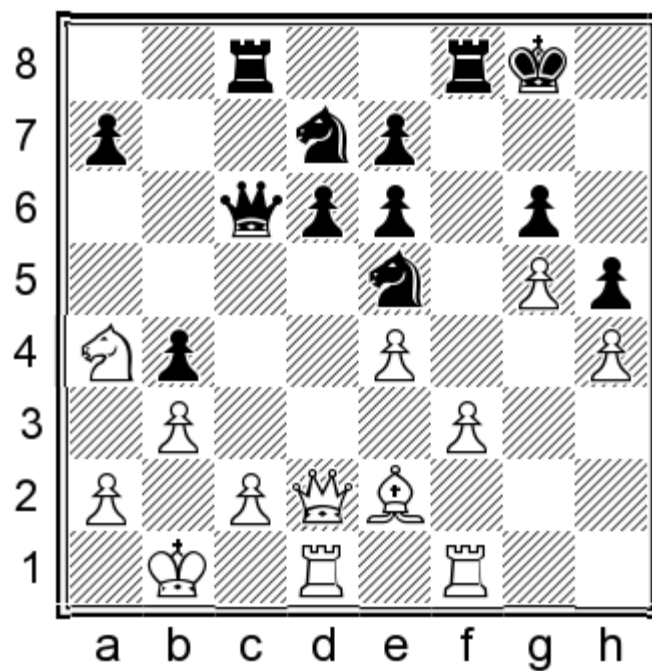
Here this move works quite well.

20.g5

20.gxh5 Nxh5 looks good for Black with his control of the f4-square.

20...Nfd7 21.Rhf1

21.f4 Rxf4! 22.Qxf4 Qxc2† 23.Ka1 Qxe2μ



21...Rf4!

A nice idea. If Black can hold on to the f4-square then the e5-knight will dominate, so White has to play:

22.Qxf4

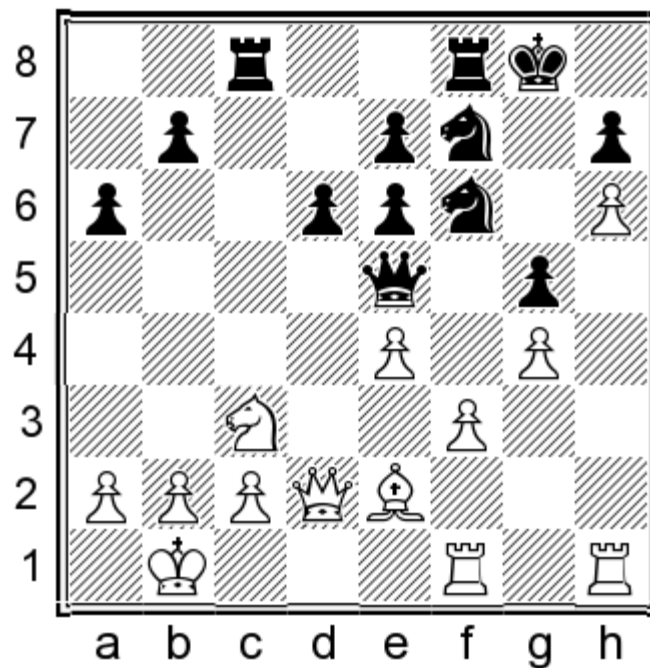
22.Bb5?! keeps the c2-pawn, but 22...Qxb5 23.Qxf4 Nc4! 24.Rf2 Ndb6 is dangerous.

22...Qxc2† 23.Ka1 Qxe2 24.Qd2 Qxd2 25.Rxd2 Rf8 26.f4 Ng4

Black has full compensation.

16...gxh5

16...Nf7!? 17.Qd2 g5= looks like a respectable alternative, keeping the kingside closed. 18.Kb1 (18.f4? gxf4 19.Qxf4 Ng5 20.Bc4 Nfxe4 21.Bxe6† Kh8 22.Bf5 e6 0–1 Marques – Quintiliano Pinto, Sao Paulo 2012, showed some of White's practical difficulties.) 18...a6 19.h6 Qe5 20.Rdf1



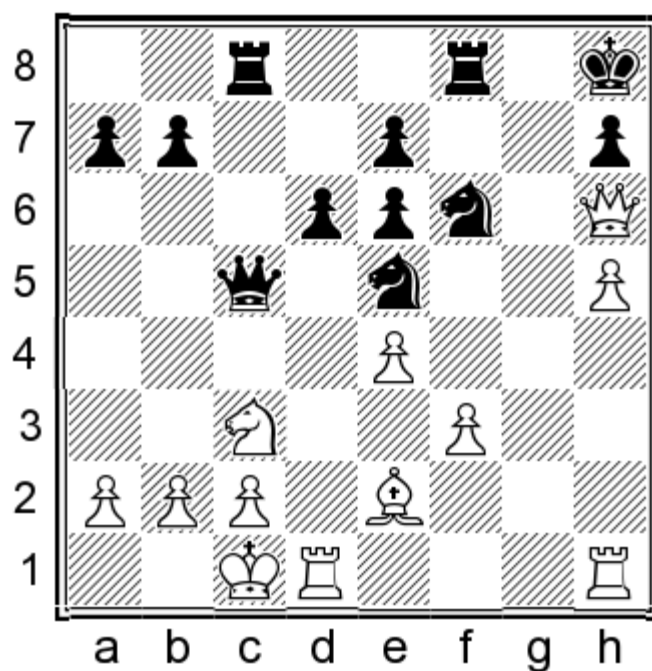
This was played in Wegener – Polzin, Germany 2012. Here I would prevent White from opening the f-file and play 20...Qf4!N, when Black's domination of the dark squares promises him the better chances.

17.gxh5

White would ideally like to keep the h-file open but 17.g5?? loses to 17...Qe3† 18.Kb1 Nf7 when the queen is trapped.

17...Kh8

The h-file is closed and Black can easily defend on the g-file, so White's attack has been drastically slowed down. This is another position which has undergone a lot of testing in engine-versus-engine games, with Black scoring well.



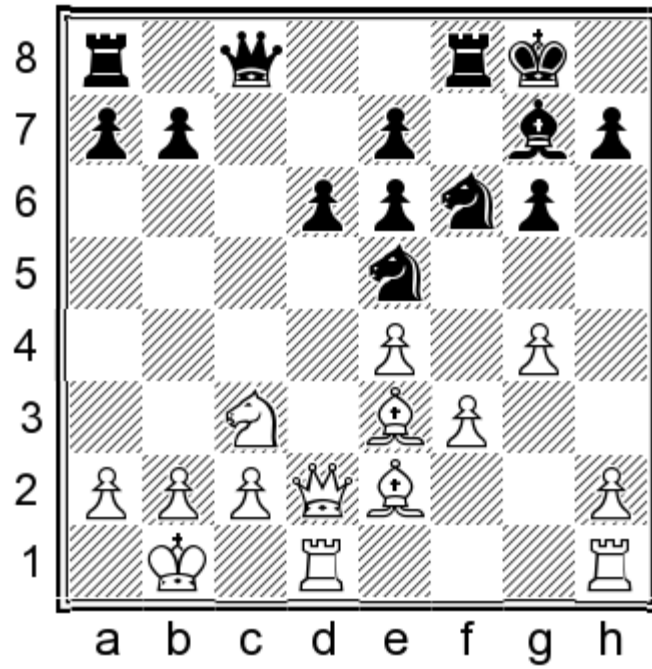
18.Kb1

18.Qd2 b5 19.Nxb5 Nxf3 20.Bxf3 Qxb5= was fine for Black in Petruzzelli – Sgherri, email 2010.

18...a6 19.Qc1 b5 20.a3 b4 21.axb4 Qxb4 22.Qe3 Rb8 23.b3 Rfc8 24.Kb2 a5 25.Ra1 Nfd7

Black had coordinated all its pieces into the queenside attack and went on to win in Chiron 2 – Stockfish DD, engine game 2013.

B2) 13.Kb1



This time White takes a moment to consolidate his queenside before pushing forward on the other wing. B21) 13...Nfd7 is the solid reply, but the sharper B22) 13...Nc4 is also playable.

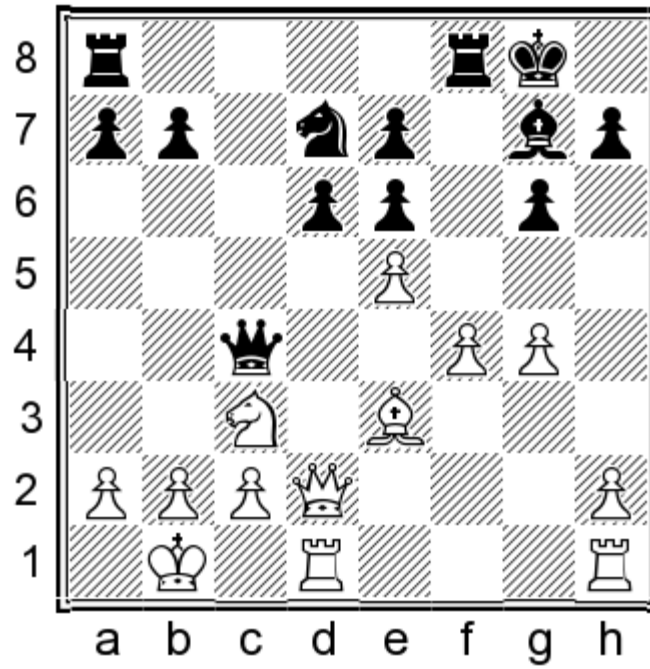
B21) 13...Nfd7

Playing in the same way as we would after 13.h4.

14.f4

14.Rhf1 was played against me by GM Zbynek Hracek but I don't consider it critical. 14...Nb6!?N was a suggestion of mine on ChessPublishing and I still rather like it; the point is to cement a knight on c4. (14...Nc4 was also fine for Black in Hracek – Jones, Porto Carras 2011.) 15.Bd4 Nec4 16.Qg5 Bf6 17.Qc1 Bxd4 18.Rxd4 Qc5=

14...Nc4 15.Bxc4 Qxc4 16.e5



16...Nb6!

This looks most reliable in this exact position.

16...Rad8 is similar to variation B32, but with Kb1 instead of h2-h4. I think the difference favours White as a2 is now defended, though of course the position remains playable for Black: 17.exd6 Nf6 18.dxe7 Rxd2 19.exf8=Q† Kxf8 20.Bxd2 Nxg4 21.Rde1²

17.Bd4

17.exd6 Rfd8 is equal.

17.Rhe1 dxe5 18.fxe5 Qxg4 19.Bxb6 axb6 20.Qd7 Rf2 21.Qxb7 Raf8 22.Qxe7 Qf5 23.Rd3 Bxe5= gave Black sufficient counterplay in magnum – sweek, engine game 2013.

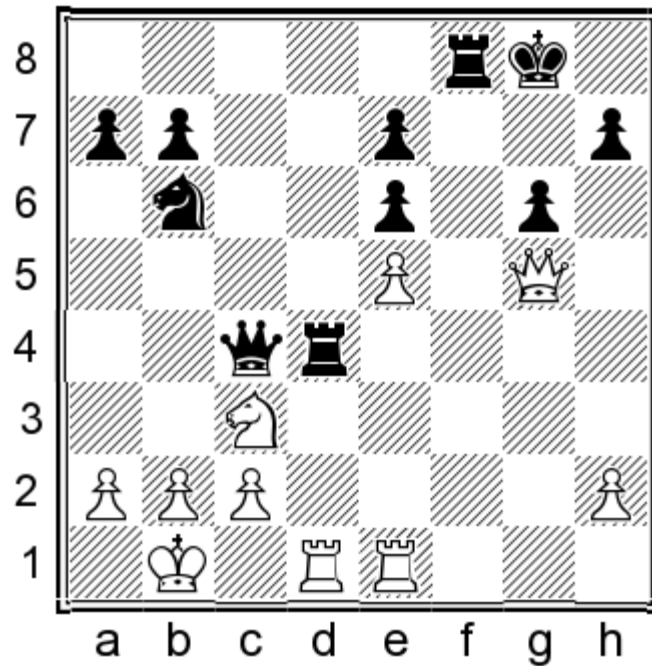
17...dxe5 18.fxe5 Rad8 19.Rhe1 Bh6!

White is trying to block the g7-bishop out of the game, so it makes sense to exchange it.

20.g5

20.Qxh6 Rxd4 is balanced.

20...Bxg5 21.Qxg5 Rxd4



22.Rxd4

In the event of 22.Qxe7 Rxd1† 23.Rxd1 Rf1!? Black exchanges rooks and moves his queen to d5 (and maybe to d7 next) when he is easily equal. (23...Rf7!? is also possible.)

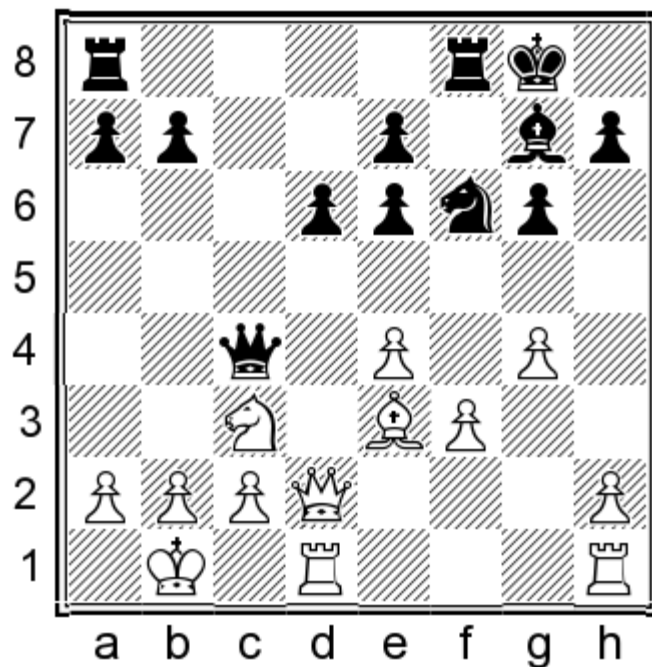
22...Qxd4 23.Qxe7

Trying to attack with 23.h4?! Nc4 24.h5? backfires after 24...Nxb2!.

23...Qd7

Black is fine.

B22) 13...Nc4 14.Bxc4 Qxc4



This is more provocative but I think Black can get away with it, as White's kingside play is not too quick. However, the positions may still become rather sharp.

15.Bd4

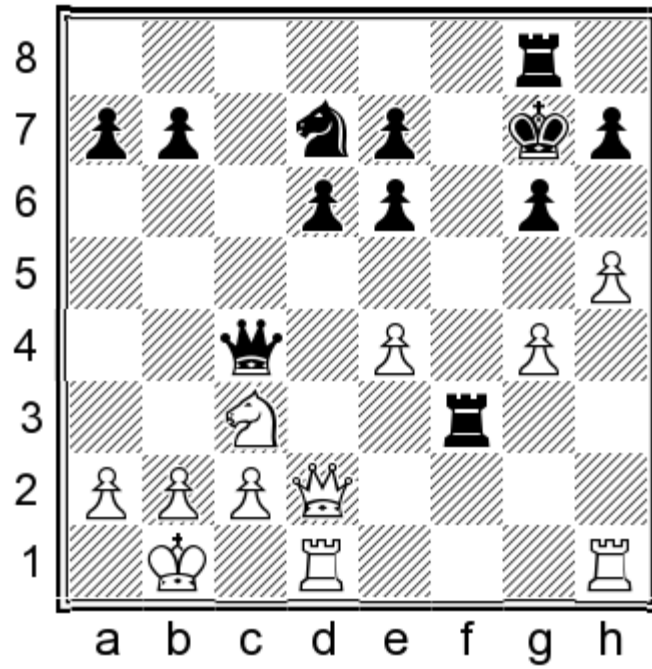
15.Bh6 isn't as good as when White has played 13.h4, as his attack is a tempo slower here. 15...Bxh6 (15...Nd7 is also possible, when 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 transposes to our main line) 16.Qxh6 b5 17.h4 b4 18.Na4 Rac8 19.Rc1 Qb5 20.b3 Qe5=

15.Qd3 Rac8 16.e5 was mentioned by Olthof in New In Chess Yearbook 104, but after 16...Ne8! Black has slightly the better game.

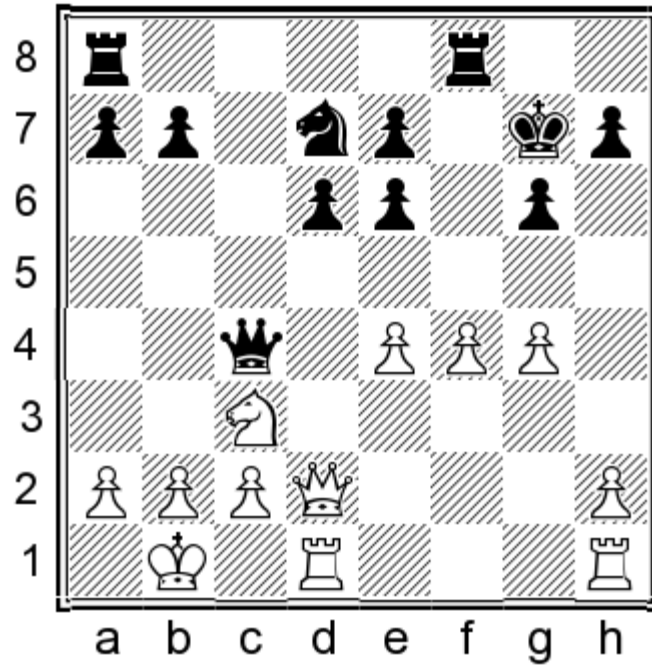
15.Ne2 has been the choice of most humans who have reached this position. 15...Nd7 16.b3 Here 16...Qc6N 17.Nf4 Rac8 18.Nxe6 Rxf3 19.Bd4 Be5 20.Bxe5 dxe5 21.Qxd7 Qxc2† 22.Ka1 Qc3†= was a sample line I gave on ChessPublishing.

15...Nd7 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.f4

17.h4!?N is sharp. 17...Rxf3 18.h5 Rg8! This looks passive, but we are getting ready to evacuate the king to safety.



19.hxg6 hxg6 20.Qg5 Rf6 21.Qh6† (21.Rh6 Ne5 22.Rdh1 Kf8μ) 21...Kf7 22.Qh7† Kf8³ Black has successfully coordinated his pieces around his king and should be safe.



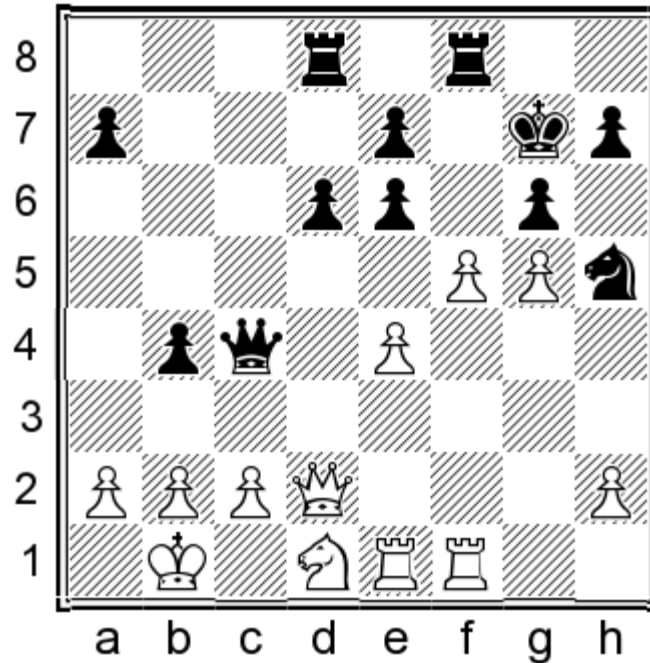
17...Nf6!

The position is complicated but Black has good counter-chances.

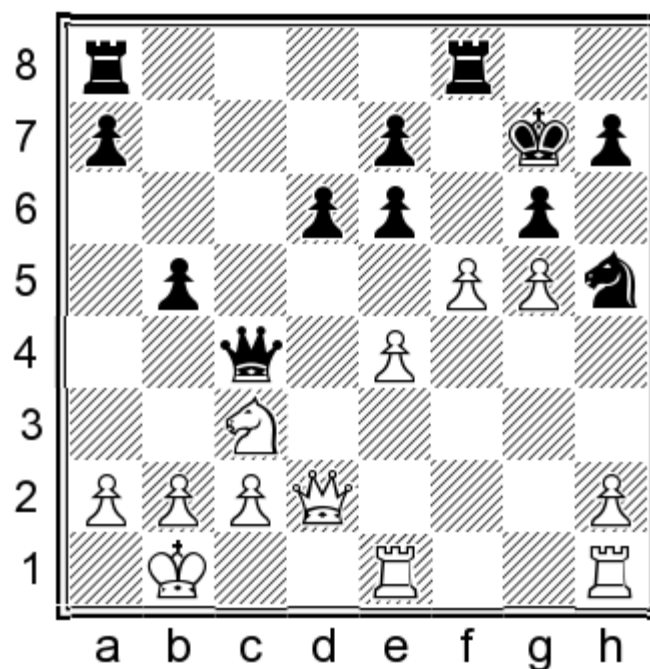
18.Rde1 b5 19.g5 Nh5 20.f5!N

This dangerous move was brought to my attention by Nikos Ntirilis. White sacrifices a pawn in order to open lines of attack.

An engine battle continued: 20.Rhf1 b4 21.Nd1 Rad8 22.f5



22...d5! 23.b3 Qc5 24.fxg6 dxe4 25.Qg2 Nf4 26.Qg3 Rc8 27.Qf2 Nxg6 28.Qxc5 Rxc5 29.Rxf8 Nxf8 30.Rxe4 a5= The complications had petered out to an equal ending in firefather – bouddha#77, engine game 2012.



20...gxf5

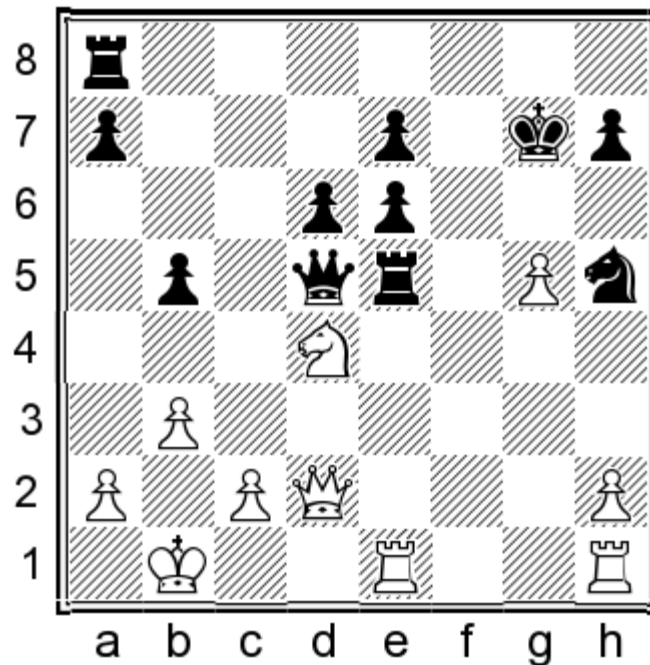
20...b4?! 21.Ne2 exf5 22.exf5 Rxf5 23.Nd4 favours White.

21.exf5 Rxf5 22.b3 Qc6 23.Ne2

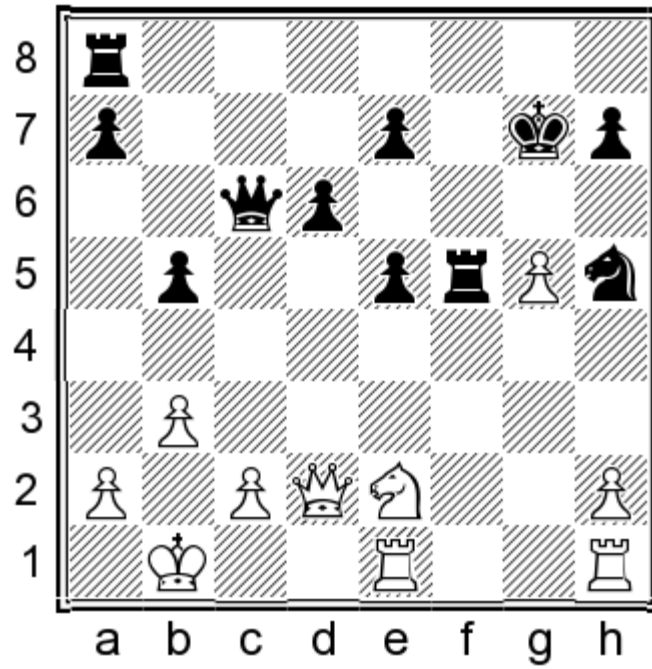
The knight is heading for d4 or g3.

23...e5!?

23...Re5 is safer; by trading material Black lessens White's attack. 24.Nd4 (24.Ng3 enables Black to simplify with 24...Nxc3 25.hxc3 Rxe1† 26.Rxe1 e5= followed by rerouting his queen to g6 via e8) 24...Qd5



25.Rd1! Rf8 26.Qc3 (26.Rhf1 a5 27.Rxf8 Kxf8 28.Qxa5 Nf4÷) 26...Nf4 27.Nf5† Rxf5 28.Rxd5 Nxd5 29.Qa5 b4 30.Qxa7 Kf7÷ White may be able to claim a tiny advantage but it will be hard for him to make progress safely, as that will involve pushing his queenside pawns.



24.Ng3 Nxg3 25.hxg3

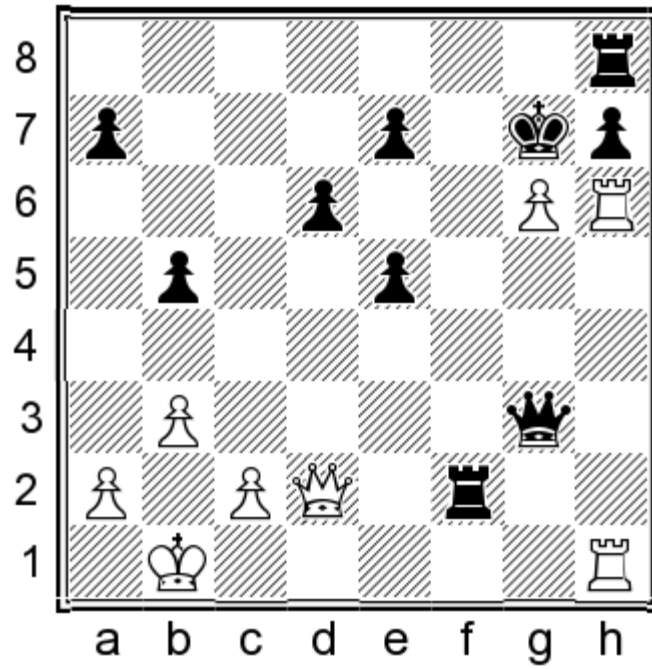
White has sacrificed a pawn for pressure down the h-file. The position looks dangerous for Black but I think he has enough counter-chances.

25...Rh8 26.Rh6

I also considered 26.Qh2 Qe8! 27.Qh6† Kg8 28.Qe6† Qf7 29.Qd7 a6÷ and Black's king is safe enough.

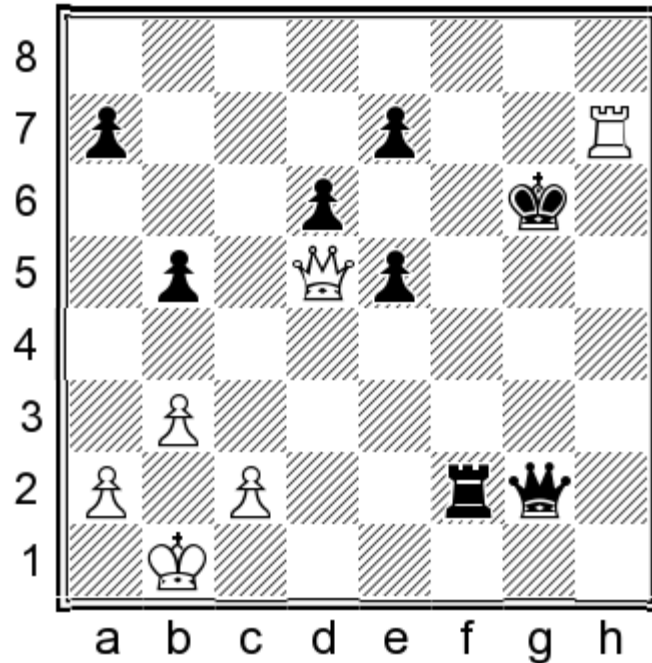
26...Qf3 27.Reh1 Qxg3 28.g6 Rf2!

White seems to be crashing through on the kingside but it is surprisingly difficult to catch the black king. Meanwhile Black is able to generate some threats of his own. I've offered a couple of possible continuations.



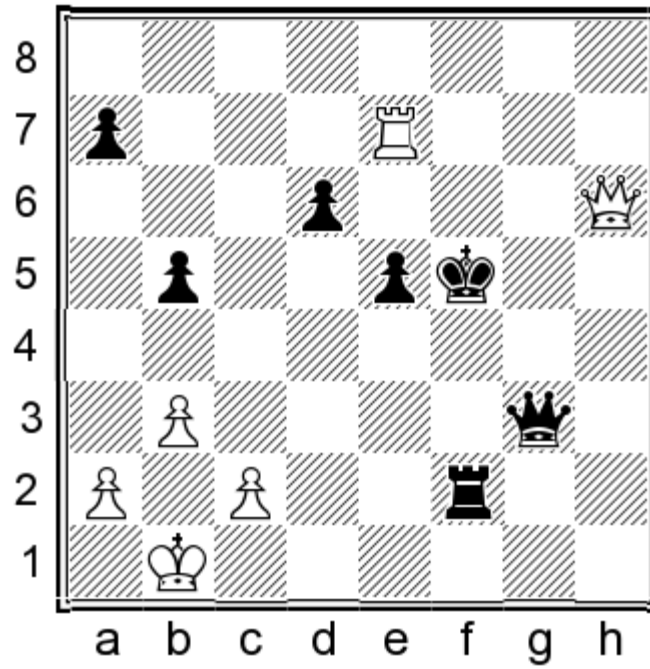
29.Rxh7†

29.Qd5 Qg2 30.Rxh7† (30.Qd3 Rd2 31.Qc3 [31.Rxh7†] 31...Qd5 32.Rxh7† Rxh7 33.Rxh7† Kxg6 34.Qh3 Rg2!= White has no mate, so the game will end in perpetual.) 30...Rxh7 31.Rxh7† Kxg6



32.Qg8† Black's king looks naked but White doesn't have enough material left to create a mating net. 32...Kf5 33.Rg7 Qf1† 34.Kb2 Rxc2† 35.Kxc2 Qe2†=

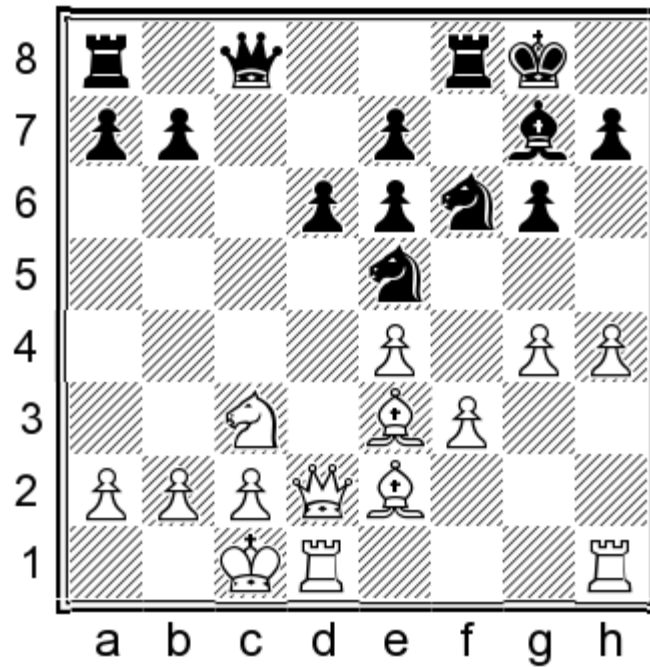
29...Rxh7 30.Rxh7† Kxg6 31.Qh6† Kf5 32.Rxe7



32...Qg1†! 33.Kb2 Rh2 34.Qxd6 Qd4† 35.Qxd4 exd4 36.Rxa7 d3 37.Rc7 b4=

With a drawn endgame.

B3) 13.h4



13...Nfd7

Black attacks the f3-pawn and, more importantly, opens up the diagonal for the g7-bishop.

13...Nc4 is the other main line. It's arguably more logical, and can transpose, but it gives White additional options, 14.Bxc4 Qxc4 15.Bh6 being the main theoretical issue. With the bishops exchanged, White seems to keep a slight advantage. (15.h5 Nd7 would transpose to variation B31 below.)

White may proceed with B31) 14.h5!? or B32) 14.f4.

Unlike the first of the main lines discussed below, 14.Bd4? allows Black to gobble the f-pawn: 14...Nxf3 15.Bxf3 Bxd4 16.Qxd4 Rxf3 17.h5 In Van Osch – Pijpers, Borne 2011, Black could have obtained a clear advantage by blocking up the kingside with 17...g5!N.

B31) 14.h5!?

This is a dangerous approach. An important point is that White isn't actually sacrificing the f-pawn.

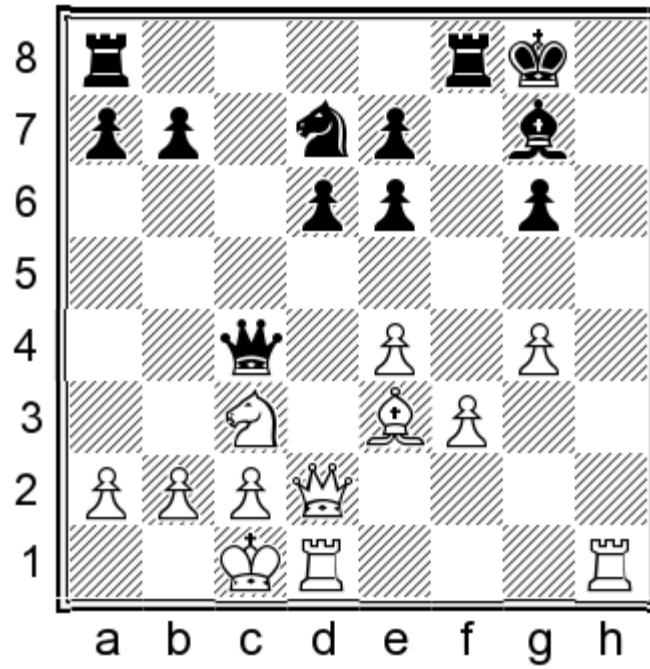
14...Nc4

14...Nxf3? allows 15.Nd5! when the tactics work in White's favour.

15.Bxc4 Qxc4 16.hxg6 hxg6

This position has not been played in many over-the-board encounters but has had a lot of testing in correspondence and computer chess. Thus far Black is holding without any major problems.

16...Rxf3!? was an interesting approach by Viktorija Cmilyte but one I struggle to fully trust.



17.f4

This has been White's main try.

17.Qh2 has been tried in a couple of correspondence games but it doesn't really work: 17...Rxf3 18.Qh7† Kf7 Black's king often turns out to be safer than it looks in these lines. 19.Bh6 Rg8 20.Bxg7 Rg7 21.Qh8 Rg8 22.Qh7† Kf8³ White's attack had been halted, leaving Black with a clear advantage in Martello – Simmelink, email 2003.

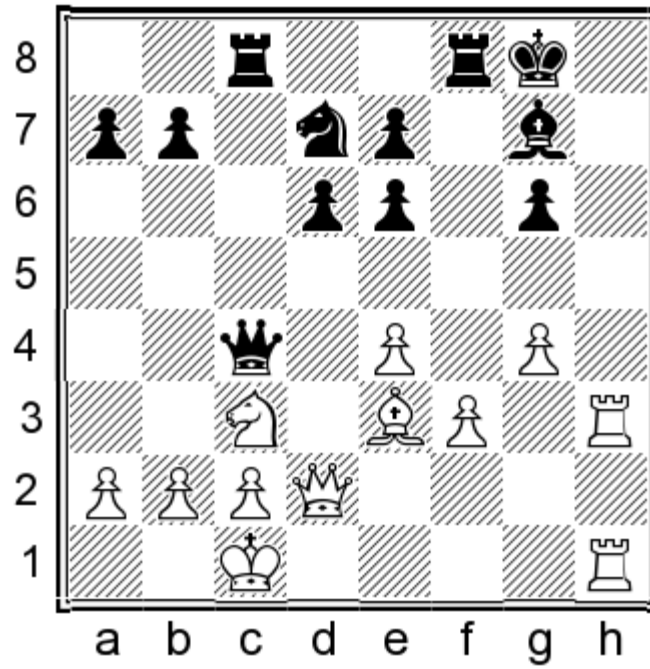
17.Rh3

This is rare but quite sensible; White defends the f3-pawn and prepares to double on the h-file.

17...Rac8 18.Rdh1N

White can also try: 18.Qh2N 18...b5 (18...Ne5!? 19.Rh1 Rxf3 20.Rxf3 Nxf3 21.Qh7† Kf7 22.Bh6 Rg8 looks quite safe for Black as our pieces are well placed) 19.Bh6 Bxc3 20.bxc3 Qxc3 21.Bxf8 Qa1† 22.Kd2 Qc3† Black has at least a draw.

A game continued 18.Bh6 Bxc3 19.Qxc3 Qxc3 20.bxc3 Rf7 21.Rdh1 Rh7 22.Bg5 Rxh3 23.Rxh3 Nf6 and Black had the slightly better of the ending in Crook – Johnson, corr. 2001.



18...Bxc3 19.bxc3

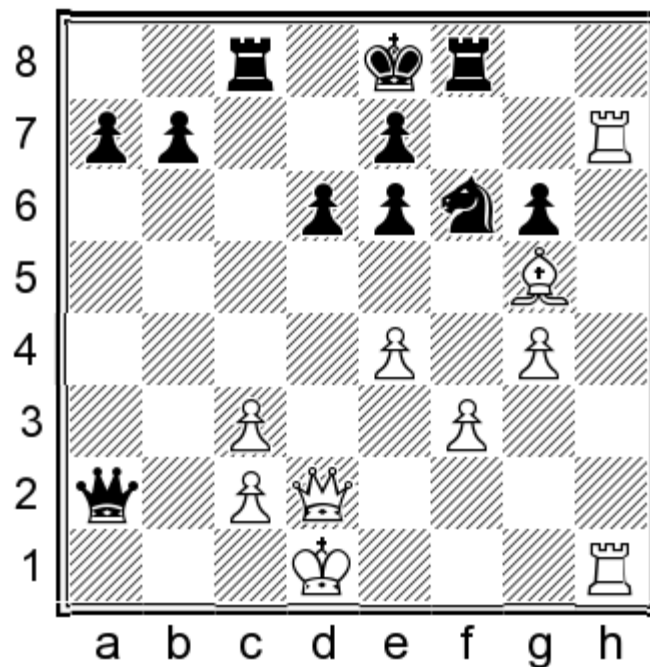
19.Qxc3 Qxc3 20.bxc3 Rc7!= A curious-looking move, but the point is to defend along the seventh rank whilst also keeping an eye on the a7-pawn; for example, 21.Rh8† Kf7 22.R8h7†?! Ke8 23.Bg5 Ne5³ and Black is better.

19...Qxa2 20.Kd1

Black can get at least a draw with our usual king run.

20...Kf7 21.Rh7† Ke8 22.Bg5 Nf6

White must find:

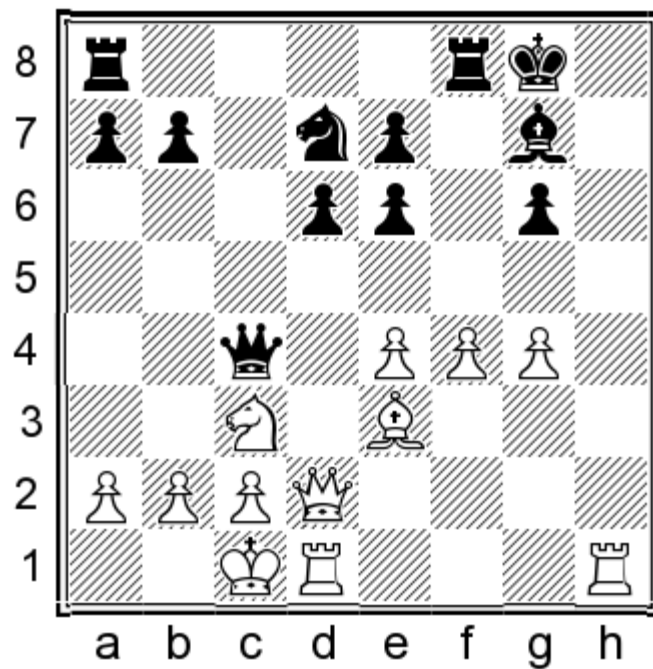


23.Rxe7†! Kxe7 24.Rh7† Ke8 25.Qxd6 Qa1† 26.Bc1

26.Ke2? Qa6† wins.

26...Nxb7 27.Qxe6† Kd8 28.Qd6†=

With a perpetual.



17...Bxc3

Giving away our beloved bishop may look suicidal but the black king can run to safety via f7-e8, and it is important to generate counterplay.

18.bxc3

As Chris Ward observes, 18.Qxc3 Qxc3 19.bxc3 Nf6 is comfortable for Black.

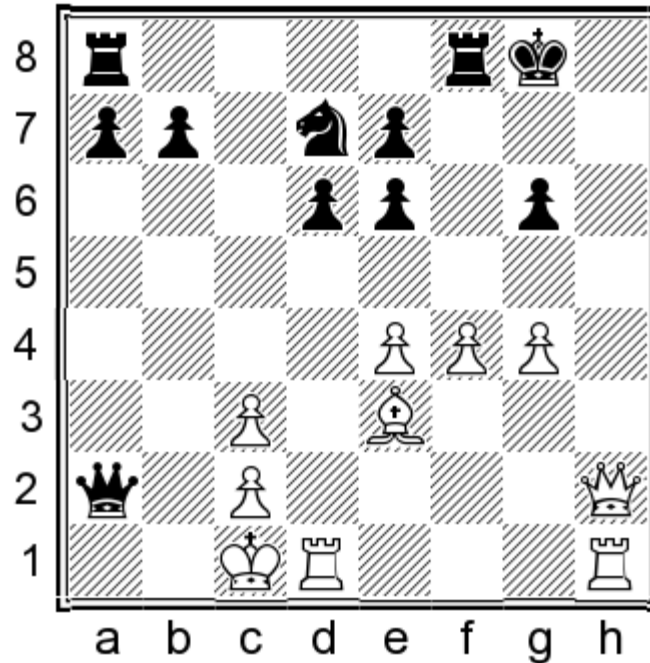
We now have an odd position. Both kings are exposed and will have to flee to the centre for some cover.

18...Qxa2

18...Rac8 is a different approach which has also been holding up for Black. However, I think the text move is the easier move to play; the lines are quite forcing and therefore easier to remember.

19.Qh2

On Chess24, GM Huschenbeth ends his analysis here, assessing the position as unclear.



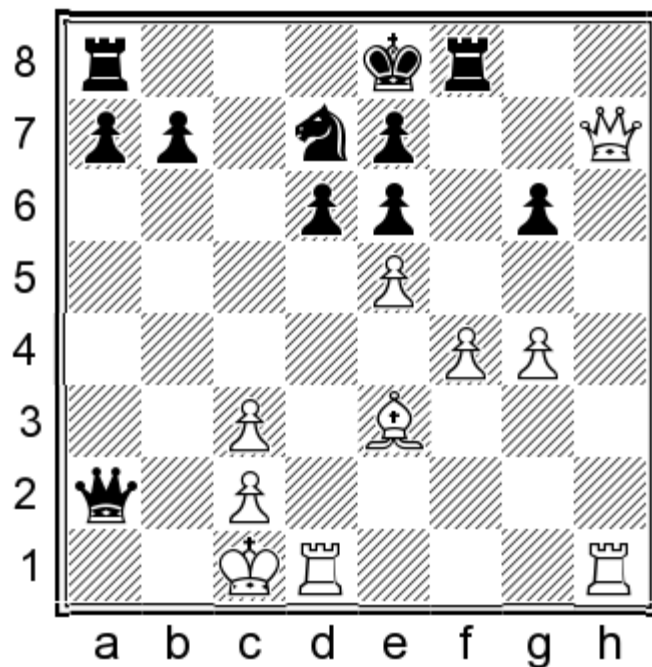
19...Kf7!

This is forced. Not for the first time, the black king rushes to the centre where the pawn clump and knight will keep it secure.

20.Qh7† Ke8 21.e5!?

This seems the most challenging. White attempts to open the centre before our king finds safety.

Instead 21.Qxg6† Kd8 seems fine for Black, as the following result confirms: 22.e5 Rc8 (22...dxe5 would transpose to our main line) 23.Qd3 $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ Hervet – Bobel, corr. 2013. Of course the draw is rather premature but the players presumably worked out the following line: 23...Rc6 24.g5 Kc8! 25.g6 Rg8 26.Rh7 Qa3† 27.Kd2 dxe5 28.Ke2 Rd6 (28...Nf6!? 29.Rg7 Rh8 30.Rh7 Rg8 is another amusing draw) 29.Qc4† Rc6 30.Qd3 Rd6=



21...dxe5! 22.Qxg6† Kd8

A lot of correspondence and engine games have reached this position and White has not found a way to give Black problems. The wall of pawns on the e-file may look ugly but it is useful for protecting the king.

23.Qd3 Qa1† 24.Kd2 Qa6

This is safest. White has to accept the queen trade, after which Black has had no problems holding the draw.

24...Qa4!?

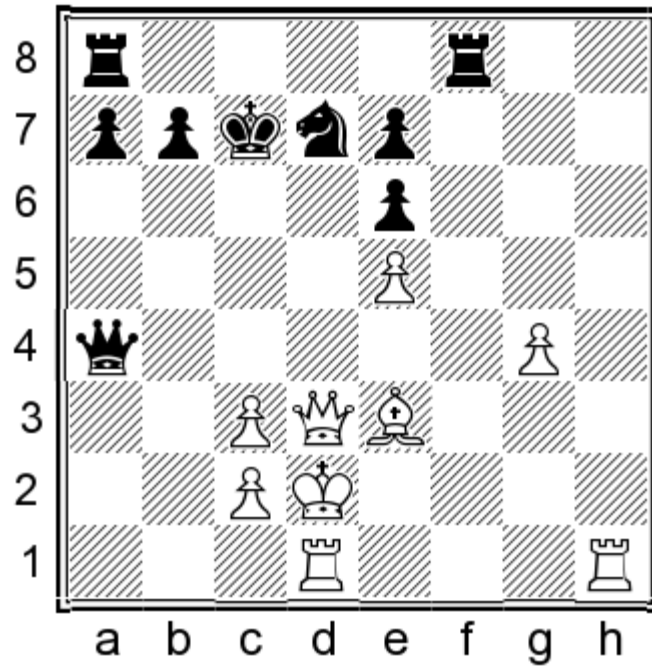
If you wish to keep more play in the position, this is a good alternative.

25.fxe5

25.Ke1?! was tried in one game but after 25...Kc7 26.Rh7 Rad8 27.Qe2 Kc8! Black had castled by hand and suddenly it was White's king which was much more vulnerable. 28.fxe5 Nxe5 29.Rxd8† Kxd8 0–1 Pilarska – Fessler, email 2010.

25...Kc7=

Black's king is safe enough and he is preparing to bring the a8-rook into the game. By this point I believe the position is far easier for Black to play in practice. The following computer game was accurately played, so I will leave the rest of it to give you an idea of how both sides could proceed.



26.Qd4 Qa6 27.Ra1 Qc6 28.Rh7 Rad8 29.Rxe7 Kc8 30.Kc1 Qb5 31.Qb4 Qe2 32.Qd4 Rf3 33.Bd2 Rf1† 34.Kb2 Rxa1 35.Kxa1 Nxe5 36.Qxa7 Qd1† 37.Ka2 Qxc2†

½–½ oops – FrauHolle, engine game 2014.

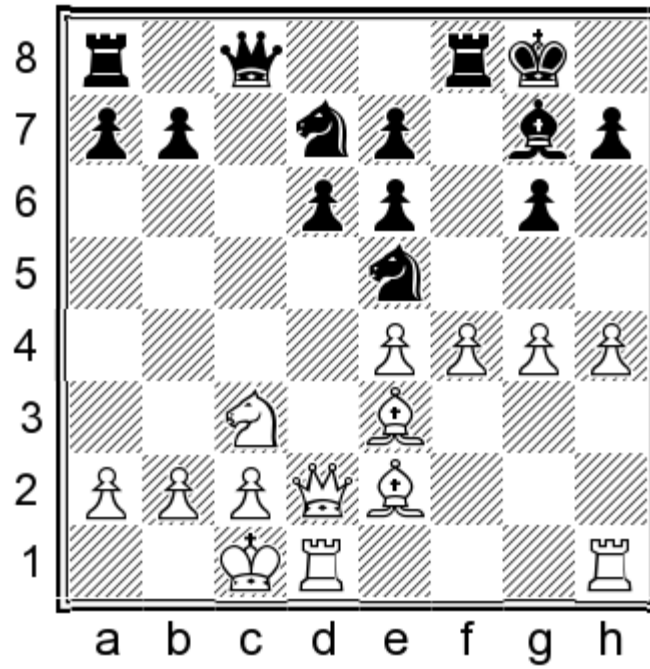
25.Qxa6

25.fxe5N 25...Qxd3† 26.Kxd3 (26.cxd3 Nxe5=) 26...Nxe5† 27.Ke4† Nd7 is another level endgame.

25...bxa6 26.fxe5 Nxe5 27.Ke2† Ke8 28.Rd4 Rc8=

A surprising number of games have reached this position but they were all drawn.

B32) 14.f4



This is the most popular move and it leads to sharp play.

14...Nc4 15.Bxc4 Qxc4 16.e5 Rad8!

Black has tried lots of different moves here but I think this is the most accurate. Black defends the knight, thus preparing to capture on e5. If White takes on d6 then we will have a useful pin down the d-file.

White's most challenging replies are B321) 17.exd6 and B322) 17.h5.

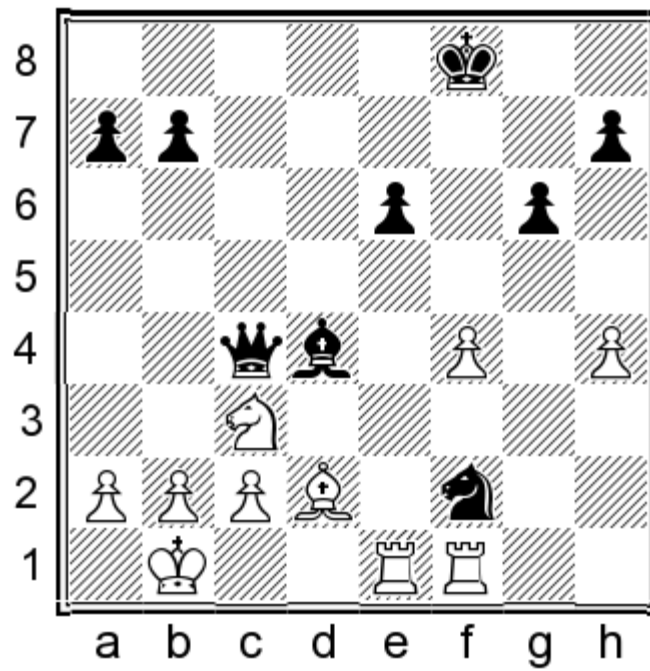
17.Qd3 does not challenge Black at all. 17...Qxd3 18.Rxd3 Nb6 19.Bxb6 axb6 20.exd6 Rxd6 21.Ne2 e5 22.fxe5 Rxd3 23.cxd3 Bxe5 ½–½ Farkas – Ljubicic, email 2006.

B321) 17.exd6 Nf6!

17...exd6 has been more popular, but after 18.h5 Bxc3 19.Qxc3 Qxc3 20.bxc3 White has a better ending and Black has to suffer.

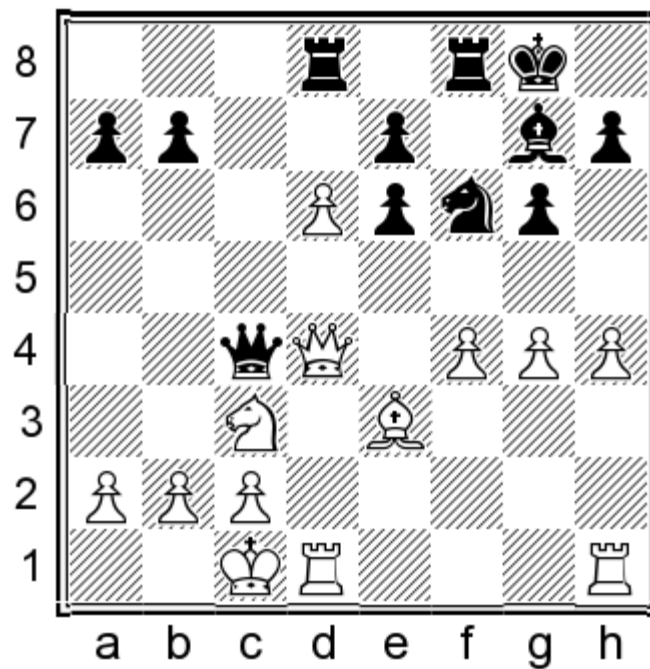
The text move is an important nuance which I first saw suggested in ChessVibes Openings. White may escape the pin with B3211) 18.Qd4 or B3212) 18.Qg2.

18.dxe7 is an important move to check but Black's queen operates better than White's rooks in this position. 18...Rxd2 19.exf8=Q† Kxf8 20.Bxd2 Nxg4 21.Rde1 Nf2 22.Rhf1 Bd4 23.Kb1



This was reached in Haba – Koepke, Germany 2012, and now 23...Kf7N would have left Black with good control of the position.

B3211) 18.Qd4

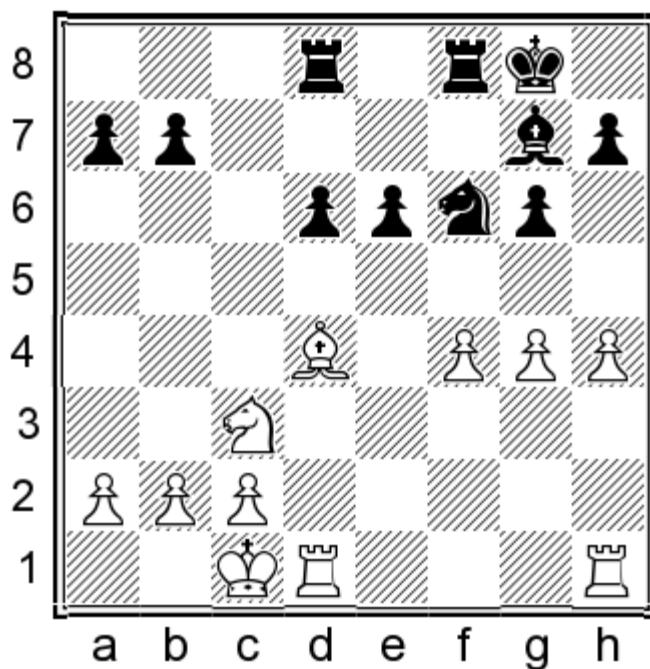


This has been tried in all the correspondence games in this line but Black has no real problems in the ending.

18...Qxd4 19.Bxd4 exd6

19...Rxd6 looks ugly but a recent correspondence game confirmed that Black's activity compensates for his structural weaknesses: 20.Nb5 Rd5! 21.Nc7 Rxd4! 22.Rxd4 Nd5 23.Rxd5 exd5 24.Ne6 Rf6 25.Re1 Bh8 In Polatel – A. Manninen, corr. 2015, Black had fully equalized as ...Kf7 was coming.

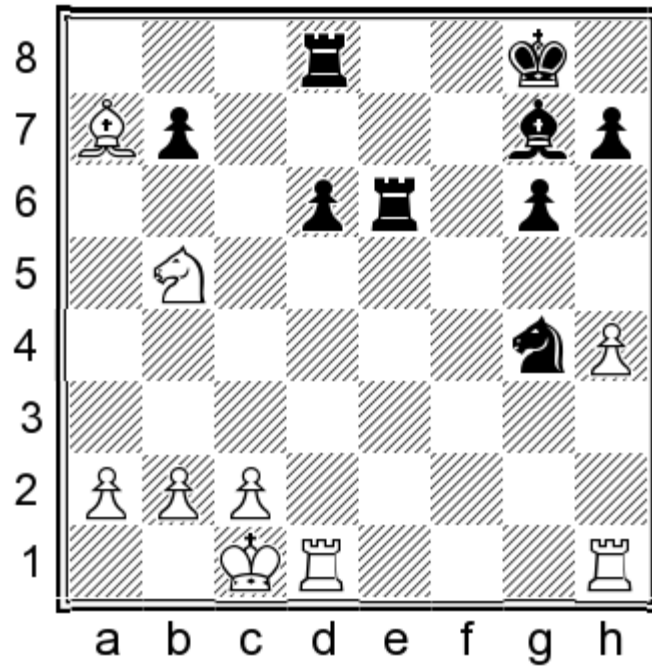
Taking with the pawn avoids exchanging so many pieces, but the position remains equal after accurate play from both sides.



20.Rhg1

20.h5 Nxg4 21.hxg6 hxg6 22.Rhe1 Rxf4 23.Bxg7 Kxg7 24.Rxe6 Kf7= Serradimigni – Kopelevich, corr. 2013.

20.f5 Nxg4 21.fxe6 Rfe8 22.Nb5 Rxe6 23.Bxa7



23...Ra8!? 24.a4 (24.Nc7 Rxa7 25.Nxe6 Nf2=) 24...h5 25.Rhg1 Re5= Schakel – Grego, corr. 2012.

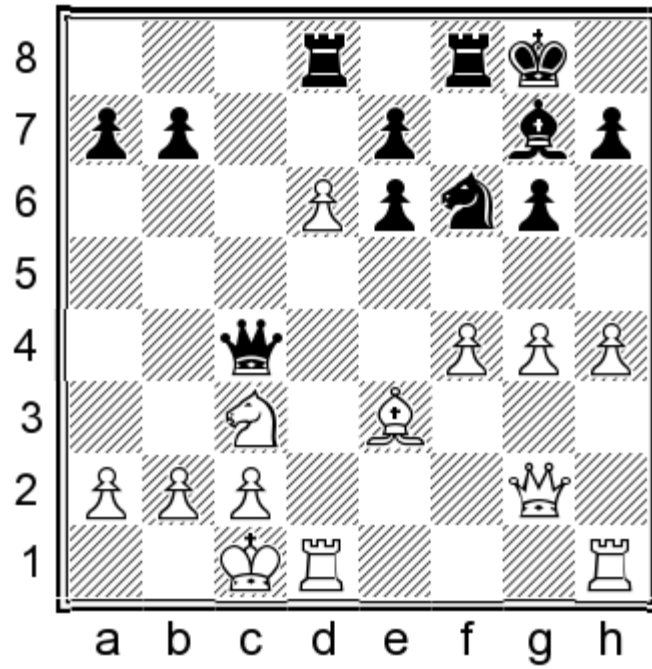
20...a6 21.f5!?

21.a4 Rd7 22.a5 Rc8 23.Bxf6 Bxf6 24.Ne4 Be7 25.f5 Kf7 26.Rgf1 exf5 27.gxf5 Rc4 28.Rf4 d5 29.b3 Rcc7 30.fxg6+ Kg7 31.Nf2 hxg6= Ryvkin – Cvak, corr. 2014.

21...gxf5 22.gxf5 e5 23.Be3 Kf7 24.Bg5 Rg8 25.Nd5 h6

½–½ LeBled – Becsenescu, corr. 2014.

B3212) 18.Qg2



This has been tried in two over-the-board games, including a battle between two English IMs, both of whom play the Dragon as Black.

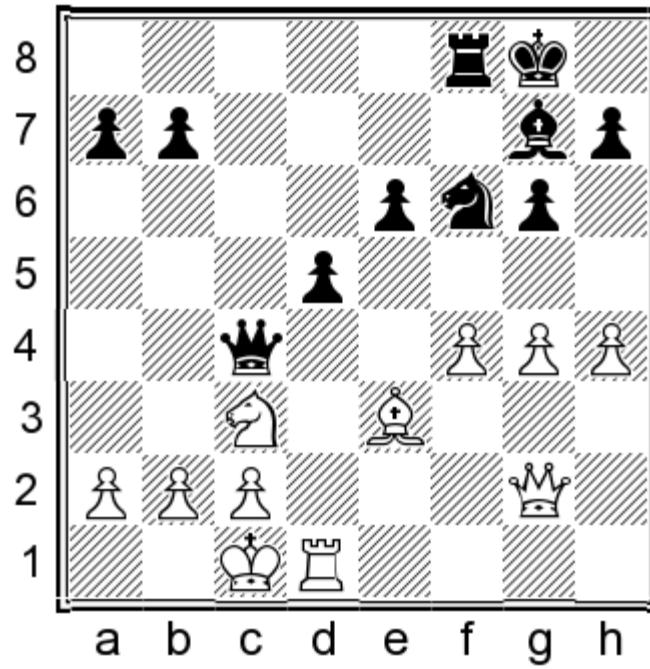
18...Rxd6 19.Rxd6

White would ideally like to avoid ironing out Black's structure but he is struggling to find an active plan.

19.Kb1 b5 looks more dangerous for White.

19...exd6 20.Rd1 d5

Black no longer has to worry about being mated. This fact, along with Black's active pieces and decent structure, gives us every reason to be happy.



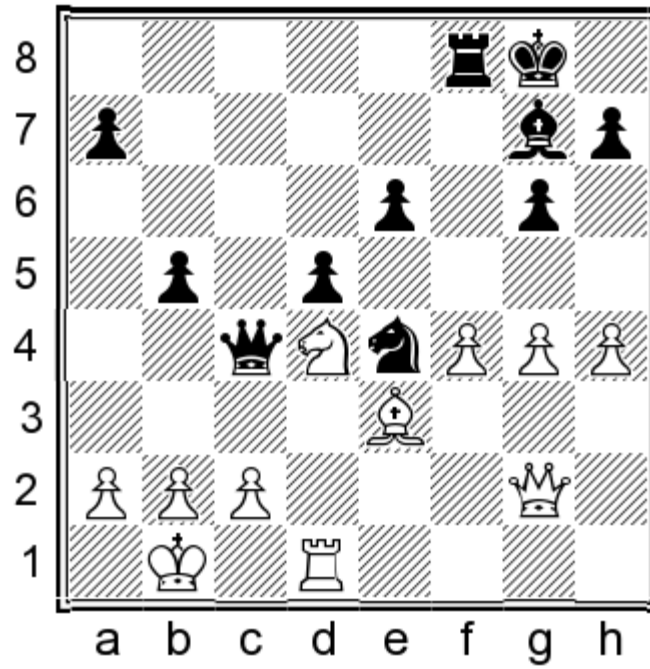
21.Kb1

Richard Pert later revealed that he thought Yang-Fan might try 21.Bd4, when he was intending 21...Ne8, with the point that White cannot play 22.Bxg7? due to the intermezzo 22...Qxf4†µ. (Getting on with it on the queenside with 21...b5!? also looks good for Black.)

21...b5 22.Ne2

Another line given by Richard is 22.h5 b4 23.Ne2 Ne4 when Black is active.

22...Ne4 23.Nd4

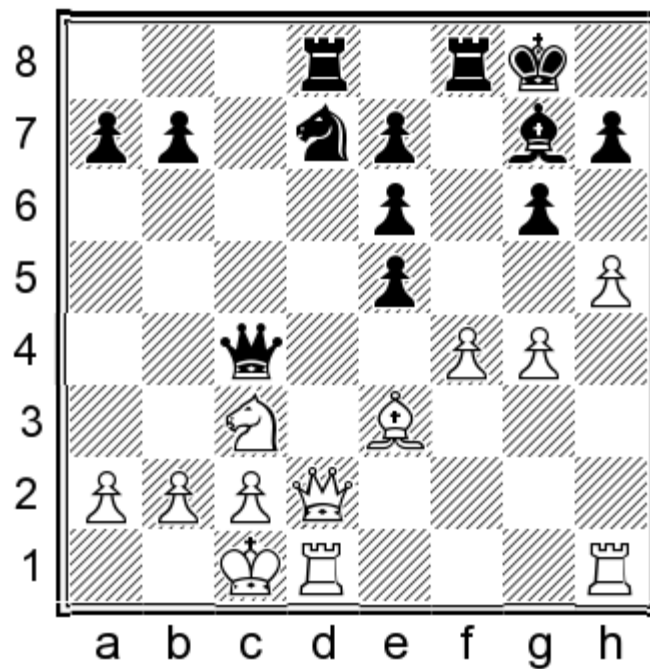


23...e5!? 24.fxe5 Bxe5=

Black was actively placed and went on to win in Zhou – R. Pert, Aberystwyth 2014.

Since 17.exd6 appears to have been defused, we will finish by examining White's most aggressive try.

B322) 17.h5 dxe5



18.hxg6

This is the only move to have been tried thus far, but Black has two good ways to meet it.

18.f5N

This was suggested by Van Delft and Kuipers in ChessVibes Openings. Their analysis continues:

18...gxf5

18...Nf6? does not work here as 19.Qxd8 Rxd8 20.Rxd8† Kf7 21.fxg6† hxg6 22.h6! wins for White.

19.h6 Bf6!?

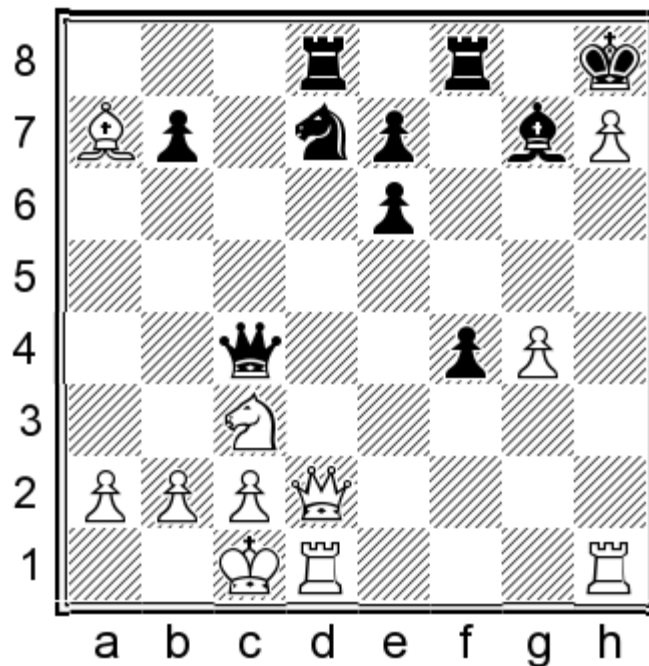
There is also 19...Bh8 20.Bb6! Nxb6 21.Qg5† Kf7 22.Qh5† Kg8 23.Qg5† Kf7= with a perpetual.

20.g5 Bh8 21.g6 hxg6 22.Qg2 Kh7 23.Rhg1 Rg8 24.Qxb7 Bf6 25.Rxd7 Rxd7 26.Qxd7 a6

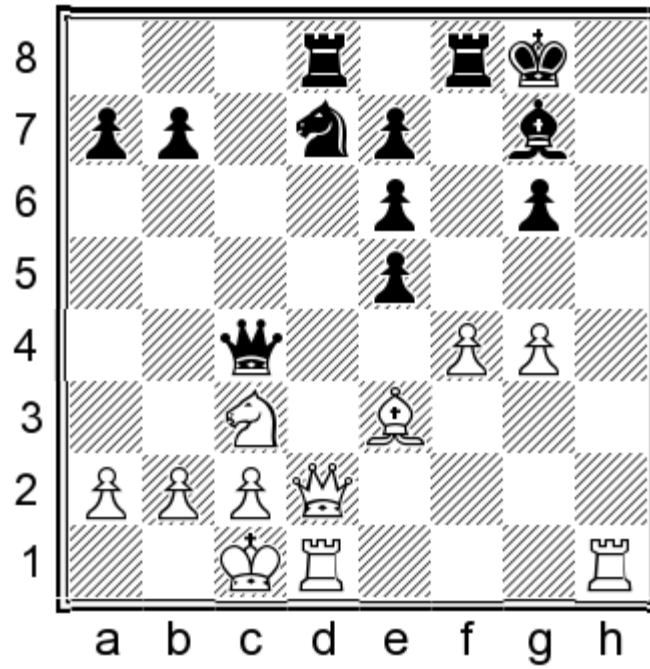
The Dutch analysts conclude that Black has compensation and I agree, even if my engine takes a while to see it. With two pawns for the piece, along with a huge pawn mass and a completely safe king, I would prefer to play as Black.

18...hxg6

18...exf4!? also works well: 19.gxh7† Kh8 20.Bxa7? A risky pawn grab. (20.Bf2 Bxc3 [20...Qc7!?!] 21.Qxc3† Qxc3 22.bxc3 e5=)



20...b6 21.Qd3 Qc8!? 22.g5 Qa8 23.Qa6 Rf5 24.g6 Ra5 25.Qc4 Rxa7 26.Qxf4 Rc8 27.Rh3 Ne5 0–1 Van der Houwen – Percze, email 2002.



19.f5!?

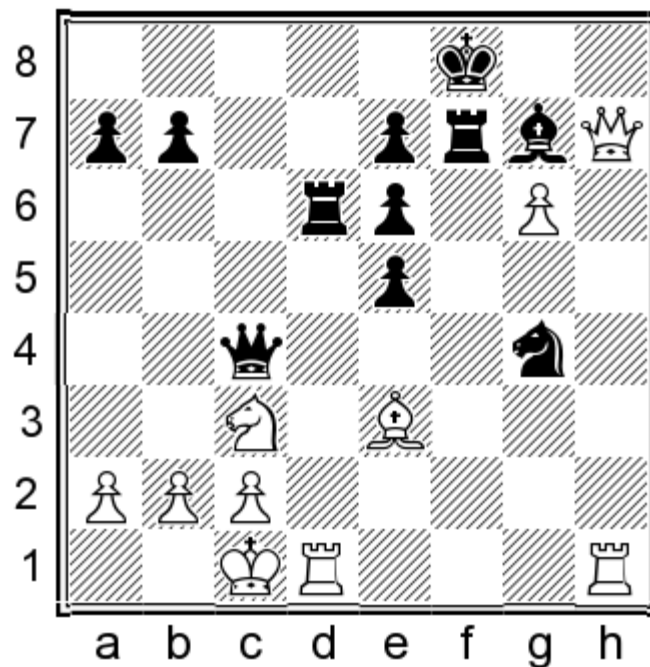
A more common continuation has been:

19.Qh2 Nf6 20.Rdf1 Rf7 21.f5

21.fxe5?! Nxg4 22.Qh7† Kf8 23.Rxf7† Kxf7μ is given by Chris Ward, who observes that Black is doing well. He is covering both f1 and h6 and so White's attack has been neutralized.

21...Nxg4 22.Qh7† Kf8 23.Rd1 Rd6!³ 24.fxg6

24.Bg5? gxf5 0–1 was the strange ending to S. Larsen – L. Van Damme, email 2007.



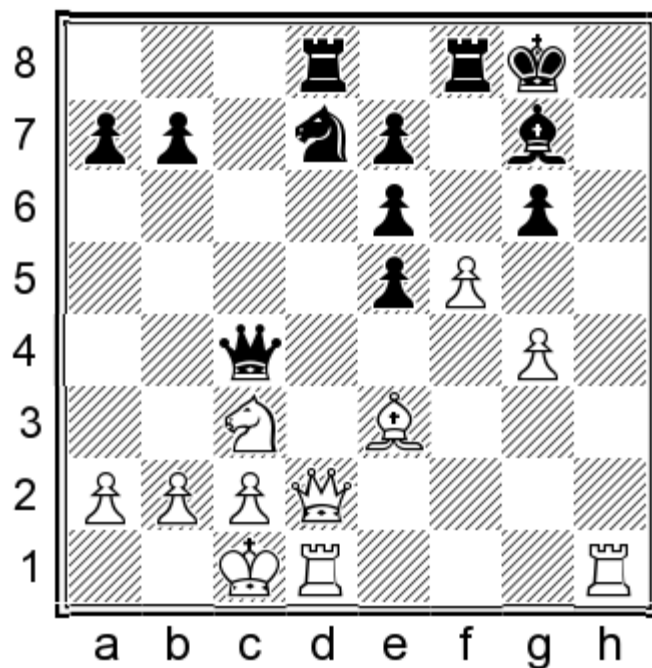
24...Rxd1†!

It looks odd to wait for White to take on g6 before exchanging rooks, but Black now has access to f1.

25.Rxd1 Rf1 26.Bg5 Nf6 27.Qh2 Rxd1† 28.Nxd1 Qe4³

Black eventually won the ending in Matsenko – Kargin, Marianske Lazne 2013.

The text move was my suggested improvement for White on ChessPublishing. However, Black is well placed to meet it.



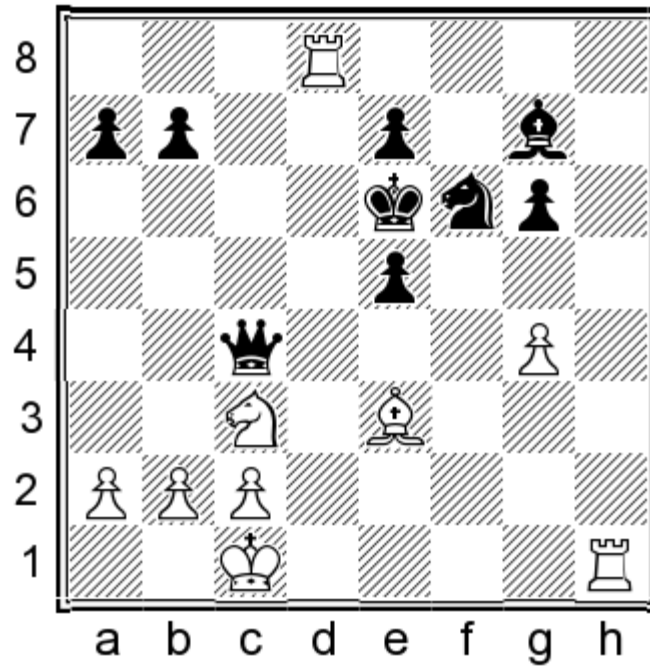
19...Nf6!

Black's queen will prove to be more powerful than the rooks.

20.Qxd8 Rxd8 21.Rxd8† Kf7 22.fxe6†

22.g5 gives us various options but I would be tempted by 22...exf5!? 23.gxf6 Bxf6, when Black's four uncontested pawns will take some stopping.

22...Kxe6



23.Bxa7 b5 24.g5 Nh5 25.Bf2 b4 26.Nd1 Qxa2 27.Rb8 Kf7

Black eventually prevailed in the computer encounter Shredder 12 – Critter 1.2, engine game 2011.

Conclusion

10.Nxe6 fxe6 is much sharper than the approach we saw in the previous chapter. There are lots of concrete lines, so my analysis had to be thorough. After 11.0-0-0 Ne5 12.Be2 Qc8 13.h4 Nfd7 the sharp 14.h5!? must be taken seriously, but Black seems to be fine with accurate play. The main line is 14.f4 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Qxc4 16.e5, but this appears to have been defused by 16...Rad8!. Going back a few moves, careful comparisons should be made between 13.h4 and 13.Kb1, while 13.Bh6 should also be checked carefully.

Variation Index

Chapter 1

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5 Rc5! 14.Kb1 b5

A) 15.Nd5?!

B) 15.Bxf6

C) 15.Rhe1 a5 16.f4 Nc4! 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.e5 b4! 19.Ncb5 dxe5 20.fxe5 Nd5

C1) 21.e6

C2) 21.Qd3

D) 15.g4 hxg4

D1) 16.f4

D2) 16.h5 Nxh5

D21) 17.Rxh5?

D22) 17.fxg4

D23) 17.Rdg1

D24) 17.Nd5 Re8 18.Rxh5 gxh5 19.Qh2 Rxd5! 20.Bxd5 Qb6!

D241) 21.Qxh5

D242) 21.f4

D243) 21.Nf5 Bxf5 22.exf5 Qc5!

D2431) 23.fxg4

D2432) 23.Qxh5

Chapter 2

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5 Rc5! 14.g4 hxg4

A) 15.Bxf6

B) 15.h5 Nxh5

B1) 16.Rxh5?

B2) 16.f4?!

B3) 16.Rdg1

B4) 16.Nd5 Re8

B41) 17.fxg4

B42) 17.Rxh5 gxh5 18.Qh2 Rxd5! 19.Bxd5 Qb6 20.Qxh5 e6 21.Bb3 gxf3

B421) 22.Bh6

B422) 22.Be3

B43) 17.f4 Nc4

B431) 18.Qe2

B432) 18.Qf2

B433) 18.Qd3

C) 15.f4 Nc4

C1) 16.Bxc4

C2) 16.Qd3 b5

C21) 17.h5?!

C22) 17.Bxf6 Bxf6 18.e5 dxe5 19.Ndxb5 Nxb2!

C221) 20.Qxg6†?

C222) 20.Kxb2

C23) 17.f5

C3) 16.Qe2 Na5! 17.e5 Nxb3† 18.Nxb3 Rxc3! 19.bxc3 Bc6

C31) 20.exf6

C32) 20.Rhf1 Ne4

C321) 21.Qc4

C322) 21.Qxg4

Chapter 3

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bg5 Rc5

A) 14.Nde2?!

B) 14.Bxf6

C) 14.Rhe1 b5 15.f4 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4

C1) 17.Bxf6?!

C2) 17.e5

D) 14.f4 Nc4

D1) 15.Bxc4

D2) 15.Qd3 Ng4 16.Bxc4 Nf2 17.Qe2 Nxh1 18.Bb3

D21) 18...Qb6

D22) 18...Bg4 19.Nf3 Rxc3! 20.bxc3 Qa5

D221) 21.Rd3

D222) 21.Rxh1

Chapter 4

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Bh6 Nc4! 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.Bxg7 Kxg7

A) 16.Rhe1

B) 16.Nd5 e5! 17.Nb3 Nxd5 18.Qxd5

B1) 18...Qc7

B2) 18...Rc6

C) 16.Kb1

C1) 16...Qb6!?

C2) 16...Qa5 17.Nb3 Qc7

C21) 18.Nd5

C22) 18.g4

D) 16.g4 hxg4 17.h5 Rh8! 18.hxg6 fxg6 19.f4 e5

D1) 20.fxe5 dxe5

D11) 21.Nb3

D12) 21.Nde2

D2) 20.Rxh8 Qxh8

D21) 21.Nb3

D22) 21.Nde2

D3) 20.Nde2 Rxh1 21.Rxh1 Nxe4 22.Nxe4 Rxe4 23.fxe5 Rxe2! 24.Qxe2 Qg5†

D31) 25.Kb1

D32) 25.Qd2

Chapter 5

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5 13.Kb1 Nc4! 14.Bxc4 Rxc4

A) 15.b3

B) 15.Nde2 b5

B1) 16.Bd4?!

B2) 16.b3 Rc8

B21) 17.Bd4?!

B22) 17.Nd5

B3) 16.Bh6 Qa5

B31) 17.g4

B32) 17.Bxg7

C) 15.Nb3 Qb8!?

C1) 16.Bg5

C2) 16.Bd4

C3) 16.Bh6

D) 15.g4 hxg4 16.h5 Nxh5

D1) 17.fxg4

D2) 17.Rdg1 Nf6 18.Bh6

D21) 18...Nxe4 19.Nxe4 Bxd4 20.Be3 Be5 21.Bf4 Bg7 22.Qh2

D211) 22...f6

D212) 22...f5N

D22) 18...Rxd4!

Chapter 6

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.h4 h5

A) 13.Nd5

B) 13.Rhe1 Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4

B1) 15.Kb1

B2) 15.Nb3

C) 13.Rdg1

D) 13.g4 hxg4

D1) 14.f4?!

D2) 14.h5 Nxh5

D21) 15.Rdg1?!

D22) 15.Bh6 Kh7!

D221) 16.Bg5

D222) 16.Bxg7

Chapter 7

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5 13.Nd5 Nxd5 14.Bxg7! Kxg7

A) 15.Bxd5 a5

A1) 16.h4

A2) 16.a3

B) 15.exd5! a5 16.a3

B1) 16...Qb6

B2) 16...Kg8!

B21) 17.g4?!

B22) 17.h4 b4 18.axb4 axb4

B221) 19.Qd4

B222) 19.Qe3!?

B223) 19.Qxb4

B224) 19.h5

B23) 17.Rhe1 Rc5

B231) 18.g4

B232) 18.Re3! b4 19.axb4 axb4 20.Qxb4 Qa8

B2321) 21.Bc4 Bf5 22.Ra3 Qc8 23.b3 Qc7

B23211) 24.Ra6!?

B23212) 24.Qd2

B2322) 21.Kd2

Chapter 8

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5 13.h4 a5

A) 14.Bxf6?!

B) 14.e5

C) 14.a3

D) 14.h5 a4 15.Bxf6 Bxf6!? 16.hxg6 e6! 17.e5! Bg7! 18.Rxh7 Bxe5 19.Rdh1 fxg6

D1) 20.Bd5!?

D2) 20.Nd5!?N

Chapter 9

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5

A) 13.g4

B) 13.e5 dxe5 14.Bxe5 Bc6

B1) 15.Qe3

B2) 15.Qxd8

C) 13.a3

D) 13.Bxa7 b4

D1) 14.Ne2

D2) 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5 Qa5

D21) 16.Bd4?!

D22) 16.Qe3

Chapter 10

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8 11.Bb3 Ne5 12.Kb1 Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.g4 b5

A) 15.Ndxb5?!

B) 15.g5

C) 15.h4!? h5

C1) 16.Nd5

C2) 16.gxh5 Nxh5

C21) 17.Nde2

C22) 17.Nce2

D) 15.b3! b4!?

D1) 16.Nce2?!

D2) 16.bxc4 bxc3 17.Qxc3 Qc7

D21) 18.Bc1

D22) 18.Kc1

D23) 18.Ka1

D24) 18.g5 Nh5

D241) 19.Ka1

D242) 19.Kc1

D25) 18.h4 h5

D251) 19.gxh5!?

D252) 19.g5

Chapter 11

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.0-0-0 Rc8

A) 11.Be2 a6 12.Kb1 b5 13.g4 Nxd4!? 14.Bxd4 e5

A1) 15.Bf2

A2) 15.Be3

B) 11.Bb3 Ne5

B1) 12.Bh6?!

B2) 12.g4?! b5!

B21) 13.h4?!

B22) 13.a3

B23) 13.g5 b4! 14.Nce2 Nh5

B231) 15.f4

B232) 15.Ng3

B3) 12.Bg5!? Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4 14.e5! dxe5 15.Nde2 Rc7 16.Bxf6

B31) 16...Bxf6

B32) 16...exf6

Chapter 12

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.Bc4 Bd7
10.h4 h5

A) 11.Nxc6

B) 11.Bb3 Rc8

B1) 12.Nd5

B2) 12.g4

B3) 12.Nxc6!?

Chapter 13

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7

A) 7.Qd2 Ng4

A1) 8.0-0-0

A2) 8.Bg5 h6 9.Bh4 Nc6 10.Nb3 Be6

A21) 11.Be2

A22) 11.0-0-0

B) 7.f3 0-0

B1) 8.g4

B2) 8.Bc4 Nc6

B21) 9.Qe2

B22) 9.Bb3

B3) 8.Qd2 Nc6

B31) 9.Nb3

B32) 9.Bc4 Bd7

B321) 10.g4

B322) 10.Bb3

Chapter 14

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.g4 Be6

A) 10.g5?!

B) 10.h4 d5!

B1) 11.h5?!

B2) 11.0-0-0

B3) 11.e5!?

B4) 11.g5

C) 10.0-0-0 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 Qa5

C1) 12.g5

C2) 12.h4

C3) 12.Kb1 Rfc8 13.h4?! Rxc3! 14.Qxc3 Qxa2† 15.Kc1

C31) 15...Bxg4

C32) 15...Qa1†

C4) 12.a3 Rab8

C41) 13.h4 b5

C411) 14.h5?! b4

C4111) 15.hxg6!?

C4112) 15.Nd5

C412) 14.Nd5

C42) 13.Kb1 Rfc8

C421) 14.g5

C422) 14.h4

Chapter 15

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.g4 Be6
10.Nxe6 fxe6

A) 11.Bc4

A1) 11...d5

A2) 11...Qc8!?

B) 11.0-0-0 Ne5 12.Be2 Qc8

B1) 13.Bh6

B2) 13.Kb1

B21) 13...Nfd7

B22) 13...Nc4

B3) 13.h4 Nfd7

B31) 14.h5!?

B32) 14.f4 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Qxc4 16.e5 Rad8

B321) 17.exd6 Nf6!

B3211) 18.Qd4

B3212) 18.Qg2

B322) 17.h5