

# The Italian Renaissance

*I: Move Orders, Tricks & Alternatives*

Martyn Kravtsiv



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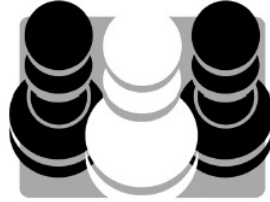
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*The Italian Renaissance I*  
**Move Orders, Tricks & Alternatives**  
By  
**Martyn Kravtsiv**



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# Key to symbols used

±	White is slightly better
∓	Black is slightly better
±	White is better
∓	Black is better
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
=	equality
∞	with compensation
↔	with counterplay
↑	with an initiative
∞	unclear
?	a weak move
??	a blunder
!	a good move
!!	an excellent move
!?	a move worth considering
?!	a move of doubtful value
□	only move
#	mate

## Bibliography

In the process of writing this book, the main books I consulted were:

Cohen: *A Vigorous Chess Opening Repertoire for Black*, New in Chess 2013

Delchev: *♔c4 against the Open Games*, Chess Stars 2018

Lokander: *The Open Games with Black*, Everyman 2015

Lysyj & Ovetchkin: *The Open Games for Black*, Chess Stars 2012

Ntirlis: *Playing 1.e4 e5 – A Classical Repertoire*, Quality Chess 2016

Sakaev: *The Petroff: an Expert Repertoire for Black*, Chess Stars 2011

Shaw: *Playing 1.e4 – Caro-Kann, 1...e5 & Minor Lines*, Quality Chess 2016

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# Preface

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Since the very beginning of chess, vast numbers of games have opened with the moves 1.e4 e5. In my chess database, the earliest one to begin this way goes back to 1560 – in that game Ruy Lopez, the man, played the King’s Gambit instead of ‘his’ opening.

I was introduced to the moves of the king’s pawns at the age of six, as soon as I was taught to play chess. Since then I have played hundreds of games starting with 1.e4 e5, and I know from first-hand experience that a question that constantly arises for White is: “What can I do that will perplex my opponent?”

If the attention previously centred on the Ruy Lopez and “Berlin Wall”, the focus has now shifted to the Italian Game and Petroff Defence.

The last World Championship match confirmed the solidity of the Petroff. For that reason, writing a book from White’s viewpoint dealing with 1.e4 e5 was a unique challenge. At first a single book was planned, but in the course of the work it became clear that the quantity of analysis was too great, and so the decision was taken to write two volumes.

The first volume is devoted to the Bishop’s Opening (2.♘c4) and also to the Petroff Defence – that is, meeting 2.♗f3 with 2...♗f6. Thus the reader will note that I will cover two options for White on move 2. This flexibility is one of the benefits of playing in Italian style.

The choice of 2.♘c4 may come as a surprise, yet the fact is that this move has been relatively little studied, since many players underestimate it. The present volume should do something towards filling the knowledge vacuum that exists in the Bishop’s Opening, as well as demonstrating ideas for White against the Petroff.

The second volume will examine the Italian Game and other variations arising from 1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♖c6 3.♘c4.

I made the decision to write in Russian, as many of the variations require understanding ideas as well as knowing the precise moves. I felt I could communicate these ideas more clearly in Russian, then the excellent translator John Sugden expressed them in English, for which I thank him.

The books are addressed to chessplayers of every level, given that knowing the best moves in the opening will be useful to anyone.

In this book you will find a large number of improvements and innovations. I have honestly included all that I am aware of, without trying to keep any ideas to myself. I must add that I don’t like it when someone deliberately tries to support his own conclusions by making an inaccurate move for the opposing side at the critical moment. Accordingly the present book will be of use to those who play 1...e5 with Black – because you can find improvements and new ideas in it for Black as well as White.

While the book is being prepared for print, I shall carry on looking for new ideas after 1.e4 e5 2.f3 c6. Hence as I write these lines now, I am reminded of the words of Thomas Merton: “Here ends the book, but not the searching.”

Martyn Kravtsiv

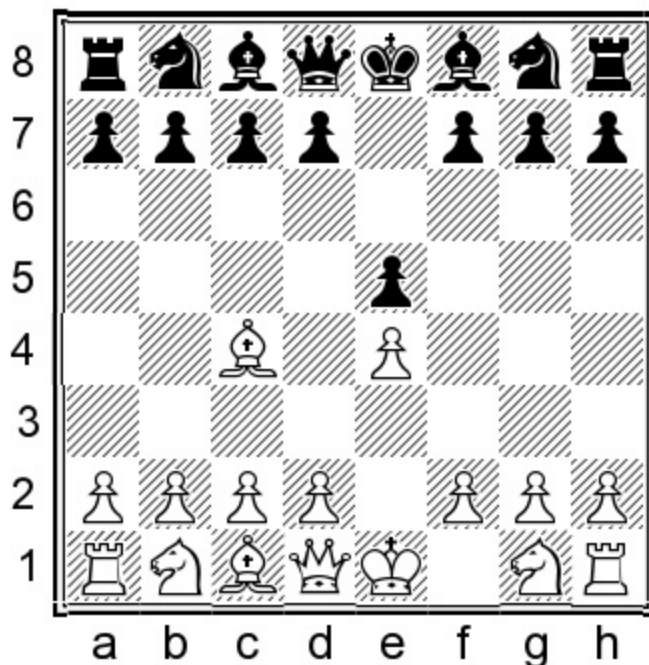
June 2020

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# Introduction

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1.e4 e5 2.♘c4



Formerly I had regarded the Bishop's Opening as merely an attempt to circumvent the much-respected Petroff Defence and reach the Italian Game (which we will see in Volume 2). But on investigating it, I realized that in the variations with ...♘c6 White doesn't have to play ♗f3 but may pursue a plan with ♗c3, d2-d3 and f2-f4. Many players don't take the Bishop's Opening seriously, and consequently, even in top-flight chess, Black can already find himself in a bad position before move 10.

For instance the game Wei Yi – Ding Liren, Baku 2015, went as follows:

**2...♗f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3 d5 5.♘b3 ♘b4† 6.♘d2 ♘xd2† 7.♙xd2!?! dxe4?!!**

A more recent example is Radjabov – Duda, Wijk aan Zee 2019: 7...a5 8.a4 0-0 9.exd5 ♗xd5 10.0-0 f6 11.h3 ♘e6 12.d4 e4 13.♞e1 ♘xh3 14.♞xe4±

**8.♗xe5 0-0**

Now White has a fine advantage if he plays 9.♗xf7. See pages 144-153 of Chapter 7 for more details of both games.

From studying the consequences of 2.♘c4, I was amazed at the quantity of positions that had yet to be examined. I unearthed a large number of improvements, innovations and generally new situations that had virtually never been encountered in practice. The present book should do something to fill the

gaps that exist in the knowledge of this opening.

## Chapter Overview

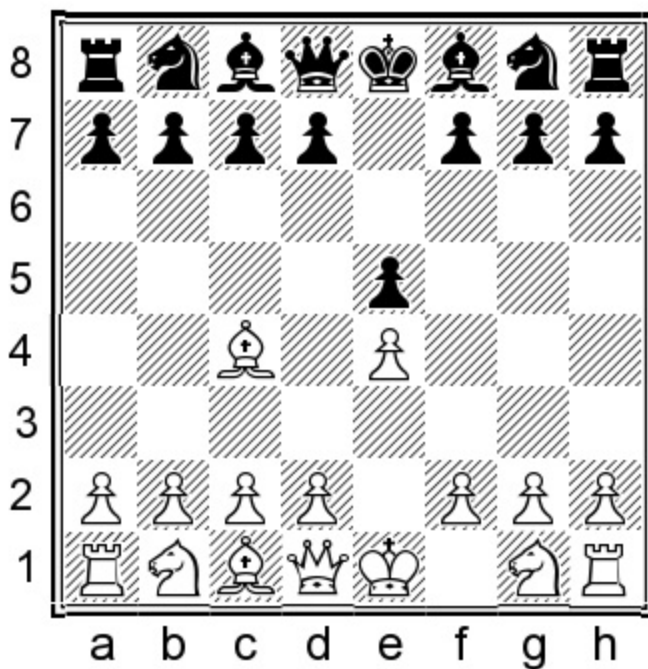
This book is split into two parts:

**Part I: Bishop's Opening**

**Part II: Petroff Defence**

### Part I – Bishop's Opening

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4

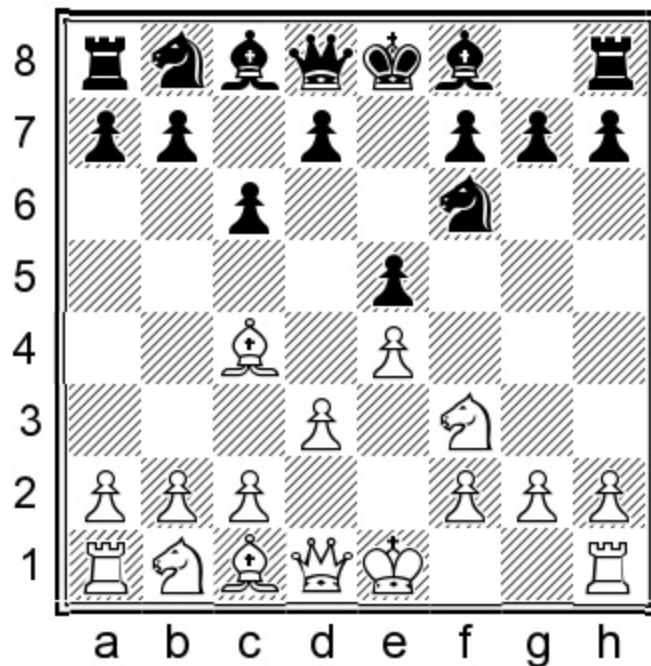


**Chapter 1** starts our study with a look at rare lines Black that can choose on move 2.

**Chapter 2** moves on to 2...♗c5 3.d3 ♘f6 (of course 2...♘f6 3.d3 ♗c5 is the same) when we can stay in less-explored territory with 4.♘c3 possibly followed by f2-f4. If White prefers then instead 4.♗f3 heads for the Italian Game.

**Chapter 3** features 2...♘f6 3.d3 ♘c6 when, as in the previous chapter, we will look at 4.♘c3 though 4.♗f3 is an Italian option.

**Chapters 4-8** cover the critical test of the Bishop's Opening: 2...♘f6 3.d3 c6 which we meet with: 4.♗f3

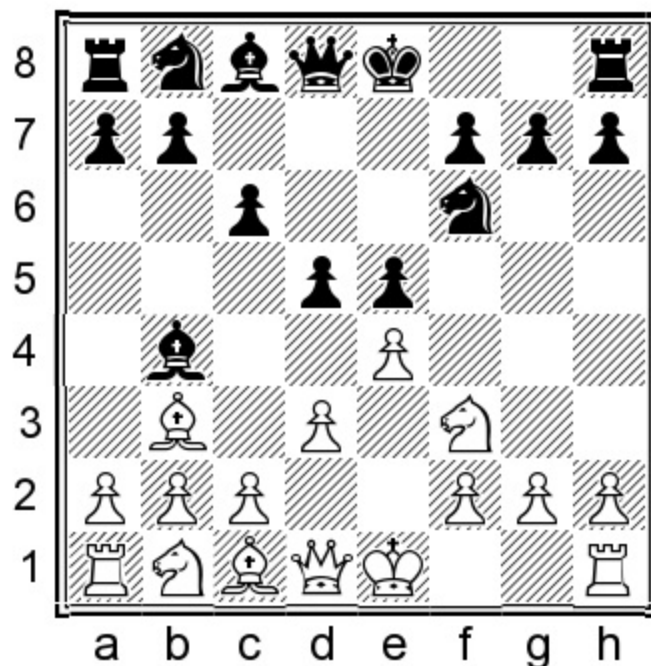


**Chapter 4** is on 4...♙e7 and also starts towards the absolute main lines with 4...d5 5.♙b3 before diverging with the rare: 5...♚c7!?

**Chapter 5** studies 4...d5 5.♙b3 ♙d6 when the move ♘c3 is usually a useful resource for White. Thus provoking the blocking c2-c3 will often be part of Black's plans in later chapters.

**Chapter 6** features 4...d5 5.♙b3 a5 6.a4 ♙b4† 7.c3 ♙d6.

The last two chapters of this section cover: 4...d5 5.♙b3 ♙b4†

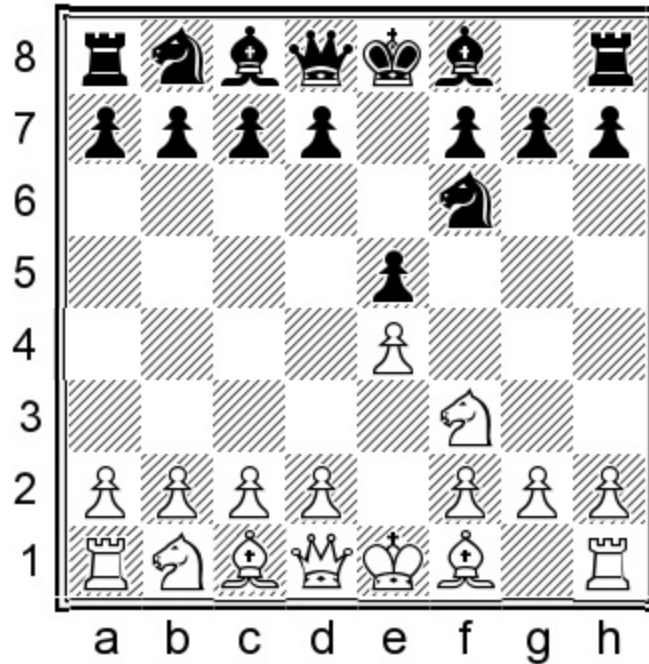


**Chapter 7** studies 6.c3 as well as 6.♙d2 ♙xd2† and then the queen recapture: 7.♚xd2!?

**Chapter 8** is on 6.♙d2 ♙xd2† and the knight recapture: 7.♘bx2

## Part II – Petroff Defence

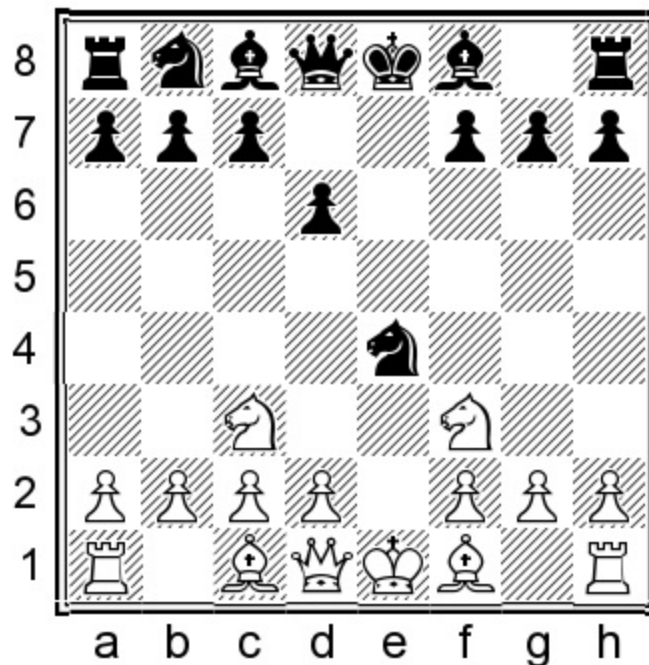
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6



We will of course meet the Petroff Defence with: 3.♘xe5

**Chapter 9** starts our study of this respected defence with rare third moves such as 3...♚e7?! and 3...♘xe4.

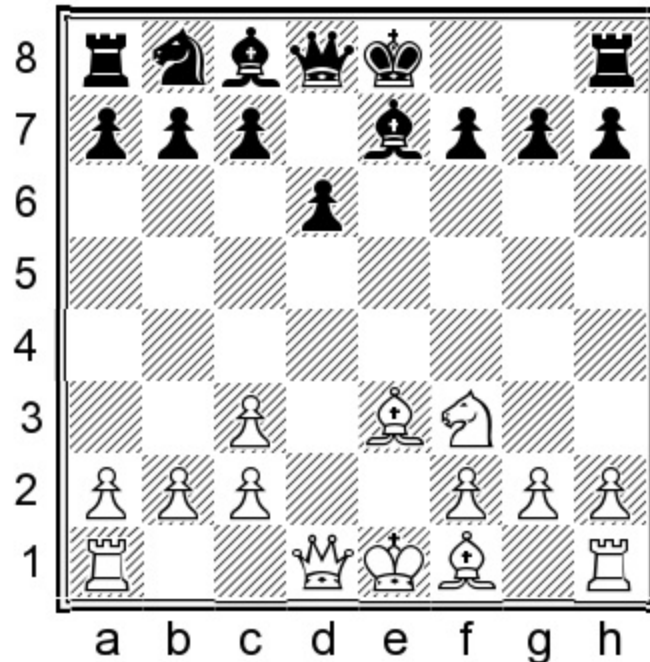
The main lines start with 3...d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 when the move I recommend is 5.♘c3.



**Chapter 10** introduces us to the retreat  $5... \text{Nf6}$  when after  $6.d4$  the replies  $6...g6!?$  and  $6...d5$  are sidelines.

**Chapter 11** features the main line of the  $5... \text{Nf6}$  variation, which is  $6.d4 \text{ Qe7}$ .

Instead of retreating the knight, Black's usual choice is  $5... \text{Nxc3}$  which is covered in **Chapters 12-17**. A key tabiya is reached after  $6.dxc3 \text{ Qe7 } 7. \text{Qe3}$ .

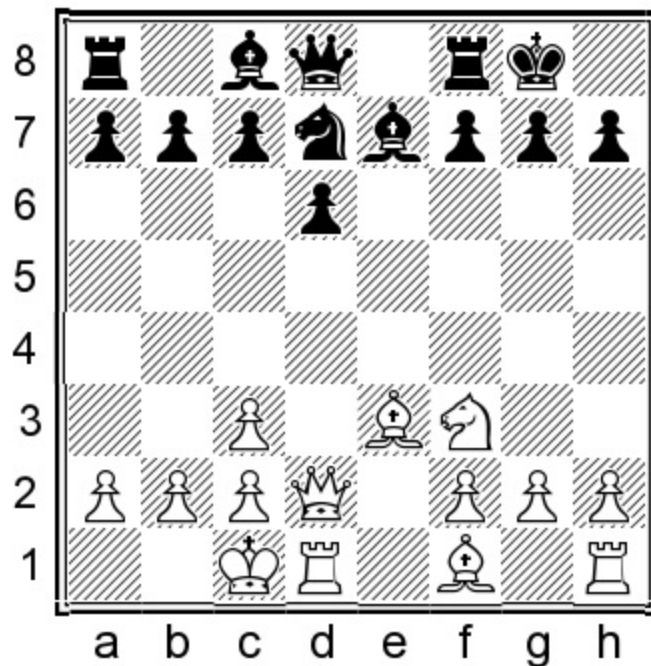


**Chapter 12** introduces us to this line and then  $7... \text{Nc6 } 8. \text{Qd2}$  followed by  $8... \text{Qe6}$  or  $8... \text{Ne5 } 9.0-0 \text{ Nxf3}$ .

**Chapter 13** starts our study of the  $7...0-0$  move order, with  $8. \text{Qd2}$  and then the sidelines  $8... \text{Qe8}$ ,  $8... \text{Nc6}$  and  $8...b6$ .

In the main lines below, many transpositions are possible if, for example, Black plans a set-up with short castling and placing the knight on e5 (of course the knight can reach e5 via c6 or d7). Chapters 14 and 15 cover such lines. Chapters 16 and 17 cover lines where Black places the knight on d7 and does *not* immediately shift it to e5.

So to be specific, the remaining chapters continue with:  $7...0-0 \ 8. \text{Qd2 } \text{Nd7 } 9.0-0$



**Chapter 14** features  $9... \text{♞e5}$  and then  $10. \text{♜xe5!}?$ .

**Chapter 15** shows the same  $9... \text{♞e5}$  line from Black but with White instead trying  $10. \text{♚b1}$ .

**Chapter 16** is on a very different idea: Black instead plays  $9... \text{♞f6}$  with aggressive ideas such as  $...c7-c5$ ,  $... \text{♙a5}$  and  $... \text{♞e6}$ .

**Chapter 17** concludes this volume by covering the option of  $9...c6$  as well as the rare  $9... \text{♞e8}$ .

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# Part I

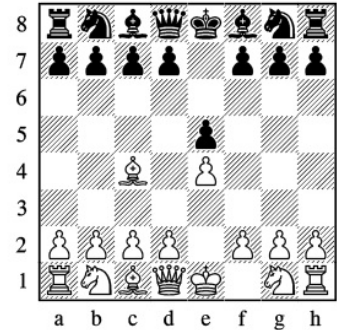
## Bishop's Opening

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# Chapter 1

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## Rare Lines

### Variation Index

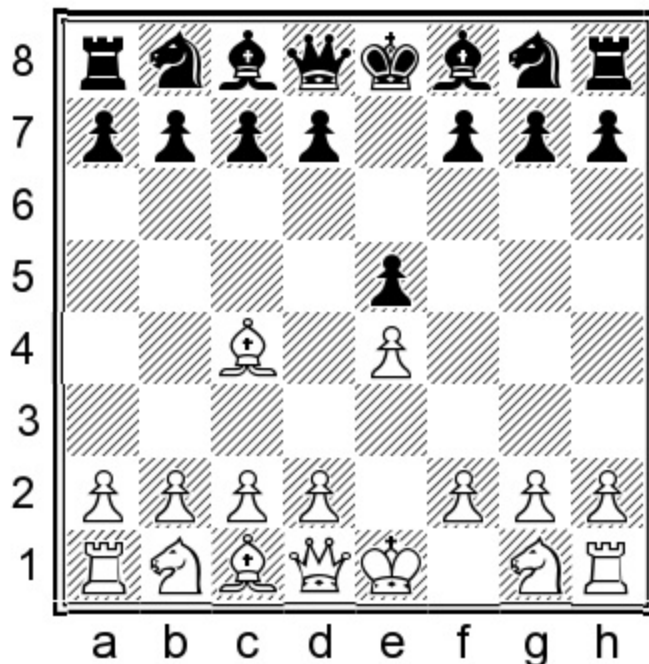
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1.e4 e5 2.♘c4

- A) 2...f5?! 14
- B) 2...c6 15
- C) 2...d6 17
- D) 2...♘c6 3.d3 17
  - D1) 3...♘a5?! 18
  - D2) 3...♘c5 18
- E) 2...♘f6 3.d3 d5?! 19

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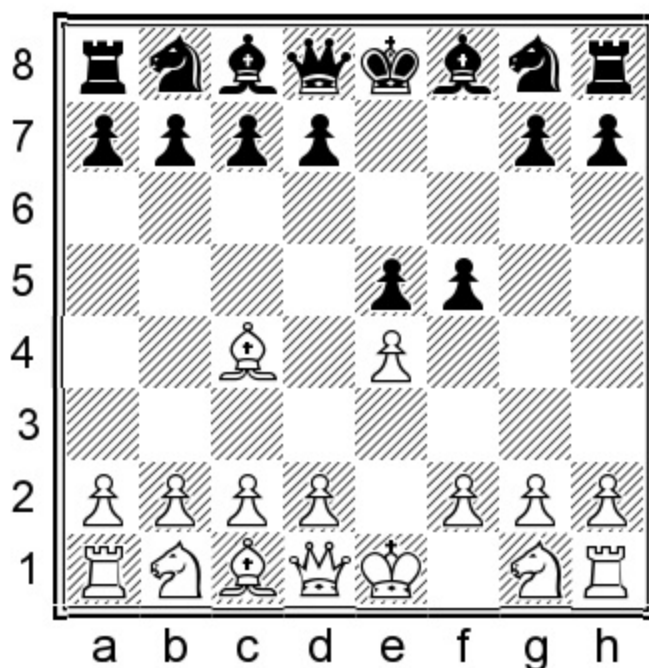
1.e4 e5 2.♘c4



In this introductory chapter to the Bishop's Opening we shall consider Black's rare options. They are **A) 2...f5?!**, **B) 2...c6**, **C) 2...d6**, **D) 2...♘c6** and **E) 2...♗f6 3.d3 d5?!**.

The first three moves are certainly rare, but 2...♘c6 and 2...♗f6 most certainly are not. However, the point is that 2...♘c6 usually transposes to other chapters, so in this chapter we will only consider the rare 2...♘c6 lines that do *not* transpose. And while 2...♗f6 3.d3 usually leads to the main lines of the Bishop's Opening, the break 3...d5?! is a poor idea, so it belongs here rather than with the respectable main lines.

### A) 2...f5?!



This break is clearly misguided, so it is the sort of move I will usually ignore in this book. Yes, I

an offering repertoire guidance for White, but it is more valuable to give several creative new ideas in the main lines, rather than give details about every weak move, when the reader could handle such poor moves quite well without preparation. However, I will briefly cover 2...f5?! for two reasons: Black has a slight plus score with it in database, probably due to shock value. And secondly, my line against it is entertaining and instructive.

### 3.d4!

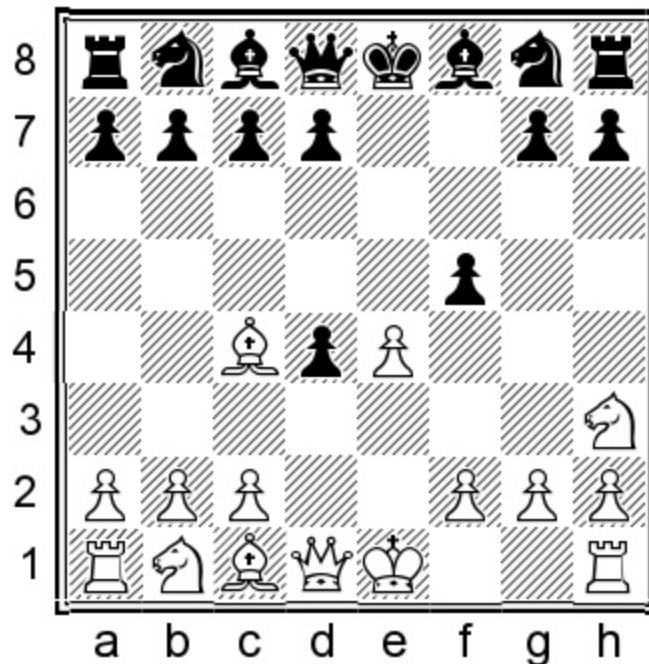
Of course the central break is the normal response to Black's premature and weakening move.

### 3...exd4

No better are lines such as 3...♘c6 4.♘f3 or 3...♘f6 4.dxe5 ♘xe4 5.♘f3 when Black is obviously in trouble.

### 4.♘h3!!

This is the move to note. It is a beautifully logical development, heading for g5 while keeping the white queen's view of h5 clear, which stops any ...fxe4 ideas.

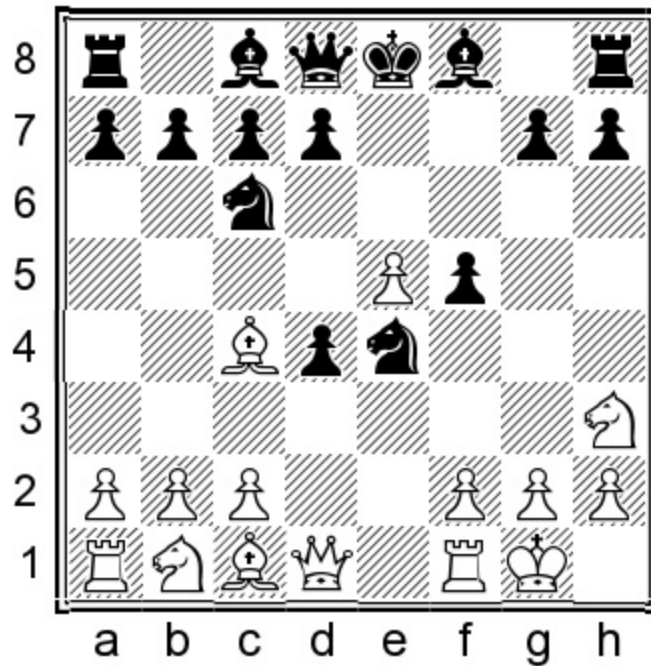


### 4...♘f6

Or 4...♘c6 would be met by 5.♘g5! ♘e5 6.♙xd4 then for example 6...♘xc4 7.♙xc4 ♙e7 8.♘c3 c6 9.♙e2± clearly favours White.

### 5.e5 ♘e4 6.0-0 ♘c6

So far this is Paridar – Gozzoli, Abu Dhabi 2004, and now I suggest:



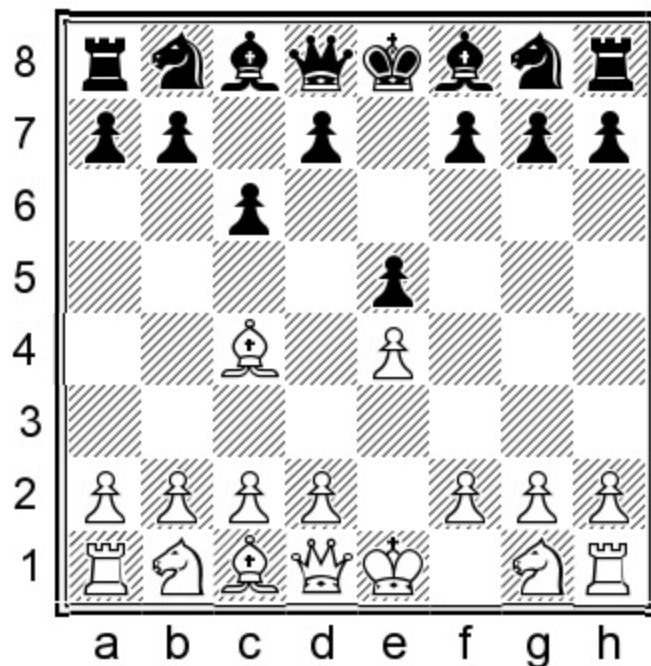
7. ♖d2! N

White already has a crushing advantage. One sample line is:

7...d5 8.exd6 ♔xd6 9. ♘b3 ♕d7 10.f3 ♘f6 11. ♗f4 ♔b4 12. ♚e2† ♚e7 13. ♚d3 0-0-0 14. ♜ae1 ♚b4 15. ♘g5+–

Appropriately, Black suffers on the f7-square.

### B) 2...c6



A rare move order and for good reason. True, Black prepares the tempo-gaining ...d7-d5, but White

is also allowed options of a d2-d4 break. Far more natural, of course, is 2...♘f6 3.d3 c6 which is the critical test of 2.♙c4 (as covered in Chapters 4-8). In those main lines, White has obviously lost the option of playing a d2-d4 break in one move.

### 3.♘c3!?

An interesting option, though 3.d4!? is also possible.

### 3...♘f6

We have an offbeat line of the Vienna.

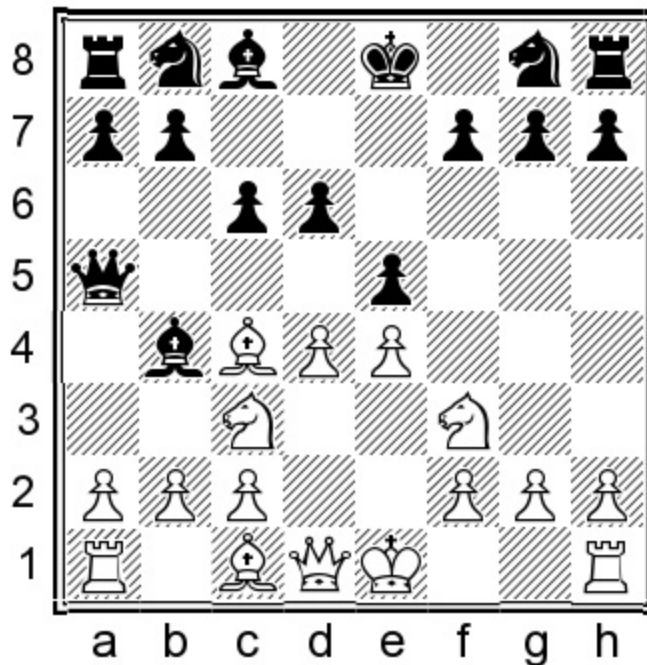
Instead 3...b5 4.♙b3 a5 is not helping Black after: 5.a3 ♘f6 (5...♙c5 6.f4±) 6.d4!N Again we make use of the d2-d4 break that Black's choice on move 2 failed to rule out. 6...exd4 7.♚xd4 d6 8.♘f3±

### 3...♙b4 4.♘f3 d6

This is Black's idea; he hopes for a Philidor-type structure except with the bishop more active than usual on b4. The plan is too slow if White is precise.

Simply bad for Black is: 4...♘f6 5.♘xe5±

### 5.d4! ♚a5



In N. Mitkov – Arencibia Rodriguez, Ponferrada 1997, White defended c3 (with 6.♚d3), but he could have played:

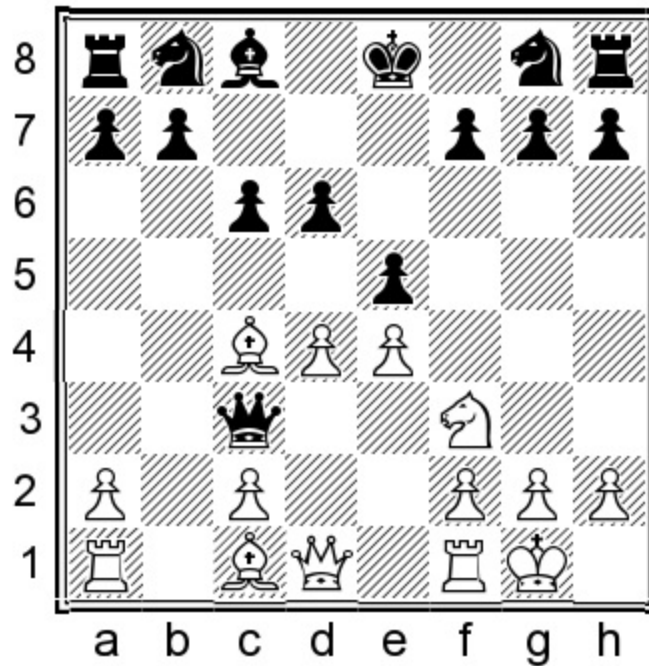
### 6.0-0!N 6...♙xc3?

This is the move to test White's idea, but we have all the answers.

Instead 6...♘f6 7.♘e2± is a strong idea with the point: 7...♘xe4 8.c3+–

### 7.bxc3 ♚xc3

White's lead in development is too great.



The fun line is:

8. ♖xf7†!!

Even 8. ♖b3!? is too strong.

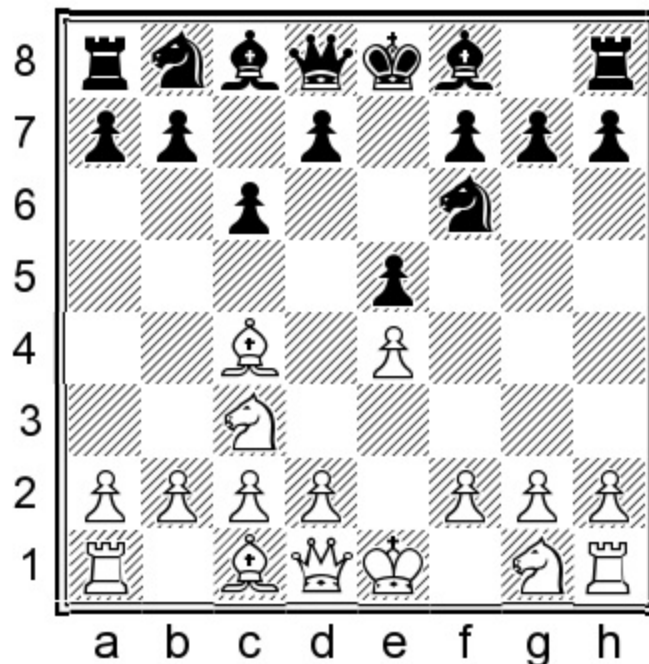
8... ♔xf7 9. dxe5+-

White's attack is decisive. I will show some lines just for fun:

9... dxe5 10. ♖d6 ♖xa1 11. ♖a3+-

9... ♘e7 10. ♖b1 h6 11. ♖b3 ♖a5 12. ♖b2+-

9... ♖xa1 10. ♖xd6 h6 11. ♖a3 ♖xa2 12. ♖f8† ♔g6 13. ♖xc8 ♔h7 14. ♖d1 ♖xa3 15. ♖f5† g6 16. ♖f7#



#### 4.d4

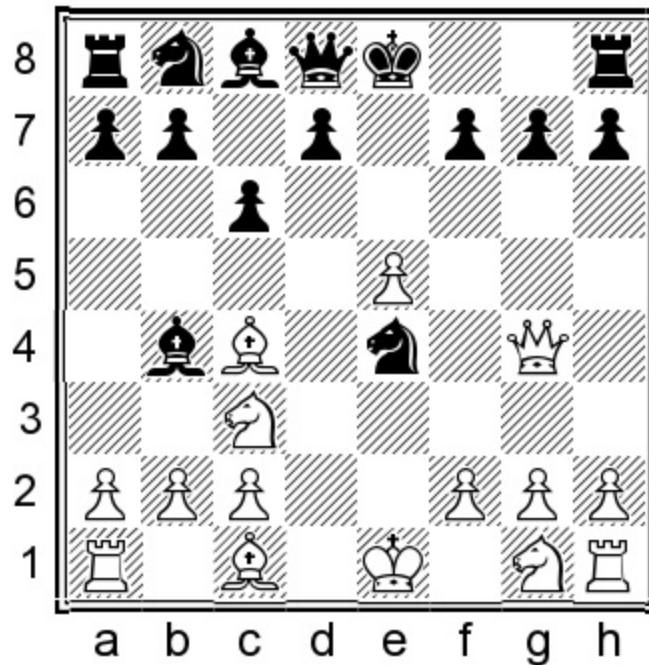
Our usual break in this line.

#### 4...♙b4 5.dxe5 ♘xe4

Black's last two moves try to justify his play, but it fails totally if White is accurate.

#### 6.♚g4!

A rare move, but highly effective. Most players move the queen to d4 or f3, staying connected to c3, but there is no need; hitting g7 is stronger.



#### 6...d5

Or 6...♘xc3 7.♚xg7 ♜f8 8.a3! is great for White. For example, 8...♚h4 9.axb4 ♚xc4 10.♙h6 ♚e4† and in Bodrogi – Jamrich, Kobanya 1996, the winning line could have been: 11.♙f1!N 11...♚c4† 12.♘e2! ♚xe2† 13.♙g1+–

#### 7.♚xg7 ♜f8 8.♙d3 d4

This was tried in Ammon – Scherb, Bavaria 2013.

Instead, equally hopeless is 8...♘xc3 9.♙d2 ♘xa2 10.c3+– Sgarlata – Hessedenz, Eppelborn 2008.

#### 9.♙xe4N 9...dxc3 10.b3+–

White is simply winning.

### C) 2...d6

This move does not require much study, so I will just suggest a few brief ideas. At best Black will transpose to a Philidor.

### 3. ♘f3!?

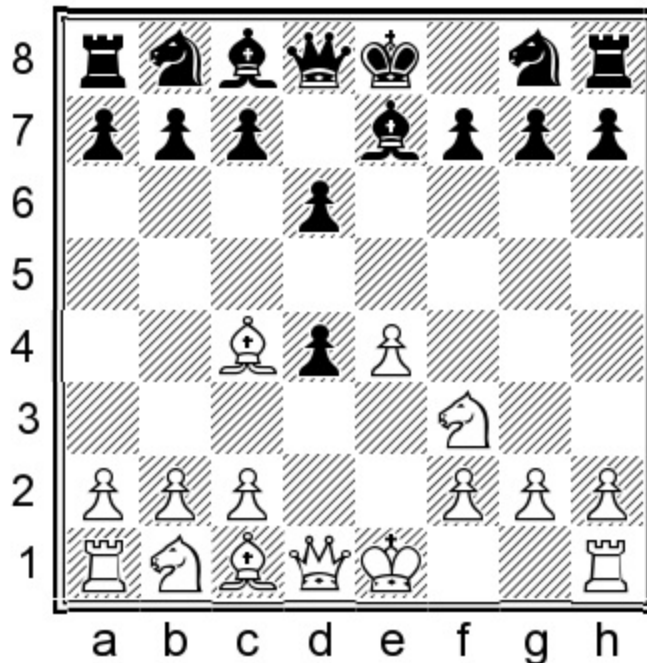
Among White's other options are 3. ♖c3 or 3. d3. In any case, Black's early ...d7-d6 will not be a critical test of 2. ♙c4.

### 3... ♙e7

The sensible move, reaching a normal Philidor position.

Instead 3... ♘d7?! 4. d4 ♙e7? is a well-known blunder, as after 5. dxe5 White wins material after either 5... ♘xe5 6. ♘xe5 dxe5 7. ♖h5 or 5... dxe5? 6. ♖d5.

### 4. d4 exd4



### 5. ♖xd4!?

A less explored line. Black will eventually gain a tempo attacking the queen, but White will retain a space advantage while keeping all the minor pieces on the board.

Instead 5. ♘xd4 ♘f6 6. ♘c3 is a main line of the Philidor where normally White is a little better.

### 5... ♘f6 6. ♘c3

One sample line is:

### 6... 0-0 7. ♙f4 a6 8. a3!?!±

Of course the game has just started, but White should be happy enough.

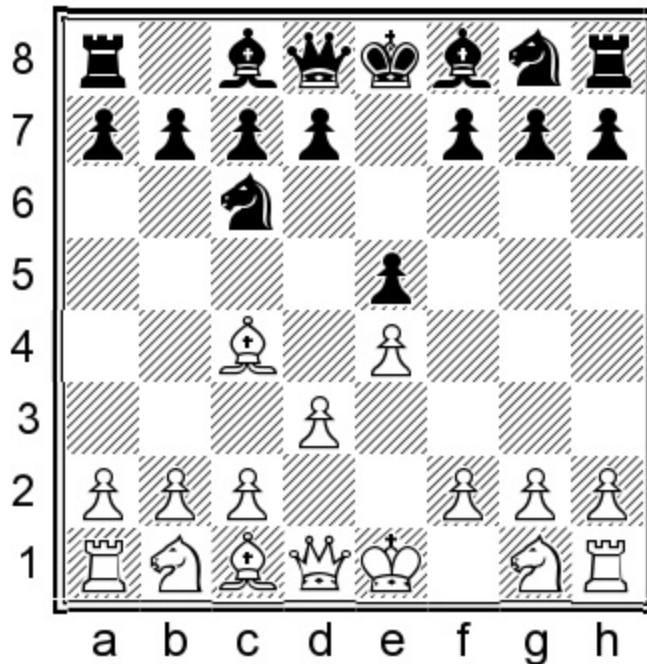
## D) 2...♘c6

A perfectly sensible move, but it almost always transposes into lines that will be covered in other chapters, or the next Volume!

### 3.d3

Arguably, White should not commit to d2-d3 unless Black forces us into it, as a d2-d4 break can be handy in some lines. However, 3.d3 can hardly be a bad move, and many transpositions are still possible.

The simplest and most practical move is 3.♘f3 which is the Italian Game and the starting point of Volume 2. In the present move order, White did not need to worry about the super-solid Petroff Defence.



After the text move there are two main independent options: **D1)** 3...♘a5?! and **D2)** 3...♘c5. Other likely moves usually transpose to lines covered elsewhere.

### D1) 3...♘a5?!

This is an independent line, though certainly ill-advised. Black will catch the light-squared bishop, but not in the way he intended.

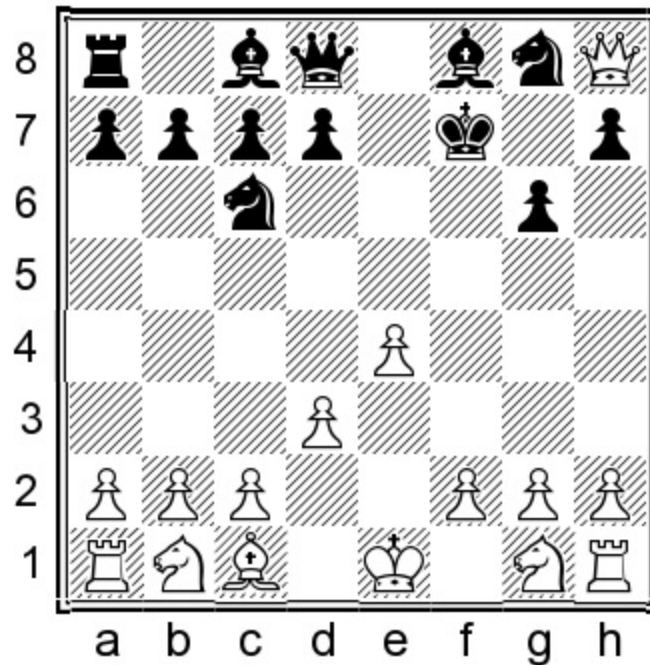
### 4.♘xf7!?

This is the right choice, even though it is not quite as devastating as it may appear at first glance.

### 4...♔xf7 5.♗h5† g6

Black must give up the h8-rook, as 5...♔e6?! 6.♚f5† ♔d6 7.f4± is an ugly position for Black, as in Gelashvili – Betaneli, Las Vegas 2012.

6.♚xe5 ♖c6 7.♚xh8



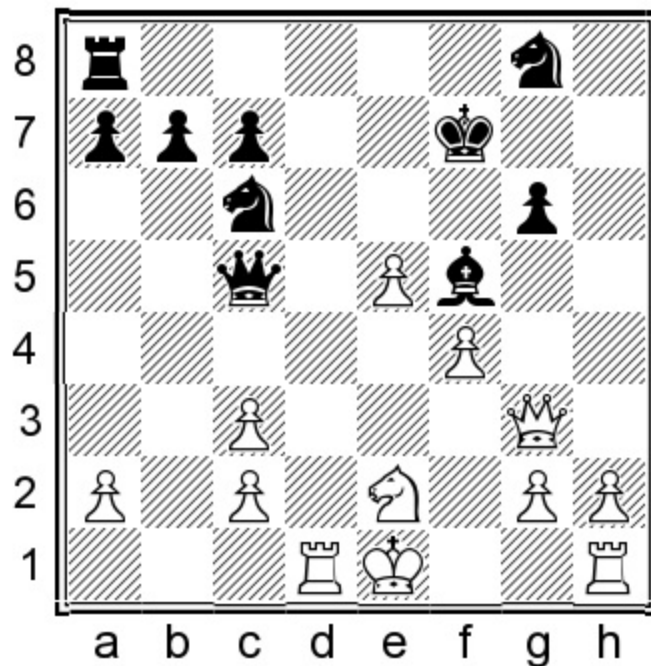
7...h6!N

The only move to keep Black alive. White must give up his other bishop to save his queen.

8.♙xh6 ♙xh6 9.♞c3

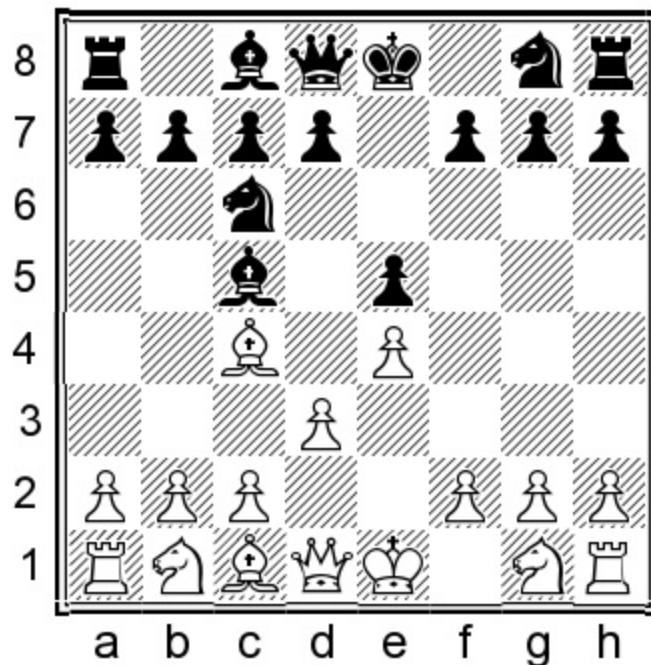
White has a rook and three pawns for two bishops, which is enough for some advantage. One illustrative line is:

9...♙g7 10.♚h3 d5 11.♚g3! ♙e5 12.f4 ♙xc3† 13.bxc3 dxe4 14.dxe4 ♚e7 15.e5 ♙f5 16.♞e2 ♚c5 17.♞d1±



White has retained his plus, as the extra pawns on the kingside will soon prove their worth; one plan is h2-h4-h5.

D2) 3...♔c5



After this move, many transpositions are possible, but there is scope for original play.

4.♘c3!?

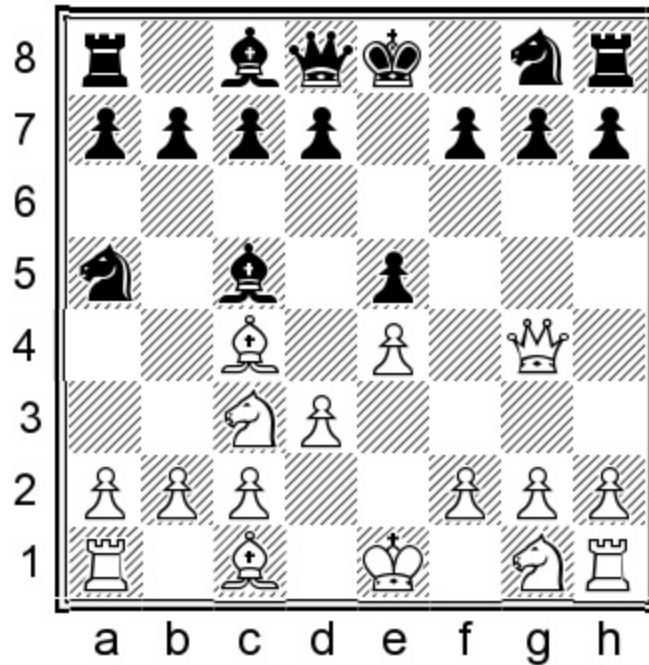
Again 4.♘f3 is a simple choice.

#### 4...♞a5

Once again this is an independent line, and again one Black should avoid.

4...♞f6 5.f4 is Variation B of Chapter 3.

#### 5.♞g4!!



Taking advantage of the undefended g7-pawn in crude but effective fashion.

#### 5...♞f6

The best try is still untested: 5...♞xc4!N 6.♞xg7 ♞f6 7.♞xf6 ♞xf6 8.dxc4 ♞g8 9.g3± Black has some compensation for the missing pawn, but not quite enough.

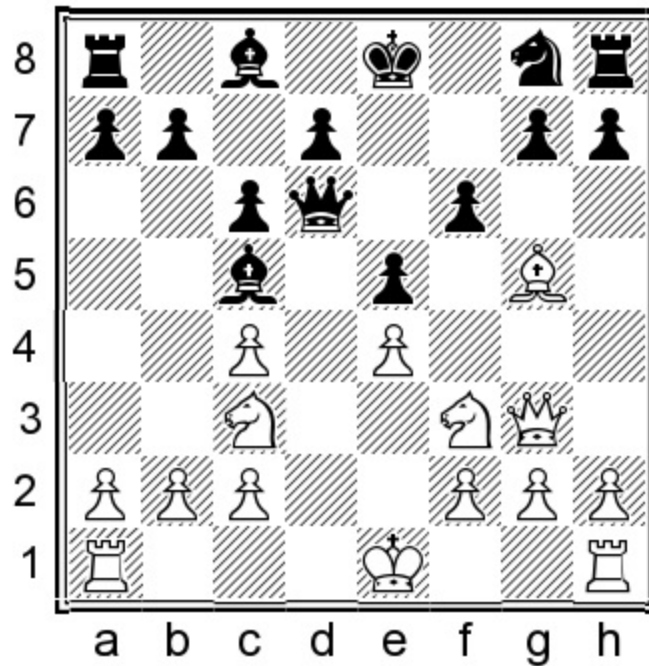
#### 6.♞g3

Threatening both ♞d5 and ♞g5.

#### 6...c6 7.♞g5

White is developing actively with gain of time. One example continued:

7...♞d6 8.♞f3 ♞xc4 9.dxc4 f6



In Van de Oudeweetering – Smeets, Hengelo 2002, the most active continuation would have been:

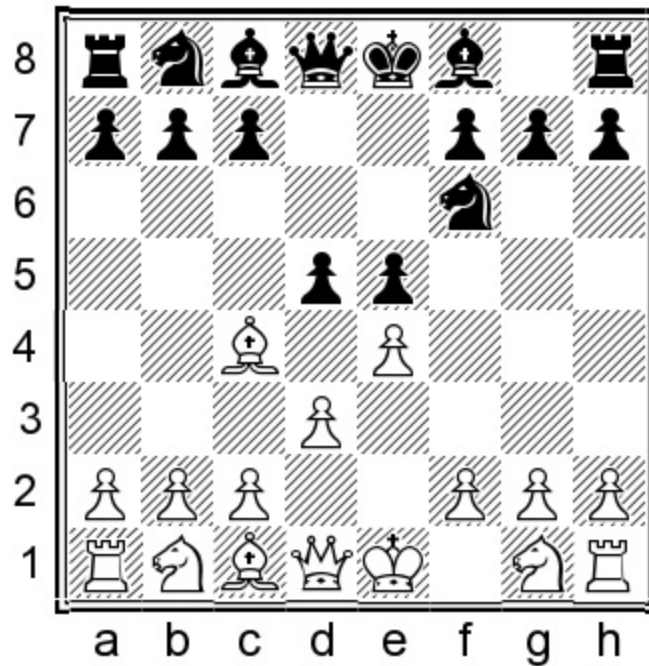
**10. ♖e3! N 10... ♔f7**

Of course not 10... ♖xe3? as 11. ♔xg7 wins at once.

**11.0-0±**

White will gain yet another tempo when a rook comes to d1. And taking on e3 is still impossible as the half-open f-file would immediately trouble the black king.

**E) 2... ♘f6 3.d3 d5?!**



We should mention this move as it is direct and there are almost 800 games in the database with it. However the break is clearly premature and the e5-pawn quickly becomes a target.

We shall concentrate on Black's better 3rd moves, and in particular 3...c6, later in this volume.

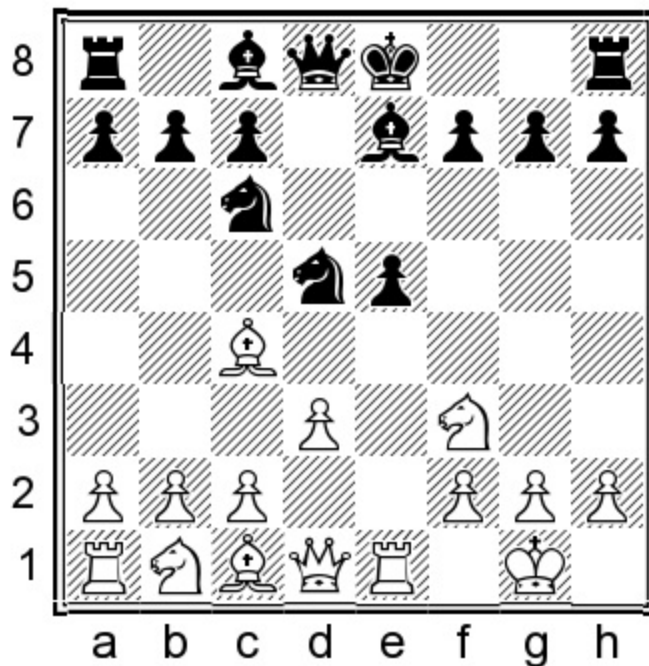
#### 4.exd5 ♖xd5 5.♗f3 ♖c6

Instead 5...♙g4 6.h3 is already a disaster for Black, who will lose at least a pawn.

#### 6.0-0 ♙e7

Or 6...♙g4 is likely to transpose below, after for example 7.♖e1 ♙e7.

#### 7.♖e1



### 7...f6

An ugly-looking move, but Black has no perfect solution. For example:

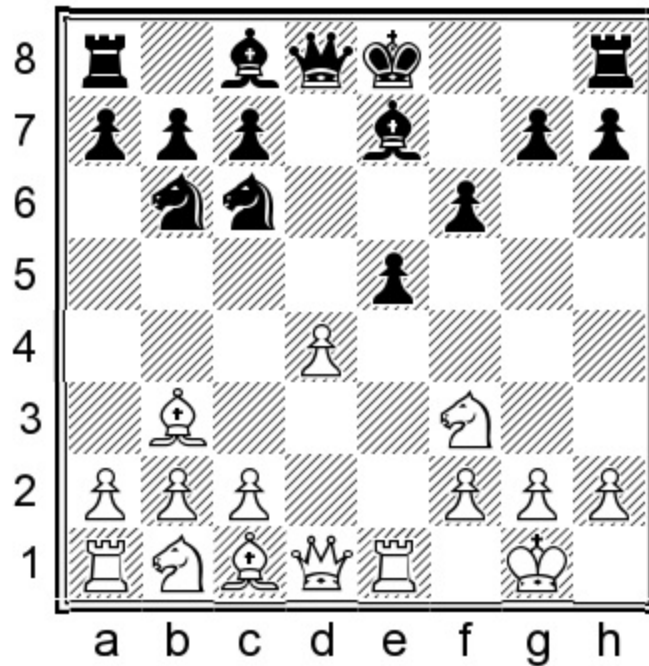
7...♙g4 8.h3 ♜xf3 9.♚xf3 ♘d4 Black has no choice (instead 9...♘f6 10.♙b5 is practically winning).  
 10.♚d1 We can follow one active attempt, just to see White's refutation: 10...b5 11.♙b3 ♘xb3  
 12.axb3 ♚d6 13.♚e2 ♘b4 In Del Arco Gimeno – Folch Zaragoza, La Pobla de Vallbona 2004, the  
 right line was 14.d4!N with a practically decisive advantage after 14...0-0 15.c3.

### 8.d4!?

A logical try, but White is not short of good options. For example, 8.c3!? ♙g4 9.h3 ♙h5 10.d4 exd4  
 11.cxd4 ♚d7 12.♘c3 ♙f7± is also more pleasant for White.

### 8...♘b6 9.♙b3!

It is best to play for long-term compensation, rather than worrying about a pawn. For Black, we can  
 see how one weakness leads to another. 3...d5?! weakened the e5-pawn, leading to ...f7-f6 which  
 leaves the king unable to castle short.



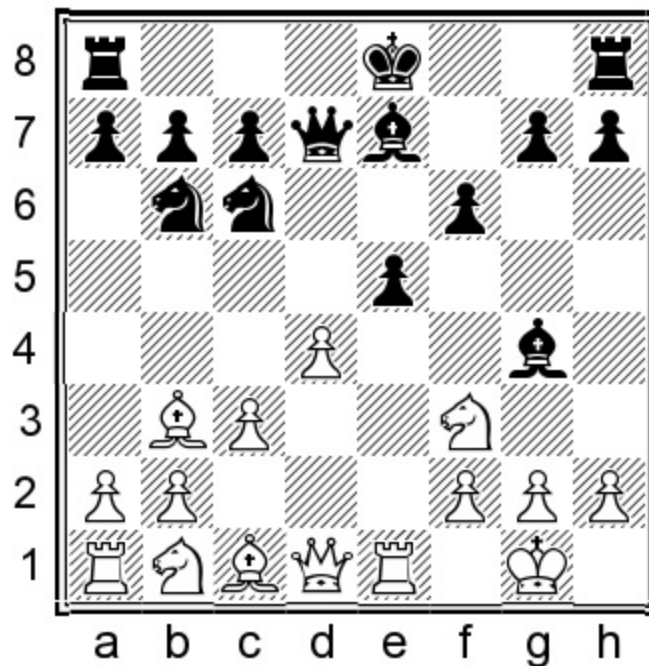
### 9...♙g4?!

A natural try, but the best approach is to accept an unpleasant endgame.

9...♘xd4 10.♘xd4 ♙xd4 11.♙xd4 exd4 12.♙f4 White's advantage is clear; even without queens on the board, the black king is unhappy. A sample line is: 12...♙d7 13.♘d2 ♙d6 14.♙xd6 ♙xd6 15.♘e4† ♙c6 16.a4 a5 17.♖ad1 ♖d8 18.♘g3± The rook is threatening to penetrate to e7; Black's extra pawn will not last.

Black could try a very slightly different version of the same endgame with: 9...a5!?!N 10.a4 ♘xd4 11.♘xd4 ♙xd4 12.♙xd4 exd4 13.♙f4 ♙d7 14.♘d2± Though of course White still has a plus.

### 10.c3 ♙d7



We have been following Freiman – Konstantinopolsky, Kiev 1938. Now an improvement is:

**11. ♖bd2! N 11...0-0-0 12. h3**

After the novelty, White can if required recapture on f3 with the knight, keeping the pressure on e5.

**12... ♗f5**

The trick is that 12... ♗h5 fails to 13. ♖xe5! picking up a pawn.

**13. dxe5 fxe5 14. a4±**

White plays for the initiative rather than rushing to grab a pawn.

### Conclusion

We started our study of the Bishop's Opening with rare lines.

1. e4 e5 2. ♗c4 f5?! is a poor move, but the reply 3. d4 exd4 4. ♖h3!! makes it worth mentioning.

2...c6 is an inferior version of 2... ♖f6 3. d3 c6 as White keeps the option of d2-d4 breaks, and we saw a few examples of this idea.

2...d6 is solid but not a critical test. We can transpose to the Philidor or try some original ideas. White does not need serious preparation here.

2... ♖c6 is a common move but in this chapter we only considered lines that do not transpose to later chapters. Firstly, we should note again that 3. ♖f3 is the Italian Game. But if White wishes to choose

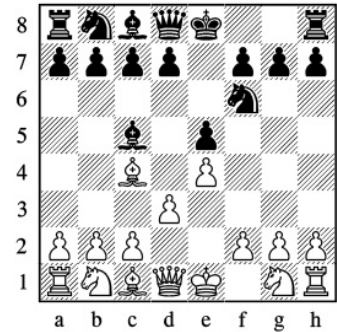
3.d3 then 3...♖a5?! and 3...♗c5 4.♖c3 ♗a5 are independent replies where Black hunts down the light-squared bishop. We saw that Black is well-advised to avoid both these lines for clear tactical reasons.

2...♗f6 3.d3 is the main line of the Bishop's Opening but not because of 3...d5?! which is premature. We saw various lines where the e5-pawn quickly became a target.

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# Chapter 2

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2...♖c5 3.d3 ♘f6

## Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♖c4 ♖c5 3.d3 ♘f6 4.♗c3

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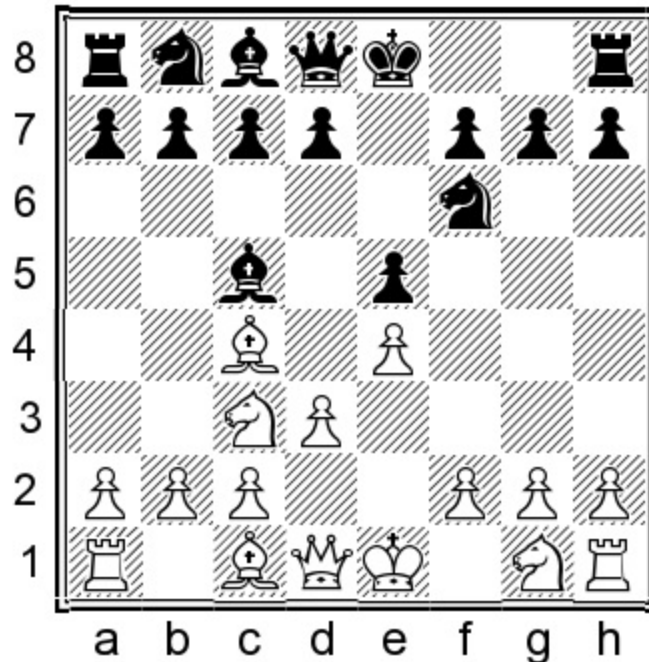
1.e4 e5 2.♖c4 ♖c5

Mimicking White's bishop development is not the most common choice, but it is a logical starting point for our serious study of the Bishop's Opening.

More common is 2...♞f6 when 3.d3 ♘c5 transposes to this chapter, while of Black's other options on move 3 the most significant is 3...c6 as we shall see in Chapters 4-8.

### 3.d3 ♞f6 4.♞c3

Instead Topalov – Kramnik, Paris 2016, went 4.♞f3 d6 5.c3 ♞c6 6.0-0 a6 7.a4 h6 8.♞e1 0-0 9.♞bd2 with a slight edge for White. The variation 4.♞f3 d6 is played chiefly in blitz games, so it's hard to give an assessment of it. Overall White should be slightly better; consequently a simpler option for Black is to transpose to the Italian Game with 4...♞c6. But that is the subject for a second volume; just now we are studying the interesting possibility of 4.♞c3!?



We now examine A) 4...h6, B) 4...d6 and C) 4...c6.

#### A) 4...h6

Strangely, the database shows over 800 games with this slow, odd-looking move. It is not such a bad move.

#### 5.f4!?

We can play in King's Gambit style, though of course 5.♞f3 is also possible.

#### 5...d6 6.♞f3

Logical and best.

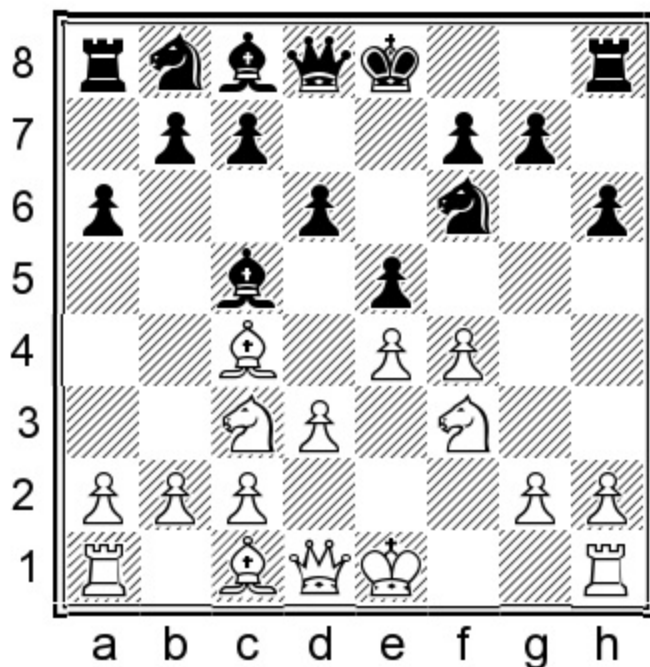
Instead after 6.f5 c6! 7.♞f3 b5 8.♞b3 a5 ♣ Black's omission of ...♞c6 has helped him greatly.

#### 6...a6

Securing the c5-bishop from harassment.

Another move with the same idea is 6...a5!? when White might continue similarly as against 6...a6.

Of course against 6...♘c6 the consistent line is 7.♗a4! ♕b6 8.♗xb6 axb6 9.0-0± with a plus for White in N. Mitkov – Sermeno, San Salvador 2003, and many other games.



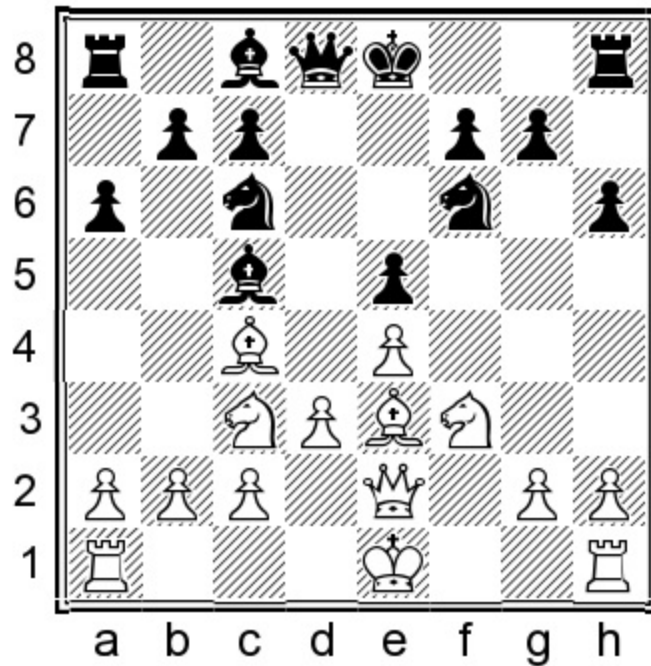
7.♙e2

Preparing to oppose the c5-bishop.

7...♘c6 8.fxe5

The best try. Instead Black is okay after: 8.f5 b5 9.♕b3 ♘a5 10.♕e3 ♕xe3 11.♙xe3 ♕b7=

8...dxe5 9.♕e3



### 9...♙xe3N

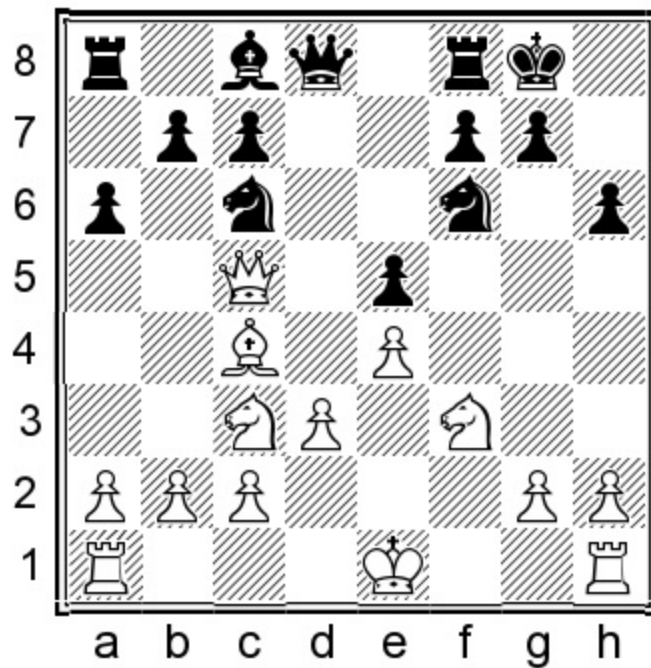
This simple new move is best.

Instead 9...♘d4 as in Stenzel – Camara, Rio de Janeiro 1965, allows a fine novelty: 10.♘xe5!N  
 10...0-0 The only way to play on (the point is 10...♘xe2? allows 11.♙xf7† followed by ♙xc5†).  
 11.♙xd4 ♙xd4 12.♘f3 ♙g4 13.♙d2± With an extra pawn.

### 10.♙xe3 0-0

Many moves are now possible but I will show one sample line:

### 11.♙c5!?



The idea of this move is to allow White to exchange on d4 in reply to ...♞d4.

### 11...♞d4

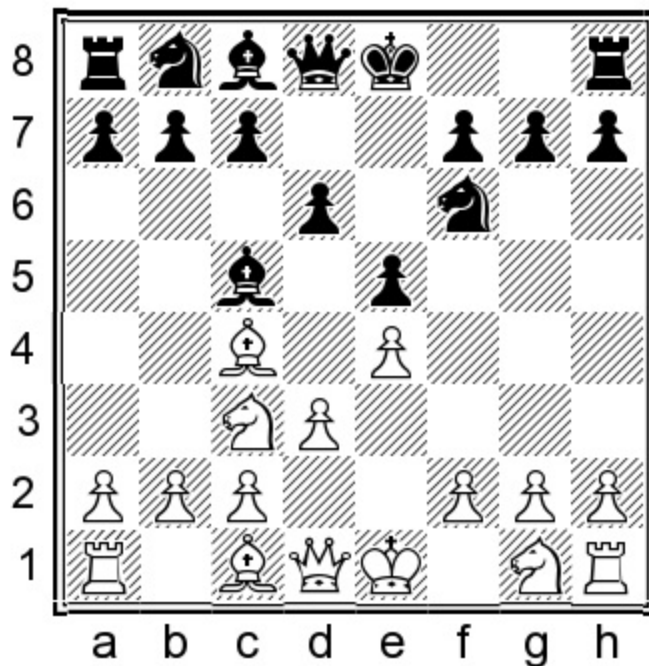
This allows us to see White's plan in action.

A good alternative is 11...♞e8!? 12.♞f1 ♕g4 13.♞d5∞ with a rather obscure position.

### 12.♞xd4 ♞xd4 13.♞xd4 exd4 14.♞d5 ♞xd5 15.exd5!±

White has a very slight endgame edge, as the d4-pawn may prove weak.

### B) 4...d6



### 5.♞a4

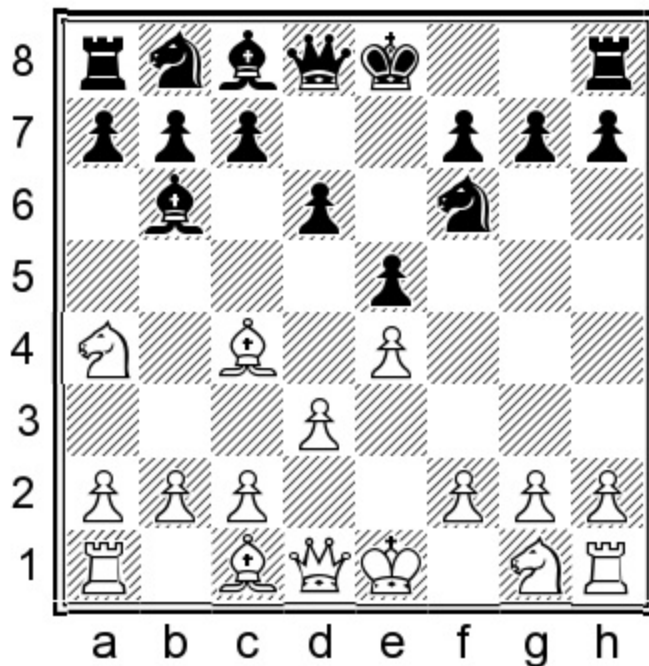
Chasing down the bishop is a logical response to ...d7-d6, which blocked its escape.

With 5.f4!? White attempts to transpose into the variations with 2...♞f6 3.d3 ♞c6 (which would be reached after 5...♞c6 6.♞f3). But White has to reckon with the possible: 5...♞g4!? 6.f5 h5 (not 6...♞f2? 7.♞h5 g6 8.♞h6± with a large plus; if 8...♞xh1 then 9.♞g5 wins) 7.♞h3 ♞c6 8.♞g5 ♞f2

At this point White has two possibilities that lead to obscure positions: 9.♞xf7 ♞h4 10.♞g5, or 9.♞f3 ♞xh1 10.♞e2!. But after some analysis I concluded that Black is all right and that he too has a certain amount of choice. I therefore prefer the calm 5.♞a4.

### 5...♞b6

Or: 5...♞d4 6.c3 ♞xf2† It was for the sake of this move that Black provoked c2-c3; the question is what it will lead to. 7.♞xf2 c6 8.♞b3 b5 9.h3! Preparing the h2-square for the king, so that ...♞b6† can be met by ♞g3 (a blitz game Caruana – Grischuk, Saint Louis 2017, went 9.♞f3?! bxa4 10.♞xa4 ♞b6†, and Black obtained an excellent position). 9...bxa4 (9...0-0 10.♞f3 will only transpose) 10.♞xa4 0-0 11.♞f3 With a small plus for White, thanks to his two bishops. On 11...♞b6† he will play 12.♞g3, while quite a good answer to 11...d5 or 11...♞bd7 is 12.♞e1.



### 6.c3!?N

A useful move after which White need not hurry to capture on b6, seeing that Black can't remove his bishop to a5 with check. This is probably more shrewd than an immediate 6.♘xb6, whereupon 6...axb6 7.f4 exf4 8.♕xf4 ♕e6 9.♕xe6 fxe6 gives a playable, roughly equal position. White can then bring his knight out to either e2 or f3. For example, 10.♖e2 e5 11.♕g5 0-0 12.0-0.

My computer advises 6.b4. Here too the idea is to stop ...♕a5† so that there will be no hurry to take on b6; but to that end I like 6.c3 better. After 6.b4 0-0 7.♖f3 ♖c6 8.c3 ♗e7∞ the knight will be transferred to g6. White's b2-b4 appears redundant.

### 6...0-0

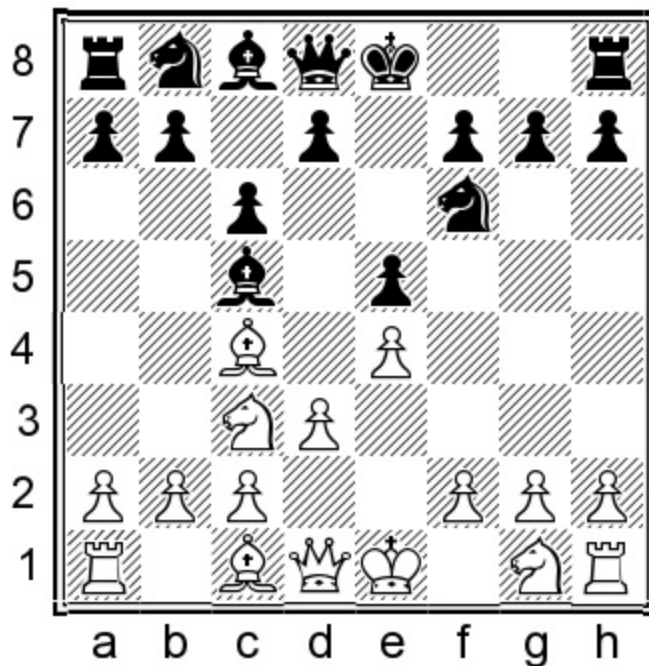
For 6...♕xf2† see the note to Black's 5th move.

### 7.♖f3 ♖c6 8.0-0

Given that there are no forced moves in such situations and that this position has hardly ever been seen in practice, it's hard to give specific variations here. Against 8...♗e7 White has 9.♕g5 ♗g6 10.♖h4, with a slight advantage.

Black probably does a little better with 8...♕d7 or 8...h6, which White can answer with 9.♞e1 or 9.h3. Overall White's position is a shade more pleasant.

### C) 4...c6



### 5.f4!?

This move leads to sharp play, which may appear risky in view of ...d7-d5. We shall examine that reply in detail.

The simple 5.♘f3 gives a level position. Rapport – Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2019, continued 5...d6 6.h3 0-0 7.0-0 ♖e8 8.♘e2 ♘bd7 9.♘g3 with a roughly equal game.

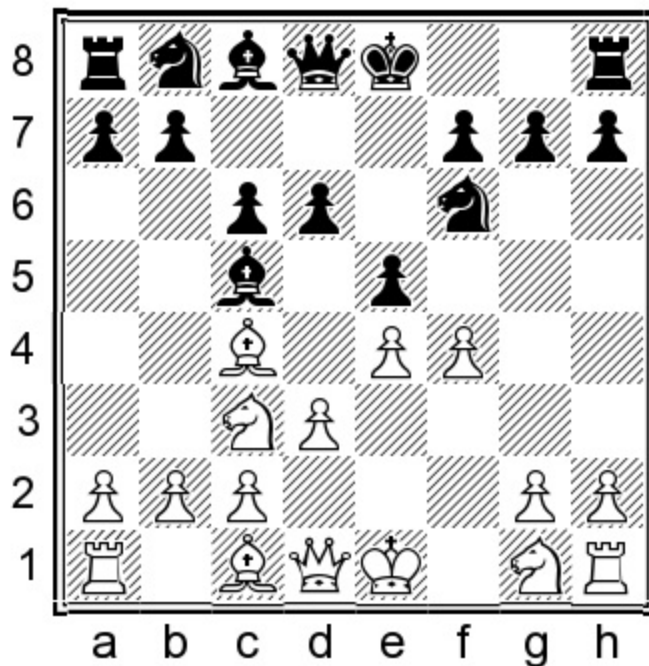
Black now has **C1) 5...d6** and **C2) 5...d5**.

Also 5...exf4 6.e5 d5 7.exf6, and now:

a) 7...♙xf6!? 8.♙e2† ♔d8 9.♙xd5 cxd5 10.♙f3 In appearance White is a little better, but objectively the position is unclear. If 10...♞e8† then 11.♘ge2, or if 10...♙xg1 11.♞xg1 ♞e8† then 12.♔f1. In the case of 10...♙e6†, the reply 11.♔f1!? is again interesting.

b) 7...dxc4 8.fxg7 ♞g8 9.♙e2† (9.♙h5!? ♙e7† 10.♘e4 cxd3 11.cxd3 ♙b4† 12.♔f1 ♞xg7 13.♙xf4∞ gives plenty of complex play; in view of the threatened a2-a3, Black has to sacrifice a pawn with 13...♙g4! 14.♙h6 ♞g6, obtaining compensation after 15.♙xh7 ♘d7) 9...♙e6 10.♘f3 cxd3 11.cxd3 ♞xg7 12.♙xf4 The position is unclear; White is nonetheless a little more comfortable owing to his slight lead in development.

### C1) 5...d6



### 6.fxe5!?

In my view it's simpler to take on e5 at once, since 6.♘f3 can be met by 6...♘bd7!? with the aim of recapturing with the knight.

### 6...dxe5 7.♘f3 0-0 8.♙e2

At this point Black has several moves of about equal value; in all cases White should be slightly better. Against 8...♘bd7 or 8...♙d6, quite a good idea is 9.a4 to prevent ...b7-b5; White will follow with ♕e3 and castle short.

After 8...b5 9.♕b3 White will still play a2-a4, for example 9...♘bd7 10.a4 or 9...a5 10.a4 b4 11.♘d1 with advantage.

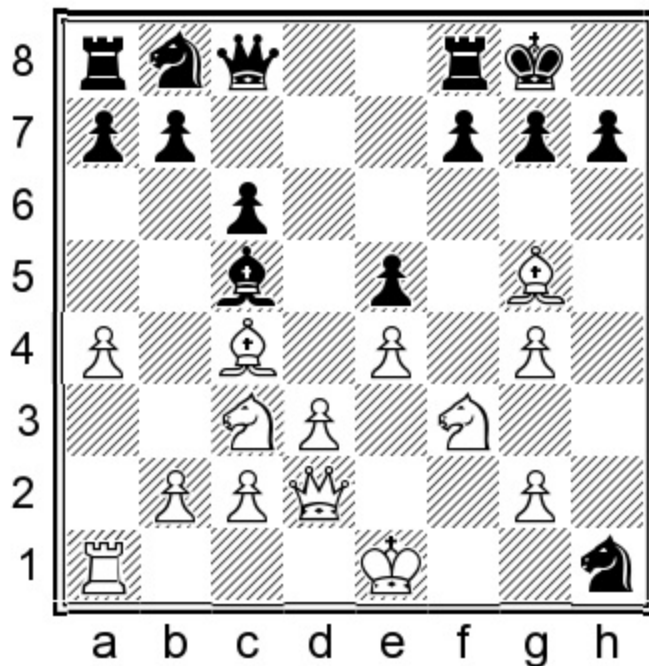
### 8...♕g4

I give this move as the main line because Black now has a cunning idea, against which White needs to know the accurate moves.

### 9.h3 ♘h5!?

The consequences of this move are not obvious, but with precise play White acquires a plus. The modest 9...♕xf3 is probably better; after 10.♙xf3 Black's position is just slightly worse.

### 10.hxg4 ♘g3 11.♕g5! ♙c8 12.♙d2 ♘xh1 13.a4!±



Forestalling Black's idea of ...b7-b5 and ...a7-a5. Surprisingly it now becomes clear that Black has no good move. After 13...♙xg4 14.0-0-0 ♘f2 15.♘xe5 White has a considerable advantage.

On 13...♘f2 he has 14.b4, immediately picking up the knight.

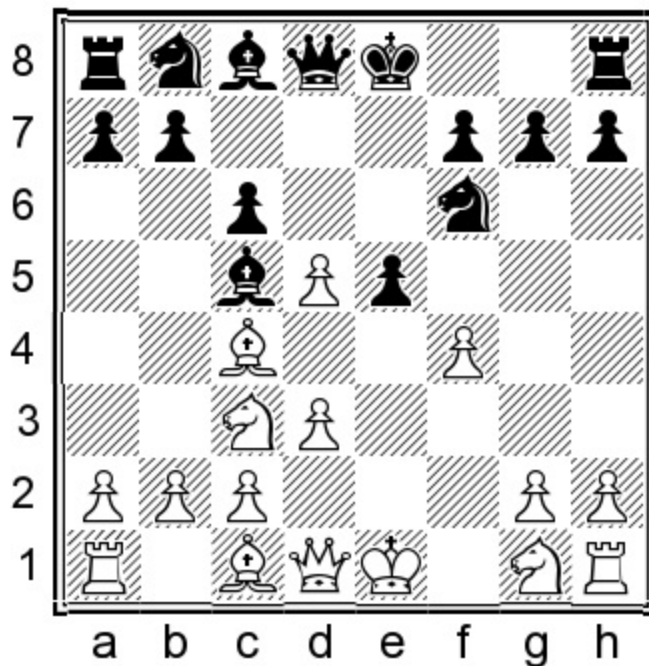
Against 13...h6 he can continue 14.♙xh6 ♙xg4 15.♙g5.

It remains for us to see what happens after 13...♘d7:

**13...♘d7 14.♙h4 ♘f6 15.♙e2 ♙xg4 16.♙g5±**

After the queen exchange, the knight on h1 is defenceless. If Black continues 16...♙xg5 17.♘xg5 h6, then 18.♘xf7! is good, securing an appreciable plus.

**C2) 5...d5 6.exd5**



Black can choose between **C21)** 6...cxd5 and **C22)** 6...♘g4.

And also:

a) 6...exf4 7.♞e2† ♔f8 (after 7...♙e7 8.dxc6 ♘xc6 9.♙xf4 ♘d4 10.♞d2± Black doesn't have adequate compensation for the pawn; White will answer 10...0-0 with 11.♘ge2) 8.♙xf4 cxd5 9.♙b3 ♘c6 10.♘f3 ♙g4 11.0-0-0± White has a clear plus on account of his better development. Nothing is altered by 11...♘d4 12.♞f1.

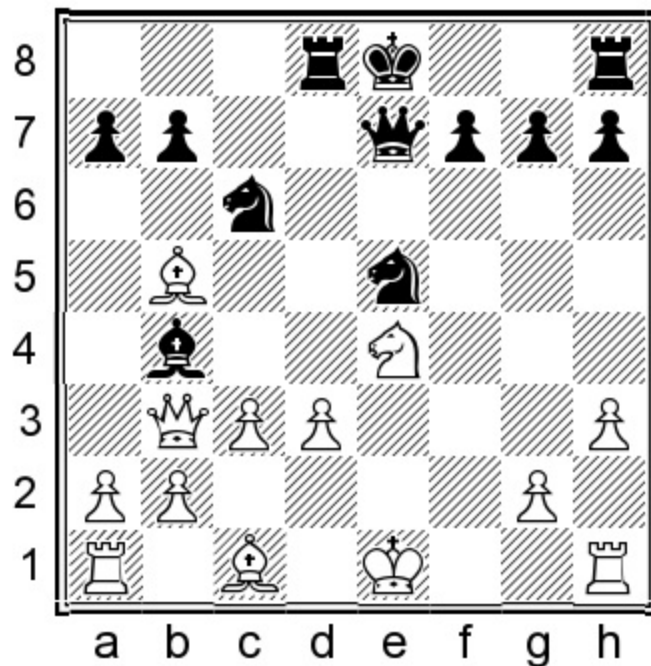
b) 6...0-0 7.fxe5 ♘g4 8.♘f3 and we arrive at variation C22 (8.d4 is strongly answered by 8...♘xe5!, so White does better to bring his knight out).

### **C21) 6...cxd5 7.♙b5† ♘fd7!**

To go for 7...♙d7 or 7...♘c6 is only human, and yet the knight's retreat from f6 is rather stronger and gives chances of equality. Let's see:

a) 7...♙d7 8.fxe5 ♙xb5 9.♘xb5 (White is also a little better after 9.exf6!? ♞xf6 10.♞e2† ♔d8 11.♘f3, but it seems to me that 9.♘xb5 is simpler) 9...♘fd7 10.d4 a6 11.♘f3 axb5 12.dxc5± With equal material on the board, Black's queenside pawns are shattered.

b) 7...♘c6 8.fxe5 ♙g4 (if 8...♘d7?! then 9.♙xc6 bxc6 10.♞g4 g6 11.♙g5±; White has brought his pieces out with gain of tempo, and after castling long he will have a large plus owing to his lead in development) 9.♘f3 ♘d7 10.h3 ♙xf3 11.♞xf3 ♘dxe5 12.♞xd5 ♞e7 White has acquired the bishop pair and picked up a pawn, but his king is now in danger; we must continue the variation until the position is simplified. 13.♘e4 ♙b4† 14.c3 ♞d8 15.♞b3

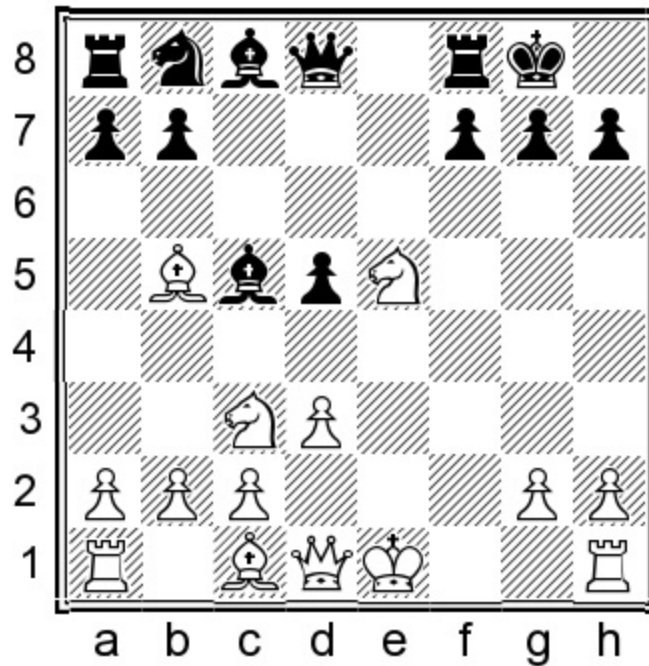


15...♞xd3† (after 15...♞h4†? 16.g3 ♞h5 17.0-0+- Black cannot get to the white king and may lose a piece in addition to the pawn) 16.♟xd3 ♞xd3 17.0-0 The tactical skirmish is finally over, and we may evaluate the position. Since 17...0-0? loses to 18.♞c4, Black must opt for 17...♟c5† 18.♞xc5 ♞xc5† 19.♞h2. White then has a small plus because in this kind of position a bishop is more useful than a knight.

### 8.♞f3 0-0

After 8...d4?! 9.♞d5 0-0 10.0-0± Black is too far behind in development. A good answer to 10...♞c6 is 11.♞g5!, while against 10...♞b6 the simple 11.♞xb6 ♞xb6 12.♟c4 is adequate.

### 9.fxex5 ♞xe5 10.♞xe5



### 10...a6!

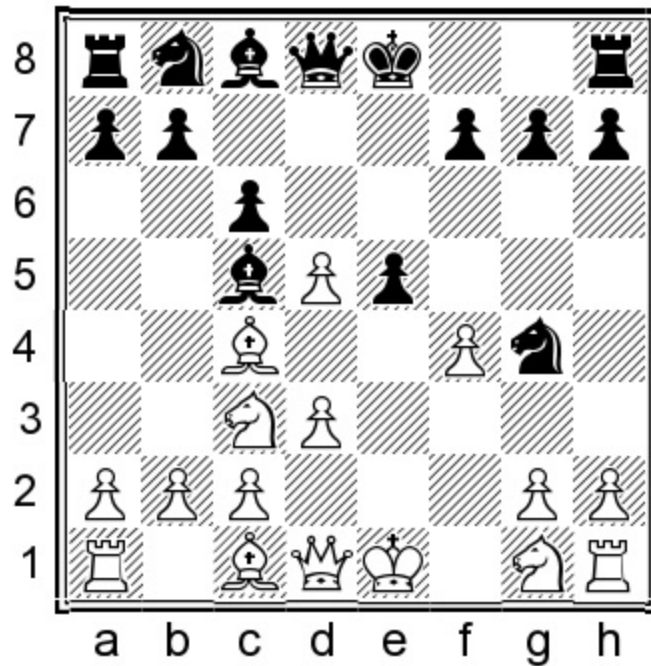
Attempting to make ...♖e8 playable by driving the bishop back. For instance after 11.♙a4 b5 12.♙b3 ♜e8 13.d4 ♚h4† Black is no worse.

Not 10...d4? 11.♘xf7! ♜xf7 12.♙c4±. The point is that after 12...dxc3 13.♙xf7† ♔xf7 14.♚h5† the bishop on c5 is lost, and Black's position is virtually hopeless.

### 11.d4 ♚h4† 12.g3 ♚xd4 13.♚xd4 ♙xd4 14.♙e2 ♙xe5 15.♘xd5

The position is close to equality, but White can nonetheless acquire the bishop pair or else force Black to place his rook on a7 after 15...♙e6 16.♘b6. White's chances are therefore slightly better.

C22) 6...♘g4

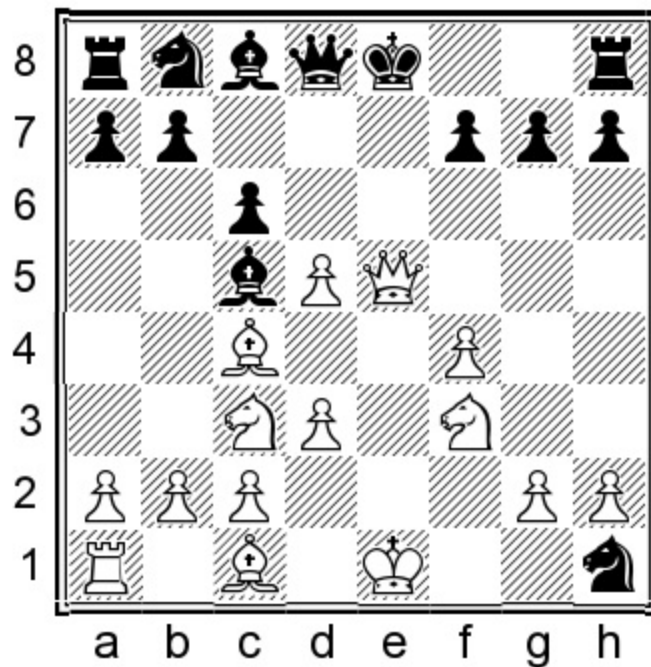


7. ♘f3

White responds to the aggressive knight jump with simple development.

7...0-0

If: 7... ♘f2 8. ♕e2 ♘xh1 9. ♕xe5†



There are these possibilities:

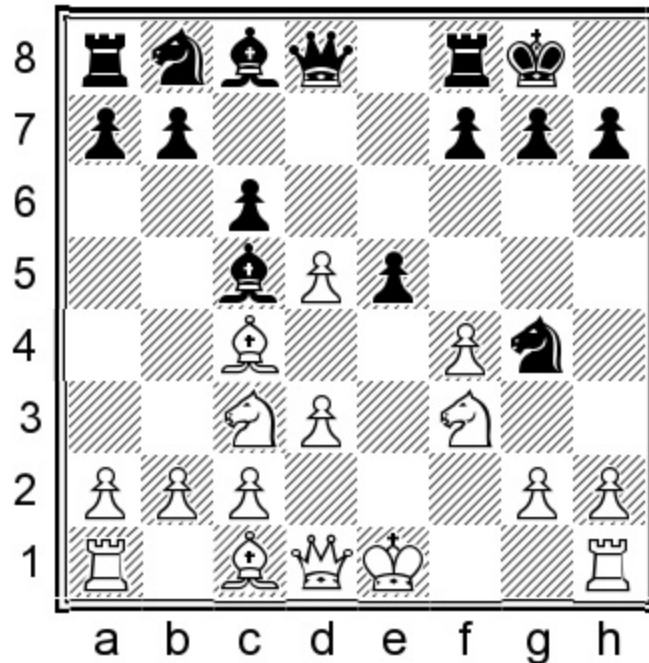
a) 9... ♔f8 10. ♕e3 ♖b6 11. ♔e2! Not allowing ... ♘f2 which would be the answer to 0-0-0; since Black has moved his king to f8, White can afford to leave his own king in the centre. 11... ♘d7 12. ♕d6† ♕e7 13. ♕xe7† ♔xe7 14. ♖xh1± Black's pieces are poorly placed. For example after 14... ♕xe3

15.♔xe3 ♖b6 16.♞e1, the position of the king on e7 makes itself felt; while 14...♞e8 can be met by 15.♙d2!?, maintaining a plus.

b) 9...♞e7 10.♘e4, and now:

b1) 10...0-0?! 11.d6 ♞xe5 12.fxe5 ♙b6 13.a4! a5 14.♔e2 ♙f5± White will continue ♙e3 with a clear advantage. It was important to insert the moves a2-a4 ...a7-a5, creating the opportunity for a later ♞b1 and b2-b4. Moreover it will be harder for Black to pick up the pawn on e5, since he must capture with ...♙e3 first.

b2) 10...♞xe5 11.fxe5 cxd5 12.♙xd5 ♙e7 13.♙e3± White will now round up the knight on h1, and the minor piece and centre pawns will be far more effective than a rook that has no open file.



### 8.fxe5!?

In the Mega Database you will find only one game in which this position occurred. This confirms the view that the Bishop's Opening is as yet little studied and contains a number of complex positions that have not been tested in practice.

Instead of the text move, the capture on e5 with the knight deserves consideration of course, but with the move-order 6...0-0!? 7.fxe5 ♖g4 8.♘f3 Black can deprive White of this possibility. I shall therefore not analyse this line but confine myself to a brief comment. After 8.♘xe5 ♖f2 9.♞h5 ♘h1 10.dxc6 ♘xc6 11.♙xf7† ♞xf7 12.♞xf7† ♔h8 13.♞d5 ♞xd5 14.♘xd5 the three pawns are not worse than a piece, but White hardly has any advantage. In Gnilka – Schreurs, corr. 2017, the players agreed a draw after 10 more moves.

Black has **C221)** 8...cxd5 or **C222)** 8...♘f2.

### **C221) 8...cxd5 9.♙g5!?**

Not a bad alternative to the simple 9.d4. A complicated position now arises, in which one mistake can

lead to defeat.

After 9.d4 dxc4 10.dxc5 ♖xd1† 11.♘xd1 White has a small plus. For example 11...♘c6 is met by 12.♙f4 ♘gxe5 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♘c3, maintaining pressure. A more cunning move is 11...f6!?, to which White may reply 12.0-0 or 12.♘c3.

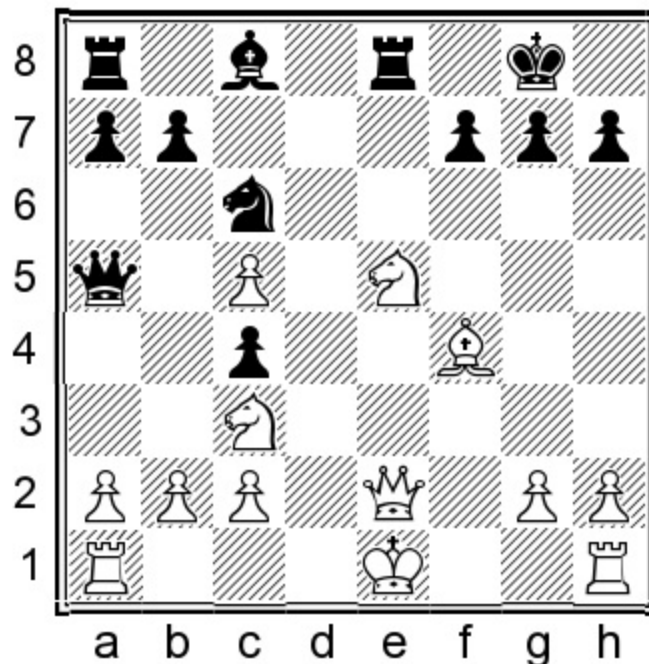
### 9...f6

An alternative is:

9...♖a5 10.d4 dxc4 11.dxc5 ♘c6 12.♗e2 ♘gxe5

After 12...♞e8 13.♙f4 Black has no better move than 13...♘gxe5, transposing; if instead 13...♗xc5, then 14.0-0-0 f6 15.♞he1 with advantage to White.

13.♘xe5 ♞e8 14.♙f4



14...♘xe5

Not 14...f6?! 15.♗xc4† ♙e6 16.♗b5 with a large plus; it's essential to exchange knights first, so that the rook can take on e5 with check when appropriate.

15.♙xe5 f6 16.♗xc4† ♙e6 17.♗d4

17.♗b5 can be met by 17...♗xb5 18.♘xb5 ♙g4!≠; by preventing White from castling long, Black can achieve equality.

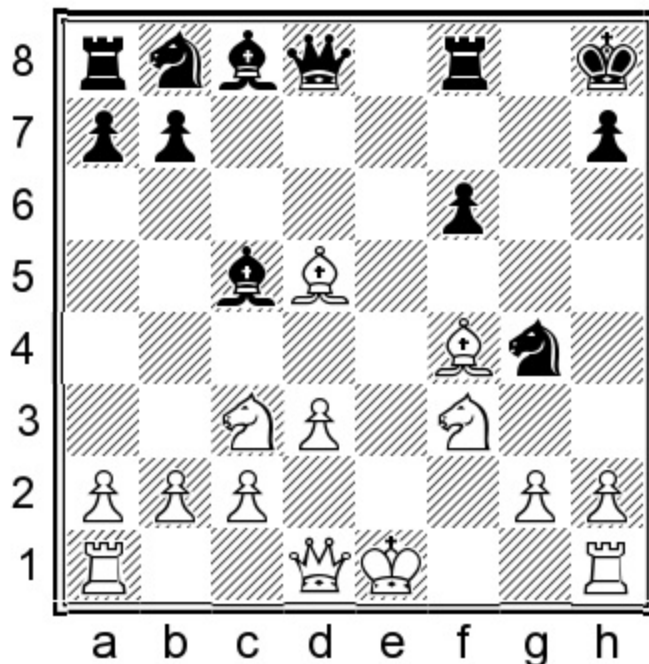
17...fxe5 18.♗e3↑

Black will of course recover the pawn on c5, but he will still be slightly worse on account of the pawn structure. For example:

18...♞ac8 19.a3 ♗xc5

And after exchanging on c5, White will castle on the queenside.

10.♙xd5† ♘h8 11.exf6 gxf6 12.♙f4



**12...♖e8†**

Or 12...♗f2 13.♕e2 ♗xh1 14.0-0-0 ♗f2 15.♖f1±.

Now in the event of 15...♗c6 16.♖xf2 ♕xf2 17.♕xf2 White has a dangerous initiative; Black will probably have to give back one exchange to neutralize the activity of the white pieces, for instance after 17...♖g4 18.♖h6.

If instead Black plays an immediate 15...♖e8, White has the strong reply 16.♗e5!.

**13.♗f1 ♗f2 14.♕d2 ♗xh1 15.♖e1 ♗c6**

Not 15...♖xe1†? 16.♕xe1+-. After the exchange of queens the black king is left defenceless. Against 16...♗c6 White wins with 17.♗g5!. He also has a decisive attack after 16...♗d7 17.♕h4.

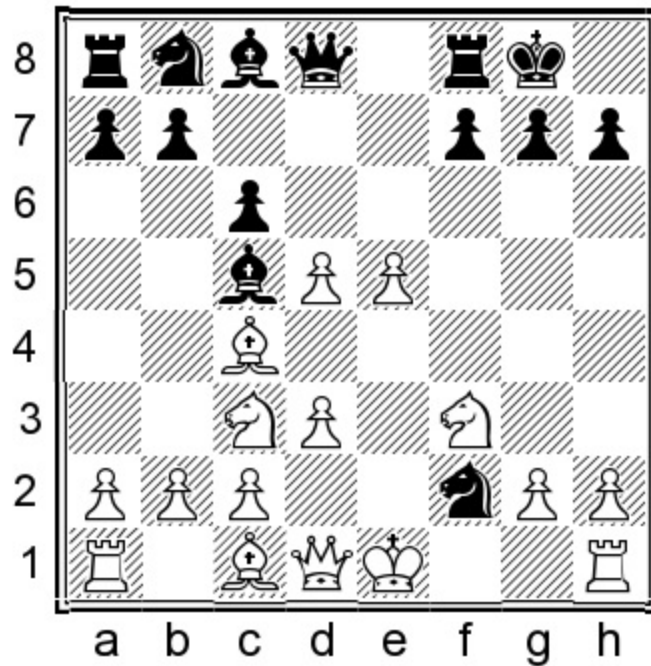
**16.♖xe8† ♕xe8 17.♗e4**

White has excellent compensation for the sacrificed material. For example, Black loses after 17...♖b6? 18.♗xf6.

Another dubious line is 17...♕e7 18.♕c3 ♖b4 19.♕xf6†; White will have plenty of pawns for the exchange after he picks up the knight on h1.

Black must play 17...♖b4 18.♕e3 ♖g4 19.♗g1 ♖a5!, after which the position remains unclear.

**C222) 8...♗f2**

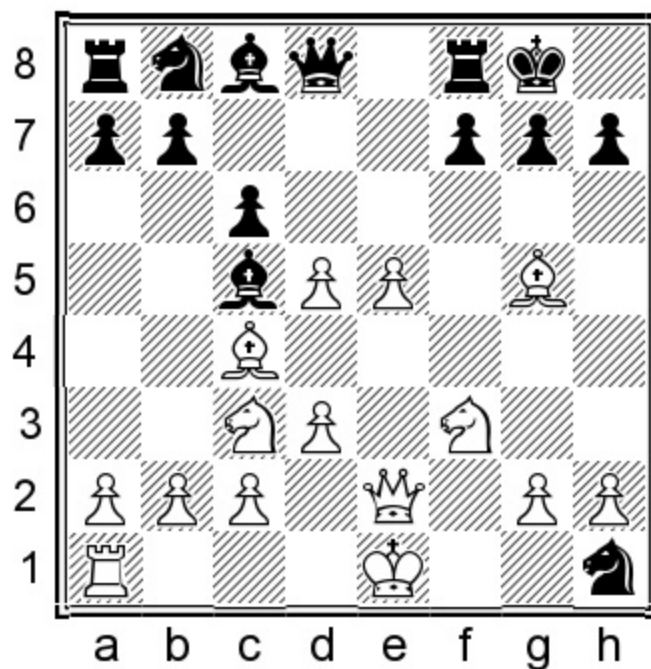


9. ♖e2 ♜xh1 10. ♔g5!

Having sacrificed material, White needs to continue playing at a fast tempo. After moves like 10.e6 or 10.♔e3 he loses the initiative and risks having the worse position:

a) 10.e6 cxd5 11.exf7 ♔h8 12.♔xd5 ♜c6 ♞ As White hasn't yet removed his king, the opening of the centre is clearly not to his benefit.

b) Pulkkinen – Enchev, Paleochora 2016 (the game in the Mega Database) went 10.♔e3?! ♔xe3 11.♖xe3 b5 12.♔b3 b4 ♞ with a good position for Black.



10... ♖a5!

The only queen move that allows Black to stay afloat. After other moves he would land in a bad position at once:

a) 10...f6? 11.dxc6† ♔h8 12.exf6 gxf6 13.c7!+- Deflecting the queen, to make ...♞e8 unplayable. 13...♞xc7 14.♙h6 with a decisive plus.

b) 10...♞b6? 11.0-0-0 ♘f2 12.♞f1± Threatening ♘a4, and now:

b1) Black's best chance is probably to give up the knight on f2 with, for example, 12...♙g4 13.♘a4 ♞a5, but he obviously has a bad position after 14.♘xc5 and 15.♙e3.

b2) 12...♘g4 13.e6+- White has a decisive advantage because Black is too far behind in development. Now 13...♙e3† 14.♔b1 is useless, and 13...♞c7 14.exf7† ♔h8 doesn't help either after 15.d4, with a won position.

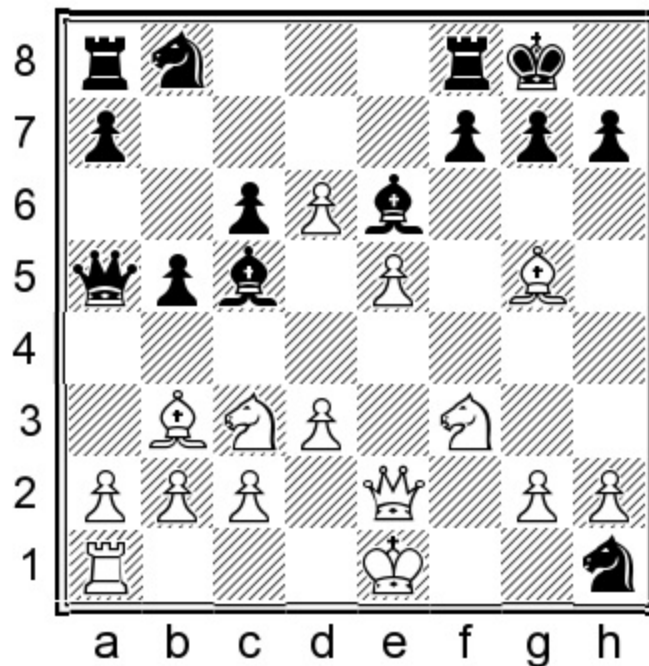
c) 10...♞e8?! 11.d4 ♙b4 12.d6 In placing his queen on e8 Black was counting on playing ...f7-f6, but he doesn't succeed in neutralizing White's light-squared bishop. It's important for White to maintain this bishop on the a2-g8 diagonal: 12...b5 13.♙b3 a5 14.a3 ♙xc3† 15.bxc3± The knight on h1 won't go anywhere, and there is no hurry to round it up by queenside castling. Against 15...♞a7 for instance, White's best move is 16.♙e3!?.

## 11.d6

It's extremely rare to see such a crazy position as early as move 11. Reasoning with general concepts makes no sense here, since the verdict on the position depends on concrete variations in cut-and-thrust style. The lines that now follow may seem long and complicated, but I couldn't simply write something like: "I have found an interesting rook sacrifice – work the rest out for yourselves." In such positions a knowledge of variations is a great asset in practical play.

At this point we analyse **C2221)** 11...b5, **C2222)** 11...♙e6 and **C2223)** 11...♙g4.

**C2221) 11...b5 12.♙b3 ♙e6**



**13. ♖e7**

Or 13. ♕f1!? ♖xb3 14. cxb3 b4 15. ♗e4 with excellent compensation.

**13... ♗d7 14. ♕d2**

Instead of castling long, we simply move the king. It is probably a little better placed on d2 than on c1.

**14... ♗f2**

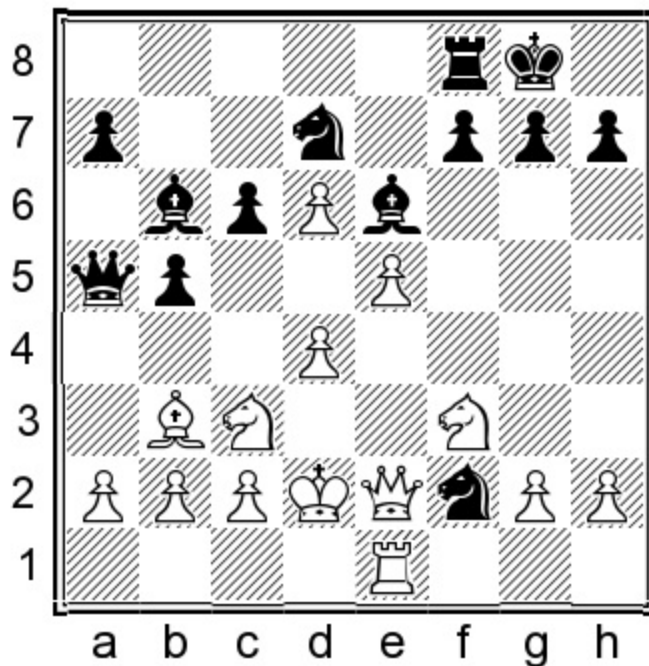
Not 14... ♖xb3?! 15. cxb3 ♗f2 16. d4±. The exchange on b3 has greatly worsened Black's position because now, after 16... ♖b6 17. ♕xf2, the move 17... c5 holds no terrors for White. The best reply to it is 18. ♕d1!, leaving Black in a hopeless position.

**15. ♖xf8**

Or 15. d4 ♖b6 16. ♖xf8, transposing.

**15... ♖xf8 16. d4 ♖b6 17. ♖e1**

In the event of 17. ♕xf2 c5 Black would obtain compensation, so we first remove the rook from a1.



### 17...c5

After 17...♞g4? 18.♚e4± Black can't simultaneously defend the c6-pawn and rescue the knight on g4.

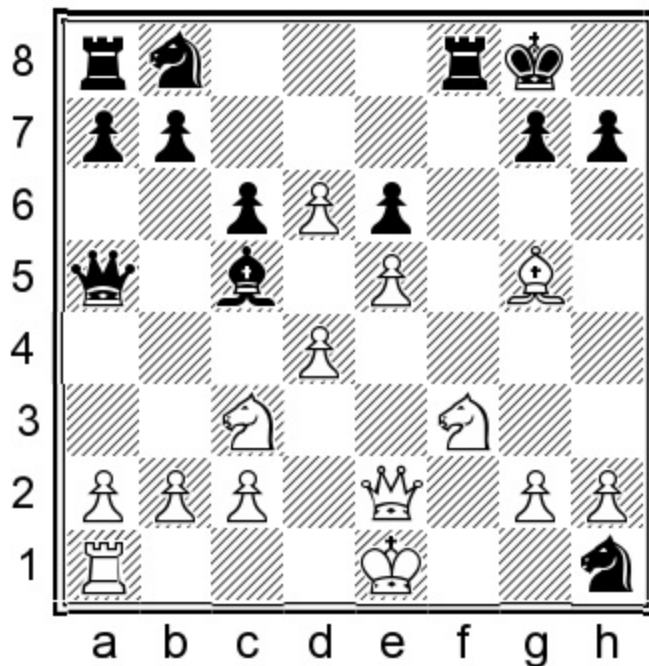
### 18.d5!?

White could play 18.♚xb5, but after 18...♚xb5 19.♞xb5 c4 the position would remain unclear. The advance of the d-pawn looks more interesting.

### 18...♙f5 19.♚xb5 ♞e4† 20.♞xe4 ♚xb5 21.♞xb5 ♙xe4 22.e6↑

Even in the ending, these pawns are not worse than a rook. The best that Black will be able to do is give up his rook for a couple of pawns and reach an equal position – so White is not risking anything. A good reply to 22...♞f6 is 23.e7 ♞e8 24.♞c3.

**C2222) 11...♙e6 12.♙xe6 fxe6 13.d4**



### 13...Rxf3!

It's imperative to weaken White's central pawns. Black has a difficult position after other moves:

a) 13...c4 14.c4 d7 15.e2 with a big advantage to White. The minor piece and two powerful pawns in the centre are much better than a rook.

b) 13...a3? 14.d2! b2 15.d1 a3 16.b1 and the bishop on b2 turns out to be trapped. Obviously 16...xd4 17.dxd4 is bad for Black, but what happens if instead on move 16, the rook takes on f3? Let's see: 16...Rxf3 17.gxf3 d4 18.Rxb7+— Suddenly White has a decisive advantage! On 18...a6 he wins with 19.e7; the threat is simply Rxe6, and 19...c5 fails to save Black on account of 20.h6!. If instead 18...c5, then again 19.h6! e5 20.Rxg7† and wins.

### 14.Rxf3 dxd4 15.0-0-0 xc3 16.Qxc3 Qxc3

In the case of 16...xa2 17.e3 (after 17.d7 dxd7 18.Rxd7 f8 19.b4 the game may soon end in perpetual check, for example: 19...f1† 20.d2 b1 21.Rd8† f7 22.Rd7† g8) 17...d7 18.b3 f8 19.Rxh1∞ the position remains unclear, but with queens on the board, White's side is easier to handle, and accurate play by Black is required.

### 17.bxc3 d7

Or 17...f2 18.d7 dxd7 19.Rxd7. Now after 19...e4?! 20.e3 White has an appreciable plus.

Black must instead play 19...b6, to which White can reply 20.c4 d4 21.c5!?. Black does then have chances to equalize, but 17...d7 looks sounder.

### 18.Rxh1 f8 19.h4

The endgame is about equal. After 19...f5 20.g3 Black cannot take on e5, but owing to the

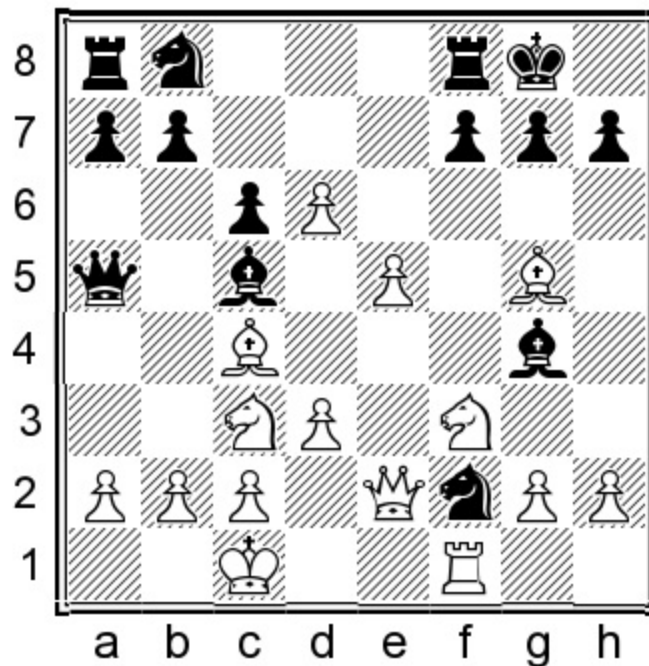
fortress-like position, White has difficulty making anything of his extra pawn.

### C2223) 11...♙g4 12.0-0-0!?

If one or two games featuring 8.fxe5!? *can* be found, the castling move has yet to be seen here. In the only game with this position that I have discovered, White played 12.♙e7 and it soon ended in perpetual check.

C. Jensen – Panitevsky, email 2015, went 12.♙e7 ♞a3 13.♙xf8 ♞xb2 14.e6 ♞xc3† 15.♚f1. As I am not recommending 12.♙e7, I will leave the remaining moves uncommented: 15...♞xe6 16.♙xe6 ♞xa1 17.♙xf7† ♚xf7 18.♞e7† ♚g8 19.♙xg7 ♞xg7 20.♞e6† ♚f8 21.♞e7† And the players agreed a draw.

12...♞f2 13.♞f1



13...♙xf3

Alternatives:

a) 13...♙xd6?! 14.♞xf2 ♙xf3 15.♞xf3→ and Black is in a dangerous position. Capturing with 15...♙xe5? is bad: 16.♞e4! ♞d7 17.♞f5!, and after 17...♞c7 White plays ♙xf7† followed by ♞f3 with a mating attack.

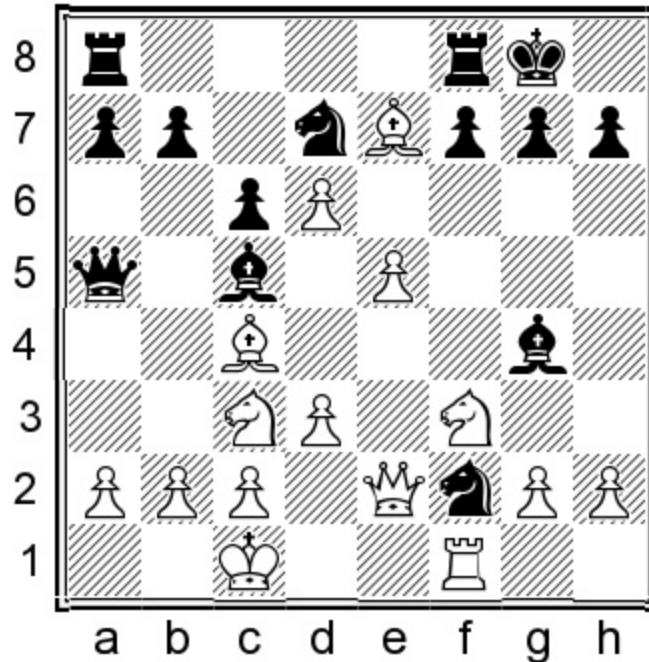
Against 15...♞xe5, White again has 16.♞e4!; then 16...♚h8 is met by 17.♙d2, while on 16...♞d7 White continues 17.♞g4 with a large plus.

Black's best chance is 15...♞d7 16.d4 ♙xe5, but after 17.♞f5 White keeps the advantage.

b) 13...♙d4 14.♙e7 ♙xf3 (or 14...♞d7 15.e6 ♞e5 16.exf7† and Black has to play 16...♞xf7 17.♙xf7† ♞xf7, after which White will take the knight on f2; the resulting position isn't so clear, but with the

bishop on e7, White's side is much easier to play) 15.gxf3 ♖xe5 (15...♘d7?! 16.f4±) 16.♗xe5 ♙xe5 17.♞xf2 Thanks to his powerful bishop on e7, White maintains some slight pressure. On 17...♘d7 it is better not to capture on f8 but to play 18.f4! ♙xc3 19.bxc3 with a pleasant position.

c) 13...♘d7 14.♙e7



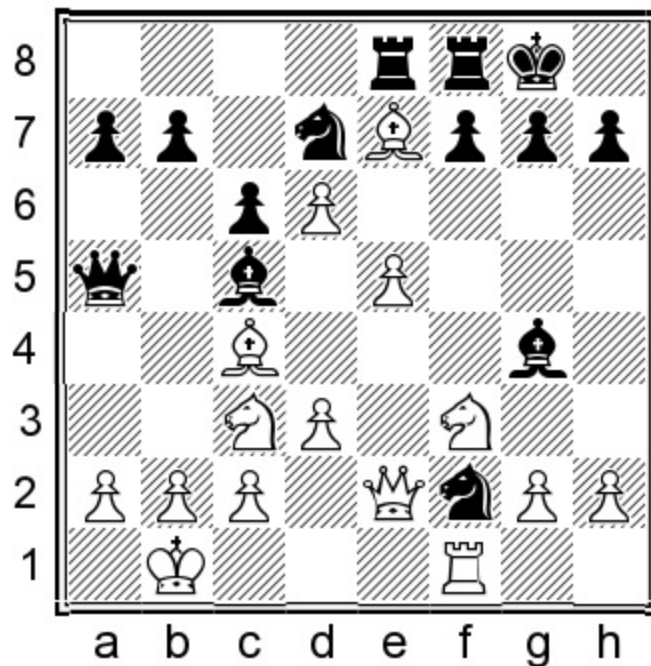
In this situation it's hard to make out what is happening. With the aid of some clever computer moves, Black can equalize or reach an unclear position, but finding them over-the-board would be very difficult:

c1) 14...b5 (14...♙d4 or 14...♙b4 wouldn't be very good on account of 15.e6, but now Black is planning to return the rook while eliminating White's centre pawns) 15.♙b3 ♖h8 16.♖b1 And Black has a choice:

c11) 16...♙d4 17.♞xf2 ♙xf2 18.♗xf2 b4 19.♘e4 ♙xf3 20.gxf3 Now 20...♘xe5? is bad in view of 21.♗e3! with a large plus. Black must opt for 20...♗xe5, to which White can reply 21.f4 with plenty of play in a complex position.

c12) 16...b4 17.♙xf8 ♞xf8 (after 17...bxc3 18.♙e7± White will play ♙h4 and take the knight on f2) 18.♘e4 ♙xf3 19.gxf3 ♘xe4 20.♗xe4∞ The two powerful centre pawns are not worse than the knight. Playing White's side is a little easier, although objectively the position is unclear.

c2) 14...♞ae8!? 15.♖b1



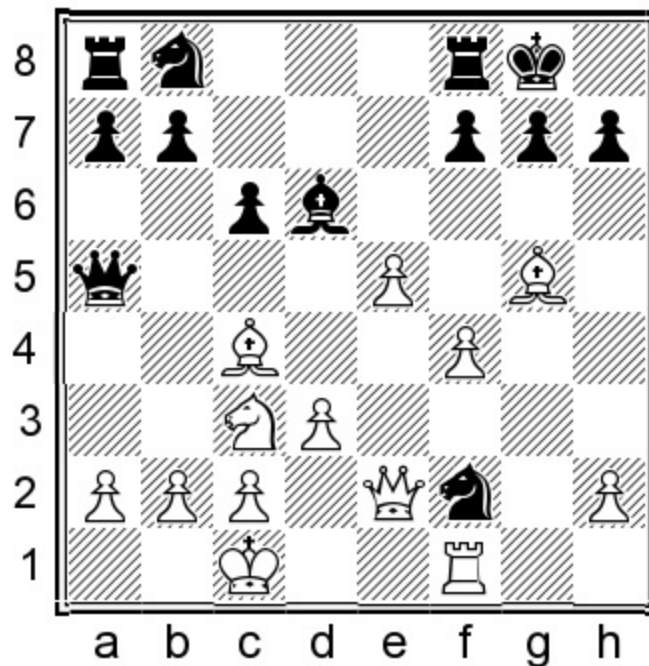
And now:

c21) 15...♔d4 is risky: 16.e6 fxe6 17.h3!? And after 17...♔xf3 18.♚xe6† ♔h8 19.♚xd7 the position is dangerous for Black.

c22) 15...♔xf3 Simplest (Black could also play 15...h6, but after the possible answer 16.h3 he would have to continue with ...♔xf3 and ...♖xe7 anyway). 16.gxf3 ♖xe7 17.dxe7 ♖e8 18.d4 Initiating a series of forced moves in which White picks up the knight on f2 while surrendering a couple of pawns (if instead he plays 18.f4 ♖xe7 19.♖xf2∞, then after 19...♔xf2 20.♚xf2 Black can give up his knight with 20...♘xe5!?, leaving the position unclear). 18...♔xd4 19.♔xf7† ♔xf7 20.♚c4† ♔xe7 21.♚xd4 ♚xe5 22.♚xf2 The complications are at an end and the situation on the board is clarified. It has all come down to a roughly equal position.

### 14.gxf3 ♔xd6 15.f4

Black now has a number of moves to choose from, but many of them are frankly bad. And even the better ones do not guarantee him a good position.



15...♙a3

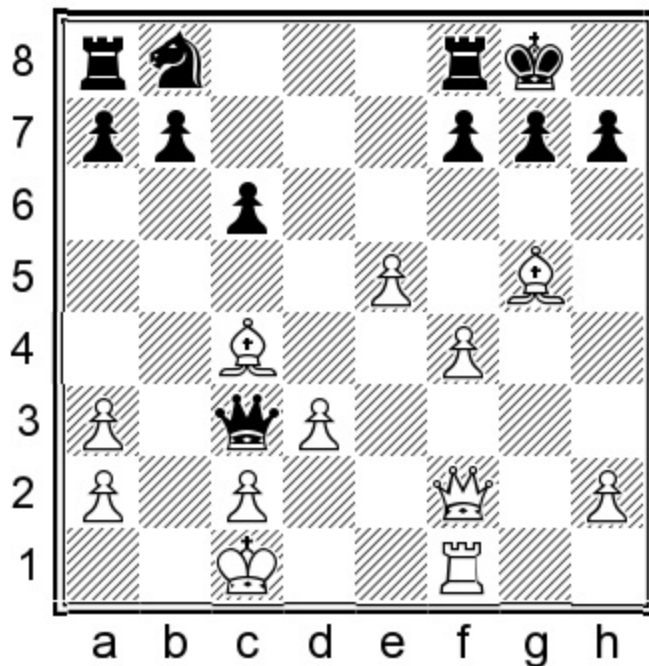
Or:

a) 15...♙c5 16.♙h4 b5! (16...♙d4?! 17.♙xf2 ♙xc3 18.bxc3 ♖xc3 19.♖g1± gives White a fearsome attack; on 19...♗h8 he wins with 20.♖xg7! ♗xg7 21.♗g4† followed by ♙h4) 17.♙b3 b4 18.♗a4 ♗d7 19.♙xf2 ♙xf2 20.♗xf2☞ With more than sufficient compensation for the exchange. Thanks to the possibility of attacking on the kingside, White has a promising position.

b) 15...♙b4?! 16.♖xf2 ♙xc3 17.bxc3± and White is close to having a won position. If Black plays 17...♗xc3 then 18.♖g2 is not bad, but 18.e6 fxe6 19.f5! is even better. After fxe6 there will be nothing to stop the e-pawn.

c) 15...♗h3?! 16.exd6 ♗xg5 17.fxg5 ♗xg5† 18.♗b1± Because Black has not finished his development, his position is difficult. Now 18...♗d7 will be met by 19.♗e7 ♗f6 20.♗e4; and if Black captures with 20...♗xe4, then after 21.dxe4 his situation will be hopeless.

16.bxa3 ♗xc3 17.♗xf2



### 17...♞d7!

Of Black's three possibilities here, only the knight move gives him chances to reach a normal position.

a) After 17...♞xa3† 18.♔d1 ♞d7 19.♞g2 ♞b6 20.♙b3, the black king is in trouble. On 20...♔h8 White plays 21.♞g1 ♞g8 22.♞h3!, with a decisive advantage thanks to the threat of ♞g4-h4.

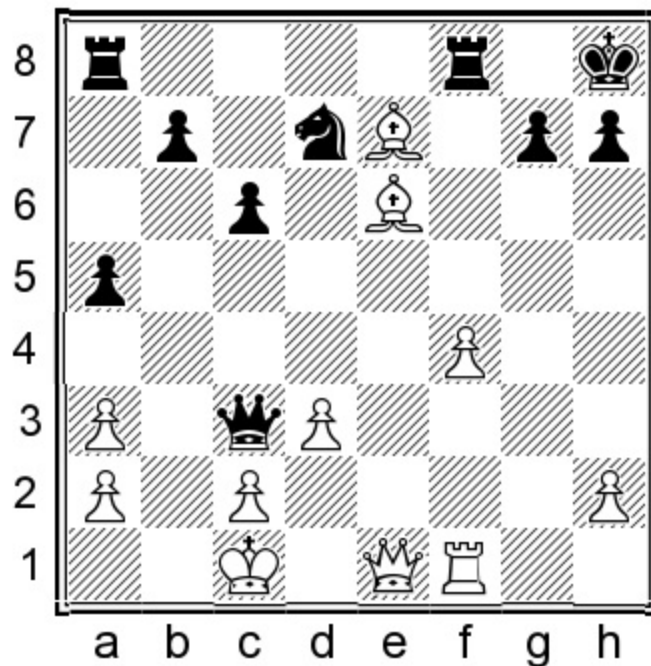
Black must instead play 20...♞d5, consenting to return the exchange after ♙xd5 and ♙h6.

b) 17...b5?! 18.♙b3 a5 19.♙e7! By rejecting the obvious e5-e6, White can be the first to go onto the attack. 19...a4 (in the event of 19...♞e8?! 20.♙c5 ♞d8 21.♔b1+– Black can't bring his pieces out normally; after 21...♞a6 22.♙b6 his rook cannot move in view of ♙d4 or e5-e6, while 22...a4 loses to 23.♙xf7† followed by ♙xd8 and ♞a7†) 20.♙b4 ♞a1† 21.♔d2 ♞b2 22.♙xf8 axb3 23.♙d6± After 23...♞xa2 24.♞c5 or 23...♞xc2† 24.♔e3, Black will have a difficult ending once the queens are exchanged.

### 18.♙e7 a5!

Black must defend against the threatened ♙b4. A worse way is 18...♞b6 19.♙b3 ♞d5 20.♙xd5 cxd5 21.♙b4; after the queen retreats, White will take on f8 and acquire a nice advantage.

19.e6 fxe6 20.♙xe6† ♔h8 21.♞e1



### 21...♙d4

Not 21...♙xe1†? 22.♖xe1± when White emerges with an extra pawn and good winning chances.

### 22.♙xf8 ♘xf8

White is slightly more comfortable, but the position is nonetheless almost equal. After 23.f5 ♖e8 24.♙f2 ♘xe6, the rook endgame should end in a draw.

A better option is probably 23.♙f5 ♖c5 24.♙e5 ♖xa3† 25.♙b1, returning the pawn but maintaining a little pressure.

## Conclusion

We continue our study of 1.e4 e5 2.♙c4, the Bishop's Opening, with the reply 2...♙c5 3.d3 ♘f6, though of course 2...♘f6 3.d3 ♙c5 is the same line.

Then the simplest option is 4.♘f3 with a likely transposition to the Italian Game. However this chapter focused on the independent 4.♘c3 which can lead to fascinating play.

4...h6 is rather odd-looking, but it is not a bad move. White can play in the style of the King's Gambit but any edge is very small.

4...d6 is unchallenging as 5.♘a4 secures the bishop pair and with it a likely edge.

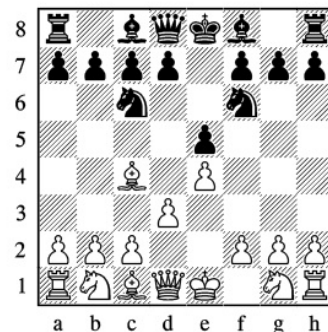
4...c6 is more testing, as it creates the option of a quick ...d7-d5. Then 5.f4! is the fun line. In reply, 5...d6 is passive, and allows White an edge, so the critical line of course starts with 5...d5 6.exd5. Many sharp lines are possible, including 6...♘g4 7.♘f3 0-0 8.fxe5! ♘f2 9.♙e2 ♘xh1 10.♙g5! ♙a5!

11.d6 and so on! If Black is very accurate and well prepared then he might thread his way to an unclear or roughly equal position, though there are a myriad of pitfalls along the way. Accordingly, this is a line where hard study will be rewarded.

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# Chapter 3

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## 2...♘f6 3.d3 ♘c6

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1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 ♘f6 3.d3 ♘c6 4.♘c3

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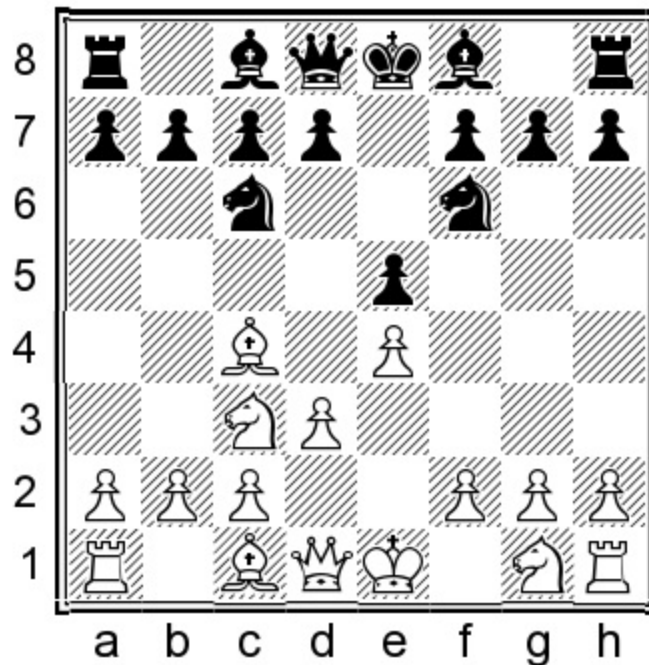
1.e4 e5 2.♕c4 ♘f6 3.d3 ♘c6

Black chooses a logical developing move, though of course it gives up the option of a quick ...c7-c6 followed by ...d7-d5 – we shall study 3...c6 lines in Chapters 4-8.

White's motive in playing 2.♕c4 is often simply to avoid the Petroff. In that case it makes sense to bring the knight out to f3 now, transposing into the Giuoco Piano – see Volume 2.

4.♘c3

Although I can strongly recommend 4.♘f3, which we shall examine in the following volume, our account of the Bishop's Opening would be incomplete without the variations after 4.♘c3. The present chapter serves primarily to acquaint you with the established theory, but I have nonetheless managed to find a few interesting ideas for White. All the same, it must be borne in mind that in some variations Black can equalize fairly quickly if he plays a few strong moves.

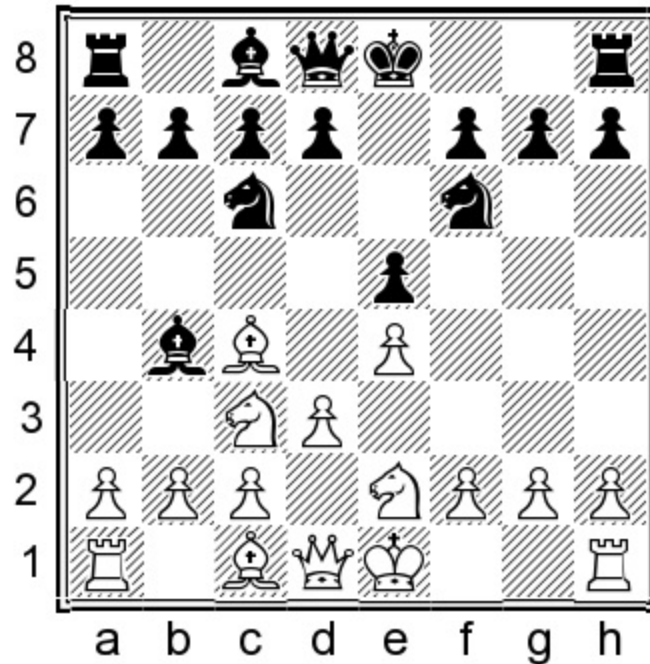


We consider A) 4...♕b4, B) 4...♕c5 and C) 4...♘a5.

A) 4...♕b4

Black develops while also creating the possibility of a ...d5-break. Now White can choose between **A1) 5.♘ge2** and **A2) 5.♘f3!?**.

### A1) 5.♘ge2



The most popular continuation, but after 5...d5! it's difficult for White to set his opponent problems. I will give some brief variations:

#### 5...d5! 6.exd5 ♞xd5 7.0-0

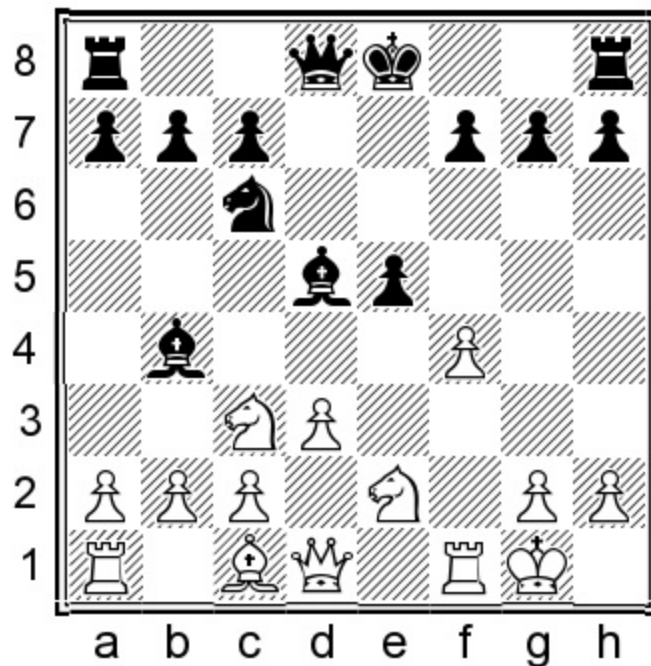
Or 7.a3 ♞xc3 8.♞xc3 ♙xc3† 9.bxc3 ♚d6 10.0-0 0-0 with a playable, roughly equal position.

#### 7...♙e6 8.♙xd5

Or: 8.♙b3 0-0 9.♞xd5 (in Le Quang Liem – Sethuraman, Internet 2019, the continuation was 9.♚h1 ♚d7 10.♞e4 ♙e7 with a comfortable game for Black; a slight improvement would be 10.♞xd5 ♙xd5 11.f4 with approximate equality) 9...♙xd5 10.f4 ♙c5† 11.♚h1 exf4 12.♙xf4 ♙xb3 13.axb3 ♙b6 Black has no discernible problems. On 14.c3 he has 14...♞e7 15.d4 c6, with a level game.

The position after 8.♙b5 0-0 9.♙xc6 bxc6 10.♞e4 ♙e7♞ is more complex than in other variations, but I don't like it on account of the possible ...f7-f5. White might consider 11.♞d2!?, to bring the knight to c4.

#### 8...♙xd5 9.f4



### 9...f6!

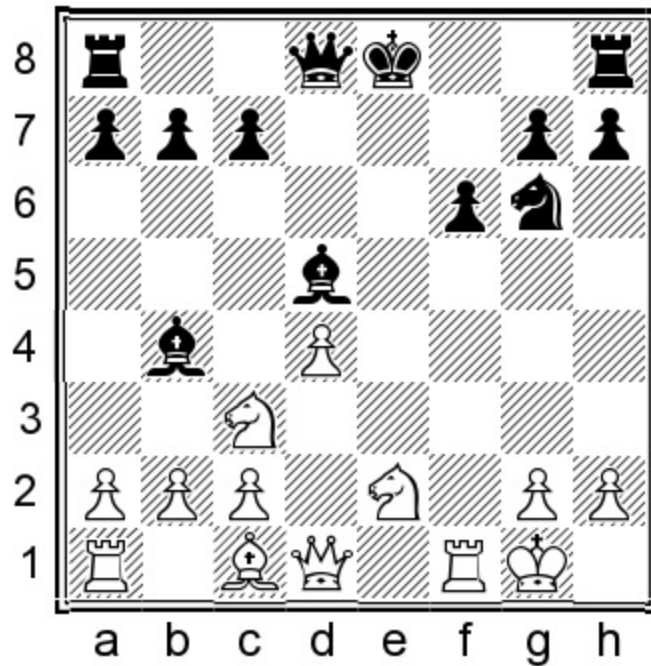
In top-level chess this move was first employed by Giri in 2017. To all appearances, Black's pawn move enables him to equalize.

If instead 9...0-0 10.♘xd5 ♚xd5 11.f5 f6 12.♘g3, White has a small but stable plus.

### 10.fxe5 ♞xe5 11.d4

Or 11.♘xd5 ♚xd5 12.c3 ♔d6 13.♘f4 ♚f7 14.d4 0-0-0 with a comfortable position for Black, Adhiban – Giri, Wijk aan Zee 2017.

### 11...♞g6



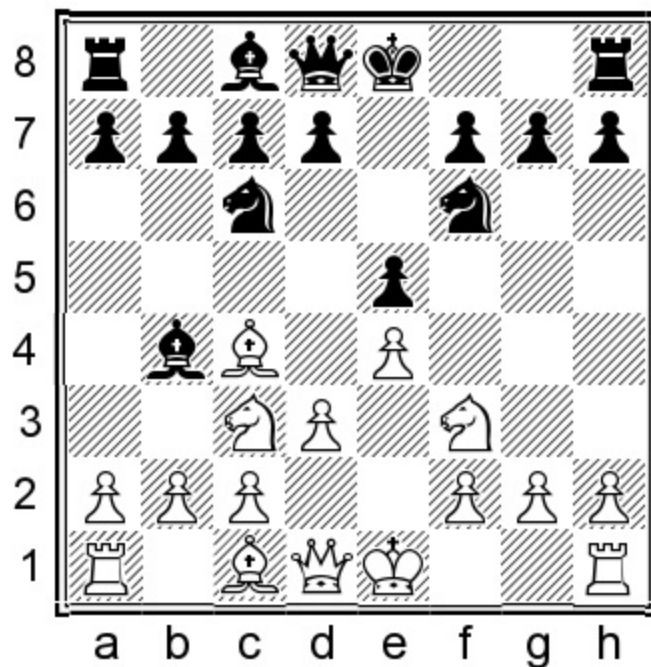
12. Nxd5

Or 12. Qd3 Qxc3 13. Nxc3 0-0=.

12... Qxd5 13. Nf4 Nxf4 14. Qxf4 0-0-0=

Black will meet 15. c3 with 15... Qd6!. Then after 16. Qg4† f5!, the pawn on g7 cannot be taken. Perhaps 15. Qd3 is slightly more cunning, but after 15... Qde8 the position remains equal.

A2) 5. Nf3!?



After I became disappointed with the variation 5. Nge2 d5, I started looking for other possibilities.

In my view the comparatively rare move of the knight to f3 is much more promising.

Black can now choose **A21) 5...d6 6.0-0 ♖xc3**

### **A21) 5...d6 6.0-0 ♖xc3**

Also possible is: 6...♗a5!? In more than ten games by high-ranking players, this move has occurred only once. 7.♖b5†N (after 7.♗d5 ♗xc4 8.dxc4 ♗xd5, Black is all right, K. Müller – Nyback, Germany 2010) 7...c6 8.♖a4 ♖xc3 (8...0-0 9.♗e2 d5 10.c3 gives White the advantage after 10...dxe4 11.dxe4 or 10...♖d6 11.♗g3) 9.bxc3 b5 10.♖b3 White's game is a little more pleasant, but this position is probably better for Black than after 6...♖xc3.

In the case of 6...0-0 7.♗e2↑ the position is almost the same as in the Four Knights Game, only the white bishop is on c4 instead of b5. This difference is clearly in White's favour, because after ...♗e7, with the bishop on b5, Black could play ...c7-c6 with gain of tempo.

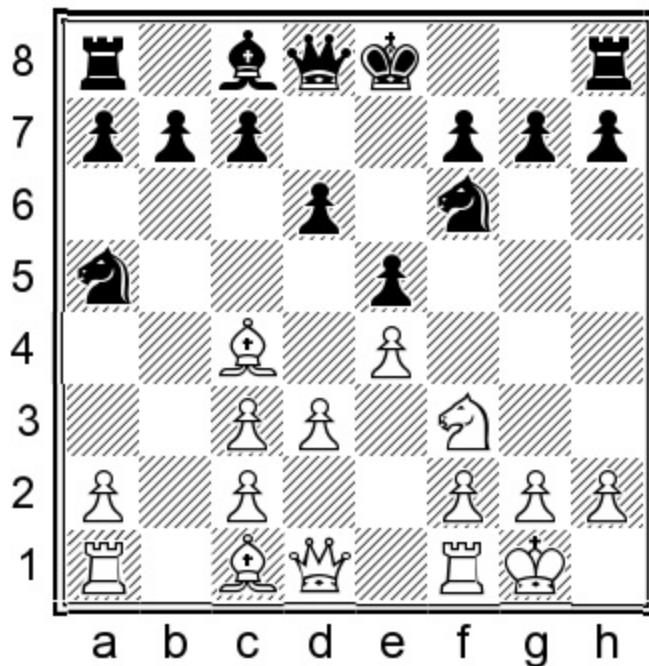
### **7.bxc3**

Black has various options here. He can castle, allowing ♖g5. He can play **A211) 7...♗a5** at once, so as to take off the bishop later when necessary; or he can play **A212) 7...h6**, to limit the scope of the white queen's bishop before castling. Let's look at each of these lines.

In the case of 7...0-0 8.♖g5 h6 9.♖h4 ♗a5 (not 9...g5? 10.♗xg5±) 10.♖b3 ♕e7 11.♞e1 the pin is of course not lethal, but it does cause Black some discomfort. For example, after 11...g5 12.♖g3, following with 12...♗h5 is no good in view of 13.♗xe5! ♗xb3 14.axb3 ♗xg3 15.♗g4 with a considerable advantage.

An improvement is 11...c5, to prevent d3-d4, but White then has 12.♗d2, repositioning his knight with a slight edge.

### **A211) 7...♗a5**



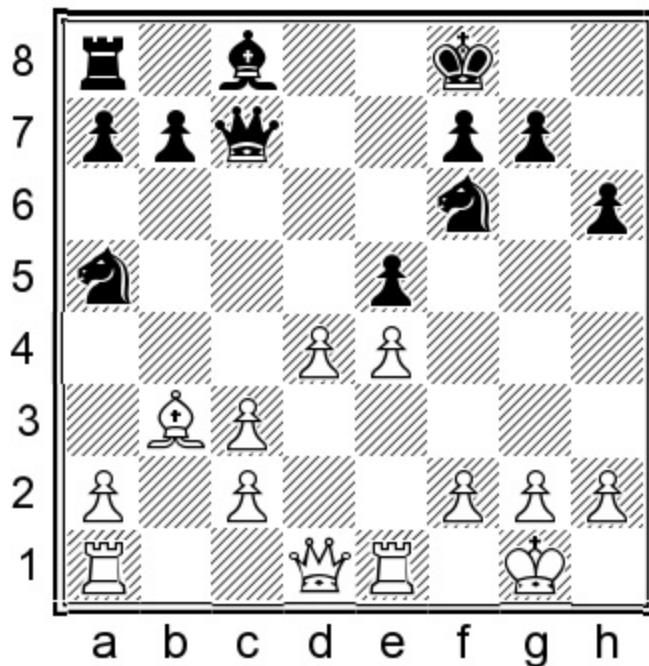
### 8. ♖b3 h6

Or 8...0-0 9. ♗g5 (after 9. ♘d2!? White's advantage is slightly less than in the case of 8...h6 9. ♘d2, but importantly it is still there: 9...c5 10. f4 exf4 11. ♖xf4 ♗e6 12. c4, followed ♘f1 with the initiative) 9...h6 10. ♗h4, transposing to 7...0-0 8. ♗g5.

### 9. ♘d2!

White does better with f2-f4 rather than with the standard ♖e1 and d3-d4.

Let's look at the latter plan on the basis of Grischuk – Tomashevsky, Dubai 2014, which went: 9. ♖e1 0-0 10. d4 ♗e7 Black will play ...c7-c5 next move, restricting the dark-squared bishop; White therefore decided to sharpen the position. 11. ♗a3!? c5 12. ♘xe5 dxe5 13. ♗xc5 ♗c7 14. ♗xf8 ♔xf8



After some analysis I have come to the conclusion that Black is OK here. The game continued 15.♖d3 ♘d7 16.f4! exf4 17.e5, with a complex position in which good play by both sides may culminate in perpetual check. But in answer to 15.♖d3 Black also has the interesting 15...♙e6 16.♗b5 g5!, with quite a good position.

And 15.dxe5 ♗xe5 will hardly give White any advantage.

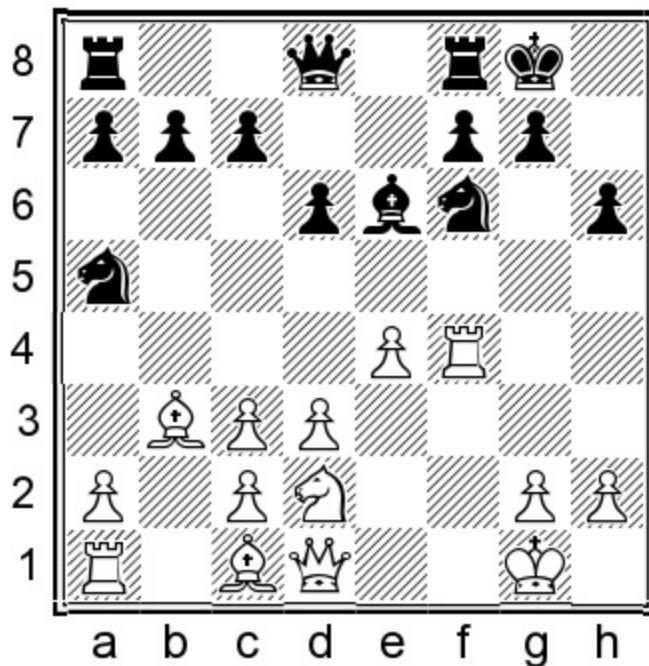
### 9...0-0

If 9...♗e7 10.f4 exf4 11.♖xf4±, Black's ...♗e7 proves of little use. Thus 11...♗e5?! is bad, as after 12.♘f3 the c3-pawn cannot be taken: 12...♗xc3 13.♙d2 ♗c5† 14.d4+-

Nor does it pay Black to castle long; after for instance 11...♙d7 12.♗f3 0-0-0 13.♙b2 White has a big advantage.

All that remains is 11...0-0, but in that case too 9...♗e7 turns out to be redundant.

### 10.f4 exf4 11.♖xf4 ♙e6



White has a number of quite good moves here. The computer suggests 12.♔e1!?, but to me it seems that bringing out the dark-squared bishop is simpler.

### 12.♘b2 c5 13.c4

Not 13.♔e2? c4. Black is likely to recover the c4-pawn in a couple of moves.

### 13...♘d7 14.♘f1±

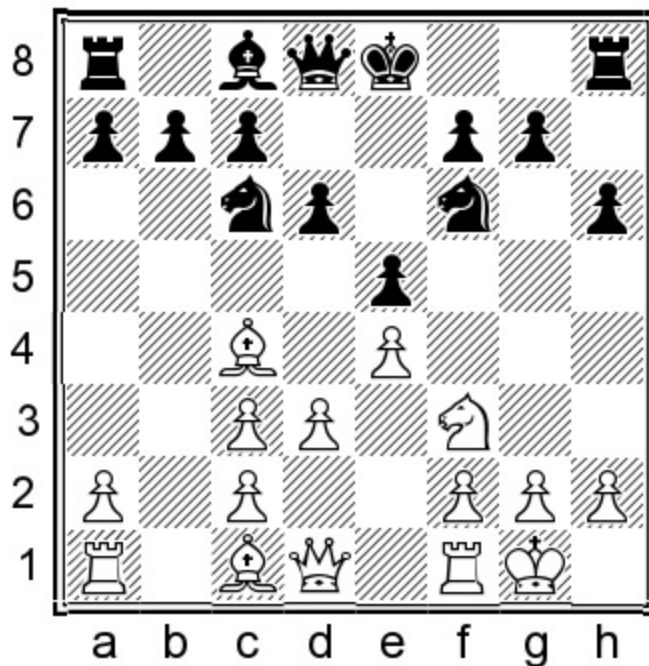
Thanks to the powerful bishop on b2 and the prospects of kingside play, White has a clear plus.

Now 14...f5?! 15.exf5 ♘xf5 is bad in view of 16.♔e1 with a big advantage.

White can meet 14...♔g5 with 15.♘c1. Then when the black queen retreats, he will play ♘g3 and return his bishop to b2.

Against other moves, White can simply bring up his knight with ♘g3 or ♘e3.

## A212) 7...h6



### 8. ♖d2!

White's play involves the f2-f4 advance. He might try withdrawing the knight to e1 instead, but in that case Black could carry out ...d6-d5 at some point. With White's knight on d2 this would be less good, as the knight could go quickly to e4.

### 8...0-0 9. ♗b3

Or 9.f4 exf4 10. ♖xf4 ♘e5∞. Since White then has to play ♗b3, it is more logical to make that move first, before f2-f4.

### 9...♗e6

No better move is to be seen. The same position would result from 9...♗g4 10.f3 ♗e6 11.f4.

Worse choices are 9...♘a5 10.f4 and 9...d5 10.exd5 ♘xd5 11.♖e4, with advantage to White in either case.

### 10.f4

Or 10.♖b1 ♖b8 11.f4 exf4 12.♖xf4 b5↗ and now 13.d4 can be met by 13...♘a5 with a comfortable position for Black. Interestingly, without the insertion of ♖b1 and ...♖b8, White would be better. The point is that after ♗e2 Black would need to defend the b5-pawn, whereas now on 14.♗e2 he has 14...d5!.

In a rapid game Zvjaginsev – Grischuk, Berlin 2015, White played:

### 10. ♖c4

Let's see what this led to and whether White's play could be improved:

### 10...a5

Or 10...d5!? 11.exd5 ♘xd5 12.♗d2, and the omission of ...a7-a5 a2-a4 scarcely affects the

verdict on the position; a possibility for instance is 12...b5!? 13.♘e3 a5, with unclear play.

11.♘e3

In the event of 11.a4 d5 12.exd5 ♘xd5 the inclusion of ...a7-a5 a2-a4 favours Black, as ♘a4 is not available.

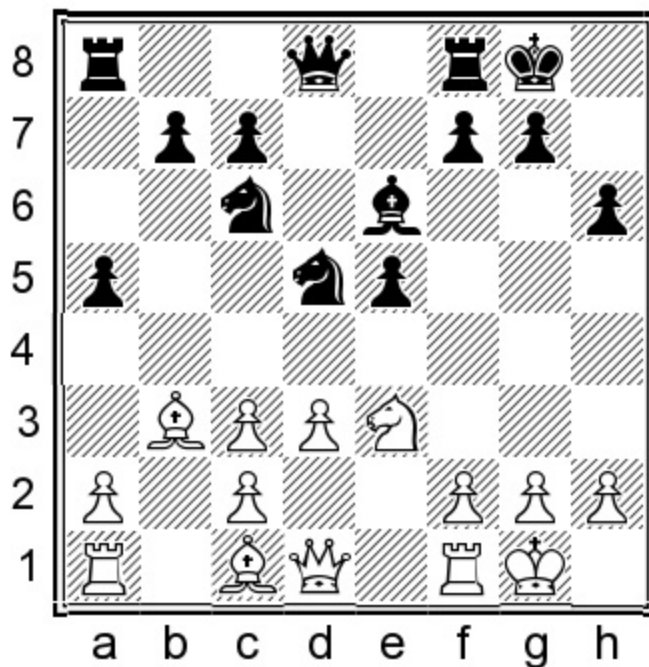
11...d5

Or 11...a4 12.♙xe6 fxe6 13.c4 with a slight edge for White.

12.exd5

12.♞b1 b5!? 13.exd5 ♙xd5 gives an unclear position; Black will answer the tempting 14.♙xd5 ♘xd5 15.♚f3 with 15...♘xe3 and then defend his b-pawn with ...♚d7!.

12...♘xd5

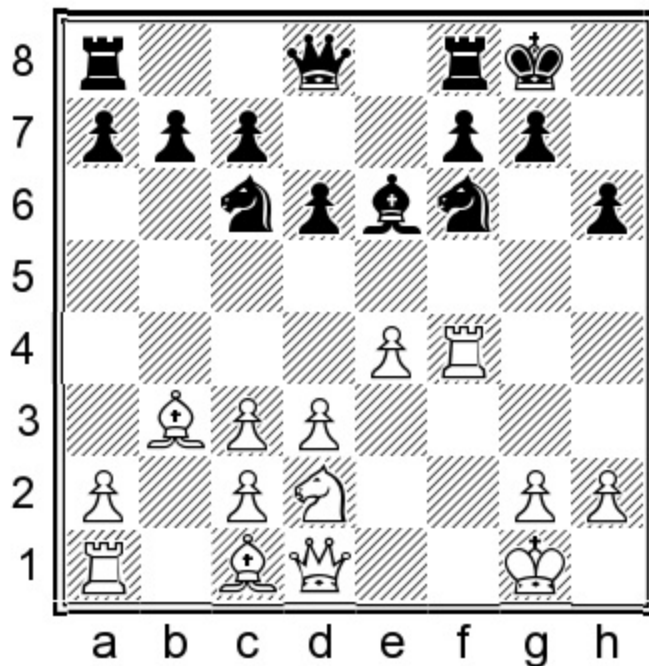


And now:

a) The game continuation was 13.♙xd5 ♙xd5 14.f4 exf4 15.♞xf4 ♙e6, with plenty of play and approximate equality.

b) A more interesting line is 13.♘xd5!? ♙xd5 14.♚g4, threatening ♙xh6. Then in the case of 14...♙xb3 15.axb3 ♚f6 or 14...f5 15.♚f3!?, White is slightly better. However, after 14...♔h7 Black has good chances to equalize.

**10...exf4 11.♞xf4**



### 11...♞e5

With ♜b1 and ...♜b8 omitted, 11...b5 is not so successful: 12.d4 ♞a5 13.♞e2 with the initiative. Then 13...♜b8 isn't very good, in view of 14.♙xe6 fxe6 15.a4 with a big advantage.

A better try is 13...♞xb3 14.axb3 c6, to which White can reply 15.c4, maintaining pressure.

### 12.c4!?

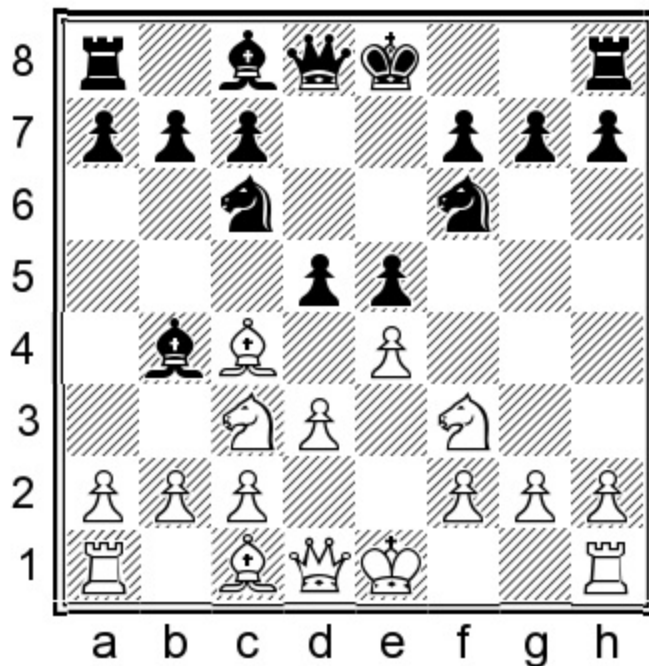
Closing one bishop's path and opening the other. Unfortunately White can't activate both bishops at once.

### 12...c5 13.♙b2 ♞fd7

There is plenty to play for, but White's game is nonetheless just a little more pleasant. At this point he has a number of playable moves, for example 14.♞e1 g5 15.♜f2; then after 15...f5 16.exf5 ♙xf5 he can withdraw his knight to f1, so as to continue with ♞d2 or ♞e3.

The immediate 14.♞f1 is also interesting: 14...♞g5 15.♙c1!?. And now 15...♞g6 16.♞g3 gives White a considerable advantage, so 15...f5! is more astute. White can continue 16.♞e2, preserving chances of a plus.

### A22) 5...d5!?



This move gives more chances of equality than the simple 5...d6. All the same, Black's ...d5-break is less effective with the white knight on f3; the reason is that after castling, ...♙e6 will not be good in view of a possible ♘g5.

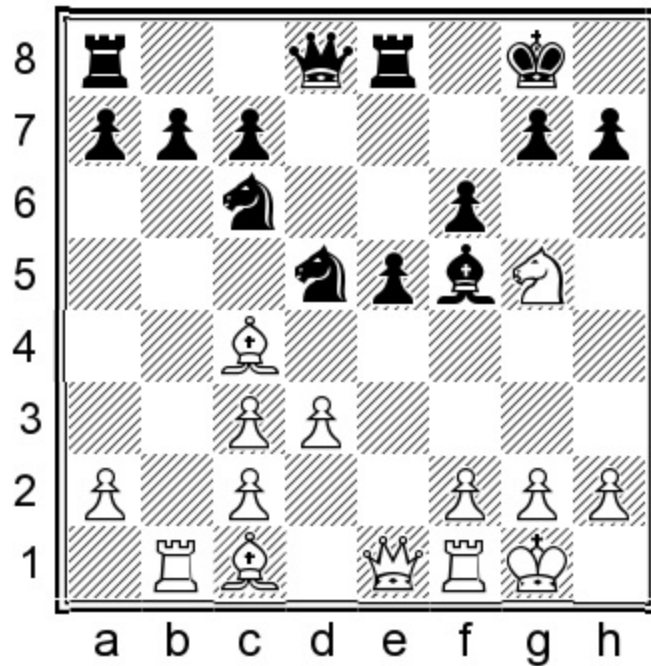
### 6.exd5 ♘xd5 7.0-0 ♙xc3

After 7...♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♙e7 (8...♙xc3?! 9.♘g5±) 9.♙e2 0-0 10.♘xe5 ♘xe5 11.♙xe5 ♙f6 12.♙e4 ♙xc3 13.♖b1± White has a nice advantage thanks to his better development.

### 8.bxc3 ♙g4

In reply to 8...0-0, the simplest course is 9.♖e1. Then 9...♖e8? is bad on account of 10.♘g5!, while 9...♙g4 transposes to the note to White's 9th (below).

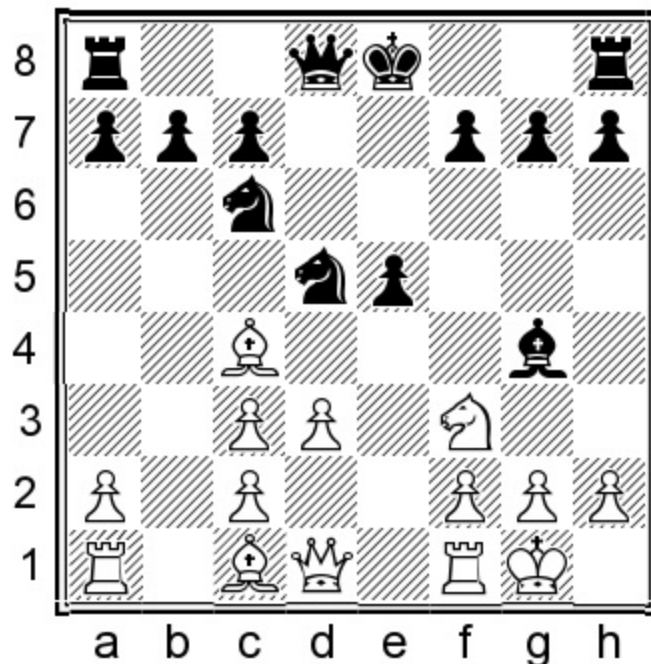
But let's also look at another possibility after 8...0-0. Interesting play can occur after: 9.♙e1 ♖e8 10.♘g5 ♙f5 (not 10...h6? 11.♙e4±) 11.♖b1 f6! (after 11...b6 12.♖b5! ♘ce7 13.♙xe5 Black comes out a pawn down)



And now White has a choice:

a) He can continue 12. ♖e4 b6 with an unclear position.

b) He can play 12. ♖b5!? after which, with correct play on both sides, the game will end in perpetual check: 12... ♗e7 13. ♕a3 If we withdraw our knight to e4, then ♖b5 loses its point; but now there follows a sequence in which the moves are the only playable ones, so we will leave them uncommented: 13...c6 14. ♖xb7 fxg5 15. ♗xe5 ♖h8 16. ♕xd5 ♗xd5 17. f4 gxf4 18. ♖e1 ♗xe5 19. ♖xe5 ♗g6! 20. ♖xf5 ♖e1† 21. ♖f2 ♖ae8= With perpetual check after 22. ♖b8 ♖1e2† 23. ♖f1 ♖e1†.



9.d4!?

You can find a large number of games with the present variation, but this move has only been played once.

After 9.♖e1 0-0 10.♘d2 ♜e8 (or 10...♚d6 11.h3 ♘h5 12.g4 ♘g6 13.♞h4, and with the two bishops White will have a small but stable plus) 11.h3 ♘h5 12.♞b1, White has a little pressure. On 12...♞b6 he must withdraw with 13.♘b3.

If 12...♞b8, then 13.♘b5! is good; Black must not reply 13...♚d6 on account of 14.g4 winning a pawn.

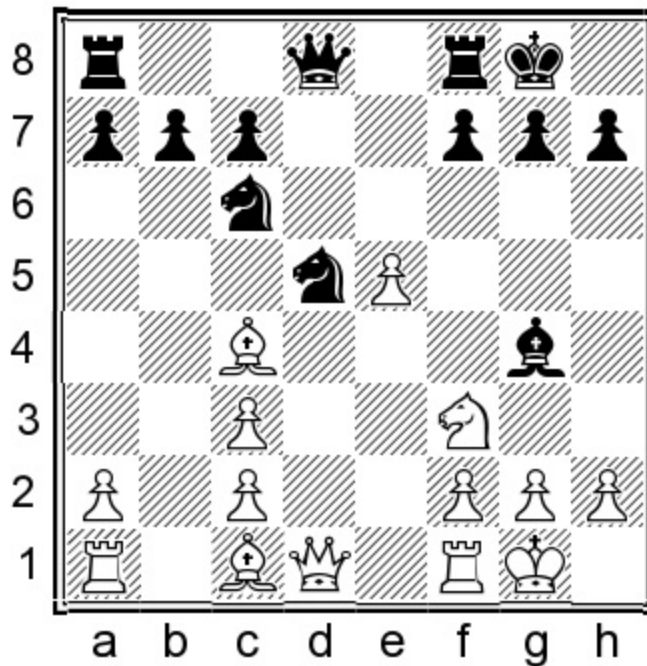
The computer suggests the cunning 12...a6!? 13.♘b3 h6!, after which the position remains unclear.

### 9...0-0

White has a good advantage after: 9...♞xc3?! 10.♚d3 ♞d5 11.♞xe5±

An alternative is 9...♞b6 10.♘b5 0-0 11.h3 ♘xf3 12.♚xf3. Then after 12...exd4, and exchanges on c6, White has a minimal plus, since in a position like this the bishop is slightly better than the knight.

### 10.dxe5



### 10...♞xc3

The position is now much more complex than in the case of 10...♞b6 and demands precise play from both sides.

In Tischbierek – S. Ernst, Germany 2009, the continuation was:

10...♞b6!? 11.♘e2 ♚xd1

11...♜e8! is a more cunning order of moves, giving Black more chance of equalizing: 12.h3 ♘h5

13.g4 ♘g6 14.♖e1 ♚xd1 15.♘d1 ♞ad8 with full compensation for the pawn.

12.♘xd1 ♞fe8 13.h3 ♘e6

At this point White played 14.a4 and gained a slight edge after 14...♖ad8 15.♙f4, so Black should instead have replied 14...a5! maintaining adequate compensation.

I would prefer 14.♞e1!? with chances of an advantage.

### 11.♞e1 ♘a4

After 11...b5 12.♞xc3 bxc4 13.♙b2± Black has a weak pawn on c4 in a situation of equal material.

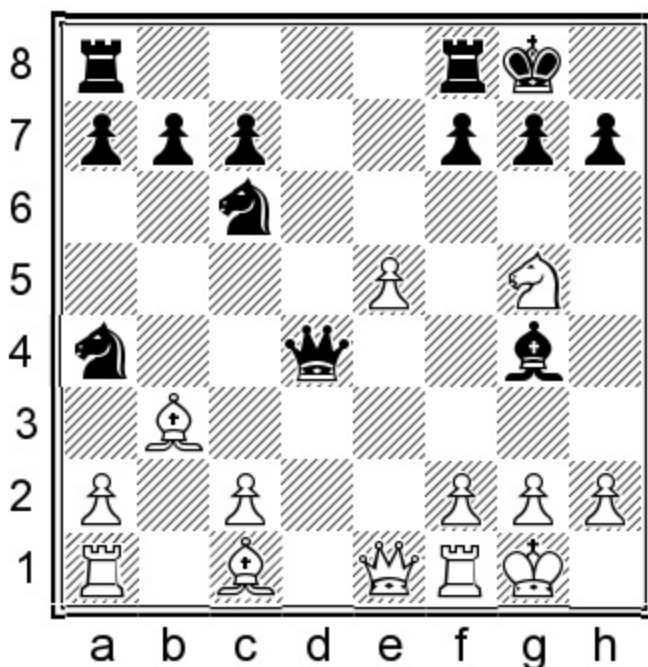
### 12.♘g5!

Otherwise White would have to struggle for equality.

### 12...♞d4

White answers 12...♘c5 with 13.h3±. Then after 13...♙f5 14.♞e3 he stands better, while in the event of 13...♞d4?! 14.♙xf7† ♞xf7 15.♙e3! he is close to victory.

### 13.♙b3



### 13...♘c5!

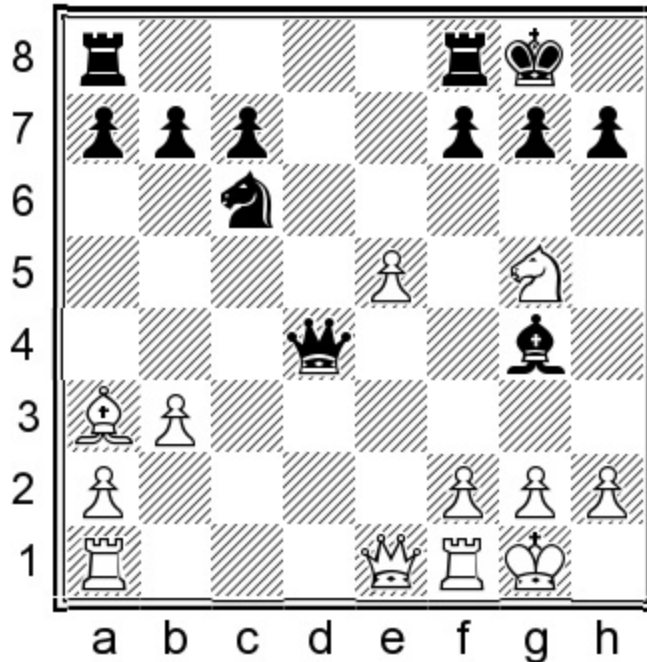
It isn't hard to see that 13...♞xa1? is bad: 14.♞e4 g6 15.♞xg4, and after the a4-knight moves, 16.♞h4 h5 17.♙xf7† wins for White.

On the other hand 13...♘c3?! might seem tempting. However, White continues: 14.♙h1 ♙e2 15.f4! With the aid of an exchange sacrifice, White acquires a large plus (instead after 15.♞g1 ♘d1 the position becomes unclear). 15...♙xf1 16.♙e3 ♞b4 17.♙d2 White threatens e5-e6, and 17...h6 doesn't help, as after 18.♙xc3 ♞xf4 19.♘h3 Black has to give up his bishop into the bargain.

### 14. ♖a3 ♜xb3

Against 14... ♜xe5? (counting on 15.c3 ♞f4, with a threat of ... ♜f3† after White takes the knight on g5) White continues: 15.h3! ♙h5 16.c3 ♞f4 17. ♙xc5 ♞xg5 18.f4 ♜f3† 19. ♞xf3 ♞xc5† 20. ♞f2+– Surprisingly Black cannot rescue his bishop on h5. After an exchange of queens and ...h7-h6, White will play f4-f5!.

### 15.cxb3



White has some initiative, but with correct play, Black can neutralize it.

After 15... ♞fe8 16. ♞b1 g6 17. ♙b2, Black must avoid 17... ♞d8?! 18.f4! with a large plus for White. Instead he should play 17... ♙f5!, to which White may reply 18. ♞c1 or 18. ♙xd4 ♙xb1 19. ♞axb1 ♜xd4 20.f4, with a minimal advantage in the ending.

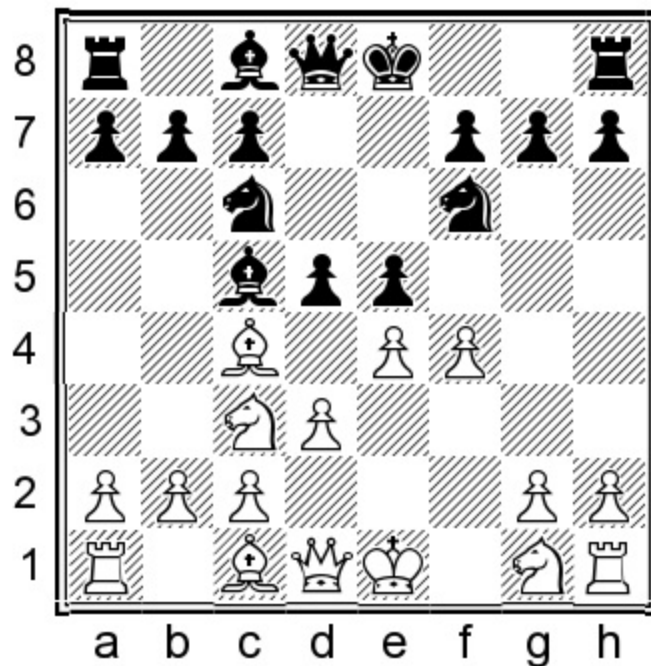
Moving the rook to d8 is stronger: 15... ♞fd8! 16.e6 f6 17.e7 ♞e8 With a roughly equal position after 18. ♜e6 ♞d7 or 18.h3 ♙f5.

### B) 4... ♙c5 5.f4

With 5. ♜f3 White transposes to variations of the Giuoco Piano. If this is what suits us, a simpler method is to play 4. ♜f3, avoiding unnecessary sidelines. The 4. ♜f3 move order also preserves c2-c3 options, which we will examine in the second volume.

We now consider **B1)** 5...d5, **B2)** 5...d6 and **B3)** 5...0-0.

### B1) 5...d5



An aggressive pawn sacrifice that aims to work up an attack before White has finished his development.

### 6. ♖xd5

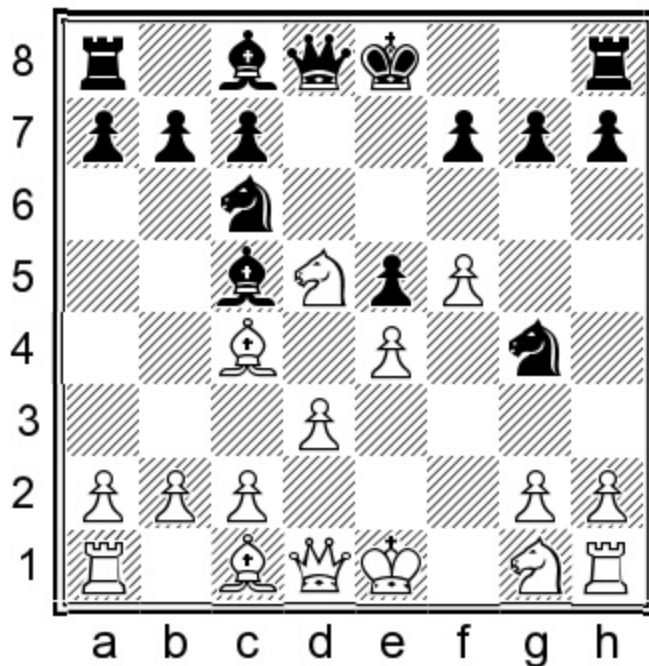
Better than 6. exd5 ♗g4! 7. ♘f3 (not 7. ♙d2? exf4± as in Amdouni – Eljanov, Tromsø [ol] 2014) 7... ♘d4 8. fxe5 with an unclear position after 8... ♚e7 or 8... ♘d7 9. ♗f4 ♗xf3.

### 6... ♘g4

If 6... ♗e6 then 7. ♘xf6† ♙xf6 8. ♗xe6±.

### 7. f5!

In the case of 7. ♘h3 ♙h4† White's problem is that with his knight on h3 he can't play g2-g3. After 8. ♗f1 ♘f2 9. ♙e1 ♗xh3 10. ♗e3 there will be several exchanges and a virtually equal ending.



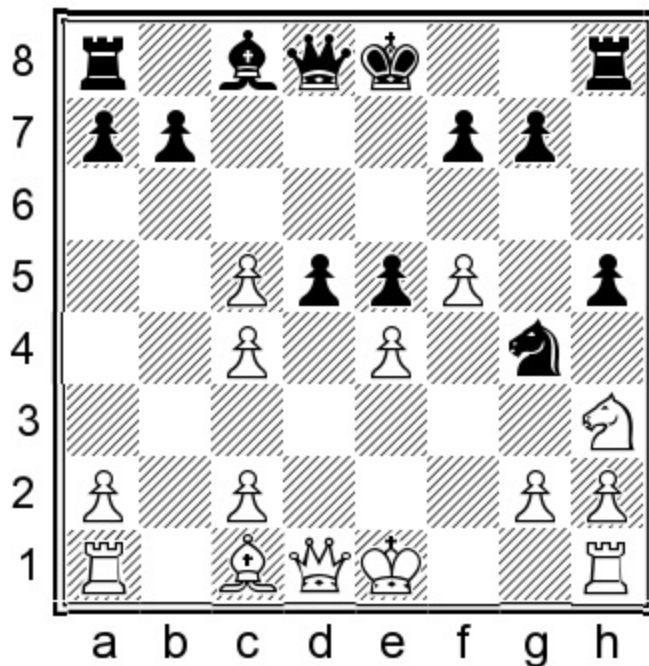
### 7...h5

Not 7...♘f2? 8.♙h5 ♘xh1 9.♙g5+– with a decisive plus. On 9...♙d6 White wins with 10.♘f6†, while if 9...♙d7 then 10.♙f6!.

### 8.♘h3 ♘a5

Or 8...♙h4†?! 9.♙f1±, and owing to the threat of ♙g5 the queen has to return to d8.

### 9.b4 ♘xc4 10.bxc5 c6 11.dxc4 cxd5



Up to here we have been following Amdouni – Nyback, Batumi (ol) 2018. In that game White played 12.cxd5, to which Black could have replied 12...♙h4!† 13.♙f1 ♘f6 with a comfortable [chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)

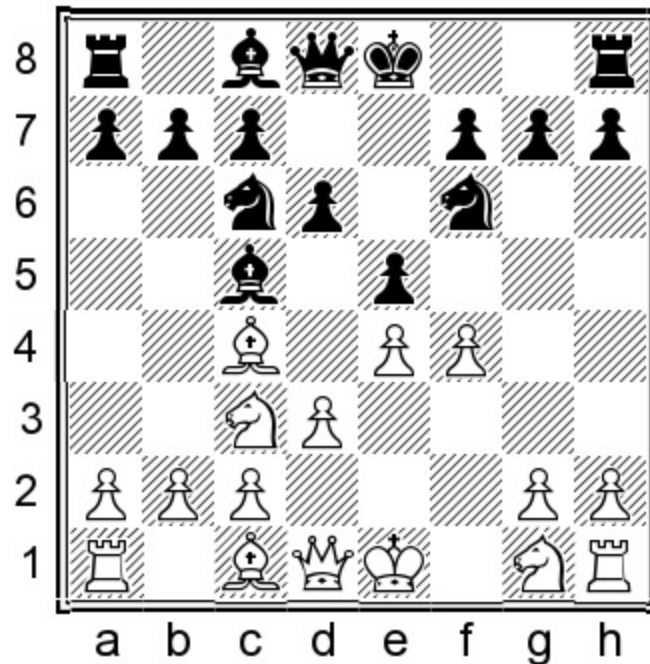
position.

Instead White may play 12.♙xd5 ♖d7 13.♘g5 0-0 14.0-0 with advantage.

An even simpler solution is 12.0-0. Then after 12...dxe4?! 13.♙xd8† ♔xd8 14.♘g5 Black has a bad position.

So stronger is 12...d4 13.c3 dxc3, after which White's advantage is not as great after the exchange on d8, though it's still an edge.

## B2) 5...d6



### 6.♘f3

Of course this is a King's Gambit, not really a Bishop's Opening, but I shall give a few ideas anyway.

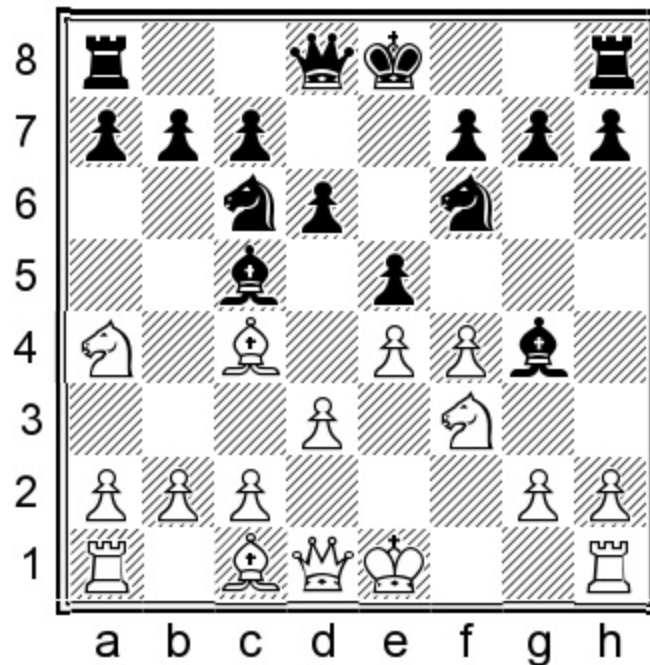
### 6...♙g4

For 6...0-0 see 5...0-0 6.♘f3 d6 (variation B33).

On 6...a6 White has 7.♘d5 then 7...♘xd5 is the most natural continuation (instead if 7...♙e6 then 8.c3 isn't bad, or if 7...h6 then 8.f5 – with initiative in either case). 8.♙xd5 exf4 9.d4 ♙b6 10.♙xf4 ♙e6 11.♙xe6 (in Wei Yi – Vallejo Pons, Leon 2014, the continuation was 11.0-0 0-0; in my view it's better to take with ♙xe6 at once, reserving the right to castle long) 11...fxe6 12.c3 With a small but stable advantage, thanks to the better dark-squared bishop. It's desirable for White to castle queenside to avoid Black's ...e6-e5. For example 12...♙f6 13.♙g3 0-0 14.♙d3 or 12...♙d7 13.♙g3! 0-0-0 14.♙d3, maintaining a plus.

## 7.♞a4

The dark-squared bishop has to be eliminated so that White can castle. An amusing fact is that this was played in Zukertort – Anderssen as long ago as 1877!



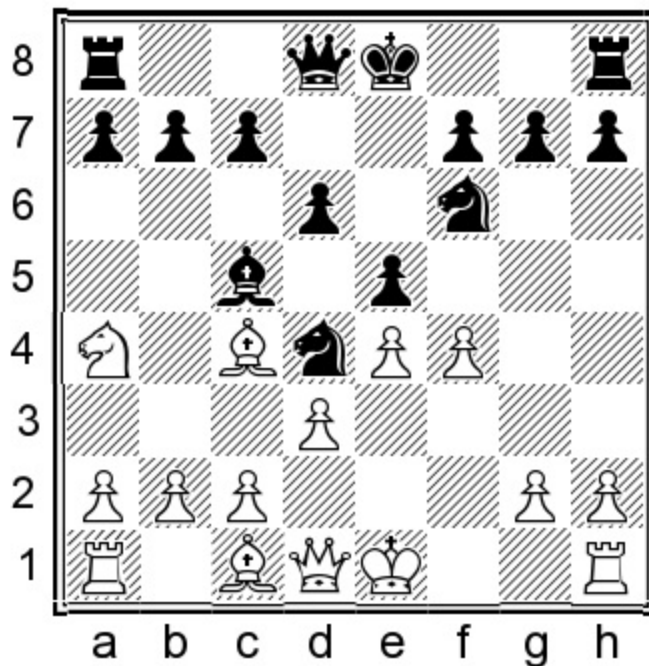
## 7...♞b6

Alternatively:

a) 7...♞d7?! 8.♞xc5 dxc5 9.fxe5! (9.h3 ♞xf3 10.♞xf3± is less good, Vazquez Maccarini – Kosteniuk, Khanty-Mansiysk 2018) 9...♞xf3 10.♞xf3 ♞xe5 11.♞g3± With a big advantage after 11...♞e7 12.0-0 or 11...♞g6 12.♞e3.

b) 7...0-0 8.♞xc5 dxc5 9.0-0± was played in So – Adhiban, Singapore 2007. The two bishops and better pawn structure give White a clear edge.

c) 7...♞xf3 8.♞xf3 ♞d4 9.♞d1±



And now:

c1) After 9...exf4 10.♘xc5 dxc5 11.♙xf4 White has a stable plus.

c2) In a blitz game Ponomariov – Tomashevsky, Huaian 2016, Black played 9...b5. White should then have continued: 10.♙xf7† ♔xf7 11.♘xc5 dxc5 (11...exf4 12.♘b3 leaves White considerably better) 12.fxe5 ♖d7 13.c3 ♗e6 14.0-0† → The powerful centre pawns and Black's problems with his king give White a comfortable plus. Against any king move, d3-d4 is good.

### 8.♘xb6 axb6 9.c3!

The c6-knight has to be deprived of the d4-square; it cannot join in via e5 for tactical reasons.

In the event of 9.0-0 exf4 10.♙xf4 ♘d4 the position is unclear.

### 9...0-0

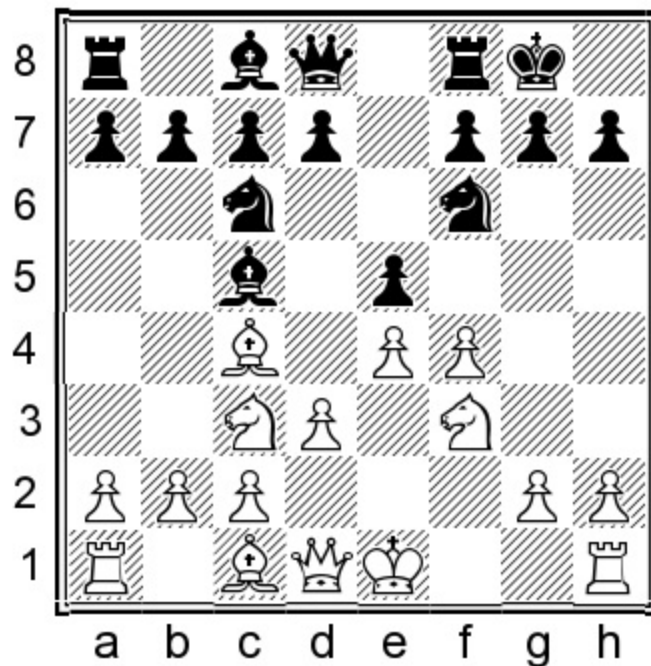
Or: 9...exf4 10.♙xf4 ♗h5 (not 10...♗e5? 11.♙xe5 dxe5 12.♙xf7†+–) 11.♙g5!± Now 11...♙xf3?! is bad: 12.♙xf7†! and the bishop cannot be taken owing to ♖b3†.

### 10.0-0 exf4 11.♙xf4

Thanks to the half-open f-file, White has an enduring plus. A good answer to 11...♗e5 is 12.♙xe5 dxe5 13.h3, after which Black has to take the knight on f3.

If instead 11...♗h5, White can withdraw with 12.♙e3. Then 12...♗e5?! is bad in view of 13.♗xe5! ♙xd1 14.♗xf7, with a large plus for White, as he will acquire plenty of material for the queen.

### B3) 5...0-0 6.♗f3



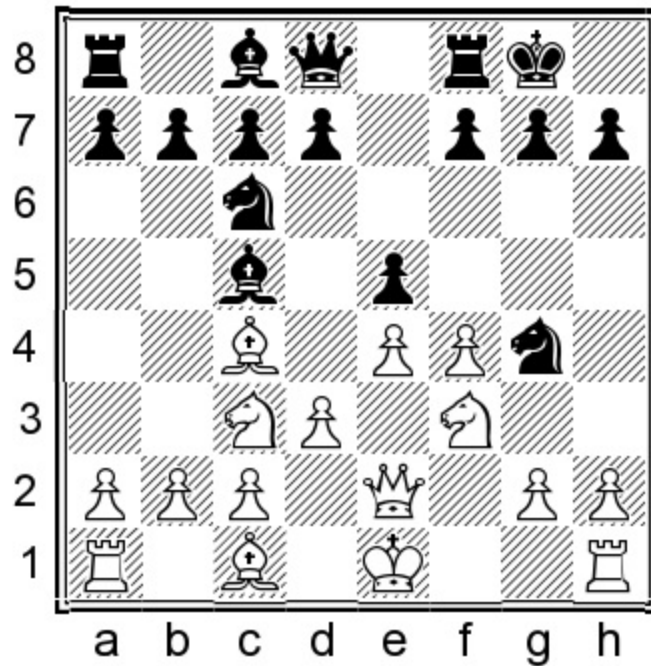
Black has **B31)** 6...♘g4, **B32)** 6...exf4! and **B33)** 6...d6.

### **B31) 6...♘g4**

Although in the Mega Database you can find some games where this position arose, only one of them was played by someone rated over 2400, so the knight move may be considered *almost* a novelty. We will not study it thoroughly; I shall just give a short variation.

#### **7.♙e2**

White might also play 7.♖f1 to prevent ...♗f2†, but what I didn't like about it was 7...exf4 with the idea of 8.♗xf4 ♘e3. Black would afterwards withdraw his bishop to h6 to stop White from castling.



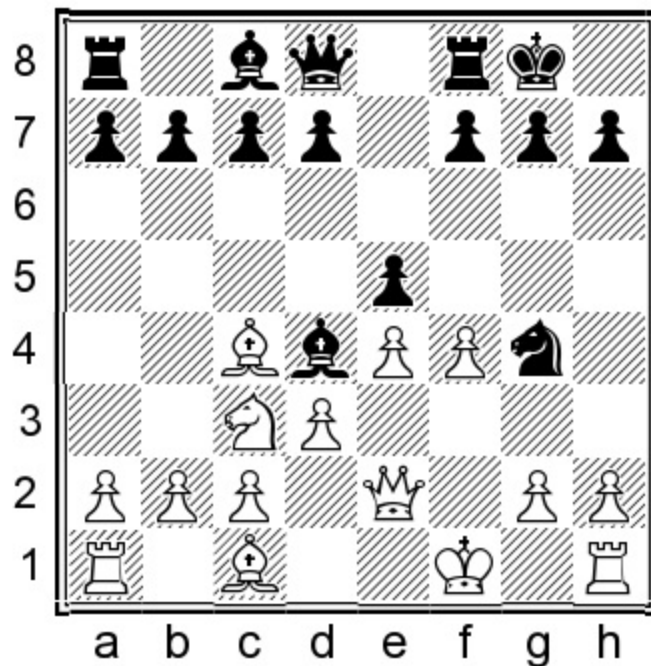
7...♙f2†

White answers 7...d6?! with 8.f5±. Then after 8...♙f2† 9.♙f1 Black no longer has ...♘d4.

8.♙f1 ♘d4!

Practically the only move. It's essential for Black to exchange his knight on c6, so as to have the possibility of ...c7-c6 and ...d7-d5. If 8...♙d4?! then 9.f5±.

9.♘xd4 ♙xd4



10.h3

Apart from this, White has some other options. I'm not very fond of 10.♔xg4 d5 11.f5 dxc4.

But interesting alternatives are 10.f5 ♖f2 11.♞g1 with complex play after 11...c6!, or there is even 10.♗d5!?. In the latter case, 10...♗f2 11.c3 ♗xh1 12.cxd4 c6 13.f5! gives a very obscure position.

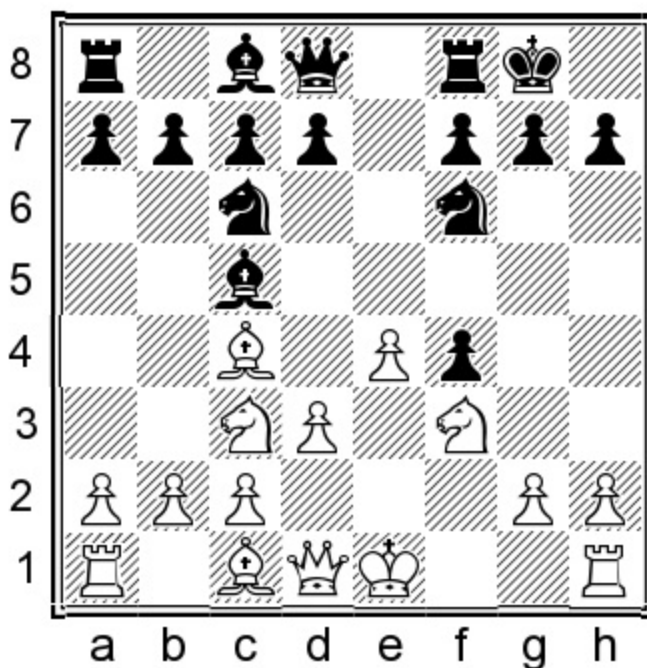
### 10...♗f6 11.♗b5

Exploiting the fact that Black can't move his bishop without losing the e5-pawn.

After 11...d6 12.♗xd4 exd4 13.♙b3 White has a small but secure plus.

The computer suggests instead 11...d5!? 12.exd5 ♞e8. Then after 13.♗xd4 exd4 14.♔f2 Black has some compensation for the pawn.

### B32) 6...exf4!?



Even though the capture on f4 allows the bishop on c1 to come into play without loss of tempo, this is definitely the best continuation for Black. We shall see below that after 6...d6 a roughly equal position results from 7.♗a4, but White also has the more interesting 7.f5!?. Black's 6...exf4 simplifies the position and gives him good equalizing chances.

### 7.♙xf4 d6 8.♔d2 ♙e6

This position arose in Ponomarev – Hou Yifan, Biel 2017.

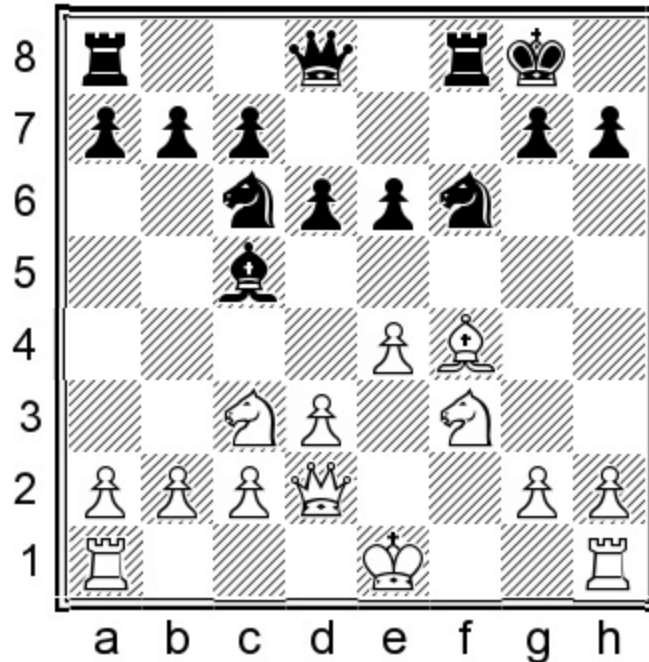
In the event of 8...♗d4 9.0-0-0 c6 10.e5 dxe5 11.♙xe5 b5, White has 12.♗e4!↑. Thanks to this tactical possibility, he seizes the initiative after either 12...♗xe4 13.dxe4 bxc4 14.♙xd4 or 12...♗g4 13.♙xd4 ♙xd4 14.♗xd4 ♔xd4 15.♙b3.

### 9.♙xe6!?!N

In the Ponomarev game mentioned above, White played 9.♙g5?!, and after 9...♙xc4 10.dxc4 ♙b4

Black obtained an excellent position. Capturing on e6 at once is therefore better.

### 9...fxe6



### 10.♘a4

By eliminating the bishop on c5, White wants to avoid the symmetrical formation that could arise after queenside castling.

After 10.0-0-0 ♖b4 (if 10...♘g4 then 11.♙g5 followed by d3-d4, with chances of an advantage) 11.♙g5 h6 12.♙h4 ♔d7, a playable, roughly equal position is reached. There could follow 13.a3 ♖a5 14.♙xf6 ♗xf6 15.d4.

### 10...♙d4

If 10...♙b4 11.c3 ♙a5 12.b4 the dark-squared bishop has to be given up anyway. After 12...♙b6 13.♘xb6 axb6 White can play 14.a4 or 14.0-0. This position looks slightly more congenial for White than the one in the main line, but here too it is nearly equal.

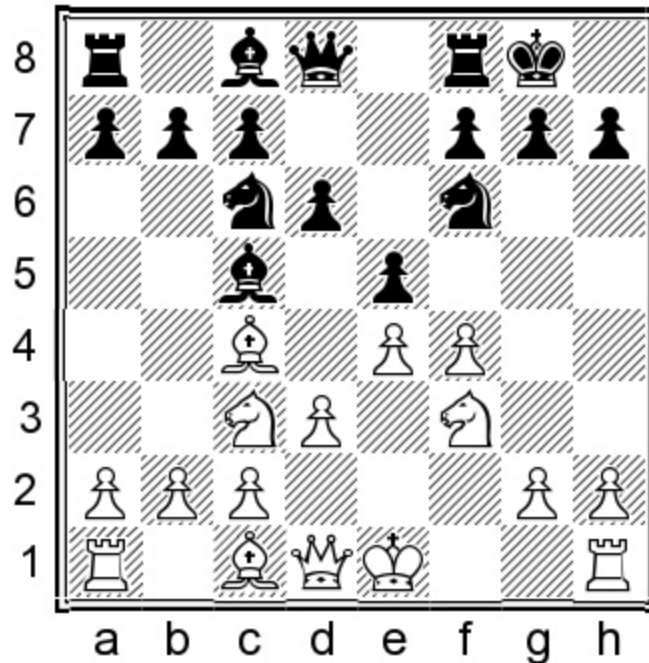
### 11.♘xd4

After 11.c3? ♘h5! White has problems owing to the badly-placed knight on a4.

### 11...♘xd4 12.0-0

White's game is probably a shade more pleasant to play, but objectively the position is approximately equal. White can meet 12...e5 with 13.♙e3; then on 13...♘g4 he can continue 14.♙g5 ♔d7 15.♘c3.

## B33) 6...d6



### 7.f5!?

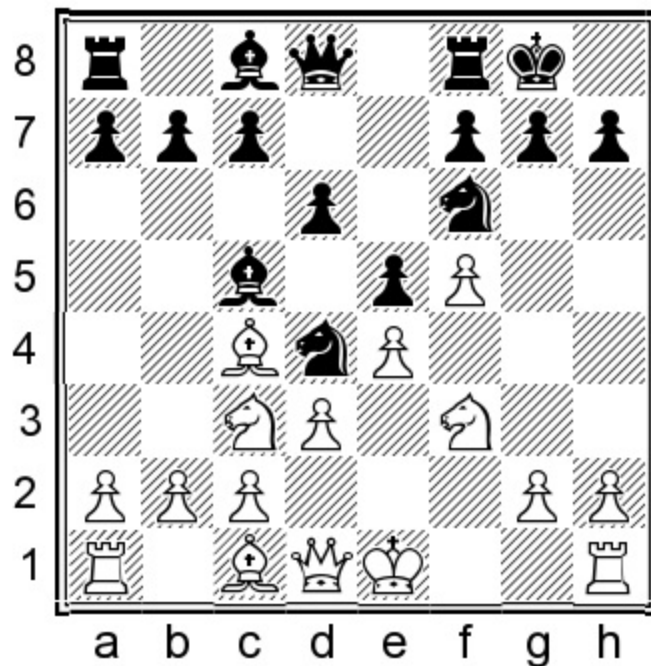
Black's previous move transposed to a relatively rare line of the 2...♘c5 defence to the King's Gambit. In the 2.f4 move order Black will have played ...d7-d6 much earlier, and the diagram position is not so popular because most Black players consider castling a risky choice on move 6.

After 7.f5!? the position becomes complicated, and I have discovered some good ideas for White, giving him chances to gain the advantage.

A move that looks obvious is 7.♘a4, to eliminate the bishop. But after 7...♙b6 8.♘xb6 axb6 9.fxe5 (9.0-0 ♘a5∞ is hardly an improvement; White can continue 10.♙d5 c6 11.♙xf7†, so as to win the piece back afterwards with b2-b4, or he can play 10.b3 – but in my view Black is OK) 9...♘xe5 10.♘xe5 dxe5, in spite of his two bishops in an open position, it's hard for White to gain a plus on account of his unfinished development. His best move here must be 11.h3!?, but in any case the position is virtually equal. That is why I began studying 7.f5!?

### 7...♘a5

Or 7...♘d4.



And now:

a) 8. ♖xd4 exd4 9. ♗d5 ♗xd5 10. ♘xd5 ♕h4† 11. g3 ♕h3 The queen on h3 hinders the completion of White's development, which means he has to move his king from the e-file or play ♖f1. For example 12. ♔f2 or 12. ♕f3 ♖e8 13. ♖f1, with an unclear position.

b) 8. ♗d5!? This is more astute than taking the knight on d4; giving up the light-squared bishop must be preferable to allowing the queen check on h4. 8... ♗xd5 9. ♘xd5 c6 10. ♘b3 ♗xb3 (after 10...d5 11. ♗xd4 ♘xd4 12. ♕f3± White has a promising position owing to his better light-squared bishop) 11. axb3 d5 12. ♕e2 White will continue with ♘e3 to exchange one of Black's two bishops. After that, White's position will be a shade more pleasant.

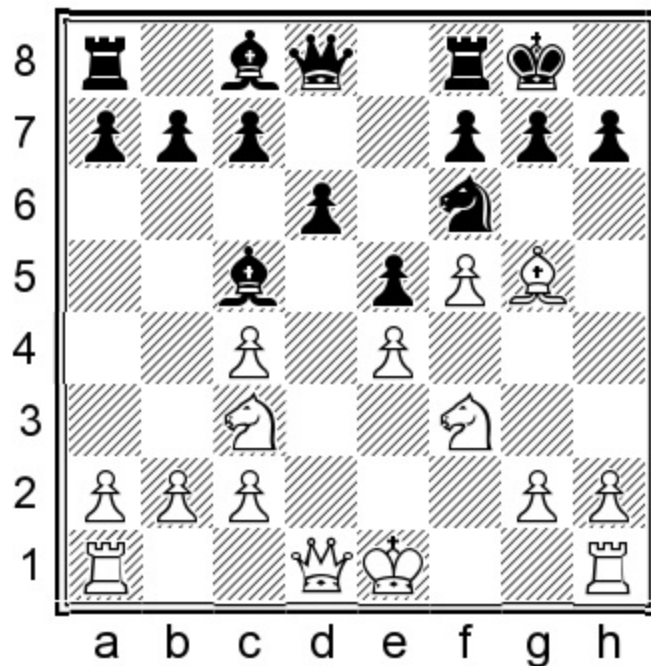
### 8. ♘g5

8.a3 ♗xc4 9. dxc4 was suggested as promising for White in *The King's Gambit* by John Shaw, but 9...b5!?N looks interesting and unclear. We will see a similar idea in the main line below.

### 8... ♗xc4

Inserting 8...c6 9.a3 before exchanging on c4 helps White more than Black; there is no longer a pin with ...♘b4 and the d6-pawn may prove weak.

### 9. dxc4



### 9...♙b4

This is the move on which Black is pinning his hopes. The point is that White won't be able to recapture on c3 with his queen, on account of ...♘xe4.

After 9...c6 10.♙d3 or 9...h6 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.♙d2, White would have a large plus.

### 10.♙e2

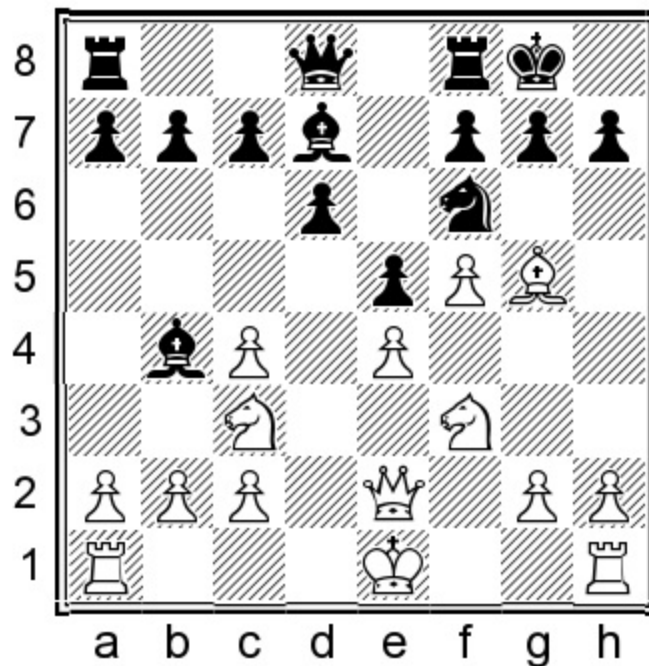
The computer greatly underestimates White's attacking potential and thinks Black will have a fairly good position in a few moves' time. In fact, quite a few problems for Black will shortly arise, and it's unclear whether he can cope with them. Let's look at some variations with which I shall try to support my verdict.

### 10...b5!?

Dissuading White from castling long, and opening lines for the light-squared bishop. Black might seem to have no problems, but in reality White has attacking possibilities even after castling short.

Alternatively:

a) 10...♙d7

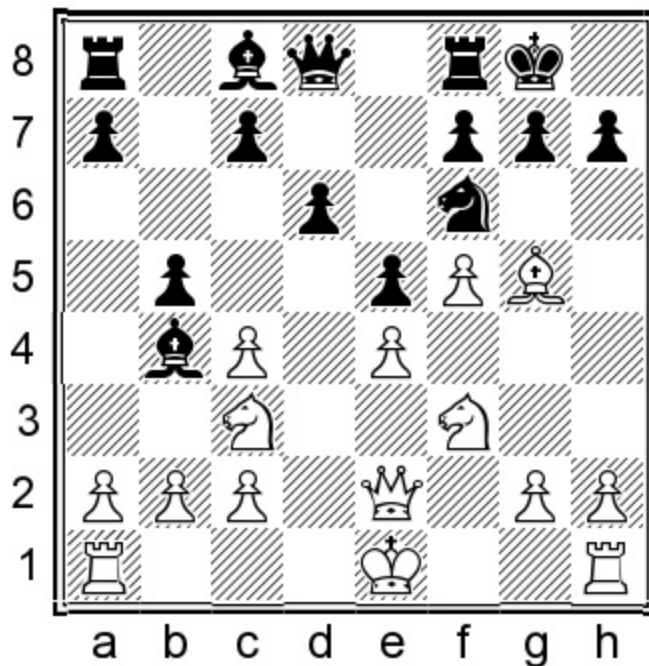


And now:

a1) 11.0-0-0 ♖xc3 12.bxc3 ♜c6! (after 12...♞e7 13.h4 White would have a dangerous attack, but now the threat of ...♜xe4 gives Black equalizing chances) On 13.♞xe5 Black continues 13...♞e8 14.♞xc6 bxc6 with sufficient counterplay.

a2) It's better not to hurry with castling: 11.h4! ♜c6 (after 11...h6? 12.g4± Black can't take on g5 owing to mate threats on the h-file, while moves like 12...♜c6 are strongly answered by 13.♜xf6 – followed by g4-g5 whichever way Black recaptures) 12.♞d2 ♜xc3 13.bxc3 ♞b8 14.g4 b5 15.cxb5± Against either capture on b5, White plays 16.c4 with advantage. For instance after 15...♞xb5 16.c4 ♞b2 he has the strong move 17.♞d1!, threatening to trap the rook with ♞b3 and forcing it to retreat from b2.

b) 10...b6 11.0-0-0 ♖xc3 12.bxc3 ♜b7 13.♞d2, From here, White's game is very simple to play – he pushes his kingside pawns. Black cannot prevent this, and has no good counterplay. For instance 13...h6 is met by 14.h4! with a big advantage. Against 13...♞d7, the simple 14.♜xf6 gxf6 15.♞e3 is adequate; while on 13...a6 White plays 14.g4 b5 15.♞hg1 with a dangerous attack.



### 11.0-0

After 11.cxb5?! a6↑ White has to play 12.b6 to stop the bishop on c8 from going into action.

### 11...♙xc3 12.bxc3 bxc4 13.h3!

Freeing the h2-square for the knight. Black is in a dangerous situation on account of the awkward pin. If White attacks in the best way, he has good chances of success.

### 13...h6

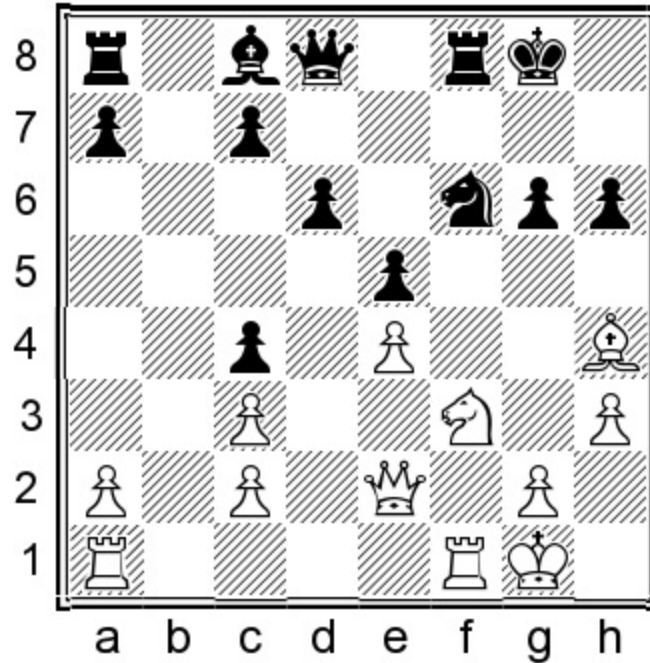
Or 13...d5 (if Black wants to play this move, it's more logical to do so after 13...h6 14.♙h4; then the capture with the knight on e5 is weaker because the black king has a loophole) 14.♘xe5 ♖d6 15.♙xf6 ♖xf6 16.exd5 ♜e8 17.♞ae1± Now if 17...♙b7 then 18.♘d7 ♖d8 follows, and after exchanges on e8 White can continue 21.♞d1 ♞d8 22.♞e1!, exploiting the fact that ...h7-h6 hasn't been played; of course ♞e7 is likely to be next.

### 14.♙h4 ♖e7

Or:

a) 14...d5!? 15.exd5 ♜e8! 15...♖xd5 16.♙xf6 gxf6 17.♘h2± leaves White with an obvious advantage in view of the black king's troubles; 17...♙b7 can be met by 18.♞f2) This cunning line is probably a little better than the straightforward 14...♖e7, but it cannot be said that Black can equalize in this way. I will give one of White's possible continuations: 16.♘h2 ♖d6 17.♙xf6 ♖xf6 18.♘g4↑ And after the knight comes to e3, White will have a pleasant position. For instance after 18...♖d6 19.♘e3 f6, a good idea is 20.♞f3! to transfer the rook to the g-file. Then 20...e4 21.♞ff1 is not in Black's favour, as his pawn on e4 will be poorly placed.

b) 14...g5 15.fxg6 fxg6



16.♙d2!

If 16.♞f2, then 16...♙e8! 17.♞af1 ♘h7; Black has extricated his knight and solved all his problems.  
16...♘h7

Not 16...♘g7? 17.♘xe5; but now the knight can no longer go to h7.

17.♞f2 ♙b7

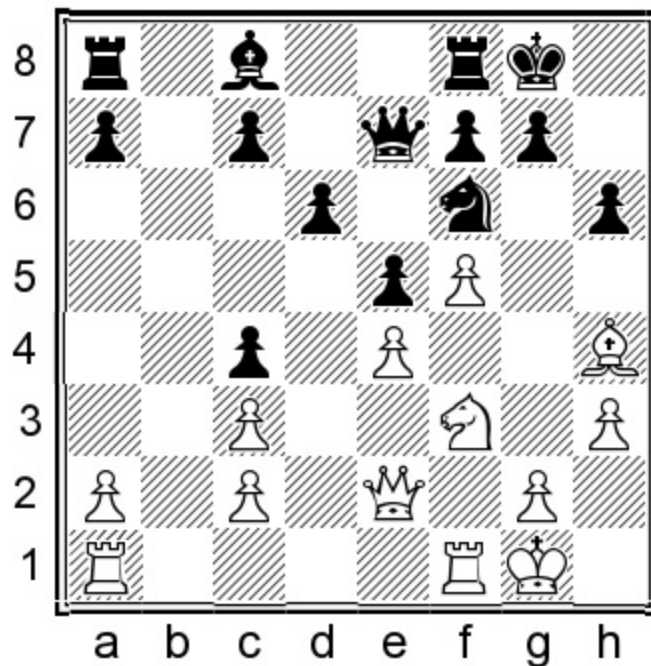
Not 17...♘xe4? 18.♙d5 and wins.

18.♙e2!±

This second queen move may seem strange, but it is all a matter of tactics. Black can't now play 18...♙e8? owing to 19.♙xf6 ♞xf6 20.♘g5†, and after the king moves and the rooks are exchanged on f6, White will play ♞f1† winning.

Black also loses with 18...g5 19.♘xg5†.

All that remains is 18...♘g7 19.♞af1, after which White has a large plus.



### 15. ♖f2!

If White played 15. ♘h2, Black would be all right after 15...g5! 16.fxg6 fxg6. It's therefore more astute to double rooks on the f-file, so that ...g7-g5 will no longer be playable.

An inferior choice is 15. ♔xc4 a5!. Once the bishop emerges to a6, the position will be unclear.

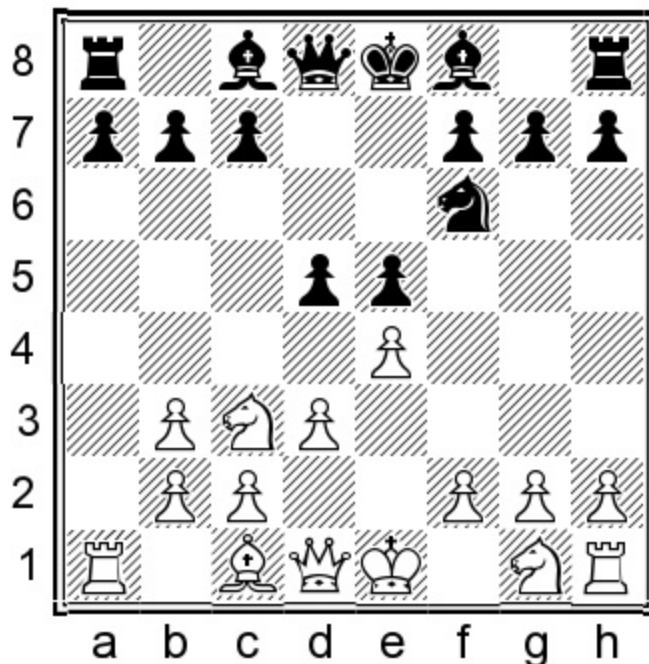
### 15... ♖b8 16. ♖af1±

Now ♘h2 will follow. Black has to aim for ...d6-d5 – for instance 16... ♖d8 17. ♘h2 d5 – but after 18. ♘g4 White has a clear advantage.

### C) 4... ♘a5

Against Black's bishop-chasing plan, White has a choice of allowing the exchange on b3 or c4. So we examine C1) 5. ♗b3 and C2) 5. ♘ge2.

### C1) 5. ♗b3 ♘xb3 6. axb3 d5



### 7.♘f3!?

A rare move, offering an endgame that is not quite as harmless as it may at first appear. In his book *The Open Games with Black* Lokander mentions only 7.♙g5 and the pawn capture below.

Less appealing is: 7.exd5 ♖xd5 (7...♙b4 is also playable, and is preferred by Lokander, but the text move looks slightly better to me), and now:

a) 8.♙h5!?! This isn't obligatory of course, but after other moves Black has no difficulty equalizing (for instance if 8.♘f3, then 8...♖xc3 9.bxc3 ♙d6 is adequate). 8...♖b4! 9.♙xe5† ♙e7 10.♙e2 (possibly 10.♕d1!?!∞ deserves attention, but such positions are to few people's taste) 10...0-0 11.♙d1 b6 12.♖ge2 ♙b7 13.0-0☞ Thanks to his good bishop on b7, Black has full compensation for the pawn. This position is hard to analyse because Black now has several moves of approximately equal value. For instance he may play 13...♙d7, 13...a5 or 13...f5!?!.

b) 8.♙e2 f6 9.f4 This move is an attempt to complicate (after 9.♘f3 ♖xc3 10.bxc3 ♙d6 Black has no discernible problems). 9...♙b4 10.♙d2 0-0 11.fxe5 fxe5 12.♘f3 ♖f4 13.♙xf4 exf4 14.0-0-0☜ With an unclear position.

### 7...dxe4

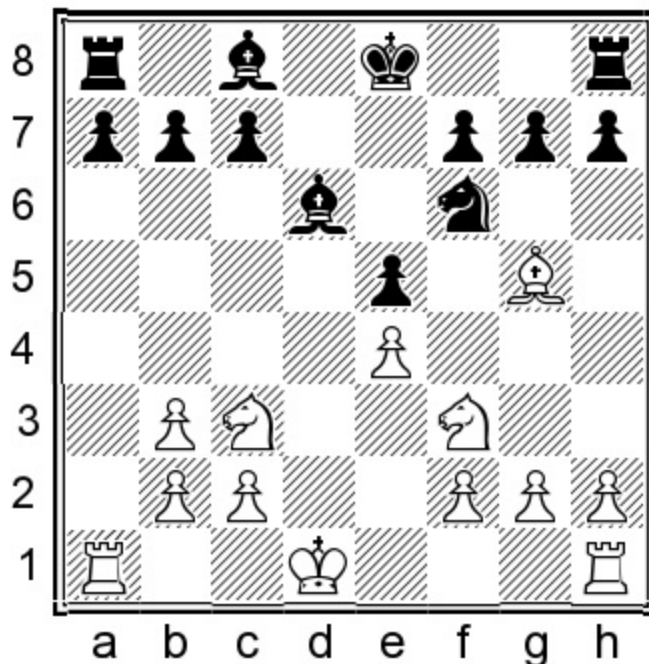
Or 7...d4 8.♘e2 ♙d6 9.c3, and now after 9...dxc3 10.bxc3 or 9...c5 10.b4! White seizes the initiative.

A more interesting try is 9...♙g4!?! 10.cxd4 ♙xf3 11.gxf3 exd4 with complex play, although after 12.♕f1 White retains chances of a plus.

### 8.dxe4

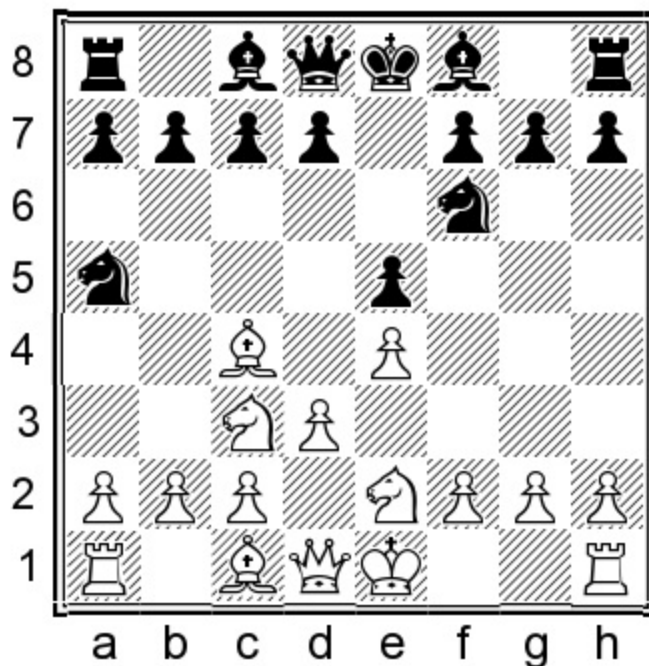
Or 8. ♖xe5 exd3 9. 0-0 ♗e7=.

8... ♙xd1† 9. ♖xd1 ♗d6 10. ♗g5



This occurred in Rapport – Laznicka, Prague 2019. Black now played 10... ♗d7, whereupon White could have gained the advantage with 11. ♗d2!N. Black would therefore do better with 10... ♗e6. Then after 11. ♗xf6 gxf6 12. ♖e2 the position is unclear, although White’s side is easier to play; he will reposition his knight with ♖h4-f5.

C2) 5. ♗ge2



## 5...♙c5

Or 5...c6 6.0-0 (6.a4 is imprecise: 6...d5 7.exd5 cxd5, and now after 8.♙a2 d4 9.♘e4 the position is unclear – while in Khodashenas – Ponkratov, Tehran 2019, it was Black who gained a slight advantage after 8.♙b5† ♘c6) and now:

a) 6...b5!? 7.♙b3 b4 8.♘a4 At this point Black has a number of moves, all of which can be answered by f2-f4.

a1) 8...d5 9.f4! ♙d6 10.fxex5 ♙xe5 11.d4 ♙c7 12.♙g5! with advantage.

a2) White also seizes the initiative after 8...♙e7 9.f4 exf4 10.e5.

a3) An immediate 8...d6 is more sensible, so that in the event of 9.f4 exf4 White can't play e4-e5. After 10.♙xf4 ♙e7 he must choose between 11.♘g3 and 11.c3!?. His position looks slightly more comfortable.

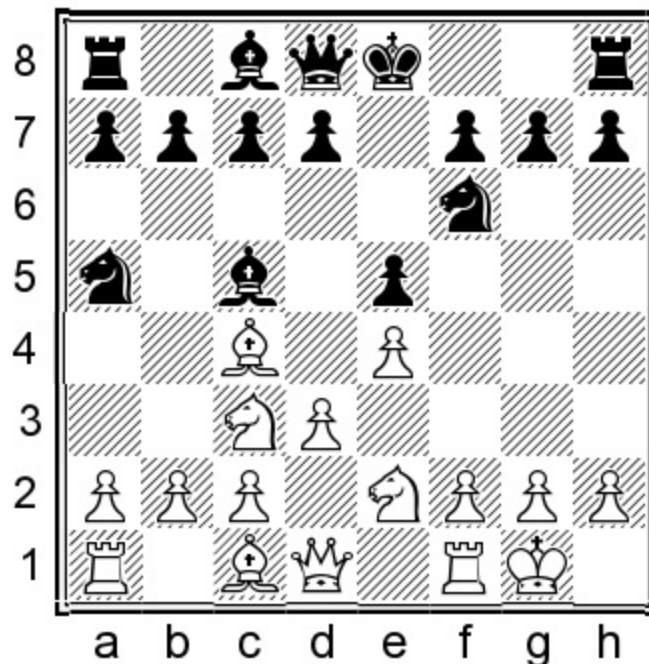
b) 6...d5 7.exd5 cxd5 8.♙b5† ♘c6 9.d4± Since White hasn't wasted time with a2-a4, he has a slight edge here. If 9...e4, then 10.♙g5 ♙e7 11.♘f4 is not bad.

c) 6...♙e7 7.a4 ♘xc4 8.dxc4 0-0 9.b3 d6 Compared with positions where his bishop is on c5, Black stands rather passively here, since he cannot achieve ...d6-d5. White can continue 10.♘g3 ♙e6 11.♙e2, with slight pressure.

Another interesting idea is 10.h3!? followed by f2-f4.

## 6.0-0

Or 6.♙b3 c6∞. With his bishop on b3, White can no longer play a2-a3, so Black can try carrying out ...d7-d5 at once. Apart from that, 6...♘g4!? would be worth considering.



Black can now choose **C21)** 6...0-0 or **C22)** 6...♘xc4!?.

## C21) 6...0-0

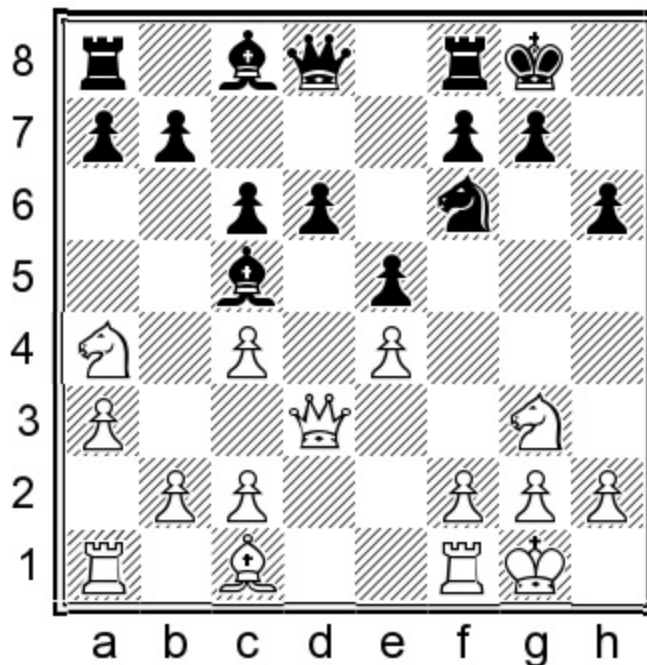
In the case of 6...d6 7.♘b3 0-0 (Possibly 7...a6!? is slightly better, as Lokander recommended in his book. But in my view White still secures the initiative by 8.♘g3 0-0 9.h3↑ with ♖f3 to follow, or ♗h1 and the f2-f4 advance. Lokander continues 9...♘xb3 10.axb3 ♙e6 11.♖f3 ♘d7 12.♙e3 ♙xe3 13.♖xe3 ♘b8, but even here I slightly prefer White after 14.f4.) 8.♘a4 ♙b6 9.c3 ♘xb3 10.axb3 White has the advantage owing to his more effectively placed knight. There can follow 10...♙d7 11.♘xb6 axb6 12.♖xa8 ♗xa8, and now rather than the immediate 13.f4 ♙g4, White does better to play 13.h3!? first, maintaining a plus.

### 7.♘g3 h6!

After the alternative 7...c6 if White replies 8.a3! then an immediate ...d7-d5 is unplayable owing to the threat of b2-b4; on the other hand after exchanging on c4 Black has to play ...d7-d6, giving a position where his ...c7-c6 move doesn't prove very useful. 8...♘xc4 (not 8...d5? 9.♙a2±) 9.dxc4 And now:

a) 9...d6 10.♘a4 ♙e6 11.b3± Having bolstered his c4-pawn, White is ready to take the bishop on c5. Black can play 11...♙d4 12.c3 ♙c5 to stop the white bishop from coming out via b2, but after 13.♘xc5 dxc5 14.♖e2 White still stands better.

b) 9...h6 10.♖d3 d6 11.♘a4



11...♙e6 (11...♙d4 12.c3 ♙c5 13.h3 ♙e6 14.♘xc5 dxc5 15.♖e2± gives approximately the same position as after 9...d6 10.♘a4) 12.♘xc5 dxc5 13.♖f3!± Despite the symmetry, White has the advantage because his knight is better placed. In addition he can presently play b2-b3 to bring his bishop out to b2 and put pressure on the e5-pawn.

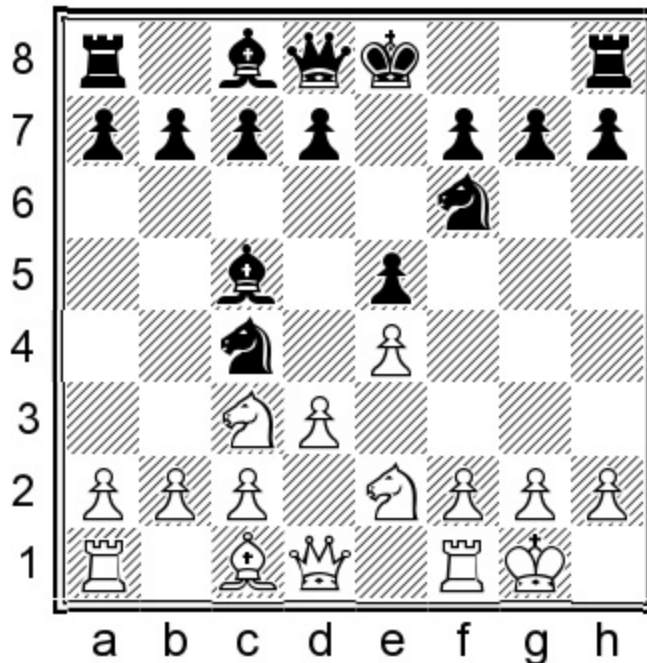
## 8.a4

Or: 8.h3 ♖xc4! (in Naiditsch – Caruana, Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2017, Black played 8...d6 and White gained the upper hand; after 9.♙b3 c6 10.♘a4 ♖xb3 11.axb3 ♙b4 he could have played 12.f4 or 12.d4 with a promising position) 9.dxc4 d6 Black has taken the bishop on c4 just as he does in the 8.a4 line. It isn't so simple to tell which is more useful – the pawn on a4 or the one on h3. In my view these moves are of about equal value.

## 8...♖xc4 9.dxc4 d6 10.♙d3 ♙e6 11.b3

The position is the same as in the main line of variation C221, only with the addition of a2-a4 and ...h7-h6. Seeing that many people have played ♙g5 specially in order to *provoke* ...h7-h6 in such situations, the insertion of these moves is likely to be in White's favour. However, it must be admitted that in a closed position such minor details make little difference to the evaluation.

### C22) 6...♖xc4!?



This immediate capture was recommended by Lysyj & Ovetchkin in a book that was published back in 2012 – *The Open Games for Black*. I must acknowledge that this is one of Black's best options.

## 7.dxc4 d6 8.♙d3

After 8.b3 0-0 9.a4 ♙e6 White would have to place his queen on d3 anyway, so as to stop Black from playing ...c7-c6 and ...d6-d5. If instead 10.a5 (for example), the continuation could be: 10...c6! 11.♙d3 d5 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.exd5 ♖xd5 14.♘e4 ♙e7 15.♙g3 f6 Since Black has the two bishops, the exchange of a couple of pawns to open the position is useful to him – though after 16.♞d1 ♙e8 17.c4 ♖b4 18.♙a3 there would still be everything to play for.

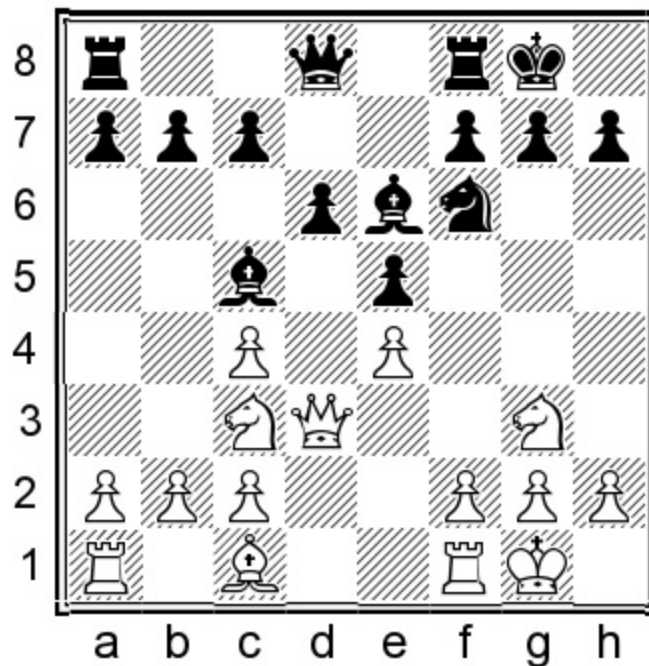
## 8...♙e6

Now White has **C221) 9.♘g3** or **C222) 9.b3**.

An early 9.♘d5 will hardly lead to a good position. To support this, I will give one of the possible variations (though 9...♘xd5 and 9...♘d7!? are also playable): 9...c6 10.b4 cxd5 11.cxd5 ♙xb4 12.♚b5† ♙d7 13.♚xb4 ♚b6= In the opposite-bishop ending, Black will have no problems.

### C221) 9.♘g3 0-0

Or 9...♘d7 10.♘f5 0-0 11.b3, transposing to the main line below.



## 10.b3

At this point 10.♘f5 is a little premature owing to 10...♘h5!?. Then 11.♘a4 can lead to repetition: 11...♚f6 12.♚f3 g6 13.♘xc5 dxc5 14.♙h6, and after the black rook moves, 15.♙g7 ♚g5 16.♙h6 ♚f6. Instead after 11.b3 ♚f6 12.♘xd5 ♙xd5 13.cxd5 g6, Black has no problems.

## 10...♘d7

Or 10...a5 11.♘f5 ♘h5 12.♙e3 ♙xe3 13.♚xe3. Since both sides have many normal moves available here, it's difficult to give concrete variations. If 13...a4, then 14.♚ad1 isn't bad. White can meet ...♚f6 with f3!?, after which Black can't win a pawn on f5 on account of g2-g4. Overall the position is close to equality, although in my view the white side is more pleasant to play.

## 11.♘f5

The obvious active move. If Black captures with ...♙xf5 he may end up worse, so he has to understand that the knight on f5 is best ignored for the present.

After 11.♙e3 the play transposes.

### 11...♘h8!

A useful prophylactic move, to meet ♖g3 with ...g6. This is better than 11...g6 12.♙h6 ♜e8 13.♘g7 with advantage to White.

White can answer 11...a5 with 12.♚g3, whereupon Black must play 12...♙xf5.

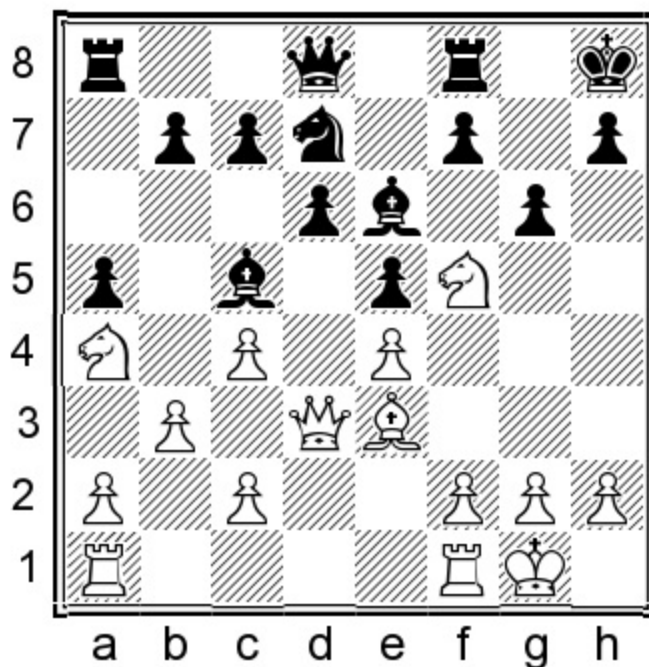
In the event of 11...♙xf5, White has some initiative: 12.exf5 ♙d4 13.♙d2↑ He can continue with ♜ae1 to enable his knight to move forward.

### 12.♙e3 a5

After 12...g6 13.♘g3 f5 14.exf5 gxf5 15.f4 e4 16.♚d2 the position is rather livelier, and if anything this favours White. He has the simple plan of transferring his knight from g3 to e3 and following with ♘d5.

### 13.♘d5

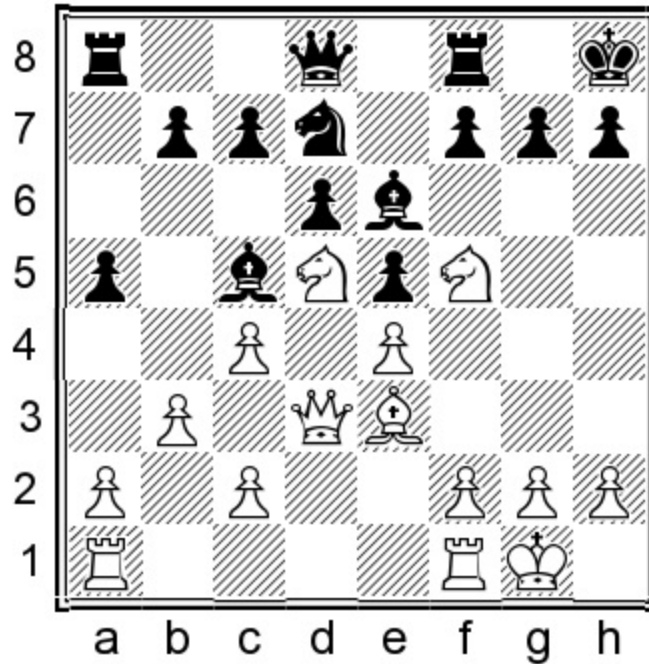
Or 13.♘a4 g6!. Instead of the simple 13...♙xe3 14.♘xe3, Black immediately drives the knight back.



Now 14.♘xc5 leads to a forced draw, while the retreat to g3 allows Black to carry out ...f7-f5 successfully, thanks to the other knight's departure to a4:

a) 14.♘xc5 ♘xc5 15.♙xc5 dxc5 16.♚c3 (16.♚g3 leads to the same result; exchanging queens on d8 is hardly an improvement) 16...gxf5 17.♚xe5† ♔g8 18.♚g3† ♘h8 19.♚e5† with perpetual check.

b) 14. ♖g3 ♙xe3 15. ♚xe3 f5 16. exf5 gxf5 17. f4 ♚h4 18. ♗e2 ∞ I wouldn't be keen to go into this position with White. Black now has a choice. He can play 18... ♗f6, which after 19. ♚g3 or 19. fxe5 ♗g4 20. ♚h3 leads to a queen exchange and simplifies the position. He may also continue 18... ♖g8 or 18... ♗f7, with complex play and chances for both sides.



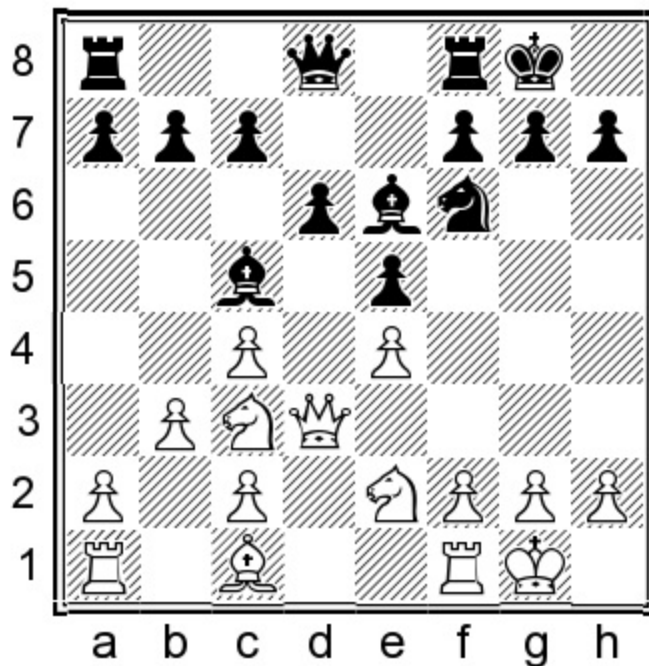
### 13... ♙xe3

The position resulting from 13...g6 14. ♖g3 f5 15. exf5 gxf5 16. f4 looks more promising than with the knight on a4, although after 16... ♙xd5! 17. cxd5 e4 it remains unclear.

### 14. ♚xe3 ♗c5

The knights on d5 and f5 are beautifully placed, but in reality they aren't of very much use. For that reason I am not convinced that it pays White to play 11. ♗f5. The position is now almost equal; White can continue with 15. ♖ae1 or 15. f3.

C222) 9.b3 0-0



### 10.♙e3

Or 10.♘g3, transposing to variation C221.

In several correspondence games White preferred 10.♙g5, to provoke ...h7-h6 before placing the bishop on e3. Evidently the idea was that Black wouldn't be able to play ...g7-g6, but in my view that advance often benefits White. Moreover in some situations, with his pawn on h6, Black may play ...♙g5 to exchange queens and simplify the position. Kreuzer – S. Olsson, corr. 2016, went 10...h6 11.♙e3 ♘d7 12.♘g3 a5 13.a4 ♖e8 14.♗ad1 ♙xe3 15.♙xe3 ♙g5. After the queen exchange, an equal ending comes about.

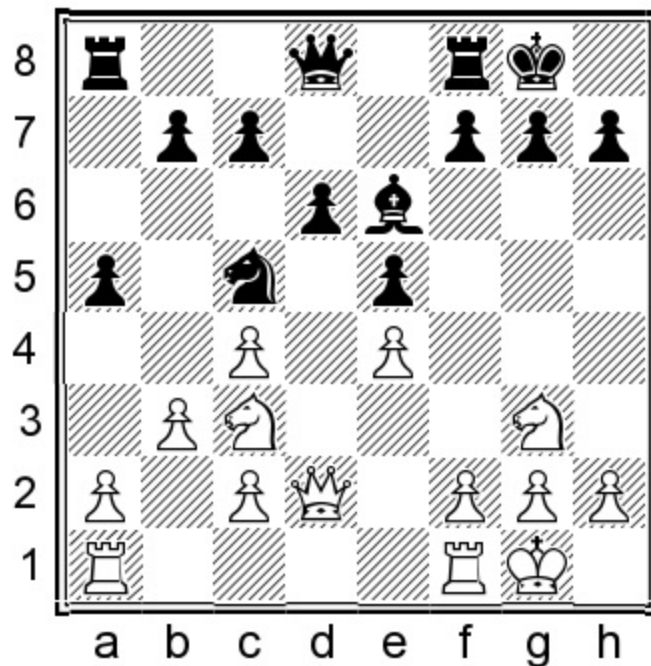
### 10...♘d7 11.♘g3 a5

After 11...g6 12.♙xc5 ♘xc5 13.♙d2 ♙h4 14.♗ad1 ♖ae8 15.a4 f5 16.exf5 ♙xf5 17.f4 White acquired a small plus in Nyberg – Lehtosaari, corr. 2017. As we can see, if Black tries to implement an active plan, he risks landing in the worse position.

### 12.♙xc5

Or 12.♘f5 ♖h8, again transposing to C221.

### 12...♘xc5 13.♙d2



### 13...f6

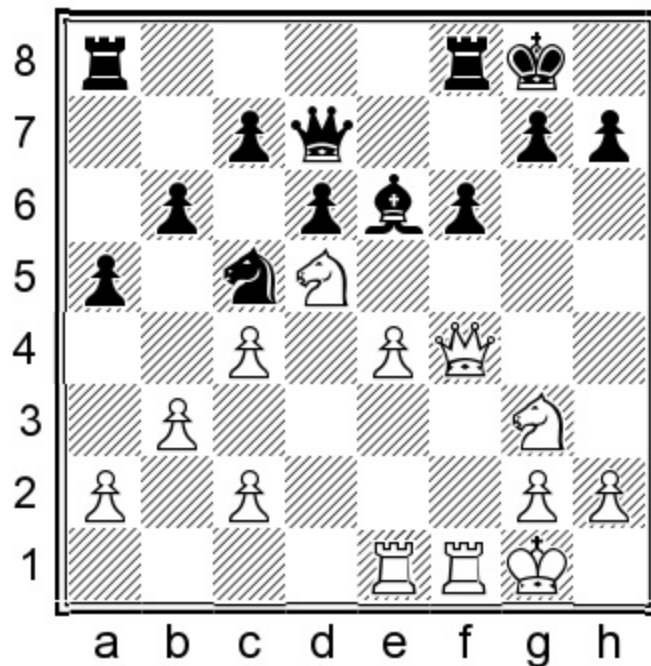
After 13...f5 14.exf5 ♔xf5 15.f4 exf4 16.♖xf4 ♕e6 17.♖xf8† ♚xf8 18.h3 White is slightly better on account of the pawn on a5. He will answer 18...♚f6 with 19.♖e1, and it isn't then easy for Black to activate his rook on a8 in view of ♘b5.

A better chance is 18...♚f7! 19.♖f1 ♚d7, although after 20.♘d5 White's position is still slightly more comfortable.

### 14.♖ae1

Of course all these moves are not forced, but let's see what happens if White carries out f2-f4.

14...♚d7 15.♘d5 b6 16.f4 exf4 17.♚xf4∞



In appearance, White is more actively placed, but objectively the position is unclear. There can follow 17...♖ae8 18.a3 ♕d8!? to free the d7-square for the knight. White may reply 19.♘f5. The position offers play with chances for both sides.

### Conclusion

After 1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♘f6 3.d3 many players answer 3...♘c6 with 4.♘f3, reaching the Italian Game by a move-order that avoids the Petroff. If White prefers 4.♘c3, Black has three playable replies: 4...♗b4, 4...♗c5 and 4...♞a5.

If Black plays 4...♗b4, then in place of the standard 5.♞ge2 White does better with 5.♘f3!?, giving chances of an advantage.

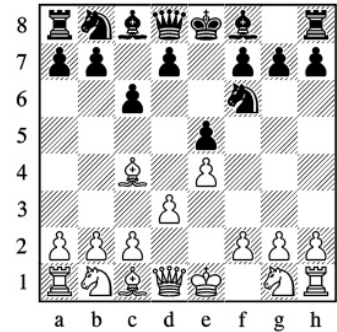
After 4...♗c5 5.f4 Black again has a choice, but the majority of continuations lead to the worse position.

4...♞a5 leads to a closed formation with fairly slow positional play. White's game is probably a little more pleasant, but Black's position is sound enough.

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# Chapter 4

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## Introduction to 2...♘f6 3.d3 c6

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6 4.♘f3

A) 4...♙e7 61

B) 4...d5 5.♙b3 ♚c7!? 6.0-0 64

B1) 6...dxe4 65

B2) 6...a5! 67

B21) 7.a4 dxe4 8.♘g5 ♙g4 9.♚e1 ♙h5 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♚xe4 67

B211) 11...♘d7 68

B212) 11...♙g6 70

B2121) 12.♚e2!? 70

B2122) 12.♚g4 ♘d7 71

B21221) 13.f4 72

B21222) 13.♘d2 73

B22) 7.a3!?N 74

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1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6

We shall also see this move in Chapters 5-8 as it is evidently a critical test of 2.♘c4. Black prepares to occupy the centre with tempo with ...d7-d5. The potential gain is clear for Black, but so are the

possible drawbacks: the e5-pawn may prove weak and the b8-knight is robbed of its most obvious developing square.

#### 4. ♘f3

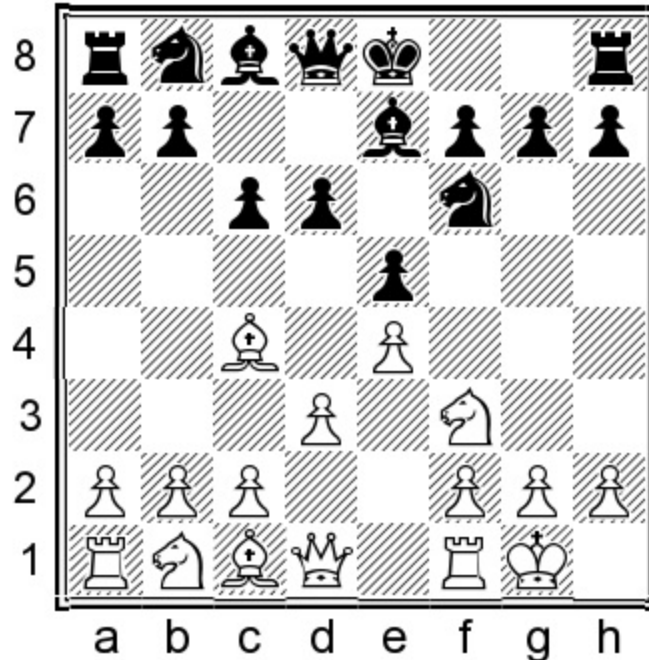
This natural move is overwhelmingly the main line, and the only move I shall study.

In this chapter we examine **A) 4... ♙e7** and **B) 4... d5**.

#### A) 4... ♙e7

An arrangement of the pieces in the style of Philidor's Defence. For White, however, there is no need to hurry with d3-d4; he does better to bring out his pieces first. He can then take stock of the situation – in some positions he may advance his pawns on the queenside.

#### 5.0-0 d6



#### 6.a4!?

I like this standard restrictive move, after which White will bring his knight out to c3. It's important to play these moves in that order. This move is not mentioned by Ntirlis in his book *Playing 1.e4 e5 – A Classical Repertoire*.

Another possible set-up for White involves c2-c3 and the retreat of the bishop to b3.

The inaccurate 6. ♘c3 b5 7. ♙b3 gives an unclear position after 7...0-0 or 7...a5.

The other alternative to 6.a4 is 6. ♙b3!?. Since I like the pawn move better, I will not write much about the bishop move but will just take two games as examples of how play may continue – 6. ♙b3 0-0, and now:

a) 7.c3 ♖bd7 8.♞e1 ♞e8 9.d4 ♙f8 10.♙c2 b6 11.♗bd2 ♙b7 12.♗f1 ♚c7 13.♗g3 g6 occurred in Harika – Ju Wenjun, Huaian 2017. The position is reminiscent of the Breyer variation in the Ruy Lopez. White retains a slight edge.

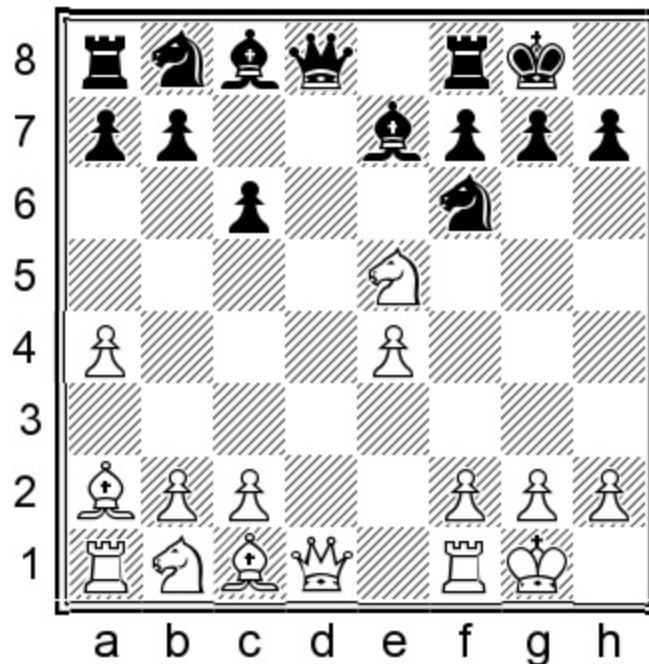
b) 7.♞e1 ♞e8 8.c3 ♙f8 9.♗bd2 ♙e6 10.♙c2 ♗bd7 11.h3 h6 12.d4 with a small plus for White, Hou Yifan – Ivanchuk, Shenzhen 2017. White can continue by bringing the knight round to g3.

### 6...0-0

Alternatively:

a) 6...♙g4 7.h3 ♙h5 8.♗c3 d5 (for 8...0-0, see 6...0-0 7.♗c3 ♙g4 8.h3 ♙h5) 9.♙a2 dxe4 10.dxe4 At this point a good answer to 10...♗bd7 is 11.g4 ♙g6 12.♗h4, while after the queen exchange – 10...♚xd1 11.♞xd1 ♙xf3 12.gxf3 – White has an advantage in the ending.

b) 6...d5 7.♙a2 dxe4 8.♗xe5 0-0 9.dxe4

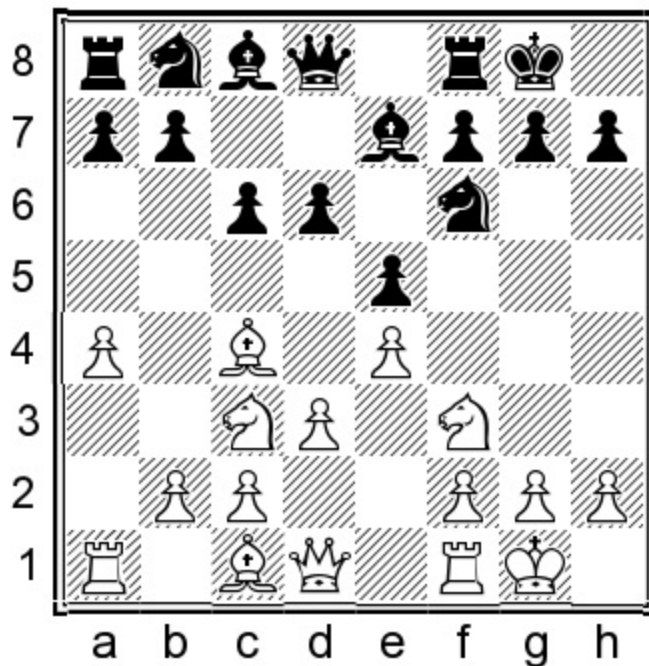


With these possibilities:

b1) 9...♗xe4 10.♚e2 ♗f6 11.♞e1 with a large plus. If 11...♗d5, then 12.♗c3 is good for White. An even worse line for Black is 11...♙d6?! 12.♗xf7! ♞xf7 13.♙g5±. His position is then virtually hopeless; White will meet 13...♚f8 with 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♚e8.

b2) 9...♚c7 10.♗d3 ♗xe4 11.♚f3± With brisk play, White seizes the initiative. Against 11...♗g5, he does well with either 12.♚h5 or 12.♙xg5!? ♙xg5 13.♗c3. Against 11...♗f6, the quiet 12.h3 is good.

### 7.♗c3



7...♞bd7

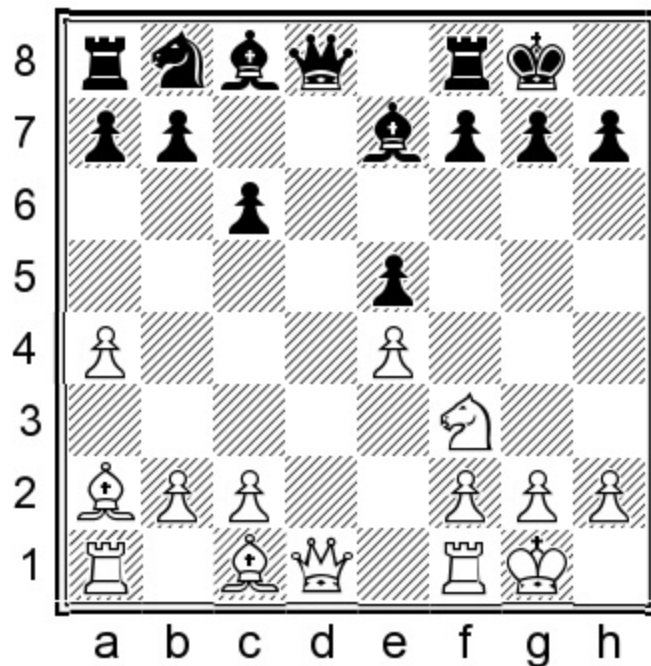
Or:

a) 7...♞g4 8.h3 ♞h5 9.g4 The standard move to break the pin; sometimes the queen's knight is brought round to g3, but this case is different. 9...♞g6 10.♞h4 d5 11.♞xg6 And now:

a1) 11...fxg6 12.exd5! cxd5 (12...♞xd5 13.d4±) 13.♞a2 It was important to capture with exd5 before retreating with the bishop. Black now has problems with the threat of g4-g5.

a2) 11...hxg6 12.♞b3 dxe4 13.g5 ♞h5 14.♞xe4± Thanks to his powerful bishop on b3, White has a pleasant position. A good reply to 14...c5 is 15.♞g4 ♞c6 16.♞c4, while after 14...♞d7 15.♞e1 ♞c5 16.♞xc5 ♞xc5 there is no need to take on e5; White can play 17.♞f3 with advantage.

b) 7...d5 8.♞a2 (in my view this is better than 8.♞b3 because in the latter case, after exchanges on e5, Black can bring his knight to c5 with tempo) 8...dxe4 (or 8...d4 9.♞e2 ♞c7 10.♞d2 c5 11.♞c4±; with f2-f4 coming, White has an attractive position) 9.♞xe4 ♞xe4 10.dxe4



From the diagram, there can follow:

b1) 10...♖c7 11.♘g5!?± This compels Black to capture on g5, giving up his dark-squared bishop. In the event of 11...h6?, let's see what happens: 12.♗xf7! ♜xf7 13.♞h5 ♕f8 14.♙xh6! gxh6 15.♞g6† ♕g7 16.♞fd1+– Of course after 11...♙xg5 White's advantage isn't so great, but the consequences of 11...h6? needed to be demonstrated.

b2) 10...♘d7 11.a5 ♖c7 12.♞e2± On account of his good bishop on a2, White has a promising position. Against 12...♘c5 he can at once play 13.b4 ♘e6 14.c3, denying Black the opportunity for ...♙e6.

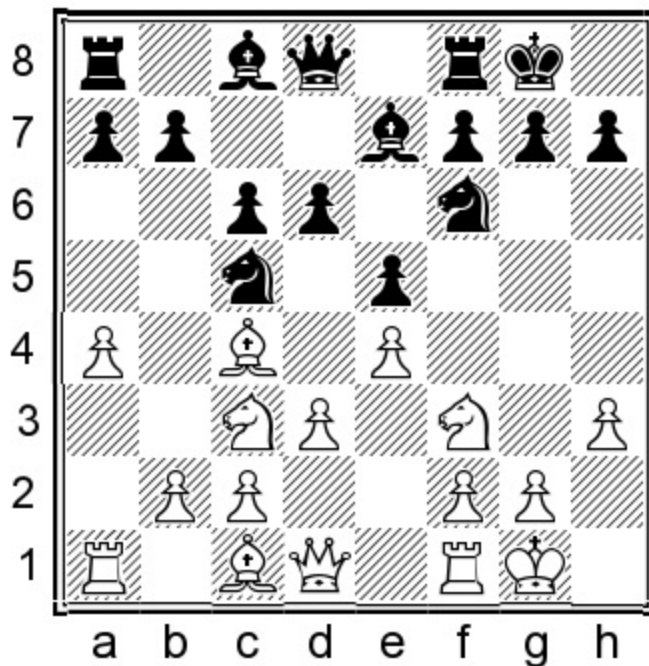
### 8.h3!?

A useful prophylactic move which not only prevents ...♙g4 but also allows White's bishop to be calmly developed to e3 without worrying about ...♘g4.

With 8.d4, a familiar position from Philidor's Defence comes about – only a tempo behind, since White has used two moves advancing his d-pawn.

### 8...♘c5

After 8...a5 9.♙e3 ♖c7 10.d4 exd4 11.♘xd4 White is a little better, thanks to his well-placed pieces in the centre. He will meet 11...♘c5 with 12.♞f3. It would also be worth considering 11.♙xd4!?



### 9.b4

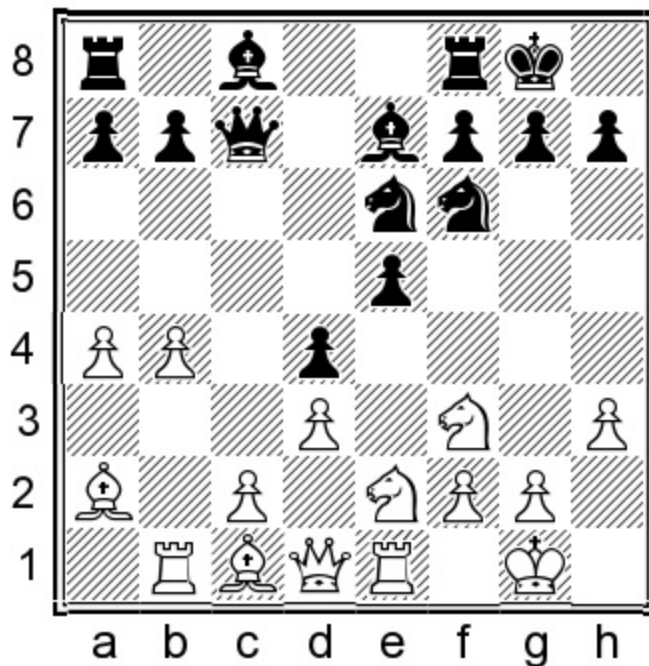
Of course in such positions there is rarely a unique correct move. For example 9.a5!? deserves attention, but the advance of the b-pawn looks more logical.

### 9...♞e6 10.♞b1 d5 11.exd5

White is also a little more comfortable after 11.♙a2!? dxe4 12.♞xe4 ♞xe4 13.dxe4. The computer then suggests 13...a5 14.b5 f6!?, which can be met by 15.♞h4, preserving some slight pressure.

### 11...cxd5 12.♙a2 d4 13.♞e2 ♚c7 14.♞e1

At first sight the position looks unclear, but after some analysis I have come to the conclusion that White has a plus. Let's continue the variations for a few moves.



#### 14...♙d7

Or 14...a5 15.bxa5 ♖xa5 16.♙c4±. White doesn't need to defend his a4-pawn directly. He will meet 16...♖xa4 with 17.c3, and against 16...♙d7 he has 17.♙d2 ♖xa4 18.♘g3 – with advantage in either of the positions.

Black can play more calmly with 16...b6, but even then, after 17.♘g3, White is slightly better.

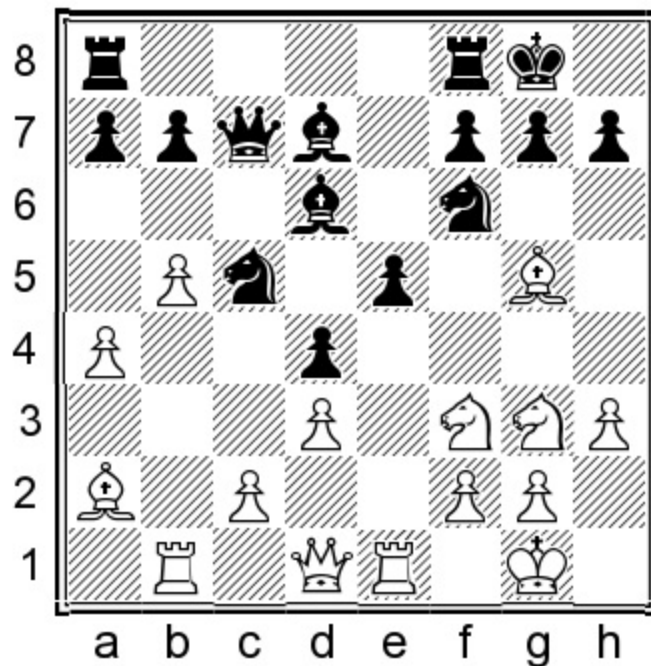
#### 15.b5 ♙d6

Bolstering the e5-pawn.

Against an immediate 15...♘c5, White has 16.c3 with a considerable advantage.

An attack on the c2-pawn can be met by ♘g3, as we see from the following: 15...♖ac8 16.♘g3 ♘c5 (on 16...♙xc2?! 17.♙xc2 ♖xc2, White can acquire a large plus by various means; for instance 18.♙c4 is playable, but 18.♙b3 followed by ♘xe5 is simpler) 17.a5!± This is a little more cunning than capturing at once on e5. Now on 17...♙xa5 White plays 18.♖a1 ♙c7 19.♘xe5, while on 17...♘a4 he continues 18.b6 axb6 19.axb6, with advantage in both cases.

#### 16.♘g3 ♘c5 17.♙g5



### 17...♖e8

Not 17...♖xa4? 18.♙xf6 gxf6 19.♚d2+-. Against the simple threats of ♖h6 and ♘h5 there is no defence.

In the event of:

17...♗h8 18.♙xf6 gxf6 19.♘h4

White has a dangerous initiative on the kingside. The computer underestimates it, so I will take the variation a couple of moves further:

19...♙e6 20.♚f3 ♙e7 21.♙c4±

Here again, taking the a-pawn is dangerous, as after 21...♖xa4 22.♘hf5 the black king is in peril. On 22...♖b6 White plays 23.♙e4 to bring the rook to h4. If instead 22...♖c5, then 23.♘h6, after which the second knight will go to f5.

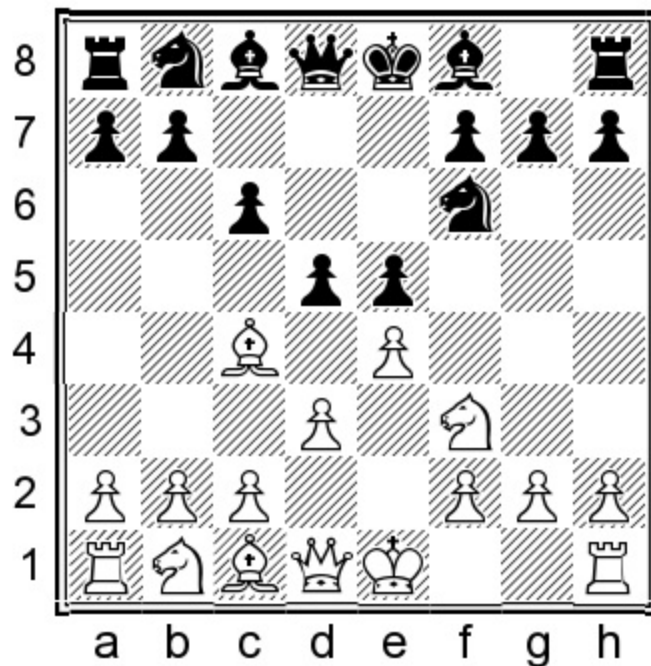
Instead of 21...♖xa4, a safer move appears to be 21...♙g8, but even then, after 22.a5 White retains a plus.

### 18.♙d2±

It is still hazardous for Black to take the a4-pawn, as White has a dangerous initiative after 18...♖xa4 19.♘e4. On 19...♙e7 he can continue with ♖e2; Black then has difficulty finding playable moves.

No doubt 18...♖f6 is an improvement, but after 19.a5 White is still slightly better.

## B) 4...d5



### 5.♙b3 ♙c7!?

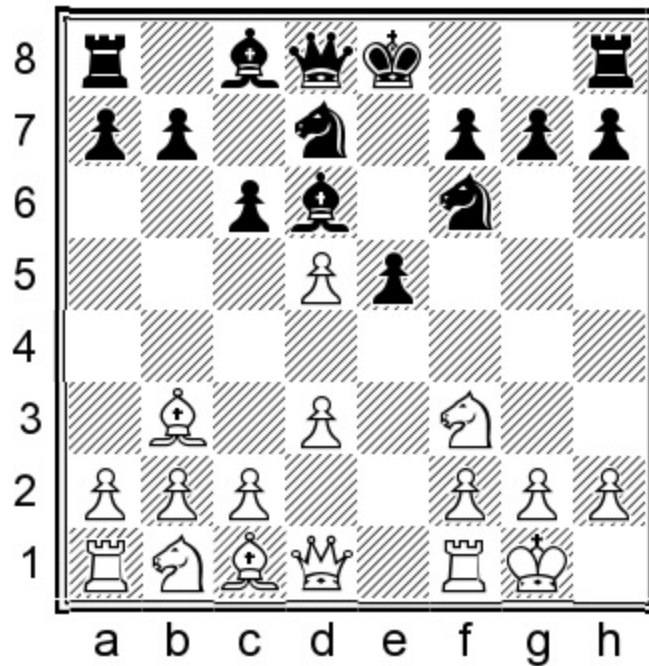
If we disregard some old games between little-known opponents, the move 5...♙c7 began to be employed only in 2017, by some Chinese players. Wang Yue played it in games with a fast time control; Yu Yangyi chose it for an important game in the European Team Championship. Too few games have been played for a definitive assessment of 5...♙c7, but we will try to study it in some detail.

We shall see 5...♙d6 in Chapter 5, 5...a5 in Chapter 6 and 5...♙b4† in Chapters 7 and 8.

Alternatives are:

a) 5...dxe4?! 6.♘g5 Now ...♙g4 is not an option for Black, so he has to continue with: 6...♙e6 7.♙xe6 fxe6 8.♘xe4± White has an appreciable advantage owing to the doubled pawns on the e-file.

b) 5...♘bd7 This has virtually never been chosen by strong players, so I will confine myself to some quite short variations. 6.0-0 ♙d6 (or 6...♙e7 7.exd5±, and whichever way Black retakes, 8.♞e1 is good) 7.exd5



And now:

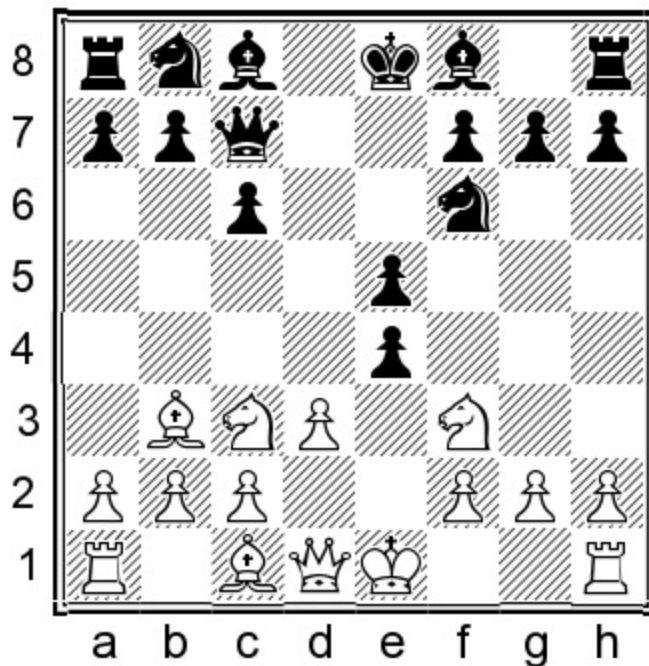
b1) 7...cxd5 8.♘c3 d4 9.♘b5± Next move White will play c2-c3 with chances of increasing his advantage. For example: 9...♙e7 10.c3 a6 11.cxd4 axb5 12.dxe5 ♘g4 13.d4±, and in spite of his extra piece, Black is in a bad position.

b2) 7...♘xd5 8.d4 0-0 9.♙g5± Black has too many pieces on the d-file; White has the advantage after either 9...f6 10.♙h4 or 9...♚c7 10.c4.

## 6.0-0

In the first few games White played 6.♘c3; afterwards it became clear that castling was better. I will show a few moves that can follow 6.♘c3 or 6.exd5:

a) 6.♘c3 dxe4



And now:

a1) 7. dxe4 dxe4 8. dxe4 This position occurred twice in games by Wang Yue at Riyadh 2017. In the first of them he played 8... e7?!, and after 9. dg5 g5 10. xg5 Carlsen exploited White's advantage to win; but in the second game Wang continued 8... g4! with an unclear position.

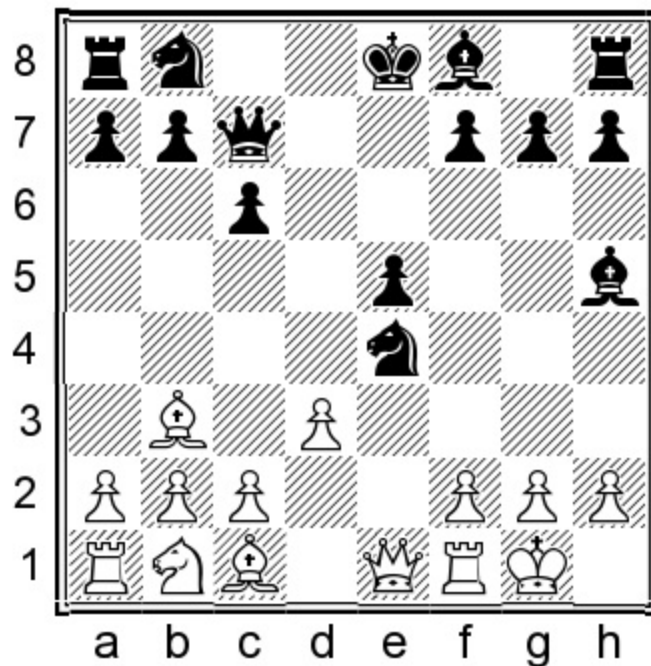
a2) 7. dg5 g4 8. d2 h5 9. dxe4 bd7 10. 0-0 0-0-0 White doesn't appear to have any advantage; for example 11. f4 can be met by 11... exf4 12. f2 b6, with simplification and a roughly equal position.

b) 6. exd5 cxd5 7. 0-0 e6 8. e1 c6 9. c3 a6 In spite of his slight lead in development, White cannot work up an initiative.

Now Black has **B1)** 6... dxe4 or **B2)** 6... a5!.

**B1) 6... dxe4 7. dg5 g4 8. d2 e1 h5 9. dxe4 dxe4**

Black must make this capture straight away and not give White the opportunity to bring up his other knight. In the case of 9... bd7?! 10. dbc3± the knight on e4 is too strong; then a good reply to 10... 0-0 or 10... e7 is 11. f4.

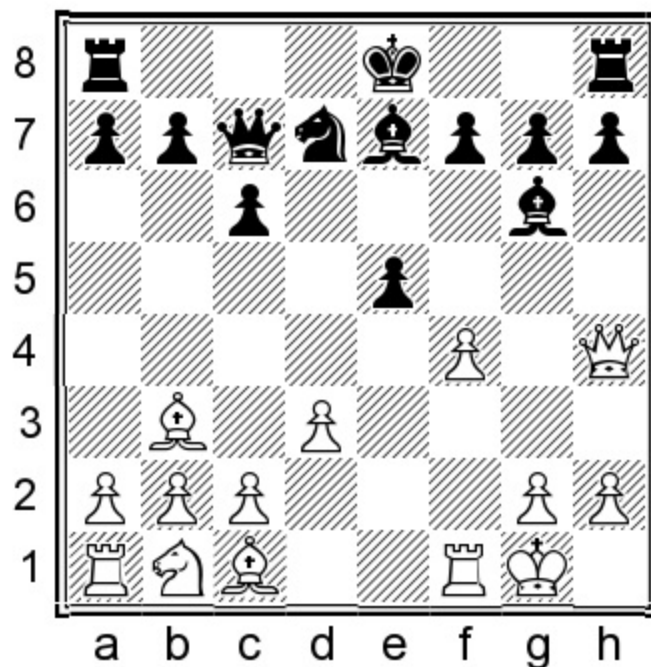


### 10. ♖xe4

In Karjakin – Yu Yangyi, Antalya 2017, White played instead 10.dxe4 ♘d7 11.f3, and had slightly the more pleasant position after 11...♘c5 12.♙e3. The more precise 11...♙c5† would have given approximate equality.

### 10...♙g6

Or: 10...♘d7 11.♙h4 (in Lu Shanglei – Yuxiang Fang, China 2017, White acquired a plus after 11.f4 ♙c5†, but after 11...0-0-0!? things aren't so clear; the queen move to h4 looks simpler) 11...♙g6 12.f4 ♙e7



13. ♙e1!? White keeps the bishop on e7 in his sights. Now after an exchange on f4 there will be no

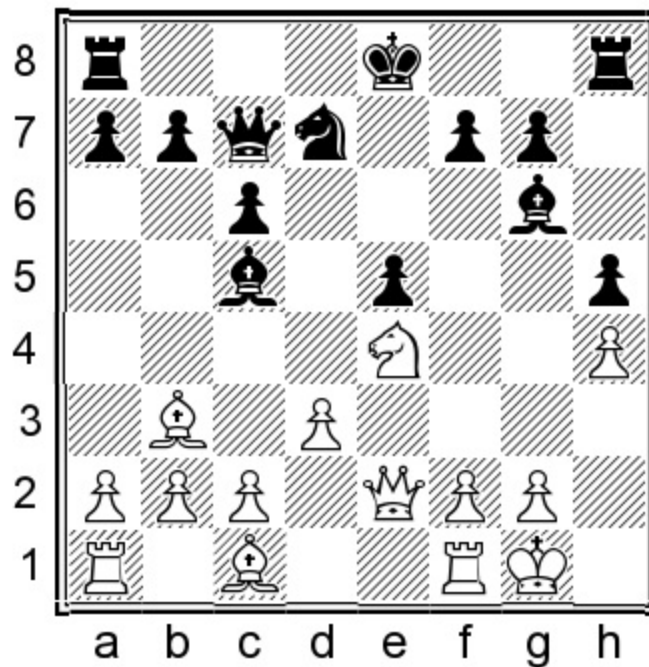
point in Black checking with ...♚b6†, as he will be unable to follow up with castling. The queen must retreat to d8. Play may continue: 13...exf4 14.♙xf4 ♚d8 15.♙d6 ♜f6 16.♙xe7 ♚xe7 17.♞d2± Then after the queens are exchanged on e1, White can move his knight forward with ♞c4-e5.

### 11.♚e2 ♙c5

Practically a forced move; it's essential to stop White from advancing his f-pawn. In the event of 11...♙e7 or 11...♞d7, White acquires a large plus with 12.f4.

For example, Xiangyu Xu chose 11...♞d7? in a rapid game, and could have immediately suffered after 12.f4!N 12...f6 13.f5 ♙f7 14.♙xf7† ♚xf7 15.♞c3 with a big advantage to White.

### 12.h4 h5 13.♞d2 ♞d7 14.♞e4



This position was reached by transposition in Wang Hao – Xiangyu Xu, Tianjin (rapid) 2018. In that game Black chose 14...0-0. We shall in addition examine some moves with the dark-squared bishop. Anticipating, I will say that in all these cases White stands better.

### 14...♙b6

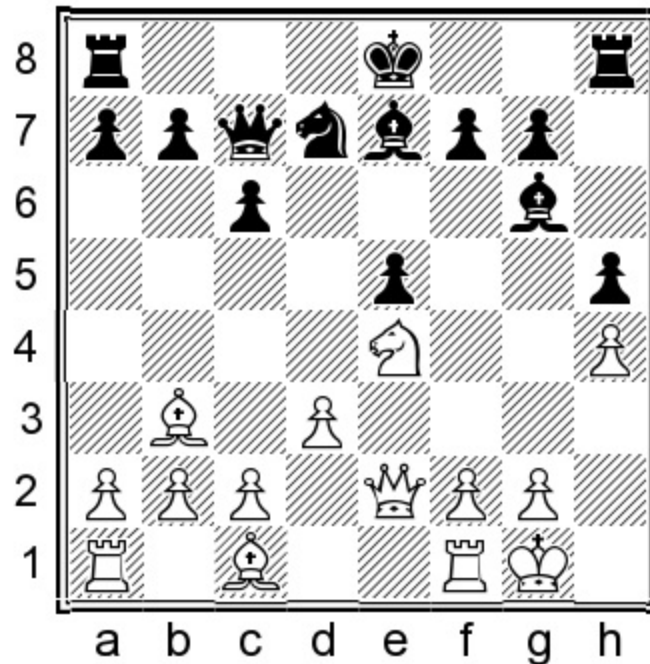
Or:

a) 14...♙d4 15.c3 ♙b6 16.a4 a5 17.♙c4 is analogous to the main line (14...♙b6 15.a4 a5 16.♙c4). Queenside castling is met by 18.b4 and kingside castling by 18.g4, with an attack in either case. A difference between this and the main line is that 17...♞c5?! is unplayable owing to an exchange on c5 followed by d3-d4. There remains 17...♙a7!?, intending ...♞b6. Then simply 18.♖e1 ♞b6 19.♙e3 is sufficient for an advantage.

b) 14...0-0 15.g4! ♙xe4 16.dxe4 hxg4 (16...♚d8?! is worse; the Wang Hao – Xiangyu Xu game

continued 17.♔g5 ♕e7 18.♖ad1±) 17.♗xg4 ♘f6 18.♗f3± The two bishops give White quite an advantage. The h4-pawn is not weak; we can support it with ♕g5 or push it with h5-h6.

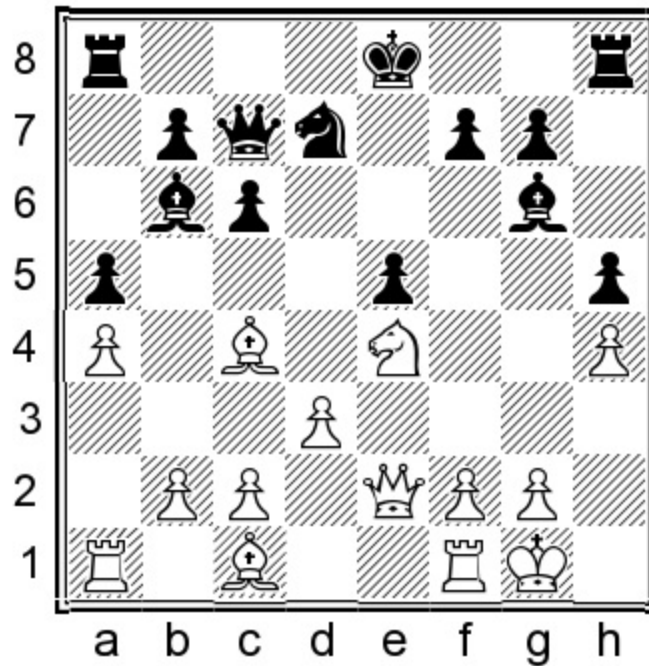
c) 14...♕e7



Here we can observe a difference between 6...dxe4 and 6...a5!. Specifically in this position the insertion of ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 would favour Black. With his pawn on a2, White can calmly answer ...♕xe4 by retaking with the queen. He therefore has a good continuation in: 15.f4! ♕xe4 16.♗xe4 ♘c5 17.♗e2± Black has problems with his e5-pawn – he doesn't want to take on f4 on account of ♕xf4 and ♖ae1. Probably 17...f6 is better, but after the simple 18.fxe5 White has a clear plus.

### 15.a4 a5 16.♕c4!?

The bishop clears the path for the b-pawn to go into attack if Black should castle queenside.



16...♞c5

If 16...0-0-0?! then 17.♞b1± with a dangerous attack. There is no defence against b2-b4; White will push this pawn forward after 17...♞c5 or almost any other move.

17.♞xc5 ♟xc5 18.♞e1 f6 19.♟e3±

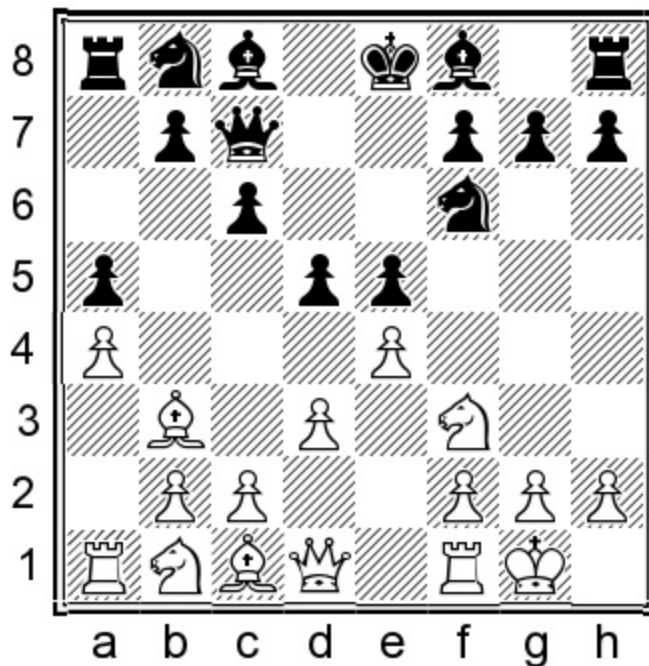
Black remains with some problems owing to his advanced pawns on a5 and h5. For example after 19...♟xe3 20.♞xe3 ♟f7, quite a good move is 21.b3, so as to answer ...♟xc4 with bxc4. If Black castles, White will play ♞f3, attacking the h5-pawn and maintaining a plus.

### B2) 6...a5!

As in some other lines, Black is keen to insert the moves ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 in order to weaken the white bishop's position on b3. For instance with his pawn on a4 White won't want to allow ...♞c5xb3. I consider that 6...a5! is the only move to give Black chances of equalizing.

White can reply **B21)** 7.a4 or **B22)** 7.a3!?N.

### B21) 7.a4



The standard continuation. At first I thought White could easily gain an advantage with this move, but then it turned out that it wasn't all so simple. I therefore began studying 7.a3 which constitutes an interesting alternative.

### 7...dxe4

After 7...♙d6 8.exd5 ♘xd5 9.♙xd5 cxd5 10.♘c3± Black has difficulties with the defence of his centre pawns. In support of this, I will give a short variation: 10...♙e6 11.♖e1 ♘c6 12.♘b5 ♚d7 13.♘xd6† ♚xd6 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.♙f4± With the aid of a small tactical ploy, White recovers his pawn and obtains a large plus.

### 8.♘g5 ♙g4

A standard manoeuvre in this variation; Black transfers his bishop to h5 to defend the f7-pawn.

### 9.♚e1

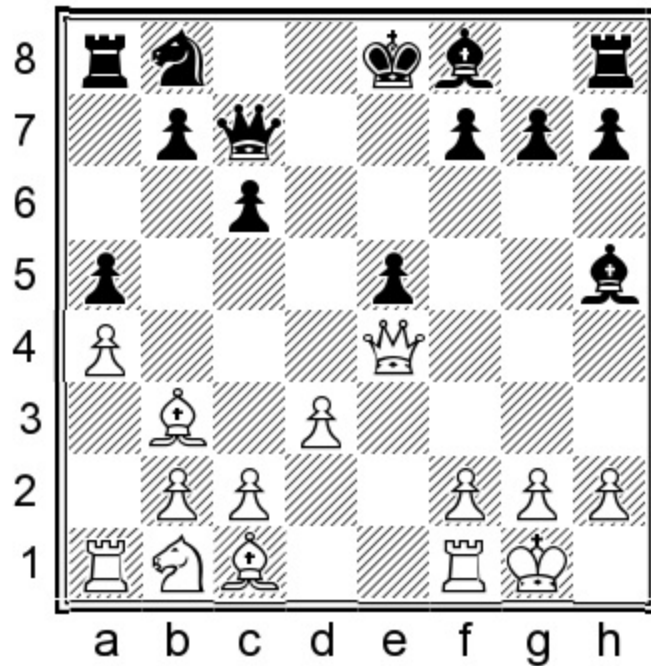
Of course not 9.♙xf7†?? ♚xf7 10.♘xf7 ♙xd1 11.♘xh8 ♙xc2-+ and White can resign.

### 9...♙h5 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4

After 10...♘bd7 11.♘xf6† ♘xf6 12.f4 ♙c5† 13.♙h1± the pawn on e5 remains defenceless, and it isn't clear whether Black will manage to recover it.

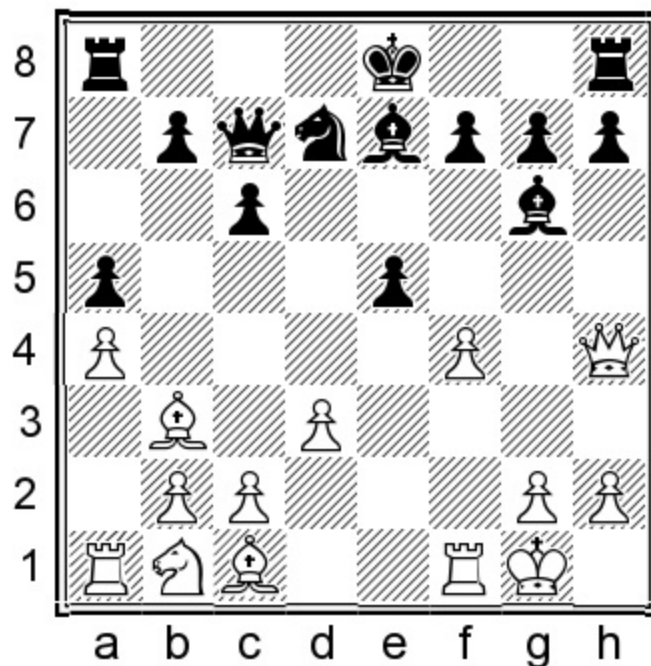
### 11.♚xe4

The continuation in Fedorchuk – Miton, Hamburg 2019, looks harmless: 11.dxe4 ♘d7 12.f3 ♙c5† 13.♙h1 0-0=



Now Black has **B211)** 11...♘d7 and **B212)** 11...♙g6.

**B211)** 11...♘d7 12.♙h4 ♙g6 13.f4 ♙e7



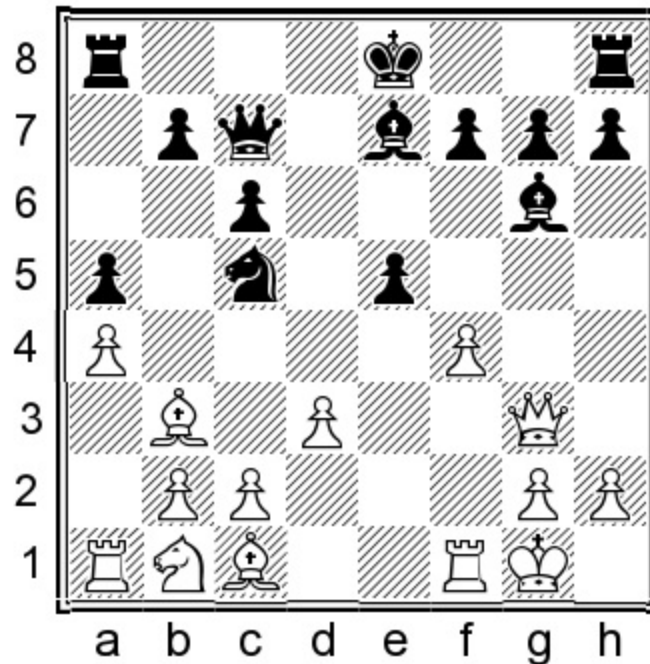
**14.♙g3!?**

An ambitious continuation involving a pawn sacrifice and an attack on the kingside.

With 14.♙f2 exf4 15.♙xf4 ♙d8 16.d4 0-0 17.♘d2 White keeps up a small amount of pressure; 14.♙g3 is more complicated but more promising.

### 14...♞c5

After 14...exf4 15.♙xf4 ♚b6† 16.♖h1± the queen on b6 is exposed to ♜c4. On 16...0-0 the simple 17.♞d2 is sufficient, but 17.♞a3!? is also interesting, aiming to transpose (by 17...♞c5 18.♙a2) into the note to move 16 below.



### 15.♙a2!

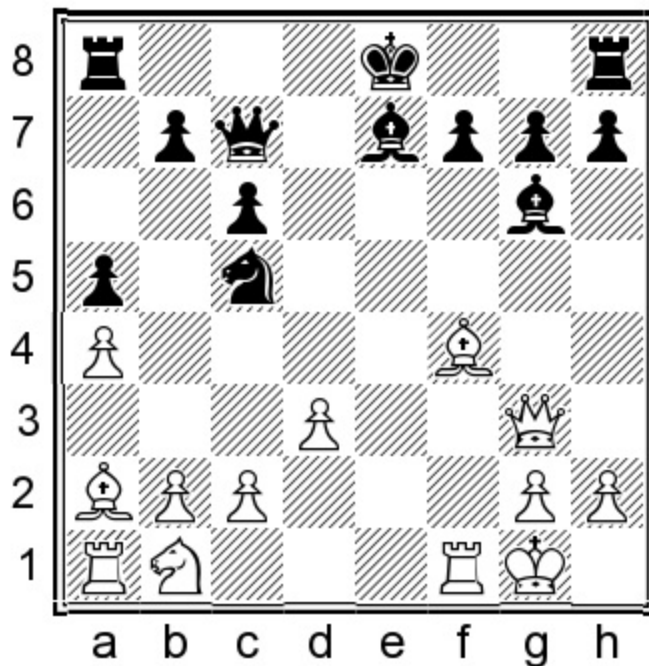
Better than 15.f5 ♞xb3 16.cxb3 ♙h5 17.♚h3 ♚b6† 18.♙e3 ♙c5 with an unclear position. After the exchange on c5 Black will play 20...♙e2 21.♞e1 0-0-0.

### 15...exf4

Not 15...♚b6?! 16.♙e3!, with a large plus after 16...♚xb2 17.♞d2 or 16...exf4 17.♚xf4.

In answer to 15...e4, White can play 16.d4 ♞d7 17.f5 with an advantage in the ending.

### 16.♙xf4



### 16...♚d8

Or 16...♜b6 17.♔h1, and now:

a) 17...♘a4? 18.♙b3+- Now 18...♘c5 is met by 19.♙c7 trapping the queen, while 18...♘xb2 loses to 19.♙d6.

b) 17...♜xb2?! 18.♘a3!, and the black queen will have to take a run up and down the board – for example 18...0-0 19.♙e5 ♜b4 20.♞f4 ♜d2 21.♜g4±, threatening to win the queen with ♞d1. Black must play 21...♙f6, whereupon White can capture twice on f6 with a big advantage.

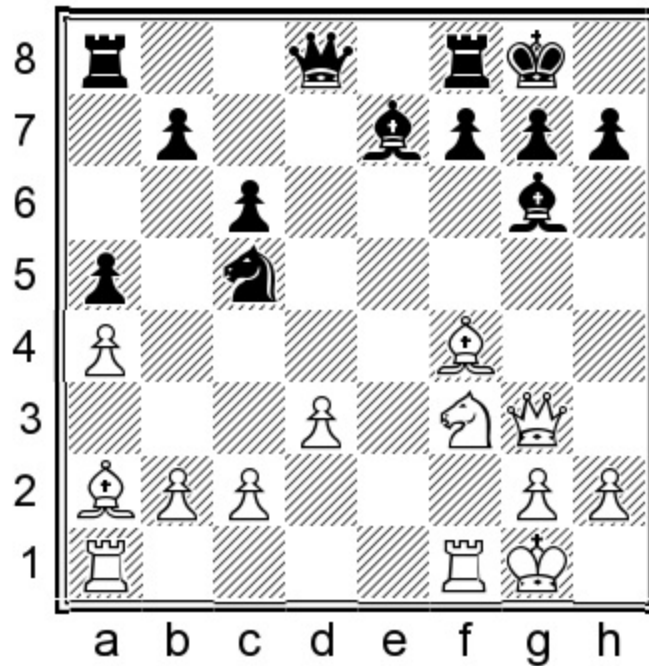
c) 17...0-0 18.♘a3 ♘xa4 19.♘c4 ♜d8 20.♞f3± Despite the pawn minus, White has a fair advantage. Now 20...♘c5 21.♘e5 is bad for Black, but also after 20...♙f6 21.♙c7 or 20...♙h4 21.♜g4 he has difficulty defending.

### 17.♘d2 0-0

Not 17...♘a4? 18.♙xf7† ♙xf7 19.♙e5!+- If the knight moves, White wins with 20.♞xf7. In the event of 19...♙d5 20.♞xa4, the black king remains in the centre.

### 18.♘f3

Thanks to his superior development, White has the upper hand. It remains for us to look at what happens if Black captures the a-pawn.



18...♖xa4 19.♙e5 ♘c5

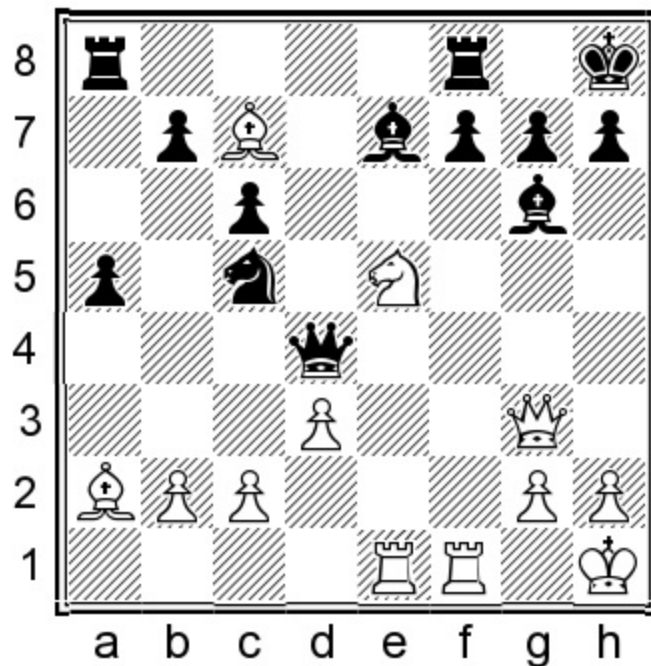
Or 19...b5 20.♔h1!? → (the immediate 20.h4 ♙f6 21.♙xf6 ♚xf6 22.♘e5 is not bad either, but we first tuck our king away, aiming for h2-h4 next move) and Black has serious problems.

20.♞ae1

White has a dangerous attack based on h4-h5. For instance after 20...♚d7? or 20...♘e6? White wins with h2-h4. Instead Black must move his king aside, in order to meet the advance of the h-pawn with ...f7-f6.

In the case of 20.h4?! ♘d7 21.♙c7 ♚c8∞ White would merely have compensation for the pawn, not a comfortable plus.

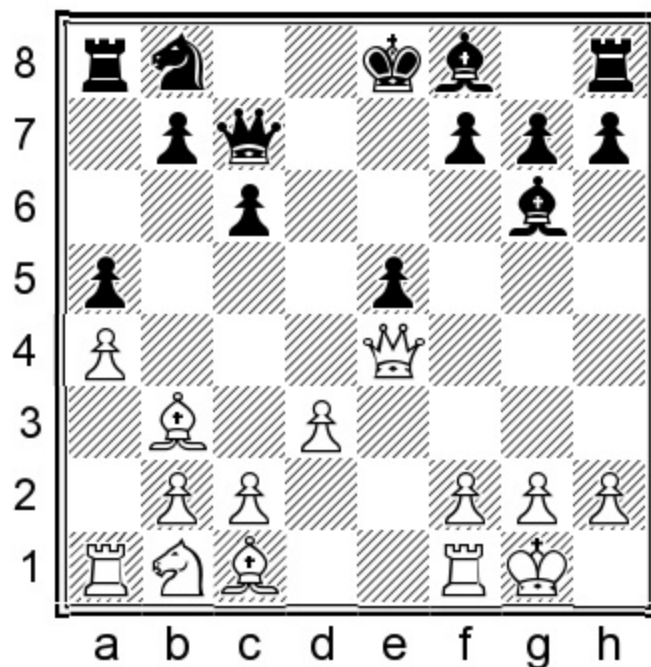
20...♔h8 21.♙c7 ♚d7 22.♘e5 ♚d4† 23.♔h1±



Now 23...♕h4? loses: White continues with 24.♖xg6† fxg6 25.♗xf8†, exchanges queens, and plays g2-g3. Then when the bishop moves, he plays ♘d6 winning a piece.

The only move for Black is 23...♙h4. Then after 24.♖e3 ♗xe3 25.♗xe3 White retains a plus, thanks to his active pieces.

### B212) 11...♙g6

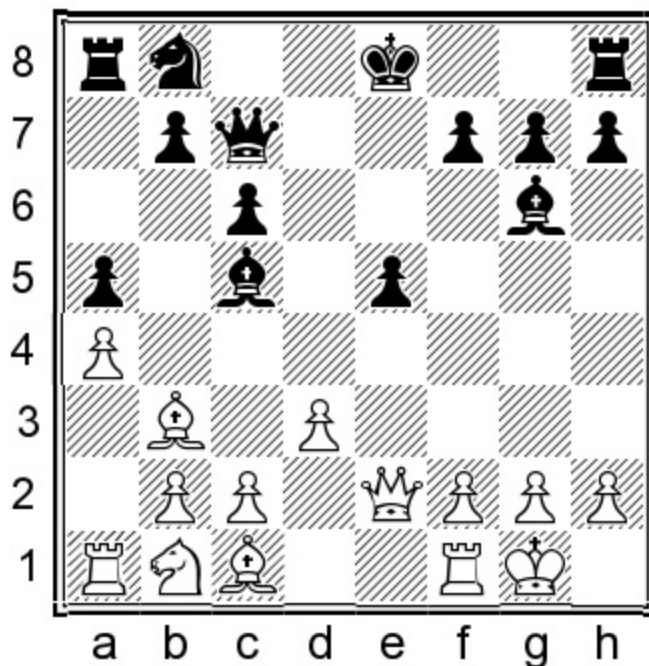


White now has a number of interesting possibilities, but none of them can be said to guarantee him an advantage. That is why I like the idea of 7.a3!?

We will examine **B2121)** 12.♖e2!? and **B2122)** 12.♖g4.

## B2121) 12. ♖e2!? ♔c5

If 12... ♗e7? then 13. f4±.



At this point I have studied nearly all White's normal moves. At first the computer rates the position in White's favour, but after a few moves the assessment diminishes. I will give the most logical continuation:

### 13. h4

The inclusion of the moves h2-h4 ...h7-h5 is often useful to White, as he obtains the g5-square and may also proceed with g2-g4 if Black castles kingside.

### 13... h5

In the event of 13...h6 14. ♖g4 h5 (or 14... ♖d7 15. ♖g3±) 15. ♖g5 ♗d7 16. ♗d2± Black has serious problems due to the difficulty of castling. Obviously 16...0-0? 17. ♖xg6 is unplayable, but White also has a big advantage after 16... ♗e7 17. ♖g3 0-0-0 18. ♗c4.

### 14. ♗d2 ♗d7 15. ♗e4

This position could arise from various move-orders. For example the knight could have gone to e4 via c3, or h2-h4 ...h7-h5 could have been inserted a move later.

### 15... ♗e7

White can meet 15... ♗d4 with 16. ♗c4!, clearing the path of the b-pawn and anticipating Black's castling (on either side). Now if 16...0-0-0, then 17. c3 ♗a7 18. b4; if 16...0-0 then 17. g4; or if

16...♖b6, then 17.c3 ♗xc4 18.cxd4 ♗d6 19.♗g3, with advantage to White in all three cases.

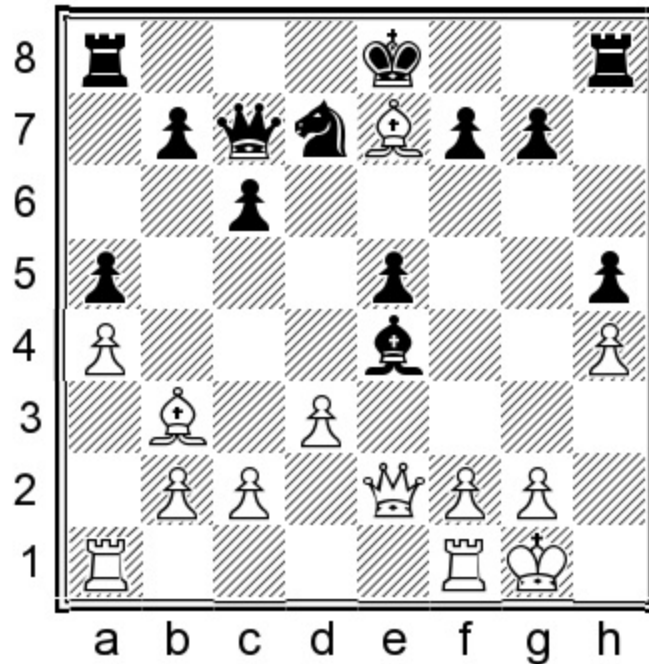
### 16.♗g5

At first I liked this position for White, but then I discovered an interesting possibility for Black.

### 16...♗xe4!?N

After 16...♗xg5 17.♗xg5 White has a small but stable plus, owing to his well-placed knight on g5. He will meet 17...♗c5 with 18.♗c4 0-0 19.♖e3, while on 17...0-0 he can play ♖e3 at once.

### 17.♗xe7



### 17...♗xg2!

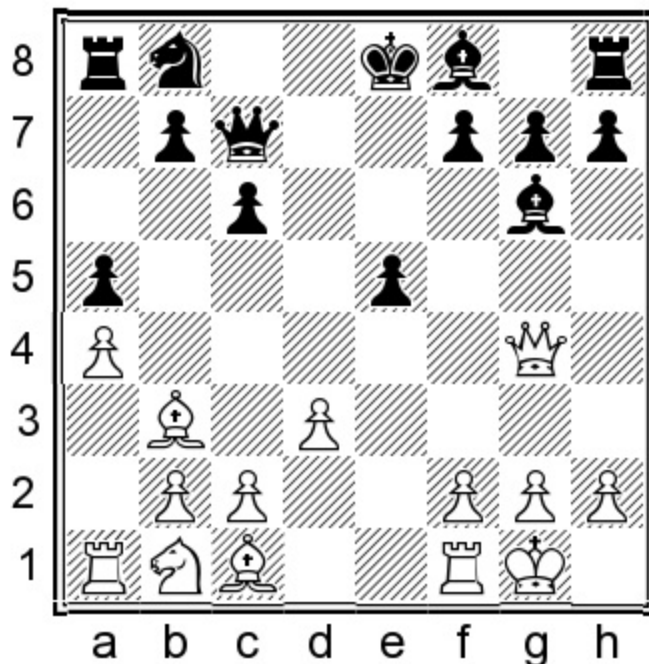
This is the right pawn to take! Not 17...♗xd3?! 18.♖xd3 ♗xe7 19.♖fe1± with a dangerous attack. White also has an obvious plus if the black bishop retreats, for example 17...♗d5 18.♗xd5 cxd5 19.♗a3.

### 18.♗xg2 ♗xe7 19.f4 ♖ae8!∞

After 19...f6?! 20.d4 White would be better, thanks to the opening of the d-file.

But now 20.d4 is not good, owing to 20...e4! – the point is that d8 has been made available to the black king. Instead White has to choose between 20.fxg5 and 20.♖ae1!?. In either case the position remains unclear.

B2122) 12.♖g4



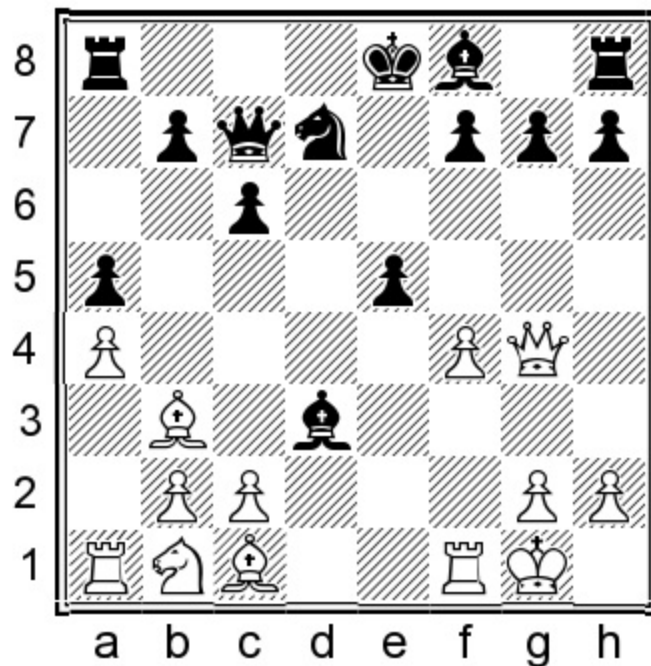
### 12...♞d7

Or 12...♙d6 13.f4 exf4 14.♞a3 0-0 15.♞c4 The simplest way to gain a plus is to acquire the bishop pair (but after 15...♙xf4 and exchanges on f4 White is also a little better, as ♞c4 will leave the a5-pawn weak). 15...♞d7 16.♞xd6 ♙xd6 17.♙xf4 ♙xf4 18.♙xf4 The two bishops give White a stable advantage. It would be inaccurate to retake with 18...♙xf4, because after 18...♞c5 19.♙c4 Black could play 19...♞xa4!. But that strike is not so good now, as at the end of the variation White will capture on c4 with his rook.

White now has **B21221)** 13.f4 or **B21222)** 13.♞d2. The latter occurred in the only game that I could find in which this position arose.

### **B21221) 13.f4 ♙xd3!**

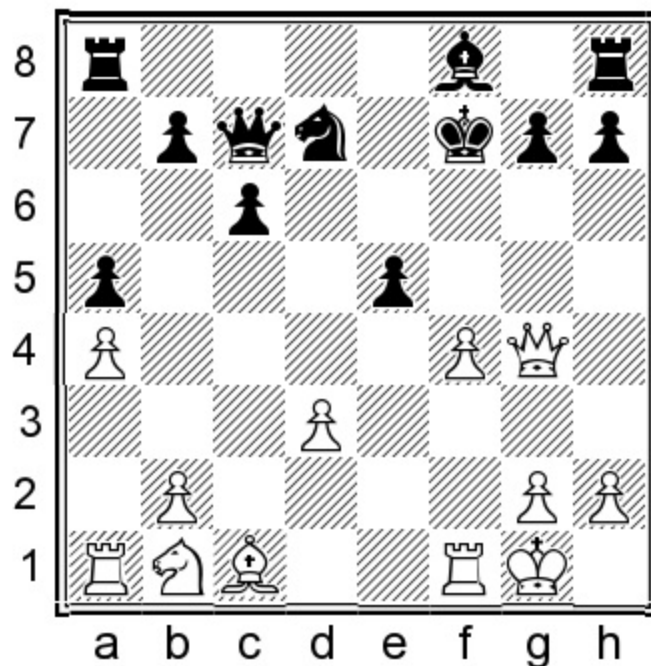
The principal continuation. After 13...f5 14.♙h3 or 13...♞f6 14.♙h3 White has the advantage in a promising position.



14. ♔xf7†

Or 14.cxd3!? ♕b6† 15.d4 ♖xb3 16.fxe5 ♗e6 (after 16...0-0-0 17.♘c3 White has a small plus) 17.♗xe6† fxe6 18.♘c3. White appears to be rather more comfortably placed, thanks to his knight which will go to e4. But in view of the reduced material it will be difficult for him to develop an initiative.

14...♕xf7 15.cxd3



15...♕c5†

Or 15...♘f6!? 16.fxe5 ♖xe5. At first sight there are a number of moves to give White a clear plus,

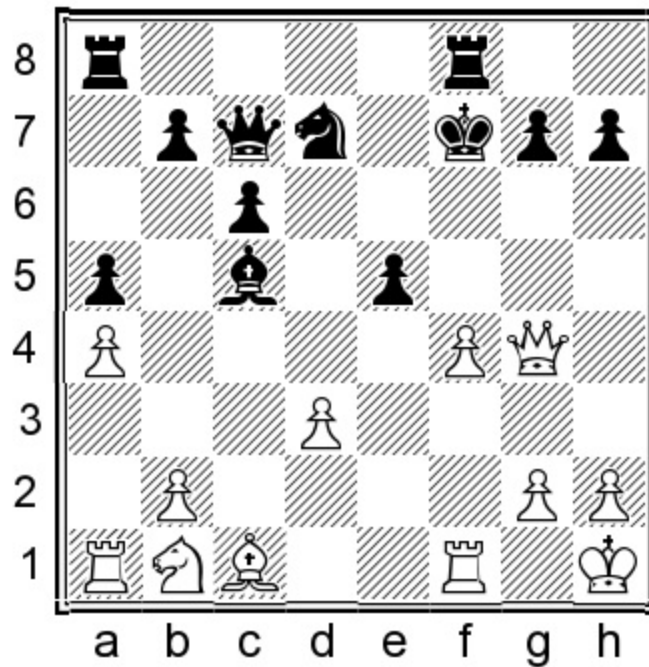
but against any of them Black has a good continuation that keeps the position close to equality. For example on 17.♔g5 it would be bad to play 17...♙c5?!† or 17...♙d6?! 18.♚h4, but instead Black has 17...♞d8!.

White obtains more chances from 17.d4, but whether he has an advantage after 17...♔g8!? is not so clear.

### 16.♔h1 ♞hf8!

It's essential to move the king away at once, without wasting time on ...♜f6.

After 16...♜f6 17.fxe5 ♚xe5 18.♔g5 ♙d6 19.♚h4 ♞hf8 Black is able to remove his king, but his queen is badly placed, allowing White to bring his pieces into the centre with gains of tempo: 20.d4 (20.♙xf6?! ♔g8∞) 20...♚e7 21.♞c3± with ♞ae1 to follow. White obviously has a dangerous initiative because Black lacks the one tempo for ...♞ae8.

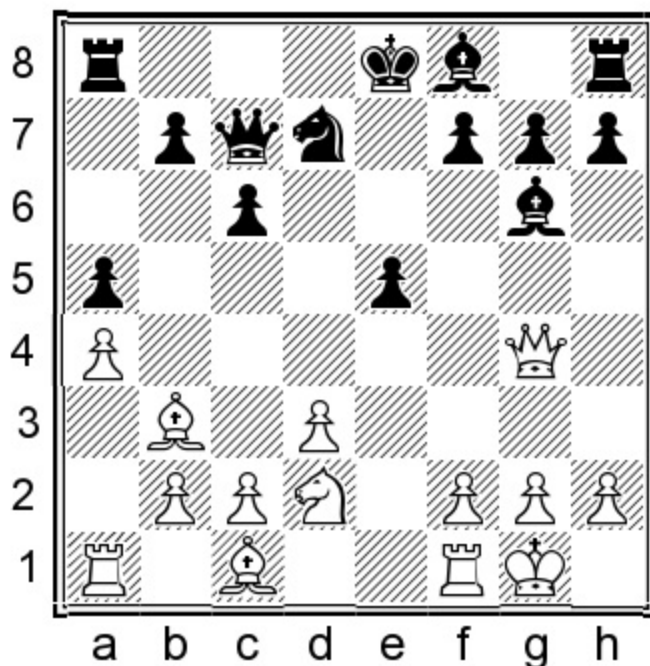


### 17.♞c3

Black has a comfortable game after 17.fxe5†?! ♔g8; on 18.♙f4 he has 18...♚xe5.

### 17...♔g8 18.♞e4 ♙d4 19.f5 ♜f6 20.♚h4

There is plenty of play in the position; the white side is easier to handle, but Black has his counter-chances if he continues correctly. White's play is based on ♜g5 or ♙g5; for example he can answer 20...♚d7 either with 21.♞g5, heading for e6, or with 21.♙g5 ♜xe4 22.dxe4 – after which his rook has the possibility to join in via a3.



### 13...♙e7

With 13...♙c5!? 14.♞e1 (or 14.♘f3 0-0-0 with attacks on opposite wings and chances for both sides) 14...0-0 15.♘f3 the same position arises as in the main line, except for the black bishop on c5. In my view the bishop is slightly better placed there than on e7, and consequently Black has more equalizing chances.

### 14.♞e1

The immediate 14.♘f3 is imprecise because Black can then play ...0-0-0. Now queenside castling would be bad because of 15.♘c4.

### 14...0-0 15.♘f3

White prepares ♘h4 with the aim of acquiring the bishop pair and a small but stable plus.

### 15...♙b4 16.♞e2 ♞ae8 17.♘h4 ♘f6

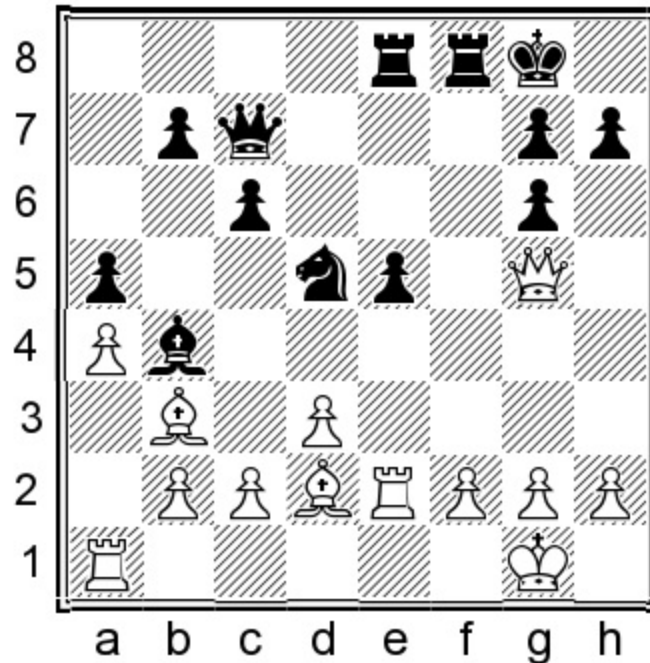
Up to here we have been following the correspondence game Molgachev – Zordick, corr. 2018. In that game White played 18.♞g3, but I prefer a different move:

### 18.♞g5!?!N 18...♘d5

Or 18...♙h8 19.♘xg6† f×g6 20.♙d2 ♙c5, with approximately the same position as in the main line – only in this case the f2-pawn is not under attack, so White may play 21.♙h1.

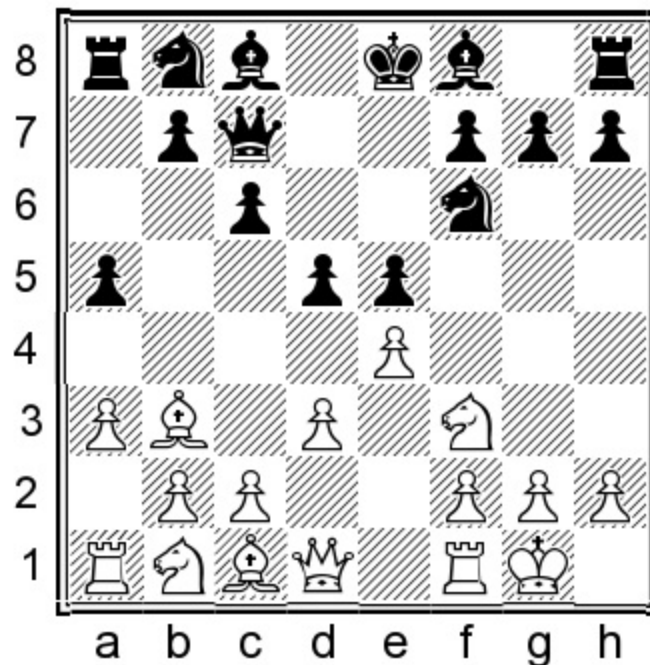
### 19.♘xg6 f×g6

After 19...h×g6 20.♞g4± White has a clear plus because Black has no counterplay on the f-file.



White has a slight but definite advantage. Now 20...♔d2 21.♚xd2 isn't very good for Black, as he will have problems with the defence of his e-pawn. An improvement is 20...♔c5, to which we can reply 21.♚h4 – fortifying the f2-pawn and not allowing ...♗f5 to be played with tempo.

### B22) 7.a3!?N



A very interesting move; the resulting positions differ substantially from those with the pawn on a4. There are some situations where the pawn would be better on a4 than a3, but queenside castling will now be a more complicated matter for Black, owing to the possibility of b2-b4.

## 7...dxe4

Black may also play:

### 7...♙d6

This calls to mind 5...♙d6 in Chapter 5 – only in this case ...♚c7 appears redundant. No one is very likely to play this way, so I will confine myself to a short variation:

### 8.♘c3

With the pawn on a3 not a4, the capture 8.exd5 is less good because surprisingly Black's queen's rook can protect his d-pawn: 8...a4! 9.♙a2 cxd5 10.♘c3 ♖a5! with an unclear position.

### 8...d4

Or 8...dxe4 9.♘g5 0-0 10.♘cxe4±, and after the exchange of knights with 10...♘xe4 11.♘xe4 White can obtain the bishop pair; if 11...♙f5 then 12.♚f3 is a good reply.

### 9.♘e2 0-0 10.c3

10.♙g5 is also interesting, giving White a slight edge after 10...♘h5 or 10...♘bd7 11.♙a2!? h6 12.♙d2.

### 10...c5

The most natural move.

White also has a plus after 10...dxc3 11.bxc3, or 10...♙g4 11.♘h4 with h2-h3 and f2-f4 to follow.

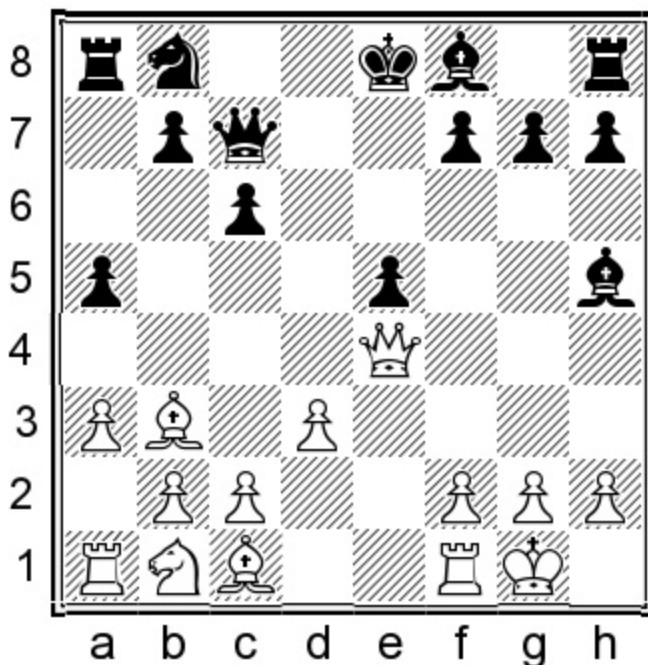
### 11.♙g5 ♘h5 12.♘g3 ♘xg3 13.fxg3

Thanks to his lead in development and the half-open f-file, White has the advantage.

## 8.♘g5 ♙g4

Once again we see this standard method of defending f7.

## 9.♚e1 ♙h5 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♚xe4



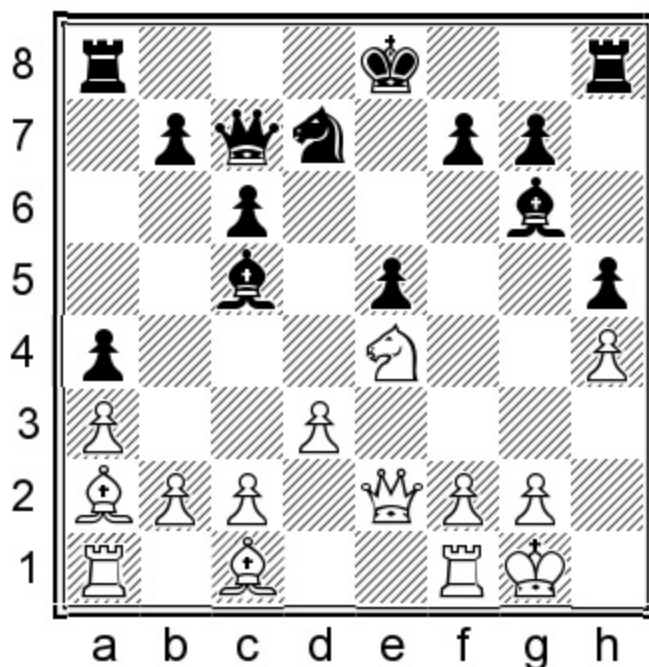
### 11...♔g6

Or 11...♞d7!? 12.♚h4 ♔g6 13.f4 ♕e7 14.♚f2 exf4 15.♔xf4. Now Black has to return his queen to d8 in view of the f7-weakness. 15...♚d8 16.♞d2 0-0 17.♞ae1 White is conveniently centralized, although objectively his advantage is minimal. He will meet 17...♞c5 with 18.♔a2, maintaining a little pressure.

And in answer to 17...♔f6 he can simply play 18.♞c4 or 18.♔d6 ♞e8 19.♞e4, aiming to secure the two bishops.

### 12.♚e2 ♔c5

Or 12...a4 13.♔a2 ♔c5 14.h4 h5 15.♞d2 ♞d7 16.♞e4.



At this point Black has various possible bishop moves, but White always keeps a small plus:

a) A good answer to 16...♔b6 is 17.♔g5, and now 17...f6 18.♔e3, and the black pawn on a4 helps White to create play on the queenside. On 18...0-0-0, both 19.♞c3 and 19.♞ab1 are good moves.

b) White can meet 16...♔d4 with 17.♚f3!?, to see where the black king is going. On 17...0-0-0 he will play 18.♞b1 and advance his b-pawn. On 17...0-0 he has 18.g4!?

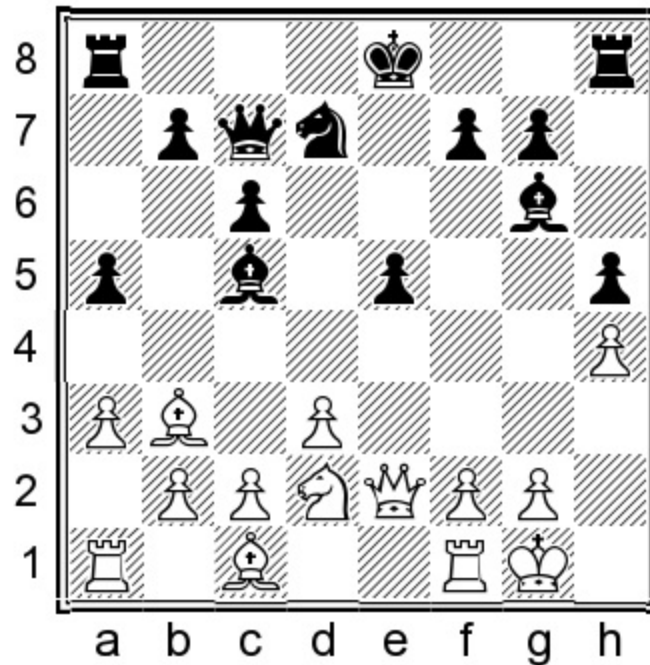
c) If 16...♔e7, then 17.f4 ♔xe4 18.♚xe4 is good for White; with the bishop on a2 Black doesn't have the chance to capture it with ...♞c5xb3.

### 13.h4 h5

Alternatively: 13...h6 14.h5 ♔h7 15.♚g4! (after 15.♞e1 0-0 16.♚xe5 ♚xe5 17.♞xe5 ♞d7, Black would obtain compensation based on his lead in development and the weakness of the h4-pawn; but now we prevent him from castling short and acquire an advantage with equal material) 15...f5 16.♚h3

♖d7 17.♙e6 ♜f8 18.♙d2± Thanks to the possibility of b2-b4, White has gained the upper hand. If Black castles, both 19.b4 and 19.♙c3 are good replies. On 18...♙d4 White plays 19.♙c3.

14.♗d2 ♖d7



15.♙a2!?

It was for the sake of this waiting move that White played 7.a3 rather than 7.a4. The difference is that he will be able to attack on the queenside if Black castles long.

The position after 15.♗e4 ♙e7 16.♙g5∞ was examined with the white pawn on a4 (see B2121); in this case it is no better on a3.

15...0-0-0

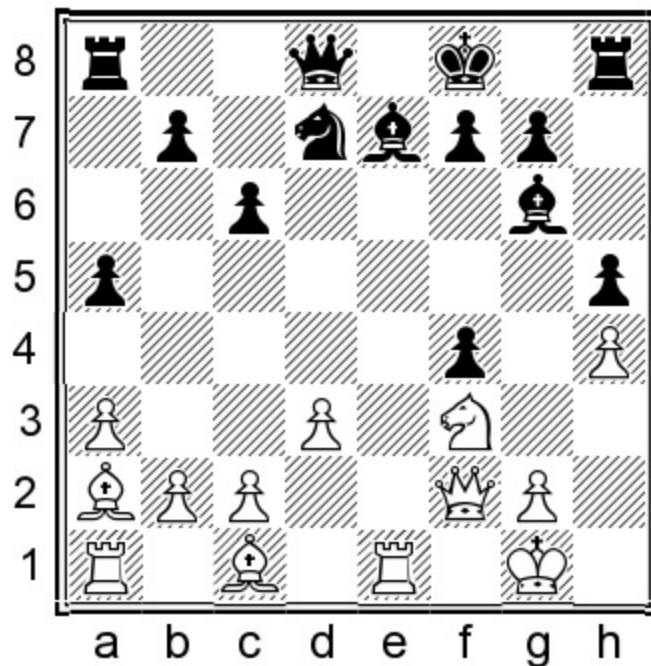
At first sight castling queenside looks risky, but actually it isn't all so simple. For instance after 16.b4 ♙d4 Black has a good game.

Alternatives to castling long are:

a) 15...a4, transposing to the variation 12...a4 13.♙a2 ♙c5.

b) 15...0-0 16.♗e4 ♙e7 17.g4 ♙xe4 18.dxe4 hxg4 19.♜xg4 ♖f6 20.♜f5 Owing to his two bishops, White's position is a little more pleasant. Not a bad reply to 20...♜c8 is 21.♜f3; then after the queens are exchanged on g4, White can play ♙g5.

c) 15...♙e7 (Black decides to withdraw his bishop at once, counting on 16.♗f3 after which ...0-0 cannot be met by g2-g4) 16.f4! exf4 17.♜e1 ♜d8 18.♗f3 ♖f8 19.♜f2!±



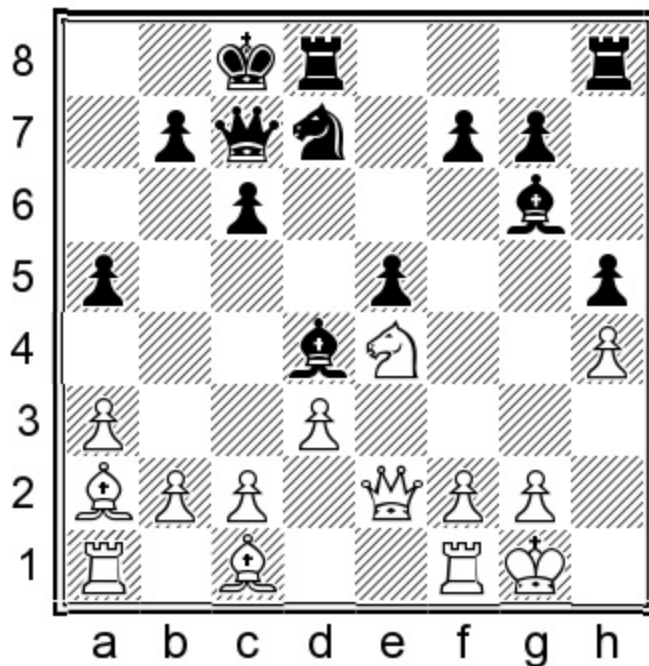
It's best to protect the h4-pawn before recapturing on f4. Now in answer to 19...♙d6 or 19...♚c7 White will play 20.♘g5 and win his pawn back, while Black's problems with his king will remain.

### 16.♘e4

If 16.b4, then 16...♙d4 17.♖b1 ♘f6! 18.bxa5 ♘g4⇝ with a complicated position and mutual chances.

### 16...♙d4

Against 16...♙b6 or 16...♙a7 White can continue 17.♙e3 ♙xe3 18.♚xe3 ♘f6 19.f3±. By bolstering the knight with the f-pawn, we avoid the opening of the d-file. On 19...♘d5 we can play 20.♚f2; the black knight doesn't in any way hinder b2-b4.



### 17. ♕f3!?

The queen is needed on f3 to stop Black from activating his knight. The answer to 17. ♖b1 could be 17... ♗f6.

An obvious-looking move is 17.c3. I will give a short variation as an example of what can follow:

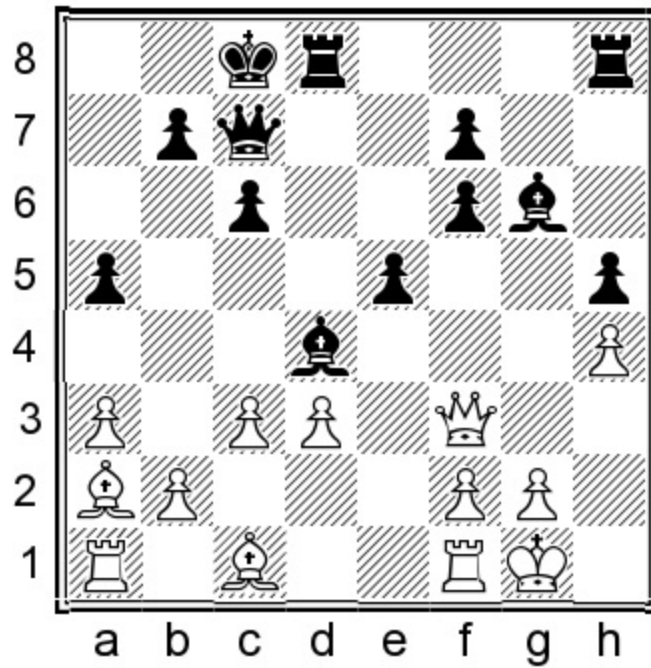
17... ♙a7 By provoking c2-c3, Black has weakened the d3-pawn, and this allows him to create counterplay. 18. ♙e3 (after 18.b4 ♗f6 19. ♙g5 ♖d7∞ the drawback of the pawn's position on c3 is obvious) 18... ♙xe3 19. ♕xe3 ♗f6∞ The weakened pawn on d3 makes it hard for White to attack on the queenside. Black can continue, for instance, with ... ♗g4 or ... ♗d5-f4.

### 17...a4

In pushing this pawn, Black prepares in advance for White's b2-b4. There is no point in attacking the pawn with 18. ♗c3, as after 18... ♗f6 Black would have good counterplay.

Alternatives are:

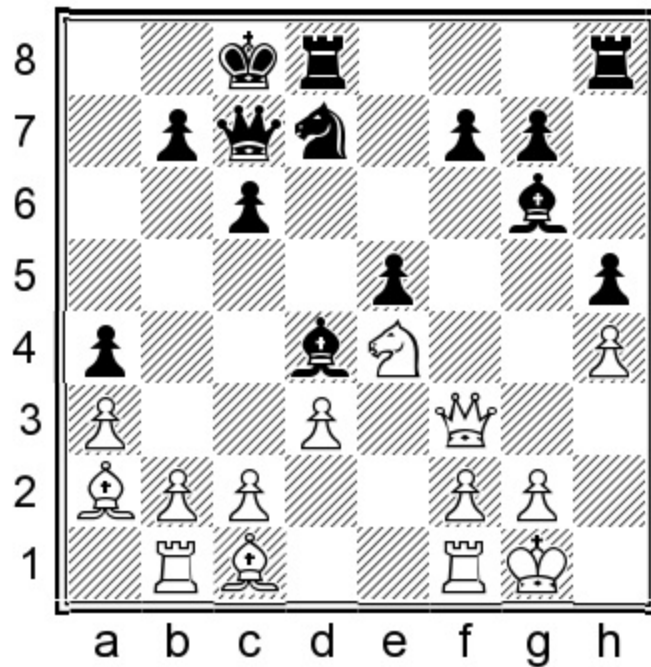
a) 17... ♗f6 18. ♗xf6 gxf6 19.c3



With a small plus after 19...♙b6 20.♚xf6 or 19...♙c5 20.b4 ♜e7 21.♞d1.

b) 17...♞he8 18.c3 ♜a7 19.b4 The insertion of the moves ♞f3 ...♞he8 is clearly in White's favour, hence he has a slight advantage.

### 18.♞b1



### 18...♞he8

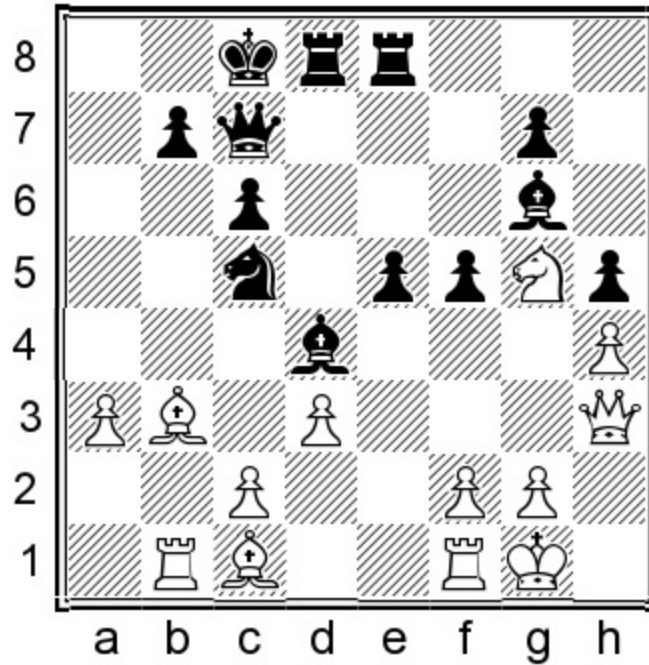
Or:

a) 18...♞f6 19.♞xf6! (after 19...♙g5 ♞xe4 20...♙d8 ♞xd8 21.dxe4 ♞xh4 Black has adequate

compensation for the exchange) 19...gxf6 20.♖xf6 e4 21.♗g5 With a small plus for White after 21...exd3 22.♙f4 or 21...♙e5 22.d4! ♖xd4 23.♙e3.

b) 18...♘c5 19.♘g3± By removing our knight to g3, we aim to exchange it for the bishop on d4 rather than the black knight. Now most moves on Black's part will be met by 20.♘e2. While against 19...♘d7, quite a good continuation is 20.♙g5 f6 21.♙d2, stopping Black from playing ...♘f6.

**19.b4 axb3 20.♙xb3 f5 21.♘g5 ♘c5 22.♗h3**



The queen on h3 prevents Black's ...e5-e4. Thanks to the half-open b-file, White has a slight edge. Now 22...♖d7 will be met by 23.♘f3, and the threat of ♘xd4 will induce Black to capture with ...♘xb3.

If instead Black plays 22...♙b8, White can reply 23.a4 to bring his bishop out to a3, or alternatively 23.♘f3!?.

### Conclusion

It was only in 2017 that 5...♗c7 began to be played at a high level, and as yet there have been too few games to enable a comprehensive assessment of the whole variation. It may be said with confidence that White's best reply is 6.0-0!, and after 6...dxe4 7.♘g5 he definitely gains a plus.

There have been just a handful of games featuring 6...a5!, after which Black has chances to obtain quite a decent position. In response to 6...a5! White has the choice between two lines. He can play 7.a4 in order subsequently to bring his knight to h4, aiming to acquire a slight edge based on the two bishops.

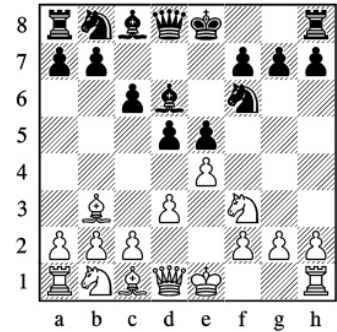
Or he can play 7.a3!?!N to make it more difficult for Black to castle queenside. After that, White can withdraw his queen to e2 and play the cunning 15.♙a2!?. This last possibility looks very interesting

and has yet to be encountered in practice.

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# Chapter 5

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3...c6 4.♘f3 d5 5.♙b3 ♙d6

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1.e4 e5 2.♙c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6 4.♘f3 d5 5.♙b3 ♙d6

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### 1.e4 e5 2.♙c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6 4.♘f3 d5 5.♙b3 ♙d6

This move, which used to be considered the main line, is now less popular than 5...a5 or 5...♙b4†. Nor is this surprising. White has a promising position after either the active 6.exd5!? or the relatively quiet 6.♘c3, which aims at acquiring a small, solid plus. I like both of these moves, so I will give the readers the opportunity to choose which one suits them better.

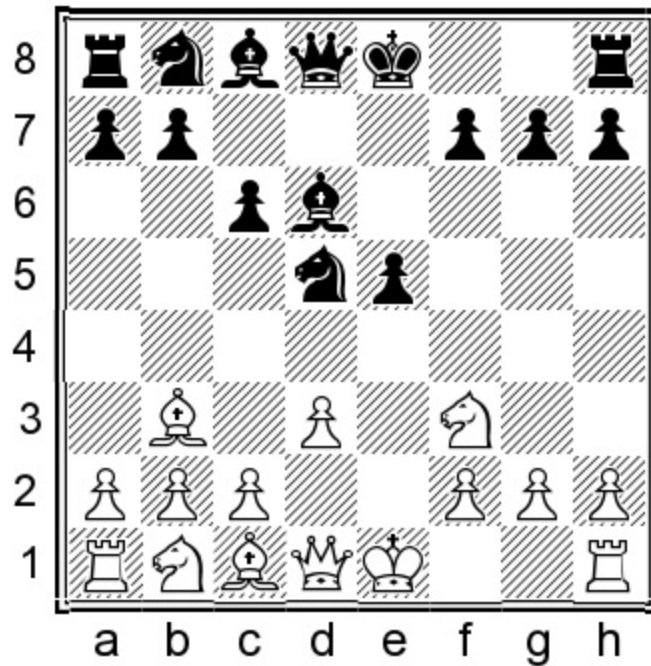
We consider **A)** 6.exd5!? and **B)** 6.♘c3.

#### A) 6.exd5!?

In the Mega Database I have not found a single game in which Black played the best way after this capture. He has one possibility to avoid having a bad position immediately, and no one has ever chosen that line. But even if Black does choose it, White has chances of gaining a plus.

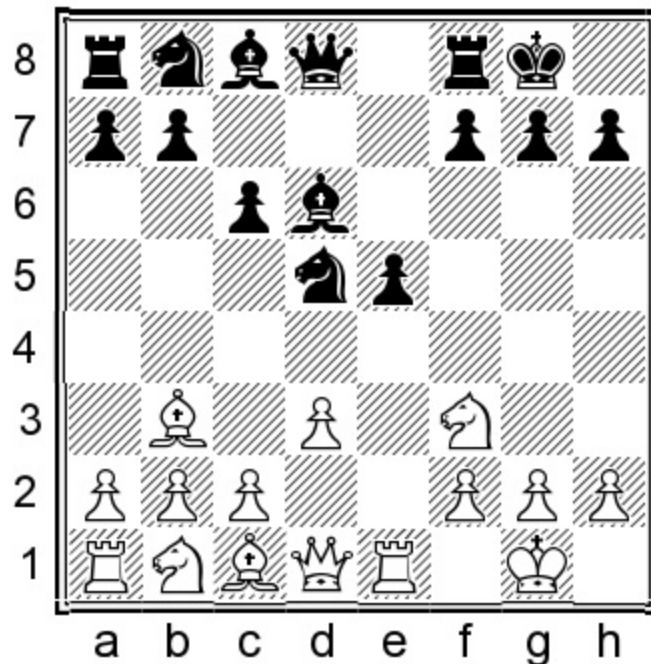
Black can now choose between **A1)** 6...♘xd5 and **A2)** 6...cxd5.

#### A1) 6...♘xd5



This was frequently played in the past, but lately Black has been recapturing more often with the pawn. Among the recent ideas associated with the knight's capture, 8...♔g4 should be noted. We shall examine it in detail.

7.0-0 0-0 8.♖e1



At this point the choices are A11) 8...♘d7 and A12) 8...♔g4.

A11) 8...♘d7 9.d4!?

A move with a concrete aim: White will surrender his good bishop on b3 in order to give Black an

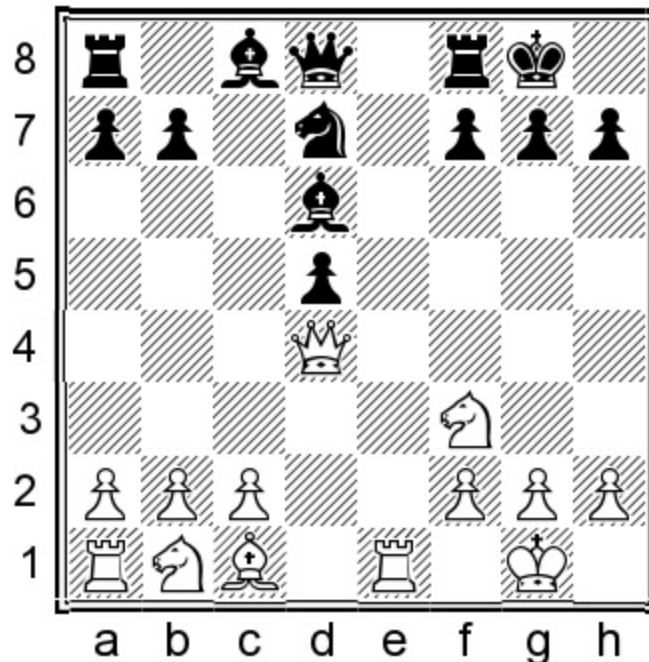
isolated pawn.

The standard continuations 9.♖bd2 ♘c7 and 9.♙g5 f6 10.♙h4 ♘c5 hardly achieve anything. One other move, 9.♘c3!?, is interesting, but after 9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♚c7 11.d4 b5! the position remains unclear.

### 9...exd4

Or 9...♘5f6, relying on the fact that after exchanges on e5 White cannot win a piece because of mate. Thus Black avoids having a weak pawn on d5, but in the process he loses time and lags somewhat in development. 10.♘c3 exd4 11.♚xd4 ♘c5 12.♙g5 h6 13.♙h4 g5 14.♜ad1! Now after the forced 14...♙xh2†, either 15.♘xh2 or 15.♙xh2 gives White the better ending. In Tiviakov – I. Hera, Budva 2009, White converted his advantage into a win after taking with the king.

### 10.♙xd5 cxd5 11.♚xd4



### 11...♙c5

Alternatively:

a) 11...♘f6 12.♙g5 ♘e7 (or 12...♙e6 13.♘c3 ♘e7) 13.♘c3 ♘e6 Thanks to the isolated pawn on d5, White has a small but stable plus. He can play 14.♚e3 with the idea of ♘d4, or simply 14.♜ad1, increasing the pressure against the d5-pawn.

b) 11...♘b6 was played in Tiviakov – Granda Zuniga, El Sauzal 2008. There followed: 12.♙f4 (12.b3 ♙f5 13.♙b2 f6 14.a4 is also interesting, but after 14...♜f7!? I'm not convinced that White has any advantage) 12...♙f5 13.♙xd6 ♚xd6 At this point the simplest course is 14.c3, with a small plus for White. He can meet 14...♘c4 with 15.b3 ♘a5 16.♘bd2 ♘c6 17.♚e3.

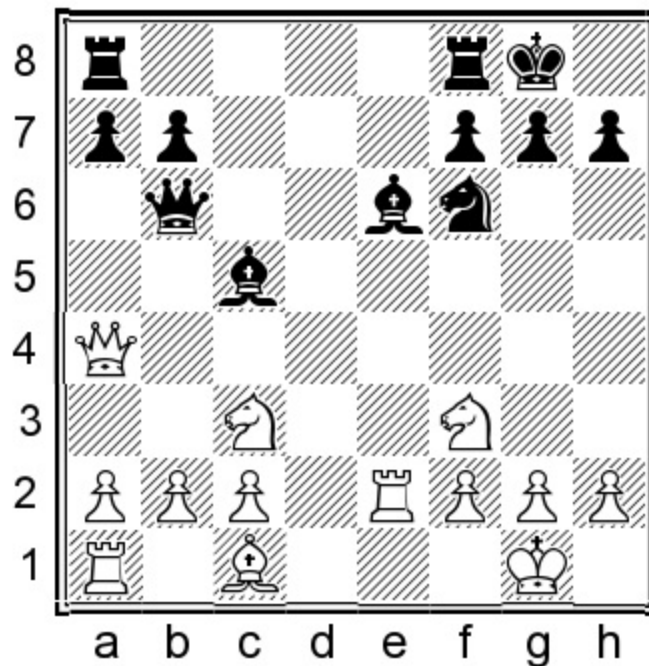
## 12. ♖xd5

The position after 12. ♖d3 ♖b6 13. ♖e2 ♘f6 14. ♘c3 arose in Morozevich – Gelfand, Biel 2009, and in a game Bok – Fridman. In both cases White acquired a plus, but after 14... ♙d7!N the position remains unclear. For example: 15. ♘e5 ♙g4 16. ♘xg4 ♘xg4 17. ♘xd5 ♘xf2∞ and Black has successfully solved all his problems.

## 12... ♖b6 13. ♖e2 ♘f6 14. ♖b3 ♖a6

In the case of 14... ♖c7 15. ♙e3 ♖e8 16. ♘bd2 ♙xe3 17. ♖xe3 ♖xe3 18. fxe3 the extra pawn gives White a stable advantage. A good answer to 18... ♙e6 is 19. ♖d3 followed by ♘d4.

## 15. ♘c3 ♙e6 16. ♖a4 ♖b6



So far we have been following the game Tiviakov – Stefanova, Wijk aan Zee 2004. At this point White could have continued with:

## 17. b3! ♙b4

This position was studied in Delchev's book, so I decided to analysed it in some depth.

## 18. ♙d2

Planning to follow up with a2-a3 to free the queen. Black then has insufficient compensation for the pawn.

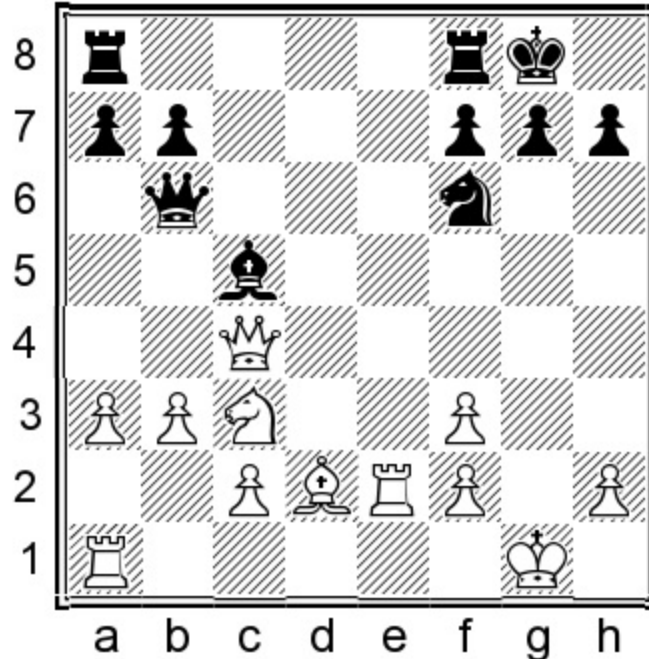
## 18... ♙g4

Instead 18... ♙d7 fails to 19. ♘d5!.

### 19.a3

Instead 19. ♖b5 ♕xf3 20. ♗xb6 axb6 21. gxf3 ♜ac8 offers Black compensation.

### 19... ♕c5 20. ♗c4 ♕xf3 21. gxf3



### 21... ♕d6

Less sound is: 21... ♜ac8?! 22. ♘a4 ♗c6 (maybe a little better is 22... ♗d6 23. ♕f4 ♗c6 24. ♘xc5 b5 23. ♘xc5 ♗xf3 24. b4 b6 25. ♞e3± Black will win back the knight, but will still have a difficult position. For instance 25... ♗h5 26. ♞g3 bxc5 27. ♕c3 or 25... ♗c6 26. ♞ae1 bxc5 27. b5, with a large advantage in both cases.

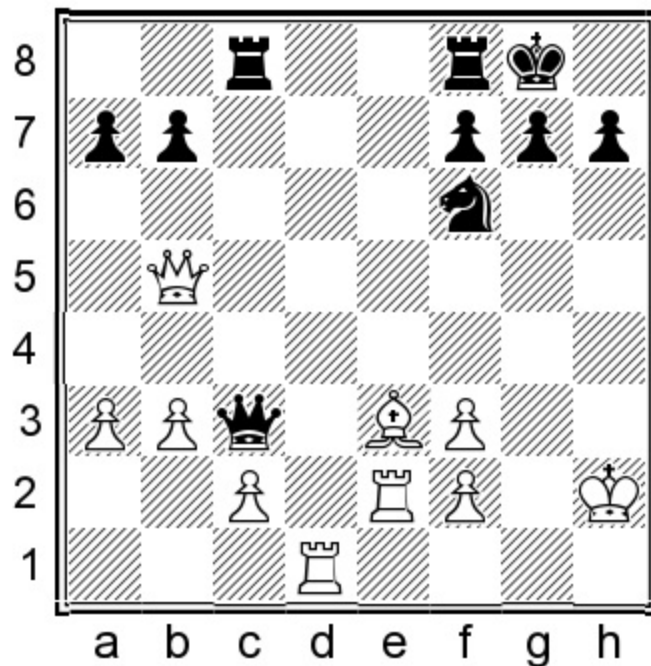
### 22. ♕e3 ♗a5 23. ♞d1!

Weaker is 23. ♘b5 ♞fc8 24. ♗a4 ♗xa4 25. bxa4 ♕c5 when White may have a nominal advantage, but due to the doubled pawns he is unlikely to increase it.

### 23... ♜ac8

Instead 23... ♕xa3?! 24. ♘d5!± strongly favours White. After 24... ♘xd5 25. ♞xd5 ♗b4 26. ♗xb4 ♕xb4 27. ♞b5 Black loses the b7-pawn, while if 24... ♕b2 then a good reply is 25. b4 ♗a4 26. ♕c5 with a clear advantage.

### 24. ♗b5 ♕xh2† 25. ♘xh2 ♗xc3

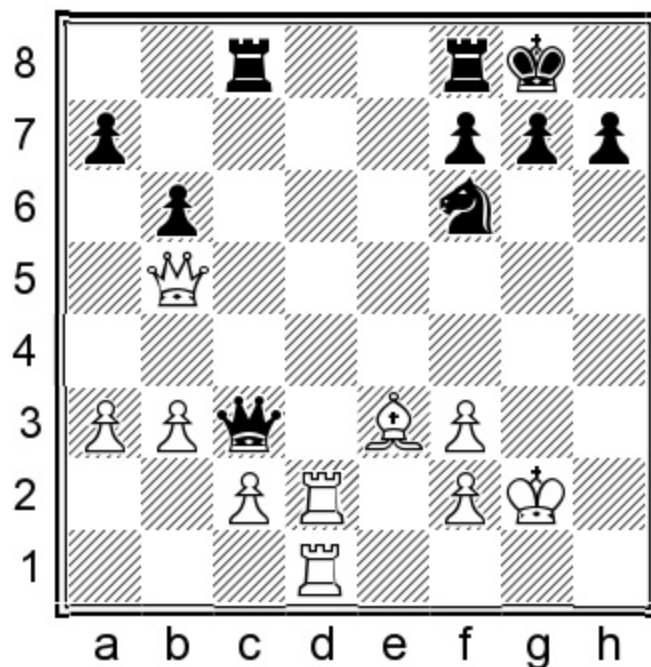


### 26.♔g2

The text move is better than the immediate 26.♖f5.

However an alternate move order is 26.♞ed2 b6 27.♔g2, transposing below.

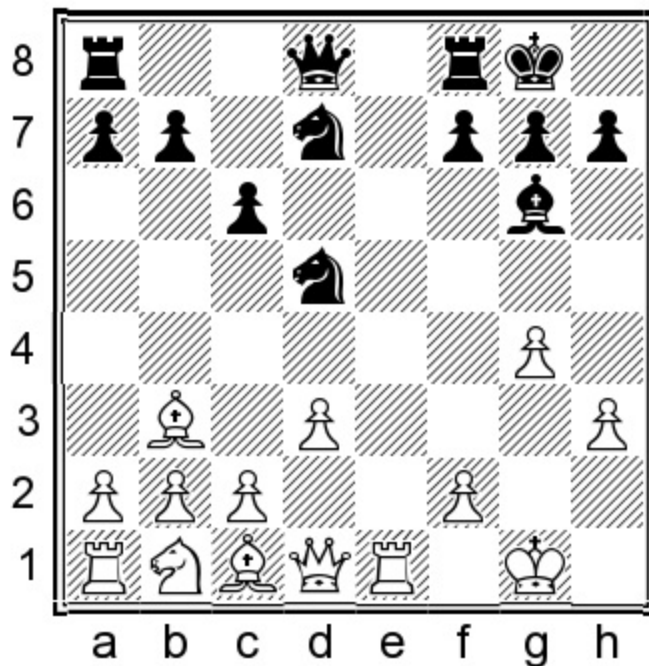
### 26...b6 27.♞ed2±



In Sanchez Huerga – Kolek, email 2015, there followed 27...♖c7 28.c4 ♞fe8 29.♞d6, with a good advantage which White managed to convert.

Instead 27...♞fe8 looks more logical, although after 28.♖f5 ♞e5 29.♞d8† ♞e8 30.♞xe8† ♞xe8 31.♞d4!? White is better anyway. The plan is to push the pawn to a4 and play ♞c4; note that on 31...♖c8 White should choose 32.♖d3!, keeping control of the d-file.





### 13...♚h4

The most logical continuation, but probably a slightly better one is the modest 13...♘c5 hoping that White's extra pawn won't be a great advantage in an opposite-bishops position. 14.♘c3 ♘xb3 15.axb3 f5 16.♘xd5 cxd5 17.♙f4± Only two results are plausible here. After 17...fxg4 18.♚xg4 ♚f6, White has 19.♙e3!. Then the pawn on b2 can't be taken on account of 20.♙d4 ♚xc2 21.♙e7 with a mating attack.

### 14.♚f3 ♜ae8

In the case of 14...♜fe8 15.♙d2 ♜xe1† 16.♙xe1, the rook on a8 is in no way better than the one on f8 in the main line below.

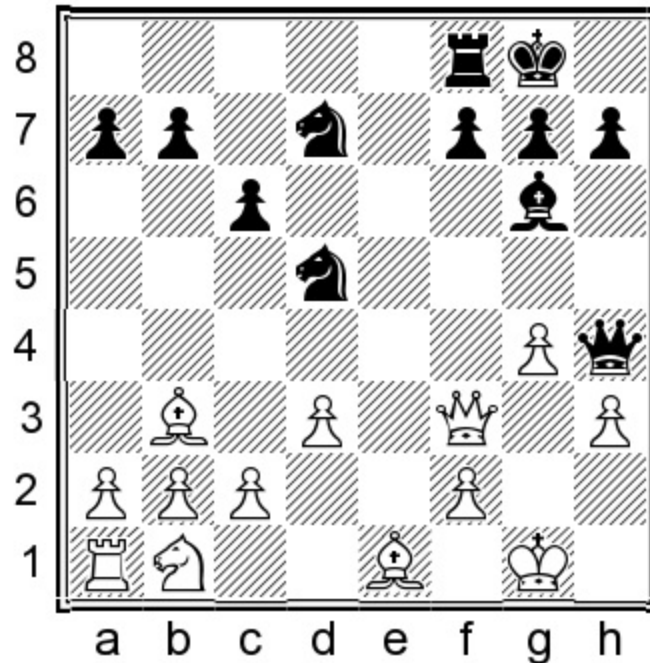
### 15.♙d2!

A mistake would be 15.♙e3?! ♘e5 16.♚g2 ♘xd3! 17.cxd3 ♘xe3 18.♜xe3 ♜xe3 19.fxe3 ♚e1†∞ with enough compensation for the piece.

### 15...♜xe1†

In the event of 15...♘e5 16.♚g2 ♚f6 (or 16...h5 17.♘c3 hxg4 18.hxg4±; Black can't now win the pawn back, because after 18...♘xc3 19.♙xc3 ♘xg4 20.f3! he loses his knight on g4 or his bishop on g6) 17.♙xd5 cxd5 18.f4, White has successfully fended off the attack while keeping the material. To support this conclusion, it remains to look at a possible piece sacrifice: 18...♘c4 19.dxc4 ♜xe1† 20.♙xe1 ♚xb2 21.♙c3 ♚c1† 22.♙h2 ♚xf4† 23.♚g3± After 23...♚xc4 24.♘d2 ♚e2† 25.♙g1 the knight is obviously much stronger than the pawns. White has good chances of winning with his extra piece.

## 16. ♖xe1



### 16...h5

There is evidently no other continuation. The inferior 16...f5 17. ♘c3 or 16...♖e8 17. ♘c3 would leave White with a big advantage.

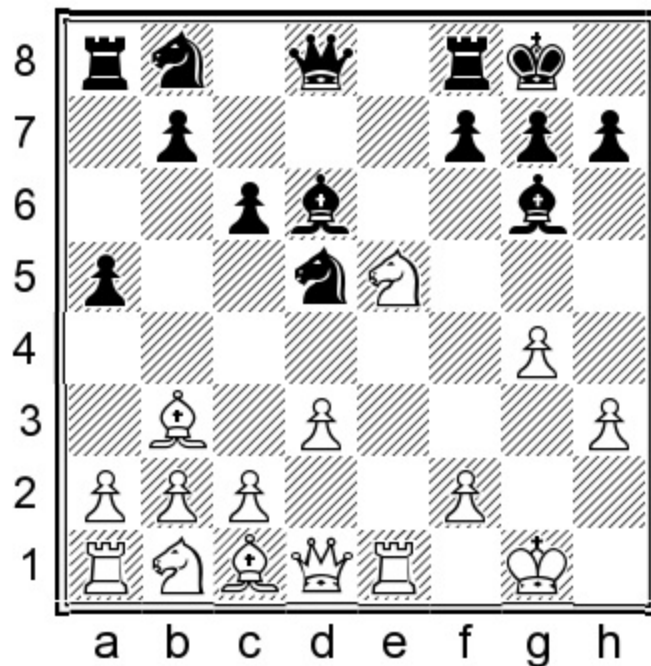
### 17. ♘c3 ♘5f6 18. gxh5 ♘e5

With 18...♙g5† 19. ♙g3 ♙xh5 we reach the same position only with the knight still on d7. This difference favours White; for instance 20. ♗d2 is good.

### 19. ♙g3 ♙xh5 20. f4±

Black's attacking resources are practically at an end, and White will remain with his extra pawn. His advantage is plain to see.

A122) 11...a5!?



An interesting idea that was demonstrated by Fridman against Kovalenko in the decisive last round of the European Championship, Minsk 2017. Seeing that Fridman had played a good many games with the Bishop's Opening, this move was most likely the result of home preparation.

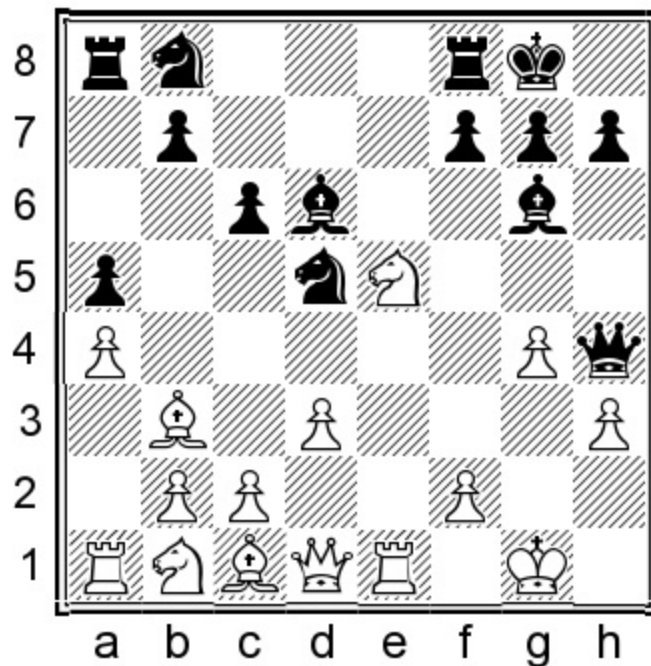
### 12.a4N

The Kovalenko – Fridman game went 12.♙d2?! a4 13.♙xd5 cxd5 with excellent compensation for the pawn. After 14.♘c3 ♘c6 Black gained the advantage. A better move would be 14.f4, but even then Black would have a comfortable position.

### 12...♙xe5

Or:

### 12...♚h4



13. ♖d2!

It turns out that defending the h3-pawn isn't obligatory; White can still gain the upper hand with equal material.

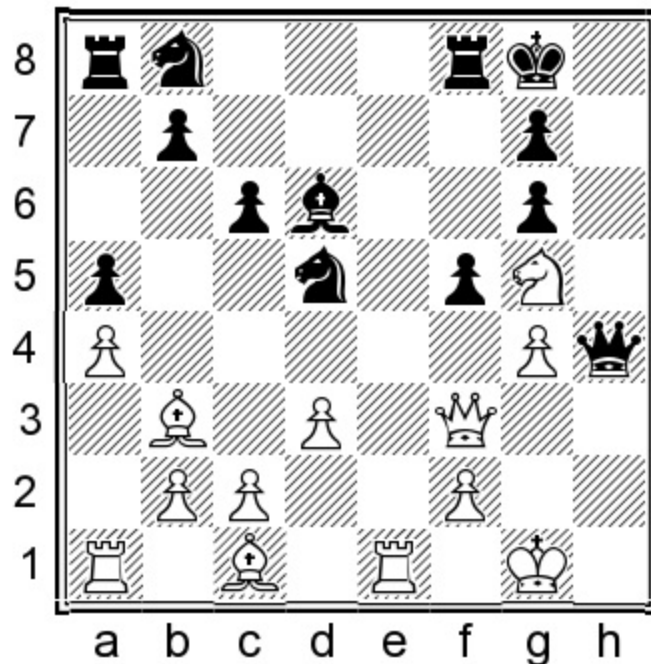
13...f5

13... ♙xh3 14. ♚f3± brings the white queen into play with tempo; now after 14... ♙xf3 15. ♘dxf3 the ending is better for White, while 14... ♗h4 15. ♘dc4 ♙c7 16. d4 gives him a nice advantage with queens on the board.

14. ♘df3

By forcing Black to take on h3, we gain important tempos for transferring the knight to g5.

14... ♙xh3 15. ♘g5 ♗h4 16. ♘xg6 hxg6 17. ♚f3



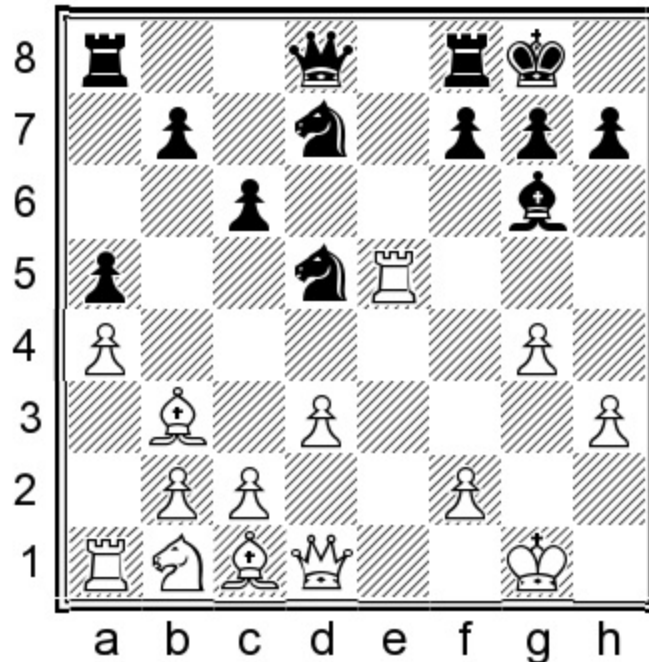
17...fxg4

After 17...♖h2† 18.♔f1± there is no defence against the threat of ♕xd5†; on 18...fxg4 White plays 19.♕xd5† cxd5 20.♖xd5† ♔h8 21.♔e2! threatening ♖h1, with a decisive plus.

18.♕xd5† cxd5 19.♖xd5† ♔h8 20.♖h1±

After the queen exchange 20...♖xh1† 21.♔xh1 White will have an obvious plus. Black can't play 21...♖xf2? on account of 22.♖e8† ♖f8 23.♗f7†, winning; and after 21...♗c6 22.♗e4 Black is left with tripled pawns on the g-file while material is equal.

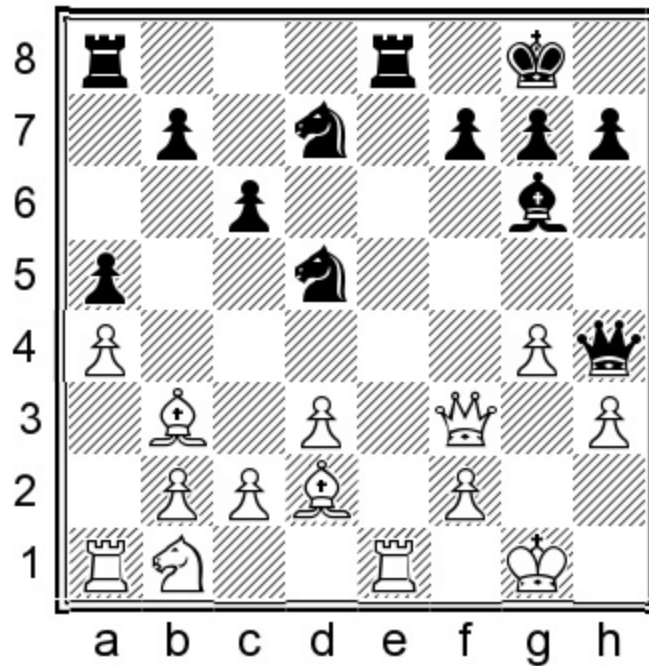
13.♖xe5 ♗d7



14.♖xd5!

This good exchange sacrifice enables White to control the centre of the board and seize the initiative. The e-file is Black's only open file, and that isn't enough for his rooks to exert their strength. The bishop and two pawns are thus superior to a rook.

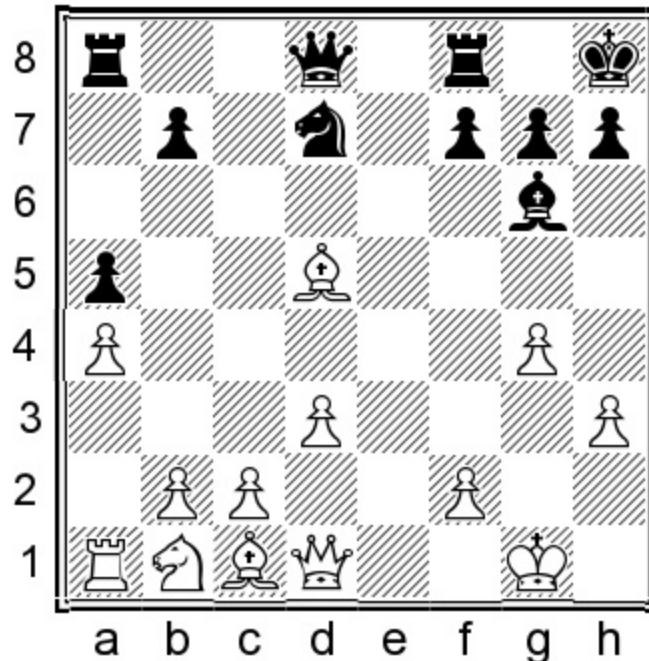
Suppose instead White continues 14.♖e1 ♖h4 15.♖f3 ♖fe8 16.♕d2.



The question now arises: does this position differ significantly from the one with the pawns on a2 and a7? The correct answer is yes, there is a big difference! Black plays 16...♖xe1†! 17.♙xe1 ♘e5 18.♚g3 ♜xg3† 19.fxg3 ♗f3†! 20.♕f2 ♘d4♞, and because the advance of the a-pawn has left the bishop on b3 vulnerable, White loses all his advantage. With the pawns on a2 and a7 Black would have no compensation.

14...cxd5 15.♙xd5 ♚h4

An alternative is 15...♕h8!?.



Instead of straightforward play with ...♚h4 and ...♖e8, Black first moves his king aside, planning ...f7-f5. There can follow:

a) 16. ♖xb7

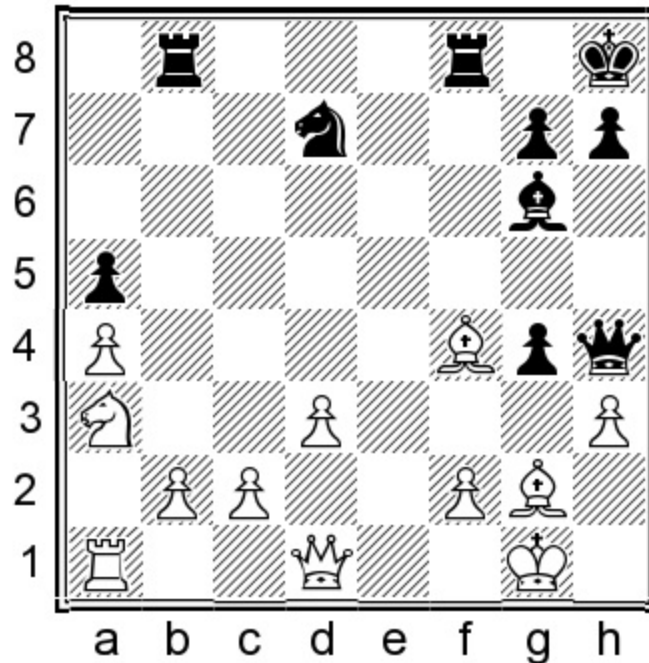
This is an ambitious continuation. White isn't afraid of an attack on his king, although he will probably have to give back one of the three pawns:

16... ♖b8 17. ♗g2 f5 18. ♘a3 ♙h4

Practically forced, as after 18...fxg4 19. ♚xg4 White has a clear plus; 19...♗f5 is well answered by 20. ♚g5 or 20. ♚d4, while 19...♙f6 will be met by 20. ♗e3.

19. ♗f4 fxg4

Not 19... ♖xb2?? 20. ♘c4+– and Black can resign.



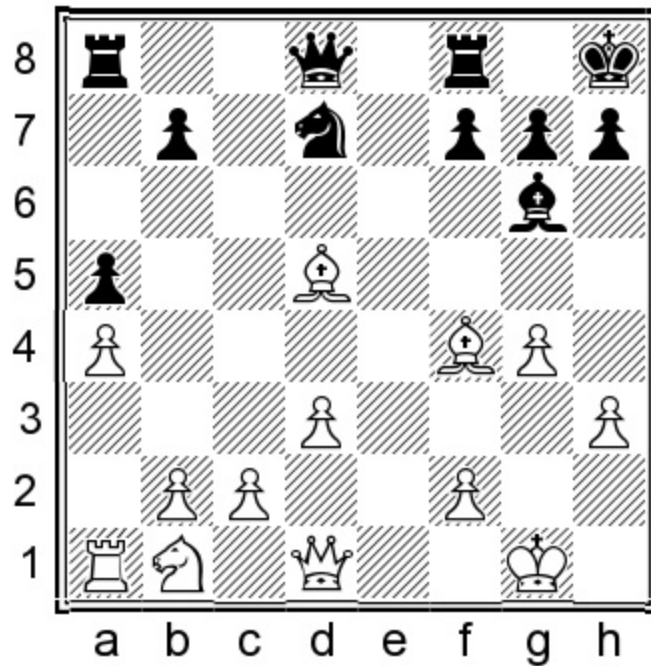
20. ♗g3!

In the event of 20. ♗xb8 ♚xf2† 21. ♚h1 gxh3 22. ♗xh3 ♘xb8 the white king is too exposed, giving Black enough compensation to maintain equality: 23. ♚g1 ♙h4 24. ♚g4

20... ♙f6 21. ♘c4±

White's king is relatively safe, and his pair of pawns with a bishop look more attractive than a rook. On 21... ♘b6 he should play 22. ♗e5, avoiding the exchange of knights.

b) 16. ♗f4!/? is more circumspect and relatively quiet, though it cannot be said that it simplifies the position.



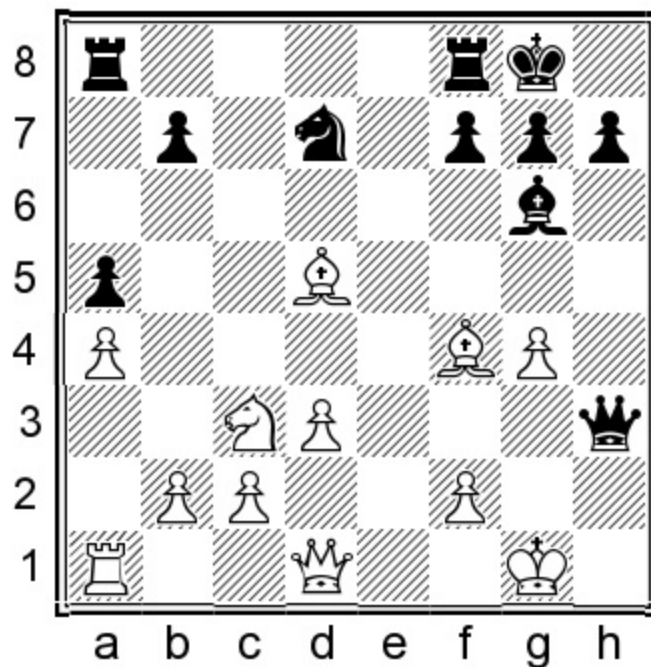
White is seeking an advantage in the complications that ensue:

b1) 16...f5 17.g5 ♘c5 18.c4!? Sacrificing the b2-pawn to fortify the bishop on d5. 18...♚b6 19.♘c3 ♚xb2 20.♞c1↑ Although White has only one pawn for the exchange, his powerful bishops give Black plenty of trouble. Even the computer evaluates the position in White's favour.

b2) 16...♚f6 17.♚c1 ♘c5 18.♘c3 ♘e6 19.♙e3 with a slight edge for White, Marchisotti – Bachmann, corr. 2017. The response to 19...♚e7 will be 20.f4 f5 21.g5.

### 16. ♚f3

Delchev mentions 16.♙f4!? ♚xh3 17.♘c3 but in my opinion this position is not so clear.

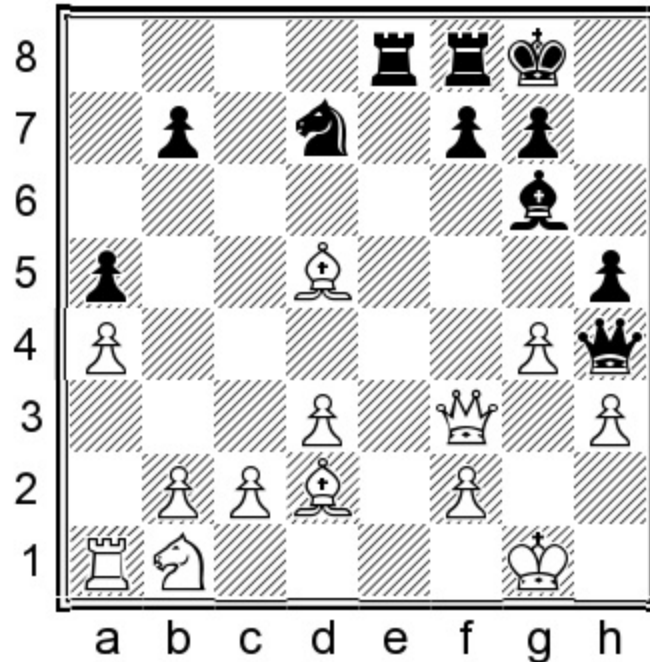


For example, Black can play: 17...h5!? 18.♙xb7 (18.♚f3 hxg4 19.♚xh3 gxh3 20.♙xb7 ♞a7∞)

18...♖ae8 19.♙g2 ♚h4 With a difficult position. On 20.♙d6 besides 20...hxg4 Black can play 20...♘e5!?, while on 20.♙g3 there would follow 20...♚g5!.

### 16...♖fe8

Instead 16...♖ae8 leaves Black's second rook out of play, giving White more possibilities: 17.♙d2 h5



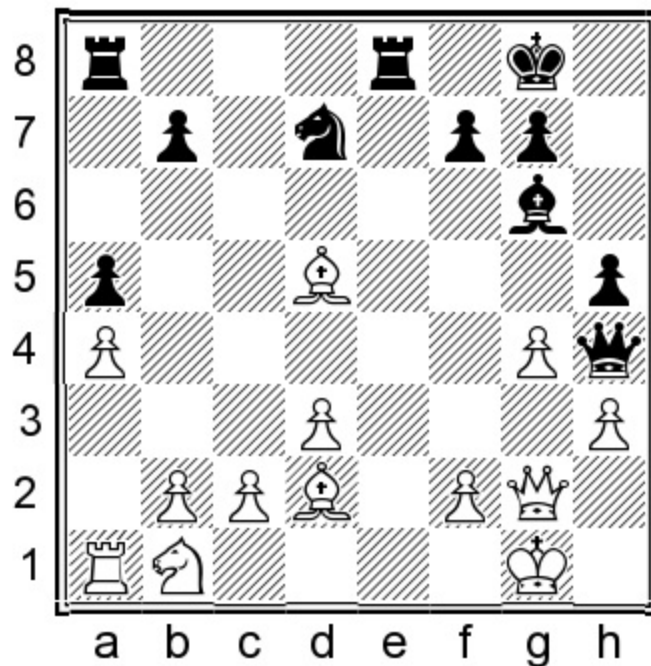
And now:

a) 18.♚g3!? ♚xg3† 19.fxg3 hxg4 20.hxg4± If Black had played 16...♖fe8, the queen exchange on g3 would be less good for White, as the rook from a8 could immediately enter the game with ...♖ac8. Here the rook on f8 is shut in, giving White the advantage.

b) 18.gxh5 ♘e5 19.♚g3 ♚xh5 20.♘c3 ♘c6 21.♙e3± Here as in other lines following 14.♖xd5!, the bishop and two pawns are stronger than a rook – because the black rooks are inhibited by the large number of pawns on the board.

### 17.♙d2 h5 18.♚g2

Averting the threat of ...♘e5. White could also play ♚g3, but there is no need for him to double his pawns on the g-file, since Black has no possibility of developing an attack.



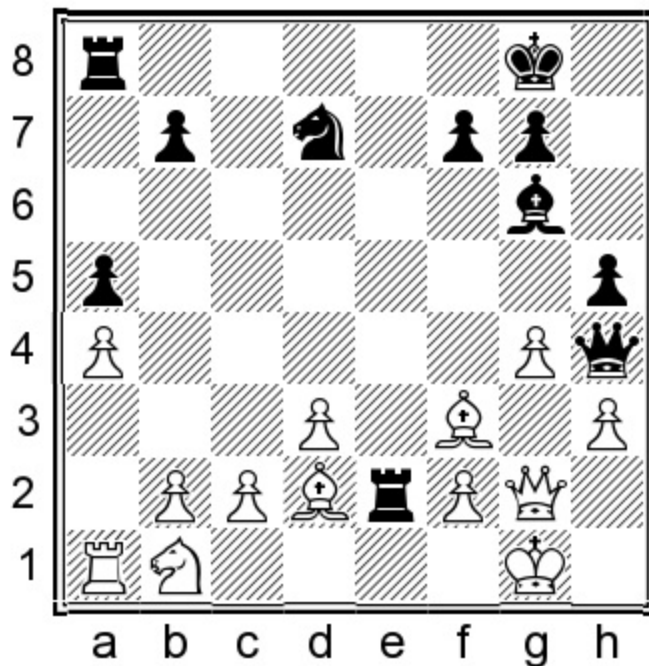
### 18...♖ad8

Alternatives:

a) 18...♖ac8 19.♘c3 hxg4 20.♙xg4 ♚xg4† 21.hxg4 ♘e5 22.♔g2± The large quantity of pawns on the board severely restricts the black rooks; for that reason the bishop and two pawns are much better than a rook here. Moreover Black has no time to protect his pawn on b7, as after 22...b6 23.♔g3 White will play f4-f5. But the exchange of the g4-pawn for the b7-pawn will strengthen White's queenside even further.

b) 18...♘e5 19.f4 hxg4 20.fxg4 ♖xe5 21.♘c3 gxh3± At first sight the white king seems to be in danger, but in reality Black's rooks have no squares on which to give check, and his queen can do nothing on its own. There are two continuations that immediately give White a large plus: 22.♙xg6 ♖xd5 23.♙e4 and 22.♙f2 h2† 23.♔g2, with good winning chances in both cases.

c) 18...♖e2 19.♙f3 White of course needs to evict the rook from the second rank before taking the b7-pawn.



And now:

c1) 19...♖e6 20.♙xb7 ♜b8

Or 20...♜ae8 21.♞c3 hxg4 22.hxg4±; this time we take on g4 with the pawn, because after a queen exchange Black could play ...♜b6, picking up the pawn on b2.

21.♙d5 ♜e5

In the event of 21...♜e7 22.♞a3 ♜xb2 23.♙c3 ♜b8 24.♞c4± White is close to having a won position; Black's a-pawn is defenceless, while White's two bishops and knight dominate much of the board.

22.♙c6 ♜xb2

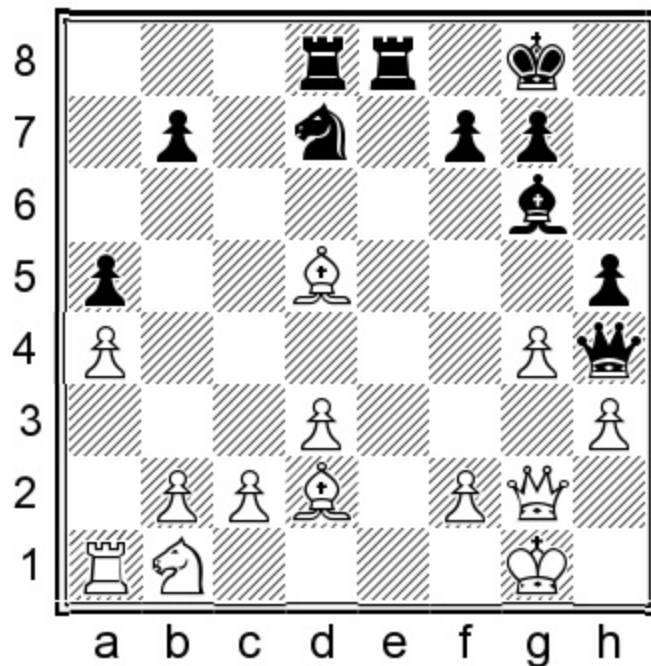
Or 22...♜e7 23.♙xd7 ♜xd7 24.♙c3± with ♞d2 to follow; against 24...f5 White should first play 25.g5.

23.♞a3±

White now brings his pieces into the centre with gain of tempo. After 23...♜e7 24.♙c3 ♜b8 25.♞c4 he has a big advantage.

Better drawing chances are offered by 23...♜e2 24.♙c3 ♜bxc2 25.♞xc2 ♜xc2; Black will try to hold on with a pawn less.

c2) 19...♜e7 20.♞c3! (whereas after 19...♜e6 we were able to play ♙d5 with tempo, this time it is the knight that can go to d5 with tempo gain) 20...♞e5 21.♙d1 hxg4 22.hxg4± White can now reposition his knight with ♞d5-e3, but a simpler plan is to exchange queens and reach the better ending: for example 22...♜ae8 23.♚h2, and Black cannot avoid exchanging.



### 19. ♖c3!

If we take the pawn with 19. ♙xa5, then after 19...b6 20. ♙d2 Black has the opportunity to play ...♘e5 and capture the g4-pawn while avoiding a queen exchange. It's important for us to be able to retake on g4 with the queen.

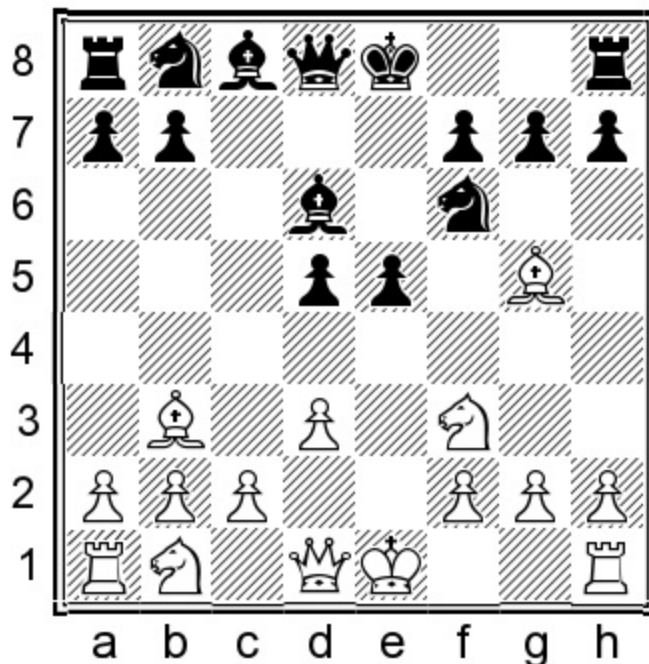
### 19...hxg4 20. ♙xg4 ♙xg4† 21.hxg4 ♘e5 22. ♖g2

Not 22. ♙xb7? ♚b8♣ after which White loses some pawns.

### 22...♘xg4 23. ♙xb7

White's long chain of pawns on the queenside gives him a stable plus. The black rooks haven't enough in the way of open files, and the pawns can soon advance.

### A2) 6...cxd5 7. ♙g5



Now Black has **A21)** 7...e6 and **A22)** 7...c6!.

Other possibilities are:

a) 7...0-0 8.0-0 e6 9.c3 c7 10.b5± c6 11.cxc7 xc7 12.xf6 gxf6 13.d4 with a small but enduring advantage to White, thanks to his better pawn structure.

b) 7...d4 8.0-0 h6 9.h4 0-0 10.bd2 c6 11.e1 with a slight edge. White can answer 11...e8 with 12.c3.

### **A21) 7...e6 8.c3**

Nearly everyone rejects this natural move. Yet although Black has several plausible replies, they all lead to an advantage for White. We consider **A211)** 8...a5 and **A212)** 8...c7.

And also:

a) 8...b4 9.0-0 c6 10.e2, and now:

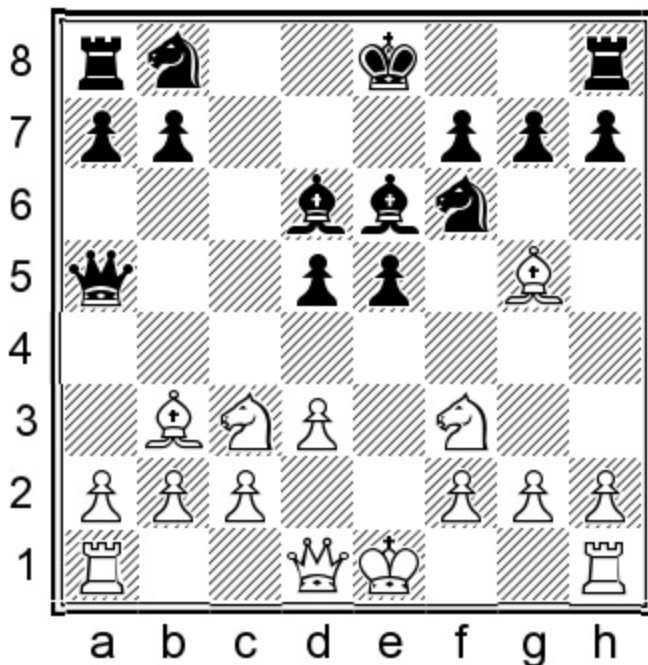
a1) 10...xc3 Black eliminates the knight in order to continue with ...d6, bolstering the pawn on e5 (if the moves 10...h6 11.h4 are inserted, the bishop will be able to go to g3, and the e5-pawn will have nothing to defend it). 11.bxc3 d6 12.ae1 d7 13.d2± To be followed by g5 after Black's 13...0-0. Black has no time to play 13...h6?! 14.cxe5!± xe5 15.xe5 dxe5 16.f4. White will emerge with an extra pawn.

a2) 10...d6 11.b5 b8 12.c3 e7 13.ae1 a6 14.a3± Again Black has problems with the e5-pawn. Let's see what happens if he supports it with 14...d6?!. White plays 15.c4 d4 16.c5 xc5 17.xe6 fxe6 18.c4±, and his advantage has only increased. After we capture on e5, the pawns on

e6 and d4 will be weak.

b) 8...d4 9.♘e4 ♙xb3 10.♙xf6 gxf6 11.axb3± If White manages to play ♘h4 before Black's ...f6-f5, he will have a large plus. For that reason 11...♙b4† 12.c3 is bad for Black; instead he must play 11...f5 at once, but after 12.♘xd6† ♚xd6 13.♘h4 White is better in any case.

### A211) 8...♚a5

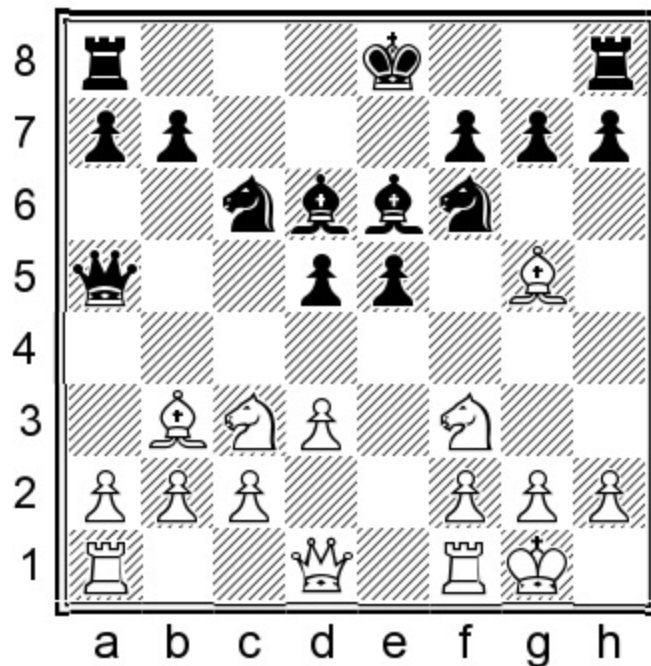


### 9.0-0 ♘c6

Or 9...♘bd7 10.♚e1, and now:

a) Giri – R. Jones, Warsaw 2013, went: 10...♖c8?! 11.d4± e4? (better is 11...♙b4, but then even the simple 12.♘xe5 gives White a large plus) 12.♘xe4+–

b) 10...♚c5 11.♙xf6 gxf6 12.d4 exd4 13.♘a4± White will regain the pawn on d4 and acquire a stable plus owing to Black's broken pawn position. He can answer 13...♚b4 with either 14.♖d1 or 14.♙xd5!?.



We will look at **A2111)** 10.♘h4!? and **A2112)** 10.♙e1!. The former might appeal to those who prefer complex positions while the latter can lead, at least in some lines, to a slightly favourable endgame.

### **A2111) 10.♘h4!?**

A very interesting idea proposed by Delchev in his book.

#### **10...0-0!?**

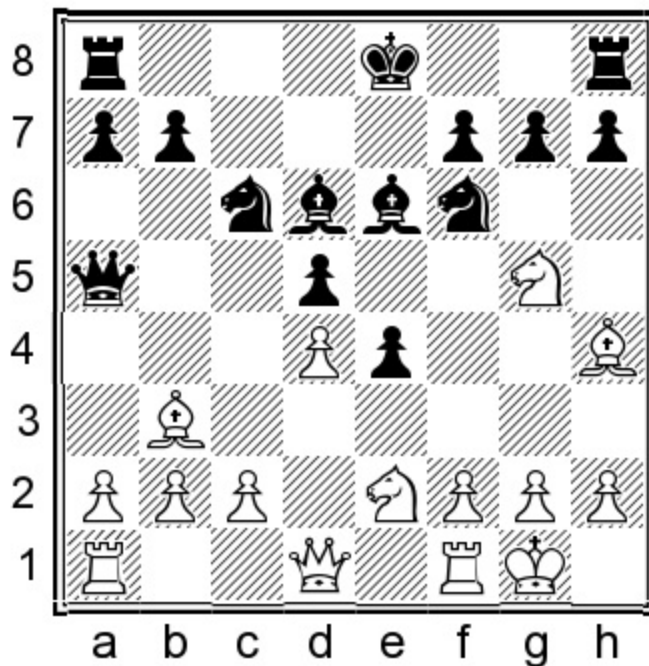
Delchev focused on 10...♘b4, but it seems to me that castling is no worse. The two bishops compensate well for the weakened pawn structure after exchanging on f6. But I will also consider the bishop move:

10...♘b4 11.♗e2 ♘d6

Going back may seem strange, but Black takes control of e5, to prevent the idea d4 ...e4, ♗e5.

For example: 11...0-0-0 12.d4 e4 13.♗e5±

12.d4 e4 13.♗g5

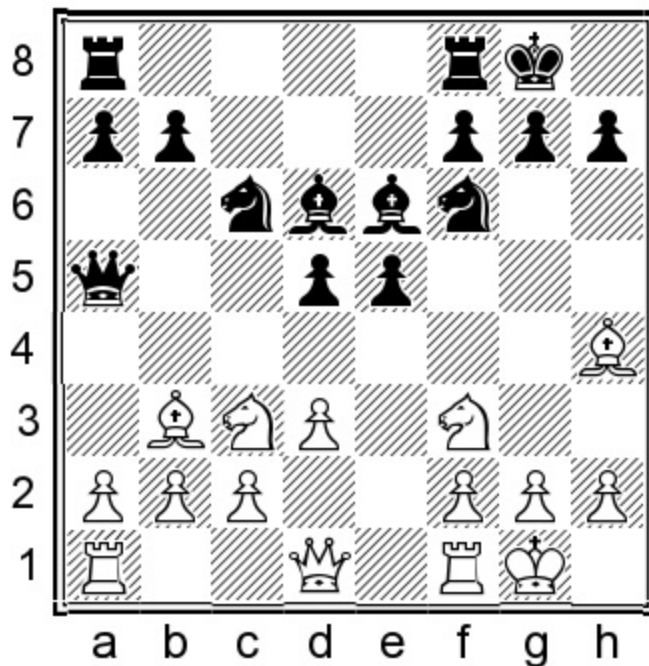


13...0-0

Castling the other way is also possible: 13...0-0-0 14.f3! (Not so clear is 14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.f3 ♖df8 16.♙xf6 when Black has a choice between 16...exf3 17.♖xf3 ♖xf6 and the cunning 16...♖xf6!? 17.fxe4 ♖xf1† 18.♚xf1 ♚d2!. In both cases Black is close to equality.) 14...exf3 15.♖xf3 ♗b8 (or 15...♙g4 16.♘xf7 ♙xf3 17.gxf3± does not help, as after 17...♚c7 18.♘h8 ♙xh2† 19.♗g2 ♖xh8 20.♚d3 White is better by a good margin) 16.c3± On 16...♖hf8 or 16...♚c7 then it's time to take the bishop on e6.

14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.c4 ♗h8∞

There may follow 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♘c3 ♘e7 or 16.c5 ♙c7 17.f3 b6!?, when in both cases the whole struggle is ahead. Objectively, the position is unclear, but it seems to me that it is more pleasant to play with White.



### 11. ♖xf6 gxf6 12. d4

After the inexact 12. ♖d2 d4 White has nothing better than perpetual check after 13. ♖h6 dxc3 14. ♘g5.

Interesting is:

12. ♘h4!?

Although I would rather not let the black knight onto d4:

12... ♘d4 13. ♖h1!?

Leaving the b6-g1 diagonal so that after moves ♘e2 ... ♖g4, f3-f3 Black will not have the ... ♖b6 resource.

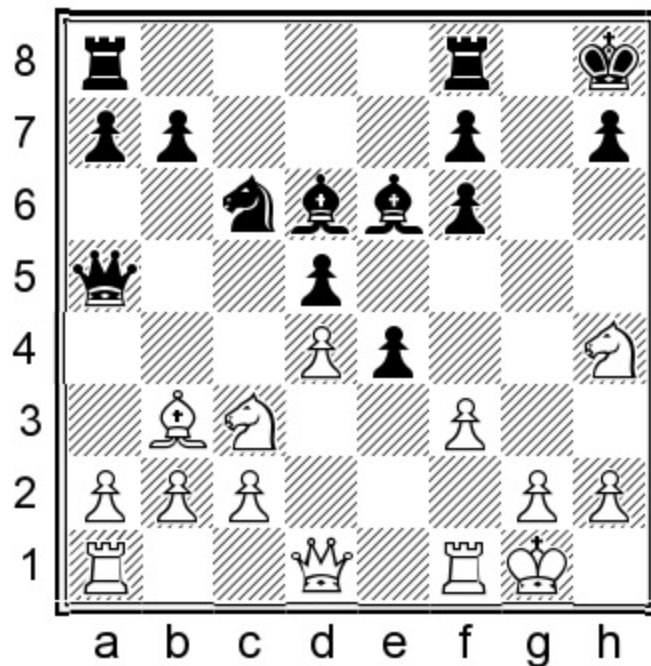
Certainly no improvement is 13. ♖h5 ♖h8! when White has no better move than 14. ♘e2.

Or 13. ♘e2 ♖g4 14. f3 ♖b6! 15. ♖h1 ♖e6∞ with a challenging game. If 16. f4 then Black would return the bishop to g4.

13... ♖h8 14. ♘e2∞

Here Black has three roughly equivalent moves: 14... ♖b6, 14... ♘xb3 15. axb3 ♖d8 and 14... ♘xe2 15. ♖xe2 ♖d8. In all cases, Black seeks to make good use of his queen.

### 12... e4 13. ♘h4 ♖h8 14. f3



**14...f5!?**

After 14...♞xd4 15.♞h1! ♞xb3 16.axb3 ♞c7 the computer believes that Black is alright, but playing White's side is much more pleasant after, for example, 17.♞xd5 ♞xd5 18.♞xd5 ♞xh2 19.♞xe4.

**15.fxe4 fxe4 16.♞f5**

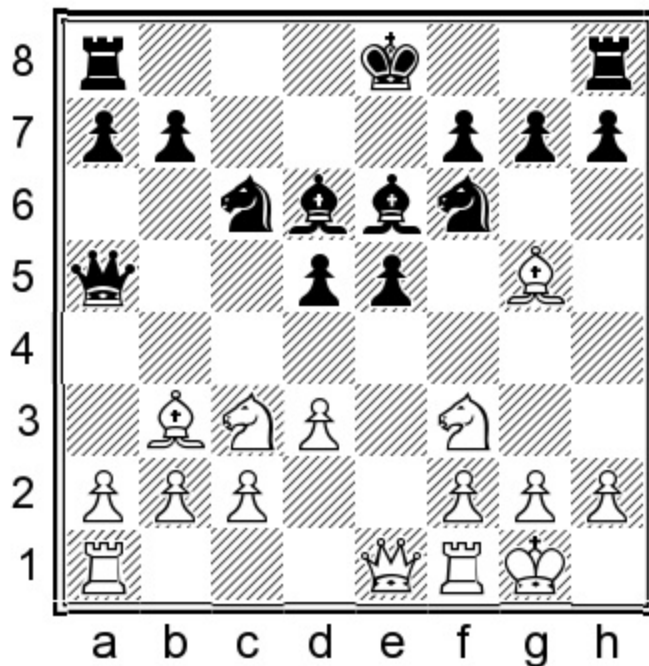
Instead 16.♞h5!? ♞g8 17.♞f5 ♞f8! 18.♞f4 ♞g6 offers Black enough counterplay. White gains nothing clear from 19.♞h4 h6, while if 19.♞af1 ♞d8 and Black connects his queen with the key area of the game.

**16...♞b4 17.♞e2 ♞d8 18.c3 ♞e7!∞**

With a difficult-to-play position and mutual chances.

But it should be noted that 10.♞h4!? has never been tried in practice and it would be hard for Black to find the best moves at the board.

**A2112) 10.♞e1!**



Apart from the threat of  $\text{♙xf6}$  and  $\text{♜xd5}$ , the queen on e1 is very useful: by increasing the pressure against the e5-pawn, it facilitates d3-d4.

### 10...♙c5

Or: 10...d4 11.♙xe6 dxc3 12.b4! ♙xb4 (after 12...♜xb4 13.♙b3± White's advantage is even more noticeable; if Black returns his knight to c6, then 14.♙xf6 gxf6 15.♙e4 follows) 13.♙xf6 gxf6 14.♙f5± Although a pawn down, White is clearly better. In the event of 14...♜e7 15.♙e4 ♙d5 he can regain the pawn by 16.♞fb1 or 16.♙xd5 ♜xd5 17.♞fb1, with an endgame advantage.

### 11.♞d1 0-0-0

After 11...0-0 12.♙xf6 gxf6 13.♙d2± White has threats of ♙h6 and d3-d4. Black can only defend against one of them.

### 12.d4 ♜xd4

Or 12...exd4 13.♜a4 ♙b4 14.♙xb4 ♙xb4 15.♜xd4±. Without queens, the weakness of the d5-pawn is more obvious.

### 13.♜xe5 ♜xb3

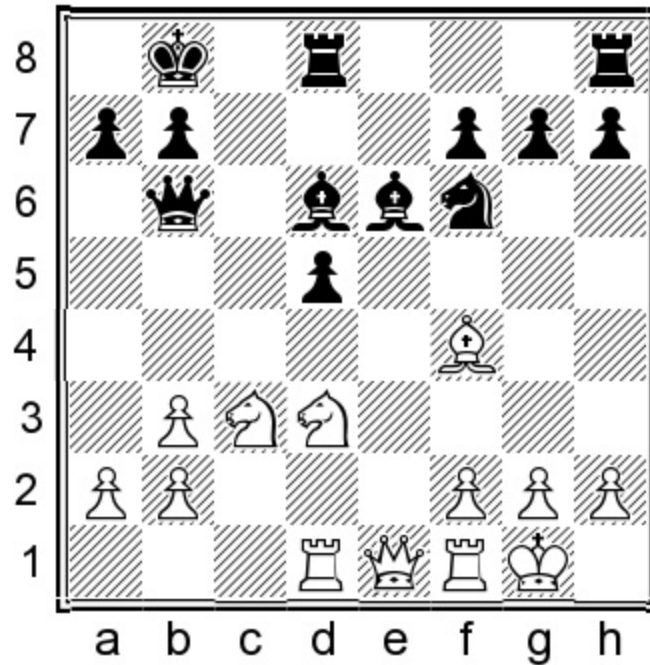
The bishop must be taken.

On 13...♞he8 there is 14.♙a4!, while on 13...h6 White will not take on f6, but will play 14.♙f4! with advantage.

### 14.♜d3 ♙b6 15.cxb3 ♜b8 16.♙f4±

In spite of his doubled pawns on the b-file, White has a slight edge. Black's bishop on e6 is of little

use, and his d-pawn is an object of attack.

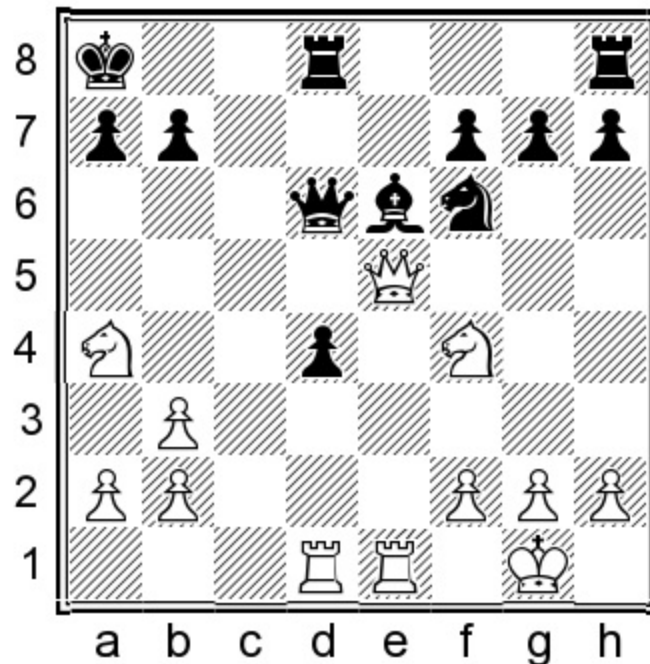


16...♙xf4

This move was tested in correspondence games.

On 16...♜he8 White can play 17.♙xd6† when Black cannot recapture with the queen because of ♘b5 winning, so after the forced 17...♜xd6 not bad is 18.♘a4, with an edge.

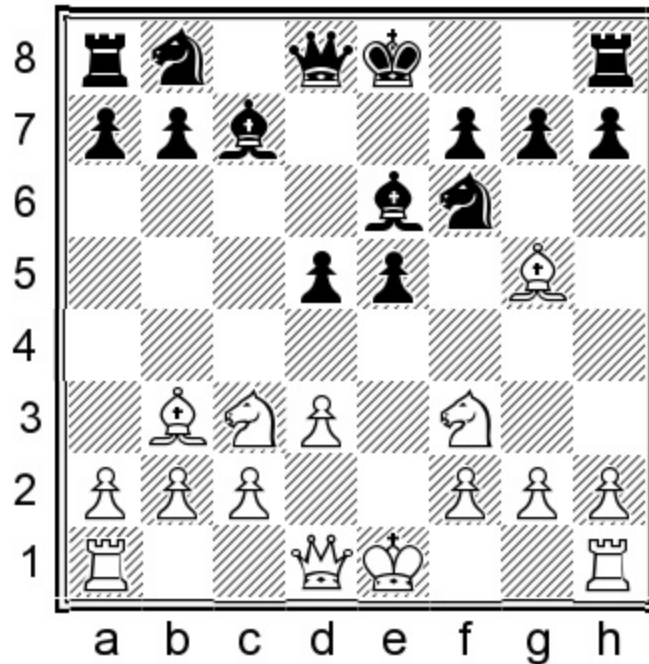
17.♘xf4 d4 18.♞e5† ♔a8 19.♘a4 ♞d6 20.♞fe1



With a small but stable advantage; White will probably exchange queens and then play ♘c5. In the correspondence games, Black made a draw after 20...♙c8 21.♞xd6 ♜xd6 or 20...♜he8!? 21.♞xd6 ♜xd6 22.♘c5 ♙f5!, but this does not mean that Black has no problems. For example, in the latter line

after 23.♖xe8† ♜xe8 24.f3 White retains a slight edge.

### A212) 8...♙c7



#### 9.d4!

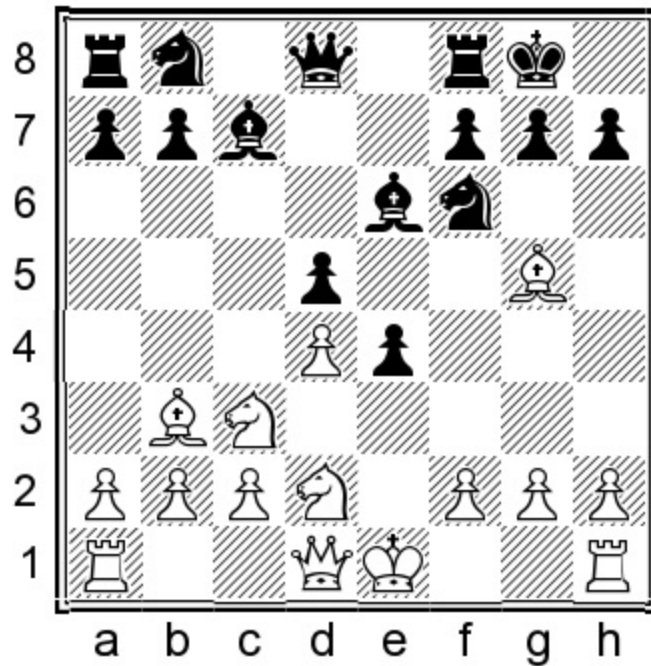
By itself, ♙xf6 ...gxf6 doesn't give White anything. But if d3-d4 ...e5-e4 has occurred, the exchange on f6 can be followed by ♖h5 or (if Black has played ...♜c6) by ♜dxe4 and d4-d5.

#### 9...e4 10.♜d2

We will look at two main options: **A2121) 10...0-0** and **A2122) 10...♜c6**.

There is also: 10...♙a5 11.♙xf6 gxf6 12.♖h5 ♙xc3 (12...0-0 transposes to 10...0-0) 13.bxc3 0-0± Then not so good is 14.f3 e3 15.♜f1 ♖a5, but noteworthy is 14.♖d1!? after which White does want to play f2-f3. However, to avoid exploring additional options, it's easier to play 14.f4, with a transposition to the 10...0-0 line below.

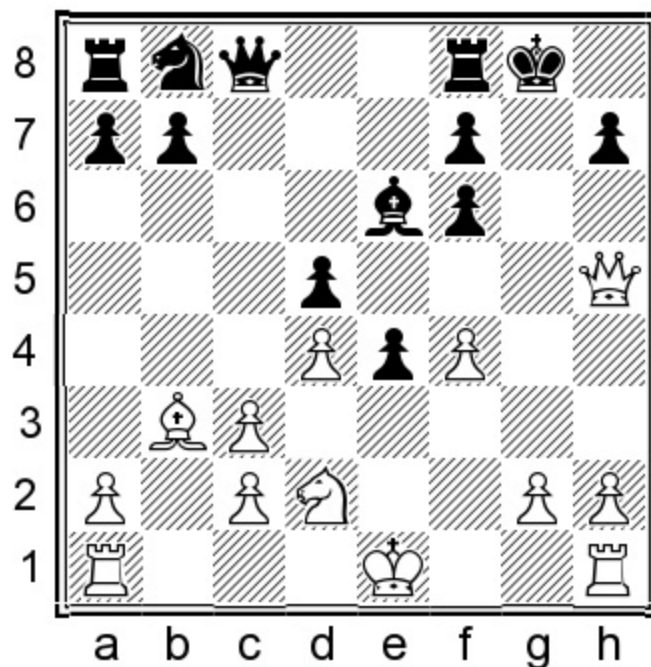
### A2121) 10...0-0



11. ♖xf6 gxf6 12. ♖h5 ♖a5 13. f4

13. ♘xd5 also gives a slight advantage, but the move f2-f4 is more universal since Black can take on c3 before castling. Then White also has a choice, but the easiest way is to reduce everything to one option with the move f2-f4. Nevertheless, I will give a short variation with this line: 13. ♘xd5 ♖xd2† 14. ♔xd2 f5 15. ♘f4 ♖xd4† 16. ♔c1 ♖f6! After other moves Black is on the verge of defeat. And here White can choose between 17. c3 or 17. g4!? fxg4 18. ♘xe6 fxe6 19. ♖xg4†; after both moves White is a little better.

13... ♖xc3 14. bxc3 ♖c8



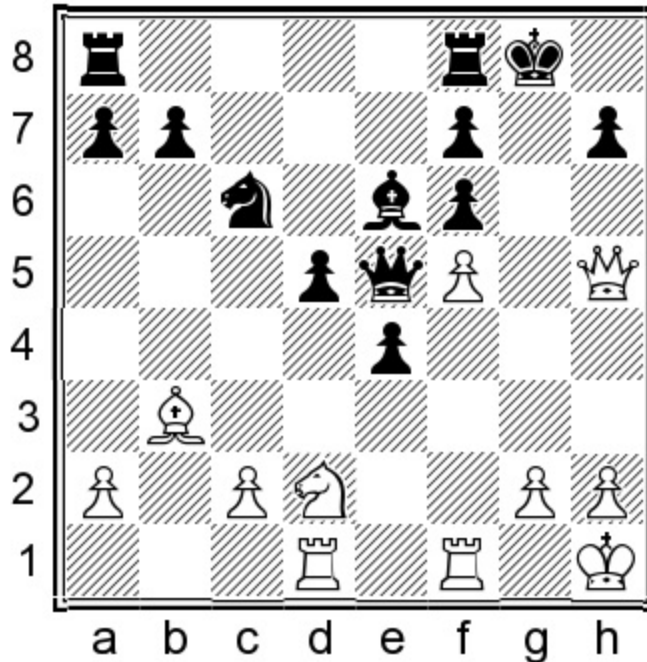
## 15.0-0

Or 15.0-0 is also an interesting move, but if Black makes a couple of strong moves in a row, the position will be completely unclear. 15...e3 (15...♙xc3?! 16.f5±) 16.♘f3 ♕f5! (not 16...♙xc3?! 17.♖b1±) 17.♖b2 a5!∞ With a complex game and mutual chances. On 18.a4 Black must play 18...b5!.

## 15...♙xc3 16.♞ad1 ♘c6

16...♙xd4† 17.♖h1 ♘c6 transposes.

## 17.f5 ♙xd4† 18.♖h1 ♙e5



## 19.♞de1!

Weaker is 19.♙g4†?! ♖h8 20.fxe6 fxe6 with a good game for Black.

## 19...♖h8

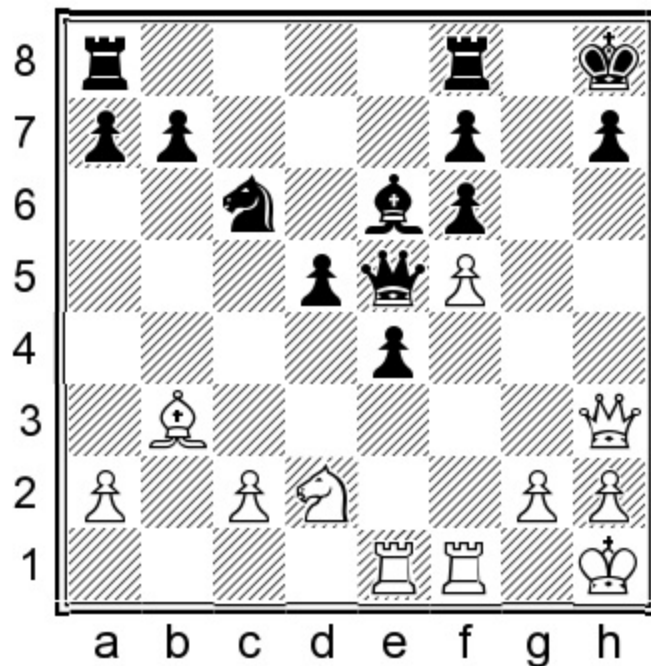
Also plausible is: 19...♘d4!? 20.♙g4† ♖h8 21.fxe6± On 21...fxe6 White will play 22.♘f3! ♘xf3 23.gxf3!, after which the black pawns in the centre are no longer dangerous.

## 20.♙h4

This is a very sharp position where White often has sacrificial options, so I shall extend the lines considerably.

White can also consider:

20.♙h3!?



20...♙d7

On moves like 20...♖ad8 White will not immediately take on e6, but will instead play 21.c4! with a huge advantage since Black cannot play 21...dxc4? 22.♖xe4.

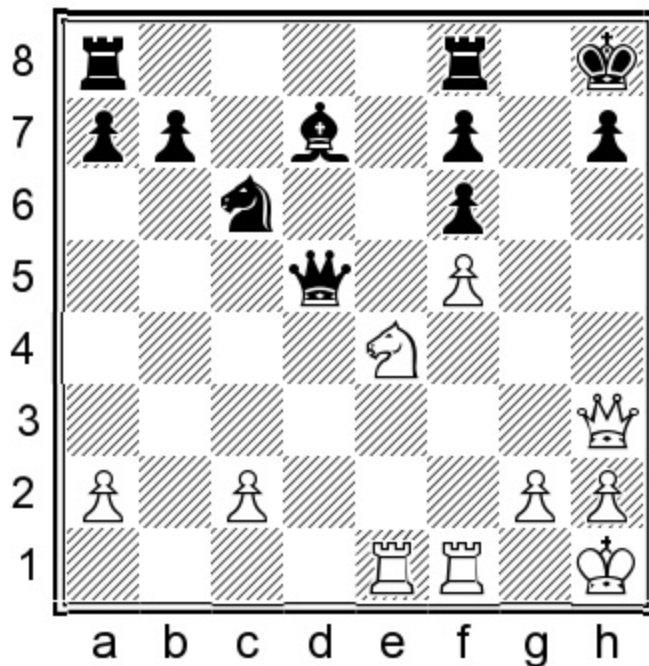
But we need to consider the move 20...b5, which does not allow White to control c4. 21.♗h4!

Compared to the immediate 20.♗h4 the ...b7-b5 move has weakened Black's position. For instance: 21...♘e7 (21...♖c3?! 22.♘xe4 dxe4 23.♖e3± And bad is 23...♖xe3? 24.♗xf6† ♔g8 25.fxe6 h6 26.exf7† ♔h7 27.♙d5+- We will see a related position in the main line below, except with the b-pawn still on b7; it makes a big difference.) 22.fxe6 fxe6 23.♘xe4! dxe4 24.♖xe4 ♗g5 25.♗h3± With an edge as the e6-pawn is dropping. Not possible is 25...e5?? due to 26.♖g4 ♗d2 27.♖h4 and wins.

21.♙xd5!

In other lines we will see various knight sacrifices on e4, but in this case it is the bishop which must give itself up.

21...♗xd5 22.♘xe4



22...♙a5!

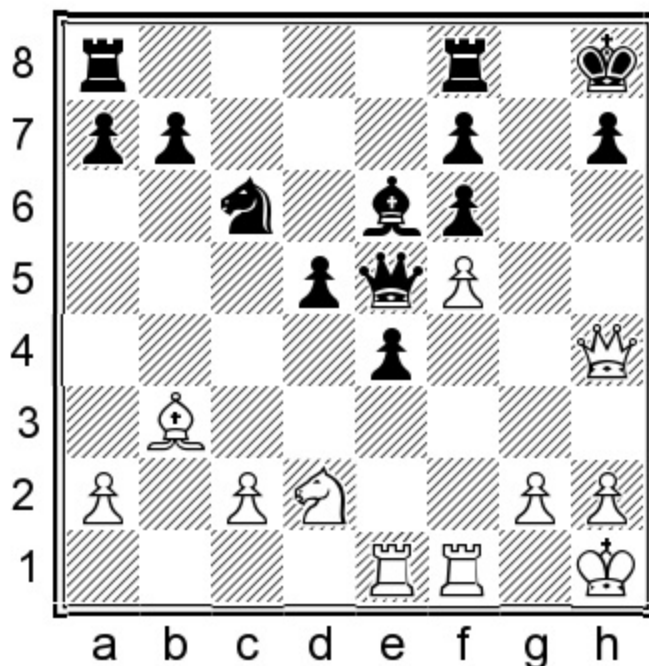
Not an easy move to find over-the-board; by eyeing the e1-rook, Black makes ...♙xf5 a better option, exchanging queens.

23.♘xf6 ♙xf5 24.♙xf5

As mentioned above, White cannot take with the f1-rook.

24...♙xf5 25.♞xf5±

With a small but stable advantage due to the active rook on f5; the game has two possible results. For example if 25...♞ad8 then 26.h3 is sensible.



20...♙c3

Instead 20...♙xf5!? is a tempting option, but if White replies precisely he can secure an edge; [www.chessedge.com](http://www.chessedge.com)

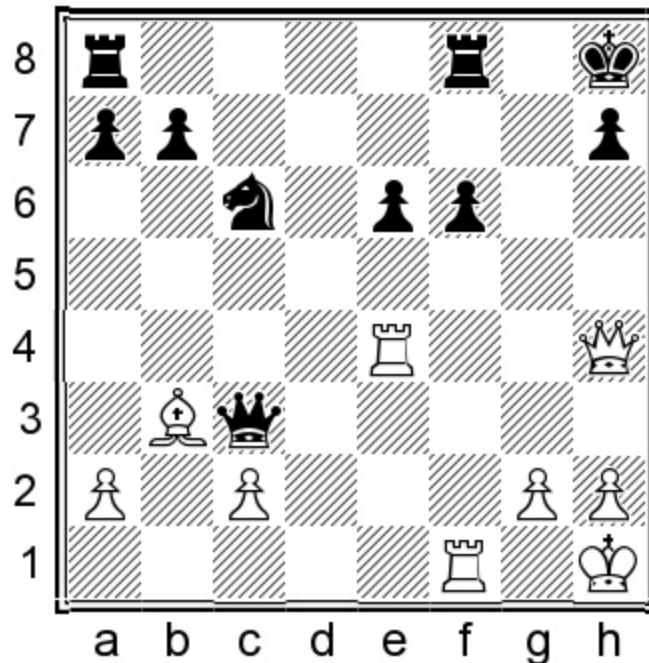
21.♙xd5! ♙g6 22.♙xc6 (inexact is 22.♙xe4?! due to 22...♚g5 when Black is at least level) 22...bxc6 23.♜xe4 ♙xe4 24.♞xe4± On 24...♚d6 there would follow 25.♞ef4 with a clear advantage.

The best saving try is 24...♚g5 but after, for example, 25.h3!? ♞ae8 26.♞xf6 ♚hx4 27.♞hx4 it is not so easy for Black to make a draw; even in the double-rook endgame, White has a good edge.

### 21.♜xe4 dxe4 22.fxe6

Only good enough for a draw is: 22.♞e3 ♚xe3 23.♚xf6† ♙g8 24.fxe6 h6!= When the game may end in perpetual check. It is curious that White would win if the black pawn was on b5 (as in the related position considered in the variant 20.♚h3 b5 21.♚h4!). The difference is that White needs the ♙d5 resource to threaten a loose knight on c6 as well as the e4-pawn.

### 22...fxe6 23.♞xe4



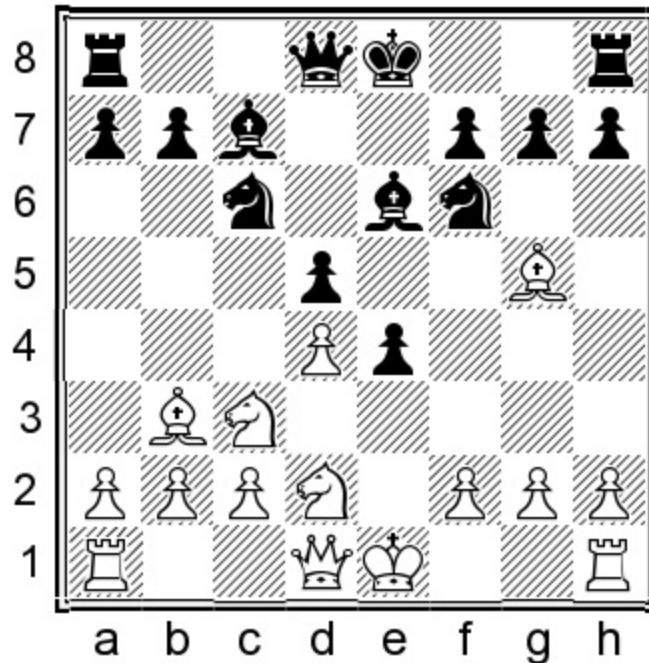
### 23...♜e5

Just for the moment Black is a pawn up, but White has some advantage in every line. For example: 23...e5 24.h3!? ♜d4 25.♞g4! ♜xb3 26.cxb3± Black cannot hold the f6-pawn, as 26...♚c6 would be met by 27.♞g6!. When the material becomes level, White will have a noticeable advantage, since Black has a weak king.

### 24.♚h6 f5 25.♙xe6 ♜f7 26.♞e3±

Black must take the white queen and then try to hold an unpleasant endgame.

Weaker is 26...♚d4?! 27.c3! when Black will have a worse version of the ensuing endgame; the bishop is much more useful than the knight, so White has a stable advantage in a ‘two-results’ type of game.

**11.♙xf6!**

It's important to double the black pawns before taking on e4. After the imprecise 11.♘dxe4 dxe4 12.d5 ♙d7 13.dxc6 ♙xc6 Black has no particular problems.

**11...gxf6**

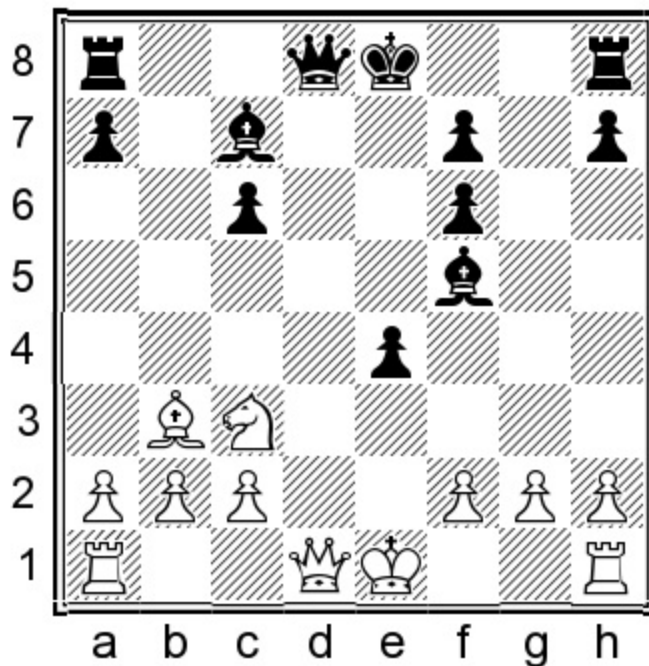
In the case of 11...♙xf6 12.♙xd5 0-0 13.♘dxe4 ♙g6 14.♙xc6! (after 14.0-0?! ♙xd5 15.♘xd5 ♙xh2† Black wins the two pawns back at once, as when his queen captures on e4 the white knight and d4-pawn will be *en prise*) 14...bxc6 15.♙d3± White emerges with a healthy extra pawn.

**12.♘dxe4 dxe4 13.d5 ♙f5**

With ♙xf6 ...gxf6 having occurred, 13...♙d7?! is not good: 14.dxc6 ♙xc6 15.♙h5±

**14.dxc6 bxc6**

After 14...♙xd1† 15.♙xd1 bxc6, White has 16.♙d4±. Then 16...♙d8 or 16...♙e5 will be met by 17.♙c4, and one of the pawns that are *en prise* will fall.



**15. ♖h5!N**

With this queen manoeuvre, White stops Black from castling.

In Le Roux – Delorme, Brest 2018, White played 15.0-0. Black could then have replied 15...0-0 with a roughly equal position.

**15... ♗g6 16. ♖h6 ♕d6**

Black's position may look quite tolerable, but with the aid of a few forcing moves White can gain the advantage.

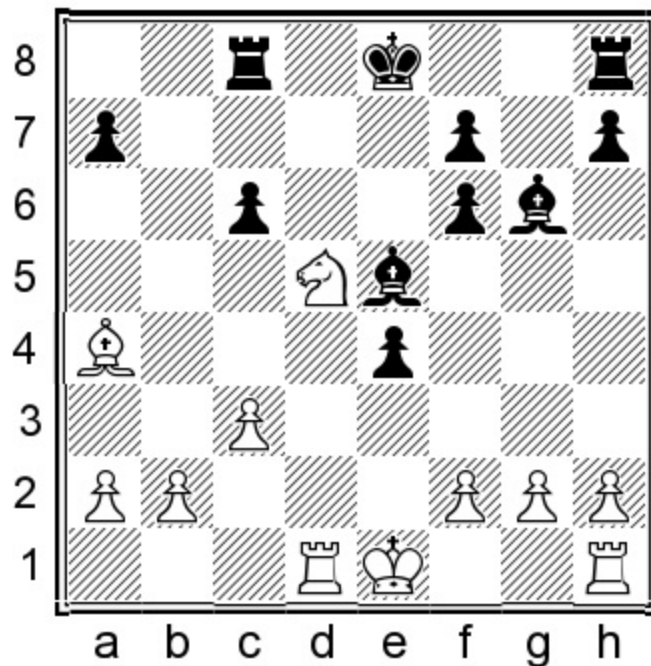
**17. ♝d1!**

Not 17.0-0? 0-0-0. Once having castled, Black will not exchange queens.

**17... ♖f4**

If 17... ♖e5 then 18. ♗a4±.

**18. ♖xf4 ♗xf4 19. ♗a4 ♝c8 20. ♘d5 ♗e5 21. c3±**



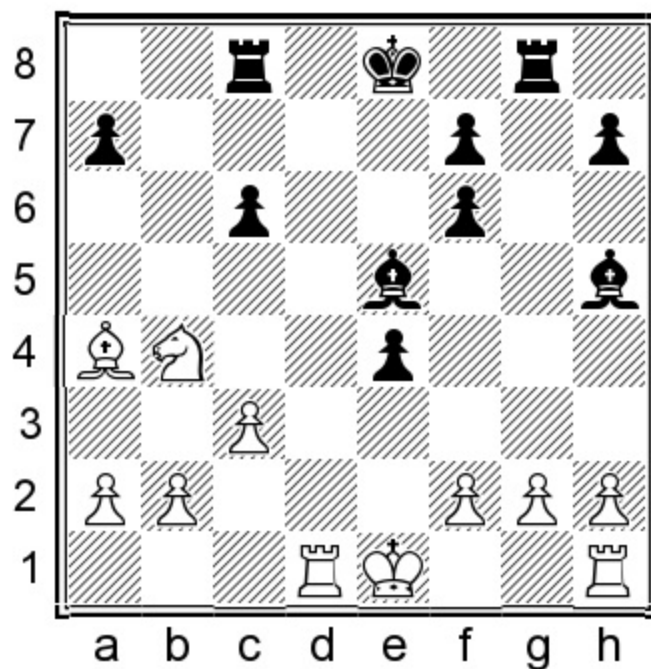
Although Black has the bishop pair, his position is worse. The weakness of his broken pawn position makes itself felt, and the bishop on g6 is of little use. In the event of 21...♔f8 22.♘e3 White can presently play h2-h4, so that after ...h7-h5 the black bishop will have even fewer squares.

After completing my original analysis I learned that Delchev had also reached this position in his analysis, so I decided to extend my analysis with some sample lines.

### 21...♔f8

Also worth noting is:

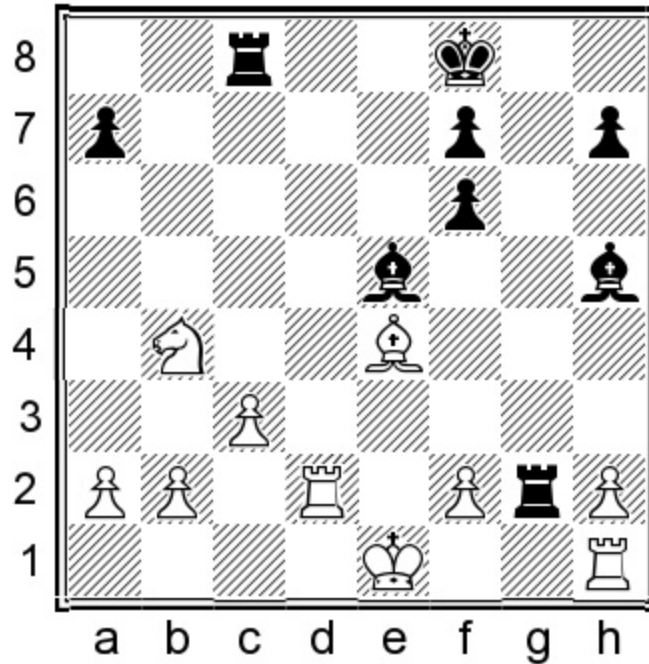
21...♖g8 22.♘b4 ♕h5



23.♖d2!

This is the only way White can gain an edge.

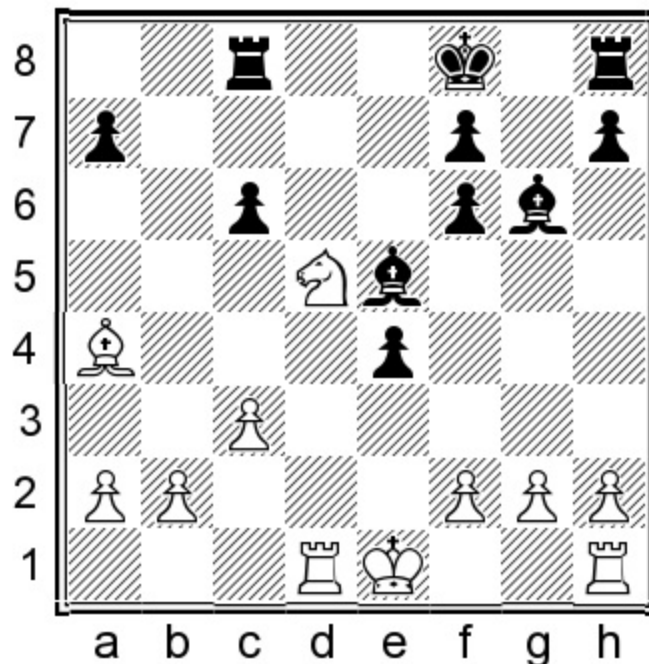
Weaker are 23.♙xc6† ♜xc6 or 23.♞d5 ♜xg2 24.♘xc6 ♚f8 which are both about equal.  
23...♞xg2 24.♙xc6† ♚f8 25.♙xe4



25...♞e8

Also favouring White is: 25...♞xh2 26.♞xh2 ♙xh2 27.♘d5±  
26.♚f1 ♞xh2 27.♞xh2 ♙xh2 28.♚g2!±

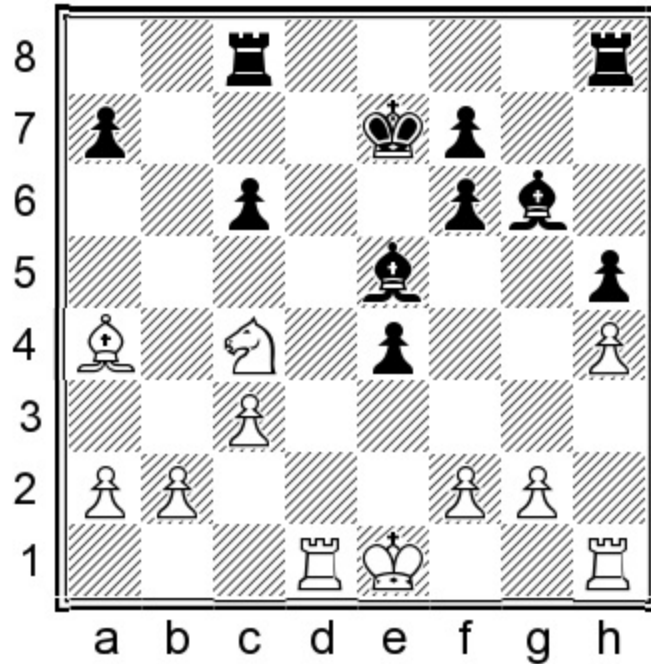
Thanks to the passed pawns on the queenside, White has a good edge. On 28...♙f4 there would follow 29.♞d5! to exchange a pair of bishops.



22.♘e3 ♚e7

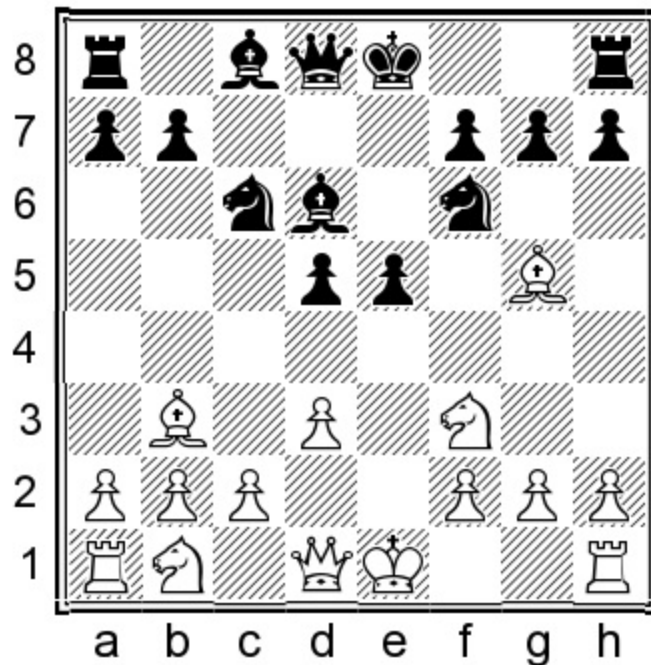
Instead after 22...♚g7?! 23.h4 h5 24.♚e2± the black king is out of the game on g7 [esstouring.com](http://esstouring.com)

23.h4 h5 24.♖c4±



Due to the weak c6-pawn, Black is worse even with his two bishops. On 24...♗f5 White can play 25.♗c2!? so that ...♗e6 is not possible. Then on 25...♖b8 White can continue 26.♖d2! and again 26...♗e6 is impossible since after 27.♗xe5 fxe5 28.♗xe4 the b2-pawn is defended.

A22) 7...♗c6!



This good move has been chosen by about 5% of players with Black here, and none of them managed to avoid getting the worse position!

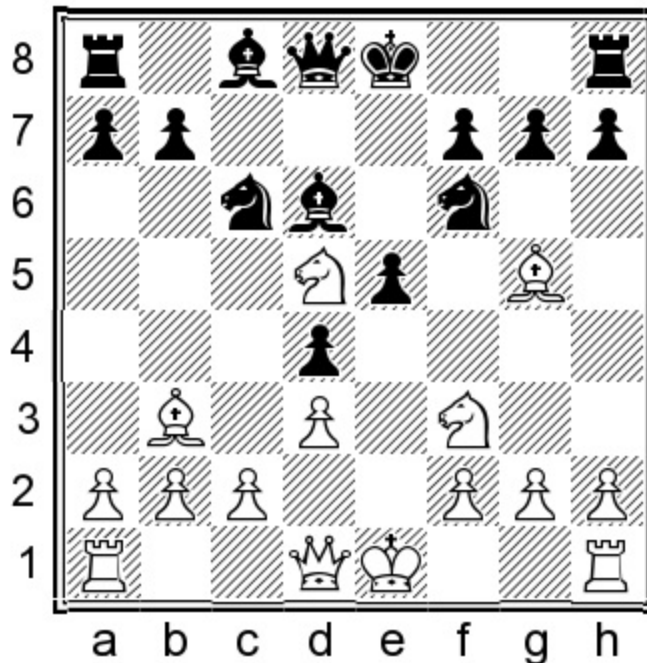
### 8.♘c3

Or 8.0-0 ♕e6 9.♘c3 ♕c7∞. With the black knight on c6, White can't play d3-d4 and answer ...e5-e4 with ♘d2. And Black can meet ♘b5 by retreating with ...♕b8.

### 8...d4

For 8...♕b4 9.0-0 ♕e6± see variation A21 (7...♕e6 8.♘c3 ♕b4 9.0-0 ♘c6).

### 9.♘d5



### 9...h6!N

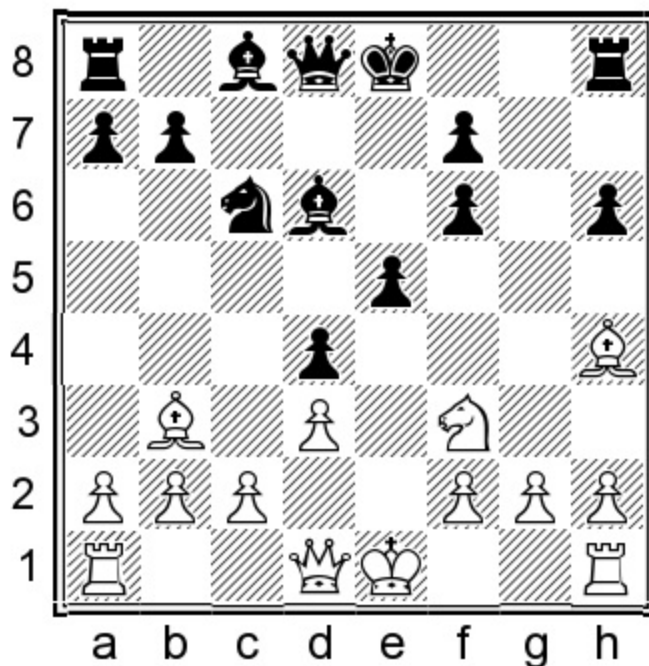
This move has not so far been played. Back in 2005, Dominguez continued with 9...♕e6. Apart from that, 9...♕e7 has been seen. After the move of the h-pawn, White has the choice between 10.♘xf6† and 10.♕xf6. In both cases, complex positions arise; in most of them White preserves a slight edge. Overall these lines need practical testing, but I have tried to provide an analysis of the positions over the next 5-10 moves.

The game Ivanchuk – Dominguez Perez, Havana 2005, went 9...♕e6 10.0-0 ♕xd5 (10...h6 11.♘xf6† gxf6 12.♕h4± transposes to variation A221: 9...h6 10.♘xf6† gxf6 11.♕h4 ♕e6 12.0-0) 11.♕xd5 h6 12.♕xf6 ♖xf6 13.c3 dxc3 14.bxc3 0-0 15.♖b1± with a slight but persistent advantage to White, who succeeded in converting it into a win.

After 9...♕e7 10.♘xe7 ♖xe7 11.0-0 h6 12.♕h4 (in Stojanović – Sulskis, Baku 2016, White for some reason exchanged with 12.♕xf6 ♖xf6 and forfeited all his advantage) 12...0-0 13.♖e1 ♕g4 14.h3 ♕xf3 15.♖xf3± White has a considerable plus, thanks to the two bishops and the possibility of pressuring the e5-pawn after doubling rooks on the e-file.

We now examine A221) 10.♘xf6† and A222) 10.♙xf6.

**A221) 10.♘xf6† gxf6 11.♙h4**



**11...♖g8**

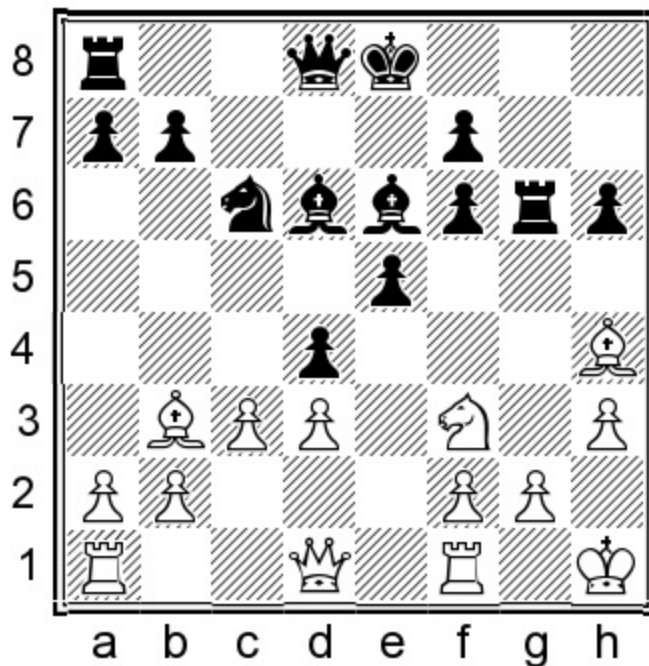
For 11...♙g4 12.0-0 ♖g8, see the note to move 12 below.

If 11...♙a5†? then 12.♘d2±. In addition to ♙xf6 White is threatening ♙h5.

After 11...♙e6 12.0-0 ♖g8 (12...♙e7 13.♘d2±) 13.♙xe6 fxe6 14.c3± White's advantage may soon increase, thanks to his superior development. For example, 14...♙e7 15.cxd4 exd4 16.♘d2±. The transfer of the knight to e4 gives White a large plus. After 16...0-0-0 17.♘e4 ♖df8 he has a number of good moves; 18.♙b3 followed by 19.f4 is simplest.

**12.0-0 ♙h3**

Or 12...♙g4 13.♙h1 ♖g6 14.h3 ♙e6 15.c3:



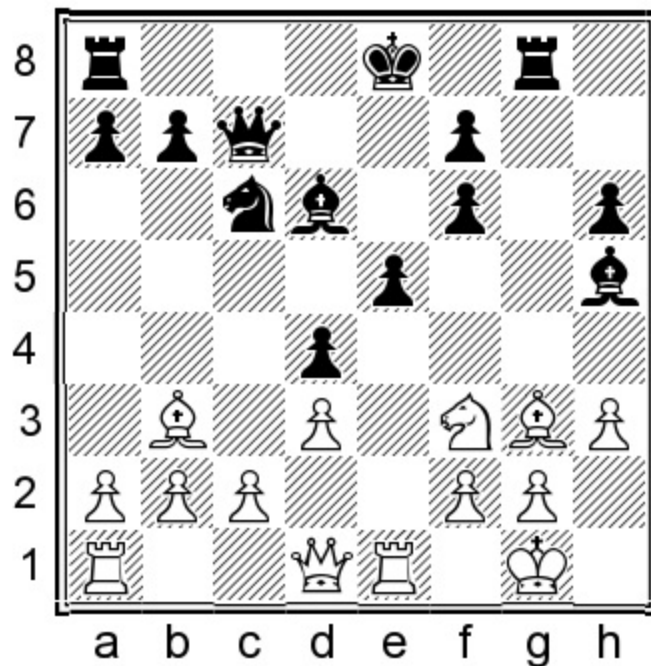
15...♚d7 (15...dxc3 16.bxc3 ♚d7 17.♗g3 gives White a small plus; the bishop shuts off the g-file, and after 17...0-0-0 18.♚e2 White will carry out d3-d4) 16.♗xe6 fxe6 17.cxd4 exd4 18.♖c1 In human terms White is slightly better, although the computer maintains that after the cool-headed 18...♔e7! the position remains unclear.

For 12...♗e6 see 11...♗e6 in the previous note.

### 13.♗g3 ♗g4

Among all the variations after 10.♘xf6†, this is probably the only position where Black successfully solves his opening problems.

### 14.h3 ♗h5 15.♖e1 ♚c7

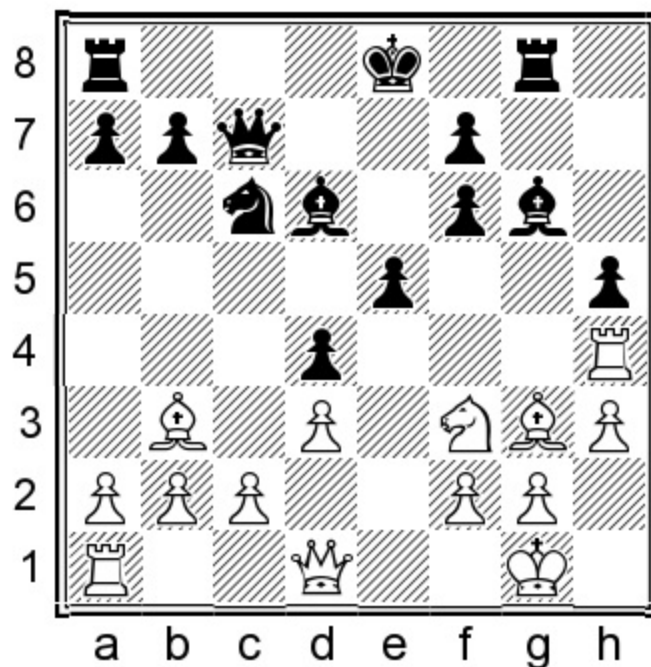


### 16. Re4

The point of bringing the rook to h4 is not so much to attack the h6-pawn as to get rid of the pin.

### 16... Qg6 17. Rh4 h5

Or 17... 0-0-0 18. Rxb6 Qf8 19. Rxc6 Rxc6 20. Nh4 with Wf3 to follow. White has full compensation for the exchange; we may even say he can bid for an advantage.



### 18. c3

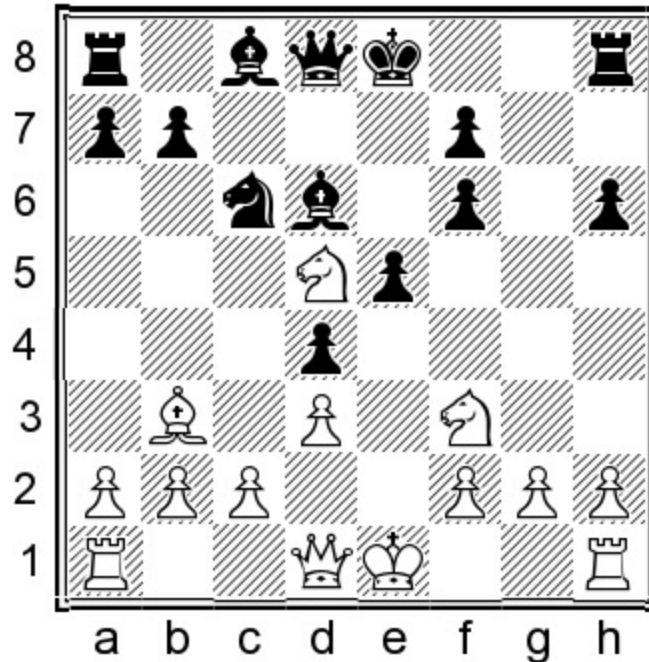
After 18. Qa4 0-0-0 19. c3 dxc3 20. Rxc4 cxb2 21. Rb1 White has adequate compensation but is unlikely to be better; for instance 21... Qe7 22. Qxc6 bxc6 23. Wa4 Qxd3 24. Rxc6 Qxb1 25. Rxc7†, and the game may end in perpetual check.

### 18...dxc3 19.bxc3 0-0-0 20.d4∞

The position offers plenty of play and approximately equal chances. In the event of 20...exd4 21.♙xd6 White has a slight edge.

A better move is 20...♖b8, with a level position after 21.♙c1 exd4 or an unclear one after 21.♙e2!?

### A222) 10.♙xf6 gxf6

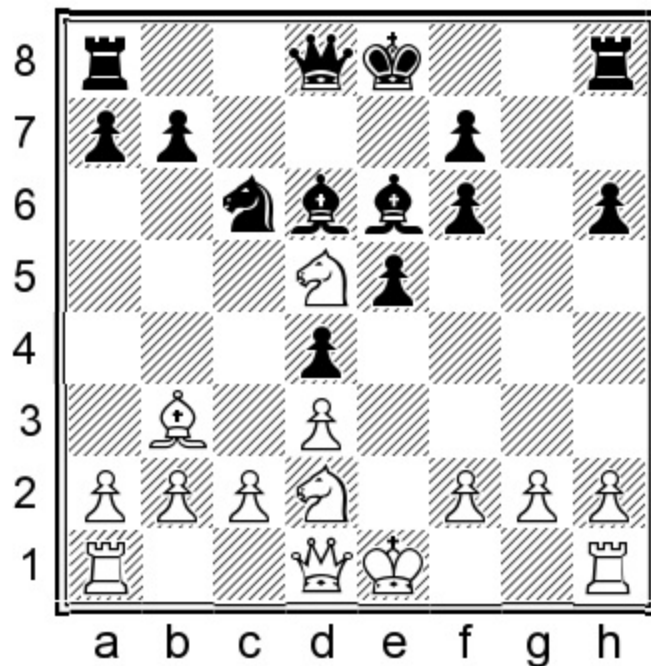


### 11.♘d2

In the case of 11.0-0 ♙g4 12.h3 ♙e6∞ the pawn on h3 somewhat weakens White's king position, but 11.♘d2 ♙e6 12.0-0 is playable – see the note to move 12.

### 11...♙e6

After 11...♘a5 12.c4 dxc3 13.bxc3 f5 14.0-0 White has a small plus since his king feels a little more secure. A good answer to 14...♙e6 is 15.♙f3, while 14...0-0 can be met by 15.♞e1.



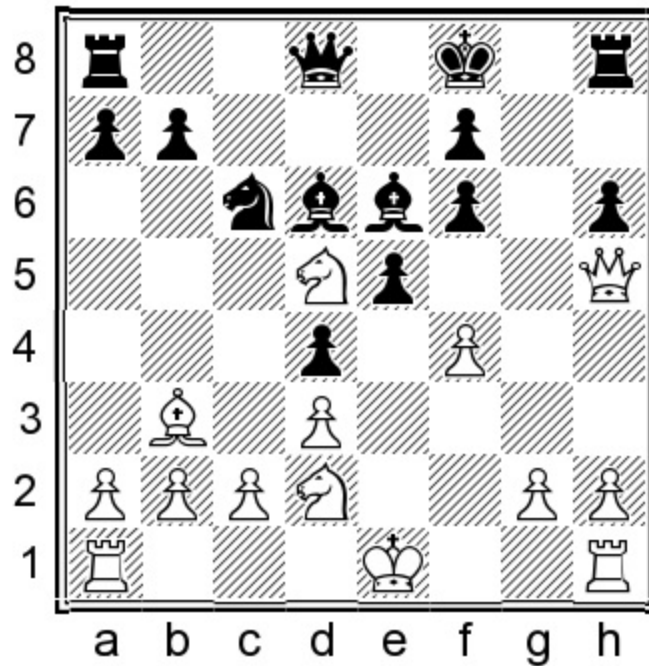
### 12.c4

An unclear position results from 12.0-0 ♕b8 13.c4 dxc3 14.♖xc3 f5. Moreover, apart from 12...♕b8, Black has the interesting 12...♕f8!?

Black is set some concrete problems by the interesting 12.♗h5!?. He has a pair of good moves (12...♖f8 then 13...♞c8) to solve them:

a) 12...♞g8 13.0-0 ♞g5 14.♗e2!? (after 14.♗xh6 ♞g6 Black would have compensation for the pawn, so withdrawing the queen and following with f2-f4 is simpler) 14...♖f8 15.♘e4 ♞g6 16.f4 Now Black is compelled to take the knight on d5 and the pawn on f4, weakening his own pawns. 16...♕xd5 17.♕xd5 exf4 18.♕xc6 bxc6 19.♘xd6 ♗xd6 20.♞ae1± White has a stable plus owing to his superior pawn structure.

b) 12...♖f8 13.f4

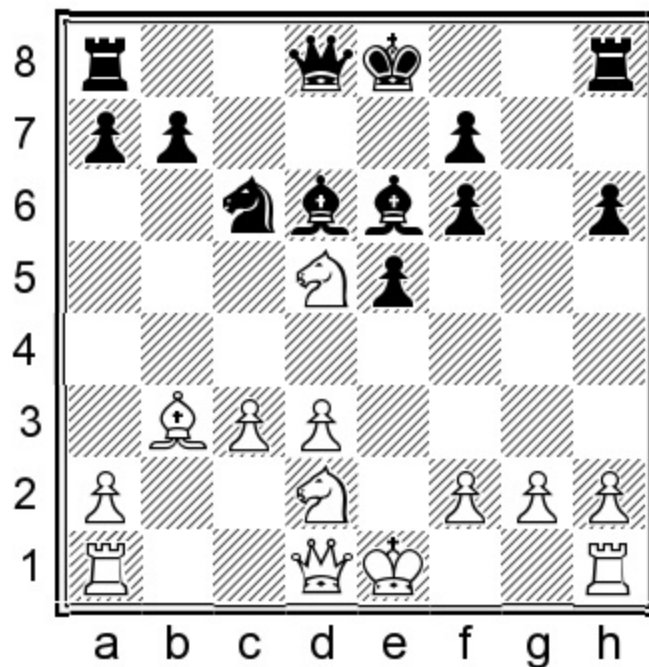


And now:

b1) 13...♖b8 14.♚f3 f5 (not 14...♘a5? 15.f5±) 15.a3± White will castle long and play on the kingside. He will meet 15...a5 with 16.a4.

b2) 13...♞c8! With the aid of these last two precise moves, Black solves his problems. 14.0-0 Intending to sacrifice a piece (14.f5 ♕xd5 15.♕xd5 ♞c7 would give White nothing, but it would be worth considering 14.a3!? with an unclear position). 14...♖b8 15.fxe5 ♕xd5 16.e6∞ In this complicated position White has enough compensation for the piece, but I doubt if he can convert it into an advantage; for that reason I have decided to focus on other variations.

**12...dxc3 13.bxc3**



### 13...f5

A humanly understandable idea is 13...♔f8, so as to transfer the bishop to g7 as a guard for the king, and then castle short. There can follow: 14.♘e4 ♕g7 15.♘e3 f5 16.♚h5! Making use of the pin to stop Black from having powerful pawns in the centre (in the case of 16.♕xe6 fxe6 White might not even equalize). 16...fxe4 17.♕xe6 0-0 18.♕d5 exd3 19.♖d1± White recovers the pawn and acquires a plus owing to his better pawn structure. Against 19...e4 White does quite well with 20.♕xe4 ♕xc3† 21.♙f1; he will then have the advantage either in the middlegame or (after Black's ...♚g5) in the ending.

In the event of 13...♕e7 14.♚f3 f5 15.0-0 ♕g5 16.♖ad1 0-0 17.♗fe1, White has a slight edge on account of his well-centralized pieces.

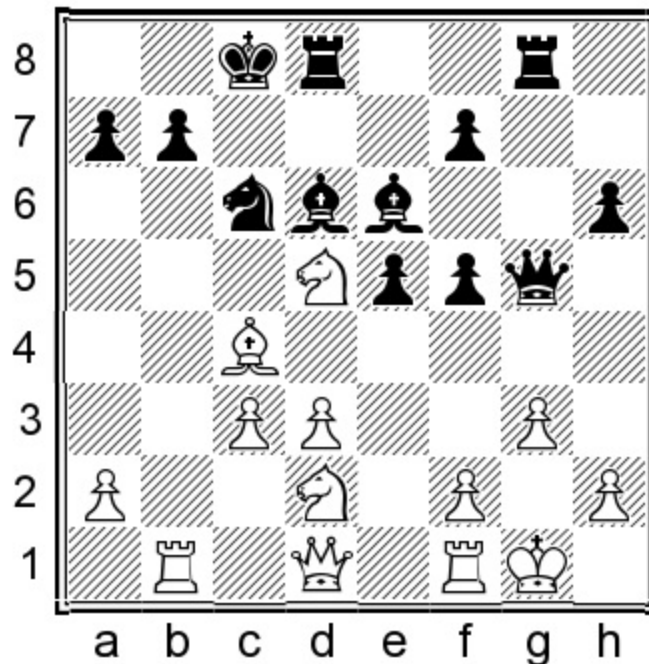
### 14.0-0 ♚g5 15.♗b1 ♗g8

This position could arise from a different move-order, for instance 13...♗g8 14.0-0 f5 15.♗b1 ♚g5.

Instead of 15...♗g8 Black's best move is possibly 15...♖d8!?, though I still prefer White's position: 16.♕c4 ♖d7 17.♘f3 ♚g6 18.g3 0-0 19.♘h4 ♚g5 20.♘e3, and the knight will reach c4 after the exchange of bishops. The position remains complex, but the white side is easier to play.

Another possibility is 15...0-0-0 16.♕c4. Attacks on opposite wings now commence, but it's easier for White to exert pressure against the b7-pawn than for Black to put pressure on a pawn on g3.

16...♗hg8 17.g3



And now:

a) 17...♗g6

Otherwise Black is in a bad way; from g6 the rook will subsequently be able to defend the

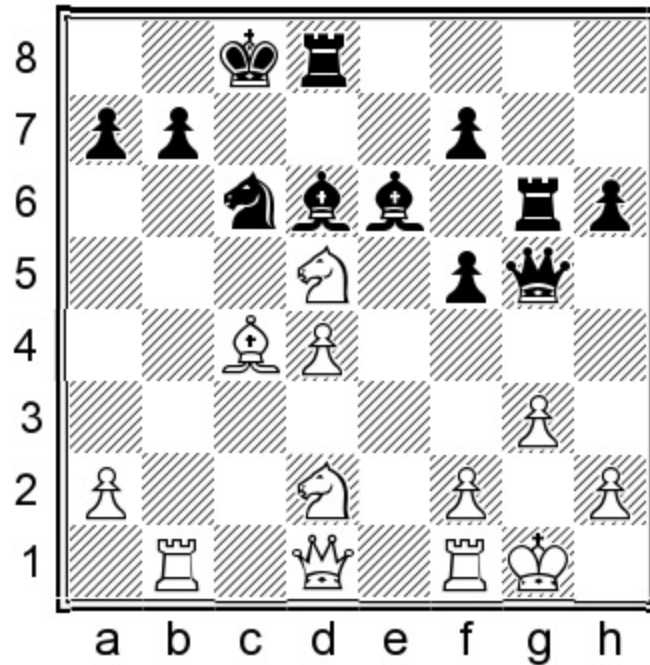
knight on c6 (for instance after 18.♖a4).

18.d4!

It's important to shut off the g1-a7 diagonal against Black's dark-squared bishop.

White doesn't gain any advantage from 18.♖a4 ♕xd5 19.♕xd5 ♖c7 with an unclear position, or from 18.♗e1 e4 19.dxe4 f4 with great complications.

18...exd4 19.cxd4



19...♖g4!

The best chance.

After 19...♗xd4? 20.♗f3 ♗xf3† 21.♖xf3 Black has an utterly hopeless position as his king is too exposed.

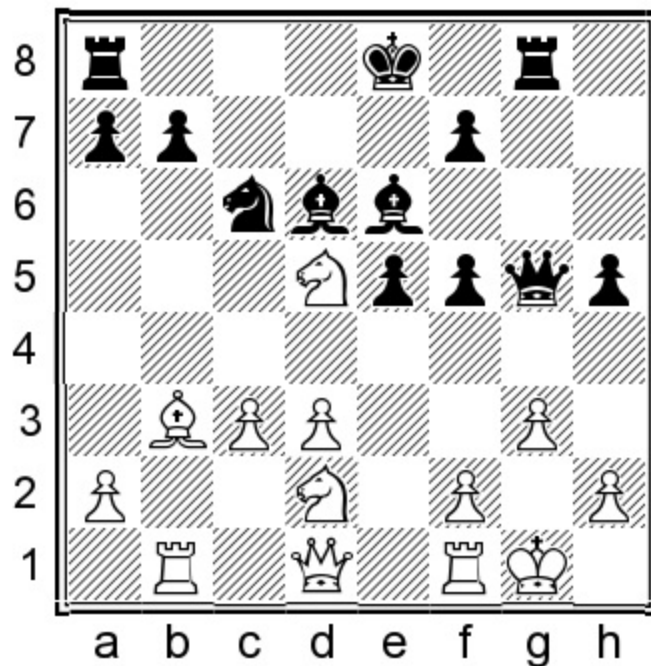
20.♖b3 ♖d7 21.♗e3 ♖xd4 22.♗fd1↑

By sacrificing a pawn, White has managed to seize the initiative. He should answer 22...♖b6 with 23.♖c2, avoiding a queen exchange and picking up the pawn on f5.

And a good reply to 22...♖f6 is 23.♗f3 f4 24.♕xe6 ♖xe6 25.♗c4, keeping up the pressure.

b) 17...♕c5 18.♖b3 ♖d7 19.♖b5± There is no good square for the bishop to move to. Against 19...♖d8, White needn't hurry to capture on c5 but may play 20.♗fe1!

**16.g3 h5**



### 17. ♖c4

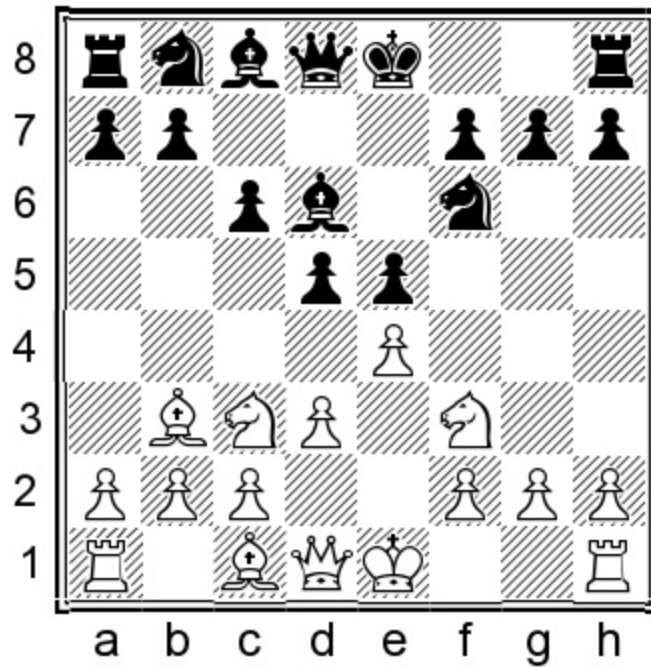
Another interesting line is 17.d4 h4 (17...exd4 18. ♘f3±) 18. ♘f3 ♙h6 19. ♚c1 ♚xc1 20. ♘f6† ♔d8 21. ♖bc1. White's position is a little more pleasant, but objectively the ending after 21...♞g6 22. ♘h5 ♖xb3 is close to equality.

### 17...♞b8 18. ♘f3 ♙h6 19. ♔h1

The position remains complex, but White's chances are nonetheless slightly better. He will answer 19...♔f8 with 20. ♘e3.

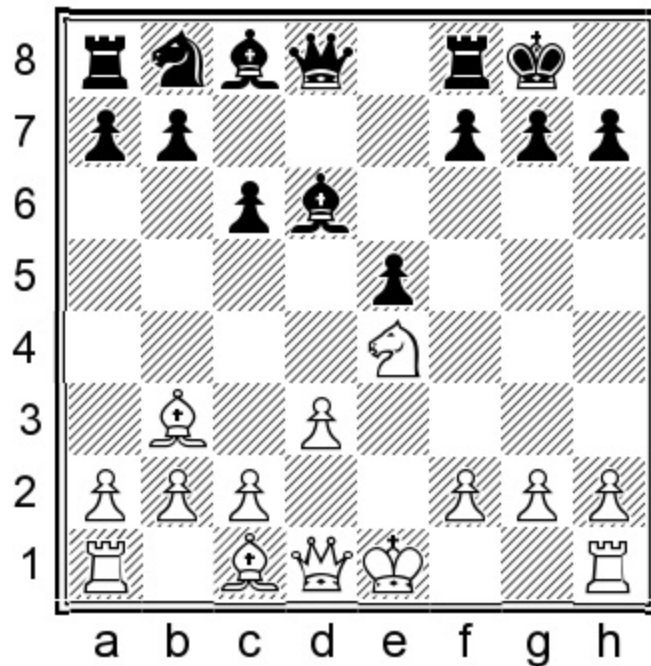
Instead after 19...h4 20. ♘xh4 f4 21. ♙f3 Black has some compensation for the pawn, but no direct attack.

### B) 6. ♘c3



Now Black has **B1)** 6...dxe4, **B2)** 6...0-0!? or **B3)** 6...d4.

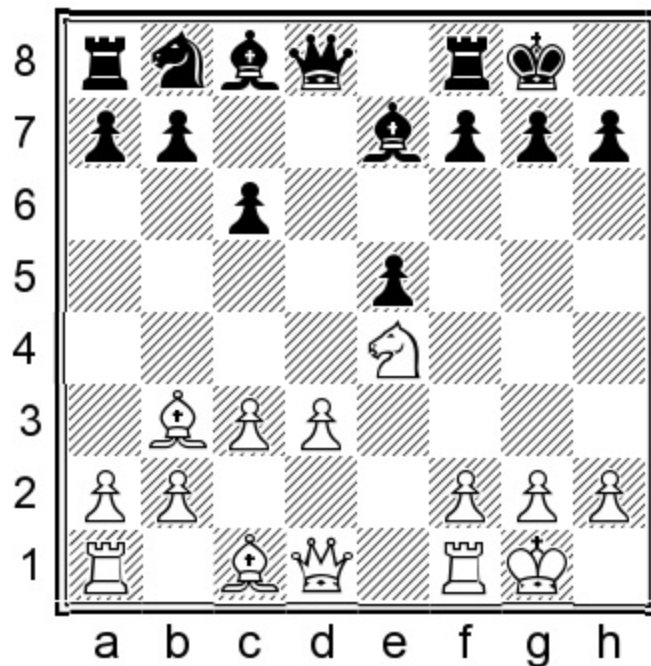
**B1)** 6...dxe4 7. ♘g5 0-0 8. ♗cxe4 ♘xe4 9. ♗xe4



The previous sequence was almost automatic, but now Black has a choice.

9... ♖f5

Or 9... ♖b4 † 10. c3 ♖e7 11. 0-0



And now:

a) 11...♙f5 12.♖h5 (if 12.♖f3 then 12...♙g6∞; White can't force Black to capture with ...♙xe4, as h2-h4 is no longer playable) 12...♙xe4 13.dxe4± This is almost the same position as in the main line below, only here White has an extra tempo.

b) 11...♘d7 12.♞e1 This position is reminiscent of the Giuoco Piano, but here Black is slightly behind in development; White therefore has a small plus.

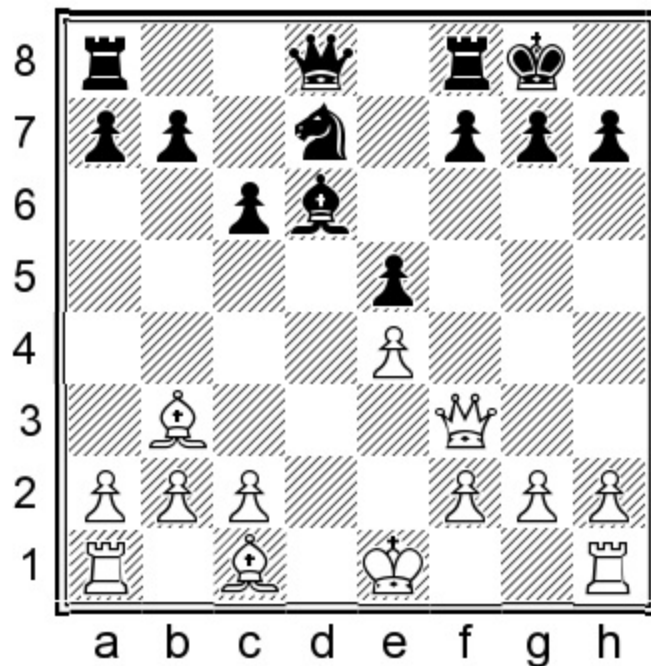
### 10.♖f3

A simple and good move, compelling Black to part with his light-squared bishop. Among other playable moves I may mention 10.♙e3!?, but there is no need to analyse it since the queen move is perfectly adequate.

### 10...♙xe4

Or 10...♙g6 11.h4 ♙xe4 (with ♘xd6 and h5 threatened, Black has to take the knight after all) 12.dxe4±. White's extra move h2-h4 is rather in his favour; next move he may play h4-h5.

### 11.dxe4 ♘d7



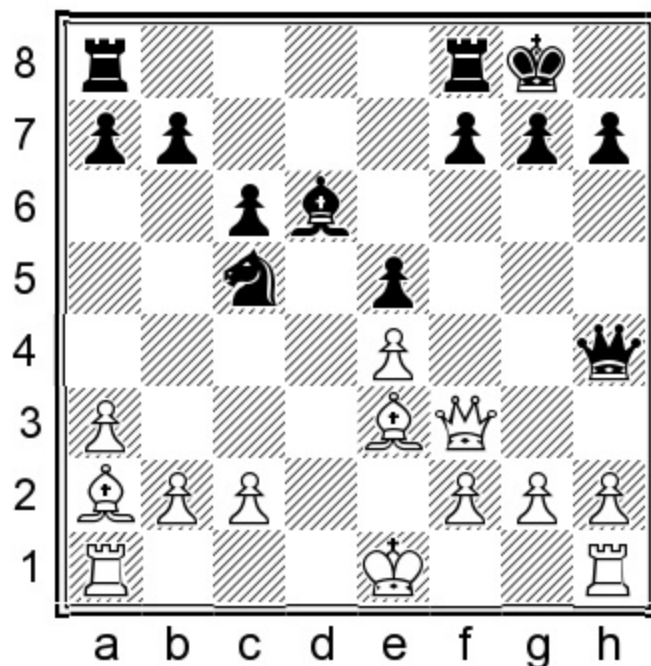
### 12.c3

It is necessary to free a square for the bishop to avoid simplifying the position. With two bishops, White usually retains the initiative.

Alternatively:

12.a3!? ♖c5 13.♙a2 ♚h4 14.♙e3!

Giving up the e4-pawn enables White to play 0-0-0 with tempo; after the queen exchange he can bring his rook to d7 with the aid of b2-b4.



14...♚xe4

If 14...b6 then 15.0-0-0± with a clear plus for White; 15...♖ad8 can be effectively met by

16.b4!?, or by 16.g4 as in Motylev – Fridman, Minsk 2017.

15.0-0-0 ♖xf3 16.gxf3 ♕e7 17.b4 ♜e6 18.♞d7 ♕f6 19.♞xb7 a5

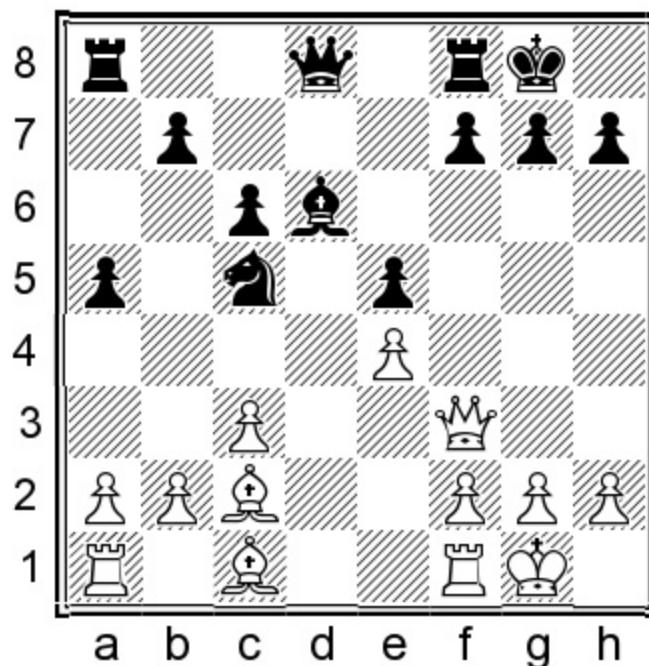
There isn't a great deal of material left on the board, but White still has pressure and winning chances after 20.♕a7!.

12.h4 ♜c5 13.♕e3 ♜xb3 14.axb3 ♖e7 15.h5 h6= After exchanging one of the bishops, it became easier for Black to play.

### 12...♜c5

Also worth noting is: 12...♕e7 13.♕h6!? White could prevent ...♕g5 by the simple ♖g3, but apart from being more spectacular, ♕h6 is actually a rather better move. 13...♜c5 (if 13...gxf6?! then 14.♞d1±) 14.♞d1 ♖c7 15.♖g4 ♕f6 16.♕c2± White keeps the two bishops and a slight advantage.

### 13.♕c2 a5 14.0-0



The bishop pair gives White a small but stable plus. From the example of V. Kovalev – Kacharava, Skopje 2019, let's see how events may develop further:

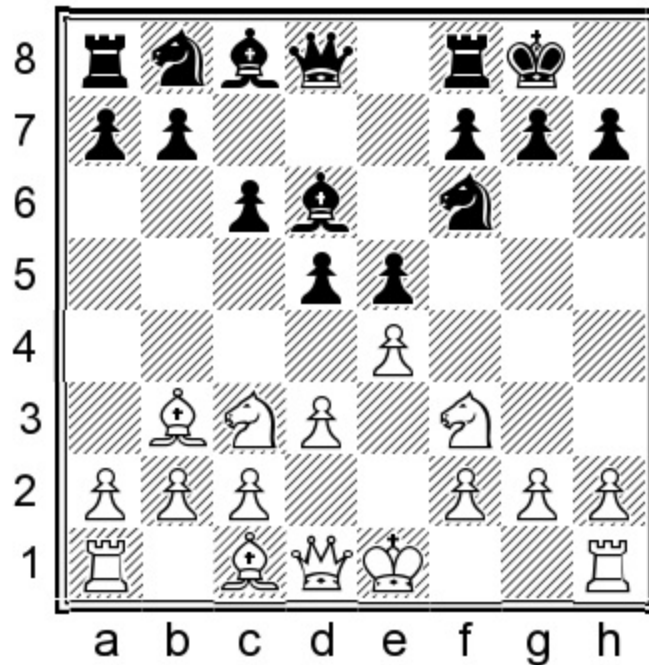
### 14...♖e7

Instead 14...a4 15.♕e3 ♜e6 16.♞ad1 ♖e7 17.g3 leads to about the same position, when White has the bishop pair.

### 15.♕e3 ♞fd8 16.g3 ♜e6 17.♞ad1 ♕c5 18.♕c1

The situation on the board has not radically altered. The main thing for White is not to exchange either of his bishops. He then keeps a slight advantage practically to the end of the game.

## B2) 6...0-0!?



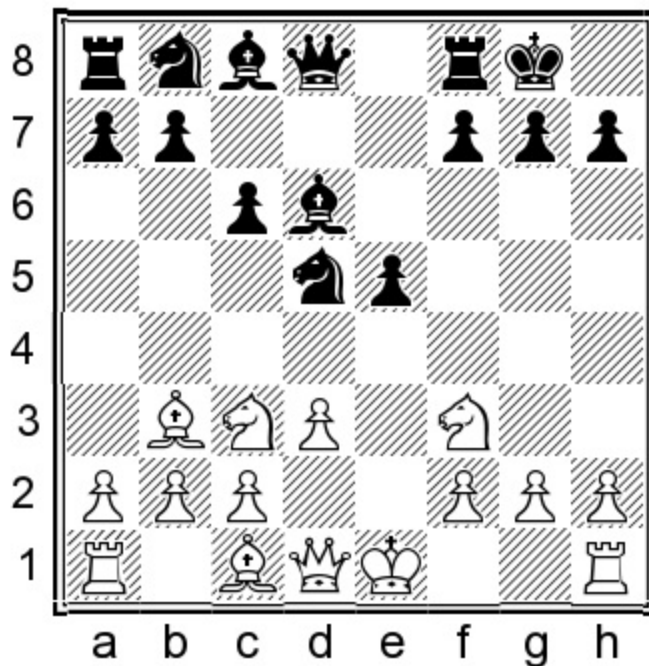
The third move in order of popularity. It's interesting that the most widespread move 6...dxe4 is weaker than the comparatively rare 6...d4 and 6...0-0.

### 7.exd5

The most natural move. If White castles, then after 7.0-0 dxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.dxe4 ♗a6! the position is equal. There is hardly any improvement in 7.♙g5 d4 8.♗e2 h6, with an unclear position.

### 7...♗xd5!

This move has only been encountered in correspondence games. The capture with the pawn could be met by 8.♙g5, so taking on d5 with the knight is more logical. A game Berlinger – Koesebay, email 2009, went 7...cxd5 8.♙g5 d4 9.♗e4 ♙e7 10.♙xf6 ♙xf6 11.0-0 ♗c6. At this point 12.♞e1 was played. A stronger move was 12.♗fd2!, after which White would retain the initiative.



### 8. ♖g5!?N

The aim is to transfer the knight to e4 and bring the queen out to h5.

Of White's other moves, 8. ♖e4 deserves attention.

After 8.0-0 ♜xc3 9.bxc3 ♙g4 Black has a comfortable position.

In the case of 8. ♙xd5 cxd5 9. ♖xd5 ♜c6 he has good compensation.

### 8...h6

The most logical move, but of course not the only one.

Black may also play 8... ♙b4 9.0-0 h6 10. ♖ge4 ♙e6 with chances of equalizing, or 8...a5!?, after which White does best to transpose to the main line with 9. ♖h5 h6 10. ♖ge4.

Of course, not 8... ♜xc3? 9. ♖h5 and White wins.

### 9. ♖ge4 a5!

Rather than retreat with his bishop, Black is prepared to sacrifice a pawn.

Against 9... ♙e6, 9... ♙c7 or 9... ♙e7, White has a good move in 10. ♖h5!. With the bishop on e7, the e5-pawn is then *en prise*; with the black bishop on c7, White is already aiming for g2-g4-g5.

### 10. ♖h5!?

Most likely the only possibility to set Black problems.

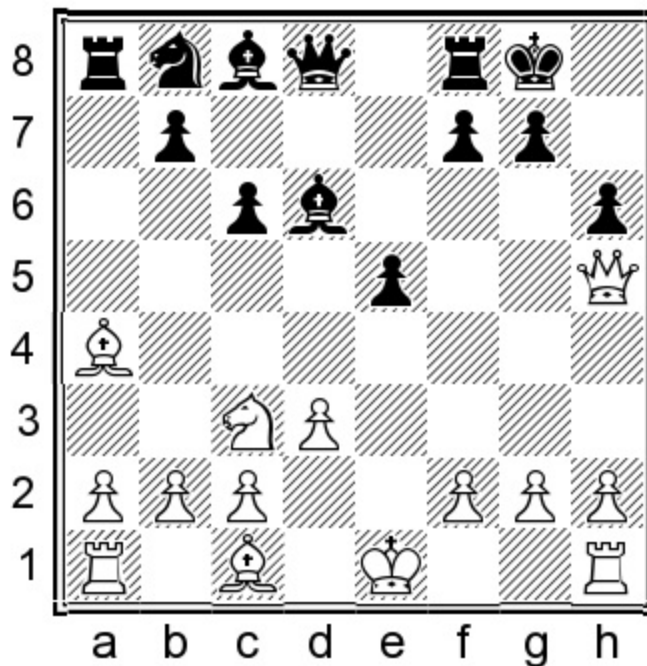
After 10.a4, or 10.♖xd6 ♔xd6 11.a4, the position is almost equal.

And if White captures with 10.♙xd5 cxd5 11.♗xd5, then 11...f5 gives Black good compensation for the pawn.

### 10...♗xc3 11.♗xc3

Now Black has to reckon with ♙xh6. On 11...♙b4 (threatening ...a5-a4) White will play 12.a3 ♙xc3† 13.bxc3 with a small plus. The computer's move 11...a4!? is more cunning.

### 11...a4!? 12.♙xa4



### 12...♗a6

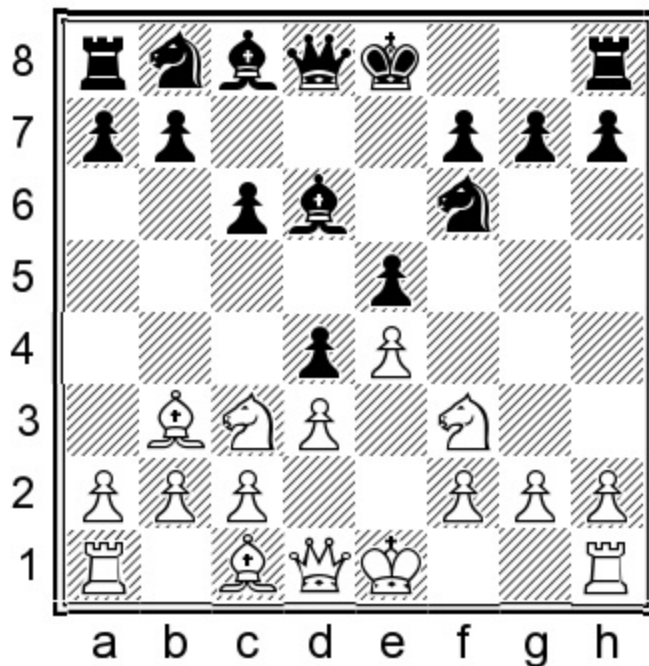
Black needs to bring his knight out via a6 to give himself the possibility of ...♗b4.

In the event of 12...♗d7 13.♙e3, or 12...♙e6 13.0-0, he hardly has sufficient compensation for the pawn.

### 13.♙e3 ♗b4 14.♙b3 ♙e6 15.♞c1 ♗xa2 16.♙xe6

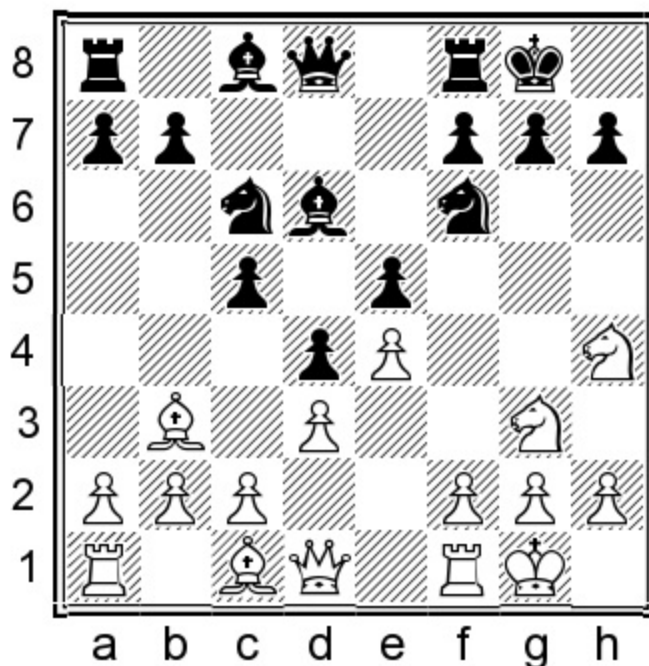
Now 16...♗xc1?! is met by 17.♙f5!, after which 17...♗a2? is unplayable owing to 18.♗e4! with a winning attack.

After 16...fxe6 17.♞b1 White's position is a little more pleasant on account of Black's doubled pawns on the e-file.



A comparatively rare move, leading to a positional game. To me it seems more logical than the more popular 6...dxe4, but White still maintains a certain amount of pressure.

7.♘e2 0-0 8.0-0 c5 9.♘g3 ♘c6 10.♘h4



Having finished his development in standard fashion, White proceeds to active operations – he directs a knight towards f5. Let's look at Black's possible replies: **B31)** 10...♙g4, **B32)** 10...g6 and **B33)** 10...♘a5.

And also:

a) 10...a5!?, forcing a2-a4. On the one hand, White will now have to take Black's bishop when it comes to e6, to avoid ...xb3 cxb3. On the other hand, the good square c4 will be available to a knight that cannot be driven away from it by pawns. After 11.a4 there can follow:

a1) 11...g4 12.f3 (not 12.f3?! e6) 12...e8 13.h3 e6 14.xe6 xe6 15.d2± After transferring his knight to c4, White has a pleasant position. He will continue with f2-f4.

a2) After 11...e6 12.xe6 fxe6 13.f3 d7 14.d2 c7 15.c4 White has a small but stable plus. A similar position arises in variation B32. In the present case Black has done without ...g7-g6, but owing to the insertion of the moves ...a7-a5 a2-a4 the white knight is effectively stationed on c4.

b) 10...e6 11.hf5 e8 12.g4 Having activated his queen, White has a promising position. For this reason Black may instead decide to play 10...g4 (as we shall see below) 11.f3 e6, so that the pawn on f3 stops the queen from emerging to g4.

### B31) 10...g4 11.e1!?

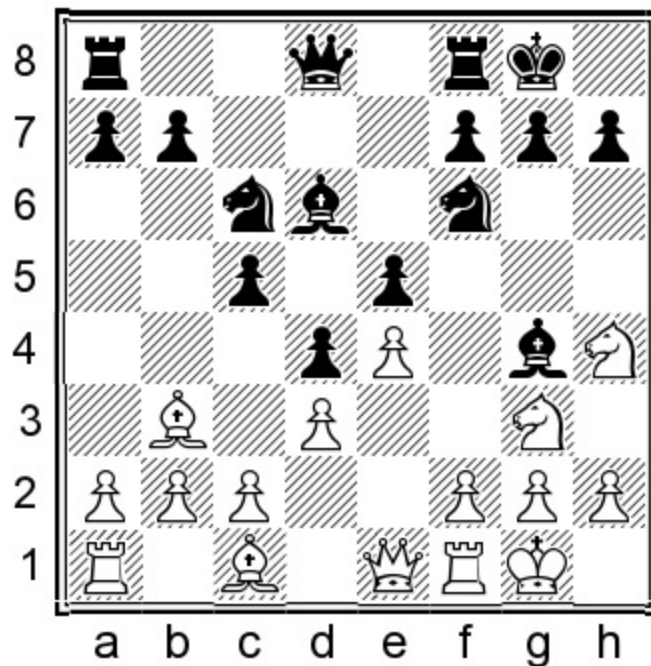
Not a bad alternative to continuing in routine style with 11.f3 e6. On e1 the queen is quite well placed; for example after 11...e6 12.hf5 we have chances to play f2-f4 and bring the queen into play via g3.

If White plays 11.f3 he will not have g4 available (as he has in the variation 10...e6 11.hf5 e8), but he can still lay claim to an advantage following the f3-f4 advance: 11...e6 12.hf5 e8 13.xd6 xd6 14.f4, and now:

a) 14...xf4 15.xf4!? By retaking on f4 with the rook, we prepare to meet the advance of Black's c-pawn. 15...c4 16.dxc4, with a slight advantage to White after 16...xc4 17.e5 xe5 18.xd4 or 16...xc4 17.f5 b5 18.h5.

b) After 14...c4 15.dxc4, Black has to capture with 15...xf4 all the same.

Instead 15...xc4?! is bad: 16.fxe5 xe5 17.f4± and Black risks losing the d4-pawn. On 17...f6 White plays 18.xc4 dxc4 19.b3 d6 20.h1, and there is no defence against the threat of xd4.

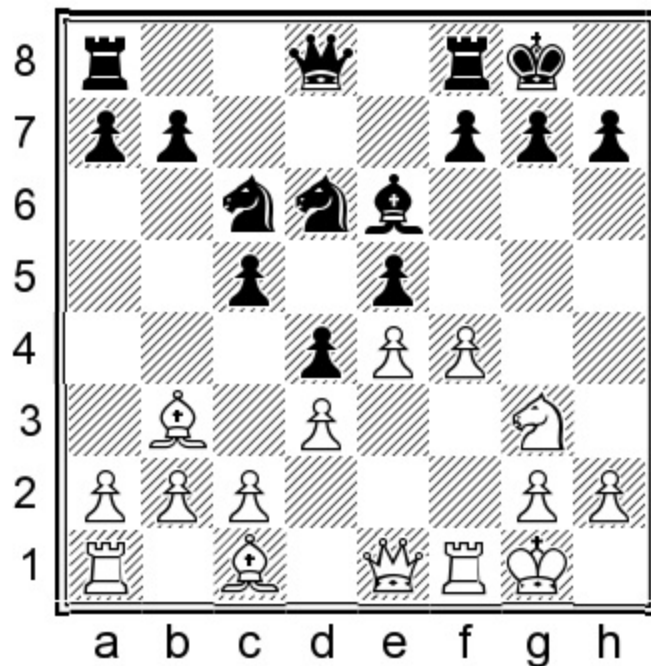


11...Qc7

Or:

a) 11...g6 12.Qg5 Qe6 13.Qxe6 fxe6 14.Nf3 with a slight edge for White. This position is very similar to the one arising from variation B32.

b) 11...Qe6 12.Nhf5 Ne8 13.Nxd6 Nxd6 14.f4±



With the queen on e1, Black cannot conveniently carry out ...c5-c4. On 14...c4 White has 15.Qxc4!? Nxc4 16.f5 with advantage.

An even worse version of Black's idea is 14...exf4 15.Qxf4 c4 16.Nh5! with a large plus for White.

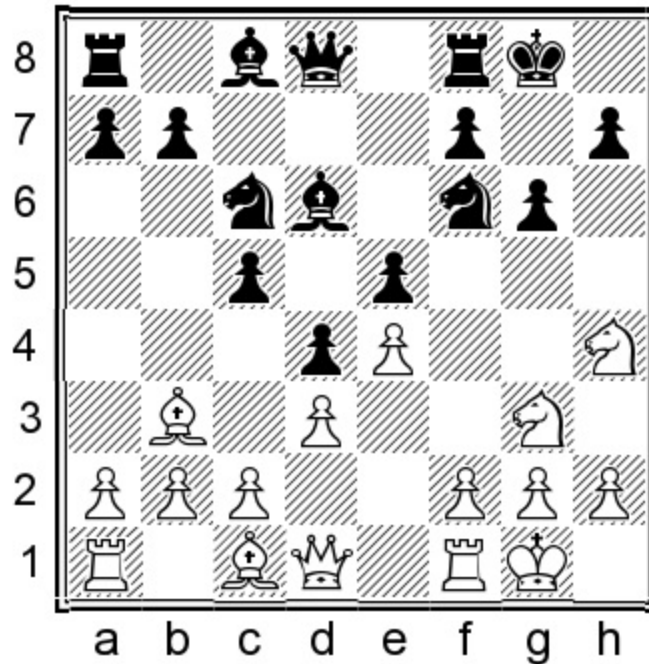
**12.♘hf5 ♕a5**

Logically playing to exchange the constricted bishop on c7 for the good one on c1. But afterwards Black will have to give up his light-squared bishop as well.

**13.♖d2 ♖xd2 14.♗xd2 ♖xf5 15.♘xf5 ♘e7 16.♗g5**

Despite the pair of exchanges, White keeps a little pressure. After 16...♘xf5 17.♗xf5 he will proceed with f2-f4.

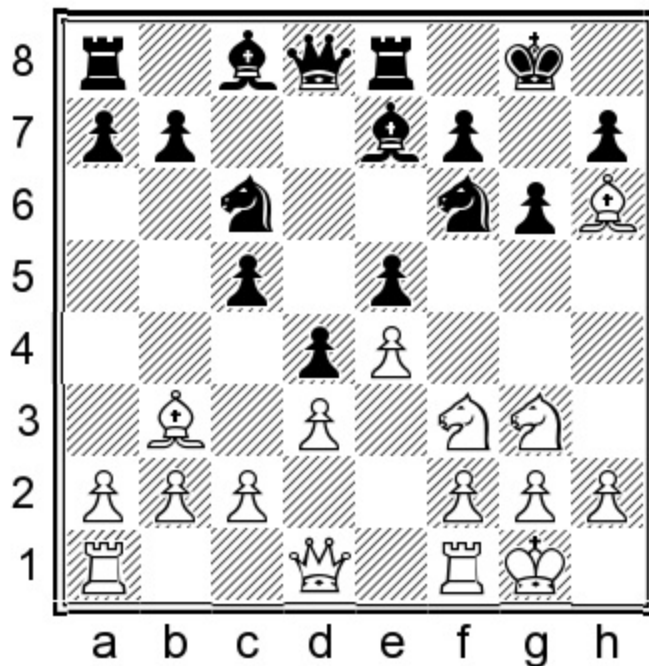
**B32) 10...g6**



**11.♖g5 ♖e7 12.♖h6!?N**

In Grischuk – El Gindy, Tbilisi 2017, the continuation was 12.♘f3 ♖g7 13.h3 ♘g8 14.♖d2 and White maintained some slight pressure. But Black could have played 13...h6!? 14.♖d2 ♖d6, leaving his knight on f6 for the moment. I therefore like 12.♖h6 better.

**12...♖e8 13.♘f3**



Now the threat of ♖g5 prompts Black to play ...♗e6, so as to exchange off the dangerous bishop on b3.

### 13...♗e6

Alternatives:

a) 13...♗f8 14.♘g5! ♜e7 (after 14...♗e6 15.♘xe6 fxe6 16.♗g5± the two bishops, combined with the threat of f2-f4, give White a considerable plus) 15.♗xf8 ♜xf8 16.f4± With the opening of the f-file, White obtains a dangerous attack. On 16...exf4 17.♝f4 ♜h6, he will play 18.h4; while against 16...♜g7, the simple 17.♜f3 is good.

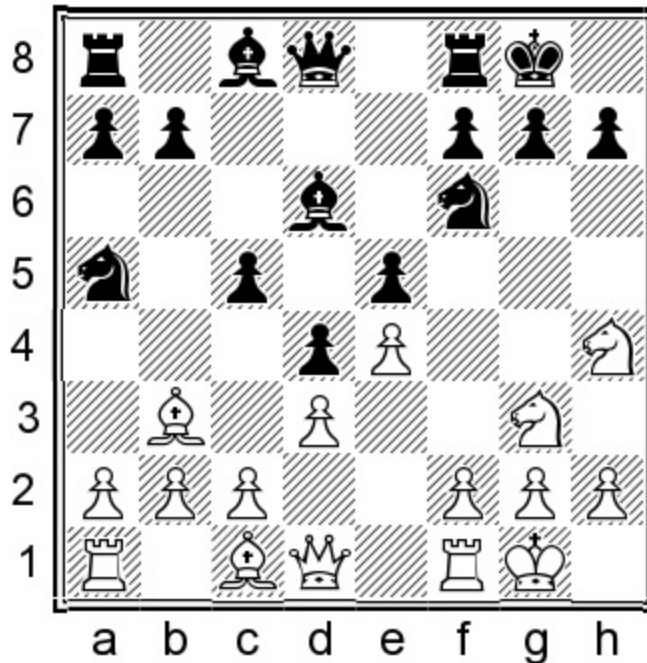
b) 13...♘g4 14.♗d2± The threat of ♖g5 has not gone away. White threatens to play h2-h3 and answer ...♘f6 with ♖g5 followed by f2-f4. Black can do nothing to stop this.

c) 13...♜c7!? 14.h3 (or 14.c3!? ♘a5 15.♗c2 with a small plus for White) 14...♘a5 15.♗a4 ♗d7 16.♗xd7 ♘xd7 17.♘h2 This position reminds me of the Breyer variation of the Ruy Lopez. White has a small but stable advantage.

### 14.♗xe6 fxe6

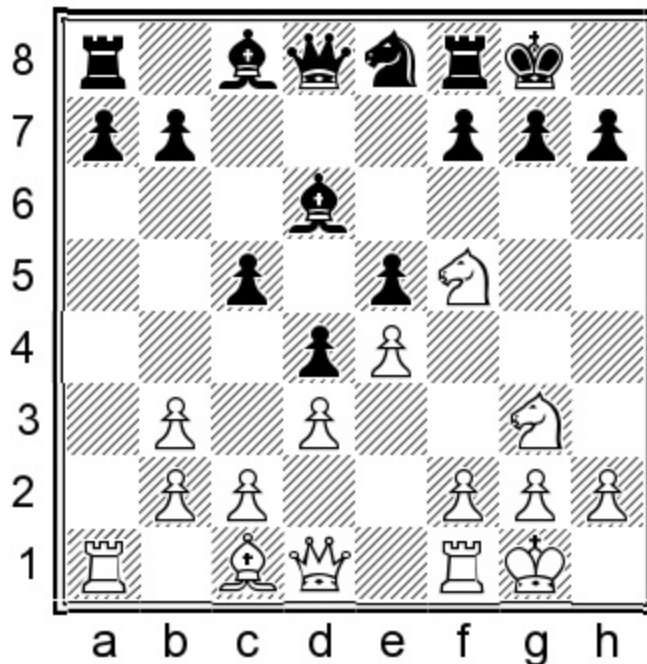
We have reached a position where a long manoeuvring game is in prospect. The doubled pawns on the e-file give White a slight edge – but since the players will constantly have the choice between various moves of roughly equal worth, it's hard to give any concrete variations. For White I can suggest 15.a3!?, aiming to advance with b2-b4. For instance after 15...♗f8 16.♜d2, White already wishes to push his b-pawn. Should Black play ...a7-a5, White can reply a3-a4 and then redeploy his knight with ♖g3-f1-d2-c4. In a closed position there is no cause for hurry.

B33) 10...♘a5



This variation was also mentioned by Delchev in his book. Black eliminates the potentially dangerous bishop but it takes time, and White still has plenty of play on the kingside.

11.♘hf5 ♗xb3 12.axb3 ♖e8



13.f4!?N

This novelty makes the claim that the f5-knight is no weaker than any bishop, so there is no hurry to take on d6.

The game S. Sanchez – Alvarez Pedraza, Cartagena 2015, continued:

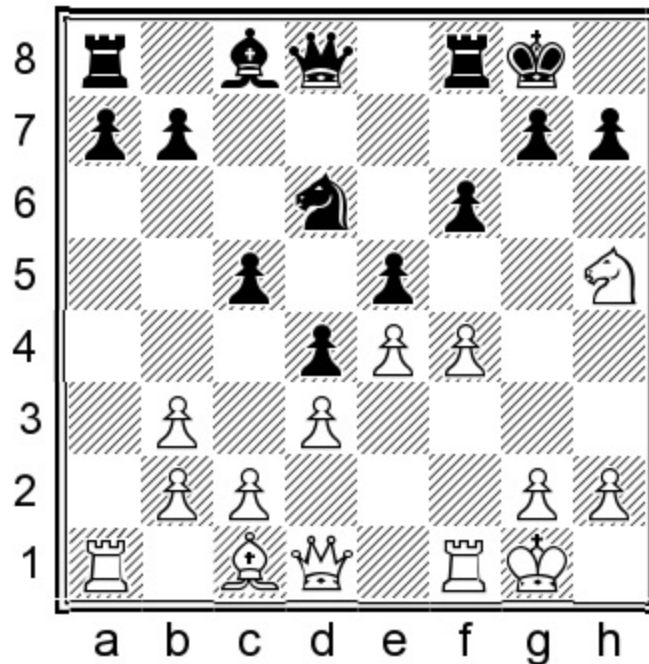
[chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)

13. ♖xd6 ♜xd6 14. f4 f6

Here White continued 15. ♕h5, when Black could have answered 15... ♘f7!?.

More interesting is:

15. ♘h5



15...g6

Challenging White to either retreat or sacrifice.

White also has an edge after 15... ♕e8 16. f5± or 15... ♘f7 16. ♕f3±.

16. ♕f3!?

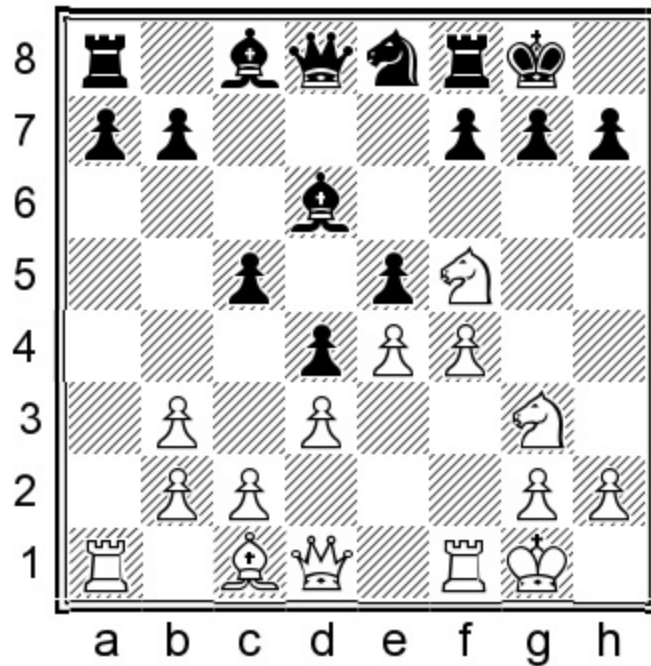
Or 16... ♘f7 17. fxe5 gxe5 transposes.

17. fxe5 ♘f7

Instead 17... ♙g4 18. ♕g3± does not help Black. After 18... fxe5 White exchanges on f8 then plays h2-h3, regaining the piece with a good advantage.

18. exf6±

With more than enough compensation for the piece, even though White only has two extra pawns so far. On 18...h4 White will play 19. ♕h5, creating several threats at once, including ♙h6 as well as simply taking the h-pawn.



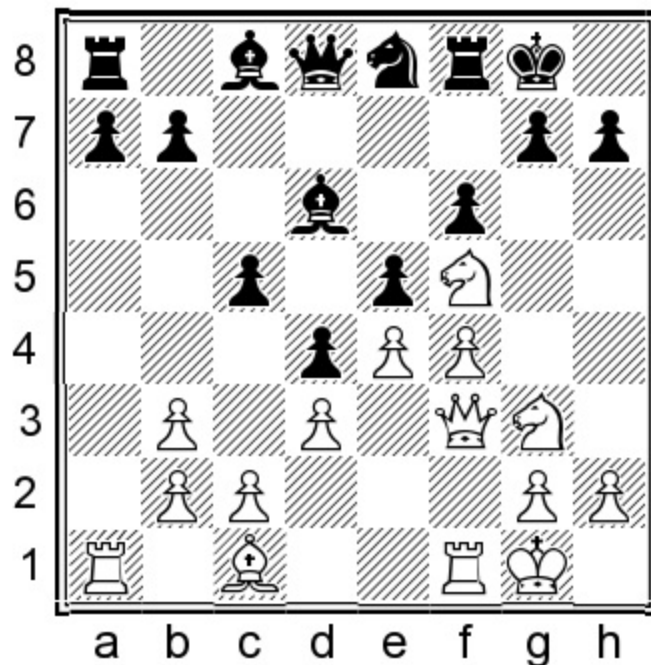
### 13...f6

After 13...exf4 14.♙xf4 ♘xf4 15.♖xf4± White's advantage is more obvious.

### 14.♗f3

At first I wanted to play 14.♗h5 g6 15.♘h6† ♔g7 16.♗h4, but then I found that after 16...exf4 17.♙xf4 ♘e7! 18.♙d2 f5 19.♗f4 ♗d6 Black has good chances of equalizing.

14.♘xd6 ♘xd6 transposes to 13.♘xd6.



### 14...b6!?

A slight strengthening of the position.

Instead after 14...♙c7 15.fxe5 ♘xe5 16.♙f4 the same position arises, only with a pawn on b7.

Also after 14...♙e6 15.♘h5 Black has a rather unpleasant position.

### 15.fxe5 ♘xe5 16.♙f4 ♘xf4 17.♚xf4±

The game is focused on the kingside, where White has a half-open f-file, so the initiative is on his side. Black has no counterplay and needs to concentrate solely on defence.

## Conclusion

The popularity of 5...♙d6 has recently slumped. Fridman played that way a few times in 2017, but from analysing the games I concluded that with precise play White had the chance to gain the upper hand. Against 5...♙d6 White has two possibilities.

The first of them sets Black some specific problems after 6.exd5 and swift development of the pieces.

In the case of 6...♘xd5!? 7.0-0 0-0 8.♙e1 White seizes the initiative or picks up the e5-pawn with advantage.

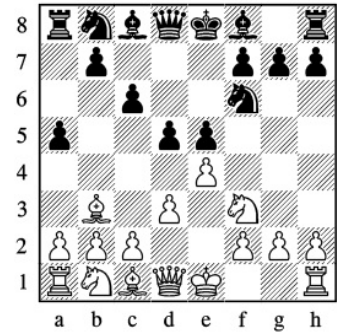
After 6...cxd5 7.♙g5 only the accurate moves 7...♘c6! and 9...h6!N give Black chances of equalizing.

White's other continuation, 6.♘c3, is designed to give him a small but stable plus after 6...d4 7.♘e2. Black also has the slightly more shrewd 6...0-0!?, but the most popular choice, 6...dxe4, is definitely inferior.

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# Chapter 6

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## 5...a5

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6 4.♗f3 d5 5.♙b3 a5 6.a4 ♙b4† 7.c3 ♙d6 8.exd5

A) 8...♗xd5 9.0-0 0-0 112

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B) 8...cxd5 9.♙g5 ♙e6 10.♗a3 ♗bd7 11.♗b5 ♙b8 114

B1) 12.d4!? e4 13.♗d2 h6 14.♙h4 115

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B21) 16.d4 e4 17.c4 dxc4 18.♙xc4 126

B211) 18...♙f4 126

B212) 18...♙xc4 127

B22) 16.♗f1!?N ♗c5 17.♙c2 d4 18.cxd4!? exd4 19.♞d2 ♙d7 20.♗xd4 ♞xe1 21.♞xe1  
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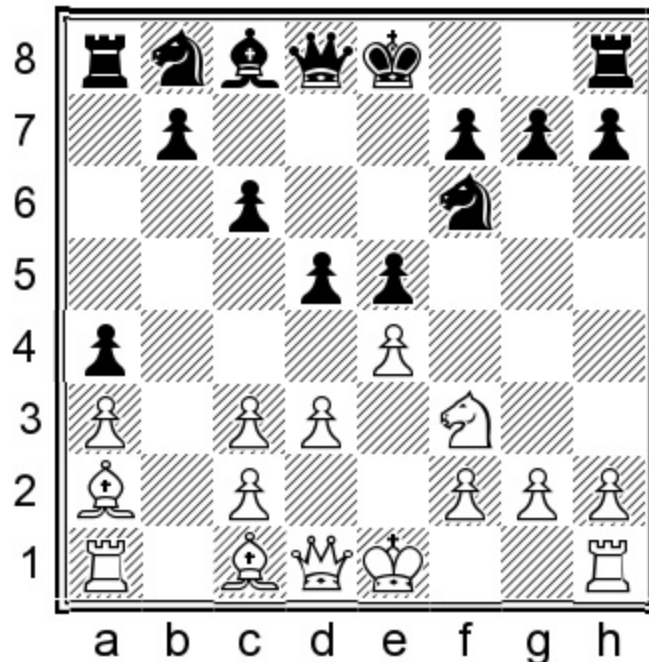
1.e4 e5 2.♙c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6 4.♘f3 d5 5.♙b3 a5

A natural-looking try, so we will consider it in some depth. Since the usual reply is a2-a4, this chapter will in effect explore which side benefits from the addition of ...a7-a5 and a2-a4.

### 6.a4

I am sceptical about White's other possible moves; they shouldn't give Black any difficulty. Still, let me say a few words about two of them:

a) 6.♘c3 ♙b4 7.a3 ♙xc3† 8.bxc3 a4 9.♙a2

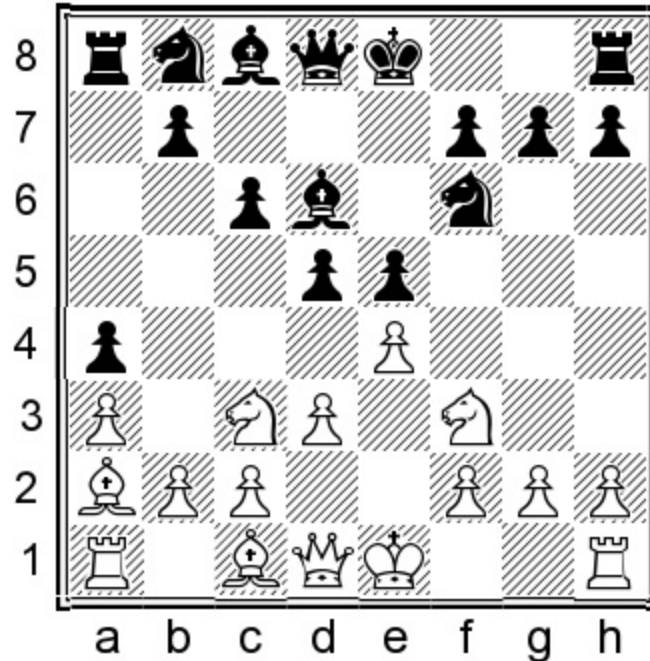


And now:

a1) 9...dxe4!? 10.♘xe5 0-0 11.0-0 ♘bd7 This position arose from a different move-order in Wegelin – Suess, corr. 2018. There followed 12.♘c4 b5 13.♘d6 exd3 14.♙xd3 ♘c5 15.♙g3 ♙e6, and now a series of forced moves, after which the position clears up: 16.♙h6 ♘h5 17.♙e5 ♙xa2 18.♙xc5 (not 18.♙xa2?! ♘e6) 18...♙d5 19.♙e3= Next move White will play c3-c4, ridding himself of the doubled pawns. But afterwards Black will not be any worse.

a2) 9...♙g4 10.exd5 ♖xd5 11.♙xd5 cxd5 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♚xf3 0-0 14.0-0 ♖c6= occurred in Tocklin – Sutkalenko, corr. 2018. Black has no perceptible problems.

b) 6.a3 This was played not long ago by Caruana, but on closer inspection we perceive that it was just a blitz game. 6...a4 7.♙a2 ♙d6 8.♖c3



And now:

b1) 8...dxe4?! 9.♖g5 0-0 10.♖xe4 ♖xe4 11.♖xe4± was Caruana – Harikrishna, Saint Louis (blitz) 2019.

b2) Kovalev – Fridman, Liep’ja 2017, went: 8...d4 In pushing this pawn, Black is preparing to exchange the light-squared bishops (8...♙e6 9.0-0 0-0∞ is also worth considering). 9.♖e2 0-0 10.0-0 c5 11.♖g3 ♙e6 With an unclear position; in my view Black’s chances are not at all worse.

### 6...♙b4† 7.c3

Unlike the position with the a-pawns on their original squares, in this case blocking the check with the bishop is rare and feeble. 7.♙d2?! is well met by 7...dxe4 or by simply castling at once. In this case the benefit of the ...a7-a5 move is simply to defend the b4-bishop.

### 7...♙d6 8.exd5

I consider it best to take the d5-pawn at once, depriving Black of the chance to capture with ...dxe4 himself.

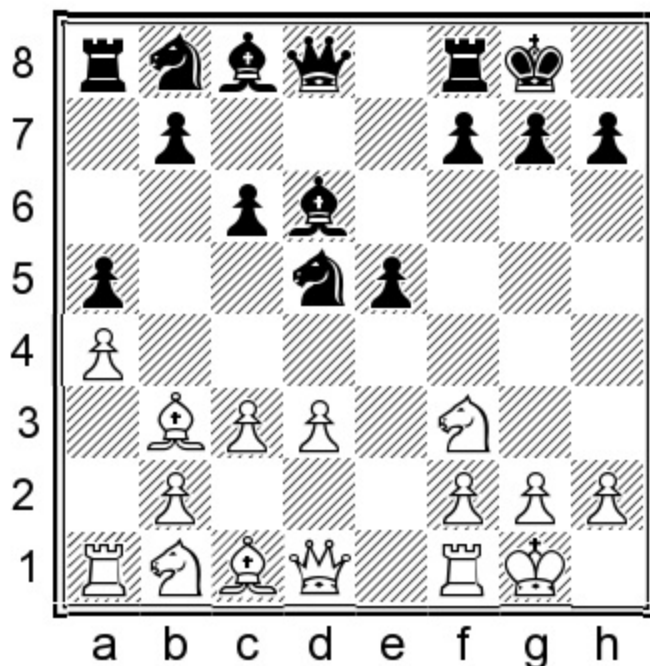
From the symmetrical formation that arises after 8.0-0 dxe4!? 9.dxe4 0-0 it’s hard for White to obtain anything. I will give a short variation to show how events may develop: 10.♖bd2 ♖bd7 11.♖c4 ♙c7 12.♙c2 ♚e7 13.♚e2 b6 14.b3 with a roughly equal position.

Now Black has **A)** 8...♖xd5 or **B)** 8...cxd5.

### A) 8...♖xd5

A comparatively rare move; much more often 8...cxd5 is chosen. With ...♖xd5 Black stops the white knight from going to b5, but on the other hand White acquires the possibility to put pressure on the e5-pawn, which will probably have to be supported by ...f7-f6. On the whole 8...cxd5 appears sounder.

### 9.0-0 0-0

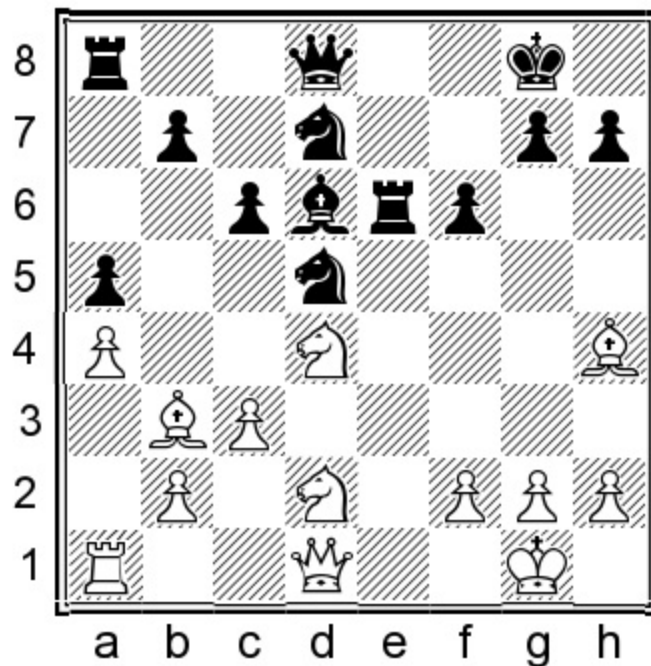


Now White can choose between A1) 10.♖e1, A2) 10.♖a3!? and A3) 10.♗g5N.

With 10.♖bd2 ♖d7 11.♖c4 ♗c7 the play transposes to A2.

### A1) 10.♖e1 ♗g4!

Or: 10...♖e8 I give this move because the subsequent play can lead to variation A3 (that is, 10.♗g5 f6 11.♗h4 ♗e6). 11.♗g5 f6 12.♗h4 ♗e6 13.♖bd2 ♖d7 14.d4! (Nabaty – Fridman, Batumi 2018, went 14.♖c4 ♗c7 15.d4 exd4 16.♖xd4 ♗f7; the position has quietened down, although after 17.♖xe8† ♗xe8 18.♗g3 White still has rather the more pleasant game) 14...exd4 15.♖xe6 An excellent way to exploit the a2-g8 diagonal, making use of the fact that the black king hasn't moved to h8. 15...♖xe6 16.♖xd4



And now:

a) 16...♖c5 17.♗xe6 ♗xe6 18.♗e4 ♕e5 19.♔g4± Thanks to his powerful bishop on b3, White has a large plus. On 19...♔e7, a good move is 20.♕g3, with the idea of transferring the knight (after 20...♗xg3 21.♗xg3) to f5.

b) 16...♞e5! The only possibility to avoid a difficult position. 17.c4 ♗c5 18.cxd5 ♗xb3 19.♔xb3 ♞xd5 20.♗c4± A rook and pawn are nominally equal in value to two knights – but with queens on the board, White's greater quantity of pieces gives him the advantage. In answer to 20...♗h8, the simple 21.♗f3 is adequate.

11.♗bd2 ♗d7 12.♗c4 ♔c7! 13.h3 ♕h5

With an unclear position.

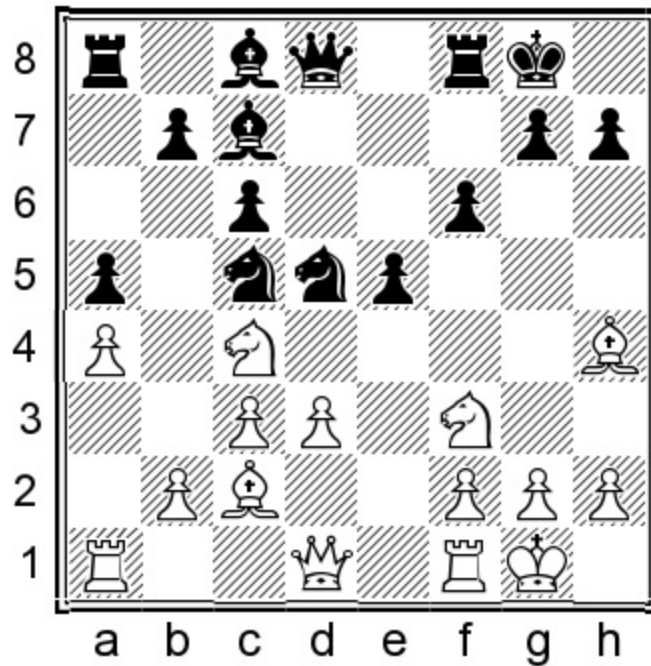
**A2) 10.♗a3! ♕c7 11.♗c4 ♗d7**

This position could also arise from a different sequence of moves: 10.♗bd2 ♗d7 11.♗c4 ♕c7

**12.♕g5**

Or 12.♞e1 ♞e8 13.♕g5 f6 14.♕h4 ♗c5 15.♕c2 ♕f5∞. In this position White can't play 16.♗fxe5? because of 16...g5!. Contrast variation b in the note to move 14.

**12...f6 13.♕h4 ♗c5 14.♕c2**

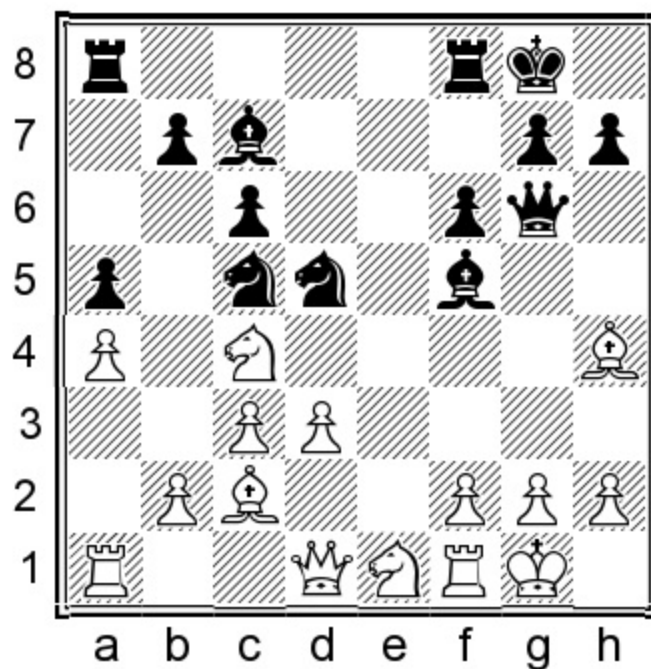


14...♙g4!?

Or:

a) 14...♘f4 15.d4 exd4 16.♘xd4 and White maintains a little pressure. Now 16...♘xg2? doesn't work: 17.♙xg2 ♖d5† 18.♙g1 ♖xc4 19.♖h5 and wins. The best continuation is 16...♘ce6 17.♘f5, followed by ♘d6.

b) 14...♙f5 15.♘fxe5!? ♖e8 (not 15...g5? 16.♘g4!±; if ♖e1 and ...♖e8 had been inserted, White wouldn't have this resource – so his ♘f3xe5 would fail) 16.♘f3 ♖g6 17.♘e1

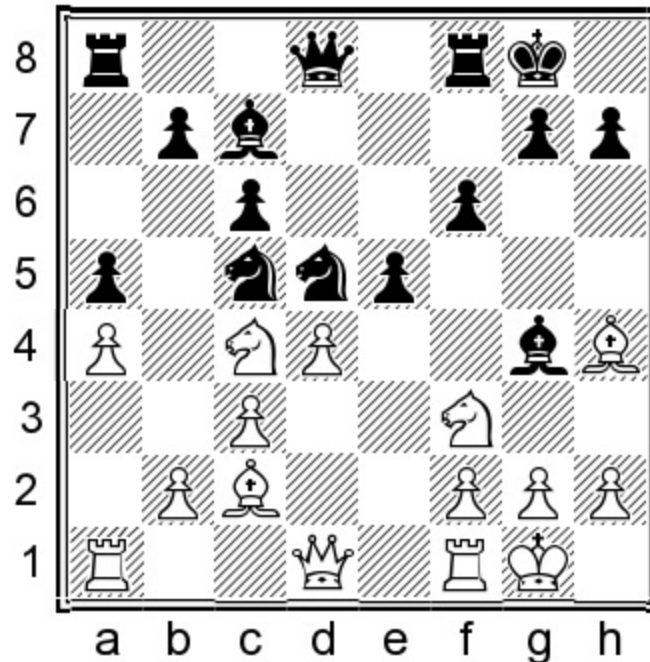


And now:

b1) 17...♞ae8 18.♔g3± White remains with an extra pawn. In answer to 18...♔g4 he can simply move his queen: 19.♚c1, and if 19...♔xg3 then 20.fxg3.

b2) 17...♔g4! The threat of a subsequent ...♔e2 compels White to weaken himself with f2-f3. 18.f3 ♔f5 19.d4 Now with the help of a small tactical ploy, Black can regain his pawn, but this isn't sufficient to equalize. 19...♔xc2! 20.♚xc2 ♚xc2 21.♞xc2 ♞xa4 22.♞xa4 b5 23.♞aa1 With a small but persistent advantage to White, thanks to Black's disrupted pawns. After 23...bxc4, a good move is 24.♞a3.

## 15.d4



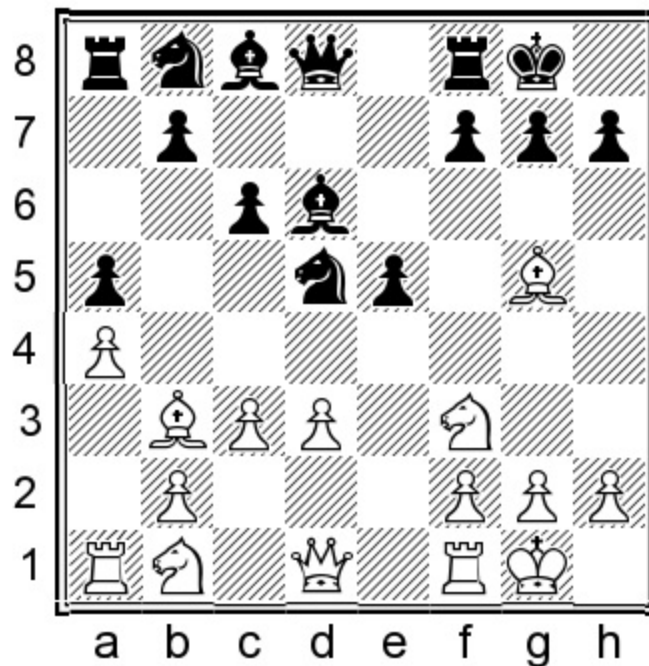
## 15...♔xf3!

In the event of 15...exd4 16.♚xd4 ♔xf3 17.♚xc5 ♔h5 18.♔g3± White is slightly better on account of his active pieces. And after the exchange of dark-squared bishops, the a5-pawn and the d6-square are weakened.

## 16.♚xf3 exd4 17.cxd4 ♞e6∞

The computer says the position is unclear, but from the human standpoint White's game is more pleasant because of his bishop on c2. He can play 18.♞ad1 or 18.♚e4 ♞df4! 19.♞ad1, with a comfortable position.

## A3) 10.♔g5N



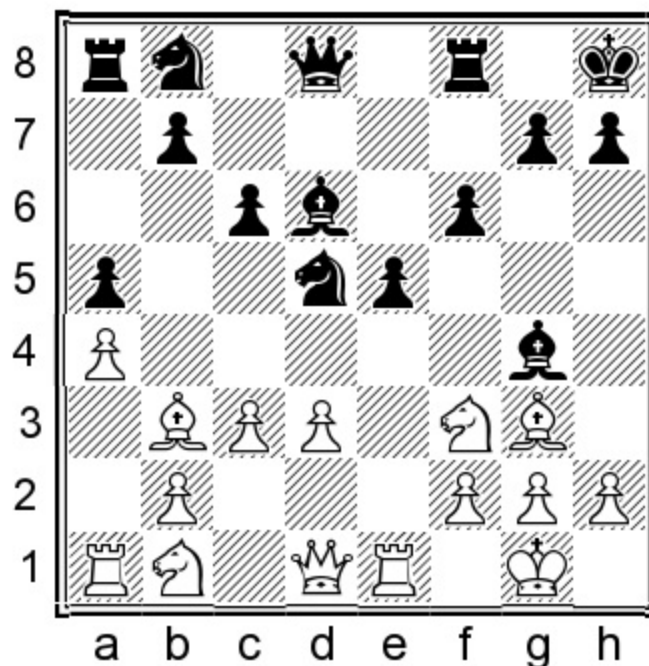
In general terms this transfer of the bishop to h4 or g3 is useful to White; but we have seen that he may try bringing his knight to c4 first, by 10.♘a3 or 10.♘bd2.

### 10...f6 11.g4 ♔h8

Evading the threat of c3-c4-c5.

The continuation 11...♙e6 12.♖e1 ♖e8 13.♘bd2 ♘d7 gives a position from the Nabaty – Fridman game that we examined in variation A1 (10.♖e1 ♖e8).

### 12.♖e1 ♙g4 13.♙g3



### 13...♖a6!?

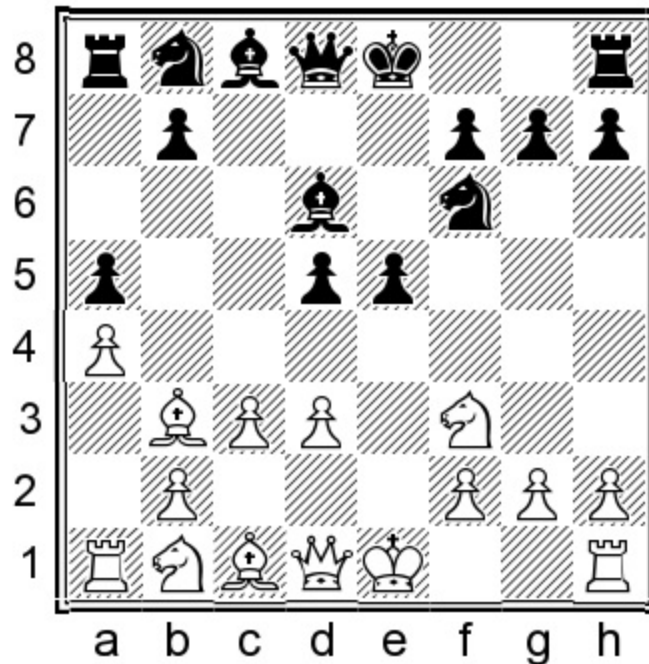
On 13...♖d7 White has the additional possibility of 14.d4!? ♙c7 15.♖a3 ♗7b6 16.♖c4. Then 16...♙xf3 can be answered by 17.gxf3, and in spite of his spoilt pawn structure, White has a small plus.

### 14.♖bd2 ♗c5 15.♙c2

The position offers plenty of play; White's chances are slightly better. Against 15...♖e6 he can continue 16.h3 ♙h5 17.d4.

He can meet 15...♙c7 with 16.♙b1!?!; then on 16...♖e6 he has 17.h3, with the same idea of d3-d4 after Black's ...♙h5.

### B) 8...cxd5



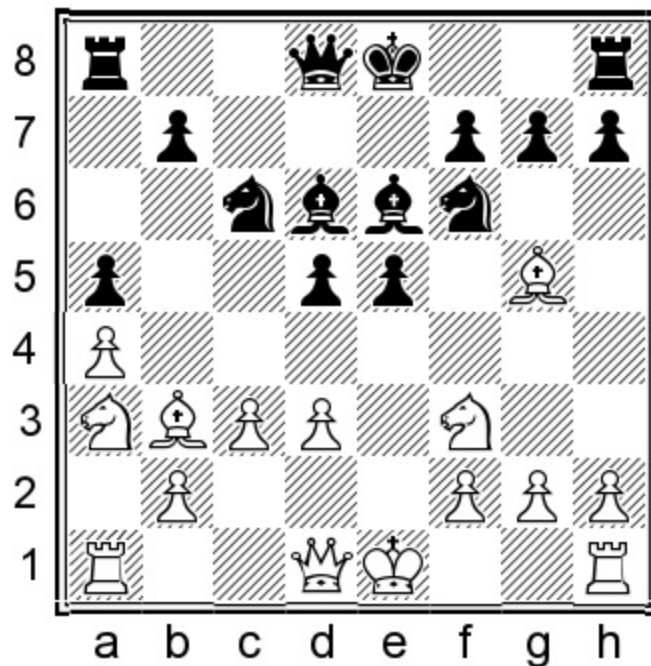
### 9.♙g5

The inaccurate 9.♖a3 leads to a comfortable position for Black after 9...h6!? 10.♖b5 ♖c6 11.♖xd6† ♙xd6. Black doesn't mind giving up his dark-squared bishop for the good knight on b5, taking into account that White's bishop on c1 can no longer reach h4 or g3.

### 9...♙e6 10.♖a3 ♗bd7

This is the standard move, but the other knight development is also worth a quick look:

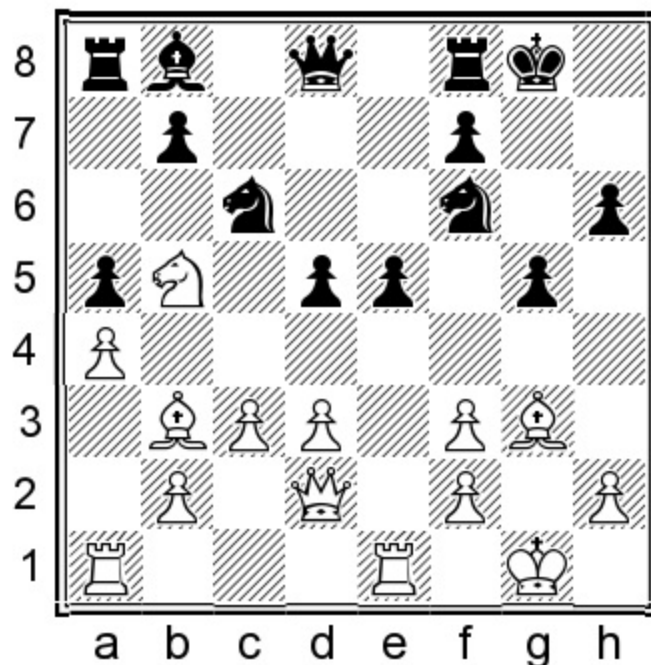
### 10...♖c6



A relatively rare line. Usually Black puts this knight on d7 so as not to be afraid of the pin on f6. With a knight on c6, Black will probably have to play ...g7-g5 at some point.

11. ♖b5 ♙b8 12. 0-0 h6 13. ♗h4 0-0 14. ♚e1

Instead the game V. Onischuk – Motylev, Minsk 2017, continued: 14. ♚e1 g5!? 15. ♗g3 ♗g4 16. ♚d2 ♗xf3 17. gxf3

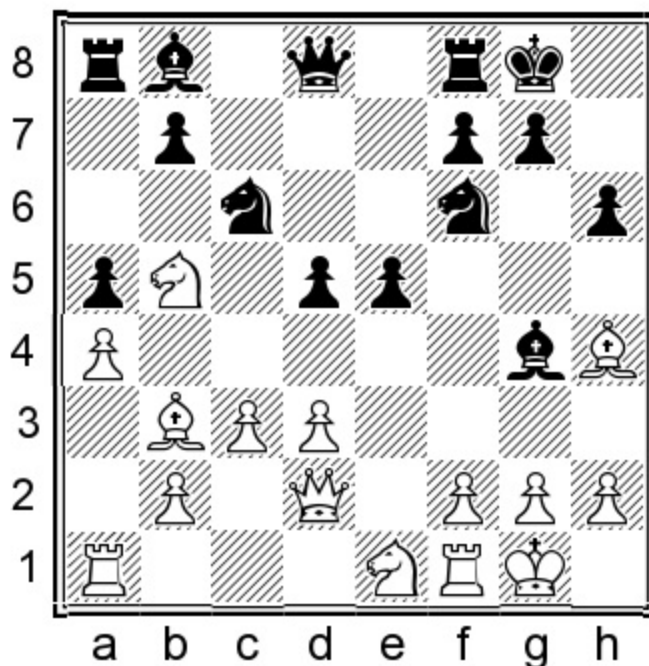


And here Black could play 17... ♗h5! N 18. d4 ♗f6 when most likely Black is OK. For instance: 19. ♗xd5 (or 19. ♚d3 ♗d8 20. ♗c2 ♗f8∞) 19... ♗d8 20. ♗e4 exd4 21. ♗ad1 dxc3 22. ♗xc3 ♗e5 with a complex, roughly equal position.

14... ♗g4 15. ♗e1!?

Weaker is 15. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 16. ♗xd5 ♗d8 with rough equality.

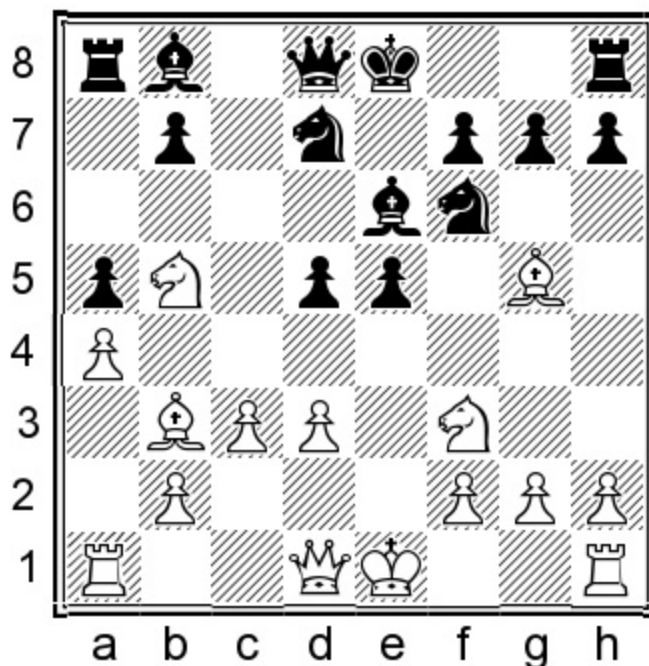
Also unconvincing is 15. ♔e3 d4! 16.cxd4 exd4 17. ♖fxd4 g5 with an obscure position.



After the knight retreat, White is a little better, although the main struggle is still ahead. On 15...g5 16. ♗g3 ♜h5 there could follow 17.d4 exd4 18.cxd4 ♜f4 19. ♗d1! with a slight plus.

While after 15...d4 White can play 16. ♜c2 g5 17.f3! ♗h5 18. ♗g3, keeping the initiative.

### 11. ♜b5 ♗b8



Now White has **B1)** 12.d4!? or **B2)** 12.0-0.

**B1) 12.d4!?**

Quite an interesting idea, employed in 2019 by Oratovsky. After ...e5-e4 White plans to bring a knight to e3 as soon as he can. He will then have the option of castling long, and in one variation we shall even be looking at the move ♔d2!?.

### 12...e4

A forced move. After 12...0-0?! 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.0-0± with a big advantage to White. The d5-pawn is weak, and the bishop on e6 is not in the best of shape either:

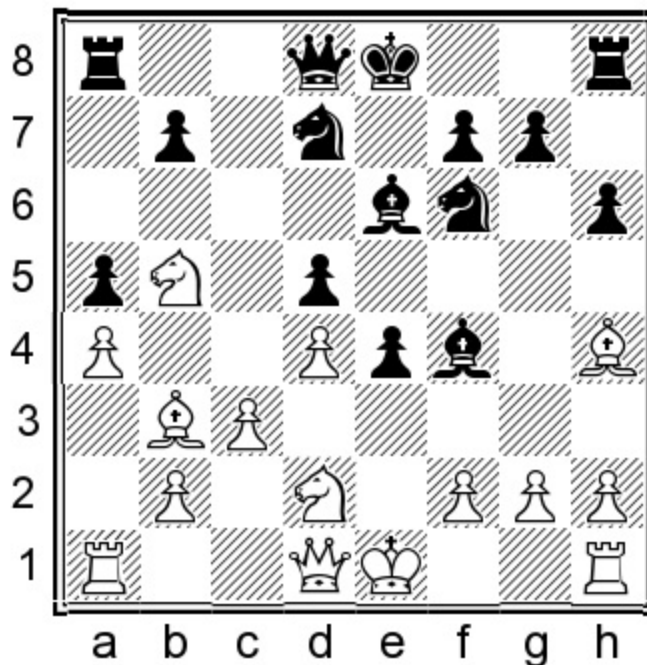
a) 12...0-0?! 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.0-0± with a big advantage to White. The d5-pawn is weak, and the bishop on e6 is not in the best of shape either.

b) 12...h6?! 13.♙xf6 (after 13.♙h4 Black still won't have any better move than ...e5-e4, but why not pick up a pawn?) 13...♗xf6 14.dxe5 ♖xe5 15.♙xd5±

### 13.♗d2 h6 14.♙h4

Here we consider **B11)** 14...♙f4!? and **B12)** 14...0-0.

#### B11) 14...♙f4!?



This is no doubt a smarter move than 14...0-0. I have found just one correspondence game in which this position arose. In that game Black demonstrated a good idea.

### 15.c4N

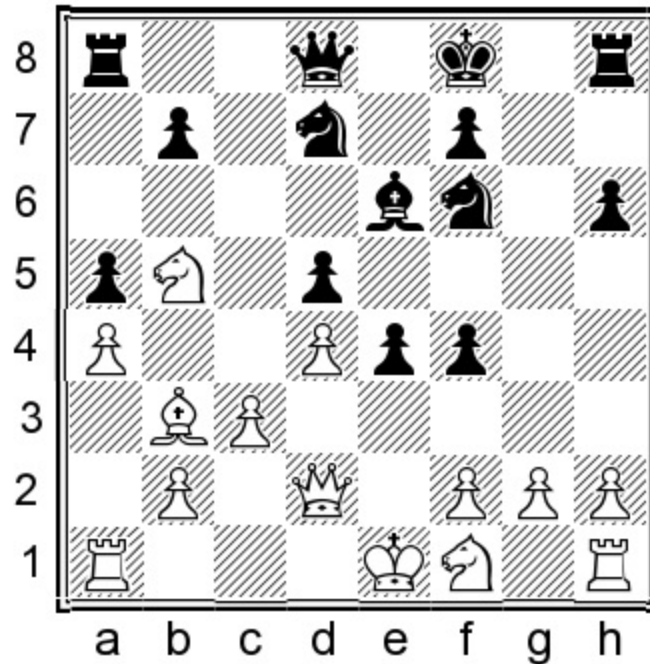
One of several playable continuations, this sets Black some specific problems. Delchev also looked at this move in his book.

Let's also briefly look at the other possibilities:

a) 15.♔g3 ♕xg3 16.fxg3 ♖b6 17.♗f1 0-0 18.♗e3 transposes to the game Oratovsky – Postny, Israel 2019 (see variation B12).

b) 15.0-0 0-0 16.c4 dxc4 17.♗xc4 ♜b8 18.♔g3 ♕xc4 19.♕xc4 ♗b6 with an approximately equal position. On 20.♖b3 Black will play ...♗bd5, and he appears to have no problems.

c) 15.♗f1 g5 16.♔g3 ♔f8!? Bringing the king straight to g7 without removing the rook from h8 (now in the event of 17.h4 ♔g7 the rook is in the right place, as it would *not* be after 16...0-0 17.h4).  
17.♕xf4 gxf4 18.♜d2



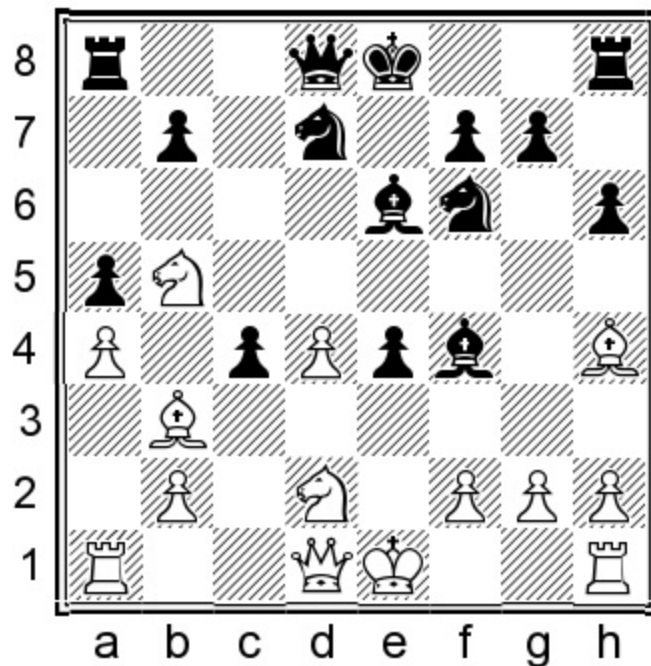
And Black has these choices:

c1) 18...♜b8 19.g3 ♗h5 20.0-0-0± As long as White manages to castle queenside in normal conditions, he will have a promising position.

c2) 18...e3!? 19.fxe3 ♗e4 20.♜c2 ♜h4† 21.g3 Now after 21...fxg3 22.0-0-0 White has a clear plus, but in the case of 21...♜h5 22.♗c7 ♜f3! the position remains unclear.

c3) 18...♗h5 19.♕d1 (19.g3 is met by 19...♗b6!∞; then on 20.0-0-0 Black can continue 20...♕d7, or 20...♔g4 21.♞e1 ♕d7, with perfectly good counterplay) 19...♗df6 20.g3 ♞a6 21.c4⇌ With a complicated position and chances for both sides, H. Williamson – Riccio, email 2018. This correspondence game between high-ranking players ended in a draw.

**15...dxc4**



### 16. ♖xc4!?

Taking advantage of the fact that Black hasn't yet castled. Now 16... ♖xd2? 17. ♗xd2 gives White a large plus, but Black has three other moves that are playable.

If 16. ♖xc4 0-0, White can play 17. 0-0 and transpose into the variation 15. 0-0 0-0 16. c4. He may also play 17. ♖e3!?, but the verdict on the position will be about the same.

### 16... ♖f5!

Probably the only move after which Black is not worse. Other tries are:

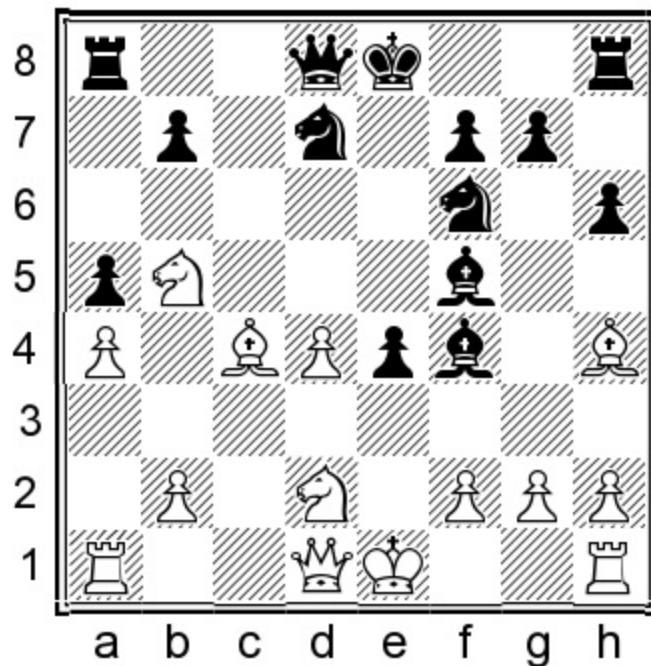
a) 16... ♖a6 17. 0-0, and now:

a1) 17... 0-0 18. d5 ♖g4 19. ♗c2 and Black has problems with the defence of his e4-pawn. White answers 19... ♖c5 with 20. ♖c3. In the event of 19... ♗c8 20. ♖xe4 ♖xd5 21. ♗b3 he preserves a small plus.

a2) 17... ♗b8 18. ♖g3 0-0 19. ♖c3 ♖xc4 20. ♖xc4 Black has no good square for his d7-knight, and this gives White a slight edge. On 20... ♖b6 he should play 21. ♖e3, avoiding exchanges.

b) 16... ♗e7 17. 0-0 0-0 18. b3 ♖f5 19. ♖e1 ♗b4 20. ♖f1, and White has a little pressure. Black's best continuation here is 20... g5 21. ♖g3 ♖b6, but after 22. ♖e3 White remains more comfortably placed.

After 16... ♖f5 White has a number of continuations that lead to an unclear position. I will give a sample variation:



### 17. ♖f1!?

White can transfer his knight to e3 without delay, so that after castling he doesn't need to play ♖e1 to give the knight access to the f1-square.

Another possibility is 17. ♕b3, followed by ♘c4-e3.

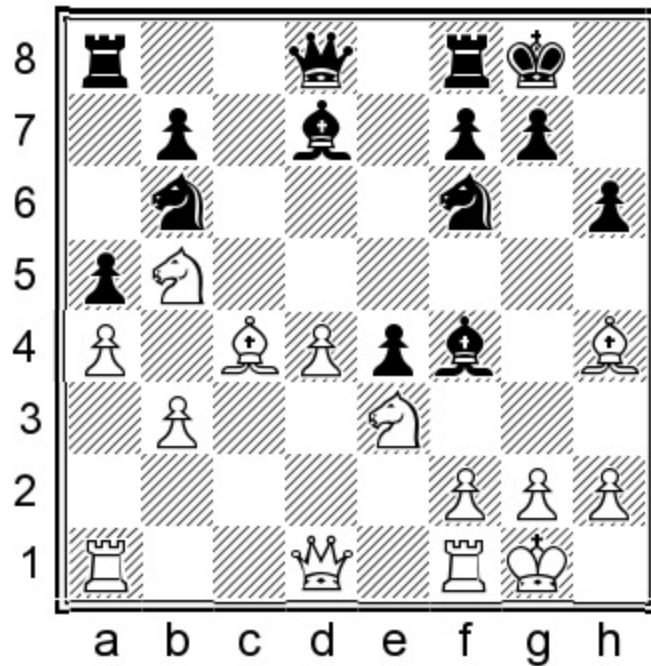
After 17. 0-0 0-0 18. ♖e1 ♘b6 19. b3 g5 20. ♕g3 ♕g6∞ there is play with approximately equal chances. Here again White should probably continue with 21. ♖f1 and bring the knight to e3.

### 17... ♘b6 18. b3 0-0

Delchev mentioned 18... ♖c8 when 19. ♖e3 ♕d7 20. 0-0 0-0 leads to the main line below.

### 19. ♖e3 ♕d7 20. 0-0∞

The position is about equal. Both sides have play, but White's side is perhaps easier to handle, if only because of his well-placed knight on e3.



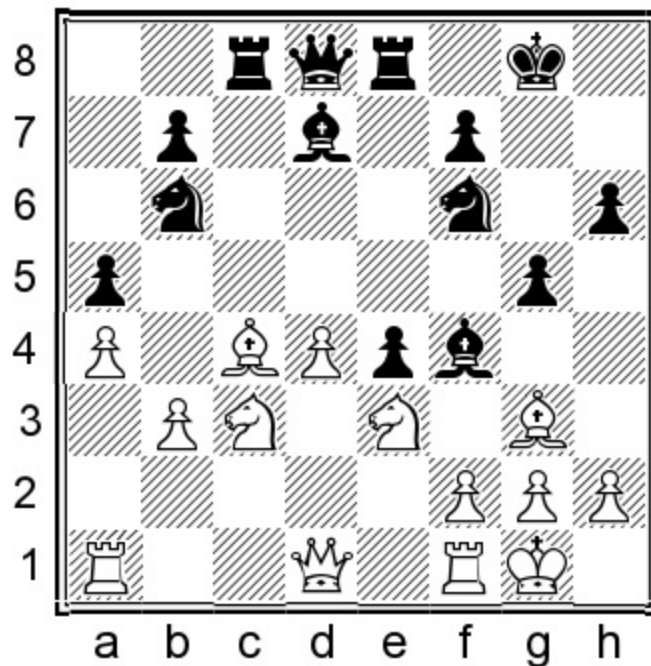
### 20...Rc8

The most logical move, although also deserving of attention is 20...Rxb5!? 21.Rxb5 Qd6 22.Rxf6 Qxf6 23.g3 with a close-to-equal position.

### 21.Nc3 g5 22.Rg3 Re8

Black should avoid: 22...Rxe3?! 23.fxe3 Nxc4 24.bxc4 Rxc4 25.Rxe5!± And Black cannot play 25...Rxc3? due to 26.Rxf6 and Qh5, with a mating attack.

While after 25...Ng4 26.Nxe4 White has a big advantage.



### 23.h3!?

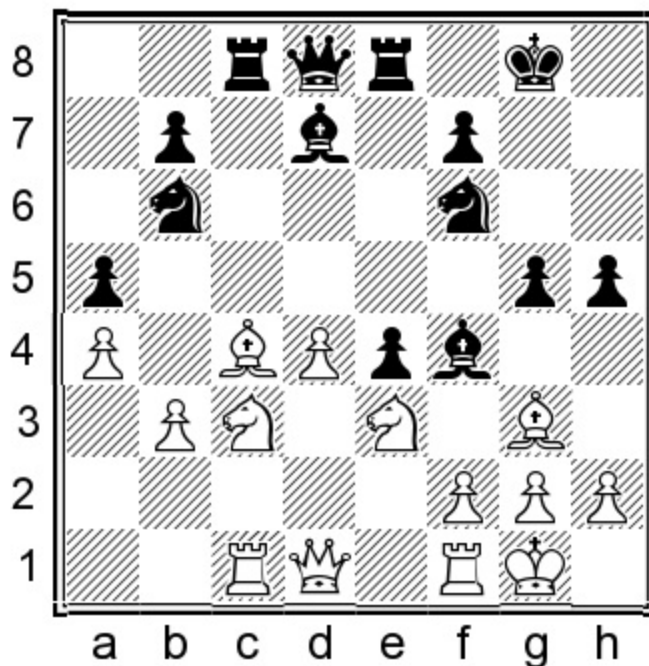
White takes control of the g4-square; in some cases this helps White to play ♖e2.

Also noteworthy is:

23. ♖c1!?

But then Black can reply:

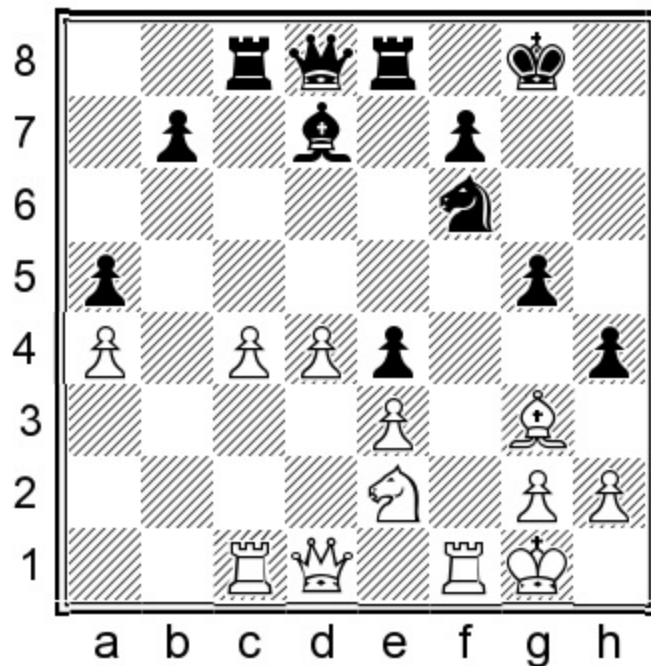
23... h5!?



24. ♖e2

It is too late for 24. h3?! due to 24... h4 25. ♕h2 ♖c7 26. ♕xf4 gxf4 and it is no longer clear who is playing for a win. I don't like the position after 27. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 28. ♕xf7 ♔xf7 29. ♖xc7 ♖xc7 and Black has plenty of pieces for the queen.

24... ♖xc4 25. bxc4 ♕xe3 26. fxe3 h4



With a difficult game and mutual chances.

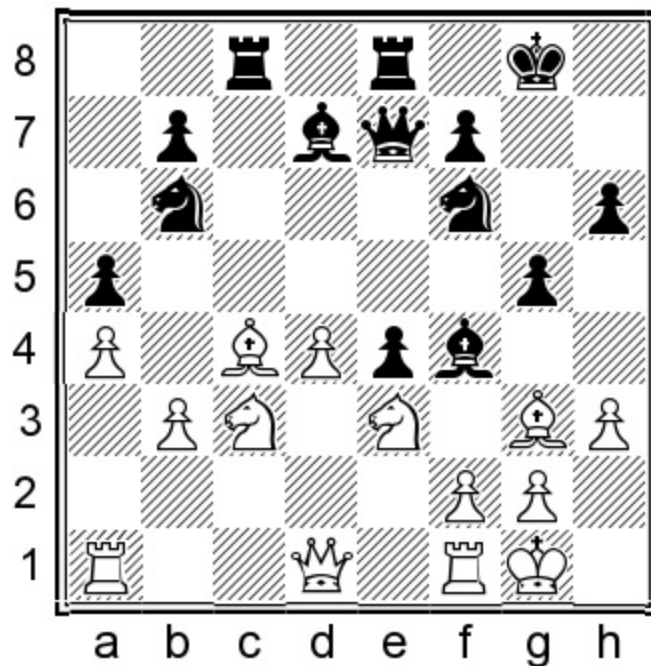
Delchev mentioned 27.♔e5 ♖g4 28.♜c3 ♜xe5! 29.dxe5 ♜xe3 30.♞h5 ♜xf1 and the game is still level, with various perpetual checks possible, after for example 31.♜xe4.

More struggle is offered by 27.♔d6 h3 28.♞b3 hxg2 29.♞f2 with an obscure position.

Or 27.♔e1 h3 28.♞d2 hxg2 29.♜xg2, when on 29...b6 White can choose between 30.d5 ♜g4 31.♞d4 f5 or 30.h3!? ♜h5 31.d5. While if 29...♜g7 then noteworthy is the exchange sacrifice 30.d5 ♞h8 31.♔g3!? (allowing ...♔h3†) when I would prefer to play with White, but objectively these positions are completely unclear.

### 23...♞e7

As mentioned above, White is ready to meet 23...h5?! with: 24.♜e2± For example: 24...♔xe3 25.fxe3 ♜xc4?! (the only saving chance is 25...♔e6, though White is clearly better after various moves) 26.bxc4 ♞xc4 27.♔e5 ♜d5 28.♜g3+— On 28...♞xe5 White would reject the recapture 29.dxe5 in favour of 29.♞xh5! winning quickly.



### 24.♖c1

Unlike the 23...h5 line above, White should avoid 24.♗e2?! ♕xe3 25.fxe3 ♗xc4 26.bxc4 ♖xc4 with a good position for Black. The ♕e5 and ♗g3 idea does not work here because the pawn stands on h6.

### 24...♕b4

After 24...♗g7 25.♗e2 ♗h5 26.♗xf4 ♗xf4 27.d5 the position remains complicated, but the initiative is on White's side. On 27...♕b4 White can play 28.♖c2, when no good is 28...♗xc4?! 29.bxc4!, while after 28...♗g6!? White can try 29.d6.

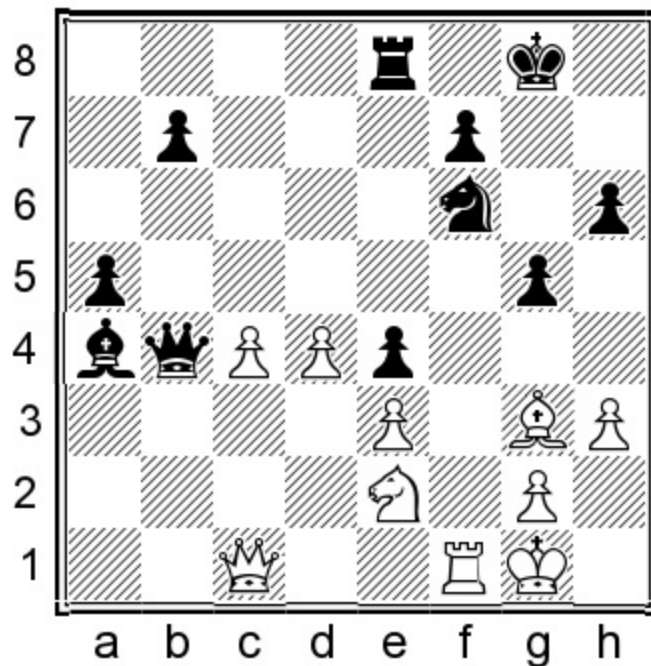
### 25.♗e2 ♕xe3

Or 25...♗xc4 26.♖xc4 ♖xc4 27.bxc4 ♕xa4 28.♖c1 ♕xe3 29.fxe3 transposes to the 25...♕xe3 26.fxe3 main line. Instead of 28...♕xe3, Black should avoid 28...♕xg3?! 29.fxg3 or 28...♗h5?! 29.♕xf4 gxf4 30.♗f5, with a large plus for White in both cases.

### 26.fxe3

Now the following sequence is Black's best chance:

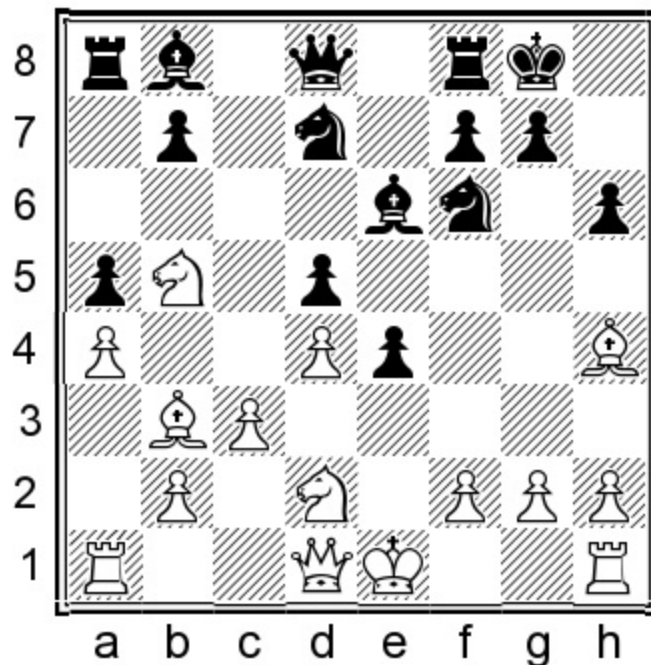
26...♗xc4 27.♖xc4 ♖xc4 28.bxc4 ♕xa4 29.♖c1



Followed by ♕e1. White has the initiative, while Black must keep defending with precise moves. After 29...♘d7?! 30.♕e1 White shifts the knight to g3 and stands better.

Stronger is 29...♘h5 30.♕e1 ♖b3! 31.d5 ♜c8 32.♘d4 and Black needs to find yet more strong moves. After 32...♙xc4?! 33.♙b2 White has a dangerous attack; correct is 32...♙a2! 33.g4 ♘g7! when Black is close to equalizing.

### B12) 14...0-0



### 15.♘f1 ♕f4

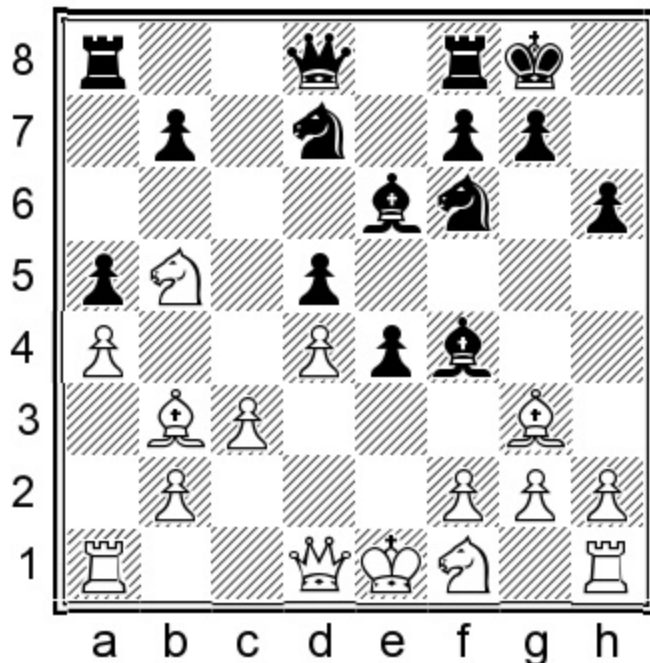
The bishop has to be brought into play sooner or later. After 15...♘b6 16.♘e3 Black still has no

better move than ...♔f4.

## 16.♘e3!?N

In my view it's better not to hurry with ♔g3, to which Black can react by capturing on g3 and removing his knight from f6, with ...f7-f5 to follow. Instead we first bring our knight to e3 and our queen to e2, making queenside castling an option.

In the only game with this position in the Mega Database (Oratovsky – Postny, Israel 2019), White played 16.♔g3.



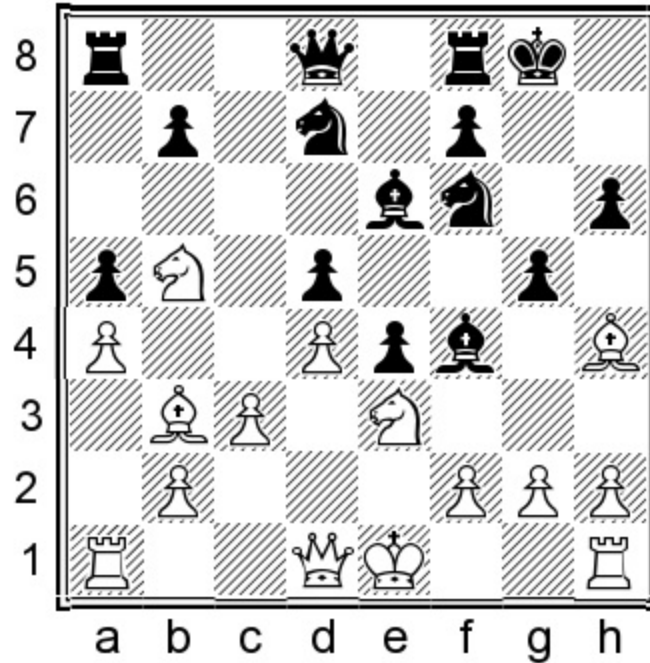
Now 16...♔g4 can be met by 17.f3!, and since both his bishops are then under attack, Black will have to play ...♔xg3†, straightening White's pawns out in the variation 17...exf3 18.gxf3 ♔xg3† 19.hxg3 ♖e8† 20.♔f2±. White's king is quite comfortable on f2, and he has the advantage owing to his better pawn structure and the half-open e-file.

In Oratovsky – Postny, Black preferred 16...♔xg3, and there followed: 17.fxg3 (after 17.♘xg3 ♘e8 18.0-0 f5 19.f3 ♘df6 there is play in an approximately equal position; White may continue 20.fxe4 fxe4 21.♖e2) 17...♘b6 18.♘e3 ♘e8∞ Black will follow with ...f7-f5, and the position is unclear. For that reason I prefer not to play ♔g3 in a hurry; while the bishop is on h4 Black cannot move his knight away from f6.

We now consider **B121)** 16...g5 and **B122)** 16...♘b6.

Instead with 16...♖b8 Black unpins his knight and prepares to bring his queen's rook into play with the manoeuvre ...♖a6-c6. This is not, however, the best arrangement for his pieces. There can follow: 17.♖e2 ♖a6 18.♔g3 ♖c6 19.♔xf4 ♖xf4 20.h3↑ Having covered the g4-square, White will castle long and then start advancing his kingside pawns. Black would appear to have no counterplay.

## B121) 16...g5



**17.♔g3 ♚e7 18.♚e2**

Or 18.h4 ♘b6 19.♚e2 is the same.

**18...♘b6 19.h4**

Or 19.0-0 ♘e8!?. Then in the event of 20.c4 dxc4, followed by the exchange of two pairs of pieces and ...♘d6, the position is equal.

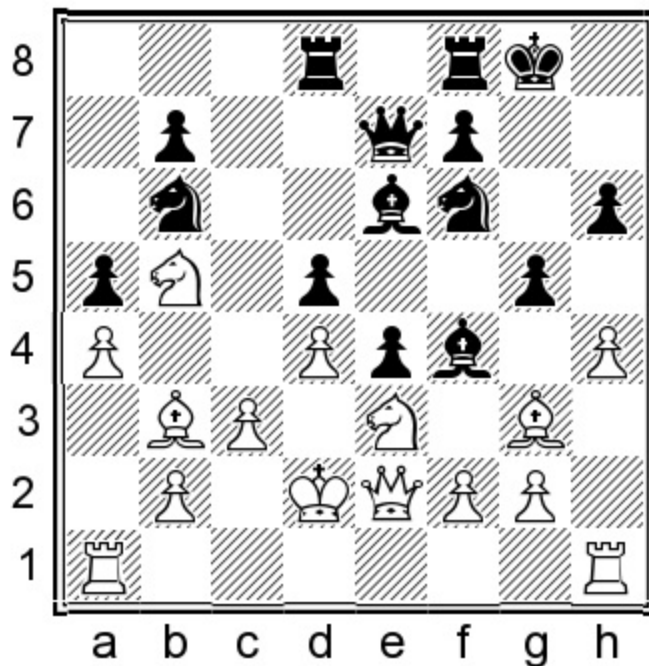
More complex positions result from 20.f3 f5, but in my view Black is no worse.

**19...♚ad8**

If 19...♔g7 then 20.0-0-0±. White is able to castle because, with his king on g7, Black cannot play ...♔g4.

**20.♔d2**

Given that 20.0-0-0 would be met by ...♔g4, why not remove the king to d2? Still, the exchange sacrifice is also worth considering: 20.0-0-0!? ♔g4 21.♚e1 ♔xd1 22.♚xd1♚ with excellent compensation.



### 20...♔g7

Following 20...♔g4?! 21.♚e1, Black will not be able to play ...♔g7 and ...♖h8. For example:

a) 21...♔g7? 22.hxg5 hxg5 23.f3+- Now after 23...exf3 24.♔xf4 Black can't recapture with ...gxf4 owing to ♘f5†. But after 23...♔c8 24.♔xf4 gxf4 25.♚h4! fxe3† 26.♔e2 there is no defence against the mate threats.

b) 21...♔c8 22.hxg5 hxg5 23.f3± The black king is in danger even if the queens come off: 23...exf3 24.gxf3 ♔xe3† 25.♚xe3, and Black is in a hopeless position due to the weakness of his king and the pawn on g5.

A slight improvement is 23...♘h7, but even then, after 24.♔xf4 gxf4 25.♘c2, White has a big advantage.

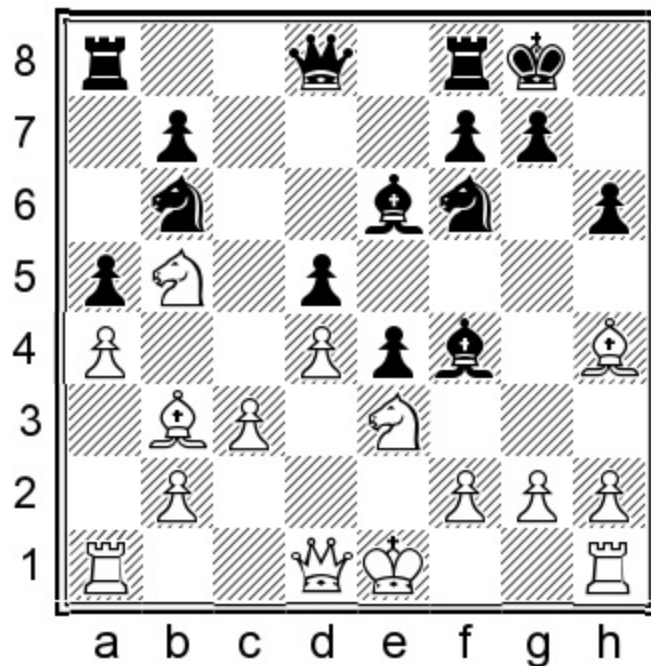
### 21.♖af1

Making way for the king. White could also play 21.♖ag1 or 21.♔c2; overall it makes little difference.

### 21...♖h8 22.♔c1

The position remains unclear, but all the play is concentrated on the kingside while the white king is safe on the queenside. From the practical viewpoint, playing the white side is much more pleasant.

**B122) 16...♘b6**



### 17. ♔e2 ♖c8

The players improve their positions with the most natural moves. Now that White has brought out his knight and queen, it's time for him to proceed to concrete actions.

In the event of 17... ♕e7 18. ♗g3 ♗xg3 White can capture either way, and the black queen on e7 will not be particularly useful. In answer to 19. fxg3 the computer recommends ... ♕d7 or ... ♞e8-d6. Then the same positions arise as after 17... ♖c8, only with the rook still on a8. Something similar also follows from 19. hxg3.

### 18. ♗g3

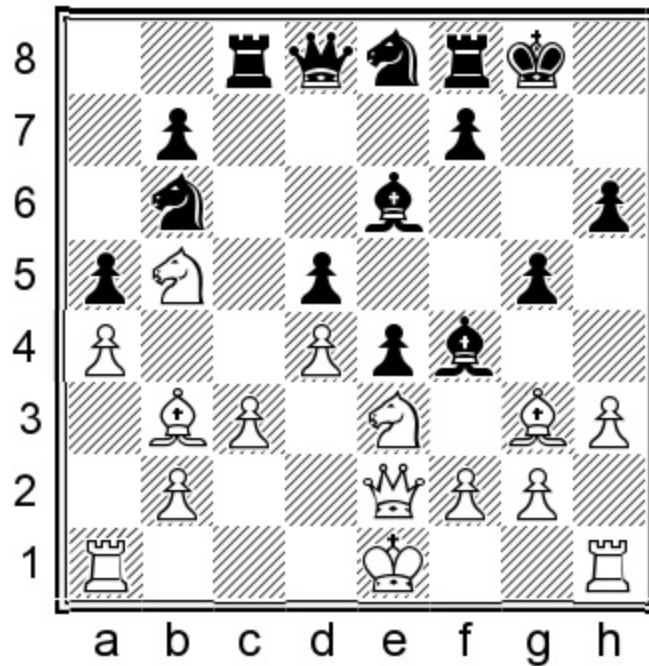
I prefer this to 18. 0-0 g5 19. ♗g3 h5∞. The position is then unclear; White could sacrifice a piece with 20. f3 h4 21. ♗xf4 gxh4 22. ♖ae1 fxh3 23. ♕xe3, but after a little study of this position I concluded that Black was no worse. There is no need to give the subsequent variations to support this verdict.

However, there is a different 18th move that is worth considering:

### 18. h3!?

Delchev mentioned this move. The idea is to wait for Black to play 18... ♖e8 and then after 19. ♗g3 ♗xg3 20. fxg3 we will get an improved version of the 18. ♗g3 line. But instead Black can play ...g7-g5! after which a difficult position arises. Let's see:

18...g5! 19. ♗g3 ♞e8

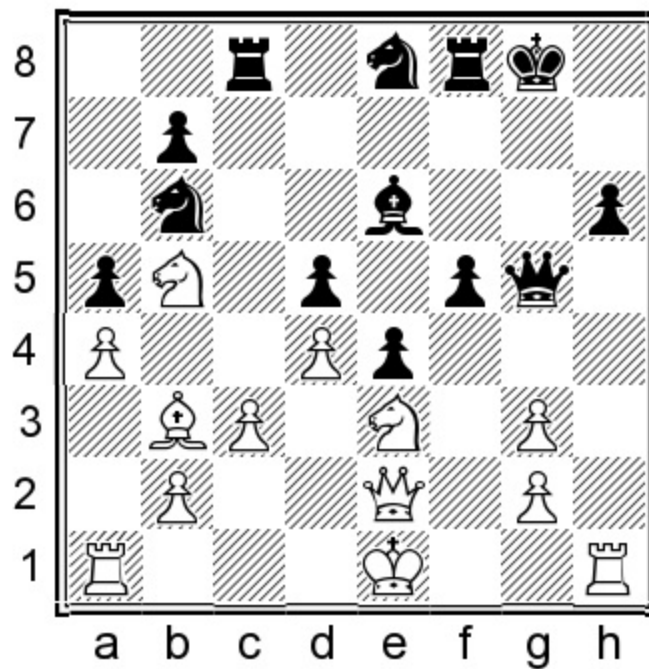


It is necessary for White to open the h-file as early as possible. If White starts making moves like 20.0-0-0 then we risk getting a worse position.

20.h4

As suggested above, if 20.0-0-0?! f5 21.h4 ♗xg3 22.fxg3 g4 and after the kingside closes, White has an unpleasant position.

20...f5 21.hxg5 ♗xg3 22.fxg3 ♕xg5



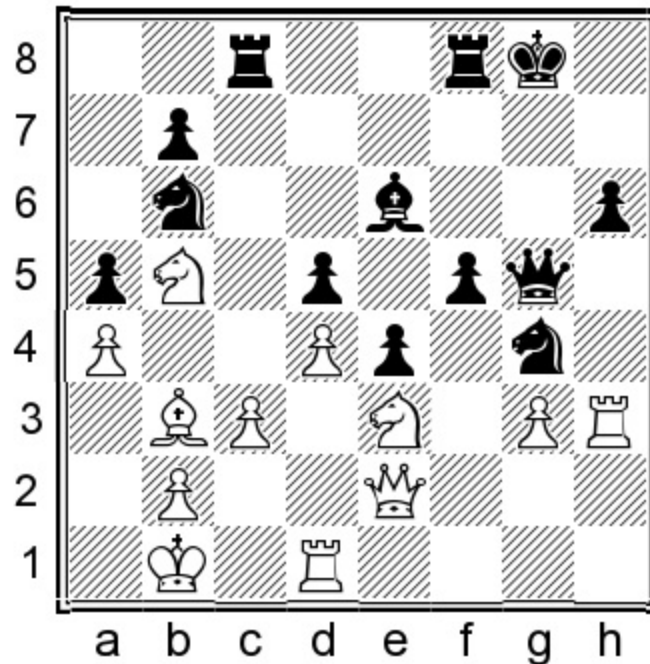
23.♕f2

The text move leads to a sharp line where precision is essential.

We should also consider: 23.0-0-0 ♖f6 24.♔b1 (instead after 24.♖df1 ♗g4 25.♖f4 ♗xe3

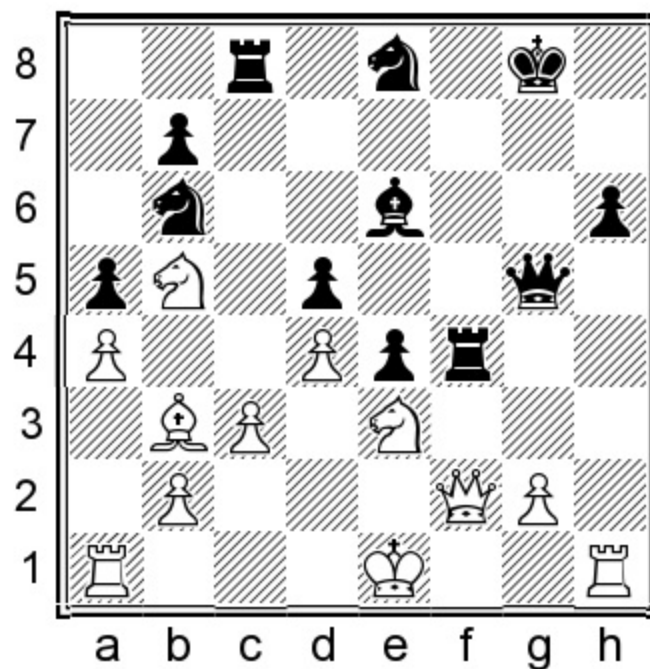
26.♕xe3 ♖c6∞ if 27.♗d1 then Black will play ...♗f7 or ...♖f6. In my opinion, Black has a rather

strong position.) 24...♖xg3 25.♖h3 (certainly not 25.♖xh6?? f4+) 25...♖g5 (Also playable is 25...♖g6!? 26.♖dh1 f4 27.♖xh6 ♖g5↗ when the position is very difficult to evaluate. After 28.♜c2 ♜g7 29.♜d6 Black must play 29...♖h8! 30.♜xc8 ♖xh6 31.♖xh6 ♜xc8, with good compensation for the exchange.) 26.g3 ♜g4



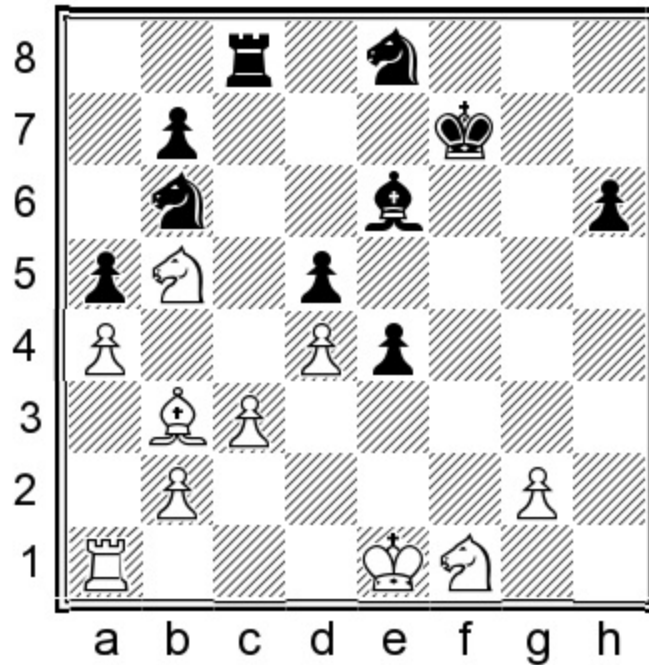
The half-open h-file gives White enough compensation, but nothing more. On 27.♜xg4 fxg4 28.♖h2 not bad is 28...♖c6 and White has nothing better than repeating moves with 29.♜a7 ♖d6 30.♜b5. More logical is 27.♜g2!?, but after 27...♖e7 28.♖dh1 ♖f6 it is unclear how White can continue the attack on the kingside.

23...f4 24.gxf4 ♖xf4



25.♖h5!

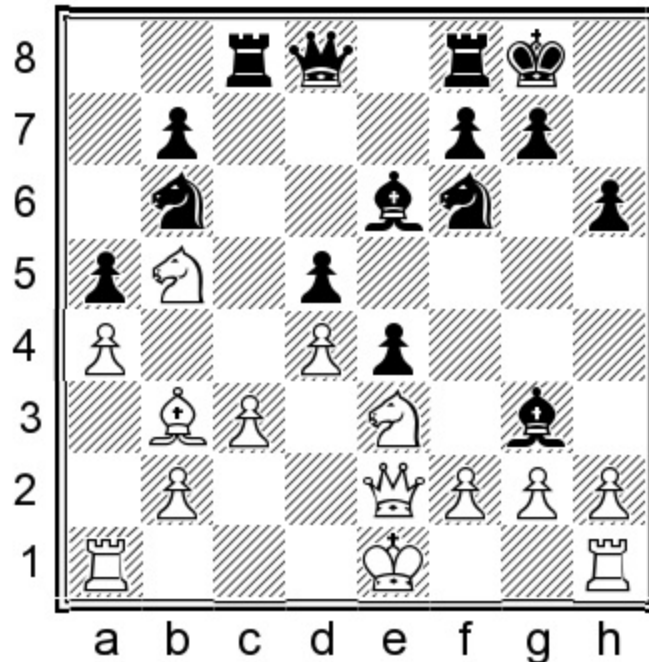
If not for this resource, then the move 23. ♖f2 would be a blunder.  
 25... ♗xh5 26. ♖xf4 ♗h1† 27. ♖f1 ♗xf1† 28. ♘xf1 ♔f7



Black will transfer his king to e7 and then play ... ♘f6. For example:  
 29. ♘e3 ♔e7 30. ♘d2 ♘f6 31. ♗h1 h5

White is a little better, but it bothers me that there are few pieces left on the board and the position is so simplified.

18... ♗xg3



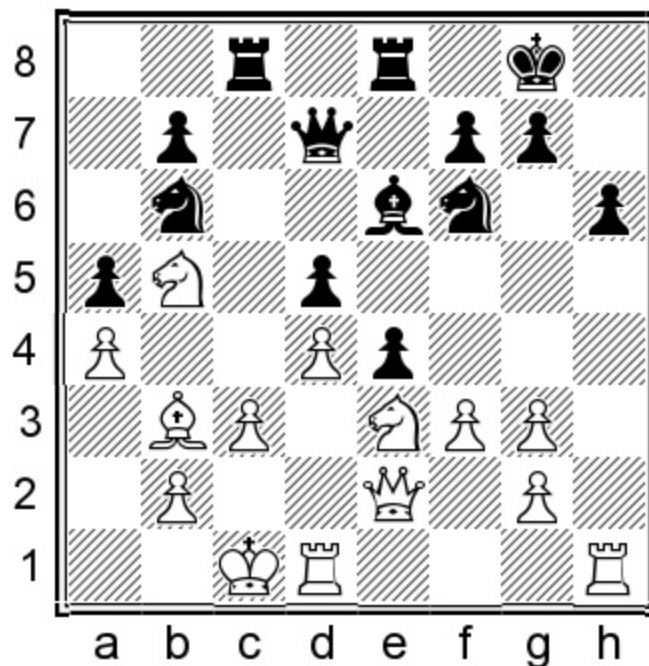
19. fxg3

The quieter continuation, aiming to castle short.

For those who like more complicated positions, 19.hxg3!? can be suggested. In that case, in contrast to 19.fxg3, White plans to castle long and then play g3-g4; also f2-f3 and f2-f4 are possibilities. There can follow:

a) 19...♞e8 20.g4 ♜c6 Given the threat of g4-g5, Black has to bring up his rook so that it can recapture the knight after ...♞d6 (if at once 20...♞d6, then 21.♞xd6 ♜xd6 22.g5, with a dangerous attack). 21.0-0-0 ♞d6 22.♞xd6 ♜xd6 23.♞h5± Thanks to the possibility of attacking on the kingside, White has a clear plus. He can meet 23...♙d7 with 24.♜c2.

b) 19...♜d7 20.f3!? (White could also play ♞h4, which denies Black the chance to exchange off the knight on e3, but the pawn move looks more interesting) 20...♞fe8 21.0-0-0



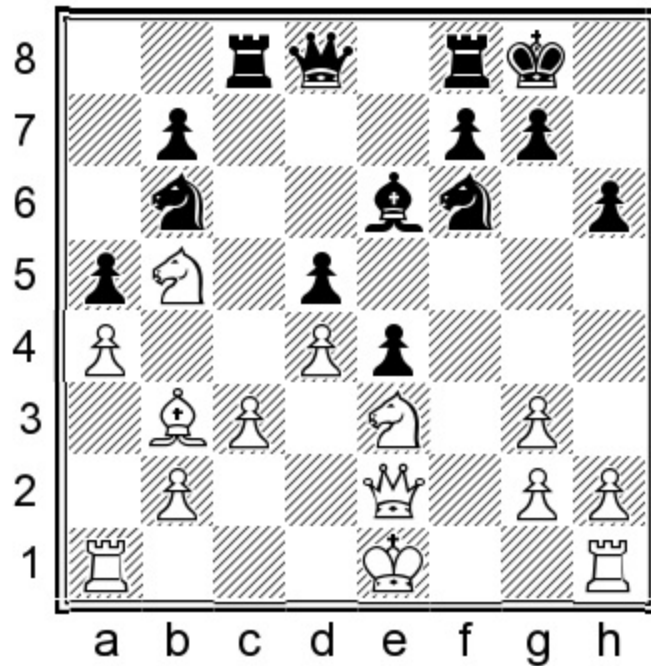
And now:

b1) 21...♞c4 22.♙xc4 dxc4 23.fxe4 ♞xe4 24.♜f3± The half-open f- and h-files give White attacking possibilities. He will answer 24...♞g5 with 25.♜f4, threatening ♞d6; while against 24...♙d5 a good continuation is 25.♞h5 ♙c6 26.♞f5, with ♜g4 to follow.

b2) 21...exf3 22.gxf3 ♙f5 23.♜d2 ♙g6 24.g4↑ with a dangerous initiative. White can follow with ♞dg1 and then ♞f5. Now 24...♞c4? is bad for Black due to: 25.♙xc4 dxc4 26.♞f5! And after 26...♙xf5 27.gxf5 he has major problems.

c) 19...♞h7!

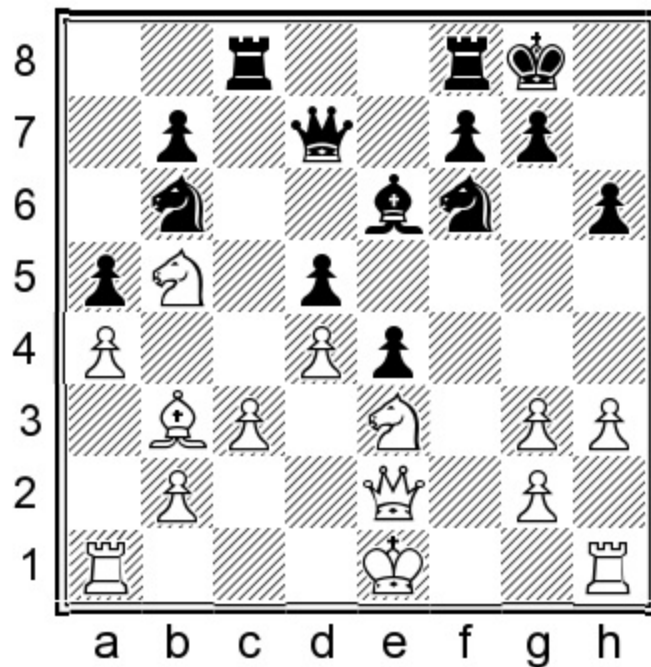
After White's hxg3 the knight is best removed to this square. It will hold up g4-g5, and later it may go to g5 itself. After 20.g4 ♜c6 21.0-0-0± the white side is easier to play, but objectively the position is unclear. There are hardly any forced moves here; a manoeuvring game is beginning. Black can try playing ...f7-f5. White can bring his king round to a2 or play f2-f3.



19...Nxe8

Or:

a) 19...Qd7 20.h3! (after 20.0-0 Ng4 Black would exchange the good knight on e3)



And now:

a1) 20...Nc4 (the variation 20...Nh7 21.g4 is dubious for Black) 21.Qxc4 dxc4 22.0-0 Nd5

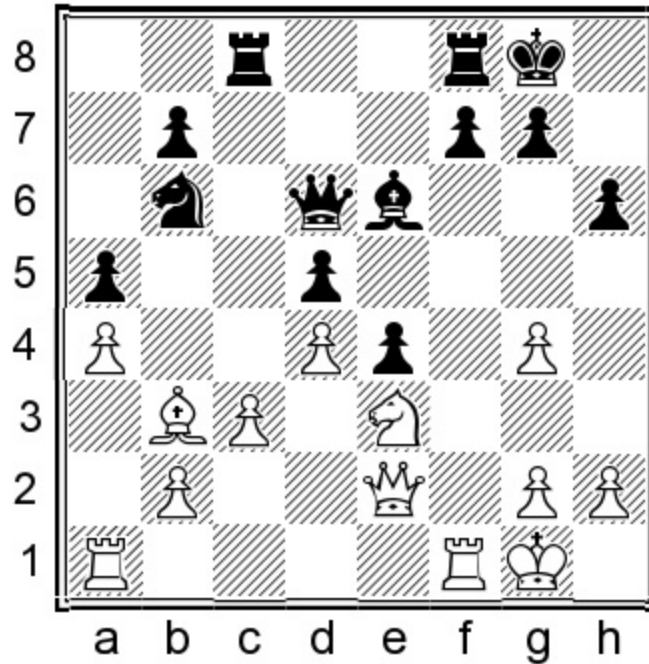
Practically the only move (White was threatening 23.Rxf6, and 22...Qe7 23.Rf4 would give him a big advantage). 23.g4 White has a solid plus, as the e4-pawn is weak and Black's light-squared bishop is confined by the pawns.

a2) 20...Ne8 21.g4 Nd6 22.Nxd6 Qxd6 23.0-0 leads after all to the same position as in the main

line (19...♖e8), except that White's pawn is on h3 instead of h2.

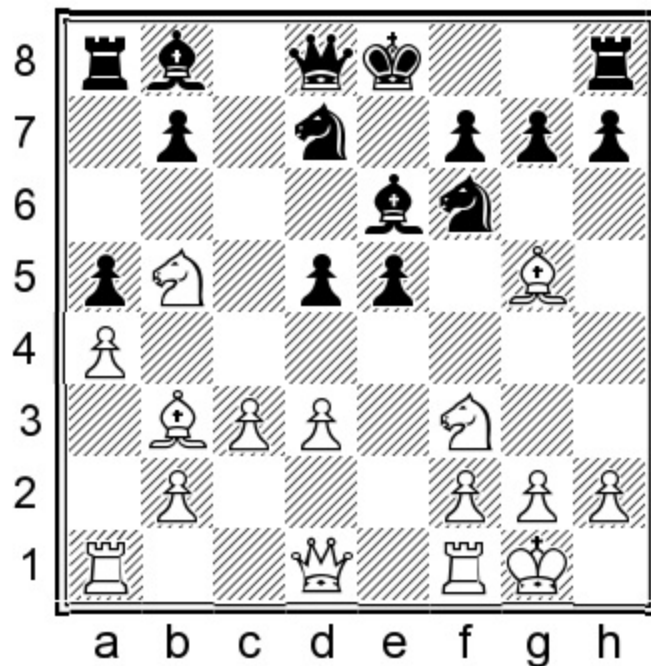
b) 19...♗h7 20.g4 As White has captured with fxg3, the knight on h7 is useless. Now 20...f5?! isn't very good: 21.gxf5 ♕xf5 22.0-0 with a clear plus for White.

20.g4 ♗d6 21.♗xd6 ♕xd6 22.0-0



The computer rates this position as approximately equal, and yet Black will be marking time – moving a rook on the back rank. In practical play, as I see it, White has the advantage; he can gradually improve his position, while for Black this is much more difficult.

**B2) 12.0-0**



### 12...0-0

Or 12...h6 13.♔h4 0-0 will transpose.

### 13.♖e1 h6

The insertion of ...h7-h6 ♔g5-h4 is useful to Black; he will later have the possibility of ...g7-g5. He could play ...♖e8 first, but he can hardly do without ...h7-h6.

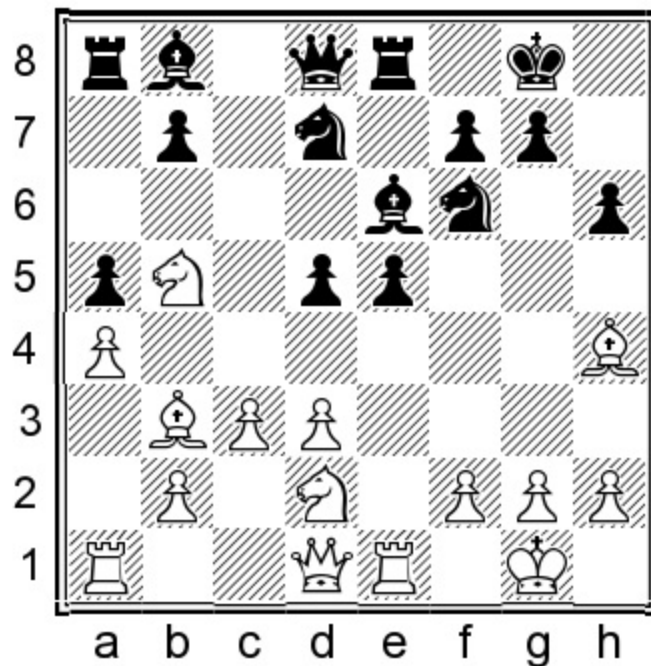
### 14.♔h4 ♖e8

Or 14...♖a6 15.♘d2 ♖e8 transposing.

### 15.♘d2

By removing this knight from f3, White prepares d3-d4.

After 15.♗d2 ♖a6 16.♔a2 g5 17.♔g3 ♔f5♞ Black has fully adequate counterplay. The game Kovalenko – Sulskis, Palanga 2018, continued 18.♖ad1 ♔g4!, and after 19.♗e3?! Black could have gained the advantage with 19...♘f8!N. A better move for White would be 19.♖e3N with an unclear position.



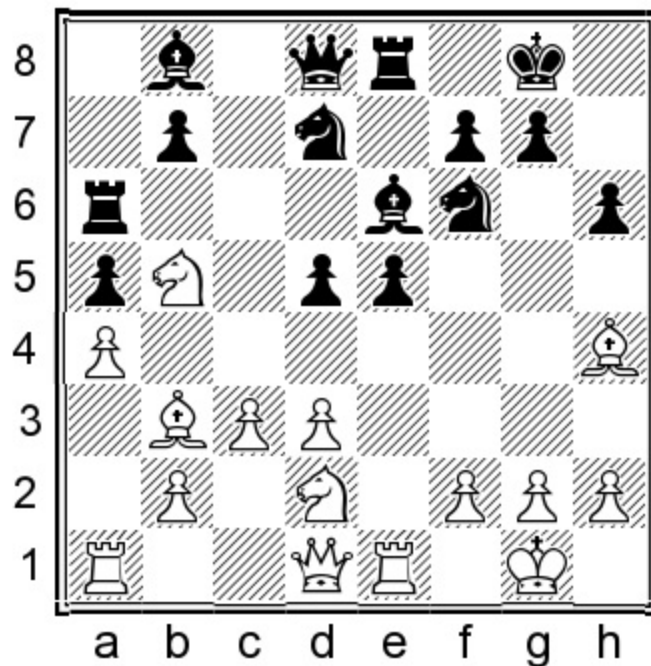
### 15...♖a6

This is the key position for our evaluation of the entire line with 5...a5. Although it has only been seen a handful of times in practice, we will try to take the theory further and study the position in detail.

Alternatives to 15...♖a6 are:

a) 15...♘c5 16.♙c2 ♘d7 17.d4 exd4 18.♖xe8† ♚xe8 19.♘xd4 with a small but stable plus for White, Fahrbach – Morcin, Internet 2016.

b) 15...♗f8 16.d4 (16.c4!? also deserves attention) 16...♘g6 17.♙xf6 ♚xf6 18.dxe5 with a slight edge for White. Black's bishop pair is insufficient to compensate for the weakness of the d5-pawn. White will answer 18...♙xe5 with 19.g3. On 18...♘xe5 he plays 19.♗f1; then 19...♘g4 can be met by 20.♖e2.



From the diagram we examine **B21)** 16.d4 and **B22)** 16.♘f1!?N

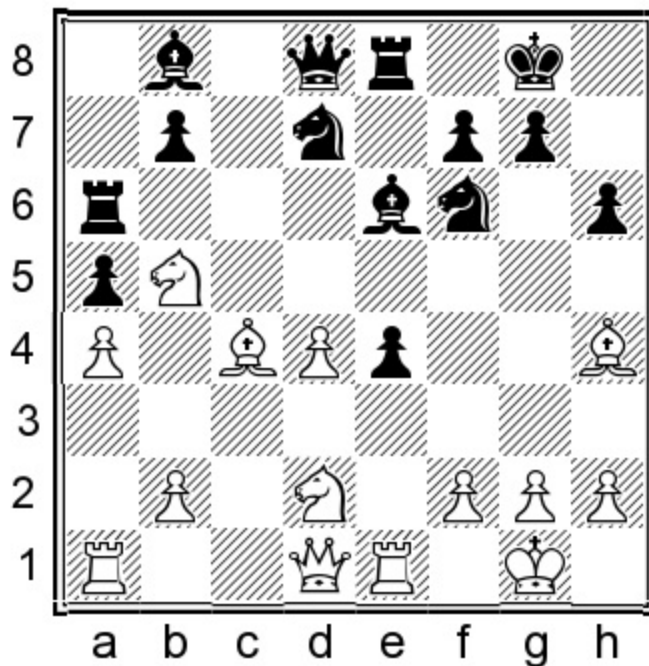
After 16.♙c2 g5 17.♙g3 ♙g4!∞ you wouldn't be very keen to play 18.f3 ♙h5, but a move of the queen to b1 or c1 would be met by 18...♘h5. White would not be worse, but the resulting positions did not appeal to me.

### **B21) 16.d4 e4 17.c4**

This position has been seen three times in games by Chinese players, starting in 2016 (Yu Yangyi – Wang Yu). In all these games White obtained a plus, but Black's play could be improved.

### **17...dxc4 18.♙xc4**

If 18.♘xc4 g5 19.♙g3 ♙xc4 20.♙xc4 ♘b6∞ there are about equal chances for both sides.



At this point **B211)** 18...♙f4 was played in one of the three games mentioned, but overall it is rather weaker than **B212)** 18...♙xc4.

After 18...g5 19.♙g3 ♗xg3 20.hxg3 ♖c6 21.b3 White has a little pressure.

### **B211) 18...♙f4 19.♙xe6**

A simple solution is:

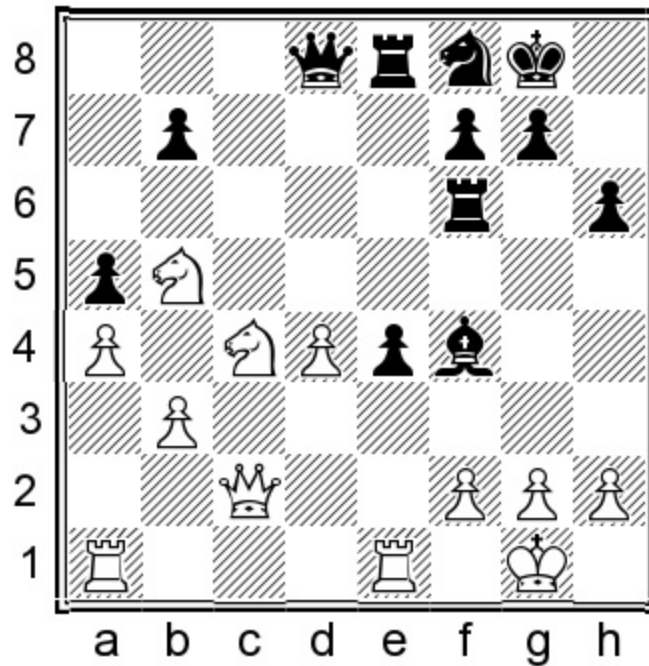
19.b3!?

White supports his bishop and sets up the threat of ♗xe4, inducing Black to capture with ...♙xc4. In this way we avoid the complications that arise from 19.♙xe6. There can follow:

19...♙xc4

19...g5 20.♙g3 ♗xg3 21.hxg3 ♖c6 22.♙f1± exerts pressure on the e4-pawn; if now 22...♙g4 then 23.♙b1.

20.♗xc4 ♗f8 21.♙xf6 ♖xf6 22.♙c2



22...Rg6!

Threatening ...W

#### , an idea which stops White from increasing his advantage further.

If 22...Rfe6 then 23.g3± followed by Rd1.

23.Rxe4 Rxe4

23...W

#### 24.g3 Rxe4 leads to the same position.

24.Wxe4 W

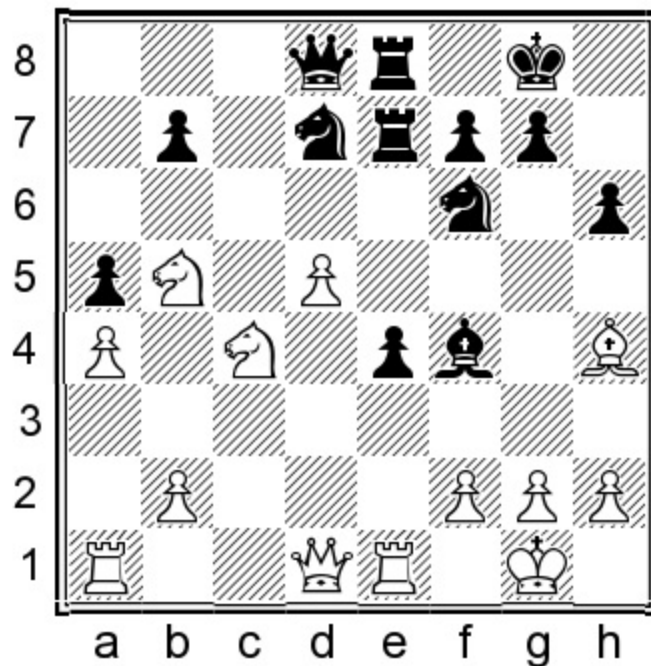
#### 25.g3 Rxc3 26.Wxh4 Rxc4† 27.Qf1

Thanks to his d-pawn, White retains a stable plus.

**19...Raxe6 20.d5 R6e7**

The computer recommends the sacrificial line 20...Re5 21.Nc4 g5, but after 22.Nxe5 White with his extra exchange is after all a little better. For example, 22...Nxe5 23.Rg3 Nd3 24.Re2± or 22...Rxe5 23.Rg3 Rxd5 24.We2 Rd2 25.Wf1±.

**21.Nc4**



### 21...e3!

The only way to avoid a bad position. Not 21...g5? 22.d6 ♖e6 23.♔g3± as in Lu Shanglei – Guanchu Liu, Xinghua 2018.

### 22.f3 ♘b6! 23.♔xf6 gxf6 24.♚d4 ♘xd5 25.g3 ♔c7

White has more than enough compensation for the pawn. Either 26.♞ad1 or 26.♚g4† ♕h8 27.♕h1 would be a good continuation, but those who prefer a more lucid position may play the earlier option 19.b3!?.

### B212) 18...♔xc4 19.♘xc4 ♘b6!

Or:

a) The simplest answer to 19...♔f4 is 20.b3, transposing to the variation 18...♔f4 19.b3 ♔xc4 20.♘xc4. Apart from that, 20.♔g3! is interesting; while in a game Chen – Lin, Chengdu 2017, White played 20.♚b3, to which Black could have replied 20...♘b6!N with an unclear position.

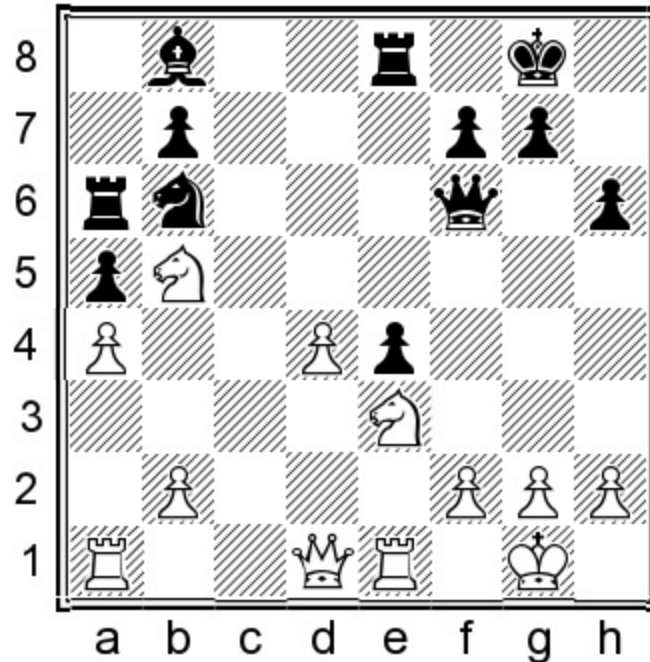
b) 19...♘f8 20.♞c1 ♘g6 21.♔xf6 ♚xf6 (or 21...♞xf6 22.g3 ♘h4 23.♘d2± and the knight on b5 is much better than the bishop on b8 which is inhibited by the pawns) 22.g3± Restricting the black bishop. The d-pawn will shortly advance, while Black's attack doesn't make headway: 22...♘f4?! 23.gxf4 is bad for him, as White remains with an extra piece after 23...♔xf4 24.♞c3 or 23...♚xf4 24.♚h5. A better try is 22...♘h4, but White still has the advantage after 23.♞c3.

### 20.♔xf6

In the event of 20.♘d2 g5 21.♔g3 ♔xg3 22.hxg3 ♘bd5∞ the weakening with ...g7-g5 doesn't make

itself felt, as there is nothing with which to attack the black king.

20...♔xf6 21.♘e3



21...♔g6!N

It was because of this good move that I preferred to treat 16.♘f1!? (variation **B22**) as the main line. The position here is unclear, but Black has a wider choice. Compared with the main line, rather less precision is required of him.

Alternatives are:

a) 21...♔e6 22.♖c1 ♘d5 (or 22...f5 23.d5 ♔f7 24.d6 f4 25.♘f1± and the d6-pawn is quite dangerous; on 25...♘d5 White plays 26.♖c5, with ♘c7 to follow) 23.♔b3 ♘xe3 24.♔xe6± Followed by 25.fx3 whichever way Black recaptures. The knight on b5 is clearly better than the bishop on b8.

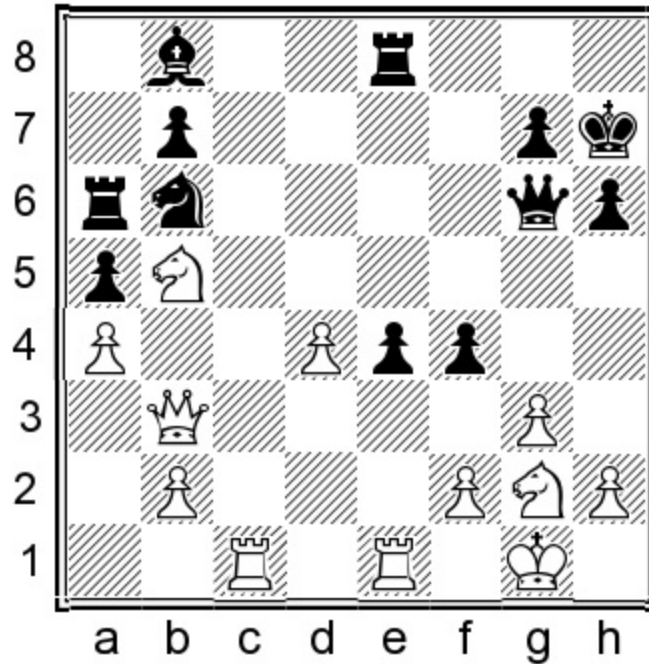
b) 21...♖d8 22.♔g4 ♔g5 23.♔xg5 hxg5 24.b3± Thanks to his well-placed knight on b5, White has a stable plus. There is nothing to attack the pawn on d4, and while Black is taking care of his own e4-pawn White will seize the c-file.

c) 21...♙f4 22.♖c1!? (22.♔b3 brought success in the game Yu Yangyi – Wang Yu, Shenzhen 2016, but after 22...♖6a8! the position would have remained unclear) 22...♙xe3! (better than 22...♖aa8 23.♖c5 or 22...♔d8 23.♖c5, with a clear plus for White in either case) 23.fx3 ♘d5 24.♘c7 ♘xc7 25.♖xc7 White's position is a shade more pleasant, on account of his superior pawn structure.

22.♖c1

Or 22.♔b3 ♔h7 23.g3 f5 24.♖ac1, transposing.

22...f5 23.♖b3† ♔h7 24.g3 f4 25.♘g2



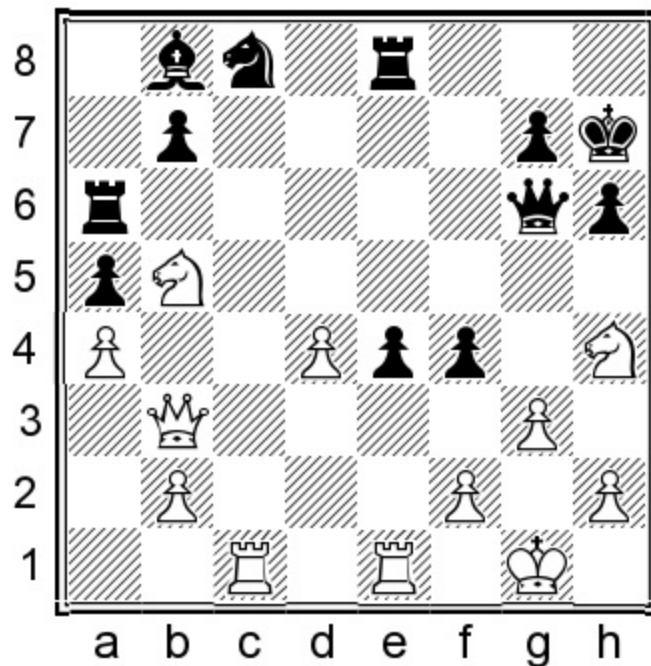
In this situation both sides have the choice between several plausible moves. We will examine some of these.

25...♘d7

Or:

a) 25...fxg3 26.hxg3 (26.fxg3!? is also interesting; then 26...♘d7 27.♘c7 ♖b6 28.♖d5 transposes to the main line below) 26...♘d7 27.♘c7 ♖b6 28.♖e3 ♔xc7 29.♖xc7 Visually White's position is a little more congenial, but objectively the position is unclear.

b) 25...♘c8 To this, White has 3 or 4 different replies, of which we shall examine one (he may also play 26.♘c7 or 26.♖c3). 26.♘h4

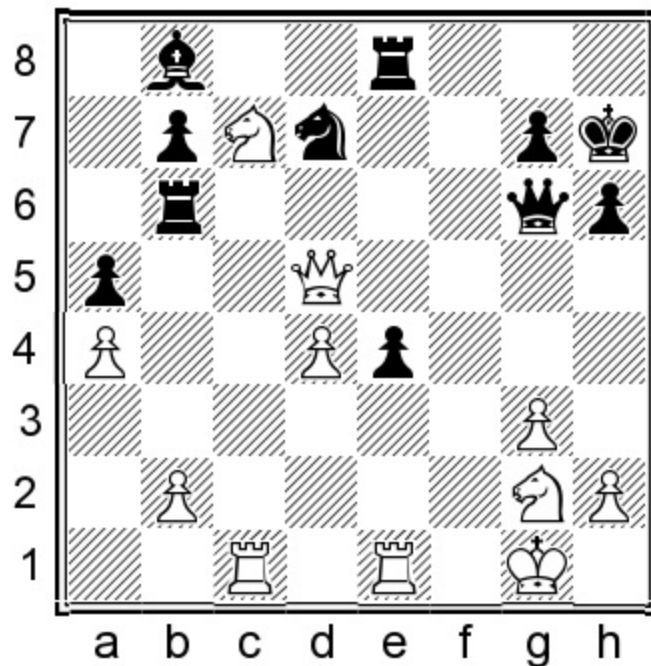


And now:

b1) 26... ♖g4 27. ♗f7 ♜ae6 28. ♘f5 ♗g6 (or 28...e3 29.fxe3 fxg3 30.h3! ♗g5; now White can play 31.♞c5 to force the exchange of queens, or else continue the middlegame struggle with 31.♘c7!?, giving an obscure position) 29. ♗xg6† White's pieces are slightly more active, but the position is nonetheless close to equality.

b2) 26... ♗f6 27. ♞xe4!? A move that forces events (27.♞c5 e3 28.♔g2!? would be unclear). 27...♞xe4 28.♞xc8 ♜ae6 29. ♗c2 Black's following moves are the only playable ones, but they are not perhaps all that difficult. 29...fxg3 30.hxg3 ♙xg3! 31.fxg3 g6 32.♞c7† ♔h8 33.♞c8†= with a repetition of moves.

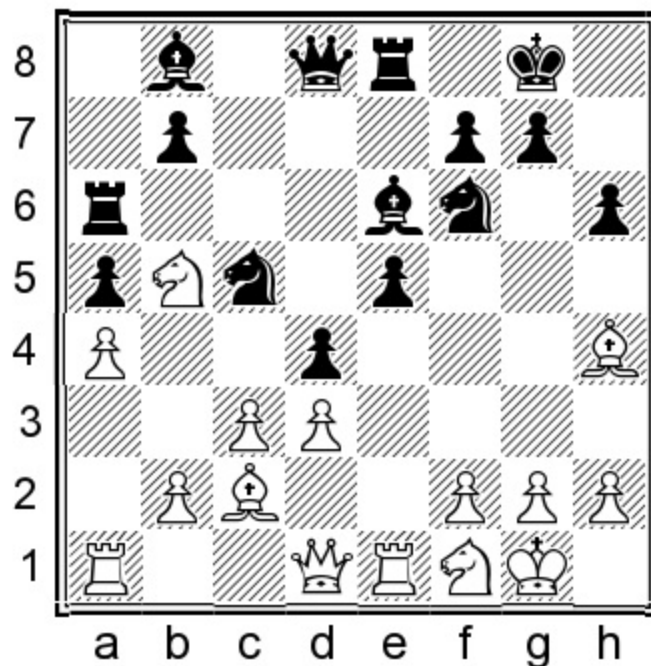
**26. ♘c7 ♞b6 27. ♗d5 fxg3 28.fxg3**



28...♙xc7 29.♞xc7 ♘f6 30.♚xa5 ♞xb2∞

There is still play in the position, but the probability is that it will soon be simplified by an exchange of queens – for example 31.♘h4 ♚g4 32.♚f5†. A smarter choice is 31.♘f4 ♚g4 32.♚c3, continuing the fight.

B22) 16.♘f1!?N 16...♘c5 17.♙c2 d4



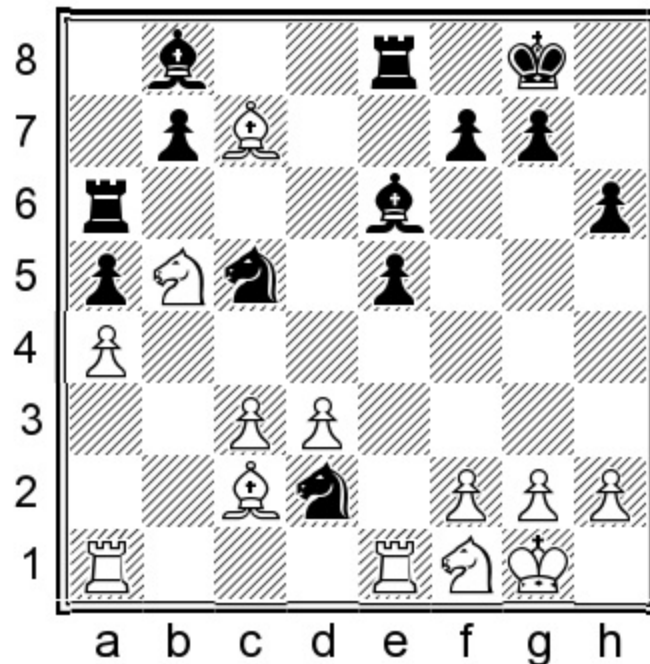
It's essential not to allow White to play d3-d4 himself, breaking up Black's pawn structure.

## 18.cxd4!?

Of White's various possible moves, this capture gives Black the most problems. Let's briefly examine the alternatives:

a) 18.♙g3 dxc3 19.bxc3 ♕f5 20.d4 ♕xc2 21.♚xc2 exd4 22.♖xe8† ♚xe8 23.cxd4∞ The position still offers play but is close to equality. White hasn't managed to set Black problems to give him scope for error.

b) 18.♚d2 (the main drawback to this move is that after 18...♕d7 White has to take with 19.cxd4 anyway, but in addition Black has the opportunity to exchange queens) 18...dxc3 19.bxc3 ♖fe4 20.♕xd8 ♗xd2 21.♕c7

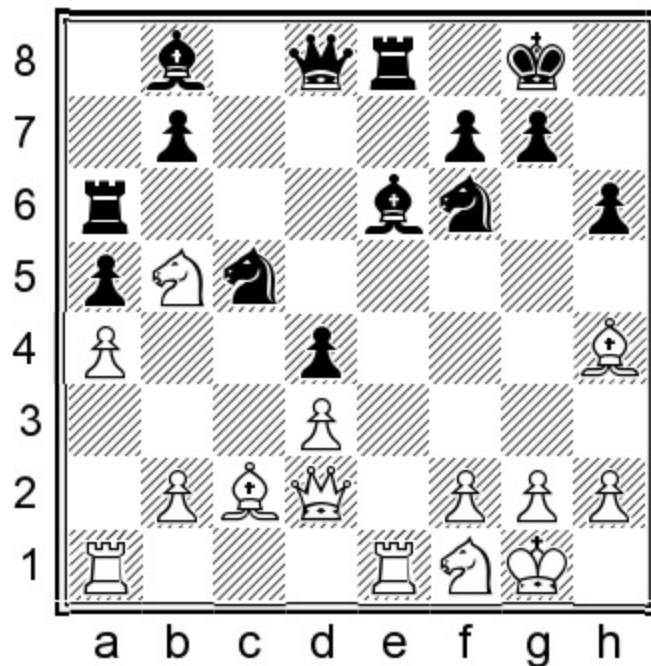


Despite the exchanges it isn't so simple for Black to solve all his problems:

b1) After 21...♕b3 22.♗xd2 ♕xc2 23.d4 ♕xa4 24.c4 (24.♗d6 ♕xc7 25.♗xe8 ♕xe8 26.dxc5∞) Black still has some difficulties.

b2) 21...♗xf1 22.♖xf1 ♕f5 23.♖ad1 ♗d7 24.f4!? A last attempt to give Black trouble. 24...♖f6 25.fxe5 ♗xe5 26.♖g1 ♕xc7 27.♗xc7 ♖c8, finally shaking off all the threats. And although finding the correct moves for Black is not simple, I would remind you that he had the option of 18...♕d7, transposing to the main line below.

## 18...exd4 19.♚d2



### 19...♙d7

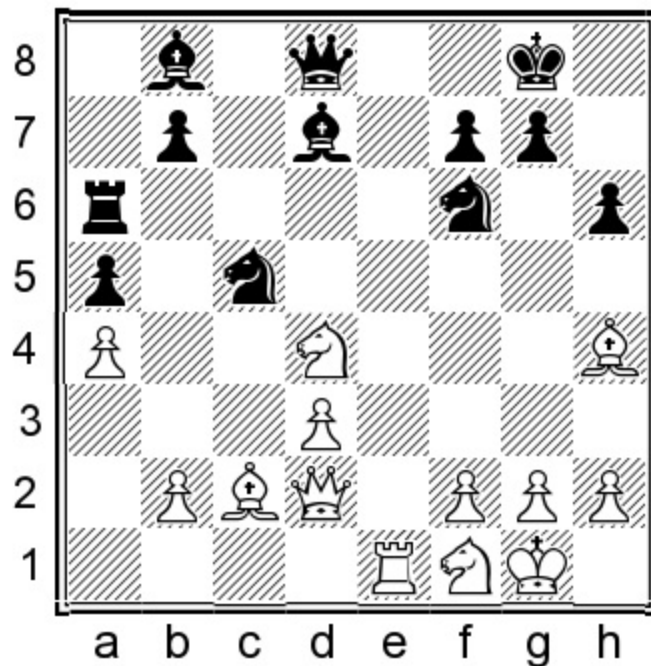
Now that the pawns have been exchanged on d4, there is no point in 19...♗fe4 as the d-pawn is lost:  
 20.dxe4 ♖xh4 21.♗xd4±

After 19...♞c6 20.b4 axb4 21.♗xb4, the computer's move 21...♞c8! enables Black to keep the situation under control (after 21...♘a6 22.♗b2 White has a small plus owing to the weak pawn on d4). There can follow: 22.♞ab1!? (more interesting than the simple 22.♗xd4 ♖xd4 23.♘xd4 ♘d5, when White's position looks more appealing but Black's activity supplies full compensation for the pawn) 22...♘a6 23.♗b2 ♙d7 24.♞xe8† ♙xe8 25.♙d1 (or 25.♙b3 ♘c5 26.♙c4 ♘xa4 27.♗xd4= and with his weak d-pawn exchanged off, Black shouldn't have any problems) 25...♙e5 26.♘d2 ♘c5 27.♘f3∞ With a complex position in which White's practical chances are slightly better.

### 20.♘xd4 ♞xe1

Or 20...♙xa4 21.♘f5 ♞xe1 22.♞xe1, transposing to variation B222 below.

### 21.♞xe1



This is the critical position after 18.cxd4 and indeed one of the key positions for the variation as a whole. We will therefore examine it fairly thoroughly.

Black can choose **B221)** 21...♞xa4 or **B222)** 21...♙xa4.

**B221) 21...♞xa4 22.♜e3**

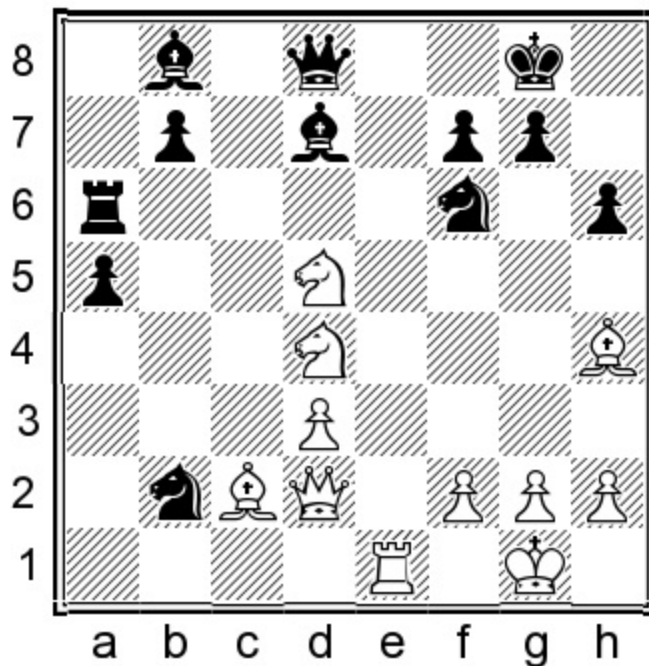
Again Black has a choice: **B2211)** 22...♞xb2?!, **B2212)** 22...♞b6, **B2213)** 22...♚b6 or **B2214)** 22...♙f4!.

Not 22...♙d6?! 23.♞d5!±. Black would then have to play 23...♙b4 with clearly the worse position.

**B2211) 22...♞xb2?!**

Overall this continuation is very dangerous for Black, but he has an interesting possibility in ...♙xh2†, giving White some worries about his king.

**23.♞d5**



### 23...♙xh2†

The consequences of this move are hard to calculate; nevertheless with correct play White obtains a large plus.

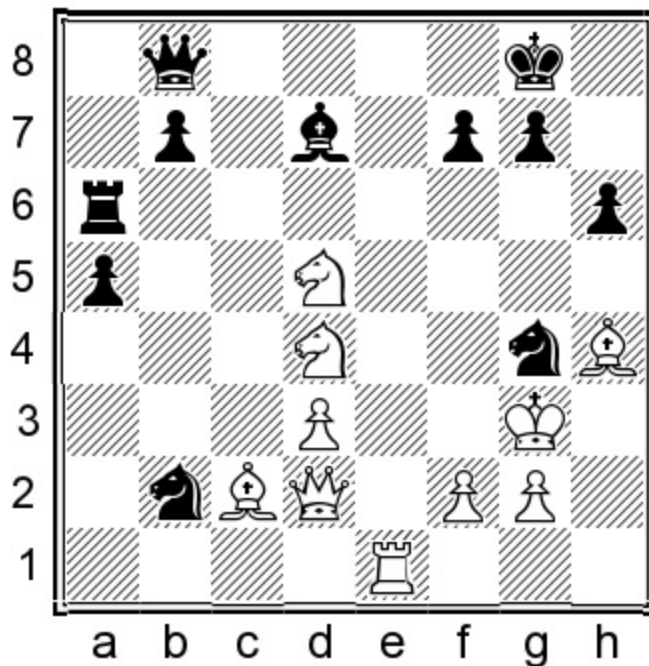
An improvement is 23...a4!. White then has less advantage than he would like, but some very difficult moves are required on Black's part. After 24.♙xf6 ♖xf6 25.♚c3 the obvious 25...♞d6 fails to 26.♜f5!; White then emerges a piece up. Black's only playable continuation is 25...♙a7 26.♚xb2 ♔h8!, leaving him the exchange down but with some compensation.

With 23...g5? Black loses: 24.♙xg5 hxg5 (against 24...♙xh2† the easiest way to win is 25.♔xh2 ♜g4† 26.♔g3; after the exchange of queens on g5, White picks up a piece with ♖b1) 25.♚xg5† ♔h8 26.♞e4 ♚g8 27.♞h4† ♜h7 28.♜f6!+- with a mating attack.

### 24.♔xh2

In the case of 24.♔h1 ♙c7∞ Black is all right.

### 24...♜g4† 25.♔g3 ♚b8†



Seeing that the bishop on h4 is trapped, Black counts on winning his piece back with ...g7-g5. But this weakens his own king, and for that reason it's important for White to keep the queens on the board.

#### 26.f4

With 26.♙f4?! ♚xf4† 27.♘xf4 g5 the material balance is restored. After 28.♖b1 the ending will be about equal.

#### 26...g5 27.♙c3±

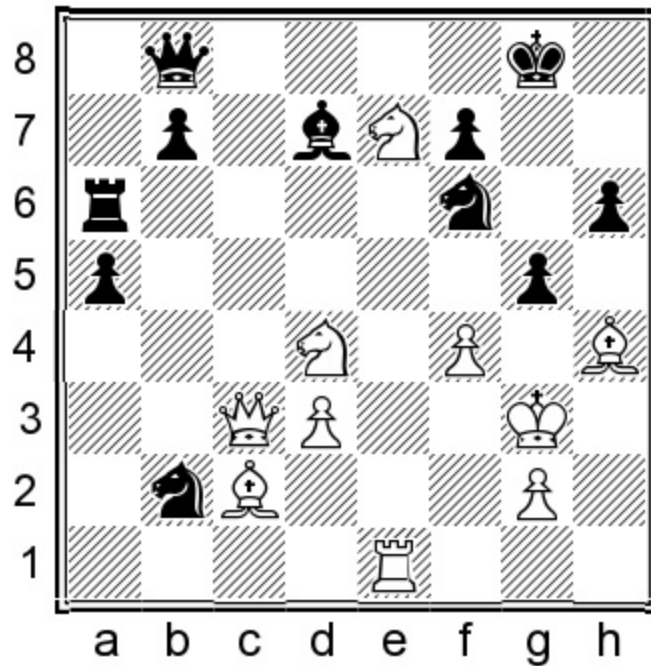
Simultaneously attacking the knight on b2 and launching an offensive against the king. I would have liked to conclude here, but Black's next move demands some accurate play by White.

#### 27...♘f6!

By not hurrying to take the bishop, Black prolongs the struggle and places quite a few difficulties in White's path to realizing his advantage.

After 27...gxh4† 28.♔xh4+- Black has no way of attacking anything; 28...♞d6?! is no good in view of 29.♘f5!.

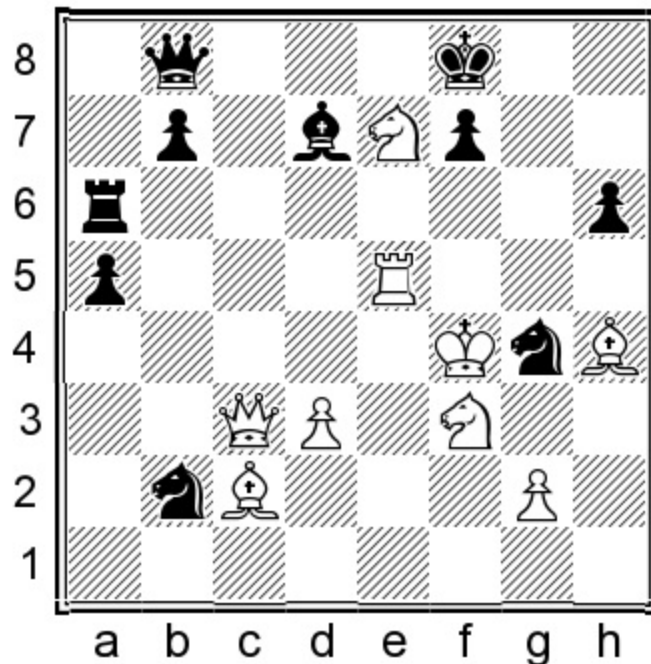
#### 28.♘e7†



28...♔h7

The most stubborn. Black would lose in short order with 28...♔g7?! 29.♖df5†.

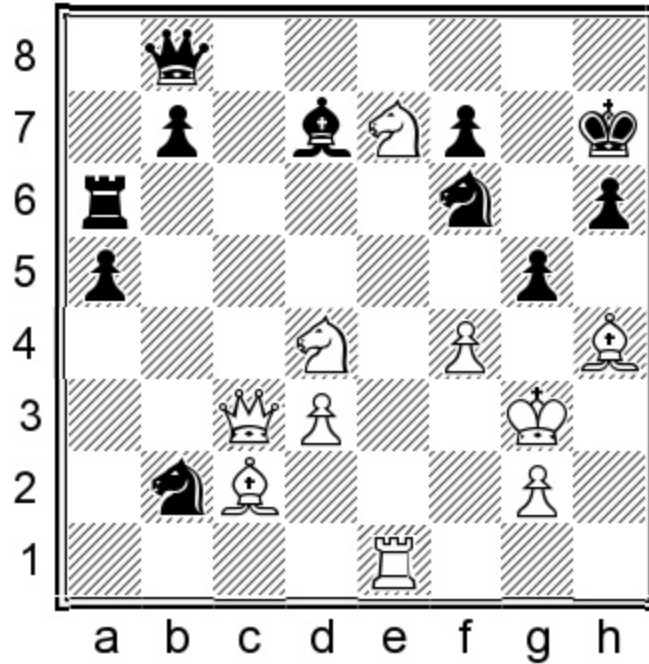
White's task is also made easier by 28...♔f8. There can follow: 29.♖e5! The best way to cover the f4-pawn; Black can't get through to the white king because his knight on b2 and rook on a6 aren't participating in the attack. 29...gxf4† (or 29...gxh4† 30.♔xh4 ♖g4 31.♖e4+- with ♖df5 to follow; Black's king position is too weak, being accessible not only from h8 but along the a3-f8 diagonal) 30.♔xf4 ♖g4 31.♖f3



And now:

a) 31...♖xe5 32.♗xe5 f6 33.♘7g6† ♔g7 34.♚xb2± Black can regain one minor piece, but White will still keep a material plus. Moreover the rook on a6 can't join in the attack because the white king is guarded by the bishop on h4.

b) 31...f6 is worse: 32.d4 fxе5† 33.dxe5+- The pawn on e5 is very effectively placed, and there is no saving the knight on b2. On 33...♞b6 White wins with 34.♚c5.



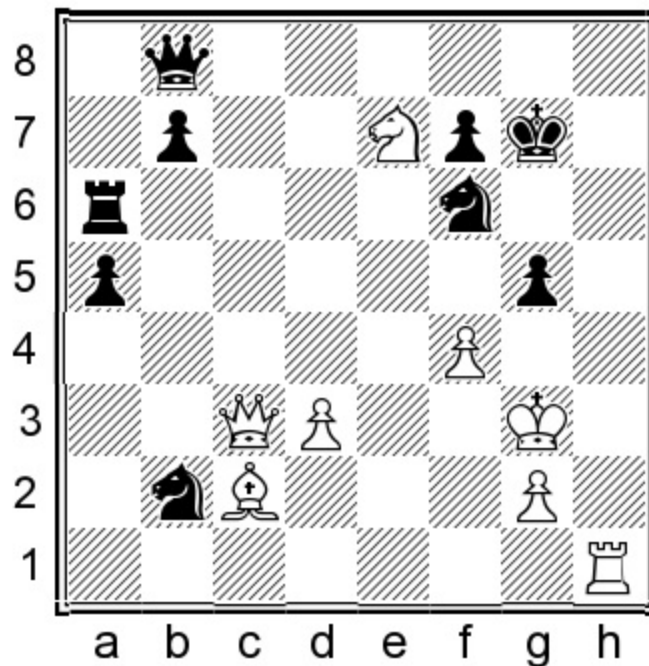
### 29.♙xg5!

If 29.♞e5?! then 29...♗a4∞. In contrast to the 28...♔f8 line, White cannot now get at the black king via the diagonal a3-f8.

### 29...hxg5 30.♞h1† ♔g7 31.♗df5†

With this move we not only cause Black's good bishop on d7 to be exchanged but also open the path for our queen; after a couple of checks the black knight on f6 will be subject to a pin.

### 31...♙xf5 32.♗xf5† ♔g6 33.♗e7† ♔g7



### 34.♖f1!

Only thus! The knight is best left on e7 for the moment.

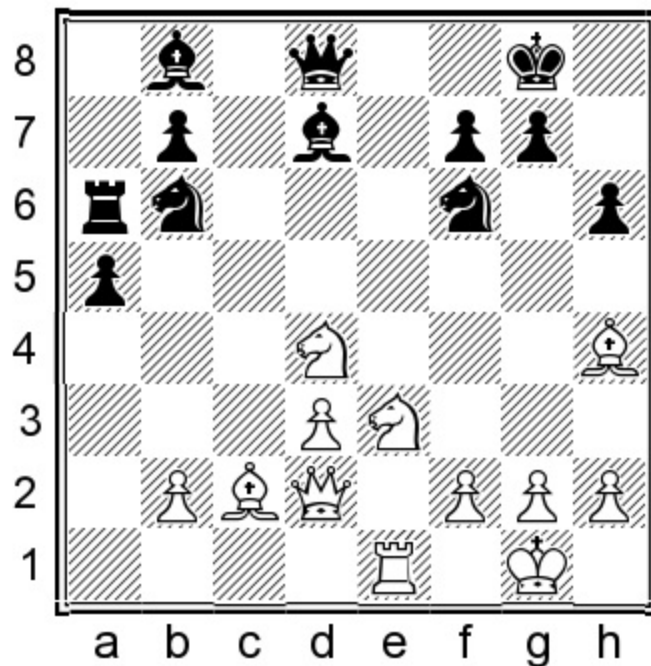
With 34.♘d5?! ♔d6! White would lose his advantage. For example: 35.♖h5 gxf4† 36.♘xf4 ♖c6!∞ Black intends to take on c2, deflecting the white queen from the pin.

### 34...gxf4† 35.♕h2!±

We can now state some results of the skirmish that started with 23...♙xh2†. Black has severe problems with the knight on b2. In the event of 35...♖b6 36.♘f5† ♕g8, White has various ways of winning; the simplest is the prophylactic 37.♕g1, after which Black's rook and two knights are forced to stay where they are.

The best chance is 35...♖e6!, but even so, with 36.♘f5† ♕g8 37.♕g1!, White eliminates the threat of ...f4-f3† and will then capture the stray knight.

### B2212) 22...♘b6



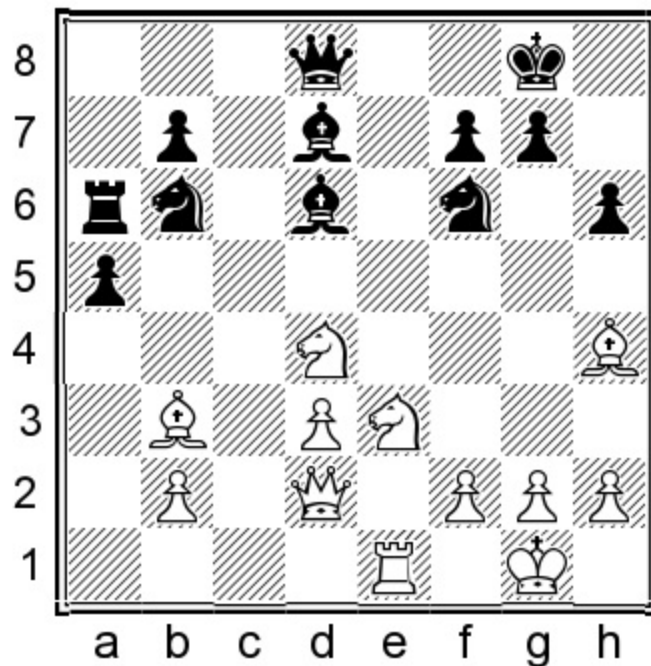
After this, White has two possibilities of about equal worth. I prefer 23.♘b3, but I will also give a few moves following 23.♘df5.

### 23.♘b3

Or: 23.♘df5 ♘f4 An important protective move, reducing White's attacking potential (a worse choice is 23...♘e6 24.g3!?, followed by d3-d4). 24.♙c3 ♘xe3 Probably the best decision (although 24...♘e6 is also possible; White can then take on f6 to obtain an ending with the better pawn structure, or else carry on the middlegame fight with 25.d4!?). 25.♘xe3 g5 26.♘g3 ♘bd5 27.♘xd5 ♘xd5 28.♙d4 The computer assesses this position as unclear, but from the human perspective White is a little better on account of his bishop pair and Black's weakening with ...g7-g5.

### 23...♘d6

Not a bad move is 23...a4!?, but Black needs to follow it up accurately or he will be decidedly worse: 24.♘a2 ♘f4 25.♘e2 (or 25.♙e2!? ♘c8! with a playable position) 25...♘xe3 26.fxe3 ♘e6! Black is in a bad way otherwise. 27.♘xe6 fxe6 With these rather strange moves Black has achieved an almost equal position, even though from the practical viewpoint White is more comfortable.



### 24. ♖e2

An interesting idea is 24. ♘ef5!? with ♗xh6† to follow, leading to some complex variations. Black however has various possibilities. He can play 24... ♙b4 at once, or capture first with 24... ♙xf5; or he can even play 24... ♗bd5 – with a complicated game in all these cases.

### 24... ♙b4 25. ♖d1 a4

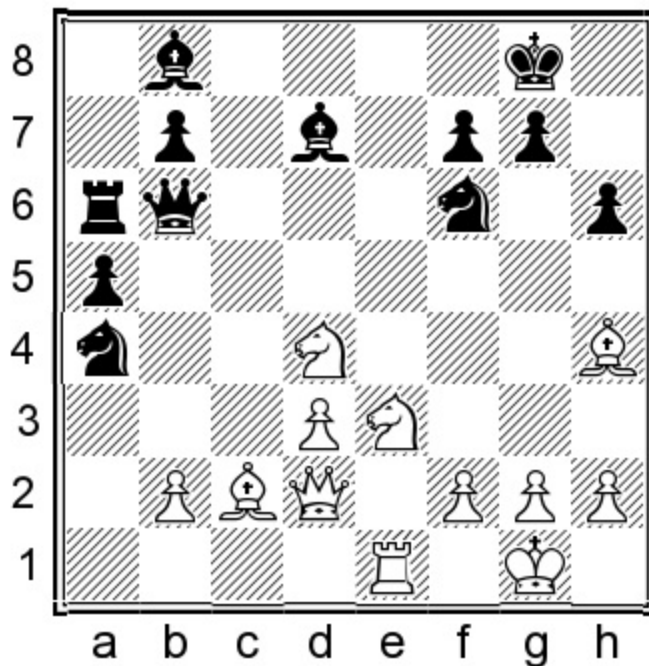
After 25... ♙a4 26. ♙xa4 ♗xa4 27. ♗df5 White's pieces are more active, giving him a slight advantage.

### 26. ♙a2

The position offers plenty of play; White is a little more comfortable. At this point 26...a3 isn't very good in view of 27. ♗dc2, while a good answer to 26... ♙f8 is 27. ♖f3.

The computer advises 26... ♖a5, but in that case after 27. ♖f3 ♙c5 28. b4! ♙xb4 29. ♗df5 White has a dangerous initiative.

### B2213) 22... ♖b6



23. ♖xf6!

By exchanging off the knight on f6, White prepares to play d3-d4 and worry the black king.

23... ♙xf6 24. ♘f3 ♙xb2

After the capture on b2 with the knight, the position tends to become extremely complicated.

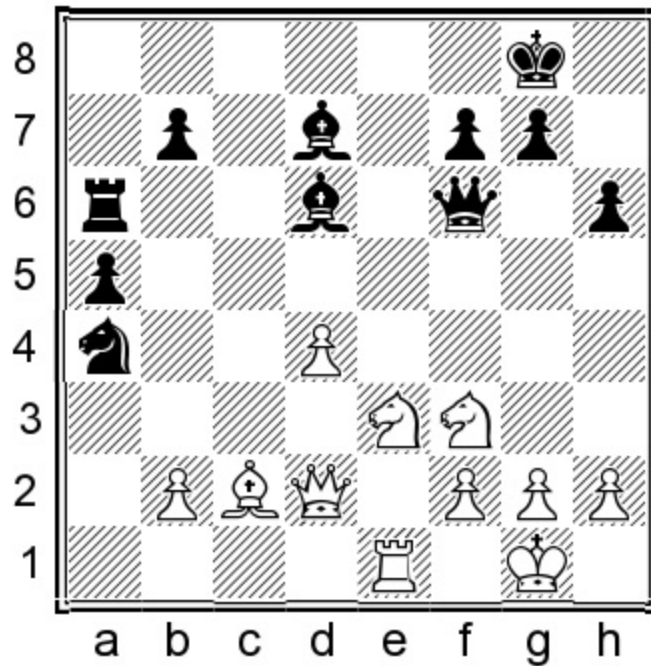
Obviously a worse choice would be 24... ♙xb2?! 25. ♖b1, but there is also:

24... ♗d6

This is worth examining. There can follow:

25. d4!

White relies on his own threat of ♙d3 to counter Black's ... ♗b4, and continues with the attack.



25... Nb6

In the event of 25... Qb4 26. Wd3 g6 27. Ra1 Nb6 28. Ne5± White has a clear plus, thanks to the activity of his pieces.

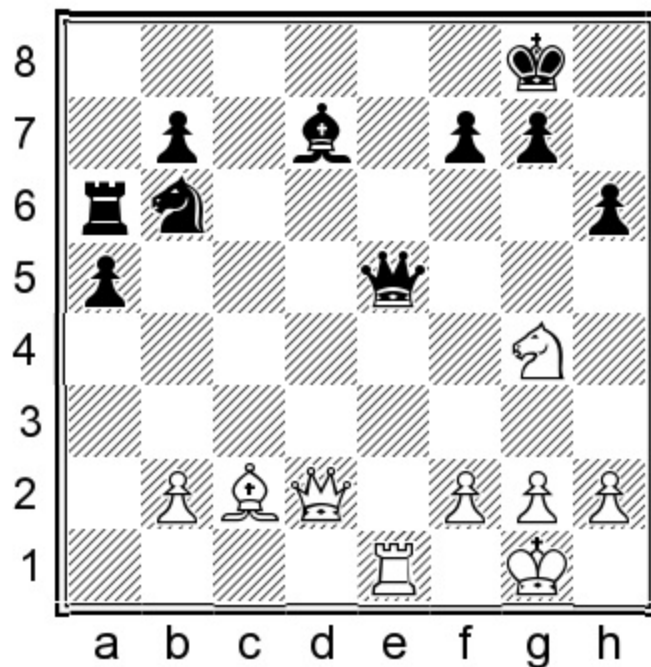
26. Ne5! →

Owing to the threats of Wd3 and Ne3g4, White has a dangerous attack; it remains to be explained what happens if Black takes the pawn sacrifice on e5.

26... Qxe5?!

The consequences of this capture aren't obvious even to the computer; and yet with precise play, White's attack is too dangerous.

27. dxe5 Wxe5 28. Ng4



28...♖g5

Or 28...♖c5 29.♗d3 g6 30.♘b3+- with the terrible threat of ♗xg6†; on 30...♔g7 White wins with 31.♗f3!.

29.♗d3 g6

If 29...♗g6 then 30.♗xa6 wins.

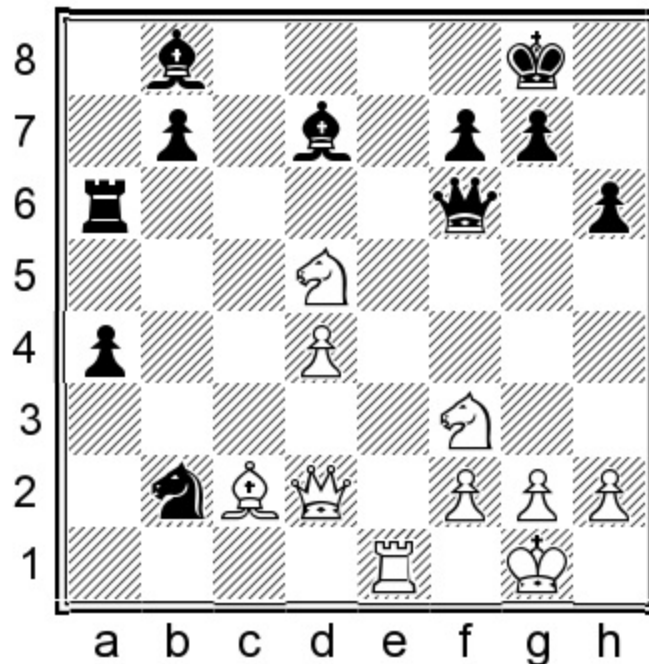
30.♗d4 ♘d5 31.♘b3!±

It's only now that the situation on the board begins to clear up. Black can't take on g4 in view of ♗e8†, and there is nothing with which to defend the knight on d5, in view of a check by the white knight on f6. Let's look at Black's possible continuations:

a) 31...♔h7 32.f3 h5 33.♘f2+- Black must play 33...♘f6. Then after 34.♘xf7 his king's position is too weak.

b) 31...h5 32.♘xd5 ♗xg4 33.♘xf7†! ♔xf7 34.♗e4+- and Black has no easy choice between playing 34...♗e6 and sacrificing his queen. Whatever move Black chooses, White should win with correct play.

25.d4 a4 26.♘d5



26...♗d8

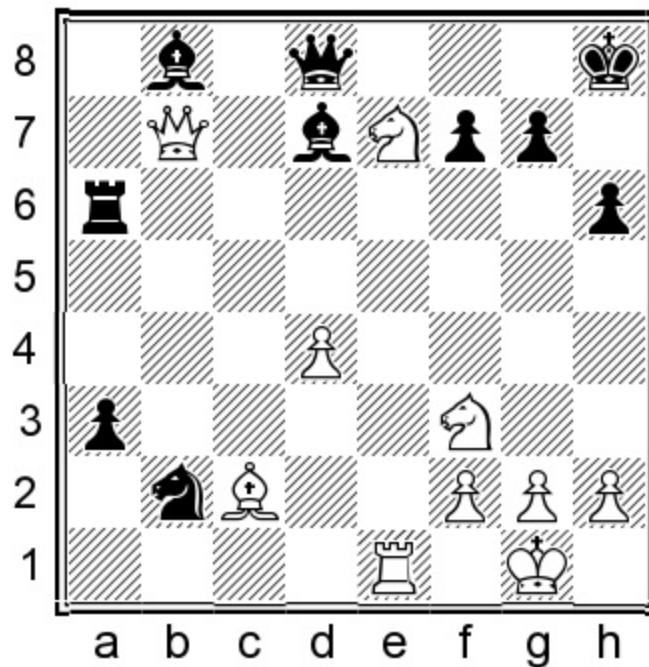
Covering the back rank. There is now no point in ♗c3, but on the other hand the possibility of playing the queen to b4 arises.

If 26...♗d6, then 27.♗c3! makes use of the back-rank weakness. Owing to the threat of ♗c8†, Black has to give up the exchange: 27...♞c6 28.♗xb2 ♞xc2 29.♗xc2 ♗xd5 30.♗c5± White is the exchange to the good with a stable advantage. After 30...♗xc5 31.dxc5 White will be able to swap off the light-

squared bishop, thanks to the threats of ♖e7 and ♖b1 (to answer ...♙c6 with ♘d4).

Black does better with 30...♙d6!?, but after 31.♖e7 ♙c6 32.♘e5 White still keeps a plus.

27.♙b4 a3 28.♘e7† ♔h8 29.♙xb7

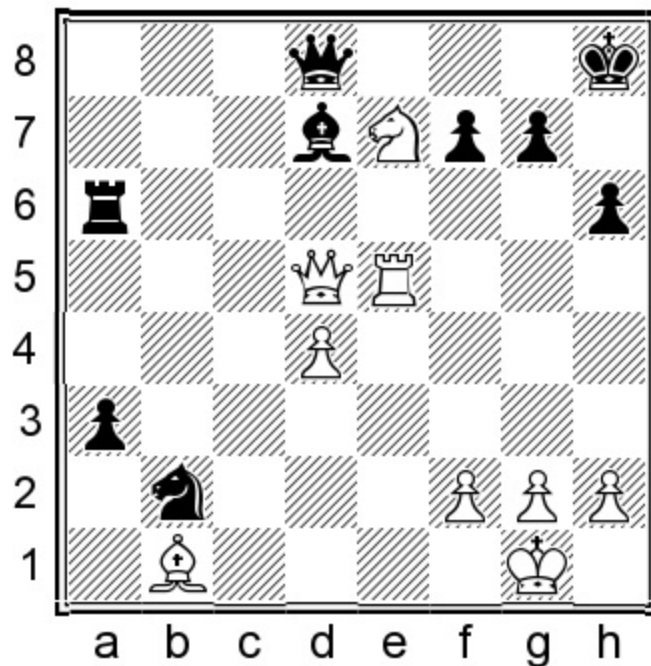


29...♖f6!

The only move to leave Black with a normal position. Other continuations give White a large plus:

a) 29...♖e6?! 30.♖xe6 ♙xe6 31.♙e4 g6 32.♙h4± On 32...♙f8 White has 33.♙f6† ♙g7 34.♘xg6†, picking up a pawn and continuing the attack.

b) 29...♖b6?! 30.♙d5 ♙d6 (or 30...♖f6 31.♙f5 a2 32.♙xa2±; after the exchange of bishops on f5, Black will have no compensation for the pawn) 31.♘e5! ♙xe5 32.♖xe5 ♖a6 33.♙b1± with an appreciable advantage.

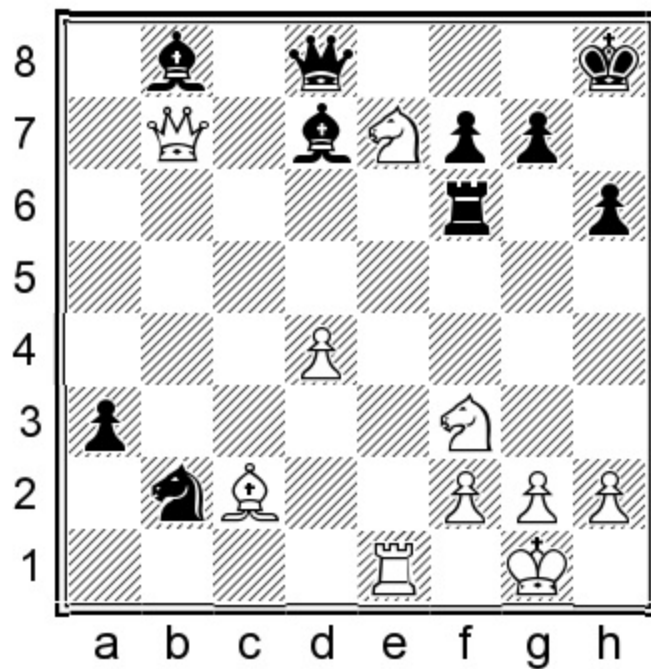


Black has serious problems with the safety of his king:

b1) 33...♖f6 is not good: 24.♔e2! and the queen on d8 has no moves, owing to the weak back rank.

b2) 33...♔c7? loses outright to 34.g3 ♕h3 35.♔e1!. White has defended against the threats, while Black cannot do the same.

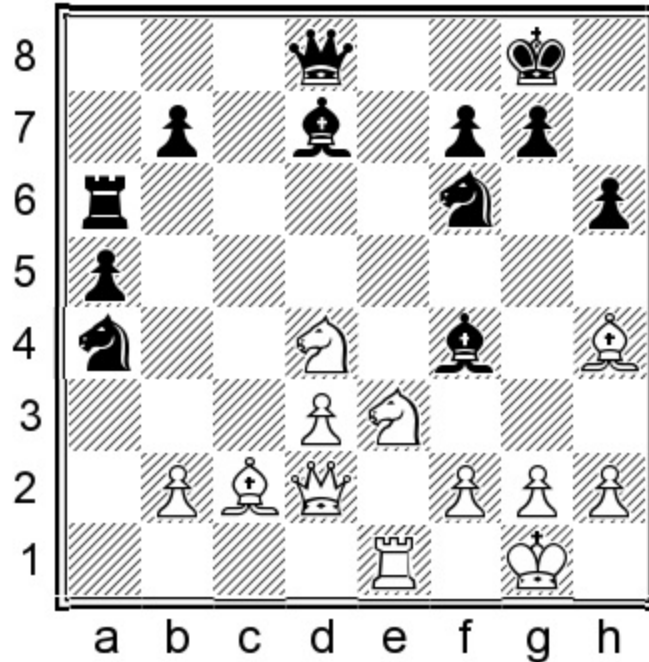
b3) Only the strange 33...a2! 34.♕xa2 ♖d3 35.♔e3 ♔a8 leaves Black with quite good chances of salvation in the ending with a pawn less.



30.♔e4 g6 31.♔e3 ♔g7 32.♔xa3

Despite being a pawn down, Black does retain some compensation – but of course the white side is more pleasant to handle. We must also take into account that Black has played several good moves just to avoid having much the worse position.

B2214) 22...♔f4!



Of all the possible moves, this is probably the only one that allows Black, with good play, to achieve full equality.

23.♞e2 ♔xe3

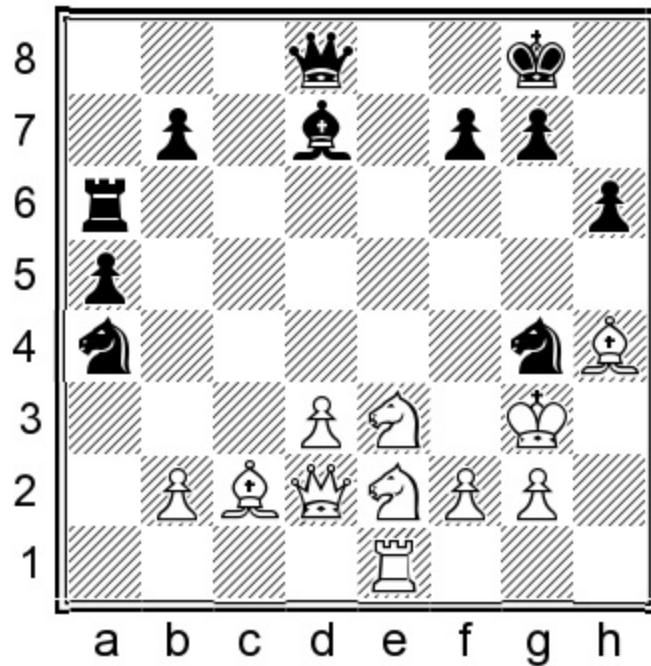
Or:

a) 23...♔d6?! Intending to answer 24.♞d5 by capturing on h2, but the resulting complications turn out in White's favour: 24.♞d5 ♔xh2† 25.♞xh2 ♞g4† 26.♞g3 g5 27.♔xg5 hxg5 28.♔xa4 ♔xa4 29.♞ec3± Quite apart from the two pieces that are *en prise*, White is threatening ♞e7†.

b) 23...♔xh2†!?

Unlike other variations featuring ...♔xh2†, this particular one does not lead to a bad position.

24.♞xh2 ♞g4† 25.♞g3



25...♙c7†

Exploiting the under-protected bishop on c2.

Not 25...♙b8†? 26.f4, or 25...g5? 26.♘xg4 gxh4† 27.♔h2 with an extra piece.

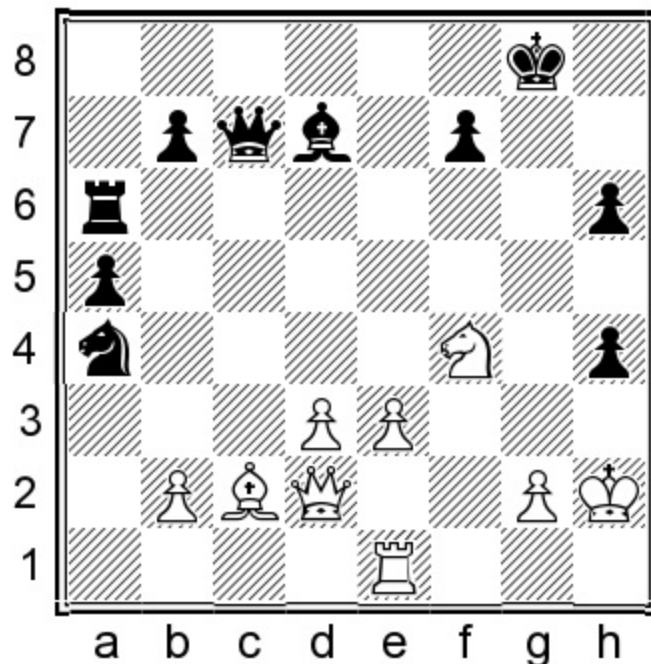
26.♘f4 ♘xe3

26...♞g6? would lose to 27.d4.

27.fx3

White may also play 27.♞xe3, though it looks slightly odd.

27...g5 28.♔h2 gxh4∞



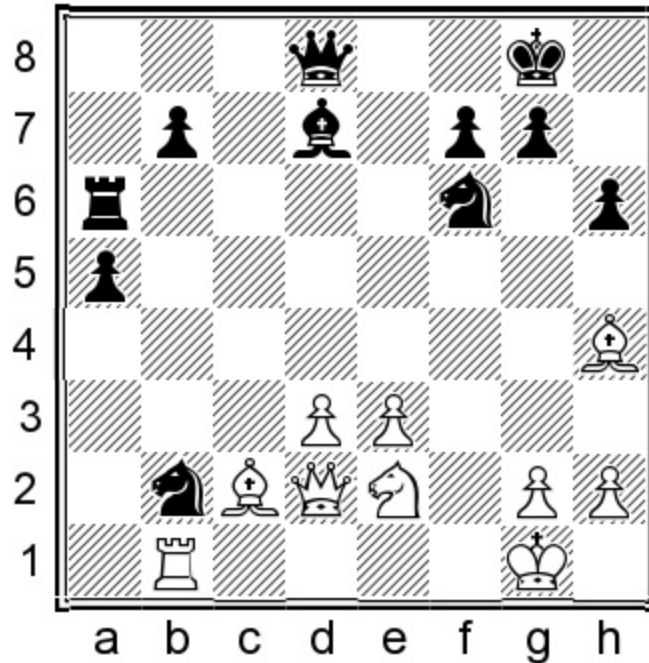
With a playable position and approximately equal chances. White has the choice between the simplifying 29.♙xa4 and the complicating 29.♞c1!?, after which Black needs to understand that

29...♖c6! 30.♙xa4 ♖xc1 31.♙xd7 leaves the position unclear.

## 24.fxe3 ♘xb2

If Black doesn't take the pawn, his exchanging manoeuvre with ...♙f4 and ...♙xe3 loses its point.

## 25.♖b1



## 25...♖b6

Anticipating 26.♙xa5 which leads to wholesale exchanges.

Black may also play 25...♘a4, which in conjunction with the following 26...♘b6! is his simplest way to equalize. In this situation there is little in the way of forced moves, so I shall try to give some humanly plausible ones: 25...♘a4!? 26.♖xb7 (26.d4∞ gives White enough compensation for the pawn, but there can be no question of an advantage) And now:

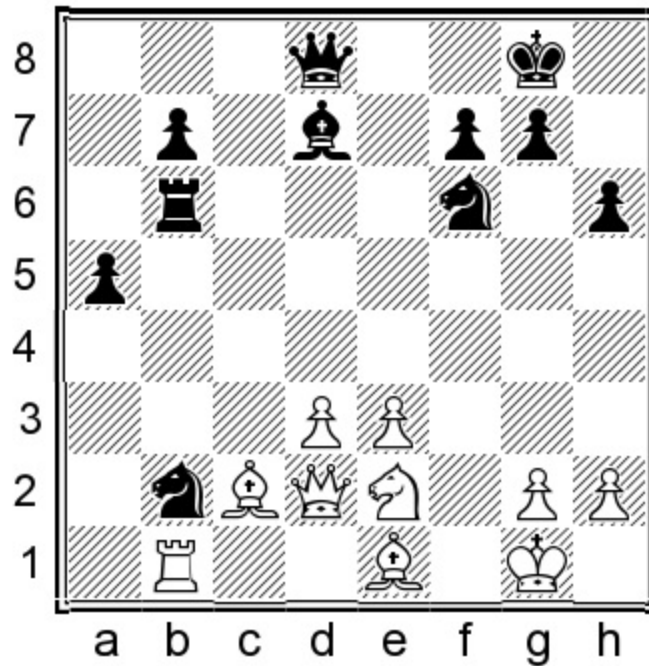
a) 26...♘c5 27.♖b1 a4 28.♙b4 ♘e6 29.♘c3 In general terms the a-pawn is not dangerous, but its presence is sufficient to compensate for White's good bishops. For example after 29...a3 30.♖a1 ♙a5 Black should hold the ending with no particular difficulty.

b) 26...♘b6! 27.♙xf6 ♙xf6 28.♖b8† ♘c8 29.d4 ♖b6 30.♖a8 ♖a6 31.♖b8= with repetition of moves.

## 26.♙e1!?

After this, Black still has scope for error, and a few accurate moves are required of him.

Instead 26.♙xa5 ♘c4! 27.♙a7 ♖xb1† 28.♙xb1 ♙f5 leads to exchanges and a drawish position after ♙xf6 and dxc4.



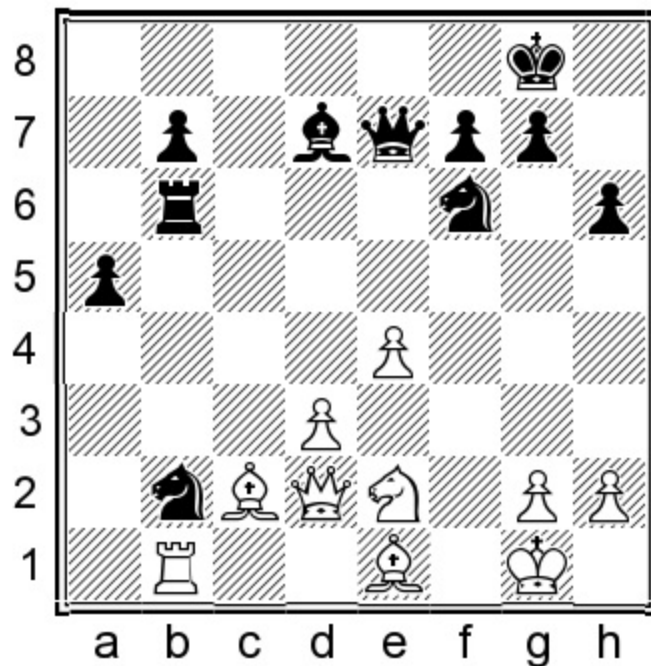
26...♔e7

Alternatively:

a) 26...♔c7!? 27.♘d4 ♘a4! (27...a4? 28.♔a5± is even worse for Black now than a move earlier) 28.♖xb6 ♘xb6 29.♔xa5 Black's position looks forlorn, but by means of concrete threats he will be able to exchange some pieces: 29...♘g4 30.♙g3 ♔d8, and because his king is somewhat exposed, White cannot acquire a plus. Either 31.♙f2 or 31.e4 leads to a roughly equal position.

b) 26...a4 27.♔a5! a3 (the only defence against the threat of ♖xb2) 28.♔xa3 ♘a4 29.♖c1± White avoids exchanging rooks and simplifying the position. Thanks to his bishop pair and good centre pawns, he has a definite advantage.

27.e4



**27...♙a4!**

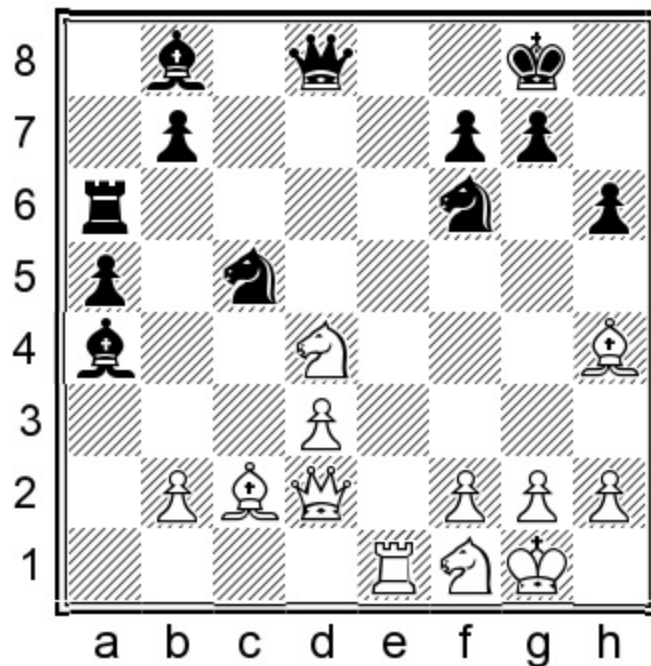
Black has to give up the a5-pawn in time to free himself from the pin.

A worse choice is 27...a4 28.♙f2 ♖b5 (or 28...♖b4 29.♙c3±, and in view of the threatened ♙c5 Black must surrender his knight for the d3-pawn) 29.♘d4 ♙b4 30.♙xb4 ♖xb4 31.♘e2± with a comfortable plus. As a minimum White will pick up the a-pawn after ...a4-a3 and ♙c5; but if Black plays 31...a3 at once, then apart from 32.♙c5 White has another good move in 32.♘c3!?

**28.♙xa4 ♘xa4 29.♖xb6 ♘xb6 30.♙xa5**

The position is nearly equal, but some scope for play still remains. As we have noticed, after 21...♘xa4 Black is required to play a large number of good moves in order to equalize.

**B222) 21...♙xa4**



### 22. ♘f5 ♙xc2 23. ♚xc2 ♜e6

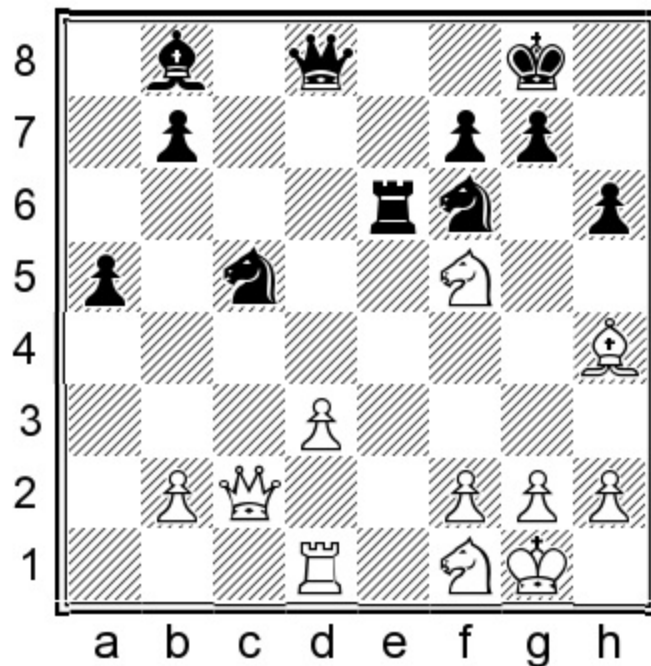
This was the first move that came into my head when I was studying the position. Of the alternatives, 23... ♘e6?! is dubious but 23... ♘cd7! is more precise, denying White one of two possibilities that would be about equally good. Let's see:

- a) 23... ♘e6?! 24. ♙xf6 ♚xf6, and now instead of checking on c8, White boldly advances his d-pawn: 25.d4! (25. ♚c8†?! ♜h7 would entirely justify Black's scheme; on 26. ♚xb7 he has 26... ♘f4, with full compensation for the pawn) At this point if Black had his rook on c8 he would have no problems, but it cannot get there (after 25... ♜c6 26. ♚b1±, the threat of d4-d5 and a check on e7 means that Black has no time to bring his rook to the back rank). So there is nothing better than: 25... ♙d6 26.d5 ♘c7 27. ♘1e3± Owing to the awkward placing of his pieces, Black has serious problems. On 27... ♚d8 White has 28. ♘xd6 ♜xd6 29. ♘f5!, and the pawn will advance to d6.
- b) 23... ♘cd7! 24.d4 ♜e6 Black isn't afraid of having his pawn structure damaged by ♜xe6. On the white side I would prefer 25. ♜d1!?. For this, see 23... ♜e6 24. ♜d1 ♘cd7 25.d4 below.

### 24. ♜xe6

The rook exchange simplifies the position at the same time as setting Black some specific problems. But although White wins a pawn, Black successfully activates his remaining pieces.

If White wants a more straightforward line of play, he has:  
24. ♜d1!?



By avoiding exchanges, White brings support to his d-pawn. There can follow:

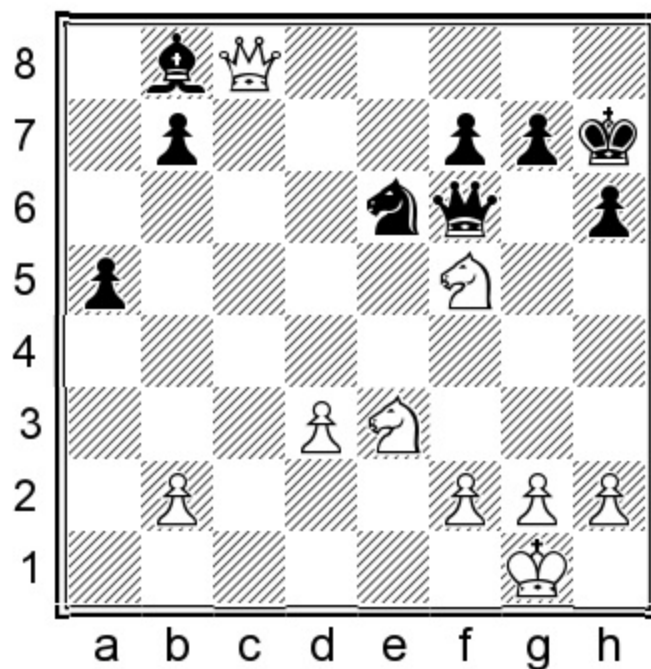
24...  $\text{Ncd7}$  25.  $\text{d4}$

Objectively this dynamic position is about equal; but White's side is easier to play, since his d-pawn is controlling central squares and can advance.

25...  $\text{Wf8}$  26.  $\text{d5}$   $\text{Rb6}\infty$

As there are no forced moves here, it would be difficult to take the analysis further; at each turn, each player has a number of moves of roughly equal value. For White, 27.  $\text{Qxf6}$   $\text{Nxf6}$  28.  $\text{Rd3}!?$  is interesting.

24...  $\text{Nxe6}$  25.  $\text{Qxf6}$   $\text{Wxf6}$  26.  $\text{Wc8}\dagger$   $\text{Kh7}$  27.  $\text{N1e3}$

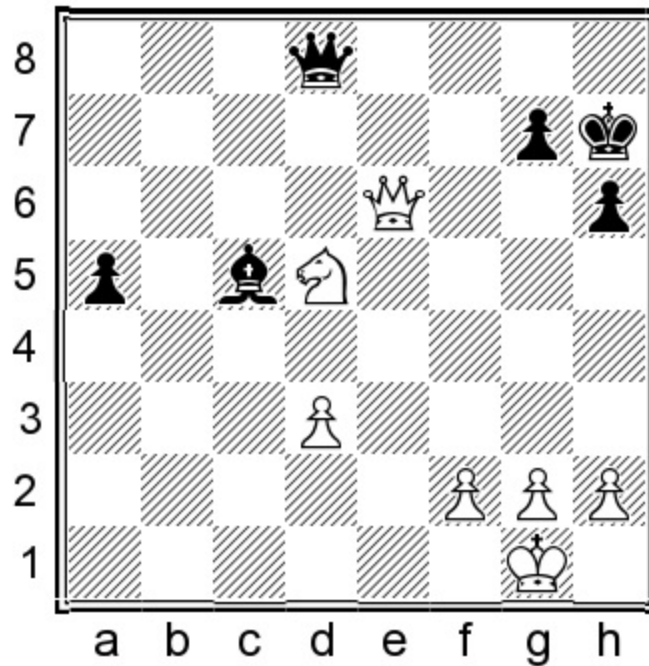


This position can come about by force after 23...♖e6, so let's look into it further. Despite losing the pawn on b7, Black has various ways of holding the position, but a moment will come when a strong move must be found.

## 27...♙c7

Alternatives:

a) 27...♙e5 28.♘d5!? White takes advantage of Black's weak king position to activate his knight. 28...♚d8 (after 28...♙xh2+?! 29.♔h1! ♚e5 30.♘de7 ♚b8 31.g3± White wins the bishop and has good chances to conduct his advantage to victory) 29.♚xb7 ♙xb2 30.♘fe3 ♙d4 31.♚xf7 ♙xe3 32.♚xe6 ♙c5



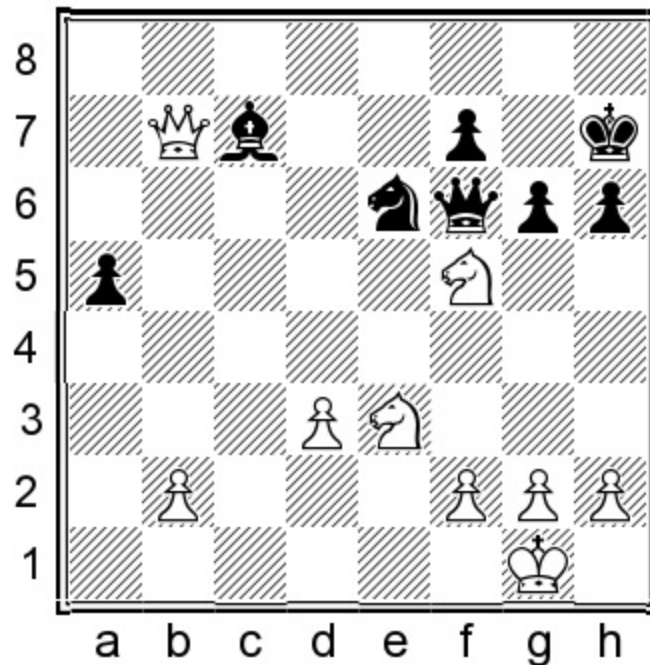
With good play, the a-pawn will be enough to secure Black against loss. Accuracy is still required, however; in answer to 33.g3, for example, 33...a4?! is not good in view of 34.♚f5+ ♔h8 35.♘c3. Black should therefore play 33...♔h8!.

b) 27...♙a7!? 28.♚xb7 ♙c5 is one of Black's best options. Despite being a pawn up, White has difficulty co-ordinating his pieces. For example: 29.h4 g6! (in the case of 29...♙b4 30.h5 ♚xb2 31.♚xf7± Black would still have to work for the draw) 30.♘xh6 ♙xe3 31.♘g4 ♙xf2+ 32.♘xf2 ♔g7. And the weakening of his king position prevents White from exploiting his extra pawn.

c) 27...♙f4 28.♚xb7 g6?! (the enigmatic 28...♙e5! is the only move to solve Black's problems; see 27...♙c7 28.♚xb7 ♙e5 which we consider below) 29.♘g3 ♔g7 30.♘c4±. After bringing his knight to this square, White has an obvious plus.

## 28.♚xb7 g6

Or: 28...♔e5!? Of course a human player would find it hard to make two moves running with the bishop; the subsequent moves are not obvious either: 29.b3 ♕f4 30.g3 g6!♞ And Black holds the position, although moves like these bear little relation to a practical game.



**29.♖xh6!?**

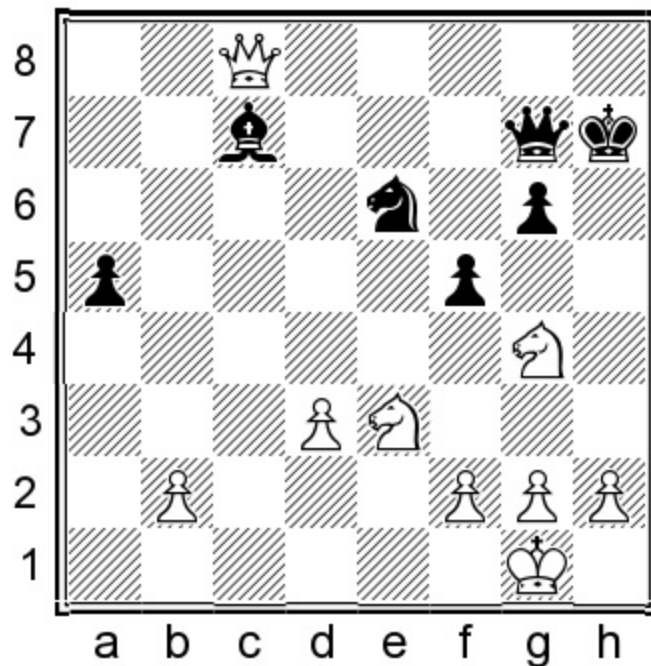
This sets Black more problems than the simple 29.♖g3 which can be met by 29...♗d4♞.

**29...♗g7!**

This move, which isn't obvious (the one that suggests itself is 29...♗e7) allows Black to keep the situation under control.

In answer to 29...♗e7 White cannot withdraw his knight in view of the threatened ...♔xh2♠, but he can make use of the eighth rank: 30.♗c8! (better than 30.♗a8 ♖d8♞) 30...♔d8 Practically the only move (with the white queen on c8, Black can't play 30...♖d8? on account of 31.♗h3, and the knight cannot be taken either, as Black would be mated after ♗h8♠). 31.♖hg4 ♗b4 32.♗c3± Retaining the extra pawn with chances of a win in the ending.

**30.♖hg4 f5 31.♗c8**



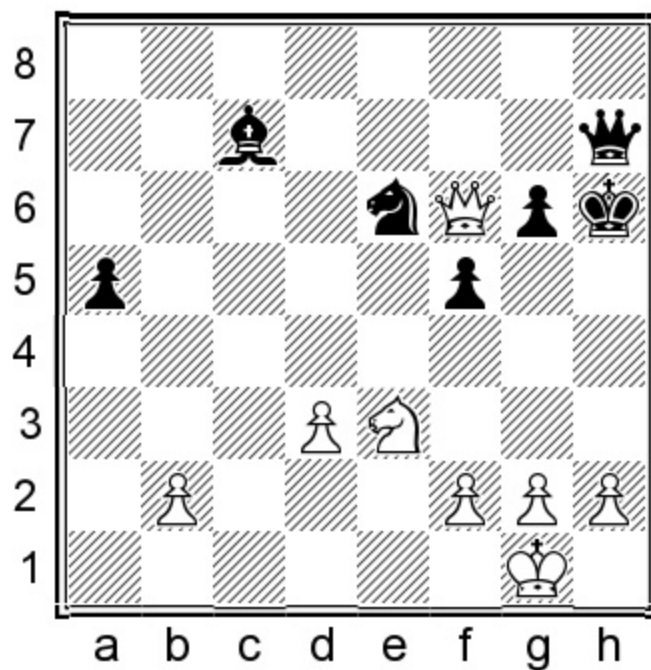
**31...Qf7**

Or 31...fxg4 32.Qxe6± with a pawn to the good and winning chances after 32...Qxb2 33.Qe7† Qg7 34.Qh4†.

**32.♞h6 ♔xh6**

Or 32...Qf6 33.♞g8 (if White wants, he can continue the fight with 33.d4 or with the knight sacrifice ♞hg4!?, but I'm not convinced anything good would come of it) 33...Qf7 34.♞h6=.

**33.♞h8† ♞h7 34.♞f6**



### 34...♔d7

If 34...♖g7?! then 35.g4±. The attempt to keep the extra piece does not succeed; Black will have to give up his knight after ♖h4†.

### 35.♖h8† ♖h7=

With a repetition of moves. Of course not all the moves in this variation were obligatory, but any alternative possibilities for the black side are far from obvious.

## Conclusion

White has various moves in answer to Black's early 5...a5, but undoubtedly the best of them is 6.a4. Later, at move 12, White can choose between two interesting possibilities: an immediate 12.d4!? with the aim of bringing a knight to e3 without delay, or the standard move 12.0-0. The pawn move is quite interesting but still requires practical testing.

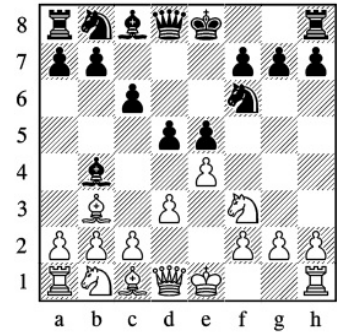
After 12.0-0 Black has to make a large number of good moves to avoid getting the worse position.

I have given many new ideas in this chapter, and analysed them in great depth. Often Black will have a route to escape disaster, but it tends to be a narrow path that would be almost impossible to find over-the-board.

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# Chapter 7

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## Introduction to 5...♗b4†

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6 4.♘f3 d5 5.♗b3 ♗b4†

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B) 6.♗d2 ♗xd2† 7.♙xd2!?! 143

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B22) 8.a4 0-0 9.exd5 151

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1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 ♘f6 3.d3 c6 4.♘f3 d5 5.♗b3 ♗b4†

Playing this check directly, without inserting 5...a5 6.a4 first, leads to a very different game from the lines we saw in the previous chapter. As we shall see, blocking with the bishop on d2 becomes a serious option.

I shall now give some variations following A) 6.c3, although I prefer B) 6.♗d2.

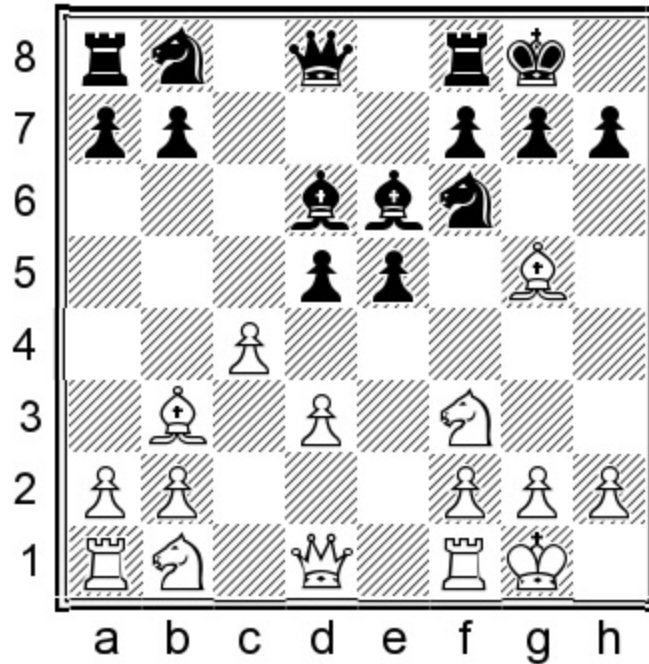
A) 6.c3 ♗d6 7.exd5!?

If White wants to fight for something, it pays to complicate the position a little.

I am not very fond of 7.♔g5, as it gives Black the chance to obtain a stable pawn structure after 7...dxe4. The game Carlsen – Caruana, Saint Louis 2014, then continued: 8.dxe4 h6 9.♔h4 ♔e7 10.♞bd2 ♞bd7 with a roughly equal position.

**7...cxd5 8.0-0 0-0 9.♔g5 ♔e6 10.c4!?**

The game is quieter after 10.♞e1 ♞bd7 11.♞bd2, giving approximate equality.



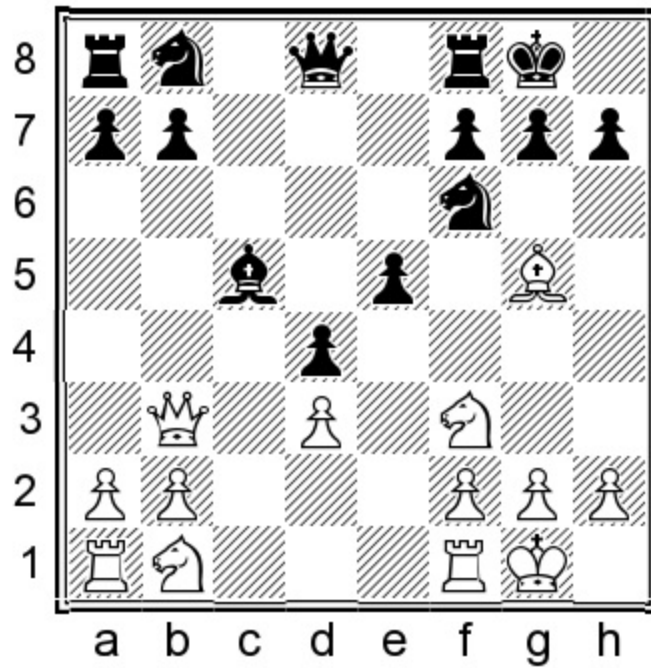
**10...d4**

In the event of 10...dxc4 11.dxc4 ♞c6 12.♞c3 White has a slight edge.

**11.c5 ♔xb3**

After 11...♔xc5 12.♔xe6 fxe6 13.♞xe5± White has the advantage owing to his better pawn structure.

**12.♞xb3 ♔xc5**



**13. ♖xf6**

Or 13. ♘xe5 ♙d5 14. ♖xf6 ♜xb3 15. axb3= with a level ending.

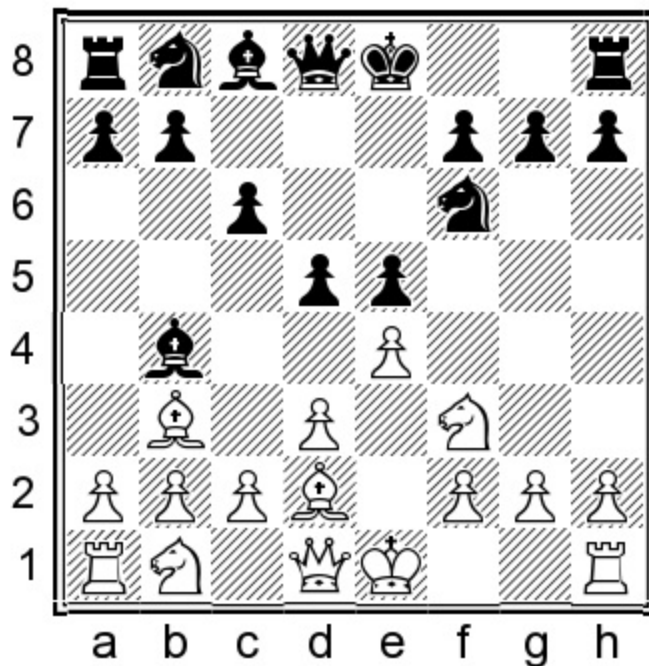
**13... ♜xf6**

Also possible is 13... gxf6!? 14. ♜xb7 ♘d7∞.

**14. ♜xb7**

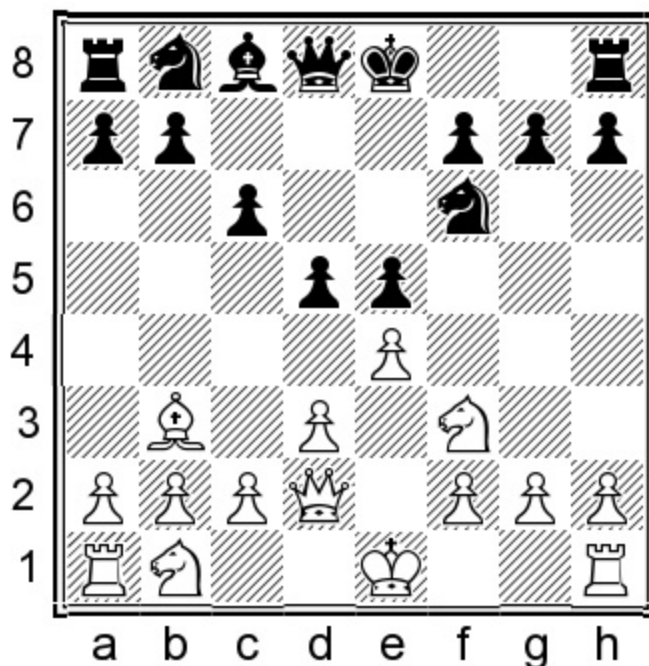
White's position looks a little more pleasant, but there is everything to play for.

**B) 6. ♖d2**



6...♙xd2+ 7.♚xd2!?

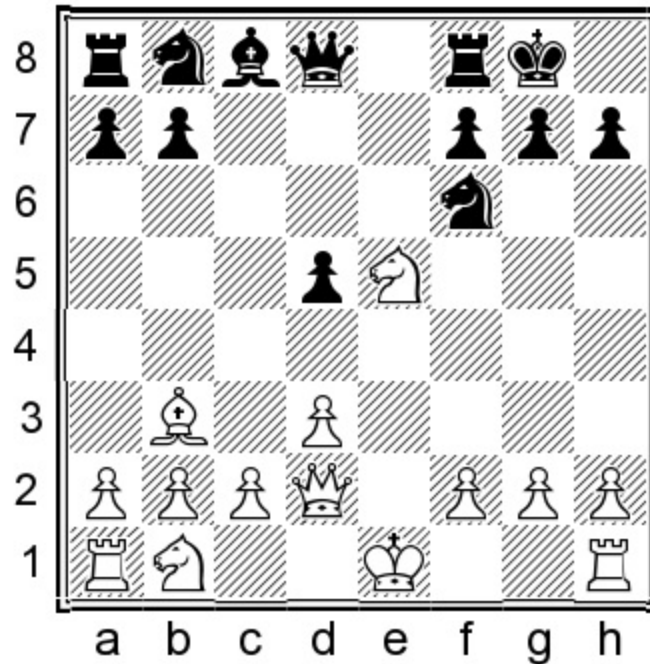
Unlike 7.♘bd2, which will be covered in the next chapter, this line requires more specific knowledge on Black's part. Ding Liren in a game with Wei Yi (for example) played 7...dxe4 and immediately had the worse of it. Also, Duda came out of the opening very badly in a game with Radjabov. But if Black makes four or five good moves, a stable position with roughly equal chances can be obtained.



In this position **B1)** 7...♚d6 is one of Black's most popular moves, but in my view it is inferior to **B2)** 7...a5.

Alternatives are:

a) 7...0-0 8.exd5 cxd5 9.♘xe5



9...♘c6?!

The text move is one of three independent options, all of which Black should avoid.

9...♖e8?! 10.d4! (White has no need to weaken himself with 10.f4 in this case) 10...♘c6 11.0-0 ♘xe5 12.dxe5 ♖xe5 13.♘c3 With a large plus for White. In addition to the weak d5-pawn, Black is lagging behind in development, and the rook on e5 gives White the opportunity to play ♖d4 with tempo.

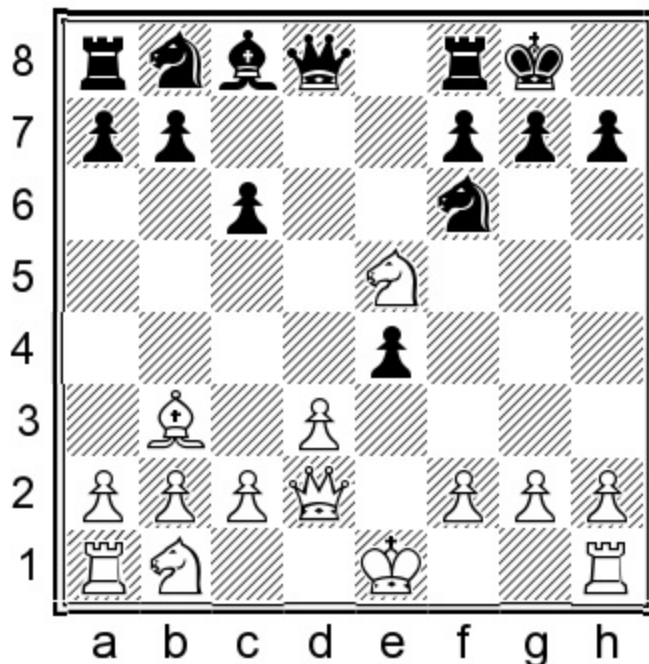
9...♙e7?! 10.d4 ♘c6 11.f4± In contrast to the position with the moves ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 inserted, here after 11...♘e4 12.♙e3 Black gains nothing from playing 12...♙b4† because, while the pawn stands on a2, White can play c2-c3 and the b3-bishop is still protected.

But it still isn't too late to play 9...a5! with the aim of reaching variation B222 if White replies a2-a4.

10.d4±

Now 10...♙b6 is met by 11.♘c3!, after which 11...♘xd4? fails against 12.♘a4+-.

b) 7...dxe4?! This move puts Black in a difficult situation straight away. 8.♘xe5 0-0

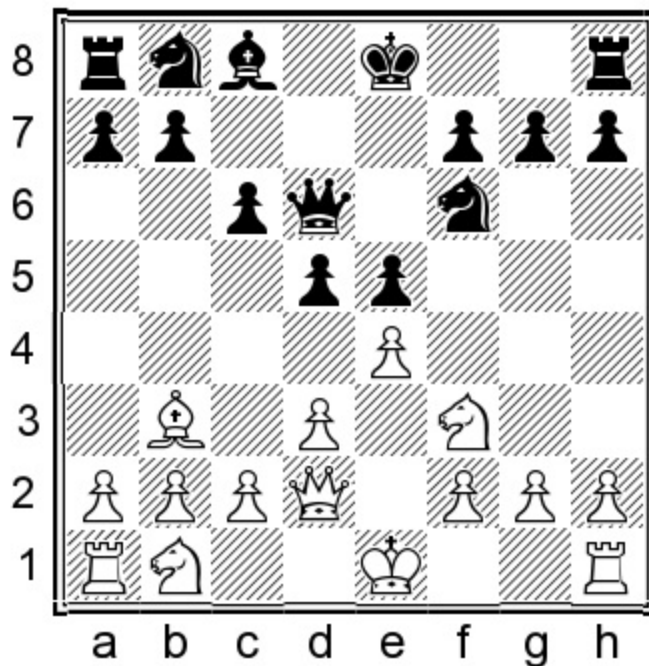


And now, from the diagram:

b1) 9.dxe4 Complicating the whole issue. 9...Qe7 10.Qf4 This occurred in Wei Yi – Ding Liren, Baku 2015. Black now played the cunning 10...Ra6!?, and there followed 11.d2 (not 11.dxf7? d5; in the case of 11.Qxf7 Rxf7 12.dxf7 b4!∞ Black brings his pieces into play with gains of tempo) 11...h5 (11...c5!?) 12.Qxf7 h8 13.Qg3 Rxf7 14.dxf7 Qxf7 15.Qf3 White retains a small plus, but this version of the sacrifice on f7 is in no way better than 9.dxf7.

b2) 9.dxf7! It's better to sacrifice the knight on f7 at once. 9...Rxf7 10.dxe4 Qe7 (in the position without queens after 10...Qxd2† 11.dxd2±, White's advantage is not in the least diminished) 11.Qxf7 h8 (11...Qxf7 12.Qd8†± is no improvement) 12.f3± The rook and two centre pawns are a good deal stronger than the two minor pieces. Once White posts his rooks in the centre, the pawns will advance.

### B1) 7...Qd6



### 8. ♖g5 ♘bd7

After 8...0-0 9. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 10. ♘xe5 dxe4 11. d4± White has the advantage thanks to his powerful knight on e5. Black can't remove it with 11... ♘bd7 12. ♘c3 ♘xe5?!, as after exchanges White's other knight would penetrate to d6.

### 9. exd5 cxd5 10. d4!

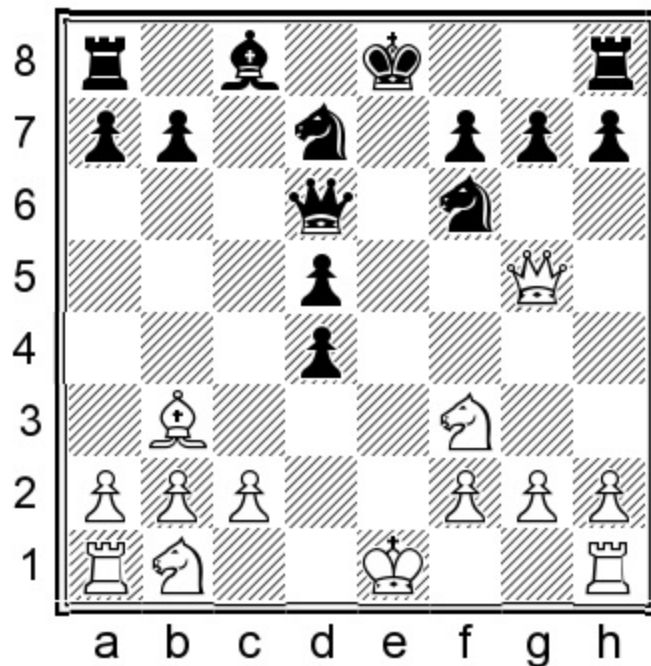
Switching to play in the centre. Capturing the pawn on g7 would give Black quite good counterplay:

a) 10. ♖xg7 ♖g8 11. ♖h6∞ and now apart from 11... ♖xg2, Black has the interesting 11... a5!? with the idea of 12. ♘c3 a4.

b) 10. ♘h4 ♘c5!?! (10...g6 11. 0-0±) 11. ♖xg7 ♖g8 12. ♖h6 a5∞ Black's counterplay is adequate; a good reply to 13. 0-0 is 13... ♖a6!.

### 10...exd4

Or: 10...e4 11. ♘e5 (11. ♘h4 g6 isn't so clear) 11...0-0 12. ♘c3 ♘b6 13. f3 ♙e6 (White also aims to castle queenside after 13...exf3 14. gxf3±, so opening the g-file makes no sense for Black) 14. 0-0-0 a5 15. a4± White has plenty of moves available to improve his position, such as ♖he1 or ♘b1, while for Black it isn't so simple to deploy his pieces effectively. If 15... ♖fc8 then 16. ♖he1 isn't bad, and nor is 16. ♖e3, forestalling the idea of an exchange sacrifice on c3.



### 11.0-0

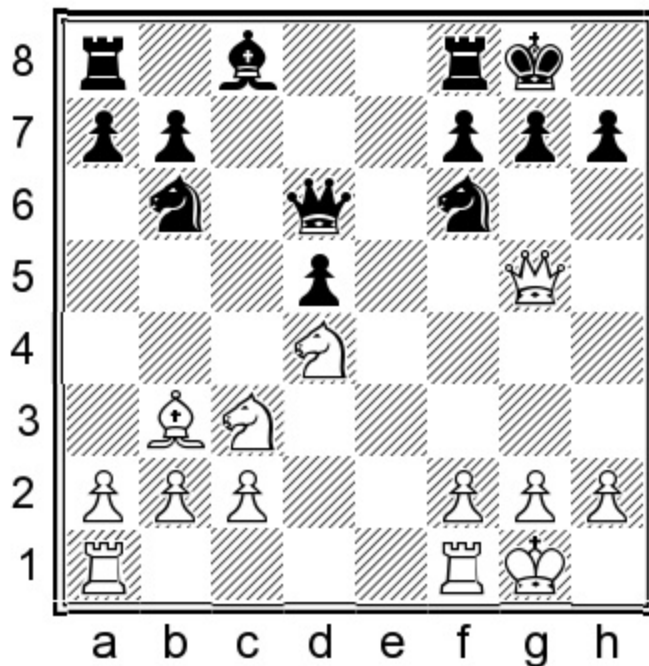
Or: 11. ♖xd4! N 11... ♕e7† 12. ♘e2 (after 12. ♗e3 ♗xe3† 13. fxe3 the position is closer to equality, since White now has a weak pawn of his own on e3) 12...0-0 13. ♗d2 At first sight White has lost some time, but his knight on e2 is not badly placed and he retains a small plus.

### 11...0-0 12. ♘xd4 ♘b6

Or 12... ♘c5 13. ♘c3±. Capturing on b3 fails to solve the problem of the d5-pawn.

### 13. ♘c3

Thanks to the d5-pawn, White has a small but persistent advantage. In the Mega Database there are no games in which this position was encountered, so instead let's see how events can develop further based on the example of a correspondence game.



**13...h6 14.♔g3**

Or 14.♔h4!? ♕d7 15.♘de2 also gives a slight advantage; White wants to play ♖fd1, and maybe ♔d4.

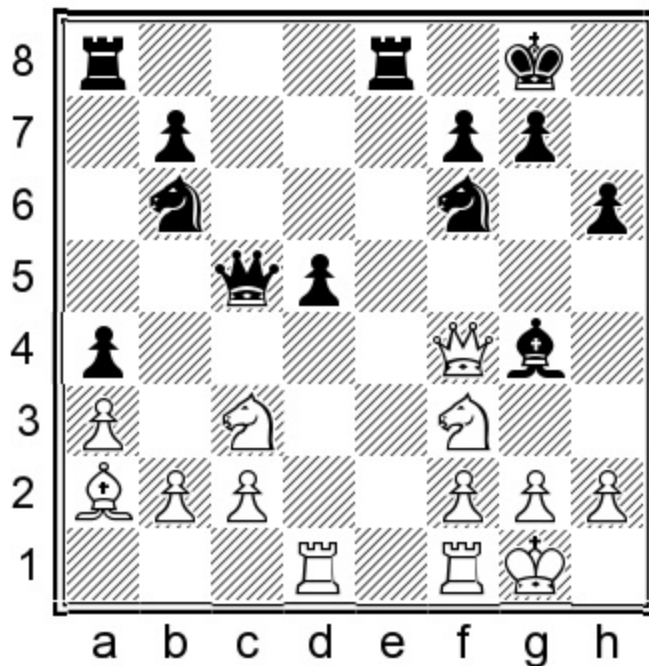
**14...♔c5**

Or 14...♔xg3 15.hxg3 ♕d7 16.♖fe1 and White has a small but stable advantage, and can play without any risk.

**15.♖ad1 ♕d7 16.♘f3 a5**

After 16...♖fe8 17.♘e5 ♕e6 18.♘d3 ♔a5 19.♘f4 White has successfully transferred the knight and retains the initiative.

**17.a3 ♖fe8 18.♔f4 a4 19.♕a2 ♕g4**



## 20.♖d2

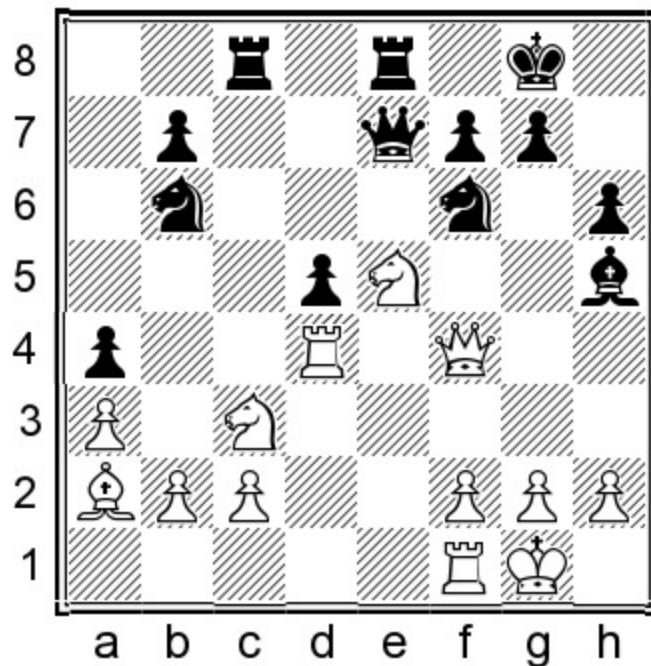
Instead after 20.♙xd5 Black can easily equalize, while 20.♖de1 may look good at first, but then Black has a good defensive idea. I will give a little more detail on these lines:

20.♙xd5 ♜fxd5 21.♞xd5 ♞xd5 22.♚xg4 ♜f6! with a roughly equal position. On 23.♚b4 Black will take on c2.

20.♖de1 ♙xf3 21.♚xf3 ♜c4! With these unobvious moves, Black can get a good position. 22.♖xe8† ♖xe8 23.♞xa4 ♚b5 24.♙xc4 dxc4 25.b3 cxb3 26.♚xb3♚ It may seem strange, but despite being a pawn down, Black is not significantly worse. After 26...♚e5 or even 26...♚c6 the position is very close to equality.

## 20...♖ac8 21.♞e5 ♙h5 22.♖d4 ♚e7

Another playable option for Black is 22...g5!? 23.♚xf6! ♚xd4 24.♞d7 ♚xf6 25.♞xf6† ♜f8 26.♞xe8 ♜xe8 27.f4 when thanks to the weak d5-pawn, White retains a little pressure.



### 23. ♘d3!?!N

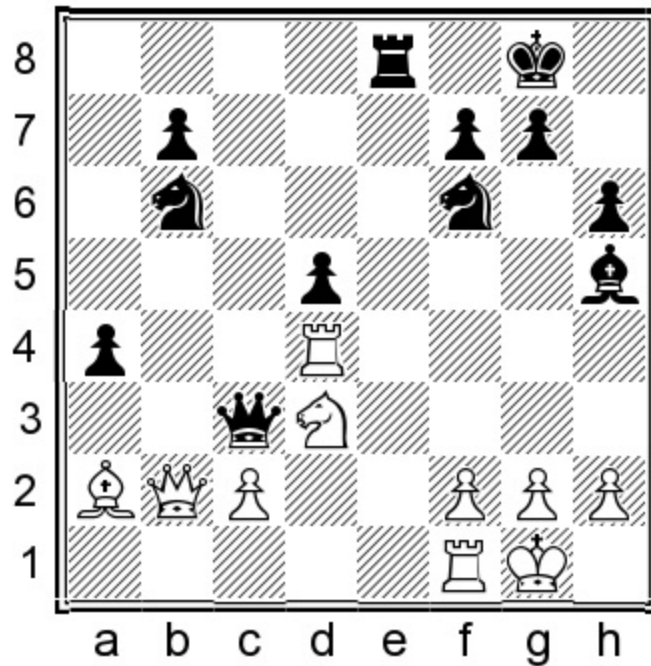
Instead 23. ♖b4 ♕xe5 24. ♗xe5 ♜xe5 25. ♖xb6 d4! 26. ♘xa4 ♙e2!?! 27. ♖a1 ♖a5 28. ♖b4 b5 29. ♘b6 ♖xc2= was Roy Laguens – Costa Trillo, corr. 2018, where Black had no problems.

### 23... ♖xc3!?!

Black should not allow White to calmly move the knight, for example after 23... ♙g6?! 24. ♘b4 Black has a difficult position.

After 23... ♙e2?! 24. ♖e1 ♖xc3 25. bxc3 ♕xa3 26. ♗c1± it turns out that adding the moves ... ♙e2 and ♖e1 is clearly in White's favour.

### 24. bxc3 ♕xa3 25. ♗c1 ♕xc3 26. ♗b2±

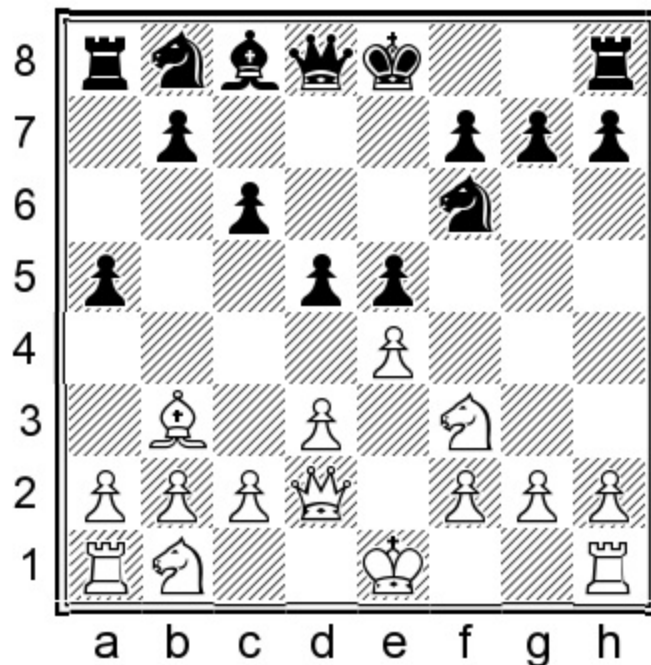


The bishop on a2 is a bit passive, but at the same time it does not allow Black to move the pawns forward. On 26...♙xb2 27.♘xb2 ♖e4 White can play 28.♗xe4 ♘xe4 29.f3 ♘c3 30.♗a1 with the idea ♘d1.

Or after 26...♙c6 a sensible line is 27.♗b1 ♕g6 28.♘f4! ♙xc2 29.♙xc2 ♕xc2 30.♗c1 followed by ♗b4.

In both cases, White retains an advantage.

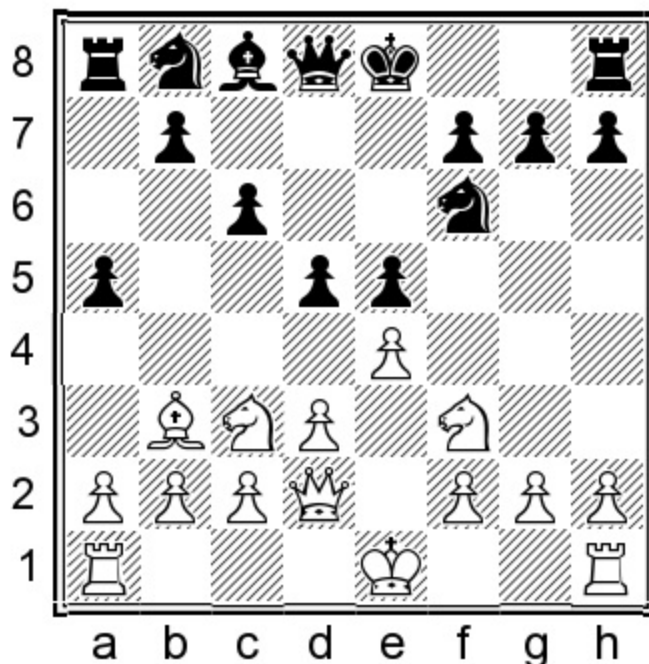
### B2) 7...a5



One of Black's basic ideas in this variation. In almost every case the insertion of the moves ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 slightly improves his position.

We now consider **B21)** 8.♖c3!? and **B22)** 8.a4.

### B21) 8.♖c3!?



A highly original idea that was demonstrated by Caruana. White is prepared to sacrifice his bishop for the pawns on f7 and e5. The idea can be employed to confuse your opponent, but on the whole it is scarcely reusable. All the same I will try to supply some analysis of this position.

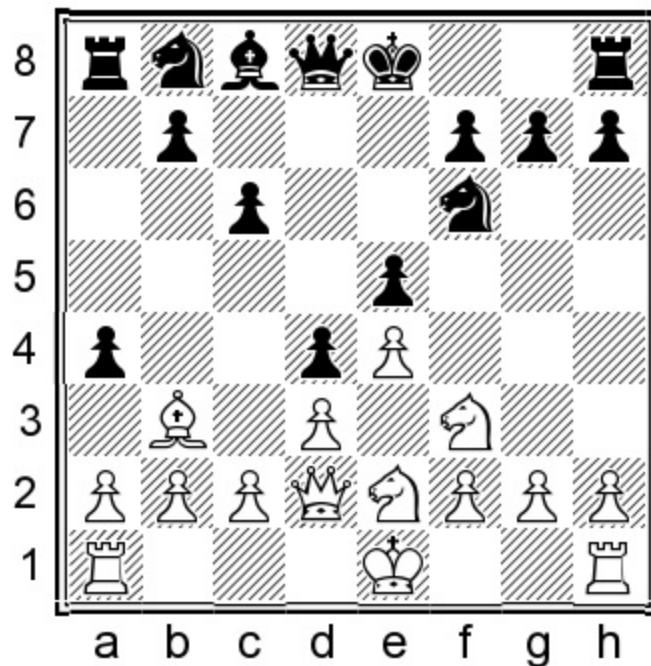
#### 8...d4

If 8...0-0 then 9.♖xe5±. This action, though standard in other variations, leads in the present case to an advantage for White. Let me briefly state what can follow: 9...♕e7 (or 9...♖e8 10.f4 ♖bd7 11.♖xd7 ♕xd7 12.e5 d4 13.♖e4±; after an exchange on e4, the bishop will have a square to move away to) 10.f4± ♖bd7 11.♖xd7 ♕xd7 12.e5± and White keeps his extra pawn. He can meet 12...d4 with either 13.♖e4 or 13.♖e2!? ♖g4 14.c3.

#### 9.♖e2 a4N

In Caruana – Tregubov, Germany 2017, Black didn't risk hunting the bishop and instead defended his e-pawn with 9...♕e7!?. There followed 10.a4 0-0 11.0-0 c5 12.♖g3 ♖c6 13.♕c4∞ with plenty of play and roughly equal chances.

After 9...♖bd7 10.c3 a4 11.♕c2 c5 12.0-0 0-0 13.b4 White is slightly more comfortable, but the whole struggle still lies ahead.



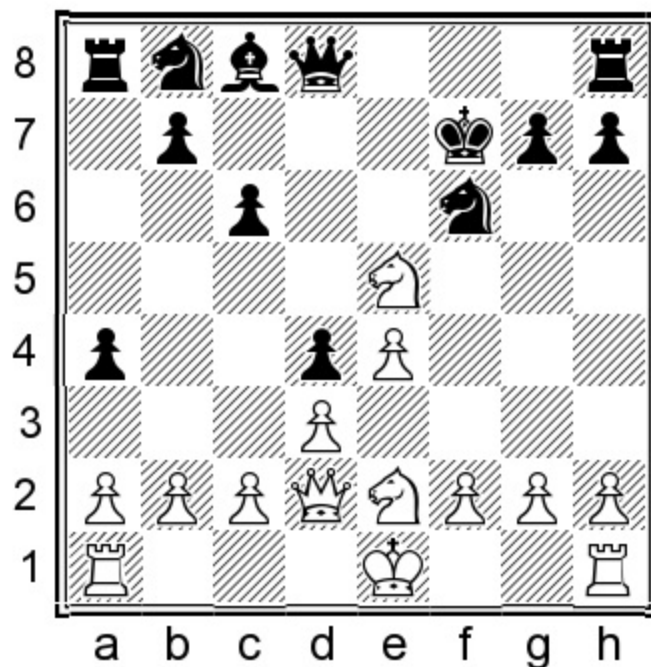
### 10. ♘xf7†

Practically forced. After 10. ♘c4 Black can hunt down the bishop anyway with 10...b5, or alternatively play 10... ♖e7 which is much more attractive now that ...a5-a4 has been inserted. I will give slightly more detail on these lines:

In the case of 10...b5 11. ♘xf7† ♔xf7 12. ♖xe5†, I doubt if White has improved his sacrifice on f7 by provoking ...b7-b5.

In the variation 10... ♖e7!? 11. a3 0-0, Black has a comfortable game after conquering space on the queenside.

### 10... ♔xf7 11. ♖xe5†



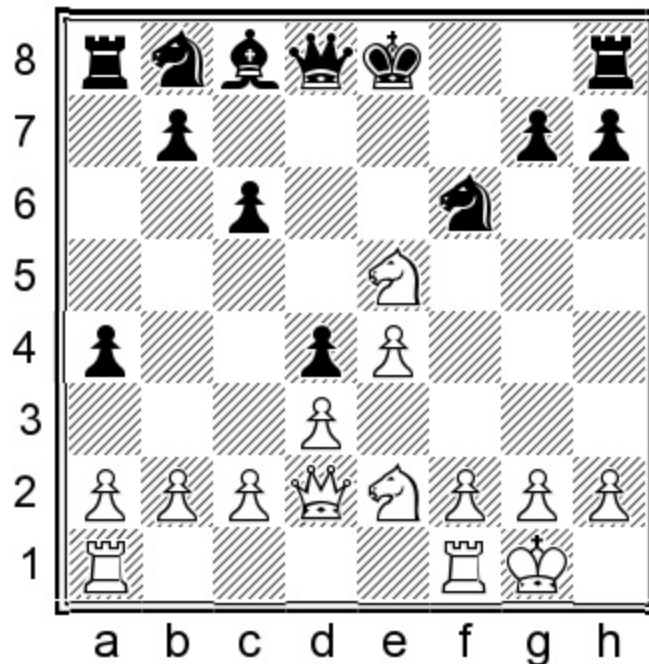
This position has not yet been seen, either in “classical” games or even in correspondence play. Analysing it at home is one thing; obtaining it over-the-board, with difficulty finding your bearings, is something quite different.

### 11...♔e8

With 11...♔g8 Black allows White to pick up the d4-pawn straight away: 12.♖b4 ♖a5 13.♗xa5 ♗xa5 14.♘c4∞ It’s difficult to say who is better in this ending. To me it seems that playing White would be more pleasant, as there are still plenty of pawns on the board.

### 12.0-0

With the black king on e8, 12.♖b4? fails to 12...c5!♠. Then 13.♗xc5 is unplayable, as after 13...♞a5 White doesn’t have the resource 14.♗c4♠.



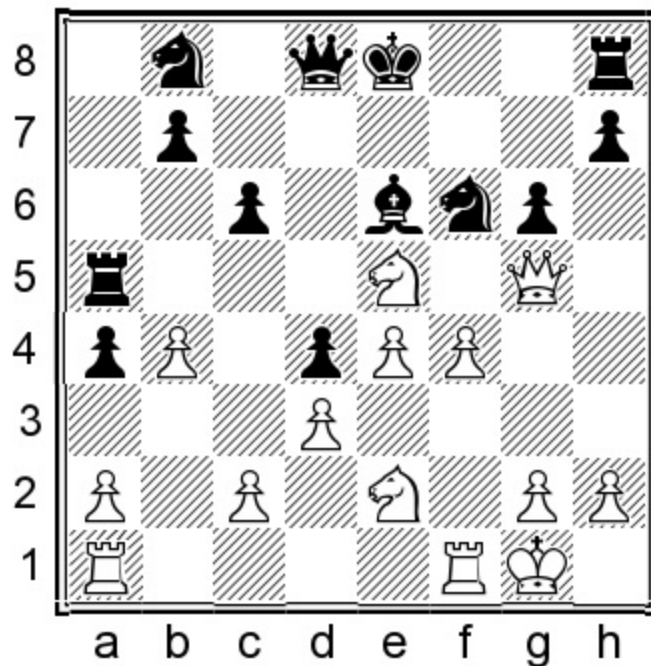
### 12...♞f8!

Before I started analysing this move, White’s piece sacrifice looked much more attractive. The intermediate rook move prepares the option of transferring the king via f7 to g8. Of course if a human player isn’t familiar with the position in advance, there is little likelihood that 12...♞f8 will be played.

Alternatives:

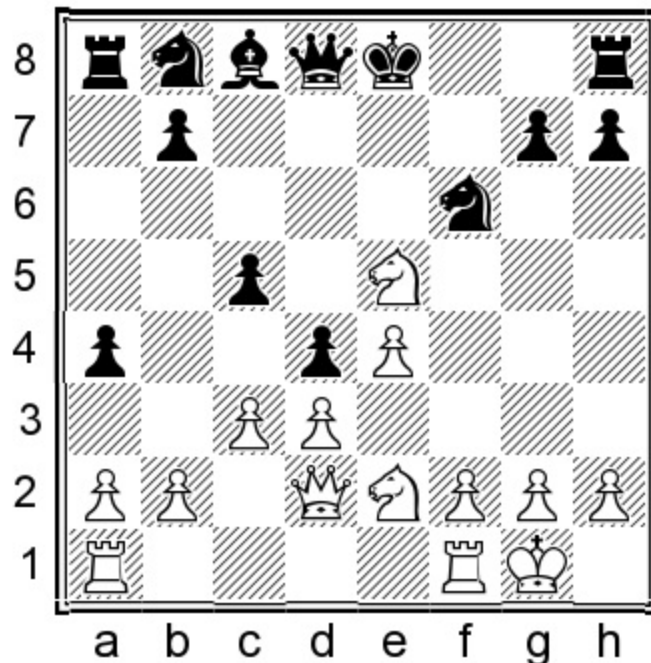
a) 12...♘g4 13.♘f3 c5 14.h3∞ Now 14...♘f6 leads to an advantage for White after 15.c3, but in the case of 14...♘h6! 15.b4 the position remains unclear.

b) 12...♔e6 13.♗g5 (13.f4 c5 14.f5 ♔f7∞ is also interesting; White obviously has good compensation for the piece, but how it will all end is uncertain) 13...♞a5 (not 13...g6? 14.♘xd4±; with three pawns for the piece, White has a large plus) 14.f4 g6 15.b4



15...axb3 (after 15...♖b5?! 16.a3± Black doesn't have enough space for all his pieces) 16.axb3 ♖xa1 17.♖xa1 Black's pieces are poorly placed. His best move here is 17...♞fd7, giving up the d4-pawn. Then White will have a slight advantage in the ending.

c) 12...c5 13.c3



And now:

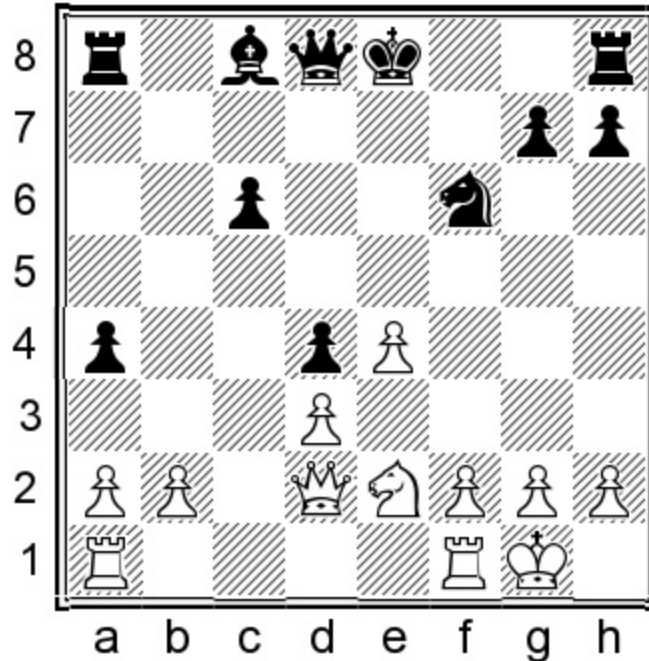
c1) 13...♞g4 14.♞c4, and the idea of playing ♙f4 and penetrating with the knight to d6 comes into consideration for White. There can follow:

c11) 14...♙e6 15.♙f4∞ Now 15...♙xc4?! 16.dxc4 is not good for Black, on account of the opening of the d-file. On the other hand after 15...g5!? 16.♞d6† ♔d7 17.♙g3, White has full compensation for the piece.

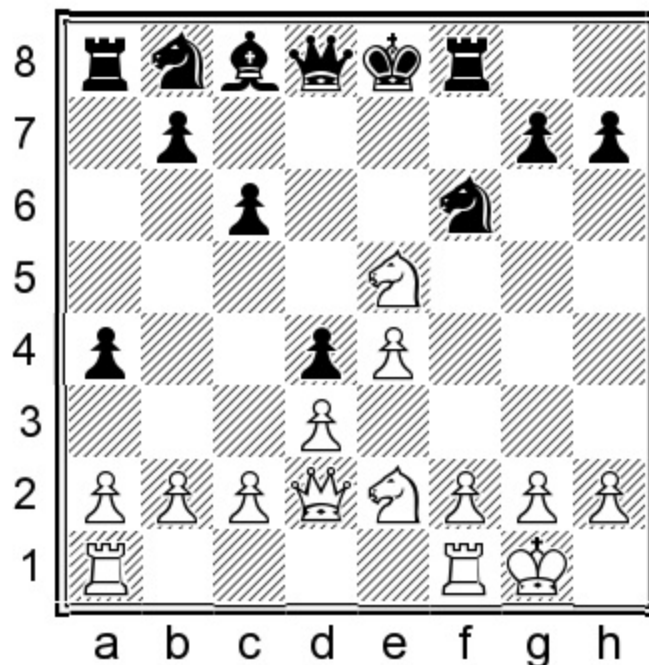
c12) 14...b5 15.♞a3 Black has taken radical measures to drive the knight away from d6, but now, after an exchange of pawns, White will have play on the c-file.

c13) 14...♞c6 15.♞f4 ♞f6 16.♞g3 with a complicated position. Black should play 16...h5!. Then after 17.♞b6 and the transfer of the knight to d5, the position remains unclear.

c2) 13...♞c6 14.♞xc6 bxc6 15.cxd4 cxd4



16.b4!? White needs a pawn on b4 in order to station a rook on c5 (he could also consider 16.♞ac1). 16...axb3 (after 16...♞d6 17.♞ac1 ♞f7 18.f4 ♞g4 19.♞c5 White conveniently doubles rooks on the c-file, and if Black defends the c6-pawn with his bishop, he will have to reckon with b4-b5) 17.axb3 ♞xa1 18.♞xa1 Although the position has been simplified, the active rook on the a-file and Black's inability to castle give White full compensation for the piece.



### 13.h3!?

This is the main line. After other (more “human”) moves, White may end up worse. Here are some brief variations:

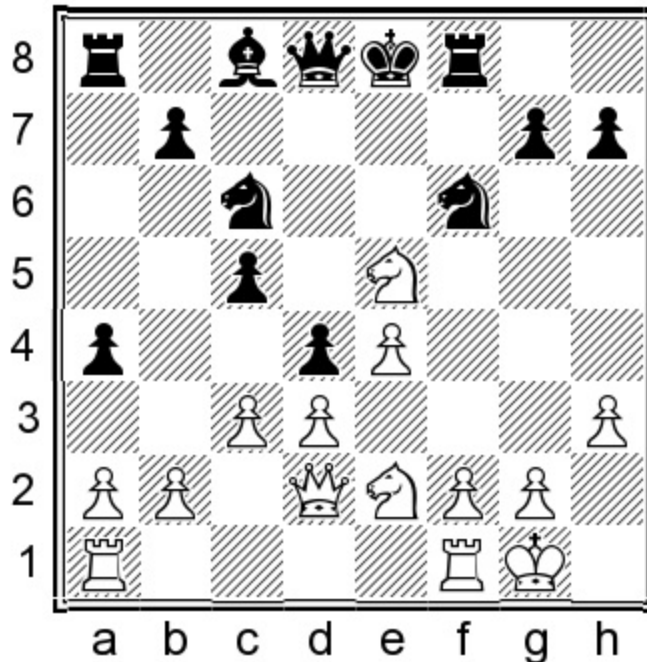
- a) 13.c3 dxc3 14.bxc3 ♖bd7⚡ Now that there is no d4-pawn to defend, Black calmly completes his development.
- b) 13.f4 c5 14.c3 (or 14.b4 axb3 15.axb3 ♜xa1 16.♜xa1 ♘a6⚡) 14...♘c6 15.♘xc6 bxc6⚡ and Black can't be prevented from removing his king to g8.
- c) 13.b4 ♘g4 14.♘xg4 (or 14.♘f3 c5 15.bxc5 ♘c6⚡) 14...♙xg4 15.f3 ♙c8!⚡ with ...♚f7-g8 to follow.

### 13...c5

Or 13...♘bd7 14.♘f3! (in the event of 14.♘c4 ♘b6 15.♘e5 ♘bd7 the game may end in repetition) 14...c5 15.♙g5 ♙e7 16.b4∞ with complex play in the position.

### 14.c3 ♘c6

Possibly 14...♘fd7, though it looks odd, is not worse than ...♘c6. White continues with 15.cxd4.



### 15.♘xc6

Not 15.f4?! ♘xe5 16.fxe5 ♘d7 17.cxd4 cxd4⚡. There is no attack, and the pawn on e5 falls.

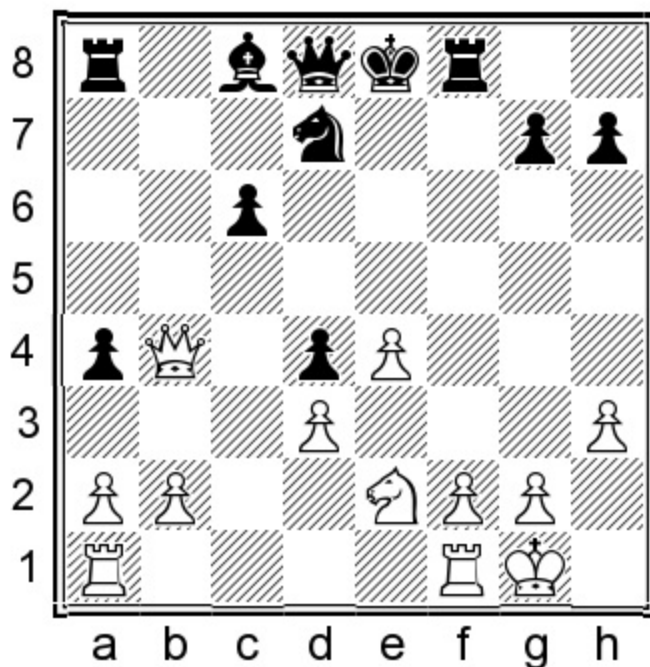
### 15...bxc6 16.cxd4

Playing to win the d4-pawn. Other moves are probably no better.

### 16...cxd4 17.♙b4

If 17.b4 then 17...♔f7. White's b2-b4 is rather worse in this case than in the variation 12...c5 13.c3 ♖c6 14.♗xc6 bxc6 15.cxd4 cxd4, because his h2-h3 is much less useful than Black's ...♗f8.

17...♗d7!



18.♗xd4 ♗f6

Now 19.♗e3 will be met by 19...♔f7.

If instead White plays 19.♗ac1 and the queens are exchanged, Black will be no worse and possibly even a little better. Of course it's highly unlikely that anyone will make all these moves over-the-board. Black's 12...♗f8! was already a clear departure from "human" play. Nevertheless this variation supports the overall view that 8.♗c3 is for one-off use.

### B22) 8.a4 0-0

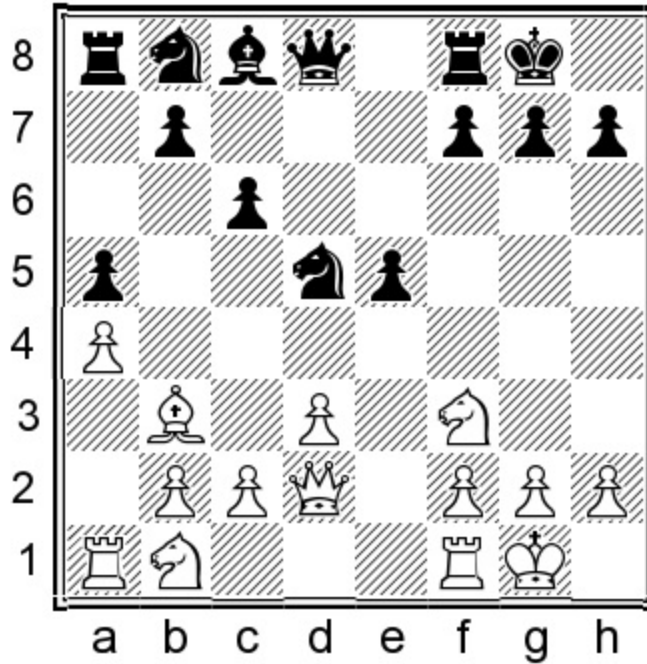
A possibility is 8...♗d6, but this is a rare case where the insertion of ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 turns out to benefit White. The point is that his knight reaches b5 with tempo: 9.exd5 (or even 9.♗a3!?) 9...cxd5 10.♗c3<sup>2</sup>

9.exd5

There have so far been no practical trials with 9.♗xe5. The resulting positions give ample play, but we are not speaking of any advantage: 9...♗e7 10.f4 (or 10.♗c3 dxe4 11.0-0 ♗d5∞) 10...dxe4 11.d4∞ The knight on e5 is beautifully placed, but with correct play Black has no particular problems.

At this point **B221)** 9...♗xd5 is weaker than **B222)** 9...cxd5!.

B221) 9...♞xd5 10.0-0

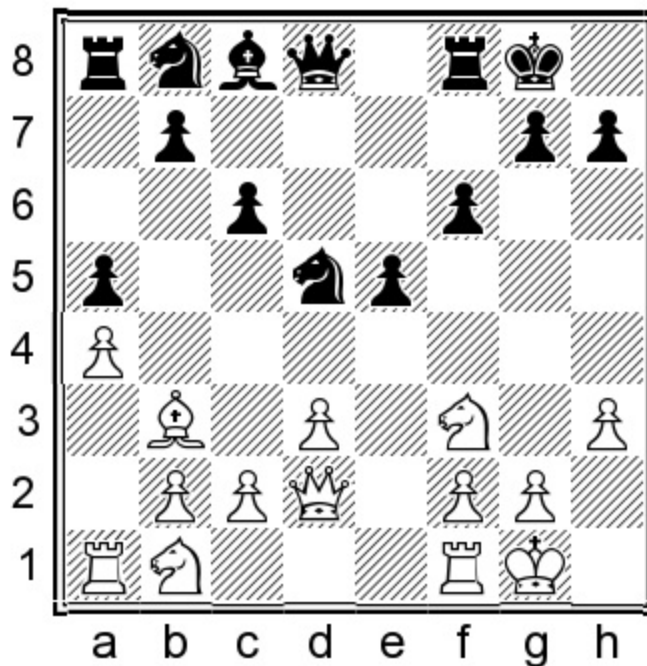


10...f6

Black cannot do without this move; for example, 10...♞e8 11.♞e1 ♞d7 12.♞c3± leaves him unable to complete his development.

11.h3!±

If 11.♞c3 then 11...♞g4∞. Before White starts active operations it's important to prevent this move of the black bishop. In the game Radjabov – Duda, Wijk aan Zee 2019, Radjabov convincingly showed how to acquire a plus.



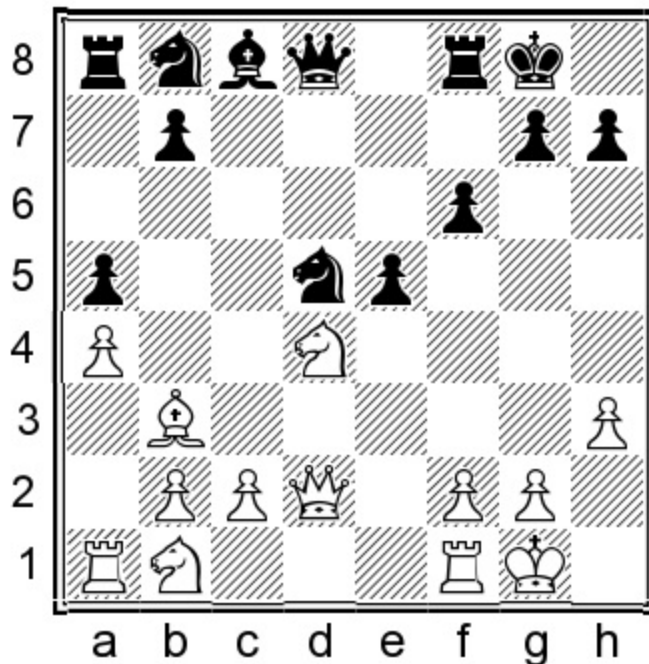
11...♞e6

Or:

a) 11...c5 12.d4!

By making use of the pin, White undermines the centre at once; but calculating the variations to the end is not so simple.

12...cxd4 13.♘xd4



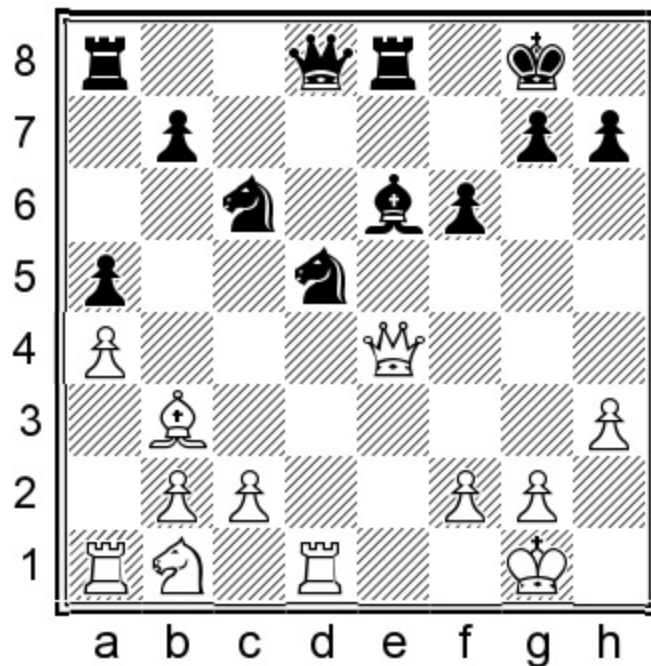
13...exd4

After 13...♗c6 14.♘xc6 bxc6 15.♗c3 ♔e6 16.♞fd1± White has a noticeable plus on account of Black's damaged queenside pawn position.

14.♞xd4 ♔e6 15.♞d1 ♗c6 16.♞e4

Not 16.♞c5? ♞e7±; White then has nothing better than 17.♞xd5.

16...♞e8



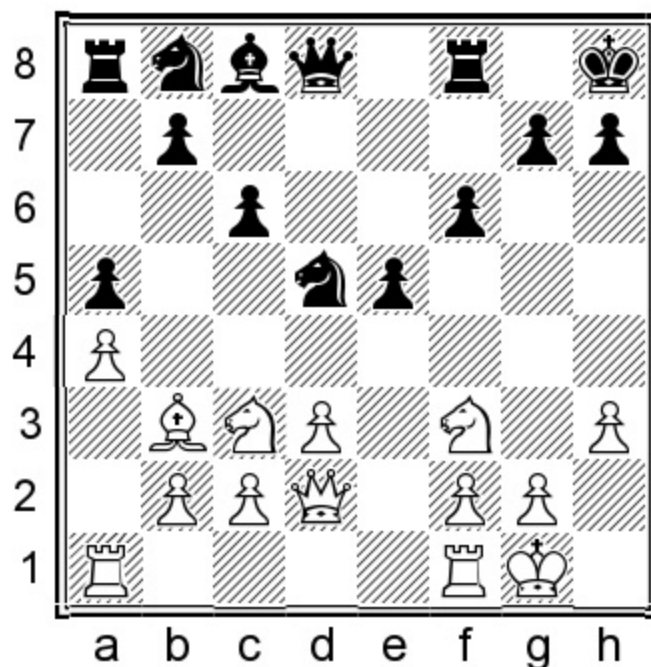
17. Nc3

Not 17. Qxd5?? Qxd5 18. Wxd5† Wxd5 19. Bxd5 Bx1†-+ as the knight cannot emerge from b1. At this stage the situation on the board is more or less clarified. White recovers the piece and remains with an extra pawn. For example:

17... Qf7 18. Qxd5 Bxe4 19. Qxf7† Qxf7 20. Bxd8 Bxd8 21. Nxe4±

With a decent plus and good winning chances.

b) 11... Qh8 12. Nc3

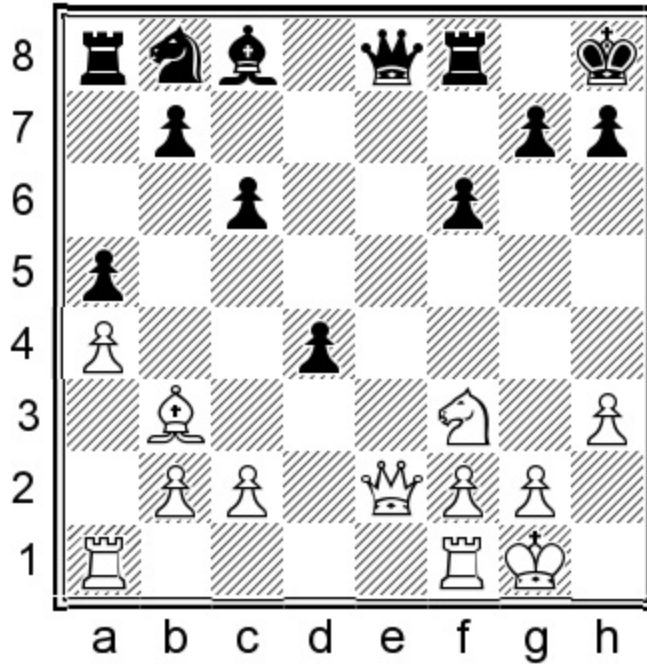


Black has fallen behind in development, but White still needs to play accurately to secure a plus.

12... Nf4 13. d4! Qe8 14. Ne2

Exchanging off Black's only active piece.

14...♖xe2† 15.♚xe2 exd4



16.♚c4!

It's better to keep the queens on.

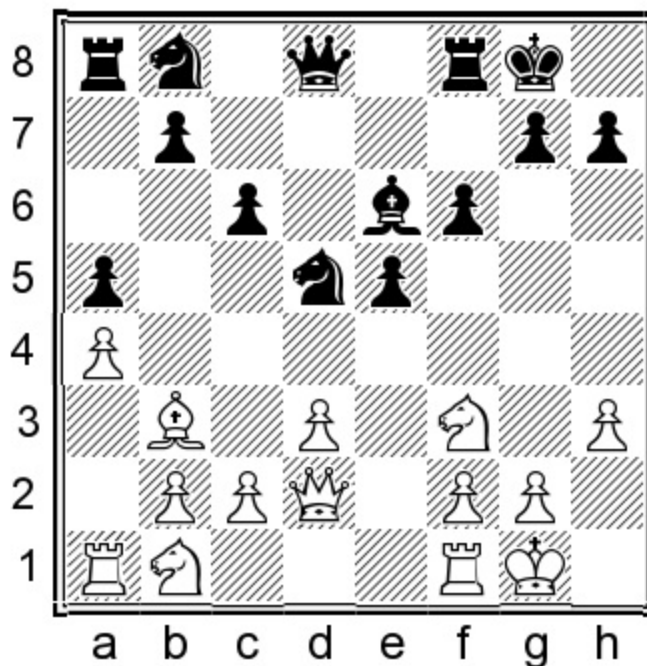
After 16.♚xe8 ♜xe8 17.♘xd4 ♘a6 White has less advantage than he would like.

16...♚g6

We now defend against the threatened ...♙xh3 in an original manner.

17.♚c5! ♘d7 18.♚d6±

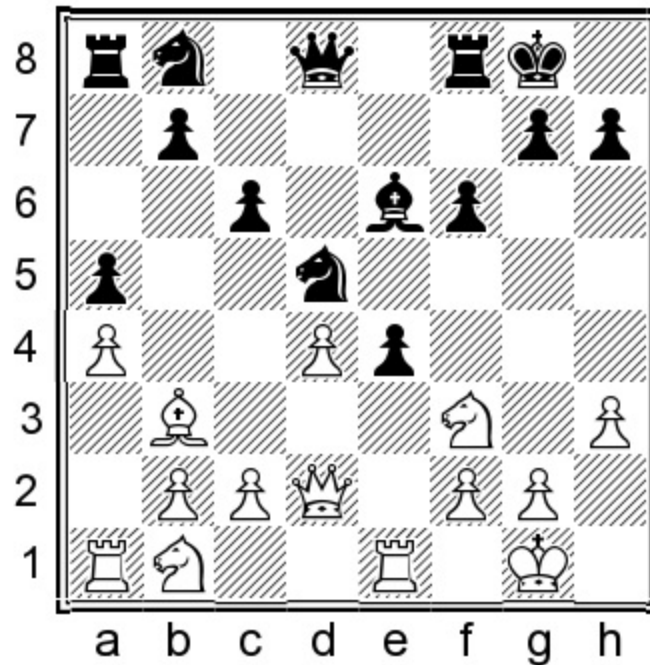
Black has difficulty finishing his development. He can try bringing his queen across to c5, but after 18...♚h5 19.♜fe1 ♚c5 20.♚f4! his position shows no particular improvement.



12.d4 e4

In the event of 12...♘d7 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 fxe5 15.♘c3± the weakness of the pawn on e5 will make itself felt.

13.♞e1



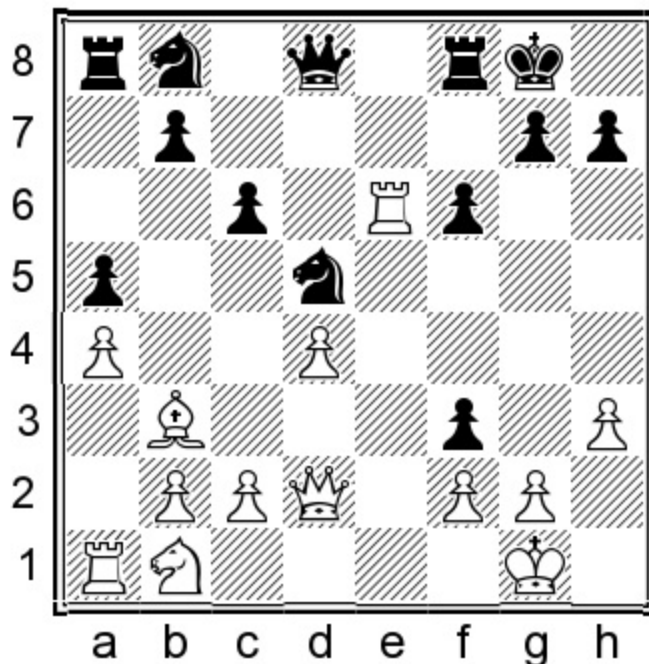
13...♙f5!?

The best chance. After this, White will still have to play several good moves to gain an advantage.

Alternatively:

a) 13...♙xh3?! Exchanging the e4-pawn for the h3-pawn is not the best of ideas. The Radjabov – Duda game continued: 14.♞xe4 ♙f5 15.♞e2± White has a simple plan for play in the centre with ♘c3 and ♞ae1.

b) 13...exf3 14.♞xe6, with ♘c3 and ♞ae1 to follow. White's pieces are just too active.



For example:

b1) 14...fxg2 15.♘c3±

b2) 14...♚d7 15.♞e3! fxg2 16.♘c3± The verdict of “±” might seem questionable, so I will give a few moves more: 16...♙h8 17.♘xd5 cxd5 18.♞ae1 ♘c6 19.c3± With the material (in effect) equal, White has a good bishop and is in possession of the e-file.

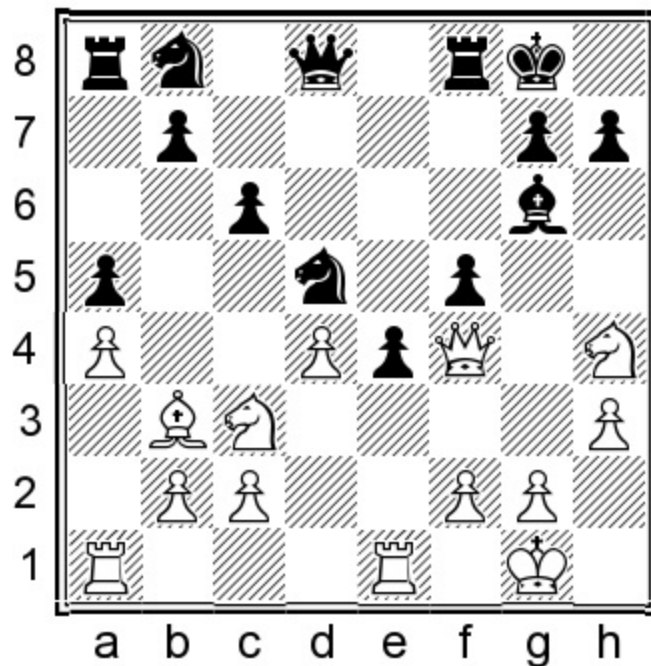
b3) 14...♙h8!? is best. Black moves out of the pin and can now withdraw his knight. There can follow: 15.♘c3 ♘c7 16.♞e3 fxg2 17.♞ae1± While Black’s pieces linger on the queenside, White has already established himself in the centre.

#### 14.♚f4!

Clearer than 14.♘h4 ♙c8!. Then 15.♞xe4 is unplayable owing to 15...f5, while after 15.g3 f5 the position becomes complicated.

#### 14...♙g6 15.♘h4 f5 16.♘c3±

White has an appreciable advantage. Originally I wanted to stop here, but then I discovered that after 16...♙f7 White is required to make some accurate moves; so I continued the variation.

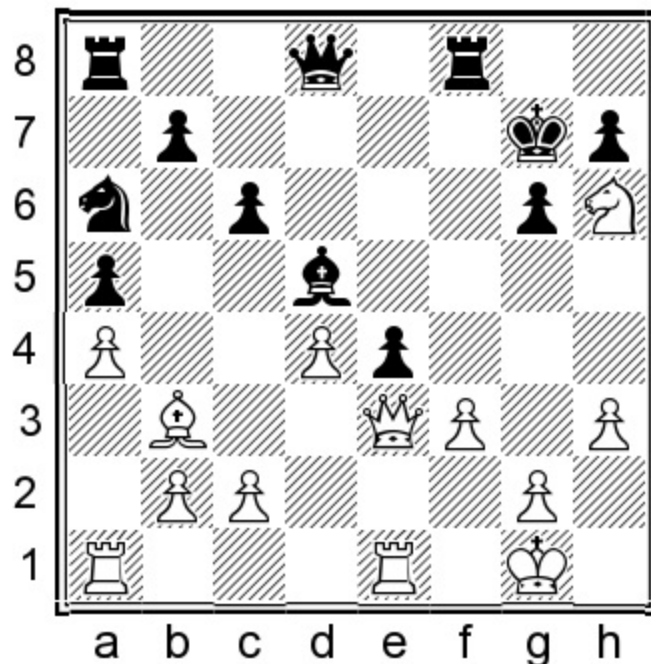


### 16...♔f7

Against 16...♘a6 White can achieve a plus by various means. For example: 17.f3 (or 17.♘d5 cxd5 18.f3 ♔h8±, with advantage to White after 19.c3 or 19.♖f1) 17...♔f7 (not 17...♔h8? 18.♘g6† hxg6 19.♚g3+–; with pawns under attack and his king position weak, the situation is hopeless for Black) 18.♘d5 ♔xd5 19.♘f5 And now:

a) 19...♔xb3 20.cxb3 ♚xd4† (20...g6, which will transpose to variation b, is probably better) 21.♘d4 ♖xf4 22.♘e6! ♖h4 23.♞ad1!± Now 23...exf3 is met by 24.♞d8†; Black then loses the pawn on b7, and afterwards another on a5 or c6.

b) 19...g6 20.♘h6† ♔g7 21.♚e3

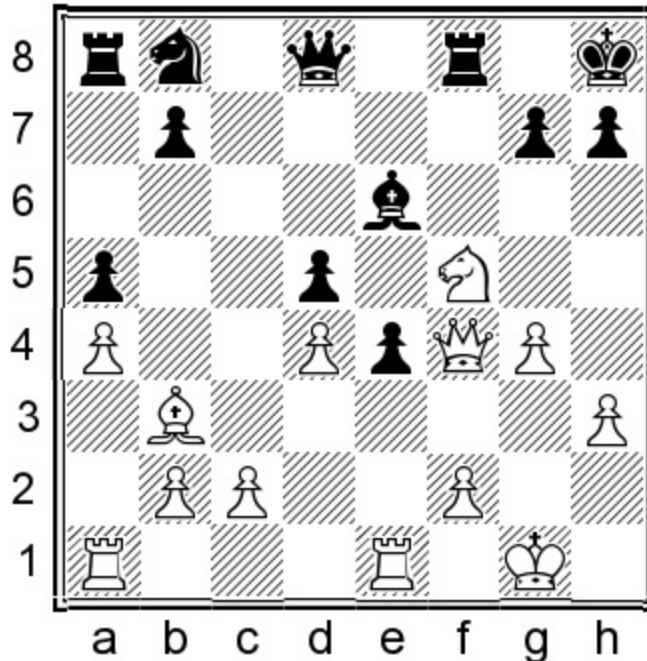


21...♙xb3 (after 21...exf3?! 22.♘g4± Black hasn't time to take on b3, and if 22...♚d6 then 23.♙xd5 is good for White) 22.cxb3 exf3 23.♘g4± With the terrible threat of ♚e5†. On 23...♚d6 White can play 24.♚e7†, and after exchanges he will have an extra pawn in the ending.

**17.♘xd5 cxd5**

Or 17...♙xd5?! 18.♘xf5±.

**18.♘xf5 ♙e6 19.g4 ♖h8!?**



By removing his king to h8, Black prepares ...g7-g6. White will not now have ♘h6† as a reply, while ♚e5† will surprisingly be inadequate.

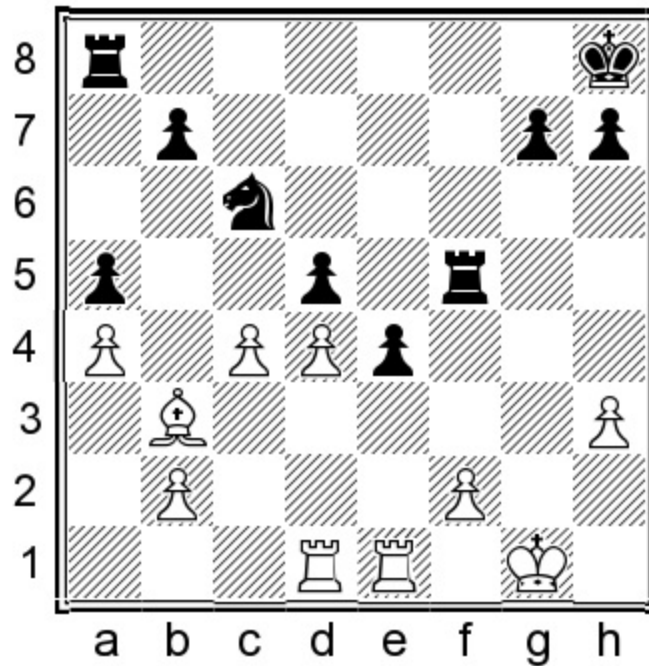
**20.♚d6!**

By exchanging queens, White achieves a clear plus, whereas the tempting 20.f3 leads to an obscure position: 20...g6! 21.fxe4 (on 21.♚e5† Black has 21...♙f6!∞; then 22.g5? fails to ...♘d7) 21...gxf5 22.♚e5† (or 22.exf5 ♙f7∞) 22...♙f6 23.exf5 ♘d7 And there is still everything to play for.

**20...♙f6 21.♚e7 ♙xf5**

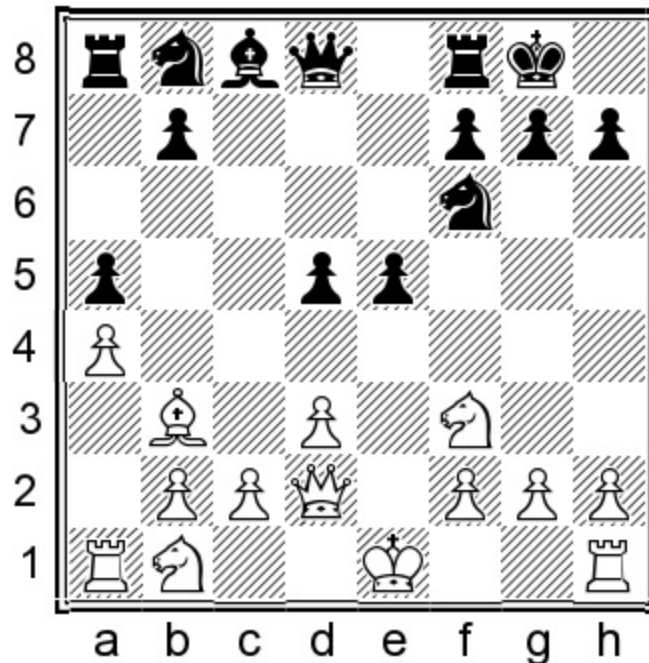
Or 21...♘c6 22.♚xf6 ♙xf6 23.♙ad1 ♙xf5 which will lead to the same position.

**22.♚xf6 ♙xf6 23.gxf5 ♙xf5 24.c4 ♘c6 25.♙ad1±**



In this kind of ending the bishop is much better than the knight. Moreover the pawn on f2 is stopping the black e-pawn from advancing while the white d-pawn can soon move ahead.

**B222) 9...cxd5!**



Black isn't afraid of losing the e5-pawn. What is happening here is difficult to fathom over-the-board. Duda for instance, in his game with Radjabov, chose 9...♞xd5 instead.

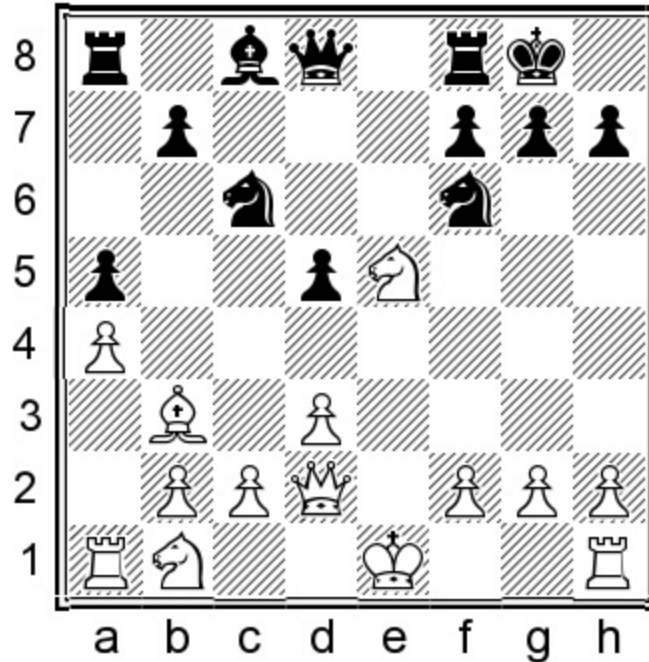
**10.♞xe5**

In the event of 10.d4 exd4 11.0-0 ♞c6 12.♞xd4 ♚b6 13.♞b5 ♟f5∞ the activity of Black's pieces compensates for the weakness of the d5-pawn.

## 10...♞c6!

Instead 10...♞e8 is an imprecise order of moves, as White can now give up his d-pawn instead of his f-pawn. 11.d4 (11.f4 ♞c6 transposes to the main line below) 11...♞c6 12.0-0± If Black continues with 12...♞b6!?, then apart from 13.♞xc6 White can play 13.♞d1, compelling Black to capture on e5.

Also inaccurate is: 10...♞e7 11.d4 ♞c6 12.0-0 ♞xe5 13.dxe5 ♞xe5 14.♞e1± Black cannot take the b2-pawn because of ♞a2. And so after the queen goes to on c7 or d6, White will play 15.♞c3, with a good plus.



## 11.f4

Or:

a) Here 11.d4 is no improvement on f2-f4. There can follow 11...♞b6! 12.♞xc6 bxc6 13.0-0 ♞e4 14.♞d1 (after 14.♞e3?! ♞d6± Black will attack the pawn on d4 with gain of tempo) 14...♞d6± White has difficulties with the defence of his d4-pawn, as 15.c3 weakens the position of his bishop on b3; for instance 15...♞a6 16.♞e1 ♞e4 17.f3 ♞f6 with sufficient compensation.

b) After 11.♞xc6 ♞e8† 12.♞e5 ♞xe5†± Black has adequate compensation for the pawn.

## 11...♞e8

Not a bad move is 11...♞d4!?, but I don't see why Black should make life complicated for himself. After 12.♞c3 ♞xb3 13.cxb3 ♞b6 14.♞f2 (or 14.♞b5 ♞g4! 15.d4 ♞h6± with quite good compensation after a subsequent ...f7-f6) 14...♞xb3 15.0-0 the computer assesses the position as equal, but the white side would be much more pleasant to handle. On the whole it's simpler for Black to play 11...♞e8.

## 12.0-0 ♖xe5 13.fxe5 ♜xe5 14.♗c3

White has the better pawn structure, but despite this the position is close to equality. The pawn on d5 is not weak because White too has a pawn on the d-file. Let me give some sample variations:

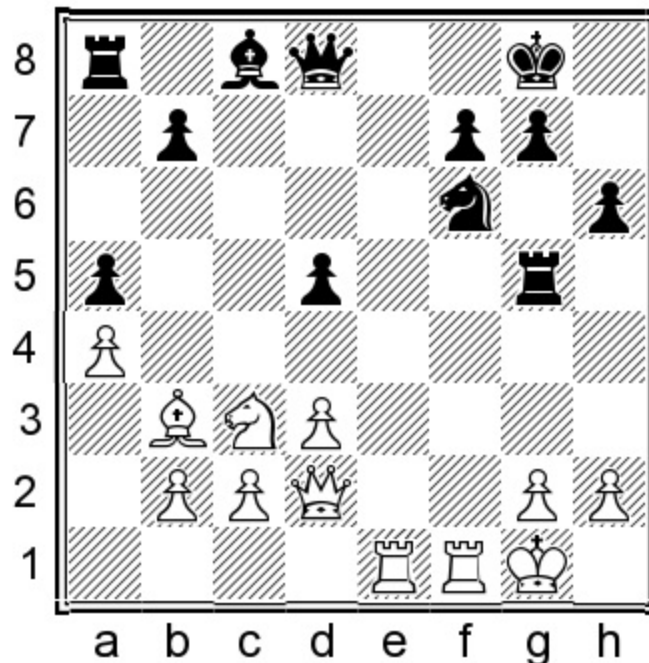
### 14...h6!?

An interesting idea of bringing the rook to g5, where it will cause the white king some discomfort. Other moves are:

a) 14...♗d7 15.♞ae1 ♜xe1 16.♞xe1 ♚c7 17.h3 In appearance, White's position is more appealing, but objectively there is approximate equality.

b) 14...♚b6† 15.♞f2 ♚xf2† 16.♞xf2 The exchange of queens benefits White because he no longer needs to reckon with any threats to his king. He now has a small but stable advantage.

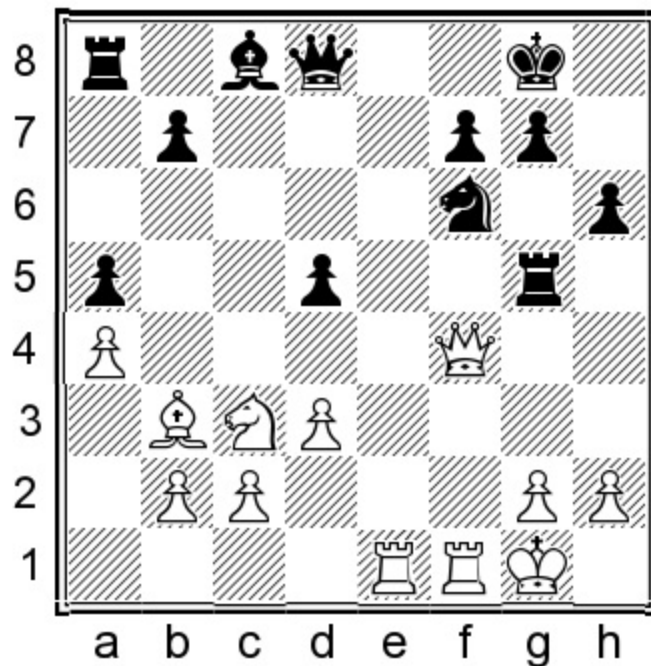
## 15.♞ae1 ♜g5



### 16.♞f4!?

This move appears more flexible than 16.d4. The pawn, after all, can still advance later, but there can be no moving it back again afterwards.

The game Topalov – Dominguez Perez, Saint Louis 2019, went: 16.d4 ♗h3 (Black could also play 16...♗e6 at once, but overall this alters nothing) 17.♞e2 ♗e6 18.♞ef2 (or 18.♞e5 ♜xe5 19.dxe5 ♗e4= with a drawish endgame after exchanges) 18...♞c8 19.♞f4 ♗h5 20.♞4f3 ♗f6= It's difficult for White to improve his position here, but then Black in turn lacks active play.



### 16...♙h3

Or 16...♙e6 17.♘b5, and now:

a) 17...♚b6† 18.♚f2 ♖a6!? (18...♚xf2† 19.♖xf2±) 19.♚xb6 (only not 19.c3?? ♙h3—+) 19...♖xb6 20.c3  
White is a shade more comfortable, and within a few moves this may grow into a real advantage.

b) 17...♙d7! is better. By making this second move with his bishop, Black equalizes completely. On 18.♘d4 he has a good continuation in: 18...b5! 19.♚d6 ♖a6 20.♚e7 ♚xe7= Exchanging queens in these circumstances is much better for Black than in the 17...♚b6† line.

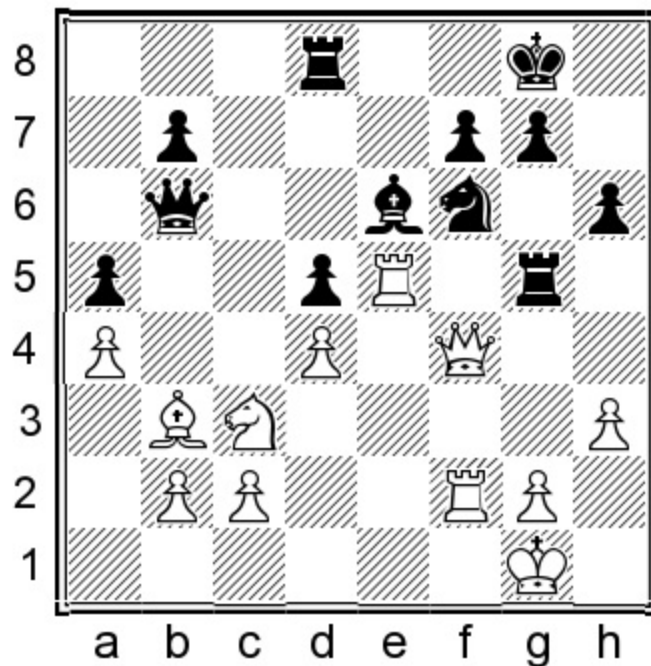
### 17.♖f2 ♚b6

Prompting White to push his pawn to d4.

### 18.d4

Quite a good alternative is 18.♙f1!?. The complexion of the game changes somewhat, but the verdict on the position remains as before. White can answer 18...♙e6 with 19.♘b5, still leaving the pawn on d3. Then 19...♙d7 will be met by 20.♚c7 and a queen exchange; while in the case of 19...♖c8 White can just play 20.h3 for now, depriving Black of the g4-square.

### 18...♖d8 19.♖e5 ♙e6 20.h3



The position offers plenty of play and approximately equal chances, as in Mulligan – Gomila Martí, corr. 2017.

### Conclusion

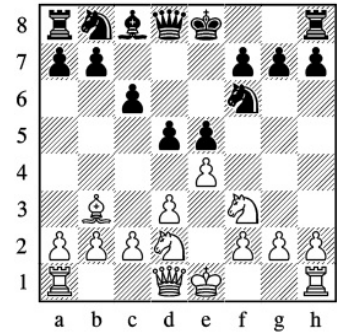
After White's recapture on d2 with his queen, some precise moves on Black's part are required. Natural moves like 7...♔d6 will lead to a worse position, not to speak of 7...dxe4?!

The best option for Black is undoubtedly 7...a5!, followed by castling in reply to a2-a4. Subsequently White can capture on e5 and then give up his f-pawn after playing f2-f4 and 0-0. This is what occurred in the Topalov – Dominguez game in 2019. The result is a position with plenty of play and approximate equality. White's game is nevertheless more comfortable, thanks to some activity at his disposal. And if the queens should be exchanged, White may acquire a small plus.

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# Chapter 8

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5...♖b4† 6.♖d2 ♖xd2† 7.♞bxd2

## Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♖c4 ♞f6 3.d3 c6 4.♞f3 d5 5.♖b3 ♖b4† 6.♖d2 ♖xd2† 7.♞bxd2

A) 7...♞bd7 159

B) 7...♖g4 8.h3 ♖xf3 9.♞xf3 0-0 10.g4 161

B1) 10...a5 162

B2) 10...♞a6 162

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C121) 11.0-0 168

C122) 11.g4!? 168

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C21) 8...♖g4 173

C22) 8...♞bd7 174

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1.e4 e5 2.♖c4 ♞f6 3.d3 c6 4.♞f3 d5 5.♖b3 ♖b4† 6.♖d2 ♖xd2† 7.♞bxd2

This recapture is worth considering as an alternative to the queen recapture we saw in the previous chapter.

We will now examine **A) 7...♞bd7**, **B) 7...♝g4** and **C) 7...a5!**.

### A) 7...♞bd7

The omission of ...a7-a5 and a2-a4 before playing this move (later, line C11 will show us ...♞bd7 with the moves ...a5 and a4 added) is not fatal but nonetheless gives White slightly more options.

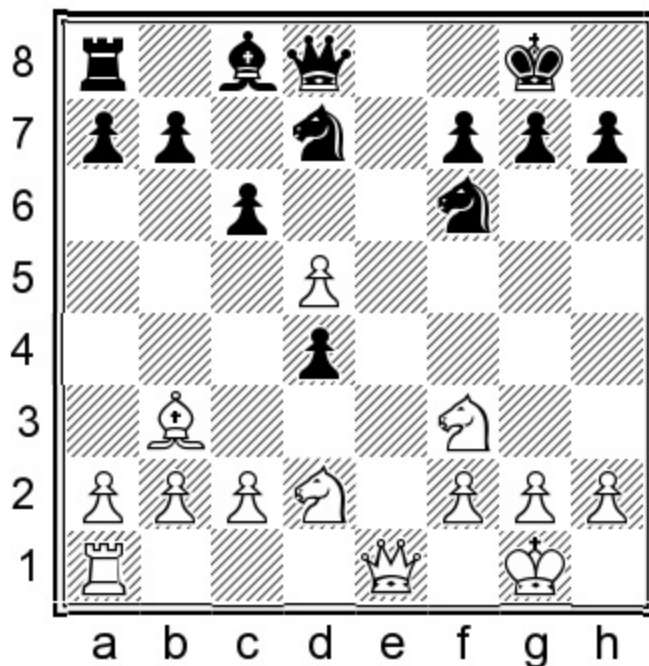
### 8.0-0 0-0

It's too late for 8...a5?! 9.exd5 cxd5 10.c4!± with a definite plus for White.

### 9.♞e1

Now the following sequence is standard, and leads to a fascinating position:

**9...♞e8 10.d4 exd4 11.exd5 ♞xe1† 12.♚xe1**



### 12...c5!?

This is a rather risky move, although if Black consistently makes the best moves, then he can resist. The alternatives are less testing:

12...cxd5 13.♞xd4± White has a small but stable advantage. A similar position can arise with the inclusion of the moves ...a5 and a4 (that inclusion is probably in Black's favour). Now on 13...a5 White can reply 14.c3.

12...♞xd5 13.♝xd5 cxd5 14.♞xd4± In this position, exchanging the b3-bishop for the f6-knight is

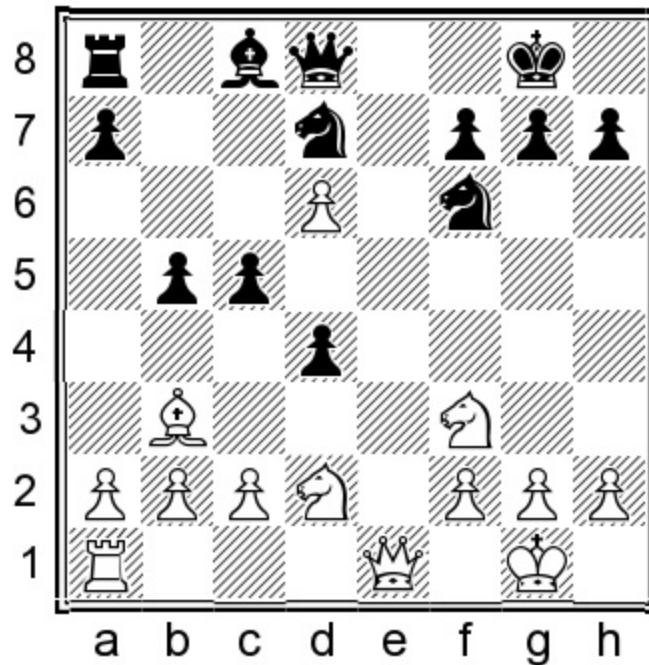
most likely in White's favour; the d5-pawn would have limited White's bishop.

### 13.d6!

Instead 13.c4 is a more relaxed continuation with chances of a slight advantage after 13...dxc3?! 14.bxc3 b5 15.c4, but instead after the stronger 13...♘f8 the position is closer to equality.

### 13...b5

After any other move, Black is clearly worse.



### 14.♘g5!?N

This novelty leads to entertaining play and also appears to be the best move.

The sacrifice with 14.♙xf7? does not work due to 14...♔xf7 15.♘g5† ♔g6! while on 14.a4 c4 15.♙a2 Black will play 15...a6! 16.♘d4 ♚b6 with an unclear position, as in D. Stojanovic – S. Solomon, Dresden (ol) 2008.

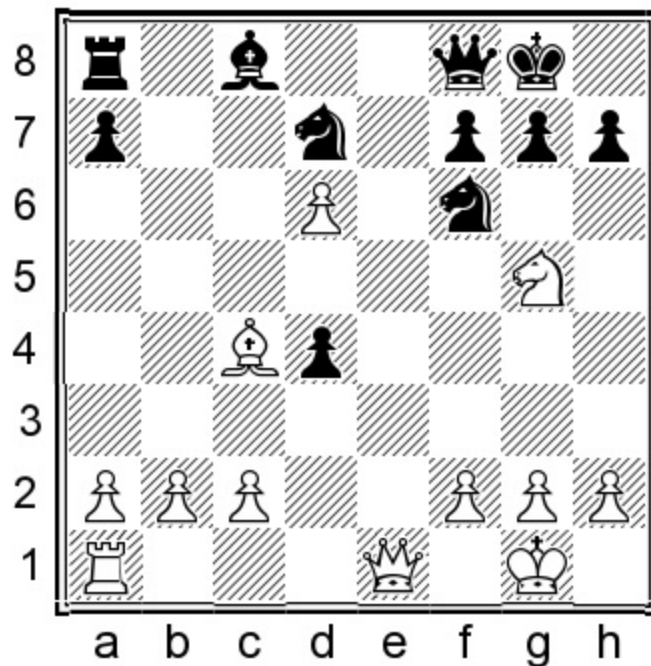
### 14...c4 15.♘xc4 bxc4 16.♙xc4

White has a strong initiative and will soon have at least three pawns for the piece. Black has to find a number of strong moves, and even after that he is not sure to achieve complete equality.

### 16...♚f8!

The only move.

Black must avoid 16...♙b7? 17.♙xf7† ♔h8 18.♙e6 when White wins. For example, if 18...♚c8 then 19.♘f7† ♔g8 20.♘e5† ♔h8 21.♚d2, with a decisive advantage.



### 17. ♔e7

This sets more problems than taking on f7 at once, though of course 17. ♕xf7† might also transpose.

### 17...h6

Again, Black must play an only move.

### 18. ♕xf7†

Instead 18. ♖xf7 can be met by 18... ♔xe7 19. dxe7 ♖b6 20. ♕b3 and then either 20... ♔h7 or even 20... ♕d7!? leave Black with no problems; it's about level.

### 18...♔h8 19.f4!

The most promising follow-up.

After 19.h4 White does not control the e5-square, so Black can play 19... ♕b7 without fearing 20. ♖e6, as he could swap queens and then put the knight on e5, equalizing.

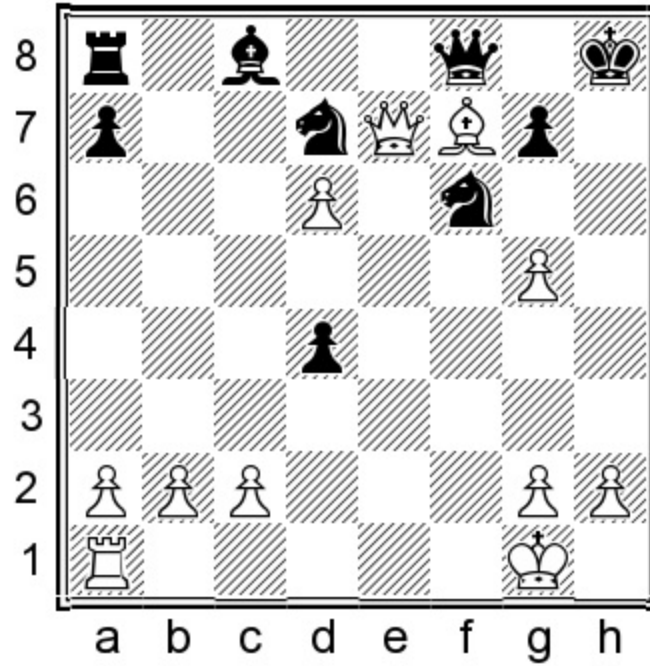
Also not so scary for Black is 19. ♖f3, when 19... ♕b7 or 19...d3!? may follow.

Unclear is: 19. ♖e6 ♔xe7 20. dxe7 ♖e5 21. ♖c7∞ Besides 21... ♖xf7!? Black can play 21... ♖b8 22. e8=♔† ♖xe8 23. ♕xe8 ♕f5! with an approximately equal position.

### 19...hgx5

Less accurate is: 19... ♕b7?! 20. ♖e6± Now bad is 20... ♔xe7?! 21. dxe7 since Black cannot play ...♖e5. And even after the better defence 20... ♔c8 21. ♕g6 ♔g8 22. ♖d1 White keeps the initiative.

## 20.fxg5



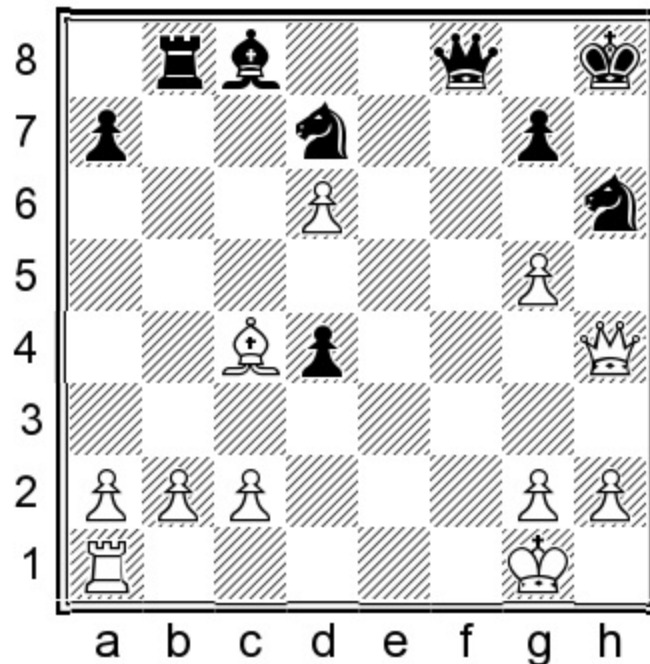
## 20...♘g8!

The only way! Black is in trouble after 20...♘g4?! 21.♖d1 ♘ge5 22.♙d5 while of course 20...♙b7?! simply fails to 21.gxf6.

## 21.♙e4 ♖b8

After 21...♙xf7 22.♙xa8 ♘b6 23.♙f3± the rook and four pawns are more dangerous than three scattered minor pieces.

## 22.♙h4† ♘h6 23.♙c4



### 23...♙b7!

Black has no time to take the d6-pawn.

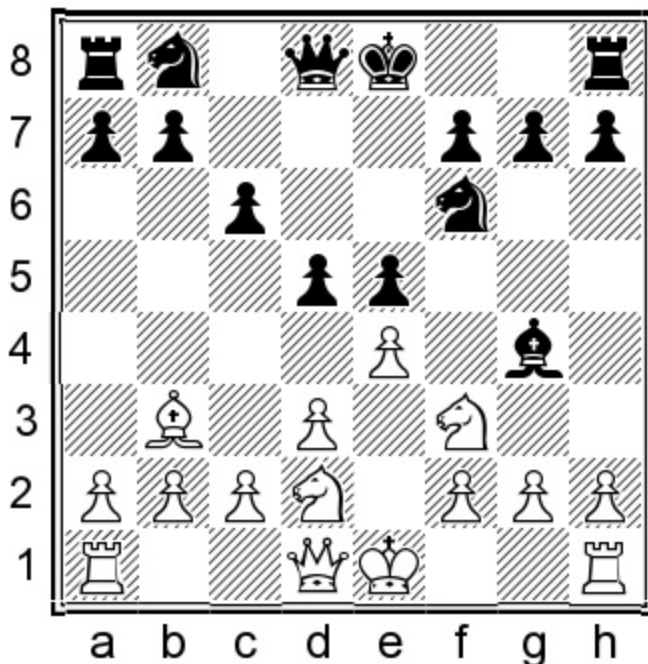
After 23...♙xd6?! 24.♖e1 ♜e5 25.gxh6 White is winning, but the line is quite complicated:  
25...♜xc4 26.♖e8† ♚h7 27.hxg7† ♚xg7 28.♙h8† ♚f7 29.♙h5† ♚g7 30.h4!+- The computer says "+2.5" although to us humans this is not immediately obvious. On 30...♜e3 there can follow 31.♙h8† with the idea after 31...♚f7 to reply 32.h5!, while instead if 30...♖xb2 then 31.♙g5† ♚f7 32.♖xc8 secures a decisive advantage.

Almost as bad is: 23...♙d8?! 24.♖e1 ♜f8 25.♖e7! ♙xd6 26.gxh6± Then 26...gxh6? 27.♖f7 is hopeless. So forced is 26...♙xh6 and then 27.♙xh6† gxh6 28.♖e8 ♚g7 29.♙a6± is a forcing line to win material.

### 24.gxh6 gxh6 25.♙xd4†

White has four pawns for the piece, but with accurate play Black might make a draw. Nevertheless, White's side is much more pleasant to play; the game has two plausible results.

#### B) 7...♙g4



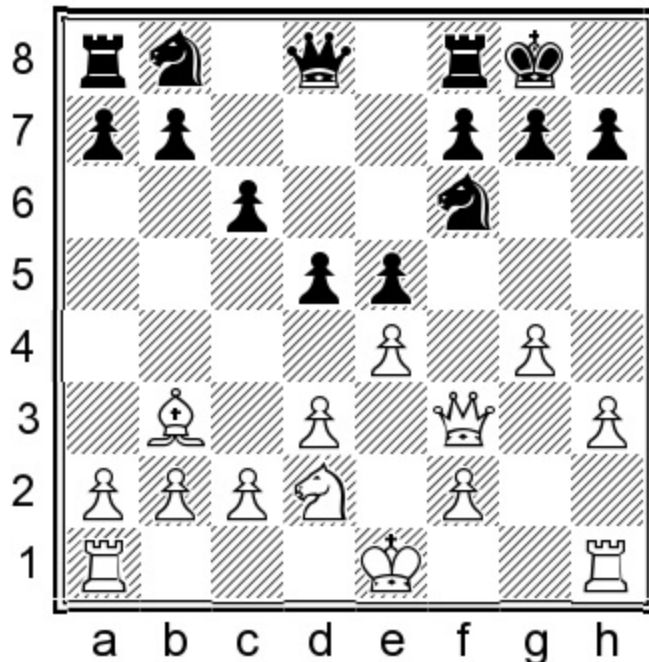
In the first draft of my analysis I gave this move a dubious sign, but it is not quite as bad as I thought. Still, White can expect a slight edge.

### 8.h3 ♙xf3 9.♙xf3 0-0

After 9...a5 10.a3! it's hard for Black to do without ...0-0 anyway. For example: 10...dxe4 11.♜xe4 (11.dxe4!?) 11...0-0 12.♜xf6† ♙xf6 13.♙xf6 gxh6 14.0-0-0± Thanks to his better pawn structure and good bishop, White has a stable advantage; he is likely to follow up with a d4- or f4-break.

## 10.g4

The most active way of playing the position.



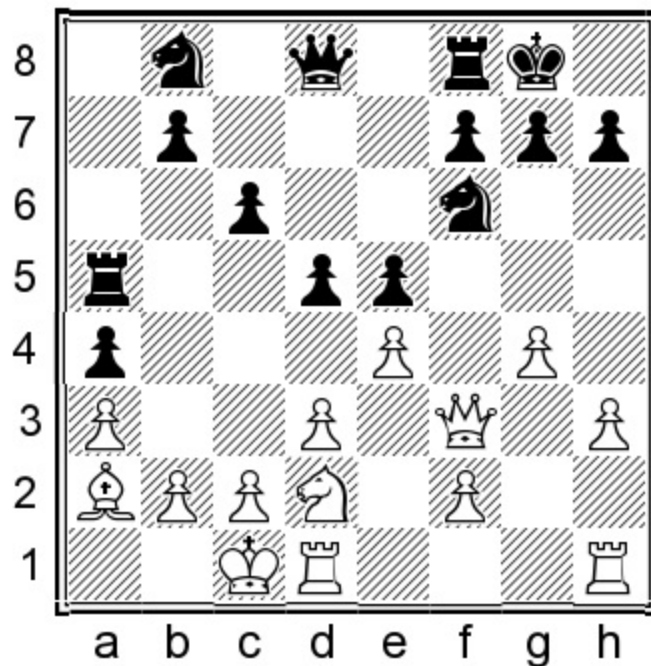
We will consider **B1)** 10...a5 and **B2)** 10...♘a6.

### **B1) 10...a5 11.a3!±**

Black has played ...a7-a5 too late, and White now has no need for a2-a4. What makes all the difference is that after ...♘a6 Black doesn't have the important b4-square available. As we shall see in the variations following 7...a5 8.a4, it is this very possibility of ...♘b4 that enables Black to obtain compensation for a material deficit.

### **11...♘a6**

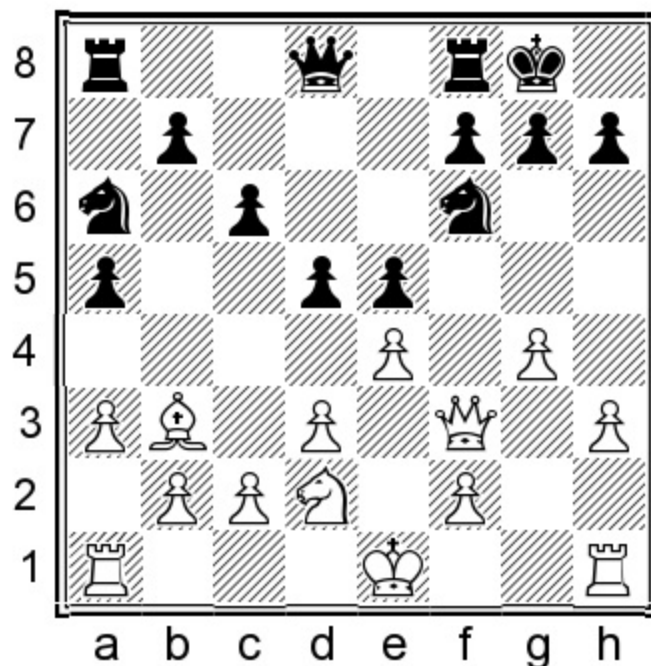
It doesn't help Black to play 11...a4 12.♕a2 ♖a5, as he cannot get at the b2-pawn: 13.0-0-0



And now let's see two options:

a) 13...♖b5 14.♘c4!? (the simple 14.g5 ♞e8 15.h4 ♚b6 16.♙e3± also preserves a large plus after the exchange of queens) 14...♞bd7 15.g5 ♞e8 16.h4± Black's pieces are too clumsily placed. He gains nothing from 16...♚c7? 17.♞e3 ♚b6 18.exd5+–, as the b2-pawn cannot be taken owing to ♘c4.

b) 13...♞e8 14.h4 ♞c7 15.♙g3 ♞d7 16.♞f3± as in Bajt – Almeida, corr. 2016. Black has no time to create counterplay. In the game there followed 16...♖e8 17.g5 ♚e7 18.d4! dxe4 19.♞d2 ♞e6 20.♞xe4 ♞xd4 21.♙b1, with a decisive advantage thanks to the attack on the kingside.



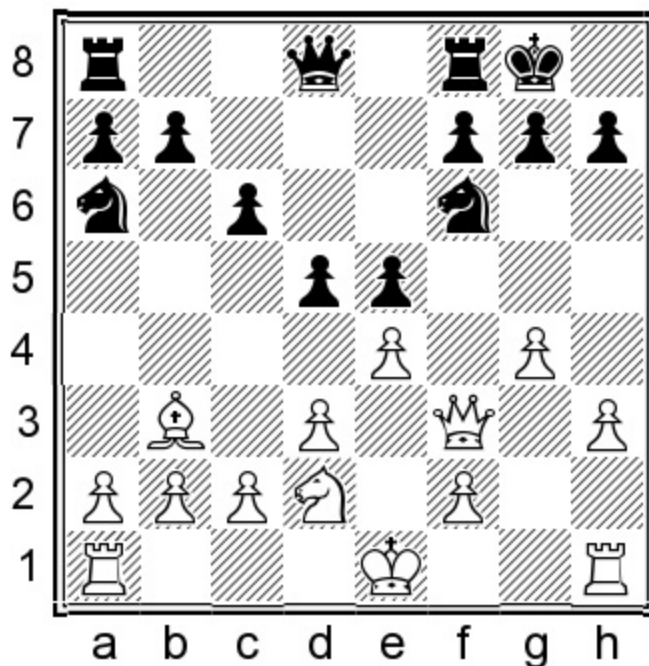
12.g5 dxe4

Or 12...♞d7 13.exd5± with an extra pawn and a big advantage.

### 13.dxe4 ♞d7 14.h4±

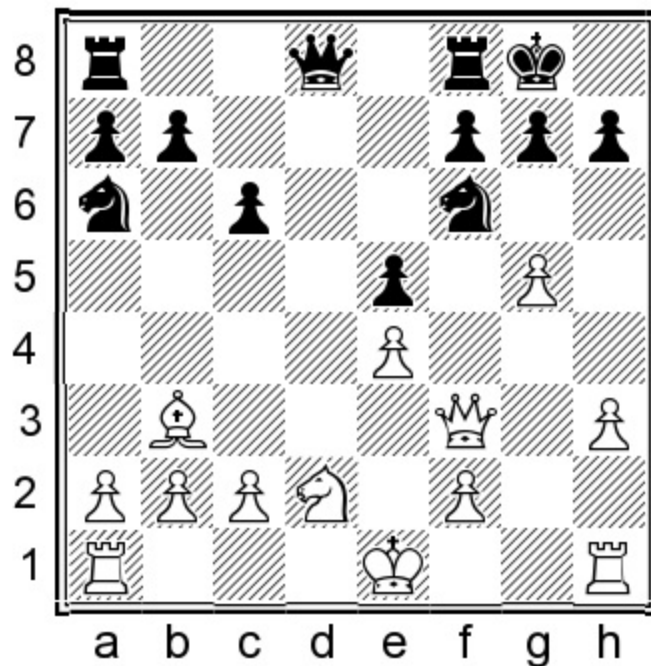
On ...♞ac5 White withdraws with ♔a2. He then castles long and sets about mating the black king.

### B2) 10...♞a6



### 11.g5 dxe4 12.dxe4

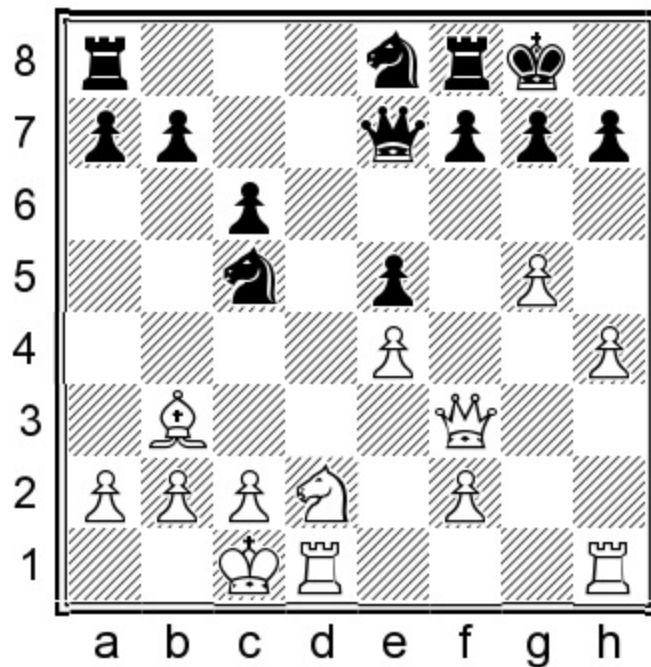
In the game Dastan – A. Saric, Izmir 2016, White played 12.♙f5 which Black could have answered with: 12...♞h5!?N 13.♞xe4 g6 14.♙f3 (14.♙xe5 ♖e8 15.♙c3 ♙xg5∞) 14...♞c5 15.♞xc5 ♙a5†= with a comfortable game for Black.



12...Nxd7

The other knight retreat is also worth studying:

12...Ne8 13.h4 Nc5 14.0-0-0 Qe7



Here White can get an advantage in several ways; I will give two small options:

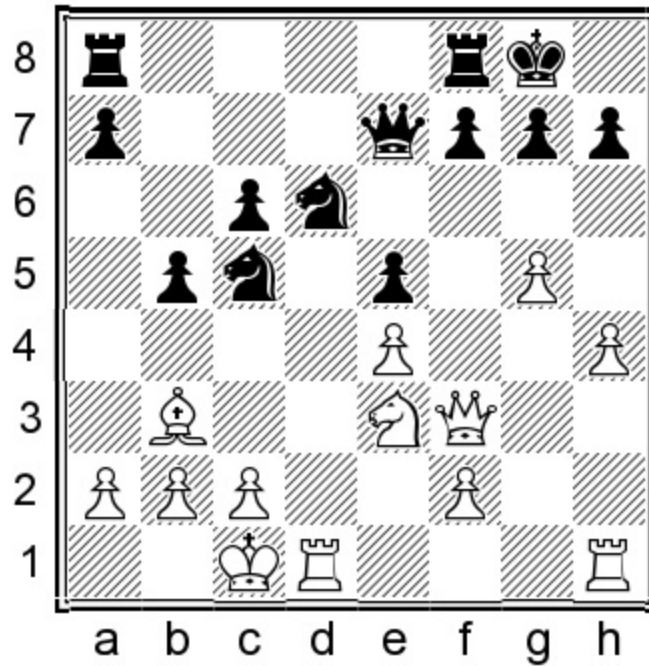
15.Nc4

Or: 15.a3!? Nxb3† 16.Qxb3 Nd6 17.Rhe1± White placed the rook on e1 so that he could play Nf3 and then push h4-h5.

15...b5 16.Ne3!

Also possible is 16.Na5 Qc7 when White also has an edge after, for example, 17.Qe3 Nxb3† 18.Nxb3 or 17.Qc3!? Nxe4 18.Qe1, but in these positions Black has some counterplay.

16...♖d6

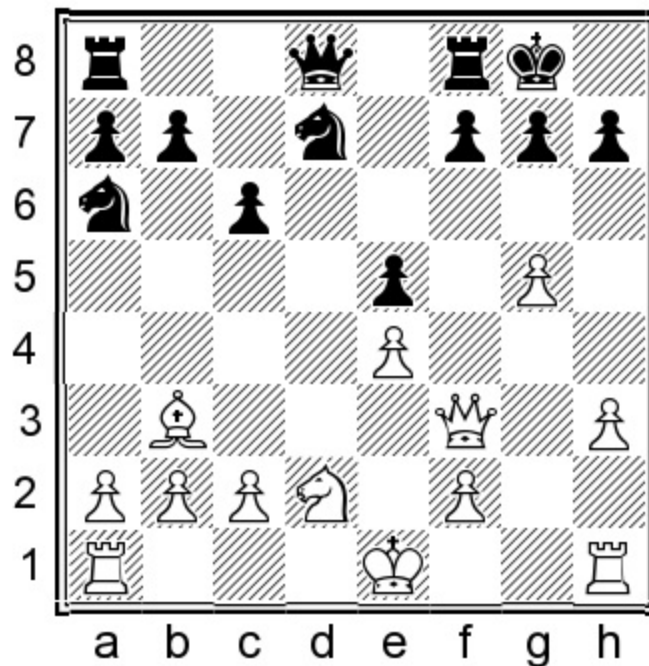


17.♖hg1

Less convincing is 17.♗f5 ♗xf5 18.exf5 e4 (unlike 17.♖hg1 ♖ad8 18.♗f5 here Black has had no reason to put a rook on d8). For example on 19.♖g3 Black can play 19...♖ae8 and ...♗e5.

17...♖ad8 18.♗f5 ♗xf5 19.exf5±

After 19...♗xb3† 20.axb3 ♖b4 21.♖g3 or 19...♖xd1† 20.♖xd1 ♗xb3† 21.axb3 ♖b4 22.♖g3 White has a stable advantage thanks to the initiative on the kingside.



13.h4 ♗ac5 14.0-0-0

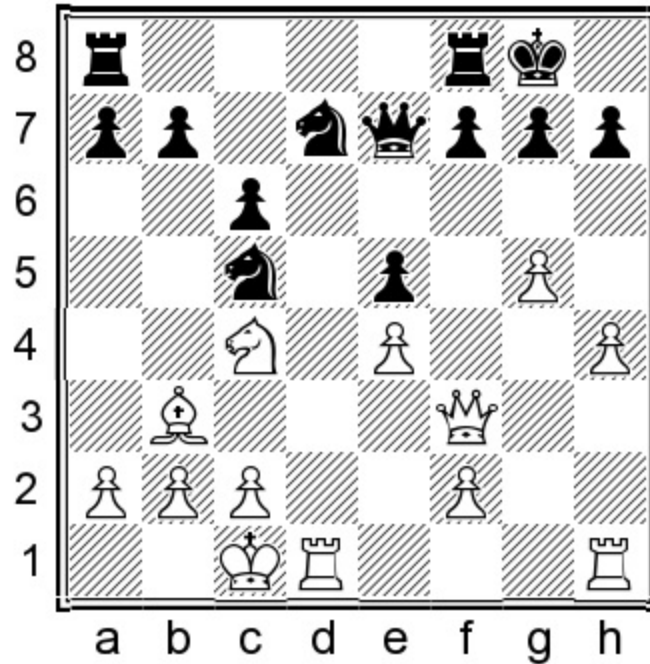
White's play is straightforward and strong.

### 14...♞e7

Or: 14...a5 15.a3 ♜xb3† 16.♞xb3 ♞e7 17.♞c3 a4 18.♞a5± With a knight on c4 and a sure advantage, for example, 18...♞c5 19.f3 f6 20.gxf6 ♞xf6 21.♞c4.

Maybe it's better to try 18...♞b6!? although after 19.♞b1 f6 20.f3 Black has a nasty position.

### 15.♞c4±

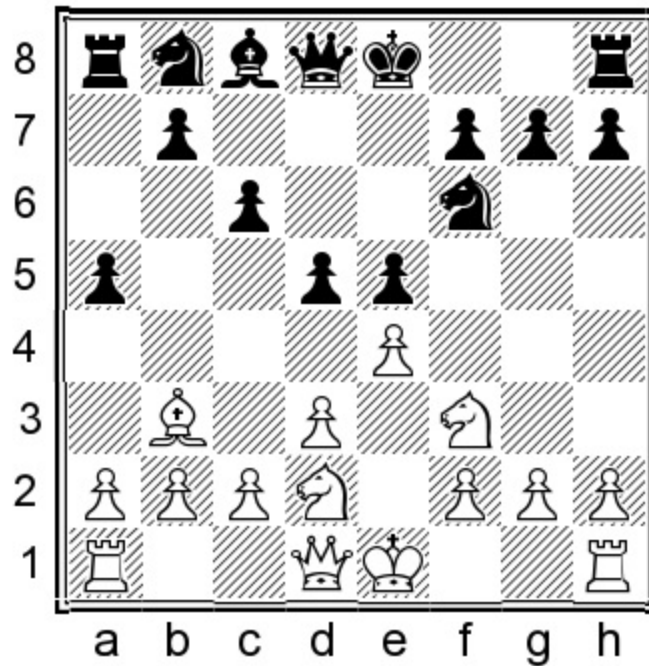


Now unsuccessful for Black is 15...a5 16.♞d6 g6 17.a3, with a big plus.

On 15...♞ad8 White can also play 16.♞d6, with a pleasant position after 16...g6 17.♞d2 or 16...♞xb3† 17.axb3 ♞c5 18.♞f5.

Trickier is 15...♞fd8!? to answer 16.♞d6 with 16...♞xb3† 17.axb3 ♞f8 18.♞f5 ♞b4! when Black will soon play ...♞e6 and be close to equality. Therefore on 15...♞fd8 White does better to play 16.♞e3! ♞xb3† 17.axb3 ♞f8, and White retains an edge after 18.♞f5 or 18.♞b1.

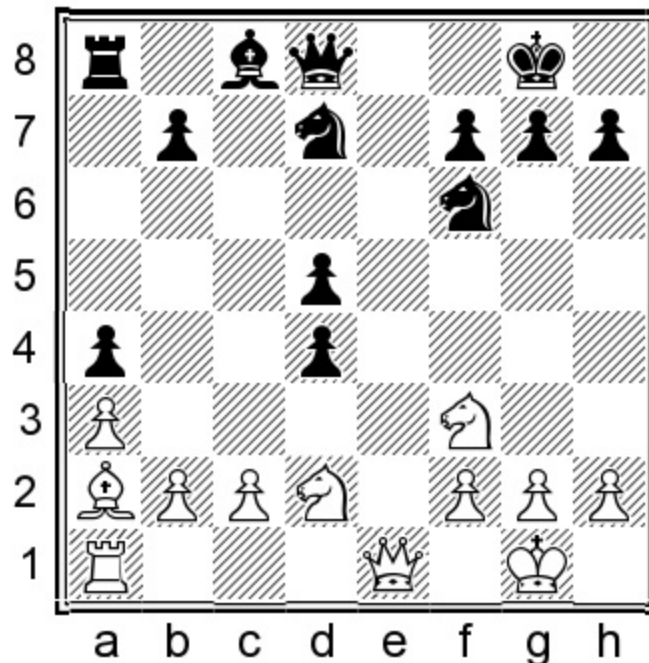
### C) 7...a5!



Aiming to induce a2-a4 before Black develops the remaining minor pieces. Of course White can also play 8.a3 or 8.c3, but even so this line is better than the immediate 7...♖bd7 or 7...♙g4.

We will mainly consider C1) 8.a4 and C2) 8.c3.

With 8.a3, White is counting on 8...♙g4. However, after 8...♖bd7 White's move turns out to have a defect compared with 8.a4: at some point his b2-pawn may be left hanging. I will demonstrate this using the example of Aronian – Caruana, Paris 2018, which went: 8.a3 ♖bd7 (the position after 8...♙g4 9.h3 ♙xf3 10.♚xf3 0-0 11.g4± was examined in variation B above) 9.0-0 a4 10.♙a2 0-0 11.♞e1 ♞e8 12.d4 exd4 13.exd5 ♞xe1† 14.♚xe1 cxd5∞



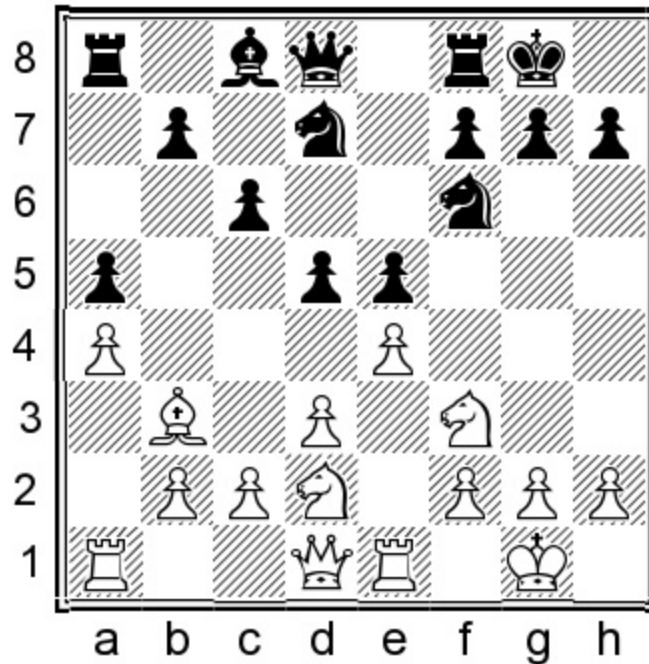
At this point, in contrast to the variations with 8.a4, it isn't so good for White to capture at once on [chesstouring.com](http://chesstouring.com)

d4, on account of ...♙b6. Here is a sample variation: 15.♘xd4 (after 15.♘f1 ♙b6 16.♙b4 ♙xb4 17.axb4 d3= Black has no problems) 15...♙b6 16.♘f5 ♙xb2 17.♘e7† ♔f8!?! 18.♘xd5 With an equal position after 18...♘xd5 19.♙xd5 ♙d4 or 18...♙xa3 19.♙b3 ♙c5.

### C1) 8.a4

Now Black has C11) 8...♘bd7 and C12) 8...♙g4!?.

#### C11) 8...♘bd7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♙e1



#### 10...♙e8

Or 10...♙c7 11.d4 exd4 12.exd5, and now:

a) 12...cxd5 13.♘xd4 ♘c5 14.♘f1 gives one of those typical positions with an isolated pawn on d5 and a small plus for White.

b) 12...c5 is weaker: 13.c3! (the game Cornette – Le Roux, Nîmes 2018, went 13.c4 dxc3, but in this case the capture of the c-pawn was by no means obligatory) 13...dxc3 14.bxc3 ♘b6 15.c4± The powerful d5-pawn gives White a considerable advantage.

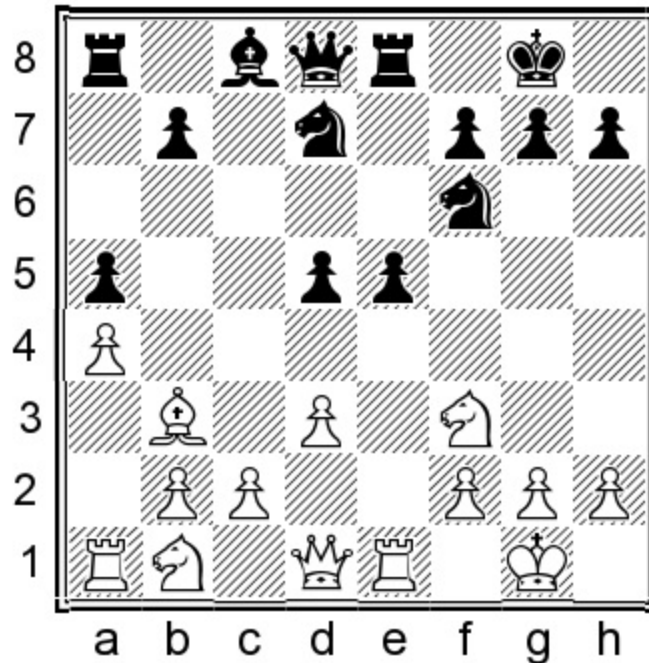
#### 11.d4

An interesting alternative is:

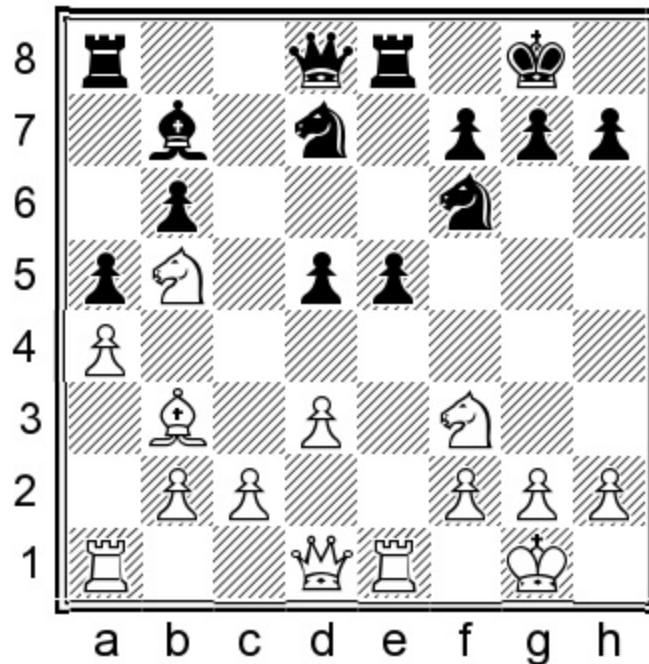
#### 11.exd5!? cxd5

Better than 11...♘xd5 12.d4 exd4 13.♙xe8† ♙xe8 14.♙xd5 cxd5 15.♘f1±; after ♘xd4 the second knight will go to e3, giving White a clear plus.

12. ♖b1



The sort of manoeuvre that could be incorporated in a textbook on strategy.  
12...b6 13. ♗c3 ♕b7 14. ♖b5



White has beautifully repositioned his knight on b5 and threatens to go to d6; I have come to the conclusion that Black does better *not* to prevent the following knight manoeuvre.

14... ♗c6!?

14... ♔b8 15. d4 e4 16. ♖d2 gives White a slight edge; he meets 16... ♗f8 with 17. f3, while a good answer to 16... ♗c6 is 17. c4!.

15. ♖d6

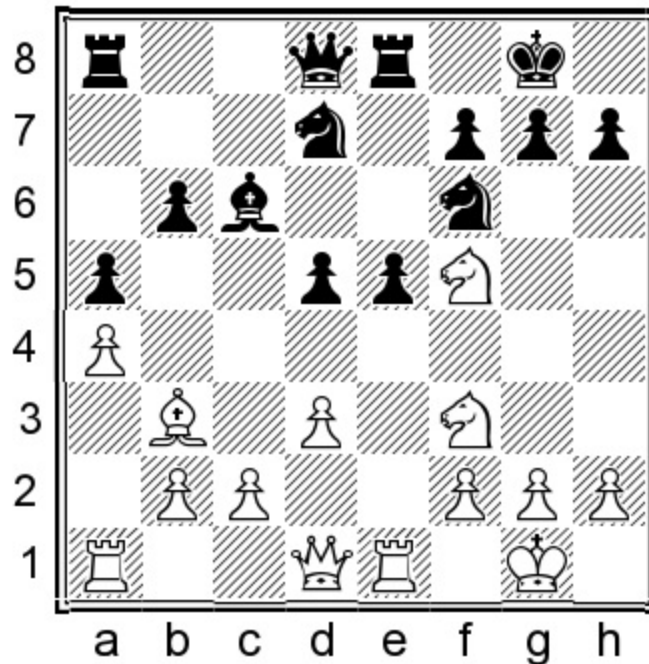
After 15. c3 the position is somewhat simplified: 15... ♗xb5 16. axb5 ♔c7=

chesstouring.com

15...♖e7

Not: 15...♖e6? 16.♘xf7±

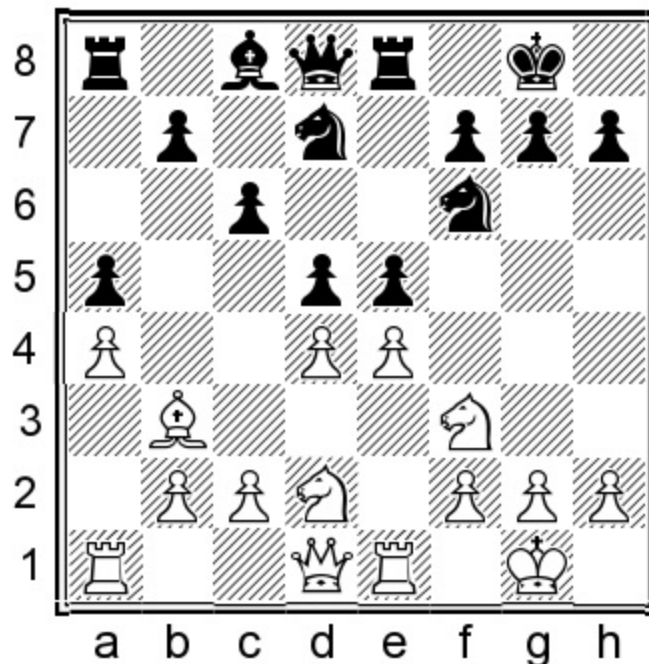
16.♘f5 ♖e8



The knight has made a long journey from d2 via b1 and b5 to f5; the question is whether this gives White any advantage.

17.♕d2 h6∞

Black covers the g5-square; and although visually White's pieces are rather better placed, the position remains unclear.



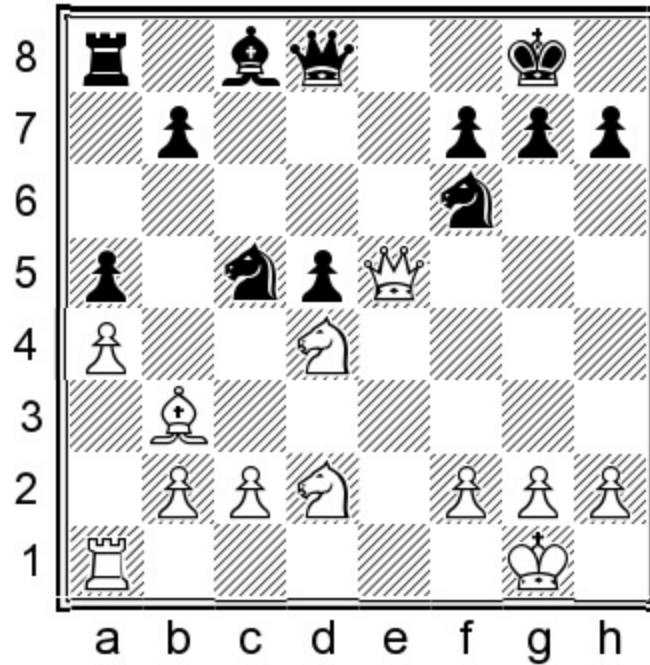
11...exd4 12.exd5 ♖xe1† 13.♕xe1

If 13.♘xe1, then apart from 13...cxd5 Black can very well play 13...c5!?.

### 13...cxd5

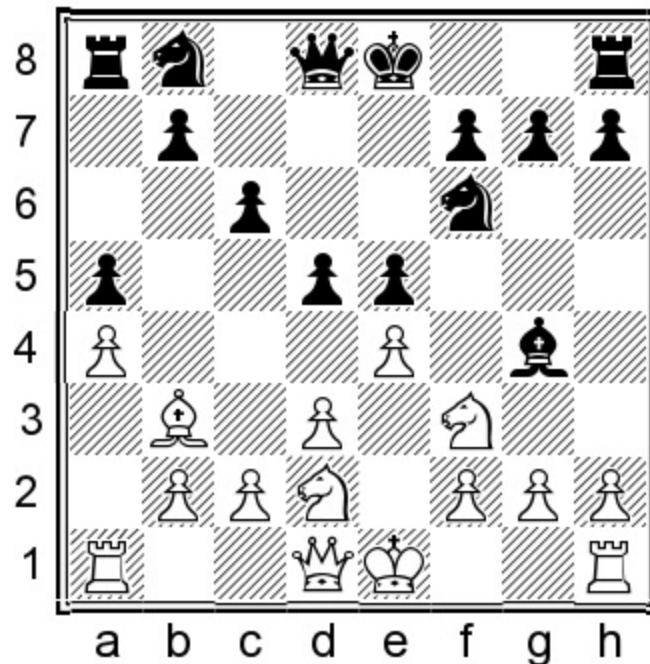
In Variation A (page 159) we saw the same position except with the pawns still on a2 and a7. In that case, the move ...c6-c5 was critical, as d5-d6 could be met by ...b7-b5. In the present position, after 13...c5?! 14.d6! the ...b5-push is impossible, so Black would simply be much worse.

14.♞xd4 ♞c5 15.♚e5



The isolated pawn on d5 gives White a small but stable advantage.

C12) 8...♙g4!?



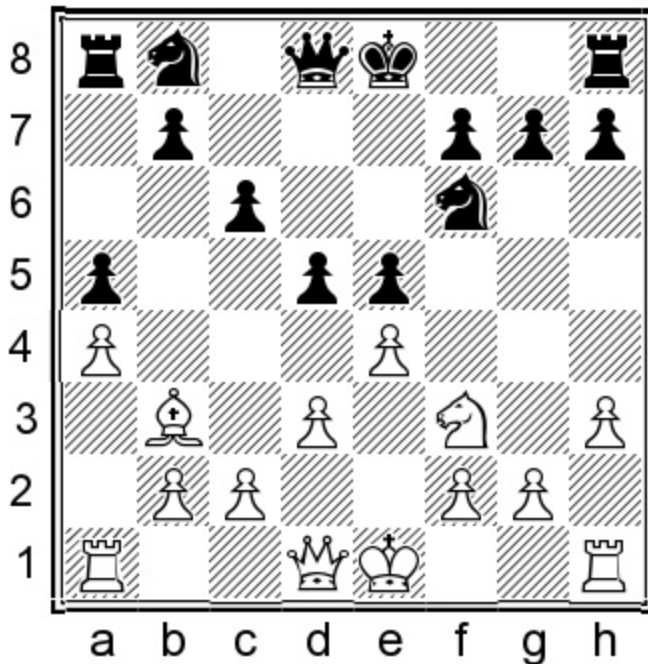
This is Black's preferred move in correspondence games. In addition it has been played recently by Ding Liren.

### 9.h3

Forcing Black to capture on f3; the symmetrical formation after 9.0-0 dxe4 10.dxe4 0-0 is approximately equal.

### 9...♙xf3 10.♚xf3

The other recapture is also interesting: 10.♘xf3



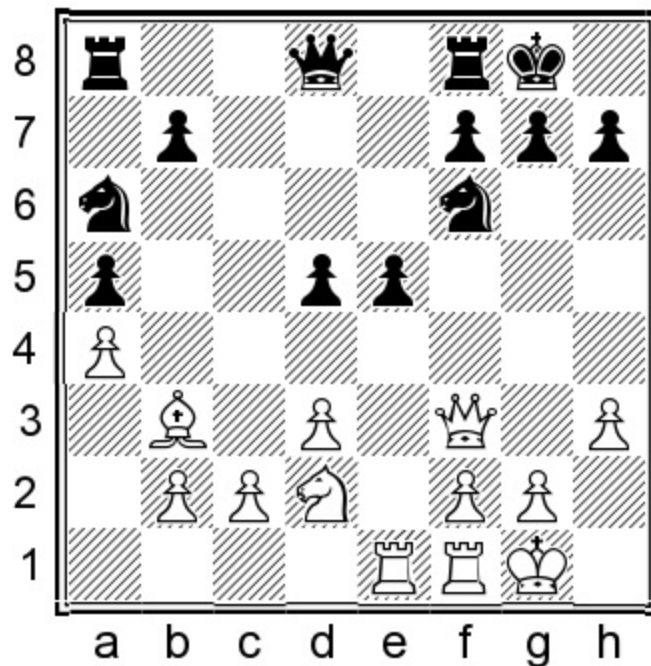
And now:

a) 10...dxe4 11.♘xe5 0-0 12.♚d2!? Queenside castling livens the position up a little. 12...♘bd7 (or 12...exd3 13.0-0-0!) 13.♘xd7 ♚xd7 14.0-0-0 White's position is a little more pleasant, thanks to his good bishop on b3.

b) 10...♘bd7 11.exd5 cxd5 12.d4 e4 13.♘h2∞ occurred in Straka – Helbich, corr. 2018. The knight heads for e3. In this unorthodox position the chances are about equal.

### 10...0-0

After 10...♘a6 White will *not* want to play g2-g4 but can calmly castle kingside and put pressure on the black e-pawn: 11.exd5 cxd5 (or 11...♘xd5 12.0-0 0-0 13.♚fe1± attacking the pawn on e5; now a good answer to 13...f6 is: 14.d4!? exd4 15.♚e4) 12.0-0 0-0 13.♚ae1

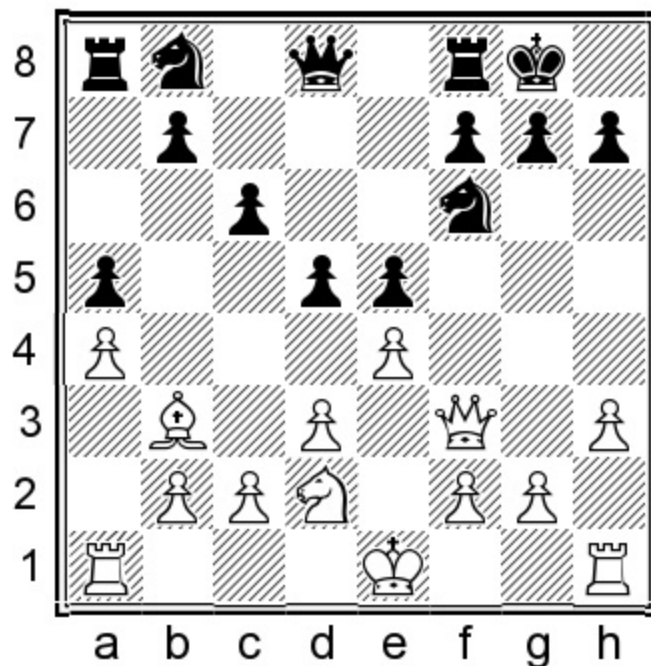


And now:

a) 13...Rxe8 14.Wf5 Wd6 15.Nf3 g6 16.Wg5 Nd7 17.d4 e4 18.Nd2± followed by f2-f3, giving White a slight edge. Other moves are no better:

b) 13...Wd6 14.Wg3 Wb4 (not 14...Rfe8? 15.d4±; the threat of d3-d4 forces Black to move his queen away) 15.c3 Wf4 16.Wxf4 exf4 17.d4± with a pleasant endgame; White can continue by redeploying his knight with Nf3-e5.

c) 13...Wc7 14.Qxd5 Nxd5 15.Wxd5 Wxc2 16.Nc4± with a plus. On 16...Nb4 White has 17.Wb5; then 17...Nxd3? fails against 18.Ne3+-.



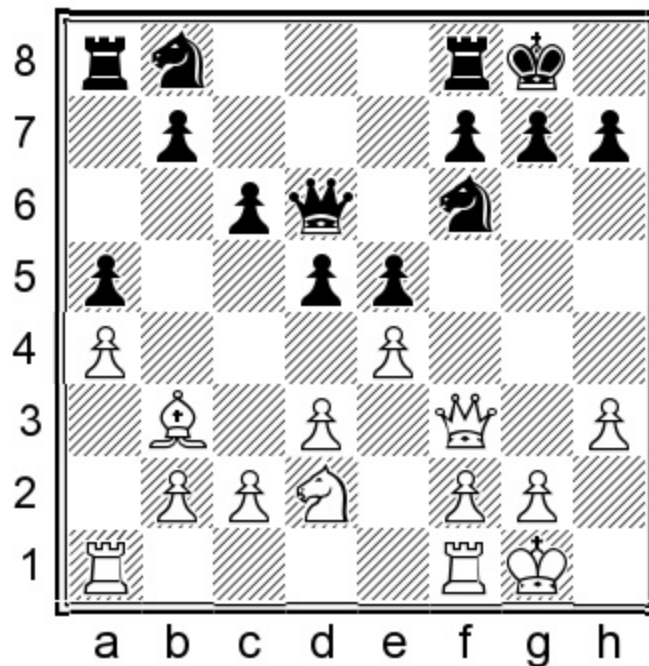
White can choose the calm **C121) 11.0-0**, or else **C122) 11.g4!?**.

### C121) 11.0-0

In all probability this leads to an equal position.

#### 11...dxe4

The alternative 11...♔d6!? is not bad.

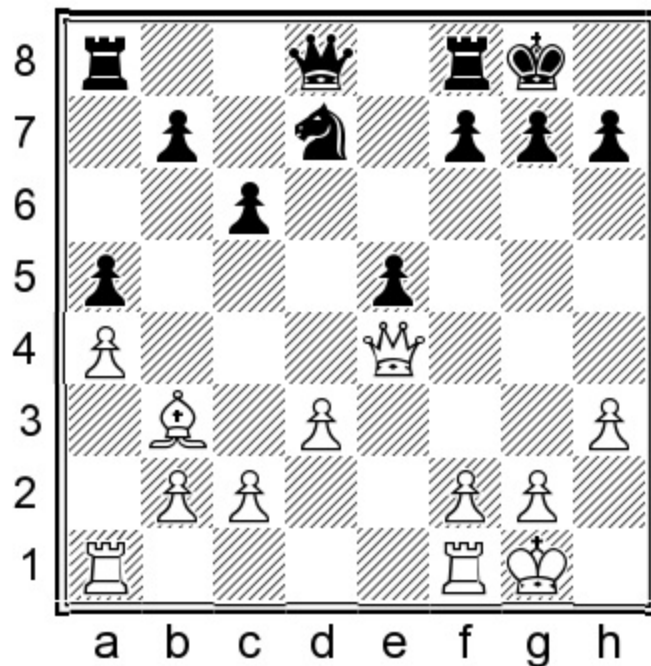


There can follow:

a) 12.exd5 cxd5 13.d4 exd4 14.♔d3 White weakens the black d-pawn, but at the same time Black manages to deploy his pieces conveniently. 14...♘c6 (or 14...♘bd7 15.♔xd4 ♘c5) 15.♘f3 ♖ae8 16.♘xd4 ♘xd4 17.♔xd4 ♖e4 In Morrow – Straka, corr. 2017, the activity of Black's pieces compensated for the isolated pawn on d5.

b) 12.♖fd1 ♖e8 (12...♘a6 13.d4 exd4 14.exd5 cxd5 15.♘f1 gives White a minimal plus; in contrast to the line with 12.exd5 cxd5 13.d4, he has not used up time with his queen) 13.♘f1 (13.g4 h6 14.h4 is hardly any better; Black has the good move 14...♖e6!? which forestalls the g4-g5 advance) 13...♘a6 14.exd5 cxd5 15.♘e3 With play for both sides in a roughly equal position.

**12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♔xe4 ♘d7**



**14.♞e3**

Or 14.d4!? exd4 15.♞xd4. In such a position the bishop is very slightly better than the knight, but the game is nonetheless almost level.

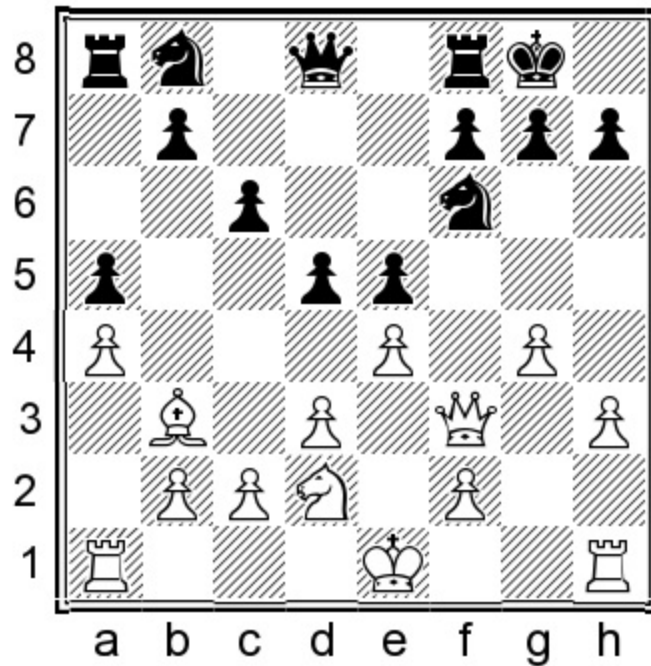
**14...♞e8 15.f4N**

In Rapport – Ding Liren, Wijk aan Zee 2019, the players agreed a draw after: 15.♞ae1 ♘f6 16.♞e2 e4=

**15...exf4 16.♞xf4 ♘f6 17.♞ae1**

White is a little more comfortable owing to his good bishop on b3, but this is not enough for us to speak seriously of a concrete advantage.

**C122) 11.g4!?**



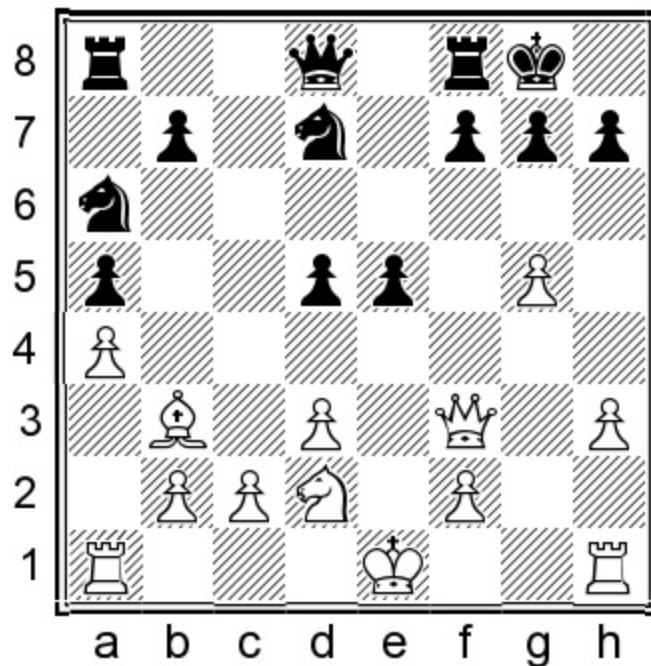
Seeing that Black has been the first to castle, White can try to work up a kingside attack and remove his own king to the queenside.

### 11...♞a6

For 11...dxe4 12.dxe4 ♞a6 13.0-0-0, see 11...♞a6 12.0-0-0 dxe4 below.

### 12.0-0-0

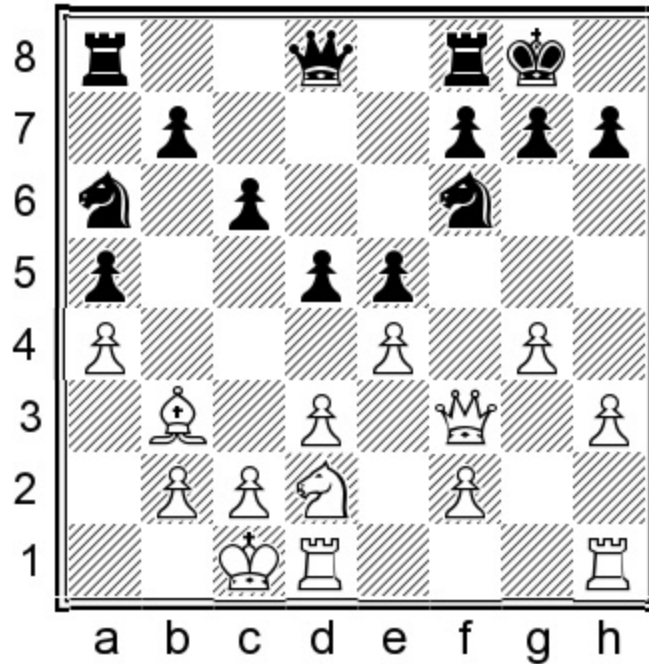
In general terms 12.g5 is a normal move, but its value is reduced by the fact that Black has numerous alternative options in the ensuing play. There can follow 12...♞d7 13.exd5 cxd5.



And now:

a) 14. ♖xd5 ♜b4 15. ♔d1 (not 15.0-0-0?! ♜c5 16. ♖c4 ♜xa4) 15... ♙xg5∞ The position remains unclear, but playing with your king on d1 is not very appealing.

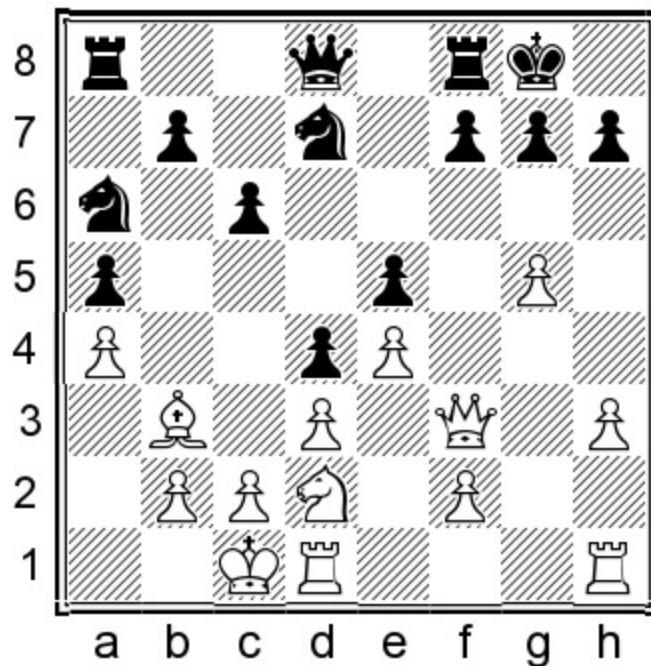
b) 14.0-0-0 At this point Black has several moves that leave the position unclear. Here is one of them: 14... ♜dc5 15. ♙xd5 ♙e7 (again Black had a choice; after 15... ♙xg5 16. ♖c4 White is somewhat better, but 15... ♙b6 or 15... ♙c7 would be worth considering) 16.d4 exd4 17. ♗he1 ♙c7 18. ♙xd4 ♜b4∞ Owing to the threats to his king, White has difficulty keeping his extra pawn. For instance after 19. ♙c3 ♜xb3† 20. ♙xb3 ♗fc8 he has to give up the c2-pawn and go into a roughly equal ending.



12... ♜c5

Or:

a) 12...d4 13.g5 ♜d7



14.g6! This sacrifice speeds up White's offensive (in the event of 14.♖dg1 ♜dc5⇌ Black has perfectly good counterplay). 14...hxg6 15.♖dg1, With a good attack (15.h4 ♜f6!/? also leaves White with a plus, but I like the rook move better). Black now has to make the only playable move at each turn, to stop White's advantage from becoming virtually decisive: 15...♜dc5 (if 15...♜ac5?! then 16.♙a2±; as the knight has left a6, and ...♜b4 is no longer a possibility, we can calmly withdraw the bishop like this) 16.h4 And now:

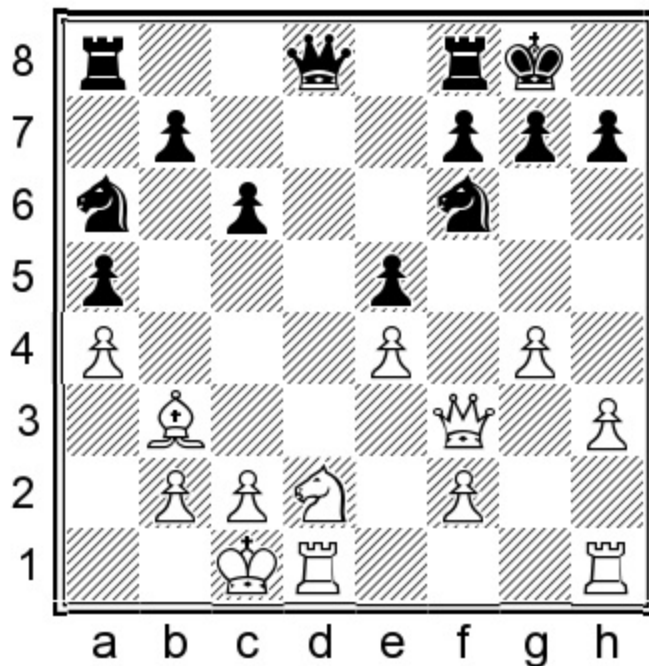
a1) 16...♜xb3† Practically the only move. 17.♜xb3 ♜c7 18.♜g3± With the threat of h4-h5 White wins his pawn back, and the advantages of his position will remain.

Other moves take Black to the brink of defeat:

a2) 16...b5?! 17.h5± with a powerful attack. White will answer 17...g5 with 18.♜f5.

a3) 16...♜f6?! 17.♙c4± and Black would seem to have no way of holding on to the g6-pawn.

b) 12...dxe4 13.dxe4



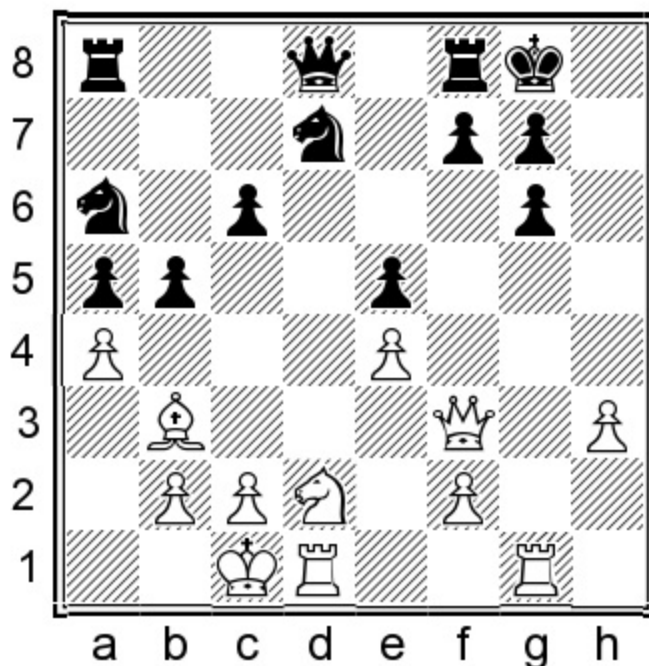
And now:

b1) 13...Qe7 14.h4! The accurate order of moves (rather than 14.g5 Qd7 15.h4 Qdc5∞). 14...Qd7 Now, as we have no pawn *en prise* on g5, we can immediately play our knight to c4. 15.Qc4 Qdc5 16.Qd6± Thanks to his well-placed knight on d6, White is somewhat better.

b2) 13...b5, and now White has a choice:

b21) 14.Qc4 Qe7 15.Qd6 Qc5 16.Qe3 Qxb3† 17.Qxb3 with a slight advantage. White will meet 17...Bfd8 with 18.Qf5, while an interesting answer to 17...g6 is 18.Qa3!?, threatening Qxb5.

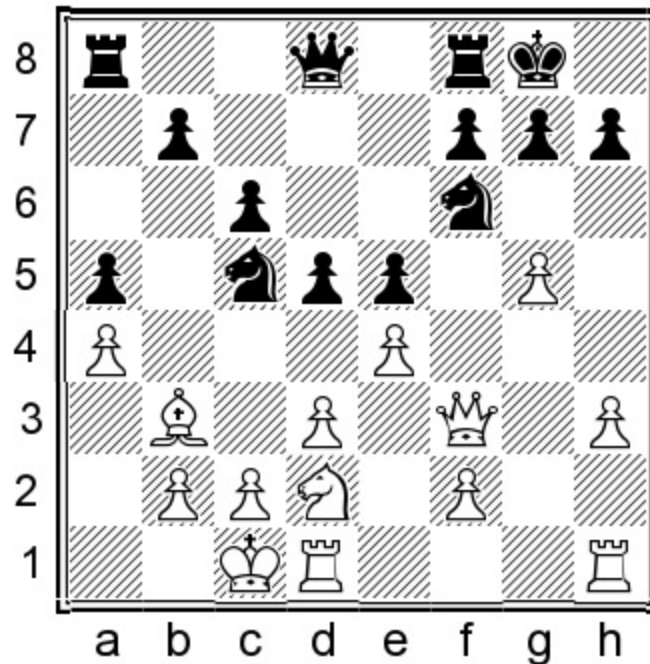
b22) Another interesting line is: 14.g5 Qd7 15.g6!? hxg6 16.Bhg1



16...Qf6 (if 16...bxa4?! then 17.Qc4→; in this case ...Qf6 is much weaker, because after Qc5 the white bishop will not be under attack) 17.Qxf6 Qxf6 18.Bxg6 Qc5 19.Qa2 Qh7 20.Bg5 In

appearance the position is more pleasing for White, but after 20...♖ae8! Black keeps it close to equality.

### 13.g5



### 13...♖e8!

Not the obvious move, but the best one in the position. Black does better to hold on to his d5-pawn rather than exchange it for the one on g5.

Alternatives are:

a) 13...♖xb3† 14.♖xb3 ♖e8 is rather an illogical order of moves. Now 15.exd5 transposes to the main line below, but White also has other options.

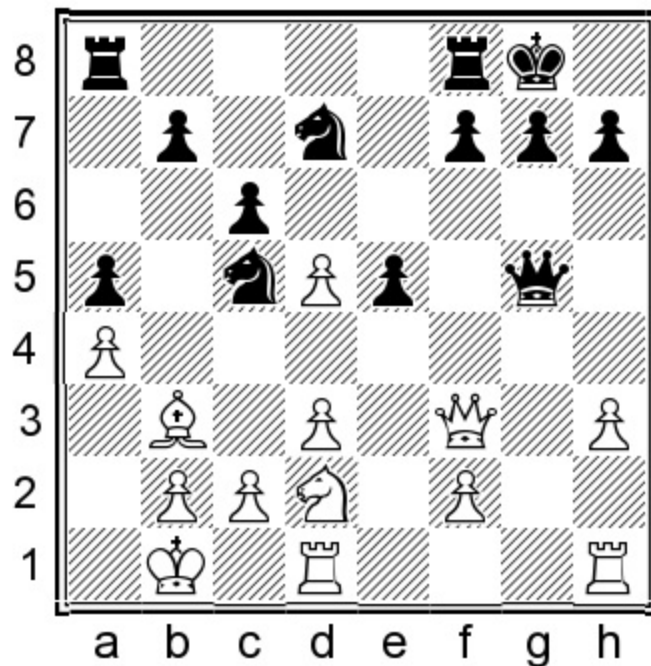
b) 13...dxe4 14.dxe4 ♖fd7 15.h4± and now:

b1) 15...♖e7 16.♖a2!→ with ♖c4 to follow, giving White a large plus. Black can't capture on a4 on account of g5-g6!.

b2) 15...b5 is also strongly answered by 16.♖a2→. Again 16...♖xa4? is unplayable: 17.g6! hxg6 18.h5 g5 19.♖f5+– with the decisive threat of ♖f3.

b3) 15...♖xb3† 16.♖xb3 ♖e7 17.♖c3± Black has a weak pawn on a5, and his knight on d7 lacks scope.

c) 13...♖fd7 is somewhat weaker. 14.exd5 ♖xg5 15.♖b1



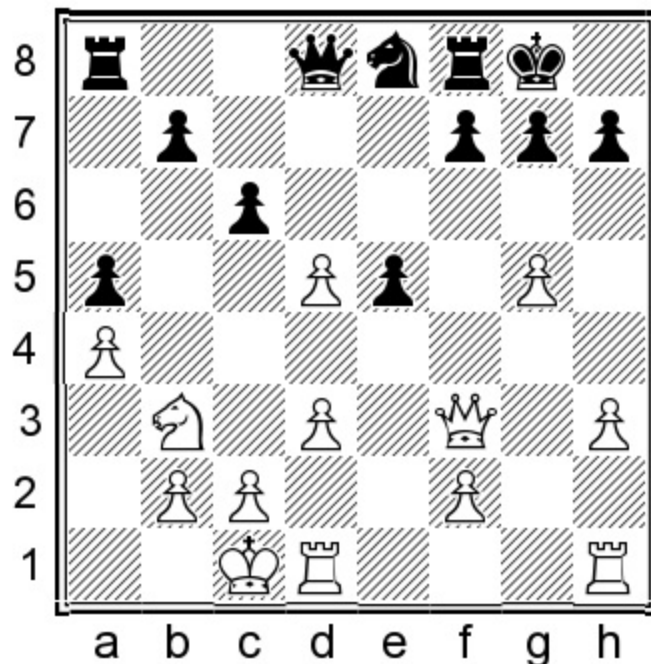
And now, from the diagram:

c1) 15...♖f6 16.♗xf6 ♘xf6 17.dxc6 bxc6 18.♞he1, followed by ♘c4. White has a slight advantage.

c2) 15...♘b3 16.♘b3 ♞fc8 17.♞he1± White has gained the advantage by deploying his pieces conveniently in the centre.

c3) 15...cxd5 16.♗xd5± With such a pawn structure, White is slightly better not only in the middlegame but also in the ending, thanks to the weakness of the a5-pawn. For example: 16...♗f6 17.♘e4 ♗c6 (17...♘xe4? 18.dxe4±) 18.♘xc5 ♘xc5 19.♞he1, with a plus for White after either 19...♗xd5 20.♙xd5 or 19...♘b3 20.♗xb3.

**14.exd5 ♘xb3† 15.♘b3**



### 15...cxd5

The text move is better than 15...♚xg5† 16.♔b1±. Then 16...♚f6 isn't good for Black, because after exchanges of queens and pawns, his a5-pawn is too weak. His best course is 16...cxd5, but even so, after 17.♚xd5, White has an obvious plus.

Now, however, owing to the possibility of ...b7-b5, Black maintains the balance – as the following line illustrates.

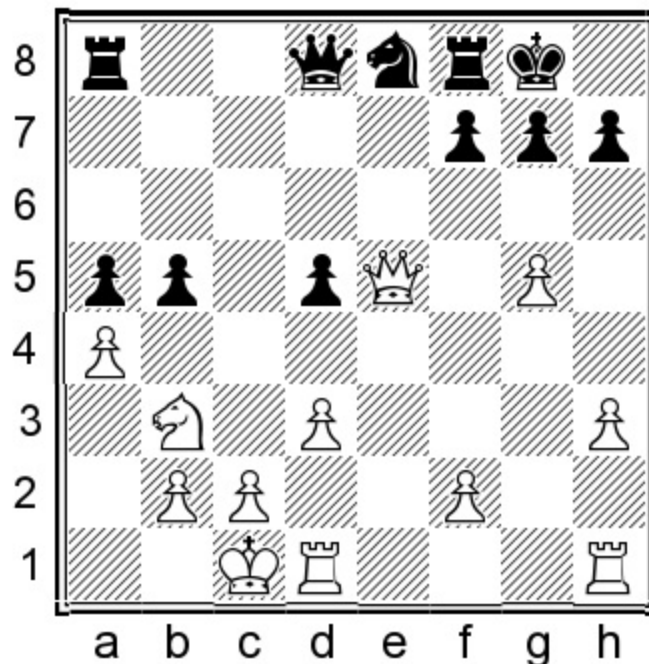
### 16.♚f5

After 16.♞de1 ♚xg5† 17.♔b1 White has quite good compensation for the pawn, but I doubt if he can convert this into an advantage.

### 16...b5!?

Black cannot do without this pawn break, but he may carry it out in different circumstances: 16...♚c7 17.♞he1 ♞c8 18.c3 (not 18.♞d2? ♞d6†, to which White can't reply ♚xe5 on account of ...♞e8) 18...b5! 19.♚xe5 bxa4 20.♚xc7 In this ending Black plays the role of defender, but objectively the position is nearly equal.

### 17.♚xe5

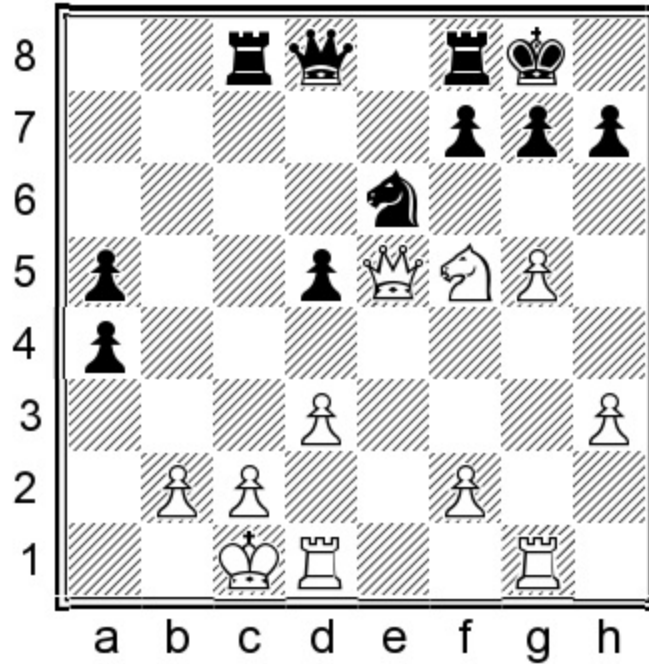


### 17...♞c7!?

The most precise. In this way Black has time to play ...♞e8 before White can bring his knight to f5.

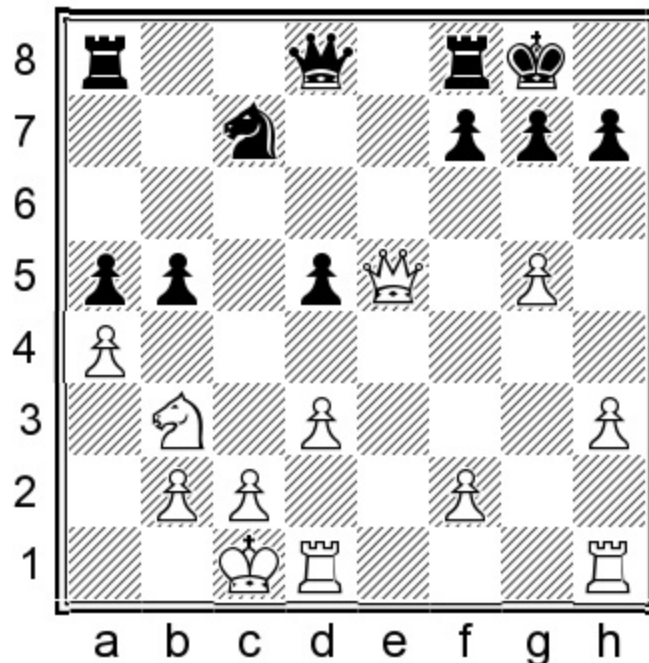
In the event of 17...bxa4 18.♞d4 ♞c7 White can transpose into the main line below by playing 19.♞he1 ♞e8 20.♚f4, but he also has the option of ♞f5 – not that this greatly alters the assessment of the position: 19.♞f5 ♞e6 20.♞hg1 (or 20.h4 ♞b8∞) 20...♞c8 (20...♞b8 21.♞g4 gives White a slight

advantage: 21...♖b5 22.♞xa4 ♚xg5† 23.f4)



And now:

- a) 21.♚d6 ♚xd6 22.♞xd6= The weakness of the c2-pawn deprives White of a plus.
- b) 21.♚xd5 ♚c7 22.♚c4 ♚d7 23.♚d5 ♚c7 24.♚c4= and the game should end in a draw by repetition.
- c) 21.♞g4 ♞c5 22.♞d2∞ By fortifying his pawns on the second rank, White sets up a threat of ♞h6† and ♞xf7†. After the normal 22...♞e8 23.d4 he acquires a small plus. The only way for Black to preserve equal counter-chances is 22...♚h8!?.



18.♞d4

There is hardly any improvement in 18.♘c5 ♜e8 19.♚f4, seeing that on 19...bxa4 we cannot play ♘xa4 on account of ...♗e6.

**18...♜e8 19.♚f4 bxa4 20.♞he1**

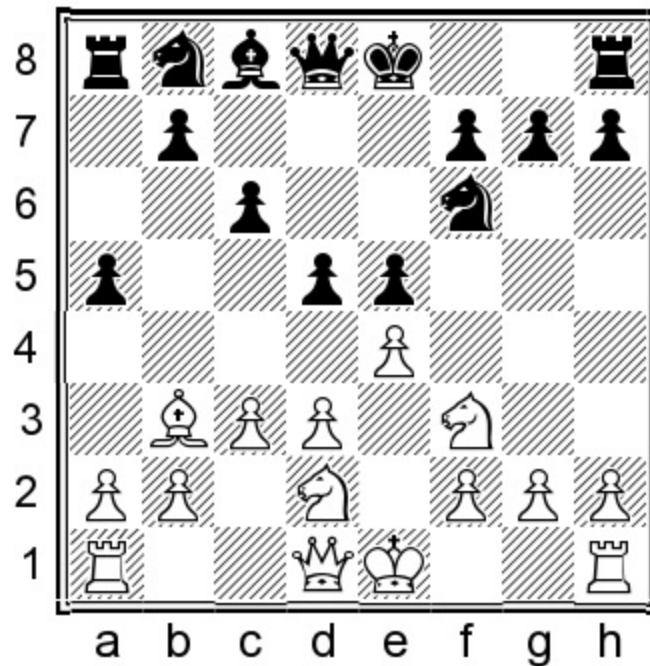
Or 20.♞de1 which comes to almost the same thing.

In the case of 20.h4 on the other hand, White would have to reckon with 20...a3!? 21.bxa3 ♚e7.

**20...♗e6 21.♗xe6 fxe6**

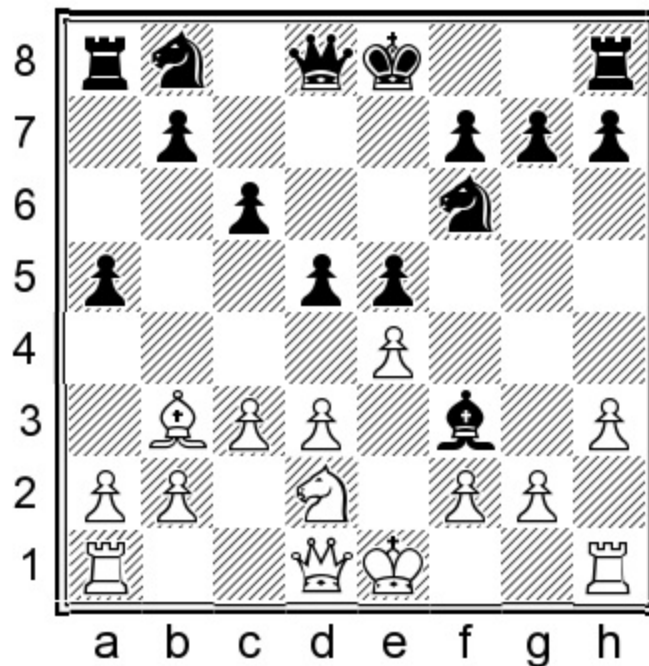
This occurred in Ilyin – Podvoysky, corr. 2017. With the help of some precise moves in the opening, Black has achieved equality, though there is still a good deal of play in the position.

### C2) 8.c3



Black has C21) 8...♗g4 or C22) 8...♗bd7.

**C21) 8...♗g4 9.h3 ♗xf3**



### 10. ♘xf3

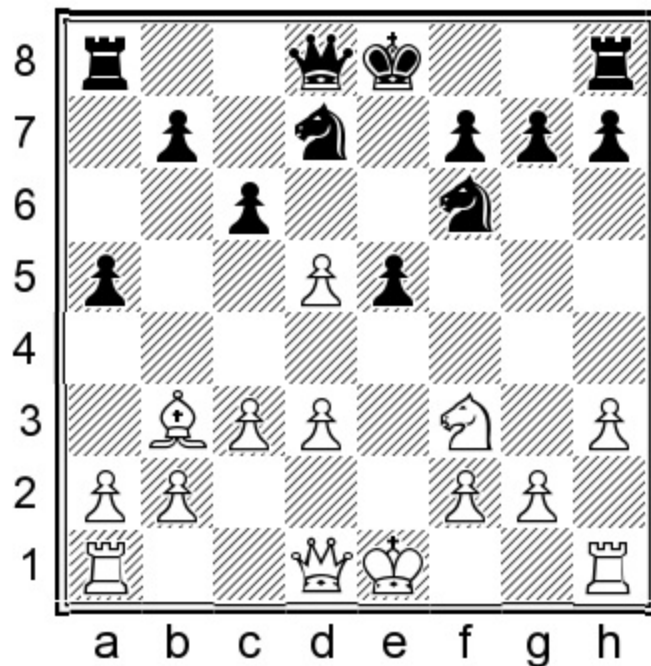
Now it's no good playing 10. ♖xf3 in view of 10...a4 11. ♙c2 0-0 with a comfortable game for Black.

### 10... ♘bd7

Capturing with 10...dxe4 is dangerous: 11. ♘xe5 0-0 12. ♘xf7!? ♖xf7 13. ♙xf7† ♔xf7 14. ♖b3†± And the black king is in trouble: 14...♔f8? is bad in view of 15. ♖xb7. Practically the only move is 14...♔g6, but White still has the advantage after the simple 15.dxe4.

### 11. exd5!?

Not giving Black the opportunity for ...dxe4. After 11.0-0 dxe4 12.dxe4 ♖e7= he has no perceptible problems.



### 11...cxd5

The alternative is dubious:

11...♞xd5 12.♠xd5 cxd5 13.♞b3±

At first sight Black is in a very bad way, though after:

13...e4

It isn't all so simple:

14.dxe4!?

In the event of 14.♞d4 0-0 15.♞xd5 ♞e8 16.dxe4 ♞e5 Black will have partial compensation, since White's king will be left in the centre.

14...dxe4 15.0-0-0! 0-0

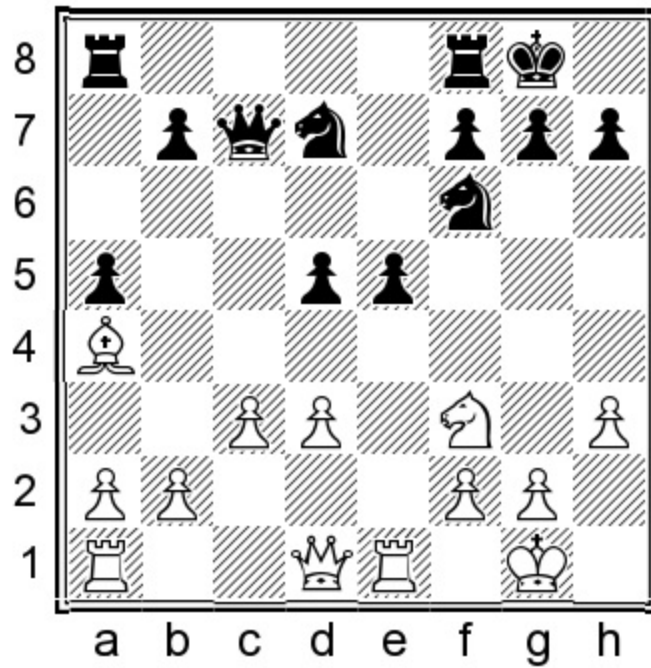
The text move is better than: 15...♞c7 16.♞a4±

16.♞xb7 exf3 17.♞xd7±

White emerges with an extra pawn. Now 17...♞g5† 18.♞d2 is bad for Black, as is 17...fxg2 18.♞xd8 – since after the exchange of queens White can play ♜hg1 and pick up the g2-pawn.

Black's best option is 17...♞b6 18.♞g4, after which White's advantage is not so great.

12.0-0 0-0 13.♞e1 ♞c7 14.♠a4



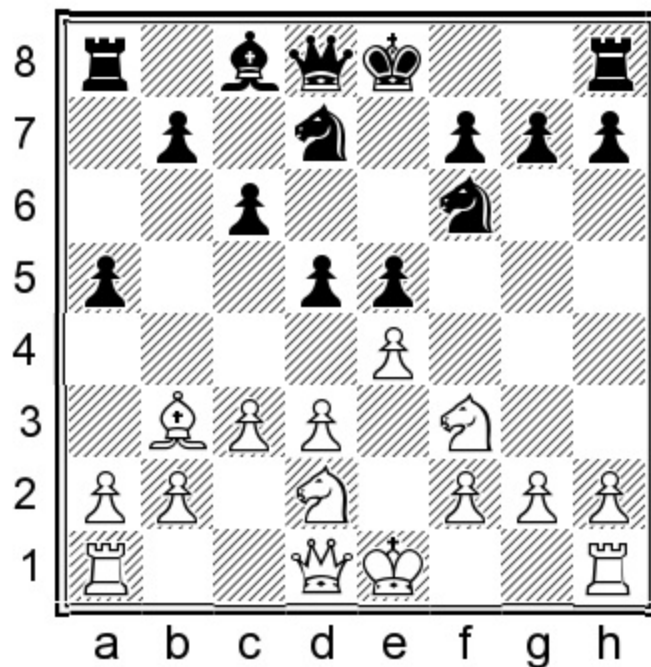
**14...e4**

Or 14...♖ad8 15.♚c2 ♜fe8 16.♞e3, and after White doubles on the e-file he will have a slight advantage.

**15.♘d4 ♘c5 16.♙b5**

Owing to his good bishop on b5, White is a little better. Capturing on d3 is not in Black's favour, while a good answer to 16...a4 is 17.dxe4 dxe4 18.♚c2, maintaining White's small plus.

**C22) 8...♘bd7**



## 9.exd5!?

Immediately forcing Black to decide what to recapture with. Instead 9.0-0 allows him the option of 9...dxe4.

## 9...cxd5

After 9...cxd5 10.0-0 0-0 11.Ke1± White has the advantage owing to his lead in development. For example:

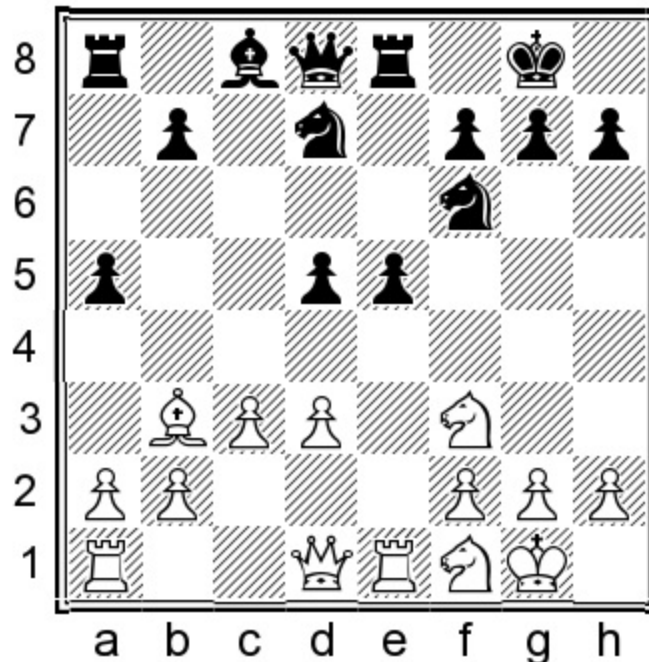
a) 11...Qc7 12.Nc4 a4 13.Bc2± and Black has problems with the defence of his e-pawn, seeing that ...Re8 will be met by d2-d4. Against 13...a3 White does quite well with 14.Nxa3 Nxc3 15.Qd2, followed by returning the knight to c4.

b) 11...Nf4 12.Ne4 Ng6 13.Ng3± with d3-d4 to follow.

## 10.0-0 0-0 11.Ke1 Re8 12.Nf1

According to the Mega Database, this position has only been seen once – in Carlsen – Caruana, Stavanger 2018.

With 12.Ba4 White prevents ...b7-b5, but Black can do without that move: 12...b6 13.Nf1 Ba6 14.Ne3∞ with about equal chances.

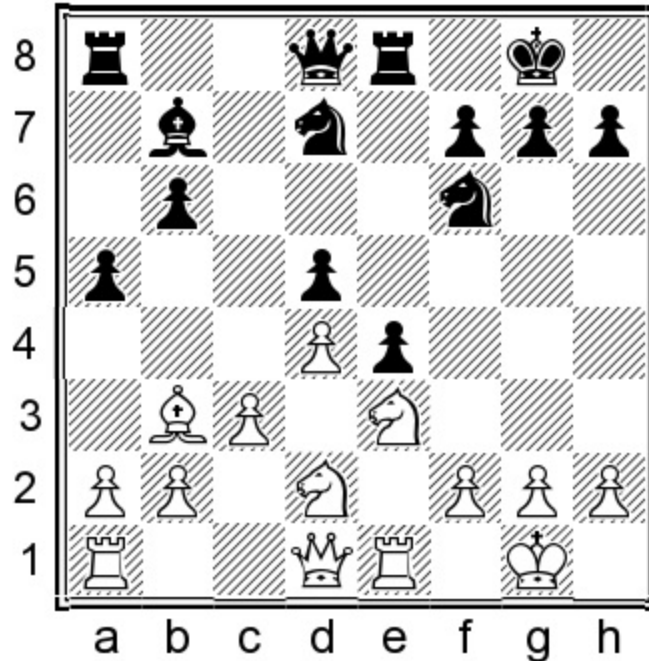


## 12...b5!?

An ambitious move, selected by Caruana in the aforementioned game. Let's also look at Black's other choices:

a) 12...b6 A more modest expedient for bringing the bishop into play on b7 – a trifle passive, but not a

bad move overall. 13.♘e3 ♕b7 14.d4 e4 15.♘d2



With these possibilities:

a1) 15...♘f8 16.♕a4 ♖e6 17.f3± with a slight edge after 17...exf3 18.♚xf3.

a2) 15...♗c6! threatening ...a5-a4. This intermediate move enables Black to keep the position unclear: 16.a4 ♘f8 17.f3 exf3, with a playable game after 18.♘xf3 or 18.♚xf3. White's side is easier to handle because he has the more active light-squared bishop, but the position is unclear when viewed objectively.

b) 12...♚c7 13.♘e3 ♘b6 14.a4, and now:

b1) 14...♗g4!/? is interesting: 15.h3 (or 15.♘xg4 ♘xg4∞) 15...♗h5 16.g4 ♗g6 17.d4 exd4 18.cxd4 followed by ♘e5. White appears to be just a little better.

b2) 14...♗e6 15.d4 e4 16.♘e5 with a small plus for White. If either knight goes to d7, then 17.f4 is not bad.

### 13.a4

Black can meet 13.♘e3 with 13...♕b7 14.a4 b4, to transpose to the main line. But he also has other possibilities: 13...♘b6 or 13...♘c5.

### 13...b4

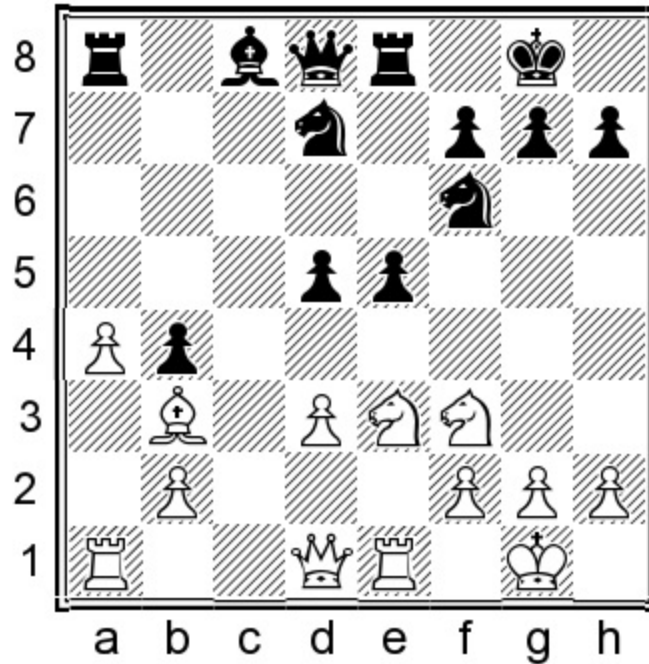
The exchange 13...bxa4 14.♕xa4 creates a potential weakness on a5. Black is more passively placed than after 13...b4. There can follow:

a) 14...♖b8 15.♖a2 ♚c7 16.♚a1±, immediately attacking the a5-pawn. After 16...♗a6 17.♗xd7 ♘xd7 White can take the pawn and meet ...♗xd3 either by capturing on d5 or by playing ♘e3!/?.

b) 14...♙b7 15.♘e3 ♚c7 16.d4 e4 17.♘e5± White has the advantage owing to his superior pawn structure and more active light-squared bishop.

c) 14...♚c7 15.♘e3 ♜d8!? Relieving the pin, to forestall d3-d4 ...e5-e4 ♘e5 (instead 15...♙b7 16.d4 transposes to 14...♙b7). 16.d4 e4 17.♘d2 ♘f8 18.♙c2, followed by ♜a2 and pressure against the a5-pawn. White's position is a little more pleasant.

### 14.cxb4 axb4 15.♘e3



### 15...♙b7

After 15...♘c5 16.d4 exd4 17.♘xd4± White has a small but stable plus on account of his superior pawn structure.

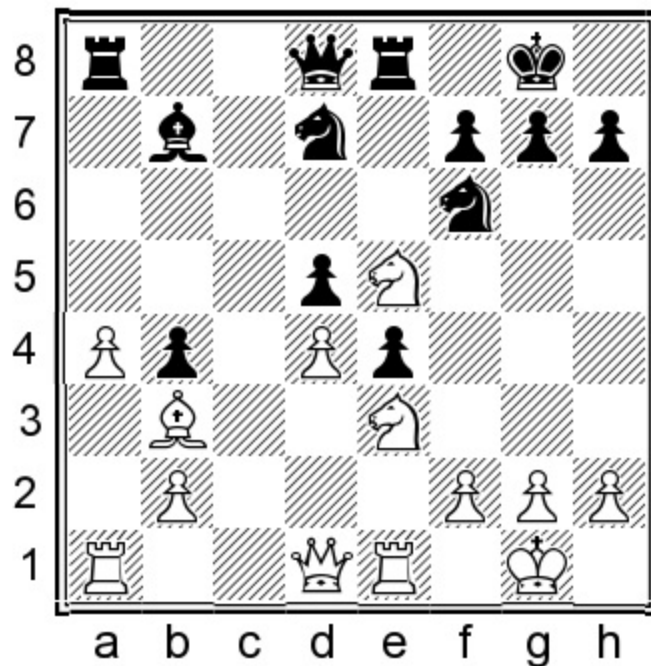
In the event of 15...♚a5 16.d4 e4 17.♘e5 ♘xe5 18.dxe5 ♜xe5 19.♚d4± White executes the same idea as after 15...♙b7, but in a much more favourable form.

### 16.d4!?

The interesting idea of this move is to sacrifice a pawn on e5 in order to free the d4-square for the queen. It leads to a complicated position, but White's side is easier to play because his plan is clearer.

The variation 16.♘f5 ♚b6 17.♚d2 (or 17.a5 ♜xa5!? 18.♜xa5 ♚xa5 19.♘d6 ♜e7 20.♘xb7 ♚c7∞ and the knight can't be rescued from b7; after 21.d4 e4 22.♘c5 the position remains unclear) 17...h6 leaves Black with a comfortable position.

### 16...e4 17.♘e5



17...♞xe5

Or:

17...♞xe5!?

This is a very interesting sacrifice with the aim of advancing the d-pawn. After this, however, the price of any error is greatly increased, and finding the best moves is essential for Black.

There can follow:

18.dxe5 ♞xe5 19.♞d4

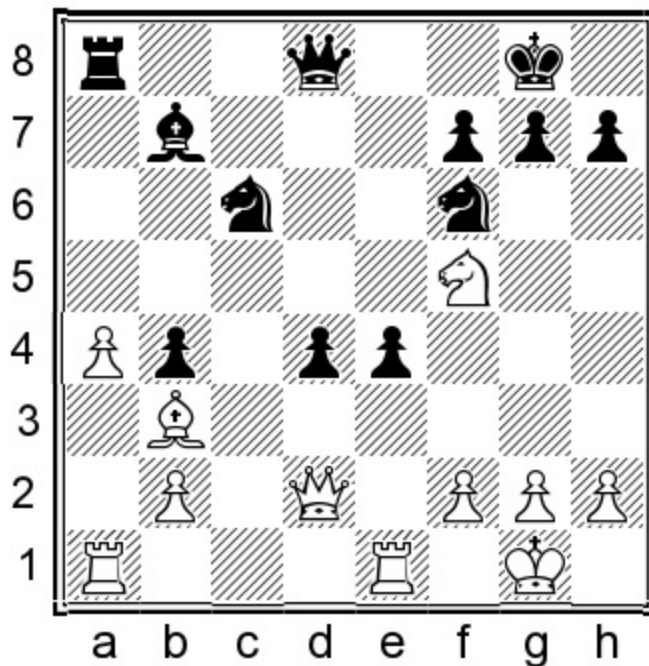
After 19.♞xd5 ♞xd5 20.♞xd5 ♞xd5 21.♞xe4∞ White's rook and a-pawn are no worse than two knights, but he scarcely has any advantage.

19...♞c6

Black has to push his d-pawn or his exchange sacrifice makes no sense.

After 19...♞d3? 20.♞e2± the knight on d3 looks pretty but is of little use.

20.♞d2 d4 21.♞f5



21...♖a5

This is the only way to defend against the threats of ♖g5 and ♖f4.

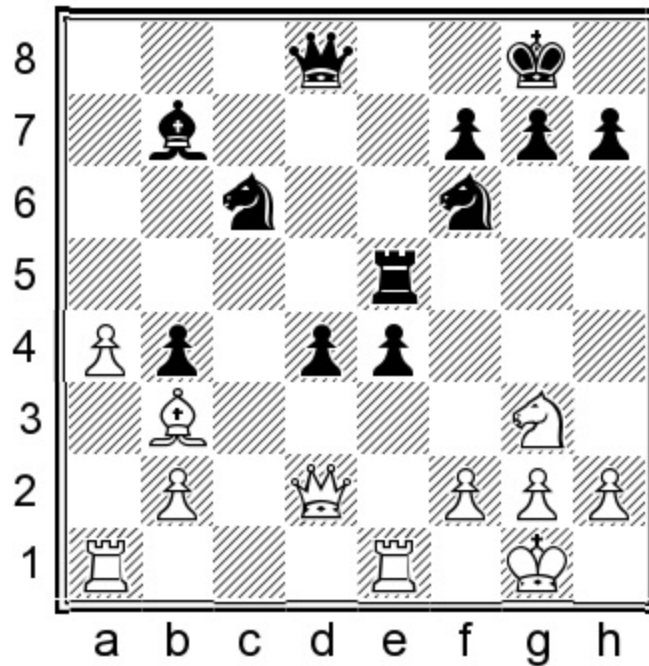
Without this rook manoeuvre, Black loses: 21...d3? 22.♖g5+–, or 21...h6? 22.♖f4+– and there is no defence against the threatened ♖g3.

In answer to 21...♖a5, White has:

a) 22.♖f4 ♖e5! (Black loses with 22...♖e5? 23.a5 d3 24.a6 ♖a8 25.♖ec1+– as the passed a-pawn decides the issue; for instance 25...♖d5 26.♖xe5!? ♖xe5 27.♖xd5 ♖xd5 28.♖c8+–, and after ♖e7† and ♖xc8 there is no stopping the a6-pawn) 23.♖ad1 d3 24.♖g3∞ with approximately equal chances.

b) 22.♖g5? is in this case a bad move: 22...g6 23.♖h6† ♖g7†

c) 22.♖g3 ♖e5

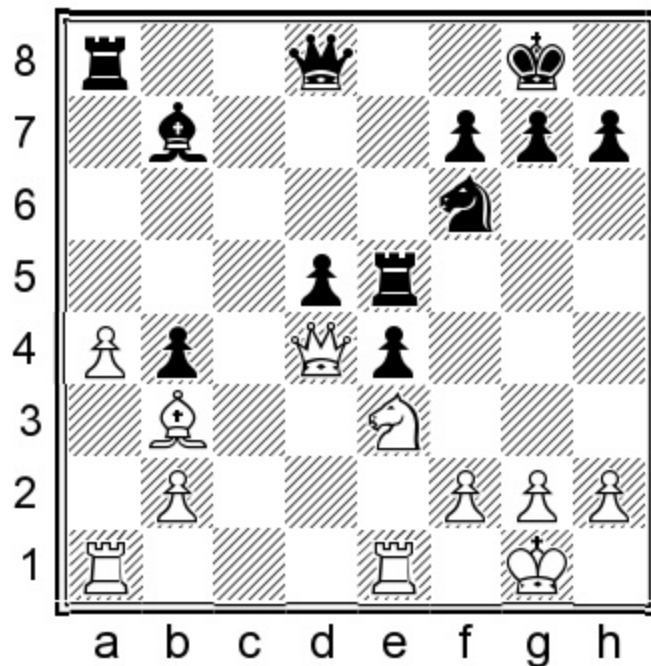


And now:

c1) 23.a5 ♖xa5 24.♙xb4 ♘xb3 25.♙xb3♞ With precise play, Black probably has enough compensation for the exchange. In the event of 25...♙d5 26.♙b4 White is better, but after 25...♙d7!? the position remains unclear. White can repeat moves with 26.♙a4 ♙d5 27.♙a2, or continue the game with 26.♙a7 ♙b5 27.♙a4; then there is still everything to play for.

c2) 23.♙ad1, with the idea of sacrificing a piece in answer to ...d4-d3, is also interesting: 23...d3 24.♘xe4!? ♙xe4 25.♙xe4 ♘xe4 26.♙f4 (it doesn't pay to be hasty with 26.♙xd3 ♙xd3 27.♙xd3 ♘c5 28.♙e3 ♘f8∞; the knight on c5 is too well placed, stopping the white bishop from becoming active) 26...♘f6 27.♙c4∞ The rook and outside passed a-pawn are in no way worse than two pieces. Without queens White would most likely have a plus – but with them the position remains unclear, because Black can try for an attack on the king.

**18.dxe5 ♙xe5 19.♙d4**



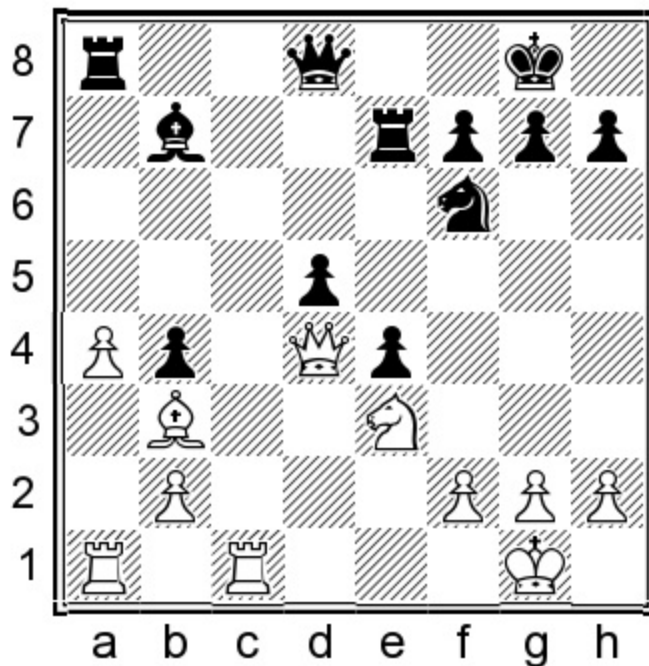
### 19...♖e6!N

A difference between this and 19...♖e7 is that Black will have the important option of exchanging queens with ...♙b6. Moreover ♘f5 doesn't look as attractive as it would with the rook on e7. If 19...♗g5?! then 20.♖ed1± and the black rook on g5 is simply out of play.

After 19...♖e7 there are these possibilities:

a) 20.♖ac1 In my view it's more useful to leave this rook on a1, behind the a4-pawn which may soon be advanced. 20...♘e8!?N This move is rather more effective here than against 20.♖ec1 (in the Carlsen – Caruana game, Black played 20...♗d7±). 21.♘f5 ♗d7 22.♙xb4 ♘c7∞ With a white rook on a1 instead of e1, Black's ...♘c7 would be worse, as the a-pawn would advance with the rook's support.

b) 20.♖ec1!?N±

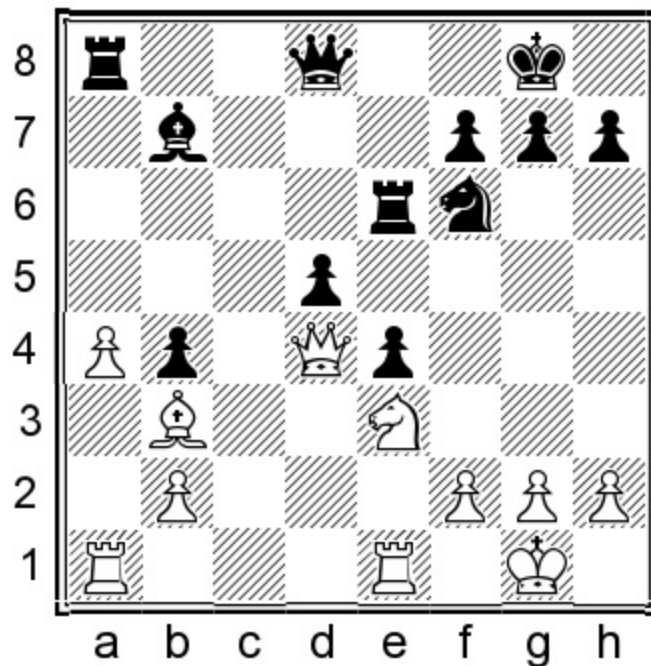


And now, from the diagram:

b1) After the normal 20...♞d7 21.♞c5± Black simply has no useful moves: 21...♞a5 22.♞ac1 h6 with advantage to White. Black still has difficulty finding a good move while White can reposition his bishop via d1 or capture with ♞xa5 and follow with ♞c5.

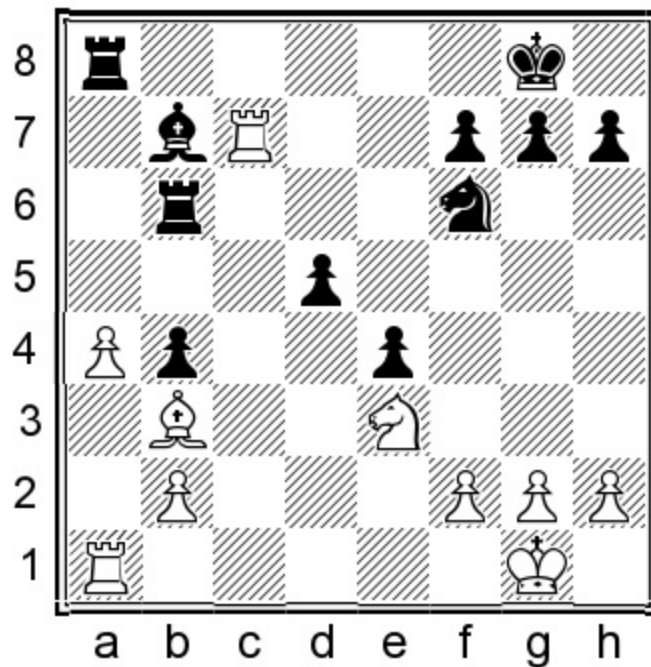
b2) 20...♞c7 21.♞xb4 With his rook on c7 Black can't play ...d5-d4, so we have time to pick up the pawn and return to d4 with our queen: 21...♞b8 22.♞d4± with a good plus for White. The queenside pawns will soon be moving forward.

b3) 20...♞e8!? Aiming to bring the knight to d6; this slightly bizarre move is probably Black's best possibility, though I would be surprised if it came into anyone's head in over-the-board play. 21.♞f5 (or 21.♞xb4 ♞d7 22.♞f5) 21...♞d7 22.♞xb4± The knight heads for d4; the position remains complex although White is a shade better.



### 20.♞ed1

With 20.♞ec1!? White allows an exchange of queens but nonetheless retains some activity in the ending: 20...♚b6 21.♙xb6 ♞xb6 22.♞c7

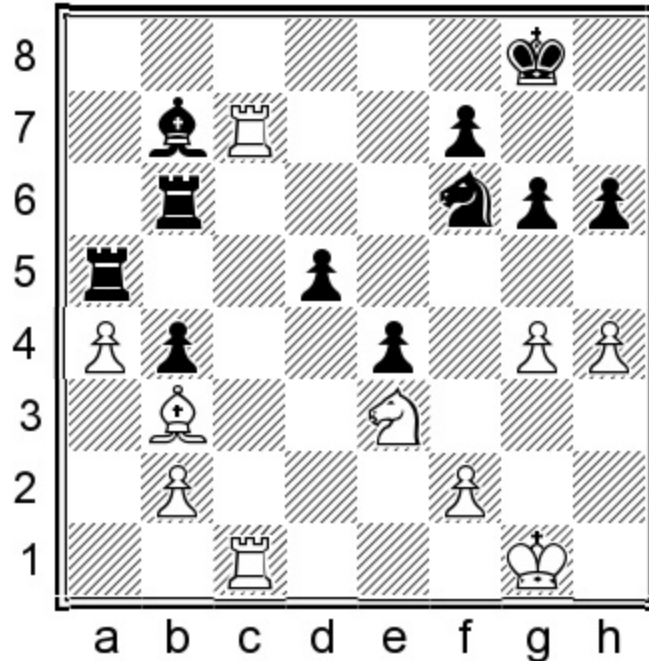


White has good compensation due to the activity of his rook on c7. It cannot be said that Black is worse, but from the practical viewpoint White's game is much easier to play. Let's look at these possible continuations:

a) 22...g6?! is imprecise: 23.g4! Now Black can only defend against one of the threats, g4-g5 or a4-a5. 23...♞a5 (not 23...h6? 24.a5 ♞b5 25.a6+–; after 25...♙c8 26.a7 the pawn is too far advanced) 24.g5 ♜e8 25.♞d7 ♙c6 26.♞d8 d4 27.♜d5! Forcing Black to give up his bishop, after which the a-pawn is

much more dangerous. 27...♙xd5 28.♞xd5± After Black exchanges on d5 and plays ...♜d6, White continues with ♞d1!, recovering the pawn and gaining an appreciable advantage.

b) 22...♞a5 23.g4 h6 24.♞ac1 g6 25.h4= In actual fact White has no particular threats at the moment, but if Black tries to play actively he risks encountering problems; his best policy is to mark time.



For example:

b1) 25...♙f8 26.♙h2 ♜e8 27.♞d7 ♜f6?! (reckoning on 28.♞dc7 ♜e8 with a repetition of moves, but Black's problems are not to be solved so simply) 28.♞d8† ♙e7 29.♞b8 ♙d6 30.♞d1± The threat of ♜c4† gives Black distinct trouble. On 30...♞c5 White has 31.g5; then after the exchange of pawns and ♜d7, his rook will go to e8.

b2) 25...♞aa6? 26.g5 hxg5 27.hxg5± After 27...♜e8 28.♞d7 the d5-pawn is not to be defended.

b3) 25...♙g7 26.♙h2 (or 26.♞1c5 ♞xc5 27.♞xc5, and the game can end in perpetual check: 27...d4 28.♞c7 dxe3 29.♞xf7† ♙h8 30.♞f8† ♙g7=) In general terms, both players have difficulty improving their positions here. It probably pays Black to stay put – for instance with 26...♙f8 27.♙g3 ♙g7 – and it will be hard for White to make progress in any way.

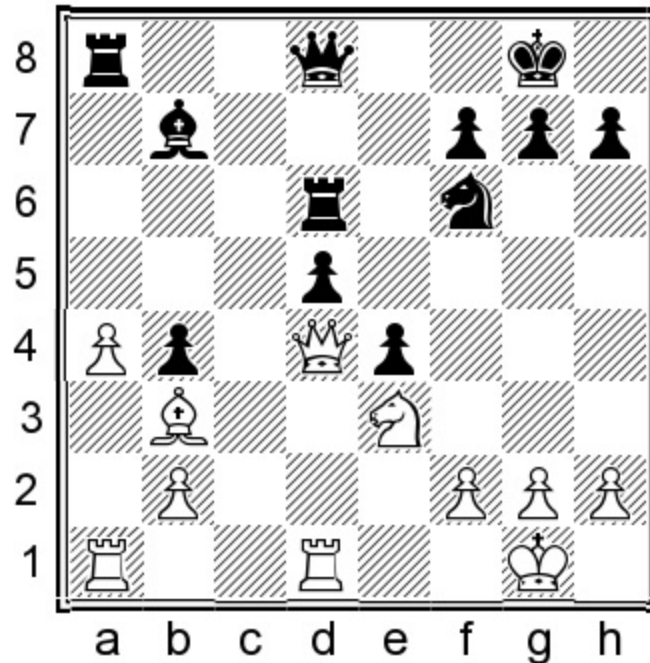
## 20...♞d6

Quite likely 20...h6!? is more accurate, depriving White of additional possibilities on his 21st. But 20...♞d6 is more natural, and in any case we shall examine the position that can result from either move-order.

In answer to 20...h6, with the idea of reaching a rook ending after exchanges on d5, White can play: 21.h3!? (21.♜xd5 ♜xd5 22.♙xd5 ♙xd5 23.♞xd5 ♞xd5 24.♞xd5= leads to a drawish endgame) Then Black has nothing better than 21...♞d6 anyway.

Black does badly with: 20...♞b6?! 21.♞xb6 ♞xb6 22.♙xd5 ♜xd5 23.♜xd5 ♙xd5 24.♞xd5± Owing to

the poor position of his rook on b6, he has a difficult ending. White will meet ...♖c6 with ♜b5.



### 21.h3

One of a number of moves that are about equally good. Let's take a brief look at White's other choices:

a) 21.♙c4 g6∞ Since the white bishop can go to b5, it's a good idea for Black to deprive the knight of the f5-square. I'm not convinced White should play 22.♙b5 in view of ...♘h5, but 22.b3!? isn't bad, giving an unclear position.

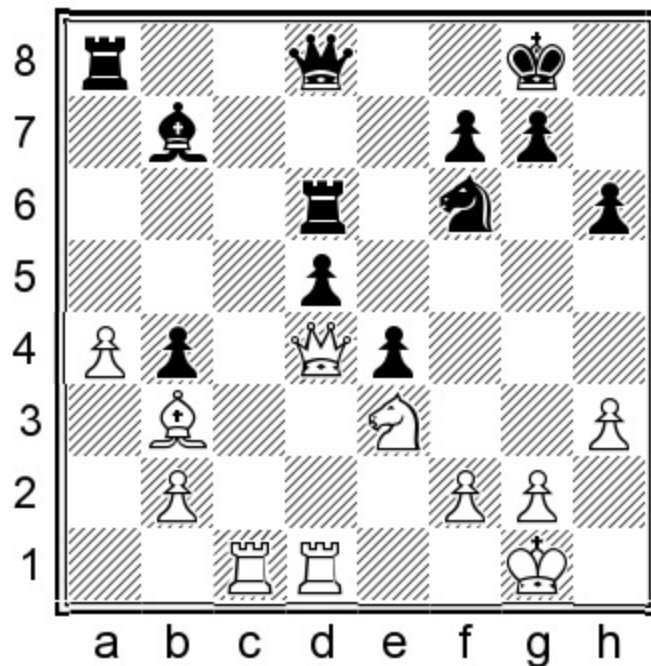
b) 21.a5 ♙a6 22.♘f5 ♖d7 23.♖dc1 h6∞ Black's idea is ...♙a6-c4. White should probably continue 24.♙a4 ♖c7 25.♚xb4, with roughly equal chances.

### 21...h6

This position could also arise from 20...h6 21.h3 ♖d6.

Another possibility is: 21...g6 22.a5!? ♙a6 (not 22...♖xa5?; since Black has played ...g7-g6 his knight is no longer supported by the pawn, so White wins with 23.♖xa5 ♚xa5 24.♘c4+-) 23.♖dc1∞ White can't take immediately on d5 on account of ...♙d3, so he aims to bring his rook to c5.

### 22.♖ac1∞



The rook heads for c5. Objectively the position is unclear, but White's side is easier to play because his pieces are more active. Black has more difficulty improving his position.

### Conclusion

Against White's 7.♘bd2, just as in some other variations, it's important for Black to play ...a7-a5!. In this case, playing it at once on move 7 is best.

7...♘bd7 is not ideal, as after 8.0-0 a level of accuracy is demanded of Black to stay out of trouble. In particular it is worth noting the novelty I suggest for White on move 14. In practical terms, White has the better chances, though a long series of perfect moves by Black might lead to a position he can hold.

If 7...♙g4 then after 8.h3 ♙xf3 9.♚xf3 White should gain a slight edge. As in much of this chapter, White's play generally involves g2-g4.

In answer to 7...a5! there are two possibilities for White to choose from:

He can play 8.a4 as in the game Rapport – Ding Liren, Wijk aan Zee 2019, but instead of castling kingside at move 11 he has the more interesting 11.g4!?, requiring some precise play on Black's part.

Or White can play 8.c3 which is familiar especially from Carlsen – Caruana, Stavanger 2018. This leads to a complex position in which White's practical chances are a little better, thanks to the activity of his pieces.

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## Part II

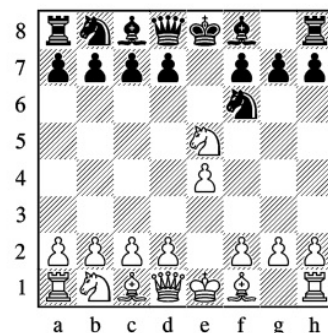
# Petroff Defence

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## Chapter 9

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## Rare Third Moves

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5

A) 3...Qe7?! 184

B) 3...Nxe4 186

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5

In this chapter we consider the minor lines A) 3...Qe7?! and B) 3...Nxe4.

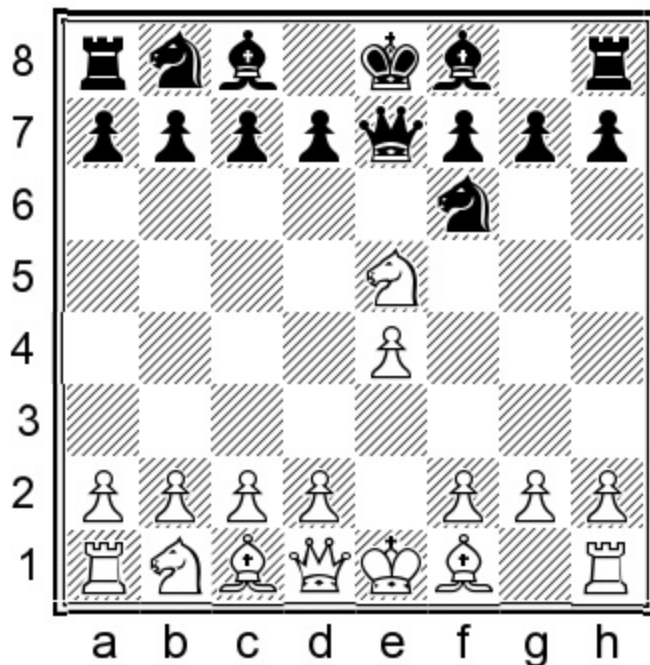
There are some even more minor lines where Black turns the Petroff into an unsound gambit:

3...Nc6?! is a dubious line that contains one trap. 4.Nxc6 dxc6 5.d3 Qc5 6.Qe2!? One of the sensible options. (Black's dream is 6.Qg5?? Nxe4! 7.Qxd8 Qxf2† 8.Qe2 Qg4# but since 6...Qxf2† also works, it is even more unlikely that White will blunder into this) 6...Ng4 This is Black's only aggressive try. 7.Qxg4 Qh4 8.g3 Qxg4 9.Qxg4 Qxg4 10.Qe3± In Murshed – Saidul, Dhaka 2010, White was a pawn up in the ending, with a solid structure.

3...d5?! has been tried a few times by Jobava in blitz and rapid. One of many good options is: 4.exd5 ♖xd5 5.d4 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 ♜xc6 7.♚e2† Effectively forcing a queen exchange when White has a solid extra pawn. 7...♙e7 8.♚b5± Vachier-Lagrave – Jobava, Leuven (blitz) 2017.

The main line, 3...d6, will be examined in the chapters that follow.

### A) 3...♚e7?!



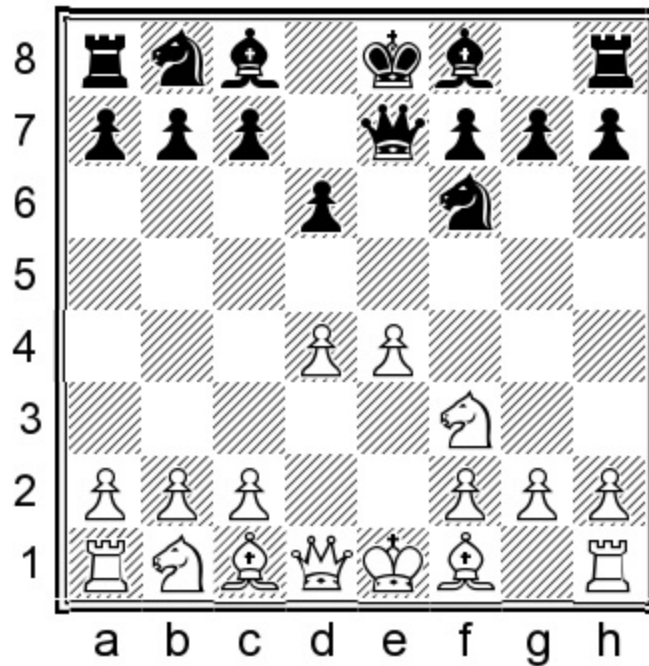
A move for lovers of sharp sensations.

#### 4.d4!?

The simple 4.♘f3 gives White a small plus after 4...♘xe4 5.♙e2 d5±. But why not extract the maximum from the position?

#### 4...♘c6!?

It looks like a minor capitulation to play 4...d6 5.♘f3.



And now:

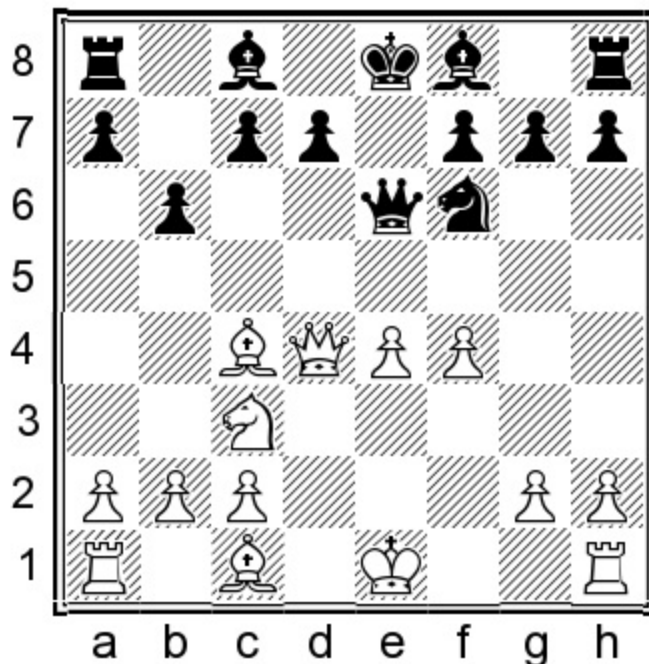
a) 5... ♖xe4† 6. ♗e2 ♗f5 7. ♘a3, and it's time for the black queen to retreat: 7... ♚e7 8. 0-0 ♚d7 9. c4 h6!? An attempt to preserve the bishop. (After 9... ♗e7 10. ♘h4 ♗e4 11. f3 ♗g6 12. g4!± Black doesn't manage to complete his development normally.) 10. ♘h4 ♗h7 11. ♚b3! ♘c6 12. d5 ♘d4 13. ♚e3† ♚e7 And after the simple 14. ♗d1 c5 15. dxc6± it's obvious that Black is too far behind in development.

b) 5... ♘xe4 6. ♗e2 (now after ...d6-d5, Black will be a tempo down on the 4. ♘f3 ♘xe4 line) 6... d5 7. 0-0 ♚d8 8. c4 dxc4 9. ♗xc4 ♗e7 10. ♘c3 ♘d6 11. ♗b3 0-0 12. ♗f4 With a large plus for White.

**5. ♘c3 ♘xe5 6. dxe5 ♚xe5 7. f4 ♚e6 8. ♚d4!**

A good centralization of the queen; Black can't prevent ♗c4.

**8...b6 9. ♗c4**



### 9...♙c5

Black is unsuccessful with 9...♙g4 10.e5 ♙c5 11.♙d3, and now:

a) After 11...♙xg2 12.♖f1, Black has to choose between sacrificing a piece or going into a bad ending: 12...♙b7 (12...b5 is most simply answered by 13.♙e2! ♙xe2† 14.♙xe2 ♖g8 15.♜xb5± with abundant winning chances; also 12...0-0 13.exf6 ♖e8† 14.♜e2+- is hopeless for Black) 13.exf6 0-0-0 14.♙d5 ♖de8† 15.♙d1 ♙xd5 16.♜xd5 And having taken the piece, White will increase his advantage. For example: 16...c6 17.b4! ♙d4 18.c3 gxf6 And now the most precise move is 19.♙d2!+-, after which White has a won game.

b) 11...♙b7 is no better: 12.exf6 ♙xg2 (or 12...0-0-0 13.♙g3 ♖he8† 14.♙e2+-) 13.♖f1!? Simplest; Black can't avoid a queen exchange. 13...0-0-0 (13...0-0 14.♙g3 ♙xg3† 15.hxg3+- is even worse, as in Aframeev – A. Zaitsev, Tula 2005) 14.♙g3 ♖de8† 15.♜e2 ♙xg3† 16.hxg3± The position is close to being won for White.

### 10.♙d3 ♙e7

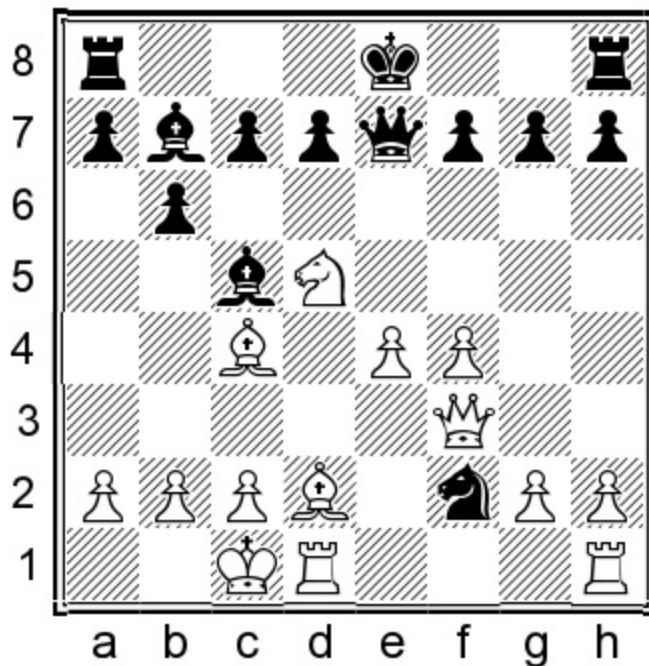
If 10...♙g4, then 11.e5 transposes to the 9...♙g4 line.

### 11.♙d2 ♙b7 12.0-0-0

If White simply completes his development, he will have a large plus. We will just need to check that the threat of ...♜g4 doesn't help Black to solve his problems.

### 12...0-0-0

Or 12...♜g4 13.♙f3 ♜f2 14.♜d5:



With these possibilities:

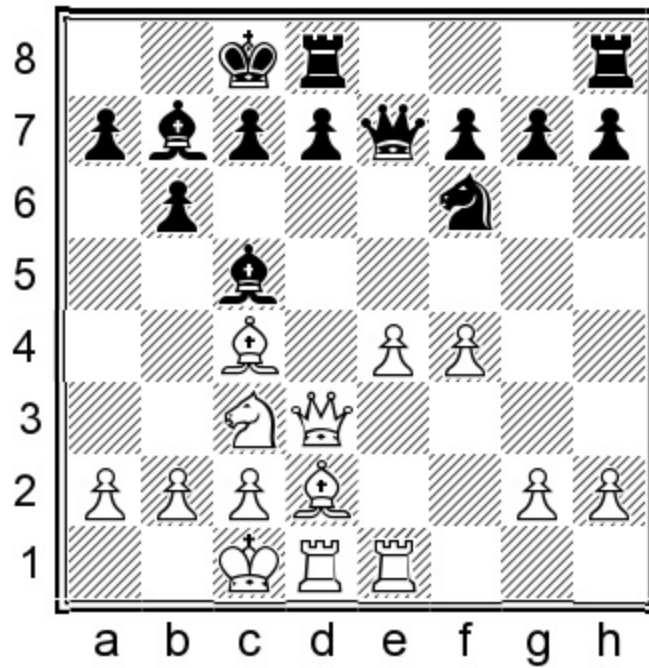
a) 14...♔d6 15.♙c3 ♖xh1 16.b4! White has three simultaneous threats: ♜f6†, bxc5 and ♖xh1. And now:

a1) If 16...♜f2 17.♜f6† ♜xf6 18.♙xf6 gxf6, then 19.♞d2± is not bad, but 19.♙xf7† is probably the most punishing: 19...♜e7 20.bxc5 ♜xd1 21.♙h5+— In this position, which is far removed from the main lines, there is no need to demonstrate why Black stands badly; I will just say that the computer's evaluation is somewhere between +2 and +2.5.

a2) 16...0-0-0 17.bxc5 ♜xc5 18.♙b3 ♞he8 19.♙d4! White needs to secure his knight before capturing on h1 (not 19.♖xh1? c6=). 19...♜f8 (19...♜a3† 20.♙b2 ♜f8 21.♖xh1+— is even worse) 20.♖xh1± With extra material and a good position.

b) 14...♙xd5 15.exd5 0-0 (White was threatening not only ♞e1 but also d5-d6) 16.♞de1 ♜h4 17.♞hf1 ♜g4 18.♜d3± With h2-h3 to follow; Black has less space, and his pieces are rather clumsily placed.

### 13.♞he1



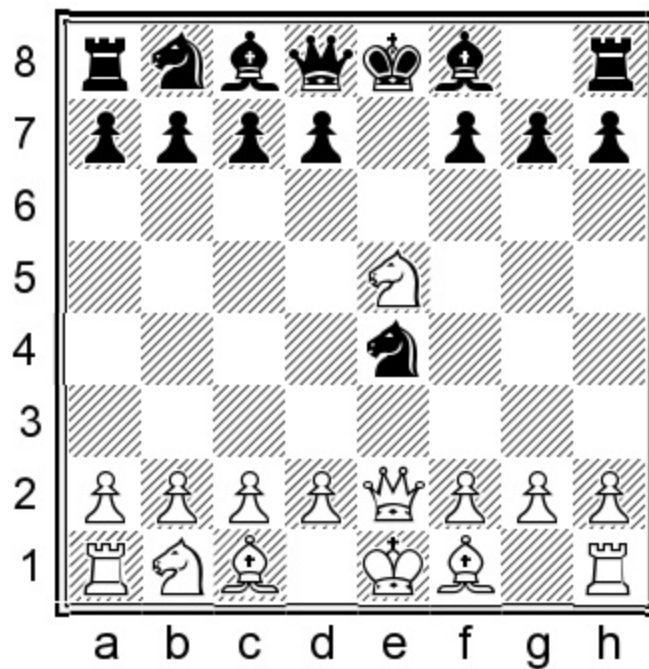
### 13...♔b8

After 13...♔g4 14.♘d5 ♚f8 (14...♚h4 15.b4 ♘f8 16.g3 ♚h3 17.♞e2± is no better) 15.b4! ♘e7 16.♞e2± White obviously has a big advantage.

### 14.♞e2±

White has calmly arranged his pieces in the centre, and Black is at a loss for a good continuation.

### B) 3...♘xe4 4.♚e2



### 4...♚e7

After 4...d5? 5.d3 ♖e7 6.dxe4 ♖xe5 7.exd5± Black is simply a pawn down.

### 5. ♖xe4 d6 6.d4 dxe5

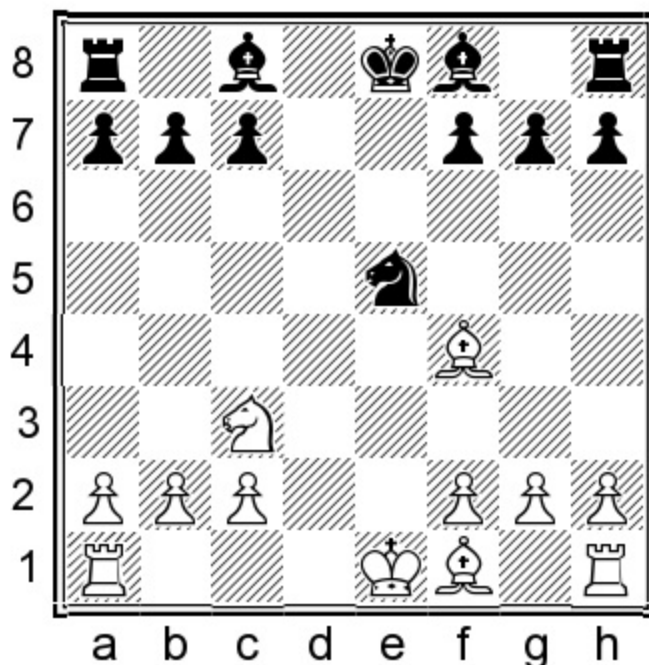
Not 6...♗d7? 7.f4 f6 8.♗c3±.

### 7.dxe5 ♗c6 8.♗c3

A simple and good decision. White gives up the pawn on e5 and obtains a stable plus in the ending.

### 8...♖xe5 9.♖xe5† ♗xe5 10.♗f4

Black is slightly behind in development and will now have to struggle to draw.



### 10...♗d6

After 10...f6 11.0-0-0 ♗d7 (11...♗d6 12.♗g3 transposes to 10...♗d6) 12.♗b5 ♗xb5 (or 12...0-0-0 13.♗xa7† ♖b8 14.♗b5±) 13.♗xb5† c6 14.♗a4± the two bishops guarantee White an advantage.

### 11.♗g3!

It's important to protect the bishop. If 11.0-0-0?! then 11...♗d3†=.

### 11...f6

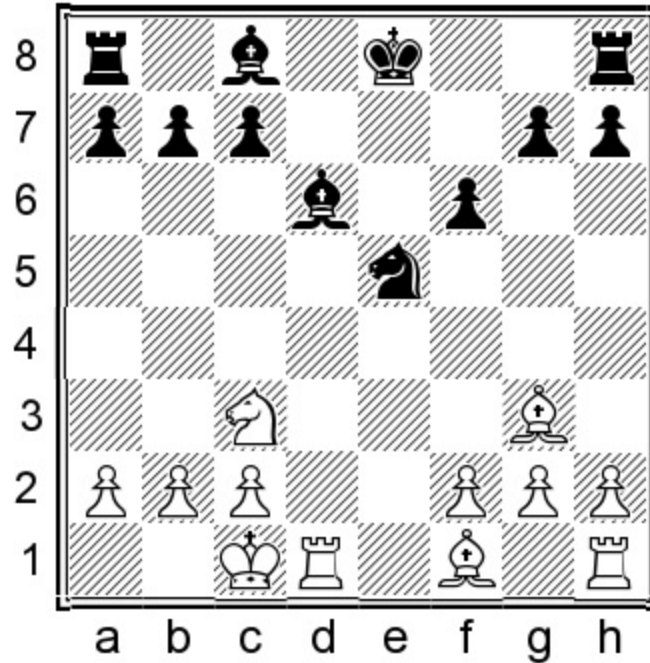
Rather better than 11...♗d7 12.♗e4 0-0-0 13.♗xd6† cxd6 14.0-0-0±, when apart from possessing the bishop pair, White has spoiled the black pawn structure.

### 12.0-0-0

Better than 12.♗b5 ♗b4† 13.c3 ♗a5.

After the text move, White threatens ♗b5 or ♗e4. Black has to give up one of his bishops or allow

his pawn structure to be damaged.

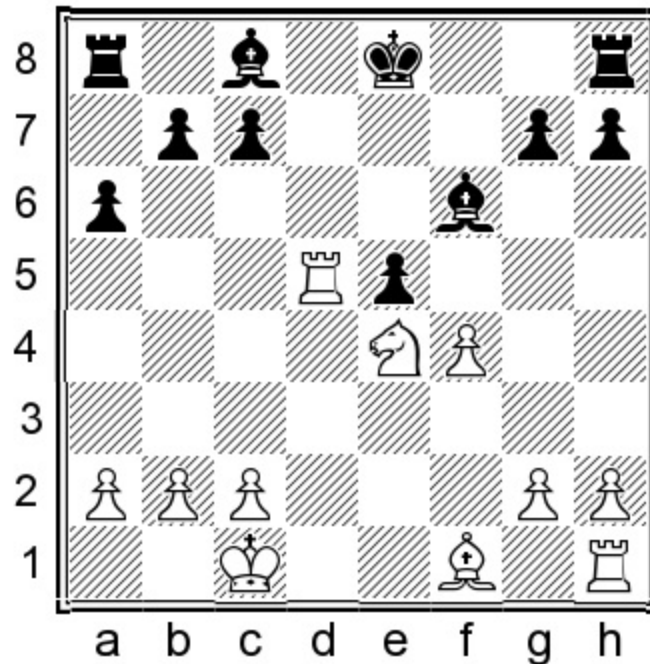


12...♙d7

An interesting possibility is:

12...a6!? 13.♘e4 ♙e7 14.♙xe5 fxe5 15.♖d5 ♙f6 16.f4!

Exploiting the fact that Black mustn't let his king be opened up too much.



16...c6!

The most stubborn choice.

If 16...exf4?! then: 17.♘xf6† gxf6 18.♙c4±

After 16...♙e6?! 17.♖c5 0-0-0 18.♘xf6 gxf6 19.fxe5± White won with his extra pawn in Nisipeanu – Z. Varga, Baile Tusnad 2005.

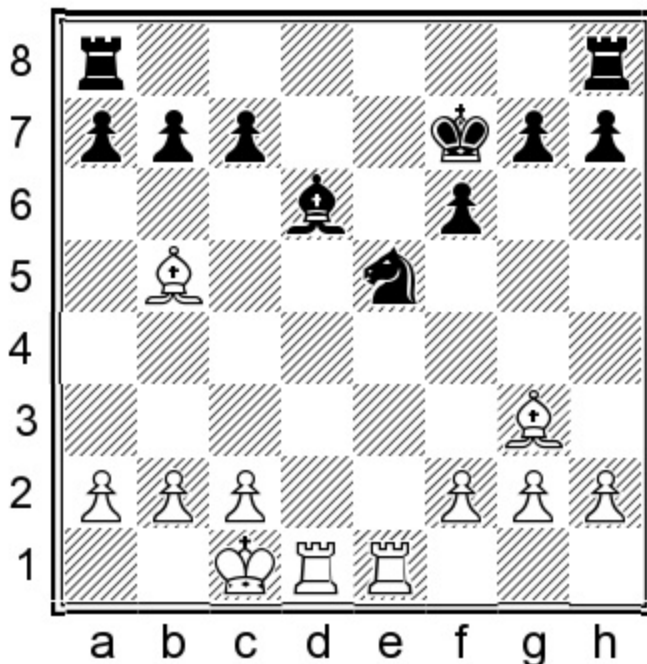
17.♖d2

Or 17.♘xf6† gxf6 18.♞d6 ♔e7 19.fxe5± isn't bad either.

17...♙e7 18.♙c4!? ♙f5 19.♞e1±

Black will have to fight for the draw in an opposite-bishop endgame with a pawn less.

13.♘b5 ♙xb5 14.♙xb5† ♔f7 15.♞he1±



The game has only two likely results. Thanks to his bishop pair, White retains a stable plus, practically all the way to the end.

### Conclusion

Frankly 3...♞e7?! is a poor move. After 4.d4 White obtains a large plus.

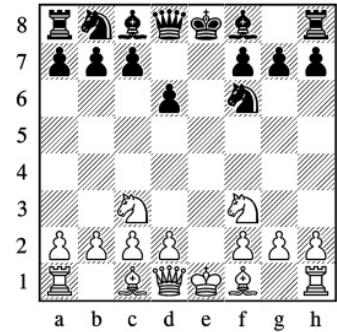
The 3...♘xe4 line is not as bad, but White can calmly steer for an ending with a small but stable advantage.

On the whole, Black tends to employ these rare variations in games with a fast time control. But then, rapid and blitz tournaments in our own day are accorded great importance, and even an extra half point can be very valuable. It therefore pays to know how White can obtain the advantage in these lines; working it out over-the-board with limited time is difficult.

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# Chapter 10

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## Introduction to 5...Nf6

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Nc3 Nf6 6.d4

A) 6...g6!? 189

B) 6...d5 190

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Nc3

In my view this is White's most solid continuation against the Petroff Defence. Variations with 5.Wwe2 or 5.c4 set Black no great problems. The lines after 5.d4 d5 6.Wwd3 may offer an alternative, but they have a serious drawback: Black has too many possibilities, and even if you study everything painstakingly, it's difficult to recollect it, given the sheer volume of data.

### 5...Nf6

The retreat with the knight is quite a good alternative to the main line 5...Nxc3, which we will examine in Chapters 12-17. At the top level, players who like this retreating continuation are Yu Yangyi, Ni Hua, Wesley So...

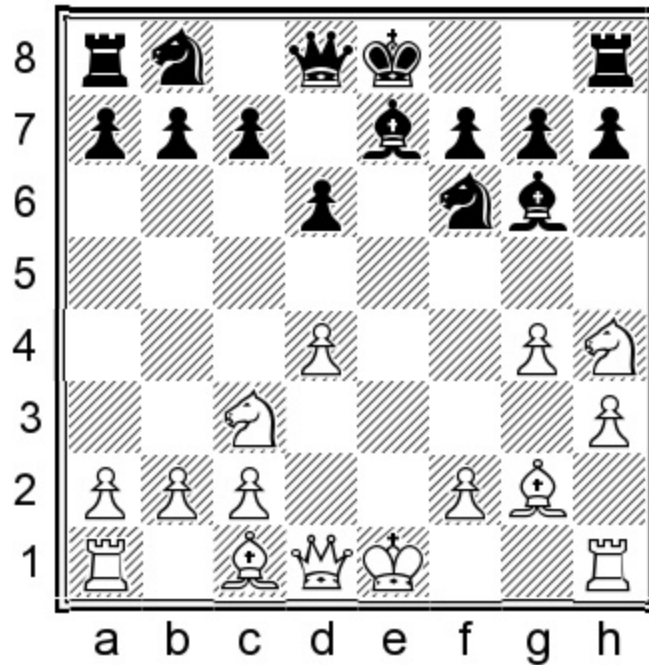
Broadly speaking 5...Nf6 is a solid move, but it has one defect – Black is somewhat passively placed, with a struggle for equality ahead of him.

### 6.d4

We now consider A) 6...g6!? and B) 6...d5.

The next chapter will cover 6...Wwe7 7.Wwd3.

An ineffective try is: 6...♔g4?! 7.h3 ♔h5 (or 7...♔xf3 8.♚xf3 d5 9.♔g5 c6 10.0-0-0±) 8.g4! ♔g6 9.♔g2 ♔e7 10.♖h4!



The standard idea of exchanging the bishop on g6 – and in this case it all happens with tempo too, as the pawn on b7 is *en prise*: 10...c6 (10...d5 11.♖xg6 hxg6 12.g5 also leads to a large plus for White after 12...♗e4 13.♖xe4 dxe4 14.♚g4± or 12...♗h7 13.♖xd5 ♖xg5 14.♔e3±) 11.♖xg6 hxg6 12.d5± The two bishops and greater space give White a solid advantage.

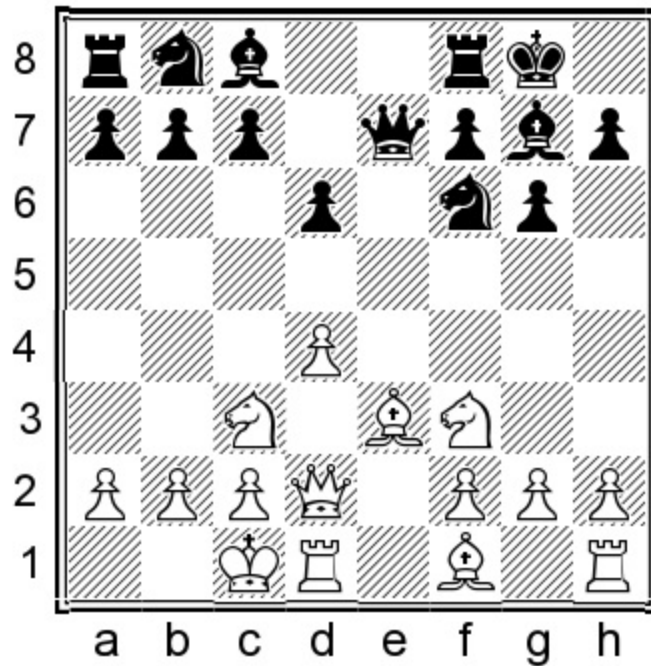
### A) 6...g6!?

A move that looks rather artificial but is quite viable.

#### 7.♚e2†!N

After 7.♔g5 ♔g7 8.♚e2† ♖f8 Black's position has rather an odd look, but surprisingly his king on f8 is not badly placed. For example, 9.0-0-0 h6 10.♔h4 ♖c6∞ or 9.h3 h6 10.♔e3 a6∞ as in Jakovenko – Rakhmanov, Ankara 2018.

7...♚e7 8.♔e3 ♔g7 9.0-0-0 0-0 10.♚d2±

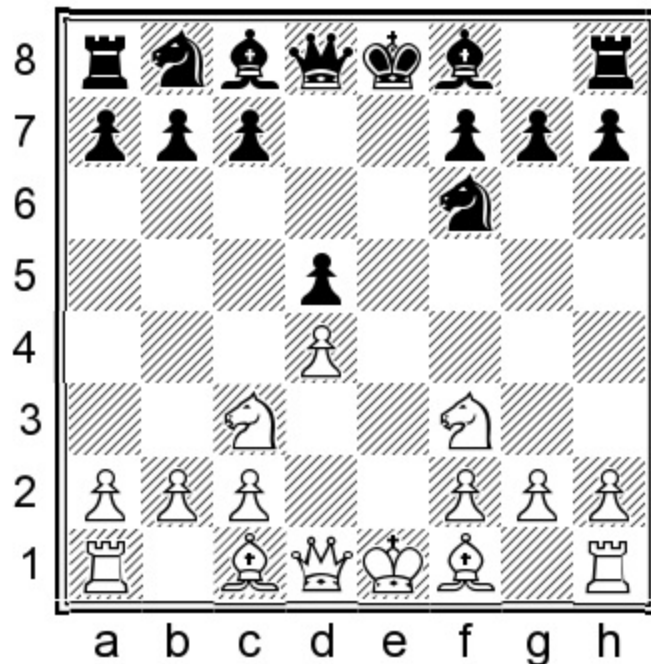


White has a small but stable plus. This position has yet to arise in practice, but let's see one possible variation:

10...♖e8 11.♗h6 ♗g4 12.♗e2 ♘bd7 13.h3 ♗e6 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♖he1±

White has quite a pleasant position.

### B) 6...d5



Aiming to bring the bishop out to d6. Positions where ...d6-d5 is combined with ...♗e7 will be handled in the next chapter.

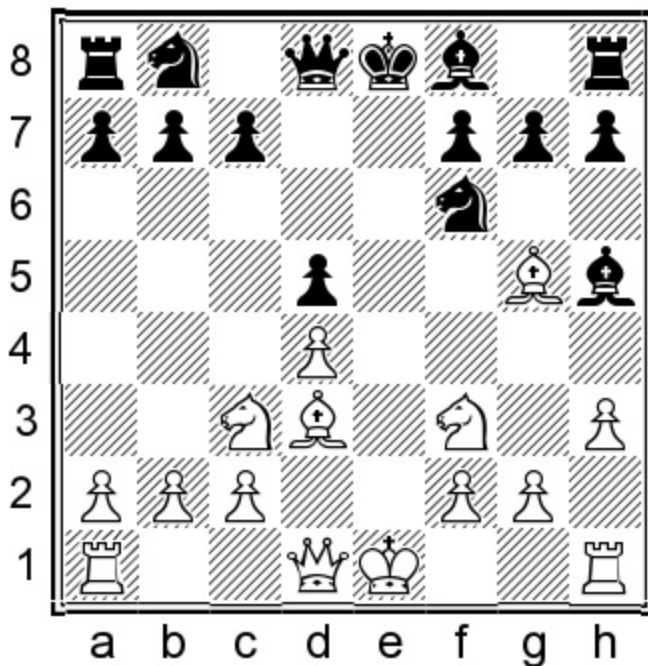
### 7.♔d3

White's game is simple to play. We intend to castle short, bring out the dark-squared bishop, then continue with ♖d2 and ♜ae1, followed by ♘e5.

### 7...♕d6

For 7...♕e7 8.0-0 0-0, see the next chapter (6...♕e7 7.♕d3 0-0 8.0-0 d5).

After 7...♕g4?! 8.h3 ♕h5 9.♕g5 Black can't complete his development normally.



For example: 9...♕e7 (or 9...♘c6 10.♖e2† ♕e7 11.♕xf6 gxf6 12.0-0-0±) 10.♕xf6! ♕xf6 11.♖e2† ♕e7 (11...♘f8 12.g4 ♕g6 13.0-0-0± doesn't help) 12.g4 ♕g6 13.♕xg6 hxg6 14.♖b5†± White is winning a pawn.

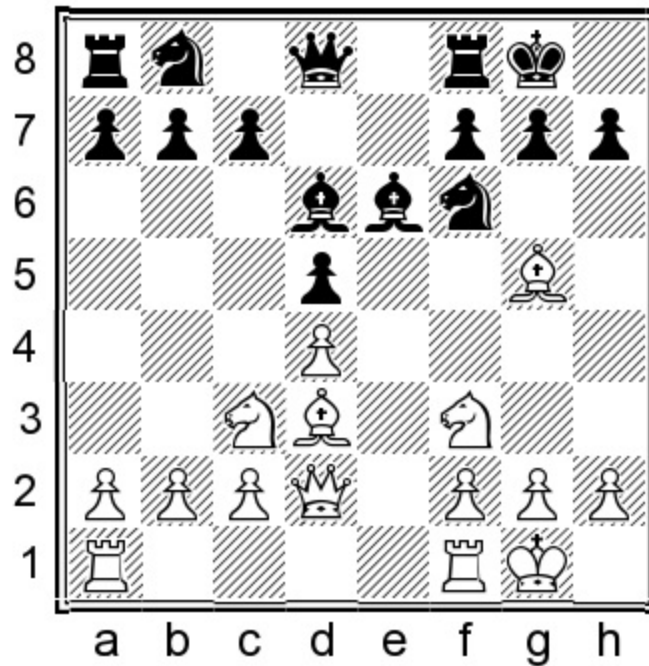
### 8.0-0

Quite a good alternative is 8.♖e2† ♕e7!? 9.0-0 0-0 10.♞e1 with a slight edge.

### 8...0-0 9.♕g5 ♕e6

Or 9...c6 10.♖d2 ♕e6 11.♜ae1, transposing to the note to Black's 10th.

### 10.♖d2

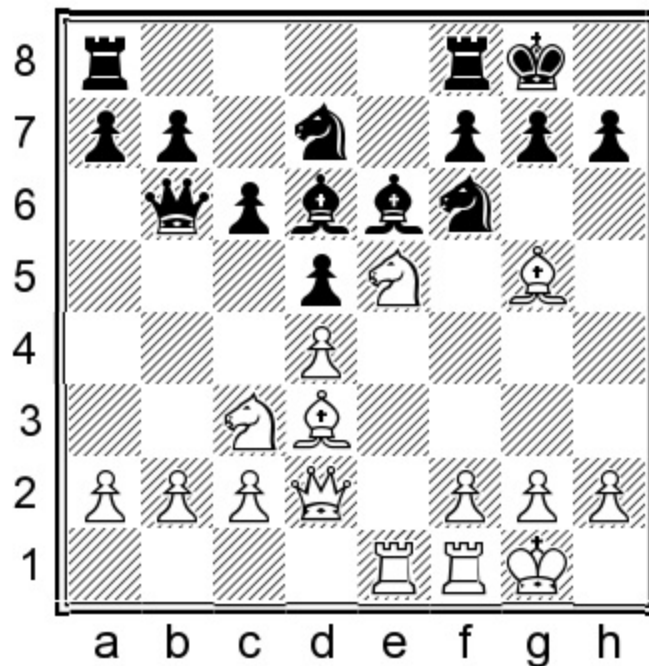


White is a couple of tempos ahead. Black now has to consider whether it is worth expending one more tempo preventing  $\text{Bb5}$ , or whether he should allow that move by playing  $\dots\text{Bbd7}$  at once.

### 10...Rxe8

After 10... $\text{Bbd7}$  11. $\text{Bb5}$   $\text{Qe7}$  12. $\text{Qf4}\pm$  Black has problems with his c7-pawn.

If 10...c6 then 11. $\text{Rae1}$   $\text{Bbd7}$  12. $\text{Be5}\pm$ , and now in answer to 12... $\text{Qb6}$ :



White has 13. $\text{Qf4}\pm$  with a big advantage: 13... $\text{Bg4}$  (13... $\text{Qxb2}$ ? loses at once to 14. $\text{Qh4}$  g6 15. $\text{Bd1}+-$ ; also after 13... $\text{Bh5}$  14. $\text{Qh4}$   $\text{Qxe5}$  15.dxe5 g6 16.g4  $\text{Bg7}$  17. $\text{Re3}+-$  White has a decisive plus) 14. $\text{Bxd7}$   $\text{Qxf4}$  15. $\text{Bxb6}$   $\text{Qxh2}\dagger$  16. $\text{Qh1}$  axb6 17.g3± And Black comes out a piece down.

## 11. ♖a1±

Black is somewhat behind in development. For example:

## 11... ♖bd7

There is no improvement in 11...c6 12. ♖e5 h6 13. ♗xf6 ♕xf6 14.f4.

## 12. ♖b5 h6 13. ♗h4±

After we have taken the bishop on d6, White will obviously be better; but 13... ♗f8 isn't very good in view of 14. ♗g3.

## Conclusion

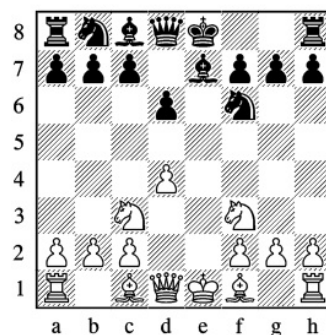
Summing up, we may state that in all these minor variations after 5... ♖f6 White has a stable plus. Moreover the game is very simple for him. We play d2-d4, bring the bishop out to d3, castle and deploy our pieces in the centre. Black (given that he refrains from ... ♗e7) has much more difficulty planning anything. An early ... ♗g4 is frankly ineffective if White hasn't yet castled – while after ...d6-d5 Black is a tempo behind with his development, on top of White's advantage of the move. And the artificial 6...g6!? will hardly become popular.

Not surprisingly then, the most popular continuation is the main line 6... ♗e7 with ...0-0 to follow, which is our next topic.

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# Chapter 11

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## 5...Nf6 Main Line

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4  
5.Nc3 Nf6 6.d4 Qe7 7.Qd3!? 0-0 8.0-0

A) 8...d5 193

B) 8...Ke8 194

C) 8...Qg4 195

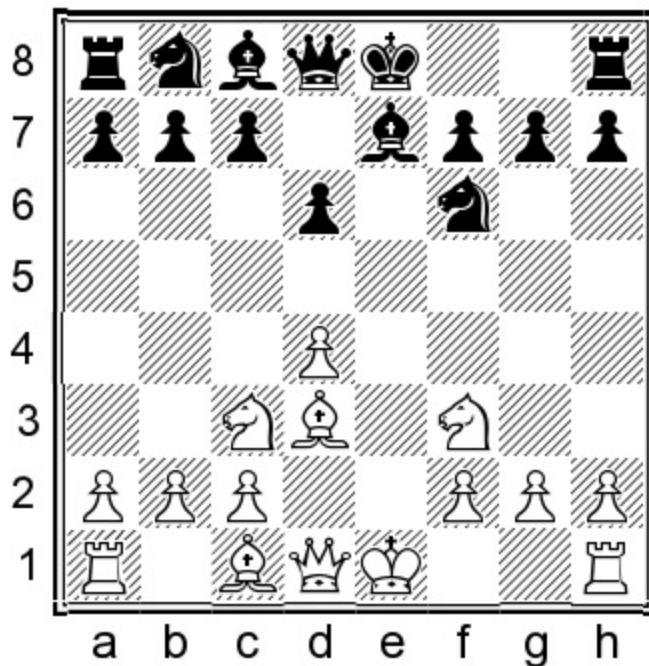
D) 8...Nc6!? 9.d5 196

D1) 9...Ne5 197

D2) 9...Nb4 198

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Nc3 Nf6 6.d4 Qe7 7.Qd3!?



By refraining from h2-h3, White allows ...♙g4. But then we can get rid of the pin by h2-h3 – and if ...♙h5 then g2-g4 – which usually gives White the advantage. On the other hand, if Black plays passively, we can carry out a standard manoeuvre with ♖e2-g3 or d4-d5 while saving the tempo that h2-h3 would have cost.

### 7...0-0 8.0-0

Formerly White almost invariably played 8.h3!?. But now, apart from the standard 8...♞e8 (with a view to 9.0-0 ♜bd7 10.♞e1 ♜f8), an interesting idea has been discovered for Black: 8...b6!? 9.0-0 ♞e8! (there's no need to hurry with ...♙b7 in view of ♜h4; for instance 9...♙b7?! 10.♜h4± g6 11.♙h6 ♞e8 12.f4→) And now:

a) After 10.♜e2 ♙b7 11.♜g3 Black has two quite good moves: 11...♜bd7∞ and 11...c5∞.

b) 10.♙g5 ♜bd7 11.♜h4 ♜f8∞

c) 10.♞e1 ♙b7 11.d5 (or 11.♙f4 ♜bd7 12.d5; however 11.♜h4 g6∞ no longer scares Black) 11...♜bd7 12.♙f4 a6∞ In my view Black is not worse.

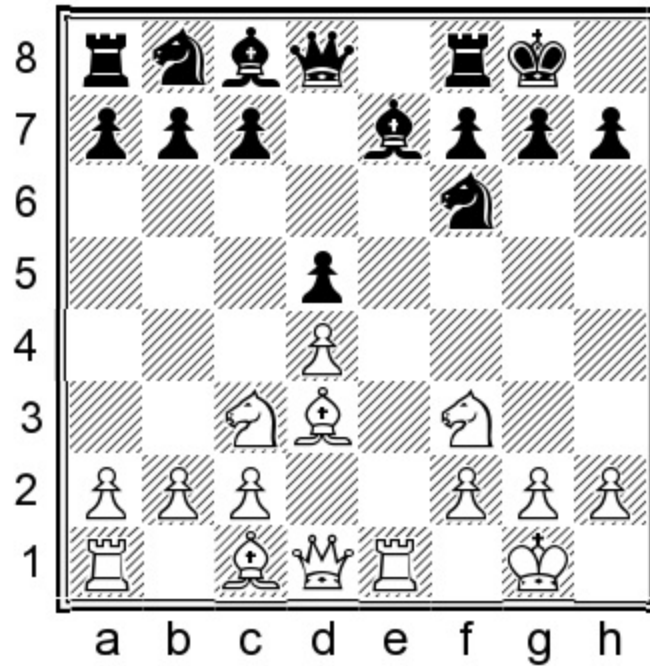
We now consider Black's options **A) 8...d5**, **B) 8...♞e8**, **C) 8...♙g4** and **D) 8...♜c6!?**.

### A) 8...d5

This position has hardly ever been seen in high-level games. Yet I don't consider Black's ...d6-d5 to be worse than the other moves.

### 9.♞e1

White may also play an immediate 9.h3!? ♖e8 10.♗f4, probably transposing to the main line.

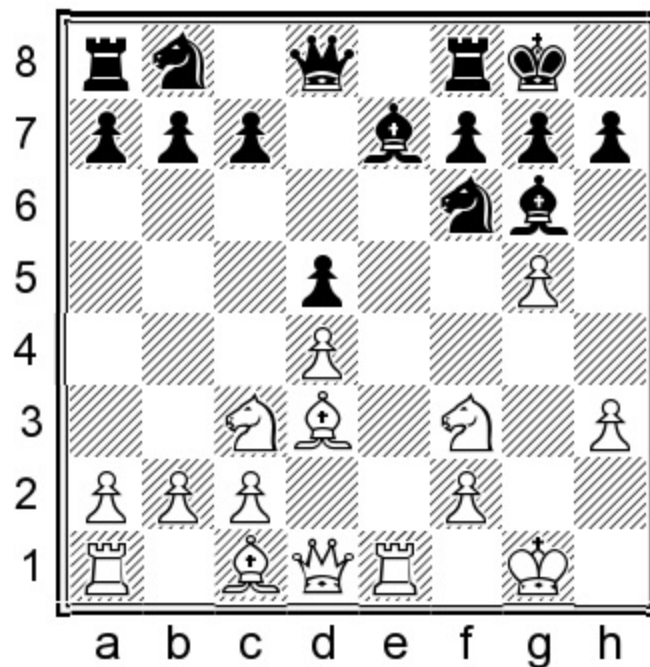


### 9...♖e8

Alternatively:

a) 9...♗c6 10.♗b5!? (with the mundane threat of ♗xc6) 10...♗g4 11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.h3 ♗xf3 (or 12...♗h5 13.g4 ♗g6 14.♗e5±) 13.♖xf3± Black's damaged pawn formation gives White a certain advantage.

b) 9...♗g4 10.h3 ♗h5 (10...♗xf3 11.♖xf3±) 11.g4 ♗g6 12.g5 A standard idea in this variation, but now for good measure Black risks losing a pawn to ♗xd5.



12...♖h5 (If 12...♗e8 then 13.♗xd5! ♕xd5 14.♞xe7, and now 14...♗d6 15.♞e5 ♖c6 16.d5± or 14...♗c6 15.c4! ♕d6 16.♞e1±, leaving Black with no compensation for the pawn – 16...♗xd4 17.♗xd4 ♕xd4 18.♙xg6 ♕xd1 19.♙xh7† ♗xh7 20.♞xd1± is no help to him.) 13.♙e2! ♗c6 (with the idea of ...♗b4; there is no saving the knight on h5) 14.♗h2 ♗b4 15.♙xh5 ♙xh5 16.♞xh5 ♗xc2 17.♙f4± With a large plus.

### 10.h3 ♗bd7 11.♙f4

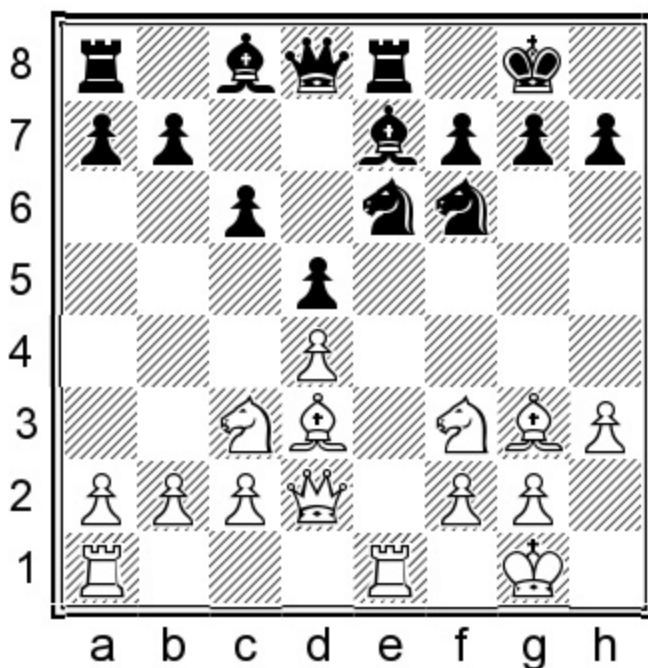
Another possibility is 11.♗e2 ♙d6 12.♗g3 ♗f8 13.♙g5 ♞xe1† 14.♞xe1 h6 15.♙d2 c6 16.♙b4, with a slight edge.

### 11...c6 12.♞d2 ♗f8 13.♙g3!?

This is more cunning than the simple 13.♞e2.

### 13...♗e6

Or 13...♗g6 14.♞e3 ♙d6 15.♞ae1±.



### 14.♞e5! ♙d6

If 14...♙d7 then 15.♞ae1±.

### 15.♙h4!

Setting up an unpleasant pin.

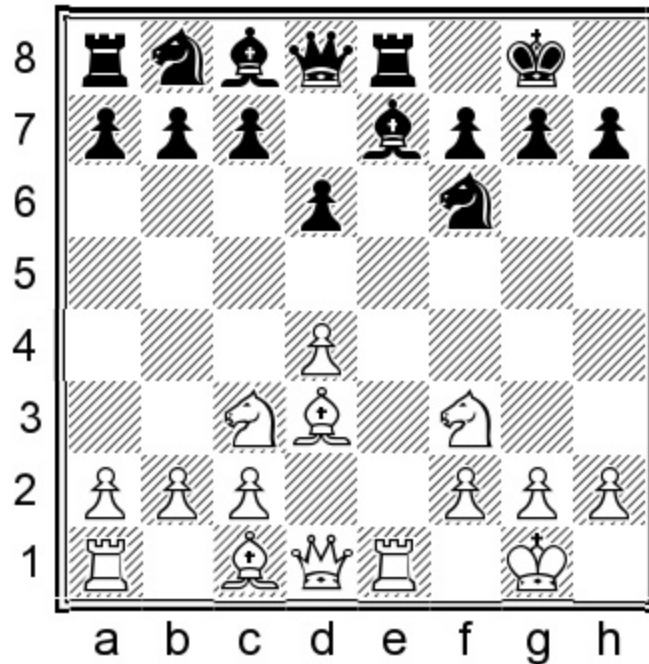
### 15...♙d7

Not 15...h6 16.♞ae1 g5?? 17.♗xg5 hxg5 18.♞xg5† after which Black can resign.

## 16. ♖ae1±

White is a few tempos ahead, which gives him some advantage.

### B) 8... ♖e8 9. ♖e1



### 9... ♞bd7

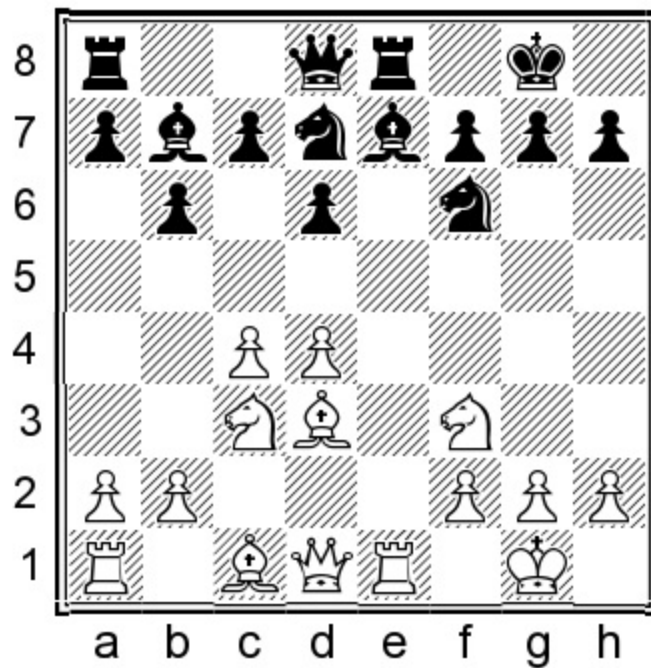
Even though White has done without h2-h3, Black has quite a robust position. For 9... ♔g4 10. h3 ♔h5, see variation C).

### 10. ♞e2 b6 11. c4

Or 11. ♞g3 ♔b7∞.

### 11... ♔b7 12. ♞c3!±

Now that we have carried out c2-c4, it makes sense to return the knight to c3 rather than play the standard ♞g3. White has a small but stable plus.



**12...d5**

Or 12...♔f8 13.♖xe8 ♚xe8 14.♕g5±.

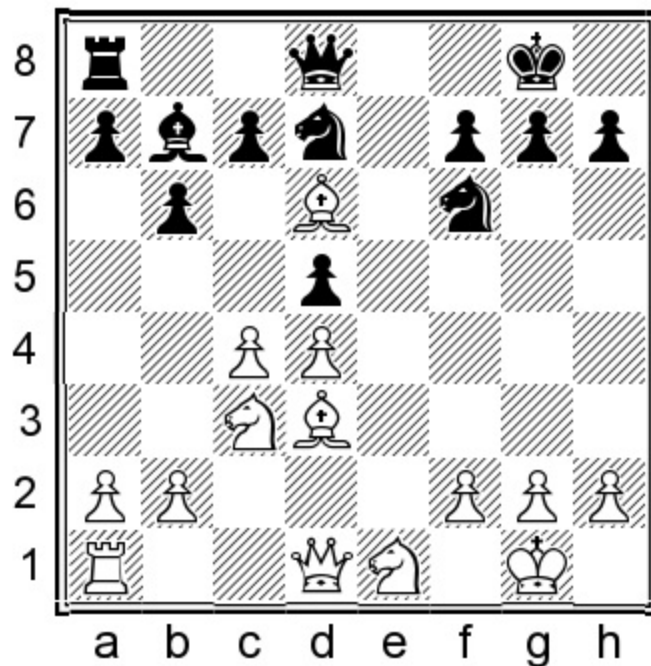
**13.♕f4 ♕d6!?**

An attempt to simplify the position. The game Nepomniachtchi – Jobava, Tbilisi 2017, saw 13...a6 14.♚b3±.

**14.♕xd6 ♖xe1†**

If 14...cxd6 then 15.♚b3±.

**15.♘xe1**



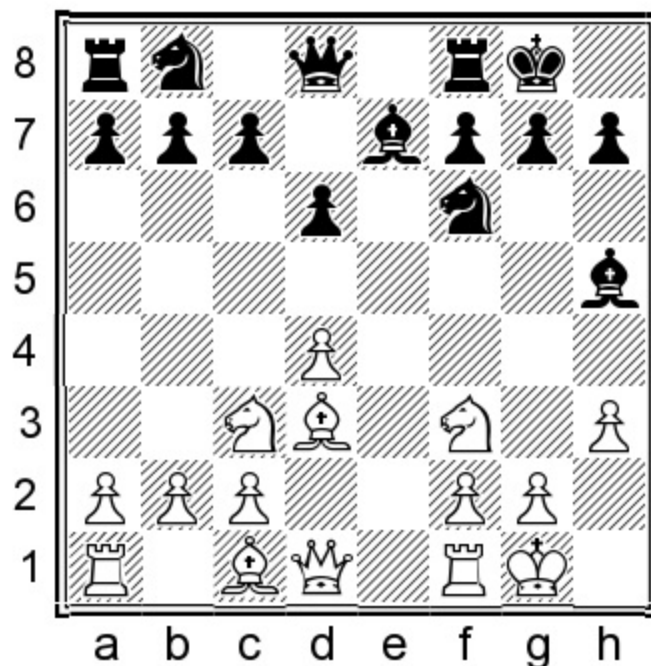
**15...dxc4**

Preferable to 15...cxd6 16.♞f3! dxc4 17.♞xh7†, which is “±” or even better for White.

**16.♞xc4 cxd6 17.♞b3±**

With ♞c2-e3 to follow.

**C) 8...♞g4 9.h3 ♞h5**



If White wants to fight for an advantage, he will need to get rid of the pin by means of g2-g4. For the moment, though, he can simply improve his position with the following rook move.

## 10.♖e1 ♜e8

The most natural move. Alternatives are:

a) 10...♗bd7 11.g4 ♙g6 12.g5 ♘h5 13.♙e2 ♜e8, transposing to the note to move 12 in the main line.

b) 10...c6!? 11.g4 (for 11.d5 ♜e8, see the note to move 11 below) 11...♙g6 12.g5 ♗fd7 (if 12...♗h5 then 13.♙e2±, or if 12...♗d5 then 13.♗xd5 cxd5 14.c3±) 13.♗e2 ♜e8 14.♗g3± Black's pieces are rather clumsily placed.

## 11.g4

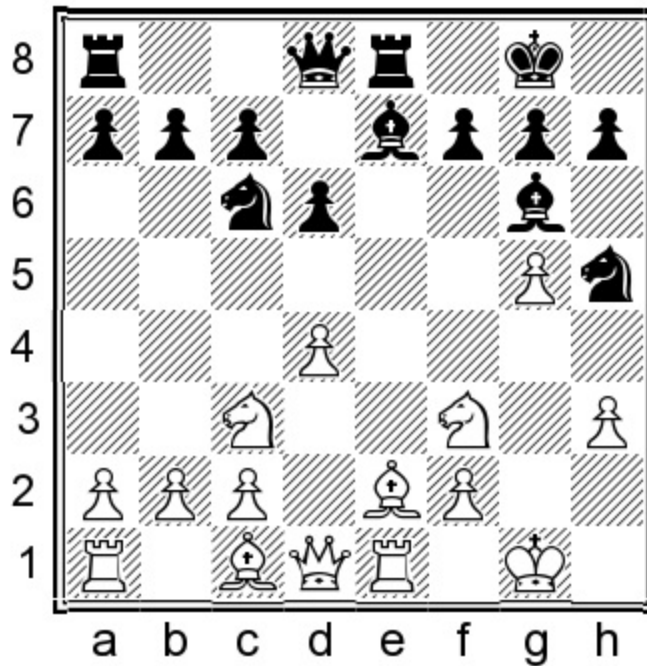
A strong answer to 11.d5 is: 11...c6!N (11...♗bd7 12.g4± occurred in Leko – Nisipeanu, Baden-Baden 2018) 12.♙f4 ♗bd7 13.g4 ♙g6∞ White can't pick up the d-pawn with 14.♙xg6 hxg6 15.dxc6 bxc6 16.♙xd6?, on account of 16...♙xd6 17.♚xd6 ♗e5∞.

## 11...♙g6 12.g5 ♗fd7

Or if 12...♗h5?! then 13.♙e2! taking aim at the knight on h5, and now:

a) 13...♗d7 14.h4 d5 15.♙d2!± It's important to guard the rook on e1 (not 15.♗h2? ♙d6∞). 15...♙d6 (or 15...♙b4 16.♗h2±) 16.♗e5 ♙xe5 17.dxe5 d4 18.♙xh5±

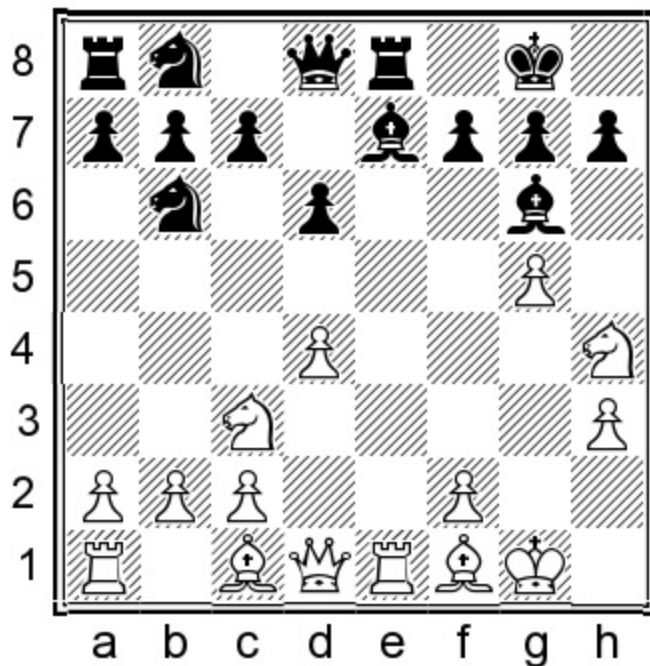
b) 13...♗c6



14.♖f1!± It turns out that the knight on h5 is lost (14.♙e3 ♙f8 is not so good). 14...♙f5 15.d5 ♗b4 16.♗d4 ♙xh3 17.♙xh5 ♙xf1 18.♖xf1 g6 (better is 18...♙xg5, leaving Black with some chances of salvation: 19.♙xf7† ♖xf7 20.♚h5† ♖g8 21.♙xg5 ♜e5 22.♗f3 ♜f5 23.♚h4 ♚d7 24.♗d4±) 19.♗e4±

c6 20. ♖f5 1–0, Körber – Böhnke, corr. 2018.

13. ♕f1 ♜b6 14. ♘h4



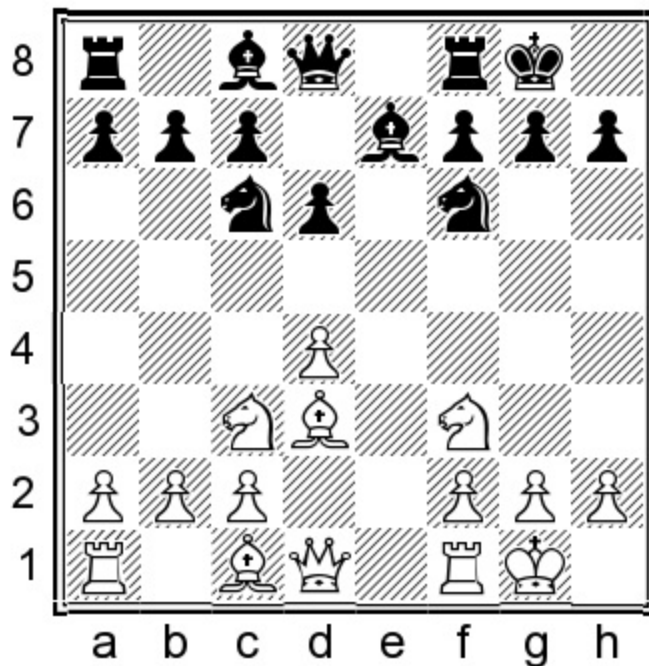
14...d5

Not 14... ♜8d7? 15. f4±.

15. ♘xg6±

Thanks to the two bishops, White is a little better.

D) 8... ♘c6!?



In the last two years the majority of strong grandmasters have been opting for this knight move. For instance Yu Yangyi had played this position with White in a game against Jobava in 2017, then began defending it with Black. At the present time we may definitely call 8...Nc6 the main line.

### 9.d5

At first I would have liked to play 9.a3!?, but then I concluded that after 9...Bg4 10.Qe3 (or 10.h3 Qxf3 11.Wxf3 Nxd4 12.Wxb7 d5∞) 10...d5 11.h3 Qh5 12.g4 Qg6 13.Ne5 Qxd3 14.Wxd3 Nd7!

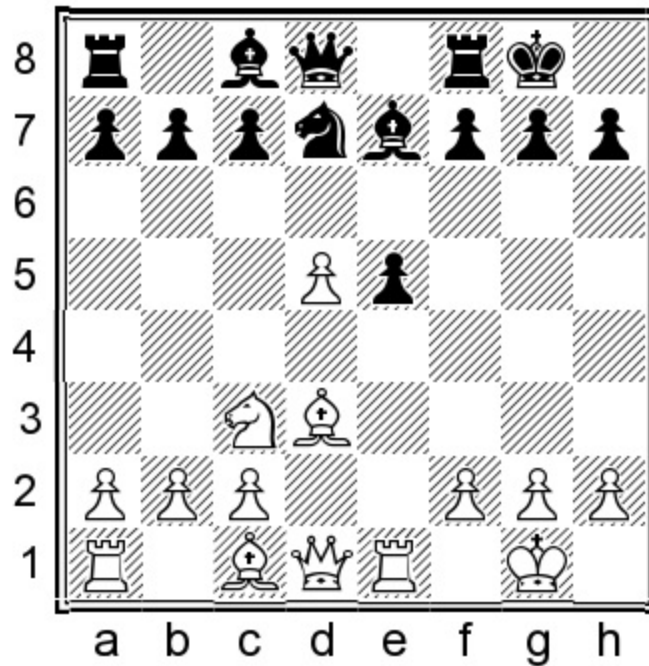
Black's position is in order. For example 15.f4 Ncxe5, and now:

a) After 16.fxe5, Black played 16...c6 in Cheparinov – Li Di, China 2018. Alternatively 16...Nb6!? 17.Rae1 Wd7 gives Black adequate counterplay.

b) Or 16.dxe5! c6 and it's hard for White to avoid further simplification. For instance: 17.Rae1 (or 17.Ne2 Nc5 18.Qxc5 Qxc5† 19.Qg2 Re8 20.Ng3 f6∞ with roughly balanced chances) 17...Qc5 18.Nd1!? (or 18.Ne2 Wb6∞) 18...Qxe3† 19.Wxe3 Wb6 20.Wxb6 axb6!? (more precise than 20...Nb6) 21.Ne3 Nc5 22.Nf5 Ne4 23.Qg2 f6= Black has managed to solve all his problems.

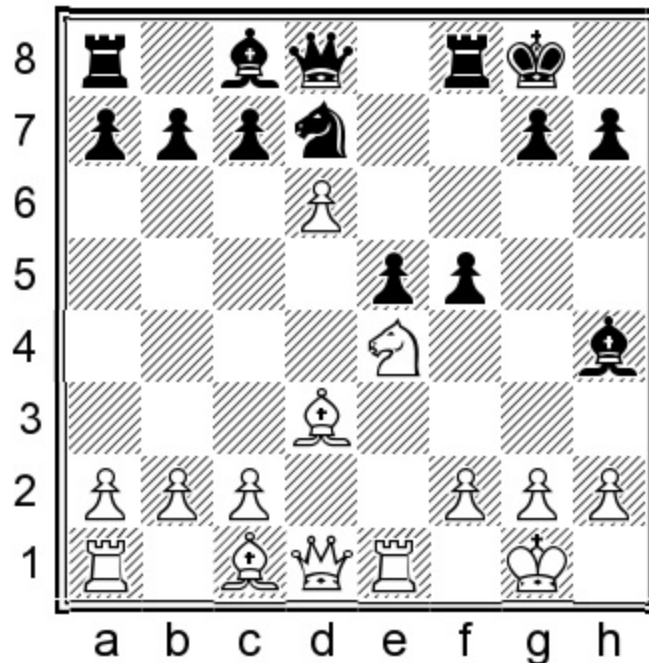
Black now has **D1)** 9...Ne5 or **D2)** 9...Nb4.

**D1) 9...Ne5 10.Nxe5 dxe5 11.Rae1 Nd7**



### 12. ♖h5!?N

With 12. ♖e4 White gained the advantage in Wei Yi – Yu Yangyi, Danzhou 2018, which continued 12... ♗f6 13. ♘xf6† ♕xf6 14. ♖f3±. However, I discovered that Black has the interesting: 12...f5!?N 13.d6 ♕h4!



A very complicated position arises, and even a computer has difficulty making sense of it. It certainly isn't the sort of position that we aim for in the opening when playing White. Let me give some sample variations: 14.dxc7 (or 14. ♕c4† ♖h8 15.dxc7 ♖xc7 16. ♗d6 f4∞) 14... ♖xc7 15. ♗d6 ♖h8 16. ♗xc8 (or 16. ♕xf5, and now 16... ♗b6!? or 16... ♗c5 17. ♕e3 ♕xf5 18. ♗xf5 ♖xf5 19. ♖g4 ♕xf2† 20. ♕xf2 ♖af8 21. ♕e3 ♗e6∞) 16...e4 17. ♕b5 ♗e5 18. ♗d6 ♖f6∞

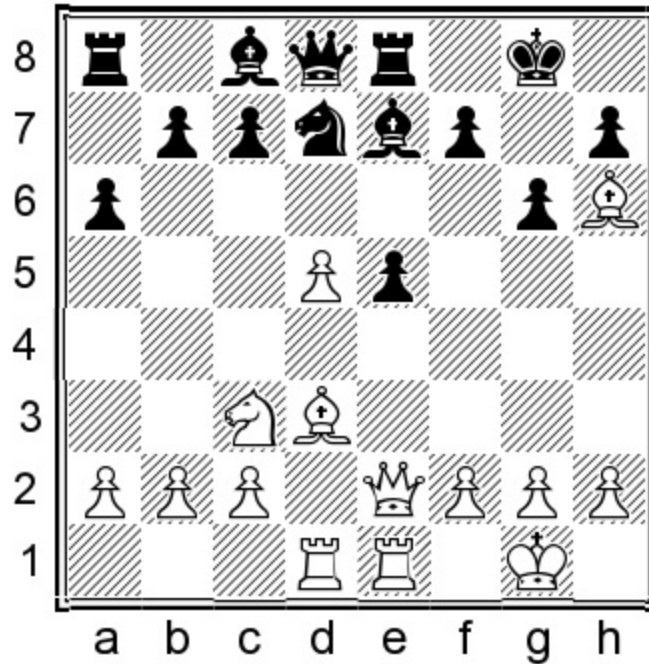
## 12...g6 13.♖e2

After the weakening move ...g7-g6, White has every chance of gaining a plus.

## 13...♖e8

Or:

a) 13...a6 14.♗h6 ♖e8 15.♖ad1



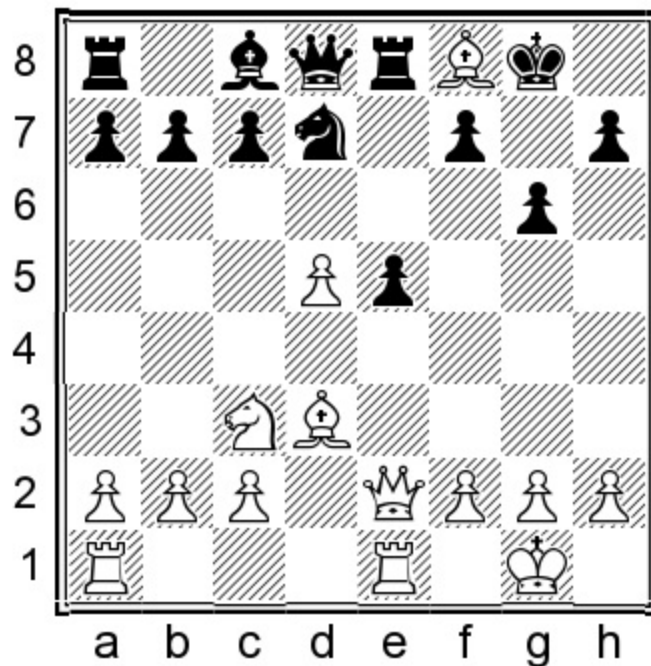
And now:

a1) 15...♗b4 is dangerous: 16.♗e4!? ♗xe1 (16...f5 17.♗g5 ♗d6, avoiding 17...♗xe1?? 18.♗c4+-, is sounder: 18.♗e6 ♗e7 19.♗c4±) 17.♗xe1 b5 18.c4 Despite the extra exchange, Black is in trouble. 18...♗b7 19.cxb5 f5 (19...♗xd5 20.♗c2±) 20.♗g5 ♗c8 21.♗c3± Black's king is too open and his pieces are badly placed.

a2) 15...♗f8 16.♗xf8 ♗xf8 17.♗e3 ♗g7 18.♗e2 f5 19.c4± Black has yet to complete his development.

b) 13...♗g7 14.♗f4 (14.f4 isn't as good: 14...♖e8 15.♗f3 ♗d6 16.f5 ♗c5 17.♗b5 ♗xf5! 18.♗xe8 ♗xe8 with quite good compensation) 14...♗d6 (or 14...f6 15.♗e3 ♗h8 16.♗g3 ♗g7 17.♖ad1±) 15.♗d2 f5 (the verdict on 15...♗f6 is about the same: 16.h3 ♖e8 17.♖ad1±) 16.♗b5 a6 17.♗xd6 cxd6 18.c4± With an obvious plus for White.

## 14.♗h6 ♗f8 15.♗xf8



### 15...♔xf8!?

The other recaptures are no better: 15...♖xf8 (15...♘xf8 16.f4 ♘d7 17.♚f2±) 16.♞ad1 ♞e8 The e5-pawn needs support. 17.♙b5!?! a6 18.♙xd7 ♙xd7 19.♘e4± White has an obvious advantage.

### 16.♙b5!?

The bishop is hampered on d3 by Black's pawns, so it makes sense to exchange it off.

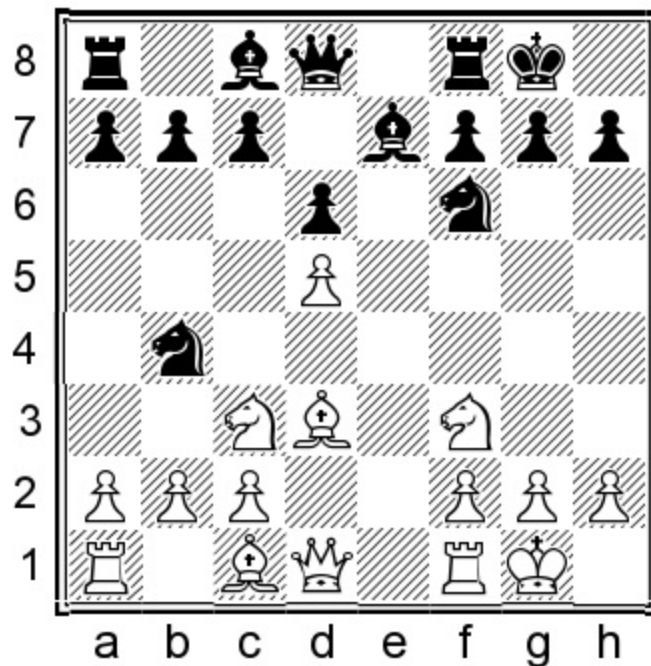
### 16...a6 17.♙xd7 ♙xd7 18.♞ad1 ♔g7

Or 18...f5 19.♚c4 ♔g7 20.♚b4±.

### 19.♘e4±

White's pieces are rather better placed. Black will have to labour to hold out.

## D2) 9...♘b4



This move was virtually unknown when I first analysed it, but it is perfectly logical. It was then played against Caruana in the US Championship by Lenderman.

### 10.♔c4!?N

This novelty leads to some interesting play.

Also reasonable is the simple 10.♔e2 as in Caruana – Lenderman, USA (ch) 2019, which continued 10...c6 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.a3 ♖bd5 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♗d4 ♔d7 15.♔f3. White had an edge which he converted into a win.

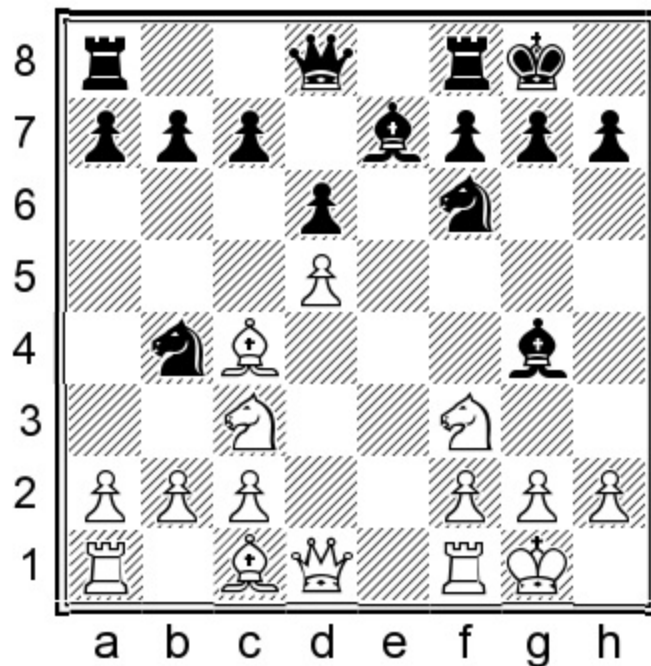
### 10...♔g4!?

Black might seem to have finished his development successfully.

If instead 10...c6 11.♞e1! (clearer than 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.a3 d5 13.axb4 dxc4 14.♚xd8 ♞xd8 15.♘e5 ♔d7∞), he has these possibilities:

a) 11...♔g4 12.dxc6 bxc6 (12...♔xf3 13.♚xf3 ♘xc2 is no better: 14.cxb7 ♞b8 15.♔e3 ♚d7 16.♔a6± with a big advantage) 13.a3 ♔xf3 14.gxf3 ♘bd5 15.♔xd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 cxd5 17.♚xd5± White has a healthy extra pawn.

b) 11...♘bxd5 12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♔xd5 ♘xd5 14.♚xd5± Owing to his inferior pawn structure, Black is somewhat worse.



**11. ♖b1!**

Preparing in advance for ... ♗xf3.

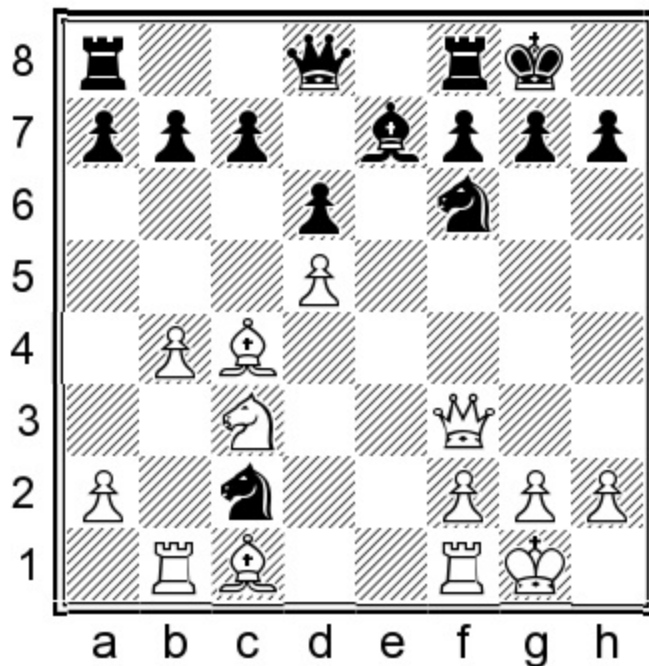
**11... ♗xf3**

The thematic continuation.

A less ambitious line is: 11...c6 12.dxc6 bxc6 (or 12...♖c8!? 13.h3, and now 13...♗f5 14.c7 ♕xc7 15.♗b3± or 13...♗h5 14.♖e1±) 13.a3 d5 14.♗e2 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3± The two bishops give White the advantage.

**12. ♕xf3 ♘xc2 13.b4!**

This is why 11. ♖b1 was needed! Black must now give up his b7-pawn in order to save his knight.



**13...♞d4**

Or 13...c5 14.bxc5 dxc5 15.♞xb7 ♞d4 16.♞d3, transposing.

**14.♞d3 c5 15.bxc5 dxc5 16.♞xb7 ♞d6**

Preparing to bring a knight to e5; not 16...♞d7 on account of 17.♞f4.

**17.♞g5**

The only possible way to acquire an advantage.

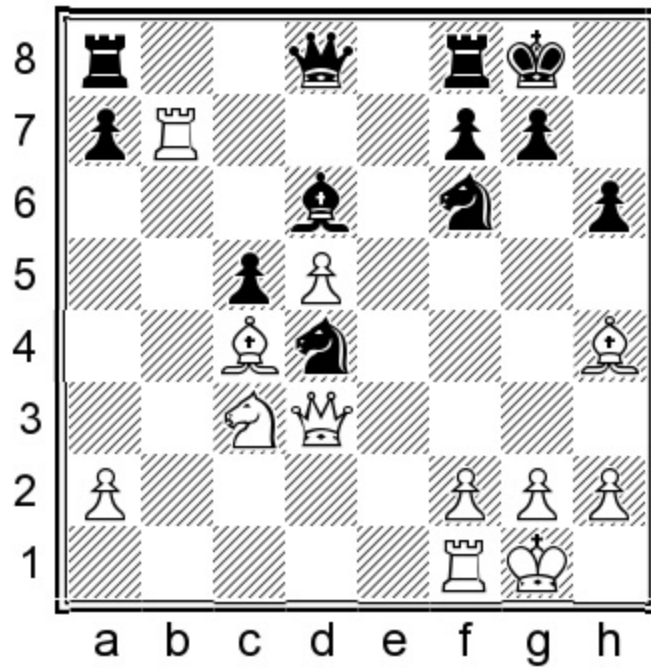
**17...h6**

And certainly not: 17...♞xh2? 18.♞h1± For example: 18...♞c8 (18...♞c7 19.♞e4 ♞e5 20.f4 ♞c8 21.fxg5 ♞xe4 22.♞xe4 ♞xb7 23.♞f6+-) 19.♞a6 ♞g4 20.♞h3 ♞c7 21.f3+- The ending that comes about is dismal for Black.

In the event of 17...♞e8 18.♞b5 ♞xb5 19.♞xb5 (now the threat of ♞d7 forces Black's next move) 19...♞e7 20.♞xf6 gxf6 21.♞xe7 ♞xe7 22.g3± White has a clear plus, thanks to his better pawn structure and safe king position.

**18.♞h4±**

Better than 18.♞xf6 ♞xf6 19.♞e4 ♞g6=.



I would have liked to stop here, but Black's following blow needs to be dealt with.

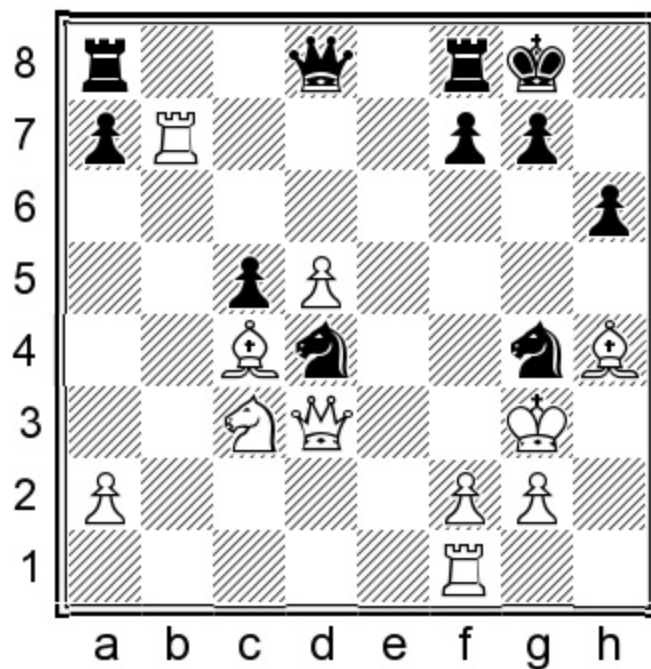
**18...hx2+?!**

Better is: 18...Re8 19.f3± (or 19.Nb5± on the same lines as 17...Re8 18.Nb5)

**19.ϕxh2!**

Accepting the challenge; 19.ϕh1 ♔c8 isn't so clear.

**19...Ng4† 20.ϕg3**



## 20...g5!?

Pouring oil on the flames. The white king now has a journey to make, in the direction of its black counterpart.

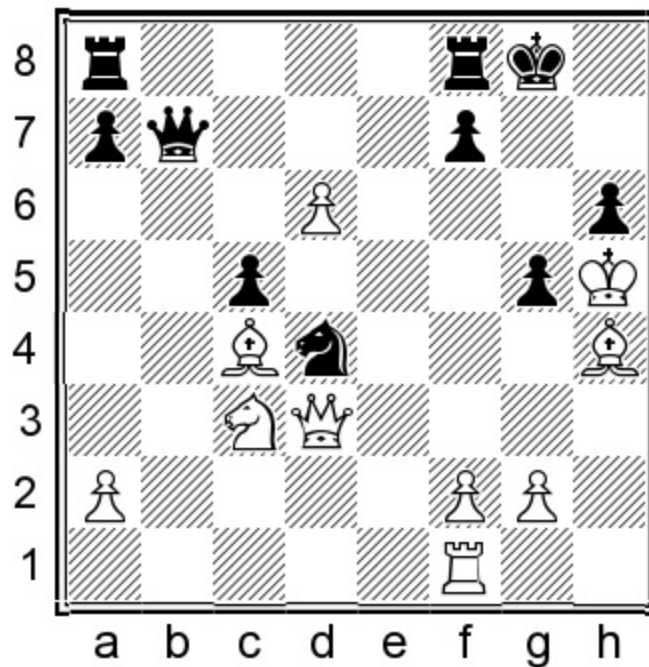
The play following 20...♖c8 21.♙a6 is less involved:

a) 21...♘e5 22.♚e4 ♘g6 23.♙h2 (23.♚g4 isn't bad either: 23...♘f5† 24.♙h2, and now 24...♘gxh4 25.♘e4, or 24...♘fxh4 25.♚xc8 ♖fxc8 26.♞d1±) 23...♞e8 24.♙e7 ♘xe7 25.♞e1 White plays to exchange queens. 25...♘ef5 26.♚xe8† ♚xe8 27.♞xe8† ♞xe8 28.♞xa7 With a big advantage.

b) 21...g5 22.♙xg5 hxg5 23.♚d2! Almost any resulting endgame is clearly in White's favour. 23...♚f5 (or 23...♚d8 24.♘e4 ♚xd5 25.♚xg5†±) 24.♙d3 ♚e5† 25.f4 ♚e3† 26.♚xe3 ♘xe3 27.♞h1± With ample winning chances.

## 21.♙xg4 ♚c8† 22.♙h5 ♚xb7 23.d6!±

With the terrible threat of ♚g6†. Black is in a bad way, but only on condition that White finds the best moves!



## 23...♙h8

Or 23...♙g7 24.♘b5! It's important to divert the knight from d4 (not 24.♙g3? f5∞). 24...♘xb5 25.♙g3! ♞ae8 (now 25...f5 26.♞e1 ♞f7 doesn't work on account of 27.♞e6!+-; this is why we dislodged the knight from d4!) 26.d7 ♞e7 (or 26...♚xg2 27.dxe8=♘† ♞xe8 28.♚f5+-) 27.♚f5+- There is no adequate defence against ♙e5†.

## 24.♘b5! gxh4

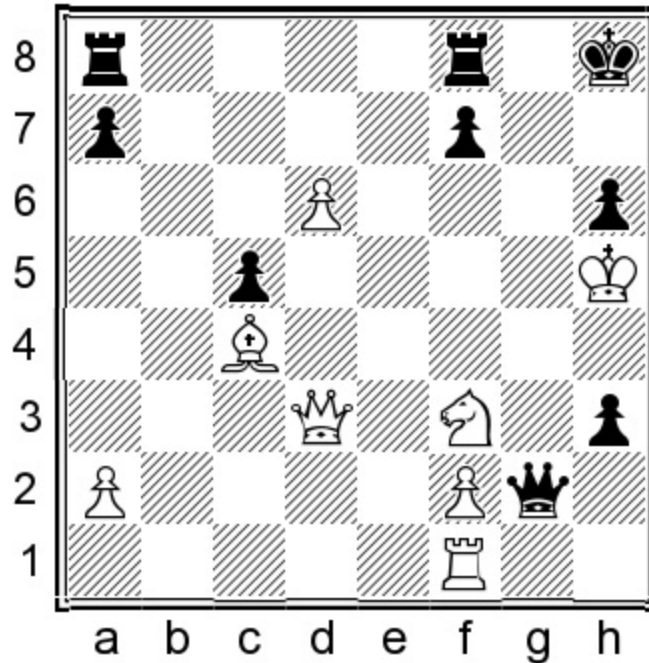
Or 24...♘xb5 25.♚f5 f6□ 26.♙g3 ♘d4 (there is no better move) 27.♚g6 ♚g7 28.♞e1+ with ♞e7 to

follow. Surprisingly the white king on h5 has proved very useful!

25. ♖xd4 ♜xg2

After 25...cxd4 26. ♔xh6 f6 27. ♛g6+- Black simply has no moves.

26. ♖f3 h3



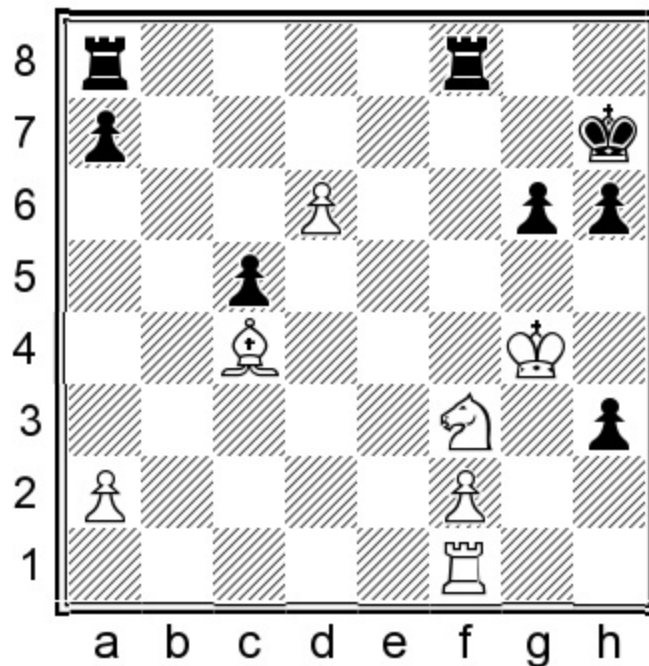
27. ♛c3†

Only not 27. ♜g1?? ♛xg1 28. ♖xg1 h2-+.

27... ♔h7 28. ♛f6 ♛g6†

After 28...h2 29. ♕d3† ♔g8 30. ♔xh6 White mates in fine style: 30...h1=♛† 31. ♜xh1 ♛xh1† 32. ♖h4  
Black must give up his queen just to delay the mate.

29. ♛xg6† fxg6† 30. ♔g4±



White has good winning chances thanks to his strong pawn on d6.

### Conclusion

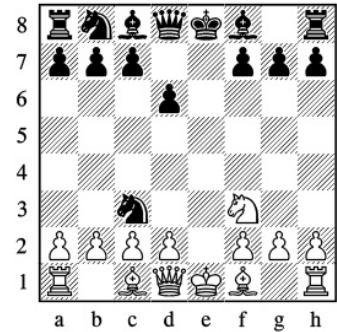
The line with 7.♔d3 0-0 8.0-0, which is acquiring popularity, is very interesting and has been little studied up to now. In most of the variations we examined, only one or two games have been played on a high level. Black faces quite a difficult choice: should he try to punish White for omitting h2-h3, or should he play the standard ...♖e8 and ...♞bd7, resigning himself to the fact that this omission has saved White a tempo? It seems that the early 8...♔g4 leads to an advantage for White after the advance of the g-pawn.

The continuation 8...♞c6 9.d5, and then 9...♞e5 or 9...♞b4, is critical. I have found a couple of interesting ideas for White and come to the conclusion that there is no full equality for Black in any of the variations.

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# Chapter 12

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## Introduction to 5...♞xc3

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♗xe4  
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 ♗c6 8.♚d2

A) 8...♙e6 9.0-0-0 ♚d7 10.♖b1 203

A1) 10...a6 204

A2) 10...h6 205

A3) 10...♙f6 11.h4 207

A31) 11...h6 12.♗d4 ♗xd4 207

A311) 13.♙xd4 207

A312) 13.cxd4!? 208

A3121) 13...0-0?! 208

A3122) 13...d5 209

A32) 11...0-0-0 12.♗d4 ♗xd4 13.♙xd4 ♙e5 14.♙e2 210

A321) 14...♙xd4?! 211

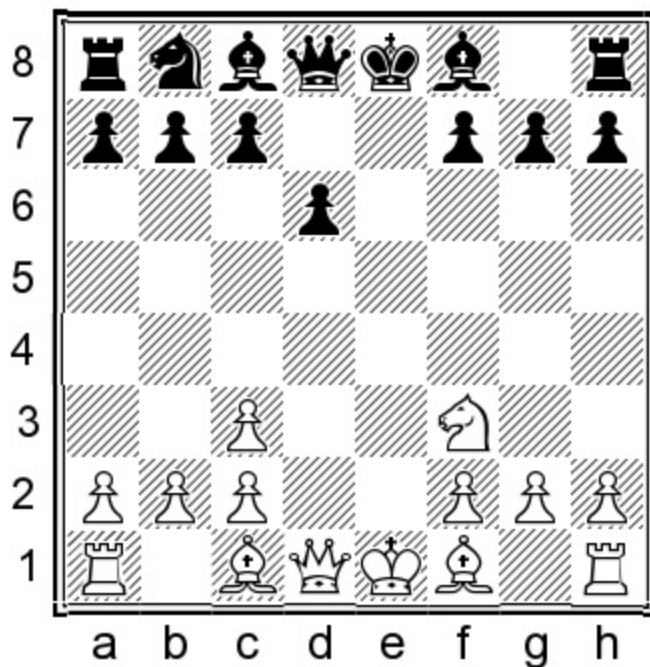
A322) 14...♚a4 211

B) 8...♗e5 9.0-0-0 ♗xf3 213

This is of course the standard move, and the topic of the remaining chapters in this volume.

### 6.dxc3

Again, so standard that it can almost pass without comment. Recapturing towards the centre with 6.bxc3 might seem more natural to some, but experience has shown that 6.dxc3 – allowing rapid development with ♕e3, ♖d2 and 0-0-0 – is more promising.



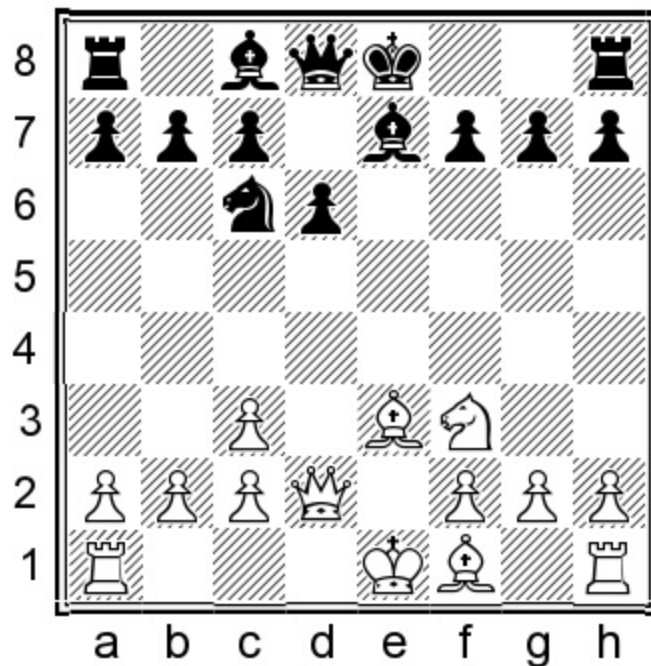
### 6...♕e7 7.♕e3 ♖c6

A natural move; note that if the knight is heading for e5 then transpositions are possible from lines where the knight went to d7.

Chapter 13 will start our study of the 7...0-0 move order. Again, many transpositions are possible if, for example, Black plans a set-up with short castling and placing the knight on e5. Chapters 14 and 15 cover such lines.

Chapters 16 and 17 cover lines where Black places the knight on d7 and does *not* immediately shift it to e5.

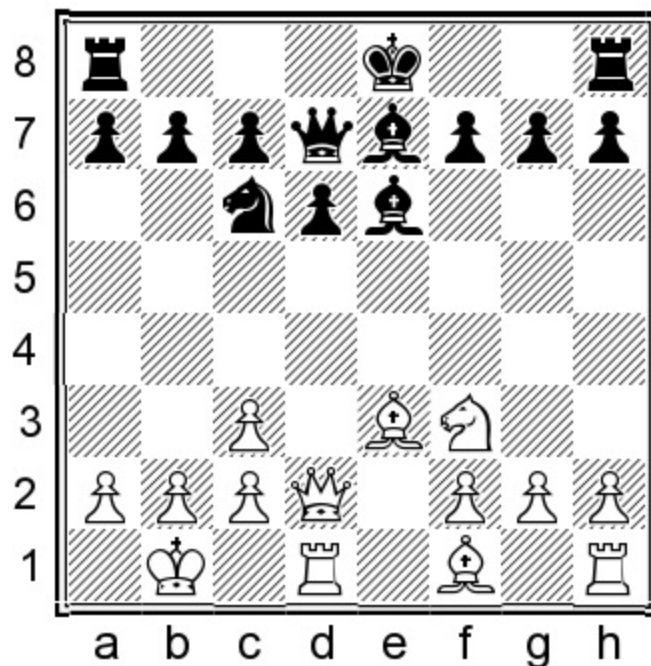
### 8.♖d2



In this chapter we will examine **A) 8...♗e6** and **B) 8...♞e5**.  
 For 8...0-0 see Chapter 13, variation B.

**A) 8...♗e6 9.0-0-0 ♖d7 10.♝b1**

The most popular move. White has also tried various others, such as 10.a3!?, 10.b3 or 10.h4, but I have come to the conclusion that after 10.♝b1 he obtains some advantage and that studying the rare moves is unnecessary.



We now consider Black's possible replies **A1) 10...a6**, **A2) 10...h6** and **A3) 10...♗f6**.

No one plays 10...0-0-0?! 11.♘d4 a6 12.♘xe6 fxe6 13.g3± which gives White a solid plus.

### A1) 10...a6 11.h4

Sakaev does not mention this move when analysing this line – although 10...a6 is not his main recommendation anyway. Now the threat of ♘g5 carries much more weight, since on ...♙xg5 we can retake with hxg5.

But 11.♘g5!? isn't bad either. Black then has to choose between 11...♙xg5 and 11...♙f5, with a slight edge for White in both cases: 11...♙f5!? (or 11...♙xg5 12.♙xg5 f6 13.♙e3 0-0-0± giving White a small plus) And now one possible move is 12.h3!?

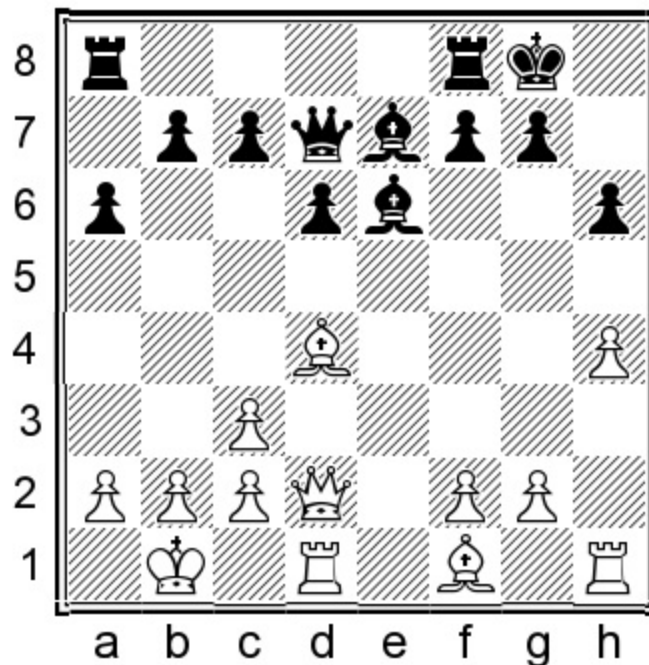
Other interesting lines are 12.♙e2 or even 12.♖g1!? h6 (12...0-0 13.♙e2 ♘e5 14.♘f3±) 13.♘f3 0-0-0!? 14.♘d4 ♘xd4 15.♙xd4 ♖hg8, reaching a standard position where the evaluation is somewhere between 'equality' and 'slight edge to White'.

### 11...h6

Instead 11...0-0-0?! allows White's plan: 12.♘g5 with the intention of meeting 12...♙xg5 with 13.hxg5±.

### 12.♘d4 ♘xd4 13.♙xd4 0-0

The set-up with queenside castling after 13...♖g8 14.c4 0-0-0 15.♙c3± comes about in a version favourable to White.



### 14.♙e2

In the case of 14.f3 ♖fe8 15.g4 ♖ad8∞ Black reacts to the flank attack with a counter-stroke in the centre based on ...c7-c5 and ...d6-d5. From the example of a correspondence game, let's see how

events can develop: 16. ♖f2 c5 17. ♙e3 ♘f8 18. ♙c1 d5 19. ♖g1 ♚c6 20. f4 d4! ⇒ And after 21. f5 ♙d5 22. cxd4 ♙f3= Black equalized in Milde – Tropf, corr. 2018.

### 14... ♖fe8

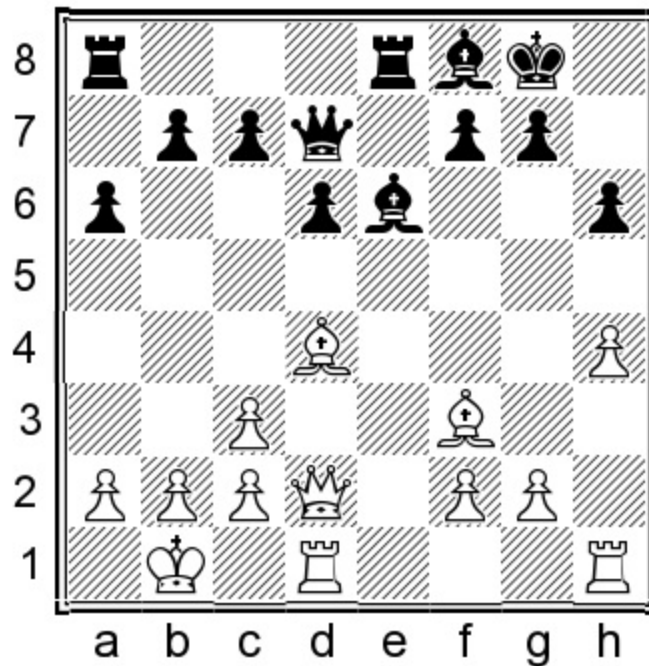
Preparing ... ♙f8 to fortify his king position.

Alternatively 14... ♖ad8 15. g4 c5 16. ♙e3 d5 17. g5 (17. ♙xh6) 17... d4 18. cxd4 cxd4 19. ♚xd4 ♚xd4 20. ♙xd4 hxg5 21. hxg5 ♙xg5 22. ♙d3±.

### 15. ♙f3

Better than 15. g4 ♙f8 after which, thanks to the threat of 16... ♙xa2†, Black is OK: 16. g5!? (or 16. ♖dg1 c5 17. ♙e3 d5 ⇒) 16... ♙xa2† 17. ♙xa2 ♚e6† 18. ♙b1 ♚xe2 19. ♚xe2 ♖xe2 20. ♙e3 ♖e8∞ Although the rook on e2 is trapped, White cannot comfortably win it. Most likely Black will give up the exchange in return for one more pawn.

### 15... ♙f8



### 16. ♖hg1

Not 16. ♙xb7?? ♖ab8 17. ♙f3 ♙xa2†-+.

### 16... ♙g4

Preventing g2-g4.

### 17. ♚f4 h5

Or 17... ♙xf3 18. gxf3±.

### 18.b3

Preparing c3-c4. The immediate 18.c4 is also playable: 18...b5 19.♙c3 c6 20.♞d4! with chances of an advantage.

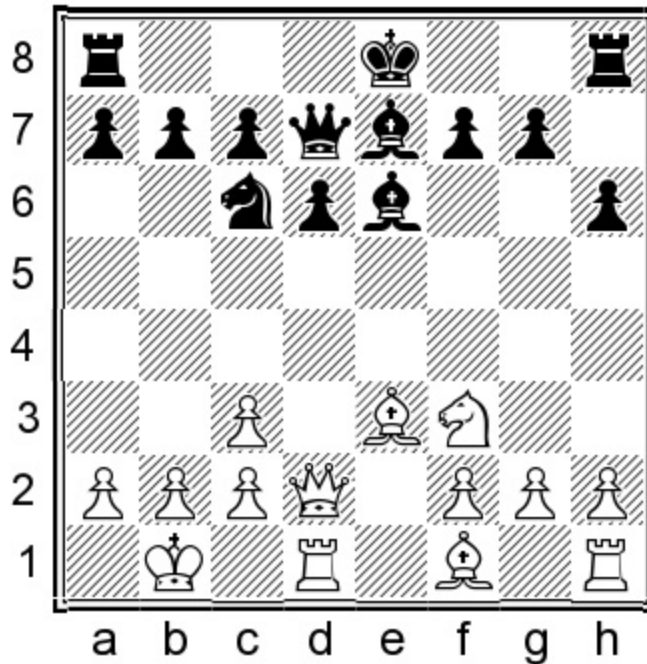
### 18...c6

In the event of 18...d5 19.♞g5! Black has an interesting possibility for counterplay with 19...c5!? (if 19...c6 then 20.c4±) 20.♙e3 d4 21.cxd4 c4, aiming for 22...cxb3 and ...a5-a4. However, after 22.♞d5! (22.d5 is unclear: 22...cxb3 23.axb3 a5 24.♙xg4 hxg4 25.♞d4 a4∞) 22...♞xd5 23.♙xd5 ♙xd1 24.♞xd1 cxb3 25.axb3± White has a solid advantage owing to the two bishops and passed d-pawn.

### 19.c4 b5 20.♙b2±

White has a slight edge on account of his more active dark-squared bishop.

### A2) 10...h6



### 11.♞d4!?

Or 11.h4, which is also quite good and will probably transpose into variation A1 (after 11...a6) or A31 (after 11...♙f6). If instead 11...0-0-0 12.♞d4 ♞xd4 13.♙xd4 ♞hg8 14.♞e3 (better than 14.c4?! c5 15.♙c3 d5=) 14...b6 15.c4, White retains a slight edge.

### 11...♞xd4 12.♙xd4 0-0 13.♞g1!

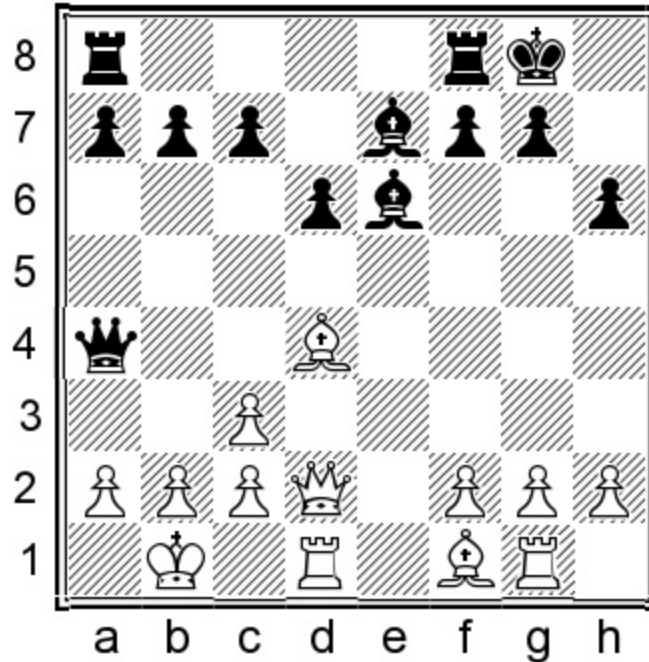
A typical move in these positions; White prepares g2-g4.

### 13...♞a4!?

Black tries to be the first to attack.

If 13...f5 then 14.♙e2 ♜f6 15.♞ge1±. With Black having impaired his own pawn structure by ...f7-f5, we can simply build up in the centre.

In Karjakin – Mamedyarov, Sochi (blitz) 2014, Black played 13...♞ad8 14.g4 ♞fe8. Then the simple 15.♙d3 d5 16.♙e3± would have given White a pleasant advantage.



#### 14.b3!N

In Kudr – Kolpak, corr. 2018, White tried 14.c4!?. But after 14...d5! 15.b3 (15.♞c3 ♙b4 16.♞g3 f6∞) 15...♞c6 16.cxd5 ♙xd5 Black is close to equalizing. White gains no advantage from 17.♙xg7 ♜xg7 18.♞xd5 ♞fd8 19.♞e5† ♙f6 20.♞g3† ♜f8 21.♙c4 b5 22.♙e2 ♙g7∞. Black has adequate counterplay thanks to the weak a1-h8 diagonal.

#### 14...♞a5 15.g4 c5!?

An attempt to create counterplay.

Instead:

15...♞fe8

This is too slow:

16.g5!?

The simple 16.♙e3 is also good; then 16...♙f6 is useless after 17.♜b2±, while 16...♙g5 is met by 17.♙xg5 hxg5 18.♙d3±.

16...hxg5 17.♞e1±

Objectively speaking, White practically has a won game – Black just has no possibility to arrange his pieces normally; the following is a sample variation:

17...♞f5

Not 17...c5? 18.♖xg5+–.

18.f4!? ♕xf4 19.♗xf4 gxf4 20.♞xg7† ♔f8 21.♞h7 ♕g5 22.♕b5!

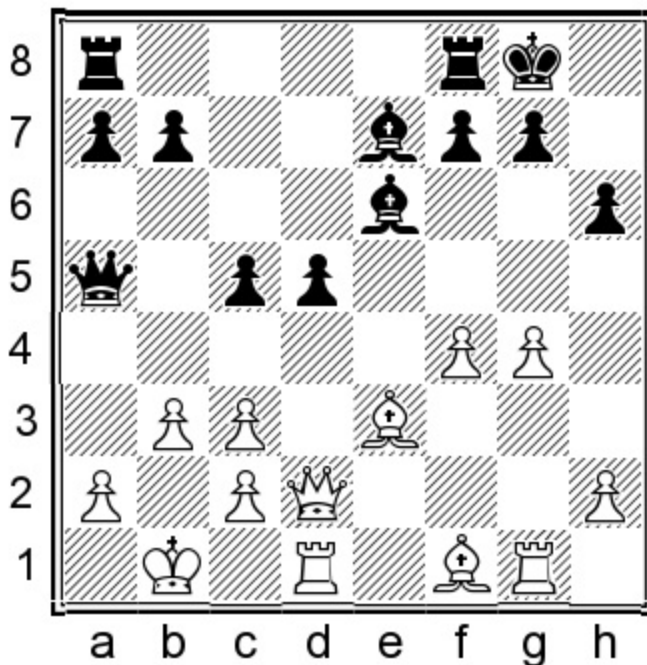
This is stronger than 22.h4 c5±.

22...c6 23.h4 cxb5 24.hxg5 ♔e7 25.g6+–

### 16.♕e3 d5

Better than: 16...♕f6?! 17.♔b2± g6!? (17...d5 18.g5 ♕xc3† 19.♗xc3 ♗xc3† 20.♔xc3 d4† 21.♕xd4± leaves Black with some hopes of salvation) 18.f4! (but not 18.♕xh6? b5⇝) 18...d5 (18...♕d5 19.f5 g5 20.h4+– is no better) 19.f5 d4 20.cxd4 ♗xd2 21.♞xd2± White has a healthy extra pawn.

### 17.f4±



Thanks to the threats of f4-f5 and g4-g5, White has a clear plus. It's important to note his reply to Black's next move:

### 17...♕f6?!

In this case White doesn't need to spend a tempo on ♔b2.

### 18.f5! ♕d7

Or 18...♕xc3 19.♗c1 ♕d7 20.♞xd5±.

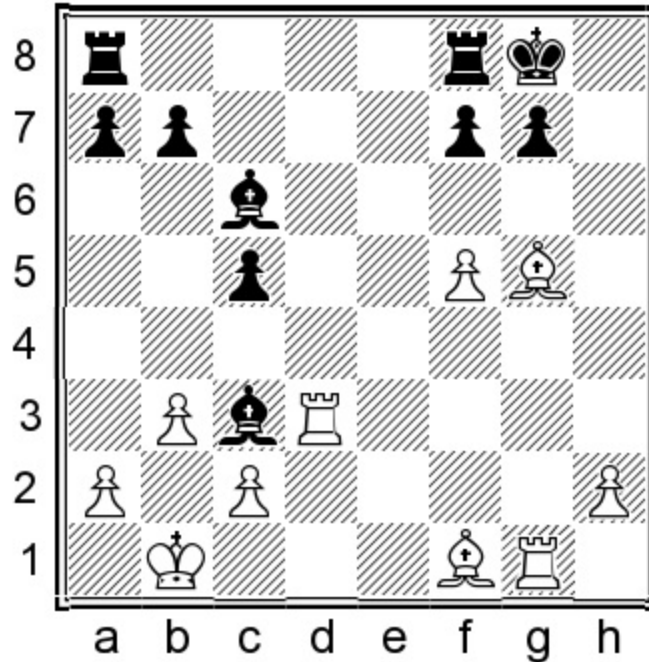
### 19.g5 hxg5 20.♕xg5 ♗xc3

On 20...♕xc3? White wins with: 21.♗xd5 (there is no mate after 21.♕f6? ♕xd2 22.♞xg7† ♔h8=) 21...♕c6 22.♗d6+–

21. ♖xc3 ♕xc3 22. ♖xd5

Despite the exchange of queens, Black's king is still in danger – and he has no time to make it safe, owing to the attacks on his bishops.

22... ♕c6 23. ♖d3



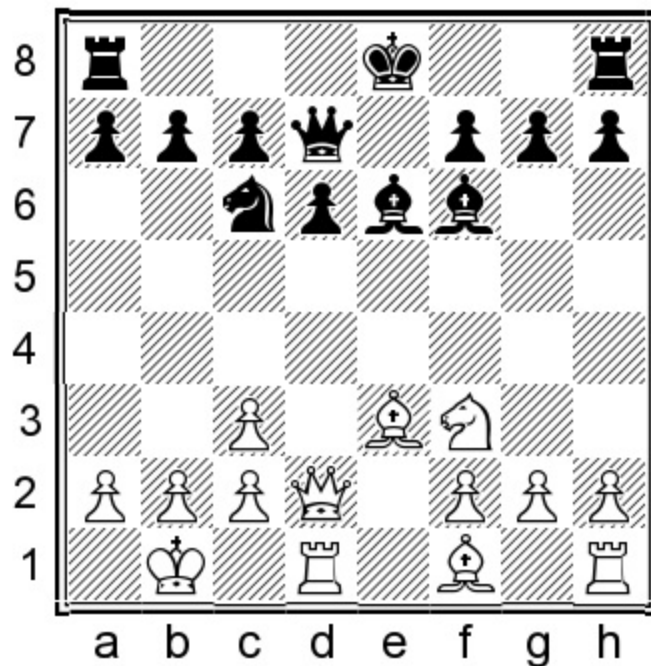
23... ♕e5

Not 23... ♕d4? 24. ♖xd4 cxd4 25. ♕f6+-.

24. ♕e7! ♖fe8 25. f6 g6 26. ♖h3±

Threatening ♖g6†. Black has nothing better than to surrender the exchange with 26... ♖xe7.

A3) 10... ♕f6



#### 11.h4

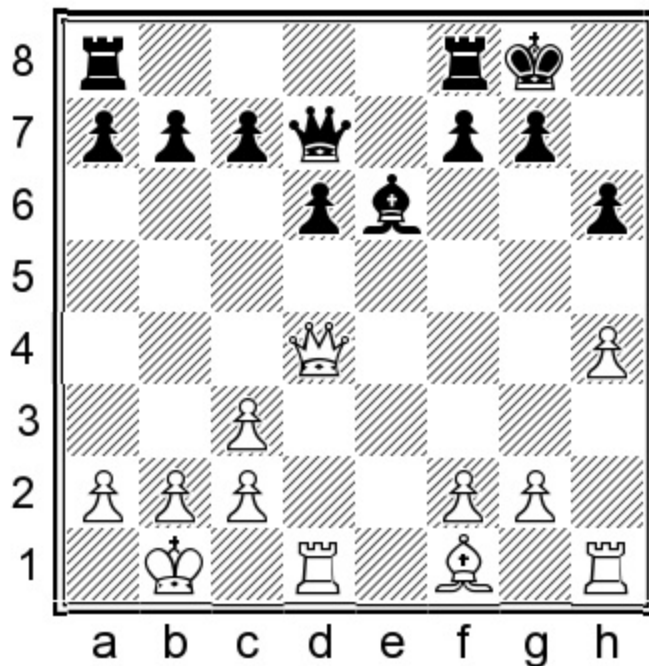
This leads to what is perhaps the fundamental position in the lines where Black castles long.

At this point **A31)** 11...h6 used to be treated as the main line, but it was then supplanted by **A32)** 11...0-0-0. Let's look at these variations in more detail.

**A31)** 11...h6 12.♘d4 ♗xd4

Now White can choose between **A311)** 13.♙xd4 and **A312)** 13.cxd4!?

**A311)** 13.♙xd4 ♘xd4 14.♚xd4 0-0



The computer confidently rates this position as favourable to White, but on studying it I have come to the conclusion that Black has the good idea of ...♞e7-f6 available, to exchange queens without worrying about the damage to his own pawn structure. This gives Black good chances to equalize.

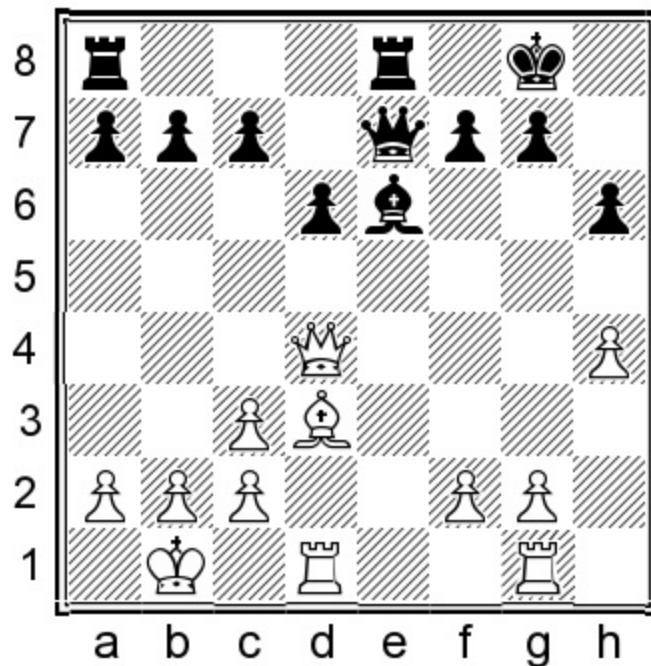
### 15.♞g1

A game Florea – Novák, corr. 2018, went: 15.♙e2 ♞ae8 16.♙f3 b6 17.g4 (17.c4 f5∞) 17...♞b5! 18.g5 (an improvement might be 18.b3!? ♞c5 19.♞d2 ♙d7 20.g5 ♞f5 21.♙g2 h5, with approximate equality, but more play in the position) 18...♞c4 19.gxh6 ♞xd4 20.cxd4 gxh6 21.♙c6 ♞d8 White retains a minimal edge which he will hardly manage to convert into a win.

### 15...♞e7 16.♙d3

After 16.h5 ♞f6! 17.♞xf6 gxf6 18.g4 ♙h8 there seem to be no problems for Black.

### 16...♞fe8



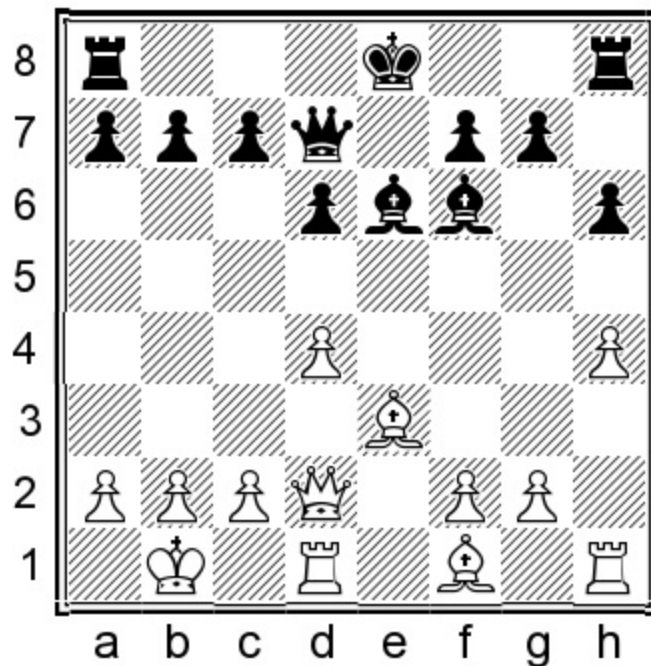
**17.g3!**

Probably the best chance to set Black some problems. White preserves a minimal advantage in the event of either 17...♙f6 18.♚xf6 or 17...d5 18.f3.

After 17.♞de1 d5 (17...♙f6 18.♚xf6 gxf6 19.♙c1± occurred in Ding Liren – Bu Xiangzhi, China 2015; with accurate play, Black drew the game) 18.f3 b6!? (with ideas of ...c7-c5 or ...♙c5) 19.♞b5 ♞ed8 20.h5 c5 21.♙e5 ♙d6= Black has not even needed to double his own pawns in order to neutralize the active placing of White’s queen.

After 17.h5 ♙f6 18.♚xf6 gxf6=, the pawn on h5 simplifies Black’s defence.

**A312) 13.cxd4!?**



An old idea revived. In my view this is an underrated move, after which White can lay claim to an advantage. Leko played this way once in 2009, after which the move was forgotten. It was because everyone captures with the bishop automatically that I gave the variations arising from 13.♙xd4 in addition to this one.

Black can reply with the dangerous **A3121) 13...0-0?! or with A3122) 13...d5.**

Other possibilities:

a) 13...♙a4!? A little artificial, but not a bad move overall. 14.d5 ♘d7 15.f3 White wants to gain space on the kingside. There can follow 15...0-0-0 16.g4 ♖de8 17.a3 ♘b5 18.♙xb5 ♙xb5 19.b3, giving White a small but stable plus.

b) 13...c6 14.f3 0-0-0

14...d5 15.♙f4± occurred in Leko – Wang Yue, Nanjing 2009.

15.g4

Instead 15.d5 would be met by 15...♙xd5 16.♙xa7 ♙c7 when Black is close to equal.

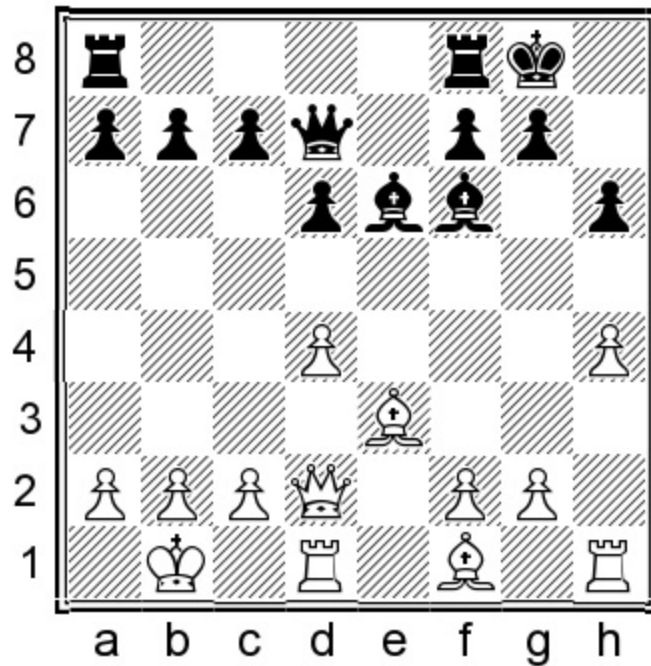
15...♖de8 16.♙d3

With a slight edge for White. Black fails to solve his problems with:

16...♙xa2† 17.♙xa2 ♙e6† 18.d5 ♙xe3 19.dxc6 ♙xd2 20.cxb7† ♙xb7 21.♖xd2±

After which he still has work ahead of him.

**A3121) 13...0-0?!**



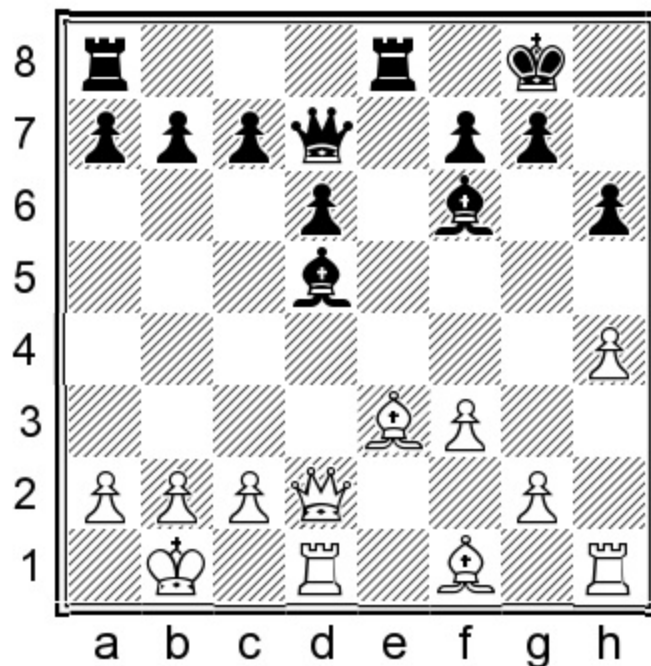
### 14.f3!

Accuracy is required if White wants to gain the advantage. This continuation is better than 14.d5 ♖f5 15.f3 h5 when Black is OK since his dark-squared bishop has been given access to e5. For example: 16.♗g5 ♗e5! 17.f4 ♗xb2 18.♔xb2 f6∞

### 14...♗fe8

Creating the threat of ...♗xa2†. But now, by problem-like means, White can secure a large plus. If 14...h5 then 15.♗g5±.

### 15.d5! ♗xd5



## 16.♙g5!!

A brilliant idea. If White didn't have this resource, the evaluation of 13...0-0 would probably be altered.

Instead 16.♙xh6?! ♚xa2† 17.♖xa2 gxh6 18.♗xh6 ♛a4† 19.♕b1 ♙g7= gives White nothing.

## 16...hxg5 17.hxg5 ♚xa2†

After 17...♙e5 18.♗xd5, with equal material, White has his attack “for free”.

## 18.♖xa2 ♙e5 19.g6!

Carrying on energetically. We shall soon see how this fast-tempo play bears fruit.

## 19...♗e6† 20.♕b1 ♗xg6 21.f4 ♙f6 22.♙b5

Now either 22...♞e7? or 22...♞ed8? loses by force.

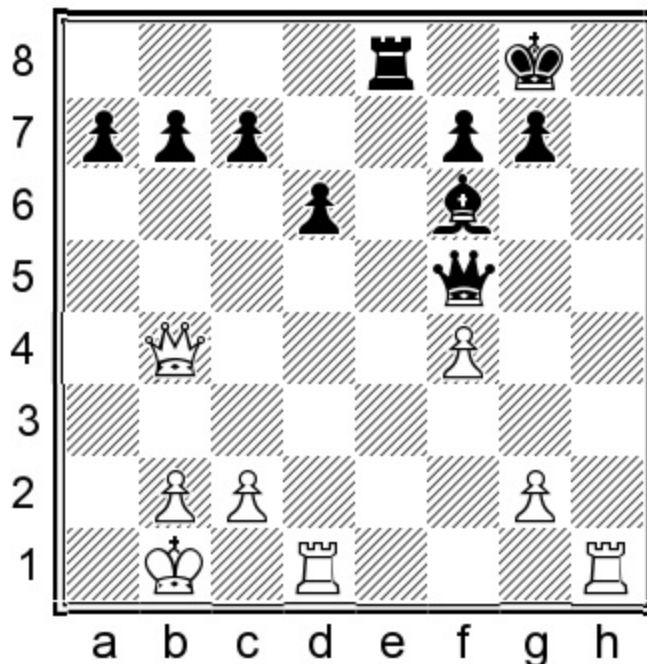
## 22...♗f5

Black has to give up the exchange.

If 22...♞ed8?, then 23.♙d3 ♗g4 (23...♗g3 24.♞h3 ♗g4 alters nothing) 24.♞h7 g6 25.♞dh1, and Black cannot repel the mate threats: 25...d5 26.g3! ♗xg3 27.♞7h3 ♗g4 28.♗h2+–

Or if 22...♞e7? then 23.♙d3 ♗g3 24.♞h3 ♗g4 25.♙h7† ♕f8 26.♙f5+–.

## 23.♙xe8 ♞xe8 24.♗b4



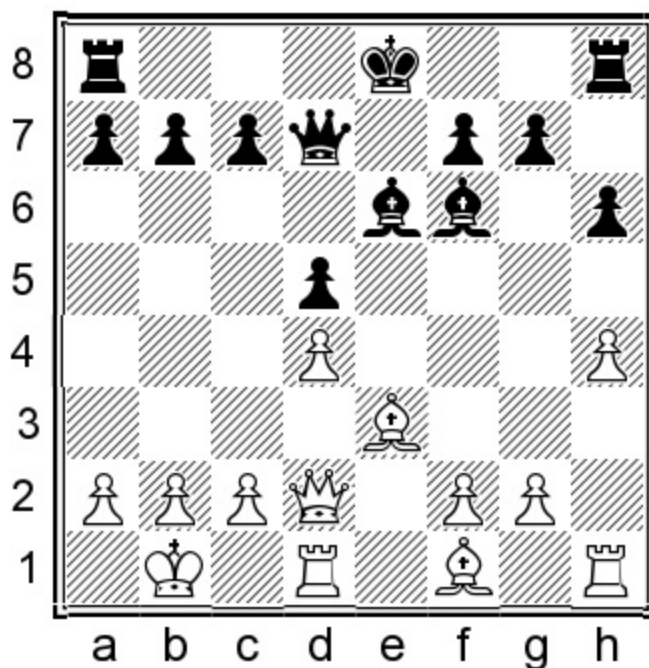
## 24...b5

Or 24...b6 25.♞de1±.

### 25.♞de1±

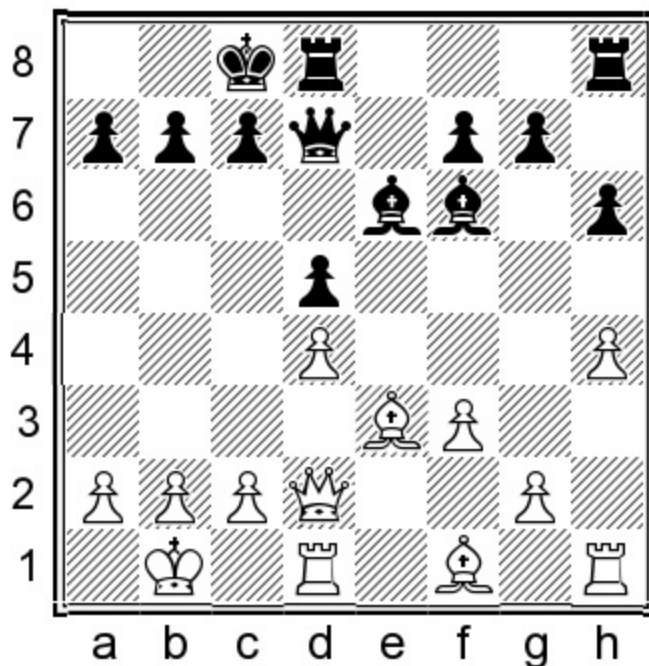
Black's king position has been weakened by the opening of the h-file, and moreover a rook exchange is unwelcome to him as this would weaken his queenside.

A3122) 13...d5



The most natural move. Black has eliminated the threat of d4-d5 and prepares to castle long.

### 14.f3 0-0-0



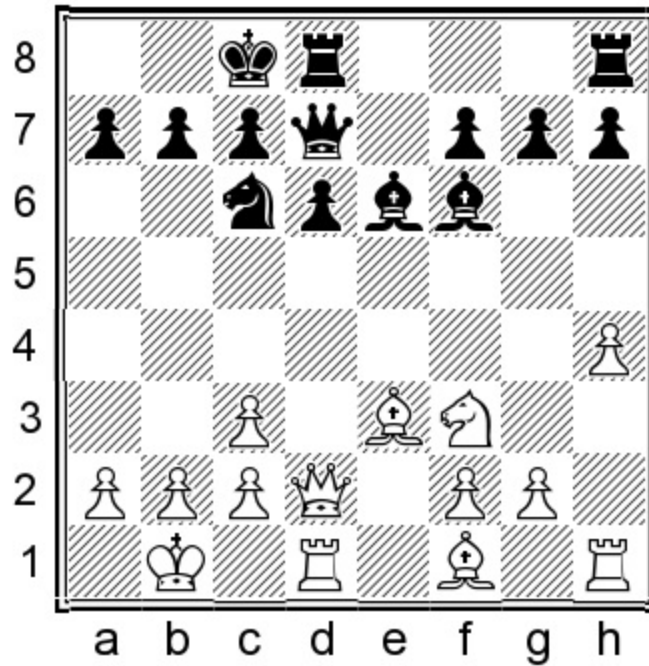
### 15.h5

More effective than 15.g4 h5 16.g5 ♔e7=.

### 15...♔b8 16.g4±

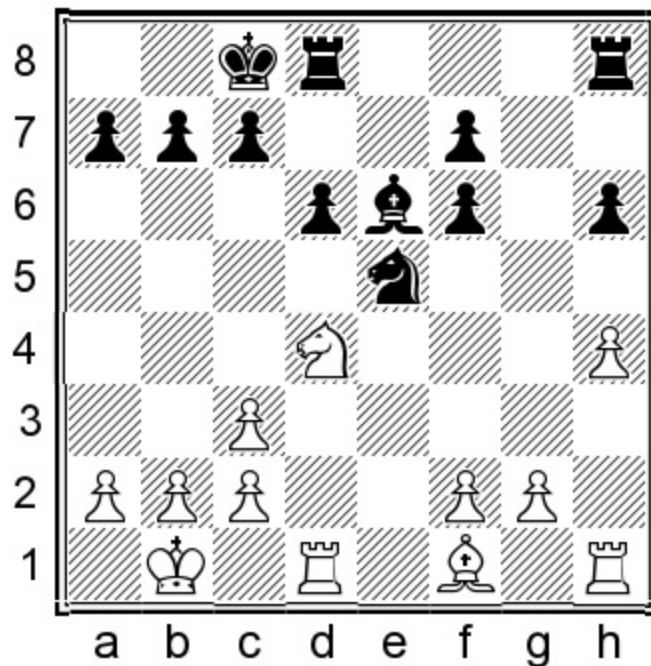
Thanks to his spatial advantage on the kingside, White preserves a slight edge.

### A32) 11...0-0-0



### 12.♘d4

The alternative 12.♙g5 ♚e7 13.♚f4 (13.♙b5 is not better: 13...♘e5 14.♘d4 a6 15.♙e2 h6 16.♙xf6 ♚xf6=) 13...h6! 14.♙xf6 ♚xf6 15.♚xf6 gxf6 leads to an ending with a minimal plus for White. Black obtains the half-open g-file to compensate for his poor pawn formation: 16.♘d4 ♘e5 (or 16...♘xd4 17.♚xd4±)

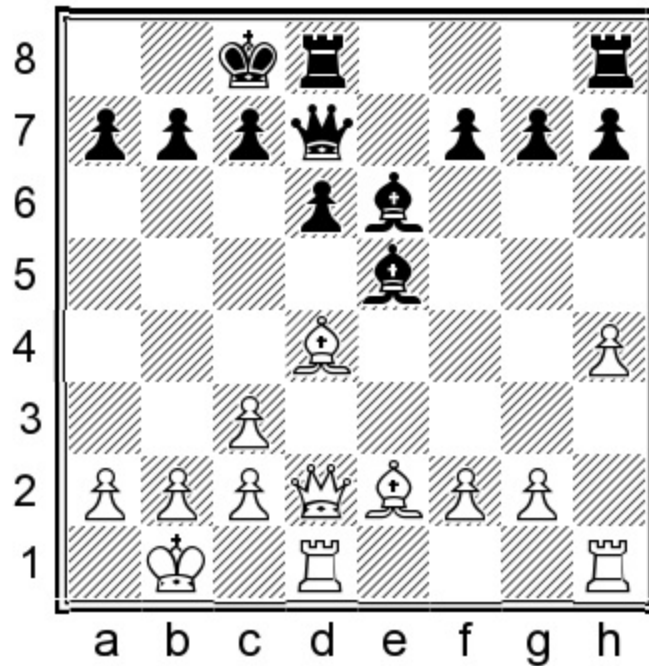


And now:

a) 17.♖d2!?N Securing the f2-pawn with the aid of the rook is more flexible than playing f2-f3, as in this way we preserve the option of g2-g3; we now aim to play b2-b3 and transfer our knight to f4.  
 17...d5 Black has several moves of roughly equal value, but they don't affect White's ideas. 18.b3 c6  
 19.♗e2 With a minimal advantage for White.

b) 17.f3 is less effective: 17...♜hg8 18.♗e2 ♘g6 19.h5 ♗e7 20.♗f4 ♜g5 21.♞e1 ♘d5 With a comfortable position for Black in Vachier-Lagrave – Yu Yangyi, Shenzhen 2018.

12...♗xd4 13.♙xd4 ♙e5 14.♙e2



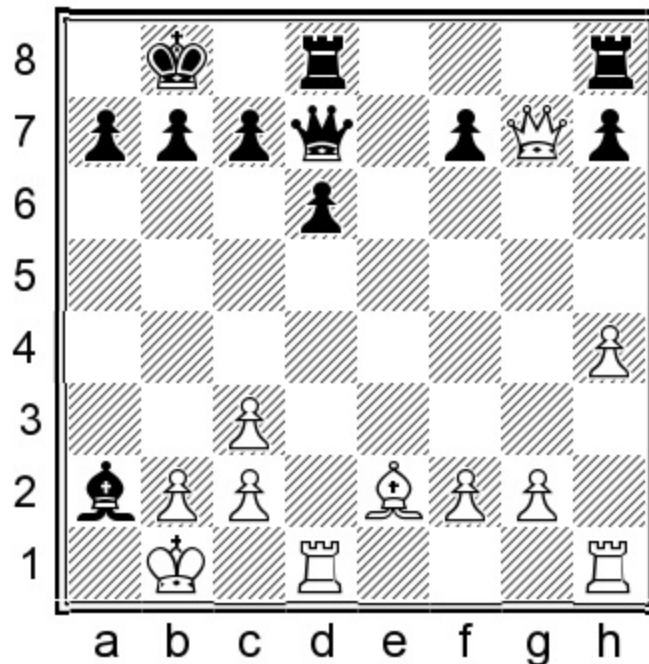
Now Black has **A321)** 14...♙xd4?! or **A322)** 14...♚a4.

A lesser option is 14...g6?! as in Leko – Wei Yi, Doha (blitz) 2016, when after 15.♙xe5!?N 15...dxe5 16.♚e3 ♚a4 17.b3 ♚a5 18.h5!?!± White has the initiative.

### **A321) 14...♙xd4?!**

Sakaev awards this move an exclamation mark but I am not so impressed by it. Black's attempt to exploit the position of the bishop on e2 by means of a little tactical ploy does not bring success.

**15.♚xd4 ♖b8 16.♚xg7 ♙xa2†**



### 17.♔c1!

Black has made an unfavourable exchange of his g7-pawn for the white a2-pawn, and now his pawns on f7 and h7 remain weak even if the queens are exchanged.

### 17...♙e6 18.♚d4

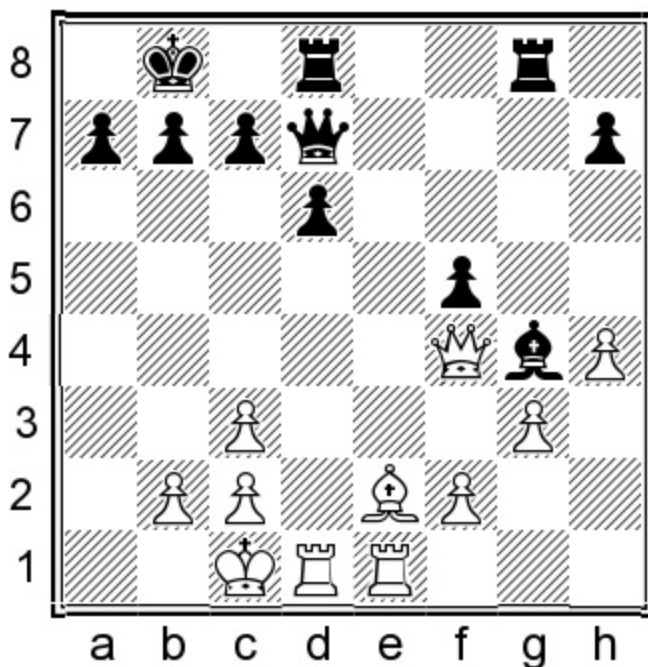
Another quite good line is: 18.♙f3!? ♚a4 19.♚d4 ♚a1† (or 19...♚xd4 20.♞xd4±) 20.♔d2 ♚a5 21.♞he1±

### 18...♞hg8 19.g3 ♙g4

Sakaev stops here and evaluates the position as equal, but I disagree.

### 20.♞he1 f5 21.♚f4±

White has a solid advantage on account of his better pawn structure. We now want to play f2-f3, and if Black exchanges with ...♙xe2 he will have to concede the e-file thanks to his weak f5-pawn.



### 21...♙xe2

Black does no better with 21...♞de8 22.f3 ♙h5 23.♙c4 ♙f7 24.♙d3± as in R. Ward – Bredenhof, corr. 2018.

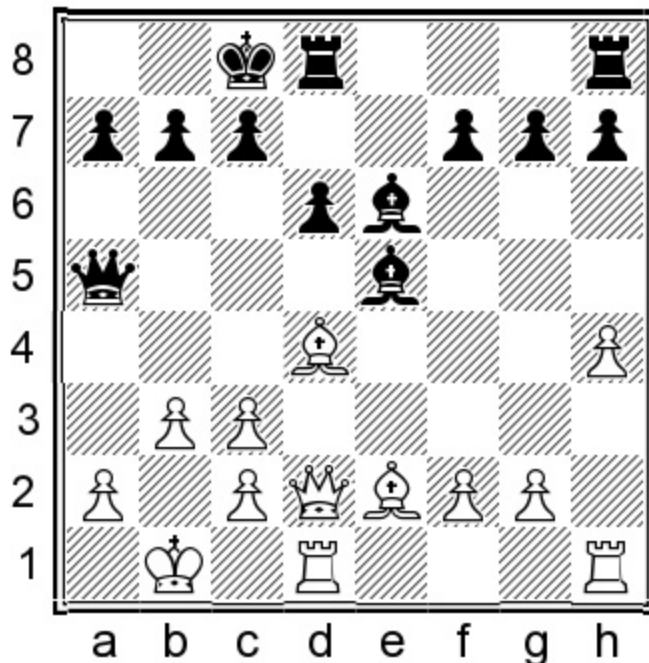
### 22.♞xe2 ♞de8 23.♞de1 ♞xe2 24.♞xe2 a6

Not 24...♞e8?? 25.♚xf5+–.

### 25.♚e3±

White has quite good winning chances.

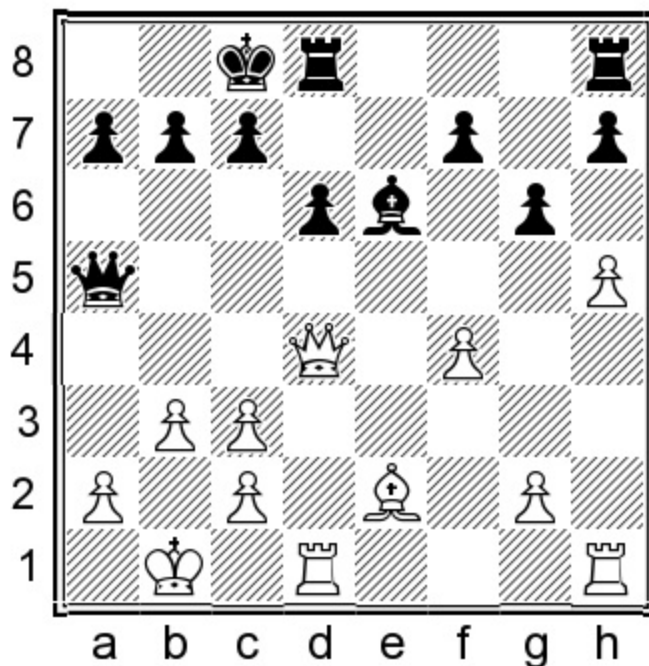
A322) 14...♙a4 15.b3 ♚a5



16.♙xe5!?N

Another interesting line is:

16.f4 ♙xd4 17.♙xd4 g6 18.h5



18...♜he8!

Black sets up a threat of ...♙xb3. It's important for him to force the bishop on e2 to commit itself at a moment when White cannot calmly place it on d3.

In Vachier-Lagrave – Caruana, Saint Louis 2018, Black played instead 18...♙c5. White could then have gained the advantage by 19.♙f6!, answering 19...♜he8 with 20.♙d3± or 19...♙f5 with

20. ♖h4±. It is just this favourable set-up that Black's 18... ♖he8! is designed to prevent.

There can follow:

19. ♗f3

If 19. ♗d3 then 19...c5!, which explains why Black didn't hurry to play ... ♖c5; now after 20. ♖f6 c4 21. ♗xc4 ♗xc4 22. bxc4 ♖b6† 23. ♔a1 ♖f2∞ he has full compensation for the pawn.

19... ♖c5 20. ♖g7 a5∞

With chances for both sides. The pawn on h7 is invulnerable for now, and if 21. ♕b2 then 21...a4!? is not bad.

**16... ♖xe5 17. ♗f3**

Thanks to his good bishop on f3, White maintains some pressure. Let's examine Black's possible replies.

**17... ♖he8**

Or:

a) 17... ♖f6

Withdrawing the queen before it is attacked, and taking aim at the h4-pawn.

18. c4 ♗f5

18... ♕b8 is no better: 19. ♖g5 and now 19... ♖xg5 20. hxg5± or 19... ♖g6 20. ♖de1±.

19. ♖a5

By manoeuvring with the queen on this rank, White forces Black to remove his own queen from f5.

19... ♕b8 20. ♖b5 ♗c8 21. ♖g5 ♖g6 22. ♖de1

And White has kept his small plus.

b) 17... ♕b8 18. ♖he1 ♖f6 19. ♖e4!± This good deployment of the rook gives White the advantage; with his king on b8, Black has more trouble playing ...d6-d5, since his rook on d8 now lacks protection. 19...d5?! 20. ♖f4 ♖e7 (or 20... ♖e5 21. c4±) 21. ♖e3 ♖he8 22. ♖fd4±

c) 17...d5 fails to equalize after 18. ♖he1 ♖f6 19. ♖e3 ♕b8 20. ♖d4±, with ideas of ♖ed1 and ♖g5.

**18. c4**

White may also play 18. ♖he1!? ♖f6 19. ♖e4 d5 20. ♖f4 ♖e5 21. ♖e1 ♖d6 22. ♖d4, retaining a slight edge.

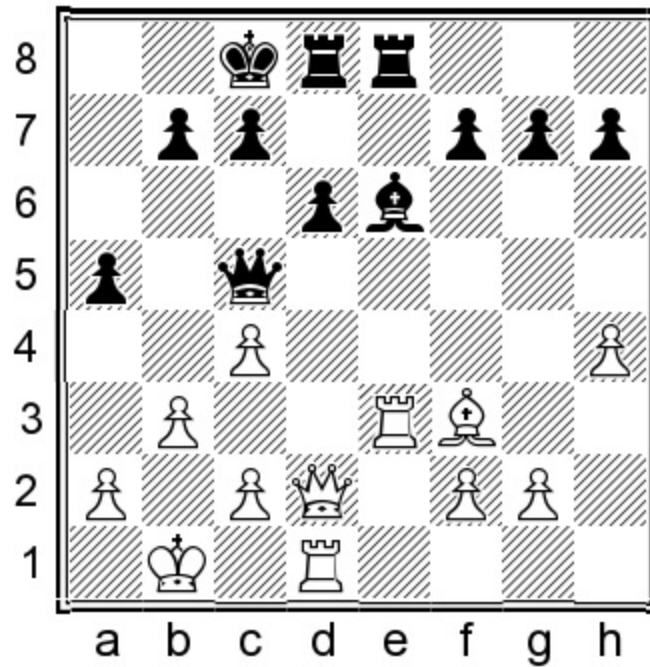
**18... ♖c5**

Or 18... ♕b8 19. ♖he1 ♖f6 20. ♖g5± with the better ending.

**19. ♖he1 a5**

On 19...♔d7, White plays 20.♔d5 f6 21.h5±. Then 21...♔g4 isn't very good in view of: 22.h6! gxh6 23.f3±

**20.♖e3**



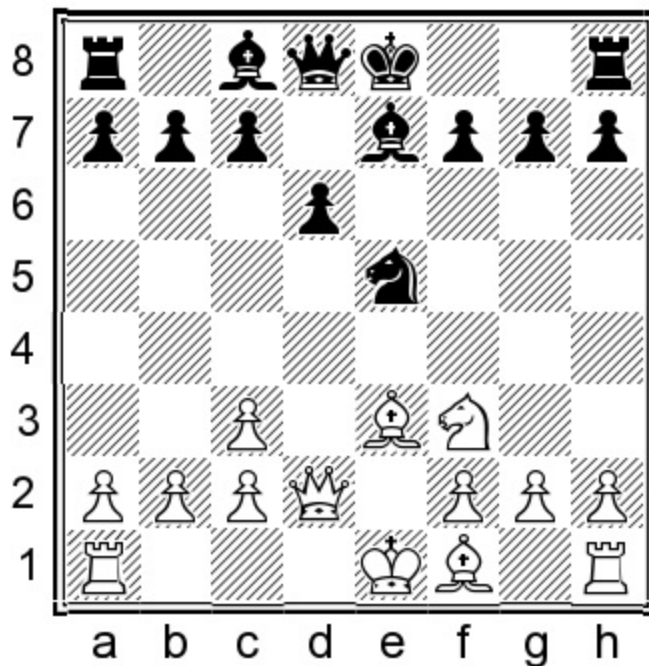
**20...g6**

Not 20...♔d7?! 21.♖c3 ♖xe3 22.fxe3 ♖e5 23.♖xe5 dxe5 24.♖d5, after which Black will have to struggle with a pawn less.

**21.♖de1±**

Thanks to his more active pieces, White maintains a plus. As in the majority of lines with ...0-0-0, Black will have work to do to reach a draw.

**B) 8...♘e5**



### 9.0-0-0

Most often the early 8...♘e5 merely transposes (after 9.0-0-0 0-0) into Chapter 14 and 15. But we also need to look at the possible capture of the knight on f3.

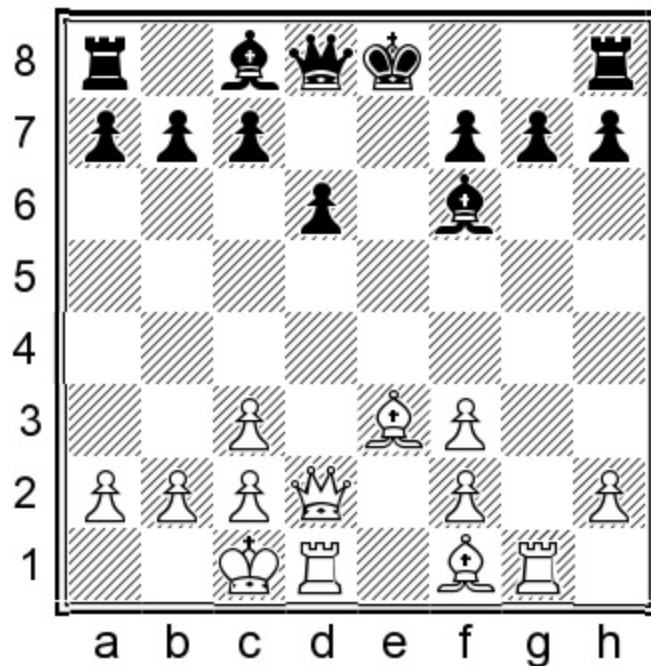
After 9.♘xe5!? dxe5 10.♙xd8† ♕xd8 11.♖c4 0-0 12.0-0-0 ♖f6 White maintains a small amount of pressure owing to the fact that Black's bishop is still on c8. White's play involves pushing his kingside pawns; for example he can prepare the advance of his g-pawn with 13.h3 or 13.♖hg1!?. But seeing that Black has no weaknesses, it will be hard for White to increase his advantage in any way. For that reason most players prefer 9.0-0-0.

### 9...♘xf3

Given that Black plans to castle short, this knight exchange looks suspect; by opening the g-file, he risks coming under attack. For that reason this move is rarely seen today in "classical" games.

### 10.gxf3 ♖e6

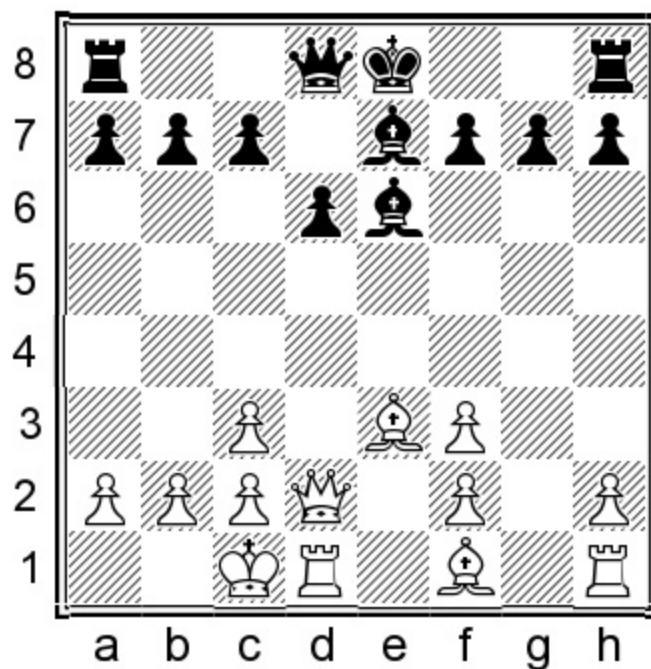
Or 10...♖f6 11.♖g1



And now:

a) If 11...0-0, then 12.♘d4 ♘f5! is inaccurate; at this moment the advance 12.h4± is simpler. Thanks to the open g-file, White has a promising position.

b) 11...♙e6 12.♘d4± At this point 12...0-0 is dangerous in view of 13.♚f4 ♘xd4 14.♚xd4 with an attack. A better option is 12...g6 13.♚f4 ♘xd4 14.♚xd4; then instead of castling, Black may play 13...♖g8 or 13...♔d7!?. But here too White is somewhat better.



### 11.♚d4!

The computer assesses the position as favourable to White after a few moves, but acquiring a stable

plus is actually not so simple. For instance in reply to the seemingly more logical 11.♖g1, Black has the clever possibility of transferring his king to the other flank: 11...g6 12.♔d4 (or 12.♙d4 ♖g8∞) 12...♗d7! 13.♙c4 ♗c8 Surprisingly, after these king moves Black's position is not bad. After some analysis I concluded that he was close to equalizing.

### 11...0-0

Or:

11...♙f6 12.♔b4

12.♔e4 is weaker: 12...c6! 13.♔b4 ♔e7∞ And after 14.♔xd6 ♔xd6 15.♖xd6 ♙d5 a complex position arises.

12...♔c8

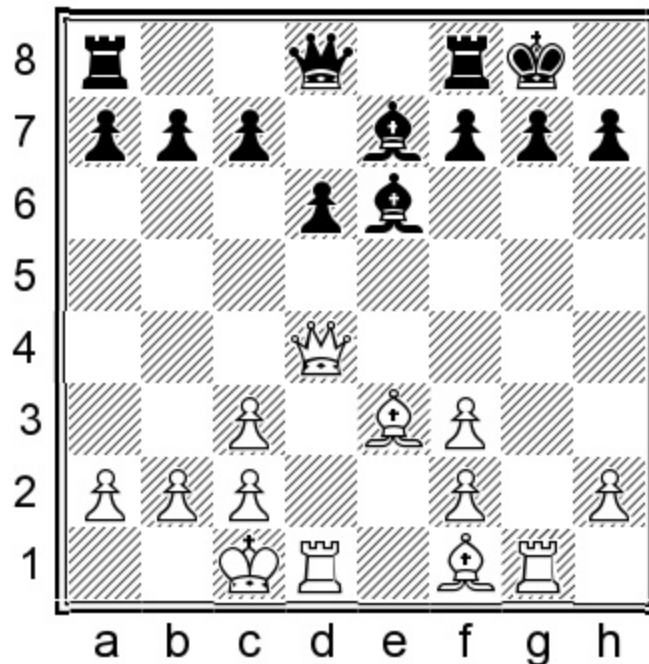
If Black plays 12...0-0, then after 13.♔xb7 ♖b8 14.♔a6 he has insufficient compensation for the pawn; 13.♙d3!? isn't a bad reply either.

13.♖g1 a5 14.♔e4±

This occurred in Dominguez Perez – Wang Yue, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010. That game continued 14...a4 15.♙d4, and Black had a difficult position.

No doubt Black could improve with 14...0-0 15.♙d3 g6 16.h4 or 14...g6 15.h4, but White still has a clear plus in either case.

### 12.♖g1



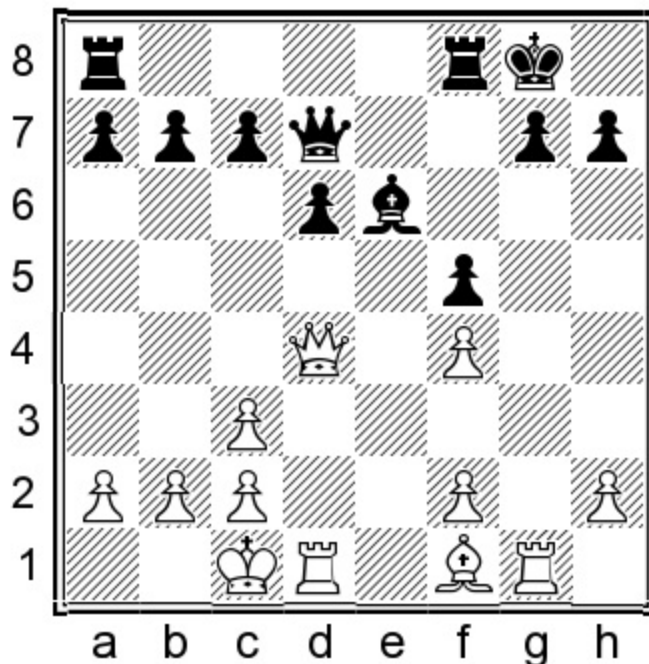
### 12...♙f6

After 12...g6 13.♔f4 ♙f6 14.h4 ♙e5 15.♔e4± White intends h4-h5. The computer now suggests the ingenious 15...f5!? 16.♔xb7 ♔xh4, but with 17.♔c6! White keeps the advantage.

### 13.♔f4

Or 13.♔e4!?. Then after 13...d5 14.♗f4 or 13...c6 14.h4, White again keeps the initiative.

13...♙e5 14.♗e4 ♖c8 15.♙d4 f5 16.♗h4 ♙xd4 17.♗xd4 ♖d7 18.f4±



Thanks to his pressure along the g-file, White has a stable plus. Black cannot create counterplay on the queenside.

### Conclusion

After 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.♘c3 ♘xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 ♘c6 8.♗d2 the lines considered in this chapter are 8...♙e6 and 8...♘e5.

After 8...♙e6 9.0-0-0 ♗d7 the later variations where Black castles long are very interesting. There was a time when the evaluation of the Petroff Defence depended on these lines. After 10.♖b1 Black has three possibilities, which we have thoroughly examined.

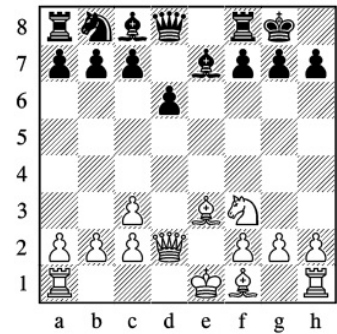
The most popular set-up is 10...♙f6 with the intention to castle queenside. Then the line with 12.♙g5 yields a symbolic plus for White. More chances are offered by 12.♘d4, after which, to all appearances, Black is unable to equalize. White keeps a slight but stable edge in all variations. Accurate play is required on Black's part to stop White from increasing his advantage. Most likely for this reason, lines in which Black castles short have recently become popular.

8...♘e5 usually leads after 9.0-0-0 0-0 to a transposition to Chapter 14 or 15. But in this chapter we looked at the exchange on f3 on move 9, when White's f-pawns are doubled, but the g-file is opened. In general, the active white rook on g1 is more significant than the weakened pawns, but as we saw, securing a definite edge requires considerable precision.

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# Chapter 13

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## Move 8 Sidelines

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♗xe4  
5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♕e7 7.♕e3 0-0 8.♚d2

A) 8...♚e8 217

B) 8...♗c6 217

C) 8...b6 9.0-0-0 ♖b7 10.h4 ♗d7 11.♗d4!? 219

C1) 11...♕f6 12.♖g1!? 220

C11) 12...♗e5!? 220

C12) 12...♕xh4 221

C121) 13.♗f5!? 221

C122) 13.g4 223

C2) 11...♗e5 12.♕g5 228

C21) 12...♕f6!? 228

C22) 12...♚d7 229

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1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♗xe4 5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♕e7 7.♕e3 0-0 8.♚d2

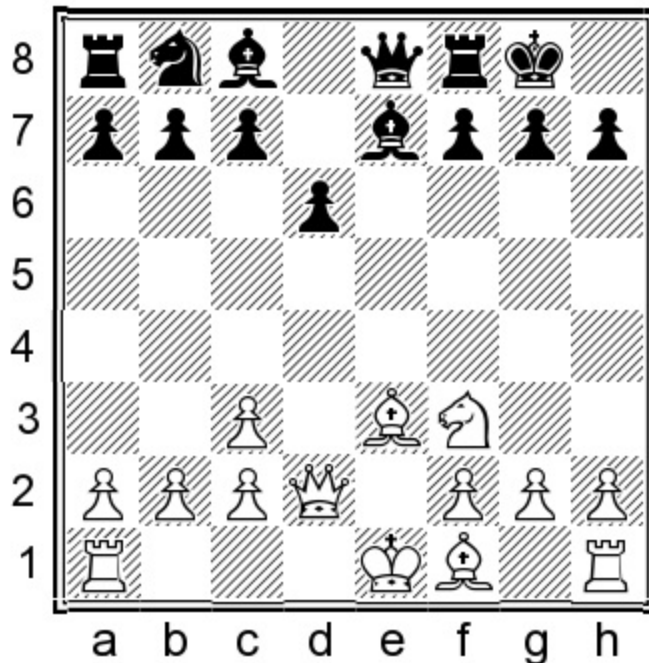
We now analyse A) 8...♚e8, B) 8...♗c6 and C) 8...b6.

For 8...♗d7, see Chapters 14-17. Note that we shall cover ...♗e5 lines in Chapters 14 and 15, though

of course the knight can reach e5 via c6 as well.

### A) 8...♙e8

A fairly uncommon idea for transferring the queen to a4 before the knight has come out to c6.



### 9.0-0-0!?

White could simply continue 9.♘d3 ♞c6 (as White has not played 0-0-0, there is no point in 9...♙a4 10.♗d4 ♘d7 11.0-0±) 10.0-0-0 ♞e5 11.♗xe5 dxe5, whereupon 12.♙e2 ♘e6 transposes to Chapter 14, variation B1.

However, if White allows ...♙a4 he acquires a plus all the same.

### 9...♙a4 10.♖b1 ♗c6 11.♘d3 ♘e6 12.a3

Black doesn't succeed in creating queenside play, so he does better to concentrate on action in the centre.

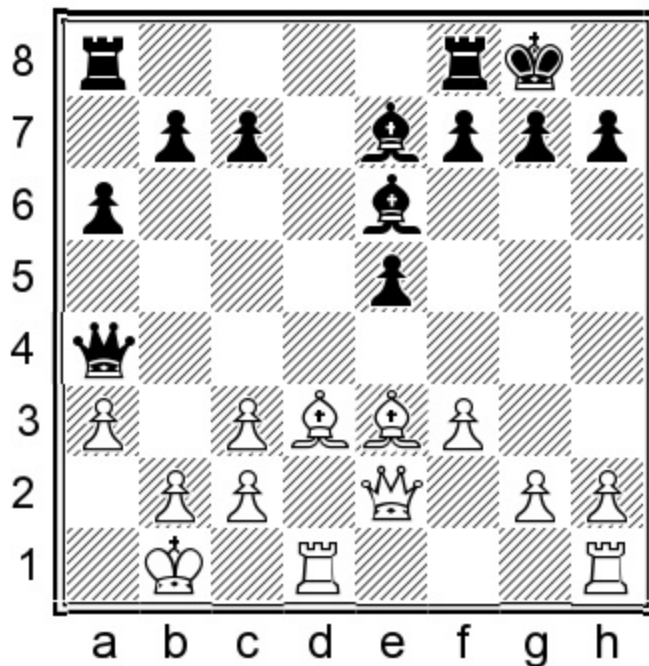
### 12...♗e5

If 12...b5?! then 13.♘g5±.

### 13.♗xe5 dxe5 14.♙e2 a6

Instead 14...♖ad8 was played in Hracek – Lalic, Bol 2014, when one option was 15.♘c1!?N with a similar plan for White as mentioned below. Black's most natural way to defend the e5-pawn is ...♘d6 at some point, so putting the rook on the soon-to-be closed d-file is not the most logical choice.

### 15.f3



White will follow with ♔c1 and ♖he1. It's hard for Black to devise anything better than a set-up with ...♙d6, ...♞ae8 and ...f7-f5.

### 15...♞ae8

The same position results from 15...♙d6 16.♔c1 f5 17.c4 ♞ae8 18.♖he1.

### 16.♔c1 ♙d6 17.c4 f5 18.♖he1±

White can continue calmly improving his position with ♙d2-c3, or b2-b3 and ♙b2. Black has run out of active moves and must play defensively.

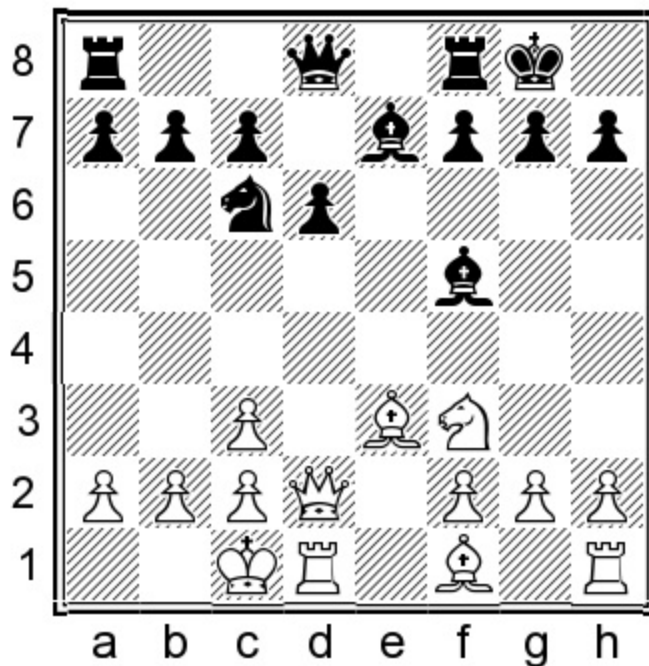
### B) 8...♘c6 9.0-0-0 ♙f5!?

We consider 9...♘e5 in Chapters 14 and 15.

Alternatively 9...♙e6, and now:

a) Interestingly, after 10.h4 Black may capture the pawn: 10...♙xa2!? 11.b3 (11.♙d3!?! is probably better) 11...a5 12.♖b2 a4 13.♞a1 axb3 14.cxb3 ♙xb3 15.♞xa8 ♗xa8 16.♖xb3 ♗a1∞ With quite good compensation for the piece. This is why I recommend 10.♙d3 instead.

b) 10.♙d3! ♘e5 (not 10...♙xa2? 11.b3 a5 12.♖b2 a4 13.♞a1+–; the difference between this and the 10.h4 line is that the rook on a1 now has protection) 11.♘xe5 dxe5 This transposes into the line 8...♘d7 9.0-0-0 ♘e5, which will figure in the next chapter.



An interesting set-up; Black plans ...Qd7, ...Rae8 and ...Qd8, achieving a fairly compact arrangement of his pieces. Later White's kingside attack can be countered by ...f7-f5!?.

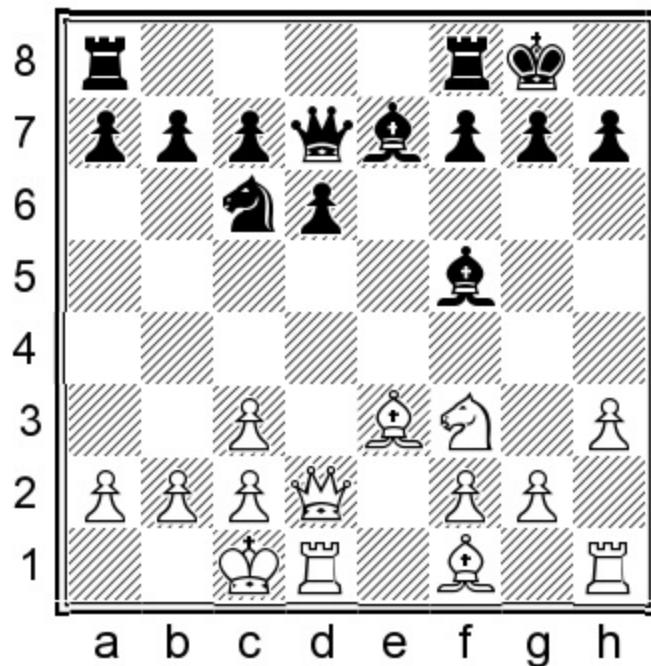
### 10.h3

Preparing g2-g4.

After 10.Qd3 Qd7 11.h3 Rae8 12.g4 Qg6 13.Qb1 Qd8 White has a minimal plus which may soon evaporate.

In Inarkiev – Ivanchuk, Sitges 2018, the continuation was 10.h4 Qd7 11.h5 (11.Qb1!? may well be better) 11...h6 12.Qh4 Qh7, and Black achieved full equality.

### 10...Qd7



### 11.♔b1!?

This useful king move is often a good choice, not only in the Petroff but in other openings where the players castle on opposite wings – for instance the Dragon Variation.

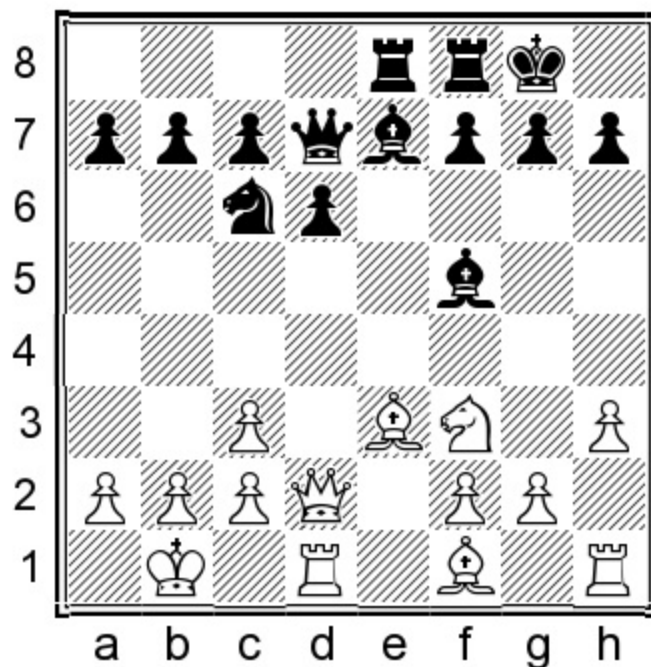
It's too early for 11.g4 ♕e4 12.♕g2 ♖e6 13.♔b1 f5∞.

For 11.♕d3 ♜ae8, see 10.♕d3.

### 11...♜ae8

Black doesn't manage to work up play on the queenside. A good answer to 11...a5 is: 12.a4!

(12.♕b5 a4 13.a3 ♕e4∞) 12...♕e4 (if 12...♘a7? then 13.♘d4±) 13.♕b5 ♖f5 14.♘e1± After 14...♘d8 White will advance his kingside pawns.



## 12.♙e2!

White does better not to exchange the light-squared bishops, as that would simplify Black's defence.

## 12...♙d8

Not 12...♙f6 13.g4 ♙e4 14.♖hg1± as the bishop on f6 is holding up ...f7-f5.

## 13.g4 ♙e4

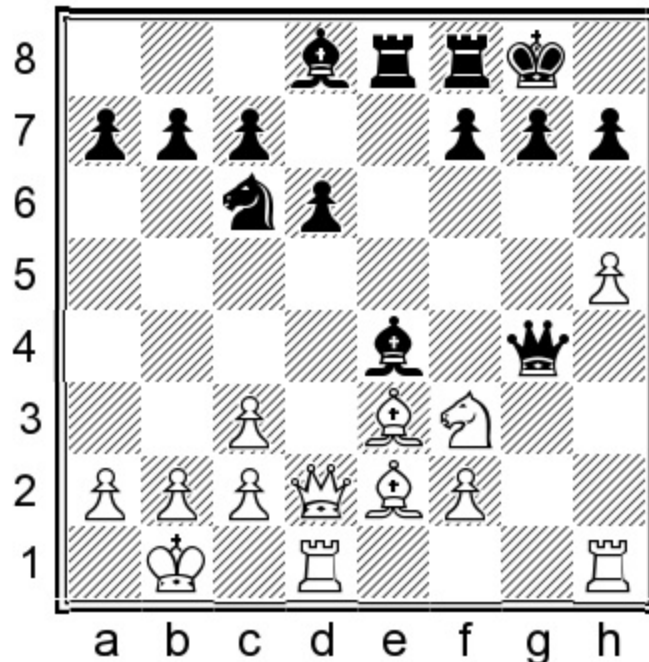
It looks dangerous to play:

13...♙g6 14.h4 ♚xg4!

The best chance.

In the case of 14...♙e4 15.♖hg1±, Black has only worsened his own position through the insertion of 13...♙g6 14.h4.

15.h5 ♙e4



Whereupon White has to choose between attacking with a pawn less and recovering the g-pawn with some advantage:

16.♖dg1

Or 16.♘g5!? ♚f5 17.♖hg1↑ gives White powerful compensation for the pawn sacrifice.

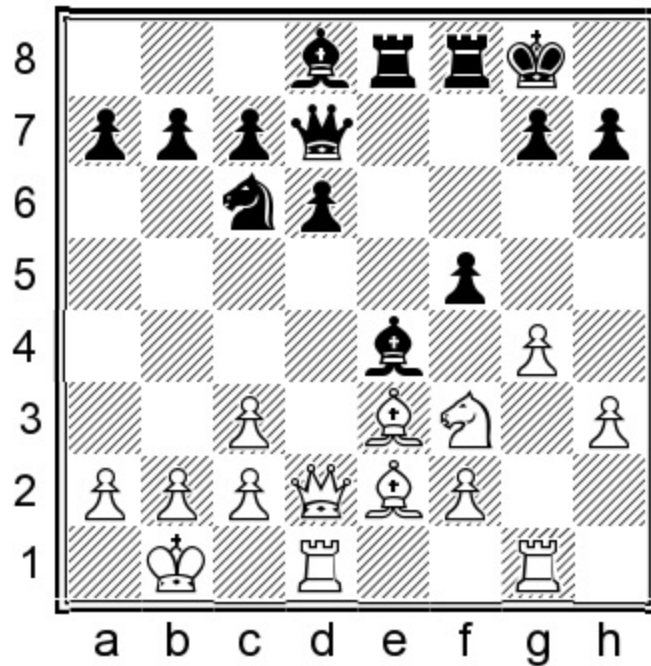
16...♚f5 17.♙h6 ♙f6 18.♙xg7 ♙xg7 19.h6 ♖e6□

19...♙xc2†? loses to: 20.♙a1 ♖e6 21.♖g5+–

20.♖g5 ♚f6 21.♖xg7† ♙h8 22.♖h3±

With level material, the black king's position has been seriously weakened.

## 14.♖hg1 f5



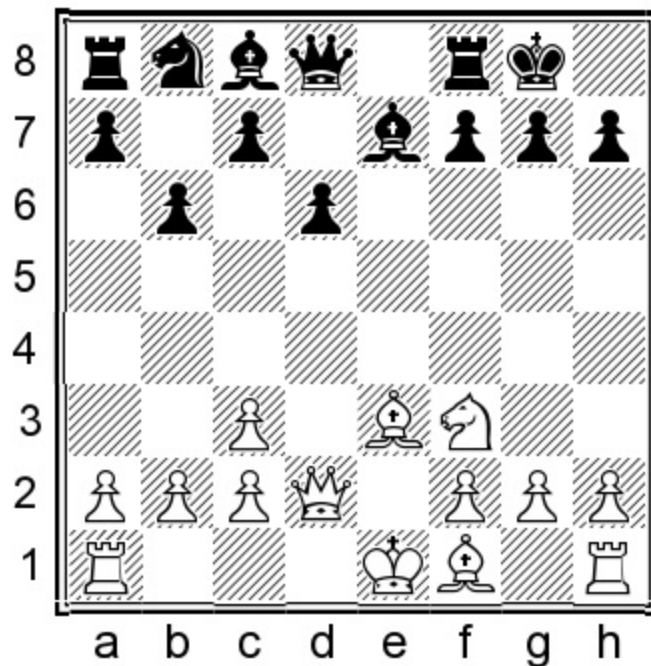
15.♖g3!

As ...f5xg4 is not good for Black, we don't have to capture with g4xf5 at once.

15...♔h8 16.gxf5 ♜xf5 17.♞dg1±

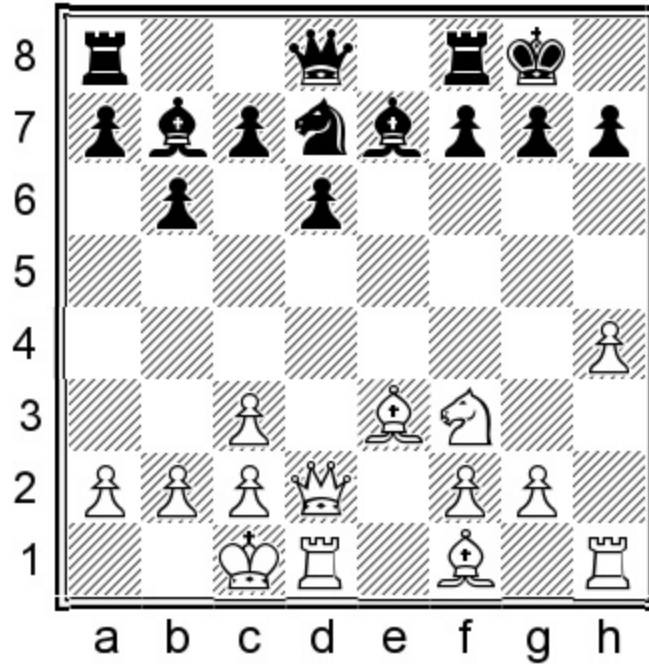
Thanks to the open g-file, White has an obvious plus.

C) 8...b6



Quite an interesting move, introduced into practice by Wang Hao. Others after him have played this way: So, Vallejo, Mamedyarov... This has spurred me to study the move in greater detail.

9.0-0-0 ♖b7 10.h4 ♜d7



### 11. ♜d4!?

Bringing the knight into an attacking position at once. In addition we are making f2-f3 possible, to prevent Black's ...♜c5-e4 manoeuvre. In my view this move is more dangerous for Black than 11.♙d3 or 11.♚b1!?

Caruana – Mamedyarov, Stavanger 2018, went: 11.♙d3 ♖e8! 12.♚b1 (12.♜g5 h6 13.♙h7† ♚f8∞ gives White nothing) 12...♙f6↗

Now Black has **C1)** 11...♙f6 and **C2)** 11...♜e5.

For 11...♜c5 12.f3 ♙f6, see 11...♙f6.

11...a6 was tried in Eljanov – Vallejo Pons, Sharjah 2017, but it feels rather slow in such a potentially sharp position. The game continued 12.♙g5 ♜c5 13.f3 ♖e8 14.♖h3 ♙f6 15.g4 ♜e6 when I suggest 16.♜xe6!?N 16...♖xe6 17.f4 is a good way to keep the initiative.

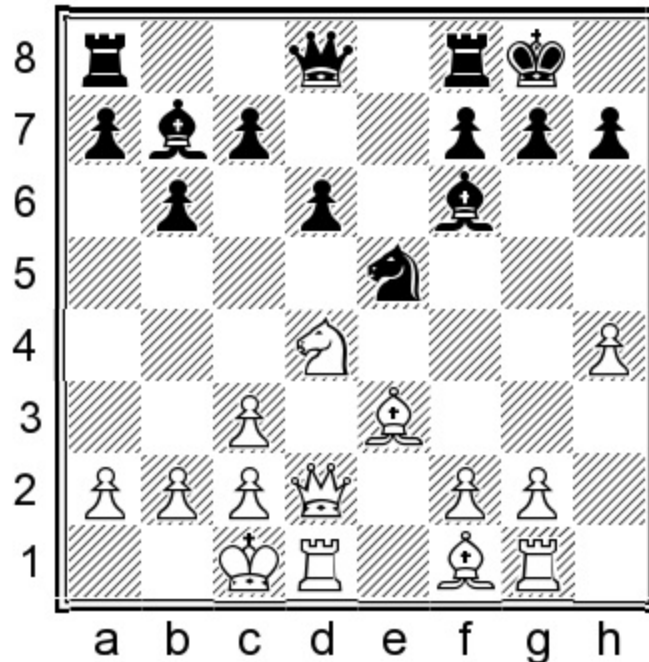
### **C1) 11...♙f6 12.♖g1!?**

Preparing g2-g4; this is very hard for Black to meet. He can choose **C11)** 12...♜e5!/? or **C12)** 12...♙xh4.

After 12...♙xd4 13.cxd4± the capture 13...♚xh4 is risky: 14.♙d3 g6 15.♖h1 ♚f6 16.f3, With more than sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn.

Nor is 12...♖c5?! successful. After 13.f3 it's difficult for Black to impede the advance of the g-pawn: 13...♗e6 (13...♙xh4?! 14.g4 ♕f6 15.♙c4±) 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.h5→ With a large plus.

### C11) 12...♗e5!?



Not taking the risk of capturing the h-pawn, Black settles for somewhat the worse position. This is quite possibly the best practical decision.

### 13.♙e2 ♖e8

After 13...♙xh4, White can play 14.g4 transposing to variation C122.

### 14.h5

Simplest. Seeing that Black has declined the pawn, we can take the attack forward with equal material.

After 14.f4 ♗g6 15.♙b5, Black can simply give up the exchange with: 15...♗xh4 16.♙xe8 ♔xe8

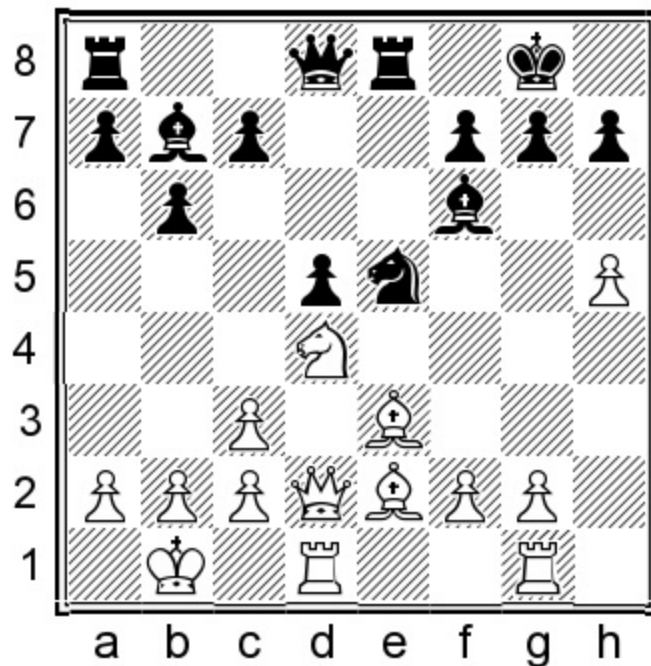
White doesn't succeed with 14.g4 either; after 14...c5 15.♗f5 ♗f3 16.♙xf3 ♙xf3∞ it's hard for him to develop his initiative.

### 14...d5

With the idea of ...♗c4; this is practically the sole possibility for counterplay.

### 15.♗b1!?

Freeing c1 for the queen.



15...♖c4

Or: 15...g6!? 16.hxg6 fxg6 (16...hxg6 17.g4 c5 18.♘f5! is no improvement, since with the h-pawns exchanged, the black king can't go to h8; after 18...gxf5 19.gxf5† ♔f8 20.♙b5± White has a dangerous attack) 17.f4 ♘c4 18.♙xc4 dxc4 19.♚f2± Thanks to the open position of Black's king, White maintains the upper hand.

16.♙xc4 dxc4 17.♚c1±

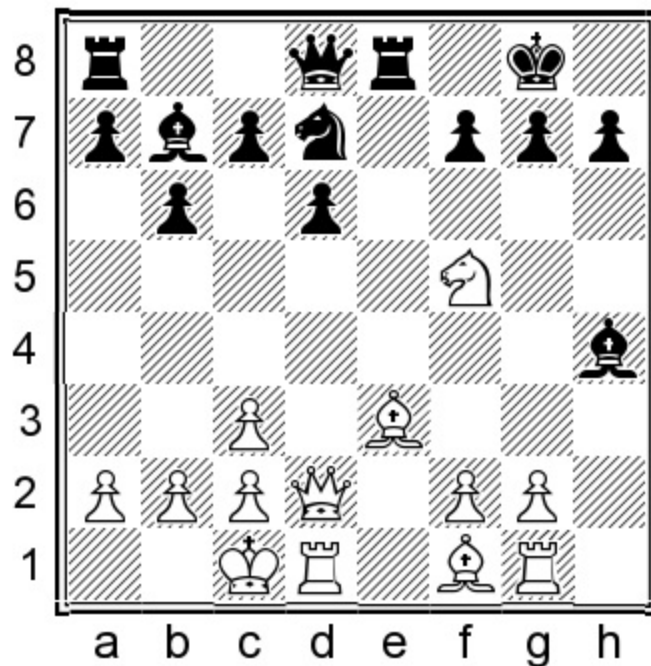
White has a stable plus, as the play will proceed on the kingside after the g2-g4 advance. Should Black capture the knight on d4, his c4-pawn will be left hanging.

**C12) 12...♙xh4**

This looks very dangerous, but I've discovered that Black has a couple of good defensive ideas. Nevertheless the complications are in White's favour.

White now has a good choice between two lines. To me it seems that **C121) 13.♘f5!?** demands less accuracy on Black's part, but someone else may take a different view. I have therefore decided to give the possible variations stemming from that move, in addition to the main line **C122) 13.g4**.

**C121) 13.♘f5!? ♚e8**



### 14. ♖h1

Alternatively:

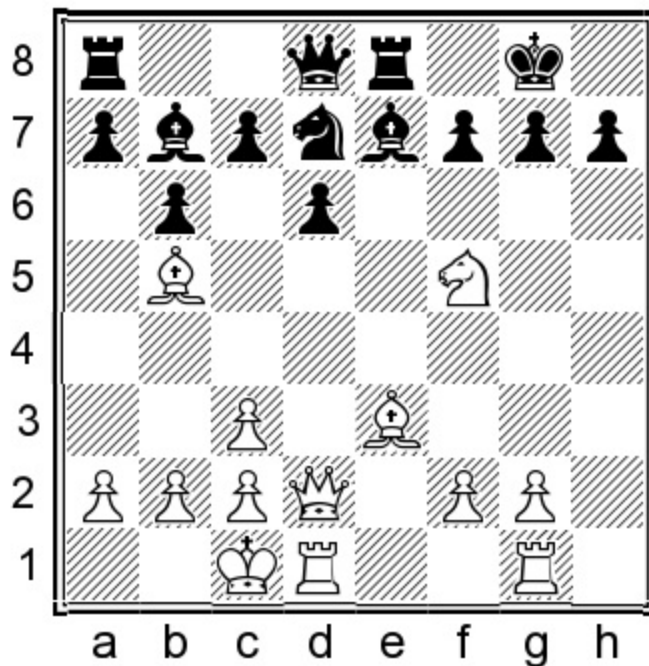
14.g4 ♜e5 15.♙e2 ♞f3 16.♙xf3 ♙xf3∞ simplifies Black's defence.

### 14. ♙b5!?

This is a computer recommendation. White preserves a slight edge:

### 14...♙e7

14...♙f6 15.g4 ♙f3 If Black can't prevent g4-g5, he must at least hold up the f-pawn. 16.g5 ♙e5 17.♙e2 ♙e4 18.♙d3 ♙xf5 19.♙xf5 g6± Thanks to his two bishops and the open h-file, White has more than sufficient compensation for the pawn.



15. ♖d4

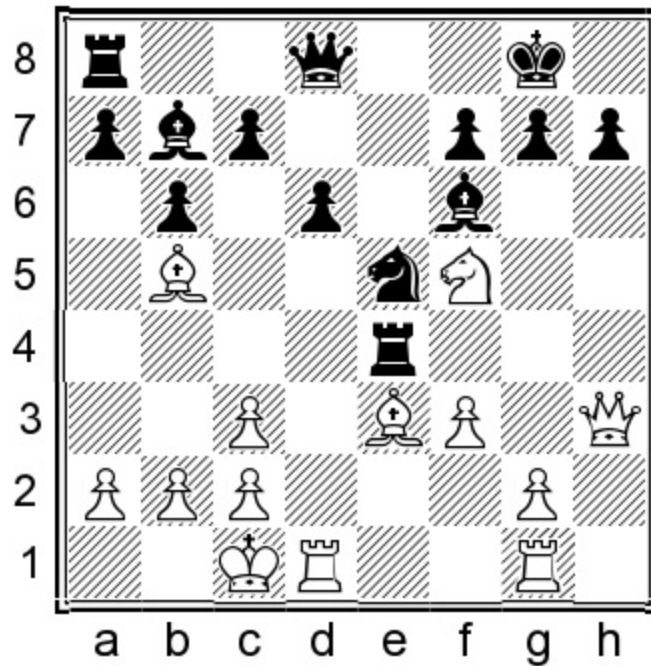
15. ♖e2 ♗g5 16. ♖g4 ♜xe3 17. ♗xe3 ♗xe3† 18. fxe3 ♞ Black has some compensation after 18... ♗f6 or 18... ♗e5.

After 15. ♖h1 ♗f6 16. ♖e2 ♜e5 17. ♖h5 ♗f8 it isn't all that simple for White to carry on with the attack. For instance after 18. ♗d3 ♗e4 19. ♗xe4 ♜xe4 20. ♖f3 d5 he has a small plus, but there is still everything to play for. This looks the best option White has. But I will leave 15. ♖d4 as the main line as it leads to fascinating play.

15... ♗f6 16. ♖g4 ♜e4 17. ♖h3 ♗e5!

Black's knight on e5 would seem to be cutting off his own rook, but he has the bishop on b5 in his sights.

18. f3



18...a6!

An important resource; White can't now retreat with 19.♙e2, on account of 19...♞xe3.

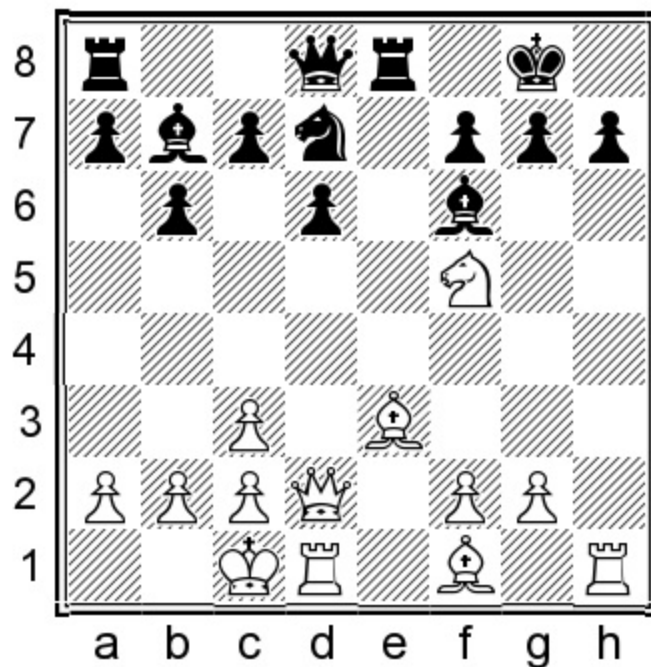
19.♙d3 ♜xd3† 20.♞xd3 ♞e6

At this point it's difficult to say whether White will succeed in developing his attack. Let's look at the most obvious continuation:

21.♞h1 h6 22.♙xh6 gxh6 23.f4 ♔f8 24.♞g3 ♙h4!? 25.♜xh4 ♚f6⇌

With ...♞ae8 coming, Black has adequate counterplay.

14...♙f6



15.♙d3

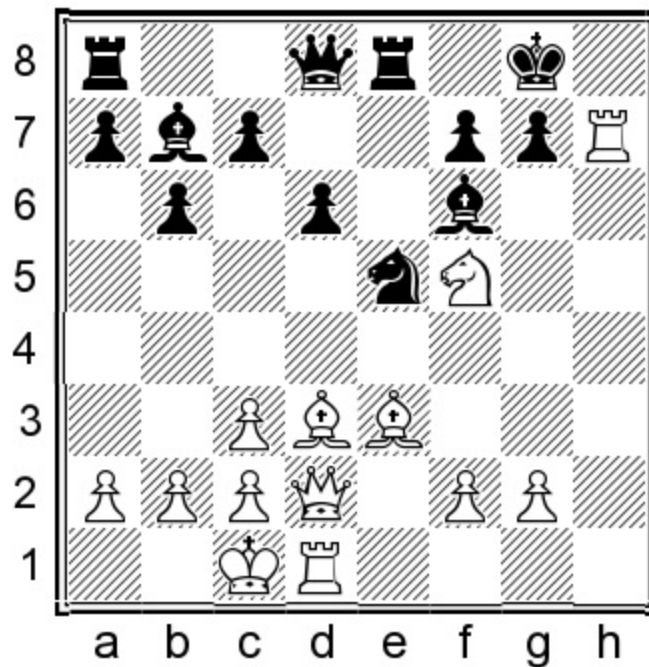
On 15.♖e2, sacrificing the exchange is a good idea for Black: 15...♗g5 16.♙g4 ♜xe3 17.♘xe3 ♗xe3† 18.fxe3♞ With quite good compensation after 18...♙e7 or 18...♘f6.

### 15...♘e5

This leads to great complications.

The simpler 15...♘f8 is rather passive. After 16.♙b1 (16.♙e2 ♗c8 17.♙g4 ♗xf5 18.♙xf5♞ gives good compensation for the pawn) 16...♙d7 17.f3± White's game is easy to play – he doubles rooks on the h-file and brings up his bishop with ♗d4.

### 16.♜xh7!



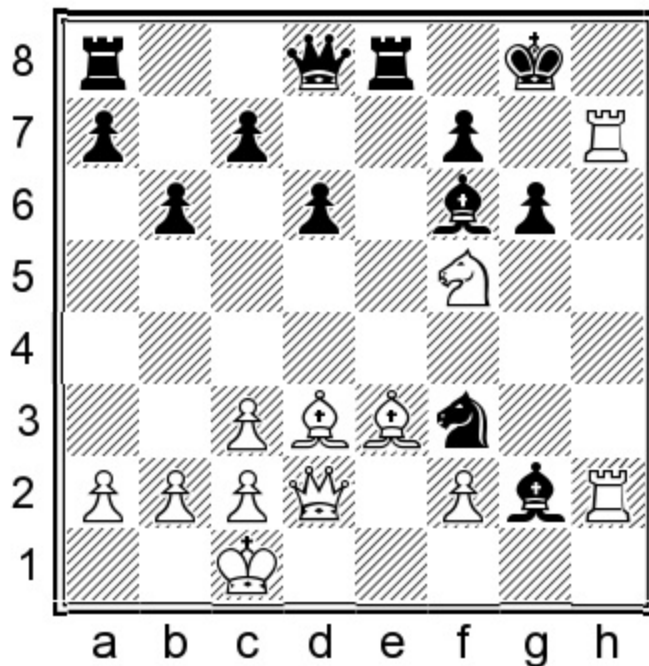
### 16...g6

It looks dangerous to play: 16...♗xg2 17.f4 ♘xd3† 18.cxd3 ♙d7 (better than 18...♙xh7 19.♙xg2, when 19...g6 is the only way to cover the h8-square; then after 20.♜h1† ♙g8 21.♘h6† ♙f8 22.♗d2± there is no defence against f4-f5) 19.♘xg7! ♗xg7 20.♜xg7† ♙xg7 21.♙xg2† ♙f8 22.♗d4→ With a powerful attack. Now 22...♙f5 will be met by 23.♗g7†, and after 23...♙e7 24.♙c6 the black king must take a walk in the centre.

### 17.♜dh1 ♗xg2 18.♜1h2

The black bishop on f6 is doing good work guarding the king. Therefore to increase his threats against the king's position, White must preserve both his rooks.

### 18...♘f3



### 19. ♖xf7!

Continuing to create threats to the king.

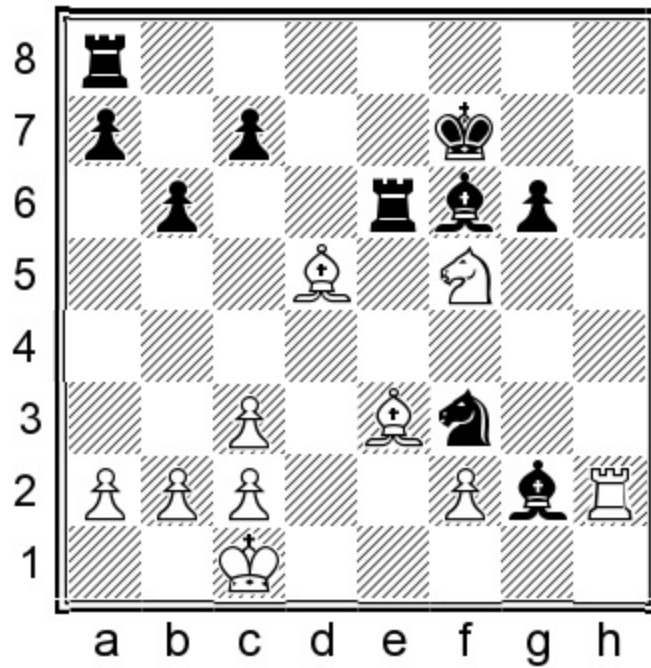
If 19. ♔d4 then 19... ♞xh2 20. ♖xh2 ♔f3, and to all appearances Black succeeds in defending.

### 19... ♔xf7

The only move. Black can't capture on d2 or h2, owing to ♞h6†, ♔xg6 and mate.

### 20. ♔c4† d5 21. ♚xd5† ♚xd5 22. ♔xd5† ♞e6

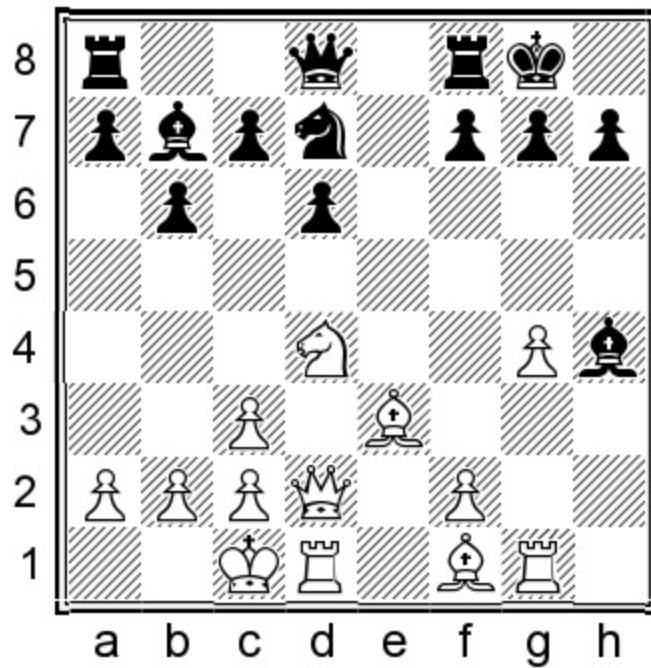
By returning material, Black has avoided mate, and has fairly good chances to hold out in a slightly inferior ending.



23. Rg2 gxf5 24. Qxa8 c6 25. Rg3±

White has an extra pawn, but Black will succeed in exchanging his knight for the bishop on e3, retaining good drawing chances in the opposite-bishop endgame.

C122) 13.g4



The most logical continuation. Now apart from Nf5, White is also threatening g4-g5, cutting off the bishop on h4.

13... Nf5

White meets 13...♔f6 with 14.♘f5±. Then 14...♘e5? is bad in view of: 15.g5 ♔e7 16.f4 ♘f3 17.♙g2+–

#### 14.♔e2

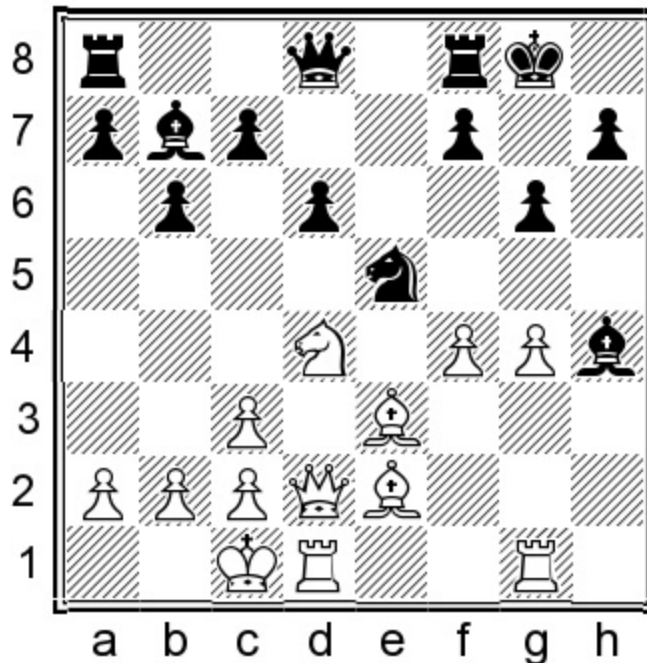
White must guard the f3-square, as ...c7-c5 was threatened.

#### 14...g6

Quite an interesting idea. By taking f5 away from the white knight, Black is again preparing ...c7-c5, and against f2-f4 he has a surprise ready.

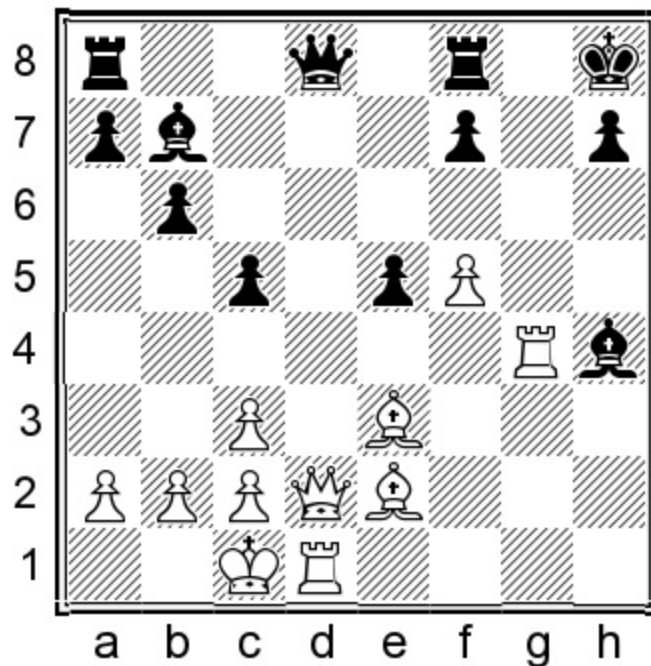
#### 15.f4

Not 15.g5? c5♞.



#### 15...♙e7!

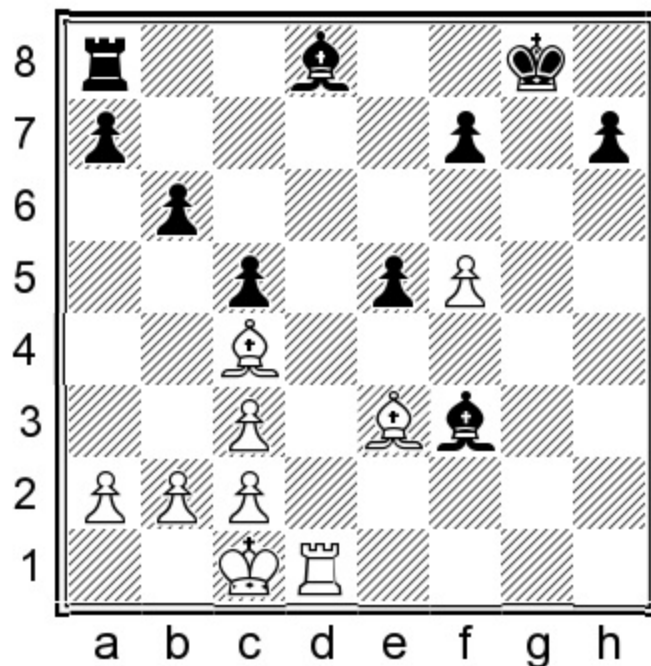
This move looks much more cunning than the simple 15...c5, which can be met by: 16.♘f5! gxf5 (not 16...♘f3?! 17.♔xf3 ♔xf3 18.♞df1±, whereupon 18...gxf5? loses to 19.♞xf3+– with irresistible threats) 17.gxf5† ♖h8 18.fxe5 dxe5 The smoke has cleared and Black might seem to be OK, since White cannot avoid the queen exchange. 19.♞g4! It's important for White to take aim at the bishop on h4. If Black now exchanges queens, the fact that his bishop remains *en prise* will cost him an important tempo. But if the bishop withdraws from h4, White will have ♙e1 available:



a) 19...♙xd2? is weak: 20.♖xd2 ♕d8 21.♕h6 ♖g8 22.♖d7+-

b) 19...♕f6?! also fails: 20.♙e1 ♙e7 21.♙g3 And White's attack is most likely decisive. For example, 21...♖g8 22.♖g1 ♖xg4 23.♙xg4 ♙f8 24.♖g3+- with ♙h5 to follow. Black can only stand and wait.

c) 19...♖g8 20.♙xd8 ♕xd8 21.♖xg8† ♔xg8 22.♕c4 Now there is no defending the f7-pawn. 22...♕f3



23.♖g1†! (23.♖d7 ♕h5 24.♕d5 ♖b8∞ gives White too little) 23...♔h8 (or 23...♔f8 24.♕h6† ♔e7 25.♖g7±) 24.♕xf7 ♕f6± And despite the equal material, Black has a difficult position. His rook is tied to the back rank, and he has no scope for counterplay. White has the pleasant choice between 25.♕h6 and 25.b4!?, with a big advantage in either case.

## 16.g5!

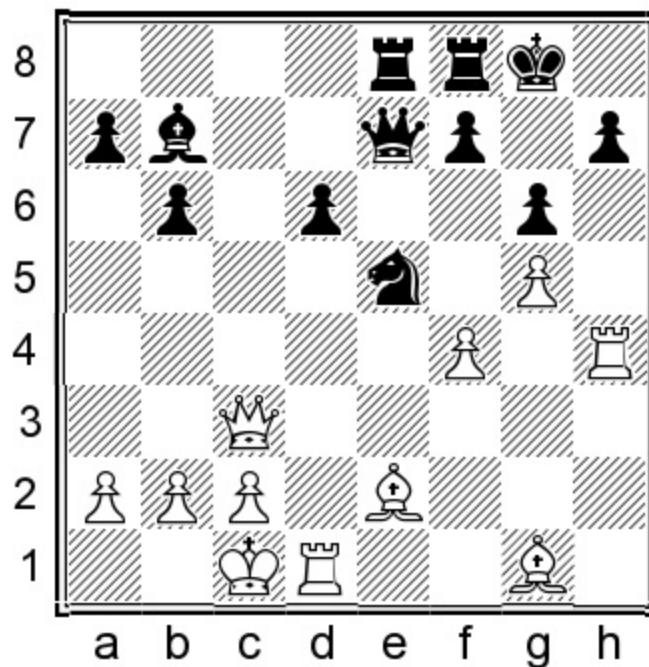
Switching his attention to the bishop on h4.

After 16.fxe5?! dxe5, the threat of ...♖ad8 prevents White from retaining the piece: 17.♘f5 gxf5 18.gxf5† ♔h8∞

## 16...♖ad8

Not 16...♖ae8 on account of: 17.fxe5 dxe5 18.♘c6! This problem-like continuation is the only way for White to maintain a large plus. Then 18...♙xc6 19.♙c4± is threatening ♖h2. Black cannot save his bishop.

With 16...♘d7 Black attempts to exchange the bishop on h4 for one of the white bishops on the e-file. There can follow 17.♖g4 ♖ae8 18.♙g1 c5 19.♖xh4 cxd4 20.♙c4. Black has managed to avoid losing a piece, but he remains badly placed owing to his weak king position. 20...dxc3 21.♖xc3 ♘e5!/? Now he tries to counter-attack, but we shall soon see that these endeavours won't bring success. 22.♙e2!

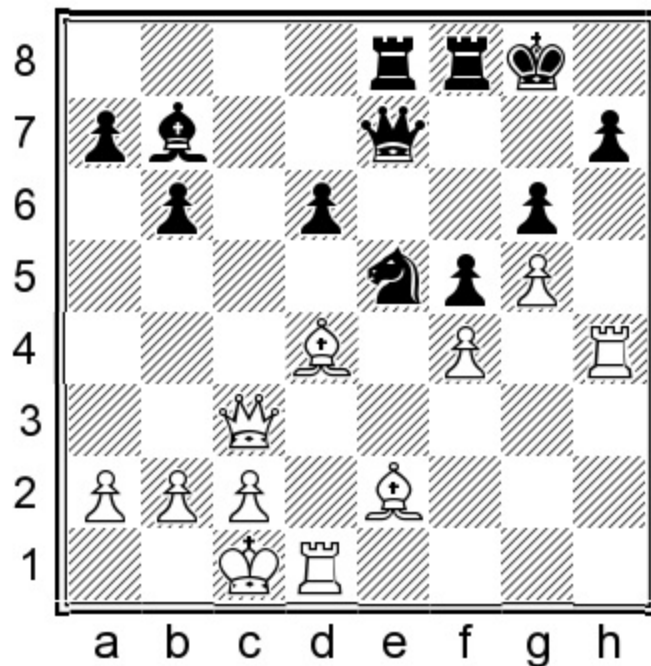


And now:

a) 22...h5? loses to: 23.♖g3 ♘d7 24.♙xh5+–

b) 22...♙e4 is strongly answered by: 23.♖h3! ♙f5 24.♖h1 h5 (24...♖c8 25.c3± fails to improve Black's position) 25.♙xh5 gxh5 26.♖xh5 ♔g7 27.♙d4± With material equality, the black king will still be in danger.

c) 22...f5!/? 23.♙d4 A good centralization of the bishop, intensifying White's threats, with these possibilities:



c1) 23...♘d7 This looks awkward. 24.♙b3† d5 25.♙h3, The two bishops and open h-file give White good winning chances. Black should probably continue 25...♞f7, so as to bring his knight to f8. Then a good reply is 26.♙f3, with a decent advantage.

c2) 23...♙e4

This is worse:

24.♙b3†

After this check, the knight will be badly placed on f7.

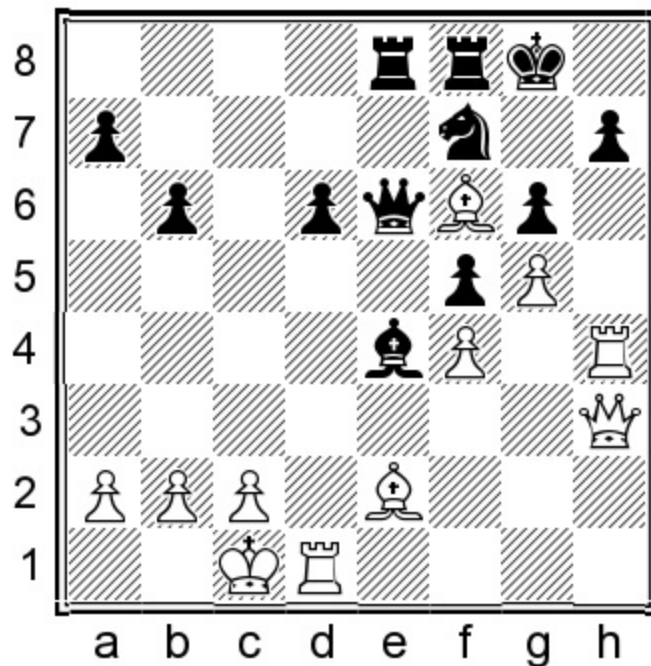
24...♘f7 25.♙f6

Black's position is now practically hopeless owing to the threats on the h-file.

25...♙e6

25...♙c7 26.♙c4+- sets up the lethal threat of ♞xh7, and after 26...d5 27.♙xd5 ♙xd5 28.♙xd5 ♞e2 29.c3+- this threat is still in force in spite of the exchange of light-squared bishops, leaving Black with no defensive resources; but 26...h5 27.gxh6 ♙h7 28.♙g7+- is no improvement either.

26.♙h3

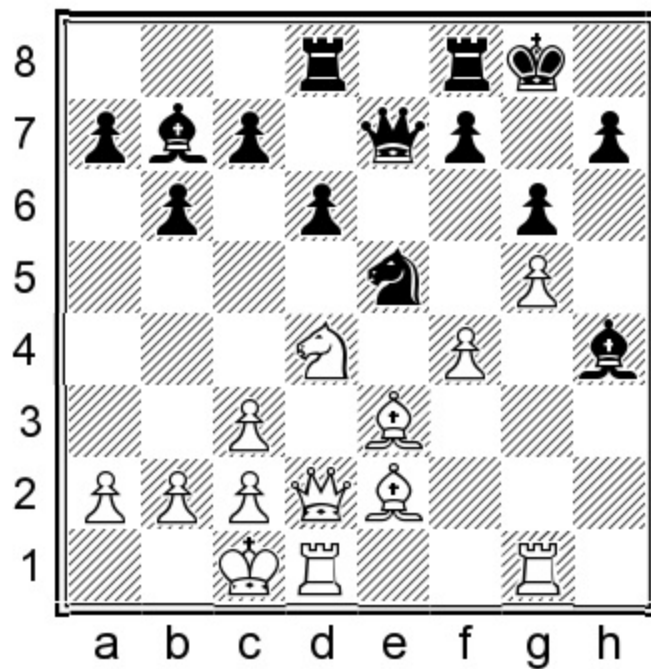


26...h6

Or 26...♖c8 27.c3, and now 27...h6 28.b3 transposes, while 27...♚xa2? 28.♖xh7+ leads to mate.

27.b3 ♖c8 28.c3+–

With ♖g1 and ♖xh6 to follow. If Black doubles on the c-file, White can simply fortify his c3-pawn with ♔b2.



17.♙d3

After 17.♖h1!? ♙xg5 18.fxg5 c5 19.♖hf1 cxd4 20.♙xd4∞ White has good compensation for the pawn.

## 17...♞d7!

With the white bishop on d3, a resource has turned up for Black: after the moves ♖g4 ...♞de8, he can meet ♙g1 with ...♙e1.

The alternatives are:

### a) 17...♞xd3† 18.cxd3

The only way – it's important to free c2 for the knight!

### 18...h6

The only chance to rescue the bishop somehow or other; 18...f6? loses at once to 19.♞f5+–.

### 19.♞c2 f6 20.gxf6

20.gxh6 ♖h7 21.♞xg6 looks tempting, but after 21...♙xg6 22.♞g1† ♙g5! 23.fxg5 f5 White has much less advantage than he would like; for instance 24.♙f4 ♞de8 25.♞d4 a6, and there is still a full struggle ahead.

### 20...♞h7

20...♞xf6?! 21.♞h2+– wins a piece.

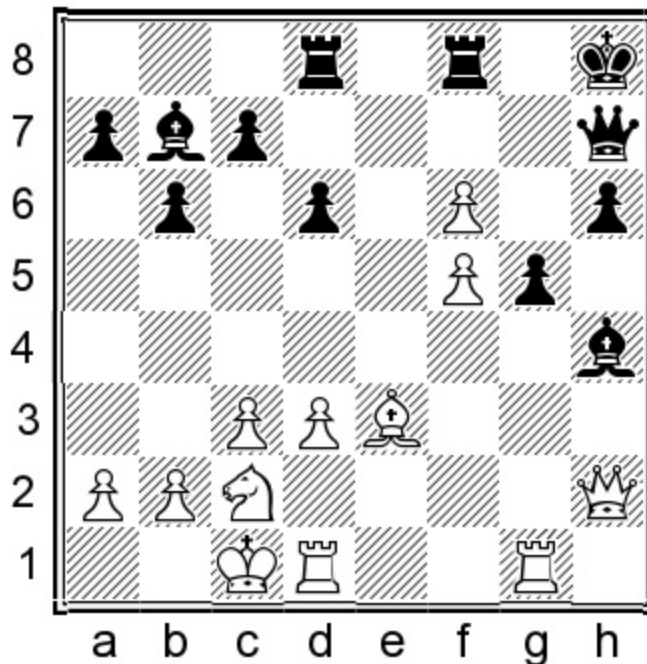
### 21.f5

21.♞g4 ♙xf6 22.♞dg1 ♖f7± is less accurate.

### 21...g5 22.♞h2!

Switching the queen to the attack; after ...♖h8 in reply, Black won't be able to capture on f6 on account of ♙d4.

### 22...♖h8



And now:

### a1) 23.♞d4 ♞de8

This leads, after a series of forced moves, to a position with queen against two rooks:

24.♞e6 ♞xf5 25.♞xg5 ♞xe3 26.♞xh4 ♞xf6 27.♞df1!

The only way White can continue his attack; 27.♘f7† is ineffective, for after 17...♔h7 there is nothing better than going back again.

27...♙xf1† 28.♖xf1 ♖xf1† 29.♔d2 ♜e7 30.♙xh6† ♔g8±

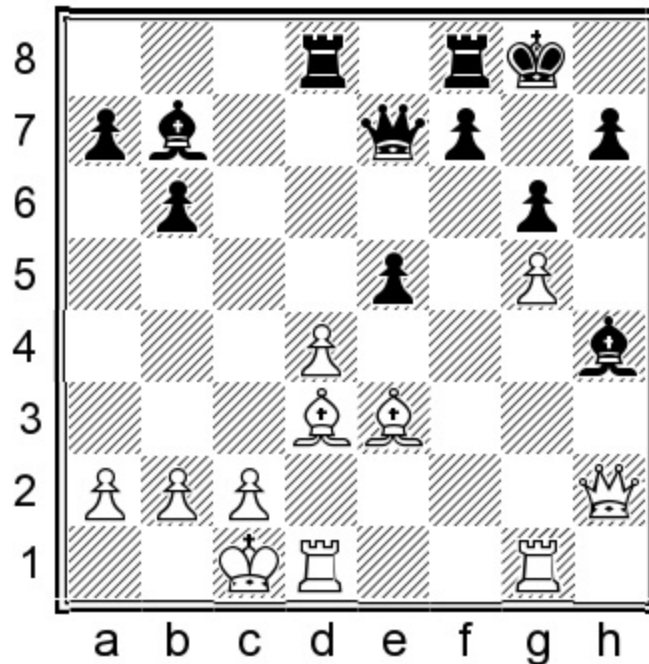
Given the situation of Black's king, White still has a large plus, though it's hard to say if he will manage to convert it into a win.

a2) 23.♖g4!? (with the idea of ♖xh4; this is probably simpler, though less forcing, than 23.♘d4) 23...♖f7 24.♖xh4 gxh4 25.♙xh4 h5 26.♘d4± The pawns on f5 and f6 are controlling important squares, denying Black the possibility to unravel.

b) 17...c5

This is in no way saves Black from the loss of a piece, since his bishop on h4 is trapped:

18.fxe5 cxd4 19.cxd4 dxe5 20.♙h2



20...♖xd4

If 20...exd4 then 21.♘f4+–.

21.♔b1!+–

Removing the king from a ...♘xg5 check.

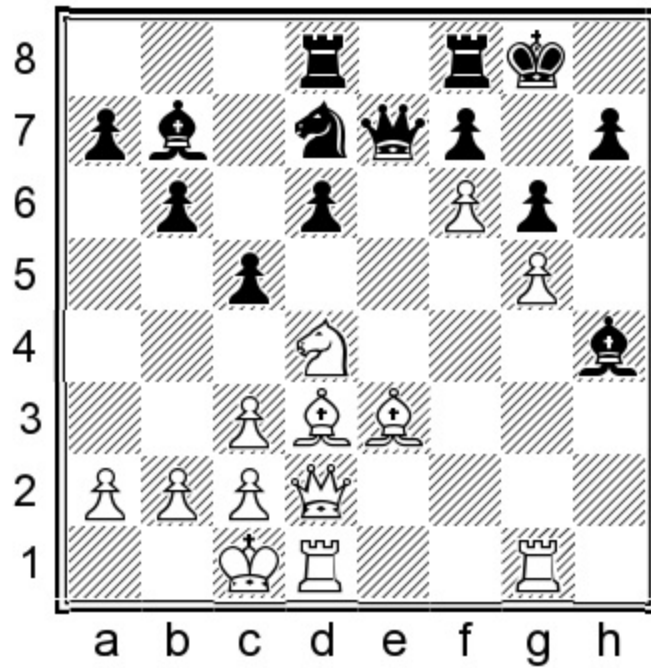
Black is now unable to preserve the bishop on h4, for example:

21...♖fd8

Or 21...♖b4 22.c3 ♖a4 23.c4+–.

22.♘xd4 ♖xd4 23.♘xg6+–

**18.f5 c5 19.f6**



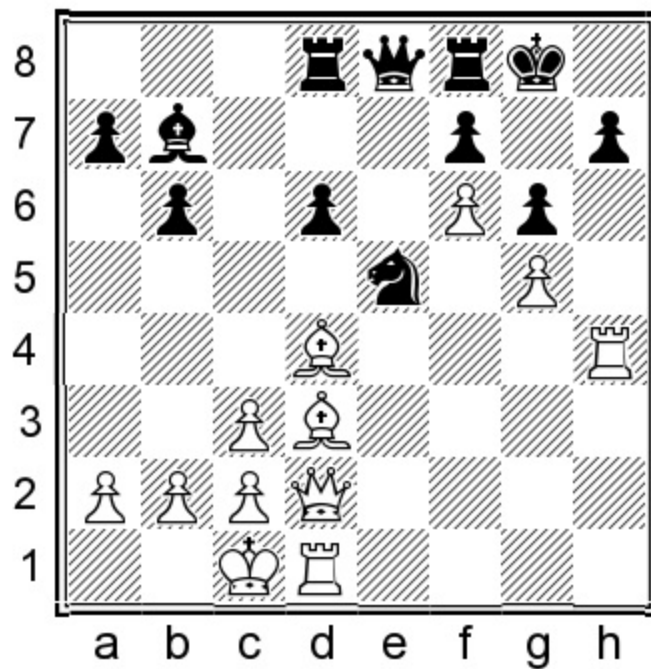
19...♙e8

Not 19...♘xf6? which is hopeless after: 20.♗f5 ♚e6 21.gxf6 ♜xf6 22.♙g5+-

20.♞g4 cxd4 21.♙xd4 ♘e5

Or 21...h5 22.♞xh4 ♘e5, giving the same position.

22.♞xh4



22...h5

The best defence. Now White has to choose between 23.gxh6 and 23.♙e2, with some advantage in

either case.

After:

22...♘f3? 23.♙f4 ♘xh4 24.♙xh4

The position of Black's queen on e8 is fatal to his king's defence:

24...h5 25.gxh6 ♔h7 26.♞e1 ♞c6

So as to have the possibility to exchange queens after ♞e7.

27.♚e4!?

Probably the most severe punishment.

27...♞d7 28.♚xg6† fxg6 29.♞e7†+–

The black rooks are tied to the defence of their king, and White will gradually advance his queenside pawns.

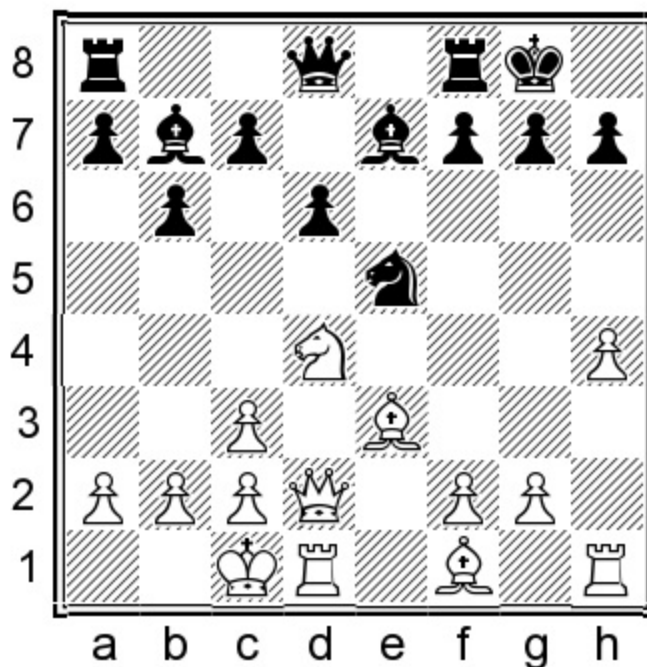
### 23.gxh6

The alternative is: 23.♚e2 ♘f3 (23...♚f3 is hardly better: 24.♚xe5 ♚xe2 25.♞xe2 ♞xe5 26.♞xe5 dxe5 27.♞e1± with good winning chances) 24.♚xf3 ♚xf3 25.♞e1 ♞c6 26.♞e7± Thanks to his powerful rook on e7, White keeps a plus.

23...♔h7 24.♞f4 ♘xd3† 25.♞xd3±

White's extra pawn and superior pawn structure give him quite a good advantage.

### C2) 11...♘e5



### 12.♚g5

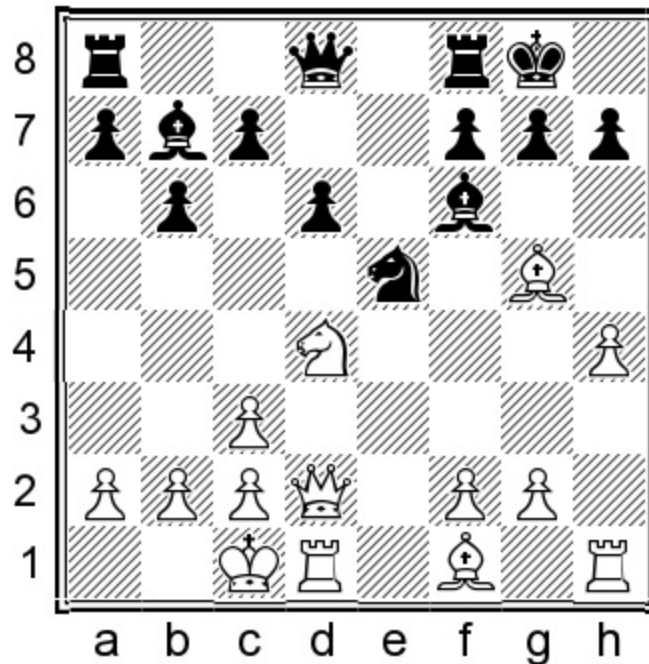
If 12.♘f5 ♞e8 13.♚g5 f6 14.♚f4 ♞d7 15.♘xe7† ♞xe7∞ Black arranges his pieces in the centre fairly comfortably, so whether White has any advantage is difficult to say.

Now Black has **C21) 12...♔f6!?**, which is probably one of the best moves together with **C22) 12...♚d7** as given by the computer.

Not: 12...h6? 13.♕xh6 gxh6 14.♚xh6 ♔f6 15.♖d3! (this is far more punishing than 15.♕d3) 15...♕g7 16.♖g3 ♘g6 17.♚d2+- Black then has no defence against h4-h5; nothing is altered by 17...c5 18.♘f5.

If 12...♖e8?!, then 13.f4 ♘c6 14.♘f5 ♚d7 15.♕d3±. Having lost a couple of tempos with his knight moves, Black is in a difficult position.

### C21) 12...♔f6!?



#### 13.f4

Stronger than 13.♚f4 ♘g6 14.♚f5 ♕xg5† 15.hxg5 ♚c8!. White then has to settle for a queen exchange: 16.♖h2 ♚xf5 17.♘xf5 ♖fe8 18.♕d3 ♕e4 19.♖dh1 ♘f8 And Black is close to equalizing.

#### 13...♘g4 14.♕d3

Now that White has brought his bishop out, he threatens ♚e2.

#### 14...♖e8

Or 14...♚e8, but that is not better: 15.♕xf6 ♘xf6 16.h5±

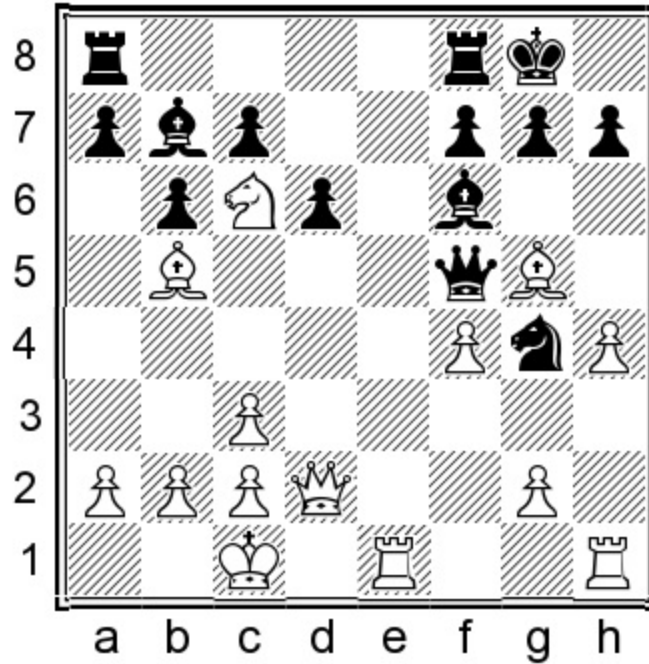
#### 15.♕b5 ♖e4

After:

15...♖f8 16.♖de1 ♚c8

White needs to play accurately if he wants to obtain a plus:

17.♖c6 ♔f5



18.a4!

The insertion of a2-a4 ...a7-a6 is important, for on 18.♙xf6 Black has 18...♗xb5∞.

18...a6 19.♙xf6 ♖xf6 20.♗e7† ♔h8 21.♙d7±

Thanks to his small tactical ploy, White gains the advantage whichever way the black knight goes. For example:

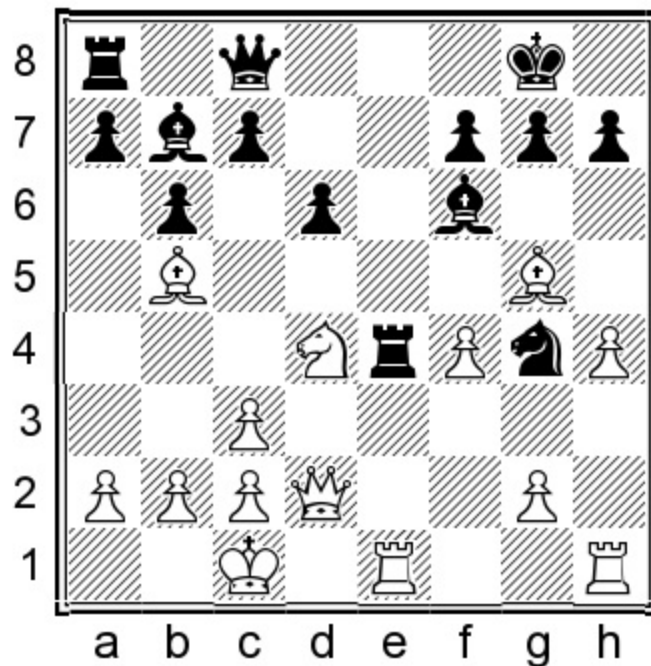
21...♗e5

Or 21...♗h6 22.♖h3±; then 22...♖ad8? is met by 23.g4+.

22.♗d5±

And if 22...♙xd5 then 23.fxe5.

16.♗de1 ♔c8



17. ♖c6!?

Shutting off the bishop on b7. This is more astute than the simple 17. ♖xe4.

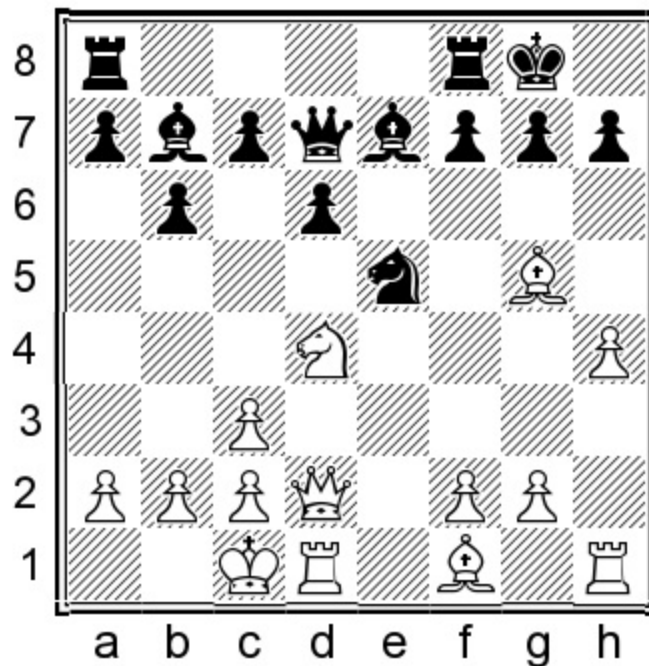
17... ♖xe1 †

Or 17... a6 18. ♖xe4 axb5 19. ♕d5! ♖f2 20. ♖he1 ♖xe4 21. ♖xe4±. White has returned the exchange, but Black's pieces are now uncoordinated.

18. ♖xe1 ♕f5 19. ♔d3 ♕c5 20. ♖d4±

White's seizure of the e-file gives him a reasonable advantage.

C22) 12... ♕d7



### 13.f4!?N

This move involves the idea of a piece sacrifice. But as we shall see, it is highly promising.

### 13...♘c6 14.♙b5!

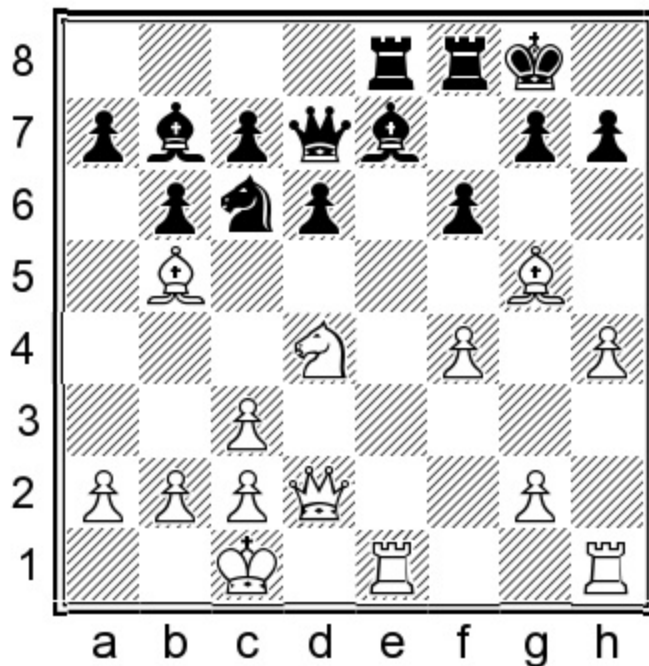
Ignoring the threat of ...f7-f6. White can very well sacrifice the bishop on g5 for the sake of the coming attack.

### 14...f6 15.♗de1!

I have come to the conclusion that after 15.g4 a6! 16.♙c4† d5 Black is OK. I will give just one pretty variation: 17.♘f5 ♖ad8 18.♗g2 ♔h8 19.♙xd5 ♘b4! 20.♙xb7 ♘xa2† 21.♔b1 ♘xc3† 22.bxc3 ♗b5† with perpetual check.

### 15...♖ae8

Obviously 15...fxg5 16.hxg5 is unplayable, but 15...♖fe8 is also a good deal weaker than the main line – though this is not simple to establish. After 15...♖fe8 16.♘e6 a6 17.♙c4 ♘a5 18.♙d3 ♙f8 19.f5± the bishop on g5 is invulnerable, and the knight on e6 is too strong.



### 16.f5

It's astonishing, but after 16.♘e6 ♖f7 17.f5 a6! 18.♙a4 (18.♙xc6 ♗xc6 19.♙f4 ♙f8∞ is insufficient) 18...fxg5 19.hxg5 ♗xf5 20.g4 ♗b5∞ Black, by some miracle, is in general terms no worse! However, since this is the wrong track for White, there is no need to follow the variation to the end.

### 16...fxg5 17.hxg5 ♙d8

In the event of:

17...a6?! 18.♙c4† d5 19.♘e6

White reaches an endgame a pawn up:

19...♘e5

The only possibility to fight for a draw.

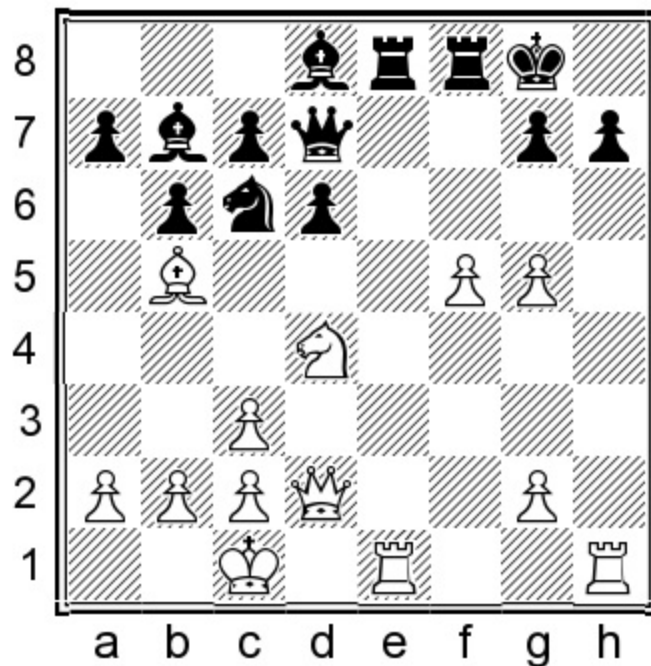
After 19...♗xf5? 20.♙d3+- Black can resign.

20.♗xe5 ♗d6 21.♗xd5! ♙xd5 22.♙xd5 ♗xf5 23.♘xc7† ♗xd5

23...♙h8 is no better: 24.♘xe8 ♗xd5 25.♗xd5 ♗xd5 26.g6± and White is two pawns up instead of just one.

24.♗xd5† ♗xd5 25.♘xd5 ♙xg5† 26.♙d1±

White has a healthy extra pawn and good winning chances.



### 18.g4

At first I wanted to go for 18.f6!?, but then I concluded that 18.g4 is better after all. I will give just one of the possible variations: 18.f6 a6 19.♖xe8 ♖xe8 20.♔d3 gxf6 21.♙xc6 ♙xc6 22.♘xc6 fxf6 23.♘xd8 ♖xd8± And although my computer confidently assesses the position in White's favour, his advantage is less than he would have wished.

### 18...♖xe1† 19.♖xe1

Even though White has only a pawn for the piece, Black's position is difficult in view of his weakened king and poorly-placed pieces.

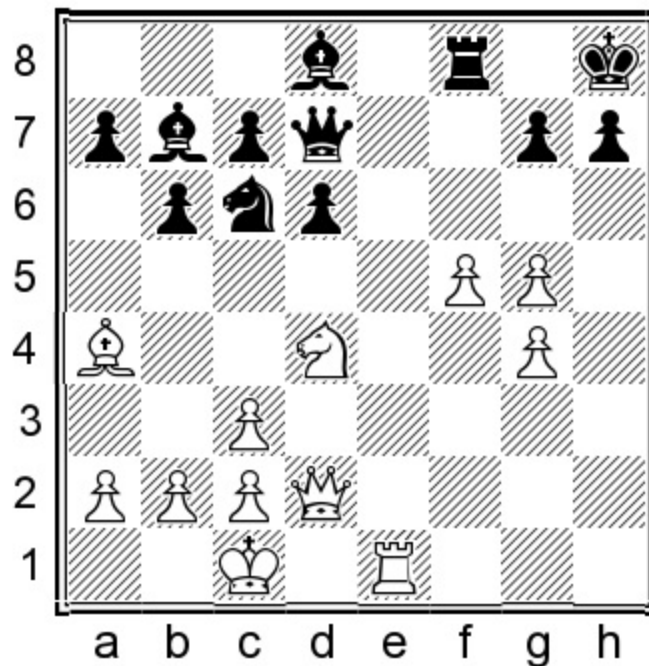
### 19...♖e8

Alternatively:

a) 19...a6?! 20.♙c4† d5 21.♘e6± Black can't simultaneously defend his pawn on d5 and his rook on f8.

b) After 19...♔h8, White fails to win with 20.♖h1 due to 20...♔e7 21.♖xh7† ♔xh7 22.♔h2† ♔g8 23.♙c4† ♖f7.

Instead he can transpose to the main line (20.♘e6 ♖e8 21.c4±), but he also has the enigmatic: 20.♙a4! The whole point is that Black simply has no useful move; even the nondescript ...a7-a6 slightly worsens his position!



And now:

b1) 20...♖e8? loses: 21.♖h1 ♕e7 (now White's rook sacrifice works because Black doesn't have ...♖f7 as a defensive resource) 22.♖xh7† ♔xh7 23.♕h2† ♔g8 24.♙b3†+-

b2) 20...a6 21.♘e6 ♖e8 22.c4±

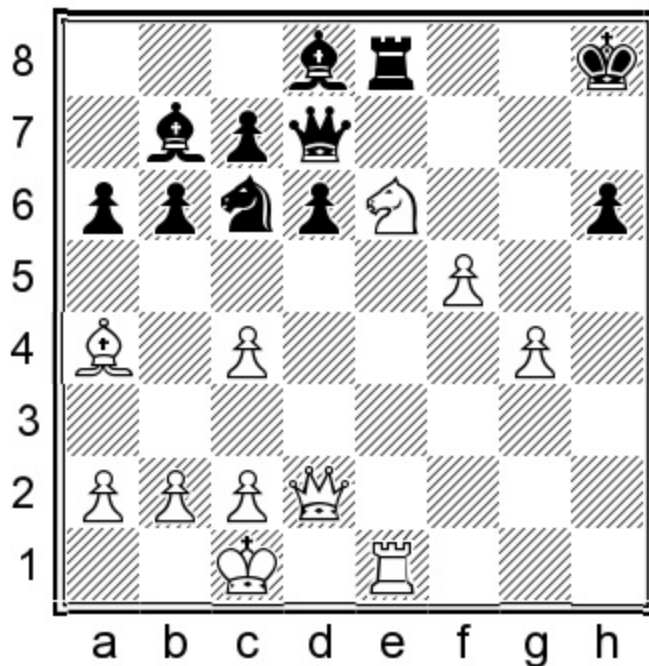
Black obviously has too little space, but since White is after all a piece down, we will try continuing our variation.

22...h6!?

Attempting somehow to untangle.

22...♕f7 23.g6 doesn't help, as after 23...hxg6?! 24.♖h1† ♔g8 25.♕h2 ♕f6 26.♕h7† ♔f7 27.♖f1! Black is beyond saving: 27...♔e7 28.g5+-

23.gxh6 gxh6



24.f6!

24. ♖xh6† ♚h7∞ doesn't work for White.

24... ♚h7 25. ♙xc6!

By utilizing the weakness of the seventh rank, White can recover his piece.

Not 25.g5 ♚g6∞.

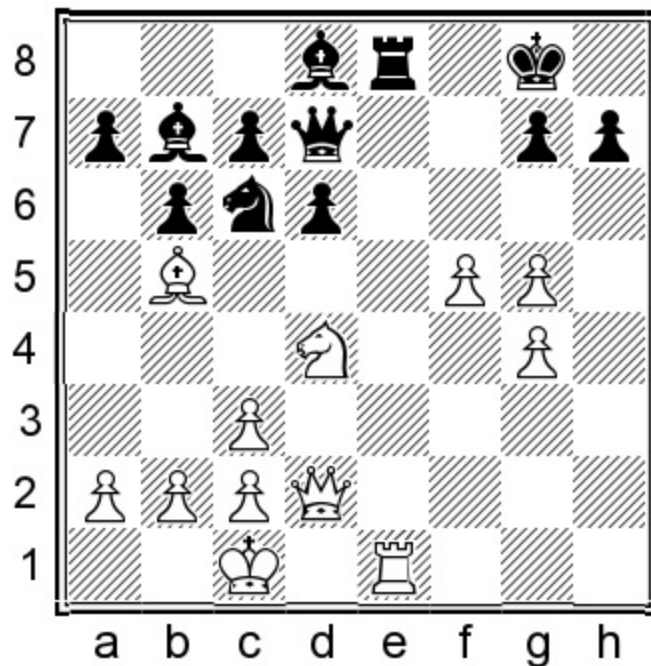
25... ♙xc6 26. ♖c3 ♔g8 27. ♘xd8 ♜xe1†

If 27... ♜xd8? then 28. ♞e7+-.

28. ♖xe1 ♚e4 29. ♖xe4 ♙xe4 30. ♔d2±

White has an extra pawn and good winning chances.

Incidentally if we hadn't played 20. ♙a4, we could have obtained this position with just the difference that Black's a-pawn would be on a7. But in that case our advantage would be slightly less!



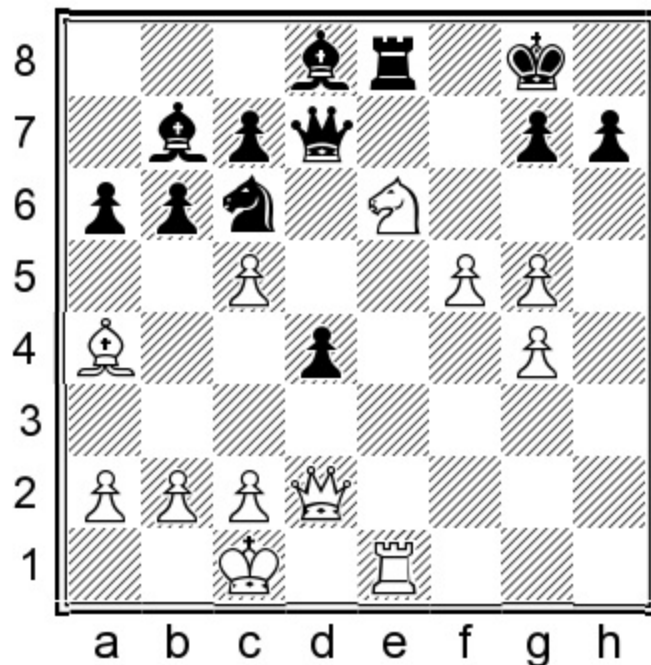
### 20. ♖e6

An insufficient try is 20. ♖c4† d5 21. ♖xd5† ♔h8 22. ♖xe8† ♚xe8 23. ♖e6 ♕e7∞, after which Black is OK.

### 20... ♔h8

The most stubborn.

Alternatively: 20...d5 21.c4 d4 (after 21...a6 22. ♖a4 d4 23. ♔b1 Black still suffers from a shortage of moves; 23... ♔h8 24.c5 transposes to line “b” below, but 23... ♚d6? is met by 24.c5 bxc5 25. ♖b3+—) 22.c5 a6 23. ♖a4



And now:

a) 23...d3 24.♔b1!

The subtle point is that after ♔b3 ...♘d4 Black won't be able to take on b3 with check; if instead 24.cxd3, then 24...♖xe6! 25.♔b3 ♘d4∞.

24...♖xe6

24...dxc2†? loses to 25.♙xc2 b5 26.♖d1+–.

25.♔b3 ♘d4 26.fxe6

It was for the sake of this very move that we played ♔b1.

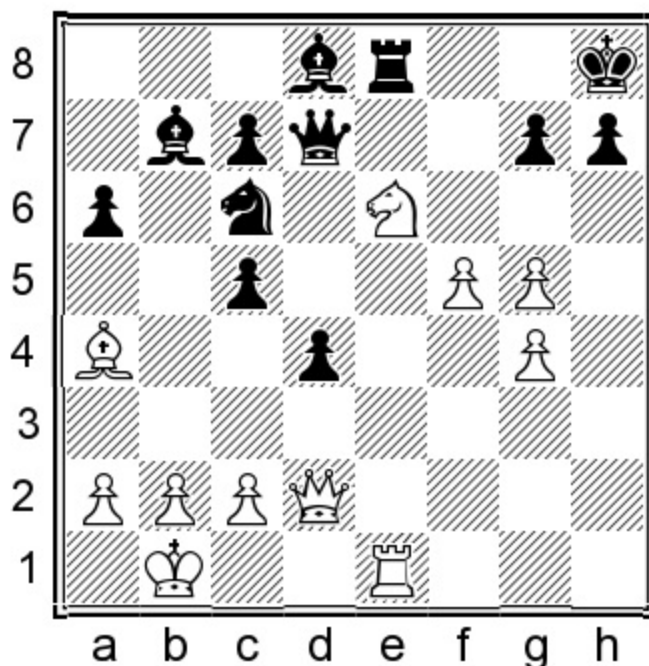
26...♘xb3 27.axb3 ♙e8 28.♙xd3±

The passed pawn on e6 gives White a large plus. Black must play ...♙e7, preserving a slim hope of salvation.

b) 23...♔h8 24.♔b1

Removing the king from the c1-g5 diagonal is very useful.

24...bxc5



25.♔b3!±

Having fortified his knight on e6, White wants to give mate on the h-file.

25.♘xc5?! is inadequate, as after 25...♖xe1† 26.♙xe1 ♙e7± Black is not far from drawing.

25...d3

Preparing ...♘d4; Black would lose with 25...♘b4 26.♘xc5 ♖xe1† 27.♙xe1 ♙e7 28.♙xb4+–.

26.♖h1

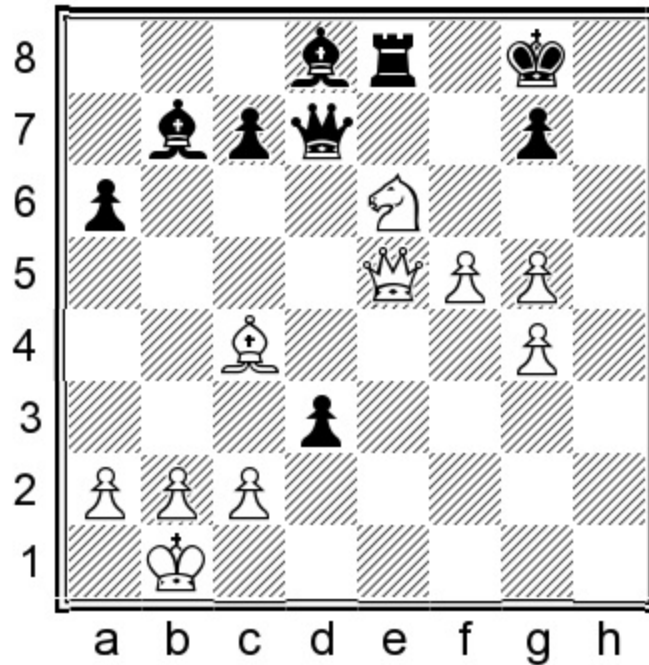
White isn't going to be side-tracked into playing cxd3.

26...c4!

The most tenacious; now the bishop on c4 will be *en prise* after ...♘e5.

27.♔xc4 ♘e5 28.♖xh7† ♔g8

Or 28...♔xh7 29.♘f8† ♚xf8 30.♚h2#.  
 29.♚h8† ♔xh8 30.♚h2† ♔g8 31.♚xe5

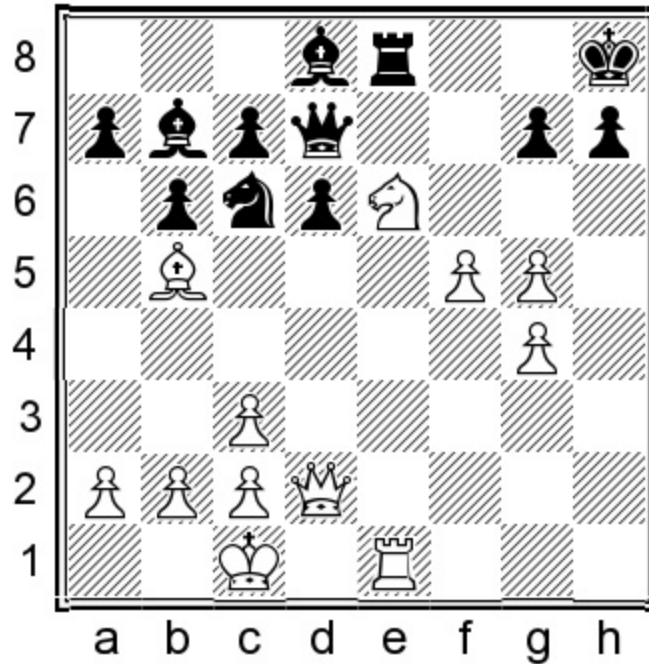


I would like to terminate the variation here, but seeing that White is a rook down, we will carry on for a few more moves.

31...♔h8 32.♚h2† ♔g8 33.cxd3 ♘d5 34.g6

Now Black must give up his rook to avoid mate.

34...♘xe6 35.fxe6 ♚xe6 36.♚e2+-



## 21.c4

It's probable that 21.♘a4 d5 22.c4 d4 leads to a drawish opposite-bishop ending. As we are rejecting that variation, I will not take you all the way through it.

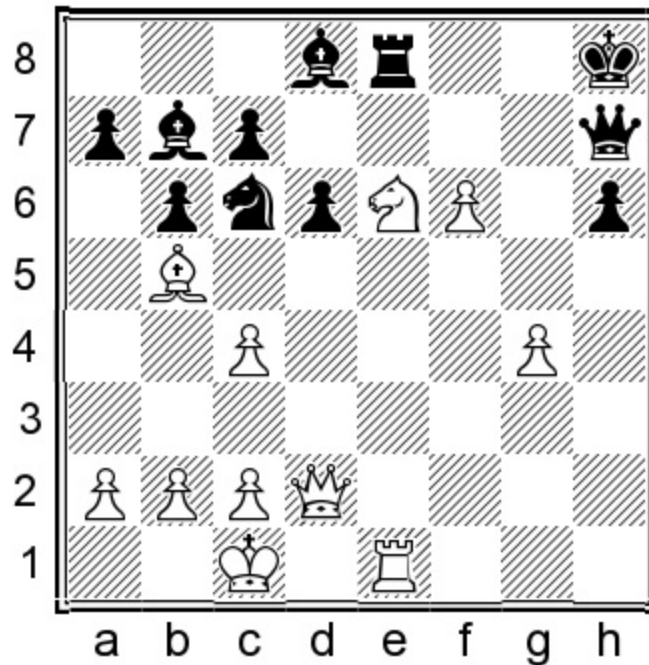
## 21...h6

The insertion of 21...a6 22.♔a4 gives a position from variation b2) in the note to Black's 19th move.

## 22.gxh6 gxh6 23.f6

Not 23.♖xh6† ♕h7∞.

## 23...♕h7



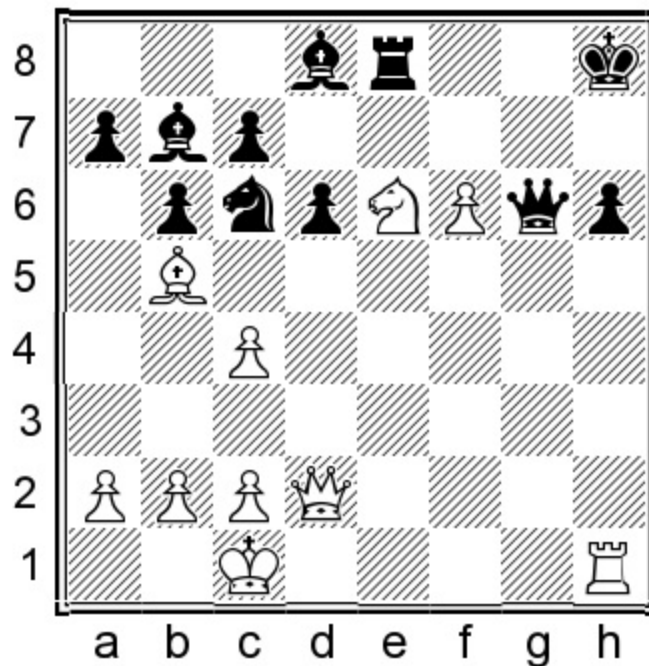
## 24.g5

After 24.♔xc6!?, exploiting the weakness of the seventh rank, 24...♔xc6 25.♖c3 ♔g8 26.♗xd8 ♖xe1† (not 26...♖xd8? 27.♖e7+-) 27.♖xe1 ♕e4±, White hasn't as much advantage as he would have liked. In the variation with 19...♔h8 we reached this position with the black a-pawn on a6, which made a substantial difference to the assessment.

## 24...♖f5

Or 24...♖f7 25.g6 ♖xg6, giving the same position.

## 25.g6 ♖xg6 26.♖h1



26...♔g8

Of course not: 26...♔h7? 27.♘g5†+–

27.♘xd8 ♜xd8 28.♚d5† ♔h8 29.♙xc6 ♙xc6 30.♚xc6±

Material is equal and the black king is too open; this gives White a solid plus.

### Conclusion

These side variations after 8.♚d2 are of great interest.

The move 8...♚e8 is of little use, since White doesn't even have to allow ...♚a4, but if he does allow it, he gains the advantage.

The line with 8...♘c6 and ...♙f5 has been seen in games by Jobava, Ivanchuk, Fridman... But if anything these have been one-off attempts to startle the opponent with an unconventional piece formation. As we can see, if White avoids exchanging the light-squared bishops, he has the upper hand after an advance of his g-pawn.

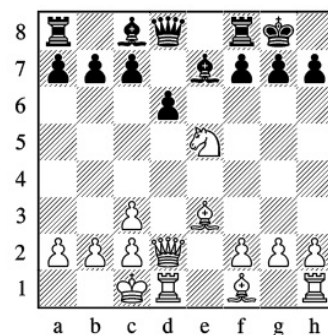
The most interesting of the variations in this chapter is 8...b6, after which we have seen the highly promising idea of a bishop sacrifice on g5.

Overall, with precise play, White obtains an advantage in each of these lines, and for that reason hardly anyone will play them regularly.

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# Chapter 14

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## 9...Nxe5 10.Nxe5!?

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Nc3 Nxc3 6.dxc3 Qe7  
7.Qe3 0-0 8.Wd2 Nd7 9.0-0-0 Ne5 10.Nxe5!? dx5 11.Qd3

A) 11...c6 12.Qe2 236

A1) 12...Qc7 236

A2) 12...Qa5 238

B) 11...Qe6 12.Qe2 240

B1) 12...Qe8 240

B2) 12...Qc8 240

B3) 12...Qd6 242

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1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6 4.Nf3 Nxe4 5.Nc3 Nxc3 6.dxc3 Qe7 7.Qe3 0-0 8.Wd2 Nd7 9.0-0-0 Ne5

This position could also arise if Black had brought his knight out to c6 instead of d7. In 2005 Kramnik started to play this way, and the variation's popularity peaked in 2010 when Boris Gelfand adopted the Black side of this position with success. In our own day the line is seen infrequently, as Black has some good alternatives.

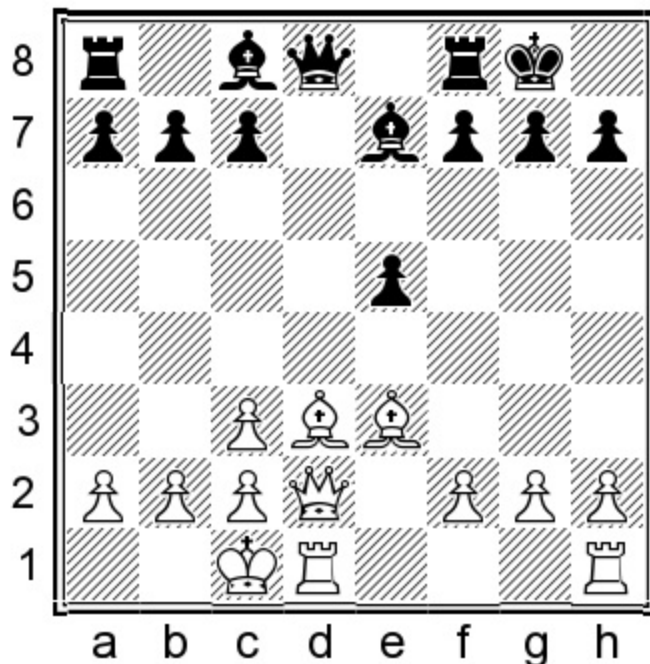
In my view the moves 10.Nxe5!? and 10.Qb1 are of roughly equal worth, so I have decided to include them both. 10.Nxe5!? in this chapter and 10.Qb1 in the next. Essentially the choice is between a quiet and a complicated position.

In the case of 10.h4, the play should transpose to the next chapter after 10...c6 or 10...♙e6.

### 10.♗xe5!?

Quite a rare move, but not at all a bad one. White simplifies the position slightly, aiming to obtain a small but steady plus. Sakaev does not analyse this possibility at all, whereas Cohen mentions it but evaluates it as dubious for White. However, I take a different view on the relative importance of White's activity versus Black's structural superiority.

### 10...dxe5 11.♙d3



At this point we consider **A) 11...c6** and **B) 11...♙e6**.

Cohen quotes a game in which 11...♙d6 was played. 12.♙e4N looks a logical improvement, and after something like 12...♖e7 (12...♙e6 13.♖d3! attacks h7 while preparing to take on b7) 13.f3± White has the more pleasant game, with a safe king and the more active bishops. Black's pawn structure would help in a distant endgame, but in the meantime White can easily improve his position with g2-g4, h2-h4 and so on, while it is not so easy for Black to find counterplay.

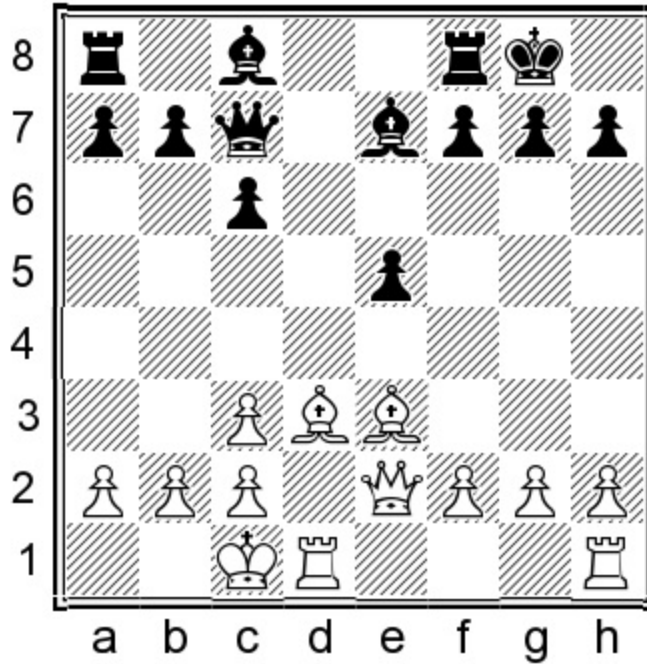
### A) 11...c6

Giving the queen access to a5 and c7 before White plays ♖e2. However, the queen's position on these squares has both advantages and drawbacks.

### 12.♖e2

We shall examine **A1) 12...♖c7** and **A2) 12...♖a5** in turn.

A1) 12...♔c7



13.♖h1 ♘e6 14.♔b1 ♗fe8

Intending to place his bishop on f8, relying on the fact that the e5-pawn will be immune on account of ...♙xa2†.

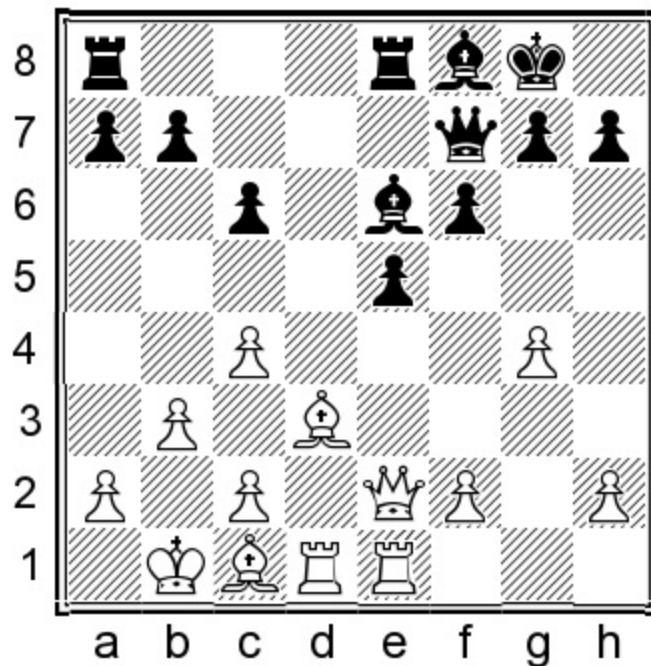
White answers 14...♗ad8 with 15.♙c1 ♙f6 16.h4± followed by h4-h5 (if instead 16.g4 ♙h4!?, the black bishop blocks the h-pawn and is difficult to attack, even after 17.g5 which is met by 17...g6). The bishop is somewhat misplaced on f6, which is why 14...♗fe8 looks a good deal more logical.

15.♙c1 ♙f8 16.c4

It's very useful to forestall ...b7-b5 before starting the kingside attack.

16...f6 17.g4 ♖f7 18.b3

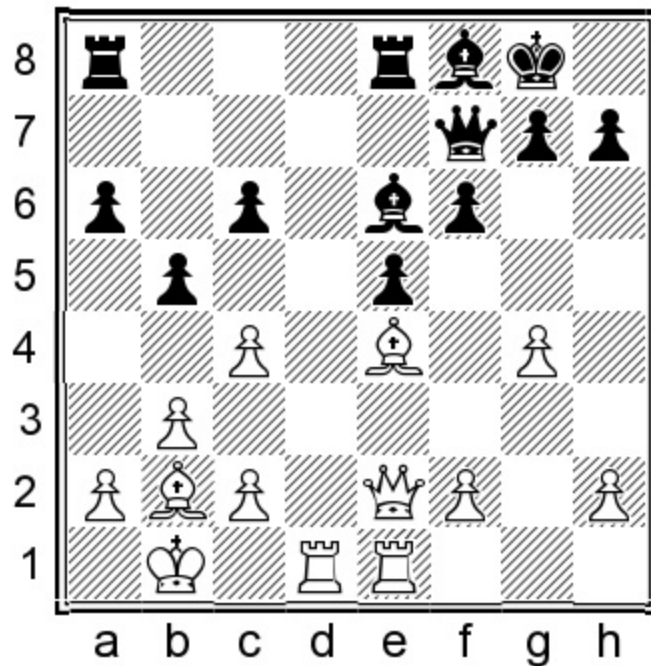
Defending against Black's ...b7-b5 idea. In actual fact the threat isn't all that frightening, but since 18.h4 b5 is a sideline, I prefer not to set out the ensuing analysis – so as not to burden you once again with the memorization of long variations.



### 18...f5

Since Black cannot evade White's kingside pawn advance, it makes sense to exchange his f-pawn for the g-pawn.

After 18...a6 19.♙b2 b5 20.♙e4! Black cannot defend his c6-pawn successfully:



a) 20...♖ec8 21.f4! exf4 22.♙g2 Exploiting the rook's departure from e8; owing to the potential ♖xe6, Black can't capture with ...bxc4 or fortify the c6-pawn with his queen. 22...♙d7 23.♖f1 bxc4 24.♖xf4± There is no defence against g4-g5, so White has a large plus.

b) 20...♙c7?! On f7 the queen was supporting the king, so it doesn't pay to remove it from there.

21. ♖f3 ♜ac8 22. g5±

c) 20... ♜ac8

Probably best, but without the rook on a8 Black cannot create counterplay.

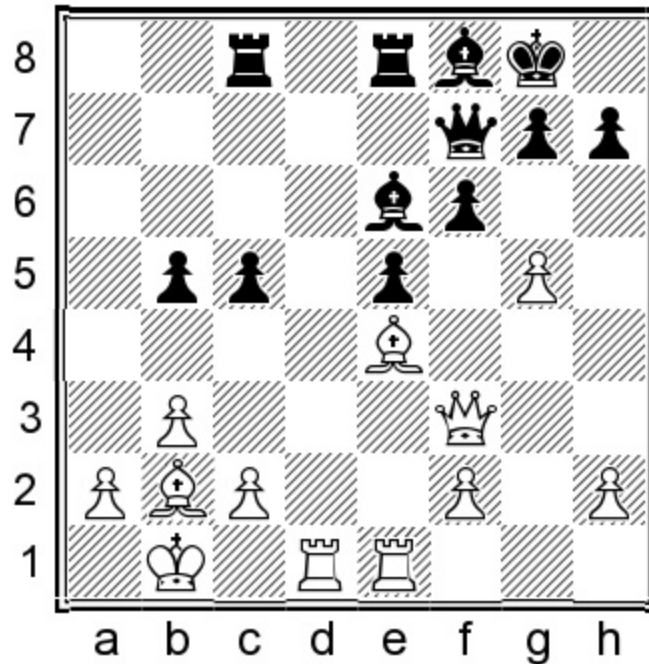
21. cxb5 axb5

Or 21... cxb5 22. h4, and it's obvious that White's attack on the kingside is much more effective.

22. ♖f3

It may seem strange to provoke the advance of the c-pawn, but we have a specific tactical idea in mind.

22... c5 23. g5!



23... fxg5

If 23... f5 then 24. ♙c6±.

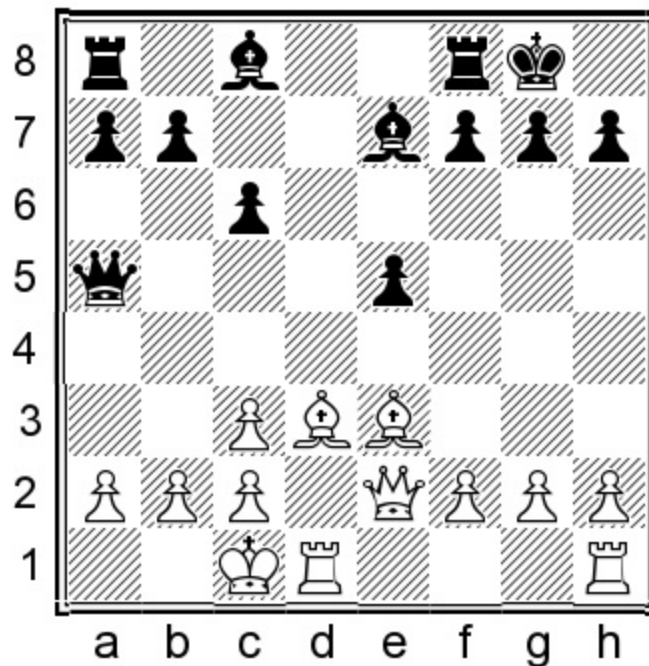
24. ♖d3±

After taking one of the pawns on b5 or h7, White will have a big advantage since the black pawns are too scattered.

19. gxf5 ♙xf5 20. ♙xf5 ♖xf5 21. ♜g1±

Thanks to the half-open g-file, White retains a fair advantage.

A2) 12... ♖a5



Moving off the d-file with tempo. But going to b1 with the king is useful for White in any case.

### 13.♔b1 ♕e6 14.c4

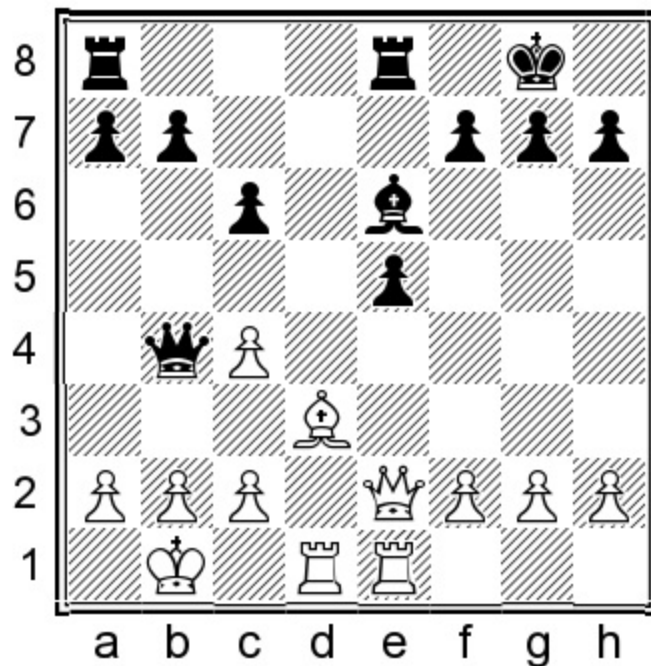
We now notice the snag to ...♖a5 – White gains a tempo for redeploying his bishop (♗d2-c3).

But 14.a3 is also interesting: 14...e4!? 15.♗c4 (15.♗xe4 is worse: 15...♗xa3! 16.bxa3 ♖xa3 17.c4 ♗b4† 18.♔c1 ♗a3† 19.♔d2 ♗a5†♞, and if White wants to carry on the fight with c2-c3, Black will have quite good compensation) 15...♖f5 16.♞he1 With a slight edge for White.

### 14...♞fe8

The most logical. Black supports the e5-pawn, and prepares to meet ♗d2 with ...♗b4. Otherwise White will transfer his bishop to c3, which Black does best to prevent.

### 15.♗d2 ♗b4 16.♗xb4 ♖xb4 17.♞he1



Again taking aim at the pawn on e5. Black now has three possible moves, which all lead to an advantage for White. Let's look at each of them.

### 17...♔f8

Probably the safest move. Black brings his queen closer to the king, but with this formation he is rather passively placed.

Alternatively:

#### a) 17...♕c5

Placing the f2-pawn in his sights; after f2-f3 Black can play ...f7-f6 without fearing ♔h5.

#### 18.b3!?

This is a little more cunning than the immediate capture of the e5-pawn.

White also has a small plus after 18.♕xe5 ♕xf2, but the insertion of b2-b3 is in his favour.

#### 18...♞ad8

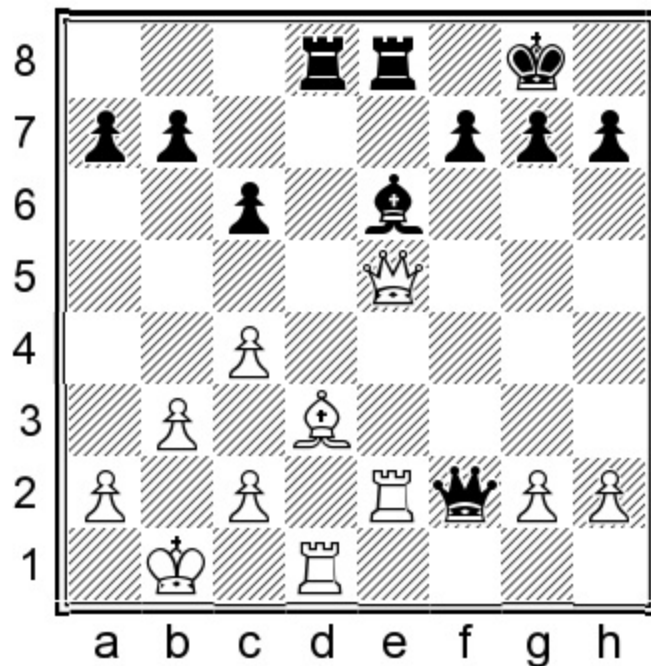
18...g6 would be more effective after an exchange of the pawns on e5 and f2, but at this point

White can exploit the position of the pawn on g6 by pushing his own h-pawn; after 19.f3!?

f6

20.h4± Black can't prevent h4-h5, and his king will then be weakened.

#### 19.♕xe5 ♕xf2 20.♞e2



20...♞b6

20...♞h4 is not better; after 21.g3 ♞e7 22.h4± White's advantage is more obvious, as the queen is worse placed on e7 than on b6.

21.h4

The standard advance of the h-pawn softens Black's king position.

21...g6

Not 21...♙d7? 22.♙xh7†! ♔xh7 23.♞h5† ♔g8 24.♞xd7±.

22.♞g3±

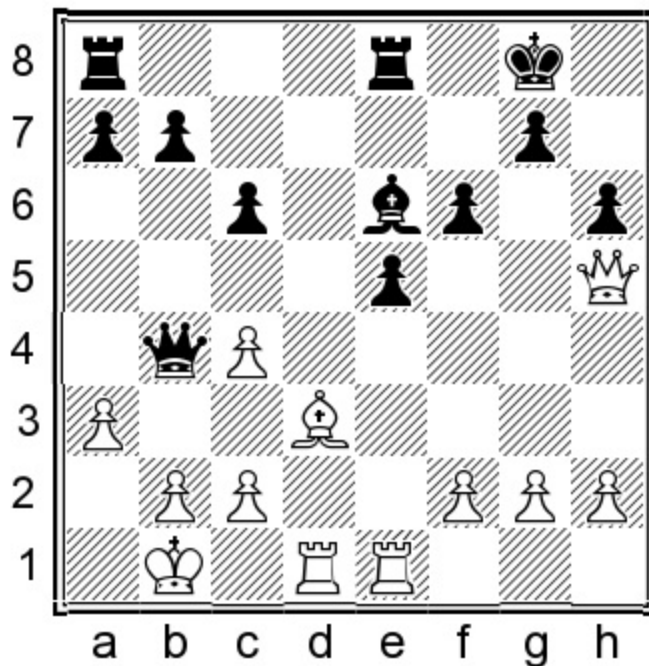
The subsequent advance h4-h5 will open the h-file and create threats to the black king. Black cannot exchange the light-squared bishops and is compelled to defend.

b) 17...f6

This rather a dangerous continuation. Black intends to meet ♞h5 with ...h7-h6 and then move his king away to f8. The problem is that White has the possibility of opening the e-file by pushing his f-pawn. There can follow:

18.♞h5 h6 19.a3!

It turns out that Black has no good square to withdraw his queen to; apart from ♞g6 White has the f2-f4 resource, which will seriously weaken the black king.



19...♙c5

Otherwise Black has a plainly bad position.

19...♙e7?! 20.f4, and now 20...exf4? loses to 21.♔g6 ♖ed8 22.♗xd8† ♗xd8 23.♙e2+–, while after 20...♔f7 21.♙f5 g6 22.♙h3± the black pawns will be split up, leading to a big advantage for White.

20.f4 ♔xc4 21.♔xc4†

Simple and good; there is no need to insert b2-b4 on the computer's recommendation.

21...♙xc4 22.♗d7 ♖ed8

Not 22...♗ad8?? 23.♙g6+–.

23.b3!

The tempting 23.♗e7 ♔f8! unexpectedly reduces White's advantage.

23...♙e6 24.♗xb7 ♗ab8!

Thanks to the threat of ...♗xb3, Black avoids losing his e5-pawn.

25.♗xb8 ♗xb8 26.♙e2±

This last move is the best way of defending against 26...♗xb3†. Owing to his weak queenside pawns, Black is faced with a laborious struggle to draw. After 26...♗e8 he will have to recapture on e5 with the pawn, while a good answer to 26...♗b5 is 27.a4.

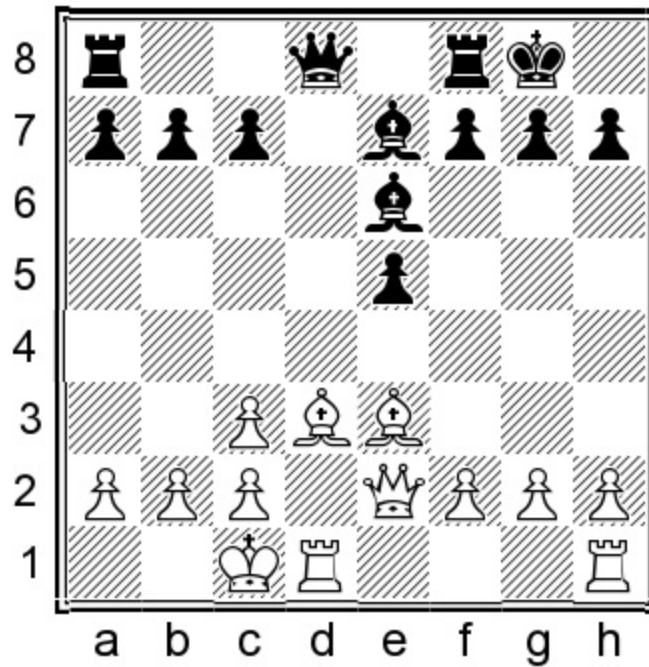
## 18.h4

The typical advance of the h-pawn to unsettle the enemy king, which we encounter in other variations too.

18...♗ad8 19.♙e4! g6 20.♙e3±

Having induced ...g7-g6 we will continue with h4-h5, opening the h-file. With the white king on c1 completely safe, the play is concentrated on the kingside, giving White a small but stable plus.

B) 11...♔e6 12.♚e2



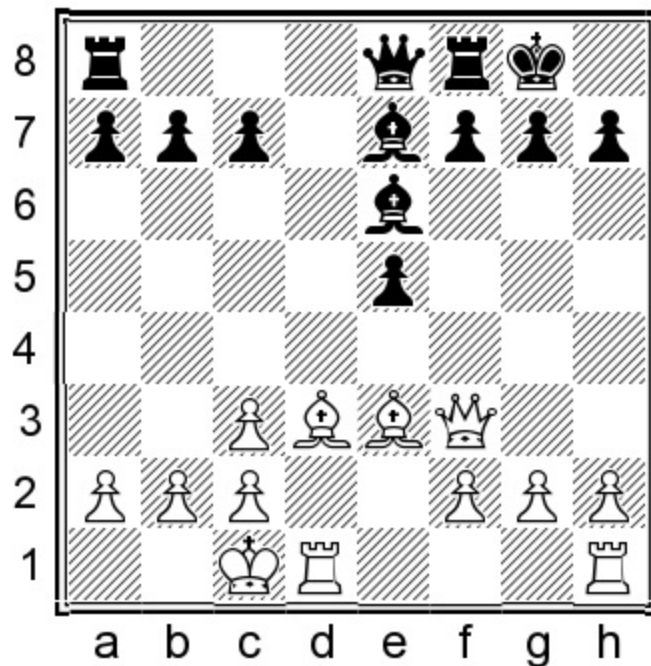
White's game is simple to play: advance the kingside pawns, or build up in the centre with ♔b1, ♙h1 and transfer the e3-bishop to the a1-h8 diagonal after c3-c4.

We now consider **B1)** 12...♚e8, **B2)** 12...♚c8 and **B3)** 12...♔d6.

**B1) 12...♚e8 13.♚f3!?**

The text move has only been tested in correspondence chess.

In Caruana – Ponomarev, Bucharest 2013, the continuation was 13.♔b1 f5 with a slight edge for White. I like the queen move better; it leads by force to a pleasant endgame.



### 13...♔a4

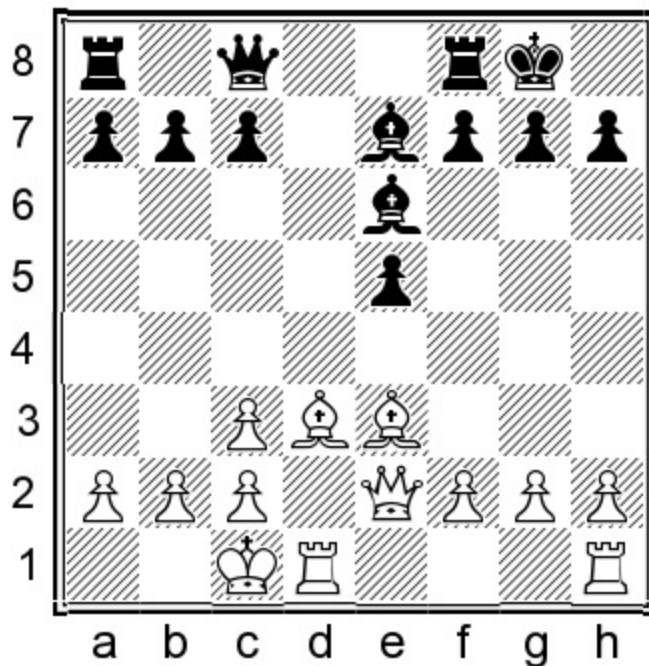
There is simply no other normal move. If 13...♕xa2?, then 14.♖f5 g6 15.♖xe5+-. White threatens ♕h6, and if Black plays to exchange queens, his bishop on a2 will not escape.

### 14.♖xb7 ♖xa2 15.♖a6 ♖xa6 16.♕xa6±

Thanks to Black's disconnected pawns on a7 and c7, White has a decent advantage. We are planning to play b2-b3 and bring the king to b2. If Black plays ...f7-f5, we will simply answer f2-f3.

In over a dozen email games to reach this position, White has won a few, drawn more, and lost none, which is a fair reflection of the position.

### B2) 12...♔c8



### 13.h4

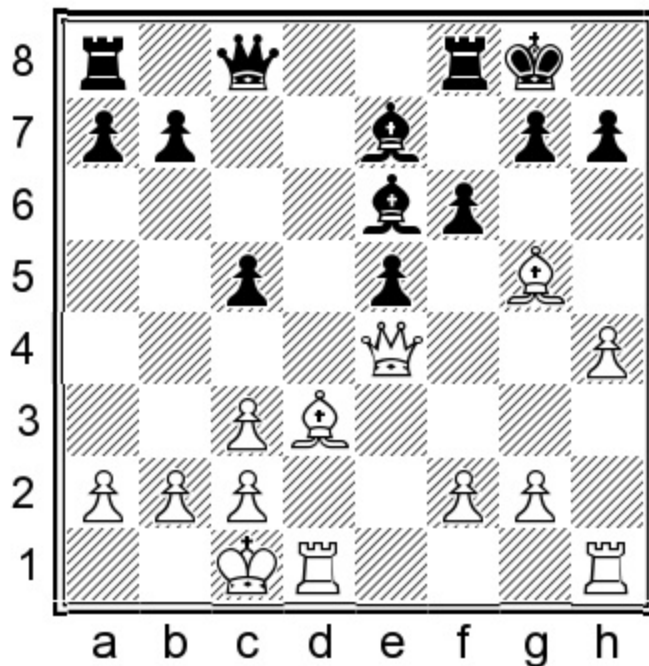
More precise than 13.♔b1, which allows Black to play 13...c5 14.♙e4 ♚c7 with the aim of exchanging both pairs of rooks on the d-file.

### 13...♙f5

By exchanging off the light-squared bishops Black simplifies the position, but White has a small, stable plus after almost any normal reply – ♙xf5, ♔b1 or h5.

In contrast 13...f5?! does nothing to simplify the position and after, for example, 14.h5!?!±, Black's kingside advance feels more like a weakening than a productive plan.

Instead 13...c5 is met by 14.♙g5! Going onto the attack at once (14.c4 isn't so clear, in view of 14...f5 or 14...b5). 14...f6 15.♚e4



15...♔f5

If 15...g6?! 16.♔h6 ♖f7, then 17.♞e2±, freeing the e4-square for the bishop; White obviously has a large plus, owing to the poor placing of Black's pieces.

16.♞xf5 ♞xf5 17.♔xf5 fxg5 18.♔e6† ♔h8

At first sight the position seems close to equality in view of the opposite bishops, but this is by no means the case.

19.♞d7 ♞ae8 20.h5! ♞xf2 21.g4±

Once White has captured a pawn on b7 or a7 he will set up a passed a-pawn, so his advantage may soon increase. For example:

21...♔f8 22.♔d5 e4

Or 22...b5?! 23.♞xa7 ♞f4 24.c4± b4 25.a4 bxa3 26.bxa3 ♞xg4 27.a4+- and the a-pawn will advance to queen; I give this variation to show that defending the position is quite difficult for Black.

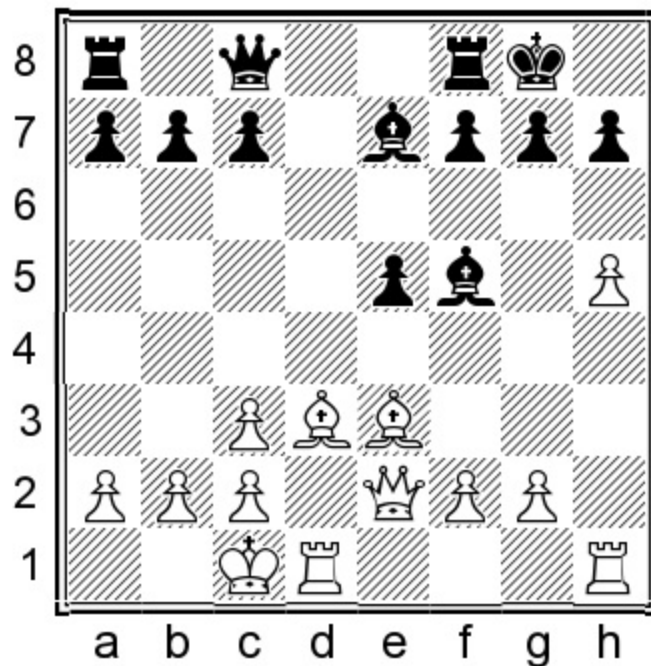
23.♞e1±

White has a decent advantage owing to Black's badly-placed bishop on f8. The e-pawn cannot get through, as the white king is too close.

## 14.h5

The insertion of the moves h4-h5 ...h7-h6 will be useful for White if we are planning to play ♔xf5 and ♞c4.

But 14.♔xf5 immediately is not bad either: 14...♞xf5 15.♞c4! (after 15.g4 ♞e4 Black's queen at least is quite well placed) 15...c6 (if h4-h5 ...h7-h6 had occurred, ♞d3 at this point would be good; as it is, White shouldn't play that way, because after the exchange of queens he cannot double rooks on the d-file) 16.g3±



### 14...h6

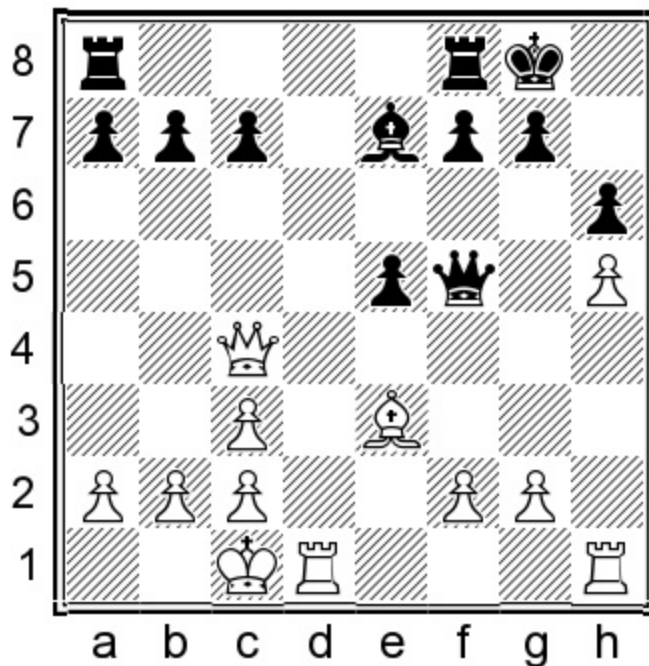
Or 14...♖d8!? and now:

a) It looks tempting to play: 15.h6 ♗xd3 16.♖xd3 ♖xd3 17.♙xd3 (17.cxd3!? is probably better, preserving a small plus) But after 17...♚e6! 18.hxg7 e4∞, miraculously, Black is all right. I shall not give the rest of the long variation.

b) 15.♗c4 is quite an interesting idea: 15...♖xd1† 16.♖xd1!? ♗g4 17.f3 ♗xh5 18.g4 ♗g6 19.♗f4± Thanks to his active pieces, White maintains a certain amount of pressure. Black should probably return the pawn with 19...e4. But if you think White's idea is unwarranted, I advise you to choose variation c).

c) Even the unsophisticated 15.♗xf5 ♚xf5 16.♙c4.

15.♗xf5 ♚xf5 16.♙c4



**16...♖ac8**

Or: 16...c6 17.♔d3!?. With White's pawn on h4, Black could solve his problems by exchanging queens – as White wouldn't be able to double on the d-file without leaving the h-pawn *en prise*.  
 17...♕f6 18.♕d7 b6 19.♕g4± Owing to his badly-placed queen, Black has an unpleasant position.

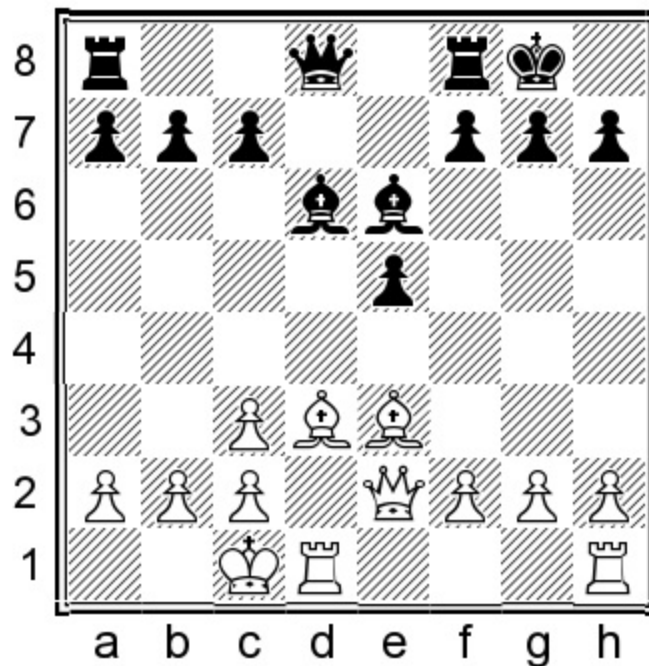
**17.♕d5!?**

With this manoeuvre White forces the black queen back to f6. An immediate g2-g4 would be met by ...♕f3.

**17...b6 18.g4 ♕f6 19.♔b1 ♖fd8 20.♕e4±**

Thanks to his active queen, White keeps a steady plus. Exchanging both pairs of rooks would not be good for Black, as his queenside pawns would then be weakened.

**B3) 12...♗d6**



### 13.♔b1 ♚d7

Roughly the same positions could result from 13...♚e8.

It is too early for: 13...f5?! 14.g4! e4 (if 14...fxg4 then 15.h3±, and ...gxh3 is unplayable owing to ♚h5) 15.♗c4 ♚e7 16.gxf5 ♞xf5 17.♞d4± Black is then unable to defend the e4-pawn.

Also 13...♚e7 14.♗e4! is bad for Black, as he has to place his rook awkwardly on b8. After 14...♞ab8 15.g4± White has an obvious plus.

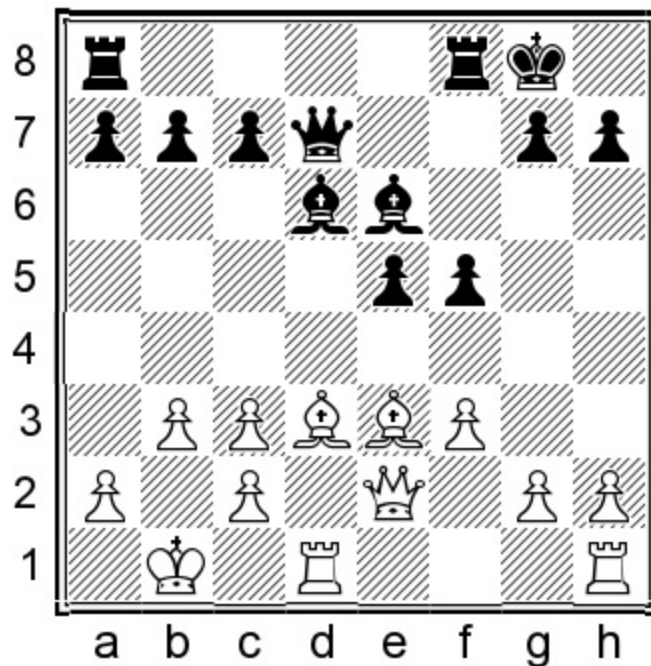
13...♚h4 has been tried, when one promising option is 14.f3 f5 15.h3!/? preparing g2-g4.

### 14.f3

Not the immediate 14.c4 b6 15.f3 f5 16.h3 ♚e7∞. The pawn on c4 deprives White of some possibilities, so it's best not to hurry to place it there.

### 14...f5 15.b3

It's very useful to shield the a2-pawn, as Black would otherwise have the possibility of ...e5-e4, relying on the idea of ...♗xa2† and ...♚a4†. Black now has difficulty finding play; ...♚c6 would be met by ♗d4, while ...♞ae8? fails to ♗b5.



15...♙f7

Alternatively:

a) 15...a6 (covering b5) 16.c4, and now:

a1) 16...e4!?

A little tactical trick, but White has no intention of taking the e4-pawn.

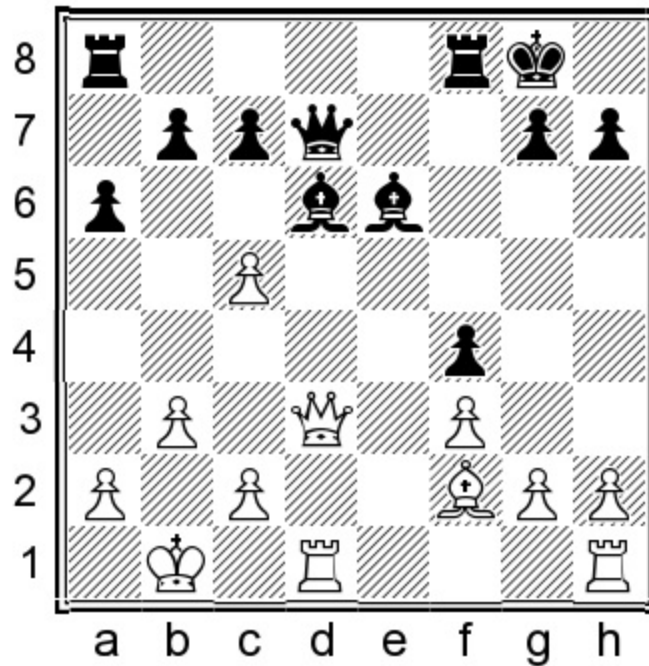
17.c5!

If 17.fxe4 then 17...f4∞.

17...exd3 18.♙xd3

Now Black's advanced f-pawn prevents him from equalizing.

18...f4 19.♘f2



19...♞xc5

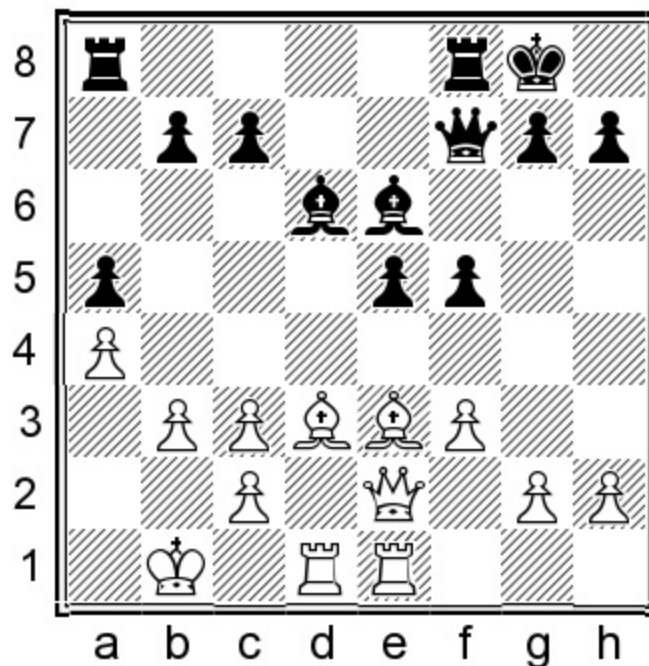
19...♞ad8 20.♞e4± is no better.

20.♞xd7 ♞xd7 21.♞xc5 ♞f7 22.♞he1±

In spite of the opposite bishops, White has quite an advantage on account of his more active rooks.

a2) 16...♞c6 17.♞d4 exd4 (after 17...♞ae8 18.♞xe5 ♞c8 19.f4± Black will probably manage to recover the pawn, but even then he will remain with the worse position) 18.♞xe6† ♞h8 19.♞xf5 ♞ae8 20.♞d7± Black has come out a pawn down, but he retains quite good drawing chances.

b) 15...a5 It's hard to say who benefits from the insertion of ...a7-a5 a2-a4; after this, Black will hardly play ...c7-c6 in view of the weakening of his queenside. 16.a4 ♞f7 17.♞he1±



White has a simple plan: transfer the dark-squared bishop to the a1-h8 diagonal and play c3-c4. Black for his part has practically exhausted the possibilities for improving his position.

**16.♔c1 ♖ae8 17.h3±**

White maintains a small but stable advantage. He has enough moves to improve his position – c2-c4, ♔b2, ♖he1, g2-g4. Black has already positioned his pieces conveniently and has no more obviously useful moves.

### Conclusion

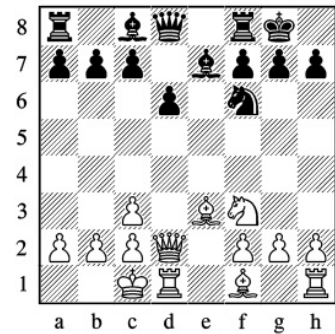
The once popular move 9...♘e5 has now been consigned to secondary status, seeing that White often maintains a small but steady advantage after an exchange of knights on e5. Even though this line is relatively rare, I personally prefer the early knight exchange – 10.♘xe5 dxe5 11.♔d3. Black then has to forget about active play and concentrate on defence.

More common is 10.♙b1, which we will consider next.

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# Chapter 16

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## 9...♞f6

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞f6 3.♞xe5 d6 4.♞f3 ♞xe4 5.♞c3 ♞xc3  
6.dxc3 ♟e7 7.♟e3 0-0 8.♞d2 ♞d7 9.0-0-0 ♞f6 10.♟d3 c5

A) 11.♟b1 269

B) 11.♞he1 ♟e6 272

B1) 12.♟b1!? 273

B2) 12.♟g5 d5 13.♞f4 ♞e8! 274

B21) 14.♞e5!? ♞c7 15.♞h4 275

B211) 15...c4 276

B212) 15...h6 278

B22) 14.c4!? 280

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1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞f6 3.♞xe5 d6 4.♞f3 ♞xe4 5.♞c3 ♞xc3 6.dxc3 ♟e7 7.♟e3 0-0 8.♞d2 ♞d7 9.0-0-0  
♞f6

This knight move is the topic of the current chapter. As we shall soon see, Black's normal plan is ...c7-c5 clearing a path for ...♞a5, and ...♟e6 is also on the cards – this is a potentially lively line.

Chapter 17 will cover 9...c6.

10.♟d3

Here 10.h3 is a waste of time, since White isn't all that keen to play g2-g4. After 10...c5 11.♔f4 ♕e6 Black has quite good counterplay, as in Caruana – Hou, Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden 2018.

### 10...c5

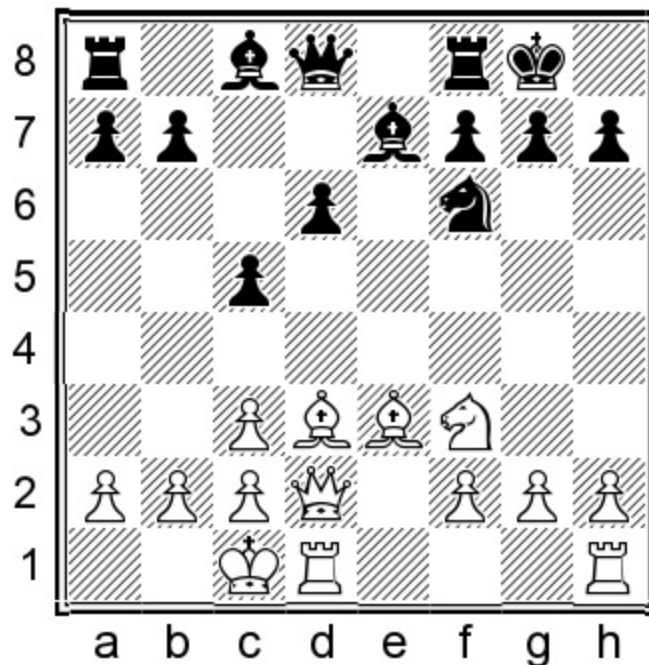
With this move Black deprives White of the d4-square and prepares ...♕e6. He shouldn't bring the bishop out at once on account of 11.♖d4.

An alternative is 10...♖e8 11.♖he1 ♕d7, and now:

a) In the only game played from this position, the continuation was: 12.h3 c5 13.♕g5 h6 14.♕xf6 ♕xf6 15.♕e4 (15.♖xe8† ♖xe8∞) 15...♕c6!? 16.♕xc6 ♖xe1 17.♗xe1 bxc6 18.♖xd6 ♖b6 With sufficient compensation for the pawn in Antoniewski – Cyborowski, Czech Republic 2018.

b) 12.♕d4!? h6 (or 12...c5 13.♕xf6 ♕xf6 14.♕e4± and this time, in contrast to the Antoniewski – Cyborowski game, the moves h2-h3 ...h7-h6 have been omitted, which makes quite a difference to the verdict on the position) 13.c4 c5 14.♕c3± The successful transfer of his bishop to c3 has given White a small but stable plus.

10...d5 is rare, and has been seen mainly in rapid and blitz games. For example, 11.♖he1 ♕g4 12.♕g5 ♗e4 13.♕xe4 dxe4 14.♕xe7 ♖xe7 15.h3 ♕xf3 16.gxf3 ♖e6 17.♔b1 ♖xh3 18.fxe4± and in Praggnanandhaa – Wei Yi, internet (blitz) 2019, White had the safer king, which is key in major-piece positions.



From the diagram we consider **A) 11.♔b1** and **B) 11.♖he1**.

**A) 11.♔b1**

A fresh idea, but in my view this move isn't in any way better than 11.♖he1. I shall show some lines as they are instructive, but I do not recommend this variation.

### 11...♜a5

When I was studying 11.♔b1 it was this reply, followed by ...♙e6, that troubled me the most. If we are going to continue with c3-c4, it's simpler to play 11.♖he1 ♙e6 12.♔b1.

In Kryvoruchko – Stark, Hockenheim 2018, 11...♙e6 12.♘g5 ♙d7 13.h4 gave White the initiative.

Another try is:

11...b5!? 12.♖he1 ♖b8! 13.♙g5

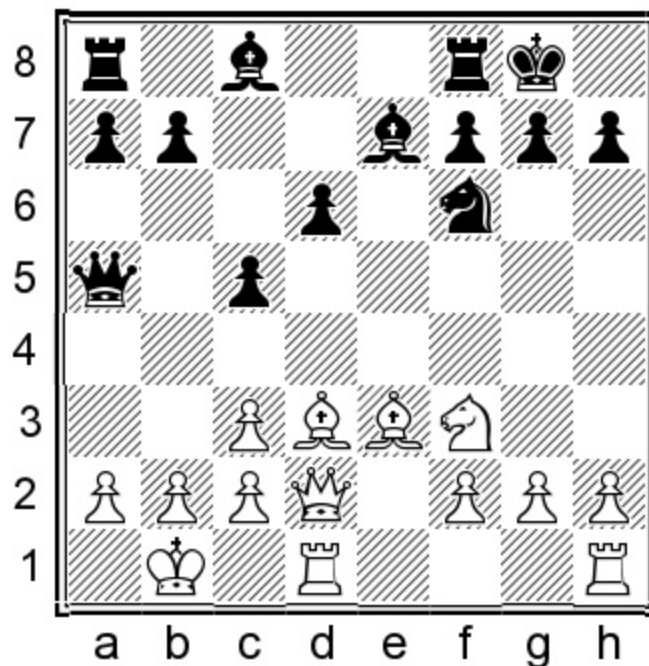
13.♙f4 can be met by either 13...♖e8 or 13...♖b7 with an unclear position.

13...♙e6

13...c4?! 14.♘d4 ♙d7 15.♘f5± gave White a good advantage in Vidit – Gelfand, Prague 2019.

14.♜f4 ♜a5 15.♞xe6 fxe6 16.♜h4

And now not only 16...g6 but also 16...h6 leaves the position unclear. It's because Black has plenty of quite good possibilities that I don't advise you to play 11.♔b1 at all – and hence I shall not continue to the end of the long variations in this position.



### 12.a3!?

I arrived at this move in an attempt to find an alternative to transposing into the 11th Carlsen – Caruana match game. This seems to be the only reasonable possibility to avoid the exchange of queens. It was a novelty when I first analysed it, but was then played by the Chinese Super-GM Wei Yi.

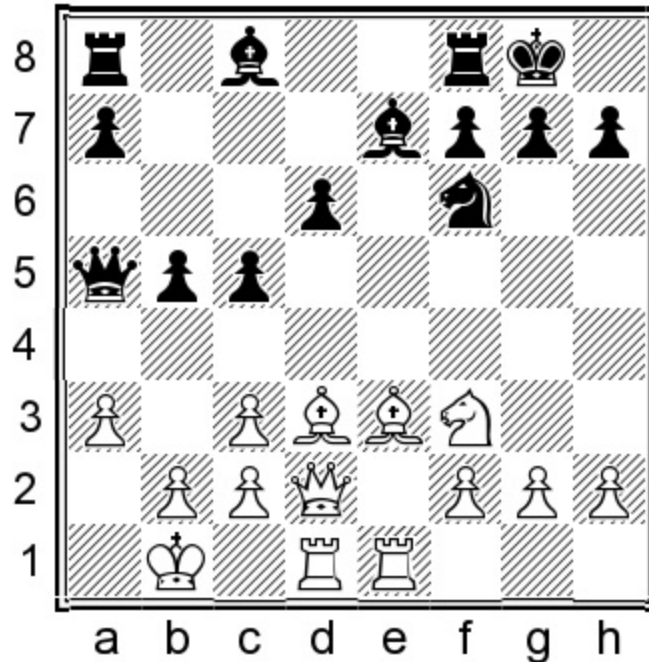
If instead 12.♖he1 ♙e6 13.c4, then it's hard to understand why White needs the move-order with

11.♔b1, allowing Black the option of 11...b5.

## 12...d5

After 12...♞e8 13.♞he1, either 13...♙e6 14.♘g5 or 13...♙d7 14.♙g5! would be bad for Black. His best choice would be the computer's 13...♞b6 14.c4, with a slight edge for White.

If 12...b5?! then 13.♞he1±. The moves ...♞a5 and ...b7-b5 somehow don't go very well together.



This verdict was backed up by the game Wei Yi – Bai Jinshi, China 2019, which continued: 13...c4 14.♙d4 ♙d8 15.♙xf6 ♙xf6 16.♙e4 ♞b8 17.♞xd6 White had won a pawn for nothing, and the game ended quickly: 17...♙g4 18.♞f4 ♙xf3 19.♞xf3 ♞b6 20.♞d7 ♞fd8? 21.♙xh7† ♔f8 22.♞xf7† ♔xf7 23.♞h5† ♔f8 24.♙g6 1-0

## 13.c4 ♞a4!?

If 13...♞xd2 then 14.♙xd2±. The ending with an early ...d6-d5 is better than after the moves ♞he1 ...♙e6.

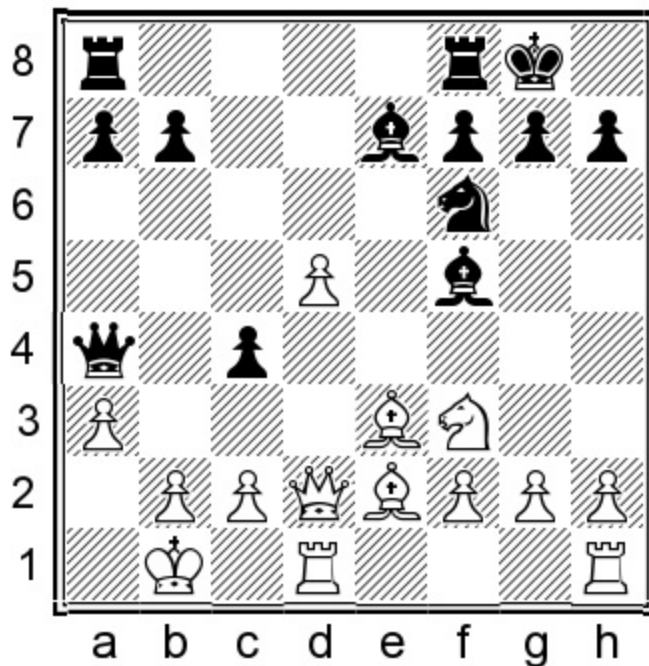
## 14.cxd5 c4

Not 14...♘xd5?! 15.♙xh7† ♔xh7 16.♞xd5± with an extra pawn.

## 15.♙e2 ♙f5!

Taking aim at the c2-pawn. The activity of Black's pieces obviously compensates for the pawn minus.

Black does badly with: 15...♞d8?! 16.♞c3 b5 17.d6! The only move to give White the advantage. 17...♙xd6 18.♙c5± Then after 18...♙c7 19.♞xd8† White has a large plus, while 18...♘e4? fails to 19.♞e5!+-.  
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### 16.d6!?

The immediate 16.♙c3?! is dangerous: 16...♞ac8 17.d6 ♔d8→

### 16...♙xd6 17.♙c3

White wants to obtain the c4-pawn in return for his d-pawn, and exchange queens at the same time. Unfortunately Black is not obliged to defend his bishop on d6.

After 17.♙xd6 ♙xc2† 18.♔a1 c3! (but not 18...♙xe2?? 19.♞d2+–) 19.♙b4 ♙xe2 20.♙xc3 the position is close to equality, but Black's game is more pleasant to play.

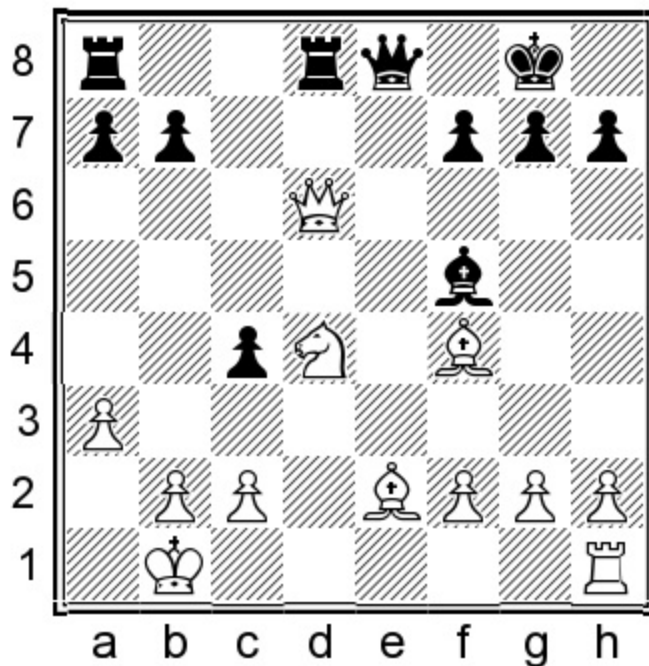
### 17...♞ac8

There is a parallel option:

### 17...♞fc8!?

The difference between this and 17...♞ac8 is that the rook remaining on a8 will not be exposed to attack from White's knight; a more precise explanation will follow presently.

18.♞xd6 ♘e4 19.♙e5 ♘xd6 20.♘d4 ♙d7 21.♙f4 ♞d8 22.♙xd6 ♙e8



If Black had played 17...♖ac8 and 21...♗fd8, White would now have the possibility of 23.♘xf5!?, exploiting the vulnerability of the rook on c8 – see the note to move 21.

23.♙c5 ♖xd4

In the event of 23...♙xc2† 24.♘xc2 ♙xe2<sup>2</sup> White's two minor pieces are clearly stronger than a rook and pawn.

24.♙e3 ♖d2 25.♙xd2

25.♙f3 ♙xc2† 26.♙c1 ♖c8∞ is not better.

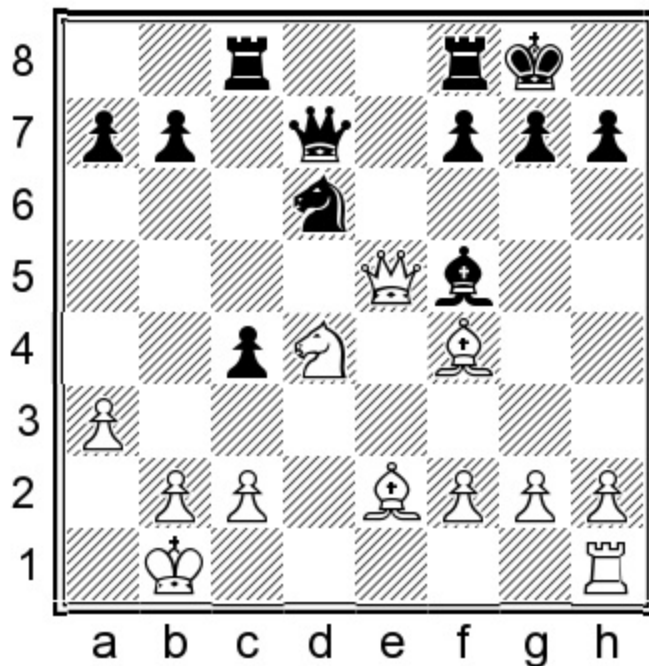
25...♙xe2 26.♙xf5 ♙xd2

White is a little more comfortable after 27.♙f3, or 27.♙e4!? aiming to meet ...♙xf2 with ♖d1.

### 18.♖xd6

In the sequence that follows, both sides make the only playable moves.

18...♘e4 19.♙e5 ♘xd6 20.♘d4 ♙d7 21.♙f4



### 21...Rfd8

Alternatively:

a) 21...Rcd8?! is inferior: 22.Qxd6 Qe8 23.Qc5± And in this case the tactics don't work for Black: 23...Rxd4?! 24.Qe3 Rd2 25.Qf3! Qxc2† 26.Qc1± Since the rook on f8 is shut in, Black can't create threats against the white king. In the analogous position with the rook on a8, he has ...Rc8 available – see the note to Black's 17th.

b) 21...g5!? 22.Qg3 Rfd8 23.Qxd6 Qxd6 24.Qxd6

We can now understand the reason for 21...g5; if Black didn't have this loophole for his king, his position would be much worse.

24...Qg6 25.Qb5

25.Qe5 Rd5 26.Qf6 Rd6= leads to a repetition of moves.

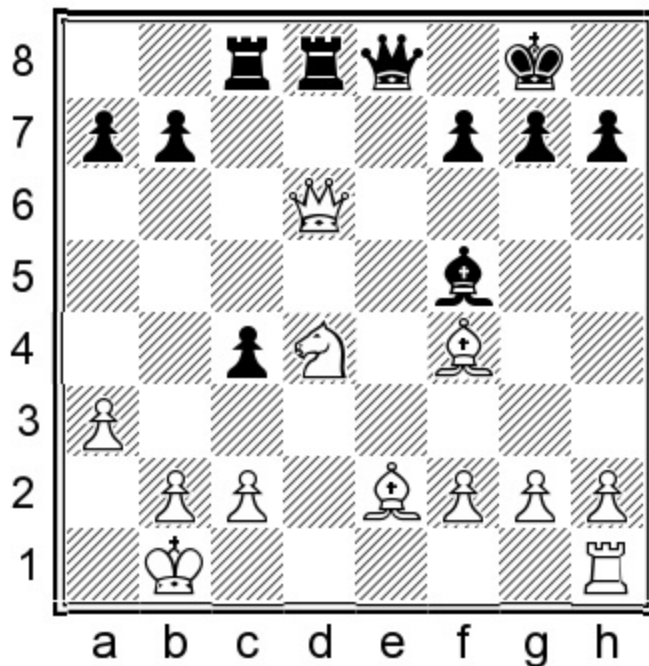
25...a6 26.Qa7 Ra8 27.Qc5 Rd2 28.Qd1

Given a single tempo more, White would have a large plus; Black can only hold on by going after the bishop on c5.

28...Rd5 29.Qe3 Re5 30.Qf3 Rxe3 31.fxe3 Rxa7±

With a slight advantage for White, thanks to his active rook after 32.Rd1.

### 22.Qxd6 Qe8



23. ♖xf5

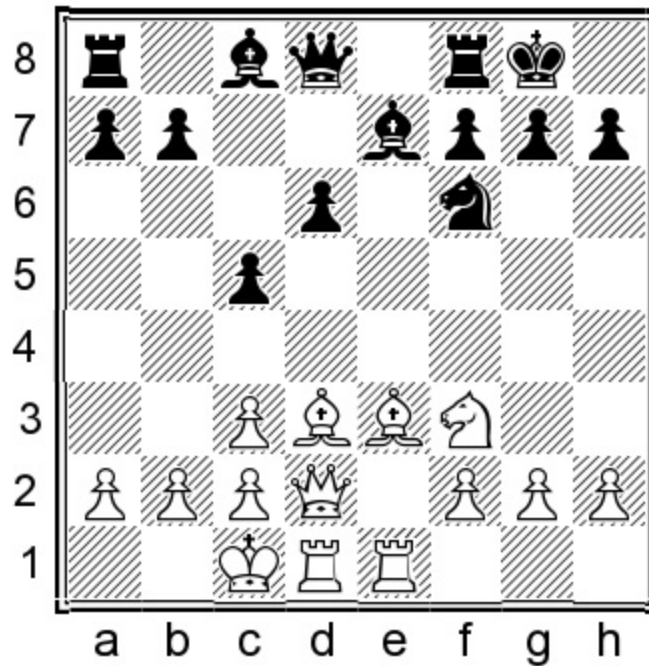
This brings about a complex position with an unusual distribution of material.

Instead 23. ♕e5 leads to exchanges and an equal game: 23... ♖xd4 24. ♕xf5 g6 25. ♕f6 ♖xf4 26. ♕xf4=

23... ♖xd6 24. ♗xd6 ♕xe2 25. ♖e7† ♔h8 26. ♖xc8

White has plenty of material for the queen, but I'm not convinced he has the advantage. The queen and two pawns will probably be sufficient for counterplay. It's important to note that 26... ♕e6? doesn't work: 27. ♖d1! and Black can't take on c8 in view of ♗e7.

**B) 11. ♖he1**

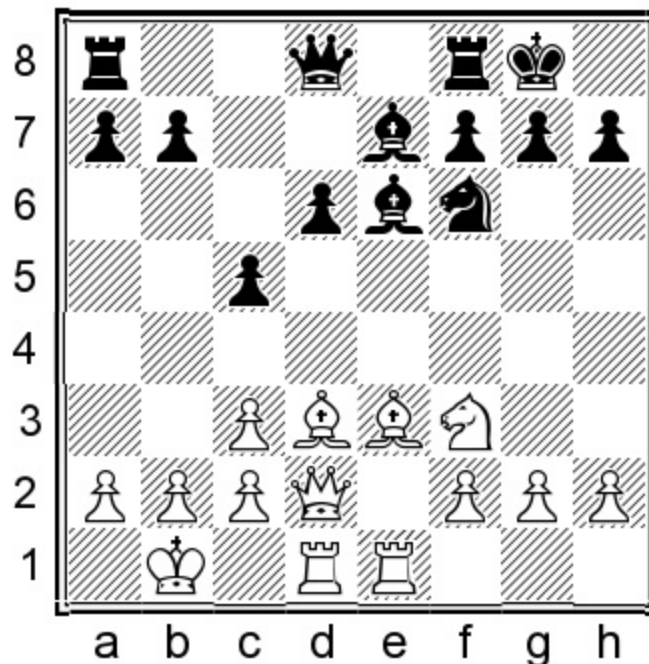


### 11...♙e6

The critical position of the variation. White may play **B1)** 12.♚b1!? which leads to a minimal plus in the ending, or **B2)** 12.♙g5, testing his opponent's preparation.

If 12.a3, then 12...c4!? 13.♙f1 ♞e4 14.♞d4 d5∞ isn't bad. Black has his full share of the play after 15.♙xc4 ♙f6.

### B1) 12.♚b1!?



This move has become familiar since it was played in the last World Championship match. At first I thought Carlsen had chosen it because it was more in his style than 12.♙g5, but then I concluded



convinced that this move is useful (strengthening White's position with 15.b3 or 15.h3 is probably a shade better). 15...♙d7 16.f3 ♘c6 17.a3 h6 18.♗e4 ♗xe4 19.♙xe4 ♙xe4 20.♞xe4 The White side is more congenial to play, but the position is nearly equal.

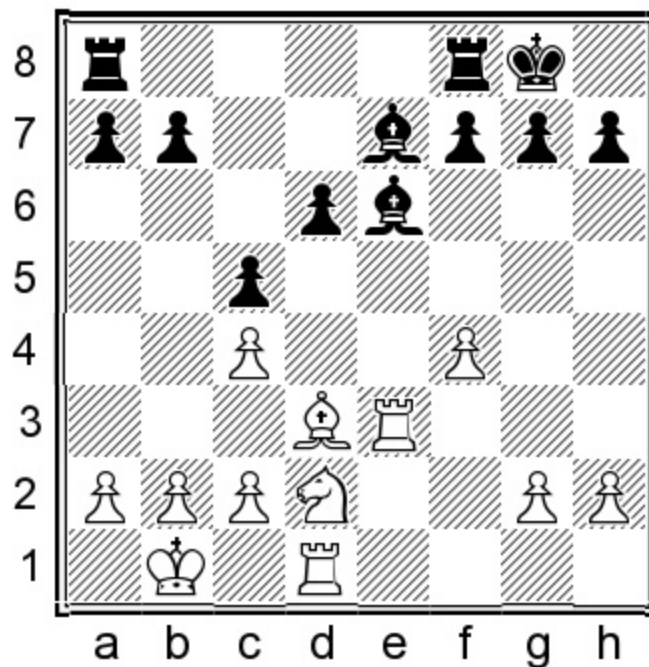
b) 14...h6, and now:

b1) 15.♗h4 lets Black bring about an exchange of bishops and simplify the position still further: 15...♞fe8 (or 15...♗g4 with the same ideas) 16.♗g6 ♗g4 17.♗xe7 ♞xe7 18.♞e2 ♗e5 19.♙f4 ♗xd3 20.♞xd3 ♞d7= With opposite bishops on the board, even an extra pawn will not bring success – as was confirmed in Carlsen – Caruana, London (11) 2018.

b2) 15.h3 ♞fe8 16.♙c3 ♞ad8 17.a3 d5 18.cxd5 ♗xd5 19.♙e5 White has the more pleasant game thanks to his active bishop on e5, but equality is not far off.

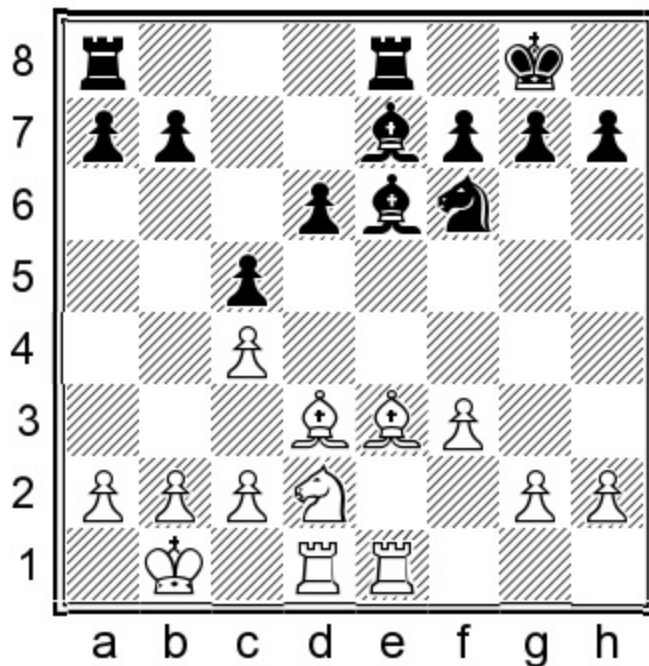
### 14...♞fe8

Or 14...♗g4 15.f4 ♗xe3 (better is 15...♞ad8 16.♙g1 ♞fe8 17.♗e4 with a small plus for White) 16.♞xe3.



Thanks to his greater command of space, White has a pleasant advantage. Black cannot prevent the manoeuvre ♙e4-d5, leading to an exchange of light-squared bishops in circumstances favourable to White. There can follow: 16...g6 (or 16...♞fe8 17.♞de1 g6 18.♙e4±) 17.♙e4 ♞ab8 18.♙d5 ♙xd5 19.cxd5± With a gratifying plus. On 19...♞fe8, good continuations are 20.♞de1 and 20.a4.

### 15.f3



Of course, in a position like this there are no obligatory moves, so I will just give a sample variation to show how play might continue in practice.

### 15...d5

The email games featured 15...♞ad8 with similar possible ideas, though White quickly gave up and accepted draws in those games.

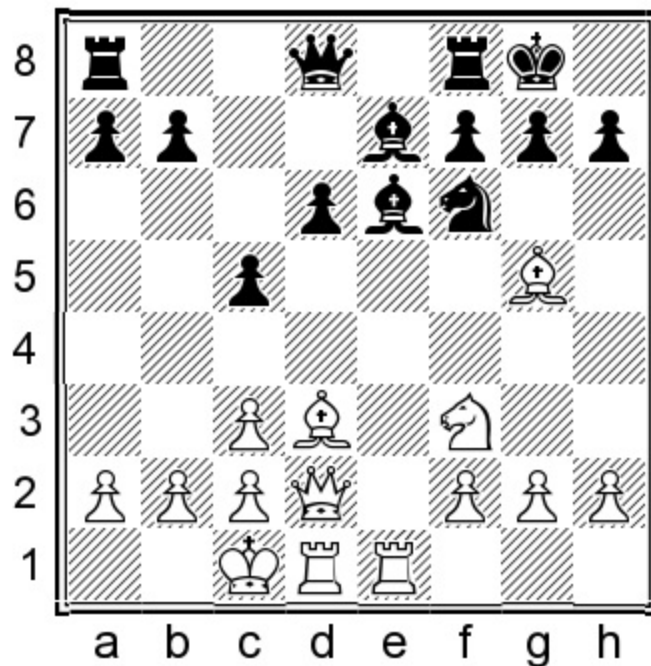
### 16.♙f2

Or 16.g4!?

### 16...♞ad8 17.cxd5 ♜xd5 18.♙b5 ♞f8 19.a4

With a small plus for White.

### B2) 12.♙g5



Unlike the quiet 12.♔b1 variation, this one demands good preparation on Black's part, since finding your way through the complications over-the-board would be very difficult.

### 12...d5

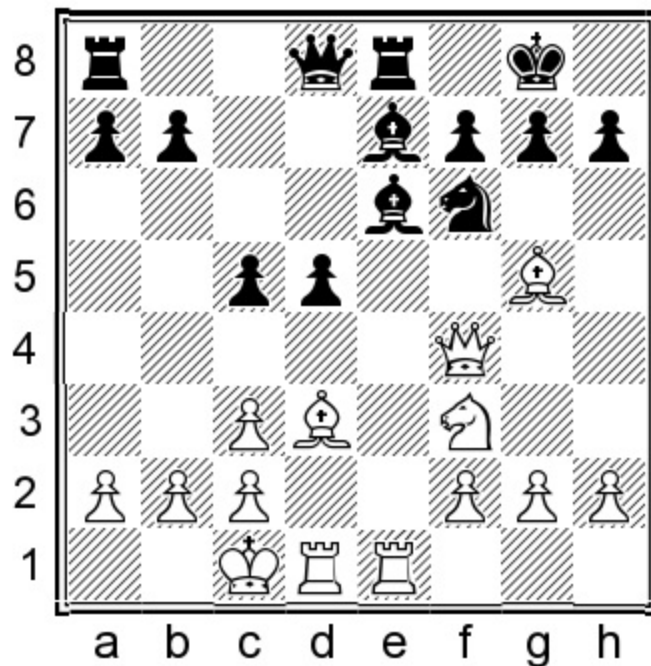
Not 12...♙a5?! 13.a3±, whereupon 13...d5 or 13...b5 would be well answered by 14.♙f5!.

### 13.♙f4 ♖e8!

A key defensive move, after which a bishop sacrifice on h6 will not be all that terrible.

If instead 13...♙a5?, then 14.♙h4 h6 15.♙xh6 ♙xa2 16.♘g5+- with the decisive threat of ♙xg7.

In the event of 13...♙d6 14.♙h4 h6 15.♙xf6 ♙xf6 16.♙xf6 gxf6 17.g3±, with ♘h4 to follow, Black is forced to suffer on account of his bad kingside pawn position.



White now has to make an important choice between 14.♖e5 and 14.c4. Instead moves like 14.♙b5 and 14.♚h4 can cause the game to end in a quick draw.

A draw results from:

14.♚h4 h6

If 14...g6, then 15.♙b5 ♖f8 16.♘e5±; the threat is to play ♘d7! and answer ...♙xd7 with ♖xe7+.

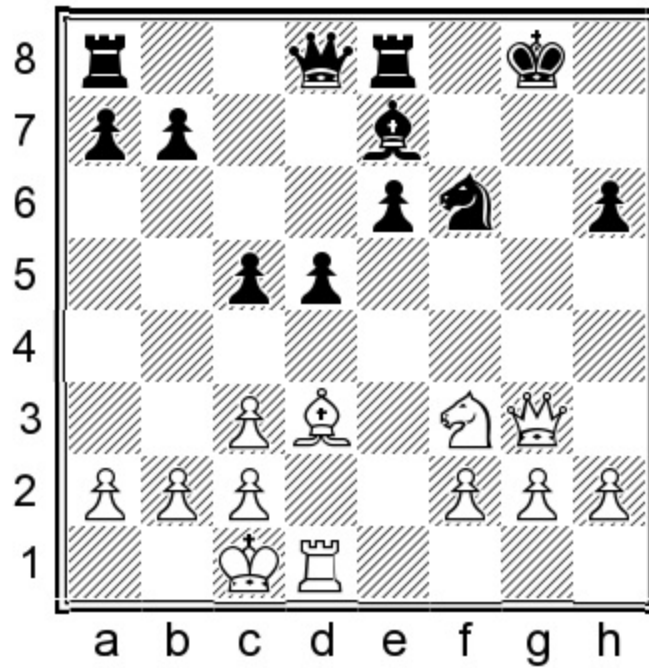
15.♖xe6 fxe6

Not 15...hxg5? 16.♘xg5+– with a decisive plus, since Black cannot take the rook on e6; he is mated after 16...fxe6 17.♙h7† ♔f8 18.♙g6.

16.♙xh6 gxh6

After 16...♘h7? 17.♚h5 ♘f6 18.♚g6 ♙f8 19.♙e3+–, with ♘g5 to follow, White has a winning advantage since Black's king position is too weak.

17.♚g3†



17...♔f8

If 17...♔h8?? then 18.♖e5+.

18.♗f4=

Not 18.♗g6?? ♘g8-+ because Black can answer ♖e5 with an intermediate check on g5.

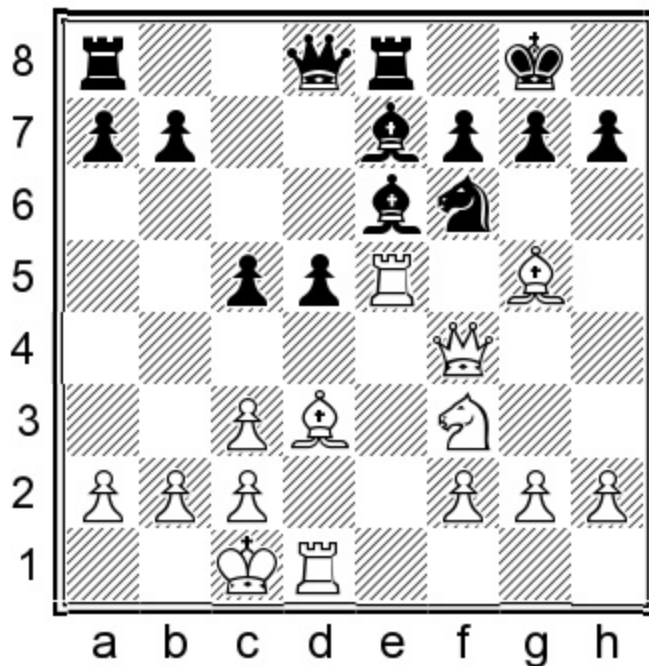
18...♔g7 19.♗g3†

With a repetition of moves.

After 14.♗b5 ♖f8 White appears to have nothing better than 15.♗d3.

So we will analyse **B21)** 14.♖e5!? and **B22)** 14.c4!?

**B21) 14.♖e5!?**



The rook can join in the attack on the king if the opportunity arises. If the rook went to e3 instead, Black's ...h7-h6 would be playable. The move 14.♖e5 leads to complications, but at certain moments Black has a choice of quite good continuations. For that reason I like 14.c4 (variation B22) better.

#### 14...♙c7

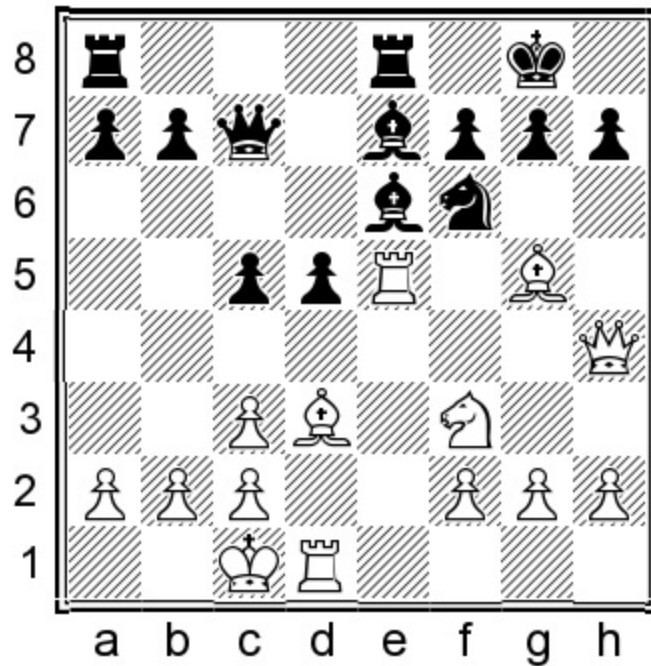
After 14...♙a5 15.a3 Black would be forced to withdraw his queen to c7 in view of the threatened ♙h4.

In the event of: 14...♘d7 15.♖e3 Now that the knight has moved away, White isn't afraid of ...h7-h6 and can calmly double on the e-file. 15...♘f8 16.♙xe7 ♖xe7 (or 16...♙xe7 17.♘g5±) 17.♖de1± White has a slight advantage thanks to his occupation of the central file.

#### 15.♙h4

Or 15.♙f5 ♘h5 16.♙h4 ♙xg5† 17.♙xg5 ♘f6 18.♙xe6, giving approximate equality after 18...fxe6 or 18...♖xe6.

White gains nothing from 15.♙xf6 ♙xf6 16.♙xh7† ♔h8!? (16...♔f8 17.♖dx5∞) 17.♖dx5 ♙xe5 18.♖xe5 f6 19.♙h4 fxe5. He has too few pieces left to try for anything more than perpetual check.



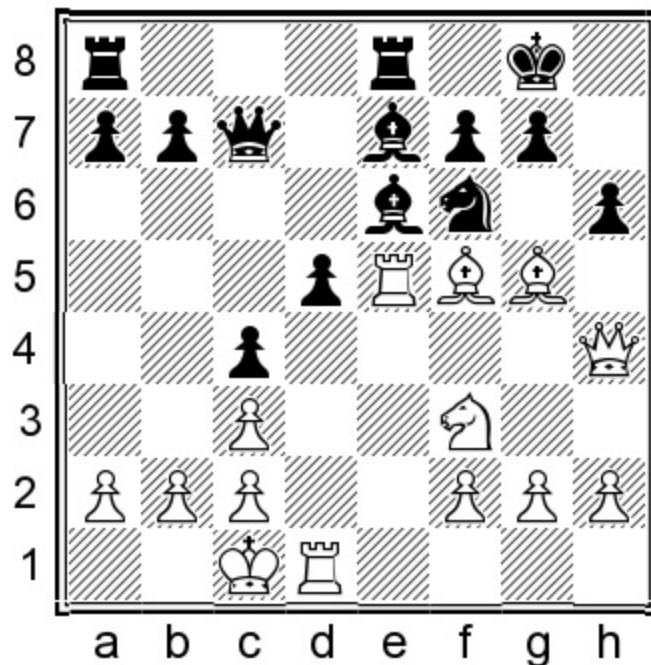
Now Black has quite a good choice between **B211)** 15...c4 and **B212)** 15...h6.

**B211) 15...c4 16.♙f5**

Sacrificing with 16.♙xf6 ♗xf6 17.♚xh7† ♔f8 18.♖xe6 fxe6 is no better; I am not convinced that White has enough compensation.

**16...h6!?**

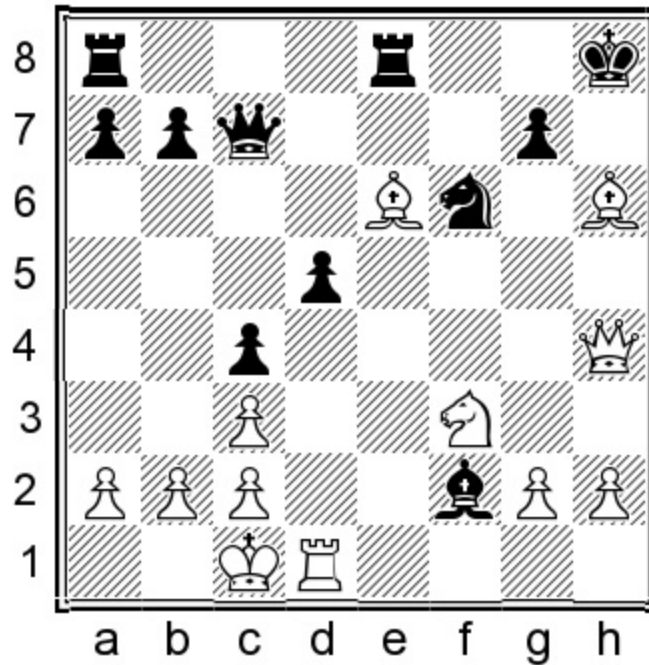
After 16...♙xf5 17.♖xf5 ♖ad8 18.♘d4 ♘e4 19.♙xe7 ♚xe7 20.♚xe7 ♖xe7 White has a small plus owing to the potentially weak black pawn on d5.



## 17. ♖xh6

Here everything is much simpler than in the case of 17. ♖xe6!?. The latter move leads to great complications, but they aren't always favourable to White. There can follow: 17...fxe6 18. ♖xe6† ♔h8 (Black loses with either 18...♔f8 19. ♖xh6! or 18...♔h7 19. ♖f4) 19. ♖e3 Other possible moves are no better. And now Black has two moves that keep the position within the region of equality:

a) 19... ♖c5 20. ♖xh6 ♖xf2

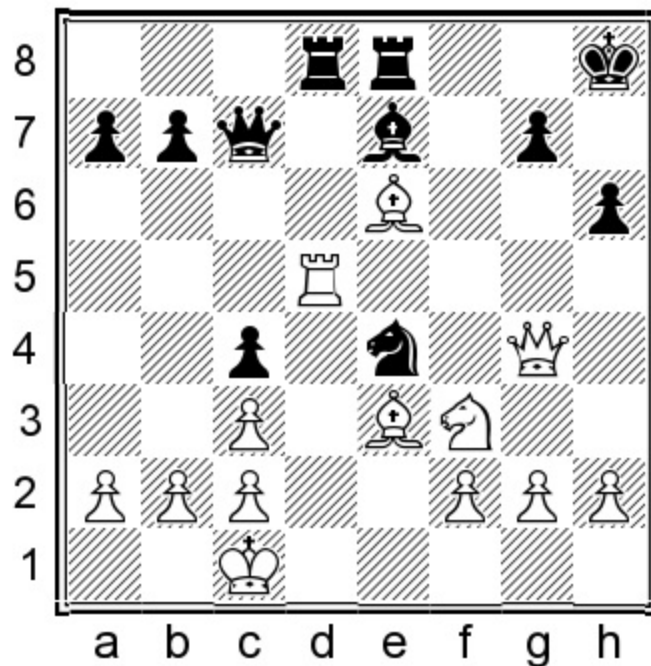


And now:

a1) 21. g3!? gxh6 22. ♖xf6† ♖g7 23. ♖f5 ♖f8∞ At this point 24. ♖xd5 ♖f6 25. ♖e5 ♖fe8 can lead to a forced draw, whereas after 24. ♖h5!? the White side is more pleasant to play but the position remains unclear.

a2) 21. ♖xg7† ♔xg7 22. ♖g5† ♔h8 23. ♖xf6† ♖g7 24. ♖xg7† ♔xg7 with a roughly equal position after 25. ♖g4 or 25. ♖xd5 ♖ad8 26. b3 b5.

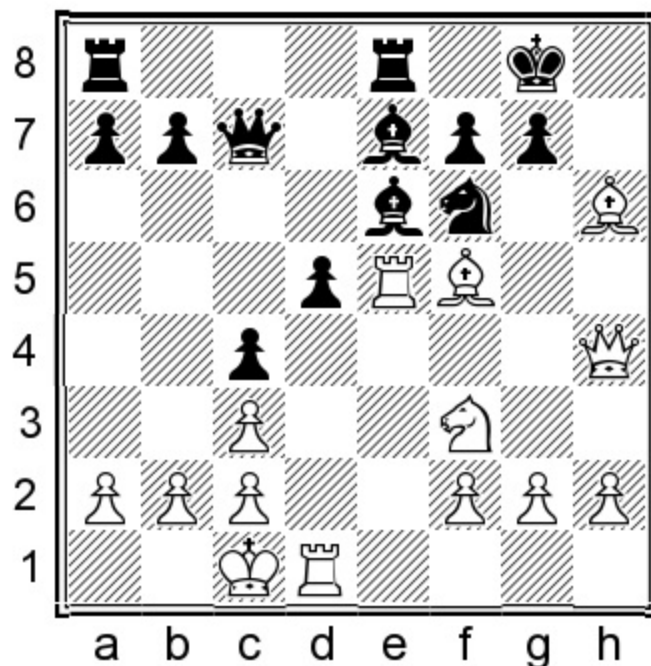
b) 19... ♖e4 20. ♖g4 ♖ad8 21. ♖xd5 (after 21. ♖g6 ♖c5! 22. ♖xd5 ♖xe3† 23. fxe3 ♖f6! White is not better)



And now:

b1) 21...♞xd5?! 22.♙xd5 ♜xc3 After the exchange on d5, this capture comes too late (but if 22...♞f6, then 23.♞xc4±). 23.♙xc4 ♞d8 24.♙d2± White has a fair advantage thanks to his two bishops and Black's weakened king position.

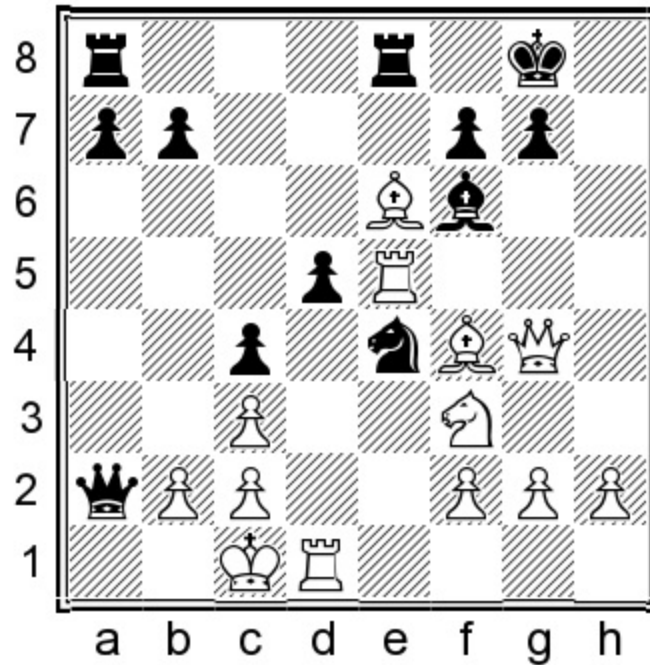
b2) 21...♞xc3! is the correct order of moves. White can now carry on the game with 22.♞d2, but it looks unconvincing (22.bxc3 ♙a3† is even worse, as White will emerge the exchange down as the result of a pin on the d-file). Instead 22.♙xh6 leads to a forced draw: 22...♞xa2† 23.♙d1 gxh6 24.♞d4† ♙h7 25.♙f5† ♙g8 26.♙e6† with perpetual check.



17...♙xf5!

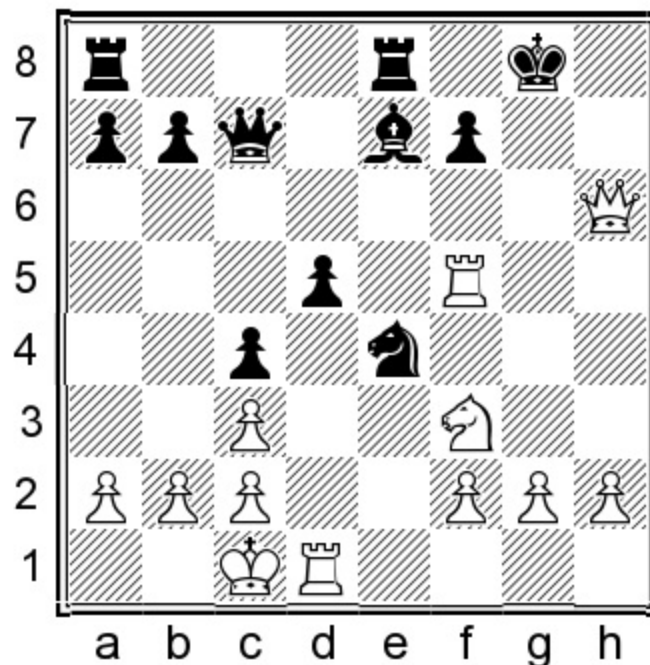
Not: 17...♞e4?!, as after 18.♞g4 ♙f6 19.♙f4± the complications turn out in White's favour.

Possible variations are: 19...♔a5 (or 19...♔e7 20.♖xe6 fxe6 21.♙g6+— and when the rook moves, ♖h5 follows) 20.♙xe6 fxe6 (or 20...♖xa2



21.♙xf7† ♔xf7 22.♖h5† ♔f8 23.♖xe4+—; now if 23...dxe4 then 24.♖d7! is decisive, while 23...♖xe4 loses to 24.♙d6†) 21.♗g5! At the price of the exchange, White eliminates Black's active pieces. 21...♙xg5 22.♖xg5 ♗xg5 23.♖xg5 ♖f8 24.♙e5 ♖f7 25.♔b1± Although White has only one pawn for the exchange, he has a big advantage. The bishop on e5 is worth no less than the rook that is tied to the defence of the g7-pawn.

18.♖xf5 gxh6 19.♖xh6 ♗e4



White can now bring about perpetual check with 20.♖xf7 or else play 20.♖h5, but after the latter

move Black is no worse.

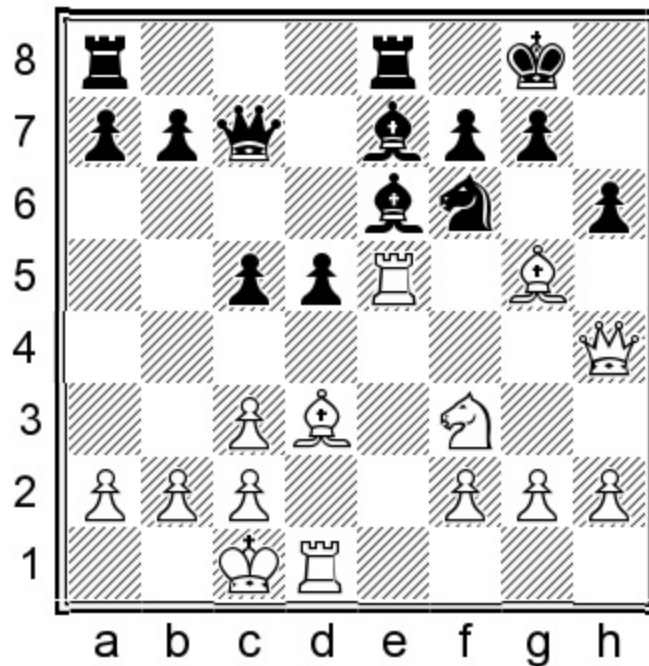
### 20. ♖xf7

If 20. ♔h5 then 20... ♕f8∞.

### 20... ♖xf7 21. ♗h7† ♖f6 22. ♗h6†=

With perpetual check.

## B212) 15...h6



### 16. ♕xh6 ♖e4

Of course not 16... ♖g4? 17. ♕g5+–.

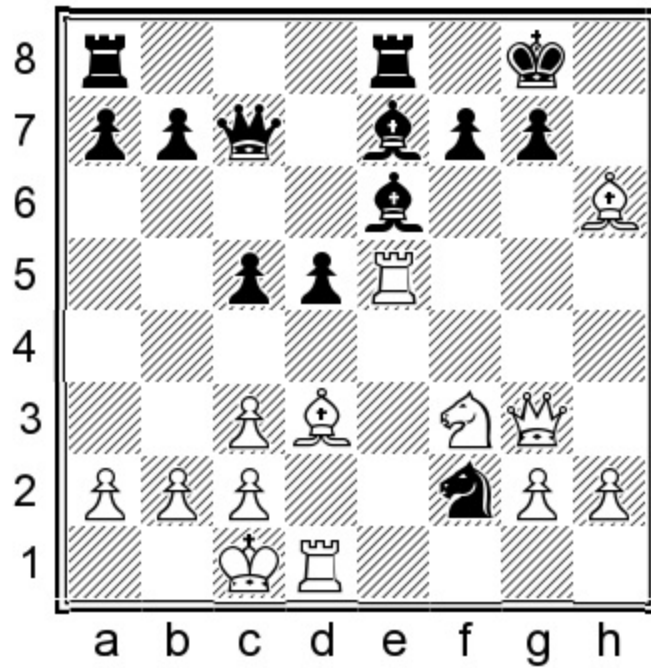
### 17. ♗f4

Not 17. ♕g5? ♗xe5±.

### 17... ♖xf2

Better than: 17... gxf6?! 18. ♕xe4 ♕d6 19. ♕xd5 ♖ad8 (after 19... ♕xe5 20. ♖xe5± Black can't play 20... ♖ad8? on account of 21. ♗g3†) 20. ♕xe6 (20. ♖de1 ♖g7 isn't so clear) 20... ♕xe5 21. ♗xf7† ♗xf7 22. ♕xf7† ♖xf7 23. ♖xe5†± With three pawns for the exchange and a nice advantage.

### 18. ♗g3



18...♖g4

Not 18...♗xd3†? 19.♖xd3 ♕f6 20.♙xg7! ♕xg7 21.♖xe6± when White emerges with an extra pawn.

After:

18...♙f6!?

The continuation can be:

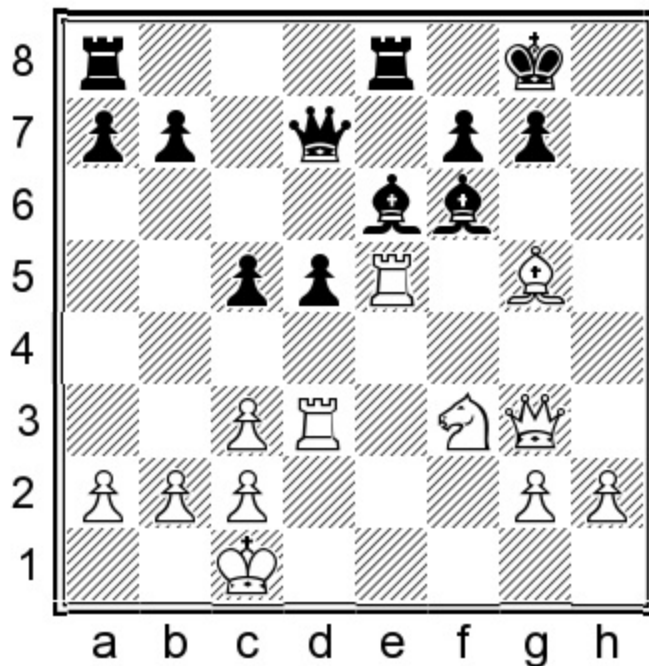
19.♙f4

19.♙h7†? is bad in view of: 19...♔xh7 20.♙xg7 ♕xe5! 21.♗xe5 ♙xg7†

19...♗xd3† 20.♖xd3 ♕d7

Or 20...♕c8 21.♖e1±.

21.♙g5



21...♙d8!

With the aid of this move, Black keeps a fairly good position.

21...♙xg5† 22.♘xg5 f6 23.♖xe6 ♖xe6 24.♗xe6 ♚xe6 25.b3± is worse, since the pawns on g7 and f6 don't give good protection to the king; White therefore has a pleasant advantage.

There can follow:

22.♙xd8 ♖axd8 23.♖h5

Trying to get to the black king.

Not 23.c4? f6⚡.

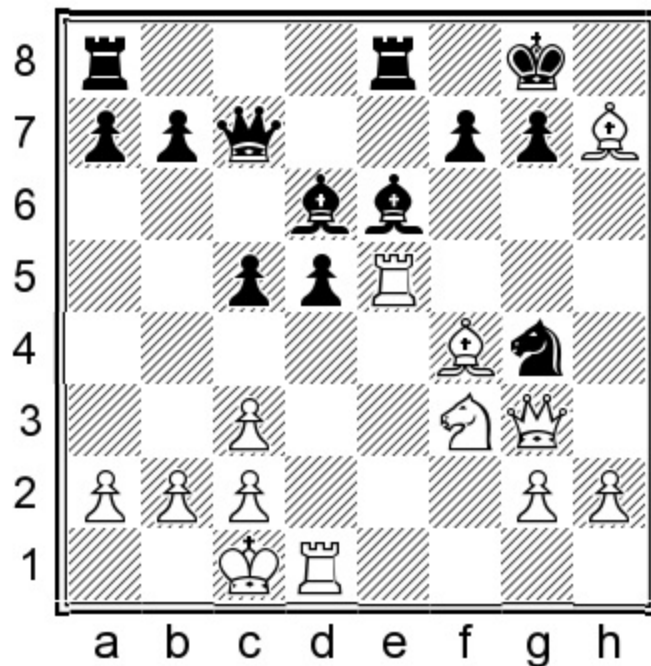
23...♙f5 24.♚h4 f6 25.♖h8† ♔f7 26.♚h5† ♔e7

26...♙g6? loses to: 27.♗g5†+–

27.♖e3†∞

With a playable, roughly equal position.

19.♙f4 ♙d6 20.♙h7†



### 20...♔h8!

Moving the king to h8 is psychologically difficult but correct.

Instead 20...♔f8? 21.♖de1!± occurred in Navara – Gelfand, Prague 2019. I will give a few more moves from that game, as the subsequent play was quite good: 21...♖ad8 22.♙h4 ♜xe5 23.♞xe5 ♙xe5 24.♙xe5 ♚e7 25.♙h5! f6 26.♙g6 ♙f7 27.♙h8† ♙g8 28.♙xe8 ♖xe8 29.♙g3+– And Black had to give up his queen, since on 29...♚d8 White would win with 30.♙d6†!.

### 21.♖e4

After 21.♙h4?? ♜xe5+– White's threats would prove illusory.

### 21...dxe4!?

Black isn't afraid he will be mated. Indeed White's threats are not all that dire.

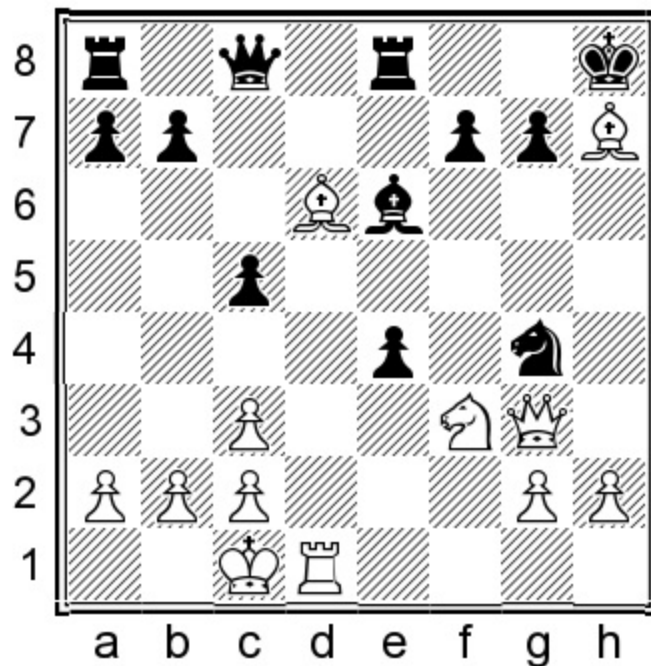
Instead 21...♙xf4† brings about exchanges and simplifies the game: 22.♖xf4 ♔xh7 23.♞g5† ♔g8 24.♖xg4 ♙xg3 25.♖xg3 The position is nearly equal, but White has the more enjoyable side to play.

### 22.♙xd6 ♚c8

By placing his queen on this square, Black has prepared ...♙f5.

The inferior 22...♙a5? 23.♙xe4 ♞f6 24.♙h4† ♔g8 25.♞g5± gives White a formidable attack.

After 22...♙b6 23.♙xe4∞ White has good compensation.



### 23. ♖h4

After 23. ♖xe4 ♜f5 White's attack comes to a halt.

### 23...exf3

White has good compensation for the exchange in the event of: 23... ♘h6 24. ♖xe4 ♜f5 25. ♖e5 ♜g8 26. ♖d5

### 24. ♖e4 ♘h6 25. ♖e5 ♜g8

Not 25...f6? 26. ♖xf6+-.

### 26. ♖xg7

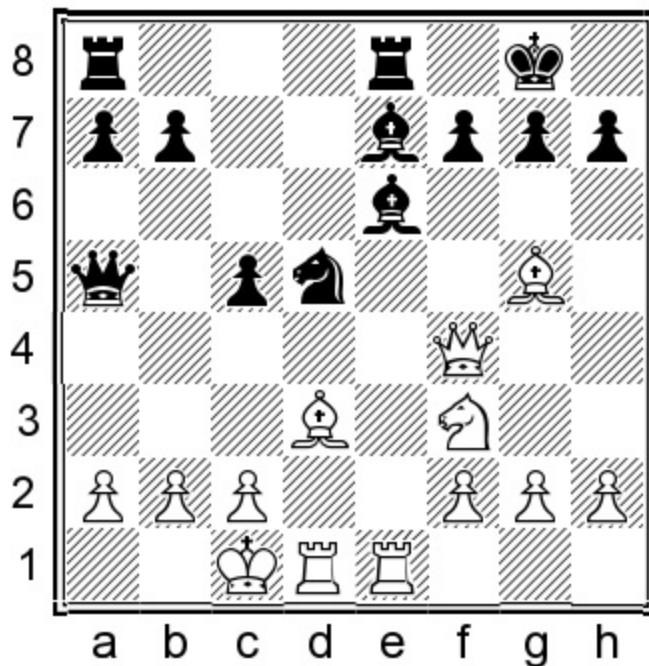
White has to give up one of his bishops. There is no other way to continue the attack.

### 26... ♜xg7 27. ♖g5 ♜f8 28. ♖xh6 ♜e7=

With a draw.

**B22) 14.c4!?**





### 16. ♖h4

Or 16. ♖e4 g6 17. ♙xe7 ♜xe7 18. a3 ♞ae8 19. ♖h4 ♔g7= with approximately balanced chances; if 20. ♘g5, then 20... ♗f6 is not bad.

### 16...h6 17. ♙xe7 ♜xe7!?

This leads to more forcing play than 17... ♗xe7. And although some accurate moves are demanded of Black, he has good counter-chances if he handles it correctly.

After:

17... ♗xe7

There can follow:

18. a3

18. ♞xe6 fxe6 19. ♖e4 ♜xa2∞ is hardly any better.

18... ♖b6!

If 18... ♗d5 then 19. ♙c4±, or if 18... ♖c7 then 19. ♞xe6! fxe6 20. ♖e4± with more than enough compensation for the exchange.

White appears to have the initiative, but with correct play Black can gradually neutralize it. For example:

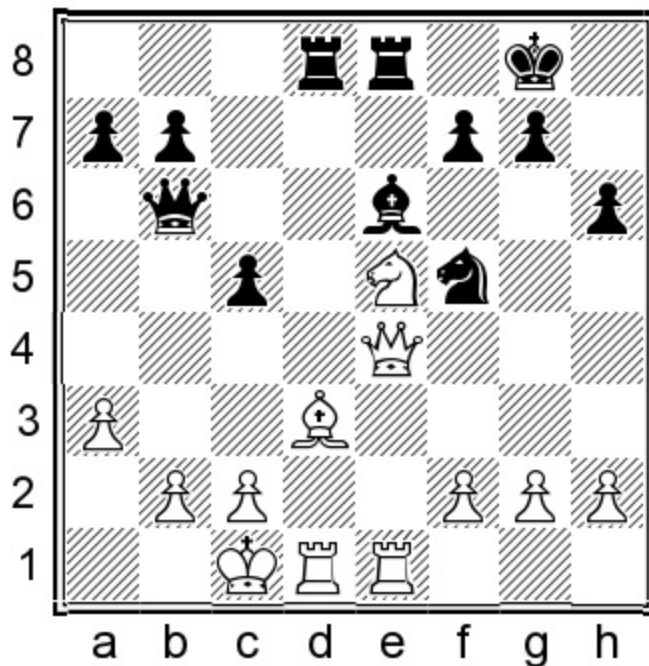
19. ♗e5

After 19. ♙e4 White no longer has ♞xe6 available; Black can reply 19... ♖c7! 20. ♖g3 ♞ac8=.

19... ♞ad8

After 19... ♗f5 20. ♖e4 Black has nothing better than 20... ♞ad8 anyway.

20. ♖e4 ♗f5



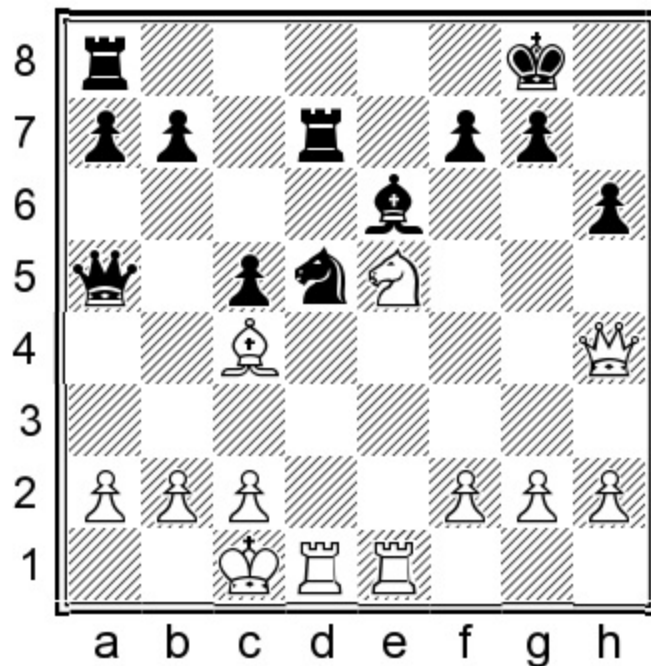
And now:

a) 21. ♖c4 ♜c7 22. ♛e5 (22.g4!? ♙xc4 23. ♛xe8† ♞xe8 24. ♞xe8† ♚h7 25. ♙xc4∞ is interesting; it's hard to say who is better in this situation, but I would estimate the chances as roughly equal)  
22... ♛xe5 23. ♞xe5 b6=

b) 21.c3 g6! (in the event of 21...c4 22. ♖xc4 ♜xf2 23. ♞f1 ♜h4 24.g4! ♙xc4 25. ♛xc4± White has a small plus, since the bishop is more useful than the knight in this type of position) 22. ♙c2 ♚g7 This gives a playable position with approximate equality. For example: 23. ♛f4 ♞xd1† 24. ♞xd1 ♞d8

18. ♙c4 ♞d7 19. ♖e5

Or 19. ♞xe6 fxe6 20. ♛e4 ♜b6∞.



**19...♞d6!**

After 19...♞dd8?! 20.a3!± Black cannot unravel. For example: 20...♛a4 21.♞e4 ♛a5 22.♞d3±

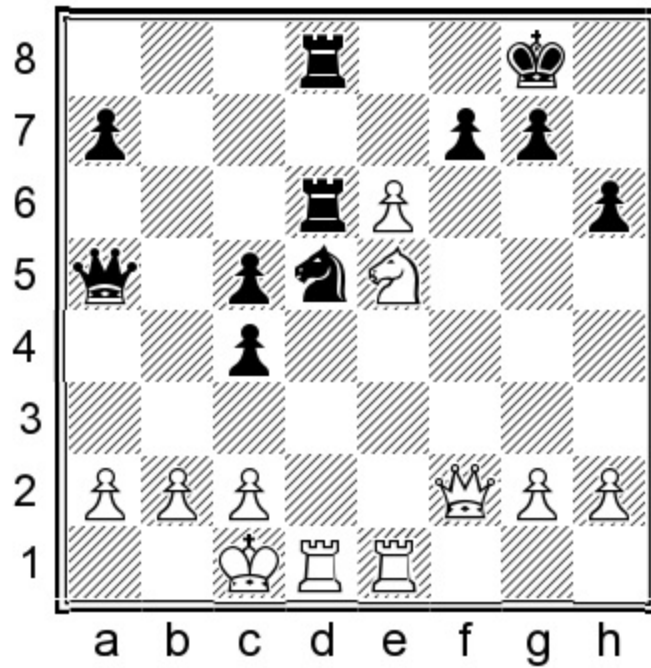
**20.f4 ♞ad8 21.♛f2 b5!**

After 21...♞f6 22.♞xe6 ♞xd1† 23.♞xd1 ♞xd1† 24.♞xd1 fxe6 25.a3 White has a slight edge on account of the e6-pawn.

**22.f5**

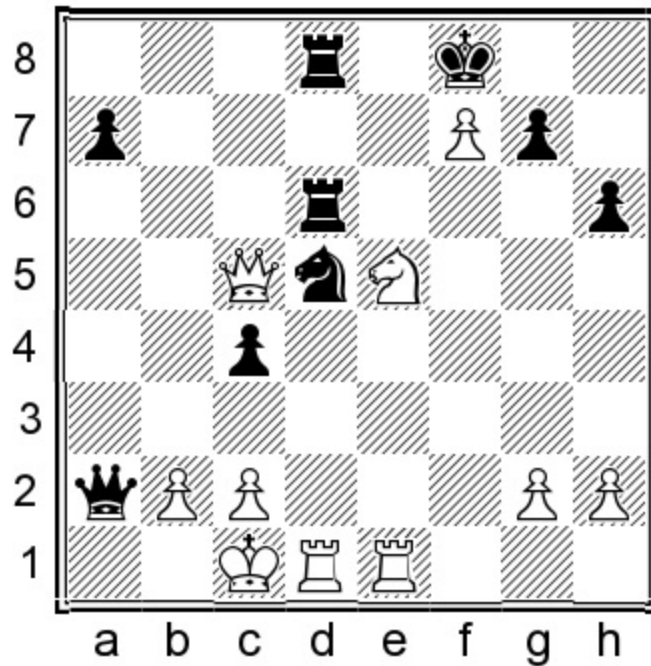
It isn't so simple to make out whose attack is more dangerous. In the end, with best play by both sides, it should all come down to perpetual check.

**22...bxc4 23.fxe6**



**23...c3!**

Not the inaccurate 23...♙xa2 24.exf7† ♔f8 25.♙xc5!.



Black does not now succeed in harming the white king:

a) 25...♙a1†?

This is bad:

26.♔d2 ♘e7†

Or 26...c3† 27.♔e2! ♙a6† 28.♔f2± when the king has escaped successfully, while Black's problems remain.

27.♔c3! ♚xd1 28.♘g6†

With the aid of checks, White forces the black rook to go back.

28...♔xf7 29.♚xe7† ♔xg6 30.♚e4† ♔f7 31.♚e6† ♔f8 32.♚e7† ♔g8 33.♚xd8† ♚xd8 34.♚xa1+–

In this rook endgame Black has no saving chances.

b) 25...c3 26.♚a3 leaves White with a small plus.

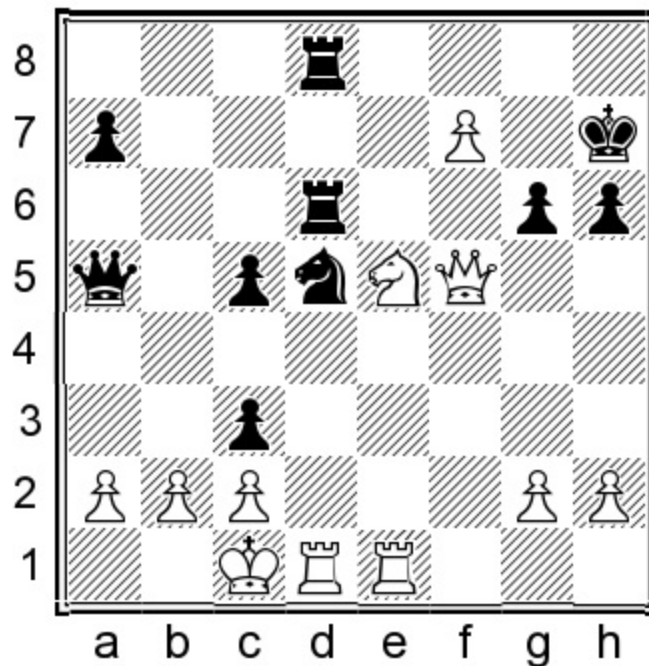
**24.exf7† ♔h7**

Not 24...♔f8? 25.♚xd5+–.

**25.♚f5†**

It's essential to force ...g7-g6 before the promotion to a knight.

**25...g6**



**26.f8=♞† ♚xf8 27.♚xf8 cxb2† 28.♔xb2 ♚b6†**

Or 28...♚c3† 29.♔c1 ♚a3† 30.♔d2=.

**29.♔c1 ♚a3† 30.♔d2 ♚c3† 31.♔c1 ♚a3† ½–½**

This occurred in Douglas – Szerlak, corr. 2018. Such is the finale to which 14.c4!? can lead, after a series of more or less forced moves!

## Conclusion

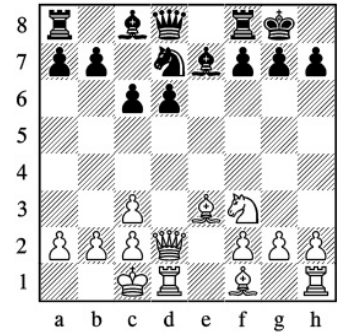
After 10...c5 11.♚he1 ♚e6, White has the choice between the quiet 12.♔b1 and the complex positions that arise from 12.♚g5. After 12.♚g5, Black has to show he is well prepared – he needs to know and

remember some complicated forced variations. By contrast 12.♔b1 leads to positions that don't demand extensive knowledge; but then again, studying it thoroughly is harder because there are no cases where only one move is playable. The endgame, moreover, is just a little more pleasant for White.

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# Chapter 17

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## 9...c6

### Variation Index

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1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♗xe4 5.♗c3 ♗xc3  
6.dxc3 ♕e7 7.♕e3 0-0 8.♙d2 ♗d7 9.0-0-0 c6

A) 10.♕d3 d5 11.h4 ♗c5 285

A1) 12.♖b1 286

A2) 12.♗g5 287

B) 10.♖b1 d5 11.h4 289

B1) 11...♗f6 290

B11) 12.♗g5 290

B12) 12.♕d3 ♜e8 13.♗g5 291

B121) 13...♕d6?! 292

B122) 13...h6 293

B2) 11...♜e8 12.♕d3 295

B21) 12...♗c5 13.♗g5 h6!? 14.♕h7† ♖f8 15.c4 ♗a4 295 B211) 16.cxd5 296

B212) 16.c3!?N 296

B22) 12...♕c5 13.♕g5!? f6 14.♕f4 298

B221) 14...♗b6N 300

B222) 14...♕f8 15.♕e3!?N 301

B2221) 15...♖b6 301

B2222) 15...♖c5 303

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗f3 ♗xe4 5.♗c3 ♗xc3 6.dxc3 ♕e7 7.♕e3 0-0 8.♚d2 ♗d7 9.0-0-0 c6

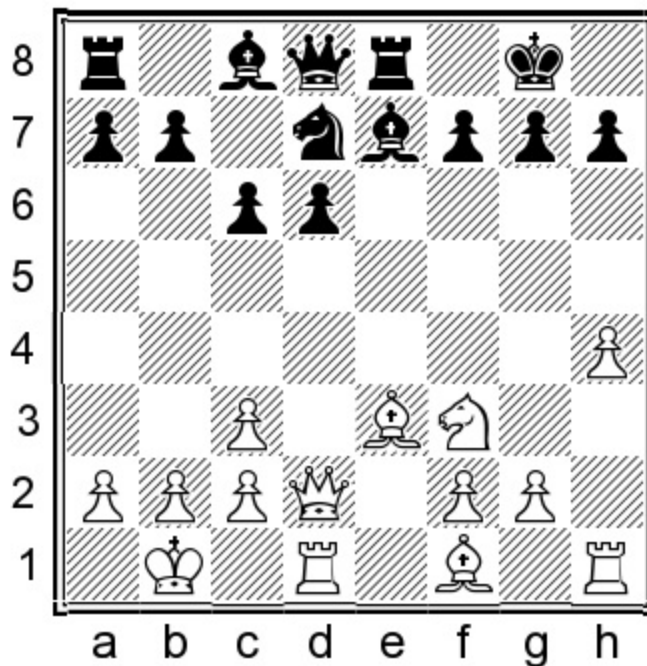
This move is the focus of our final Petroff chapter, but there is a sideline to consider first.

9...♞e8

This is a very rare move, but it was one of the options recommended by Sakaev in his book.

Black keeps the knight's options open – c5, e5, f6 or even in some cases f8. So Black is trying to be flexible, but putting the rook on e8 was not a priority. After:

10.♖b1 c6 11.h4



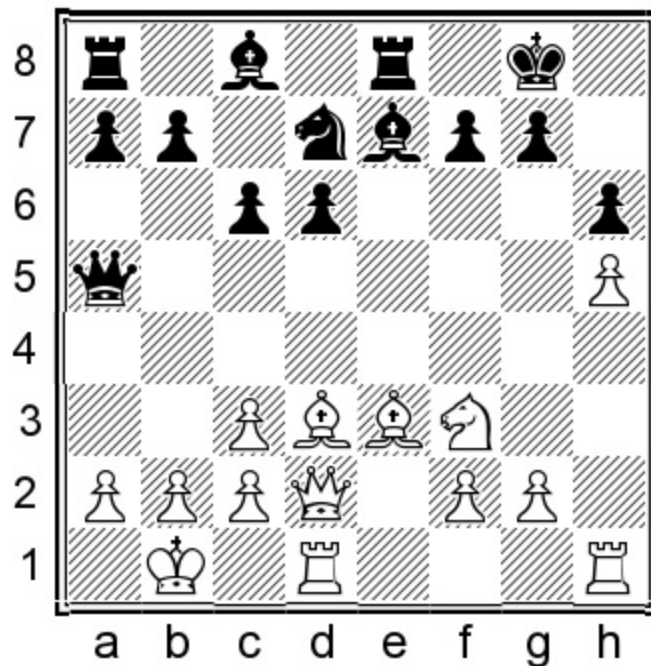
Many transpositions (or near transpositions) are possible, either to later in this chapter or versions of earlier chapters. For example, if Black later plays ...♗e5 then positions from Chapter 14 and 15 are similar.

11...♚a5

This can be an independent line.

11...d5 12.♕d3 is variation B2.

12.h5 h6 13.♕d3



13...♖e5

13...♗f6?? 14.♕xh6! is known to win for White, as mentioned in the book by Shaw.

14.♗xe5 dxe5 15.♚e2

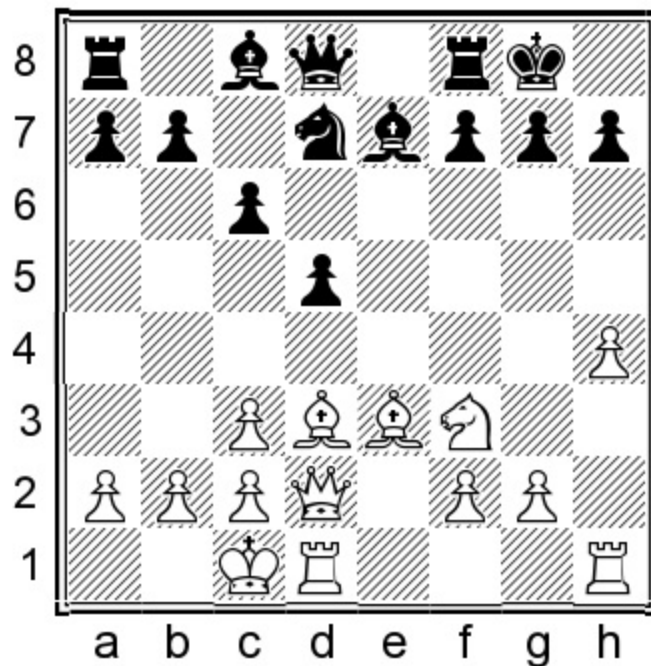
We saw similar positions in Chapters 14 and 15, but this is a fine version for White, who has made good progress on the kingside while Black has no threats on the queenside. It is in positions like this where the early ...♞e8 looks out of place.

15...♕e6 16.♕c4 ♕xc4 17.♚xc4 ♞ad8 18.♚g4 ♔f8

Now 19.♞d7± was excellent for White in Dominguez Perez – Gelfand, Nice (rapid) 2010, while 19.♚f5!N 19...♔g8 20.♞d7 is an even better version.

Returning to the main line, we now consider the early development of White's king's bishop: **A)** 10.♕d3, and also **B)** 10.♔b1.

**A) 10.♕d3 d5 11.h4**



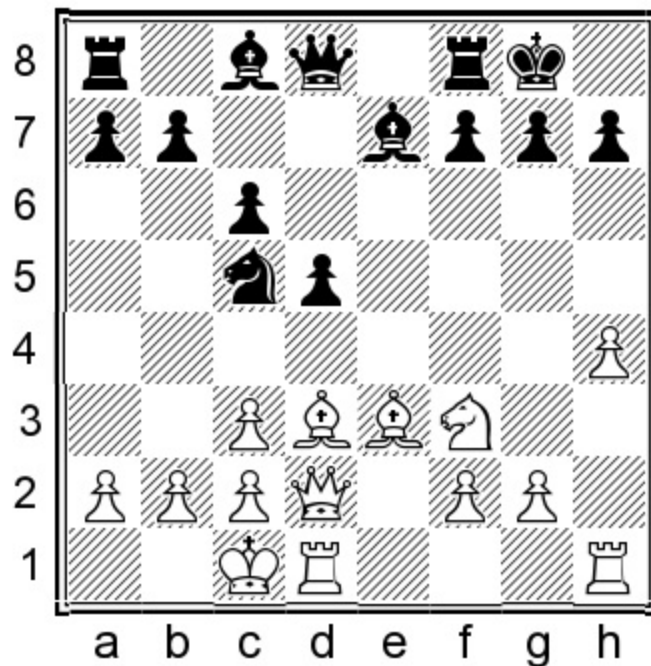
### 11...♞c5

Some precise play on Black's part is now required, but if he is well prepared, the game can end in a quick draw. Wei Yi, for example, in his game with Sethuraman (see below), must have known what the capture of the knight on g5 would lead to.

If Black is afraid of the line with the knight sacrifice on g5, he can play 11...♞e8!?, attempting to reach variation B2 (into which 12.♕b1 would now transpose). This is one of the reasons why I prefer to play 10.♕b1 rather than 10.♞d3, in spite of the fact that against 11...♞e8 White has an extra possibility: 12.h5!? ♞c5 13.h6 g6 14.c4, and now:

a) 14...♞xd3† 15.♞xd3 ♞e6 Black probably does better to sacrifice the d5-pawn, but White keeps some advantage all the same. 16.♞c3 f6 17.♞d4 ♞f7 18.c5± Thanks to his good knight on d4 and his pawn on h6, White has a reasonable plus.

b) 14...dxc4 15.♞xc5 cxd3 16.♞xe7 ♞xe7 17.♞xd3∞ Considering Black's weakened king, the White side is more pleasant to play, but objectively the position is close to equality.



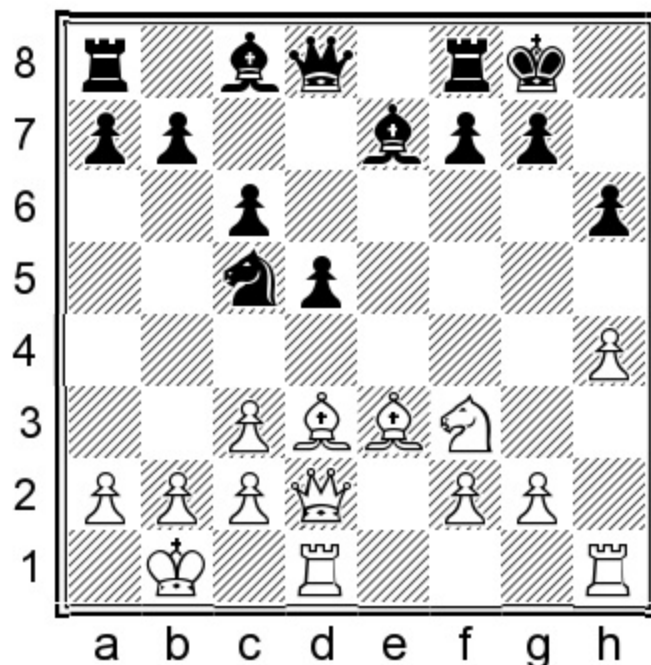
From the diagram, we shall examine A1) 12.♔b1 and A2) 12.♘g5.

### A1) 12.♔b1

This position arose from a slightly different order of moves in Aronian – Caruana, London 2018.

### 12...♘xd3

I'd be interested to know what Aronian was intending to play against 12...h6!?

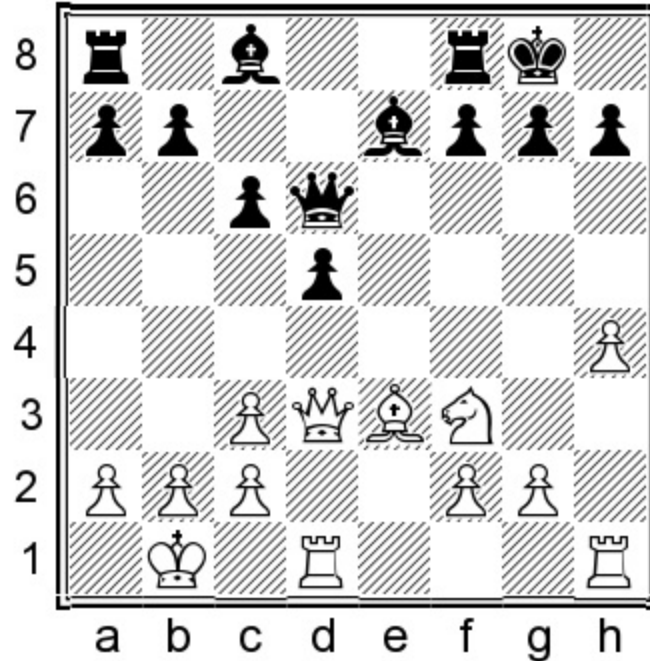


I would imagine 13.♘g5, transposing into variation A2 (12.♘g5 h6 13.♔b1).

The most natural move is 13.♘d4; apart from this and 13.♘g5, nothing in particular suggests itself.

White hardly gains anything from 13.♖de1 or 13.♖dg1. The latter move could transpose into the line 13.♘g5 ♗xd3 14.♙xd3 ♜e8 15.g4 ♕f8 16.♖dg1 ♚e7 where White has advanced his kingside pawns but Black has counterplay in connection with ...c6-c5. In my view the chances are about equal.

### 13.♙xd3 ♚d6



### 14.c4

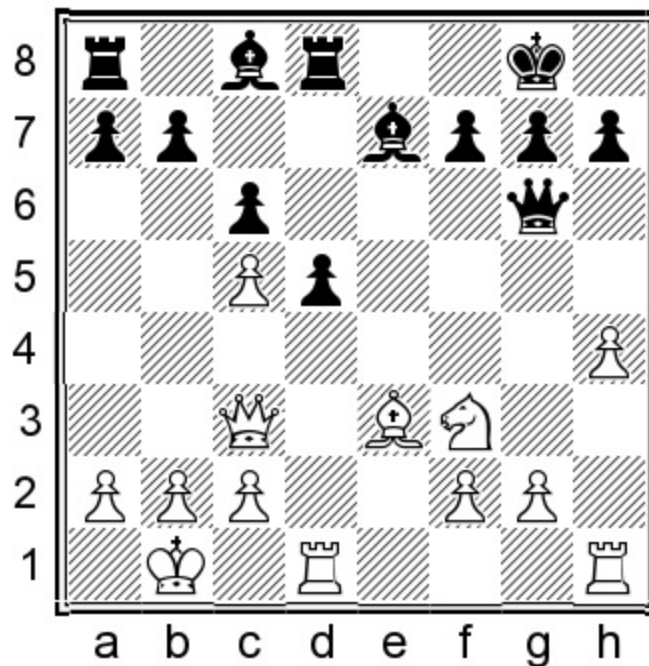
After 14.h5 h6 White is unlikely to gain an advantage. For example, 15.♙d2 ♕g4 16.♙d4 ♕xf3 17.gxf3 ♕f6∞, as in Morales – de Mingo Matias, corr. 2018.

### 14...♖d8 15.c5!?

This is more interesting than the simplifying exchange on d5.

The Aronian – Caruana game went 15.cxd5 ♙xd5 16.♙xd5=, and now either 16...cxd5 (as played) or 16...♖xd5 gives an equal position.

### 15...♙g6 16.♙c3



### 16...h5!

Freeing the h7-square for the queen.

After 16...♙f6 17.♘d4 ♙xd4 18.♞xd4± White would have some advantage owing to his powerful knight on d4.

### 17.♞e5 ♚h7 18.♘d4 ♜e8∞

In my view White is a little more comfortable, but this is the sort of position where people tend to say, “whoever plays better will win.”

### A2) 12.♞g5 h6

After 12...♞xd3† 13.♚xd3 g6 14.f3 f6 15.♞h3± White has some advantage in view of his potential attack on the kingside.

### 13.♞b1

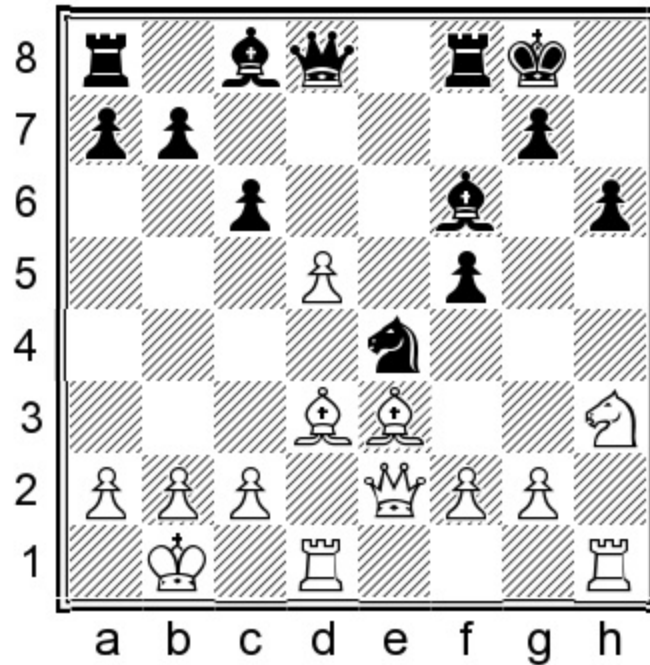
The critical position of the 10.♘d3 variation, but so far it has only been seen in one game. It can be reached from a different order of moves – for instance it could have arisen in the Aronian – Caruana game already mentioned. The position has been little studied, so I shall try to do something to fill this gap. Let’s look at Black’s possible replies.

### 13...♞xd3

Some alternatives are:

a) 13...f5 14.♞h3 ♞e4 15.♚e2

With a complex position. I will give one of the possible variations:  
 15...♙xh4 16.c4 ♞f6 17.cxd5



17...♚a5!

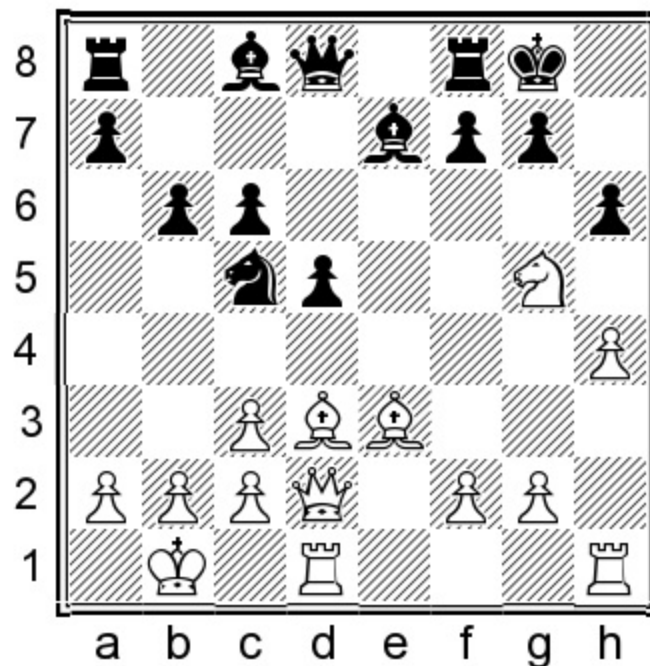
Creating threats to the king and inducing White to take the knight on e4.

17...cxd5? 18.♙c4± is bad for Black.

18.♙xe4 ♚b4 19.♙c1 ♚xe4 20.♚f1 cxd5 21.♞f4∞

White will pick up the d-pawn, but after 21...d4!? an ending with opposite bishops may arise.

b) 13...b6!? This move, which at first sight looks silly, performs an important function: Black defends his knight on c5 and prepares for White's c3-c4.



And now:

b1) 14.♖de1 ♜b8!?

This enables the rook to be brought into play via b7. White now somehow lacks a useful move; there are the following possibilities:

15.♙h7†!?

A serious alternative is: 15.♘f3 ♕d6 16.♘d4 ♘xd3 17.♙xd3 ♕d7 18.g4∞, which gives a position with plenty of play, in which the chances are about equal.

15...♗h8 16.♙d4 ♜b7!∞

This is interesting.

If instead 16...♙f6 17.♙d3±, the threat of ♘h7 gives Black a great deal of trouble.

It's important for Black to fortify the seventh rank. After this last move, the position still remains unclear.

17.♙d3

I do not advise 17.♘xf7† ♜xf7 18.♙xh6 ♕f6 19.♙xf6 ♜xf6 20.♙h5 ♕g4!∞, because after 21.♜e8† ♙xe8 I would prefer to play Black.

Now Black can play:

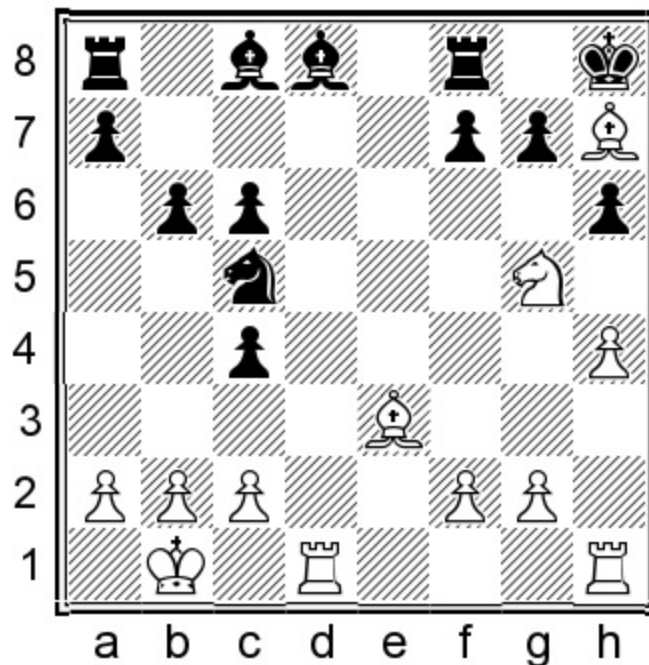
17...♗g8

Not objecting to a repetition.

b2) 14.c4 dxc4 15.♙h7† ♗h8 16.♙xd8

16.♙c3!∞

16...♙xd8



17.♜xd8

17.♙xc5 bxc5 18.♜xd8 ♜xd8 19.♘xf7† ♗xh7 20.♘xd8 is not an improvement, for White has no advantage in spite of the tripled pawns: 20...♙d7 21.♘b7 ♜e8∞ And with his rook coming to e2, Black has good counterplay.

17...♖xd8 18.♗xf7† ♔xh7 19.♗xd8 ♕h3 20.♖xh3 ♖xd8 21.♔c1∞

Playing with the bishop is more appealing, but it's hard to say if White has any advantage.

c) 13...hxg5 14.hxg5

And now Black should take on d3, transposing to the main (13...♗xd3) line. Instead:

14...f5?!

This is now unsuccessful:

15.g6 ♖e8

15...♖f6 16.♖e2± is no better.

16.♕xc5 ♕xc5 17.♖g5 ♖f6 18.♖h5 ♖xg6 19.♖h8† ♔f7 20.♕e2±

That White has a powerful attack is visible to the naked eye, but since he is after all a piece down, I will continue the variation to the end:

20...♔e7 21.♕h5 ♖g5

The only chance to avoid immediate loss.

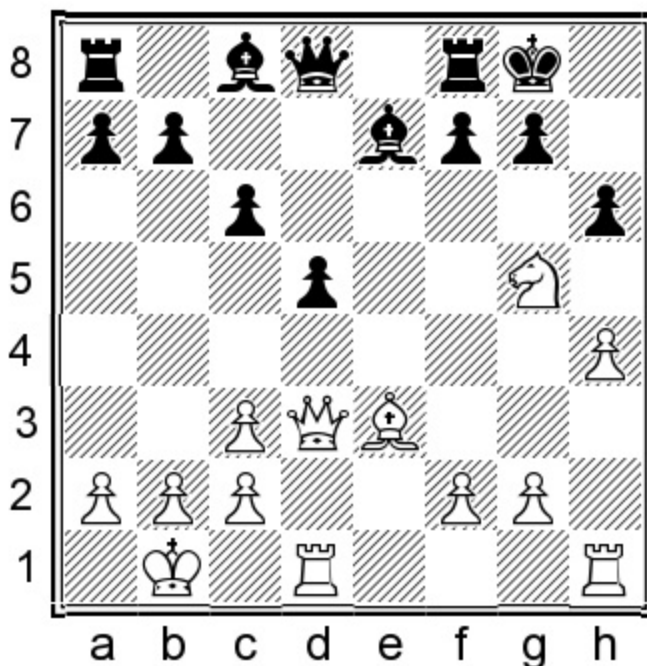
22.f4 ♖xg2 23.♖e8† ♔d6 24.b4

With the aid of his pawns, White creates mating threats and recovers his piece.

24...♔c7□ 25.bxc5 ♖e4 26.♖dg1±

In the ending with equal material, Black is cramped in the corner.

14.♖xd3



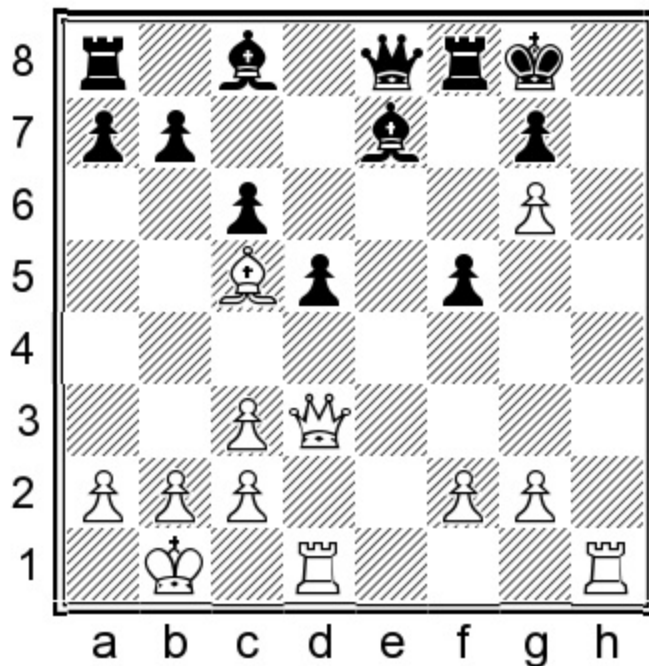
14...hxg5 15.hxg5

The position looks very dangerous for Black, but by means of some precise moves he holds on.

15...f5 16.g6 ♖e8!

Not 16...♖d6?! 17.♕c5 ♖xg6 18.♕xe7± with a large plus.

17.♔c5



17...f4!

The bishop coming out to f5 with tempo enables Black to keep the situation under control.

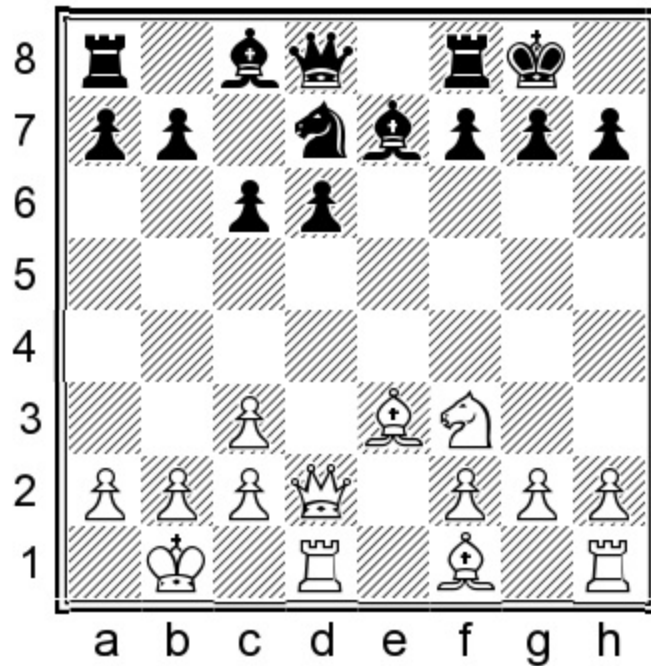
18.♖de1

After 18.g4 ♟xg4 19.♞dg1 ♟f5 20.♞d1 (20.♞f1 leads to roughly the same position, while if 20.♞e2 then 20...♟g5! is not bad) 20...♟xg6 21.♟xe7 ♞xe7 22.♞xg6 ♞ White has quite good compensation for the pawn, but no more than that.

18...♟f5 19.♞d1 ♞xg6 20.♞xe7 b6 21.♟d4 ♞f7

The position is virtually equal. The game Sethuraman – Wei Yi, Astana 2019, ended in a repetition of moves.

B) 10.♕b1

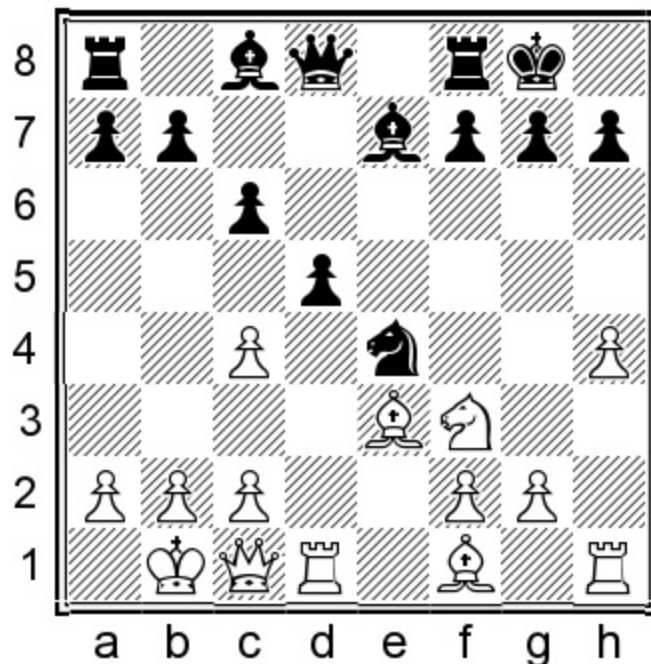


**10...d5 11.h4**

For 11.♔d3 ♘c5 12.h4 (12.♖he1 and 12.♖hg1 are hardly any better), see variation A1.

We now consider **B1)** 11...♘f6 and **B2)** 11...♗e8.

With 11...♘c5 Black envisages 12.♘g5 h6 13.♔d3, transposing into variation A2 where White sacrifices his knight on g5. However, by replying 12.c4! White exploits the fact that Black can't now capture on c4 because his knight would be loose. There can follow: 12...♘e4 13.♙c1±



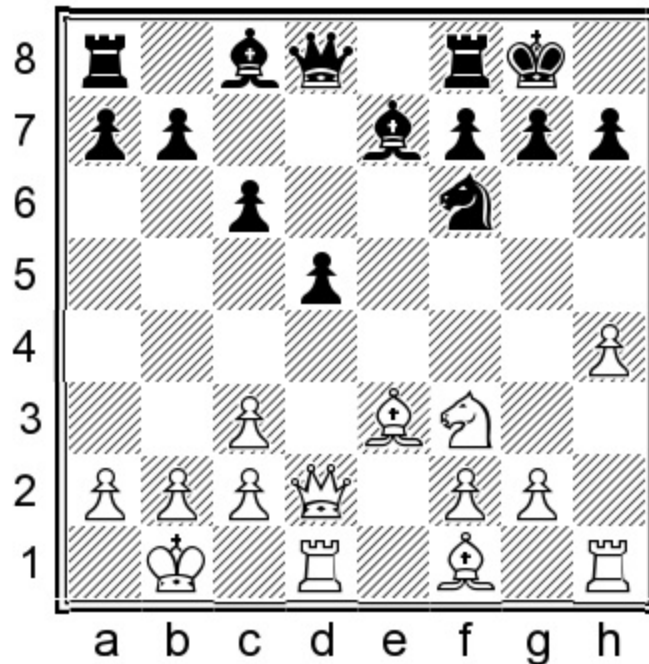
Now after an exchange on d5, White will have a stable plus. For instance:

a) 13...♔a5 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♗d4± threatening ♖b3.

b) 13...♗g4 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♗c4 ♖f6 16.♗d3± White has a solid advantage, thanks to the isolated pawn on d5.

c) 13...♗f6 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.♗c4 ♗e6 16.♗d3 ♔a5 17.♗d4± By blockading the d4-square White has stopped Black from attacking, and will now attack on the kingside himself by advancing his g-pawn.

### B1) 11...♗f6



In this position White has **B11)** 12.♗g5 and **B12)** 12.♗d3. The latter is the move I prefer, but it's worth understanding why the knight lunge is ineffective here.

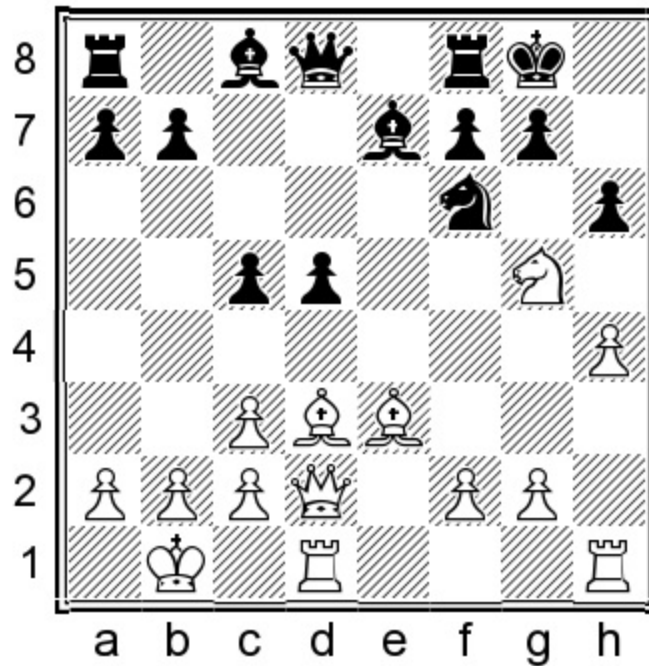
### B11) 12.♗g5

A move I don't like.

### 12...h6!?N

The move to have been chosen by Kuzubov and Ni Hua is 12...♗e4, after which White can gain the upper hand in more than one way: 13.♔e1 (I prefer this to 13.♔c1, though the latter isn't bad either) 13...♗f5 (13...♗f6, though it looks odd, is probably better) 14.♗xe4 ♗xe4 15.f3 ♗f5 16.g4± With a pleasant advantage for White.

### 13.♗d3 c5!?



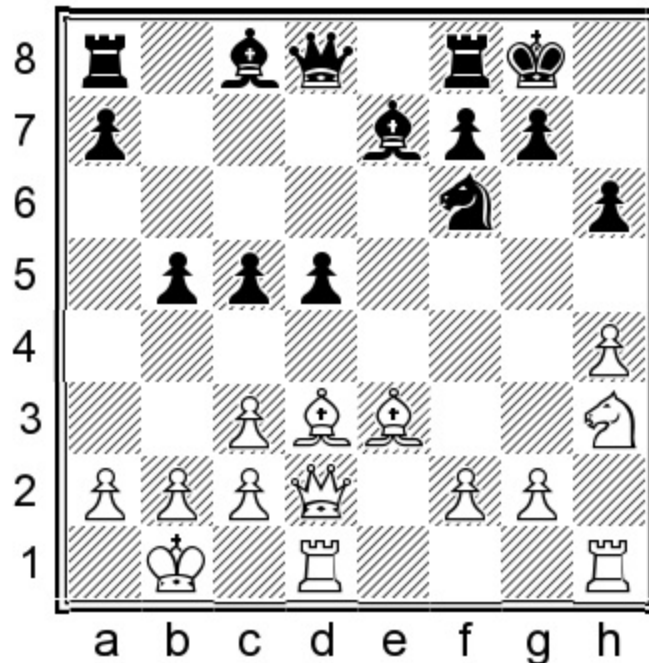
Now it's difficult for White to strengthen his position.

### 14. ♖h3

There is no better move to be seen. On 14.f3 Black has 14...c4 15. ♕e2 b5 with good counterplay.

### 14...b5

Now White has the choice between capturing with 15. ♕xh6, which leads to perpetual check, or playing 15.g4!? which brings about a complex game where all three results are possible.



### 15.g4!?

Not 15. ♖f4? b4⚡.

After 15. ♖xh6 c4 16. ♖xg7 ♖xg7 17. ♛g5† ♖h8 18. ♛h6† ♖g8= White has to give perpetual check. Playing for mate with 19. ♗g5 cxd3 20. ♖xd3 fails against 20... ♖g4!. The position is then difficult to evaluate, but I have come to the conclusion that Black is no worse.

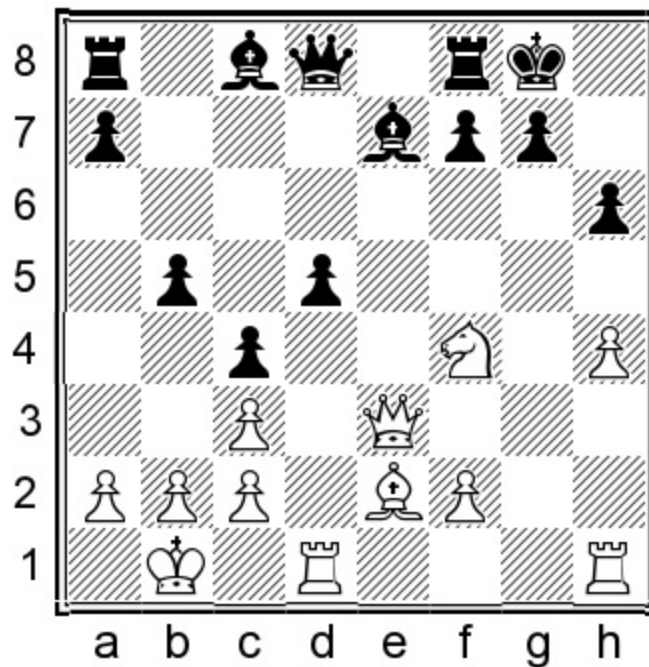
### 15... ♗xg4

From one point of view White is a step ahead with his attack, yet the position is clearly double-edged. I would prefer a position with a minimal plus, but a player more inclined to risk-taking could very well choose this line. I will give some sample variations:

### 16. ♗f4

The consequences of 16. ♖f4!? are hard to assess: 16... ♖f6 (or 16...c4 17. ♖e2 h5∞) 17. ♖hg1 ♛b6 18. ♖e2 ♗e5∞ And the struggle is only just beginning.

### 16...c4 17. ♖e2 ♗xe3 18. ♛xe3∞



It doesn't look as if White will succeed in mating the black king. Here is one possible continuation:

### 18... ♖e8

Or 18... ♖b7!?∞.

### 19. ♗xd5 ♖b7 20. ♖hg1

Or 20. ♖f3!?∞.

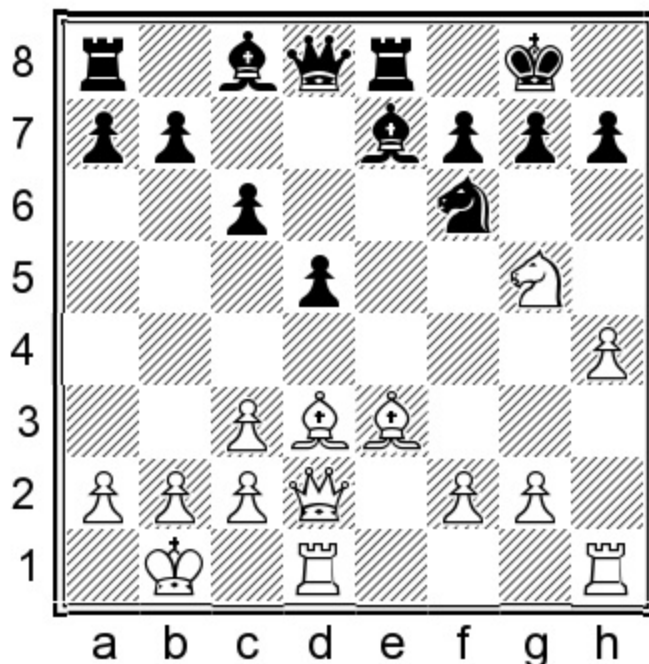
### 20... ♖xd5 21. ♛xh6

And the game must end in a forced draw.

21...♙f8 22.♖xg7† ♙xg7 23.♖g1 ♔f8 24.♗xg7† ♔e7 25.♗e5†

With perpetual check.

**B12)** 12.♙d3 ♖e8 13.♘g5



This position has been seen in several games. We will examine Black's possible replies **B121)** 13...♙d6?! and **B122)** 13...h6.

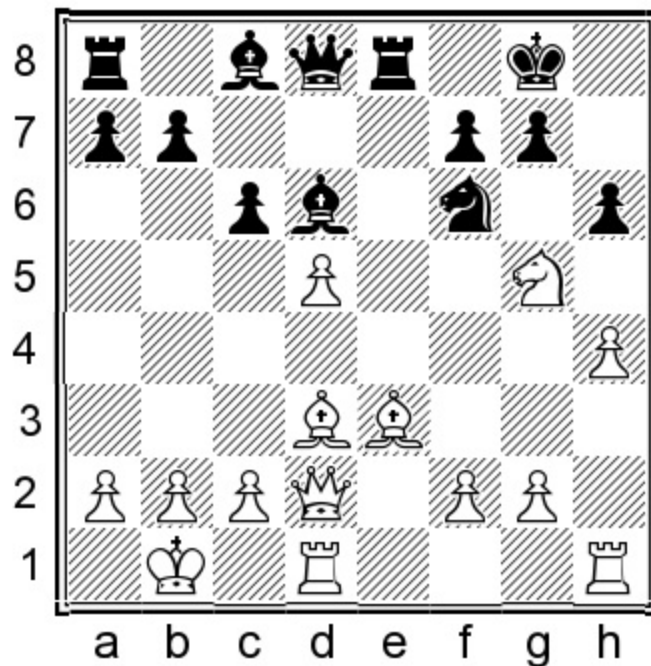
In correspondence games 13...c5!? has been played a couple of times. The move is sound but cannot be said to equalize: 14.c4 d4 15.♙f4 ♙d6 16.♖he1 ♖xe1 17.♖xe1 with a slight edge for White.

**B121)** 13...♙d6?!

This move has occurred in a few games but we shall soon see that it isn't the most effective.

**14.c4 h6 15.cxd5!**

Even though the move ...♘xd5 is now available to Black, the capture with h6xg5 still gives White a powerful attack!



### 15...hxg5

Or 15...♞xd5 16.♙d4 ♘f4 17.♙h7† ♚f8 18.♚d3 hxg5 19.hxg5, transposing to the main line.

With 15...cxd5, refusing to take the knight, Black is voluntarily settling for the worse position. There can follow:

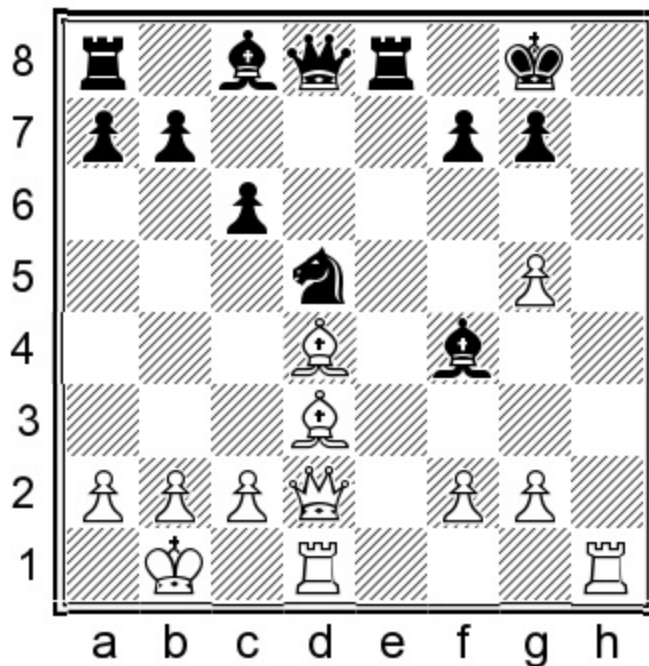
a) 16.f3!? Not only preparing g2-g4 but also guarding the e4-square. 16...♙g3 (or 16...♚e7 17.♙d4 ♙g3 18.♙b5±, and whichever way the rook goes, White has 19.♚d3 with a plus) 17.♞h3 (if 17.♙d4?! then 17...♚d6∞) 17...♙xh3 18.♞xh3± Thanks to his two bishops, White has a fair advantage.

b) 16.♙d4 ♙d7!? 17.♙xf6 ♚xf6 18.♙h7† ♚f8 is less clear. After 19.♚xd5 ♙c6 Black retains good drawing chances.

### 16.hxg5 ♞xd5 17.♙d4 ♘f4

White's attack might seem to have collapsed, but the whole thing is only just beginning!

A bad choice is: 17...c5?! 18.♙h7† ♚f8 19.♙xg7†! ♚xg7 20.♚xd5 ♙e6 21.♚f3! (even better than 21.♚xd6) 21...♚xg5 22.♞xd6+- As well as his attack, White even has an extra pawn.



18. ♖h7†! ♔f8 19. ♕d3

Apart from ♕a3†, White wants to withdraw his bishop from h7, creating mate threats.

19... ♕xg5

Alternatively there is:

19... ♕a5 20. ♖e4 ♖xg5 21. ♖xd5 cxd5 22. ♗h8† ♔e7 23. ♖c3!

It's important to drive the queen away, so as to control the e1-square.

23... ♕c5 24. ♗h5 f6

24... ♖g4 25. ♗e1†± wins the bishop back.

25. ♕g6 ♖g4

25... ♖d7 loses to 26. f4+-.

26. ♗xg5!

The capture on g5 is the only way!

Not 26. ♕xg7†?? ♔d6-+.

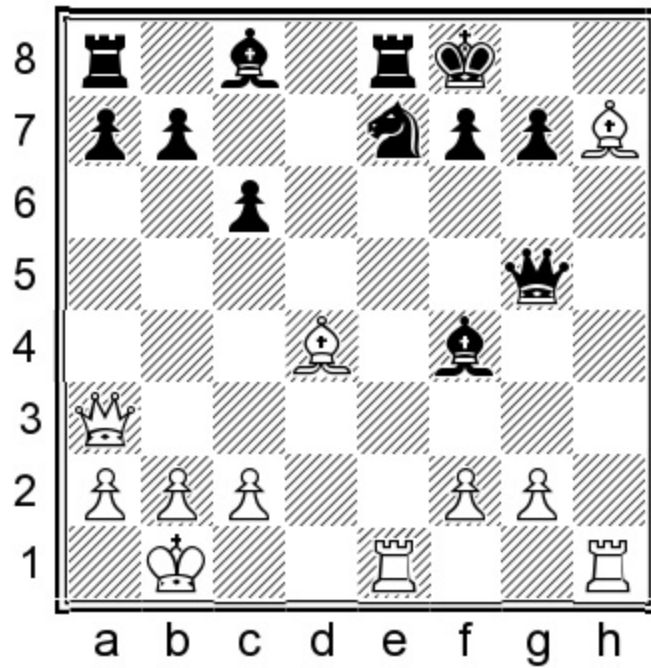
26... fxc5

26... ♖xd1? is hopeless: 27. ♕xg7† ♔d8 28. ♕xf6† ♔c8 29. ♕f5†+- and it's time for Black to resign.

27. ♕xg5† ♔d6 28. ♕xg4±

With approximately equal material, the black king is forced to walk about in the centre. Even if the king manages to hide, White will remain with dangerous pawns on the kingside.

20. ♕a3† ♔e7 21. ♗de1



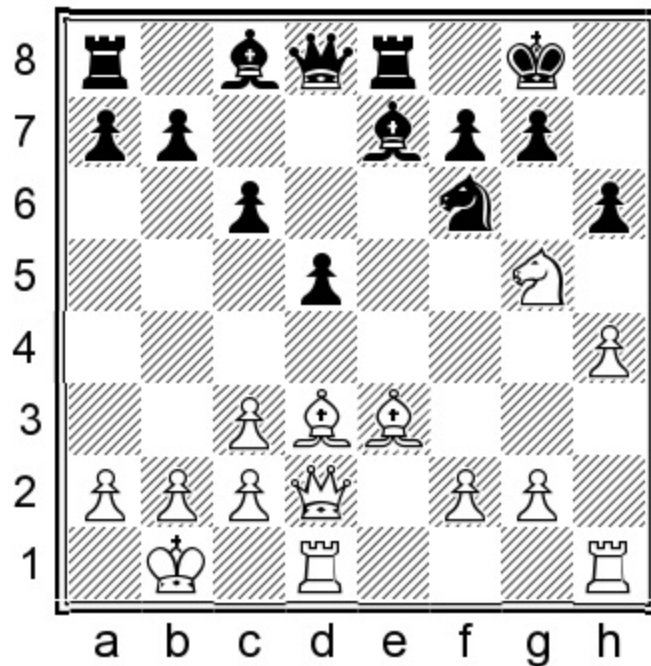
21...♙e6

Or 21...♙g4 22.♙c5 ♙e6 23.♙f5± giving almost the same position.

22.♙f5 ♙g8 23.♙h3 ♙h6 24.♙xe6 ♙xh3 25.♙xh3±

The two bishops give White a large plus. In Liedl – Bobarnac, corr. 2016, he conducted his advantage to victory.

B122) 13...h6



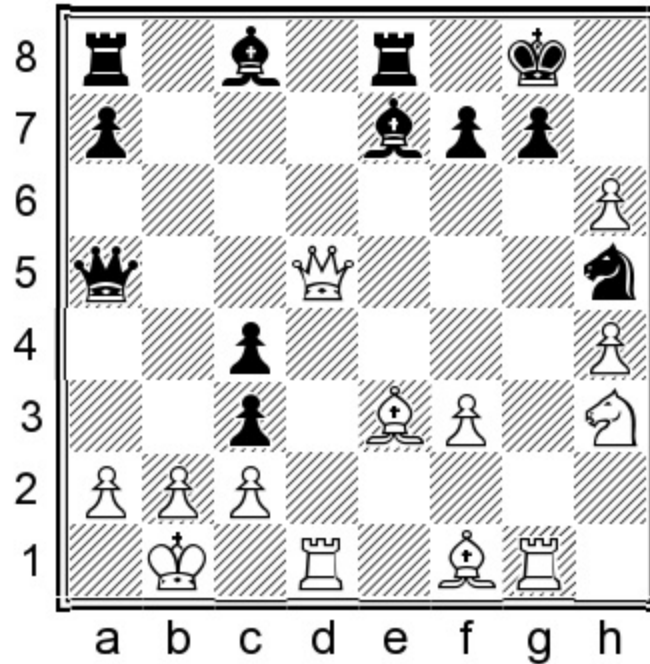
14.f3 c5



In Aronian – Anand, Saint Louis 2018, White played 19.♘f4. But since this was a blitz game, the continuation was not optimal: 19...♗g3? (better 19...♗xf4! 20.♙xf4 ♖b6∞ with perfectly good counterplay) 20.♖g1±

### 19...bxc3

Better than: 19...♙a5?! 20.♖g1! bxc3 21.♙xd5

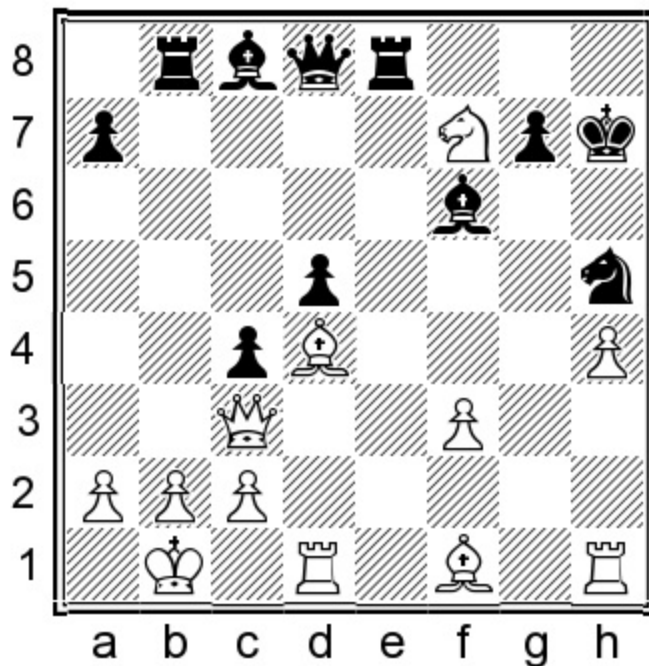


21...♙xd5 (an important point is that after 21...♖d8 22.♙xc4! ♖xd5 23.♖xd5 ♙b4 24.b3+- White has a won position) 22.♖xd5± With a large plus.

### 20.♙xc3 ♗f6

Or 20...♖b8, and now:

a) 21.♗g5 ♗f6 22.h7† ♔h8 23.♗xf7† ♔xh7 24.♙d4



24...♔xd4!?

Against 24...♚b6 White could gain the advantage with 25.♕d3† ♖g8 26.♕xf6.

25.♚xd4 ♚a5!

And Black is all right, for example:

26.♕h3 ♕xh3 27.♖xh3 ♖g8 28.♗g5 ♗f4!

This problem-like idea appeals to me, which is why I decided to demonstrate the variation.

29.♚xf4 ♖xb2† 30.♔xb2 ♚b4†

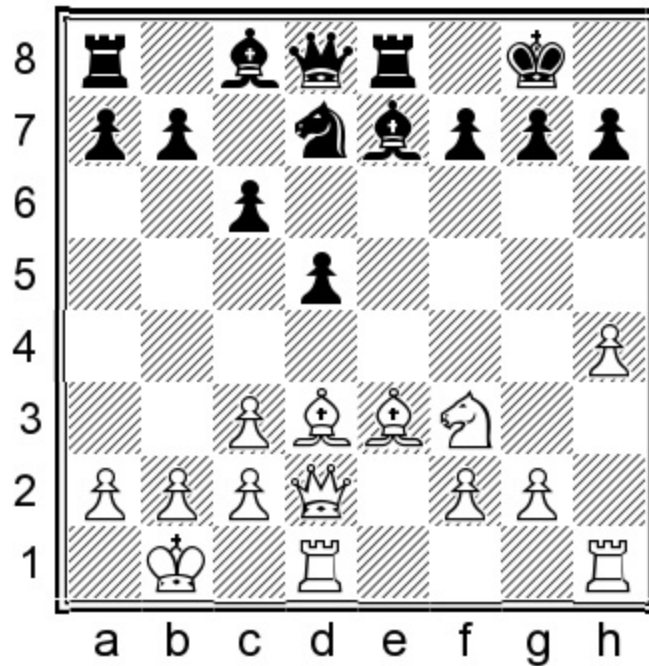
With perpetual check.

b) 21.♖g1 ♕f6 22.♕d4± The position remains complex, but White has some advantage. On 22...♖b6 he has various moves to choose from. For instance 23.♗g5!?! isn't bad; it leads to the better ending after 23...♕f5 24.♕xf6.

21.♕d4 ♕xd4 22.♚xd4 ♚f6 23.♚xf6 gxf6 24.♗f2±

White will continue with b2-b3. Black will of course pick up the pawn on h6, but owing to the doubled pawns on the f-file, White retains a plus.

**B2) 11...♖e8 12.♕d3**



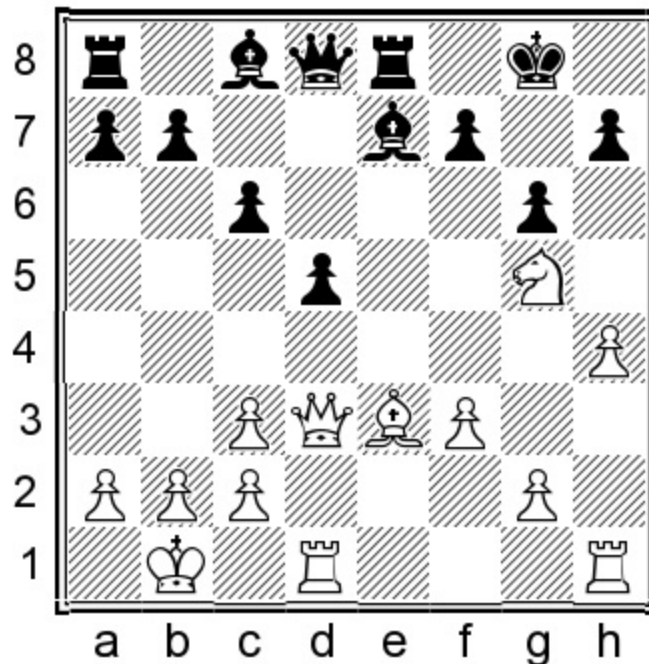
Now Black has **B21)** 12...♘c5 and **B22)** 12...♙c5.

### B21) 12...♘c5

Compared with 12...♙c5, this move looks risky. I won't say it is bad, but it does allow a dangerous attack after 13.♘g5.

### 13.♘g5 h6!?

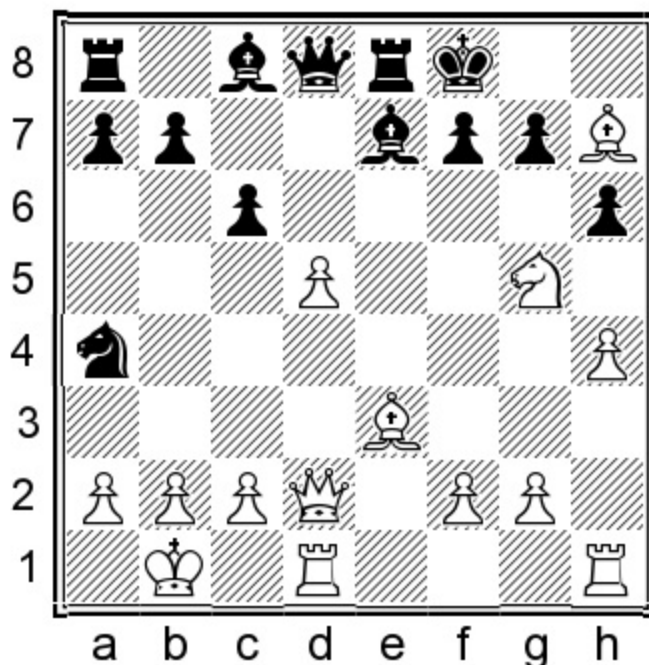
After 13...♘xd3 14.♙xd3 g6 15.f3± White's game is easy to play. We advance our kingside pawns, and against ...h7-h6 or ...f7-f6 the simplest thing is to retreat with the knight.





c) 16...hxg5!? If you haven't studied the position in advance, the result of the knight sacrifice on g5, in this or that set of circumstances, is extremely hard to work out over-the-board. 17.hxg5 ♖c5 18.♗c1 ♚b6! Now the important resource ...♘c3† comes into play for Black. 19.♚f3 ♗e6 20.♗f5 ♘c3† 21.♚xc3 ♗xf5∞ And it's difficult to discern what the outcome of White's attack will be. The position doesn't lend itself to analysis, given the multitude of variations.

### B211) 16.cxd5

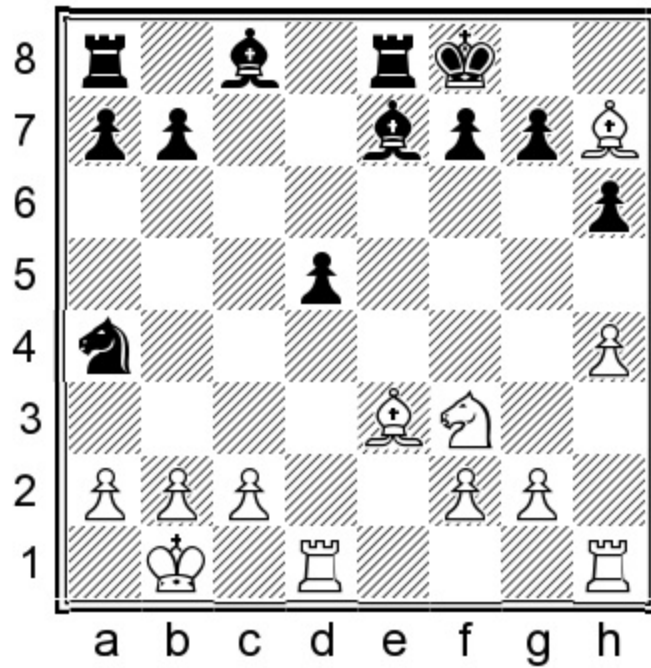


A simple and good move, which gives White a slight advantage.

### 16...♚xd5 17.♚xd5

Clearer than 17.♚c1 ♚a5 18.♘e4 ♗e6 19.b3. In that position, apart from 19...♘c3†, Black could consider 19...♗d5.

### 17...cxd5 18.♘f3



**18...Bb6**

If 18...Bc5, then: 19.Bf4! (not 19.Bxc5† Bxc5 20.Rxd5 b6) 19...Bb6 20.Bd4± The isolated pawn on d5 and the rather less than ideal situation of the king on f8 give White quite an advantage.

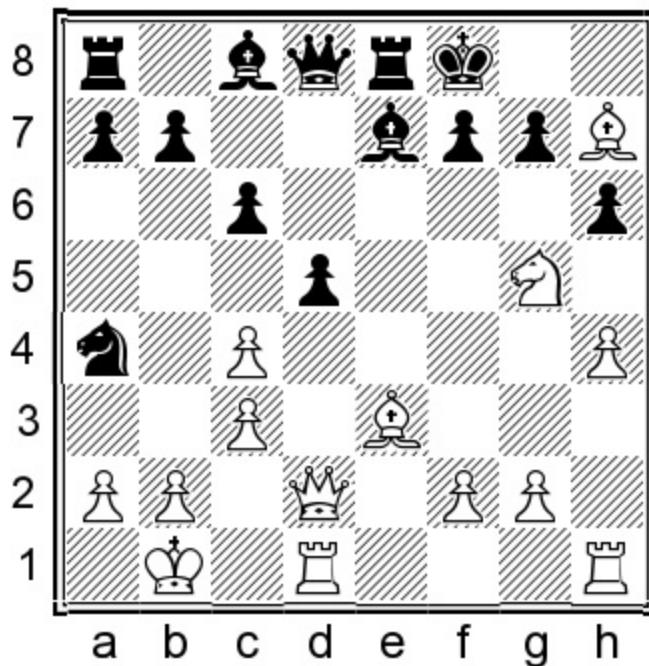
**19.Bd2!?**

Avoiding being pinned by ...Bg4.

**19...Bd7 20.Bd3±**

With a small but steady plus.

**B212) 16.c3!?!N**



At first this move struck me as odd, but then I became convinced that Black needs to play very accurately here.

### 16...♖b6

Practically the only move.

Black would lose with: 16...hxg5? 17.hxg5 g6 18.♙xg6! fxg6 19.♖h8† Thanks to the fact that Black can't play ...♔g7, White is able to double rooks on the h-file. 19...♔f7 20.♖h7† ♔g8 21.♖dh1 ♙f5† 22.♔c1!+- White's threats are irresistible, for instance on 22...♙c5 he wins with 23.♙d4 ♙xd4 24.♗xd4.

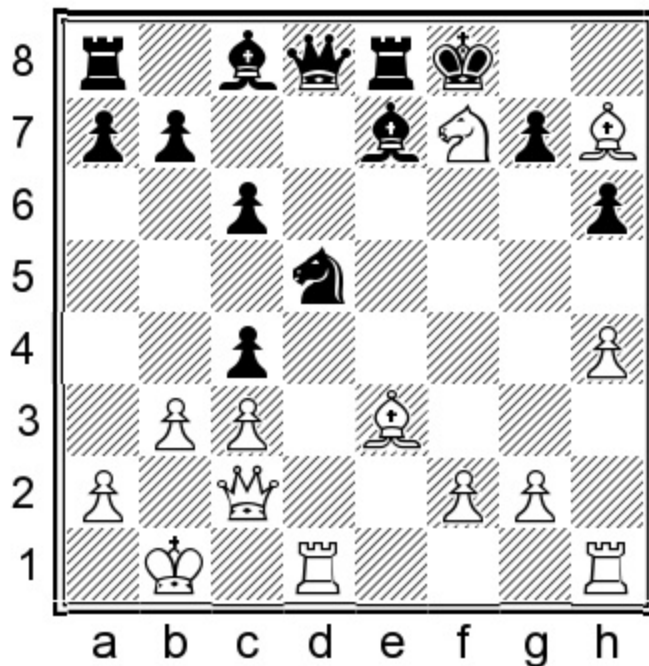
### 17.b3!?

After 17.♙xb6 axb6!∞ the position remains unclear.

### 17...dxc4

Again, not 17...hxg5? 18.hxg5+- . Although this time the black knight will not be *en prise* when the bishop withdraws to c2, Black still loses. For example: 18...♙a3 (or 18...g6 19.♙xg6+- with the same consequences as in the note to move 16) 19.♙c2 ♙e6 20.f4+-

### 18.♗c2 ♖d5 19.♖xf7



### 19...cxb3

Or 19...♙a5 20.♞xd5 (20.♙d4 ♘f6∞) 20...♚xd5 21.♘h8 cxb3 (not 21...♙f6? 22.♞d1±) 22.axb3, transposing to the main line.

In the event of 19...♙xf7 20.bxc4 ♘xc3† 21.♚xc3 ♙f6□ (21...♚c7? loses to 22.♚d3+–) 22.♞xd8± White has a pleasant advantage in the ending. After exchanges of queens and rooks, both 24.♙c2 and 24.♙g6† are good moves.

### 20.axb3 ♚a5 21.♞xd5! ♚xd5

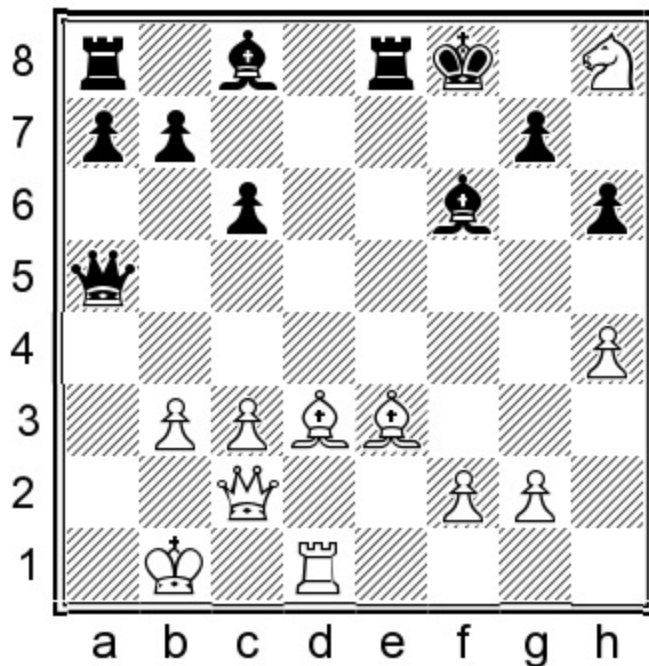
After 21...cxd5 22.♘h8± Black has no counterplay.

### 22.♘h8

The threat of ♘g6† and ♘f4 guarantees White equal chances as a minimum. Black has to keep making the ‘only move’ to save himself.

### 22...♙e6!

Black loses with: 22...♙f6? 23.♞d1 ♚b5 24.♙d3! ♚a5



25.b4!

This position would lend itself to a good chess study.

25...♔a3 26.♙c5† ♔g8 27.♘f7!!

But for this move, it would be Black who would win!

27...♔xf7 28.♙h7

Now the threat of ♔g6† compels Black to give up a rook.

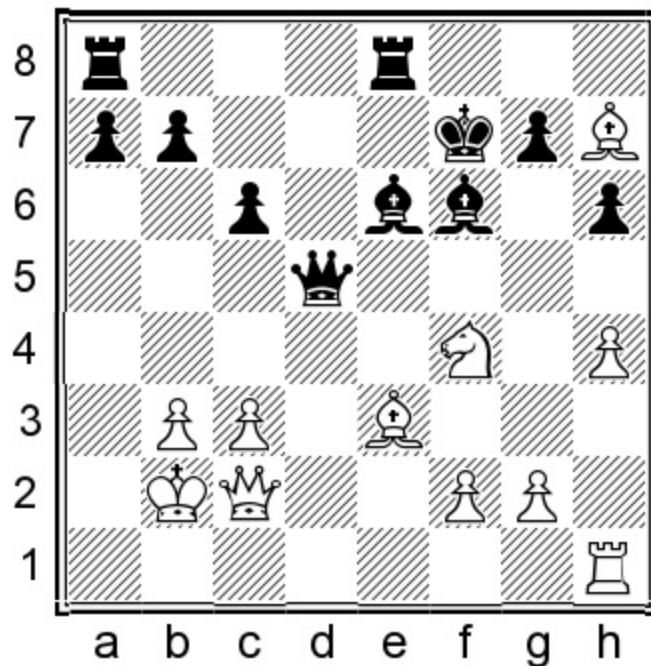
28...♖e4 29.♙xe4+-

On 29...♙e6 we return with 30.♙h7, while 29...♔g8 is strongly answered by 30.♖d6!, threatening ♖xf6.

23.♗b2 ♙f6

If 23...♙f7 then 24.♖d1±.

24.♘g6† ♔f7 25.♘f4

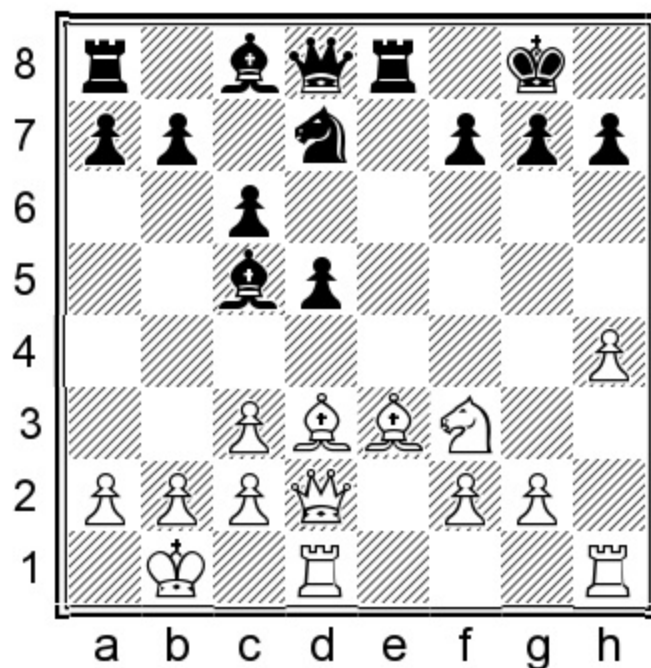


25...♔e5!

With this accurate move, Black keeps the position close to equality. In any event White's 16.c3!? proves a reasonable alternative to 16.cxd5, seeing that Black's defence has been anything but simple.

If instead 25...♔b5, then 26.g4+- creates the decisive threat of g4-g5.

B22) 12...♔c5



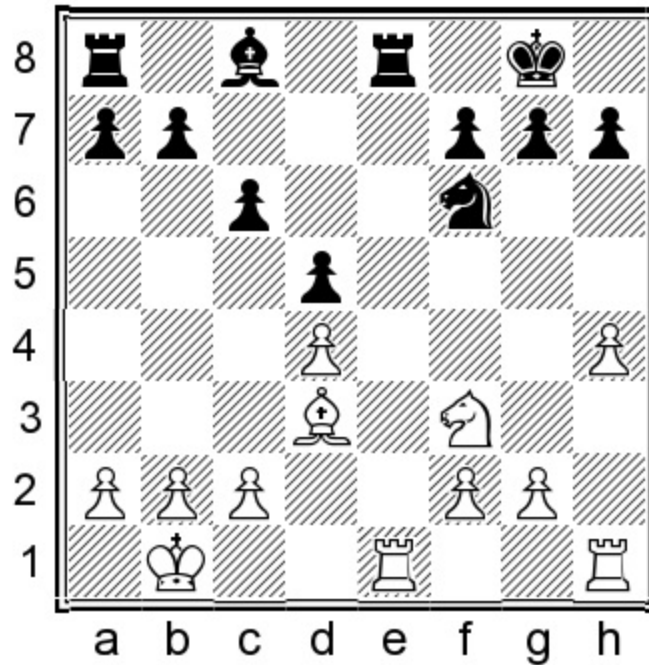
In this way Caruana has twice secured an easy draw. The position is among the most reliable for Black in the Petroff Defence. I have nonetheless succeeded in finding some fresh ideas for White.

### 13.♔g5!?

A most interesting move, compelling Black to weaken himself with ...f7-f6. This was a novelty when I first analysed it, but it has since been played by two 2600+ players.

But let's also look at some other possibilities for White at this juncture:

a) 13.♔d4 ♕xd4 14.cxd4 ♘f6 15.♖de1 (nothing is altered by 15.♗f4 ♘e4 16.♗he1 ♗f6) 15...♘e4!  
16.♗f4 ♗f6 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6=



Although the computer likes White's position, it is probably just equal, Nakamura – Caruana, London 2018.

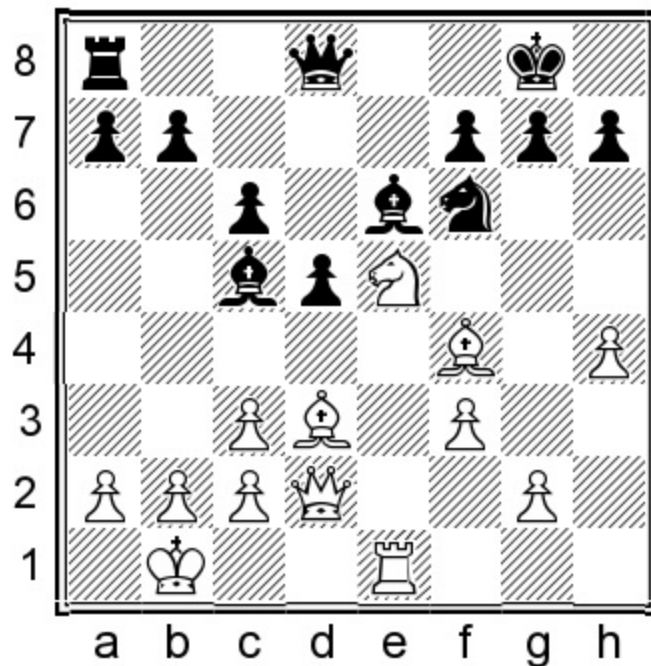
b) 13.♖de1 ♕xe3 14.♖xe3 ♖xe3 15.♗xe3 ♘f6= gives White nothing, Aronian – Caruana, Batumi (ol) 2018.

c) 13.♔f4 ♘f6 14.♖de1 ♖xe1†

14...♘e4?! 15.♔xe4 dxe4 16.♖xe4± leaves White with an extra pawn and winning chances, as in Praggnanandhaa – Ju Wenjun, Prague 2019; another possibility is 14...♔e6 15.♘g5 ♔d7∞  
15.♖xe1 ♔d7∞

And despite his control of the e-file, White has difficulty improving his position. For example:  
16.♘e5

Going straight ahead (he might also try making improvements first, with 16.a3 or 16.g3).  
16...♔e6 17.f3



17...♙d6!?

Or 17...♚a5!?, to which White could reply 18.a3, 18.♚c1 or 18.♚e2 – with a roughly balanced position in each case.

18.g4 ♖c7⇒

With about equal chances.

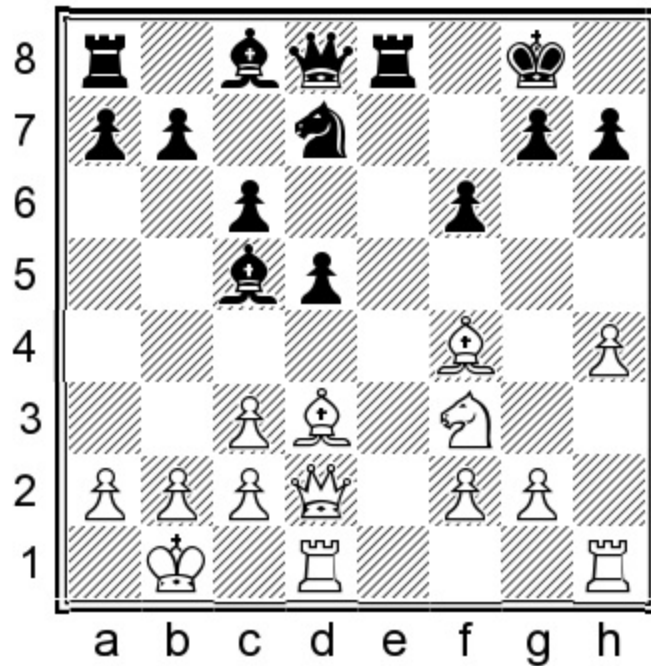
### 13...f6

Or: 13...♘f6 14.♘d4 Now on ...h7-h6 we will simply play f2-f3; the bishop on g5 is invulnerable. 14...♙f8 15.f3 c5 16.♘e2± Taking advantage of the fact that ...c5-c4 is unplayable, White transfers his knight to f4.

After 13...♚b6? 14.♖de1, unexpectedly Black can resign: 14...♗f8 15.h5+–

### 14.♙f4

He can scarcely improve with 14.c4 ♘b6!? 15.cxd5 ♘xd5∞.

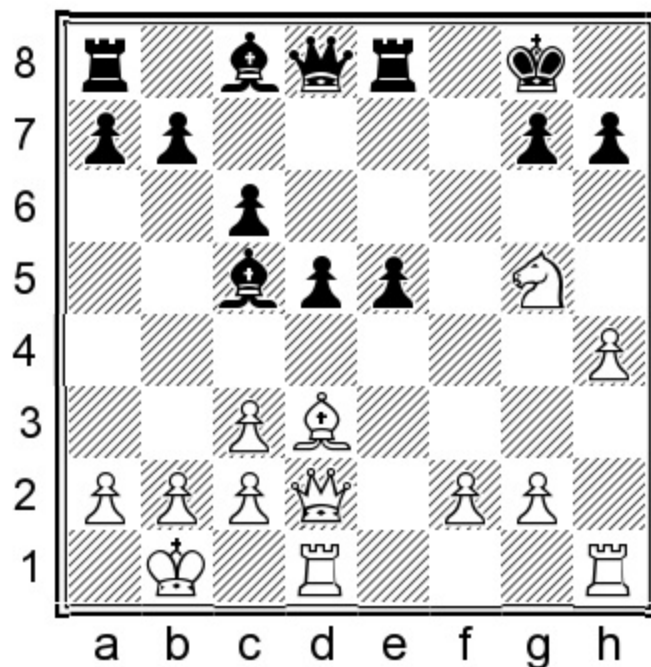


We now consider the main lines **B221)** 14...♘b6N and **B222)** 14...♙f8.

The minor options are:

a) 14...♙b6!?N has the same idea as 14...♙f8; by exchanging off the bishop on d3, Black reduces White's attacking potential. There can follow 15.h5 ♘c5 16.♘d4 ♘xd3 17.♙xd3 ♙d7 18.f3 ♙e7 19.g4. In my view White's game is a little more pleasant, since the play is concentrated on the kingside while the white king on b1 is completely safe.

b) 14...♘e5 15.♙xe5 fxe5 16.♘g5



Given that Black can't play ...e5-e4, he has to allow ♙h7†. After 16...h6 17.♙h7† ♙f8 18.♘e4± the

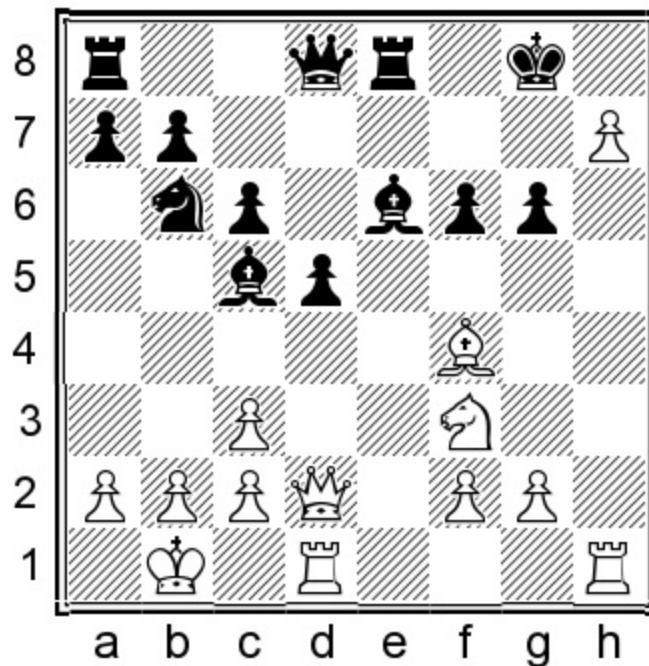
awkward position of the king on f8 gives White quite a good advantage. This verdict was later supported when the game Paravyan – T. Burg, Porto Carras 2018, reached this position. White's advantage soon grew to a decisive level, even though later slips allowed Black to draw.

### B221) 14...♞b6N

By removing his knight to b6, Black is slightly weakening his king. And the knight may not get to c4 anyway.

#### 15.h5 ♗g4

Not: 15...♗e6? 16.h6! (16.♞d4 ♞c4± is less good) 16...g6 (after 16...♞c4 17.♚c1± White threatens both hxg7 and ♗xc4) 17.♗xg6! With the aid of this bishop sacrifice, White breaks through to the black king. 17...hxg6 18.h7†



And now:

a) 18...♞g7 19.♞e5!

Threatening ♗h6†; objectively the position is won for White, but he needs to find the strongest moves.

19...g5 20.♚d3 ♗f7

20...fxe5?! loses at once to 21.♗xe5† ♞f7 22.♞h6+–.

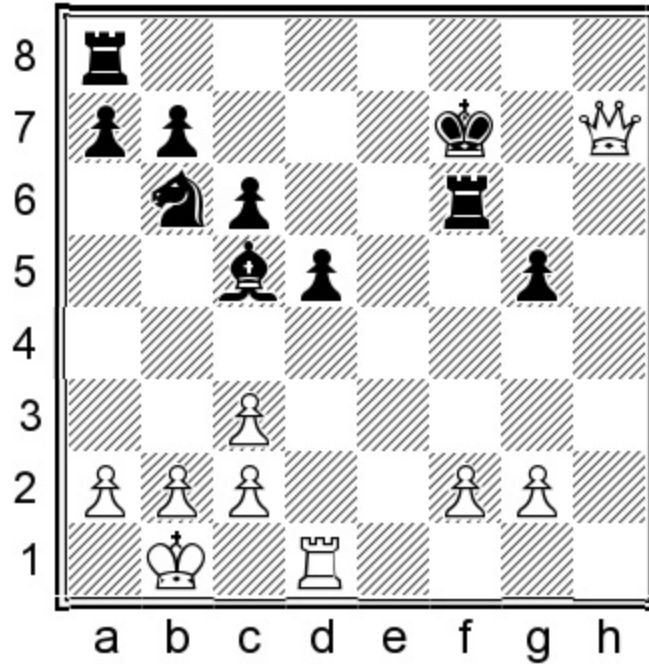
21.♞xf7 ♞xf7 22.♗xg5! fxg5 23.♞h6

Following the second piece sacrifice, the position starts to clear up a little; it's obvious that White's attack is extremely dangerous.

23...♞e6 24.♚f5† ♞f6 25.h8=♞† ♚xh8 26.♞h7†!

By forcing Black to give up his queen, White attains a decisive plus.

26...♙xh7 27.♚xh7†+-



For example, after 27...♙e8 White will pick up the pawns on b7 and a7.

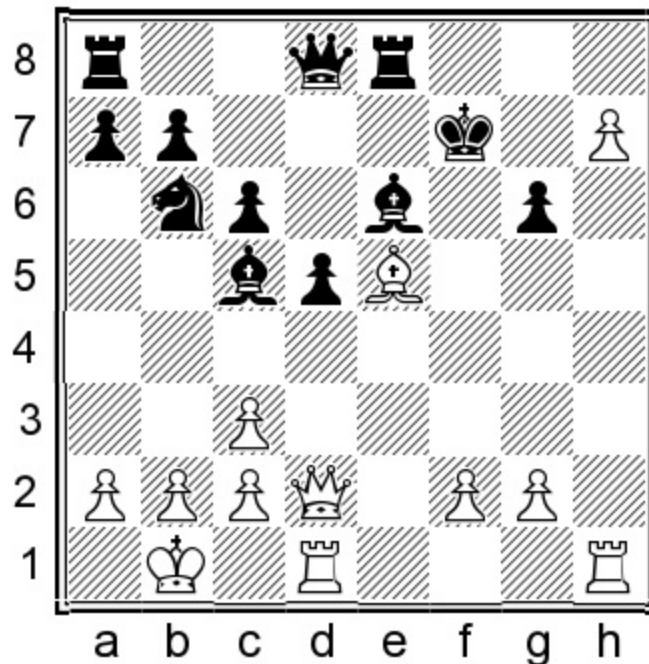
27...♙f8 is even worse after 28.♖e1! ♖xf2 29.a4 and apart from his vulnerable pawns, Black has to worry about his pieces.

b) 18...♙f7

This probably gives Black more chance of salvation, as it requires more in the way of accurate play on White's part:

19.♘e5† fxe5 20.♙xe5

Now there is no defence against h7-h8; Black appears to emerge with plenty of material for the queen, but with play on both wings the queen proves far more useful.

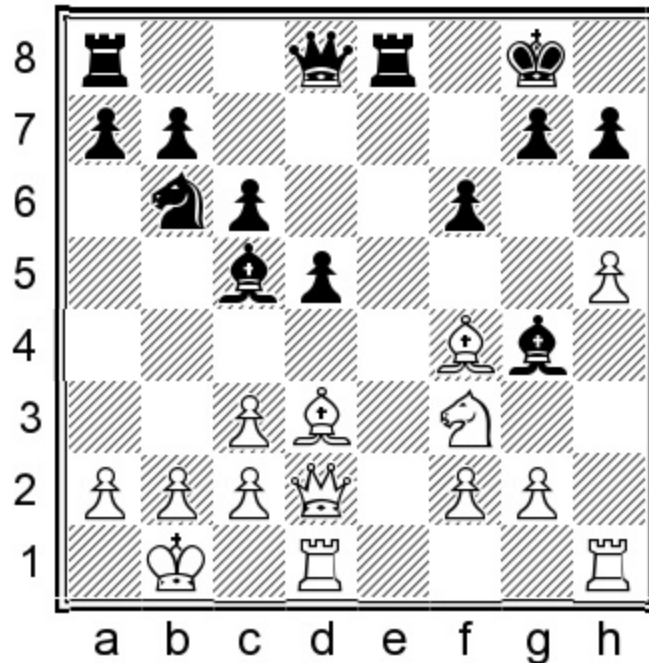


20...♙d6

20...♘d7 is no better: 21.h8=♚ ♖xh8 22.♖xh8 ♗xh8 23.♙xh8 ♖xh8 24.♗f4†+— And in contrast to the 20...♙d6 line, White can now attack the pawns at once.

21.h8=♚ ♖xh8 22.♖xh8 ♗xh8 23.♙xh8 ♖xh8 24.♖e1±

Despite the fact that Black has three pieces for the queen, his king is too vulnerable and his queenside pawns risk being left defenceless. The computer rates Black's position as hopeless, though I admit it may be exaggerating a little.



16.♙g3

Freeing f4 for the queen.

16...♙d6

After 16...♗d7 17.♗f4 h6 18.♖h4 ♙e6 19.♘d4± White has an obvious plus.

17.♙xd6 ♗xd6 18.c4

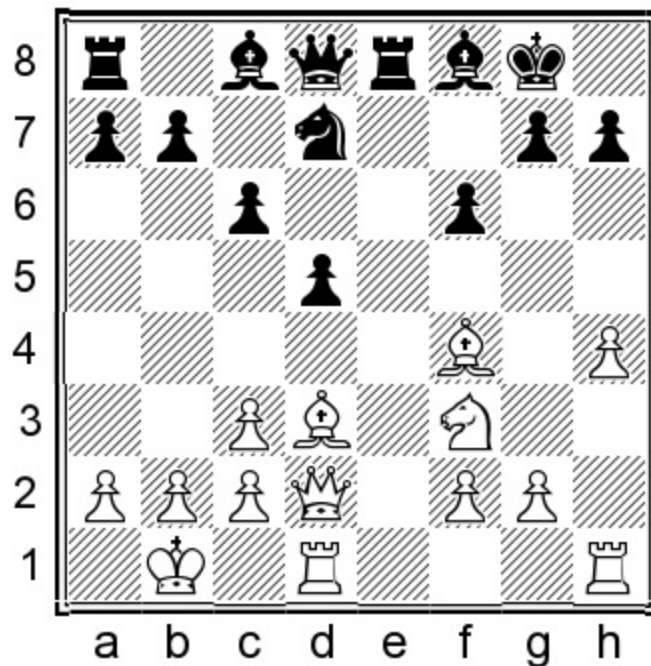
Following the exchange of the c- and d-pawns, the black king will feel uncomfortable.

18...♖ad8 19.a3!?

A slight improvement to the position, before capturing with cxd5.

19...♗c5 20.cxd5 ♘xd5 21.♖de1±

White has a slight edge, since the pawn on f6 causes Black some discomfort. If 21...♙e6, then 22.♘d4 is not a bad reply.



### 15.♙e3!?N

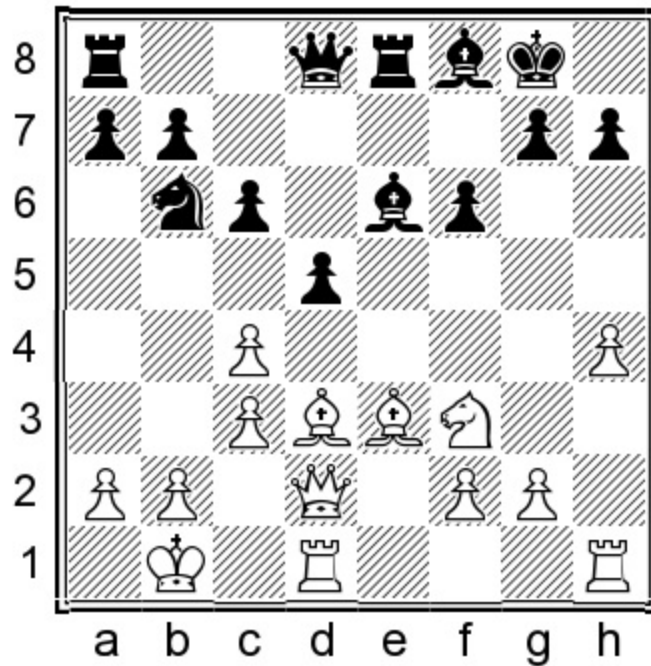
White's aim is to give up the dark-squared bishop, not the light-squared one, for the black knight. The computer underestimates this idea.

Instead 15.♖he1 ♞c5 was Vocaturo – Yankelevich, Porticcio 2019, when White's light-squared bishop was going, and Black was already comfortably equal.

After the novelty, Black now has **B2221)** 15...♞b6 or **B2222)** 15...♞c5.

### **B2221)** 15...♞b6 16.h5

An interesting alternative is: 16.c4!? ♙e6 (or 16...♙g4 17.♙xb6 axb6 18.h5 ♙e6 19.c3± and after for instance 19...♚c8, White will gain a slight advantage with 20.♚c2) 17.c3!

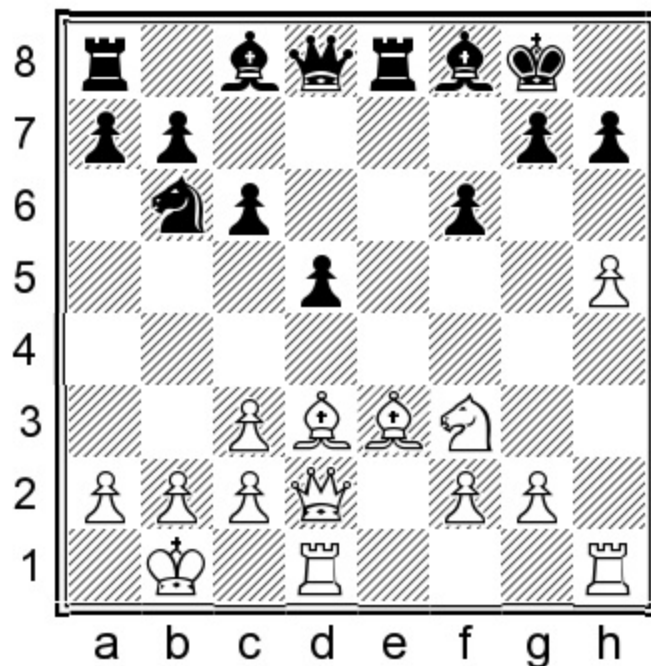


And now:

a) 17...dxc4?! 18.♙xh7† ♔xh7 19.♚c2† ♚d3 20.♖xd3 ♜f5 21.♚d1± Black will hardly have sufficient compensation after 21...♙xd3†, but 21...cxd3 is unplayable owing to 22.♞d4.

b) 17...♞xc4? 18.♚c2+–

c) 17...♚c7 18.♚c2 h6 19.cxd5 ♞xd5 20.♙c1 with a small plus for White.



16...♙e6

Or 16...c5 17.♞h4 ♚c7 18.♙f5± and after the exchange of bishops, the knight will successfully

settle on f5.

White can meet 16...♙g4 with 17.b3!± and having covered the c4-square, he can calmly proceed with his plans. If now 17...♚d7, a good reply is 18.a4!±; or if 17...♙a3, then 18.♖h4 ♚d7 19.♗dh1 – with advantage in either case.

### 17.♙xb6 axb6

Or 17...♚xb6 18.♘d4±.

### 18.♘d4 b5 19.a3±

At first sight the position seems unclear, but White has some hidden resources that can cause Black a good deal of trouble. I will give some sample variations.

### 19...♙c5

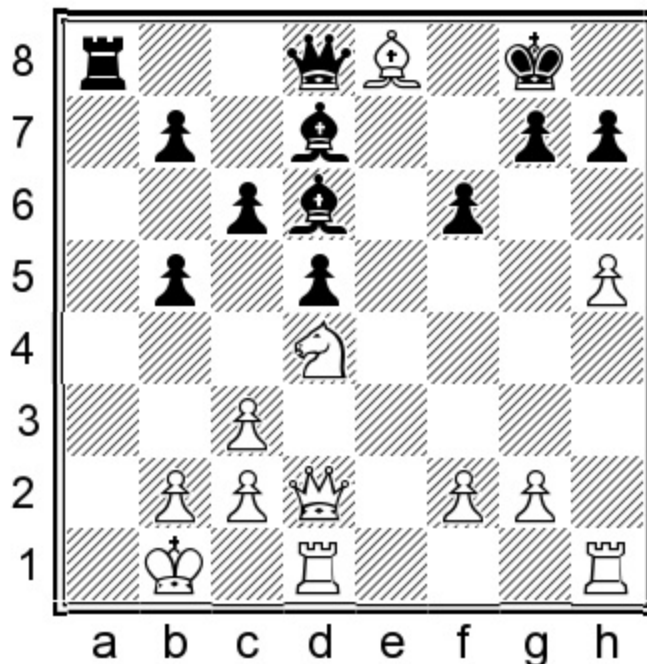
Alternatively:

a) 19...♙d7?! 20.♙g6!± with a large plus, for example:

a1) 20...♖e5 21.f4 ♖e7 22.♚d3 h6 23.♖he1± The weakening with ...h7-h6 has left White well on top.

a2) Black loses with: 20...hxg6?! 21.hxg6 ♙xa3 22.♚f4 ♙c5 23.♘b3!+– He cannot play ...♚a5, while the threats of mate on the h-file persist.

a3) 20...♙xa3 21.♙xe8 ♙d6

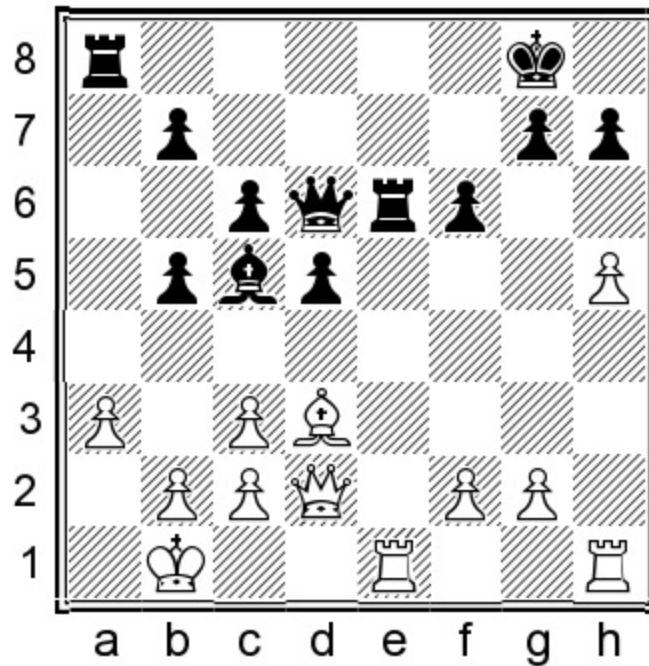


22.b4! ♚xe8 23.♘b2± With ♖a1 to follow. With his bishops confined, Black doesn't have compensation for the exchange.

b) 19...♔a5?! 20.♞de1 ♕d7 21.♞f4, The capture on a3 fails because of the intermediate move ♖b3, hence Black's ...♞a5 is unsuccessful.

c) 19...♕xa3?! doesn't work: 20.bxa3 ♞d6 (or 20...♞xa3 21.♖b3±) 21.♞c1 ♞xa3 22.♖xe6 ♞ea8 23.♞b2 ♞xe6 24.♞de1 And Black is unable to develop his attack, thanks to the possibility of ♞e8†, exchanging rooks.

20.♞de1 ♞d6 21.♖xe6 ♞xe6



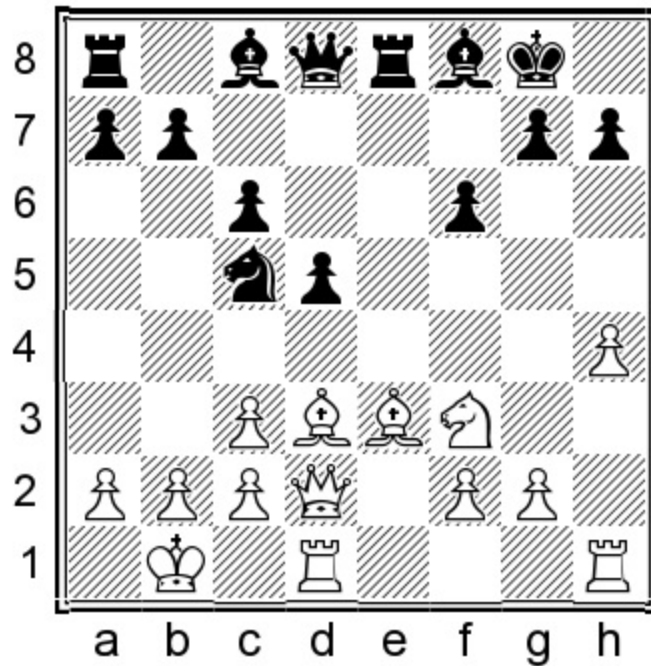
22.b4!?

Driving the bishop off the a3-f8 diagonal.

22...♕b6 23.♞xe6 ♞xe6 24.♞e1±

With a pleasant advantage. A good answer to 24...♞f7 is 25.♞f4. Exchanging rooks on the e-file would be dangerous for Black, as his king position would then be too weak.

B2222) 15...♖c5



**16. Qxc5 Qxc5 17. h5**

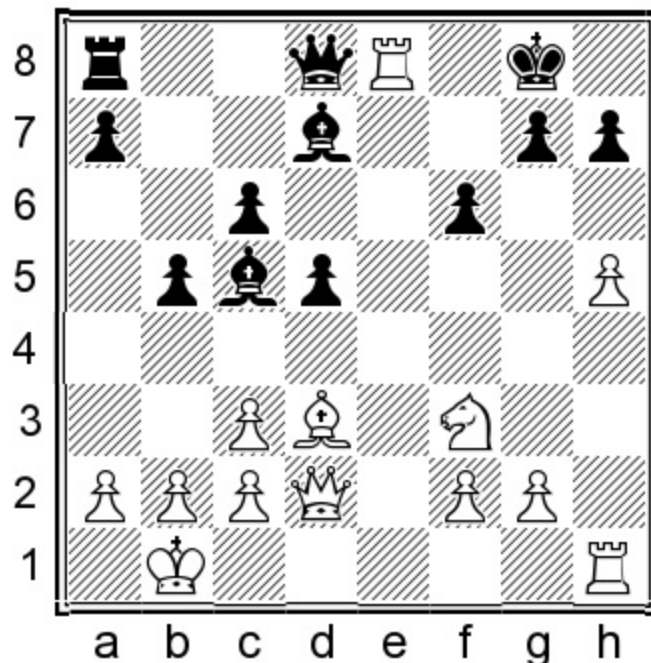
This is more flexible than 17. d4, as we will also have d4 as an option.

**17... Qc7**

By taking control of the f4-square, Black now plans ... g4. Alternatively:

a) With 17... b5 Black eliminates c3-c4, but White can perfectly well do without that move. After 18. d1 there are these possibilities:

a1) 18... d7?! is bad, because after: 19. ex8†



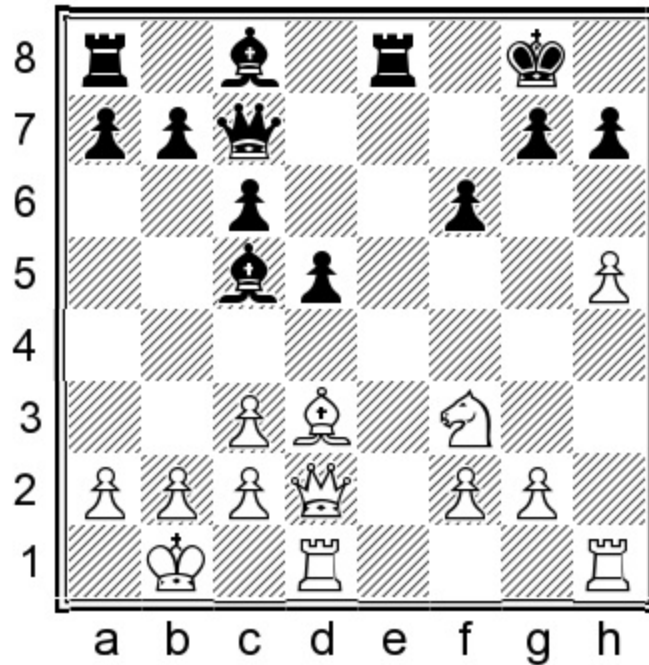
White can answer 19... ex8 with 20. xb5, giving Black serious problems. If instead 19... ex8, there can follow 20. f4± d7?! (20... d7 21. h6 g6, giving up a pawn, is objectively better)

21.♙xh7†! ♔xh7 22.h6+- And White wins, since on 22...g6 he has 23.♗g5†.

a2) 18...♙e6 19.♗d4 ♙xd4 20.cxd4± And Black's pawn advance to b5 turns out to have been a weakening rather than a strengthening of his position.

b) 17...♙d7!? 18.c4±

c) 17...♙e6 18.♗d4 ♙xd4 19.cxd4 ♖d6 20.♗dg1± Followed by g2-g4. White has a small advantage thanks to his kingside play.



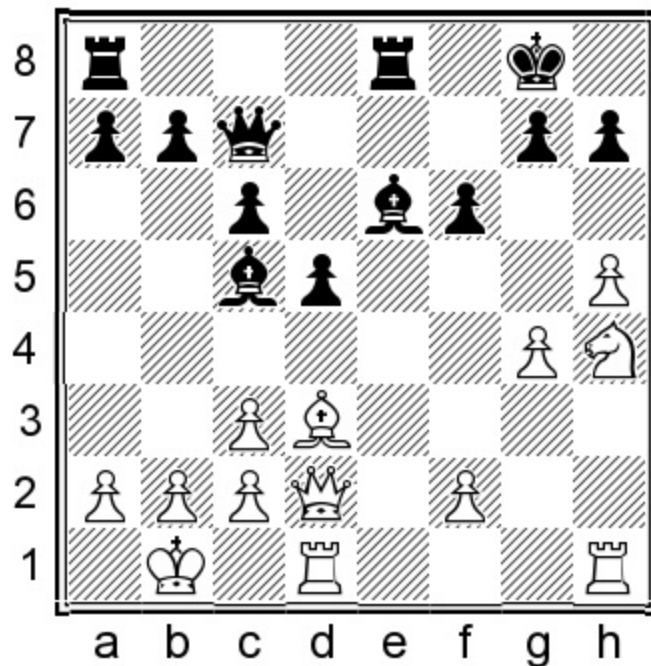
### 18.♗h4

A continuation of roughly equal worth is: 18.♗d4!? ♙d7 19.♗dg1 ♖e5 (on 19...♙d6 White has 20.g3!?, putting a stop to ideas of ...♙h2 or ...♙f4; then after 20...♖ad8 21.♗f5 he has the initiative) 20.g4 ♖ae8 21.a3 In my view White has a slight edge because he still has ways of strengthening his position – such as the manoeuvre ♗f3-h4, the advance of his g-pawn, or at some moment c3-c4.

### 18...♙e6

In the event of 18...♙g4 19.f3 ♙e6 20.g4 Black has hardly gained anything by inducing f2-f3.

### 19.g4



### 19...♙d6

Preventing g4-g5 and intending to block White's attack after 20.♖dg1 ♙f4.

### 20.♙f5

White has a small but stable advantage. The play is concentrated in the area of the black king.

## Conclusion

The focus of this chapter is on 9...c6. Then the order of moves with an early 10.♙d3 gives Black the opportunity to eliminate this bishop with ...♞c5 – which can lead to a forced draw as in the Sethuraman – Wei Yi game. For that reason I recommend playing 10.♙b1 d5 11.h4, which sets Black more problems. The variation 11...♞e8 12.♙d3 ♞c5 looks dangerous; after 13.♞g5 h6 14.♙h7† ♙f8 15.c4 ♞a4, White can head for slightly the better ending or else play 16.c3!?, which demands great accuracy on Black's part. The position after 11...♞e8 12.♙d3 ♙c5, which has occurred in Caruana's games, is critical. White can experiment with the idea of 13.♙g5!?, when most of the following variations still need practical testing.

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1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♘xe5 d6 4.♘f3 ♘xe4 5.♘c3 ♘xc3 6.dxc3 ♙e7 7.♙e3 0-0 8.♖d2 ♘d7 9.0-0-0 c6

A) 10.♙d3 d5 11.h4 ♘c5 285

A1) 12.♕b1 286

A2) 12.♘g5 287

B) 10.♕b1 d5 11.h4 289

B1) 11...♘f6 290

B11) 12.♘g5 290

B12) 12.♙d3 ♖e8 13.♘g5 291

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B21) 12...♘c5 13.♘g5 h6!? 14.♙h7† ♕f8 15.c4 ♘a4 295 B211) 16.cxd5 296

B212) 16.c3!?N 296

B22) 12...♙c5 13.♙g5!? f6 14.♙f4 298

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