Nikolaos Ntirlis

Playing 1.d4 d5

A Classical Repertoire

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A Classical Repertoire

Playing 1.d4 d5

By

Nikolaos Ntirlis

Quality Chess

http://www.qualitychess.co.uk

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PLAYING 1.d4 d5 – A CLASSICAL REPERTOIRE

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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
#	

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I'd like to say a big "Thank You" to Georgia for her patience when she was hearing from me, "I have to finish and send this to Andrew tonight," night after night after night...

Secondly, I'd like to thank John, Jacob and Andrew for their continuous feedback and support, not only in matters relating to the authoring of this book.

Lastly, thanks to all of those people who told me that they liked *Playing 1.e4 e5* and expressed their enthusiasm for this companion volume.

Nikos Ntirlis
Thessaloniki, August 2017

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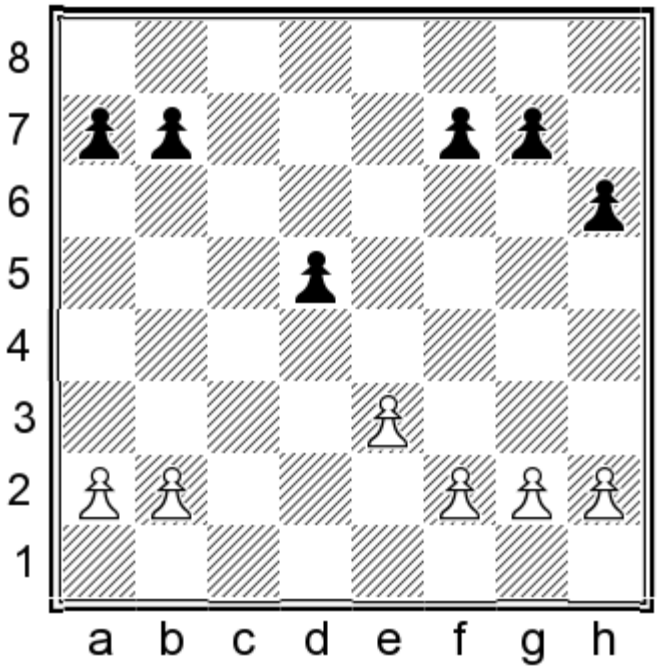
Introduction

This book presents a complete guide for Black after 1.d4 d5, the backbone of which is the Queen's Gambit Declined (henceforth abbreviated to QGD), which arises after 2.c4 e6.

It has been more than a year since *Playing 1.e4 e5 – A Classical Repertoire* hit the market, so the time has come to complete the picture with *Playing 1.d4 d5.* Although the previous work and the current one share a lot of similarities (the title and the author are two obvious ones!), in many ways they are completely different books. The Spanish, the Italian, the Scotch and other 1.e4 e5 lines are generally rather concrete in nature, making it hard to pick out common characteristics and play the resulting positions following a strategic masterplan. The openings stemming from 1.d4 d5 are of a completely different nature. No matter which major defence you choose, you tend to come across the same pawn structures and strategic patterns again and again. An opening book which has the ambition to be useful for both club players and more experienced ones up to GM level (something that *Playing 1.e4 e5* accomplished, of which I am proud) cannot be blind to that fact.

You know the pawn structure? You know how to play the opening!

This book is structured in an entirely different way from my previous work. Every major set-up has a dedicated introduction, where I present vital information about thematic pawn structures and plans. The challenge here was to present useful, relevant concepts, without crossing too far into the territory of a specialist middlegame book. My goal was to keep things practical, by focusing on specific themes which crop up again and again in my chosen repertoire. As an example, take the Isolated Queen's Pawn, which often arises in our repertoire against the ♗g5 QGD, as found in Chapter 1b:



The IQP is perhaps the most written-about structure in chess, and it would be silly for me to try and discuss every facet of it in this book. Instead, in Chapter 1a, I will mention some of the most important themes and scenarios which

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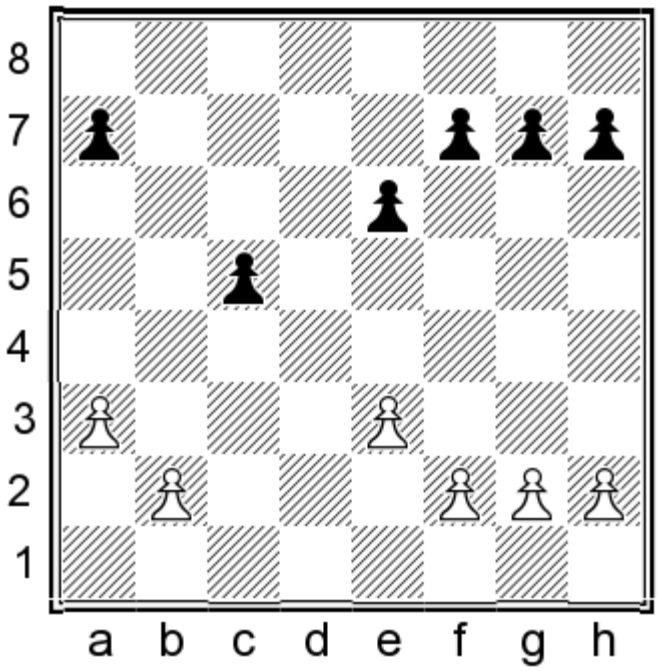
are particularly relevant to the types of IQP positions we may reach in the proposed repertoire. I also offer some guidance on how to play against the IQP, including certain scenarios in which we should avoid that structure altogether.

I believe the most valuable parts of my introductions are those places where I was able to identify a structure which commonly occurs in the specific variation under discussion, but which has not (to my knowledge at least) been discussed in any general-purpose middlegame books. In such cases, I had to formulate my own principles and guidelines. Here are a few examples of the kinds of structures under discussion:

The “2QPI” (2 Queenside Pawn Islands) Structure



This structure often occurs in the ♗f4 QGD, when Black answers a dxc5 exchange with ...bxc5, rather than recapturing with a piece. It may look ugly but it can work surprisingly well, as we will see.

The Rubinstein Structure

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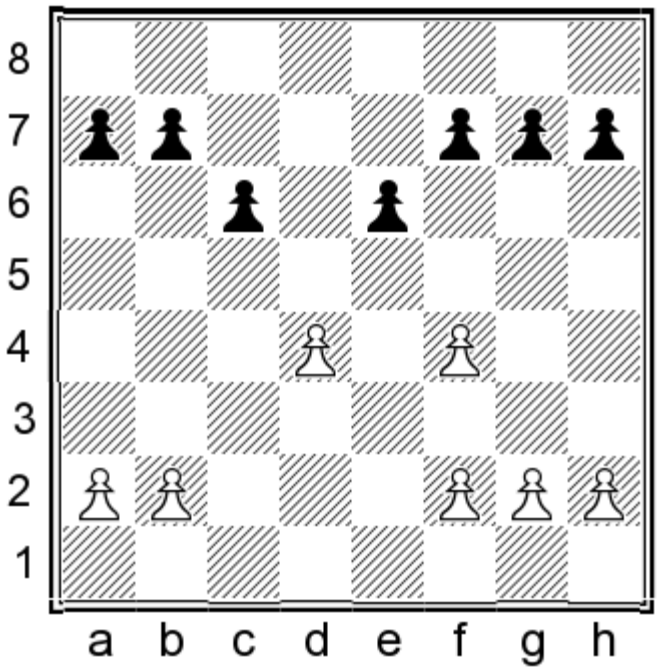
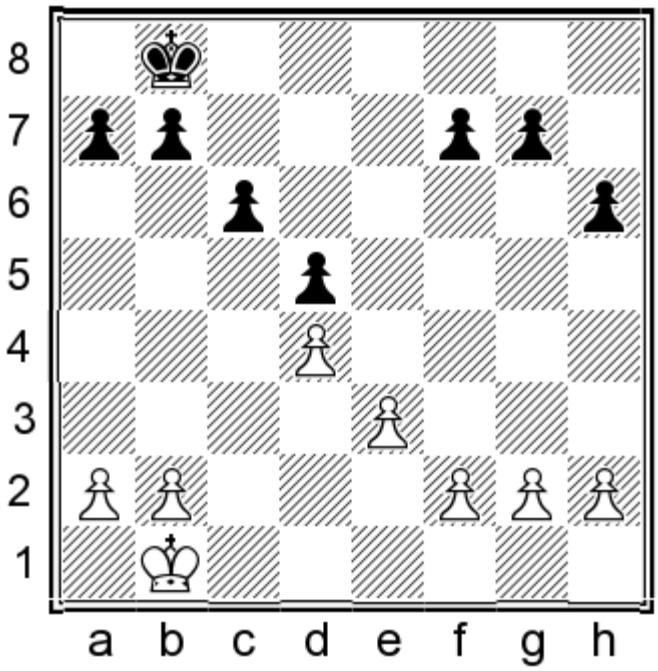


Rubinstein often allowed his bishop to be exchanged on f4 (or f5, if he was playing with Black) in order to transform the structure in this way. In Chapter 2a I will present several examples and show exactly how Black should deal with it and what he should avoid.

The Carlsbad Structure with Long Castling



Such positions make up a vital part of our repertoire against the Exchange Variation. Much ink has been used in discussing the minority attack and other typical plans in this structure when both sides castle on the kingside (and I will say something about that too...) but queenside castling leads to a completely different type of struggle.

How to use this Book

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Before looking at any theory, I strongly advise you to read the relevant introduction to the topic in question. I consider the material in those introductory chapters to be the minimum that a practical player needs to know in order to navigate the theoretical part comfortably. Even if you are a strong player with experience playing the lines being recommended, you will still get more out of the theoretical section if you've read the strategic introduction first, as I often refer back to certain plans and structures which have been discussed there. On a more general note, I would advise the readers to deepen their knowledge by consulting other middlegame books. The bibliography on page 6 contains a few such sources which I have found useful.

My Personal Story with 1.d4 d5

The repertoire I proposed in *Playing 1.e4 e5* was my own, which I have tested and continue to do so without fear in high-level correspondence tournaments. The background to this project is a little different, as I started working on a repertoire for Black based on 1.d4 d5 for various students of mine during 2012. When I say "students", I include some real beginners rated 1500 or less, but also some Grandmasters, including a few rated over 2600 (they cannot really be called students, of course, but they find my opening ideas useful). In the text you'll find names such as Sabino Brunello of Italy and Sune Berg Hansen and Mads Andersen from Denmark, all of them strong GMs who have made no secret of their collaboration with me, but there are also quite a few others who have preferred to keep our working relationship private. All of them have contributed greatly to the continual refinement of the material over the last five years.

So, despite the fact that I have yet to test this repertoire in the harsh environment of correspondence chess, I am confident that it is theoretically bulletproof. One reason is that I have used the same methods and tools of analysing it which I use for all the other openings that I personally play, with the added benefit of extensive GM feedback over the years. Also, as I play as White in at least half of my correspondence games, I have tried hard to find ideas against the Queen's Gambit Declined, which has resulted in further refinement of my analysis.

Book Overview and Repertoire Suggestions

The book is divided into seven sections, each of which comprises an introduction (a) and either one or two chapters of theoretical content (b and c), depending on the volume of material. Sections 1-4 cover the QGD, and 5-7 deal with other lines. Here is a brief summary of the material:

1) The ♗g5 QGD

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5

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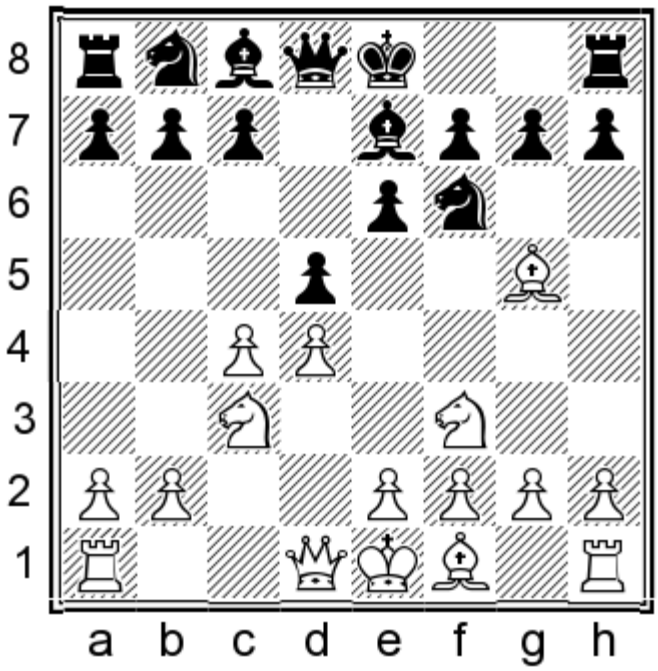

The biggest challenge when constructing any repertoire is choosing how to handle the absolute main lines. In the case of the diagram position, the crux of our repertoire is 5...♘bd7! 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 intending the freeing ...c5!. Vladimir Kramnik is the hero of this variation, having resurrected it from obscurity a few years ago and achieving splendid results with it ever since. Many other top GMs have followed in his footsteps and the current outlook is one of optimism for Black. What I like most about Kramnik's handling of the QGD is that he blends well-tested old ideas with modern twists, move orders and nuances. Although there are some theoretical details which are worth knowing, a good understanding of positional themes and pawn structures will go a long way in this variation. When I was writing this section (as well as some other parts of the book), whenever I had a problem it seemed that there was always a Kramnik game that answered all my questions!

2) The ♗f4 QGD

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4

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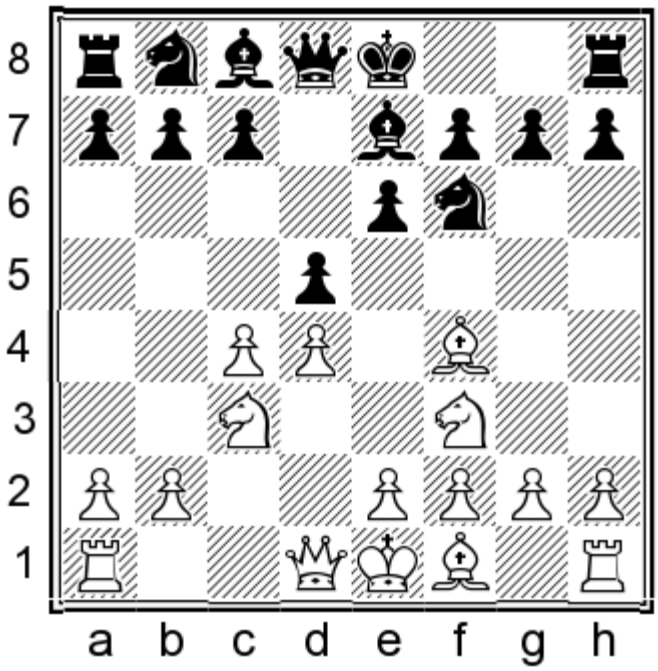
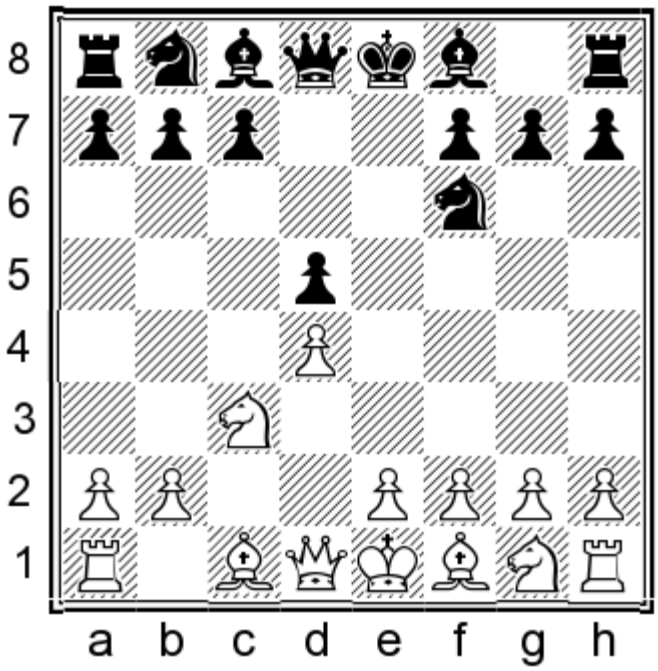


This is White's other most serious option on the fifth move. After the normal **5...0-0 6.e3**, it seems to me that Black is under some pressure at the top level in the most popular lines after 6...c5 and 6...♘bd7. Fortunately, there is an excellent solution in **6...b6!**. Theoretically Black is in good shape, and I believe my chosen move also offers more prospects for Black to play for a win than the other main lines mentioned above.

3) The Exchange Variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5



The Exchange Variation is a serious option and a popular recommendation in White repertoire books. In recent years, however, one particular plan has emerged as an excellent solution for Black. The main line continues **5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7** when any of **8.♕c2**, **8.♘f3** or **8.♘ge2** will be met by **8...h6**, intending **9.♗h4 ♘h5!**. Exchanging

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the dark-squared bishops eases Black's task, as we will see.

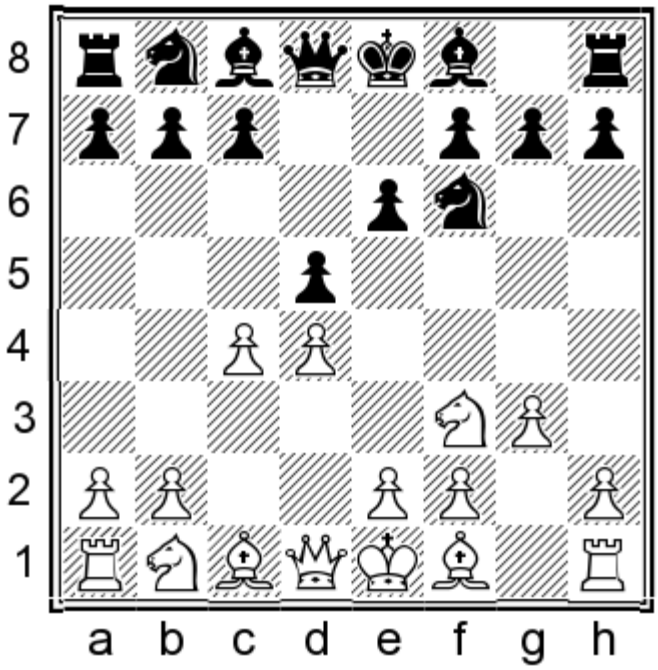
4) QGD Sidelines

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7

We conclude our coverage of the QGD by checking some sidelines such as **5.♕c2**, **5.g3**, and **e2-e3** set-ups with the b1-knight going to either c3 or d2.

5) The Catalan

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3



The Catalan is another major option for White. My choice against it is **4...dxc4 5.♗g2 a6** when, depending on circumstances, Black may or may not hang on to his extra pawn with ...b5. The Catalan is a big topic and my coverage spans an introduction plus two good-sized theoretical chapters, but I am satisfied that the proposed repertoire presents a stiff challenge to White.

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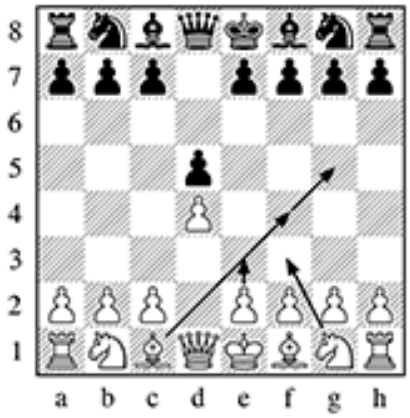
6) d-Pawn Openings



We end our 1.d4 d5 coverage by covering a variety of alternatives to 2.c4, from the wild Blackmar-Diemer Gambit to the currently trendy London System, and everything in between.

7) Bonus Chapters

Having dealt with 1.e4 in my previous book and 1.d4 in this one, I decided to go the extra mile and offer the reader some advice about other openings, specifically **1.c4** and **1.♘f3**. Victor Mikhalevski covered this topic superbly in his 2016 book *Grandmaster Repertoire 19 – Beating Minor Openings*, but I (along with the Quality Chess team) decided it would be of value to offer some repertoire advice tailored for QGD players. We will therefore meet **1.c4** with **1...e6** followed by **2...d5**, and **1.♘f3** with **1...d5** followed by ...e6 in the near future. For a complete repertoire you will have to do your own research, but I have laid out some suggestions and analysis of White's main options to give you a useful head start.

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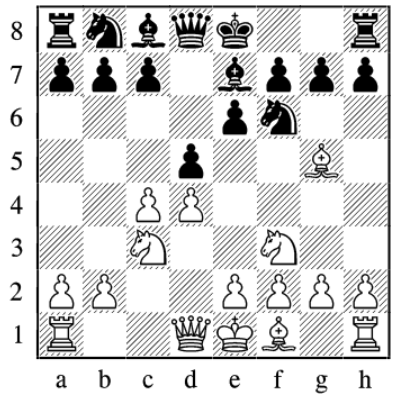
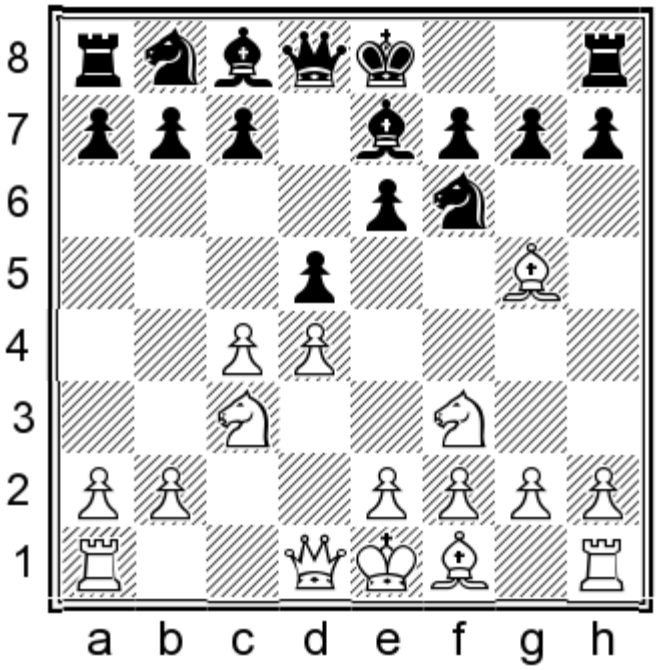
Chapter 1a



♗g5 QGD Introduction

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5



This set-up has a rich heritage, having been played extensively (often from both sides of the board) by numerous world champions and other leading players over the past century. For most of that period, the ♗g5 set-up has been viewed as White's best attempt to obtain an advantage against the QGD, but recent developments have called that assessment into question.

A Decline in Popularity

In recent decades, White discovered new ways to cause problems with systems such as the ♗f4 QGD and the Catalan – both of which will be discussed later, of course. Another factor which contributed to the shift towards other systems was the rise of the Lasker Defence against the ♗g5 set-up. I will not actually be recommending the Lasker in this book,

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but I will touch on it briefly as it's worth knowing some background information about different set-ups. The following game was extremely influential in cementing the Lasker's status as a serious obstacle for White to overcome.

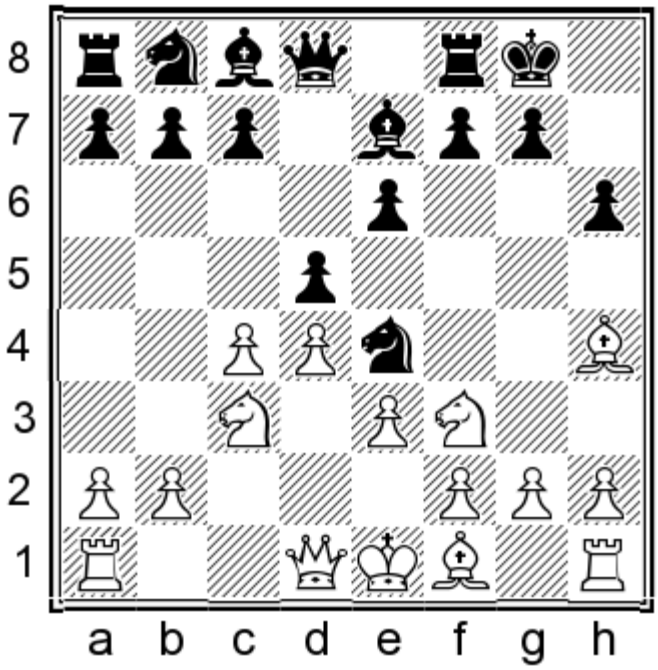
GAME 1

Veselin Topalov – Viswanathan Anand

Sofia (12) 2010

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 0-0 7.e3 ♘e4

7...b6!? is the so-called Tartakower-Makogonov-Bondarevsky Variation, which I will, from now on, refer to simply as the Tartakower. It's another highly respectable system which ♗g5 players have to worry about. I will not be recommending it in this book, although there is one particular variation where I recommend transposing to a good version of it; see the theoretical coverage of 8.♗d3, beginning on page 32.



8.♗xe7 ♕xe7 9.♖c1 c6 10.♗e2 ♘xc3 11.♖xc3 dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♘d7

In the Lasker, Black strives for piece exchanges and leaves White with essentially two options. The first is to settle for a dry position, where the first player is slightly more comfortable but most modern GMs can draw with Black in their sleep. The second is to take some risks and give Black his fair share of chances. Topalov naturally chose the second option in this game and got famously punished.

13.0-0 b6 14.♗d3 c5 15.♗e4 ♖b8 16.♕c2 ♘f6 17.dxc5 ♘xe4 18.♕xe4 bxc5 19.♕c2?!

The subsequent attempt to improve White's play with 19.b3 ♗b7 20.♕f4 has been neutralized by the accurate 20...♗xf3! 21.♕xf3 ♖fd8 22.♖fc1 ♖d2, after which there are only draws in my database.

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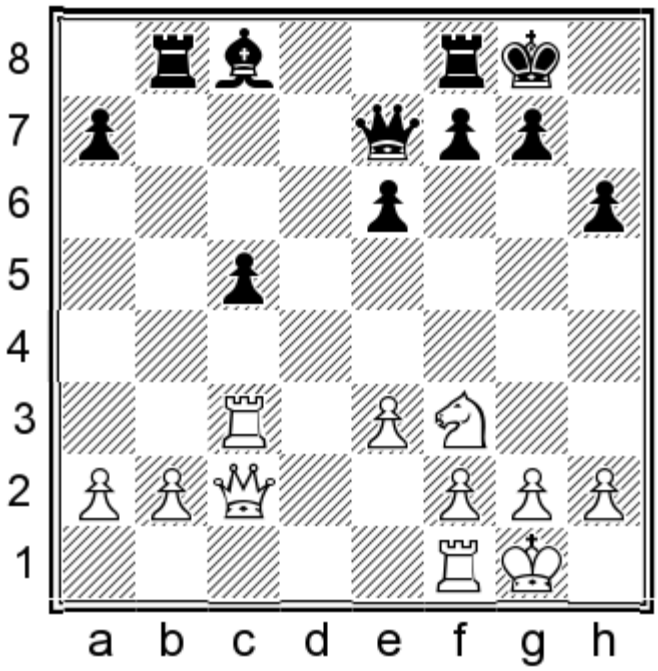

19...♗b7 20.♘d2 ♖fd8

Black has plenty of dynamic counterplay for his broken structure. (By the way, this structure occurs in some parts of our repertoire, especially the ♗f4 QGD; see *The "2QPI Structure"* on page 67 for more information about it.) Anand went on to win the game – and with it, the World Championship.

...0–1

Today the Lasker Defence is still considered a bulletproof way to play for Black, but it is not the only reason for the decline of the ♗g5 set-up at the top level. In just the last three years or so, another hero of the same generation, Vladimir Kramnik, has popularized another method for Black, which I have chosen to recommend in this book.

Kramnik's Modern Classical

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0

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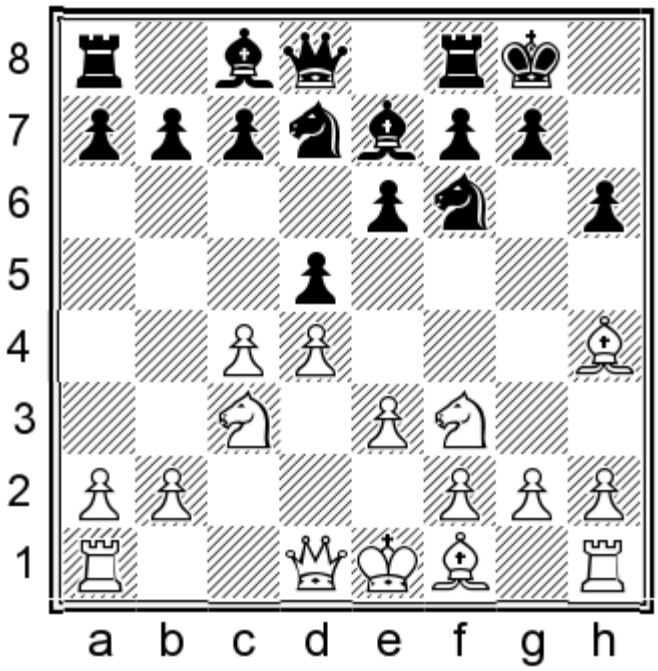

Against any of the natural developing moves 8.♗d3, 8.♕c2 or 8.♖c1, Black intends to strike at the centre with 8...c5!. (In the theoretical section I will also provide some brief information about 8...c6!?, but I will focus on my primary recommendation for now.)

The ...c5 plan is nothing new in itself. For instance, in the position after 8.♕c2, Capablanca played 8...c5 against Stahlberg in Moscow 1935, and earlier examples exist on the database. However, what Kramnik was able to do rather brilliantly was to see the potential in an old, almost forgotten system of defence, before analysing it extensively with modern engines in order to discover the most accurate lines for Black. In the past three years, Kramnik has not only demonstrated the theoretical soundness of Black's set-up, but also outplayed many strong opponents, showing that Black has real prospects to play for the full point if he understands the position better than White.

To summarize, Kramnik's plan seems just as theoretically sound as Lasker's Defence, but it has the added benefit that Black keeps his position more fluid and avoids excessive exchanges. Now that you know what we are aiming for in the first seven or eight moves, I will discuss some of the most important positional themes that may occur, before presenting a theoretical repertoire in the next chapter.

Developing the c8-Bishop

The light-squared bishop is well known as Black's problem piece in the QGD, but there are many possible ways of developing it. It's important to know them all, as different methods will apply in different situations.

Bishop to e8 or to the c8-h3 diagonal

Let's see how the hero of Black's cause has dealt with the problem bishop.

GAME 2

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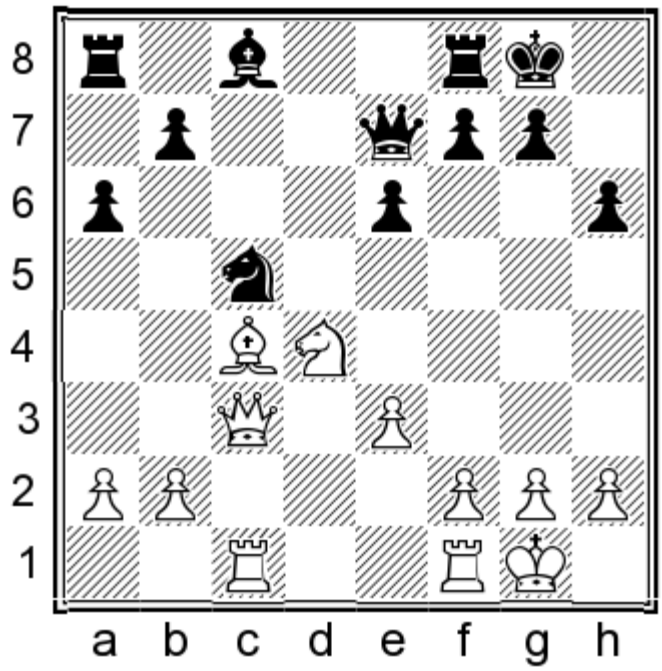
Wesley So – Vladimir Kramnik

Leuven (rapid) 2016

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♘f3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♕c2

Here is another Kramnik game, which will be presented in more detail on page 57: 8.♖c1 c5 9.dxc5 dxc4 10.♗xc4 ♘xc5 11.0-0 a6 12.♘d4 ♘fe4 13.♗xe7 ♕xe7 14.♕c2 ♘xc3 15.♕xc3



15...♘a4! 16.♕c2 ♗d7 In Matlakov – Kramnik, Doha 2015, the bishop stayed on d7 until move 26, at which point it moved to c6 and was perfectly placed.

8...c5 9.♖d1 ♕a5 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♗xe7 ♘xe7 12.♗e2 ♘f6

12...♘d5! is slightly more accurate; for more about this, see Game 14, starting on page 45.

13.0-0 cxd4 14.♖xd4 ♘c6

14...e5! 15.♕a4 ♕c7 16.♖d2 ♗e6 shows another possible way of developing the bishop.

15.♖d2 ♗d7 16.♖fd1 ♖fd8

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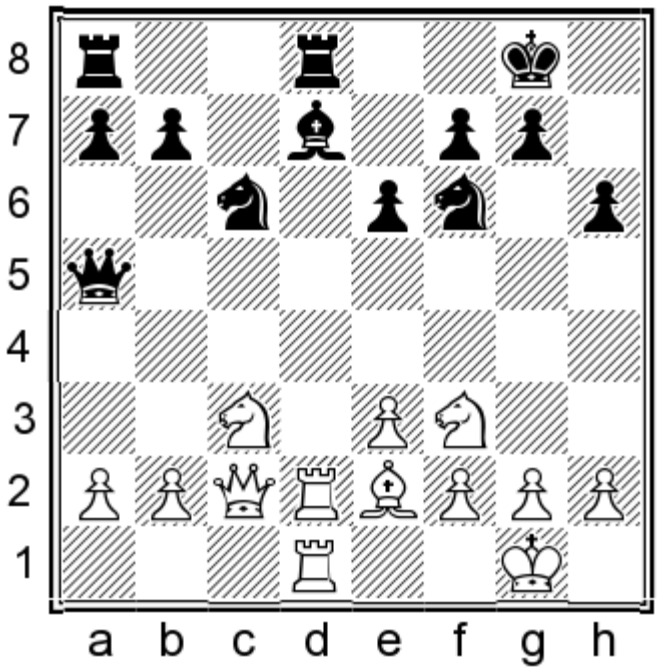
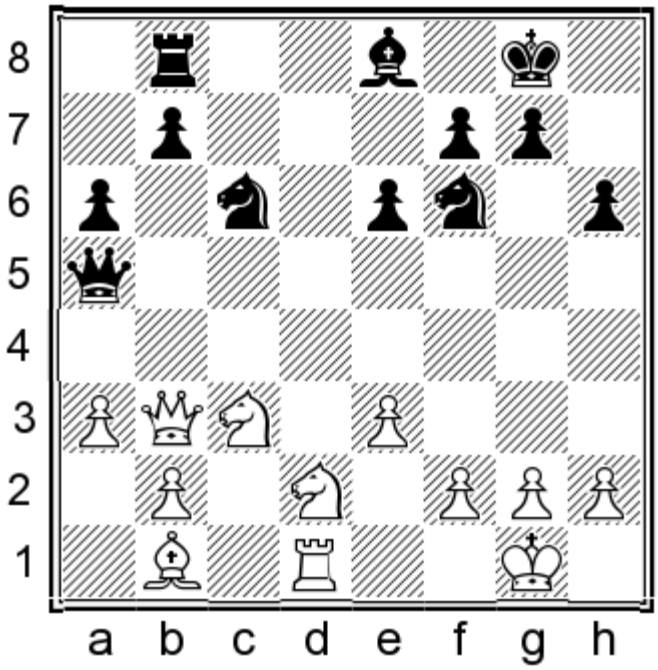


17.♕b3 ♖ab8 18.a3 a6 19.♗d3 ♗e8

Despite the minor improvements mentioned above, this game is useful for showing that the e8-square can make a good home for the bishop. From here, the bishop bolsters the f7-pawn, which could be important if White manages to post a knight on e5. Meanwhile the bishop avoids obstructing the rooks and of course it can always come to a more active square later. Black has equalized comfortably, but it is worth following the game for a few more moves to see how Kramnik creates problems for his opponent.

20.♗b1 ♖xd2 21.♘xd2

21.♖xd2 may also have been met by 21...♘e5!?.



21...♘e5!

If Black is allowed to play ...♗c6 and ...♘eg4, he will start creating unpleasant threats, which explains White's next

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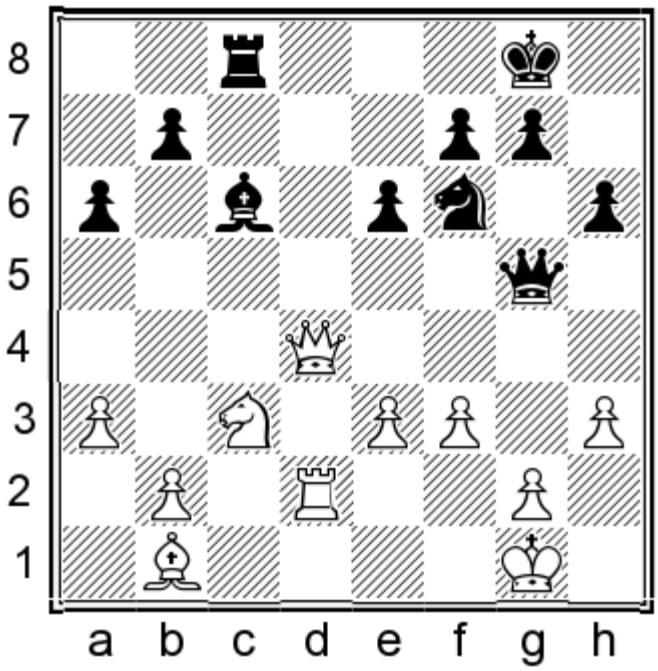
move.

22.♘c4 ♘xc4 23.♕xc4 ♗c6

The bishop is perfectly placed here.

24.♕d4 ♖c8 25.h3 ♕h5 26.♖d2 ♕g5 27.f3

Kramnik succeeds in provoking a weakening of his opponent's kingside. Note that White is unable to create similar threats with his own light-squared bishop.



27...e5!

Obviously Black must avoid 27...♗xf3?? 28.♕d8†.

28.♕d3 e4 29.fxe4 ♖e8

White was under some pressure, although So defended well and held the draw.

Bishop to b7

There are several variations in which the bishop finds a good home on b7. Here is a simple example of a ...b6 fianchetto.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♘bd7 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 ♗e7 7.e3 0-0 8.♖c1 c5 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗xe7 ♘xe7 11.♗e2

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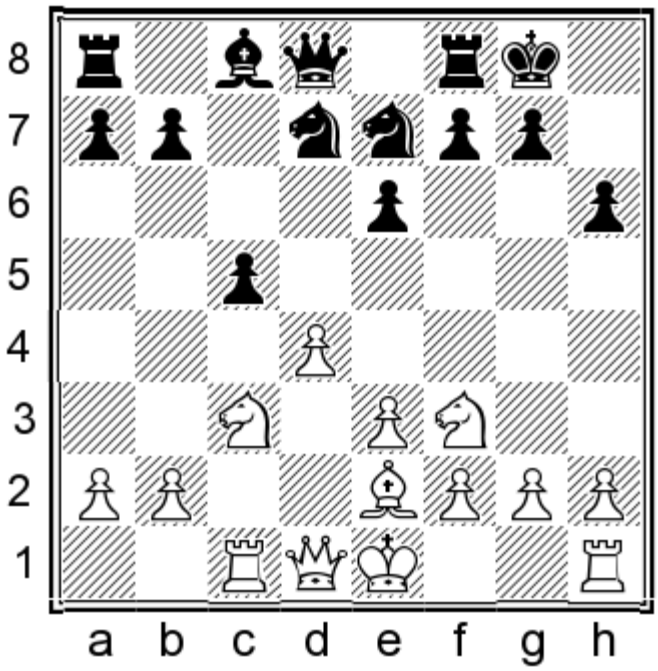

11...b6! 12.0-0

12.dxc5 is slightly more challenging but Black is still fine. Further details can be found in the theoretical coverage of 9.cxd5, on page 56.

12...♗b7

Black was doing well in Salem – Kramnik, Doha 2014.

Meran Style with ...b5

Let me introduce this theme by showing you the relevant position from the Meran Semi-Slav, which can be considered a sister opening of the QGD.

GAME 3

Ernst Grünfeld – Akiba Rubinstein

Merano 1924

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 c6 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.e3 ♘bd7 6.♗d3

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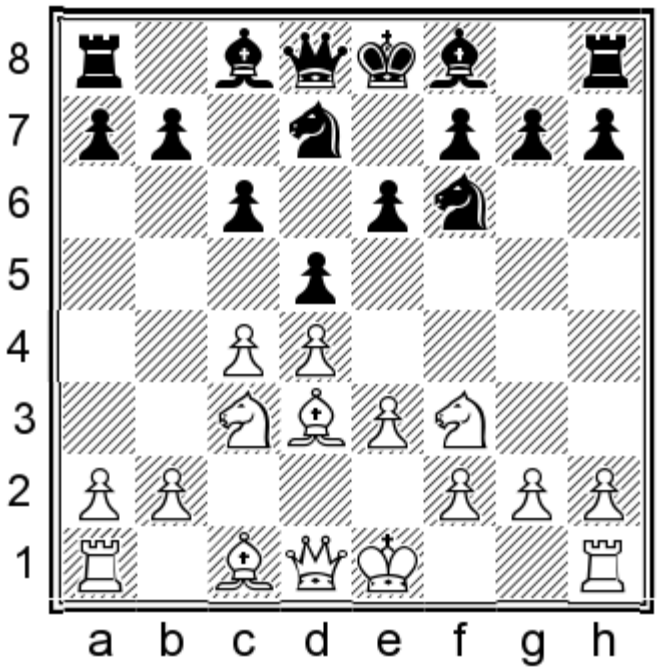

6...dxc4! 7.♗xc4 b5! 8.♗d3 a6 9.0-0 c5 10.a4 b4 11.♘e4 ♗b7

Black went on to win. Grünfeld must have been impressed, as he followed the exact same path with Black a couple of rounds later in the same tournament, defeating Rudolf Spielmann.

Those games from the Merano tournament explain where the opening gets its name from, but Rubinstein was by no means the first player to come up with that plan. Among other examples, Ossip Bernstein played the same way against Capablanca in Moscow 1914, and the less-well-known Austrian player Julius Perlis played it against Schlechter in Ostend 1906. The earliest example which I was able to track down is the following game, where the same plan was used in a World Championship match (albeit in the QGD rather than the Semi-Slav).

GAME 4

Wilhelm Steinitz – Emanuel Lasker

Moscow (17) 1897

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3 0-0 6.♕b3 ♘bd7 7.♘f3 c6 8.♗d3

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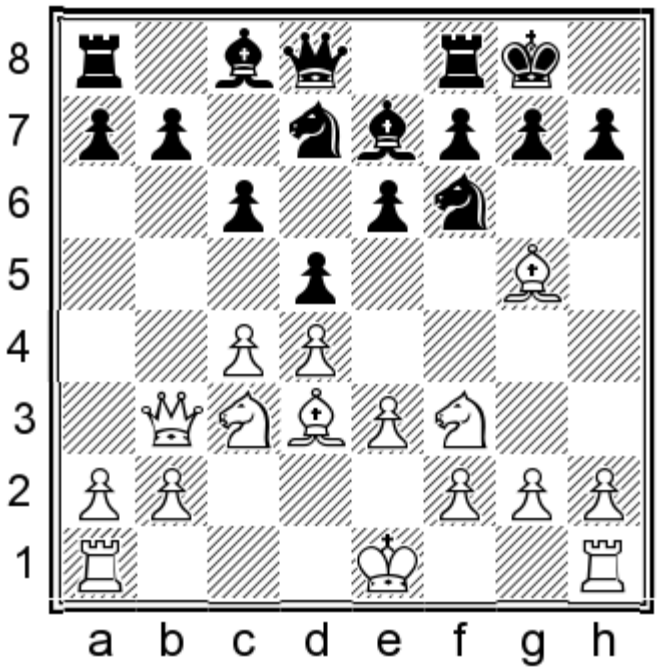

8...dxc4 9.♗xc4 b5 10.♗e2 a6 11.a4 b4 12.♘b1 c5 13.♘bd2 ♗b7

Black went on to win.

Let me show you another historically significant example of the same plan.

GAME 5

Jose Raul Capablanca – Alexander Alekhine

Buenos Aires (21) 1927

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♘bd7 5.e3 ♗e7 6.♘f3 0-0 7.♖c1 a6 8.a3 h6 9.♗h4

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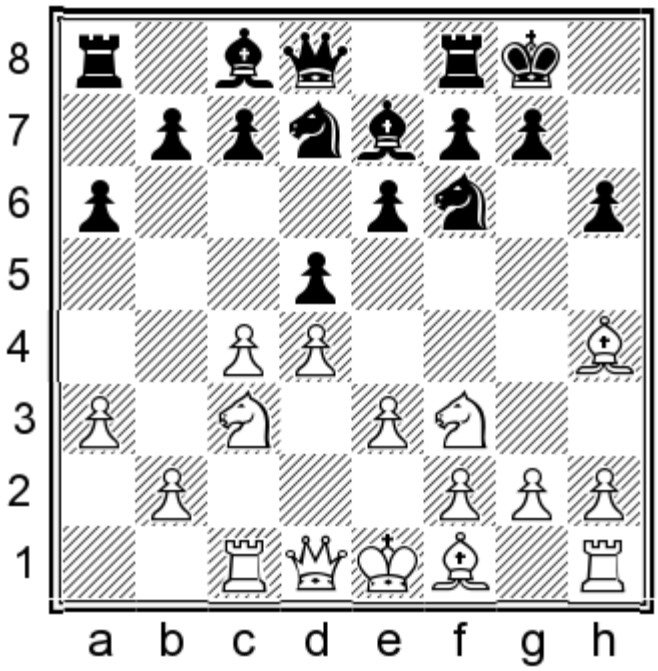
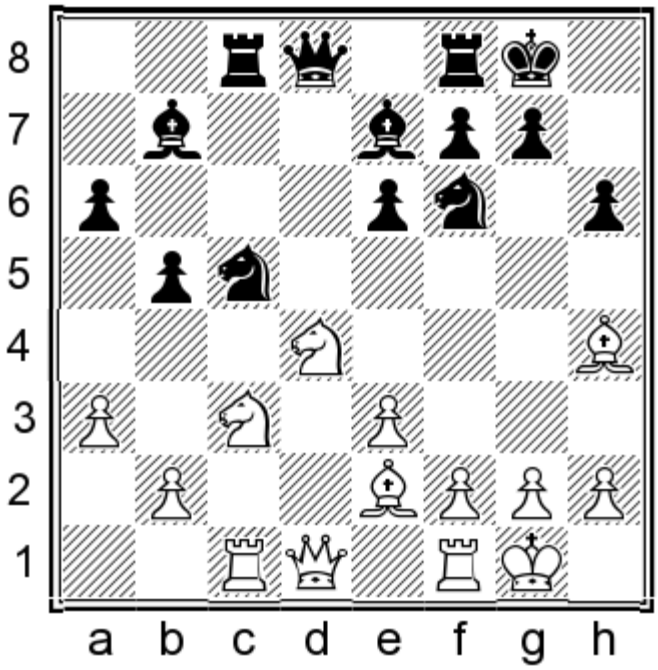


9...dxc4 10.♗xc4 b5 11.♗e2 ♗b7 12.0-0 c5

It is essential for QGD players to be able to handle such positions, and analysing the games of the great players of the past is a good way to start.

13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.♘d4 ♖c8



15.b4 ♘cd7 16.♗g3 ♘b6

Black has a slight advantage due to the outpost on c4. Alekhine went on to outplay his opponent and eventually forced resignation by using a knight on c4 to capture a pawn on e3.

Aronian's Prophylaxis

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In 2016, I noticed that Aronian used a clever idea in Game 13 of his Chess.com blitz match against Grischuk. I will show it to you now, as it is applicable in some other variations and is worth knowing.

GAME 6

Alexander Grischuk – Levon Aronian

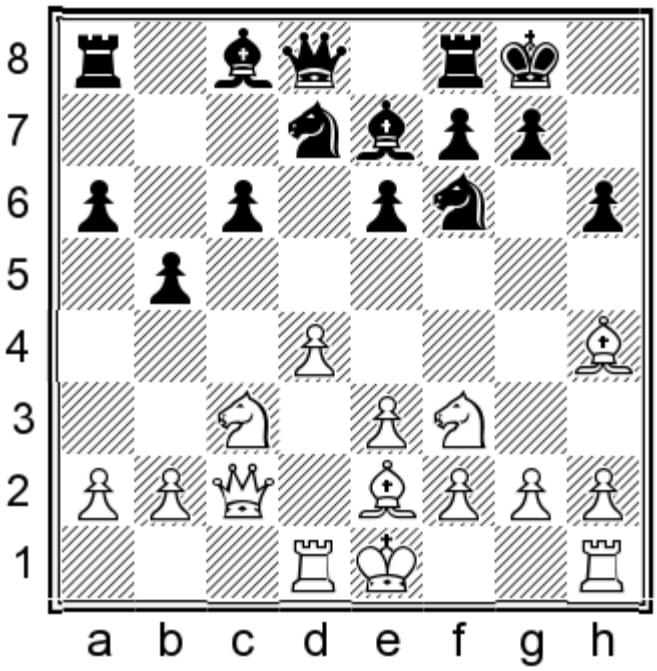
Internet (blitz) 2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♘bd7 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 ♗e7 7.e3 0-0 8.♕c2 c6!?

8...c5! is my main recommendation but, on page 42, I will present the text move as an interesting, fighting alternative.

9.♖d1 a6 10.♗e2 dxc4 11.♗xc4 b5 12.♗e2

Black would like to free his game with ...c5, but he has to be careful with the rook on the d-file opposite his queen. Aronian finds a clever solution to the problem.



12...♕e8!

This is an unusual square for the queen in the QGD, but it meets the requirements of the position. The reason for putting the queen on e8 rather than, say, b6, is that it defends the e7-bishop, taking the sting out of ideas like e3-e4-e5, ♘e5 or ♘e4.

13.0-0 c5 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♘xb5 axb5 17.♕xc5

Now 17...♖xa2! would have been absolutely fine for Black. In the game Aronian gave up a pawn unnecessarily, but eventually managed to win after a long struggle.

One of the many positive features of the QGD is that it can lead to several classical pawn structures. Obviously it requires some effort to learn how to handle these structures; but the great thing is that as your understanding of these structures improves, you will be able to apply the lessons you have learned to many other openings where the same structures occur. One obvious example of a famous pawn formation is the Carlsbad structure, which will be covered under the Exchange Variation. In the case of the ♗g5 variation, the IQP is a recurring theme, especially in Kramnik's Modern Classical where Black plays an early ...c5.

Chess literature contains a wealth of information about the IQP structure. To take one example, Mauricio Flores Rios discusses it in the very first chapter of *Chess Structures – A Grandmaster Guide*. In this section I will not attempt to lay out everything there is to know about the IQP structure, but will instead focus on a few of the themes which I consider most relevant to the readers of this book. When it comes to our repertoire, there are certain variations where I recommend playing with an IQP, but I generally prefer to *avoid* lines where Black plays against an IQP, for reasons that will be explained.

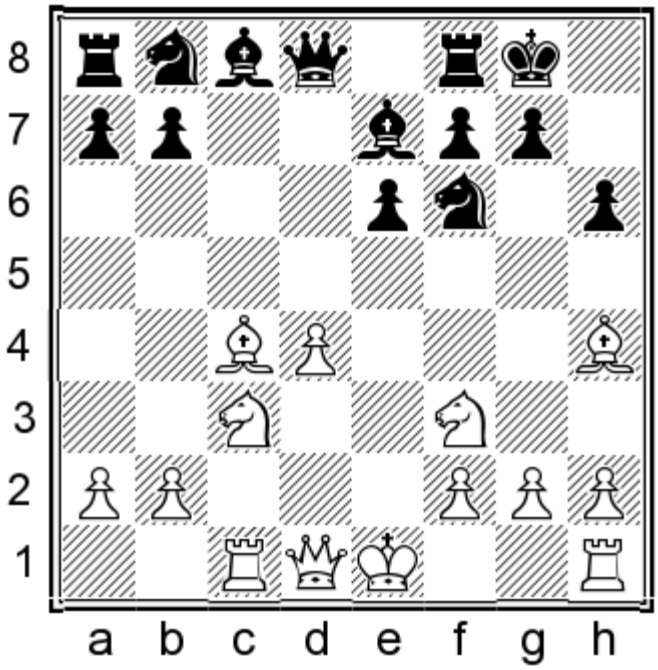
GAME 7

Viktor Korchnoi – Anatoly Karpov

Merano (9) 1981

1.c4 e6 2.♘c3 d5 3.d4 ♗e7 4.♘f3 ♘f6 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 0-0 7.♖c1 dxc4 8.e3 c5 9.♗xc4 cxd4 10.exd4

This position does not feature in my recommended repertoire, but I have chosen the game to illustrate the ideal placing of Black's queen's knight.



10...♘c6!

It is common knowledge that, in order to fight successfully against the IQP, Black should develop his knight to c6, rather than d7 and b6. The advantages of the c6-square are as follows:

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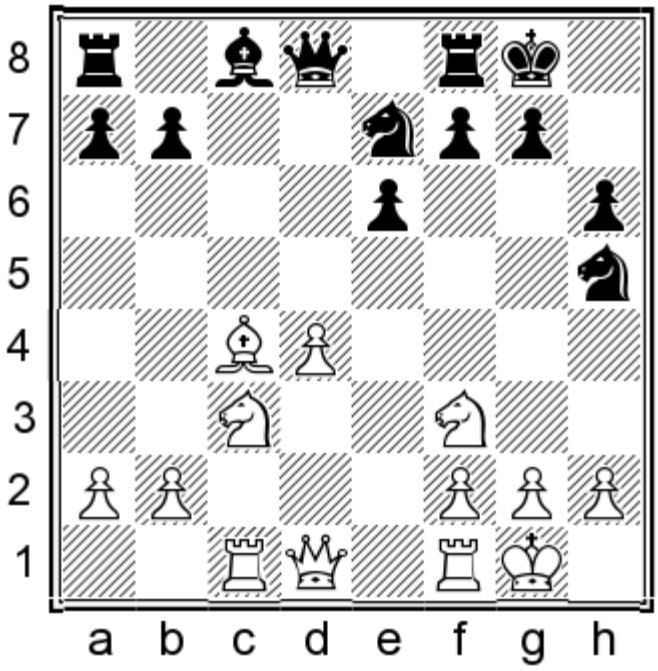
a) Black puts pressure on the d4-pawn, making it harder for White to reach his optimal set-up with a queen on e2 and a rook on d1.
b) When the black knight goes to d7 and b6, White can easily plonk a knight on the ideal e5-outpost. With the knight on c6, it is harder for White to do so – partly because the knight can be exchanged at any time, and also because it may be needed on f3 to defend the d4-pawn.
c) The knight on c6 is still not far away from the blockading d5-square. It can get there via b4 (especially if it gains a tempo against the enemy bishop or queen), or via e7, which is what soon occurred in the present game.

11.0-0 ♘h5! 12.♗xe7 ♘xe7

Another well-known rule of thumb is that minor-piece exchanges tend to favour the side playing against the IQP. The fact that Black is trading his 'good' bishop hardly matters, unless his dark squares are already compromised in some way.



13.♗b3 ♘f6 14.♘e5 ♗d7 15.♕e2 ♖c8

Karpov went on to win an instructive game.

So why am I making such a big deal out of the development of the knight from b8? Let me remind you of the starting moves of our repertoire:

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7

I prefer to develop the knight here before playing ...h6, as ♗xf6 makes no sense when the d7-knight can recapture.

6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0

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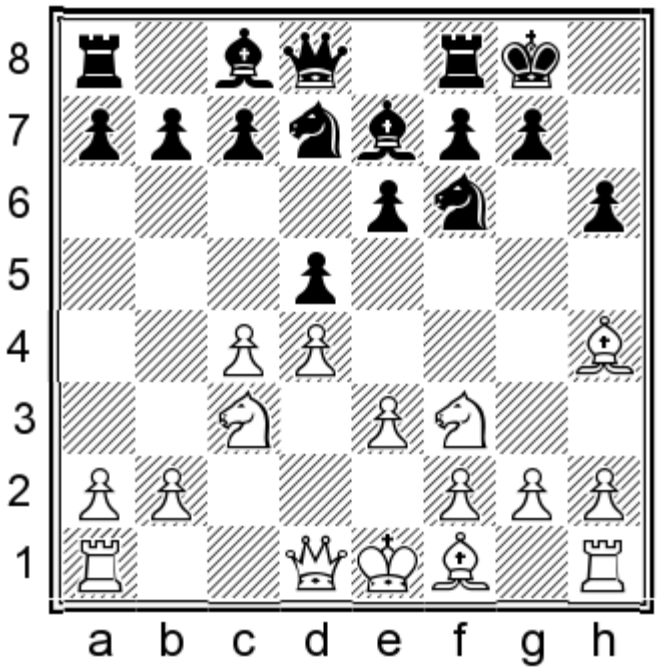

This is the position we will aim for before carrying out the Kramnik plan of ...c5. As you can see, the knight is already on d7, making it impossible for Black to develop it as Karpov did in the example above. Therefore, if you carry out the ...c5 break from the above position and White maintains the tension, my advice is to avoid swapping down to a position where White has the IQP.

To reinforce this point, let me show you a couple of famous examples where Black got into trouble after developing the knight to d7 and b6. I will also mention a few improvements for Black along the way; even though we should strive to avoid these positions altogether, it is worth knowing a few rules of thumb, just in case we forget our theory and unwittingly end up in them.

GAME 8

Gideon Stahlberg – Jose Raul Capablanca

Moscow 1935

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 0-0 6.e3 ♘bd7 7.♕c2 h6 8.♗h4 c5 9.♖d1 ♕a5 10.♗d3 cxd4 11.exd4 dxc4 12.♗xc4 ♘b6 13.♗b3 ♗d7 14.0-0 ♗c6 15.♘e5 ♗d5?!

Trading the light-squared bishop for the knight on c3 is a strategic error. The bishop might be useful for defending weak spots such as f7 and e6, and the c3-knight could have been put under pressure from a knight on d5, especially with the queen already on a5, as in the present game. Note that this plan of harassing the c3-knight works especially well when the white bishop has gone to h4, where it is no longer able to defend the queenside.

16.♘xd5 ♘bxd5 17.♕e2 ♖ad8

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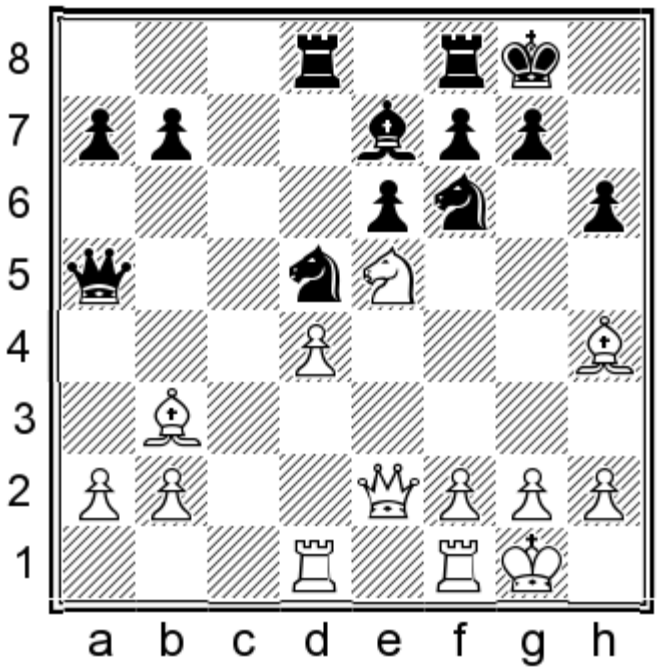

18.f4! ♘e8?

A mistake, but Black was in trouble anyway.

19.♗xe7 ♘xe7 20.f5! ♘xf5 21.♘xf7!

White has a winning position but somehow Black managed to escape with a draw. And just one year later...

GAME 9

Mikhail Botvinnik – Milan Vidmar

Nottingham 1936

1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.e3 ♘bd7 7.♗d3 c5 8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4 dxc4 10.♗xc4

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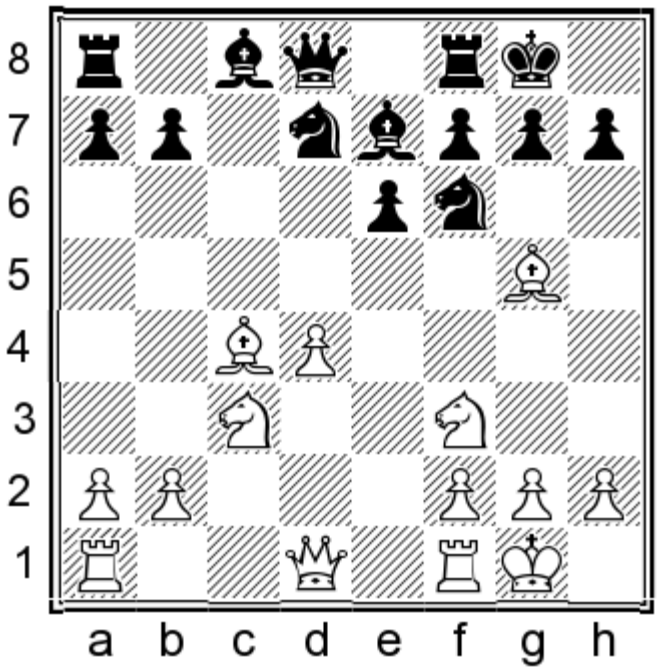

10...♘b6

It would have been useful to throw in 10...a6, intending to complete development with ...b5 and ...♗b7. White would almost certainly reply with 11.a4, but the inclusion of these pawn moves helps Black slightly. The b4-outpost may prove useful, and the a4-pawn may become vulnerable after some pieces are exchanged on the queenside.

11.♗b3 ♗d7 12.♕d3 ♘bd5

Black should have preferred 12...♘fd5!, provoking favourable exchanges, as in the Korchnoi – Karpov game.

13.♘e5 ♗c6 14.♖ad1 ♘b4 15.♕h3 ♗d5?!

And once again, this exchange should have been avoided.

16.♘xd5 ♘bxd5

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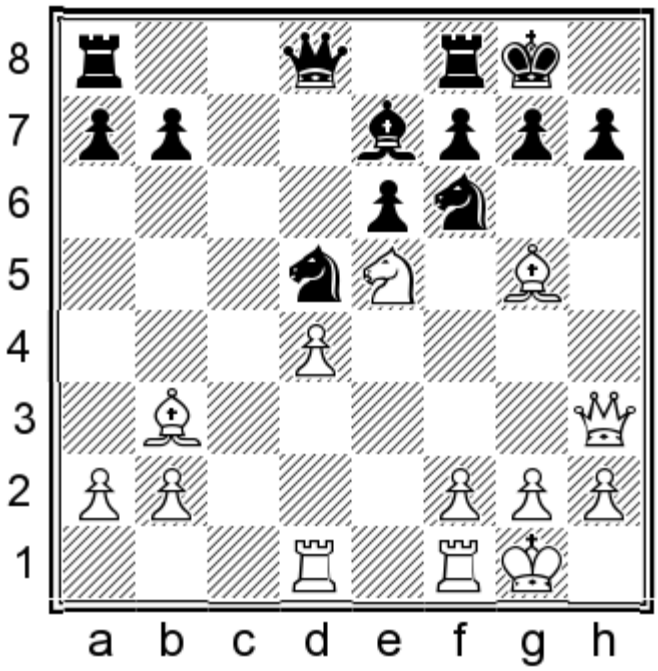

17.f4!

Botvinnik carries out exactly the same attacking plan as Stahlberg, and soon destroys his opponent's defences.

17...♖c8 18.f5 exf5 19.♖xf5 ♕d6 20.♘xf7! ♖xf7 21.♗xf6 ♗xf6 22.♖xd5 ♕c6 23.♖d6 ♕e8 24.♖d7

1–0

These games have been included partly to show the dangers of playing against an IQP with the b8-knight committed to d7, but also to show how, even if you do find yourself in such a position, you can avoid the worst by taking the following steps:

a) Throw in ...a6 at an early stage to provoke a2-a4.
b) When the white bishop has gone to g5, look for an opportunity to play ...♘fd5 (or possibly ...♘h5) to exchange the dark-squared bishops.
c) Do not spend time manoeuvring the valuable light-squared bishop to d5, where it can be traded for the knight on c3.

Avoiding the IQP

Out of all the variations covered in the theory section, the following is the one where the above advice about avoiding an unfavourable IQP position really comes into play.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♗d3

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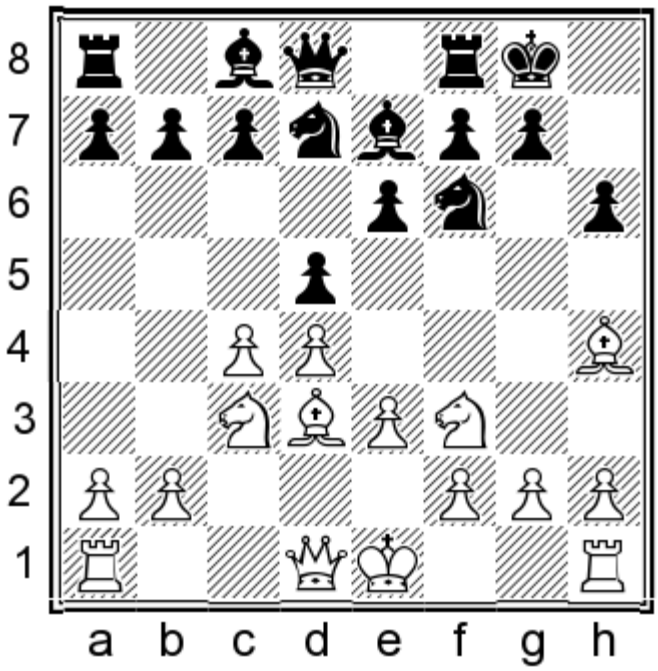

8...c5!

Rather than the more popular 8...dxc4, which usually leads to an IQP structure after a subsequent ...c5 and ...cxd4.

9.0-0 b6!

Once again, Black avoids unnecessary exchanges in the centre. Full details can be found in the analysis of 8.♗d3, beginning on page 32.

Playing with the IQP

Let me show you a typical example of the kind of IQP position Black may aim for when playing Kramnik's ...c5 plan.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♕c2 c5! 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘xd5 exd5 12.dxc5 ♘xc5

This is not the kind of position where the side with the IQP plays for a kingside attack. Rather, Black will swiftly finish developing and fight for control over the d4-square.

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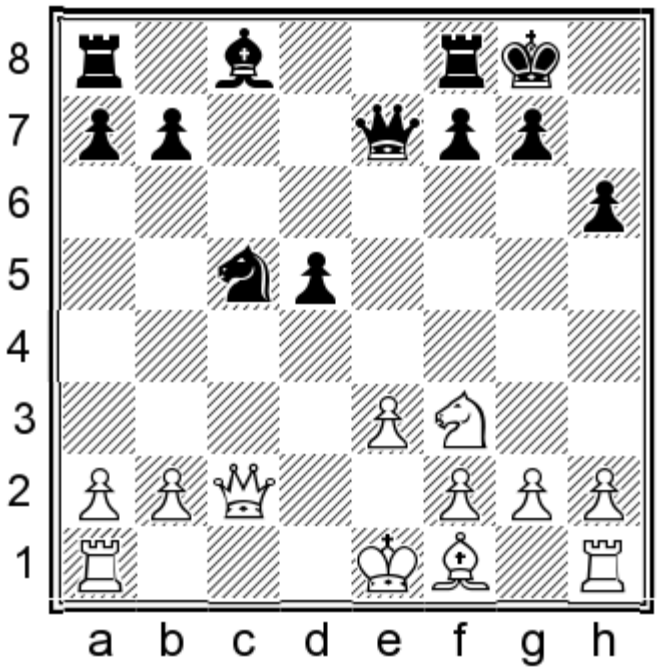

13.♗e2 ♗g4

Black will centralize his rooks and drop his knight back to e6, and the ...d5-d4 break will not be far away. Kramnik has played this position twice with Black, against Nakamura and Giri, and was never in trouble; on the contrary, he was able to obtain slight pressure and force his opponents to play carefully to secure their respective half points. The Giri game is analysed fully in Game 15, beginning on page 48.

Defending with an IQP

Not every game will go perfectly, and every now and again you may have to sit tight and defend a marginally worse IQP position. Here are two games to illustrate how Black should handle that scenario.

GAME 10

Evgeny Tomashevsky – Viswanathan Anand

Moscow 2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♘bd7 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 ♗e7 7.♕c2 c5 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.dxc5 ♘xc5 12.e3 0-0 13.♗e2 ♗g4 14.0-0 ♖ac8 15.♖ac1 ♕f6 16.♕c3 ♕xc3 17.♖xc3 ♘e4 18.♖cc1 ♖fd8 19.♖fd1 ♔f8 20.♔f1 ♔e7 21.♘d4

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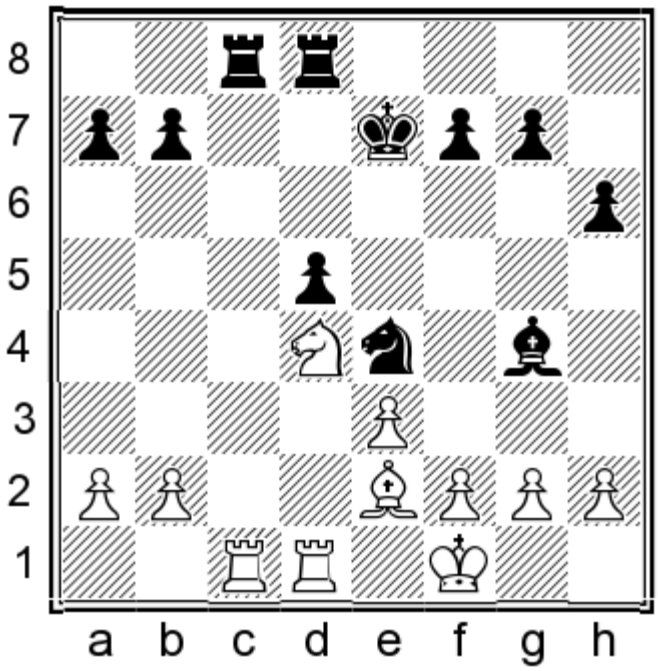
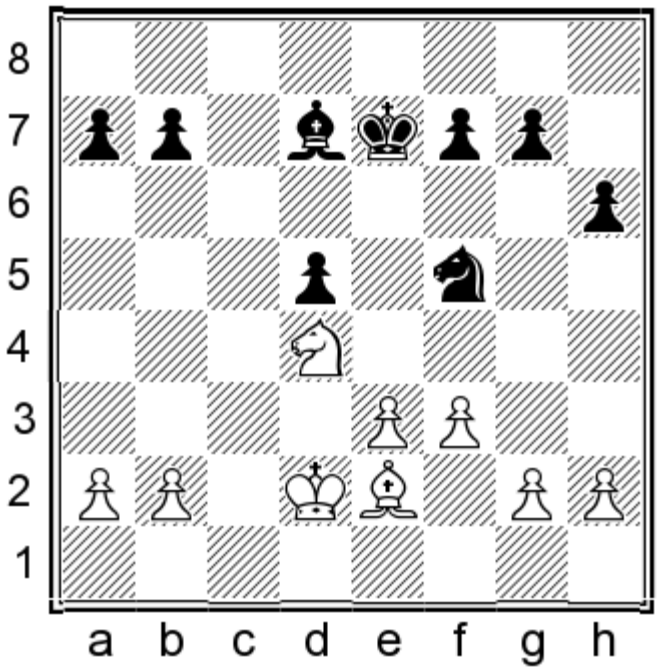


I imagine that a lot of club players would be worried by the prospect of having to defend Black's position here, but the drawing technique is actually pretty straightforward. Anand starts by exchanging rooks.

21...♖xc1 22.♖xc1 ♖c8 23.♖xc8 ♗xc8 24.♔e1 ♗d7 25.f3

If White wants to make any kind of progress he has to oust the knight from e4, but this gives Anand the chance to make the kind of exchange he wants.

25...♘d6 26.♔d2 ♘f5!



This is the kind of position where engines are of limited use; in fact, not a single one of mine suggests this move as its top choice. This is where a classical chess education kicks in. The ensuing endgame with the bishops and the IQP is easily holdable for Black, as long as he does not make the mistake of allowing his pawns to be fixed on light squares.

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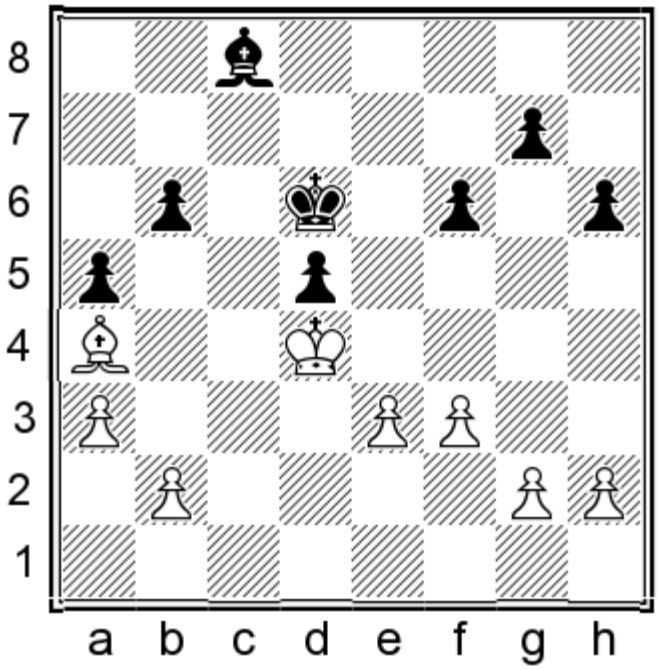
27.♘xf5† ♗xf5 28.♔c3

After I studied this endgame, I concluded that 28.b4!? ♔d6 29.♔c3 may be a bit more challenging. However, after analysing it a little I was satisfied that 29...b6 leaves Black with no real problems, just like in the game.

28...♔d6 29.♔d4 a5! 30.♗b5 b6! 31.♗a4 ♗c8 32.a3 f6!

Anand completes the process of putting as many of his pawns as possible on the dark squares. This leaves White's king with no way of invading and his bishop with no secondary target to attack. For White to have serious winning chances he would need to create a second weakness; but as things stand, Black holds effortlessly.



33.b4 axb4 34.axb4 ♗b7 35.♗b3 ♗c6

From now until the end of the game, Anand simply leaves his pawns where they stand and shuffles his pieces back and forth. Tomashevsky tries to manoeuvre a bit, but soon gives up.

36.♗a2 ♗b7 37.h4 ♗c6 38.♗b3 ♗b7 39.b5 ♗a8 40.♗a2 ♗b7 41.h5 ♗a8 42.♗b1 ♗b7 43.♗f5

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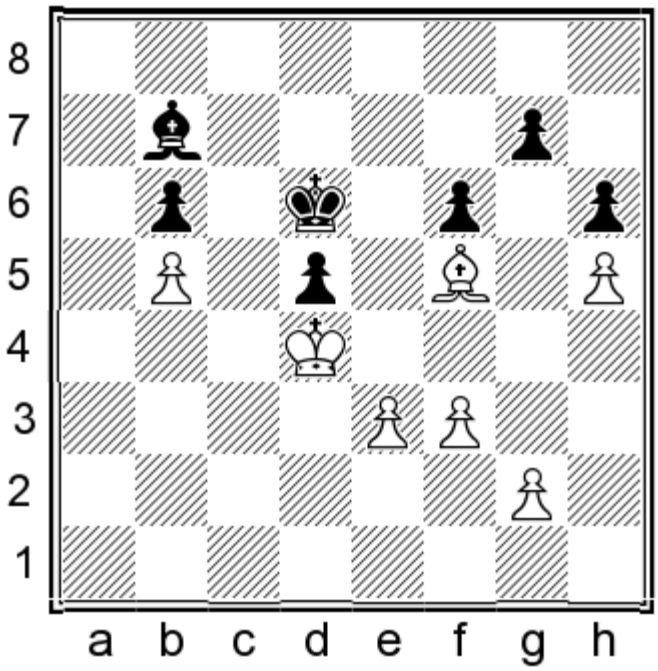

43...♔e7

43...♗a8 would still be drawing, but there is no point in allowing the bishop to be caged in after 44.♗c8. Since White's bishop is no longer exerting pressure against the d5-pawn, Black can quite happily go back and forth with his king.

44.♗h3 ♔d6 45.♗g4 ♔e7 46.f4 ♔d6 47.♗f5 ♔e7 48.g3 ♔d6 49.♗g4

½–½

I remember that the Indian IM Sagar Shah was so impressed by the ease with which Anand defended the seemingly difficult position that he wrote about it on his Facebook page. This generated a lively and interesting discussion, with players like Peter Heine Nielsen and Nigel Short stating that the drawing technique had actually been common knowledge since Shereshevsky's *Endgame Strategy* book was published. The same two players also pointed out that the even worse scenario, with White having a good knight against a bad bishop, is also well known to be a draw with correct defence, since the following game was played and analysed.

GAME 11

Salo Flohr – Jose Raul Capablanca

Moscow 1935

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♘bd7 5.♗g5 ♗e7 6.e3 0-0 7.♕c2 c5 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♗d3 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♕b4† 13.♕d2 ♘c5 14.♗b5 ♕xd2† 15.♔xd2 a6 16.♗d3 ♗e6 17.♖ac1 ♖fc8 18.♖c2 ♘xd3 19.♔xd3 ♖xc2 20.♔xc2 ♔f8 21.♔d2 ♖c8 22.♖c1 ♖xc1 23.♔xc1 ♔e7

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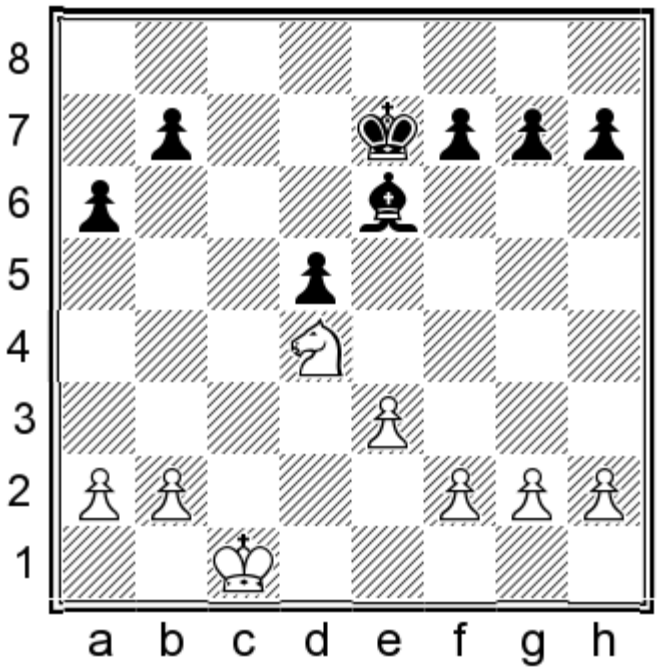
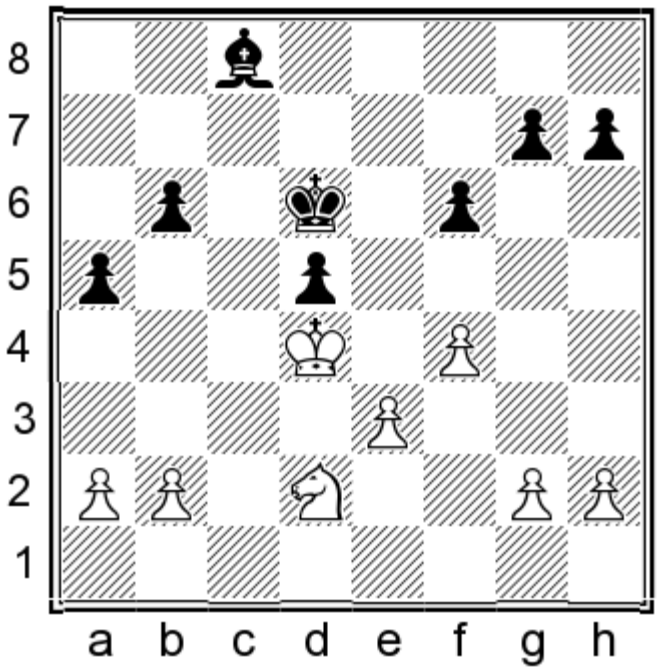


An endgame with the IQP can hardly look much worse than this, but Capablanca shows the way. Once again, Black's main idea is to put the majority of his pawns on the opposite colour to the bishop. This time, this strategy doesn't make the pawns immune from attack by the knight, but it gives the bishop as much freedom as possible and enables Black to control all the entry squares.

24.♔d2 ♔d6 25.♔c3 b6! 26.f4 ♗d7 27.♘f3 f6! 28.♔d4 a5! 29.♘d2 ♗c8



30.♘b1 ♗e6 31.♘c3 ♔c6 32.a3 h6

Black's vulnerable points are b6 and g7, which are not easy targets to attack. The game went on for a while but Flohr was unable to make any headway and the game was eventually drawn.

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...½–½

Obviously we will not be aiming to defend this type of endgame all the time – but it is useful to know that, even when things go wrong for Black, the drawing margin is often wider than one might imagine.

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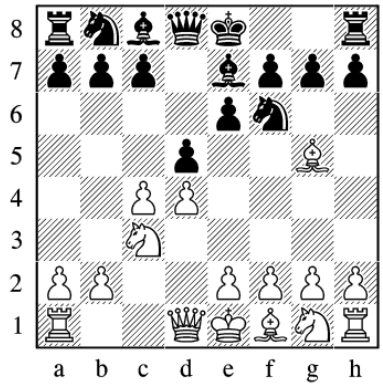
Chapter 1b



♗g5 QGD Theory

Delaying ♘f3 or e2-e3: **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3** (5.♘f3 ♘bd7 6.♖c1 page 29) **5...♘bd7 6.♕c2** (6.♖c1 page 30) page 30

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0

8.cxd5 – A Harmless Sideline page 30

8.♗d3 page 32

8...c5! (8...c6!? page 32; 8...dxc4 page 32) **9.0-0** (9.cxd5 page 34) **9...b6 10.♕e2** (10.♕c2?! page 34; 10.♖c1 page 35; 10.cxd5 page 35) **10...♗b7**

A) 11.♖ad1 page 35

B) 11.♖fd1 Game 12, page 36

C) 11.♗g3! Game 13, page 39

8.♕c2 page 42

The Combative **8...c6!?** page 42

The Professional Variation – **8...c5!** page 44 (9.0-0-0?! page 44; 9.♗e2 page 44; 9.cxd5 page 45)

9.♖d1 Game 14, page 45

9.dxc5 Game 15, page 48

8.♖c1 page 52

Fighting with **8...c6!?** page 52

The Professional Variation – **8...c5!** page 55

A) 9.♗d3 (9.♗e2) page 55

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B) 9.cxd5 page 56

C) 9.dxc5 Game 16, page 57

Armed with the background information of the previous section, we are now ready to delve into the details of the repertoire I am advocating. Let's start by recapping the first seven moves leading to our main target position.

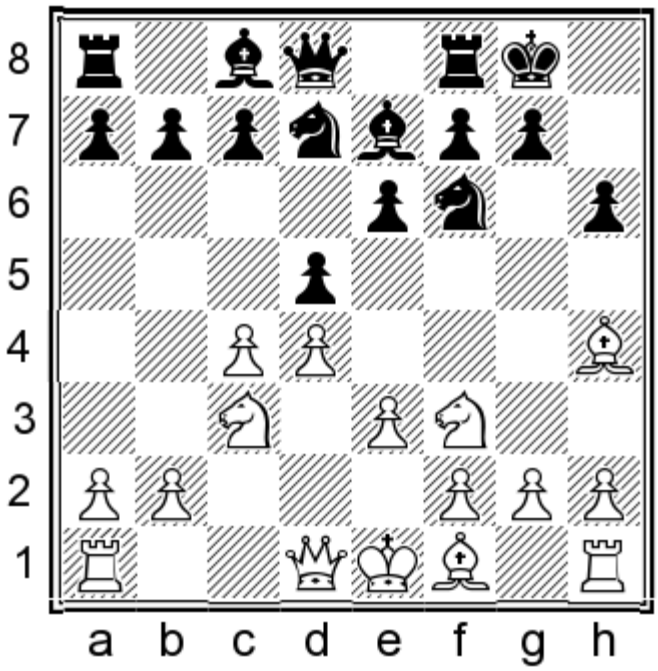
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7

4...♘bd7 is a move order with certain advantages, but the drawback is that it deprives us of some valuable options involving ...♘c6 in some of the ♗f4 lines; see Chapter 2b for full details.

5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4

7.♗f4 is an attempt to trick us into an unfavourable version of the ♗f4 variation, and will therefore be discussed in Chapter 2b.

7...0-0



From the above position, White's most important options are 8.♗d3, 8.♕c2 and 8.♖c1, which will be discussed in separate sections in the chapter. It is worth briefly noting that 8.g4?! is wildly optimistic here, and the simple 8...c5 9.g5 ♘e4∓ gives Black a great position.

Before analysing the aforementioned three main branches, we will spend a few pages dealing with some minor alternatives available to White between moves 4 and 8.

Delaying ♘f3 or e2-e3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.e3

Against defensive schemes like the Tartakower and Lasker variations, it makes some sense for White to try not to develop his knight at f3 so soon; but against our Classical set-up, it makes no real difference.

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5.♘f3

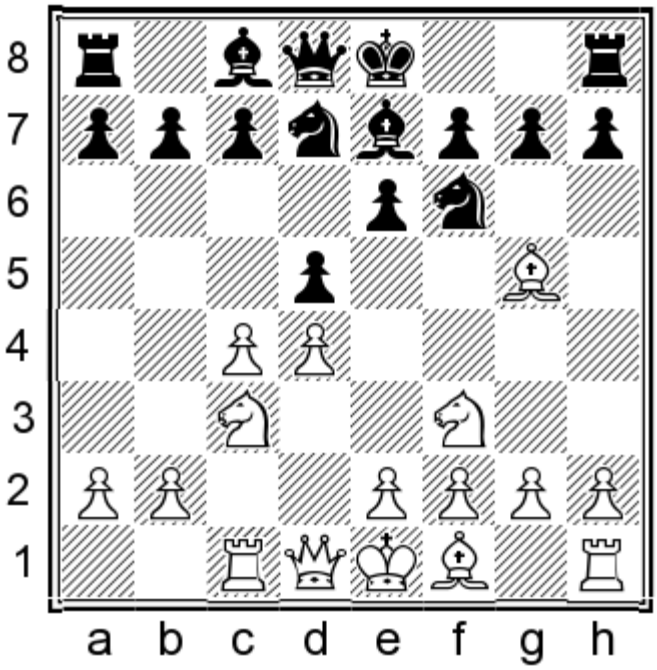
Another idea for White is to develop the knight while delaying e2-e3. This is known as the Uhlmann Variation, and was a favourite weapon of the Korchnoi/Seirawan team in the late eighties. Once again though, with our move order we don't allow White any ideas of much independent value.

5...♘bd7

5...h6 is another move order, but this allows White to take on f6 with interesting play. We want to be ready to recapture on f6 with the knight, which is why we play ...h6 only after ...♘bd7.

6.♖c1

6.e3 is the main line of course.



6...h6 7.♗h4 0-0

Almost every game from this position has continued with 8.e3, transposing to the 8.♖c1 variation as covered later on page 52. It is hard to see a constructive alternative for White: 8.cxd5 exd5 reaches a version of the Exchange Variation (as covered in Chapter 3c) where the rook has gone to c1 prematurely, while most other moves can be met by ...dxc4 followed by the 'Rubinstein plan' of ...a6, ...b5 and ...♗b7.

5...♘bd7 6.♕c2

After 6.♖c1 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 White has nothing better than 8.♘f3, transposing to the main 8.♖c1 variation analysed later. Virtually any other developing move will also be met by 8...c5.

6...h6 7.♗h4

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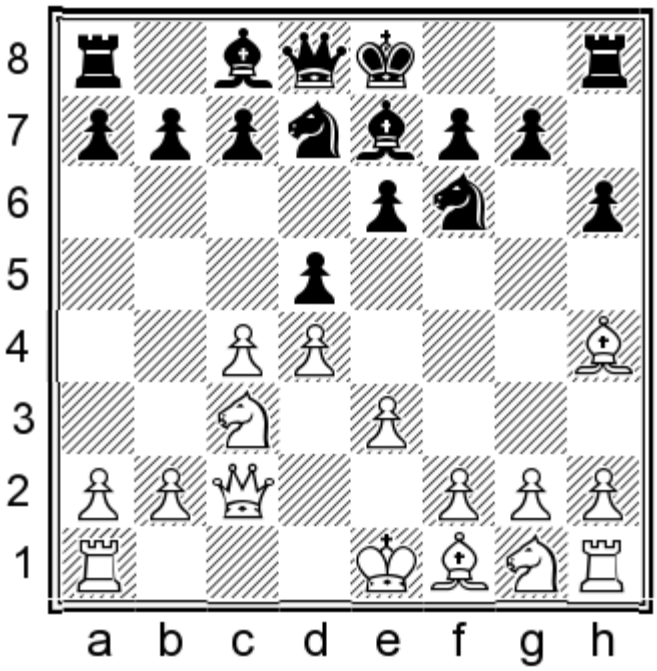

7...c5!

This is just about the only line involving an irregular move order by White, in which Black must take real care over his move order. The point is that 7...0-0 can be met by 8.cxd5, when 8...exd5 9.♗d3 leads to a line of the Exchange Variation which lies outside of our repertoire. The point becomes clear when you study Chapter 3b, where White castles on the queenside and Black does the same. Please also note that, unlike the harmless 8.cxd5 line analysed below, Black cannot play 8...♘xd5 here because the c7-pawn will hang.

Fortunately, the text move is an easy solution, which fits in with the 8.♕c2 c5 variation which you can find on page 44. The only difference is that the moves ♘f3 and ...0-0 have not been played here. Both moves are virtually essential for each side's development, so a transposition seems likely.

8.dxc5 0-0N

8...♕a5 was played in Ivanchuk – Ivanisevic, Sibenik 2016, but the text move seems like an easier solution for us.

9.cxd5

9.♘f3 leads straight to the Giri – Kramnik game, beginning on page 48.

9...♘xd5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘xd5 exd5

Now 12.♖c1 d4↑ would be too dangerous for White, so the time has come for him to play:

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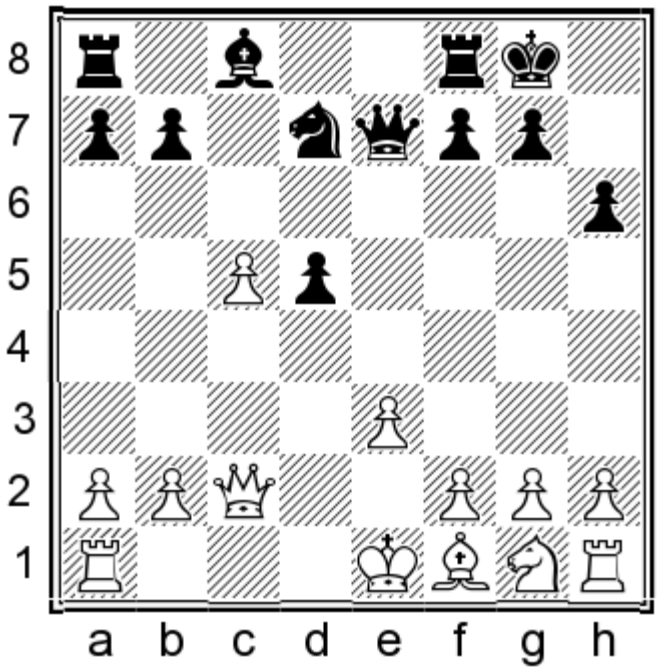

12.♘f3 ♘xc5

Transposing once again to Giri – Kramnik.

8.cxd5 – A Harmless Sideline

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.cxd5

This move has only occurred in a small minority of games. White invites a transposition to the Exchange Variation with 8...exd5, which is how most Black players have responded. However, the resulting position lies outside of our repertoire. Fortunately, we have a much more convenient solution:

8...♘xd5!

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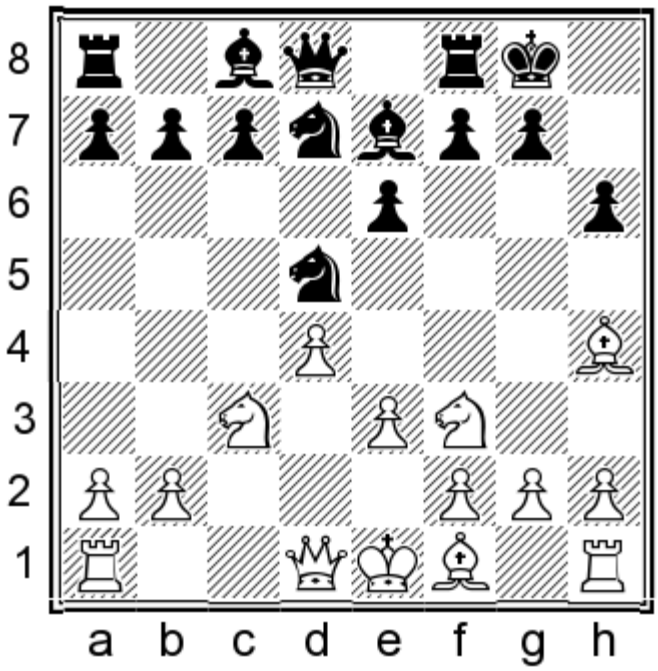
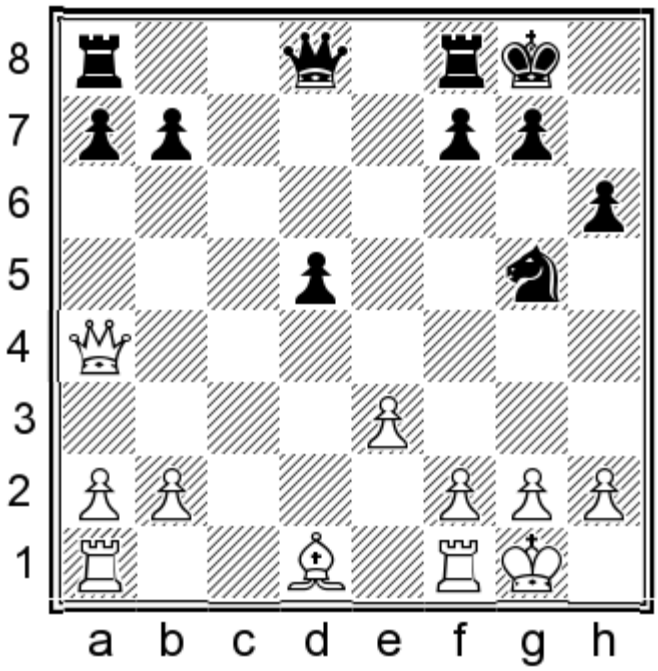


9.♗xe7

9.♘xd5 needlessly gives Black the option of diverting the f3-knight with: 9...♗xh4!? 10.♘xh4 exd5 11.♘f3 c5 (11...♘f6 intending ...♘e4 is also fine) 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.♗e2 ♗g4 This is the kind of comfortable IQP position we talked about on page 24, under *Playing with the IQP*; Black is fine because he can control the d4-point with ...♘e6. A practical example continued: 14.0-0 ♘e6 15.♕a4 ♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♘g5 17.♗d1



17...d4! 18.♕xd4 ♕xd4 19.exd4 ♖fd8 20.♗b3 ♖xd4 21.♖ad1 ♖ad8 Black even went on to win in Gajewski – Naiditsch, Germany 2014.

9...♕xe7 10.♘xd5

10.♖c1 ♘xc3 11.♖xc3 c5= is fine for Black.

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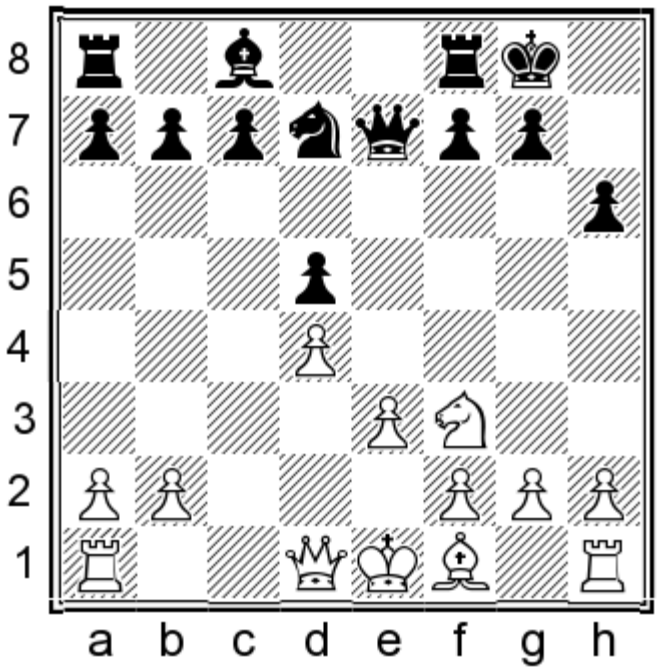
10...exd5

We will study this structure in more detail when covering the Exchange Variation; for now, it suffices to say that the exchange of the c3-knight benefits Black. An easy plan is to manoeuvre the knight to d6; for more about this strategic concept, please refer to the discussion on the Exchange Variation.

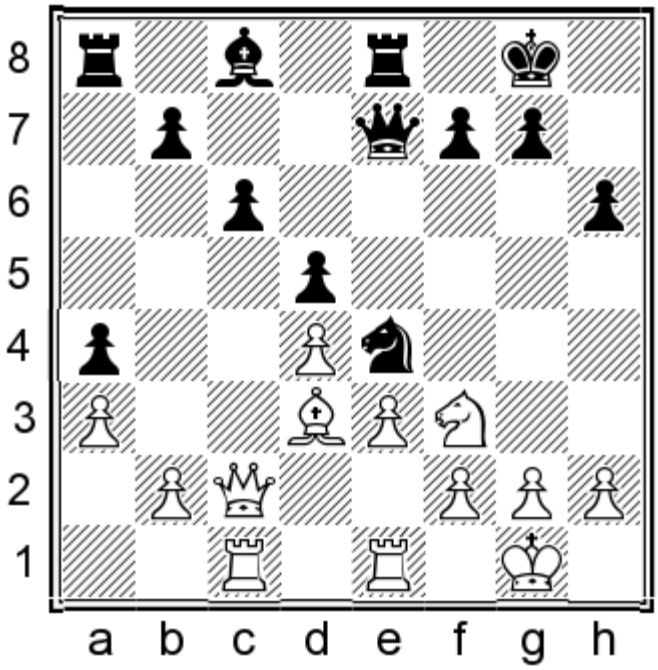


11.♗d3 ♘f6 12.♕c2 a5!?

The immediate 12...♘e4 is fine but there is also something to be said for delaying the manoeuvre, as in the present example.

13.♖c1 c6 14.0-0 ♖e8 15.a3 a4 16.♖fe1 ♘e4

Black is ready for ...♘d6, with a comfortable position. White decides to prevent this by swapping off the knight, but this leads to a different set of problems.



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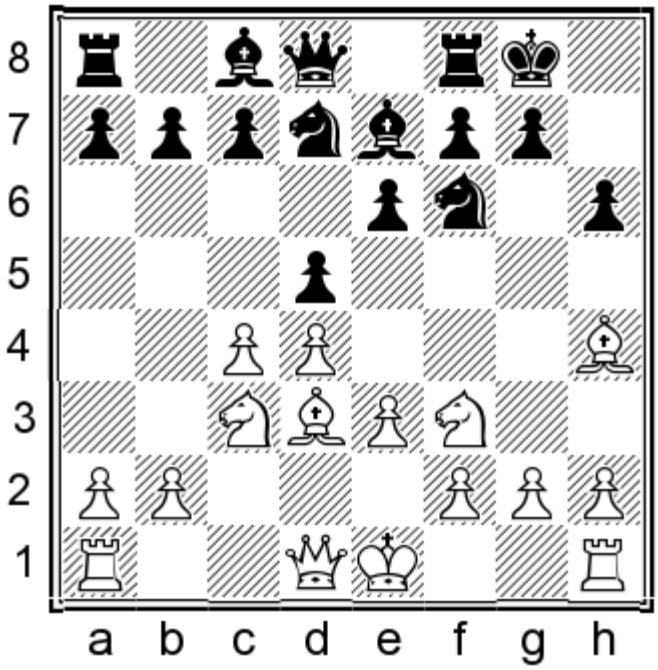
17.♗xe4 dxe4 18.♘d2 ♖a5!

In Kholmsky – Atalik, Vladimir 2002, Black had a slight edge as he was able to play on both sides of the board.

8.♗d3

This bishop move is the first of White's three major options on move 8.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♗d3



8...c5!

There is no reason to refrain from this typical break, which we are also ready to play against the other two main lines. While I was preparing this chapter, I was under the impression that Black could safely choose between several equalizing options, but I was proven wrong after analysing the positions carefully and, more importantly, trying to discover practical approaches and not merely trusting the assessment of the engines.

8...c6!? is a move which I have covered as a secondary option against both 8.♕c2 and 8.♖c1. In those variations, however, it is played with the idea of taking on c4 after White develops his bishop, so it feels like it loses some of its point here. Nevertheless, Black's position remains extremely solid, so if you study the relevant sections on 8.♕c2 c6!? and 8.♖c1 c6!?, you should be able to incorporate the ideas here as well.

8...dxc4 9.♗xc4 is the most popular continuation and now Black has two options:

a) 9...b6!? 10.0-0 ♗b7 11.♕e2 ♘e4 is considered a solid version of the Tartakower for Black, but after 12.♘xe4 ♗xe4 (12...♗xh4 13.♘c3!? also favours White somewhat) 13.♗g3 ♗d6 14.♖fd1 ♗xg3 15.hxg3 ♕e7 16.♖ac1 ♖fd8 White has a risk-free edge.

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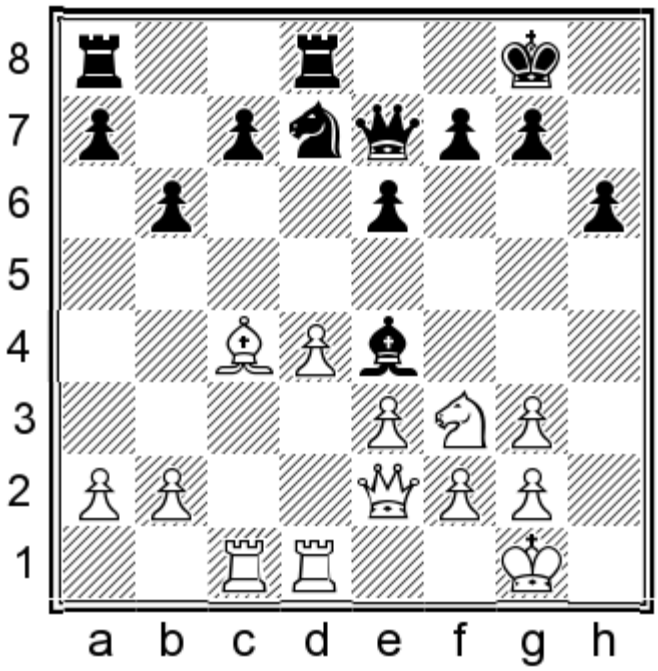


Both Khalifman's 17.♗b5!? and Grivas' recommendation of 17.♗d3 ♗xd3 18.♖xd3 c5 19.♖dc3 leave White somewhat better, at least in practical terms. With a slight inaccuracy, Black will suffer.

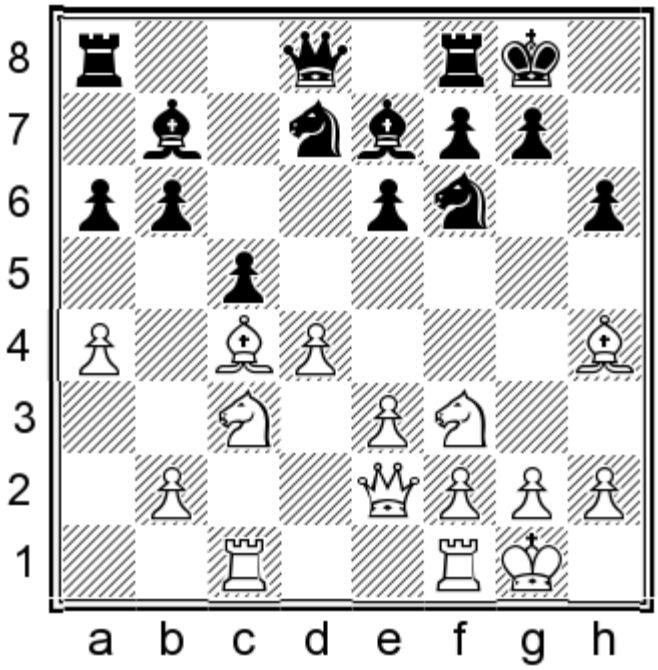
b) The other main option is 9...a6 10.a4 c5 11.0-0 with a further split:

b1) 11...b6

This transposes to an inferior version of the Tartakower System, which is generally considered slightly favourable for White.

12.♕e2 ♗b7 13.♖ac1

After 13.♖fd1 the correct move seems to be 'Aronian's prophylaxis' 13...♕e8. However, despite my computer analysis indicating that Black can eventually equalize, I wouldn't consider this a good practical solution. The a6-pawn is under constant pressure and, whenever Black decides to take on d4, the resulting IQP position is easier to play for White.



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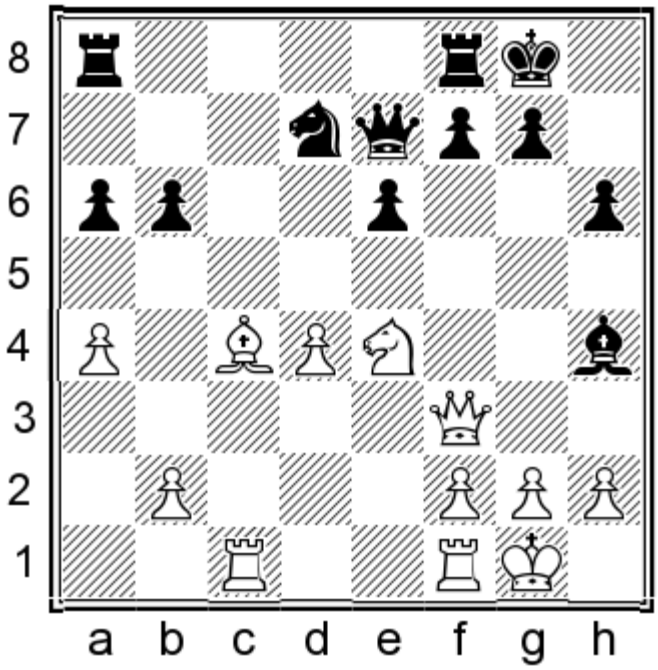
13...♘e4

13...cxd4 might be better but White retains some initiative after both recaptures.

The text move is a typical freeing device in this structure, but it enables White to develop a punishing initiative.

14.♘xe4 ♗xh4 15.♘d6 ♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♕e7 17.♘e4 cxd4 18.exd4

Black has serious problems, mainly because of his vulnerable a6-pawn which prevents him from challenging for the c-file.



18...♘f6 19.♘c3!

Now the black bishop is in trouble.

19...♖fd8 20.g3 ♗g5 21.♖c2 ♕b4 22.♗a2 ♖ac8 23.h4 ♗xh4 24.d5 exd5 25.♘xd5 ♘xd5 26.♖xc8 ♖xc8 27.♕xd5

I went on to win in Ntirlis – Gonzalez Barcina, email 2013.

b2) Black's most popular continuation has been:

11...cxd4 12.exd4 ♘b6 13.♗b3 ♗d7

We have reached the kind of IQP position which I advise you to stay away from, for reasons explained in the strategic introduction.

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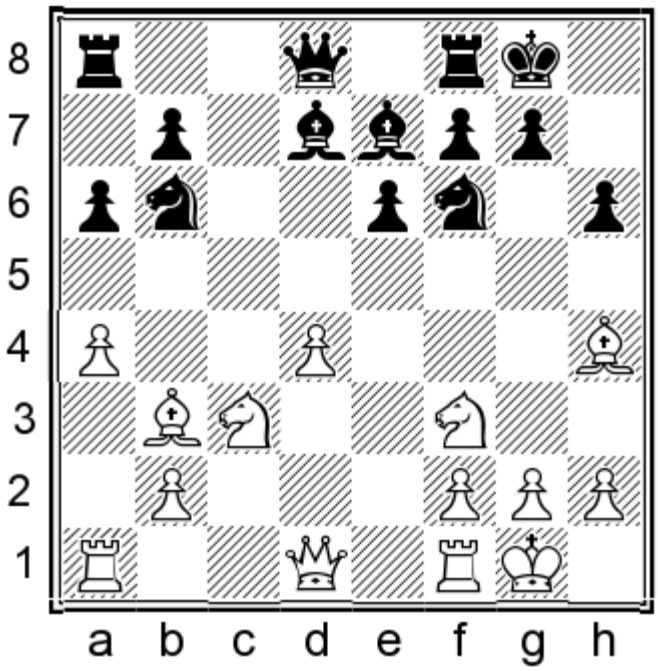


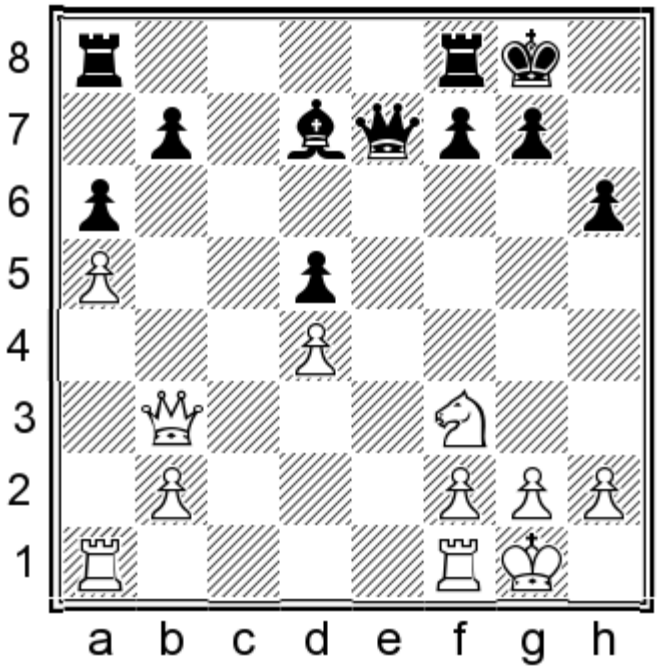
14.a5!?

White has plenty of freedom. 14.♕d3 is one good alternative, while he can also consider 14.♘e5, intending to build up in the style of the Stahlberg and Botvinnik games, as featured in the strategic introduction. When I tested these lines with my engines defending Black's position, they always managed to stay out of danger, but in a practical game it would be easy for Black to fall into serious difficulties.

14...♘bd5

I also analysed 14...♘c8 but White keeps the easier game, and Black has to play with machine accuracy to maintain equality.

15.♗xd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 exd5 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.♕b3



Engines call this equal and in an absolute sense they may be right, but in a practical game this would be torture for Black. In a similar position with the pawn back on h7, Black demonstrated the correct method of defence in Seirawan – Timman, London 1984, but there are plenty of scary examples which show the potential in White's position, my

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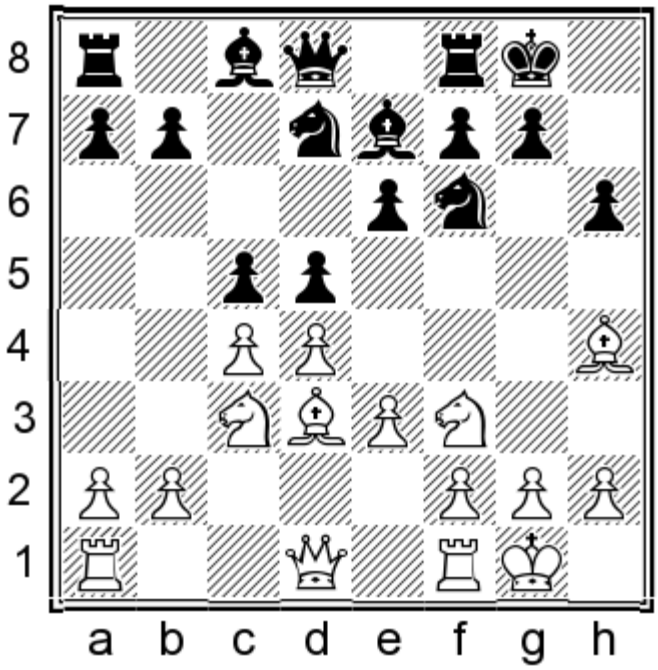
favourite being Halkias – K. Karanikolas, Kavala 1999 (in which the pawn also stood on h7). No, please don't follow this path, especially when my main line offers a much simpler life.

9.0-0

9.cxd5 is an attempt to play against an IQP, but Black has a good answer: 9...cxd4! Khalifman mentions this move as his reason for not recommending 8.♗d3 in his *Opening for White According to Kramnik* repertoire series. (Incidentally, 9...♘xd5 10.♗xe7 ♘xe7 11.0-0 b6 is also fine for Black.) 10.♘xd4 ♘xd5 11.♗xe7 ♘xe7 12.0-0 ♘f6 13.h3 ♗d7 14.♕e2 ♕b6 Black was comfortably equal in Skembris – Portisch, Tilburg 1994.



9...b6!

Angling for a Tartakower set-up, having avoided some of White's more threatening ways of playing against that variation. Let me remind you once again that it is not in our interests to exchange on c4 and/or d4, as the ensuing IQP positions are pleasant for White.

10.♕e2

Alternatives are fairly harmless:

10.♕c2?! makes no sense as Black can quickly put a rook on c8: 10...♗b7 11.♖fd1 ♖c8 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♗xe7 ♕xe7 14.♘xd5 The players agreed a draw here in Dolmatov – Geller, Amsterdam 1986, but my guess is that the outcome was pre-arranged, as Black is slightly better after 14...♗xd5.

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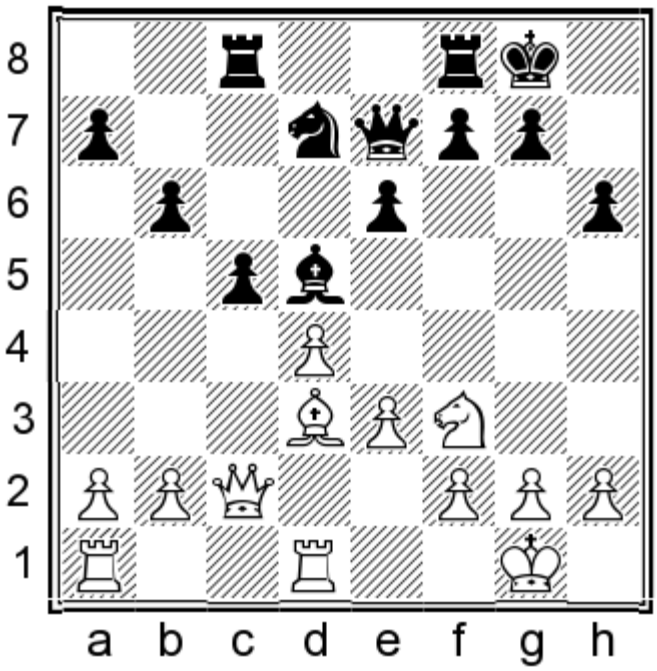
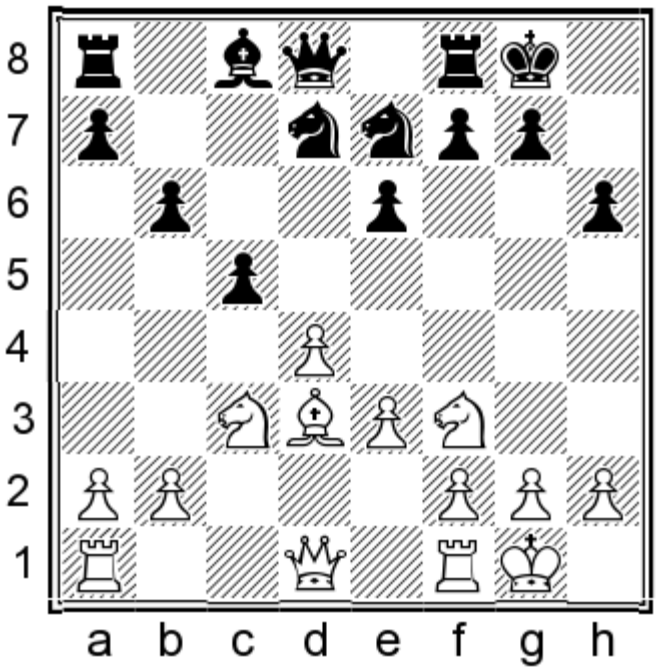


Black is ready to spoil White's structure with ...♗xf3 and, if White defends against this and the other threat of ...cxd4 with 15.♕e2, then Black can play ambitiously with 15...c4!, intending to steamroll down the queenside.

10.♖c1 ♗b7 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♗g3 ♘7f6 Black is fine, for example: 13.♕e2 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♘xc3 15.♖xc3 ♖c8= Arun Prasad – Akobian, Bursa 2010.

10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♗xe7 (11.♗g3 ♗b7 might transpose to the Akobian game above) 11...♘xe7 Black has no particular problems, as I was able to experience first-hand:



12.♗e4 ♖b8 13.♕b3 This was played with the intention of putting a rook on the d-file but it allows a concrete operation: 13...cxd4 14.exd4?! (my opponent didn't fancy his prospects after 14.♘xd4 ♘c5 15.♕c2 ♘xe4 16.♕xe4 ♗b7 but his chosen move is even worse) 14...♘f6 15.♖fe1 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♗b7 17.♖ad1

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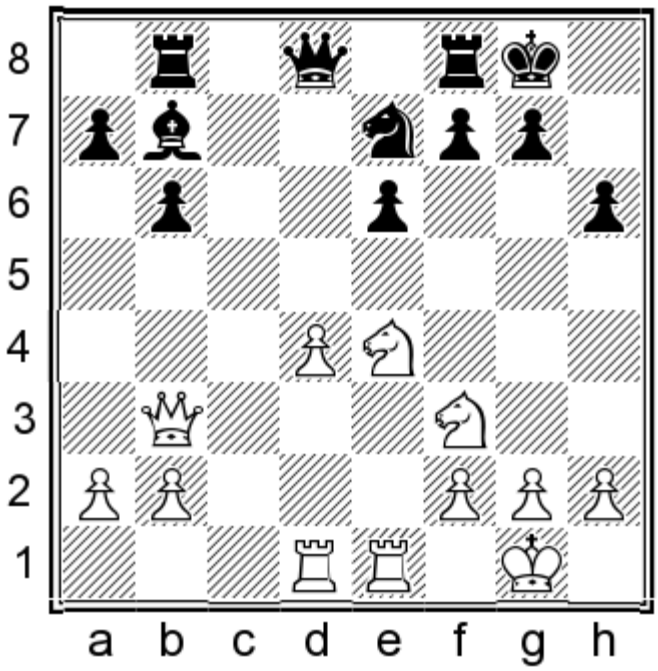
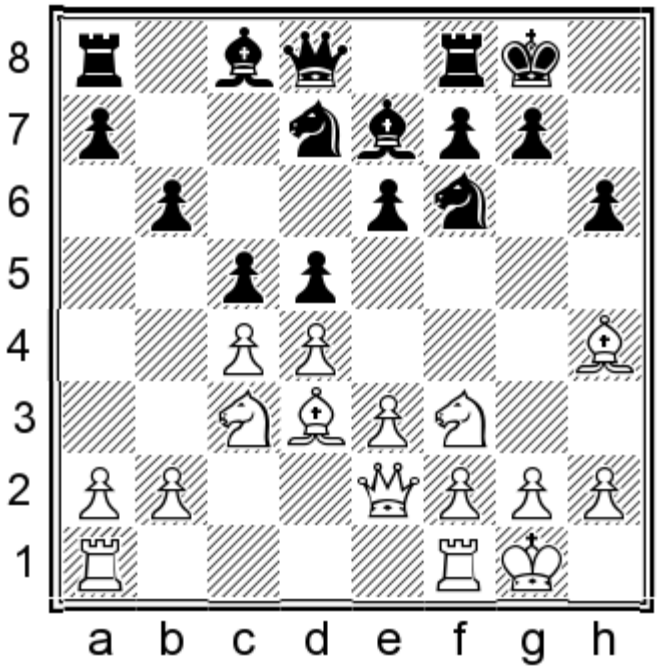


In Ballas – Ntirlis, Thessaloniki 2017, I rushed to simplify with 17...♗xe4 and was slightly better, but it would have been more accurate to improve the pieces first with 17...♖c8!, or even Jacob Aagaard's suggestion of 17...♕c7!?.



10...♗b7

As the knowledgeable readers among us may already have realized, this move transposes to the so-called Romanishin Variation against the Tartakower Defence. Black intends to free his position with ...♘e4.

White has tried a load of different moves, but I consider the most important options to be **A)** 11.♖ad1, **B)** 11.♖fd1 and **C)** 11.♗g3!.

A) 11.♖ad1

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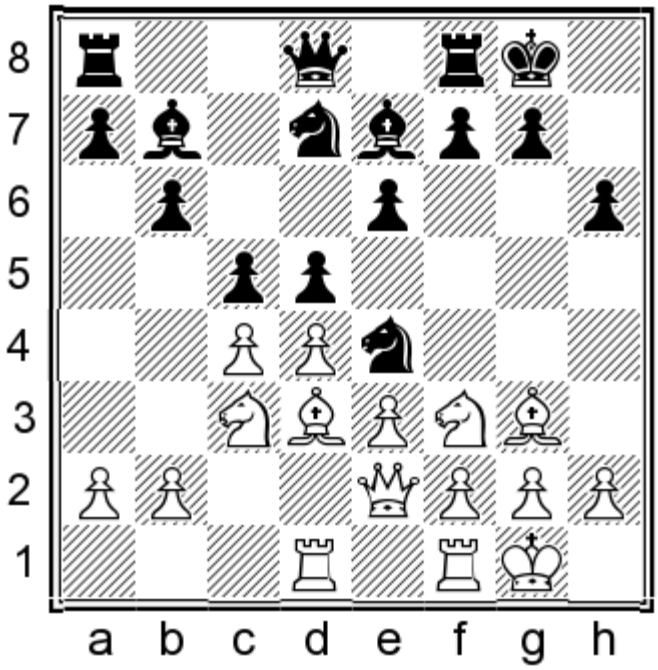
This is sometimes played with the following idea in mind.

11...♘e4 12.♗g3!

12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.cxd5 exd5 gives Black a better version of Game 12, as it is difficult to imagine a role for the f1-rook.

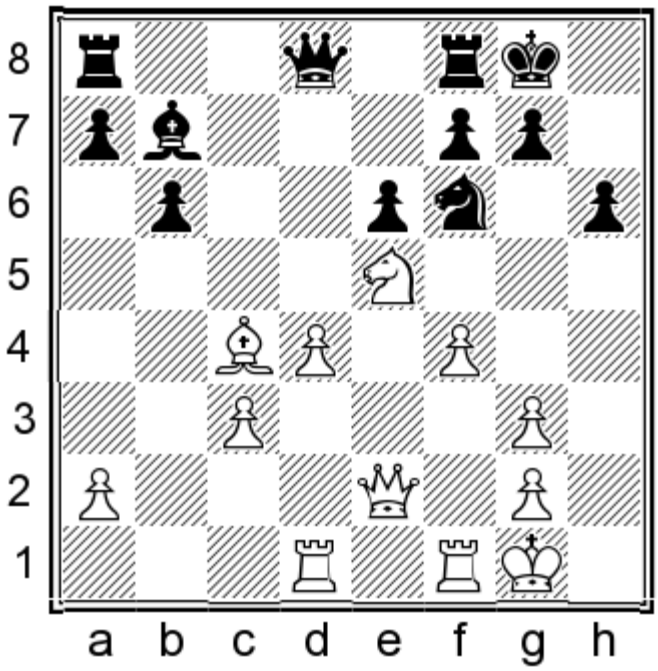


12...♘xg3

I considered 12...cxd4 13.♗xe4! dxc3!?N, but found that 14.cxd5 cxb2 15.♕xb2 ♗f6 16.♕b5! favours White.

13.hxg3 cxd4 14.♘xd4

It is too optimistic for White to play the IQP position after: 14.exd4?! dxc4 15.♗xc4 ♘f6 16.♘e5 ♗b4!? (16...♖c8 is an engine-produced novelty: 17.♗a6 ♕c7=) 17.f4 ♗xc3 18.bxc3



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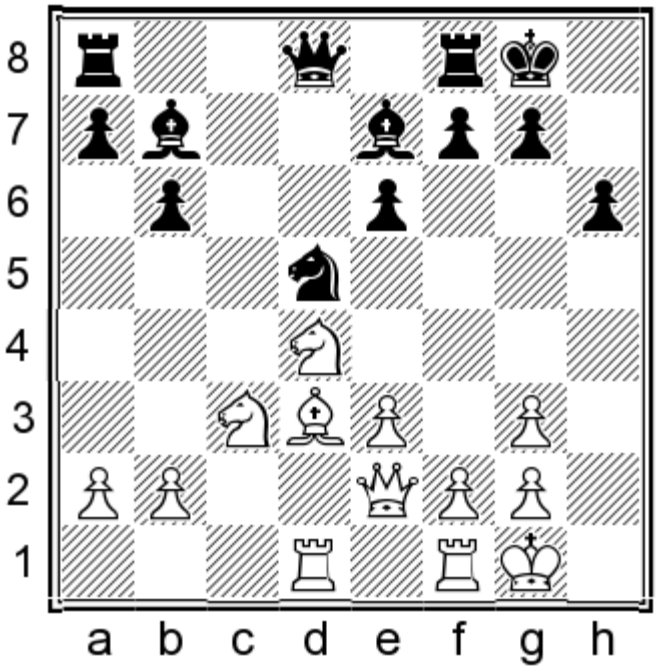
We have been following Speelman – Hracek, Germany 2001, and now the cold-blooded engines give 18...♖c8!N∓, intending to meet 19.f5?! with 19...exf5 20.♖xf5 ♗d5∓.

14...♘f6 15.cxd5

Another game continued 15.♘f3 ♕b8 16.cxd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♗a6 ♗f6 19.e4 ♗b7 20.♗xb7 ♕xb7 21.♔h2 ♖fd8 22.a3 and a draw was agreed in Hoe – Duenas, email 2011. I have the feeling that Kramnik would have played on with Black.

15...♘xd5



16.♘db5 ♘xc3 17.♘xc3 ♕c7

With a miniscule edge due to the bishop pair, Black tortured his opponent before eventually agreeing a draw on move 85 in Adly – Kramnik, Baku (ol) 2016.

B) 11.♖fd1

GAME 12

Jernej Spalir – Tigran Petrosyan

Katowice 2014

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6

The game actually featured a different move order with 3...♗e7, but I have modified the opening sequence to fit with the proposed repertoire.

4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♗d3 c5 9.0-0 b6 10.♕e2 ♗b7 11.♖fd1

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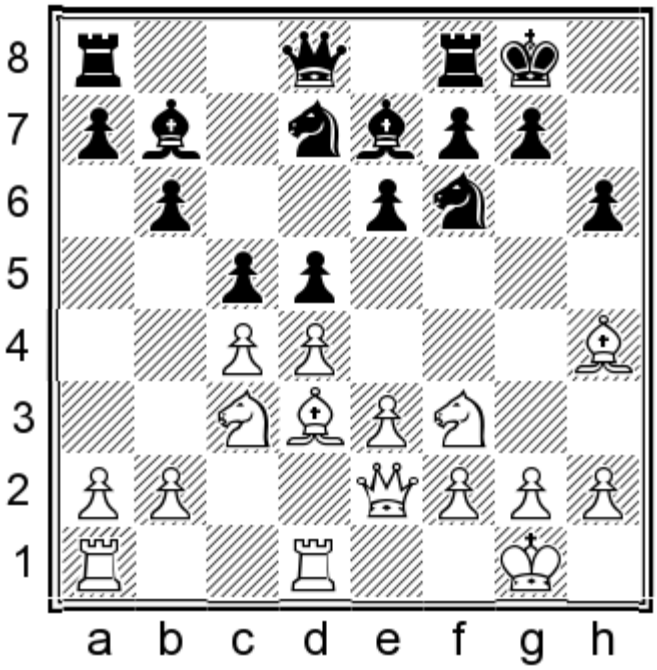
The critical 11.♗g3! will be examined in the next illustrative game.

The text move is recommended by GM Grivas but even he couldn't claim an advantage after the strong reply:



11...♘e4!

This leads to a good position, although there are some details which are worth knowing.

12.♗xe7

12.♗g3

Retreating the bishop has been a popular choice, but it is less justified compared with the 11.♖ad1 line, as Black can play:

12...cxd4!

12...♘xg3 13.hxg3 cxd4 14.♘xd4 (14.exd4?! dxc4 15.♗xc4 ♘f6∓) 14...♘f6 is, of course, playable here as well, but the text move exploits the vulnerability of the rook on a1 in a key line.

13.exd4

13.♗xe4? works well in the 11.♖ad1 line, but here it runs into 13...dxc3 14.cxd5 cxb2 15.♕xb2 ♗f6 16.♘e5 ♕e8!∓ as in Miralles – Renet, Lyon 1990.

13.♘xd4?! ♘xc3! 14.bxc3 ♘f6 also favoured Black in Kourousis – Managadze, Nikea 2006. Black can follow up with ...♗d6 to exchange the strong bishop, leaving White with no compensation for his weaknesses.

13...♘df6 14.♖ac1

This position was reached in Short – Adams, Gibraltar 2017. I think Black could have fought for an advantage with:

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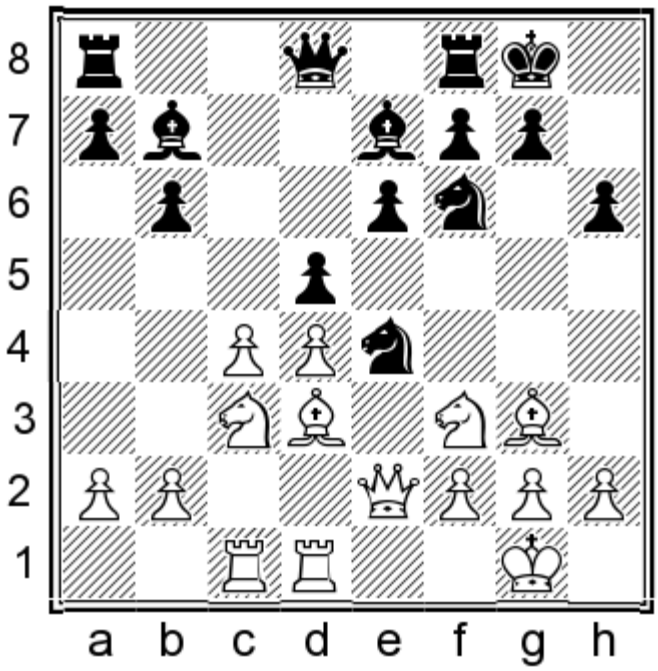


14...♘xg3!N 15.hxg3 dxc4 16.♗xc4 a6!?

16...♖c8 17.♗a6 ♕c7 is another possible way to play.

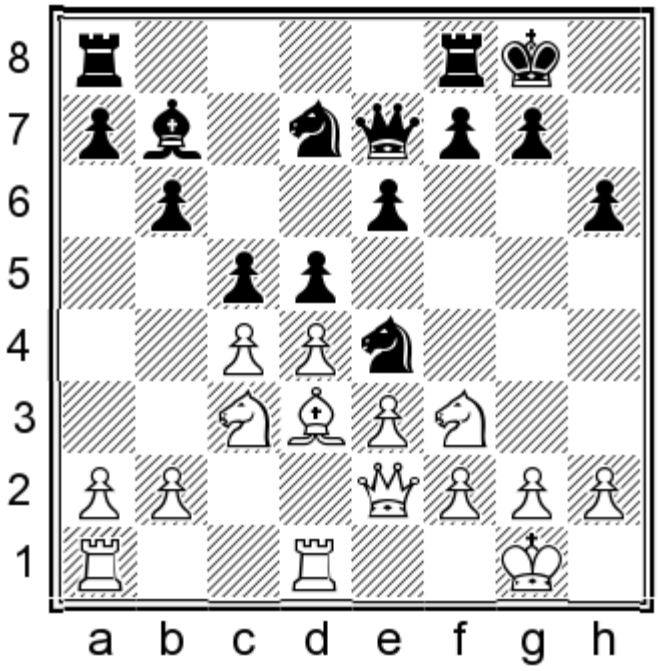
17.a4

This way White prevents ...b5 but opens up a hole on b4, allowing:

17...♗b4

Giving a good square for the queen at e7. I would certainly prefer Black's position.

12...♕xe7



13.cxd5 exd5!

The first pitfall to avoid is 13...♘xc3?! 14.bxc3 exd5 which is well met by 15.a4!±. This pawn thrust is an important motif in this line for White and it shows why, on move 11, putting the other rook on d1 makes less sense if

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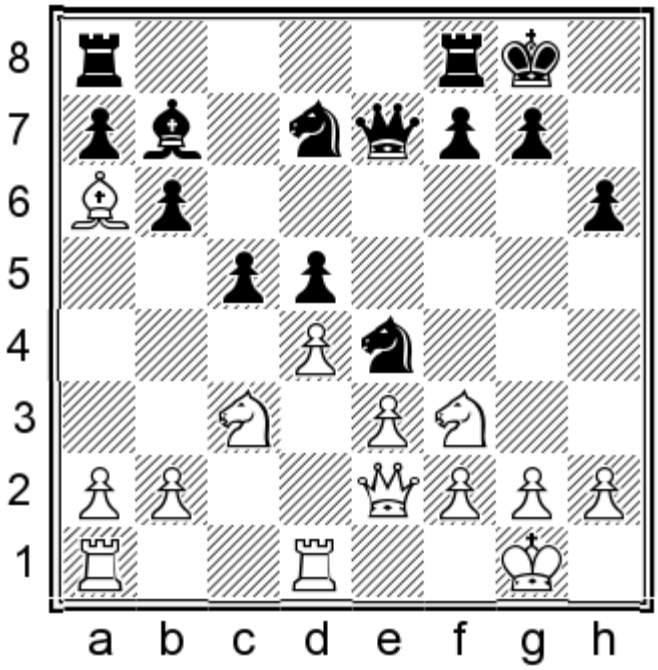
White intends to follow up as he does in the present game.

14.♗a6

14.♖ac1 has been the most popular choice but 14...♘xc3! (as mentioned by Grivas) followed by ...c4 is excellent for Black.

14.dxc5 ♘xc3 15.bxc3 ♘xc5= was level in Aleshin – Rjabzev, Essentuki 2003, with the two camps' weaknesses cancelling each other out.

I briefly thought that 14.a4!? could be tricky to meet, but 14...a6! is a fully adequate response, intending to meet White next move in the same way as in the other variations shown.



14...♘xc3!

Analysis proves that this is the right time for this capture.

14...♘df6 15.♗xb7 ♕xb7 16.dxc5 bxc5 17.♖ac1 is slightly better for White according to Grivas, although this evaluation could certainly be debated.

14...♗xa6 15.♕xa6 ♘df6 is given by Grivas as equal, but maybe White still has chances of a small edge after 16.♖ac1!?.

15.bxc3 ♗xa6! 16.♕xa6 c4

Black's position is completely fine and, if he manages to put his pieces on the right squares (for example, with ...♘f6-e8-d6 or -c7), he can fight for the full point.

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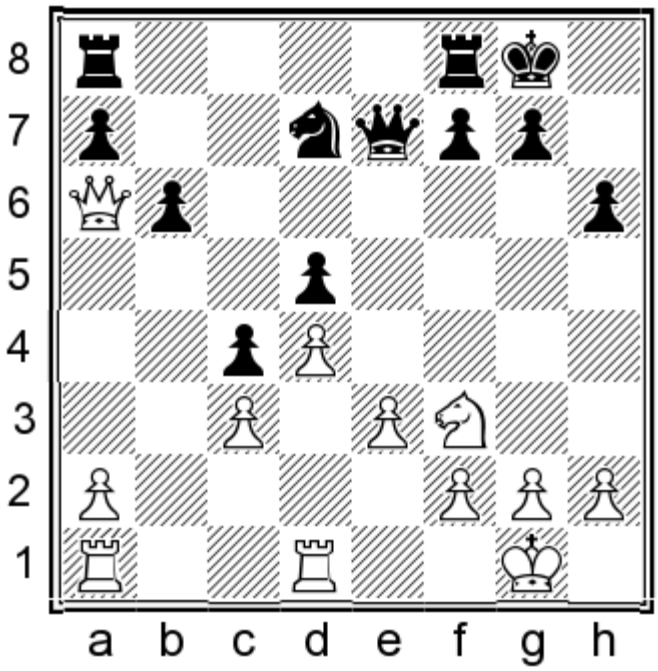


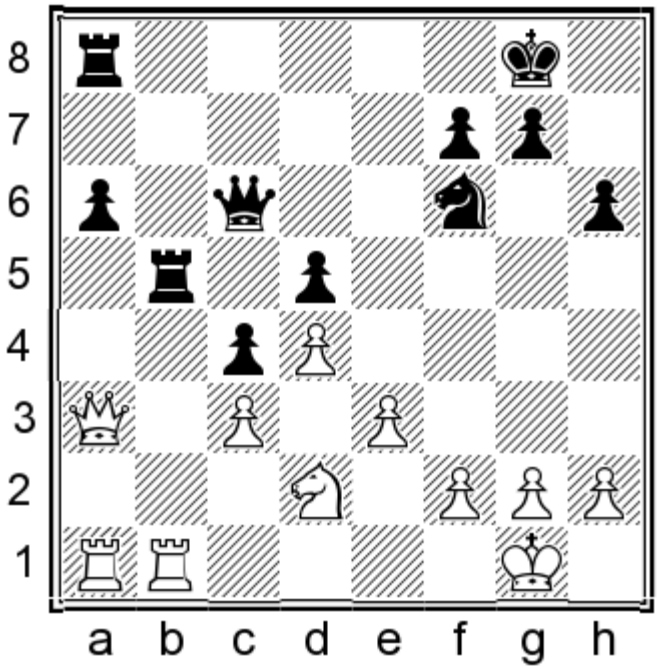
17.a4 ♘f6 18.♘d2 ♖fb8!?

18...♘e8 was also worth considering.

19.♕b5

19.♖db1 is well met by 19...♘e8! 20.♕b5 (20.a5?? ♘c7 traps the queen) 20...♕e6 followed by ...♘d6.

19...a6 20.♕b1 ♕b7 21.♕b4 b5 22.♖db1 ♕c6 23.axb5 ♖xb5 24.♕a3



24...♖ab8?!

Tempting though it appears, taking control over the b-file doesn't yield much for Black.

Stronger was 24...♖xb1†!N 25.♖xb1 a5∓, pushing the passed pawn as far as possible before reorganizing the other

pieces. One simple plan would be ...g6, ...♔g7 and ...h5, improving Black's position on the kingside. At some point he may even be able to contemplate ...♖b3 as the type of exchange sacrifice Botvinnik was known to like.

25.♖xb5 ♕xb5 26.♔f1 ♕b2 27.♕xb2 ♖xb2 28.♔e1 ♖c2 29.♖a3 ♘g4

Black is trying to attack as many vulnerable points as possible, but White can keep things under control

30.♔d1

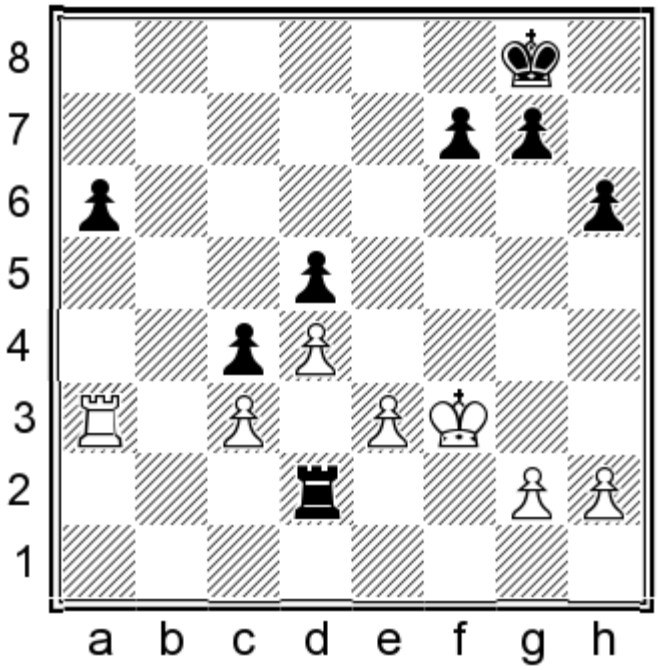
The first step is to make the active rook go away.

30...♖b2 31.♔e2

The engine points out that 31.♔c1! ♖b8 32.e4! would have turned the tables and forced Black to play accurately to draw.

31...♘xf2 32.♔xf2 ♖xd2† 33.♔f3

The mutual pawn weaknesses cancel each other out; besides, we know what Tartakower said about all rook endgames...



33...g5 34.h3 ♖d3 35.♖xa6 ♖xc3 36.♖xh6 ♖c1 37.♖d6 c3 38.♔e2 ♖g1 39.♔d3 ♖xg2 40.♔xc3 ♖g3 41.♔d3 ♖xh3 42.♖xd5 ♖g3 43.♖a5 ♔g7 44.d5 ♖g1 45.♔e4 g4 46.d6 ♖d1 47.♖g5† ♔f6 48.♖xg4

½–½

Black emerged from the opening with a good position and we saw how his play could have been improved. Let's turn our attention to White's more challenging option on move 11.

C) 11.♗g3!

GAME 13

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Ivan Cheparinov – Michael Adams

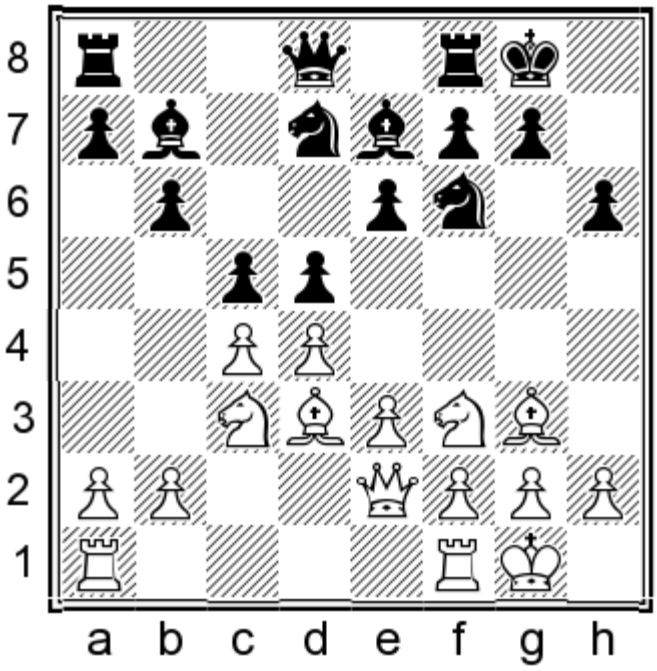
Plovdiv 2010

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♗d3 c5 9.0-0 b6 10.♕e2 ♗b7

This game also arrived here via a distinctly different sequence, but I want you to get used to seeing the 'correct' move order.

11.♗g3!

I consider this the critical move.



11...cxd4!

The more popular 11...♘e4 is certainly playable, but it is too messy for my taste. The text move is a cleaner solution, which I consider more in keeping with our "Classical Repertoire".

12.exd4 dxc4

Okay, so I am breaking the rule I told you about avoiding the IQP structure in positions where the knight has gone to d7. Every rule has its exceptions though; and on this occasion, retreating the bishop to g3 was a concession which makes Black's life a bit easier in the ensuing positions.

13.♗xc4 a6

13...♘h5 is similar to 14...♘h5 below. Still, I like the text move as it follows the advice on page 23 about inserting this pawn move to provoke a slight weakening of White's queenside.

14.a4

Now Black must make an important decision. I believe the move played by Adams to be the ideal solution.

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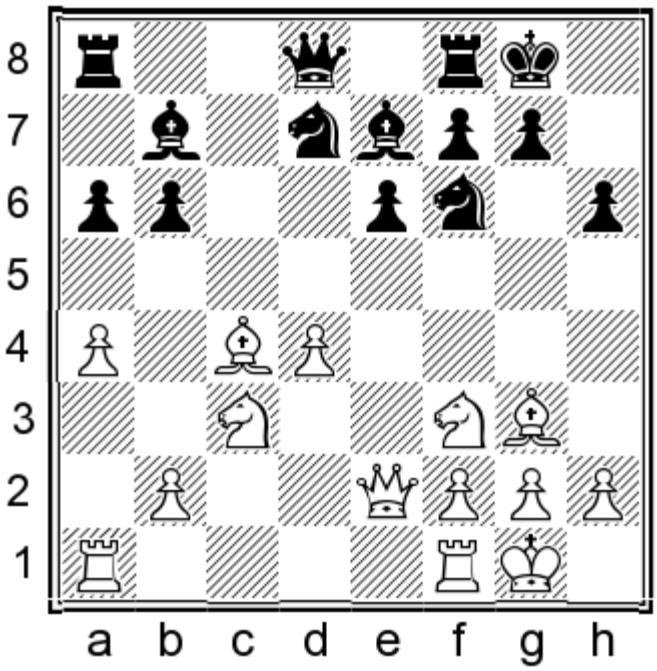

14...♖e8!

With this flexible move, Black maintains the options of playing ...♘h5 or ...♗b4 next, while discouraging the d4-d5 break by placing the rook opposite the white queen. There are two other options worth noting:

a) According to both Kasparov and John Cox, 14...♘h5!? is a reliable equalizer. However, White has a couple of interesting ways to play against it:

a1) 15.d5!? ♘xg3 16.hxg3 exd5 17.♘xd5 gives White excellent results in my database, which tells us something about the practical problems Black may face here, regardless of the equal verdict on which the engines insist.

a2) 15.♖ad1N 15...♘xg3 16.fxg3!? is dismissed by the engines, but a similar plan (without the inclusion of the pawn moves ...a6 and a2-a4) has been played by Tomashevsky. White intends ♘e5 and ♖f4, with some attacking chances.

b) 14...♗b4!? has the idea of entering a double-edged middlegame playing against hanging pawns: 15.♖ac1 ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘e4

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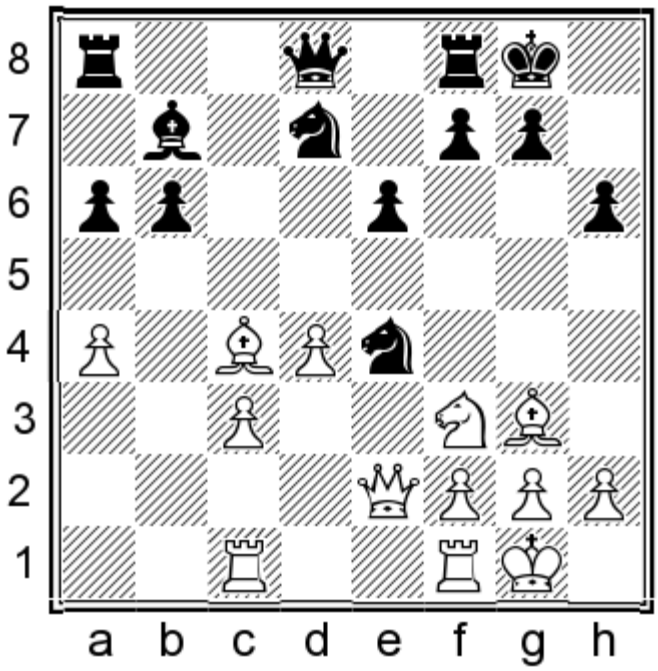
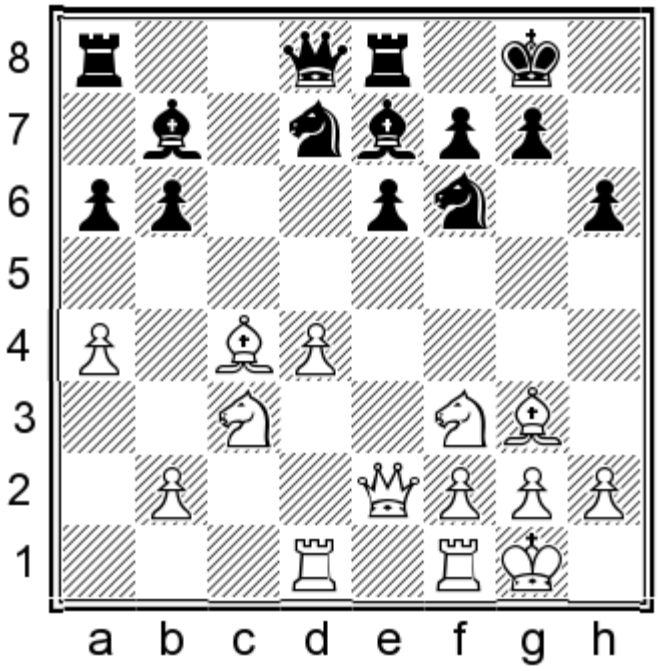


This is a fighting choice for Black, which can also occur without the inclusion of the pawn moves ...a6 and a2-a4 – although if Black omits the pawn moves, he has to consider the possibility of White meeting ...♗b4 with ♘b5!?. In the present version, after Sadler's recommendation of 17.♗h4 ♕c7 18.♗d3, as played in Mikhalchishin – Ivanchuk, Lvov 1987, Black can equalize with 18...♕f4!N, intending 19.c4 ♘g5!.

15.♖ad1

15.♖fd1 is met in the same way as in the main game: 15...♗b4 16.♖ac1 ♘h5! 17.♗e5 ♕e7= Goy – L. Milde, corr. 2006.



15...♗b4 16.♗d3 ♘h5 17.♗b1

After 17.♗e4 ♗xe4 18.♘xe4 ♘xg3 19.hxg3 Black can put his queen on the long diagonal with 19...♕c7 20.♖c1 ♕b7, with equal chances.

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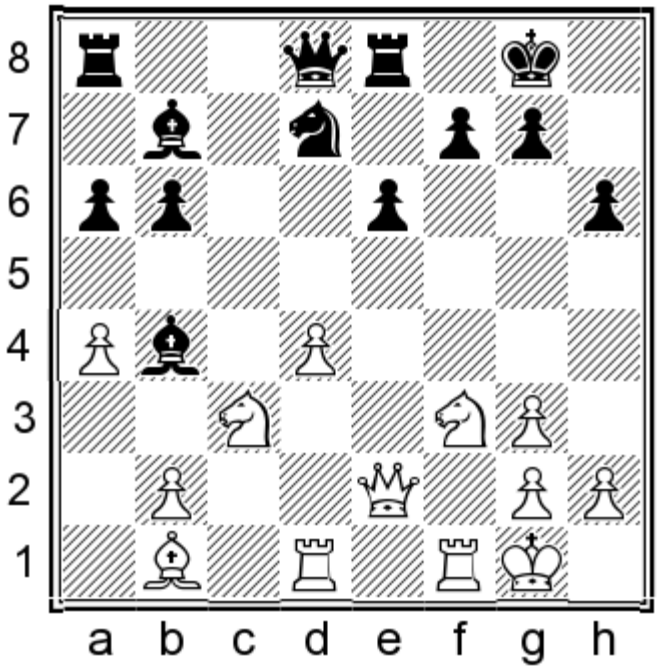
17...♘xg3 18.fxg3

We have already seen that this recapture is an idea when White moves the a1-rook to d1. Opening the f-file seems logical after Black has moved his rook away from f8; even so, I am not convinced that White has enough activity.



18...♗xc3!?

18...♖c8!N 19.♕d3 ♘f8 20.♘e5 ♖e7!∓ followed by ...♖ec7 seems like the right plan to me, when I would certainly prefer Black's position.

19.bxc3 ♕c7

19...♖c8 20.♕d3 ♘f8 21.g4 ♖e7! still looks like a good plan. Presumably Adams underestimated the following attacking idea.

20.g4! f6 21.g5! hxg5 22.♘xg5!

This spectacular sacrifice only leads to a draw, indicating that Cheparinov was probably not especially happy with the outcome of the opening.

22...fxg5 23.♗h7† ♔xh7 24.♕h5† ♔g8 25.♕f7† ♔h8

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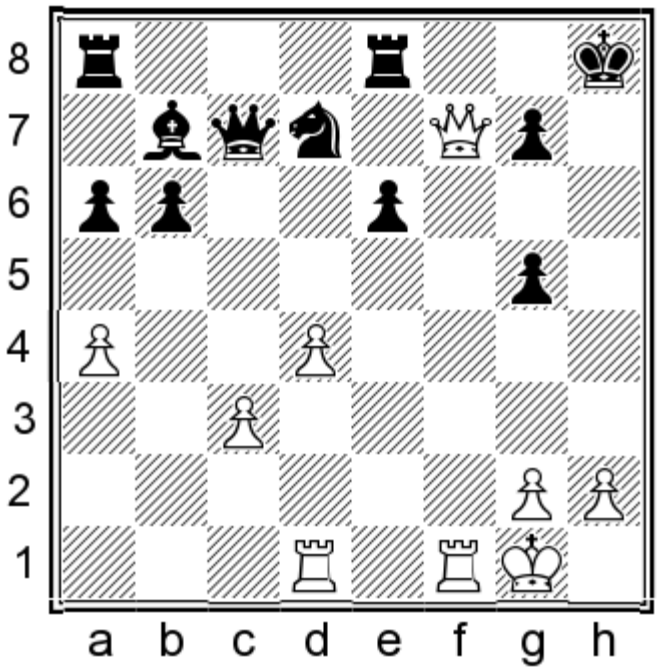

26.♖d3!?

White plays a couple more moves before agreeing to the inevitable.

26...♗e4 27.♖h3† ♗h7 28.♖xh7† ♔xh7 29.♕h5† ♔g8 30.♕f7†

½–½

11.♗g3 is certainly a challenging move but the IQP structure, in conjunction with the clever 14...♖e8!, seems fully satisfactory for Black. If White goes for an aggressive set-up with fxg3, Black has good chances to fight for the advantage, as the note to move 18 indicates.

8.♕c2

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♕c2

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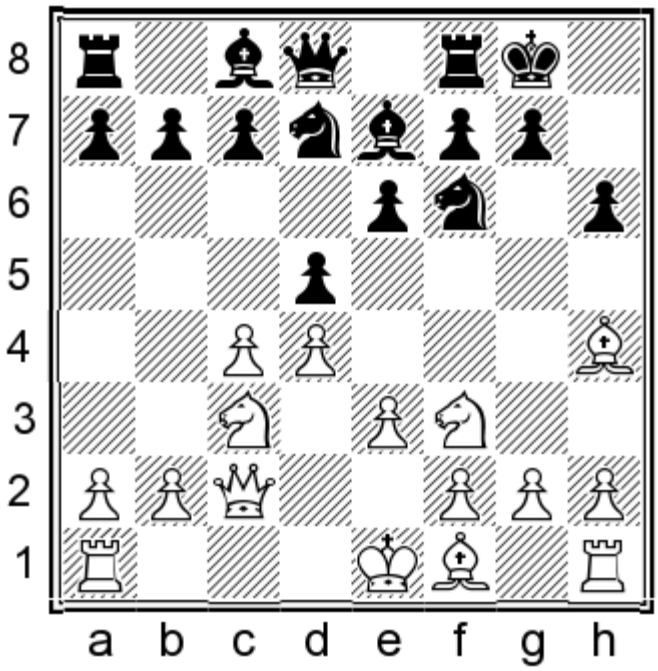

This is the Rubinstein Variation; when a variation is named that way, you know it's going to be a serious option.

The Combative 8...c6!?

Before I present my main recommendation, I would like to briefly touch on this fighting option. In the QGD it is not always easy to take risks and get a complex game, so if such an option exists in one line, it might be worth adding it to your arsenal for special occasions. Black's idea is to play a 'Rubinstein-type' queenside development with ...a6, followed by ...dxc4 and ...b5.

8...c6!? 9.♖c1

9.a3 can also be met by 9...a6, with similar ideas as in the lines below.

White's other big option is:
9.♖d1 a6 10.♗e2

10.c5 e5 11.dxe5 ♘e8 seems fine for Black, and can be compared with the 9.♖c1 line below.

10...dxc4 11.♗xc4 b5 12.♗e2

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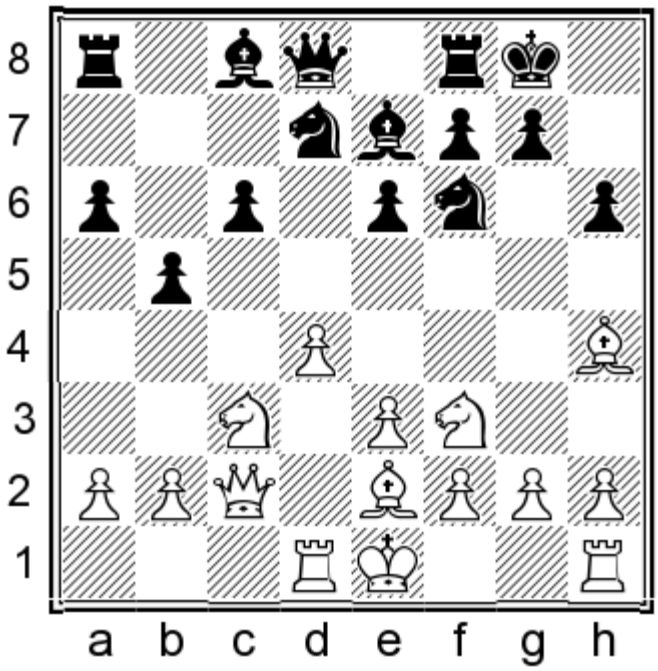
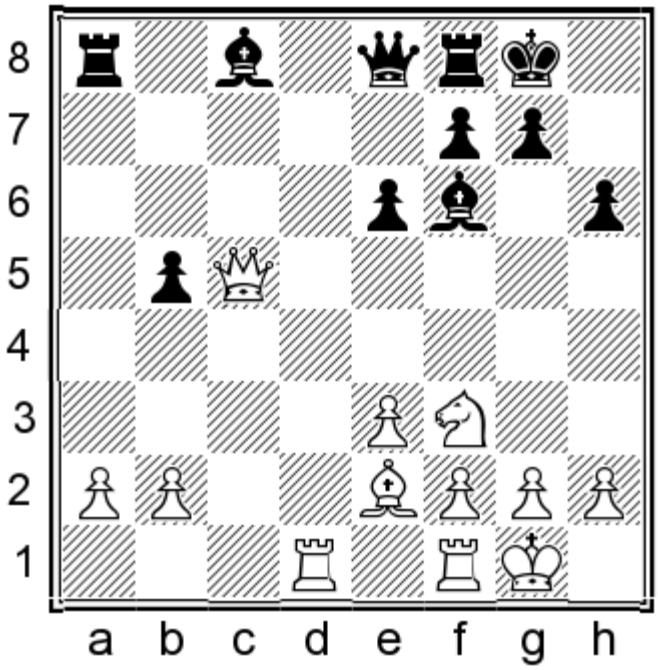


12...♕e8!

Aronian’s prophylaxis! I saw this move played in the Chess.com blitz match between Grischuk and Aronian. 12...♗b7 13.0-0 ♖c8?! was Aronian’s first try before he came up with the ...♕e8 idea. (Incidentally, 13...♕e8! is fully playable here too.) 14.♘e5! c5?! 15.dxc5 ♕e8 16.♘xd7 ♘xd7 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.b4 ♘xc5 19.bxc5 ♕xc5 20.♖c1 b4 21.♕b1+– Grischuk – Aronian, Internet Blitz (9) 2016.

13.0-0 c5 14.dxc5 ♘xc5 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♘xb5 axb5 17.♕xc5



17...♖xa2!N

17...♗b7?! is less accurate, although Black obtained some compensation with 18.♗xb5 ♕c8! 19.♕xc8 ♖fxc8 20.a4 ♗xb2∞ in Grischuk – Aronian, Internet Blitz (13) 2016.

18.♗xb5 ♖a5!=

Black has no problems at all.

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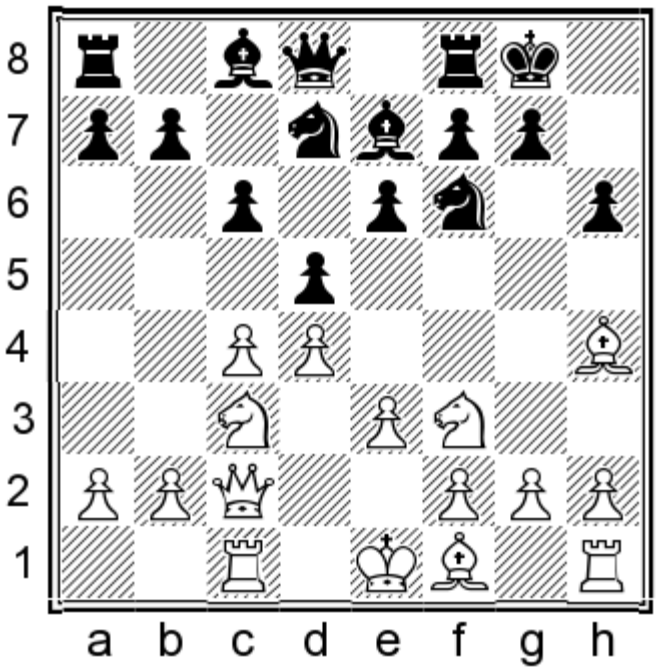


9...a6

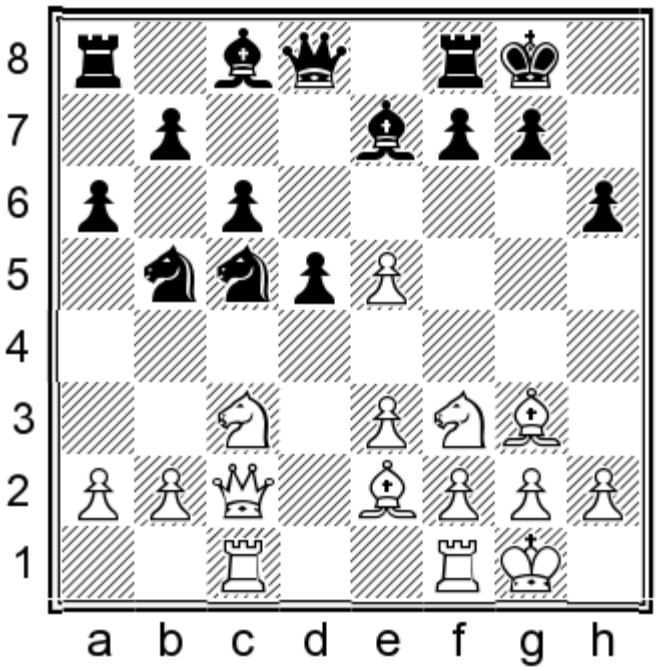
Now Black is ready for ...dxc4.

10.cxd5

10.b3 can be met by the simple 10...b6, intending ...♗b7 and ...c5, or the computer's suggestion of 10...♗a3!? followed by ...♕a5, seeking to cause White trouble on the weakened dark squares.

10.a4 b6!?N also seems fine for Black.

10.c5!? is an ambitious move, which we should always take into consideration after playing ...a6. In this instance, we have a good reply: 10...e5! 11.dxe5 ♘e8! Black will regain the sacrificed pawn. A logical continuation is: 12.♗g3 ♘xc5 13.♗e2 ♘c7 14.0-0 ♘b5!



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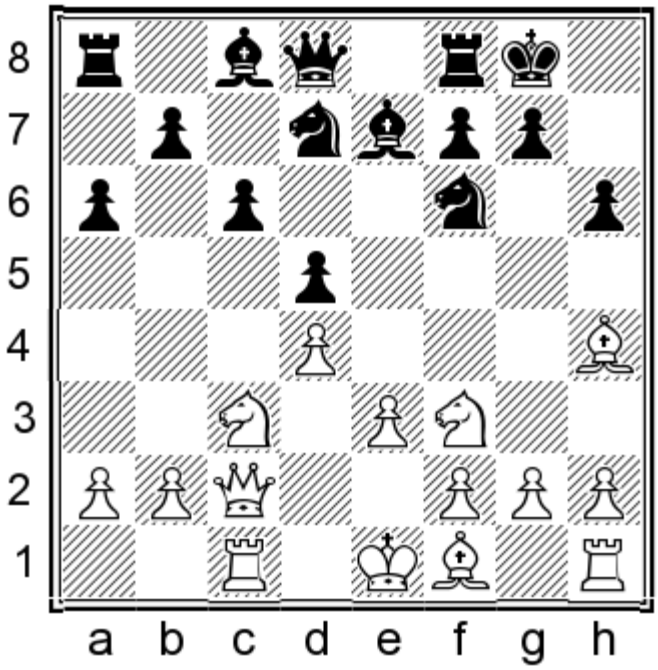
Black has the idea of removing the knight that guards e4, in order to play ...♘e4, ...♘xg3 and eventually take on e5. 15.♖fd1 ♖e8 16.♘d4 ♘xc3 17.bxc3 ♘e4 18.c4 ♗a3 19.♖b1 ♘xg3 20.hxg3 ♖xe5 Black was fine in Adam – Domagala, email 2008.

10...exd5



11.♗d3

This type of Exchange Variation with Black having played an early ...a6 has been considered slightly favourable for White since the 1927 match between Capablanca and Alekhine. The reasoning behind this assessment is that Black has slightly weakened his dark squares on the queenside, lending more force to manoeuvres such as ♘a4-c5. In Capablanca – Alekhine, Buenos Aires (27) 1927, the reigning champion did exactly that and got an advantage after recapturing with the d-pawn, although the challenger managed to hold. If Black does not exchange the strong knight, White may proceed with the classical minority attack or a timely break in the centre with e3-e4. It is all about flexibility!

Nevertheless, after examining the games from this match, while taking into account subsequent developments and modern engine assessments, I am confident that Black is okay here. If White does have any kind of edge, it is merely symbolic – especially after Black's next move.

11...♘h5!

Alekhine traded bishops with 11...♘e8 12.♗g3 ♗d6, but he didn't find the ideal way to arrange his pieces until after the match! One knight obviously belongs on d6, but the other should head for f8 (once the queen has gone to f6 and the rook to e8 or d8). I think that Black should be okay here as well, but the text move is the most accurate. Incidentally, the ...♘h5 manoeuvre was not really known at the time of the Capablanca – Alekhine match.

12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.0-0 ♘hf6

The following two examples show that Black has nothing to fear.

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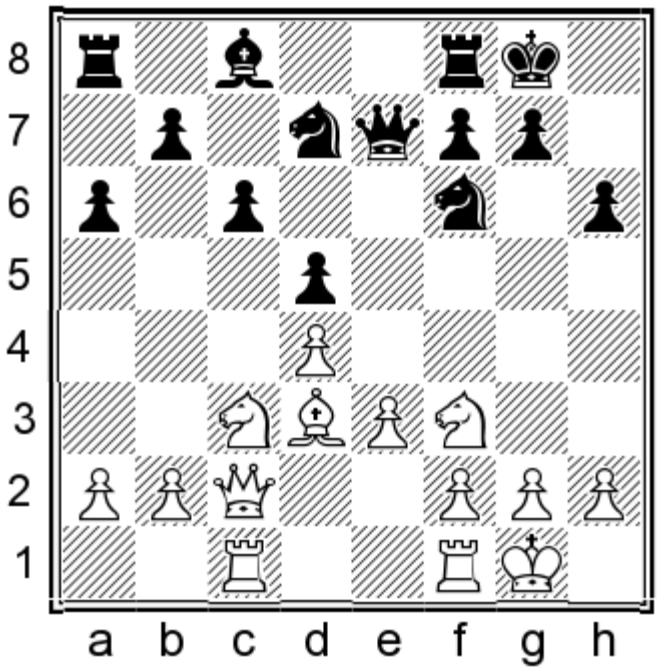

14.♘h4

Central play leads nowhere: 14.♖fe1 ♖e8 15.e4 dxe4 16.♘xe4 ♕d8= Black was fine in Dorfman – Seirawan, Elista (ol) 1998.

14...♖e8 15.♘f5 ♕d8 16.b4 ♘b6 17.♘g3 h5!

Black had promising kingside play in Bazhenov – Flores, email 2005.

We may conclude that 8...c6!? is playable, and you may find it a good choice if you desire a complex game. However, it gives White a large choice and some of resulting positions are not that clear-cut. The clean theoretical solution is the one recommended below.

The Professional Variation – 8...c5!

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♕c2 c5!

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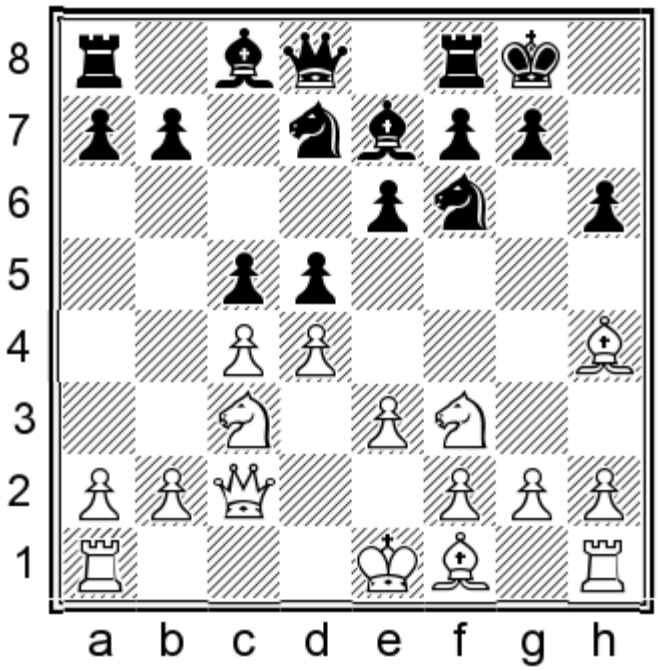

I call this the Professional Variation, as top GMs like Kramnik and Anand have had no trouble holding the resulting IQP positions against world-class opposition. Not only that, but Kramnik has played for a win with Black whenever he has played this variation.

White's most important options are 9.♖d1 and especially 9.dxc5; these moves will be covered in Games 14 and 15 respectively. Before then, we will briefly consider three minor alternatives:

a) 9.0-0-0?! is a much worse version of 9.♖d1 for White; his king immediately becomes a target, so Black can forget about structural problems and seize the initiative with: 9...b6! 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♘xd5 exd5 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 A nice example continued: 14.♘d4 ♗d7 15.♗b5 ♖ac8 16.♔b1 ♘e4 17.♕e2 ♕b4 White was under huge pressure in Garcia Palermo – Vladimirov, Oviedo 1993.

b) 9.♗e2 allows Black easy equality by liquidating the centre: 9...dxc4 10.♗xc4 cxd4 (10...a6 makes a lot of sense as well) 11.♘xd4 (Entering the IQP structure with 11.exd4? is a poor decision here: 11...a6 12.a4 ♘b6 13.♗b3 ♗d7 14.a5 [after 14.0-0 ♗c6 White must choose between losing the d4-pawn and allowing his kingside structure to be wrecked] 14...♘bd5 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 16.♗xd5 exd5 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7† Black recaptures with a huge check, leading to serious problems for White.)

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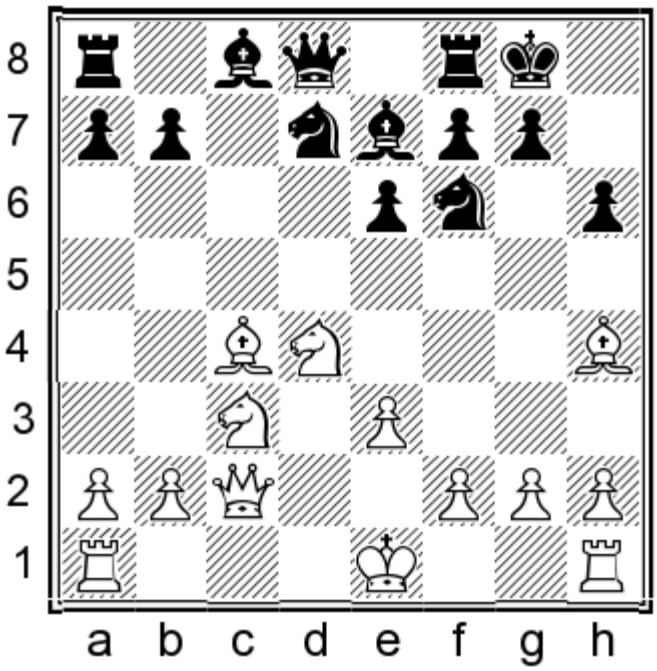
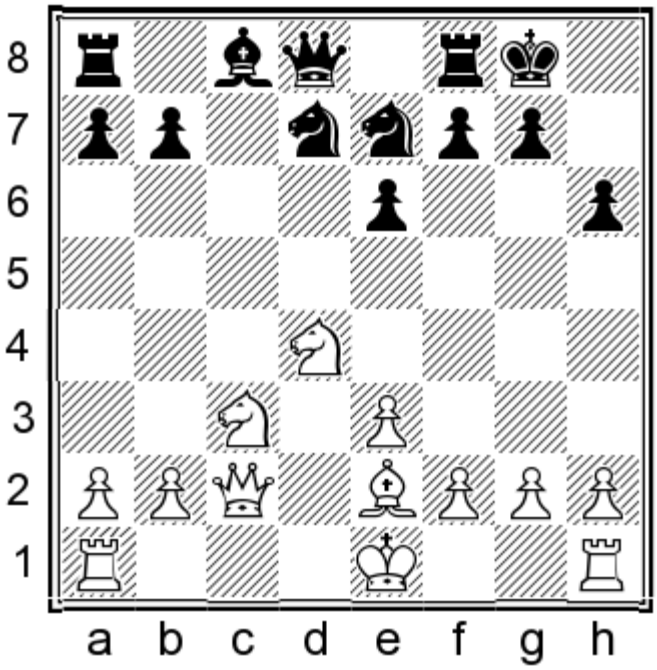


11...♘e5! 12.♗e2 ♗d7 13.0-0 ♕b6=

c) 9.cxd5 has actually been White's most popular choice, which is surprising, as I consider it a slight inaccuracy. Black has two good replies:

c1) 9...♘xd5 is a simple solution, when 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘xd5 exd5 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 transposes to the main line as covered in Game 15.

c2) 9...cxd4!? is a useful extra option which White's chosen move order presents to us. 10.♘xd4 ♘xd5 11.♗xe7 ♘xe7 12.♗e2



12...e5! 13.♘db5 a6 14.♘d6 ♘f6 15.♖d1 ♕c7= Black was fine in Grigorov – Rusev, Sunny Beach 2009.

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GAME 14

Magnus Carlsen – Curt Hansen

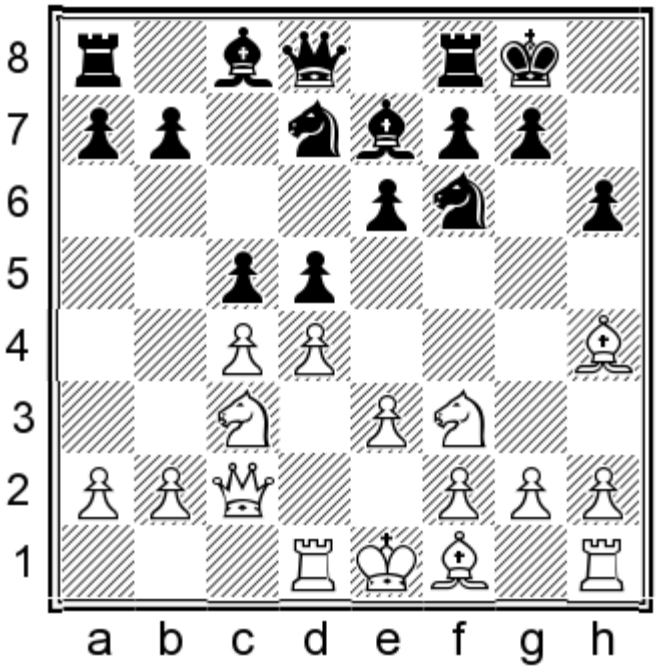
Skanderborg 2005

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♕c2 c5

The game featured a different move order but I have once again fiddled it for our purposes.

9.♖d1

This has been White's second most popular choice, behind 9.cxd5.



9...♕a5!

This is the most solid and accurate choice, and was also Kramnik's choice in a 2016 game, as noted below.

9...b6!? is playable, although Black has to be ready to take on an IQP after: 10.cxd5 (10.dxc5 ♘xc5 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.cxd5 is also slightly problematic from a structural point of view, although Black's position remains fully playable) 10...♘xd5 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♘xd5 exd5 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.♗e2 ♗e6 15.0-0 ♖ac8 16.♘d4 a5 17.♗f3 ♖fd8 18.♕b1 White was symbolically better, but Black was rock solid in Chuchelov – Haslinger, Germany 2010. Clearly the IQP isn't a big problem, and Black takes on the same structure in the main line as featured in Game 15. However, given the choice between that and easy equality without a structural weakness (as occurs in the main game), I would go for the latter.

10.cxd5

Other moves are also nothing great for White:

10.♘d2!? White borrows an idea from the Cambridge Springs, but here it comes with less force: 10...cxd4 11.♘b3 ♕c7 12.♖xd4 ♘b6= D. Gurevich – Cu. Hansen, Jerusalem 1986.

10.a3 ♘b6!? 11.♘d2 dxc4 12.♘xc4 ♘xc4 13.♗xc4 occurred in Dreev – Baburin, Helsinki 1992, and now I think Black is fine after the following typical plan:

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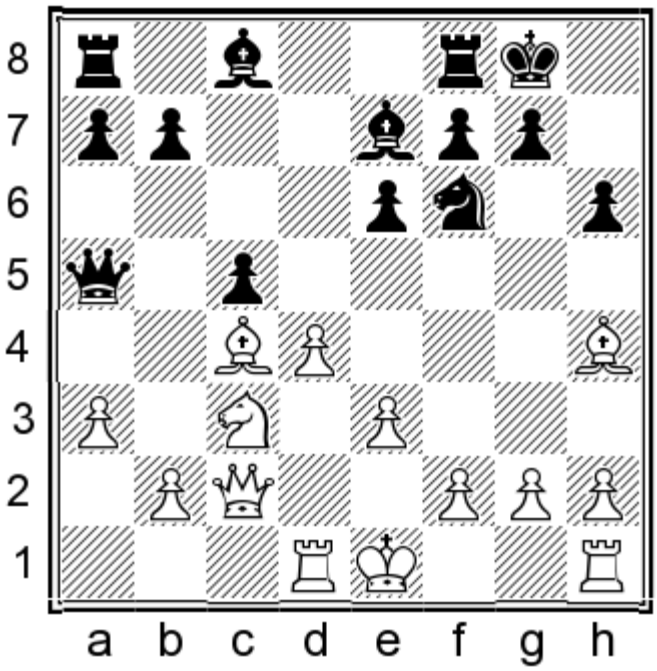
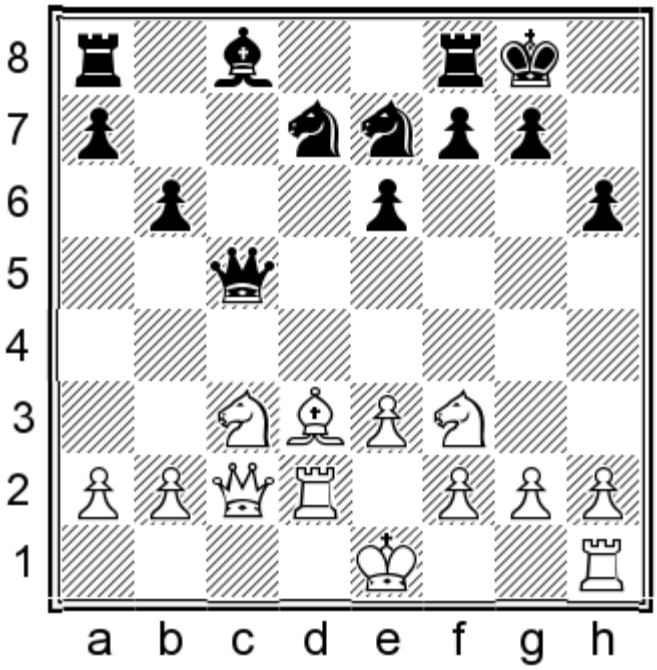


13...cxd4N 14.♖xd4 ♖d8= Followed by ...♗d7-e8.

10...♘xd5 11.♗xe7 ♘xe7 12.♗e2

12.dxc5 ♕xc5 should also be fine for Black. 13.♖d2 b6 14.♗d3 Now the most accurate continuation is:



14...♖b8!N (14...♘f6 15.♘e4! ♕xc2 16.♘xf6† gxf6 17.♖xc2 ♗b7 18.♔e2 was seen in Bukavshin – Inarkiev, Sochi 2015; White is marginally better, but in the game he was unable to create any real winning chances) 15.0-0 ♘f6 16.♘e4 ♘xe4 17.♗xe4 ♕xc2 18.♗xc2 ♗b7=

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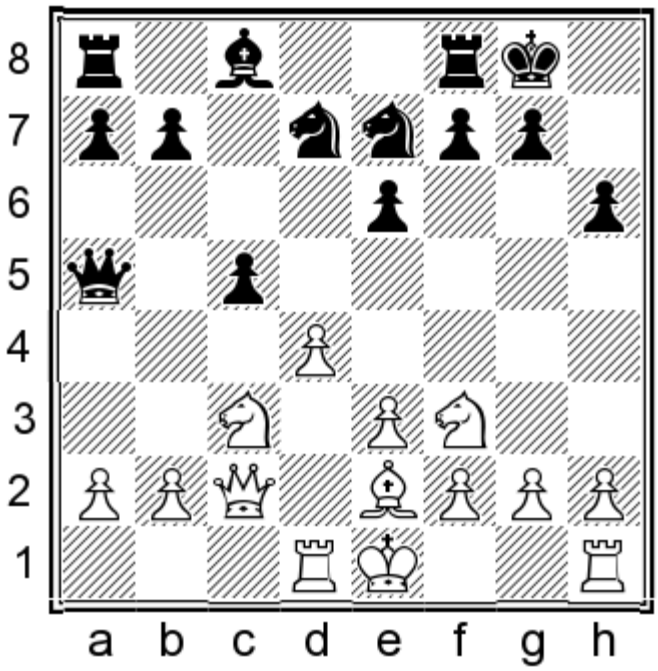

12...♘d5!

12...♘f6 was Kramnik's choice in a rapid game. 13.0-0 cxd4 (13...b6!?) 14.♖xd4 ♘c6 (14...e5! was also mentioned in the introduction) 15.♖d2 ♗d7 This was So – Kramnik, Leuven (rapid) 2016, as featured in the strategic introduction on page 16.

I like the text move even more than Kramnik's choice. Now White will have to be careful not to drift into a slightly unpleasant position.

13.0-0 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 b6 15.♘d2 ♗a6 16.♘c4

This was Carlsen's idea, to play with bishop versus knight, but Hansen correctly accepts the challenge.

16...♗xc4 17.♗xc4 b5!

Now the knight can come to b6 and, when the time is right, to a4.

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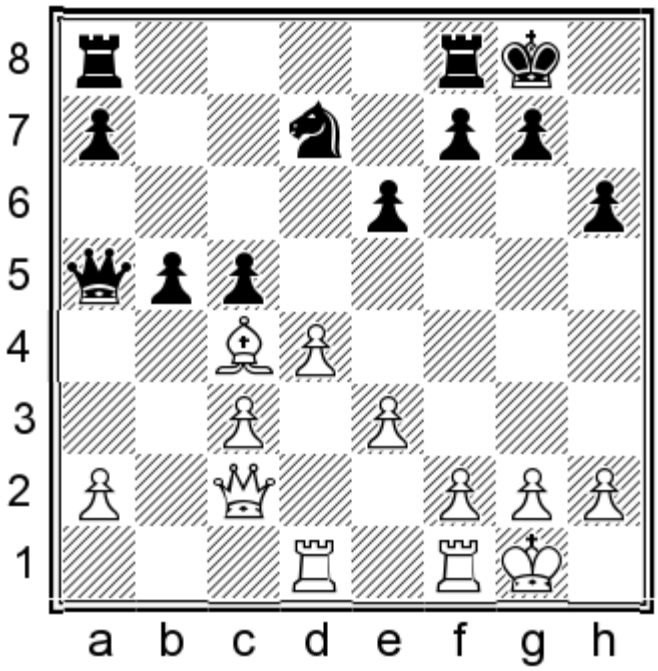


18.♗e2 ♖fc8 19.d5

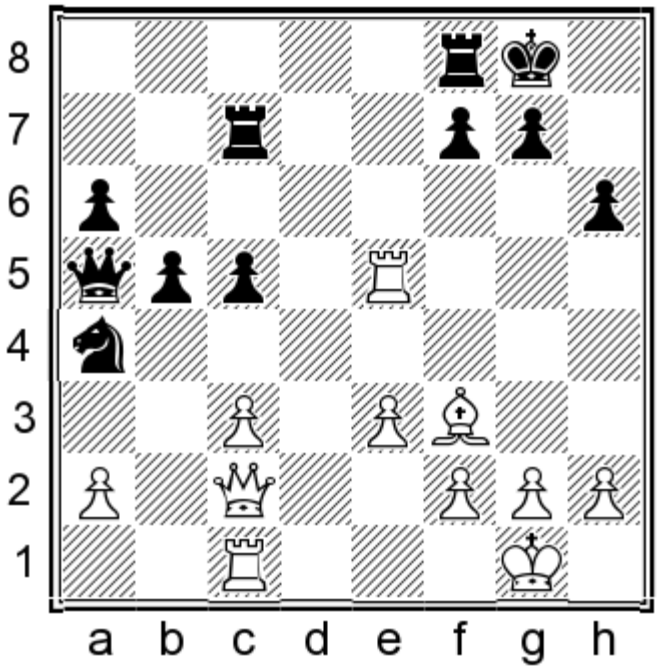
White needs to create counterplay.

19...exd5 20.♖xd5 ♘b6 21.♖f5 ♖c7 22.♖d1 ♘a4 23.♗f3 ♖e8

23...♖f8!? is the computer's suggestion, with a modest edge to Black.

24.♖e5 ♖f8 25.♖c1 a6

25...c4!? and 25...♖d7!? also deserved attention.



26.h4! ♖d7 27.h5

Now White has counterplay based on the plan of ♕f5 and ♗e4.

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27...♕d8 28.c4 ♖d2 29.♕f5 ♕f6

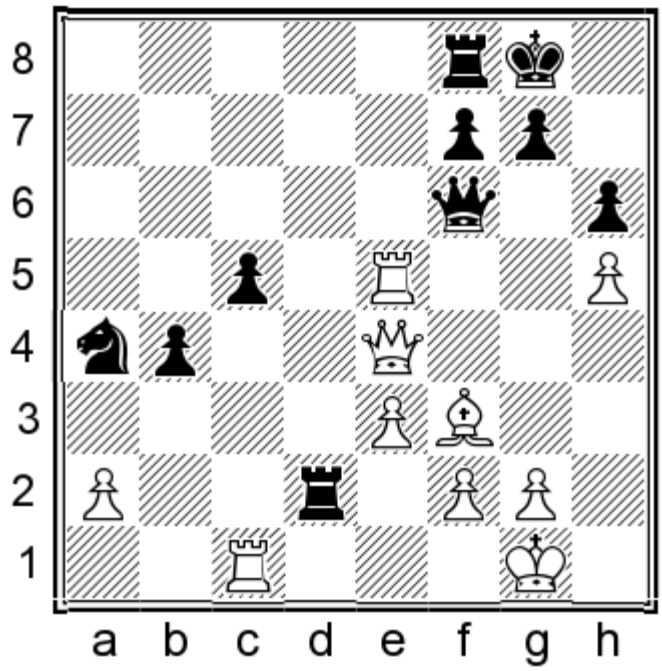
After 29...♖xf2 30.♔xf2 ♕d2† 31.♔g3 ♕xc1 32.♗e4 Black must take a perpetual: 32...♕e1† 33.♔h2 ♕h4†=

30.cxb5

After 30.♕xf6? gxf6 31.♖f5 b4 the a2-pawn is in danger, while the b4-pawn may become a monster.

30...axb5 31.♕e4 b4

Hansen tries to push for the win, but the young Carlsen (a month shy of his fifteenth birthday at the time, and rated 'only' 2570) defends well to earn half a point.



32.♖e8 ♕d6 33.♖xf8† ♕xf8 34.a3 ♘c3 35.♕c4 ♖b2 36.axb4 cxb4 37.♖a1 ♖b1† 38.♖xb1 ♘xb1 39.♗d1 ♕b8 40.♕d3 ♘c3 41.♗b3 ♕c7 42.f3 ♕e7 43.♔f1 ♕h4 44.♕d7 ♕h1† 45.♔f2 ♕h4† 46.♔f1

½–½

In the next game we will look at the IQP structure that might result after 9.dxc5.

GAME 15

Anish Giri – Vladimir Kramnik

Moscow 2016

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♕c2 c5 9.dxc5

Yet again, the actual move order was a little different, but the players found their way here soon enough.

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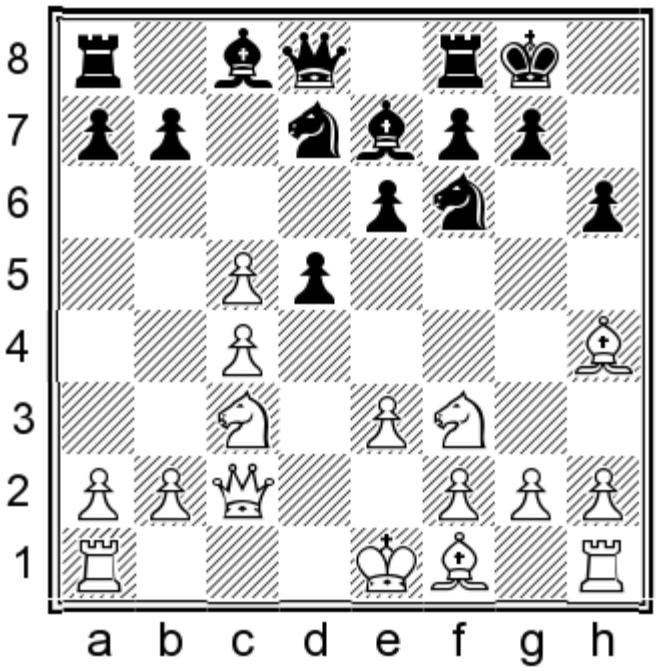
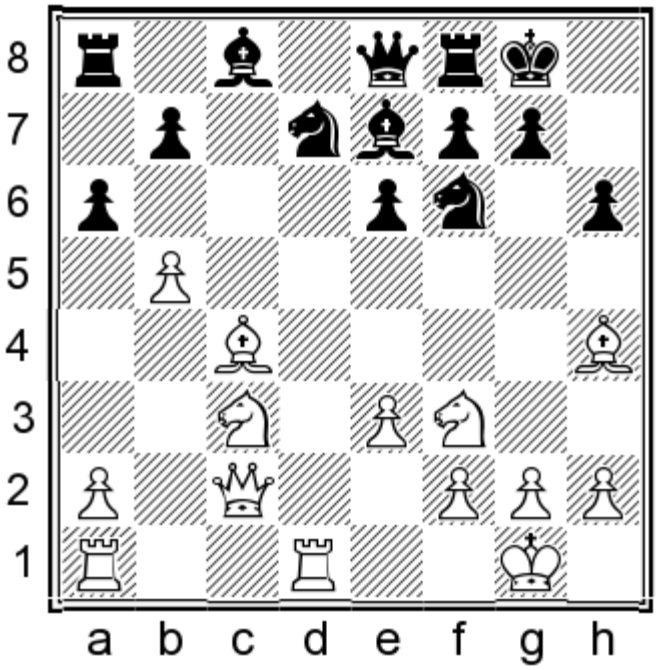


9...♘xc5

With this recapture, Black accepts the challenge of the IQP. The games of Kramnik, Anand and others have demonstrated that Black's position is fine, and I see no need to shy away from the ensuing structure.

However, for players who wish to have another option available, I will briefly mention two alternatives which can be considered:

9...dxc4!? 10.♗xc4 (10.c6 is met by 10...♘b6!) 10...♘xc5 11.0-0 a6 12.♖fd1 ♕e8 13.b4 ♘cd7 14.b5 Other moves can be met by ...b5. The text move puts Black under a bit of pressure, but he can defend with:



14...♘b6!N (14...b6?! was inferior in Ubilava – Vazquez Igarza, Benasque 2013) 15.♗f1 ♘bd5 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7=

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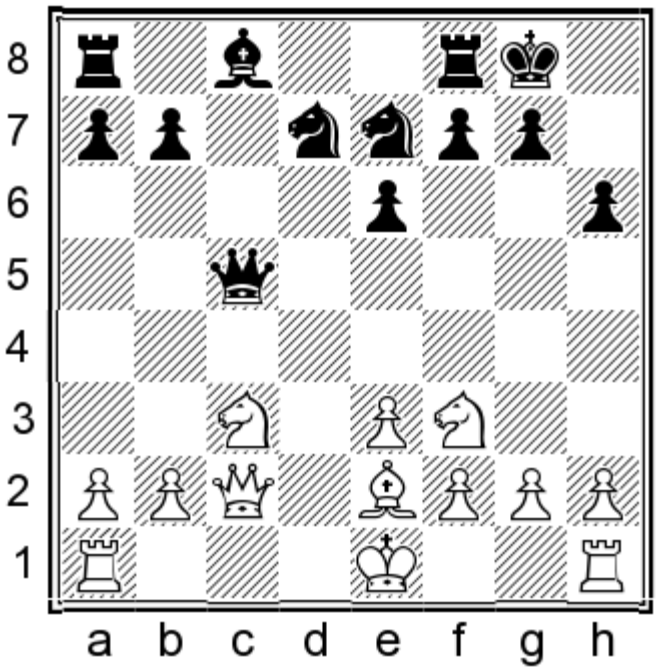
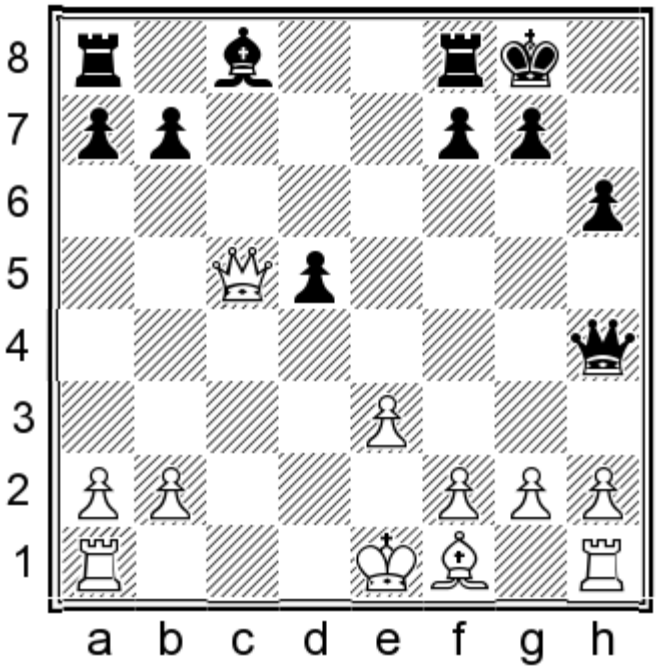
If I was determined to avoid the IQP, then 9...♕a5!? would be my choice. After 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♗xe7 ♘xe7 12.♗e2 ♕xc5 Black is close to full equality, for instance:



13.0-0 ♘f6 14.♖ac1 ♗d7 15.♖fd1 ♖fc8 16.♕b3 ♕a5 17.h3 ♖c7 18.♘b5 ♗xb5 19.♗xb5 ♖xc1 20.♖xc1 ♖c8 21.♖xc8† ♘xc8= Sofrevski – Trifunovic, Zagreb 1961.

10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♗xe7

11.♘xd5 ♗xh4 12.♕xc5 exd5 13.♘xh4 ♕xh4 is fine for Black, as his lead in development easily compensates for the weak d-pawn:



14.♗e2 ♗e6 15.♕d4 (15.0-0 is met by 15...♖fc8 followed by ...d4) 15...♕xd4 16.exd4 ♖fc8 17.♔d2 ♔f8 18.♖ac1 ♔e7= A draw was soon agreed in Fressinet – Anand, Doha 2016.

11...♕xe7 12.♘xd5 exd5

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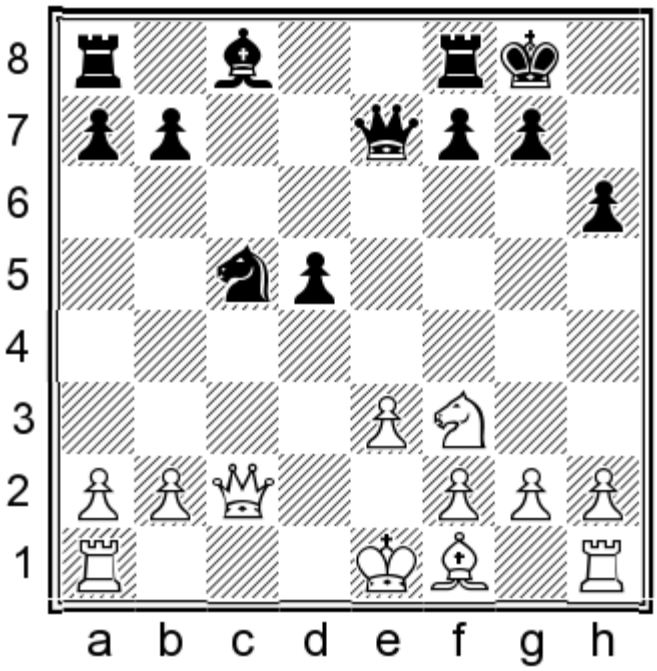


13.♗e2

This is the most accurate.

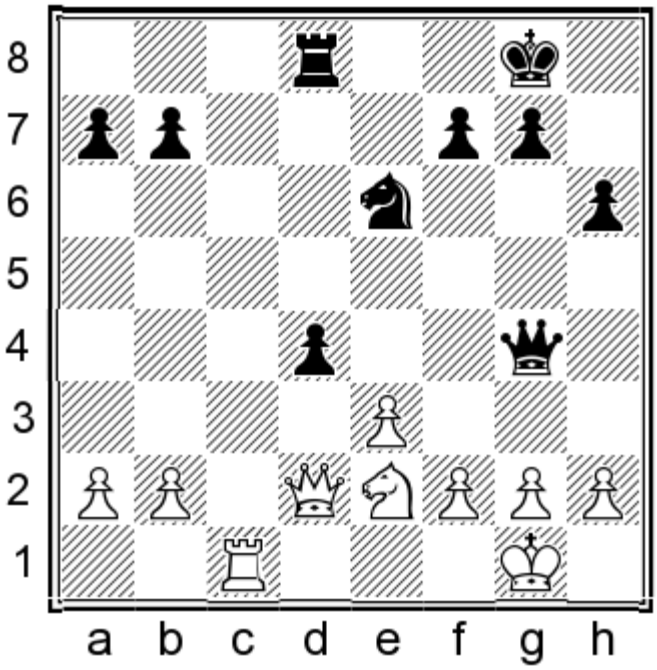
13.h3?! ♗e6 14.♗e2 ♖ac8 is comfortable for Black, especially as 15.0-0? runs into 15...d4! 16.♘xd4 ♘b3∓.

13.♗d3?! ♗g4 14.♘d4 ♘e6 15.♘xe6 fxe6 16.0-0 e5 left Black with an easy game in Broder – Pirc, Ljubljana 1938.

13...♗g4 14.0-0 ♖ac8 15.♖ad1

Giri reasons that White has little to gain from challenging for the c-file. Here are some examples of other options:

15.♘d4 ♘e6 16.♕d2 ♕g5! 17.♗xg4 (17.f4 ♕h5) 17...♕xg4 18.♘e2 ♖fd8 19.♖ac1 ♖xc1 20.♖xc1 d4 As always in this opening, Kramnik first equalizes and then tries to squeeze something extra out of the position.



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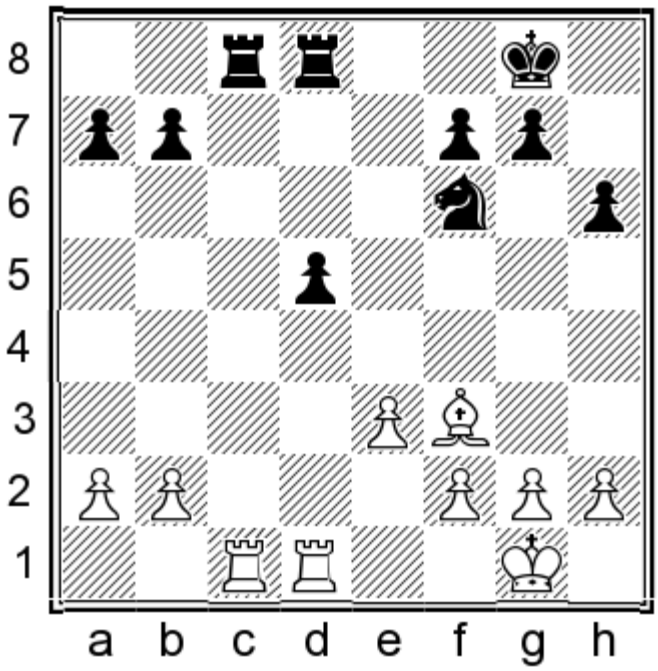
21.exd4 ♘xd4 22.♘xd4 ♕xd4 23.♕c2 h5 24.h3 g6 25.b3 b5 26.♕e2 a6 27.♕e7 ♔g7 28.♖c7 ♕d1† 29.♔h2 ♕d6† 30.♕xd6 ♖xd6 31.♖a7 h4 In Nakamura – Kramnik, Baku (ol) 2016, Black played on for a while but Nakamura held firm.

15.♖ac1 ♕f6! 16.♕d2 (16.♕c3 ♕xc3 17.♖xc3 ♘e4 18.♖cc1 ♖fd8 19.♖fd1 ♔f8 20.♔f1 ♔e7 21.♘d4 ♖xc1 22.♖xc1 ♖c8 was seen in Tomashevsky – Anand, Moscow 2016, as presented in the introduction) 16...♖fd8 17.♖fd1 ♘e4 18.♕d4 ♗xf3 19.♕xf6 ♘xf6 20.♗xf3



20...♔f8 21.♔f1 ♔e7 22.♔e2 ♔d6 23.♖xc8 Otherwise ...♖c6 will be fine for Black. 23...♖xc8 24.♖d2 ♔e5= Simagin – Suetin, Moscow 1952.

The other logical continuation is:
15.♖fd1 ♖fd8 16.h3

16.♖ac1 ♘e4 (16...♕f6!? can also be considered) 17.♕d3 ♕f6 18.♕d4 transposes to Simagin – Suetin above.

After the text move, a useful improvement is:

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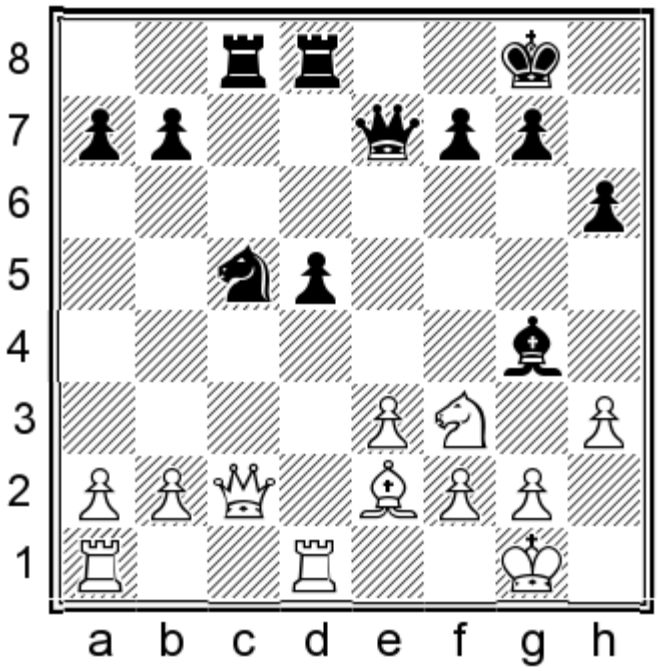
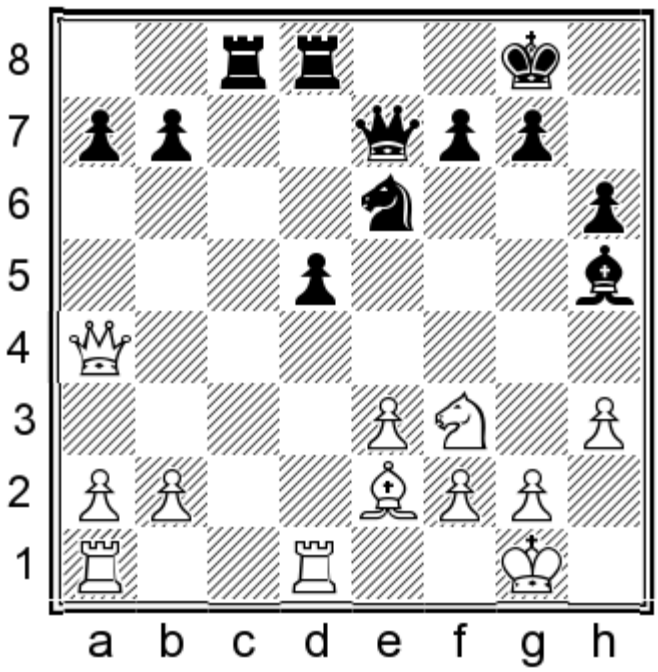


16...♘e6!

I discovered this move a while ago and presented it as a novelty in this work. Then, just as the book was about to be typeset, it was played by Dominguez against Kasparov, in the St Louis rapid event where Kasparov made his comeback to competitive chess.

16...♗e6 17.♕d2 ♗f5 18.♖ac1 ♗e4 19.♘d4 ♘e6 20.♗g4± left Black under some pressure in Vitiugov – Dreev, Moscow 2007.

17.♕a4 ♗h5!



18.♖d2

18.♕xa7 ♖c2 sees Black regain the pawn while activating his rook.

18.♘d4 ♗xe2 19.♘xe2 ♕f6 is level; Black's idea is 20.♖d2 ♘c5 and the knight goes to e4 with tempo.

18...d4! 19.♕xa7 ♗xf3 20.♗xf3 ♕b4 21.♖ad1

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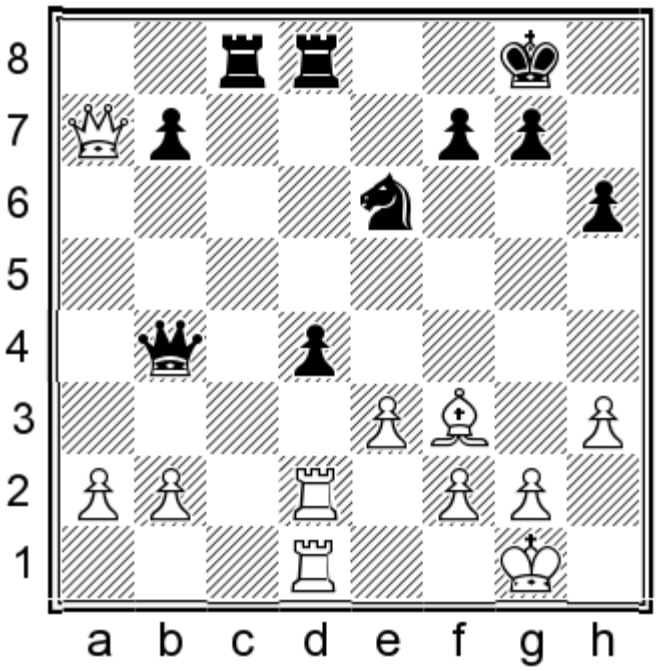
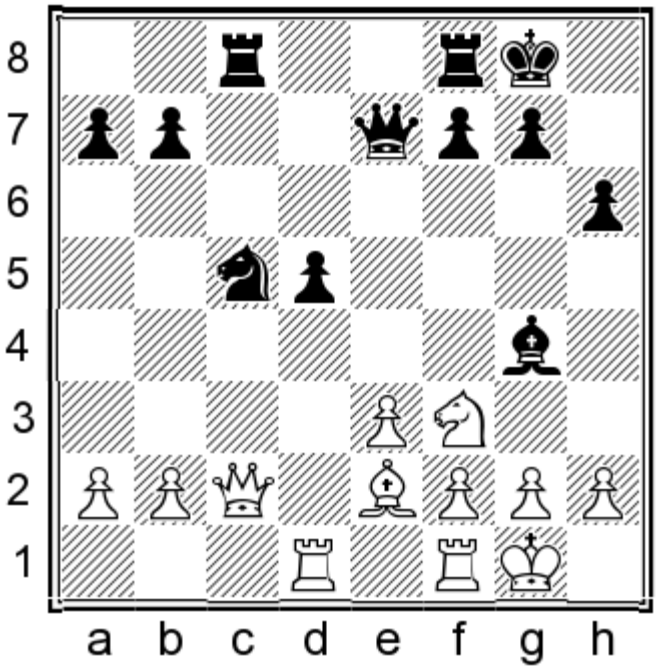


21...♖c1!=

Black will win back the pawn, with easy equality. This is exactly how my analysis ended, and all of it was played in the game. Kasparov appeared to have overlooked Black's last move, which Dominguez had clearly found at home. The remaining moves were:

22.♖xc1 ♕xd2 23.♖d1 ♕xb2 24.♕xb7 ♕xa2 25.♕b1 ♕xb1 26.♖xb1 dxe3 27.fxe3 ♘g5 28.h4 ♘xf3† 29.gxf3

A draw was agreed in Kasparov – Dominguez Perez, St Louis (rapid) 2017.



15...♖fd8 16.♘d4

16.h3 ♘e6 17.♕a4 occurred in another high-level game where Anand showed the way: 17...♗f5! (unlike the 15.♖fd1 line above, the f2-pawn is guarded here; this means that 17...♗h5 doesn't work as well due to 18.♘d4 ♗xe2 19.♘xe2 ♕f6 20.♖d2 ♘c5 21.♕xa7 ♘e4 22.♖d4 and White keeps an extra pawn)

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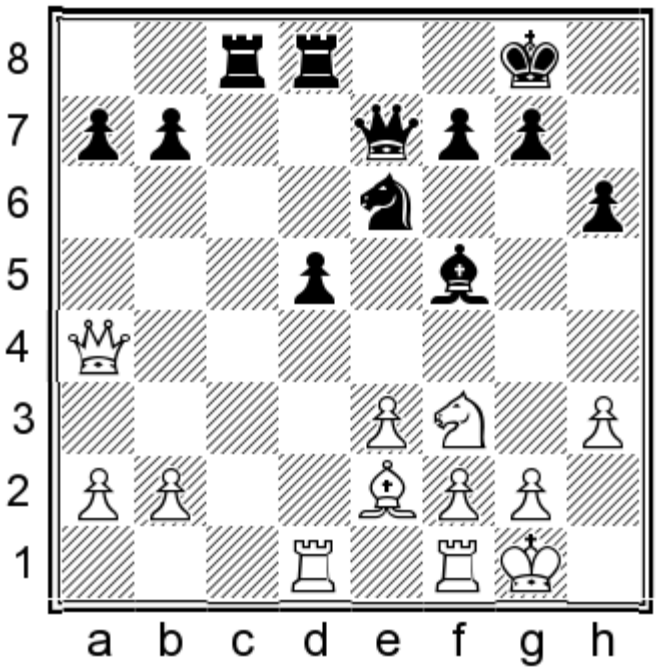
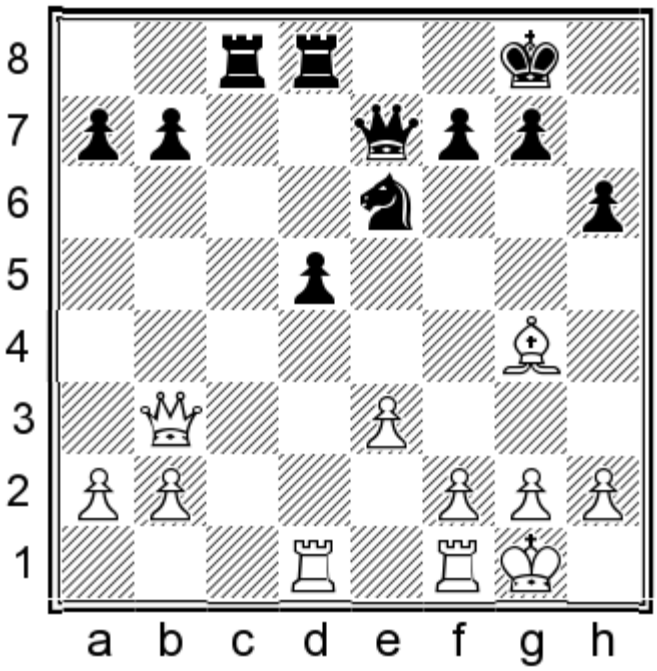


18.♘d4 (18.♕xa7 ♖c2 is also fine for Black) 18...♘xd4 19.♖xd4 ♖c2 20.♗f3 ♖xb2 21.♕xa7 ♗e4 22.♗xe4= Yu Yangyi – Anand, Doha 2016.

16...♘e6 17.♕d3 ♘xd4 18.♗xg4 ♘e6 19.♕b3

After 19.h3 Black unpins the knight with 19...♖c6 and he is ready to follow up with ...d4.



19...♖c4! 20.♗f3 ♖b4 21.♕a3 d4

Black has comfortably equalized.

22.♖d3

22.♕xa7 gives Black a choice between 22...♘g5!?, 22...♕f8!? threatening ...♖a8, and 22...dxe3 23.♕xe3 ♖xd1 24.♗xd1 ♖xb2, all of which are fine for Black.

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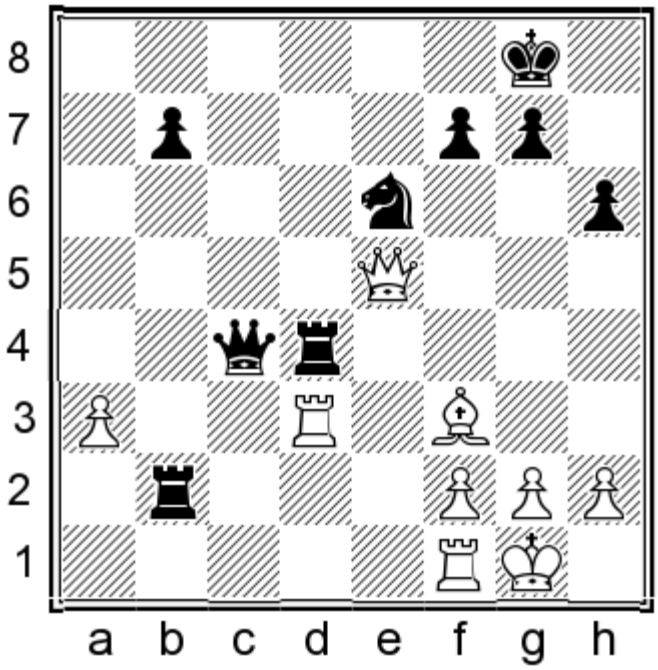
22...a5 23.♕xa5 ♖xb2 24.♕e5 ♕b4 25.exd4 ♖xd4 26.a3 ♕c4

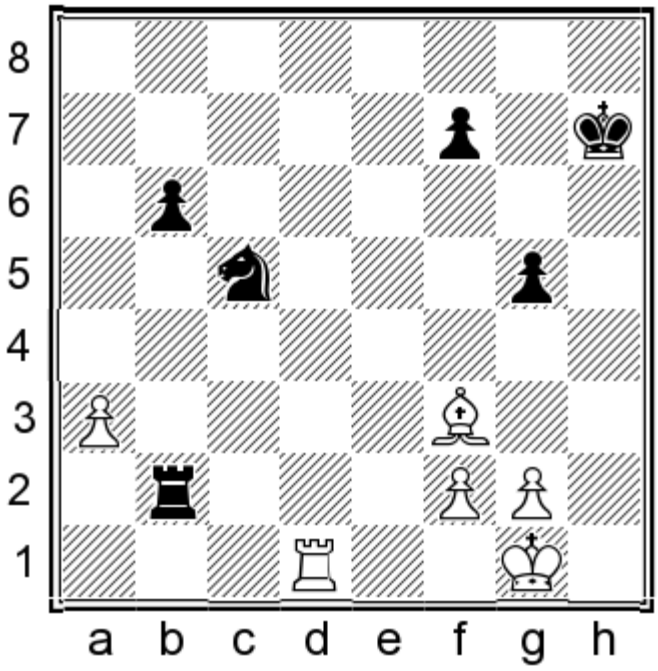
For the rest of the game Kramnik tries hard to make something happen, but Giri never gives him a real chance.



27.♖dd1 ♖xd1 28.♖xd1 ♕b3 29.♕b8† ♔h7 30.♕d6 ♕c2

After 30...♘g5 31.♕d3† ♕xd3 32.♖xd3 ♘xf3† (32...♖b1† 33.♗d1=) 33.gxf3 the doubled pawns give White a purely symbolic disadvantage.

31.♕d3† ♕xd3 32.♖xd3 ♘c5 33.♖d1 g5 34.h4 b6 35.hxg5 hxg5



36.♖d6 ♔g7 37.g3 f5 38.g4 f4 39.♗c6 ♖b1† 40.♔g2 ♖b3 41.♖d5 ♔h6 42.♖d6† ♔g7 43.♖d5 ♔h6

½–½

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We may conclude that the Professional Variation with 8.♕c2 c5! is holding completely firm for Black. Let's turn our attention to White's last major option on move 8.

8.♖c1

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♖c1

This has been White's most popular choice by some margin, and can thus be regarded as the main line. Just like after 8.♕c2, I will present a complex, combative option followed by a 'Professional' equalizing line.

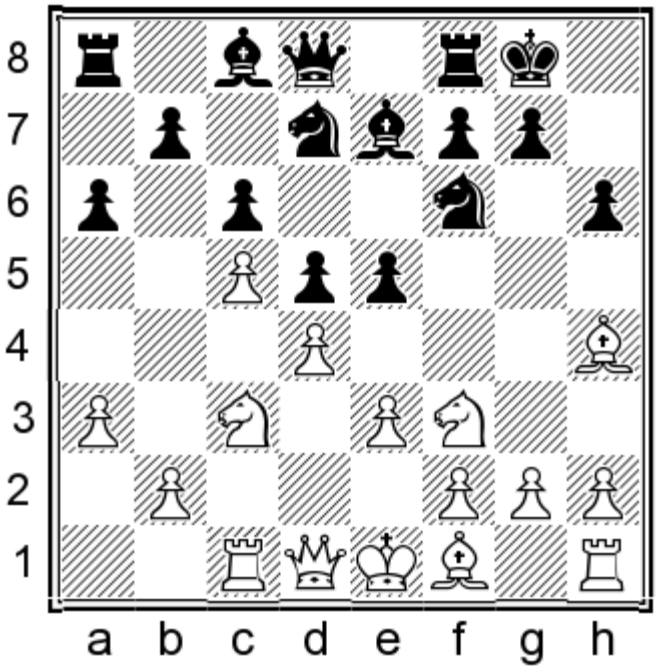
Fighting with 8...c6!?

8...c6 9.♗d3!

This seems like the most challenging option.

9.♕c2 has already been covered under 8.♕c2 c6!?, when 9.♖c1 was presented as the main line.

9.a3 a6 (9...♘e4!? and 9...b6!? are reasonable alternatives here) 10.c5 e5



11.♗e2!? (11.dxe5 ♘e4! has occurred in a couple of games; in both cases Black regained his pawn with a pleasant position and went on to win) The text move was played in Akobian – Shulman, Upper Lake (blitz) 2009, when 11...♘e4!?= would have been an easy equalizer.

9...a6!?

Aronian's choice seems best.

The alternative is 9...dxc4 10.♗xc4 and now:

a) In the similar position without the inclusion of the moves ...h6 and ♗h4, 10...♘d5 is a logical continuation which dates back to the 19th century, and was played many times by Capablanca against Alekhine in their 1927 match.

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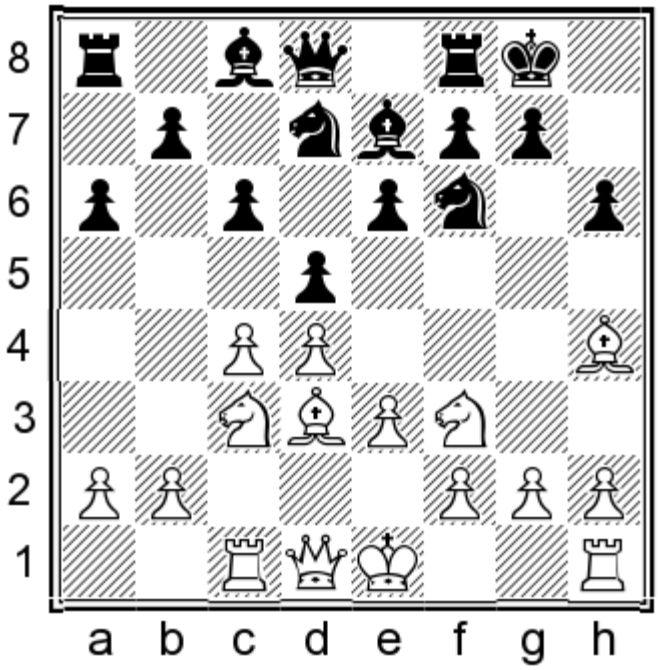
However, this is one instance where the early ...h6 works against Black, as White has the easy option of 11.♗g3!± with a comfortable edge.

b) 10...b5 11.♗d3 a6 is more consistent with Black's earlier play, with the idea to follow up with ...c5 and ...♗b7. I tried this plan myself in two club games and both times I scored comfortable wins, but later I discovered that 12.a4! is a good reply, leading to an annoying edge for White.



10.c5!

This move seems the strongest.

10.0-0 dxc4 11.♗xc4 b5 is obviously fine for Black.

10.cxd5 exd5 11.0-0 ♘h5 is similar to our main line after 8.♕c2 c6!?, and may well transpose.

10.b3 b6! (10.a4 b6! is similar) 11.0-0 ♗b7 12.♕e2 c5 13.♖fd1 ♘e4 has been defended successfully by GM Zvjaginsev a few times. Black doesn't seem to have any problems and, since this section is mainly inspirational, I will leave it for interested readers to investigate more deeply if they wish to.

10...e5!

This is the standard reaction when White sets up a queenside clamp.

The great Larsen has played 10...♖e8 but I couldn't make this work for Black after the prophylactic retreat 11.♗g3!.

I also examined other moves like 10...♘h5, 10...♘h7 and 10...b6, but White can get a clear plus against all of them.

11.dxe5 ♘e8 12.♗g3 ♘xc5 13.♗b1!

If the pawn was on h7, this line would have been easily fine for Black. However, having the pawn on h6 weakens the kingside and gives White some attacking chances.

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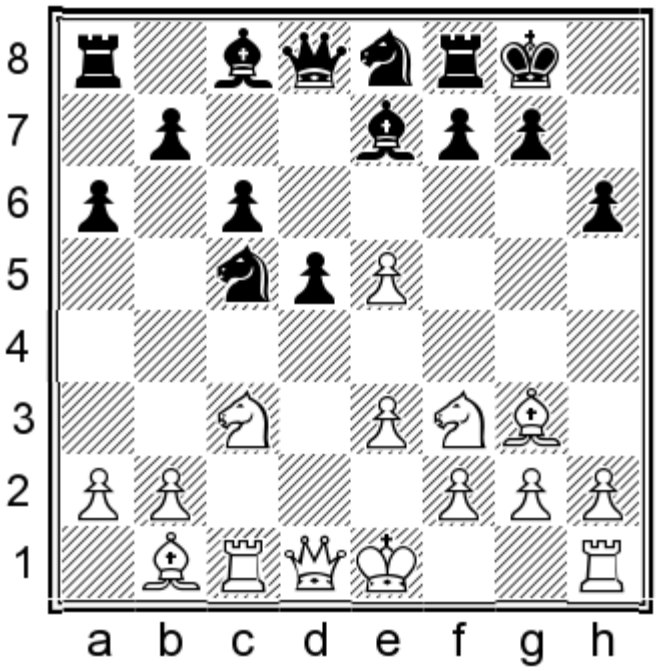


13...f5!?

This is my attempt to make the game as complicated as possible. In general Black would like to move his c5-knight to e6 and then continue with ...g5 and ...♘8g7. Later he might continue regrouping with ...♗d7-e8-g6 or ...♕e8 followed by ...♗d8-c7.

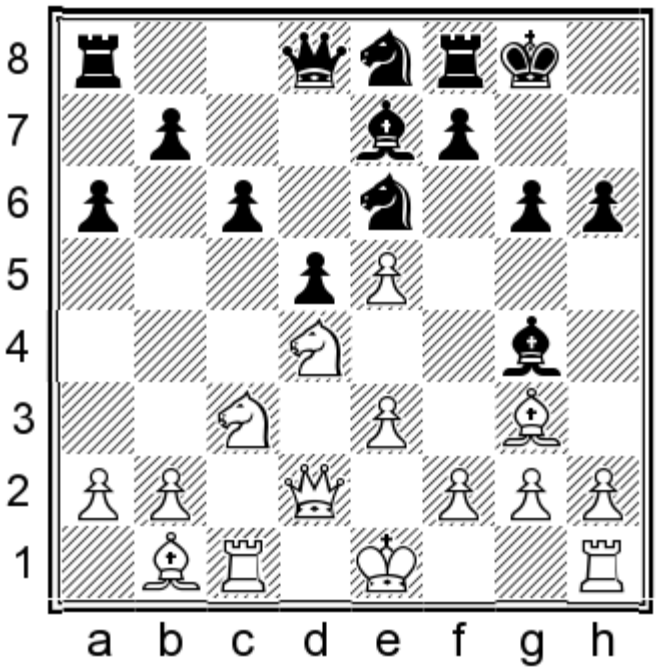
13...♗g4!?

This move also appears playable.

14.♕c2 g6 15.♘d4 ♘e6 16.♕d2!N

After 16.h3?! ♘xd4 17.exd4 ♗f5 18.♕d2 ♗xb1 19.♖xb1 ♘g7 20.♗f4 (20.♕xh6? is met by 20...♗g5 21.♗h4 ♗xh6 22.♗xd8 ♖axd8 with Black emerging a piece up) 20...g5 21.♗h2 f5 Black had adequate counterplay in Gordievsky – Shariyazdanov, Kazan 2015.

The text move is clearly more challenging; my analysis continues:



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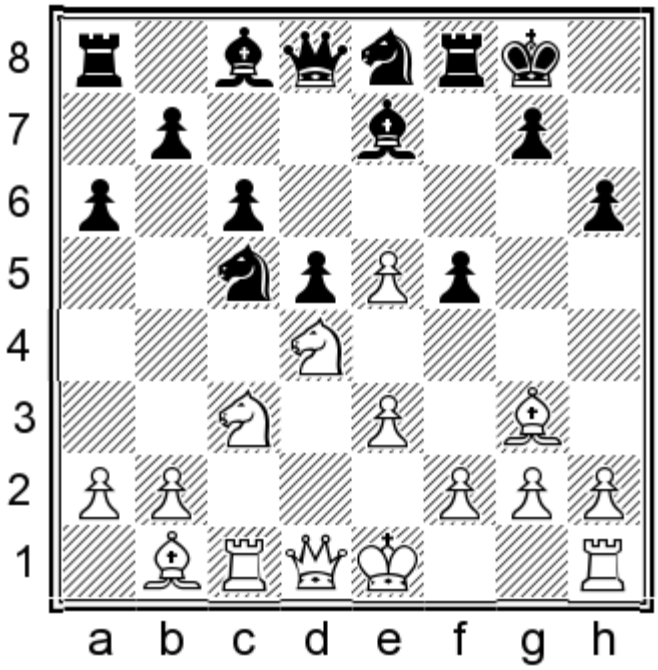
16...♘xd4 17.exd4 ♘g7 18.0-0

18.♕xh6?? is a blunder as 18...♗g5 snares the queen.

18...♗f5 19.♗xf5 ♘xf5 20.♗f4 h5

I showed this variation to the Danish national team, but none of them was keen enough to try it. The engines evaluate the position marginally in White's favour, but such assessments are less important than the issue of finding a reasonable plan. My suggestion would be to manoeuvre the knight to e6 and look to play ...f5 at the right moment. Black's position looks playable (though not entirely without risk) to me.

14.♘d4



This is a good move as it prevents Black's plan from unfolding at full speed. Now he must spend a tempo on ...g6 before the knight can go to e6.

14...g6 15.0-0

There are some ideas for White involving delaying castling, but I don't think they are especially important. As I mentioned before, the idea of this section is to give you some essential information and ideas for how to handle the 8...c6!? variation, rather than presenting detailed analysis of every line.

15...♘e6 16.a3 ♘8g7 17.h3

This move defends against a possible ...♘xd4 and ...f4, but it creates a target on the kingside.

17...♗d7

17...♘xd4!? could also be considered.

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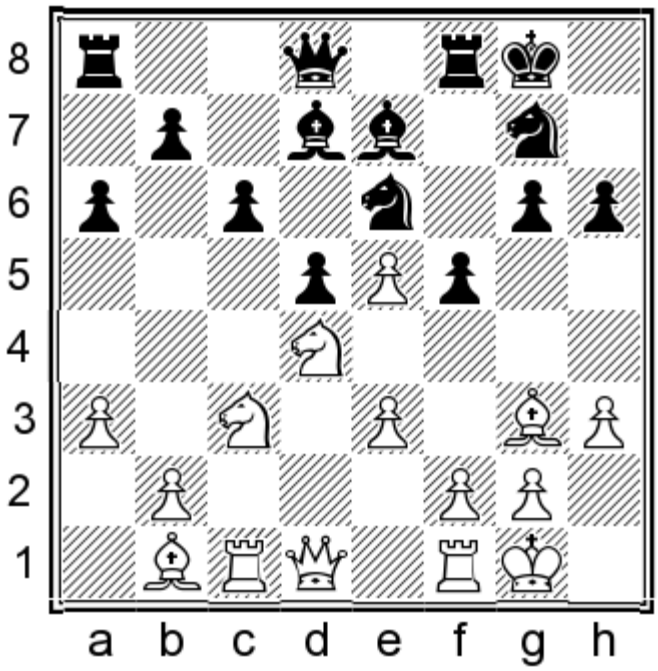


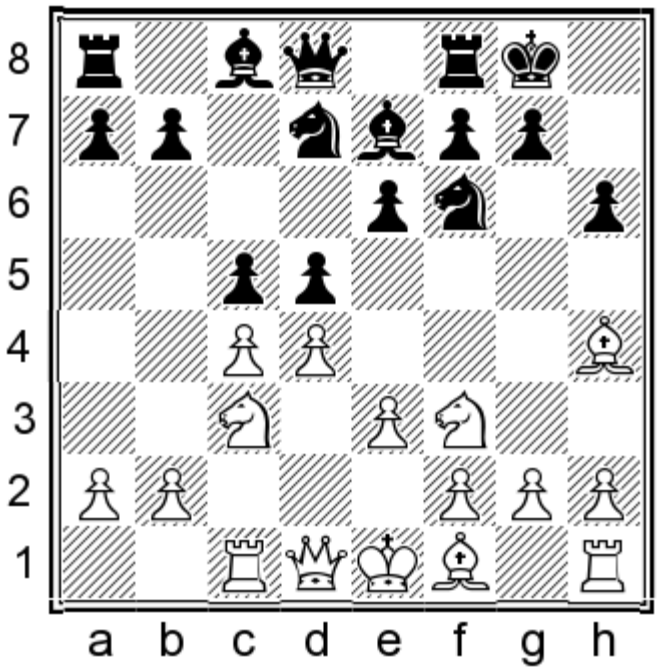
18.♕d3 g5 19.♖fd1 ♕e8!? 20.♘a4 ♗d8 21.b4 ♘xd4!? 22.exd4 b6 23.♘c3 ♖a7!?

This sample variation shows how Black can slowly build a kingside attack. His plan from here will involve ...♘e6 and ...♕g6, followed by ...h5-h4, with the rook swinging to g7 at some point in the future. In the meantime, White obviously has serious prospects on the queenside. In practice, the position can be considered unclear, with Black having good fighting chances.

The Professional Variation – 8...c5!

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 8.♖c1 c5!

Once again, this standard equalizing option is my main recommendation.



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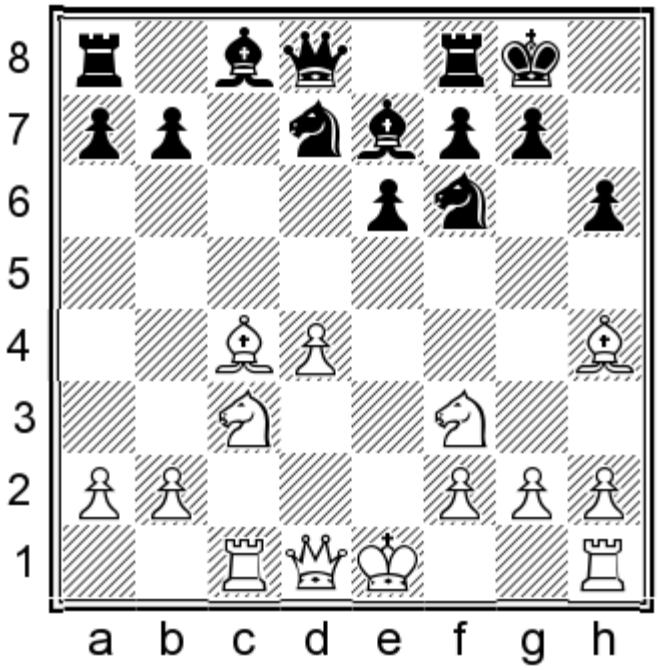
We will consider **A)** 9.♗d3, **B)** 9.cxd5 and **C)** 9.dxc5.

9.♗e2 dxc4 10.♗xc4 transposes to variation A below.

A) 9.♗d3 dxc4 10.♗xc4 cxd4 11.exd4

11.♘xd4 can be met by 11...♘e5N, rather like in the similar variation after 8.♕c2.



After the text move White may appear to have a reasonable IQP position, but this particular version suffers from a tactical problem.

11...a6 12.a4 b5!N

On page 22 in the introductory section, I mentioned the possibility that we may end up in a standard IQP structure after forgetting our theory. This comment was born out of personal experience, as I had reached the above position a few years ago in a crucial round of a rapid tournament against a talented youngster. Around this point I remembered that there was something wrong with White's move order, but I couldn't remember it or find it over the board. So, I settled for the IQP position and built an almost decisive advantage, but my opponent managed to hold a draw. It was not until I returned home and checked my notes that night that I rediscovered the beautiful ...b5 move, which works wonders in this specific position.

13.axb5 ♘b6! 14.♗d3 axb5

The engines also see good compensation for the pawn after: 14...♘fd5!? 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.0-0 axb5 18.♗xb5 ♗a6!? 19.♗xa6 ♖xa6 Black has excellent play against the weaknesses on b2 and d4.

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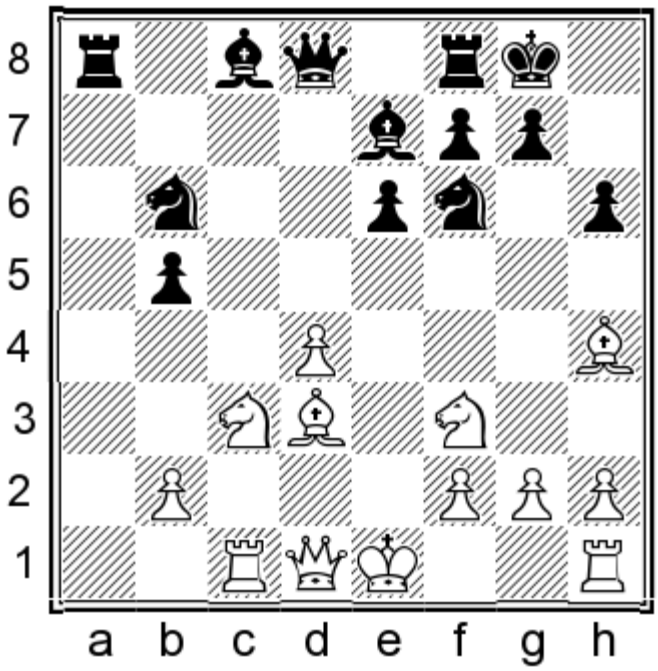

15.♗xb5 ♗b7

Black regains the pawn with slightly the better position. For example:

16.0-0 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 ♕xd4

The b2-pawn is a serious weakness.

B) 9.cxd5

This has been White's most popular move.

9...♘xd5 10.♗xe7 ♘xe7

Black avoids any structural weakness and is ready to continue developing with ...b6.

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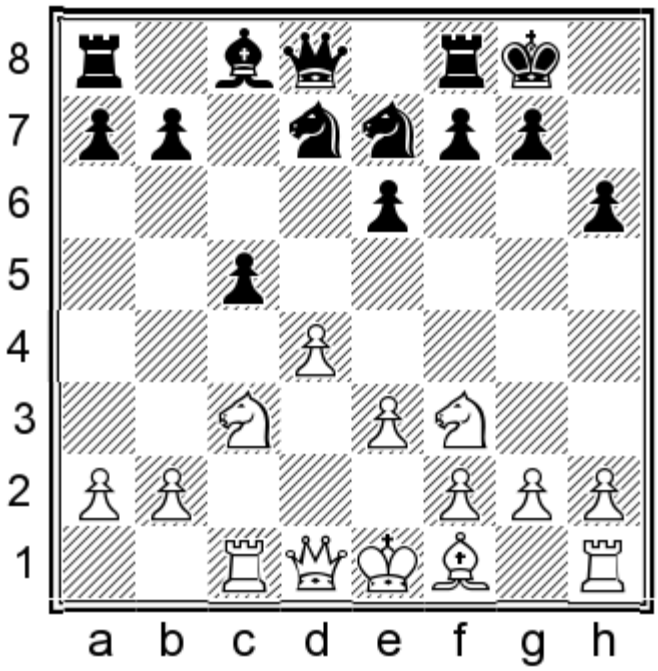


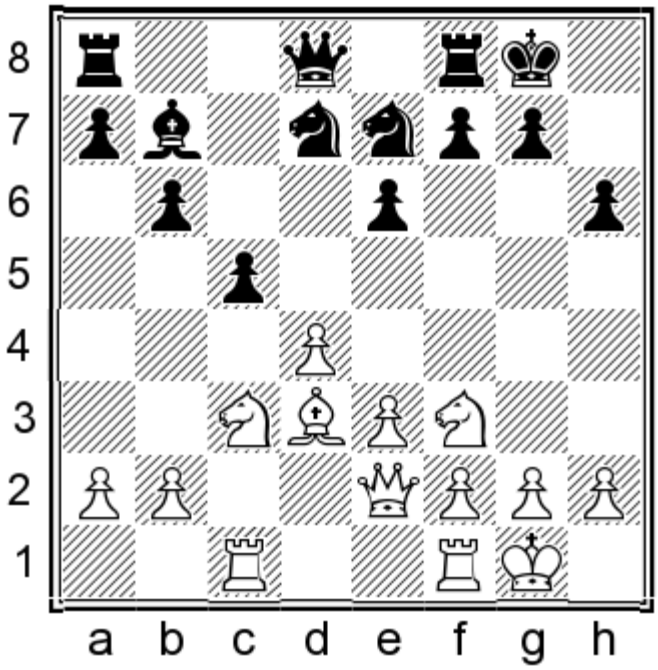
11.♗e2

Black is also fine after other moves:

11.♗b5 cxd4 12.♕xd4 (both 12.♘xd4 ♘f6 followed by ...♗d7 and 12.exd4 ♘f6 followed by ...b6 are fine for Black) 12...♘f6 13.♕a4 b6= Hawkins – Fressinet, England 2016.

The French GM had no problem repeating the same line with Black a month later: 11.dxc5 ♘xc5 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.b4 ♘d7 14.♗d3 ♘c6 15.a3 ♘ce5 16.♗b1 ♘xf3† 17.gxf3 b6= Nakamura – Fressinet, Paris (blitz) 2016.

Finally, 11.♗d3 b6 12.0-0 ♗b7 13.♕e2 is less than harmless. In Lokander – Zaiatz, Stockholm 2013, Black should have played:



13...♗xf3!N 14.♕xf3 cxd4 15.exd4 ♘f6∓

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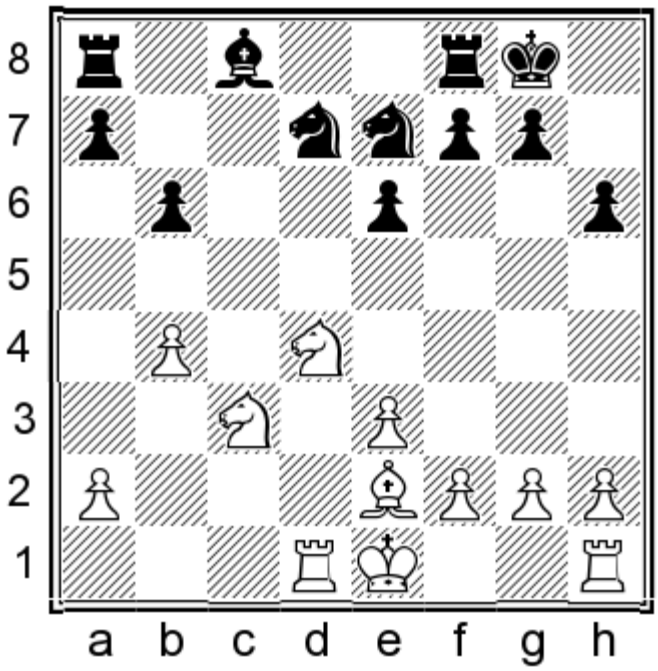
11...b6 12.dxc5

12.0-0 ♗b7 13.dxc5 ♘xc5 14.♘d4 ♘f5!? is equal, and Kramnik went on to win another technical masterpiece in Salem – Kramnik, Doha 2014.

12...♘xc5 13.b4 ♕xd1† 14.♖xd1 ♘d7 15.♘d4

Here Kramnik uncharacteristically weakened his queenside with 15...a5?! 16.b5, when the c6-square was a concern in Ivanchuk – Kramnik, Novi Sad 2016. Better would have been:



15...♘f6!N

But not 15...♗b7?? 16.♘xe6.

16.♗f3 ♖b8 17.♘db5 a5=

Black is fine.

C) 9.dxc5

We will finish the chapter by looking at my favourite game in the book, which inspired me to take the whole variation seriously.

GAME 16

Maxim Matlakov – Vladimir Kramnik

Doha 2015

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗h4 0-0 7.e3 ♘bd7 8.♖c1 c5! 9.dxc5 dxc4! 10.♗xc4 ♘xc5 11.0-0 a6 12.♘d4

12.♗e2 b5 13.♘e5 ♗b7 14.♗f3 ♕xd1 (14...♕c7!?) 15.♖fxd1 ♗xf3 16.gxf3 ♖fc8 17.b4 ♘b7 18.a3 was seen in

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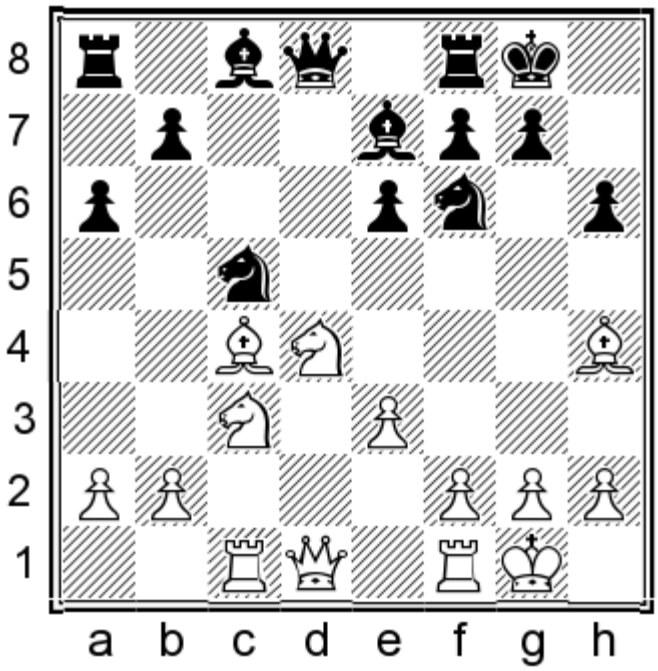
Ivanchuk – Kramnik, Berlin (blitz) 2015, and now the simplest idea would have been to improve the worst placed piece with 18...♘d6N, with equal chances.



12...♘fe4

Another high-level example continued: 12...♘ce4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.♕c2 ♘f6 (15...♘d6!?N, followed by ...e5 and then developing the bishop to the newly opened diagonal, also seems perfectly playable) 16.♗b3 ♖b8!? 17.e4 ♖d8 18.♖fd1 e5 19.♘f5 ♗xf5 20.exf5 ♖xd1† 21.♖xd1 e4 This was seen in Ding Liren – Aronian, St Louis 2016. Aronian tried hard to create some imbalance, but the position remained objectively equal until a draw was agreed ten moves later.

13.♗xe7 ♕xe7 14.♕c2

14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 transposes to Ding Liren – Aronian, as noted above.

14...♘xc3 15.♕xc3 ♘a4!

15...b6 is a reasonable alternative to develop the bishop on b7, but Kramnik's choice enables Black to complete development without giving White any hope of exploiting the c6-square.

16.♕c2 ♗d7

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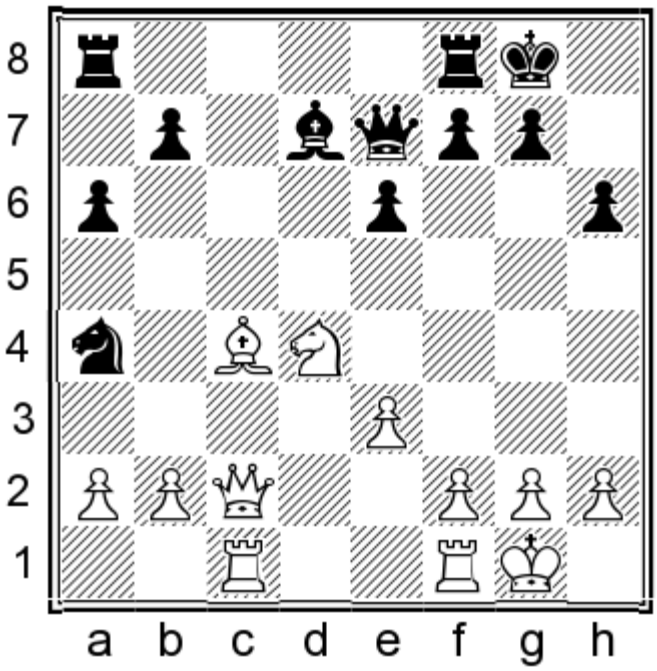


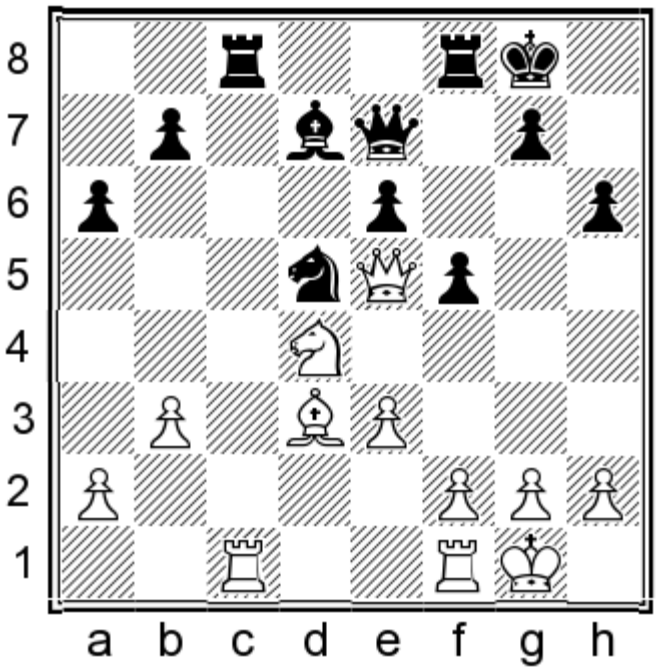
17.b3 ♘b6 18.♗e2 ♖ac8 19.♕e4

This looks active but it gives Kramnik the chance to take some space.

White should probably settle for the modest 19.♕b2, although this would be an admission that he has achieved nothing from the opening. Black can either continue classically with 19...♖fd8 or take some space with 19...e5!?.

19...♘d5 20.♗d3 f5! 21.♕e5

Matlakov puts his queen on a central outpost while threatening to exploit the placement of the knight on d5 with ♗xf5 or ♘xf5.



21...♘c3!

Not only defending the knight, but also threatening ...♖c5 followed by ...e5. Black already has some initiative, so

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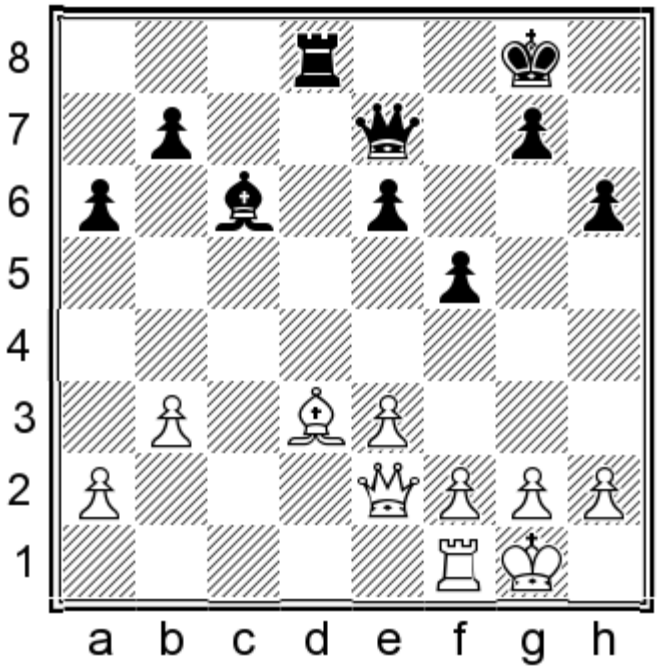
White decides to exchange some pieces.

22.♘c6!? ♖xc6 23.♖xc3 ♖xc3 24.♕xc3 ♖c8 25.♕d2 ♖d8 26.♕e2 ♗c6

How can a player of close to 2700 rating points, with no weakness in his position, ever lose this? That is what makes this game a masterpiece. Kramnik starts by using the strong points in his position.



27.a4 ♕g5

First, due to the mate threat, a small weakness is created.

28.f3 ♖d6 29.♖d1 ♔f7 30.♗c2 ♖xd1† 31.♗xd1 f4! 32.exf4

32.e4 might slowly become unpleasant for White after 32...♕c5† 33.♔f1 ♕d4. Black first centralizes his queen and then fixes White's queenside pawns on light squares with ...a5.

32...♕xf4 33.♕d3 ♕e5 34.h3

This was probably played with the idea to give the king an additional flight square and restrain any potential ...g5-g4 advance, but it further weakens the dark squares, as will be highlighted when Kramnik plays ...h5-h4 later.

34...♔e7 35.♗c2 ♕c5† 36.♔h1 a5 37.♕d2 ♕e5 38.♗d3 ♕a1† 39.♔h2 ♕d4 40.♕c2 ♔d6

The difference between the activity of the two kings is obvious. At any point, if the queens get exchanged, Black will be quick to attack the b3-pawn.

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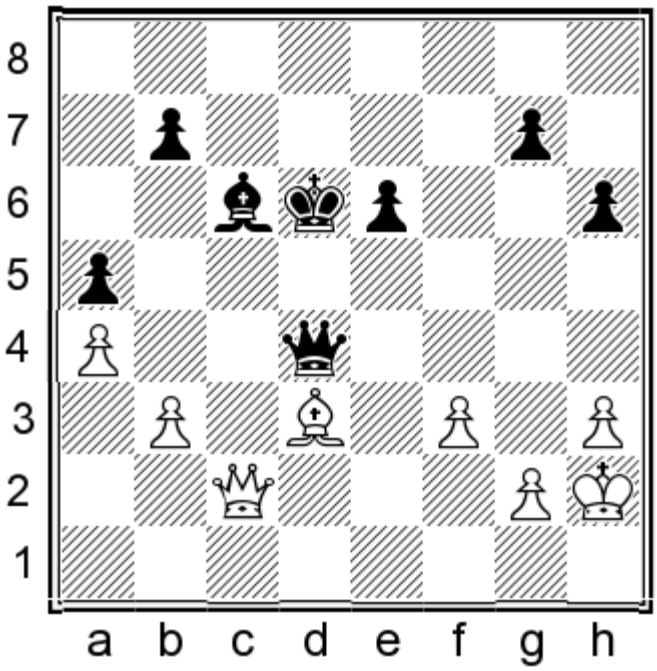
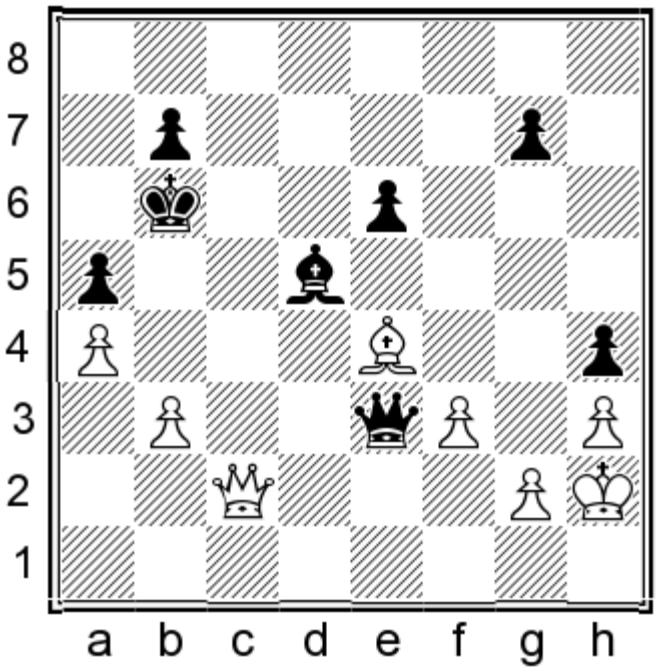


41.♗c4 ♗e8 42.♔h1 h5 43.♕c1 ♗d7 44.♕a3† ♔c7 45.♕c1 ♔d6 46.♕a3† ♔c7 47.♕c1 ♔b6! 48.♕c2 h4 49.♗d3 ♗c6 50.♗e4 ♗d5 51.♔h2 ♕e3!

Black's efforts are finally ready to bear fruit. This is a perfect move, which White should probably have prevented with something like 51.♕e2. From e3, the black queen attacks b3 and e4.



52.♗xd5 ♕e5† 53.♔h1 exd5

Now there is a passed pawn to add to the equation!

54.♕c8 ♕e1† 55.♔h2 ♕e5† 56.♔h1 ♕d6 57.♕e8 ♔c5! 58.♕b5†?

As Sagar Shah points out in his annotations, 58.♕e1! was essential in order to stop the march of the black king.

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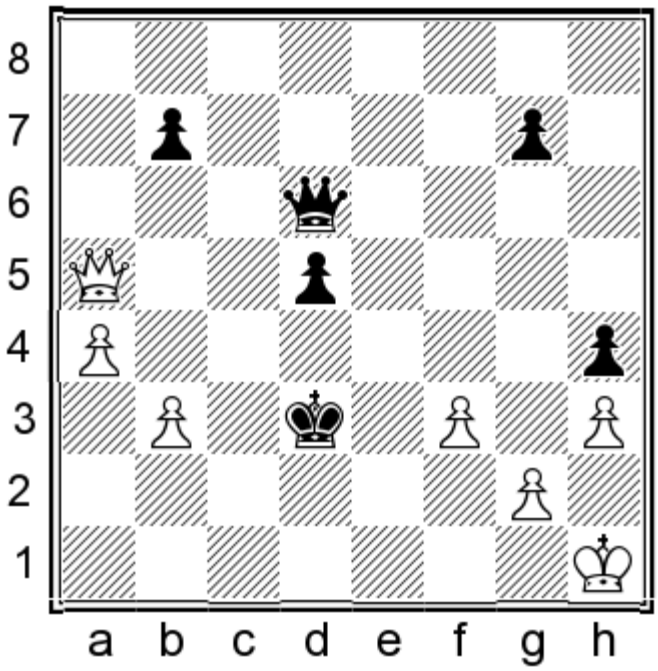
58...♔d4 59.♕xa5 ♔d3

It is doubtful that White can save the game from here, as the active king and passed d-pawn are too strong. Kramnik confidently converts his advantage.



60.♕b5† ♔c3 61.♕a5† ♔c2 62.♕e1 d4 63.♕e2† ♔xb3 64.♕d1† ♔b4 65.♕b1† ♔xa4 66.♕xb7 d3 67.♕b2 d2 68.♕a2† ♔b5 69.♕b2† ♕b4 70.♕c2 ♕d4 71.♕b3† ♔c5 72.♕c2† ♔b4 73.♕d1 ♕b2

A masterpiece!

0–1

Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the Classical Variation of the Orthodox QGD, but with the modern twist which has been championed by Kramnik, and subsequently adopted by other outstanding Grandmasters like Anand, Aronian and Fressinet, among others. In the tabiya after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 0-0 White's main options of 8.♗d3, 8.♕c2 and 8.♖c1 can all be met by 8...c5!.

Against both 8.♕c2 or 8.♖c1, I call 8...c5! the Professional Variation, as the great players of our time have shown again and again that Black's position is fully reliable, regardless of whether or not he ends up with an IQP. If you prefer to avoid this structure, or simply wish to keep the game more complex, then I have offered an alternative in the form of 8...c6!?. I would say that this move works best against 8.♕c2, but it also gives fighting chances against 8.♗d3 and 8.♖c1. In general, the lines covered in this chapter have been played and analysed for decades, so there is little chance of a novelty being discovered which will dramatically change the landscape.

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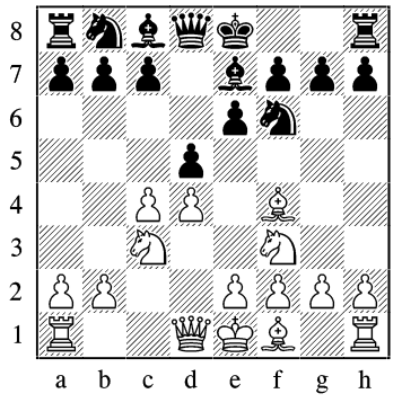
Chapter 2a



♗f4 QGD Introduction

Rubinstein's Structure

A bishop on f4 in the QGD is connected with a particular structure which has not been discussed in any strategic manuals of which I'm aware, despite the fact that it can be reached via several different openings (the Nimzo-Indian, the Slav and of course the QGD come to mind off the top of my head). I decided to name this structure after Rubinstein; it seems to have been one of his favourite ways to play, as he tended to invite this structure with either colour whenever he got the opportunity. One of its earliest appearances was in the following game.

GAME 17

Rudolf Swiderski – Akiba Rubinstein

Vienna 1908

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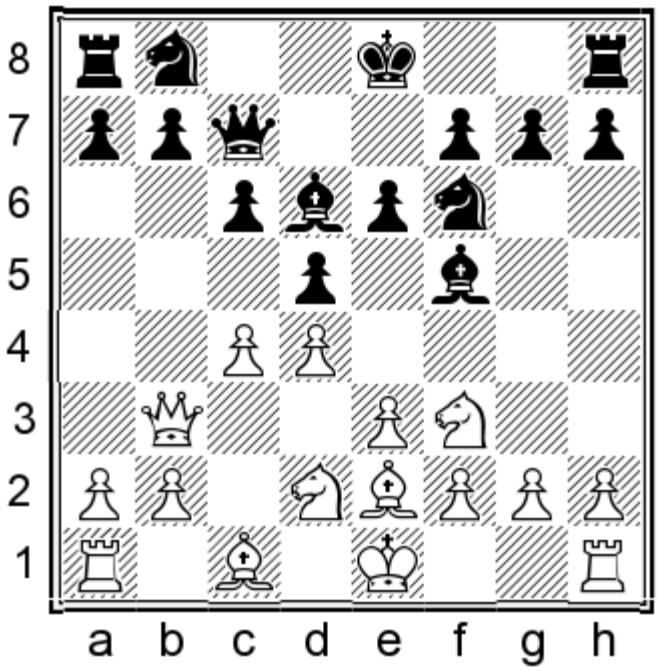

8.♗d3 ♘bd7!?

And now Swiderski didn't miss the chance to double his opponent's pawns.

9.♗xf5 exf5

This is what I refer to as Rubinstein's structure. In the QGD there are many possible systems and move orders with which, at some point, White allows his bishop to be exchanged on f4, with the e3-pawn recapturing. In the present game, the structure has arisen with colours reversed. Black has excellent control over e4 and his front f-pawn can help to attack White's kingside at a suitable moment.

10.♕c2 g6 11.cxd5?

As my editor, Andrew Greet, pointed out, it would have been better to maintain the tension with 11.0-0 0-0 and now aim for exchanging the bishops with 12.b3 ♖fe8 13.a4 followed by ♗a3. In that case Black's attack is not so strong, and White remains in the game. See the next illustrative example for more about this theme.

11...♘xd5

Thanks to White's hasty exchange on d5, Black gets the optimal set-up for his pieces.

12.0-0 0-0 13.♘c4 ♖fe8 14.a3 ♖e7 15.♗d2 ♖ae8 16.♖fe1 ♘7f6 17.g3 ♘e4

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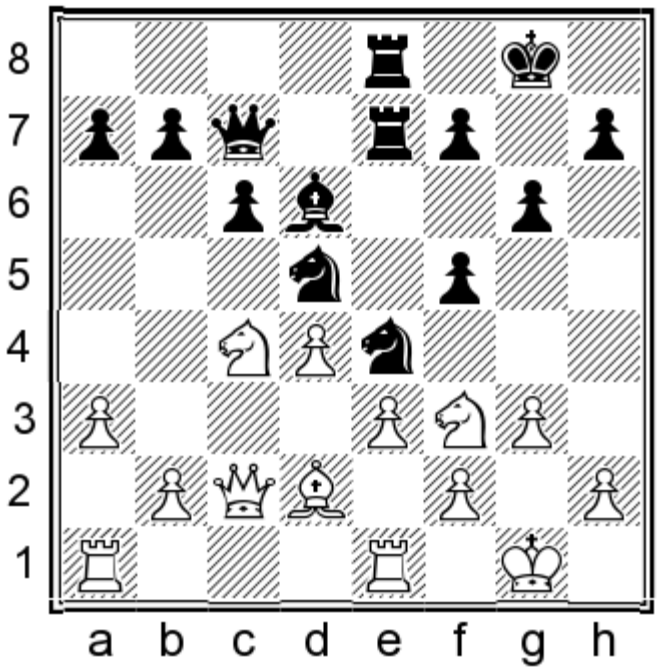

We can consider this a model game as it shows Rubinstein's idea in its purest, most idealized form. Black's knights have taken up their ideal central outposts and his rooks are doubled in preparation for an attack. It only took Rubinstein twelve more moves to win.

Rubinstein didn't always get an advantage with his structure, but he still kept winning, which increased his confidence even more, so he was always trying to get it. Here is an example from the year after the Swiderski game, where his opponent reacted better.

GAME 18

Akiba Rubinstein – Jacques Mieses

Germany (6) 1909

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 e6 3.e3 ♗d6

This is a rare move order against the London System, although it could easily transpose to my recommendation in Chapter 6c, where Black plays ...♘f6 before offering the bishop trade.

4.♘f3!?

A modern London player would almost certainly play 4.♗g3, but Rubinstein is happy to allow the doubling of his pawns again.

4...♗xf4 5.exf4 ♕d6

Mieses reacts well. That being said, almost a hundred years later, Black played in the same spirit as Mieses, but in a slightly improved fashion:

5...♘e7! 6.c3 b6! 7.♘bd2 0-0 8.♗d3 ♗a6 9.♕e2

White should have exchanged on a6 in order to lure the knight away from the centre, although Black is doing fine regardless.

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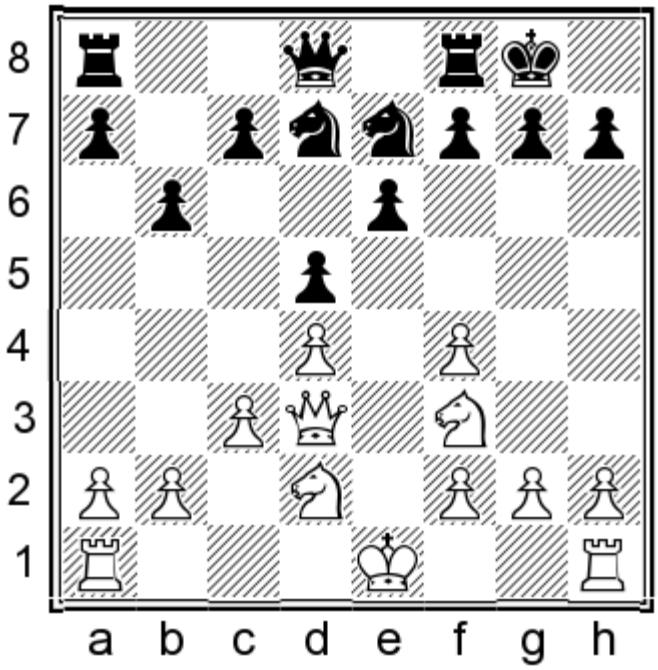
9...♗xd3 10.♕xd3 ♘d7

There are a few advantages for Black in having his king's knight on e7 rather than f6 in this structure:

a) The f4-f5 break is prevented.

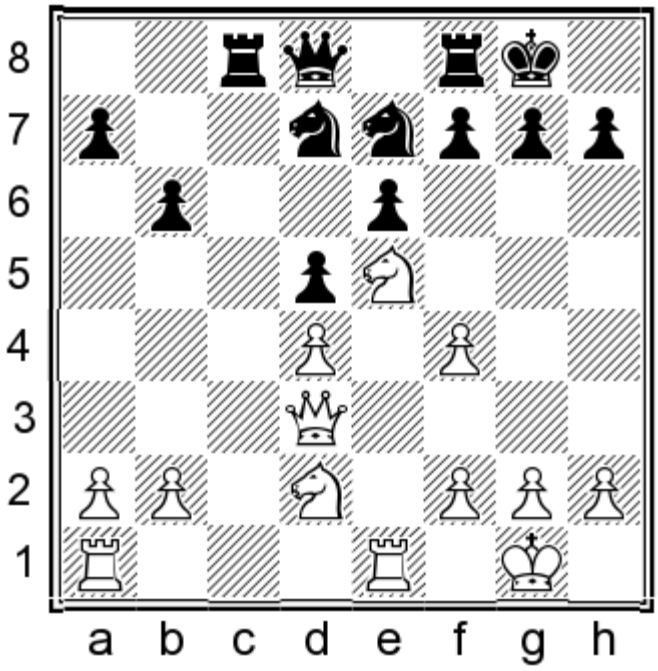
b) The knight can go to f5; from there, it may put pressure on d4 after ...c5 has been played, or it may be transferred to the flexible d6-square.



11.0-0 c5 12.♖fe1 ♖c8 13.♘e5 cxd4!

Perfect timing, now that White is unable to recapture with the knight on d4 and obtain the optimal piece configuration seen in Swiderski – Rubinstein.

14.cxd4



14...♘xe5! 15.fxe5 ♕c7 16.♘f3 ♕c2 17.♕a3 ♖c7 18.♖ad1 ♖fc8∓

Having established complete control of the only open file, Black was dominating in Carrion – Luther, Santo Domingo 2003.

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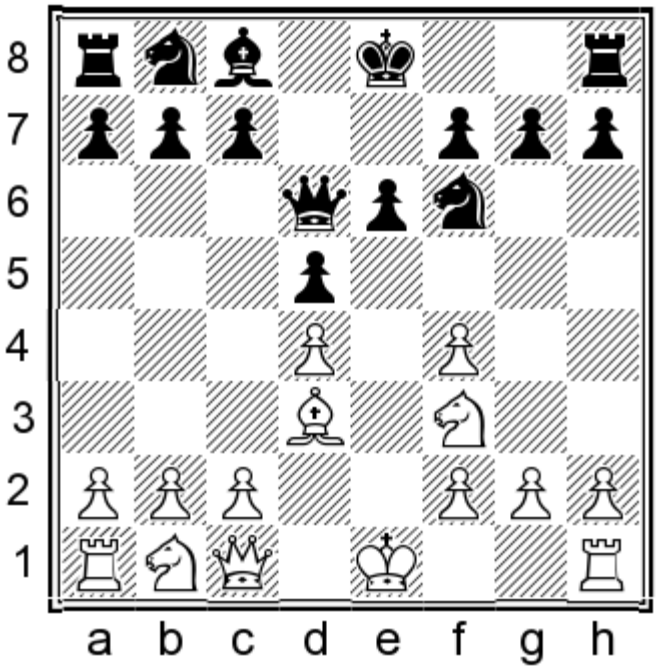
6.♕c1 ♘f6 7.♗d3

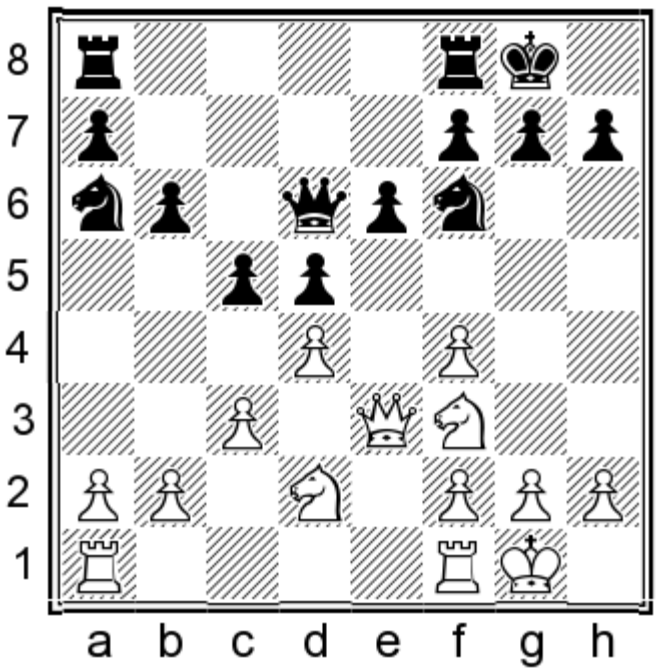


7...b6!

Trading bishops is exactly the right idea!

8.0-0 ♗a6 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 10.c3 0-0 11.♕e3 c5 12.♘bd2

Up to this point Mieses has done fine, but his next move was not optimal.



12...cxd4?!

12...♖ac8!? was better, possibly followed by improving the knight's position with ...♘b8-d7/c6.

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13.♘xd4 ♘c5!

Despite the previous inaccuracy, Black still keeps the game level by improving his knight.

14.♖fe1 ♘ce4

Due to the fact that White cannot easily avoid exchanging one pair of knights (as ♘d2-f3 allows ...♘g4!), Black was still okay – although Rubinstein subsequently managed to cause problems with a timely f4-f5, and eventually prevailed.

In light of these two examples, we can begin formulating conclusions about how to play against Rubinstein's structure:

a) Since White is playing for control over the dark squares, especially e5, playing ...c5 helps Black. White will most probably meet this with c2-c3, waiting for the exchange ...cxd4 in order to recapture with the knight. Rather than allow this, Black should be ready to play ...cxd4 when the knight cannot recapture (for example, after ♘f3-e5) and take control over the c-file after cxd4, just like in the Carrion – Luther game quoted above.

b) Exchanging the light-squared bishops also helps Black, as it removes an important attacking piece while rendering f4-f5 less dangerous. Black may also aim for counterplay on the light squares at some point, as Mieses tried to do in the above game by using e4 for his knights.

The Modern Rubinstein Structure

Over the years, Rubinstein opted for the London-style ♘f3 and ♗f4 from time to time; a good example is the London 1922 tournament, where he got his exf4 structure in consecutive rounds against Tartakower and Capablanca, winning the first game before taking a quick draw in the second. Nevertheless, by that time the Queen's Gambit was by far Rubinstein's most frequent weapon after 1.d4 d5. He went for the ♗g5 system in many games, but also mixed in some ♗f4 set-ups. The following game is of particular interest, as it features a newer version of Rubinstein's structure.

GAME 19

Akiba Rubinstein – Esteban Canal

Rogaska Slatina 1929

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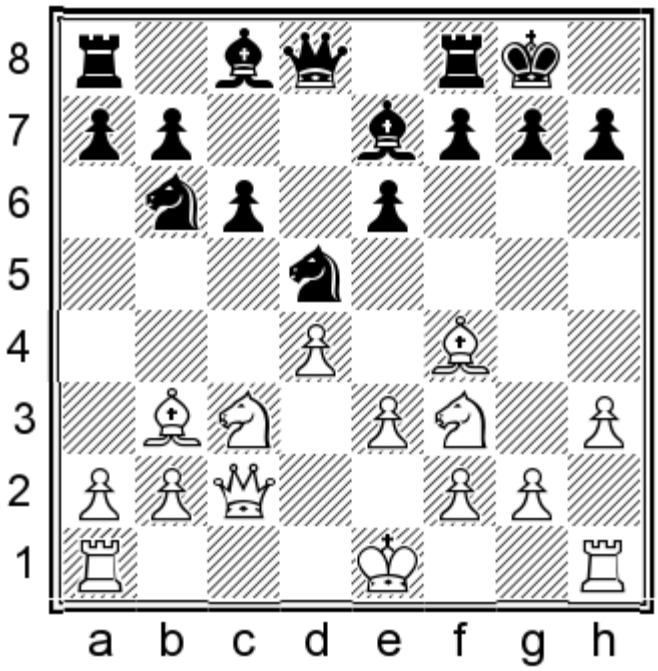

11.0-0!

Earlier in the game, Rubinstein played h2-h3 to safeguard his bishop in certain lines. However, once the present situation arose on the board, he decided there was no need to retreat it to h2.

11...♘xf4 12.exf4 ♘d5 13.g3

I call this the Modern Rubinstein Structure because Rubinstein and other players started using it in the 1920s – quite some time after the Swiderski and Mieses games quoted above. Rubinstein may have regarded the present structure as inherently more promising than the aforementioned version with a white pawn on c3 (and knight on d2) and black pawn on d5. Another explanation is that Rubinstein (and other leading players) recognized that the Queen's Gambit was overall a better try for an advantage than the London System, which naturally led players to start experimenting with this version of the exf4 structure. So why is this structure any good? Doesn't White simply have a weak d4-pawn in addition to doubled pawns on the kingside (not to mention Black's bishop pair)?

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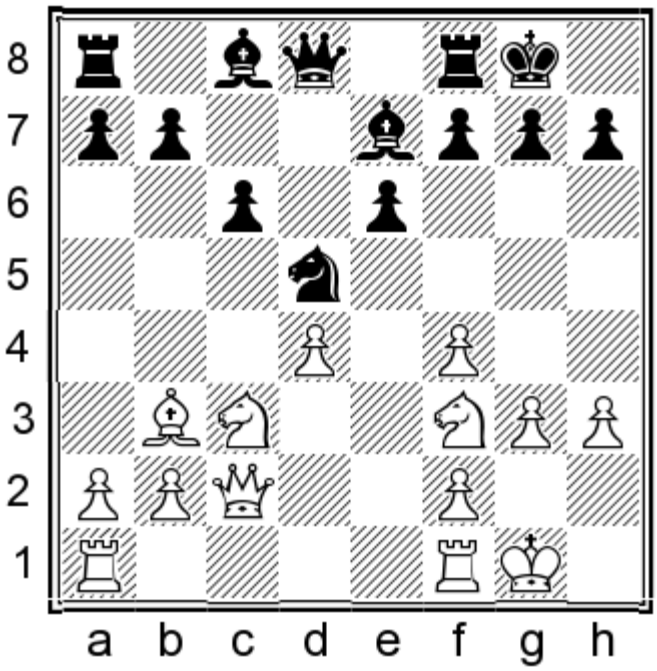

White's structure is actually a lot better than it looks. The d4-pawn is difficult to attack and Black's bishops (especially the light-squared one) are passive. Moreover, the disappearance of White's c-pawn and Black's d-pawn makes the b3-bishop an excellent piece. The pressure along the a2-g8 diagonal discourages Black from playing ...f6 any time in the foreseeable future, which means that White is guaranteed the superb e5-square for his knight.

13...♘xc3 14.♕xc3!

14.bxc3 would make it easier for Black to free his position with a timely ...c5.

14...♕d6 15.♖ac1!

Once again, Rubinstein takes care to prevent any ...c5 ideas. Now White is ready to strengthen his position.

15...♗d7 16.♘e5 ♖ad8 17.♖fd1 ♗c8 18.a3 ♗f6 19.♕e3 ♕e7

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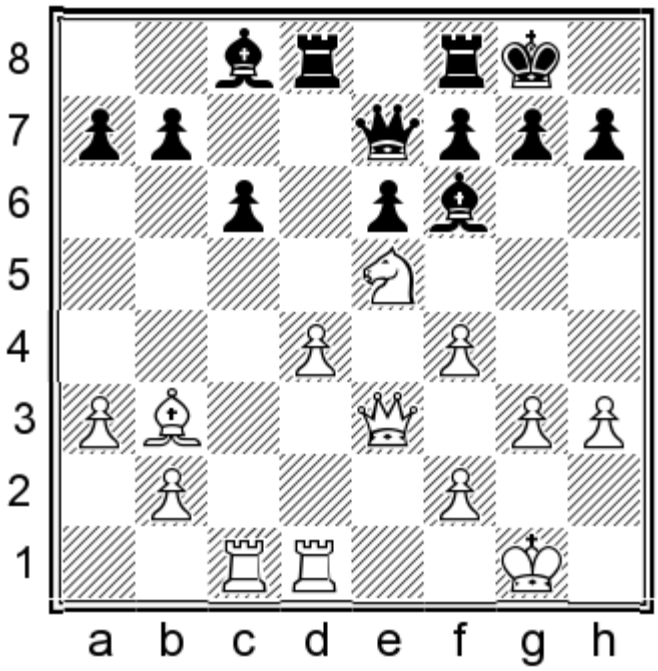

20.h4! ♖d6 21.h5 ♖fd8 22.♖c3 g6 23.♗c2

White is in full control and he eventually won a fine game.

Although "Modern Rubinstein Structure" seems like an appropriate name, it is worth pointing out that Rubinstein was not the first player to employ it with White. Six years before the above Rubinstein – Canal game, Alekhine played it – against none other than Rubinstein himself! Let us see how the latter reacted when he had to play against 'his' pawn structure.

GAME 20

Alexander Alekhine – Akiba Rubinstein

Carlsbad 1923

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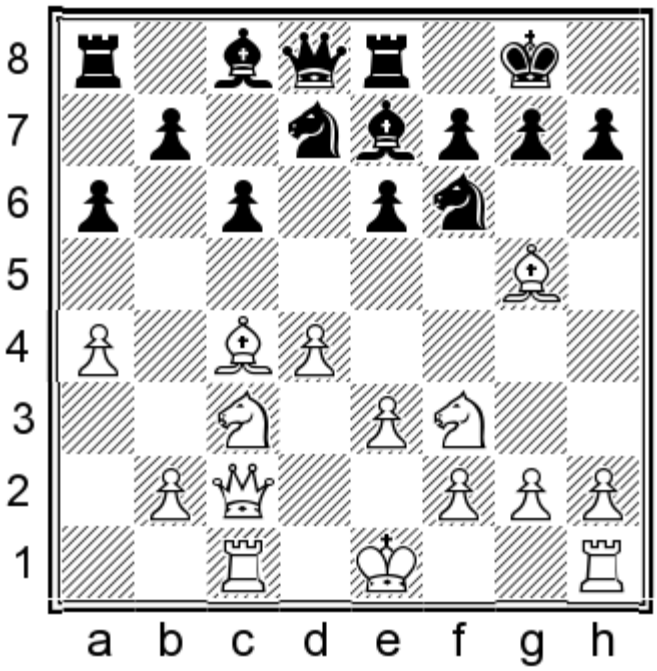
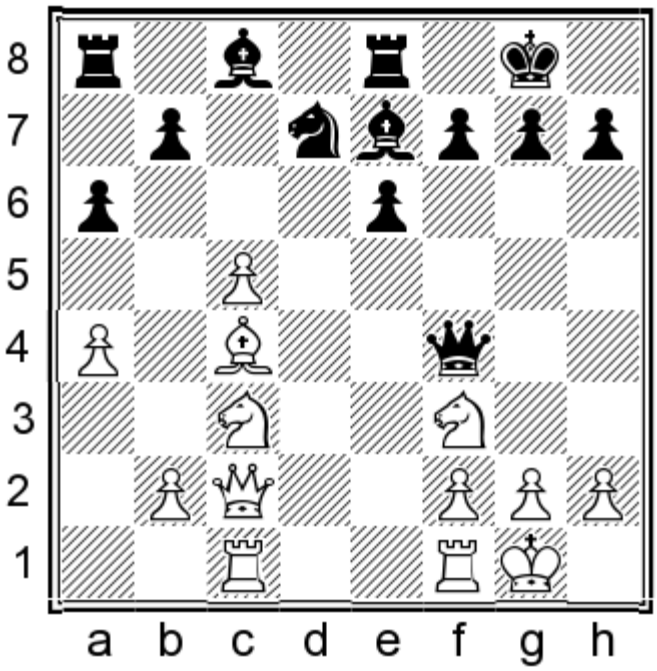


11...♘d5 12.♗f4!? ♘xf4 13.exf4 c5!

Yes, immediately; not on the next move – NOW!

Rubinstein utilizes a tactical nuance (the unprotected f4-pawn) to carry out the vital positional plan of freeing his position with ...c5. Clearly he understood the importance of this break: we have already seen how, six years after this game, he made a point of preventing it against Canal. In the present game, Rubinstein doesn't care about exchanging off White's isolated d-pawn, as he knows it is more important to avoid a slow game where White can build up an initiative using his control over e5.

14.dxc5 ♕c7 15.0-0 ♕xf4



16.♘e4! ♘xc5

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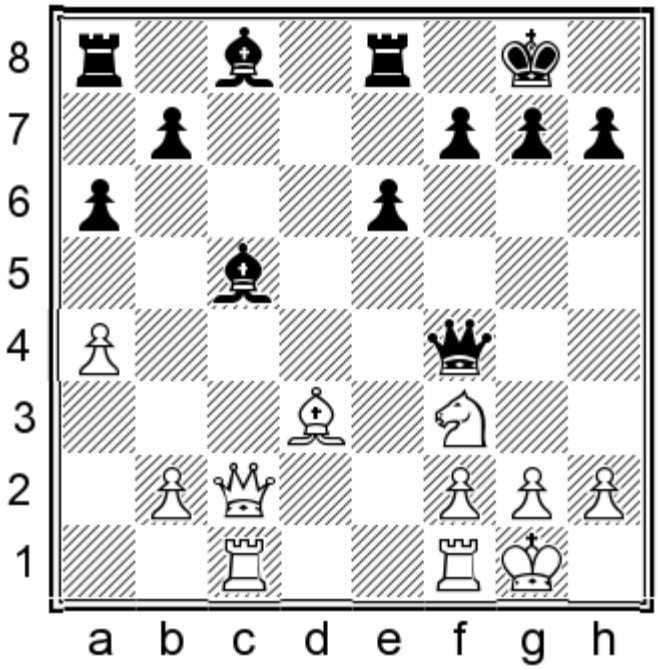
Also 16...♗xc5!? is fine for Black, as 17.♘eg5 is met by 17...g6 when the bishop goes to f8 to protect the dark squares.

16...♘f8!? is slightly passive but is also playable, with ...♗d7-c6 to follow.

17.♘xc5 ♗xc5 18.♗d3



18...b6?

Rubinstein commits a serious error.

The strongest engines find no problems for Black after 18...♗e7! 19.♗xh7† ♔f8! followed by ...♖d8, ...♖b8! and possibly ...♗d7-e8, which I'm sure both Steinitz and Kramnik would approve of. This possibility was not mentioned by either the victor in *Alekhine's Best Games* or by Kasparov in *My Great Predecessors*.

19.♗xh7† ♔h8 20.♗e4! ♖a7 21.b4 ♗f8

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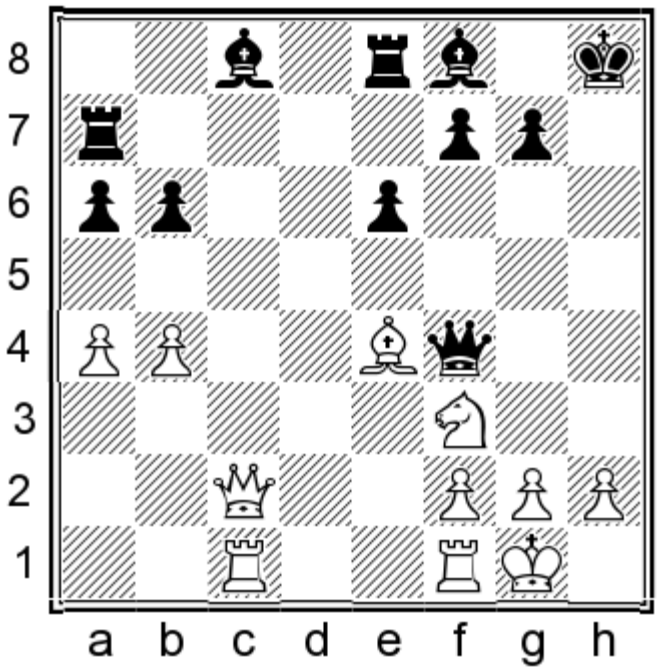

22.♕c6! ♖d7 23.g3 ♕b8 24.♘g5! ♖ed8 25.♗g6!!

The star move of the game, making room for the queen to go to e4 and from there to h4 and h7. White went on to win a masterpiece. On the one hand, this seems like a good advertisement for White's structure; but Alekhine had to display amazing abilities, and only built up an advantage after Rubinstein made a serious mistake on move 18. Up to that point, the ...c5 break solved all Black's problems.

A Final Variation on the Theme

A year after the above game, Alekhine went for a slightly different version of the Rubinstein structure against Lasker. Let's see how things change when Black has a pawn on d5 instead of e6.

GAME 21

Alexander Alekhine – Emanuel Lasker

New York 1924

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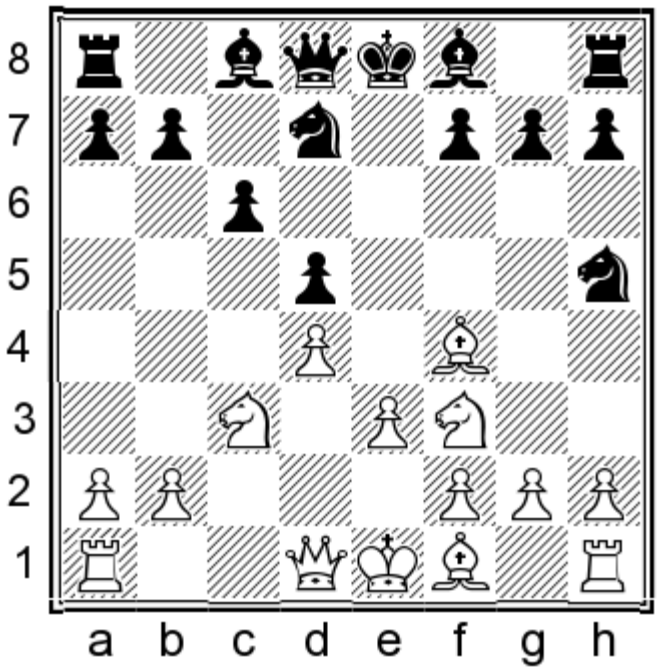
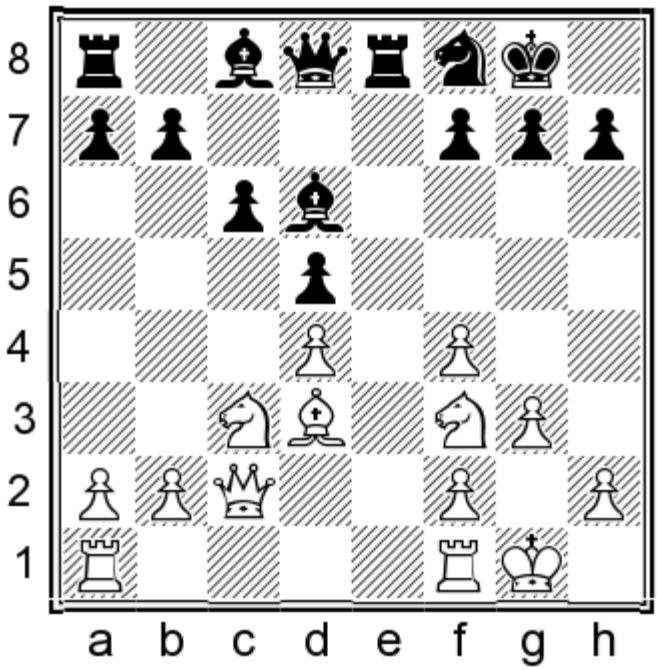


8.♗d3!? ♘xf4 9.exf4 ♗d6 10.g3 0-0 11.0-0 ♖e8 12.♕c2 ♘f8

White actually has a pretty bad version of the Rubinstein structure, and it is important to understand why. There is no open a2-g8 diagonal, so Black has no great difficulties playing ...f6 in order to take away the e5-square from White's knight. Black is under no pressure to carry out the ...c5 break here, and indeed the d4-pawn is a long-term weakness. Let's see how Lasker proved all this as if it was a mathematical theorem.



13.♘d1 f6!

Note the importance of the knight on f8 in covering the light squares around the king, which means Black is completely safe in making this important pawn move. In the next phase of the game, Lasker improves both of his bishops.

14.♘e3 ♗e6 15.♘h4 ♗c7! 16.b4 ♗b6 17.♘f3 ♗f7 18.b5 ♗h5!

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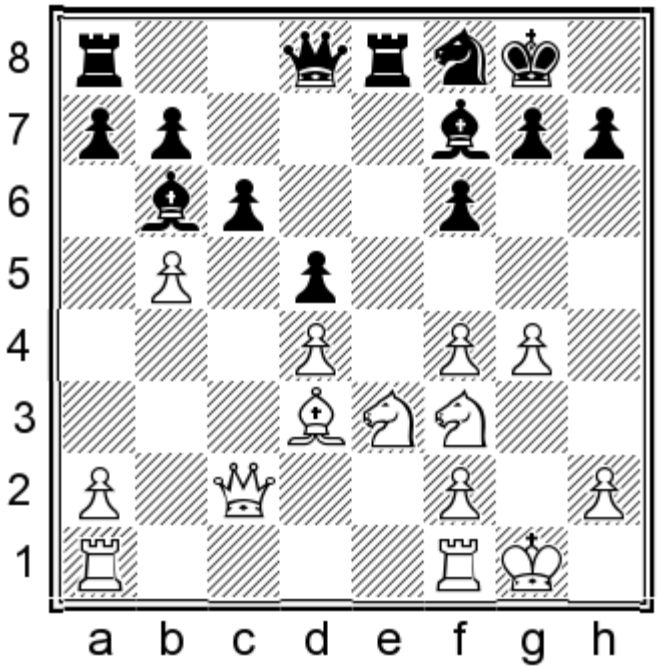
Lasker provokes a pawn advance which will weaken White's dark squares.

19.g4 ♗f7



20.bxc6 ♖c8 21.♕b2 bxc6 22.f5 ♕d6 23.♘g2 ♗c7 24.♖fe1 h5 25.h3 ♘h7

Black was dominating the dark squares: a nightmare outcome for White in the Rubinstein structure. Alekhine had no good answer, and resigned eleven moves later.

Summary of the Rubinstein Structure

• The best possible scenario for White is when the a2-g8 diagonal is open for his bishop and Black cannot play the freeing ...c5 (see Rubinstein – Canal).

• Even if the a2-g8 diagonal is open, Black will have a reasonable game if he can execute the ...c5 break without incident (see Alekhine – Rubinstein).

• If Black has exchanged on f4 with his bishop rather than the knight, it is usually a good idea for him to exchange the light-squared bishops as well, with ...b6 and ...♗a6 (see Rubinstein – Mieses).

• If Black has the bishop pair and a pawn on d5 instead of e6, he should put his knight on f8 and play ...f6 to cover e5, and eventually use his bishop pair to probe White's position (see Alekhine – Lasker).

Armed with these principles, you should be able to handle this important structure with confidence in your games.

The "2QPI Structure"

This stands for "Two Queenside Pawn Islands", and is another important structure for the ♗f4 systems. It arises when Black plays ...c5 and answers dxc5 with ...bxc5, leaving himself with a- and c-pawns on the queenside. This possibility often misleads players on both sides: White often goes for it, overestimating the benefits of his theoretically better structure; and Black players tend to overestimate the drawbacks of the structure and avoid it, when in reality it's fully

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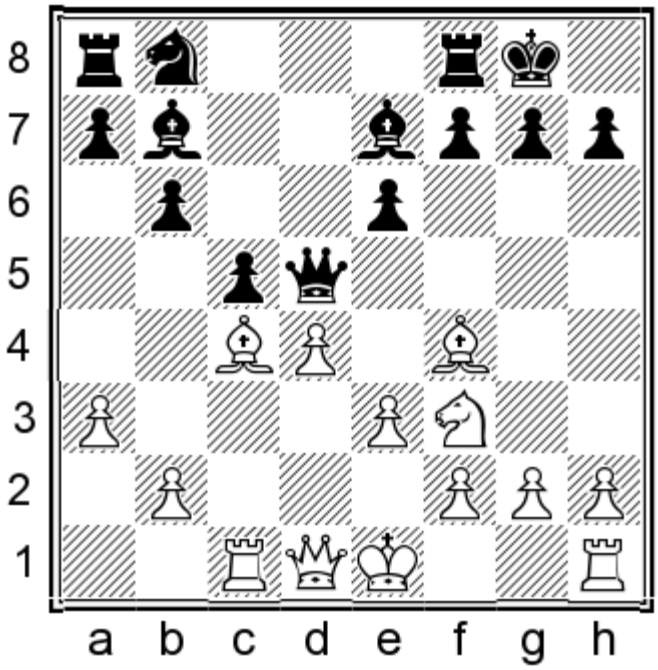
playable, and even the best option in some situations. The following game will be covered in more detail within the main chapter (see Game 27, starting on page 100) but I will preview it here to introduce you to the structure in question.

GAME 22

Alexander Rustemov – Pavel Tregubov

New Delhi/Tehran (1.6 – rapid) 2000



11...♕d8 12.0-0 ♘c6! 13.dxc5 bxc5!

13...♗xc5? 14.♕c2 gives White a huge queenside initiative.

White usually aims for queenside pressure in the ♗f4 system, so achieving a structural advantage on that side of the board may seem like a good outcome from the opening. However, the reality is that Black will not only neutralize any pressure on the queenside, but may even have chances to take the initiative there. The c5-pawn certainly could become weak eventually, but it cannot easily be attacked; moreover, it controls the important d4-square and Black may obtain counterplay from the open b-file.

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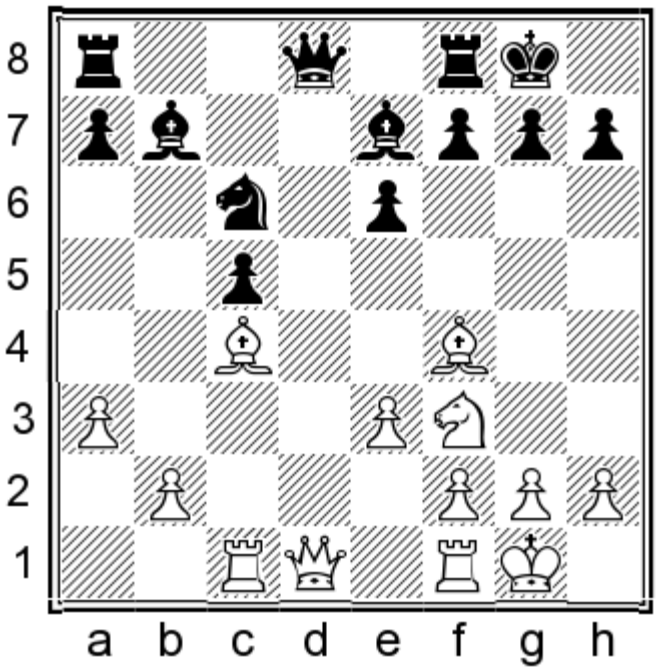
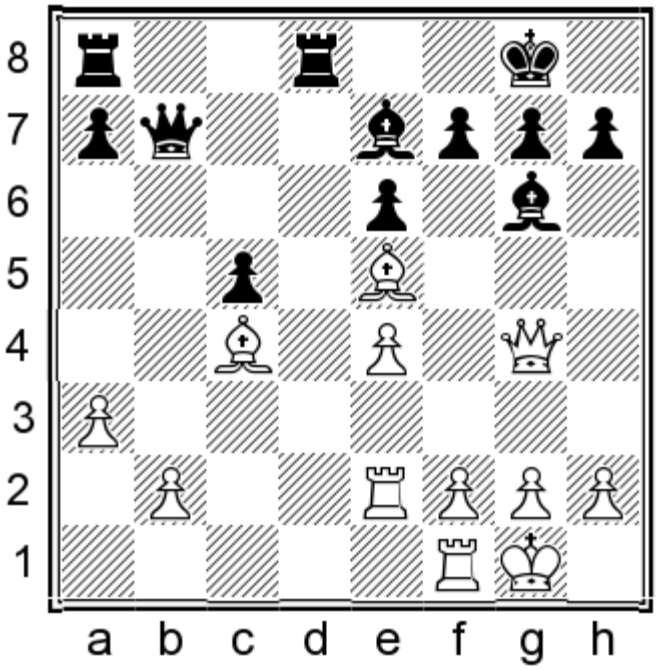


14.♕e2 ♕b6 15.♖c2 ♖fd8!?

15...♘a5! is another good option, intending 16.♗a2? ♗a6.

16.♘e5 ♘xe5 17.♗xe5 ♗e4!? 18.♕g4 ♗g6 19.e4 ♕b7 20.♖e2



20...♗f6!

In this way, Black gets access to the d4-square.

21.♗xf6 gxf6 22.b3 ♖d4

Black has comfortably equalized and White had to be careful to hold the ensuing endgame. Full details can be found in the main chapter.

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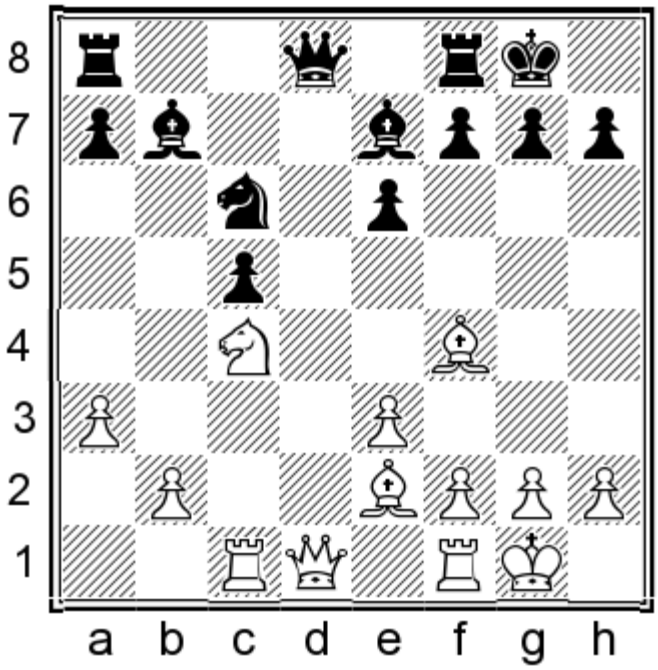
Good and Bad Minor Pieces

One of the reasons why the 2QPI structure worked so well in the above game is that the bishop on c4 is ineffective as a blockading piece. It doesn't control many important squares, it's shut out of play by the e6-f7 barrier, and it can be driven back by ...♘a5 at any moment. Let me show you a contrasting, hypothetical position:



Everything is the same as the position after move 13 in Rustemov – Tregubov, except that White's bishop has gone back to e2 and the f3-knight has been moved to the blockading square on c4. Shuffling two pieces may not sound like much, but it is enough to render Black's position a total disaster. White can either move his knight to d6 immediately, or continue to build up with ♕b3 (or ♕c2) and ♖fd1. Sooner or later the knight will go to d6 and the c5-pawn will drop off, and there is nothing that Black can do about it. Even if it weren't for this concrete plan, the knight would be extremely well placed, dominating the knight on c6 and controlling several important squares – a completely different situation from the game we just saw.

The good news is that we need never allow anything like this; but it is important to be aware of the dangers that may arise if Black gives his opponent too much time to manoeuvre his pieces to optimal squares.

The 2QPI Structure in a Different Setting

There are certain variations where I consider the 2QPI structure a necessity, a good example being the Rustemov – Tregubov game above. Sometimes, however, it may exist as a fighting option to liven up an equal position. Take the following game:

GAME 23

Panagiotis Tsolakos – Nikolaos Ntirlis

Thessaloniki 2017

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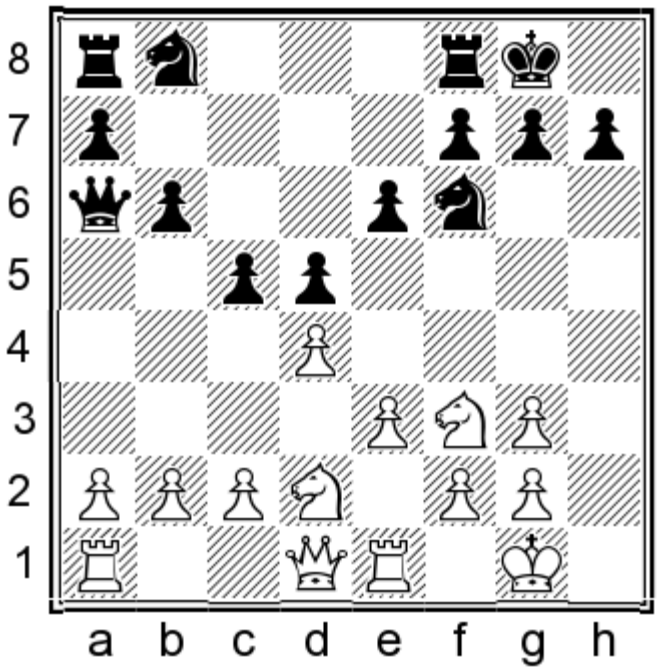

This game started with a London System, as covered in Chapter 6c. When I showed this game to my good friend Sabino Brunello, he suggested that White could consider:

12.e4!?N

The game continued 12.♘e5; for more about this, see the relevant note on page 304. The text move gives Black a few options, my favourite being:

12...dxe4!

12...cxd4 13.♘xd4 dxe4 14.♘xe4 ♘bd7 is equal, although the asymmetrical pawn structure means that a strong technical player could try to outplay his opponent from either side.

13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♖xe4 ♘c6!?

When we looked through the game (without engines), Sabino and I only considered 14...♘d7 and 14...♕b7.

14...♕b5! actually seems like Black's best, improving the queen with gain of tempo before deciding whether to proceed with ...♖d8 or ...♘c6.

15.dxc5 bxc5

Here it is: the 2QPI structure!

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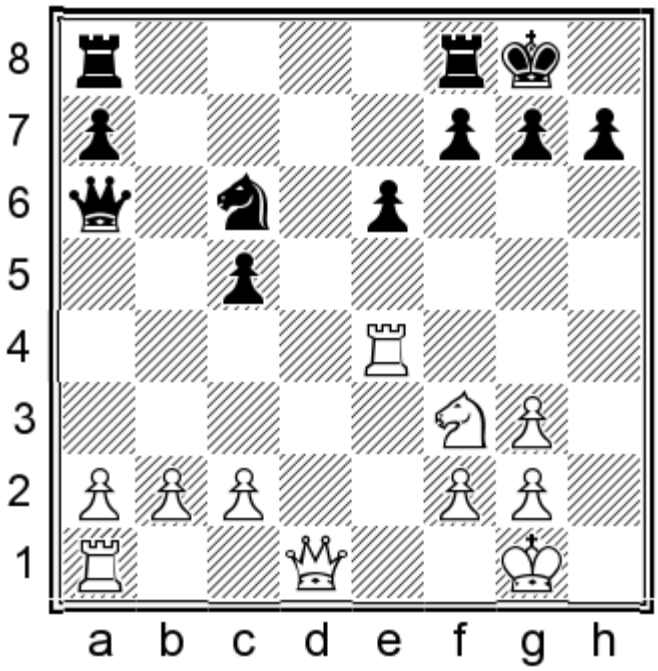

Both Sabino and I neglected to consider this possibility, and I imagine many other players would instinctively filter it out of their thought process because of the fact that Black is voluntarily giving himself an extra pawn island. Does it really matter though? White's majority will be restrained for a long time by Black's two pawn islands, and the c5-pawn is hard to attack. The real risk of this structure is that White may establish a bind with his knight on c4 and pawn on c3, which will control a lot of squares on the queenside. For the time being though, Black's queen is helping to guard the c4-square, and his knight can go to a5 or b6 to challenge a knight on c4 if needed. Black also has an open b-file and future possibilities of ...a5-a4, and the extra central pawn may come into its own later.

I would not go so far as to claim an advantage for Black, but my main point is that Black is not worse and he arguably has more winning chances than in the more common structure with pawns on a7 and b6. A sample continuation is:

16.c3 ♖fd8 17.♕e2 ♕xe2 18.♖xe2 ♖d5 19.♘d2 ♘a5!?

19...h5!? is a good alternative.

Another sensible idea is 19...♖ad8 20.♘c4 ♘e7! 21.g4 ♘c8 intending ...♘b6.

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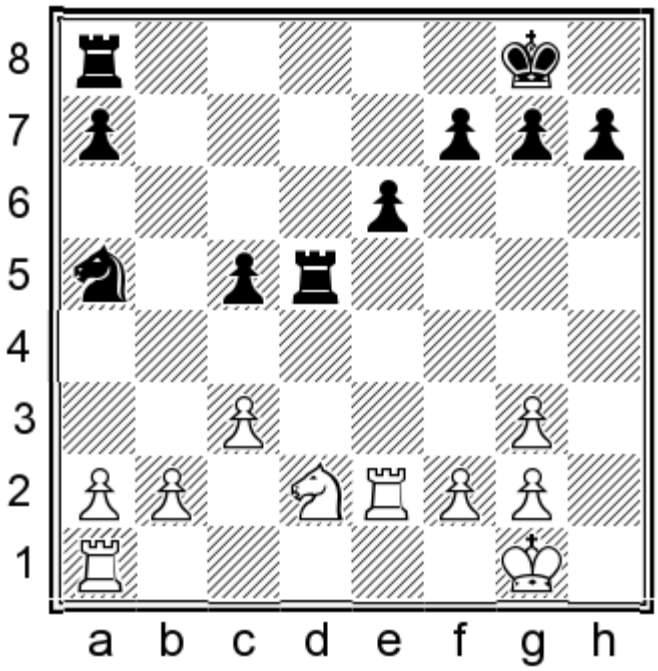

20.c4 ♖d4 21.b3 ♘b7!

21...♘c6? is met by 22.♘e4 and the c5-pawn falls. The text move is better, as Black safeguards the pawn and prepares ...a5-a4.

My conclusion is that the 2QPI structure is underestimated. Many players will pass by it without even looking at it. Now you know that it's a serious option, so use it to your advantage if you get the chance.

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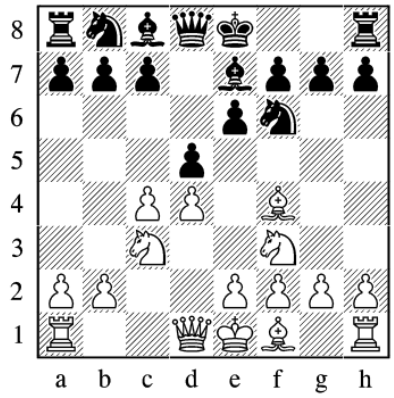
Chapter 2b



♗f4 QGD Theory

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7

The ♗g5-f4 Shuffle:

5.♗g5 ♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗f4!? page 72

5.♗f4 0-0

6.♕c2!? page 74

6.♖c1!? page 76

6.a3!? dxc4 7.e3 page 78

7.e4 Game 24, page 80

6.e3 b6 page 82

A) 7.cxd5 ♘xd5! 8.♘xd5 (8.♗d3 page 83; 8.♗g3?! page 83) **8...♕xd5!** page 83

A1) 9.♗xc7 page 83

A2) 9.a3 page 85

A3) 9.♗e2 page 87

A4) 9.♗d3 ♕a5† 10.♔e2 page 87

10.♘d2 Game 25, page 88

B) White Maintains the Tension

B1) 7.♗d3 page 91 (7.♗e2 page 91)

B2) 7.♕c2 ♗a6! (7...c5 page 94) **8.♘e5** page 94

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8.cxd5 Game 26, page 95

B3) 7.♖c1 ♗b7 8.cxd5 (8.♗e2; 8.♗d3) **8...♘xd5 9.♗g3** page 99

9.♘xd5 Game 27, page 100

The ♗g5-f4 Shuffle

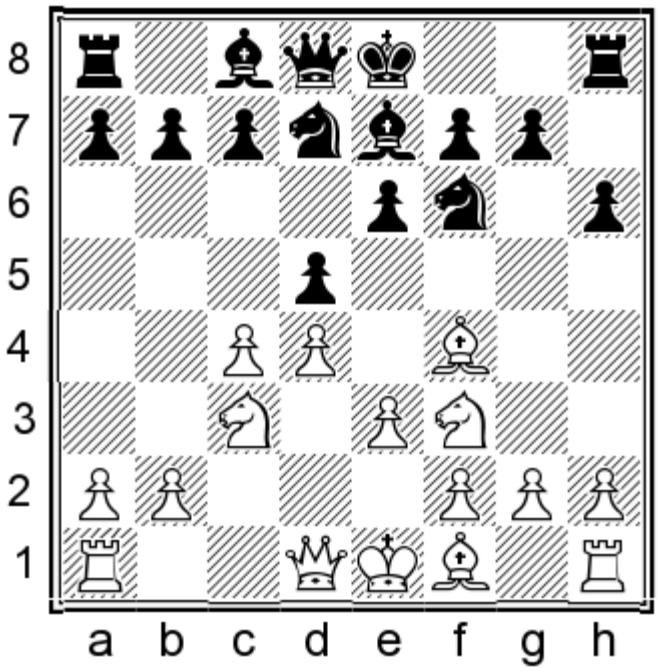
Even through this chapter is dedicated to the ♗f4 set-up, I will start by analysing a related variation where the bishop goes to g5 first.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗g5

Let me point out at this point that after 5.♗f4 0-0 (5...♘bd7? is met by 6.♘b5!) 6.e3, the idea of 6...dxc4 7.♗xc4 a6 is seriously considered by Dreev, who proposes 8.♘e5!± as the only way to get an edge for White.

5...♘bd7 6.e3 h6 7.♗f4!?

7.♗h4 0-0 was analysed in the previous chapter. The curious move order featured here was brought to my attention by my friend FM Sotiris Logothetis. White's idea is to play a modified version of the ♗f4 variation, where Black has been 'tricked' into playing an early ...♘bd7. This presents a challenge to our repertoire, as I will be recommending a different plan of development whereby Black avoids moving this knight so early. Obviously White pays a price in giving Black the ...h6 move for free, but it is not clear how relevant this is. In certain variations, it might even be harmful! Fortunately though, Black has a good solution:



7...dxc4!

7...0-0 is the main alternative. In the equivalent position without ...h6 included, White has a bunch of interesting and popular options including c4-c5 and ♗e2 (the two recommendations of Dreev) and Aronian's recent favourite, ♕c2. Not only that, but in the version with ...h6 included, 8.g4!? was an interesting choice in Grischuk – Caruana, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015. This is too much! It makes no sense for us to go down this path and prepare for so many different options, all because of this one rare move order by White.

8.♗xc4 a6!

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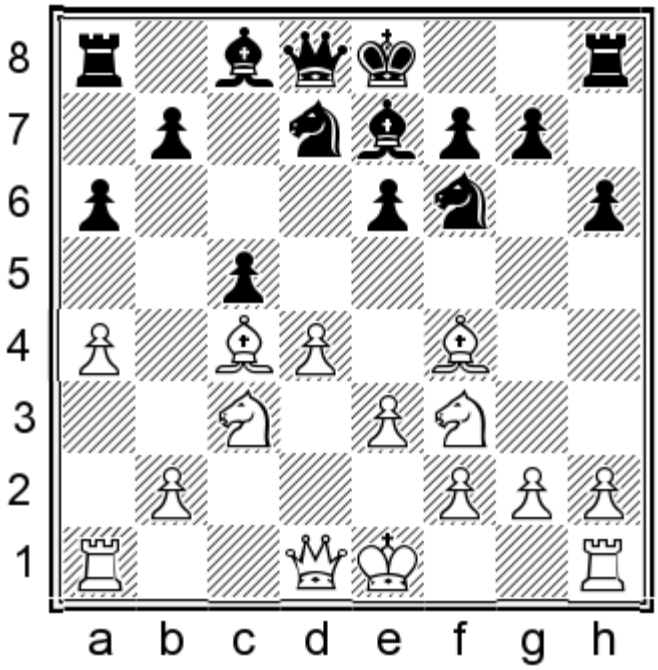
This makes perfect sense as, compared with the Dreev line quoted in the note to move 5 above, Black has played ...♘bd7 instead of ...0-0. This works in his favour, as in many lines Black can leave his king in the centre and use the spare tempo to activate his queenside pieces. The extra ...h6 move is also of some value.

9.♘e5!?N

Despite the differences noted above, I believe this is still White's best try.

9.h3?! creates space for the bishop against the ...♘h5 idea, but gives Black time for 9...b5 followed by ...♗b7, with excellent play.

9.a4 can be met by 9...c5!? intending a quick ...cxd4.



An important point is that the IQP position which may result after exd4, is not at all favourable for White because the ...♘b6-d5 manoeuvre will gain time against both bishops. On the other hand, 10.0-0 cxd4 11.♕xd4 0-0 (11...♕b6!? is also possible) followed by ...♘b6 is not scary either. The queens will be exchanged and the position will be equal.

9...♘xe5 10.♗xe5

10.dxe5 ♕xd1† 11.♖xd1 ♘d7 is certainly not worse for Black, as his queenside majority is about to be set in motion.

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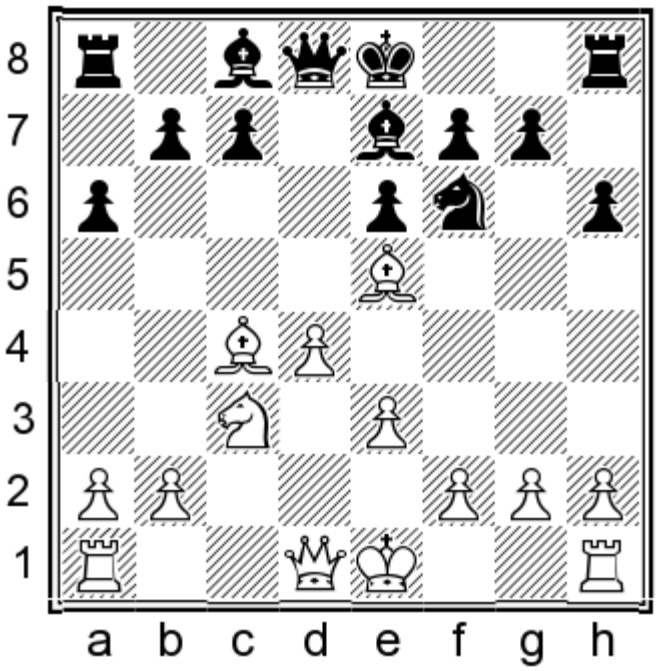
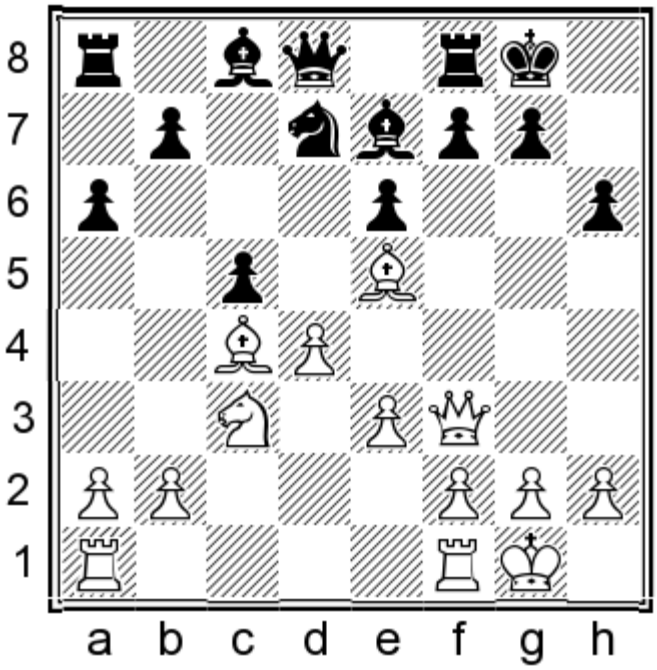


10...0-0 11.♕f3!?

This is the first choice of the engines. White stops ...b5 for now and is ready to put the queen on g3 in some lines, to put some pressure on the black kingside.

11...c5 12.0-0 ♘d7

12...cxd4 13.exd4 ♖a7!? is a playable alternative, but chasing the bishop away also seems fine. A possible continuation is:



13.♗g3 cxd4 14.exd4 ♗h4 15.♗f4 ♗g5 16.♗g3 ♗h4=

Obviously neither side is forced to take the repetition, but the position is balanced anyway.

Now that we have dealt with the quirky ♗g5-f4 manoeuvre, it is time to analyse our main subject of 5.♗f4.

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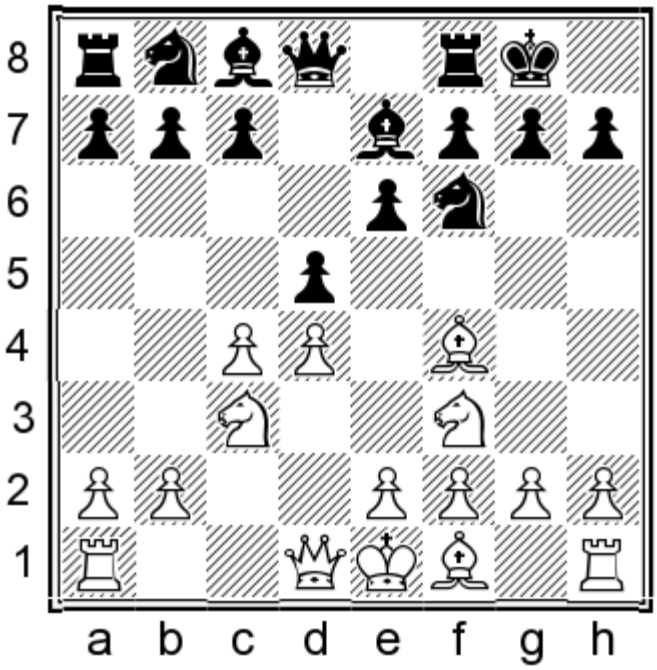
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0



This is the main tabiya of the chapter. We will start by analysing the subtle options of **6.♕c2!?**, **6.♖c1!?** and **6.a3!?**, before moving on to the normal **6.e3**.

6.♕c2!?

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.♕c2!?

This move generally signifies that White just wants to avoid mainstream theory and play a game. During the 2016 Baku Olympiad the Danish team had to face the overperforming Canada, and on Board 1 Sune Berg Hansen was Black against Bareev. We predicted correctly that Bareev would play ♗f4 against the QGD and, in the files I prepared for Sune, I even had 6.♕c2!? at the very top, as I thought that Bareev might avoid theory. This is exactly what happened!

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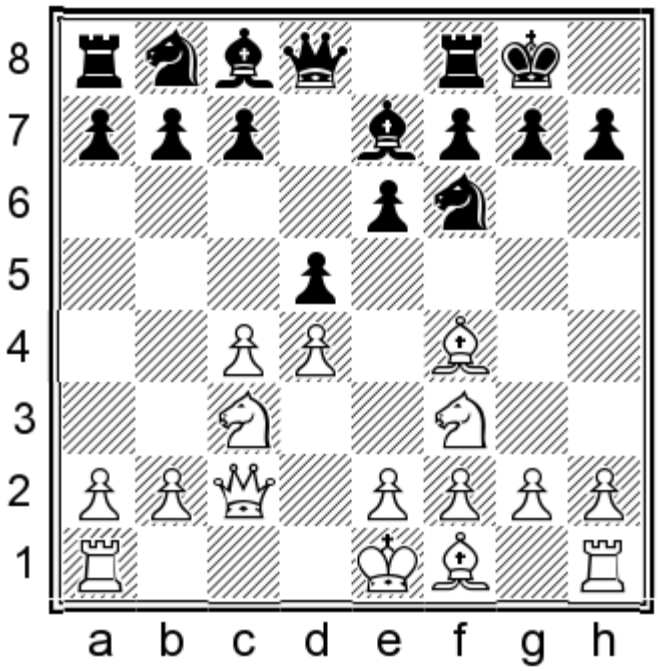

6...c5

As you will see under the 6.e3 section, our repertoire in this chapter is largely based on lines with ...b6, so naturally I checked 6...b6 here too. However, Black has rather a tough time after 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5 9.e4! ♗b4† 10.♔d1! as in Sanclemente Carrasquer – Lafarga Bueno, Spain 2004.

7.dxc5 ♕a5!

This is a good choice for Black, which Sune remembered at the board.

8.♘d2!?

But we did not consider this. As I see now, it pops up as the fifth choice of the engines, so maybe this is why it escaped my radar. Still, this method of dealing with the queen on a5 is well known from the Cambridge Springs, so in that respect it could be considered a natural choice for White. Here are some other possibilities:

8.0-0-0?! was played in Lima – Pelikian, Brasilia 1997, when 8...♘a6!N would have given Black a strong initiative.

8.a3?! led to an eventual success for White in Anand – Karpov, Corsica (rapid m-3) 2009, but 8...dxc4!N is a simple improvement, after which 9.♗d6 ♗xd6 10.cxd6 ♘bd7 11.e3 b5∓ favours Black.

8.♗d6?! ♗xd6 9.cxd6 was seen in Geissler – Kuehne, corr. 2009. Here too, I found a way to improve Black's play:

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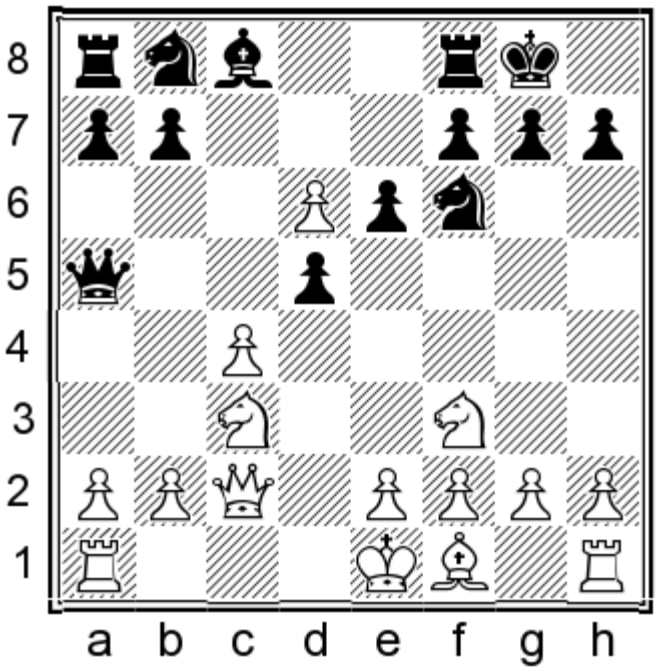
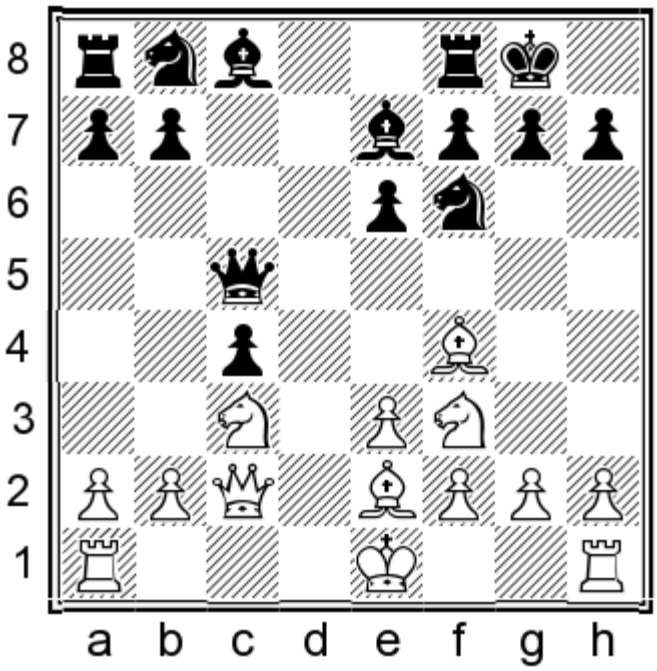


9...dxc4!N 10.e4 b5 11.e5 ♘d5 12.♗e2 ♘d7 The position is double-edged but I prefer Black's chances; he has active pieces and a mobile queenside majority, while the d6-pawn is securely blockaded and e5 may become weak.

8.e3 is the most natural and best move for White. Still, after 8...♕xc5 9.♗e2 dxc4 I see no problems for Black, for instance:



10.0-0 ♘c6 11.♘a4 ♕a5 12.♕xc4 ♗d7!? Black was comfortably equal in Andreikin – Matlakov, Sochi 2012.

8...♕xc5

Black has more than one good continuation. 8...dxc4 9.e4 ♕xc5 10.♗e3 ♕c7 11.♗e2 occurred in Pein – Anka, Budapest 1989, when 11...♘c6N or 11...b6N would have given at least equal chances.

9.e3 ♘c6!

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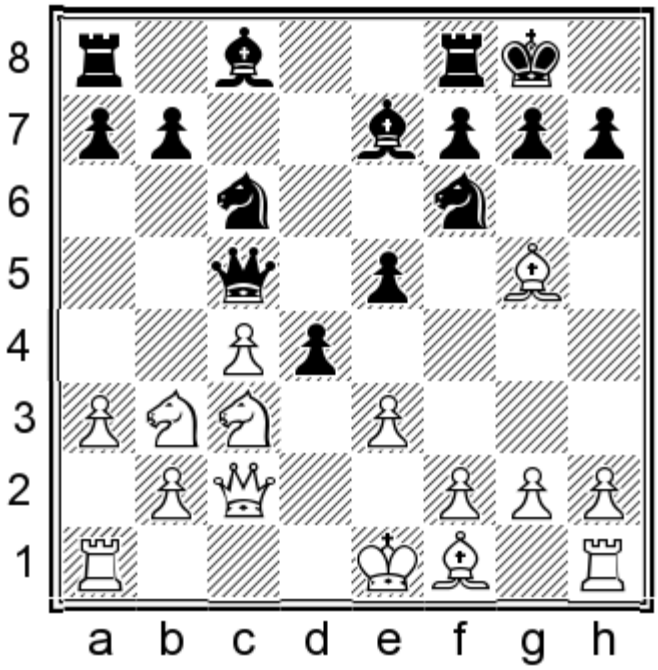
This seems most accurate to me.

Sune preferred 9...♗d7, which is also okay, although he slightly lost his way in the next few moves: 10.a3 ♖c8!? (10...dxc4=) 11.b4 ♕b6?! 12.♗e2 ♘c6 13.0-0 ♕d8 14.♖ad1!± In Bareev – S.B. Hansen, Baku (ol) 2016, Black was in trouble for most of the game, but eventually managed to draw after tenacious defence.

10.a3 e5

Sune saw this possibility but thought that it might be risky for Black; but in the cold light of day, and with engine assistance, we understood that Black has nothing to fear. By the way, this all occurred in an earlier game between 2300-rated players, which we will follow for a few more moves.

11.♗g5 d4 12.♘b3



12...♕d6!?N

12...♕b6 is also fine, when my analysis continues: 13.♗xf6N (13.c5?! ♕d8 14.0-0-0 ♗e6 favoured Black in Studnicka – Neckar, Czech Republic 2010) 13...dxc3! 14.♗xe7 cxb2 15.♖b1 ♘xe7 Here too, Black has the slightly easier side of equality.

13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♘e4

Now the key idea is:

14...♗f5! 15.♗d3

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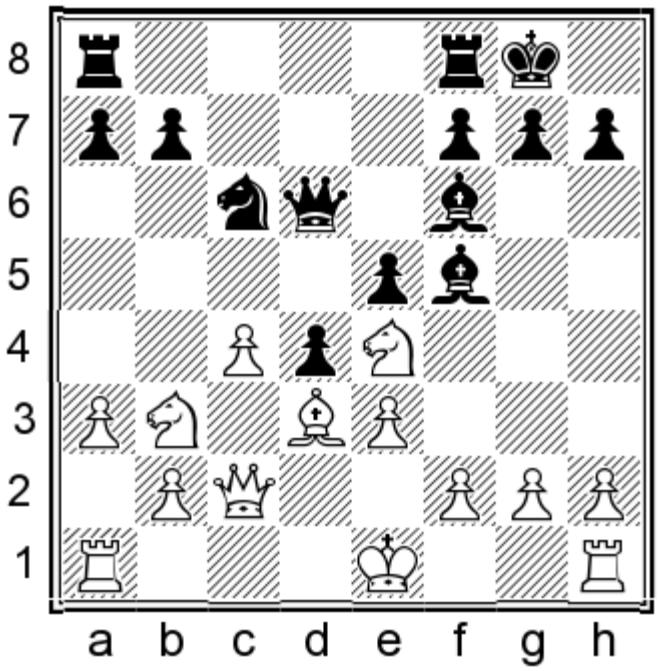


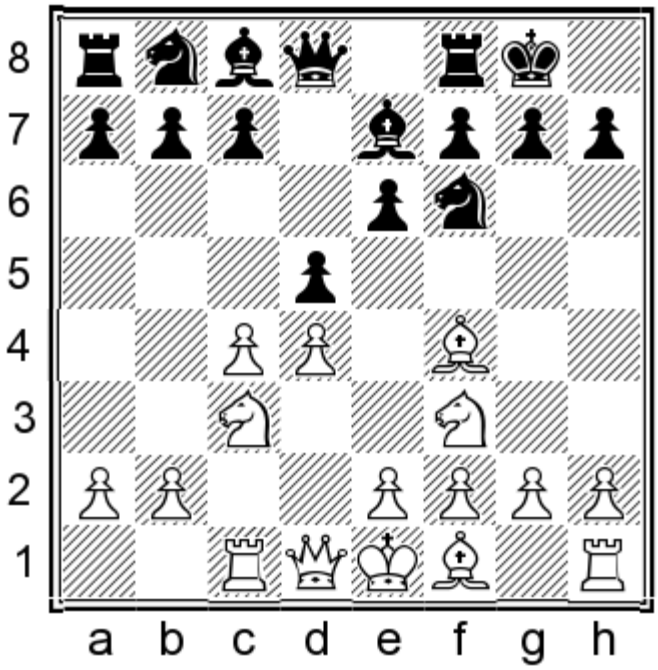
15...♗xe4! 16.♗xe4 dxe3 17.fxe3 ♗g5

Followed by ...♕h6, when Black is the one applying pressure out of the opening.

6.♖c1!?

This is similar to the previous line, in that White makes a generally useful move while keeping his pawn on e2 for the time being.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.♖c1!?



6...c5!

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This is the most popular move, and a reliable choice.

6...b6

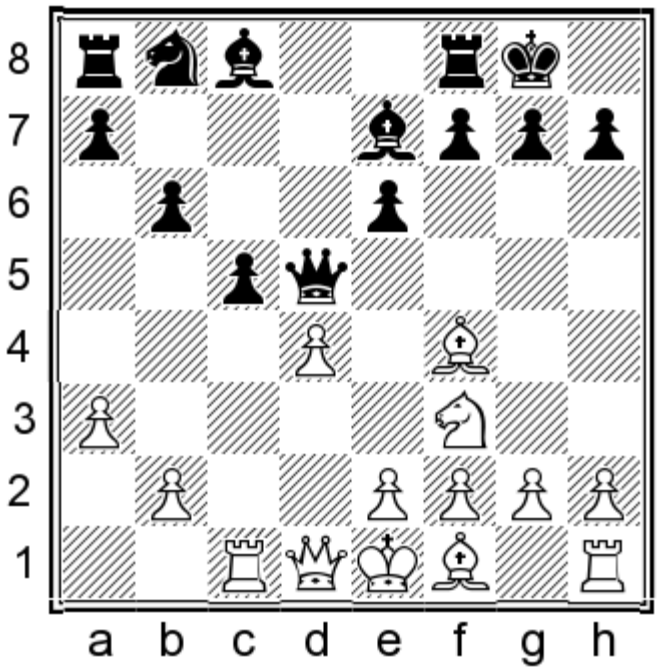
Once again, it is worth considering what may happen after this move. This time, I was almost ready to recommend it when I discovered an annoying possibility for White.

7.cxd5 ♘xd5

The structure arising after 7...exd5 is always pleasant for White.

8.♘xd5 ♕xd5 9.a3 c5

Black had no choice as his c-pawn was hanging. Here I found a promising new plan for White.



10.g3!N

The bishop will be ideally placed on g2. With this plan, White takes full advantage of the flexibility of his 6th move. My main line continues:

10...♗b7 11.♗g2 ♕a2!? 12.♕c2

Interested readers can investigate this more deeply if they wish. Most probably, with super-accurate play Black comes close to full equality, but it all seems like way too much trouble to be ready for a sideline.

7.dxc5

After 7.e3 cxd4 8.exd4 b6! Black stops c4-c5 and is getting ready for a favourable IQP position. Let me remind you again that the f4-bishop is poorly placed for this structure, as it will almost always be hit by a knight arriving on d5. Play may continue 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗g3N, and now 10...♗a6!∓ is excellent for Black.

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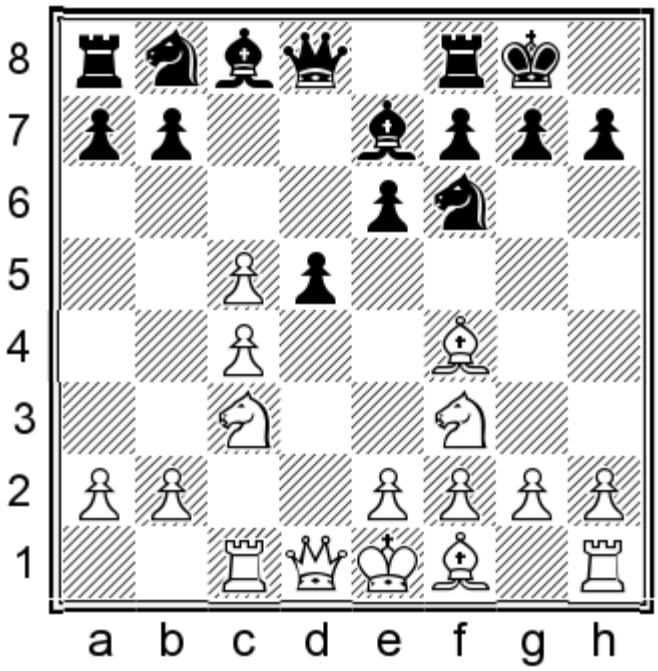

7...dxc4!

This has been an extremely rare choice but I find it the simplest solution.

7...♕a5 was a good choice in the previous variation with the queen on c2 and rook on a1, but here after 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♗d6! Black will not be able to exchange queens after taking on c3, and White is slightly for choice.

7...♗xc5 is more common but 8.e3 transposes to a main line which lies outside of our repertoire. Play may continue 8...♘c6 9.a3! (9.♗e2!? is also a bit annoying for Black) when White obtains the kind of small, safe edge which attracts some people to the 6.♖c1 line and the ♗f4 system in general.

8.e3

The following lines are both quite important:

8.e4 ♕xd1† 9.♖xd1 ♗xc5 10.♗xc4 and here the key move to remember is:

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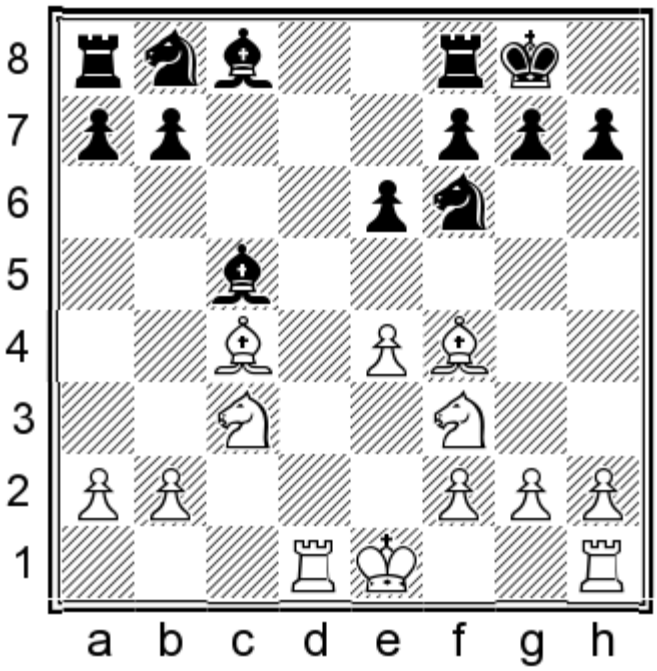
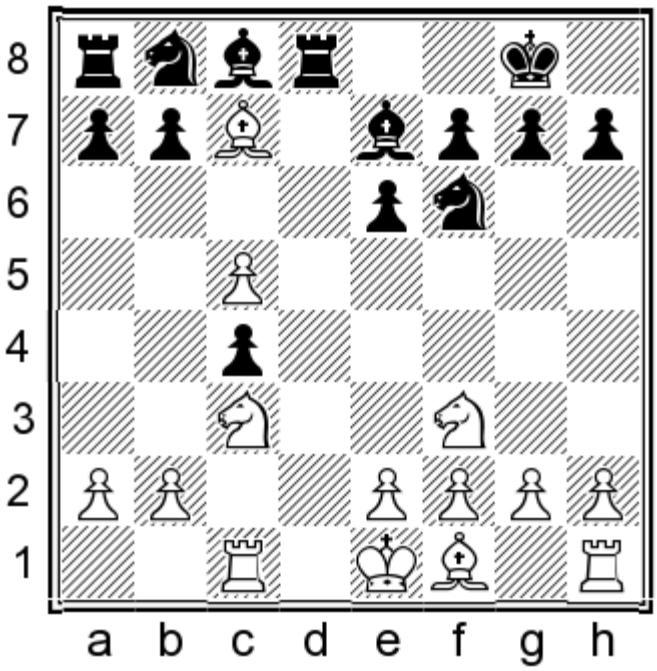


10...♗b4! As played in Aronian – Radjabov, Porto Carras 2011. Black gets a good game after exchanging on c3 to damage White's structure, followed by ...b6 and ...♗a6.

8.♕xd8 is trickier than you might think after: 8...♖xd8 9.♗c7!?N (9.e3 ♘d5 was level in Shankland – Meier, Dresden 2013) A good way to respond is:



9...♖e8!? 10.e3 ♘a6 11.♗d6 ♘xc5= Black should be fine.

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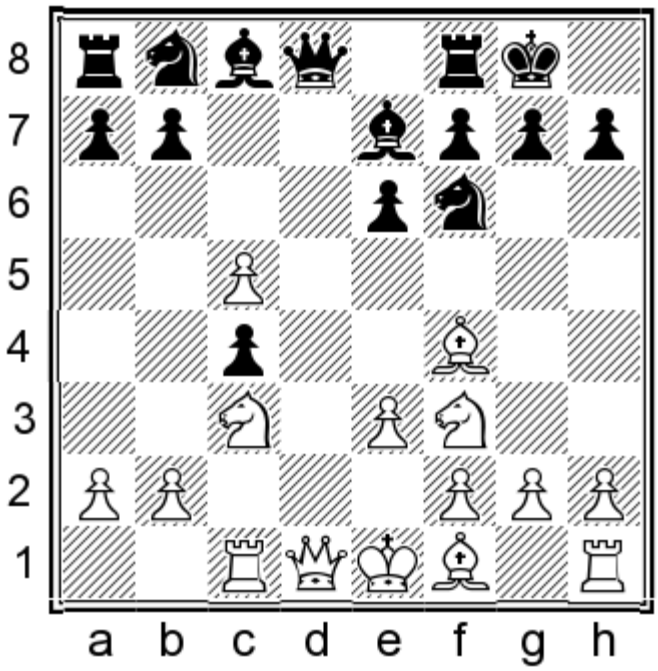
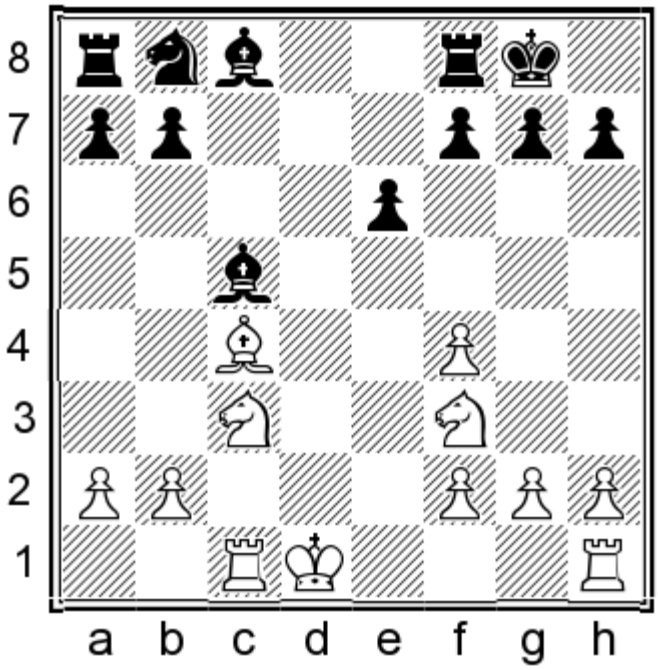


8...♕xd1†!

Just like after 8.e4!?, this is the most accurate.

8...♘d5!? is also worth checking: 9.♗xc4 ♘xf4 10.exf4 ♕xd1† 11.♔xd1 ♗xc5



At first I thought this might be a good Rubinstein structure for White; but in fact, after 12.♔e2 ♘d7 13.♖hd1 ♘f6 14.♘e5 b6= Black was fine in Wagner – Parligras, Medias 2015. Nevertheless, I think that the main line is a clearer equalizer and slightly more ambitious.

9.♖xd1 ♗xc5 10.♗xc4 ♗b4!

Radjabov uses the exact same plan as in his 2011 game against Aronian, as referenced above.

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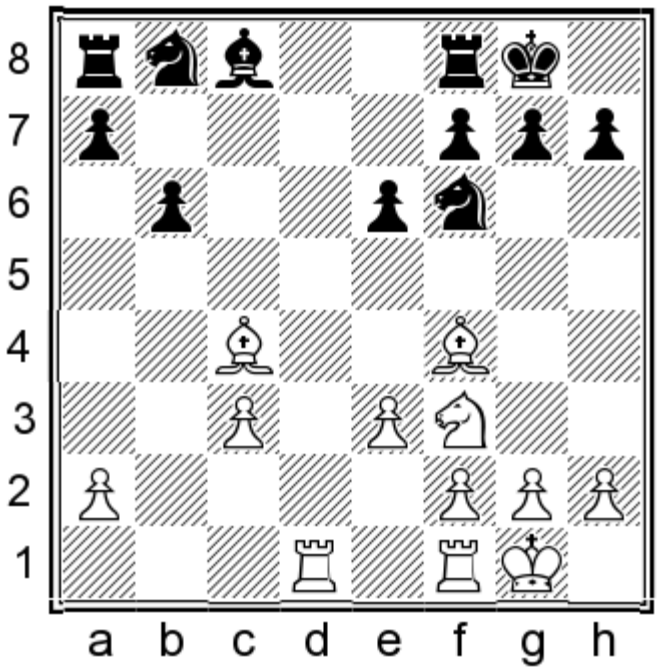
11.0-0 ♗xc3 12.bxc3 b6



13.♗d6 ♖e8 14.♗b5 ♗d7 15.♗e2

White found a clever trick in order to leave the bishop slightly misplaced on d7, but Black is fine anyway.

15...♘c6 16.♖c1

We have been following Adhiban – Radjabov, Baku (ol) 2016. At this point I prefer:

16...♖ed8N

Intending to drop the bishop back to e8; Black is absolutely fine.

6.a3!?

Just like the previous two options, White is making a useful waiting move. There are a few lines in this chapter where exchanges on d5 are followed by a check on b4 or a5, so the relevance of a2-a3 is obvious.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.a3!?

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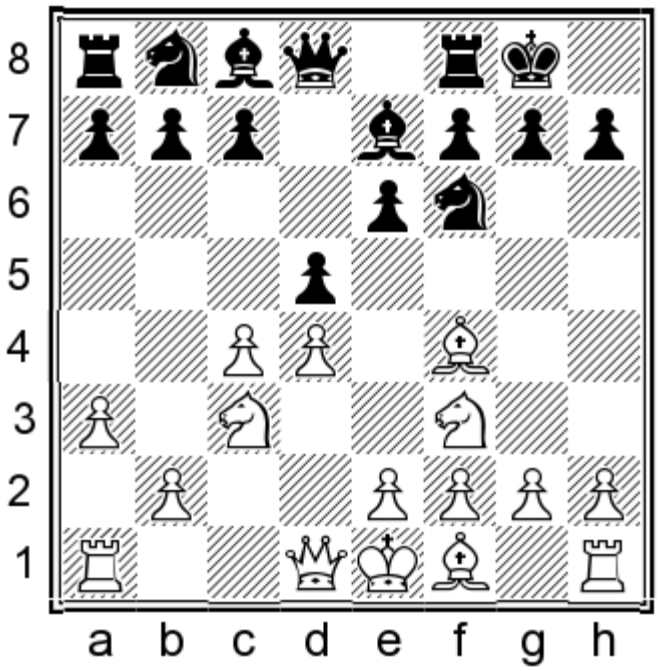

6...dxc4

6...b6 is of course playable, but the text move has its own theory and in many lines Black can push for some initiative, as long as he is reasonably well prepared of course.

7.e3

7.e4 is examined in Game 24 below, where we will see that 7...b5! is a good answer.

7...♘d5 8.♗xc4 ♘xf4 9.exf4

Rubinstein's structure always has to be taken seriously. However, unlike the Rubinstein – Canal and Alekhine – Rubinstein games from the introduction, here Black can benefit from the fact that he has not wasted time moving his pawn to c6.

9...♗f6! 10.♕d3

10.♕d2 is marginally less accurate in view of 10...b6! followed by ...♗b7. White will have to spend a tempo dealing with the positional threat of ...♗xf3, which gives Black time to organize ...c5 with ease.

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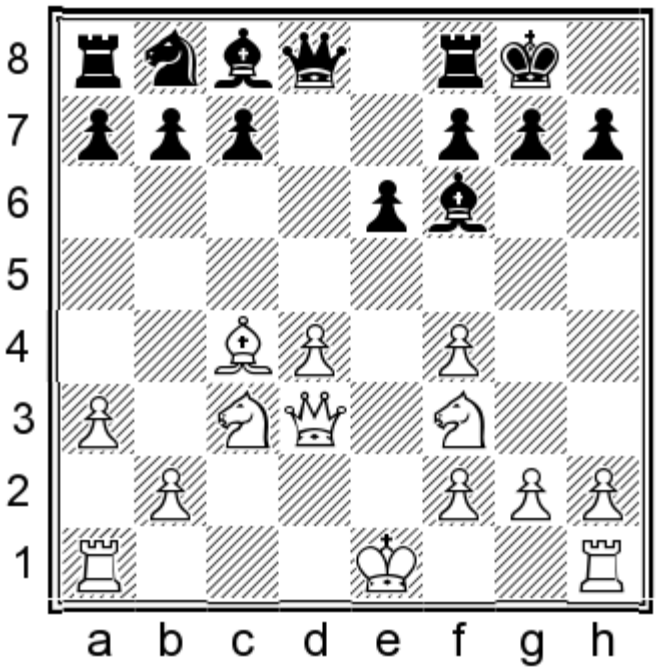


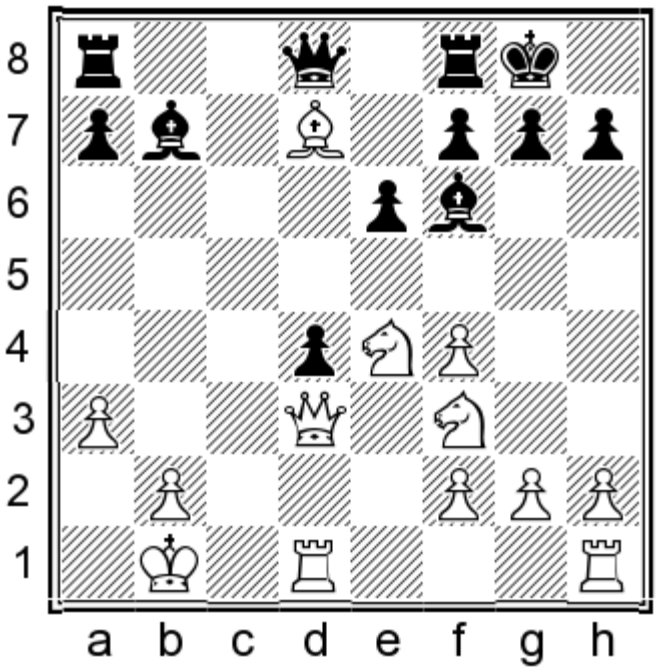
10...c5!

We have already seen how important it is for Black to execute this freeing move against the Modern Rubinstein structure. Here it solves all Black's problems, as the following lines demonstrate.

11.♘e4

11.dxc5N 11...♕xd3 12.♗xd3 ♗xc3†! 13.bxc3 ♘d7 is comfortable for Black, albeit still equal after 14.c6! bxc6.

11.0-0-0 cxd4 12.♘e4 ♘d7 (12...♕c7!?N 13.♘xf6† gxf6 14.♔b1 ♕xf4∓ also looks good) 13.♔b1 b5!? (13...b6N is also worth considering) 14.♗xb5 ♗b7 15.♗xd7



15...♗xe4! 16.♕xe4 ♕xd7 17.♘e5 ♗xe5 18.fxe5 ♖fd8= Vachier-Lagrave – Kramnik, Hoogeveen 2011.

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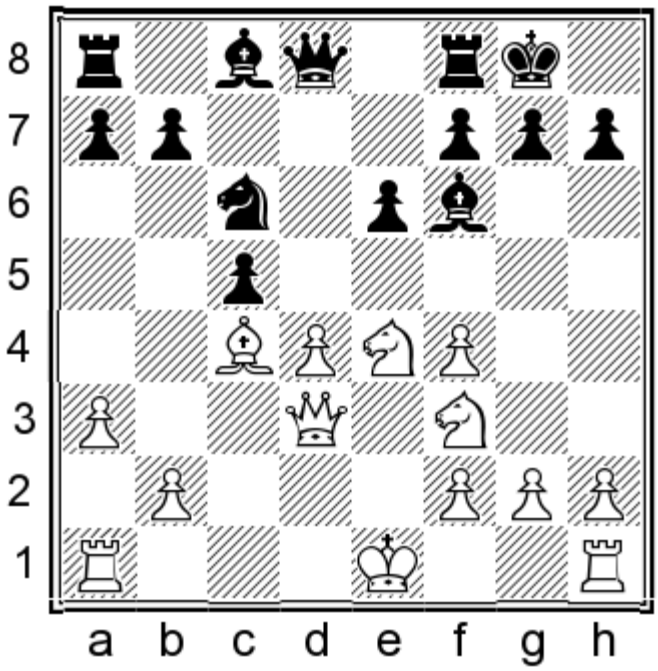
11...♘c6!?

11...♗xd4N is also possible.



12.♘fg5?!

Meier points out the improvement 12.♘xf6†N 12...♕xf6 13.dxc5 ♕xf4 14.0-0 b6, with equality. The text move is an aggressive try but it is too optimistic.

12...g6 13.0-0-0 ♘xd4 14.h4 b5!∓

Black seized the initiative in Nisipeanu – Meier, Novi Sad 2009.

Let's go back to move 7, where White had a chance to seize the centre with 7.e4. The following game shows how Black should respond.

GAME 24

Robert Szymanski – Miroslaw Nowakowski

Correspondence 2011

As usual, I have tweaked the move order to fit with our theme.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.a3 dxc4 7.e4

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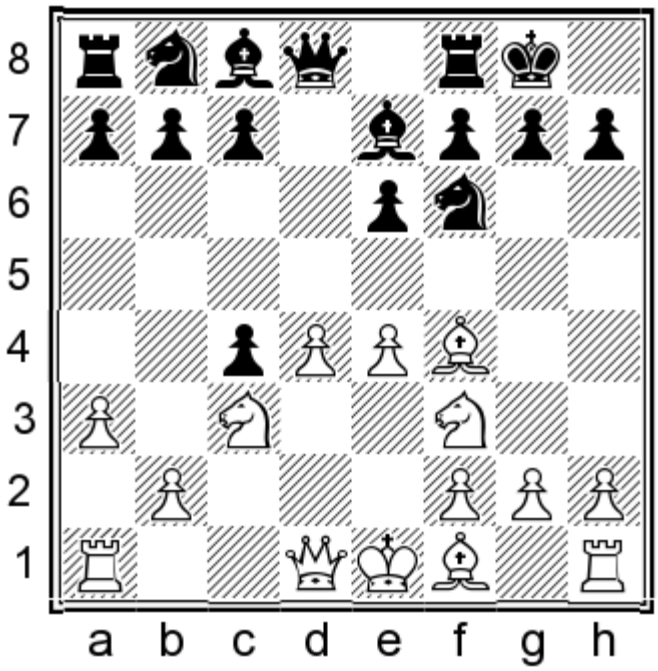

7...b5!

Black obtains good prospects after trading this flank pawn for the one on e4. White has to take on b5, otherwise he will simply be a pawn down.

8.♘xb5 ♘xe4 9.♗xc4

9.♗xc7?! ♕d5 makes things tougher for White, for instance: 10.♘c3 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 ♘d7 12.♗e2 ♗b7 13.0-0 ♖ac8 14.♗g3 ♘f6∓ Papin – Kostrikina, Taganrog 2011.

9...♘d6 10.♗d3

10.♘xd6 cxd6 is also fine for Black; he can play for control over the d5-square with ...♗b7 and ...♘d7-b6. 11.0-0 ♘d7 12.b4 ♗b7 13.♕e2

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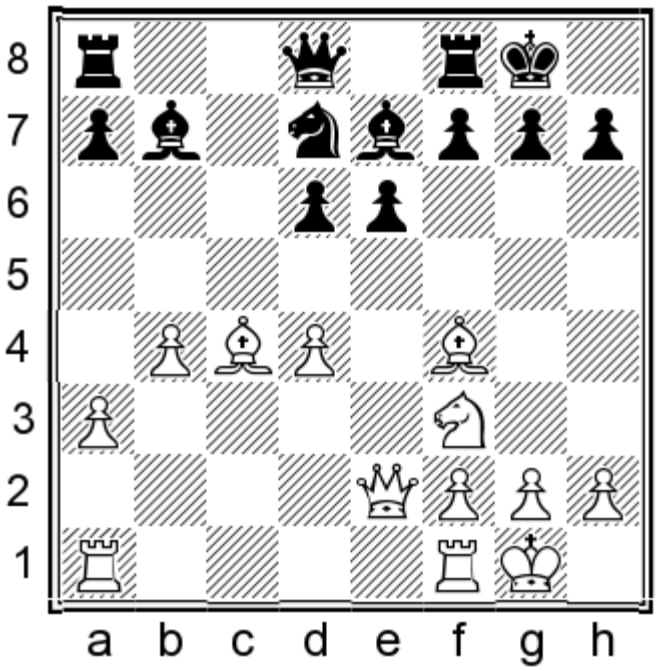
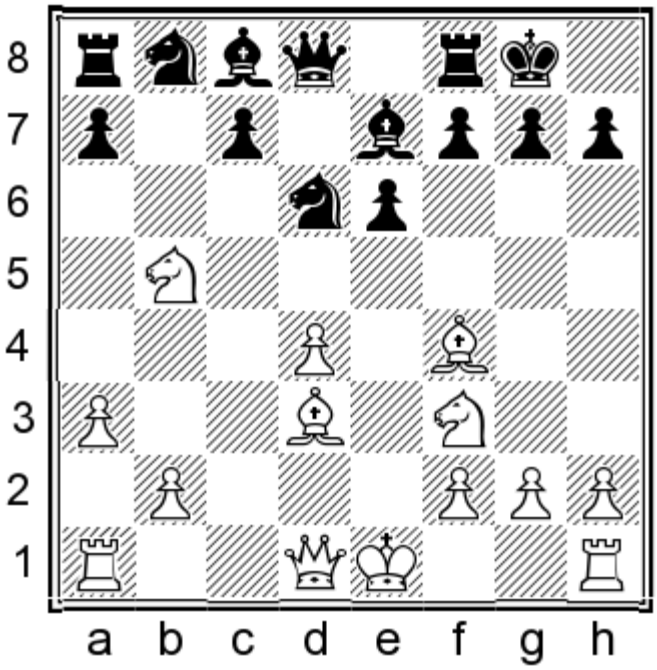


13...♖c8 (13...♘f6 14.♗d3 ♕b6 15.♖ac1 ♖fc8= is another route to a comfortable position) 14.♖fc1 ♘b6 15.♗d3 ♖xc1† 16.♖xc1 ♕a8= Moiseenko – Fridman, Porto Carras 2011.



10...♘xb5

Black can also avoid exchanges with: 10...♗b7 11.0-0 a6!? (11...♘xb5 will most probably transpose to the main game) 12.♘c3 ♘d7 Planning ...c5 next, while in some cases ...♘f6 or ...♘b6 can be considered. Keeping more pieces on the board might be a good option against a lower-rated opponent. One example in my database continued:

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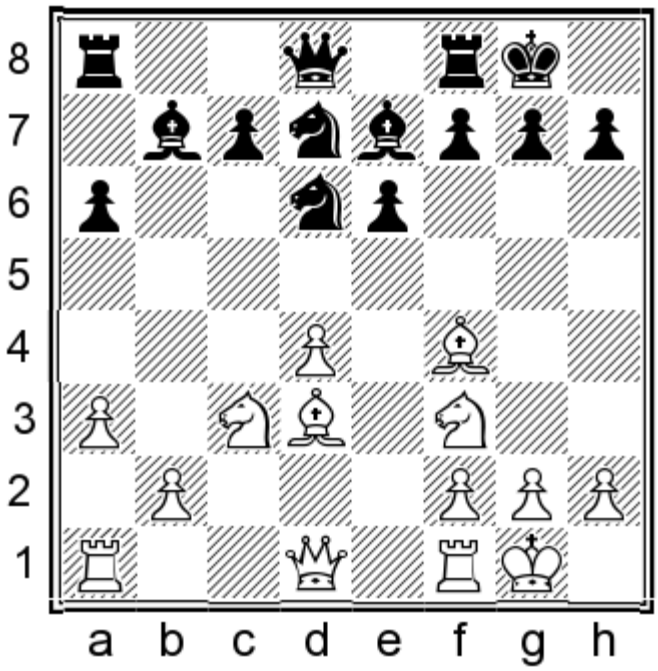


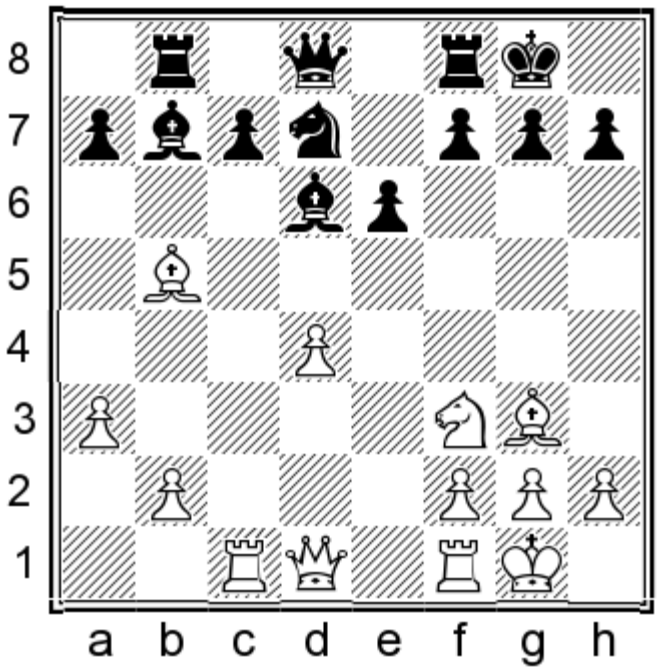
13.♖c1 ♘f6 (13...c5! seems equal) 14.♘e5 ♘f5!? 15.♗xf5 exf5 16.♘a4 ♘d5 17.♗d2 ♘b6 18.♘c5 ♗d5 19.♕c2 ♕c8 20.a4 a5 21.b4 axb4 22.♗xb4 ♘xa4 23.♘xa4 ♗xb4 Black emerged from the complications with some advantage in Aradhya – Aravindh, Kolkata 2013.

11.♗xb5 ♗b7

11...c5!?N looks like a valid alternative. Play continues 12.0-0 and now 12...♕b6! is the key move, after which 13.♗d3 ♘d7, followed by ...♗b7 or ...♗a6, is equal.

12.♖c1 ♗d6 13.♗g3 ♘d7 14.0-0 ♖b8!

With simple and direct play, Black has equalized.



15.♘e5!

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This is White's only way to safeguard the b2-pawn without creating a significant weaknesses.

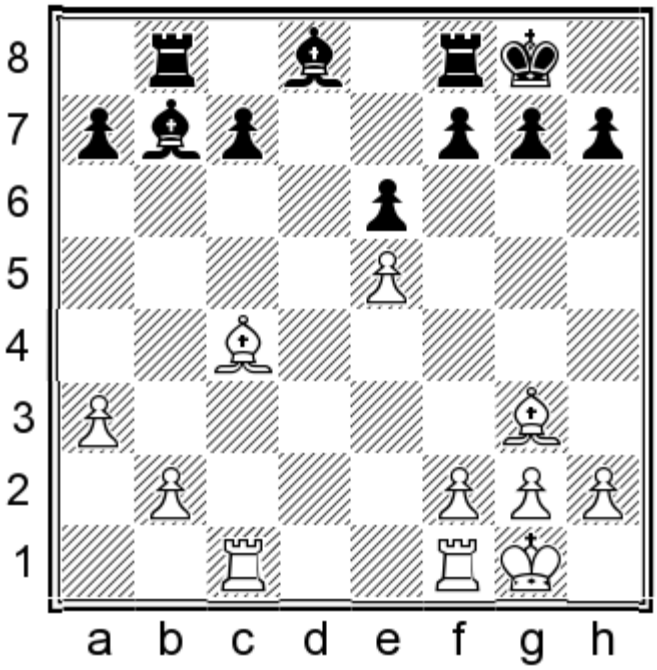
15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗e7 17.♕xd8

Again, this is more or less forced.

17.♕e2?! allows 17...♗xg2! when White must struggle for equality; the trick is 18.♔xg2 ♕d5†.

17...♗xd8 18.♗c4

It may look as though White is slightly better, but this is another case of the 2QPI structure where Black is actually fine and has plenty of counterplay.



18...a5!

The pawn is heading for a4, in order to fix b2 as a weakness.

18...♗e7 19.♖fd1 ♖fd8 is a bit less precise, but still good enough to draw: 20.♗f4 ♖xd1† 21.♖xd1 ♗c6 22.♖d2 a5 23.♔f1 ♔f8 24.♗e3 ♔e8 25.f4 a4 26.♗a7 ♖a8 27.♗e3 ♖b8 28.♗a7 ♖a8 29.♗e3 ½–½ Gelfand – Anand, Moscow 2011.

19.f3

19.a4 can be met by 19...♗d5, leading to simplifications and an almost inevitable draw.

19...a4 20.♖fd1 c5 21.♖c2 ♗c7 22.♖d7

Also after 22.♔f1 ♖fc8 23.♗e2 ♗d8 24.♗f2 ♗d5! Black keeps the equilibrium.

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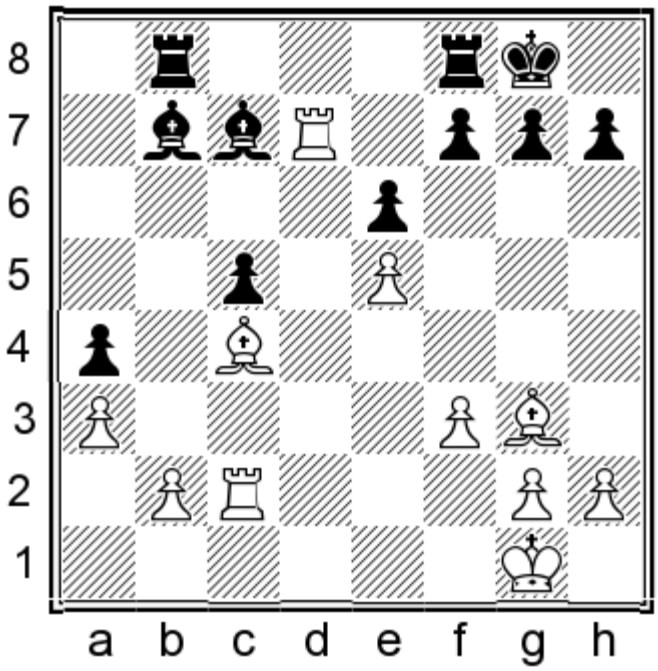
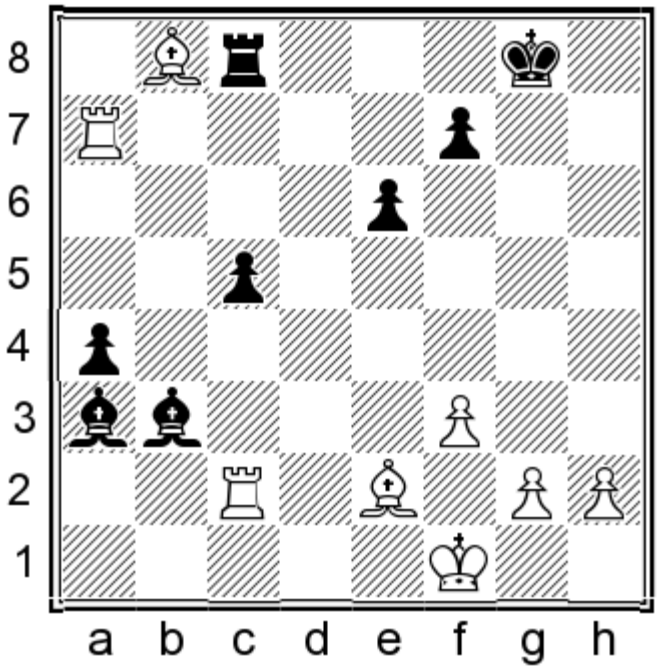


22...♖fc8 23.♔f1 h5! 24.♗e2 h4 25.♗f4 g5!

An excellent pawn sacrifice. In a practical game this would be a good attempt to seize the initiative, but at correspondence level it's still just a draw.

26.♗xg5 ♗xe5 27.♗xh4 ♗d5 28.♖a7 ♖xb2

28...♗xb2!? is a final attempt to play for the win, intending: 29.♗g3 (29.♖xa4 ♗d4 gives Black some initiative plus a strong passed pawn) 29...♗xa3! 30.♗xb8 ♗b3!



Black intends to capture the bishop on b8 and make his passed pawns count, but White can give back the material to reach a completely equal situation after: 31.♖c3 ♖xb8 32.♖xa4! ♗xa4 33.♖xa3 ♗b3 34.♔f2 ♗d5=

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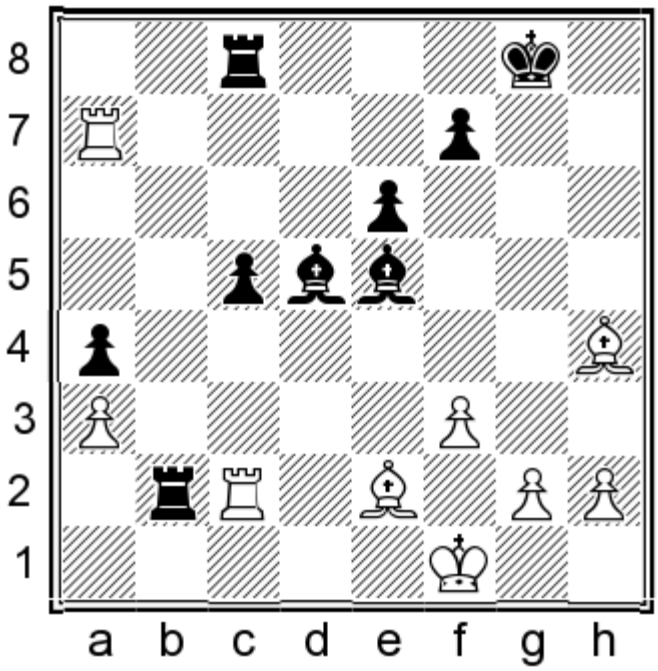

29.♖xb2 ♗xb2 30.♖xa4 ♗d4

Black is a pawn down but his pieces are excellent and his passed c-pawn seems much more dangerous than White's a-pawn. With deep engine assistance, however, the position is a clear draw, so the players called it a day – a frequent occurrence in correspondence games.

½–½

6.e3

Let's turn our attention to White's most obvious choice on move 6, and by far his most popular option in the position.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.e3

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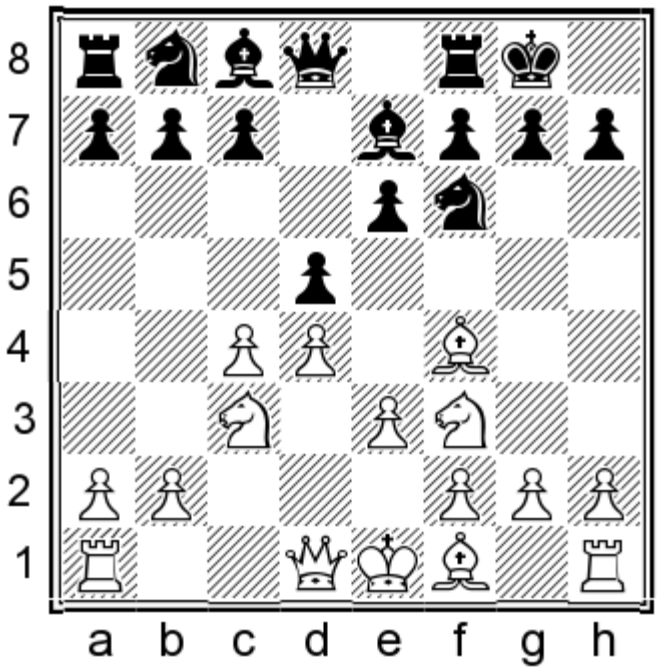

6...b6

6...c5 and 6...♘bd7 have been the most popular choices, but the text move has a lot to recommend it. Black prepares to develop his problem bishop while keeping the ...c5 move in reserve.

We will start by analysing **A)** 7.cxd5, which is White's most popular choice according to the database. We will then consider a second group of moves: **B)** White Maintains the Tension. In that case, he will develop with moves like 7.♗d3, 7.♕c2 or 7.♖c1 before taking any direct action.

A) 7.cxd5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.e3 b6 7.cxd5

I think it makes sense to start with this move, as it is the most direct attempt to cause problems. Once we have established that this forcing continuation is no threat to us, we can turn our attention to White's slower alternatives.

7...♘xd5!

7...exd5 has been almost as popular. However, as I mentioned earlier on page 76, the ensuing structure is always pleasant for White.

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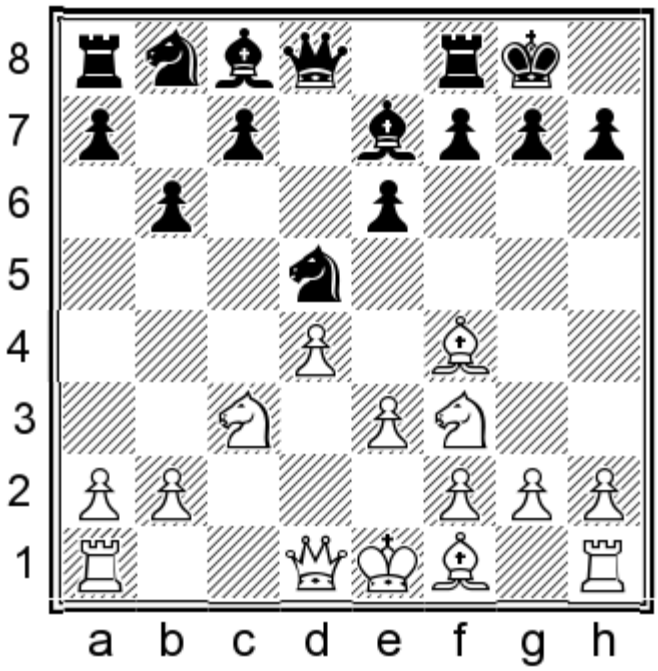

8.♘xd5

8.♗d3 ♘xf4 9.exf4 is a harmless version of the Rubinstein structure, as Black will soon free his position. 9...♗b7 10.0-0 ♘d7 11.♕e2 occurred in Danner – Klovans, Schwarzach 2001, when 11...c5N= would have given Black comfortable play.

8.♗g3?! is too slow: 8...c5 9.♗d3 (or 9.dxc5N 9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 ♗b7!? and Black gets plenty of play for the pawn in all variations) 9...cxd4 10.exd4 ♗b7 11.0-0 ♘d7 12.♖c1 ♘7f6 13.♖e1 ♖c8 Black had an excellent IQP position in Bacrot – Tregubov, Cap d'Agde 2000.

8...♕xd5!

This is the big idea, intending to sacrifice the c7-pawn for the initiative. We will analyse **A1)** 9.♗xc7, **A2)** 9.a3, **A3)** 9.♗e2 and **A4)** 9.♗d3.

A1) 9.♗xc7

This pawn grab is the first line that we need to check.

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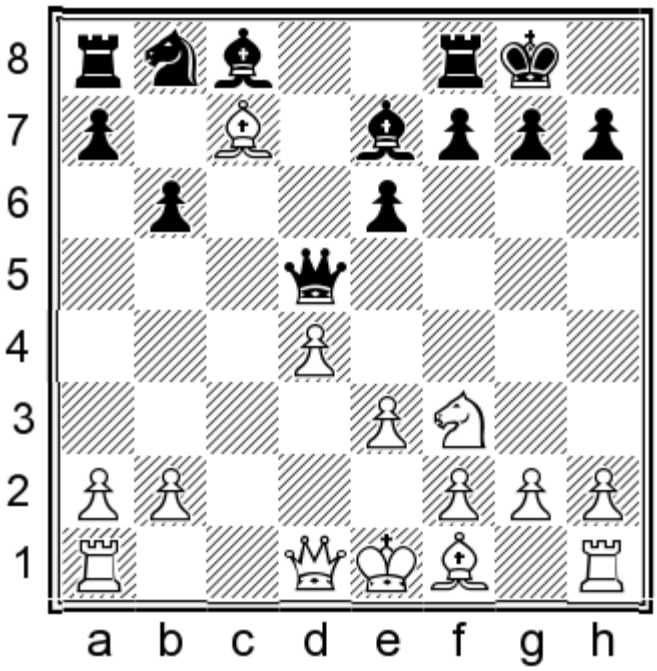


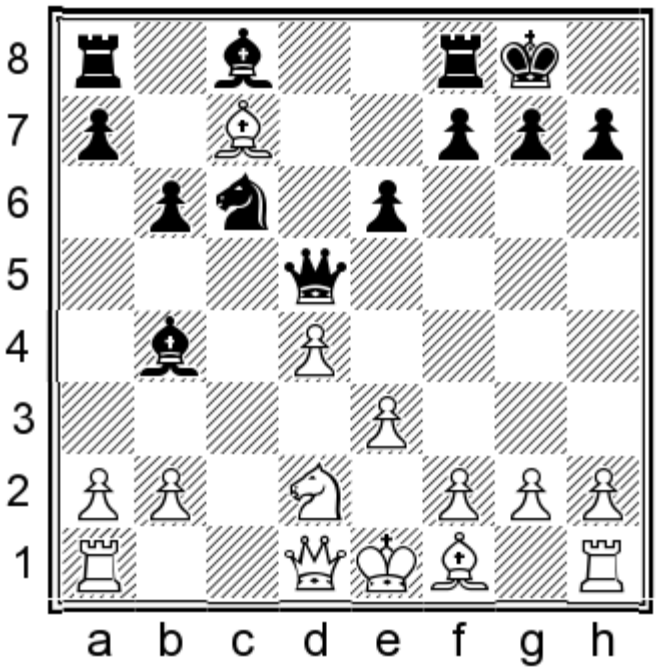
9...♗b4†!

Black should take the opportunity to disturb White's coordination.

10.♘d2 ♘c6!

This has only been played in one game so far, but my analysis indicates that it is Black's easiest route to equality.

10...♗a6 is the most popular move in the position, but 11.♗xb8! is a good response: 11...♗xf1 (11...♗xd2† 12.♕xd2 ♗xf1 13.♔xf1 ♖axb8 is no better after 14.f3N 14...e5 15.♔f2±) 12.♔xf1 ♖axb8 13.♘f3± I don't see full compensation, and White intends ♕d3 and ♔e2 to finish development.



11.f3!?N

I believe this to be White's most challenging move.

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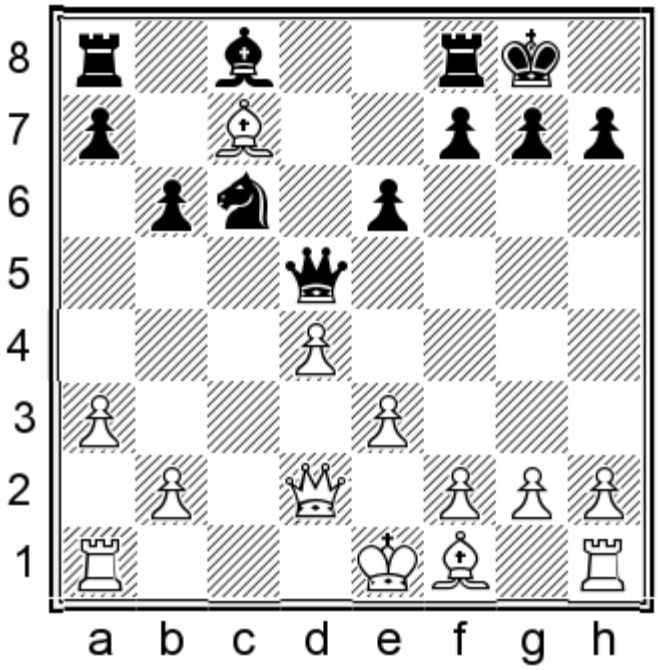
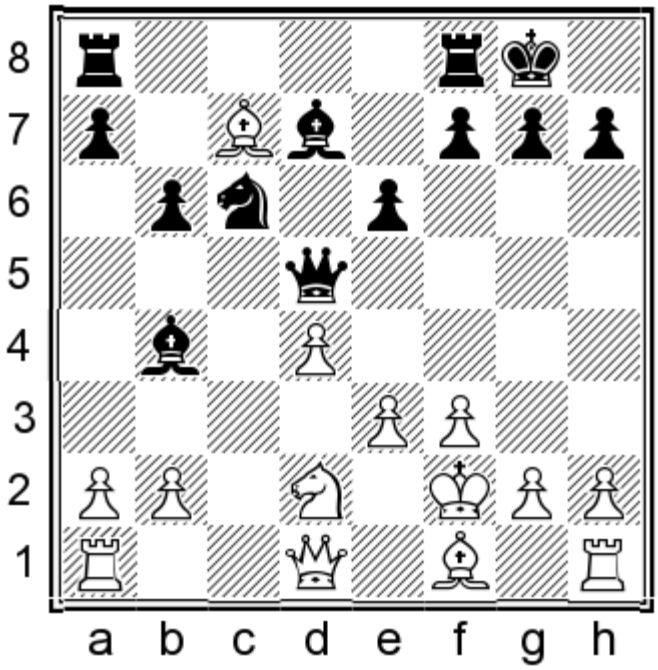
11.a3 ♗xd2† 12.♕xd2 was seen in Thiel – Singer, Bad Wiessee 2012, when Black missed a nice idea (which is also not mentioned by Dreev in his book):



12...♘a5! 13.♖b1 ♗d7!∞ With ...♖fc8 coming next, Black has plenty of play for the pawn.

11...♗d7 12.♔f2

White is ready to retreat his bishop from c7 and finish his development.



12...♘xd4!

This strong move enables Black to restore the material balance. According to my analysis, best play continues:

13.♘e4! ♖fc8! 14.♖c1 ♘b5 15.♗xb5 ♗xb5 16.♘d6 ♗xd6 17.♕xd5 exd5 18.♗xd6

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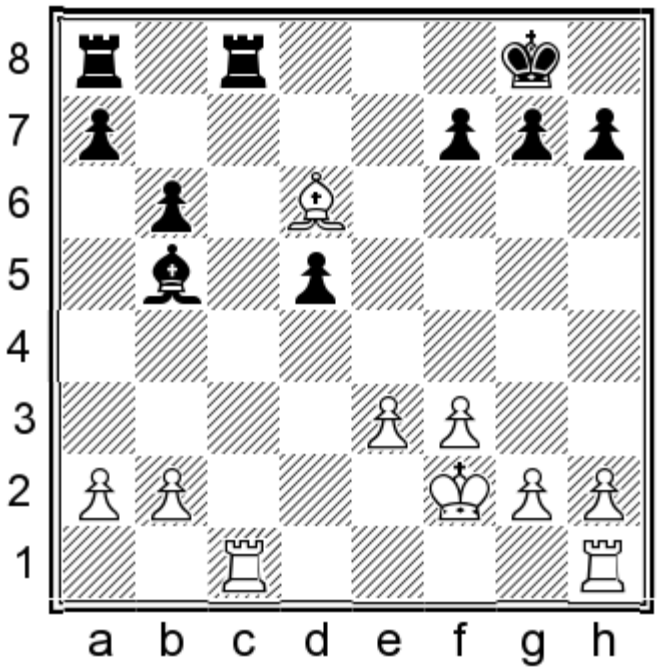
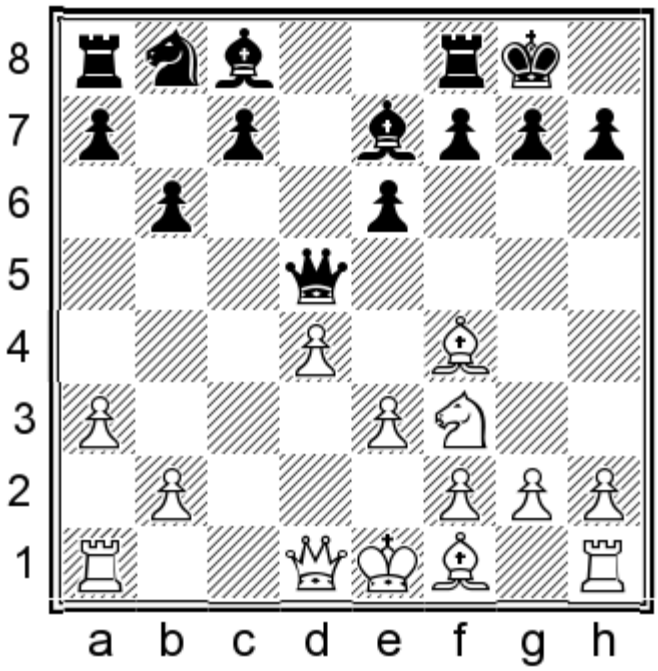


18...f6!=

The last detail. Black's king comes to e6 and there is no reason to believe that White has any more than a symbolic advantage with his better pawn structure.

A2) 9.a3

With this calm move, White prevents the disruptive check and thus threatens to take on c7.



9...c5

Black avoids the threat while making a move he would like to play anyway.

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10.dxc5

10.♗e2 ♗a6 and 10.♗d3 ♗a6 are fine for Black.

I also considered:

10.♖c1!?N

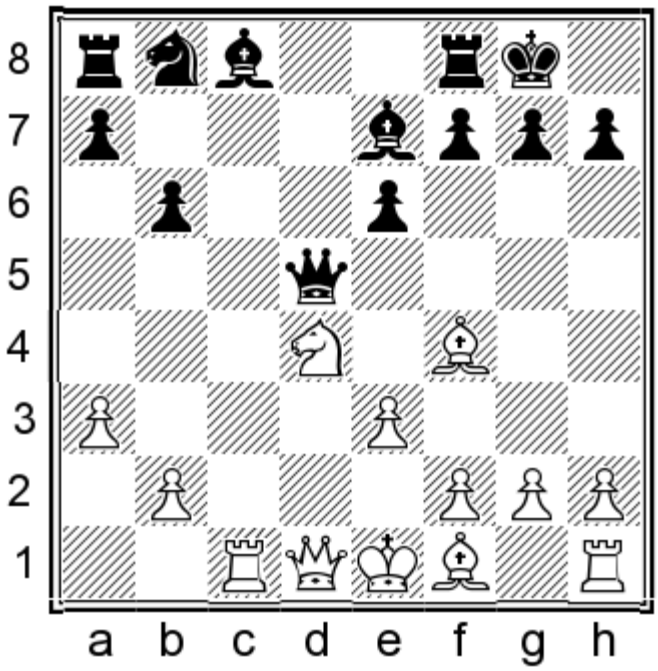
This transposes briefly to the game Duda – Howell, Tallinn (rapid) 2016. Black's most accurate continuation is:

10...cxd4!N

The game continued 10...♗a6 when 11.dxc5! would have presented some challenges. Black can equalize, but some accuracy is required. The text move is stronger due to the following line:

11.♘xd4?

White should settle for 11.♕xd4, when 11...♗b7 gives Black easy equality. The text move is more ambitious but it backfires on White in the following line:



11...e5! 12.♗e2! exf4!?

12...♗b7 13.♗f3 ♕a5† 14.b4 ♗xb4† also leads to at least equal chances for Black.

13.♗f3 ♕e5 14.♖c3!

14.♗xa8 fxe3 is even worse for White.

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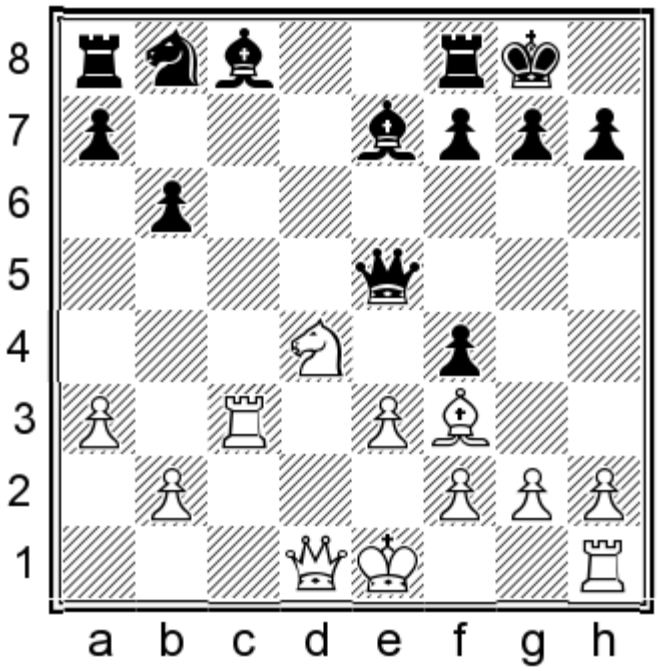


14...fxe3 15.fxe3!

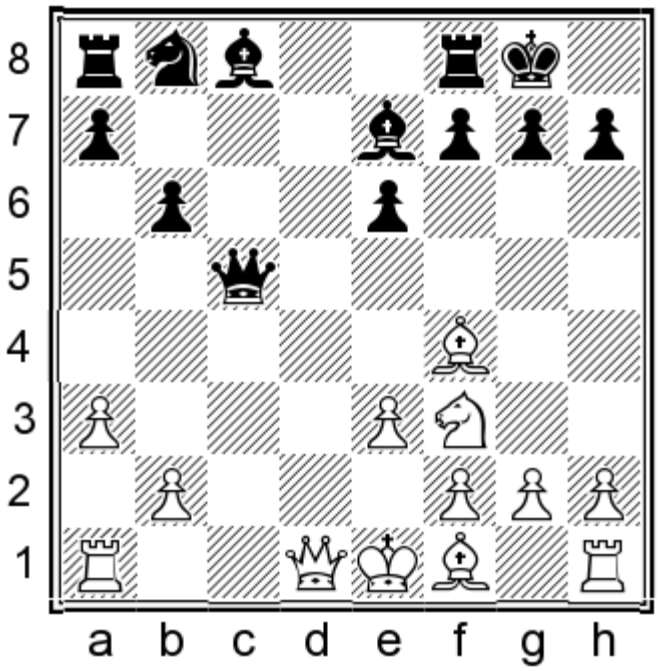
15.♖xe3? ♕f6 16.♗xa8 ♗c5∓

15...♗g5∓

Black’s initiative offers more than enough compensation for the sacrificed material, and a single mistake could plunge White into a losing position.

10...♕xc5

10...bxc5!? is not a particularly good version of the 2QPI structure. Nevertheless, it seems just about playable, and could be considered as an attempt to unbalance the position against a weaker opponent.



11.♖c1

White wins a tempo, but Black can conveniently move his queen away while delivering a disruptive check.

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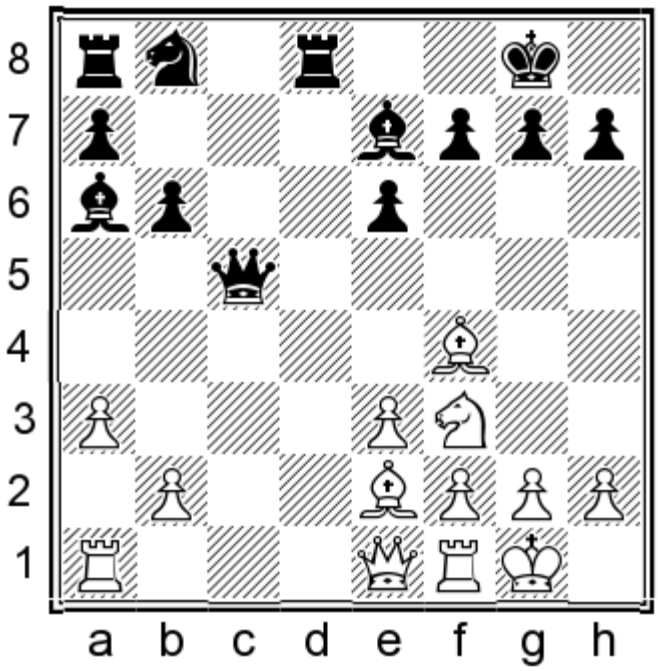
Another logical continuation is:

11.♗e2 ♗a6!?

11...♖d8 12.♕c1 ♗b7 13.0-0 ♘c6= occurred in Nikolov – Radulski, Blagoevgrad 2010. This is a good example to follow if you wish to keep more pieces on the board and play for a win.

12.0-0 ♖d8 13.♕e1

In Zhou Weiqi – Wu Wenjin, Jiangsu Wuxi 2008, Black could have secured full equality with:



13...♕c2!N 14.♘d4

14.♗xa6?! ♘xa6 15.b4 ♕a4 followed by ...♖ac8 is a bit more comfortable for Black.

14...♕xb2 15.♖b1 ♕a2

15...♕xa3!? looks risky, but 16.♖a1 ♕c5 17.♗xa6 ♘xa6 18.♖xa6 e5 19.♗xe5 ♕xe5 20.♘c6 ♕b5 21.♘xe7† ♔h8 22.♕a1 ♕d7 sees Black regain the knight to reach an equal endgame.

16.♖a1 ♕b2 17.♖b1 ♕a2=

With a repetition.

11...♕a5† 12.♕d2 ♕xd2† 13.♘xd2

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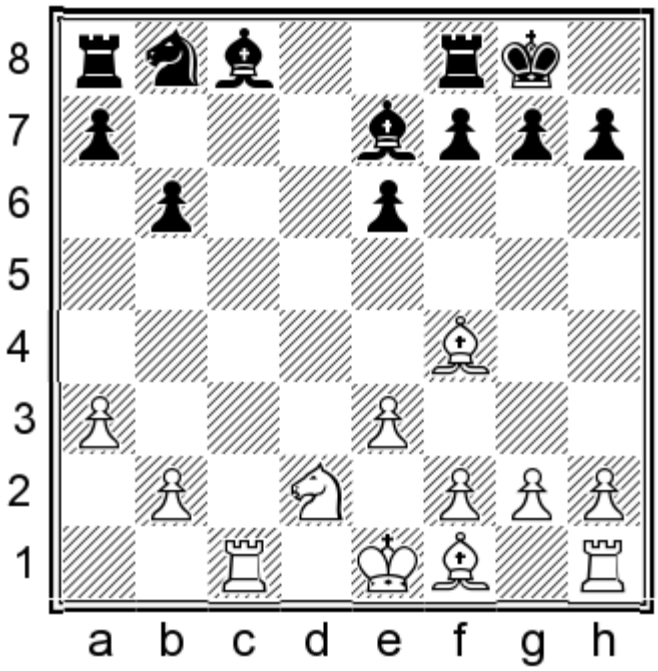
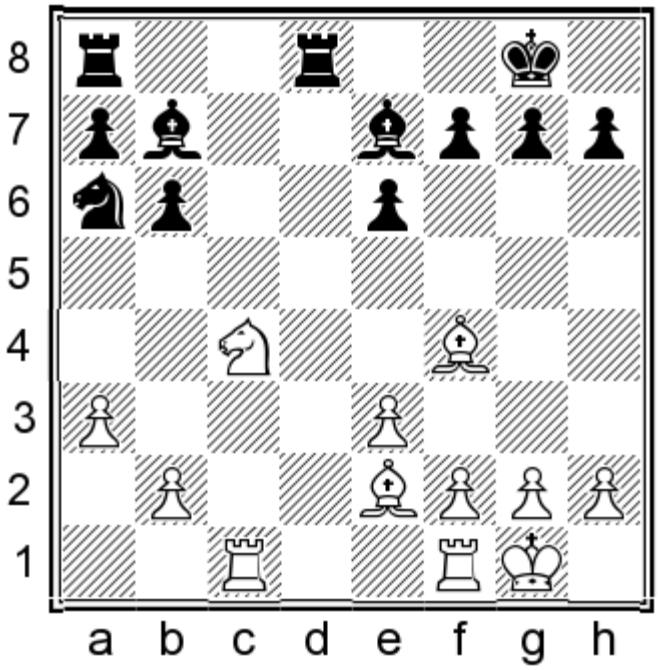


13...♘a6! 14.♘c4

14.♗e2 ♗b7 15.0-0 ♖ac8 16.b4 ♖fd8 17.♘f3 ♘b8 is equal, as Dreev points out.

14...♖d8 15.♗e2 ♗b7 16.0-0

We have been following Matviishen – Sabuk, Lvov 2015. Black has a few decent moves here but my suggestion is:



16...♖ac8N=

Depending on circumstances, Black may follow up with ...f6 to control some kingside squares, or ...♘b8 to reroute the knight.

A3) 9.♗e2

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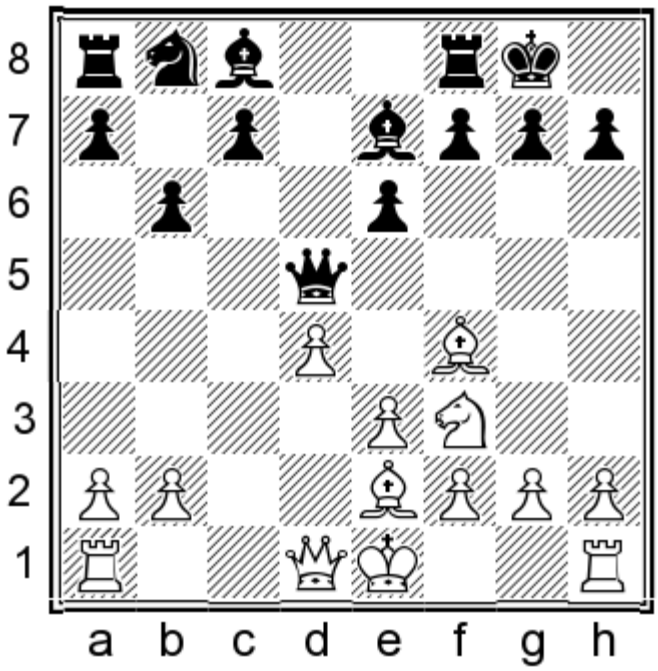
This may not appear to be the most threatening move, but it was one of Dreev's suggestions, so we have to take it seriously.

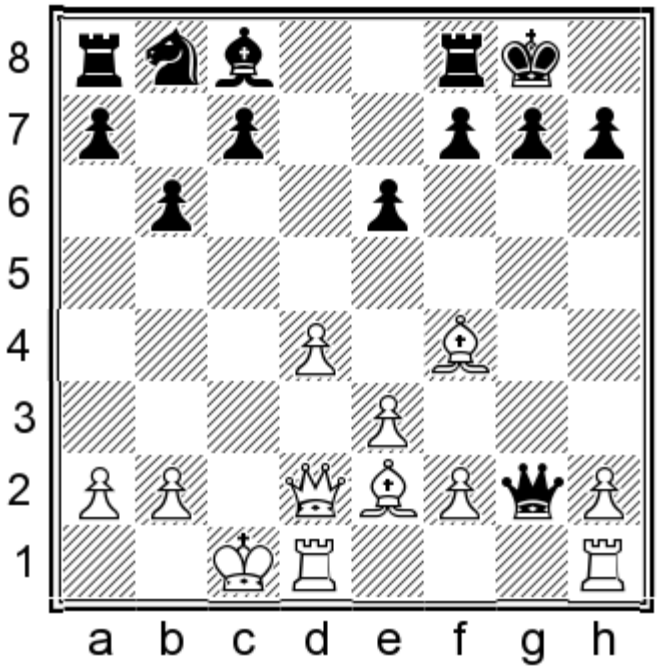


9...♕a5†!?N

This has yet to be tested but it may be the most accurate move.

9...c5?! 10.♘e5! followed by ♗f3 shows one of the main ideas behind 9.♗e2.

9...♗b4† is playable as well: 10.♘d2 (10.♔f1?! ♗d6! 11.♘e5 ♗a6 was slightly better for Black in Kozul – Babula, Austria 2013) 10...♗xd2† 11.♕xd2 ♕xg2 12.0-0-0



12...♗a6! 13.♖hg1 ♕c6† 14.♔b1 Dreev suggested this line and evaluated White's compensation quite favourably. I would agree that White has decent value for a pawn, but Black's position remains playable too, so I would say it is a

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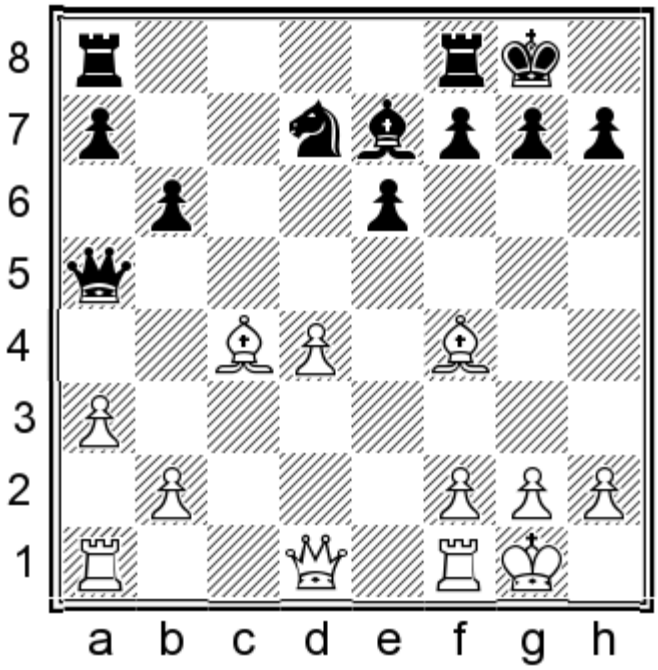
matter of taste which side to choose. A sensible continuation is 14...♗xe2 15.♕xe2 f6, as seen in Martinovic – Vetoshko, Slovakia 2017.

10.♘d2

10.♔f1 c5 just leaves White's king misplaced.

10...♗a6 11.0-0 c5 12.♘c4 ♗xc4 13.♗xc4 cxd4 14.a3 ♘d7 15.exd4

Dreev covers this in a brief line ending in a '±' sign, presumably due to White's bishop pair. However, bishops by themselves are not the best at working with an IQP, whereas Black's knight will love the outpost on d5. I suggest:



15...b5!? 16.♗d3 ♘f6 17.♕e2 a6=

I think it is fair to call the position level.

A4) 9.♗d3

I think we should meet this in the same way as the previous line.

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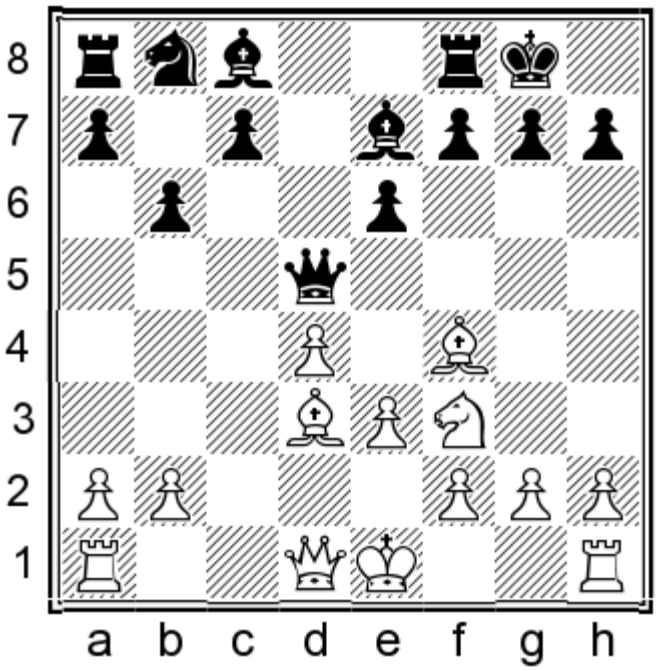


9...♕a5†

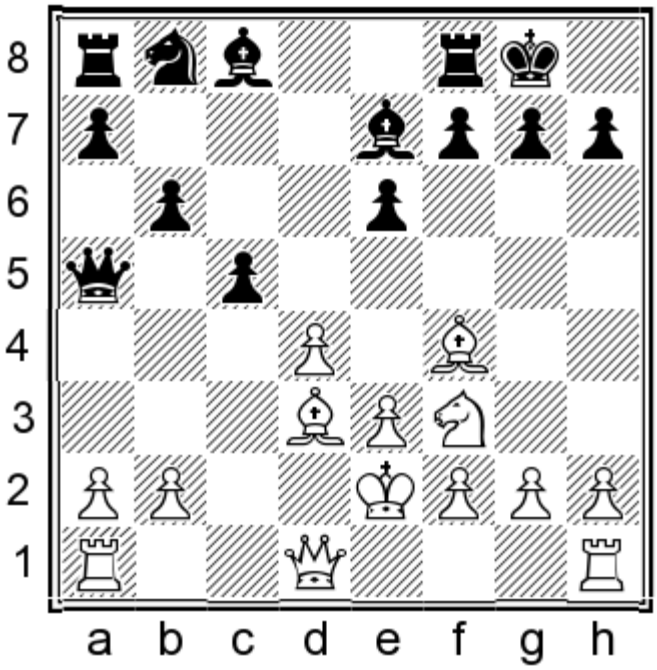
9...♗b4† 10.♔e2! shows one advantage of putting the bishop on d3 rather than e2.

9...c5 10.♕c2! threatens ♗e4 and virtually forces Black to give up a pawn: 10...♗b7 11.♗xh7† ♔h8 Black may have something resembling adequate compensation, but I regard this as too risky to be our repertoire choice.

10.♔e2

10.♘d2 is an important alternative which will be covered in Game 25 below.

10...c5



11.♕d2

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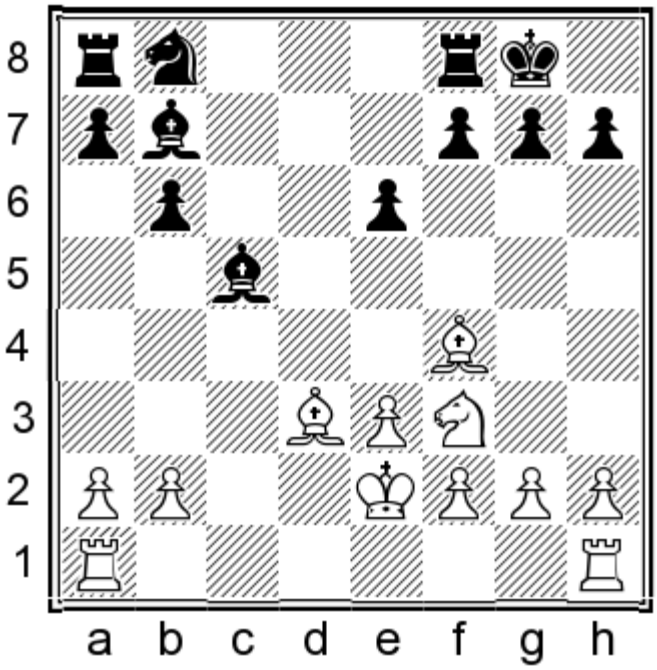
11.♕c2 ♗a6! is fine for Black. For instance, 12.♖hc1N 12...♘d7 13.♗xa6 ♕xa6† 14.♕d3 ♕b7 and the position is level.

11...♕xd2† 12.♔xd2 ♗b7 13.dxc5 ♗xc5

13...♘d7!? 14.cxb6 ♘c5 was seen in Akobian – Zherebukh, Internet 2015, and is a reasonable attempt to unbalance the game.

14.♔e2

In the event of 14.♖ac1 I suggest 14...♘d7N, when 15.♔e2 reaches the main line below.



14...♘d7=

The players agreed a draw in Miton – Babula, Czech Republic 2011. A logical continuation could be:

15.♖ac1 ♘f6 16.a3 ♖fc8 17.♖c2 a5 18.♖hc1 ♖d8 19.h3 h6=

The position is rather drawish.

GAME 25

Yuri Yakovich – Boris Gelfand

Minsk 1986

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3

The game arrived here via a minor transposition but I have altered it to fit with our subject.

4...♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.e3 b6 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5! 9.♗d3 ♕a5† 10.♘d2

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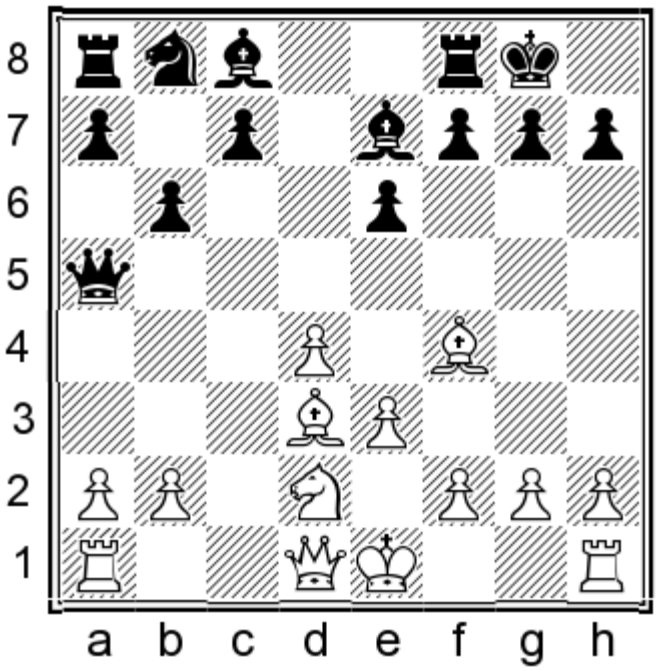


10...♗a6! 11.♗xa6

11.♗e4?!

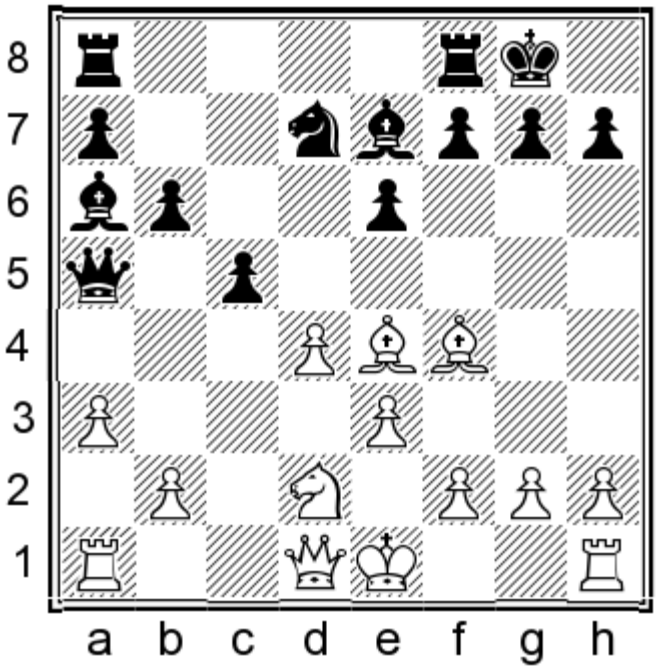
It is risky to leave the bishop on a6, where it prevents White from castling. Now Black can make a powerful exchange sacrifice.

11...♘d7! 12.a3

12.♗xa8 ♖xa8 followed by ...c5 gives Black a huge initiative for the exchange, and if 13.♗xc7?! ♖c8 Black follows up with ...♕b5 and is close to winning.

12...c5!

Improving over 12...♖ac8, which was played in Harikrishna – Doettling, Mainz 2007.



13.b4?

The computer offers 13.♗c6 as a better try, but 13...♗b5 still gives Black a great position.

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13...♕b5! 14.♗f3 cxd4 15.♗xa8 ♖xa8 16.♘f3 e5 17.♗g3 ♖d8 18.e4 ♖c8

0–1 Shabaev – Baciak, corr. 2014.

11...♕xa6!?

Offering a pawn sacrifice, which no one has been brave enough to accept so far.

A reasonable alternative is:

11...♘xa6 12.0-0 c5

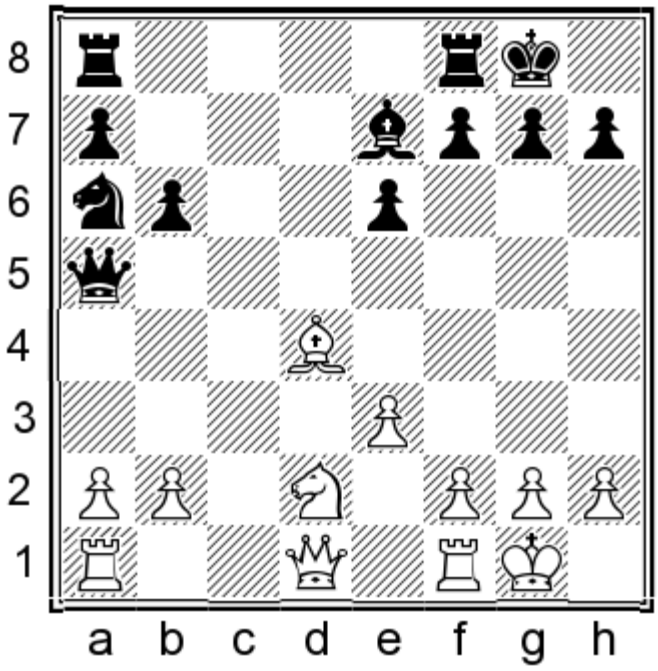
Most games from this position have been drawn, although White is the only side to have scored some wins from here in practice. Despite this ominous sign, my analysis indicates that Black's position is not worse at all. I will show a few lines so you can form your own opinion.

13.♗e5

13.♘c4 ♕b5 was equal in Ponomariov – Fridman, Warsaw (blitz) 2010.

13.♕e2?! has been the most popular choice but it is a slight inaccuracy. 13...cxd4 14.♘b3 d3! 15.♕xd3 ♕a4 16.♗e5 ♖fd8 17.♕e2 ♖d5 18.♗c3 ♖ad8 The position is roughly equal but a touch more comfortable for Black. In Richter – Rau, Germany 2011, White's eventual victory had little to do with the outcome of the opening.

13...cxd4 14.♗xd4



White went on to outplay his opponent and win in Adhiban – Zherebukh, Atlantic City 2016. At this point, however, a good continuation would have been:

14...♖fd8N 15.♕g4 ♕g5 16.♕e2 ♘b4=

Black is not worse at all.

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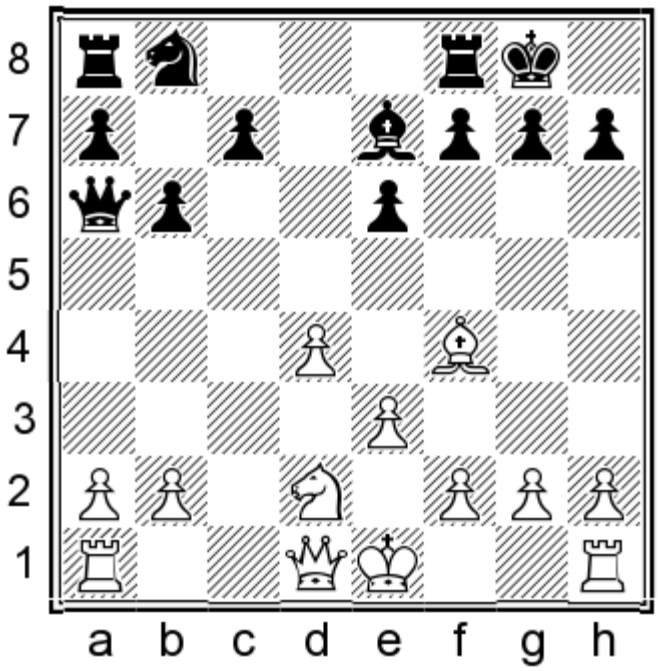

12.♕e2

12.♗xc7N 12...♖c8 13.♗g3 ♕b5 (13...♗b4!? could also be considered) 14.♖b1 ♗b4 15.a3 ♗xd2† 16.♕xd2 ♘c6 gives Black full compensation for the pawn, and in practice his position would be more comfortable than White's.

12...c5 13.♗xb8

13.dxc5 gives Black the option of keeping the queens on: 13...♕b7!?N (13...♗xc5 is also fine, and after 14.♗xb8 ♕xe2† 15.♔xe2 ♖axb8 we transpose to the main game; this was the actual move order of the Volke – Jepson game quoted below.) 14.0-0 ♗xc5 The position is equal once again. (14...bxc5!? is not ridiculous, but the 2QPI structure makes less sense when the white knight can come to the ideal blockading square on c4.)

13...♕xe2† 14.♔xe2 ♖axb8 15.dxc5 ♗xc5 16.♖ac1 ♖fc8 17.♖c2

17.♘b3 was played in Volke – Jepson, Rhodes 2013. 17...♗e7!?N 18.♘d4 ♔f8 19.♘c6 ♖a8= would be my suggestion, when the knight on c6 looks nice but White does not really have anything.

17...♗d6 18.♖hc1 ♖xc2 19.♖xc2 ♔f8!

Gelfand improves his king.

20.♖c6 ♔e7 21.♘c4 ♖d8 22.f4

Perhaps White should have settled for 22.♘xd6 ♖xd6 23.♖c8 ♖d5 when a draw is likely.

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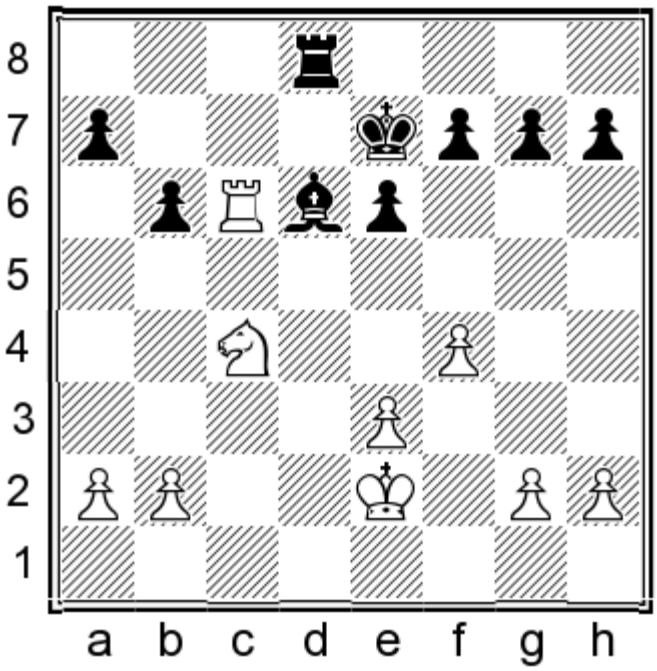

22...♗b8!

Gelfand takes the opportunity to preserve his bishop and play for a win.

23.b4 g5! 24.g3

24.fxg5 ♗xh2 remains equal, but Black has achieved a certain level of imbalance in the position.

24...gxf4

24...h5!? was another way to handle the position.

25.gxf4 ♖g8 26.♔f2 ♔d7 27.b5 ♖g6! 28.♘d2 e5 29.♖c4

½–½

A draw was agreed and it is certainly a fair result, but Black could have continued with 29...exf4 30.exf4 ♖h6, with some practical chances to exploit the long-range power of the bishop along with White's pawn weaknesses.

This brings us to the end of our coverage of 7.cxd5. Let's now turn our attention to those variations where White plays more patiently on move 7.

B) White Maintains the Tension

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.e3 b6

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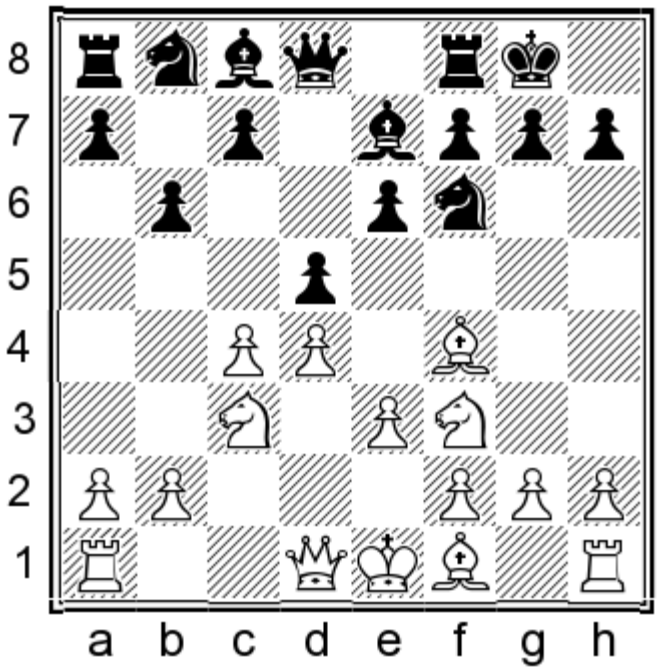


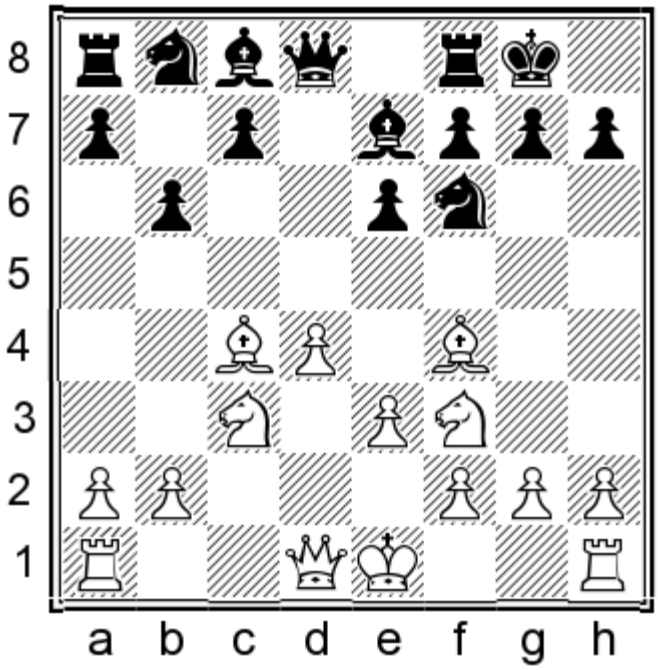
We will analyse **B1)** 7.♗d3, **B2)** 7.♕c2 and **B3)** 7.♖c1.

7.♗e2 is a common move but after 7...dxc4, all of the games on my database have continued 8.♗xc4, transposing to variation B1. Perhaps 8.♘e5!?N could be tried, but 8...♗a6! 9.♘xc4 ♘d5! 10.♗g3 c5 looks absolutely fine for Black.

B1) 7.♗d3 dxc4

This exchange makes a lot of sense after White has spent a tempo developing his light-squared bishop. Dreev does not mention this possibility in his generally excellent book *Bf4 in the Queen's Gambit and the Exchange Slav*.

8.♗xc4



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8...♗a6!

This was first played at a high level by Carlsen in 2015. Since then, it has been taken up by other strong players, most notably Dominguez Perez, who has used it several times with solid results.

9.♗xa6

This is the first choice of the engines, but it doesn't look threatening to me.

Several games have continued:

9.♕e2 ♗xc4

9...♕c8!? is also possible, but it gives White the choice between transposing to our main line by taking on a6 or maintaining the tension. Given the choice, I would prefer not to give my opponent that freedom.

10.♕xc4 c5 11.dxc5 bxc5!?

This is the pet line of GM Zherebukh and is a good choice for players wishing to play for a win. 11...♗xc5 is a safe equalizer which was played in Cheparinov – Dominguez Perez, Varadero 2016.

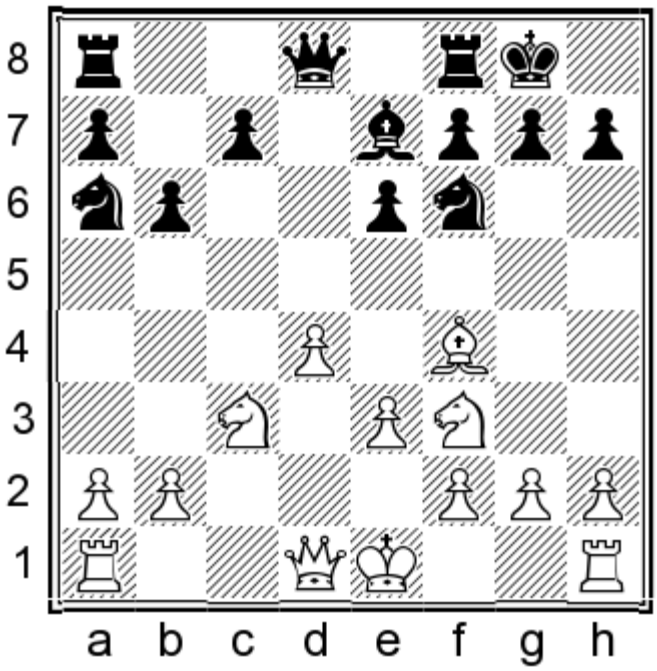
12.0-0 ♘c6 13.♖ac1

13.♖fd1 ♕b6!? (13...♕a5N makes a lot of sense as well) 14.♘a4 ♕b4 15.♕a6 ♖fc8 16.a3 ♕a5 17.♕xa5 ♘xa5 18.♖ac1 ♘d5 was also balanced in Le Quang Liem – Zherebukh, Cleveland 2015.

13...♕a5 14.♖fd1 ♖fd8 15.a3 ♖ac8 16.h3 h6

The chances were about equal in Dreev – Zherebukh, Las Vegas 2016, with White having the structural edge and Black having active piece play. One of the nice features of this line is that Black had the choice on move 11 between two types of position: both of them objectively equal, but one being safe and the other more double-edged.

9...♘xa6



10.♕e2

White also fails to make any headway after: 10.0-0 c5 11.♖c1 ♕d7!? (11...♖c8!? 12.e4 ♕d7! is also fine for Black, with the queen going to b7 if needed) 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.♕xd7 ♘cxd7!?

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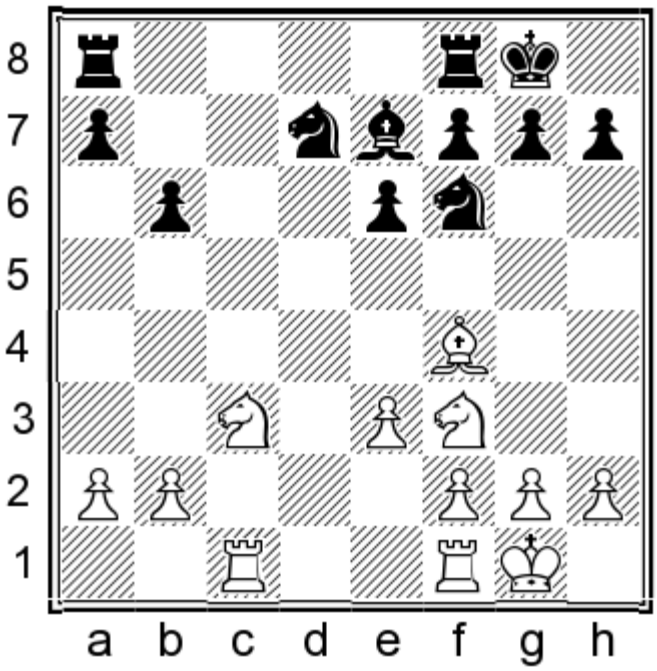


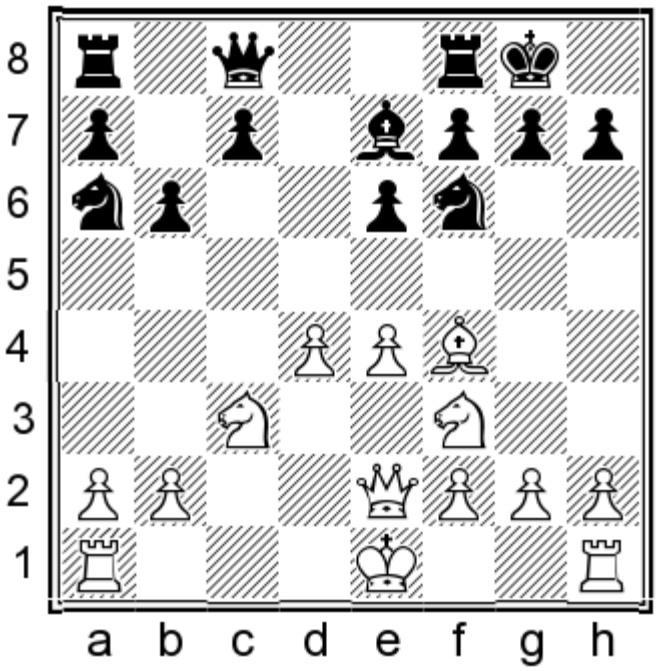
14.♘b5 ♘d5 15.♗g3 ♘c5= White had nothing in Ding Liren – Dominguez Perez, Huaian 2016.

10...♕c8!

The queen will be perfectly placed on b7, as is often the case when the light-squared bishops have been exchanged.

11.e4

I will take the unusual step of mentioning two main continuations for Black. The first is more theoretically accurate, while the second is slightly imprecise, but is worth mentioning as it was played in a high-level game.



a) First, the move I would recommend is 11...c5!N. Black is fine, as 12.d5? exd5 13.e5 is unsound due to 13...♖e8!.

b) 11...♖e8!?

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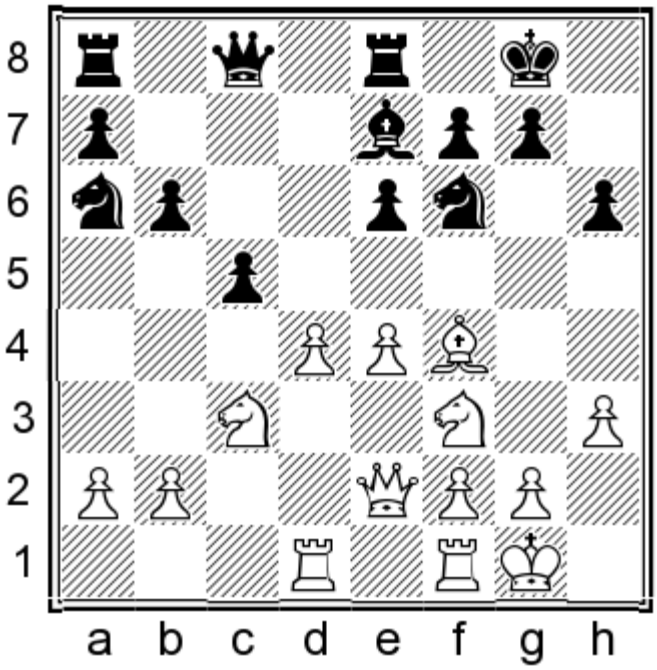
Although it would have been possible to give the above line and move on, I would like to show you an excerpt from a high-level game. Despite a few small inaccuracies, it contains some instructive ideas which may be applied in similar positions. Dominguez Perez opts for a subtle prophylactic move: with the rook already on e8, it will be practically impossible for White to meet ...c5 with d4-d5.

12.0-0 c5 13.♖ad1 h6!? 14.h3

Both sides have improved their positions, but now Dominguez plays a bit too subtly for his own good.



14...♗f8?!

This gives White the chance to force the knight away from controlling d5.

14...♕b7 was better; the queen clearly belongs on this square and Black can choose how to continue according to White's response. For instance, 15.♖fe1 can be met by 15...♖ad8, bringing the last piece into play with equal chances.

15.♗e5! ♘d7 16.♗g3 ♕b7

Despite the previous inaccuracies, Black's position is resilient enough and he is only slightly worse.

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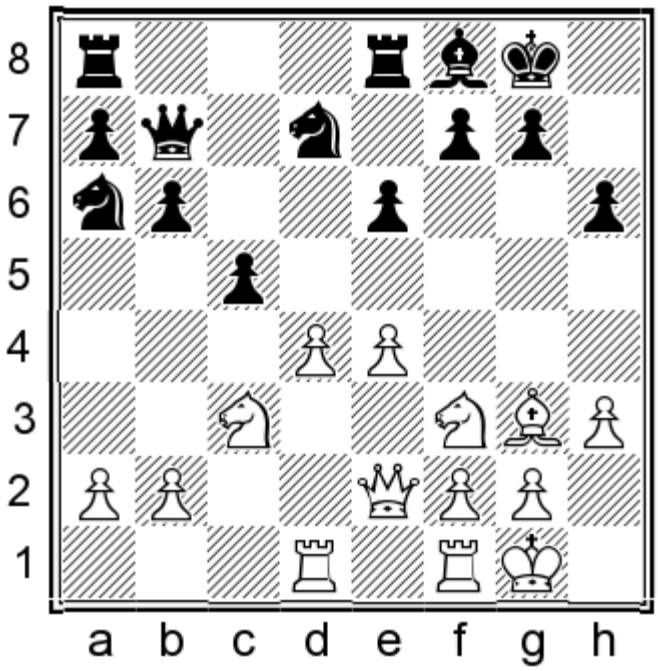

17.d5

This seems like the natural choice when Black does not have a knight controlling d5.

The engines suggest 17.a3!N intending dxc5 and b2-b4. This would indeed have maintained an edge, but after 17...♖ac8 there is nothing fundamentally wrong in Black's position, and he should be able to neutralize the slight pressure without too much trouble.

17...exd5 18.♘xd5 ♖ac8

Despite the horse on d5, Black is fine as his pieces are well placed and working in harmony. The only exception is the knight on a6, but Dominguez solves this problem on the very next move!

19.b3

It is logical to think about 19.a3 in order to restrict the a6-knight, but after 19...c4! it is obvious that White's last move created weaknesses, and the knight will find an active role on c5 anyway.

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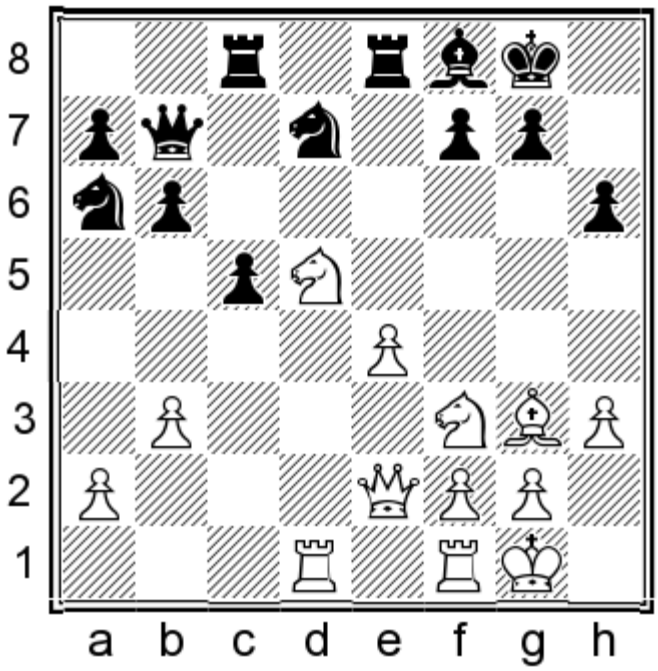
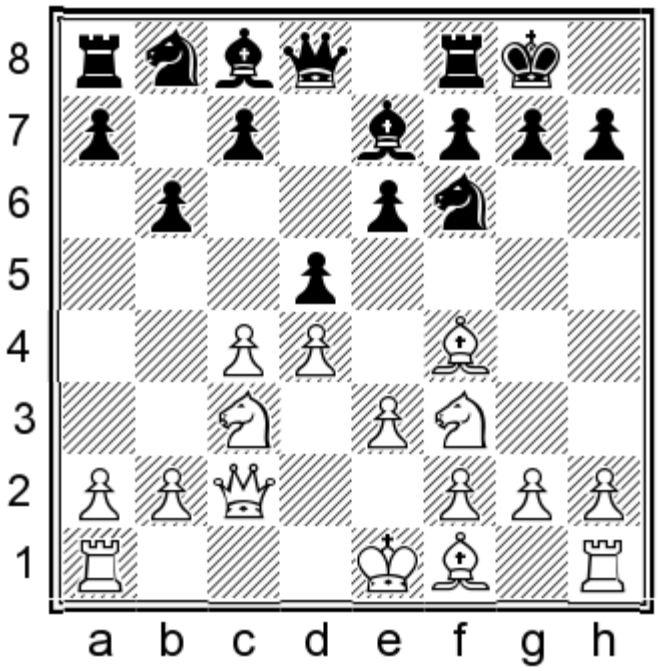


19...♘b4!

All this happened in Najer – Dominguez Perez, Dortmund 2016. In the game White found nothing better than retreating his knight to c3, after which it is obvious that Black has no problems. The point of Black's last move is that 20.♘xb4 cxb4 leaves the e4-pawn under attack, and this gives Black time to play ...♕c6 and take over the c-file.

Even though Black can improve on this game with 11...c5!N, I think that the above fragment contains some instructive points, while also demonstrating the fundamental soundness of Black's position, even when he commits a few inaccuracies. With that being said, let's move on to a couple of more challenging lines.

B2) 7.♕c2



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7...♗a6!

Once again, I prefer this move over the more popular development of the bishop to b7.

7...c5 is the other main move, when there are two continuations worth mentioning:

a) 8.dxc5 bxc5 9.♖d1 ♘c6 10.cxd5N 10...♘xd5! is analysed in considerable detail by Dreev, who claims it is a crucial position for the assessment of the 7.♕c2 variation. I don't quite agree with this, as I think both sides can improve earlier, but it is worth noting this line in passing as another case where the 2QPI structure holds up well.

b) 8.cxd5!? is a sterner test. 8...♘xd5 seems correct, when Dreev indicates that Black is okay after 9.♗d3, but it seems to me that 9.♘xd5 exd5 10.♗d3 gives White slightly better prospects.

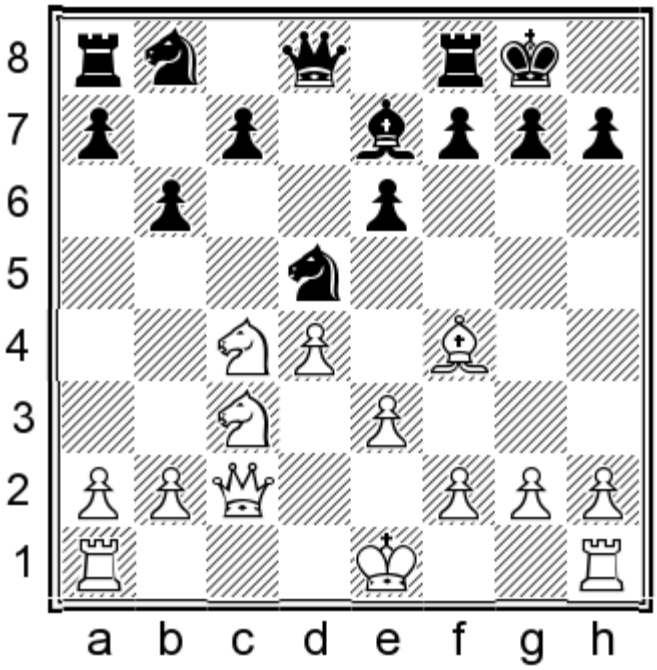
8.♘e5

8.cxd5 is an important alternative which is featured in Game 26 below.

8...dxc4

8...♕c8!?N also seems playable for Black, with ...c5 to follow.

9.♗xc4 ♗xc4 10.♘xc4 ♘d5



11.♗g3!?N

Dreev suggests this as an improvement over 11.♘xd5 ♕xd5 12.0-0 (12.♗xc7? ♖c8∓) 12...c5= when Black had no problems in Khalifman – Pigusov, Sochi 1989.

11...♘xc3 12.♕xc3 ♘a6 13.0-0

Here I found a useful improvement for Black.

13...♕d5!

13...c5 14.♖ad1 ♕d5 15.♕b3 ♖fd8 16.dxc5 ♕xc5 17.♘e5± is a line given by Dreev. Black is close to equal here, but small problems begin to appear when he opens the centre too quickly, which leads to his queen being kicked to an unfavourable square. The point of my improvement is to bring one or both rooks into play before committing to ...c5.

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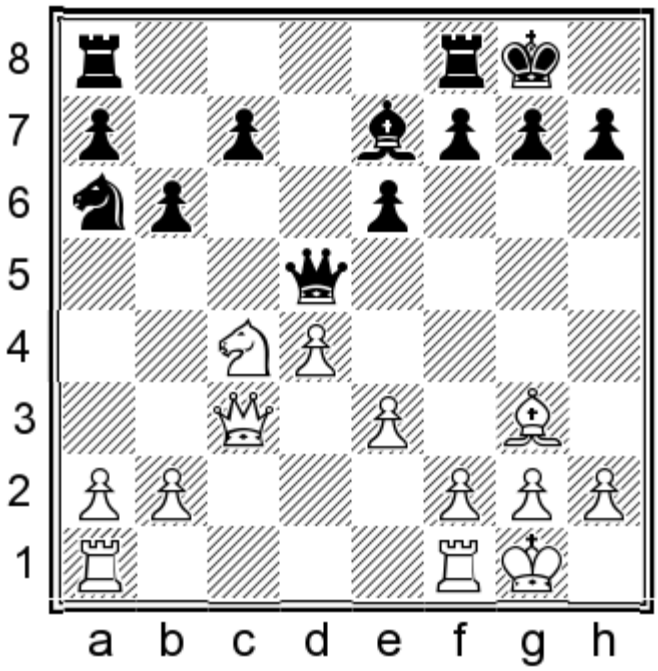

14.♕b3

14.♖ad1 and 14.♖fd1 are both met by 14...♖fd8, with a probable transposition, as White will want to move his queen at some point.

14...♖fd8 15.♖fd1

15.♖ad1 ♖ac8 hardly changes anything.

15...♖ac8=

With his rooks already in play, Black is ready to play ...c5 and I see no problems for him.

GAME 26

Erwin L'Ami – Lazaro Bruzon Batista

Merida 2015

As so often happens, the game featured a slightly different move order which has been suitably altered.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4 0-0 6.e3 b6 7.♕c2 ♗a6 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6

Dutch GM Erwin L'Ami is an excellent theoretician whose opening ideas are to be taken seriously. This particular try for White against the 6...b6 variation is one such case, which has some subtle points that need our attention. At this moment White has two central pawns against one, while Black has a clear weakness on c7. Black would obviously like to play the freeing ...c5 break, but White is well prepared for that. One of the advantages of the early ♕c2 is that the d1-square has been vacated for a rook, while the other rook can go to c1. In the event of ...cxd4, White may recapture with the knight and invade on c6, taking advantage of the weakness which Black created on move 6! Fortunately, Bruzon Batista is a top GM and a QGD expert, and he shows a good antidote in this game.

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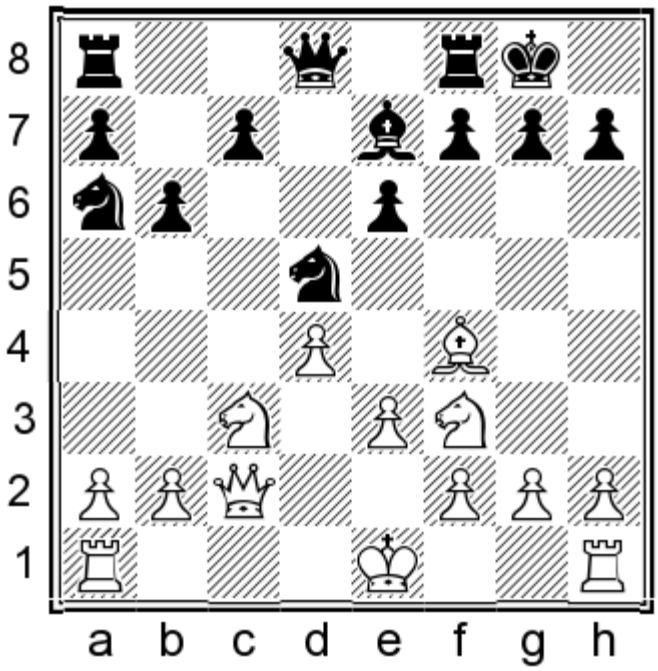

10.0-0

This was L'Ami's attempt to improve on his own play.

His previous game from the same position continued:

10.♖d1

This feels less natural, as White would ideally like to put this rook on c1 and the other on d1. Black reacted fine with:

10...♘ab4! 11.♕b3

a) 11.♕d2 c5 gives Black no problems.

b) 11.♕c1 also allows 11...c5!, this time having in mind a tactical justification:

b1) 12.dxc5?! ♘xf4! 13.0-0 (13.♖xd8 ♘fd3† wins back the queen immediately) 13...♘fd5 14.e4 ♘xc3! 15.♕xc3 ♘xa2∓ and Black gets the time needed to move his queen on the next turn.

b2) 12.♘xd5 is actually White's best, although Black has a pleasant choice: 12...♘xd5 (12...exd5 is also fine, with a decent version of the hanging-pawns structure) 13.dxc5 bxc5!? Yet again, the 2QPI structure offers good prospects. 14.0-0 ♕a5 and Black has plenty of counterplay, as White's pieces are not so well placed.

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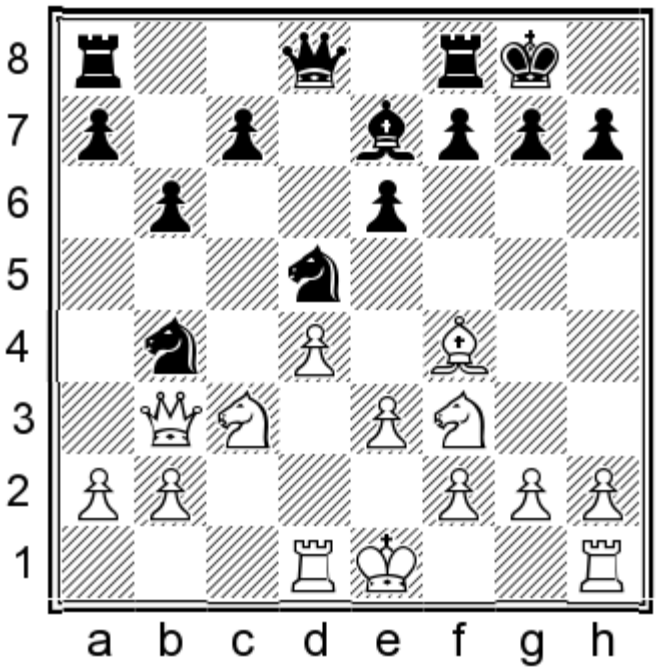


11...a5!?

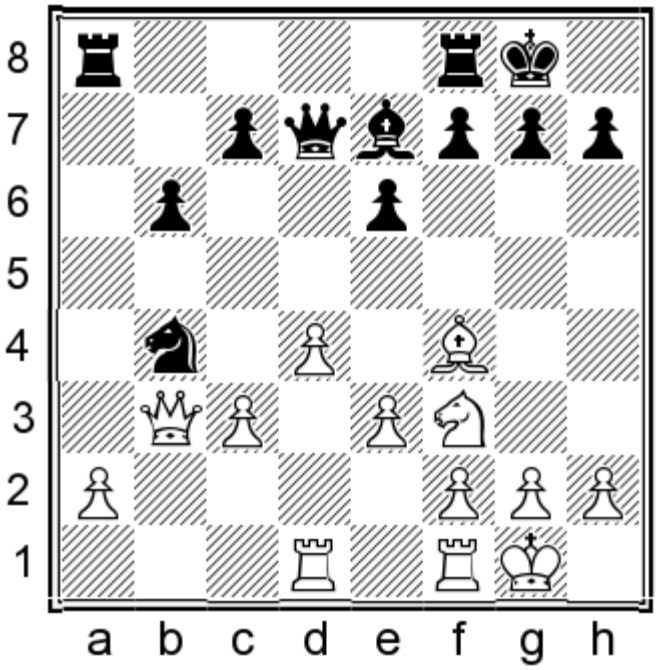
11...♕c8N= seems the simplest solution, with ...c5 to follow.

12.0-0 a4 13.♘xa4

Otherwise the pawn reaches a3.

13...♕d7!? 14.♘c3 ♘xc3 15.bxc3

15.♕xc3 ♖xa2=



15...♘xa2 16.♘e5 ♕a4=

Black was doing fine in L'Ami – Haslinger, Germany 2014.

10...c5

Black carries out the standard freeing break, while keeping White guessing as to whether or not he will exchange on f4.

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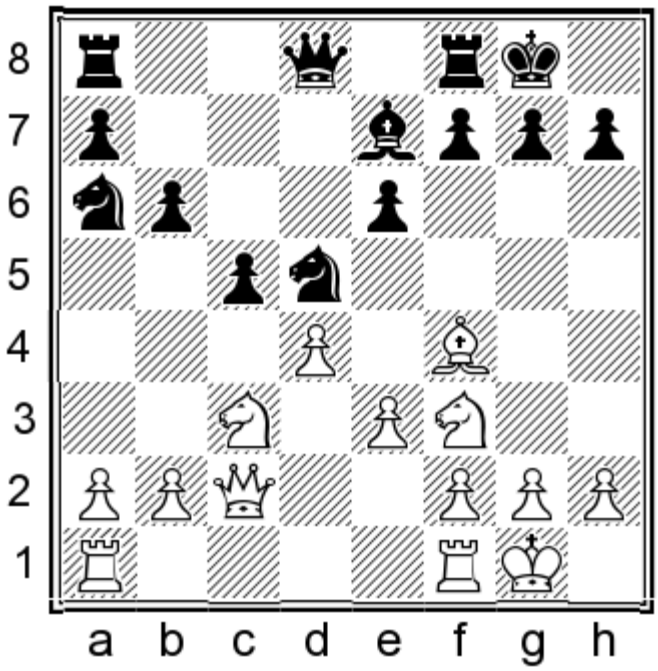

11.♖fd1 ♘ab4!

One specific downside of the 7.♕c2 variation is that a knight may land on b4 with tempo, and our set-up with an early ...♗a6 is a good way to take advantage of that factor. From this particular position, Black can exchange on f4 and bring the other knight to d5 in some lines.

11...cxd4 12.♘xd4 is a bit uncomfortable for Black, while White has easy options such as ♖ac1, ♘xd5 and ♘c6 available at every turn.

11...♕c8 allows 12.♘xd5 exd5, with a version of the hanging pawns which is not to everyone's taste. Black has some activity although White may be able to demonstrate an edge with accurate play.

12.♕b3 ♘xf4

12...♕c8!?N is a reasonable alternative, planning ...c4 while keeping the possibility of exchanging on f4 in reserve.

13.exf4

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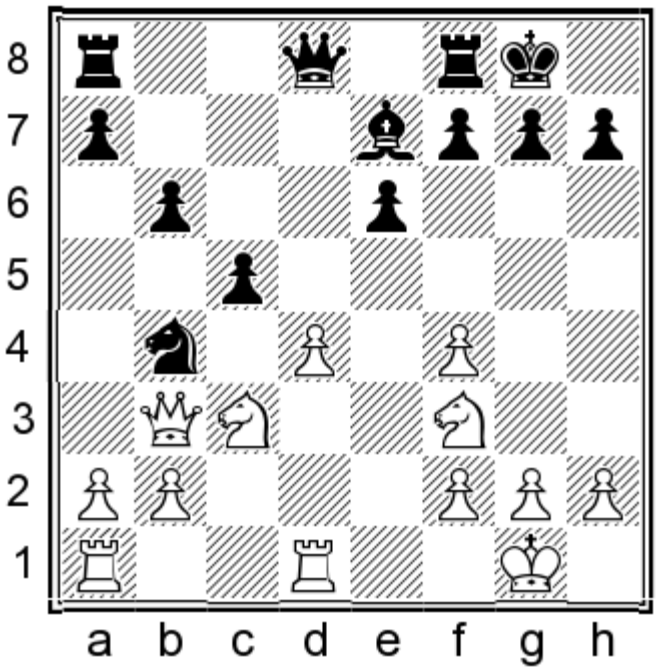


13...♕c7!

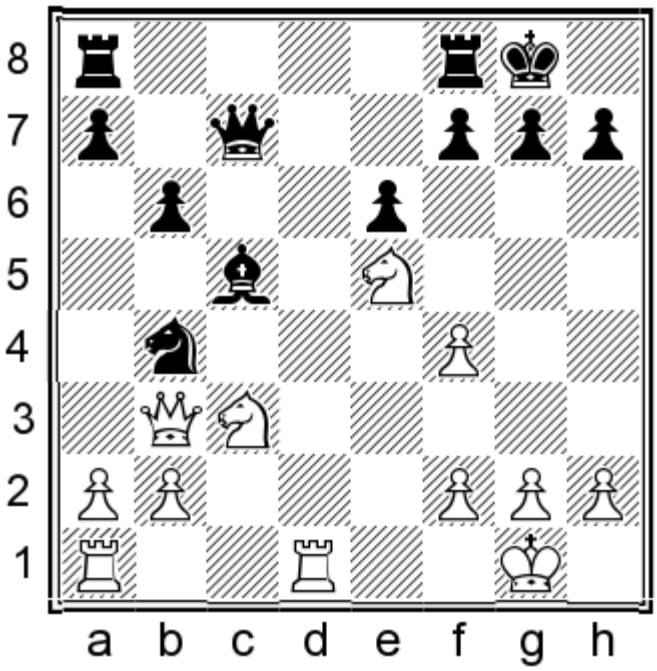
Black solves his opening problems with this excellent move, which attacks the f4-pawn while also creating a positional threat of ...c4. It is worth remembering this instructive forcing sequence, not only for dealing with this specific variation, but also because you may be able to use the same concept in slightly different situations as well.

14.dxc5!

14.g3?! c4! 15.♕a4 a6!∓ creates serious problems for White.

14...♗xc5 15.♘e5

In the resulting Rubinstein structure, White can still try to cause trouble with specific threats like ♘b5 followed by ♖ac1. Fortunately, the Cuban GM finds an excellent solution.



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15...♖ad8!

This is essentially the last accurate move Black needs to remember in order to deal with the set-up used by L'Ami in this game.

16.a3

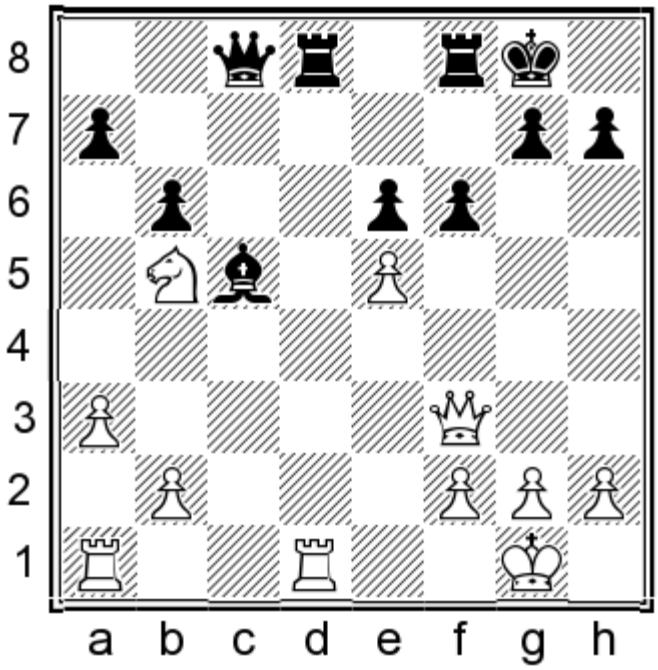
16.♘b5 is conveniently met by 16...♕b8 (but not 16...♕c8? 17.♘xa7). Both this line and the game continuation show why it was important to choose the a8-rook to go to d8, as the queen is now free to drop back to b8 or c8 without breaking Black's coordination.

16...♘c6 17.♘b5 ♕c8!

Now a7 is protected by the knight. Black has a comfortable position and it is now White who needs to play accurately in order to avoid becoming worse.

18.♕f3 ♘xe5 19.fxe5 f6!

Bruzon finds an excellent way to activate the dormant rook on f8.



20.♘d6?!

20.♘xa7 ♕c7 21.♘b5 ♕xe5 22.♘c3 is called equal by the engines, but 22...f5!? 23.♖e1 ♕f6 24.b4 ♗d4 25.♖ac1 e5 gives Black chances to play for the full point, thanks to his superior minor piece and mobile kingside majority.

20...♕c7 21.♕b3 fxe5! 22.♕xe6† ♔h8 23.♘e4 ♖xd1† 24.♖xd1 ♗d4∓

Black is somewhat better and he went on to build up a winning advantage. The rest is not particularly relevant to our opening study, so I will limit myself to a few brief comments at the critical moments of the ensuing endgame.

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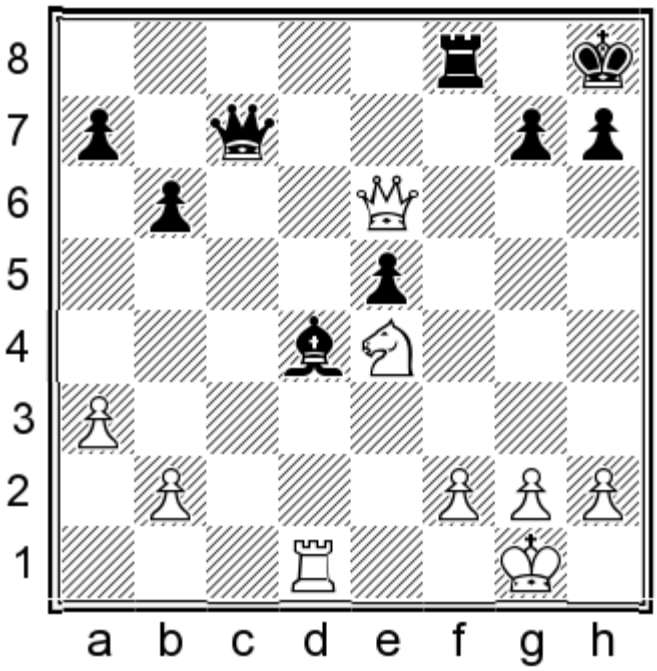
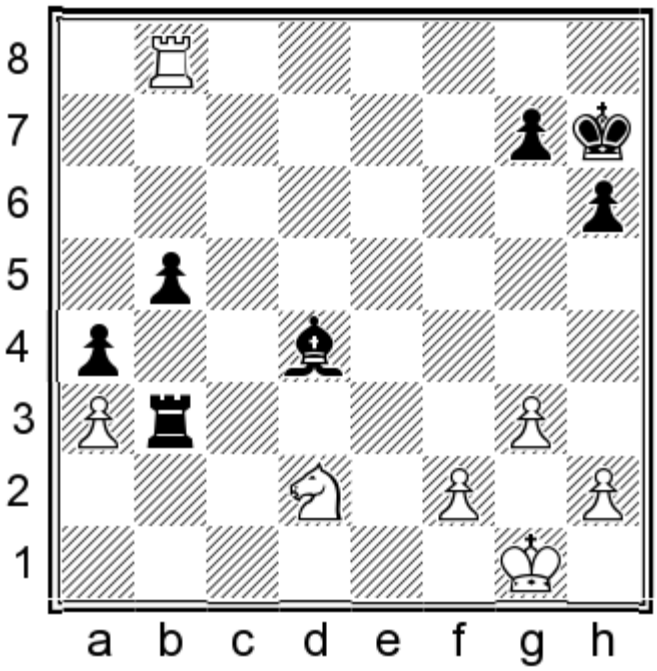


25.♕b3 ♕c6 26.♖e1 a5 27.g3 a4 28.♕b4 ♖f3 29.♖e2 h6 30.♘d2 ♖d3 31.♕c4 ♕xc4 32.♘xc4 ♖b3 33.♘xe5 ♗xb2 34.♘c4 ♗d4 35.♖e8† ♔h7 36.♖b8 b5 37.♘d2



37...♖b2!

After 37...♖xa3!? 38.♖xb5 ♖a2 39.♘c4 a3 40.♘xa3 ♖xa3 it is hard to give a definite verdict of this endgame, but White is certainly in for a tough defence. The game continuation should be winning outright if followed up correctly.

38.♘e4 b4 39.♖xb4

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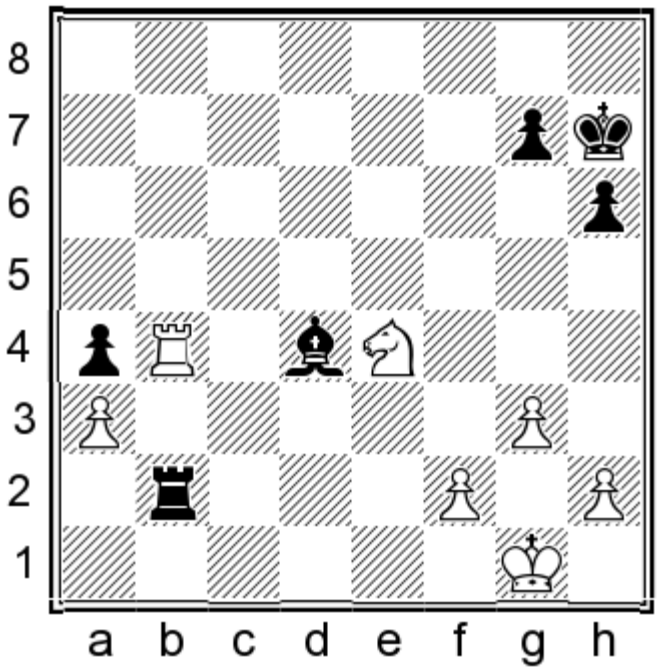

39...♖xb4?!

Black may still be winning after this, but his task becomes more complicated.

39...♗xf2†! was a nice finesse: 40.♔g2 (40.♘xf2? ♖xb4 41.axb4 a3 wins immediately as the pawn cannot be stopped) 40...♖xb4 41.axb4 ♗d4 The a-pawn will cost White his knight. We will be left with essentially the same ending as in the game, but with White missing his f-pawn, which is enough to change the outcome from a draw to a win for Black.

40.axb4 a3 41.♘d2 a2 42.♘b3 a1=♕†?

42...♔g6! looks to be winning: the point is that Black can trade the knight for the a-pawn at any time of his choosing, so he would be better off keeping the mighty pawn and threatening to invade with his king on either flank. This is not an endgame book, but I would encourage the reader to set the position up and play around with an engine to see how Black can force his king in.

43.♘xa1 ♗xa1

White has two pawns for a bishop and, crucially, Black has the wrong combination of bishop and rook's pawn. Bruzon keeps trying but the draw is fairly easy for a player of L'Ami's calibre.

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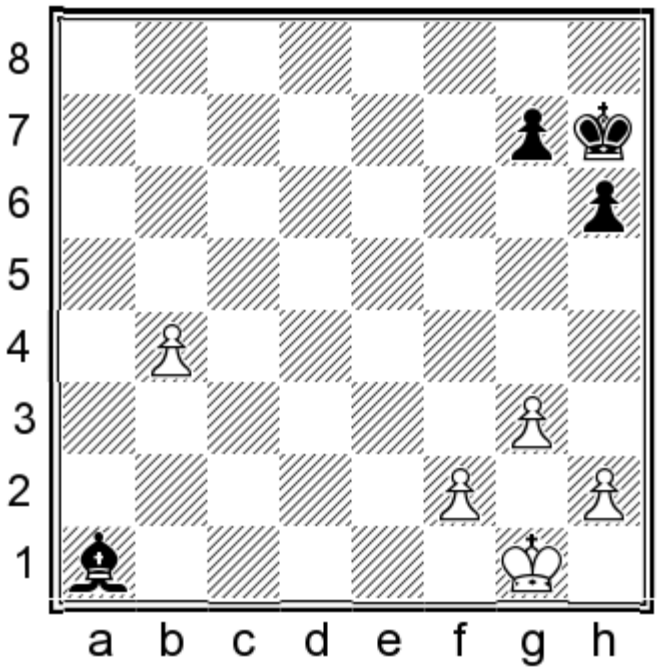


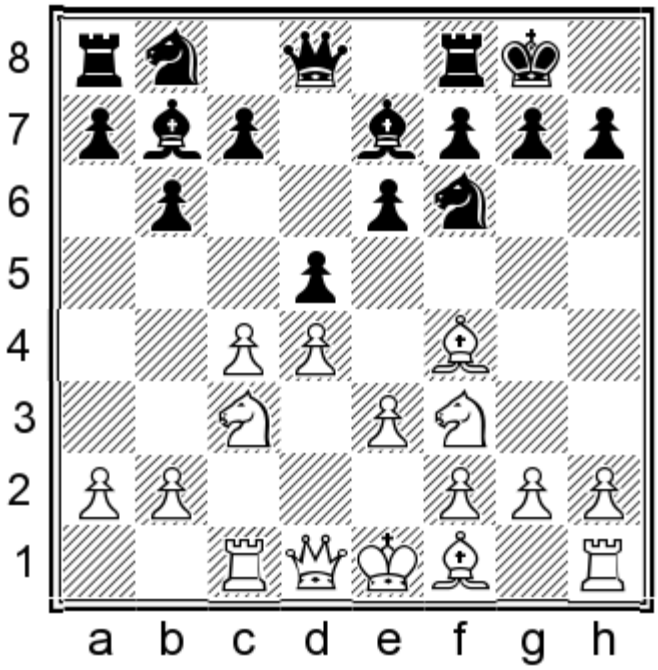
44.f4 ♔g6 45.♔g2 ♔f5 46.♔f3 ♗f6 47.g4† ♔e6 48.♔e4 ♗h4 49.b5 ♗d8 50.h3 g6 51.f5† gxf5† 52.gxf5† ♔f6 53.♔f3 ♔xf5 54.♔g2 ♔f4 55.b6 ♗xb6 56.h4 h5 57.♔h1 ♔g4 58.♔g2 ♔xh4 59.♔h1 ♔h3

½–½

This game and the previous analysis show that Black has no reason to fear 7.♕c2. Let's now turn our attention to a different waiting move by White.

B3) 7.♖c1 ♗b7

7...♗a6 is not so good this time, as 8.♕a4! is a good answer.



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8.cxd5

This is the usual continuation, and a logical follow-up to White's previous move.

8.♗e2 (or 8.♗d3) can be met by 8...dxc4 9.♗xc4 a6 when I see no real problems for Black. For instance: 10.0-0 (10.a4 c5=) 10...b5 11.♗d3 ♘bd7 12.a4 b4 13.♘b1 c5= Mu Ke – Schroeder, Barcelona 2016.

8...♘xd5 9.♗g3

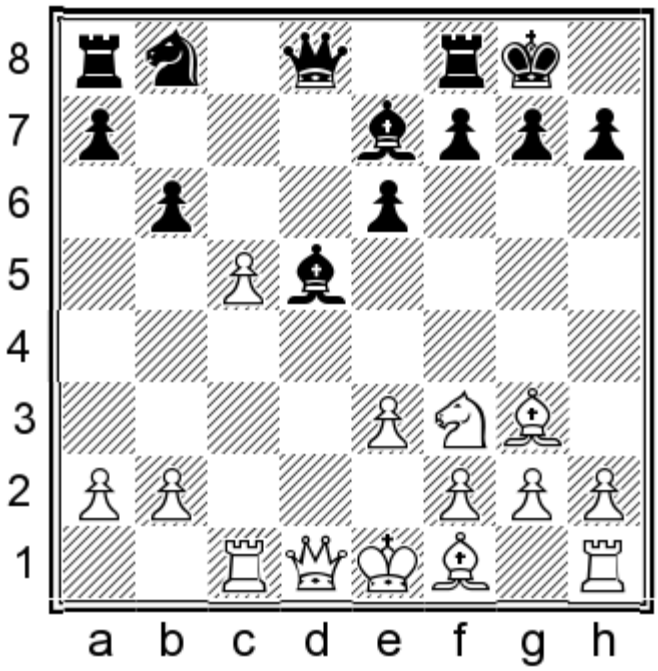
The more popular 9.♘xd5 is covered in Game 27 below.

9...c5 10.♘xd5

10.♗d3 cxd4 11.exd4 ♘c6 gives Black a comfortable position playing against the IQP, as White's bishop is not ideally placed on g3 in this structure.

10...♗xd5 11.dxc5

This happened in one game, where White was presumably hoping for 11...♗xc5?! 12.a3!, with a small edge. Black has more than one improvement though; my suggestion is:



11...♘c6!?N

11...bxc5 12.♗c4 was played in Petrosian – Kapelan, Vrsac 1981, when 12...♘c6N would be my suggestion, transposing to our main line below. The text move is equally valid, and has the practical advantage of forcing White to make a choice, while keeping the options of recapturing on c5 with either the bishop or the pawn.

12.♗c4!?

12.cxb6? ♗b4† is horrible for White, while 12.♗e2 bxc5⇄ gives Black typical counterplay in the 2QPI structure.

12.♕a4!? is slightly trickier, but 12...♗xc5= is a good reply which gains time by threatening a nasty check on b4 (but not 12...bxc5?? because 13.e4! wins material).

12...bxc5!?

The ambitious choice.

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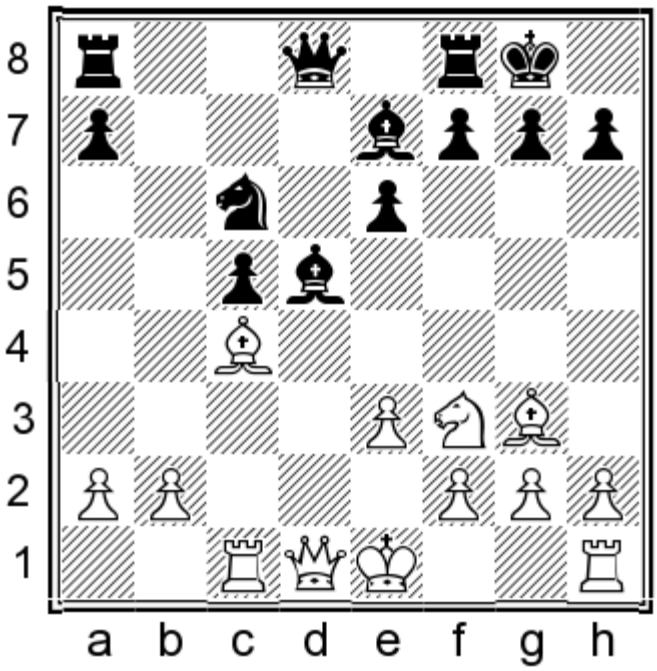
12...♗xc4 13.♕xd8 ♖axd8 14.♖xc4 ♗xc5= leads to safe equality.



13.♗xd5 exd5

13...♕a5†!? 14.♔e2 ♖fd8 is also possible; White should reply with 15.♕e1, leading to a hanging pawns structure without queens, with roughly equal chances.

14.0-0 ♕d7=

With mutual chances.

GAME 27

Alexander Rustemov – Pavel Tregubov

New Delhi/Teheran (1.6 – rapid) 2000

Both of these players belong to a small group of GMs who are not among the absolute top players in the world, but they know their favourite opening systems extremely well, so it is worth studying their games if your opening repertoire matches their choices. In 2000 they met in an extremely important event: the FIDE knockout World Championship. Tregubov had just won a game in the rapid tie breaks and just needed a draw to advance to the next stage.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♗f4

This position (which they reached via a slightly different move order) had been the tabiya of their mini-match.

5...0-0 6.e3 b6

This was the first time Tregubov played this particular move in the match; it served him well, as we will see.

7.♖c1 ♗b7 8.cxd5 ♘xd5

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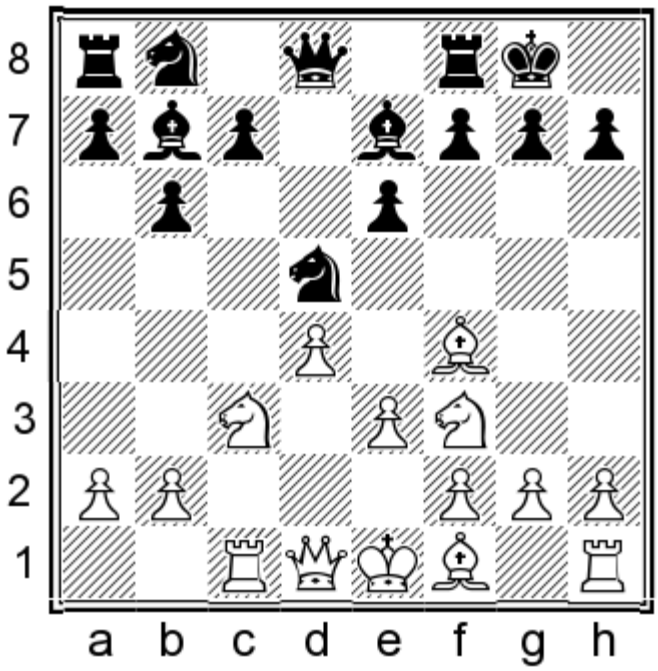
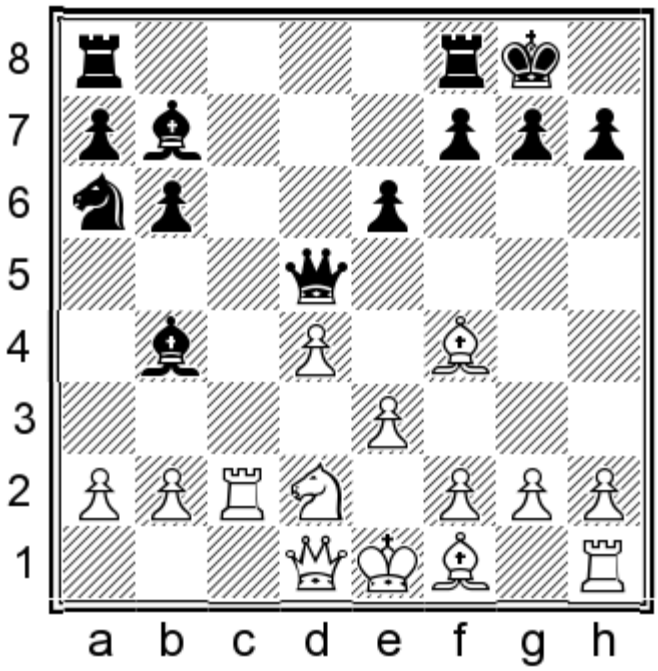


9.♘xd5 ♕xd5 10.a3

10.♖xc7? is much too risky: 10...♗b4† 11.♘d2 ♘a6 12.♖c2?! (12.♖xb7 ♕xb7 gives White some chances to survive, although Black went on to convert his material advantage in Gusev – A. Smirnov, Efremov 2017)



12...♖ac8 13.a3 ♖xc2 14.♕xc2 ♖c8 15.♕d1 ♗xd2† 16.♕xd2 ♕a2! Black invaded and soon won in H. Nguyen – Wang Shiwu, Chengdu 2017

10.♗c4 ♕a5† 11.♘d2 occurred in Doroshkievich – Manasterski, Polanica Zdroj 1971.

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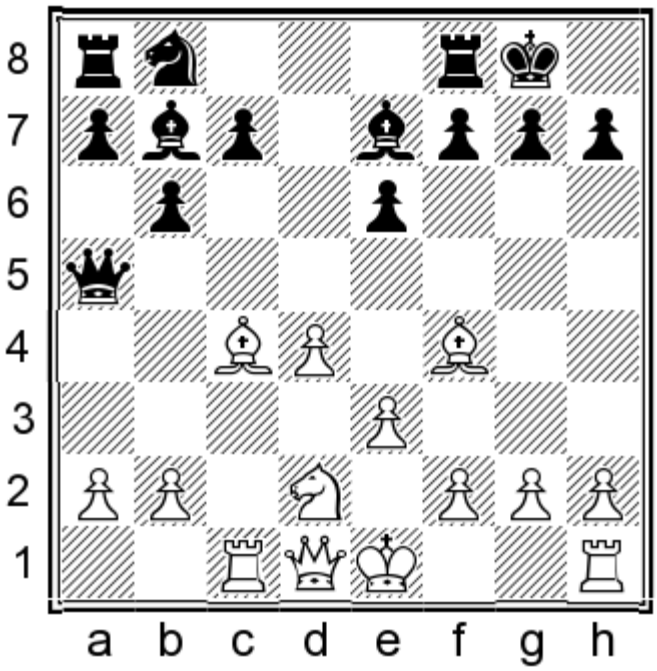

Here Black is not yet better, but he does have the luxury of determining the character of the ensuing battle: 11...♗xg2!? 12.♖g1 ♗e4 is a pawn grab leading to double-edged play, whereas 11...♗d6 12.♗xd6 cxd6 13.0-0 ♘d7= leads to a more solid type of equality.

Rustemov chooses the most solid and popular choice. White prevents any annoying bishop check from b4 and is ready to snatch the c7-pawn. On the other hand, we should always remember that the a2-a3 move improves Black's chances in the 2QPI structure...

10...c5!

Considering what we have already learned about the 2QPI structure, we can consider this the simplest and most natural reaction.

10...♗d6!? is a playable alternative; I analysed it and found that Black can equalize, but I prefer Tregubov's handling of the position.

10...♕a5†

This move has scored well for Black but I find it less convincing after the following precise continuation by White:

11.♘d2!

11.♕d2 ♕xd2† 12.♘xd2 c5 13.dxc5 ♖c8!= was equal in Khenkin – Buhmann, Eppingen 2013.

11...c5

11...♗d6 12.♗g3!± also gives White good prospects.

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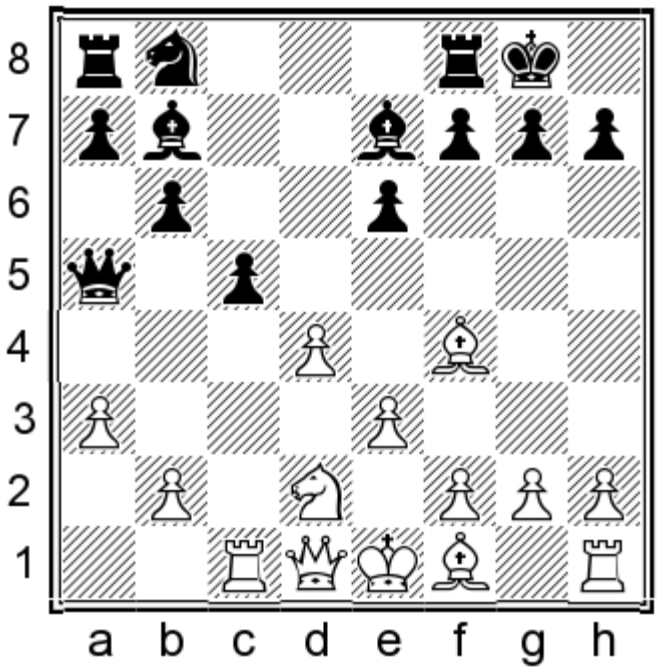


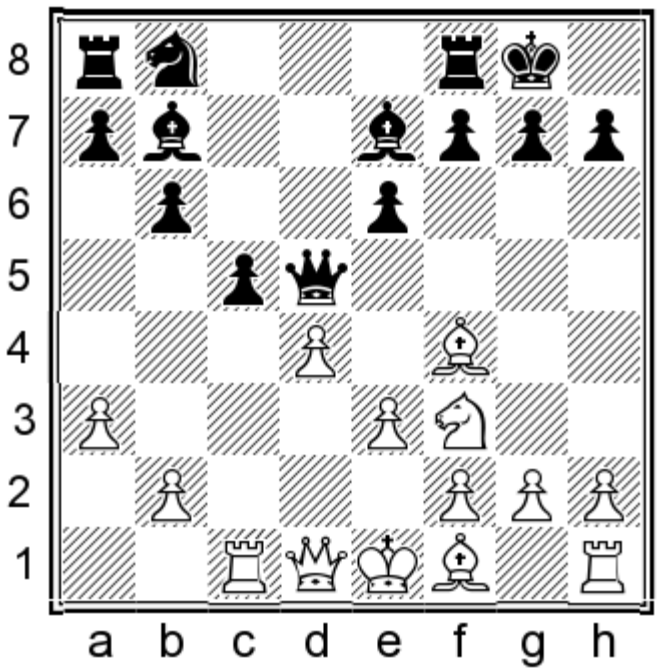
12.♖c3!N

12.dxc5 bxc5! was fine for Black in Goudriaan – Riemersma, Amsterdam 2015.

The text move is an excellent improvement which makes ♘c4 possible and gives White the edge. Black's best reply seems to be:

12...♗a6 13.♘c4 ♗xc4 14.♗xc4 b5 15.♗e2 ♘d7±

Intending ...c4, with equality according to the engines. This may be true in the absolute sense, but in a practical game White should fancy his chances with the bishop pair.



11.♗c4 ♕d8 12.0-0

Another game continued:

12.dxc5 bxc5!

By now, you should not be at all surprised to see Black recapturing in this way. Yet again, the 2QPI structure

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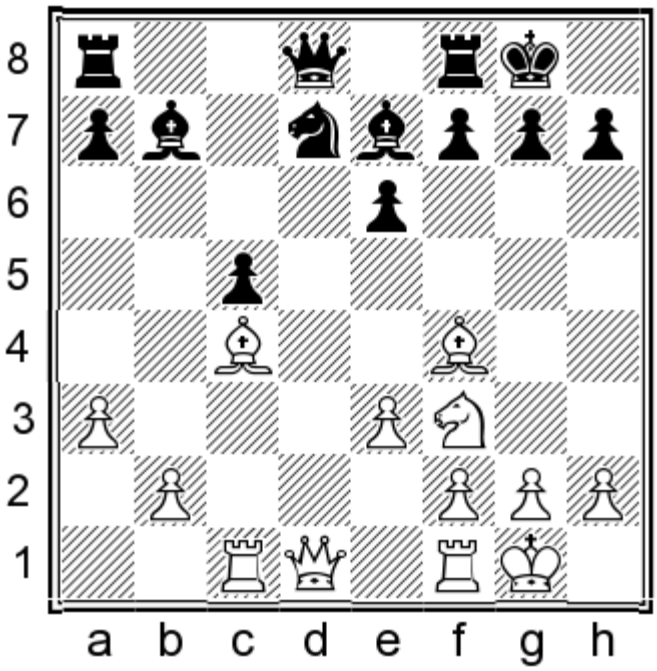
offers plenty of counterplay.

13.0-0 ♘d7

13...♘c6!?N is also possible, with the queen typically coming to b6 and the knight to a5.

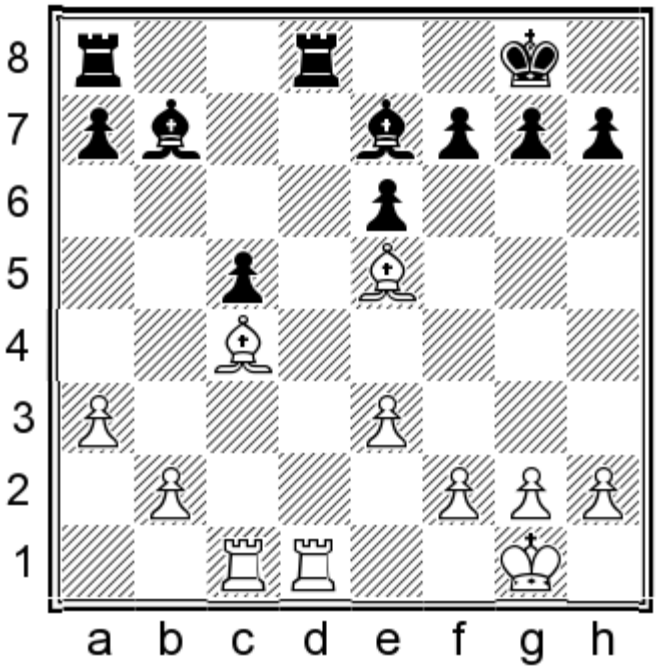


14.♘e5

14.♕e2 ♕b6 15.♖fd1 ♘f6 16.h3 ♗d5!? is an instructive variation, with ...♕b7 coming next.

14...♘xe5 15.♗xe5 ♕xd1 16.♖fxd1 ♖fd8

Without knights on the board, it is hard for White to claim an edge based on his structural superiority. Something similar happens in the main game as well.



17.f3 ♗d5 18.♗e2 ♗b3 19.♖xd8† ♖xd8 20.♔f2 f6 21.♗c3 ♔f7=

Bindrich – Fedorovsky, Deizisau 2011.

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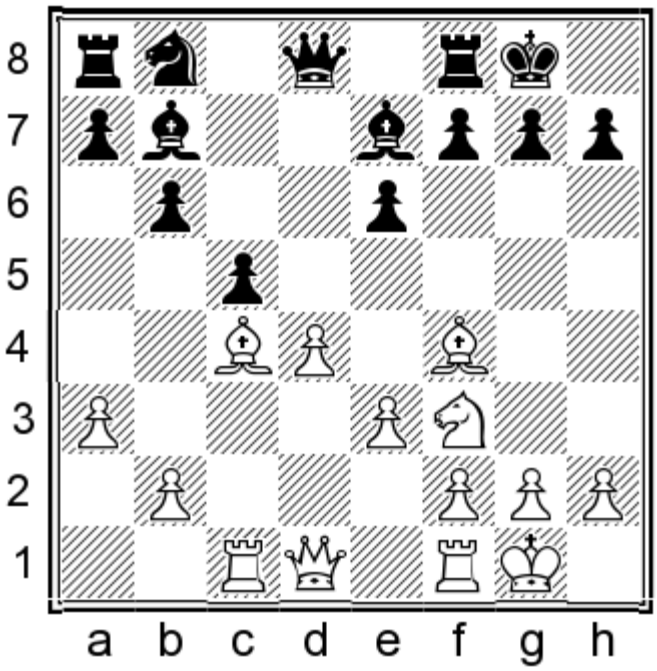


12...♘c6 13.dxc5

What else? If 13.♕e2?! cxd4 14.♖fd1 ♗f6 Black is starting to get the upper hand.

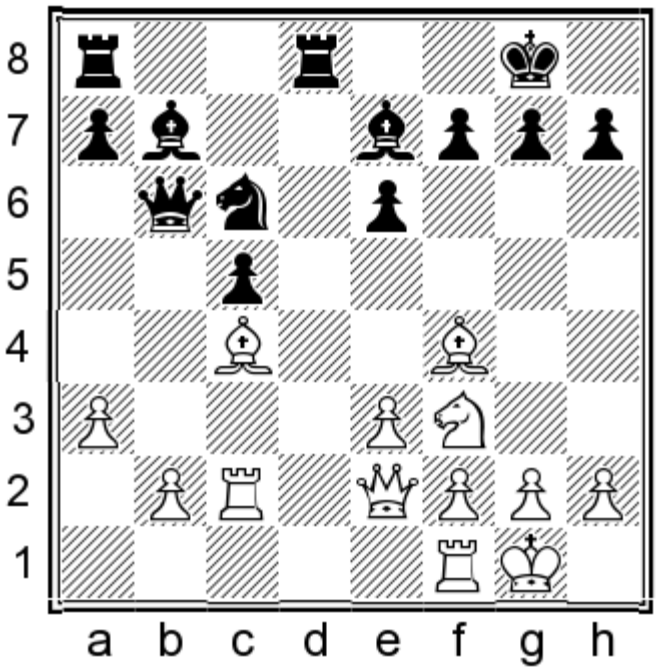
13...bxc5! 14.♕e2 ♕b6

Once again, I cannot stress it enough: Black always has counterplay in this structure, and objectively the chances are level.

15.♖c2

15.♖fd1 ♖fd8 is also equal.

15...♖fd8



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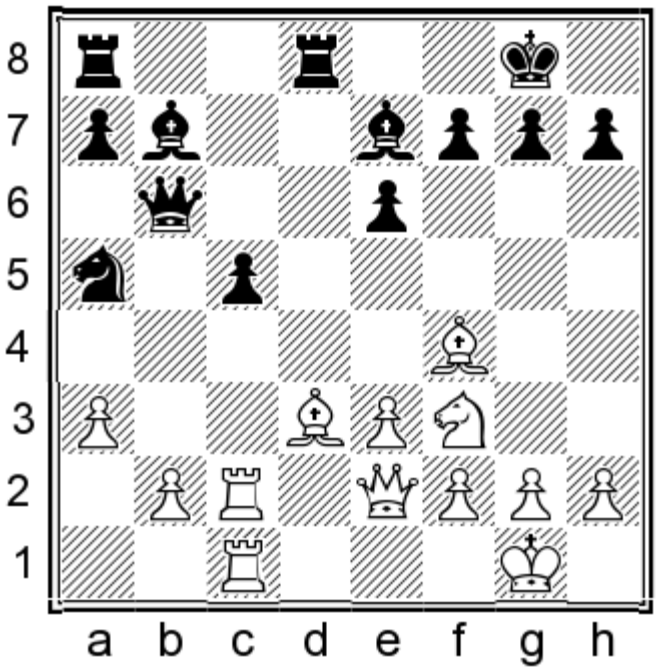
16.♘e5

White found no other way forward than to exchange the knights, but in doing so he abandons most of his winning chances.

16.♖fc1 is well met by: 16...♘a5! 17.♗d3 (17.♗a2?! ♗a6 would be annoying for White)



17...c4! An excellent pawn sacrifice. (There is a second good option: 17...♖ac8 threatens ...c4; and if 18.♘e5! g6!⇄ Black prevents the threat of ♗xh7† and his position remains absolutely fine.) 18.♗xc4 ♗e4! 19.♖d2 ♖xd2 20.♕xd2 ♗f6∞

16...♘xe5

16...♘a5?! would have been okay for Black had it not been for 17.♗d3 g6 18.b4!.

17.♗xe5 ♗e4 18.♕g4

18.♖cc1 can be met by 18...♖d7 or 18...♗d5!?, with level chances in either case.

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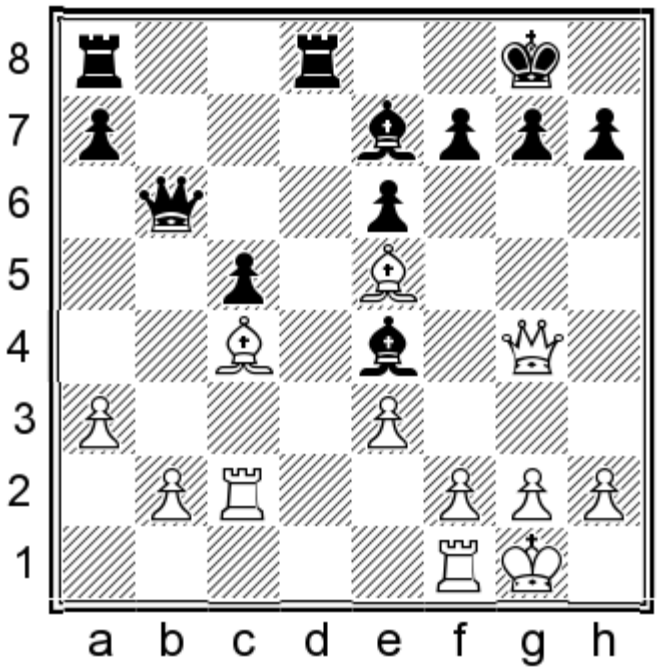

18...♗g6 19.e4

19.♖e2!? is an odd-looking attempt to avoid e3-e4. Black can try to provoke it anyway with 19...♕c6, planning ...♕e4, and if 20.e4 ♗f6! the situation is similar to the game.

19...♕b7 20.♖e2 ♗f6!

Black exchanges the bishops in order to take advantage of the d4-square. Tregubov correctly judges that the doubled pawns are not a serious problem, and from now on Black has the better long-term chances. Rustemov was trailing in the match, so he had no other choice than to attack, but with no success.

21.♗xf6 gxf6 22.b3 ♖d4 23.f3 ♖ad8 24.h4 h5 25.♕f4 ♔g7 26.g4 ♕b8!

After this White cannot keep the queens on the board.

27.♕xb8 ♖xb8

The endgame is close to equal, but Black is the only one with realistic winning chances. The rest of the game is not particular relevant to our opening study, so I will keep the comments brief.

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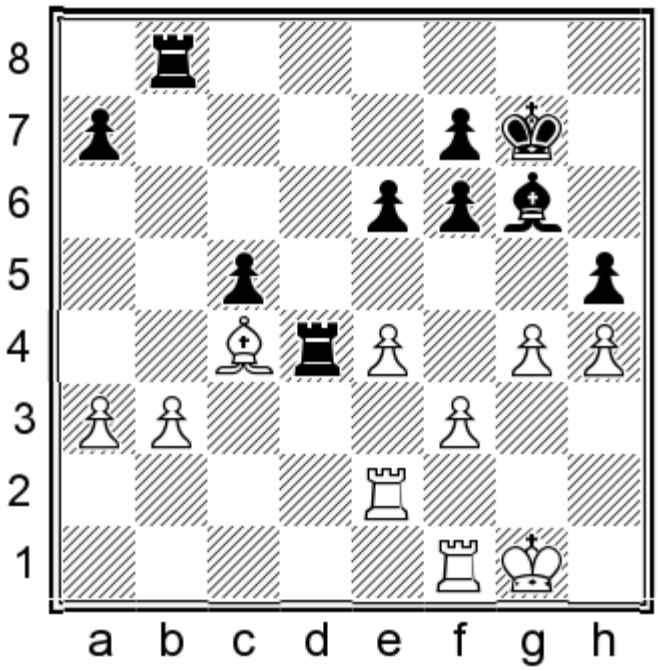
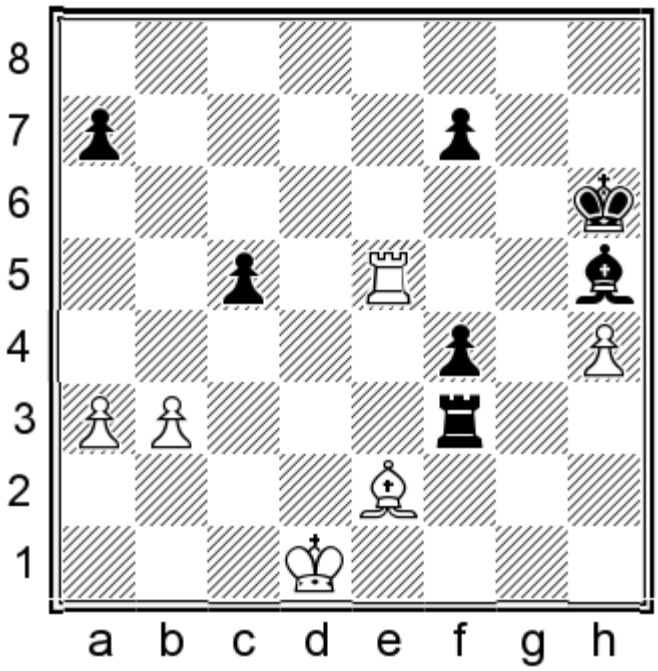


28.gxh5 ♗xh5 29.♔f2 ♖bd8 30.♖g1† ♔h6 31.♔e3 f5 32.exf5 exf5 33.♖h1 ♖g8 34.♔f2 f4 35.♖e5 ♖g3 36.♗e2 ♖d2 37.♖d1 ♖xf3† 38.♔e1 ♖xd1† 39.♔xd1



39...♖f1†

39...♖d3†! was a stiffer test, when 40.♔c2? ♗xe2 41.♖xe2 ♖e3 wins for Black. 40.♔e1! is better, but then 40...♗xe2 41.♔xe2 ♖xb3 42.♖xc5 reaches the position after move 42 in the game, except that here it is Black to move instead of White. Play continues 42...f3† 43.♔f2 ♖xa3 and Black can press for a bit longer, although White can still hold.

40.♔d2 ♗xe2 41.♔xe2 ♖b1 42.♖xc5 ♖xb3

Now it’s a fairly simple draw. Given the match situation, this was still as good as a win for Black.

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43.♖a5 f5 44.♖xa7 ♔h5 45.♖h7† ♔g4 46.♖g7† ♔xh4 47.a4 ♖a3 48.♖h7† ♔g4 49.♖g7† ♔h4 50.♖a7 ♔g3 51.♖g7† ♔h4

½–½

Conclusion

The 5.♗f4 set-up is a serious weapon which QGD players must be ready for. After 5...0-0 we started by checking the sidelines 6.♕c2!?, 6.♖c1!? and 6.a3!?, each of which has its supporters. Still, the main line has always been 6.e3, and it is hard to imagine that this will ever change. Of the main options available to Black, I find 6...b6 to be fully reliable without demanding an excessive amount of theoretical knowledge. An important point occurs after 7.cxd5 ♘xd5! 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5!, when Black offers to sacrifice the c7-pawn and gets a good game whether or not White takes it. We finished by analysing White's less forcing options on move 7. Every line has its own specific nuances but I would like to reiterate two recurring concepts from the 6.e3 b6 variation. Firstly, think carefully about the best way to develop the light-squared bishop: often it should go to a6 to put pressure on the c4-pawn and/or to exchange itself for a bishop on d3. Secondly and perhaps most importantly, keep in mind the value of the 2QPI structure.

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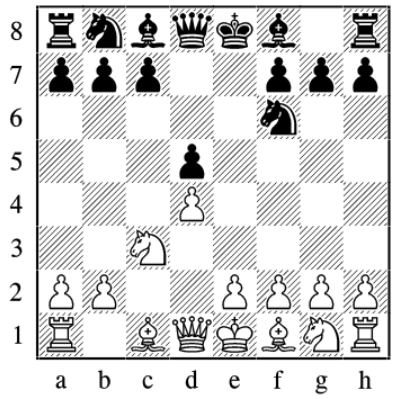
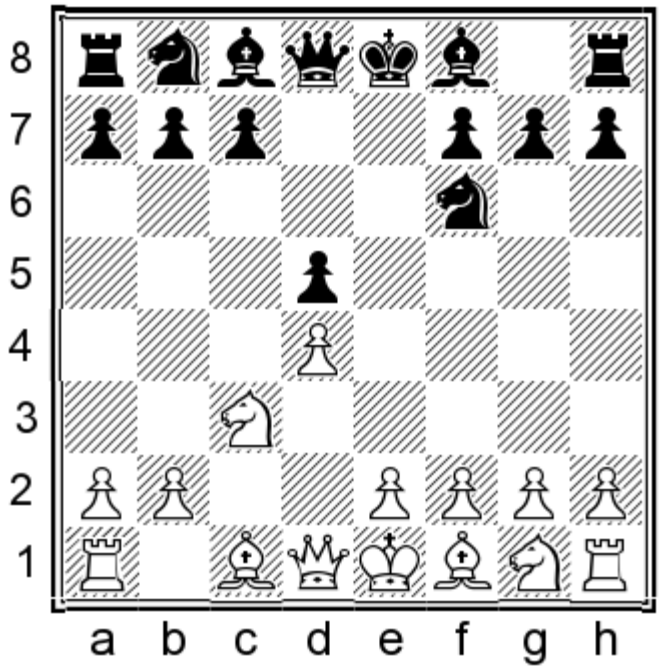
Chapter 3a



Exchange QGD Introduction

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5



This is the dreaded Exchange Variation, which has no doubt deterred a lot of would-be QGD players from taking up this opening. It is not just that White's plans are theoretically challenging, but they are also easy for the first player to remember and implement. No doubt, that's why this system has been advocated in so many White repertoire books! Things have changed in recent years though, and the Exchange Variation is being seen less and less at the elite level. I don't believe this is merely a matter of fashion, but rather because players such as Carlsen, Aronian and Adams have been getting good positions with chances to play for a win with Black. The key plan is to trade bishops with a timely ...♘h5!. This idea is nothing new in itself, but recent years have seen the reassessment of certain lines which were previously considered promising for White.

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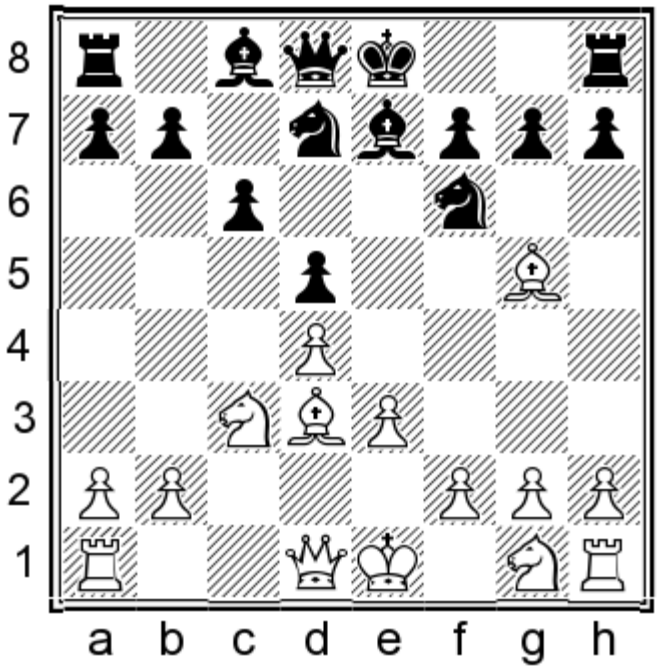
5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7

Other moves orders are possible of course, and we will deal with them in the theoretical section, but for now we will concentrate on the most common sequence which you are likely to encounter in most games. An important point is that Black should avoid castling too quickly, as in some lines he will prefer to castle on the queenside. The general rule is that Black should wait for White to castle, and then castle on the same side.



As I mentioned above, our main idea is to play ...♘h5 in the near future in order to exchange the dark-squared bishops. At the moment the h5-square is controlled by the white queen but this usually changes, as White generally either puts his queen on c2 or develops the g1-knight to f3 or e2. Waiting moves such as 8.h3!? will be considered in the theoretical section; for now, however, we will get acquainted with White's main plans from the present position.

It is not easy to categorize all the different lines, as many transpositions are possible. White may start with 8.♕c2, which seems to hint at long castling; but he can also follow up by developing the g1-knight to e2 or f3, before deciding where to place his king. Conversely, 8.♘ge2 and 8.♘f3 might seem to prepare short castling, but White can just as easily follow up by moving his queen and castling on the queenside. We will delve into the specific details of each option in the theoretical section. I decided the easiest way to organize the material is to start by considering those set-ups where White castles on the queenside, before exploring lines with kingside castling in a separate chapter. In this introductory section, I will show you some of the main ideas and plans associated with both of these options.

Following Kasparov's Example

When I checked the various White repertoire books, I found that virtually all of them recommended queenside castling against our ...♘h5 plan, probably because Kasparov was successful with it. Thus, it seems logical to consider this plan first, even though I ultimately regard kingside castling as more theoretically challenging when White follows up in the right way.

GAME 28

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Garry Kasparov – Ulf Andersson

Reykjavik 1988

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2

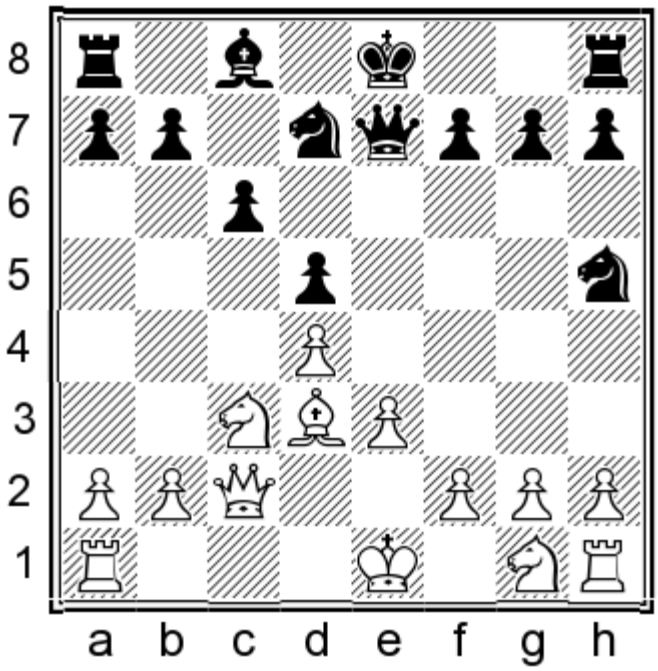
I have doctored the move order in my usual way, but from here on we will follow the game.

8...♘h5

8...h6! 9.♗h4 ♘h5 will be our repertoire choice. As we move along, I will explain the advantages of inserting the ...h6 move.

9.♗xe7 ♕xe7

One of the reasons why opening systems go in and out of fashion is the re-evaluation of old, established dogmas, especially with the aid of modern analytical tools. Take the present case, where White's plan is to attack on the queenside after both sides castle there. Kasparov won a good game against Andersson, and his plan has been recommended by many authors including Sadler, Ward, Watson, Kaufman and Schandorff.



10.♘ge2

White can also castle immediately and then develop the knight to f3, which is indeed how Schandorff and Kaufman propose that White should play. The general characteristics of the position remain the same, although there are some differences in the details, which I will discuss in the theory section (where we already have our pawn on h6!).

10...g6

Black is preparing the thematic plan of ...♘g7 and ...♗f5.

11.0-0-0 ♘b6 12.♘g3

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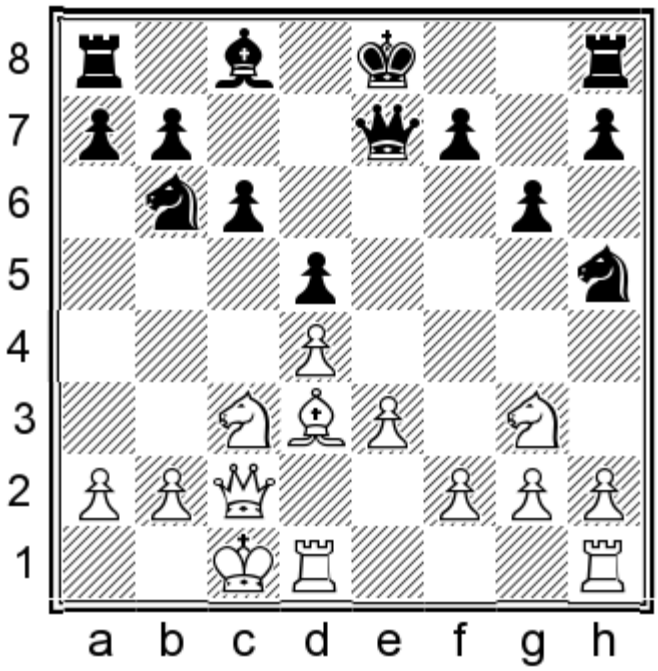

A key move, making it hard for Black to carry out his intended bishop trade. Retreating the knight to f6 would encourage White to prepare f2-f3 followed by e3-e4-e5 with gain of tempo, so Black should either trade knights or retreat to g7.

12...♘g7

After 12...♘xg3 13.hxg3 Black must invest an additional tempo with 13...h5 (since 13...♗e6? allows 14.♖h6 followed by ♖dh1 with a positional bind). An important detail is that, with the pawn already on h6, Black could avoid this loss of time! But here White has exactly the one spare tempo he needs to start active operations: 14.e4! dxe4 15.♗xe4 ♗e6 16.♖he1 White stands better, as d4-d5 is a nasty threat. The engines may be able to hold with their customary accuracy, but this is not how humans should play chess.

13.♔b1 ♗d7

Anticipating what is coming on the queenside, Andersson posts his bishop in a defensive position while keeping the e6-square free for the knight.

14.♖c1 0-0-0

14...h5!? seems like an improvement. 15.h4 0-0-0 was the continuation of Hammer – Yilmaz, Gjakova 2016, with Black having a slightly improved version of the main game, due to the loose pawn on h4. Alternatively, 15.h3 h4 16.♘ge2 will allow Black to annoy White in the future with a timely ...♕d6-h2 manoeuvre – an important source of counterplay which crops up time and time again in these positions.

15.♘a4 ♘xa4

Black can actually ignore the knight, arguing that ♘xb6 isn't a big deal and if the knight goes to c5 it can be challenged with ...♘e6, but that's another story.

16.♕xa4 ♔b8 17.♖c3! b6

If Black somehow had a couple of spare tempos, he could meet the ♖a3 threat by playing ...♘e8-d6-c8. As things stand though, he has to weaken his queenside slightly.

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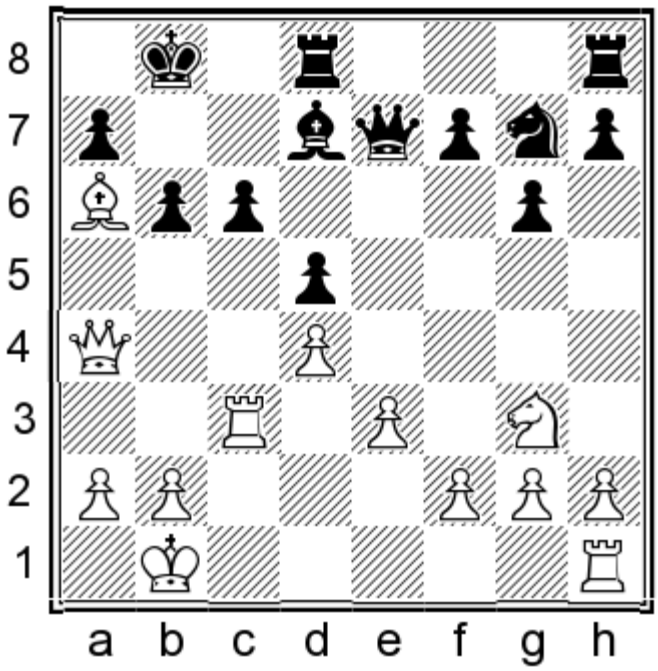
18.♗a6



Black is still okay but White's position is easier to handle. Perhaps more importantly, Kasparov provided other White players with a standardized way to meet the ...♘h5 plan: simply castle long and point all the pieces towards the black king.

Meeting Kasparov's plan

One of the most important shifts in our understanding of this variation came from realizing that Black should not be in a hurry to exchange the light-squared bishops, as White can prevent that anyway in a flexible way, as Kasparov showed. Even though subsequent analysis has shown that Black was doing okay for quite some time in the Kasparov – Andersson game, there is a much more practical way to meet White's plan.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 ♘h5

Let me remind you that 8...h6! will be recommended in the theoretical section.

9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.♘ge2 ♘b6!

This is the first step towards improving on Andersson's play; there is no need to hurry with ...g6.

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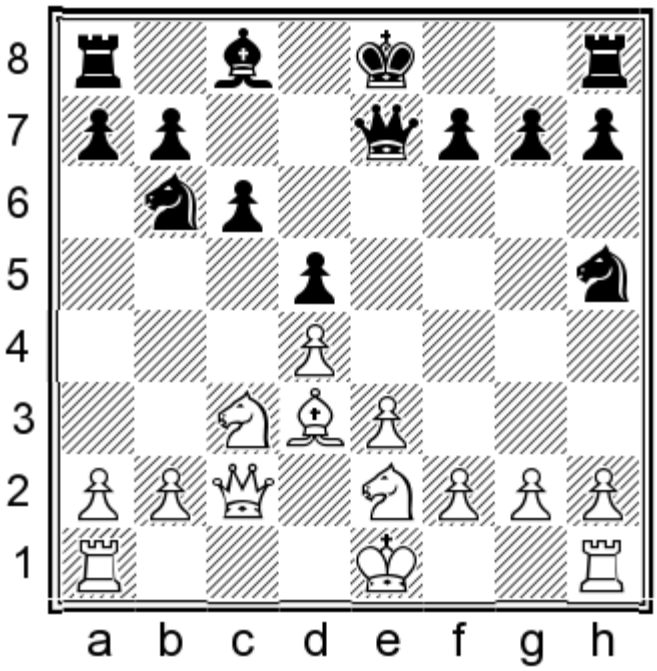


11.0-0-0 ♗d7!?

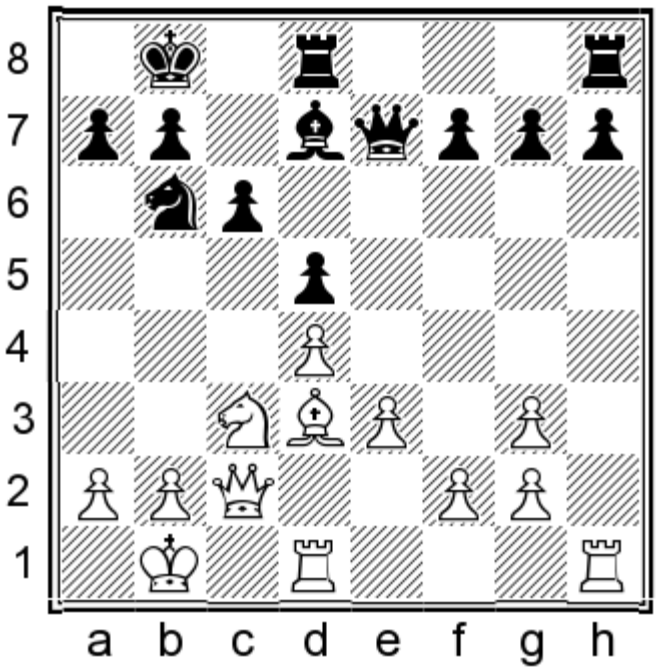
The bishop can also go to e6; I will discuss the pros and cons of each option in the theoretical section. For the purposes of this section, I have chosen d7 in order to make direct comparisons with Kasparov – Andersson.

12.♔b1 0-0-0 13.h3

White usually makes this move sooner or later. It is mainly played for prophylactic purposes, controlling g4 and putting the h-pawn on a more secure square. A secondary purpose is preparing g2-g4 in some lines.

13.♘a4 ♘xa4 14.♕xa4 ♔b8 15.♖c1 gives Black the strong retort of 15...♕g5! followed by ...♗f5.

13.♘g3 can be met by 13...♘xg3 14.hxg3 ♔b8 without fearing a quick e3-e4 push, while the h7-pawn is defended tactically:



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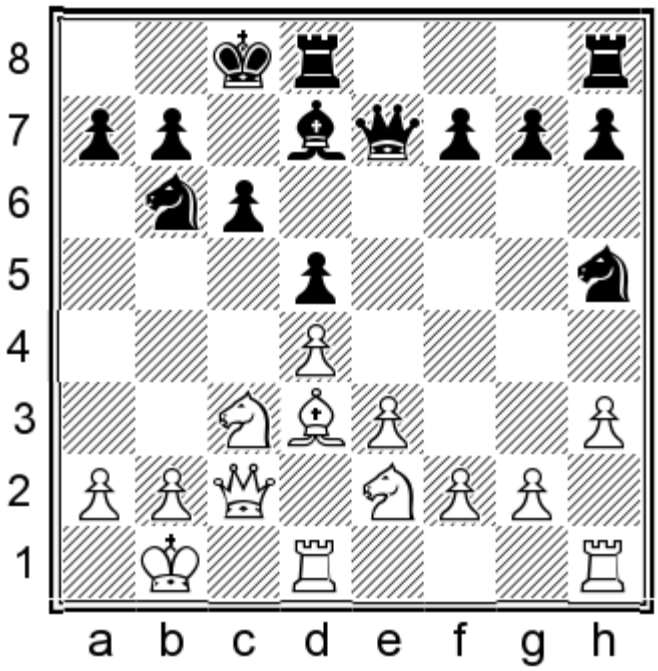
15.♖xh7? (15.♗xh7? g6–+) 15...♖xh7 16.♗xh7 g6–+ Even though the h7-pawn proves to be untouchable in this instance, Black will surely want to safeguard it with ...h6 at some point. This is one reason why I advocate playing ...h6 before ...♘h5.



13...♔b8 14.♘c1 g6

Only now, with the white knight far away from g3, does Black prepare the ...♗f5 plan.

15.♘b3 ♘g7 16.♘c5

16.g4 h5 (16...f5!? is also interesting) creates problems for White: 17.♗e2, for example, can be met by 17...♘e8, 17...♕h4 or even 17...f5!?.

16...♗f5

Mission accomplished! A few games have reached this position via different move orders. We will follow a few more moves of a game which arrived here via a transposition, after the bishop went to e6 rather than d7 earlier.

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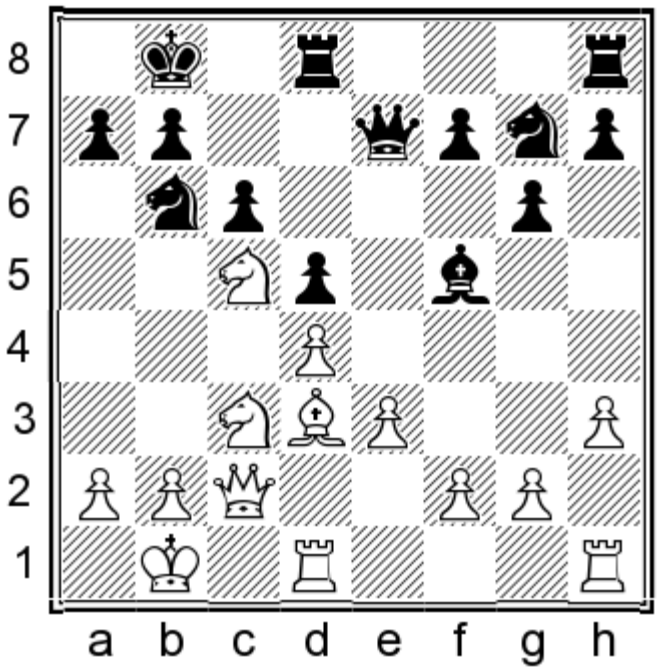

17.♔a1 ♗xd3 18.♘xd3 ♘f5 19.♖c1 ♘d6

Black has no problems at all in Vidit – Hracek, Golden Sands 2013. Having realized that meeting Kasparov's plan becomes easier if we avoid an early ...g6 and leave the knight on h5 a while longer, Black players came to understand that the inclusion of an early ...h6 doesn't harm Black's game but, on the contrary, gives him additional trumps.

Even without the ...h6 move, Black was doing fine in the line above, so White needs to find a more venomous way to put pressure on Black's position. I would like to draw your attention to one such plan.

The Dvoretsky-Tukmakov Plan

In one of his Chess24 lectures, Jan Gustafsson recalls a training session of the German national team, in which Mark Dvoretsky asked the players to find "the only way for White to play for an advantage" in the following position (or something similar, as Gustafsson couldn't be sure of the exact placement of the pieces). After much consideration and deliberation, none of the players found Dvoretsky's solution, which was:

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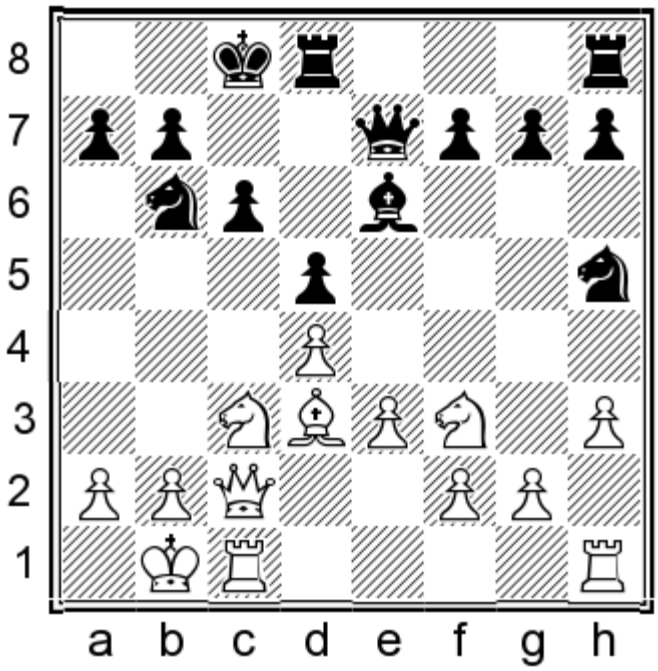


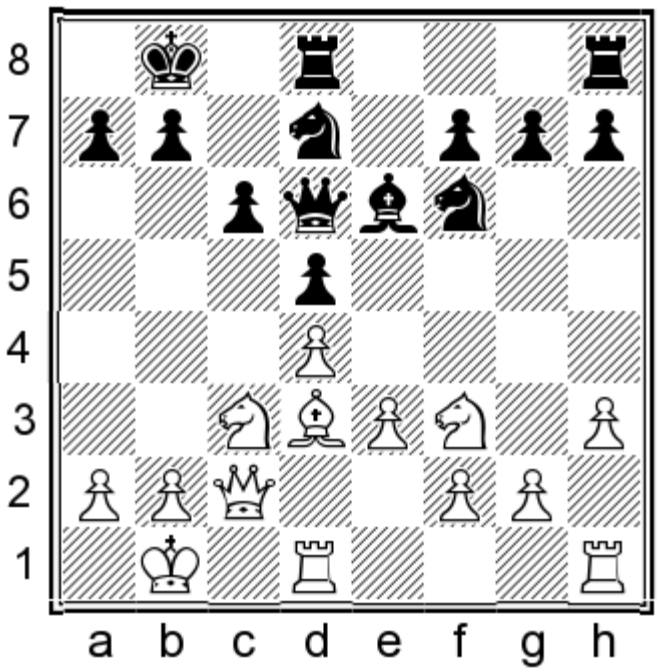
14.♔a1!

Intending to carry out a minority attack with ♖b1 (or even ♕b1) and b2-b4. I searched through Dvoretsky's books but was unable to find anything similar to this position, so I can only guess where he found that particular idea.

GAME 29

Vladimir Tukmakov – Alexander Ivanov

Ashkhabad 1978



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14.♔a1! ♖he8 15.♖b1 ♖c8 16.♖hc1 ♘b6 17.b4

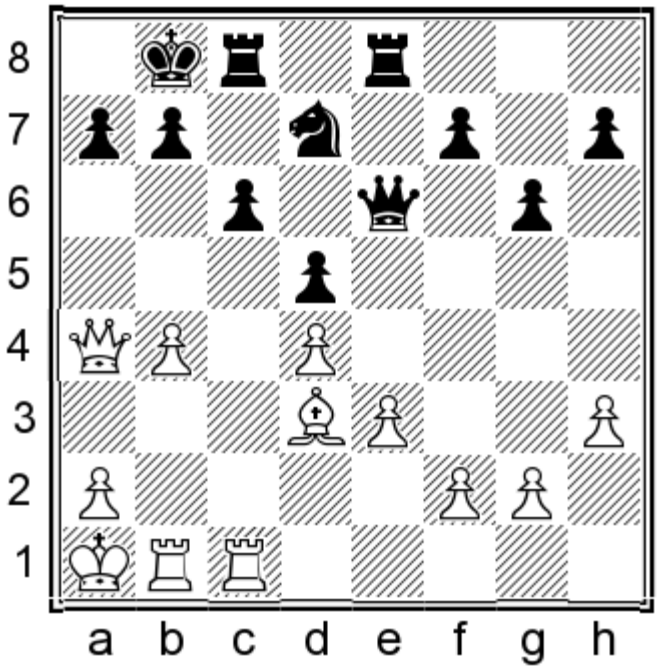
White rules out a ...c5 break and intends to prepare b4-b5, perhaps after manoeuvring a knight to c5.

17...g6 18.♘g5!?

18.♘a4 looks like a more natural continuation of White's plan, but Tukmakov presumably did not want to allow 18...♘c4!?.

18...♕e7 19.♘xe6 ♕xe6 20.♘a4 ♘xa4 21.♕xa4 ♘d7

21...♘e4! was much more to the point, as Black should be looking for counterplay in the centre and/or on the kingside.



22.♕a5 f5 23.♖b3

Thanks to his space advantage on the queenside, White manoeuvres freely and threatens ♖a3.

23.g3 can be met by 23...g5!? 24.♖b3 b6 25.♕a6 f4 and the engines claim that Black is within the bounds of equality. It is essential for Black to create some play to disturb White from his plans on the queenside.

23...b6 24.♕a6

This is the type of position that White is generally happy to reach in this variation, but things are still not so bad for Black.

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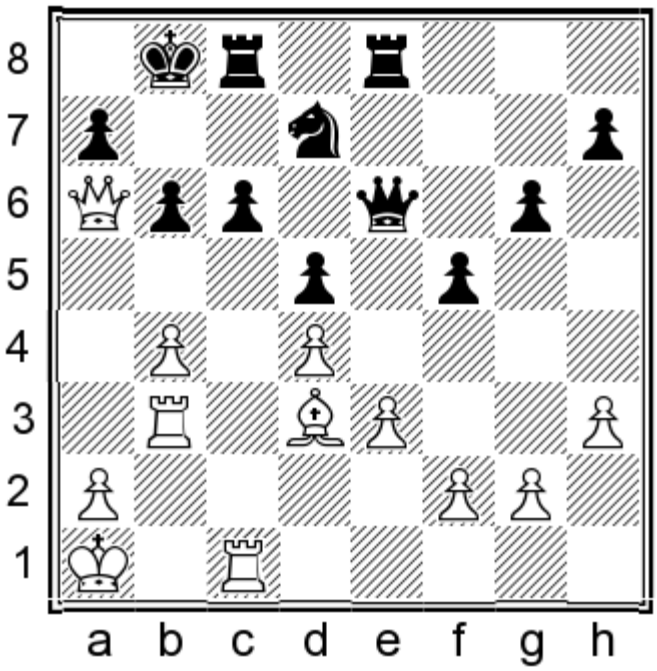


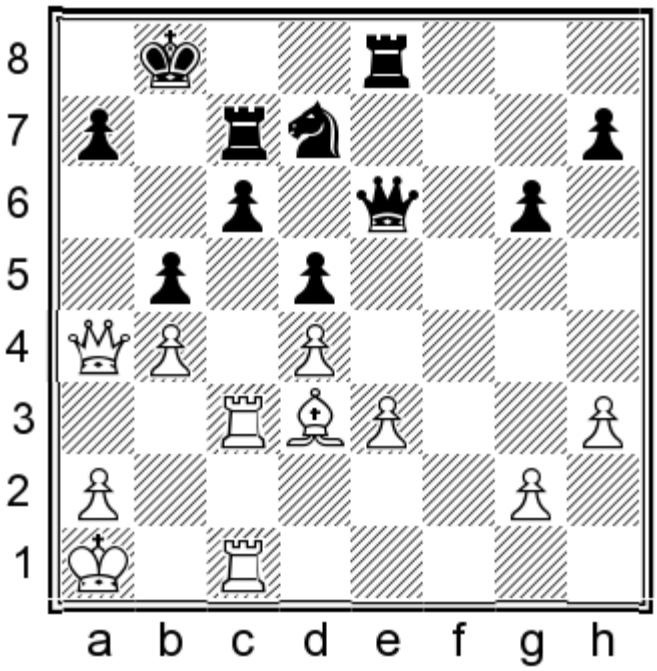
24...f4! 25.♖bc3 fxe3 26.fxe3 ♖c7?!

26...♕xe3 27.♗xg6 produces a double attack, leading to the win of the exchange for White.

Black should have played 26...♘f6! when, in contrast to the game continuation, 27.♕a4? is now met by 27...♕xe3! 28.♗xg6 ♕xd4 29.♗xe8 ♘e4!∓.

27.♕a4 b5?!

27...♖e7! removes the rook from the potential attack from a bishop at g6, which means Black is now threatening to take on e3. 28.♖xc6 ♖xc6 29.♕xc6 ♕xc6 30.♖xc6 ♖xe3 31.♗a6 ♖e8 White keeps the better chances, but Black has some counterplay with ...♘f8-e6 on the way.



28.♕a6

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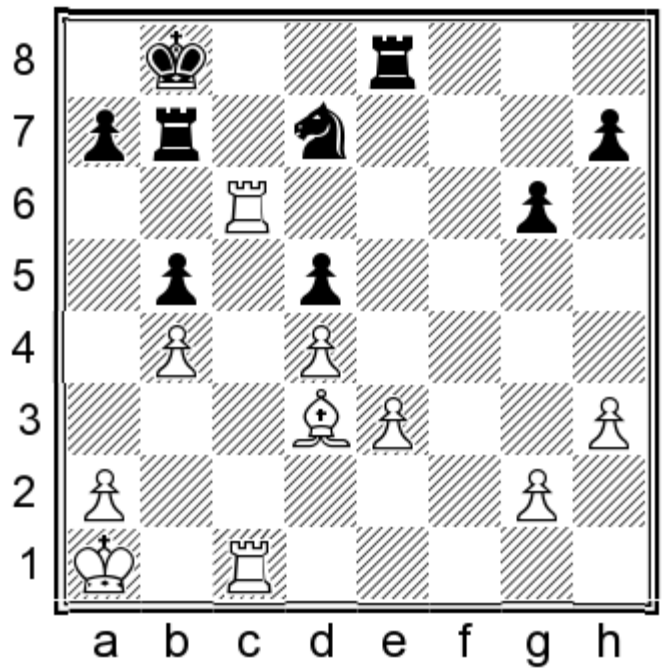
The machine points out that 28.♕c2!± was more precise, but who could resist bringing the queen closer to the enemy king?

28...♖b7?

28...♕xe3! 29.♗xg6 ♕xd4 30.♗xe8 ♘b6!= is an amazing defence which the silicon monster spits out in a fraction of a second. Black threatens ...♘a4, and 31.♔b1 can be met by 31...♕e4†, picking up the bishop on e8.

29.♕xc6 ♕xc6 30.♖xc6±



White converted his advantage without much difficulty. So let's think about how to deal with the Dvoretsky-Tukmakov plan.

Kingside Counterplay

The previous game saw White carry out the b2-b4 plan in reasonably favourable circumstances. Even so, Black had enough resources to hold the balance by focusing on his own play in the centre and on the kingside. Let's see another example where Black eventually lost, but only after missing several good opportunities to create play on the kingside.

GAME 30

Julio Granda Zuniga – Jesus Nogueiras Santiago

Buenos Aires 1991

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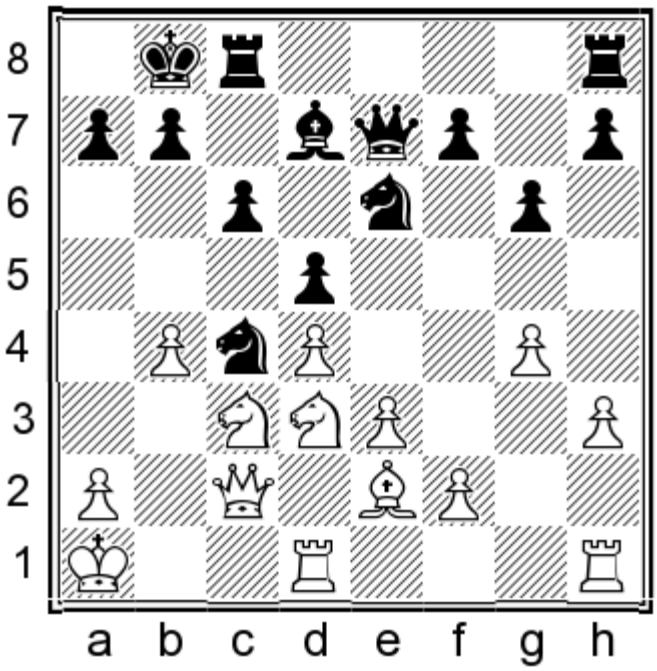
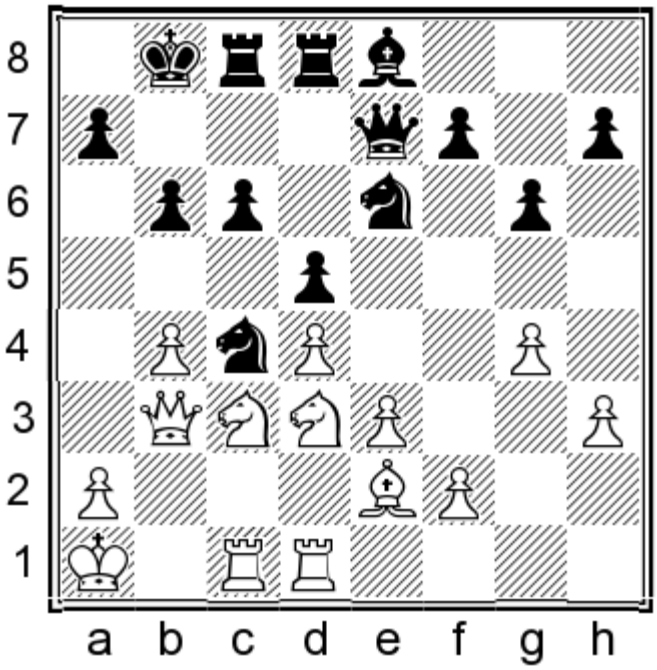


19...b6?!

Objectively this is not a big mistake, but it's one of those moves that White will always be happy to see. My advice in these positions is to avoid weakening the king's shelter unless there's a truly compelling reason to do so.

19...♕h4! was recommended by Cox, while 19...♖hf8!?, planning ...f5, or even the immediate 19...f5!?, all seem like the right kind of ideas.

20.♕b3 ♖hd8 21.♖c1 ♗e8 22.♖hd1



22...f6?!

22...f5! intending ...f4 was a better idea; and it would have been better still with the bishop back on d7.

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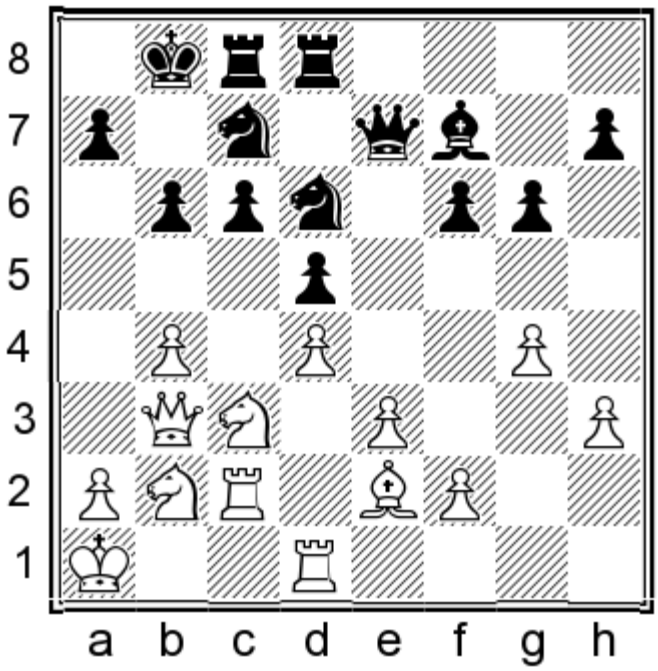
23.♗f3 ♘c7 24.♘b2 ♗f7 25.♗e2 ♘d6 26.♖c2



White eventually managed to outmanoeuvre his opponent and won, but even at this stage Black's game would not have been worse after something like 26...h5!?⇄. Overall I don't consider Tukmakov's plan to be a great threat to Black's set-up, as long as he takes action on the kingside when the time is right. Let's consider one final attacking scheme available to White.

The Tomashevsky Plan

A new version of the queenside attack was shown in a recent game by Evgeny Tomashevsky – not only an extremely strong player, but also a diligent worker whose opening ideas are always worth checking. In the following game, he came up with an impressive concept.

GAME 31

Evgeny Tomashevsky – Tigran Gharamian

Germany 2017

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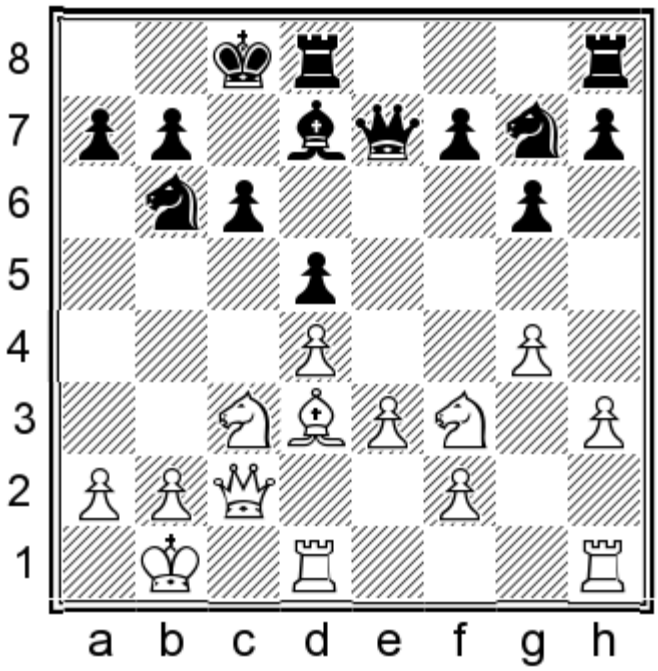


15.a4! ♕b4

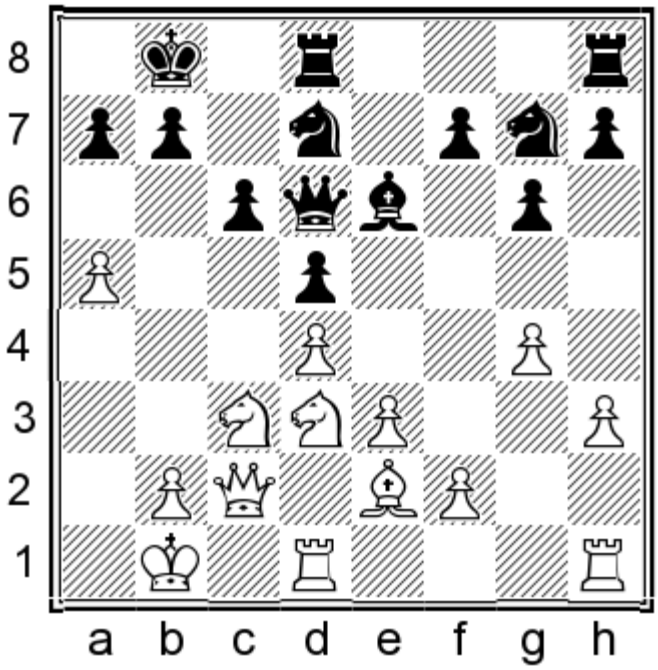
15...a5?! would seriously weaken Black's queenside.

The text move looks like a good answer, but now comes the deep idea.

16.♘e5! ♗e6 17.♗e2!

The knight will drop back to d3, forcing Black's queen away and thus enabling the a-pawn to advance.

17...♔b8 18.♘d3 ♕d6 19.a5 ♘d7



20.a6! b6 21.e4!

White had an excellent position and went on to win a fine game.

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Tomashevsky's a2-a4 plan is certainly something to watch out for. However, it tends not to be a big problem against my recommended set-up with the knight coming back to f6 rather than g7, as Black is ready to counterattack with a timely ...♘e4. See page 145 for an example of this theme.

Let's now turn our attention to those lines where White castles on the kingside.

Kingside Castling – Move Orders

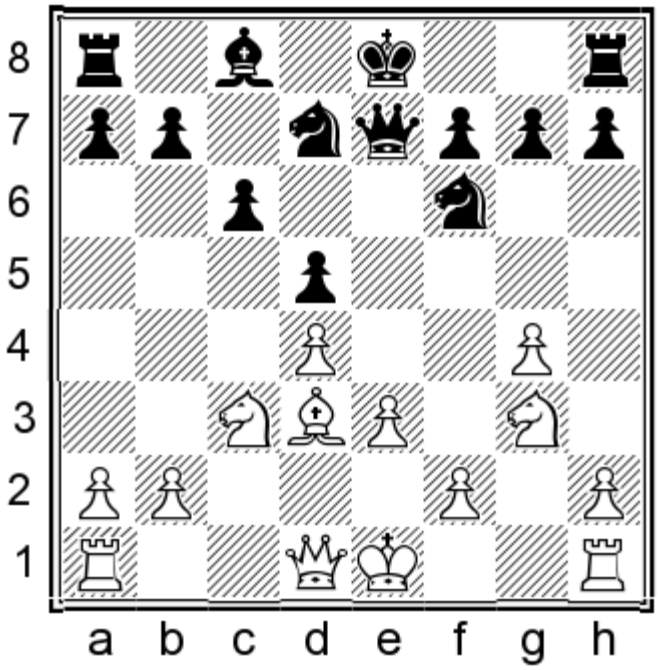
I will start by laying out the main pathways and emphasizing the importance of the ...h6 move.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♘ge2

White can go for a ♘f3 set-up as well, either with or without ♕c2. However, I regard the ♘ge2 set-up as the most threatening.

8...h6!

Once again, inserting this move brings clear benefits. Compare the following line:
8...♘h5?! 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.g4! ♘hf6 11.♘g3



11...h6

This was Spassky's choice, as well as the preference of modern engines. However, it gives White plenty of time to consolidate his space advantage. If Black plays my suggested 8...h6 instead, he will be a whole tempo up if White tries the same plan.

Some players have tried 11...g6 as an improvement. Play may continue 12.g5 (12.♕e2!? is another critical path, preparing long castling) 12...♘g8 13.h4 h6 14.gxh6! White retains some pressure, with h4-h5 coming next.

12.h3 ♘b6 13.♕d2 ♗d7 14.b3 g6

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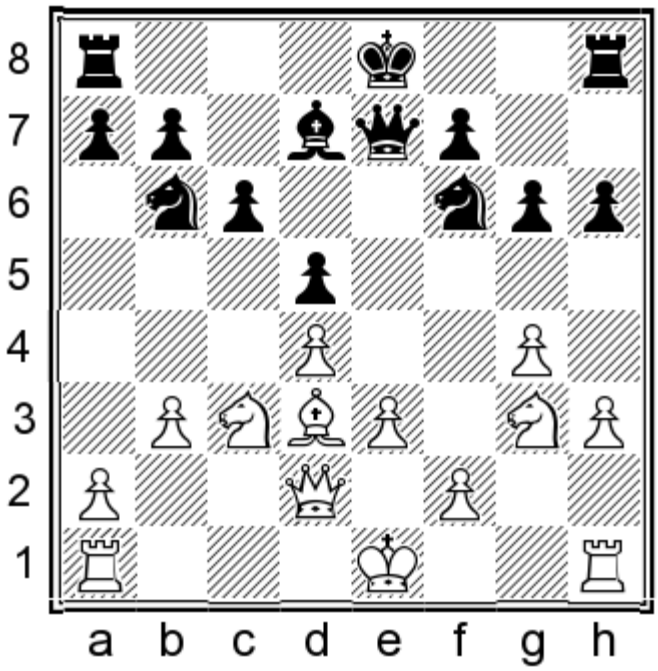

15.a4!

White's flexible strategy of not committing his king starts to pay off. The advance of the rook's pawn is a typical way to disturb a knight sitting on the b6- or g6-squares.

15...a5 16.f3 h5 17.g5 ♕d6 18.♘ge2 ♘g8 19.e4!

White has far more space and won a nicely controlled game in Kasparov – Spassky, Barcelona 1989. Interestingly, this was the then World Champion's first victory over his opponent; in their previous games, Spassky had won two and drawn the other four. But enough history: let's get back to our target position after 8...h6!.

9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0

11.g4 is still legal but it's hardly a serious threat with ...h6 already included, so I will focus on the more important lines.

11...0-0

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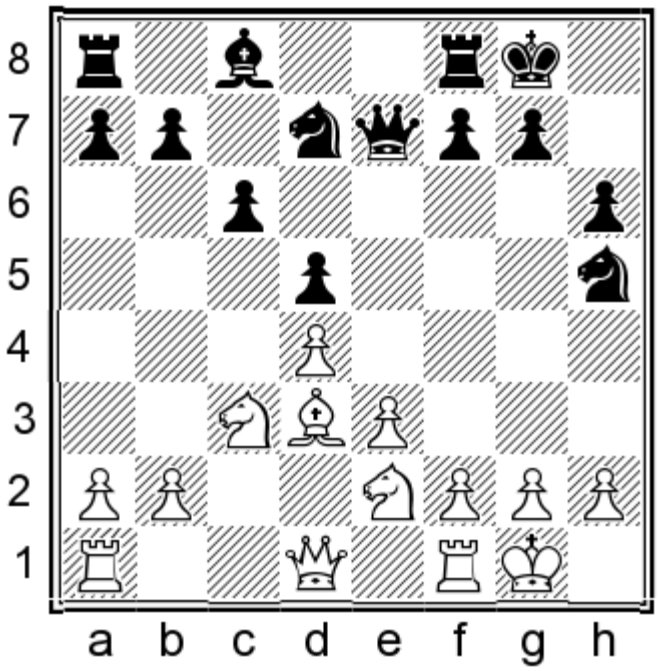

As I mentioned earlier, White sometimes goes for this set-up with the moves ♕c2 and ...♘b6 included. He may also play with the knight on f3 instead of e2. In either case, he can choose between a minority attack with ♖b1 and b2-b4, or central play with e3-e4. I believe the set-up with the knight on e2 in conjunction with f2-f3 to be the most challenging; but before discussing these plans, I would like to present a key concept for Black.

The Capablanca Knight

This has to do with bringing a knight to the excellent d6-square. I named this manoeuvre after the third World Champion because, to my knowledge, he was the first one to play it, in his 1927 world championship match in Buenos Aires against Alekhine, a match where all but the very first of the games were QGDs!

GAME 32

Alexander Alekhine – Jose Raul Capablanca

Buenos Aires (14) 1927

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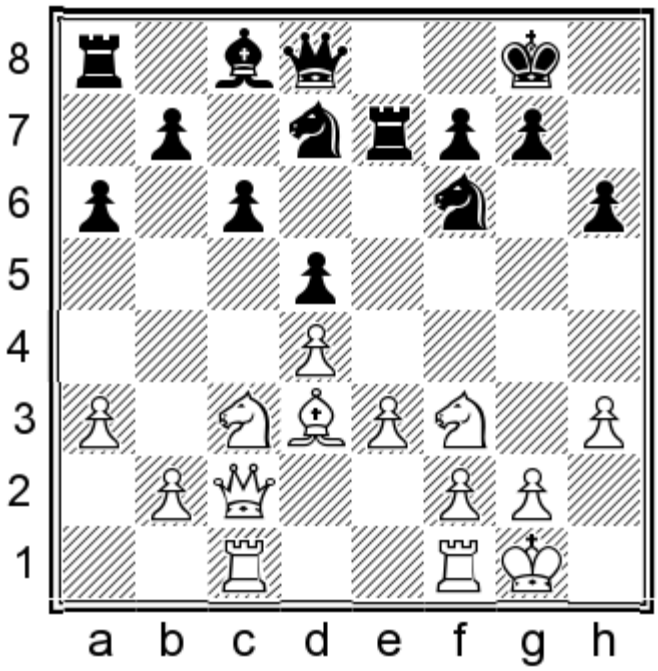


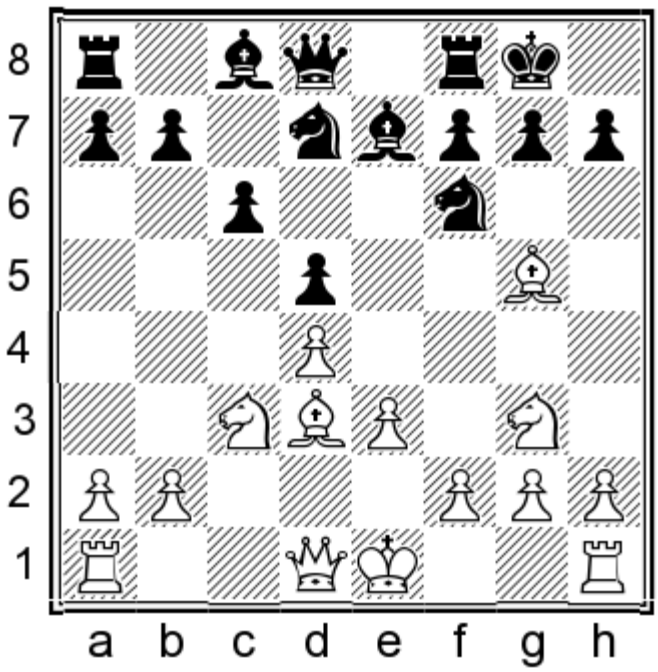
15...♘e8!?

The knight took up an ideal post on d6, and Capablanca made an easy draw. Here is another example from later in the match:

GAME 33

Alexander Alekhine – Jose Raul Capablanca

Buenos Aires (32) 1927



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9...♘e8!?

This time the manoeuvre didn't work out so well, as White was able to create threats on the kingside. Nevertheless, the logic behind it is crystal clear, and you should most definitely have it in your arsenal of ideas. Please note, by the way, that in some lines it may be the queen's knight that goes to d6, via b6 and c8 (or c4).

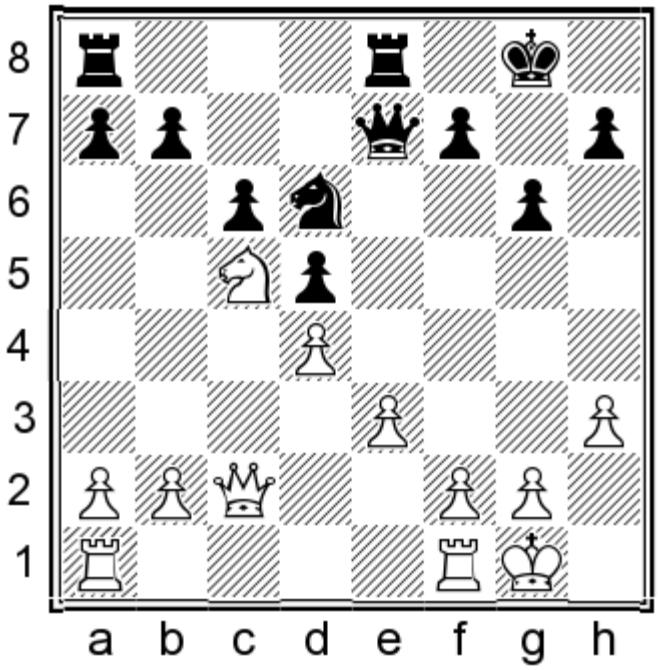
Dealing with the Minority Attack

The minority attack with b4-b5 is White's simplest and best-known plan in the Carlsbad structure, so I'd like to show you some examples of how Black should deal with it. We will start with a classic example, which ties in with the previous section by demonstrating the tremendous effectiveness of the knight on d6.

GAME 34

Milko Bobotsov – Tigran Petrosian

Lugano (Olympiad) 1968



As Kasparov explains in the relevant volume of *On My Great Predecessors*, the position favours Black, as he has a clear plan of attacking on the kingside. In the event of b2-b4 and a2-a4, Black simply plays ...a6, when b4-b5 is impossible to carry out. Black's knight is not only a superb defender, but it is also placed flexibly enough to support Black's operations on the kingside as well.

22.♖ac1 ♕g5 23.♕d1 h5 24.♔h1 ♖e7 25.♘d3 ♘e4 26.♘c5 ♘d6 27.♘d3 ♕f5 28.♘e5 f6 29.♘f3 ♖g7 30.♘h2 ♖e8

White has failed to find any sort of plan, while Black has gradually directed his heavy pieces towards the kingside.

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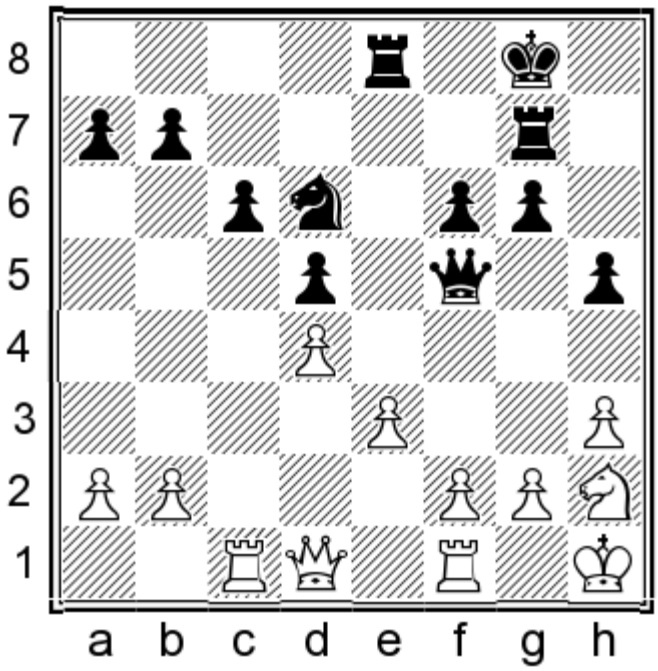
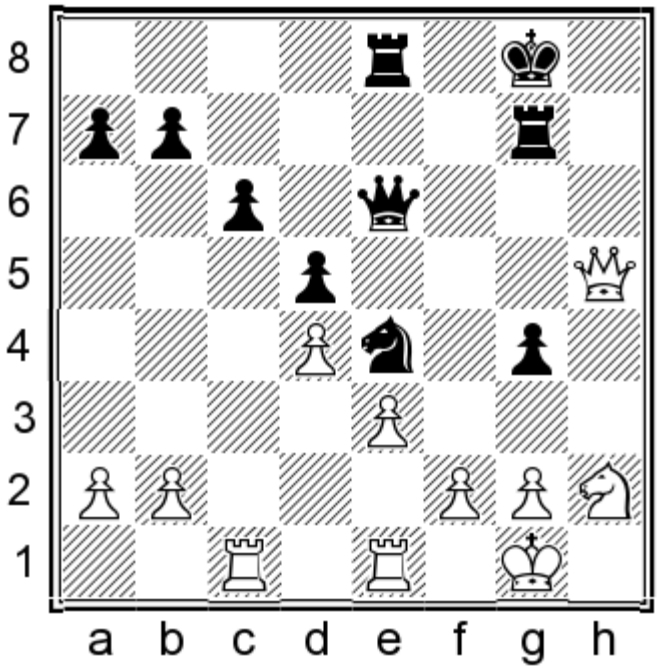


31.♔g1 ♘e4 32.♕f3 ♕e6 33.♖fd1 g5!

Petrosian gives up a pawn to accelerate his attack. It leads to a quick victory, but Black could also have posed serious problems by building up more slowly.

34.♕xh5 f5 35.♖e1 g4 36.hxg4 fxg4



37.f3 gxf3 38.♘xf3 ♖h7 39.♕e5 ♕c8 40.♕f4 ♖f8 41.♕e5 ♖f5

0–1

Let’s see another example. This time there are two knights of each colour, and White tries to play more actively on the queenside.

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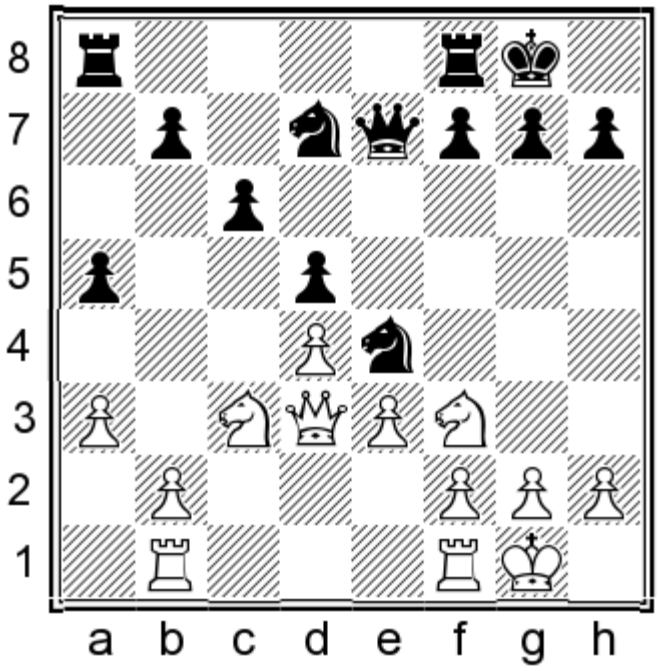
GAME 35

Predrag Nikolic – Vladimir Kramnik

Monte Carlo (blindfold) 1998

In both of these examples, both sets of bishops have been exchanged, which is desirable for Black. Remember, our ...♘h5 plan ensures that the dark-squared bishops will leave the board early, which only leaves us the task of preparing ...♗f5 at the right moment. That said, the plan shown in the present game works well with the light-squared bishops still on the board, as shown in the theoretical section on page 152.



14.b4 b5!

The key idea! If Black can get a knight to c4 quickly, the weakness of the c6-pawn will be immaterial. He is spoiled for choice, as one knight is ready to drop back to d6 (since exchanging on e4 would lose a piece to the ...dxe4 fork) while the other is poised to go to b6.

15.♕c2 axb4 16.axb4 ♘d6 17.♖b3 ♘b6 18.♘e5 ♖fc8 19.♘d3 ♘bc4 20.♘c5 ♖e8

The queenside structure is a little different from the Petrosian game, but the general character of the position is similar. White has no active prospects on the queenside, and Black can steadily build his kingside play.

21.h3 g6 22.♖c1 ♖a7 23.♕d1 h5 24.♔h1 ♕g5 25.♖bb1 ♖ae7 26.♖a1 ♘f5 27.♖a2

Now Kramnik breaks through in style.

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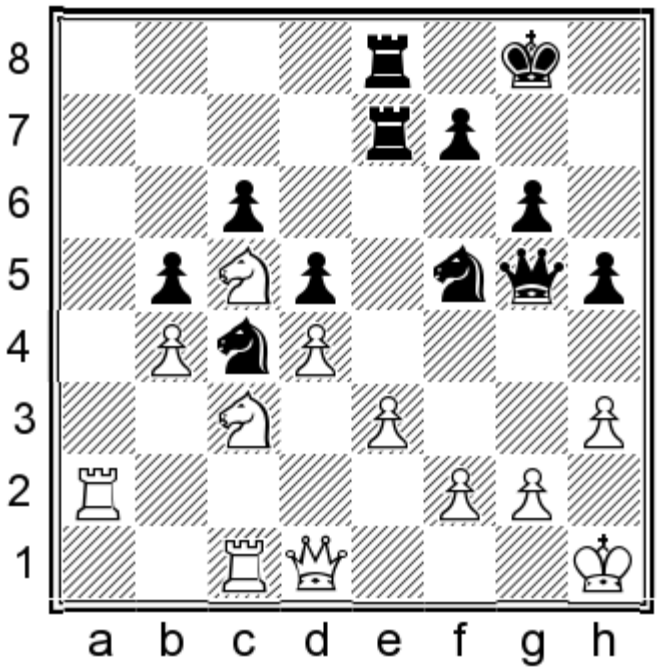

27...♘cxe3! 28.fxe3 ♖xe3 29.♖f2 ♕h4 30.♕d2 ♘xd4 31.♖cf1 ♘f5 32.♖xf5 gxf5 33.♘d1 ♖e1 34.♔g1 ♖8e2 35.♕c3 ♖xd1

0–1

Things may not always go as smoothly as in the above two games. However, as long as you stay ready to meet b2-b4 with ...b5 followed by ...♘b6 (or ...♘d6) and ...♘c4, you shouldn't have any problems. As always, further details will be presented in the theory section.

The f3-e4 Plan

As I mentioned earlier, I regard this as White's most challenging plan. Consider the difficulties experienced by Black in the following game.

GAME 36

Anish Giri – Laurent Fressinet

Montpellier 2015

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7

The players got here via a different move order.

7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♘ge2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♕d2!

This is quite a modern idea. If White intends a central advance, it makes sense to put the queen on this square rather than c2, in order to guard e3.

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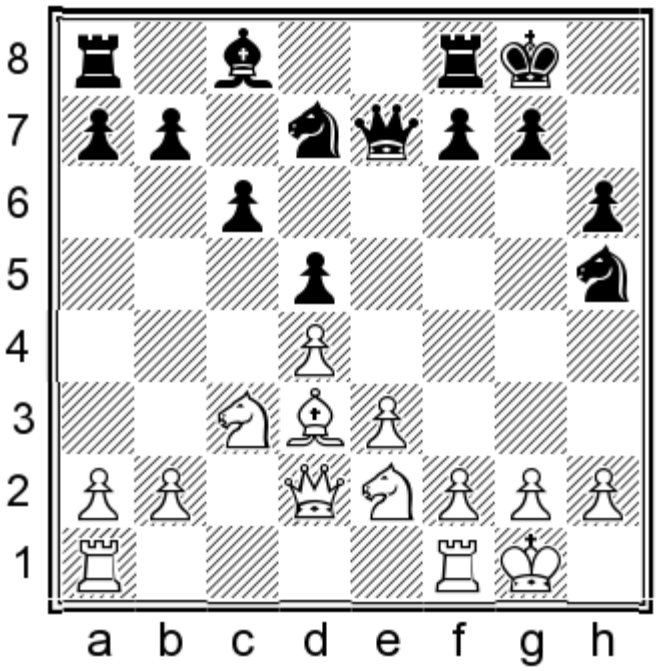

12...♖e8

This isn't a bad move, but in the theoretical section I will make a case for 12...♘b6!?, intending to put the other rook on e8. This is a new approach to the position but it makes a great deal of sense, as the rook does not have much to do on the queenside, whereas the one on f8 is useful in supporting ...f5 in some lines.

Please note that the straightforward transfer of the knight to d6 is ineffective here, as shown after 12...♘hf6 13.♖ae1 ♘e8? 14.♘f4! ♘d6 15.f3. The e-pawn is ready to advance, and the knight on d6 stands badly as it will soon be forced to move yet again.

13.♖ae1 ♘b6 14.♘c1

Black has smartly left the knight on h5 for the time being, so Giri avoids rerouting his knight to g3 or f4.

14.♘f4 ♘xf4 15.exf4 can be met by 15...♕d8! 16.♖e5 ♗d7 17.♖fe1 ♘c8! and this time, with no pawn going to e5, the knight is excellently placed at d6. Even so, it is hard to say if Black is fully equal here. My analysis file says he is, but in a practical game it might be tough, as Black has to be accurate for several more moves. For example, 18.♖xe8† ♗xe8 19.f5 could be tricky to meet over the board, as White intends to put his queen on f4 and push the kingside pawns.

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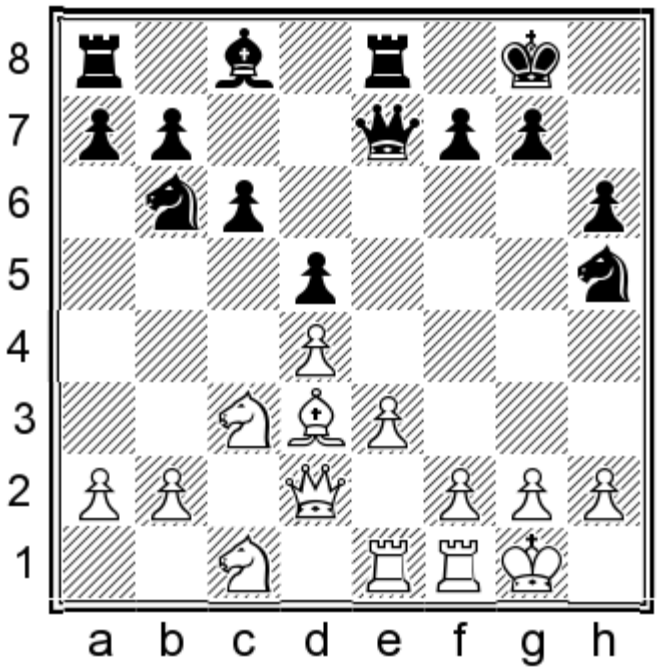


14...♕g5

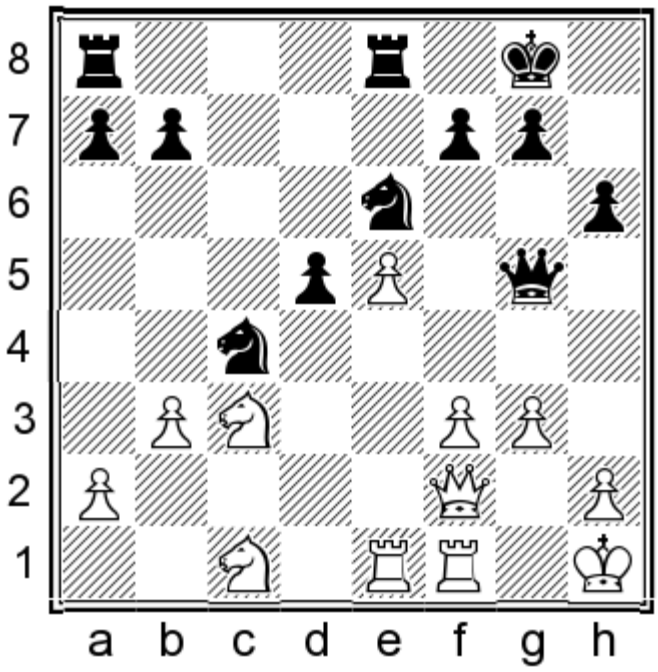
14...♘f6!? is another idea, intending to meet 15.f3 with 15...c5!, the point being that f2-f3 is not a move that White would normally play in the IQP structure. In that case Black would only be marginally worse.

15.f3 ♗f5 16.♗xf5 ♕xf5 17.e4 ♘c4 18.♕e2 ♕g5

So far Fressinet has done a decent job of activating his pieces. Nevertheless, White's position is easier to play, and in the next phase of the game Giri takes control.

19.♕f2 ♘f4 20.♔h1 ♕d8 21.e5 c5 22.b3 cxd4 23.♕xd4 ♕g5 24.g3 ♘e6 25.♕f2

Taking on e5 would cost Black a piece, so his pieces find themselves being driven away, one by one.



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25...♘b6 26.f4 ♕e7 27.f5 ♘g5 28.♕d4 ♖ac8 29.♘d3

White is in full control and Black was unable to offer much resistance.

29...♖ed8 30.♘b5 ♘c4 31.♘f4 ♘a3 32.♘d6 ♘c2 33.♘xc8 ♕d7 34.♕d1 ♖xc8 35.♕xd5 ♕xf5 36.e6 fxe6 37.♖xe6 ♕xd5† 38.♘xd5 ♔h7 39.♖e7 ♘d4 40.♖c7 ♖d8 41.♘f4

1–0

Clearly Black needs to find another way to deal with the f3-e4 plan. I have outlined some ideas in the notes above, and will present my recommendations and original analysis in the theoretical section.

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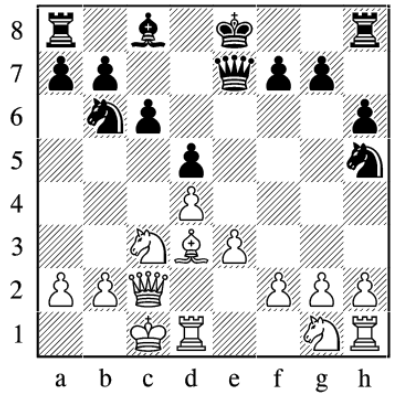
Chapter 3b



Exchange QGD Theory (0–0–0 Lines)

A) Early Deviations and Move Order Tricks page 120

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5

A1) 5.♘f3 page 120

A2) 5.♗f4 page 123

A3) 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 (7.♕c2 page 126) **7...♘bd7** (8.f3 page 126)

A31) 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗f4 page 126

A32) 8.h3!? page 128

B) Lines with ♕c2, ♗xe7 and 0-0-0 page 131

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0-0 ♘b6

B1) 12.♘ge2 page 132

B2) 12.♔b1 page 133

B3) 12.♘f3!? Game 37, page 136

B4) 12.h3 Game 38, page 144

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5

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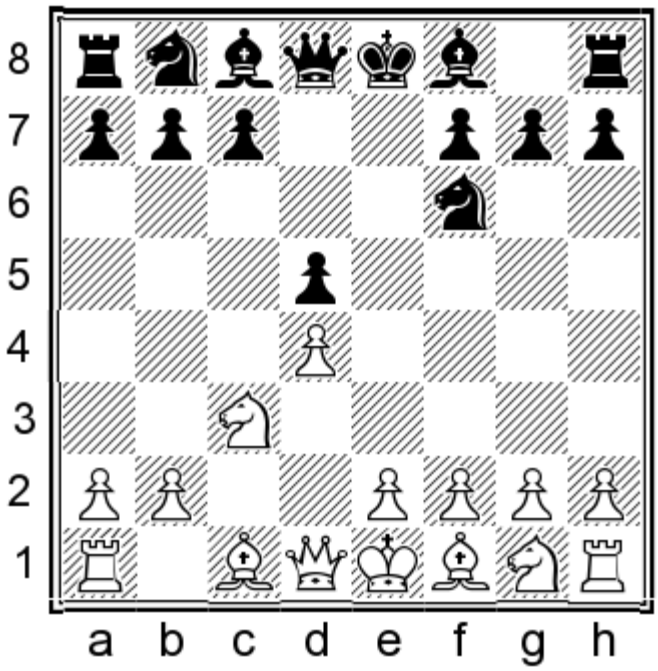

Having got acquainted with the main plans and set-ups in the introductory section, we will start delving in to some specific variations.

A) Early Deviations and Move Order Tricks

We will start by investigating the slightly unusual options of **A1)** 5.♘f3 and **A2)** 5.♗f4, before looking at some deviations after the most common **A3)** 5.♗g5.

A1) 5.♘f3

As a general rule, White loses some flexibility when developing this knight so early.

5...c6

This pawn move should be played almost regardless of what White does. Strengthening the centre is always useful and it maintains the option of an early ...♗f5, should a suitable opportunity arise. By the way, this particular position has been a popular one, as it has arisen thousands of times via the Semi-Slav.

6.♕c2 ♗e7

6...♘bd7 is playable but 7.♗f4!? is a slightly annoying reply for us, as 7...♘h5 8.♗g5 ♗e7 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.e3 ♘b6 reaches a standard position except that our pawn is on h7 instead of h6. As I explained in the introductory section, there are good reasons to prefer the version with ...h6 included.

6...g6, planning ...♗f5, has traditionally been the main line. After 7.♗g5 ♗e7, the reply 8.e4!? has been considered by many analysts and authors as a good practical way to play for White. At least, that’s what was believed until Lars Schandorff (with my help!) showed in his Semi-Slav book that Black can play 8...♘xe4!, which had been dismissed by previous analysts. The key line continues: 9.♗xe7 ♔xe7 10.♘xe4 dxe4 11.♕xe4† ♗e6 12.♗c4

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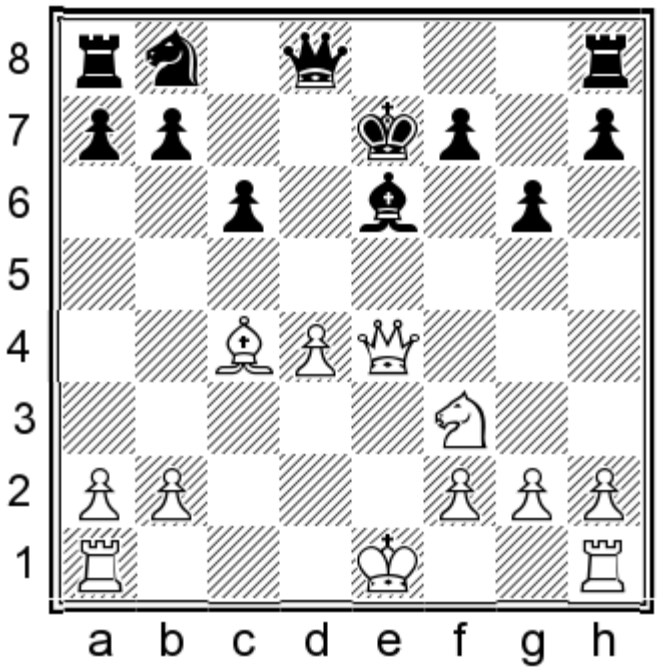
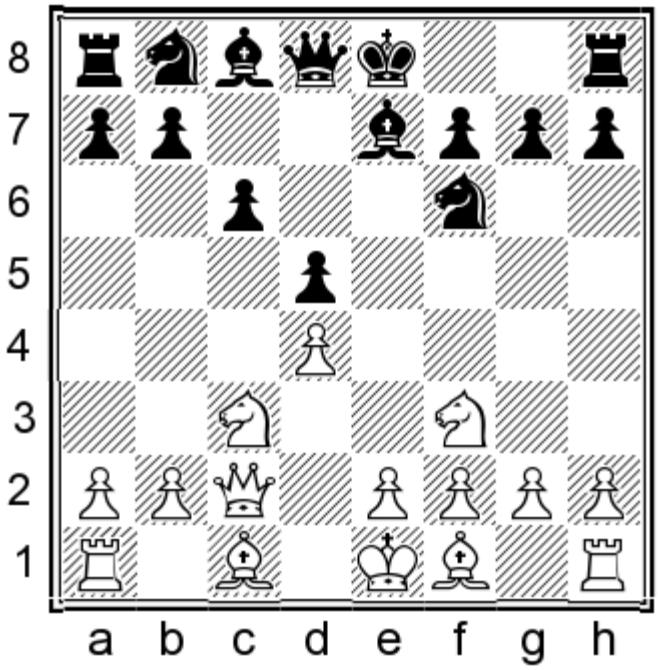


12...♖e8! 13.♗xe6 ♔f8 White will have the unpleasant task of defending quite a grim IQP position. Further details can be found in Lars' book, *Grandmaster Repertoire 20 – The Semi-Slav*.



7.♗g5

7.♗f4 g6! gives Black an even better version of the 6...g6 line above, as 8.e4? is poor and 8.e3 ♗f5 is similar to the 6.e3 line in the notes to variation A2 below.

7...♘bd7 8.h3!?

This interesting option seems to me to be the only positive reason for White to favour the present move order. The point is that he avoids the main lines of our intended system with ...h6 and ...♘h5.

8...0-0

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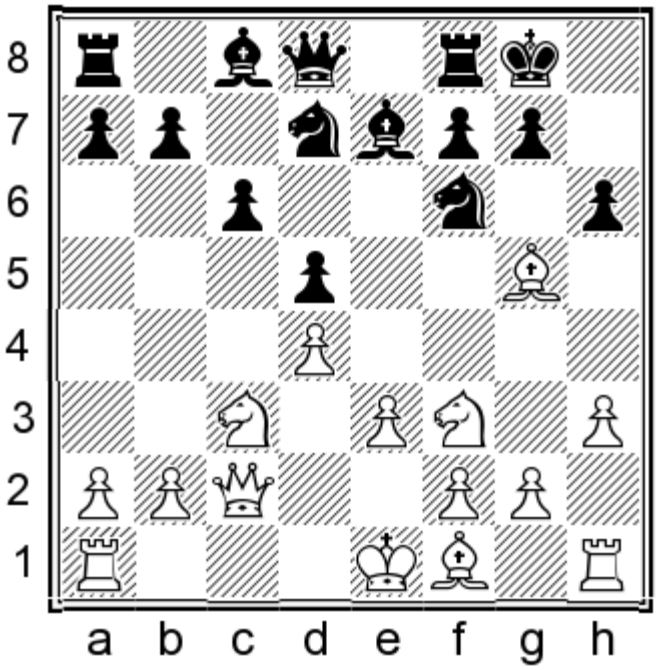
8...h6 is met by 9.♗f4, while 8...♘b6 9.e3 ♘h5 gives Black a slightly inferior version of the standard set-up, as he is missing the useful ...h6 move.

9.e3 h6



10.♗f4N

10.♗h4 ♘e4!= gives Black an easy game.

Funnily enough, I found no games in which White retreated the bishop to f4 here, but the resulting position has occurred more than fifty times via different move orders. Hardly anyone has found the most promising continuation for Black:

10...♘e4!

In the course of researching and writing this chapter, I came to understand that Black should always look for opportunities to bring the knight to e4 in those lines where White develops his knight to f3 early on. One idea is the same as the ...♘e8 manoeuvre, in the sense that it allows ...♗d6 followed by recapturing with the knight, but the ...♘e4 move has the advantage of being a more active choice which doesn't interfere with Black's piece coordination.

Most games have continued 10...♖e8?! 11.♗d3, transposing to an even more popular position, from which White has amassed a huge score.

10...♘e8?!

Originally I was attracted by Capablanca's knight manoeuvre, before I appreciated the advantages of ...♘e4 as noted above. Moreover, when I looked more closely I realized there was a concrete problem with the text move:

11.♗d3 ♗d6 12.0-0-0!

12.♗xd6 ♘xd6 13.0-0 occurred in Khusnutdinov – Khismatullin, Moscow 2013, when 13...♕f6!?N would have been pleasant for Black. The last move prepares the typical plan of ...♘b6 and ...♗f5, while also winning a tempo due to the incidental threat of ...♗xh3.

The text move is much stronger; White intends to exploit the ...h6 weakness.

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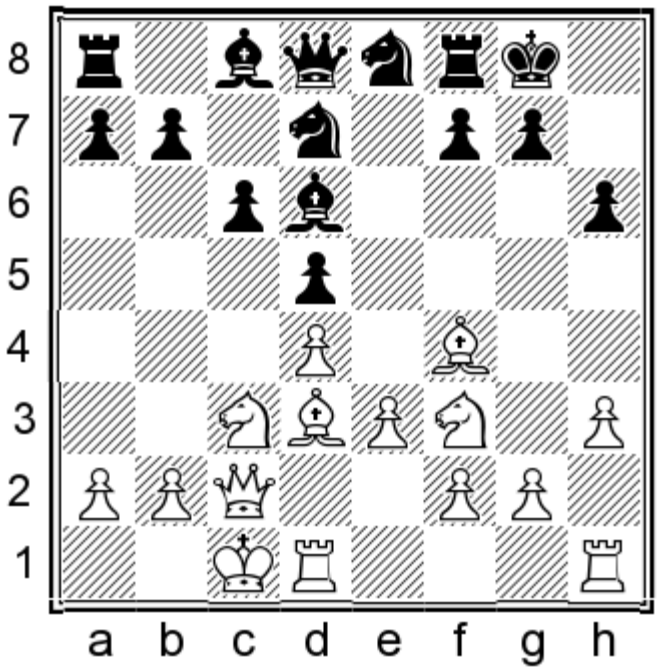


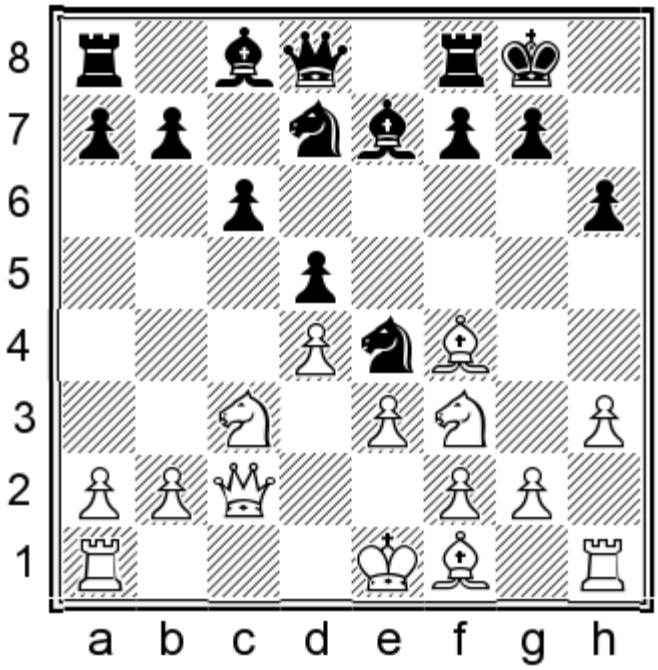
12...♗xf4N

12...♕f6 was seen in Alvarez – Gazzarri, Buenos Aires 1992, when 13.♘e2!± followed by g2-g4 would have been much better for White.

The text move is the engines' top choice but White keeps an excellent position after:

13.exf4 ♘d6 14.g4!

White's attack plays itself.



11.♘xe4N

This is yet to be tested, but it's surely the reason why Black's last move has been so rare.

11.♗d3 was played in Orsag – Subrt, Czech Republic 1998, when the simple 11...♘df6!N would have been fine for Black, who intends ...♗f5 next. 12.g4?! is the only idea I can think of to interfere with this plan, but White is pushing his luck and soon runs into problems: 12...♗d6 13.♘e2 ♖e8 White cannot castle on the queenside because the f2-pawn

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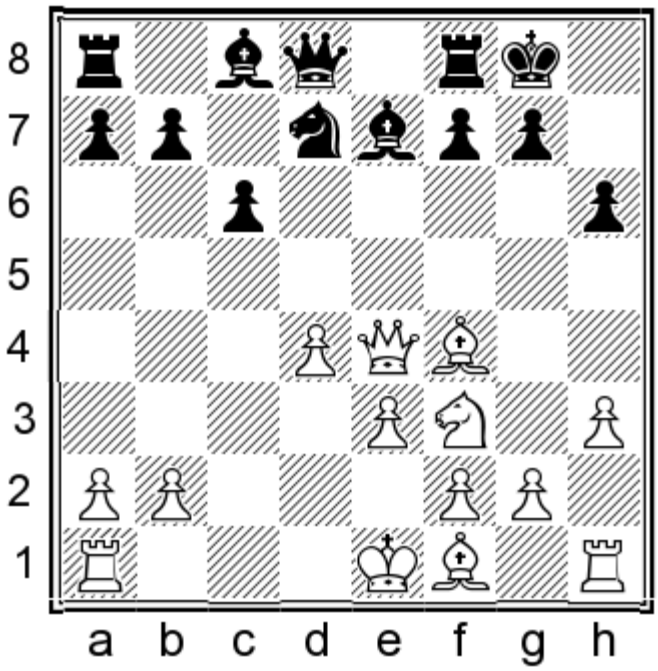
hangs, and if 14.0-0 h5!∓ White will suffer on the kingside.

11...dxe4 12.♕xe4

12.♘d2 c5 13.d5 is safer for White, but 13...♘f6 still gives Black the easier side of approximate equality.

The text move is critical: White wins a pawn but he plays with fire, as his king will be stuck in the centre and Black can open the position with ...c5.



12...♗b4† 13.♘d2

13.♔d1 ♖e8 14.♕c2 c5!∞ also gives Black plenty of play.

13...♗xd2† 14.♔xd2 ♖e8 15.♕d3

15.♕c2 allows 15...c5!.

15...♘f6

White's idea is to meet 15...c5 with 16.dxc5, hoping for a queen exchange. Black can avoid this with 16...♕h4!, leading to unclear play, but I prefer the clarity of my main line.

16.♔e1 ♕b6!

16...♘e4!?∞ could also be considered but the text move is cleaner.

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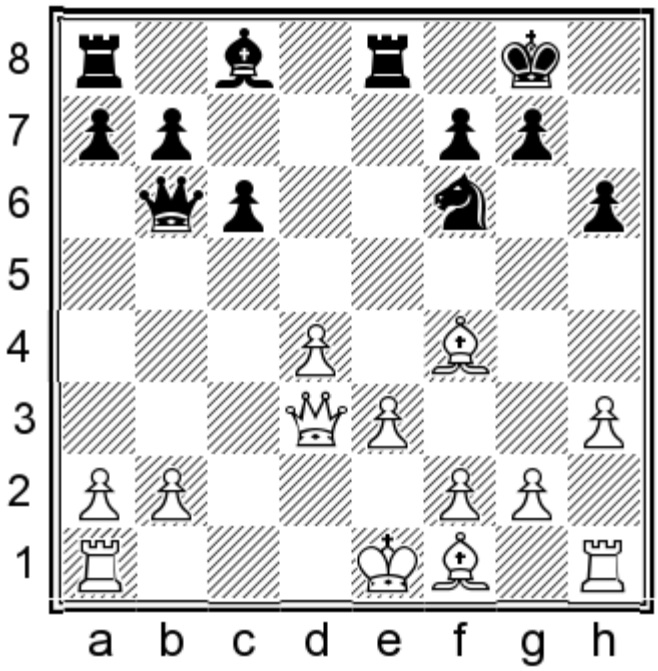

17.a3!

Of course we are talking about computer chess by this stage.

Any other move allows Black's game to unfold. For instance, 17.♖b1 ♗e6 and 17.b3 ♗f5!? (not the only option but certainly the prettiest) 18.♕xf5 ♕xd4 both give Black fine play.

17...♕xb2 18.♖b1 ♕a2 19.♕b3 ♕xb3 20.♖xb3 b6

The engines call this equal, which seems reasonable, as White has the bishop pair and a central pawn majority, but he is also behind in development and unable to castle.

A2) 5.♗f4

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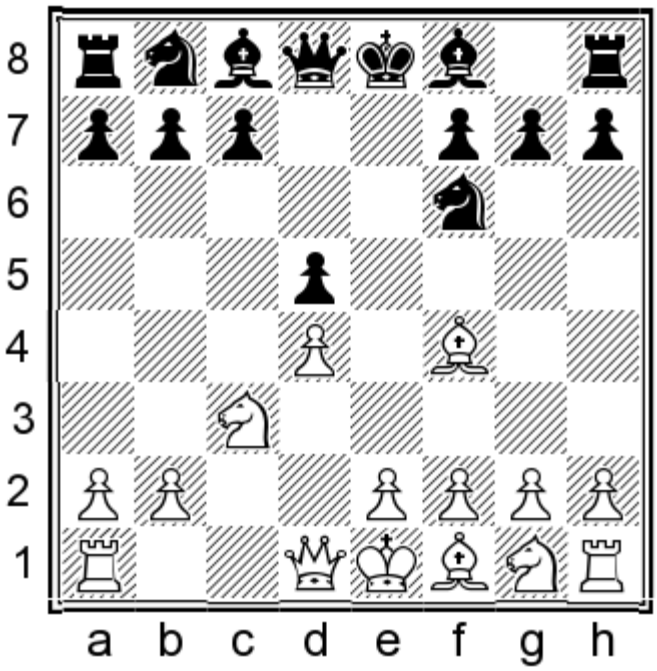

5...c6

Again, it makes sense to start with this pawn move. With a solid pawn chain from b7 to d5, we can now think about ...♗f5 without being bothered by ♕b3.

6.♕c2

Let's see what happens if White ignores Black's plan:

6.e3 ♗f5 7.♗d3 ♗xd3 8.♕xd3 ♗d6

It is important to appreciate that, if all four bishops are removed in the Carlsbad structure, Black's position tends to become better if White is not accurate enough. See *Dealing with the Minority Attack* on page 115 for some examples and further explanation of this theme.

9.♗xd6

9.♗g5 is not a problem, as after 9...♘bd7 Black will always be able to break the pin sooner or later with ...♕e7-e6.

9...♕xd6 10.♘f3 ♘bd7 11.h3 0-0 12.0-0 ♖fe8 13.♘d2

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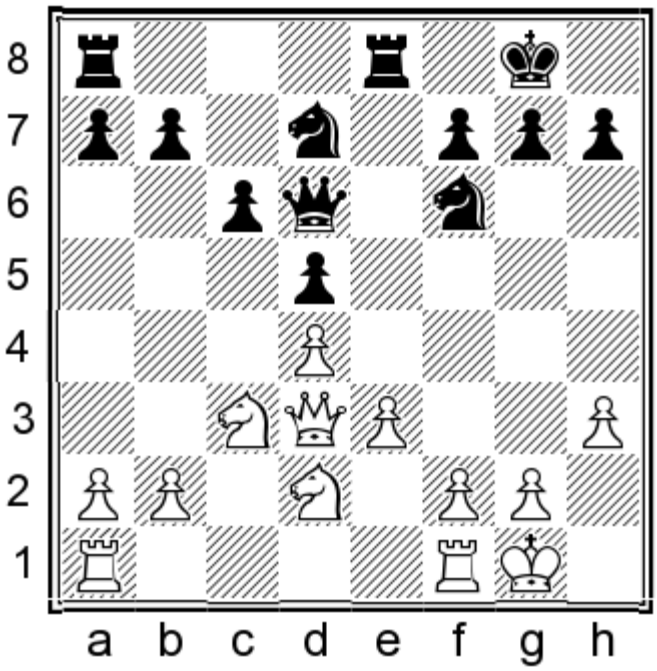

This position has been reached in several games, and there are many other examples involving the same pawn structure and material distribution. Most strong players on White's side know they should avoid it, for reasons already explained in the introductory section. A good, flexible continuation is:

13...♘b6! 14.♖ab1

Otherwise Black can continue improving his position with ...♘c8, ...♕e6 and ...♘d6.

14...a5! 15.a3 ♘c8!N

This move improves on a few existing games. The idea is revealed after:

16.b4 axb4 17.axb4 b5!∓

Followed by ...♘b6-c4.

6...♗e7 7.e3 ♘h5 8.♗e5

8.♗g3 is less critical. An instructive example continued: 8...♘d7 9.♗d3 g6 10.♘ge2 0-0 11.♘f4 ♘df6 12.0-0-0 (12.0-0?! is well met by 12...♘xg3 now that the rook has left the h-file; after 13.hxg3 Black has fine prospects after 13...♗d6!? or 13...♘e8!?)

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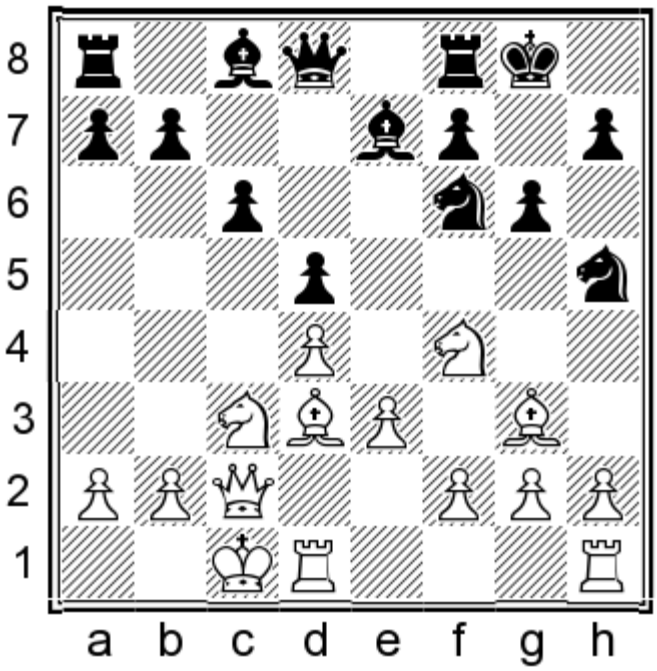
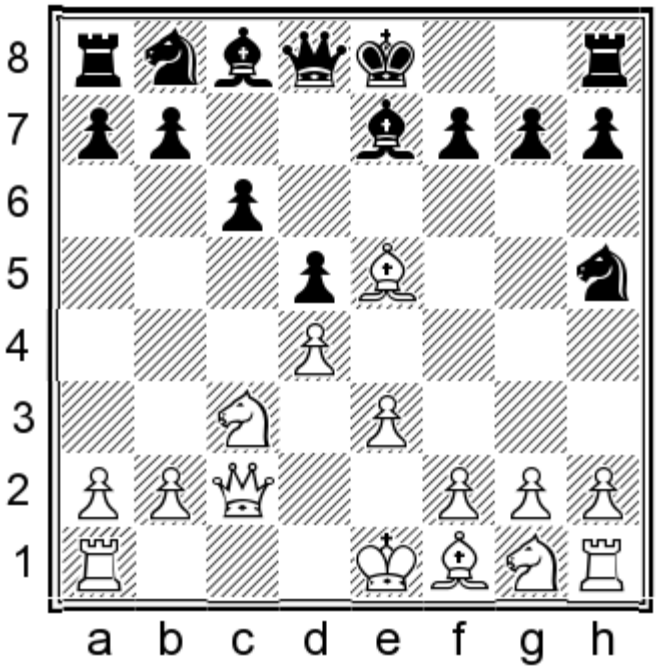


12...♖e8 13.♘xh5 ♘xh5 14.♗e5 ♗d6 15.♗xd6 ♕xd6 16.h3 ♗d7 (16...♘g7!? 17.h4 ♕f6 18.h5 ♗f5 also looks good) 17.g4 ♘f6 18.♔b1 ♖e7 19.♔a1 ♖ae8= Zhou Jianchao – Liang Chong, China 2010.



8...♘d7 9.♗e2 ♘xe5!

Heading for a position with mutual pawn weaknesses. This move was introduced by Aronian in 2011 and has proven its worth in several subsequent games.

10.dxe5 g6 11.♗xh5

Otherwise ...♘g7 will give Black an excellent position.

11...gxh5

Black will play ...f6 next and his strong bishops – especially the dark-squared one – will be excellent both in attack

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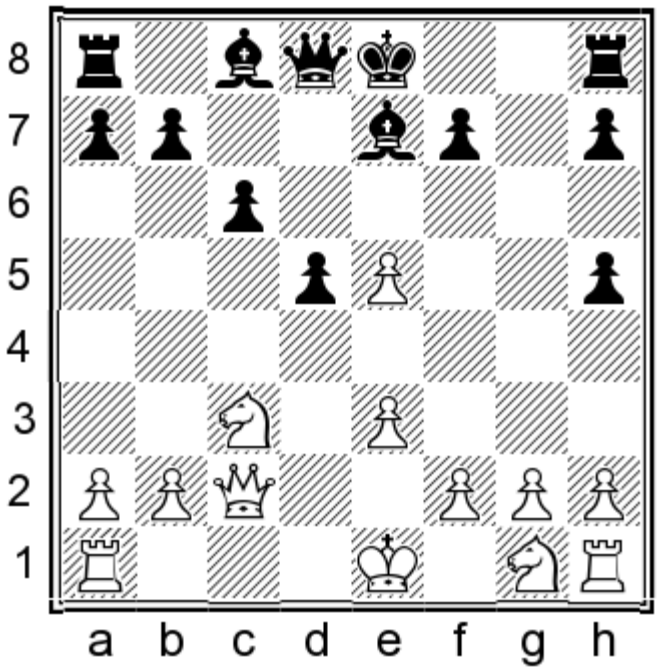
and in the defence of Black's exposed king. This type of positional decision is well known in other openings such as the Advance Variation of the French, and it took both imagination and fine judgement by Aronian to apply the same concept to the QGD.

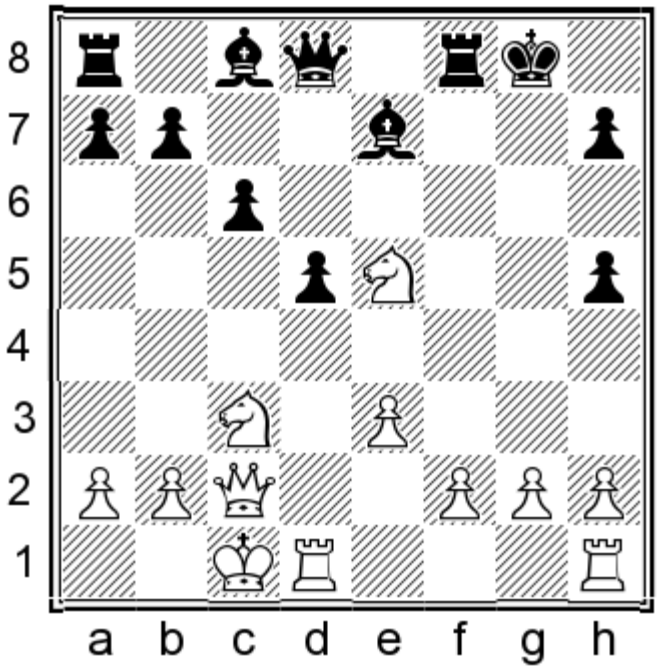


12.0-0-0

12.♘ge2 f6 13.exf6 ♗xf6 14.♘f4 h4 15.g3 0-0 16.0-0-0 ♔h8∓ was excellent for Black in Kovalyov – Kasimdzhanov, Baku 2015.

12...f6! 13.e4

The stem game continued:
13.♘f3?! fxe5 14.♘xe5 0-0∓



15.f4?!

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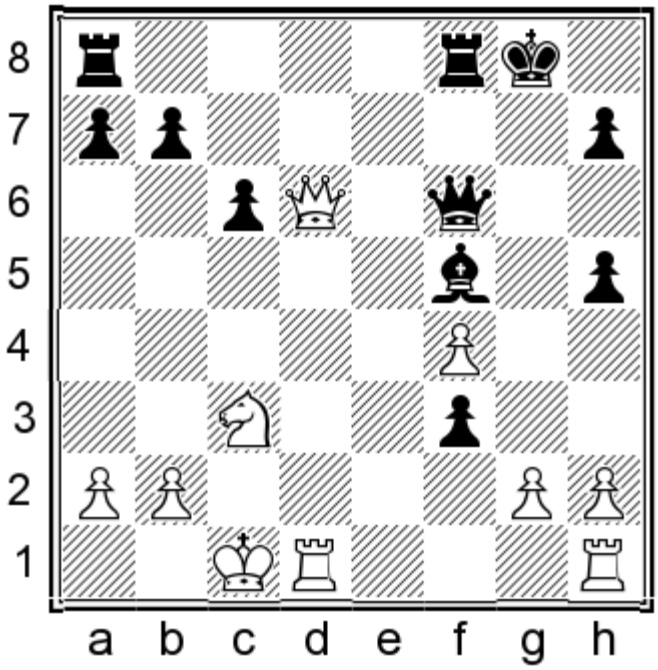
15.♔b1N 15...♗f6 16.♘d3 is suggested as a better shot by Krasenkow. Nevertheless, Black is still doing excellently after: 16...♗f5 17.♘e2 ♕d6!? 18.f3 White must do something in the centre, otherwise ...c5-c4 will hurt. 18...♖ae8 19.e4 dxe4 20.♘c5 exf3! 21.♕xf5 ♖e5 22.♖xd6 ♖xf5 23.gxf3 ♖xc5∓ White is in bad shape.

15...♗d6!? 16.♘f3 ♗f5 17.♕d2 ♕f6 18.e4?!

18.♘d4!? ♗g4! 19.♖de1 ♖ae8 20.h3 ♗d7∓

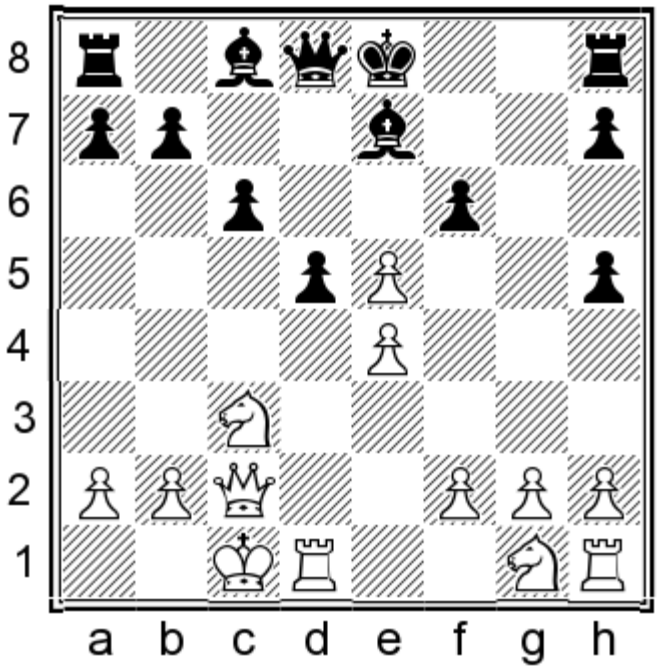
18...dxe4 19.♕xd6 exf3



20.♕xf6 ♖xf6 21.gxf3 ♗g6∓

Grischuk – Aronian, Kazan (rapid – 1.6) 2011.

The text move is the engines' top choice and has been tested in some more recent games, but it seems to me that Black is still at least equal.



13...d4 14.exf6 ♗xf6 15.♘f3

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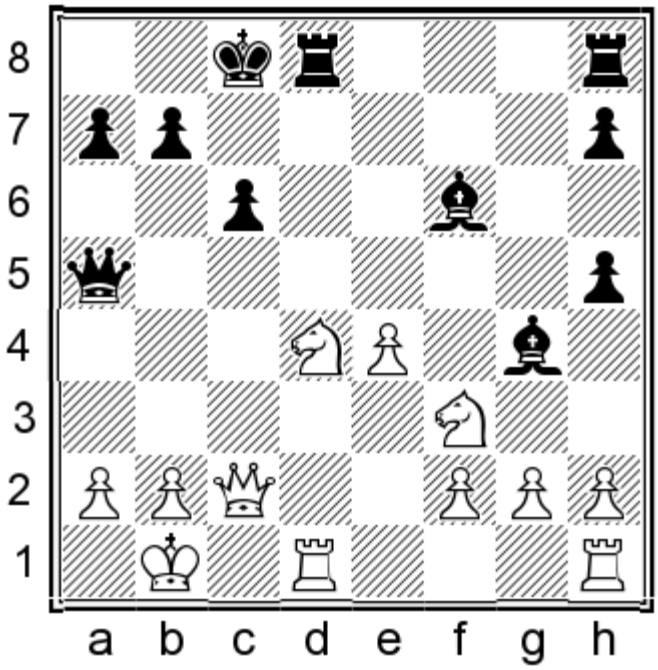
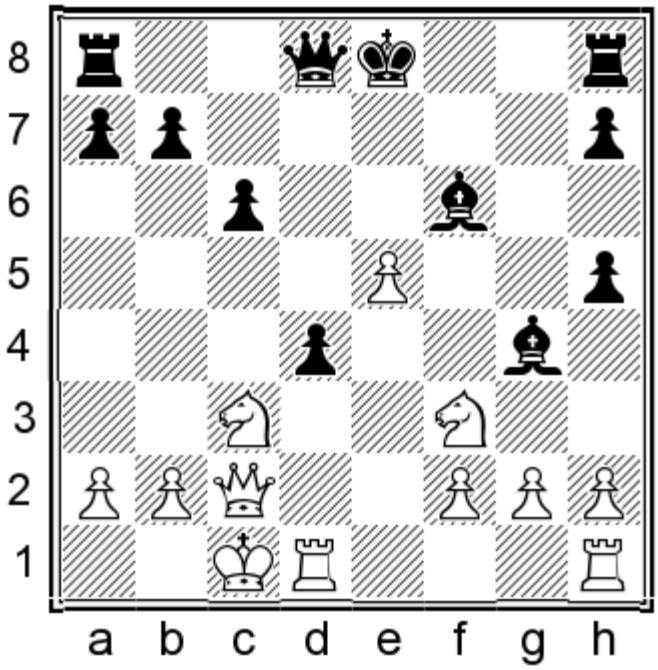
15.♘ge2N 15...0-0 16.f4 ♗g7 is unclear but slightly advantageous to Black, as his mobile queenside pawn mass is more dangerous than White's majority on the kingside.

15...♗g4! 16.e5

16.♘e2 ♕a5 17.♔b1 0-0-0 18.♘exd4 (18.♘fxd4 ♕b6 19.f3 ♗xd4 20.♘xd4 ♖xd4 21.fxg4 hxg4 is fine for Black according to Krasenkow, and I agree)



18...♗xd4 19.♖xd4 ♗xf3 20.♖xd8† ♖xd8 21.gxf3 ♖d2 22.♕b3 ♕e5 White has no advantage and will most probably feel inclined to take a perpetual check. See, for instance, Eljanov – Shimanov, Legnica 2013, as well as a couple of correspondence games.



16...♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♗xe5 18.♕f5

Threatening the bishop while preventing the check on g5.

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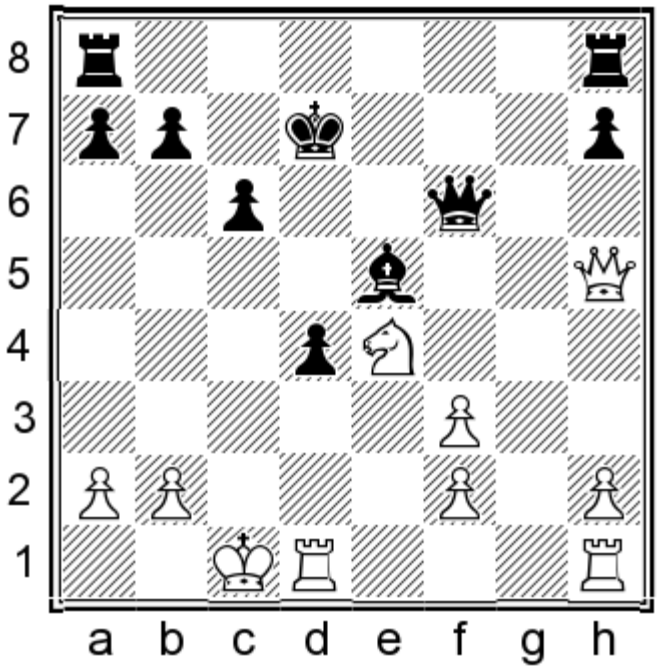
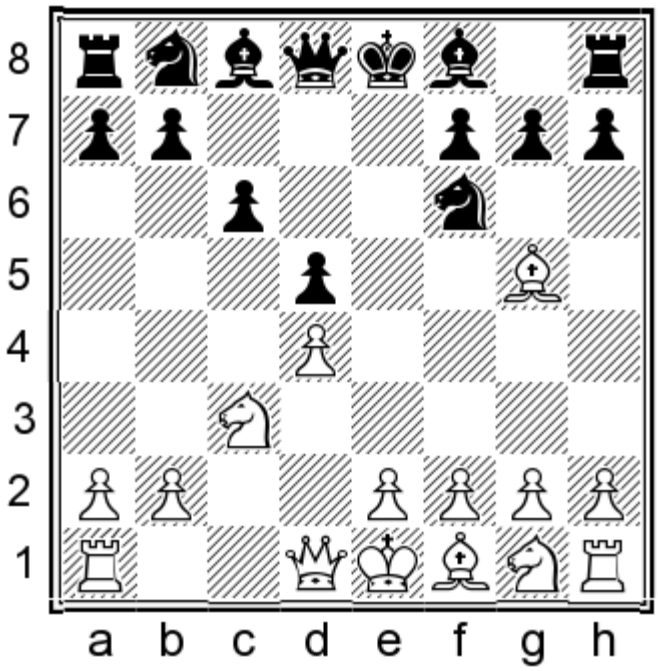
18...♕f6 19.♕xh5† ♔d7 20.♘e4



20...♕f4† 21.♔b1 b6!

Now the black king can hide on b7. The situation is quite unclear and the engines offer their typical 0.00, as so often happens in complex situations. However, practice so far has shown that White's position is more dangerous: Black prevailed in Dreev – Grischuk, Apatity (rapid) 2011, and obtained a winning position in Vakhidov – Kasimdzhanov, Tashkent 2016, although on the latter occasion White escaped with a draw.

A3) 5.♗g5 c6



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6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3

7.♕c2 ♘bd7 hardly changes anything, as White will surely put his bishop on d3 at some point.

7...♘bd7

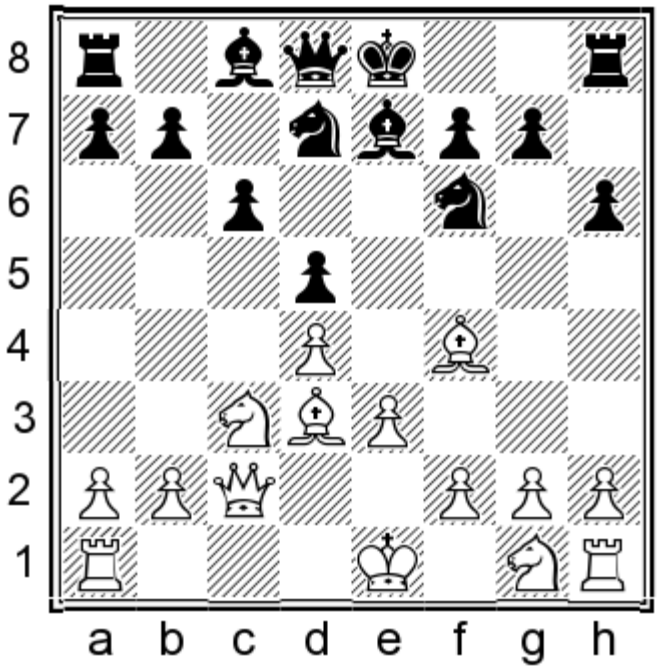
From this position White's three main moves are 8.♕c2, 8.♘f3 and 8.♘ge2. In all three cases, I recommend responding with 8...h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5, and the resulting positions will be discussed in the relevant sections of this chapter and the next.

Here we will look at a couple of ways for White to avoid our plan, beginning with **A31**) 8.♕c2 (intending to retreat the bishop to f4 rather than h4) and following with **A32)** 8.h3!?.

8.f3 obviously allows 8...♘h5! 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7= when both ...♘f4 and ...♕h4† are nuisances for White, as Illingworth points out.

A31) 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗f4

9.♗h4 ♘h5 is the main line, which we will examine shortly. The text move is not particularly theoretically challenging, but it can lead to different structures and plans which are worth knowing about.



9...♘h5 10.♘f3!?

Mamedyarov, Ponomariov and Wang Hao have all played like this, dropping only half a point between them. Other moves are easy to meet, for instance:

After 10.♗g3 ♘xg3 11.hxg3 Black just has to remember not to castle too soon. A good continuation is 11...♘f6, followed by continuing development with moves like ...♗e6 and ...♕d7. Whenever White castles, Black can castle on the same side, with a fine position.

10.♘ge2 ♘xf4 11.♘xf4 ♗d6 12.♘fe2 is hardly a good way for White to play. A logical continuation is: 12...♘f6 13.h3 0-0 14.0-0 (14.0-0-0 b5 gave Black easy attacking chances against the white king in Kessler – Boensch, Austria 2015)

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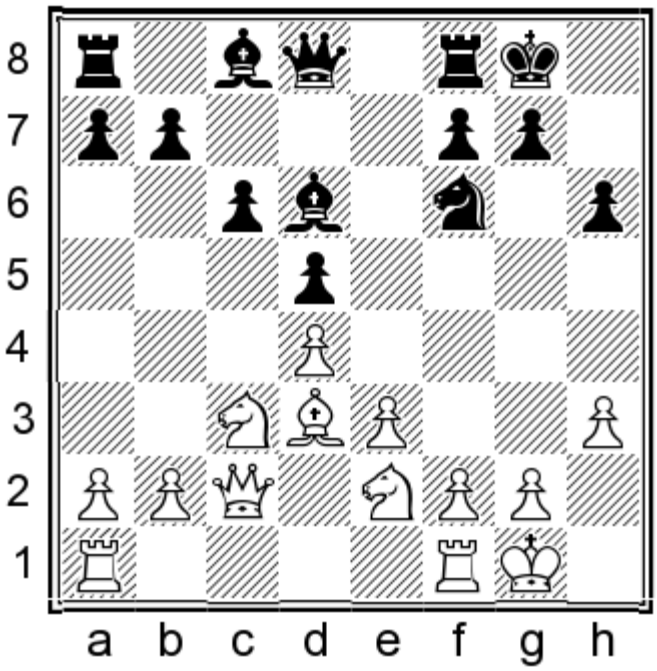
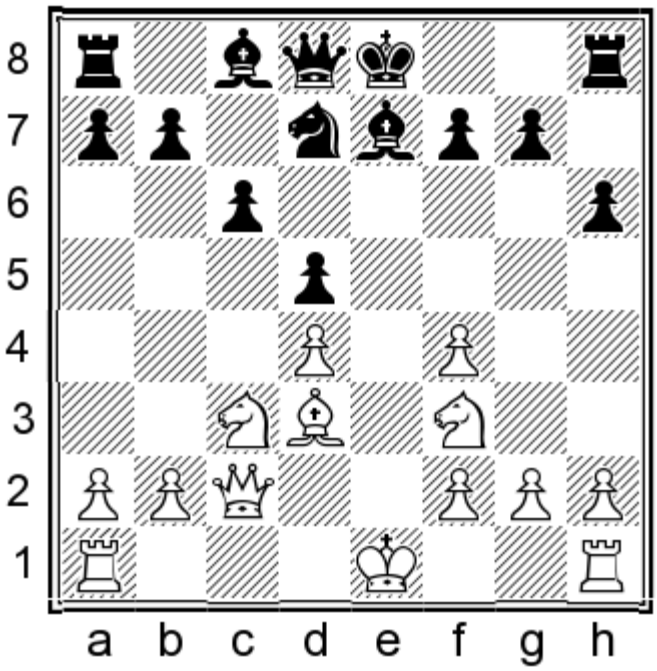


14...♕e7!? 15.♖ab1 g6 16.a3 ♗d7 17.b4 ♖ac8! Black's last move prepares to meet b4-b5 with ...c5!. 18.♖fc1 is logical, but Black can reply with 18...♗b8!, intending ...♘h5 and ...♕d6, with excellent attacking prospects.

10...♘xf4 11.exf4

The plans associated with this pawn structure have already been discussed in the introduction to the ♗f4 QGD. In this particular position, Black is fine after:



11...♗d6!

This has only been played once but I find it the most accurate move, having taken the game Alekhine – Lasker, New York 1924, as my inspiration. See page 66 for my further comments about that game.

12.g3 0-0 13.0-0

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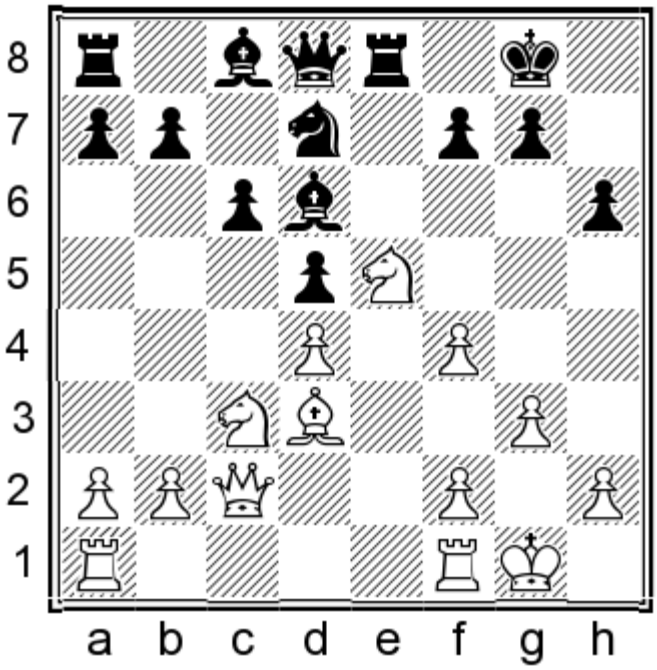
13.0-0-0 can be met by 13...a5, with attacking ideas involving ...a4 and ...♕a5.

13...♖e8 14.♘e5



14...♘f8!

As Lasker showed in a similar position, this is the correct placement for the knight in this structure. The benefits are that it covers the light squares around the king and is ready to go to e6 at any point, in order to target the weakness on d4. Black's position here is not quite as good as in the Alekhine – Lasker game, as his h-pawn is on h6 rather than h7, which means he has to think a bit more carefully before playing ...f6. Nevertheless, his position is still fine and his chances are not worse at all.

A32) 8.h3!?

Assuming that White knows about our intentions of playing ...♘h5 next, he might think of this tricky waiting move.

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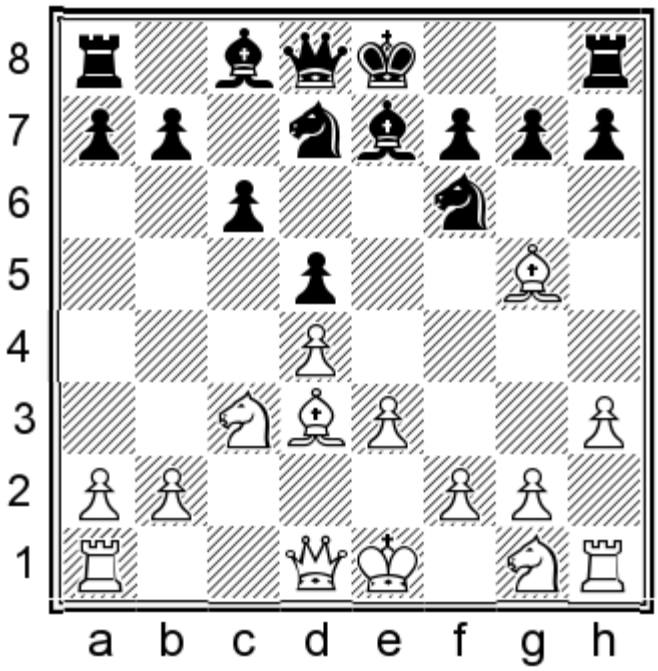

8...h6

After careful consideration, I think Black should prod the bishop before deciding what to do next.

8...♘e4?! is convincingly met by 9.♗xe7! ♕xe7 10.♗xe4 dxe4 11.♕g4! ♘f6 12.♕xg7 ♖g8 13.♕h6 ♖xg2 14.♘ge2 ♖g6 15.♕h4±.White dominates the dark squares and has amassed a heavy score from here.

8...0-0 9.♕c2 ♖e8 10.♘f3 is problematic for us, as ...h6 will always be met by ♗f4, so we will not be able to carry out our preferred bishop trade with ...♘h5.

8...♘b6!? is a playable alternative. White has a few options, but I think 9.♘f3! is the most challenging. Black should respond with 9...h6, and now 10.♗h4 ♘e4! seems okay for Black, while 10.♗f4 transposes to our main line below.

9.♗f4

This is the consistent follow-up, hoping to utilize the h2-h3 move to preserve the bishop.

Black gets an easy game after:
9.♗h4 0-0 10.♕c2 ♖e8!

This plan is well known from a similar position where White has played ♘f3 instead of h2-h3. Here Black has an improved version, as h2-h3 is of little use.

11.♘f3

11.♘ge2 ♘e4 and 11.0-0-0 ♘e4 offer Black comfortable play as well.

11...♘e4! 12.♗xe4

After 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 Black follows up with ...♘df6 and ...♗f5, with an easy game.

12...♗xh4 13.♗h7† ♔h8

Normally this position is reached with White having castled instead of playing h2-h3. I hardly need state that the difference favours Black. Here are a few brief lines:

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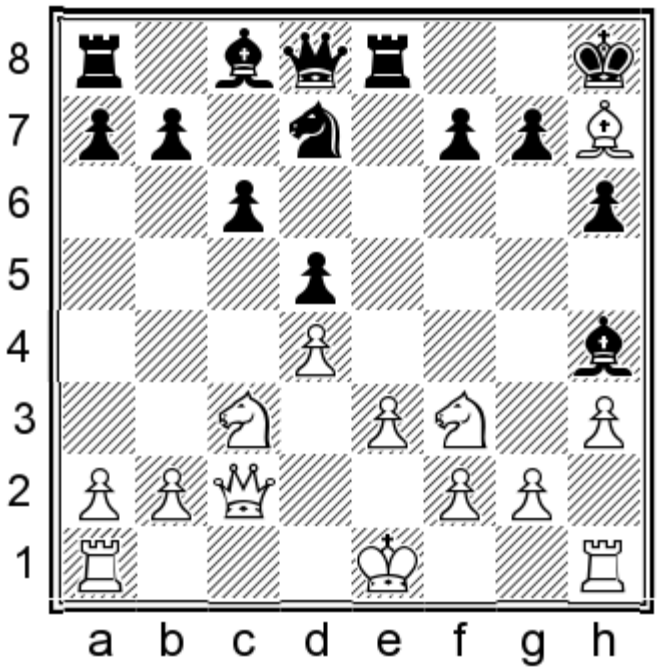


14.0-0

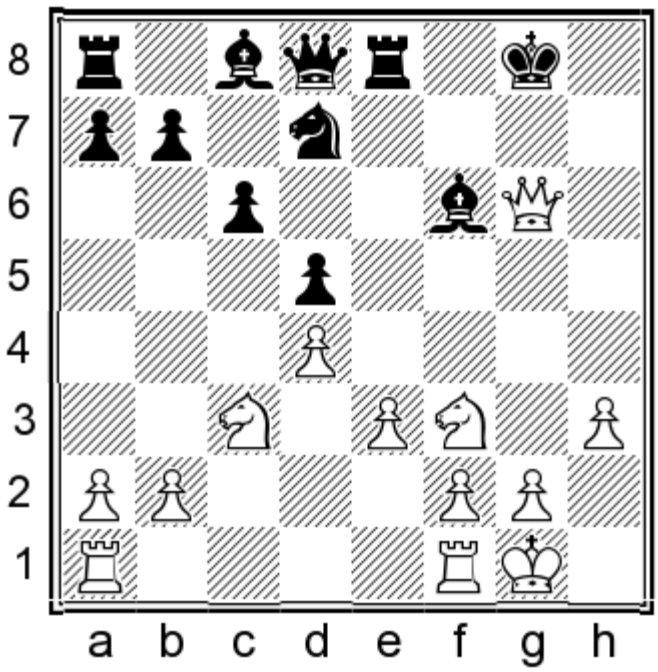
14.♗d3 ♖xe3† is another major difference!

14...g6!?

14...♗e7 15.♗d3 ♗d6 is another way to take advantage of White's inaccurate play. The minority attack is not that strong, while Black enjoys excellent attacking chances.

15.♗xg6 fxg6 16.♕xg6 ♗f6 17.♕xh6† ♔g8 18.♕g6†

White is obviously playing for a perpetual, but he won't get it after:



18...♗g7! 19.♘g5

Otherwise ...♘f8 comes.

19...♖e7 20.♕h7† ♔f8

With ...♘f6 coming next, Black easily defends on the kingside and his extra piece should outwork White's pawns in the long run.

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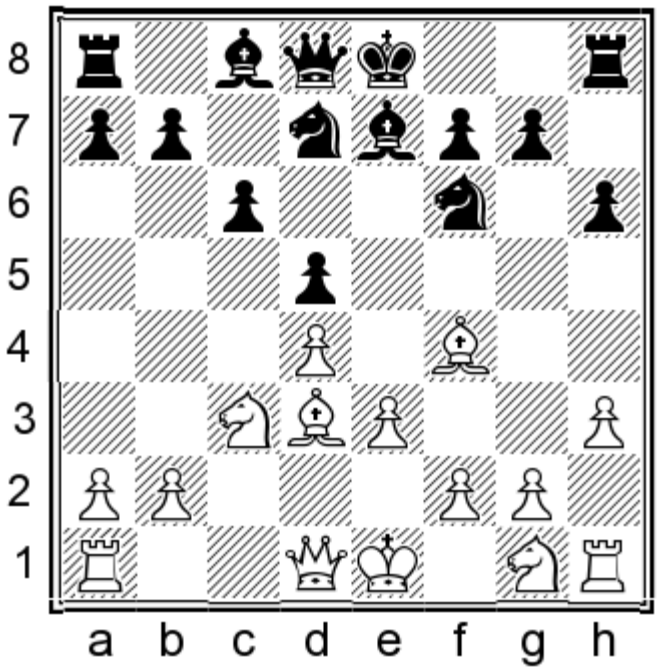


9...♘b6!

This seems like a good antidote, preparing ...♗d6 at a suitable moment.

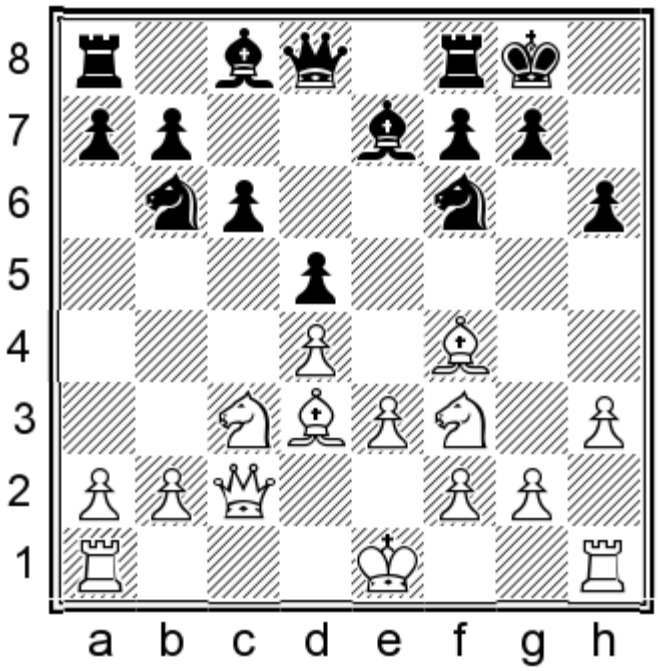
10.♘f3

10.♘ge2 ♗d6 looks fine for Black.

10...0-0

10...♗d6 11.♕c2 ♘c4 12.b3 ♗xf4 13.exf4 ♘d6 could also be considered.

11.♕c2



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11...♘c4!

According to my analysis, this move enables Black to solve his opening problems.

12.0-0N

This has not been played but it seems to me like the most obvious move.

12.0-0-0?! is risky in view of 12...♕a5⇄ followed by ...♗b4.

12.g4!? was played in Usachyi – Jahr, Verden 1999. One good reply is 12...♘d6!?N 13.♘e5 ♘de4 14.♘e2 ♘d7!?, with decent prospects for Black.

12.b3N

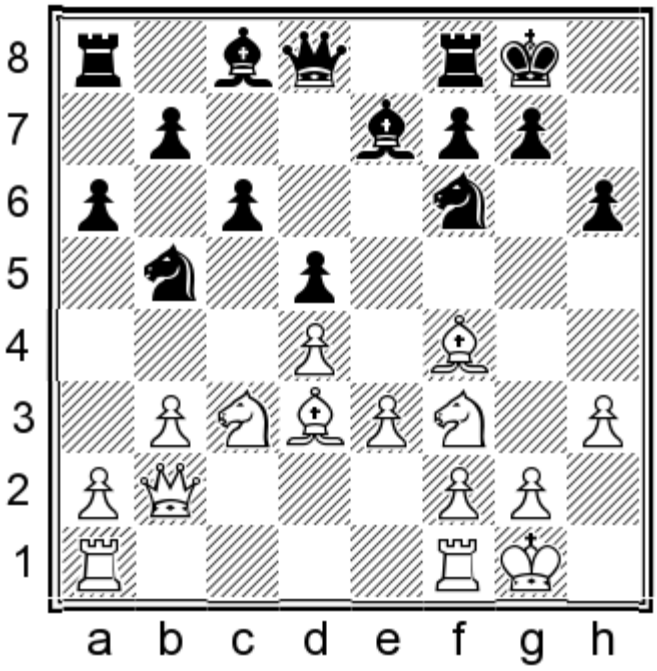
This is an important move to consider, but Black has an excellent reply:

12...♘a3!

I don't like 12...♘d6 13.0-0, when White can slowly build up with ♘e5, ♖ae1, ♗h2 and eventually e3-e4.

13.♕b2 a6! 14.0-0 ♘b5

Black wants to exchange the c3-knight.



15.♘e5

15.♘e2 ♖e8!? 16.♘e5 ♗a3 17.♕c2 ♕e7 gives Black a queenside bind.

15.♘a4 ♗a3 16.♕c2 is also fine for Black after 16...♘d7 or 16...♘d6.

15...♗a3 16.♕c2 ♘xc3 17.♕xc3 ♕e7

The position is close to equal, but I think Black has the easier game due to his queenside control.

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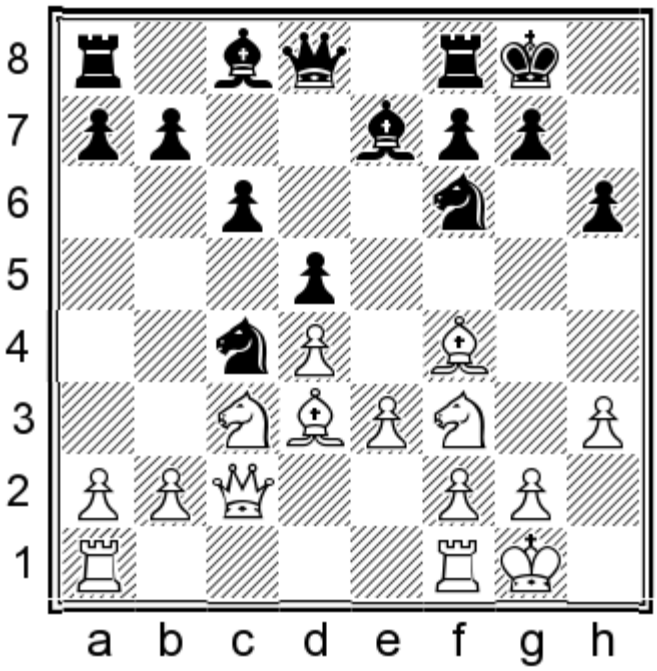


12...♖e8 13.♖ac1

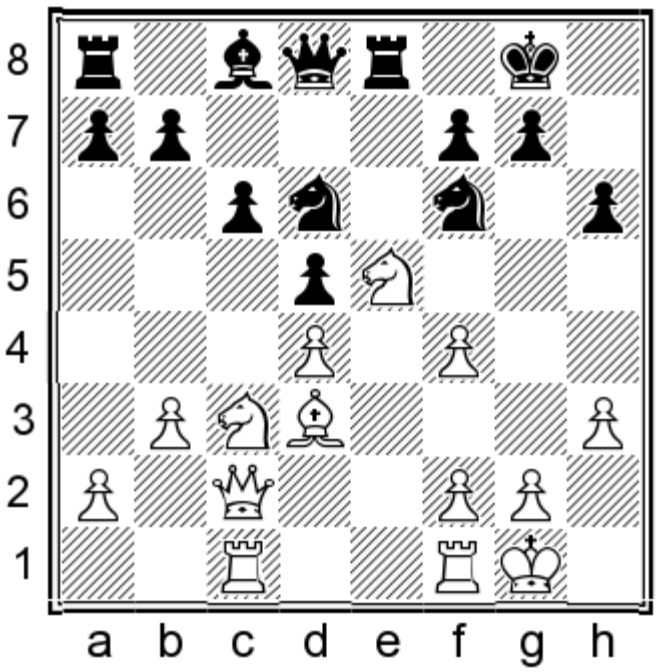
13.♗xc4 dxc4 14.♗h2 b5 gives Black excellent queenside counterplay and a pair of bishops to work with.

13...♗d6!

This would be the reply to most other non-forcing moves by White. Now we can see another advantage of the knight on c4, as it prevents the reply ♘e5.

14.♗xd6

14.b3 can be met by: 14...♗xf4 15.exf4 (15.bxc4 ♗c7=) 15...♘d6 16.♘e5



16...♘d7!? Just as in variation A31 above, the knight transfer to f8 is a good plan in this structure. (The engines recommend a more active approach: 16...♘fe4 17.♘e2 ♕h4 18.♖ce1 ♗f5=) 17.♘e2 ♘f8= The knight covers some

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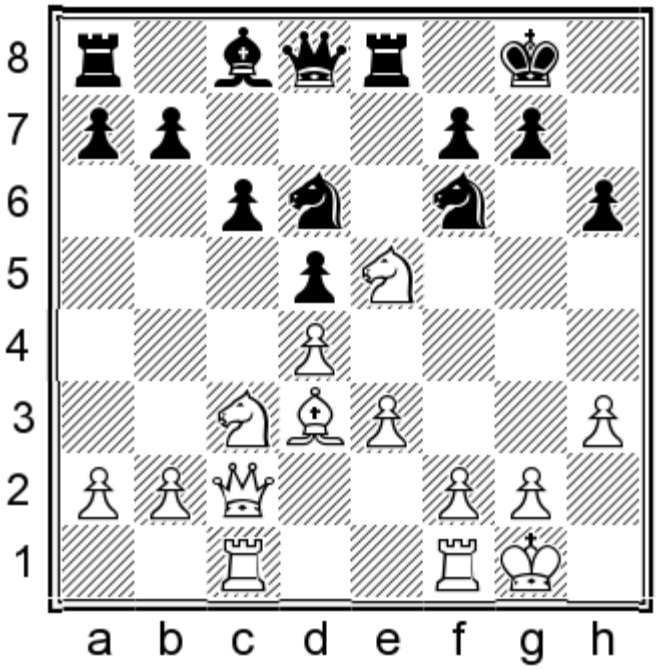
important squares on the kingside, enabling Black to follow up with ...f6 if needed.

14...♘xd6 15.♘e5

Otherwise Black will play ...♘fe4 and ...♗f5.



15...♘d7!

15...♘fe4?! 16.♘e2! is not so easy for Black, as 16...♗f5? loses material after 17.f3.

16.f4 f6! 17.♗g6!? ♘f8!?

17...fxe5 18.♗xe8 ♕xe8 leads to approximate equality.

18.♗xe8 ♕xe8∞

Black will pick up the e3-pawn, with good play for the exchange.

Having dealt with an assortment of sidelines, let us turn to an important plan for White, which will be the main focus of the present chapter.

B) Lines with ♕c2, ♗xe7 and 0-0-0

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0-0

Let us briefly note that 11.♘f3?! ♘f4! gives Black an easy game, as detailed at the start of the next chapter on page 150.

11.♘ge2 has no independent value after 11...♘b6, when 11.0-0-0 transposes to variation B1 below, and 11.0-0 is covered in the next chapter.

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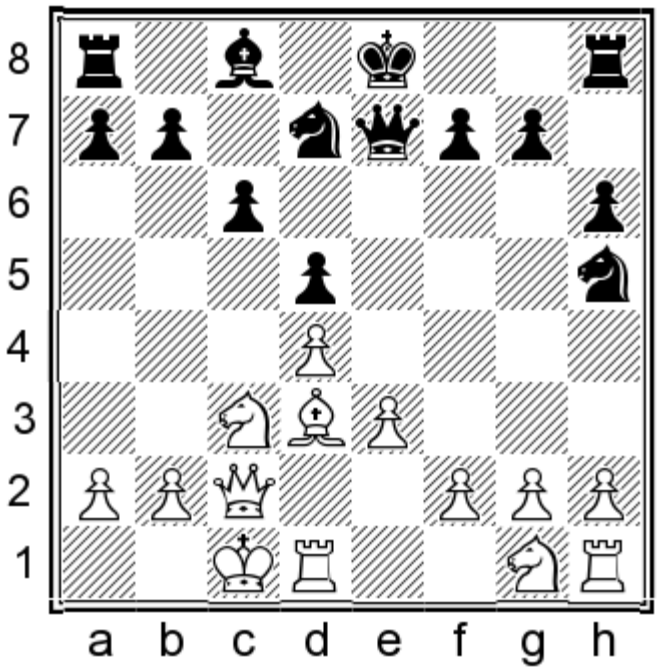

11...♘b6

Black will develop his bishop to e6 or d7, then castle queenside and play ...♔b8. These moves are simple and straightforward, although one needs to weigh up the minor pros and cons of both the e6- and d7-squares for the bishop. After safeguarding his king, Black usually brings the h5-knight back to f6, although in some situations it makes sense to delay this move, as will be explained.

Regarding the choice of square for the bishop, I generally prefer e6 over d7, for two reasons. Firstly, the bishop will support a knight coming to c4 if needed. And secondly, having the bishop on e6 makes it harder for White to carry out f2-f3 and e3-e4, as the reply ...dxe4 will open the diagonal for the bishop and the d-file for the rook, neither of which would have been the case with the bishop on d7. Having said that, there are some specific reasons to put the bishop on d7 against an early ♘ge2, which I will discuss below.

Assuming that the centre remains closed, Black can follow the prophylactic ...♔b8 with ...♖c8, bolstering the queenside and hinting at a possible ...c5. If Black is feeling cautious, he may consider the ...♗c8 retreat, in order to play ...♘fd7 without leaving the bishop on e6 as a target for a knight on f4 or a pawn marching to f5. Generally though, I would prefer to leave the bishop on e6. On pages 138 and 141, in the notes to Aronian – Carlsen, we will see a couple of good ways for Black to meet the f4-f5 threat.

A final idea to keep in mind is that Black may tweak his move order and avoid retreating the knight from h5 too quickly. This makes particular sense when White puts his king's knight on e2, in which case our knight will prevent the enemy knight from annoying our bishop with ♘f4. Keeping the knight on h5 also gives us additional options such as ...g6 followed by ...♘g7 and ...♗f5. This plan works best with the bishop on d7 rather than e6, for reasons shown in the Zhu Chen – Short game in the notes that follow.

Now that we know Black's approximate plan over the next few moves, we will look at some specific variations. We will start with some lines after **B1)** 12.♘ge2 and **B2)** 12.♔b1, followed by a couple of illustrative games dealing with **B3)** 12.♘f3!? (Game 37) and **B4)** 12.h3 (Game 38).

B1) 12.♘ge2 ♗d7!?

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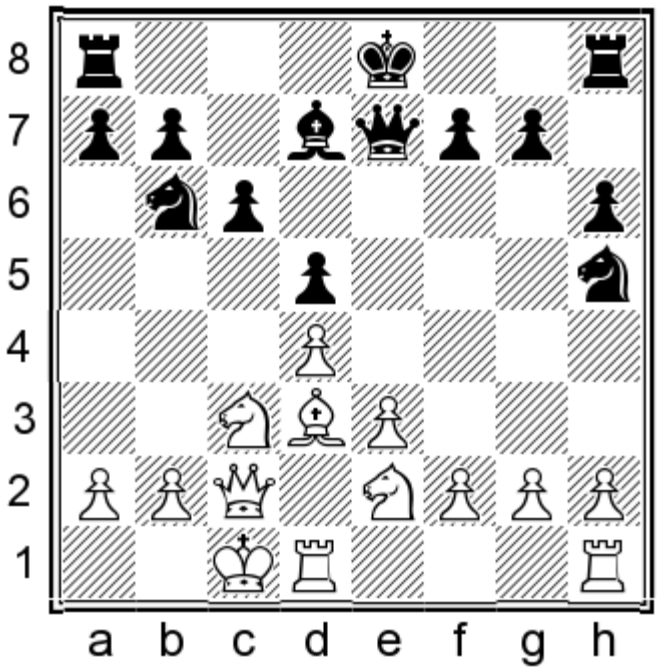
If Black is going to leave the knight on h5 for some time (which makes sense against White's last move, as ♘f4 will be discouraged), it makes sense to put the bishop on d7, for the reason shown in the Short game below. Moreover, with the knight on e2 rather than f3, the bishop on d7 cannot be harassed by any ♘e5 ideas.

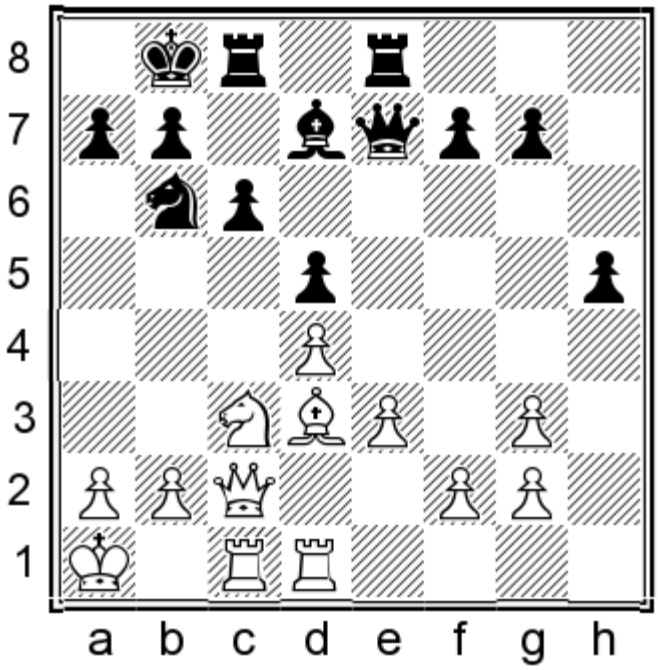


13.♔b1

Another instructive game continued:

13.♘g3 ♘xg3 14.hxg3 0-0-0 15.♔b1 ♔b8 16.♖c1 ♖he8 17.♔a1 ♖c8 18.♖hd1 h5

Black is comfortably equal. The main advantage behind keeping the bishop on d7 is shown after:



19.♘a4?! ♘xa4 20.♕xa4

If the bishop was on e6, White would have chances to develop some queenside pressure, but here Black can play: 20...c5 21.♕a3 c4!∓ 22.♕xe7 ♖xe7 23.♗e2 g6 24.♗f3

So far, Black had done everything right in Zhu Chen – Short, Jinan 2002. At this point his play can be improved

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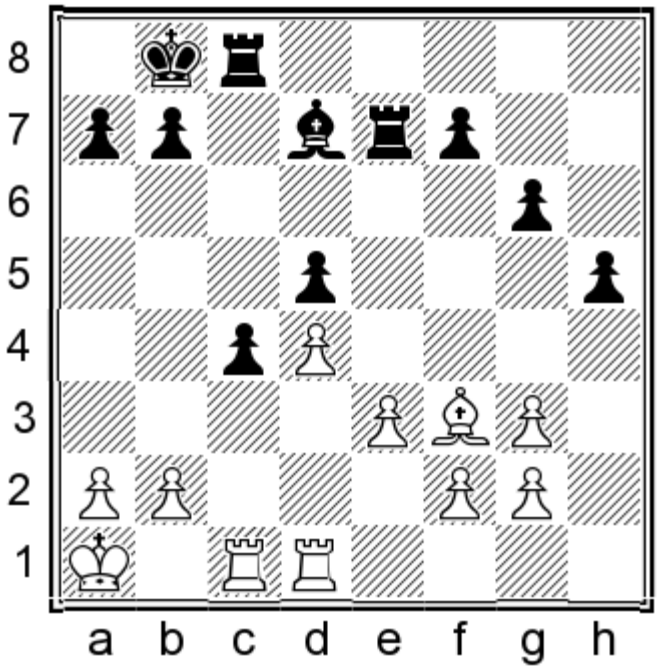
with:



24...♗e6N

In the game Black played 24...♗c6?! and White managed to hold the draw.

24...♗g4!?N is a second available improvement: 25.♗xg4 hxg4 26.♖h1 ♖e6 27.b3 b5∓ and White faces a long defence.

25.b3 b5 26.a4 a6

26...b4!? 27.bxc4 dxc4 28.d5 ♗f5 29.e4 leads to a lot of exchanges and most probably a forced draw, although White will have to be more careful.

27.♔b2 ♖b7!∓

White is under pressure; it is obvious that the bishop is much more active on e6 than it would have been on c6.

13...0-0-0 14.♘c1

This position was reached in Sorin – Hoffman, Buenos Aires 1999. Here I like the following plan, which was recommended by Marin:

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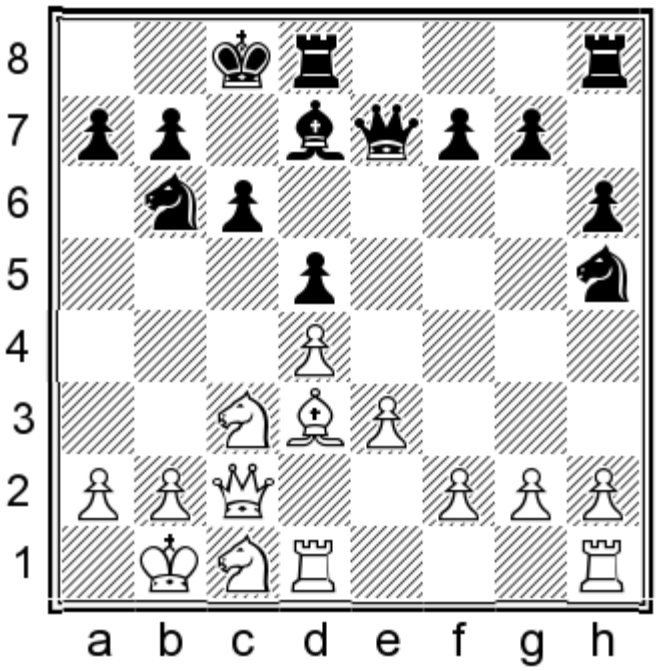


14...♔b8N 15.♘b3 ♗c8

By tucking the bishop out of the way, Black gets ready to challenge a knight on c5 with ...♘f6-d7.

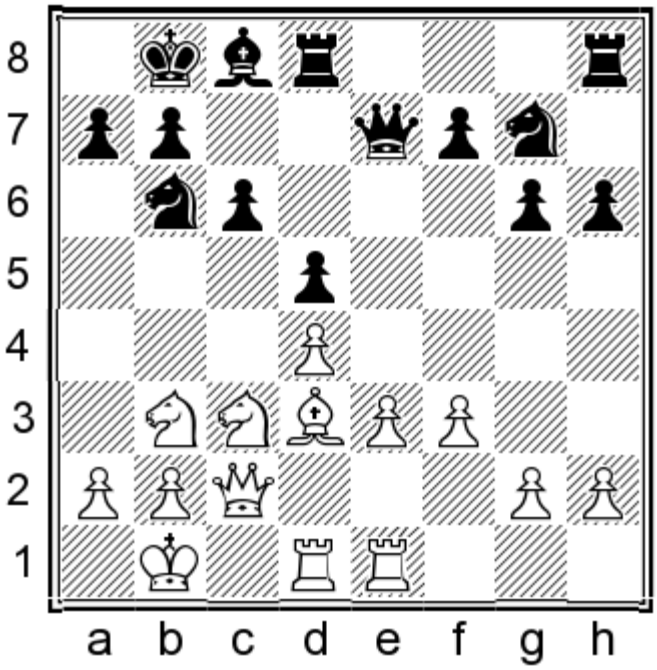
15...g6 also makes a lot of sense; this has actually been analysed in the introductory section (see *Meeting Kasparov's plan* on page 108), except that here the pawn is on h6 rather than h7, which doesn't affect much of what follows.

16.♖he1

Black can meet White's intended central expansion with:

16...g6 17.f3 ♘g7

17...f5!? is also interesting.



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18.e4 ♘e6! 19.e5

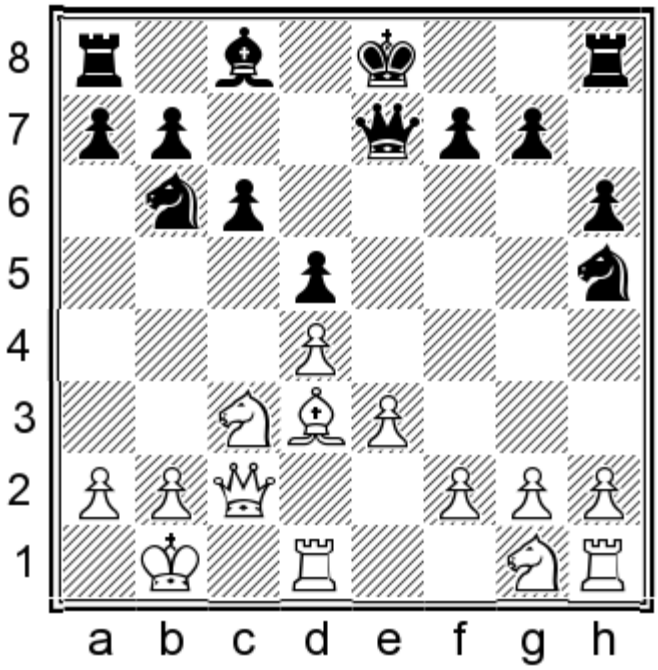
Otherwise White will have to think about ...dxe4, when the d4-pawn will be under pressure.

19...♘f4!

Black intends to exchange on d3 and establish his bishop on f5, where it can be stabilized by ...h5 if necessary.

B2) 12.♔b1

By making a useful waiting move, White waits for Black to determine his set-up before deciding whether to put the knight on f3 or e2.



12...♘f6!?

Black also plays flexibly.

If instead Black plays 12...♗d7, intending to keep the knight on h5 for a bit longer, White can play 13.♘f3!, reaching a set-up where I would prefer to have the bishop on e6 (or g4, as in Game 37 below). Play may continue 13...0-0-0 14.♘e5 when White may claim a slight edge.

A good alternative to the main line is:

12...♗e6 13.♘ge2

13.♘f3 ♘f6 transposes to the note to Black's 12th move in Game 37 below, where my conclusion is that Black is fine.

13...0-0-0

13...♘f6 leads to our main line below.

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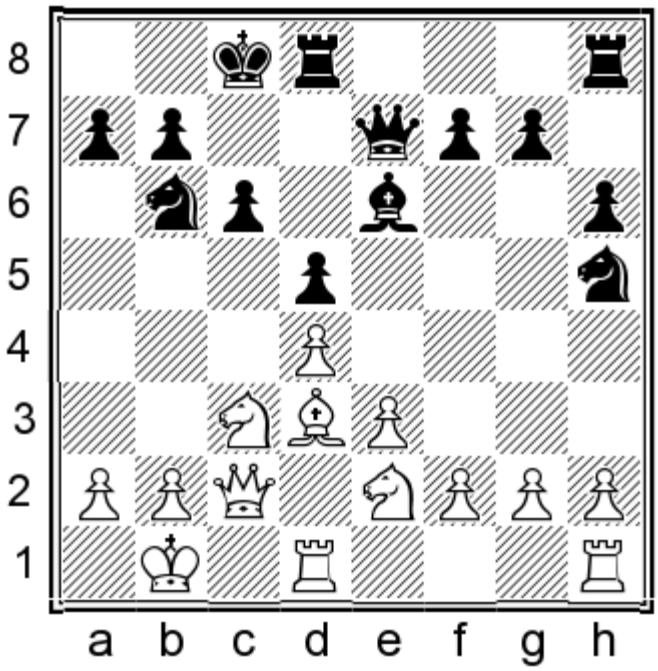

14.♘c1

14.f3 can be met by 14...♔b8!?, intending to drop the bishop back to c8 and target the e3-pawn. 15.g4 ♘f6 Black is doing fine.

14...g6!?

14...♔b8 is a good move here too, but I want to show a slightly different plan which is only available when Black keeps the knight on h5.

15.♘b3 ♘g7

Now ...♗f5 is an option. Note that the knight can also go to e8 and d6, just as it can do from f6.

13.♘ge2 ♗e6!

In variation B1 above, I showed that the bishop could work well on d7 when White went for a ♘ge2 set-up. However, the inclusion of the moves ♔b1 and ...♘f6 changes things slightly, and I find the text move a good choice here.

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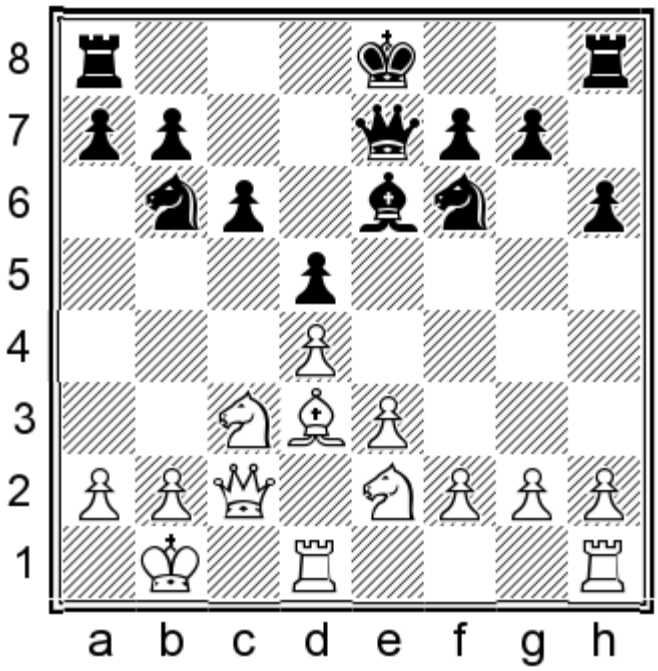
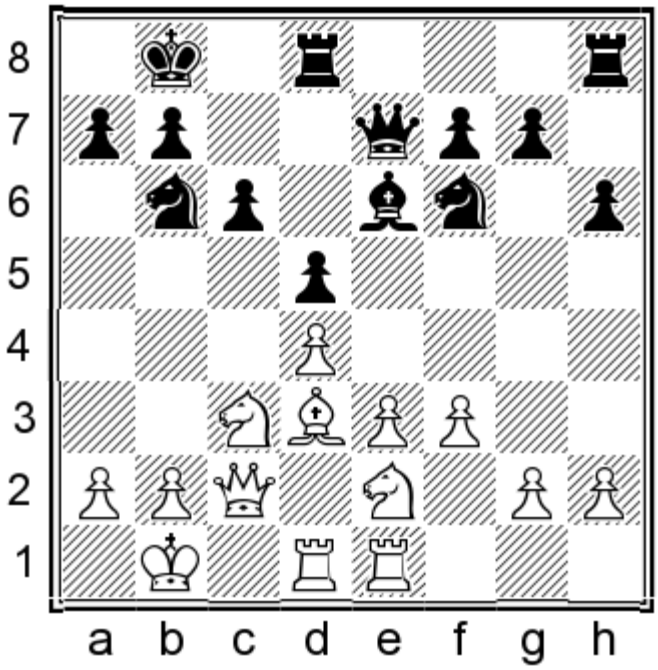


14.♘c1!?N

White has several other possibilities:

14.h3 0-0-0 15.g4 ♔b8 16.♘g3 ♘e8!? was fine for Black in Jojua – Sanikidze, Tbilisi 2016.

14.f3 0-0-0 15.♖he1 (15.g4?! ♗d7!∓ highlights the weakness on e3) 15...♔b8



16.g4 (16.♘f4 ♗c8 and White will have to watch out for ...g5 ideas) 16...♘e8 17.♘g3 g6 18.h3 ♘d6⇄ Black can look for counterplay with ...♕f6 and/or ...h5, and may also drop his bishop back to c8 at some point in order to open the e-file for his pieces.

Finally, 14.♘f4N is a natural move to consider, but 14...♗d7! is a good reply. (14...0-0-0!? is fine too) Black can afford to lose a tempo like this because the knight is not doing much on f4. 15.♖he1 0-0-0 16.f3

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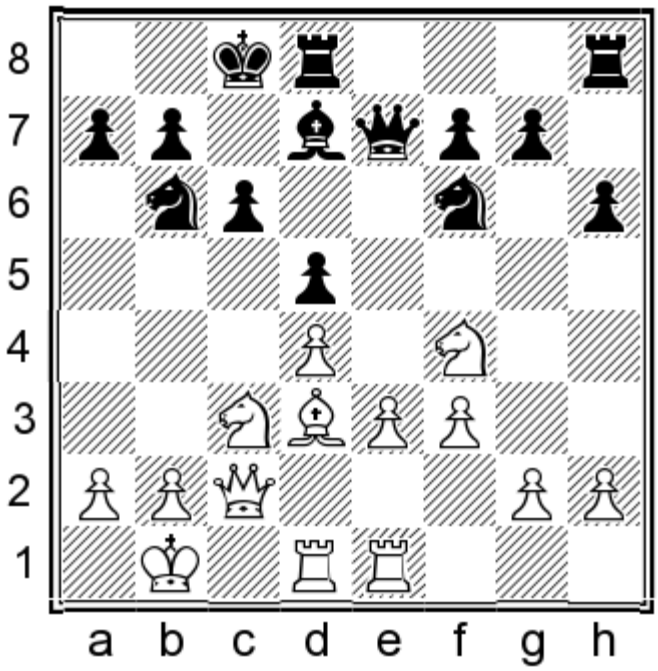
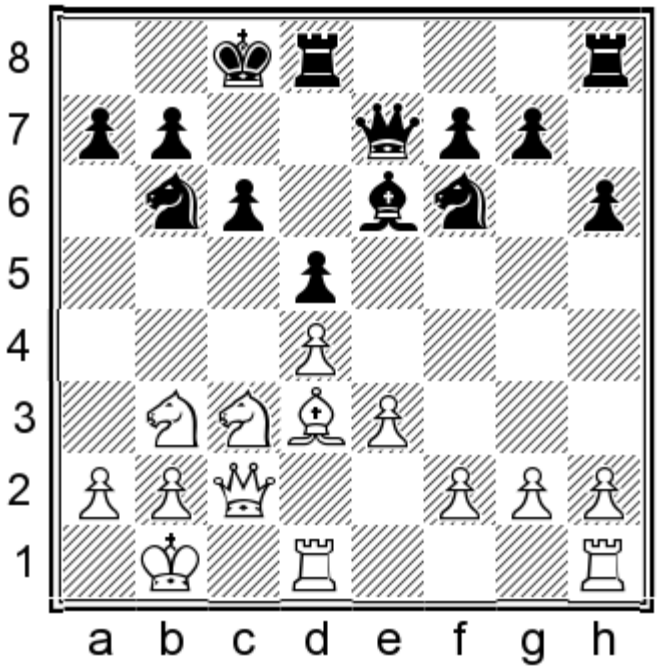


16...g5! 17.♘h3 ♕d6⇄ Black’s position seems more pleasant to me.

The text move is technically a novelty here, but it has been played in the almost identical position with the bishop on d7, and I consider it a natural choice.

14...0-0-0 15.♘b3



This knight manoeuvre is absolutely typical. By the way, White can go for a similar plan in the ♘f3 lines, as the horse can hop to b3 via the d2-square. See, for instance, Game 38, where Tomashevsky does exactly this against Adams.

15...♔b8 16.♖he1

My analysis up to this point has proceeded in parallel to the game Moiseenko – A. Mastrovasilis, Gjakova 2016,

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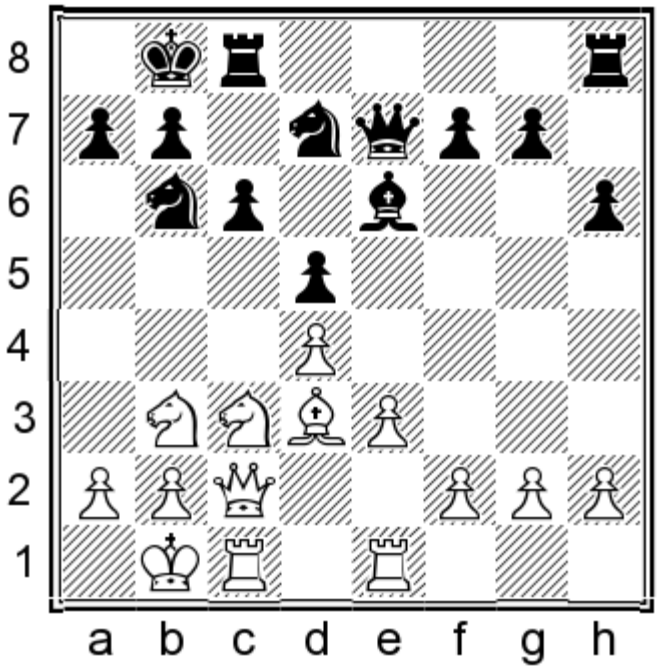
except that I have recommended placing the bishop on my preferred e6-square rather than d7. Now, Athanasios played 16...♗c8, a move which is reasonable in our line as well, but I prefer the following plan.

16...♘fd7!

Borrowing an idea from Carlsen, as seen in Game 37 below. The knight controls the c5-square and supports a possible ...c5 break, while also opening a path for the queen towards the kingside.

17.♖c1 ♖c8!?

Another typical move, bolstering the queenside but also preparing future counterplay.



18.f3

This is a logical move which Moiseenko used in the aforementioned game against Mastrovasilis, but it is less effective here.

18...h5!?

18...c5!? is also possible; after 19.dxc5 ♘xc5 20.♘xc5 ♖xc5 21.♕f2 ♕c7 22.h3 ♖c8 23.♘e2 ♘c4 Black has excellent counterplay in return for the isolated d-pawn. This line illustrates a few important themes, such as winning a tempo against the undefended h2-pawn and utilizing the c4-square with a knight.

19.e4

This leads nowhere, but how else can White make progress?

19.h3 can be met by 19...h4. Black can continue to make a bunch of useful waiting moves like ...g6, as well as ...♔a8 and/or ...a6, before thinking about the ...c5 break.

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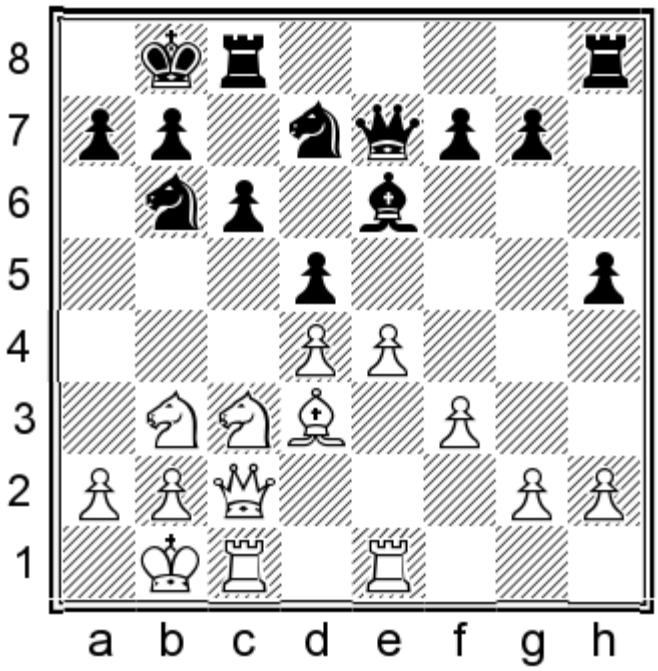

19...dxe4 20.♘xe4 ♗xb3!? 21.♕xb3 ♖he8

The position remains objectively balanced, but I'd prefer to be Black due to his long-term prospects against the IQP.

B3) 12.♘f3!?

GAME 37

Levon Aronian – Magnus Carlsen

Baden-Baden 2015

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2

The players used a different move order to get here, but I have adapted it for our purposes.

8...h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0-0 ♘b6 12.♘f3!?

A tricky decision by Aronian.

Let me remind you that 12.♘ge2 and 12.♔b1 have been considered in the analysis above, while the most popular 12.h3 can be found in the next illustrative game.

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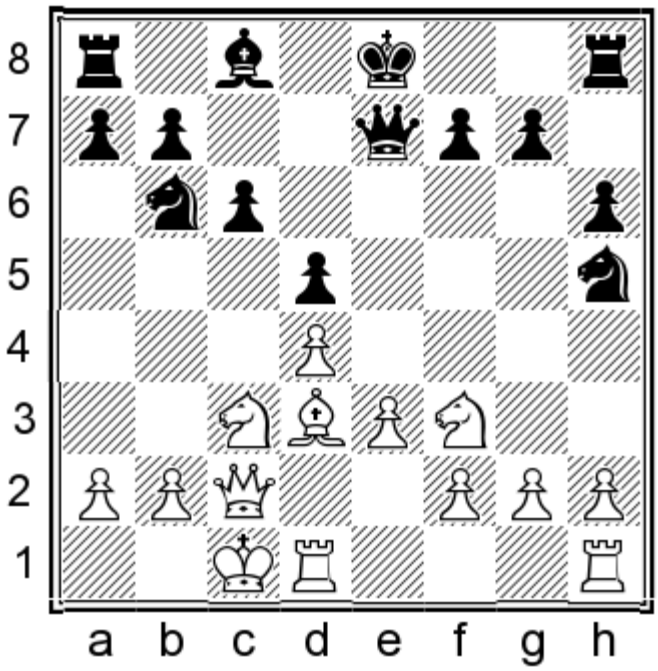

12...♗g4!?

Carlsen is a principled player and he commented after the game that, since White didn't play h2-h3, he felt that he should play this way without thinking all that deeply about his decision. Commenting live on this game, Nigel Short – an experienced QGD adherent – indicated that 12...♗e6 is possible, as White will almost certainly have to play h2-h3 at some point in the future. One reason will be to prevent counterplay with ...♘g4 in some lines; another point is to put the pawn on a protected square to avoid being attacked, for instance by a queen on d6. Moreover, White sometimes looks to advance his pawns to f3 and e4, or f4 and g4, both of which will usually require preparation with h2-h3.

Another game continued 12...♘f6!? 13.♔b1 ♗e6, at which point White found nothing better than 14.h3 0-0-0 15.♘e5, but after 15...♘fd7 Black was at least equal in Kalesis – D. Mastrovasilis, Porto Rio 2015. Later Black was able to gain space on both sides of the board, advancing his pawns to g5 and h4 before breaking on the queenside with ...c5.

All in all, I'd say that White gains little by omitting the h2-h3 move. Black can either play the position normally like Mastrovasilis as in the example above, or take the opportunity to put the bishop on g4 as Carlsen did. I see no advantage for White in either case, although there are a couple of traps coming up – which Carlsen easily avoids, of course.

13.♔b1

Aronian continues playing according to the standards of this variation.

White can practically force Black to take on f3 with:

13.h3?! ♗xf3 14.gxf3

However, Black should be happy to see such a change. The open g-file isn't a big problem and the doubled pawns may prove weak in the long run. For example:

14...0-0-0 15.♖hg1 g6 16.f4

White should play for the f4-f5 break, otherwise Black will stabilize the position with ...♔b8, ...♘c8-d6 and ...♘g7-f5, after which White will be left only with weaknesses.

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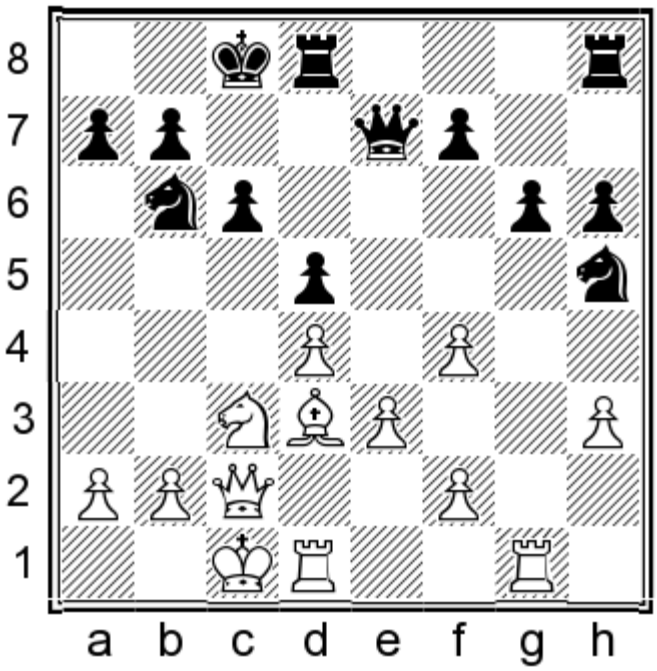


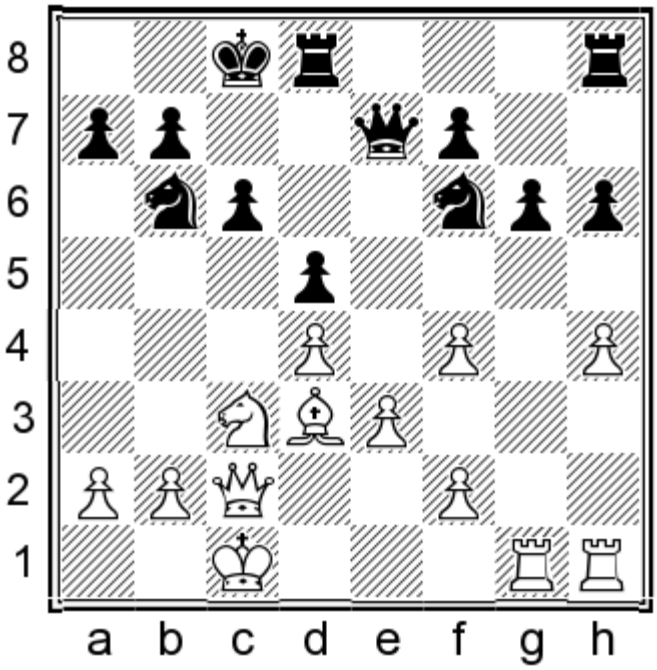
16...♘f6 17.h4

White has to play this in order to play f4-f5 without allowing the response ...g5.

17...♔b8 18.f5 gxf5 19.♗xf5 ♘e8!

Followed by ...♘d6, when Black is absolutely fine. Note that there are no black pieces on the light squares, so the unopposed bishop has no real targets to attack.

13.♖dg1!? is an interesting suggestion by Jan Gustafsson. By preparing ♘e5, White provokes the exchange on f3 while making a more useful move than h2-h3. Nevertheless, after 13...♗xf3 14.gxf3 g6 Black is still perfectly okay, for instance: 15.f4 ♘f6 16.h4 0-0-0



17.f5 Once again, the correct response is 17...gxf5 18.♗xf5† ♔b8 followed by either ...♘c4-d6 or ...♘e8-d6, with a fine position for Black.

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13...♘f6!

After the game Carlsen admitted he got a bit annoyed at the fact that 13...0-0-0?? was impossible due to 14.♗f5†.

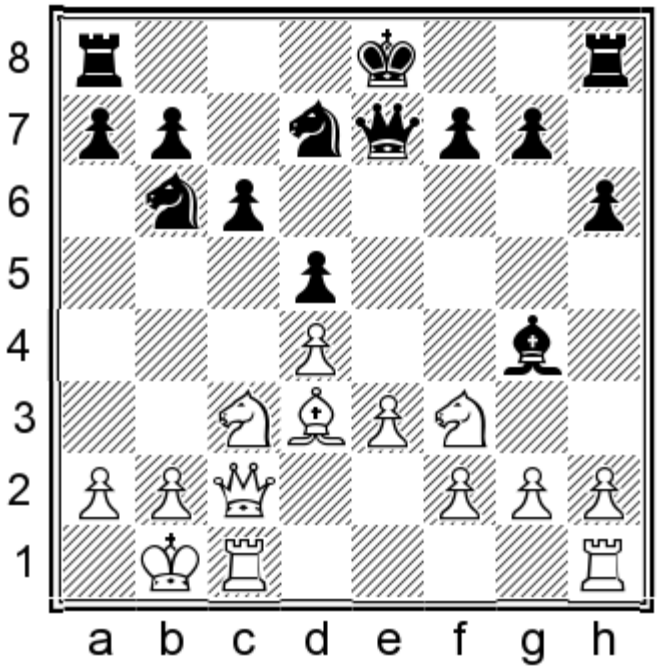
13...0-0? would also have been a bad idea, as 14.♖dg1! gives White a much-improved version of Gustafsson's idea. White threatens ♘e5 followed by a kingside pawn storm, and after 14...♗xf3 15.gxf3± White has an easy plan of attacking the black king.

14.♖c1 ♘fd7!

Aronian admitted after the game that he "saw nothing for White" after this precise move.

Aronian calculated lines such as 14...0-0-0 15.♘e5 ♗e6 16.♘b5! ♔b8 17.♕xc6!, and 14...♗xf3 15.gxf3 0-0-0 16.♘a4! ♘xa4 17.♕xa4 ♔b8 18.♖c3 ♘e8 19.♖a3 a6 20.♗xa6! bxa6 21.♖c1; in both cases White is winning. Aronian's lines are instructive because they show that Black should be alert about his queenside defences, and not take it for granted that castling will lead to safety.

Carlsen thought that 14...♘c4 might be a playable alternative. His main line continued 15.e4 ♗xf3 16.gxf3 0-0 17.♖cg1 b5, but Aronian had spotted the excellent move 18.♕c1!, when White's attack is amazingly strong. One illustrative line is 18...♔h8 19.♖xg7! ♔xg7 20.♖g1† ♔h7 21.e5† and White smashes through.



15.♔a1

This is the Tukmakov plan, as featured in the introductory section on page 110. Aronian explained that he wanted to play ♘d2 and b2-b4.

15.h4 was his second idea, intending ♘h2. My analysis continues: 15...0-0-0 16.♘h2 ♗e6 17.f4 ♘f6 (17...g6?! is met by 18.h5; but 17...f5!? appears fully playable, albeit somewhat ugly)

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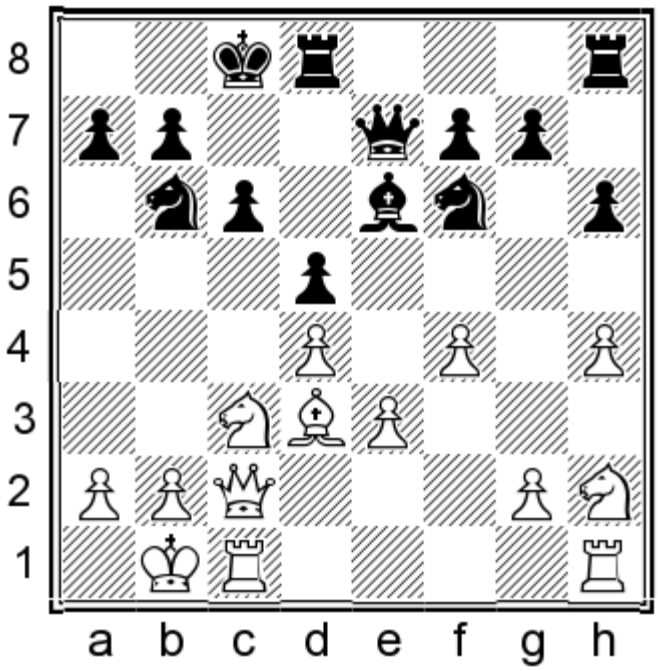

18.f5 ♗d7 19.♘f3 ♔b8 (19...h5!?) 20.♘e5 ♗c8 21.g4 ♘bd7= Black has a solid position, and if 22.g5?! ♘e8! White will find himself overextended.

Another thematic idea is:

15.♘d2

White intends to bring the knight to b3 and a5. However, Aronian pointed out that he would have to spend additional time on a2-a3 to prevent the reply ...♕b4; and when White finally carries out his plan, Black will be able to counter with ...c5, when the knight does nothing at a5. Let us see a line which illustrates this train of thought:

15...♗e6!

The most flexible. Black will still most probably castle queenside but, if White does something crazy on that flank, short castling remains an option.

For example, after 15...0-0-0 White has the interesting option of 16.a4!?. If White tries the same idea before Black has committed his king, he can simply reply with ...♕b4 followed by ...0-0.

16.♘b3 0-0-0

This is the normal plan but it is worth pointing out that 16...0-0!? is not stupid at all, as most of White's pieces are on the queenside and the b3-knight makes an inviting target for ...a5-a4.

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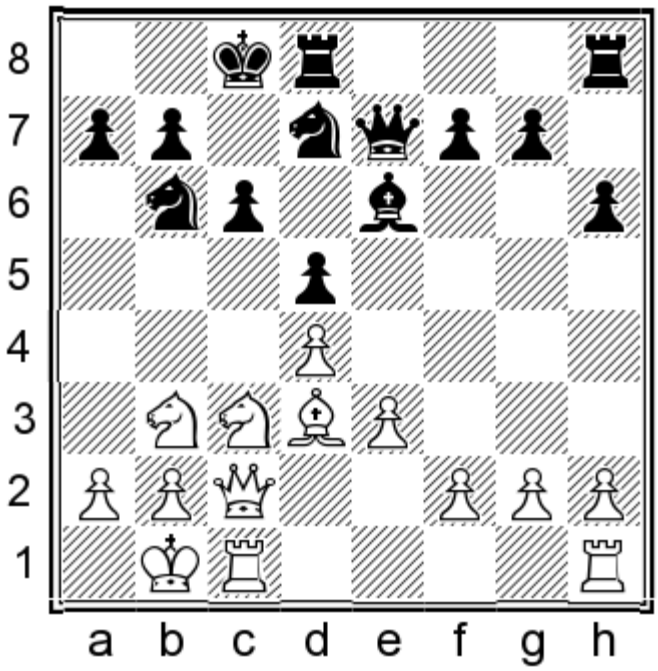

17.a3

17.♘a5?! allows 17...♕b4 as per Aronian's comment.

17...♔b8 18.♘a5 ♖c8! 19.♘a4 ♘xa4 20.♕xa4 ♖c7!?

Black intends either ...♕g5, with typical kingside counterplay, or ...♖hc8 followed by ...c5. (The immediate 20...c5!? could also be considered.)

15...0-0-0 16.♘d2 ♔b8 17.♘a4

Black is comfortable after this, but Aronian explained that he saw nothing better and he at least wanted to be safe rather than sorry.

If White can find a useful move, Black is not threatening yet to counterattack on the kingside. For example, an instructive continuation given by Short is 17.a3 ♕h4?! (17...♖c8! is much better) 18.h3 ♗e6 19.f4 (or 19.g3 ♕f6 20.f4) and White is better.

Black should therefore retreat his bishop to e6 before undertaking anything active on the kingside; but how can White strengthen his position in the meantime? 17.h3 ♗e6 is natural (since h2-h3 is useful anyway) but what is White supposed to do next? 18.f4 is an obvious try but it leads nowhere after: 18...g6 (18...f6!? is also playable) 19.g4 ♘f6 (19...f5!?) and now 20.f5?! gxf5 21.gxf5 ♗c8 favours Black, who can follow up with ...♘e8-d6.

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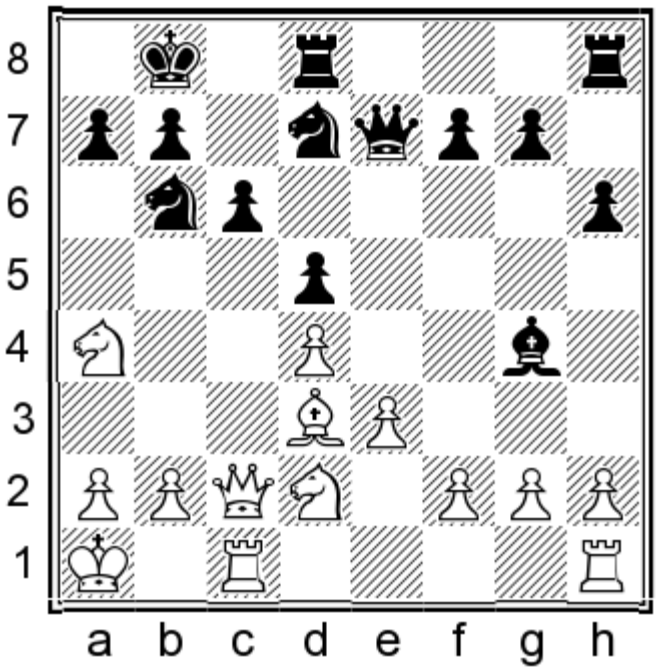
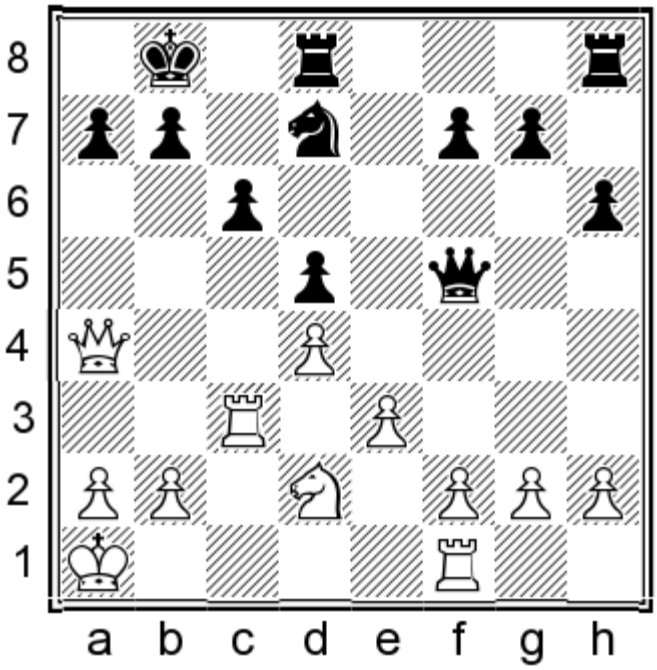


17...♘xa4 18.♕xa4 ♕h4!?

This typical counterattacking move leads to a good position.

18...♘b6 seems to win a tempo in order to play the knight to d6, but after 19.♕a5 ♘c8 20.♘b3 ♘d6 21.♘c5 both players thought that ♖c3-a3 might be annoying. The cold-blooded machine gives 21...♗f5! and demonstrates that Black is still fine; nevertheless, there is no need to go down this path at all.

18...♕f6! seems like the most precise move of all. Both players saw the line 19.♖hf1 ♗f5 20.♗xf5 ♕xf5 21.♖c3 but during the post-mortem Carlsen spotted the strong:



21...♘b6! The knight is ready to defend via c8 if needed, while on the other flank ...♕g4 will annoy White.

19.♖cf1

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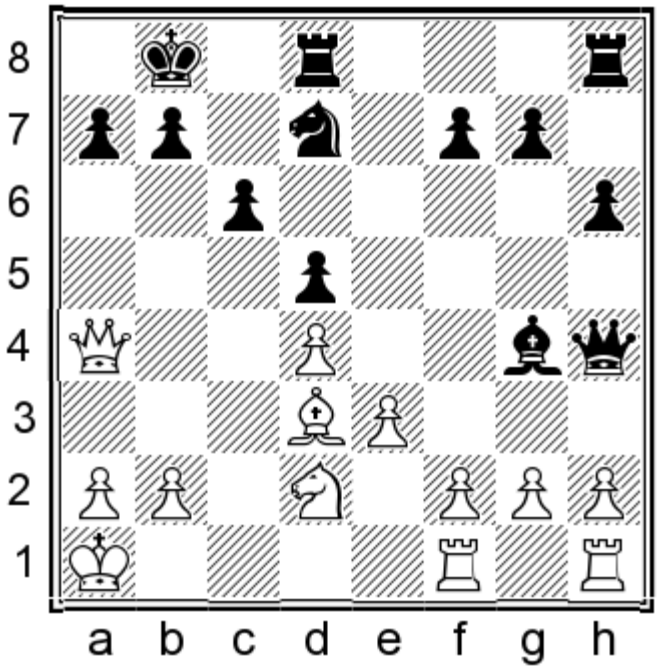
This looks awkward but White has nothing better.

19.g3?! ♕f6 20.f3 ♗f5 21.e4? (21.♗xf5 ♕xf5 followed by ...♖he8 is excellent for Black) The text move is the most forcing option, and thus the first line that both sides should consider, but it is easy to refute: 21...♘b6! 22.♕c2 dxe4 23.fxe4 ♕xd4–+



19...♕f6!

Having lured the white rook to a passive square, Carlsen prepares ...♗f5.

20.♕c2 ♖c8!

20...♗h5!? followed by ...♗g6 is far from stupid, but Carlsen's choice is both thematic and strong. Black is preparing a timely ...c5.

21.♘b3

Aronian prevents that plan and improves his knight, which was not great on d2.

21...♖c7!?

This is the kind of multipurpose move that one should always expect from Carlsen. The rook stands slightly better on c7 than on c8, as it defends the 7th rank and prepares to double rooks on either the c- or the e-file. By putting extra force behind a possible ...c5 break, I imagine Carlsen may have been trying to provoke ♘c5 followed by dxc5. This way White would prevent the pawn break but reduce his central control.

21...g6!? is a good alternative, with the same ideas as in the note to Black's next move. I would say the move works even better with the rook on c7 though.

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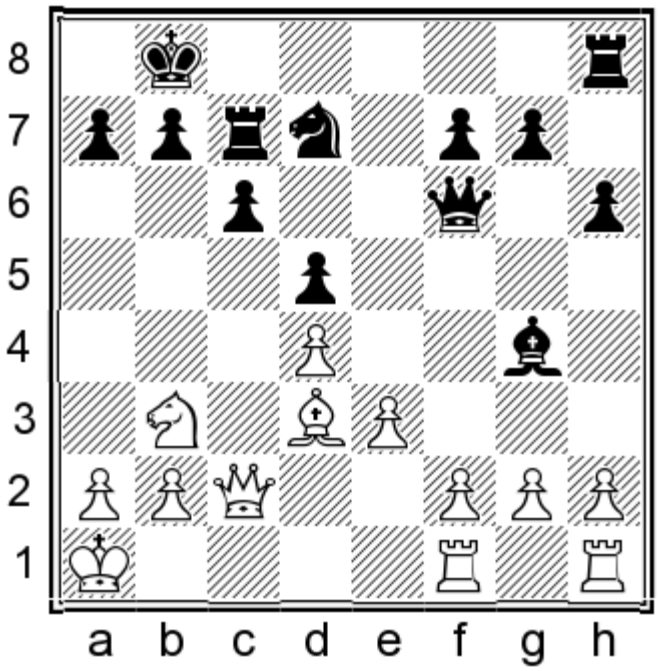

22.♖c1

Aronian reacts solidly, and refuses to be provoked into worsening his position.

22.♘c5?! ♘xc5 23.♕xc5 (23.dxc5 ♖e8 is also pleasant for Black) 23...♗f5! is slightly better for Black, who will look to develop pressure on the kingside with ...♖he8, ...♖c7-e7 and ...h5-h4.

22...♖hc8

Carlsen sticks to his original plan but his move is not the most precise.

He could have pressed for an advantage with:

22...g6!

The World Champion mentioned this improvement himself after the game. Short described Black's subtle yet thematic plan of advancing his h-pawn to improve his prospects in a future endgame. Another Scandinavian, Bent Larsen, was one of the biggest aficionados of this technique, so Carlsen must have known all about it. A sample line goes:

23.h3

White will have to play this at some point, as it would be a major concession to allow the black pawn to go all the way to h3.

After 23.f3 ♗e6 Black will pushes his h-pawn, patiently waiting for White to commit with f3-f4, as the e3-e4 push is not great either.

23...♗e6 24.f4?!

This might look an active attractive option for White, but it is exactly the move Black was waiting for.

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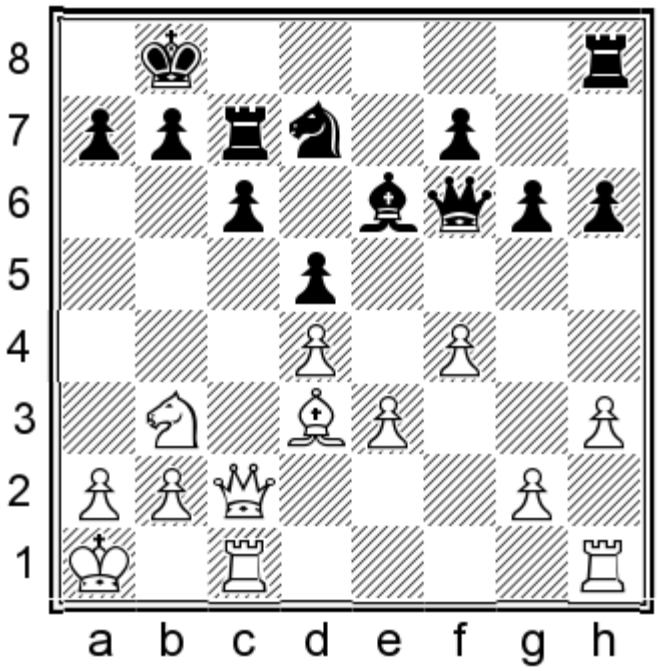


24...♗f5! 25.♗xf5 ♕xf5 26.♕xf5

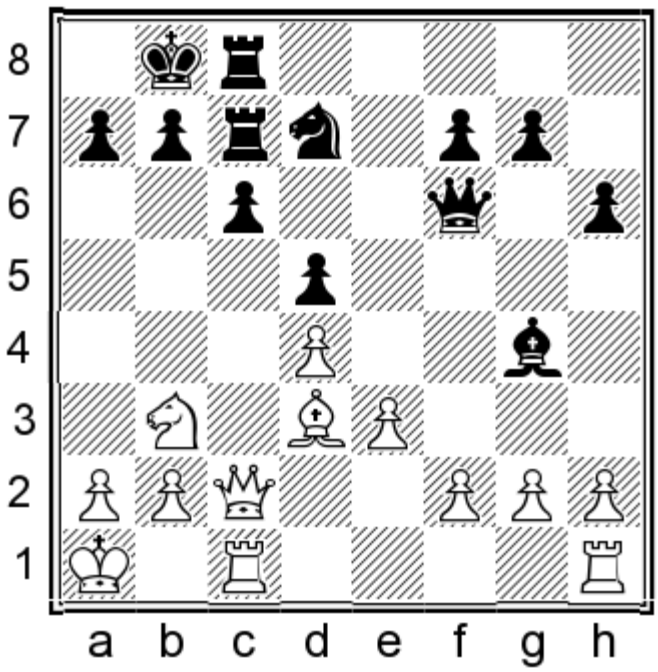
Otherwise ...♖e8 will be strong.

26...gxf5 27.g4 ♘f6! 28.gxf5 ♖e7 29.♖he1 ♖he8 30.♖c3

Now that White is unable to challenge for the g-file, Black can play:

30...♖g8

With some advantage, as given by Short. The machine's suggestion of 30...♘e4 31.♖d3 ♘d6 is also strong of course.



23.h3 ♗e6 24.♖hf1

Carlsen demonstrated the following line in the post-mortem: 24.f4 g6 (24...♘b6 25.f5 ♗d7 26.g4 ♖e8 followed by ...♘c8 is also viable for Black) 25.g4 c5 (25...♘b6!? is possible) 26.♘xc5 (26.f5?! ♗xf5! 27.gxf5 c4∓) 26...♘xc5 27.dxc5 ♖xc5 28.♕xc5 ♖xc5 29.♖xc5 ♗d7 30.♖hc1 ♕h4!? (30...♗c6?! can be met by 31.♗b5!) 31.♗f1 ♕g3 Black is no

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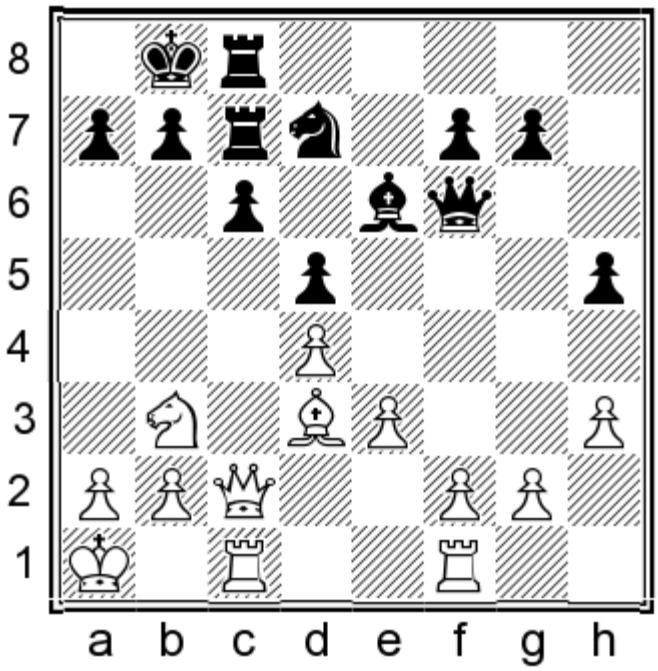
worse according to Carlsen.

24...h5?!

This is not a terrible move in itself, but it was played without taking into consideration Aronian's excellent reply.

24...c5 would have led to balanced play, rather like in the line above, but the now familiar idea of 24...g6! looks best of all, as pointed out by Carlsen after the game.



25.f4! g6

25...♘b6!? was not bad.

26.f5! gxf5 27.g4!

Of course Aronian avoids 27.♗xf5?! ♕g5!∓.

27...hxg4 28.hxg4 ♘b6

28...f4? 29.g5! is one of the main points of Aronian's idea.

29.gxf5 ♗d7 30.♘c5 ♖e8 31.♖ce1

White has taken over the initiative. However, if Black defends well than the future belongs to him, as he has the better structure.

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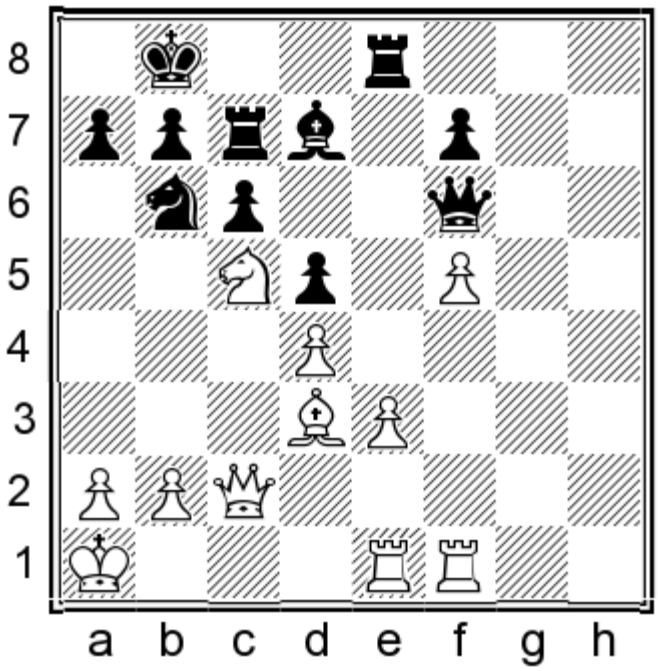
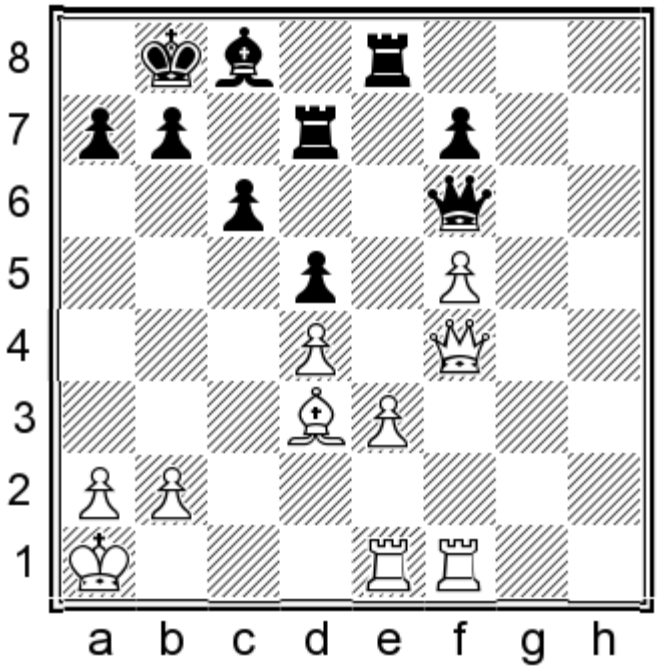


31...♕d6?!

Carlsen criticized this choice.

31...♗c8 32.♕f2 (neither 32.e4? ♕xd4 nor 32.♕h2 ♖h8 helps White) 32...♘d7 33.♘xd7† This was Aronian's intention, trying to cause some practical problems but not really playing for an edge. (The alternative is 33.e4 ♘xc5 34.dxc5 dxe4 [34...♖e5!?] 35.♖xe4 ♖ce7 36.♖fe1 ♖xe4 37.♗xe4 ♕e5 38.♖e2 ♕c7 and Black will be safe after ...♗d7, ...f6 and ...♖e5.) 33...♖xd7 34.♕f4† Now the simplest defence for Black is:



34...♕d6! (Aronian thought that 34...♔a8 35.♖h1 might be annoying for Black, although the engines say "0.00" as expected...) 35.♕xd6† ♖xd6 36.♖h1 ♔c7! Followed by ...♖f6 and Black has no problems whatsoever.

32.a3 ♗c8 33.♕f2 ♘d7 34.e4! dxe4

Carlsen's first thought was to play 34...♘xc5 35.dxc5 ♕d8, but he realized that after 36.exd5! (36.e5!? sets its own

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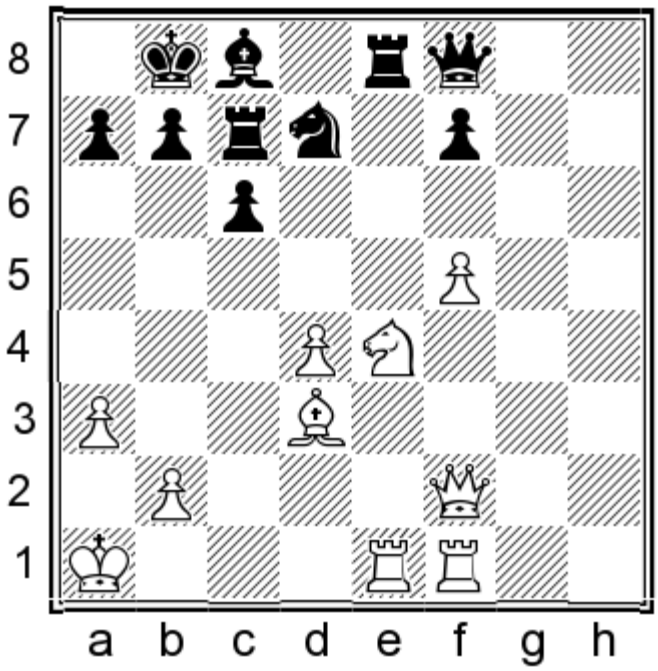
problems, but 36...♖ce7! seems an adequate reply) 36...♖xe1† 37.♖xe1 ♕xd5 38.♗b1 Black's position is not good.

35.♘xe4 ♕f8!

Forced. White has some initiative, but if Black manages to play ...♘b6 and ...♘d5 he will be able to look at the future with optimism.

35...♕h6? is refuted by 36.♕g3! followed by ♘d6, when Black is completely tied up.



36.♖g1!

Other moves exist but this is perhaps the trickiest, especially as Carlsen only had a couple of minutes remaining.

36...♖d8

36...♘b6 37.♘f6 (37.f6!? ♘d5 38.♗c4 followed by ♖g7 is also threatening) 37...♖xe1† 38.♕xe1 ♕d6? 39.♕e5! ♕xe5 40.dxe5 ♖e7 41.♖e1 is what Aronian was hoping for.

37.♕h2?

This throws away White's advantage.

Aronian should have preferred 37.f6! ♘b6 and now either 38.♖g7 or 38.♗c2 would have maintained a dangerous initiative for White.

37...♕h8! 38.♕xh8 ♖xh8 39.♖g7 ♘b6 40.♘f6 ♖d8 41.♖g4 c5 42.♘e8 ♖cd7 43.dxc5 ♖xd3 44.cxb6 axb6∓

Black is slightly better and, typically for Carlsen, tried for another twenty moves before finally agreeing to a draw.

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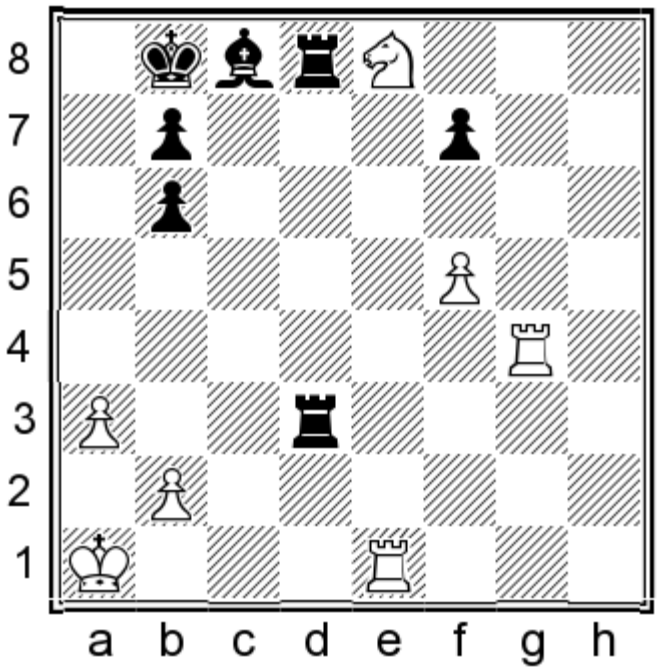

45.♖f4 ♖8d5 46.♖ef1 ♖d1† 47.♖xd1 ♖xd1† 48.♔a2 ♖d5 49.♘g7 ♗d7 50.♔b3 ♔c7 51.♖e4 ♔d6 52.♘e8† ♔c6 53.♘g7 ♖d3† 54.♔b4 ♖g3 55.♖c4† ♔d6 56.♖d4† ♔c7 57.♘h5 ♖g2 58.♘f6 ♗c6 59.b3 b5 60.♘g4 ♖e2 61.♘h6 ♗e8 62.♘g4 ♗d7 63.♘h6 ♗e8 64.♘g4

½–½

Wow! What an instructive game! An author can rarely hope for an illustrative game with as much instructive value as this. I would say the biggest thing to take away from this game is the way Black counterattacked on the kingside while maintaining flexibility on the opposite flank. Once he had established his pieces on good squares, the plan of ...g6 and ...h5 would have been strong. Another important point, thinking back to the note to Black's 14th move, is that we should never underestimate White's tactical resources, especially in the immediate moments after Black has castled on the queenside, before he has had time to consolidate with ...♔b8.

We will wrap up the theory of White's plan of long castling in the next game, which deals with his most popular option on move 12.

B4) 12.h3

GAME 38

Evgeny Tomashevsky – Michael Adams

Wijk aan Zee 2016

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4

Again, I have fiddled the move order to reinforce the sequence being recommended in this repertoire.

9...♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0-0 ♘b6 12.h3

Let me remind you that 12.♘ge2 and 12.♔b1 have been considered in the earlier analysis section, while 12.♘f3

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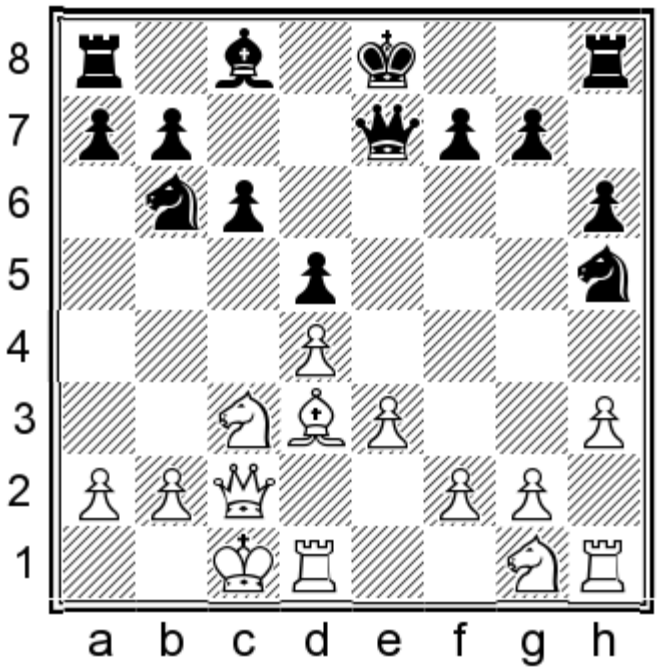
was the subject of the last game of course.

As I explained in the notes to move 12 in the previous game, White rarely manages to accomplish much without playing this pawn move at some point. Now Black must decide how to develop his bishop.



12...♗e6!

I prefer this approach, although the issue becomes a bit more complicated when White has yet to determine the position of the g1-knight.

12...♗d7!?

As we have seen, there is something to be said for developing the bishop here and delaying the knight centralization to f6. The plan seems playable, although I must warn you of the following possibility:

13.♘f3 0-0-0N

Black played 13...♖c8 in one game, but the text move is what we really want to play. The critical reply is:

14.♘e5!

According to the engines White has some pressure, but I am not sure if it’s anything serious after:

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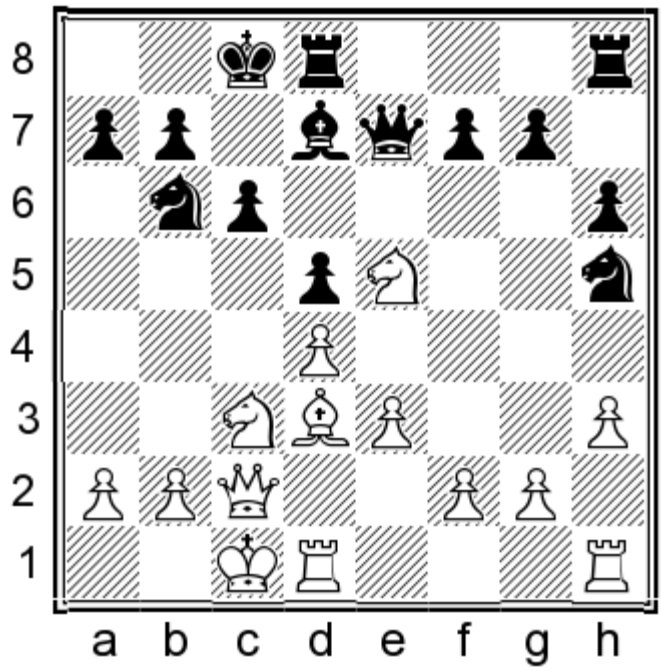

14...♔b8! 15.a4!?

If White improves his position with 15.♔b1, Black has time for 15...♘f6 16.♖c1 ♗c8, when 17.a4 can be safely met by 17...♘fd7.

The text move seems to me like the most dangerous of the engine suggestions, but Black can defend with:

15...♗e6! 16.a5 ♘d7 17.a6

Other moves are playable, but the text seems like the only serious attempt to break up Black's solid position.

17...♘xe5 18.dxe5 d4!

With unclear complications.

13.♘f3

An interesting alternative is:

13.♘ge2!?

With the bishop committed to e6, it makes sense to bring the knight to f4.

13...0-0-0 14.g4 ♘f6 15.♘f4

After 15.♘g3 g6! Black prevents either piece from landing on f5, while preparing counterplay with ...h5. A sample continuation is 16.f3 h5 17.g5 ♘e8 (17...♘fd7 18.h4 f6 is also fine for Black) 18.h4 ♘d6 19.e4 dxe4 20.fxe4 ♘dc4 and Black is better.

15...♔b8 16.♘xe6

Otherwise Black might play ...♗c8 next.

16...fxe6

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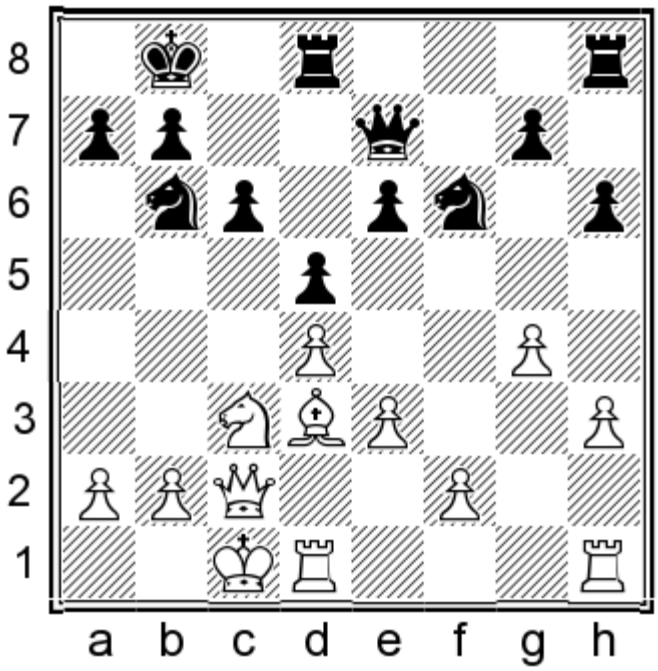


17.f4

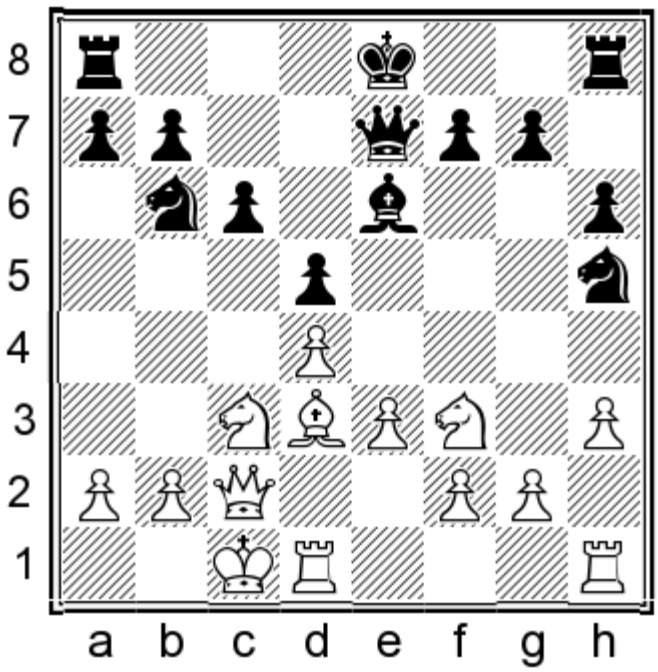
White should prevent ...e5.

17...g5!?

This move appeals to me, although the engines offer 17...c5!? as their top choice.

18.♖he1 ♘fd7

Black may consider ...h5 next, with plenty of counterplay on the kingside.



13...♘f6 14.♔b1 0-0-0 15.♘d2

Several plans and move orders are possible for both sides. Let me show you a few lines of analysis, along with some instructive practical examples:

15.a4N

On page 112 I introduced this as the Tomashevsky plan, so it’s worth asking ourselves why the Russian super-

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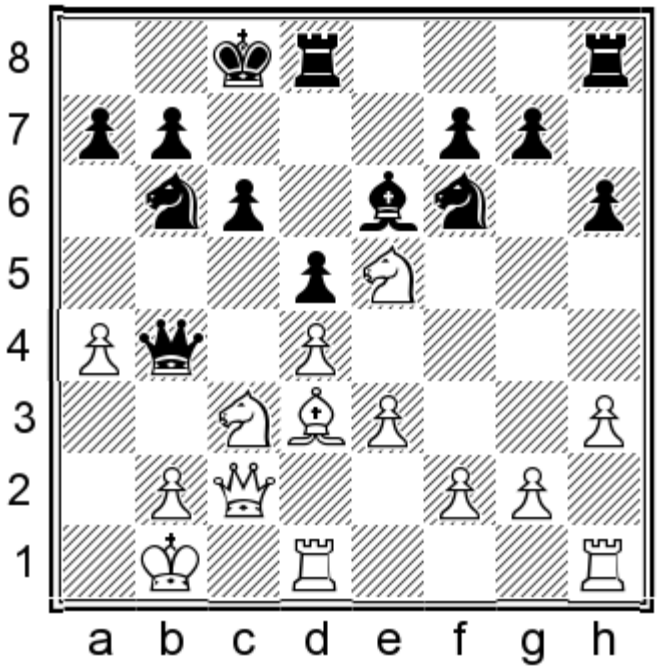
GM rejected it in this game.

15...♕b4

15...a5 is playable but the text move is more critical.

16.♘e5

White intends to move the bishop away and drop the knight back to d3. This worked well for Tomashevsky against Gharamian, as we saw earlier, but here our knight stands on f6 rather than g7, which makes a big difference.



16...♘e4!

16...♔b8!? is a solid alternative: 17.♗f5 (17.♗e2 ♘e4 is good for Black) 17...♗xf5 18.♕xf5 ♘c4 19.♘xc4 ♕xc4= and Black has no problems. The text move is more ambitious.

17.♗xe4

After 17.♖c1 f6 White's knight is driven away before the d3-square can be cleared.

17...dxe4 18.♘xe4

18.♕xe4 gives Black a pleasant choice between 18...♘xa4 and 18...g6!?.

18...♗b3 19.♕c5 ♕xa4 20.♘c3 ♕a6

Black is better due to his safer king.

15.♘a4 ♘xa4 16.♕xa4 ♔b8 17.♖c1 ♘d7 18.♖c3 ♘b6 19.♕a5 was played in B. Kovacevic – Ascic, Neum 2003. Black thought that ♖a3 next is not a big deal, as Black has the defensive move ...♘c8 at his disposal. This is correct, but an even more convincing continuation would have been:

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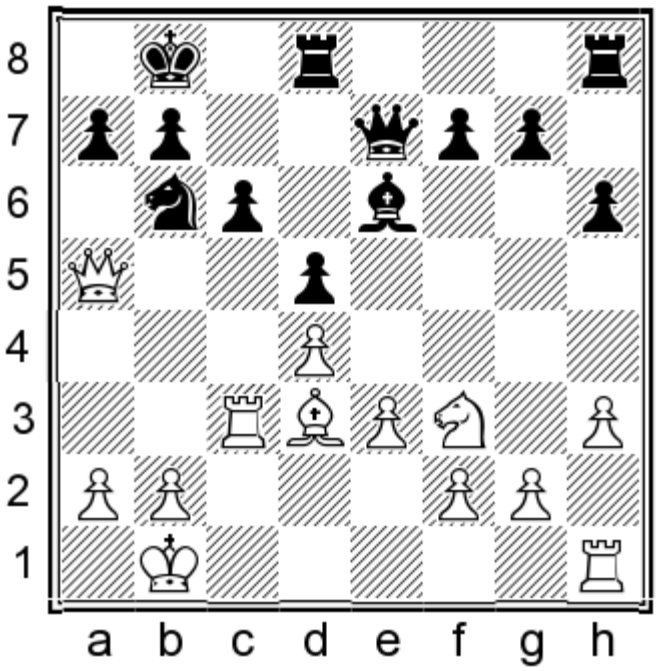

19...♘c4!N= One illustrative line is 20.♕c5 ♖he8 21.♖hc1, when Black can think about preparing ...♘d6 followed by ...♗f5. One idea is to bolster the queenside first with 21...♖c7!?; another is 21...f6!?, preventing any ♘e5 ideas once and for all, while supporting a future expansion with ...g5 and ...h5.

15.♘e5 ♘fd7 16.f4

This is another natural plan, but the ensuing change in the pawn structure is no problem for us.

16...♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♔b8 18.♖he1 h5!? 19.♕f2 h4

19...g5!?N is an engine suggestion which I also find attractive.

20.♗c2

20.e4? can of course be met by 20...d4 21.♘e2 c5∓.

We have been following the game Le Quang Liem – Meier, Dubai (blitz) 2014. Despite the fast time limit, the play has been of good quality, with White clearly preparing e3-e4. I think Black should have fought against this plan with:

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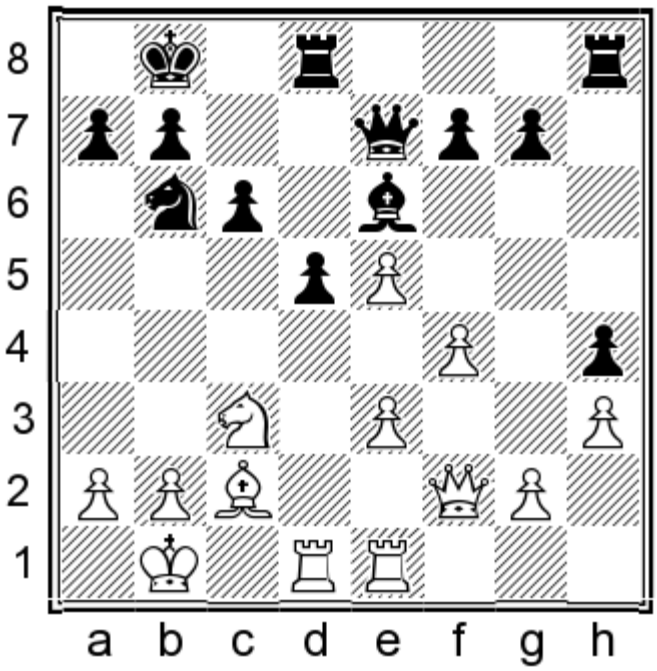
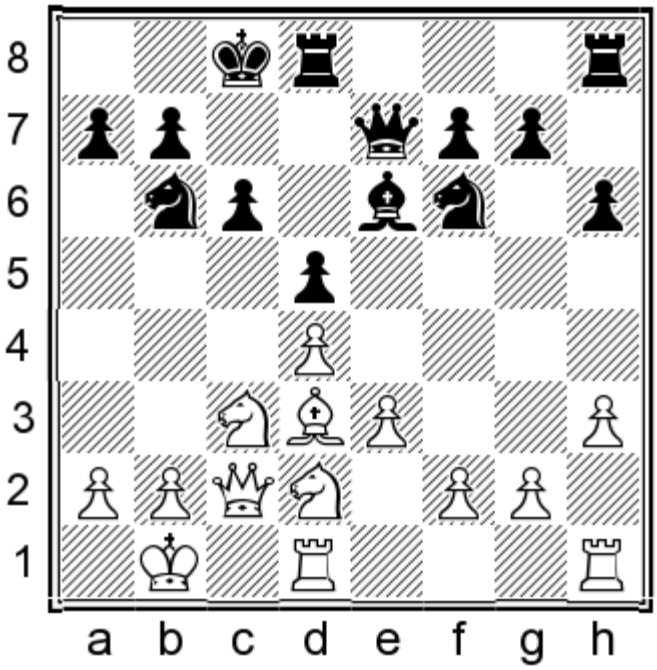


20...♘c4!N

This move not only threatens ...♕b4, but also sets up the sneaky idea of ...♘xe3 followed by ...d4 (if White plays 21.♗d3 for example). The other tactical point behind Black's play is revealed after:

21.e4? d4! 22.♖xd4 ♖xd4 23.♕xd4 ♕b4 24.♗b3 ♘a3†–+

Winning the queen.



15...♔b8 16.♘b3 ♖he8!?

If I was in Adams' shoes, I would have a difficult time choosing between the various options including 16...♖c8, 16...♘c4, 16...♘e8, 16...♘fd7 and 16...h5, all of which make sense and give Black a solid position. However, the game continuation meets quite effectively the possibility mentioned in the next note.

17.f3

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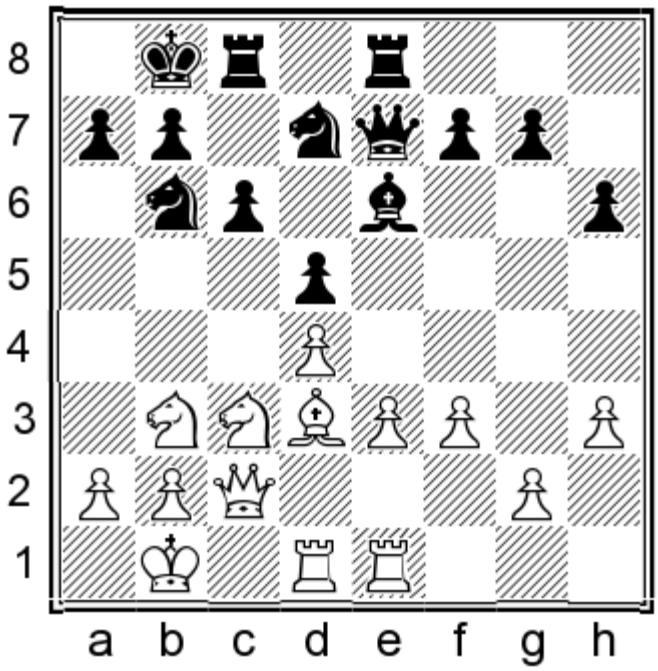
In a similar situation, Nakamura played 17.♘e2 against Aronian, intending to place the other knight on c5. Here though, 17...♗c8 18.♘c5 ♘e4!⇄ is a good reply.

17...♘fd7 18.♖he1 ♖c8

18...♕d6!? is a playable alternative, planning to put the queen on g3. If White answers with 19.♕f2, then even the engine suggestion of 19...f5!? has some attraction. Black is planning large-scale operations on the kingside with ...g5 and most probably doubling rooks on the e-file.

That said, 18...h5!? would be my personal choice, especially now that White cannot meet this with h3-h4.



19.♖c1

White has nothing better than pointing his forces towards the queenside. His problem is that the e3-e4 break will always give Black good counterplay against the d4-pawn, while any kingside expansion with g2-g4 will be met by the thematic ...h5.

19.e4?! dxe4 20.fxe4 ♗xb3! 21.♕xb3 c5 is excellent for Black, as Svidler pointed out in his commentary for Chess24.

19...♖c7 20.♘b5 ♖cc8 21.♘c3 a6!?

Adams decides not to offer a further repetition of moves. My guess is that he probably would not have minded a draw with Black, as he was having a bad tournament, but he may have thought that Tomashevsky would avoid it anyway.

21...♘c4!? was another reasonable idea.

22.♘e2 ♘c4!? 23.♘f4 ♘d6 24.♘c5 g5

Adams heads for a position where he will be marginally worse, but well within the drawing zone.

24...♘xc5 25.dxc5 ♘b5 26.♗xb5 axb5 is close to equal according to the engines, but defending with the bishop against White's strong knight may prove unpleasant for human players.

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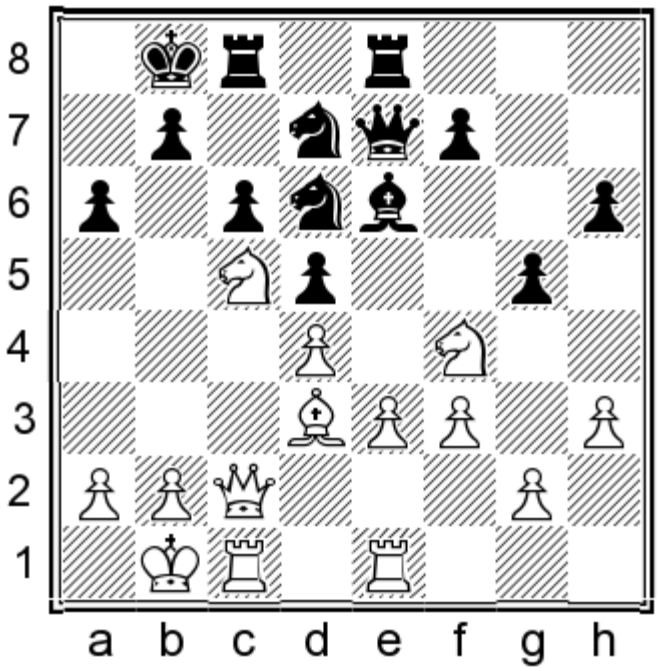


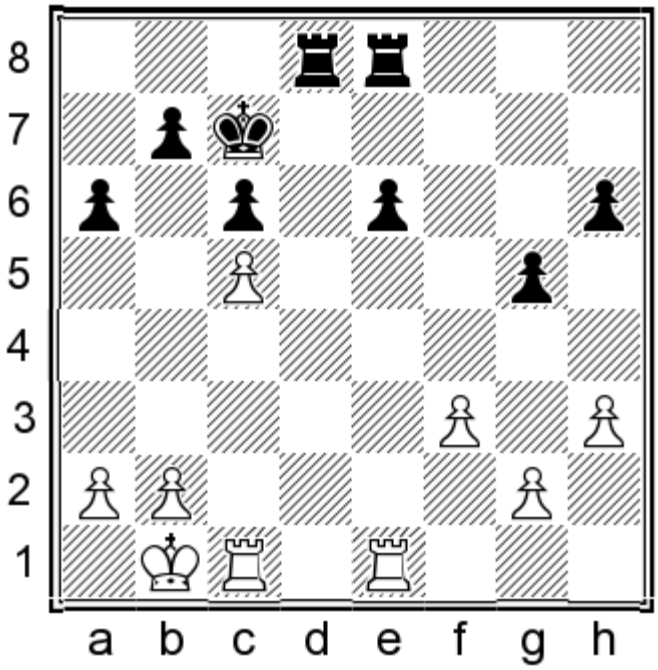
25.♘fxe6 fxe6 26.e4 dxe4 27.♗xe4

27.fxe4 ♘xc5 28.♕xc5 e5 is fine for Black.

27...♘xc5 28.dxc5 ♘xe4 29.♕xe4 ♖cd8

Intending to plonk the rook on d5.

30.♕e5† ♕c7 31.♕xc7† ♔xc7



32.♖e4 ♖d2 33.♖c2 ♖d1† 34.♖c1 ♖d2

A draw was agreed, but Black could have played on with 34...♖d5! 35.b4 e5 36.a3 a5 37.♔b2 ♖a8, intending to bring his king to e6.

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½–½

Conclusion

The Exchange Variation is one of the most important topics of the whole book, rich in ideas for both sides. After dealing with some early deviations and unusual move orders, we started our investigation into the recommended ...♘h5 plan by considering those lines where White exchanges bishops on e7 and castles on the queenside. I have discussed a lot of ideas and plans; but probably the most important thing for Black to remember is to always be on the lookout for ways to counterattack on the kingside, in order to prevent White from building a queenside attack at his leisure. This has been the key to Black's success in many games, where he has not merely settled for a solid defensive position, but actively played for the win.

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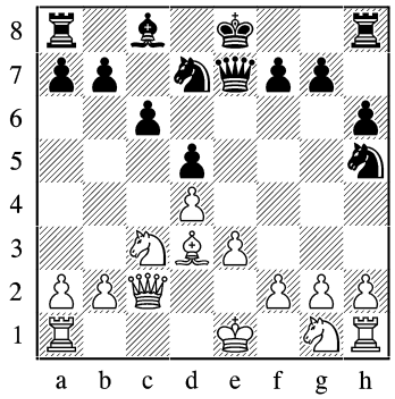
Chapter 3c



Exchange QGD Theory (0–0 Lines)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7

♘f3 Lines page 150

8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘f3?! ♘f4! page 150

The Right Move Order: **8.♘f3 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0 0-0** page 151

The Minority Attack: **12.♕c2** (12.♖b1) page 152

Central Play: **12.♕c2** (12.♖e1) **12...♘hf6 13.♖e1** page 152

♘ge2 Lines page 154

8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘ge2 ♘b6 12.0-0 0-0 page 154

The Minority Attack page 155

13.♖ab1 a5! page 155

14.a3 (14.♘a4; 14.b3N; 14.h3N) page 155

14.♕b3 Game 39, page 157

The Central Attack page 158

13.♖ae1 page 159

The ♕d2 Set-Up: **8.♘ge2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0** (11.♕d2!? page 160) **11...0-0 12.♕d2 ♘b6!?** page 160

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A) 13.♖ae1 page 161

B) 13.f3 page 163

The previous chapter covered various sidelines in the Exchange Variation, followed by the important plan of long castling. This chapter will deal with those lines where White castles on the kingside. When he goes for this plan, his most important decision concerns the development of the g1-knight, which may go to either f3 or e2. We will discuss both options in turn.

♘f3 Lines

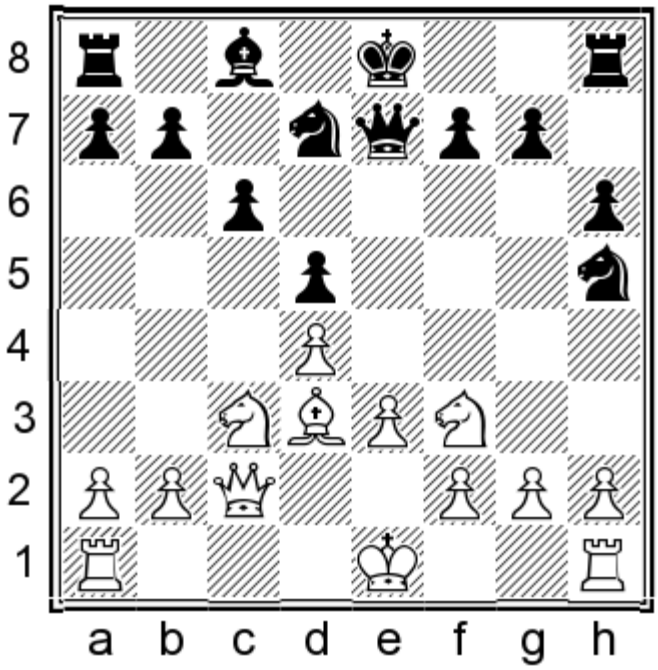
To start things off, let me show you how to deal with an inferior move order for White.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7

If White gets as far as this position, he should either castle queenside or, if he really wants to castle short, he should go for a set-up with ♘ge2.

11.♘f3?!

If White wishes to place the knight here and castle kingside, he should make proper time for it by delaying the development of his queen to c2. The present move order gives Black easy play with:



11...♘f4! 12.0-0

It seems to me that there is no better option. White might also switch plans and castle on the queenside, but in that case Black has good chances to start an attack.

12.♗f1 0-0 13.0-0-0 should be met by: 13...♘e6! (in Karjakin – Kramnik, Stavanger 2014, the former World Champion preferred 13...♘g6, but the knight is less active and more of a target on that square) 14.♗d3 Now in Ploehn – R. Schneider, Germany 1997, Black should have played:

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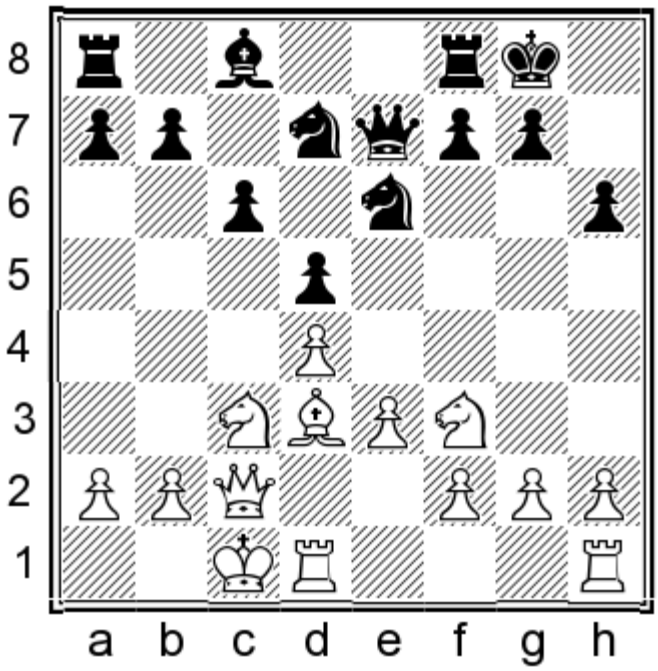
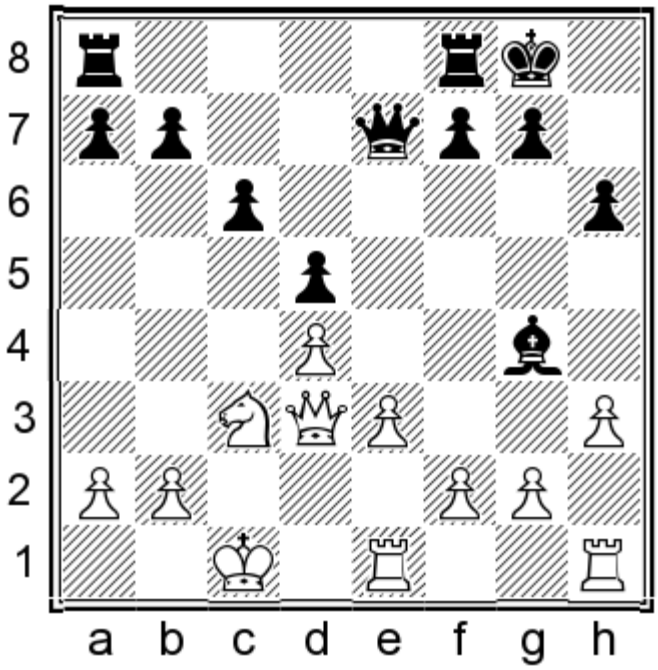


14...b5!N↑ Black has the faster attack.

12.0-0-0 ♘xd3† 13.♕xd3 ♘f6!? also gives Black comfortable play, and he has the useful practical advantage of being able to castle on either side. One game went: 14.♘e5 (14.h3 ♘e4! is good for Black) 14...♘g4! 15.♘xg4 (15.f4? ♘f2) 15...♗xg4 16.♖de1 0-0!? Black decides to sharpen the game. 17.h3 In Lantos – Kiss, Hungary 2008, Black should have preferred:



17...♗d7!N Black has good chances in the likely pawn race, for instance: 18.f4 (18.g4 f5! is good for Black; and if 18.♘e2, hoping to meet Black's ...b5 advance with ♔b1 followed by ♘c1-b3-c5, Black has the annoying 18...♕f6!, hitting f2 and threatening ...♗f5)

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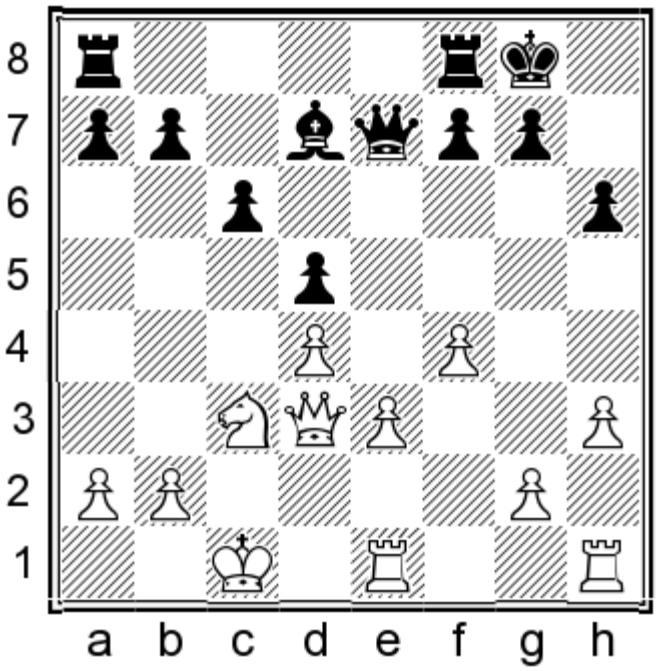
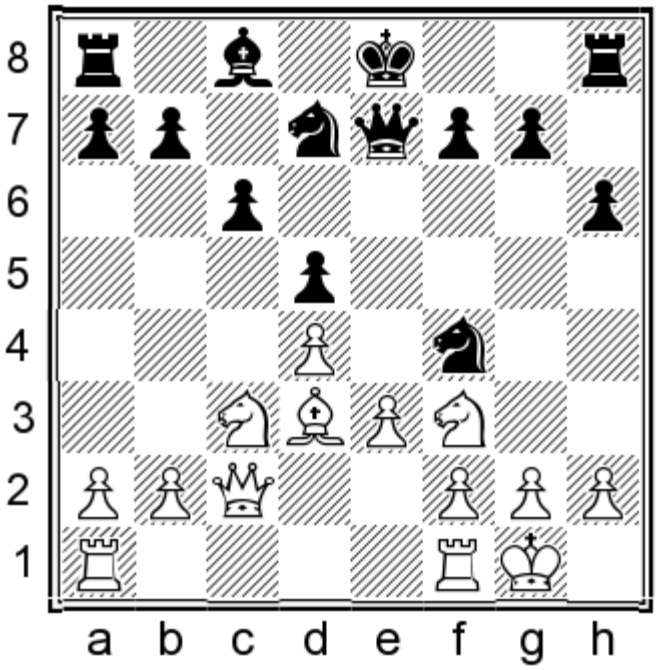


18...b5! 19.g4 ♖fe8 20.♖hg1 a5 21.h4 a4 22.h5 b4 23.♘d1 c5∓



12...♘xd3 13.♕xd3 0-0

Black has a comfortable game; he has traded two minor pieces and his remaining bishop, while theoretically 'bad', actually has a lot of potential on the kingside. All that remains is to see how Black should counter White's obvious plan of a minority attack.

14.♖ab1 a5 15.a3

This position was reached in Jakob – Mayer, Gyongyos 1996, when Black should have continued:

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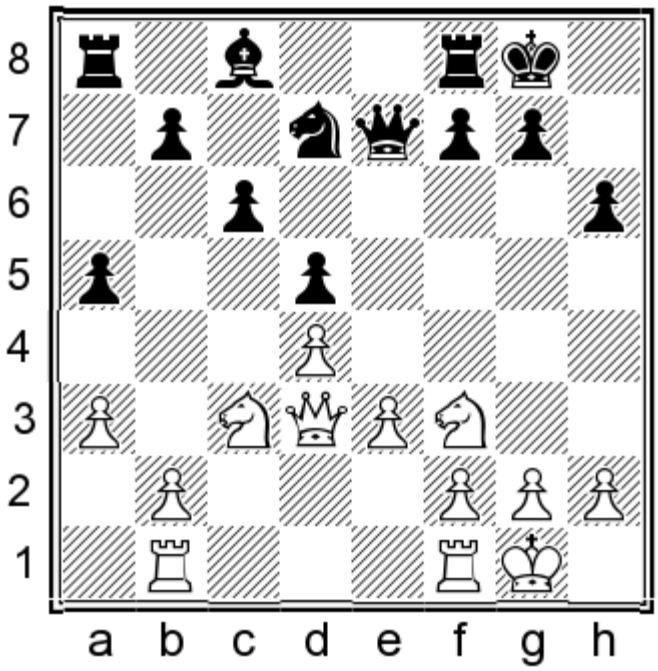

15...♘b6!N

Now b2-b4 will give the knight an excellent outpost on c4.

16.♘e5

Covering the c4-square is a natural reply, but Black has a strong answer.

16...♕f6

Threatening ...♗f5.

Now that we have dealt with the inaccurate move order involving an early ♕c2 followed by 11.♘f3?!, let's see the superior version where White delays the queen move and makes time for castling before ...♘f4 becomes possible.

The Right Move Order

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♘f3 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0 0-0

From here White has two plans: he can go for the typical minority attack of course, as well as the central break with e3-e4. We will deal with both options in turn.

The Minority Attack

The minority attack may be White's most popular and best-known plan in this structure, but in this particular variation it is easy for Black to handle.

12.♕c2

If White omits the queen move, Black handles the position in much the same way. For example:
12.♖b1 a5 13.a3 ♘hf6

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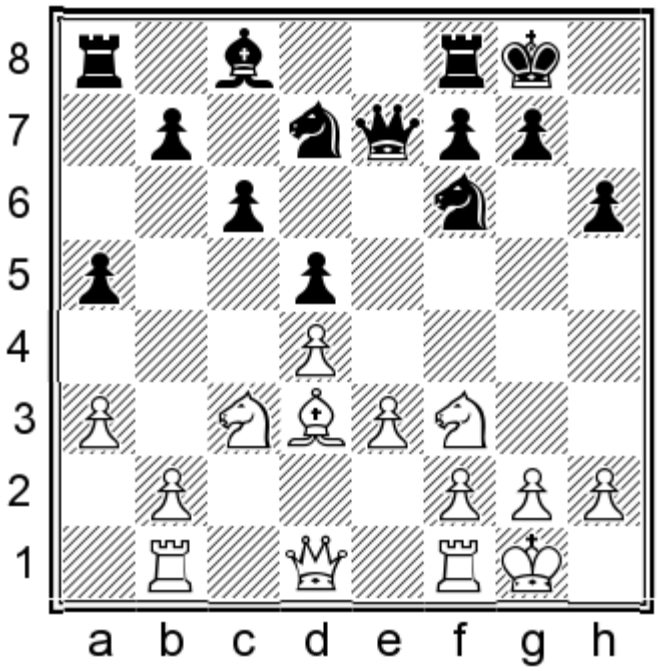

14.♘a4!?N

After 14.b4 axb4 15.axb4 b5! Black is more than okay.

14.♕c2 ♖e8 transposes to the main line below.

I decided to check the text move in light of the advice given by Botvinnik, who suggested that White should first establish a knight on c5 before advancing the b-pawn in this structure. However, Black obtains an easy game with:

14...♘e8!

Our thematic manoeuvre, intending to put the knight on d6. With the other knight on d7 for the moment, White still cannot play ♘c5 yet. Play may continue:

15.b4 b5!

Followed by ...♘b6-c4.

12...♘hf6

The knight has done its job, so it returns to the centre.

13.♖ab1 a5 14.a3 ♖e8

Black has a fine position and is ready to meet White's queenside activity in a familiar way:

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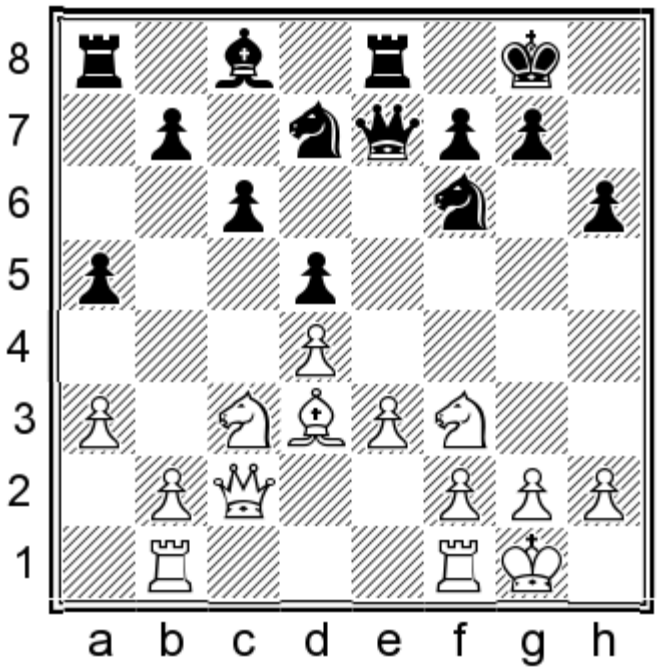

15.b4 axb4 16.axb4 b5!

Followed by ...♘b6-c4, with an excellent game. It is clear that White's minority attack is going nowhere, so let's see if White can do any better by focusing on the centre.

Central Play

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♘f3 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♕c2

12.♖e1 ♘hf6 13.♕c2 is the same thing.

12...♘hf6 13.♖fe1

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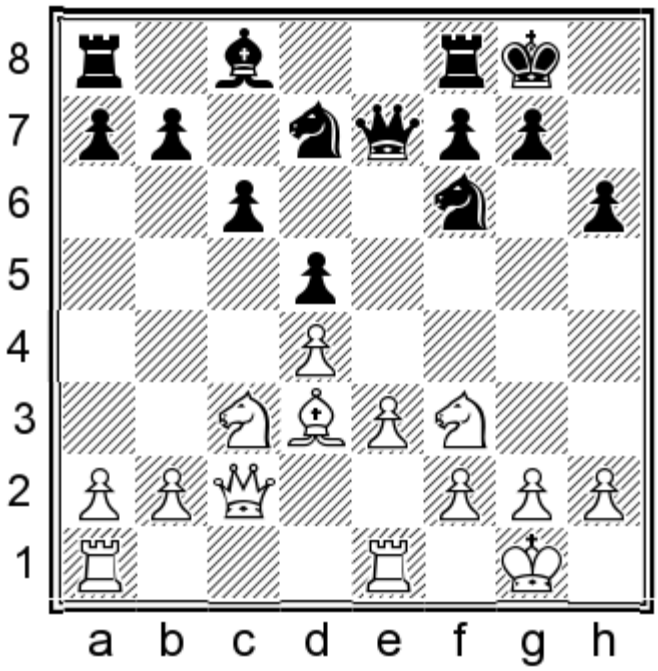


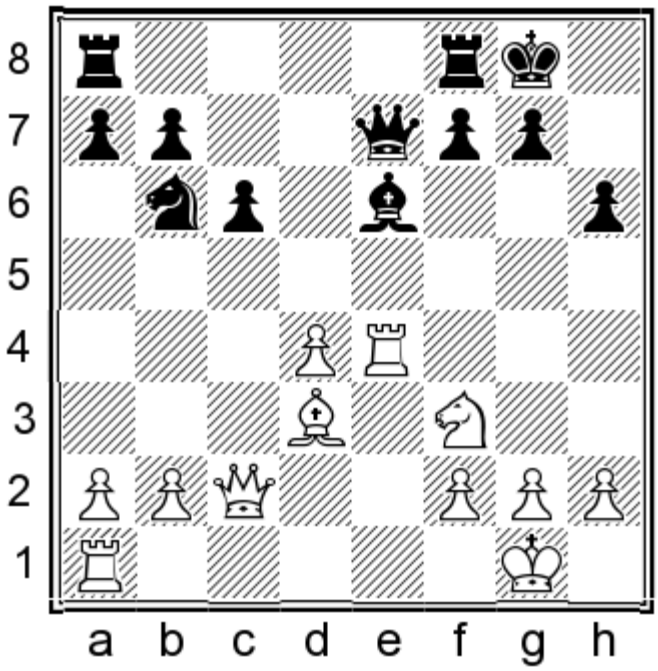
13...♘b6!

Black is ready to meet e3-e4, as the knight is poised to come to d5 and the bishop is also ready to be developed. If White refrains from advancing in the centre, Black may strengthen his position with ...♘e4 and ...♗f5 if allowed.

14.h3

14.♘e5 was well met by 14...♘g4! in Ziems – Heilemann, corr. 1953.

14.e4 dxe4 15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 16.♖xe4 ♗e6 is fine for Black. One illustrative line goes:



17.♖ae1 ♘d5 18.a3 ♕d6 19.♖h4 This occurred in Juszczak – Maleska, Lublin 1999, when 19...♖fe8N= would have left Black with nothing to fear.

I also considered the untested 14.♖ab1!?N, with the idea to revert to a minority attack, now that Black is unable to

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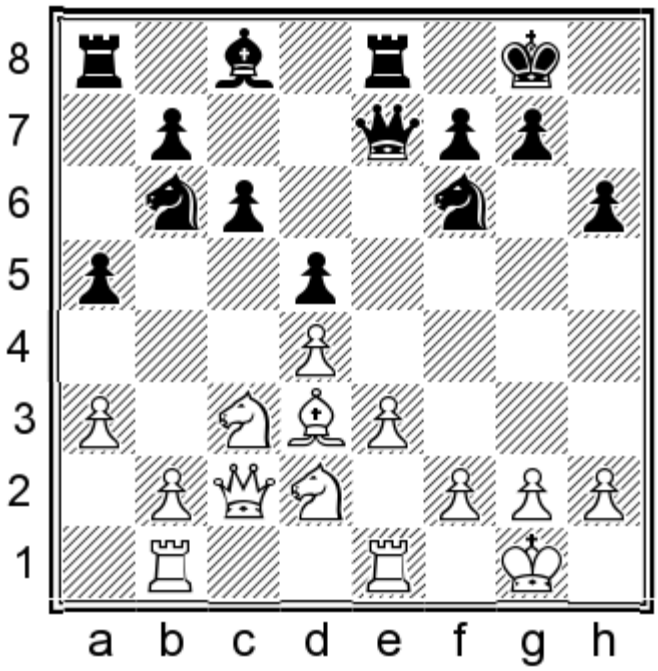
counter b2-b4 with ...b5. My analysis continues: 14...a5 15.a3 ♖e8 16.♘d2! Otherwise ...♘e4 comes.



16...♗e6! Black is ready to regroup with ...♘c8-d6. A sample line is: 17.♘b3 (17.b4 looks premature due to 17...♘c4!) 17...♘fd7!? Before carrying out his own knight manoeuvre, Black prevents ♘c5. 18.♖ec1 Black can choose between 18...♘c8 and 18...♘c4, with a good game in either case.

14...♖e8

Intending ...♘e4.

15.♘e5!?

This is an idea of my good friend Vasilios Kokkalis, who played it against me in a training game. White's plan is surprisingly strong and so Black has to know how to meet it.

15.♖ad1 allows Black to carry out his plan: 15...♘e4 16.♗xe4 (otherwise ...♗f5 followed by ...♘xc3 will give Black an excellent position) 16...dxe4 17.♘d2 f5 18.f3 exf3 19.♘xf3 ♗e6 Black has a good game.

15...♘fd7 16.f4 ♘xe5 17.fxe5 ♕g5!

This is the antidote. Black wins a tempo in order to complete development and carry out the ...f6 break under optimal circumstances.

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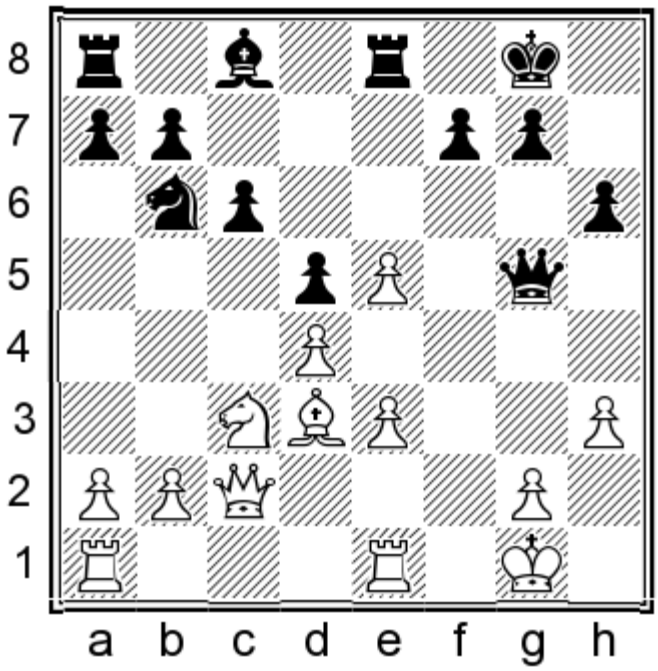

18.♔h1

18.♔h2?! gives Black a useful extra option: 18...f6! (18...♗e6 is also playable of course) 19.exf6 ♕xf6 White would like to play 20.♖f1, hoping to develop threats with ♘e2, ♗h7† and ♘f4, but the position of his king allows 20...♕d6† 21.♔g1 ♖xe3, when Black wins a pawn for inadequate compensation. Note that 22.♗h7† ♔h8 23.♘e2? is refuted by 23...♖xe2.

18...♗e6!

It should come as no surprise that, with the king on h1, 18...f6?! allows White to seize the initiative with 19.exf6 ♕xf6 20.♖f1 ♕d6 21.♘e2!. The extra tempo makes all the difference after 21...♖xe3? 22.♗h7† ♔h8 23.♘f4 and White wins.

19.♖ad1

This seems as logical a move as any. Most other moves can be met by either 19...f6 as in the line below, or by the preliminary 19...♖f8!?.

19...f6 20.exf6 ♕xf6 21.♖f1 ♕h4

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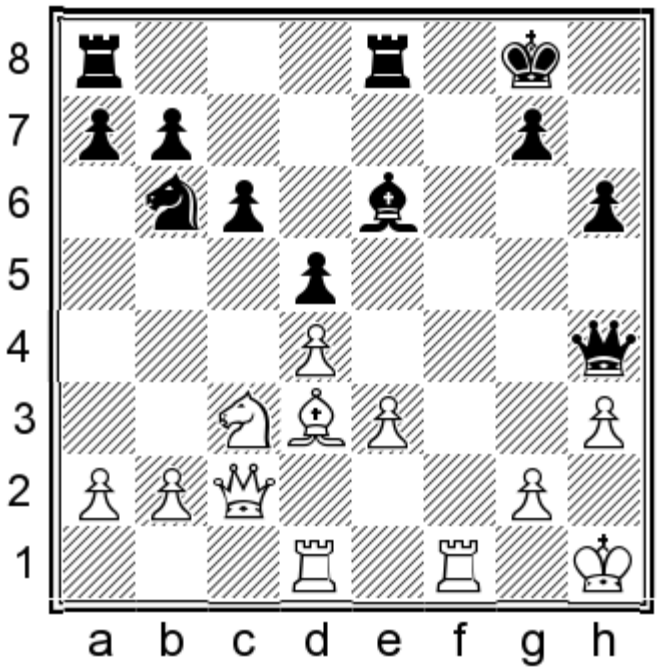

22.♔g1 ♖f8 23.♘e2 ♖xf1† 24.♖xf1 ♕e7!?

With ...♖f8 coming next, Black has nothing to fear.

♘ge2 Lines

This is similar to the previous section, but White will be developing his knight to e2 rather than f3 before castling kingside. We will begin by considering this plan in the context of a familiar move order where the queen goes to c2 early. Later, we will see how White can try to improve his set-up by delaying the queen's development and possibly choosing a different square for it, such as d2.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘ge2

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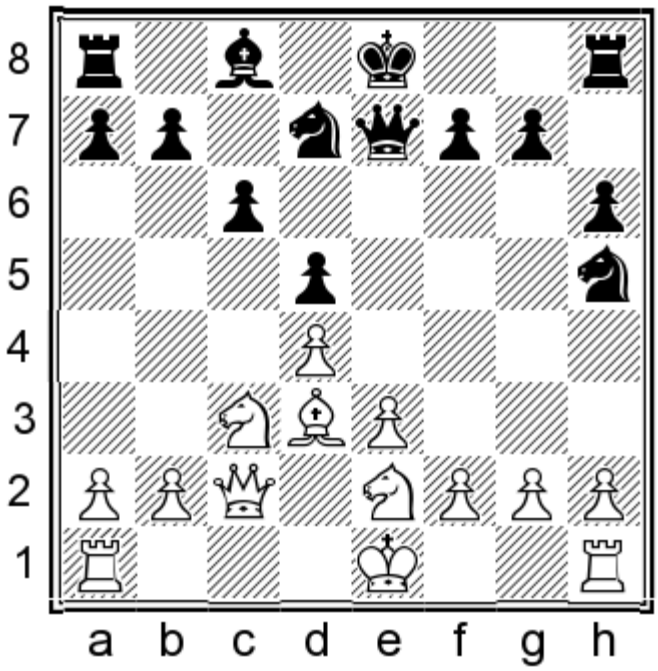

11...♘b6 12.0-0

12.0-0-0 leads back to variation B1 of the previous chapter on page 132.

12...0-0

Let me remind you that this move is only possible because Black inserted ...h6 before playing ...♘h5. If the pawn was still on h7, Black would have to bring the knight back to f6 before castling. In our version, Black can benefit from leaving the knight on h5 for a while, as this gives him the additional option of ...f5. This may prove especially useful in the later lines where White aims for f2-f3 and e3-e4.

Just as in the ♘f3 section, White has two main plans: he can play for a minority attack on the queenside, or for a central expansion.

The Minority Attack

13.♖ab1

Despite being a thematic plan, the minority attack is slightly risky with the knight on e2, as the black queen may utilize the g5- and h4-squares. As we will see, this may lead to some brutal attacking ideas.

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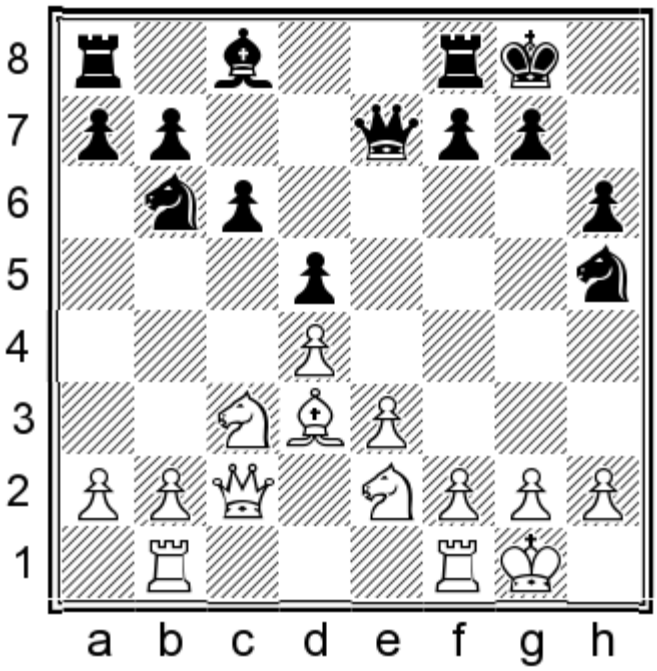

13...a5!

Before taking action on the kingside, we should first take the opportunity to hold up White's queenside initiative.

14.a3

Trying to speed up the queenside play is the critical approach, but Black is well placed to meet it. Other possibilities include:

14.♕b3 will be covered in Game 39, immediately after this brief analysis section.

14.♘a4 ♘xa4 15.♕xa4 ♗g4 is the same as the Leko – Adams game, except that Black's queen is on e7 rather than d8. After 16.♘c3 ♕g5 we have transposed to 17...♕g5 in the notes to that game. (The Ovod – Pogonina game quoted there actually arose via this 14.♘a4 move order.)

14.b3N is a slow way of building up on the queenside. 14...♗g4! This move is perfectly timed. 15.h3 (15.♕b2 gives Black a pleasant choice: 15...♘c8 is a good move, planning to exchange on e2 and go with the knight to the dream d6-square; 15...♕g5 is also sensible, as the threat of ...♗f3 forces 16.♔h1, allowing 16...♗f5 with easy play for Black) 15...♗xe2 16.♕xe2

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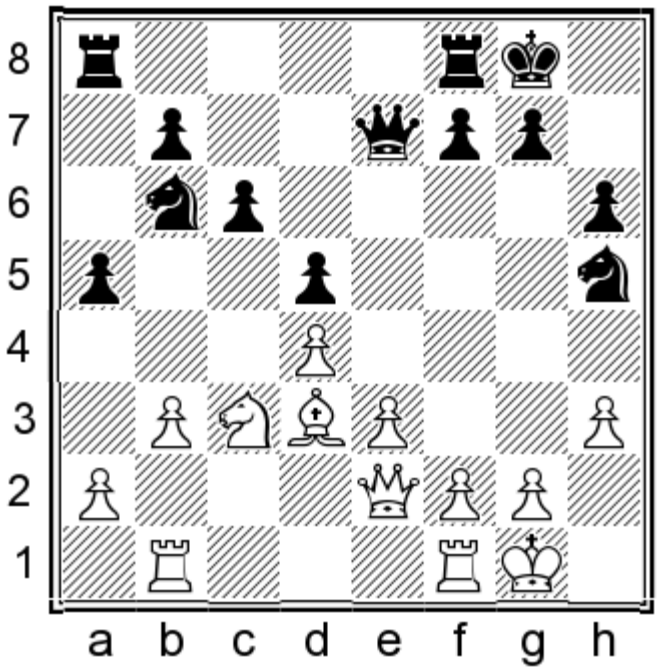


16...g6!? 17.♕b2 ♘c8 18.a3 ♘d6 19.♖fe1 f5 I prefer Black's chances, as he can methodically build up his kingside attack.

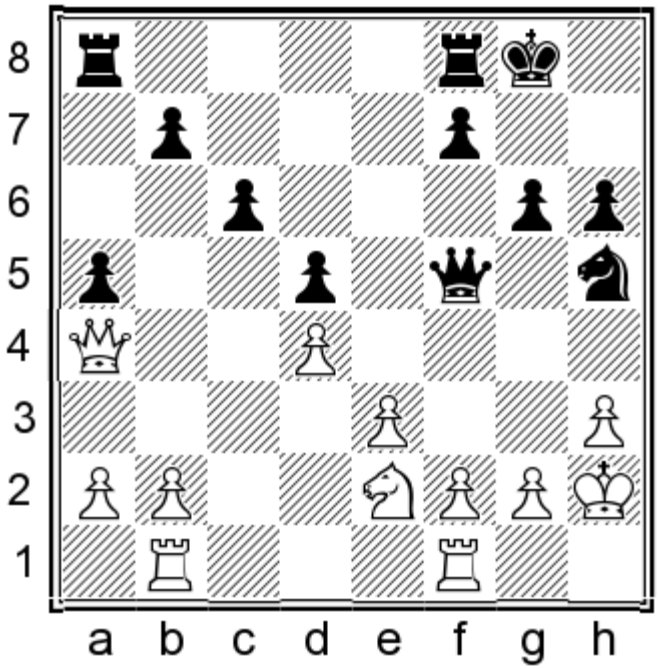
14.h3N

This move has not been tried but it's a logical option to consider. The two lines above, plus the Leko – Adams game, all feature the ...♗g4 move, so we should have some idea of what to do if White prevents it.

14...g6!

14...♖e8 has been recommended with exactly the same follow-up in mind. However, one advantage of the text move is that if White doesn't follow up with ♘a4, Black will play ...♘g7 and ...♗f5. Another advantage will be revealed at the end of the variation.

15.♘a4 ♘xa4 16.♕xa4 ♕g5 17.♔h2 ♗f5 18.♗xf5 ♕xf5



19.g4 ♕d3!

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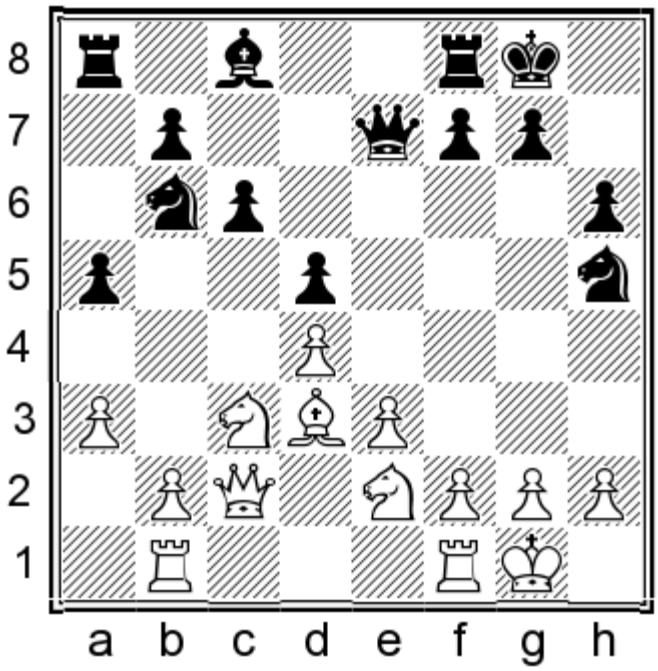
Everything works perfectly for Black; White has no good knight move, so he should settle for:
20.♕d1 ♕xd1 21.♖fxd1 ♘g7

Followed by ...♘e8-d6, with comfortable equality. If the rook was on e8, Black would have had to spend another tempo to get the knight to its best square.

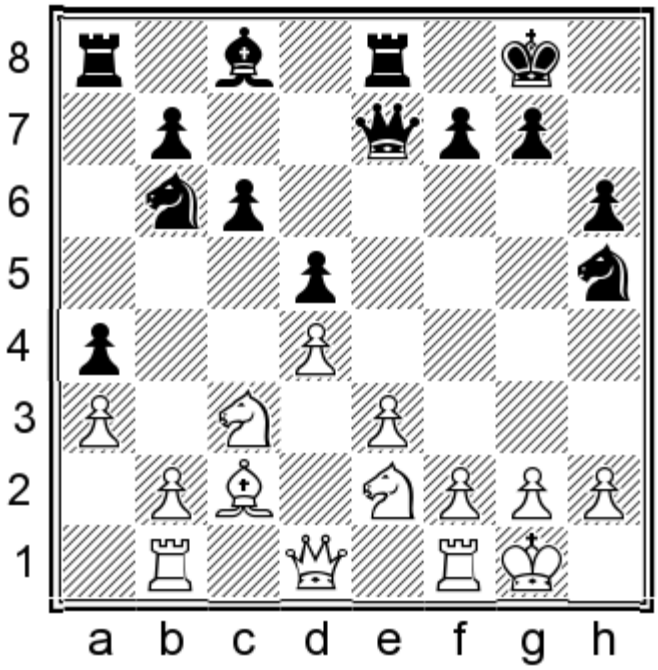


14...a4!

This idea is obvious, but Black has to be sure than White cannot simply gang up on the pawn and capture it.

15.h3

The direct attack on the pawn leads nowhere: 15.♕d1 ♖e8 (15...g6!? 16.♗c2 ♕g5 is also possible) 16.♗c2



16...♕g5! Black intends ...♗f5 to eliminate an attacker of the a4-pawn. The stubborn 17.♗xa4? is refuted by 17...♗g4!, threatening ...♗f3, and after 18.f3 ♗h3 19.♖f2 ♘xa4 20.♘xa4 ♖xe3∓ White's strategy has clearly failed.

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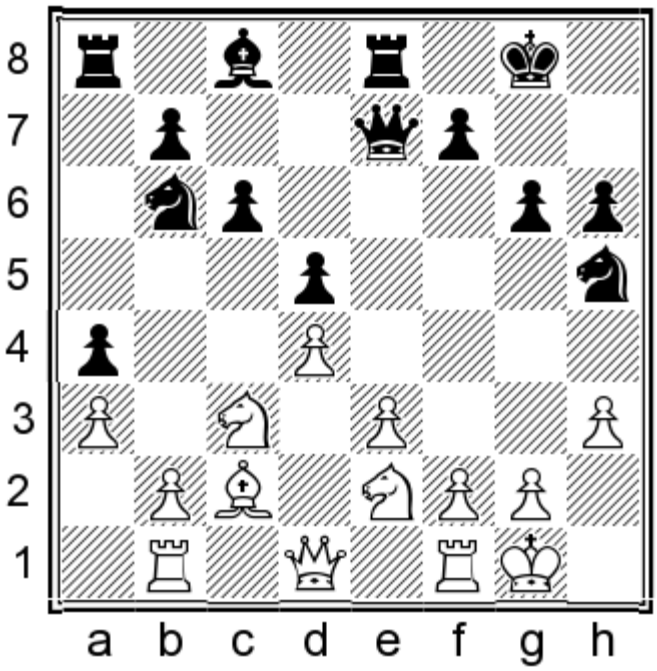
15...♖e8

Black is spoiled for choice, 15...g6!? 16.♕d1 ♘g7 17.♘g3 h5 being a fine alternative. After the further 18.♕f3 h4 19.♘ge2 ♘e8, followed by ...♘d6, Black has an excellent position.

16.♕d1 g6! 17.♗c2

The point of Black's last move was to meet 17.♔h2 with 17...♘g7 18.♗c2 ♗f5, and once again Black rescues the a4-pawn and keeps a fine position.



17...♘c4!∓

Black is ready to play ...b5 with a clamp on the queenside. The crucial point is that capturing the a4-pawn exposes White to a vicious attack:

18.♗xa4?

18.♘xa4? ♕g5 19.♔h2 ♖xe3! is similar.

18...♕g5 19.♔h2 ♖xe3!

With a decisive attack.

GAME 39

Peter Leko – Michael Adams

Dortmund 2013

Just like most of the illustrative games we have seen, this one also began with a different move order.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘ge2

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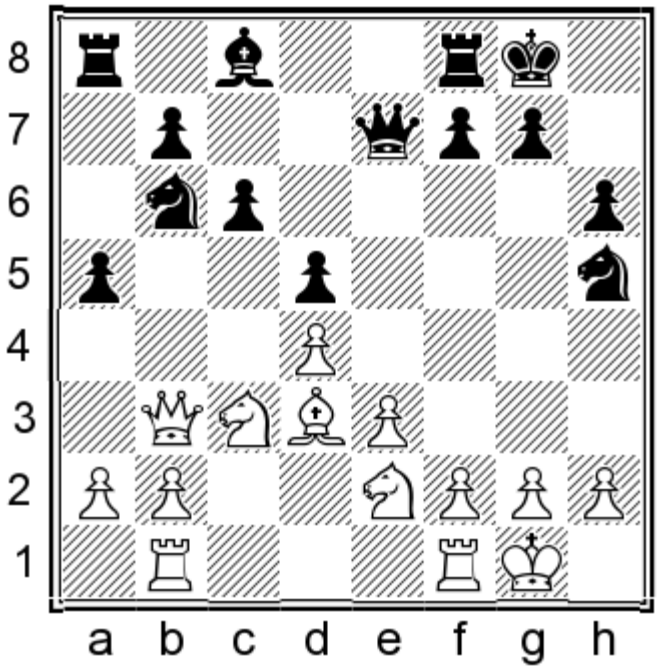
♘b6 12.0-0 0-0 13.♖ab1 a5! 14.♕b3

14.♘a4, 14.a3 and 14.h3 have all been mentioned in the analysis section above.

Leko's move looks like a non-standard approach, but the idea is pretty simple: he wants to lure the black queen slightly further away from the kingside before playing ♘a4, which will exchange the knight that is currently interfering with his minority attack.



14...♕d8 15.♘a4 ♘xa4 16.♕xa4 ♗g4!

This move is thematic and strong. Black activates the bishop and prepares ...♕g5, which can be followed by either ...♗f3 or ...♗f5.

17.♘c3

17.h3 ♗xe2 18.♗xe2 ♘f6 19.a3 ♘e8! gives Black a slight edge, as the knight will be perfect on d6.

17...♖e8

17...♕g5 is a safe alternative, with ideas of ...♗f3. White avoided this with 21.♔h1 in Ovod – Pogonina, Novosibirsk 2016, when ...♗f5N= would have been equal. Adams' move is more ambitious, as Black avoids exchanges and keeps more pieces floating around the kingside.

18.♕c2 ♕g5 19.♔h1 ♘f6 20.a3

20.h3 ♕h4! is becoming dangerous for White, for instance: 21.♔h2 ♗xh3! 22.gxh3 ♘g4† 23.♔g2

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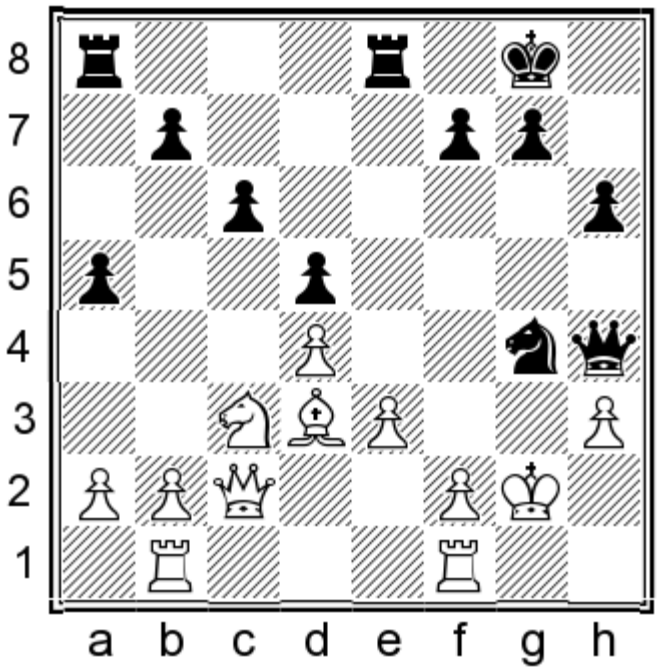
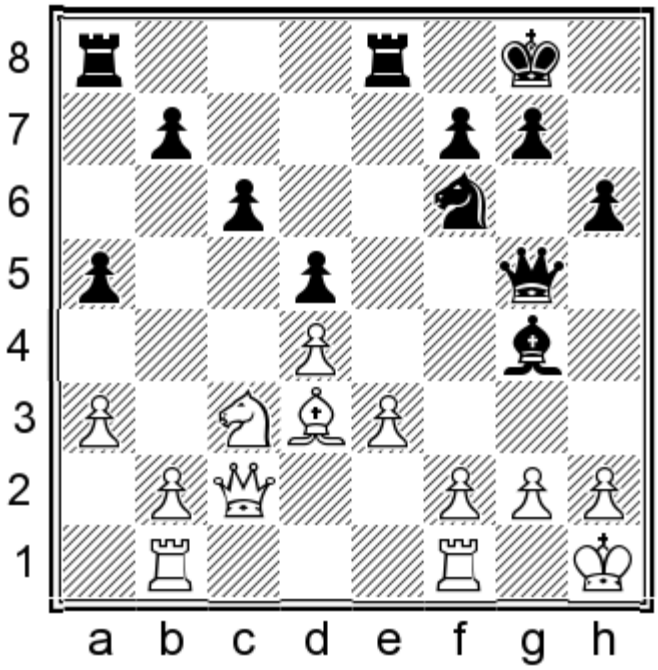


23...♖xe3! I think this ambitious move is justified. (It is important to point out that Black has a draw available with 23...♕g5!? if he wants it.) 24.♗h7†! ♔h8 25.♖h1 ♘xf2 26.♕xf2 ♕g5† Followed by ...♔xh7 and, with three pawns for a knight and such an exposed white king, I like Black's practical chances.



20...♕h5

20...♘d7!? was also possible, intending to meet 21.b4 with 21...axb4 22.axb4 b5 followed by ...♘b6-c4.

21.b4

After 21.f3 ♗d7 22.♕f2 ♖e7 23.♖be1 ♖ae8 Black is ready to increase the pressure on the e3-pawn with ...♕g5. The critical continuation is: 24.g4

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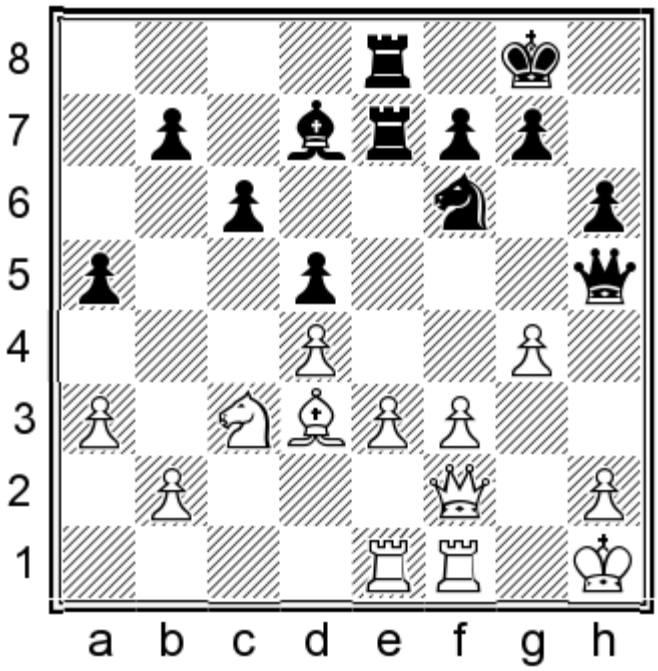
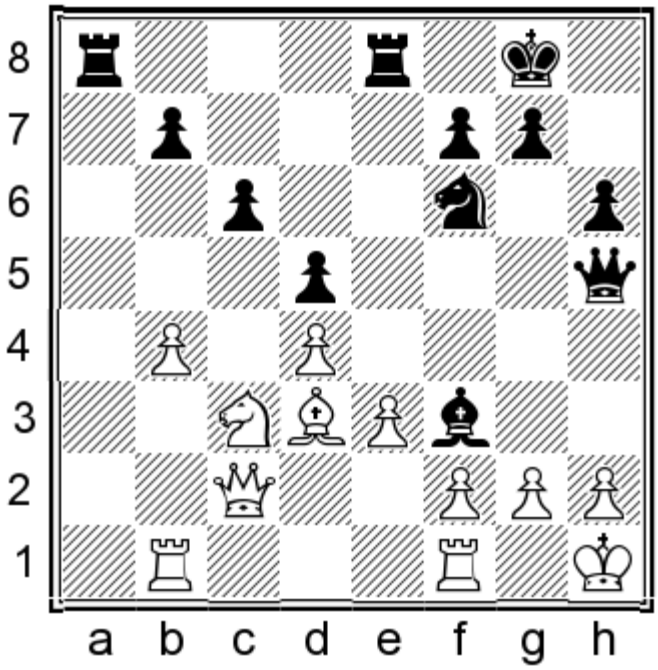


24...♗xg4! 25.fxg4 ♘xg4 26.♕g3 ♘xe3 27.♖g1 g6 28.♖e2 ♘f5 29.♗xf5 ♕xf5 30.♖f2 ♕h5 Black has enough play, with three pawns for the piece and more shelter around his king.

21...axb4 22.axb4 ♗f3!?

If Black wants to keep the game going, then 22...♖a3!? seems like a good try.

The text move forces a draw. Black threatens to win with ...♘g4, while his secondary idea is ...♗xg2† followed by perpetual checks.



23.gxf3

23.♗f5?! would parry both threats, but after 23...♖a3! White's pieces would be hanging.

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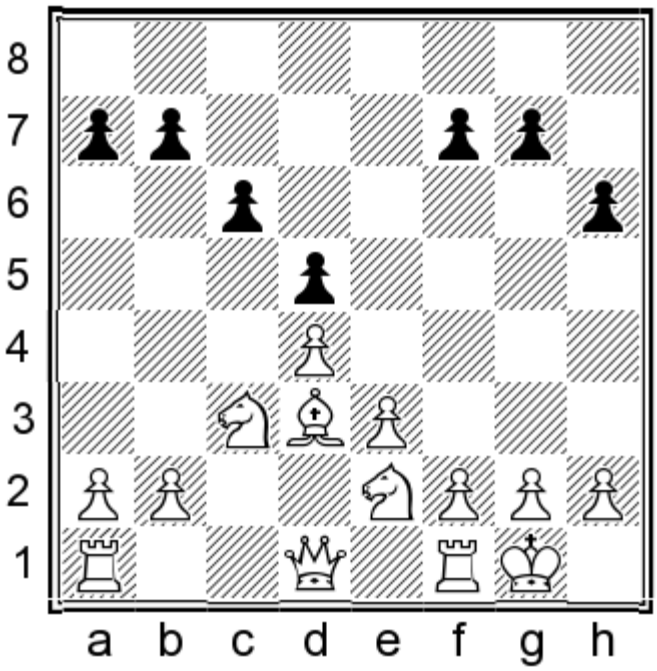
23...♕xf3† 24.♔g1 ♕g4† 25.♔h1 ♕f3† 26.♔g1 ♕g4† 27.♔h1 ♕f3†

½–½

The Central Attack



According to my research, this is White's most dangerous way of handling the Exchange Variation against our ...♘h5 plan. In its ideal form, White places his queen on d2 (although it can also go to c2) and plays f2-f3, thus challenging Black to find the correct placement for his pieces in anticipation of the e3-e4 break. The ♕d2 version is a relatively new invention, so the practical material is limited and Black players still haven't demonstrated the most accurate set-up and plans. Therefore I had to analyse all the options carefully and come up with my own ideas in many lines.

Because so much of my analysis is original, I sought to confirm my assessments not only with hardcore engine analysis, but also with numerous training games against both humans and engines, as well as with a number of thematic engine tournaments where the bots were forced to start "thinking" from various critical positions found below. Despite the encouraging results of the above procedure, I only became completely content when the members of the Danish Olympiad team confirmed the soundest of Black's position, when I showed them my analysis during a training camp a few weeks before the Baku Olympiad.

The ♕c2 Version

On pages 117-118 of the introductory section, we learned from the Giri – Fressinet game how Black might fall into a bad position against the plan of ♘ge2, 0-0, f2-f3 and e3-e4. Here I will show what I believe to be the best way to deal with it.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕c2

We will start by considering the set-up with the queen on c2, which occurs in a lot of games. Once we have dealt with it, we will move on to a more refined set-up where White puts the queen on d2 instead.

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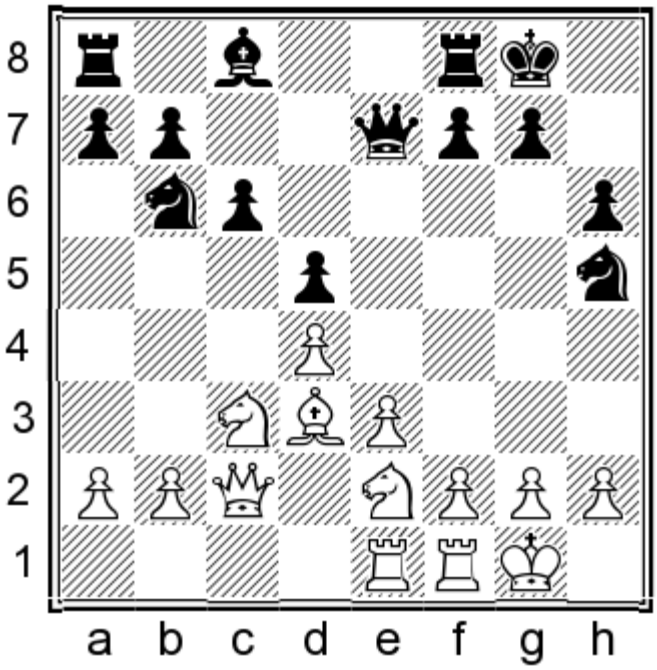
8...h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7 11.♘ge2 ♘b6 12.0-0 0-0 13.♖ae1

The problem for White in having the queen on c2 rather than d2 is that the e3-pawn is vulnerable, and will require additional support before f2-f3 can be played. From the present position, Black gets an excellent game with just a few precise moves.



13...♗d7!

I like this plan the most. Black's idea is to play ...♖ae8 followed by ...♘c8-d6 and, if f2-f3 is played, then respond with ...f5!.

13...♘f6?! allows 14.♘f4! followed by f2-f3 and e3-e4, when Black does not have the ...f5 option available.

I also considered 13...♖e8, intending 14.♘c1 ♘c4!, which may well be okay for Black. However, White has the interesting option of 14.♘d1!?, preparing f2-f3 while preventing Black's intended knight manoeuvre.

14.♕c1 ♖ae8 15.h3

Having brought all our pieces into play, it looks logical to follow up with:

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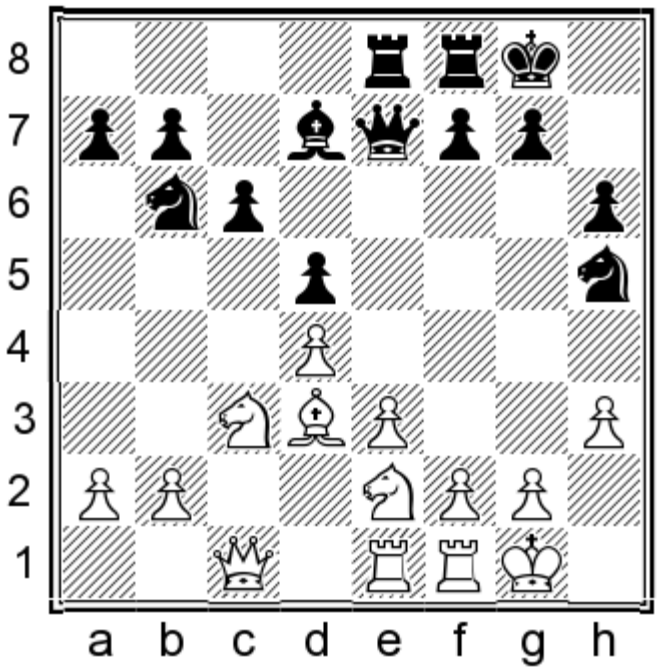

15...f5!?N

Gaining space and planning a timely ...f4.

15...♕h4 is also a decent option, and it led to an eventual success for Black in Murdzia – Feygin, Germany 2014.

15...♘c8!?N is another good move, with at least equal chances for Black.

The ♕d2 Set-Up

By supporting the e3-pawn with his queen, White makes it easier to play f2-f3 than in the lines above.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 c6 6.e3 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♘ge2 h6 9.♗h4 ♘h5 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7

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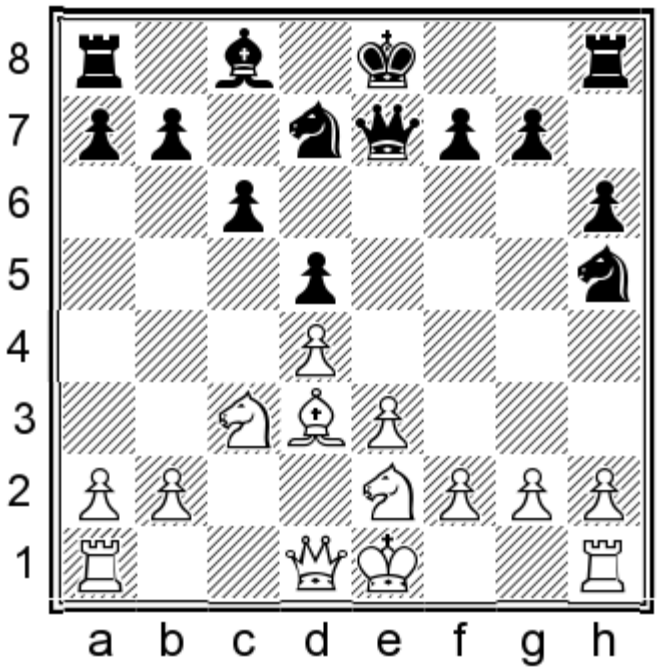

11.0-0

White can also try:

11.♕d2!?

This move was introduced by Tiger Hillarp Persson late in 2015, and was repeated by Mamedyarov a few months before this book was finished. On both occasions, White castled within the next few moves, thus transposing to our main line below. However, the text move allows him to consider long castling, or even f2-f3 followed by ♔f2. Let's have a quick look at those ideas.

11...♘b6 12.f3

Hillarp Persson preferred 12.0-0, leading straight to our main line.

The text move was tried by Mamedyarov against Adams, who reacted wisely with:

12...♗d7!

12...0-0?! should be avoided due to 13.g4! ♕h4† (13...♘f6 14.h4 gives White a big attack) 14.♔d1 and White is better.

At this point Mamedyarov found nothing better than 13.0-0, transposing to our analysis below. Let's quickly check the alternative options:

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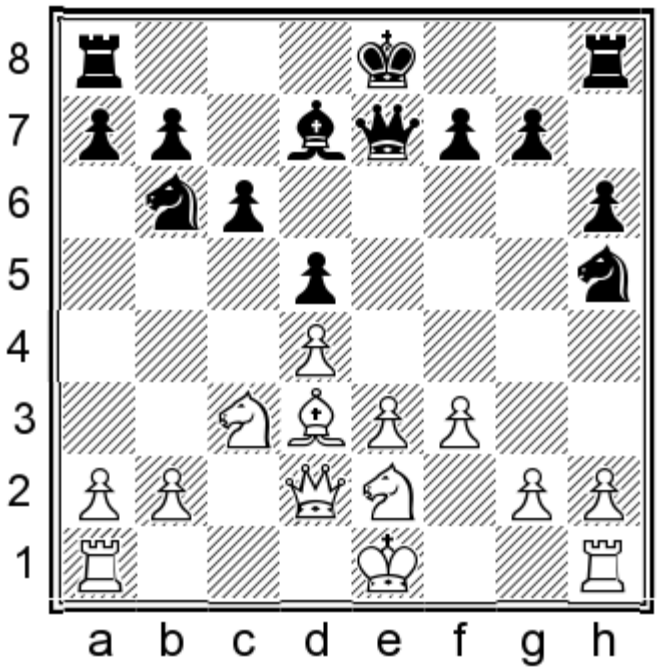


13.♔f2!?N

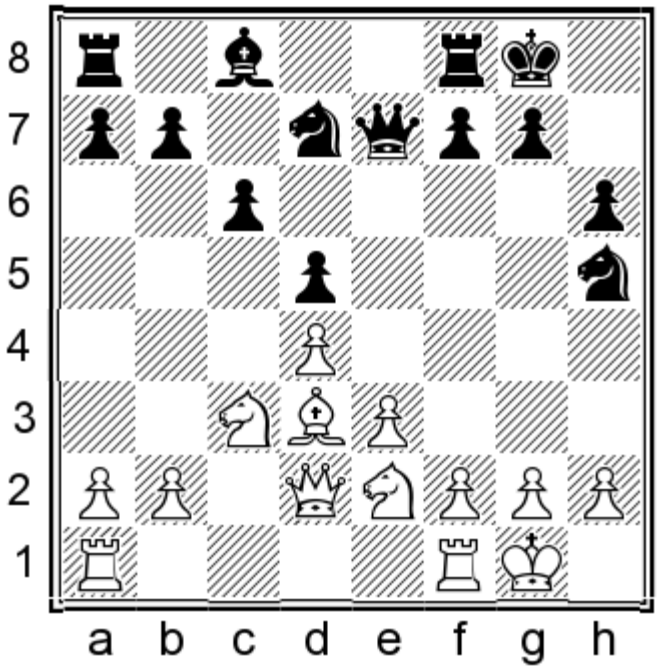
13.0-0-0 is met by 13...0-0-0, with typically fine play for Black.

In Hillarp Persson's annotations in *ChessBase Magazine* 177, the Swedish GM says he had considered the king move in his preparation. I suggest meeting it with:

13...f5=

I don't see anything scary for Black.

11...0-0 12.♕d2



12...♘b6!?

Let's make things easy and follow the same plan as we did with the queen on c2. This move has only been played once in this exact position, although it immediately transposes to a couple of other games.

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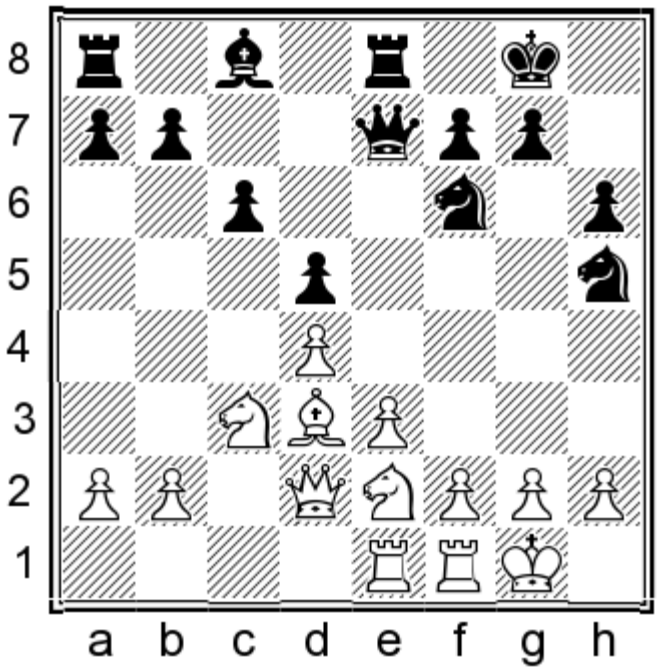
12...♖e8!? 13.♖ae1 ♘df6! (rather than 13...♘b6 as in Giri – Fressinet) is a reasonable alternative which was played in Lain – Verducci, Venice 2004.



I analysed this position in depth and I believe Black is fine, despite the unnatural appearance of the knights on the kingside. One nice point is that after 14.♘f4 Black can play 14...♕d6!.

Please note that the same plan is not so strong against the ♕c2 set-up, as one important resource for Black here is the ...♘e4 hop, something that the placement of the queen on c2 prevents. The real downside, however, is that Black's set-up is not possible against the move order with 11.♕d2 and 12.f3, so it cannot be considered a complete solution.

After the text move White's most logical tries are **A)** 13.Rae1 and **B)** 13.f3.

13.♖fe1 occurred in Neustein – Twardowski, email 2009. The move is playable of course, but it's hardly consistent with White's main plan of f2-f3 and e3-e4. A logical continuation would be: 13...♗d7N 14.♘c1 ♖ae8 15.♘b3 ♘c8 16.♘c5 ♘d6

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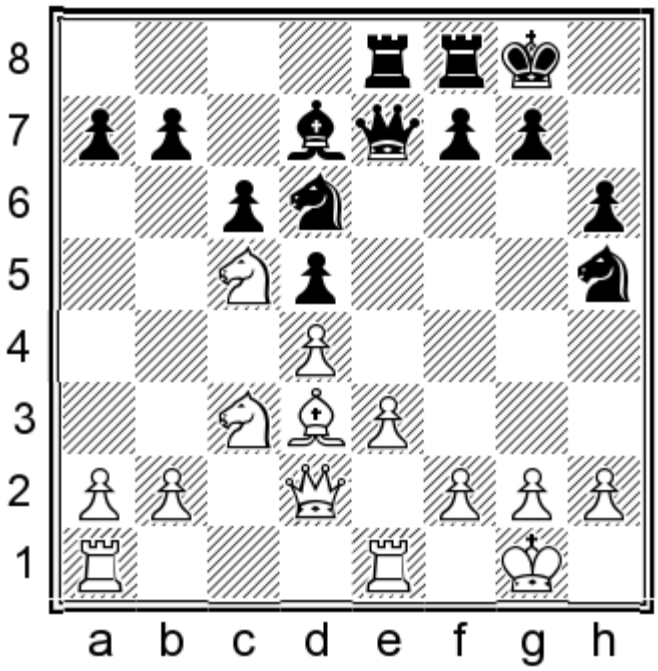
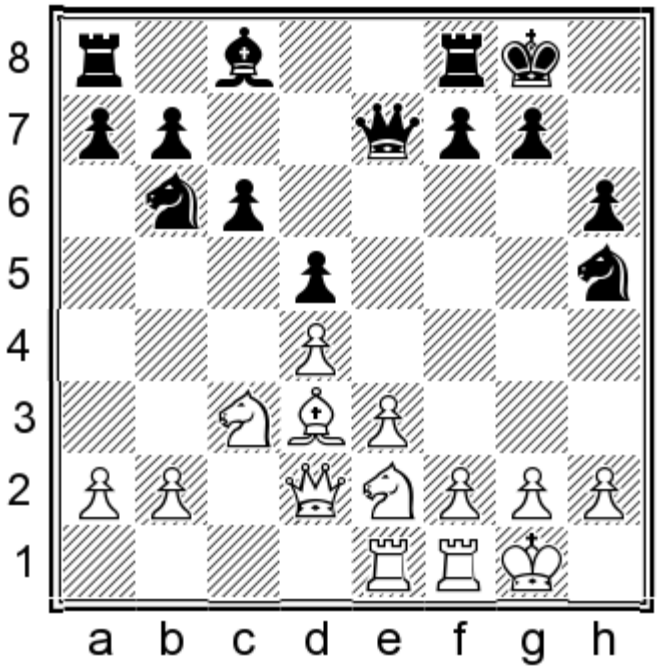


Black has arranged his pieces harmoniously and is ready for ...♗c8 and perhaps ...f5. White can try 17.e4, but then 17...dxe4 18.♗xe4 ♕d8!= is fine for Black.

A) 13.♖ae1

This move was played in Oms Palisse – Khurtsidze, Groningen 1998, when Black replied with 13...♖e8. I prefer:



13...♗d7!N

Just as in the lines above, I suggest moving the a8-rook to e8, followed by rerouting the knight via c8 to d6. Later Black may want to play ...f5, which is why it makes sense to keep the other rook on f8.

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14.♘c1

14.f3 transposes to 14.♖ae1 in the notes to variation B below.

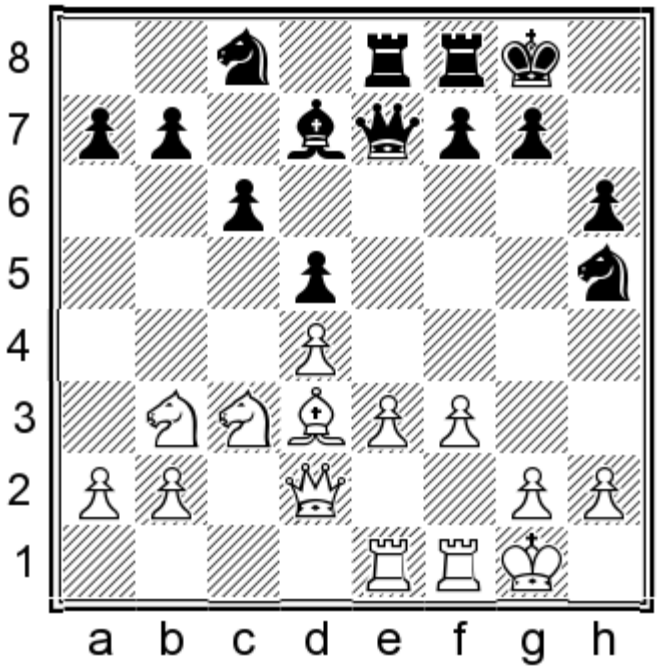
14.♘f4 ♘xf4 15.exf4 ♕d6 16.♖e5 (16.f5 ♖fe8 is also pleasant for Black) 16...♖ae8 17.♖fe1 f6 18.♖xe8 ♖xe8 19.♖xe8† ♗xe8 Black is doing fine, and most endgames will favour him due to his better structure and extra pawn on the queenside.

14...♖ae8 15.♘b3

15.f3 ♕g5! once again transposes to the note to White's 14th move in variation B below.

15...♘c8 16.f3

16.♘c5 ♘d6 17.f3 f5 is fine for Black, who intends ...♗c8 next. If White moves his bishop and drops his knight back to d3, Black can cover the e5-square with a knight on f7. Black may even consider activating his bishop with ...b6 and ...♗a6.



16...f5!

This move is an important resource, especially when both of the white knights are a long way from e5.

Please don't go for 16...♕g5?? here, as 17.♘c5 wins a pawn.

17.e4

This active move was the usual choice for White in my engine matches, but it leads nowhere.

17...fxe4 18.fxe4 ♖xf1† 19.♖xf1 dxe4 20.♗xe4

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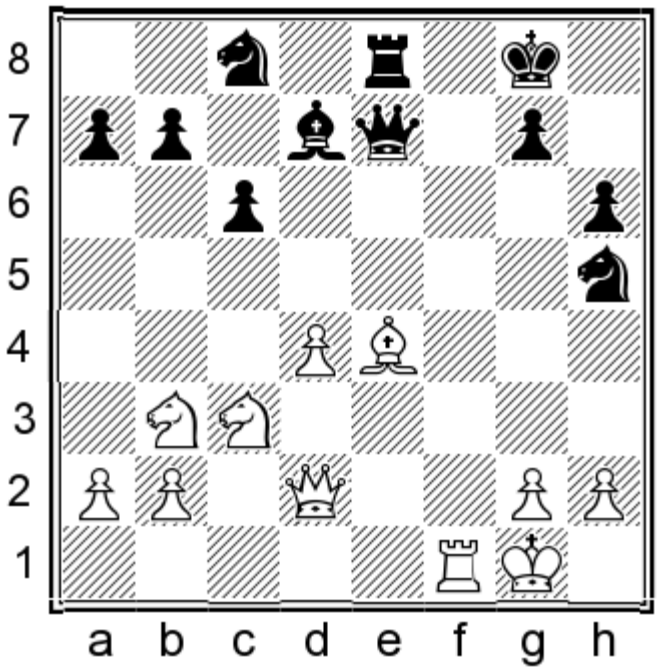
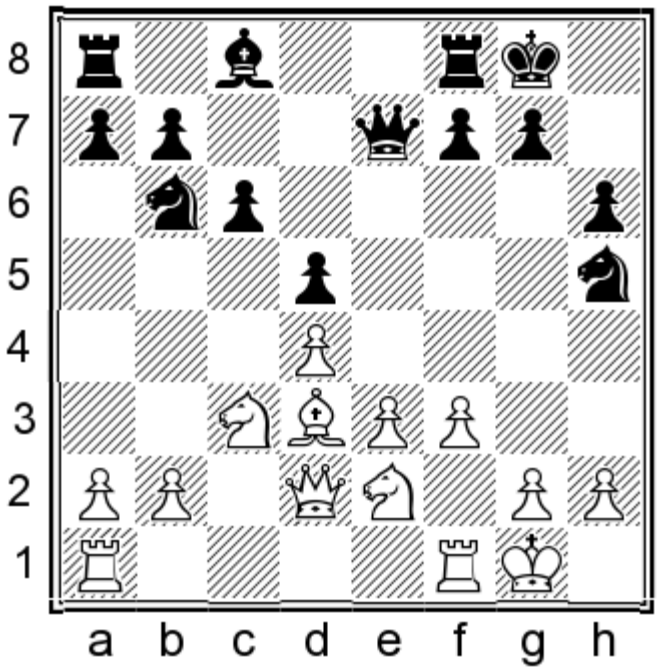


20...♘f6! 21.♗g6 ♖d8 22.♕f2 ♗e8=

Black has no problems. Throughout this line, his position remained both sound and easy to handle. I see no reason why the second player shouldn't be happy, as long as he keeps in mind when to play and when not to play ...♕g5.

B) 13.f3

I recommend meeting this move with our usual plan, beginning with:



13...♗d7N

13...♗e6 was the less accurate continuation of Hillarp Persson – Merriman, London 2015. Black needs the e-file open in order to be able to obtain counterplay in the centre.

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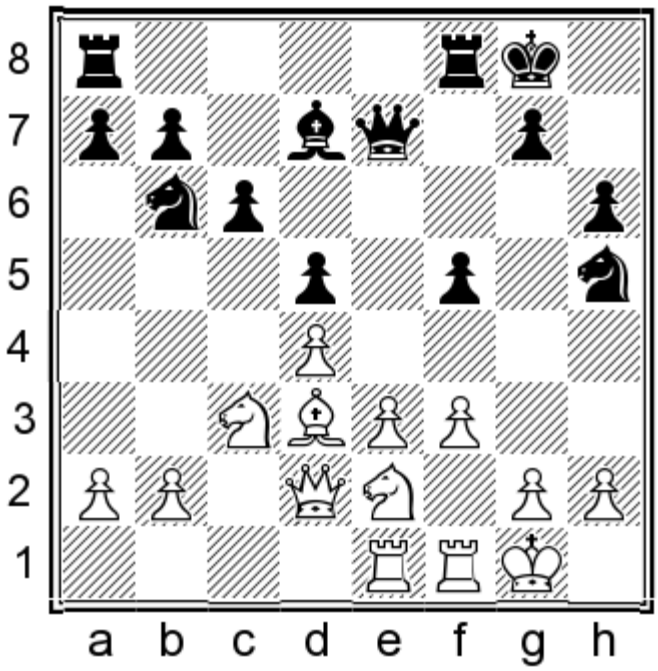
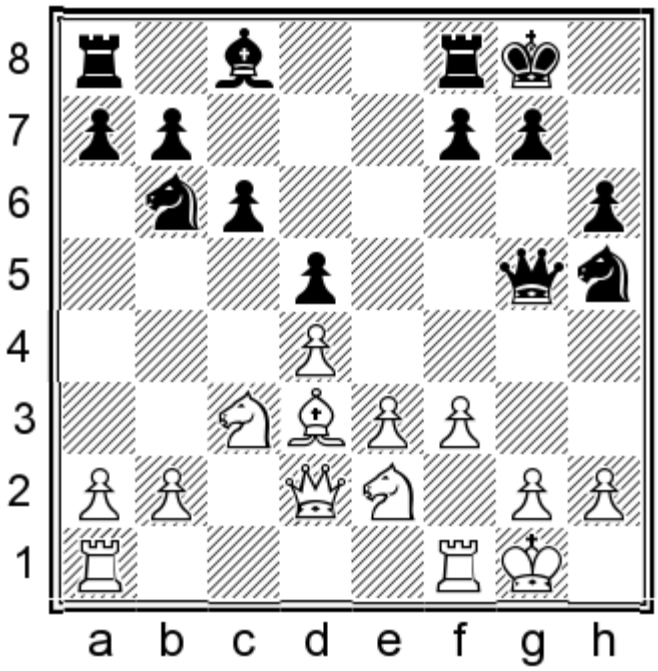
At first I thought that 13...f5?! was a good move but then I discovered a plan for White which is difficult to meet: 14.♖ae1! (after 14.a4 Black should play 14...♗e6 intending ...♘c8 and ...♘d6, and if 15.a5 ♘c4! 16.♗xc4 dxc4 17.e4 fxe4 18.fxe4 b5 Black has good counterplay) 14...♗d7



15.b3! ♖ae8 16.♘c1! Intending ♗b1 and ♘d3-e5. Black's best continuation may well be 16...c5. Although in a correspondence game I would feel confident of being able to hold Black's slightly worse position, I cannot really recommend it for the practical player.

13...♕g5!? is a more tempting alternative which I was almost ready to recommend:



As we will soon see, this queen move is an important resource in these positions. Here it prevents the e3-e4 push without weakening the e5-square, which was a problem in the line above. However, there are two problems with relying on this move as a repertoire solution:

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a) 14.♖ad1! seems like a good reply, when White may be able to claim a small edge.

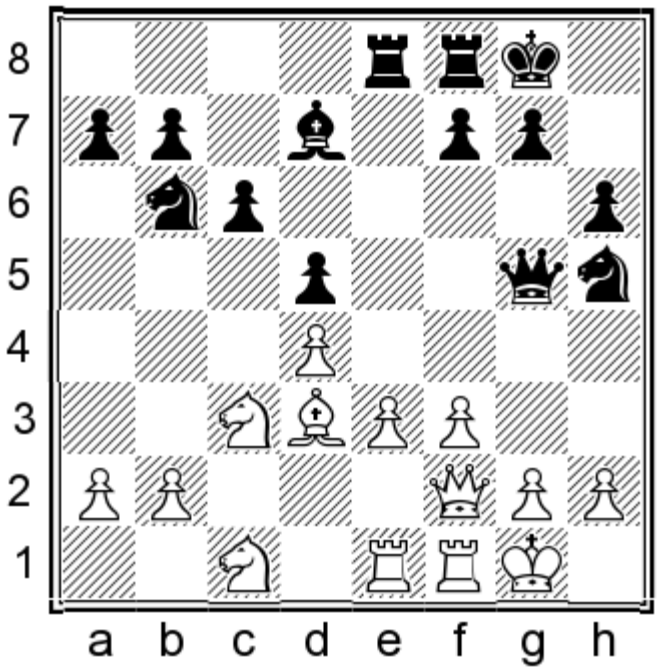
b) The main problem is the 11.♕d2 ♘b6 12.f3 move order, when Black should play 12...♗d7 before castling, and after 13.0-0 0-0 Black has been 'move-ordered' away from the 13...♕g5 line.

My recommended move is compatible with both move orders, and I was unable to find any advantage for White against it. By the way, we have now transposed to the Mamedyarov – Adams game, which we will follow for some more moves.

14.g4

This seems strongest.

14.♖ae1 is an obvious alternative, but now 14...♕g5! makes a lot of sense, as White will not want to lose a tempo putting his rook on d1 as in the line we saw above. Aside from pinning the e-pawn, the queen also prepares some ideas on the kingside such as ...♘f6 followed by ...♗f5, either with or without first playing ...h5 and possibly ...h4. A sample variation runs: 15.♘c1 ♖ae8 16.♕f2



16...f5! Now this is fantastic for Black, as White is still a few tempos away from carrying out his desired knight manoeuvre to e5. Moreover, after 17.♗b1 (or 17.b3, to prevent ...♘c4), Black has the powerful 17...f4! move, based on the fact that 18.e4?! ♘g3! wins the exchange, as the knight is untouchable.

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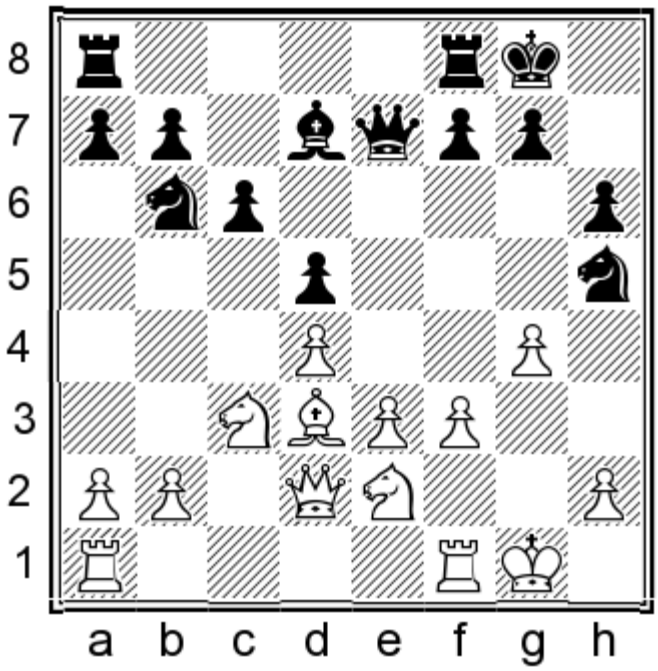

14...♘f6

I also investigated 14...♕g5 15.♔h1 ♘f6, but was unable to find equality and concluded that the queen is better off staying where it is.

15.♘f4!?N

15.♘g3 was seen in Mamedyarov – Adams, Sharaj 2017, but the thematic 15...c5!N 16.♔g2 ♖fe8 gives Black enough counterplay. I consider the text move to be White's most active and challenging option.

15...c5!

Tiger only mentions the plan of ...♘e8-d6 in his analysis but the text move is more active and thematic. The same idea is often seen in similar variations of the Nimzo-Indian where this structure occurs. The point is that with the pawns on f3 and g4, White can hardly hope to benefit from taking on c5 and playing against the isolated pawn.

15...g5!? is a concrete response which also doesn't seem bad. Here are a few sample lines: 16.♘g2 (16.♘fe2 ♘e8=) 16...♘e8 17.♖ae1 (17.e4 dxe4 18.♘xe4 f5! 19.♘c5 [19.gxf5 ♗xf5 20.h4 ♖d8=] 19...fxg4 20.f4 ♘d6=) 17...♘g7

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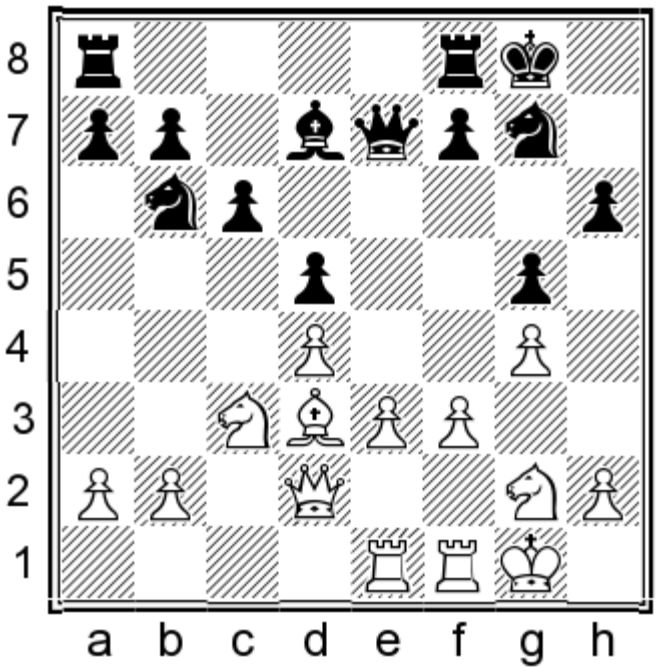
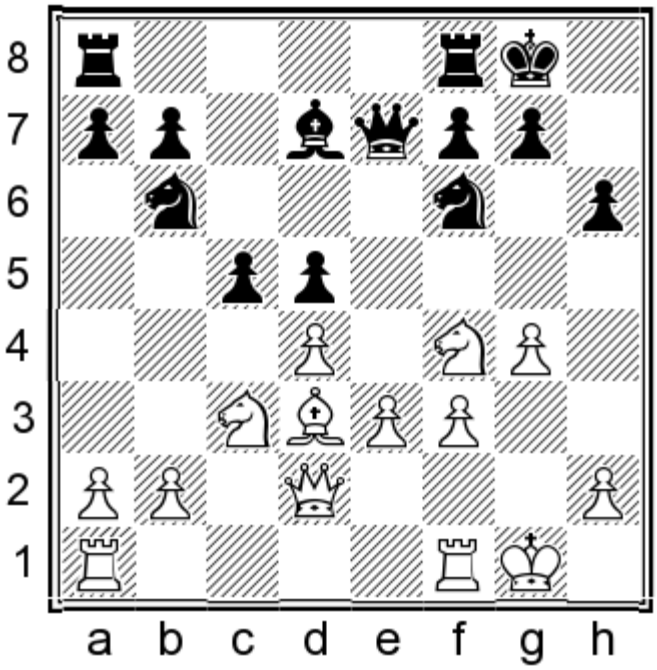


18.e4 Otherwise ...f5 comes. 18...♕b4 19.exd5 (19.♕f2 is met by 19...♘e6) 19...♕xd4† 20.♘e3 ♔h8! Black seems to be okay.



16.♖ae1

16.h4 ♖ac8 is similar and may well transpose.

16...♖fe8 17.h4

I see no other idea that makes sense.

17...♖ac8! 18.♕h2!

18.♔g2 gives Black time for 18...cxd4 19.exd4 ♕d6, intending 20.g5 ♘h7 with equal play.

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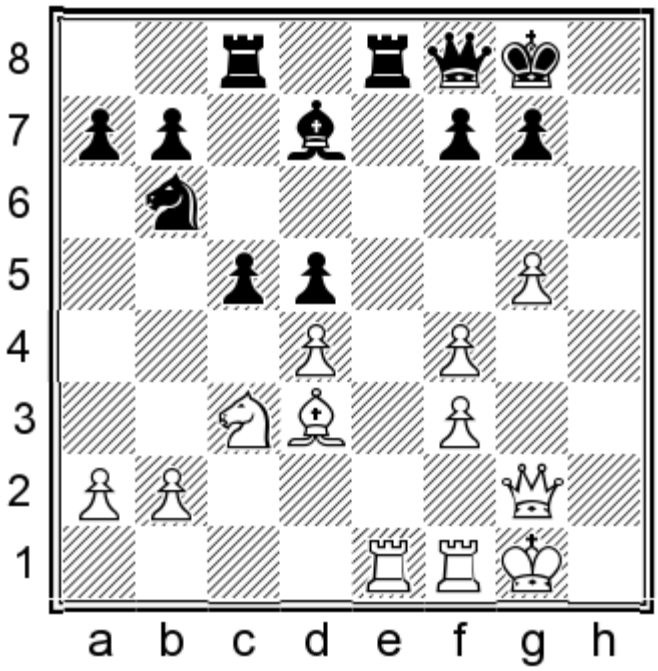
18.g5 hxg5 19.hxg5 ♘h5! is a nice trick, when the knight cannot be taken. My analysis continues: 20.♕g2 ♘xf4 21.exf4 ♕f8



Black intends ...g6 next, with a fine position. In the event of 22.g6 fxg6 23.♕xg6 Black has a choice: 23...♕xf4 practically forces White to take a repetition, but Black can avoid that outcome with 23...♖c6!?, when the position remains complicated and roughly balanced.

The text move is the most critical continuation, which demands a concrete response.

18...cxd4 19.exd4 ♕b4!

Hitting the d4-pawn.

20.♘ce2

20.♕f2 ♕d6! 21.♕h2 (21.♕g3 guards e1 but places the queen on an unprotected square, so the d5-pawn is not at all vulnerable after 21...♖xe1 22.♖xe1 ♖e8!=)

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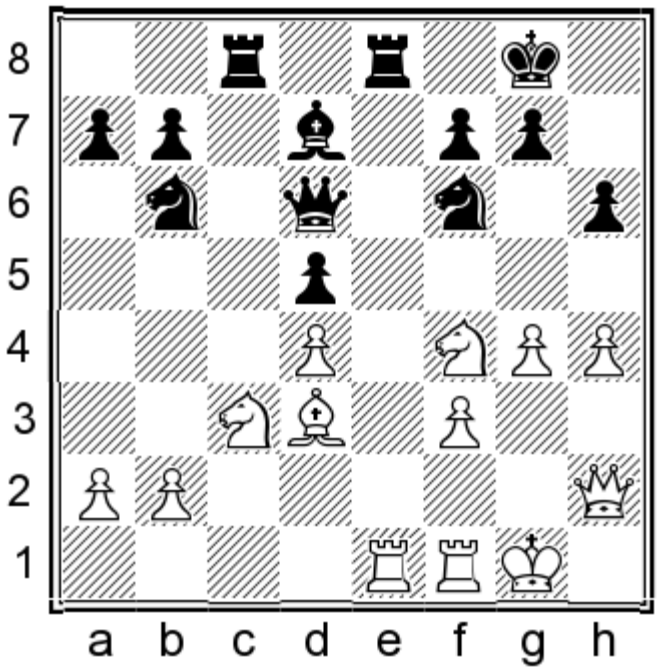
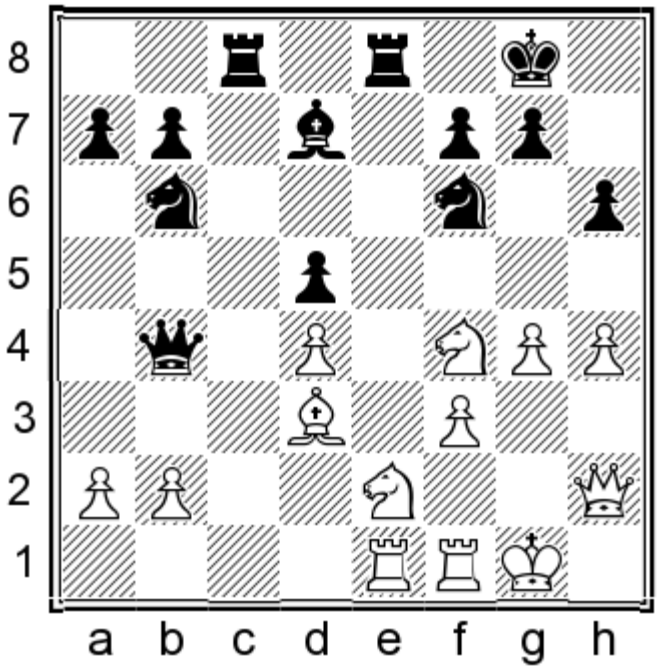


21...♖xe1 22.♖xe1 ♗c6! 23.g5 ♖e8= Followed by ...♘h7-f8.



20...♗b5

This natural move seems like the most solid way to play.

20...♖c6?! 21.g5 ♘h7 is dangerous for Black, as after 22.♔h1! White will develop a big initiative.

20...♘e4!? 21.fxe4 dxe4 22.♗b1 ♗xg4 is an interesting sacrifice, which could be considered by players who feel like rolling the dice to play for a win.

21.♗xb5

21.g5 ♗xd3 22.♘xd3 ♕d2 23.♘ef4 ♕xh2† 24.♔xh2 hxg5 25.hxg5 ♖xe1 26.♖xe1 ♘e8 should lead to a draw, for instance:

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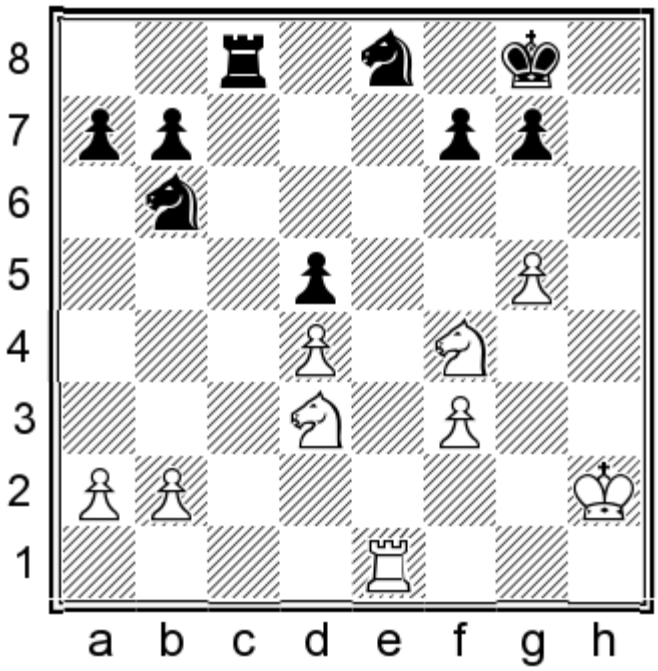

27.♖e5 ♖c2† 28.♔h3 ♔f8 29.♘xd5 f6 30.gxf6 gxf6 31.♖f5 ♘xd5 32.♖xd5 ♖d2=

21...♕xb5 22.♘g3

22.♘c3 ♕c6 23.g5 ♘h7= seems safe enough for Black.

22...♖xe1 23.♖xe1 ♕b4 24.♖d1

24.♕f2 ♖c2! 25.♕xc2 ♕xe1† 26.♔g2 ♘c4 is also level.

24...♘a4 25.b3 ♘c3 26.♕d2

26.♖d2 ♘b5 27.♕f2 ♕d6 28.♘fe2 ♖e8 keeps things even.

26...a5 27.♘f5 ♘xd1 28.♕xb4 axb4 29.♘e7† ♔f8 30.♘xc8 ♘c3=

The four-knight endgame should be drawn.

Conclusion

This chapter has completed our coverage of the Exchange Variation by dealing with those lines where both sides castle on the kingside. In many lines, Black should be able to obtain a good position by relying on well-established plans such as manoeuvring a knight to d6, being ready to meet b2-b4 with ...b5 followed by getting a knight to c4, and developing a kingside attack when given the opportunity. Things are a little different when White goes for the central attacking plan with ♘ge2 and f2-f3; and this is especially true in the modern set-up where White puts his queen on d2. In that case a certain amount of theoretical knowledge is needed, but overall I don't think Black has too much to worry about.

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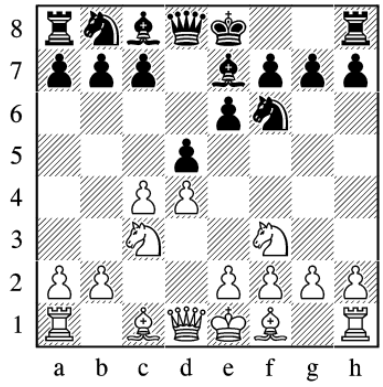
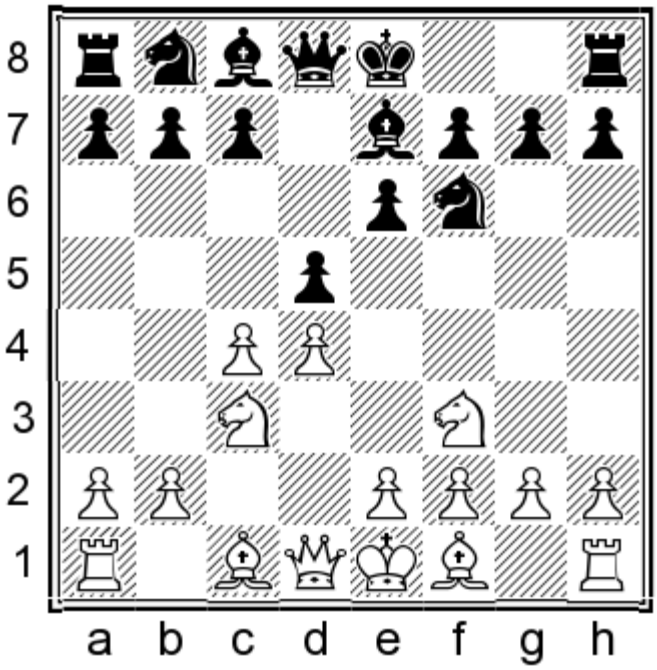
Chapter 4a



QGD Sidelines Introduction

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗e7



From this, our main QGD tabiya, we have dealt with the most important options of 5.♗g5 and 5.♗f4. The following chapter will address three alternative systems at White's disposal, all of which have their own body of theory and have their fans among the world's elite. The three systems are quite distinct from one another, so it is hard to identify common strategic themes and typical manoeuvres which apply to all of them. Instead I will give a short introduction to each system and give you a brief idea of how I will recommend meeting it.

5.♕c2

This move not only has its own independent ideas, but also creates a bunch of move order issues for our repertoire. The key point to remember is that any time Black castles, he must watch out for cxd5, when ...exd5 leads to a version of the

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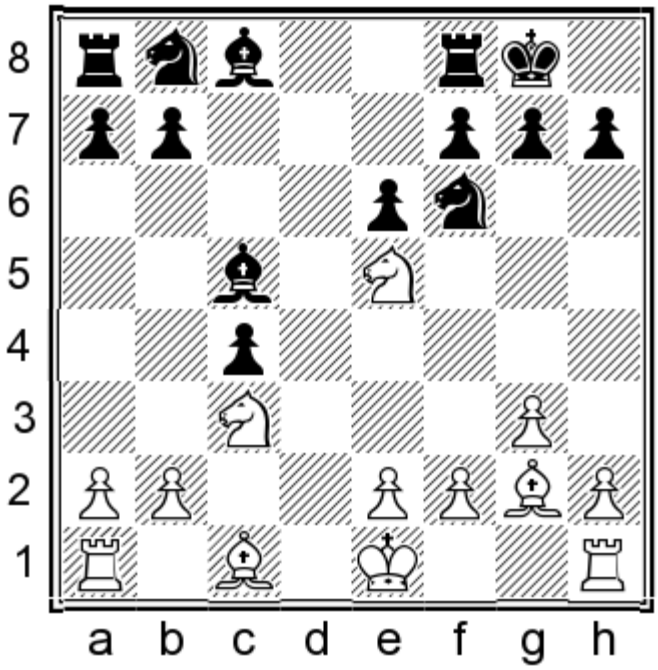
Exchange Variation where Black no longer has the option of long castling, which rules out the plan of development prescribed in Chapter 3b.

Instead I propose the active 5...c5!, immediately fighting for the centre and questioning the placement of the queen on c2. After 6.dxc5 d4! our main line sees Black offer a pawn sacrifice, but he gets plenty of activity in return.

5.g3

5.g3 is closely connected to the Catalan. I will propose an effective way to deal with it, but would like to draw your attention to the following position where we must rely on an important resource.



I remember watching the live transmission from the Moscow 2016 Candidates Tournament, where Topalov found himself having to play this position as Black against Giri. My first impression was that Topalov was drifting towards a typical Catalan endgame, in which White would be able to press with no risk for the next three or four hours. I was wrong to underestimate Topalov's preparation though, as the former World Champion confidently played:

10...♘c6!

This looks like the perfect solution; I have presented the full game in the theoretical section.

e2-e3 Systems

Playing e2-e3 with the bishop still on c1 may seem like a timid approach, but White intends to post his bishops on d3 and b2, where they point towards the black kingside. It's similar to the Colle-Zukertort set-up, which will be analysed later in Chapter 6c. Here White has lost some flexibility by committing to c2-c4 rather early, but transpositions are still possible.

I recommend developing the bishop to b7, leading to a Queen's Indian set-up which has long been established as a reliable choice for Black. Here I will preview a couple of important plans I will be recommending for Black. White has two main versions of the e2-e3 set-up; here is the main line with the knight on c3:

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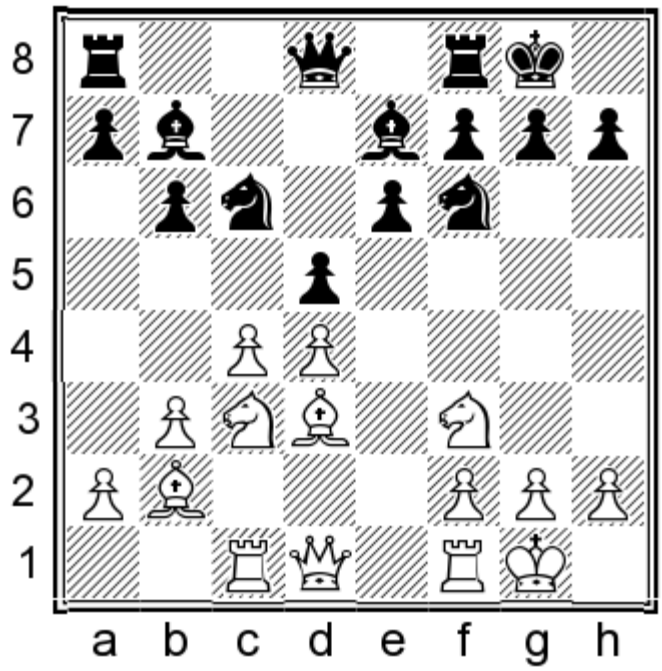

The central tension tends to work in White's favour as he doesn't mind getting hanging pawns and, if Black hesitates too long before exchanging on c4, White may consider creating a dangerous passed pawn with c4-c5. I'd like to bring to your attention a concrete plan to challenge White's set-up.

11...♘b4! 12.♗b1

Clearly this is the move White wants to play, in order to keep his bishop pointing towards the kingside.

12...dxc4 13.bxc4 ♗xf3! 14.♕xf3

Recapturing with the g-pawn would chronically weaken White's kingside.

14...♕xd4 15.a3 ♘a6 16.♕b7

White is forking two pieces but Black has a great resource.

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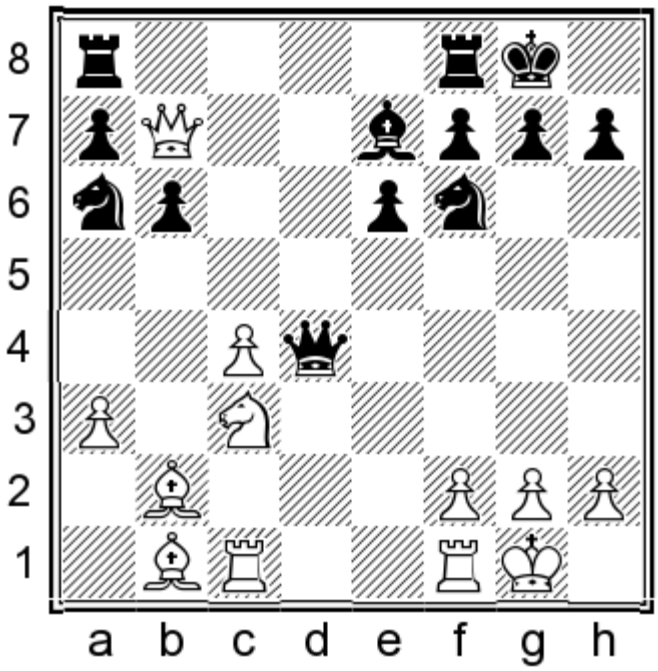
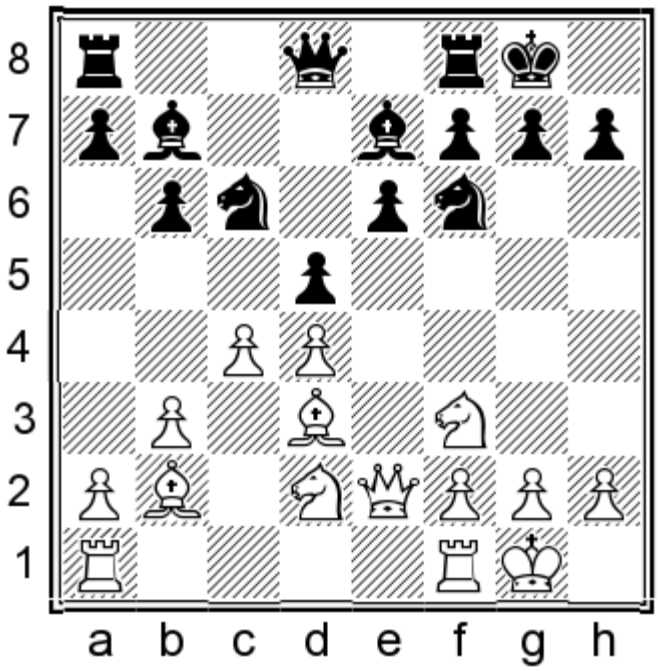


16...♗d6!

Threatening to take on h2. Full details can be found in the theoretical section.

And finally, White can go for a related set-up with the knight on d2 instead of c3. Clearly the above plan involving ...♗xf3 would be senseless here, as White can simply recapture with the second knight. Instead, I'd like to bring to your attention a move played by Anatoly Karpov:



11...♕d6!

The queen makes room for the f8-rook to come to d8, while the queen's rook has a natural home on c8. Black's other main idea it to post the queen on f4, where it has some nuisance value and cannot be disturbed by any ♗c1 ideas. My analysis has convinced me that Black is not worse and his next three or four moves will flow easily. In Game 41 White chases the queen with g2-g3, and Karpov goes on to exploit the light-square weaknesses in great style.

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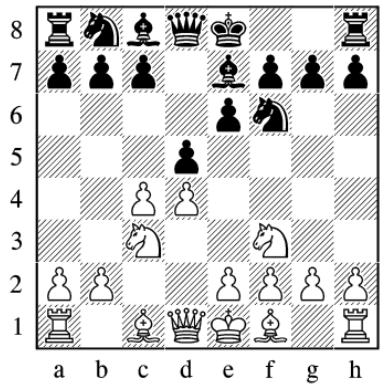
Chapter 4b



QGD Sidelines Theory

5.♕c2 page 171

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♕c2 c5!? (5...0-0 page 171) **6.dxc5** (6.cxd5 page 171) **6...d4! 7.♘b5!** (7.♘a4?! page 172) **7...♗xc5!** page 172

5.g3!? – Catalan Style Game 40, page 175

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.g3!? 0-0 6.♗g2 dxc4 7.♘e5! (7.0-0?! page 175) **7...c5! 8.dxc5 ♕xd1† 9.♘xd1 ♗xc5 10.♘c3** (10.♘xc4 page 176; 10.♘e3 page 176; 10.♗e3 page 176; 10.0-0!? page 177) **10...♘c6!** page 177

e2-e3 Set-Ups page 178

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 (4.♘c3 page 178) **4...♗e7**

A) ♘c3 Lines page 179

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗e7 5.♘c3 0-0 6.b3 (6.♗d3 page 179) **6...c5 7.♗d3** (7.dxc5 page 179; 7.cxd5 page 179) **7...♘c6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4 b6 10.♗b2 ♗b7** (11.♖e1 page 180)

A1 11.♕e2 page 180

A2 11.♖c1 page 181

B) ♘bd2 Lines Game 41, page 182

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗e7 5.b3 0-0 6.♗d3 b6 7.0-0 ♗b7 8.♗b2 c5 9.♘bd2 (9.cxd5 page 183; 9.dxc5 page 183) **9...cxd4 10.exd4 ♘c6 11.♕e2 ♕d6!** page 183

As I mentioned in the introductory section, this chapter will deal with three distinct set-ups, so let's go directly to the first of them.

5.♕c2

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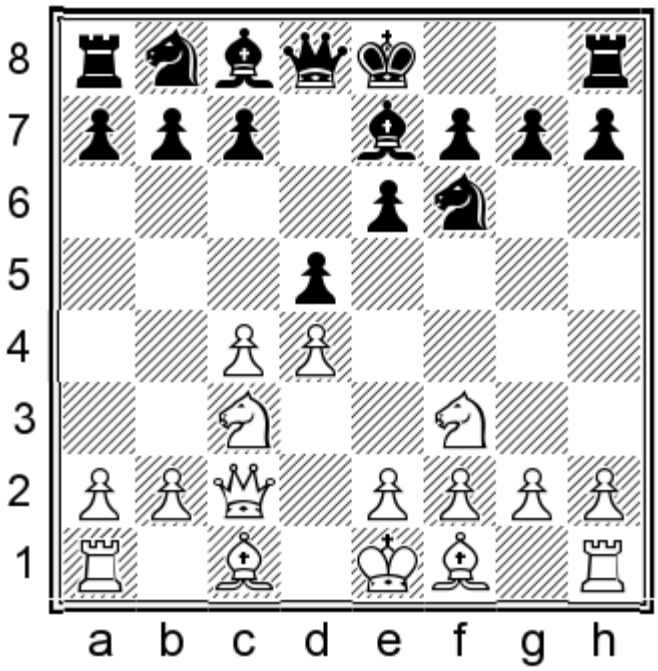
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.♕c2

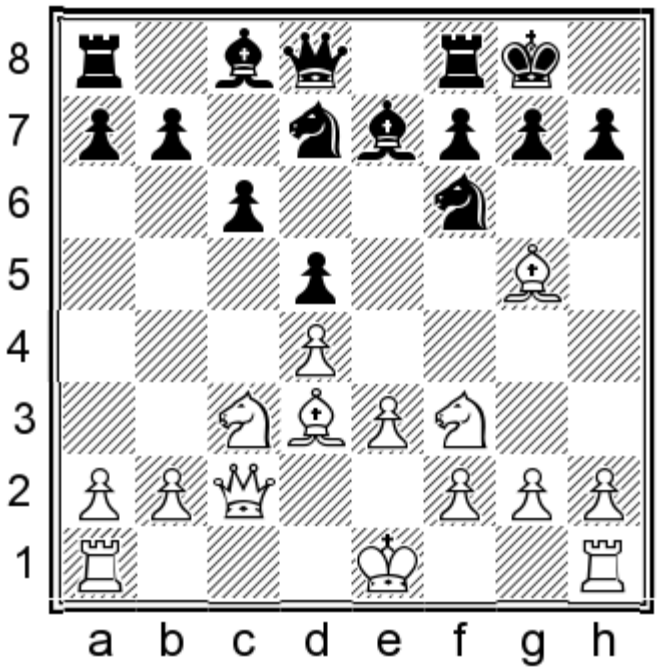
This early development of the queen is actually quite a serious move. I have used it myself in my correspondence practice, and it was one of the 'secret weapons' I showed to the Danish Team before the 2014 Tromso Olympiad.



5...c5!?

This is linked to a pawn sacrifice.

At first I wanted to recommend 5...0-0, making a flexible developing move while keeping the ...c5 idea in reserve. However, after my intended 6.♗g5 ♘bd7 (I always like to develop the knight here against a bishop on g5 before playing ...h6), my editor Andrew Greet pointed out the following transpositional problem: 7.cxd5! exd5 8.e3 c6 9.♗d3! (9.h3 h6 10.♗f4 is not a problem for us, as we have transposed to a line given on page 121, where 10...♘e4! turns out well for Black)



We have reached a line of the Exchange Variation which lies outside of our repertoire. In Chapters 3a and 3b I

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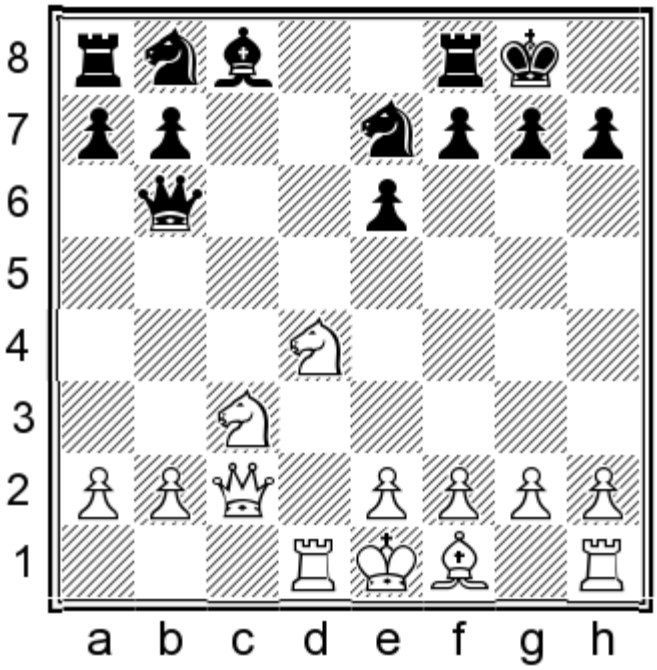
recommend delaying castling in favour of a quick ...♘bd7 and ...h6 to force a commitment from White's bishop. Here, however, White can meet 9...h6 with 10.♗f4 ♘h5 11.♗e5!, reaching a completely different type of position from those covered in our repertoire. After 11...♘xe5 12.dxe5 g6 (or 12...♗g4) Black hasn't done too badly at correspondence level, but I couldn't shake the feeling that White is objectively better, and his favourable statistics in my database certainly reinforce the view that Black's position is tougher to handle.

6.dxc5

6.cxd5 has been played fairly often but 6...cxd4! 7.♘xd4 0-0 8.♗g5 ♘xd5! 9.♗xe7 ♘xe7 10.♖d1 ♕b6 seems fine for Black. A good example continued:



11.♕b3 ♕a5!? 12.e3 a6 C.E. Costa – Frey Beckman, corr. 2003. Black is ready for ...e5 and ...♗e6, and does not stand worse at all.

6...d4!

This is the point of Black's previous move; he utilizes the position of the queen on c2 to fight for the initiative.

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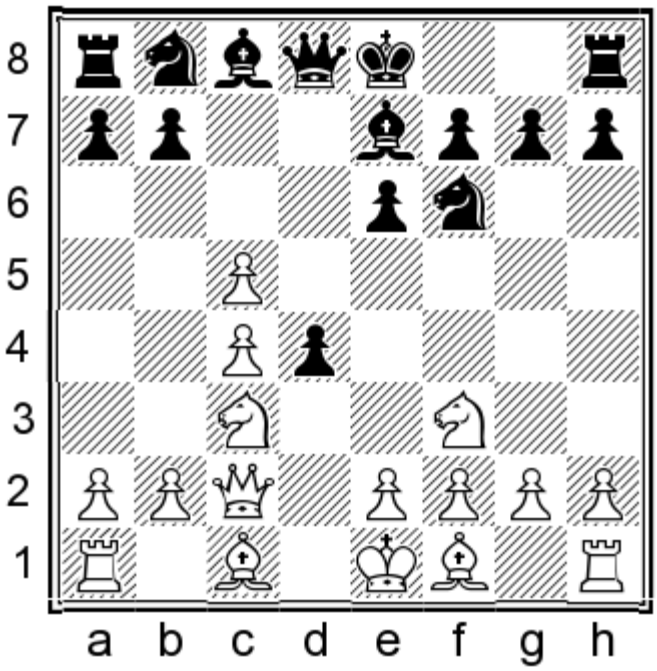


7.♘b5!

White should counterattack the d4-pawn rather than trying to defend c5.

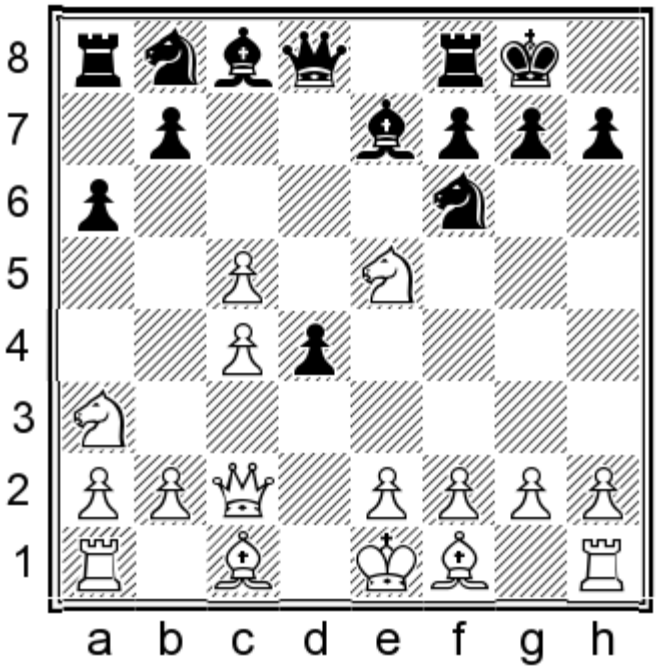
7.♘a4?! b6! 8.e4 (8.cxb6?! axb6 looks highly suspicious for White) 8...bxc5 9.♗d3 ♘c6 10.a3 e5∓ gave Black a healthy edge in Krasenkow – P.H. Nielsen, Copenhagen 2003.

7...♗xc5!

This move is unusual, but it's a simple, practical approach which I like a lot.

The main line has been:
7...e5!? 8.♘xe5 a6 9.♘a3 0-0

Black certainly has some compensation, but White can challenge his opening concept with:



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10.♘d3!

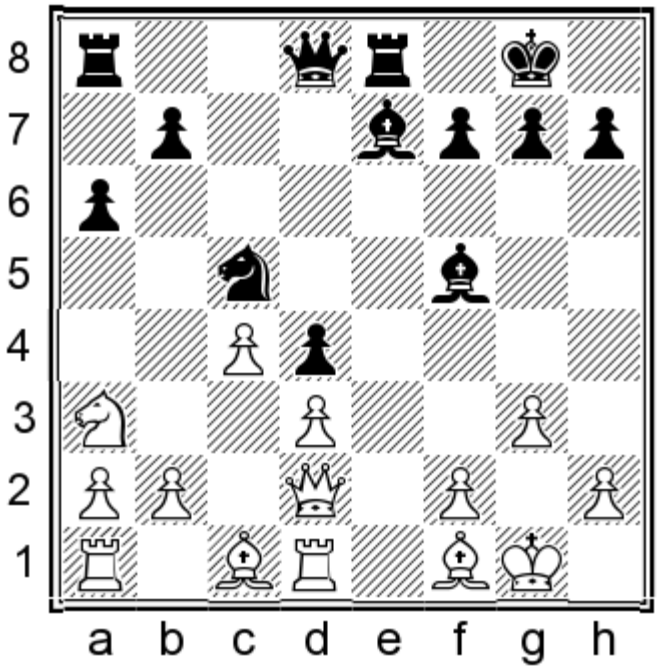
I tested this move in a correspondence game, which continued:

10...♗f5 11.g3 ♘bd7 12.♗g2 ♘xc5 13.0-0

With careful play, I think White can look to the future with some optimism. He is a pawn up after all!

13...♘fd7 14.♕d2! ♘xd3 15.exd3 ♘c5 16.♖d1 ♖e8 17.♗f1!

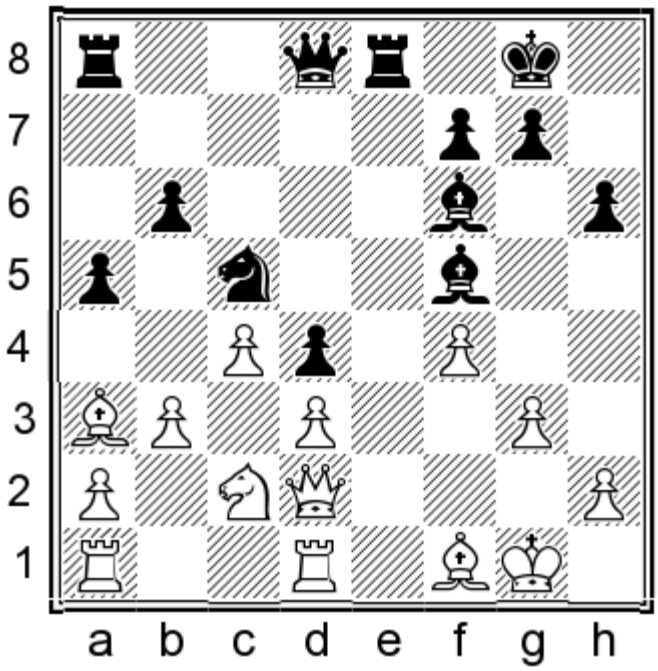
White's last move looks ugly but Black is under pressure to make something happen, otherwise he will be much worse after White gets coordinated. My opponent found a good way to provoke a kingside weakness.



17...h6! 18.♘c2 ♗g5 19.f4 ♗f6 20.b3 a5

Now White has to find a plan. I think I found a decent one, which clarifies the situation in White's favour.

21.♗a3 b6

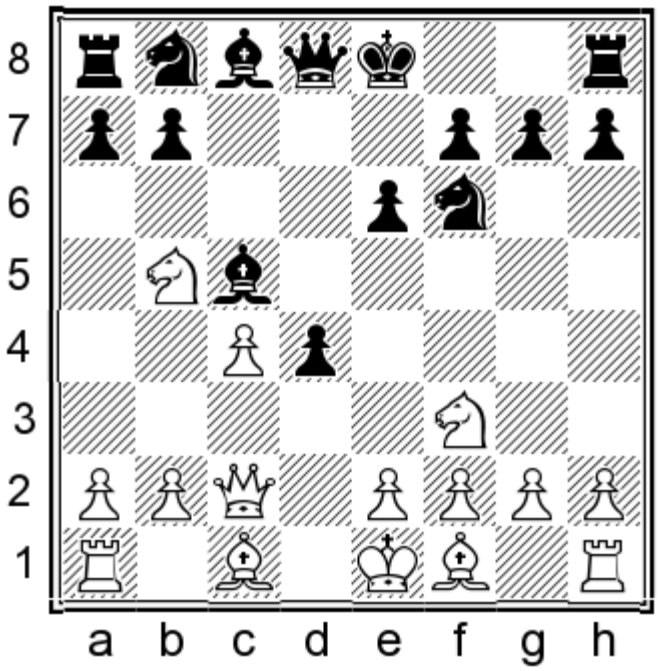


22.♗xc5!? bxc5 23.a3 ♗g4 24.♖db1 ♗f3 25.b4

White was better in Ntirlis – Capuano, corr. 2014, but my opponent managed to draw an endgame where I had a

queen, knight and extra pawn against queen and bishop. I would not have been completely comfortable offering this line as a repertoire solution for Black, although it could be worth considering for players who are happy to take a risk to unsettle their opponents.

Let’s return to my main line, which I regard as a cleaner, calmer solution for Black.



8.♗f4!

This is more challenging than 8.e3 e5! 9.♘xe5 dxe3 10.♗xe3 ♗xe3 11.fxe3 ♕e7 12.♘f3 0-0∞ when Black had plenty of compensation in Korinek – Koehler, Internet 2012.

8...0-0!

I only found two games in which this useful finesse was played.

9.0-0-0!

The point of the last move is that 9.♘c7? e5! 10.♗xe5 ♗b4† (or 10...♘g4!? 11.♗g3 ♘xf2!?) 11.♘d2 ♘c6 gives Black clearly better prospects.

9.♖d1?! ♘c6 10.e3 ♕a5†! also fails to impress for White.

9...♕e7!

Improving over 9...♕a5 as played in Eingorn – Vaganian, Moscow 1988.

10.♗g3 ♘c6 11.♘bxd4 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4

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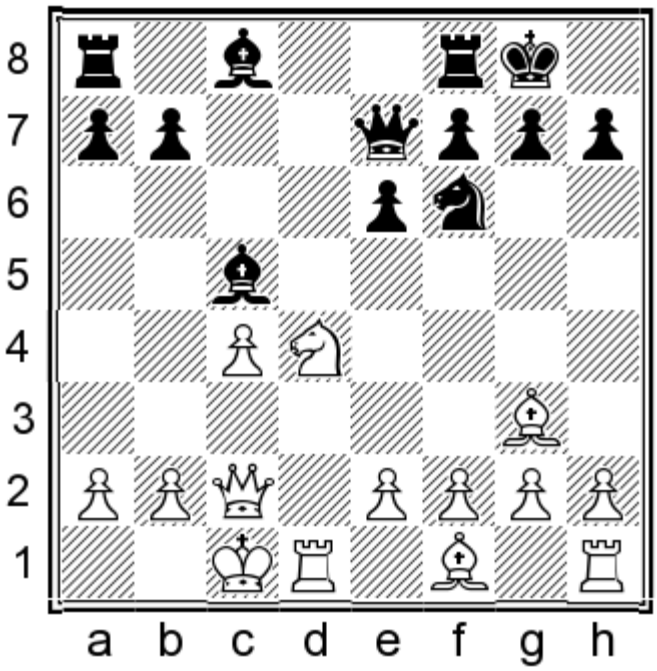


12...♗xd4!N

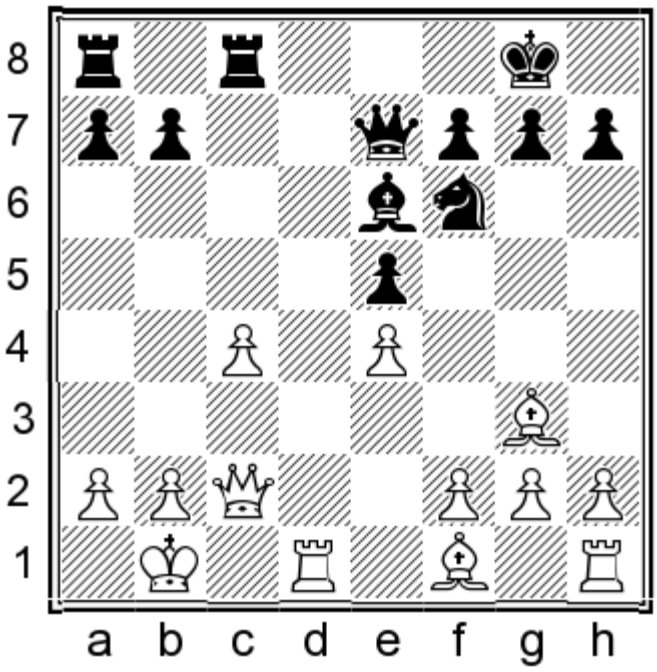
12...e5 13.♘b3 ♗d6 14.♗h4 ♖d8 15.♔b1 ♗e6 16.e3 ♖ac8 17.♗d3 h6 was subsequently drawn in Lauer – Giesemann, corr. 2013, but I was unable to find full equality for Black after the paradoxical 18.c5!N.

13.♖xd4 e5 14.♖d1 ♗e6

According to my analysis Black is fine; the main plan is to hit the c4-pawn with a rook on the c-file and ...b5. Here are some supporting lines.

15.e4

15.♔b1 ♖fc8 16.e4 (16.♕d2?! ♘e4) does not stop Black from carrying out his plan:



16...b5! 17.♗xe5 ♗xc4 18.♗xf6 gxf6 19.♗xc4 ♖xc4 20.♕d3 ♖xe4 21.♕xb5 ♖e2 22.♕d3 ♖e8=

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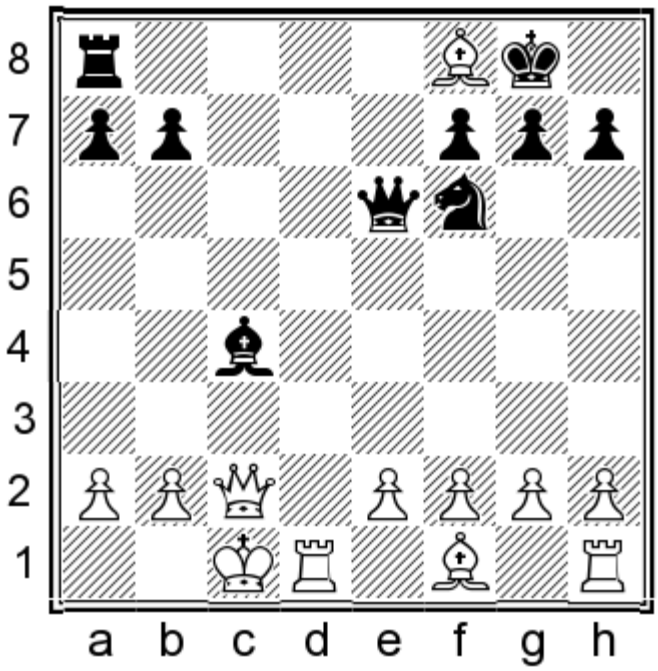
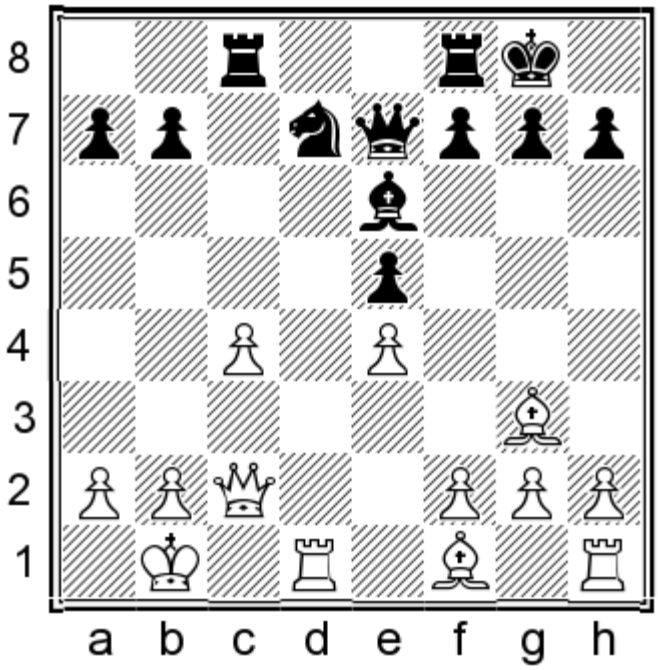
Another important detail occurs after: 15.♗xe5 ♗xc4 16.♗d6 ♕e6 17.♗xf8



17...♔xf8! (17...♖xf8 18.b3! forces the bishop to retreat, leaving White with good chances to consolidate) The text move keeps a dangerous initiative for Black, as 18.b3? now runs into 18...♖c8! when White will not have a killing check on d8 up his sleeve.

15...♘d7 16.♔b1 ♖ac8

16...♖fc8?! 17.♕d2! makes it harder for Black to find compensation.



17.f3

Now 17.♕d2?! makes no sense due to 17...♖fd8.

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17...b5!

Black carries out his main plan, which ensures him of strong counterplay.

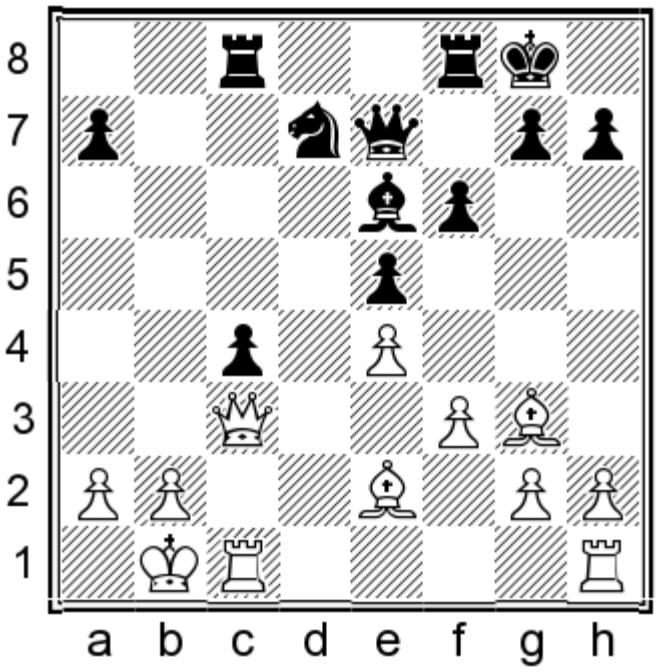
18.♗e2 bxc4 19.♕c3!

Otherwise ...c3 will be problematic for White.

19...f6

Black's idea is to play ...♘c5/b6-a4 followed by ...c3.

20.♖c1!



20...♘c5!

20...♘b6?! is inaccurate due to 21.♕a5! when it is hard for Black to find counterplay.

21.♗xc4!

After 21.♕a5?! ♘b7! 22.♕c3 ♖c6∓ Black brings the other rook to b8 and the knight to d6 and b5.

21...♘xe4 22.♗xe6† ♕xe6

With a level game.

5.g3!? – Catalan Style

GAME 40

Anish Giri – Veselin Topalov

Moscow 2016

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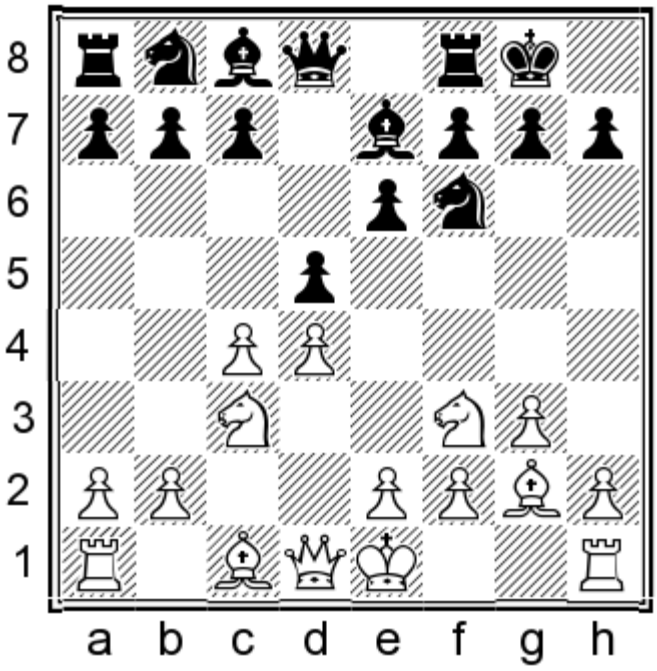
1.d4 d5

The game actually started via the Catalan move order of 1...♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.♘f3 0-0 6.♘c3!?.

2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.g3!? 0-0 6.♗g2



Not so long ago, this variation was viewed as a suboptimal version of the Catalan, as White does not usually develop his knight to c3 so early in that opening. Normally White would like to keep the option of ♘bd2 in some lines; another issue is that his queen can no longer defend (or recapture, after ...dxc4) the c4-pawn from c2. Nevertheless, the fact that Black has already developed his bishop to e7 leads to some concrete ideas which justify the placement of the knight.

6...dxc4 7.♘e5!

The ♘e5 plan is nothing new in itself, but it has been reinvigorated in recent years as some new ideas came to light. Kramnik played some influential games in the related position with 0-0 (instead of ♘c3) and 7.♘e5; and at some point, players began to realize that having the knight on c3 could improve White's chances in certain variations. Black players took a while to figure out what to do, but now the main roads have been adequately mapped out.

Let me briefly point out that 7.0-0?! ♘c6! 8.e3 ♖b8!?∓ gives Black an excellent version of the Catalan lines which we will analyse later. The last move prepares ...b5, and Black may be able to save time by omitting ...a6.

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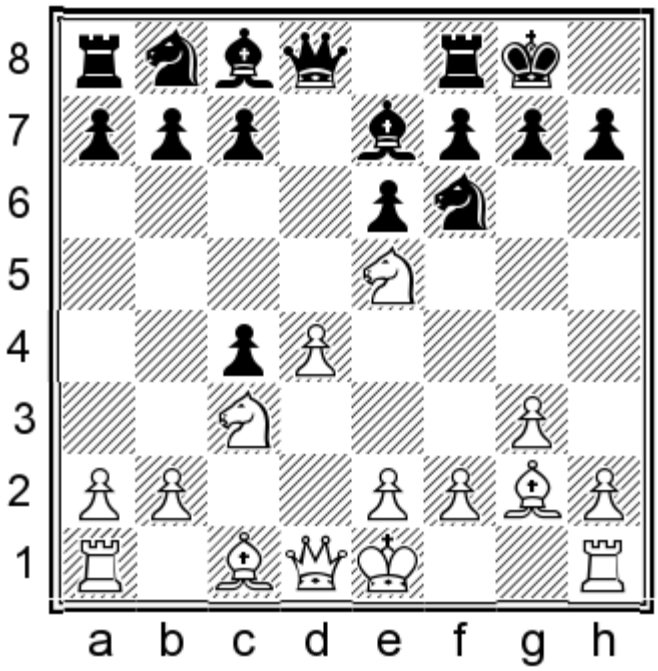

7...c5!

In the similar Catalan position where White has castled instead of having played the knight to c3, Black responds with 7...♘c6 and the game continues: 8.♗xc6 bxc6 9.♘xc6 ♕e8 10.♘xe7† (if White was unable to swap his knight for this bishop, the entire line would be a failure for him) 10...♕xe7 Black is doing fine in the similar position with 0-0 and the knight on b1; but in the present variation, White has achieved good results after 11.♕a4±.

I was almost ready to recommend 7...♕d6!?, as used by Kramnik. Black's idea is that after 8.♘xc4 ♕a6 the queen stands excellently at a6, putting pressure on the queenside and making room for the rook to come to d8. However, I was ultimately not quite satisfied with Black's chances after 9.♕a4!?. He will either lose more time exchanging on a4, or leave White with the chance to take the queen and misplace Black's knight at a6. In either case, White will be left with an unopposed bishop on g2 and some initiative on the queenside.

8.dxc5 ♕xd1†

I think this is best. After 8...♕c7 Black will lose more time to recapture on c5, and the queen won't stand comfortably on c7 or c5 anyway.

9.♘xd1 ♗xc5

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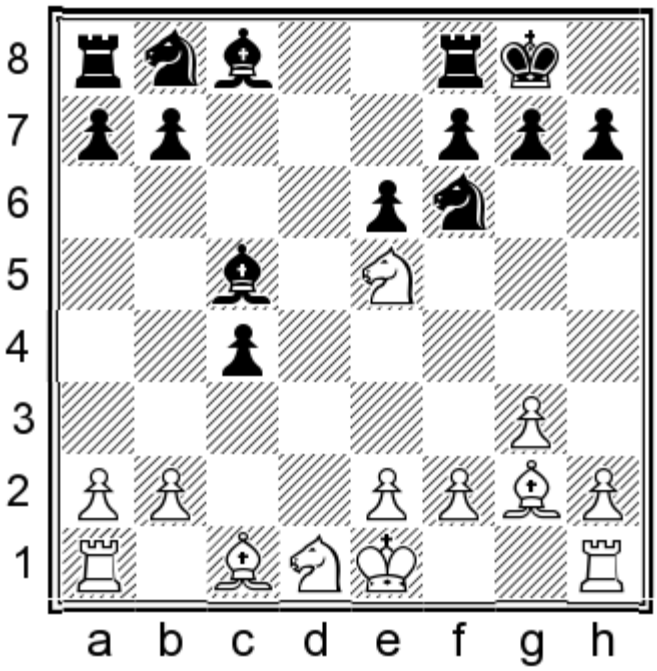
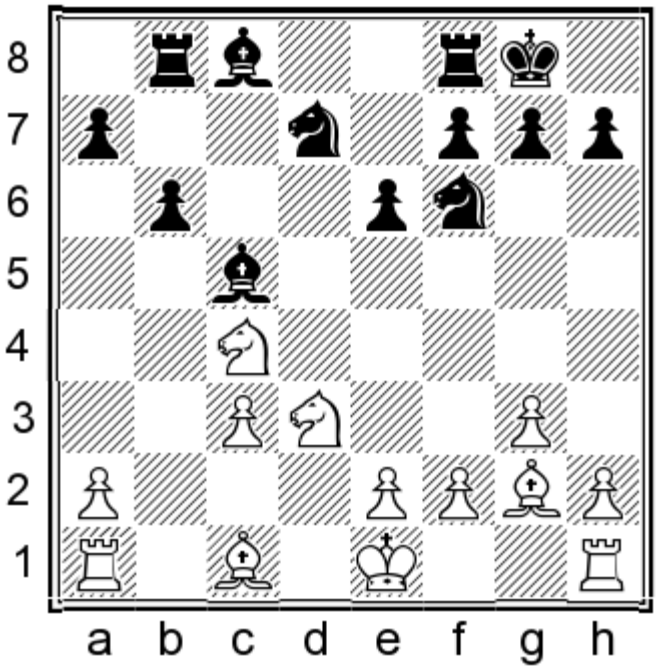


10.♘c3

Several moves have been tried but Giri tends to be extremely well prepared, so we can trust his choice to be one of White's strongest options.

10.♘xc4 was neutralized by 10...♘c6 11.♗e3 ♗b4† 12.♘c3 ♖d8 13.♖c1 ♗d7= in Andeer – Szczepankiewicz, corr. 2008.

10.♘e3 c3! 11.bxc3 ♘bd7 seems fine for Black, for instance: 12.♘d3 ♖b8 13.♘c4 b6



14.♘xc5 ♘xc5 15.♗a3 ♗a6 Black's piece activity and superb knight on c5 were worth at least as much as White's bishop pair in Gelfand – Adams, London 2013.

10.♗e3 ♗b4† 11.♘c3 (11.♗d2 ♗xd2† 12.♔xd2 ♖d8† 13.♔e1 ♘bd7 14.♘xc4 ♖b8=) 11...♘d5!? 12.♘xc4 ♗xc3† 13.bxc3 I found a couple of games in which Black grabbed the c3-pawn, but it looks preferable to eliminate one of the bishops

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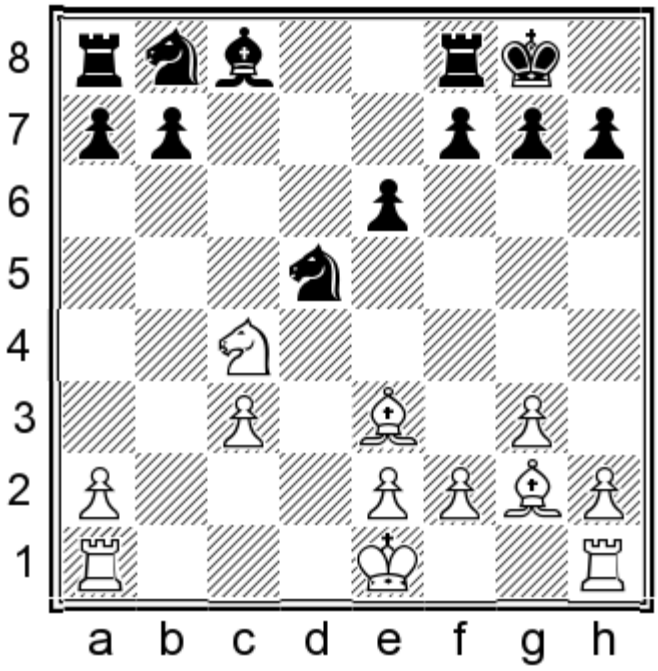
with:



13...♘xe3N 14.♘xe3 ♘d7 Followed by ...♖b8 and Black is fine.

10.0-0!?

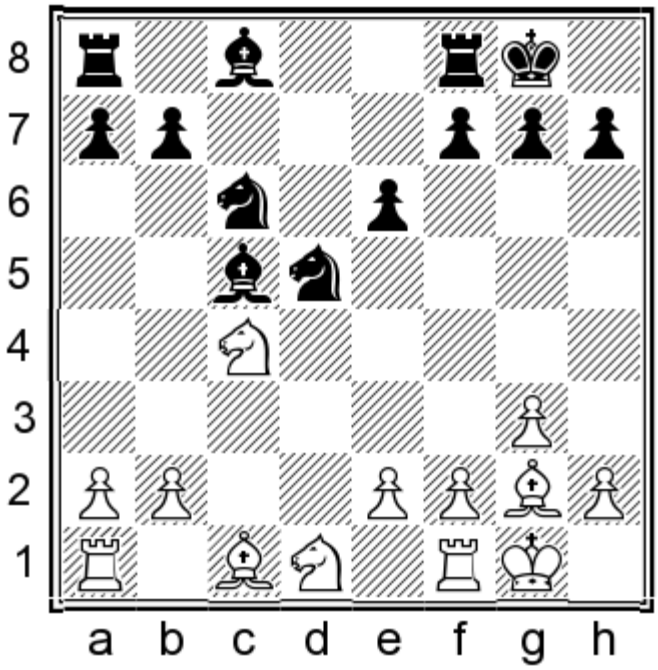
This seems to be the most challenging alternative but Black can play just as in the main game with:

10...♘c6! 11.♘xc4

11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗e3 is met by 12...♗xe3 13.♘xe3 ♗a6 and, with ...♖b8 and ...c3 coming, Black's counterplay is good enough.

11...♘d5!

As long as Black finds this important move, he should be able to equalize comfortably.



12.♗e3

12.♘c3 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 e5!?N=

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12...♘xe3 13.♘dxe3 ♗d7

Black is doing fine. This assessment was confirmed in one of my training games, which continued: 14.♖ad1 ♖fd8 15.♘d6 ♗xd6 16.♖xd6 ♗e8 17.♖xd8 ♖xd8 18.♖d1 ♔f8!=

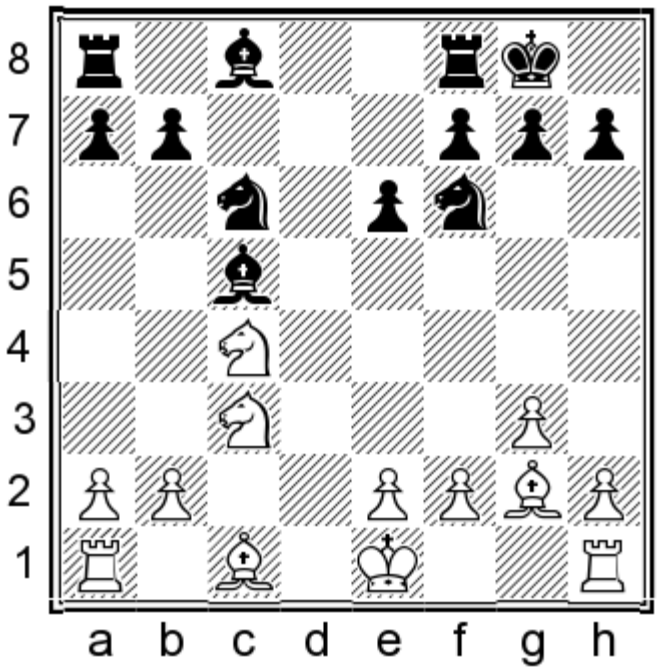
And the king comes to e7.

10...♘c6!

The importance of this move has already been discussed in the introductory section.

11.♘xc4

11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.♗xc6 ♖b8 13.0-0 e5 gives Black a healthy position; his pieces are more active. If anyone has to be more careful here, it is White. It may have felt like Black was sacrificing a pawn on c6, but remember that he was a pawn up already, so he really has nothing to worry about in this line.



11...♖d8

Other moves exist, but Topalov's choice seems as good as any; it is safe to assume that the former World Champion was still in his preparation.

12.♗e3

12.♗g5!?N looks like an interesting alternative. I think Black should respond with 12...h6 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.0-0 ♗d7, when the bishop pair balances White's better structure. A training game of mine continued: 15.♖fd1 ♗e7 16.♘d6

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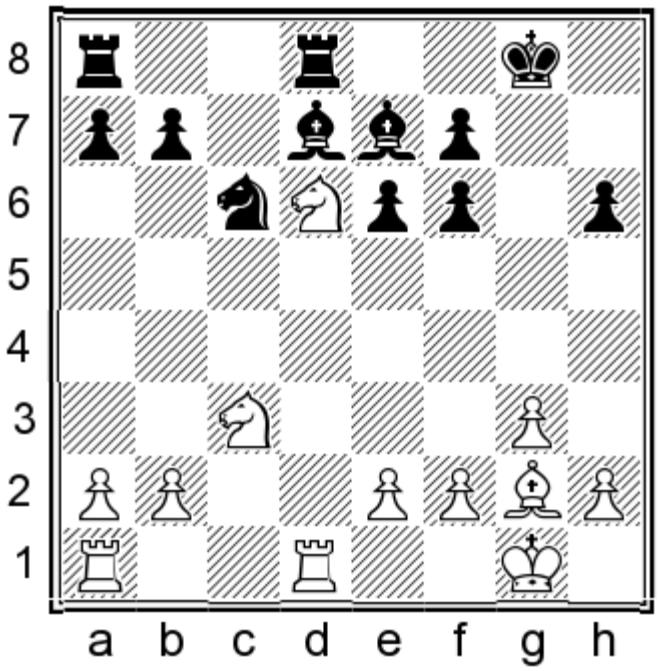
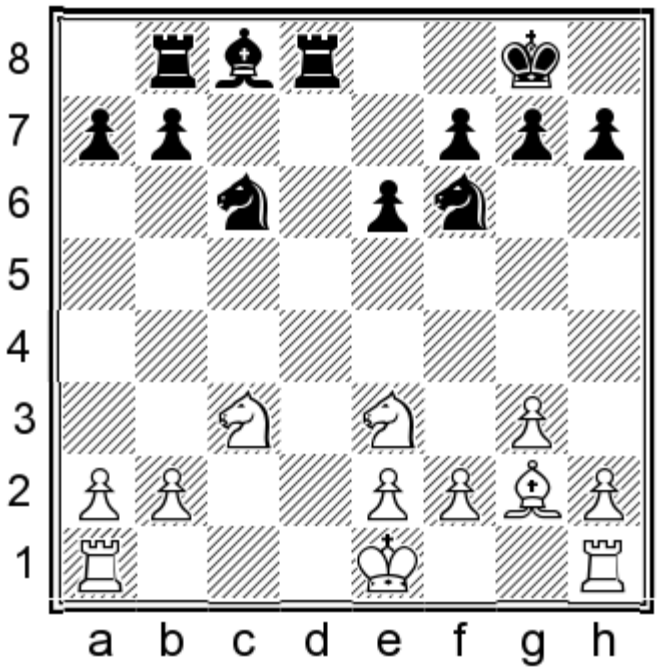


16...♘a5! Intending to exchange the strong Catalan bishop. 17.♖d3!? ♗c6 18.♖ad1 ♗xg2 (Keeping the tension with 18...♖ab8!? 19.g4 ♔f8!? is also possible. At the right moment Black can go for ...♖d7 and ...♖bd8.) 19.♔xg2 ♔f8 20.g4 ♗xd6 21.♖xd6 ♖xd6 22.♖xd6 ♔e7 23.♖d3 ♖c8 24.f4 ♘c4 25.b3 ♘d6 26.e4 f5!=

12...♗xe3 13.♘xe3 ♖b8!?

13...♗d7!? 14.0-0 ♘e7 followed by ...♗c6 is a 'Kramnikian' way to handle the position, which equalizes at once. Topalov evidently wanted to keep some more tension in the game.



14.f4!?

Despite drawing all his games in this tournament, a historic achievement, Giri was playing for the win with both colours in most of the games. This is one of those occasions where he tried to create problems for the out-of-form Topalov.

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14.0-0 e5 was presumably Topalov's idea.

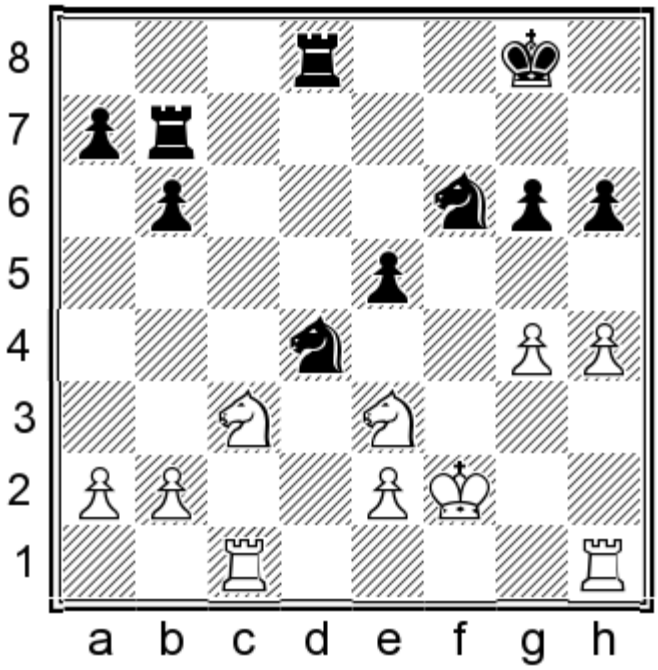
14...e5 15.f5!?

15.0-0 exf4 16.gxf4 ♘e7!? would have been about equal.

15...♘d4! 16.g4 b6!? 17.♖c1 ♗b7 18.♗xb7 ♖xb7

Black has equalized comfortably and most engines slightly prefer his position. But even if micro-improvements are possible in Topalov's subsequent play, Giri always stayed well within the drawing range.

19.♔f2 h6 20.h4 g5! 21.fxg6 fxg6



22.♖hg1 ♘e6 23.g5 hxg5 24.hxg5 ♘h7 25.♘e4 ♔g7 26.♖c6 ♘d4 27.♖c3 ♘e6 28.♖c6 ♘d4 29.♖c3 ♘e6

½–½

e2-e3 Set-Ups

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3

4.♘c3 ♗e7 5.e3 is a simple transposition, but I will assume that White wants to maintain the option of ♘bd2 for the moment.

4...♗e7

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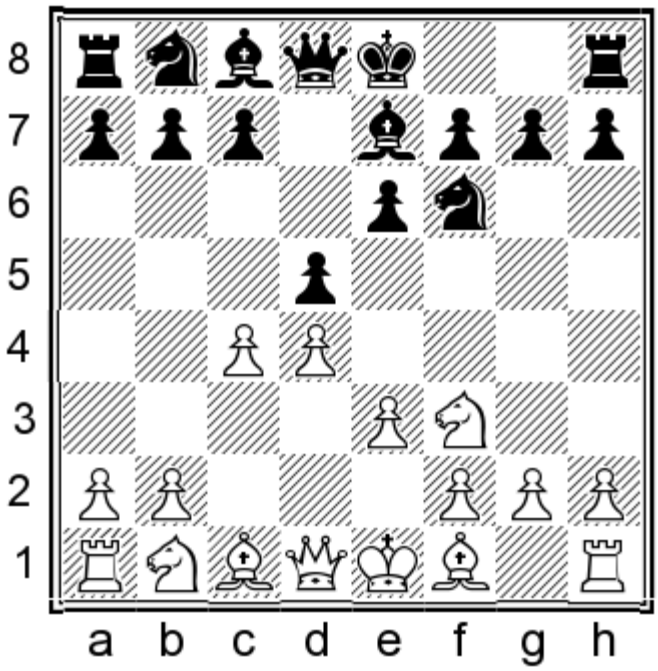

White can develop his pieces in all kinds of ways from here, but I will focus on the most threatening set-ups where he puts his bishops on d3 and b2, pointing towards our kingside. White's biggest decision concerns the development of his queen's knight. Therefore I will divide the material into **A)** ♘c3 Lines and ♘bd2 Lines.

Transposing to the Colle-Zukertort

Before we go into any specific variations, I must point out that White's set-up with bishops on b2 and d3 is closely related to the Colle-Zukertort, as analysed in Chapter 6c, and transpositions may easily occur. I must admit that I carried out my analysis for those two chapters at different times, and only later noticed that there is considerable scope for transpositions between the two. Should you wish to reduce your study time, you should be able to meet the set-up covered in this chapter with a timely ...♗a6, as indicated at various points in the lines below. However, my research on the ...♗b7 lines for this chapter yielded many attractive ideas for Black, so my advice is to study both chapters and decide which approach you prefer.

A) ♘c3 Lines

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗e7 5.♘c3 0-0

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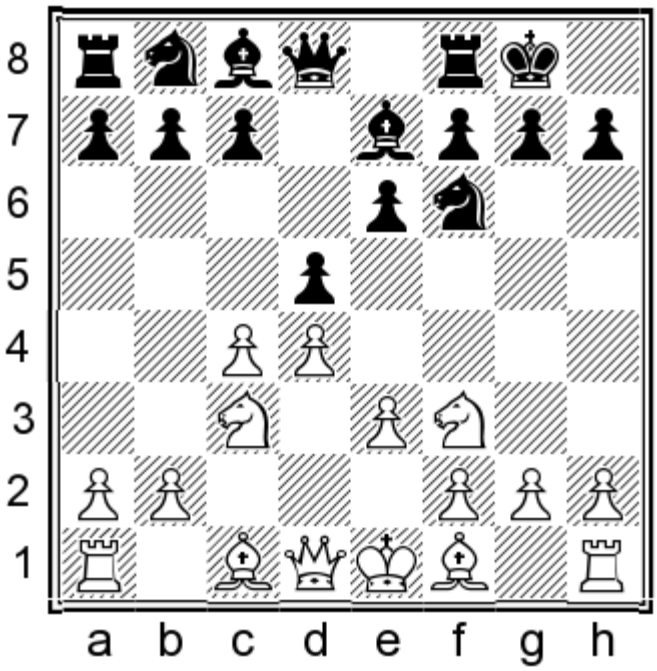


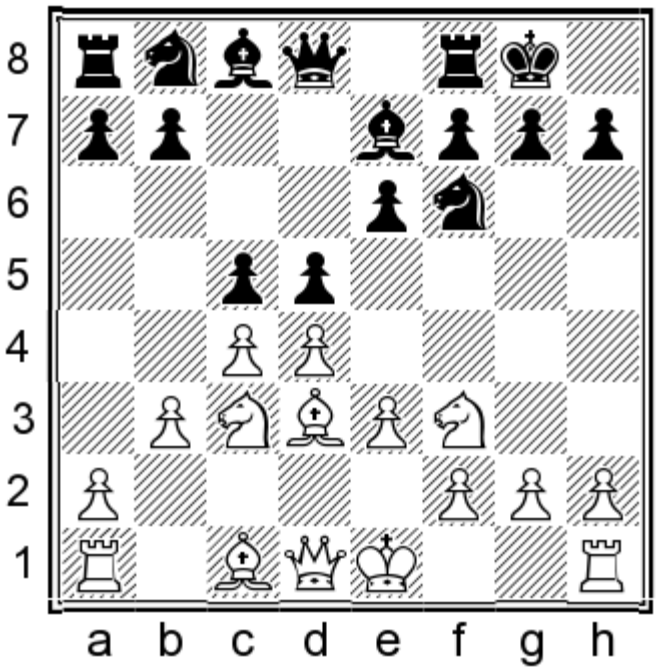
6.b3

6.♗d3 gives Black the option of playing a good Queen's Gambit Accepted with 6...dxc4 followed by ...a6 and ...b5, but the simple 6...c5 is also fine.

6...c5 7.♗d3

7.dxc5 dxc4 8.♕xd8 ♖xd8 9.♗xc4 ♗xc5 10.0-0 a6 was level in Kacheishvili – Hess, USA 2012.

7.cxd5 cxd4! also looks fine for Black. One relevant example continued 8.♕xd4!? exd5 9.♗b2 ♘c6 10.♕d3 ♘b4 11.♕d2 ♗g4 12.♘d4 ♗c5 and Black had an excellent IQP position in Schlosser – Navara, Saint Quentin 2014, with a promising lead in development.



7...♘c6

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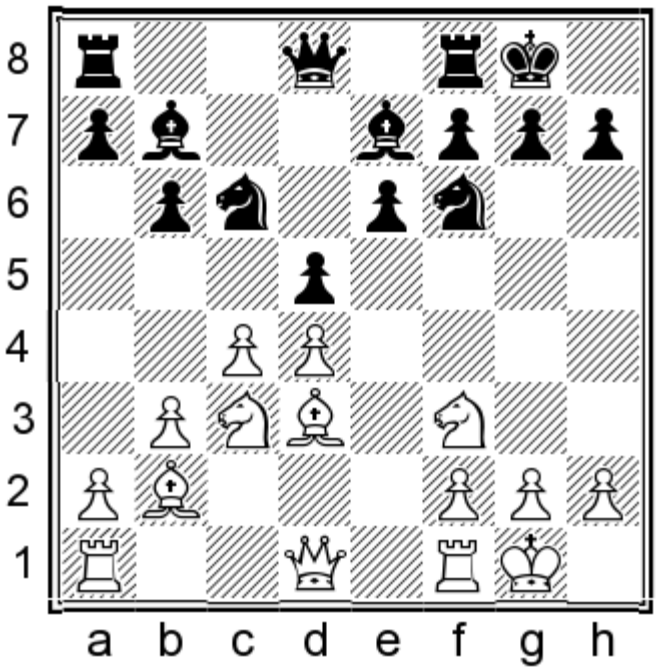
7...cxd4 should lead to the same thing.

It is important to point out that 7...b6 followed by ...♗a6 is perfectly playable, and could well transpose to the Colle-Zukertort coverage in Chapter 6c.

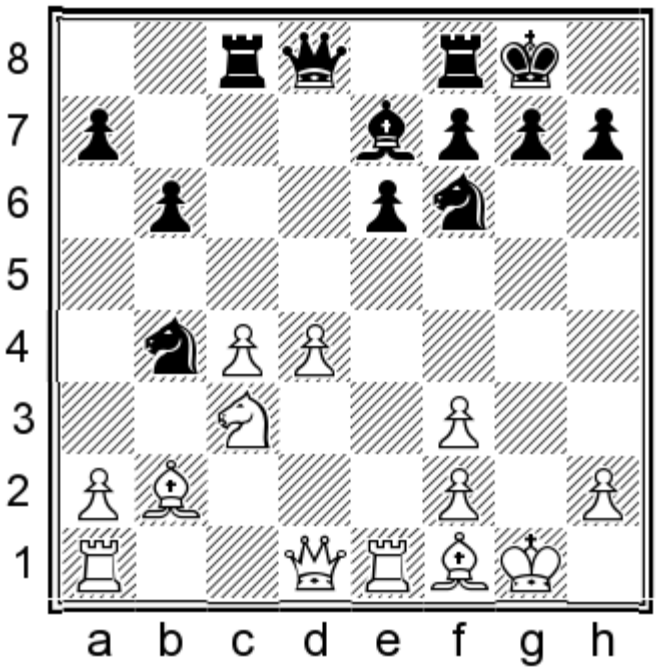
8.0-0 cxd4 9.exd4 b6 10.♗b2 ♗b7

As I explained in the introductory comments, Black's main idea here is ...♘b4 followed by ...dxc4 and ...♗xf3.



We will analyse **A1)** 11.♕e2 followed by the more popular **A2)** 11.♖c1.

11.♖e1 vacates the f1-square for the bishop, but Black can carry out his plan all the same: 11...♘b4 12.♗f1 dxc4 13.bxc4 (13.♗xc4?! is worse due to 13...♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♘c2) 13...♗xf3 14.gxf3 ♖c8



15.d5!?N (15.♖c1 ♗d6 16.a3 ♘c6∓ Kekki – Sammalvuo, Espoo 1996) 15...exd5 16.a3 ♘a6 17.cxd5 ♘c5 Black has the easier game due to his better pawn structure, although White should be able to keep things about equal with accurate

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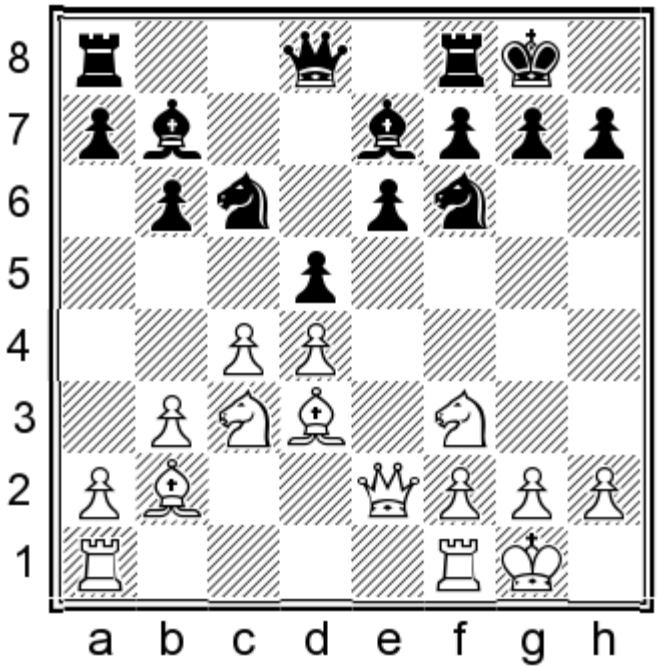
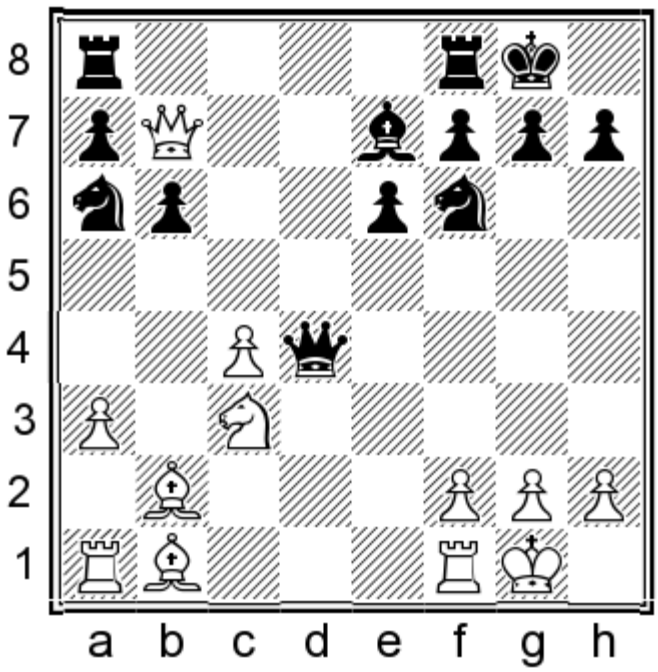
play.

A1) 11.♕e2



11...♘b4 12.♗b1 dxc4 13.bxc4 ♗xf3 14.gxf3

14.♕xf3?! makes little sense, considering that White spent a tempo putting the queen on e2 just a few moves ago. 14...♕xd4 15.a3 ♘a6 16.♕b7? (the lesser evil is 16.♖d1, as played in T. Nguyen – T. Pham, Ho Chi Minh City 2015, although 16...♕h4 17.g3 ♕h6∓ maintains some advantage for Black) The text looks like a tempting move, but it's a losing one:



16...♗d6! We will see the same idea in variation A2 below. Here it is even stronger, as the a1-rook is unable to participate in the game. 17.♕xa6 ♗xh2†! 18.♔xh2 ♕h4† 19.♔g1 ♘g4–+ Black had a decisive attack in Straeter – Van

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den Doel, Germany 2002.

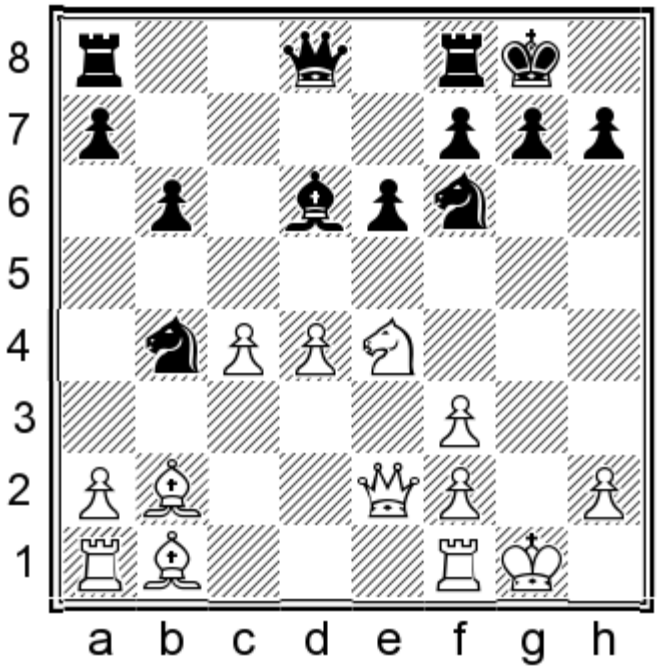
14...♗d6

14...♖e8!? 15.♖d1 g6!? 16.♘e4 ♖c8 17.a3 ♘a6 18.♗a2 ♗f8 19.♔h1 ♗g7= was also quite acceptable in Peralta – Volzhin, Saint Vincent 2001.

15.♘e4

Another game continued: 15.♔h1 ♖c8 16.♘e4 ♗f4 17.♖g1 g6 18.d5 ♘xe4 19.fxe4 exd5 20.cxd5 ♕e7∓ Urlau – Hoeppenstein, Internet 2007.

Now in S. Maksimovic – Zarkovic, Kragujevac 2016, Black should have continued:



15...♖e8N 16.♔h1 ♖c8 17.♖g1 g6 18.♘xd6 ♕xd6∓

White's bishop pair is outweighed by his chronic pawn weaknesses.

A2) 11.♖c1

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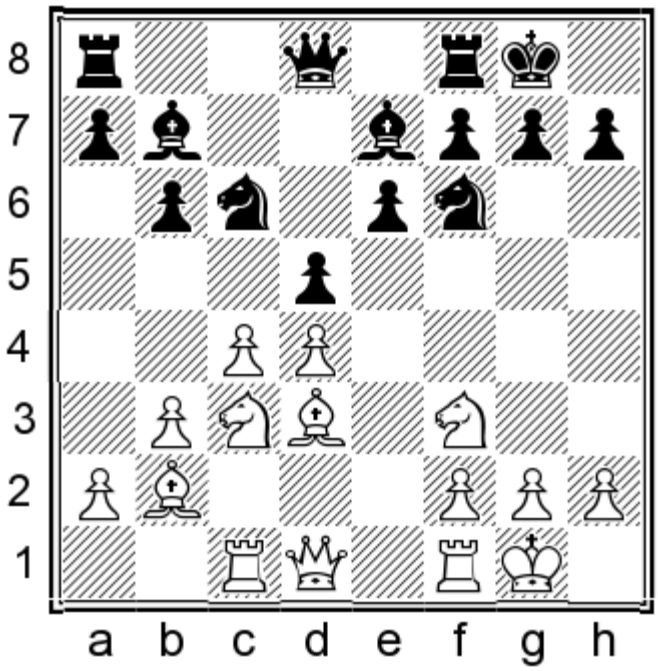

This is the most popular move, preparing to tuck the bishop away on b1 without blocking in the rook.

11...♘b4 12.♗b1

Perhaps White should settle for safety with 12.♗e2; in that case, White keeps the f3- and c4-points better defended, but takes his bishop off the dangerous b1-h7 diagonal, so Black has little to fear. 12...dxc4 13.bxc4 occurred in Polklaeser – Miethke, email 2008, after which 13...♖c8N looks like the logical follow-up.

12...dxc4 13.bxc4 ♗xf3 14.♕xf3

14.gxf3?! is met by 14...♗d6 intending ...♘h5, when White's kingside is seriously weak.

14...♕xd4 15.a3 ♘a6 16.♕b7

Forking two pieces is the only challenging idea.

16.♖fe1 ♘c5 17.♘d5 ♕xb2 18.♘xe7† ♔h8 19.♘c6 ♕d2 20.♖cd1 ♕g5 21.♘e5 ♔g8∓ left White struggling to prove his compensation in Giobbi – Evstigneev, corr. 2010.

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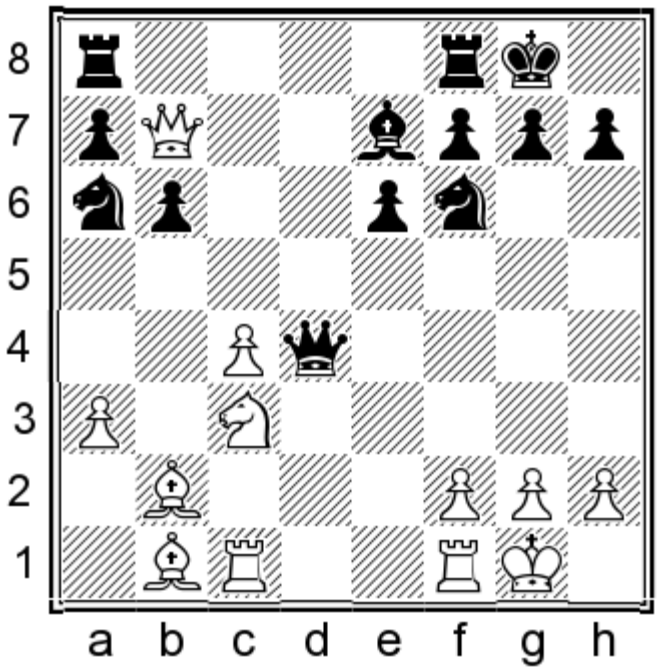
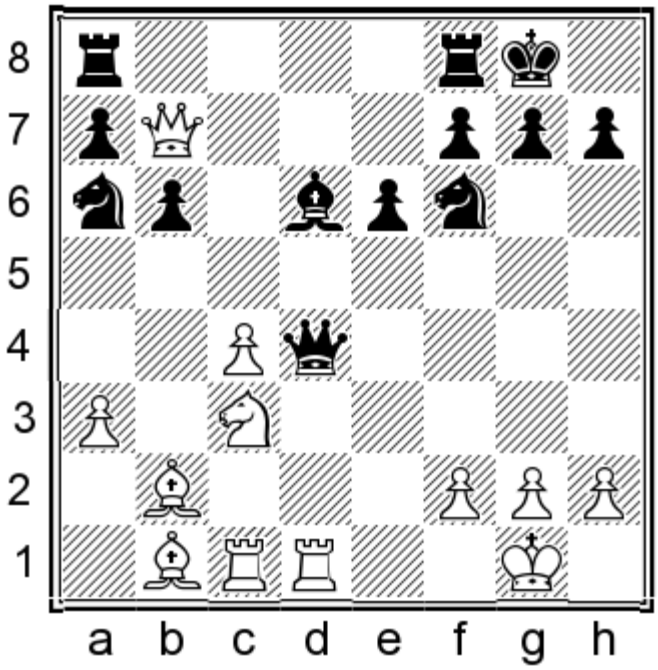


16...♗d6! 17.♖fd1

17.♕xa6? ♗xh2† wins just as in variation A1 above.

17.♘d1 ♘c5 18.♕f3 ♕g4–+ left White a clear pawn down with the worse pawn structure in Wageih – Amin, Egypt 2012.



17...♕e5!

Black can also consider 17...♗xh2†!?N, based on the fact that 18.♔xh2? ♕xf2 19.♖c2 ♘g4† 20.♔h3 ♕f5 gives Black a decisive initiative against the king; but 18.♔f1! is a more resilient move, which keeps the game unclear.

18.♕xa6

18.g3 ♘c5 is great for Black.

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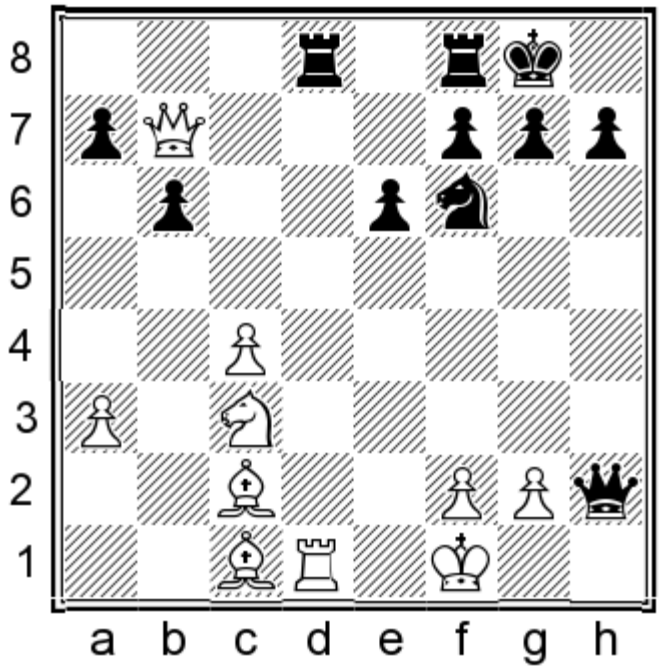
18...♕xh2† 19.♔f1 ♗f4 20.♕b7 ♗xc1 21.♗xc1 ♖ad8 22.♗c2

Black went astray and eventually lost in Hoefker – Czubak, Ruhrgebiet 2004. At this point though, he could have caused serious problems with:



22...♕h4!N∓

Hitting the c4-pawn.

B) ♘bd2 Lines

GAME 41

Luc Winants – Anatoly Karpov

Brussels 1986

1.d4 d5

The game actually started 1...♘f6 2.♘f3 e6 3.e3 c5 4.♗d3 cxd4 5.exd4 b6 6.0-0 ♗b7 7.c4 ♗e7 8.♘bd2 0-0 9.b3 d5 10.♗b2. The fact that Black delayed ...d7-d5 until move 9 gives you some indication of the scope for possible transpositions; it is also worth noting that the 4.e3 Queen's Indian is another popular way to get here. For our purposes, I have substituted in an appropriate move order for our repertoire.

2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗e7 5.b3 0-0 6.♗d3 b6 7.0-0 ♗b7

A serious alternative is 7...c5, when 8.♗b2 ♗a6 transposes to the Colle-Zukertort coverage in Chapter 6c.

Another popular set-up for Black sees his dark-squared bishop go to d6 rather than e7 in this pawn structure. In that case, he often looks to build a kingside initiative with moves like ...♘e4 and f5; but with the bishop on e7, the ...c5 plan makes more sense.

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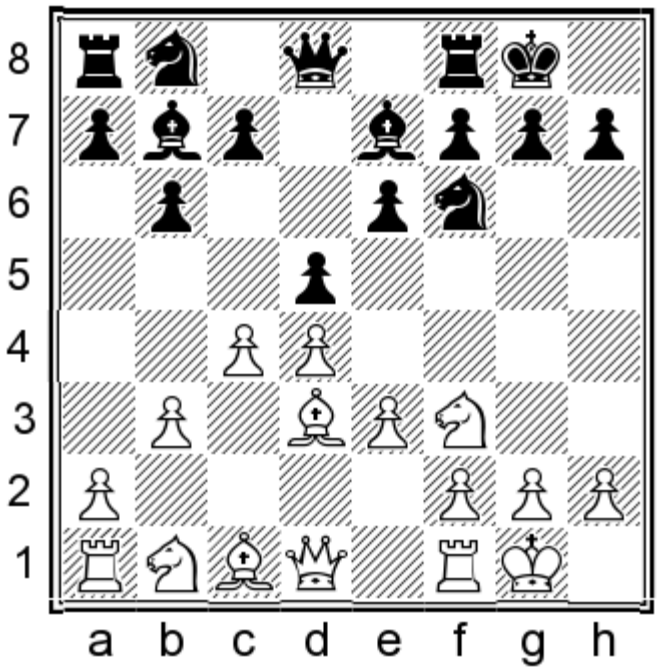
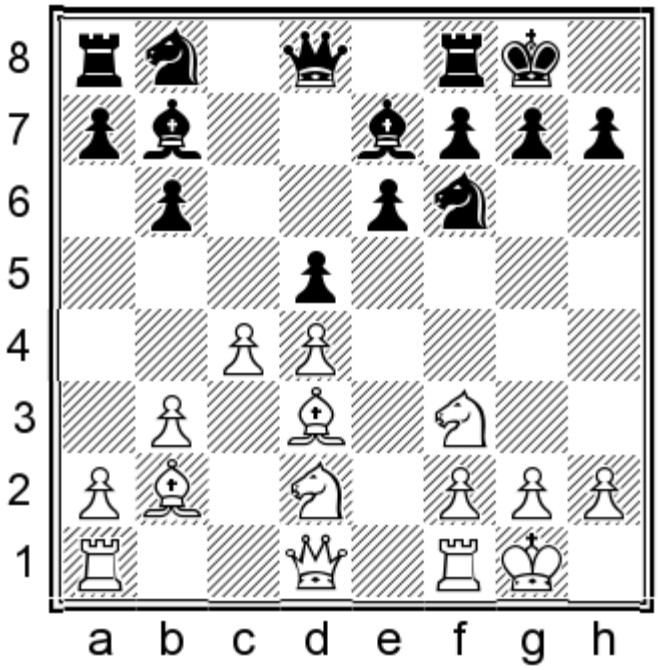


8.♗b2 c5 9.♘bd2

9.cxd5 ♘xd5 and 9.dxc5 dxc4 are fine for Black as well.

9...cxd4 10.exd4

We have now transposed to Winants – Karpov.



10...♘c6 11.♕e2 ♕d6!

As prescribed in the introductory section.

12.♖ad1

12.♖ac1 ♖fd8N 13.a3 is one engine recommendation; after 13...dxc4!? (but not 13...♕f4?! 14.c5!) 14.bxc4 ♕f4 I

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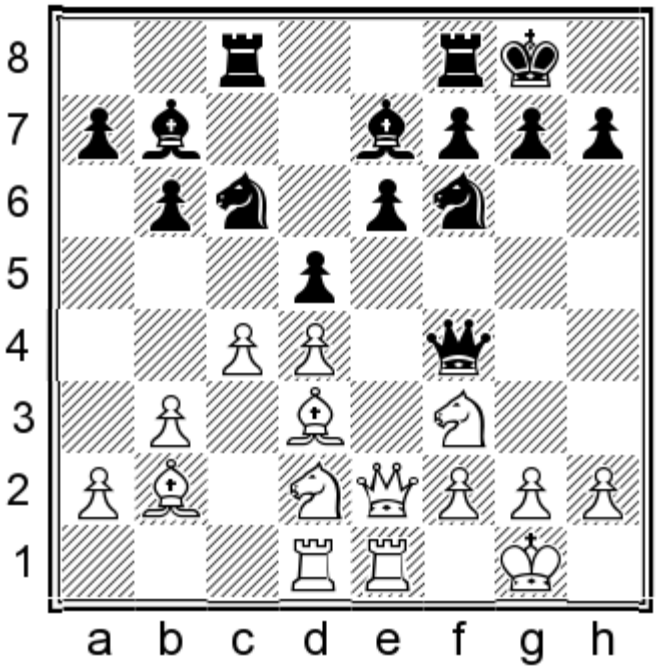
see no problems for Black.
12.♖fd1 has also been played, but it does not really affect Black's plans: 12...♖fd8N 13.a3 ♕f4=

12...♖ac8

12...♖fd8!? also looks fine; the two options may end up transposing, as it is hard to imagine Black finding better squares for the respective rooks.

13.♖fe1 ♕f4



14.g3?!

White's position is not too bad after this; but the weakening of the light squares is an encouraging sign for Black.

14.a3N seems a natural attempt to improve White's play, although 14...♖fd8 leaves Black with a solid, harmonious position. A sample continuation is: 15.b4!? dxc4 16.♘xc4 g6!? (16...♗a6!? is a decent alternative) 17.b5

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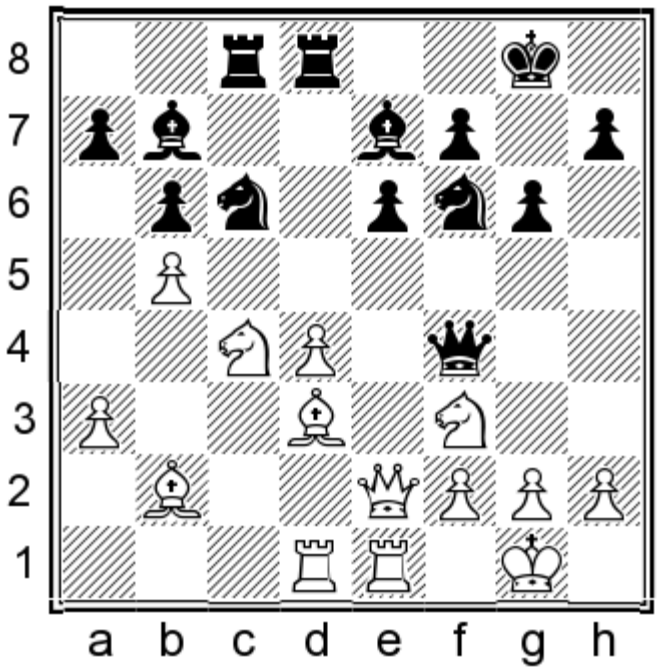
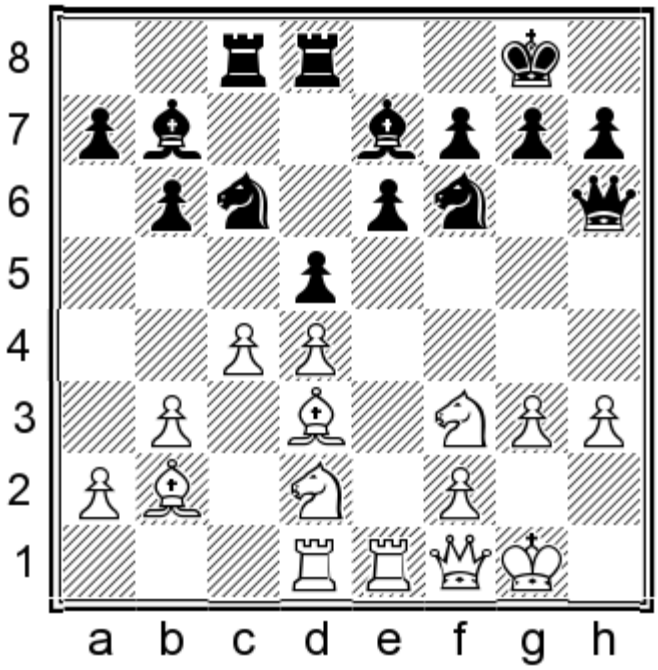


17...♘xd4!? (17...♘a5 is also playable: 18.♘ce5 [18.♘xa5?! ♗xf3! 19.♕xf3 ♕xf3 20.gxf3 bxa5∓] 18...♗xf3 19.♘xf3 ♘d5=) 18.♘xd4 ♖xd4 19.♗xd4 ♕xd4∞ With fair compensation for the exchange.

14...♕h6 15.♕f1 ♖fd8 16.h3?!

16.a3 can be met by 16...a5 or even the sophisticated 16...♘e8!?.

The text move allows Black to carry out an instructive idea:



16...♗b4!

Karpov wants to attack on the light squares, so he prepares to exchange his useless (for that purpose) dark-squared bishop for one of White's valuable defenders.

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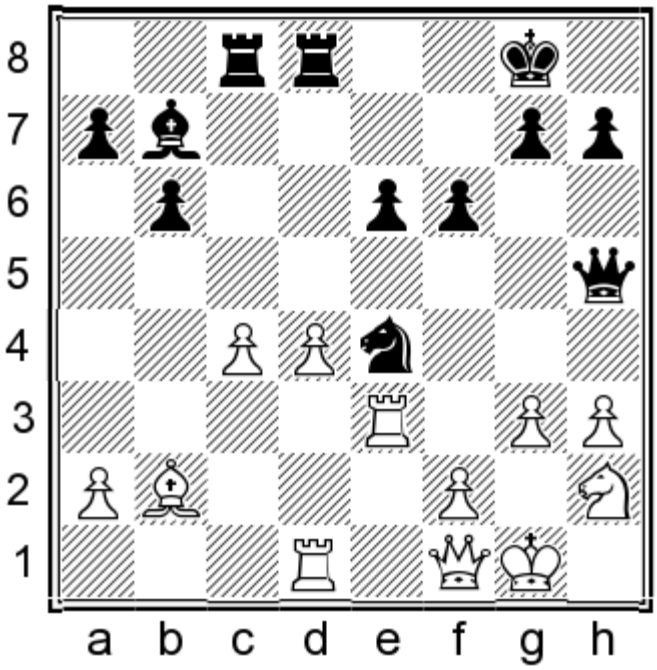
17.♖e3 ♗xd2 18.♖xd2 ♘b4 19.♘e5 ♘xd3 20.♖dxd3 ♘e4

White is under serious pressure and Winants is unable to keep his position together.

21.♖d1 f6

Driving the knight to a passive position.

22.♘g4 ♕h5 23.♘h2 dxc4 24.bxc4



24...♖xc4!

Exploiting the loose rook on d1. White is a pawn down and has terrible weaknesses on the kingside.

25.d5 ♖xd5 26.♘g4 ♘g5

0–1

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with a few significant sidelines. 5.♕c2 is flexible but a little slow, and so 5...c5!? makes a lot of sense. Our main line sees Black obtain ample activity for his sacrificed pawn.

5.g3!? is an interesting way to convert to a Catalan. 6...dxc4 7.♘e5 c5 is the most logical response, after which I see no advantage for White, although it is important to remember certain details such as the strong 10...♘c6! move, as featured in Game 40.

Finally we looked at e2-e3 set-ups, followed by posting the bishops on d3 and b2 in the spirit of the Colle-Zukertort. Black can either angle for a transposition to Chapter 6c by developing his queen's bishop to a6, or put it on b7 and go for the attractive ...♘b4 or ...♕d6 ideas, according to whether White puts his knight on c3 or d2.

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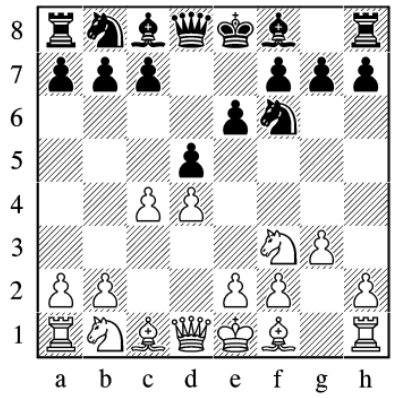
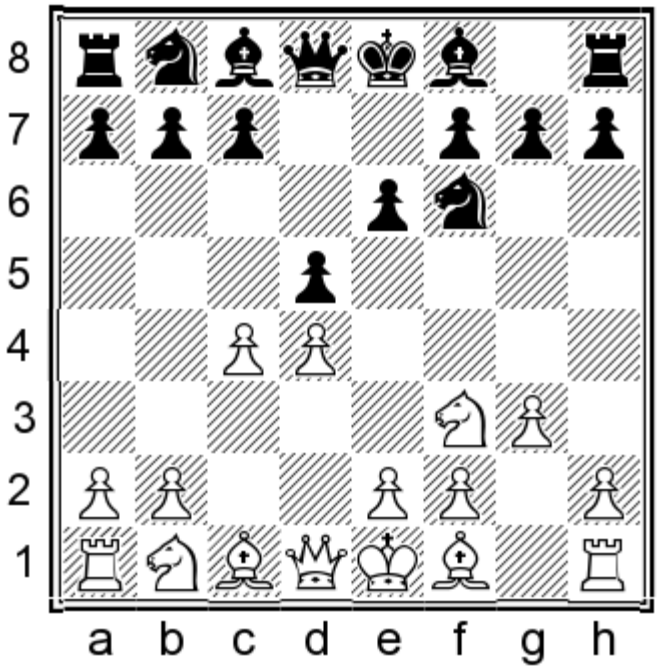
Chapter 5a



Catalan Introduction

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3

The Catalan is an opening rich in strategic and tactical complexity. White typically hopes to develop positional pressure with the help of the bishop on g2, but in some lines he will sacrifice one or more pawns in the hope of building a crushing initiative. It is hard to choose between the many options available to Black, but I suggest taking the c4-pawn for starters.



4...dxc4

4...♗e7 5.♗g2 0-0 can arguably be considered the main line, but it gives White a few too many options for my liking.

5.♗g2

I recommend meeting 5.♕a4† with 5...♘bd7!, as you will see shortly.

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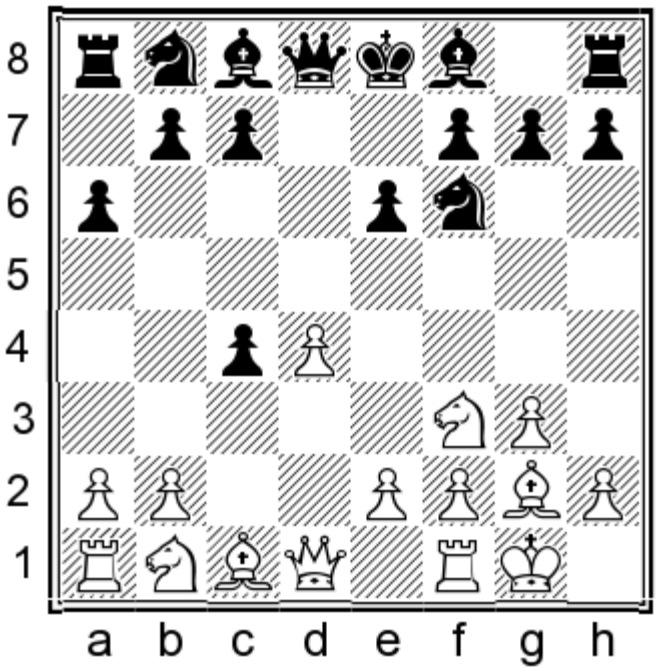
5...a6!

Black has several other options, all of which have their own pros and cons. After a lot of research, I opted for one of the most popular and best-scoring set-ups in the correspondence chess world over the last few years.

When you see the set-up I have in mind, you might wonder if 5...♘c6 can be played immediately. It is certainly a valid option, but 6.♕a4! takes the game in a different direction from what I have in mind.

6.0-0

6.♘e5 is an important alternative but my analysis indicates that the ambitious 6...♗b4†! leads to complex positions where Black is not worse.



6...♘c6!

The knight comes here to prevent ♘e5. With the pawn already on a6, Black obviously does not have to worry about the queen coming to a4 due to the reply ...b5.

6...b5?! is met by 7.♘e5! and after 7...♘d5 8.a4 ♗b7 9.b3 Black's queenside comes under heavy pressure.

7.e3

This is the main line, as recommended by Avrukh among others.

7.♘c3 ♖b8 8.e4 was Avrukh's recommendation in the original *Grandmaster Repertoire 1*, but Game 47 shows that Black should be happy to see it.

White can also develop the bishop with 7.♗g5 before closing the pawn chain with e2-e3. This will be examined in Chapter 5c, along with 7.e3.

7...♗d7 8.♕e2 ♗d6!

I think Black should catch up on development and allow White to recapture on c4. The materialistic 8...b5 is well met by 9.b3! when White will enjoy excellent compensation.

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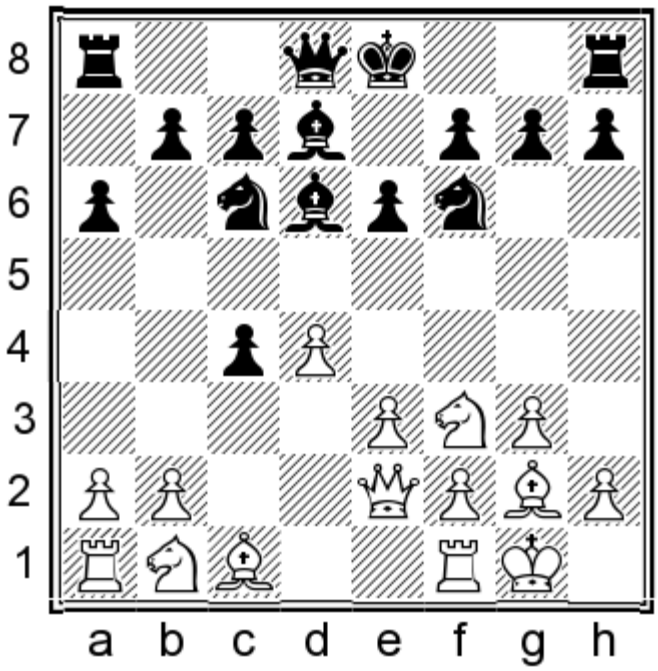

9.♕xc4 0-0 10.♖d1 ♖b8!

Black intends to free his game with ...♕e7 and ...e5. There are numerous details to remember, plus some other options available to White along the way. Obviously these will be explored in full detail in the next two chapters; for now though, you have a basic idea of how we will play between moves 5 and 10.

Strategic Themes

The Catalan is a flexible opening and there are many structures and types of position that may ensue. Compared with the main variations of the QGD, play in the Catalan often proceeds in more of a concrete, move-by-move way, so I will not devote as much space to general themes. That said, there are a few important, recurring motifs which I would like to bring to your attention.

Avoiding the ...b5 Structure

Firstly, I would like to highlight a seemingly paradoxical feature of my recommended set-up for Black. Even though the moves 4...dxc4 and 5...a6 seem to be preparing ...b5, we actually don’t really want to play it!

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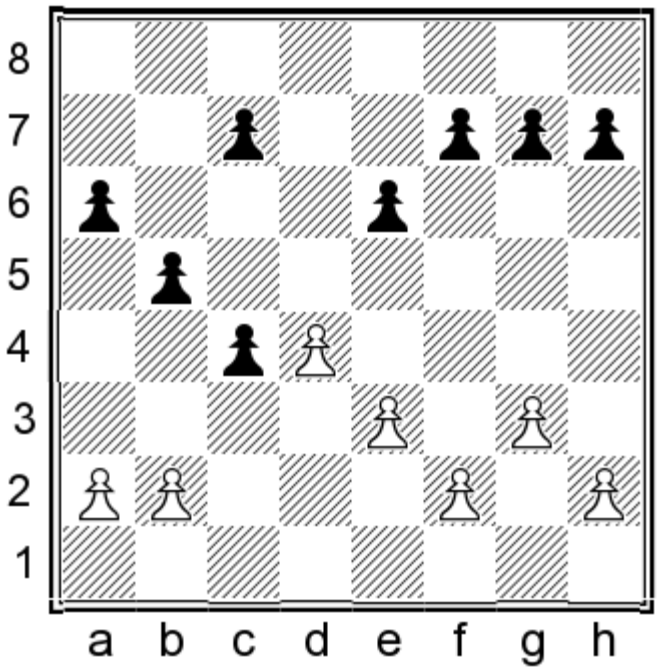
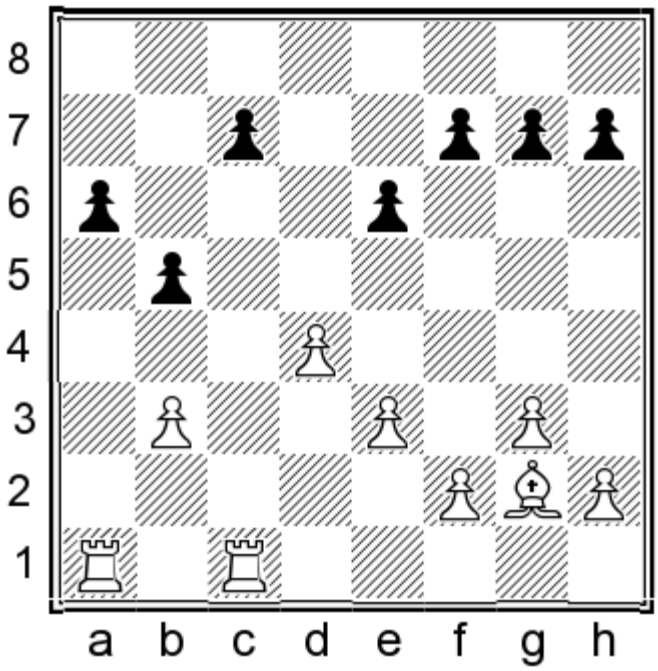


As Kramnik has pointed out (as quoted by Bologan in *The Powerful Catalan*), even if White doesn't get an ideal position from the opening, when the move ...b5 has been played, he can almost always obtain ample practical compensation by playing b2-b3 and, after the likely ...cxb3, recapturing with the a-pawn.

Consider the following structure:



White's Catalan bishop and strong rooks exert lasting pressure on the queenside, which will become even nastier if a knight finds its way to the c5-outpost.

In view of the above, I would like to emphasize the following rule of thumb when using my recommended system against the Catalan: Avoid playing ...b5, unless there is already a knight at c3, or the b2-b3 plan doesn't work for a specific reason.

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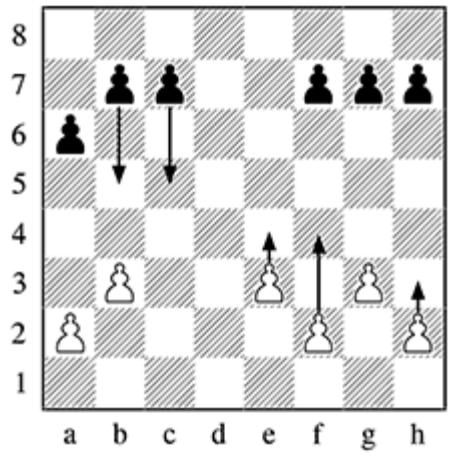
A Battle of Pawn Majorities

A typical structure that arises in our repertoire is the following:



Flores Rios calls this the “3–3 vs. 4–2 structure”, but I have more commonly heard it referred to as the “queenside majority structure”. Both sides can try to demonstrate the superiority of their respective pawn majorities in different ways. White can argue that his unopposed e-pawn offers better central control than Black’s slightly more remote c-pawn. Sometimes White will aim for a minority attack on the queenside, while in other cases he can try to mobilize his kingside majority and perhaps start an attack. Black, on the other hand, generally enjoys free piece play and his queenside majority offers him good chances in future endgames, due to the possibility of creating a remote passed pawn.

The evaluation of positions with this structure generally comes down to the following factors. Which side has the more mobile majority? Whose pieces are more active? And is there another positional advantage present? If one side has the upper hand in one or more of these areas, then the presence of a pawn majority on either side usually works as a ‘magnifying glass’, making this advantage more important than it would be in a similar position with a symmetrical structure.

The phrase “another positional advantage” could refer to something like a strong outpost or a weak enemy pawn, but perhaps one of the most important and commonly occurring scenarios in this structure is when one side takes over the open d-file. I would like to present two classic examples to show how the open d-file can be used to press home an advantage from either side of this structure.

GAME 42

Frank Marshall – Jose Raul Capablanca

New York (23) 1909

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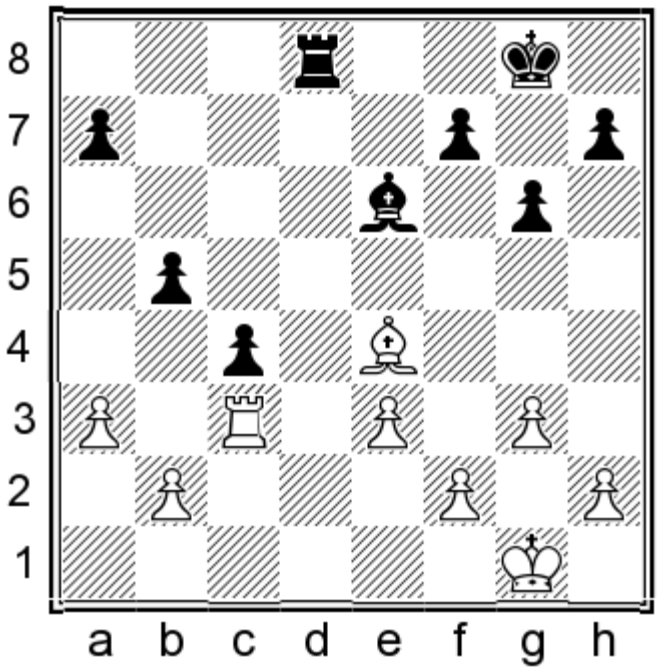
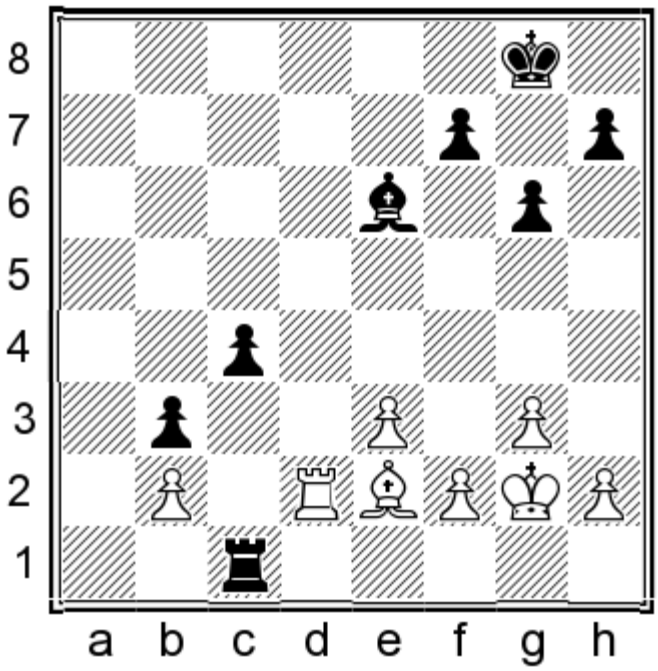


This classic game has been studied by generations of chess players. There are many instructive details, such as why Capablanca played ...g6 (rather than ...h6 or ...f6) earlier to avoid a back-rank mate, and Marshall's crucial mistake of playing a2-a3 when it was necessary to defend with b2-b3 instead. In fact, I would highly recommend a closer study of this game (from about move 15 onwards) as you will surely pick up some useful tips on how to utilize a queenside majority most effectively. For our purposes though, what matters most is Black's control over the d-file, which enables Capablanca to score a seemingly effortless victory from here.

26...♖d1† 27.♔g2 a5 28.♖c2 b4 29.axb4 axb4 30.♗f3 ♖b1 31.♗e2 b3 32.♖d2 ♖c1

Threatening ...♖c2, so White's reply is forced.



33.♗d1 c3 34.bxc3 b2–+

White had to give up his bishop to prevent the pawn from promoting, and Black won easily.

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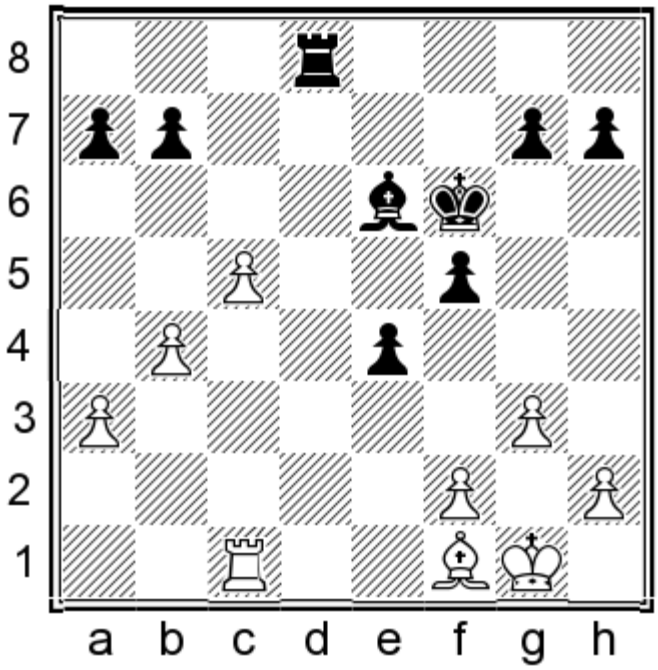
...0–1

The above game shows that control over the d-file combined with an advancing queenside majority spells trouble for the side with the “4–2” pawn formation. Now let’s see another jewel of the classics of chess. This time, the side with the central majority controls the open file.

GAME 43

Frederick Yates – Alexander Alekhine

The Hague 1921



Obviously in our Catalan scenario White would have the “4–2” formation with the e-pawn and Black the “3–3” with a c-pawn, but the instructive value is the same with colours reversed. Even though White’s queenside majority is quite far advanced, Black has the d-file and the more active king, and these factors make his majority more dangerous.

28.♗c4 ♗c8!

Many authors have awarded this move a double exclam. Whatever punctuation you prefer, there is no doubt that the move is highly instructive. Pure rook endgames have strong drawing tendencies, which is why Alekhine avoids the exchange of bishops.

29.a4 g5 30.b5 f4 31.♔f1

31.a5! ♖d2 32.b6! creates quick counterplay and should lead to a draw. White is still not lost after the text move, but his position is not easy to defend in practice.

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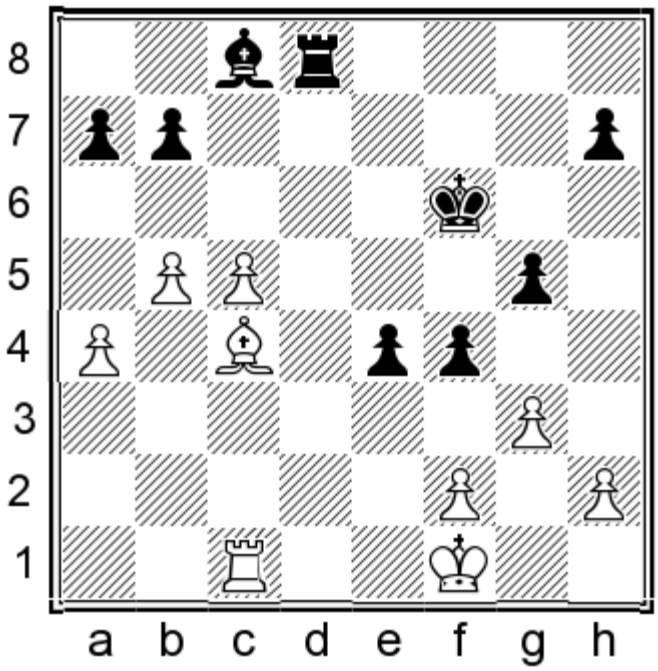
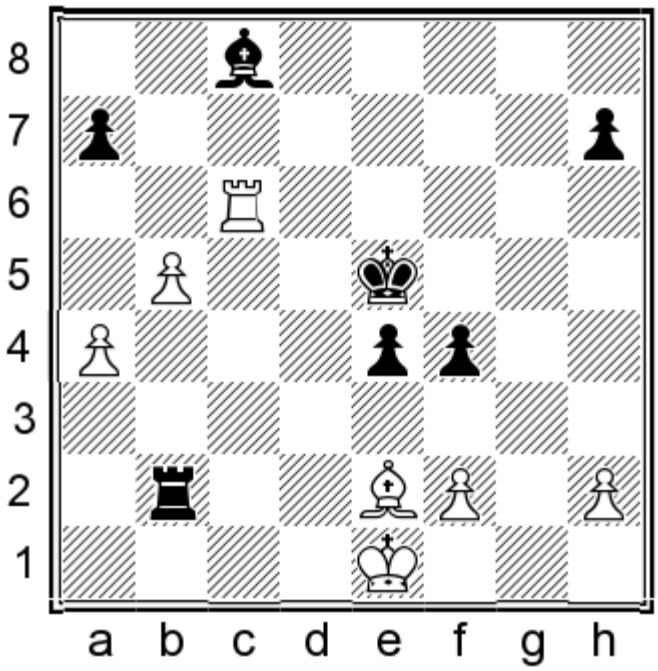


31...♖d2 32.♔e1 ♖b2 33.gxf4 gxf4 34.♗e2 ♔e5 35.c6 bxc6 36.♖xc6?

Alekhine's strong play has put his opponent under pressure, and now he makes the decisive mistake.

36.bxc6 was necessary. Yates may have rejected this because it would have been hard to dislodge the bishop from c8, and the passed pawn appears vulnerable after 36...♖b6. Nevertheless, White has enough resources to maintain the balance. (To give detailed analysis here would be to distract you from our main topic, but I would encourage curious readers to check a few moves with an engine to see how White can hold.)



36...♗e6

With a few more purposeful moves, Alekhine makes the win seem effortless.

37.♗d1

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37.♖c1 f3 38.♗d1 e3 39.♗xf3 ♖xf2 is winning for Black.

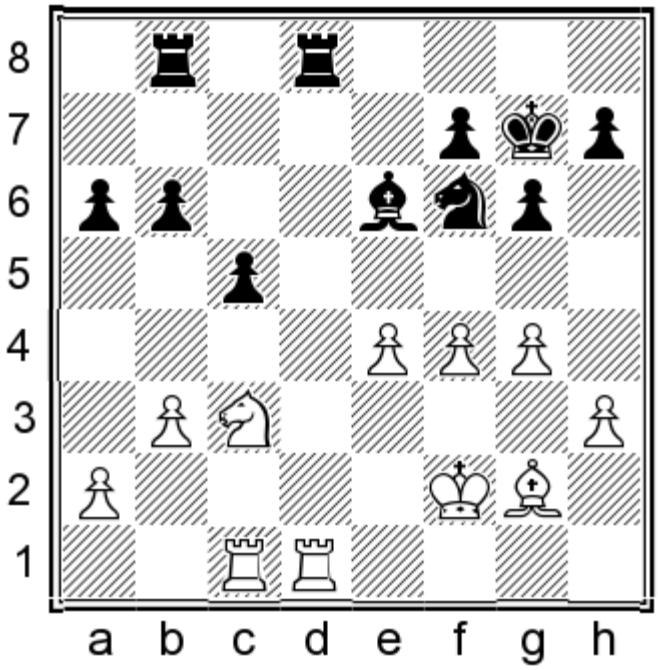
37...♖b1 38.♖c5† ♔d4 39.♖c2 e3 40.fxe3† fxe3 41.♖c6 ♗g4 42.♖d6† ♔e5 43.h3 ♗h5

0–1

The lesson from these two examples is clear: the side that controls the open d-file is likely to have the upper hand, especially in endgames.

Majority Mobility

If neither side dominates the d-file or boasts any other obvious positional trump, then the evaluation may hinge on the mobility of the respective pawn majorities. Consider the following position:



White has the epitome of a mobile majority. It can create lots of threats with a timely e4-e5 or f4-f5, and White can easily advance his king behind it. Moreover, Black is unlikely to be able to use his minority to weaken White's formation. Black, on the other hand, will find it harder to do much with his queenside majority. For instance, ...b5-b4 will simply be met by ♘a4 when the c5-pawn will be weak. White also has the possibility of a minority attack at some point, by playing ♗f1 to provoke ...b5 and then striking with a2-a4. Black has the option of heading for such a position via our repertoire but I prefer to avoid it for the reasons explained.

Dealing with White's Pawn Majority

The following game will be presented in Chapter 5c as a full illustrative game. However, the way Black handled White's kingside majority is so instructive that I decided to show this part twice.

GAME 44

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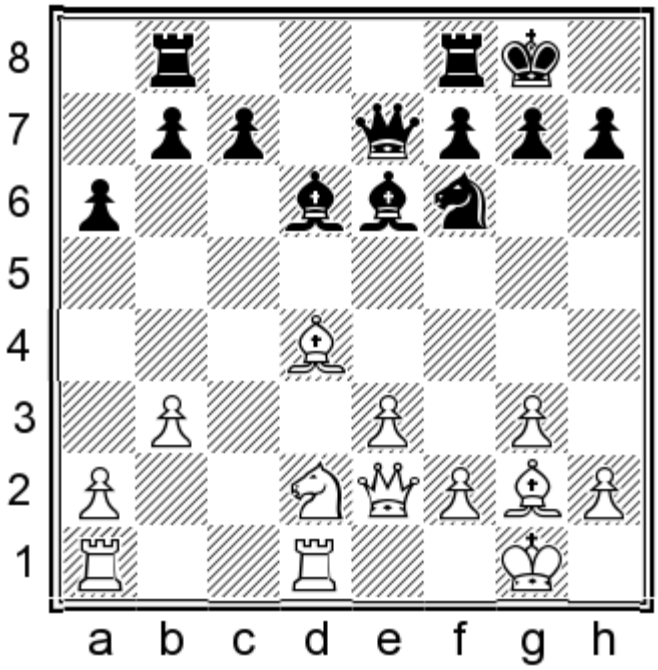
Mikhail Yakovlevich Romm – Helmut Grill

Correspondence 2013



16...♗g4!

Black needs to address the positional threat of ♗xf6.

17.f3 ♗e6 18.e4

Now after 18.♗xf6 gxf6! the f3-pawn interferes with White's coordination, and the doubled f-pawns are not too great a handicap.

18...♗c5!

White's dark-squared bishop was well placed to support the further advance of White's pawns, so it makes sense to swap it off. This move also reminds White of the dark-square weaknesses created by f2-f3.

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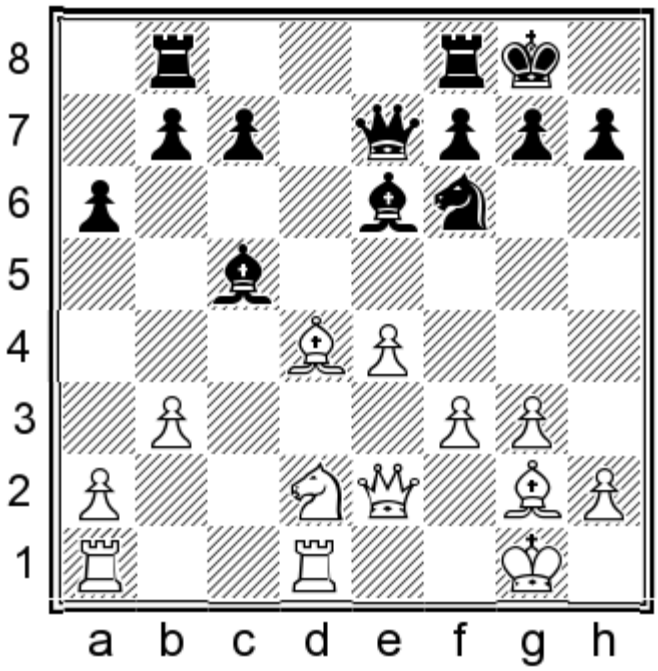

19.♘f1 ♗xd4† 20.♖xd4 ♖bd8!

Now Black trades a pair of rooks to reduce the risk of White capitalizing on the open d-file.

21.♖ad1 ♖xd4 22.♖xd4 h5!

Another strong move, making it harder for White to advance his pawn majority. Black is fine and the players agreed a draw not long after.

...½–½

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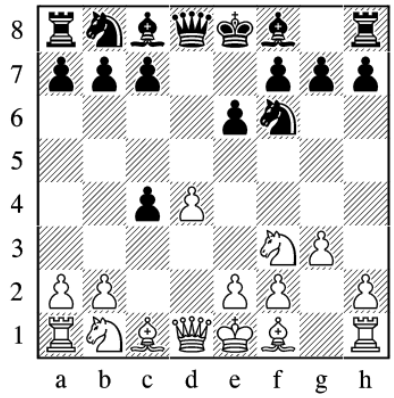
Chapter 5b



Catalan Theory (Part 1)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4

The Queen Check Variation page 193

5.♕a4† ♘bd7! 6.♗g2 (6.♘fd2?! page 193; 6.♘e5?! page 193; 6.♕xc4 page 193) **6...a6**

7.♕xc4 page 194

7.♘c3 page 195

Introduction to the Main Line page 196

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6!

6.♘c3 page 196 (6.♕c2 page 196; 6.a4 page 197)

6.♘e5 ♗b4†! 7.♘c3 ♘d5 page 199

8.♗d2 Game 45, page 200

8.0-0! 0-0 page 202

9.♗d2 page 203

9.♘e4!? page 203

Main Line with **9.♕c2** page 204**9...b5**

10.♗e4 Game 46, page 204

The Forcing **10.♘xd5** page 206

10.♘xd5 exd5 11.b3 c6!

12.e4 page 206

12.bxc4 page 207

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6.0-0 ♘c6 (7.♘a3 page 208; 7.♗e3!? page 208; 7.♘bd2 page 209)

7.a4 page 209

The Old Main Line: **7.♘c3** page 211

7...♖b8 8.e4 (8.e3?! page 211) **8...♗e7 9.♕e2** (9.♗g5?! page 212; 9.d5 page 212) **9...b5** Game 47, page 213

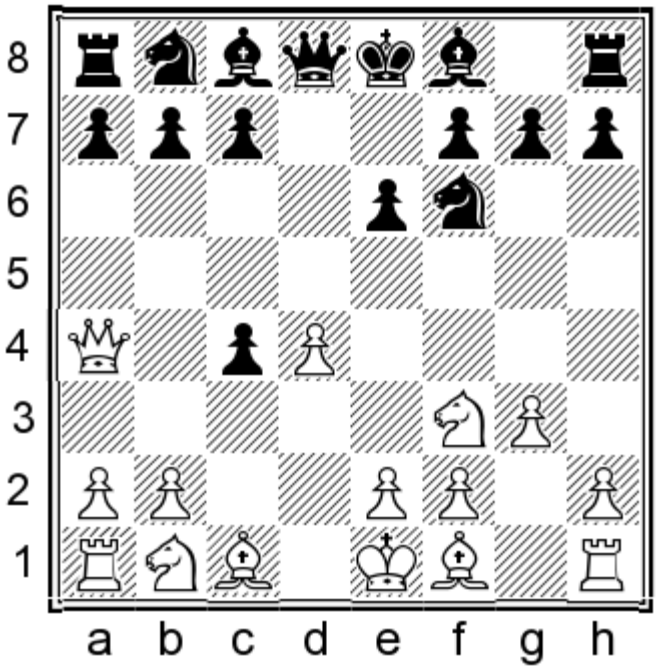
1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4

We will start by considering a sideline by White.

The Queen Check Variation

5.♕a4†

During the 2015 European Team Championships, in Reykjavik, I had the thankless task of preparing Sune Berg Hansen, the Danish Board 1, to play against World Champion Magnus Carlsen! My idea for Sune was to play the Catalan and specifically this sideline. Sune never had the chance to test our preparation, as Carlsen preferred 4...♗b4†. Perhaps it was just as well, as Sune went on to make a well-earned draw, whereas we actually overlooked an important option for Black in the present variation, as mentioned a few moves down the line.



5...♘bd7!

5...♗d7 6.♕xc4 ♗c6 is a solid option which should be good enough to equalize, but Black will have to spend additional time moving his bishop to prepare ...c5. The text move enables Black to develop more efficiently.

6.♗g2

This is the most flexible move order.

6.♘fd2?! is pointless due to 6...a6!, while 6.♘e5?! c5! also favours Black.

A slightly less accurate option is: 6.♕xc4 a6 (White's move order gives Black the extra possibility of 6...b6!? 7.♗g2

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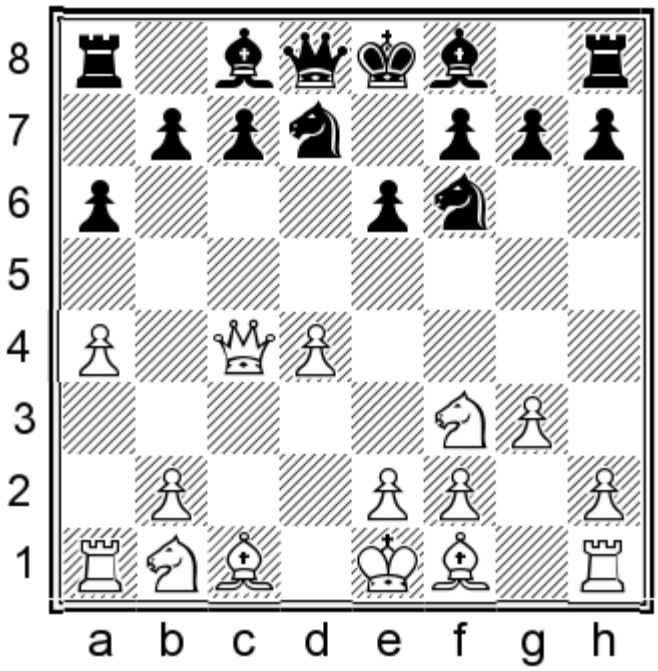
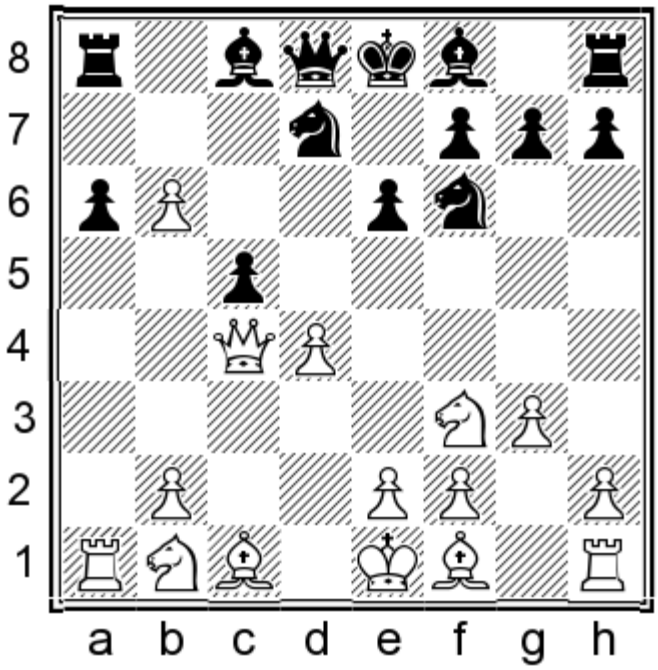
♗b7 8.0-0 c5 as in Karpov – Korchnoi, Moscow [22] 1974, but the text move is simpler) Now White should settle for 7.♗g2, transposing to the 7.♕xc4 variation below. If he instead tries 7.a4?!, then Black can seize the initiative with:



7...c5! (7...b5!? 8.♕c6 ♖b8 9.♗f4 ♗b7! is also good for Black but is more complicated) 8.a5 Otherwise ...b5 comes. 8...b5! 9.axb6 This position was reached in Tu – V. Nguyen, Da Lat 2011. Black has a choice of good options but my preference is:



9...cxd4N 10.♗g2 ♗b7 11.♕xd4 ♗c5∓ Black will take the b6-pawn, remaining with a development advantage.

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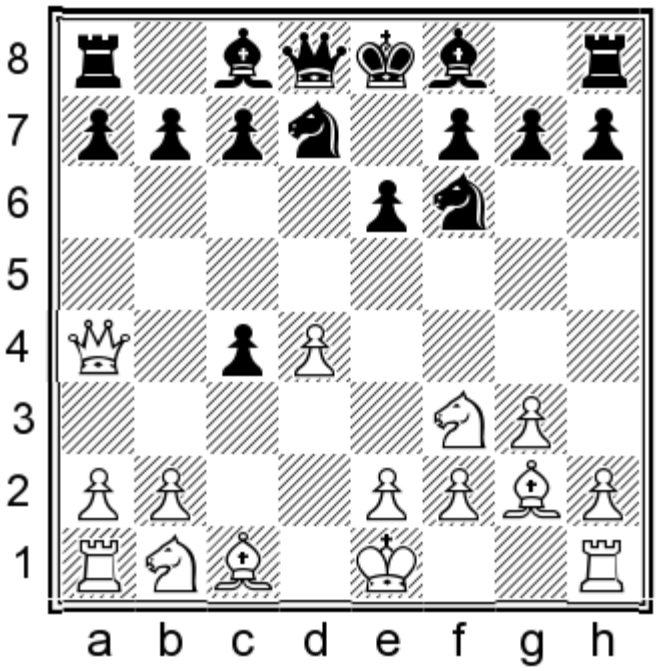

6...a6

White can either recapture the c4-pawn or maintain the tension by developing his knight to c3; naturally, we will look at both options.

7.♕xc4

This enables Black to develop quickly and smoothly.

7...b5 8.♕c6

8.♕c2 has been played in hundreds of games but it does not require serious preparation. Simply ...♗b7, followed by ...c5 and ...♖c8, gives Black easy play on the queenside and forces White to struggle for equality.

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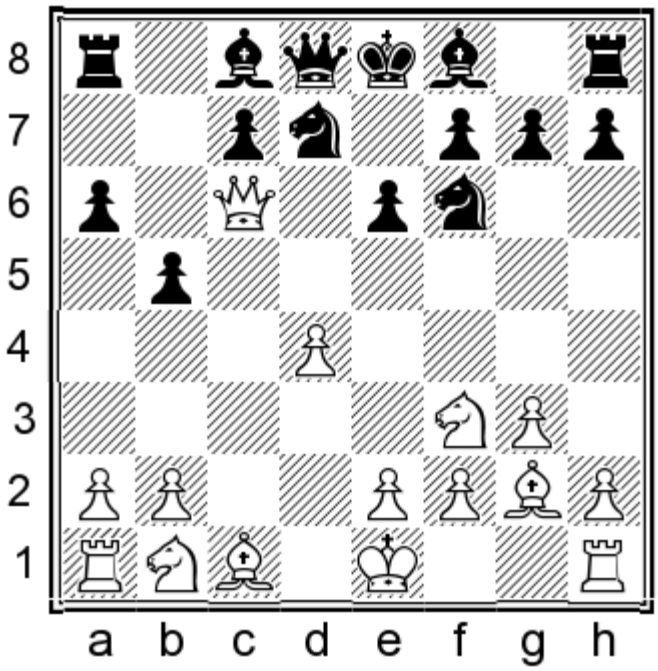

8...♖a7!

8...♖b8 allows 9.♗f4 when Black is still okay, but White has some ideas. This was the main focus of my preparation with Sune.

In the limited time before the game (keeping in mind that I was also assisting three other players), I neglected to consider the text move. For some reason it has been less popular than going to b8, but later analysis has convinced me that it is undoubtedly stronger. An obvious advantage is that the rook guards the c7-pawn; but isn't it misplaced on a7? Actually, not at all! On the contrary; after a subsequent ...c5 and some bishop move, the rook may go to c7, perhaps as part of a doubling operation with the other rook coming to c8. Another important point is that a space has been cleared for the black queen to go to a8, where it combines with the b7-bishop to produce pressure on the long diagonal.

9.♗f4

9.0-0 ♗b7 10.♕c2 c5 is similarly comfortable for Black, as has been shown in practice many times.

9...♗b7 10.♕c1

Of course, if 10.♕xc7?? ♕xc7 11.♗xc7 ♗xf3 and White loses a piece.

10...c5 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.0-0 0-0 13.♘bd2

White eventually won from here in Capablanca – Reshevsky, Nottingham 1936, but not because of his opening play. Black should have continued thematically with:

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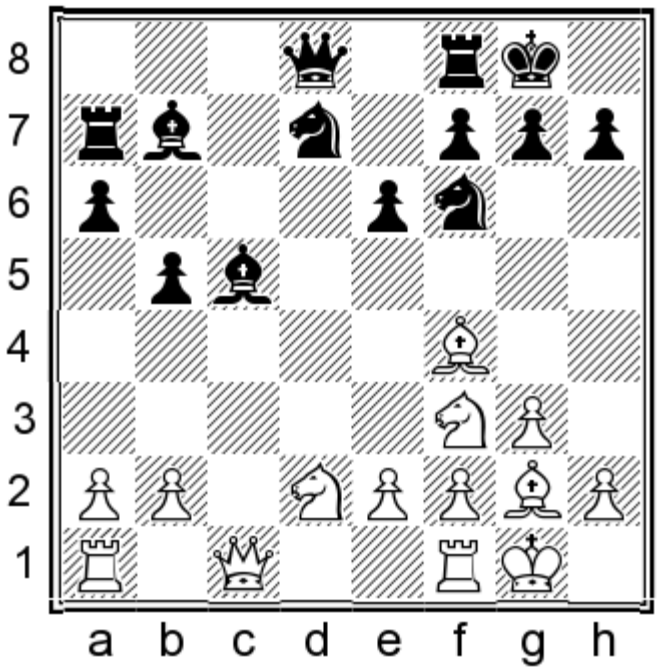
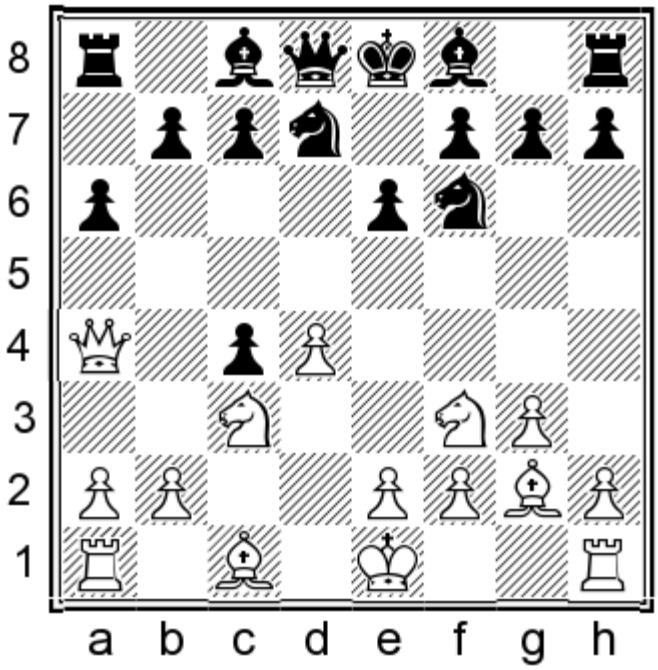


13...♕a8!N

Intending ...♖c8, with an excellent position.

7.♘c3



Allowing ...b5 seems rather miserable for White, so quite a few strong players have preferred this move.

7...♗e7!?

7...♖b8 8.♕xc4 b5 9.♕d3 ♗b7 10.♗f4 ♖c8 followed by ...c5 is a simple, clear-cut equalizing option. My main line is intended to keep a bit more tension in the position.

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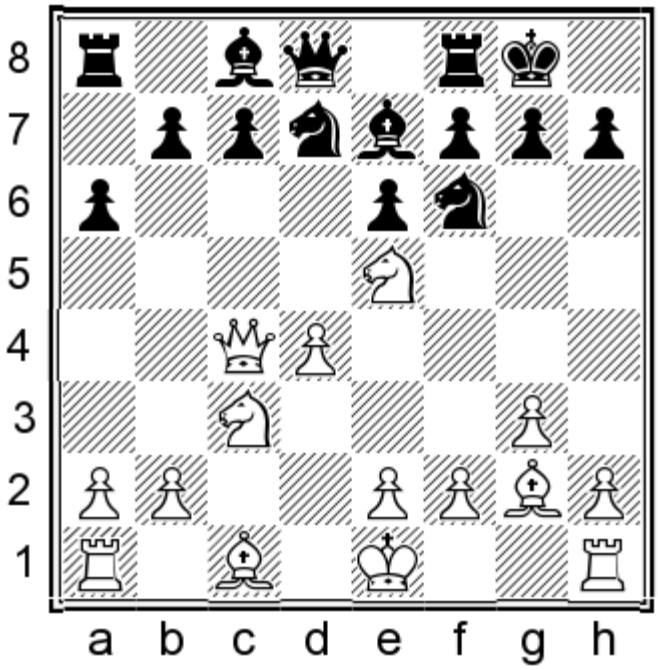
8.♘e5

Since 8.♕xc4 and 8.0-0 0-0 9.♕xc4 both give Black easy play with ...b5 followed by ...♗b7, the text move has been White's most popular choice in practice. However, it seems to lead to an edge for Black after best play.

8...0-0 9.♕xc4

After 9.♘xc4?! b5 10.♘xb5 axb5 11.♕xa8 bxc4 the two knights should prove stronger than a rook and a pawn.



9...♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘d7

White has accepted doubled e-pawns in the hope that the e5-pawn will exert a cramping effect on Black's pieces. However, this is outweighed by Black's queenside majority, which can be mobilized after some combination of ...♖b8, ...b5 and ...c5. The following examples demonstrate that Black's chances should be slightly higher.

11.f4

11.♕e4 ♖b8 12.0-0 b5 13.♖d1 c5 14.♗f4 ♗b7 15.♕d3 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♘b6 occurred in Burmakin – Roeder, Pardubice 2015.

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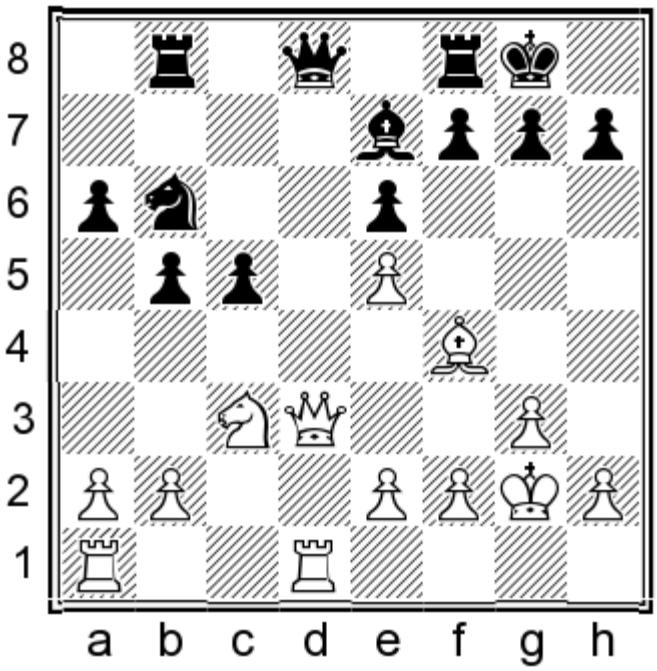
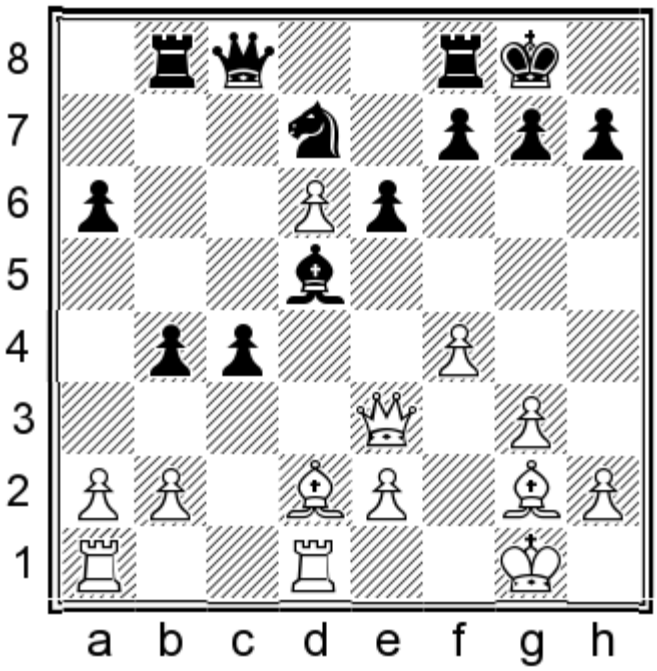


White eventually prevailed but the engines prefer Black at this point; I think they are right, as Black has a mobile queenside majority and White's only trump is a potential invasion from the d6-square, which seems far-fetched at this point.

11...b5 12.♕d3 ♖b8 13.0-0 c5 14.♘e4 ♗b7

Black holds a slight edge. We are following a correspondence game, where Black shows how to improve his position while keeping White's play under control.

15.♖d1 ♗d5 16.♕e3 c4 17.♗d2 b4 18.♘d6 ♗xd6 19.exd6 ♕c8



20.♕d4 ♗xg2 21.♔xg2 ♕c6† 22.♔g1 ♖fc8 23.♖ac1 ♖b5∓

Black was dominating in Chitescu – Voiculescu, corr. 2011.

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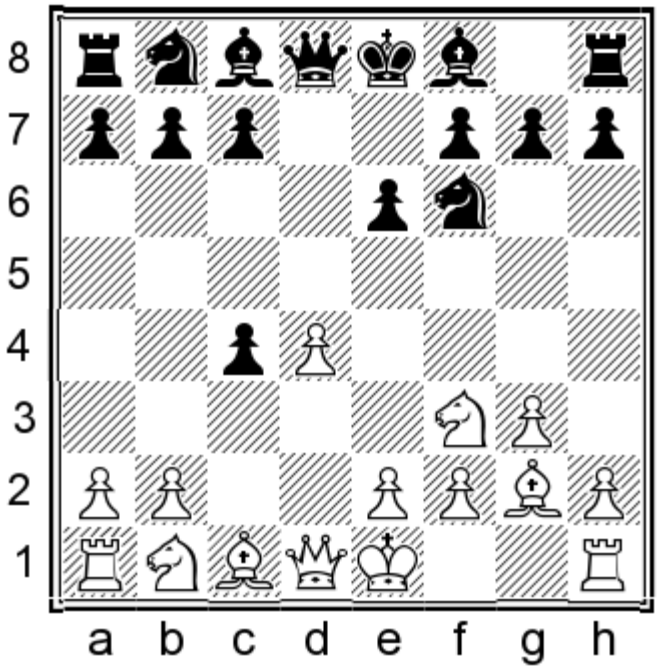
Introduction to the Main Line

Although the queen check warrants some attention, the great majority of Catalan players prefer to do battle from the following position.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2



5...a6!

White's two most important options, by far, are 6.♘e5 and 6.0-0. We will address both moves in detail, after briefly addressing a few rare lines in this introductory section. As usual with such sidelines, Black should meet them with clear, concrete lines which do not take too much effort to remember.

6.♘c3

I considered two other rare continuations.

6.♕c2 b5 7.b3!?N

7.♘e5?! ♖a7 8.0-0 ♗b7 only helps Black. One example continued: 9.♖d1 ♗xg2 10.♔xg2 c5∓ Kuttruf – Lange, email 2005.

The text move is the only option that makes real sense to me. White is aiming for the thematic structure with axb3, which tends to offer him lasting positional compensation, but Black has a much more practical way to deal with his opponent's scheme:

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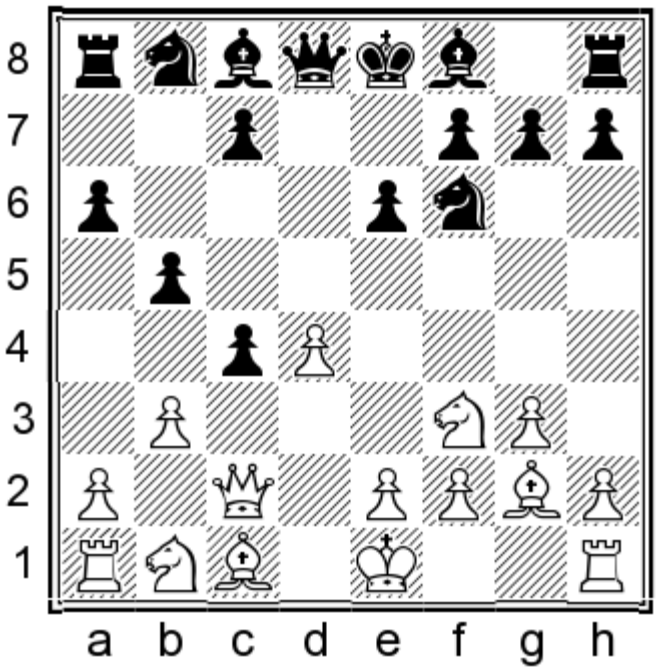


7...♗b7!? 8.bxc4 c5

Black has a comfortable game and I dare say his position would be slightly easier to handle over the board.

6.a4 This move prevents ...b5 but is rather committal. I will present two good replies: a) 6...♘c6 and my personal favourite b) 6...♗d7!. (By the way, 6...c5!? is another decent move, but two options are plenty!).

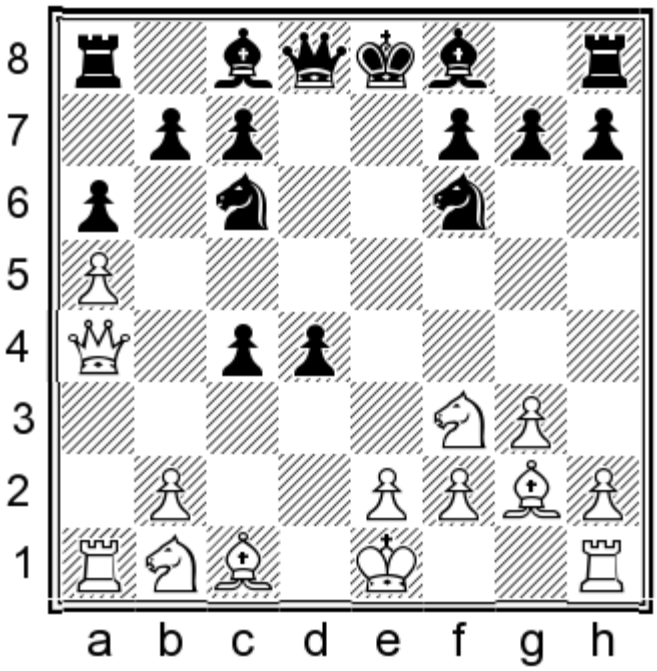
a) 6...♘c6

This is a convenient repertoire choice for us, since the best continuation of 7.0-0 transposes to the 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.a4 line on page 209. Let's see what happens if White tries something else:

7.a5?! e5!

This occurred in an attractive miniature, which we will follow until the end.

8.♕a4 exd4



9.♘e5

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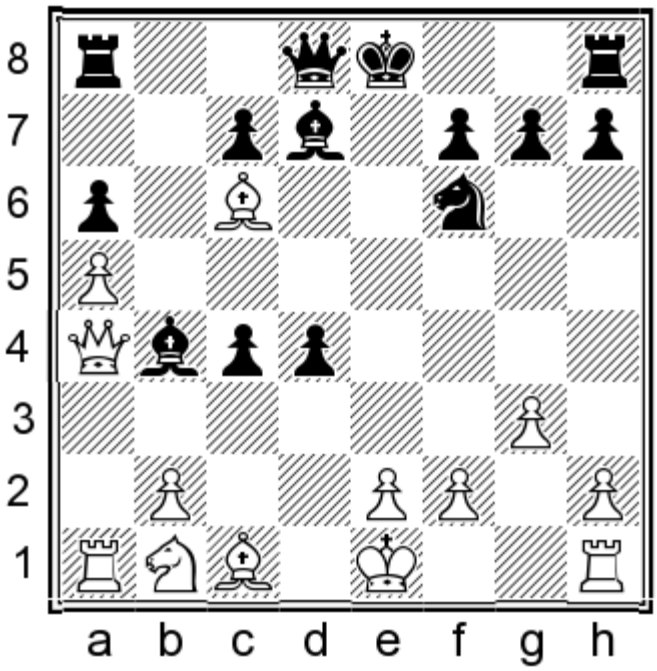
9.♘xd4 ♕xd4 10.♗xc6† ♗d7 11.♗xd7† ♕xd7 12.♕xc4 0-0-0∓

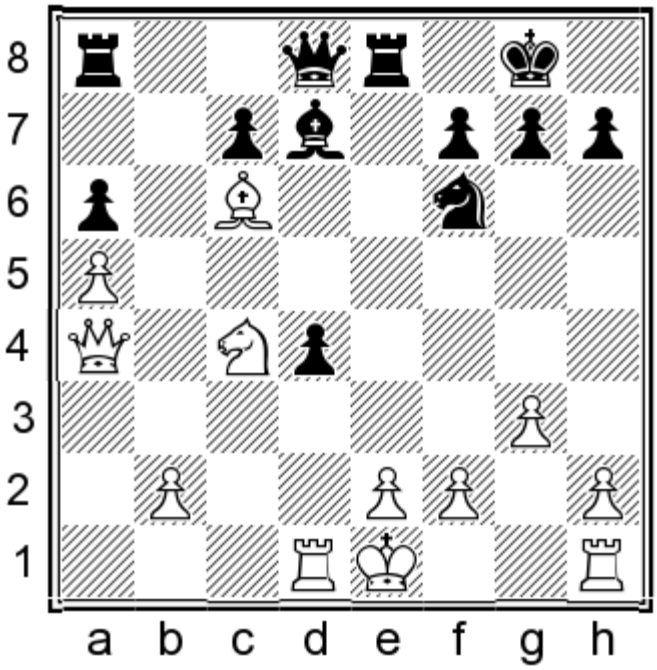
9...♗d7 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♗xc6 ♗b4†!

Black is building a dangerous lead in development.



12.♗d2 ♗xd2† 13.♘xd2 0-0 14.♘xc4 ♖e8 15.♖d1?

15.♗xd7 ♘xd7 16.0-0 ♘c5 17.♕c2 ♖b8∓



15...♖xe2†!

A simple but effective tactic.

16.♔xe2 ♕e8† 17.♘e5 ♕xe5† 18.♔f1 ♗h3† 19.♗g2 ♕e4 20.♖g1 ♘g4!

0–1 Goczo – Miton, Porto Rio 2015.

b) 6...♗d7!

Although the previous line was fine as a transpositional tool, I find the text move the simplest choice against

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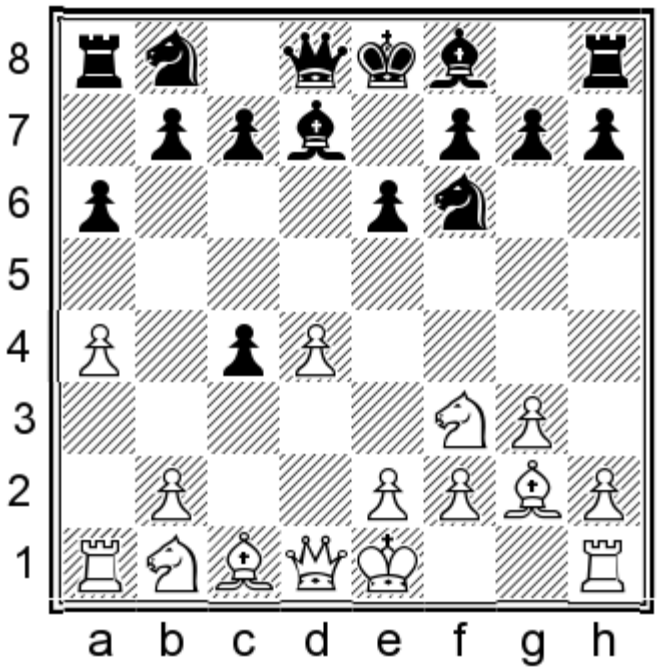
White's chosen move order.



7.♘bd2

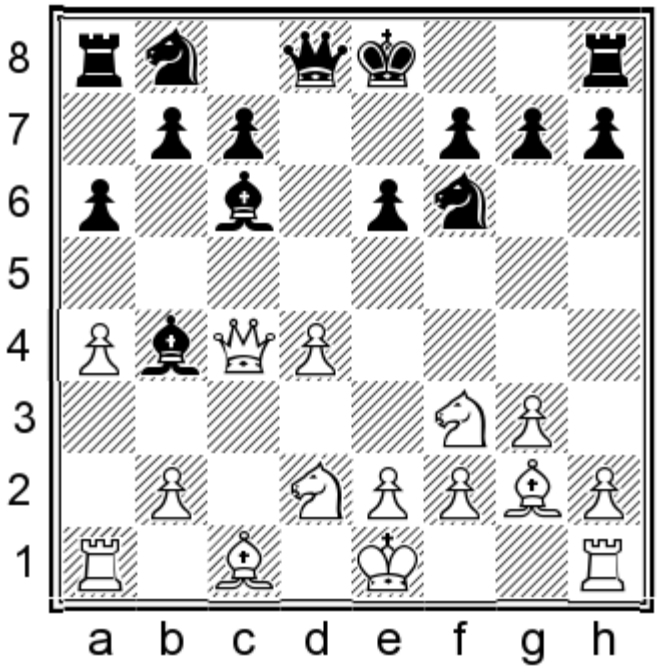
7.♘e5 ♗c6 8.♘xc6 ♘xc6 gives Black an improved version of a normal ...♗d7 Catalan as White has weakened his queenside, inviting ideas such as ...♘a5-b3. Note that 9.♗xc6†?! bxc6 does not help White, as the tripled pawns are hard to attack and Black will get plenty of queenside counterplay – not forgetting that he still has an extra pawn for the time being.

7...♗b4

7...♗c6!? 8.♘xc4 ♗d5 is another good choice.

8.♕c2 ♗c6 9.♕xc4

Now in Razuvaev – Zhidkov, Baku 1972, simplest would have been:



9...♗xd2†N 10.♗xd2 ♗d5=

Followed by ...♘c6, with a pleasant game for Black.

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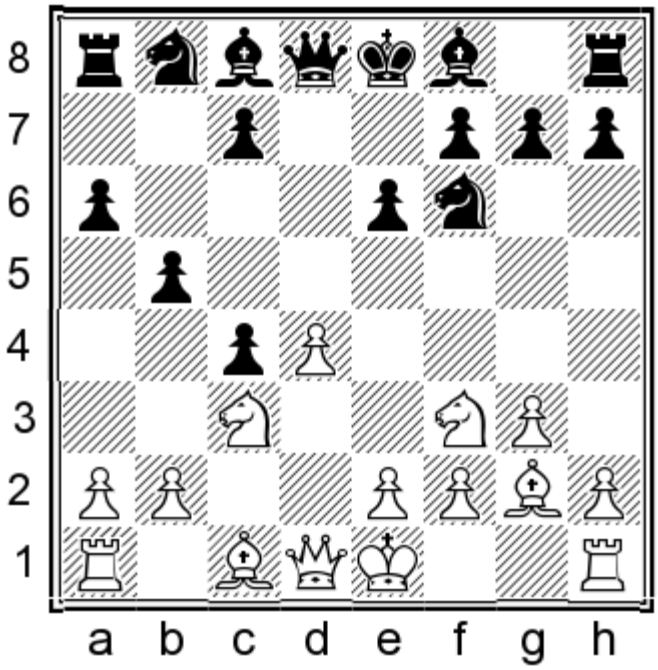
6...b5

As I mentioned in the introductory section, this move becomes more appealing once a knight has landed on c3.



7.♘e5

7.b3N has not been played but it is always a move we should consider after ...b5 has been played. 7...b4 is possible of course, but I prefer to return the pawn with 7...♗b7!? 8.bxc4 c5, when Black is fine.

7...♖a7

Another typical way for Black to play is 7...c6!? 8.♘xc6 ♕b6 9.♘xb8 (9.♘e5 ♗b7) 9...♗b7! with comfortable equality, as in Matthiesen – P.H. Nielsen, Denmark 2009.

8.♗c6†

8.e4 c5! is great for Black.

8.a4 ♗b7 9.♗xb7 ♖xb7 10.axb5 axb5 11.0-0 occurred in Wang Yue – Jianu, Bazna (blitz) 2014, when the simple 11...♗e7N would have left White struggling to find compensation.

The text move was played in Bopp – Zhigalko, Bad Wiessee 2016, when the best way of blocking the check would have been:

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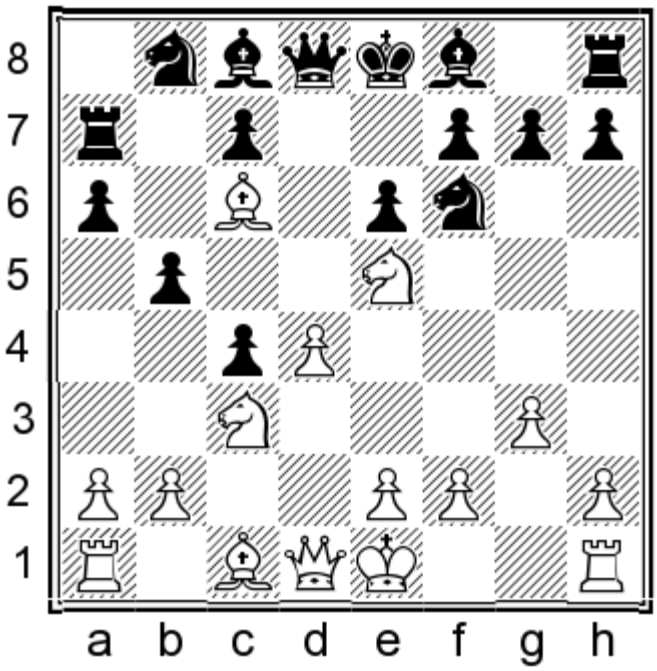

8...♘fd7! 9.♗e3

Otherwise ...♗b7 comes.

9...♗d6! 10.d5 ♗xe5 11.♗xa7 0-0∞

Black will follow up with ...exd5, forcing White to recapture with the bishop, after which ...c5 comes. I think Black has excellent compensation for the exchange, with a massive queenside majority supported by strong minor pieces.

6.♘e5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.♘e5

With this natural move, White threatens to recapture on c4 while preventing our intended ...♘c6 move. However, Black can exploit the delay in White's castling with:

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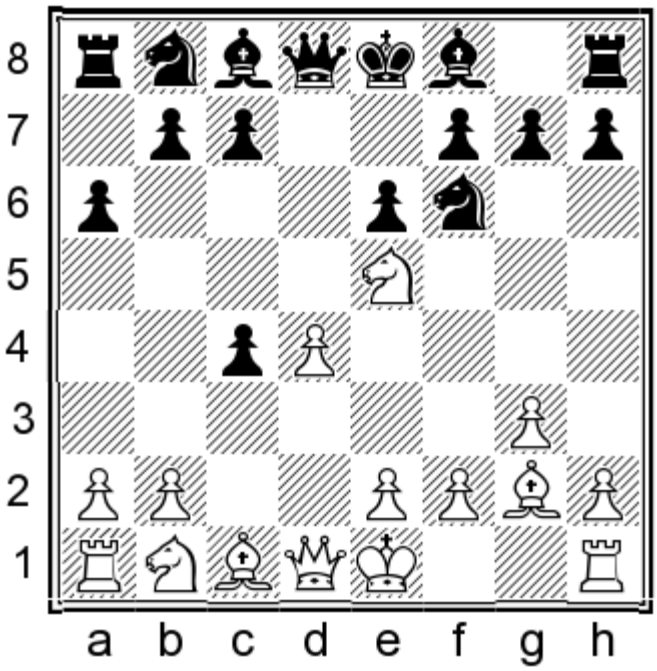


6...♗b4†!

6...c5 is a reasonable alternative which should eventually equalize. However, it lacks ambition and enables White to get a small initiative with minimal risk. The text move requires more work from Black, but it's worth it to make the game more challenging for our opponents.

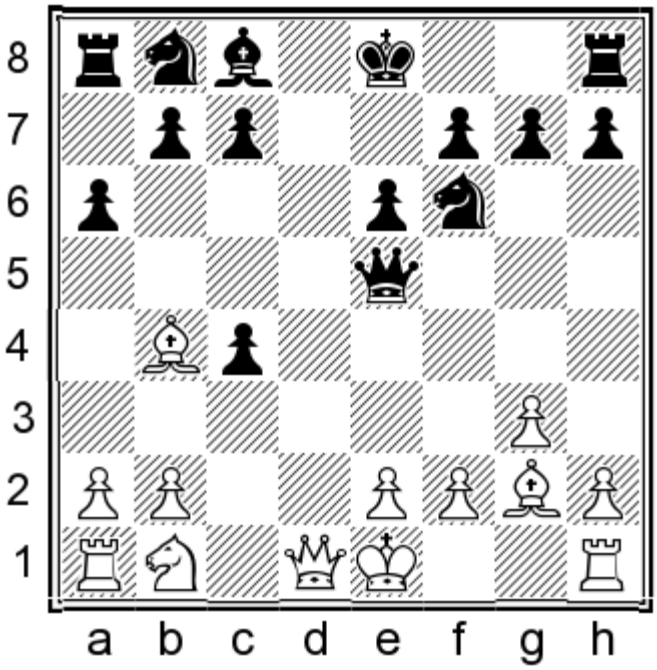
7.♘c3

7.♘d2? is, of course, a blunder allowing 7...♕xd4.

7.♗d2?!

This idea has been virtually abandoned after a couple of high-level games turned out badly for White.

7...♕xd4 8.♗xb4 ♕xe5



9.♘a3

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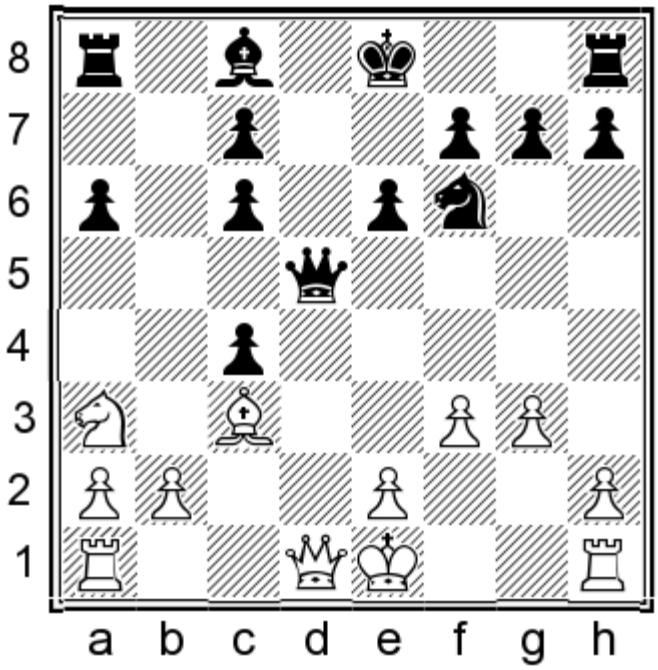
9.♘d2?! ♕b5!? 10.♗a3 ♗d7! 11.♕c2 ♘c6 12.♖c1 0-0-0∓ was better for Black in Kamsky – Wang Hao, Tashkent 2012.

9...♘c6! 10.♗xc6† bxc6 11.♗c3 ♕d5 12.f3

This position was reached in Aronian – Mamedyarov, Ohrid 2009. Later the game become double-edged and White was even better for a while, before he eventually went wrong and lost. However, at this point Black has a significant improvement.



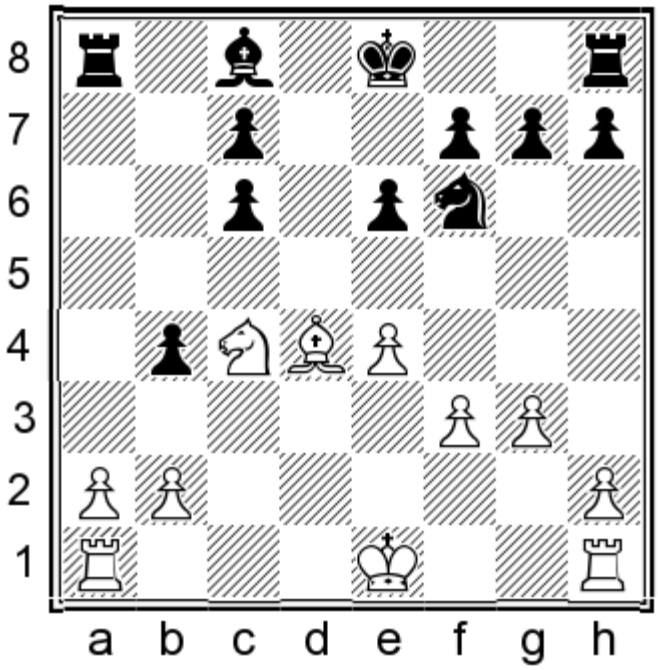
12...a5!N

Intending a quick ...♗a6. A sample line continues:

13.e4 ♕c5 14.♗d4 ♕e7 15.♕a4

I don't see anything better for White, but now Black gets to transform the queenside with:

15...♕b4†! 16.♕xb4 axb4 17.♘xc4



17...♘d7!

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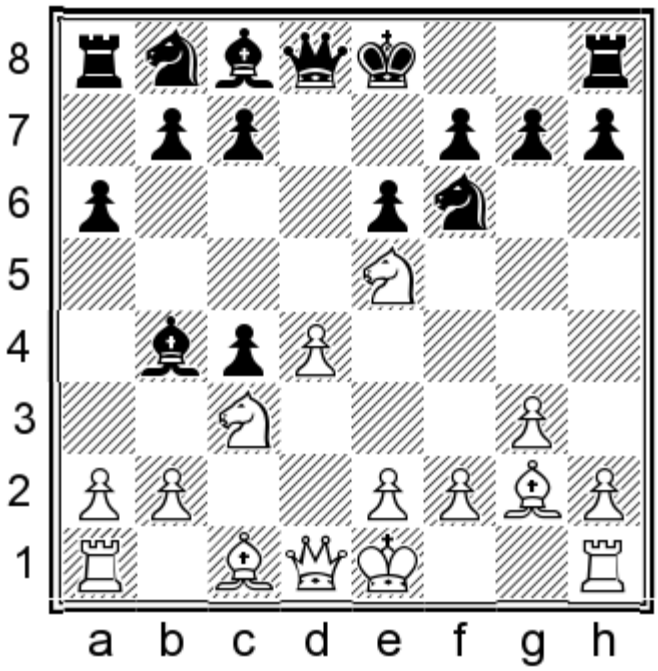
This dynamic move gives Black excellent chances. Given the chance, he will consolidate his extra pawn with ...f6, so White's next move is the only challenging option.

18.♗xg7 ♖g8 19.♗h6 ♗a6 20.♘d2 ♘e5

Black's superb piece activity is more important than his inferior pawn structure.



7...♘d5

Now we have a split between 8.♗d2 and the more critical **8.0-0!**.

8.♕c2 is of little concern to us. The simplest reply is 8...0-0, when 9.0-0 transposes to the 8.0-0 0-0 9.♕c2 variation, coverage of which begins on page 204.

Black also has the option of grabbing a pawn with 8...♘xc3!? 9.bxc3 ♕xd4. However, after 10.♕a4† ♘d7 11.♕xb4 ♕xe5 12.♕xc4 (12.♗a3?! c5 13.♕xc4 b5 14.♕d3 ♖b8 favours Black) 12...♘b6 13.♕d4 ♕xd4 14.cxd4 White had reasonable compensation in Loeffler – Heinke, email 2008.

8.♗d2

GAME 45

Piotr Walczak – Leonid Shetko

Correspondence 2012

I have tweaked the move order as usual.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.♘e5 ♗b4† 7.♘c3 ♘d5 8.♗d2

This natural move has been recommended by Bologan.

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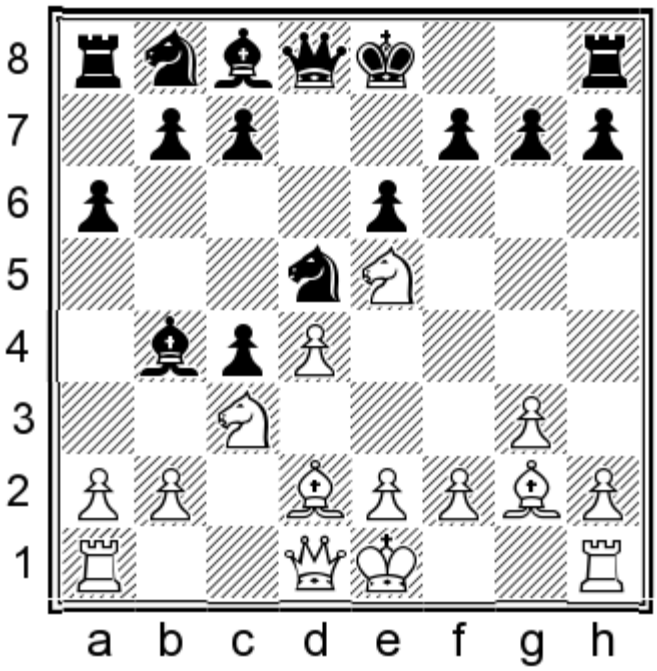


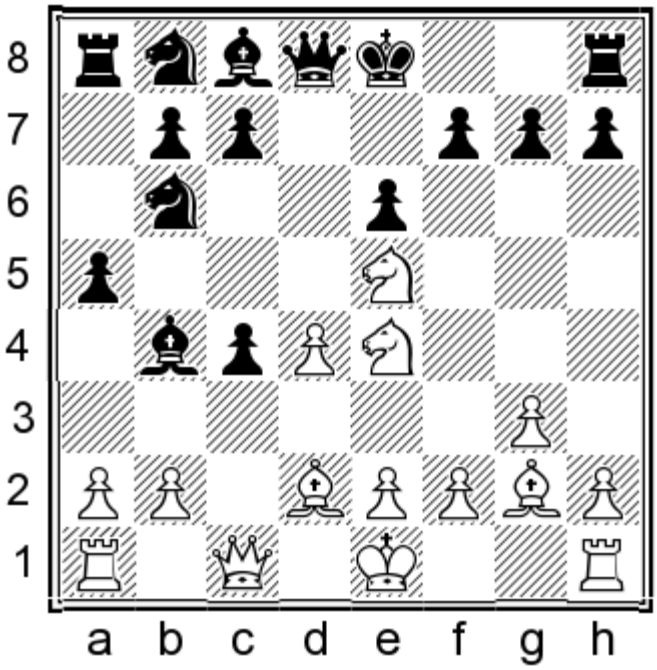
8...♘b6!

8...b5 is the other option, but I like White's chances after 9.0-0 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 0-0 11.a4 f6 12.♘f3 ♗b7 13.♕b1! as in Zmokly – Mielke, corr. 2012. White obtains typical pressure for the pawn, as can be seen in so many Catalan lines.

9.e3

This is almost universally played.

That said, 9.♘e4!? is probably just as good, and was played in Zhukova – Kosteniuk, Olginka 2011. I propose 9...a5!?N, which resembles the continuation at move 11 of the main game. 10.♕c1 is the best that the engines have to offer for White, but with sensible chess Black is doing well:



10...0-0! (Please avoid 10...♕xd4?? 11.♗xb4 axb4 12.♕f4+–) 11.e3 ♘8d7 12.♘xc4 ♘xc4 13.♕xc4 b6! 14.♗xb4 ♗a6 15.♕c3 axb4 16.♕xb4

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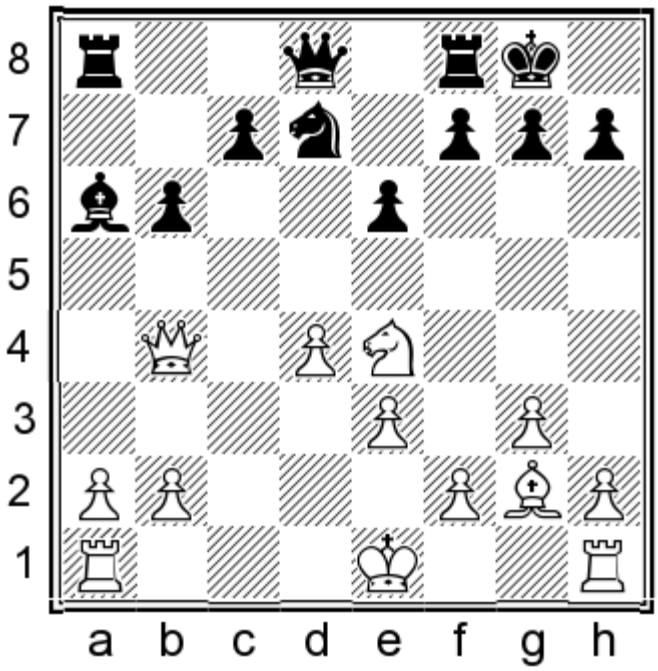
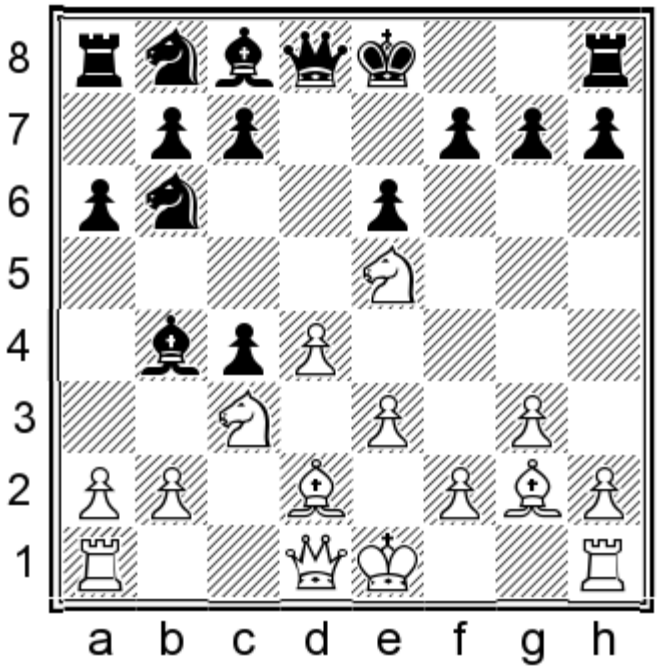


16...c5! 17.♕b3 cxd4 18.exd4 ♕c7 Black has plenty of compensation for the pawn.



9...♘8d7! 10.♘xd7 ♕xd7 11.♘e4

Bologan calls this position unpleasant for Black, but does not consider the best reply.

11...a5!

This is the standard way for us to react to the proposed bishop exchange, which appears again and again in this system. Obviously Black will be happy to receive an open a-file if White exchanges on b4; and if a2-a3 is played, Black can retreat his bishop and think about ...a5-a4 to clamp down on the queenside. So far, Black remains unbeaten from this position in correspondence play.

12.0-0 0-0 13.♕c2 ♖d8 14.a3 ♗xd2 15.♘xd2 e5

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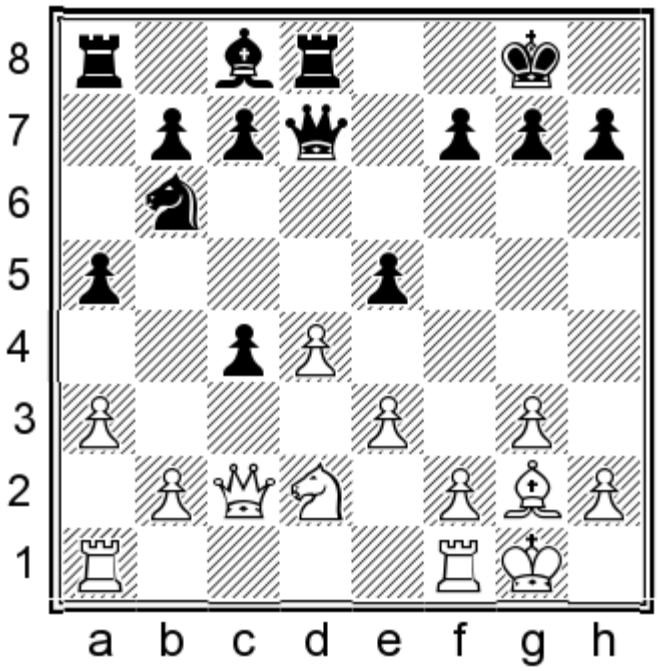
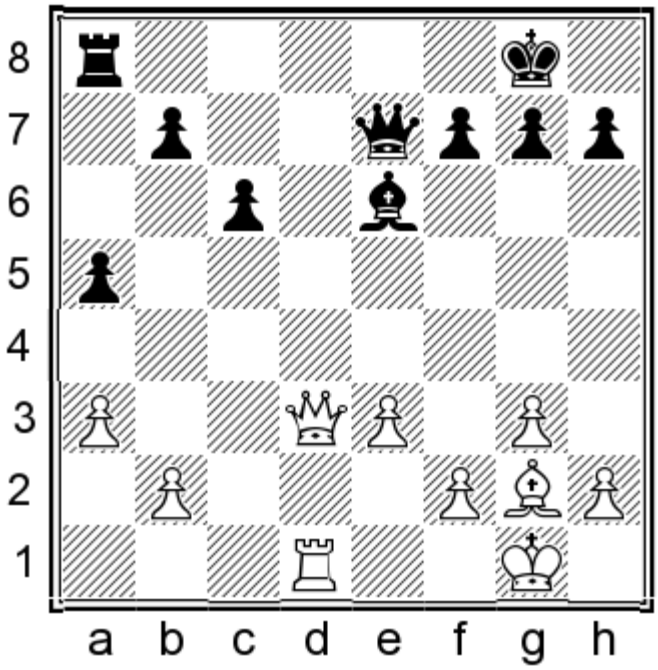


16.♘xc4 ♘xc4 17.♕xc4 exd4 18.♖fd1 d3

In the time it takes White to round up this pawn, Black will be able to complete development.

19.♖d2 ♕e7 20.♕c3 c6 21.♖xd3 ♖xd3 22.♕xd3 ♗e6 23.♖d1

White has the faintest initiative due to his possession of the open file, but Black neutralizes it easily enough.



23...♕c5 24.e4

Another game ended peacefully after: 24.♗e4 g6 25.♗f3 ♔g7 26.♖d2 ♖e8 27.♕b1 ½–½ Dimov – De Pinho, corr. 2013.

24...g6 25.h4

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A draw was agreed here in the earlier game Halldorsson – Efremov, corr. 2012. The present encounter continued for a few more moves:

25...♖c8 26.♖d2 ♔g7 27.♖c2 ♖d8!

Forcing further simplifications and an easy draw.

28.♕xd8 ♕xc2 29.♕d4† ♔g8 30.♕b6 ♕c1† 31.♔h2 ♕d2

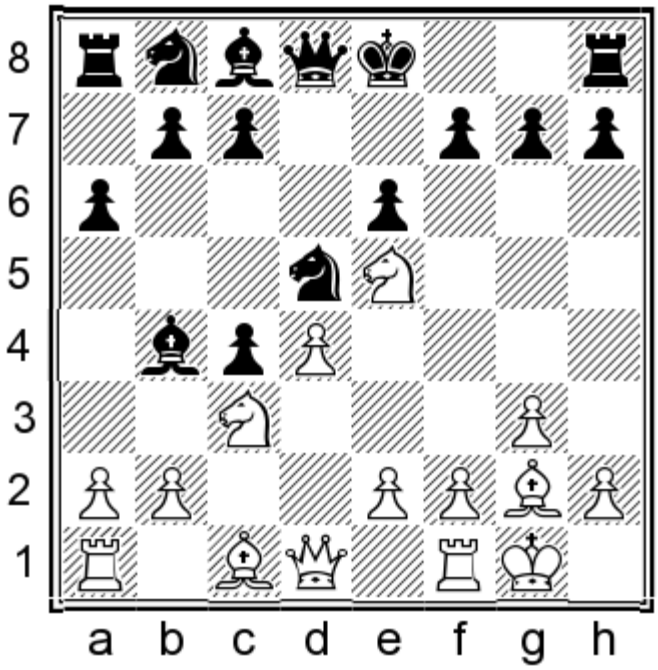
½–½

Let's move on to White's more challenging option at move 8.

8.0-0!

This was one of Kramnik's many valuable contributions to the theory of the Catalan. Let's recap the opening moves:

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.♘e5 ♗b4† 7.♘c3 ♘d5 8.0-0!



8...0-0

8...♘xc3?! 9.bxc3 ♗xc3 10.♖b1 ♕xd4 11.♕a4†! gives White too much initiative. (11.♕xd4!? ♗xd4 12.♘xc4 is also reasonable for White) 11...b5 12.♕a3 ♕xe5 13.♗f4 ♕f6 14.♗xc7 White is two pawns down but scores more than 65% in my database. The position can be analysed more deeply of course, but overall I see absolutely no reason to take such risks.

After the text move, 9.♗d2 ♘b6 is similar to Game 45 above; it is hard to see how mutual castling will affect Black's plans in any significant way. For instance, 10.♘e4 should once again be met by 10...a5!N. One small difference worth pointing out is that 11.♕c1? is not an option here due to 11...♕xd4!∓.

9.♕c2 is the main line and we will move on to it shortly. Before then, however, it is worth investigating a rare but quite challenging alternative:

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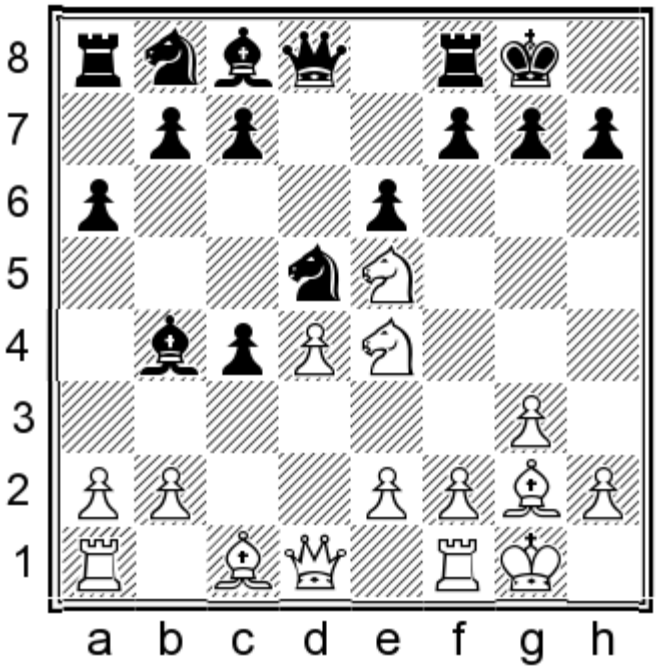
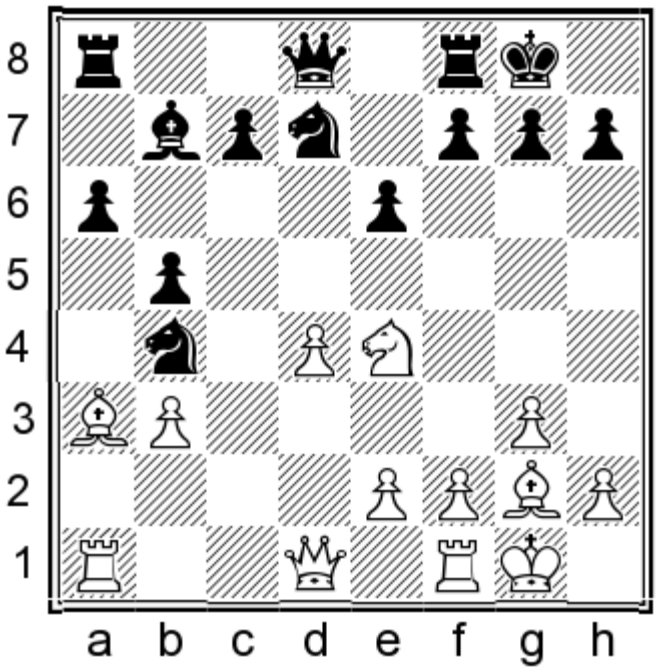
9.♘e4!?

This has still not been tested in over-the-board play, but it seems objectively at least as good as the main line.



9...c3!N

9...b5 is met by 10.b3! cxb3 11.axb3, reaching a structure which I have been careful to avoid in my recommendations in this chapter. The game continued: 11...♗b7 12.♘d3 ♘d7 13.♘xb4 ♘xb4 14.♗a3 (14.♗d2!? ♕e7 15.♕b1 followed by ♖fc1 may be an improvement)



14...a5 15.♕d2 c5! 16.♖fc1 ♗xe4 17.♗xe4 ♖c8 Black was okay in Ruefenacht – Mahnke, corr. 2015. Nevertheless, I would prefer to avoid following such a path, as this type of scenario with positional pressure for a pawn is something that Catalan players are usually happy to reach.

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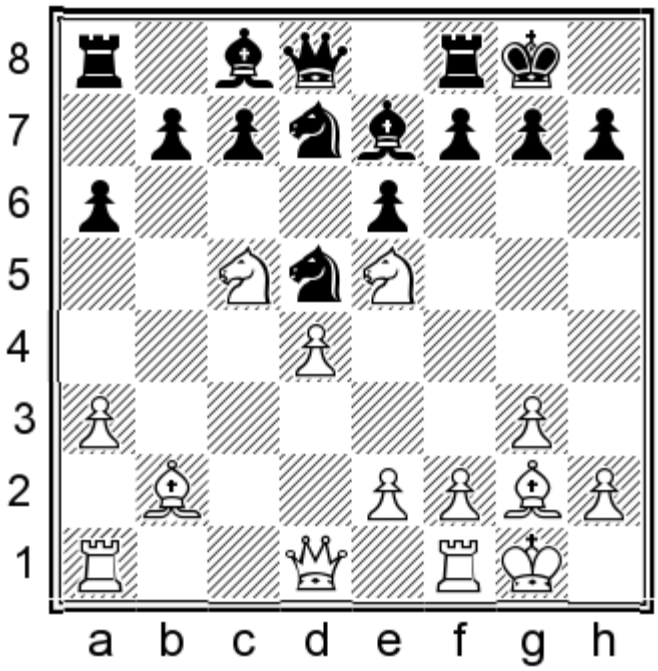
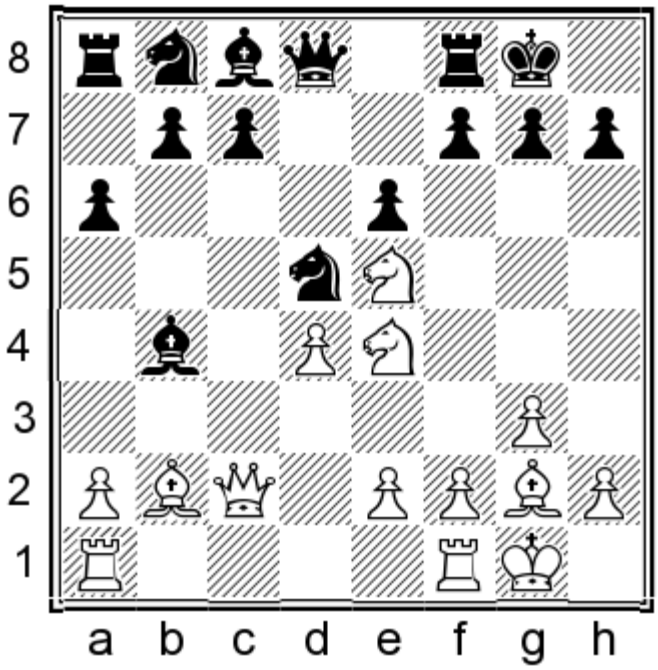
10.♕c2

I also considered 10.a3 cxb2 11.♗xb2 ♗e7 12.♘c5 ♘d7 when White has reasonable compensation for the sacrificed pawn. I think the most logical continuation is:



13.♘cd3 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗d7! Black keeps a solid position and can consider plans such as ...a5 and ...♗b5-a6. Although White has compensation, the big difference between this and the previous note is that Black has not weakened his queenside with ...b5.

10...cxb2 11.♗xb2



11...♘d7 12.♖fd1 ♗e7 13.e3 ♕e8!

Black is planning ...♘xe5 and ...♗d7. Once again, it is good to have avoided any weakening pawn moves on the queenside. White has reasonable compensation for the pawn, so the game can be evaluated as dynamically balanced. I

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suspect that this line will receive more practical testing in the future, as the main lines are holding up well for Black. Speaking of which...

Main line with 9.♕c2

GAME 46

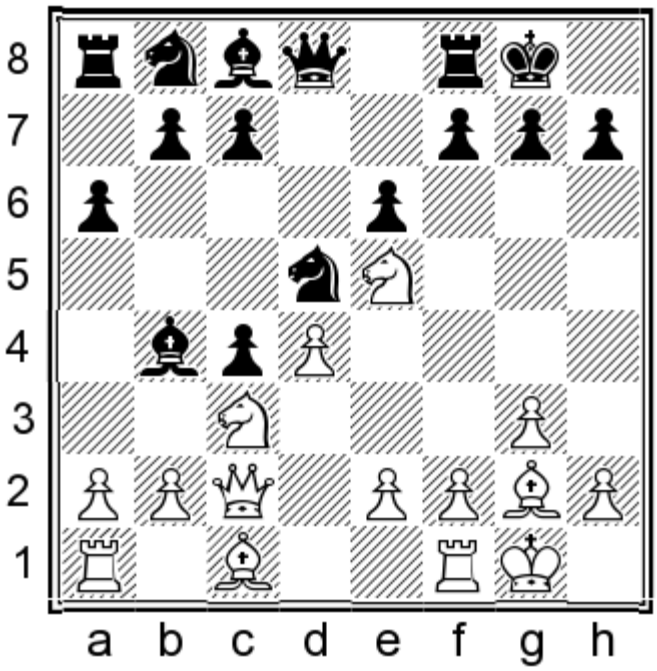
Evgeny Podvoysky – Aleksandr Rudenko

Correspondence 2012

As usual, I have used our standard move order in place of the slightly different sequence which occurred in the game.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.♘e5 ♗b4† 7.♘c3 ♘d5 8.0-0 0-0 9.♕c2

Compared with the ♗d2 set-up, here White defends the c3-point while keeping more active options available for his bishop.



9...b5!

Here this move works well, since it's not easy for White to prepare b2-b3 with his knight already on c3.

10.♗e4

10.♘xd5 is the other main move, and will be covered in the analysis section after this game.

The text move was introduced by Gelfand in 2009. White would like to provoke 10...h6, after which he could obtain a nice initiative with 10.a4, since Black would no longer be able to chase the knight away with ...f6 due to the hole on g6.

10...♗b7!

Other moves have been tried, but take my word for it: Black's best approach is to activate his pieces while ignoring

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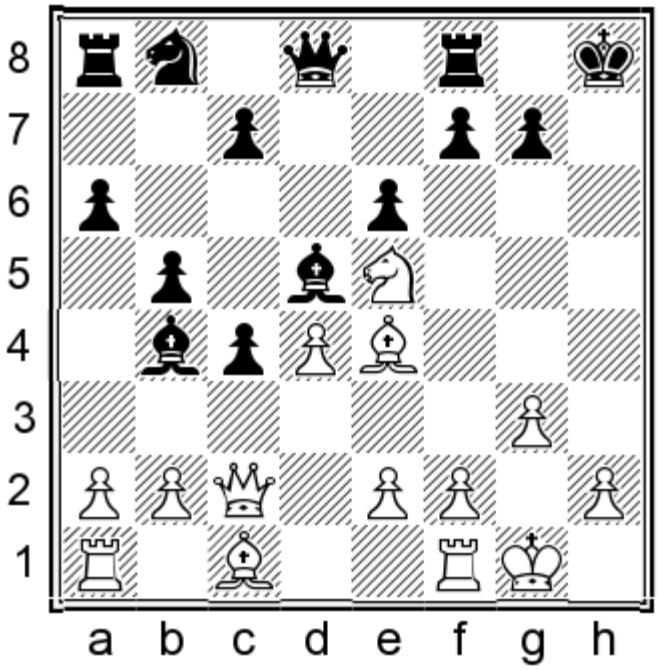
the h7-pawn.

11.♘xd5

11.♗xh7† ♔h8 12.♗e4 has also been tried. Black has many ways to obtain decent chances in the complicated middlegame, the most bulletproof of which seems to be: 12...♘c6!? 13.♖d1 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 c5= Helbich – Poleshchuk, corr. 2013.

11...♗xd5 12.♗xh7† ♔h8 13.♗e4



13...♗xe4!

This is the cleanest solution for the practical player who doesn't like chaos on the board.

13...♕e8!? can be considered if you want a more complicated game. 14.♗g2 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♘d7 16.♘f3 and now Black should prefer:

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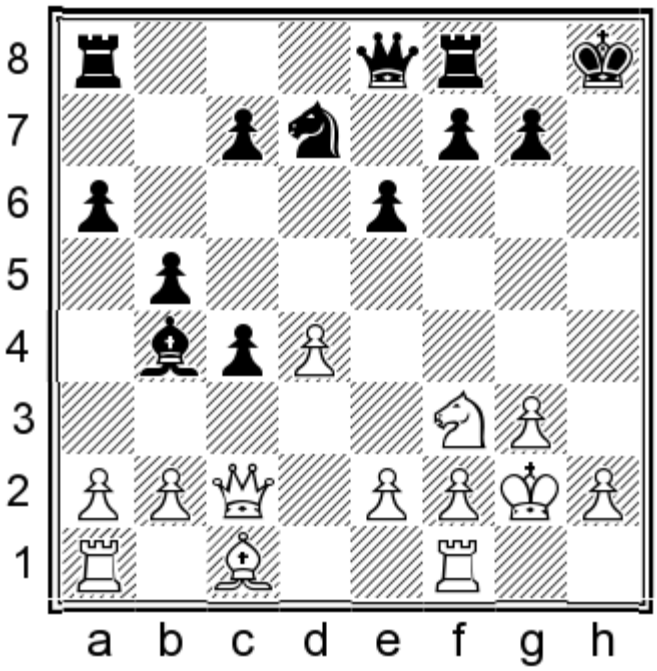
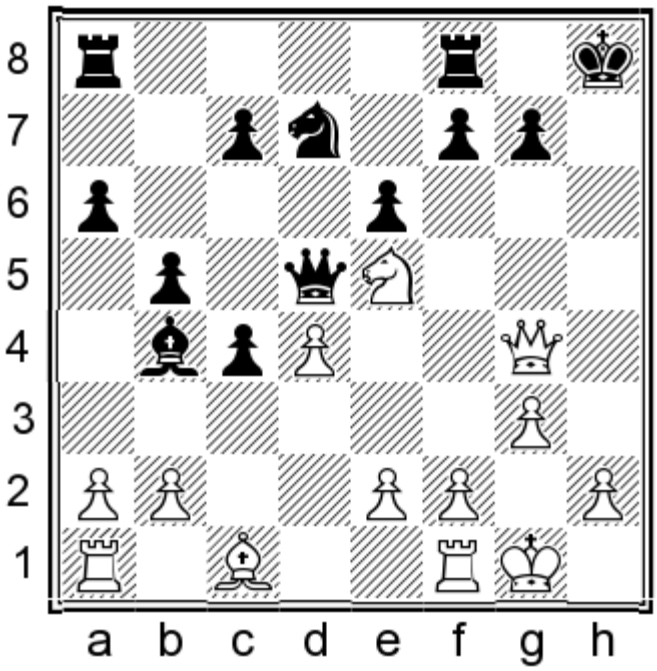


16...f6! (16...e5?! 17.b3!? exd4 18.♘xd4 ♕e5?! 19.♘f3 ♕c3 20.♕b1!± was the stem game, Gelfand – Morozevich, Biel 2009) 17.a4 (17.b3 ♘b6! also seems decent for Black) 17...♗d6! 18.♗d2 ♕f7 Black was doing fine in Rawlings – Green, corr. 2011, albeit in an extremely tense and complicated position.

14.♕xe4 ♕d5 15.♕g4 ♘d7



16.♗f4 ♘xe5 17.♗xe5 f6! 18.♗xc7 ♖fc8 19.♗b6 ♖c6

These moves are all easy to understand. Black has temporarily sacrificed a pawn, but will quickly win it back because the white bishop is short of squares.

20.e4 ♕g5 21.♕xg5 fxg5 22.♗c5 ♗xc5 23.dxc5 ♖xc5 24.♖fd1 ♖ac8

Black's kingside structure looks ugly but his pawns are not really weak. Black's strong queenside majority means

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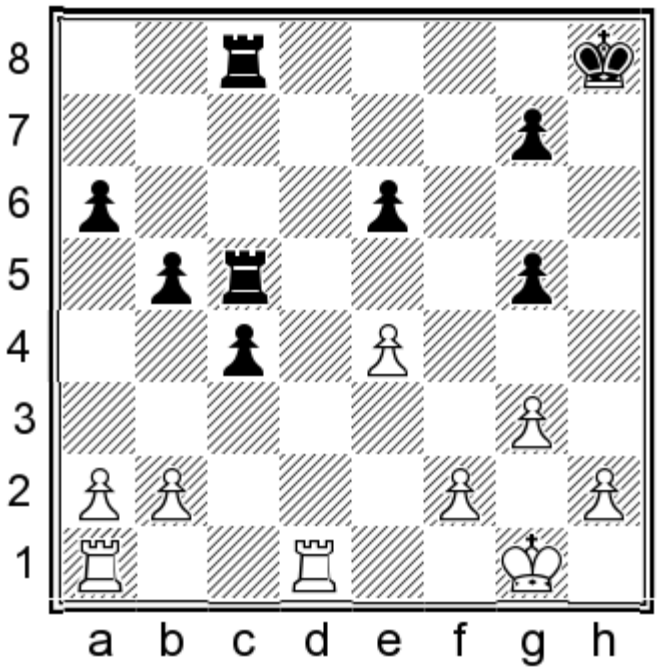
that White is actually the one who has to be careful to hold a draw. Of course, with the present encounter being a correspondence game, he managed it easily enough.



25.♖d6 ♖8c6 26.♖ad1 b4 27.♔f1 ♖xd6 28.♖xd6 ♔g8 29.♔e1 c3 30.bxc3 bxc3 31.♔d1 ♖a5 32.♖xe6

½–½

The Forcing 10.♘xd5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.♘e5 ♗b4† 7.♘c3 ♘d5 8.0-0 0-0 9.♕c2 b5 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.b3

The exchange on d5 may appear counterintuitive from White's perspective, as Black's pawn centre has been strengthened. However, White hopes to undermine it using the b2-b3 pawn lever along with his active pieces, especially the Catalan bishop. Kramnik introduced this plan (following what was, at the time, his novelty on move 8) in 2007 against Morozevich, and it has since been tested in many games, including some high-level correspondence battles – which is typical for such complex Catalan lines, which offer both players room for creativity in positions that cannot be killed by engines.

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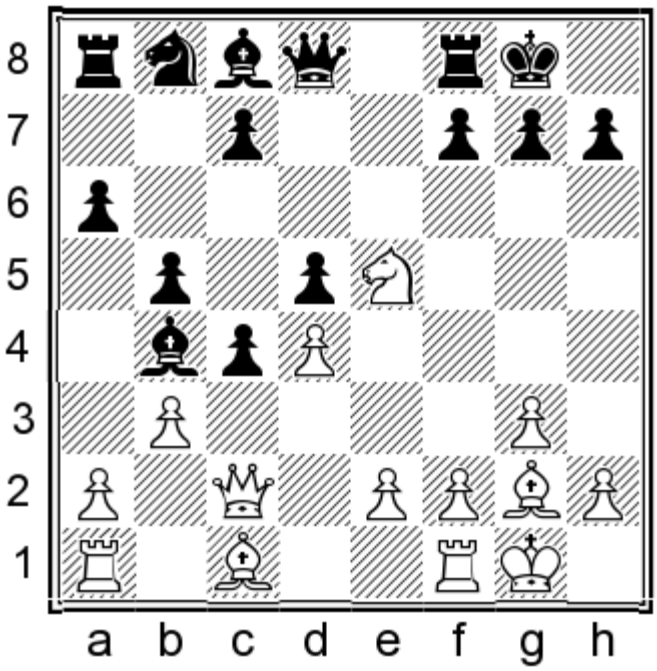

11...c6!

Correspondence games have proved beyond any doubt that this is the best move.

We have reached a final branching point for this section, where White can choose between Kramnik's **12.e4** and the newer invention of **12.bxc4**.

12.e4 ♖a7!

12...f6 13.exd5! was the continuation of Kramnik – Morozevich, Mexico City 2007, where White gave up the knight in order to smash through the centre. If you have not seen this remarkable game then I would recommend playing through it, but it is not relevant to our repertoire, as there is no need for us to take such risks.

13.exd5

13.♗f4 ♖c7 14.bxc4 dxc4 15.♘f3 ♗d6 was excellent for Black in Hunger – Akdag, corr. 2009.

13...cxd5 14.bxc4 dxc4 15.♖b1 ♗d6 16.a4

White is trying to put as much pressure as possible on the queenside.

16.♘c6 ♘xc6 17.♗xc6 loses some momentum, and after 17...♕f6 18.♗e4 ♖e8 19.♗e3 ♖ae7 20.f3 ♗b7 Black was better in Fillon – Garscha, corr. 2010.

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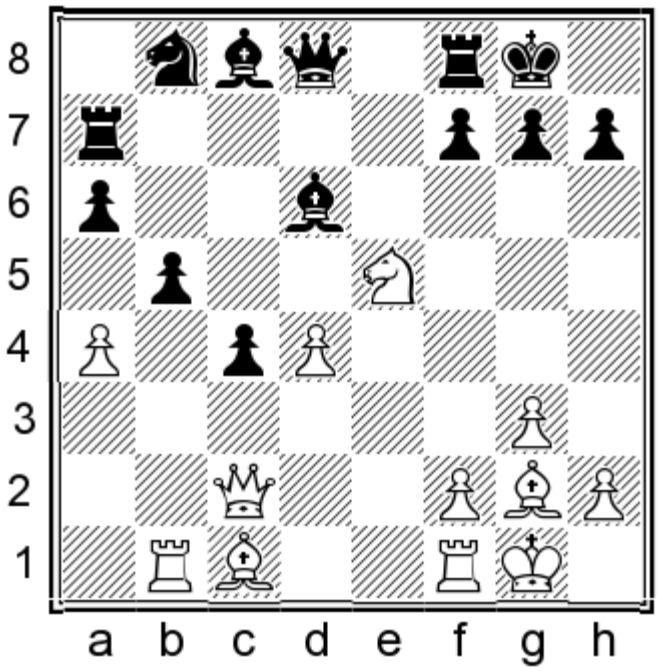

16...♗d7!?N

16...f6 17.♘f3 ♗d7 has done pretty well for Black in correspondence games, although it gives White the option of complicating things with 18.d5!? as in Engelhardt – Frericks, email 2012.

My suggested novelty has two advantages. The first is obvious, when compared with the above note: White does not have the option of d4-d5. The second is that Black preserves the option of ...♗xe5 followed by either ...♗c6 or ...♘c6.

17.♗f4 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5 ♖e8

The position is tense and most probably dynamically balanced. However, I would say that the situation is more dangerous for White, due to Black's material edge and protected passed pawns on the queenside.

12.bxc4 dxc4 13.♖d1

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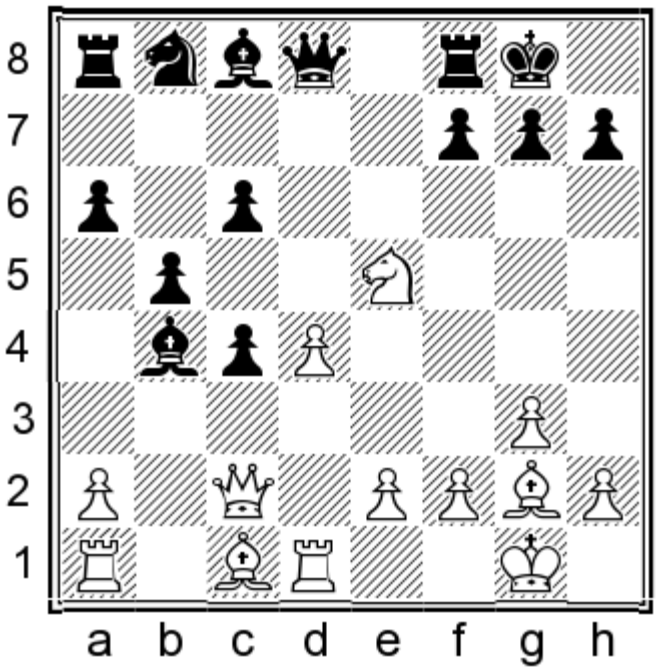


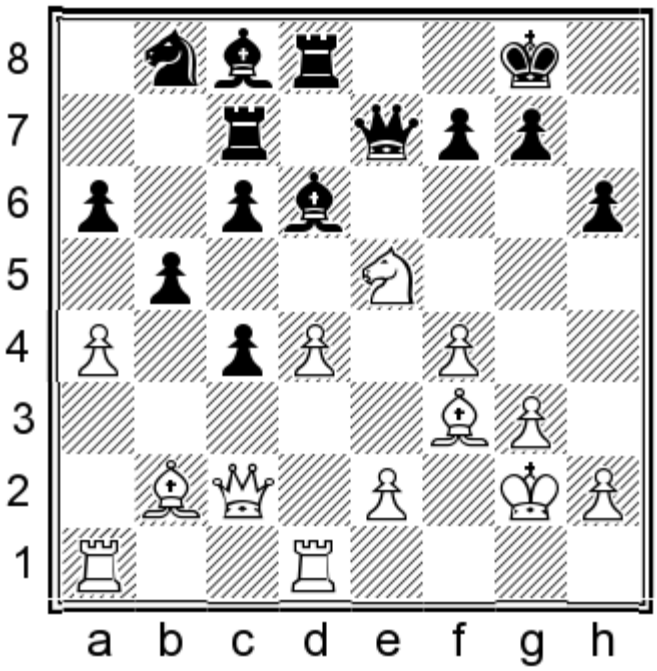
This was recommended by Hilton and Ippolito in Volume 1 of *Wojo's Weapons*. White puts his faith in his strong pawn centre but correspondence players have once again shown the way for Black.

13...♕c7!

The aforementioned authors only mention 13...♗b7.

14.♘f3

Another instructive game continued: 14.♗e4 h6 15.a4 ♖a7 16.f4 ♗d6 17.♗f3 ♖d8 18.♗b2 ♕e7 19.♔g2 ♖c7 Having skilfully organized his pieces to neutralize White's pressure, Black can now set about improving his position and converting his extra pawn.



20.♖ab1 ♗b4 21.♗a1 a5 22.e4 ♘d7! Black methodically took over the initiative and went on to win in Sabaev – Becsenescu, corr. 2015.

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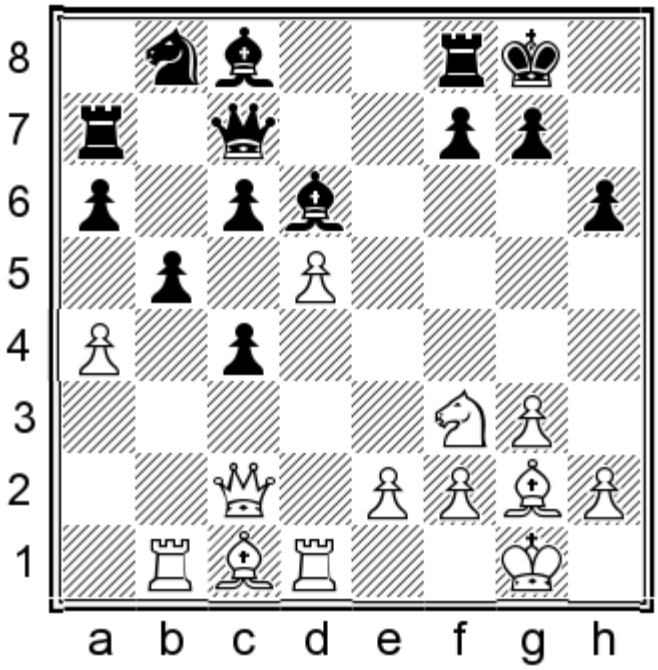
14...h6! 15.a4 ♖a7 16.♖b1 ♗d6 17.d5



17...♖b7!?

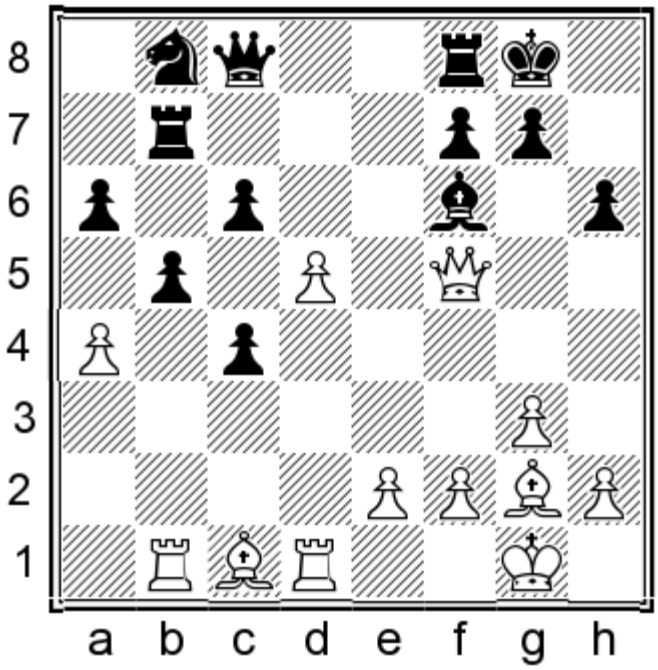
Black finds a creative solution, putting his rook on an odd square in order to deal with the queenside pressure.

18.♘d2 ♗e7

18...c5!? was also worth considering.

19.♘e4 ♗f5!? 20.♘f6† ♗xf6 21.♕xf5 ♕c8

21...♕d7!? 22.♕c2 c5 may have given better winning chances.



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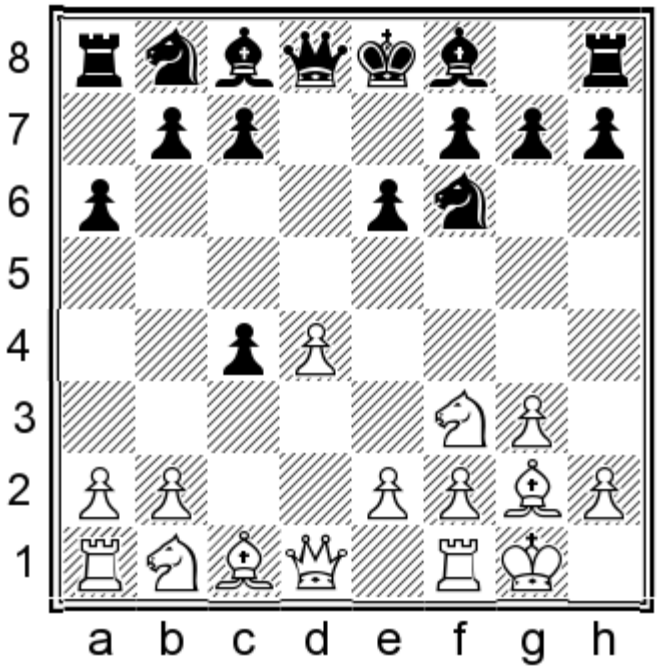
22.♕xc8 ♖xc8 23.dxc6 ♘xc6 24.♖d6 ♖bc7 25.axb5 axb5 26.♖xc6 ♖xc6 27.♗xc6 ♖xc6 28.♖xb5

Despite finally restoring material equality, White is still under some pressure due to the strong passed pawn. Nevertheless, he was able to hold the endgame in Wurtinger – Lehnhoff, corr. 2016.

6.0-0

Let's now turn our attention to White's most popular move of all.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0



6...♘c6

Let me remind you that 6...b5?! 7.♘e5! ♘d5 8.a4 ♗b7 9.b3 is best avoided.

The text move develops the knight and puts pressure on the d4-pawn, while the pawn on a6 prevents any ♕a4 ideas due to the ...b5 possibility.

White has several possible replies, which we will analyse in ascending order of importance. The remainder of this chapter will focus on 7.a4 and **7.♘c3**. The two most challenging options are **7.♗g5** and **7.e3**, which will be analysed separately in the next chapter. First though, let us briefly check a few sidelines:

7.♘a3 ♗xa3 This is a typical move in positions where Black has not already spent a tempo developing the bishop. 8.bxa3 ♖b8! Followed by ...b5, with a slightly more comfortable game for Black.

7.♗e3!? leads to unusual positions with plenty of scope for creativity. I find the course of the following correspondence game highly instructive: 7...♘d5 8.♕c1 ♗e7! Ruling out any ideas of ♗g5. 9.♕xc4 ♘xe3 10.fxe3 0-0 11.a3! Otherwise ...♘b4 may prove annoying.

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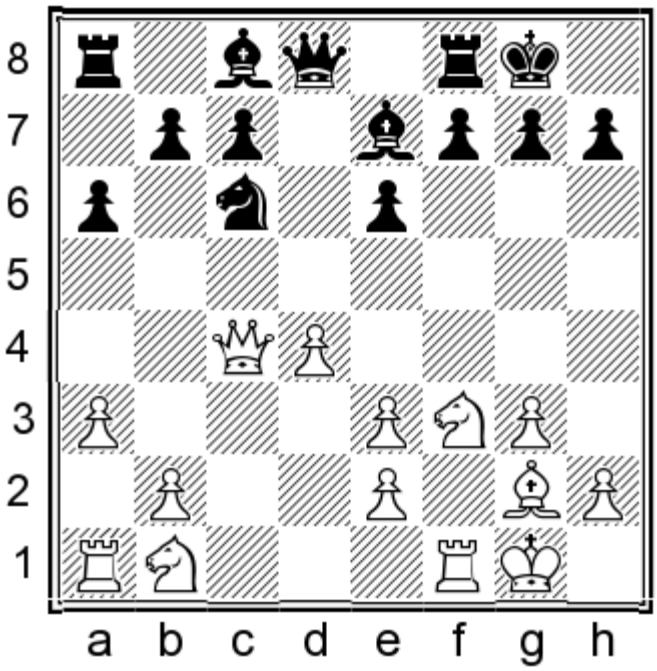
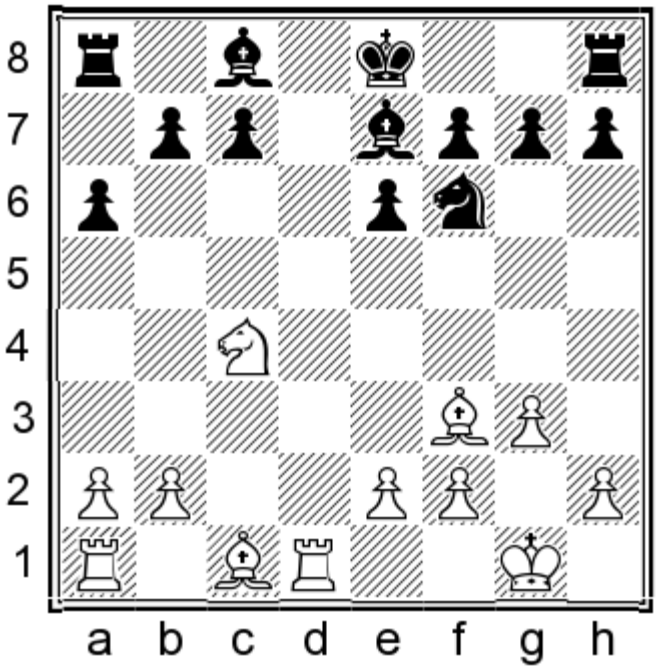


11...♘b8! 12.♘bd2 ♘d7 13.♖ac1 Otherwise ...c5 comes. 13...♘b6 14.♕c2 c6 15.♘e4 a5 16.♘f2 a4 17.e4 e5! 18.dxe5 ♖a5= Nouveau – Cravens, corr. 2013.

Finally, 7.♘bd2 sees White aim for a simplified position with compensation for the pawn: 7...♘xd4 8.♘xc4 (8.♘xd4 ♕xd4 9.♕c2 c3 10.bxc3 ♕c5 is equal; 8.♘e5 ♗e7 9.♘dxc4 0-0 was fine for Black in Feller – Shulman, Lubbock 2011, the main plan being ...♘b5-d6) 8...♘xf3† 9.♗xf3 ♕xd1 10.♖xd1 ♗e7



11.♘a5! This is the only serious move. Alternatives make it harder for White to find full compensation for his pawn deficit. 11...♗b4! 12.♗d2 ♗xd2 13.♖xd2 ♖a7!

Black will slowly unravel with moves like ...c6, ...♗d7 and ...♔e7. I have analysed the position quite deeply and concluded that White has enough compensation for equality, but in a practical game I'd prefer Black's chances to make something out of his extra pawn.

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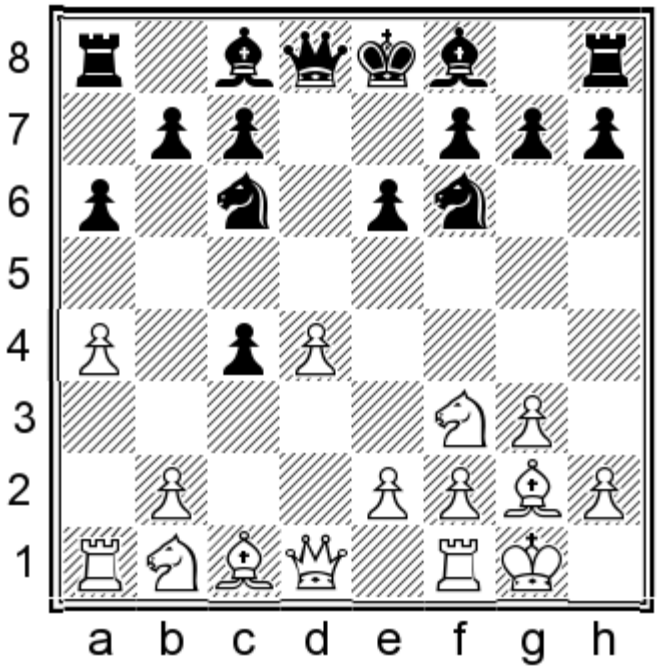
7.a4

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.a4

With this move White prevents ...b5 (not that we were intending to play it yet anyway) and prepares to take some extra space with a4-a5.



7...♖b8 8.a5 b5!?

I consider this a fighting choice, in the spirit of our general approach against the Catalan.

8...♗b4 is more popular but less convincing. For example, after 9.♘a3 ♗xa5 10.♘xc4 ♗b4 11.♕b3, as in Heinz – Eichner, Germany 2010, it seems to me that White can claim a small edge due to his centre and his powerful Catalan bishop.

9.axb6 cxb6 10.♗f4

This has been the most popular choice; it seems that hardly anyone can resist the temptation of attacking the rook.

10.♘c3!? may well be White's best move. 10...b5 (the engines suggest 10...♘b4!?N 11.♗f4 ♗d6 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.e4 ♘d7!∞ when the game remains dynamically balanced) 11.e4 ♗e7 A high-level correspondence game now took a forcing turn:

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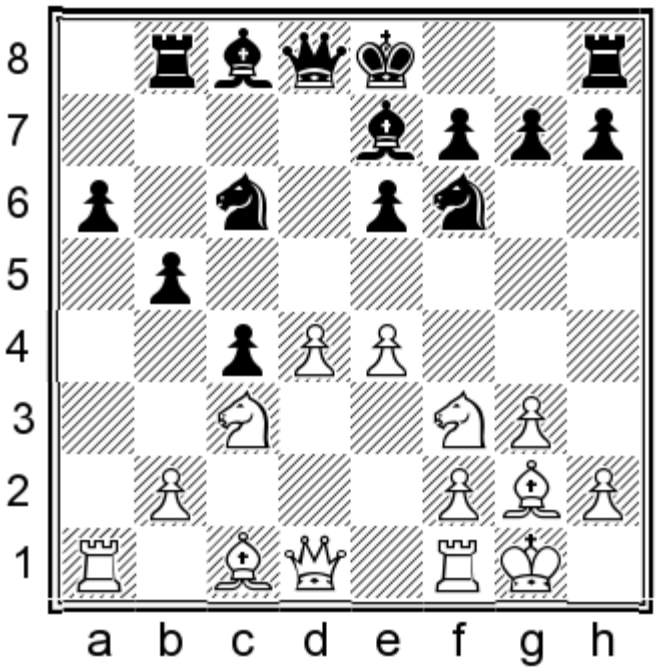
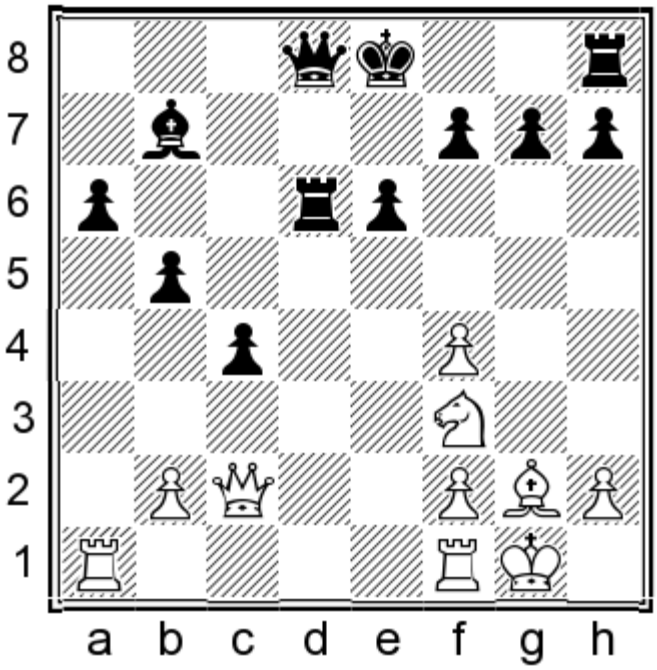


12.♗f4 ♖b6 13.d5! ♘b4! 14.d6 ♗xd6 15.e5 ♘fd5 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.exd6 ♘xf4 18.gxf4 ♖xd6 19.♕c2 ♗b7



20.♖fd1 ♖xd1† 21.♖xd1 ♕a8 22.♘h4 ♗xg2 23.♘xg2 0-0∞ An eventual draw ensued in Acevedo Villalba – Green, corr. 2010, which is a strong indication of the objective assessment of the position. In a practical game, obviously all three results are possible.

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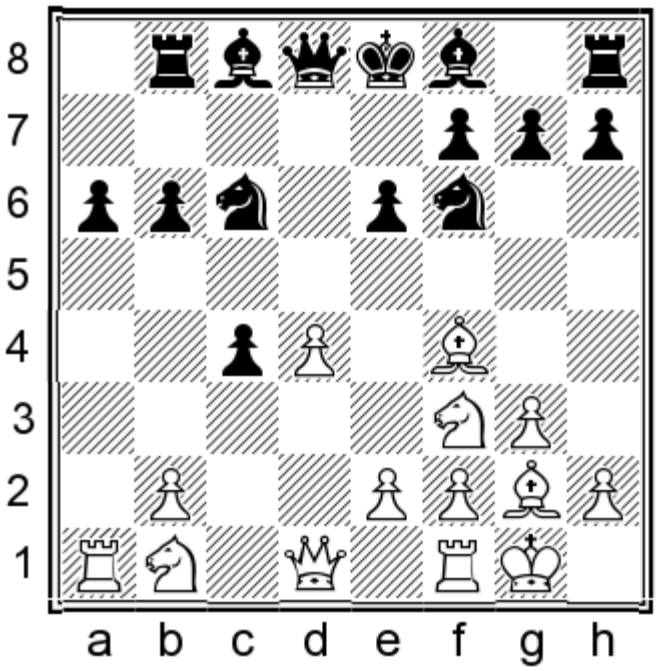
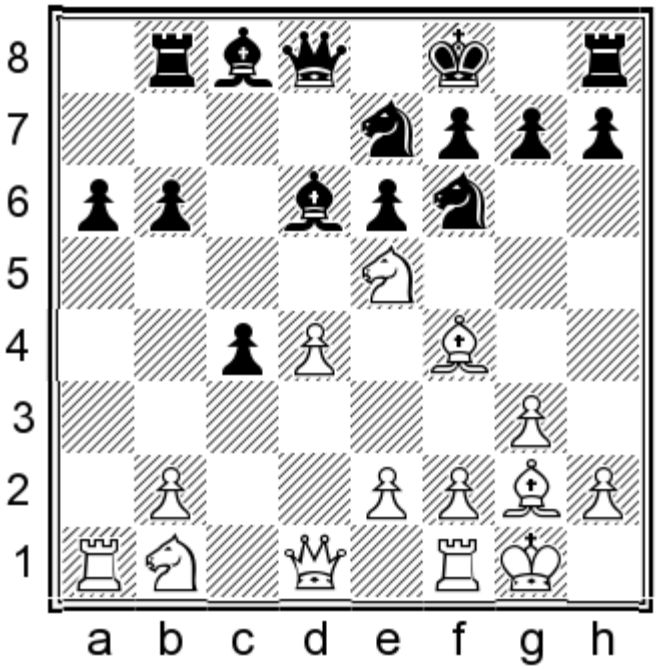


10...♗d6 11.♘e5 ♘e7 12.♗c6†

12.♘xc4 ♗xf4 13.gxf4 0-0 14.e3 ♘fd5 15.♘e5 ♗b7 was comfortable for Black in Timoshenko – Novikov, Nova Gorica 1997.

12...♔f8 13.♗g2

The Indian GM Rajaram R. Laxman has scored two victories with White from this position. It seems to me that now is the time to offer an improvement for Black:



13...♕c7!N 14.e4 ♗b7 15.♘c3

The trick 15.♘xf7? doesn't work due to 15...♗xf4! 16.♘xh8 ♗h6!∓.

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15...h5!

After this move, the position of the rook on h8 becomes a strength rather than a liability. Apart from advancing the h-pawn further, Black can also consider ...♘g4 ideas. A possible continuation is:

16.♗g5 h4!?

16...♖d8 is a good alternative.

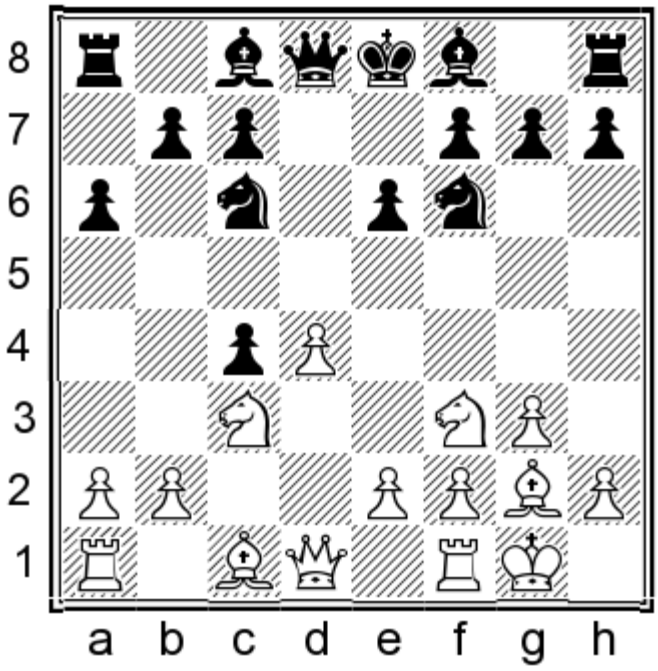
17.♗xh4 ♖xh4! 18.gxh4 ♗xe5 19.dxe5 ♕xe5 20.f4 ♕c5† 21.♔h1 b5∞

With tremendous compensation for the exchange.

The Old Main Line: 7.♘c3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♘c3

With this move White forgets about recovering his pawn and instead focuses on steamrolling Black in the centre. Boris Avrukh recommended this move in the hugely influential *Grandmaster Repertoire 1 – 1.d4 Volume One*, which was published late in 2008. Seven years later, after thoroughly updating his Catalan repertoire in *Volume 1A*, Avrukh abandoned this option in favour of 7.e3 – for good reason, as we will see.



7...♖b8

As I mentioned in the introductory section, the ...b5 move becomes much more appealing when White has committed his knight to c3. First, of course, Black must prepare it by removing his rook from the long diagonal.

8.e4

8.e3?! b5 9.♕e2 seems like a bad mixture of plans, and Black obtains an excellent game as follows: 9...♗e7 10.♖d1 0-0 11.a4 (White has tried 11.e4, but this loses a whole tempo compared with the main line below)

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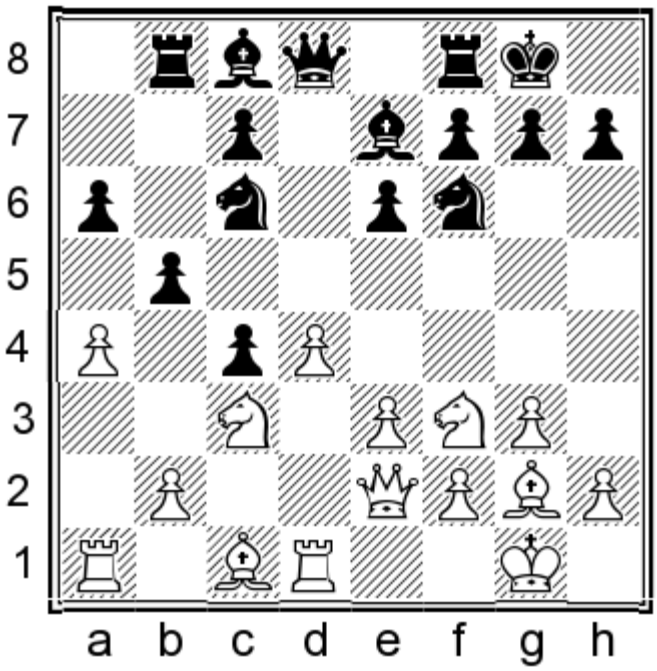
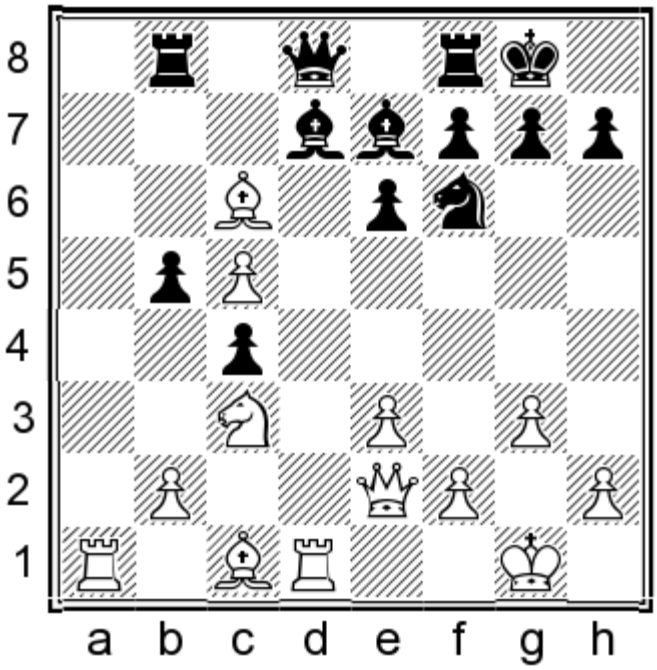


11...♘b4! 12.♘e5 c5! 13.axb5 axb5 14.♘c6?! (14.dxc5N is a better try; still, after 14...♕c7 15.e4 ♘d7!∓ Black retains slightly better chances) 14...♘xc6 15.♗xc6 ♗d7 16.dxc5 This position was reached in Kinsman – Adams, London 1992. Black has more than one good continuation, but my favourite is:



16...♗xc6!N 17.♖xd8 ♖fxd8 The c5-pawn will fall, leaving Black with full material equality for the queen. Moreover, he has a clear positional advantage, with active pieces and a mobile queenside majority, while the bishop on c6 is simply a monster!

8...♗e7

The c4-pawn is not yet being attacked, so Black's safest and most popular option is to develop the bishop and prepare castling.

8...b5 has been reasonably popular, but it encourages White to aim for a quick central initiative with 9.d5.

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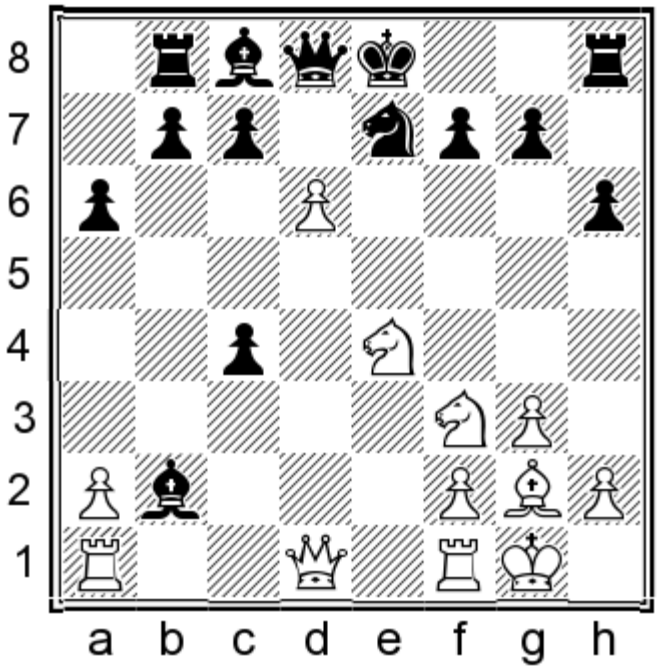
9.♕e2

The critical variation.

9.♗g5?! is a dubious hybrid of the 7.♘c3 and 7.♗g5 variations. A logical continuation is: 9...h6 10.♗xf6 ♗xf6 11.d5 exd5 12.exd5 ♘e7 13.♘e4N (13.♘d2 occurred in D. Pavlovic – Raicevic, Banja Vrucica 1991, when the simple 13...b5 14.♘de4 ♗e5 would have left White with no compensation for the pawn) 13...♗xb2 14.d6 This is the kind of position which I'm sure my friend and former co-author Jacob Aagaard would appreciate as a calculation exercise. Black can refute his opponent's play with:



14...♗f5! With a winning position. (Interestingly, when GM Mads Andersen encountered this line with Black, he chose a different option on move 11, as he missed the text move in his calculations and was put off by variations such as 14...cxd6?? 15.♘xd6† ♔f8 16.♘xc4 when White wins a piece due to the threat of mate on d8.)

A more reasonable alternative is:

9.d5

Karpov has struggled against this move in a couple of games, so it is worth paying attention to a few of the details that follow.

9...exd5

After 9...♘b4 10.♘e5 ♘d3?! (better was 10...exd5 11.exd5, transposing to the line below) 11.♘xd3 cxd3 12.♕xd3 e5 13.♕c2 ♗d6 14.♘a4 White was dominating in Lautier – Karpov, Ubeda 1994.

10.exd5 ♘b4 11.♘e5 ♗f5 12.a3 ♘d3 13.♘xc4 ♘xc1 14.♖xc1 0-0 15.♕d4

After a series of natural moves we arrive at an important position, where the key move is:

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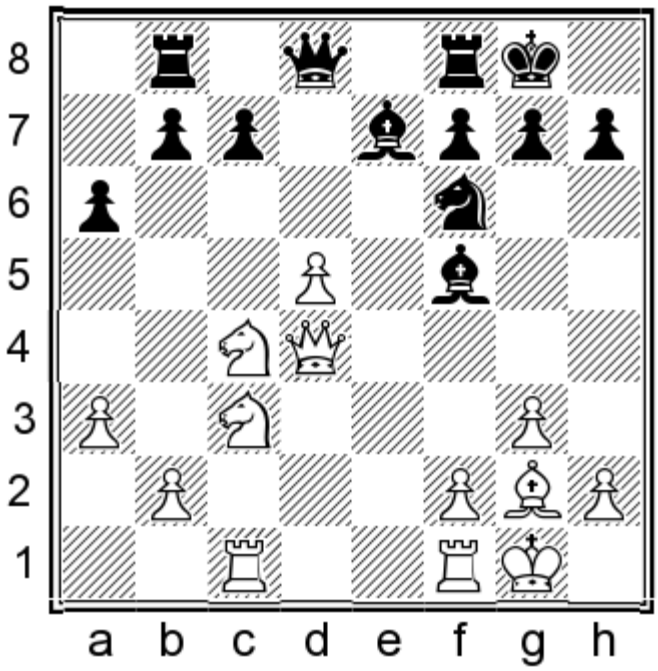


15...♘e8!

This is the correct set-up for Black; the same idea would apply against just about anything else White may try on the previous move.

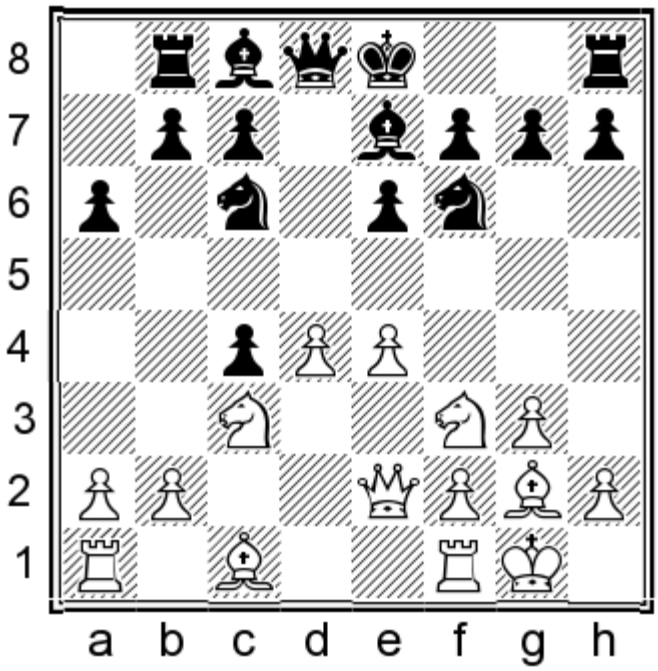
15...♘d7?! 16.d6 ♗xd6 17.♘xd6 cxd6 18.♕xd6 was better for White in Ivanchuk – Karpov, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2000, due to the excellent Catalan bishop.

16.♖fe1

Other moves are playable but Black's plan will remain the same.

16...♘d6

Black has a good position: the e7-bishop will go to f6 next and the other bishop may reroute itself to d7 and b5, depending on circumstances.



9...b5 10.♖d1 0-0 11.d5

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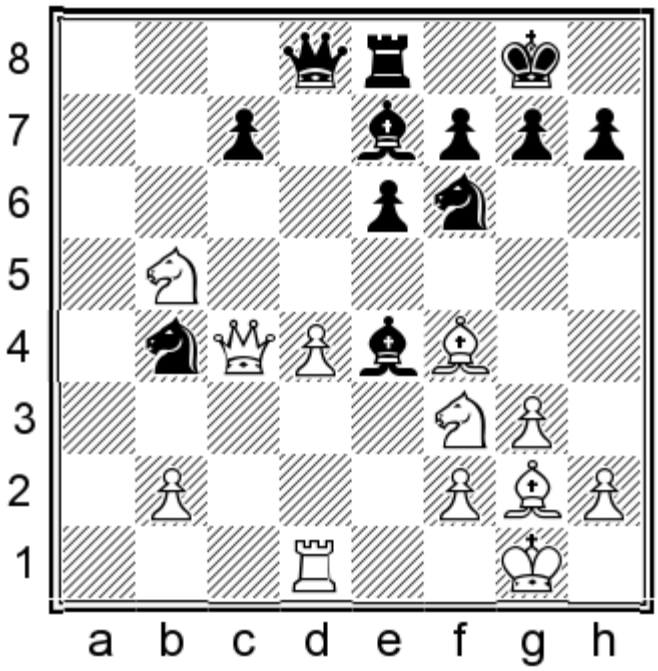
White's play has been leading up to this move, and he had better not delay it.

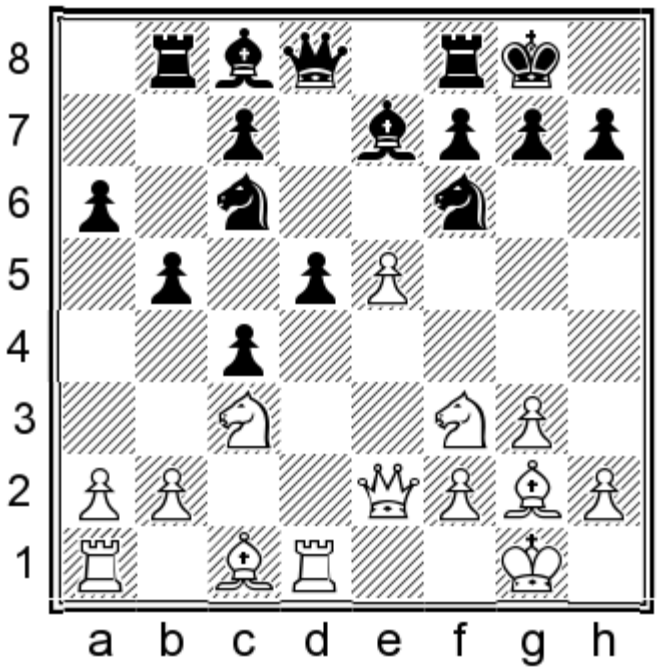
A further preparatory move such as 11.♗f4 can be strongly met by 11...♖e8!, when d4-d5 becomes hard to carry out. An excellent game continued: 12.a4 ♘b4 13.axb5 axb5 14.♖a7 ♖b7 15.♖xb7 ♗xb7 16.♘xb5 ♗xe4 17.♕xc4 (17.♘xc7 ♗d3 was the idea)



17...♕b8! The queen will be perfectly placed on b7. Note that the c7-pawn doesn't fall due to the potential pin along the c-file. 18.♘c3 ♗c6 19.♘e5 ♗xg2 20.♔xg2 ♕b7† 21.f3 ♗d6 Black went on to win in a battle of giants (both contestants were among the highest rated correspondence players in the world at the time) in Hamarat – Langeveld, corr. 2010.

11...exd5 12.e5

White's play may look dangerous, but an excellent reply is:



12...d4! 13.exf6 ♗xf6

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Black has three mobile pawns for the piece, and both analysis and practical testing have confirmed that White faces the more difficult challenges. Black's plan of action from here is illustrated excellently in the following game.

GAME 47

Joan Trepat Herranz – Jan Smeets

Barcelona 2011

The game began 1.d4 ♘f6, so I have made the customary change to our preferred move order.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♘c3 ♖b8 8.e4 ♗e7 9.♕e2 b5 10.♖d1 0-0 11.d5 exd5 12.e5 d4! 13.exf6 ♗xf6 14.♘e4

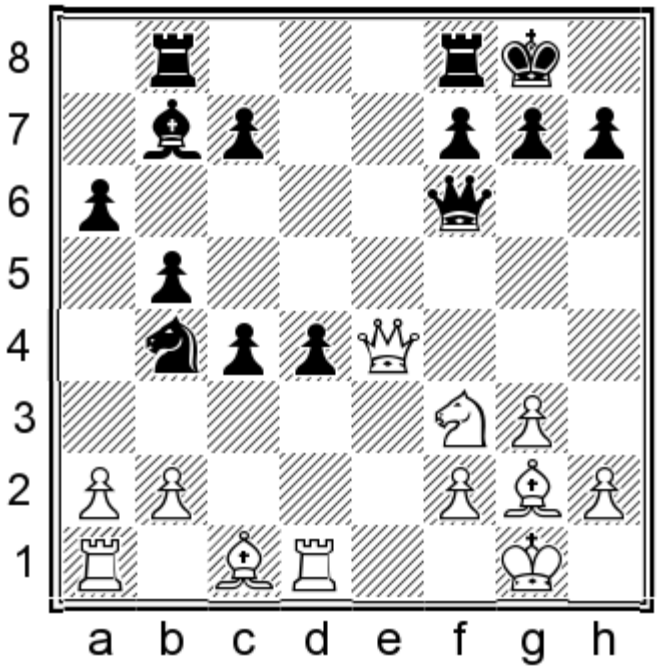
This has not been played in many games but it has scored decently, and is the top choice of the chess god called Stockfish!

14.♘g5?! has only been played once, in Ushenina – N. Kosintseva, Mardin 2011, when 14...♘b4!N (intending ...♗f5) would have been unpleasant for White.

14.♕e4

This has been the most popular move and was recommended by Avrukh in *GM 1*, but subsequent analysis has mapped out a clear route to an edge for Black.

14...♗b7 15.♘d5 ♘b4! 16.♘xf6† ♕xf6



17.♕f4

17.♕xd4?? is a blunder due to 17...♖bd8 18.♕xd8 ♖xd8 19.♗g5 ♖xd1† 20.♖xd1 ♗xf3 and Black was winning in Iskusnyh – Keosidi, Tomsk 2007.

17.♕e5N has yet to be played; the simplest reply is 17...c5, when White has nothing better than transposing to the main line by trading queens.

17...c5 18.♕xf6 gxf6 19.♗f4

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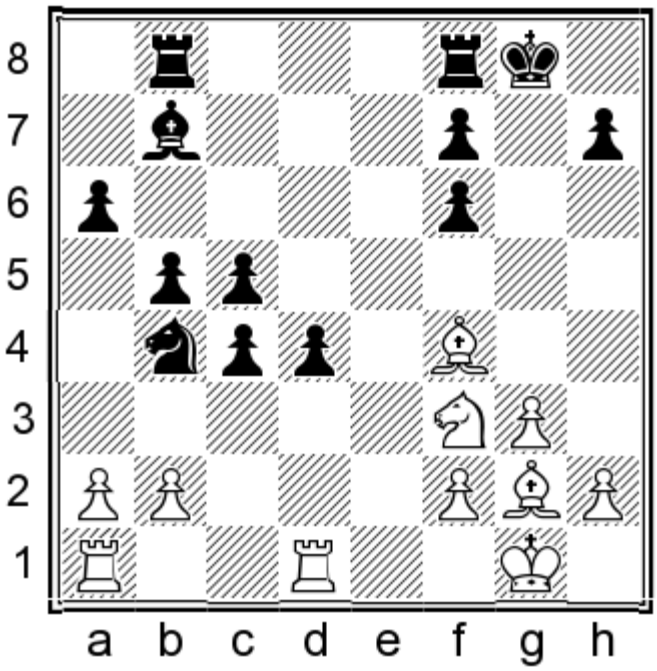
Avrukh gave this as a novelty in *GM 1*, and included an illustrative line after 19...♖bd8 20.♗c7 ♖d7?! 21.♗b6 when White is better. However, it later became clear that Black can improve with:

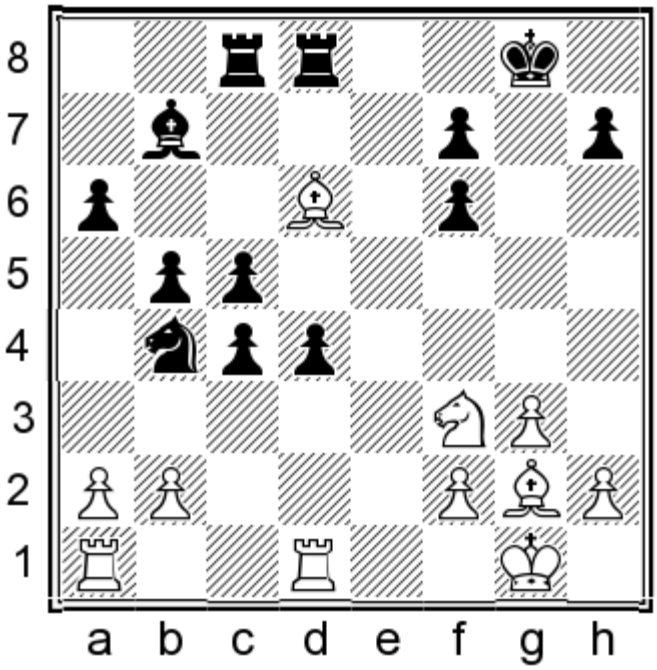


19...♖bc8!

Bolstering the c5-pawn.

20.♗d6 ♖fd8!

20...♖fe8? allows 21.♘xd4±, exploiting the loose knight on b4.



21.♗e7 ♖e8 22.♗xf6 ♘d3 23.♖d2 ♖c6 24.♗xd4

This is how Caruana tried to escape from trouble against Cheparinov in 2010.

24.♘h4 ♖xf6 25.♗xb7 ♖fe6∓ also left White with some problems in Reich – Lounek, corr. 2008.

24...cxd4 25.♘xd4

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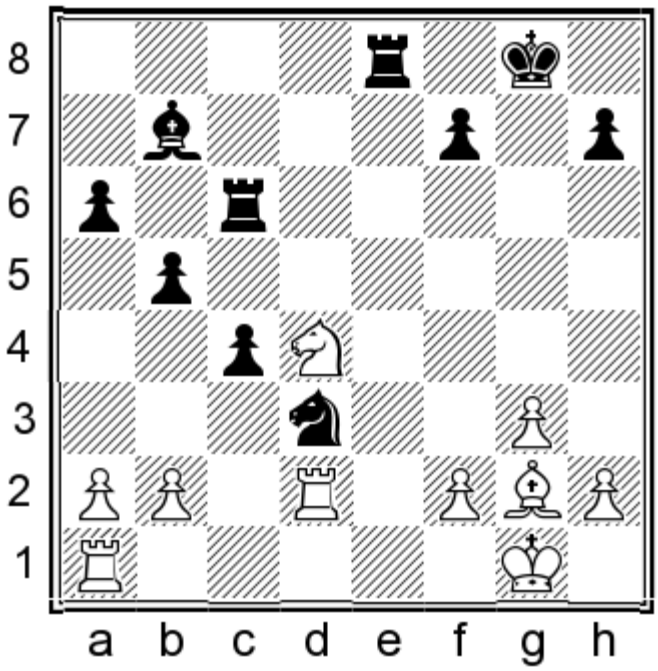
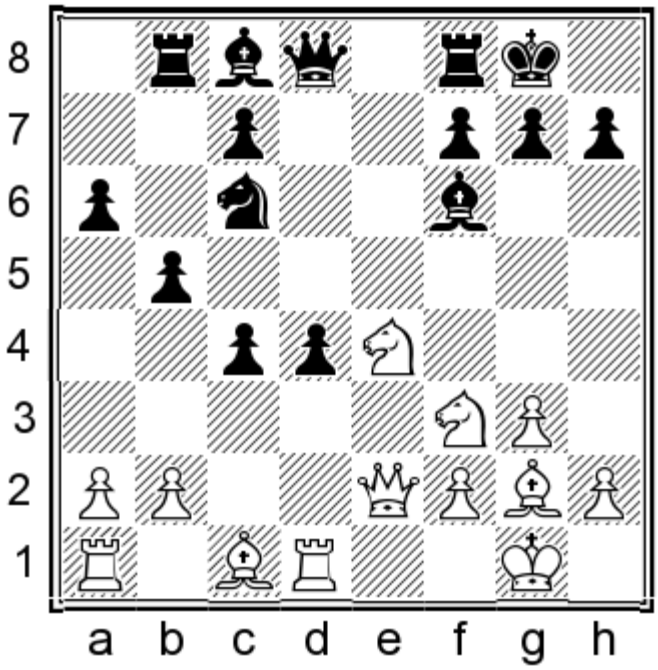


25...♖b6

25...♖c7!? has also scored well for Black in correspondence games.

26.♗f1 ♗e4∓

The rising star went on to hold the draw in Caruana – Cheparinov, Villafranca de los Barros 2010. Still, these endgames are generally quite depressing for White.



14...♗e7!

I have actually changed the move order to emphasize the more accurate sequence.

Smeets preferred 14...♗b7, when play continued 15.♗f4 ♗e7. However, White can improve with 15.♘xf6†N 15...♕xf6 16.♕d2! d3 17.♕f4, when I rate his chances as slightly superior. Even though I suspect that deep analysis would demonstrate that Black is okay, it seems better to preserve the strong bishop, as well as keeping the option of developing the light-squared bishop to g4.

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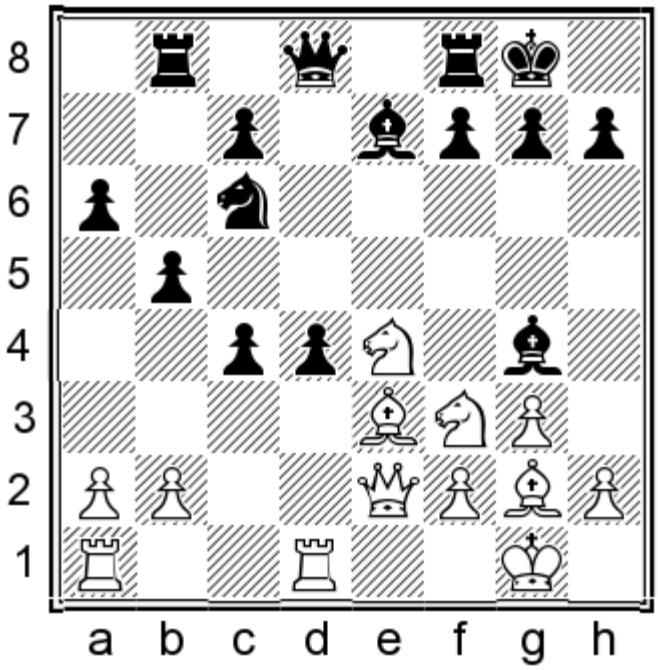
15.♗f4

This logical developing move threatens ♘xd4 (the immediate 15.♘xd4?? is easily refuted by 15...♘xd4 16.♕e3 c5; but with the bishop on f4, Black's last move would leave the rook on b8 hanging).

Considering that White went for a weird but logical ♗f4-e3 sequence in the game, it is logical to investigate what happens if he tries 15.♗e3 at once. The answer is that now Black has the strong retort 15...♗g4!, defending d4. One game continued:



16.h3 d3 17.♕d2 ♗xf3 18.♗xf3 ♘d4 19.♗xd4 ♕xd4 Black's position was slightly easier in Teverovski – Velasco, email 2011.

15.b3!?N is another top choice of the engines, but after 15...d3! White must be careful not to end up worse. For instance: 16.♕e3 (16.♕d2 f5!? 17.♘c3 [17.♘eg5?! h6 doesn't help White] 17...f4 gives Black a dangerous initiative)

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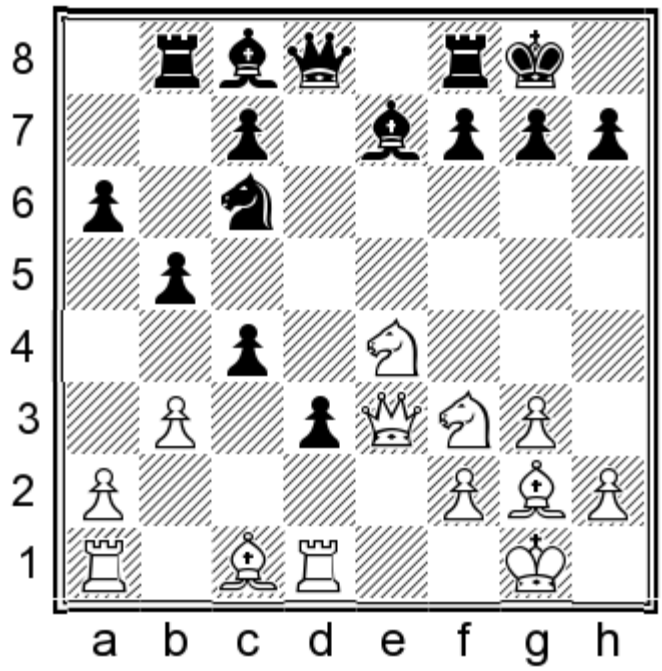
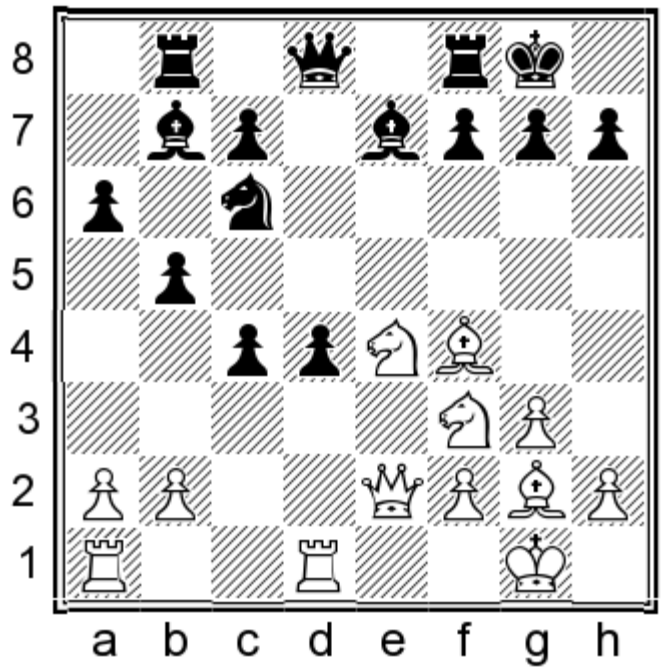


16...♖e8! Threatening ...f5, while also preparing ...♗f5 and ...♗f8 to exploit the pin along the e-file. (However, please note that the immediate 16...f5?! does not work in view of 17.♘eg5 ♖e8 18.♘e6 ♕d6 19.♘f4 when White's forces are well coordinated.)

15...♗b7!?

15...d3 16.♕d2 ♗g4 is playable but I prefer the text move, as it is more flexible and keeps the ...♘b4 threat in reserve. Following my suggested improvement at move 14, we have now transposed back into the main game.



16.♗e3

16.♘xd4?! ♘xd4 17.♕e3 c5 18.♗xb8 ♕xb8∓ is excellent for Black, who has two healthy pawns for the exchange plus a strong pair of bishops.

Some engines suggest 16.a3, but this seems pathetic to me. Black can either continue developing with 16...♖e8 or try to

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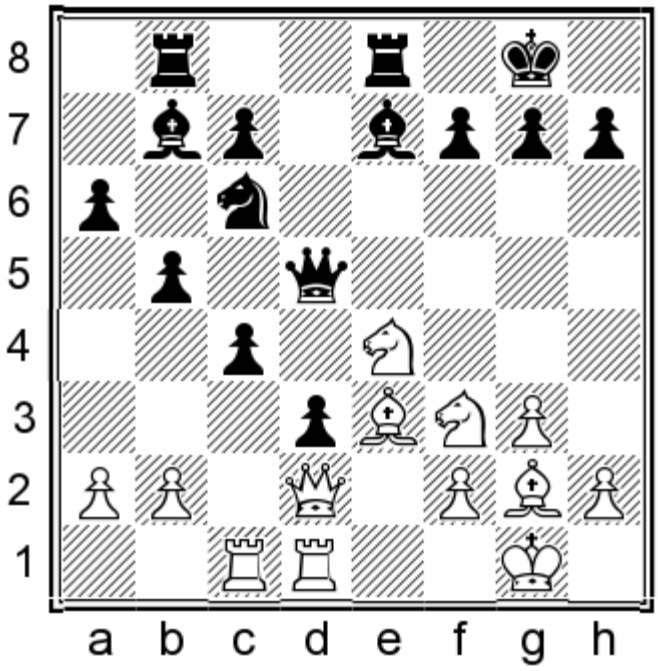
take advantage of White's last move with 16...d3!? 17.♕e3 ♘a5∓.

16...d3

With the bishop already on b7, Black has no choice but to advance this pawn.

17.♕d2 ♖e8! 18.♖ac1 ♕d5!

What I love in this game is the way Black calmly improves his pieces. White seems paralysed by Black's pawn wedge and has no active plans at all.



19.♘c3 ♕h5

Black gets ready to move his knight, when all hell will break loose on the long diagonal.

20.b3 ♖bd8

Another pleasing move to the human eye. All the pieces must participate!

That said, the engines point out that 20...♘a5!N–+ is objectively strongest. I will leave this for you to analyse further if you wish.

21.bxc4 ♘a5 22.♘xb5

The engines try to defend White's position with 22.♘d5 ♘xc4 23.♘xe7† ♖xe7 24.♕b4, but Black keeps some pressure with:

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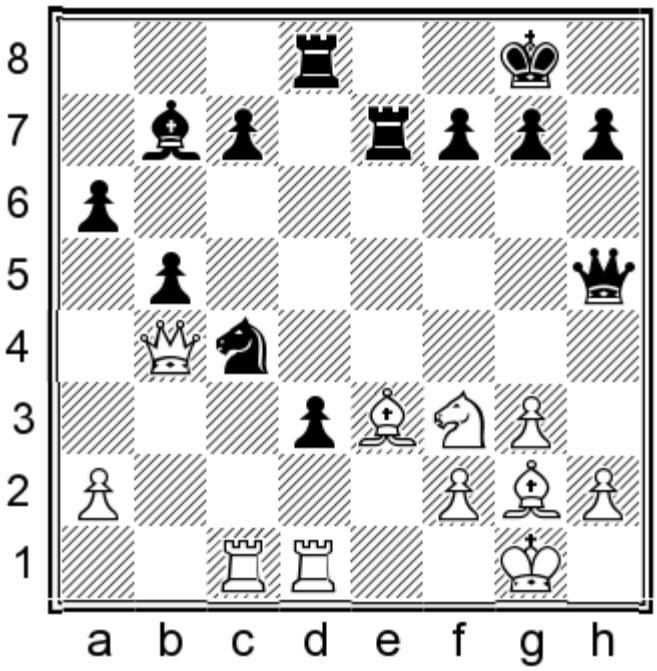
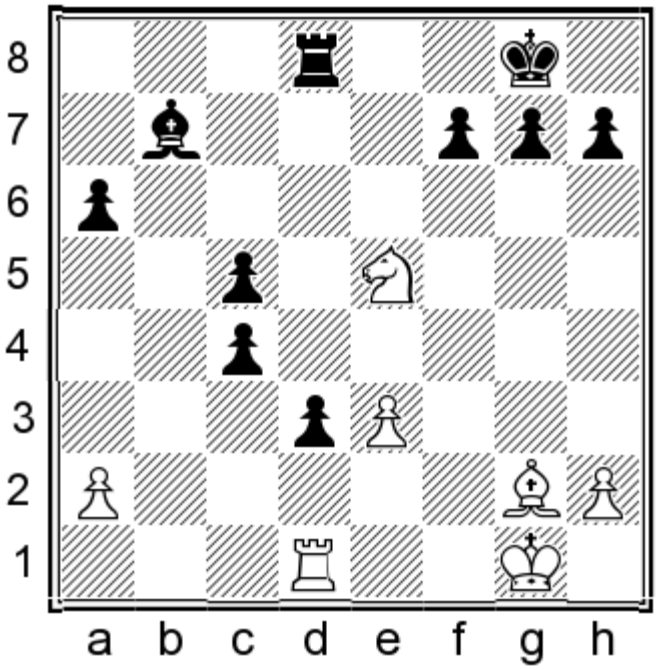


24...♖xe3! 25.fxe3 c5 Now White has to find the inhuman sequence 26.g4! ♕xg4 27.♖xc4! ♕xc4 28.♕xc4 bxc4 29.♘e5 to survive. Even here, his problems are not over after:



29...♗c8! 30.♘xc4 ♗e6 White remains under pressure. The whole sequence starting with 22.♘d5 seems like one of those incredibly hard exercises which my friend Jacob Aagaard puts in his books to torture the world's grandmasters!

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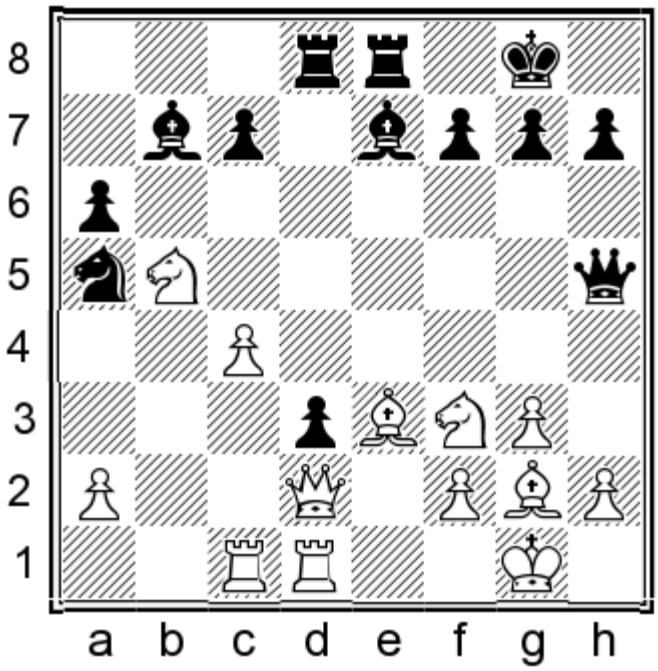


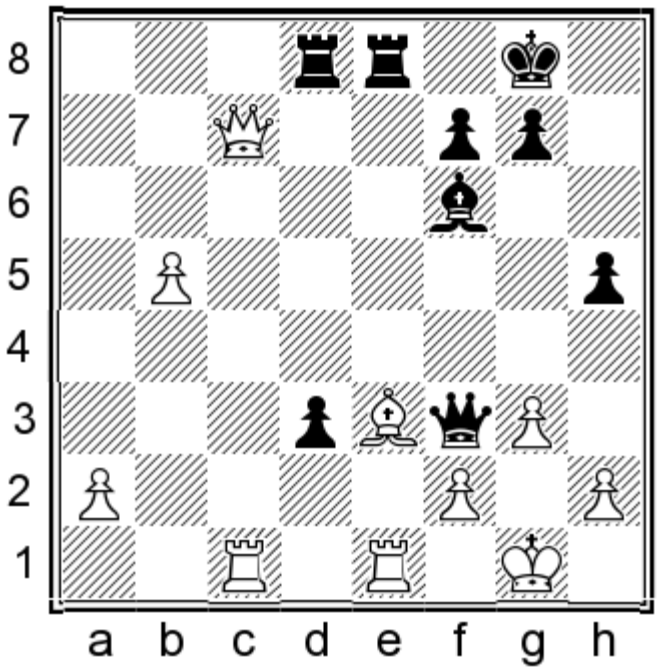
22...axb5 23.♕xa5 ♗xf3 24.♗xf3 ♕xf3 25.cxb5 ♗f6!

With the terrible threat of ...♖xe3.

26.♕d2

26.♕xc7?? ♖xe3! 27.fxe3 ♕xe3† 28.♔g2 ♕e2† 29.♔h3 g5 leads to a forced mate.

26.♖e1 h5 27.♕xc7 is refuted by:



27...♖e4!! Black prophylactically closes the long diagonal, so that ...h4-h3 is a decisive threat and ♕c6 no longer defends. 28.♗d2 (28.♕c6 loses to 28...d2! 29.♗xd2 ♖xd2) 28...♖e2! and Black wins.

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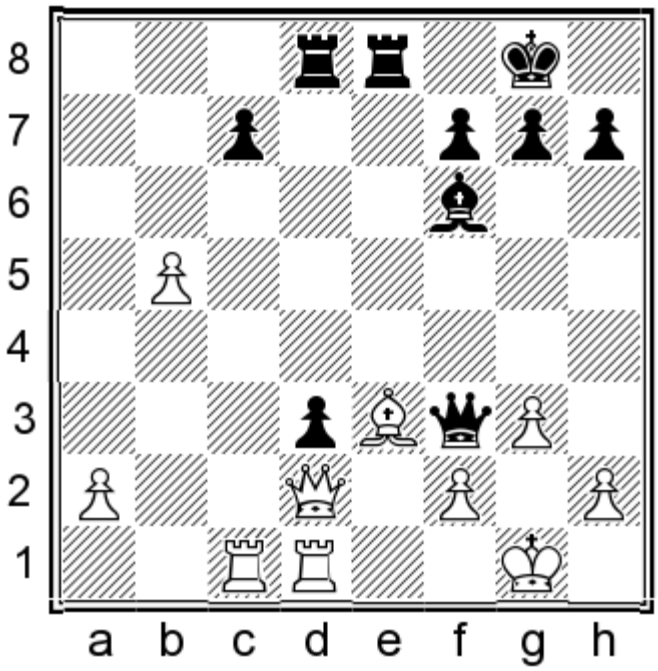
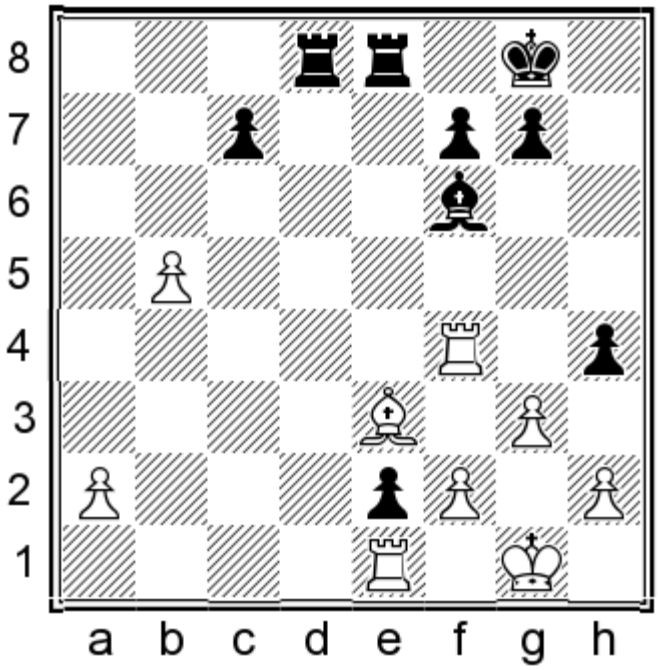


26...h5!

White's queen can no longer protect the long diagonal, so the h-pawn marches down the board.

27.♖c4 h4 28.gxh4

Another attractive variation is: 28.♖f4 ♕e2! 29.♕xe2 dxe2 30.♖e1



30...h3! 31.♖c4 ♖d1 32.♖c1 ♖xc1 33.♗xc1 ♗c3–+

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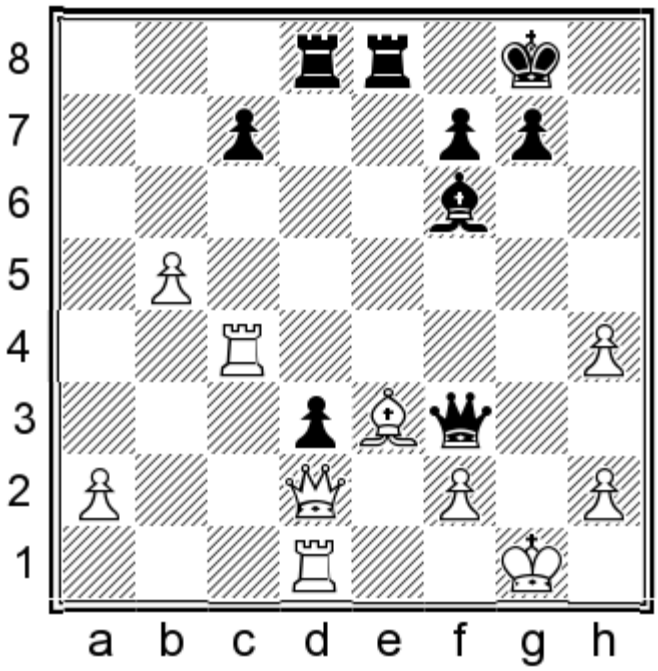

28...♖d6 29.♖e1 ♗xh4 30.♗f4 ♖e2

0–1

A superbly played game, which shows a number of Black's resources in this rich variation.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with a variety of sub-systems of the Catalan. The Queen Check Variation is harmless, and gives Black decent chances to fight for the initiative by gaining time against the exposed white queen.

After the standard 5.♗g2 a6!, we looked at options such as 6.♘c3 b5 and 6.♘e5 ♗b4†! 7.♘c3 ♘d5. Quite often, the position of the knight on c3 makes ...b5 more appealing for Black than it would otherwise have been. In some variations Black hangs on to his extra pawn, while in others he returns it to good effect in order to improve the quality of his position.

The final part of the chapter introduced the big main line of 6.0-0 ♘c6, when we analysed 7.a4 and 7.♘c3 ♖b8 8.e4. The latter used to be a serious weapon but it is theoretically not so relevant these days – although you still need to be ready to navigate the ensuing complications to be sure of getting the better position.

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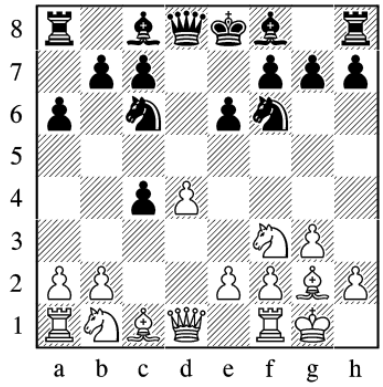
Chapter 5c



Catalan Theory (Part 2)

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6

7.♗g5 ♗e7 (7...♖b8!? page 220) **8.e3 0-0**

9.♕e2!? page 220

9.♘bd2 e5!

10.dxe5 (10.♘xe5) Game 48, page 222

10.♘xc4 Game 49, page 224

The Modern Main Line: 7.e3 page 226

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.e3 ♗d7 8.♕e2 (8.♘e5?! page 227; 8.♘fd2 page 227; 8.♘c3 page 227) **8...♗d6!**

9.♘c3 page 228

9.♕xc4 page 232

9...0-0 10.♖d1 (10.♘c3 page 232; 10.♕e2 page 232) **10...♖b8**

11.b3 Game 50, page 232

11.♘bd2 ♕e7!

12.b3 (12.a3N; 12.e4) Game 51, page 234

Two Crafty Queen Moves: **12.♕c2!?** and **12.♕e2!** page 236

Having dealt with a variety of White set-ups in the previous chapter, it's time to analyse two of the most challenging variations. In both cases, White plays e2-e3 and aims for a positional edge. The question is whether or not he will develop his bishop outside the pawn chain. We will start by analysing exactly this plan.

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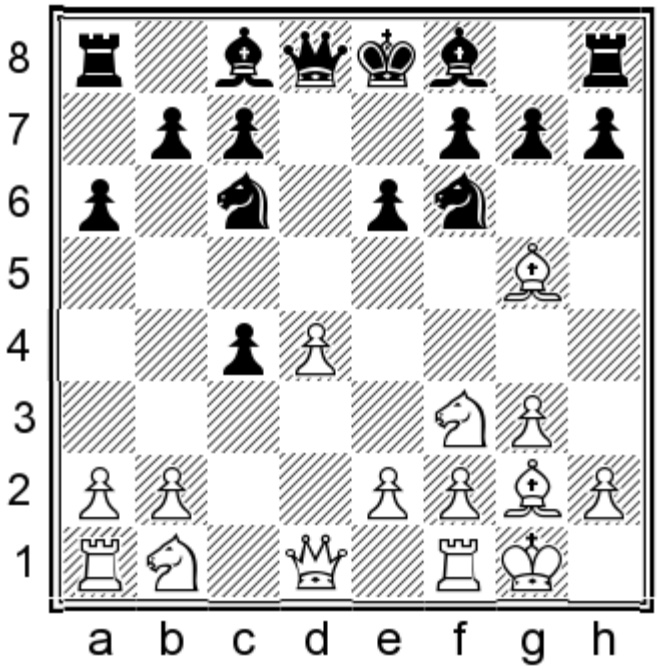
7.♗g5

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♗g5



This move is both theoretically challenging and conceptually easy to understand. In the big main line with 7.e3, White's bishop is left on c1 without many prospects in the near future. Here, on the other hand, White develops the bishop actively and does not mind exchanging it for the knight on f6.

7...♗e7

This is the main line and a good choice.

I also spent some time looking at 7...♖b8!? and am happy to recommend it to readers wishing to carry out their own research into a second option. One important improvement which I discovered occurs after 8.e3 b5 9.♘fd2 ♘a5 10.b3, as played in Dziuba – Meier, Lublin 2010. In the game White obtained some pressure, but 10...c5!N would have given Black equality in all lines according to my analysis.

8.e3 0-0

A few years ago, when I was helping GM Sune Berg Hansen to prepare this line for Black, I recommended 8...♘d5 9.♗xe7 ♘cxe7, but today I understand that this is not a great defence. 10.♘bd2! forces 10...b5, after which 11.♘e4! left Black's dark squares looking weak in Landa – Rojicek, Czech Republic 2016. Moreover, White will soon arrange the thematic b2-b3 break, leading to great compensation after he recaptures with the a-pawn.

9.♕e2!?

White's most popular continuation is 9.♘bd2, after which I recommend 9...e5! as a reliable equalizer; see the next two illustrative games for further details.

The text move was seen in Lenderman – Azarov, Dayton 2016, and a couple of other games. I think that Black should meet it with:

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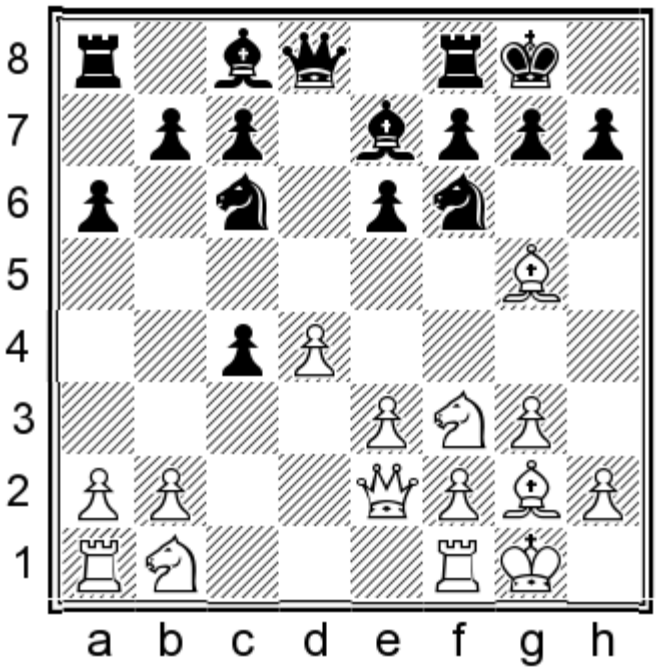


9...♘a5!N

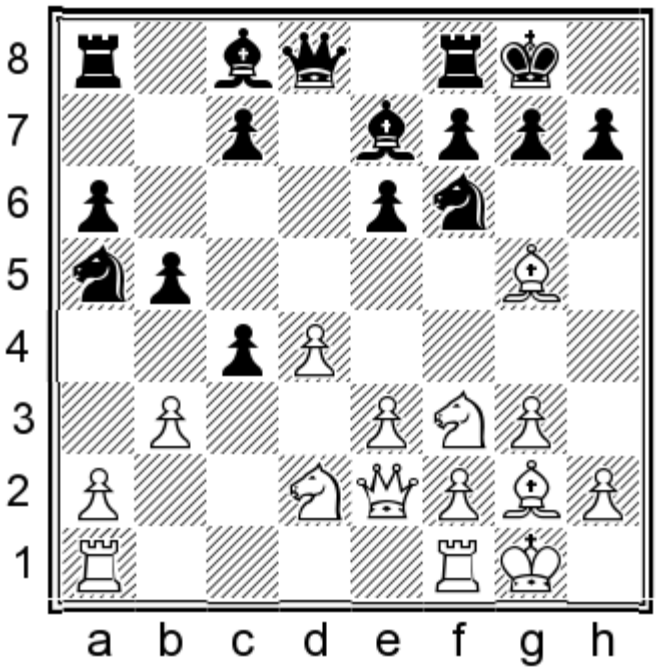
Preparing ...b5, while also restraining b2-b3 in advance. I will present my analysis of this untested yet rich position.

10.♖d1

10.♘e5 c5! equalizes easily.

A riskier alternative for White is:
10.♘bd2 b5! 11.b3

Now Black can get ambitious with:



11...c3!

11...♗b7!? 12.bxc4 ♘xc4 13.♘xc4 bxc4 14.♕xc4 ♖c8 should be good enough to equalize.

12.♘e5 ♖b8 13.b4

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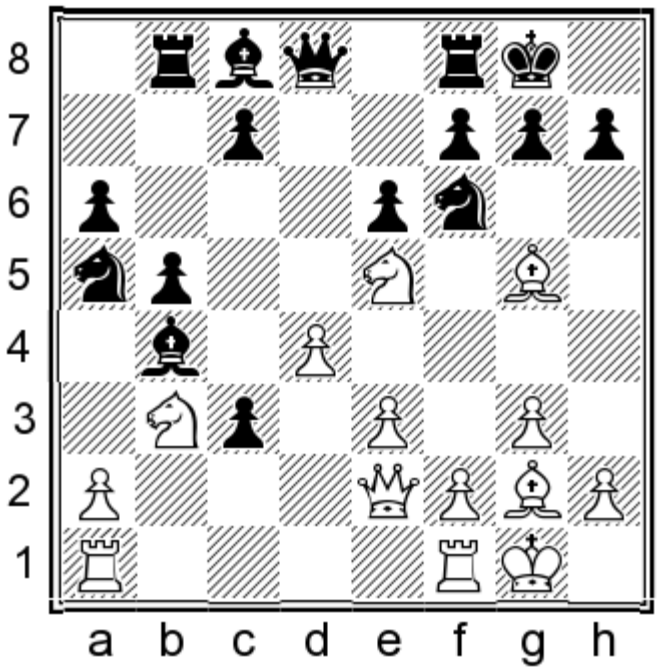
13.♘df3? b4 smells like disaster for White.

13...♗xb4 14.♘b3

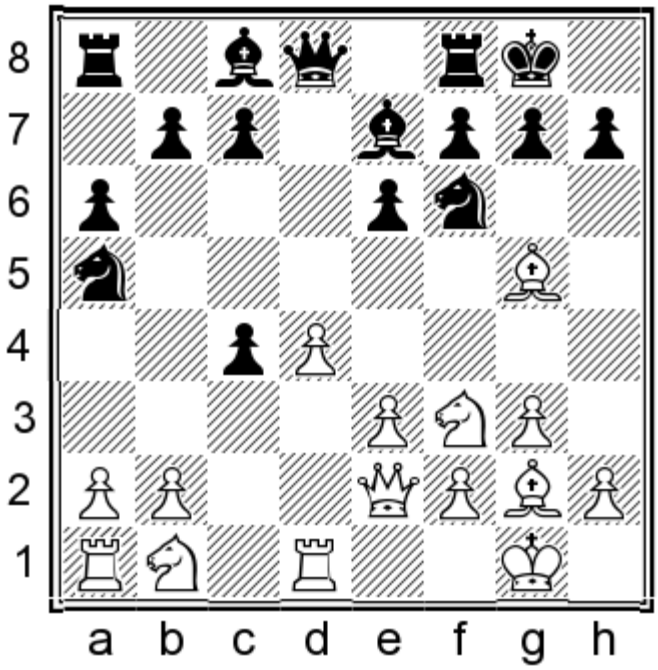


14...♘xb3!

14...♗d7 is a calmer approach.

15.♘c6 ♘xa1 16.♘xd8 ♖xd8 17.♗xf6 gxf6 18.♕g4† ♔f8 19.♖xa1 ♗d6

Black has plenty of material for the queen and the queenside pawns are powerful, so the most White can hope for is to force a draw on the kingside.



10...b5 11.♘e5 ♖a7!

An excellent response which is worth remembering. From this square, the rook supports the bishop's arrival on b7 as well as the one on e7.

11...♗b7?! 12.♗xb7 ♘xb7 13.♘c6 ♕e8 14.♕f3 ♘d6 15.♘c3 followed by a2-a4 gives White good chances to carry out a

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typical positional squeeze.

12.♕e1!?

This is the move that leads to the most complicated play.

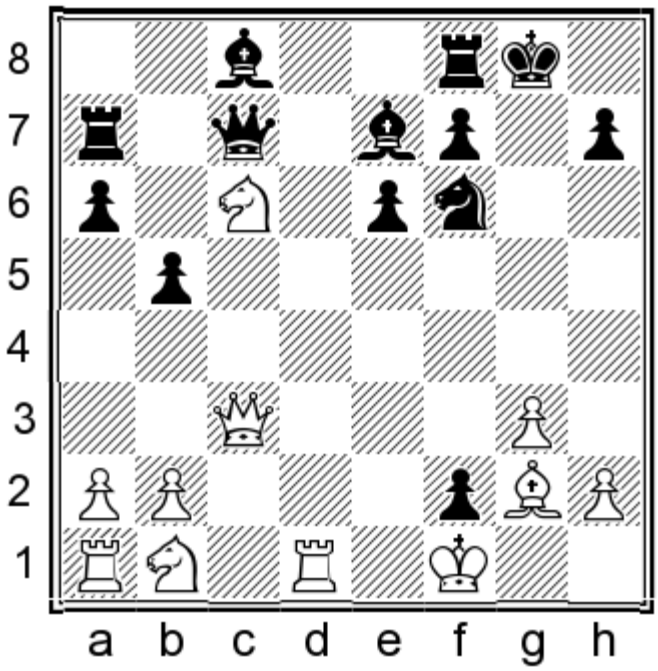
12.a4 c5! is fine for Black.

12.b3 is a better try, but it's still not enough for an edge after: 12...c5! 13.bxc4 ♗b7 Black returns his extra pawn and equalizes with ease. (13...h6!? 14.♗xf6 gxf6!?= is a fighting option) 14.♗xb7 ♖xb7 15.cxb5 axb5 16.dxc5 ♕c8=

12...c5 13.dxc5 ♕c7 14.♗f4 ♘h5!

I decided to present this combative move as my main line.

14...g5!? is also complicated, but best play results in a perpetual: 15.♘xc4 gxf4 16.♘xa5 fxe3 17.♘c6 ♗xc5 18.♕c3 exf2† 19.♔f1 ♗e7



20.♕e3 ♖b7 21.♘xe7† ♕xe7 22.♕g5† ♔h8 23.♗xb7 ♗xb7 24.♖d7! ♕xd7 25.♕xf6† ♔g8 26.♕g5†=

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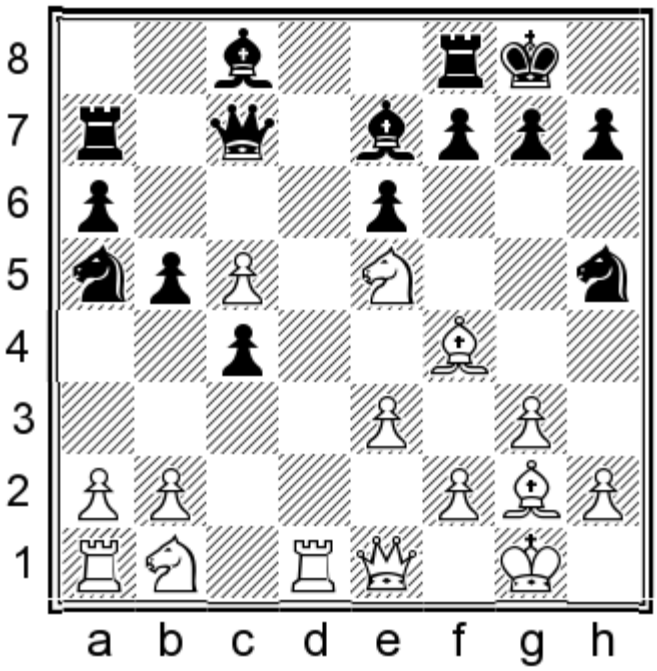


15.♘c6

15.♘g6 ♘xf4 leads to the same thing.

15...♘xf4 16.♘xe7† ♕xe7 17.exf4 ♕c7

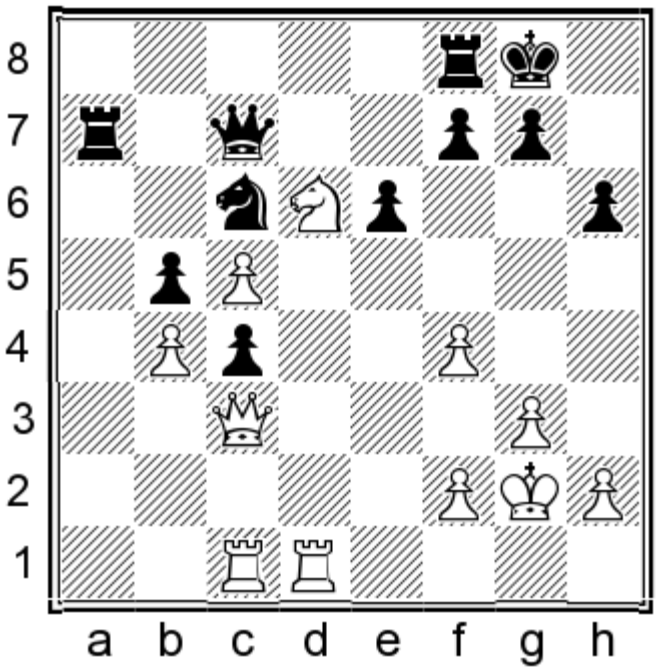
The position is quite complicated, but analysis proves that Black is fine in all cases. Here are some sample lines:

18.♕c3

18.♘c3 ♕xc5 19.♘e4 ♕c7 20.♕e3 h6=

18.♕e3 ♗b7 19.♗xb7 ♖xb7 and Black is fine, with ...♖bb8 and ...♘b7 coming next.

18...♗b7 19.♘d2 ♗xg2 20.♔xg2 h6 21.♖ac1 ♘b7 22.b4 a5 23.a3 ♘d8 24.♘e4 ♘c6 25.♘d6 axb4 26.axb4



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26...♘e7 27.♕f3 ♖b8 28.f5 exf5 29.♘xf5 ♘xf5 30.♕xf5 ♕b7† 31.♕f3 ♕xf3† 32.♔xf3 ♖a4=

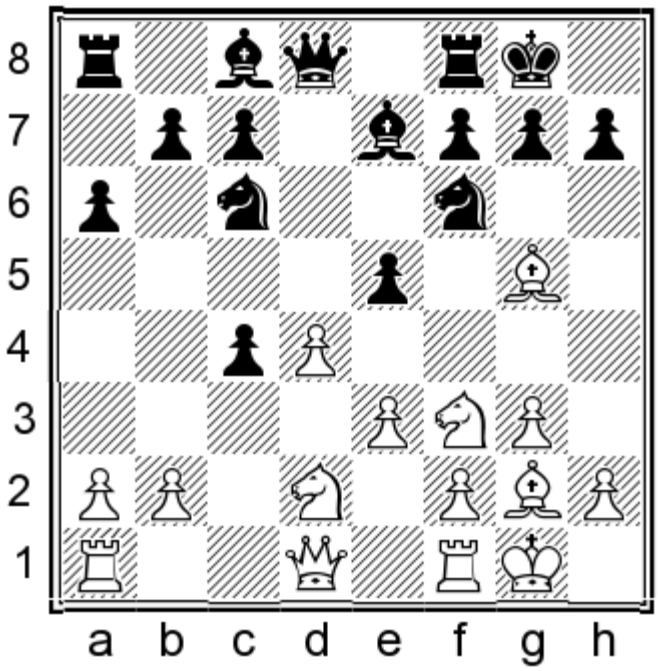
This wasn't all forced of course, but it reinforces my opinion that the line beginning with 9.♕e2 ♘a5!N is dynamically balanced. Let's turn our attention to White's most popular continuation at move 9.

GAME 48

Pavel Eljanov – Jan Duda

Doha 2014

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♗g5 ♗e7 8.e3 0-0 9.♘bd2 e5!



10.dxe5

Eljanov is a great worker on the opening and his choices should always be taken seriously. Prior to this game, Catalan players used to play 10.♘xc4, but correspondence players have neutralized this line completely. Still, as this might be the most annoying move to face over the board, I will examine it separately in the next game.

Let us also note that 10.♘xe5 has occurred in several games, but it soon transposes to the present game after 10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♘g4 and so on.

10...♘g4 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♘xc4 ♘gxe5 13.♘cxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5

The position is essentially equal, but Black still has to play a few good moves to solidify that verdict.

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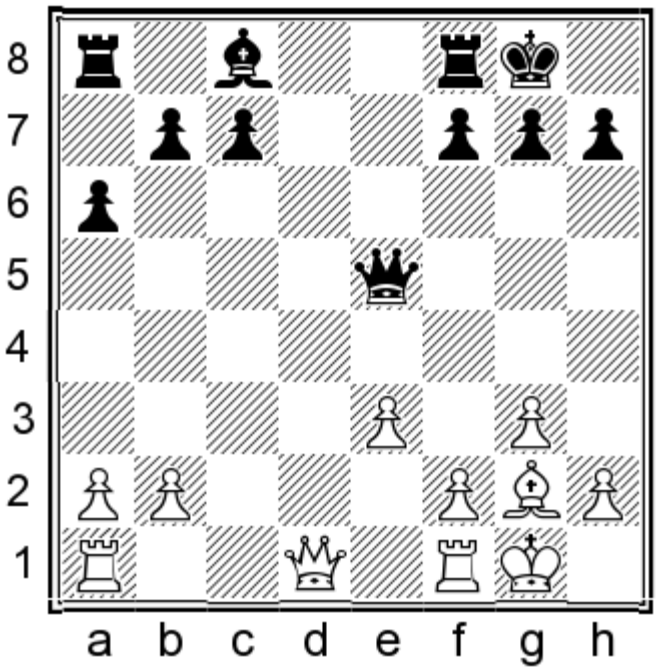
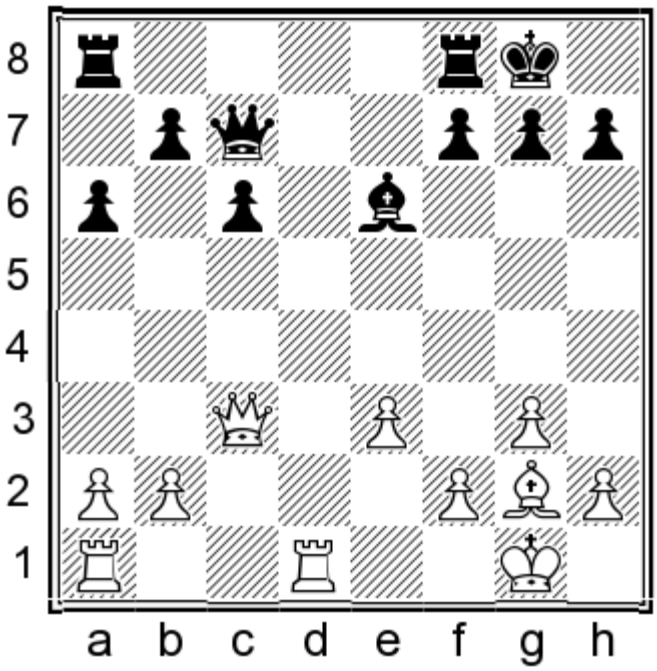


15.♕d4!?

This was Eljanov's idea to keep some pressure.

After 15.♕b3 c6 16.♖fd1 I consider 16...♕c7! most accurate. (16...♕b5 also proved to be okay in Shirov – Oparin, Moscow 2016, but I find the text move more natural.) From here I would like to present an illustrative line containing an important positional point: 17.♕c3 ♗e6



The key point is that White has the possibility of 18.a4!?, introducing the positional threat of a4-a5 to immobilize Black's queenside majority. Whenever that happens, it is important for Black to be able to prevent his opponent's plan with 18...a5!, when he has no problems. This is why I favour the set-up with the pawn on c6 and queen on c7. The same advice holds true after virtually any other option White may try on move 15 or 16.

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15...♕xd4

15...♕e7 also seems fine, and led to a quick draw in an earlier correspondence game.

15...♖e8N seems fine too, for instance: 16.♖ad1 ♕xd4 17.♖xd4 c6 18.♖fd1 ♗e6 19.a4 a5!= This is another good illustration of the positional point explained in the previous note.

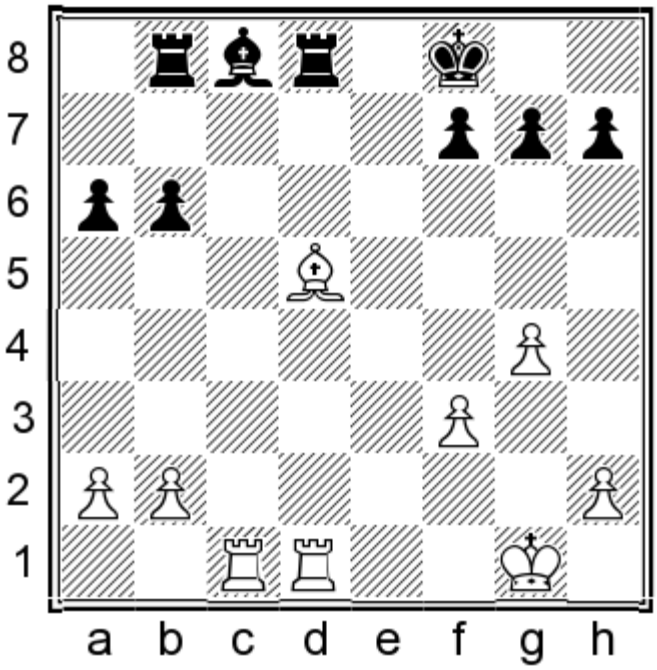
16.exd4 c6 17.d5!

Nothing else makes sense for White here, but the advantage he gets is mainly symbolic.

17...cxd5 18.♗xd5 ♖d8 19.♖fd1 ♔f8 20.♖ac1 ♖b8 21.f3 ♗e6

The exchange of bishops brings about a drawn endgame, albeit one in which White may keep playing without risk.

21...b6!N is more precise, when play may continue: 22.g4!? Anticipating Black's idea. (22.b4 ♗f5 23.g4 can be met by 23...♖bc8! with complete equality) Now Black can secure a draw with a typical defensive motif:



22...♗b7 23.♗xb7 ♖xd1† 24.♖xd1 ♖xb7 25.♖d8† ♔e7 26.♖a8 ♖c7 27.♖xa6 ♖c1† 28.♔f2 ♖c2† 29.♔g3 ♖xb2=

22.♗xe6 fxe6 23.♔f2 ♖xd1 24.♖xd1 ♖c8 25.♔e3 ♔e7 26.♖d2 e5

Black only needs a minimal amount of accuracy to hold, and Eljanov does not bother trying for much longer.

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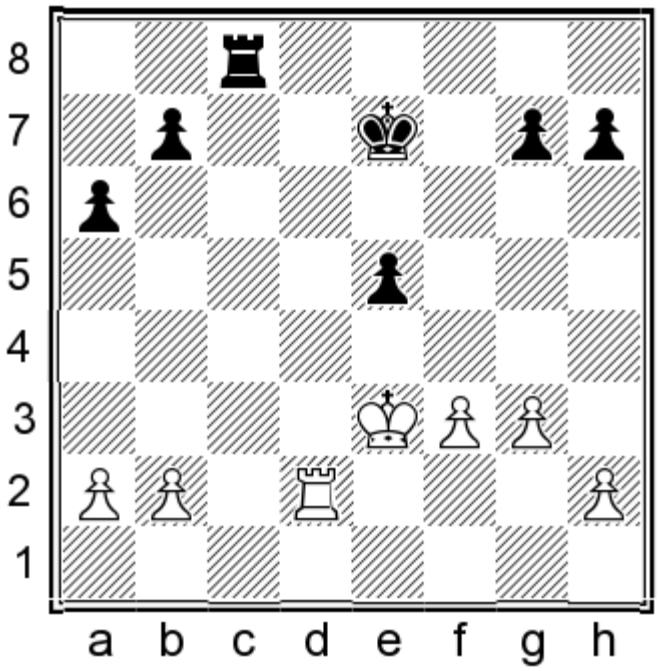

27.h4 h5 28.♔d3 ♖d8† 29.♔e3 ♖c8 30.♔d3 ♖d8†

½–½

Now let’s consider White’s other option on move 10.

GAME 49

Hans Koch – Joao de Aragao Seia

Correspondence 2010

I have tweaked the move order as usual.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.♗g5 ♗e7 8.e3 0-0 9.♘bd2 e5 10.♘xc4

This way White takes on an isolated queen’s pawn, hoping that his active pieces will create problems for his opponent.

10...exd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♕xd4 13.exd4

Ponomariov introduced 10.♘xc4 in 2009 and went on to defeat Morozevich from this position. The next year, my good friend Elshan Moradiabadi won a great game from here against Peter Heine Nielsen. These results indicate that the line contains a drop of poison but, fortunately, Seia showed the correct antidote in this and one other correspondence game.

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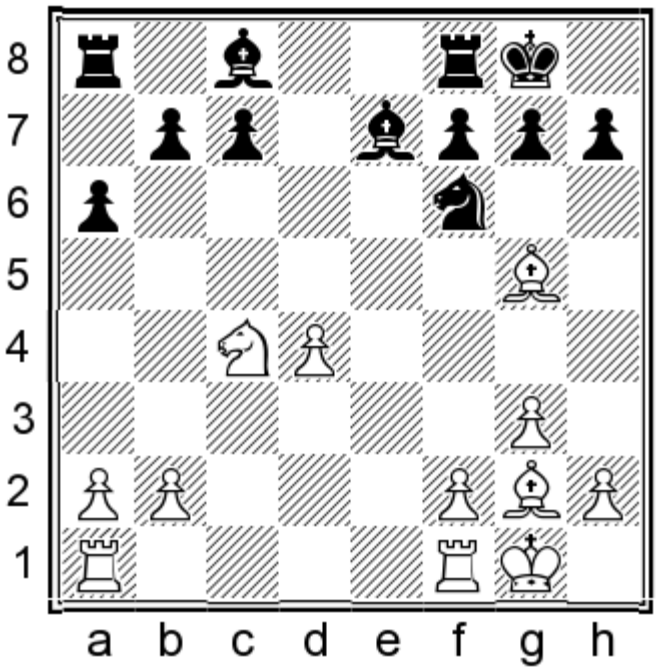

13...h6!

Improving over 13...♖d8, as featured in both of the aforementioned games. Since the game continuation became known, no other GM has repeated the line for White.

14.♗d2!

From d2, the bishop may become quite influential on the queenside. Other moves make less sense and thus will not be examined.

14...♖d8!

The most natural move, and a good fighting choice if Black wants to play for a win.

14...♗e6!?N is not bad since, after 15.♘a5 ♗d5, if White takes the b7-pawn, the b2-pawn also falls. Still, it is not the most ambitious choice for Black.

15.♖fe1!

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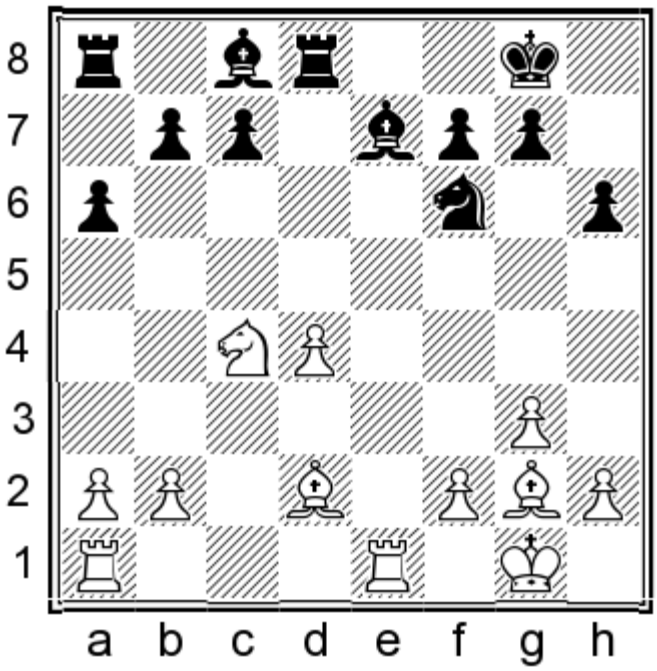
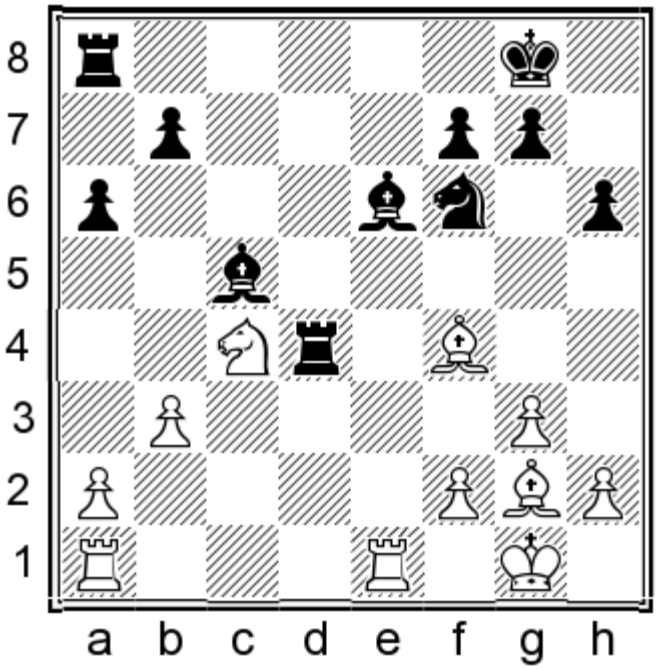


15...♗f8!

15...♖xd4?! 16.♖xe7 ♖xc4 17.♗a5! could be somewhat awkward to meet in practice, although the engines are able to hold Black's position rather easily.

16.♗c3!

16.♗a5!? ♖xd4 17.b3 ♗c5! 18.♗xc7 ♗e6 19.♗f4 (19.♗xb7? ♖a7; 19.♘b6 ♖e8=) This was seen in Stepanov – Seia, corr. 2010, where Black naturally didn't have a problem entering a complicated computer line, but for practical purposes I recommend the natural, human-looking move:



19...♖d7!?N 20.♘e5 ♖e7= All Black's pieces are active, so he has no problems at all.

16...♖b8

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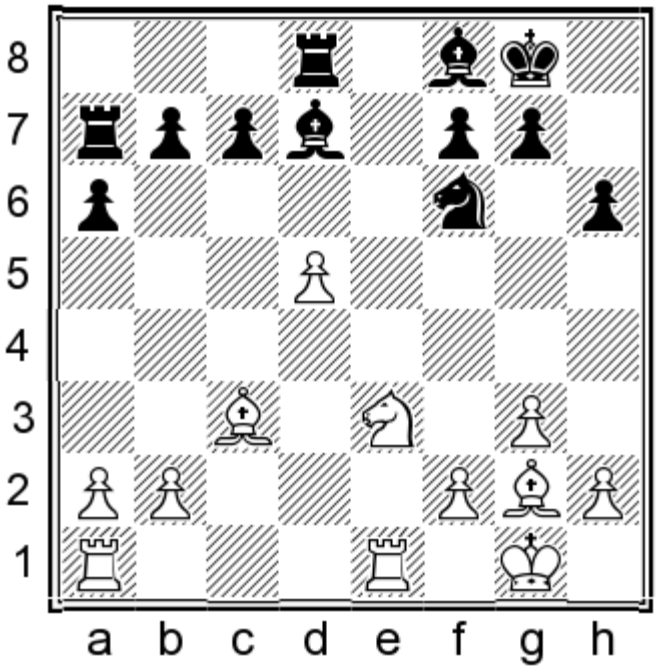
An alternative route which you may wish to investigate is:

16...♖a7!?N

It doesn't look pretty, I know, but in this way Black avoids any forcing variations and keeps more tension in the position. There are a lot of options for both sides, and I think Black keeps the game dynamically level if he plays natural moves. Here are a few illustrative lines I analysed:

17.♘e3 ♗d7 18.d5

A neutral move such as 18.h3 can be met by 18...a5!?, with the idea to be able to play ...c6 without allowing ♗a5. 19.d5 is a natural reply, when 19...♘e8!? keeps things about equal.

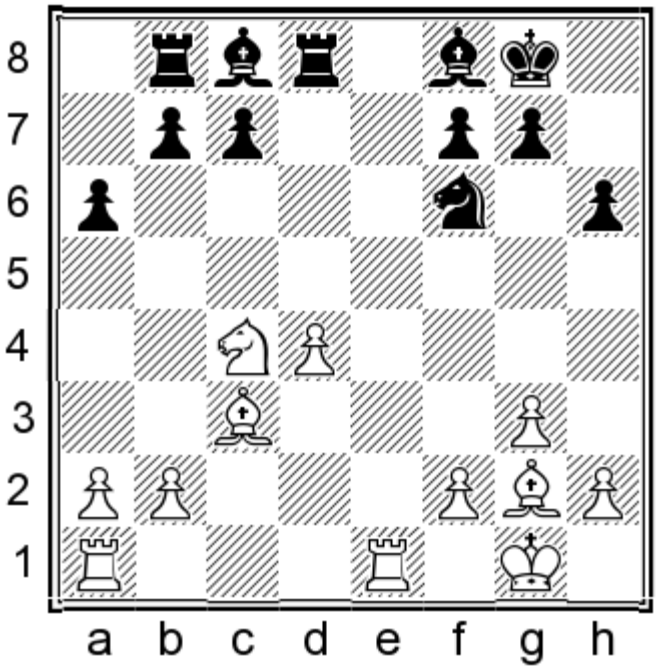


18...♘g4!? 19.♘d1 h5!?

In order to avoid the possible doubling of Black's kingside pawns.

20.h3 ♘h6=

The knight can be relocated to d6, via f5 or perhaps f7.



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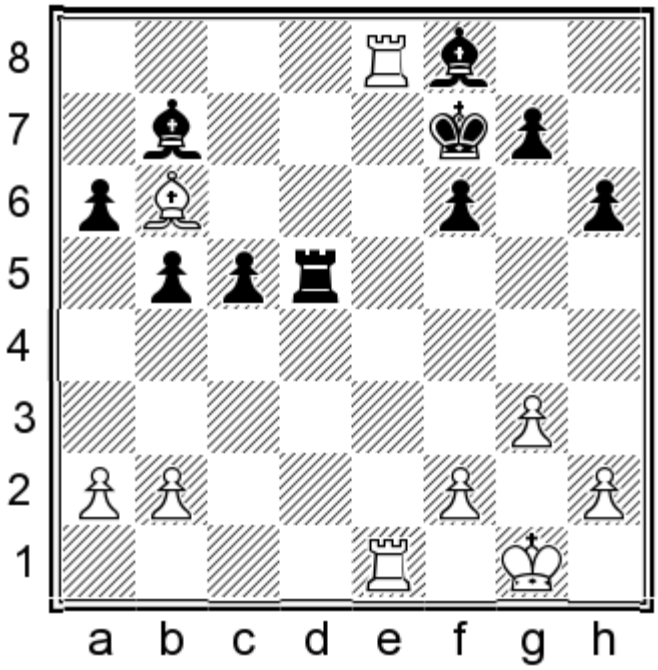
17.d5!

This is the only way to cause Black any discomfort, as other moves will be met by ...♗e6 with an easy game. Now the play becomes forced, all the way until White wins an exchange for a pawn.

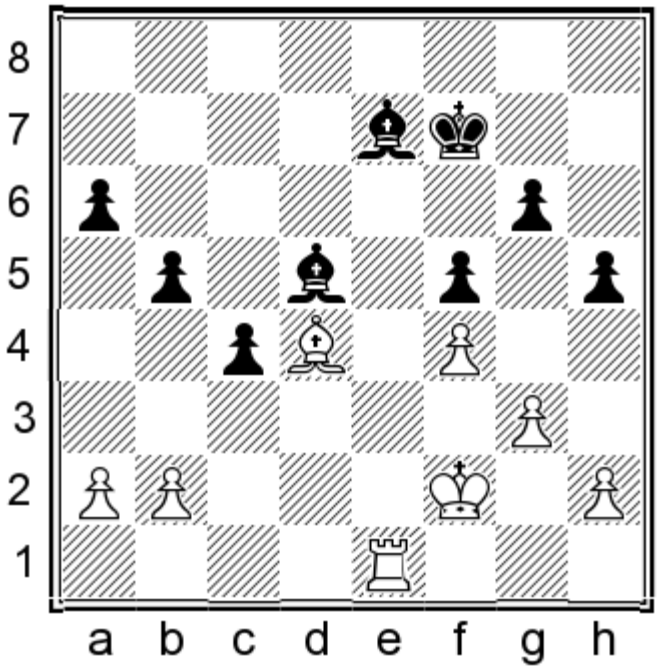
17...♘xd5 18.♗xd5 ♖xd5 19.♖e8 f6 20.♗b4 c5 21.♗a5 ♔f7 22.♖ae1 b5 23.♘b6 ♖xb6 24.♗xb6 ♗b7



Despite the slight material deficit, Black remains okay. The two bishops are incredibly good defenders, and Black even has chances to exploit his extra queenside pawn if White overestimates his winning chances. The rest of the game shows that Black is in little danger of losing if he plays sensibly.

25.♖d8 ♖xd8 26.♗xd8 c4 27.♗b6 ♗f3 28.♖e3 ♗d5 29.f4 g6 30.♔f2 ♗e7 31.♖e1 f5 32.♗d4 h5

Black keeps things closed, so that the power of the rook will not be felt.



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33.h4 b4

Here they come! Rather than wait for the pawns to advance any further, White decided to liquidate to a draw.

34.♖xe7†

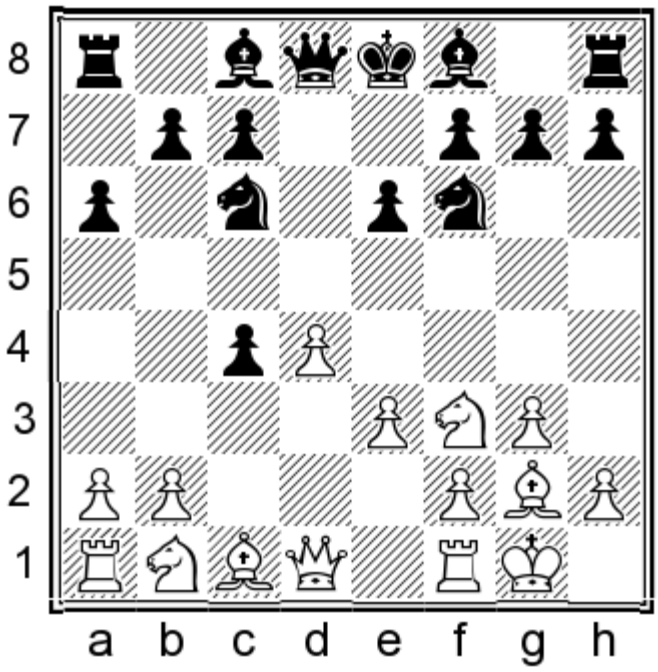
And a draw was agreed. After 34...♔xe7 35.♗c5† White takes on b4 and the opposite-coloured bishops make the position a dead draw.

½–½

The Modern Main Line: 7.e3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.e3

This is the most popular move, as well as Avrukh's recommendation in *GM 1A*. White intends to put the queen on e2 and either win back the c4-pawn or provoke a weakening ...b5.



7...♗d7

I think this is the correct move order. With the knight on c6 securely defended, Black can think about ...b5 in some lines, although generally we will try to do without this move.

7...♖b8 allows White to fight for an advantage with 8.♘fd2!±, as recommended by Avrukh.

8.♕e2

The queen almost always goes to this square, either now or on the next move. I considered three other options:

A deservedly rare move is:
8.♘e5?! ♘xe5! 9.dxe5 ♘d5

Black is on the verge of claiming an advantage. We will follow the only GM battle to have taken place from this position.

10.♗xd5

After 10.♕e2N 10...♗e7 White is still not ready to recapture on c4, because ...♗b5 will win an exchange. 11.♖d1

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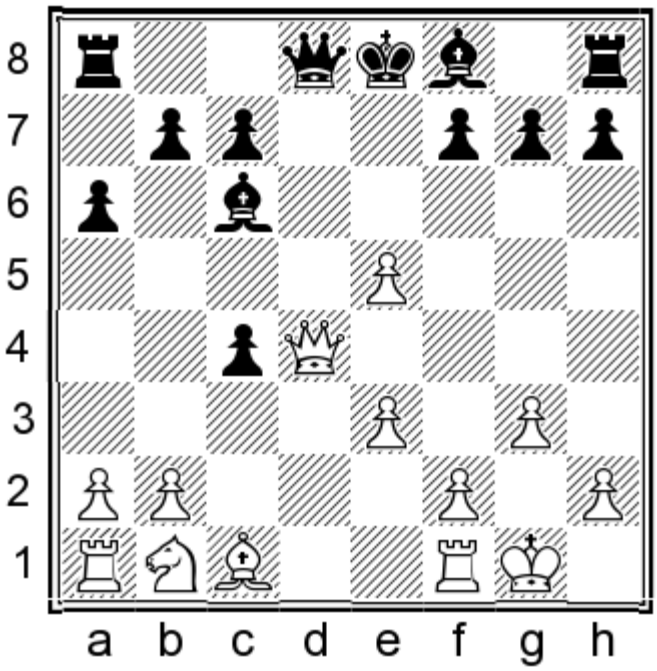
looks best, but now comes 11...b5!, and if 12.b3 cxb3 13.axb3 0-0∓ Black is better. In most lines involving the exchange on b3, White usually has a pawn at d4 and thus he has control over the c5-square, which offers lasting positional compensation. Here that is not the case, and Black can play ...c5 whenever he wishes.

10...exd5 11.♕xd5 ♗c6 12.♕d4



12...b5!?

12...♕d5N∓ would have been a clear route to an edge for Black, as it forces the queen exchange, leaving Black with two powerful bishops.

13.♘c3 h5!? 14.f3 ♗e7 15.♗d2 0-0 16.♖ad1 f6 17.♕h4 ♕e8

Black was better and went on to win in Flear – Korneev, Asti 1997.

8.♘fd2 ♘a5!

8...b5 9.b3! gives White thematic compensation.

9.♘c3

This position was reached in Kozul – Rezan, Split 2008. Black has a pleasant choice, my preference being:

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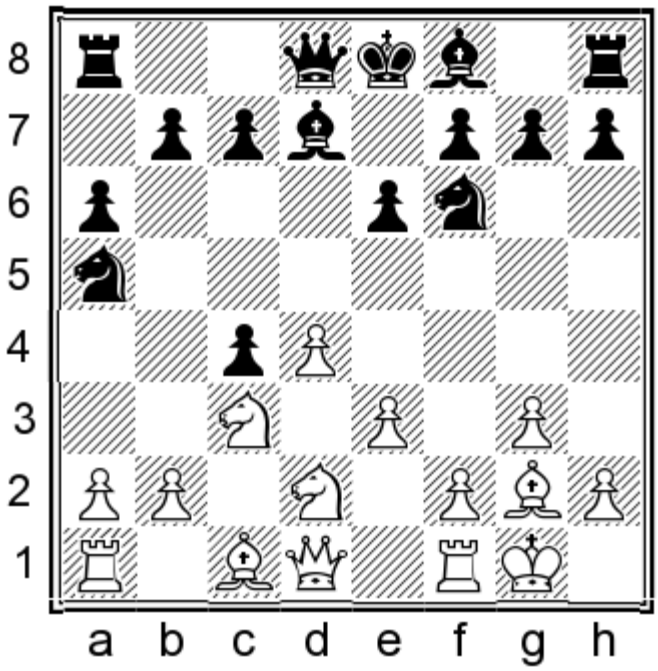


9...b5!N

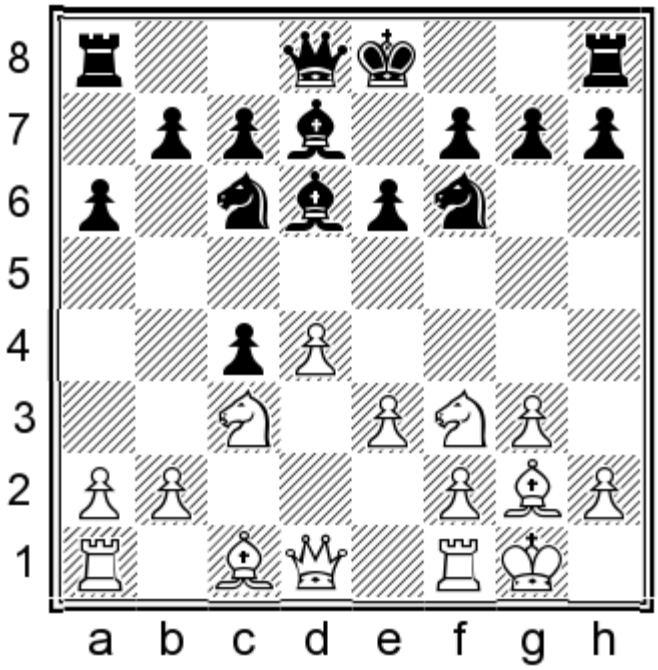
If Black wants a simple life then 9...♗c6N neutralizes the Catalan bishop, ensuring an equal game.

10.♗xa8 ♕xa8∞

In return for the exchange, Black has an extra pawn plus control over the long diagonal, and he may develop an initiative on either flank. His queenside pawn mass has a lot of potential, but he can also consider ...h5-h4 to create threats on the kingside.

8.♘c3 ♗d6

This has occurred in a few hundred games but White almost always continues with 9.♕e2, transposing to the 9.♘c3?! variation examined below.



9.♘e5

Another game continued 9.e4 e5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xe5 12.f4?! (12.♕e2 0-0 13.♕xc4 ♖e8=) 12...♗xc3

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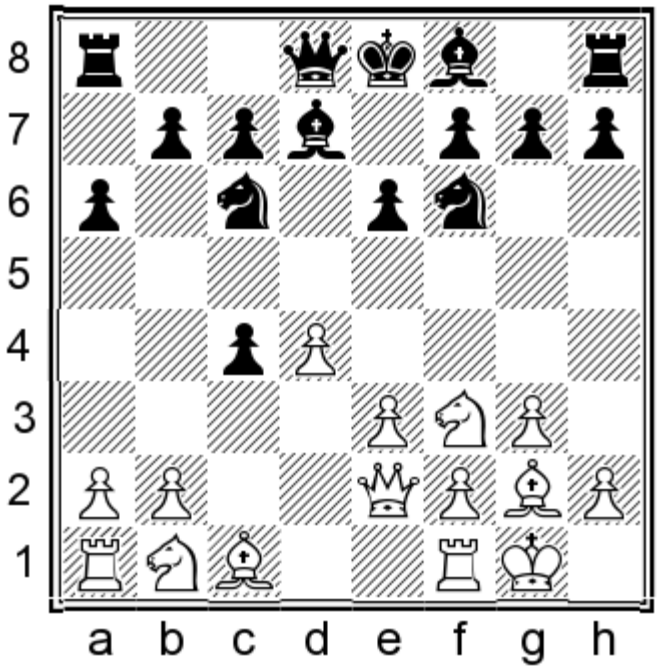
13.bxc3 ♗c6∓ and Black had a lasting advantage in Rustemov – Korotylev, Sochi 2004.

9...♘xe5!

9...♗xe5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♗xb7 ♖b8 led to an eventual victory for Anand over Karpov in an engine-assisted game in 1999, but it seems to me that 12.f4! could prove annoying for Black.

10.dxe5 ♗xe5 11.♗xb7 ♖a7 12.♗g2 c5

Black was fine in Mors – Do Amaral, corr. 2002.



8...♗d6!

8...b5 has been the most popular continuation but 9.b3! cxb3 10.axb3 reaches the thematic structure which I prefer to avoid. White has lasting compensation due to the open queenside files and outpost on c5; moreover, Black would prefer his bishop on b7 rather than d7 in such positions.

After the text move, White has the following options:

9.♘c3 is a slightly inaccurate move order which will be discussed shortly.

The obvious 9.♕xc4 is the main line, coverage of which begins on page 232.

9.♖d1 0-0 does not have much independent significance: all the games on my database continued 10.♕xc4, with an immediate transposition to the main line.

9.♘c3

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.e3 ♗d7 8.♕e2 ♗d6 9.♘c3

White postpones any recapturing on c4 in order to focus on central expansion. I have already mentioned that the knight's arrival on c3 often serves as an invitation for us to play ...b5. However, on this occasion Black should not do it too quickly.

9...0-0!

Black should play a useful move, waiting for White's rook to go to d1 before taking action on the queenside.

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Let me show you the problem with the alternative:

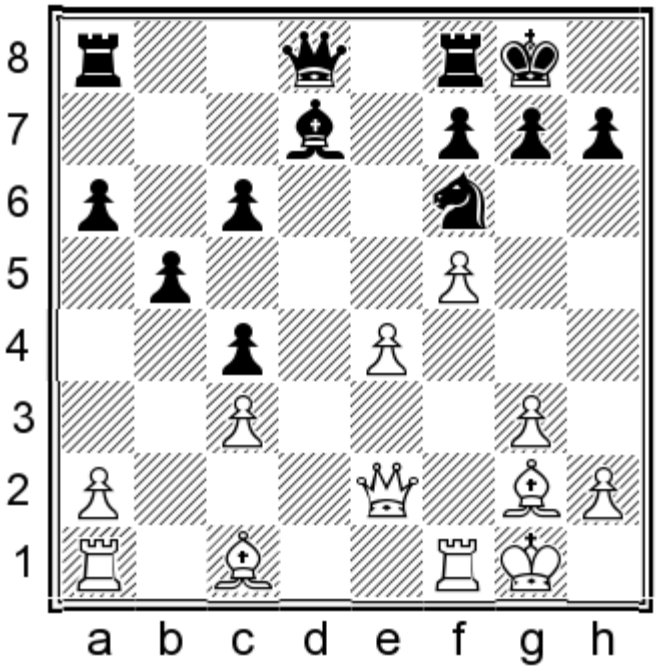
9...b5 10.e4 e5?

10...♗e7! is still okay for Black, but I would like to show you what happens after the typical central counter, which is generally the more ambitious way to challenge White's pawn centre.

11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 13.f4 ♗xc3

13...♗d4† is well met by 14.♗e3! c5 15.♖ad1, and if 15...b4? 16.e5! White is already winning. Such variations would obviously be no problem for Black if only he had already castled.

14.bxc3 c6 15.f5! 0-0



16.g4!

16.♗g5 has been played in a few GM games, but Black seems to be okay in that case. The text move has been tested in many correspondence games, with an overwhelming score for White. A good example is the original game with this move:

16...h6 17.g5 hxg5 18.♗xg5 ♕b6† 19.♔h1 c5 20.♖ad1 ♖a7 21.e5 ♖e8 22.e6 fxe6 23.♗xf6 exf5 24.♕h5+–

White was crashing through the defences in Hunger – Behrendorf, corr. 2007.

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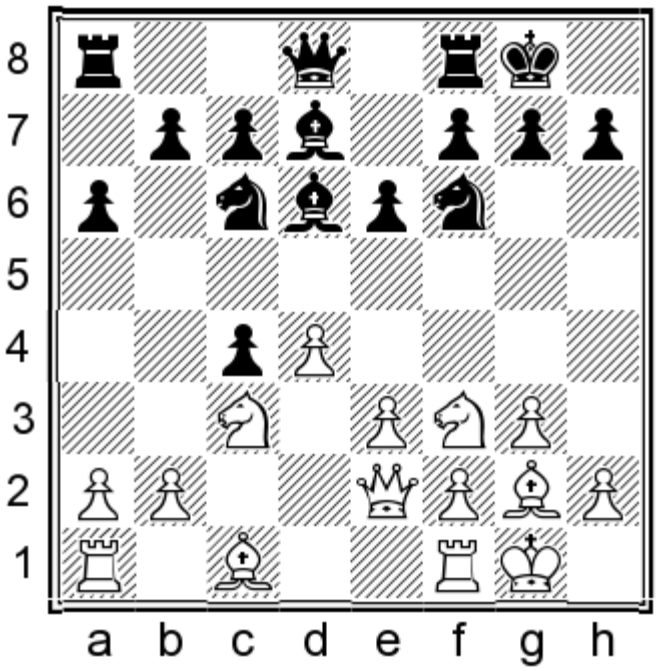
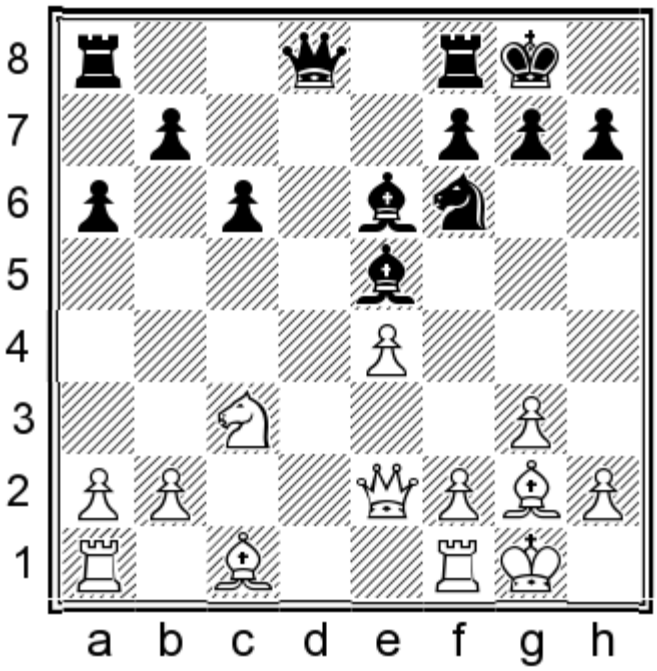


10.♖d1!?

This has been a rare choice but it may lead to interesting complications.

The immediate 10.e4 is harmless: 10...e5 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5 13.♕xc4 ♗e6 14.♕e2 c6 Black is fine, for instance:



15.f4 ♗d4† 16.♔h1 b5! Black has plenty of activity to distract White from his kingside ambitions.

10.♖e1?! has similar ideas to the main line but the rook is less active. 10...b5 11.e4 e5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 Now if 14.f4 ♗d4† 15.♗e3 c5 Black is pushing for the advantage, for example: 16.e5 ♘g4 17.♗xd4 cxd4 18.♗xa8 ♕xa8∓

10.♕xc4 may be White's best, but then 10...b5 11.♕d3 e5 gives Black equal play. It is worth mentioning that Black is offering an exchange sacrifice, which few players have accepted:

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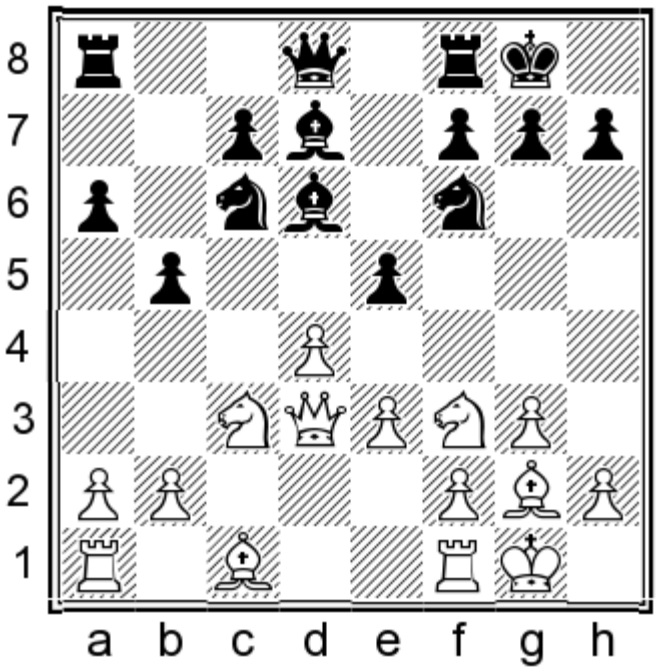

12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 14.♗xa8 ♕xa8 Black had full compensation in Parwicz – Dimitriadis, email 2006. I will spend more time looking at the ♕xc4 structures under the main line with 9.♕xc4. Most specialists on White's side tend not to combine this with the early development of the knight on c3, instead preferring to keep the c-file open while maintaining the option of ♘bd2-c4.

10...b5!

This is the ambitious choice, which suddenly transposes to a lot of games where ...b5 was played earlier.

10...♕e7 is also playable, although Black still has to take care to equalize after 11.♕xc4. It is worth mentioning in this line that 11.e4 e5! 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 gives White nothing, since 14.f4? ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♗g4 16.♗f3 ♗xf3 17.♕xf3 ♕xe4 wins for Black.

11.e4

White has lost a tempo by advancing this pawn in two separate moves, but he hopes that Black's bishops will prove less than ideally placed on d7 and d6. However, we can take the opportunity to fight back in the centre with:

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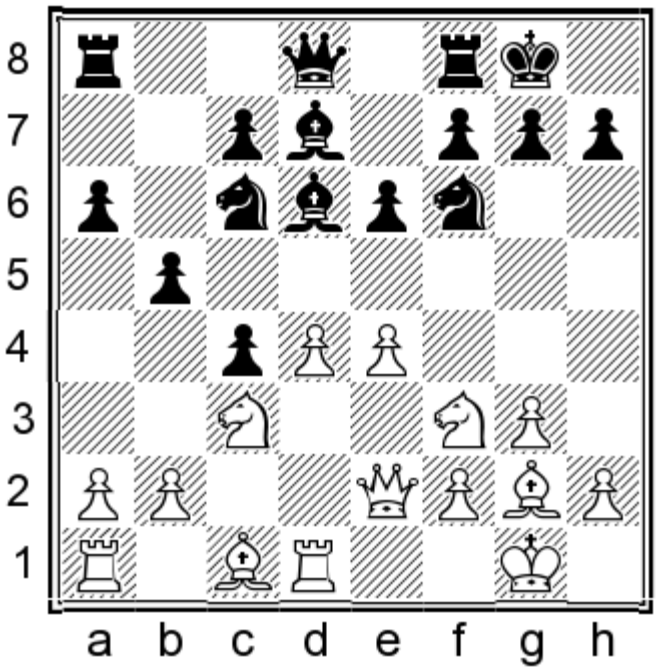

11...e5! 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 14.♗g5

14.f4?! ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♕c8! was good for Black in Van den Cruyce – Buzas, email 2007. Unlike the line on the previous page (in the note after 9...b5), 16.f5? ♖e8 17.g4? does not work here due to 17...♗c6, with a decisive counterattack in the centre.

14...c6 15.♗xf6 gxf6!

15...♗xf6 16.e5 ♖e8 17.♗xc6 ♖xe5 18.♖xd7 ♖xe2 19.♖xd8† ♖xd8 20.♘xe2 ♗xb2 21.♖e1 g5 was good enough for a draw in Iriarte Gomez – Kuerten, corr. 2009, but my main lines gives Black more winning chances.

16.♗h3

After 16.f4 ♗xc3 17.bxc3 ♕e7 a draw was agreed in Razuvaev – A. Petrosian, Tashkent 1984, but I think Black should have played on. A logical continuation would be: 18.a4 ♖ad8 19.axb5 axb5 20.♖e1 ♗c8 21.♕h5

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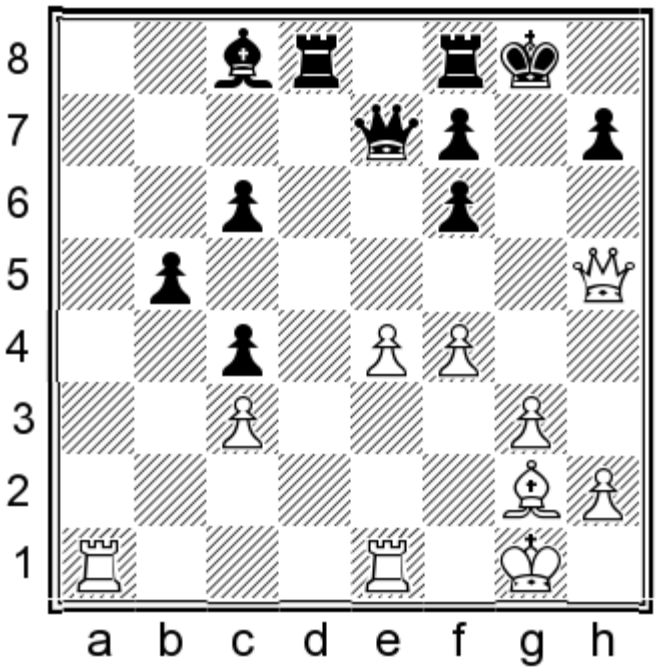
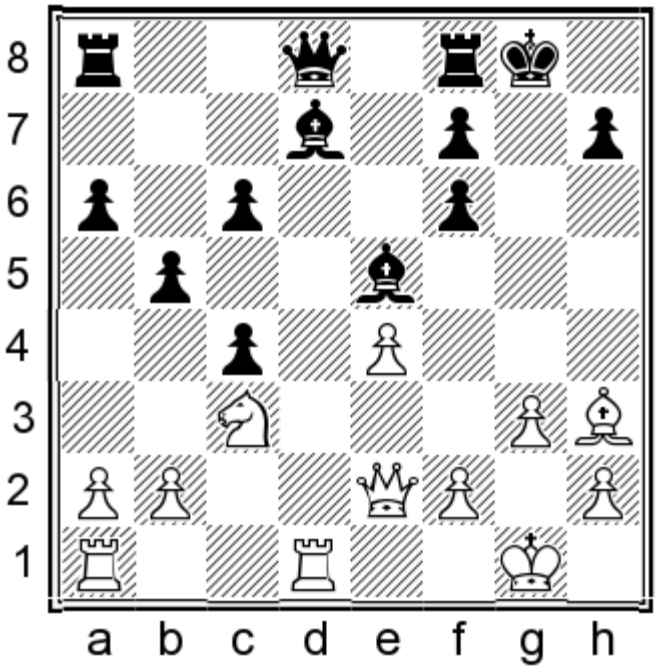


21...♖d3! 22.♕h4 ♕d8 23.♖ac1 c5∓ This line shows how Black can exploit the d3-outpost to control the d-file and advance his majority on the queenside.



16...♗xh3!

This excellent queen sacrifice gives Black at least equal chances.

17.♖xd8 ♖axd8 18.♖d1

18.f4 ♗d4† 19.♔h1 occurred in Sterud – Nejstadt, corr. 1984, when 19...b4!N 20.♘d1 ♖fe8 would have put White under some pressure, for instance:

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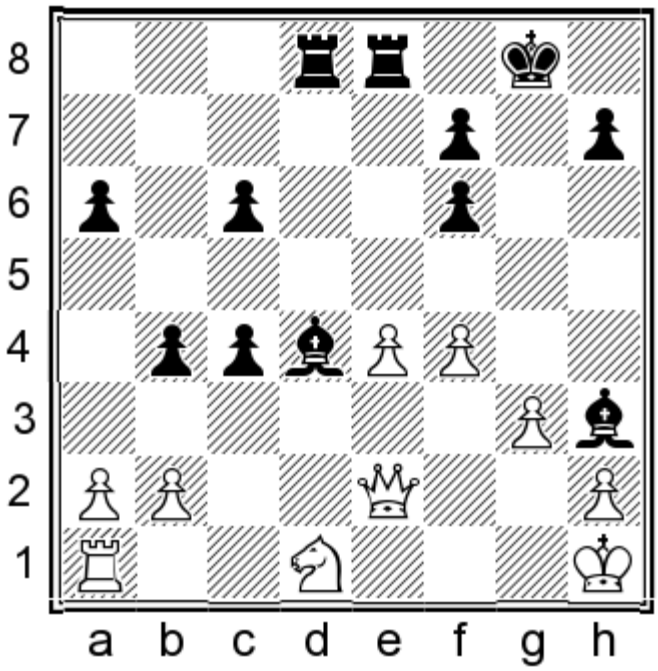
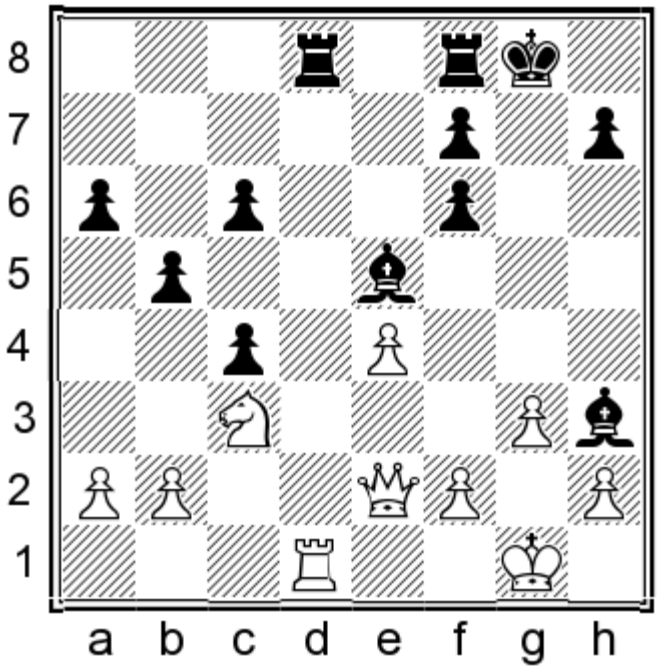


21.g4 ♔h8 22.♘f2 ♗xf2 23.♕xf2 ♗xg4 24.♕h4 ♗f3† 25.♔g1 ♖d6 Black keeps some winning chances.



18...♔g7!N

18...b4 is not so great here due to 19.♘a4 c3 20.bxc3 ♖xd1† 21.♕xd1 bxc3 22.♘xc3! ♗xc3 23.g4 when White had slightly the easier side of a draw in Petraitis – Gimbutas, Lithuania 1995.

19.♕h5 ♗c8!?

This is the most ambitious option.

After 19...♖xd1† 20.♘xd1 ♗c8 21.♘e3 ♗xb2 22.♘g4 ♗xg4 23.♕xg4† ♔h8 24.♕f5 ♖d8 25.f4 White follows up with e4-e5 and forces a draw.

20.f4 ♗d4† 21.♔g2 ♖fe8!

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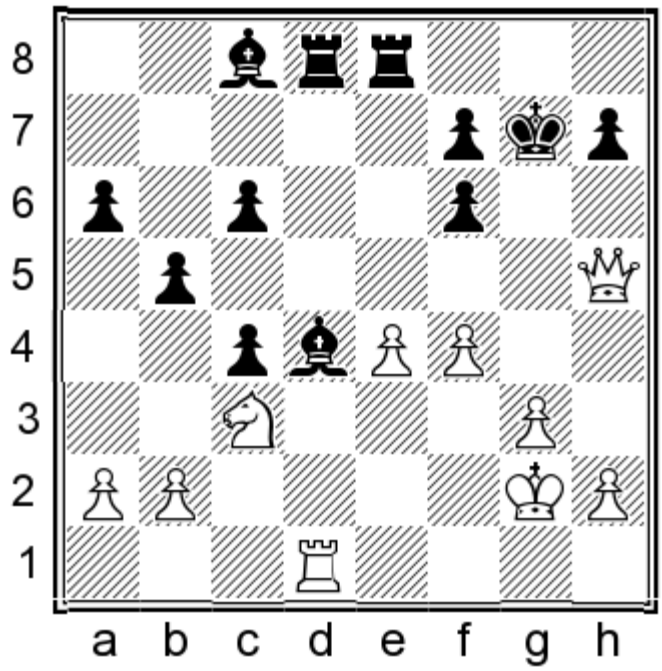
21...c5 22.♘d5 ♖fe8 23.♔f3 ♖d6 24.♘c7 ♖xe4!? 25.♔xe4 ♗b7† 26.♔f5 ♗c6 is a weird computer line which leads to a draw, but humans don't play in this manner.



22.e5 c5! 23.exf6† ♗xf6 24.♖xd8 ♖xd8

The position should be drawn with best play, but both sides (mostly White!) still have chances to go wrong.

Having reached the end of that interesting but rare line, let's turn to the straightforward pawn capture which was recommended in *Grandmaster Repertoire 1A – The Catalan*.

9.♕xc4

GAME 50

Mikhail Romm – Helmut Grill

Correspondence 2013

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 e6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.e3 ♗d7 8.♕e2 ♗d6 9.♕xc4 0-0

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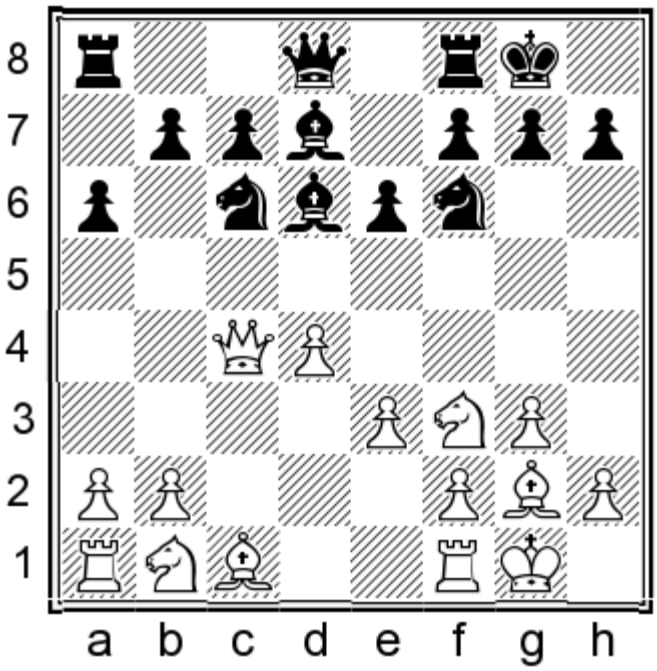
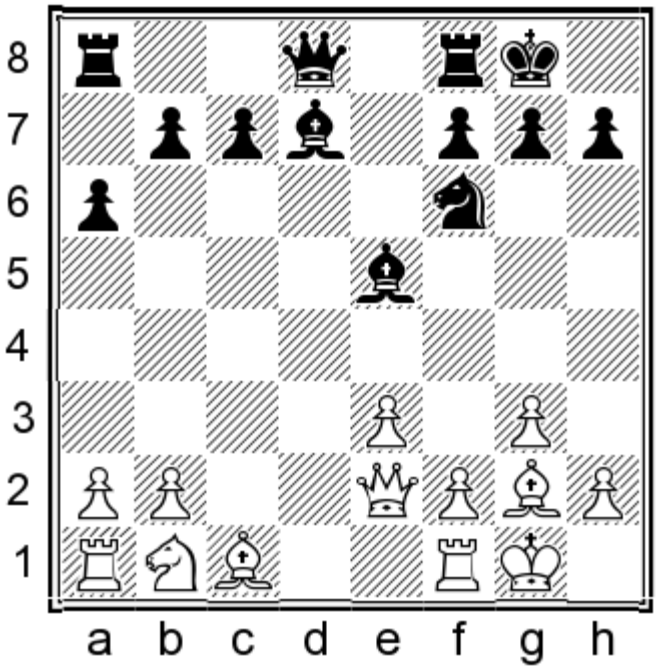


10.♖d1

10.♘c3 is met by 10...b5 and 11...e5, as we saw in the previous section under the 9.♘c3 move order.

10.♕e2 was played in a crucial round of the 2017 women's US Championship in Paikidze – S. Foisor, Saint Louis 2017. This queen retreat is not the most accurate way to play for White, as it allows the immediate freeing break 10...e5!N 11.dxe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5:



The tactical justification of Black's play is that 13.♗xb7? runs into 13...♗b5 14.♕f3 ♗xf1 15.♗xa8 ♗h3! with some advantage for Black.

10...♖b8

Black should defend the b7-pawn in preparation for ...e5.

10...♕e7?! is well met by 11.♘c3!, for instance: 11...b5 (11...h6 also favours White after 12.♗d2± or 12.♘d2!?±)

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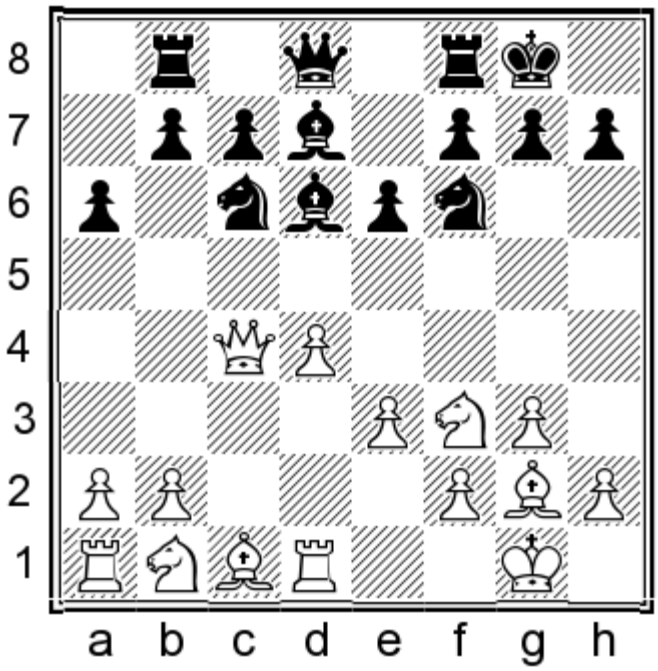
12.♕d3 e5 13.♘g5 ♘b4 14.♕b1 h6 15.♘ge4 White is better.



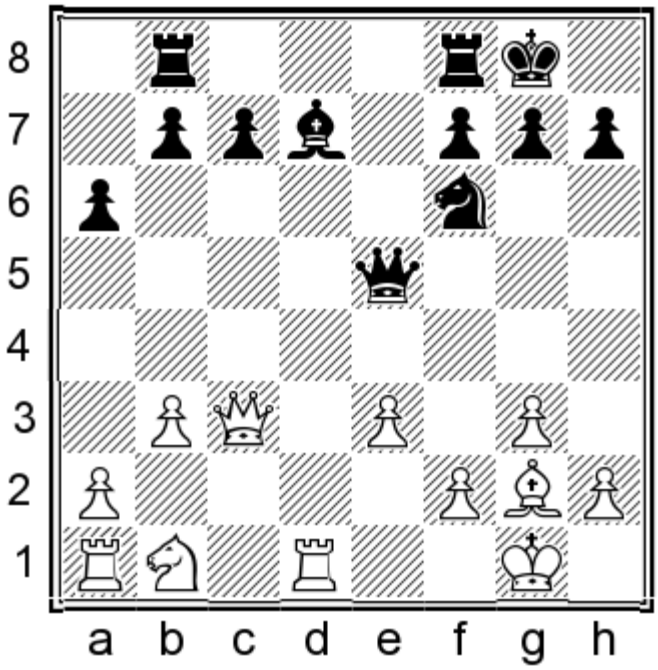
11.b3

This is the most popular and natural move.

11.♘bd2 is Avrukh's recommendation, and will be analysed after this game.

11...e5 12.♗b2 exd4

12...♕e7 has been played several times but White keeps an edge. Play continues 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♗xe5 ♕xe5 and now 16.♕c3!?N makes it hard for Black to equalize, for instance:



16...♕xc3 (after 16...♕h5 17.♘d2 c6 18.♘c4± Black's queenside is immobile and full of holes, whereas White can mobilize his e- and f-pawns any time he likes) 17.♘xc3± White has a typical advantage for such positions. Many continuations are possible, but I will just mention one sample line: 17...♖fd8 18.♖ac1 b6 19.e4 c5 20.f4 g6 21.h3 ♔g7

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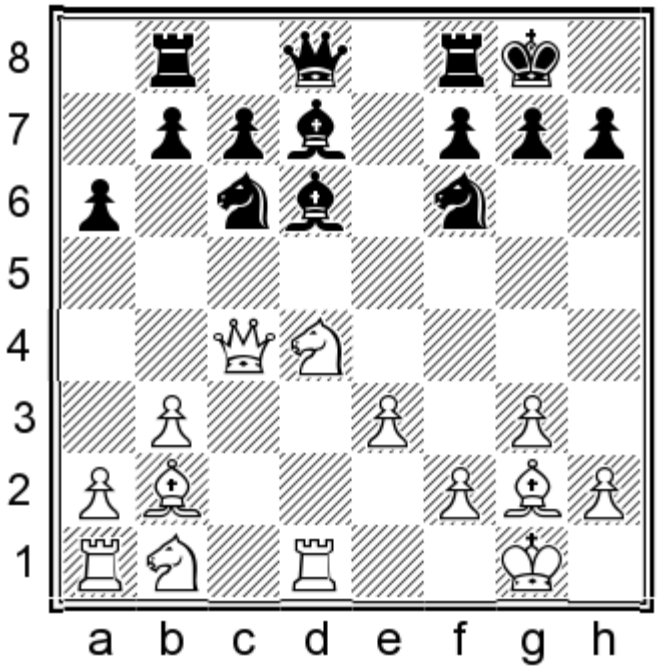
22.♔f2 ♗e6 23.g4 We have reached the position discussed in the introductory section on page 190, where I explained why Black has a hard time.

13.♘xd4



13...♘xd4 14.♗xd4

This is the usual recapture.

14.♖xd4?! ♗e5 15.♖d2 ♗xb2 16.♖xb2 ♗e6 gives Black comfortable equality.

14.♕xd4 ♖e8! 15.♘c3 Otherwise the bishop comes to e5 and Black is fine. 15...♗e5 16.♕c5 This was played in the high-level game Szczepanski – Keuter, corr. 2014. White skilfully induced several micro-weaknesses in the black position, and eventually won a finely played endgame. A really amazing game which shows how correspondence chess should be played when the engine insists that there is no life in the position and the game is equal. This is not our subject though! I think that Black should play:

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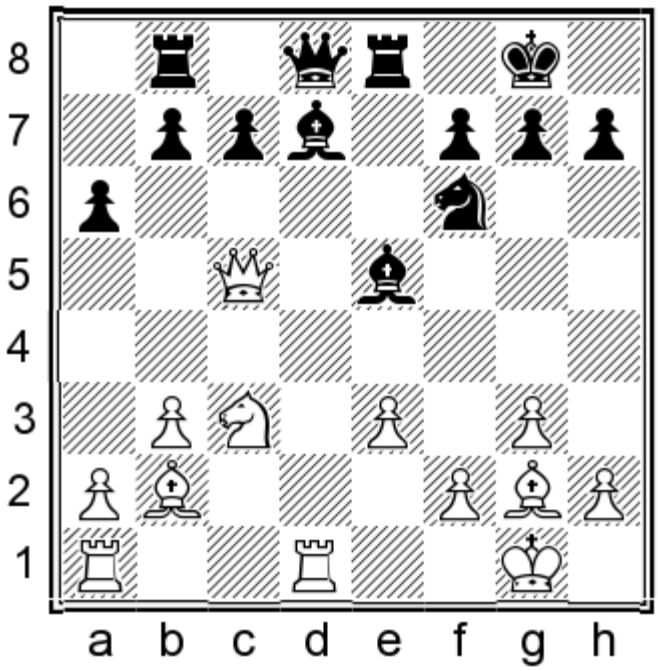
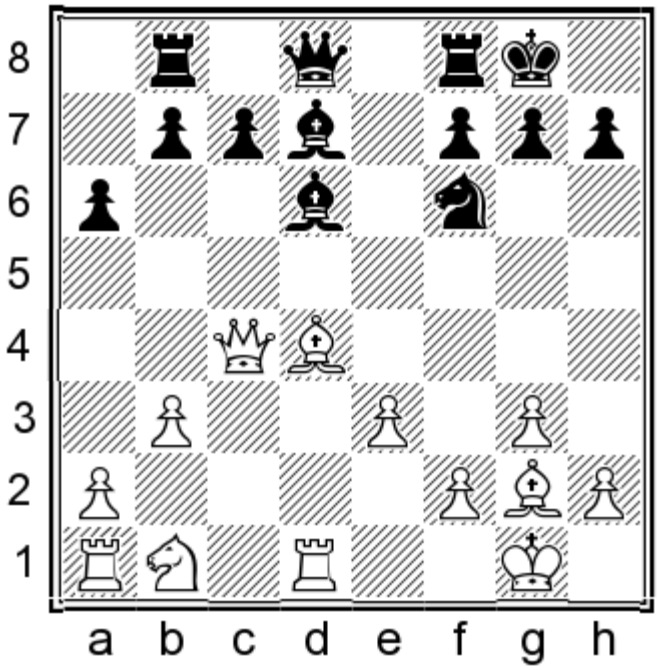


16...♗d6!N= Followed by ...♕e7 and ...h6. Black’s position is solid, flexible and easy enough to play for a human.



14...♕e7 15.♘d2 ♗e6 16.♕e2

Black is solid and essentially equal, as in the note above. The present correspondence game provides us with another impressive display of correct technique on both sides. I commented on the next few moves in the introductory section, so you may wish to refer back to page 190.

16...♗g4! 17.f3 ♗e6

By provoking f2-f3, Black took the sting out of the ♗xf6 idea, so White elects to advance his pawn majority instead.

18.e4

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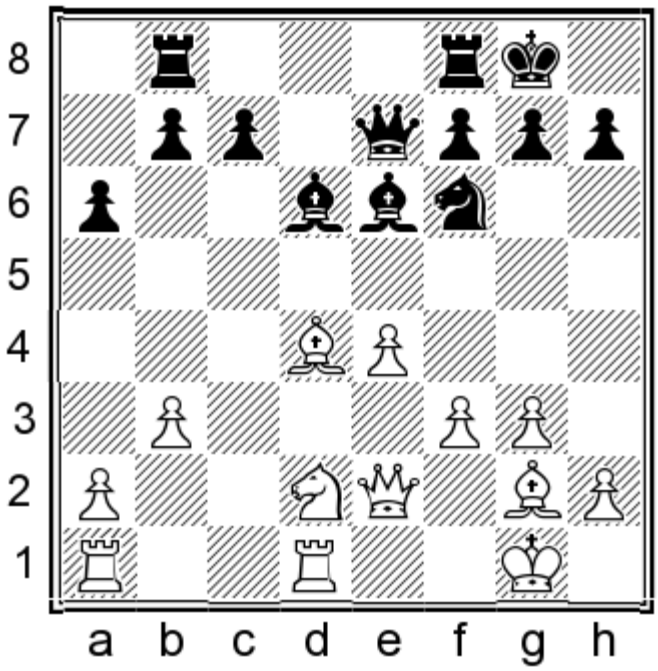

18...♗c5! 19.♘f1 ♗xd4† 20.♖xd4 ♖bd8

Black sensibly trades a pair of rooks before White can fully take over the d-file. See the Yates – Alekhine game on page 189 for a reminder of when can happen if an endgame is reached where the side with the extra central pawn controls the d-file.

21.♖ad1 ♖xd4 22.♖xd4 h5!

Black anticipates f3-f4, after which White would have to reckon on ideas such as ...h5-h4 and ...♘g4.

23.♕f2 ♖d8 24.♖xd8† ♕xd8 25.f4 ♘g4 26.♕d2 ♕xd2

A draw was agreed here. Black is not worse, as he can centralize his king and can play ...c5 to set his own majority in motion.

½–½

Boris Avrukh's *Grandmaster Repertoire* books are the 1.d4 Bible for many players. We will finish the chapter by analysing the line he recommends for White in *Volume 1A*.

GAME 51

Daniel Woodard – Miroslaw Jasinski

Correspondence 2015

Yet again, I have altered the move order to fit with our preferred sequence.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.e3 ♗d7 8.♕e2 ♗d6 9.♕xc4 0-0 10.♖d1 ♖b8 11.♘bd2

This was Avrukh's recommendation, following the example of Gelfand.

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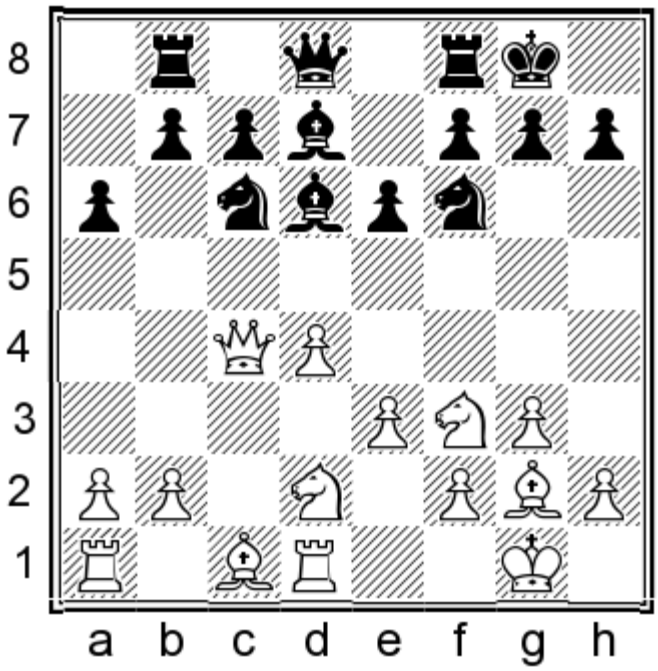

11...♕e7!

11...e5 looks natural and was played in Gelfand – Wang Hao, Tashkent 2012, but Avrukh shows that White has good chances for an advantage there.

The text move was discovered after a lot of trial and error at correspondence level, but it had not become popular enough to be caught on Avrukh's radar when his book came out in 2015.

12.b3

Preparing to develop the bishop is natural, and has been the most popular choice so far. However, Black is well placed to meet it.

The subtle 12.♕e2! (along with the related 12.♕c2!?) will be considered in the analysis section immediately following this game. Here are a few other ideas:

After studying the other options, it occurred to me that 12.a3!?N is an untested idea which is worth checking. A logical continuation is 12...e5 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 (14...♕xe5 is also playable, with the idea of bringing the queen to h5) 15.♕c2 c5!? Activating Black's pawn majority while making room for the bishop to retreat.

12.e4 e5 13.d5 (13.dxe5N 13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♕xe5 15.♕c2 ♗c6! [15...♕c5 is also okay for Black] and if 16.♘c4 ♗xe4= Black has no problems)

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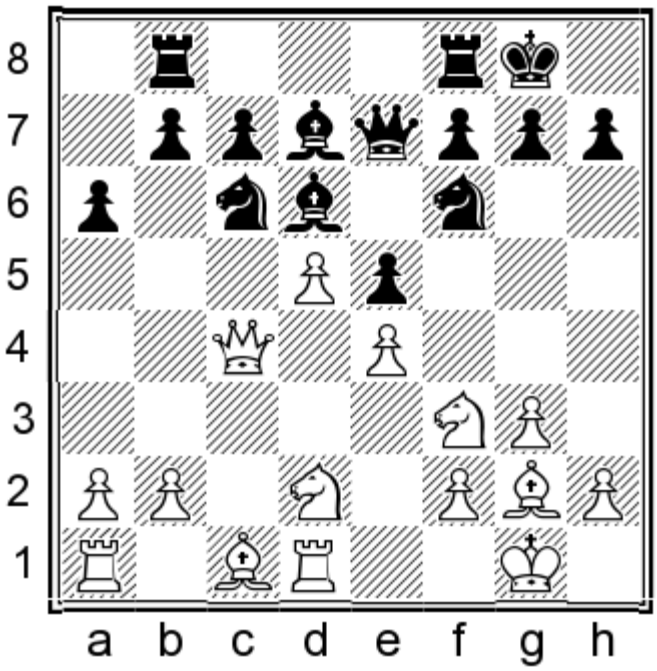
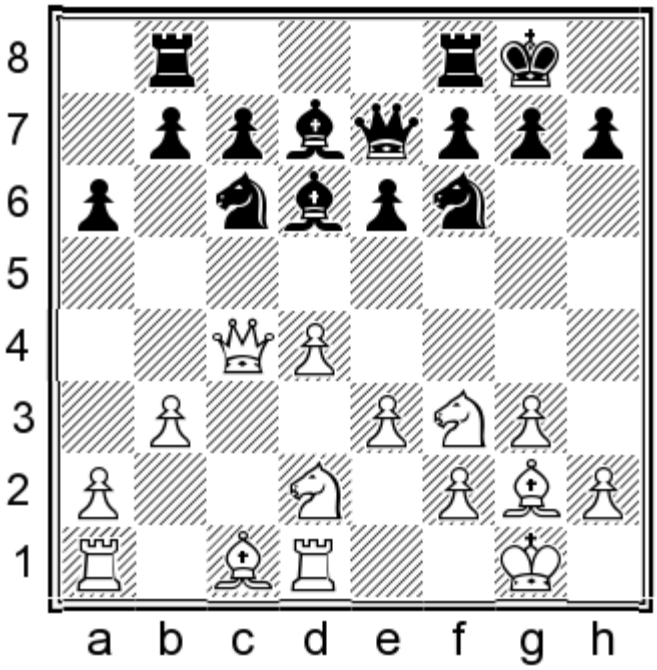


13...b5 14.♕e2 ♘a5 Planning ...♖fc8 and ...c5. 15.♘b3 This occurred in Marek – Keuter, corr. 2013, and now I like the ambitious 15...♘b7!?, planning ...a5-a4 and, at the right moment, ...c6.



12...e5! 13.♗b2

In the similar position with White's b-pawn on b2 and Black's queen on d8, Avrukh showed a route to an advantage for White after exchanging on e5. In this position, however, 13.dxe5?! ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 forces White to waste a tempo moving his rook, and 15.♖b1 ♖fd8! gives Black a pleasant game.

13...e4!

So far this move has only been tested in correspondence games, but it seems to offer Black easy equality.

14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.dxe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♕xe5 17.♘xe4 ♘xe4 18.♕xe4

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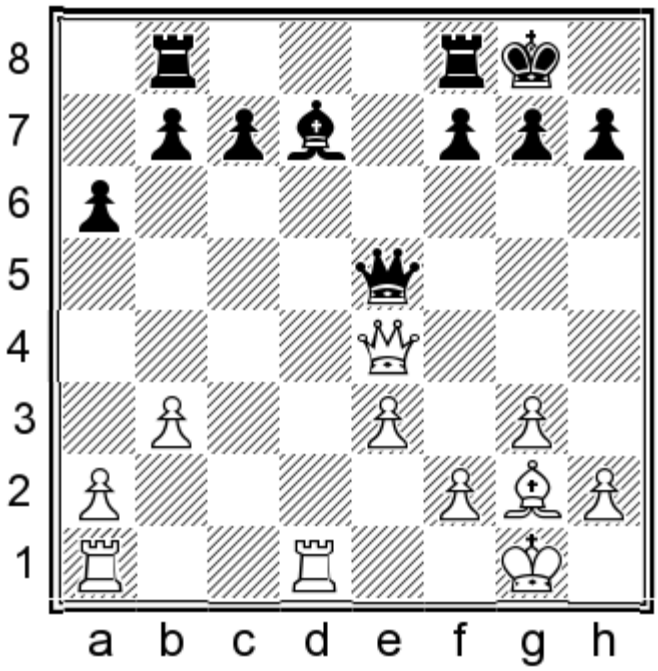
18.♗xe4 ♗e6 was agreed drawn in Cumming – Borisovs, corr. 2015.

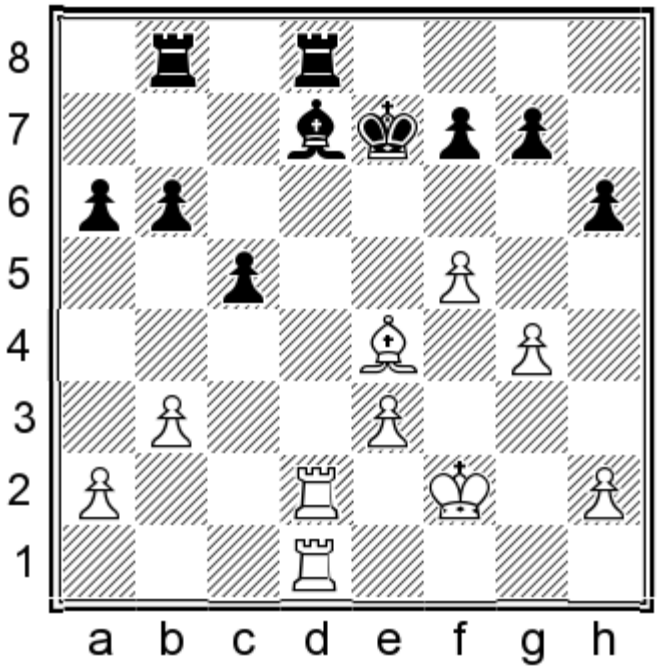


18...♕xe4 19.♗xe4 ♖fd8!?

19...♗e6 20.♖d4 c6 21.♖ad1 was agreed drawn in Vivante-Sowter – Eldridge, corr. 2015, as well as Ruggeri Laderchi – Pietrzak, corr. 2016. The position is equal but it is by no means dead; if Black wanted to play for a win in a practical game, then 21...♖fc8! would be a good choice to support the advance of the queenside pawns, while also making room for the king to come to the centre.

20.♖d2 ♔f8 21.♖ad1 ♔e7 22.f4 h6 23.♔f2 c5 24.f5 b6 25.g4

This is the kind of position which is great to test in training games.



25...♗b5

One of my training games at the club continued 25...♗e8!? 26.h4?! (26.♗d5 would keep things balanced)

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26...♖xd2† 27.♖xd2 ♖d8 28.♖xd8 ♔xd8 29.♔f3 ♔c7 30.♔f4 ♔d6 31.♗b7 ♗b5 32.e4 f6! and Black was pushing hard for the win, with ...c4 coming up next.

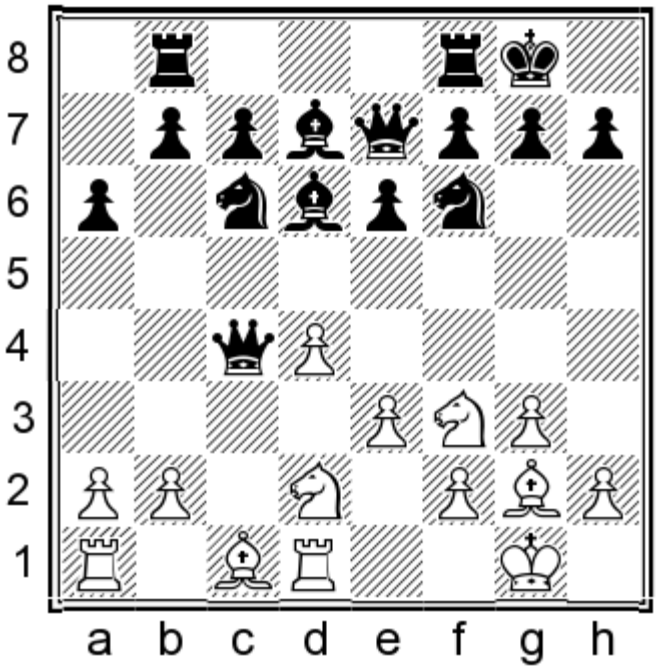
26.♗d5 ♖bc8 27.e4 ♗c6 28.♔e3 ♗xd5 29.♖xd5 ♖xd5 30.♖xd5 c4 31.♔d2

½–½

In the final section of the chapter, I will show you how to meet what may be White's two most theoretically challenging ways of handling this line.

Two Crafty Queen Moves: 12.♕c2!? and 12.♕e2!

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6 7.e3 ♗d7 8.♕e2 ♗d6 9.♕xc4 0-0 10.♖d1 ♖b8 11.♘bd2 ♕e7!



12.♕e2!

I think that this is White's best chance to get anything in this line. The idea is to put the knight on c4 as quickly as possible.

12.♕c2!?

Just when I thought I had finished my work on the Catalan, this brand new idea was used against GM Mads Andersen, one of the Danish players who I second. Mads remembered the solution after 12.♕e2 and played similarly, but he fell right into White's positional trap. Black should seek to annoy the queen with:

12...♘b4!

The game continued: 12...e5?! 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 (Black can minimize his disadvantage with 13...♗xe5!? 14.♘c4 ♗g4 15.h3 ♗h5 16.♗d2 ♖fd8 17.♗e1 ♗g6 18.♕b3 ♗d6 19.♘xd6 ♖xd6 20.♖xd6 ♕xd6 21.♗c3 ♘e4) 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♘c4± In Rasmussen – M. Andersen, Copenhagen 2017, White had a better version of the 12.♕e2 line as Black did not have the options of ...♗a4 to hit the rook, or ...♗b5 to pin the knight.

13.♕b3 ♕e8 14.a4 ♗c6

14...b5!? 15.axb5 ♖xb5 might be interesting but the text move seems more straightforward.

15.♘c4 ♗d5!

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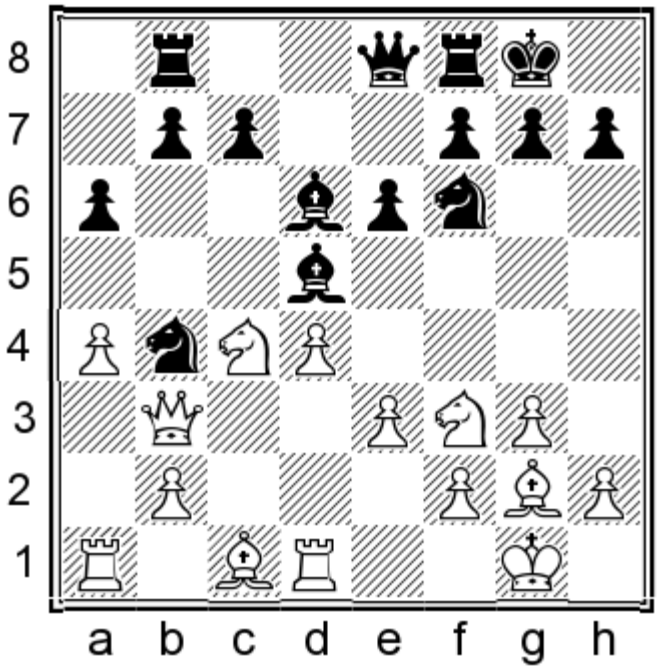
Black can maintain the equilibrium in all variations. For example:

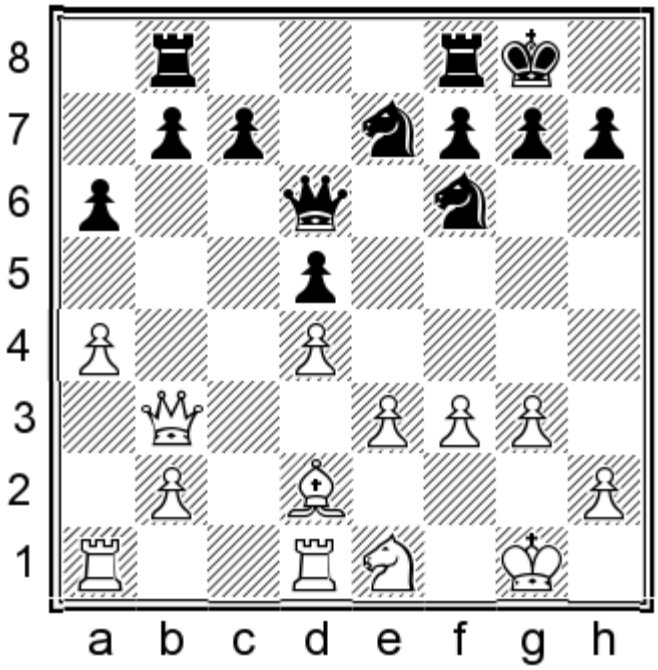


16.♘e1

16.♗d2 ♘c6 17.♘e1 ♘e4=

16...♕c6! 17.♗xd5 exd5! 18.♘xd6 ♕xd6 19.♗d2 ♘c6 20.f3 ♘e7

Black has a decent version of a Carlsbad structure, with good prospects of counterplay in the centre and on the kingside. Here are a few brief lines:



21.♗b4

21.♘d3 ♖fe8 22.♖e1 c6 23.♕c2 h5!?⇄

21...♕d8 22.♘d3 ♖e8 23.♖ac1 c6=

Intending ...♘f5.

12...e5

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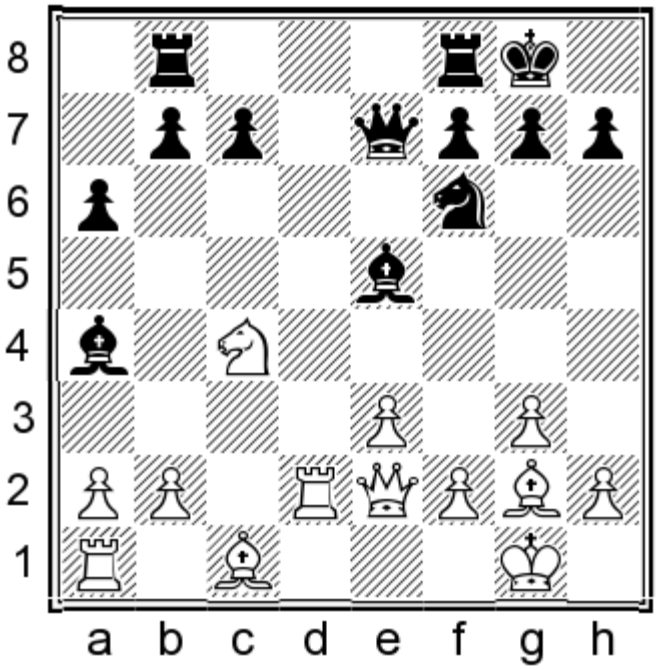
Black has nothing better, so he should free his position now before ♘c4 comes.

13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♘c4

Now Black will have to exchange one of his bishops for the enemy knight. It remains to be seen which bishop will be traded; first of all, we should take the opportunity to disrupt White's coordination with:

15...♗a4! 16.♖d2

16.♖e1 leaves the d-file to Black after 16...♗b5 17.a4 ♗xc4 18.♕xc4 ♖fd8 and now 19.♖b1 c6 (or even 19...b5!?) 20.b4 ♘d5 gives Black equal prospects.



16...♖fd8!

This move has been tested in two high-level correspondence games, where Black showed that he had enough activity to make up for the loss of the bishop pair.

17.♖xd8†!?N

This has not yet been tested, but it seems like the most critical move to consider. I checked two alternatives:

17.♘xe5N 17...♕xe5 18.♖b1

White should not be lured by the hanging status of the b7-pawn. 18.♖xd8† ♖xd8 19.♗xb7? loses to the fantastic move 19...♕a5!!, when Black has a huge attack with ...♗b5 and ...♕e1† coming.

18...♘e4!

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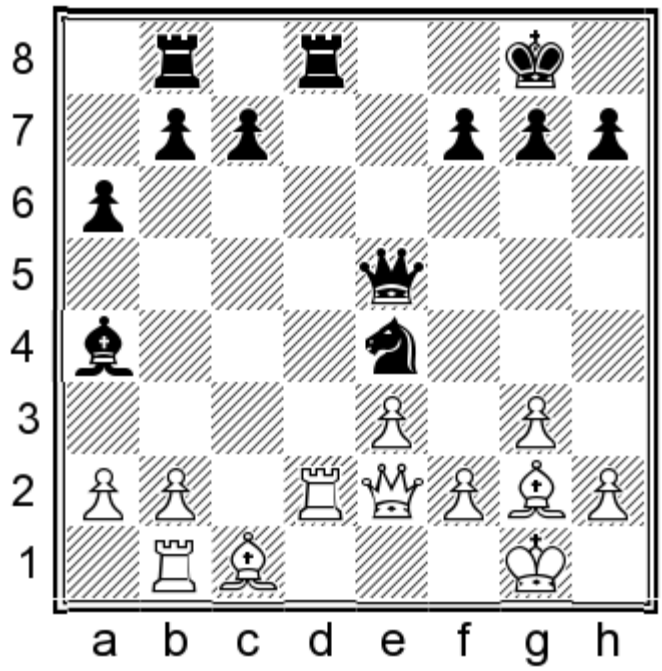


19.♖d4

White must sacrifice a pawn, otherwise he will be in serious trouble.

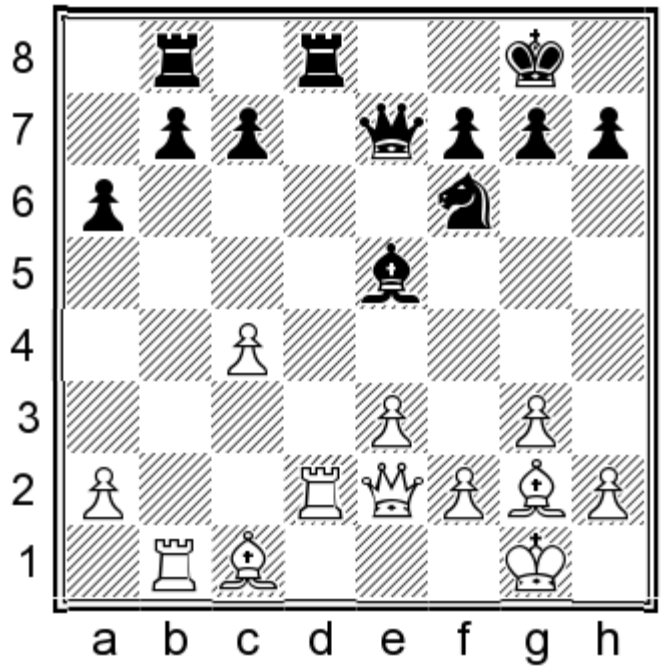
19...♖xd4 20.exd4 ♕xd4 21.♗e3 ♕d5 22.♖c1 ♗c6

White has some compensation but Black is at least equal.

The two correspondence games continued:

17.♖b1 ♗b5! 18.b3 ♗xc4 19.bxc4!?

19.♕xc4 c6!⇄ is fine for Black, once you realize what his plans will be. The knight will go to e8 and later to d6 or c7. At some point Black will improve his kingside with ...g6 and ...h5. The pawns on the light squares restrict White's bishop, and White will have to consider the possibility of ...h5-h4 at every turn.



19...b6 20.♖b3

White also failed to make any headway in a later game: 20.♕d1 ♖xd2 21.♗xd2 a5 22.♕c2 ♘d7 23.♗d5 ♖d8

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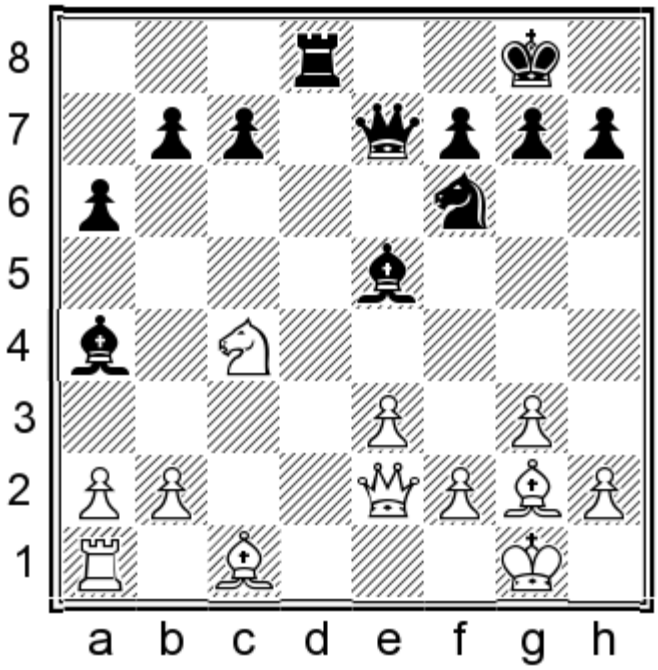
24.♔g2 ♘c5 and they agreed a draw ten moves later in Donnelly – Dmitriev, corr. 2016.

20...♖xd2 21.♕xd2 h5! 22.♗a3 ♖d8 23.♖d3 ♖xd3 24.♕xd3 ♕d7

White's bishop pair was balanced out by Black's better structure and the game was subsequently drawn in Zhak – Van der Hoeven, corr. 2010.

17...♖xd8



18.♗xb7

This pawn grab needs to be examined but it's a risky venture for White, as the initiative passes to Black's hands. The following analysis is a joint effort by Jacob Aagaard and me, as we looked at this line together a while ago.

18.♗d2 is a more prudent choice, but after 18...♗b5 19.♗e1 ♕e6 20.♖c1 c6= Black has no problems.

18...h5!

18...c6? does not work due to 19.♗xa6. Black can threaten to trap the enemy bishop with 18...♗b5? but here it runs into 19.a4!. Even though these ideas do not work immediately, it is worth making a mental note of them, as a small change in the position may render them much more effective. For the time being though, Black can simply advance his h-pawn to bring more pressure to bear on White's kingside, while asking White how he intends to coordinate his pieces.

19.♘xe5

19.♗d2? is refuted by 19...♗b5!, with the dual threats of ...c6 and ...♗xc4.

19.f4?! ♗xf4! is dangerous for White, although he can still survive with:

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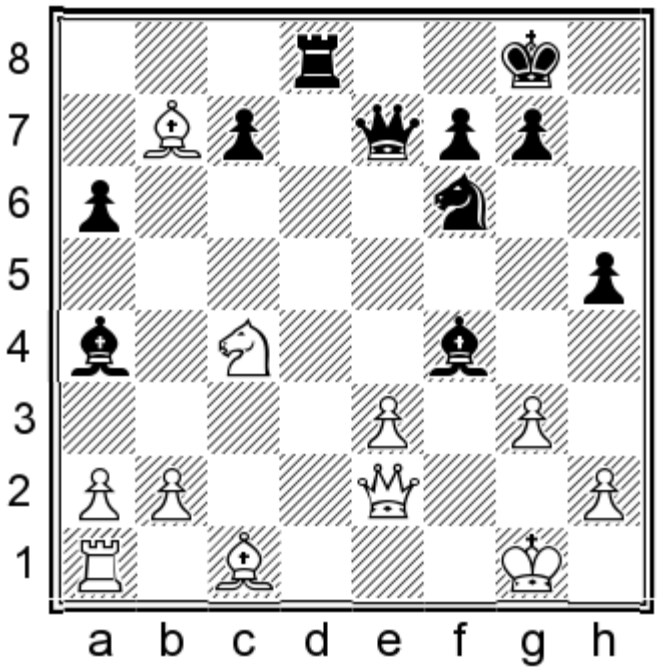


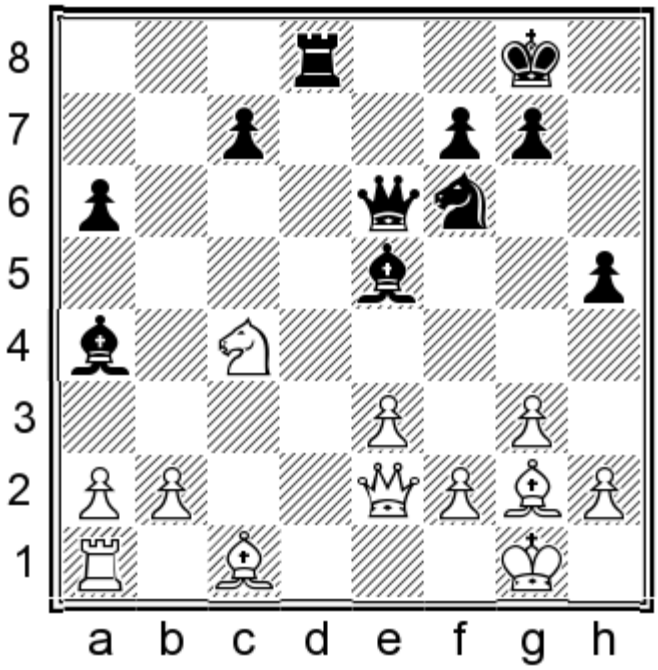
20.b3! (20.gxf4? loses to 20...♖d1† 21.♔g2 ♘g4 22.h3 ♕h4 and White has no defence against threats such as ...♖e1 and ...♗d7) 20...♗b5 21.gxf4 c6 22.♗b2 ♗xc4 23.bxc4 ♕xb7 24.♗xf6 gxf6 25.♕xh5 ♕b2 With a likely draw.

19.♗g2?!

Retreating the bishop looks natural but is a mistake due to:

19...♕e6!

Black has a huge initiative, as the following lines demonstrate.



20.♘xe5?

20.♘d2 is the only chance, although 20...h4 leaves White under considerable pressure.

20...♖d1† 21.♗f1 ♕xe5 22.e4 ♕d6 23.♗f4

23.e5 ♕d5 24.exf6 ♗b5! wins.

23...♖xa1! 24.♗xd6 ♗b5

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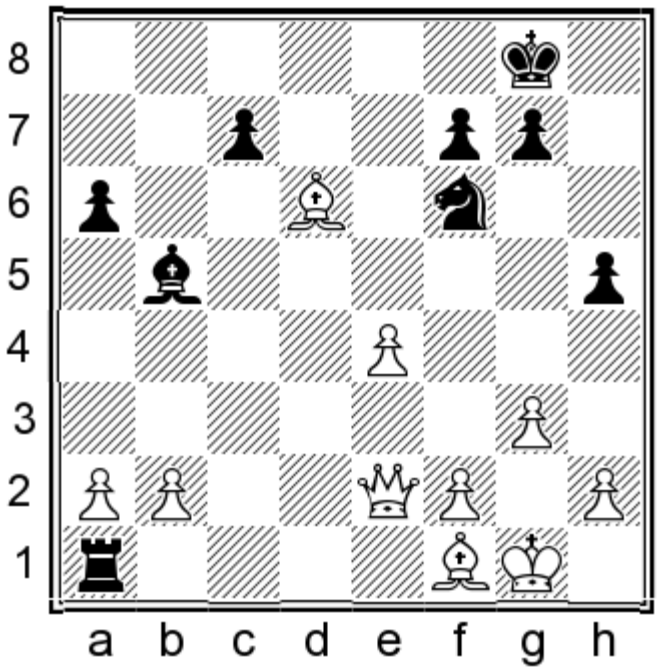

25.♕d2

Both 25.♕e3 ♘g4 and 25.♕c2 ♗xf1 26.♗f4 ♗d3† win easily for Black.

25.♕xb5 axb5 26.♗xc7 is the best try, but after 26...♘xe4 Black should eventually win the ending.

25...♘xe4 26.♕b4 ♖xf1† 27.♔g2 ♖xf2† 28.♔g1 ♖f1† 29.♔g2 ♘xd6–+

With rook, bishop and knight against a queen, Black is easily winning.

19...♕xe5 20.e4

20.♗d2?? loses trivially to 20...♕xb2, so the text move is White's only real chance to develop his queenside pieces.

20...♖d1† 21.♔g2 h4

Threatening the deadly ...h3†.

22.gxh4

22.b3?! h3† 23.♔xh3 ♖g1! 24.bxa4 ♕xa1∓ is nasty for White.

22...♘h5!?

This was my attempt to avoid the forced draw seen in the line below.

22...♕e6 equalizes immediately due to the following idea found by Jacob: 23.b3 ♖e1! 24.♕xe1 (White can hardly avoid the draw, as 24.♕f3? ♗b5 is losing for him) 24...♕g4†=

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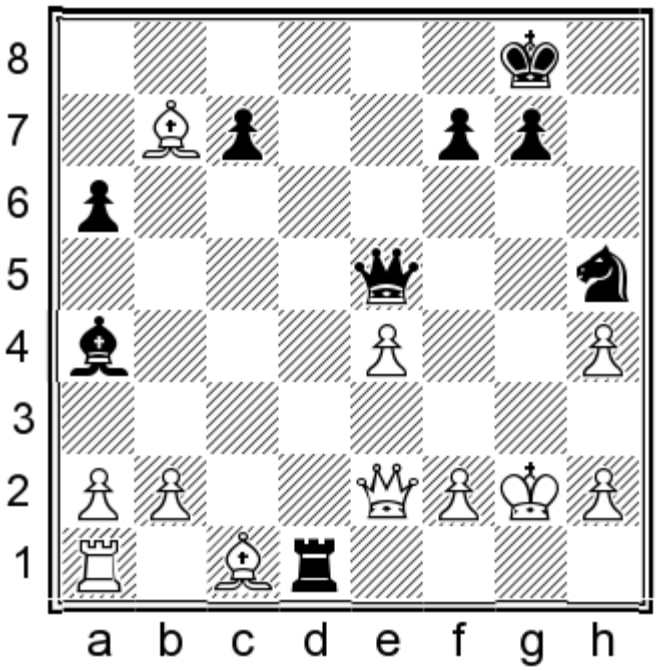

23.♕g4!

Another forced move, as Black was threatening ...♖xc1 followed by ...♘f4†, winning the queen.

23...g6!?

Now Black wants to play ...♕b5 with a huge attack.

23...♖xc1?? 24.♖xc1 ♘f4† 25.♔h1 gets nowhere for Black.

23...♕a5!? is another idea, intending to get closer to the king via e1, but again it should be a draw with best play.

24.♗d5!

White needs to cut the path of the queen, but Black is ready with a strong sacrifice:

24...♖xd5! 25.exd5 ♕xd5† 26.f3 ♗d7

Black has a big initiative although, as often happens, the computer defends. Here are a few sample lines:

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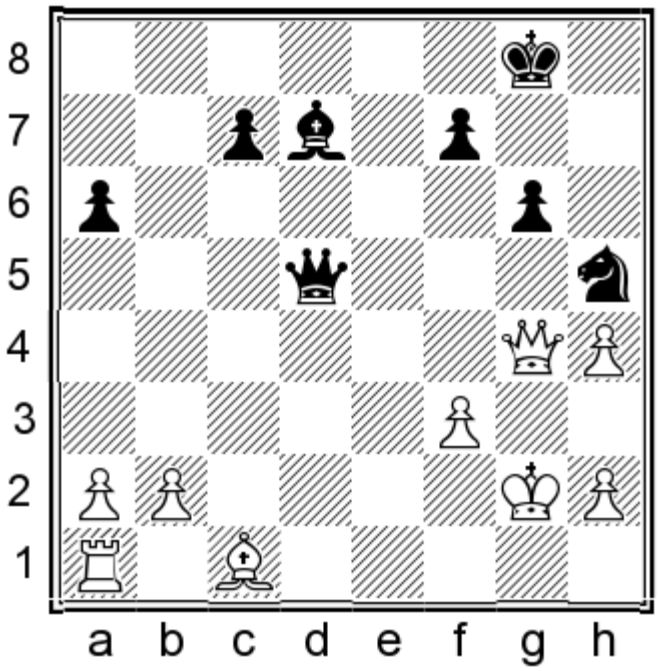
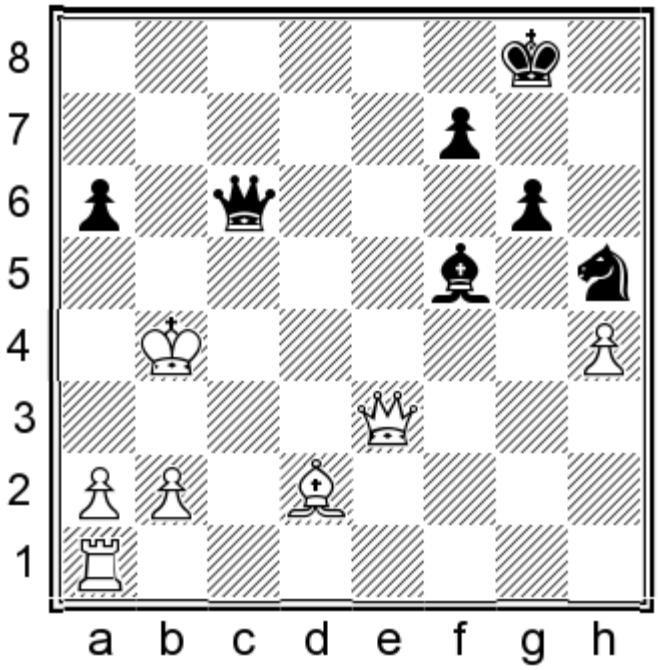


27.♕b4 ♗h3† 28.♔f2 ♕e5 29.♗d2

29.f4? ♕d5 leaves White too weak on the light squares.

29...♕xh2† 30.♔e3 c5 31.♕xc5 ♕f4† 32.♔d3 ♕xf3† 33.♕e3 ♗f5† 34.♔c3 ♕c6† 35.♔b4

Despite the white king's exposed position, the limited material and the offside knight on h5 mean that Black has no more than a draw.



35...♕d6† 36.♔a5 ♕d7 37.♔b4 ♕d6† 38.♔b3 ♗e6† 39.♔c2 ♗f5† 40.♔b3 ♗e6†=

Conclusion

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This chapter has dealt with two of White's most challenging ways of handling the Catalan against our set-up after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3 dxc4 5.♗g2 a6 6.0-0 ♘c6.

7.♗g5 ♗e7 8.e3 0-0 was the first major branch of the chapter. The line of analysis beginning with 9.♕e2!? ♘a5!N shows that there are still interesting paths which await practical testing. We then moved on to the more popular 9.♘bd2 e5!, when Games 48 and 49 show how Black can neutralize any White attempts to find an advantage.

7.e3 is the big main line these days. After 7...♗d7 8.♕e2 ♗d6! we looked at a few continuations, with 9.♕xc4 0-0 10.♖d1 ♖b8 being critical. Both 11.b3 e5 and 11.♘bd2 ♕e7! seem good enough to equalize, but it is worth familiarizing yourself with the relevant correspondence games and accompanying analysis as they contain some important nuances for both sides.

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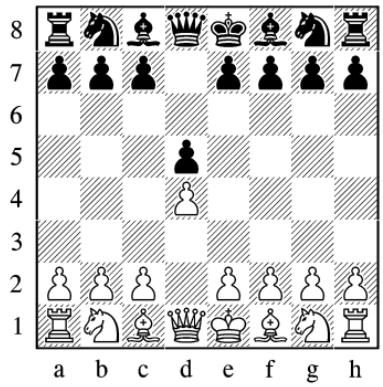
Chapter 6a



Introduction to d-pawn Systems

The next two chapters will present a repertoire against an assortment of d-pawn openings. A few years ago, I might have remarked that this bunch of opening systems are popular at club level but, due to their objective strength being nothing special, they represent no challenge whatsoever to the devoted analyst. How times have changed! Especially in the London System, it seems that barely a day goes past without the biggest brains in the chess world discovering some new idea. Even lesser systems like the Colle have found their way into the repertoires of Kramnik and Carlsen, the latter even going so far as to play the Colle in one game in his recent World Championship match against Karjakin. Such occurrences would have been almost unthinkable some years ago, but nowadays they are nothing out of the ordinary. As Anish Giri put it when Karjakin began an important game in the Moscow Candidates against Anand with the moves 1.♘f3 d5 2.e3: “Chess has changed – deal with it!”

Before we move on to discussing plans and strategic considerations, let me say something about move orders. Nowadays, White has discovered the most accurate move orders to enter his desired system, such as 2.♗f4 for the London and 3.c3!? for the Torre. However, in order to avoid making things unnecessarily complicated, I decided not to bother trying to avoid these systems with special move orders, or to try to refute a marginally inaccurate move order. My attitude is: “Do you really want to play like that? OK then...”

1.d4 d5

Chapter 6b will deal with four systems, with a few commonalities: none of them involve an early ♘f3, and all of them tend towards an attacking game, or at least a complicated battle. The systems are:

- ► **2.♗g5** (the Pseudo-Trompowsky)
- ► **2.e4** (the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit)
- ► **2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5** (the Veresov) and **3.♗f4** (the Jobava System)

These systems are all pretty distinct and many of the lines are rather concrete, so they will not be discussed in this introduction.

Chapter 6c will then discuss the following systems:

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► **2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3** (the Fianchetto System)
► **2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5 5.c3** (the Colle-Koltanowski) and 5.b3 (the Colle-Zukertort)
► **2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c3** (or **3.♗g5**) **3...e6 4.♗g5** (the Torre)
► **2.♗f4** (the London System)

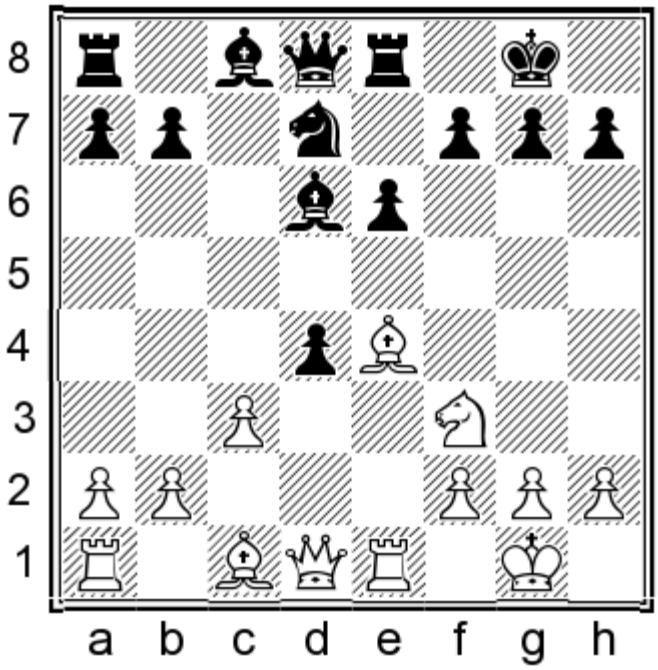
The Fianchetto System has its own character with the bishop on g2, but the rest of these set-ups have one significant commonality. I will show you what I consider the most dangerous aspect of White's position, before showing how I intend to deal with it.

The Powerful Bishop

The Colle-Koltanowski, Colle-Zukertort, Torre and London systems all share, in the broader sense, a common strategic goal. White doesn't try to dominate the centre with his pawns; rather, he wants to keep the d4-point stable so that he can think about building up on the kingside without fearing a counterattack. White's attacking hopes are based on his excellent light-squared bishop, which is the best minor piece on the board. Let me show you a famous example to demonstrate the power of this piece.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 c5 4.c3 e6 5.♗d3 ♗d6 6.♘bd2 ♘bd7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♖e1 ♖e8 9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♗xe4 cxd4

We stand behind the shoulders of Edgar Colle, after whom this opening system is named.



12.♗xh7†! ♔xh7 13.♘g5† ♔g6?

If you want, you can join the pack of famous analysts (including Vukovic, Fine, Edwards, Nunn, Lane and the list goes on...) who have tried to figure out if Black can defend after 13...♔g8! 14.♕h5 ♕f6! 15.♕h7† ♔f8 16.♘e4 ♕e5!. The critical variation is 17.f4! ♕d5 18.c4 ♕c6 followed by either 19.f5!? or 19.♕h8†!?. In both cases White has a big initiative, but most analysts agree that Black can defend.

14.h4! ♖h8

Stopping the terrible threat of h4-h5†, but White has a beautiful way to conclude the attack.

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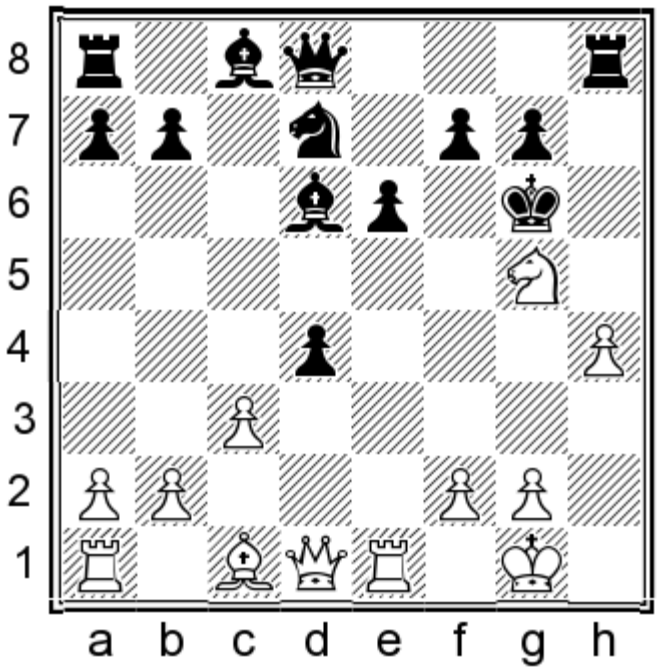

15.♖xe6†!! ♘f6

15...fxe6 16.♕d3† leads to a quick mate.

16.h5†! ♔h6

16...♖xh5 17.♕d3† ♔h6 18.♘xf7 is mate.

17.♖xd6 ♕a5 18.♘xf7† ♔h7 19.♘g5† ♔g8 20.♕b3†

1–0

Black resigned in Colle – O'Hanlon, Nice 1930. Let's see another example, taken from another of these d-pawn systems.

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.♘f3 e6 4.e3 ♗e7 5.♗d3 0-0 6.♘bd2 ♘bd7 7.♘e5 c5 8.c3

A similar scenario: the centre is stable and the d3-bishop is excellent, so things already don't look good for Black.

8...♘xe5 9.dxe5 ♘e8 10.h4! f6

10...f5 is more prudent, but White still has a strong attack after 11.g4.

11.♘f3 ♗d7?

11...fxe5 was mandatory to allow the knight to return to f6, but 12.♘xe5 leaves White with a clear plus. The text move allows a thematic sacrifice.

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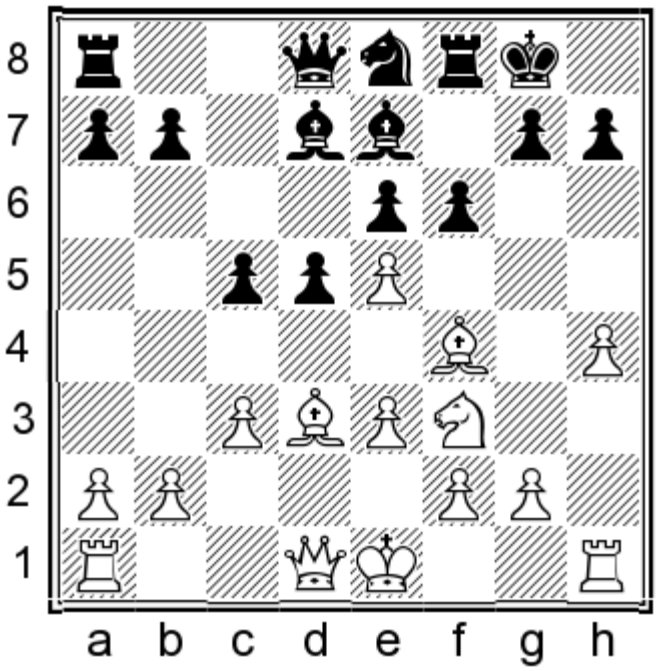
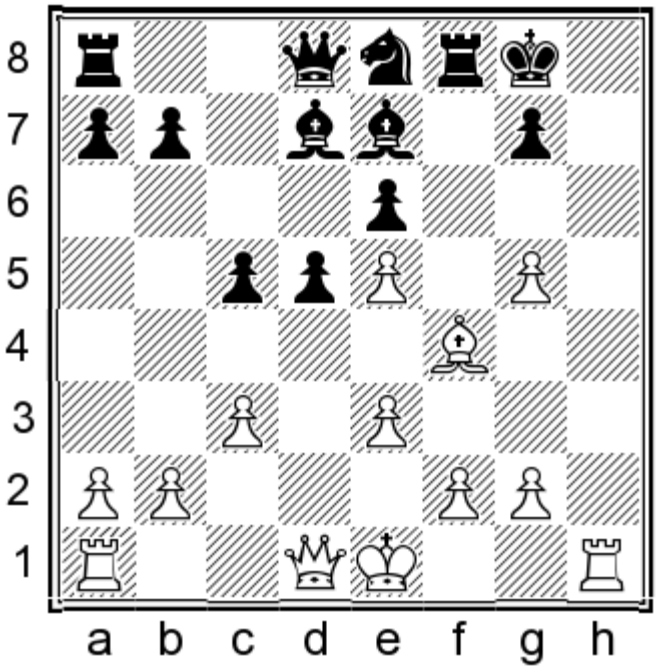


12.♗xh7†!

12.♘g5! is also strong.

12...♔xh7 13.♘g5† fxg5? 14.hxg5† ♔g8



15.♖h8†!

15.♕h5 led to a dangerous attack in Vasilev – Hrisostomidis, Plovdiv 2010, but the text move simply forces mate.

15...♔xh8 16.♕h5† ♔g8 17.g6 ♘f6 18.exf6 ♖xf6 19.♕h7† ♔f8 20.♕h8#

Taimanov's Plan

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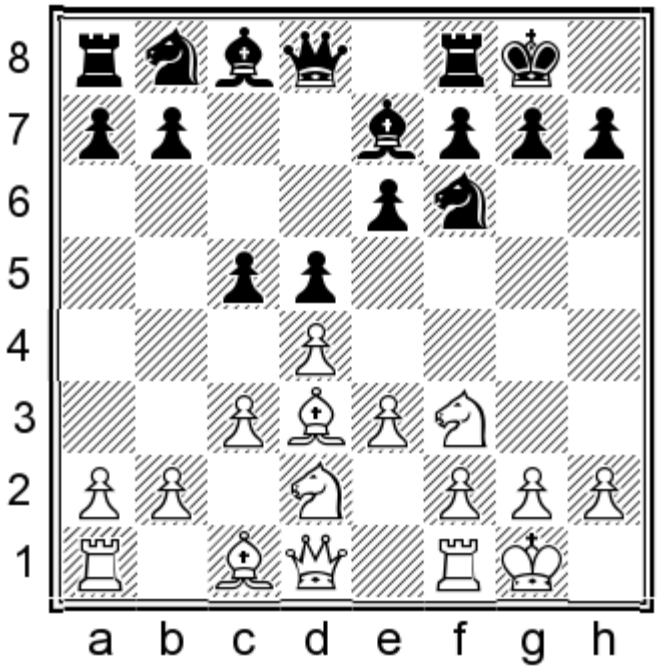
The realization that White's strongest piece is his light-squared bishop leads logically to the question: "What if Black manages to exchange it?" When researching this group of systems, I realized that the great Mark Taimanov consistently tried to carry out this exchange when facing the d-pawn openings. Take the Colle-Koltanowski for example:

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5 5.c3 ♗e7 6.♘bd2 0-0 7.0-0



7...b6!

Many players would automatically develop the knight to c6 in the early stages, but in fact this piece has real value on b8, where it supports our intended bishop exchange.

8.♕e2

8.e4 ♗a6! occurred in Viner – Taimanov, Biel 1994; I have given a few more moves of the game in the theoretical section on page 271.

8...a5!

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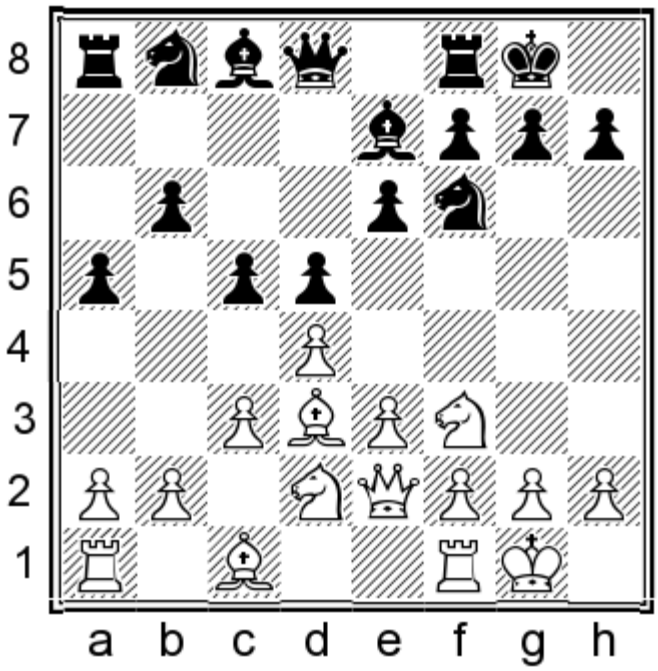

Insisting on ...♗a6. The continuation of Limberg – Taimanov, Rowy 2000, can be found on page 272.

A Nuance in the London System

Having a clear plan of exchanging bishops on a6 certainly gives us a useful head start when it comes to dealing with the d-pawn systems. Things are not always that simple though. When we study the specific details, we see new challenges begin to emerge, such as the following.

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.♘f3 e6 4.e3 c5 5.c3 ♗e7 6.♘bd2 0-0 7.♗d3 b6

Black's position is exactly the same as in the Taimanov games above, while the only difference in White's position is that ♗c1-f4 has been played instead of 0-0. So what? There's no reason why Black can't carry out exactly the same plan... is there?

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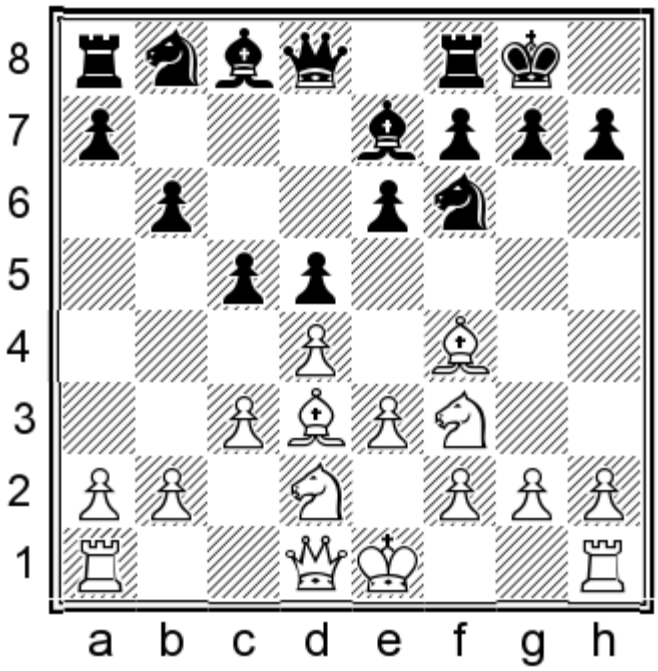

8.♘e5! ♗a6 9.♗c2!

It turns out that White can profit from not having castled.

9...♕c8

This position occurred in the fairly recent encounter Skoberne – Volokitin, Bled 2016, but now the Slovenian GM, who happens to be an expert on the London System, missed a strong and thematic idea:

10.g4!N

White's attack is rather powerful. So, does that mean we should abandon the Taimanov plan against the London System? Not so fast! It turns out that merely a small adjustment is needed.

The Ideal Set-Up

Let's imagine carrying out the same plan with our bishop on d6 instead of e7. (In Chapter 6c I will discuss some move order nuances of exactly how to get here; but for now, let's just focus on the target position.)

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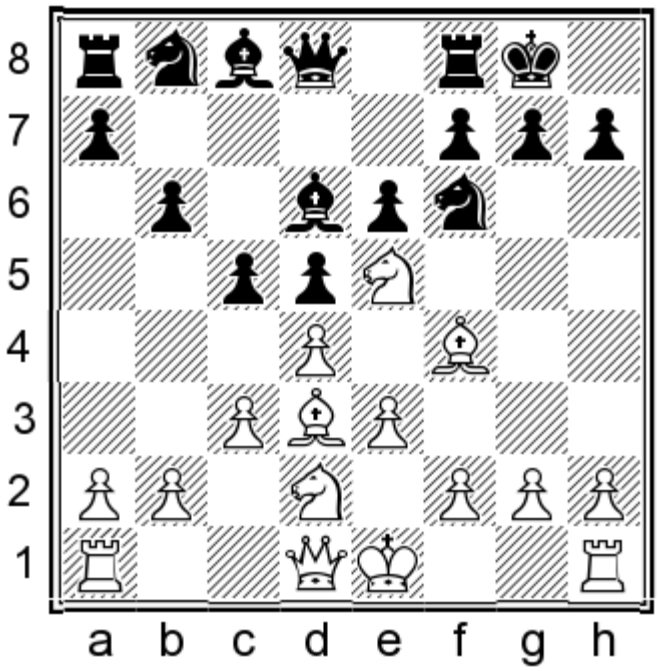

8...♗a6 9.♗c2

We know from the previous line that g4-g5 is a threat, but here Black is much quicker with his own counterplay.

9...♕c7!

Black is ready to put pressure on e5 with ...♘c6 or even ...♘fd7. In some lines, ...♖fc8 can be useful. Black is more than fine and the engines already prefer his position.

Summary

In the next two chapters we will deal with a range of systems, of which the Colle-Koltanowski, Colle-Zukertort, Torre and London all share certain elements in common: the d4-pawn will be well fortified, and a bishop on d3 may serve as the basis for a kingside attack. For that reason, our usual plan will be to avoid developing our knight to c6 too quickly and instead aim for ...b6 and ...♗a6 to trade off White's most dangerous piece. Most of the time we can carry out this plan after ...♗e7 and ...0-0. Against the London System, however, we should modify our set-up by putting the bishop on d6 instead; full details can be found in Chapter 6c.

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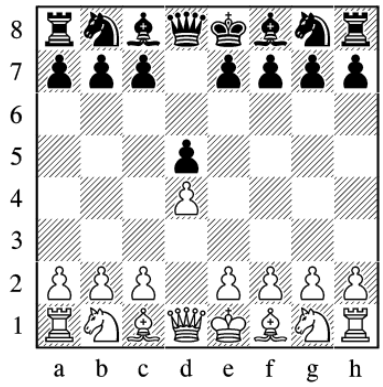
Chapter 6b



Theory of Move 2 Options

Pseudo-Trompowsky

1.d4 d5 2.♗g5!? page 248

The Blackmar-Diemer Gambit

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.f3 exf3 5.♘xf3 (5.♕xf3? page 249) **5...e6! 6.♗g5 ♗e7**

7.♕d2 page 250

7.♗d3 ♘bd7! page 252

8.0-0 Game 52, page 253

8.♕d2 page 255

8.♕e2 page 257

The Veresov

1.d4 d5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5 ♘bd7 (4.e3 page 259)

4.♘f3 page 259

4.♕d3 page 260

4.f3 c6 5.e4 dxe4 6.fxe4 e5! page 261

7.♘f3 page 261

7.dxe5 page 262

The Jobava System

1.d4 d5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗f4 page 264

This chapter will deal with a number of systems after 1.d4 d5 which do not involve 2.c4 or 2.♘f3.

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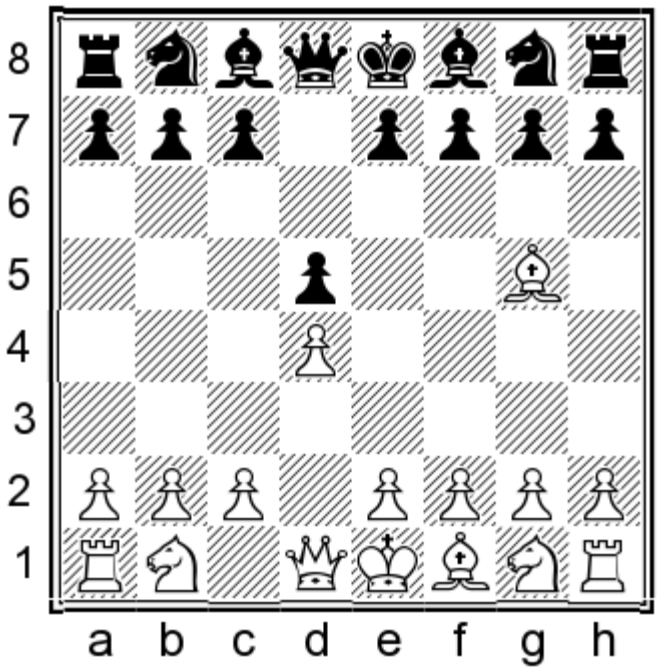
Pseudo-Trompowsky

1.d4 d5 2.♗g5!?

One thing I'd like to say about this move is that it is better than it looks! White is trying to provoke us into chasing the bishop by lunging forward with the kingside pawns, which leads to a complicated fight. However, I found a convenient way for us to steer the game back into our own territory.



2...h6!

In this book I have tried to be consistent and play a timely ...h6 whenever the enemy bishop appears on g5 – apart from the odd exception such as the Veresov, for reasons explained later in the chapter. Here it makes sense to prod the bishop straight away.

I used to be a fan of 2...f6!?, until I realized how strong the retreat 3.♗d2! really is. (The main point of 2...f6 is to meet 3.♗h4 with 3...♘h6!.) The main line goes 3...♘c6 4.e3 e5 5.♗b5 and, although it is too soon to claim an advantage for White, I think he has more chances to annoy us than he deserves after choosing this opening sideline.

3.♗h4 ♘d7!?

The advantage of this pragmatic move is that is enables Black to steer the game towards another part of our repertoire, eliminating the need to spend time learning about a rare sideline.

If you are determined to play as ambitiously as possible, then 3...c5 is undoubtedly the move to go for. Boris Avrukh provides superb coverage of this line in *Grandmaster Repertoire 11 – Beating 1.d4 Sidelines*; here I will just show one possible continuation for interested readers: 4.dxc5 g5! 5.♗g3 ♗g7 6.c3 ♘a6 7.e4 dxe4 8.♕xd8† ♔xd8 9.♗xa6 bxa6 10.f3

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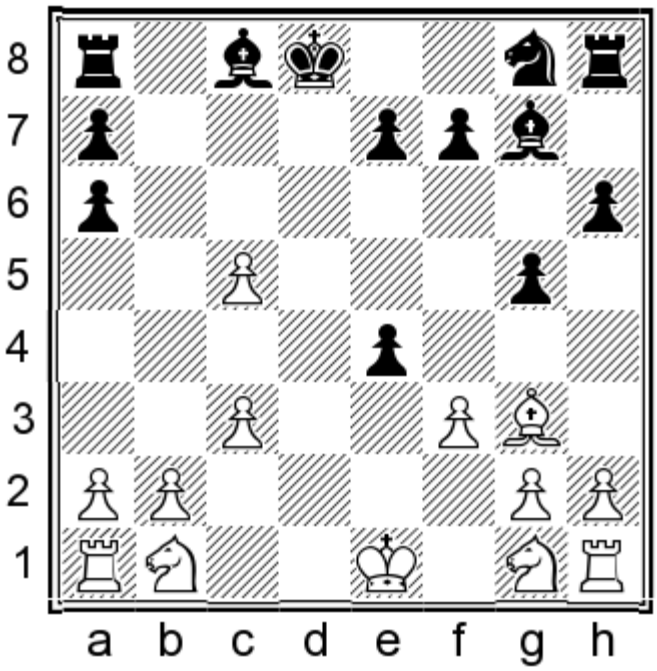
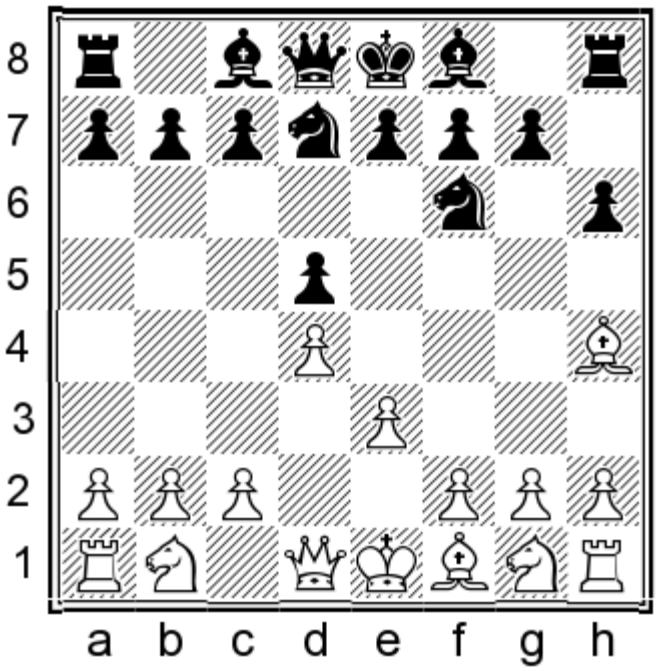


10...e3! 11.♘a3 f5 Avrukh recommended this as a novelty, and it was subsequently tested in one game. 12.0-0-0† ♔e8 13.f4 e5! 14.fxe5 f4 The players were still following Avrukh's analysis, and Black went on to win a nice game in Tamosaitis – Kazakovskiy, Lithuania 2016.

4.e3 ♘gf6

Our chosen move order virtually forces White to convert to a more mainstream opening.



5.c4

5.♘f3 e6 6.♗d3 c5 7.c3 ♗e7 8.♘bd2 b6 is a direct transposition to the Torre, as covered in the next chapter.

5...e6 6.♘c3 ♗e7

We have reached a normal Queen's Gambit Declined! Okay, we didn't refute White's opening – but believe me, if

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I knew about a refutation I would have mentioned it.

The Blackmar-Diemer Gambit

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.f3

This notorious gambit (which I will abbreviate to BDG from now on) sees White give up a pawn in return for a lead in development and an open f-file. The gambit is not fully sound, but it still requires careful handling. German IM Christoph Scheerer wrote a sizeable book on the BDG in 2011, containing some interesting suggestions which forced me to look more closely at certain lines.

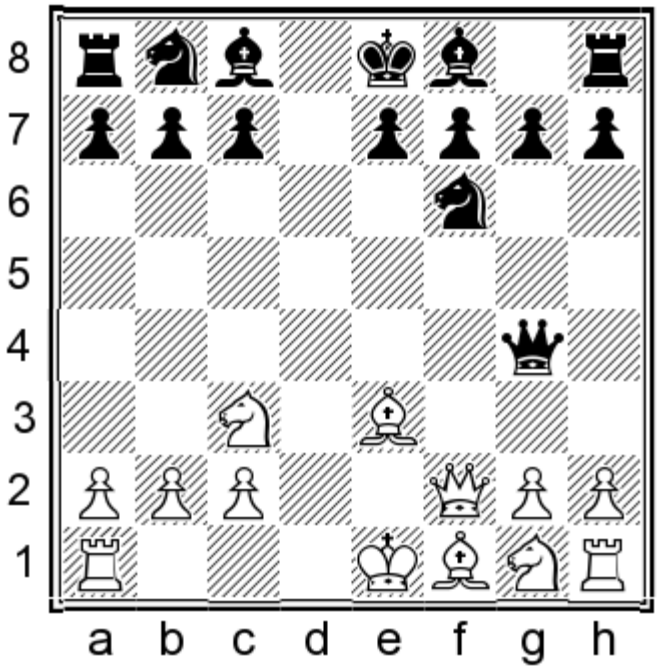
4...exf3 5.♘xf3

5.♕xf3?

This is known as the Ryder Gambit, but it can be considered refuted due to the following line.

5...♕xd4! 6.♗e3 ♕g4! 7.♕f2

Black has a few good continuations, the most convincing being:



7...♕f5! 8.♘f3

After 8.♕d2 e6 9.♘f3 ♗e7 10.♗d3 Black's queen finds safety on the queenside: 10...♕a5 11.0-0-0 ♘c6 Black has ideas of ...0-0 and ...♖d8, or ...♗b4, or ...♘d5 and ...♗f6. White is a long way from claiming compensation for his two missing pawns.

8...♘g4 9.♕d2 ♘xe3 10.♕xe3 e6 11.0-0-0 ♗e7

Black is obviously doing great. One instructive example continued:

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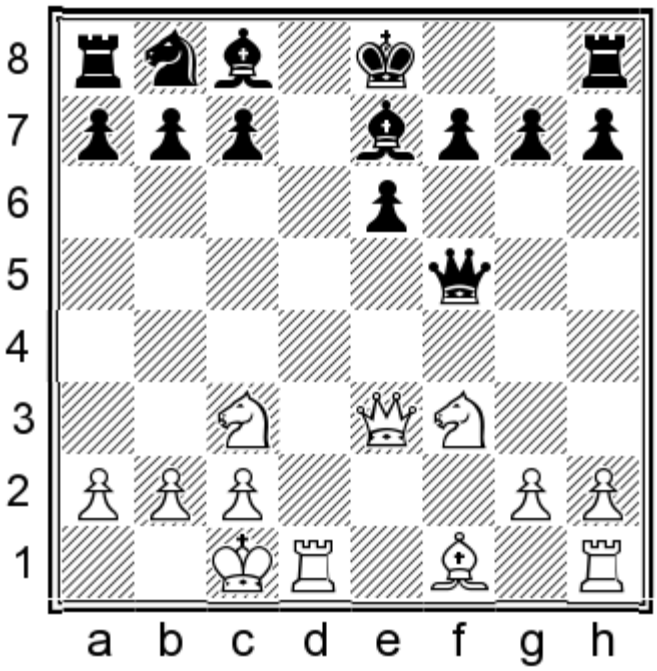
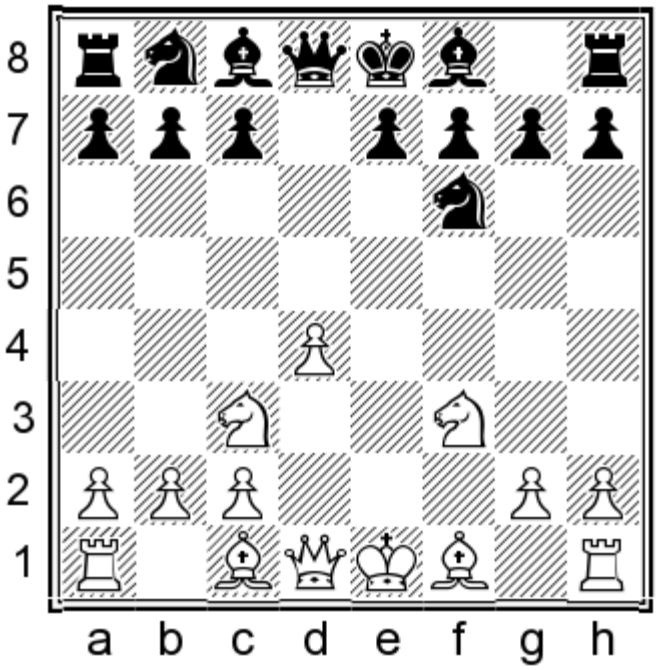


12.♗d3 ♕a5 13.♖hf1 0-0 14.h4 ♘d7 15.♘g5 ♘f6 16.♔b1 h6 17.♘ge4 ♘g4 18.♕h3 e5 19.♕g3 f5–+

Helman – Jan, corr. 2007.



5...e6!

Euwe's Defence is my favourite, as Black has a simple scheme of development in mind: ...♗e7, ...♘bd7 and ...c5, very much in the spirit of our QGD repertoire.

6.♗g5 ♗e7

Now White must make an important choice. One option is to prepare long castling; the other is to bring the bishop to d3 first.

7.♕d2

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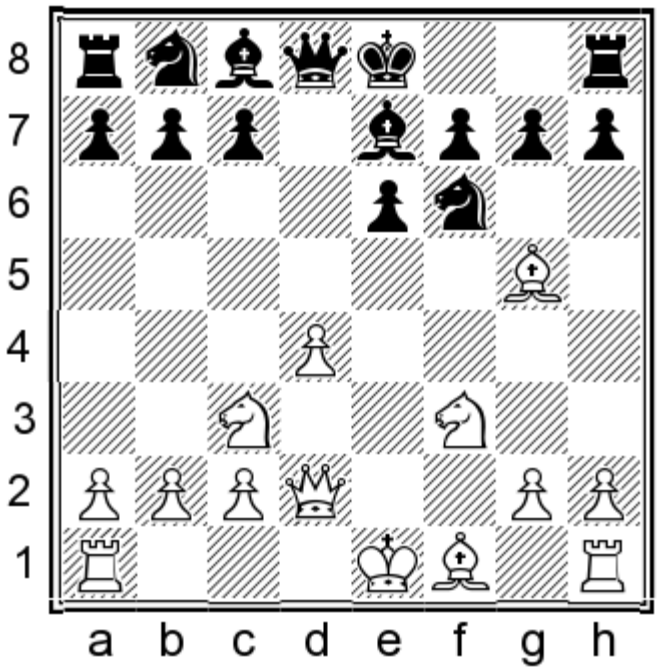

7...♘bd7!?

This move order is somewhat unusual but it has some significant practical advantages.

I have analysed the more popular 7...0-0 in considerable detail, when the main line continues 8.♗d3 c5 9.0-0-0 (Black also needs to be ready for 9.♕f4!?). With accurate play, Black's chances are superior here as well. However, the variations are more complicated, and this kind of situation with fluid piece play and opposite castling is exactly what Blackmar-Diemer players are hoping for.

Before moving on, let me quickly show you why I rejected 7...h6!?. The problem occurs after: 8.♗h4! (Black is better after 8.♗f4 a6! 9.♗d3 ♘c6 10.0-0-0 b5∓; or 8.♗xf6 ♗xf6 9.0-0-0 [9.♘e4 ♘d7∓] 9...♗g5!N 10.♘xg5 ♕xg5∓ and the queens come off) 8...♘e4! 9.♘xe4 ♗xh4† 10.g3 ♗e7 11.♗g2 White has a significant lead in development and it is not so easy to contain his initiative.

8.0-0-0

8.♗d3 is covered on page 255, via the move order 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕d2.

8...a6!

The concept of delaying castling is a serious attempt at a refutation of this line of the BDG. Moreover, it is also a good practical choice as it avoids giving White a clear target for his attack. This rare but clever move order is not mentioned in Scheerer's coverage of the 7.♕d2 line.

Please note that 8...c5?! is strongly met by 9.d5!.

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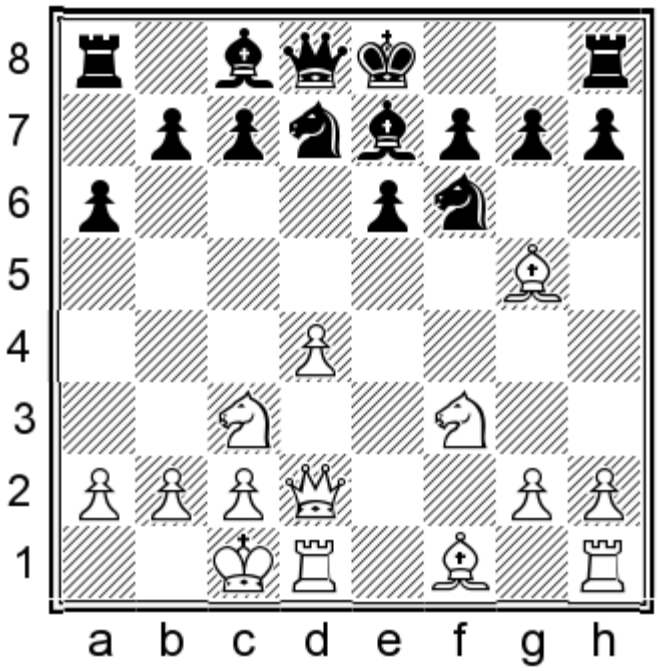


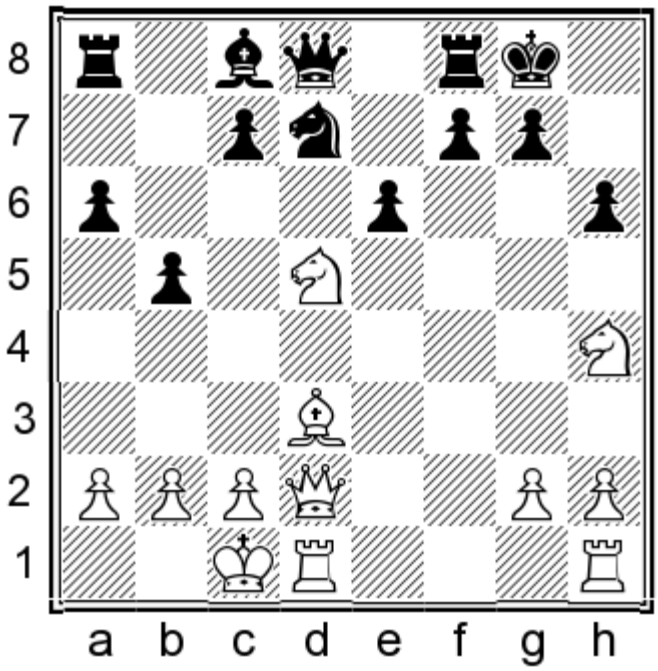
9.♗d3

9.d5?! has little point here in view of 9...♘b6! 10.dxe6 ♕xd2† 11.♖xd2 ♗xe6 12.♘d4 ♗d7∓ and White clearly does not have enough for the pawn.

9...h6 10.♗e3

This is the only move I found to be played at correspondence chess. Against most other continuations Black's plan remains the same.

10.♗h4 b5 11.d5!? is an interesting try but White plays only for equality, and still falls short after: 11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xh4 13.♘xh4 0-0! A nice trick, as White cannot save both knights. Play may continue:



14.♘g6 (14.♗e4 c6! also favours Black: 15.♘f4 ♕xh4 16.♗xc6 ♖b8 17.♗xd7 ♖d8 18.g3 ♕e7 19.♕d6 ♕xd6 20.♖xd6 ♖xd7 21.♖hd1 ♖xd6 22.♖xd6 ♔f8∓) 14...fxg6 15.♘f4 ♘e5 16.♗e4 ♕xd2† 17.♖xd2 ♖b8 18.♘xg6 ♘xg6 19.♗xg6

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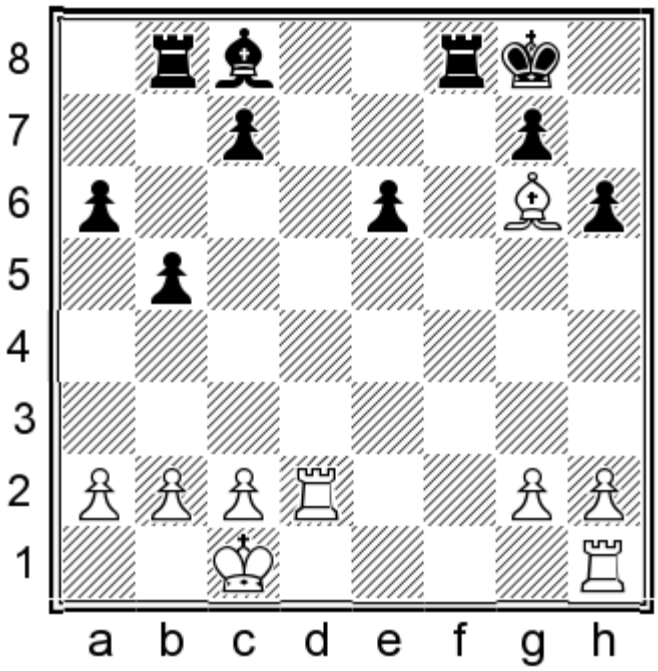
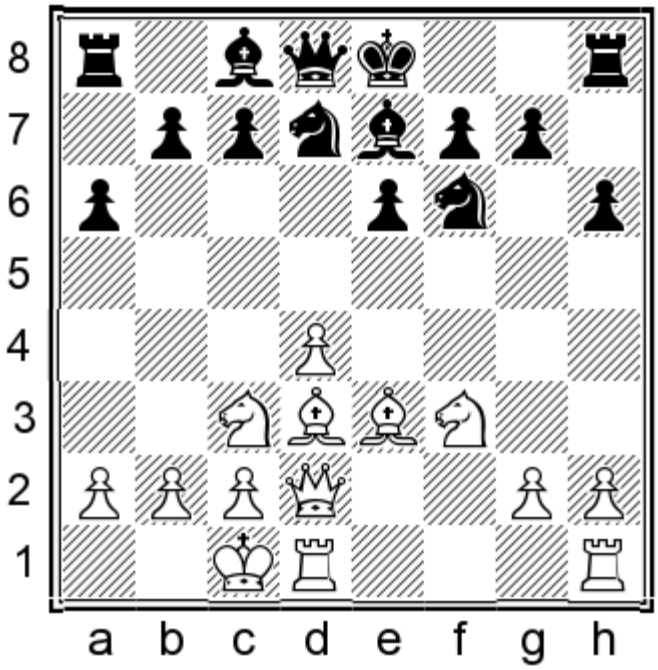


19...♗b7 20.♖e1 ♖f6 21.♗d3 ♗d5∓ Black has good chances to convert his extra pawn.



10...b5 11.♔b1 ♗b7

Black intends to strength his position with ...♗d6 and ...♕e7 before deciding on which side to castle.

12.♘e5

12.♕e1 ♗d6 13.♖f1 ♕e7 14.♗f2 occurred in another online game. Black's strongest continuation is:

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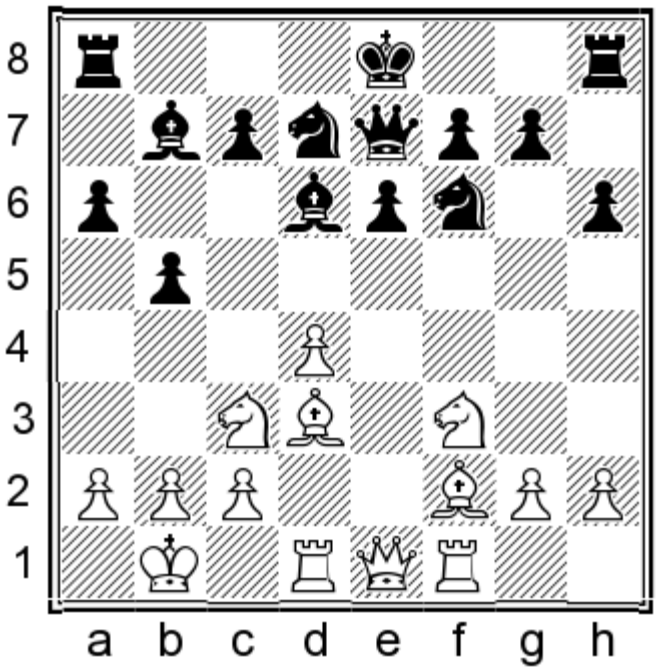
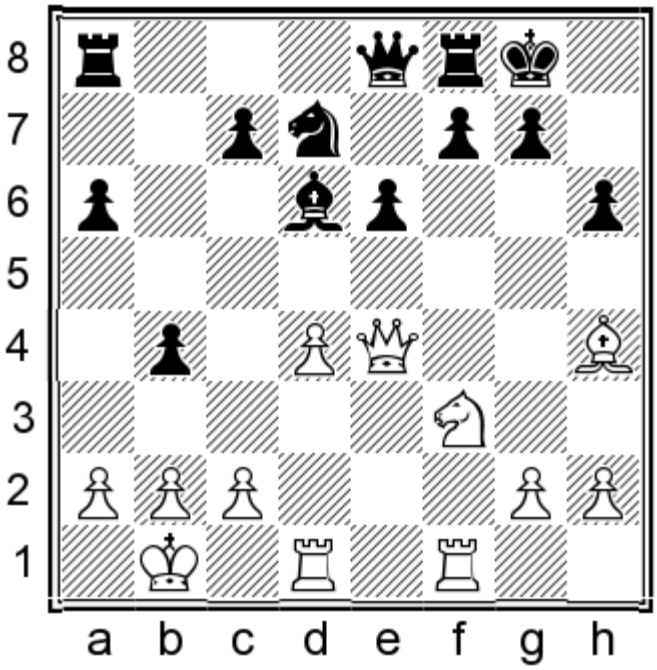


14...b4!N 15.♘e4 (15.♘a4 ♗c6 16.♘c5 ♗xf3 17.gxf3 ♘xc5 18.dxc5 ♗xc5 19.♗h4 g5 20.♗g3 ♘d5∓) 15...♗xe4 16.♗xe4 ♘xe4 17.♕xe4 0-0 18.♗h4 ♕e8



19.g4 (19.♖g1 f5 20.♕d3 ♕f7 21.♖de1 a5∓) 19...f5 20.gxf5 exf5 21.♕d3 a5∓

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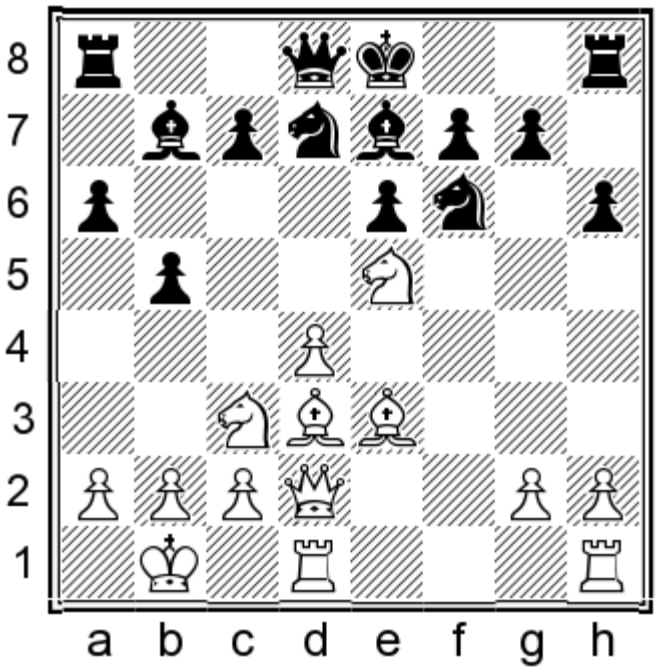


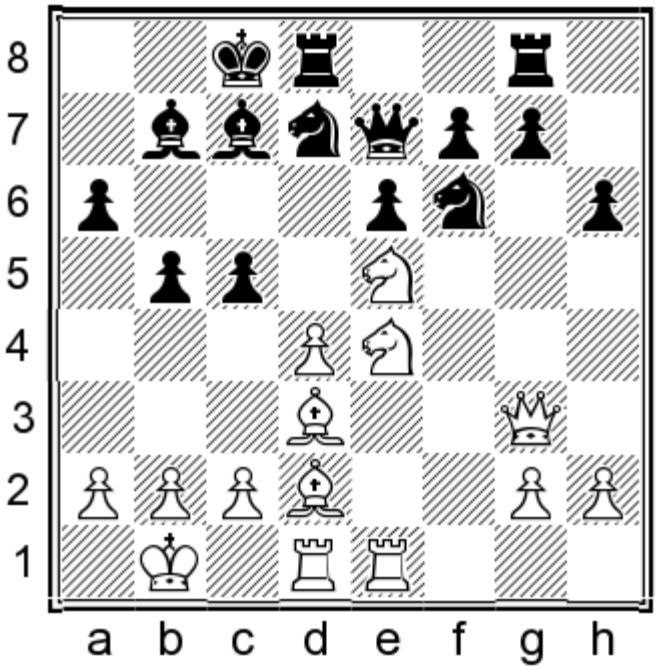
12...♗d6 13.♕e1 ♕e7 14.♕g3 0-0-0!

14...b4!? is a good alternative. After 15.♘a4 Black cannot play ...♗c6, but he can play 15...♘d5 16.♗e4 0-0-0∓ followed by ...♗xe5 and ...♗c6.

15.♖he1

15.a4 b4 16.♘a2 ♘d5 17.♗f2 g5∓ is also great for Black.

15...♖hg8 16.♗d2 c5 17.♘e4 ♗c7



18.♘xc5N

18.♕e3? cxd4 0–1 was the abrupt ending of sligunner – golda, Internet 2013.

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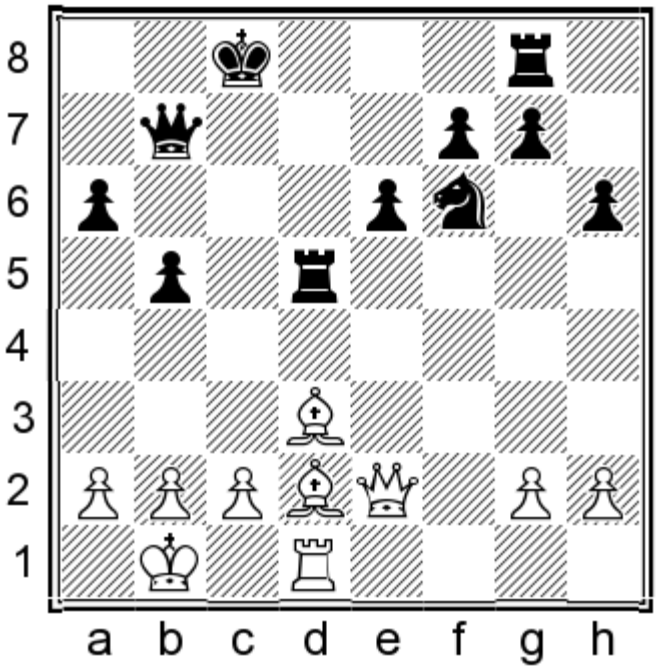
18...♘xe5 19.♖xe5 ♖xd4 20.♘xb7 ♗xe5 21.♕xe5 ♖d5 22.♕e2 ♕xb7∓



White can keep playing for tricks due to Black's slightly exposed king, but Black's material advantage should decide the game in his favour.

7.♗d3

Developing the bishop before the queen leads to a number of different possibilities. Let's dive right in with an illustrative game.

GAME 52

Nicholas Lee – Karl Mah

Sutton 1997

The game started with a different move order but I have changed it for the usual reason.

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.f3 exf3 5.♘xf3 e6 6.♗g5 ♗e7 7.♗d3

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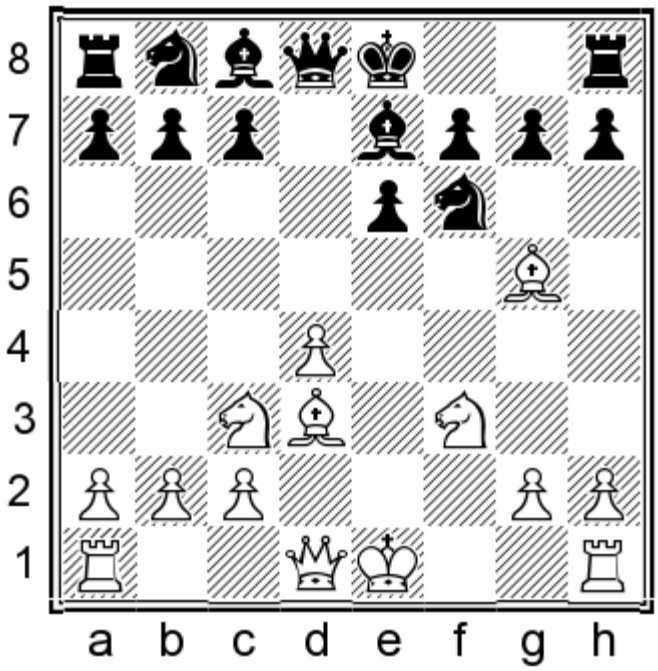

7...♘bd7!

Once again, Black delays castling. Our last move also emphasises the drawback of the bishop on d3: with the d-file blocked, Black has good chances to carry out a quick ...c5 without allowing the d4-d5 counter.

8.0-0

Castling is an obvious move, and has been the most frequent choice. White can also prepare to castle on the opposite wing with 8.♕d2 or 8.♕e2, which can be found on pages 255 and 257 respectively.

8...c5!

Black is undoubtedly better, but White still has some tricky ideas. Should you encounter this variation over the board, my suggestion is take a deep breath, focus, and then refute whatever your opponent throws at you.

9.♕e1

9.dxc5?! is ineffective after 9...♘xc5 10.♗b5† ♗d7∓ intending ...♕b6; both Rizzitano and Gallagher think that Black is much better here, and I agree.

9.d5!? is one of those tricky tries: Black may stumble with 9...♘xd5?! 10.♘xd5 ♗xg5? and suddenly find himself in a lost position after 11.♘xg5 exd5 12.♘xf7, as happened in one game; but instead the simple 9...exd5! leaves White struggling to find compensation.

9.♕e2

This has occurred in some games, but e2 is generally not the most loved square for the queen among BDG fans.

9...cxd4 10.♘b5

10.♘xd4 ♘c5 11.♗b5† ♗d7∓ leaves Black well on top.

10.♘e4 h6N 11.♗h4 0-0 12.♘xd4 ♘e5! uncovers an attack on the d4-knight, and after 13.c3 ♘d5∓ Black is clearly better.

10...♘c5 11.♗c4N

This seems like White's best, trying to keep the important bishop.

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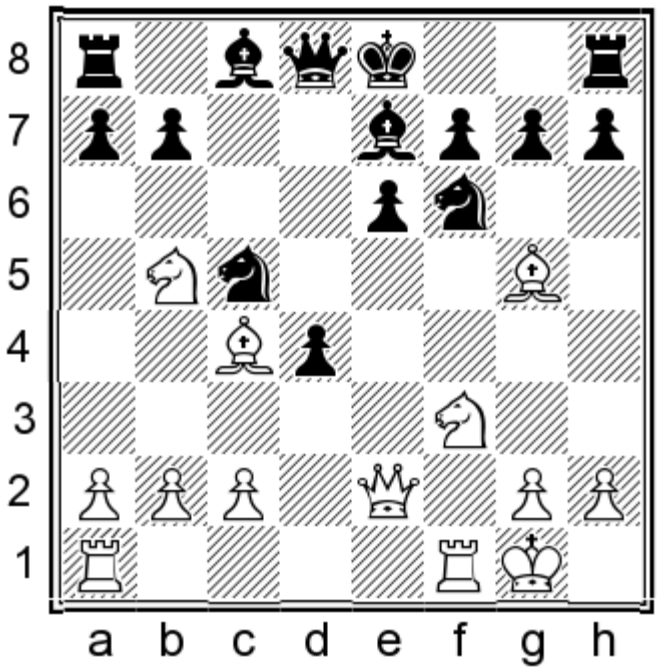
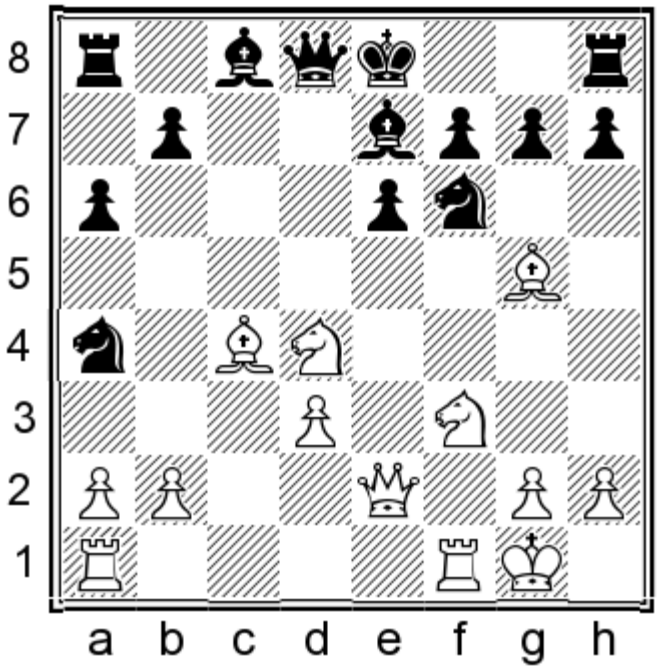


11...d3!

The simplest response. Black gives back one of his extra pawns in order to worsen White's structure and, more importantly, keep the d-file closed.

12.cxd3 a6 13.♘bd4 ♘a4!∓



Not the only move, but the most convincing way to maintain a big advantage. The knight can go to b6 and d5 at any point, and the bishop may go to c5.

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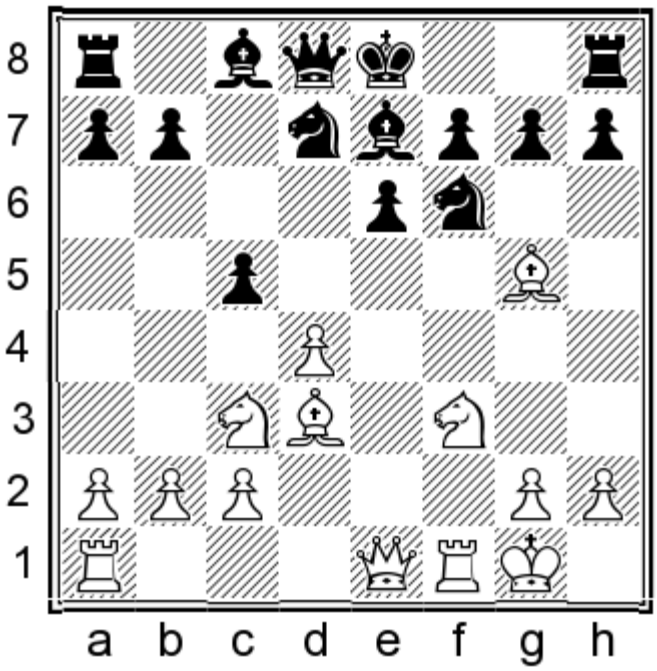


9...cxd4 10.♘b5

10.♘xd4 ♕b6 11.♗e3 ♘g4∓ was poor for White in Parwicz – Albuquerque, email 2005.

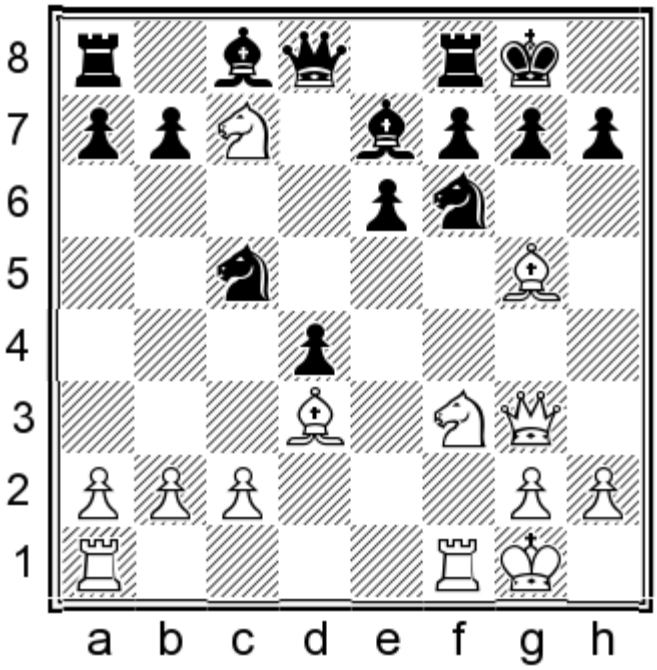
10.♘e4 h6 also favours Black, just like the lines we looked at after 9.♕e2 above.

10...♘c5 11.♕g3

11.♗c4 can be met by the familiar idea of 11...d3!, with a clear advantage.

11...0-0! 12.♘c7

Otherwise Black simply exchanges on d3 and White has nothing.



12...♘xd3! 13.cxd3?!

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13.♘xa8? ♘xb2–+ gives Black three pawns for the exchange while the a8-knight remains awkwardly placed.

According to the engines, 13.♗xf6N 13...♗xf6 14.cxd3 ♖b8 15.♘a6 ♗d7 16.♕xb8 ♕xb8 17.♘xb8 ♖xb8 is the best White can do. Even so, Black has two bishops and two pawns against rook and knight, so he stands at least somewhat better.

13...♘h5!

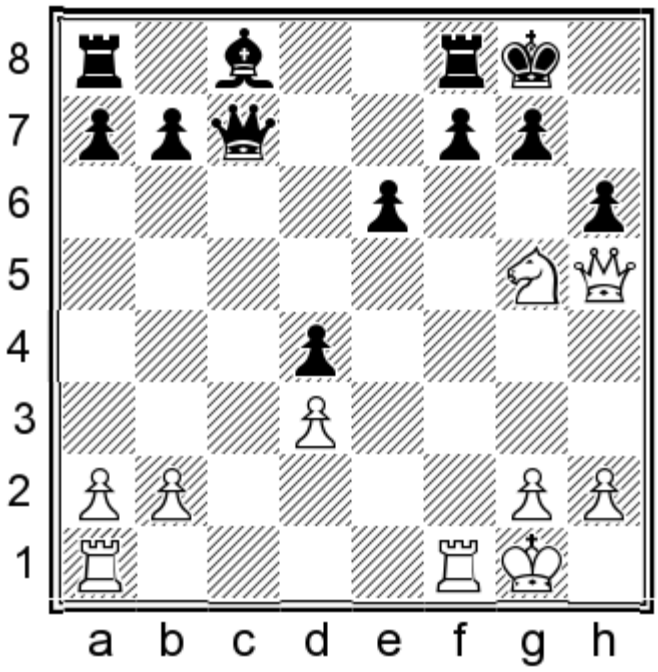
13...♖b8!? also preserves some advantage but the text move is stronger.

14.♕h4 ♗xg5 15.♘xg5

15.♕xg5? ♕xc7 16.♕xh5 f6–+ is easier for Black to deal with.

15...♕xc7 16.♕xh5 h6

Black seems totally winning and this is indeed the objective evaluation, but White still has some tricks.



17.♖f6!?

17.♘e4 and 17.♘f3 can both be met by 17...f6, when Black should slowly but surely convert his two extra pawns. The game continuation is an understandable attempt to roll the dice, but Black deals with it efficiently.

17...hxg5

17...♕e5!? was also strong.

18.♕xg5 b6 19.♖af1 ♗b7 20.h4 ♕c2!

This kind of defensive mechanism is often seen in the Sicilian defence. The queen comes to the defence of the kingside via the queenside!

21.♖6f2 ♕xd3

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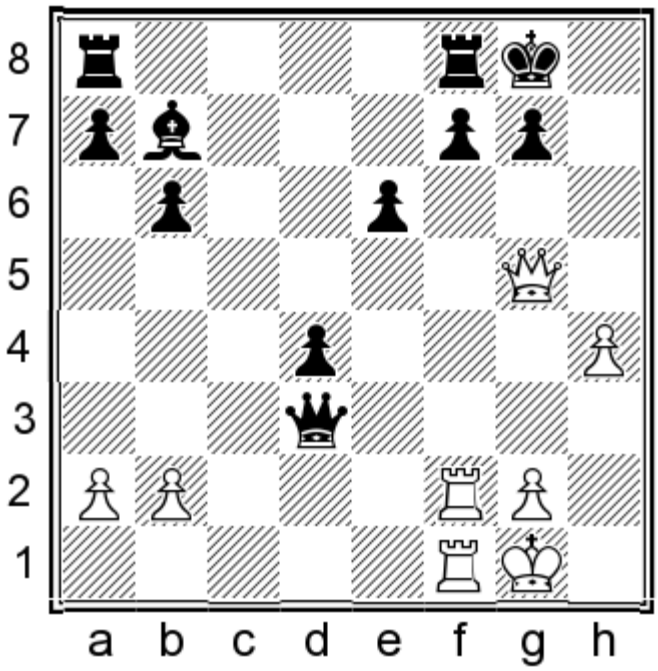


22.h5 f6 23.♕h4 ♕e3 24.♕g4 ♗d5 25.♔h1 ♖ac8 26.♖f4

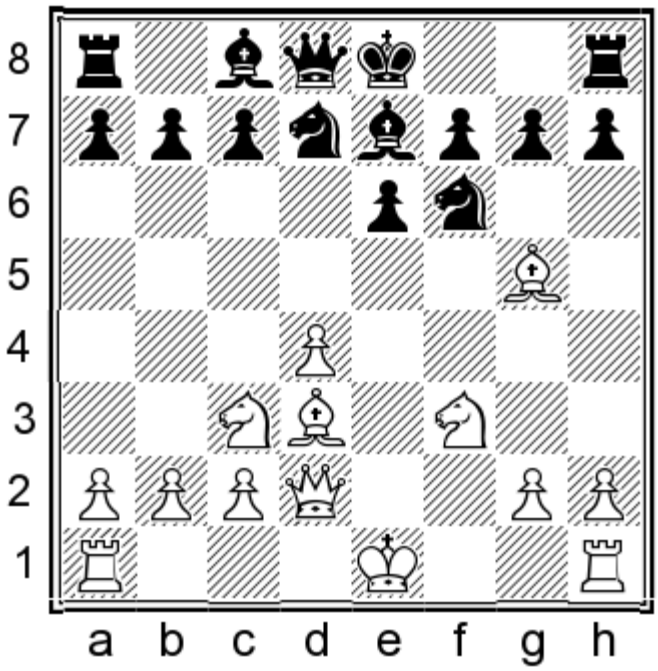
White resigned without waiting for 26...♖c2.

0–1

Let’s turn our attention to the first of White’s alternatives on move 8 which prepare queenside castling.

8.♕d2

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.f3 exf3 5.♘xf3 e6 6.♗g5 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕d2



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8...c5!

Once again, this move tends to work well as long as White is unable to create threats along the d-file.

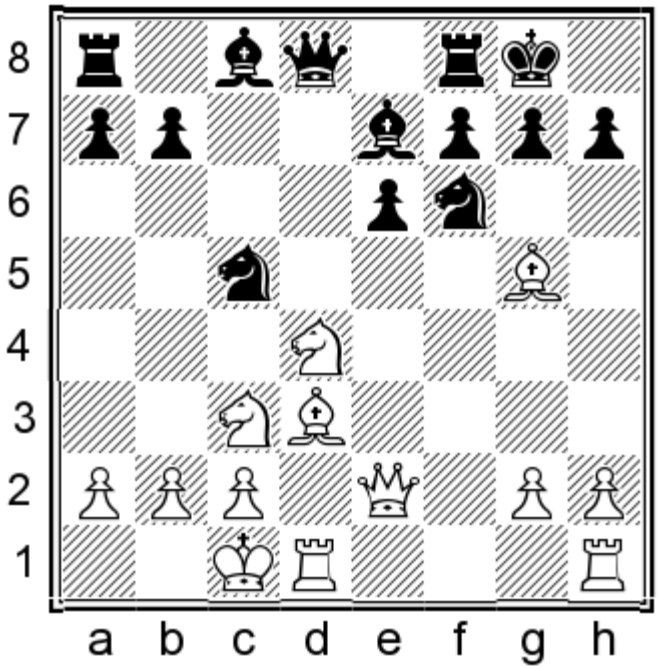
8...a6!? is possible although 9.0-0-0 b5? should be avoided. The point is that 10.d5! compares favourably with the 8.♕e2 line below, as after 10...♘xd5? 11.♘xd5 exd5 12.♗xe7 White is winning.

9.0-0-0 cxd4

Taking on d4 and plonking the knight on c5 is the typical follow-up to Black's previous move.

10.♘xd4 ♘c5 11.♕e2 0-0!

Scheerer covers 8.♕d2 in a note (8.♕e2 is his main recommendation) and quotes a game which continued 11...♗d7, but this allows the trick 12.♘f5!N 12...exf5 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♖he1 when White's initiative is enough for equality. The text move is much more convincing for Black.



12.♗c4!?N

12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♗xh7† is a trick to win back the sacrificed pawn, but Black will be left with two bishops and a potentially powerful central majority. 13...♔xh7 14.♕h5† ♔g8 15.♕xc5 ♕e7 16.♕h5 was the continuation of Boeckler – Dorst, Massbach 2001, when 16...♖d8N would have left Black clearly on top.

12.♘c6!?N is possible, but after 12...bxc6 13.♗xf6 ♕c7! 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7∓ Black remains a pawn up, and White's bishop will either be exchanged or have to vacate its most active diagonal.

I also checked: 12.♖hf1N 12...♗d7 13.♘b3 ♘xd3†! A concrete decision based on what follows. (13...♘xb3† followed by ...♕a5 and 13...♖c8 are both playable but less strong) 14.♖xd3

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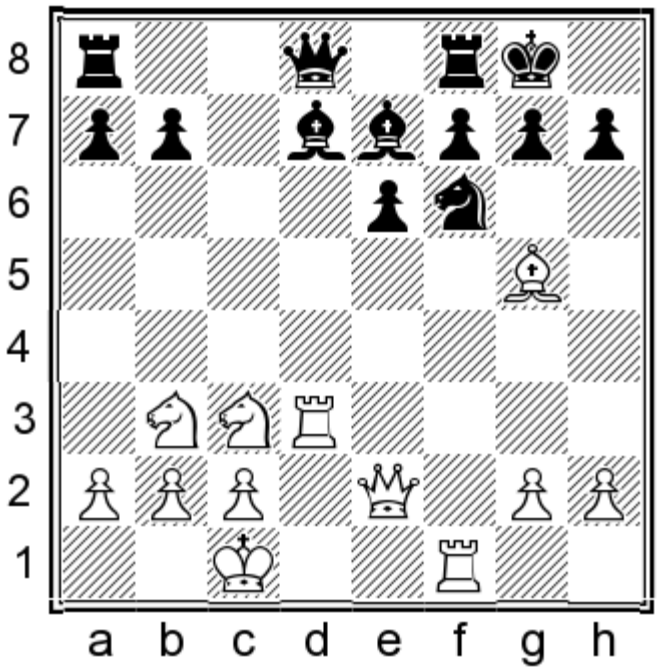


14...♘e8! 15.♗f4 ♕c8∓ Black deals with the pin along the d-file and keeps the advantage.

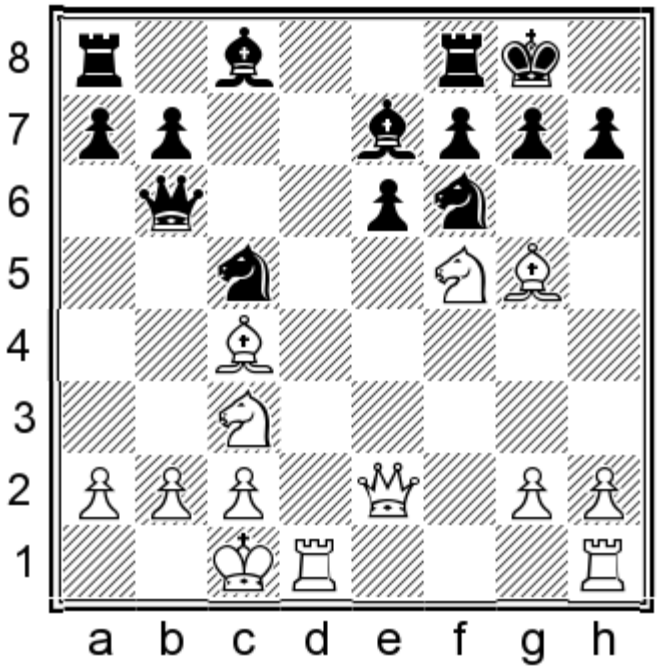
12...♕b6!

I also considered 12...♘e8 13.h4! and 12...♕c7 13.♘cb5 ♕b6 14.♘f5, both of which I found to be unclear.

After the text move Black wants to play ...♗d7 followed by either ...♘a4 or ...♘ce4, with excellent play.

13.♘f5!

This is the only tricky move, but after accurate play Black comes on top.



13...exf5 14.♕xe7 ♗e6 15.♗xf6 ♖fe8!

This simple finesse forces a queen exchange and a better endgame.

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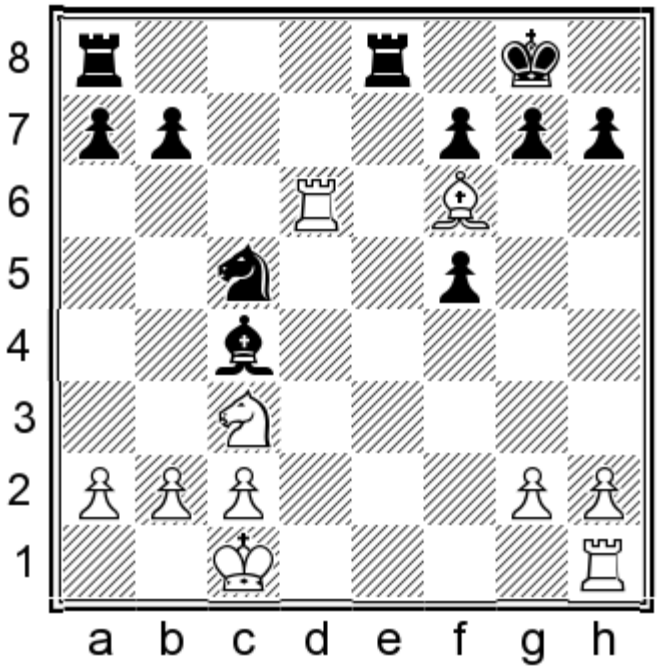
16.♕d6 ♕xd6 17.♖xd6 ♗xc4



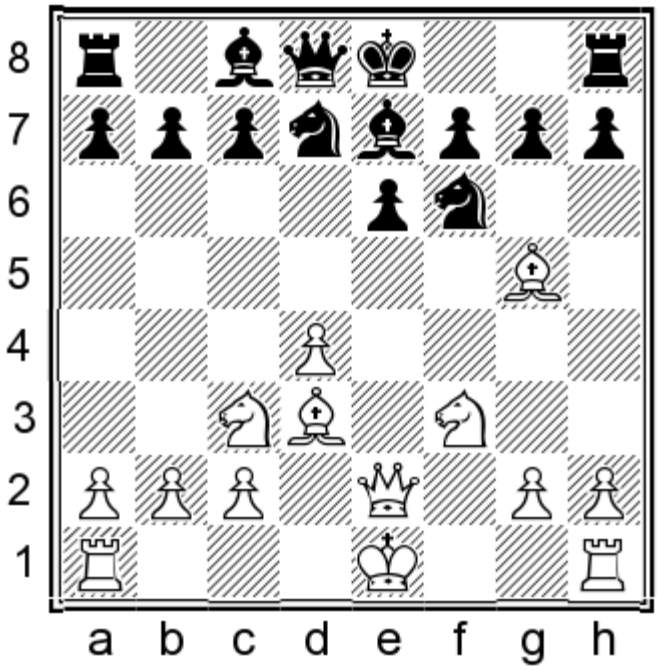
18.♗d4 ♘e4 19.♖d7 ♘xc3 20.♗xc3 b5∓

The opposite-coloured bishops offer White some drawing chances, but he faces an arduous defence.

8.♕e2

1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.f3 exf3 5.♘xf3 e6 6.♗g5 ♗e7 7.♗d3 ♘bd7 8.♕e2

This is the more popular queen move, as well as Scheerer's recommendation. Overall it's a more logical choice than 8.♕d2, as ...c5 becomes a riskier proposition without the white queen blocking the d-file.



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8...a6!N

8...c5?! 9.0-0-0 should be avoided. In the equivalent line after 8.♕d2 above, White soon moved the queen to e2, which means we would be playing a full tempo down here.

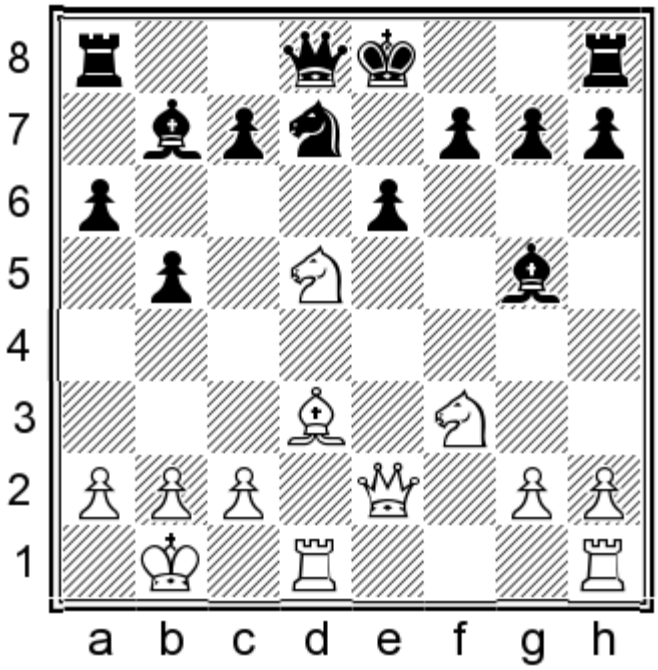
As we will see, the text move is a good way to expose the downside of White's queen placement. As a bonus, it has surprise value as a novelty, and is not mentioned in Scheerer's book.

9.0-0-0

9.a4?! allows Black to revert to 9...c5!, as it would be too risky for White to castle long after weakening his queenside like this.

9...b5 10.♔b1

10.d5?! would have been strong in the analogous position after 8.♕d2, but here it is simply met by: 10...♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♗xg5† 12.♔b1 ♗b7



13.♘xc7† ♕xc7 14.♘xg5 ♘f6! White does not have enough for the sacrificed pawn.

I also considered 10.♖hf1 ♗b7 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.♔b1 0-0 13.♘e4 ♕e7 14.g4 g6 15.h4 ♗g7 16.h5, and now both 16...c5 and 16...f5!? give Black the better chances in a complicated game.

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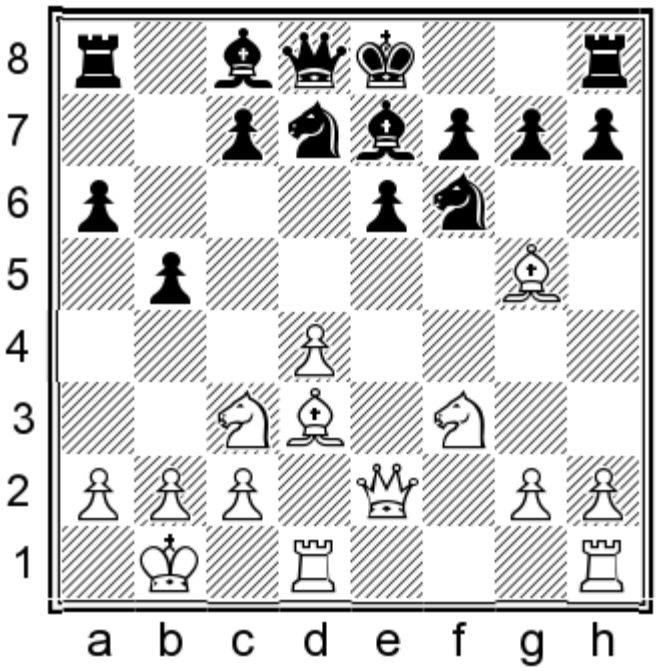


10...♗b7

10...b4!? 11.♘e4 ♗b7 12.♘xf6† ♗xf6 13.h4 h5!? looks like a pretty risky way to play for Black, but I couldn't find a direct way to refute it. The text move seems normal though.

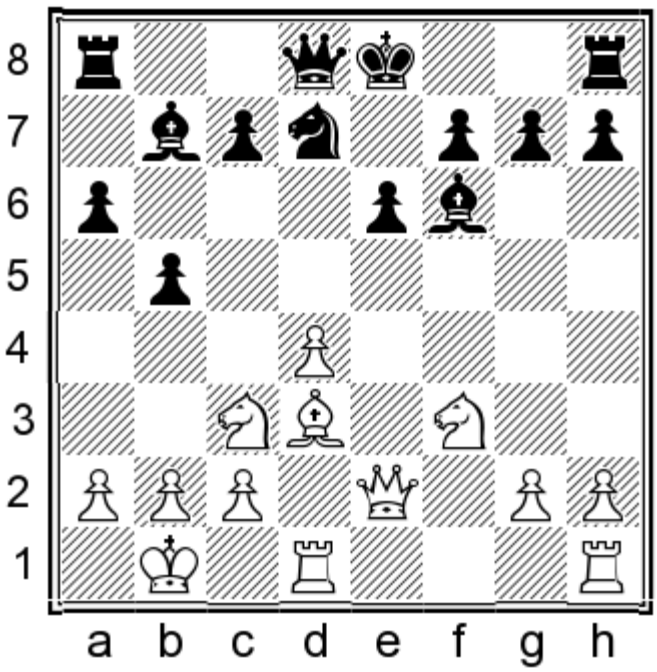
11.♗xf6

This exchange should be carried out either now or never.

11.h4 0-0 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6! 13.♘e5 ♗b4∓ gives Black everything he could wish for.

11...♗xf6

The point behind White's last move is that 11...♘xf6? allows 12.♗xb5†.



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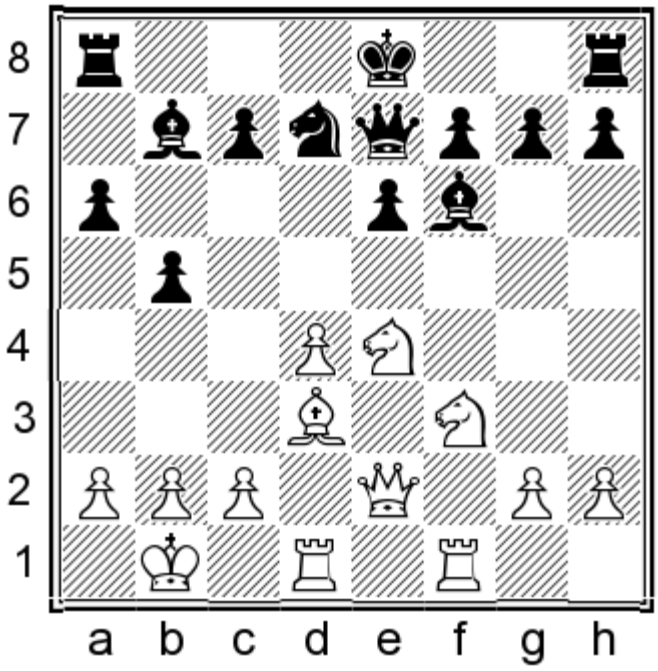
12.g4

12.d5 ♕e7! 13.dxe6 fxe6 14.♘e4 0-0∓ is good for Black.

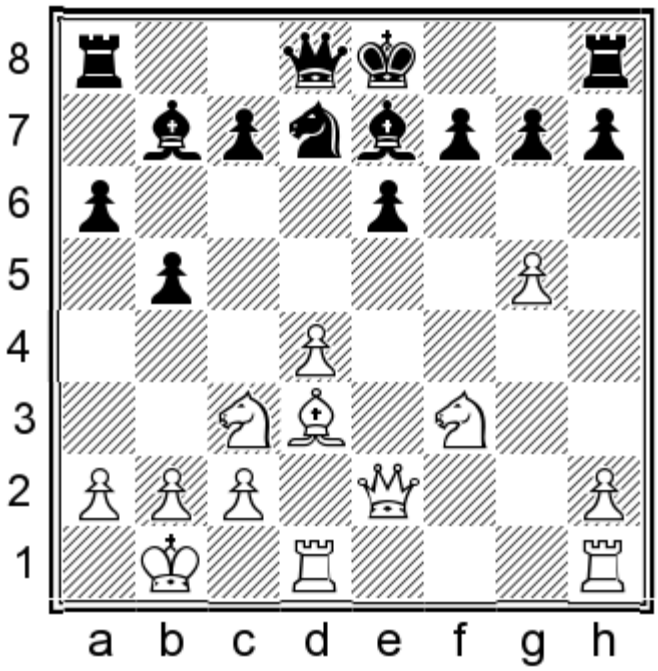
I also considered: 12.♖hf1 ♕e7 13.♘e4 (13.g4 ♗xf3! 14.♖xf3 0-0 15.h4 g6 favours Black)



13...g6 14.h4 ♗g7 15.h5 0-0-0∓ With the two bishops, an extra pawn and the ...e5 and ...f5 breaks in the air, I'd definitely prefer Black.

The text move seems like the only serious attempt to put some pressure on Black. I think the wisest approach is to start thinking about long castling.

12...♗e7 13.g5



13...c6! 14.h4 ♕c7 15.♖hf1 0-0-0 16.♘e4 ♔b8∓

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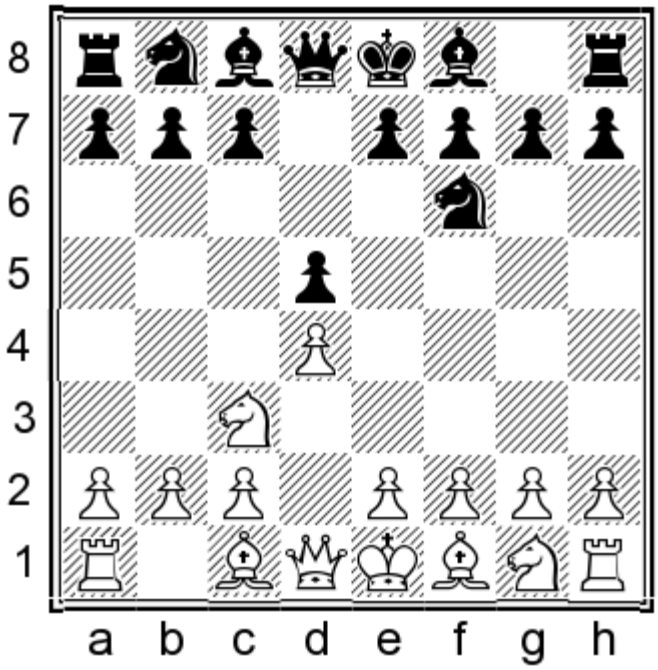
It’s the same story as in some of the lines above: Black has an extra pawn plus the bishop pair, so the future belongs to him.

The Veresov

1.d4 d5 2.♘c3 ♘f6

The Veresov serves as a good link between this and the next chapter, as it has certain elements in common with several other d-pawn systems. White often aims to open the centre with e2-e4, rather like the BDG, albeit without the element of the pawn sacrifice. But before then, he usually develops his bishop to g5, just like the Pseudo-Trompowsky and Torre, or to f4, as in the London System.



3.♗g5

3.e4 dxe4 4.f3 is the BDG of course.

3.♗f4 has actually become quite a hot move in modern chess, and will be covered in a separate section below.

3...♘bd7

Please note the following important point: in order to fight the Veresov successfully, we will refrain from playing an early ...h6, as we want White’s bishop to remain on g5 so that we can target it with a timely ...♕a5 in certain lines. We will analyse White’s three main options of **4.♘f3**, **4.♕d3** and **4.f3**.

4.e3 has been played many times but Black’s task becomes easier once e2-e4 is ruled out. Simply 4...e6 followed by ...c5 gives Black an easy game.

4.♘f3

1.d4 d5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5 ♘bd7 4.♘f3

The database indicates that this has been White’s most popular move, which is surprising, as it leads to a kind of

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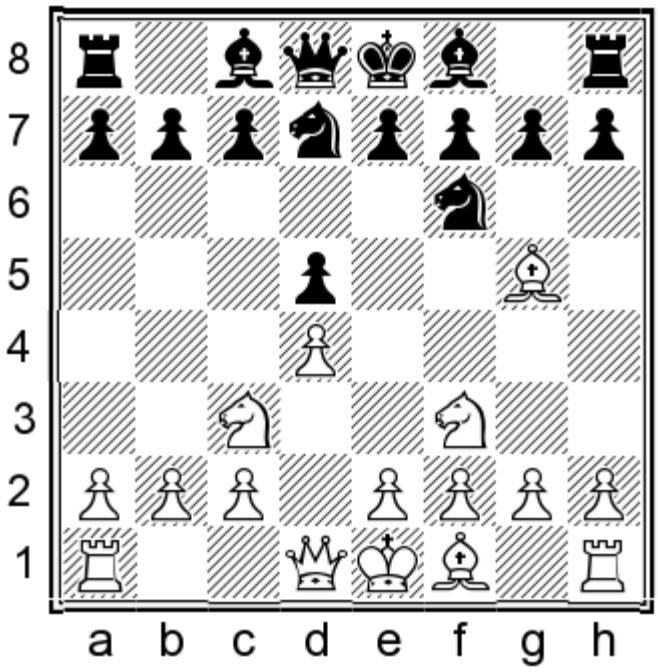
Veresov-Torre hybrid which is not scary for Black at all.



4...h6

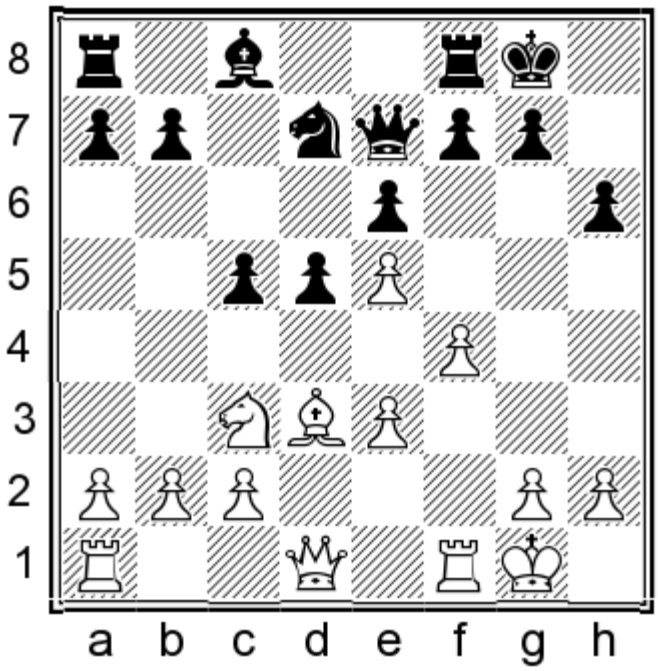
It is worth inserting this move to have the option of ...g5, as shown in the next note.

5.♗h4 e6 6.e3

6.e4?! g5 sees Black pick up a pawn for insufficient compensation: 7.♗g3 ♘xe4 8.♘xe4 dxe4 9.♘d2 (9.♘e5 h5∓ Neubert – Peschel, corr. 1983) 9...f5∓ Veresov – Korchnoi, Leningrad 1967.

6...♗e7 7.♗d3 c5 8.0-0 0-0 9.♘e5 ♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.f4

These moves were not all forced of course, but I think they represent logical play on both sides. Now Black gets good queenside counterplay with:



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12...a6 13.a4

Otherwise ...b5 comes.

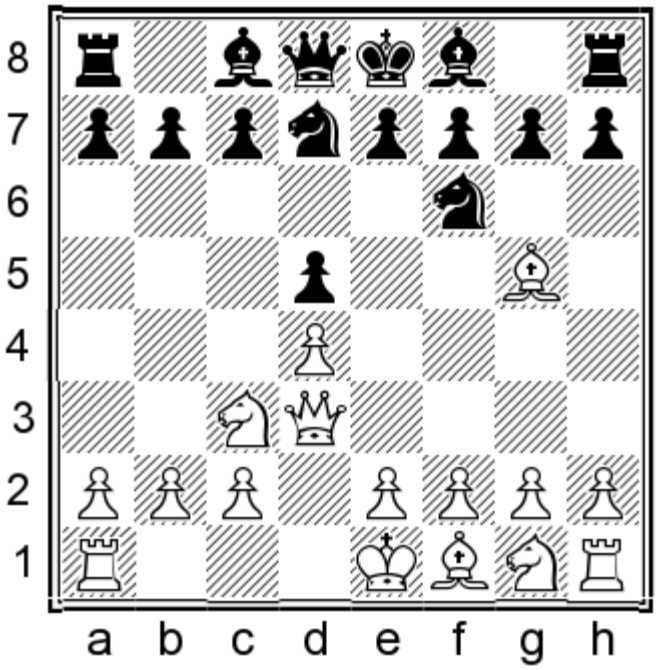
13...b6

Black had a pleasant game in Mueller – Even, corr. 1991, with ...♗b7 and perhaps ...♖ac8 coming next.

4.♕d3

1.d4 d5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5 ♘bd7 4.♕d3

For a while this was considered White's best try. The idea is obvious: White prepares both long castling and e2-e4, but a game between Nakamura and Karjakin showed an excellent way to play for Black.



4...c5! 5.0-0-0

The main alternative is 5.e4 but Black does well after: 5...cxd4 6.♗xf6 (or 6.♕xd4 e5 7.♕a4 d4 8.♘d5 ♗e7 9.♗xf6 ♗xf6 10.♕a3 ♗e7 11.♕xe7† ♕xe7 12.♘xe7 ♔xe7∓ Karagiannis – Banikas, Ermioni 2005) 6...♘xf6 7.♕xd4 dxe4 8.♗b5† ♗d7 9.0-0-0 ♗xb5 10.♘xb5 ♕xd4 11.♖xd4 This position was reached in Panagiotopoulou – Fanouraki, Athens 1996, when Black should have played:

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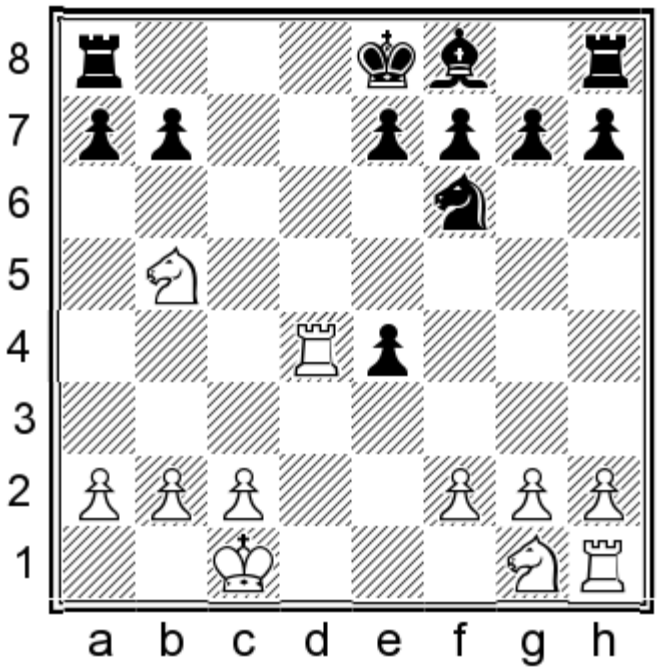
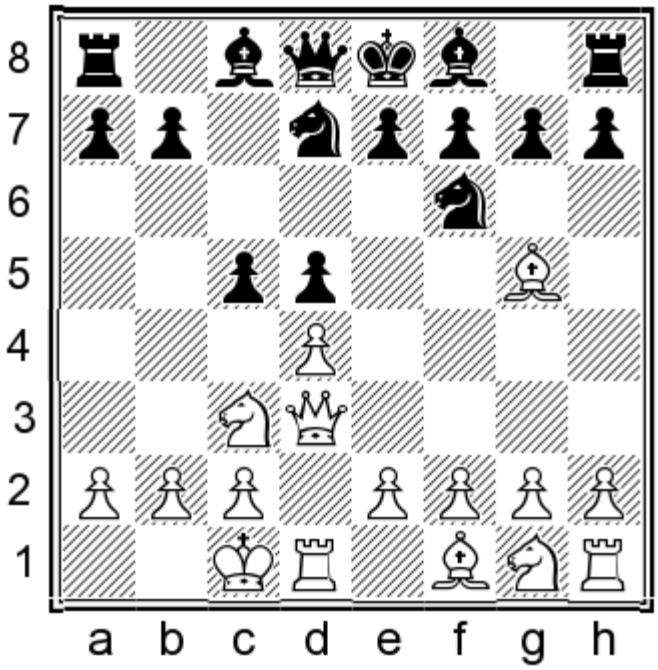


11...♖c8!N 12.♘xa7 e5! 13.♘xc8 exd4∓ With an obvious positional advantage.



5...c4!

5...cxd4?! is the only move mentioned in *A Ferocious Opening Repertoire*, which was published in 2010. The omission of the text move is understandable, as the earliest example in my database is from 2011. Black's attack is so dangerous that he does not have to bother developing his kingside pieces, and the practical results so far paint a dismal picture for White.

6.♕g3 ♕a5 7.e4 b5 8.♔b1 ♘xe4!

8...dxe4 led to an eventual success for Black in Nakamura – Karjakin, Baku 2014, but I find the continuation of the original correspondence game more convincing.

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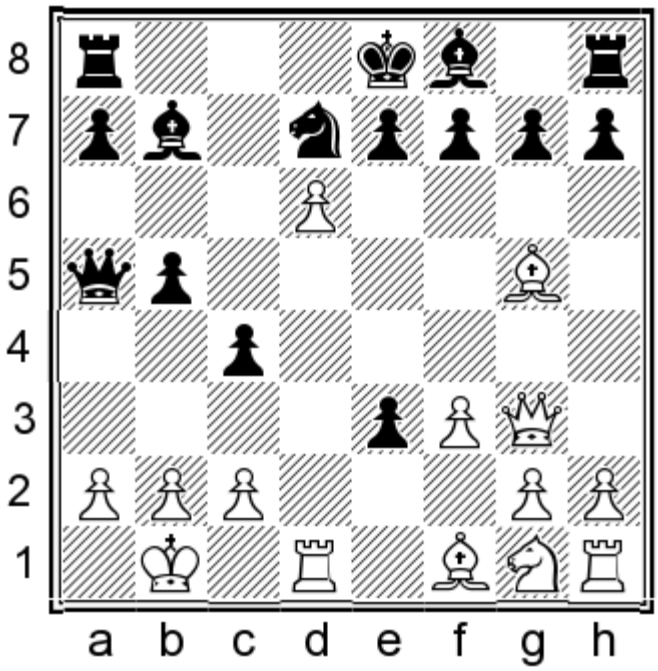
9.♘xe4 dxe4 10.f3 ♗b7 11.d5 e3 12.d6

Here I would like to propose an improvement over Black's play in Zoll – Eilmes, corr. 2011:

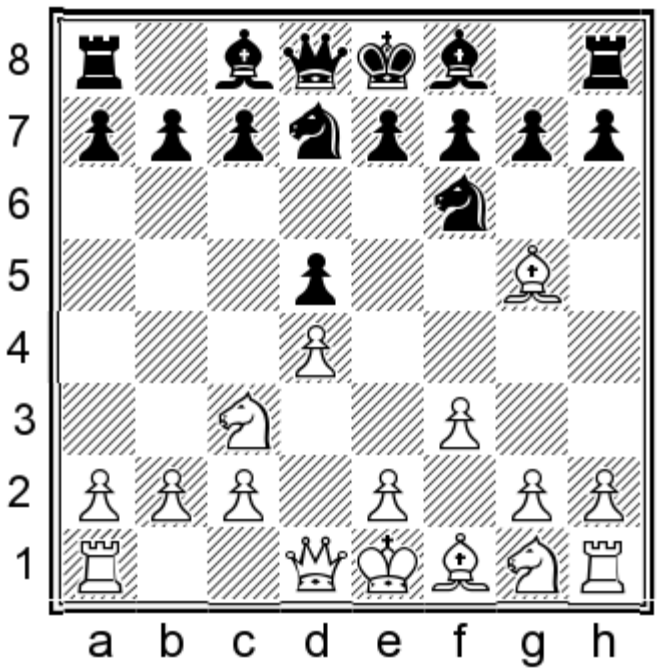


12...e5!N 13.♕h4 c3 14.bxc3 a6 15.♘e2 ♖c8 16.♗xe3 ♖c6∓

Followed by ...♖xd6. Black's king is safer, and White's poor structure means that simplifying to an endgame will not solve his problems.

4.f3

1.d4 d5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗g5 ♘bd7 4.f3



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4...c6 5.e4 dxe4 6.fxe4 e5!

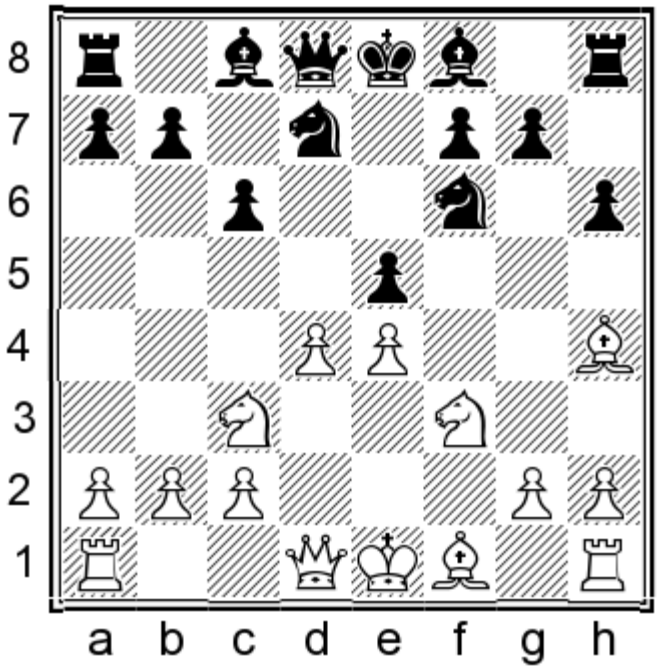
Striking at White's centre. The two main responses are **7.♘f3** and **7.dxe5**.

7.♘f3

This is quite a rare option but Lakdawala demonstrates that it can give White a lot of activity if Black is not careful. However, I was able to find a good antidote.

7...h6!? 8.♗h4

8.♗xf6?! is not critical at all. 8...♕xf6 9.d5 Otherwise Black might play ...exd4 and ...♗c5 with great play on the dark squares. 9...♗b4!? Black's bishop pair gave him an edge in Gather – I. Sokolov, Vlissingen 2000.



8...♗e7!?N

A novelty, although we have already reached a point where only three practical examples exist on my database. Lakdawala only mentions 8...exd4, which was played in two of those games.

8...♕b6 is an ambitious choice, but after 9.♕d2! exd4 10.♘xd4 ♕xb2N (10...♗b4!? was seen in Zhang Pengxiang – Shipov, Internet [blitz] 2002, but after 11.♘f5N the game is unclear) 11.♖b1 ♕a3 12.♘f5 White's initiative may prove dangerous in a practical game, even if the computer is not impressed.

9.dxe5

Nothing else is critical. We will see that the bishop on e7 serves Black well in all lines:

9.♗c4 can be met in a few ways, with 9...♘g4 being the most solid choice.

9.h3 ♕a5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 gives Black a comfortable game, and the e7-bishop prevents our pawns from being doubled after an exchange on f6.

9...♘g4 10.♗xe7 ♕xe7

Black will win back the pawn with the easier game thanks to his better structure.

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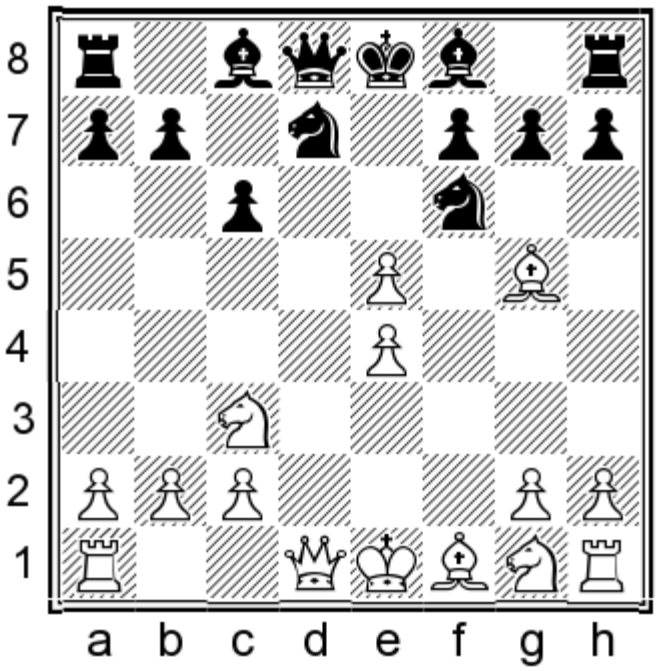
7.dxe5

This is the more forcing continuation but Black is well placed to meet it.



7...♕a5!

This was first played by the great Mikhail Tal in 1972, and has scored well for Black ever since. Black indirectly protects the knight by targeting the loose bishop on g5 – this resource is precisely the reason why it was so important not to rush with ...h6 earlier in the game!

8.♗xf6

8.exf6 ♕xg5 9.fxg7 ♗xg7 gives Black more than enough play for the pawn, even after a queen exchange. The stem game continued: 10.♕d2 ♕xd2† 11.♔xd2 ♘c5 12.♗d3 ♗e6 13.♘f3 0-0-0

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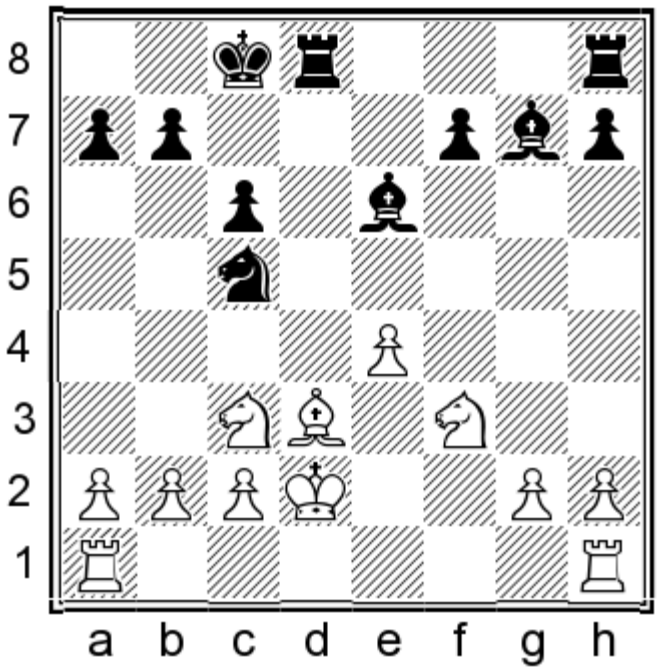
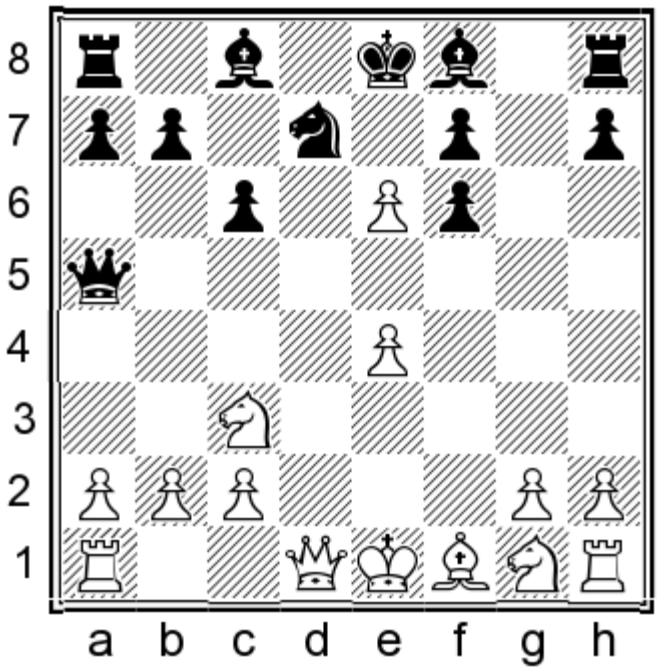


With a lead in development, a safer king and a mighty dark-squared bishop, Black had a great position in Alburt – Tal, Baku 1972.

8...gxf6 9.e6

This is Lakdawala's recommendation, and it seems like White's best attempt to fight for the initiative by returning his extra pawn. Fortunately, we have an excellent way to thwart this plan.



9...♘e5!

This move is not mentioned by Lakdawala, who only considers 9...fxe6.

10.exf7† ♔xf7

Black has an enormous initiative for the sacrificed pawn. We will follow a model correspondence game.

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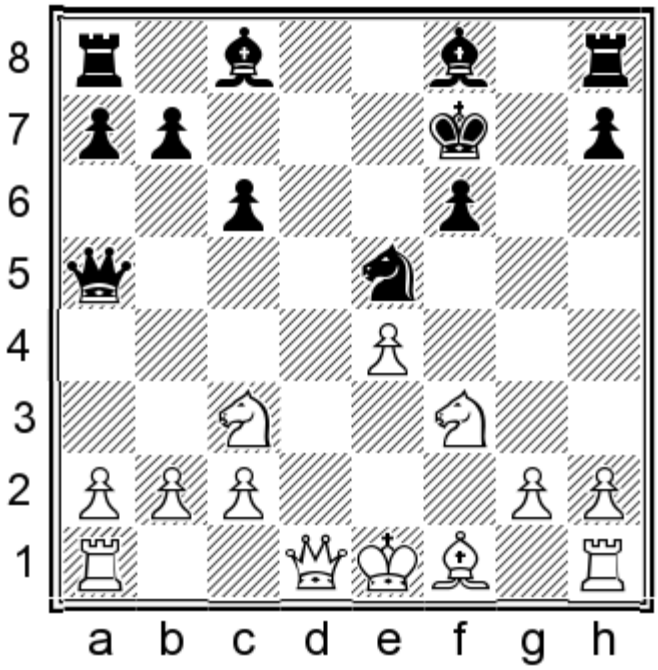
11.♘f3

The e5-knight has to be challenged. Most other moves would have been strongly met by ...♗g4.

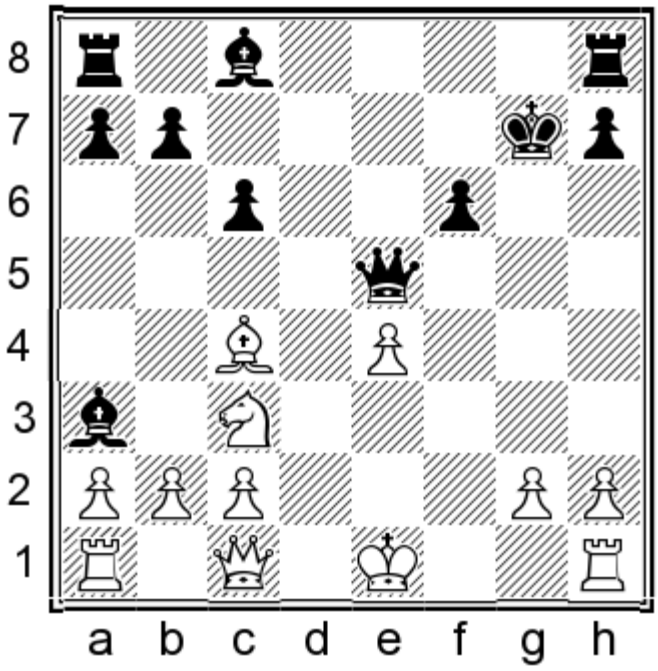


11...♗a3!

Apart from ...♗g4, this was Black's other main idea, and a key move to remember.

12.♘xe5† ♕xe5 13.♗c4† ♔g7 14.♕c1

White has to defend against ...♗xb2 somehow.



14...♗c5 15.♗d3

Otherwise ...♕d4 will yield a double attack on c4 and f2.

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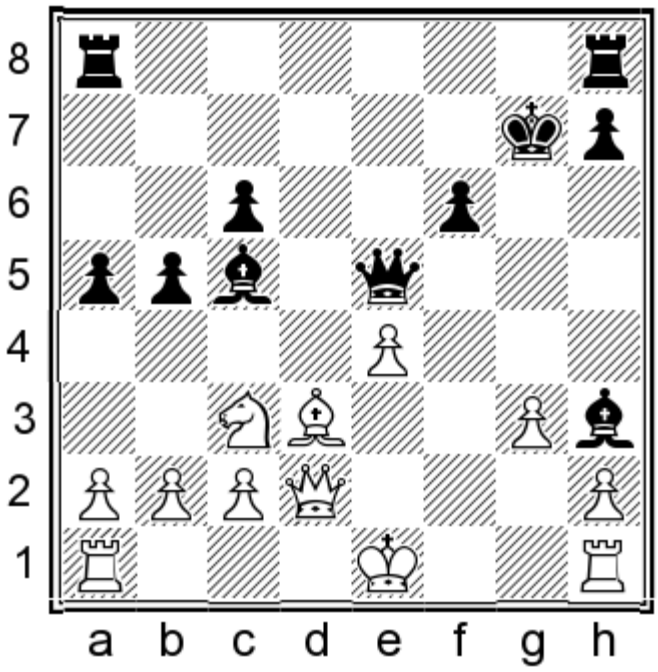
15...b5!? 16.g3

White has to safeguard the h2-pawn so as to allow the h1-rook to move.

16...♗h3! 17.♕d2 a5

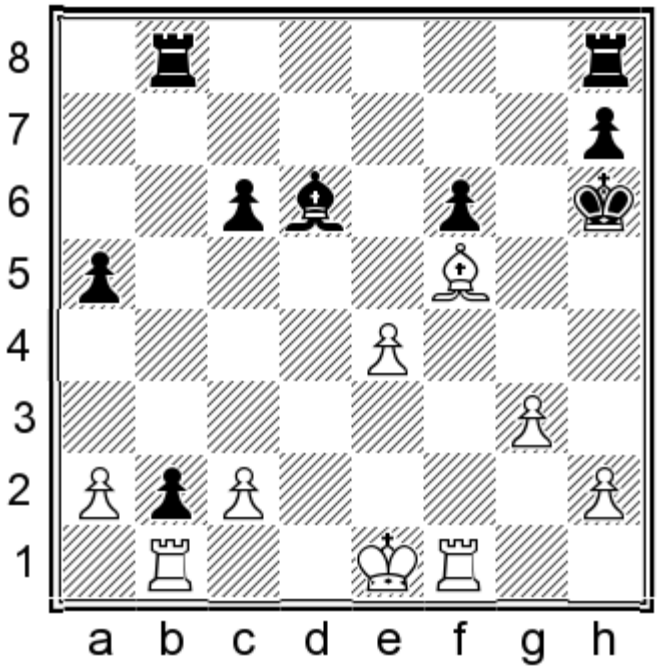
White cannot really move, so Black takes space on the queenside and prepares an assault there at the right time.



18.♗f1 ♗g4 19.♗e2 b4 20.♗xg4

20.♘a4? ♕xe4 is winning.

20...bxc3 21.♕d7† ♔h6 22.♕f5 ♕xf5 23.♗xf5 cxb2 24.♖b1 ♖ab8 25.♖f1 ♗d6



In Berger – Morcin, Internet 2012, Black instructively converted his advantage.

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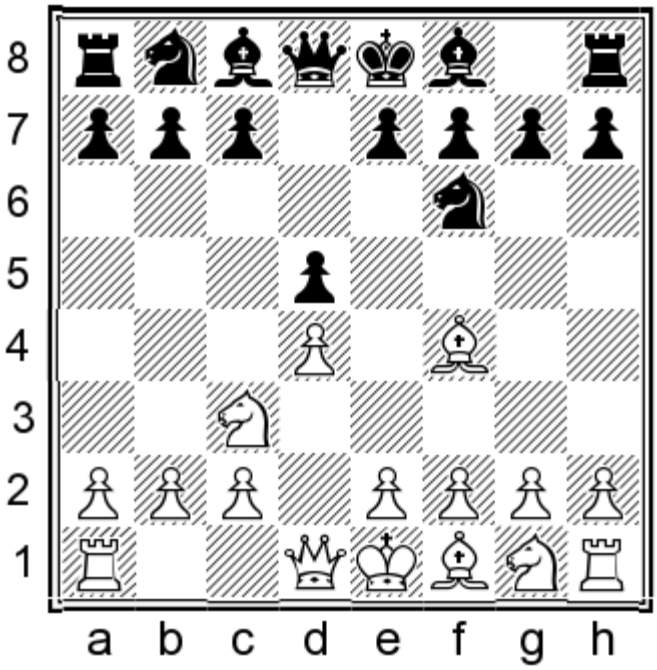
The Jobava System

1.d4 d5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.♗f4

The Georgian super-GM did not invent this move, but he has done more than anyone to popularize it and turn it from an obscure sideline into a respectable weapon.



3...c5 4.e3

Obviously 4.♘b5? runs into 4...♕a5† when the knight must make a humiliating retreat.

4.e4!? is not ridiculous, but Black certainly has nothing to fear after 4...♘xe4 5.♘xe4 dxe4 6.dxc5 ♕a5†.

4...cxd4! 5.exd4 a6

I think that this is the right way to meet the Jobava Opening. The resulting position is simple for Black to play; just think of it as a Carlsbad structure with the knight misplaced on c3. Avrukh recommends the same solution for Black in *Beating 1.d4 Sidelines*. Here I will not examine as many sub-variations, but will instead present what I believe to be the most important pointers, while updating some of Avrukh's lines to include some recent high-level games.

6.♗d3

This has been Jobava's choice whenever he has reached the present position.

The other main option is: 6.♘f3 ♘c6 (6...♗g4 is slightly premature in view of 7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♕xf3 e6 9.g4! when White seizes some space) 7.♘e5 and here I like: 7...♗d7! 8.♗e2 e6 9.0-0 ♕b6 10.♘xc6 ♗xc6 11.♖b1 ♗e7 12.♗f3 0-0 13.♘e2 ♖fc8 14.♖e1

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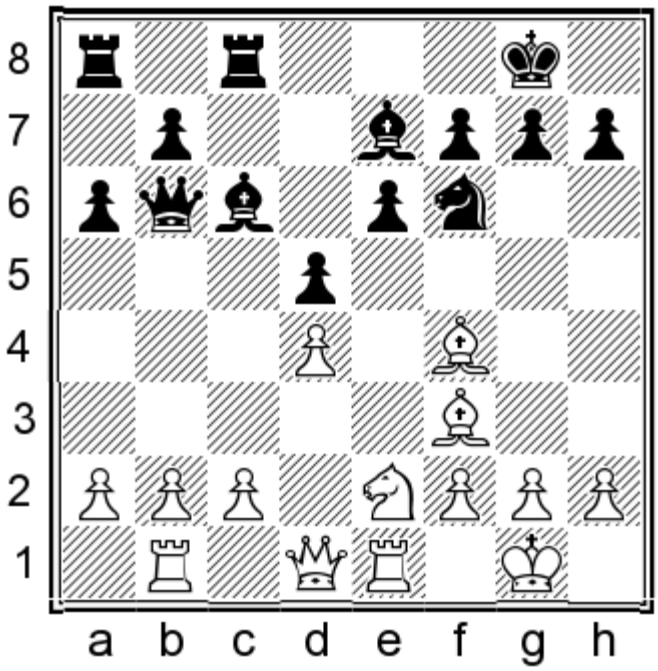
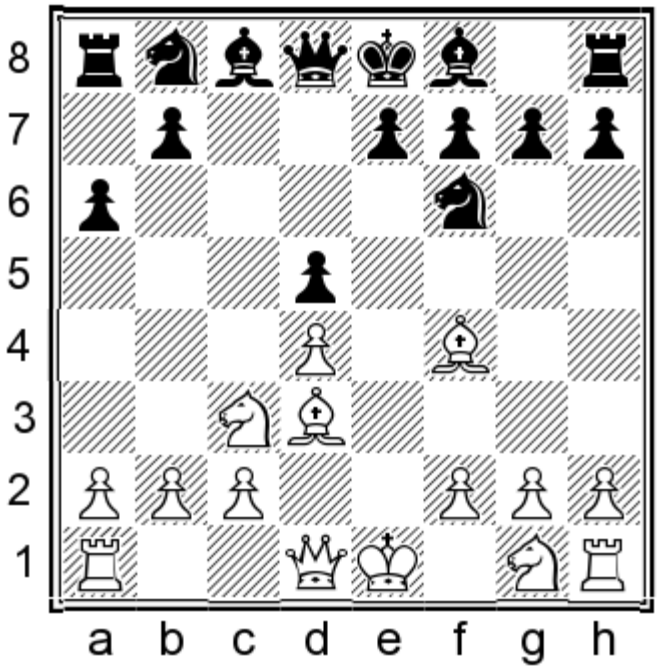


Now in V. Kovalev – L'Ami, Baku (ol) 2016, Black should have played 14...♕d8!N followed by ...b5, with an excellent position. White would like to organize his position with c2-c3 and ♘c1-d3, but Black will be too quick with ...b5-b4.



6...♘c6 7.♘ge2

7.♘f3 ♗g4! is excellent for Black.

Carlsen experimented with 7.♘ce2!? against Bok at the World Rapid Championship in Doha in 2016. I am curious as to what he had in mind against 7...♘b4!N, as eliminating this important bishop deprives White of any hope for an advantage.

7...e6

7...♘b4!? is a rare move but I think it deserves attention here too. Black will take the bishop and complete

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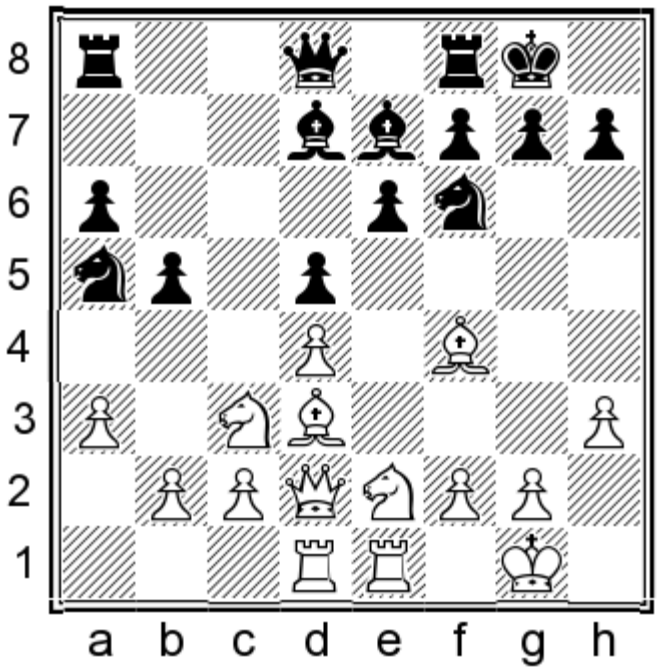
development with ...♗e7 and ...0-0, before expanding on the queenside.

8.♕d2 b5

Black gains space on the queenside and reminds his opponent that the knight is far from ideally placed on c3.

9.0-0 ♗e7 10.a3 ♗d7 11.h3 0-0 12.♖fe1 ♘a5 13.♖ad1

We have been following the famous game Jobava – Ponomariov, Baku (ol) 2016, which I had the privilege of witnessing live inside the playing hall. During the game, I had the impression that Ponomariov had discovered a convincing antidote to the system popularized by his creative opponent. Later, however, when I returned to see how the game had progressed, I saw that Black's position had been utterly ruined! At this point, the most accurate continuation would have been:



13...♘c4!N

The game continued 13...♕b6 14.♘g3, and now 14...♖fc8?! was Black's first real misstep. It is easy to underestimate White's position and I suspect this is what happened to Ponomariov. (14...♖fe8!∓ followed by ...♘c4 and ...a5 keeps the better chances for Black.) 15.♘f5! exf5 16.♖xe7 ♗e6 Here came the famous blow: 17.♗h6!!+–

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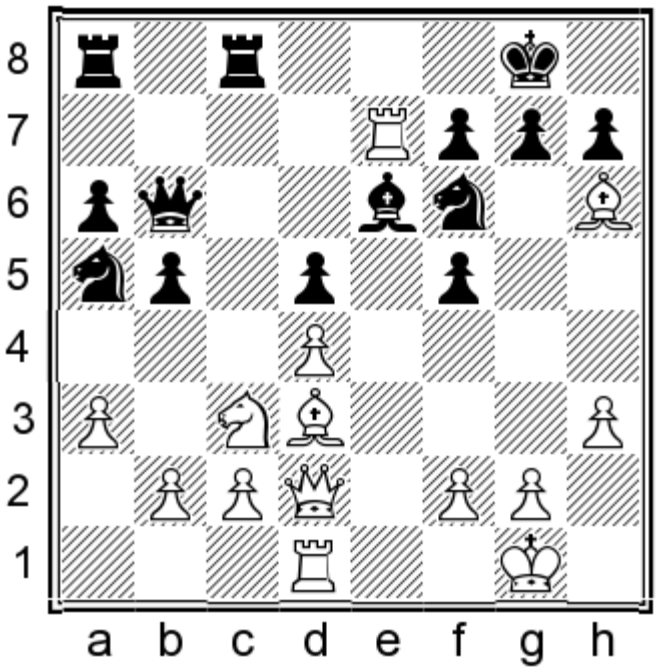
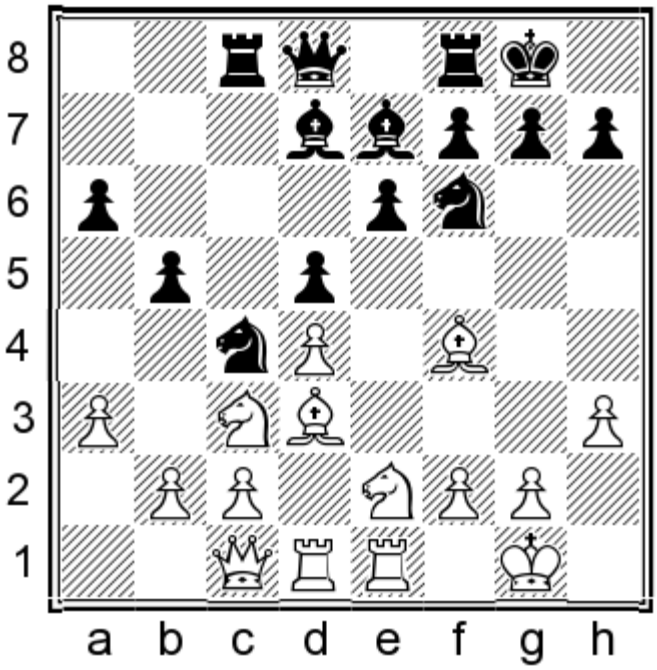


White did magical things in this game, but this shouldn't make us disapprove of Black's opening strategy.

14.♕c1 ♖c8∓



With ...a5 and ...b4 on the way, Black is simply better. It is worth adding that 15.♘g3?!, with vague hopes of doing something on the kingside, can be met by 15...♘xa3!, exploiting the poor position of the c3-knight.

Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at several systems that White may try after 1.d4 d5. Beginning with the Pseudo-Trompowsky with 2.♗g5, we saw that 2...h6! 3.♗h4 ♘d7!? 4.e3 ♘gf6 is a convenient answer, leading to either a Torre or a classical QGD.

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2.e4 dxe4 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.f3 exf3 5.♘xf3 is the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, when the Euwe Defence with 5...e6! 6.♗g5 ♗e7 is a natural fit for our repertoire, as Black develops his minor pieces on the same squares as in the QGD. Both 7.♕d2 and 7.♗d3 should be met by the flexible 7...♘bd7!, delaying castling. Depending on how White proceeds, Black may either strike at the centre with ...c5 or start building his queenside play with ...a6 and ...b5, with good chances.

The last part of the chapter dealt with White's options after 2.♘c3 ♘f6. Then 3.♗g5 is the Veresov, which is met by 3...♘bd7. We saw that 4.♕d3 is easily handled by 4...c5! intending 5.0-0-0 c4! with dangerous attacking chances. 4.f3 is the other traditional move, when 4...c6! 5.e4 dxe4 6.fxe4 e5! offers Black fine prospects, although you do need to study the lines and remember some key details. Finally, 3.♗f4 c5 4.e3 cxd4 5.exd4 a6 6.♗d3 has yielded excellent results for Jobava, but I think this is mainly because the Georgian super-GM is such a superb middlegame player. After 6...♘c6 7.♘ge2 e6, followed by ...♗e7 and ...b5, I would rate Black's chances as slightly preferable.

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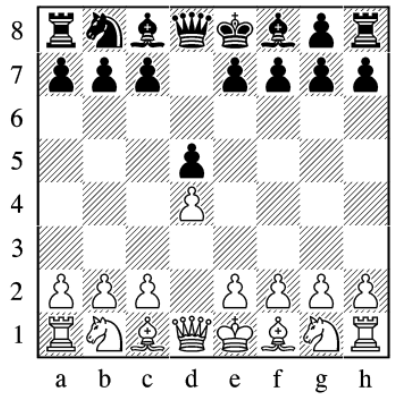
Chapter 6c



Repertoire vs FiCTaL Systems

(Fianchetto, Colle, Torre and London)

The Fianchetto: 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 b5! page 268

The Colle-Koltanowski (page 270): **1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5 5.c3 ♗e7 6.♘bd2 0–0**

7.0–0 page 271

7.dxc5 Game 53, page 273

The Colle-Zukertort (page 278): **1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5 5.b3 ♗e7 6.♗b2 0–0 7.0–0 b6**

8.♘bd2 page 278 (8.c4 page 278; 8.♘e5 page 279)

8.dxc5 Game 54, page 281

The Torre System (page 285): **1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗g5 ♘bd7! 4.♘bd2** (4.♘c3 page 285; 4.e3 page 285)

The Modern Move Order (page 286): **1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c3 e6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.♘bd2 ♘bd7! 6.e3 c5 7.♗d3 h6 8.♗h4 b6!**

9.0–0 page 286

9.♘e5 Game 55, page 288

The London System (page 292): **1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6**
Lines with an early ♘f3 page 292

4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0–0 6.c4!? Game 56, page 292
The ♘e5 Plan page 295

4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 (5.♗xd6 page 295; 5.♘e5 page 295; 5.♗d3 page 295) **5...0–0 6.♘bd2** (6.♗d3 page 295) **6...b6 7.c3** (7.♗d3 page 295) **7...c5 8.♘e5** (8.a4 page 296) **8...♗b7 9.♗d3 ♘c6! 10.f4** (10.0–0) Game 57, page 297
Delaying ♘f3 page 300

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1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 (4.c4 page 300; 4.c3 page 300) **4...♗d6**

The Stonewall: **5.♗xd6 ♕xd6 6.f4** page 301

Avoiding the Stonewall **5.♗g3 0–0 6.♗d3** (6.c3) **6...b6** page 302

Preserving the Bishop **7.c3** page 302 (7.♕e2 page 303)

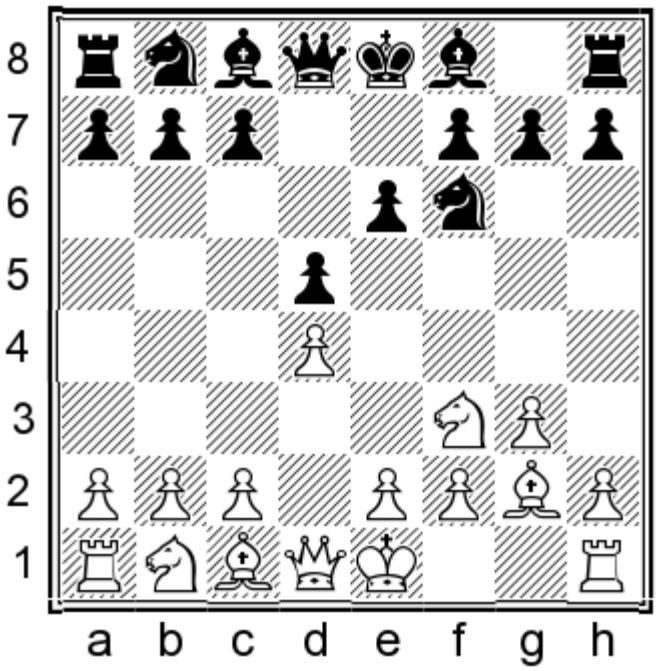
Sedlak's Recommendation **7.♘gf3 ♗a6 8.♗xa6** (8.0–0) page 304

This chapter deals with a variety of systems. I will present them in roughly ascending order of importance, in terms of the time and effort needed to prepare against them.

The Fianchetto

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2

Some tricky Catalan guys might go for this move order, hoping for a move such as 4...♗e7, when 5.c4 takes us out of my proposed repertoire. Fortunately, we have a better solution available.



4...b5!

White had his chance to play c2-c4 and he missed it!

5.a4

This is not the most popular line for White, but I think it's the only one that demands much precision from Black in the opening.

5.0-0 ♗b7

White has tried a bunch of moves from here but the only challenging idea is to prepare c2-c4. Here are two ways White may go about it:

6.a4

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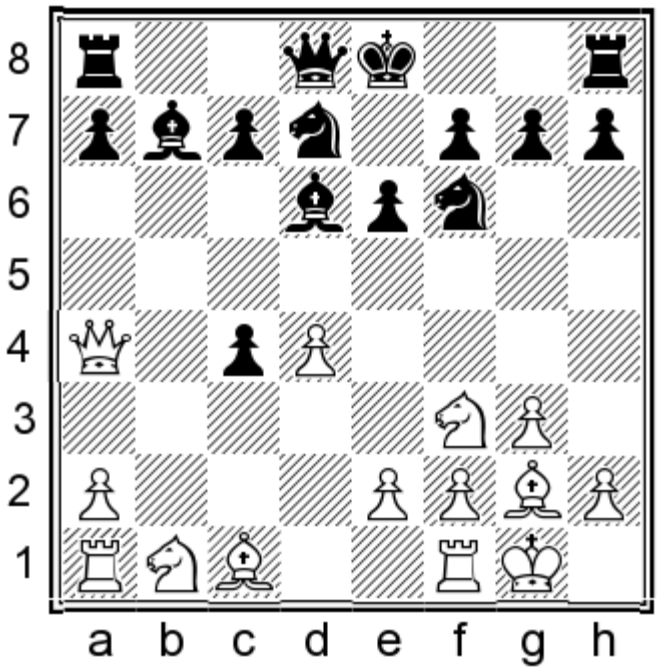
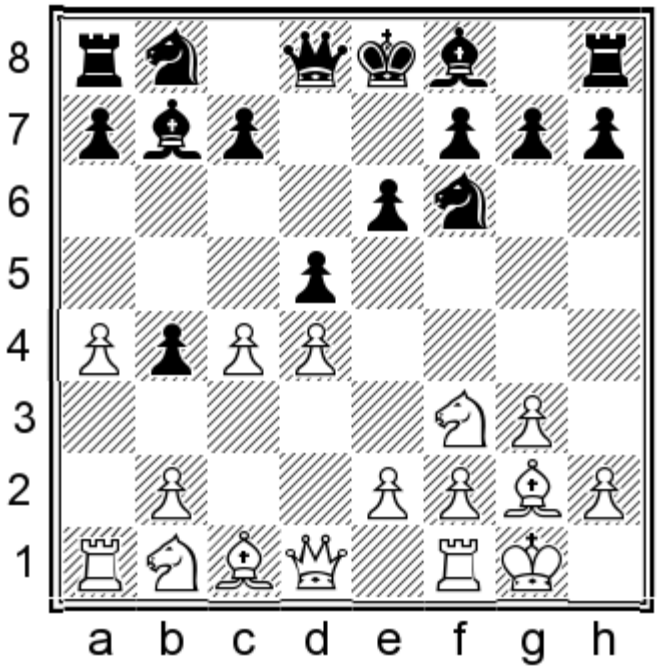
6.b3 ♘bd7 7.c4 is a popular alternative but 7...bxc4 8.bxc4 dxc4 9.♕a4 ♗d6! is fine for Black, for example:



10.♘e5 ♗xg2 11.♔xg2 0-0 12.♘xc4 ♘b6! 13.♕c6 ♘xc4 14.♕xc4 c5 In Feller – Levin, Belgium 2016, Black had the easier side of equality due to his slight lead in development.

6...b4 7.c4



7...c5!

I agree with Avrukh that 7...bxc3 8.♘xc3 makes it too easy for White to develop his pieces on active squares and build an initiative.

8.♘bd2

With the bishop already on b7, 8.cxd5 can be met by 8...♗xd5! and Black is fine. This is why I believe the 5.a4 move order to be more critical.

8...♘bd7

Avrukh analyses several lines from here, but in most cases Black simply develops with moves like ...♗e7 and

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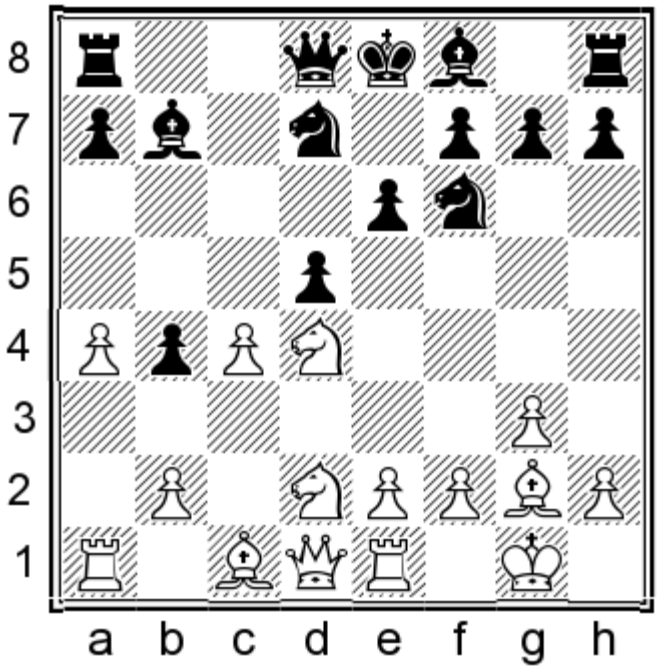
...♖c8, with a great position. I believe that the only critical move is:

9.♖e1

White intends to take on d5 and, if Black recaptures with the bishop or knight, to gain space in the centre with e2-e4. A good antidote is:

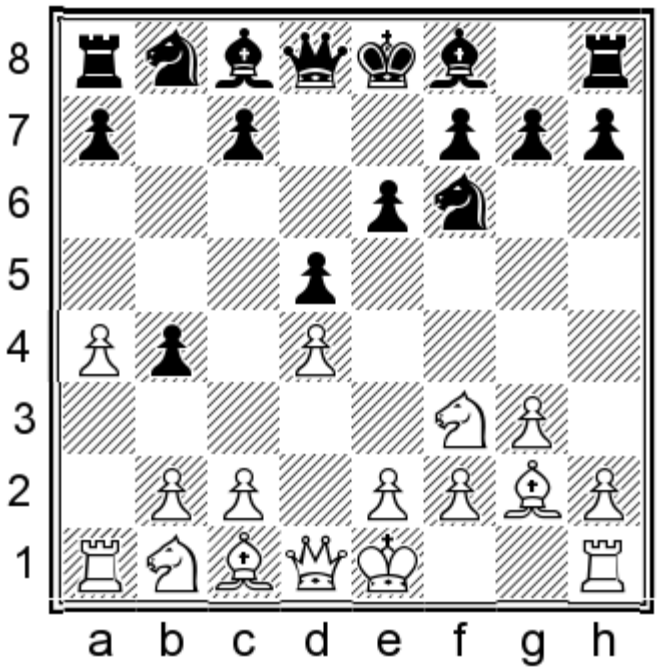
9...cxd4! 10.♘xd4



10...♘c5!N=

Black controls e4 and is ready to complete development. Instead 10...♗c5?! led to a great result for Black after the disastrous 11.♘4b3?? ♗xf2† 12.♔xf2 ♘g4† 0–1 in Zsifkovits – Knoll, Oberwart 1997, but 11.♘2b3!N is a simple improvement which gives White an easy advantage.

5...b4



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6.c4

Again, Avrukh analyses a bunch of other moves, but most of the time Black gets a good game with common-sense replies. Therefore I will focus on what I consider the only really tricky continuation at White's disposal.

6...bxc3 7.♘xc3

7.bxc3 can be met by 7...♗a6!, taking c4 under control, and after 8.♘e5 c5= Black was fine in Mrkonjic – Tancik, Novi Sad 2010.

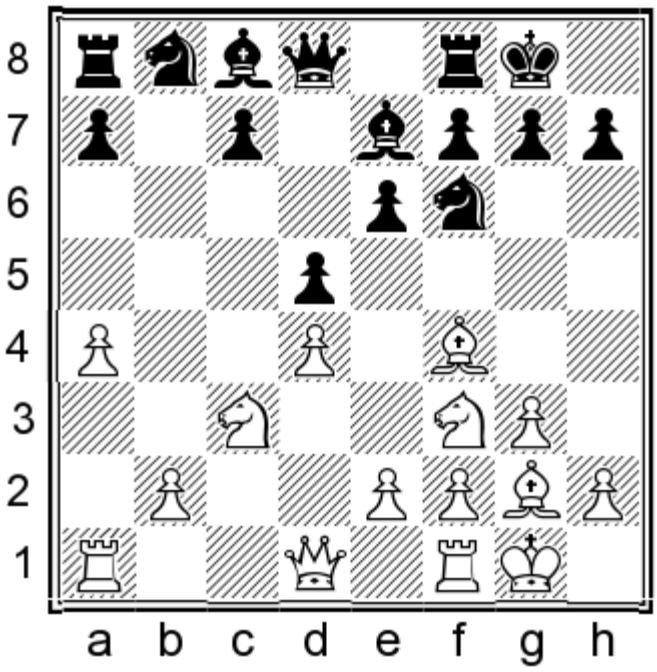
7...♗e7

Avrukh gives 7...♘bd7 followed by ...♗a6, which also seems decent.

8.0-0 0-0 9.♗f4

This is White's main plan, intending to cause trouble with ♘b5.

9.♘e5 ♘fd7! is a useful motif to remember when a knight arrives on e5 in these positions. 10.e4 was the continuation of Djingarova – Fluvia Poyatos, Figueres 2008, and now 10...c6!N would have led to comfortable equality for Black.



9...a5!N

I like this move a lot. Black fixes the b4-outpost.

9...♘a6?! 10.♘e5 ♗b7 11.♕b3 ♖b8 12.♘b5 was better for White in Vidit – Sengupta, Al Ain 2014.

10.♘b5

If White delays this move then he might get into difficulties. For example: 10.♕b3 ♗a6 11.♘b5

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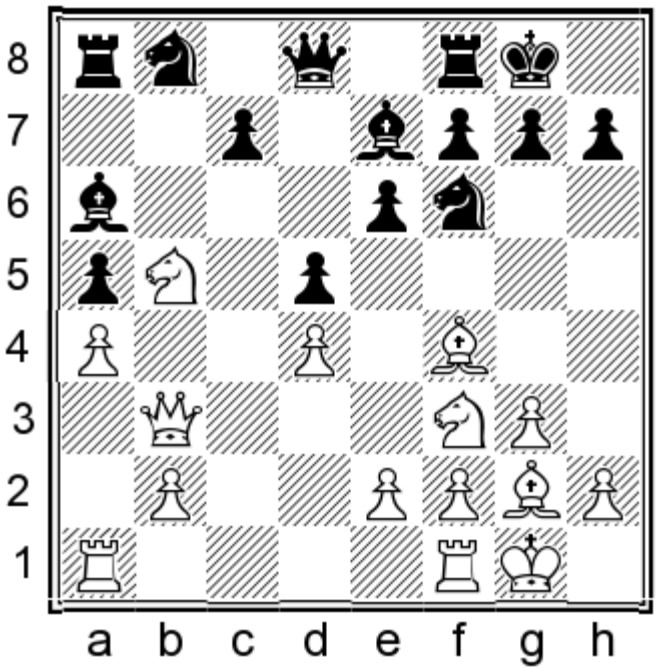
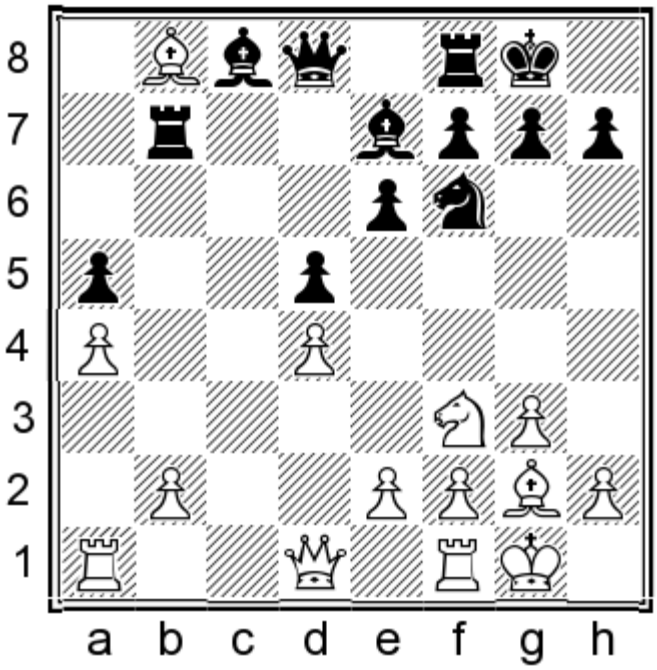


11...♘e8! 12.♖fc1 c6 13.♘c3 ♘d7 Black is ready to take control with ...g5! followed by ...♘d6.

10...c6 11.♘c7 ♖a7 12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♗xb8 ♖b7



14.♗f4 ♖xb2 15.♘e5

Otherwise Black will get a strong initiative after ...♘e4 and ...♗a6.

15...♗d7!=

Black is at least fine. He might play ...♖b4 and ...♕e8 to target the a4-pawn, or simply ...♕a8 and ...♖fb8.

The Colle-Koltanowski

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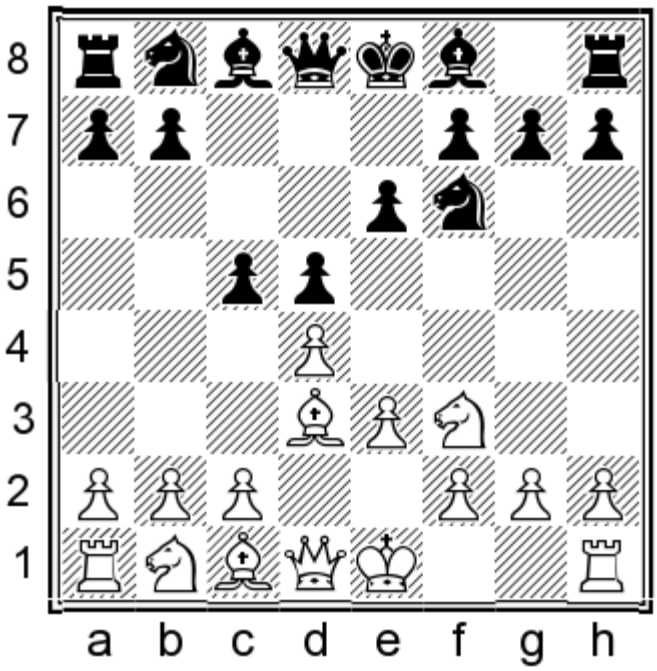
This is a popular system at club level, which also appears in high-level games from time to time.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5



5.c3

This move characterizes the Colle-Koltanowski system. Some strong players have tried to be flexible with their move orders by playing 0-0 and/or ♘bd2 before moving the c-pawn, in order to keep the option of b2-b3, converting to the Colle-Zukertort which will be discussed a bit later. Fortunately, our system of defence is immune to such move order tricks. Moreover, Peter Svidler has pointed out that 5.0-0?! can be met by 5...c4! 6.♗e2 b5, with a comfortable position for Black.

5...♗e7

5...c4? is obviously not good here due to 6.♗c2, when White has the easy plan of preparing e3-e4, leading to a comfortable advantage.

6.♘bd2

White can also try 6.dxc5 and enter a kind of reversed Semi-Slav with an extra tempo. This will be examined in Game 53 below.

6...0-0 7.0-0

7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.0-0 also leads to Game 53.

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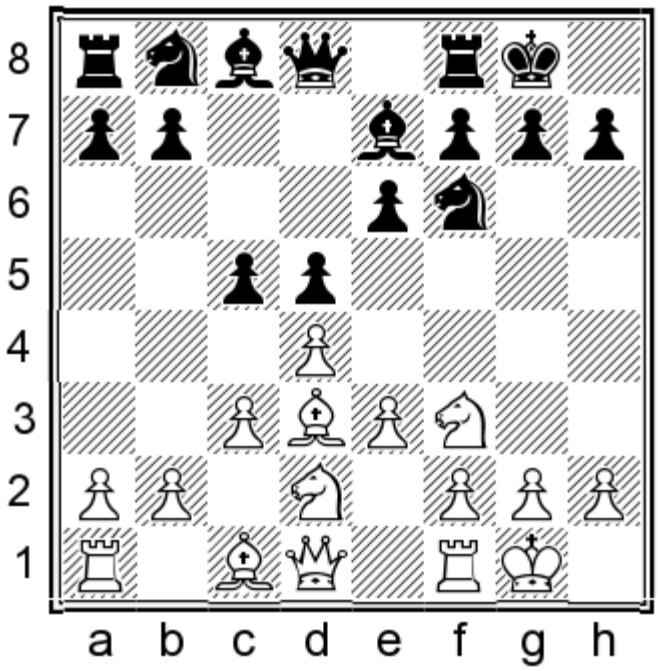


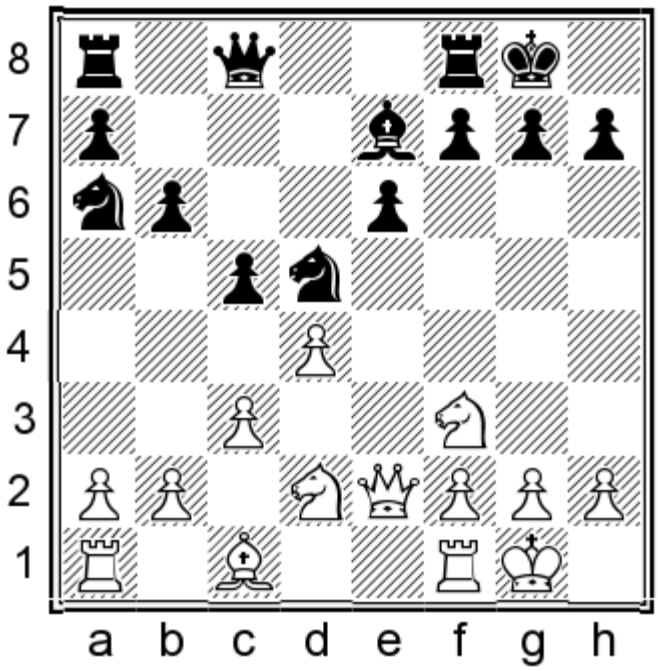
7...b6!

As we saw in the introduction, Black is planning ...♗a6; and it turns out that White cannot really do anything to stop it.

8.♕e2

This is what Valery Bronznik recommends for White in his excellent *The Colle-Koltanowski Syst*em. Let's look at a couple of other possibilities:

8.e4 can be ignored by 8...♗a6; if White plays e4-e5, then the position will resemble the Limberg – Taimanov game quoted in the note to White's 9th move in the main game. 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 10.♕e2 ♕c8 11.exd5 ♘xd5



Black had already equalized in Viner – Taimanov, Biel 1994. Later White tried to improve the scope of his bishop by playing c3-c4, b2-b3 and ♗b2, but Taimanov responded with ...f6 and ...e5! and went on to outplay his opponent.

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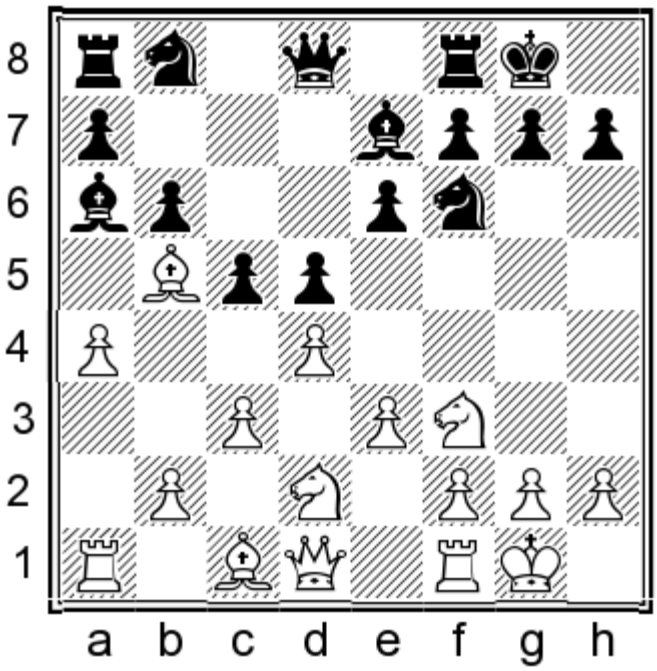
8.a4

This continuation is (deservedly) rare, but it's a thematic way of dealing with the bishop's arrival on a6, which often occurs in other openings such as the French Defence.

8...♗a6N 9.♗b5

This is the idea; White hopes to profit from the open a-file after an exchange on b5, but Black can easily thwart his opponent's plan with:



9...♗b7!

A strong retort, threatening ...c4 to cut off the bishop.

10.♗d3

10.a5 bxa5!∓ followed by ...♕b6 and ...♘c6 is strong for Black. The text move also fails to impress, as Black has effectively been given the ...♗c8-b7 move for free, while a2-a4 is also hardly White's most productive way to spend a tempo. Many moves are possible but my suggestion would be:

10...♘e4!?

Intending ...f5, with good attacking prospects. The e5-square may be weak, but this is no problem with the bishop on c1.

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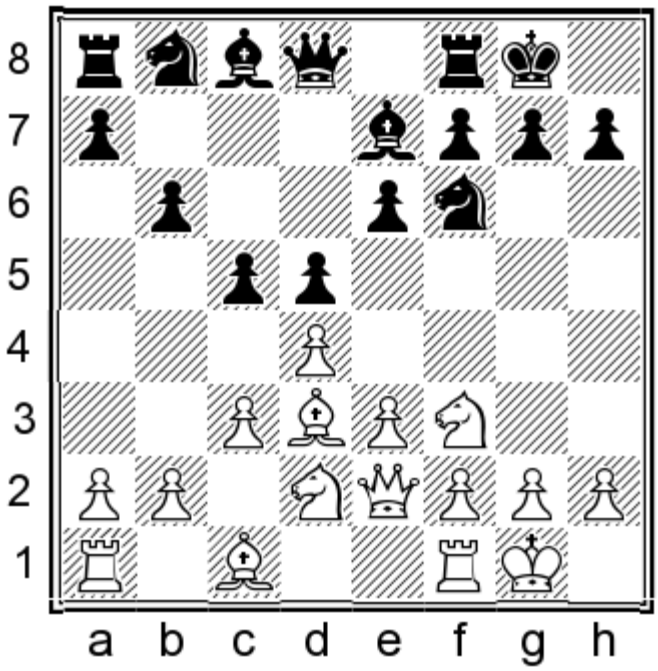


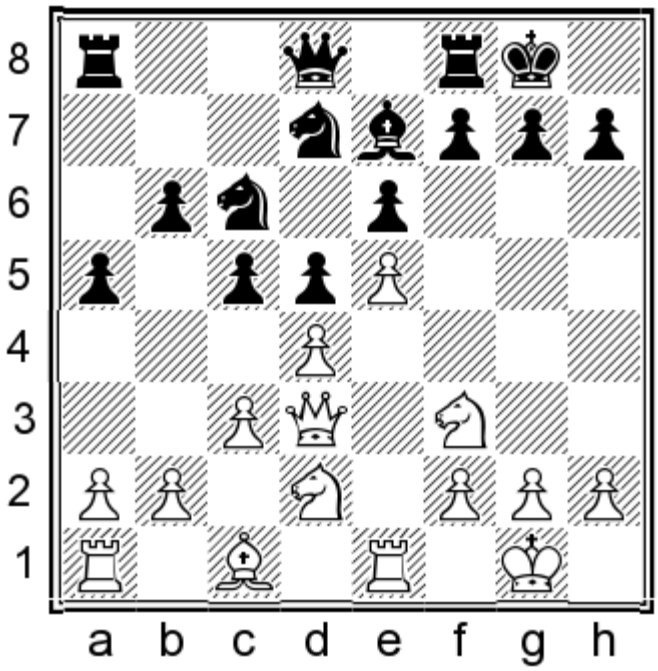
8...a5!

Insisting on ...♗a6.

9.b3

This was Bronznik's idea.

A natural alternative is: 9.e4 ♗a6 10.e5 ♗xd3 11.♕xd3 ♘fd7 12.♖e1 ♘c6



13.a3 ♕c8 14.♘f1 ♕a6 15.♕d1 ♖fc8 16.♗g5 ♗f8 17.♗e3 b5 Black had an optimal French structure in Limberg – Taimanov, Rowy 2000, and proceeded to win a nice game.

9...a4

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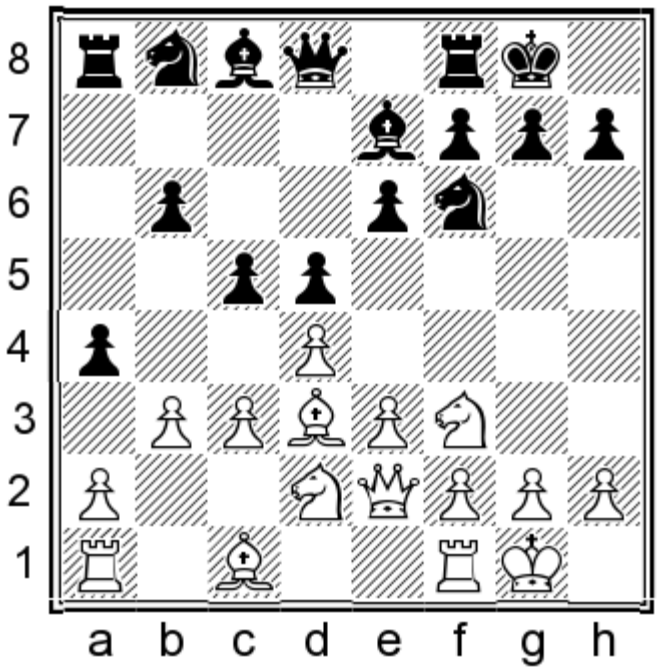
Bronznik suggests meeting 9...♗a6 with 10.c4; Black is fine here as well after 10...♘c6, but I like the text move even more.

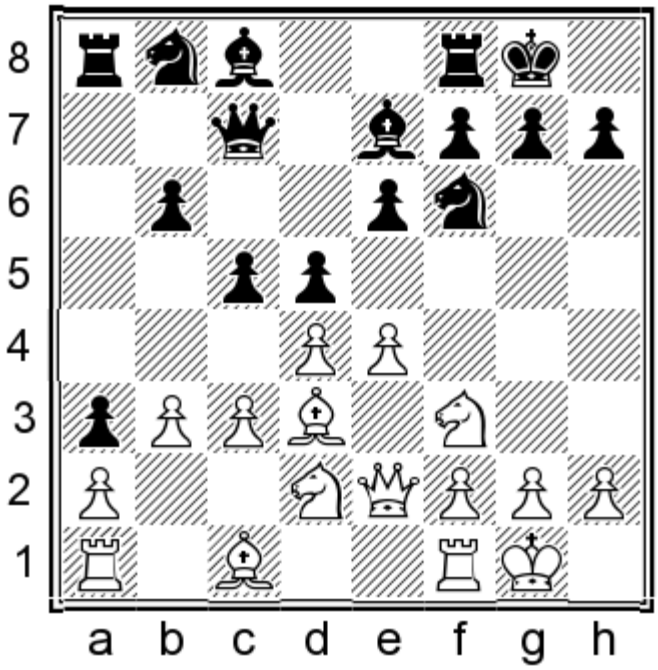


10.♗b2 a3! 11.♗c1 ♕c7!?

Other ideas exist but I like this idea by Black, who wants to have the possibility of ...cxd4 followed by ...♕c3 at hand.

12.e4

Trying to win the a3-pawn with 12.♘b1 doesn't work due to 12...♘c6, when 13.♘xa3? c4! wins material.



12...cxd4 13.cxd4 ♕c3 14.♖b1 ♘a6 15.exd5 ♘b4!

Black enjoyed a nice advantage in Orjuela – Varon, Santa Rosa 2011.

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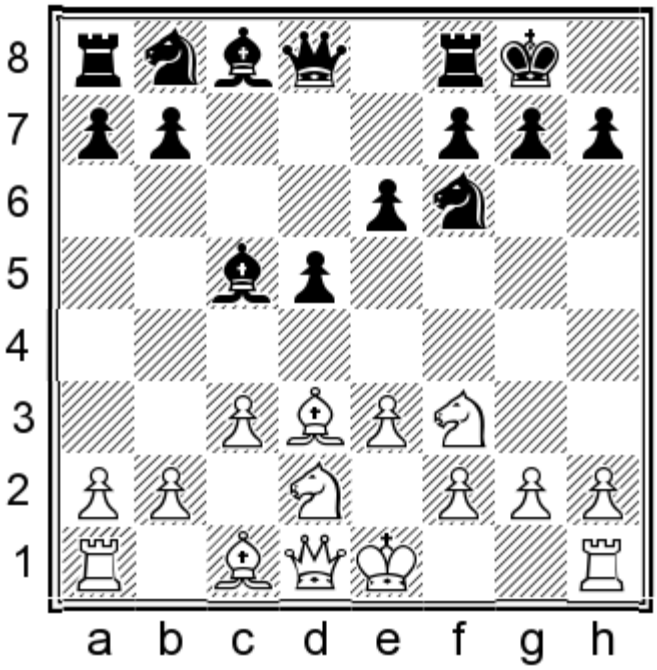
We may conclude that simple development by White enables Black to get a fine position with the ...b6 plan. Let's see if White can do any better by exchanging on c5 and playing for an initiative in the centre.

GAME 53

Dusan Vincilov – Mihajlo Stojanovic

Kac 2016

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 c5 4.c3 e6 5.♘bd2 ♗e7 6.♗d3 0-0 7.dxc5 ♗xc5



8.0-0 ♘c6

This is the most ambitious plan.

8...b6!? is not bad either. Play might continue: 9.b4!? (9.♕e2 a5 10.e4 ♗a6 looks about equal)

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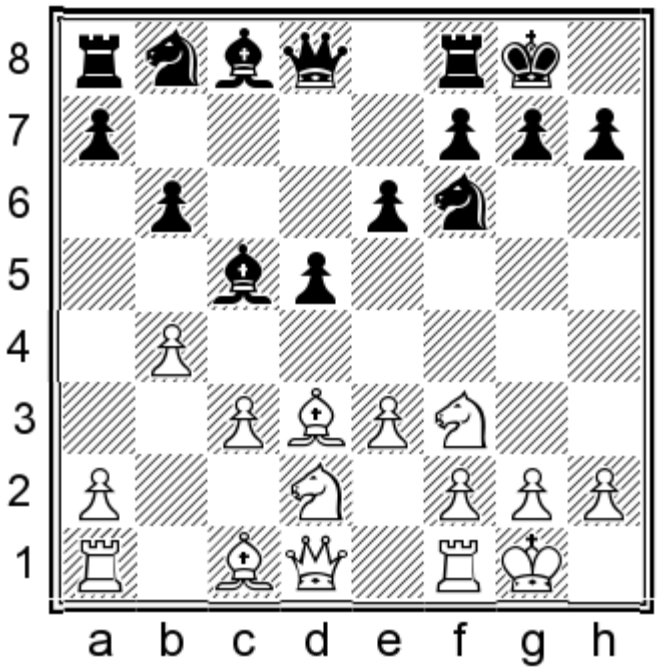
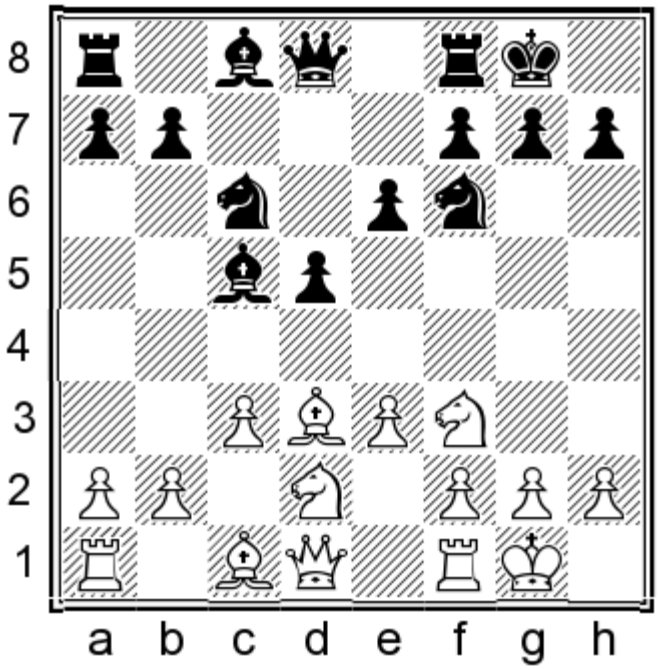


9...♗e7! 10.♗b2 ♗b7 11.a3 White is ready for c3-c4 but Black has a nice way to counter this plan: 11...a5! 12.♕b3 ♕d6!= Followed by ...♖fc8 and possibly ...e5. Objectively the position is still equal, but I like Black's chances more.



9.e4

After 9.♕e2 ♕c7 White has nothing better than 10.e4, transposing to the game.

An important alternative is:

9.b4

When the knight is committed to c6, this plan makes a lot of sense.

9...♗e7!

I discovered this move after an interesting correspondence game, in which I chose the more popular but less accurate 9...♗d6. Play continues 10.♗b2 e5 11.e4 ♗g4 with a split:

a) Without going into full details, I believe 12.♖e1! to be White's best. I cannot say for sure that Black is worse,

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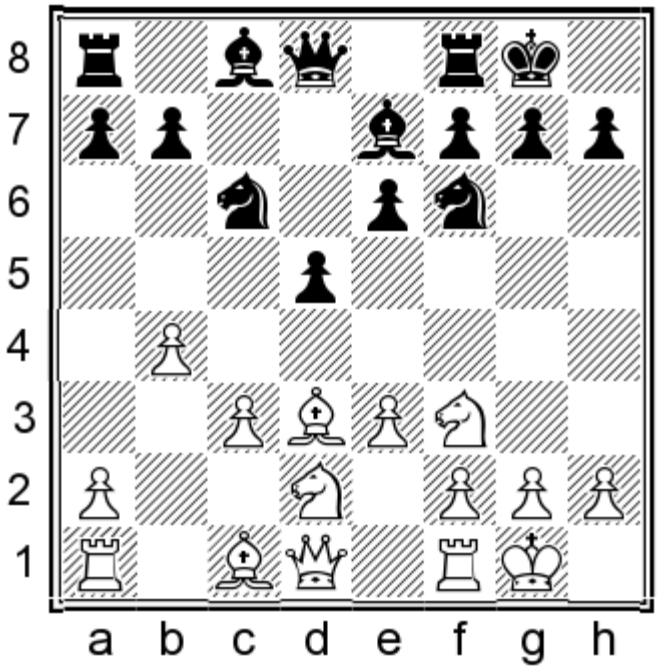
but he faces some challenges and his practical results have not been good.

b) In view of the above, my game is not really theoretically relevant to us. However, I will present it anyway for comparative purposes, as we will see Black getting an improved version of it in some of the lines below. Play continued: 12.exd5 ♘xd5 13.♕c2 ♔h8!? (Avrukh's 13...h6! is safer, one reason being that it enables Black to meet 14.♗e4 with 14...♘de7!) 14.♗e4 ♘f4 15.♘c4 f5 16.♗xc6 bxc6 17.♘cxe5! ♗xe5 18.♘xe5 ♗e2 19.c4! ♗xf1 20.♖xf1 ♕c7 21.♖d1 ♖ae8 At first I thought I was better here, but in fact White is fine and his exchange sacrifice could prove dangerous in practical play. The game ended peacefully after 22.g3 ♖xe5 23.♗xe5 ♕xe5 24.gxf4 ♕xf4 25.♕e2 h6 26.a3 ♔h7 when a draw was agreed in Jeute – Ntirlis, corr. 2013.

After that detour, let us see why White's plan is nowhere near as effective against the more accurate 9...♗e7!, to which we now return:



10.♗b2

10.b5 ♘a5 11.♗b2 b6 is equal, as a number of games have demonstrated.

10...e5 11.e4

11.b5 e4! proved to be excellent for Black in Pingitzer – Maslik, Austria 2016.

11...♗g4 12.♖e1

12.exd5 ♘xd5 (12...♕xd5!? is playable and shows another advantage of having the bishop on e7) 13.♕c2 (after 13.h3 Black can consider the fancy 13...♗xh3!?, but I think 13...♗e6! is just a better move) 13...♔h8! Now 14.♗e4?! leaves Black a full tempo up on my correspondence game; the d5-knight is not en prise, so we can simply play 14...f5! with a strong attack.

The text move is the idea that I considered potentially problematic in the similar position with the bishop on d6, but here it is harmless. Rather than continuing with 12...d4, as in Stubbe – Ditmas, Hamburg 2012, I propose the improvement:

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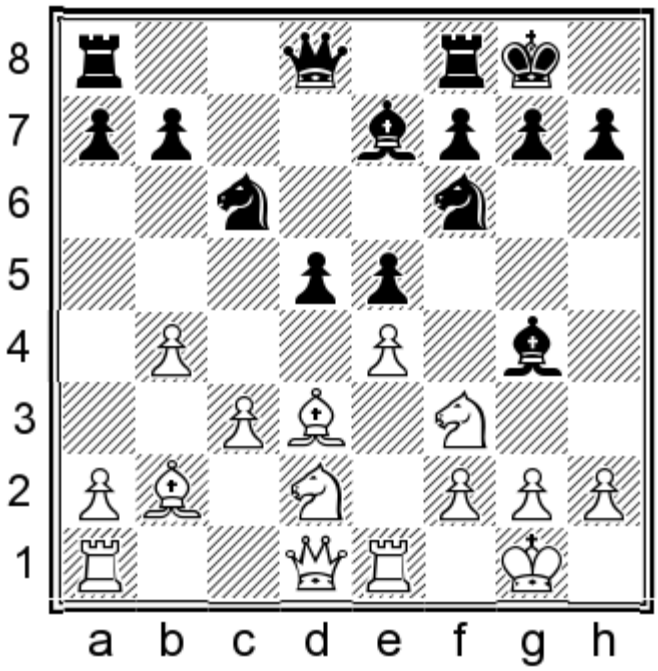
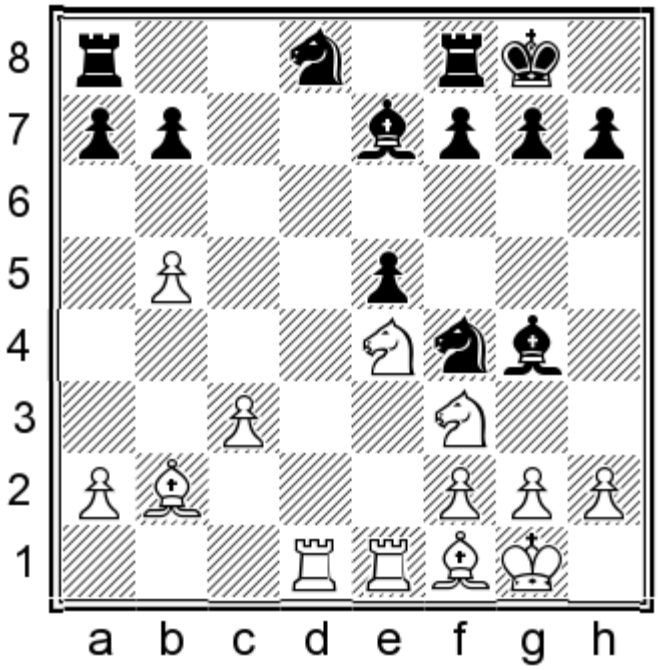


12...dxe4!N 13.♘xe4 ♘d5

13...♘h5!? is similar, with 14.b5 ♘a5 15.♗f1 ♕xd1 16.♖axd1 f6!? leading to approximate equality.

14.b5 ♘f4 15.♗f1 ♕xd1 16.♖axd1 ♘d8

White has a slight lead in development but it's not clear what he can do with it, and his queenside advances may leave him with weaknesses later in the game. Here are a few sample lines.



17.♘g3

17.♗c1 ♘g6 18.♗c4 ♖c8 19.♗b3 b6! is good for Black, whose knight can come to b7 and perhaps c5 later.

17...f6

Please note that Black should not hurry to exchange on f3: the doubled f-pawns will not really be weak, so in most cases I would prefer to keep my light-squared bishop on the board, especially as the f3-knight is currently being dominated by the f6-e5 pawn duo.

18.♗c1 ♘g6 19.♗c4† ♗e6 20.♗b3 ♗xb3 21.axb3 ♘e6 22.♘f5 ♖fd8

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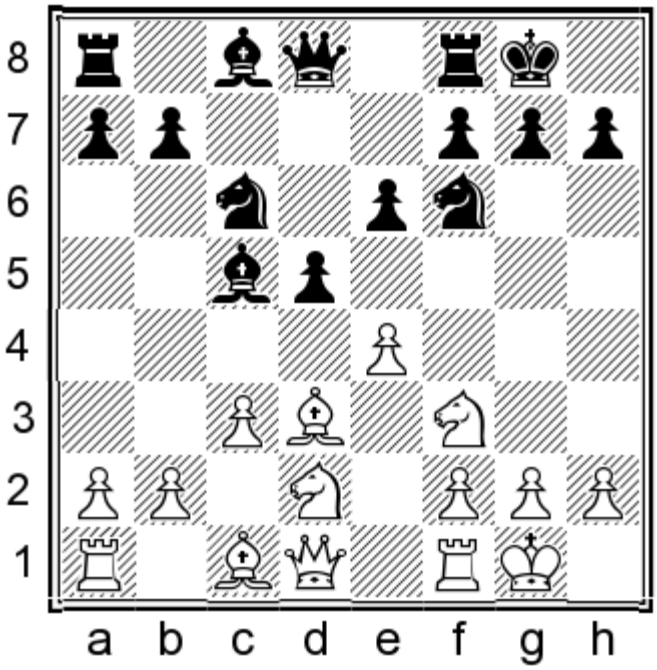
The position remains balanced.



9...♕c7 10.♕e2

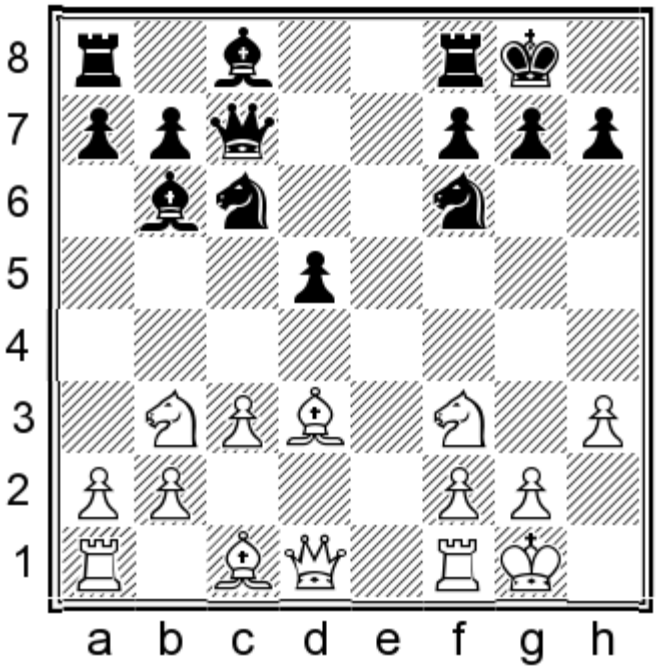
An important alternative is:

10.exd5 exd5! 11.♘b3 ♗b6

Black has an excellent IQP position, as the d3-bishop is misplaced and Black intends ...♗g4 with a big initiative. That's why the most popular continuation is:

12.h3

But now comes a surprise...



12...♗xh3! 13.gxh3 ♕g3† 14.♔h1 ♕xh3† 15.♘h2

Black has two pawns for the piece and an ongoing initiative. This position has been analysed extensively and the ultimate verdict is a draw after model play, but White faces tremendous practical problems defending the position

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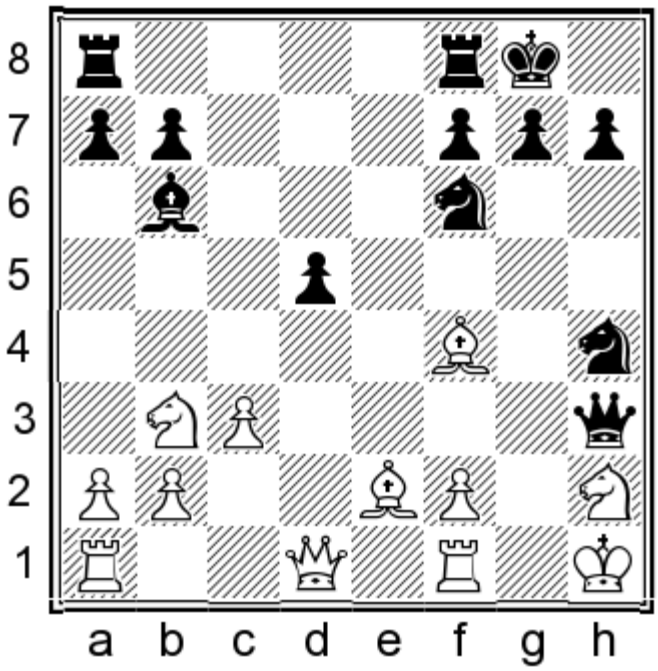
– and even if he pulls it off, the resulting endgame with three connected passed pawns for a knight is more dangerous for White than for Black.

15...♘e5 16.♗e2 ♘f3 17.♗f4 ♘h4

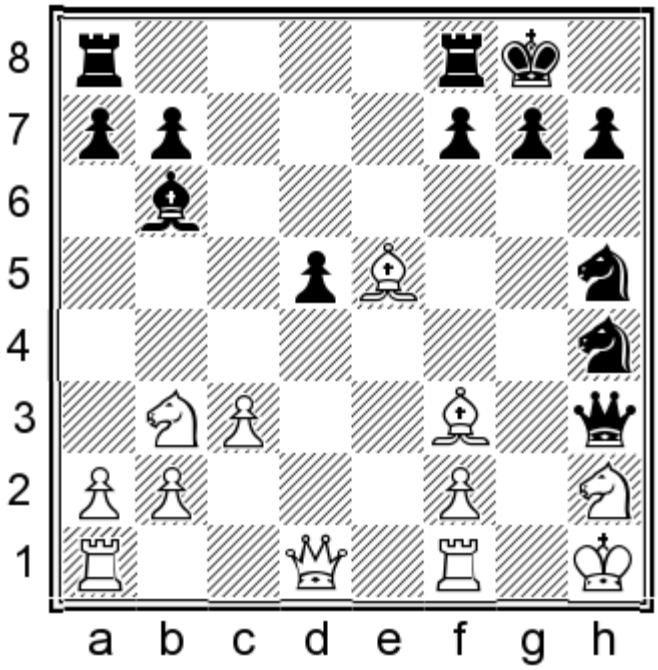


18.♗f3

At every turn White must play only moves. One example of a fatal error is: 18.♖g1? ♘e4! 19.♗g3 ♕xg3 20.♖xg3 ♘xf2† 21.♔g1 ♘xd1† 22.♘d4 ♘xb2 0–1 Piankov – Eingorn, Bad Woerishofen 2004. Perhaps White noticed at this point that he no longer had an extra piece and was four pawns down!

18...♘h5 19.♗e5

Again the only move; White has to keep his bishop on the h2-b8 diagonal.



19...♖ae8! 20.♖g1!

Again this is the only way to maintain the balance, but it was missed by Rizzitano, who gave only 20.♗d6 ♖e6 21.♗xd5 and now he missed Black's strongest move: 21...g6! The point is that the rook cannot take on d6

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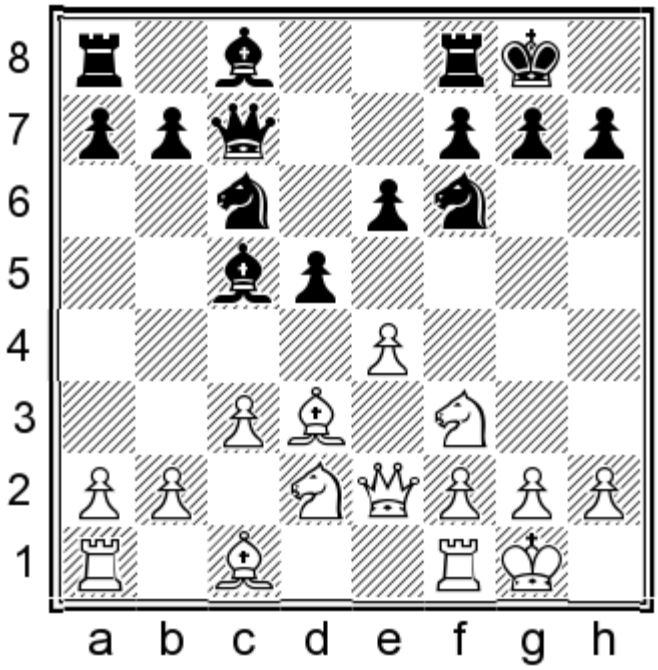
because the h5-knight hangs; but the rook also cannot be taken, as the g2-square must be guarded. Therefore 22.♖g1 is the only move that makes sense, but now 22...♖xd6! 23.♕xh5 ♗xf2! 24.♖ad1 ♗xg1 25.♖xg1 ♕f5 26.♕xf5 ♘xf5 27.♗xb7 ♖b8 reaches an endgame where the black rooks are powerful. Let's go a bit further: 28.♗e4 ♘e3 29.♘f3 f5 30.♗b1 ♖d1 31.♖xd1 ♘xd1 32.c4 ♘xb2∓ White will struggle to hold the draw.

20...♗xf2! 21.♕f1 ♕xf1 22.♖gxf1 ♖xe5 23.♗xh5 ♗b6

This is the endgame with three pawns for the knight I was talking about. It has been tested in a correspondence game, which continued:

24.♗d1 ♘f5 25.♘g4 ♘g3† 26.♔g2 ♘xf1 27.♘xe5 ♘e3† 28.♔f3 ♖e8 29.♘d7 ♗d8

The game Locio – Rinaldi, corr. 2007, ended in a draw, but White was under pressure all the way through.



10...b6!

Many analysts have recommended 10...h6 but, as recent practice has shown, allowing White to take on h7 is better, and even gives Black some advantage!

11.e5

White may as well go for it, as other continuations see him struggle to equalize:

After 11.b3 White is hit by: 11...♘h5! 12.g3

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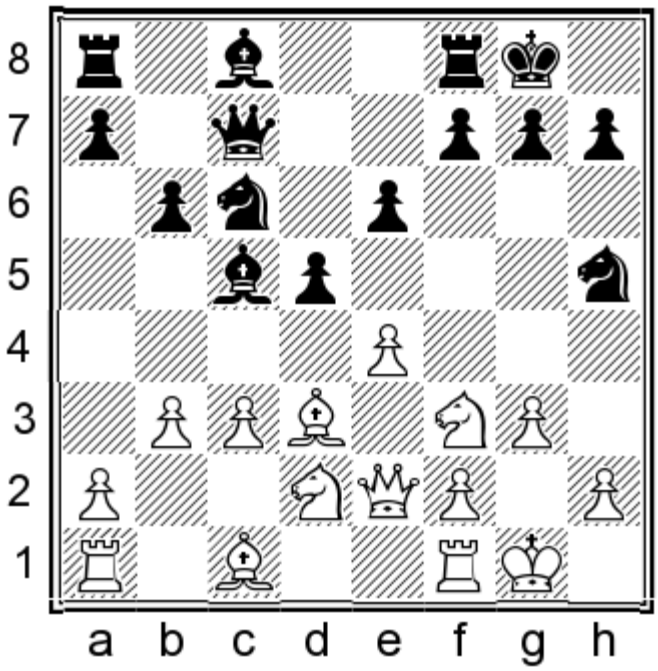
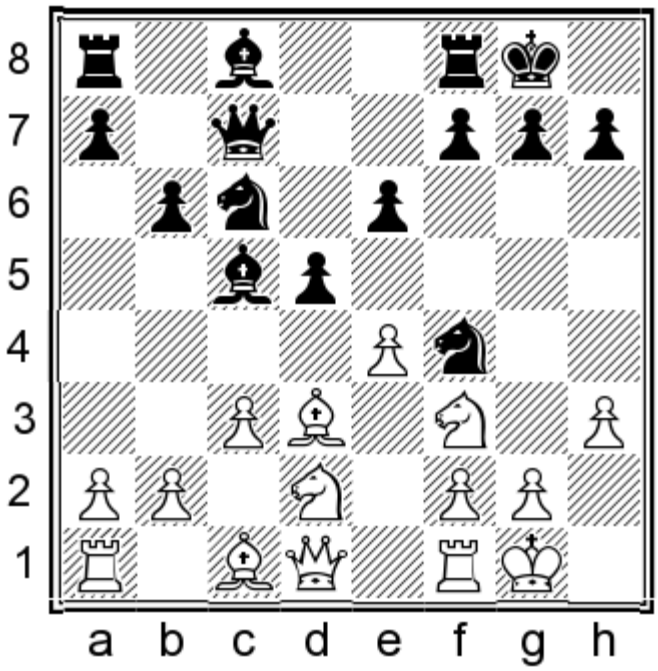


12...♘xg3! 13.hxg3 ♕xg3† 14.♔h1 ♕h3† 15.♔g1 f5∓ With a strong attack, as in Nittel – Tonne, email 2008.

11.h3 ♘h5! 12.♕d1 ♘f4 is also excellent for Black:



White cannot avoid the exchange of his bishop, as 13.♗c2? runs into 13...♗a6!, which is the main point of Black's 10th move.

11.♘b3 dxe4! 12.♗xe4 ♗d6 13.♗d3 occurred in Hofstetter – Muzyka, corr. 2006, and now after 13...h6!?N Black is slightly for choice, as his pieces are better placed.

Black also does well after:

11.b4 ♗d6!

Preventing e4-e5.

12.♗b2

12.h3 ♘e5 13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 14.♗b2 ♗b7∓

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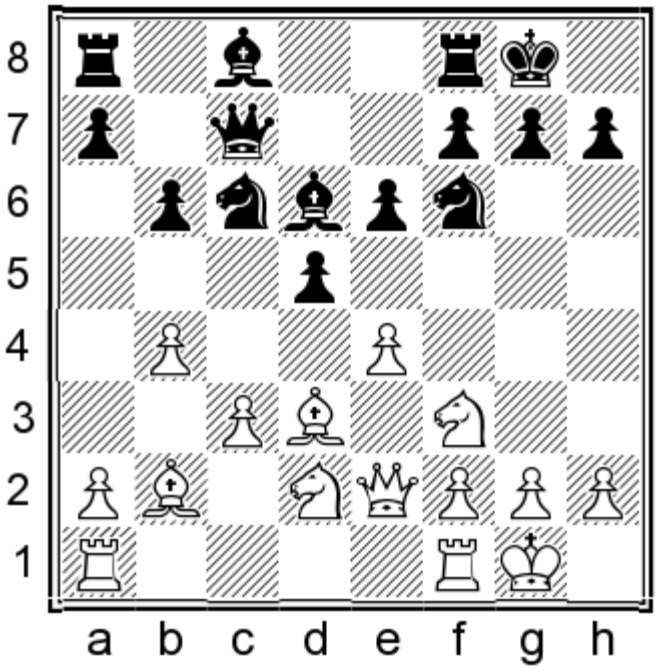


12...♘g4! 13.h3 ♘ge5 14.♗b1 ♘xf3†

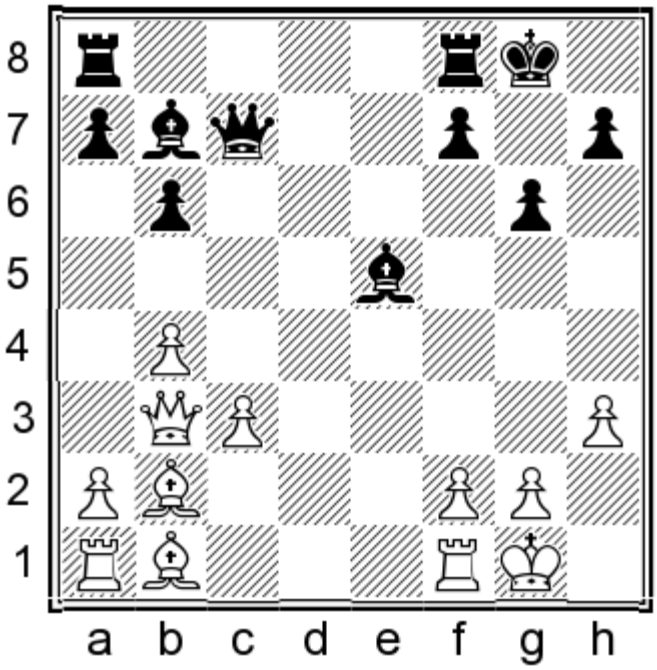
14...♗b7!? is also good.

15.♘xf3 ♘e5 16.♘xe5 ♗xe5∓

Black is already slightly for choice, but in the game White made things worse with an optimistic pawn grab:

17.exd5 exd5 18.♕d3 g6 19.♕xd5? ♗b7 20.♕b3

We have been following Diaz Velandia – Sanchez Jimenez, Linares 2016, where Black missed a win by means of:



20...♕c6!N 21.f3 ♕f6–+

Followed by ...♕f4, with a decisive attack.

11...♘g4 12.♗xh7†

12.b4 ♗e7 13.♖e1 f6 14.exf6 ♗xf6 15.h3 ♘ge5∓ is also good for Black.

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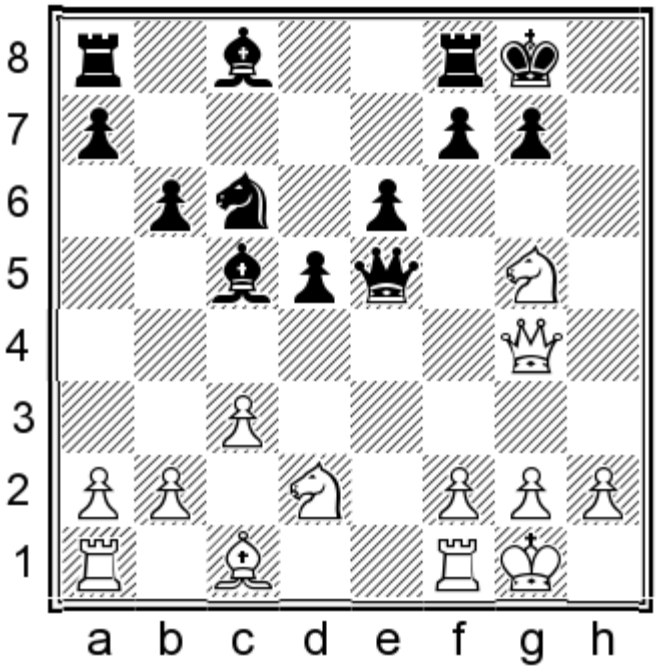
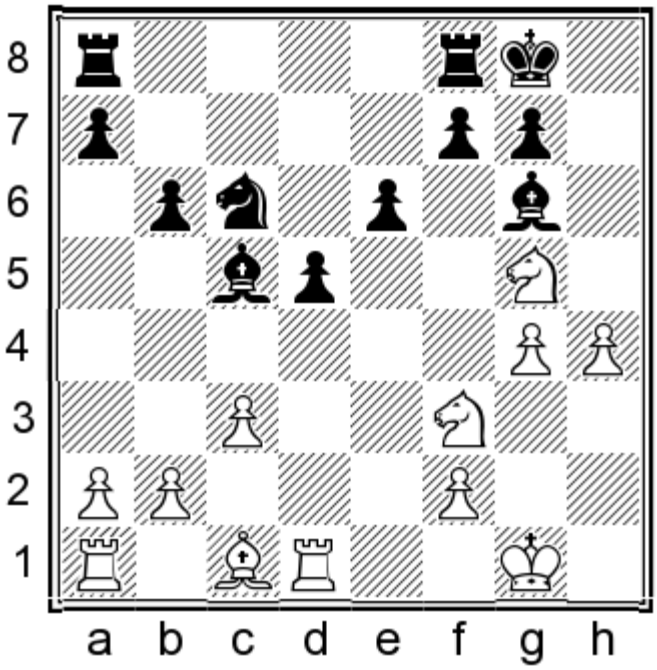
12...♔xh7 13.♘g5† ♔g8 14.♕xg4 ♕xe5∓

Analysis proves that White has no real attack, so Black's central majority and bishop pair are the dominant features of the position.



15.♘df3

Another game continued: 15.♕h5 ♕f5 16.♘df3 ♗a6! 17.♖d1 ♗d3 18.g4 ♕g6 19.♕xg6 ♗xg6 20.h4



20...♖fe8!? 21.h5 ♗c2 22.♖d2 ♗e4 23.♘xe4 dxe4 24.♘h2 f5∓ Fenollar Jorda – Gonzalez Garcia, Barbera del Valles 2011.

15...♕f6 16.♕g3

Another depressing experience for White occurred after: 16.♕h4 ♕g6 17.♖e1 ♗d6 18.♗f4 e5 19.♘xe5 ♘xe5

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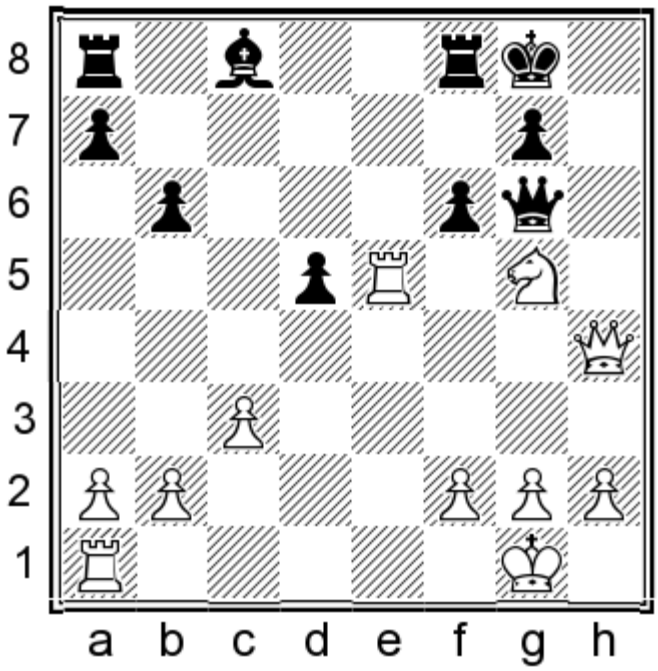
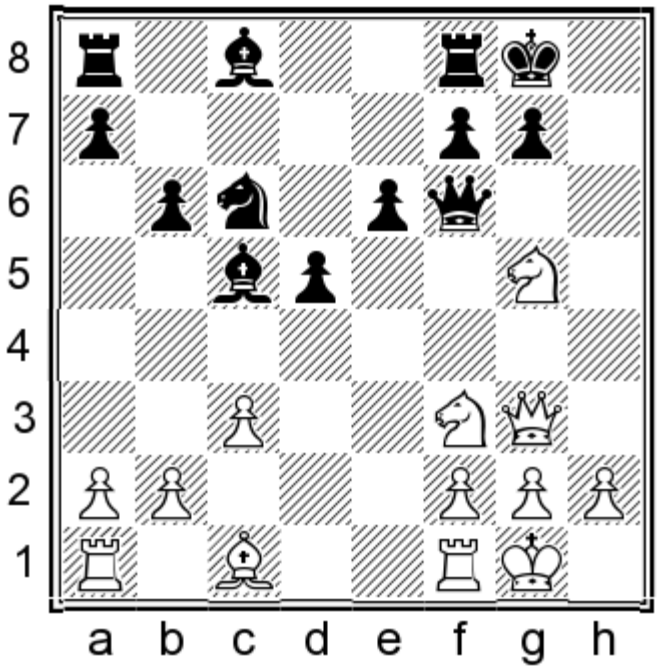
20.♗xe5 ♗xe5 21.♖xe5 f6



22.♖xd5 fxg5 23.♖xg5 ♕f6 24.♖h5 ♕xh4 25.♖xh4 ♗e6∓ Black’s bishop was clearly worth more than three pawns in Mona – El Gindy, Beirut 2014.



16...e5 17.♘h3 ♕e6 18.♖e1 f6∓

It is obvious that White’s strategy has failed, and Black goes on to convert his advantage in convincing fashion.

19.♗e3 ♕g4 20.♖ad1 ♖d8 21.♗xc5 bxc5 22.♘d2 ♗f5 23.f3 ♕a4 24.♕f2 ♕xa2 25.g4 ♗c2 26.♖c1 ♗g6 27.b3 d4 28.♘e4 ♕xb3 29.♘xc5 ♕d5 30.cxd4 ♘xd4 31.♘e4 ♖ac8 32.♖xc8 ♖xc8 33.♕e3 ♘c2 34.♕c1 ♕e6 35.♖f1 ♗xe4 36.♖f2 ♘d4 37.♕e3 ♗xf3 38.♖xf3 ♕xg4†

0–1

Having seen how to handle the Colle-Koltanowski System, let’s now turn our attention to its close relative.

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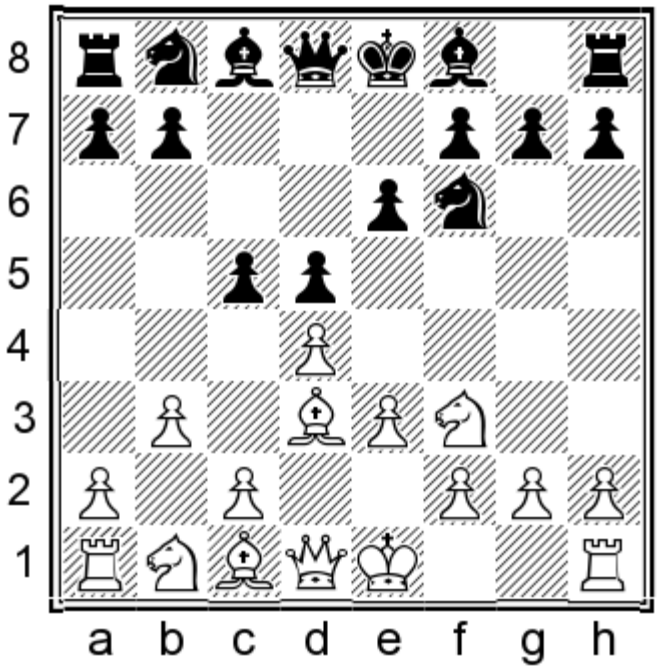
The Colle-Zukertort

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5 5.b3



5...♗e7

There is no need to change our set-up. This was also Karjakin's choice when he faced this system in his World Championship match against Carlsen.

6.♗b2 0-0 7.0-0 b6

Once again we are preparing ...♗a6. White often reacts with c2-c4 in order to avoid the unfavourable exchange of bishops but, with the bishop on a6 and the knight ready to come to c6 (rather than the less active d7), White risks ending up in an unfavourable version of a hanging pawns structure.

8.♘bd2

8.dxc5 avoids the hanging pawns and is examined in Game 54.

8.c4 ♗a6

8...♗b7 transposes to my coverage of the QGD with an early e2-e3, which can be found in Chapter 4b. It looks more challenging to put the bishop on a6 though.

9.♘c3?!

White should prefer 9.♘bd2, which transposes to our main line below.

9...dxc4 10.bxc4 cxd4 11.exd4 ♘c6

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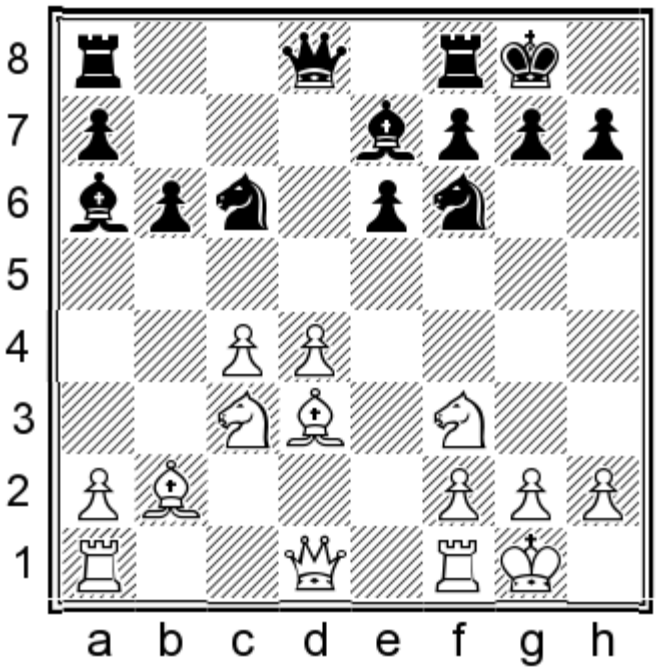


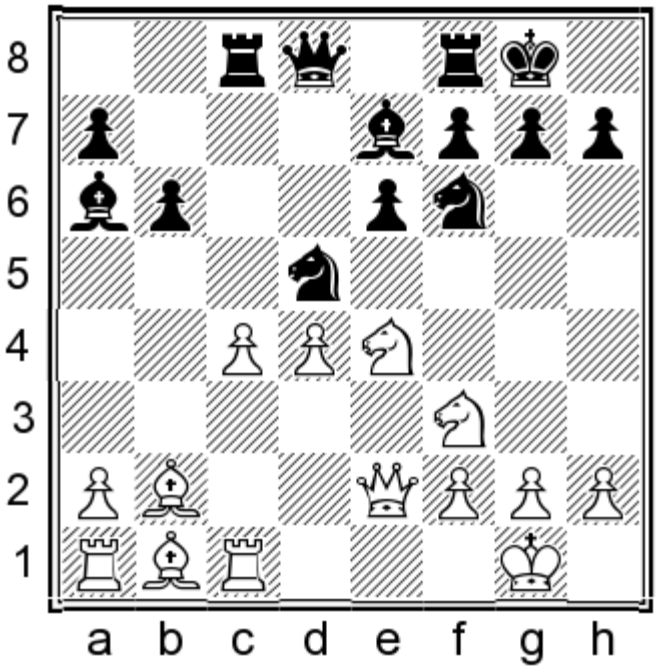
Black has strong pressure against the hanging pawns, as the following lines illustrate.

12.♕e2

12.♕a4?! fails to impress. 12...♘b4 13.♗e2 ♕e8 14.♕d1 ♖c8 15.a3 ♘c6 16.d5 This was Beikert – Gyimesi, Germany 2004, and here 16...♘a5N∓ would have given Black some advantage.

12...♘b4 13.♗b1 ♘bd5!? 14.♘e4 ♖c8 15.♖c1N

15.♘e5?! occurred in Nilsson – Horberg, Gothenburg 1964, when 15...♘d7!N∓ would have been excellent for Black.



15...♘xe4 16.♕xe4 ♘f6 17.♕e2 ♕c7 18.♗d3 ♗b7

Black is at least equal.

8.♘e5

This has been played by Artur Yusupov – a rare example of a high-level GM who has played the Colle-Zukertort on a frequent basis. However, none of his opponents chose:

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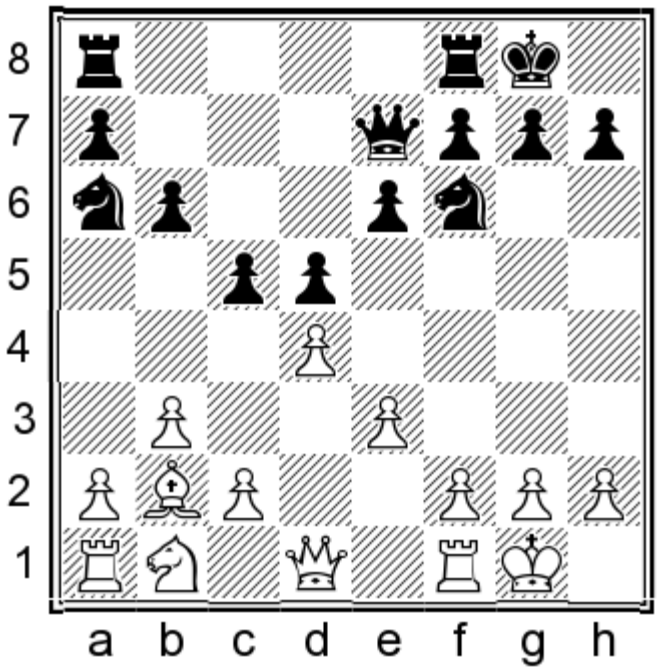
8...♗a6!

The only example I found on the database is a blitz game, which continued logically with:

9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 10.♘c6 ♕d7 11.♘xe7† ♕xe7

Black is solid and the b2-bishop is unlikely to cause him much harm.

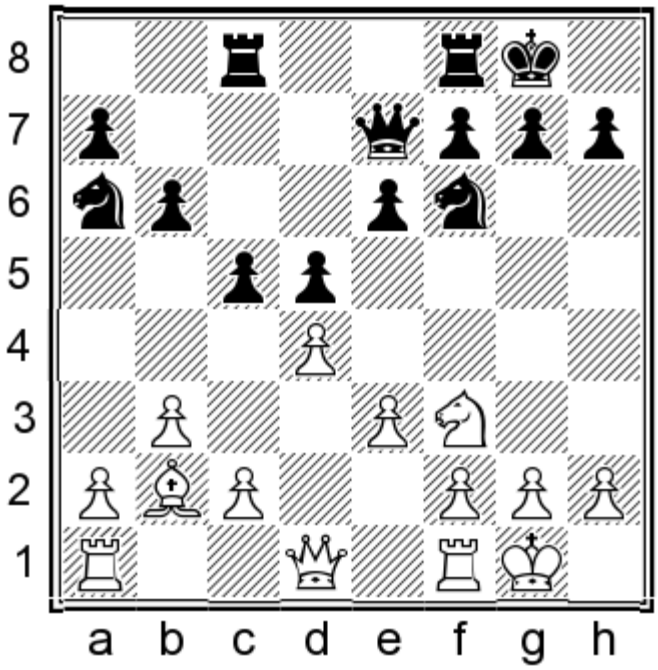


12.♘d2

12.dxc5N 12...♘xc5 13.♘d2 could be met by the ambitious 13...b5!?, intending to exert pressure on the queenside.

12...♖ac8 13.♘f3

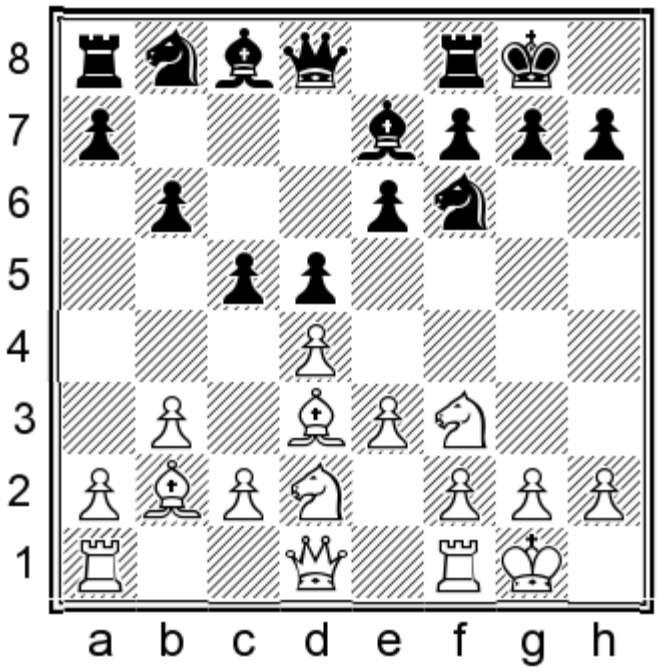
13.dxc5N 13...♘xc5 14.c4 ♖fd8 15.♕e2 can be met in various ways, but I like the clean solution of 15...♘fe4!, intending to take on d2 and then on c4.



13...c4!

All this was played in Ventura – A. Getz, Internet (blitz) 2009. Objectively the position remains equal but I prefer

Black’s chances; White’s bishop is blocked in and Black can continue gaining space with ...b5 and so on.



8...♗a6!

8...♗b7 is playable, and would transpose to the e2-e3 coverage in Chapter 4b if White followed up with c2-c4; but he is under no obligation to do that here.

9.c4 ♘c6

This is fine for Black.

10.♖c1

10.♘e5 is an obvious alternative but 10...♗b7 is a solid reply, when the ambitious 11.f4?! looks too risky. (White should probably settle for 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6 with equal play, as in Cosic – Ivekovic, Slovenia 2013) The problem for White after the text move is that the centre is fluid, and nothing like as stable as it would have been if the pawn was on c2 instead of c4. In Shaidullina – Tereshechkina, Vladimir 2008, Black should have played:

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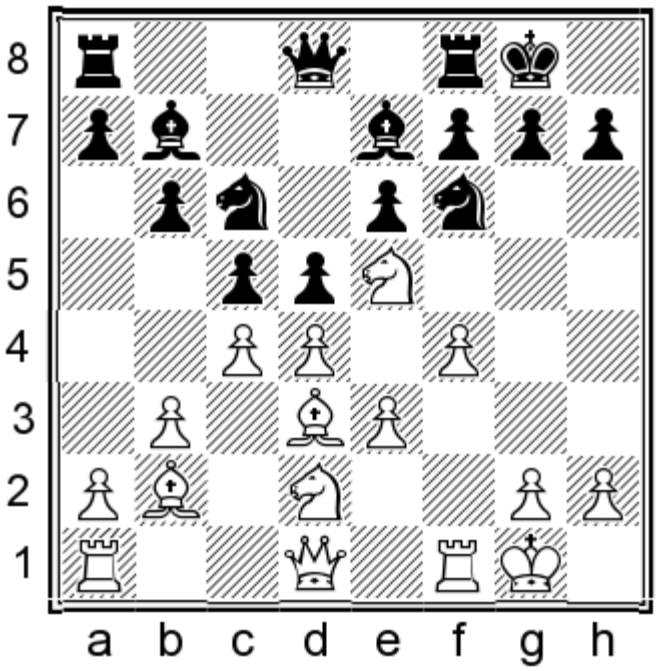
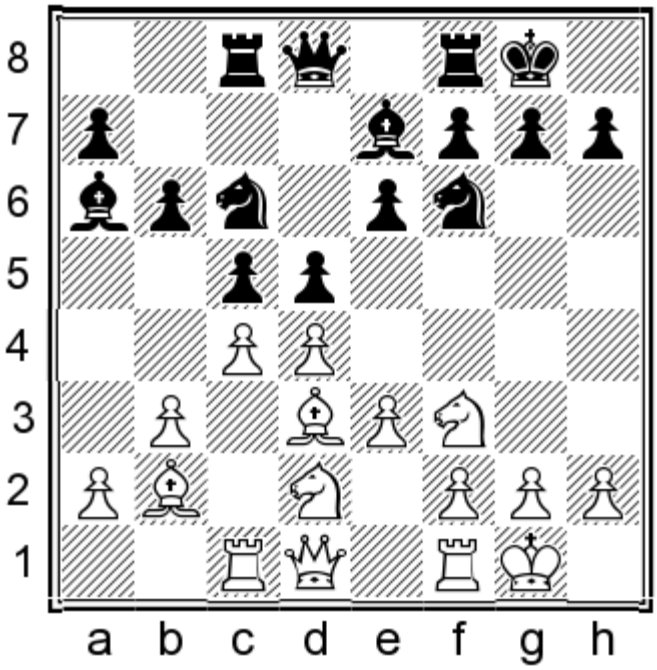


11...♖c8!N Black has good play; for instance, 12.♘df3 can be met by 12...♘b4! 13.♗b1 ♘e4∓ when I would choose Black anytime.

10...♖c8

Several games have been played from this position; I will just present one example which I consider a model demonstration of how to play against the hanging pawns.



11.♖e1

Anticipating the opening of the e-file that may occur at any time after ...cxd4 and exd4.

11...dxc4 12.bxc4 ♕d7

Black organizes her pieces before changing the structure.

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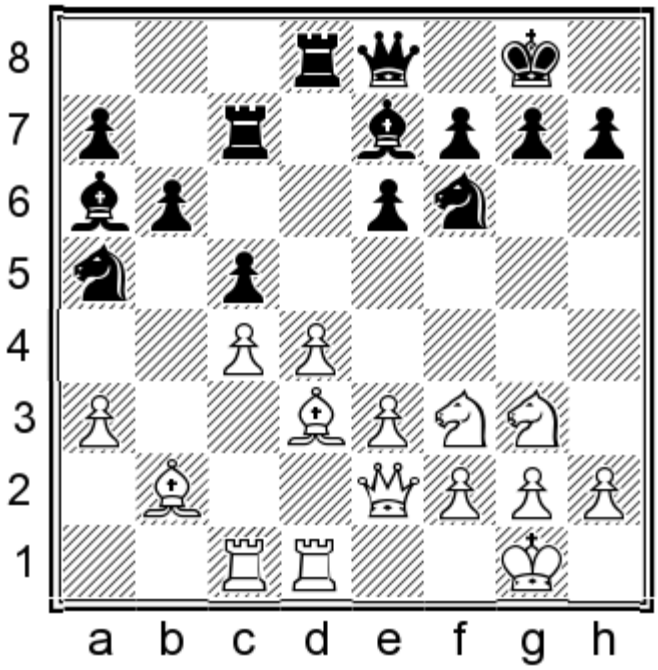
13.a3 ♖fd8 14.♕e2 ♖c7! 15.♖ed1 ♕e8 16.♘f1 ♘a5 17.♘g3

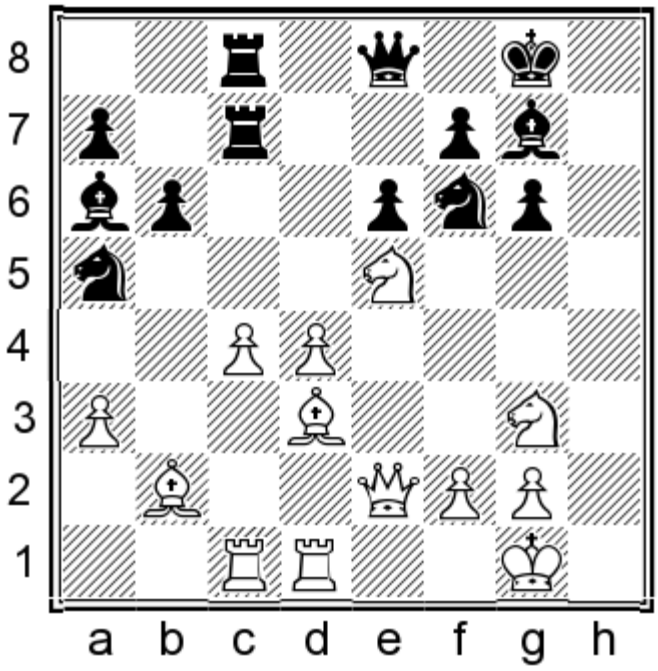
Now everything is ready...



17...cxd4! 18.exd4 ♖dc8 19.♘e5 g6 20.h4 ♗f8 21.h5 ♗g7

The bishop helps to defend the kingside while also applying latent pressure against White's centre.

22.hxg6 hxg6



23.♘f1 ♘d7 24.♘d2 ♘xe5 25.dxe5 ♕a4∓

Black went on to win in Gelashvili – Dzagnidze, Kavala 2009.

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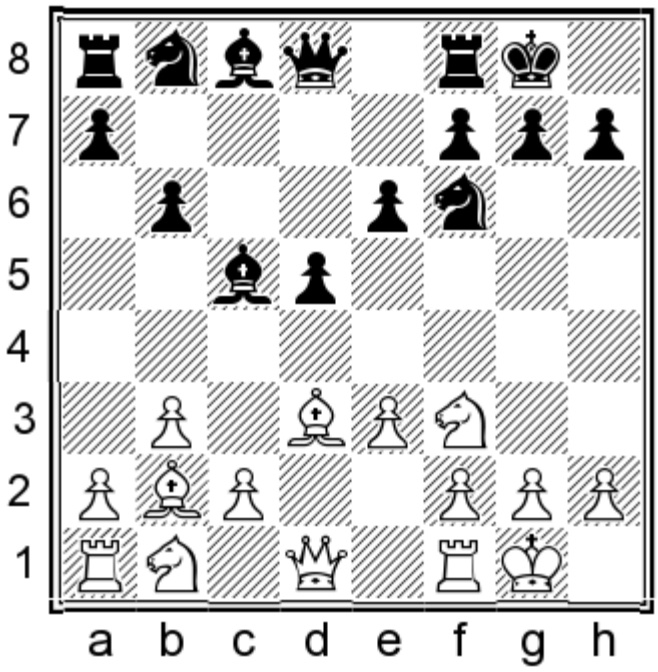
GAME 54

Magnus Carlsen – Sergey Karjakin

New York (8) 2016

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 d5 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5 5.b3 ♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♗b2 b6 8.dxc5 ♗xc5

8...bxc5 9.c4 might lead to hanging pawns for Black, although 9...♗a6 10.♘bd2 ♘c6 is objectively unclear. I prefer to stick with the solid ...♗xc5 structure, which we also saw in a similar position of the Colle-Koltanowski.



9.♘bd2 ♗b7

This time there is no great need for Black to exchange the light-squared bishops, as White is unlikely to be able to carry out a successful attack with the centre already somewhat open.

That said, I am not sure how White plays for the advantage after 9...♗a6!?. Both 10.c4 ♘bd7 and 10.♗xa6 ♘xa6 11.♕e2 ♘b4 are evaluated by the engines as marginally better for White, but I think Black's position is solid and essentially equal in either case.

10.♕e2 ♘bd7 11.c4

In his Chess24 commentary, Svidler suggested that 11.e4 could be met by 11...dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♗xe4 13.♗xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♗e7, followed by ...♕c7 and ...♗f6, with complete equality.

11...dxc4 12.♘xc4 ♕e7

White's position may appear slightly more active, but it is not easy for him to come up with an active plan without allowing Black strong counterplay.

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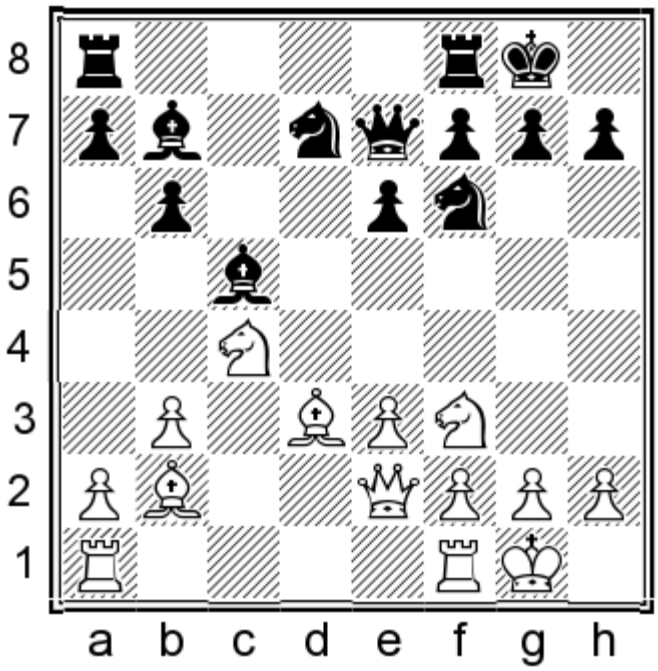

13.a3

After 13.e4 ♖fd8 Black intends ...♘f8-g6, and White will have to watch out for a knight landing on f4, as Svidler pointed out.

Carlsen's move threatens b2-b4, but the b5-square is not a big concern and so Karjakin can safely prevent it with:

13...a5! 14.♘d4

14.♖fd1 is met by 14...♖fd8, when 15.♘d4 transposes to the game and 15.h3 ♘f8 is fine for Black.

14...♖fd8 15.♖fd1 ♖ac8

Black would like to improve the d7-knight as it currently doesn't do much there, but he has to take into account White's ideas as well. The immediate 15...♘f8?! would allow 16.♘e5, which at least gives White an idea of invading on c6, even though Black can meet this with: 16...♖d5! (Svidler's 16...♖ac8 can be met by 17.♗b5! when White develops an annoying edge) 17.♘dc6 ♕c7 Keeping the chances level.

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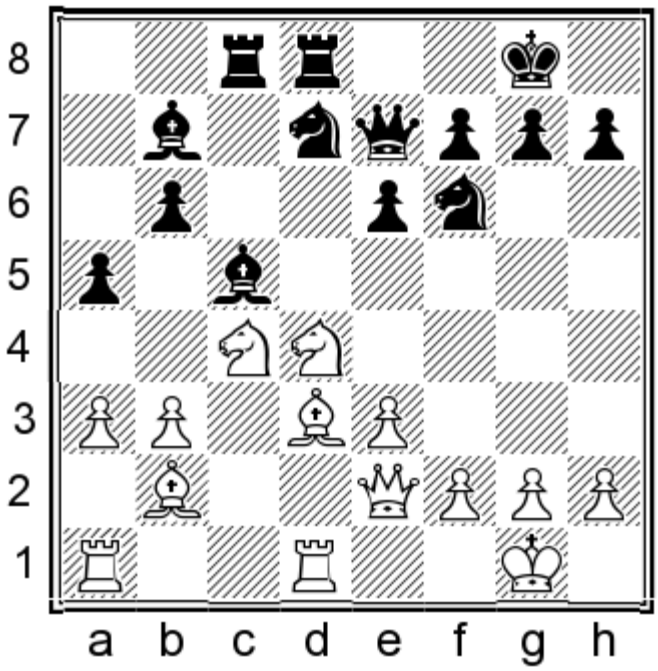

16.♖ac1

This move deprives the a3-pawn of one of its defenders, but Carlsen was evidently unable to find anything better.

16.♘b5

This looks like an obvious attempt to create something, but Black can continue his plan and obtain a fine position with:

16...♘f8! 17.b4

This is the best idea that the engines can offer.

Fighting for the d6-square with 17.♗e5 doesn't bring anything to White after: 17...♘g6 (17...♘d5!? is also adequate) 18.♗xg6 (18.♗d6? ♗xd6 19.♘bxd6 ♖xd6 20.♘xd6 ♕xd6 21.♗xg6 ♕c6! is a nice tactic pointed out by Svidler) 18...hxg6 19.♗d6 ♗xd6 20.♘bxd6 ♖c5 Black is absolutely fine.

17...axb4 18.axb4 ♗xb4 19.♘xb6 ♖c5!

Black is ready to go on the offensive, with the rook swinging to g5 and the bishops and knights not far from striking distance.

16...♘f8 17.♕e1

17.♘c2 threatens b3-b4 but Black can easily prevent it with 17...♘d5!, before continuing his plan with ...♘g6.

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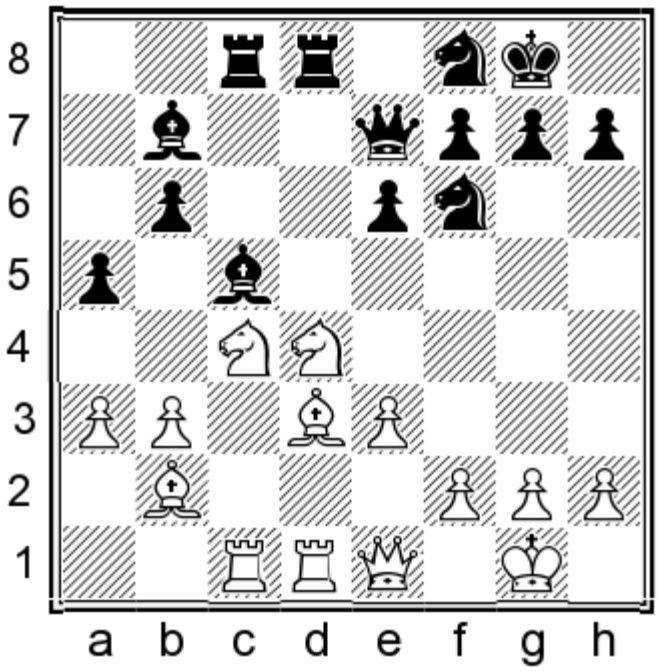
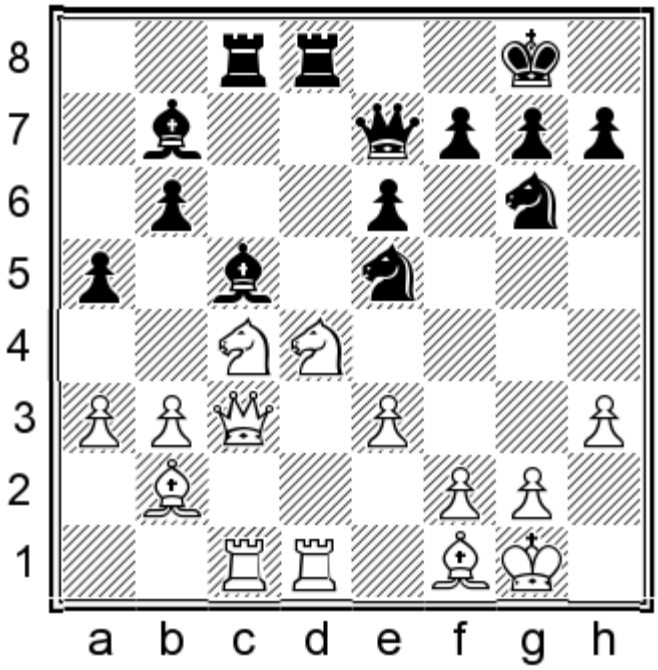


17...♘g6 18.♗f1

With his last two moves Magnus acknowledges the fact that Black can be the one attacking, so he defends in advance against ...♘h4, which might otherwise have provoked a weakening of his kingside.

18...♘g4!? 19.♘b5?

19.h3 is probably White's only good move according to Svidler, but after 19...♘4e5 Black threatens ...♘xc4 followed by taking on a3. This would challenge White to find the only move that keeps his position together, namely the tactical defence 20.♕c3!, which forces Black to keep an eye on the g7-square. A logical continuation is:



20...f6! (20...♘xc4?? 21.♘c6 is White's obvious idea) 21.♘xe5 ♗xd4 22.♘xg6 hxg6 23.♕d2 ♗c5 The position is close to equal but I slightly prefer Black, as he can put his king on f7 and perhaps utilize the h-file at some point.

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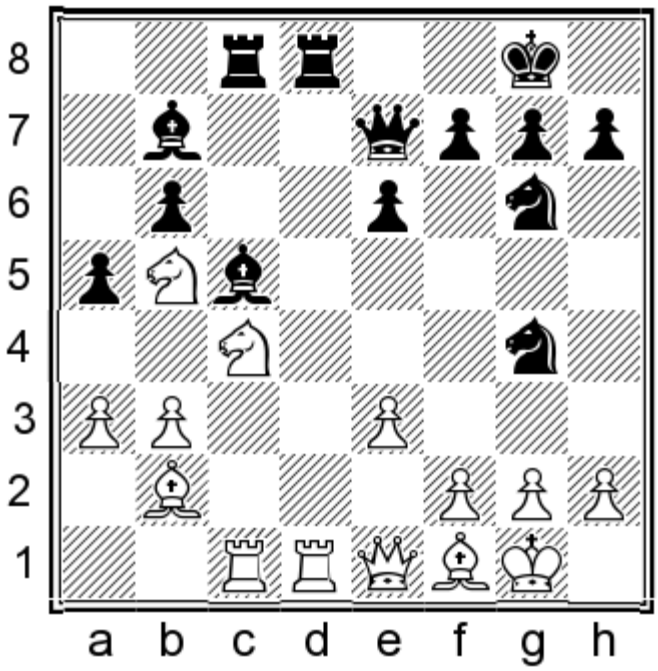

19...♗c6?!

19...♕g5!N

This improvement would have given White a much harder time. Black's threat is the amazing move ...♘f4.

20.h3

20.b4? allows Black to execute his big idea: 20...♘f4!–+ threatening ...♘h3†, followed by the complete destruction of White's kingside.

20.♘d4?! is well met by 20...e5! 21.♘e2 b5! intending 22.♘xa5 ♖xd1 23.♖xd1 ♘xf2! and Black wins.

20.♘bd6 ♗xd6 21.♘xd6 ♘4e5∓ is not immediately losing for White, but is still pretty depressing.

20...♘4e5 21.♘xe5 ♘xe5 22.♗xe5 ♕xe5∓

Black has an obvious edge due to his powerful bishop pair and White's queenside weaknesses.

20.a4 ♗d5

The rest of the game is not relevant to our opening study and has already received a lot of attention in various forms of chess media, so I'll just include some light annotations.

21.♗d4 ♗xc4

21...♗xd4! 22.♖xd4 (22.♘xd4 ♕b7!?=) 22...♘4e5 would have been safely equal, as 23.♘xb6?? is impossible due to 23...♕g5.

22.♖xc4

22.bxc4! was more challenging but, after the accurate 22...♘f6! followed by ...♘d7, the positions remains about equal.

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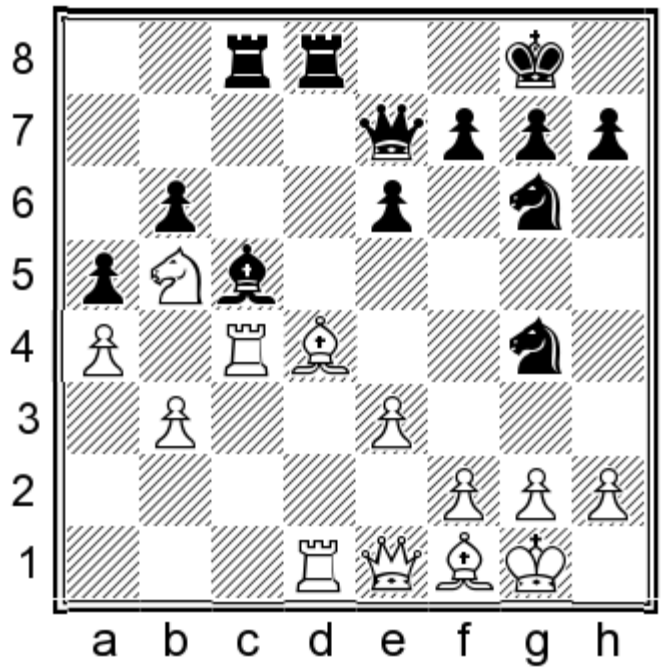

22...♗xd4 23.♖dxd4 ♖xc4 24.bxc4 ♘f6

Black wants to put a knight to c5 and White to control the d-file.

25.♕d2 ♖b8 26.g3 ♘e5!

Karjakin wisely chooses to send the g6-knight towards c5, keeping the other one on f6 in order to guard both the d7-square and the kingside.

27.♗g2 h6 28.f4!?

This leads to a sharper, though still roughly equal, position. 28.♘d6 would have been safer.

28...♘ed7! 29.♘a7 ♕a3 30.♘c6 ♖f8! 31.h3?!

31.♖xd7! ♘xd7 32.♕xd7 ♕xe3† 33.♔f1 ♕c1† 34.♔f2 ♕xc4 is materially good for Black, but he cannot really activate his rook. Engine analysis confirms that the position should be a draw.

31...♘c5! 32.♔h2 ♘xa4 33.♖d8 g6 34.♕d4 ♔g7 35.c5?

35.♖d7 ♘c5 36.♖a7 followed by ♘e5 would have given White enough counterplay to make up for Black's extra pawn.

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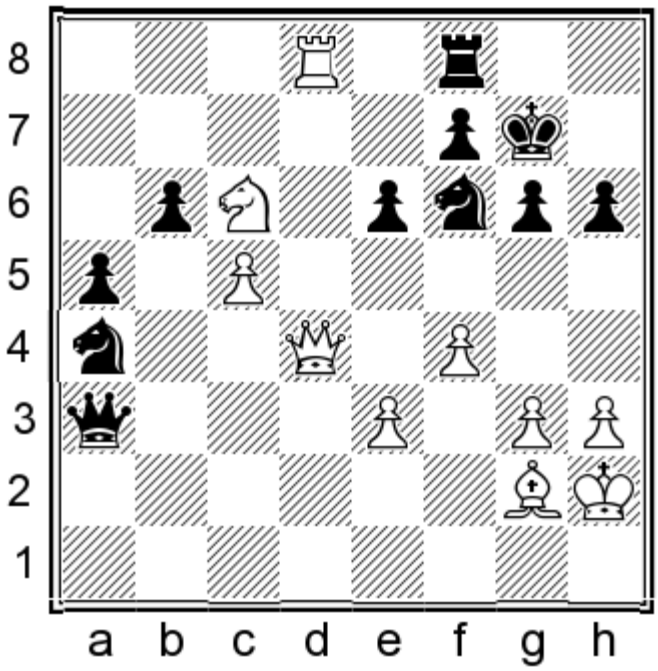
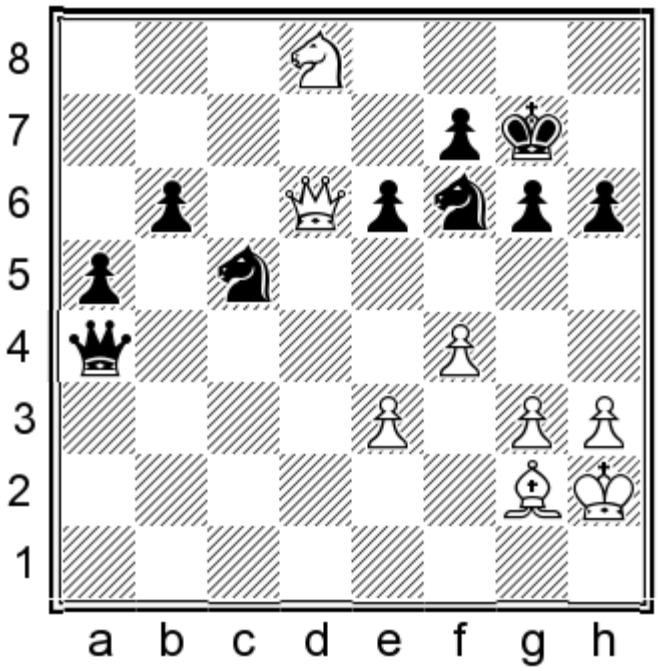


35...♖xd8 36.♘xd8 ♘xc5 37.♕d6 ♕d3?

37...♕a4! would have been powerful.



38.♕xb6 ♘cd7–+ White has no real counterplay and the a-pawn will march triumphantly down the board.

38.♘xe6†! fxe6 39.♕e7† ♔g8 40.♕xf6 a4 41.e4 ♕d7 42.♕xg6† ♕g7 43.♕e8† ♕f8 44.♕c6?!

44.♕b5 or 44.♕g6† ♔h8 45.e5 would have kept the game within the drawing zone.

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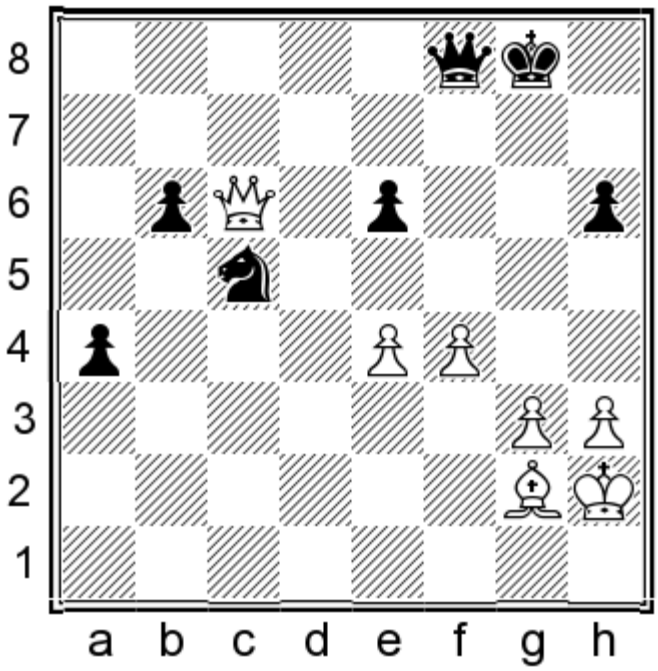


44...♕d8! 45.f5 a3 46.fxe6 ♔g7 47.e7?!

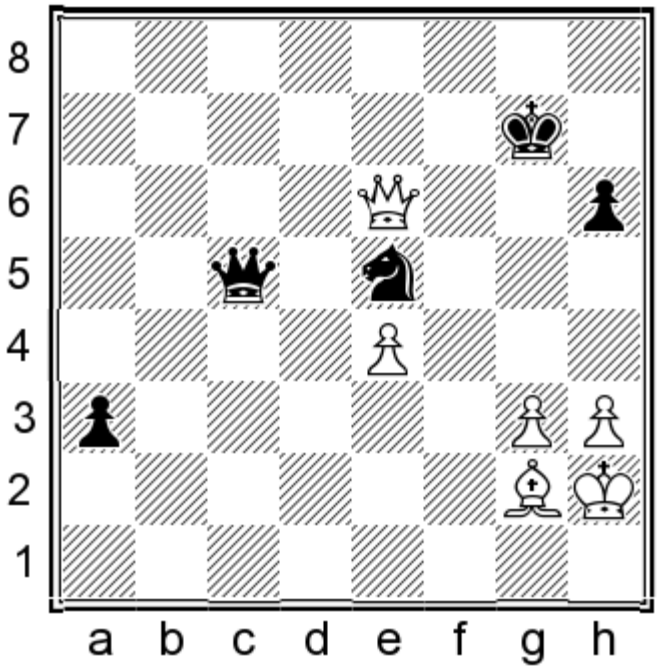
47.♕b5!=

47...♕xe7 48.♕xb6 ♘d3 49.♕a5

49.h4!?=

49...♕c5 50.♕a6 ♘e5 51.♕e6?

The decisive error. 51.♕b7† ♔f6 52.♕a6† would still have been drawing.



51...h5!!

One of the most famous moves of the match.

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52.h4 a2

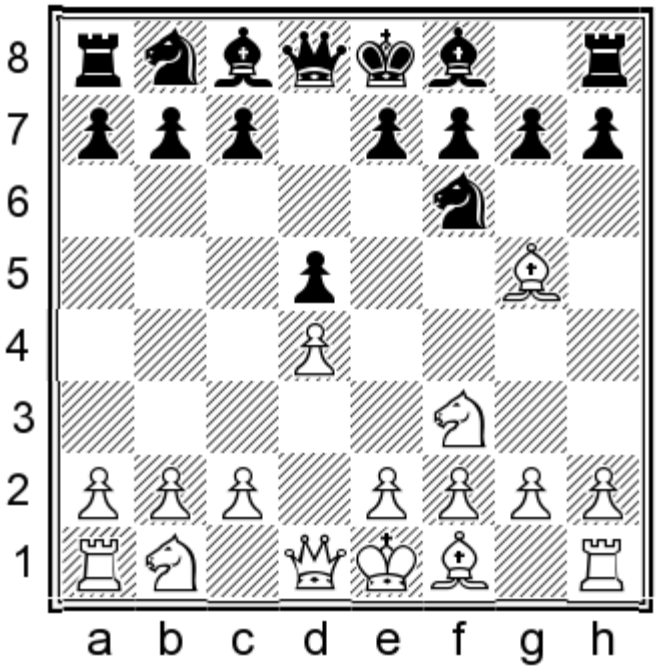
0–1

The Torre System

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗g5

White intends a set-up with e2-e3, ♘bd2, ♗d3 and c2-c3, with a solid position in the centre and some hopes of building an attack with ♘e5 and f2-f4.

3.c3 is a more sophisticated move order which will be discussed shortly.



3...♘bd7!

3...♘e4!? is the maximalist approach, and the reason why most Torre specialists prefer the 3.c3 move order these days. Black gets a good game with chances to fight for the initiative, but he has to know a reasonable amount of theory. Avrukh does an excellent job of covering this line in *Grandmaster Repertoire 11*, but for our purposes it seems easier to stick with a solid move which is likely to transpose to another part of our repertoire.

4.♘bd2

4.♘c3 leads back to a variation of the Veresov – see page 259 in the previous chapter.

4.e3 leads to normal positions after something like 4...e6 5.♘bd2 h6 6.♗h4 ♗e7 7.♗d3 c5 8.c3; this will be covered below under the 3.c3 move order.
By developing the knight first, White keeps the option of playing e2-e4 in one move, but this can easily be avoided.

4...h6!

There is no point in allowing 4...e6 5.e4.

5.♗h4 e6 6.e4

6.e3 is the same as the 4.e3 line noted above. The text move seems like the only serious way to give White's move order an independent character, but objectively it is dubious. In Karavaev – Stenyakin, Astrakhan 2013, Black should

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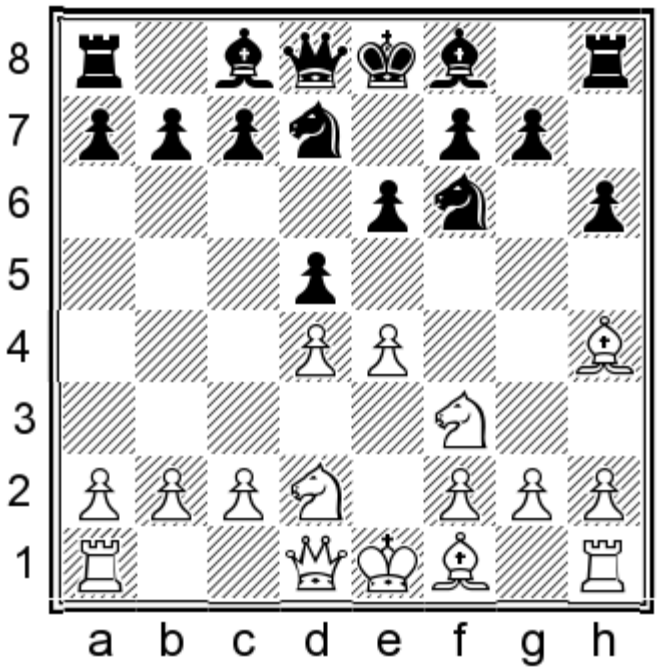
have played:



6...g5!N 7.♗g3 ♘xe4 8.♘xe4 dxe4

We have transposed to the games Neubert – Peschel and Veresov – Korchnoi, as referenced on page 259 in the previous chapter.

The Modern Move Order

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c3

This is the move order which is used by most specialists to enter the Torre, or occasionally the London System.

3...e6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.♘bd2

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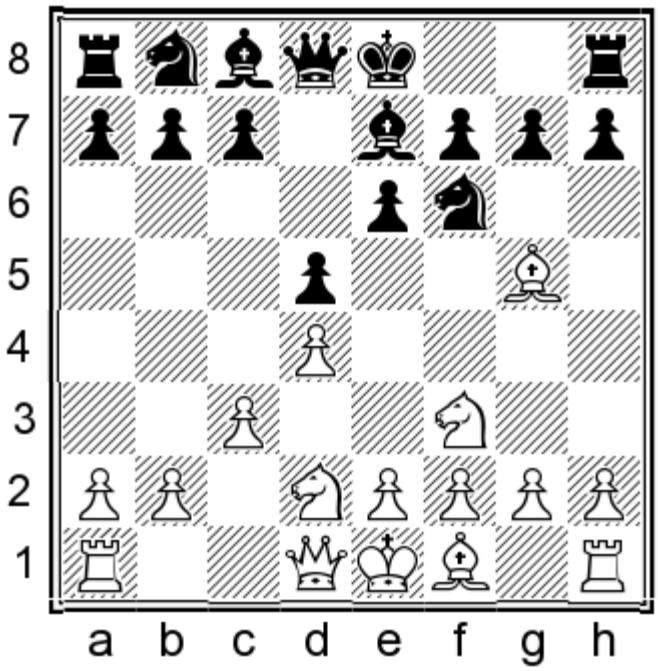

5...♘bd7!

I have tried to be as consistent as possible in this book. Thus, in the event of a white bishop landing on g5, we respond with ...♗e7, ♘bd7 and ...h6 whenever possible. Remember this is how we handled the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, as well as the QGD of course. Please note that we need to be ready to recapture on f6 with the knight rather than the bishop, in order to restrain e2-e4.

It is worth pointing out that Taimanov's plan doesn't work so well against the Torre. 5...0-0 6.e3 b6 7.♘e5! c5 8.♗d3 ♗a6 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 10.♘c6 ♕c7 11.♘xe7† ♕xe7 12.♕f3 It's nothing disastrous, but White will be able to double Black's pawns on the kingside and claim a tiny edge.

6.e3 c5 7.♗d3 h6 8.♗h4 b6!

Black can also castle, but I prefer to develop and keep the king flexible for the time being.

9.0-0

Some authors have recommended the move order with 9.♘e5 for White; this will be considered in Game 55 below.

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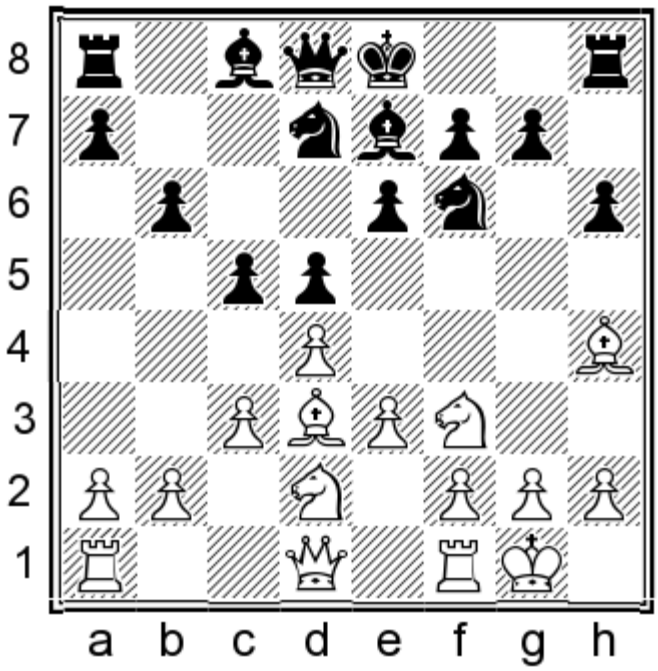

9...♗b7

Black gets ready to free himself with ...♘e4. This is an important theme for our set-up, as evidenced by the notes below, as well as the illustrative game that follows.

10.♕b1

This is a typical move for Torre aficionados. White covers the e4-square and prepares to gain space on the queenside with b2-b4. Let's see a few alternatives:

10.a4 0-0 11.a5 occurred in Vitiugov – Movsesian, Tallinn 2016, when 11...bxa5!N would have given Black good prospects on the b-file.

10.♕e2 ♘e4! gives Black effortless equality. Here is a noteworthy example where things quickly went wrong for White: 11.♗xe7 ♕xe7 12.♘e5 ♘xd2

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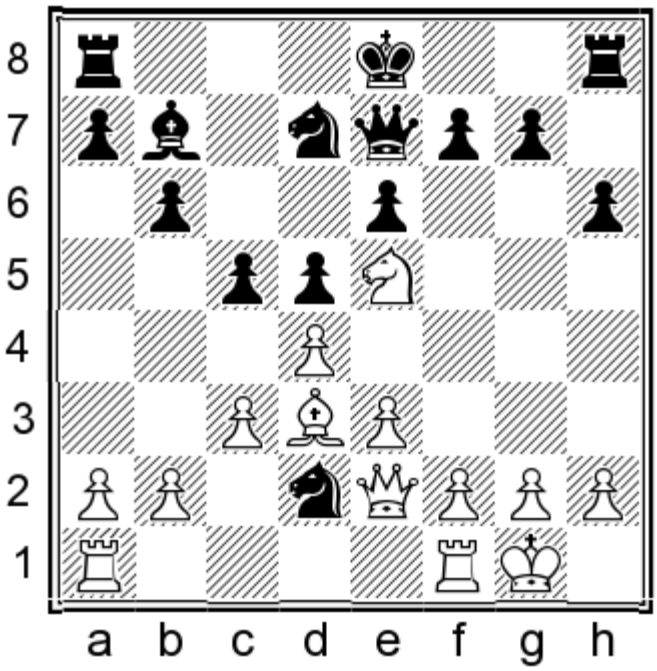
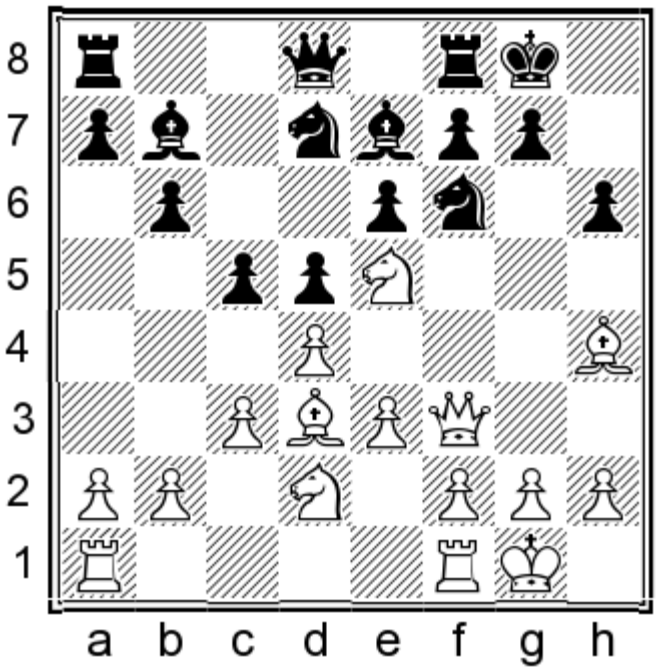


13.♘xd7? ♘xf1 14.♗b5 0-0-0 15.dxc5 ♖xd7 16.c6 ♗xc6 17.♗xc6 ♖c7 18.♗b5 ♘xe3 19.fxe3 ♔b8–+ Shirazi – Karpov, Saint John 1988.

10.♘e5 requires a bit more accuracy but Black does fine after: 10...0-0! (but not 10...♘e4? 11.♗b5+–) 11.♕f3!?N (11.f4 transposes to Game 55 below)



11...♘e4! This is an easy solution, as the tactics work out fine: 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♗xe4 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♗xe4 15.♗xe7 ♗xf3 16.♗xd8 ♖fxd8 (16...♗xg2= is fine too) 17.gxf3 ♖d2 Black's active rooks offer at least enough compensation for the pawn, and White will have to take care to hold the draw.

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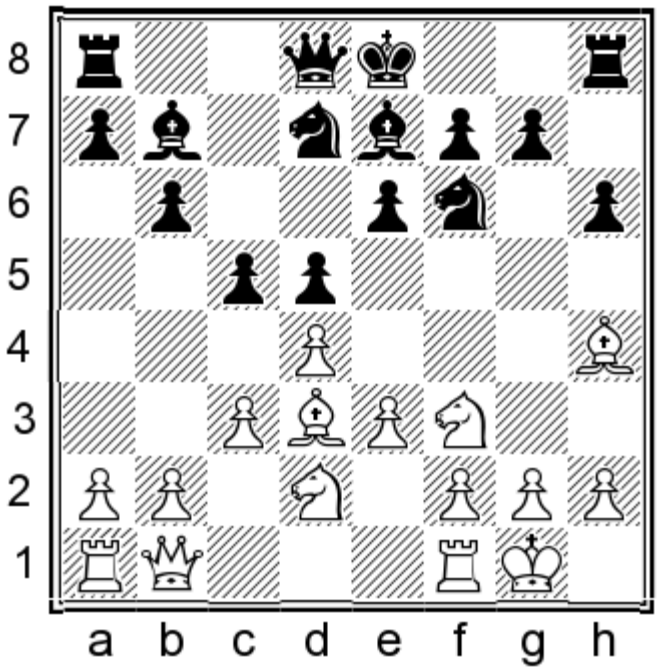


10...0-0 11.b4

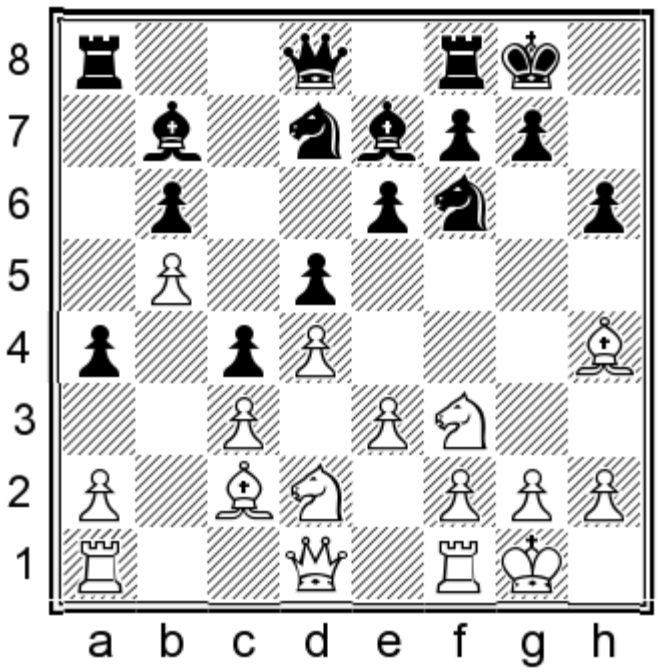
The Romanian GM Chirila has reached this position twice with Black against the same opponent, the Ukrainian-American GM Zherebukh. The second time he came up with the correct way to play.

11...c4!

After 11...cxb4 12.cxb4 Black eventually prevailed in Zherebukh – Chirila, Houston 2013, but the text move is stronger – even though the final result was the opposite.

12.♗c2 a5! 13.b5 a4! 14.♕d1

In Zherebukh – Chirila, Chicago 2016, Black should have played:



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14...♘e8!N

The key move, which ensures Black of a good game.

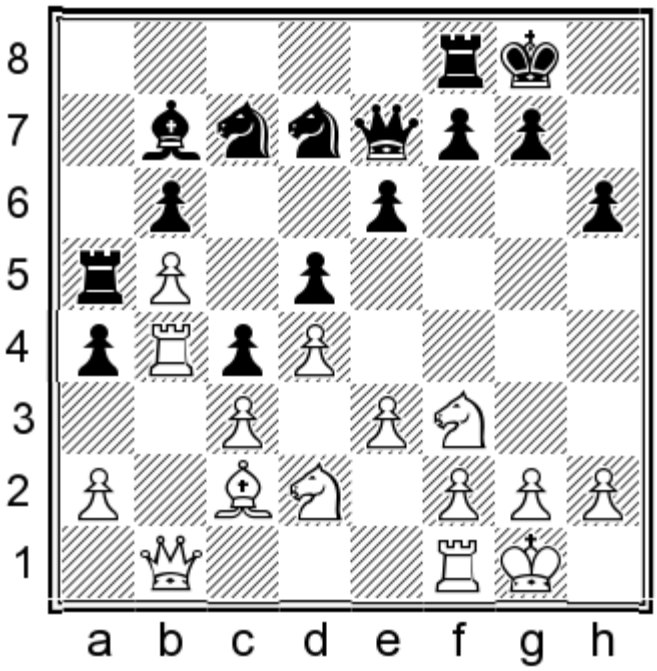
15.♗xe7

After 15.♗g3 ♖a5 16.♗xa4 ♘c7∓ Black will take the b5-pawn and follow up with ...♕a8, putting enormous pressure on the a-pawn as well.

15...♕xe7 16.♖b1

16.♗xa4?! ♕a3 17.♗c2 ♘c7∓ favours Black.

16...♘c7 17.♖b4 ♖a5 18.♕b1



18...f5!

Black stops any e3-e4 ideas and can play on both sides of the board. A sample continuation is:

19.♘e5?!

This probably does White more harm than good but it's the obvious move to consider, as White does not have many active ideas.

19...♘xe5 20.dxe5 ♕c5 21.♗xa4 ♖fa8∓

Black is in excellent shape in the Torre lines we have looked at so far. Let's turn our attention to White's popular and thematic plan of plonking a knight on e5.

GAME 55

Anthony Miles – Michael Adams

Hove (rapid) 1997

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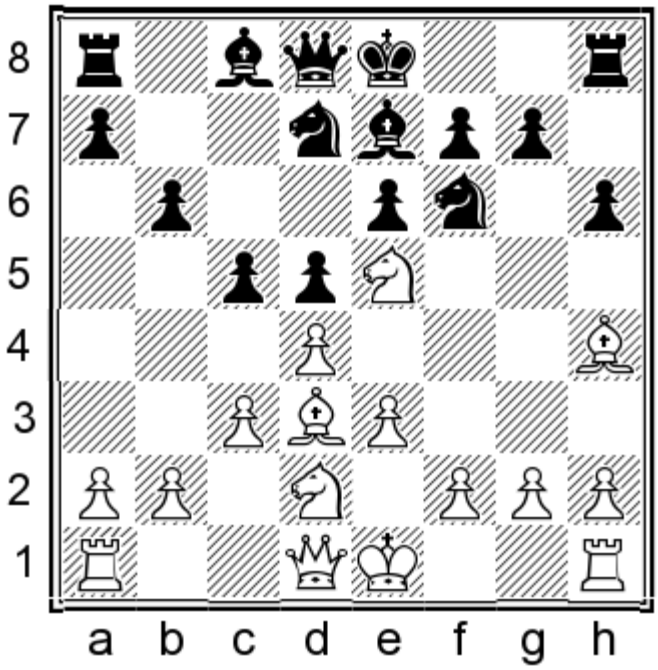
The game featured a different move order in which ...d7-d5 only occurred on move 8(!), so I have made the customary change to fit with our repertoire.

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c3 e6 4.♗g5 ♗e7 5.♘bd2 ♘bd7 6.e3 c5 7.♗d3 h6 8.♗h4 b6! 9.♘e5

Another move order is 9.0-0 ♗b7 10.♘e5, as covered in the notes to the analysis section above, where it was mentioned that 10...0-0! is Black's best, after which 11.f4 transposes to the game.



9...♗b7

I consider this the cleanest theoretical solution.

I also looked at 9...♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♘d7, when the critical continuation is 11.♗xe7! ♕xe7 12.f4 ♗b7 13.♘f3 0-0-0 14.♕e2!, as has been recommended by Yusupov, with the plan for White being to castle short and play e3-e4. The position is unclear and playable for both sides, but I find the game continuation to be simpler.

10.f4 0-0 11.0-0

A natural alternative is:

11.♕f3

I think the most accurate reply is:

11...♘xe5!?

11...♘e4 is playable, but 12.♗xe7 ♘xd2 13.♗xd8 ♘xf3† 14.gxf3! gives White a tiny edge.

12.fxe5

12.dxe5 ♘e4 13.♗xe7 ♘xd2! 14.♗xd8 ♘xf3† 15.gxf3 ♖axd8= gives Black a slightly improved version of the line above, as White is missing his important central d4-pawn.

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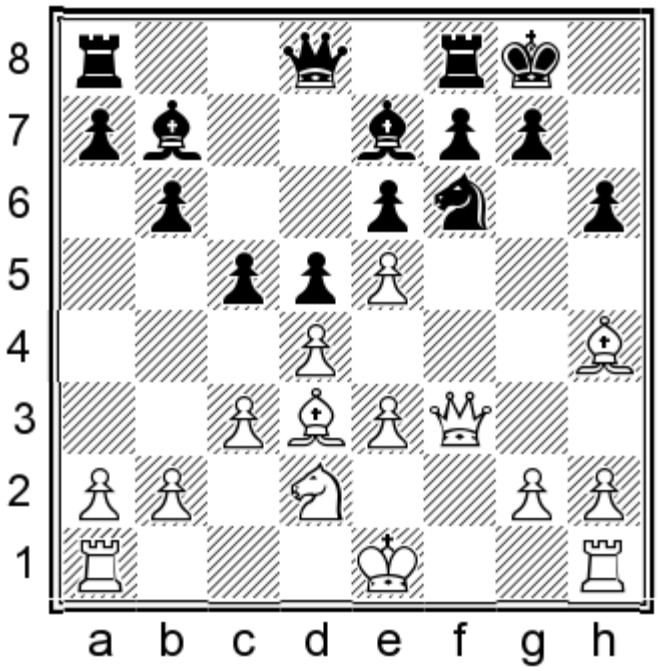
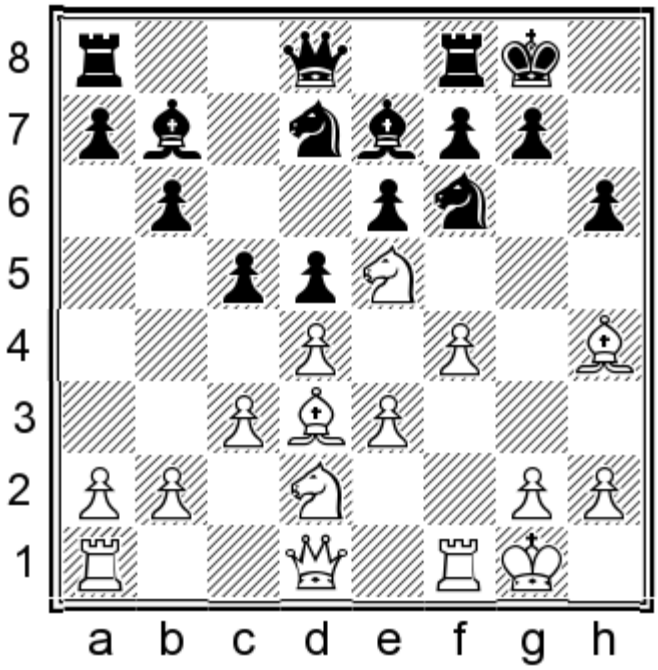


12...♘e4!

As recommended by Palliser. The tactical justification is:

13.♗xe7 ♕xe7!=

White cannot take twice on e4 due to the check on h4.



11...♘e4!

Again, this is the key move in our set-up.

12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.♗xe4!?

An interesting idea to create some weaknesses in Black's position.

13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♗b5 is no problem, as 14...♘f6 offers Black good play.

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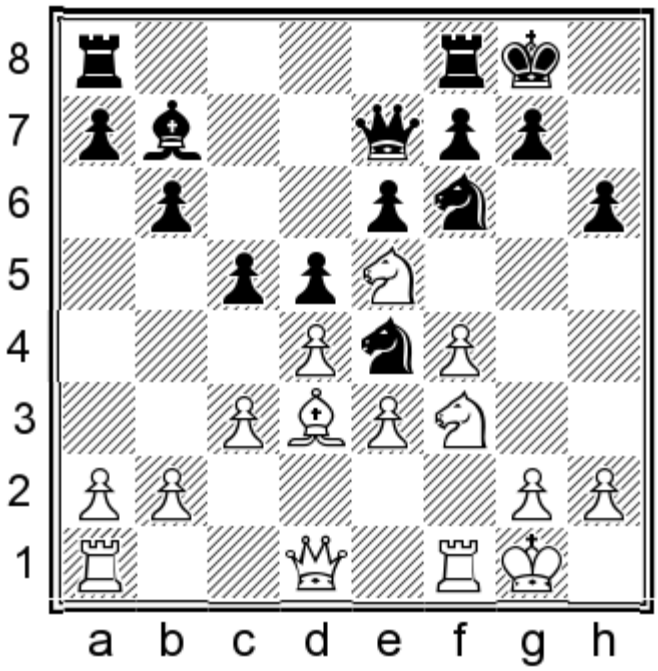
13.♘df3 has been the most popular choice and has scored well, but 13...♘df6 seems fine for Black, for instance:



14.♕e2 ♘d6! 15.♔h1 ♘fe4 It is worth remembering this method of reorganizing the knights against the Stonewall structure. 16.g4 In Laszlo – Tompa, Hungary 1994, Black could have fought back on the kingside with 16...g5!N, with fine prospects.

13.♕e2!?

Palliser recommends this move as White's best, and he may well be right. I analysed this position extensively and concluded that Black's most accurate reply is:

13...♖fd8!

I also investigated 13...♘d6 but was not happy after 14.g4!N. White's idea here is not to play g4-g5 too quickly, as that would allow Black to block the attack with a timely ...♘f5, but rather to build up more patiently with moves like ♔h1 and ♕g2. Even if Black is objectively okay somehow, in a practical game his position would be harder to handle.

The text move has the idea to move the knight to f8 and then play ..f6. My analysis continues:

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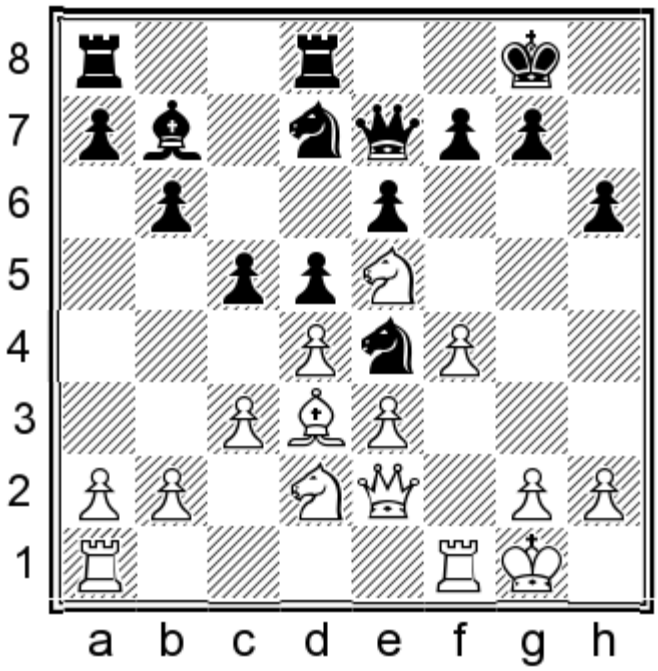
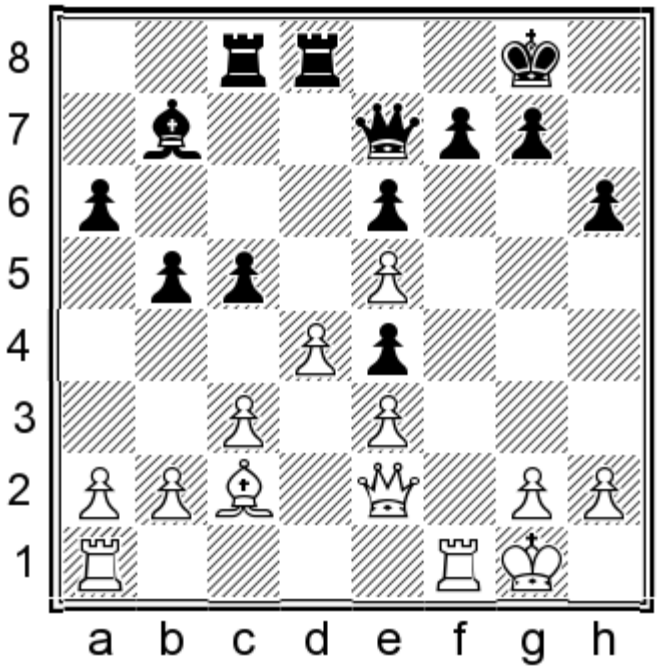


14.♘xe4!? dxe4 15.♗b5

This seems like the critical continuation but Black gets adequate play after:

15...♘xe5 16.fxe5 a6 17.♗a4 b5 18.♗c2 ♖ac8

Black has enough activity to counter any build-up along the f-file. For example:



19.♖f4 cxd4 20.exd4 b4 21.♖af1 bxc3 22.♖xf7 ♕xf7 23.♖xf7 ♔xf7 24.bxc3 ♖xc3 25.♗xe4 ♗xe4 26.♕xe4 a5!?=

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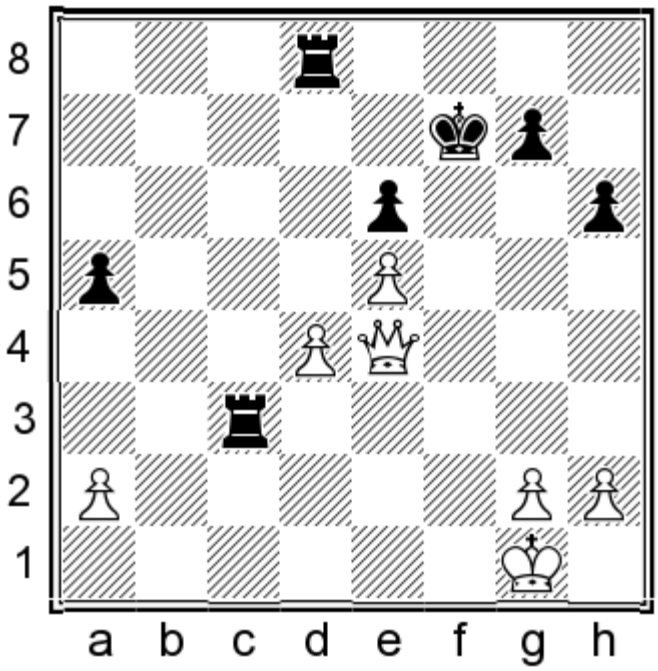
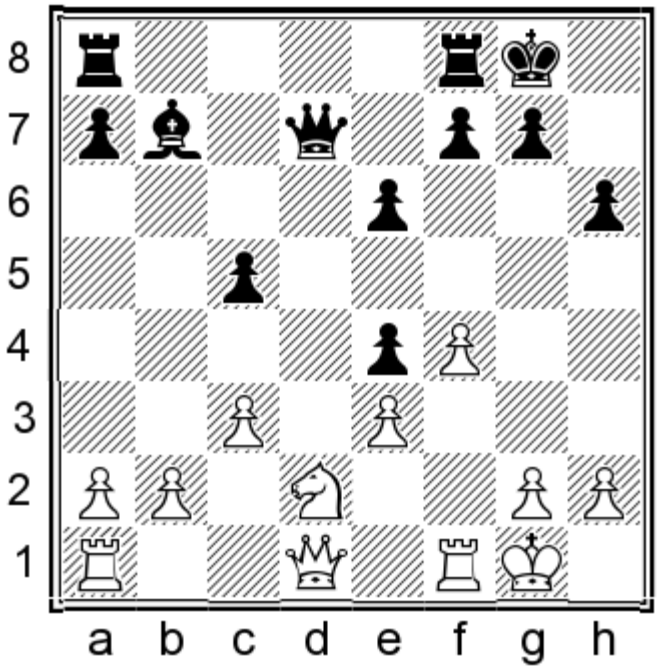


Followed by ...♖d5. The two rooks give Black a safe position, with some practical chances to press for more than a draw.

13...dxe4 14.♘xd7 ♕xd7 15.dxc5 bxc5

15...♕d3!? 16.♕e1 bxc5 17.c4 ♖fd8 is another option for Black, but there is no real need to deviate from Adams' play.

This position has been contested twice in rapid games between Miles and Adams.



White has a theoretically better pawn structure but there is no realistic way to get to Black's weaknesses on e4 and c5. Black, on the other hand, has open b- and d-files along with an outpost on d3, which has the potential to be extremely useful.

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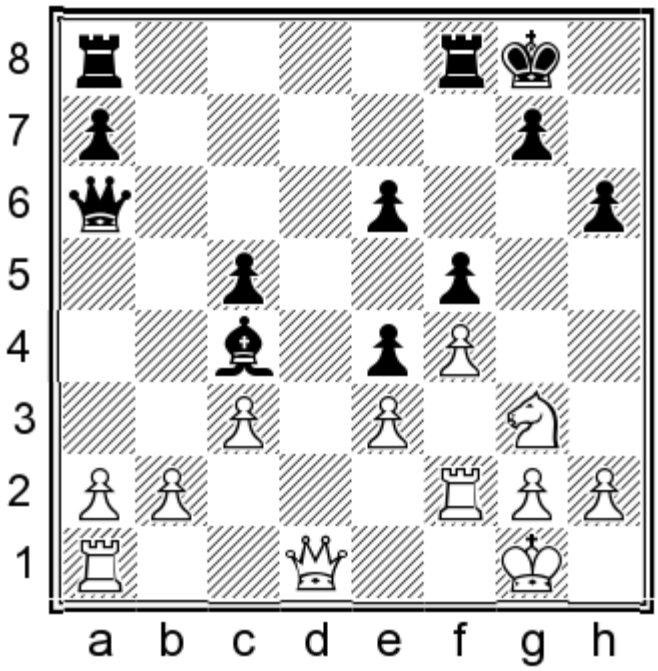
16.♕c2

Miles improves on their previous encounter, which continued: 16.♘c4 ♕b5 17.♘d6 ♕a6 18.♖f2?! (exchanging on b7 was better, but Black still has the same trumps: the d3-outpost to help him double along the d-file, plus the means to create additional targets on the queenside with ...a5-a4) 18...♗d5 19.♘f5 ♗c4 20.♘g3 f5



21.b3 ♗d3 22.c4 ♖ad8 Black was clearly better and went on to win convincingly in Miles – Adams, London (rapid) 1995.

16...♕c6 17.♖fd1 ♖ad8 18.♘c4 ♕c7 19.b3 ♖d5 20.♘b2

This was Miles's idea to cover the d3-square, but one gets the impression that White is trying to hold the position rather than fight for an advantage. Adams still found a way to push for the win.

20...g5!

Forcing White to make a difficult decision. Defending with g2-g3 would weaken the light squares around the king, so Miles opts for a different positional concession.

21.fxg5 hxg5

The exchange on g5 has given Black an open h-file plus the long-term potential to mobilize his pawn majority with ...f5-f4, perhaps with ...e5 included. Miles sensibly tries to relieve some of the tension by exchanging all the rooks.

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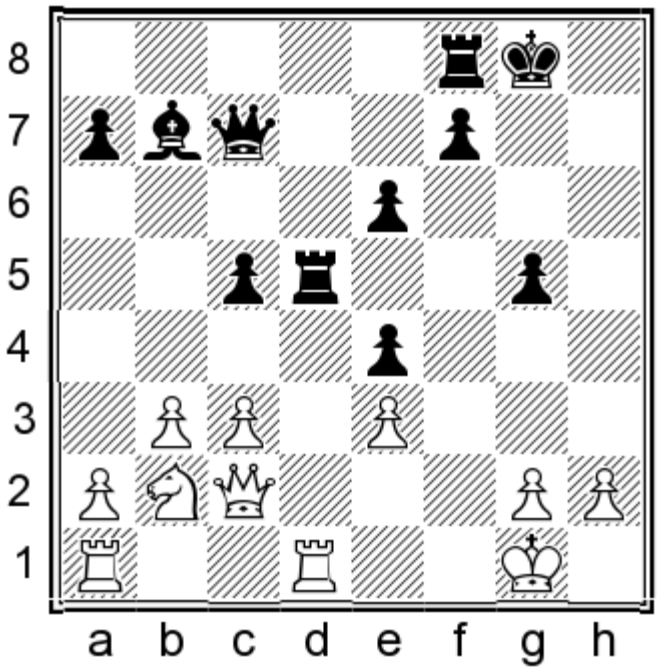
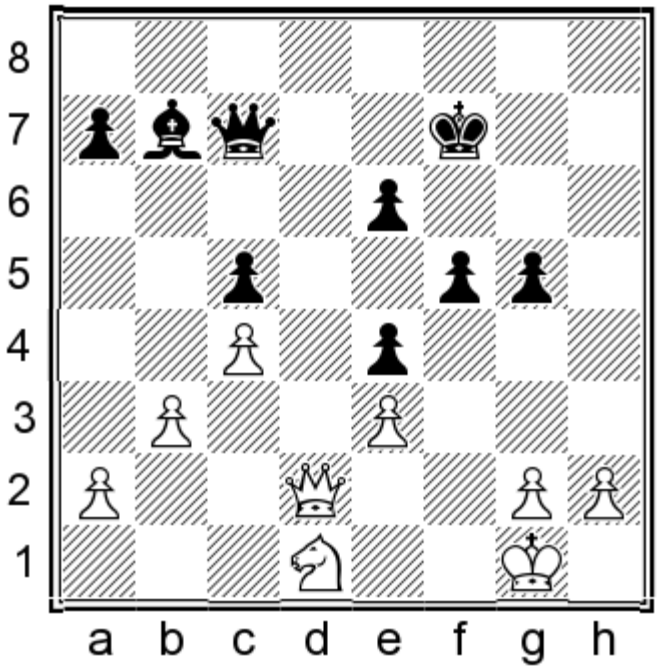


22.c4 ♖dd8

Trying to keep one pair of rooks on the board with 22...♖xd1† 23.♖xd1 f5?! is like playing with fire. After 24.♕d2± White controls the d-file and his knight can start being used for attacking purposes with ♘a4, as it is no longer needed to guard d3.

23.♖xd8 ♖xd8 24.♖d1 ♖xd1† 25.♘xd1 f5 26.♕d2 ♔f7

White has more or less equalized. In the final phase of the game Adams advances his pawn majority, but his exposed king enables Miles to force a perpetual.



27.♘c3 ♗c6 28.♘e2 e5 29.♘c3 ♔e6 30.h3 f4 31.♕d1 ♕a5 32.♘d5 ♗xd5 33.♕xd5† ♔f6 34.♕d6† ♔f7 35.♕d7† ♔f6 36.♕c6† ♔f7

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½–½

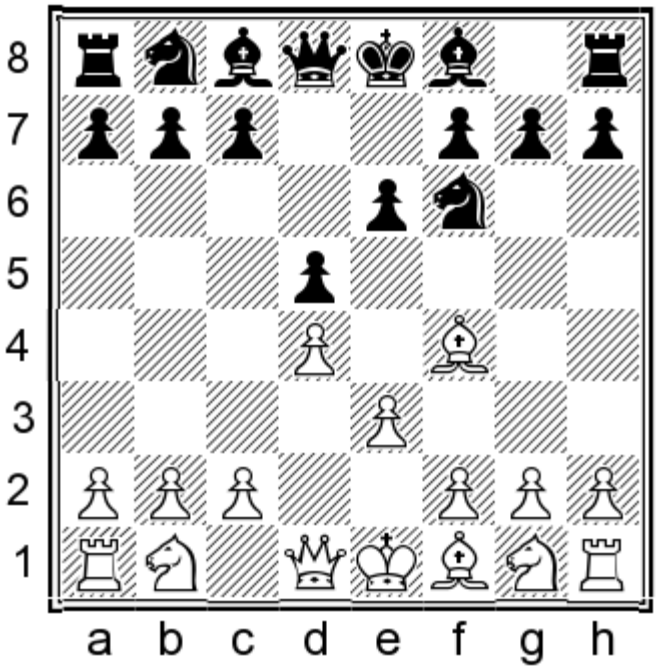
Let’s move on to the last of the d-pawn systems examined in this chapter.

The London System

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4

The early development of the bishop to f4 is what defines the London System. White can also start with 2.♘f3 ♘f6 before playing 3.♗f4, but I recommend meeting that move order in the exact same way. The text move is the more flexible option and the usual choice of London experts, so I will present it as the standard move order and consider the different ways in which White can play or delay the ♘f3 move.

2...♘f6 3.e3 e6



Many move orders are possible from here, and things can get pretty confusing as White may play moves like ♘f3, ♘bd2, ♗d3 and c2-c3 in virtually any order. As we saw in the introductory section, our standard approach will be to put the bishop on d6 and, after the likely reaction of ♗g3, to castle and play ...b6.

It seems logical to divide the material according to whether White plays an early ♘f3 from here (this also covers us against the London with a 2.♘f3 move order) or delays it.

Lines with an early ♘f3

We will start with an interesting hybrid whereby White combines the London System with an early c2-c4.

GAME 56

Magnus Carlsen – Dmitrij Jakovenko

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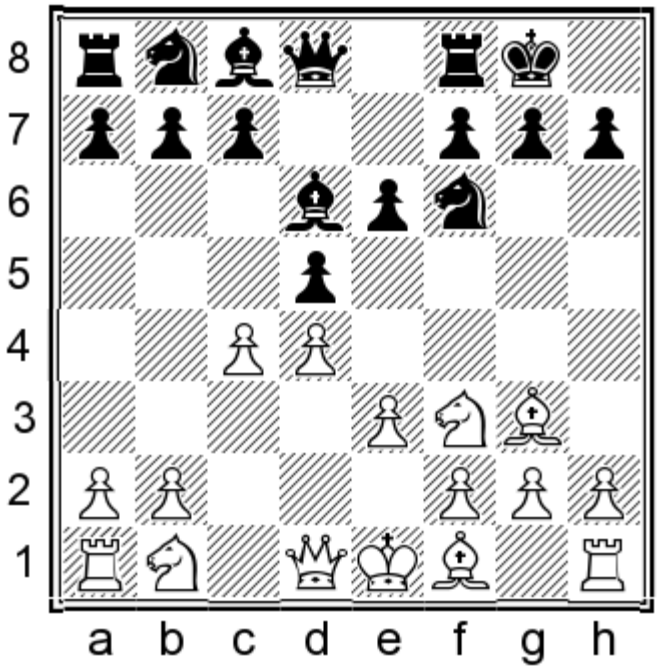
Doha (rapid) 2016

The game started with a 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 move order, so I have switched it to fit with our theme.

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0 6.c4!?

This is an interesting way to play against my proposed move order, but Jakovenko shows the correct way to respond.

6.♘bd2 is the typical London move, which will be covered after this game.



6...c5! 7.♘c3

7.cxd5 was seen in Kamsky – Ivanchuk, Beijing 2013. Although the engines call the position equal in several ways, it is not easy to decide how to respond for Black. I think that the most interesting option is 7...♗xg3!?N 8.hxg3 cxd4, intending 9.dxe6 ♕a5†! 10.♕d2 ♕xd2† 11.♘bxd2 dxe3 12.exf7† ♖xf7 13.fxe3 ♖e7 and Black has promising play for the sacrificed pawn. Play might continue:

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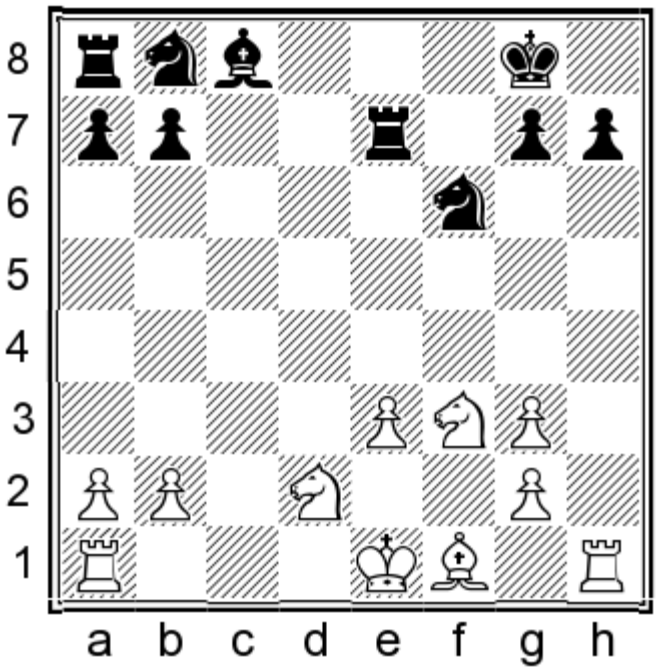
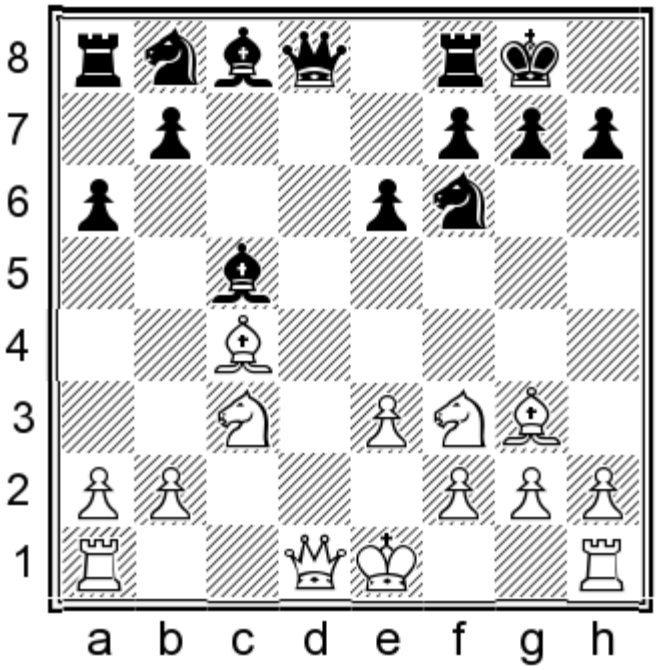


14.♗c4† ♗e6 15.♘d4 ♗xc4 16.♘xc4 g6! 17.0-0 ♘bd7 18.♖ad1 ♘g4 White will have a hard time covering all his weak spots; and if Black wins his pawn back, he will automatically be better.

7...dxc4 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♗xc4 a6!

Sensible play by Jakovenko has resulted in an equal position.



10.0-0

10.a4 can be met by 10...b6.

10...b5 11.♗d3 ♗b7 12.♕e2 ♘bd7 13.♖ad1 ♕b6 14.e4?!

Magnus tries to create something out of nothing, but his idea backfires in thematic fashion.

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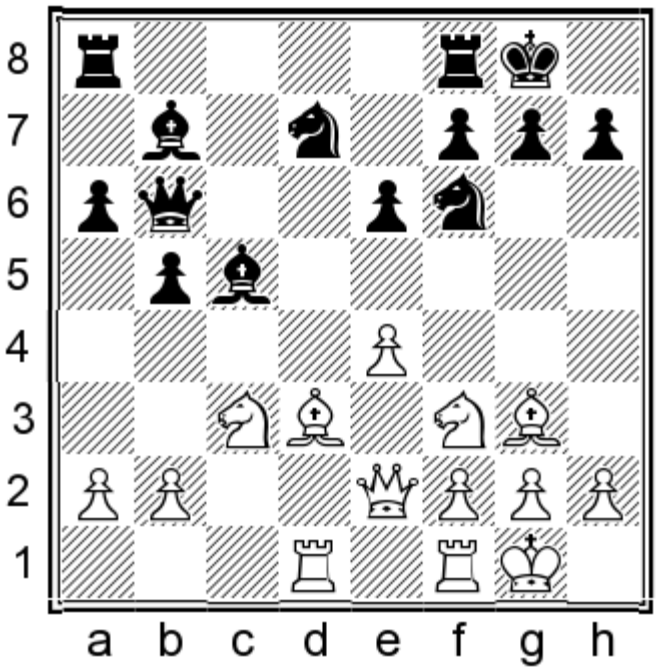
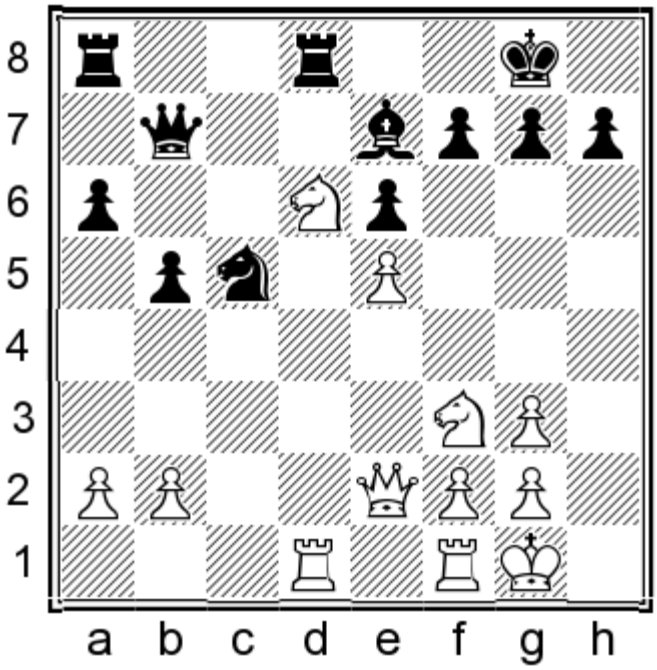


14...♘h5! 15.e5 ♘xg3 16.hxg3 ♖fd8 17.♗e4 ♗e7! 18.♗xb7 ♕xb7 19.♘e4 ♘c5

19...♘b6!?N was also quite attractive. In that case, White cannot really go for the same idea of 20.♘d6?, as after 20...♗xd6 21.exd6 ♘c4 (or 21...♘d5) White will lose a pawn for scant compensation.

20.♘d6



20...♗xd6

20...♕b6!N was more accurate, with Black keeping some pressure.

21.exd6 ♕b6

The alternative is: 21...♘e4!? 22.♖d4 ♘f6 (22...♘xd6 23.♖fd1 and Black walks straight into an annoying pin)

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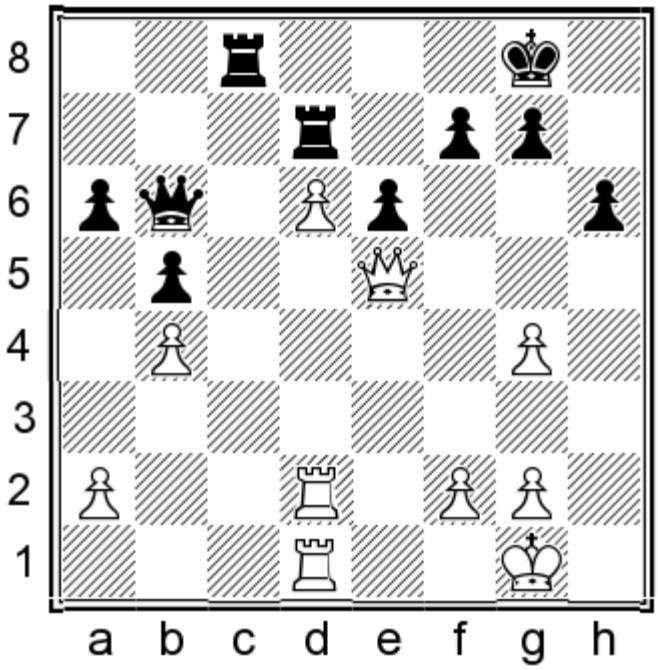
23.♖fd1 ♘d5 Black seems ready pick up the pawn, but White has enough resources to maintain the balance: 24.♘g5! ♖xd6 25.♕e4 f5 26.♕f3 ♕d7 27.♘xe6 ♕xe6 28.♖xd5 ♖xd5 29.♖xd5 ♖c8=

22.b4 ♘d7 23.♘e5 ♖ac8 24.♖d2 ♘xe5 25.♕xe5 ♖d7 26.♖fd1 h6 27.g4!?

Typical Carlsen, gradually increasing the pressure on his opponent.

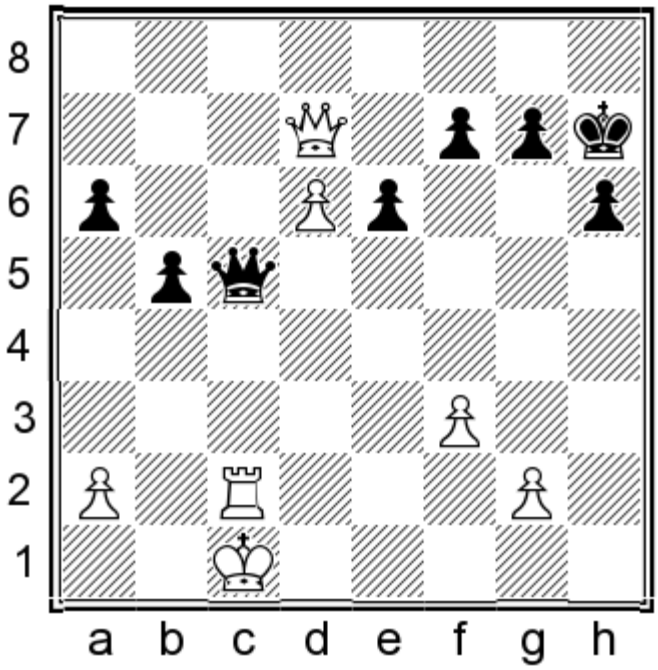


27...♕d8 28.♕e4 ♕g5?!

This is not a serious mistake, but Black is heading for a position where the slightest mistake may prove fatal.

28...♖c4!?= was better.

29.♖c2! ♖xc2 30.♕xc2 ♕xg4 31.♕c8† ♔h7 32.f3 ♕xb4 33.♕xd7 ♕c5† 34.♔f1 ♕c4† 35.♔e1 ♕c3† 36.♔e2 ♕c4† 37.♖d3 ♕c2† 38.♖d2 ♕c4† 39.♔d1 ♕f1† 40.♔c2 ♕c4† 41.♔b1 ♕b4† 42.♔c1 ♕c5† 43.♖c2



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43...♕g1†?

43...♕e3†! 44.♔b1 ♕e1† 45.♔b2 ♕b4†= would have saved half a point.

44.♔d2 ♕xg2† 45.♔c3 ♕xf3† 46.♔b4 ♕e4† 47.♔a5 ♕xc2 48.♕c7 ♕xa2† 49.♔b6+–

Magnus works his magic yet again! Black is five pawns up but the unstoppable d6-pawn is all that matters.

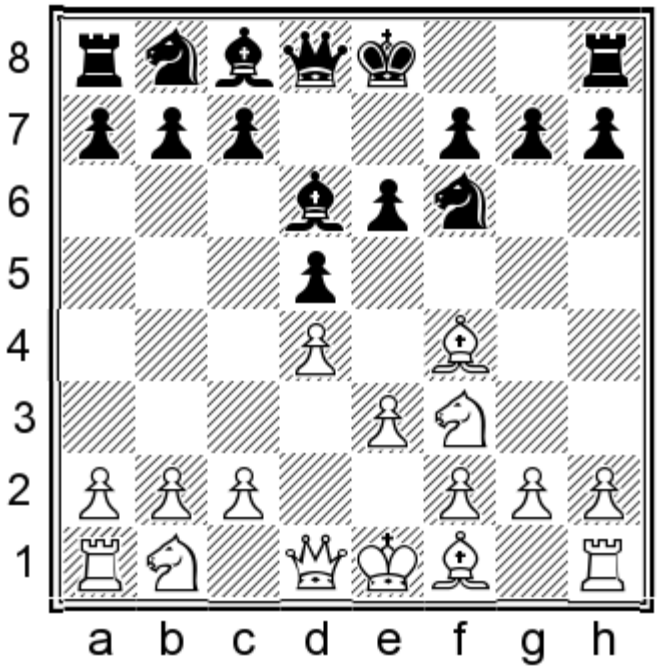
49...♕f2† 50.♔b7 b4 51.d7 b3 52.d8=♕ ♕f5 53.♕c3

1–0

Despite the unfavourable final result, we saw that the outcome of the opening was more than satisfactory for Black. Having seen that the early c2-c4 does Black no harm, let's turn our attention to another of White's possible plans.

The ♘e5 Plan

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘f3 ♗d6



5.♗g3

This is by far the most popular choice. 5.♗xd6 ♕xd6 relieves the tension in the position and gives Black an easier game, while 5...cxd6!? could certainly be considered as well.

5.♘e5 0-0 6.♗d3 c5 7.c3 b6! 8.♘bd2 ♗a6 is fine for Black, as we saw in the introductory section on page 246.

If White wants to follow in the steps of Rubinstein, he could try 5.♗d3, but Black can ignore the bishop for a couple of moves: 5...0-0 6.0-0 b6 7.c3 ♗xf4 8.exf4 ♗a6 with equal chances. For more details about Rubinstein's structure and the ensuing middlegame plans, please refer to the relevant section of the ♗f4 QGD introduction, beginning on page 60.

5...0-0

5...♘e4!? could certainly be considered, but there's no need for anything fancy. Besides, Black can't rely on this move because White could easily switch his move order around with 4.♘d2 instead of 4.♘f3.

5...b6 is also possible but I'd rather castle first.

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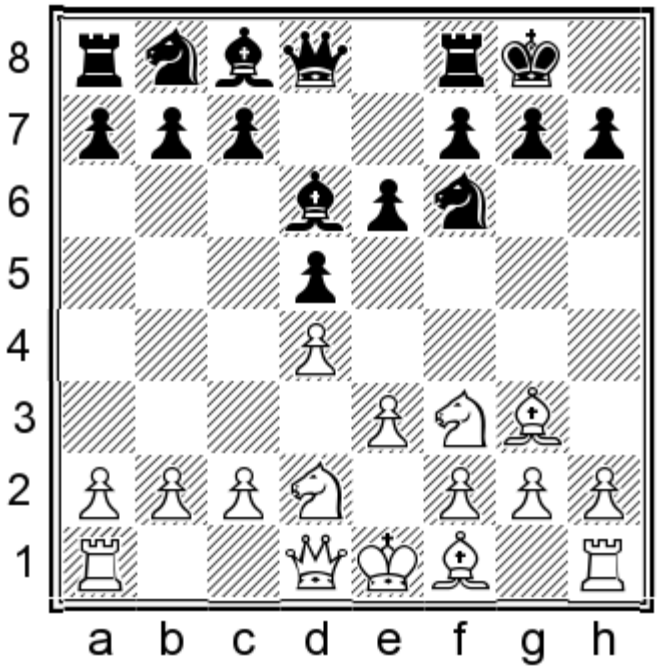
6.♘bd2

6.♗d3 should also be met by 6...b6, when 7.♘bd2 transposes to the next note below.



6...b6 7.c3

A recent game of mine continued 7.♗d3; this transposes to the final section of the chapter (after 7.♘gf3) on page 304.

The idea of the text move is to delay the development of the bishop to d3, so that ...♗a6 can be met by exchanging on a6 without losing a tempo. However, Black has two good ways to meet it, the choice being mostly a matter of taste.

7...c5

This seems simplest. If White can make a waiting move with his c-pawn, Black can do the same, hitting the ball back over the net and asking White what he intends to do next.

An interesting alternative is:

7...♗b7!?

It looks as though Black has been tricked out of the ...♗a6 plan, but he has something else in mind. This time the idea is to exploit the fact that he has not yet played ...c5.

8.♗d3

8.♘e5!? has the idea to meet 8...♘e4?! with 9.♘xe4 dxe4 10.♗c4, so my advice would be to only play ...♘e4 when White's bishop has already gone to d3. A much better response is 8...c5!, transposing to the main bolded line below.

8...♘e4!

Black has interesting play. The positional justification for the last move is revealed after:

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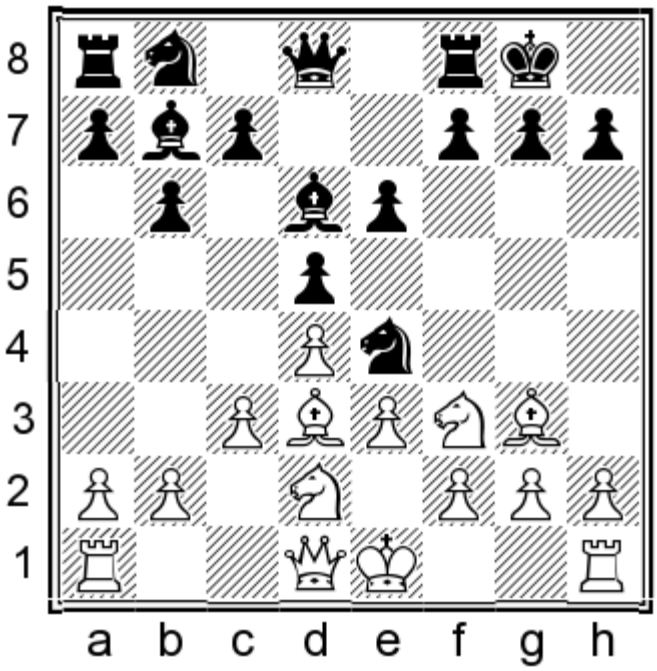
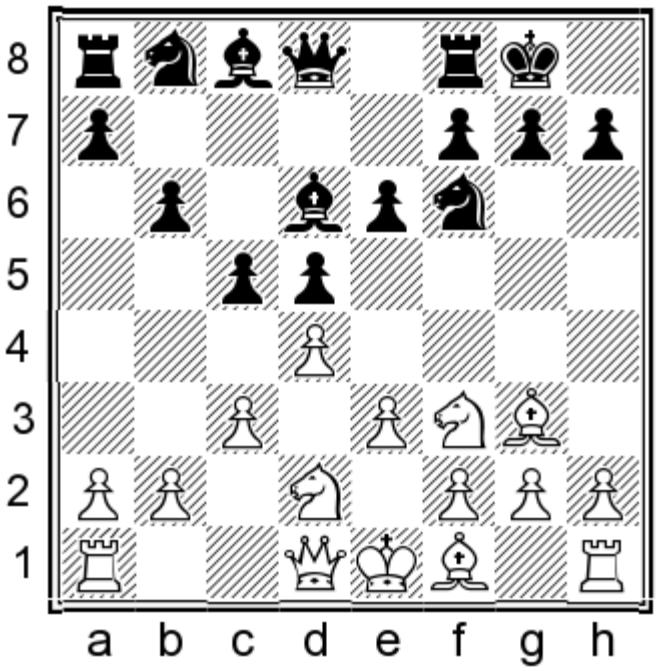


9.♕c2 f5!⇄

And if 10.♗xd6 cxd6! Black has a good version of a Stonewall structure, as there is no weakness on e5!

The above line has been tested in quite a few games, and interested readers are encouraged to carry out their own investigations. For the purposes of our repertoire, I will focus on the simpler and safer option.



8.♘e5

Plonking a knight on e5 is a thematic and popular plan in several of these d-pawn systems.

It is also worth considering:

8.a4

This move is designed to meet ...♗a6 with ♗b5. Apart from that, however, the move is a waste of time and so Black can revert to another scheme of development:

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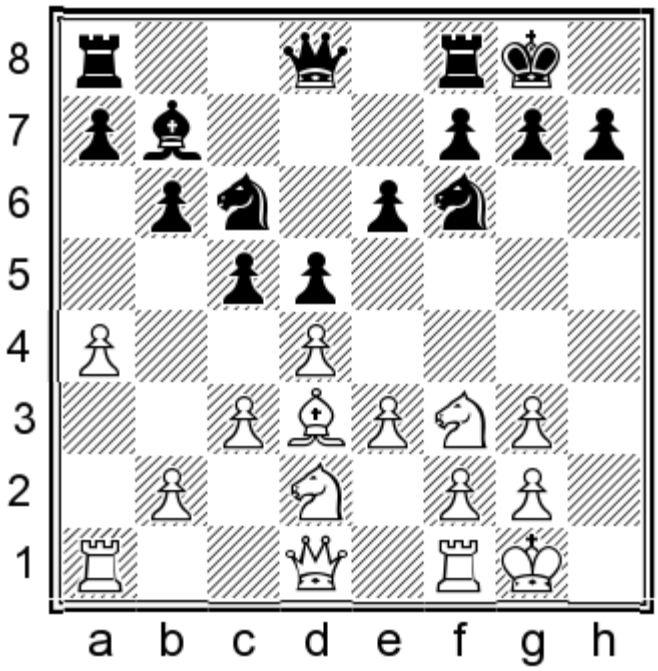
8...♘c6 9.♗d3

9.♘e5 ♗b7 10.♗d3 ♕c7 11.f4 ♘e7! 12.♕f3 ♘f5 13.♗f2 ♗e7 14.g4 ♘d6 is similar to Game 57 below.

9...♗b7 10.0-0 ♗xg3 11.hxg3

This was Sergeev – Ovsejevitsch, Zalakaros 2010. Black has several playable moves but my suggestion would be:

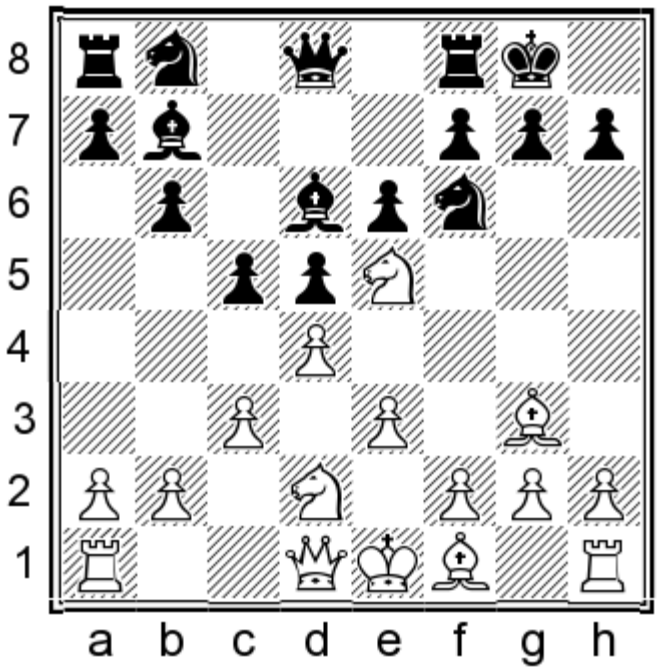


11...♕c7N=

Since White has refrained from putting his knight on e5, Black takes that square under control and can start thinking about playing ...e5 himself.

8...♗b7

8...♗a6!? 9.♗xa6 ♘xa6 leaves White a tempo up compared to lines where the bishop goes to d3 before exchanging on a6. Nevertheless, the position remained about equal in Hracek – Petr, Prague 2016. Still, it seems more principled for Black to avoid making this small concession.



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9.♗d3

Now that Black's bishop has spent a tempo going to b7, it makes sense for White to point his bishop towards the kingside.

9...♘c6!

Black begins the process of challenging the strong knight on e5, while preparing to meet f2-f4 with a key manoeuvre which will be showcased in the game below.

GAME 57

Sergey Karjakin – Michael Adams

Wijk aan Zee 2016

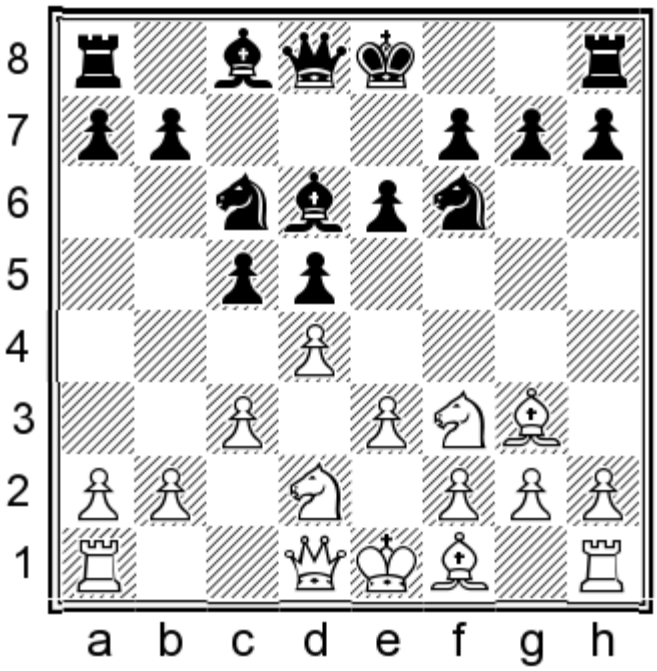
The actual move order of the game was 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♗f4 d5 3.e3 e6 4.♘f3 c5 5.c3 ♘c6 6.♘bd2 ♗d6 7.♗g3 0-0 8.♗d3 b6 9.♘e5 ♗b7; only after Black's 9th move does it finally converge on my recommended move order for Black! I will substitute in our 'official' repertoire move order, and will show why I believe the sequence used by these two great players was not the most inaccurate.

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0

Let me show you why I prefer the plan of castling followed by ...b6, rather than ...c5 and ...♘c6:

5...c5 6.c3 ♘c6 7.♘bd2

This position was actually reached in Karjakin – Adams. I suggest that you avoid it with Black, for the reasons shown below.



7...0-0 8.♗d3

I am also not sure how Black equalizes after 8.♗b5!?.

8...b6 9.♕e2!

9.♘e5 was Karjakin's choice in the game.

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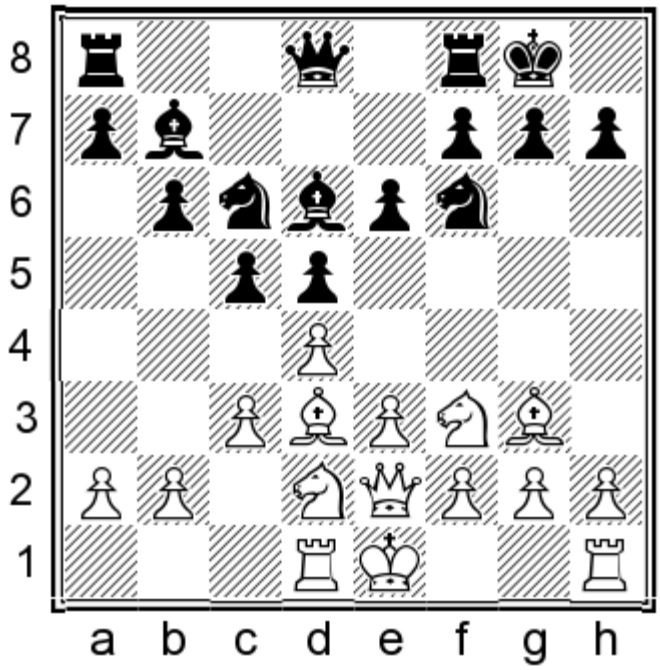
Once it became clear that Black was well placed to deal with the Stonewall set-up, 9.e4!? became a popular try for White. However, 9...♗e7! 10.e5 ♘h5! emerged as a reliable antidote. This method of meeting e3-e4 is an important motif, which we will also encounter later in the chapter on page 305.

Since Black is doing fine in the above two lines, the strongest players today tend to favour a more flexible approach with White.

9...♗b7 10.♖d1!?

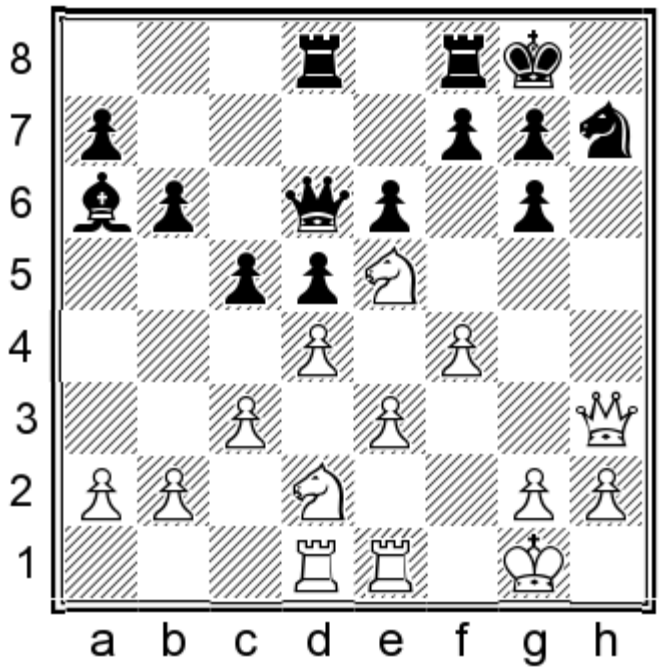
More flexibility!



10...♘e7 11.0-0 ♕c7 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.♘e5 ♖ad8 14.♕f3 ♘g6 15.♗xg6!

An impressive strategic exchange. Carlsen had already done the same thing in a similar position against Tomashevsky.

15...hxg6 16.♕h3 ♗a6 17.♖fe1 ♘h7 18.f4



White's skilful handling of the position gave him a considerably improved version of Pillsbury's attacking

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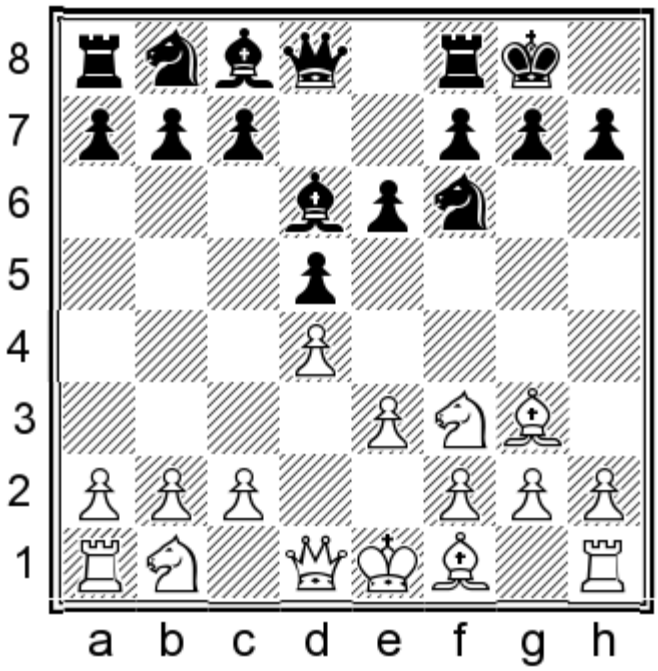
formation (i.e. ♘e5 and f2-f4) in Kramnik – Hou Yifan, Medias 2016. By keeping the knight on b8 and threatening the Taimanov plan of ...♗a6, Black can stop this kind of thing from happening.



6.♘bd2 b6 7.c3 c5 8.♘e5 ♗b7 9.♗d3 ♘c6

Let me remind you that this is the point where we have officially transposed to the main illustrative game. Alternatives on moves 7 and 8 have already been covered in the short analysis section before the game.

10.f4

This was the way in which almost everybody from club players to super-GMs was handling the London System up until a few years ago, before players like Kramnik, Grischuk and Carlsen enriched White's armoury of ideas.

10.0-0 should be met by 10...♕c7, provoking 11.f4. Now Black carries out the same manoeuvre as Adams in the main game: 11...♘e7! 12.♕b1!? (12.♕f3 ♘f5 13.♗f2 ♗e7! gives Black his usual excellent play) The text move is a modern idea which some London experts have tried, but Black showed an excellent response in the following game:

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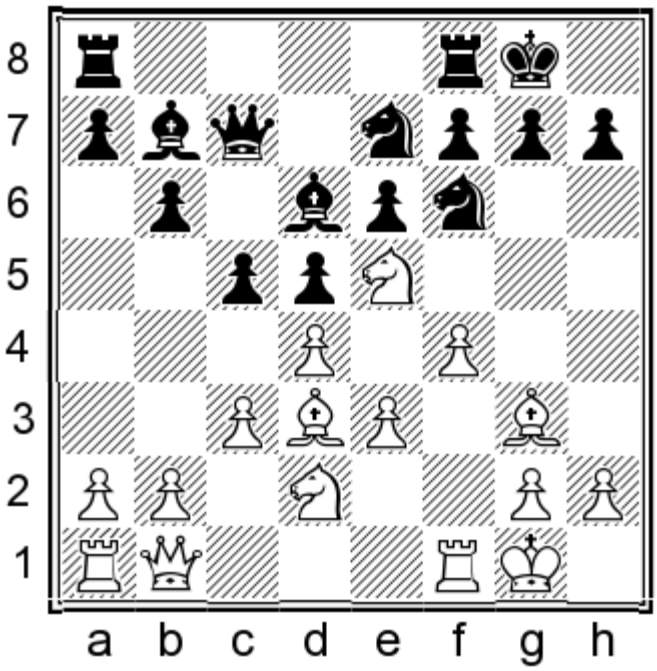
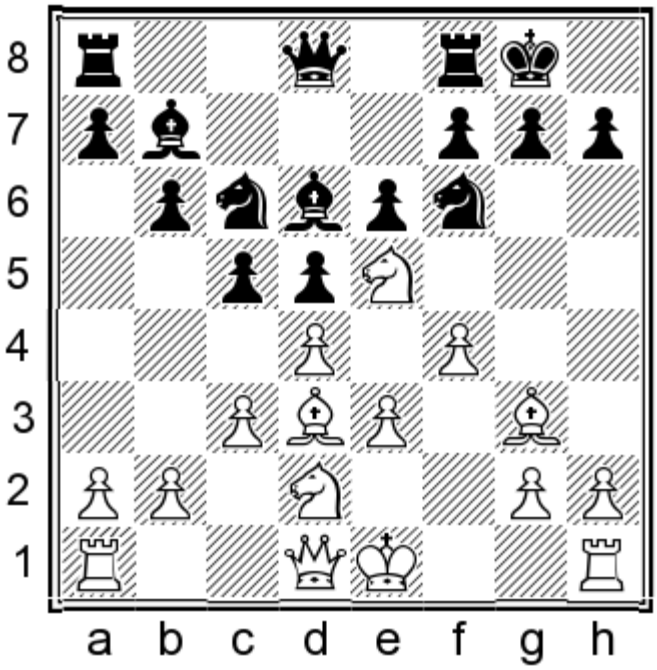


12...g6! 13.♗h4 ♘e8! 14.g4 f6 15.♘ef3 ♘g7 Black was ready to meet g4-g5 with ...f5, and he went on to win from this fine position in Skoberne – Halkias, Baku (ol) 2016.



10...♘e7! 11.♕f3 ♘f5! 12.♗f2

How should Black deal with the threat of g4-g5? Pay close attention, as the present game illustrates perfectly why the Pillsbury attacking plan has been largely abandoned.

12...♗e7!

Vacating the ideal d6-square for the knight.

13.g4 ♘d6 14.g5 ♘fe4

This was the scheme I showed to Avrukh in 2011 during the European Team Championships in Porto Carras.

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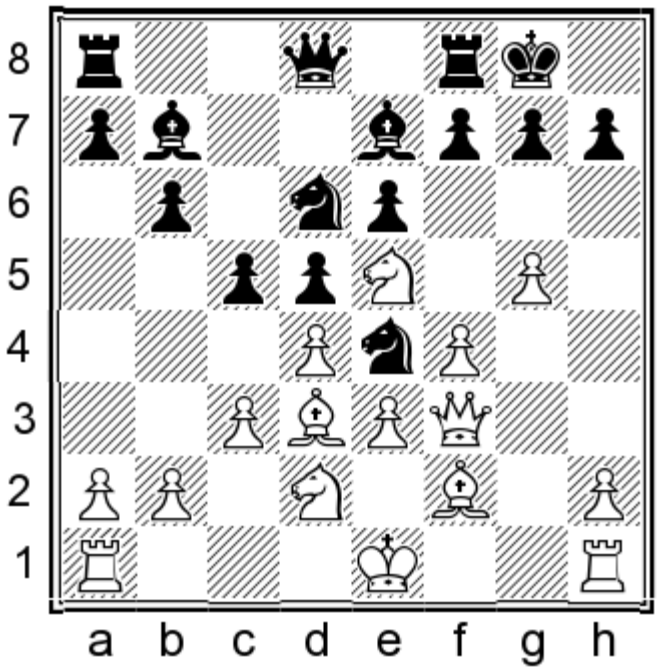
Black's strategic plan is to take on d2 and put the other knight on e4, then play ...♗d6 and ...♕c8 and get ready for ...♗xe5 and ...♗a6. Avrukh liked it and asked me if he could present it in *Grandmaster Repertoire 11*. In the press conference to the present game, Adams confirmed that he read about this plan in none other than Avrukh's book!



15.0-0-0

15.h4 ♘xd2 16.♔xd2 ♘e4† 17.♔e2 ♗d6 18.♘g4 ♕c8 was excellent for Black in Mitkov – Borges Mateos, Toluca 2009; this was the stem game for Black's plan, which inspired me when I noticed it in 2011.

Karjakin's move does not solve White's problems, as it invites Black to launch a big attack against his king.

15...c4! 16.♗c2

16.♗xe4 dxe4 17.♕e2 b5 18.h4 is proposed as an improvement by Mekhitarian but, after the further 18...b4 19.cxb4, he overlooks that 19...a5!∓ is a strong retort.

16...b5

Black's attack almost plays itself from here.

17.♕h3 b4 18.♘xe4

18.cxb4 a5!∓

18...dxe4 19.♗e1 ♗d5!

Adams conducts the attack superbly. This move strengthens his central grip and clears the b-file.

20.♖g1

20.cxb4 a5! also gives Black a tremendous attack.

20...b3 21.axb3 cxb3 22.♗b1

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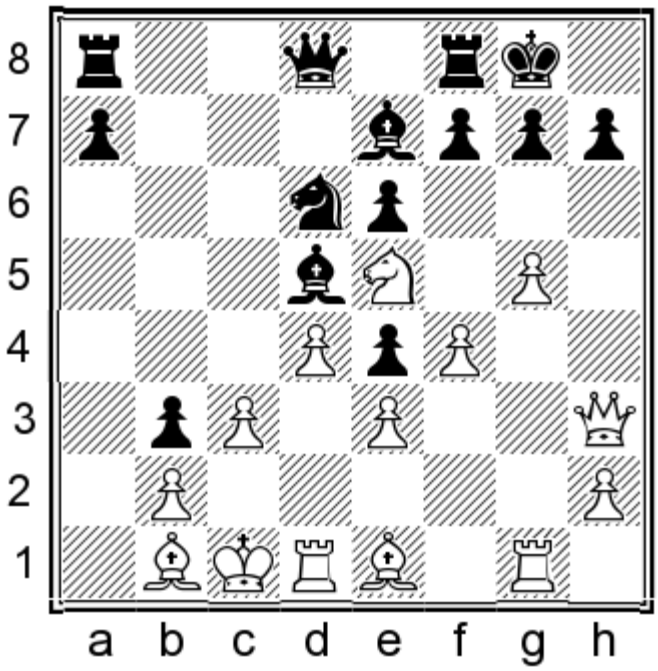

22...f5!

Before carrying out the final assault, Adams takes a moment to secures his kingside against any kind of counterplay.

23.gxf6 ♗xf6 24.♖g4 ♘f5 25.♔d2 ♕a5 26.♔e2 ♗xe5 27.dxe5 ♖ad8

Black has a huge initiative, and has not even had to sacrifice any material to get it. White soon has to give up.

28.♔f2 ♕a1 29.♗d2 ♗c4 30.♕h5 ♕xb2 31.♔e1 ♖xd2

0–1

So far, we have seen how Black should deal with all of White's main plans involving an early ♘f3. Now it is time to consider the more sophisticated move order whereby White delays this move.

Delaying ♘f3

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6

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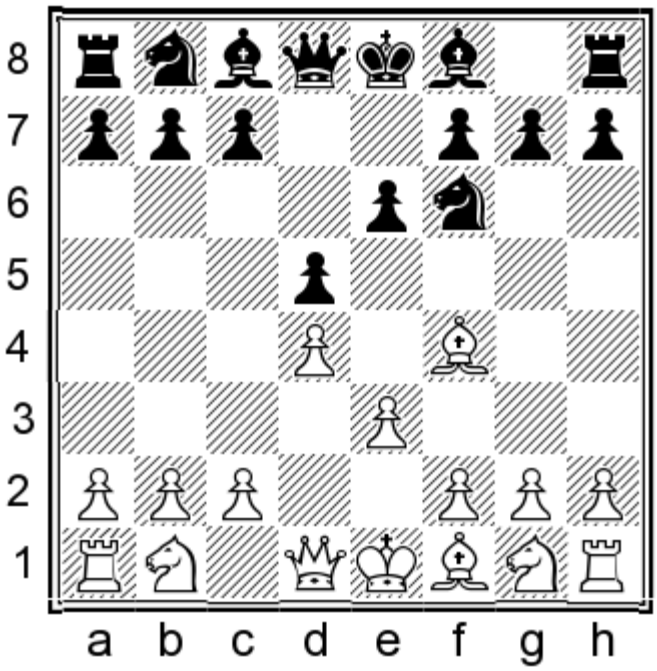

4.♘d2

This flexible move order has been used by London experts such as Grischuk, Kamsky and Sedlak, the last of whom recommended it in his book.

4.c4 has been played by Nakamura, but this strikes me as a curious way to try and enter a ♗f4 QGD. Black can play ball with 4...♗e7 5.♘c3 0-0, reaching a position from Chapter 2b, but 4...c5! looks like a convincing route to an equal position.

4.c3

This is another attempt to play flexibly, but it's slightly inaccurate.

4...♗d6 5.♗g3

Please note that when White plays an early c2-c3, Black will have to castle before playing ...b6 and ...♗a6, otherwise White will be able to win a piece with ♗xa6 and ♕a4†. This is hardly a problem though, as I recommend early castling anyway. Moreover, White's move order gives Black an extra, quite promising possibility:

5...♘e4!?

5...0-0 is fine of course; White has nothing better than 6.♘d2, transposing to normal lines which will be considered shortly.

6.♘d2

6.♗xd6 ♘xd6!? is fine for Black.

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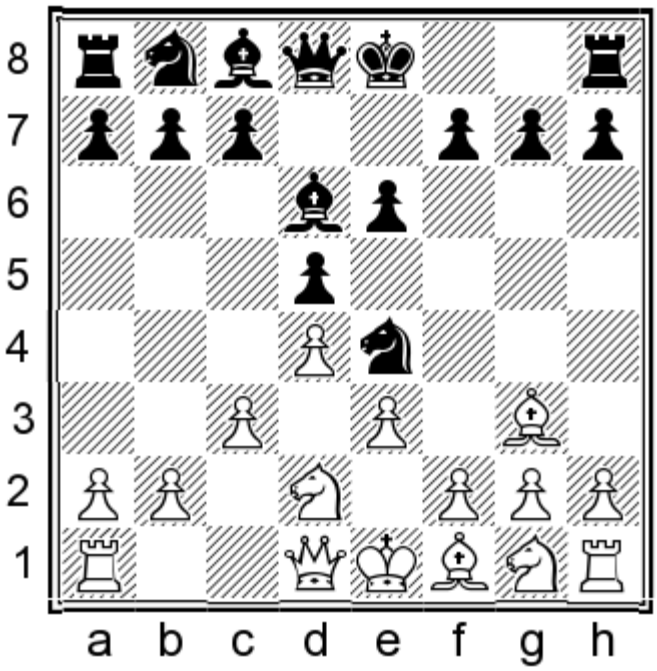

6...♘xg3 7.hxg3 c5 8.♗d3 ♘c6 9.♘df3 ♗d7 10.♘e2 ♕e7∞

All this occurred in Kamsky – Dreev, Gibraltar 2014. Black can think about long castling, and the ...e5 break may open the position for the bishop pair at any moment. White will have his own trumps, such as a compact structure and pressure against d5, so the position is roughly balanced – but this is hardly a great success story for White's opening play.

4...♗d6

The fact that White has played ♘d2 rather than ♘f3 gives him a few additional options. We will consider the Stonewall set-up followed by some other tries.

The Stonewall

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗xd6 ♕xd6

5...cxd6!? can certainly be considered, but I am happy to allow White to carry out his plan.

6.f4

White hopes to prove he has a superior Stonewall, having already exchanged his bad bishop. However, Black has good chances to exchange the remaining bishops, leaving White with a weakness on e4.

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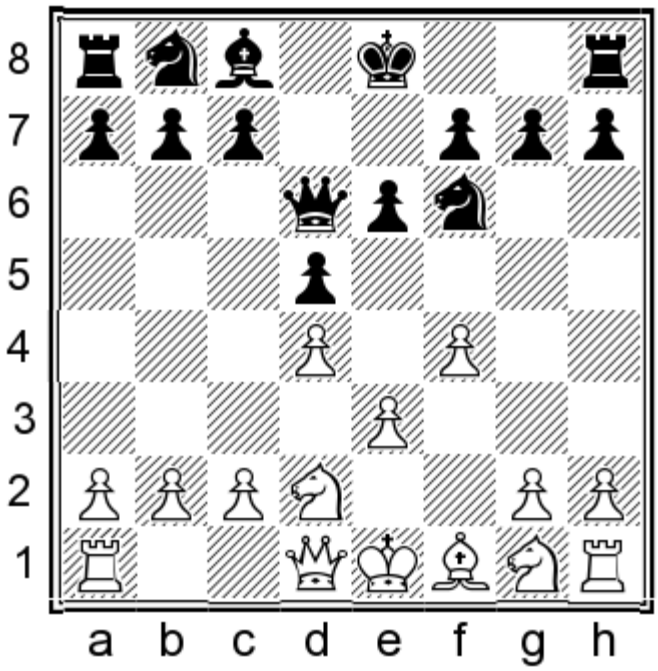

6...c5!

6...b6 looks natural but the ...♗a6 plan doesn't seem so great here, as White can delay castling. For example: 7.c3 c5 8.♘gf3 and we have to play 8...0-0 in order to be ready for ...♗a6, but now 9.♘e5 ♗a6 10.♗xa6 ♘xa6 11.g4! gives White some initiative. Engines call this equal after 11...♘c7 12.g5 ♘d7 13.♘df3 ♘xe5 (at first I wanted to make 13...♘e8 work as the knight will be great on d6, but 14.♕a4! is a bit annoying) 14.fxe5 ♕e7 15.h4 b5, but it seems to me that Black's queenside counterplay is still some way off, and White is poised to do some damage on the kingside soon, so in practical terms this is not something I would recommend for Black.

7.c3 ♗d7!?N

A new move but it's logical enough.

8.♗d3 cxd4

Once again the engines offer an alternative line as equal: 8...♕b6 9.♕b3 c4 10.♕xb6 axb6 11.♗c2 b5 12.a3 ♘c6 13.♖c1 Preventing ...b4. Now a good regrouping move is 13...♘e7, followed by ...♗c6, ...♔e7 and ...♘f5-d6. Objectively the engine assessment is probably accurate, but in practical terms I would be slightly wary of Black's position with the bad bishop, as further exchanges are unlikely to be in his favour.

9.cxd4

The other recapture would lose the f4-pawn of course.

9...♘c6

Now we have transposed to a bunch of games.

10.a3

Preventing ...♘b4 followed by ...♗b5.

10...♘e7!

Black intends to carry out the same manoeuvre as in the Karjakin – Adams game!

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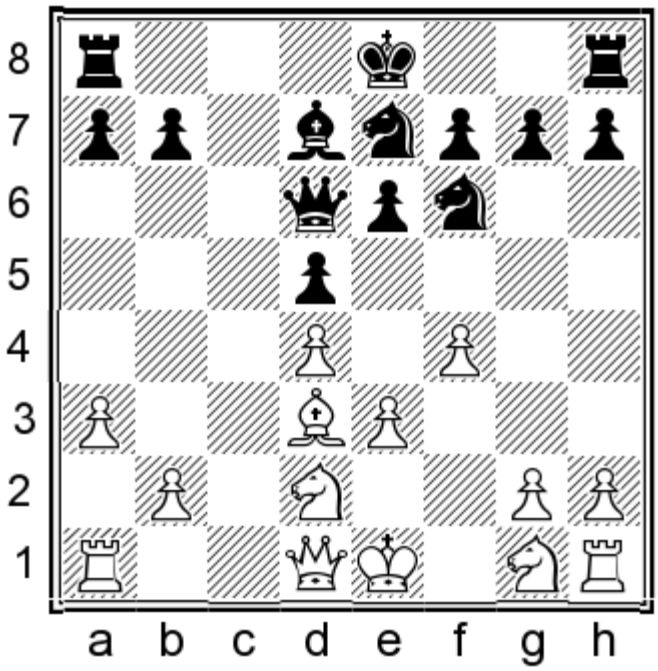


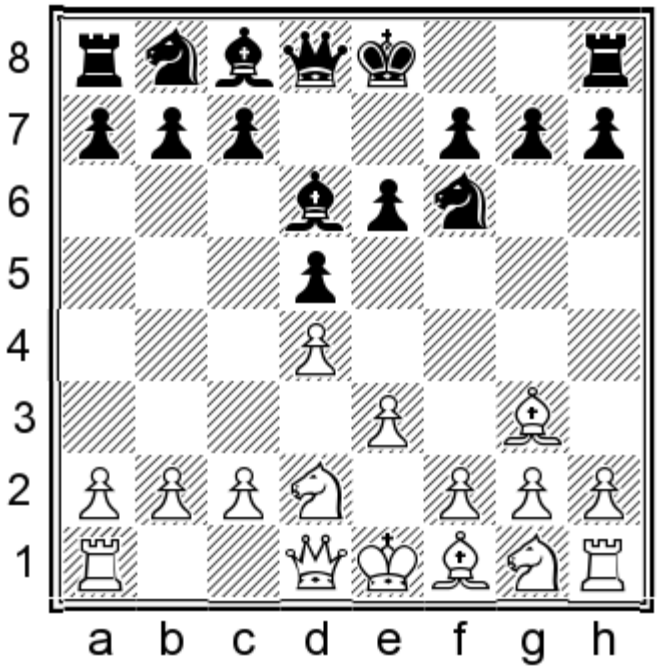
11.♘gf3 ♘f5 12.♕e2 ♕b6 13.♘e5 ♘d6

With ...♗b5 coming next, Black had slightly the more pleasant position in Frick – Vaisser, Marianske Lazne 2016.

Avoiding the Stonewall

Let's see what happens when White avoids committing to a rigid pawn formation.

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗g3



5...0-0 6.♗d3

6.c3 b6 7.♗d3 transposes to 6.♗d3 b6 7.c3 as covered below, while 7.♘gf3 has already been covered under *The*

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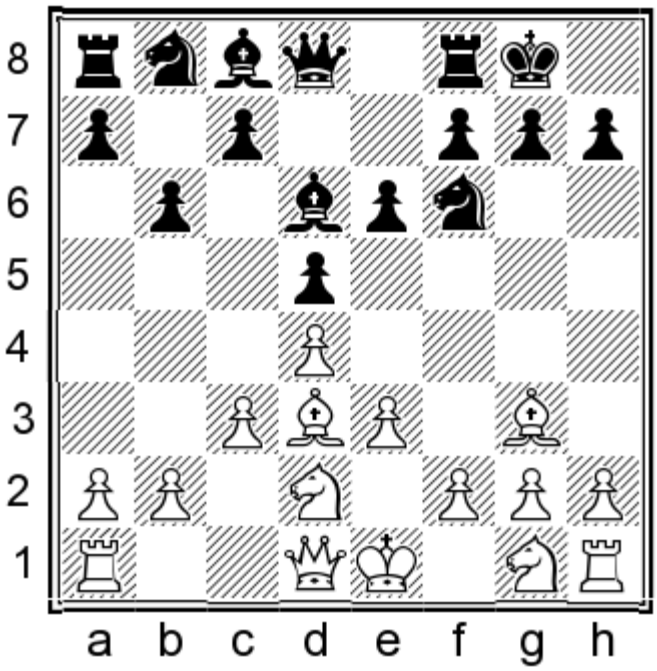
♘*e5 Plan* on page 295.

6...b6

Now we come to a final split between two fundamentally different plans. We will start by looking at a couple of ways in which White may try to safeguard his light-squared bishop from being exchanged. We will then turn our attention to 7.♘gf3, which is recommended by Sedlak in his book.

Preserving the Bishop

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0 6.♗d3 b6 7.c3



7.♕e2 has been seen a few times in practice but I don't see any reason to fear it. 7...a5 (7...c5!? 8.c3 a5 9.e4 ♗e7! is another possible continuation) 8.e4

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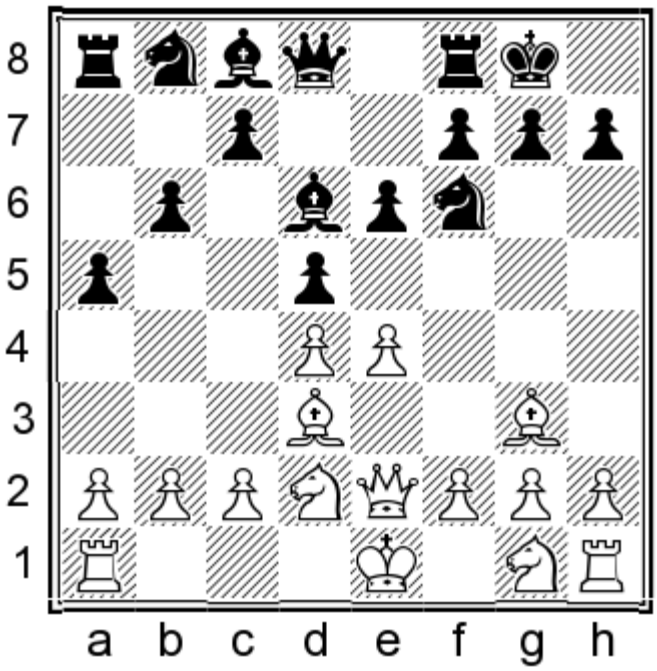

This was seen in Pirs – Chzhen, corr. 2006, with White going to win against his much lower-rated opponent. At this point, however, Black could have played 8...♗e7!N with a fine game, as ...♗a6 comes next.

With the text move, White gives himself the option of dropping his bishop back to c2. As we will see though, this makes Black's life easier.

7...♗a6 8.♗c2?!

I think this is too optimistic. White should really prefer 8.♗xa6 ♘xa6 9.♘gf3, transposing to Sedlak's recommendation as covered below.

8...c5 9.♘gf3

With the last move we transpose to a bunch of games, one of which we will follow as a model example for Black.

9...♘c6 10.♘e5 ♕c7 11.f4

White tries to keep the e5-outpost under control, but Black can develop powerful counterplay.

11...♖ac8 12.♖c1

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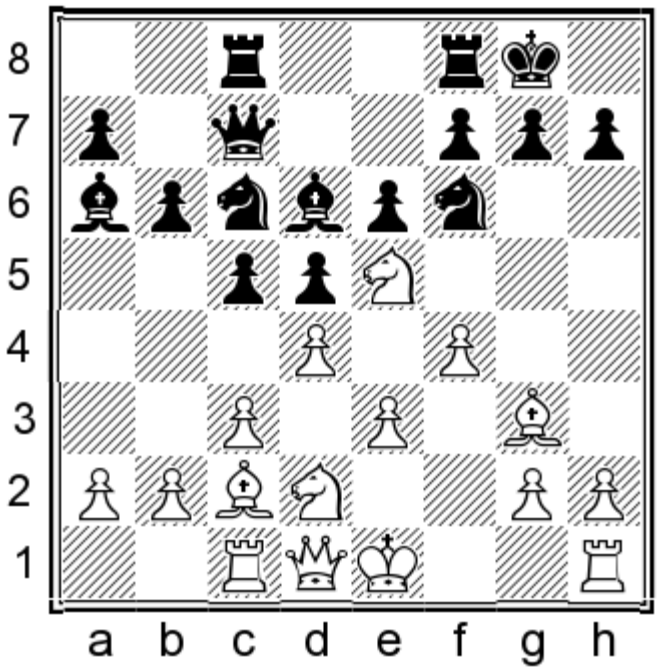
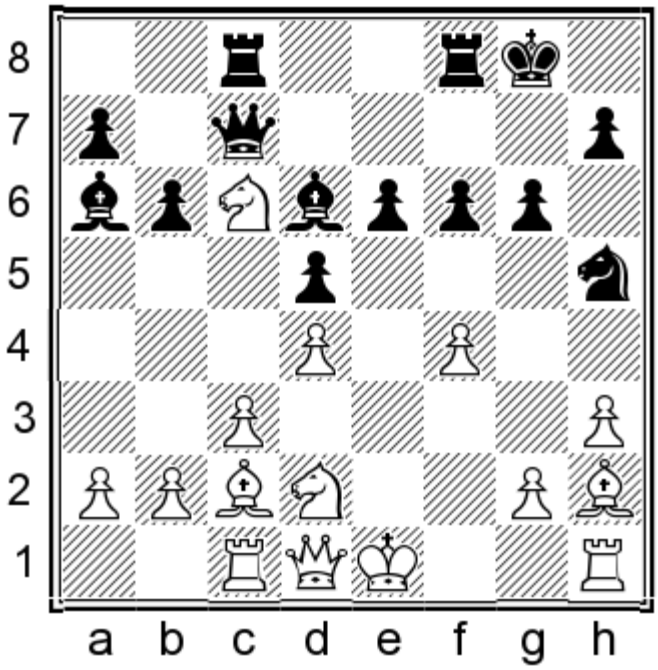


12...g6! 13.h3 ♘h5

This thematic manoeuvre can be found in some other openings where a knight occupies the e5-square (or e4, with colours reversed). Black gets ready to oust the knight with ...f6; a secondary idea is to exchange on d4, and if White recaptures with the e-pawn then the knight will be able to take care of the backward e6-pawn from g7.

14.♗h2 cxd4 15.exd4 f6 16.♘xc6



16...♗xf4!

Black wins a pawn thanks to the unfortunate position of White's king. By this point, White must have been regretting his decision not to trade his bishop for the monster on a6.

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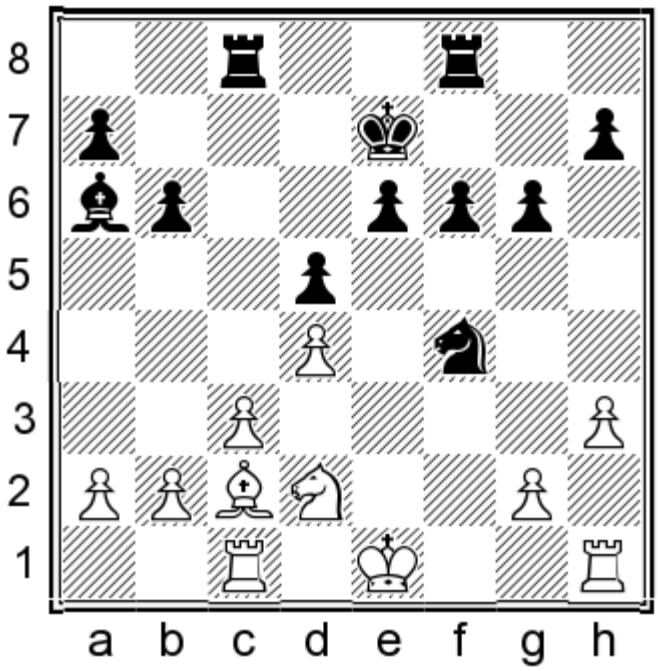
17.♗xf4 ♕xf4 18.♘e7† ♔f7 19.♕f3 ♔xe7 20.♕xf4 ♘xf4

White is one pawn down, with another to follow.



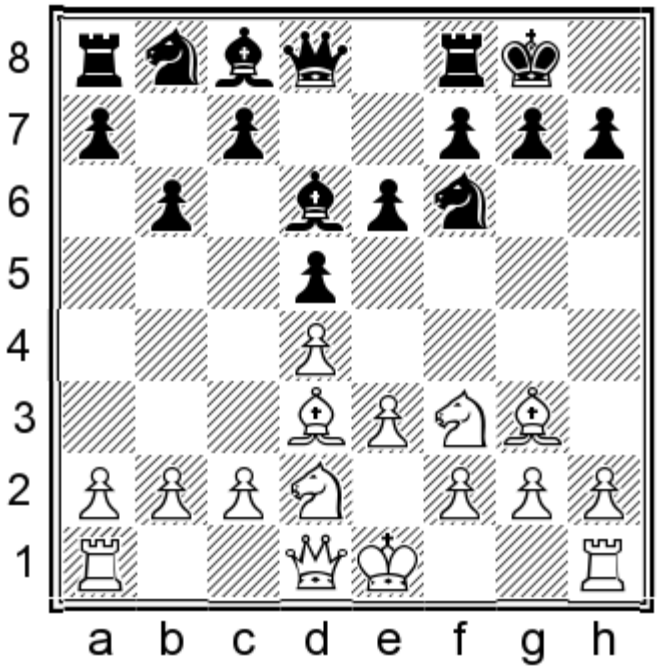
21.♔f2 ♘e2! 22.♖cd1 ♘xd4

Black eventually converted his advantage in Bruno – D'Amore, Sarre 2009.

Sedlak's Recommendation

Nikola Sedlak is a strong GM and a real specialist in the London, so it is vital to check what he suggests for White in *Winning with the Modern London System*.

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.♘d2 ♗d6 5.♗g3 0-0 6.♗d3 b6 7.♘gf3



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This position can also be reached via a move order with an earlier ♘f3. Sedlak shows that delaying the knight development gives White extra options against some other Black plans – but for our purposes, we can head for this position whichever move order White chooses.

7...♗a6 8.♗xa6

Sedlak thinks White should take the opportunity to misplace Black's knight, which seems reasonable enough.

I had the opportunity to try out my recommendation for Black in a recent game, which continued:

8.0-0 ♗xg3

This is perfectly safe, now that White's rook is unable to utilize the h-file.

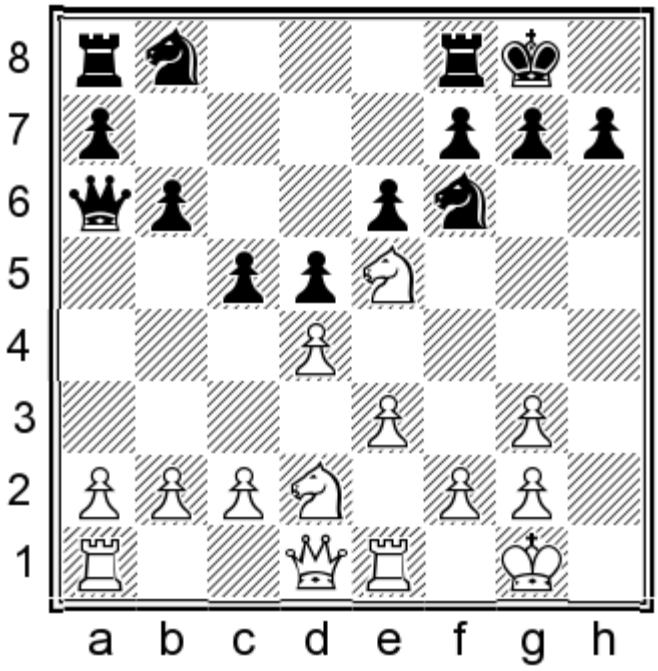
9.hxg3 c5 10.♖e1

This seems like a rather mysterious move but Black was doing fine anyway. Here I found a nice manoeuvre:

10...♕c8! 11.♗xa6 ♕xa6 12.♘e5

12.e4!? gives Black more than one good option. This position has been discussed in the Introduction to the ♗f4 QGD; see page 69.

After the text move, in Tsolakos – Ntirlis, Thessaloniki 2017, I should have continued:



12...♘bd7!N

The game continued 12...cxd4? 13.exd4 ♖c8 and I eventually won, but at this stage White had a good version of a reversed Carlsbad structure.

13.♘df3

13.g4 ♘xe5 (13...h6 is also perfectly playable) 14.dxe5 ♘e4 is fine for Black.

13.f4 can be met by 13...cxd4 14.exd4 followed by a nice manoeuvre: 14...♕b5! 15.♖b1 ♕a4! 16.c3 ♕xd1 (16...♕xa2!? would be the maximalist try; it is not clear if White's attacking chances are enough to make up for the missing pawn...) Black will follow up with 17...h5, immobilizing White's kingside structure with a comfortable endgame for Black.

13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♘e4!

Black has a good game; he can play ...f6 next to chase the knight away from e5, while White cannot do the same due to the hanging g3-pawn.

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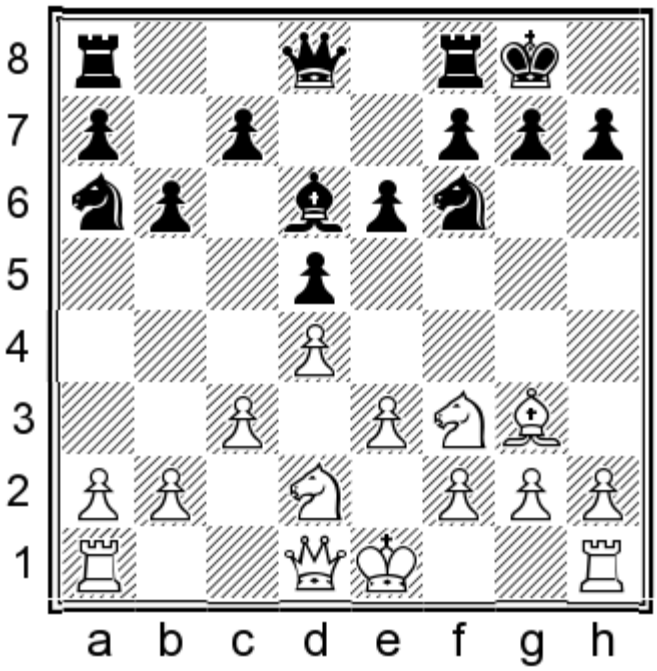
8...♘xa6 9.c3



9...c5

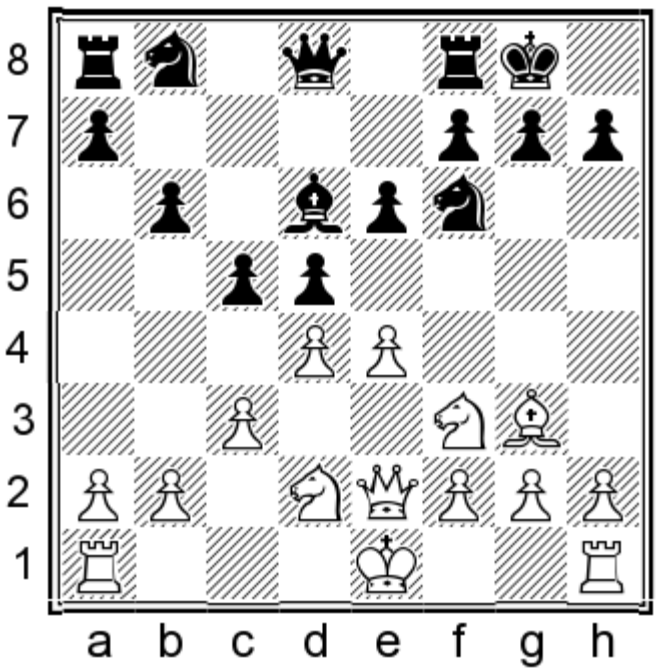
Suddenly we transpose to a lot of games where ...c5 and c2-c3 were played earlier.

10.♕e2 ♘b8

10...♘c7 was chosen by a top-class player in Iturrizaga Bonelli – Adams, Gibraltar 2017, but I prefer to bring the knight into play via b8 and c6.

11.e4

Sedlak ends his analysis here, saying that White has some pressure. However, I think Black is fine after:



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11...♗e7!

Just like in some of the lines noted earlier, this is an excellent response to the e3-e4 push.

12.0-0

12.e5 ♘h5 gives White nothing. At first I wondered if White could move the f3-knight away in order to provoke ...♘xg3 and then attack along the h-file, but this plan stands little chance of succeeding, as Black is well placed to put pressure on the d4-pawn and the queenside in general. Play around with the position yourself and you will see.

12...♘c6 13.exd5 ♕xd5 14.dxc5 ♕xc5=

Black had no problems in Rosso – Schindler, email 2007.

Conclusion

This chapter covered several systems after 1.d4 d5. First was 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3, when we saw that 3...e6 4.♗g2 b5! is a good way to avoid the Catalan.

Next was 3.e3 e6 4.♗d3 c5 5.c3, the Colle-Koltanowski, which we meet with 5...♗e7 6.♘bd2 0-0 and Black is ready for ...b6 and ...♗a6. White can avoid that with 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.0-0 but after 8...♘c6 Black is at least okay.

5.b3 is the Colle-Zukertort; once again our response is 5...♗e7!? 6.♗b2 0-0 7.0-0 b6, intending ...♗a6. Black is doing fine, whatever White throws at him.

3.c3 e6 4.♗g5 is the Torre, when 4...♗e7 5.♘bd2 ♘bd7! sees us develop in traditional QGD fashion. After the further 6.e3 c5 7.♗d3 h6 8.♗h4 b6! Black will put the bishop on b7, after which ...♘e4 is an important resource which ensures Black of a good game.

The final part of the chapter dealt with the London System with 2.♗f4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6. Regardless of whether White develops with 4.♘f3 or the more sophisticated 4.♘d2, Black will respond with 4...♗d6, and if 5.♗g3 then 5...0-0 followed by ...b6, which offers the useful option of trading bishops with ...♗a6. White has a number of plans and move orders available, but I would like to remind you of two important themes. Firstly, if White goes for an aggressive set-up with ♘e5 and f2-f4, then the regrouping plan from Game 57, with ...♘e7-f5, ...♗e7 and ...♘d6, works a treat. Secondly, if White develops more fluidly and meets our ...♗a6 plan by advancing in the centre with e3-e4, the best response is usually to retreat the bishop from d6 to e7, as we saw in a few places in the chapter.

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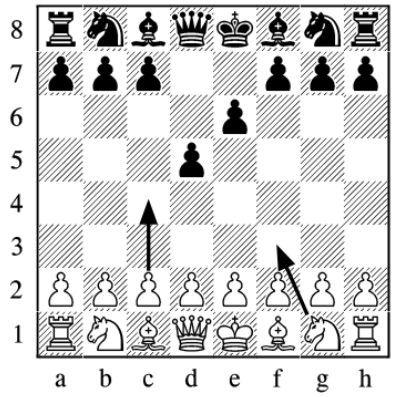
Chapter 7a



Introduction to Bonus Chapters

With the most popular openings after 1.d4 being analysed increasingly deeply, many strong players have incorporated 1.c4 and 1.♘f3 openings into their repertoire. There is still plenty of new ground to be discovered in these arenas, and the arising positions tend to be complex, with many pieces remaining on the board.

As QGD players, you have no worries about your first few moves, as ...e6 and ...d5 cannot be stopped. The main problem is how to play after that, bearing in mind that White may retain the option of d2-d4 for a while.

1.c4 and 1.♘f3 are serious moves, and to try to offer a comprehensive repertoire against each of them would clearly be beyond the scope of this book. Instead, I will provide you with solid repertoire options against White's main choices, which I hope will act as a useful stepping stone to help you on your way.

Flank openings are, by definition, flexible choices which avoid committing the centre pawns to a rigid structure in the early stages of the game. This makes it hard to pick out any recurring positional or structural themes, so I will just offer a quick preview of my recommended lines before discussing the theory.

The English

1.c4 e6

Of course we start by preparing ...d5.

2.g3

The kingside fianchetto is the natural choice for 1.c4 players. White can also start with 2.♘f3 of course.

2...d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3

The English Catalan will be the focus of the next chapter. It's a frequent choice, and the recommendation of Mihail Marin in his popular *Grandmaster Repertoire* trilogy on the English.

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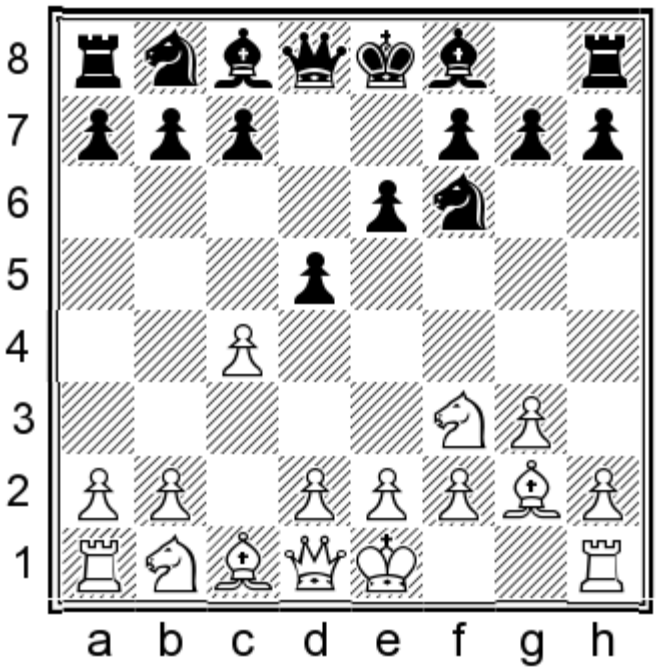

4...dxc4!

Other sensible-looking moves such as 4...♗e7 give White the option of 5.d4, leading to a variation of the Catalan which falls outside of our repertoire.

White usually seeks to regain his pawn with **5.♘a3** or **5.♕a4†**, both of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Reti & King's Indian Attack

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 e6

3...♗f5 and 3...♗g4 are respectable options, but the text move seems like the best fit for our QGD repertoire.

4.0-0

4.c4 is covered under the 1.c4 move order as noted above, while 4.d4 leads back to Chapter 6c.

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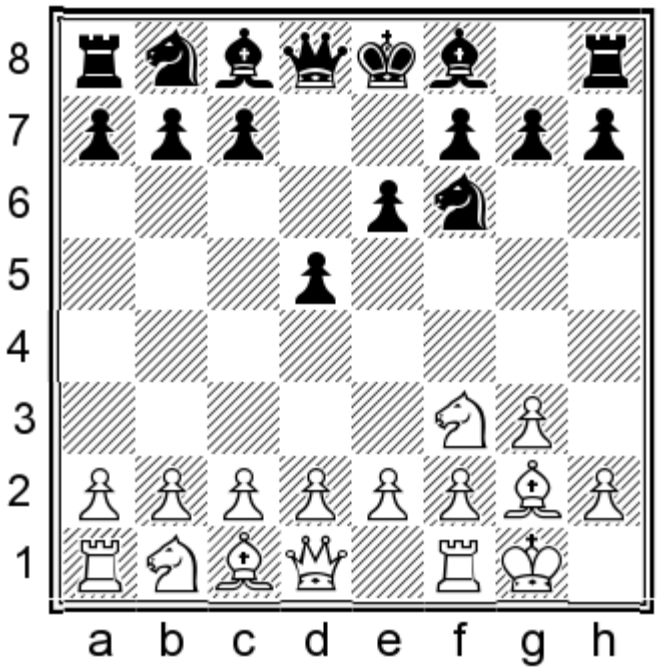

4...c5!

I find this the most suitable move order; see Chapter 7c for an explanation of why I was less happy with alternatives. I will go on to show you how to deal with White's main tries from this position, namely **5.c4**, **5.d4** and **5.d3**.

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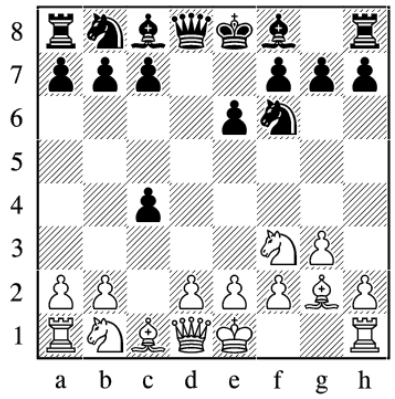
Chapter 7b



English – Starter Theory

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.♘f3 dxc4!

A) 5.♘a3 page 310

B) 5.♕a4† ♗d7! 6.♕xc4 c5! page 312

B1) 7.d4 page 313

B2) 7.♘e5 page 314

1.c4 e6

As I said before, nothing can stop us from playing ...d5 next.

2.g3

Obviously White has some other options and move orders but I will focus on the most important of them. Once you know how to meet the most popular English lines, you can fill in the gaps yourself.

2...d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6

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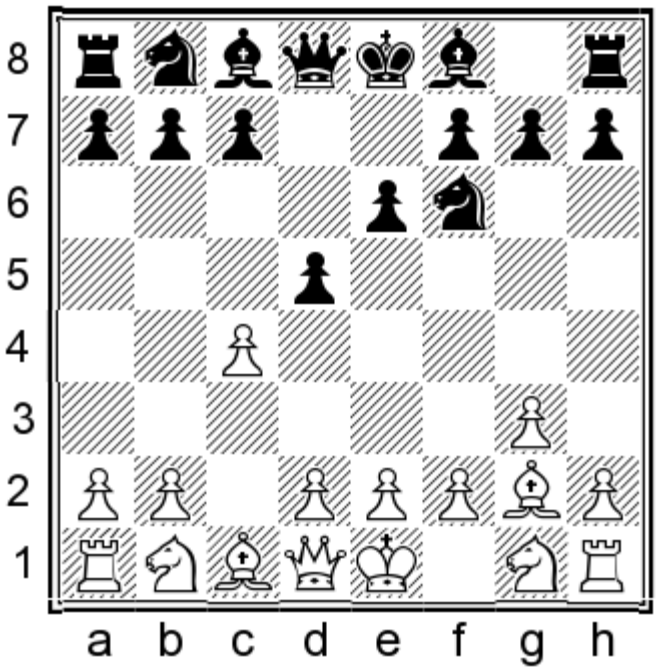
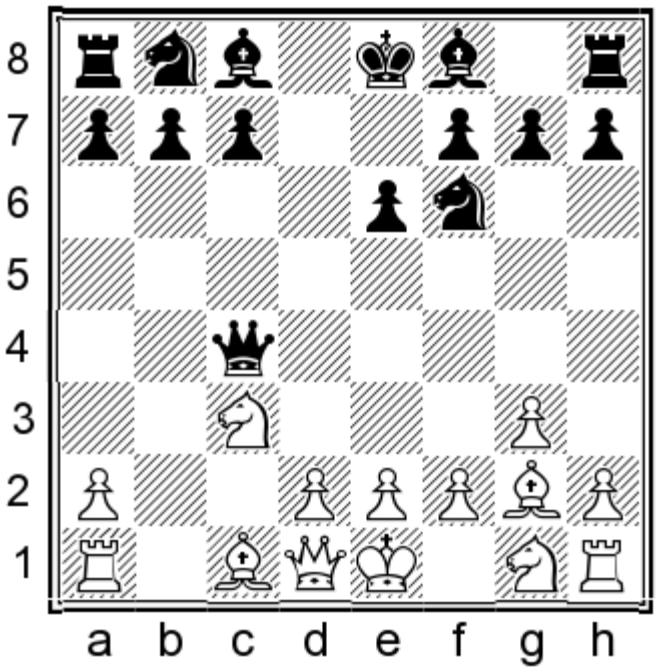


4.♘f3

4.d4 dxc4 will transpose to the Catalan after a subsequent ♘f3.

4.b3?! dxc4 5.bxc4 ♕d4! 6.♘c3 ♕xc4 wins a pawn for Black and gives him the better chances, although White's lead in development gives him a certain amount of compensation. A good example continued:



7.♘f3 ♗d6 8.a4 a6 9.0-0 0-0 10.♕c2 e5 11.d3 ♕g4 12.h3 ♕d7 13.♗g5 ♘c6 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♘e4 ♗e7 16.♖fc1 f5 17.♘c5 ♕d6 18.a5 ♗f6 Black remained somewhat better in Khismatullin – Bukavshin, Chita 2015.

4...dxc4!

Otherwise you might get move-ordered into a variation of the Catalan which falls outside our repertoire. Moreover, the text move is objectively strong as well.

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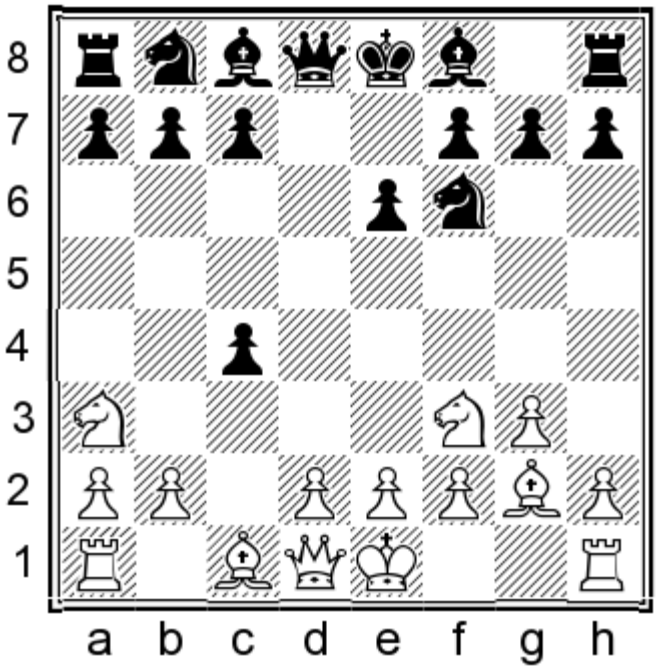
White's two main tries are **A)** 5.♘a3 and **B)** 5.♕a4†.

5.0-0 gives Black a pleasant choice: 5...c5!? transposes to variation A of the next chapter on page 318; but I have to say that an objectively better move may be 5...a6!?, which interested readers can investigate for themselves.

A) 5.♘a3



This is usually a good option when the f8-bishop has already moved to e7, but here Black can remove the knight without loss of time.

5...♗xa3 6.bxa3

6.♕a4†?! allows a nice trick: 6...b5! 7.♕xa3 (7.♕xb5†?? c6 and Black keeps an extra piece) 7...♗b7 8.b3 cxb3 9.axb3 a5∓ White does not have enough for the pawn.

After the text move, I like a set-up which was played by my good friend GM Stelios Halkias.

6...♘bd7 7.♗b2

7.♕c2 0-0 8.♕xc4 e5 9.d3 c5 10.0-0 ♖b8= was the continuation of Kjartansson – Halkias, Reykjavik 2013. As Black doesn't have his dark-squared bishop, he has sensibly placed his central pawns on dark squares. The ensuing Maroczy structure is always an ambitious way to play for Black, as we are going to see in our main line below.

7...0-0 8.♖c1

Mihail Marin recommended this creative idea in *Grandmaster Repertoire 4 – The English Opening Volume Two*. By delaying castling, White wants to create threats against the enemy kingside – not because he thinks he can deliver a quick mate, but to provoke some weaknesses which can be exploited later.

8...c5

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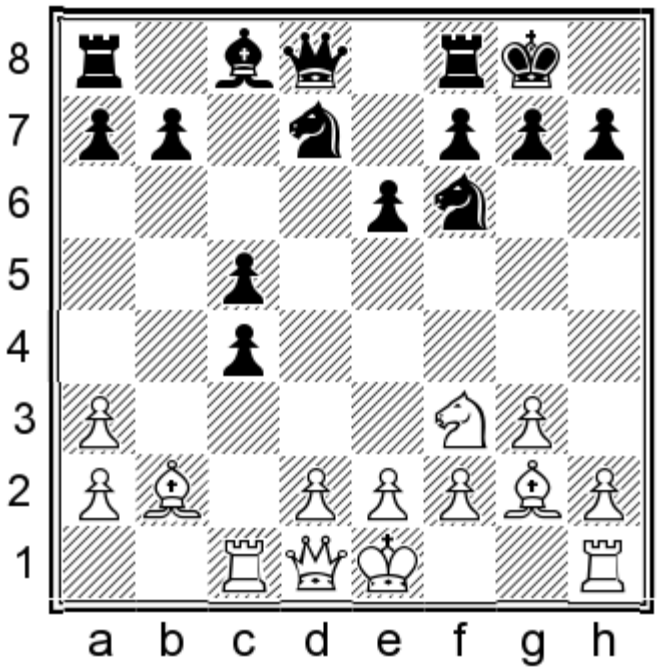
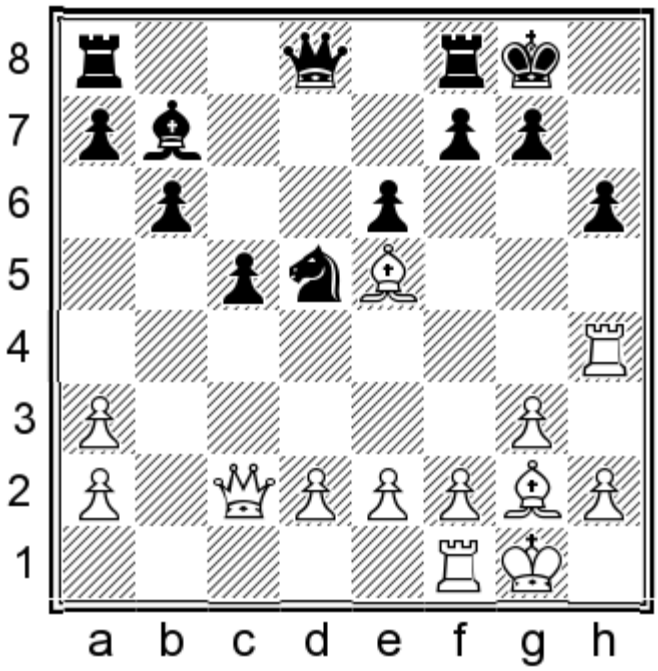


9.a4!?N

Despite my huge respect for Marin as an author, I prefer to make this idea – which is my own – as my main line, as I think it leads to more interesting positions.

9.♘e5 was Marin's main line, when play continues: 9...♘xe5 10.♗xe5 ♘d5 11.♖xc4 b6 12.♕c2 ♗b7 13.♖h4 h6 14.0-0



Marin claims a small edge for White due to Black's vulnerable kingside, but I don't think his assessment is accurate. Black can easily follow the engines' recommendation of 14...♕d7 and be solid. The engines go as far as to claim an advantage for Black, although in a practical game I can imagine White having enough play to keep things level.

Marin's second suggestion was 9.♖xc4, hoping to provoke the weakening ...b5 move, after which the rook will go to h4 as in the line above. I think that Black should restrain himself and play 9...b6 with the intention of getting a similar

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position to the one above, and if 10.♘e5 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♘d5 we have transposed to it.

9...b6!

This looks provocative but the tactics turn out fine for Black.

10.♘e5 c3!

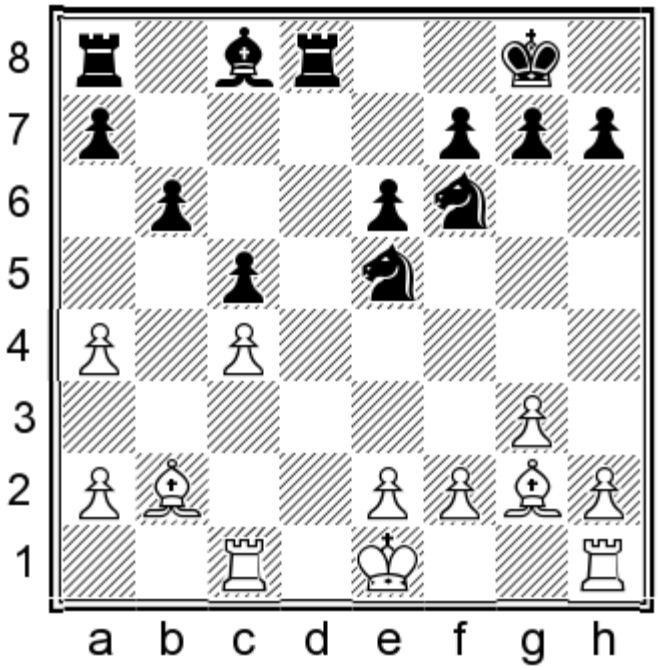
This is the key idea to justify Black's previous move.

11.dxc3

11.♗xc3 ♘d5! 12.♗b2 ♘xe5 13.♗xe5 f6 14.♗a1 e5∓ and the bishop comes to e6, with an excellent game for Black.

11...♘xe5 12.♗xa8

12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 13.c4 should be met by:



13...♘d3†! 14.exd3 ♖b8= White cannot claim an edge by pointing to his pair of bishops, as he has a fractured structure to look after.

12...♘c4 13.♕c2

13.♕b3? ♗a6! leaves the a8-bishop attacked while ...♕d2† remains a threat.

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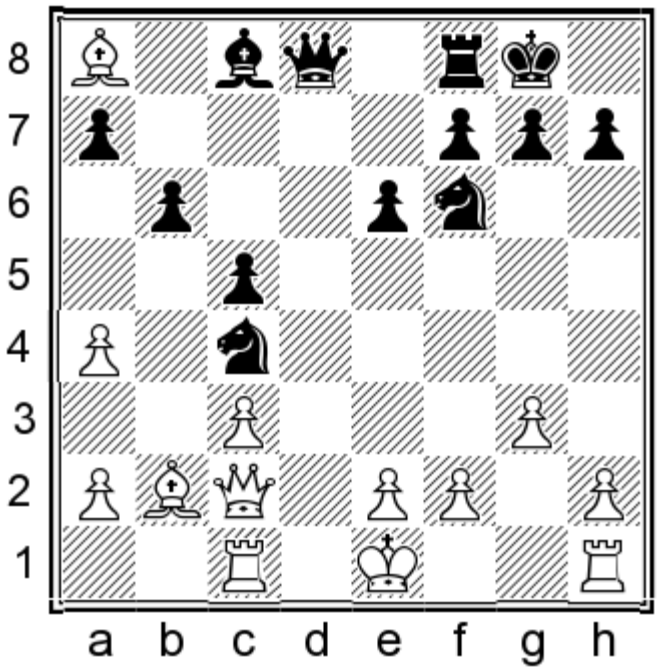


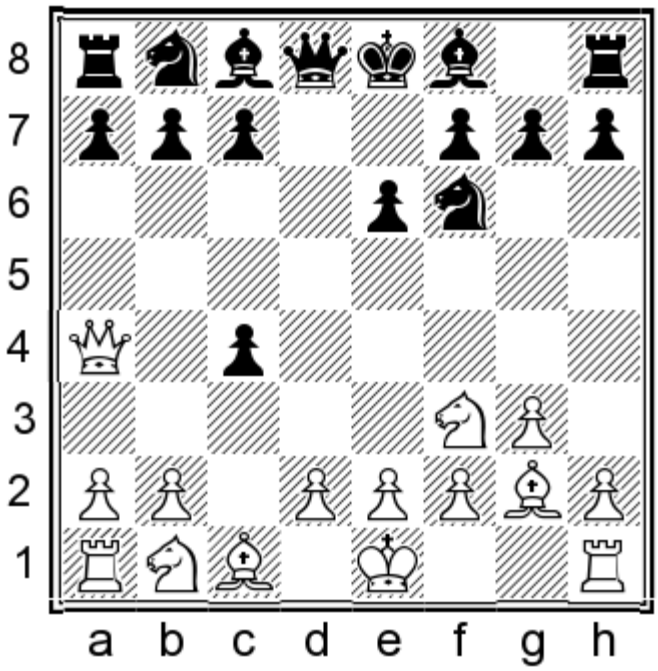
13...♗d7! 14.♗g2 e5!

After 14...♕e8 15.♕b3 ♘a5 16.♕a3 White defends the a-pawn comfortably, although Black still has a good deal of compensation.

15.0-0 e4!

Black's counterplay and initiative outweigh White's material advantage. His last move shuts out the g2-bishop and prepares ...e3 in some lines, while ...♕e8 remains an attractive possibility.

B) 5.♕a4†



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5...♗d7!

I don't like the popular 5...♘bd7 6.♕xc4 c5 due to 7.♕b3!. Modern theory recommends 7...♖b8 but White has a promising plan: 8.a4! b6 9.d3 ♗d6 10.♘a3! a6 11.♘c4 ♗c7 12.♗d2 0-0 13.0-0 White has some annoying pressure on the queenside, with ideas such as 13...♗b7 14.♕a3, threatening a timely b2-b4 or a4-a5. I am sure that deep computer analysis can neutralize this line and offer Black equal chances, but that's beside the point. Such positions, where White can push for an edge without taking any real risk, are exactly why many players are attracted to the English in the first place, so let's not give them what they want.

6.♕xc4 c5!

This line boomed in popularity around 2014, when it became clear that it leads to a sound position without many difficulties for Black. Since then, more and more top players have endorsed it.

White's two main tries are **B1)** 7.d4 and **B2)** 7.♘e5.

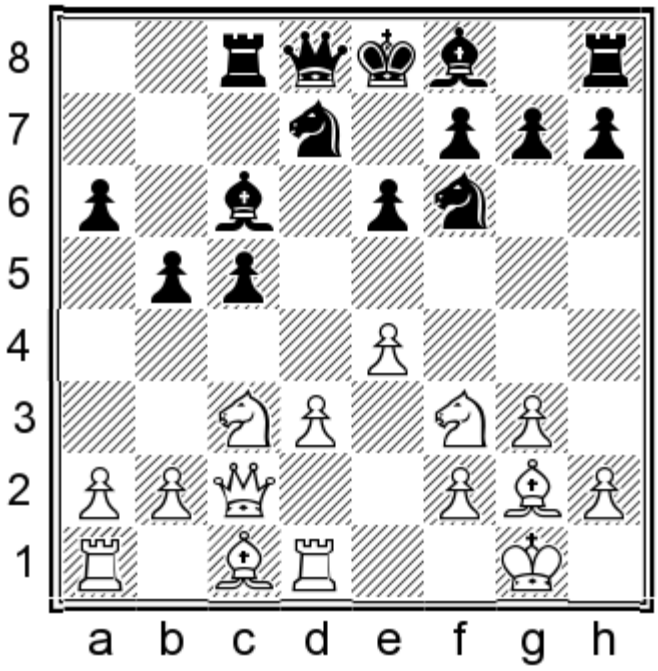
Less threatening is:

7.0-0 ♗c6

Given the chance, Black will follow up with ...♘bd7 and ...b5.

8.♘c3

8.♖d1 ♘bd7 9.♕c2 ♖c8 10.♘c3 b5! 11.d3 a6 sees Black achieve his desired set-up. 12.e4 occurred in Le Quang Liem – Nakamura, Las Vegas 2015, when Black should have continued:



12...♗b7!N 13.♕e2 ♗e7 With a level game.

8...♘bd7 9.e4

Pay attention to this position, because this is pretty much the only specific detail you must remember after 7.0-0.

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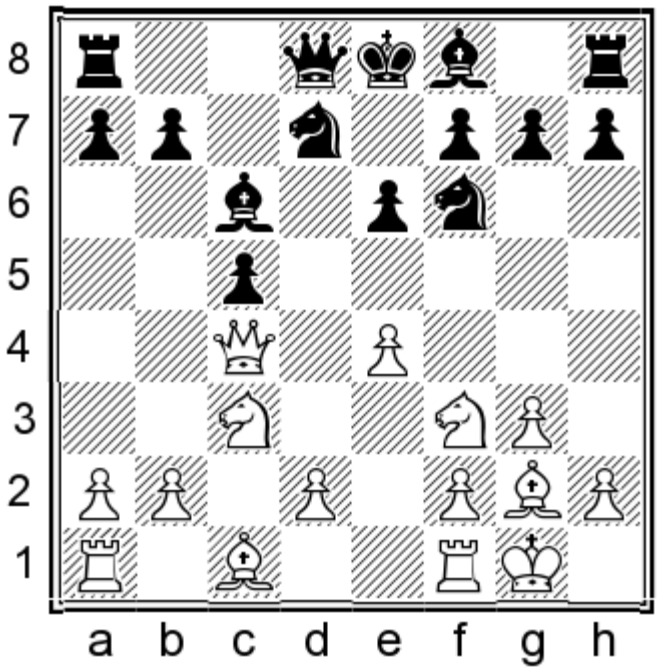
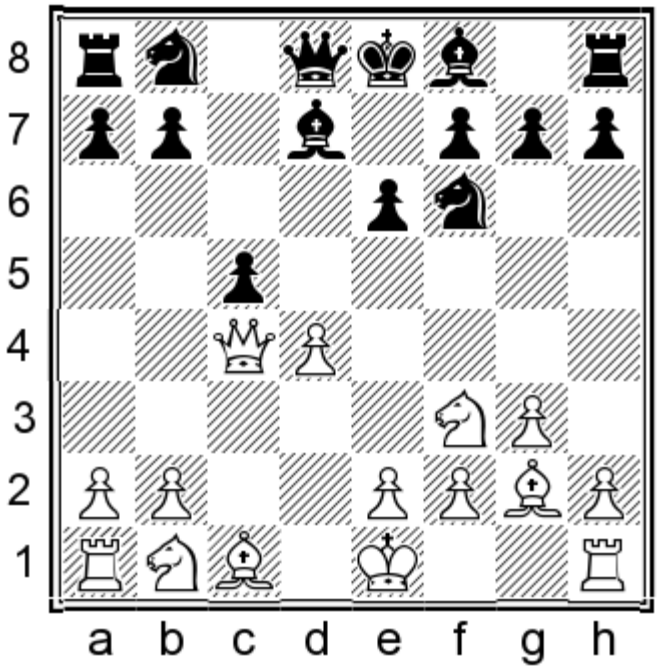


9...b5! 10.♘xb5 ♗xe4

Black was doing fine in Stellwagen – Sargissian, Porto Carras 2011.

B1) 7.d4



7...♗c6

This position can arise via a Catalan move order – although in that opening, I would prefer to meet the early ♕a4† with ...♘bd7, as detailed at the start of Chapter 5b.

8.0-0

8.dxc5 gives White no advantage: 8...♘bd7 9.♗e3 ♗d5 10.♕a4 ♗c6 11.♕c4 ♗d5 12.♕b4 a5 (12...♕c8!? was seen

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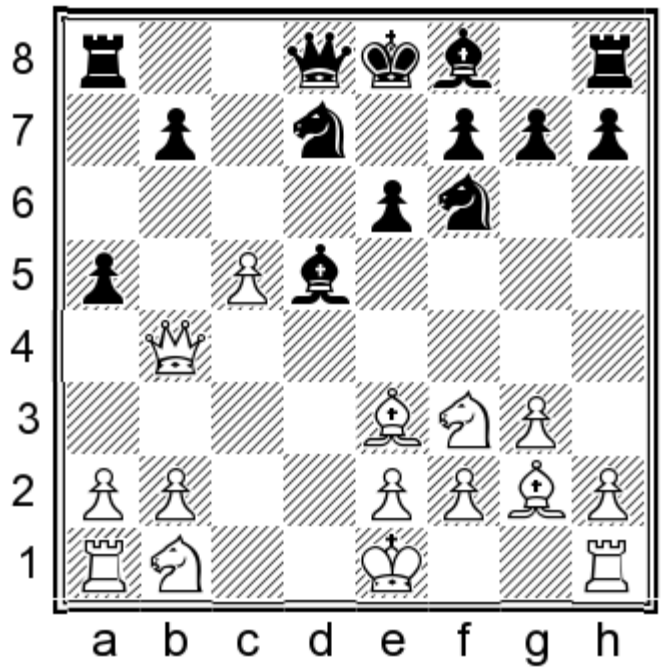
in the 7th game of the Korchnoi – Kasparov candidates match in London 1983. Kasparov drew comfortably and the next game he won brilliantly on the White side of the same variation – see the note to Black's 9th move in the main line below.)



13.♕f4 ♗xc5 14.♗xc5 ♘xc5 15.♘c3 0-0 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♕d4 ♕b6 Black was ready to centralize his rooks, and was doing fine in Sosonko – Karpov, Wijk aan Zee 1988.

8...♘bd7 9.♗g5

After 9.♘c3 ♖c8 Black is comfortable, with ideas like ...b5 or simply ...cxd4. One of the most recent high-level examples went 10.♗e3 b5! 11.♕d3 b4 12.♘b1 c4 and Black was already better in Radjabov – Anand, Stavanger 2013.

9...♘b6!

This seems like a good way to avoid suffering in the way that Korchnoi did: 9...♖c8 10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.dxc5 ♗xf3 12.♗xf3 ♗xc5 13.♕b5† ♕d7 14.♘c3 ♕xb5 15.♘xb5 ♔e7 Just when everything seemed calm and solid for Black, there followed 16.b4! and White developed serious pressure in Kasparov – Korchnoi, London (8) 1983.

10.♕d3 cxd4 11.♕xd4 ♕xd4 12.♘xd4 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 ♘e4 14.♗f4 ♘d5 15.♖c1 ♘xf4† 16.gxf4 ♖d8 17.e3

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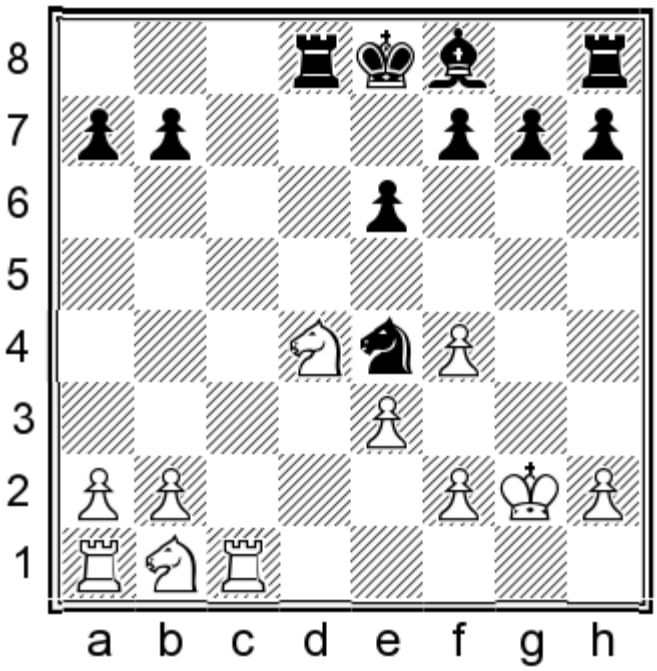


17...g6!N

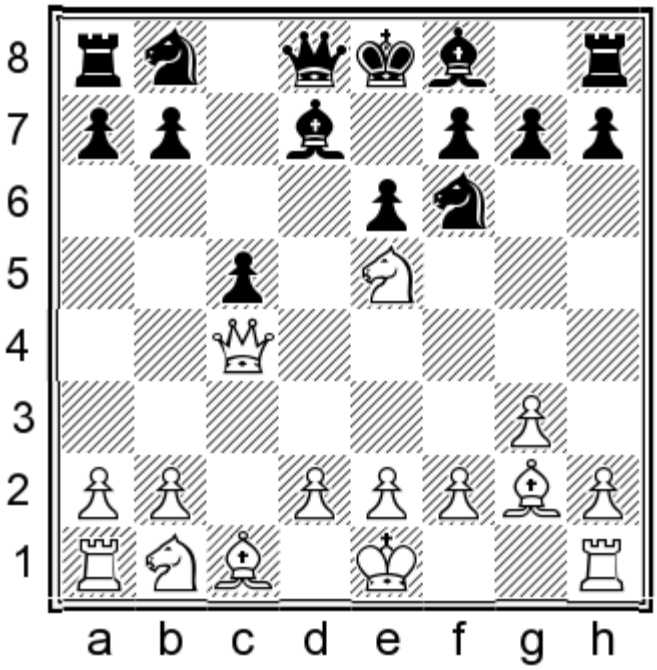
Improving on 17...♗e7, as seen in Cummings – Delchev, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

18.♔f3 ♘d6 19.♘e2 ♗g7 20.♖c2 ♔e7∓

Black can claim a small edge due to his better structure.

B2) 7.♘e5

This is the main line, and the most obvious way to challenge Black's set-up with the bishop on d7.



7...♕c8! 8.♕d3!

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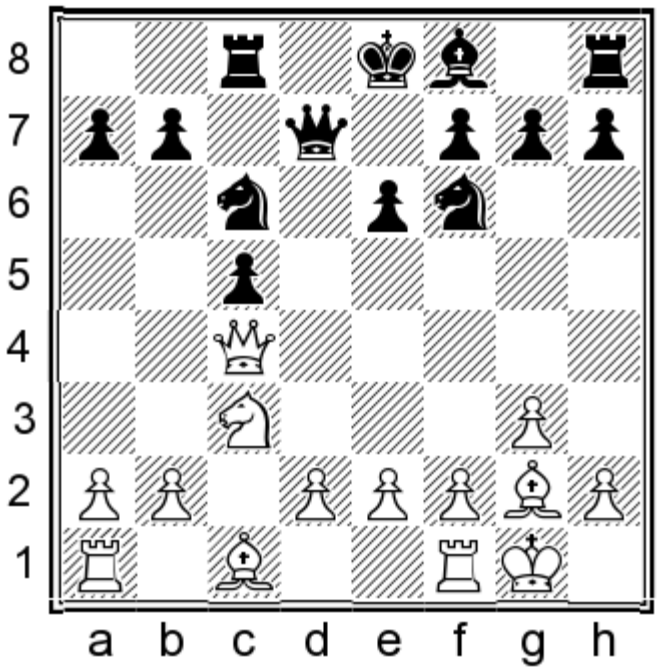
This weird-looking move was introduced by Grischuk in a blitz game. The point is to stop Black from getting a comfortable position with his queen on d7 and knights on c6 and f6.

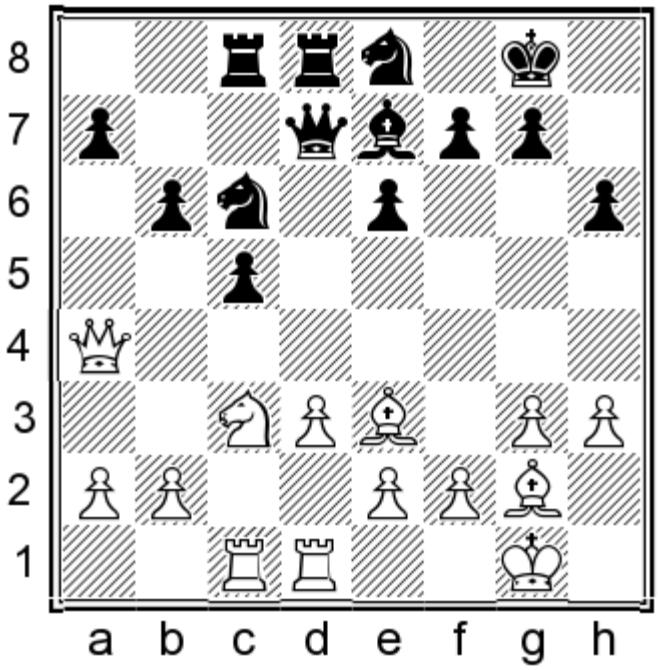
Let me show you a model example of how to handle the black position in that scenario:
8.♘xd7 ♕xd7 9.♘c3 ♘c6 10.0-0 ♖c8

White's bishop pair is indeed a long-term asset, but Black has no weaknesses, a fair share of central control and good places for all his remaining pieces.



11.♕a4 ♗e7 12.d3 0-0 13.♗e3 ♖fd8 14.♖ac1 b6 15.♖fd1 h6 16.h3 ♘e8!

This is a regrouping worth remembering. The bishop comes to f6 and the knight, if allowed, may go to d6, f5 and d4.



17.♘b5 ♗f6 18.b3 ♘d6 19.♘xd6 ♕xd6 20.♗xc6 ♕xc6 21.♕g4 ♔f8 22.♖c4 ♕d5

Black had marginally the more pleasant position in Nakamura – Eljanov, Baku 2015.

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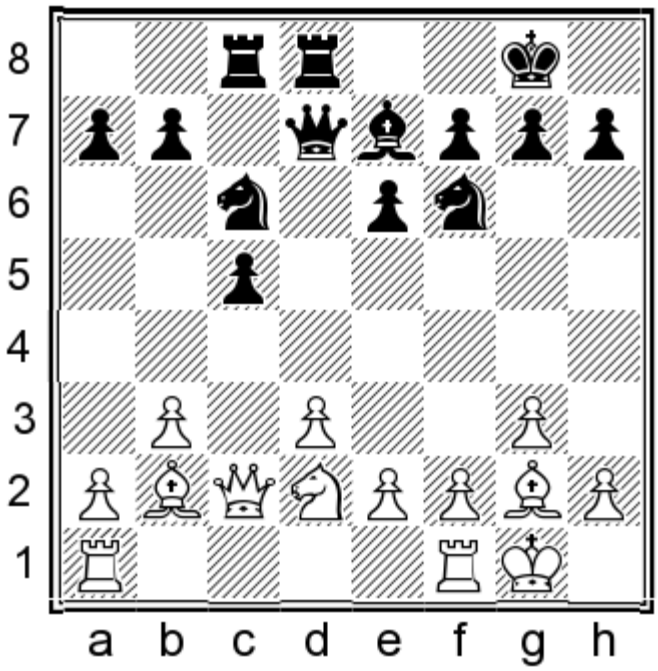
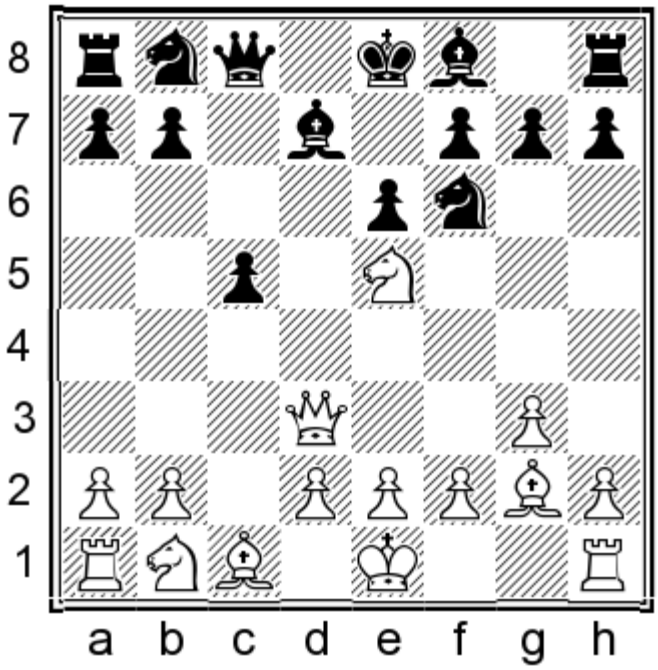
Here is one more example where White got nothing from the opening: 8.b3 ♘c6 9.♘xd7 ♕xd7 10.♗b2 ♗e7 11.d3 ♖c8 12.♘d2 0-0 13.0-0 ♖fd8 14.♕c2 In Jones – Goryachkina, Gibraltar 2016, Black should have played:



14...♘d5!N Intending 15.a3 ♘d4 16.♕d1 ♗f6 and White is under pressure.



8...♘c6 9.♘xd7 ♘xd7!

After 9...♕xd7 10.♕xd7† ♔xd7 11.♘c3 ♖c8 12.0-0 ♗e7 13.b3 ♖hd8 White was a little better in Kanep – Neiksans, Finland 2017. Without the presence of queens on the board, White is left unhindered to build his position and look for a suitable moment to break with a2-a3 and b3-b4, or e2-e3 and d3-d4. Nevertheless, Black's position remains playable and solid.

10.♕b5!

White is trying as hard as possible to weaken Black's queenside structure. Here an improvement is needed:

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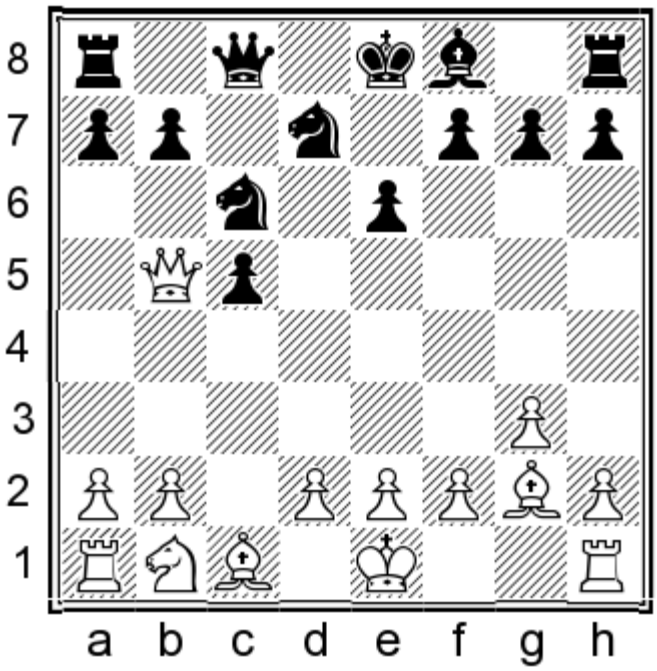
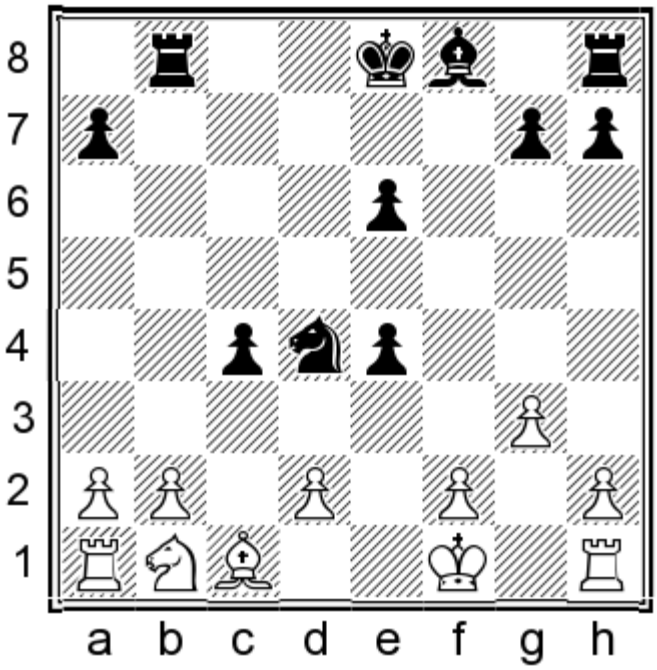


10...♘d4!N

10...♘de5 11.f4 a6 12.♕a4 ♘d7 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♘a3 was better for White in Grischuk – Wojtaszek, Doha (blitz) 2016. The doubling of the pawns on the c-file is the main idea behind White's 8th move, and my novelty is designed to sidestep it by offering a pawn sacrifice.

11.♕a4!

11.♕xb7?! is too risky: 11...♕xb7 12.♗xb7 ♖b8 13.♗e4 f5 14.♗d3 c4 15.e3 ♘e5 16.♗e4 fxe4 17.exd4 ♘f3† 18.♔f1 ♘xd4



19.♘c3 ♗e7 20.♘xe4 ♔f7∓ White may be a pawn up, but he will have great problems finishing his development.

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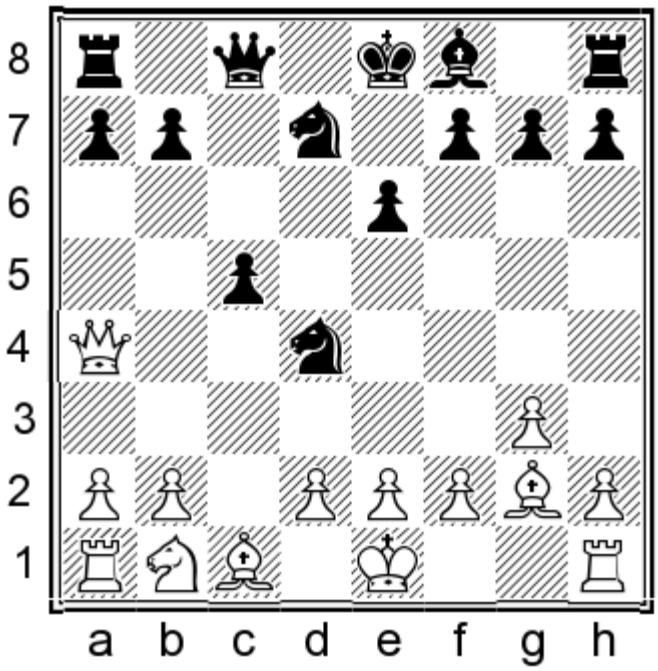

11...♗e7 12.e3 ♘f5

12...♘c6!? is not totally unreasonable, now that White has weakened his light squares with e2-e3. For instance, 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♘c3 (after 14.0-0 Black may be tempted to try 14...h5!?) 14...0-0 15.0-0 ♖d8 16.b3 ♘b6 17.♕g4 c4! 18.bxc4 ♕a6 and Black has good counterplay.

13.0-0 0-0 14.♘c3 ♖d8 15.♖d1 a6 16.b3 ♗f6 17.♗b2 b5 18.♕e4 ♖a7!?=

Black's position looks fine to me.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the English-Catalan where White defers d2-d4. I find the simplest, most direct solution to b4...dxc4!, capturing a pawn and avoiding an unfavourable transposition. In the event of 5.♘a3 Black should eliminate the knight, taking advantage of the fact that the f8-bishop has not wasted time going to e7. Marin's recommendation from *Grandmaster Repertoire 4* is interesting, but ultimately not too dangerous.

5.♕a4† is the main line, when I like 5...♗d7! 6.♕xc4 c5! for Black. Then 7.d4 leads to a harmless version of a Catalan, leaving 7.♘e5 as the theoretically critical line. White hopes to claim a small edge due to the bishop pair, and statistics have indeed favoured the first player up to now. Still, Black can count on a fully playable position after simple development. See the Nakamura – Eljanov and Jones – Goryachkina games, where White failed to cause problems and became worse.

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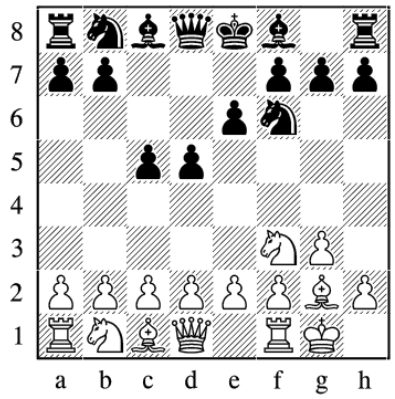
Chapter 7c



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1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 e6 4.0-0 c5!

A) 5.c4 page 318

B) 5.d4 page 319

C) 5.d3 ♘c6 6.♘bd2 ♗e7 7.e4 0-0 8.♖e1 b5 page 321

C1) 9.exd5!? page 323

C2) 9.e5 page 324

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 e6 4.0-0

4.d4 transposes to the Fianchetto System of Chapter 6c, where 4...b5! is our choice.

Black's first three moves have been easy, but now he has to commit himself in one way or another.

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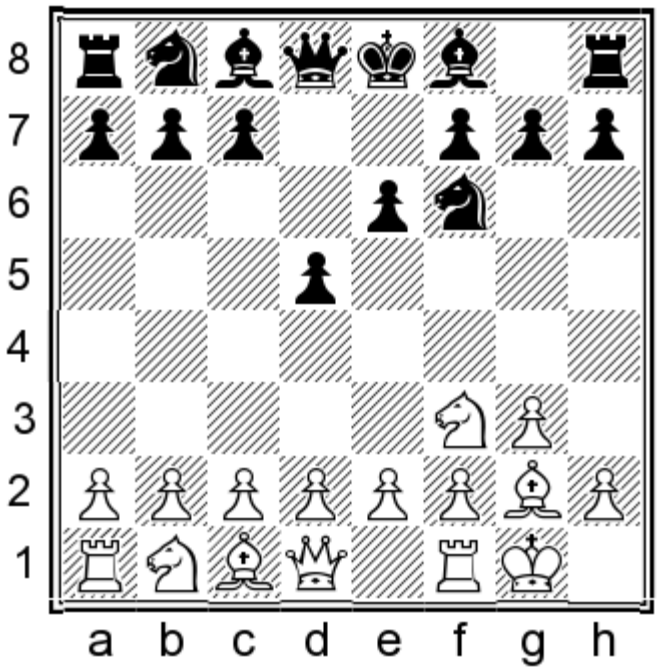

4...c5!

4...♗e7 allows 5.c4!?, leading to a variation of the English or Catalan which lies outside of our repertoire.

I also considered:

4...b5!?

Borrowing an idea from Chapter 6c, to which we may transpose if White follows up with d2-d4. However, a more challenging reply is:

5.d3!

Preparing c2-c4. Black is not doing too badly of course, and readers may enjoy exploring the unusual positions that follow. Having spent some time doing that myself though, I cannot say it is an easy task to prove that Black is equal. Here are a few short lines to get you started:

5...♗b7 6.c4

6.e4 dxe4 7.♘g5 ♕c8 seems okay for Black in all variations.

6.♘bd2 ♗e7 7.e4 0-0 is likely to transpose to the main line of the KIA, as analysed later in the chapter.

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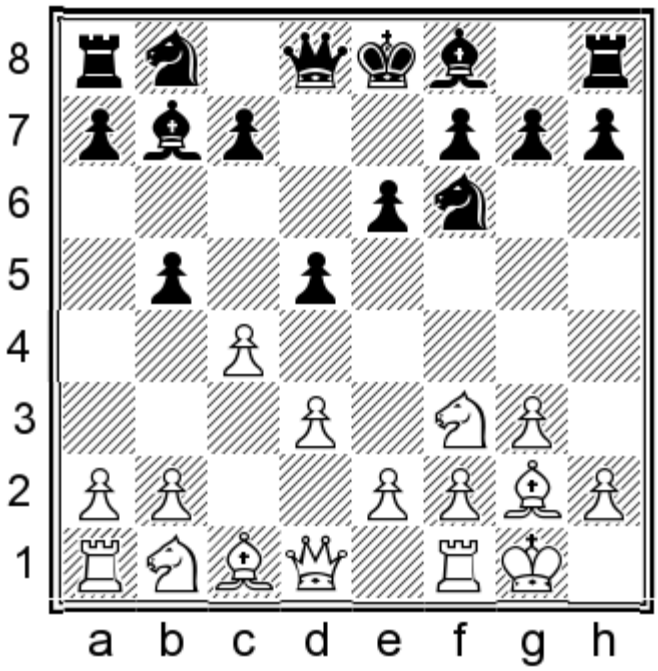


6...c6!

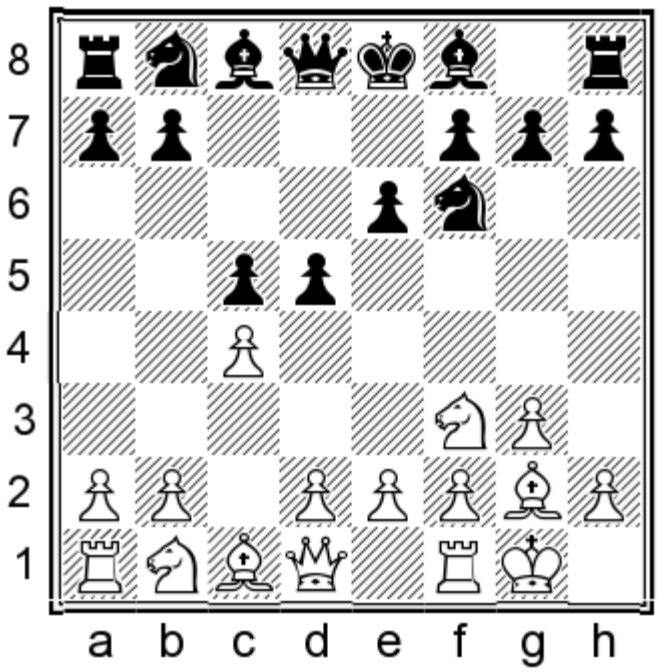
According to my own investigation, this is best.

7.♘c3 bxc4 8.dxc4 ♘bd7

Black has a pretty solid reversed Grünfeld; his plan is to finish developing and castle, before thinking about ...c5 or ...e5. Overall this looks like a reasonable alternative to the lines I am proposing in this chapter, but I find it a bit too experimental to present as my main recommendation.

After the text move we must consider **A)** 5.c4, **B)** 5.d4 and **C)** 5.d3.

A) 5.c4



5...dxc4!?

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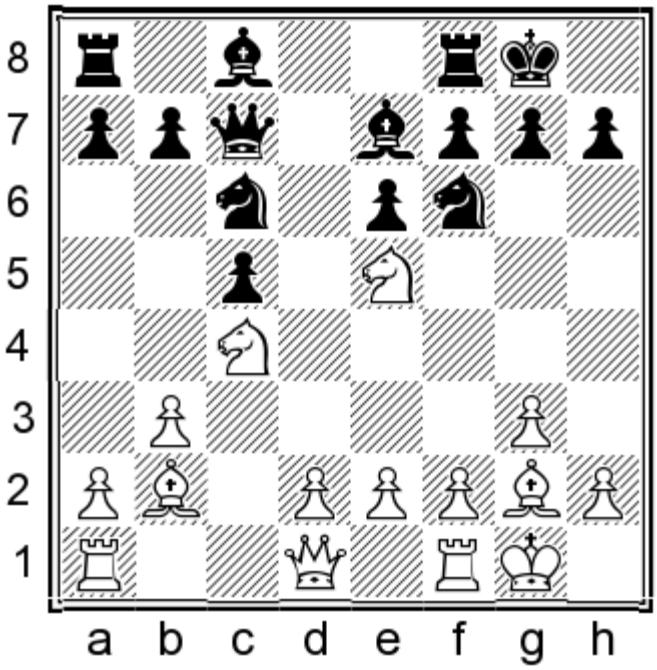
5...d4 has achieved a better percentage but I know a lot of people (especially 1.e4 players!) who would dislike having to play a reversed Benoni a couple of tempos down. Instead I propose a simpler solution, which ties in rather well with the recommendation from the previous chapter.

6.♘a3!

Now that ...♗xa3 is not an option, this is White's most challenging move.

6.♕a4† ♗d7 7.♕xc4 transposes to a line found on page 313 – see 7.0-0 in the notes to variation B of the previous chapter.

6...♘c6 7.♘xc4 ♗e7 8.b3 0-0 9.♗b2 ♕c7 10.♘fe5



10...♗d7! 11.♘xd7

If White does not remove the bishop, Black can simply play ...♖d8 and ...♗e8.

11...♕xd7

The position bears an obvious resemblance to the Nakamura – Eljanov game which was referenced in the notes to variation B2 of the previous chapter. The g2-bishop certainly has potential, but Black's position is solid and his pieces stand harmoniously.

12.♖c1 ♖fd8 13.♕c2 ♖ac8 14.♖fd1

And now for a familiar manoeuvre:

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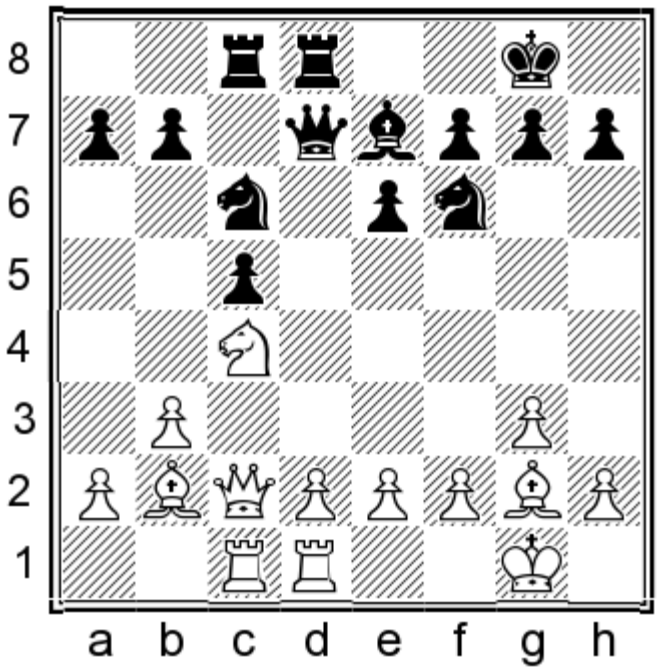
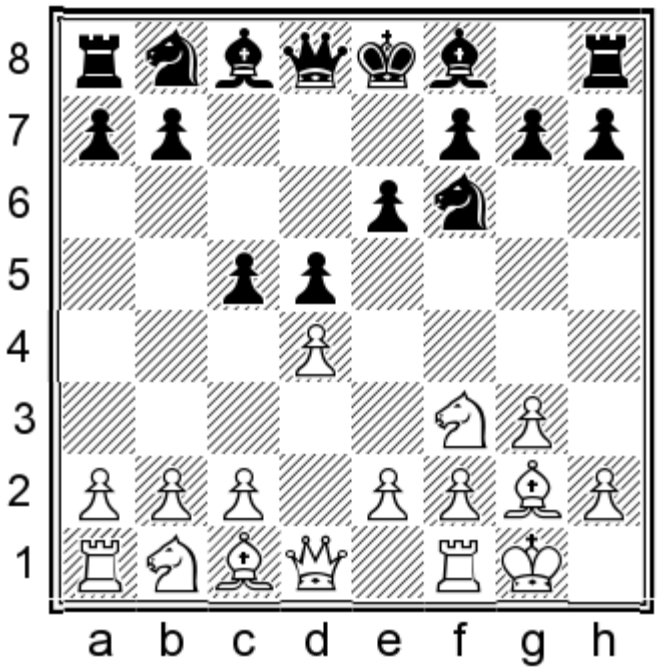


14...♘e8!

Black was fine in Anwesh – Sumets, Visakhapatnam 2011.

B) 5.d4

This time White goes for a reversed Grünfeld, but things are a little different when the knight has yet to go to c6.



5...cxd4

5...♘c6 is playable too, but 6.c4 may lead to Catalan lines which fall outside our repertoire.

5...b5!? is an interesting attempt to 'punish' White for not having played c2-c4 yet. A near-identical position has been

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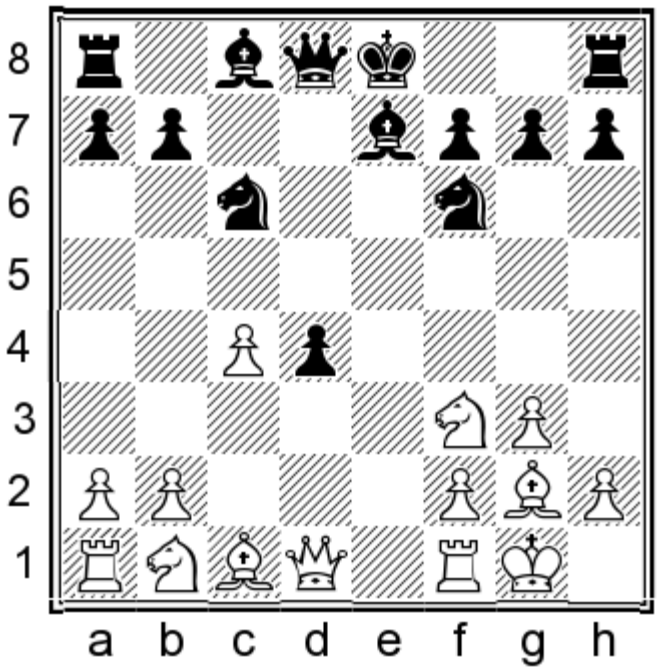
covered in Chapter 6c under the move order 1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 b5 5.0-0 ♗b7, but here Black has substituted in the move 5...c5 instead. Although the bishop move seemed more natural to me when I analysed the Fianchetto Variation, I am not sure if White has any way of taking advantage of the slight change. For instance, 6.a4 b4 7.c4 can be met by 7...♗b7 when we transpose to a line from Chapter 6c; see page 268, where this position is analysed under 6.a4 b4 7.c4 c5!.

6.♘xd4 e5!

6...♗e7 is fairly solid, but I believe 7.c4 0-0 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♕b3! to be promising for White. The text move is a more ambitious choice for Black, and probably just a better move overall.

7.♘b3

7.♘f3 ♘c6 8.c4 practically forces 8...d4, but this is not something we should fear. A logical continuation is: 9.e3 ♗e7 10.exd4 exd4



What you need to remember here is that Black intends ...♗e6 and ...♖c8; and if he carries out his plan, nothing really bad can happen! For instance: 11.♗f4 (11.a3 a5!=) 11...♗e6!? 12.♘e5 ♖c8!=

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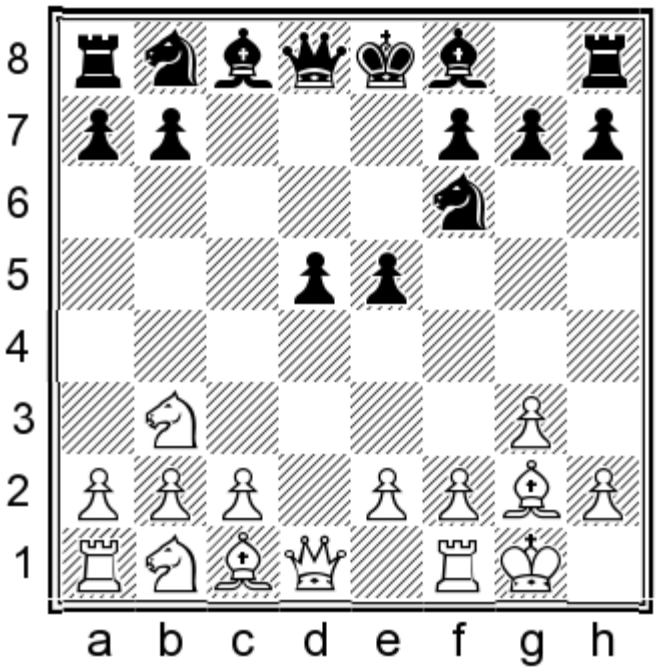


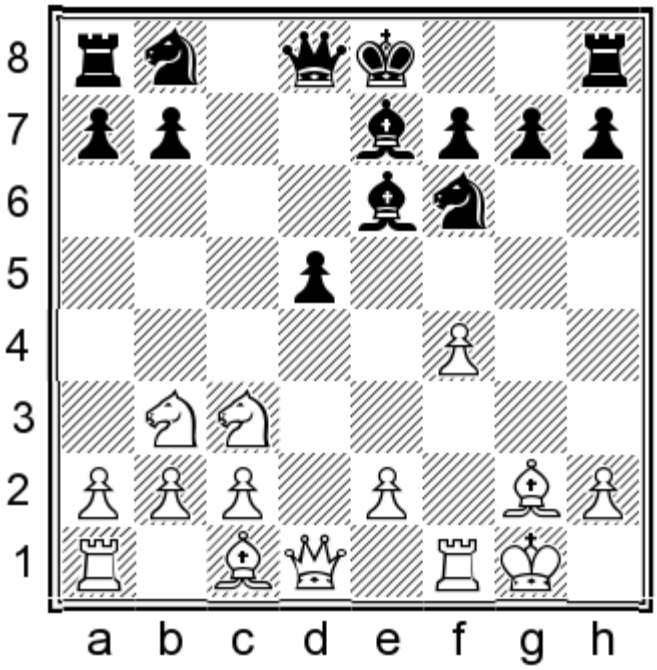
7...♗e6!

Black prepares to meet ♗g5 with ...♘bd7, showing another advantage of delaying ...♘c6. Axel Smith recommends exactly this plan for White against the Grünfeld in *e3 Poison*, and my research indicates that it is perfectly playable a tempo down as well.

8.♗g5

8.c4 ♘c6! 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♘1d2 ♗e7 11.♘e4 b6 12.♘c3 ♘cb4 13.♗d2 ♖c8 was pretty comfortable for Black in Polugaevsky – Korchnoi, Evian (4) 1977.

8.♘c3 ♗e7 9.f4 is a well-known device in the similar Grünfeld positions and one of the few possible ways (along with c2-c4) to shake Black's central superiority. A good way to meet it is: 9...exf4 10.gxf4



10...g6! 11.♘d4 ♘c6 12.♘xe6 fxe6 13.e3 0-0 14.♘e2 ♗d6 15.c3 ♕e7 Black carefully strengthens his position. 16.♗d2

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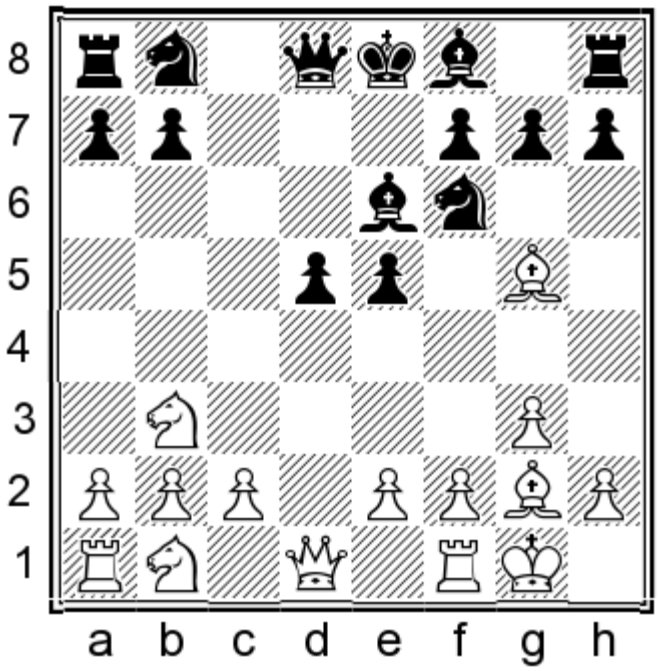
♖ad8 17.♕c2 e5! Having mobilized all his pieces and carried out a liberating pawn break, Black stood better in Gledura – Moiseenko, Bastia 2016.



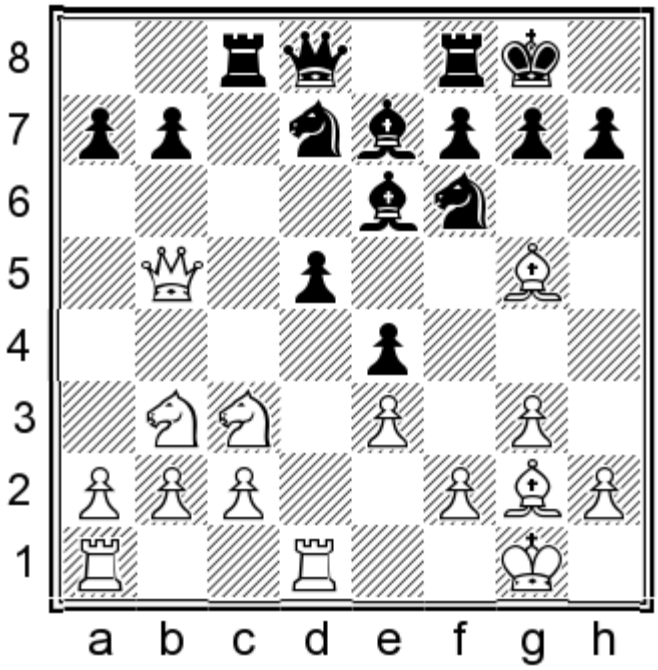
8...♘bd7 9.♘c3 ♗e7 10.♕d3?!

Most probably this is not best, but Dominguez, a Grünfeld expert himself from the Black side, plays similarly to a line known from the Smyslov System against the Russian Variation (opening theory fanatics hopefully know the line to which I am referring). In this position though, Black has his knight on d7, which makes a big difference.

10.f4 looks better but Black is still fine after 10...exf4.

10...0-0 11.e3 ♖c8 12.♖fd1 e4 13.♕b5

We have been following Dominguez Perez – Navara, Huaian 2016. Here the Czech super-GM missed a good chance to put White under pressure:



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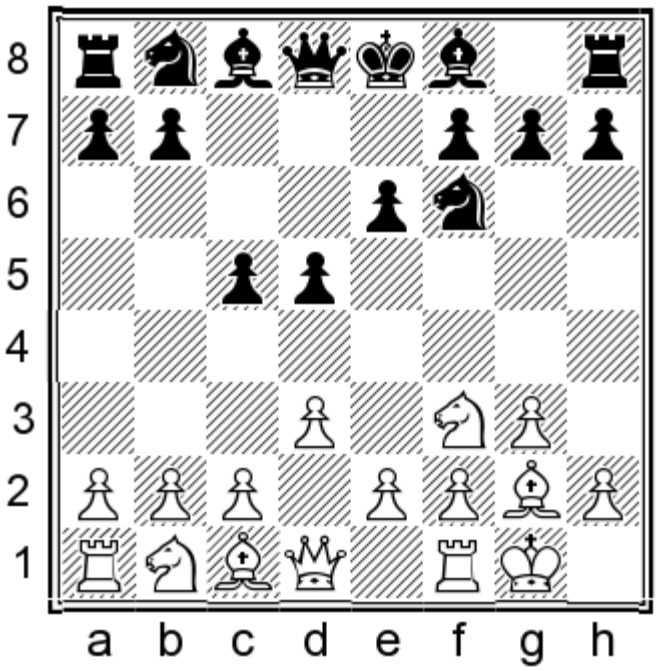
13...♘b6!N∓

Black is clearly in the driver's seat, with ...a6 and possibly ...♘c4 coming soon.

C) 5.d3



This move generally leads to a King's Indian Attack with e2-e4, although White may yet revert to some kind of Reti or English set-up with c2-c4.

5...♘c6

This seems like a good moment to develop the knight, as d3-d4 would lead to White essentially playing the Black side of a Grünfeld, having lost a tempo with the d-pawn. Of course, if you simply hate playing against the pure Grünfeld and don't wish to allow it at all, then you can start with 5...♗e7!? instead.

6.♘bd2

This is the usual way to prepare e2-e4, but it comes at a price. For starters, it doesn't allow White the dangerous option of playing e2-e4 and ♕e2, which can be followed up by e4-e5, then c2-c4 and ♘c3. This plan has been known for a long time but it has recently gained in popularity, with players like Svidler and Anand using it.

6.c4 is quite rare and it can be met by 6...♗e7 and ...0-0. I would advise against blocking the centre with ...d4 in the immediate future, at least until White makes a concession such as ♘c3, or b2-b3 and ♗b2, which he would not do in a normal reversed Benoni.

6.e4!?

This move is rare but quite interesting.

6...dxe4

I suggest taking the pawn, otherwise White will have the additional option of the ♕e2 variation I talked about above.

7.dxe4 ♕xd1 8.♖xd1 ♘xe4 9.♘a3!

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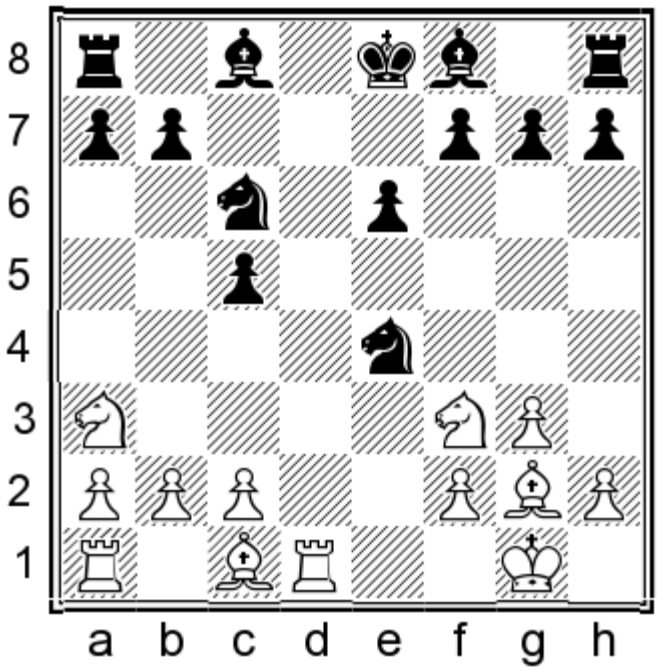
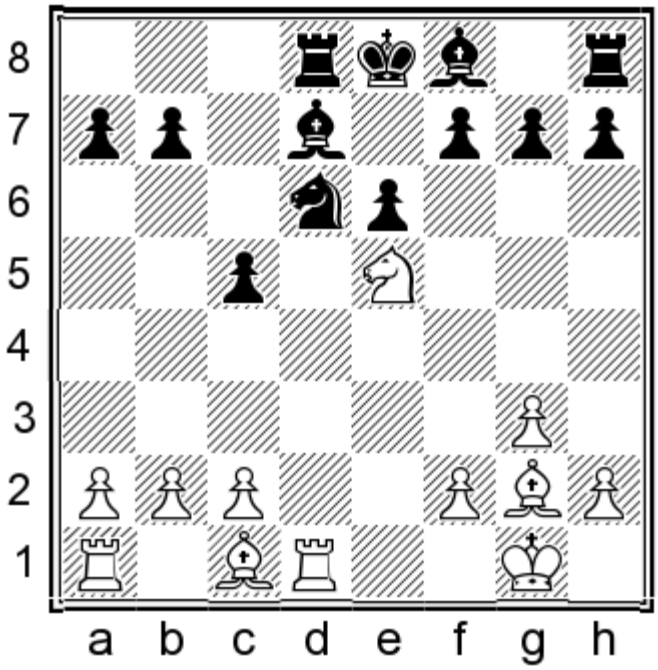


White has reasonable compensation for the pawn. I was actually quite annoyed by this line and so I spent a lot of time analysing it. I think the following set-up is the safest and simplest.

9...♗d7 10.♘c4

A slower move such as 10.♗e3 gives time for 10...0-0-0 11.♘c4 ♗e8! when I like Black's chances.

10...♖d8! 11.♘fe5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♘d6!



13.♘xd7

Otherwise Black will play ...♗c8.

13...♖xd7

White has just enough play for the pawn to claim equal chances, but nothing more.

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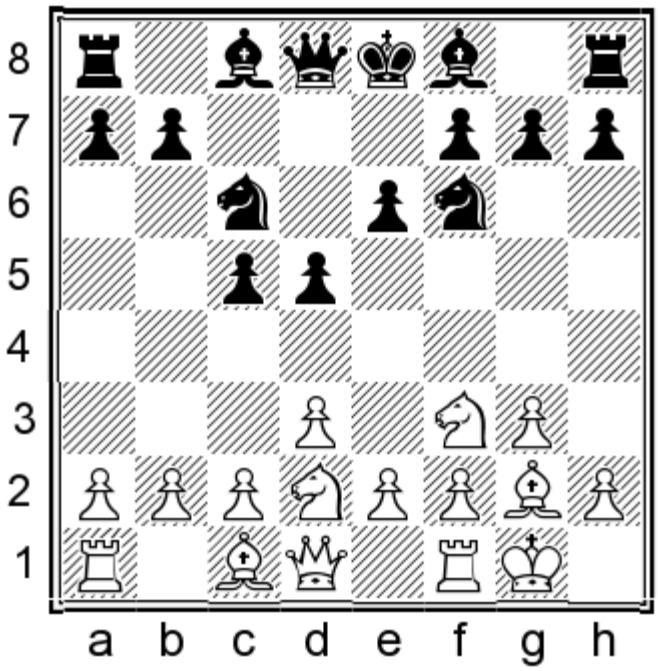

6...♗e7 7.e4 0-0 8.♖e1

This is the full-blooded King's Indian Attack, a line that I also analysed in *Playing the French*. After the publication of the book, quite a few developments saw the light of day and I'll provide an overview of them here.

8...b5

8...♕c7 was my recommendation in the aforementioned book. The queen move is still a decent option of course, but I decided to switch to the text move after being impressed by some recent games.

We will analyse **C1)** 9.exd5!? followed by the more traditional and popular **C2)** 9.e5.

C1) 9.exd5!?

Exchanging in the centre is a reasonable idea when Black has already played ...b5 – and only then!

9...♘xd5!

9...exd5 10.d4! is White's idea. If the pawn was back on b7, Black could meet his opponent's last move with ...b6. Without this move available, Black will have to weaken himself somehow.

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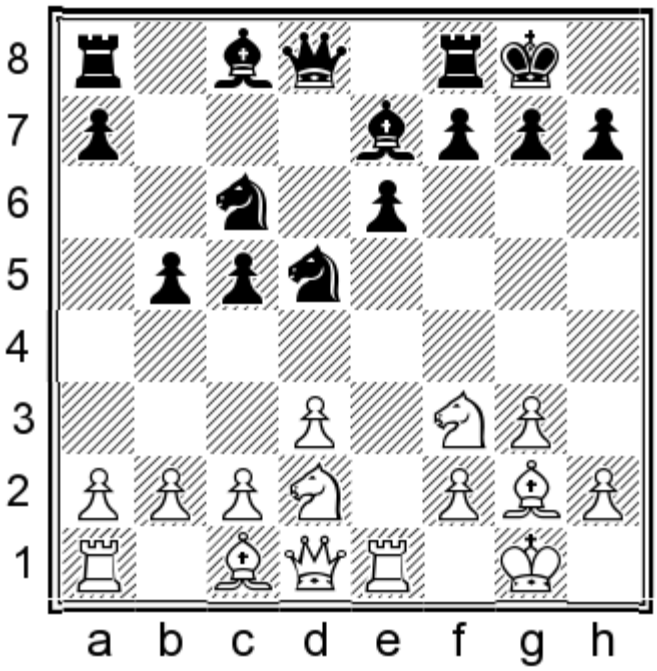

The text move is how Karjakin surprised Svidler in their first game of the dramatic final of the 2015 Baku World Cup. What we have here is a King's Indian Defence where Black (here White) has played ...exd4, but with White having a full extra tempo over the Black side. This is considered a sub-optimal line for Black (here White) but there is something else that works in our favour. In the reversed colours position, the pawn usually stands on e4, where it provides a target for the opponent's counterplay. With the pawn on the more secure e6-square, White loses some of those active possibilities, while Black can strengthen his position and decide later whether to play ...e5 when the circumstances are more favourable.

10.♘e4

After the game, Svidler explained that he initially thought that he should continue 10.a4 b4 11.♘c4, but then he found himself wondering what is White's plan. Black, on the other hand, can calmly build his position with ...♗b7, ...♕c7, ...♖ac8 and so on.

10.c4?! is an even worse idea: after 10...bxc4 11.dxc4 ♘db4! Black is slightly for choice.

10...♗b7!

Black is already comfortable. Now if a2-a4 comes, he will be able to choose between ...b4 as in the note above, or ...a6.

11.c3

Svidler rejected 11.♗g5 f6 12.♗d2 e5 as being better for Black. Indeed, more and more this resembles a good King's Indian for the White side (but here Black – to describe the situation in a reversed-colours opening can be annoyingly confusing!).

After the text move though, in typical KID style, White is ready for a timely d3-d4 break.

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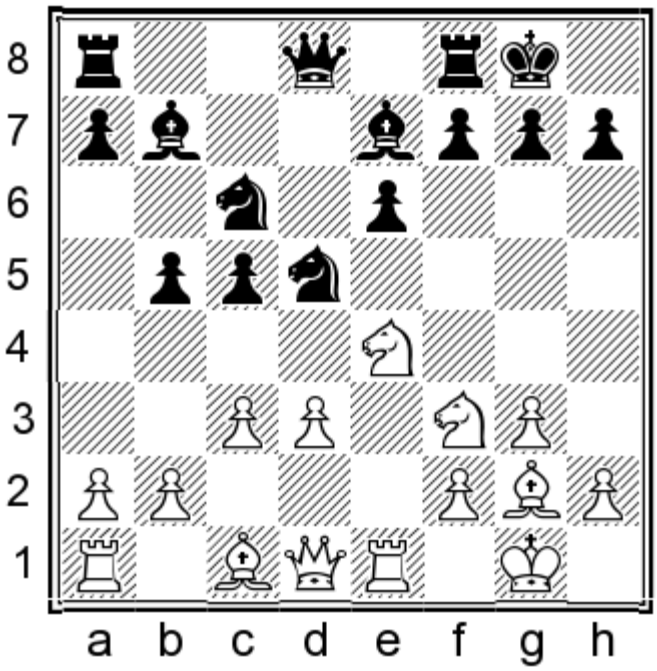


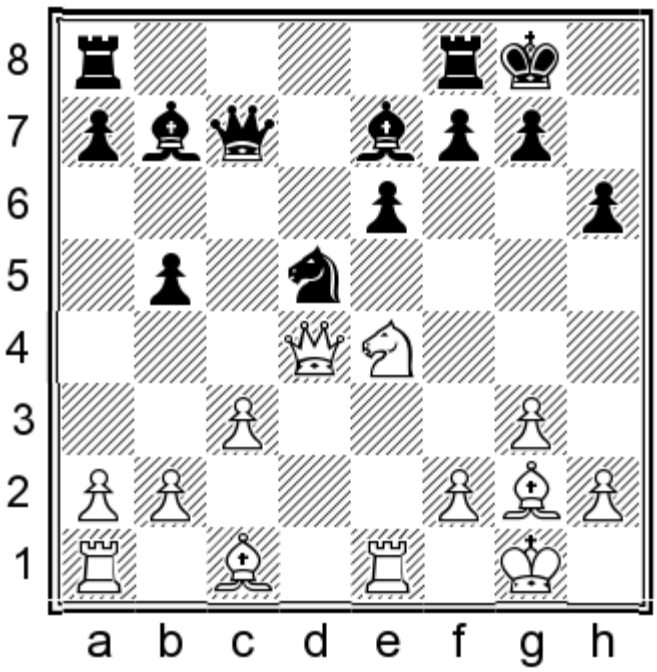
11...h6!N

Black preferred 11...a6 in Svidler – Karjakin, Baku (7.1) 2015, after which 12.♗g5!N 12...f6 13.♗d2 e5 14.♘h4⇄ would have given White enough play to hold the balance. With that in mind, the purpose of the text move becomes obvious.

12.d4

According to Svidler, this was the only idea he could see for White here.

12...cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♘xd4 14.♕xd4 ♕c7∓



Normally a position with this structure would be about equal, but here things are a bit unpleasant for White because it’s hard to find a decent square for his dark-squared bishop.

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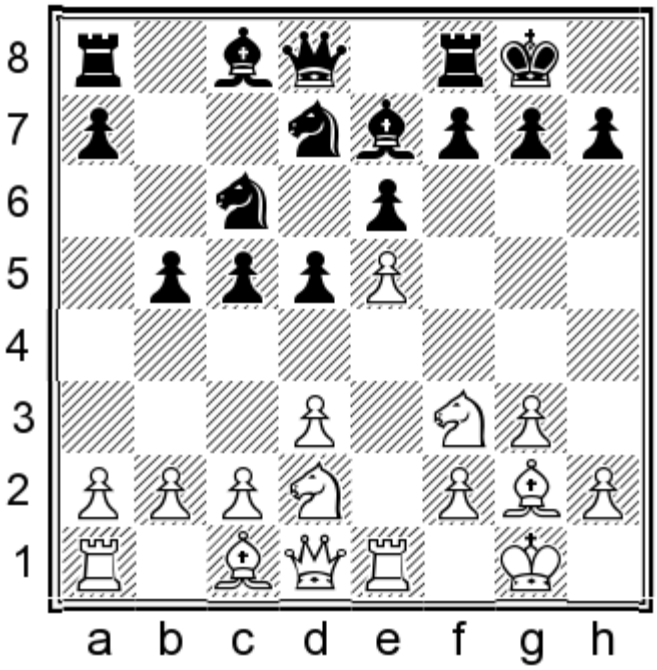
C2) 9.e5 ♘d7

This is the main line, leading to a full-blooded battle. In *Playing the French* I made a point of aiming for another version with the queens on c7 and e2 respectively, but now I have a different idea in mind for the black queen, as detailed below.



10.♘f1 ♗b7 11.h4 ♕c7 12.♗f4 ♖fc8 13.♘1h2 ♕d8!

Bukavshin's plan offers Black excellent chances in the ensuing battle. The queen drops back to aid the defence.

14.h5

Advancing the h-pawn is a typical plan.

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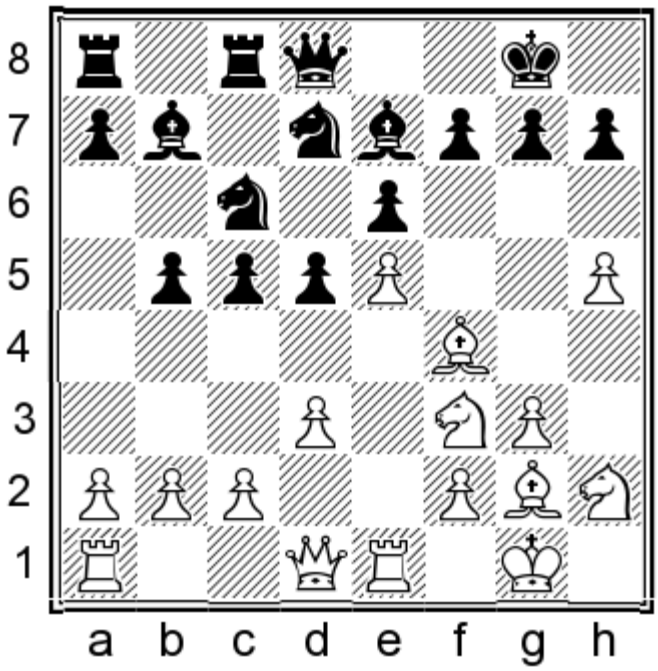

14...h6!

It is important to prevent White from creating dark-square weaknesses with h5-h6. It's true that the text move gives White a fresh target on the kingside, opening up possibilities of g4-g5 or even a straightforward piece sacrifice on h6. However, this is exactly why Black brought his queen back to d8! For the time being she guards against g4-g5, and either the queen or the bishop may go to f8 to bolster h6.

15.c3

An instructive variation runs:

15.♕d2 b4!

Black continues his plan of queenside expansion.

15...♗f8?! would be only invite 16.g4! with the strong threat of g4-g5.

16.g4

16.♘g4 is met by 16...♗f8! and possibly ...♘e7 next.

16...a5

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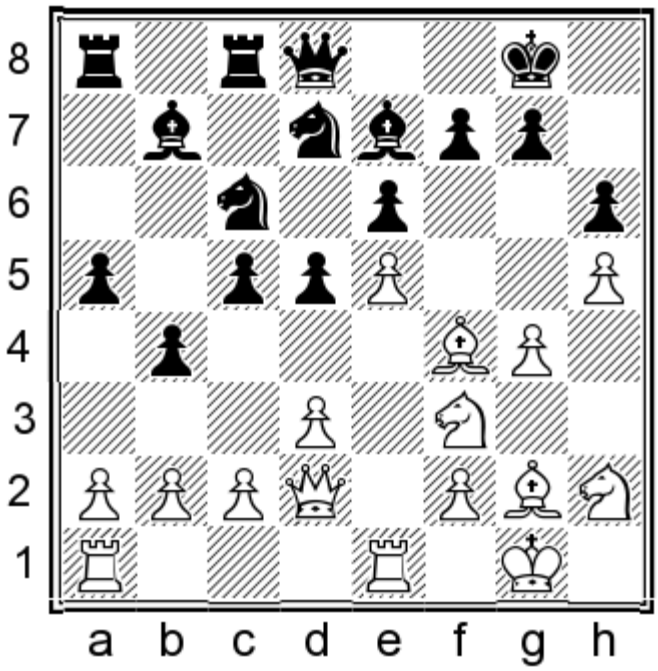


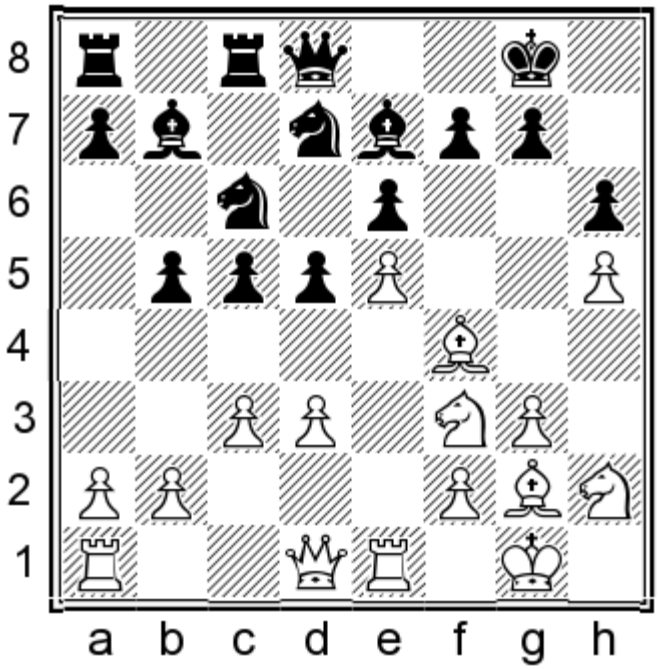
17.g5 hxg5 18.♘xg5 a4 19.a3

A typical move, otherwise Black plays ...a3 with total domination on the queenside.

19...♘dxe5!∓

This line shows the usefulness of the queen at d8 in all its glory.

The main line demonstrates the modern handling of the KIA, with White paying attention to the whole board rather than just the kingside. Now it is not so easy for Black to break through on the queenside, but he can carry out a timely ...d4 to obtain counterplay in the centre.



15...a5 16.♕d2 d4! 17.♘g4

Should the pawn or the knight go to g4? That is the eternal question for White.

Let’s see the alternative: 17.g4 dxc3 18.bxc3 b4 19.c4

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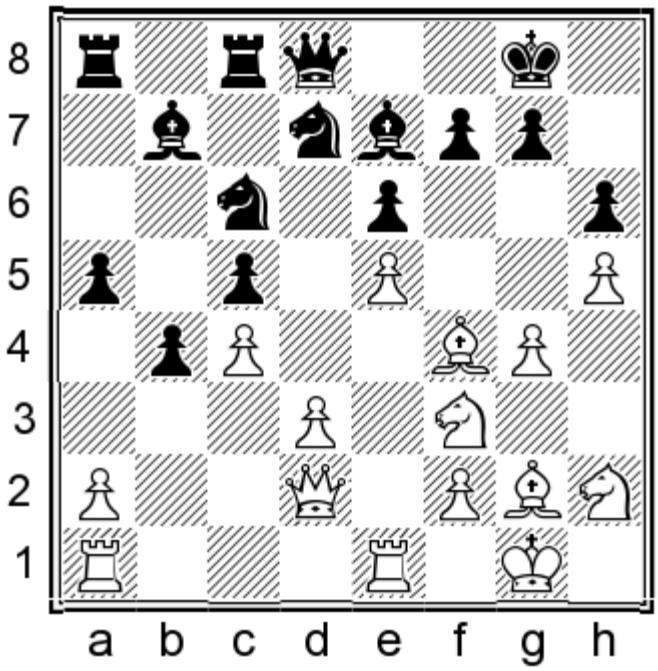
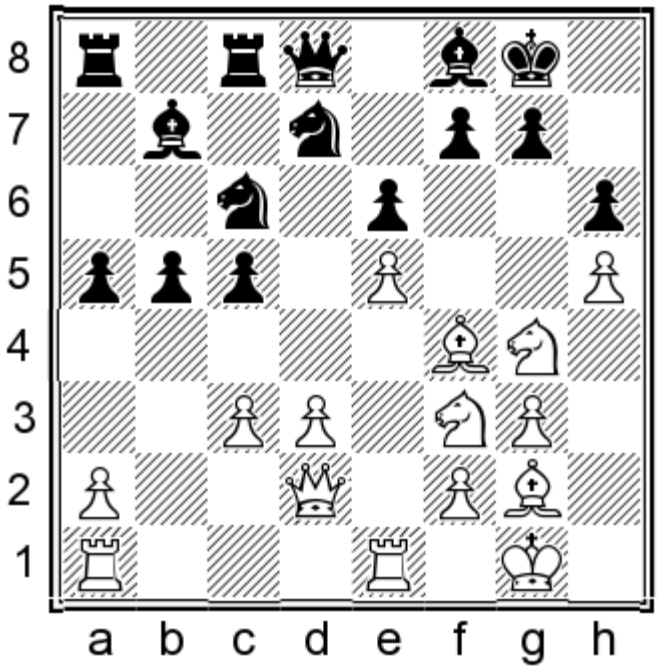


19...♖a7! Essential prophylaxis, otherwise the b7-bishop will be hanging in all variations. Now 20.g5 can be met by 20...hxg5 21.♘xg5 ♘dxe5!∓.

17...dxc3 18.bxc3 ♗f8



19.♘fh2 ♖ab8 20.♗e4 b4

The engines suggest 20...♔h8N among their top choices.

21.cxb4 axb4

Black misses his chance. 21...c4!N↑ would have been extremely strong; for example, 22.♗xh6 ♘cxe5 23.♗g5 ♗xb4! and White is in trouble.

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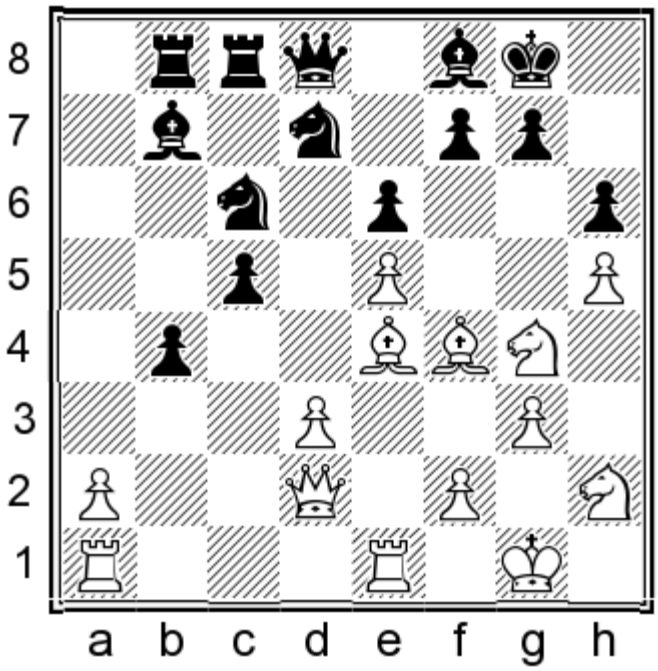

22.♗xh6! gxh6 23.♘xh6† ♗xh6 24.♕xh6

Now White has enough counterplay to draw.

24...♘cxe5 25.♗h7† ♔h8 26.♗g6† ♔g8 27.♖xe5 ♘xe5 28.♗h7† ♔h8 29.♗e4† ♔g8 30.♗h7†

½–½ Andreikin – Bukavshin, Sochi 2015.

Conclusion

The Reti is a flexible opening by nature. My aim in this chapter was to keep things simple by offering solid lines while avoiding heavy theory. By playing ...♘f6, ...d5, ...e6 and ...c5, we can manage just that. Against 5.c4 I recommend the simple 5...dxc4, when the best White can do is to trade a knight for our light-squared bishop. Black keeps a fully playable position, much like in variation B2 of the previous chapter. Next we looked at 5.d4, when we boldly trade pawns and seize space in the centre with ...e6-e5, keeping in mind that ...♘bd7 should often be preferred over ...♘c6.

Finally we studied the King's Indian Attack, where White has two main plans against our early ...b5. If he exchanges on d5, then my suggested improvement over Svidler – Karjakin will give you an excellent position. Against the barbarian kingside attack with e4-e5, we should have in mind the Bukavshin plan of ...♗b7 and ...♖fc8 followed by dropping the queen back to d8. Black always meets h4-h5 with ...h6, and has plenty of ideas on the queenside to keep White distracted from his kingside ambitions.

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