John Shaw

# Playing 1.e4

## Sicilian Main Lines



A GRANDMASTER Guide

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# Keys to symbols used

Key to symbols used

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

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# Preface

Preface

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

Our idea in creating this 1.e4 repertoire was to choose serious lines for White, but ideally not to the same level of theoretical depth as a Grandmaster Repertoire book. But the main lines of the Sicilian challenge that approach – we had to make a choice between a repertoire that is promising but complicated, or easy-to-learn but unthreatening to Black. We chose the former.

I recommend the Open Sicilian, as I feel the anti-Sicilians are not aggressive enough to form an ambitious repertoire. And some of the major Open Sicilian lines, particularly the Sveshnikov and Najdorf, must be met by heavy-duty lines if White is to threaten them. So a significant effort will be required from the reader in some places, but that is the nature of being an ambitious 1.e4 player. Given the amount of original analysis and new ideas in this book, I am confident that the reader's efforts will be well rewarded over the board.

Arguably the four biggest defences met in this volume are the Najdorf, Sveshnikov, Dragon and Taimanov. We target the Najdorf with the English Attack, when Black must thread his way through a narrow path to avoid disaster, and even then we have many dangerous innovations. Against the Sveshnikov our positional main line with 9.Nd5 gives nagging pressure. We meet the Dragon with the modern main line 9.0-0-0, while against the Taimanov we are also on-trend, with dangerous 7.Qf3 ideas.

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

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

John Shaw
Glasgow, May 2018

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# Introduction to the Repertoire

**Introduction to the Repertoire**

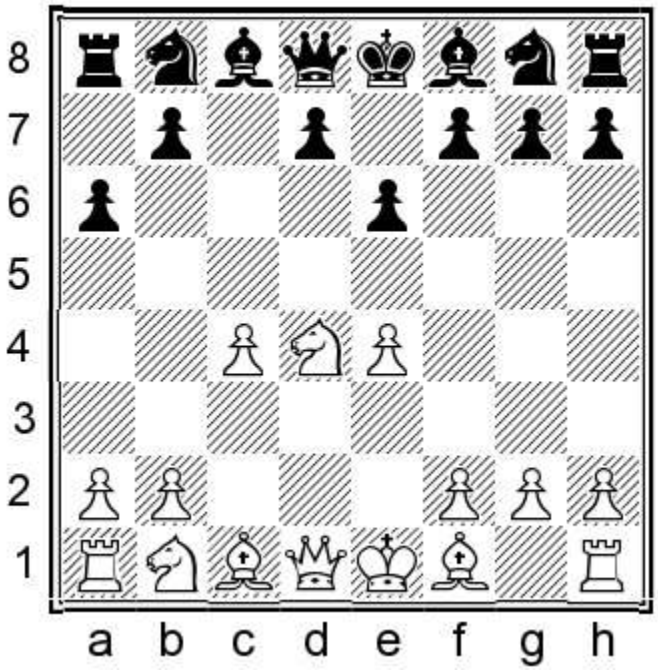
After 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 we shall deal with Black's three main second moves roughly in the following order: 2...e6, 2...Nc6 then 2...d6. Admittedly some defences – such as the Four Knights, Taimanov or Classical – could use two different second moves, but that should not trouble us unduly.

**Chapter 1 Four Knights**

After 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 we select the direct and effective 6.Nxc6.

**Chapter 2 Kan**

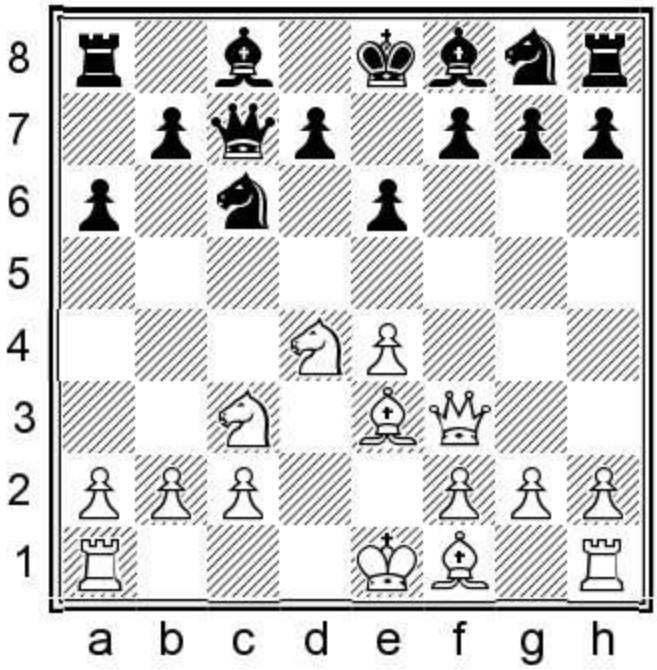
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 reaches the flexible Kan, when we go for the space-gaining 5.c4. This will be a common theme throughout the repertoire: when we can play c2-c4, we usually do.




**Chapter 3 Taimanov**

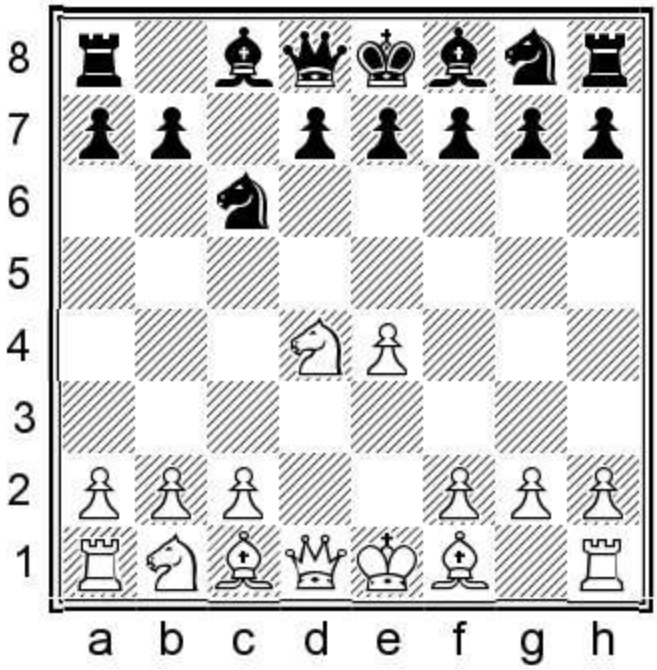
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Qc7 is the main line of the Taimanov, when our line is the active and trendy 6.Be3 a6 7.Qf3.

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**Chapters 4-6 Lowenthal, Kalashnikov and Sveshnikov**

These three chapters branch out from the position after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4.

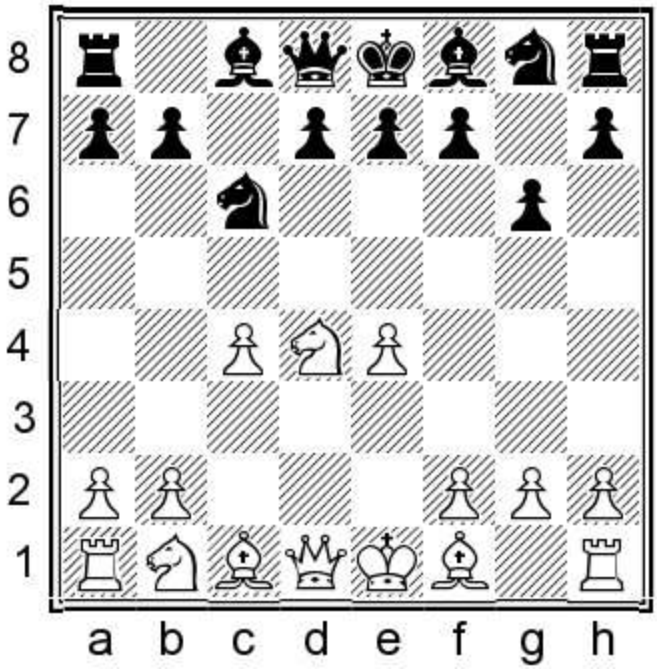


4...e5 5.Nb5 a6 is the Lowenthal, which of course we meet with 6.Nd6† Bxd6 7.Qxd6.
4...e5 5.Nb5 d6 is the Kalashnikov, which allows our standard advance 6.c4.
4...Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 is the Sveshnikov, one of the toughest tests for a 1.e4 player. I recommend the positional main line 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5.

**Chapter 7 Accelerated Dragon**

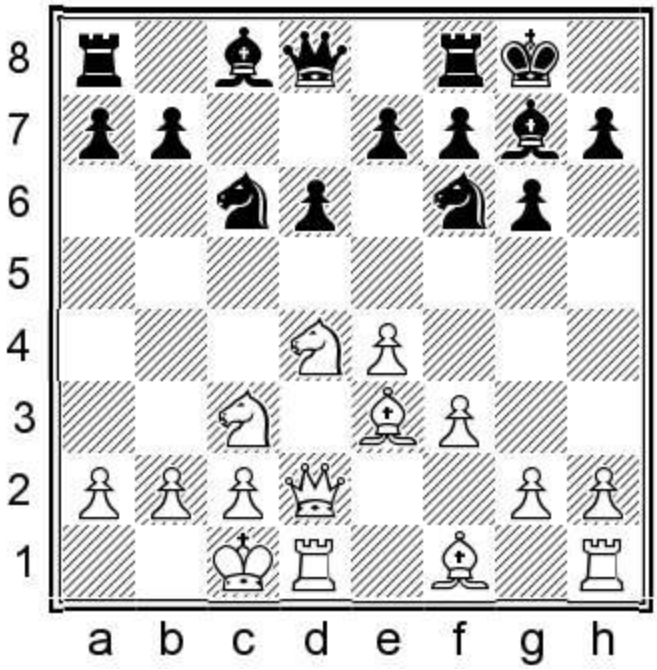
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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 allows our favourite space-gainer, so we go 5.c4.



**Chapter 8 Dragon**

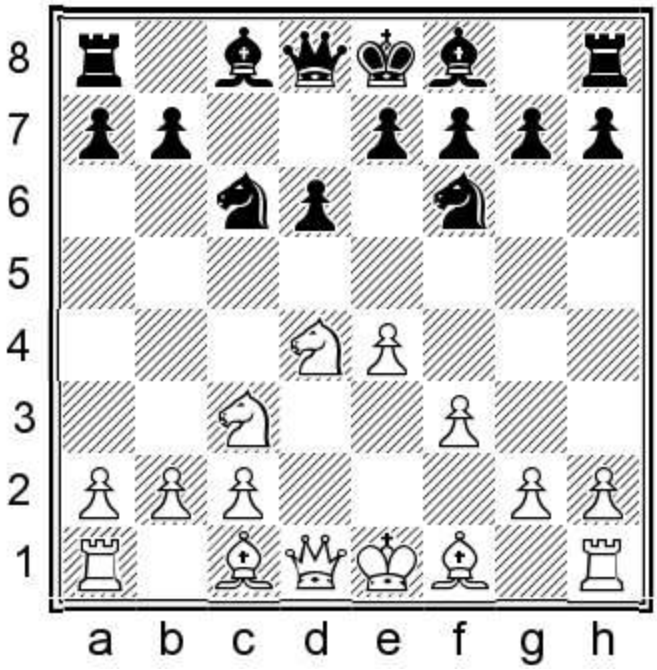
I recommend meeting 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 with the main line 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 and then 9.0-0-0, which gives more controlled play than the hair-raising Bc4 lines.



**Chapter 9 Classical**

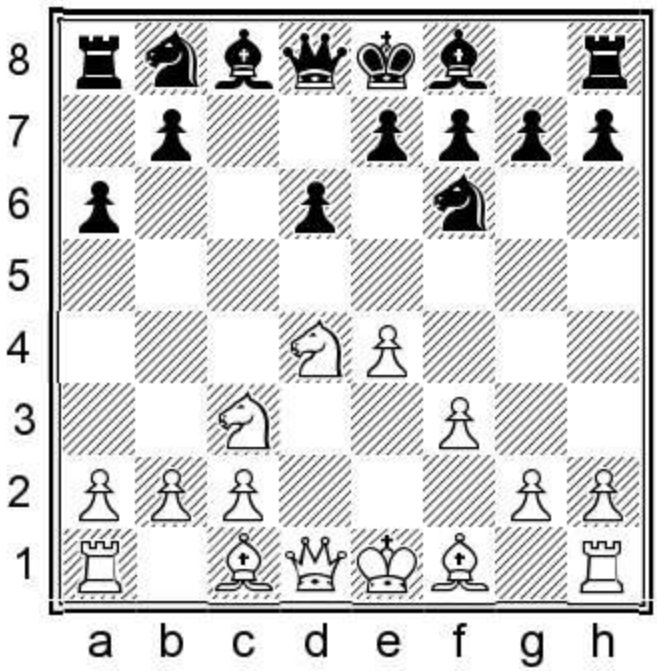
After 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 we go for 6.f3, which is essential to keep our repertoire complete, as will be clearer when you see our line against the Najdorf-Scheveningen.

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**Chapters 10-11 Najdorf**

Against the mighty Najdorf 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 our line is 6.f3.



Chapter 10 covers lines with ...e7-e6, including Scheveningen lines which can reach here using many move orders.
Chapter 11 covers ...e7-e5 lines.

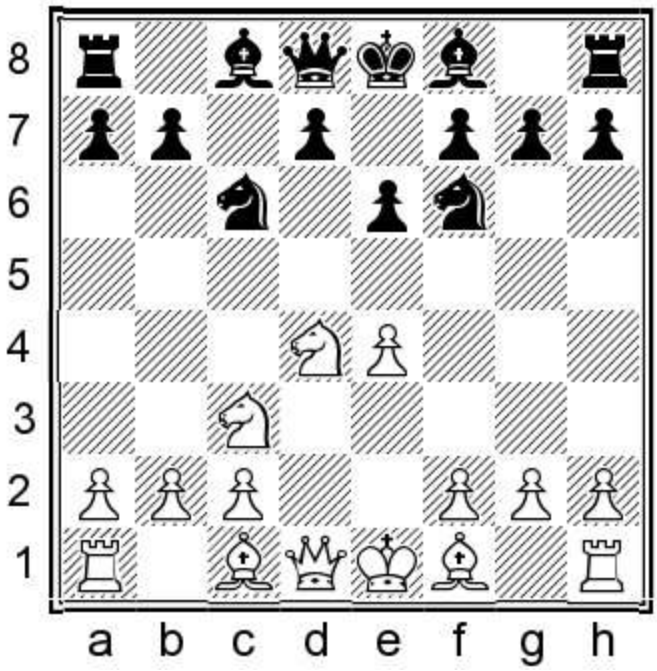
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# Chapter 1 - Four Knights

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6!?

6...bxc6 (6...dxc6?!) 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 10
A) 8...Bb7!? Game 1 (8...Ba6?) 10
B) 8...f5 15
C) 8...Qa5† 17
D) 8...Qc7 9.f4 19
D1) 9...f5 Game 2 (9...c5?!; 9...Be7?!) 19
D2) 9...Rb8 Game 3 21
D3) 9...Qa5† Game 4 24
D4) 9...Qb6 10.c4 28
D41) 10...Ne3 11.Qd3! 29
11...Nf5 Game 5 (11...Nxf1?!; 11...Qb4†) 29
11...Bb4† 12.Bd2 Game 6 32
12...0-0 (12...a5; 12...Ba6; 12...Rb8) 32
D42) 10...Bb4† 11.Ke2 35
11...f5 (11...Ba6?!) 12.exf6 Nxf6 13.Be3 36
13...Qd8 Game 7 (13...Qc7) 35
13...Qa5 Game 8 40
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6



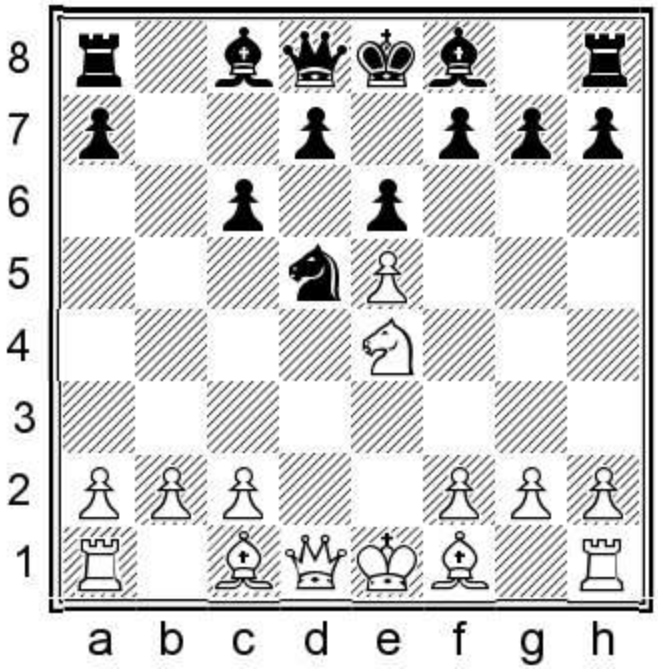

There are of course various ways to reach the above position, including starting with 2...Nc6, but the 2...e6 order given above feels the most natural. Why? Because the Four Knights appeals to Sveshnikov players who are fed up facing the Rossolimo when they play 2...Nc6. The downside for Black is that White has a non-Sveshnikov option that is more potent than the Rossolimo, and we shall use it.

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6.Nxc6!?
One of two principled choices.

The other is 6.Ndb5 when there is a possible transposition to the Sveshnikov after 6...d6 7.Bf4 e5 8.Bg5, but also independent lines such as 6...Bc5 and 6...Bb4. 6.Ndb5 is covered in the repertoire books of Negi, Illingworth and also the old '...According to Anand' series. There are two main reasons we selected 6.Nxc6. Firstly, it is useful to offer something fresh, and we have tried especially to avoid overlap with Negi's lines. Secondly, I believe 6.Nxc6 is the best move in the position. I am more confident of White securing an edge in this line than I am against the mighty Sveshnikov – although as you will see in Chapter 6, we make a serious effort.

6...bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4
The positional features are becoming clearer. White has a grip on the d6-square, and plans c2-c4 at some point to evict Black's knight. If nothing dramatic happens over the next few moves then White will have a significant advantage, so Black is duty-bound to try to stir up trouble. This limits Black's options and makes White's preparation less arduous.




The main options are A) 8...Bb7!?, B) 8...f5, C) 8...Qa5† and D) 8...Qc7. Variation D is overwhelmingly the main line, and quickly leads to a further branching point that I shall explain later in this chapter.

A) 8...Bb7!?

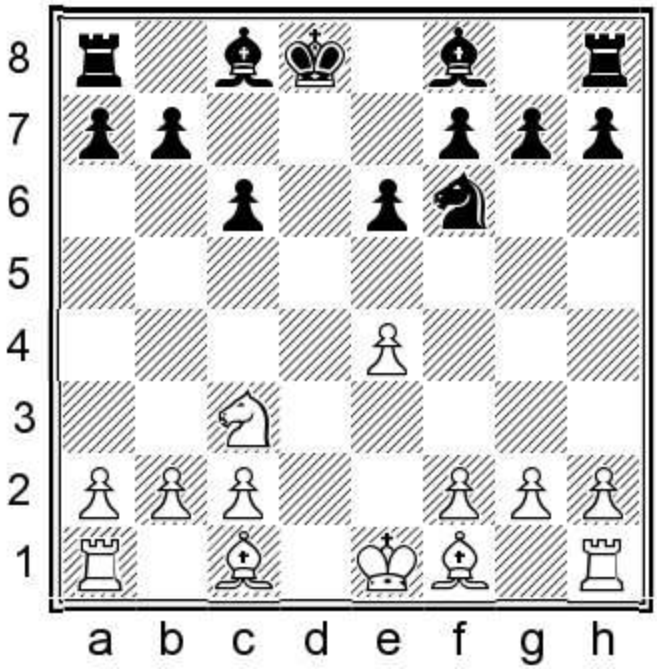
GAME 1

Peter Leko – Veselin Topalov
Dortmund (1) 2002

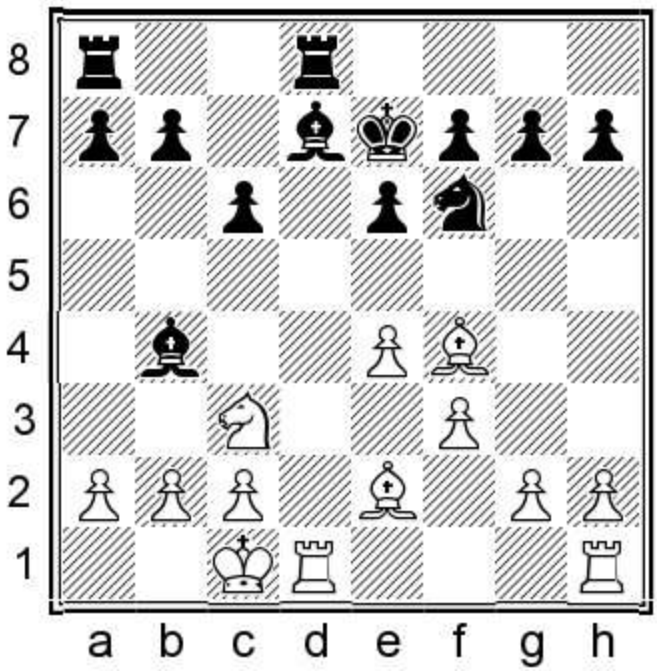
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6!? bxc6
The only sensible move.

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6...dxc6?! 7.Qxd8† Kxd8 is an ugly concession.



8.Bf4 (8.e5 is also good) 8...Bb4 (An important point is that Black cannot achieve ...e6-e5: 8...Nd7 9.0-0-0 f6 10.e5! Otherwise Black's position might make more sense. 10...g5 11.Be3 fxe5 12.Bxg5† Kc7 13.Ne4± Abergel – T. Nguyen, Malakoff 2009) 9.0-0-0† Ke7 10.f3 Rd8 11.Be2² White is certainly a little better, and Black's position is not easy to play, as the following example illustrates: 11...Bd7?!



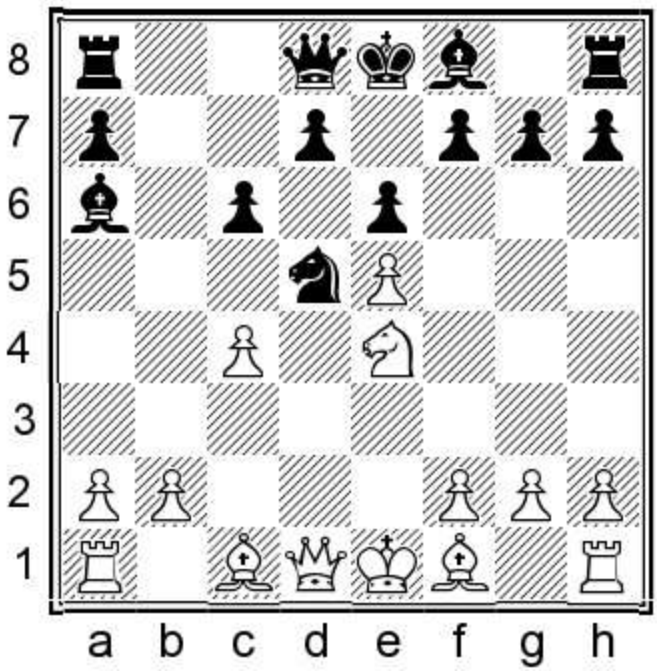
12.a3! Bxc3 13.Bd6† Ke8 14.bxc3± Polgar – Amura, Benidorm (rapid) 2002.

7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Bb7!?
This was introduced at the elite level by Leko against Kasparov, and was buried by Leko himself a few years later. Like so many variations, Black is a bit worse with no prospects of playing for more than a draw.

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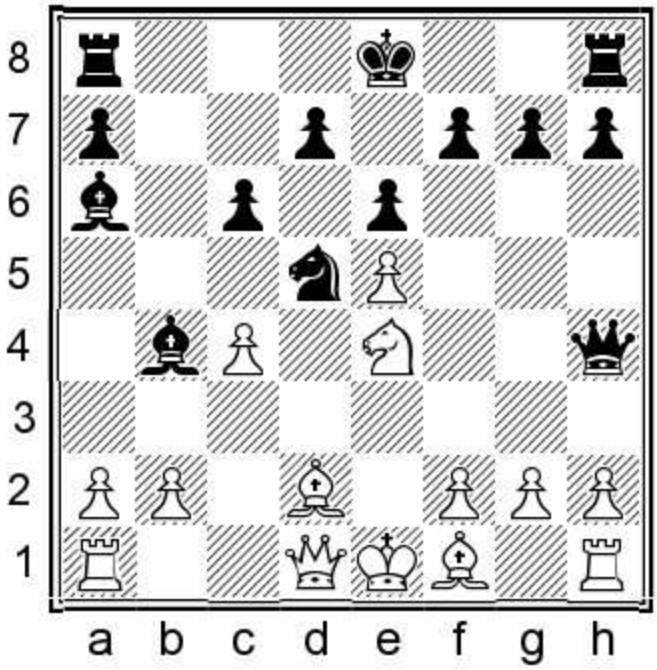
8...Ba6?

This fails to challenge White’s bind, and so leaves Black facing strategic disaster.
9.c4!
The most punishing response.
Also decent is: 9.Bxa6!? Qa5† 10.Bd2 Qxa6 11.b3± With c2-c4 likely to follow soon.

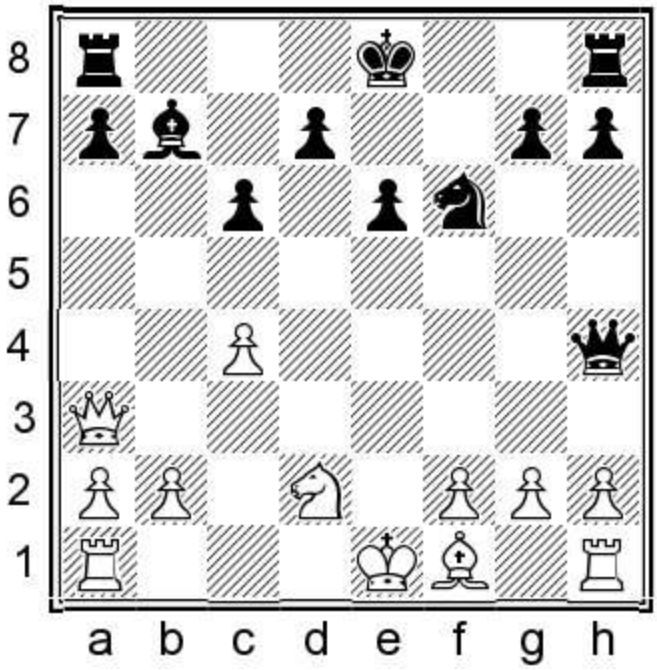


9...Bb4†
Probably the best chance of confusing the issue, but objectively it does not work.
9...Nb6? 10.b3± White is close to winning; Black’s queenside minor pieces are dead, while the gaping hole on d6 remains.
9...Qh4? 10.Qd4!+– wins a piece.
9...f5 allows a forcing line that strongly favours White: 10.cxd5 Bxf1 11.Nf6† Kf7 12.Kxf1 gxf6 13.Qh5† Kg8 14.dxe6 dxe6 15.exf6 Qxf6 16.h4± Black has an exposed king and many weak pawns, while Rh3-g3 is a nasty threat.
10.Bd2 Qh4

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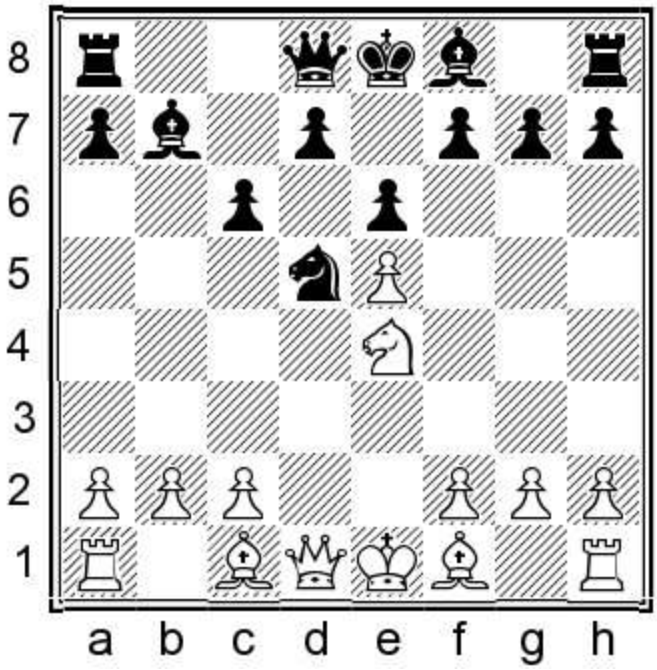
11.Qf3!
Not the only way, but forcing and effective.
11...f5
Or 11...Bxd2† 12.Kxd2 Qf4† 13.Qxf4 Nxf4 14.Ke3 Ng6 15.f4 Rb8 16.b3± gave Black a repulsive endgame in Gashimov – J. Bennet, Dubai 2000. A Scotch player dreams of reaching such a position.
12.exf6! Bxd2† 13.Nxd2 Nxf6 14.Qa3 Bb7



In Narciso Dublan – I. Almasi, Budapest 2001, the simplest way was:
15.Be2!N
Instead 15.0-0-0 Qxf2÷ was not so convincing in the game.
15...Qg5
The only way to try to stir up trouble.

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16.Nf3 Qxg2 17.Rg1 Qh3 18.Rxg7 0-0-0 19.Qxa7±
White has active pieces and an extra pawn.



9.Be2!
Emphasizing the point that White already has most of what he wants positionally, so simply castling and consolidating is good enough.
Previously White tried needlessly dramatic lines such as 9.c4 Nb4 10.c5.

9...c5
Opening up the bishop is standard.

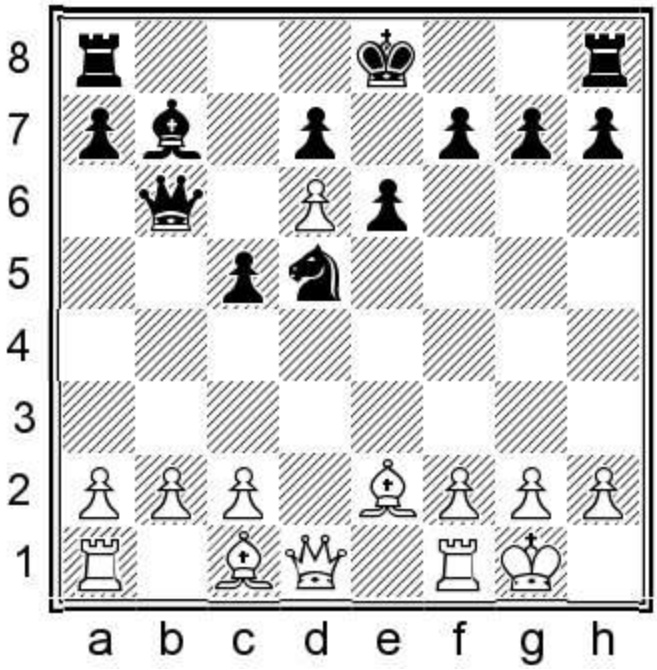
The untested 9...Qa5†N could be met by 10.c3 Qc7 11.Nd6† Bxd6 12.exd6 when the d6-pawn is poisoned, which is a key point in our main line. After 12...Qb6 13.c4² White has the bishop pair and more space, which is common in this line.

10.0-0 Qc7 11.Nd6†
This is the move I prefer, but also decent is: 11.c4²

11...Bxd6 12.exd6 Qc6
Almost universally played.

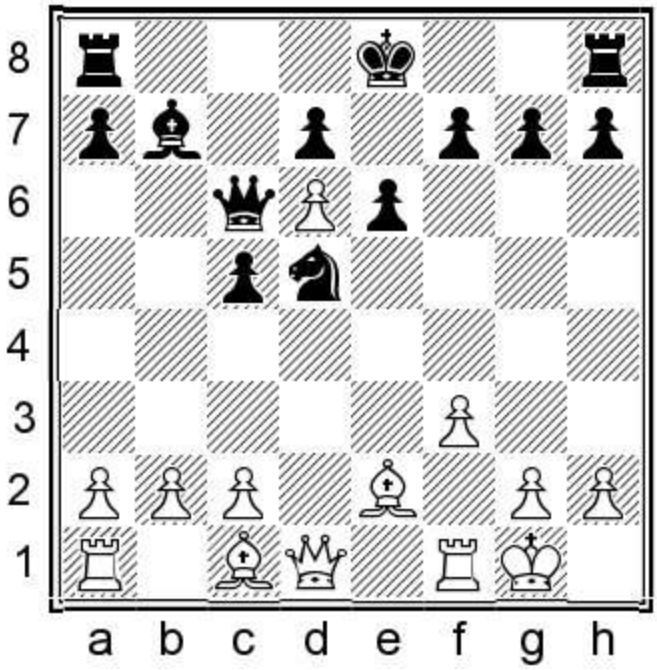
12...Qb6 was played in Sadkowsky – Hajenius, Antwerp 2011, and no other game ever.

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A logical response is: 13.a3!? 0-0 14.c4 Nf6 15.Be3²

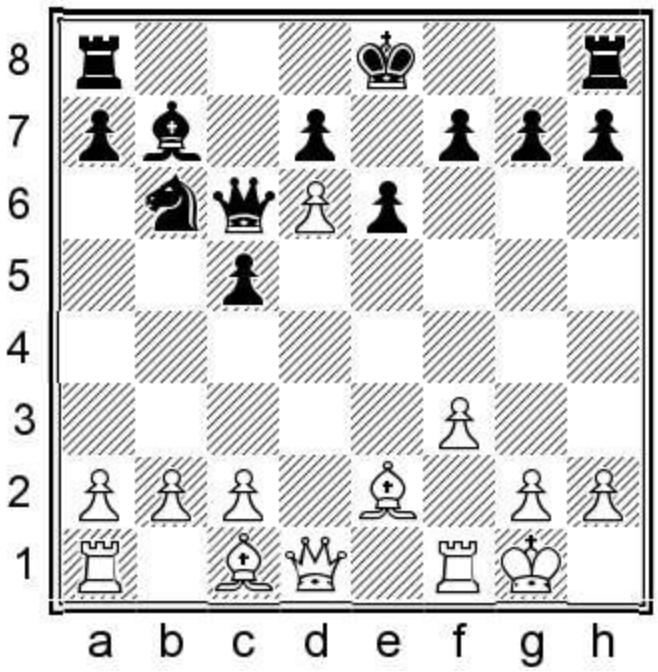
13.f3
Let's not get mated on g2.
13.Bf3?! is misguided as after 13...c4 14.Qd4 0-0 Black has everything covered, while d6 is loose. We need our bishop hitting c4.



13...c4
The usual move, preparing to take on d6 without allowing c2-c4.

13...Nb6
A shamelessly greedy try to win the d6-pawn with ...Nc8.

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14.a4!N
Creating Bb5 ideas, but also options of a4-a5-a6.
The standard line has been 14.c4 Nc8 15.Bf4 f6 16.Bg3 e5 17.Bd3 Nxd6 18.Qc2 g6 when White has decent compensation, but the new way is clearer.
14...Nd5
Retracing the knight's steps is the best try, as White is ready for the materialistic options.
For example, trying to grab the d6-pawn with 14...Nc8 is well met by: 15.Bf4 f6 16.Bb5 Qb6 17.Qe2 Bc6 18. Bc4±
14...Nxa4?! White gets far too much play after this naive capture. 15.c4 Nb6 16.Ra5!*f* One plausible continuation is: 16...Nc8 17.Bf4 f6 18.Qb3 e5 19.Be3 Nxd6 20.Rxc5 Qa6 21.Rd1 Nf5 22.Bf2± Black's position is on the brink of collapse.
15.a5 a6 16.Qd2 c4 17.Qd4 0-0 18.Bxc4 Qxd6 19.b3²
The play is similar to the game, though the space-gaining advance to a5 is a gain for White.

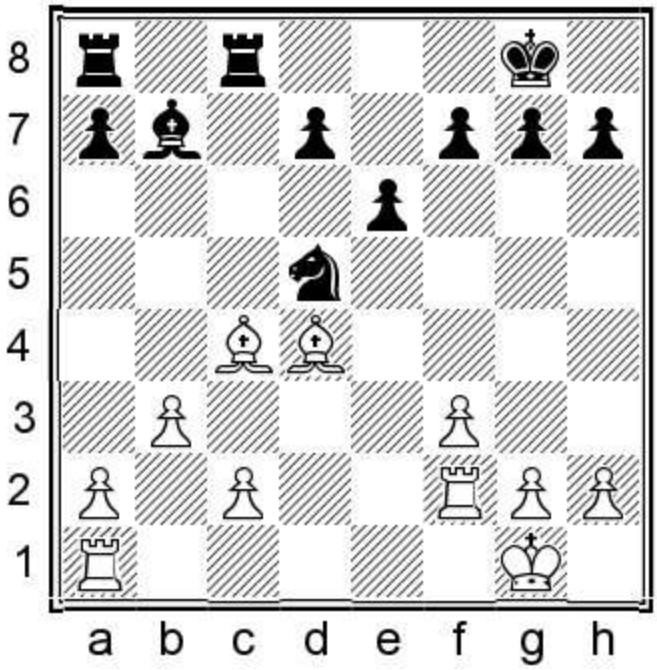
14.Qd4 0-0 15.Bxc4 Rfc8
Also common is 15...Qxd6 when 16.b3 or 16.Rd1 are equally good, and similar to the game.

16.b3 Qxd6 17.Rf2
White has various ways to achieve an edge, as the main factor is the bishop pair.

For example, 17.Rd1 Qb6 18.Qxb6 axb6 19.a4² was Shirov – Westerberg, Skopje 2015.

17...Qb6 18.Bb2 Qxd4 19.Bxd4²

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We are well past opening theory, into an ending where Black must suffer endlessly with a draw the most he can hope for. This line is not a refutation of ...Bb7 in the sense of winning by force, but it does lead to a position no strong player would wish to play with Black.

19...Nb4 20.c3 d5
Or 20...Nc6 21.Be3 d5 22.Bf1 transposes.

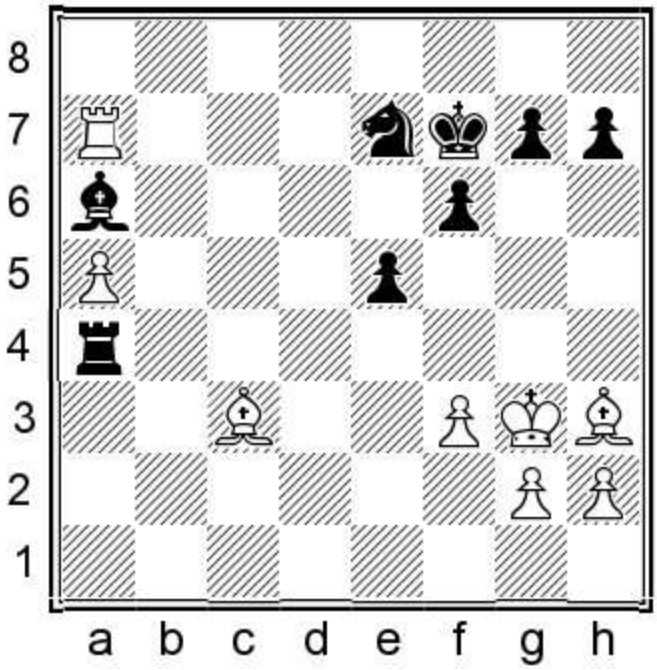
21.Bf1 Nc6 22.Be3 Ne7
Black could also try 22...a5 but it changes little. For example 23.Rc1 Ba6 24.c4 Ne7 25.Rfc2²  and in Uusitalo – Troia, email 2013, White had the usual endgame pressure.

23.Rc1
I will include the rest of the game as Leko plays beautifully, but we do not need full annotations of this endgame, so I will simply point out a few highlights.

23...a5 24.Rfc2 e5 25.c4 f6 26.cxd5 Rxc2 27.Rxc2 Nxd5 28.Bd2 a4 29.bxa4
An interesting decision, as 29.b4!?²  also looks promising.

29...Rxa4 30.Bb5 Ra8 31.a4 Kf8 32.a5 Ba6 33.Ba4 Rb8 34.Kf2 Rb1 35.Rc1 Rb2 36.Rc2 Rb1 37.Kg3 Ne7 38. Bd7 Kf7 39.Rc7 Rb2 40.Bc3 Ra2 41.Bh3 Ra4 42.Ra7

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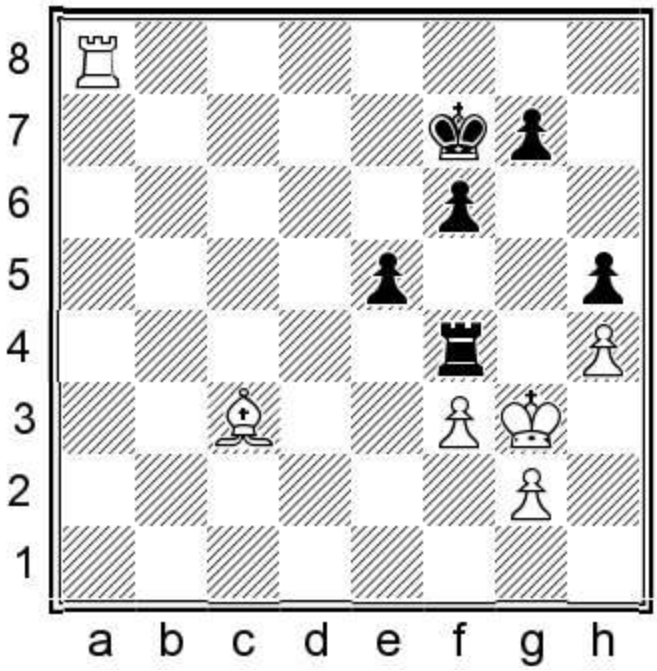


42...Bb5?
42...Bf1! was essential, with the point that 43.Bf5 can be met by 43...Ra2.

43.Bf5!+–
Now White's bishops can combine to chase the black rook off the a-file, when the a-pawn is running wild.

43...h5 44.h4 Kf8 45.Ra8† Kf7 46.Bc2 Rf4 47.a6 Bc6 48.Rd8 Nf5† 49.Bxf5
It's tough to criticize a move that wins a piece, but Leko could have shortened his task with 49.Kf2. For example: 49...Rc4 50.Bxf5 Rxc3 51.Rc8! with Be4 one of the threats.

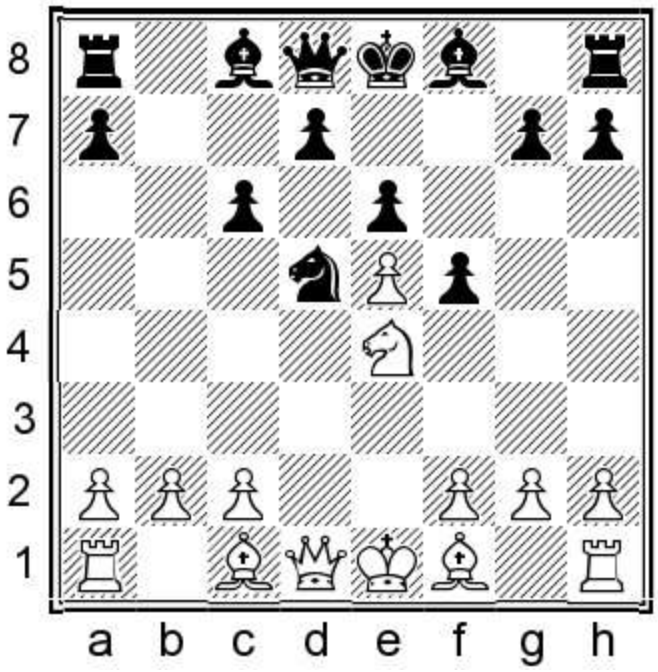
49...Rxf5 50.Rc8 Bd5 51.a7 Rf4 52.a8=Q Bxa8 53.Rxa8+–
With all the pawns on the same side, and Black solid, it takes some time to convert the extra piece into a win.



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53...Rc4 54.Bd2 Kg6 55.Ra7 Rd4 56.Be3 Rc4 57.Rb7 Rc3 58.Bd2 Rc2 59.Ba5 Ra2 60.Bd8 Ra8 61.Bb6 Rc8 62.Rc7 Rb8 63.Bc5 Re8 64.Kf2 Rh8 65.Ke3 Ra8 66.Kd3 Ra4 67.g3 Ra8 68.Ke4 Rh8 69.Kd5 Rd8† 70.Ke6 Ra8 71.Bd6 Re8† 72.Be7 Ra8 73.Rb7 Ra6† 74.Bd6 Ra8 75.f4 exf4 76.gxf4 Ra6 77.Rd7 Ra8 78.f5† Kh7 79. Kf7 Ra4 80.Bf8 Rg4 81.Bxg7!
If 81...Rxg7† then 82.Ke6 will soon be a winning pawn ending.
1–0

B) 8...f5

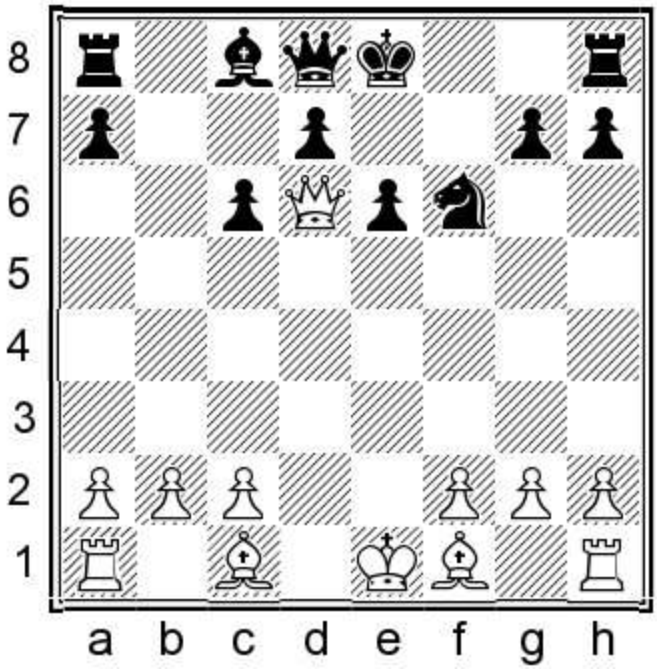


The second most common move in the position, but a long way behind 8...Qc7.

9.exf6 Nxf6 10.Nd6†
As a general rule, White does not take on f6 when Black can recapture with the queen.

10...Bxd6 11.Qxd6²
This position has been tested over 300 times, with White's advantage no longer in dispute; the top players shifted to other lines many years ago.

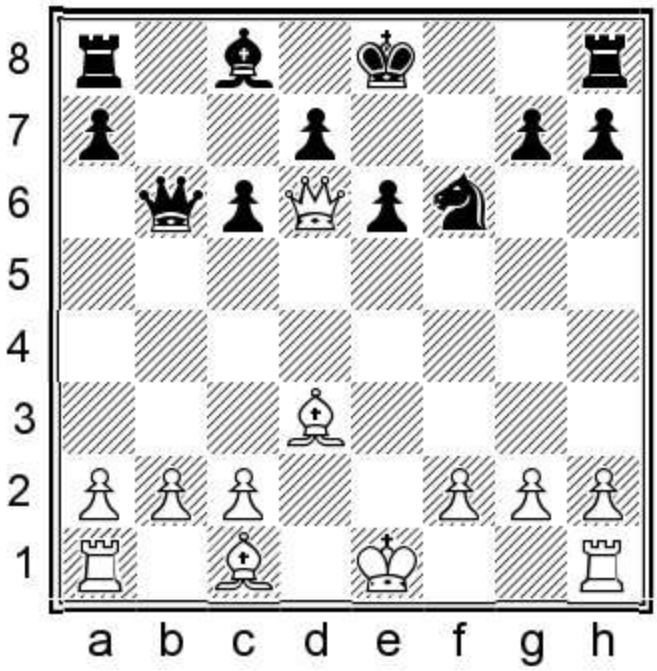
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We shall consider three moves: i) 11...Qe7?!, ii) 11...Qb6 and iii) 11...Ba6.

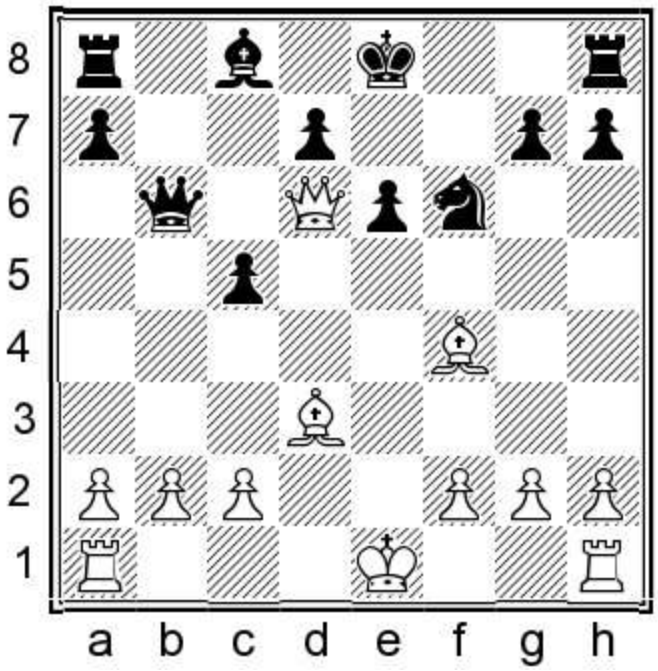
i) 11...Qe7?! Exchanging queens without improving Black's structure is exactly what White wants. For example 12.Bf4 Qxd6 13.Bxd6 Ne4 14.Be5 0-0 15.f3± In Savchenko – Lavendelis, Riga 2014, White had an ideal endgame for this line, with the bishop pair and better structure.

ii) 11...Qb6
Threatening ...Qxf2† and eyeing the b2-pawn, trying to freeze the bishop on c1. Sounds good so far, but White's best developing move stops the first threat, while White can invariably leave the b2-pawn en prise for more than ample compensation.
12.Bd3



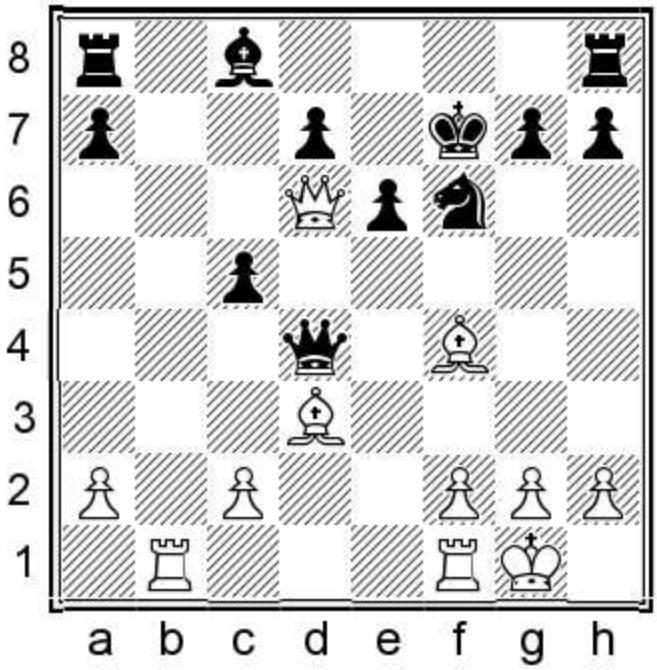
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12...c5
If White were to exchange on b6, Black's structure would improve markedly, but we will not be so obliging. Or 12...Ba6 13.Be3! shows White need not worry about b2. For example: 13...Qxb2 14.Bd4 Qb7 15.c4 Qb8 16. Qa3 Qf4 17.Rd1 Bb7 18.Qb2 Qc7 In Krnan – Langner, Tatranske Zruby 2016, White took twice on f6 and was only a little better. Stronger was: 19.c5!N Securing the bind by preventing the b7-bishop firing into life with ...c6-c5. A plausible continuation is: 19...0-0 20.0-0 Qc8 21.Rfe1 Ba6 22.Bc2± White remains a pawn down, but his dominant pieces are obviously far more significant.
13.Bf4



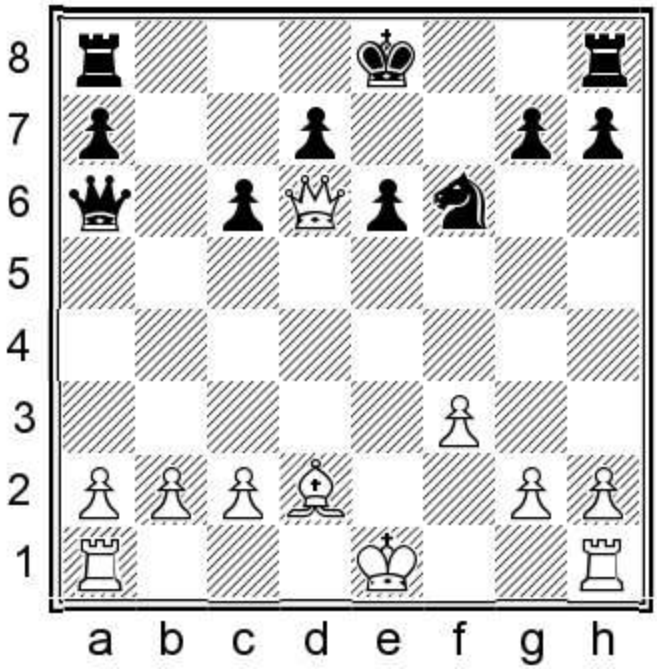
13...Qxb2
Black may as well grab the pawn; White can win it back, but Black at least has the consolation of damaging the queenside structure.
After 13...Bb7 14.0-0 Rc8 15.c4 Black can choose a grim ending or a grim middlegame: 15...Qxd6 (Or 15...Rc6 16.Qe5 0-0 17.f3± was Bezemer – Muetsch, Tegernsee 2017.) 16.Bxd6 Rc6 17.Be5± Over 24 games White has scored 75%, which is a convincing stat.
14.0-0 Qd4 15.Rab1 Kf7

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Razumichin – Kruk, email 2010, continued 16.Rfd1 which was enough for an edge, but just as strong was 16. Qxd4!?N 16...cxd4 17.Be5² regaining the pawn at once, when the bishops will be powerful.

iii) 11...Ba6
At least this move removes White's bishop pair, but the edge endures.
12.Bxa6 Qa5† 13.Bd2 Qxa6 14.f3²



White is planning b2-b3 and c2-c4, so the best test is:
14...Qc4
As in Milos – Rosito, Sao Paulo 2003.
14...Kf7 The most common move, and also a sensible try. 15.b3!? e5 16.0-0-0!N Activating the rooks is more significant than the a2-pawn. 16...Rae8 (Or 16...Rhe8?! 17.Bg5! is similar, except weaker as the a8-rook hangs

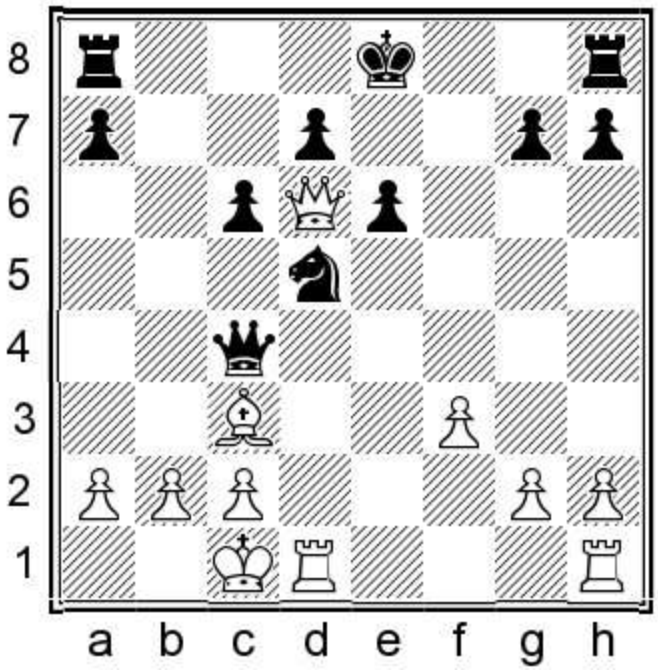
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at the end of the line; 16...Qxa2?! 17.Bc3 Rhe8 18.Bxe5 Re6 19.Qc5 d5 20.Bc3±) 17.Bg5 Qxa2 18.Bxf6 gxf6 19.Qxd7† Re7 20.Qxc6 It is here in the 16...he8 line that the rook on a8 costs Black a tempo. 20...e4! 21.Qc4† Kg7 22.Qa4 Qxa4 23.bxa4² White is a pawn up, but the drawish nature of rook endgames gives Black hope; as a position to reach while still in prep, White can have no complaints.

15.Bc3!N

This provokes forcing play and seemingly leaves the bishop vulnerable to the knight, but all the tactics work in White's favour.

15...Nd5 16.0-0-0




16...Nxc3

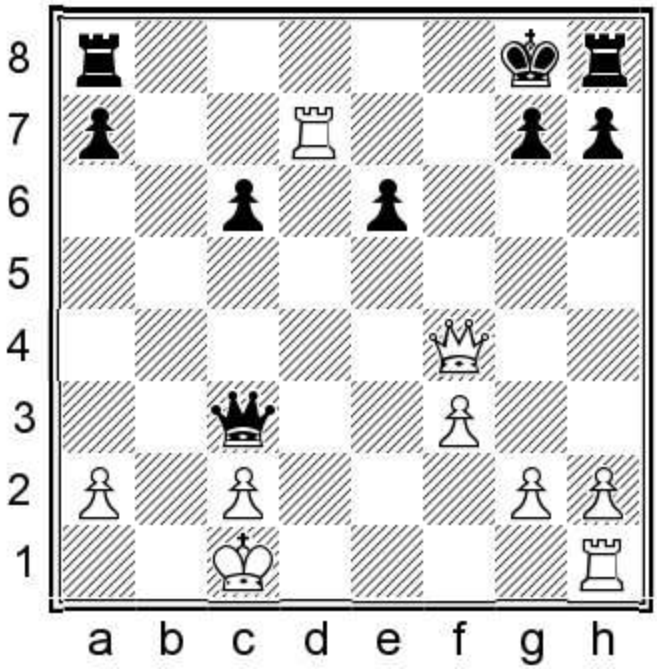
This leads to a long line where accuracy is vital, but White is in control.

16...Qf4† Bailing out to a bad endgame. 17.Qxf4 Nxf4 18.Rd2±

16...Qxa2 17.b3 It might not be obvious at first glance, but White's king is far safer than Black's, and that's a decisive issue. 17...Nxc3 (No better is: 17...0-0-0 18.Be5 Kb7 19.Rhe1+– The rook will step up to e4, then turn left, with deadly effect.) 18.Qxd7† Kf8 19.Qd6† Kf7 20.Qc7†! Kg8 21.Rd7! Despite the proximity of Black's queen and knight, the white king is perfectly safe. The best Black can do is: 21...Qa3† 22.Kd2 Qf8 23.Kxc3+– Material is temporarily level, but the gap in piece activity is decisive.

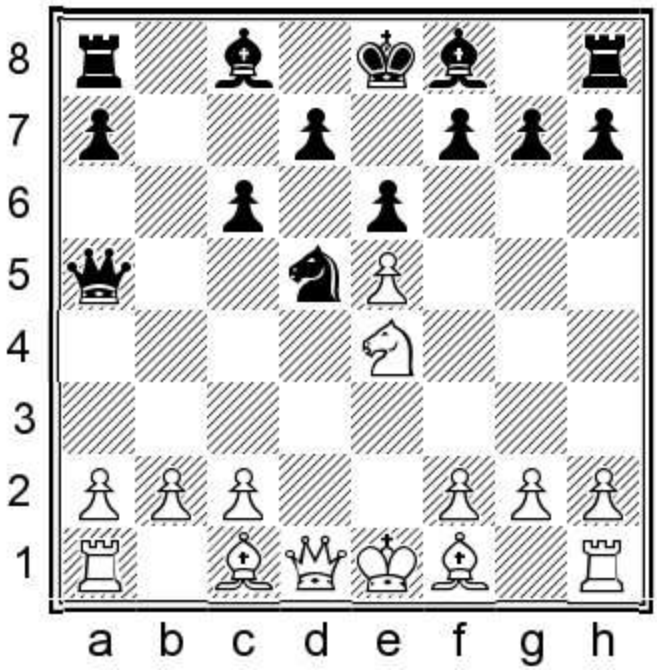
17.Qxd7† Kf8 18.bxc3 Qxc3 19.Qd6† Kf7 20.Qf4† Kg8 21.Rd7

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21...h5
It looks weird to move this pawn so it drops with check, but Black needs the later option of ...Rh6.
For example, even worse is: 21...h6 22.Qe4!+–
22.Qf7† Kh7 23.Qxh5† Kg8 24.Qg4 Qa1† 25.Kd2 Qf6 26.h4 Rd8 27.Rxd8† Qxd8† 28.Ke2±
White is simply a pawn up.

C) 8...Qa5†



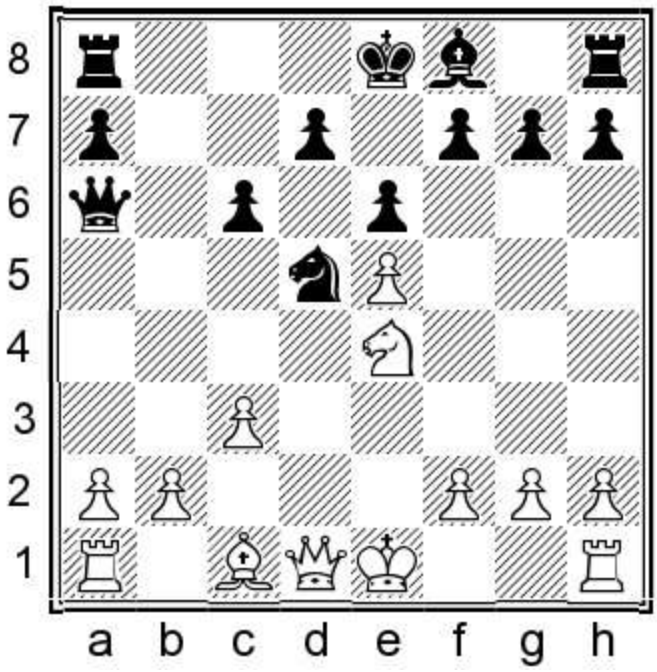
Not just a spite check; Black plans to exchange his bad bishop via a6.

9.c3
The simplest option.

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White can also try 9.Bd2 Qb6 then sac the b2-pawn, but it's not wholly convincing, so let's keep all our pawns.

9...f5
This move is almost mandatory at some stage, as the e4-knight is too strong to be tolerated, but Black can choose when to make the ...f5-thrust.
9...Qc7 10.f4 Qb6 is most simply met by 11.c4, transposing to the main variation D4 on page 28, with one extra move played. (11.Bd3 is also promising, but we should save our energy and be happy with one good line.)
9...Ba6 10.Bxa6
The direct choice, but also promising is 10.Be2.
10...Qxa6



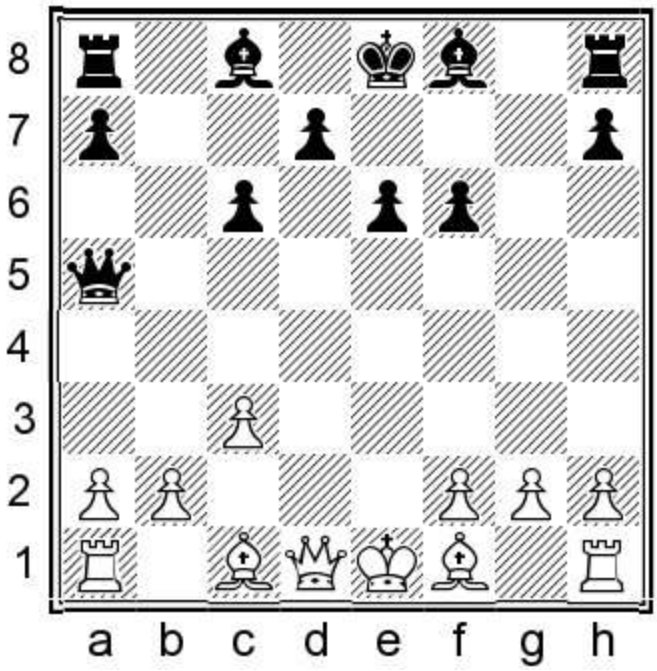
11.b3!
Keeping the queens on is the most promising option; Black must play ...f7-f5 at some point, so he will have the weaker king.
Instead 11.Qe2 Qxe2† 12.Kxe2 f5 gives Black a more pleasant version than usual of a Four Knights endgame; Black has exchanged the correct pair of bishops, and can gain space on the kingside against White's usual tries. For example: 13.Nd2 g5 looks comfortable.
11...Qa5
The main purpose of this move is not to attack c3, but instead to prevent a check on h5 after the inevitable ...f7-f5.
The immediate 11...f5 allows the black king to be kicked after: 12.exf6 Nxf6 13.Nxf6† gxf6 14.Qh5† Kd8
White has various options, but one shamelessly greedy line is: 15.Qf7 Be7 16.Qg7 Re8 17.Qxh7 f5 18.Qg7 Kc7
In Sabadell i Ximenes – Ramirez Moyano, email 2010, White could have tried 19.c4N 19...Bb4† 20.Kf1± when both kings are safe, but White has an extra pawn that is passed with a supporting rook ready to punt it.
12.Bd2 f5 13.exf6 Nxf6 14.Nxf6† gxf6
With no check on h5, White must keep it simple:
15.0-0
There are many ways the game could continue, but White's safer king and fewer pawn islands are worth an edge. For example:
15...Bd6 16.c4 Qe5 17.g3 Qf5 18.Bc3²
In Souleidis – Bousios, Aghia Pelagia 2004, Black's loose king was a continuing nuisance.

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10.exf6 Nxf6 11.Nxf6†
This is usually the right call when Black does not have ...Qxf6 as a reply.

The alternative is 11.Nd6† Bxd6 12.Qxd6 but after 12...Ba6 13.Bxa6 Qxa6 Black is close to equality.

11...gxf6
Black's king position will always be shaky, so White's task is to castle and complete development while \favoiding an exchange of queens. There are a few promising ways to do so:




12.Qf3!?N
Simple and appealing; White will castle kingside and keep on the queens.

12.Bf4!? Qf5 13.Qa4 also looked highly promising in Szymanski – Kosirog, email 2016.

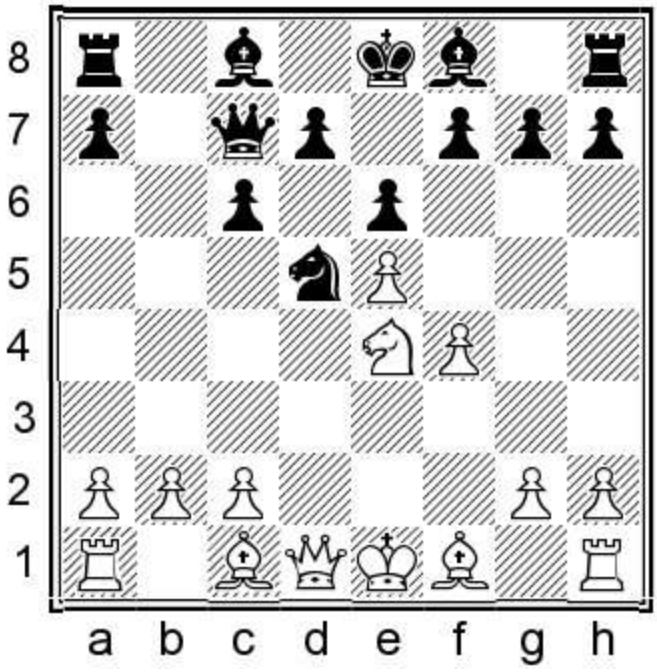
The move I suggest avoiding is the one that is by far the most common:
12.Be2 Qd5!
To keep the queens on, White must let g2 go.
13.Bh5† Kd8 14.Qe2 Qxg2 15.Bf3 Qh3 16.Be3 Ba6! 17.Qxa6 Qxf3
Both kings are unhappy. Play may continue:
18.Rg1 Rb8 19.b4
The position is sharp, as 19...Bd6?? 20.Rd1+– showed in Oll – Mellado Trivino, Oviedo (rapid) 1991, but 19...c5!N creating the option of ...Ra8, looks balanced.

12...Qe5†
Trying to disrupt White's development, but in the end Black spends a tempo to cost White a tempo.
After 12...Kf7 13.Be2 Qd5 White should of course duck the exchange with: 14.Qh3²

13.Be2 Ba6 14.Be3 Bxe2 15.Qxe2²
White is preparing to castle long, then target the black king.

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D) 8...Qc7 9.f4



This is a huge branching point. The main lines we will consider are D1) 9...f5, D2) 9...Rb8, D3) 9...Qa5† and D4) 9...Qb6, with the final line by far the most important.

D1) 9...f5

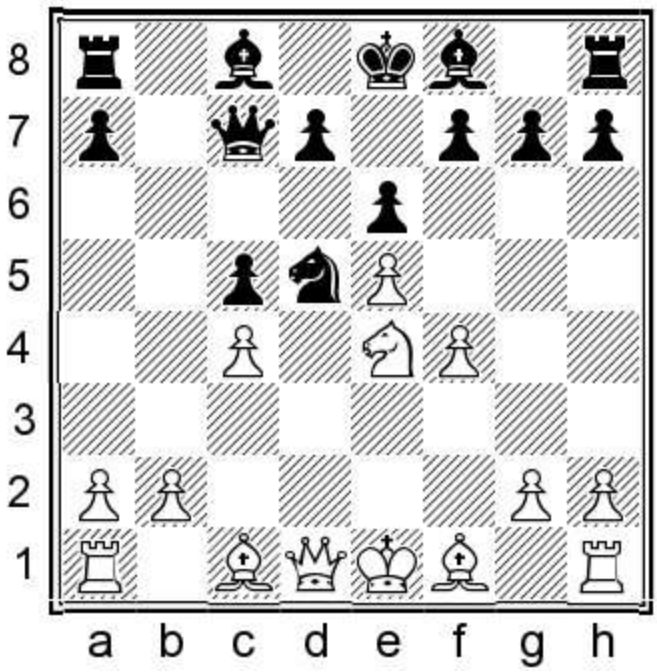
GAME 2

Deep Sengupta – Vahe Baghdasaryan
Al Ain 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Qc7 9.f4 f5
A normal move in the Four Knights, but an odd moment for it, as the queen has just moved away from d8, ending the possibility of recapturing on f6.

9...c5?!
This line illustrates once again that Black cannot afford to leave White's bind unchallenged.
10.c4

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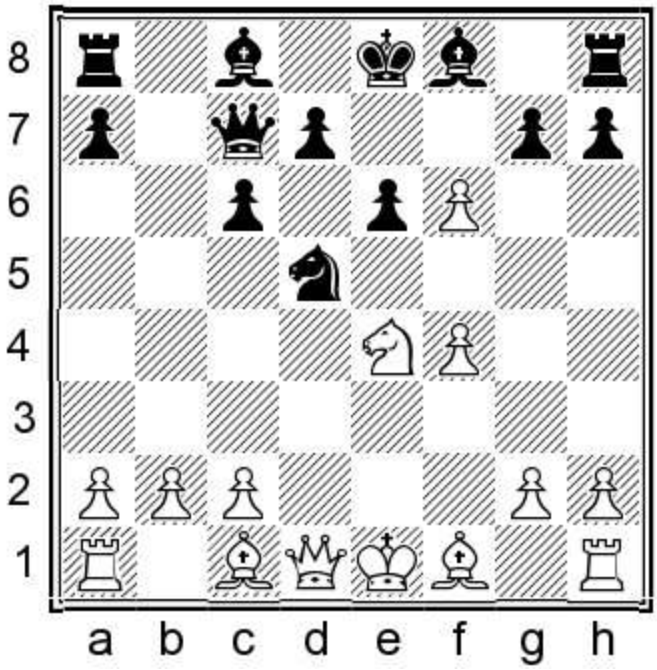


10...Nb4
Heading for the d4-square, but it's slow going.
Instead 10...Nb6 is an ugly passive square. White has many good options, including: 11.Bd3 Bb7 12.b3 d5 13. exd6 Bxd6 14.0-0 Rd8 15.Qe2± In Macieja – Starczewska, Warsaw 2008, White had the better structure while Black's b6-knight was still a problem.
11.a3 Nc6 12.Bd3
Simple play: develop and castle short.
But White is spoiled for choice; for example, 12.Be3 is logical.
12...Nd4 13.0-0 Bb7 14.Be3 Nf5 15.Bf2²
L. Schneider – Rosenlund, Roskilde 1978.

9...Be7?! is just silly: 10.c4 Nb6 11.Nd6† Bxd6 12.exd6 It's all gone wrong.

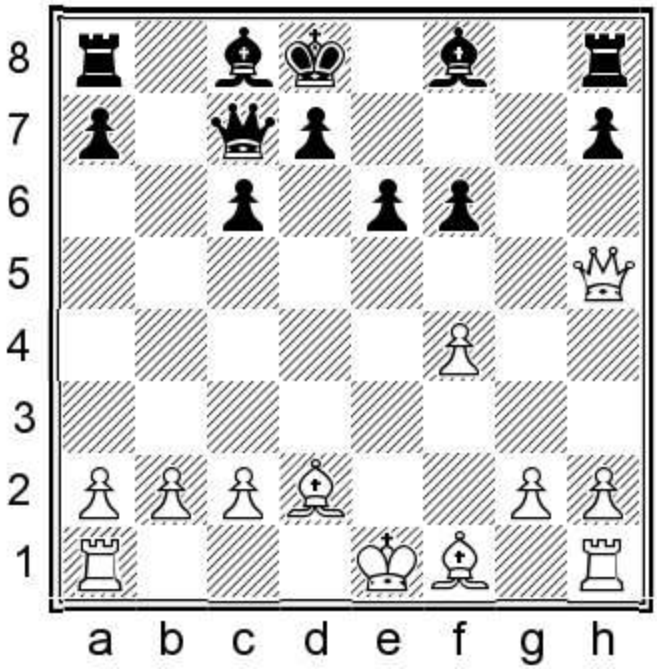
10.exf6

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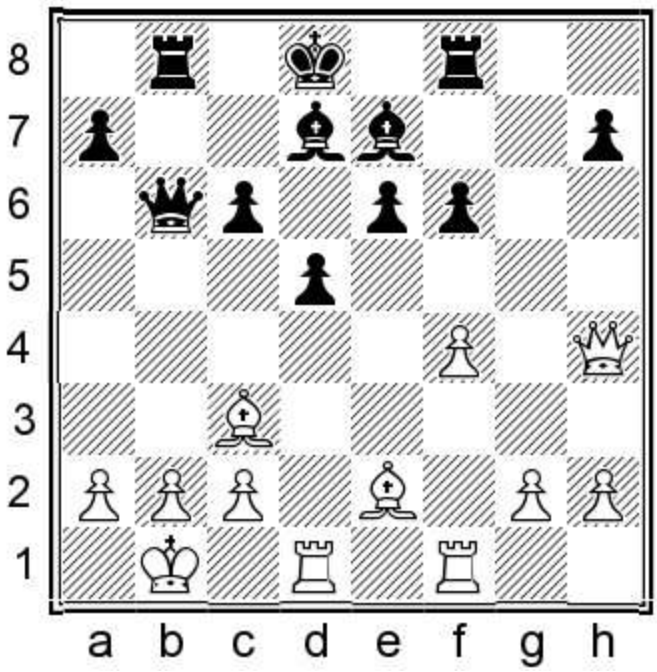
10...gxf6
The less usual recapture, but it at least tries to make some sense of Black's strange move order.

10...Nxf6 11.Nxf6† gxf6
This is a straightforwardly bad version of a normal Four Knights.
12.Qh5† Kd8 13.Bd2±



As simple as that; White castles long and it's plain to see who has the safer king. An old game is worth seeing in full to illustrate the theme:
13...d5 14.0-0-0 Rb8 15.Qh4 Be7 16.Bc3 Rf8 17.Be2 Qb6 18.Kb1 Bd7 19.Rhf1

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No real notes are needed: White develops, then opens the centre and mauls the black king. Admittedly it's not quite as easy as Unzicker makes it look, but it's a nightmare to play with Black.
19...c5 20.f5 d4 21.fxe6 Bxe6 22.b3 Kc8 23.Bb2 Bg8 24.Bg4† Kc7 25.Rde1 Kd8 26.Qh3 Qa6 27.Rf2 Bd6 28. Qh6 Be7 29.Qg7 Qd6 30.Rfe2
1–0 Unzicker – Lehmitz, Weidenau 1947.

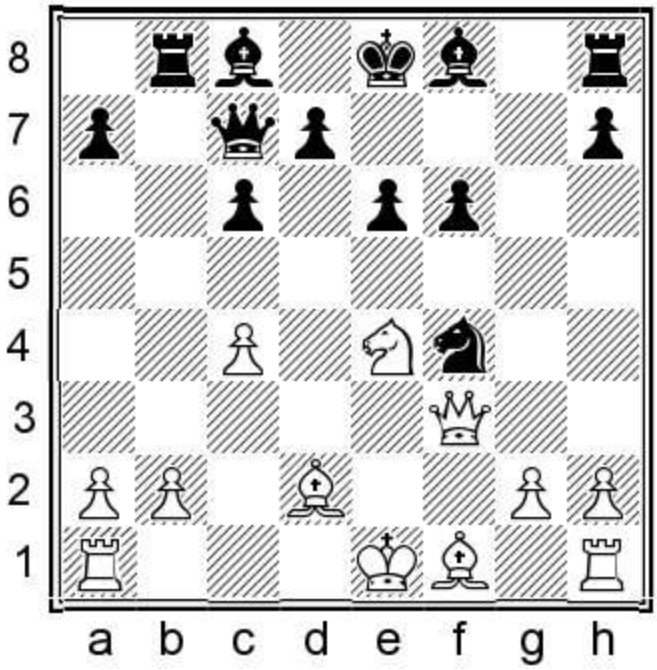
11.Bd2!
The most common move, and also the best.

The tempting 11.Qh5† is not so clear after 11...Kd8, as the white queen belongs on f3 if Black grabs on f4. So for example 12.Bd2 Rb8 13.c4 Nxf4 14.Qf3 Ng6 is not so convincing as the related idea in the main line.

11...Rb8
Certainly not 11...Nxf4? 12.Nxf6† Kd8 13.Qf3 Ng6 14.0-0-0 when Black's position is a wreck.

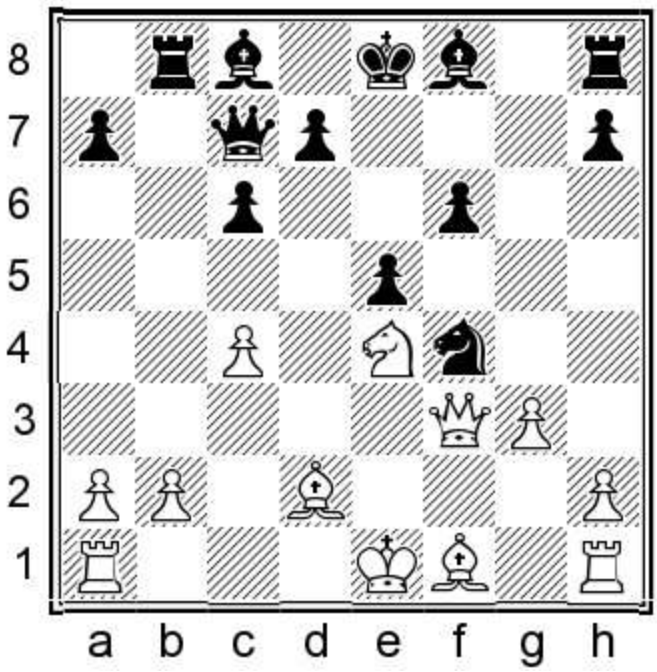
12.c4 Nxf4 13.Qf3±
White will win the pawn back, then castle long, with much the safer king.

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13...Ng6
The usual try.

After 13...e5 then 14.0-0-0 was perfectly sensible in Popilski – Baghdasaryan, Groningen 2014, but the immediate 14.g3! was simpler and totally effective.

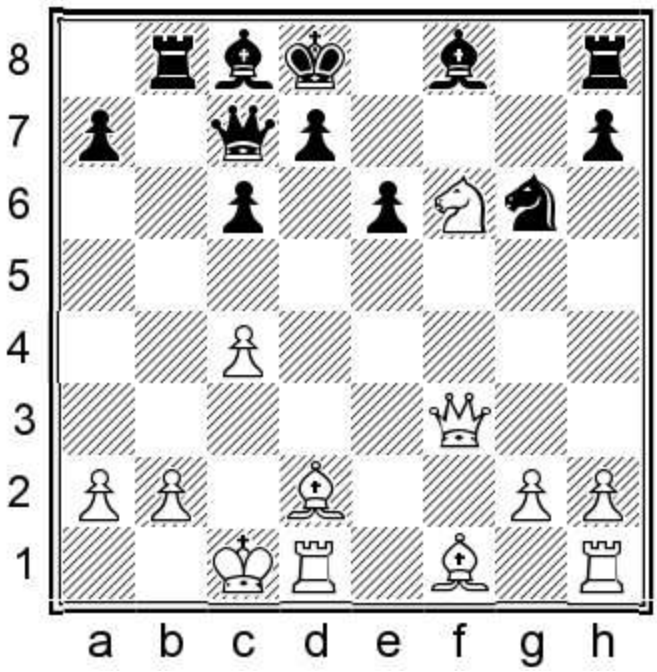


For example: 14...Ng6 15.Nxf6† Kd8 16.0-0-0± Normally White would have to sacrifice some material to get such an attacking position.

13...Bb4 is a sneaky way to save the piece, but Black faces the same problems as in the other lines: 14.Nxf6† Kf7 15.0-0-0 Bxd2† 16.Rxd2 Kxf6 17.g3± Next will be gxf4 (the queens stay on of course) followed by target practice on the black king.

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14.Nxf6† Kd8 15.0-0-0±
Thus far is enough for preparation, but we can blitz through the whole game, as it does not last long and White gives a flawless display.



15...Bg7 16.Qc3 h6 17.g4 Nf4 18.h4 d5 19.Rg1 c5 20.g5 hxg5 21.cxd5 exd5 22.Rxg5 d4 23.Rxg7 Qxg7 24. Bxf4 Bd7 25.Qa5† Rb6 26.Nd5 Rxh4 27.Nxb6
1–0

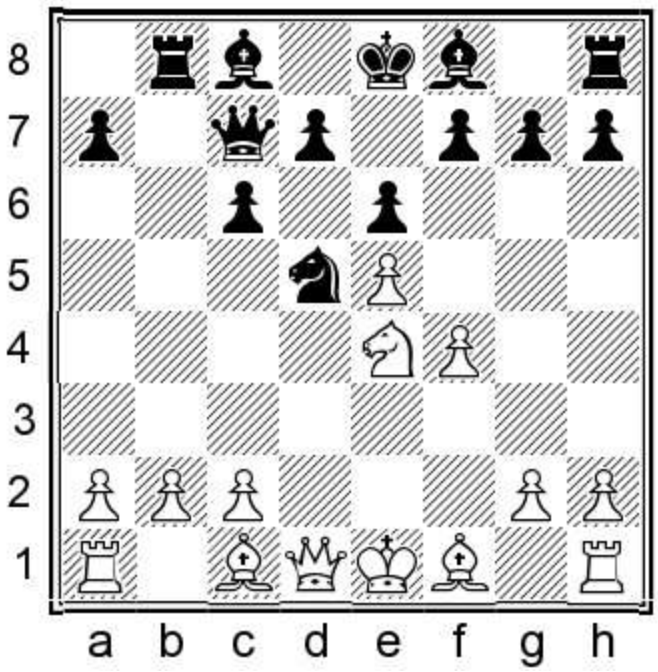
D2) 9...Rb8

GAME 3

Barry Sheppard – Elio Troia
email 2008

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Qc7 9.f4 Rb8
Moiseenko has twice used this line to win quick sacrificial games, so it is worthy of care, but I believe a precise move order effectively refutes it.

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10.c4 Bb4†
Black has no choice.

10...Nb6? was Barlovic – Podravec, Zagreb 2009, when after the simple 11.Be2N White is strategically winning.

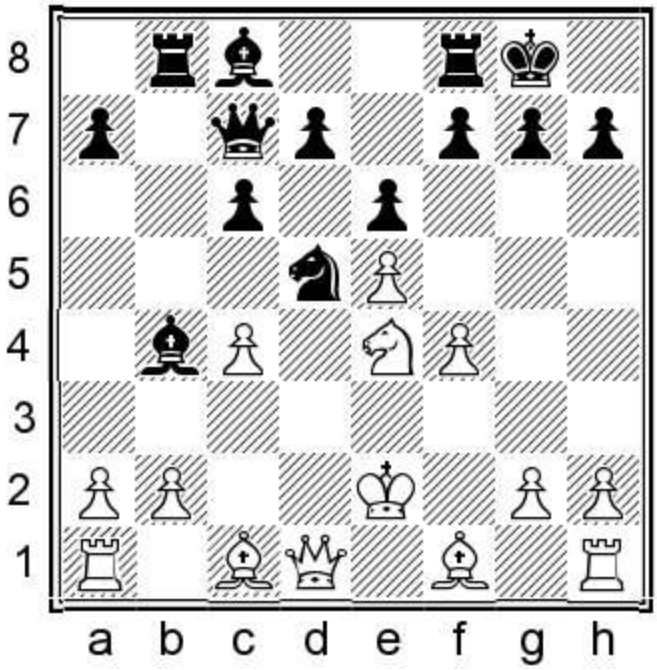
11.Ke2
As in the main line (see variation D42 on page 35), White must step forward.

11.Bd2? fails to: 11...Nxf4 12.Bxb4 Qxe5! (But of course not 12...Rxb4?? 13.Nd6† Ke7 14.Qd2+– forking two pieces.) The line continues: 13.Qd6 Qxe4† 14.Kd2 Rxb4 15.Qxb4 Nxg2 16.Bxg2 Qxg2†µ Bishop and three pawns, with an exposed king to shoot at, are far too much for a rook. Black will castle easily after a few checks lands the queen on a square that covers the ...c6-c5 advance.

11...0-0
This piece sacrifice is the only way to try to make sense of Black's position.

11...Ba6? 12.Kf3+– is a strategic fiasco.

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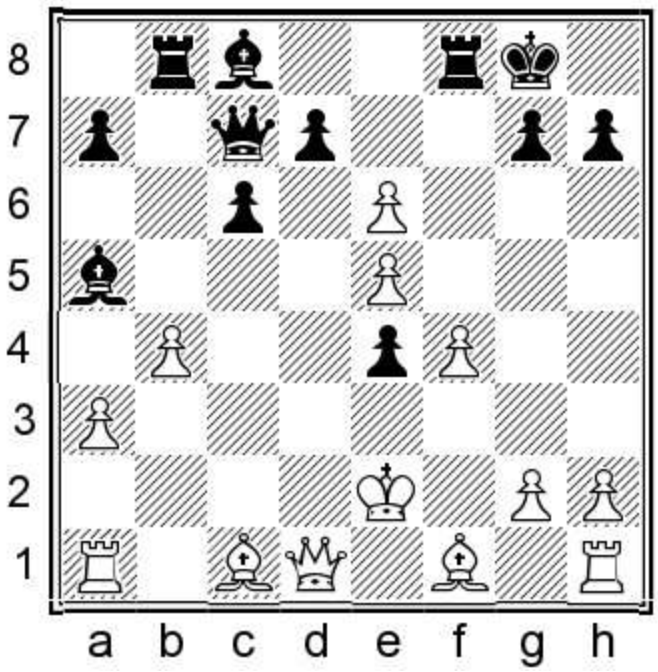


12.a3!
This accurate nudge messes up Black's coordination.
To understand the point, let's see the more obvious 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.Nd6 f6 14.Nxc8 when, with no bishop hanging on e7, Black was free to play 14...fxe5© in Kurmann – Moiseenko, Tromso (ol) 2014. Also note that after 15.a3 Black replied 15...Bc5, an option unavailable after 12.a3.

12...Be7
The most obvious option.

12...Ba5N
Untested, but at least as good as the game move.
13.b4 f5
Black must try this, as 13...Bb6? 14.cxd5 cxd5 15.Nd6+– is hopeless.
14.cxd5 fxe4 15.dxe6!
15.bxa5 cxd5 is not so clear.

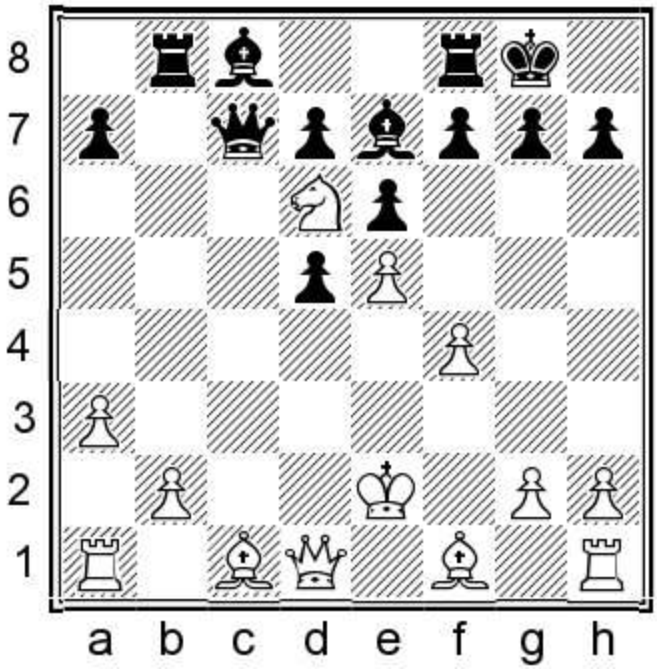
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15...dxe6
Giving up the bishop looks like the best practical chance.
After 15...Bb6?! 16.e7! Re8 17.Qd6± White has an excellent bind; e7 will drop, levelling the material, but e4 is also vulnerable. For example: 17...Ba6† 18.Ke1 Bxf1 19.Rxf1 Kf7 20.Bb2!? Rxe7 21.Qxc7 Bxc7 22.Bd4 Bb6 23.Bxb6 axb6 24.Ke2±
16.bxa5 Qxa5 17.Qd4²
Black does not have enough compensation for the missing piece. One plausible variation is:
17...Rb3 18.Kf2 Rd8 19.Qxe4 Rd1 20.Bc4 Rxh1 21.Bxb3 Qc3 22.Rb1 Rxc1 23.Rxc1 Qxc1 24.Qe3²
Material has miraculously levelled, but Black cannot afford to exchange queens due to his feeble bishop. So White can press for a win after a line such as 24...Qb2† 25.Kg3.

13.cxd5 cxd5 14.Nd6!
Eliminating a bishop is well worth a pawn.

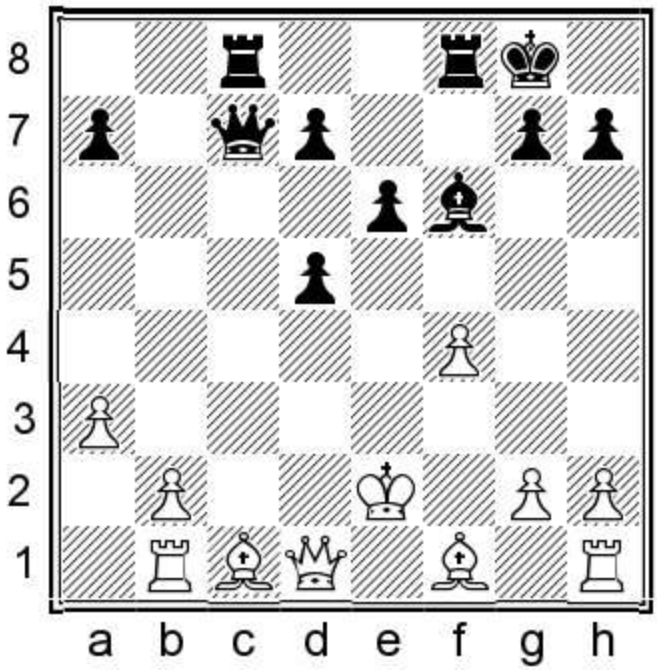
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14...f6
This allows the c8-bishop to be taken, but the alternative is no better:

14...Ba6† 15.Ke1 Bxf1 16.Rxf1 f6 17.Qe2 fxe5 18.fxe5 Bxd6 19.exd6 Qxd6 20.g3± Black has only two pawns for the bishop, and there's no attack. Certainly White will have to do some wriggling to develop while securing his king. Let's follow one game for an example of how it can be done: 20...e5 21.Rxf8† Rxf8 22.Bd2 Qg6 23. Bb4 d6 24.Rd1 d4 25.Qc4† Kh8 26.Kd2 h6 27.Kc1 Rf2 28.Rd2 Rf3 29.a4 In Langer – Grammatica, email 2014, White was well on his way to victory.

15.Nxc8 Rbxc8 16.exf6 Bxf6 17.Rb1±
It is only one pawn for a bishop, so White should win, but it's not trivial enough yet for a simple plus-minus verdict.

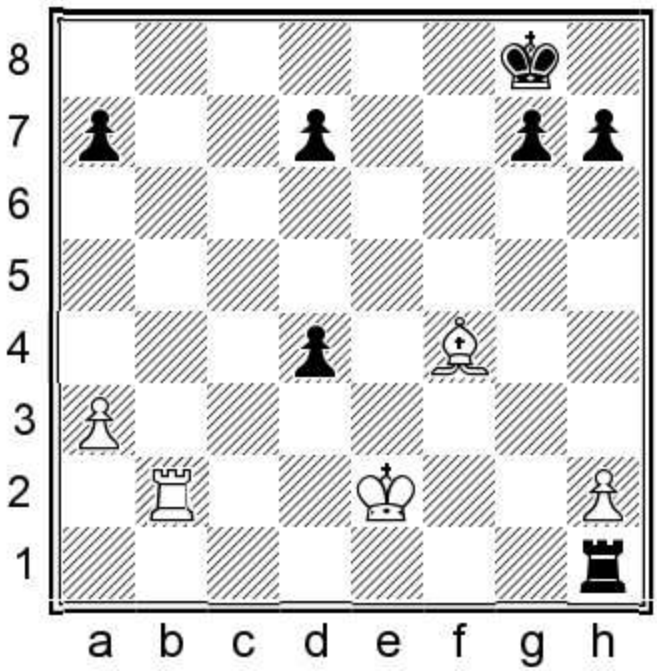


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17...Qc6 18.Qd3 e5
Black opens lines at the expense of weakening his structure.

Instead Black can try to create a central pawn roller, as Black tested in a later game:
18...d6 19.Kf2
Black has a few tries, but nothing works.
19...g5
19...e5 20.Be2 is winning for White.
19...Bd4† 20.Qxd4 Qc2† 21.Be2 Qxb1 22.Qd3 Qxd3 (22...Qa1 23.Qd1) 23.Bxd3 e5 24.Bb1!+–
20.Be2!
Developing is more important than worrying about one pawn.
20...gxf4 21.Rd1+–
In Shpakovsky – Troia, email 2010, the white king was escaping while Black's pawns were no threat.

19.fxe5 Bxe5 20.Bd2 Rce8 21.Ke1 Bxb2† 22.Be2 d4 23.Rf1 Qxg2 24.Rxf8† Rxf8 25.Rxb2 Qg1† 26.Bf1 Qf2† 27.Kd1 Qxf1† 28.Qxf1 Rxf1† 29.Ke2 Rh1 30.Bf4+–
Black has three pawns for the piece, but it's White who has made great progress in ensuring the win: the white king no longer need fear an attack, while none of Black's pawns are a threat to promote, so the extra piece easily mops up.




30...g5 31.Be5 Kf7 32.Kd3 Ra1 33.Rb3 Rd1† 34.Ke4 Ke6 35.Bxd4 d5† 36.Ke3 Rh1 37.Rb2 Re1†
This leads to the a7-pawn dropping, but 37...a5 38.Rb6† was equally hopeless.

38.Re2 Rh1 39.Bxa7 Kd6 40.Bd4 h5 41.a4 Kc6 42.Rf2 Re1† 43.Kd2 Rh1 44.Rf6† Kb7 45.a5 Rxh2† 46.Bf2
Bishop and wrong-coloured rook pawn is only a drawing problem when there are no rooks left. As is, Black is mated by force.

46...d4 47.Kc1 Rh1† 48.Kb2 Rh2 49.a6† Ka8 50.Ka3 Rh3† 51.Ka4 Rd3 52.Rd6
1–0
A beautifully controlled game by White, with many of his moves to convert the extra piece being far from the engine's first choice, yet perfectly logical with hindsight.

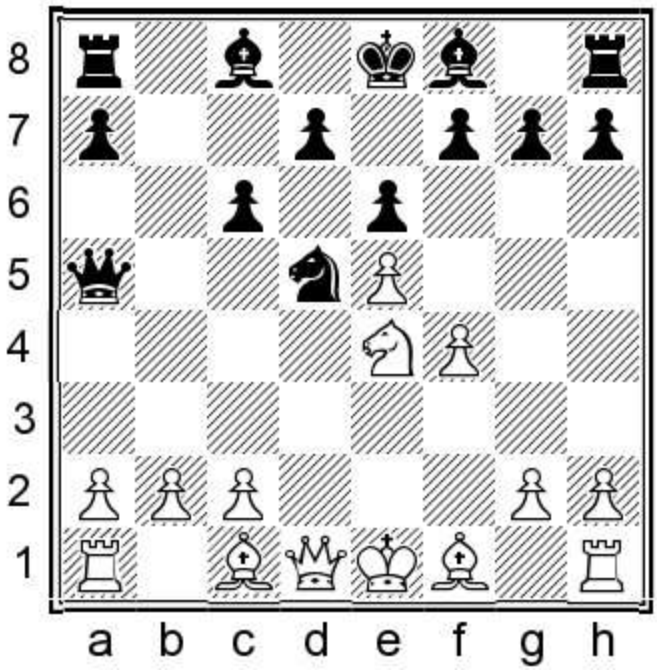
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D3) 9...Qa5†

GAME 4

Ivan Cavajda – Jan Lounek
email 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Qc7 9.f4 Qa5†
The second-most popular move after 9...Qb6, but a long, long way behind. And understandably so, as 8...Qc7 provoked a weakness on e3, which 9...Qb6 eyes, while the check on a5 leaves the potential that the addition of f2-f4 will be a useful gift.



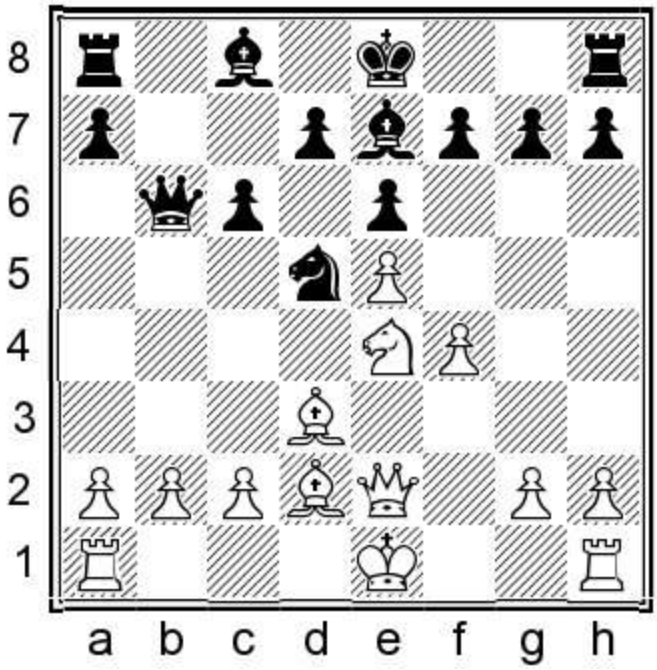

10.Bd2!
Also possible is 10.c3 but if I can develop with tempo, without fearing material loss, then I will. I mentioned after the immediate queen check line, 8...Qa5†, that I was not convinced by White's potential compensation for the b2-pawn after 9.Bd2 Qb6, but it's a different story here when Black has given us f2-f4 for nothing.

10...Qb6 11.Bd3
Now Black has various options.

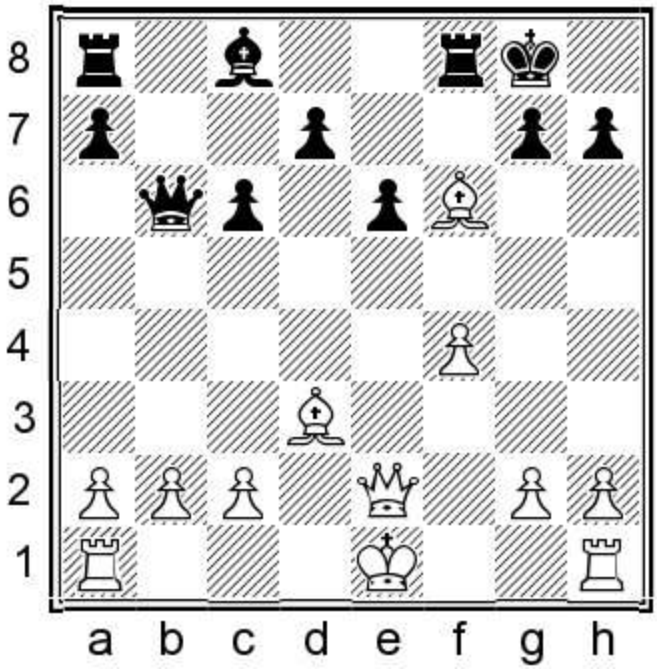
11...Nb4
Removing the dangerous d3-bishop is the critical test.

11...Be7 12.Qe2

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12...f5
This leads to a normal Four Knights position where Black has wasted time on queen moves for no gain. However, this is a bad time to get greedy, as 12...Qxb2?! 13.0-0 0-0 14.Rab1 Qd4† 15.Kh1± gives White an initiative that is close to decisive. I will offer one sample line as inspiration: 15...a5 16.c3 Qa7 17.c4 Nb4 18.Be3 Qc7 19.Nf6†! Bxf6 20.Bxh7† Kxh7 21.Qh5† Kg8 22.exf6 With a quick mate.
13.exf6 Nxf6 14.Bc3 0-0 15.Nxf6† Bxf6 16.Bxf6

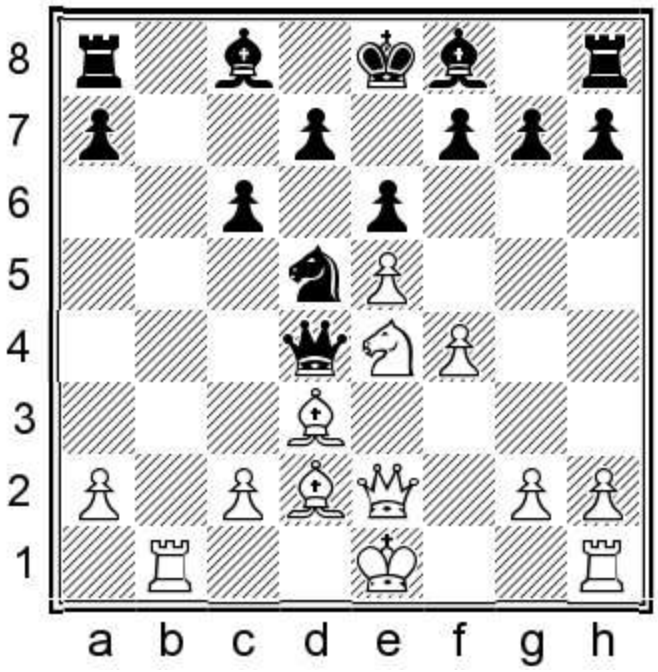


16...gxf6?!
A slight improvement was 16...Rxf6 though after 17.0-0-0² White's position is certainly preferable.
17.0-0-0±
Black's king was exposed in Emms – Sutovsky, Gausdal 1995.

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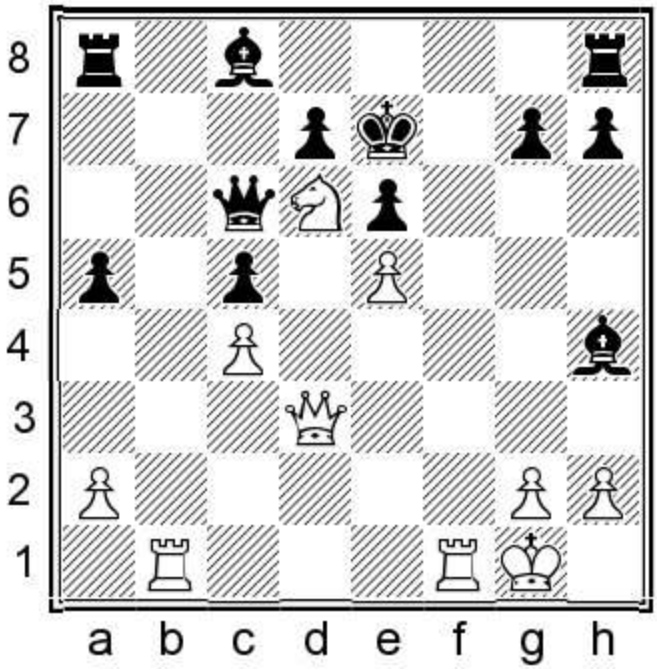
11...Ba6 offers White an easy endgame edge, but it is still one of Black's better options. 12.Bxa6 Qxa6 13.Qe2 Qxe2† 14.Kxe2 f5 15.Nf2² At some point the impressive-looking knight on d5 will be kicked by c2-c4. A recent example was Giri – Lupulescu, Antalya 2017, where Black managed to hold, but White has a pleasant two-results position.

11...Qxb2
Taking the pawn is always worth checking, but White has far more than enough compensation.
12.Rb1 Qd4 13.Qe2±

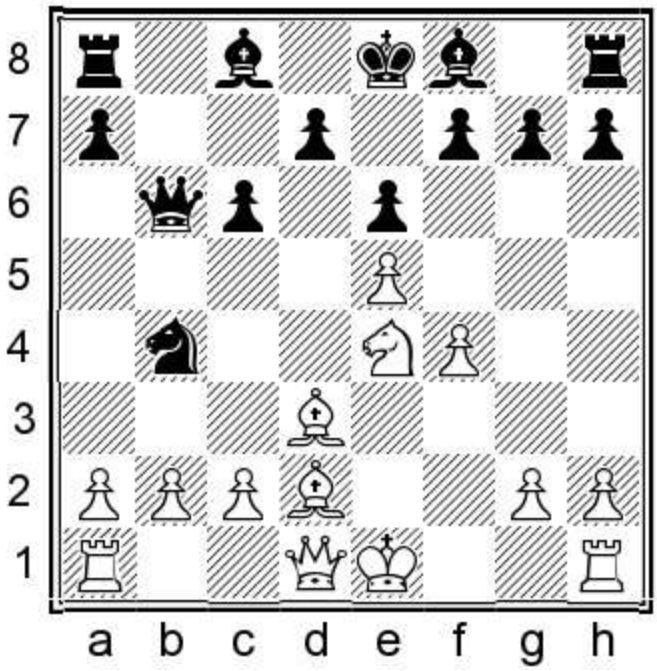



White's likely plan is c2-c3 followed by c3-c4. We have seen enough for our prep, but the following game is worth seeing in full, as it is high quality and great fun.
13...a5 14.c3 Qa7 15.c4 Nb4 16.Be3 Qc7 17.0-0 c5
Perhaps 17...Be7 was tougher, but Black is still struggling.
18.Bf2 Nxd3 19.Qxd3 Be7 20.Bh4!!
A flashy way to get our knight on its dream square.
20...Bxh4 21.Nd6† Ke7 22.f5
In addition to trying to mate the king, White also has Qe4 ideas.
22...Qc6 23.fxe6 fxe6

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24.Qd2!
White wishes his queen on the f-file, and f3 is covered, so it heads for f4.
24...Bf6 25.exf6† gxf6 26.Rxf6! Kxf6 27.Rd1!
Inhumanly precise; the knight is defended in advance to allow a queen-checking rampage.
27...Rf8 28.Qh6† Ke7 29.Qg5† Rf6 30.Qg7† Kd8 31.Qxf6† Kc7 32.Nb5†
1–0 Oates – Kopelevich, email 2004.
After 32...Kb7 White could win in many ways, but one efficient way is 33.Rd6 Qe4 34.Rxd7† Bxd7 35.Nd6†.



12.Qe2 Nxd3† 13.Qxd3 Qxb2
Black must grab the pawn, or else suffer under the usual bind for nothing.

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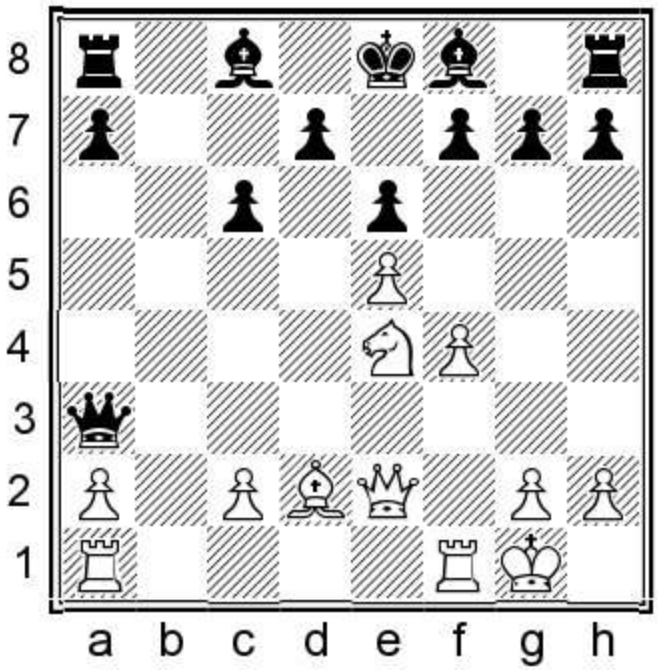
14.0-0 Qa3

Almost universally played.

14...c5 was tested in Mezera – D. Fischer, email 2016, when a promising forcing line is: 15.Qf3!?N 15...Bb7 16.Bc3 Qb5 17.Rab1 Bxe4 18.Qxe4 Qc6 19.Qxc6 dxc6 20.Rfd1± This last move, among other things, stops Black from castling long! White may be a weak doubled pawn down, but his rook activity means Black is facing an unpleasant struggle for a draw.

15.Qe2!±
Black's king faces long-term problems, so we want queens on the board.

Kotronias and Semkov mentioned only 15.Qb3, leading to equality.



15...Qb2
The only move to have been tried, but 4/4 for White is a convincing stat.

Instead 15...Ba6 16.c4± does not help Black at all. At some point the black king must castle kingside, but then f4-f5 is an instant attack, with Black unable to funnel pieces to defend his kingside. I will offer a sample line: 16...Be7 17.f5 Qb2 18.Rac1 Making sure ...Bxc4 is impossible. 18...Qd4† 19.Kh1 exf5 20.Rxf5 0-0 21.Qg4 c5 22.Bh6 g6 23.Nf6† Bxf6 24.Qxd4 cxd4 25.Rxf6+– White wins an exchange, and should win the ending.

16.Rad1
Whatever Black plays, White has a fearsome initiative.

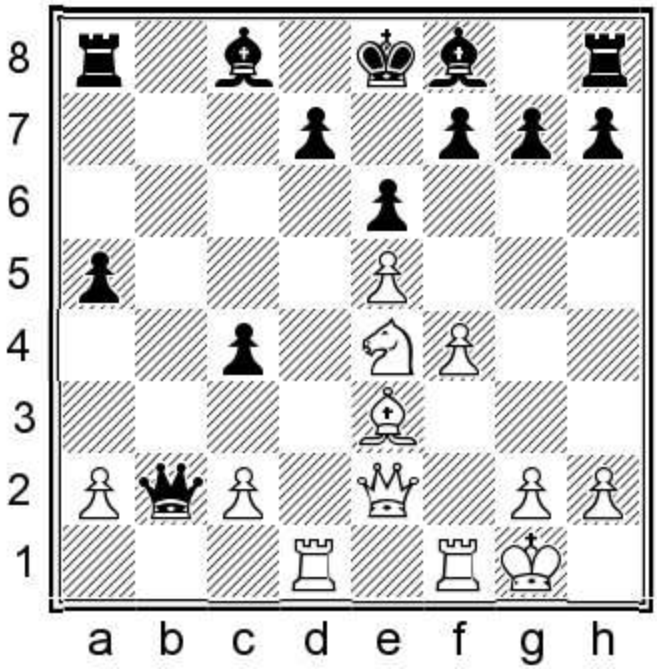
16...a5
Creating the threat of ...Ba6, c4 Qd4†, winning c4, but it's easily parried.

16...Qxa2?! 17.c4 Ba6 18.Rc1+– leaves Black two pawns up, but defenceless against the coming attack. For example, Podvoysky – Rychkov, email 2013, concluded: 18...Qb2 19.Kh1 Qd4 20.Rfd1 Bc5 21.Rc2! 1–0

16...Qxc2 is untested, and likely to remain so, as 17.f5! is close to winning. One point is: 17...exf5 18.Nf6†! gxf6 19.exf6† Qe4 (better is 19...Kd8 20.Ba5# at least losing in style) 20.Qf2+– Followed by Rfe1.

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17.Qd3 c5 18.Be3 c4 19.Qe2±



Black has tried to wriggle, but White follows the same general path: develop, then correctly time an f4-f5 advance. This plan's repeated success in various games is due to the black king's lack of a safe haven.

19...Qb7 20.Qf3 Ra6 21.Rb1 Qc6 22.f5!
Like clockwork.

22...exf5 23.Qxf5 Qg6
'Please exchange queens.'

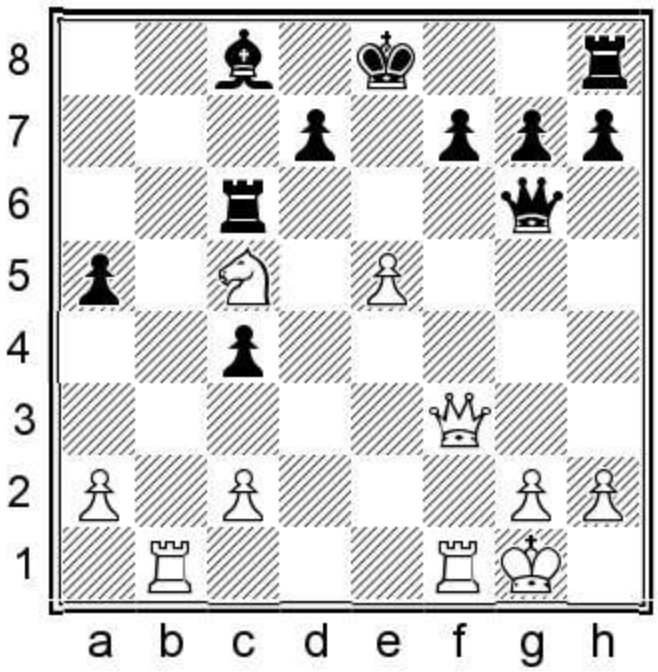
24.Qf3
'No thanks.'

24...Be7
Developing the bishop to b4 or a3 would meet the same reply.

25.Bc5!
Exchanging a key defender creates beautiful tactical opportunities.

25...Bxc5† 26.Nxc5 Rc6

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27.e6!
Blocking the black queen from the queenside leaves the rest of Black's pieces vulnerable. That includes the undefended rook on h8.

27...0-0
Black knows his opponent was not bluffing with 27.e6. After 27...fxe6 28.Nxd7!+– Black is routed after either recapture:

28...Bxd7 29.Rb8† Rc8 30.Rxc8† Bxc8 31.Qc6† Kd8 (or 31...Bd7 32.Qa8† wins the rook) 32.Qd6† Ke8 (32...Bd7 loses to everything, with the fastest mate being 33.Rd1 Qf7 34.Rb1) 33.Qc7! To delay mate, Black must lose all his pieces.

Or 28...Kxd7 29.Rfd1† Rd6 30.Rb7†! Bxb7 31.Qxb7† Ke8 32.Rxd6 and Black's position collapses.

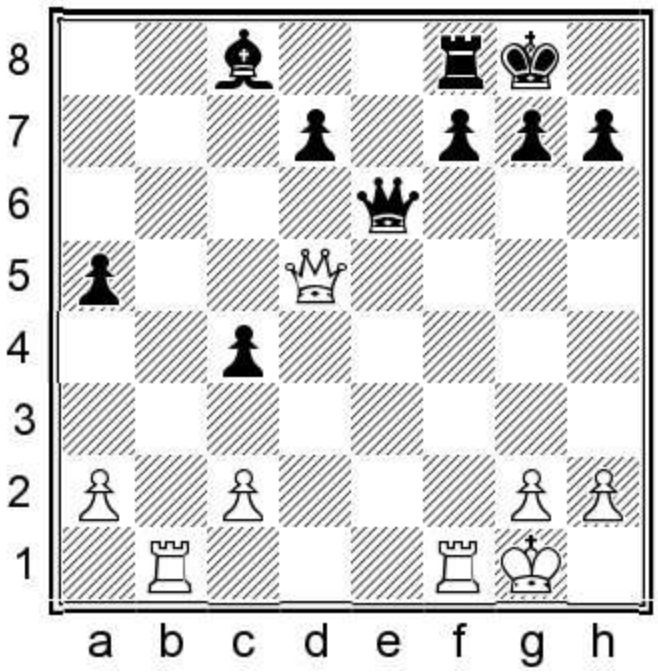
28.Qd5!
Even stronger than the also promising 28.Nxd7 Bxd7 29.exd7±.

28...Rxe6
Giving up the exchange to delay the end.

After 28...fxe6 29.Rxf8† Kxf8 30.Nxd7† Bxd7 31.Qxd7 mate is not far away.

29.Nxe6 Qxe6

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30.Qxa5
Exchanging queens was also good enough, but the game continuation is simple, as the passed a-pawn is decisive.

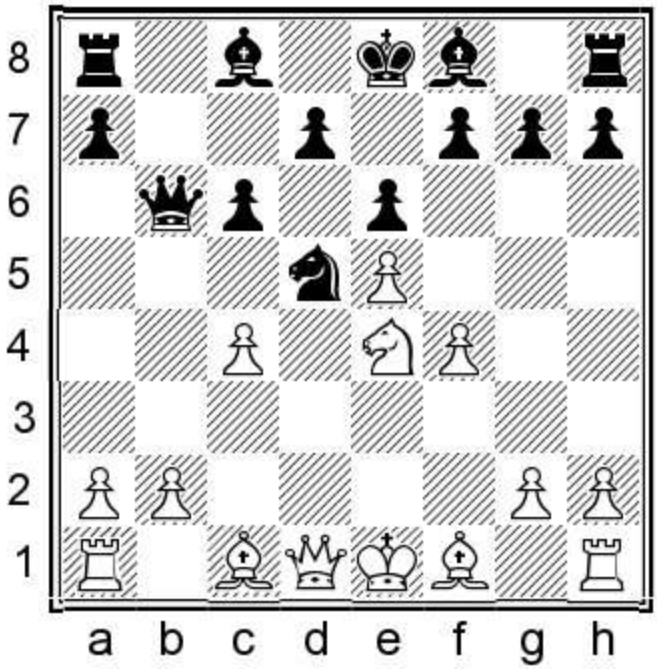
30...Qe3† 31.Rf2 d5 32.a4 Bd7 33.Qb4 Bf5 34.Re1 Qa7 35.Re7 Qd4 36.a5 g6 37.h3 Kg7 38.c3 Qd1† 39.Kh2 Qa1 40.Qc5 Qxc3 41.g4
It's another case where a correspondence player calculates a forcing line that a cautious OTB player might be nervous about.

Queening the pawn with 41.a6 keeps the white king well covered, but the game continuation shows that Black dies before White's newly-exposed king feels a chill.

41...Be4 42.Qc7
Black resigned as after 42...Bf3 43.Qf4 the cobbled-together defence breaks down.
1–0

D4) 9...Qb6 10.c4

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We need a further split: D41) 10...Ne3 and the main line D42) 10...Bb4†.

D41) 10...Ne3

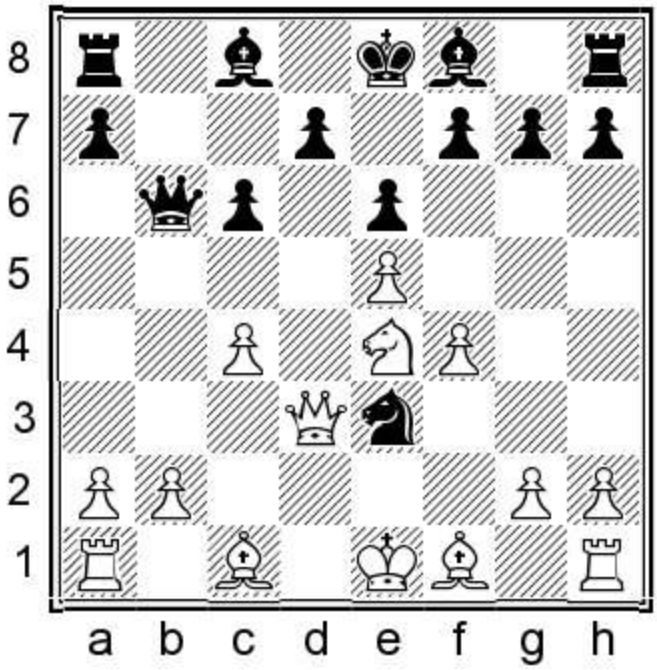
GAME 5

Sergey Glukhovtsev – Sergey Kruk
email 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Qc7 9.f4 Qb6 10.c4 Ne3
In correspondence chess this had been the main line for a few years, but the correct way for White has been found.

11.Qd3!
An important branching point.

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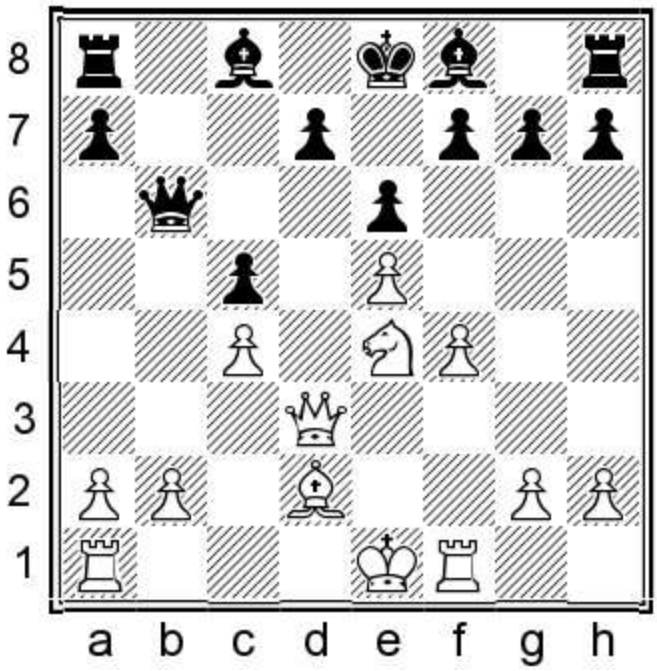


11...Nf5
One of two main options.

The other is 11...Bb4† see Game 6 below.

We should also consider two minor options:

11...Nxf1?!
This line is yet another illustration that if Black allows White to consolidate, then the hole on d6 will tell.
12.Rxf1 c5 13.Bd2!

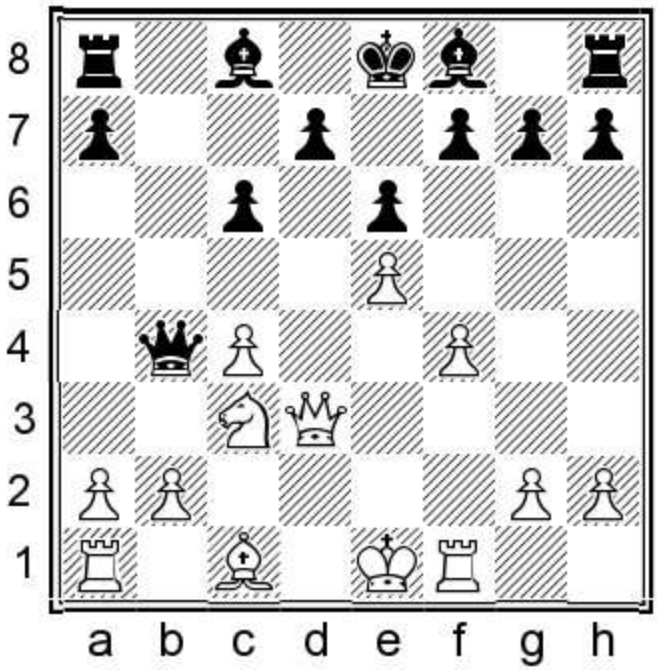


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13...Bb7

Correctly assessing that b2 is poisoned: 13...Qxb2? 14.Rb1 Qxa2 15.Nc3 Qa6 16.Nb5+– Black is routed after either 16...Qc6 17.Ba5 or 16...Kd8 17.f5!.
14.0-0-0±
In Karjakin – Nepomniachtchi, Moscow (rapid) 2010, White had the sort of bind we seek against the Four Knights.

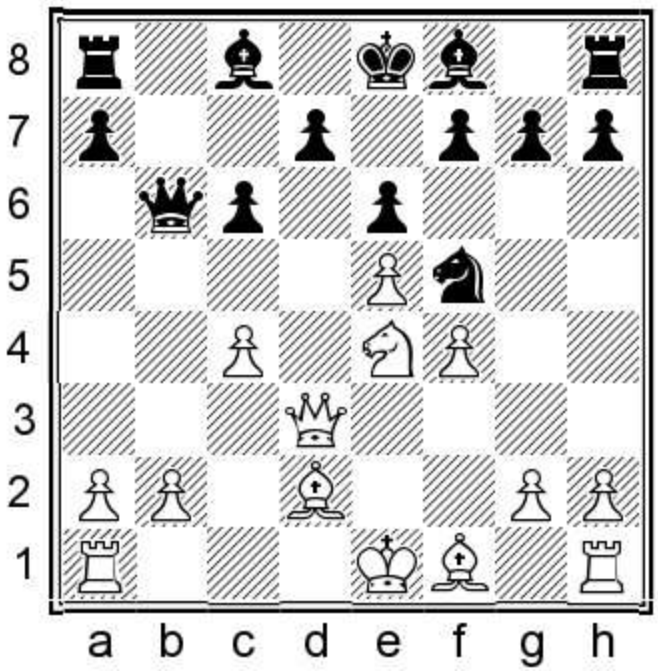
11...Qb4† 12.Nc3!?
Played just once, but far simpler than the usual move: 12.Kf2 Ng4† 13.Kg3 f5 14.exf6 Nxf6 15.Nxf6† gxf6 White should have an edge, but it's not so easy to play with a king wandering on g3.
12...Nxf1 13.Rxf1²



White's usual plan will be b2-b3, Bb2, 0-0-0 and take on d6 if Black pushes his d-pawn. For example:
13...Be7
A more testing line is: 13...Ba6 14.b3 d5 15.exd6 Bxd6 when White should vary from autopilot with: 16.Bd2! (instead 16.Bb2 0-0-0 forces a queen move) The point is 16...0-0-0 17.Ne4 Qa3 18.Nxd6† Rxd6 19.Qc3² when White has the better bishop.
14.b3 0-0 15.Bb2 a5 16.0-0-0±
Zeman – Gray, email 2010.

12.Bd2!
Rare, but active and best.
By far the most common move is 12.g4 but it's needlessly messy.

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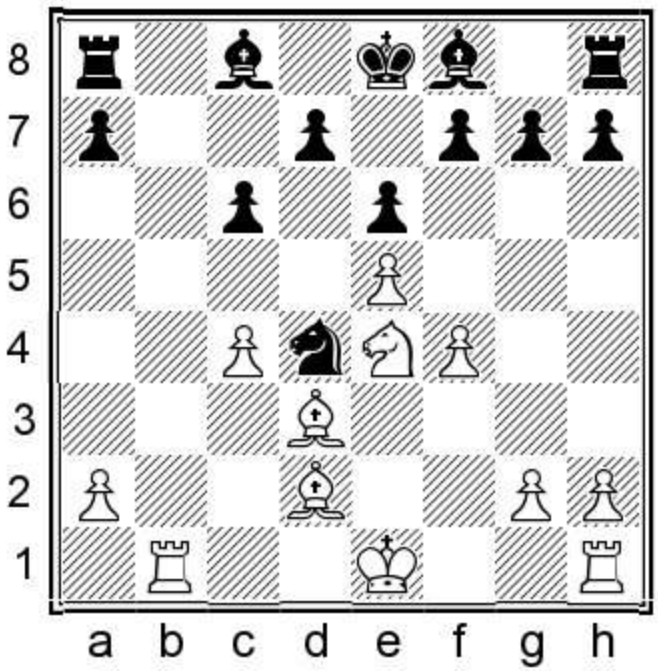
12...Qxb2
The critical test. It's the same old story: if White completes development with his bind intact, then Black will suffer.

For example: 12...Bb7 13.Bc3 c5 14.g4! Nd4 15.Bg2 Rd8 16.Bxd4 cxd4 17.0-0-0 d5 18.exd6 Bxd6 19.Nxd6† Rxd6 20.Bxb7 Qxb7 21.Rhe1² In Ljubicic – João, corr. 2012, to escape the bind, Black had to accept a position where White has the more mobile pawns and the safer king; Black must castle kingside soon, despite White's pawn storm being already on the way.

13.Rb1 Qd4
Universally played, and for good reason.
13...Qxa2?! is met most simply by 14.Be2± when White plans 0-0 followed by Ra1 and Rfb1; plus g2-g4 kicking the knight can also hurt. To save his queen, Black must grovel. For example: 14...Qa3 15.Bc3 Qe7 16.0-0 h5 17.Ra1+– Black is two pawns up, but he has no sensible moves.

14.Qxd4 Nxd4 15.Bd3±
White is a pawn down, but the difference in activity more than makes up for it.

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15...Be7
Since the bishop must take on d6 whenever the knight checks, it is tempting to leave the bishop on f8, but the h8-rook would not like that; bad positions lead to unpleasant choices.

15...Ba6N is untested but as good a try as any, using the a6-square before c4-c5 can seal the clamp forever. 16. Bc3 Nf5 17.Kf2± Black cannot break with ...f6, while pushing the d-pawn would hang g7 at the end. A sample line is: 17...h5 The immediate threat was g2-g4. 18.Rb3 Be7 19.Rd1 with the point that 19...0-0 20.Be2 hits two pawns.

15...h5 gains some kingside space, but allows a vicious central bind: 16.c5! Be7 17.Nd6† Bxd6 18.cxd6± Black had a nightmarish position in Glukhovtsev – Zlotkowski, email 2013.

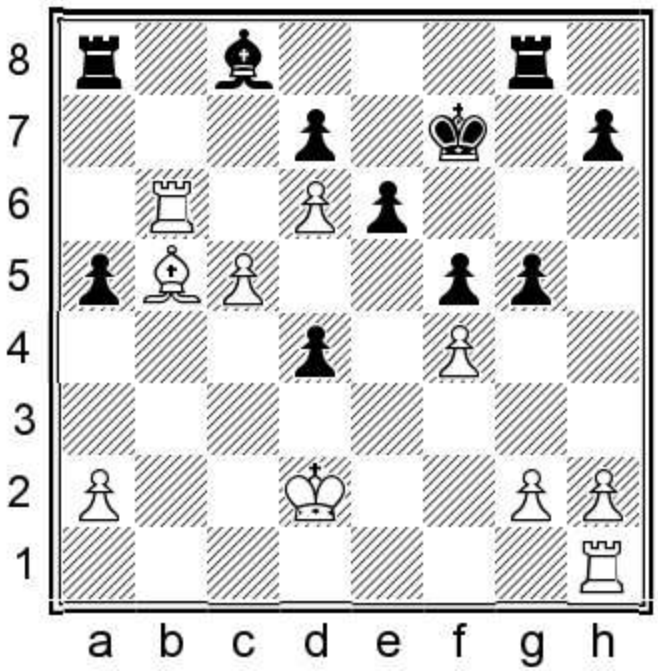
16.Bc3 c5
Slightly sturdier was 16...Nf5 when the simple 17.Kf2 covers e3 and thus prepares g2-g4. After 17...h5 18.c5± the bind should be fatal.

17.Nd6† Bxd6 18.exd6 f5
Now the c8-bishop will never emerge, but note that even after an exchange of light-squared bishops, Black is still doomed. For example: 18...Ba6 19.Bxd4 cxd4 20.Kd2 0-0 21.c5 Bxd3 22.Kxd3+– The positional point is the c8-bishop may be awful, but even with it gone, the cramping effect of the d6-pawn is still decisive.

19.Kd2 Kf7 20.Bxd4 cxd4 21.c5 a5 22.Rb6+–
The result is inevitable; you cannot play a sensible game of chess with a bishop frozen on c8.

22...Rg8 23.Bb5 g5
This may accelerate the end, but Black's situation was already hopeless.

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24.g4!
Pretty but not difficult; the theme is a Bc4 skewer.

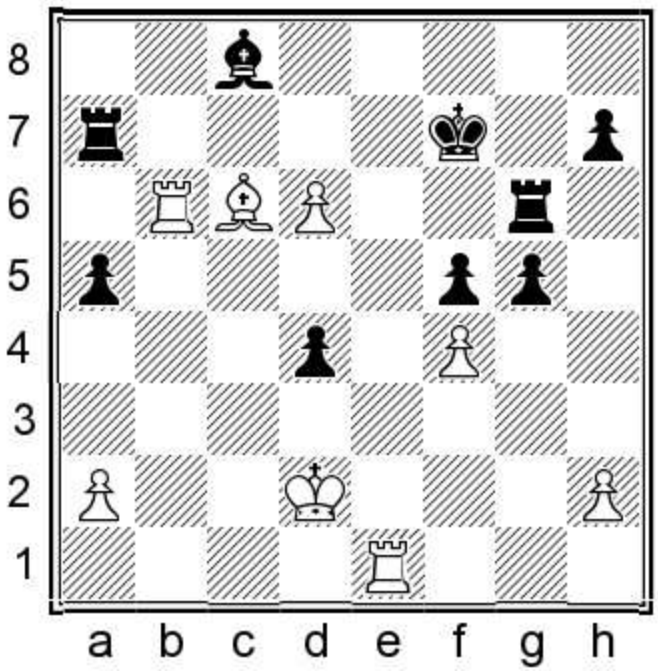
24...Rg6
As good or bad as any. For example: 24...fxg4 25.f5 exf5 26.Bc4† or 24...gxf4 25.gxf5.

25.c6
One of many winning paths.

The most direct was 25.gxf5 when Black has little choice in the following line: 25...exf5 26.Bc4† Kf6 27.Bd5 Ra7 28.Rb8 Ba6 29.Rf8† Kg7 30.Rf7† Kh6 31.Re1 With Ree7 next.

25...dxc6 26.Bxc6 Ra7 27.gxf5 exf5 28.Re1!
White's two rooks, bishop and pawn have enough firepower to overwhelm the defence.

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28...gxf4
Allowing one of the more obvious threats, but there was nothing better. For example: 28...Rh6 29.fxg5 Rxh2† 30.Kd3 f4 31.d7 Bxd7 32.Bd5† Black will lose lots of material, then get mated.

Or 28...Be6 29.fxg5 Rxg5 30.Rb8 Kf6 31.Re8 Bxa2 32.d7 and the pawn costs a rook.

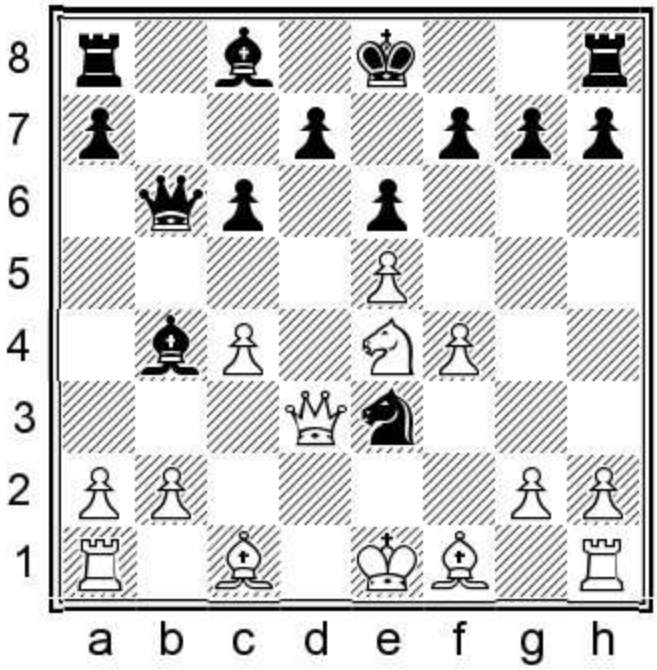
29.Be8† Kg8 30.Bxg6 hxg6 31.Rb8 Rd7 32.Rxc8† Kf7 33.Rc7
1–0

GAME 6

Ales Borstnik – Marcio De Oliveira
email 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Qc7 9.f4 Qb6 10.c4 Ne3 11. Qd3! Bb4†

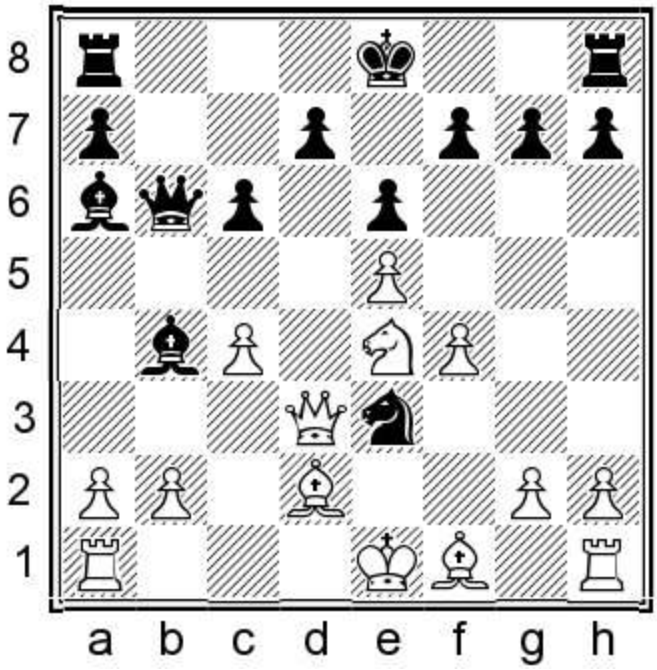
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12.Bd2 0-0
This is by far the most common move, with 12...Ba6 also well known. All the other options are rarely seen.

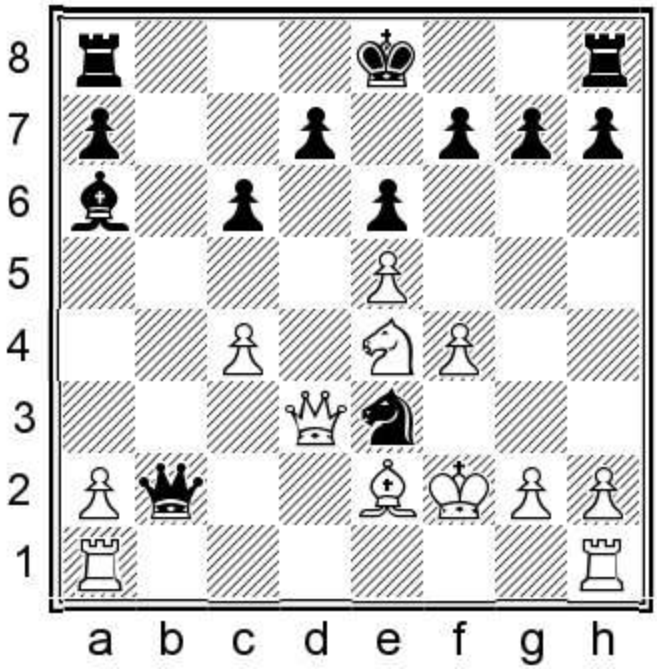
12...a5 13.c5 Bxd2† 14.Qxd2 Qb4 15.Qxb4 axb4 16.Kd2² Nogga – Folk Gilsanz, corr. 2013.

12...Ba6

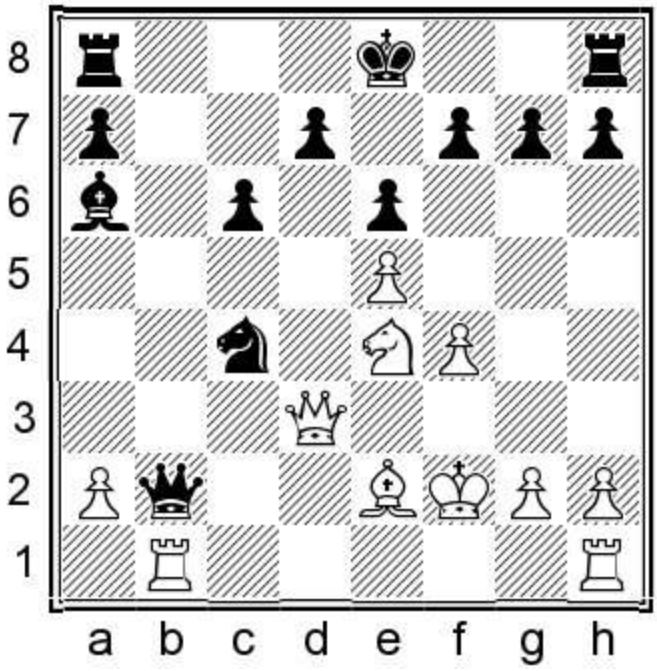


13.Bxb4!
Also sensible is 13.b3 but the text move is forcing and effective, so let's control the play.
13...Qxb4† 14.Kf2 Qxb2† 15.Be2

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15...Nxc4
Instead after 15...Nf5 16.Rab1 Qd4† 17.Qxd4 Nxd4 18.Bd3± White will soon have another version of the wonder knight against lousy bishop ending. For example 18...f6 19.Nc5 Bc8 20.Ke3 fxe5 21.fxe5 Nf5† 22.Bxf5 exf5 23.h4 was heading for a quick crush in Solodovnichenko – Abdulov, Ordu 2016.
16.Rab1!
The far more common 16.Rhd1 allows Black to wriggle with 16...Qb6†.

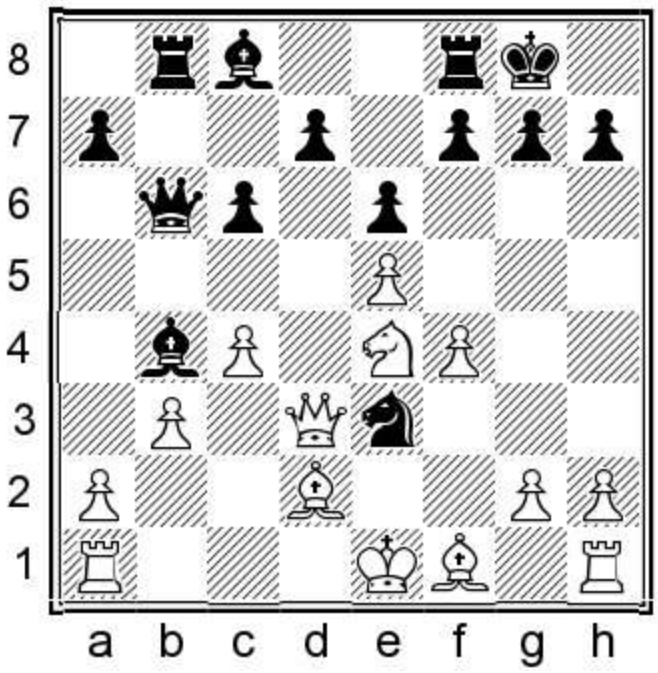


16...Nxe5
Black must give up the piece now.
16...Qxa2? 17.Rhd1! wins a piece even more favourably, due to the threats of Qxd7† or Ra1.
16...Qa3?? 17.Nd6†+–
17.fxe5 Qxe5 18.Qxa6 Qxe4 19.Rhd1 0-0 20.Bf3²

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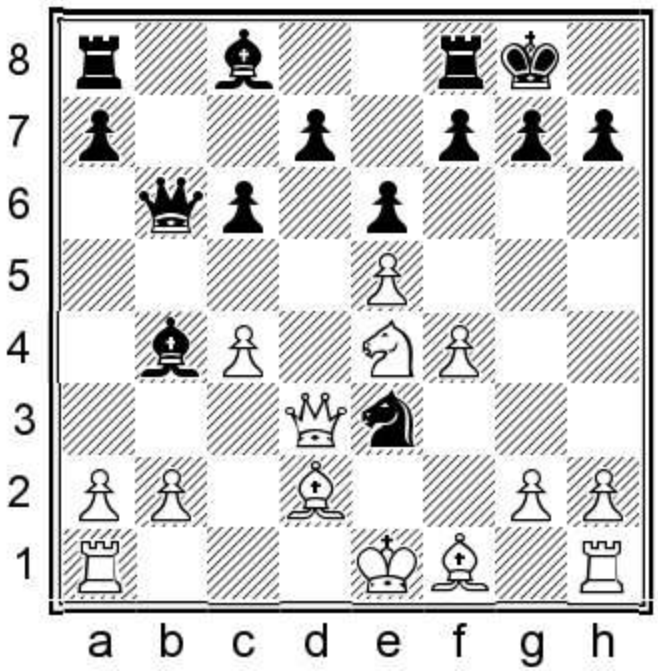
In R. O'Toole – Morcin, email 2013, Black had plenty of pawns, but no activity, so pawns will start dropping soon.

12...Rb8!?
A very rare move, but played by some distinguished players, so worthy of a brief look.
13.b3 0-0



14.c5!N
A strong but obvious novelty.
Less powerful but still promising was 14.Bxb4 Qxb4† 15.Ke2 Nf5 16.g4² as in Tringov – Hübner, Lucerne (ol) 1982.
14...Bxd2†
The only move, as 14...Bxc5?? loses a piece to 15.Nxc5 Nxf1 16.Na4 which is a common trick in the Four Knights.
15.Kxd2 Nxf1† 16.Rhxf1±
White's minor piece is dominant, while his king position is no cause for concern. For example:
16...Qa5† 17.Qc3 Rb4 18.Nd6 Ba6 19.Rf3
Ideas such as 19...Rd4† might look scary at first, but after 20.Kc2 it's obvious Black is just exchanging into a bad ending.

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13.Rc1
The direct threat is c4-c5, but we shall see the rook also has other ideas.

13...a5
Keeping the tension is Black's most testing line.
Instead 13...Nxf1 14.Rxf1 Be7 15.Bc3± is a typical bind, which Black must avoid at all costs.

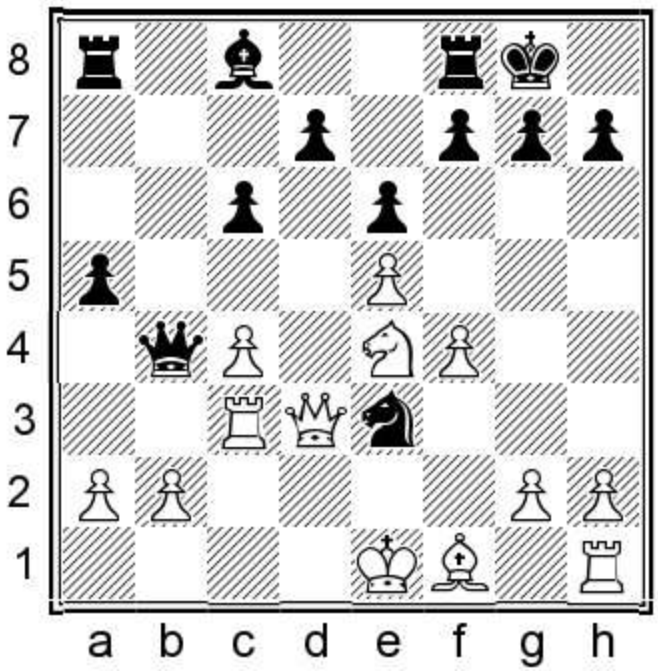
13...f5 14.exf6 Ng4 was highlighted by Kotronias and Semkov as a tricky try, while also showing the email game that solves it: 15.c5! (as K&S say, the hope is 15.fxg7?? Rxf4) 15...Qb8 16.Rc4 Bxd2† 17.Qxd2 Nxf6 18. Nd6± In Garus – Kienel, email 2012, Black was out of tricks, and facing the usual scary beast on d6.

14.Bxb4
Direct is best.

After 14.c5 Bxd2† 15.Qxd2 Black's 13th move created the resource 15...Qb4 when Black is OK; his bishop can emerge via a6, and both sides will have great knight outposts.

14...Qxb4† 15.Rc3!
This active move is the key idea; White has no need to defend b2.
Far more common, but less clear, is 15.Qd2 f5 16.Nd6 Rb8.

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15...Nxf1
This is almost always played.

15...Nf5?! can be met brutally: 16.g4 (White does not need an improvement, but 16.Qd2N± is easy and strong, planning Bd3 and 0-0. The positional point is that when Black retreats without inflicting damage, simple development is enough to secure a lasting advantage.) 16...Nh4 17.Ng5 Ng6 18.h4, Savchenko – Krasenkow, Helsingor 2008.

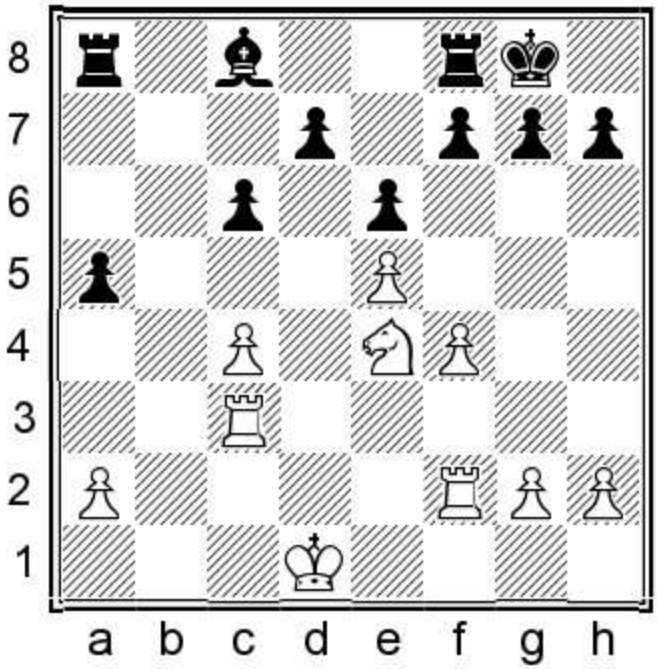
16.Rxf1 Qxb2
Black must take the pawn, as he needs something to compensate for his awful position.

17.Rf2 Qa1†
Once again Black has no choice; if the queens stay on, he is in danger of getting mated.

For example, 17...Qb4? 18.a3 Qb6 19.Rb3 Qd8 when 20.Ng5 or 20.Nf6† are both good enough to force Black to give up material to avoid mate.

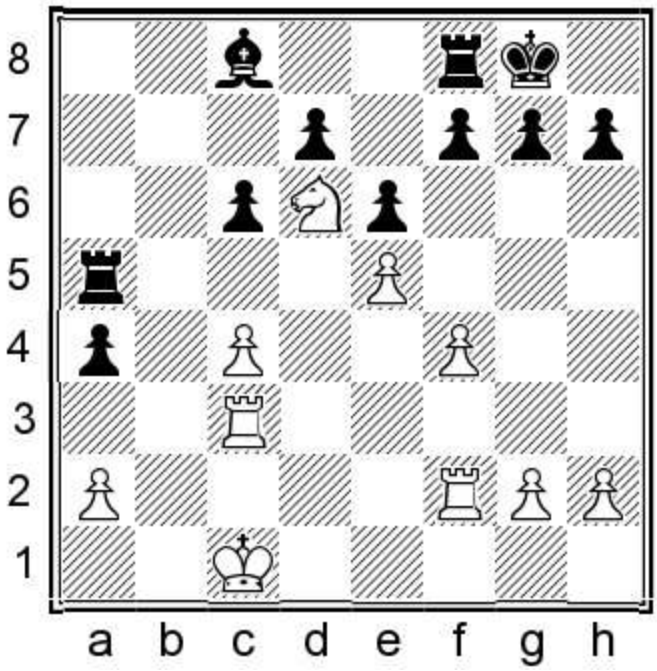
18.Qd1 Qxd1† 19.Kxd1±
Black is a pawn up, but let's compare the minor pieces: from d6 the knight will dominate the puny bishop.

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19...Ba6
Theoretically a developing move, but the bishop is just as bad on a6 as it is on c8.

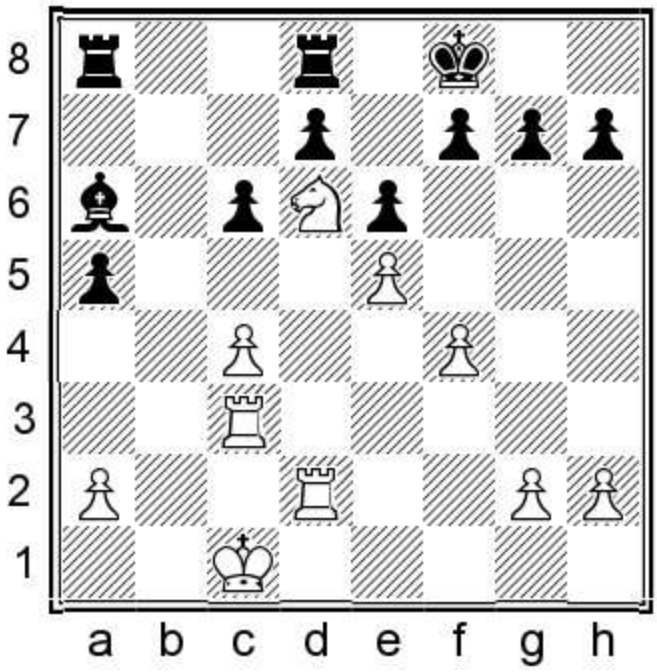
19...a4
Preparing ...Rb8 by preventing the response Rb3.
20.Kc1!±
Simple prophylaxis. This endgame is close to lost for Black.
20...Ra5
Or 20...Rb8 21.Rb2 shows the point of White's last move.
21.Nd6



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The minor pieces speak for themselves, but we can follow one game to see how play might go:
21...Ra8 22.Ra3 f6 23.Rb2 fxe5 24.Rb4 Rxf4 25.Rbxa4 Rxa4 26.Rxa4 Rf1† 27.Kc2 Rf2† 28.Kb3 Rxg2 29. Ra8+–
The extra piece and passed a-pawn eventually proved decisive in Babic – Drugda, corr. 2014, despite tough defence by Black.

20.Rd2 Rfd8 21.Kc1 Kf8 22.Nd6+–
A dream position against the Four Knights variation.




22...Rdb8 23.Ra3 Bc8
An ugly move, but Black had no choice. With admirable bluntness, White plays to open lines against the enemy king.

24.Rf2 g6 25.g4 Rb4 26.f5 exf5 27.gxf5 Kg8 28.f6!
The white rooks must wait a little longer for more open lines, as closing the net around the king is more important.

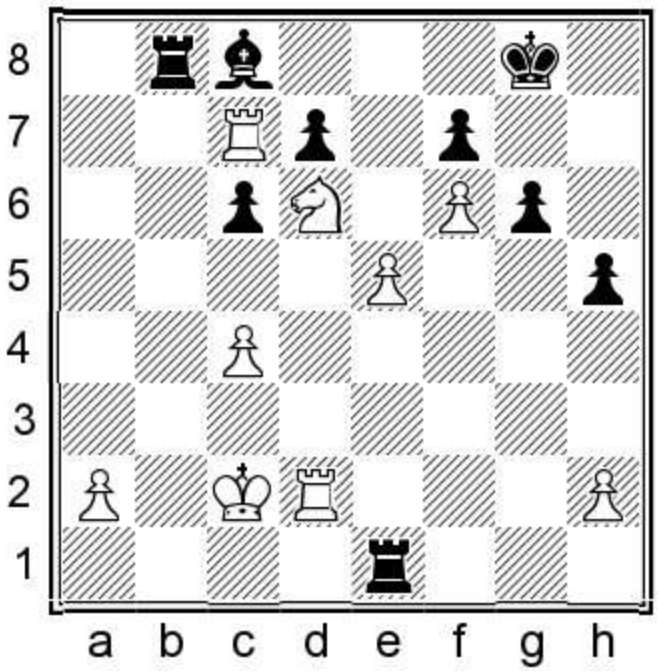
28...Rab8
Dropping the a5-pawn, but the only way Black can get any play.

Instead after 28...c5 29.Rb2 a4 30.Rxb4 cxb4 31.Rd3 Black must play waiting moves while White lifts his rook to d5 then c5 then c7 then...

29.Rxa5 Rb1† 30.Kd2 h5 31.Kc3 Bb7 32.Rd2 Rc1† 33.Kd3
Black's counterplay amounted to two checks.

33...Rb1 34.Kc2 Re1 35.Ra7 Bc8 36.Rc7
The poor bishop has been bullied all game.

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36...Ba6 37.Rxd7 Rxe5 38.Rxf7
Now we see the value of the f6-pawn.

38...Re6 39.Ra7 Rd8 40.c5
Understandably, Black had seen enough, as 40...Bf1 41.Rg7† Kf8 42.Rxg6 is easy and convincing.
1–0

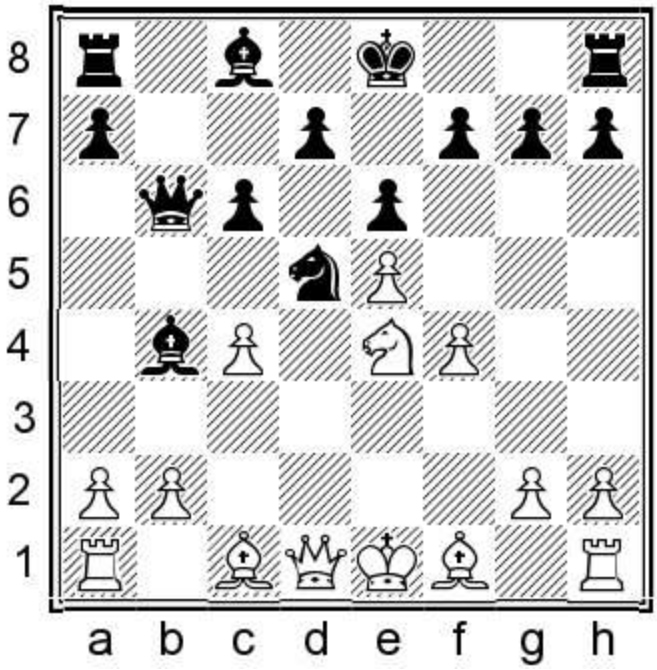
D42) 10...Bb4†

GAME 7

Santosh Gujrathi Vidit – Michal Krasenkow
Wijk aan Zee 2018

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Qc7 9.f4 Qb6 10.c4 Bb4†

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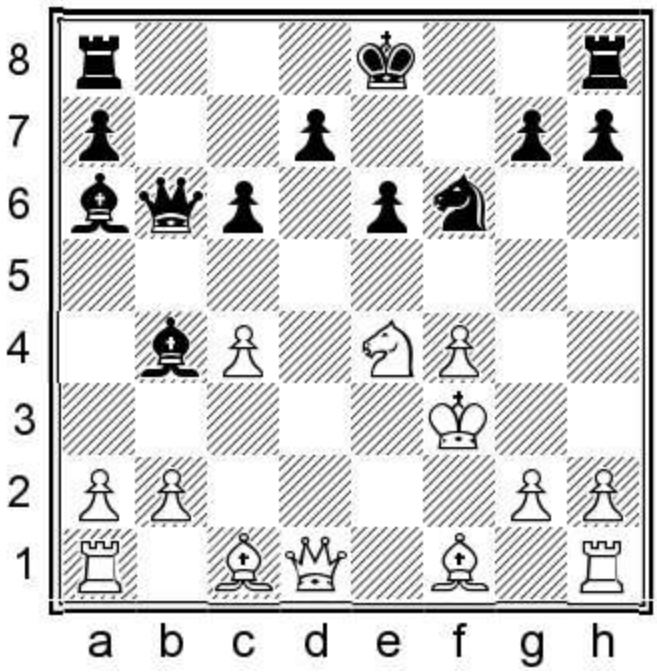
11.Ke2
This is essential. Any awkwardness in White's position is only temporary, as he can easily neaten up his king position. In contrast, Black's weaker pawn structure tends to be a game-long problem.

11.Bd2? blunders a pawn to 11...Qe3† 12.Qe2 Bxd2† 13.Nxd2 Qxe2†µ followed by ...Nxf4.

11...f5
The only respectable try.

11...Ba6?!
This used to be a main line, but then it was hit hard by a forcing line.
12.Kf3! f5
Black has no choice as 12...Ne7?? 13.a3 is fatal. For example: 13...Bc5 14.b4 Bd4 15.c5+–
13.exf6 Nxf6

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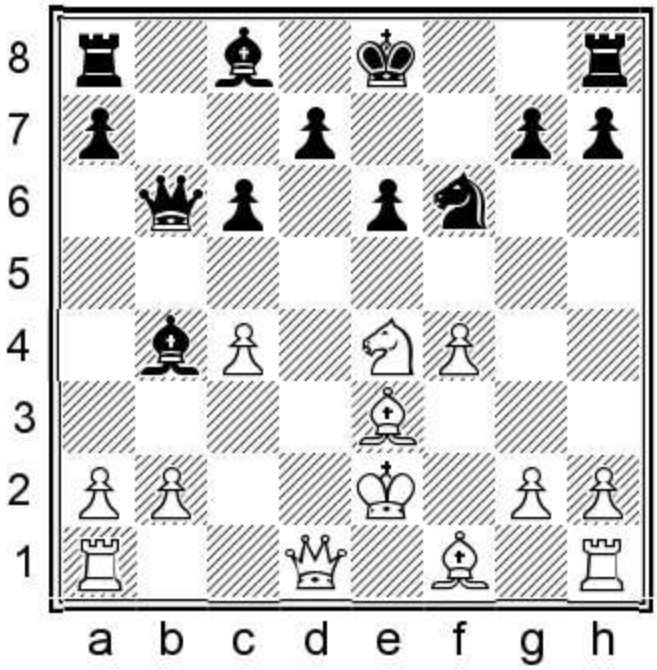
14.c5!
This is the punch that killed the line.
14...Qa5
What else?
14...Bxc5 15.Nxc5 Bxf1 16.Na4! Bxg2† 17.Kxg2± leaves Black a piece down for just two pawns.
15.Nd6† Ke7 16.Bxa6 Qxa6
Again the only chance.
16...Bxc5?? 17.Nb7 and 16...Qxc5?? 17.Nb7 both lose to the same resource.
17.Be3±
White is close to winning, with a beast of a knight on d6 and an insecure black king to harass; his score in the database is 7/8 and it should have been more. A key point is that the apparently active 17...Nd5?! is crushed by 18.Qd4!+– with the idea 18...Rhg8 19.f5!.

12.exf6
A forcing and effective line.

12.Nf2 is a common alternative.

12...Nxf6 13.Be3

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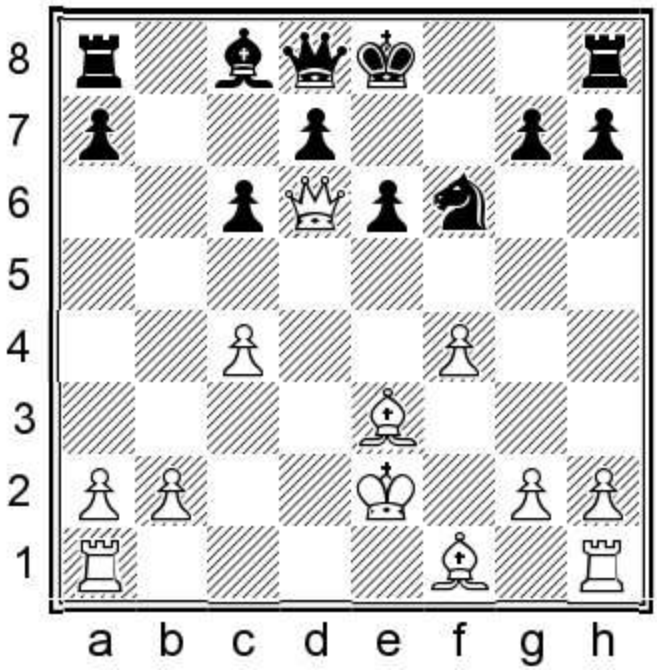


13...Qd8
One of two commonly played moves.

13...Qa5 is another important option which we will see in the next illustrative game.
13...Qc7 is rare. 14.Nxf6† gxf6 15.Kf2± is similar to the next game, though the queen is more passive on c7 than a5.

14.Nd6†
Of course this is the right path, rather than allowing Black's idea of 14.Nxf6†?! Qxf6.

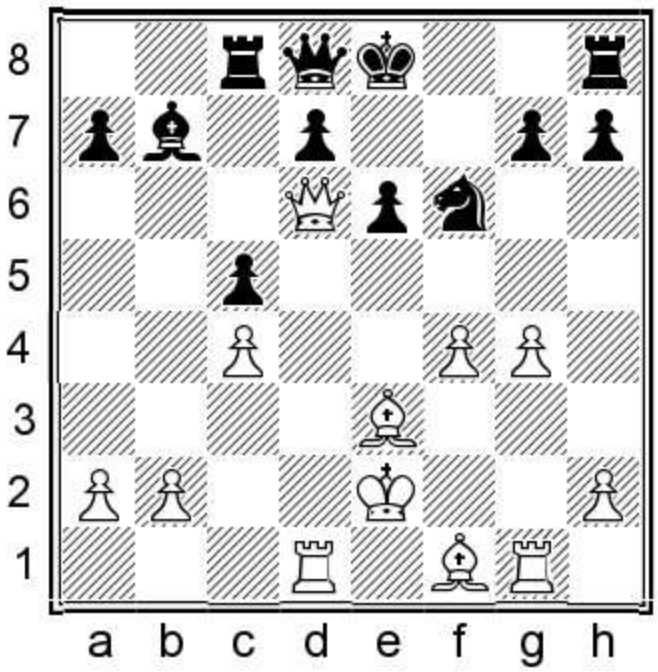
14...Bxd6 15.Qxd6



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15...Qe7?!
Krasenkow is a Four Knights expert, so his choice should be taken seriously, but the more common alternative seems stronger.

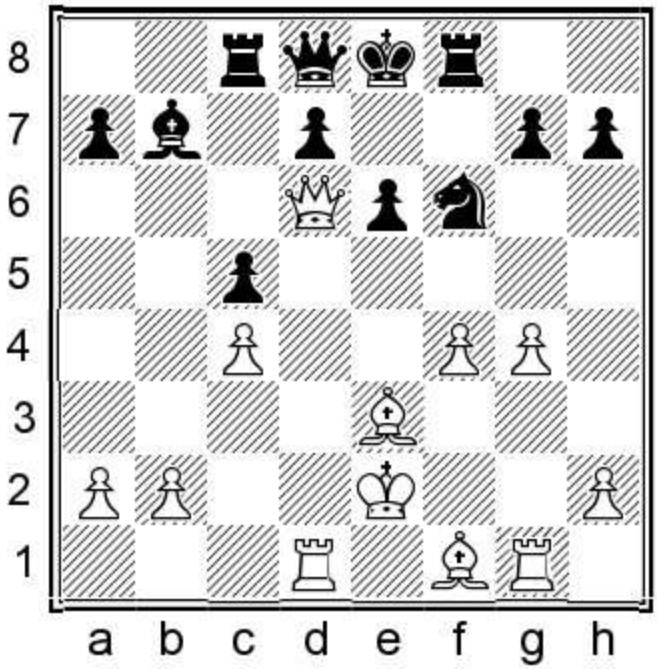
15...Bb7 16.Rd1
White's plan of development is Rg1 and g2-g4, gaining space and clearing a path for the f1-bishop; the white king is fine where it is.
16...Rc8
Preparing ...c6-c5 to free the bishop.
The same advance as a gambit is unconvincing: 16...c5 17.Qxc5 For example: 17...Be4 18.Ke1 Rc8 19.Qa3± Sanz Algarrada – Troia, email 2013.
17.g4
17.Rg1 transposes after 17...c5 18.g4.
Instead 17.c5 stops one of Black's plans, but allows another: 17...Ba6† 18.Kf3 Bxf1 19.Rhxf1 Nd5= As a general guideline, c4-c5 becomes an effective plan only after there is no black knight to settle on d5.
17...c5 18.Rg1



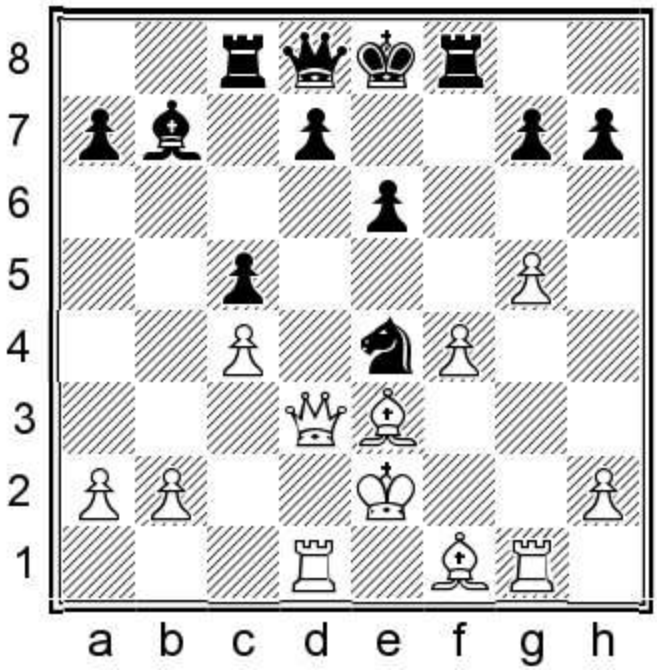

Black has many possible plans, so I would not suggest trying to anticipate and memorize every possible line. I will however give a few important lines.

a) 18...Rf8
A rare move, but chosen in a high-class encounter, so worth a look:

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19.g5!?N
I like recommending a consistent plan, unless there is good reason to vary.
19.f5÷ was interesting but messy in Karjakin – Yu Yangyi, Baku 2015.
The white king could become exposed if we go pawn-grabbing, so avoid 19.Bxc5? when 19...Rf7 renews the threat of ...Ne4. And following 20.Bxa7 Rxc4³ the previously passive rook on c8 is now hyperactive.
19...Ne4
The critical test.
19...Nh5 20.Bh3 Qc7 21.Rgf1 Qxd6 22.Rxd6² gives White a pleasant endgame edge.
20.Qd3

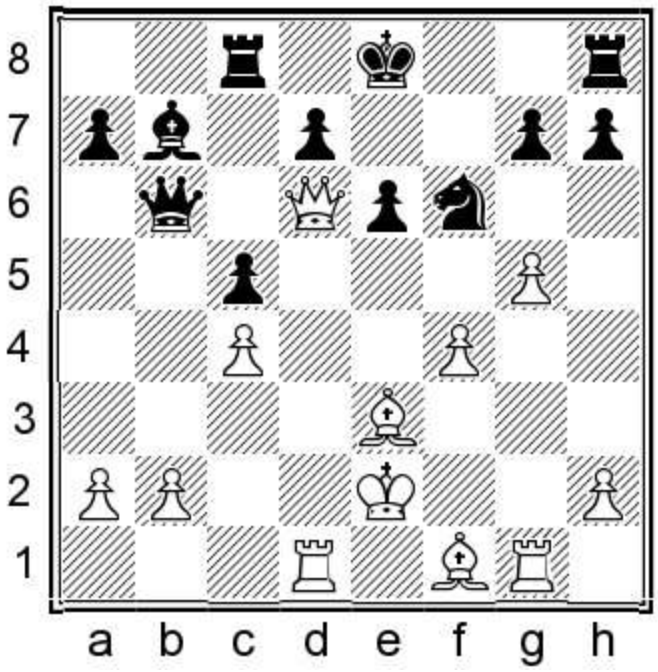


20...Rc7!
Preparing a defence to White's idea of Bg2.

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Instead 20...Qe7?! 21.Bg2 d5 22.Bxe4 dxe4 23.Qc3± leaves Black with a deadened bishop and a weak structure.
21.Bg2!? Qa8 22.Rde1 Ke7 23.b3!?²
A generally useful little move; White retains some pressure. For example: 23...Nd6?? 24.Rd1+– wins, with the point 24...Nf5 25.Bxc5†.

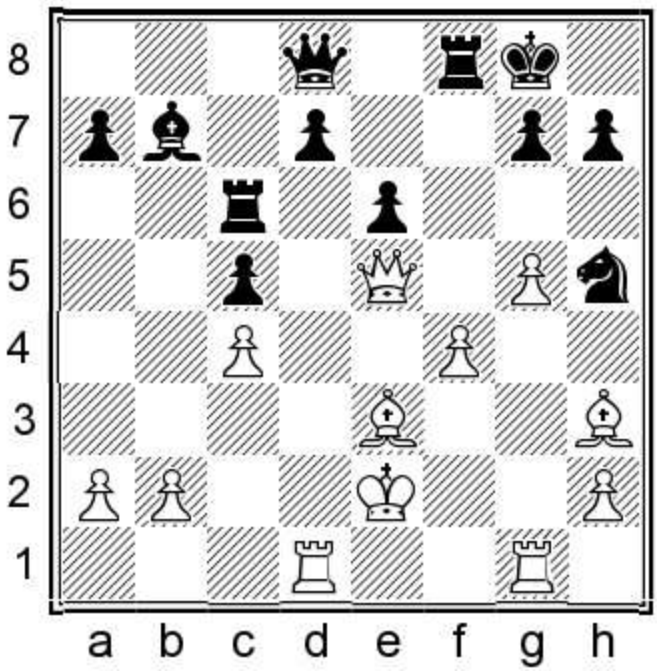
b) 18...Qb6 19.g5
White is happy to exchange queens, just not on b6 when Black can recapture with ...axb6.




19...Qxd6
Also pleasant for White is 19...Nd5 20.Qxb6 Nxb6 21.b3² as in Martin Sanchez – Soltau, email 2013; the hanging knight meant Black could not recapture with the a7-pawn.
20.Rxd6
The bishop pair should give White a edge. For example:
20...Ne4 21.Rd3 d5 22.Ra3²

c) 18...Rc6
Forcing, and the usual choice; this is one line White certainly should remember.
19.Qe5 0-0 20.g5 Nh5 21.Bh3!
Threatening Bg4 or the less obvious g5-g6, which is a common theme.
The immediate 21.g6? fails to 21...Rf5µ.

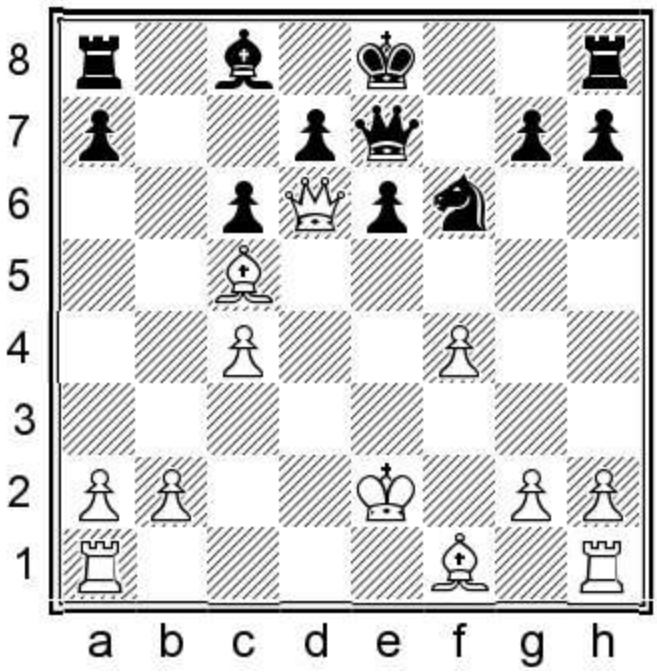
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21...d6!
This excellent move has been played in all four games in my database, which tells you they were all correspondence games.
Instead 21...Qc7?! allows White to show his idea with 22.g6 when the g1-rook springs to life.
22.Bxe6†!
Instead 22.Qxe6† Kh8 23.Rgf1 may look tempting, but Black has irritating counterplay after: 23...Rb6 24.b3 Ra6÷
The following line leaves Black little choice along the way:
22...Kh8 23.Qc3 Nxf4† 24.Bxf4 Rxf4 25.Rdf1! Re4† 26.Kd1 Rxe6 27.Rf7²
Recovering the sacced minor piece, leading to a major-piece ending where White has greater activity. My engine and I had this line ready, then Kotronias & Semkov published their book first, with exactly the same line; such things happen in forcing lines.

16.Bc5

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16...Qf7?
Keeping the queens on and threatening ...Ne4, but White has superb resources in the middlegame.

The endgame after 16...Qxd6 17.Bxd6 is grim for Black. For example: 17...Ne4 18.Ba3 (18.Be5!? is equally good) 18...d5 19.Ke3 a5 20.Rc1± In Martin Gonzalez – Li Zunian, Biel 1985, White had the bishop pair, the initiative and an active king.

17.Ke3
The funny thing is that any king move that covers ...Ne4 is good enough. So 17.Kd3 or 17.Kf3 are both winning.

17...g5?!
This does not work, but the desperation is justified.

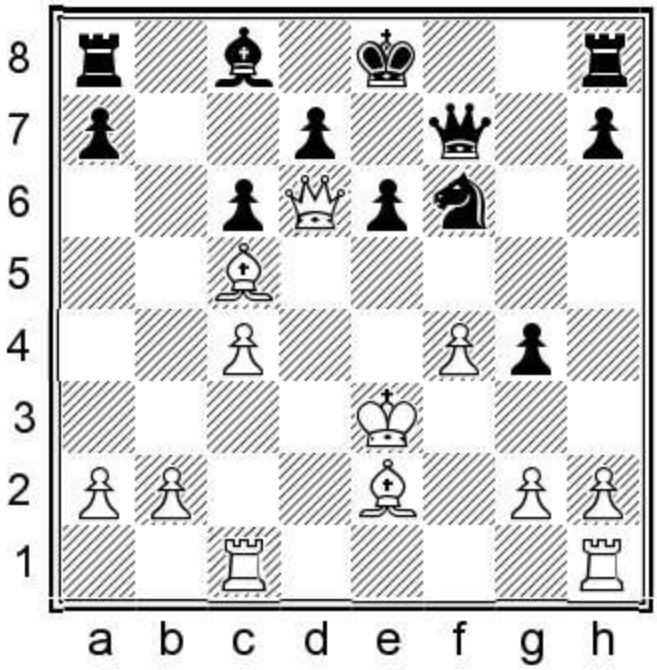
17...Ng4† achieves nothing after 18.Kd2 Qf6 19.Kc2+– when White can simply complete development with a crushing bind.

18.Be2
Logical and effective, but also strong was 18.fxg5 Ng4† 19.Kd2 Nf2 20.Bd3! with the idea of 20...Nxh1 21. Rxh1 then Rf1, when Black is finished.

18...g4
Now the advance of the g-pawn has achieved nothing other than weakening Black's kingside, but instead after 18...gxf4† 19.Qxf4 the open f-file helps White.

19.Rac1+–

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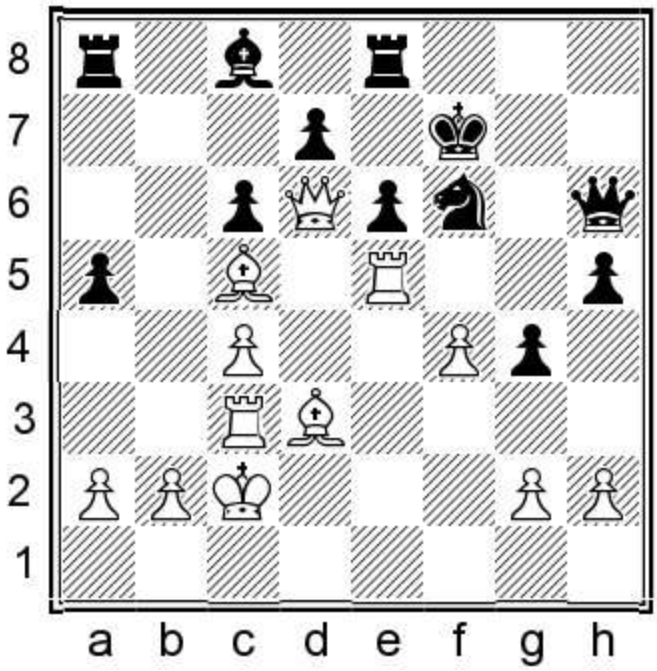


White simply needs to shuffle his pieces towards the exposed black king; it takes a few moves, but there is no rush as Black lacks any counterplay.

19...h5 20.Rc3 Qg7 21.Bd3 Kf7 22.Kd2 Re8 23.Re1 Qh6 24.Kc2
Taking his time.

The immediate 24.Re5 was possible, as 24...Qxf4† 25.Be3 Qxh2 loses to the same tactic we shall see in a moment.

24...a5 25.Re5!



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25...Nh7

Taking the pawn loses the queen: 25...Qxf4? 26.Be3 Qxh2 27.Bg6†! Kxg6 28.Rg5†

26.Rf5† Kg8 27.Qe5
Black's position is collapsing; it's notable that his c8-bishop and a8-rook never moved – the frozen bishop in particular is a sign of a Four Knights gone very wrong for Black.
The game was a disaster for Black, so 15...Qe7 is unlikely to become popular. The critical line is 15...Bb7, but with precise play White keeps the better chances.
1–0

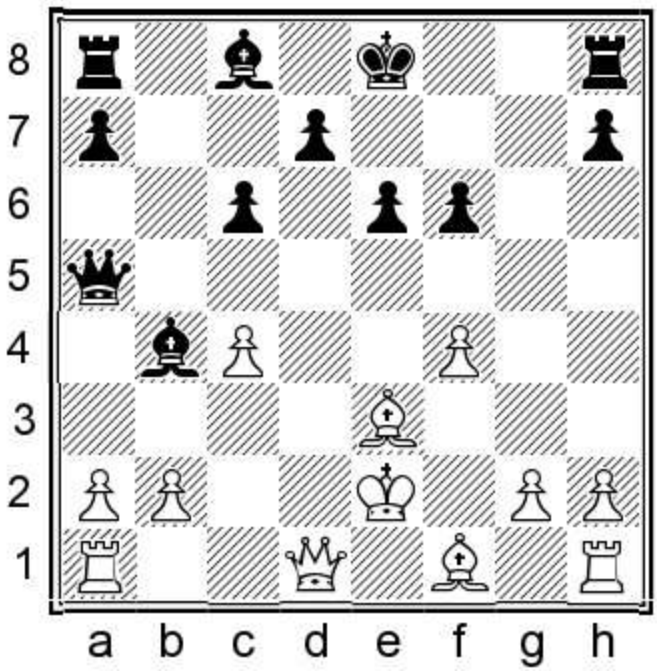
GAME 8

Juergen Buecker – Andrey Sheretyuk
Correspondence 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4 Qc7 9.f4 Qb6 10.c4 Bb4† 11. Ke2 f5 12.exf6 Nxf6 13.Be3 Qa5 14.Nxf6†
Naturally we take on f6 when the black queen cannot recapture.

Instead 14.Nd6†?! Ke7 15.Nxc8† Raxc8 helps Black to develop, with bothering his king at all; as we shall see below, Black often voluntarily places his king on e7.

14...gxf6



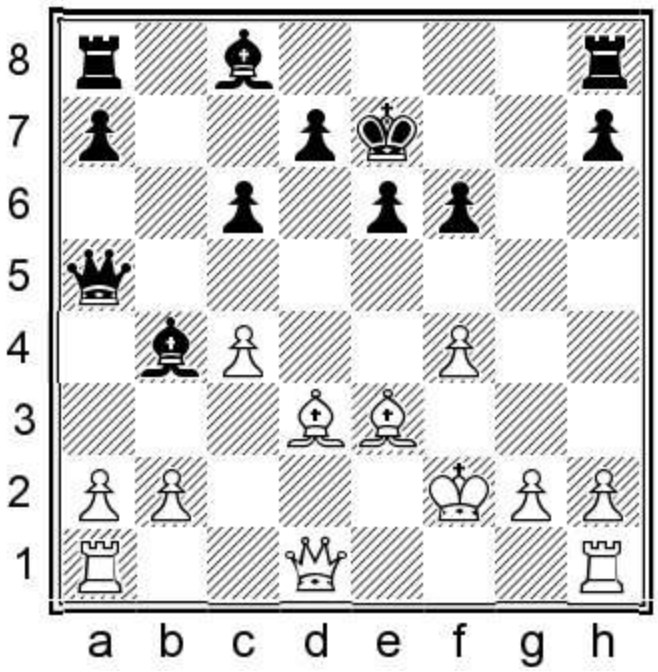

15.Kf2
Making way for the f1-bishop.

Instead 15.a3 has scored well, because Black has usually retreated his bishop, but I believe the correct response is: 15...Qh5†! 16.Kf2 Qxd1 17.Rxd1 Be7 White might have an endgame edge, but it's tiny. The a2-a3 advance means Black might find counterplay along the b-file, now that b2-b3 is not a solid roadblock.

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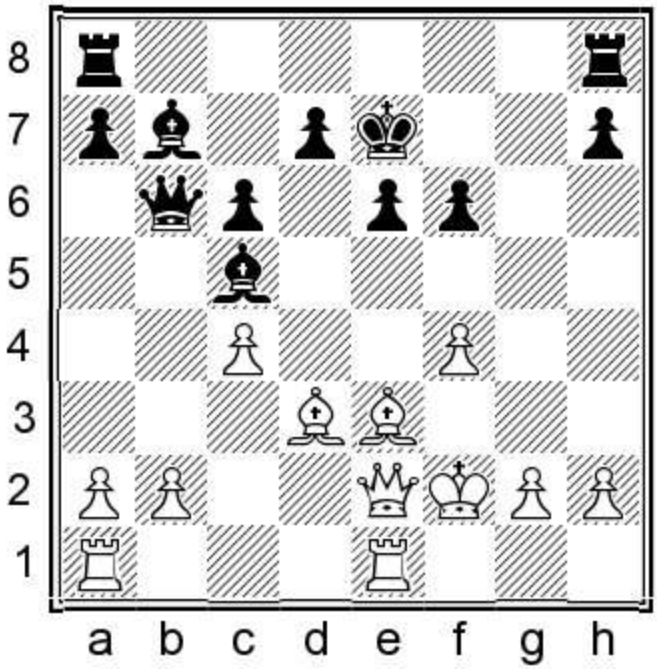
15...0-0
The most common choice, but Black can also choose to keep his king in the middle:

15...Ke7 16.Bd3²



Both sides often have several decent options on each move, so this is a position to start playing. In general, White should probe while keeping the queens on, as the black king is not secure. Having said that, White may also have better prospects in some endings, as Black's isolated rook pawns can be targets.
16...Bb7
Far from the only move.
16...Bc5 17.Re1 Qb6 18.Rb1 Bb7?! (Instead Black needed to play 18...h5² to prevent the move White plays in the game.) 19.Qh5! The queen is too strong on this square. 19...Bxe3† 20.Rxe3 Qd4 21.g3± In W. Watson – A. Jones, Eastbourne 1990, White has played the last required defensive move. The plan now is Be2 and Rd1, against which there is no effective defence.
17.Qe2 Bc5 18.Rhe1 Qb6

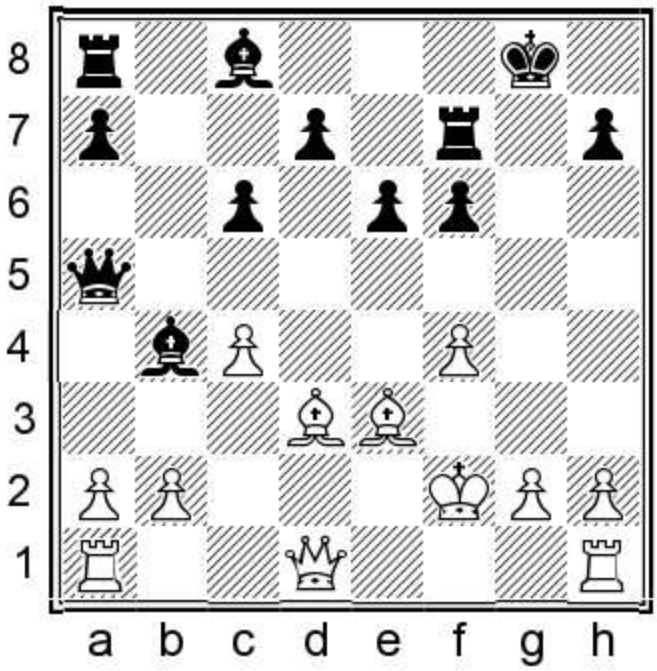
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19.Bxc5†
Keeping the queens on, though Mekhitarian mentioned that White has an edge after: 19.Rad1 Bxe3† 20.Qxe3 Qxe3† 21.Rxe3[2]
19...Qxc5† 20.Kf1 h5 21.Rad1
In Mekhitarian – Choma, Rio de Janeiro 2016, the position was not clear, but White's practical chances are better; Black is always one slip away from disaster, which is what happened in the game.

16.Bd3
One of White's ideas is Qc2, hitting h7 while also preparing c4-c5 enclosing the b4-bishop.

16...Rf7
Almost universally played.



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17.a3
The most direct of many options, preparing to gain space on the queenside while allowing ideal development with Re1.

Now that h7 is covered, 17.Qc2 can be comfortably met with 17...Bc5.

17...Bc5
A tough decision; by going to c5 Black provokes the rook to an excellent square on e3, when the black king is rather bare.

But instead 17...Bf8 is rather passive, although the black king will be grateful for the help. White has many interesting tries, with 18.Qf3!? remaining flexible with our rooks and pawns.

18.Re1 Bxe3†
Once again Black has various moves, but no equalizer.

18...Rg7 19.b4 Bxe3† 20.Rxe3 Qc7 21.g3 is similar to the game. Let's follow a few more moves of a high-class correspondence game. 21...d6 22.Be2 Re7 23.Bg4 Bd7 24.Qe2 Rae8 25.Bh5 Rd8 26.Rd1 White had continuing pressure in Moll – Bennborn, email 2009, and Black could not hold the game.

Another option is 18...d5 19.b4 Bxe3† 20.Rxe3 with a similar verdict; White is pressing.

19.Rxe3 Rg7 20.Qc2 Qc7!?
A tricky move, trying to provoke White into immediate action.

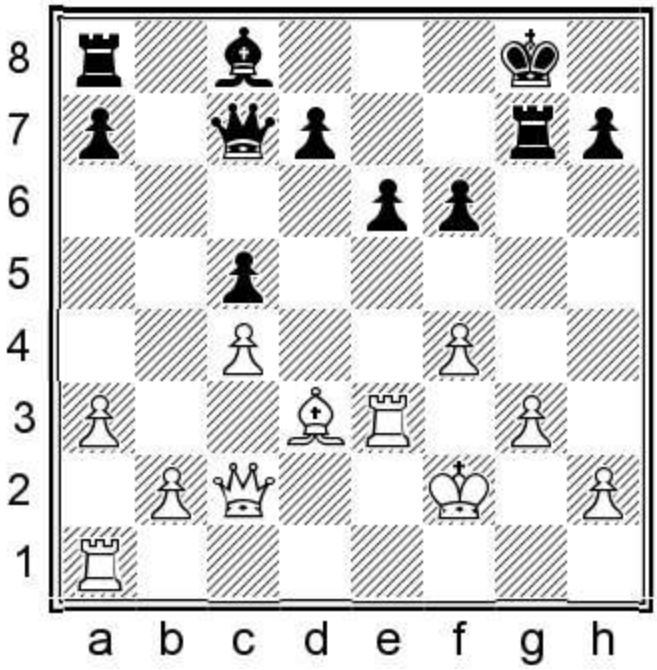
I suspect most humans would have chosen 20...Qh5 when Black remains under pressure after 21.Kg1.

21.g3
White is happy to keep the style of the position unchanged.

The line White rejected was: 21.Bxh7† Kh8 (of course not 21...Rxh7?? 22.Qg6† winning at once) 22.Rh3 Qxf4† 23.Kg1 White may well still be better, but Black gains some activity. For example: 23...Qd4† 24.Kh1 Rb8 25.Rd1 Qe5

21...c5
I will not annotate the rest of the game in great depth, as we are well past opening preparation.

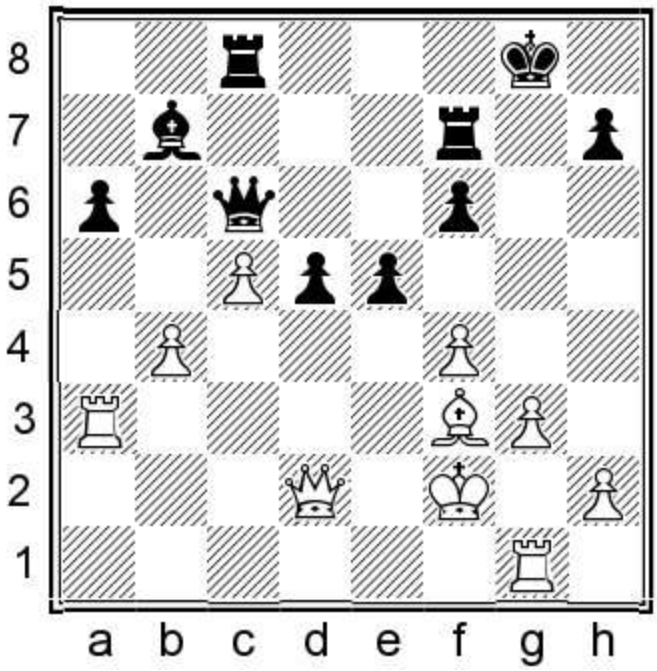
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22.Qc3 Rf7 23.Be2 Bb7 24.Rd1 Raf8 25.Qd2 Rb8 26.b4 cxb4 27.axb4 Qc6 28.Rg1
It certainly does not feel as though White is making progress, but Black's problems are not over yet.

28...Rc8
This feels like a good moment for 28...d5 although White has various testing responses, including: 29.f5!?

29.Ra3 a6 30.c5 e5 31.Bf3 d5



32.Rd1!
Provoking the pawns onto light squares, where they are easily blockaded.

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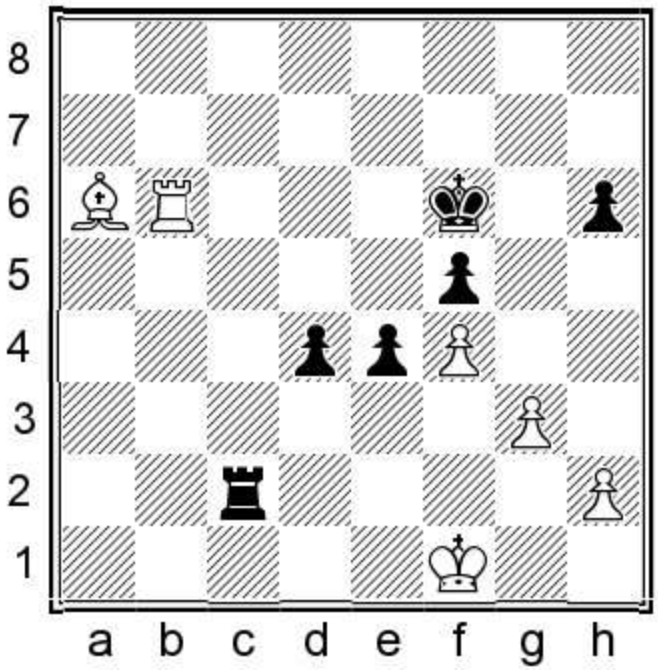
Instead 32.cxd6?! allows Black to escape after: 32...Qb6†=

32...e4 33.Be2 Re7 34.Qd4 f5 35.Kg2 Qg6 36.Rc1 h6 37.b5 axb5 38.Bxb5 Qg7!
A fine cold-blooded move; now the c-pawn will cost Black a piece, but every other move was even worse.

39.Qxg7† Kxg7 40.c6 Ba8 41.c7 Bb7 42.Ra7 Rcxc7 43.Rxc7 Rxc7 44.Ba6 Kf6 45.Rxb7±
Black's connected passed pawns are a fine resource, but they don't quite match a bishop, at least not without the possibility of time trouble or tactical blunders to help them. With all White's pawns on the same side of the board, it's not yet a clear win, but it's a tough defensive task.

45...Rc2† 46.Kf1
Instead 46.Kh3 looks tempting to me, but after 46...d4 47.Rd7 d3 it's still tough to see a winning plan, as the endgame with rook and three versus rook and two feels drawish.

46...d4 47.Rb6†




47...Kf7?
Making it easy for White.

47...Kg7 would have challenged White to demonstrate a winning plan; it's not obvious to me that there is one.

48.Rxh6+– d3 49.Ke1
The only winning move, but not so tough to spot.

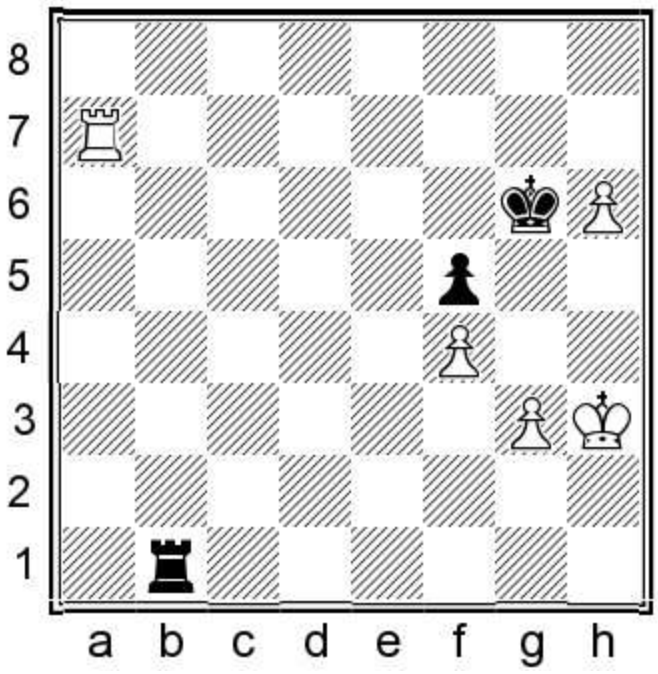
49...Ke7 50.h4 Rg2 51.Rg6 Re2† 52.Kd1 e3 53.Rc6 Rg2 54.Bxd3 Rd2† 55.Ke1 Rxd3 56.Ke2 Rd2†
The pawn was dropping anyway, after say 56...Ra3 57.Rc5 Kf6 58.Re5.

57.Kxe3 Rg2 58.Kf3 Rh2
The ending is hopeless; drawing a rook ending two pawns down requires there to be something badly wrong with the pawns, and that's not the case here.

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59.Rc1 Kf7 60.Re1 Ra2 61.Re2 Ra6 62.Re5 Kg6 63.h5† Kf6 64.Kg2 Ra2† 65.Kh3 Rb2 66.Re8 Kg7 67.Re7†

Kf6 68.Ra7 Rb1 69.h6 Kg6



70.h7
Good enough, but every OTB player would have gone for 70.Ra6† Kh7 71.Kh4, avoiding the need to calculate any variations.

70...Rb8
The line White had to be prepared for was 70...Rh1† 71.Kg2 Rxh7 72.Rxh7 Kxh7 but the pawn ending is of course winning after: 73.Kf3 Kg6 74.Ke3 Kf6 75.Kd4 Ke6 76.Kc5+–

71.g4 Rb3† 72.Kh4 Rb8 73.gxf5†
1–0

Conclusion

The Four Knights tabiya is reached after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Nxc6!? bxc6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Ne4. In this position White has already made major gains – a beautiful knight and a cramping e5-pawn hitting a hole on d6 – so the onus is on Black to try to shake off the bind.

A) 8...Bb7!? used to be trendy until it was discovered that simply 9.Be2! and then castling gives White a pleasant edge. This illustrates the point made above – if nothing dramatic happens to change the position after move 8, then White is happy.

B) 8...f5 is another line whose popularity has faded. After 9.exf6 Nxf6 10.Nd6† Bxd6 11.Qxd6 many games have been played, but White's edge, with the bishop pair and better structure, is well established.

C) 8...Qa5† is met most simply by 9.c3 when White has better chances after both Black's main options, 9...Ba6 and 9...f5. In both lines, Black tends to have the weaker king, so it is generally in White's interest to keep the queens on.

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D) 8...Qc7 is the main line and leads after 9.f4 to a vital branching point, with four main options, of which the

last is the most important. D1) 9...f5 is a standard advance in the Four Knights, but this is a poor moment for it. D2) 9...Rb8 can be the prelude to a fascinating piece sacrifice, but, as we saw, a precise move order by White defangs it. D3) 9...Qa5† leads to markedly different play than the related 8...Qa5† line. The free addition of f2-f4 means White can play actively with 10.Bd2 Qb6 11.Bd3, offering to sac the b2-pawn for superb compensation.

D4) 9...Qb6 is the absolute main line of the Four Knights and after 10.c4 we saw the two branches starting with 10...Ne3 11.Qd3! and 10...Bb4† 11.Ke2. The early play is forcing, so White should remember the move orders with care. But with that work done, White should face the Four Knights confidently, expecting to exit the opening with slightly the better chances.

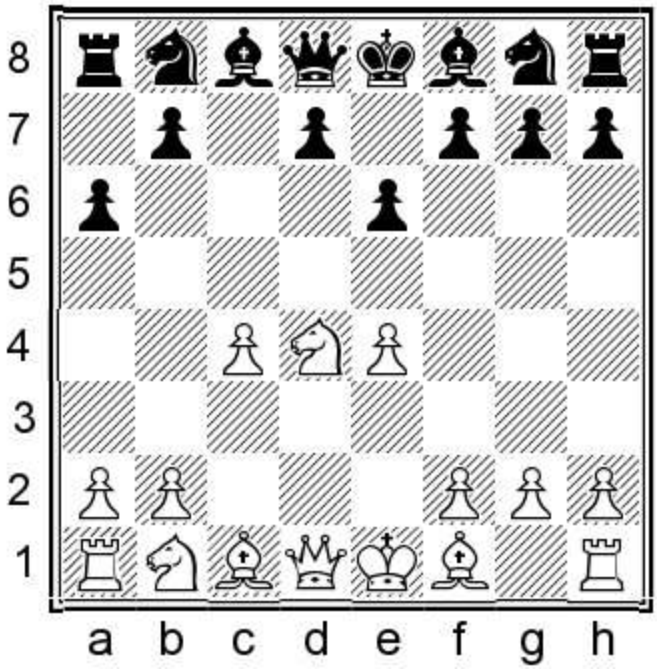
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# Chapter 2 - Kan

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.c4

A) 5...b6 47
B) 5...g6 48
C) 5...Nf6 6.Nc3 49
C1) 6...d6?! 7.Be2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.f4!? 50
C11) 9...Re8 51
C12) 9...Qc7 53
C2) 6...Qc7 7.a3 55
C21) 7...Nxe4?! 8.Nxe4 Qe5 9.Qc2! 56
C211) 9...Qxd4 56
C212) 9...f5 58
C22) 7...b6 8.Be3 Bb7 9.f3 62
C221) 9...Nc6 63
C222) 9...d6 65
C23) 7...Nc6 8.Be3 69
C231) 8...b6 69
C232) 8...Bd6!? 71
C233) 8...Be7 74
C3) 6...Bb4 7.Qd3!? 77
C31) 7...Bxc3†?! 78
C32) 7...d5 78
C33) 7...0-0 81
C34) 7...Qc7 82
C35) 7...d6 Game 9 83
C36) 7...Nc6 Game 10 87
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.c4

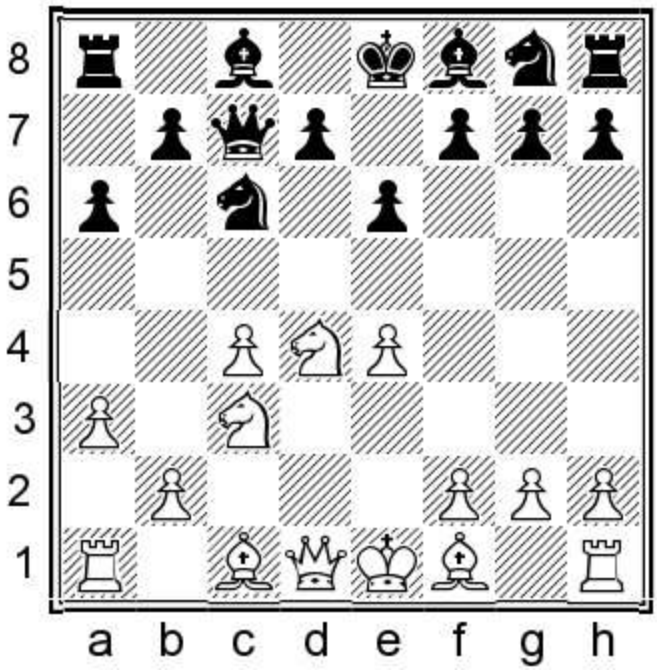
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One of the themes of our repertoire is that, given the choice between alternatives of roughly equal value, we will usually opt for a set-up with c2-c4. In the case of the Kan, the text move ranks well behind 5.Nc3 and 5. Bd3 in terms of popularity, but I believe it offers at least as many chances for an opening advantage.

We will consider the sidelines A) 5...b6 and B) 5...g6, before moving on to C) 5...Nf6, which is the main line by far. I also checked a few other oddities:

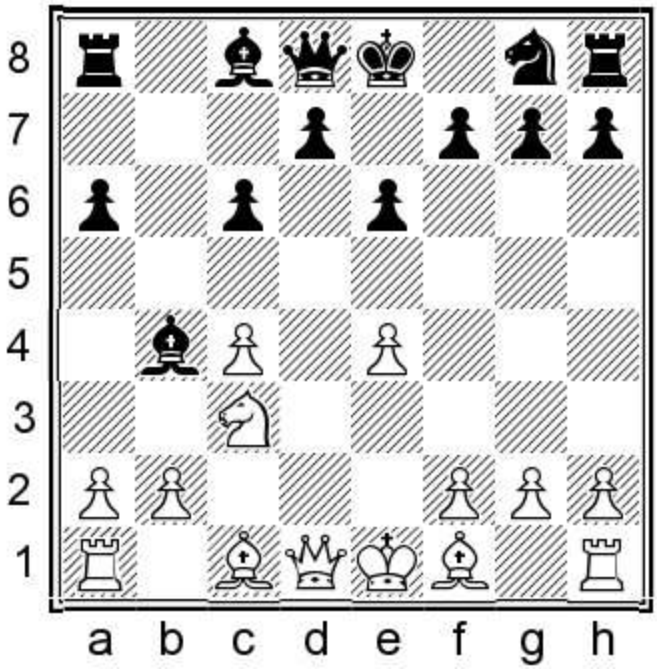
5...Qc7 has been a frequent choice but it almost always transposes to one of our main lines after a subsequent ... Nf6. After 6.Nc3 Nc6 7.a3 I don't see any advantage to Black's chosen move order, for instance:



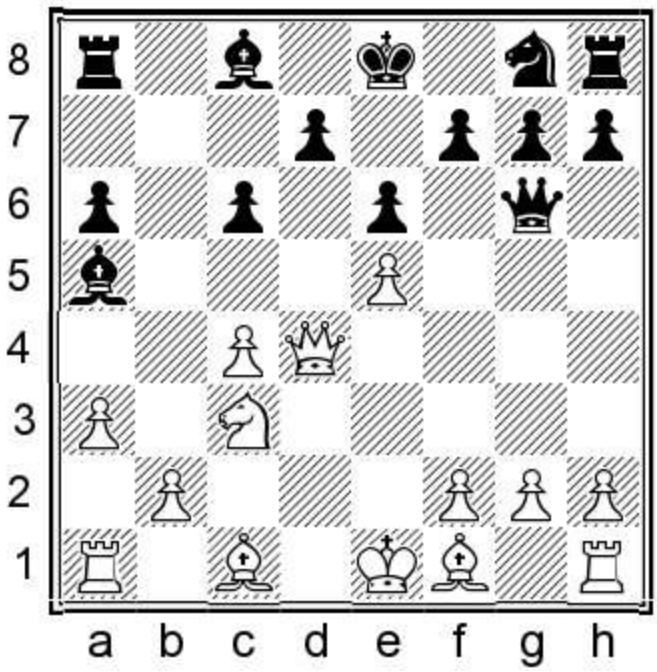
7...Ne5 (Black should prefer 7...Nf6, transposing to variation C23) 8.Be3 Nxc4? 9.Bxc4 Qxc4 10.Rc1 and White is winning.

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5...Nc6 6.Nc3 Bb4 (6...Qc7 leads to the note above) 7.Nxc6 bxc6



8.Qd4! Qf6 (8...Nf6 9.e5± was also no fun for Black in Sprotte – De Oliveira, Sao Bento do Sul 2013) 9.e5 Qg6 (9...Qe7 occurred in Grabarczyk – Siebrecht, Germany 2013, when 10.a3!N 10...Bc5 11.Qg4 f5 12.Qg3± would have been strong) 10.a3 Ba5 In Geenen – Marte, Charleroi 2013, White should have continued:

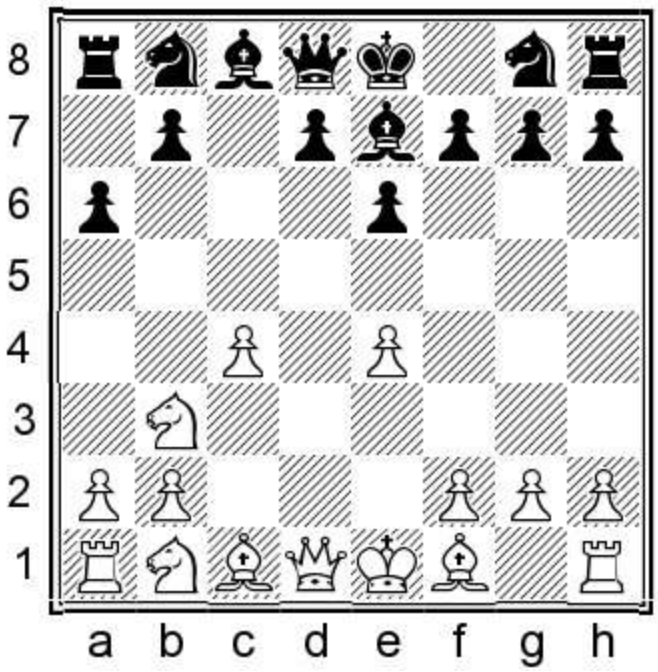


11.Bd2!N 11...Ne7 12.0-0-0 0-0 13.h4!± Starting an attack while exploiting Black's misplaced queen.

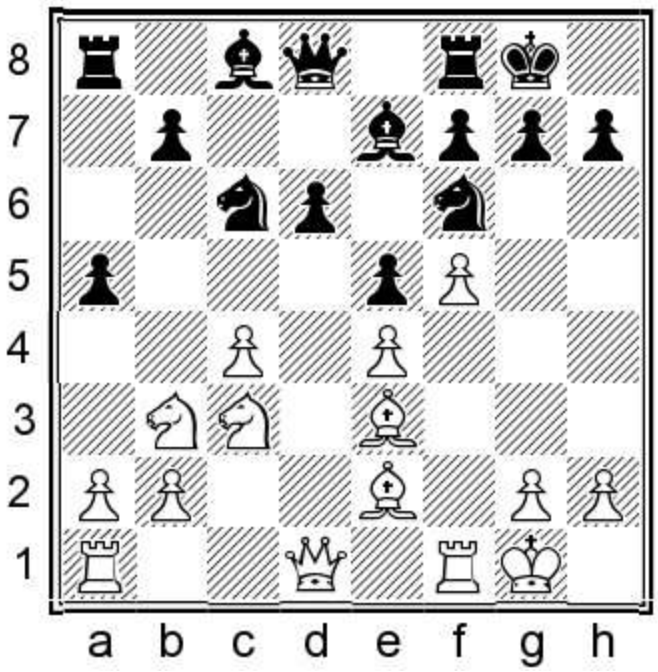
5...Bc5
This isn't a bad move, but White can reach a comfortable position with simple development.
6.Nb3 Be7

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6...Ba7 7.Nc3 Nc6 8.Be2 Nf6 9.0-0 0-0 has been played in an engine game. No one has really played like this yet, so it's not that important. My choice from here would be 10.Bg5N², setting up an unpleasant pin.



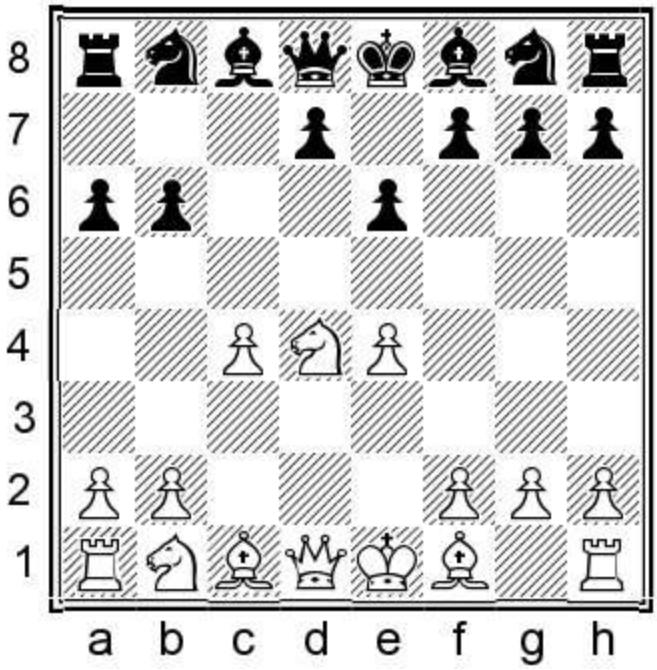
7.Nc3 d6 8.Be2 Nf6 9.0-0 0-0 10.Be3 Nc6 11.f4 e5
11...Qc7 12.Rc1 b6? 13.Nd5± gave White an easy advantage in Claisse – Ernouf, Fontenay le Fleury 2003.
12.f5 a5
This position was reached in another engine game. I think the right way for White to continue is:



13.Rc1N 13...Bd7 14.Na1! Rc8 15.Nc2²
White simply improves his pieces while waiting to see how Black is going to deal with his obvious positional problems.

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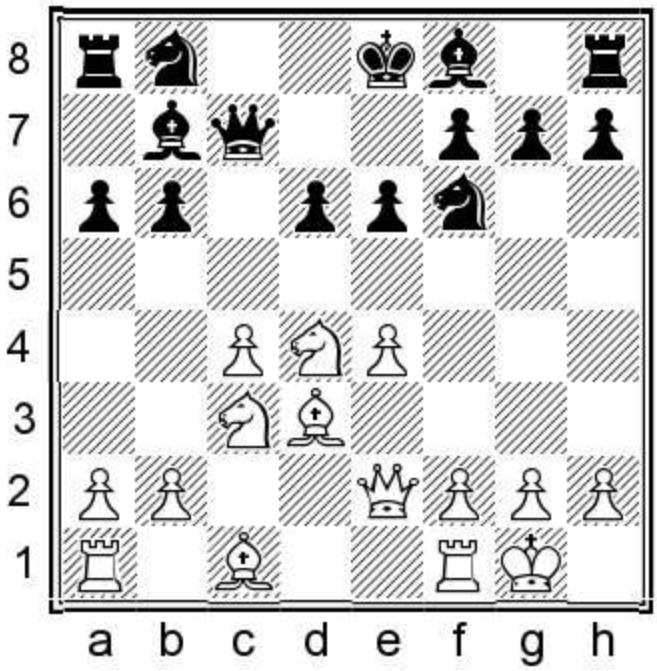
A) 5...b6



When you look at the statistics in the reference database, you will notice that this move gives Black a plus score. Don’t let this bother you, as White has excellent prospects.

6.Nc3 Bb7 7.Bd3!
We will often see the bishop go to e2 in this chapter. However, taking into account the early development of the bishop to b7, it is logical to give the e4-pawn extra support. A natural and popular continuation is:

7...Qc7 8.0-0 Nf6 9.Qe2 d6
This position has arisen via several move orders, totalling over a hundred games in my database. Amazingly, I can present a stunning novelty:

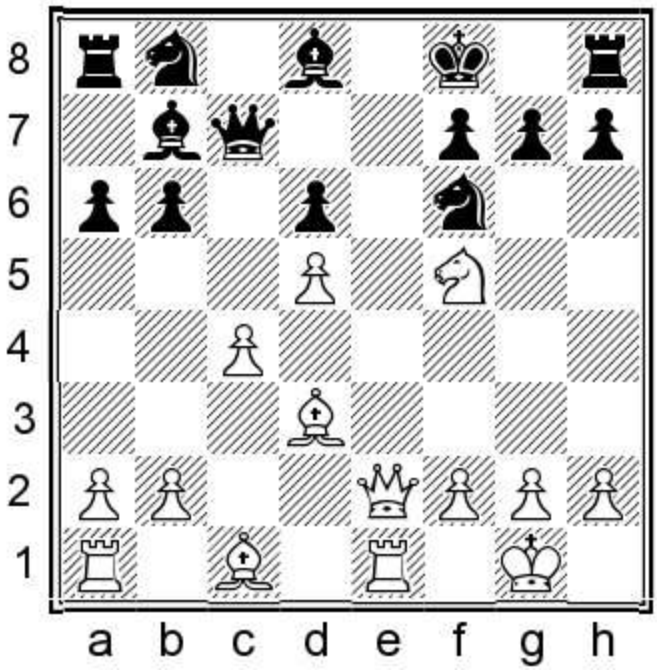


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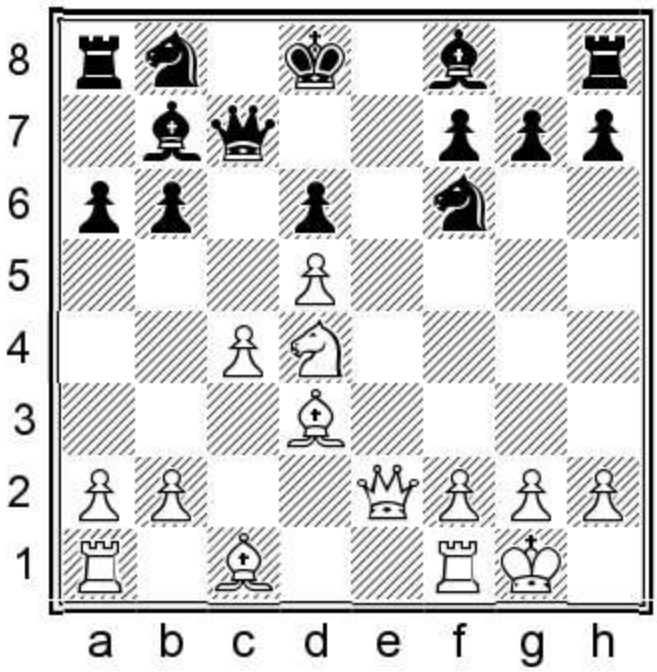
10.Nd5!!N
This sacrifice is too tempting to ignore.

10...exd5 11.exd5† Kd8
11...Qe7 12.Qf3± makes things easier for White.

11...Be7 12.Nf5± is also nasty for Black, especially as 12...Kf8? loses immediately: 13.Re1 Bd8



14.Bh6!! gxh6 15.Qe3+– and mate is near.

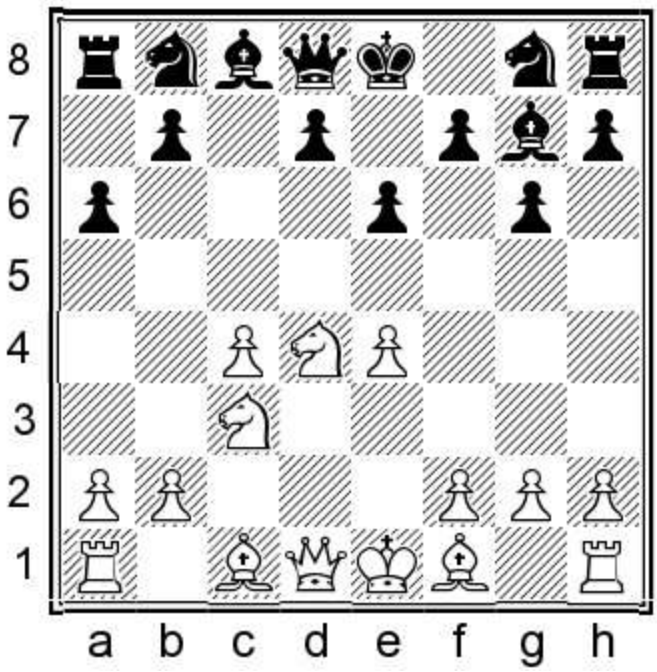


12.Re1 Nbd7 13.a4!©
White has a lasting initiative, and will develop his attack with moves like Bf4, a4-a5, b2-b4 and so on. Black

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has an extra piece but he will not be able to use it for quite some time.

B) 5...g6 6.Nc3 Bg7



Black resorts to a kingside fianchetto in several Kan lines, but here White is well placed to meet it.

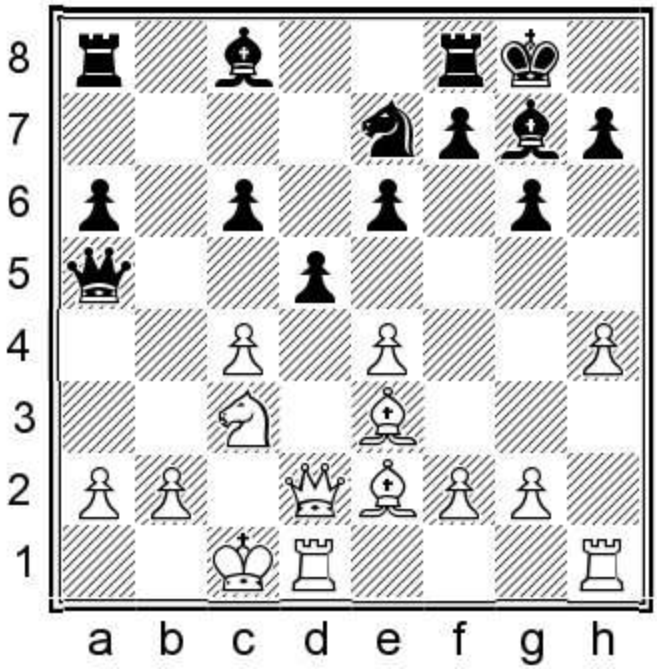
7.Be3 Ne7 8.Qd2!
8.Be2 0-0 9.Qd2 is also somewhat better for White, but it gives Black a chance to simplify matters: 9...d5 10. exd5 exd5 11.cxd5 Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.0-0 Nd7 14.Rfd1 Ne5 This was Bogner – Prosviriakov, Hastings 2014, when 15.Bh6N looks like the right way to maintain some initiative. Still, White's edge could easily evaporate.

8...Nbc6
I also considered 8...0-0, when 9.Rd1!N is an important measure to discourage the ...d5 push. Play may continue 9...Nbc6, when 10.h4!± looks rather unpleasant for Black.

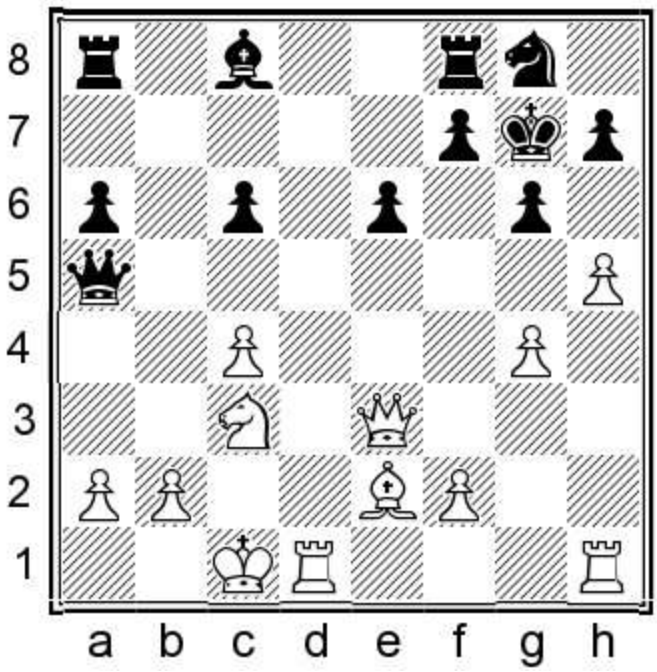
9.Be2 0-0 10.Nxc6!
This seems objectively strongest.

That said, some players may be attracted by the following possibility:
10.h4!?
This certainly looks like an interesting way to create problems for Black.
10...d5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.0-0-0 Qa5
12...Re8N² looks like a better try, although I still prefer White's chances.

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13.Bh6 dxe4?
After this Black is torn to pieces on the kingside.
13...Bxc3 was Black's best chance, although 14.Qxc3 Qxc3† 15.bxc3 Re8 16.Bf3² reaches a rather unpleasant endgame for him.
14.Bxg7 Kxg7 15.h5 Nf5 16.g4 e3 17.Qd3 Ne7 18.Qxe3 Ng8



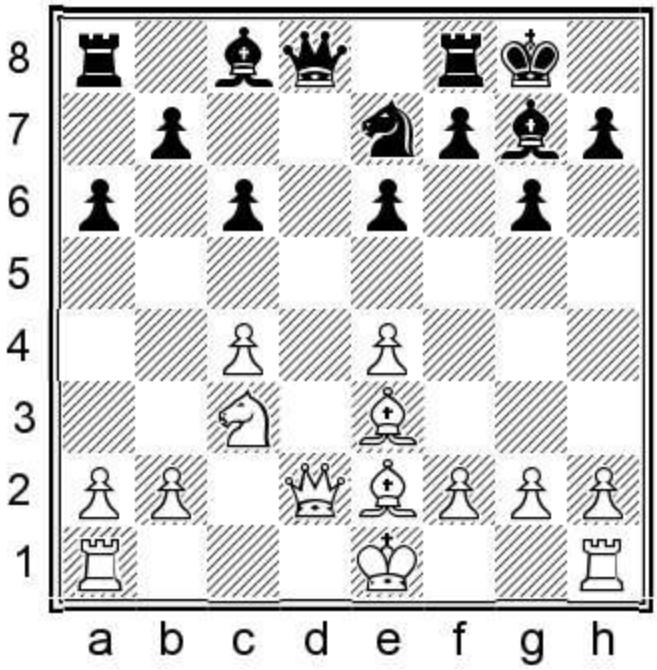
19.hxg6 fxg6 20.c5 Qc7 21.Rd6 Qf7 22.Rxc6 Bb7 23.Qe5† Nf6 24.Rc7 Bxh1 25.g5+–
White won easily in Salokangas – Franssila, Tampere 1989.

10...dxc6
Black opted for 10...Nxc6 in B. Andersen – B. Petersen, Faxe 2015, when 11.c5N± would have established a nasty bind on the queenside.

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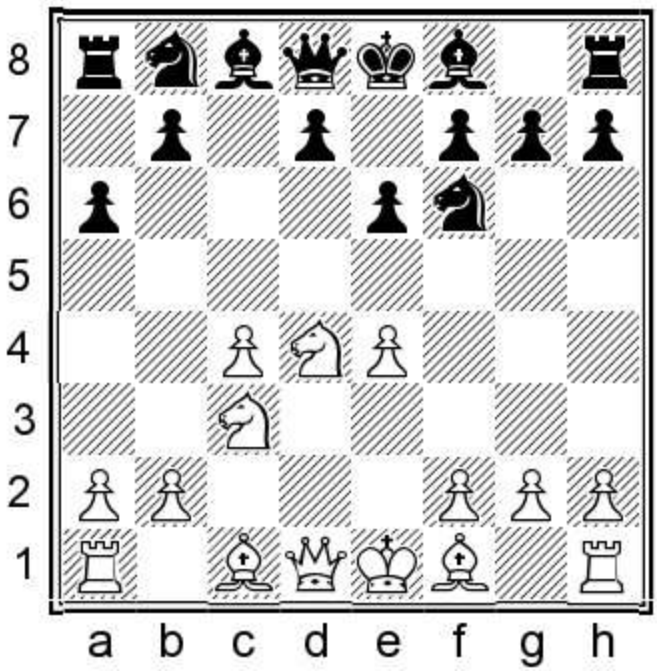
10...bxc6 11.Qd6± is also unpleasant for Black.

We have been following McKellar – Gray, San Francisco 2016. A simple improvement is:



11.Rd1!N 11...Qxd2† 12.Kxd2
Black finds himself in a dire situation, as his dark squares are too weak.

C) 5...Nf6 6.Nc3



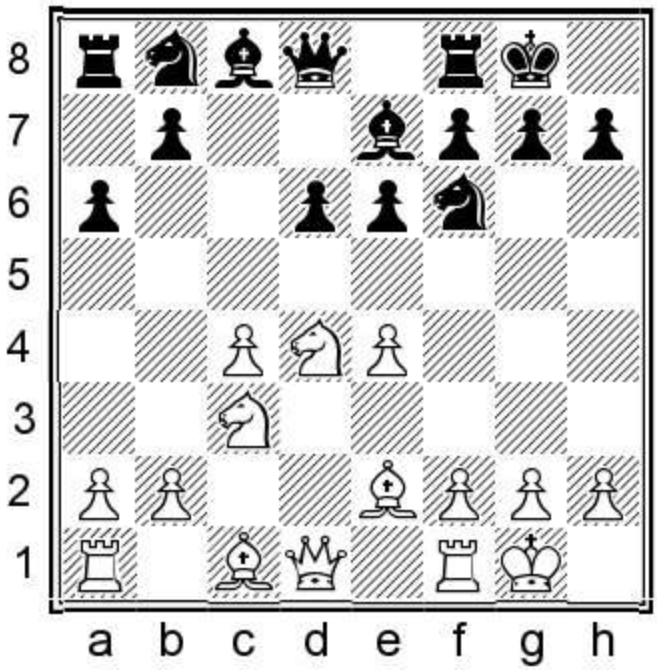
This is the main tabiya for the 5.c4 line. Black must deal with the threat of e4-e5 (since ...Qa5† is no longer available), so he almost always opts for one of C1) 6...d6?!, C2) 6...Qc7 or C3) 6...Bb4.

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C1) 6...d6?!

This move is not altogether bad, but it restricts the dark-squared bishop and gives White the freedom to build a powerful attacking position straight out of the opening.

7.Be2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0
It is worth comparing this position to a well-known variation of the Taimanov, which occurs after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nb5 (rather than 5.Nc3 as I recommend in Chapter 3) 5...d6 6.c4 Nf6 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 Be7 9.Be2 0-0. For a long time, this was one of White's foremost tries for an advantage against the Taimanov. White suffers from a misplaced knight on a3, but the reasoning behind it was that it was worth making this concession in order to provoke ...d6 and establish a space advantage with c2-c4. In the present variation, White enjoys those same benefits without having had to waste two tempos moving his knight to an inferior square, so his prospects are excellent.




9.f4!?
White has a great deal of freedom against Black's solid but passive set-up. Another decent approach involves solidifying the e4-point and aiming for queenside pressure, as seen after: 9.Be3 b6 10.f3 Bb7 11.Qd2 Qc7 12.Rac1 Nbd7 13.Rfd1 Rfc8 14.b4 Rab8 15.a3 Ne5 16.Na4² Karjakin – Yu Yangyi, Heixiazi 2015. White won this game and generally does well in this type of position. If this appeals to you, you can play it with minimal preparation, as there aren't really any forcing theoretical lines to remember.

Ultimately though, I believe it is even more promising to play actively on the kingside and in the centre. True, it takes a bit more work to understand the tactical motifs which may occur, but it's worth the effort – in many lines, White can achieve a substantial advantage with forceful play.

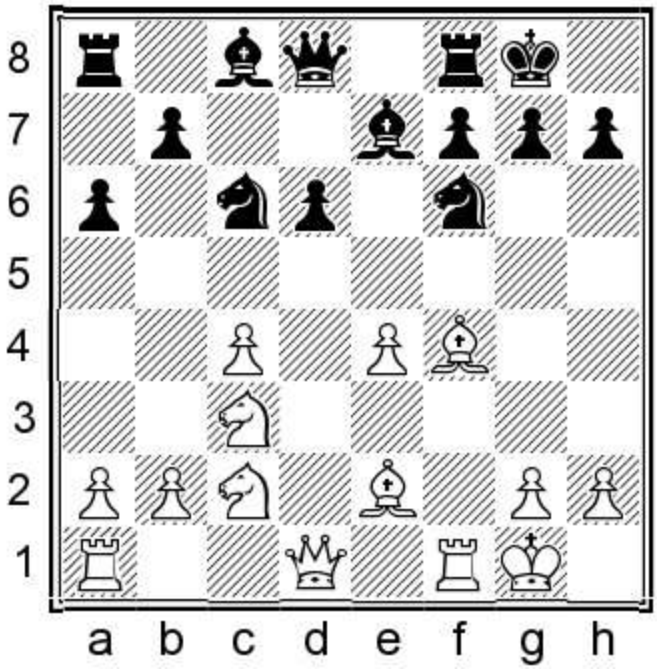
We will focus on C11) 9...Re8 and C12) 9...Qc7.

9...Nbd7 10.Be3 will either transpose to one of the ...Nbd7 set-ups covered under the two main lines, or lead to a similar situation where White gets a fine game using the same ideas.

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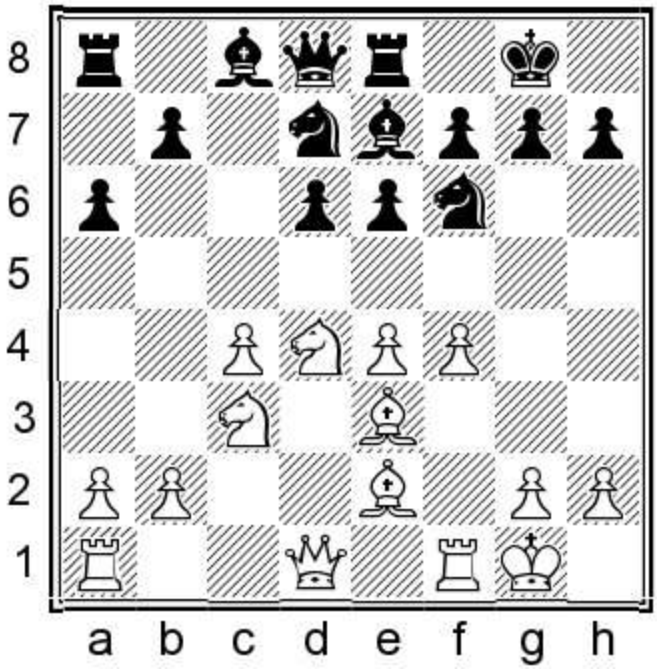
9...e5!? is playable, if rather committal. 10.Nc2 exf4 11.Bxf4 Nc6 occurred in Borrell – Incze, corr. 1994. A

normal continuation would be:



12.Qd2N 12...Be6 13.Rad1 Re8 14.b3² White can strengthen his position with Ne3, while Black will find it hard to create counterplay.

C11) 9...Re8 10.Be3 Nbd7

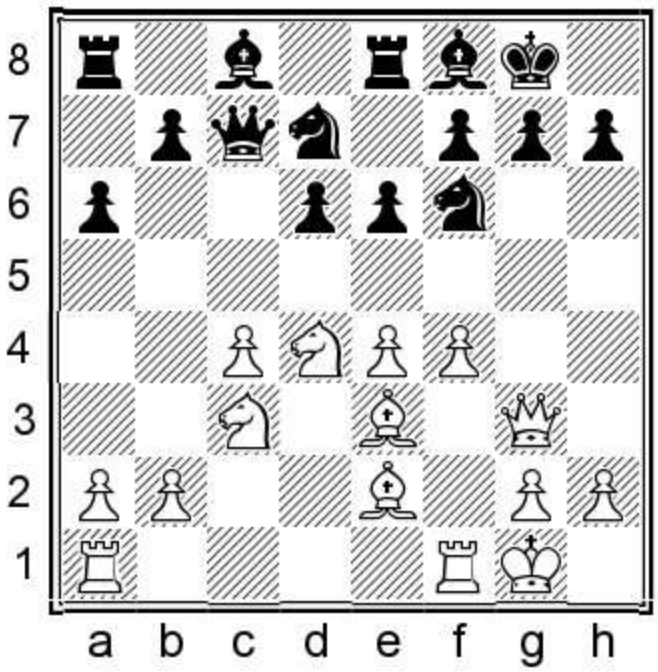


11.Qe1!
The queen will be perfectly placed on g3, menacing the black king and supporting the e4-e5 push.

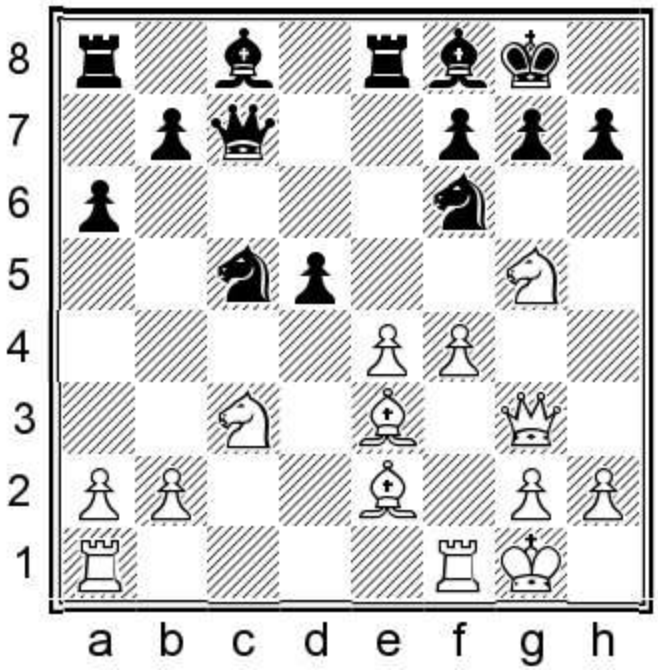
11...Qc7 12.Qg3 Rb8
Here are some other lines which demonstrate White's extensive resources.

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12...Bf8
In Nunn – Szmetan, Biel 1982, White played 12.Rad1 and stood better, but he missed something even stronger.



13.Nf3!N 13...Nc5
Black seems to be ready to meet e4-e5, but White's next move creates huge problems for him.
14.Ng5! d5
14...h6 15.e5 Nh7 16.Nxh7 Kxh7 17.Rad1+– gives White a decisive initiative.
The engines suggest the text as Black's best try, but White keeps up the pressure after:
15.cxd5 exd5

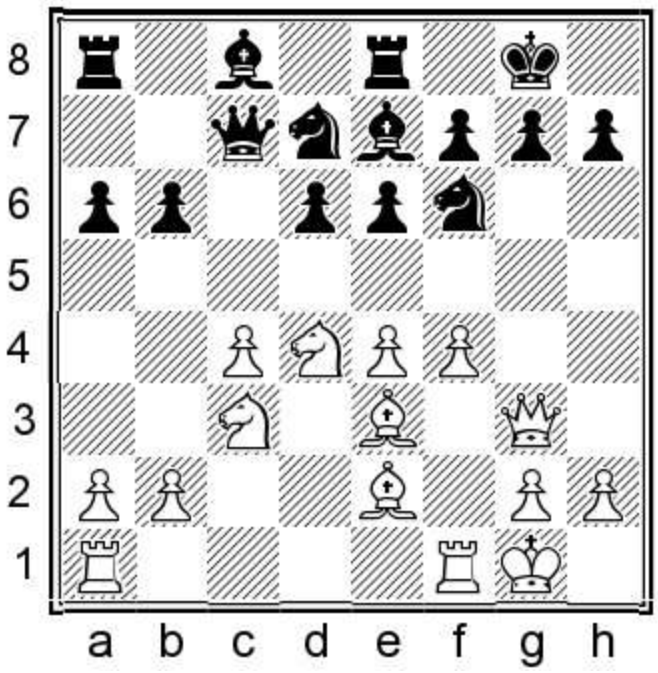


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16.Rac1! h6

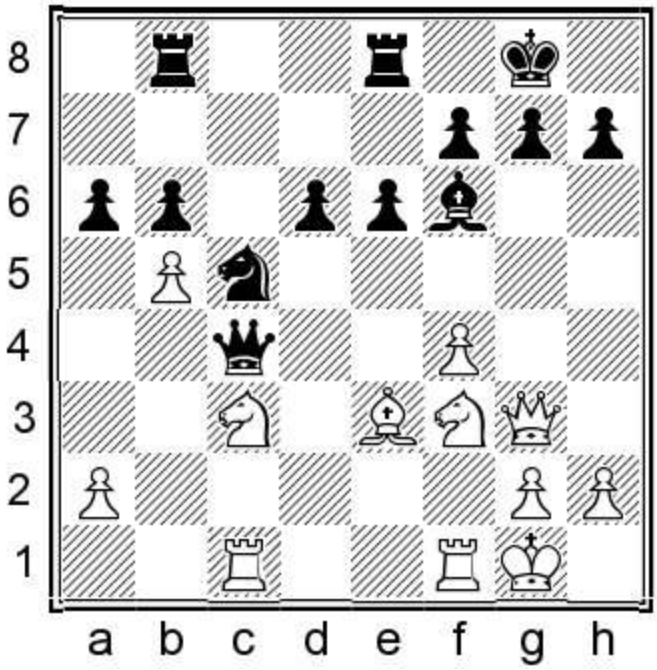
16...dxe4? runs into 17.Na4 b6 18.b4 Qc6 19.Bd1 and White wins a piece.
17.e5! hxg5 18.exf6 Qd6 19.Rfd1±

Another logical try is:
12...b6
I only found one game from here, Kast – Heinemann, Oberhof 2010. White's play can be improved with:

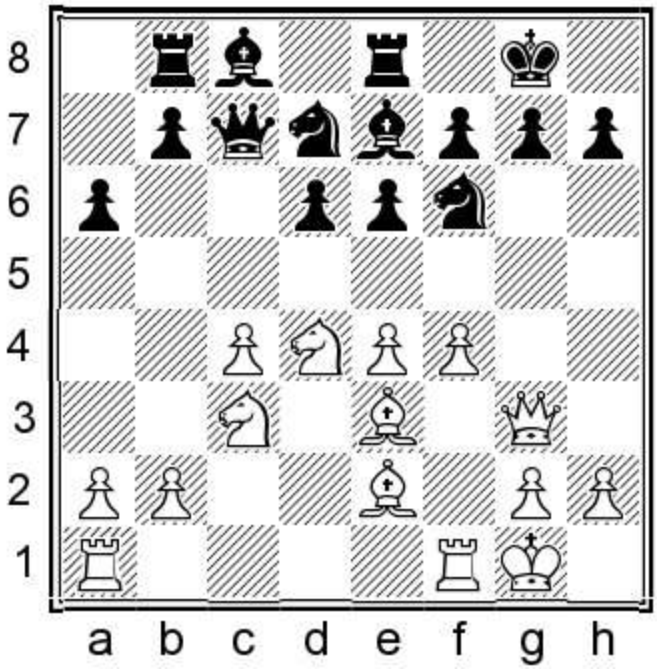


13.Bf3!N
Once again, White just has to choose the right way to threaten e4-e5.
13...Rb8
13...Bb7? is impossible as 14.e5! wins a piece.
14.Rac1 Bb7 15.b4!²
White has a promising position after preventing ...Nc5. The critical line continues:
15...Qxc4 16.b5! Nc5 17.e5 Bxf3 18.exf6 Bxf6 19.Nxf3±
Black does not have enough compensation for the missing piece. An important tactical point is:

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19...Bxc3? 20.Rxc3! Qxc3 21.Bd4
And White wins.



13.Rad1!N
Improving on 13.Kh1? b6 14.Rad1 as played in Nunn – Sunye Neto, Wijk aan Zee 1982.

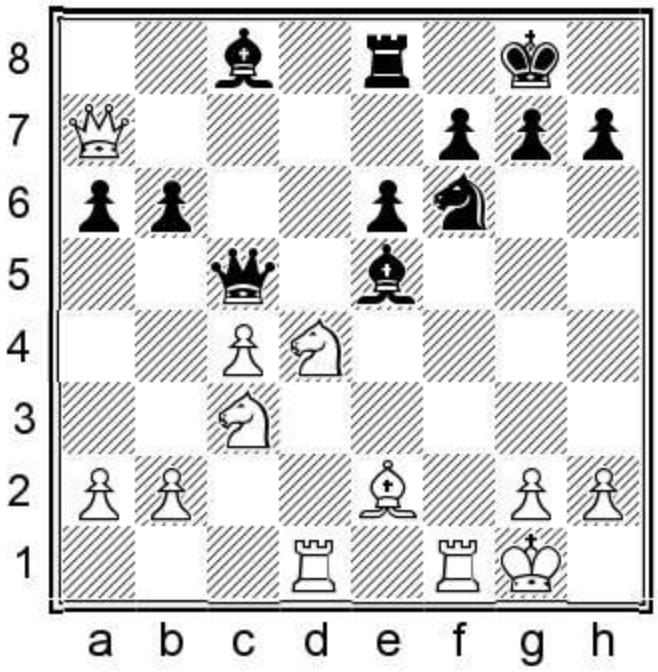
I can vaguely remember reading in John Nunn's xenophobic-sounding work from the 1980s, Beating the Sicilian, that White should move his king to h1 when the black queen goes to c7 in such positions. However, in this instance it merely loses a tempo without adding any value to White's position. White went on to win the above game in good style, but Black's play could have been improved. White's advantage is much more significant when he avoids wasting time on the unnecessary king move.

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13...b6
13...Nc5 14.Bf3± hardly seems like an improvement for Black.

After the text move, White can utilize the saved tempo and strike immediately with:

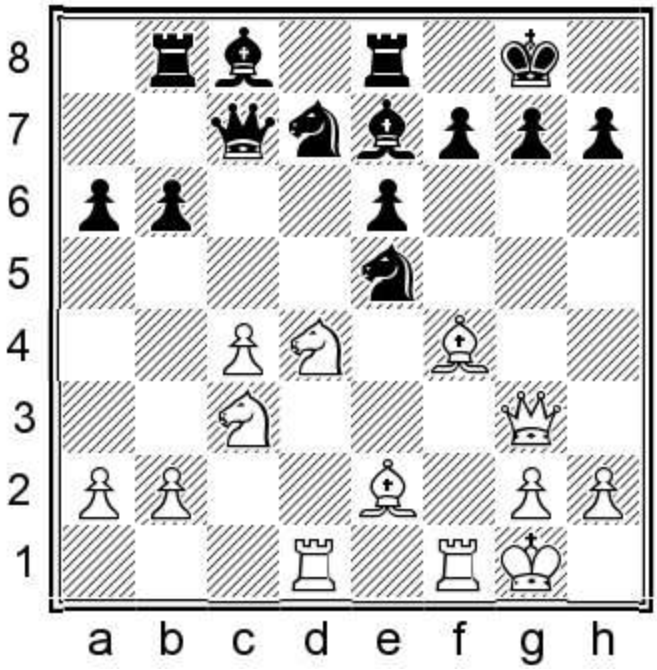
14.e5! dxe5 15.fxe5 Nxe5
15...Qxe5 is not too difficult to refute. 16.Bf4 Qc5 17.Bxb8 Nxb8 18.Qxb8 Bd6 (18...e5 19.Rxf6 Bxf6 20.Ne4 wins) 19.Qa7 Be5 Black seems to be staying in the game, but White can fatally weaken his kingside with:




20.Kh1 Bxd4 21.Ne4! Qe5 22.Nxf6† gxf6 23.Bh5! Rf8 24.Rf3+– Black is material down and his king is too exposed.

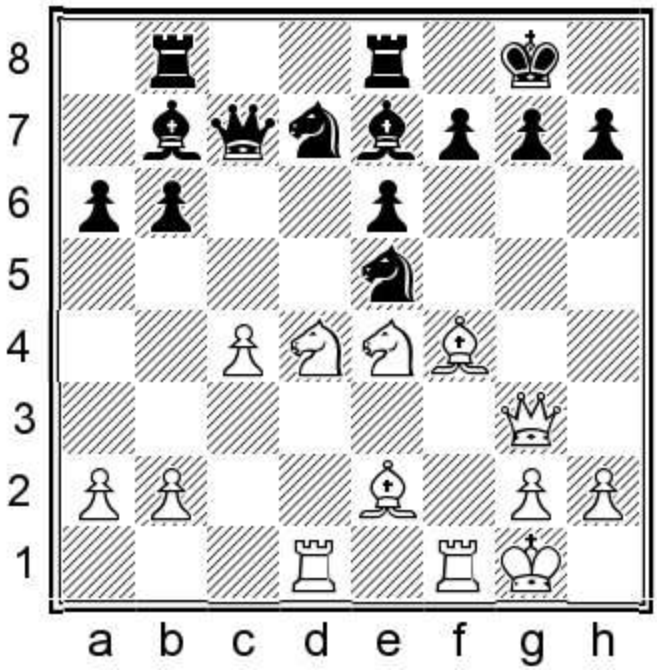
16.Bf4 Nfd7
16...Bd6 runs into 17.Nb3! and White wins a piece.

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17.Ne4
White has a decisive initiative, as the following lines demonstrate. Your goal here should not be to memorize every detail, but rather to notice the main tactical themes and combinations in order to add them to your mental library.

17...g6
17...Bb7 allows an immediate breakthrough:



18.Nxe6!! fxe6 19.Rxd7 Qxd7 20.Bxe5 Bd8 (20...g6 21.Bc3!) 21.Rd1 Qe7 22.Nf6† and White wins.

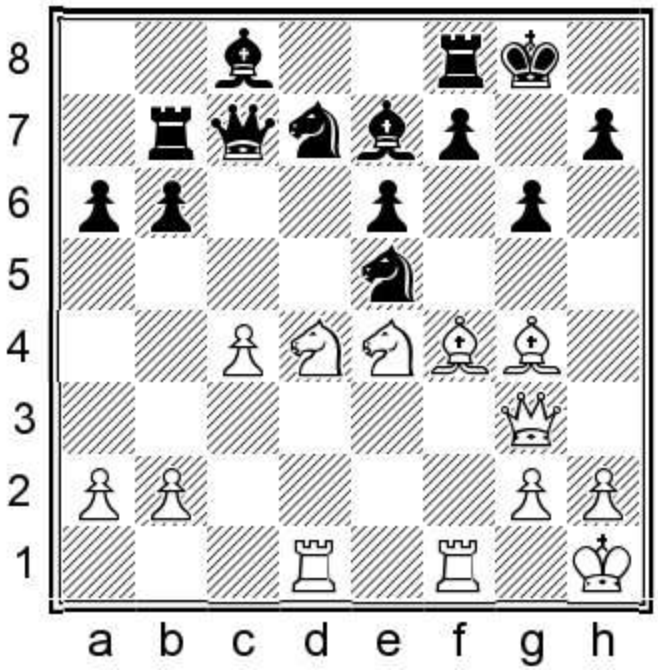
18.Bg4!
A great idea, setting up possible sacrifices on e6.

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18...Rb7
18...Qb7 19.Nf2! Nxg4 20.Nxg4 also gives White a winning attack.

19.Kh1!
On this occasion, it is useful to tuck the king out of harm's way before breaking through.

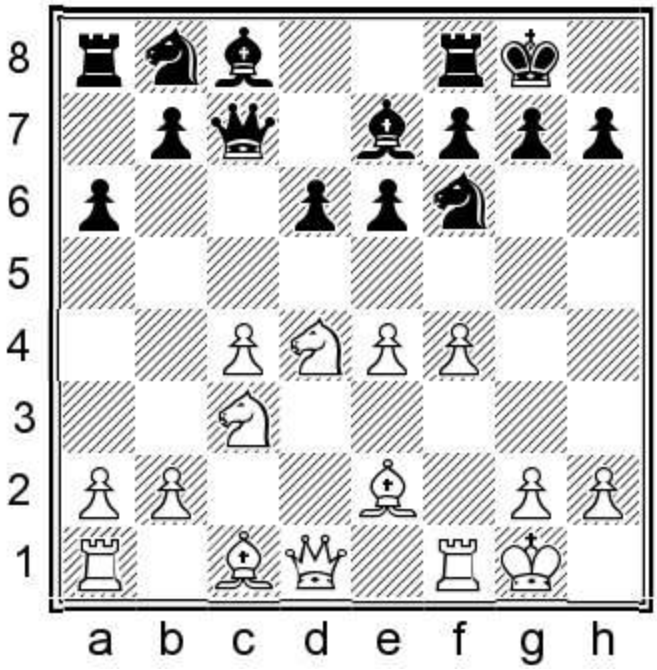
19...Rf8



20.Nxe6! fxe6 21.Bxe6† Kh8 22.Ng5+–
The black position is collapsing under the many threats.

C12) 9...Qc7

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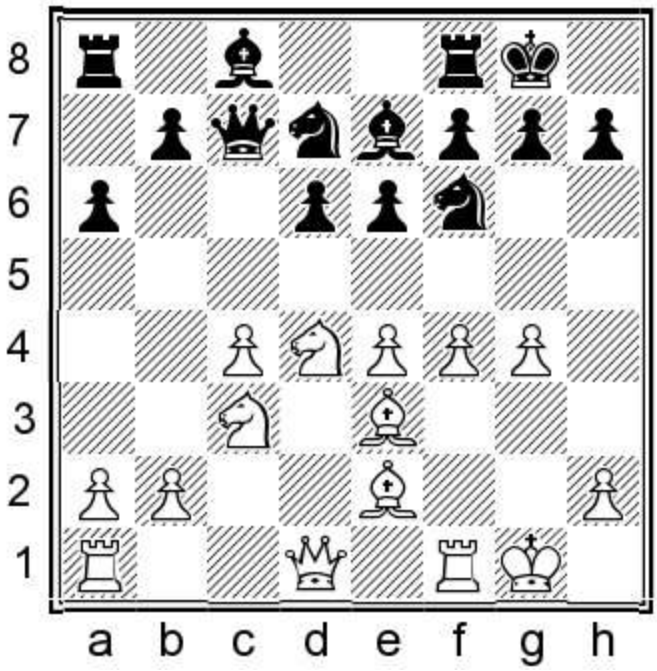


This looks similar to the previous line, but it’s more popular and can lead to some different set-ups, especially involving the knight going to c6 rather than d7.

10.Be3 Nc6
Naturally I checked some other possibilities as well:

10...Re8 11.Qe1 Bf8 could be handled in much the same way as variation C11 with 12.Qg3, but I find 12.g4!N an even more attractive way of meeting Black’s passive set-up.

10...Nbd7 11.g4! is crude but effective, for instance:

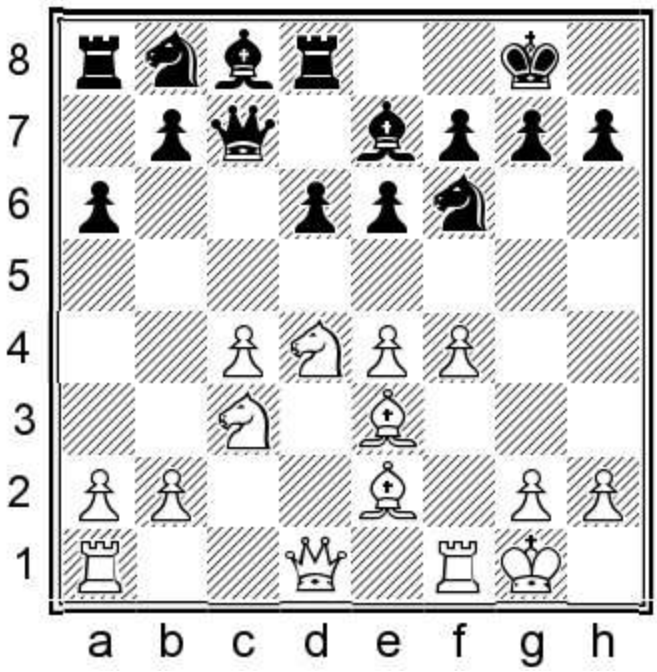


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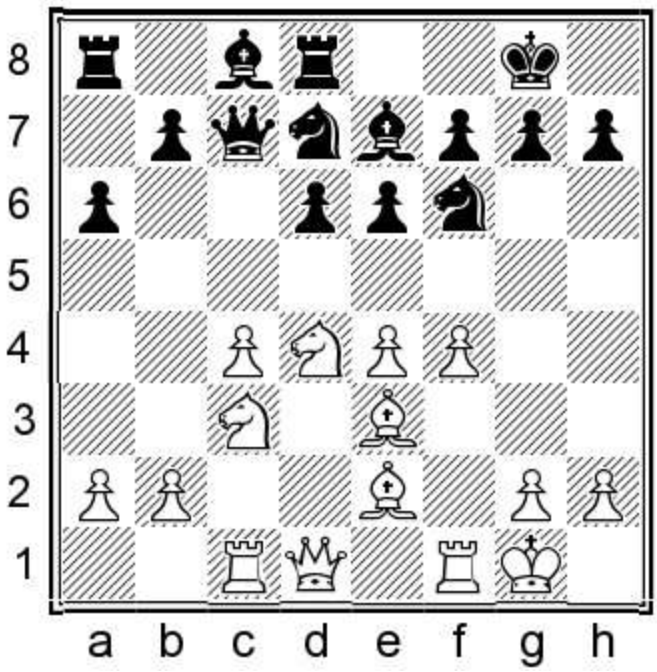
11...Rd8 (11...Nc5 12.Bf3 e5 13.Nf5 Bxf5 14.exf5 is also great for White) 12.g5 Ne8 13.Rc1 White had a huge

advantage in Erwich – Mullon, Belgium 2008.

10...Rd8

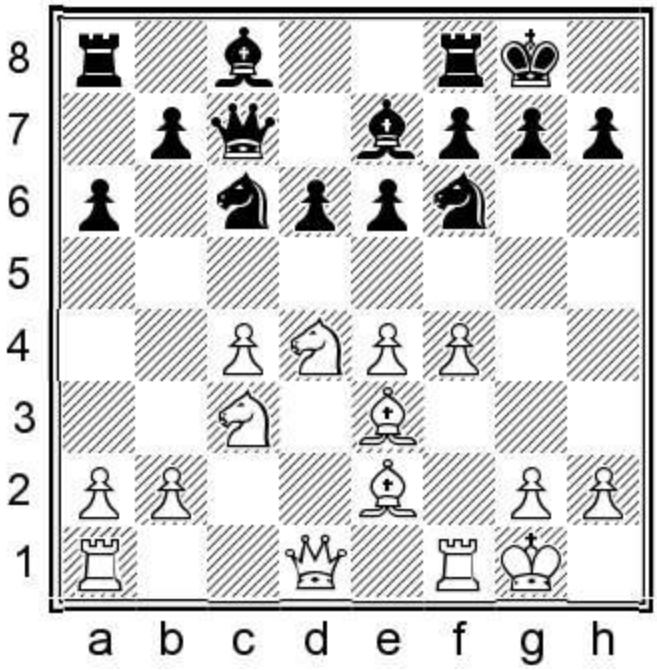


11.Rc1 (I also like 11.g4!?N 11...d5 12.cxd5 exd5 13.e5 Ne4 14.Rc1 Nxc3 15.Rxc3 with a pleasant advantage. King safety is not a concern, as Black is not active enough to create any threats.) 11...Nbd7?! (11...Nc6N² should be preferred)



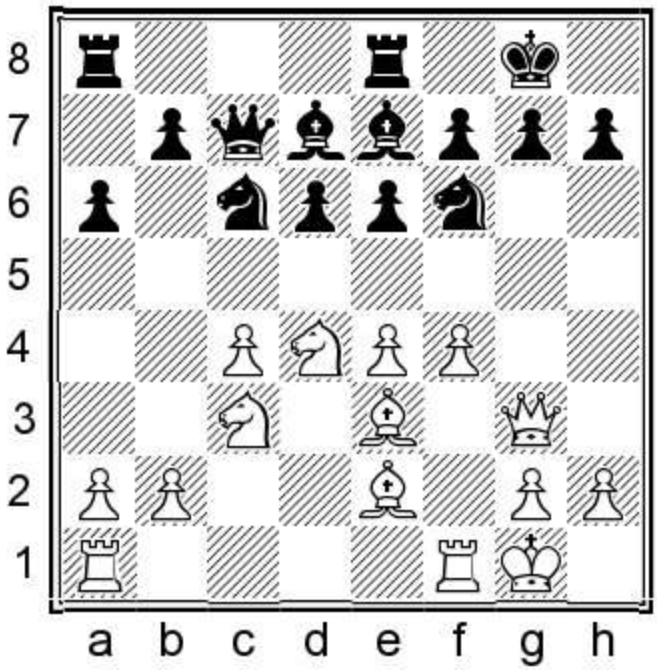
12.g4! This is even stronger now. 12...Bf8 (12...Nc5 13.Bf3 e5 14.Nf5 Bxf5 15.exf5 e4 16.Bg2±) 13.g5 Ne8 14.f5 Ne5 15.b3 Qd7 16.Qe1 Nc7 17.Qg3 Nc6 18.g6 White had an overwhelming attack in Prill – Adler, Ottenau 2005.

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11.Qe1! Bd7 12.Qg3²
Just as in the earlier variation C11, the queen is superbly placed on the g3-square. White has much the easier game and has achieved a huge score from this position. Let me show you an interesting discovery I made.

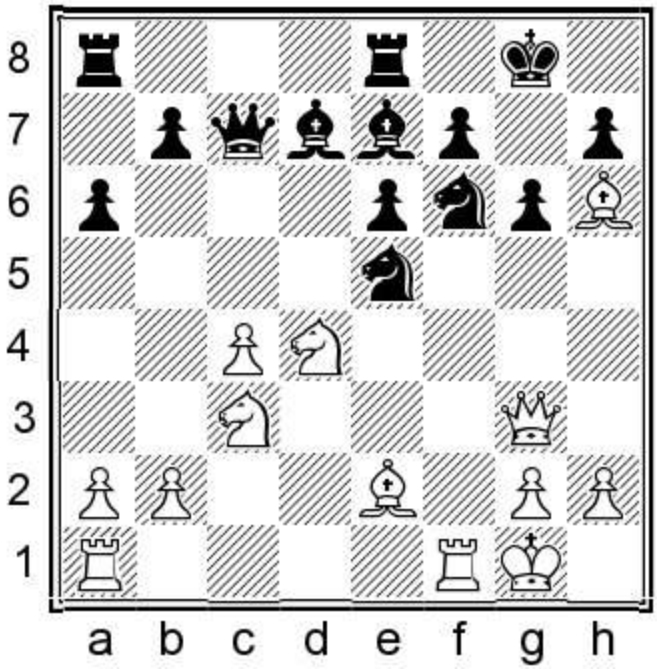
12...Rfe8?
This was played in Akhrouf – Maa El Ainin, Rabat 2001, and a few subsequent games. White has good prospects after any sensible move, but he can actually gain a near-decisive advantage with the following forcing continuation.



13.e5!!N 13...dxe5 14.fxe5 Nxe5
14...Qxe5 drops a piece to 15.Nxc6 Qxg3 16.Nxe7†.

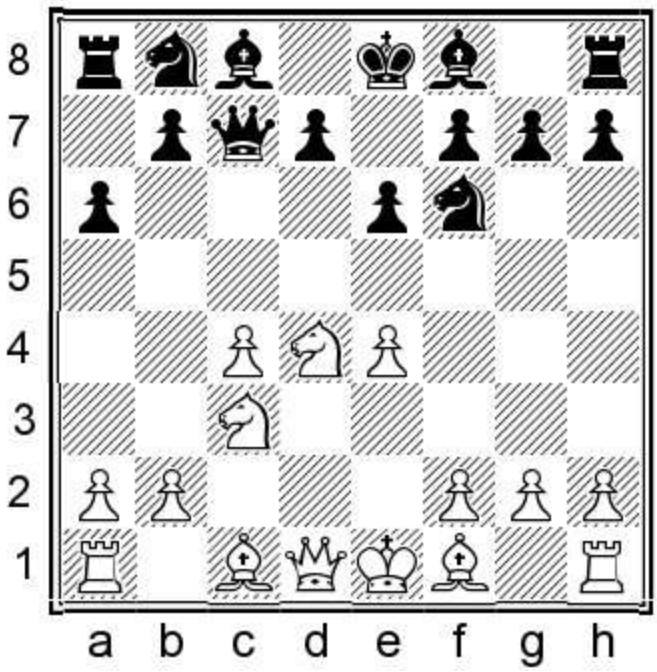
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15.Bh6! g6



16.Bf4 Bd6 17.Rad1+–
Black will lose material in the near future.

C2) 6...Qc7



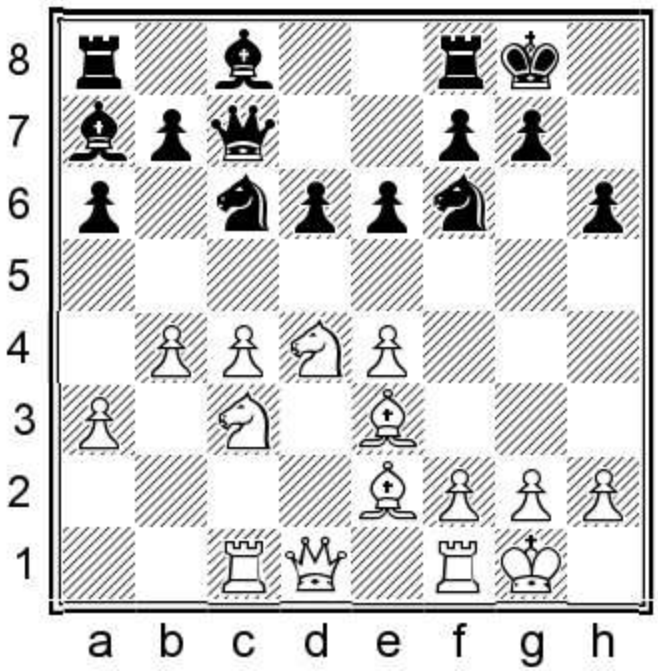
This has been Black’s most popular choice so far, and is fully in keeping with the flexible character of the Kan.

7.a3
Many other moves have been tried but I think it’s worth investing a tempo to prevent ...Bb4.

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We will start by checking C21) 7...Nxe4?!, which is ambitious but objectively dubious, before moving on to the sounder options of C22) 7...b6 and C23) 7...Nc6.

7...Bc5 has been played a few times but after 8.Be3 0-0 9.b4 Ba7 10.Rc1 Black's bishop just seems misplaced. A good example continued: 10...Nc6 11.Be2 d6 12.0-0² h6?!



13.Nd5! exd5 14.cxd5 Nxe4 15.dxc6 d5 Now in Dolana – Manolache, Alba Iulia 2016, the improvement 16.b5!?N 16...bxc6 17.Rxc6 Qd8 18.bxa6 Bd7 19.Rc1 would have been clearly better for White.

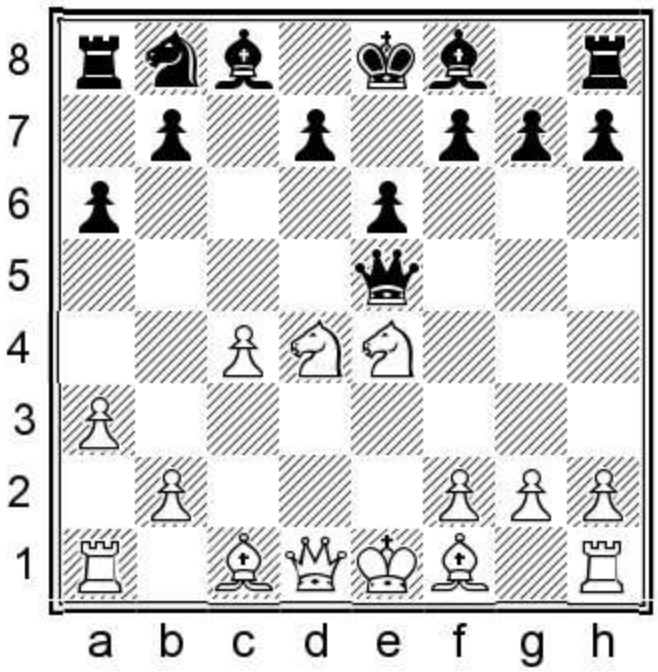
C21) 7...Nxe4?!

This was once recommended by Taimanov but it brings great danger for Black, as he grabs a pawn but falls too far behind in development.

8.Nxe4
8.Nxe6 is given as slightly better for White by Emms, but after 8...dxe6 9.Nxe4 Be7 I think Black should be fine.

8...Qe5

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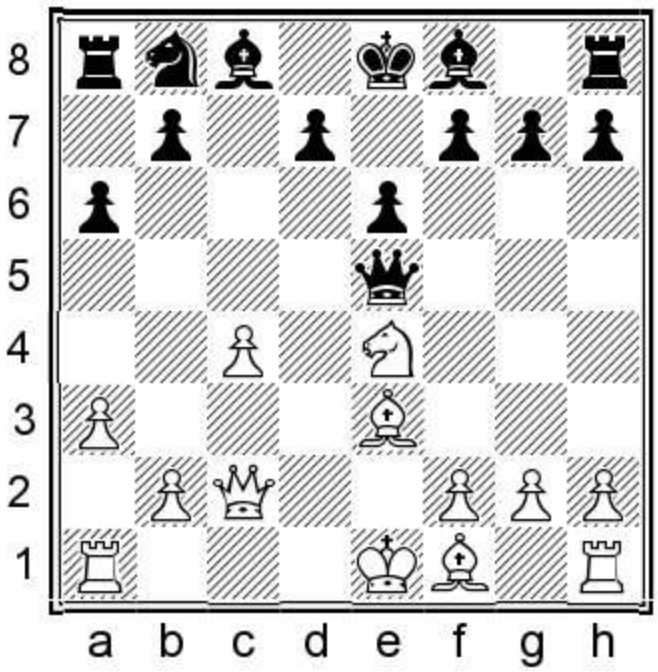
9.Qc2!
White has a few ways to get decent compensation for the pawn. However, after analysing the position deeply, I concluded that the text move is the only way to get an advantage against the most stubborn defence.

9.Bd3 Qxd4 10.0-0 is the main alternative. Here are just a few brief lines I analysed: 10...f5 11.Be3 (11.Nc3!? Be7 12.Be3 Qf6 13.Na4 is the best attempt at an advantage, but matters are more complicated here than in my recommended line) 11...Qxb2 12.Rb1 Qe5 13.f4 Qc7 (13...Qa5!?) 14.Bb6 Qc6 15.Re1 In Swinkels – Martens, Netherlands 2012, the best defence would have been 15...Bxa3!?N 16.Qh5† g6 17.Qh6 Bf8 18.Qh4 Be7, when I was unable to find anything more than a draw by repetition.

Black now has a choice between C211) 9...Qxd4 and C212) 9...f5.

C211) 9...Qxd4 10.Be3 Qe5

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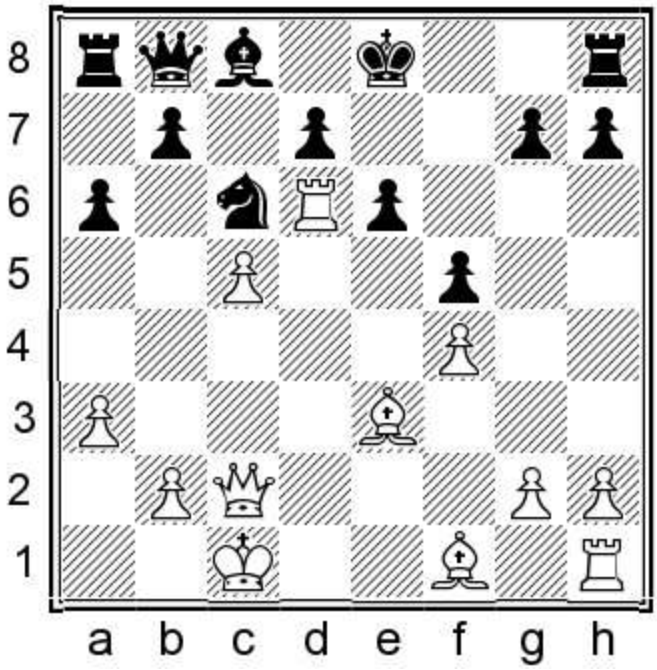
11.c5!
An excellent move, clamping down on the dark squares and inhibiting the development of Black's queenside pieces. Given the chance, White will follow up with f2-f4 and 0-0-0 in one order or another. A secondary plan is Nd2-c4, aiming at the hole on b6.

It is worth noting that the immediate 11.f4?! allowed the disruptive 11...Qa5†! 12.Kf2 f5 13.b4 Qc7 when White was unable to find enough compensation in Khismatullin – Pantsulaia, Riyadh (blitz) 2017.

11...f5
This is virtually forced. If Black does not drive the knight away from the centre, he will be smothered on the dark squares.
11...Qc7 12.Qd2 Nc6 13.Rd1 is a positional disaster for Black. For instance, 13...Be7 14.Be2 0-0 15.Nd6 Bxd6 16.Qxd6± and Black's extra pawn hardly matters, as he cannot get his pieces out.

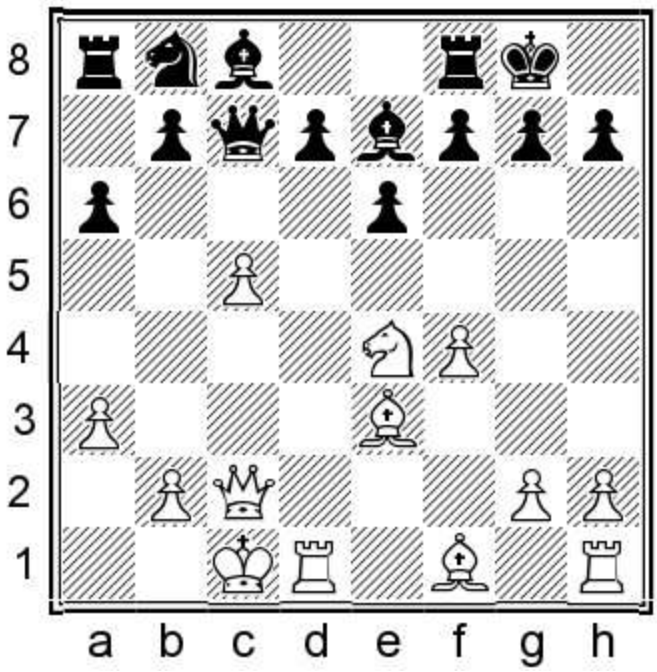
Similarly, after 11...Nc6 12.f4 Qb8 13.0-0-0 f5 14.Nd6† Bxd6 15.Rxd6 White is all over his opponent. For example:

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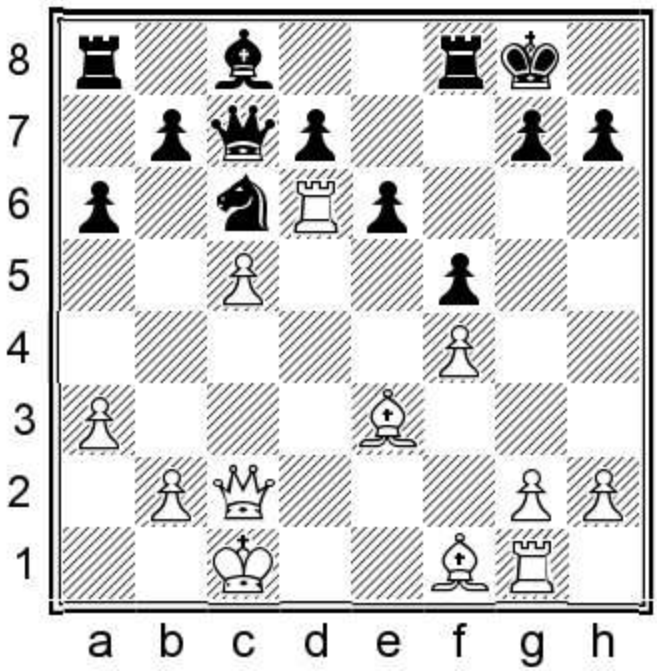
15...b6 16.Rxc6! dxc6 17.cxb6 White dominates the dark squares and has great play for the sacrificed exchange.

A final alternative is:
11...Be7 12.f4 Qc7 13.0-0-0 0-0



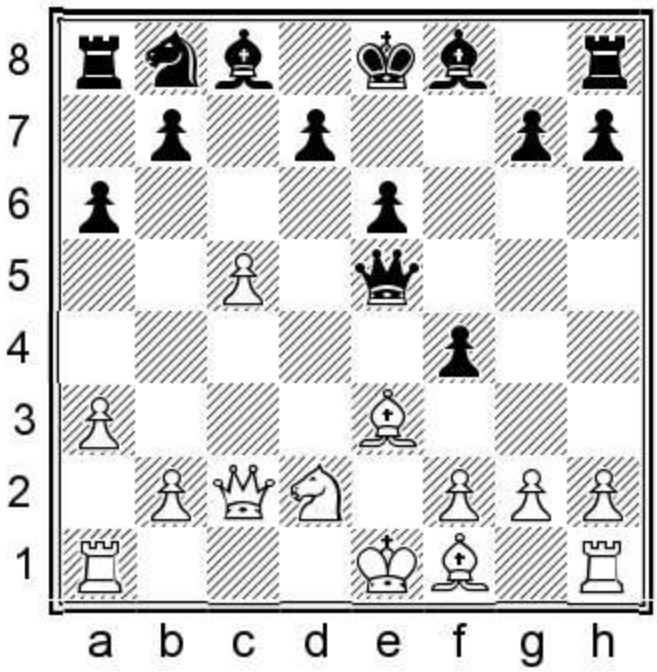
14.Rg1!?
It is worth noting that 14.g4? would be a mistake, as 14...b6! 15.cxb6 Qxc2† 16.Kxc2 Bb7 offers Black counterplay and perhaps even the advantage.
However, the simple 14.Nd6 leads to a pleasant edge as well.
14...f5
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The following line shows White's attacking potential: 14...Rd8 15.g4 b6!? 16.g5!? bxc5? 17.Nf6† Bxf6 18.gxf6

g6 19.h4 and Black is dead lost.
15.Nd6 Bxd6 16.Rxd6 Nc6
16...b5 17.g4 also gives White a big attack.



17.g4 Ne7 18.Bd3 g6 19.h4±
Black will do well to survive the attack.

12.Nd2 f4

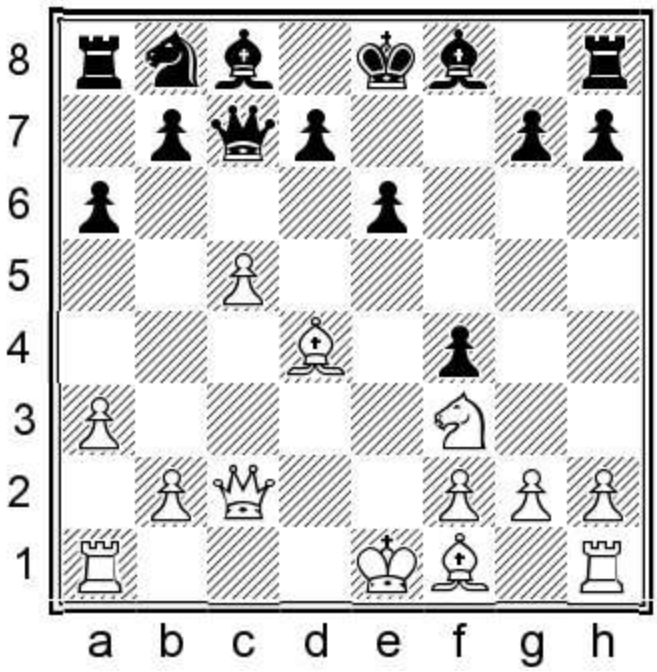


13.Nf3!N
13.Nc4 Qf6 14.Nb6?! fxe3 15.fxe3 Qe5!³ turned out well for Black in Zambrana – D. Cramling, Santos 2008.

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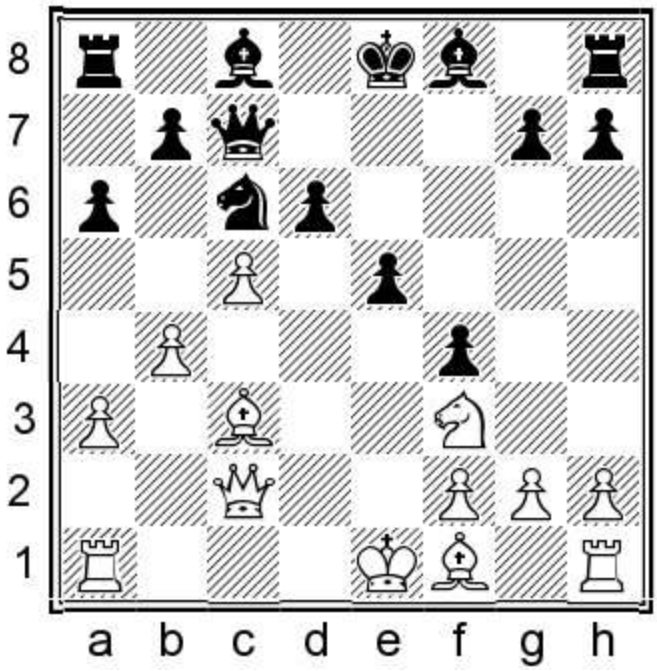
The text move is a strong novelty, although not a difficult one when you know what happened in the above game.

13...Qc7 14.Bd4
White has more than enough compensation for the pawn, as the following lines demonstrate.



14...d5
14...b6 runs into 15.Bd3 bxc5 16.Bxh7 d6 17.Bc3 and Black's king is in trouble.

14...Nc6 15.Bc3 e5 16.b4 d6 is also dangerous for Black after:

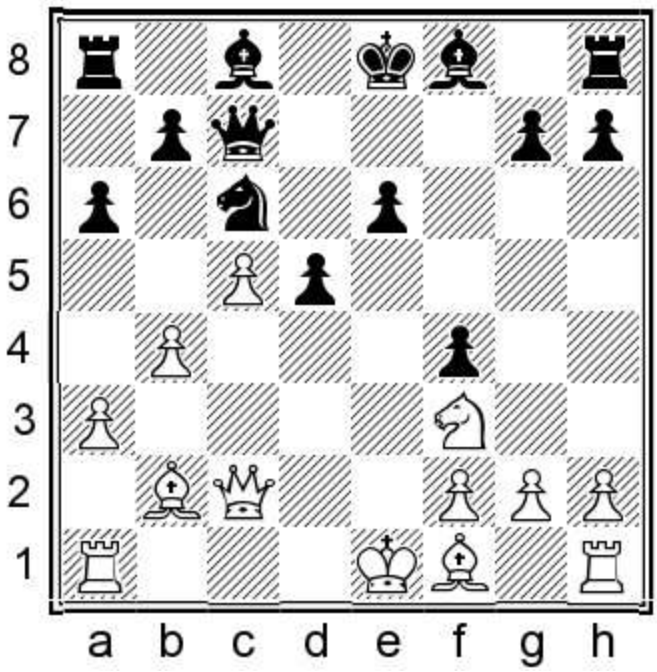


17.Bc4!© White increases his lead in development while ensuring that Black's king will not escape to the king-

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side. A sample continuation is 17...Bd7 18.0-0 0-0-0 19.a4! dxc5 20.b5 Nd4 21.Bxd4 cxd4 22.bxa6 with a deadly attack.

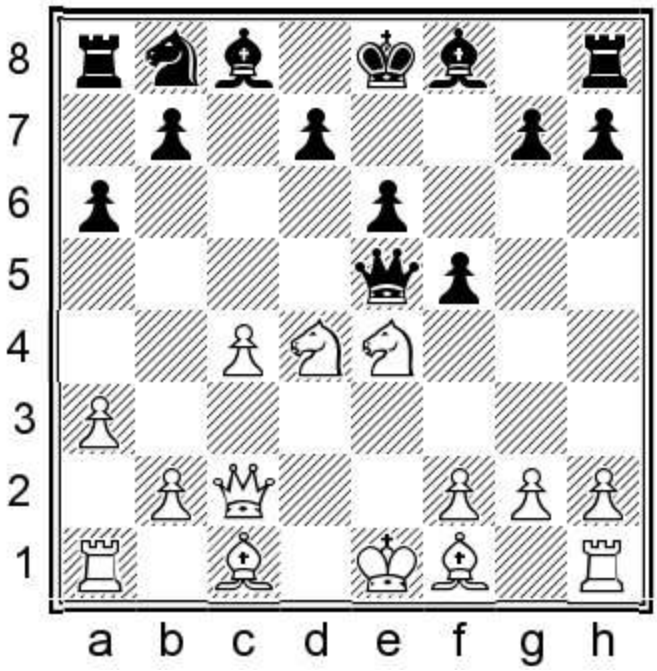
15.b4 Nc6 16.Bb2©



White has virulent compensation and will improve his position with Rd1, Bd3 and so on. An important tactical point is:

16...e5?! 17.Nxe5! Nxe5 18.Qe2
With a clear advantage for White.

C212) 9...f5



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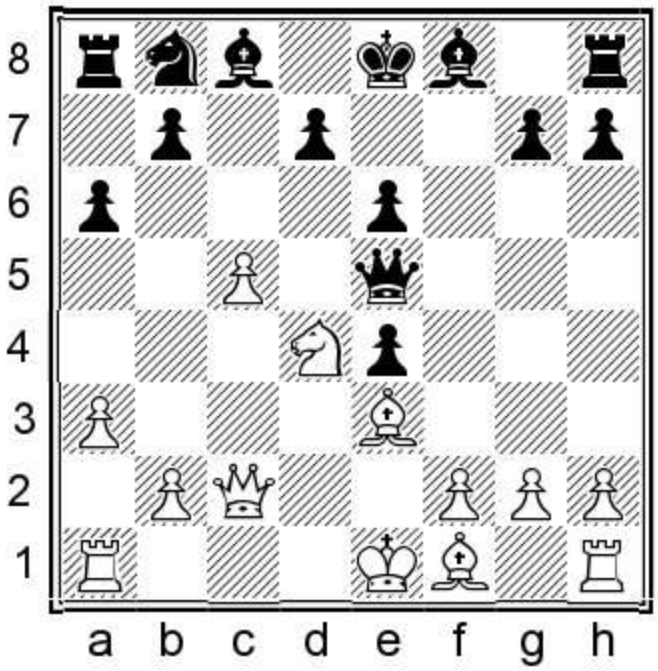
This is more complex and critical than the previous variation.

10.Be3!
I find this the most convincing solution.

10.Ne2 Qxe4!N (only 10...fxe4 has been played so far) 11.Qxe4 fxe4 12.Nc3 was evaluated as slightly better for White by De la Villa, but after 12...Be7 (12...b5!? is interesting but riskier for Black) 13.Nxe4 d5 White's advantage is minimal.

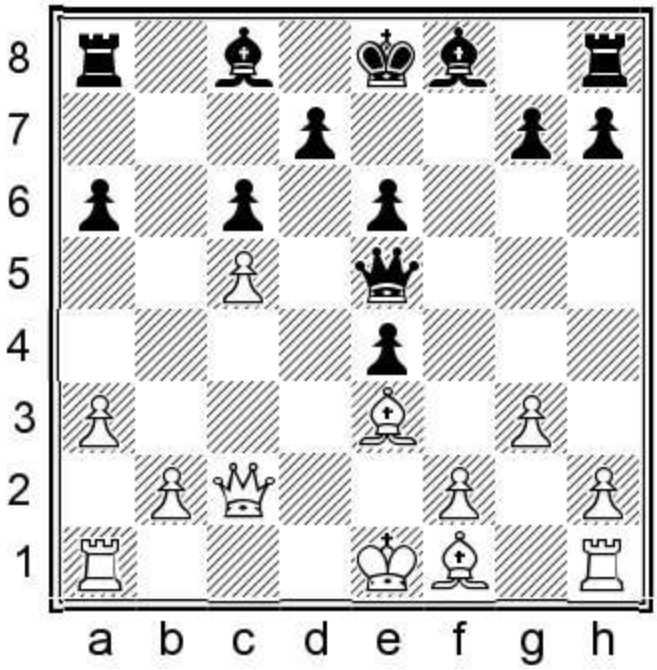
10...Qxe4
This seems most logical.

Nevertheless, I still find it important to check the alternative:
10...fxe4N 11.c5!

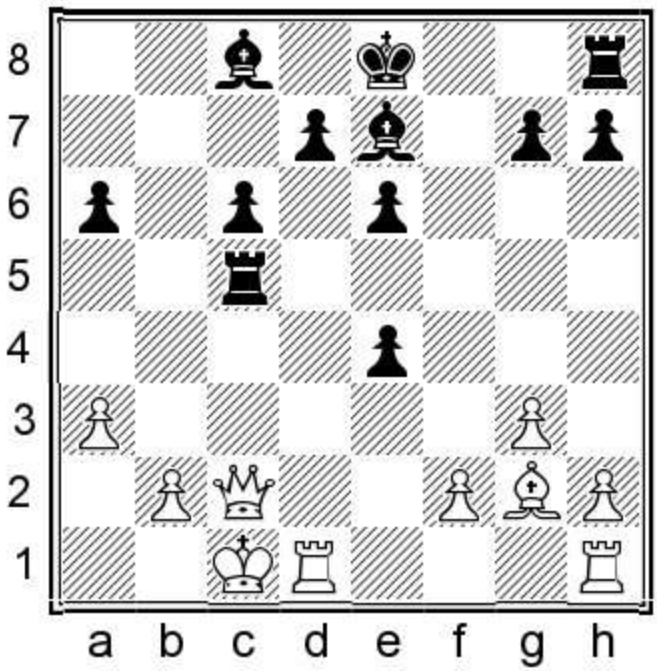



In this line we are constantly playing against the bishop on c8, which means restraining the pawns on b7 and d7. Advancing either pawn here will cause a serious weakening of Black's position.
11...Nc6
I cannot see any other sensible moves.
11...Qxc5? 12.Qxc5 Bxc5 loses a piece to 13.Rc1.
12.Nxc6 bxc6 13.g3
We could easily stop here and say that White has a positional advantage, as he will pick up the pawn on e4 and have a better structure. However, it is worth checking Black's possible attempts to free himself.

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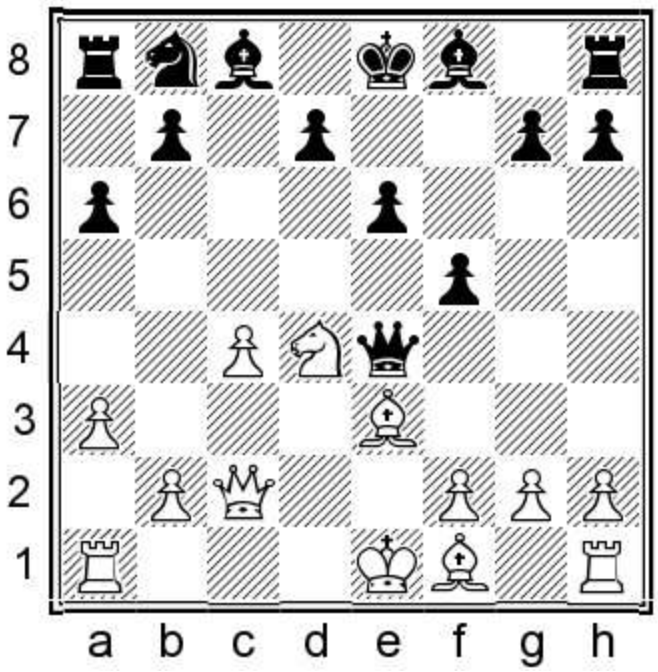


13...Rb8 14.0-0-0 Be7 15.Bg2 Rb5 16.Bd4!
This is an important detail.
16...Qxc5
16...Qh5 17.Bxe4 is better for White on account of 17...Bxc5?! 18.a4! Ra5 19.Bc3±.
17.Bxc5 Rxc5



18.Bxe4 d5 19.Kb1! Rxc2 20.Bxc2[2]
With only one pawn for the exchange, Black faces a long struggle for a draw. Some engines says he is close to equal, but they fail to see beyond a certain horizon. White will most likely spend the next ten to fifteen moves coordinating his forces, and will only then look to make inroads.

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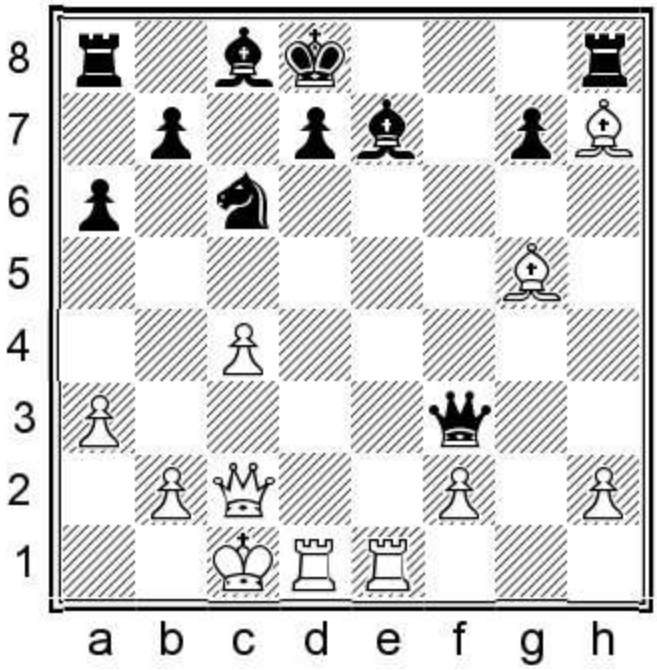
11.Bd3!
White should sacrifice a second pawn in order to increase his lead in development.

The positional approach is less successful here: 11.Qxe4 fxe4 12.c5 Nc6 (12...Bxc5? 13.Rc1 would drop a piece; even with three pawns for it, Black has no real survival chances) 13.Nb3 Ne7! Black has decent counter-play.

11...Qxg2 12.0-0-0
At this point, engines do not understand that White has a big advantage. However, when you play some moves and give them time to think, you will see the evaluation shift.

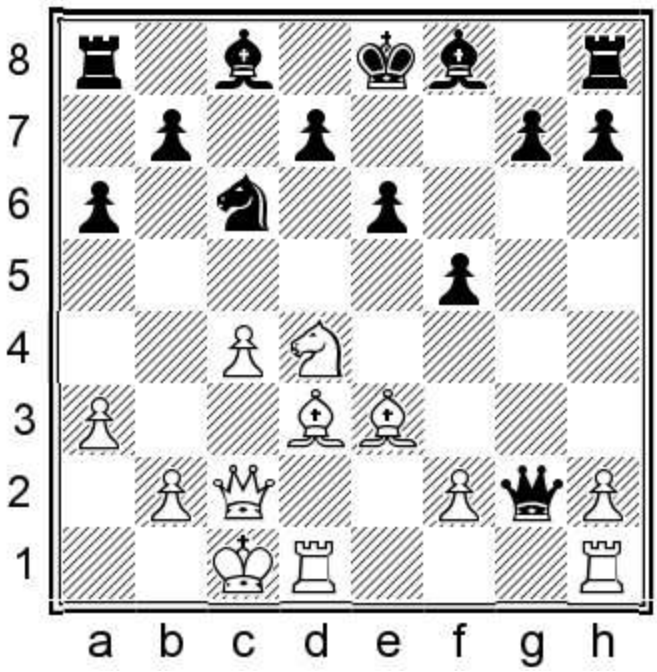
12...Nc6
I also considered:
12...Qh3 13.Nxf5!
An excellent move, with the following justification:
13...exf5?
Black should instead settle for 13...Nc6 and be prepared to suffer for a long time.
The text move leaves Black's king too exposed, with his undeveloped pieces unable to assist in the defence.
14.Bxf5 Qf3 15.Rhe1 Nc6 16.Bg5† Be7 17.Bxh7 Kd8
There are other moves, but none that hold.

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18.Rxe7! Nxe7 19.Re1
White's attack should be winning with accurate play.

Up to this point we have been following a game where White was playing well, but here an improvement is needed.



13.Rhg1!N
Bringing yet another piece into play.

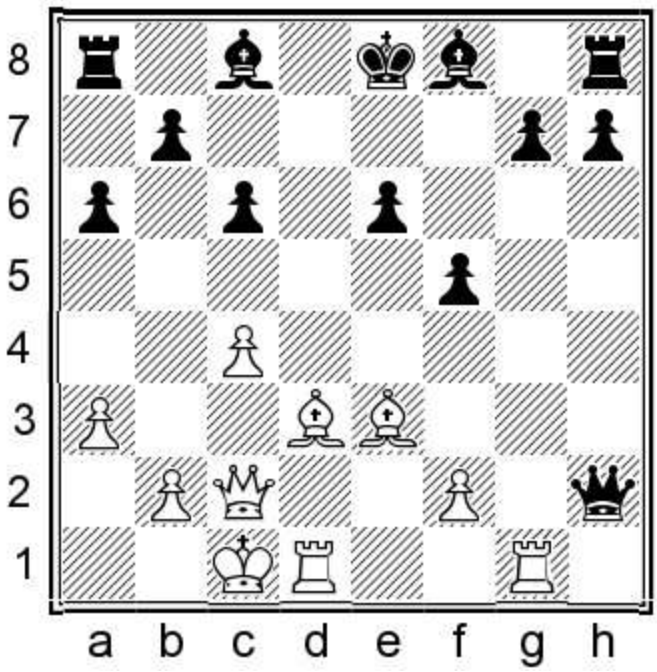
13.h4? led to an eventual win for White after some further inaccuracies on both sides in Guerra Costa – Perez Fungueiro, Pontevedra 2004. White certainly has some initiative for the two pawns here; however, instead of 13...Nxd4 14.Bxd4, when White's bishop became more active, I think Black should have continued 13...Qg6!?

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N followed by ...Qf7 with unclear play.

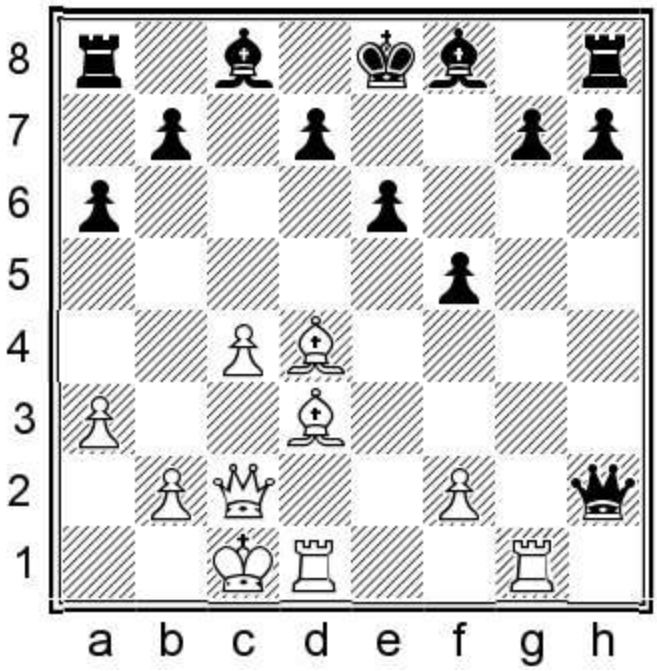
13...Qh3
Black can also capture the h2-pawn of course. There are two such possibilities:

13...Qxh2 14.Nxc6 dxc6 and now an accurate move is needed:



15.Be2! Threatening Rh1 followed by Bh5†, as well as Qd2. 15...g6 16.Qc3 Rg8 17.Qa5 Qb8 18.Rh1! h6 19. Bxh6 Be7 20.Be3± Black will not be able to get his queenside pieces into the game.

13...Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Qxh2 runs into a nice idea:

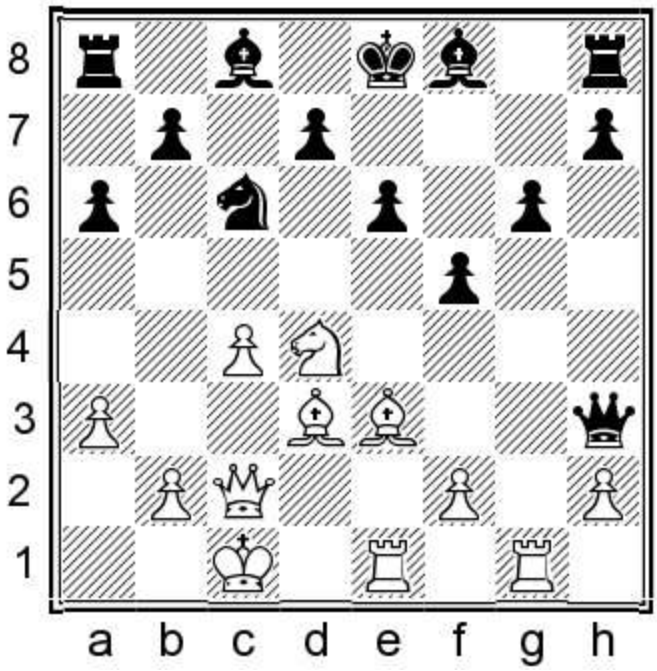


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15.Qd2! Threatening, among other things, to take on g7 without allowing a check on h6. White has a huge lead in development and a great initiative for the three pawns. The game goes on, but in a practical game Black's chances of surviving the middlegame would be slim.

14.Rde1²
White has more than enough compensation, as will be confirmed by a strong engine, if given sufficient thinking time. Here is a nice illustrative line.

14...g6

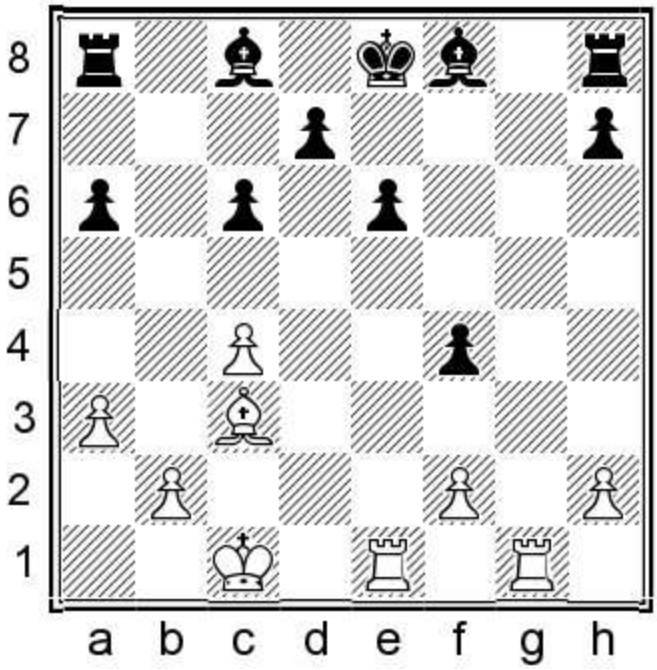


15.Bxf5!! gxf5
After 15...exf5 16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.Qb3 Black has no way to avoid a deadly check.

16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.Qc3
White looks to be completely winning, but the engine comes up with an absurd-looking way to stay in the game.

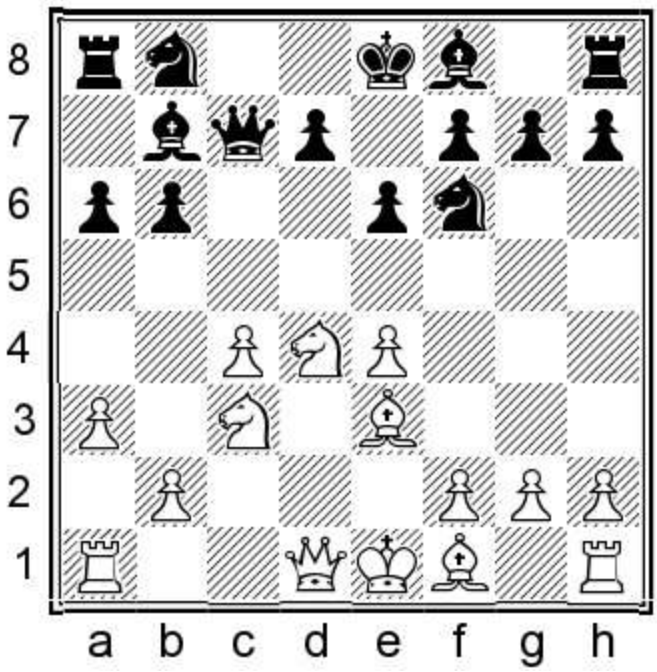
17...f4!? 18.Bd2 Qxc3† 19.Bxc3

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19...Bb4!? 20.Bxb4 a5 21.Bd6
Despite the machine's defensive heroics, White keeps a massive advantage in the ending and should win with good technique.

C22) 7...b6 8.Be3 Bb7



This time Black goes for safety with some version of a Hedgehog formation.

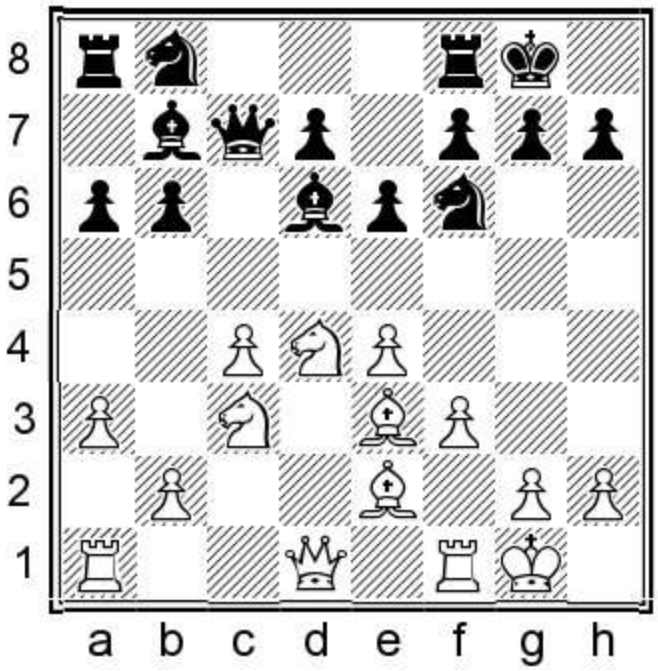
9.f3
In variation A at the start of the chapter, I suggested putting the bishop on d3 in response to an early ...Bb7. In this instance, however, 9.Bd3?! is not as good, for more than one reason. First of all, 9...Nc6 gives White more to think about than in our main line below, due to possibilities such as ...Bc5 or ...Ne5. Secondly, Black could

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switch to a ...Nbd7 Hedgehog set-up, where the bishop is not so well placed on d3. It blocks the d-file, making the ...d5 break easier to accomplish, and might also be a target for ...Nc5 or ...Ne5.

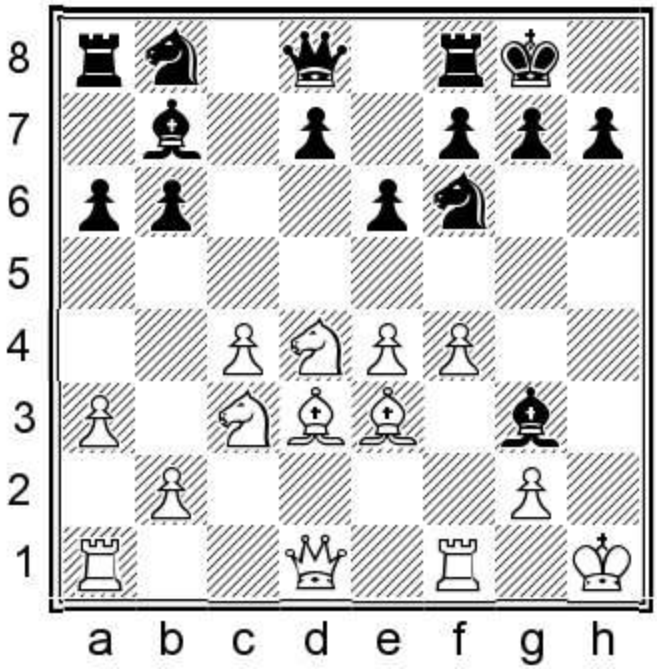
After the text move, Black has to make an important decision regarding the development of the b8-knight. We will analyse C221) 9...Nc6 and C222) 9...d6, with the latter preparing to develop the knight to d7.

9...Be7 10.Be2
This is likely to transpose to one of the two main lines after a subsequent ...Nc6 or ...d6; occasionally, however, Black tries to get creative.
10...0-0 11.0-0 Bd6?!
Losing a tempo with the bishop is too optimistic. It turns out that White can ignore the threat to the h2-pawn.

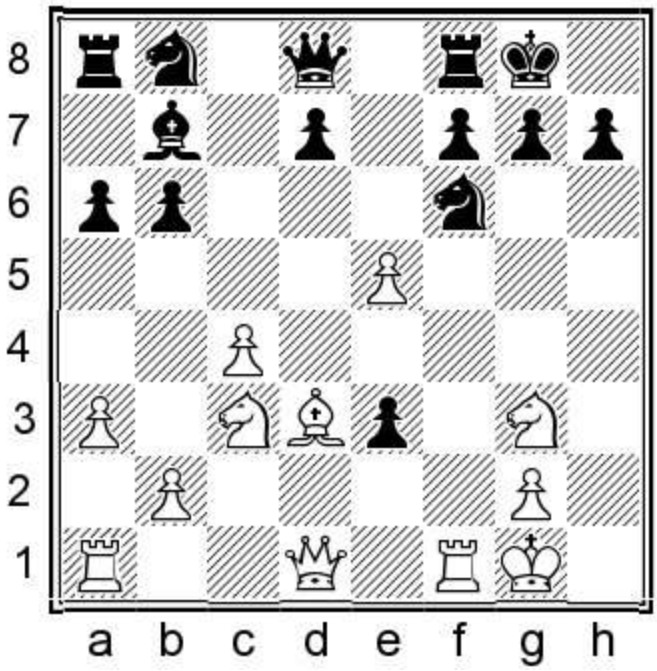



12.Kh1! Bxh2 13.f4 Bg3 14.Bd3
Black's extra pawn comes at a heavy price, as his bishop is short of squares and White will gain a lot of time to start an attack.
14...Qd8
14...g6 is well met by 15.Rf3 Nh5 16.Nde2 Bh4 17.g4!N (17.Rh3!? Be7 18.Rxh5 gxh5 19.Ng3 gave White a dangerous attack in Havasi – C. Horvath, Zalakaros 2015, but the text move is simpler) 17...Ng7 18.Rh3 followed by Qg1 and White has a huge initiative for a pawn.
After the text move, we should look to improve over Dambaev – Khantuev, Ulan Ude 2014, as follows:

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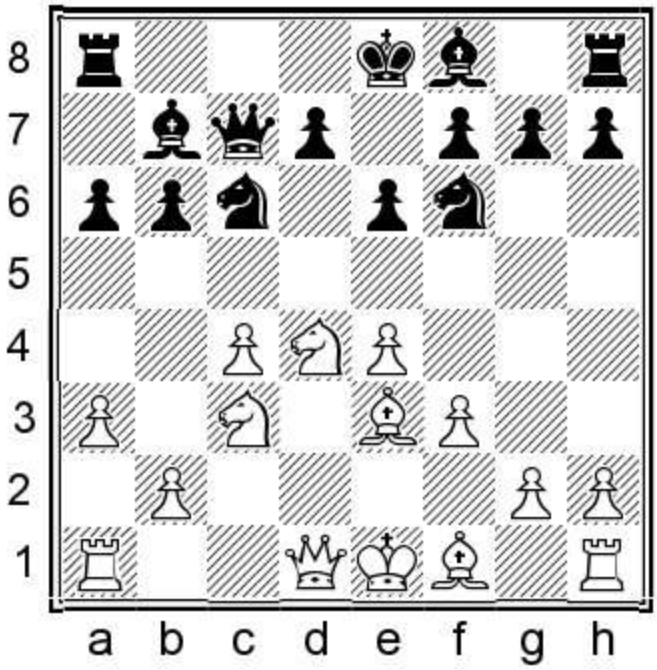
15.Kg1!N
This is the most convenient way to avoid ...Nxe4 (or some other knight move) threatening ...Qh4† and mate.
15...e5
15...Bh4 16.Qf3 gives White fantastic attacking chances.
15...g6 16.Rf3 Nh5 17.Nde2±
16.Nf5 exf4
Or 16...Bxf4 17.Bxf4 exf4 18.e5 Ne8 19.Qh5+– and White's attack decides.
17.Nxg3 fxe3 18.e5



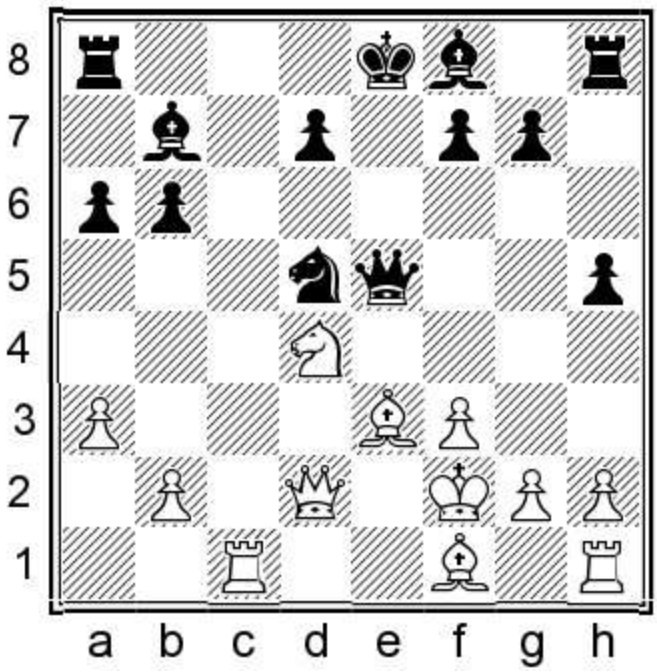
18...Qc7 19.exf6 Qxg3 20.Be4!±
The game is not yet over, but Black is under heavy pressure.

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C221) 9...Nc6



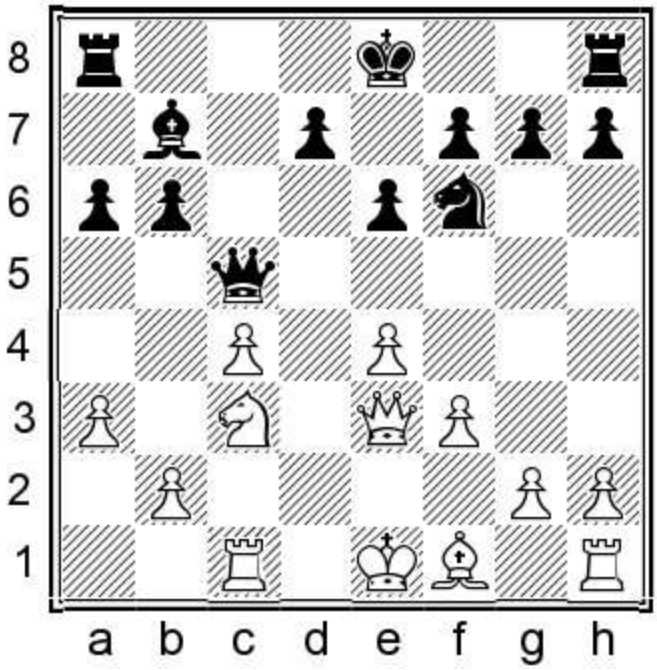
10.Rc1 Ne5
10...h5? was refuted in the following game: 11.Nd5! exd5 12.cxd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Qe5 14.Kf2 Ne7 15.Qd2 Nxd5



16.Bg5 Ne7 17.Bc4 f6 18.Bf4 Qa5 19.b4 Qa4 20.Bb3 Qxa3 21.Ra1 1–0 Gelfand – Ponomariov, Khanty-Mansiysk (blitz) 2009.

10...Nxd4 is a more sensible way to play, but at the same time rather uninspiring for Black, as he will soon find himself in a slightly worse position without much counterplay. 11.Qxd4 Bc5 12.Qd2 Bxe3 13.Qxe3 Qc5

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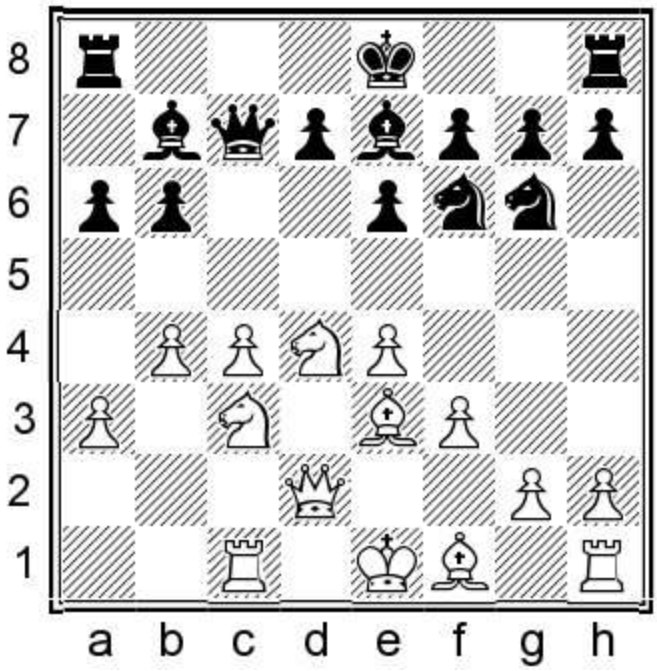


This occurred in Ganguly – Kamsky, Philadelphia 2005, and now 14.Qxc5!?N 14...bxc5 15.e5² would have given White an enduring edge.

11.b4 Ng6
11...Rc8 12.Na4 d6 13.Be2 Be7 14.0-0 leads to similar play.

12.Qd2
This stops any nonsense connected with ...Nf4.

12...Be7



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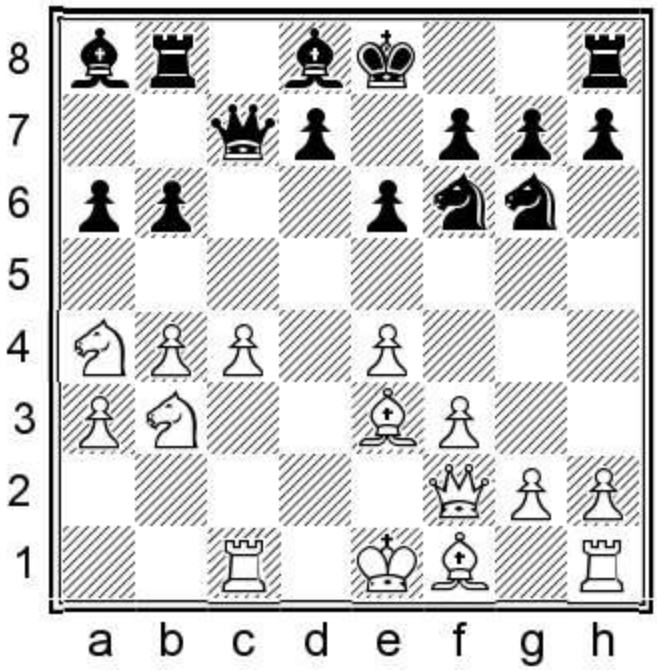
13.Nb3!N

White’s plan for the next few moves is to attack the b6-pawn, and I believe this is the most accurate move order. We will aim to transpose to an existing game, while reducing Black’s options.

The game continued 13.Na4 Rb8 (13...d6? 14.Nxb6 Qxb6 15.Nxe6+– and 13...0-0 14.Nb3± are simply bad for Black) 14.Nb3 and now 14...Bc6!?N (the game continued 14...Ba8 15.Qf2 Bd8, reaching our target position) 15.b5 Bxe4! 16.fxe4 Bxa3 would have led to complications which we may as well avoid.

13...Rb8 14.Qf2 Ba8
14...Bc6?! 15.c5 b5 16.Nd4± is excellent for White.

15.Na4 Bd8
This looks awkward but Black has no other way to defend b6. We have now transposed to the desired game, which we will follow for a few more moves before improving.

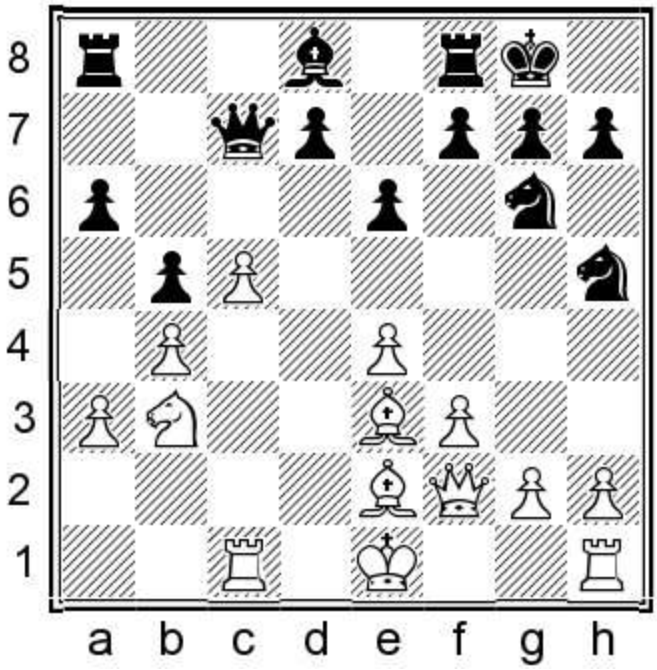



16.c5
It is also worth considering 16.Nxb6!? Rxb6 17.Bxb6 Qxb6 18.Qxb6 Bxb6 19.c5 Bc7 20.Bxa6 when White has clearly better chances with his two queenside pawns; the only real question is the extent of his advantage, as Black has some chances for counterplay with his active pieces.

The text move leads to a safe edge in a more stable type of position.

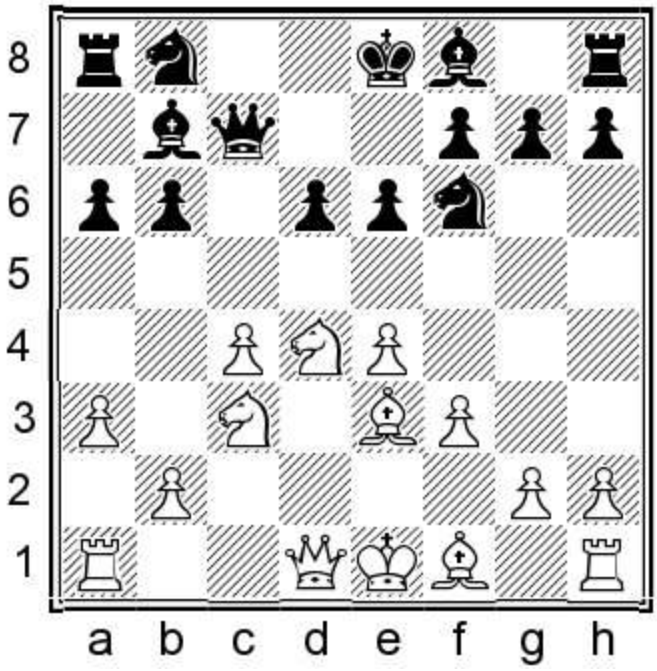
16...b5 17.Nb6 0-0 18.Nxa8 Rxa8 19.Be2 Nh5
Now a simple improvement is:

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20.g3!N
With better chances for White, as pointed out by Marin in Chess Informant 103. (The game continued 20.0-0?! Bh4! 21.g3 Nxg3! 22.hxg3 Bxg3 23.Qg2 Nf4 when Black had strong compensation and went on to win a nice game in Garcia Roman – Marin, La Massana 2008.)

C222) 9...d6

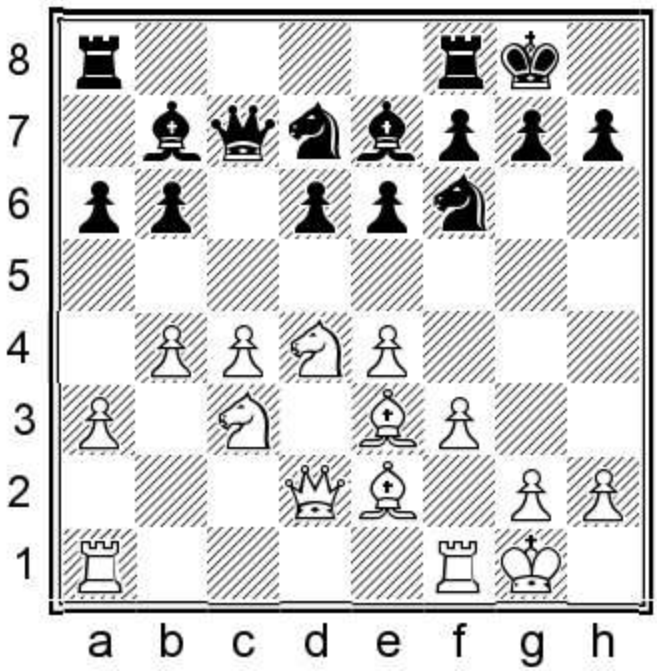


By playing this move early, Black signifies that he probably intends to develop the b8-knight on d7.

10.Be2 Be7 11.0-0 Nbd7 12.Qd2 0-0
Having made a number of natural moves, we need to ask ourselves where our rooks would be most purposefully placed, and what our plan for the middlegame should be.

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13.b4!
White could continue ‘on autopilot’ for a few more moves with 13.Rfd1 Rac8 14.Rac1 Rfe8 15.Bf1 and keep some kind of small advantage. However, I’m not convinced that the rooks are best placed in this way, so I have something else in mind. Before we commit the rooks though, I like the idea of advancing the b-pawn. This will be essential to our active plans on the queenside later, and it has no downside as the c4-pawn is not really weak.




13...Rac8
13...Ne5 does not accomplish anything: White simply plays 14.Rac1, when taking the c4-pawn would cost Black his queen.

14.Rac1 Qb8
Many move orders are possible. Black may, for instance, start with 14...Rfe8, when either 15.Rc2 or 15.Kh1 should transpose to our main line in a few moves. Black will almost always move the queen back to b8 at some point in order to escape the X-ray vision of White’s rook on the c-file.

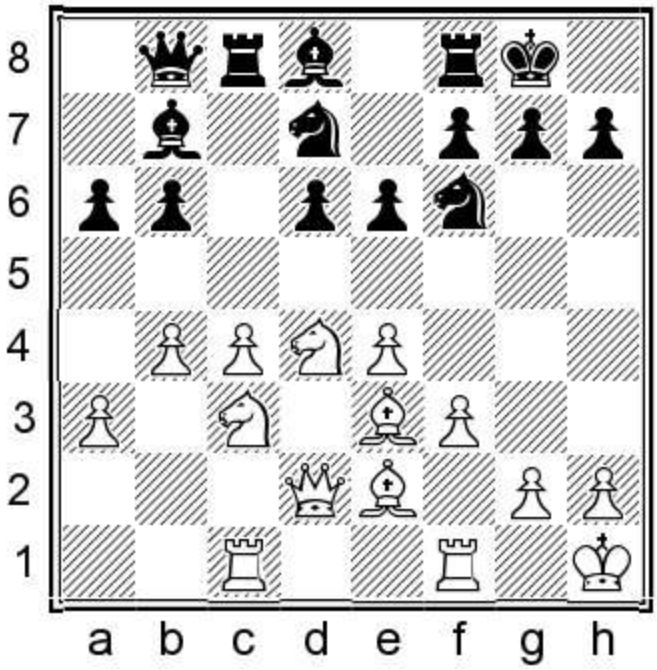
15.Kh1
This is a useful precaution. White may play a prophylactic Bg1 at some point, tucking the bishop out of harm’s way and guarding the h2-pawn. The importance of this will become clear in the note to Black’s next move below.

White could also play 15.Rc2 first; as I said before, the exact move order doesn’t matter too much. We will see the idea of the Rc2 move shortly.

15...Rfe8
Somewhere around here, Black usually commits to one plan or another. The text move keeps things flexible for the moment though.

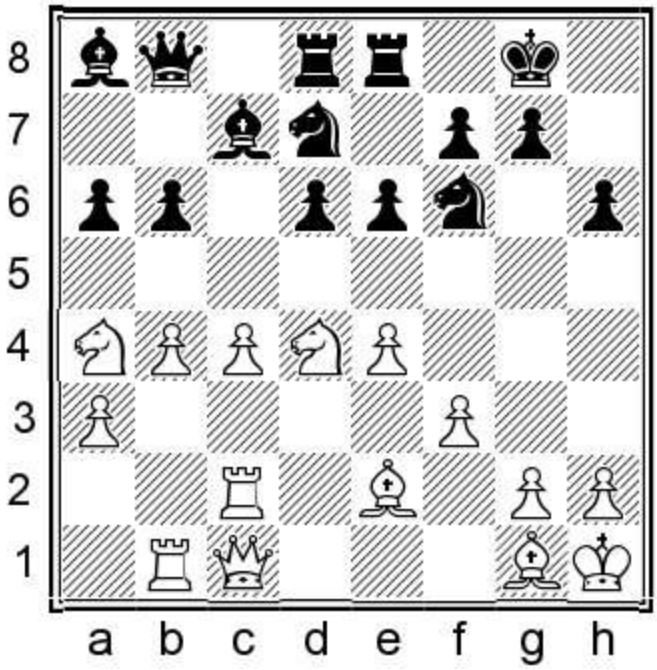
A popular alternative is:
15...Bd8
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The idea is to put the bishop on c7 to add force to a subsequent ...d5, but White is well placed to deal with this

plan, as Kasparov showed against Kramnik in 2001.

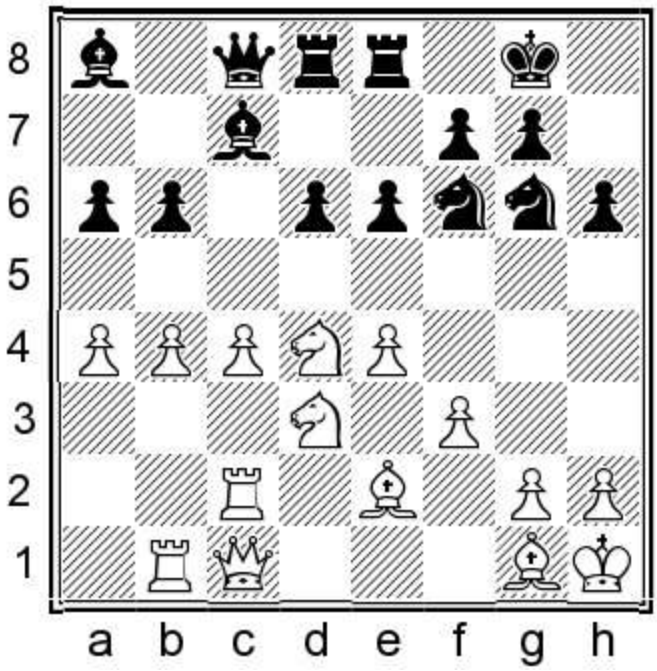


16.Rc2 Re8 17.Na4 Bc7 18.Bg1
Now we see why it was useful to make the g1-square available for the bishop.
18...Rcd8
18...h5 19.Rb1! places the rook menacingly opposite Black's queen. If Black continues his plan with 19...h4, then 20.c5! turns out to be extremely powerful.
18...Ba8 19.Rb1 h5 was mentioned by Kasparov as a possible improvement, but 20.b5! seems to me to be highly problematic for Black.
19.Rb1!
This is the usual follow-up to the earlier Rc2.
19.Rfc1 was possible as well, but I like the idea of placing the rook opposite Black's queen, setting up all kinds of ideas involving c4-c5 or b4-b5.
19...Ba8
19...d5 20.exd5 exd5 21.c5! is excellent for White; in the event of 21...b5, White simply replies with 22.Nc3 followed by a3-a4, as Kasparov points out.
20.Qc1 h6

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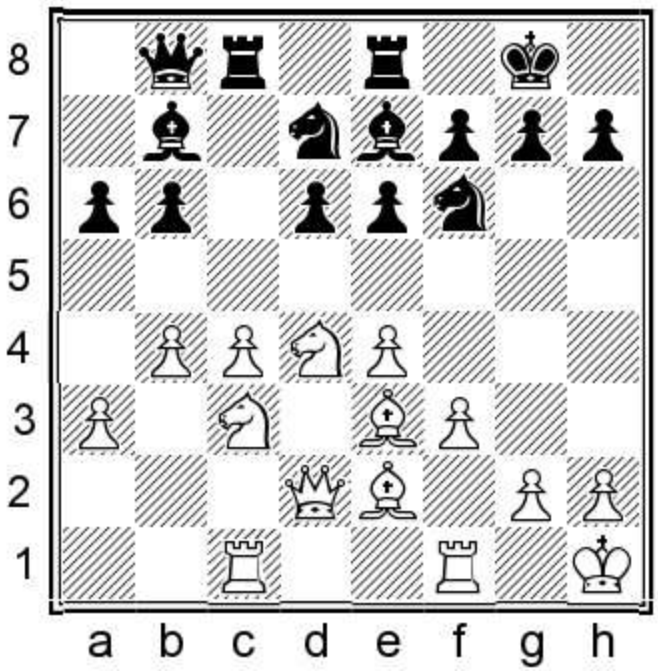
21.Nb2!
Rerouting the knight to d3 is an effective way to improve White's position.
21.c5 b5! 22.c6 Ne5÷ is not clear at all.
21...Nf8
Kasparov suggests 21...Ne5 in order to exchange the knight when it lands in d3, but 22.c5! is an improvement which poses difficult problems to Black.
22.Nd3 Ng6 23.a4 Qc8
So far White has done an excellent job of strengthening his position and preparing for action on the queenside. At this point, Kasparov missed the strongest continuation, which he subsequently pointed out in his annotations:



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24.a5!N

The game continued 24.b5 a5 25.Nc6 Bxc6 26.bxc6 e5 27.Bxb6 and White was somewhat better in Kasparov – Kramnik, Moscow (2) 2001.
24.Qa3!? and 24.Nb3!? are valid ways of preparing a4-a5, but it turns out that they are not needed.
24...bxa5 25.b5±
Black is in trouble; b5-b5 is a major threat, and 25...Bb6? would be refuted by 26.Nxe6!±.



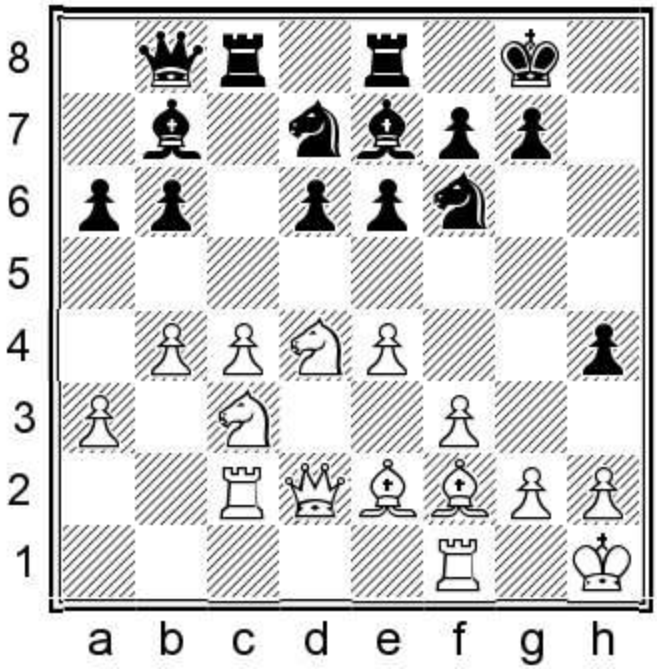
16.Rc2!
Once again, this is a useful move to prepare Rb1 or perhaps Rfc1.

16...h5!?
16...Bd8 transposes to the Kasparov – Kramnik game noted above.

The text move is recommended by Johan Hellsten in Play the Sicilian Kan. The Swedish GM does not seem to be a fan of the ...Bd8-c7 manoeuvre, and points out that the bishop is useful on e7 in supporting the pawn when it reaches h4. Although the idea of advancing the h-pawn is enterprising enough, I firmly believe that White stands better.

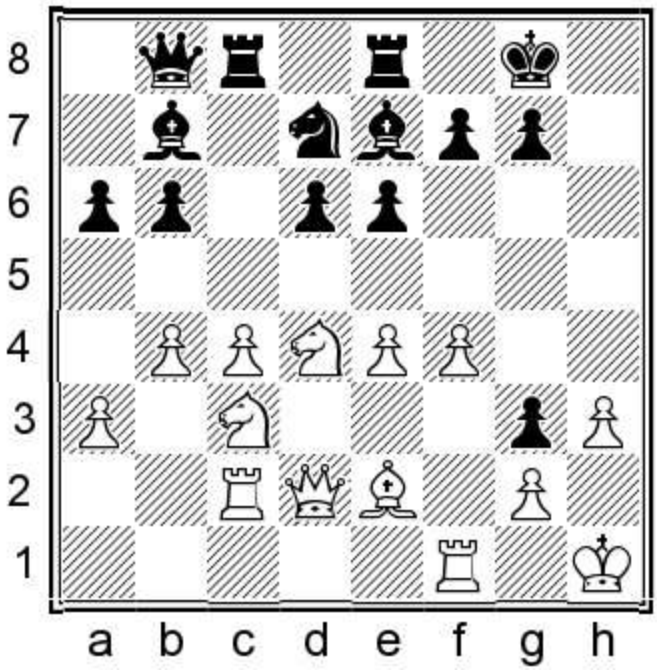
17.Bf2! h4
17...Ne5N 18.Na4 Nfd7 is another option mentioned by Hellsten, who points out that 19.f4?! is inadvisable due to 19...Ng4. That's true, but White can instead continue strengthening his position with moves like Rd1, h2-h3, Be3 and so on. It's not clear to me what Black can achieve with his advanced h-pawn, and he has to worry about the fact that f3-f4 might come at any turn.

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18.h3!
Fixing the h4-pawn as a target. Besides, I would rather not allow the pawn to get to h3. Objectively, White may still be able to fight for an advantage in such a scenario, but just look at our king on h1, standing opposite the bishop on b7. To allow the g2-pawn to disappear would be to invite a future tactical trick involving the long diagonal.

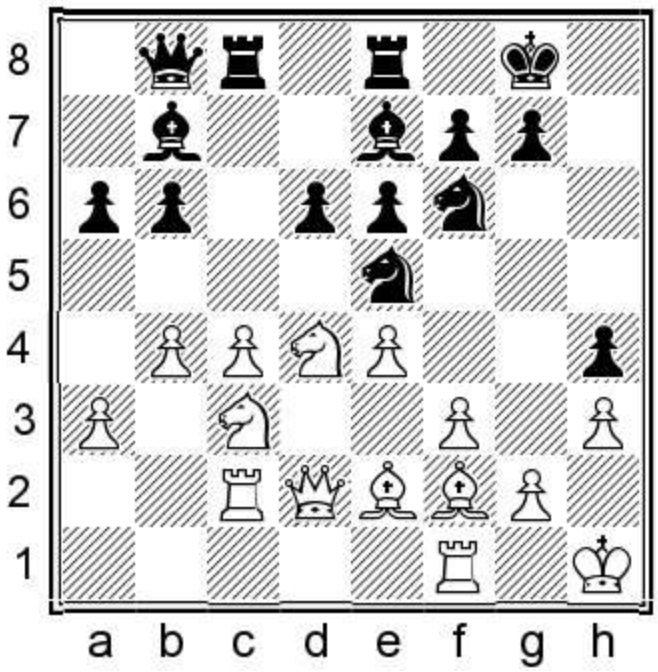
18...Ne5
Black has also tried targeting the dark-square weaknesses with 18...Nh5 19.f4 Ng3† 20.Bxg3 hxg3, as given by Hellsten. Here White's play can be improved with:



21.Qe3!N (Hellsten focuses on 21.f5?!, as played in Shabalov – Macieja, Bermuda 2004) 21...Bf6 22.Bd3 Qc7 23.Nde2 Qd8 24.Rd1 Having consolidated his position, White is ready to pick off the g3-pawn. The game re-

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mains complicated and Black can strive for counterplay on the dark squares, but he does not have full compensation and White's chances are higher.



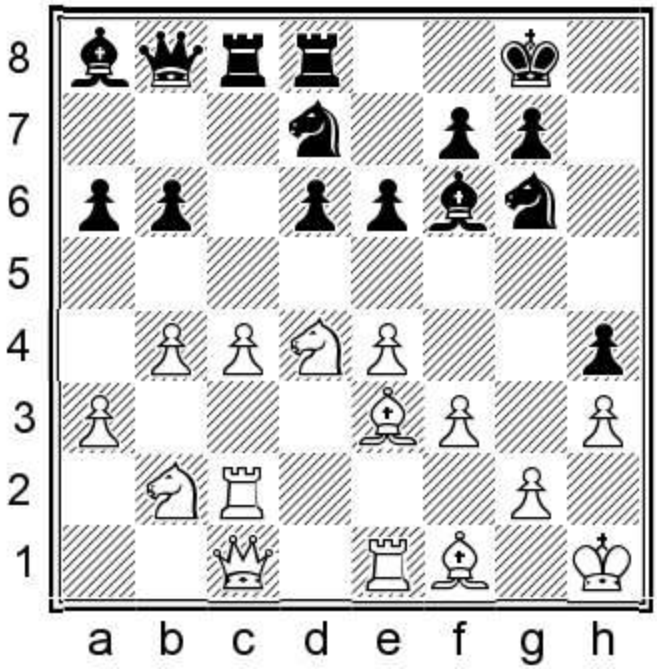
19.Na4 Nfd7 20.Nb2
Once again, Kasparov's knight manoeuvre works well in this structure. The c4-pawn is securely defended and the knight may come to d3 later if circumstances permit – although White will not be in a hurry to do this while the enemy knight is on e5.

It would be reasonable to end the line here with a 'plus equals' evaluation, but I will show a few more moves of an illustrative game.

20...Bf6 21.Re1
21.Rfc1 also looks fine.

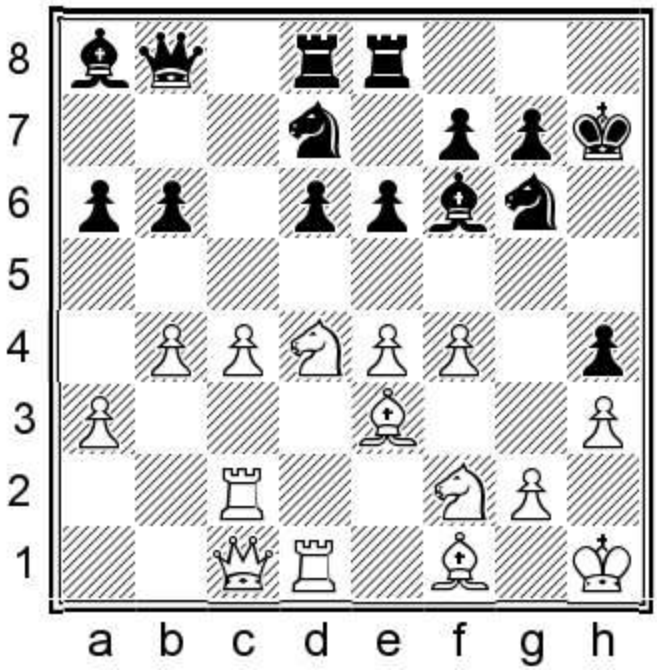
21...Ng6 22.Bf1 Red8 23.Qc1 Nde5 24.Na4 Nd7 25.Be3 Ba8 26.Nb2

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26...Re8
26...Nde5 would challenge White to come up with a plan. My suggestion for the next few moves would be 27. Rd1 followed by Qd2 and Nb3. From there, White could consider Qf2, menacing the b6-pawn while supporting a possible f4-f5. Another idea is to attack on the queenside with a4-a5. For Black, keeping an eye on the sensitive b6- and h4-pawns while restraining White's plans on both flanks will be no easy task.

27.Nd3 Nde5 28.Nf2 Rcd8 29.Rd1 Kh7 30.f4 Nd7



All this was played in Vuckovic – Grandelius, Sarajevo 2010. The notion of a theoretical novelty feels rather absurd here, as the chances of anyone reaching this exact position again are minimal. Nevertheless, I will present an improvement on the basis that it illustrates an important positional theme.

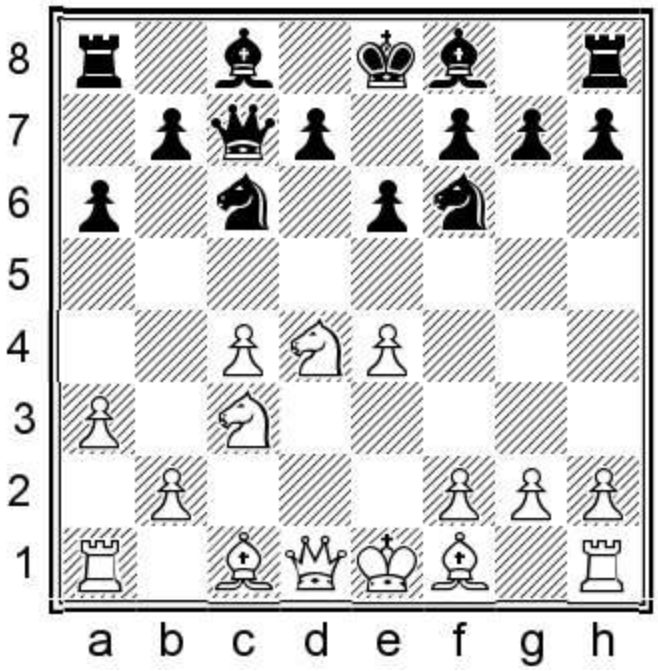
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31.f5!N
It is easy to overlook such moves on the basis of being ‘anti-positional’, but the decision is justified by the fact that the h4-pawn is short of defenders. This shows a clear strategic risk of Black’s ...h5-h4 plan.

31...Nge5
31...exf5 gives White a pleasant choice between 32.exf5 Nge5 33.Bg5, with similar play to the main line, and 32.Nxf5, with an excellent knight and attacking chances on the kingside.

32.Bg5 Kg8 33.Qf4±
White will win the h4-pawn and will also have some attacking chances, taking into account the remoteness of the black queen on b8.

C23) 7...Nc6




This time Black opts for the early development of the knight, often with the intention of moving it to e5. The other idea is to exchange on d4 at some point, although in that case Black may struggle to create counterplay due to a lack of firepower.

8.Be3
We will analyse three main options: C231) 8...b6, C232), C232) 8...Bd6!? and C233) 8...Be7.

8...Ne5 is a popular choice but it doesn’t have much independent significance. White simply plays 9.Be2 and Black will likely develop his bishop to e7 in the next move or two, reaching one of the lines covered under variation C233 where ...Ne5 is played. Note that the threat to the c4-pawn is illusory: 9...Nxc4? 10.Bxc4 Qxc4 11. Rc1 leaves Black without a good way to prevent a nasty discovered attack on his queen.

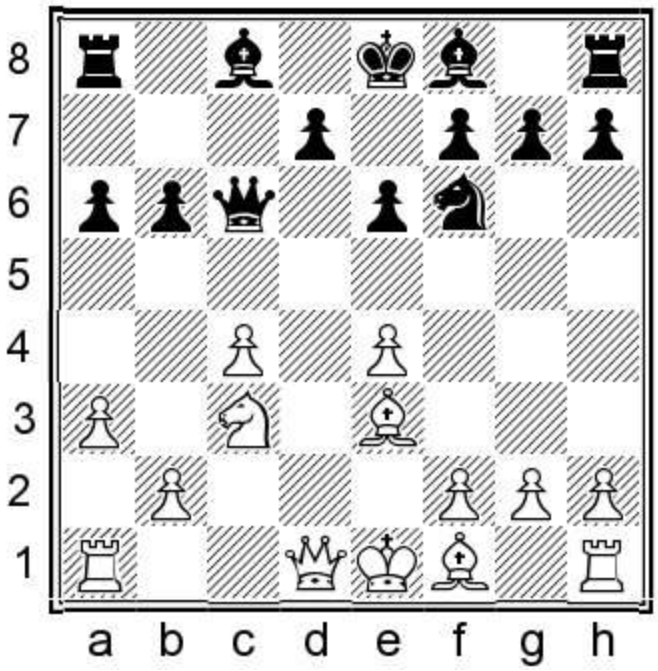
C231) 8...b6

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I am not particularly impressed by this move, as it feels as though Black has not decided which type of position

he is aiming for.

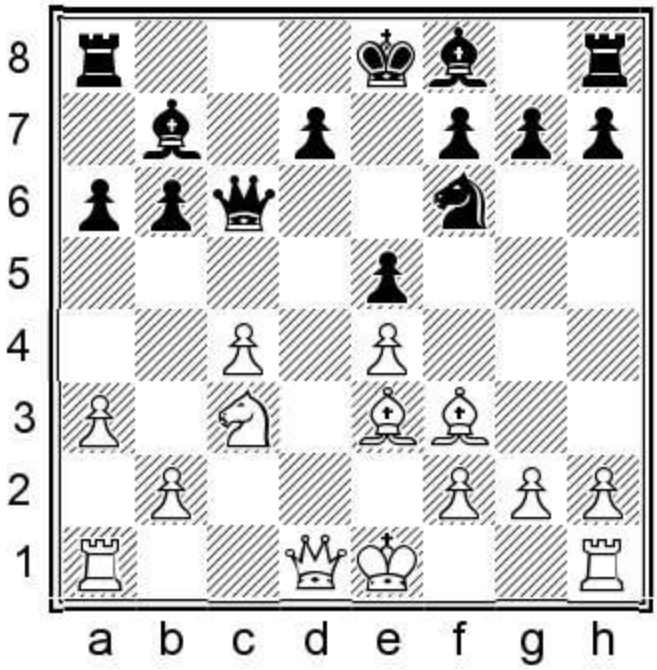
9.Nxc6! Qxc6
9...dxc6 seems less logical to me, although it might be the lesser evil. White can play 10.Be2 with a pleasant game, but 10.f4 e5 11.f5² gave him a promising position in Kovacevic – Strikovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1999. I do not think we need to prepare for this line seriously, as White is just better in a somewhat closed position. If you are unsure about how to exploit a space advantage, I would suggest that your top priority should not be opening preparation, but instead should be to read Boris Gelfand's superb book Positional Decision Making in Chess, which explores this topic in detail.



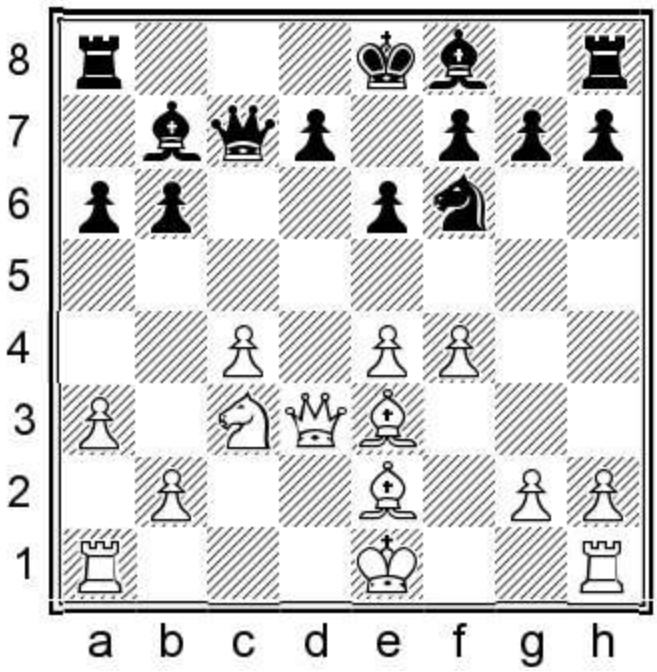

10.Be2
10.e5N is a good alternative: 10...Ne4 11.Nxe4 (11.Ne2!? can also be considered) 11...Qxe4 12.Qd4 and White has the more pleasant endgame, as De la Villa points out. However, it seems more ambitious to avoid simplifications for the time being.

10...Bd6
Black has a few obvious alternatives which should be checked:
10...Bb7N 11.Bf3! e5

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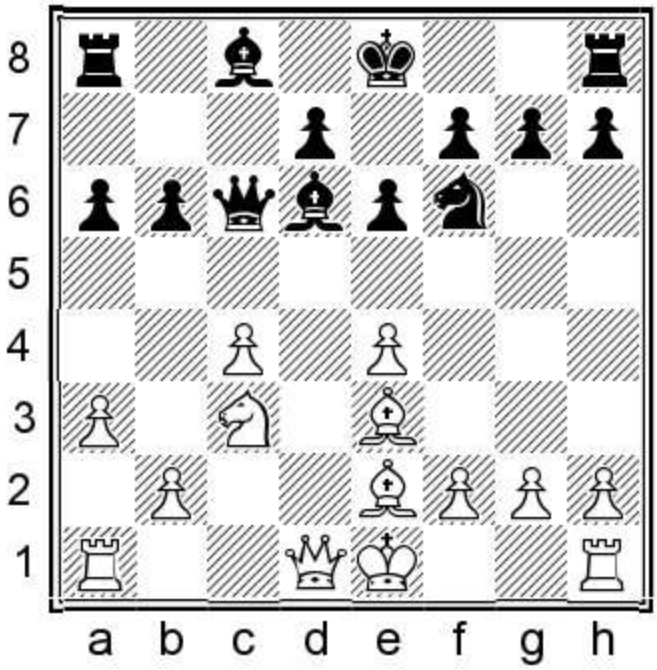
12.Nd5 Bc5 13.Bxc5 bxc5 14.0-0 White has a significant advantage. He has more space, a better structure and active pieces, as well as a small lead in development. True, Black will not be checkmated quickly, but he will have to make positional concessions, which will be painful enough.
10...Qc7 11.f4 Bb7 12.Qd3 is also promising for White, for instance:



12...Bc5?! (12...d6N² undoubtedly favours White, but would still have been the lesser evil for Black) 13.Bxc5 bxc5 14.e5± White already had an overwhelming position in Kosenkov – Boey, corr. 1975.

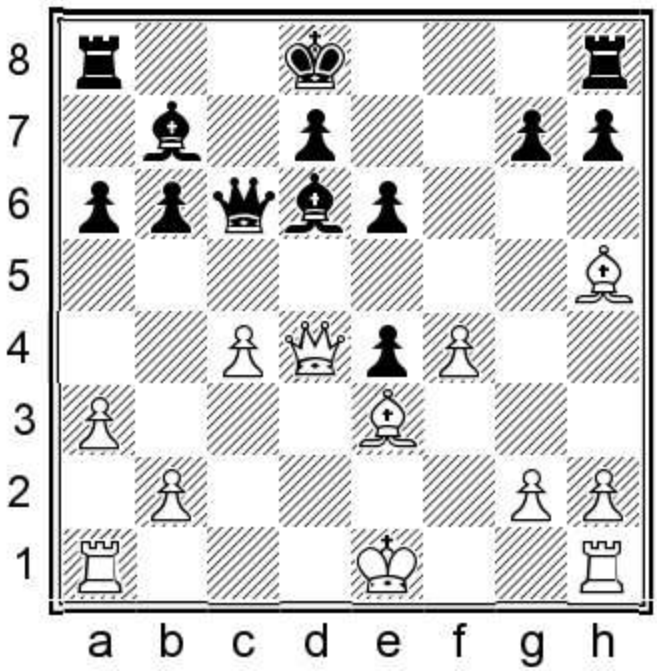
The text move is the ambitious option, played by a top Kan specialist, but here I want to improve over his opponent's play in Velimirovic – Miladinovic, Arandjelovac 1993.

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11.f4!!N 11...e5
I cannot see another defence.

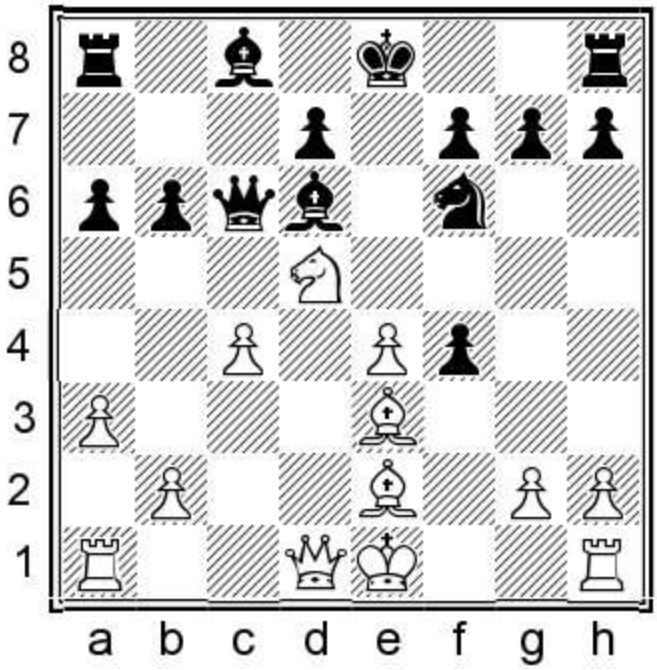
11...Nxe4 must of course be checked, but it runs into concrete problems: 12.Bf3 f5 13.Qd4 Bb7 14.Nxe4 fxe4 15.Bh5† Kd8



16.Rd1 Kc7 17.b4+– Black has a miserable position with no coordination amongst his pieces. White will castle, mobilize his rooks and then slaughter his opponent as if re-enacting a low-class pulp fiction novel.

12.Nd5! exf4
12...Bb7 13.0-0 does not change the situation much.

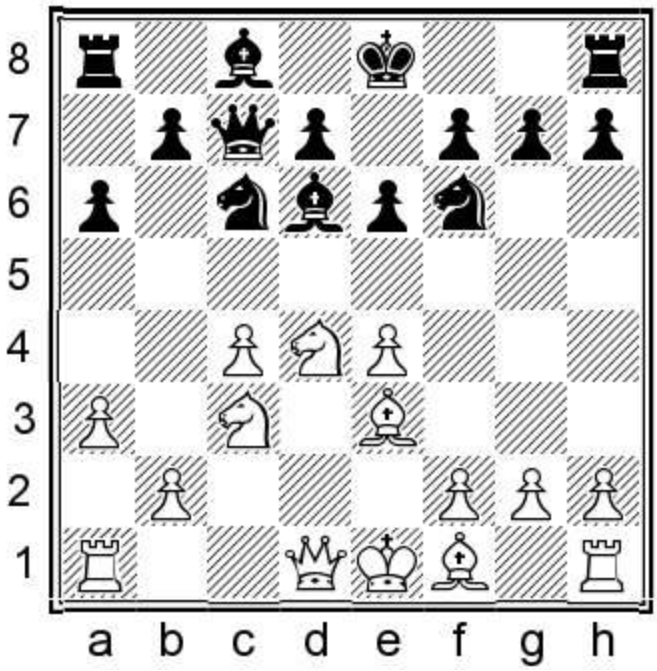
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13.Bd4! Bc5 14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Rf1!
White will follow up with Rxf4 and taking on f6, with a winning attack.

C232) 8...Bd6!?

This is not the most common move but it's one of Black's more interesting options. At first, it looks as though Black wants to use the queen-bishop battery for some kind of activity along the b8-h2 diagonal. If White prevents this (as occurs after our next move), Black can revert to a secondary plan involving ...Be5, followed by taking on d4 twice, and then ...d6, ...e5 and ...Be6. It is hardly a spectacular plan, and some might consider it a little passive, but White still has to come up with a way to make the game interesting and avoid ending up in a quiet position with a bad light-squared bishop.



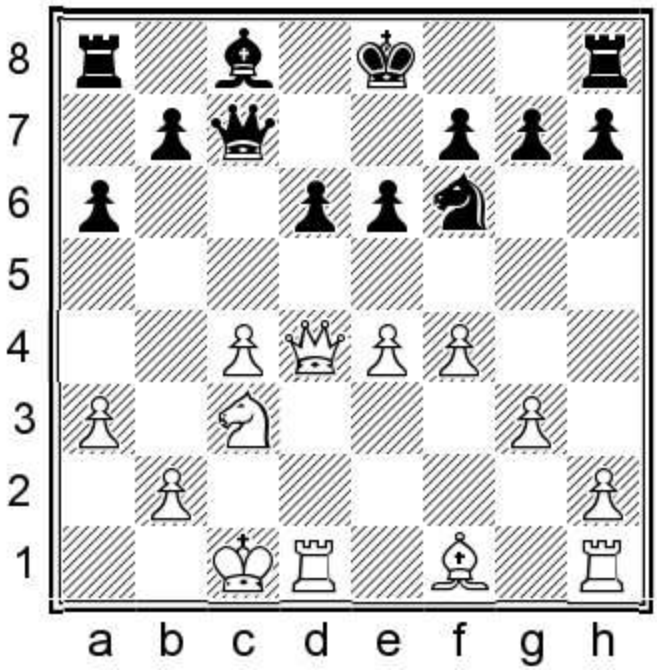
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9.g3
I find this the most logical reaction to Black's last move.

9.Qd2 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Bf4 leads nowhere.

9.c5!?N is an interesting new idea which I analysed quite a bit. Best play continues 9...Be5 10.g3 Nxd4! 11. Bxd4 d6 12.cxd6 Qxd6 13.Bxe5 Qxe5 14.f4 Qc5 15.e5 Bd7! 16.Bg2 Bc6 when Black should gradually equalize. Nevertheless, some readers may find this unexplored continuation appealing: there are chances for Black to go wrong; and even if he finds the best continuation, you still end up with a marginal advantage.

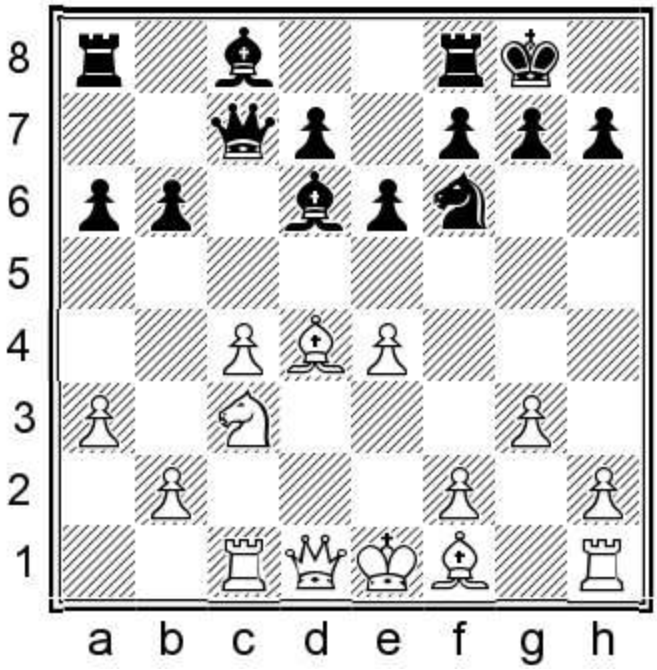
9...0-0
9...Be5? is poor. White responds with 10.f4! Bxd4 11.Bxd4 Nxd4 12.Qxd4 d6 13.0-0-0! with a winning position, thanks to the following point:



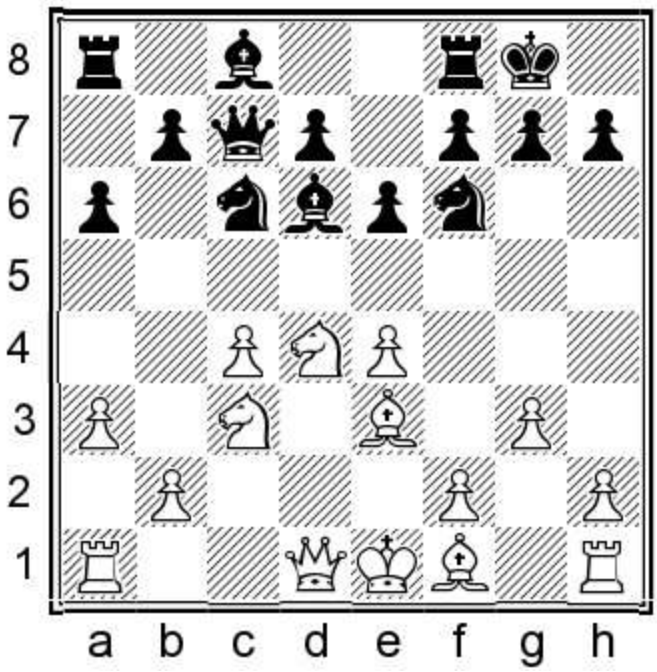

13...Ke7 14.e5 dxe5 15.fxe5 Nd7 16.Qh4†+– Black's king is stuck in the centre and he is too far behind in development.

The premature 9...Nxd4 was the choice in Gobleja – Kurpnieks, email 2011, when the correct recapture would have been: 10.Bxd4!N 10...0-0 11.Rc1 b6 Otherwise c4-c5 would have been unpleasant.

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12.Bg2 Bb7 13.0-0 White is better. For example, the plausible 13...Be5 can be met by 14.Na4!², exposing the big weakness. Play may continue 14...Bxe4 15.Bxe5 Qxe5 16.Re1 Qf5 17.Nxb6 and White has a sizeable positional advantage.



10.f4!?
This makes things interesting, as the play becomes rather concrete.

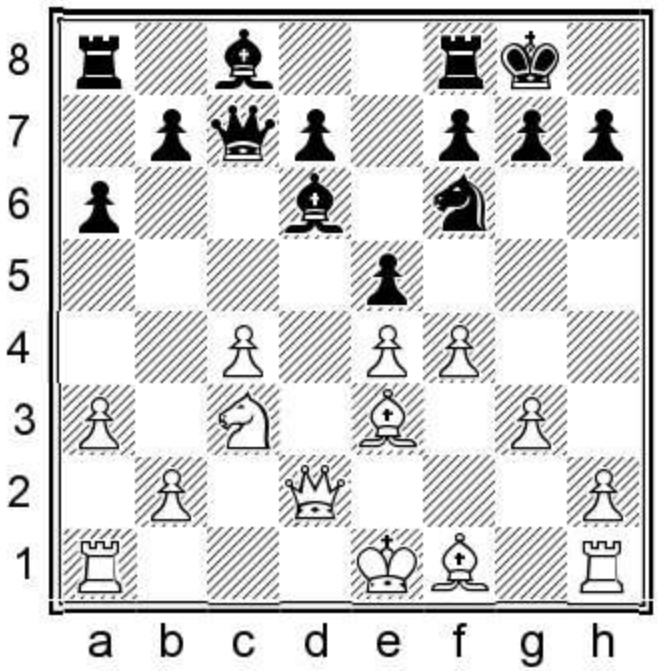
10.Rc1 has been played in a number of games, but I am not convinced that this improves White's position as much as 10...Rd8!N improves Black's.

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10...Nxd4

10...Be7 is my engine's initial preference. However, if Black has to resort to such a move, then White has won the opening battle. 11.e5!? looks like an interesting way to play, if you fancy a change from the typical continuation of 11.Nxc6 followed by Bg2.

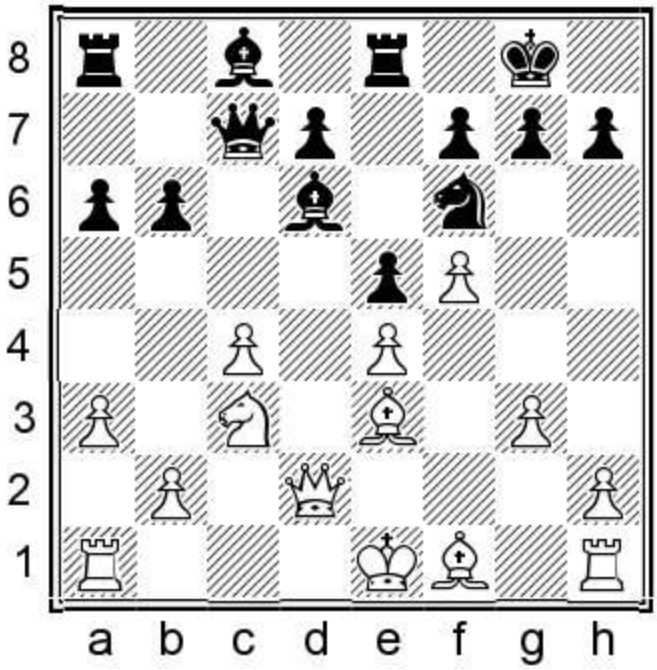
11.Qxd4 e5 12.Qd2



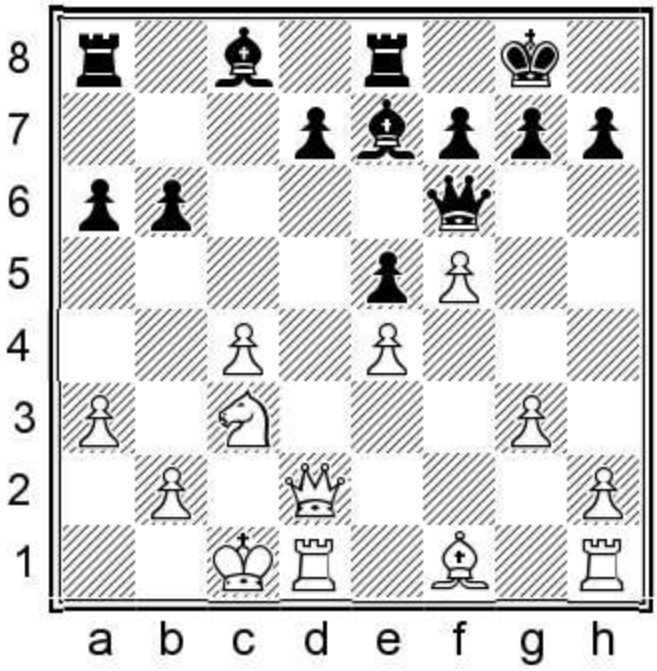
12...Bc5!N
This is certainly Black's most challenging move.

12...Re8?
This has been tested in correspondence play, but is a classic example of an engine failing to get to the essence of the position. A human thinking logically could easily work out that White intends to play f4-f5 followed by a pawn storm on the kingside. This renders Black's move entirely redundant; there is simply no positive feature to it.
13.f5! b6
13...Be7 is the recommendation of an engine which clearly does not excel in closed positions.

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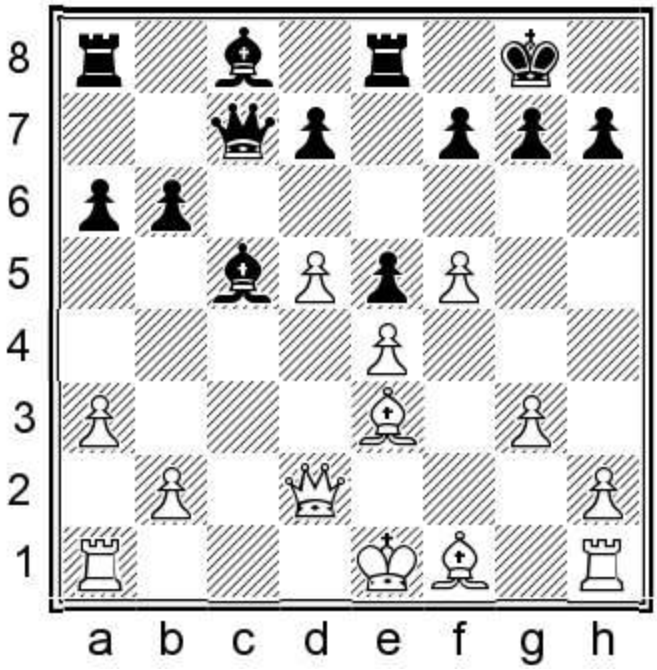


14.Nd5!?N
I find this to be the most logical move, especially in over-the-board play.
The game continued with 14.0-0-0!?, which would indeed be quite attractive for a correspondence game, where the engine helps safeguard against spoiling a better position and getting mated. Play continued 14...Be7 (14...Bc5 runs into 15.Bxc5 Qxc5 16.Qe2! Bb7 17.g4² and White's attack is faster) 15.Bg5 Qc6 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 and now the most accurate would have been:



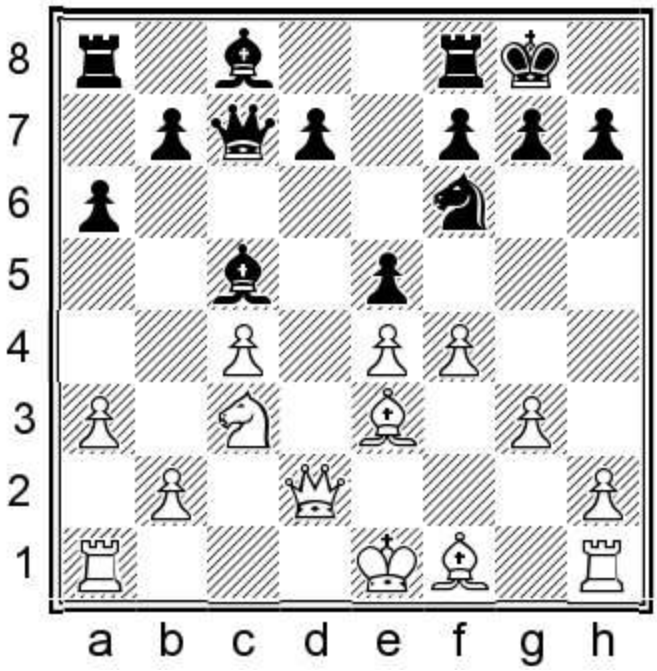
17.Kb1!N (17.Nd5?! looks appealing but is rather superficial, and after 17...Qc6 18.g4 Bb7 19.g5 Bc5 20.f6 Bd4! 21.Kb1 b5! Black had counterplay in Alonso Gonzalez – Baron Gonzalez, corr. 2007) 17...Bb7 Otherwise Black will find it hard to develop. 18.Qxd7 Rab8 19.Nd5² White has an extra pawn.
14...Nxd5 15.cxd5 Bc5

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16.Rc1
The most natural, although 16.f6!?[2] is also attractive.
16...Qd6 17.Bd3[2]
White has lots of space, better pieces and a lead in development. I would be quite optimistic, although good chess still has to be shown.

Let's return to Black's improvement on move 12, upon which the evaluation of the whole line hinges.

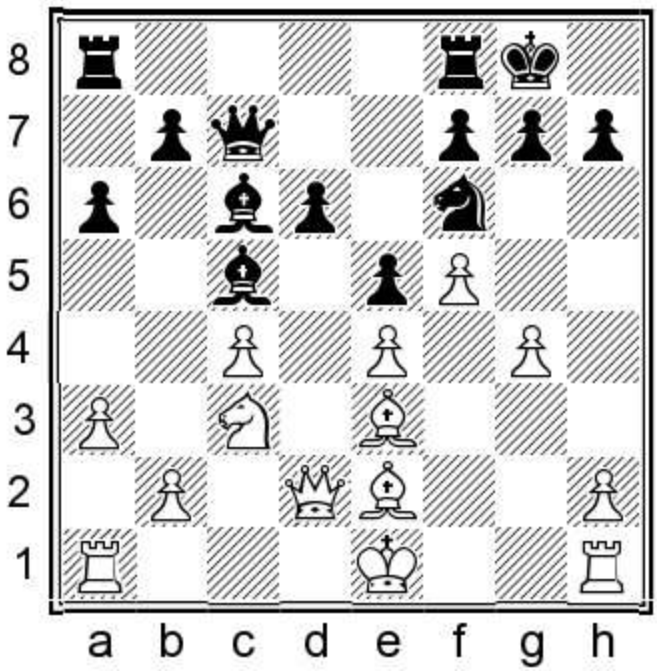


13.Be2!
13.0-0-0!? is interesting here too. However, 13...Bxe3 14.Qxe3 b5!? leads to a sharp game where, no matter the objective evaluation, I would find Black's position easier to play.

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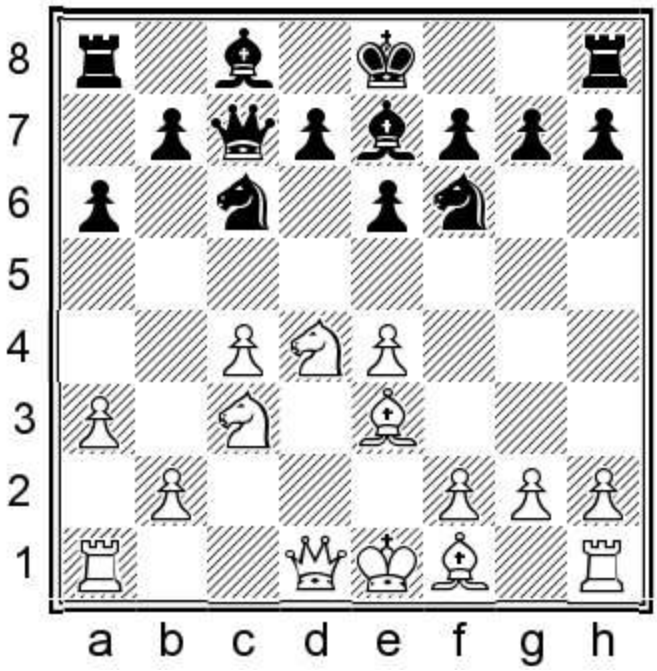
13...d6
13...b6 14.Bxc5 Qxc5 15.b4 Qc7 16.Nd5 Nxd5 17.cxd5² is somewhat uncomfortable for Black, although not completely one-sided.

14.f5 Bd7 15.g4! Bc6



16.Bxc5 dxc5 17.Qe3 Rfd8 18.g5 Ne8 19.Nd5²
There are some positive things about Black's position; nevertheless, White's space advantage is the most important factor.

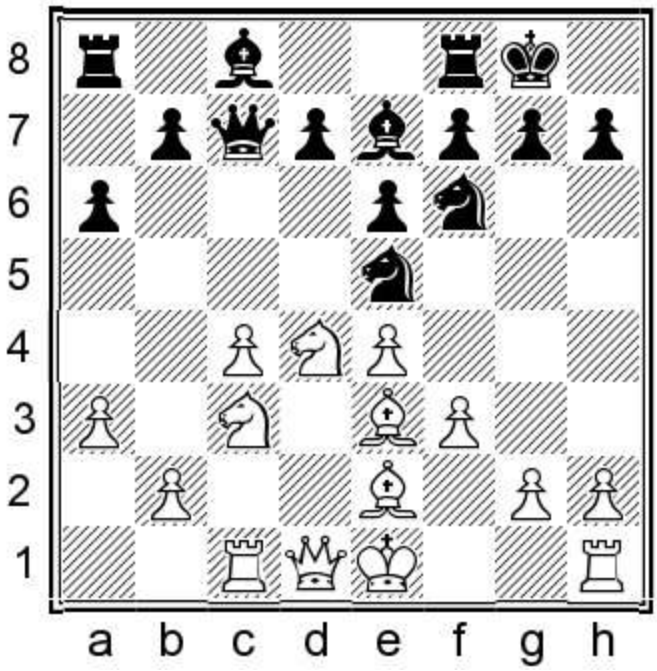
C233) 8...Be7



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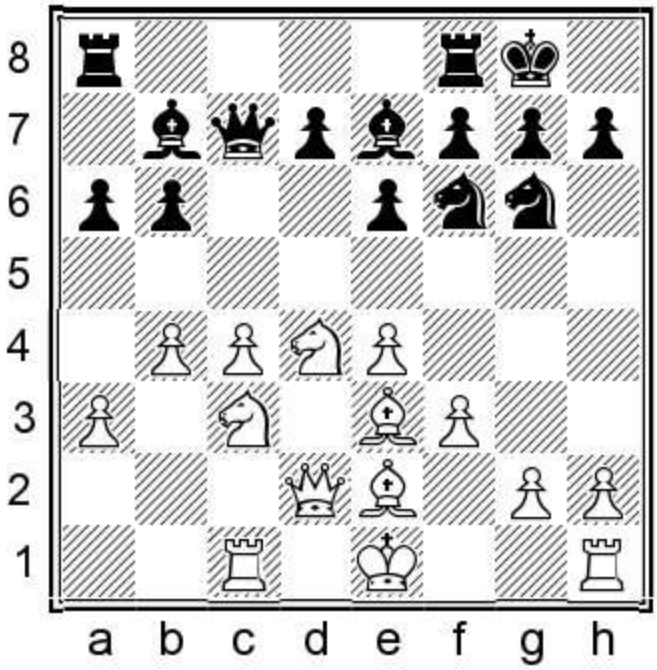
9.Be2
9.Rac1 leads to similar play, and White obtained a slight plus in Kasparov – Ivanchuk, Linares 2002. However, I see no reason to rush with the rook move, as this piece may be better placed on d1 in some lines.

9...0-0
I also considered:
9...Ne5 10.Rc1 0-0 11.f3!?
The more obvious idea would be to gain space with f2-f4. However, I would like to point out that a solid approach should also lead to a pleasant edge. I will show a few more moves from a high-level rapid game, which arrived here via a slightly different move order.

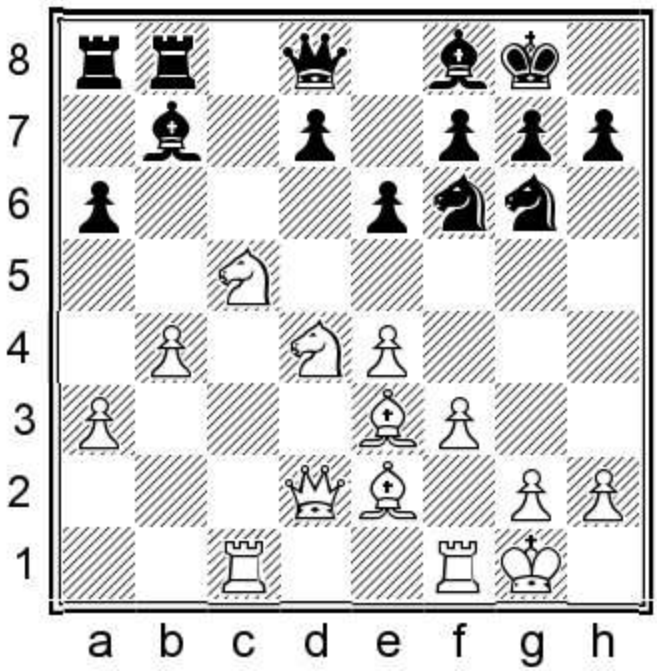



11...Ng6 12.Qd2 b6?!
Black should prefer 12...d6N 13.b4 Bd7 to prevent Na4. However, White is obviously better after 14.0-0² followed by Nb3, when the positional threat of c4-c5 will force ...b6 anyway.
13.b4 Bb7

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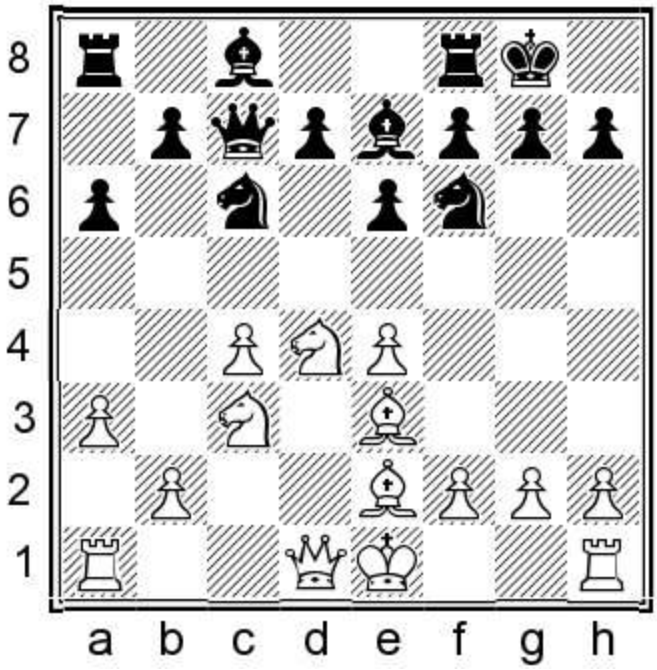


14.Na4! Rfb8
Black is in trouble. At this point he probably realized that 14...d6 would allow 15.Nxb6!? (the simple 15.0-0 is also strong) 15...Qxb6 16.Nxe6 Qc6 17.Nxf8 Nxf8 when White has a slight material plus, and after 18.c5! d5 19.e5 N6d7 20.Bd4 Ne6 21.0-0 he has a clear advantage.
15.c5 bxc5 16.Nxc5 Qd8 17.0-0 Bf8

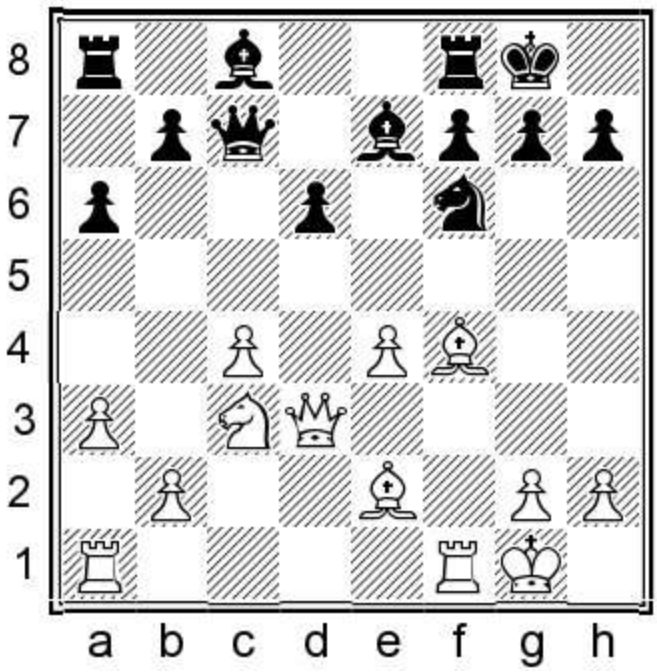


In Dominguez Perez – Svidler, St Petersburg (rapid) 2012, White failed to make the most of his advantage, and Black somehow used his great skill to survive the difficult position. A clear improvement is:
18.Ndb3! d5 19.Na5 Bxc5 20.bxc5
White maintains a huge advantage.

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10.0-0 Ne5
10...d6 has occurred in lots of games but it gives White freedom to do whatever he wants. One game continued: 11.f4!? (the more restrained 11.Rc1 is simple and good) 11...Nxd4 12.Qxd4 e5 13.Qd3 exf4 This was seen in Eisenbeiser – Epishin, Werther 2003. A simple improvement is 14.Bxf4N, when I like White's position. A possible continuation could be:

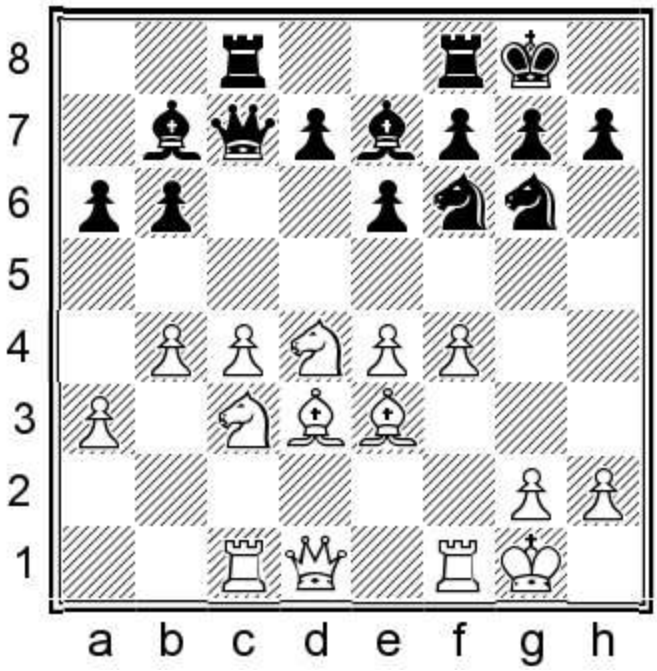


14...Be6 15.b4 Rac8 16.Nd5 Bxd5 17.exd5 As in many other lines in this chapter, the only debate is about the size of White's advantage.

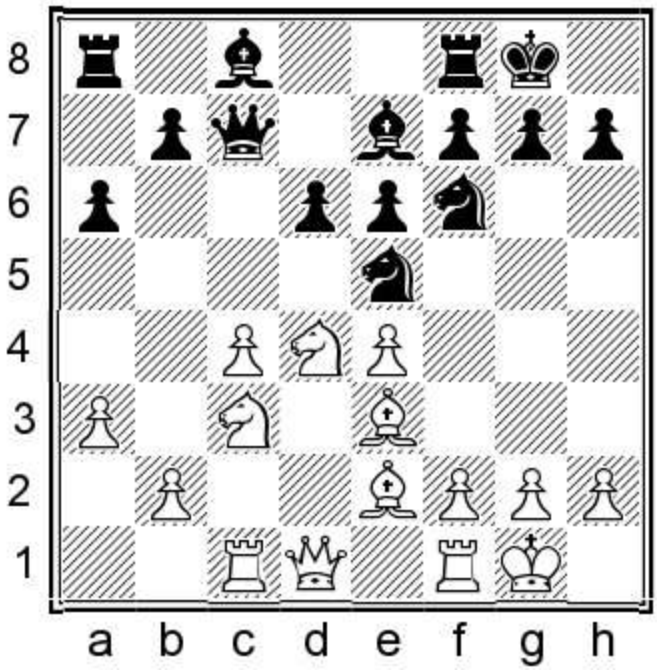
11.Rc1 d6
11...Nxc4? is impossible as usual: 12.Bxc4 Qxc4 13.Na4 Qa2 14.Ra1 and White wins.

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It is also worth considering:
11...b6 12.f4 Ng6
We have arrived, via transposition, at a game involving the then reigning World Champion sitting behind the black pieces.
13.b4 Bb7
13...d6 14.Qe1 Bb7 15.f5±
14.Bd3 Rac8
In Torre – Karpov, Bad Lauterberg 1977, White played 15.Nb3?! and ultimately lost after further mistakes. Instead, he could have taken full advantage of Black's speculative play with:



15.e5!N 15...Ne8 16.Qh5
With excellent attacking chances.



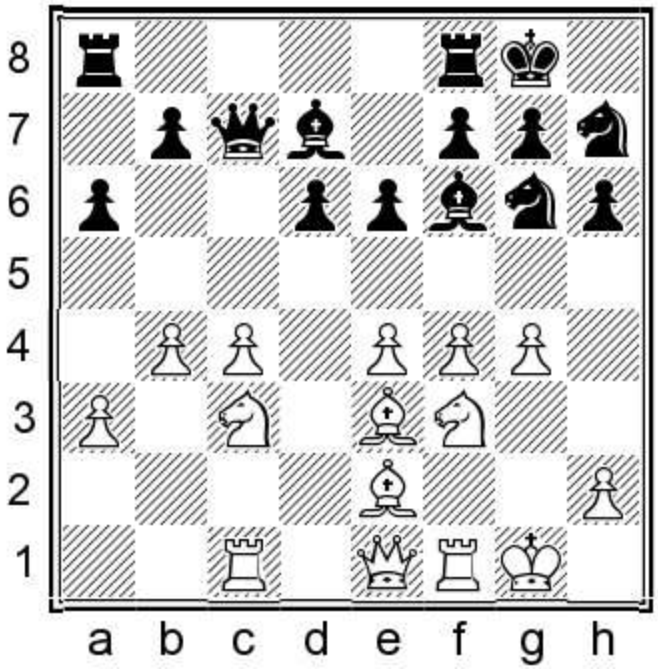
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12.f4
This feels like the most ambitious choice, although White could also consider 12.f3 in the spirit of the Dominguez Perez – Svidler game.

12...Ng6
Black resorts to this knight manoeuvre in quite a few of these lines; but yet again, it fails to impress.

13.b4 Bd7 14.Nb3!?
White proceeds cautiously, avoiding any ...e5 attacks and preventing a possible ...a5 break.

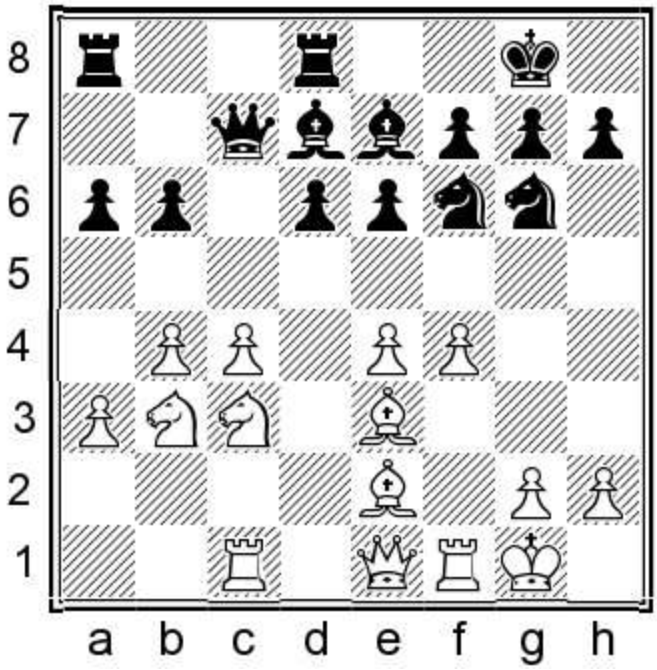
A more aggressive continuation is:
14.g4!?
The 'five pawns attack' is a bit extravagant, but objectively it seems justified.
14...h6 15.Qe1 Nh7 16.Nf3 Bf6
Should you wish to follow this path, I recommend the following improvement:




17.c5!N
17.h4!? gave White a promising attacking position and an eventual win in Svetushkin – Epishin, Werther 2011, but the text move is a simpler route to a big advantage.
17...dxc5 18.e5±
Followed by Ne4.

14...Rfd8 15.Qe1 b6
In Netzer – Sulava, Port Barcares 2005, White missed a strong idea:

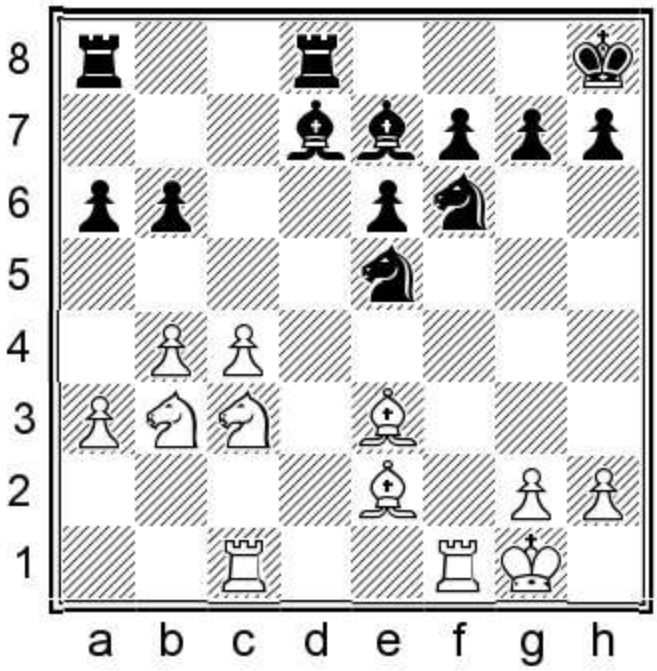
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16.Qg3!N
Threatening f4-f5 followed by Bh6, with a deadly attack.

16...Kh8
This seems like the most sensible reaction. However, White has an interesting, concrete continuation – not that he needs one to prove an advantage.

17.e5!? dxe5 18.fxe5 Qxe5 19.Qxe5 Nxe5



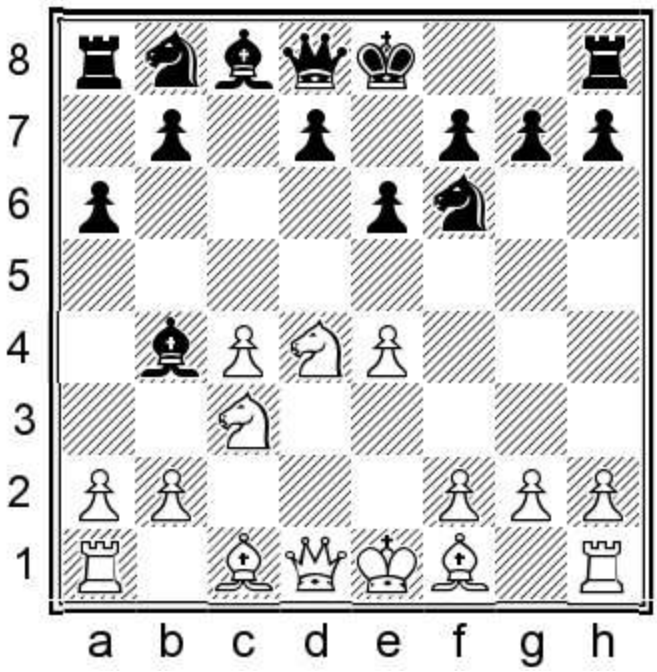
20.Bd4!

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Before restoring material equality, White takes the opportunity to drive Black's knight to an inferior square.

20...Ng6 21.Bxb6 Rdc8 22.Bc5
The endgame has the makings of a disaster for Black.

C3) 6...Bb4



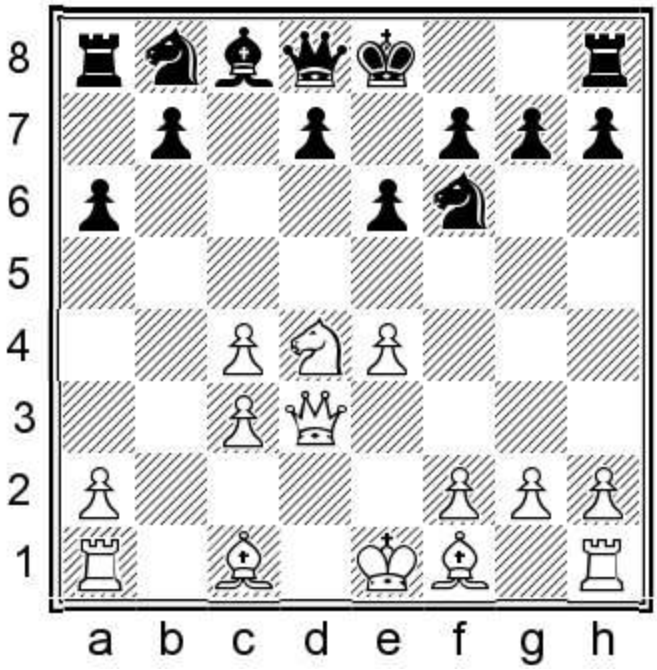
This is perhaps the most critical response. If White's c2-c4 set-up was to have a serious downside, it would surely be this.

7.Qd3!?
Several other moves have been tried but the text has emerged as the most promising in recent years. Putting the queen on d3 may appear artificial, but it actually fulfils several objectives: it supports c3 and e4, and may switch to a great outpost on g3.

Black has tried several ideas; we will consider C31) 7...Bxc3†?!, C32) 7...d5, C33) 7...0-0, C34) 7...Qc7, C35) 7...d6 and C36) 7...Nc6.

C31) 7...Bxc3†?! 8.bxc3

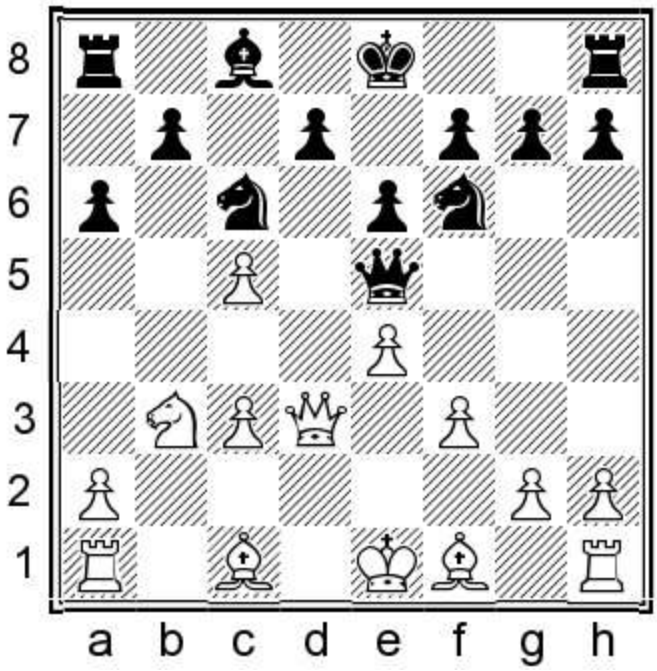
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White’s pawn structure has been damaged, but that’s the end of the good news for Black. He is behind in development and he has several holes on the dark squares.

8...Qa5
8...0-0 9.e5 Ne8 10.Ba3 is also problematic for Black.

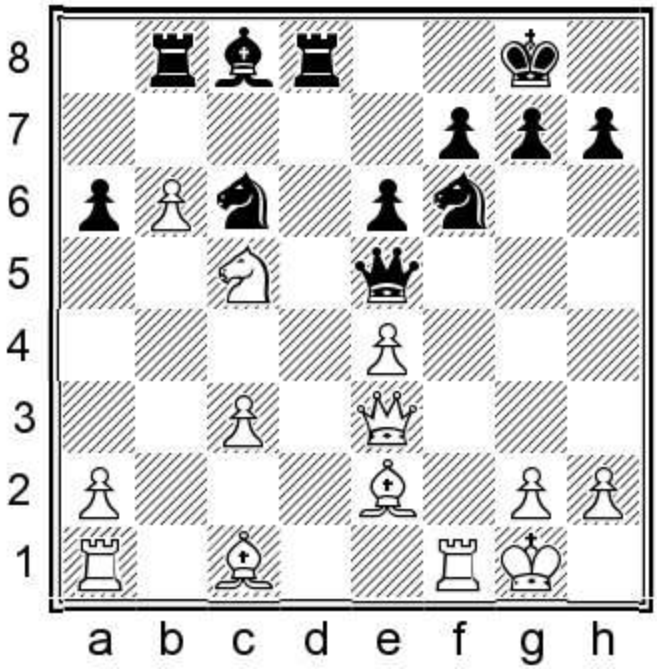
9.f3 Nc6 10.Nb3 Qe5 11.c5!
Black is heading towards a positional disaster.



11...b5!? 12.cxb6 d5
This is a reasonable attempt to change the course of the game, but White remains in control.

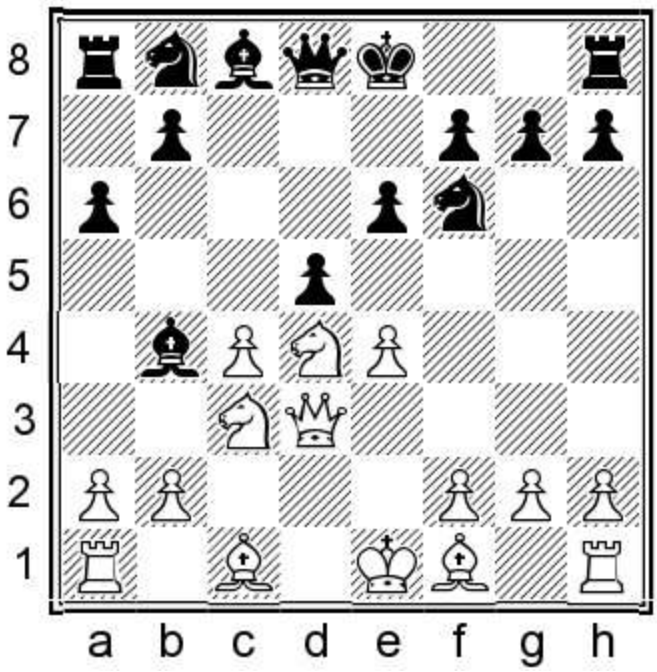
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13.Be2 0-0 14.0-0 Rd8 15.Qe3 dxe4 16.fxe4 Rb8 17.Nc5



17...Nb4 18.Qf2 Qxc3 19.Bf4 e5 20.Rac1 Nc2 21.Bg5 Rd4 22.Nb3 Qb2 23.Bd1
Black resigned in Belikov – Gorbatov, Alushta 2009.

C32) 7...d5

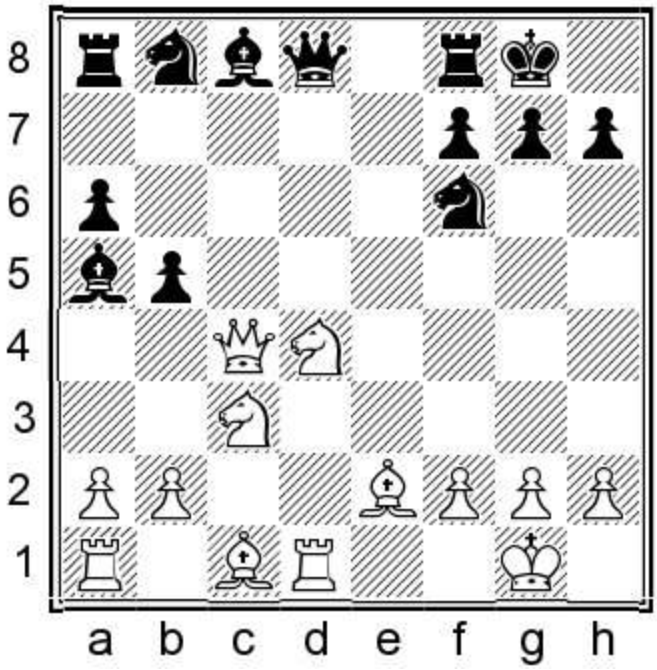


This is a reasonable attempt to liquidate the centre and play for a draw, but White should be able to keep some initiative.

8.exd5 exd5 9.Be2 0-0 10.0-0 Nc6
I checked a few other possibilities:

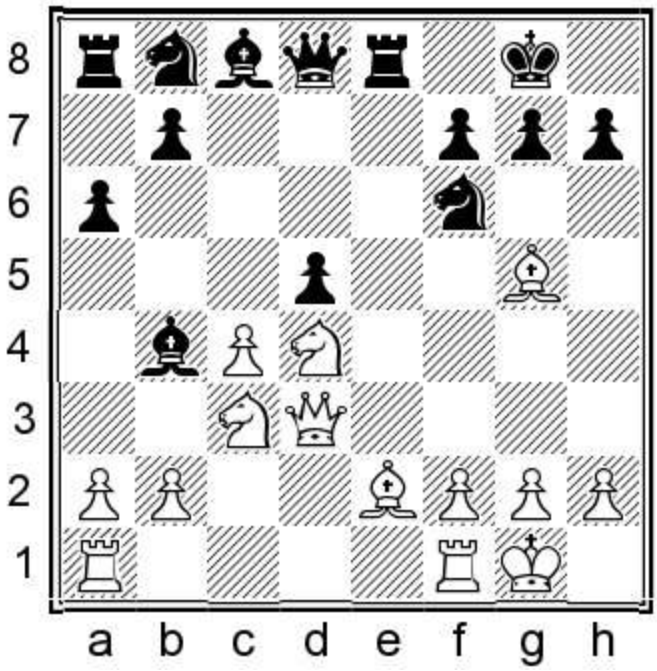
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10...dxc4 11.Qxc4 Ba5 12.Rd1 b5?! (12...Qc7N 13.Bg5 Nbd7 14.Rac1²) In Kramnik – Ivanchuk, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2005, White should have continued:



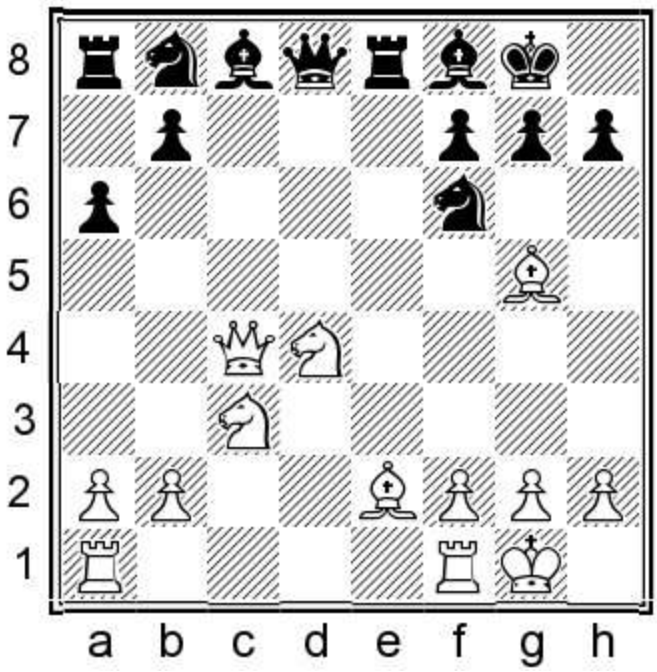
13.Qd3!N 13...Bb7 14.Bf3 Ra7 15.Bg5± White is much more active, the symmetrical pawn structure being of little comfort to Black.

10...Re8
This sensible move has only been played in one game, Popov – Andreikin, Olginka 2011.
11.Bg5!?N
A natural novelty.
11.Nxd5!?N 11...Nxd5 12.cxd5 Qxd5 13.Be3 is another good idea, with a risk-free edge for White.

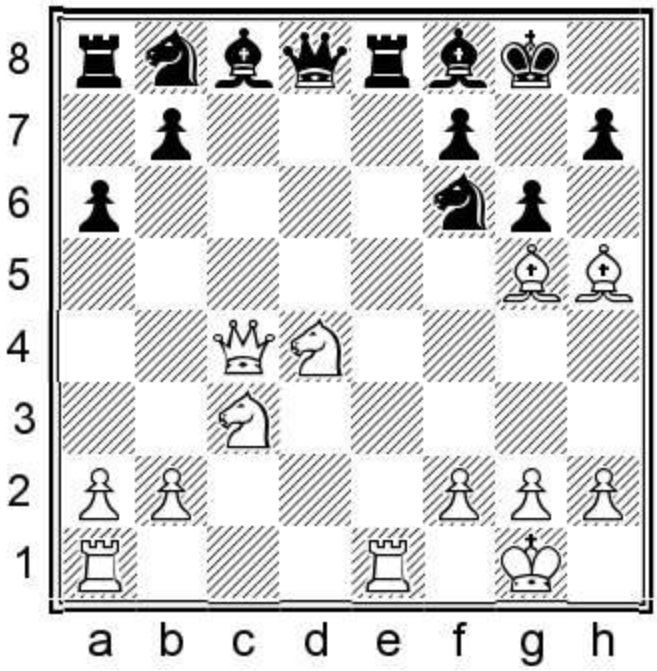


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11...dxc4 12.Qxc4 Bf8?!
12...Bxc3 13.bxc3!? (13.Qxc3 is also decent) 13...Nbd7 14.Rfe1 Qa5 15.Bh4 leaves White with a mighty pair of bishops.
The text move is a natural attempt to avoid giving up the bishop pair, but Black loses time and risks falling into even greater difficulties.

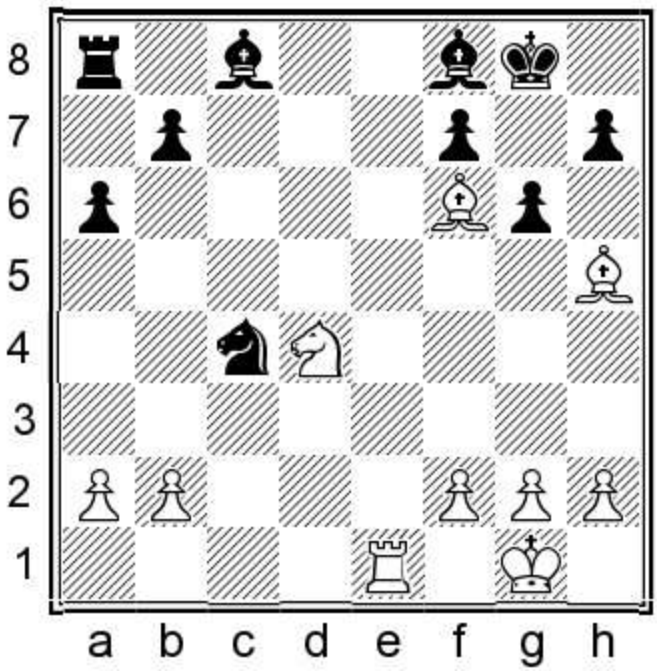


13.Bh5!
Flashiest and possibly strongest.
13.Bxf6!? Qxf6 14.Nd5 is also promising: 14...Qe5 (14...Qh6 15.Nc7 Bd6 16.h3 Bxc7 17.Qxc7 Nc6 18.Nxc6 Qxc6 19.Qxc6 bxc6 20.Bf3 Bb7 21.Rac1±) 15.Rfe1 Nc6 16.Bf1 Qxe1 17.Rxe1 Rxe1 18.Nf3 Ra1 19.Ng5 Be6 20.Qe4 g6 21.Nxe6 fxe6 22.Qxe6† Kh8 23.Qf7 Nd4 24.g3 Bg7 25.Qxb7 Rf8 26.Kg2 Rxa2 27.Bc4±
13...g6 14.Rfe1!

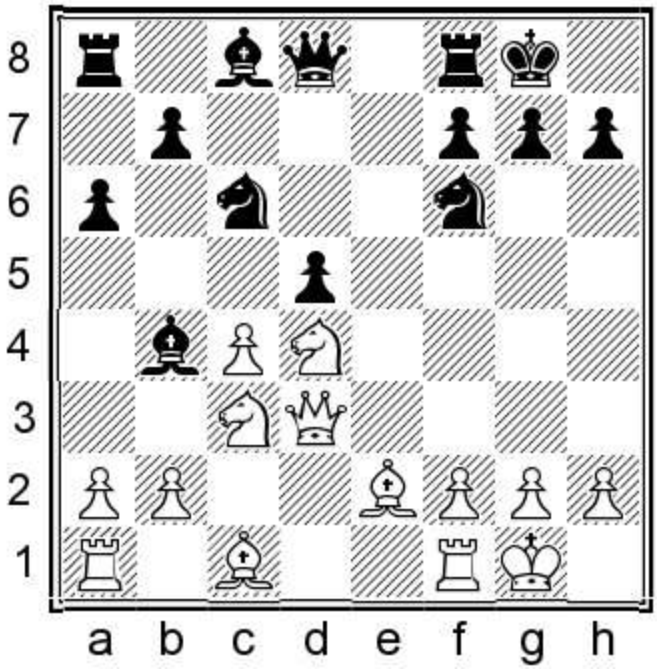


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14...Nbd7
The tactical point of White's play is revealed after 14...Rxe1† 15.Rxe1 gxh5? (Black's only chance is 15...Nbd7 16.Bf3±) 16.Bxf6 Qxf6 17.Qxc8 Qxd4 18.Re8 Qb4 19.Nd5 and White is winning.
15.Nd5! Rxe1† 16.Rxe1 Nb6 17.Nxf6† Qxf6 18.Bxf6 Nxc4



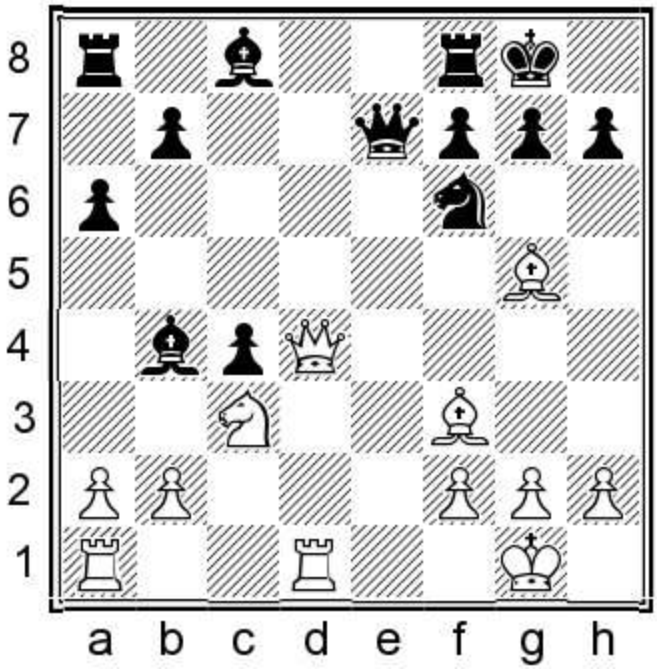
19.Re8 gxh5 20.Be7 Nb6 21.Rxf8† Kg7 22.h3 Bd7 23.Rxa8 Nxa8 24.Bd8±
Black faces an unpleasant defensive task in the endgame.



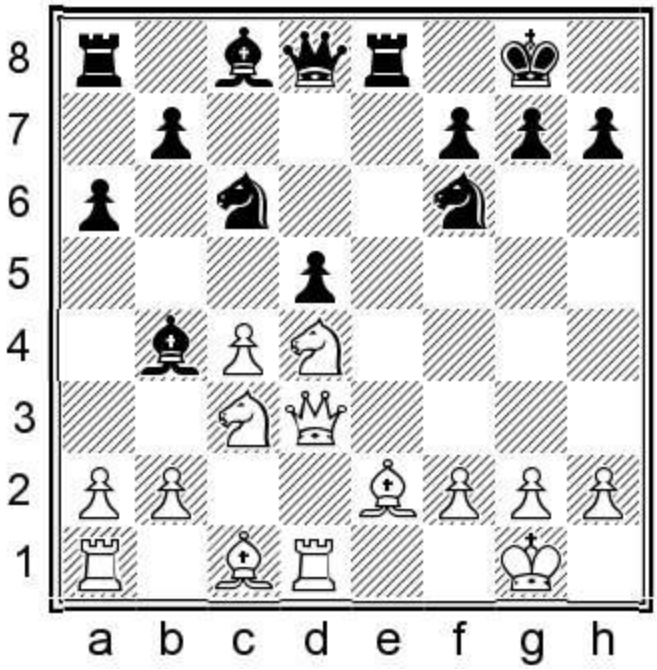
11.Rd1!?
Keeping the tension is the most ambitious approach.
11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.cxd5 Nxd5 13.Nxd5 cxd5 14.Be3[2] was a simple route to a pleasant position for White in Ivanchuk – Andreikin, Astana 2012.

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11...Re8
11...Nxd4 12.Qxd4 Qe7 13.Bf3 dxc4 14.Bg5² gives White a pleasant edge. Things can easily go downhill for Black, for instance:



14...Be6? 15.Ne4 Rfd8 16.Qe5± Black was unable to survive the pin in Quesada Perez – Pichot, Buenos Aires 2015.



12.Nxd5!?
12.Nxc6 bxc6 13.Bg5 was also promising for White in Sedina – Bjarnason, Basel 2006.

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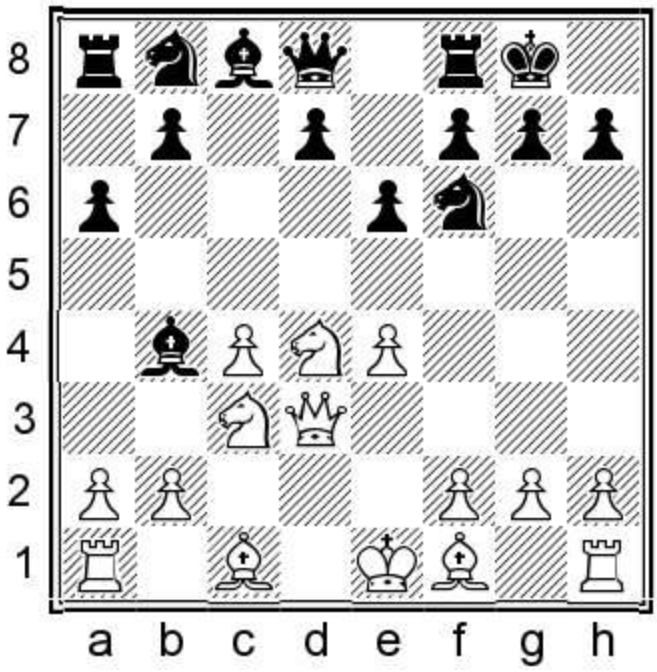
12...Nxd5

12...Nxd4 13.Qxd4 Rxe2 14.Bg5 Qf8 15.Bxf6 Bc5 16.Qd3 Rxf2 17.Bd4±

13.Nxc6 bxc6 14.cxd5 cxd5
14...Qxd5N may be a slight improvement, although 15.Qxd5 cxd5 16.Be3 leaves Black defending a one-sided endgame.

15.Be3²/±
The d-pawn was a serious weakness in B. Gonzalez – T. Carlsen, corr. 2015.

C33) 7...0-0



This was proposed by Vallejo in a lecture on Chess24. It looks rather optimistic to me and a bit of investigation revealed that Delchev and Semkov had already shown how to obtain a slight but enduring advantage.

8.e5! Ne8
8...Ng4? 9.Qg3! is even worse.

9.Bf4
9.a3 has also scored well, but one good option is enough.

9...d6
9...Nc6 10.a3 Be7 11.Be2 f6 12.Nxc6 bxc6 was also less than inspiring for Black in Boros – Mamedov, Teplice 2013; 13.0-0N would have been the simplest way to maintain White's advantage.

Vallejo ends his analysis here but Black has not equalized.

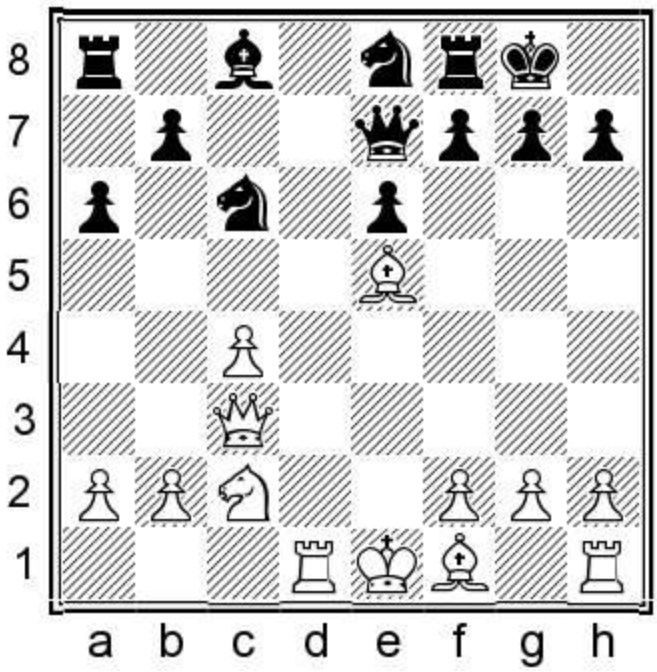
10.Nc2 Bxc3† 11.Qxc3²
The Bulgarian authors stop here, concluding that White is better. I would agree, and it is worth adding a few more moves of the game which reached this position.

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11...dxe5 12.Bxe5N

12.Rd1 Qe7 13.Bxe5 Nc6 was the move order of the game below. It makes no real difference, but somehow it feels more natural to recapture on e5 before moving the rook.

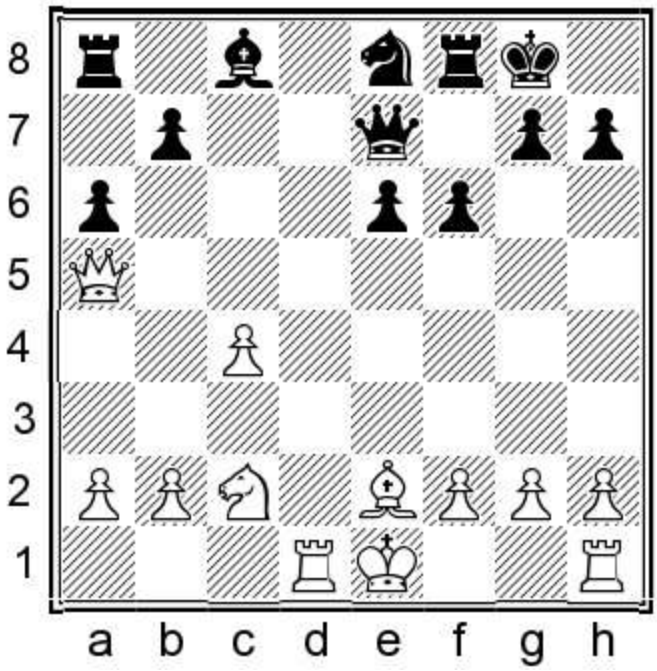
12...Nc6 13.Rd1 Qe7
Here I found a way to improve White's play.



14.Be2!N
On this occasion, retaining the bishop pair seems less important than developing quickly.

14.Bg3 f5 15.Be5 f4 gave Black enough counterplay in Solodovnichenko – Miezis, Borup 2012.

14...Nxe5 15.Qxe5 f6 16.Qa5



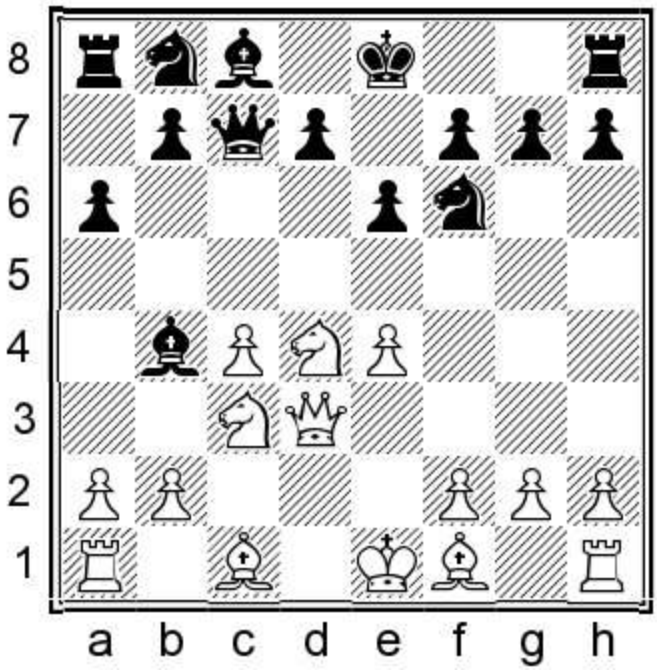
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Each side has a pawn majority but White has the better chances as his pieces are more active and better coordinated. Black could easily get into trouble, for example:

16...e5?!
Trying to activate the central majority is a natural plan, but here it is strongly met by:

17.Ne3!
Suddenly Black comes under serious pressure.

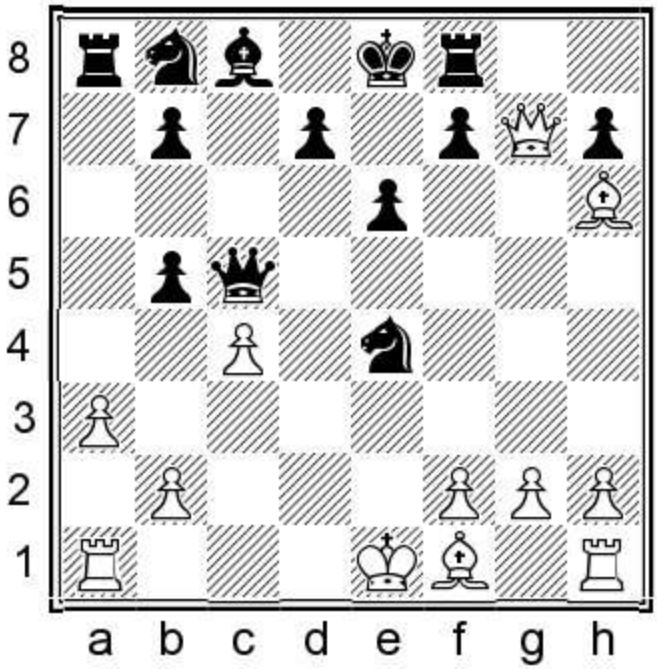
C34) 7...Qc7



This has been Black's most popular choice so far. It's a sensible move and a typical one for the Kan, but slightly slow.

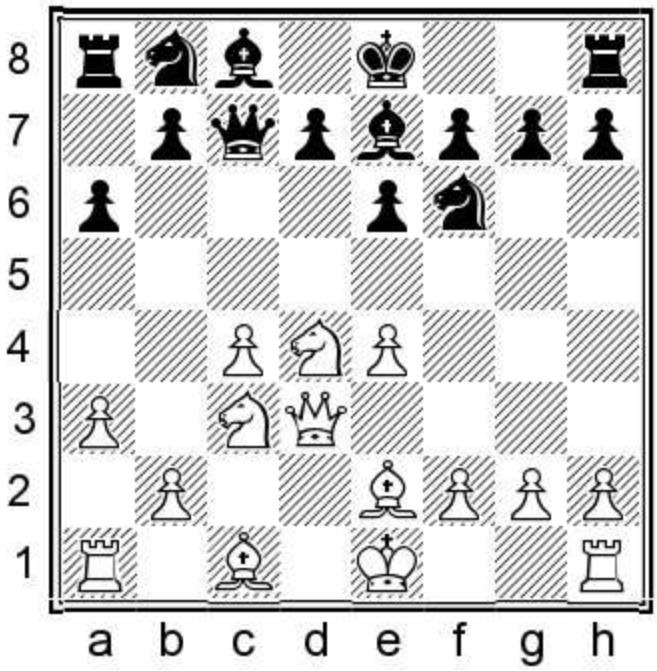
8.a3 Be7
The power of White's set-up was well illustrated in the following game: 8...Bxc3† 9.Qxc3 Nxe4 (Black should prefer 9...0-0, although 10.f3 leaves White with an obvious edge due to his space advantage and bishop pair) 10.Nb5! axb5 11.Qxg7 Rf8 12.Bh6 Qc5

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13.f3! Nf2 (13...bxc4 is the best move according to the engine, but the rather obvious 14.fxe4!N± leads to the winning of the exchange for White) 14.b4 Qe7 15.Kxf2 White successfully converted his advantage in the stem game Ninov – Pikula, Lazarevac 1999.

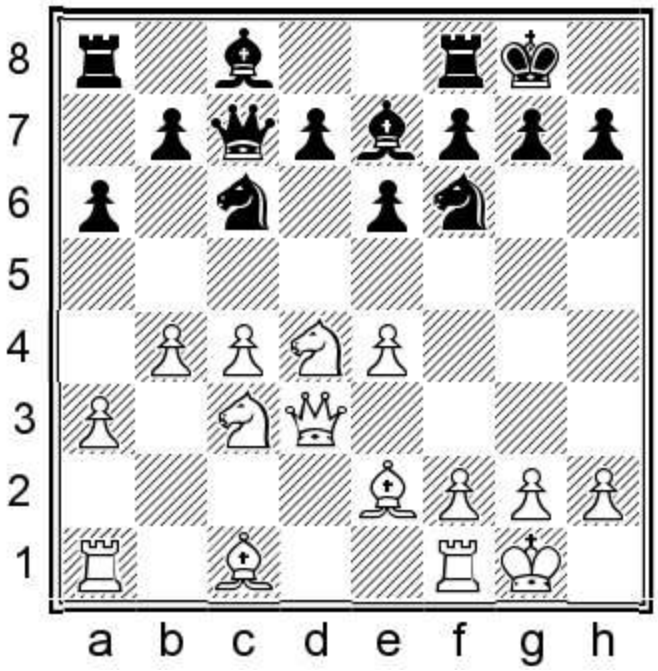
9.Be2
9.Qg3!? Qxg3 10.hxg3 Nc6 11.Nc2² was a simple route to a safe edge in Landa – Werle, Vlissingen 2015. White has more space and can press in the queenless middlegame without much risk. If you like this sort of thing (as I do!), then this is all you need to know about this line. I thought about giving this as my main line, but decided it was worth checking what happens if we keep the queens on the board.



9...Nc6 10.0-0 0-0
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10...Nxd4 11.Qxd4 Bd6 seems a bit artificial. White responded calmly with 12.Kh1 Be5 13.Qe3 0-0 14.Na4²,

earning a nice advantage in Leko – Bologan, Beijing 2012.

11.b4
I also considered 11.Kh1 Rd8 12.f4, but this gives Black a chance to break out in the centre: 12...d5 13.cxd5 exd5 14.e5 Nxd4!N (improving over 14...Ne4? 15.Nxc6 Qxc6 16.f5 f6 17.e6± as in Giri – Landa, Eilat 2012) 15.Qxd4 Bc5 Black has reasonable counterplay. For what it's worth, I let the engines run and found that White can eventually reach a better endgame, but the whole line is a lot of effort for not much reward.



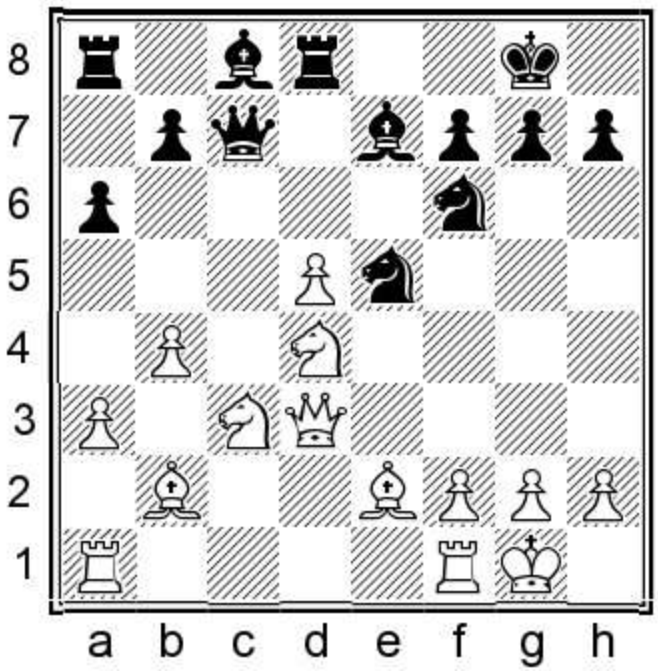

11...Rd8!?N
This seems a better try than 11...Ne5, after which 12.Qg3 d6 13.Bh6 Ng6 14.Bd2 Rd8 15.Rac1² gave White a nice advantage in Davletbayeva – Hakimifard, Tabriz 2014. Just as in some other lines in this chapter, the knight is not well placed on g6.

The text move is more critical: Black intends to break free with ...d5, and White needs to play accurately to prove something.

12.Bb2! d5
Anything else would be an admission that White has won the opening battle.

13.exd5 exd5 14.cxd5 Ne5!
14...Nxd5? 15.Ndb5!± is no good for Black.

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15.Qc2! Bd7 16.Rac1 Rac8 17.Qb3²
Black does not have quite enough play for the pawn. He can try all kinds of ideas, and it would be neither useful nor practical to analyse all of them. In general, White should simply develop his pieces and let Black worry about how to win back the pawn without suffering unpleasant side effects.

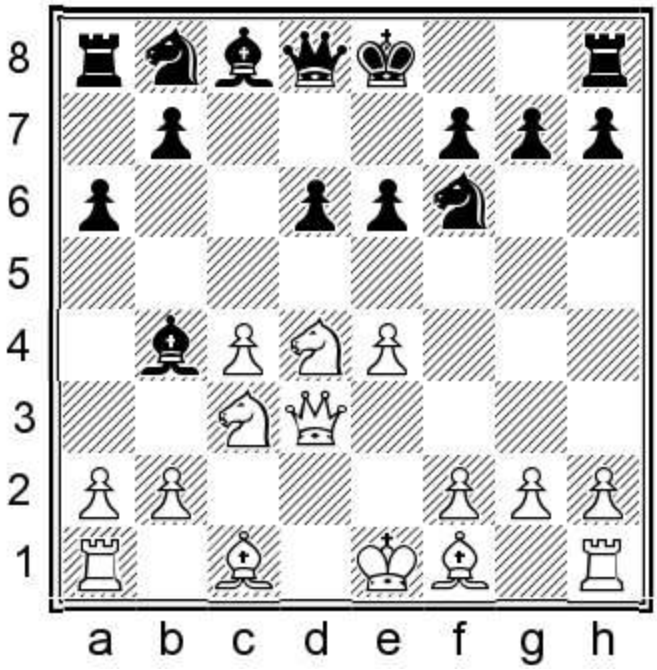
C35) 7...d6

GAME 9

Eric Hansen – Ilya Smirin
Tromso Olympiad 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 Bb4 7.Qd3!? d6
This is an important move, which has been used by a few top players. The present game shows an excellent response for White.

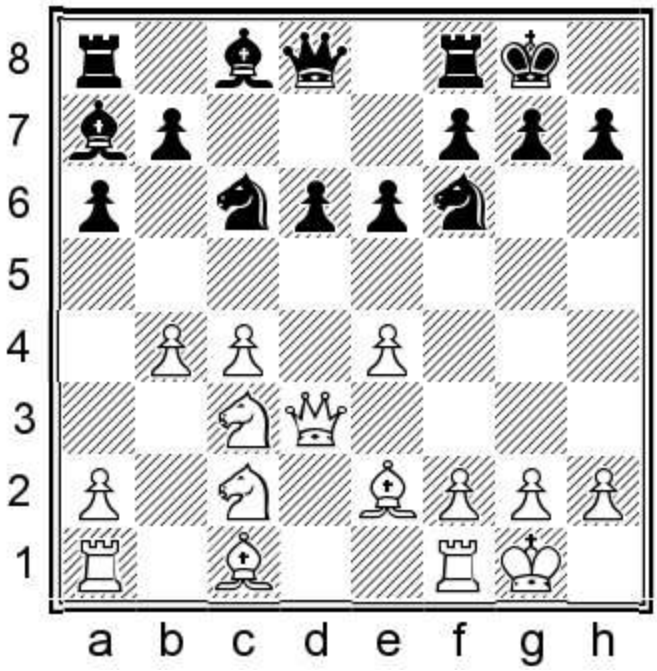
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8.Nc2!
Forcing Black to choose between giving up the dark-squared bishop or being pushed backwards.

8...Ba5
This is perhaps the most flexible option, as it preserves the pin on the knight – although the real choice is not so much between a5 and c5, as between being pushed back to b6 and exchanging on c3.

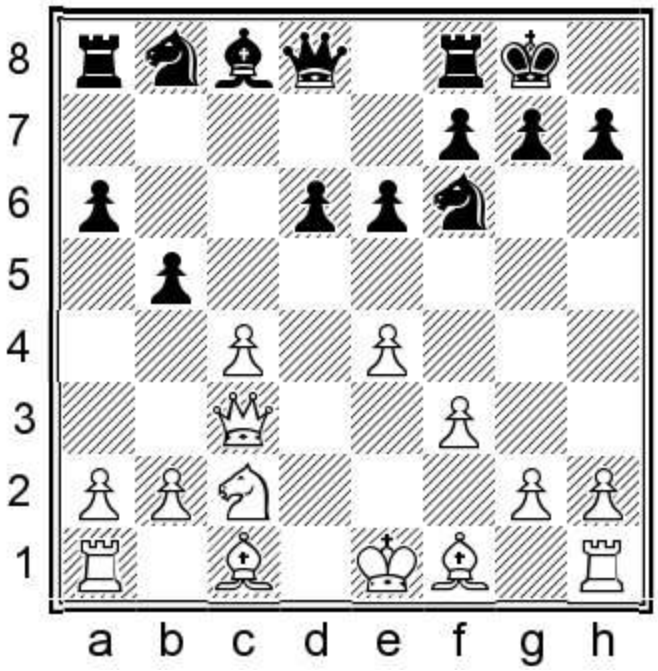
Black gains little by playing 8...Bc5, as I do not think retreating to a7 is a great alternative, but we should consider it briefly. 9.b4 Ba7 10.Be2 Nc6 11.0-0 0-0 Here I found an improvement over Smirnov – Papin, Vladivostok 2015:



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12.Rd1!N 12...e5 What else? 13.Be3 Bxe3 14.Qxe3 White keeps control over the d4-square. 14...Qc7 The only

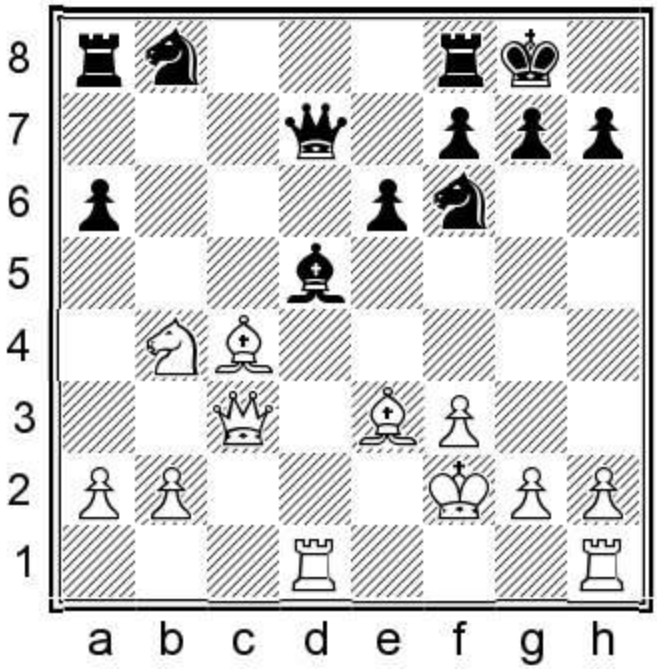
move. I have analysed this position more than I should have, only to establish that White is better, but without being able to refute Black's position outright. The most sensible approach is to continue improving with 15.a4 or 15.Rac1, with an immensely pleasant position.

Black has also swapped off his bishop in a few games:
8...Bxc3† 9.Qxc3
Slightly reminiscent of the 4.Qc2 Nimzo-Indian, don't you think?
9...0-0 10.f3 b5!?
Black has to do something quickly, otherwise White will catch up with development and enjoy a clear advantage thanks to his mighty dark-squared bishop.
Black failed to equalize after 10...d5 11.e5 Nfd7 12.cxd5 exd5 13.Be3 Re8 14.f4 Nc6 (14...f6 15.0-0-0±) 15. Be2 Nf8 16.0-0² in Baufays – Gromotka, corr. 2015.
The text move was played in Gonzalez de la Torre – Paunovic, Elgoibar 2008. I suggest the following improvement:

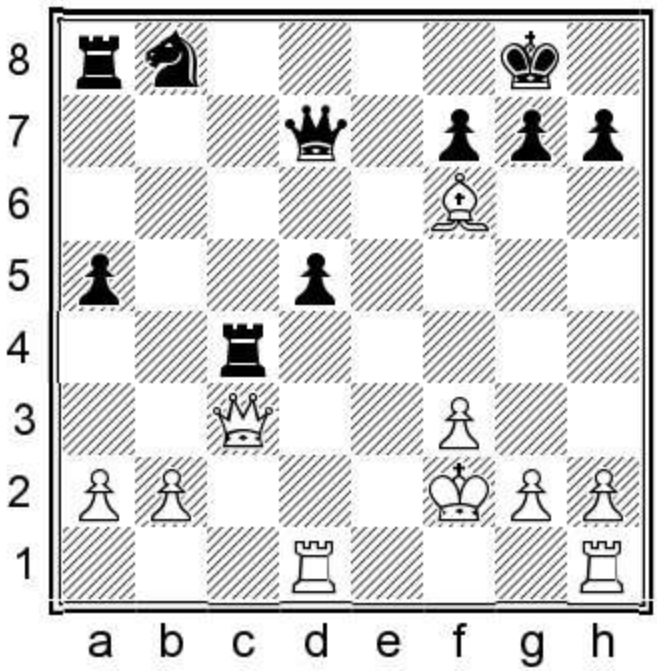



11.Be3!?N
One of many sensible moves. The only thing I would absolutely not recommend is taking on b5, which brings White further behind in development.
11...bxc4 12.Bxc4 d5 13.Rd1 Bb7 14.exd5 Bxd5 15.Nb4 Qd7 16.Kf2²

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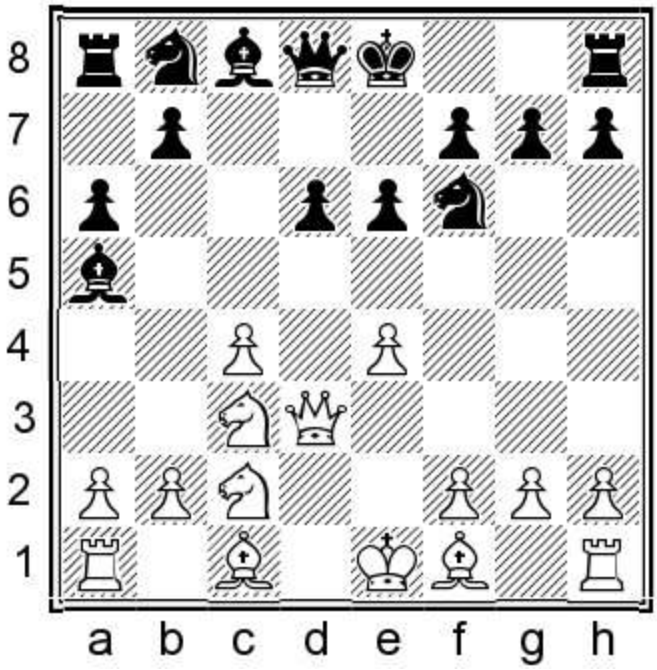


White has a nice edge. This is not something I would try to memorize, but I will show a few more moves as the position contains some interesting resources.
16...a5
This is a logical try, but White remains better after:
17.Nxd5 exd5 18.Bd4! Rc8 19.Bxf6 Rxc4

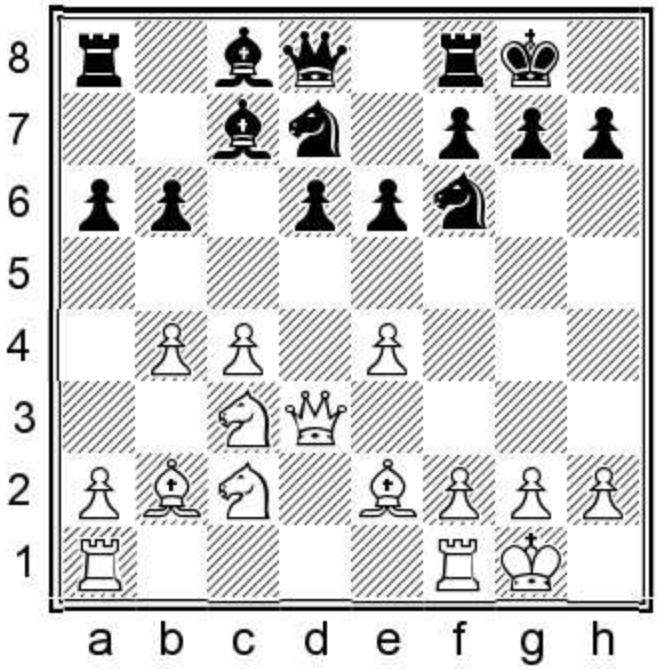


20.Qxc4 dxc4 21.Rxd7 Nxd7 22.Bd4²
The ending is quite unpleasant for Black.

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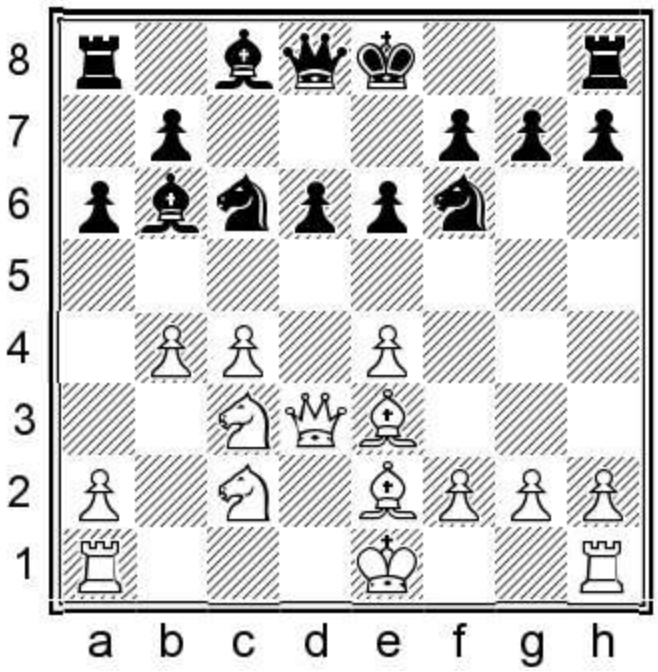
9.b4 Bb6
9...Bc7 is a bit passive, and White should be better without too much difficulty. 10.Bb2 0-0 11.Be2 Nbd7 12.0-0 b6 occurred in Negi – Andreikin, Biel 2010. Here I like the recommendation of Michael Roiz:



13.f4!?N 13...Bb7 14.Bf3² “Black is suffering from a lack from space,” as the Israeli GM points out.

10.Be2 Nc6 11.Be3

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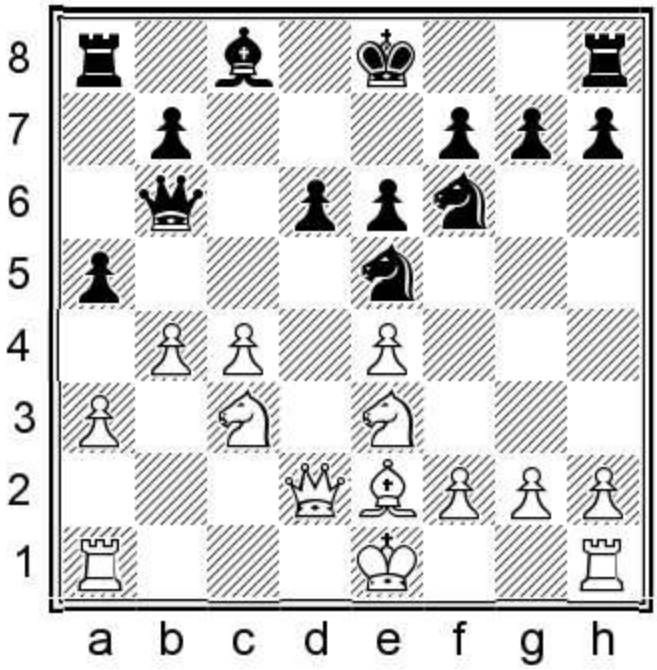
11...Ne5?
Black may appear to be gaining time, but in fact the reverse is true. White's queen will be no worse placed on d2 than d3, now that now the bishop has made it to e3, whereas Black's knight will soon be driven away by f2-f4.
Back should have preferred something like 11...0-0N 12.0-0 e5 13.Rfd1 Be6 14.Rac1², although I like White's prospects here as well. Compare the Kalashnikov positions in Chapter 5.

12.Qd2 Bxe3 13.Nxe3
Black has obviously not come close to equalizing out of the opening: he has a weak pawn on d6, less space and will find it hard to complete development.

13...Qb6
13...0-0 14.Rd1 Ne8 15.f4 Ng6 16.0-0± is also excellent for White.

14.a3 a5

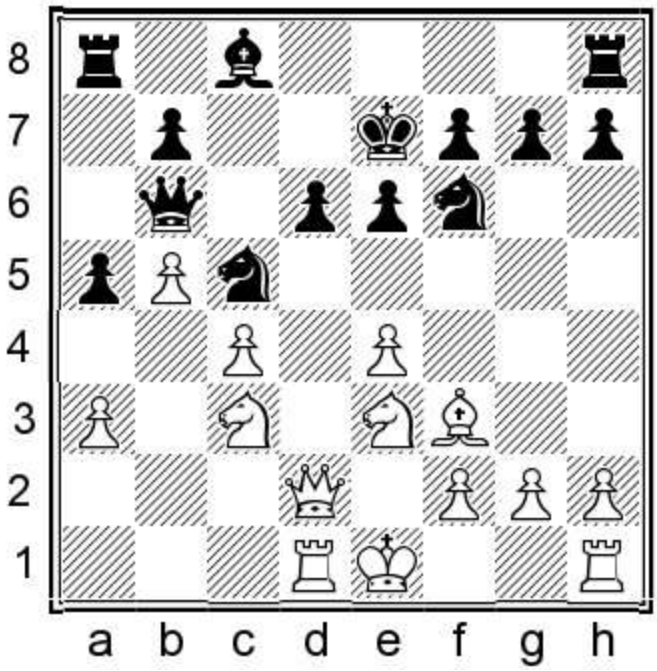
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15.b5!
Hansen correctly judges that Black will not have time to exploit the c5-outpost.

15...Ned7
15...0-0 16.0-0 Qc7 17.Rfd1 Ne8 was a better try, although the black pieces are poorly placed.

16.Rd1 Nc5 17.Bf3 Ke7?
Black's last chance to stay in the game involved a positional pawn sacrifice. After 17...e5! 18.Qxd6 Qxd6 19. Rxd6 Be6 20.0-0 Rd8 21.Rxd8† Kxd8 White is a pawn up, but the knight is well placed on c5, offering Black some drawing chances.

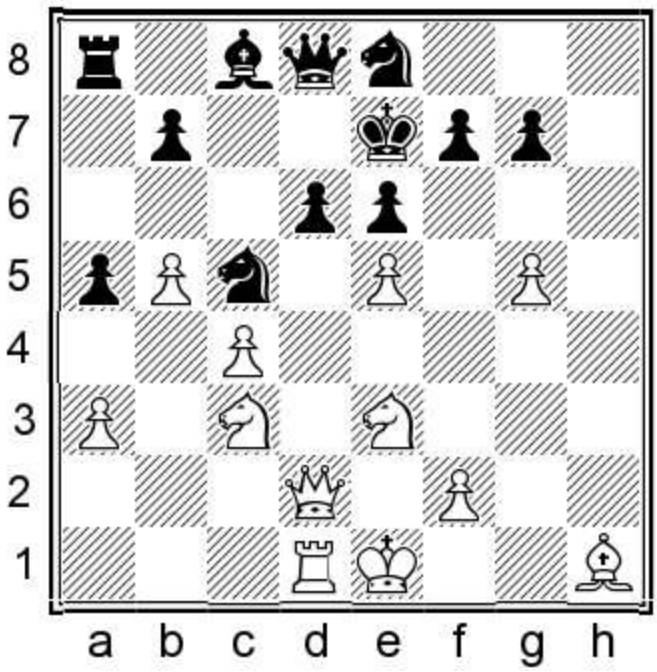


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18.g4! h6 19.h4 Qd8

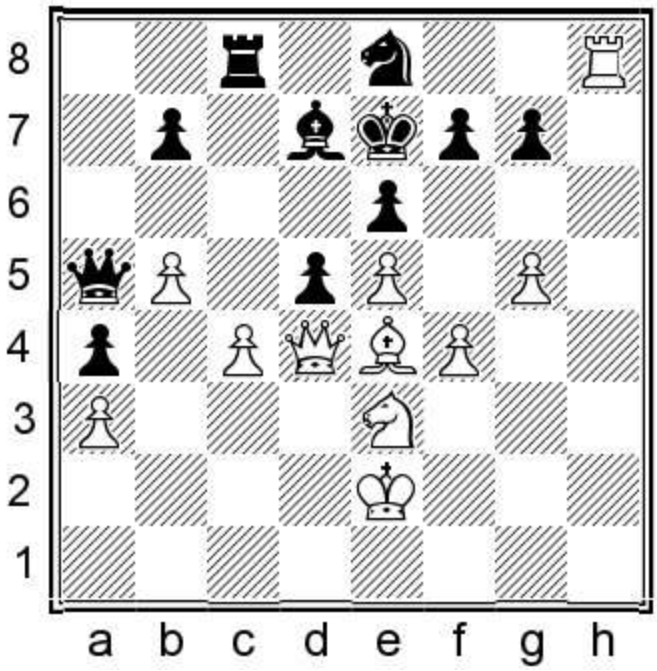
No better is: 19...Kf8 20.g5 (20.Qxd6†± is fine, but White can do better than exchange queens) 20...hxg5 21. hxg5 Rxh1† 22.Bxh1 Ne8 23.f4 Qc7 For some reason Roiz evaluated this position as only somewhat better for White, when the game is actually almost over. 24.Qh2 Kg8 25.Bf3 and Black will not be able to withstand an invasion along the h-file.

20.g5 hxg5 21.hxg5 Rxh1† 22.Bxh1 Ne8 23.e5



White's position is overwhelming. Hansen continues to play well, creating further threats without offering Black any counter-chances.

23...a4 24.Ke2 Kf8 25.f4 Bd7 26.Ne4 Nxe4 27.Bxe4 d5 28.Rh1 Qa5 29.Qd4 Rc8 30.Rh8† Ke7



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31.Bxd5!
A small flourish to end Black's resistance.

31...b6 32.f5 exf5 33.g6
1–0

C36) 7...Nc6

This is perhaps the most critical line, so it's a good thing that we have the World Champion to show us the way.

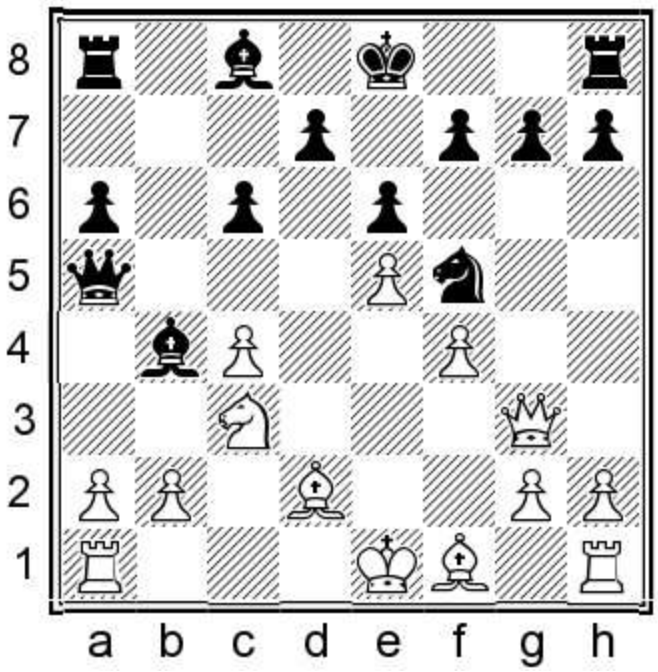
GAME 10

Magnus Carlsen – Viswanathan Anand
Sochi (6) 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 a6 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 Bb4 7.Qd3!? Nc6
Black goes for active development but White can get a good position by exchanging knights.

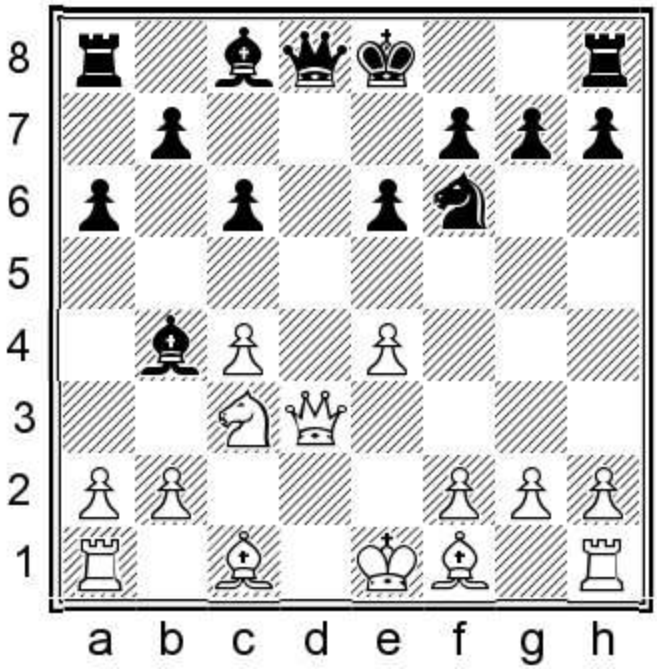
8.Nxc6 dxc6
Again this is the critical move.

Black should be worse if he takes with the other pawn: 8...bxc6 9.e5 Ng4 10.Qg3 Qa5 11.f4 Nh6 12.Bd2 Nf5
So far, White had done everything right in Eggink – Sliwicka, Lazy 2015. Here I suggest:

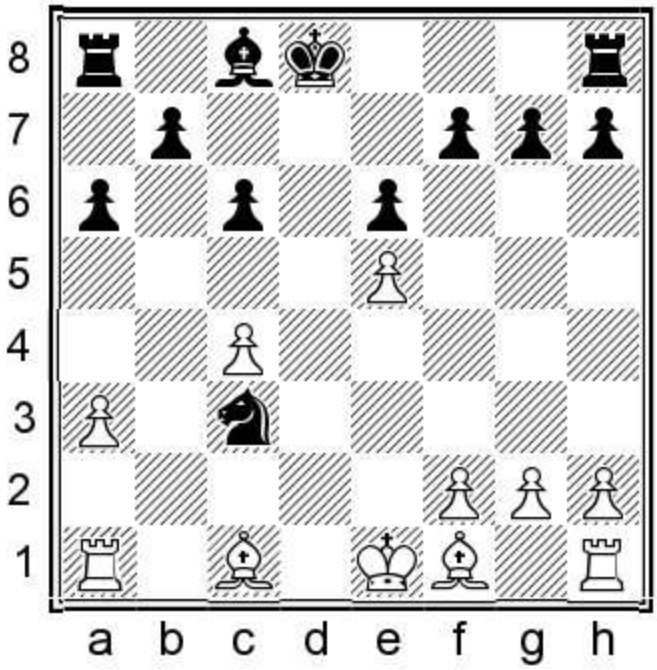



13.Qd3!N Putting the queen on a safe square while restricting the enemy knight. A possible continuation is 13...0-0 14.g4 Nh4 15.Qg3 Ng6 16.a3 d5 17.Rd1 Bxc3 18.Bxc3 Qc7 19.h4± and Black will suffer a direct onslaught.

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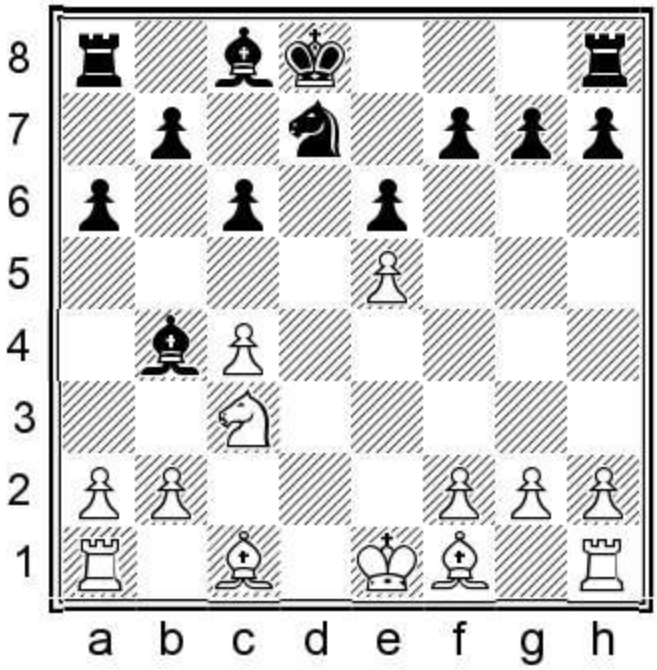


9.Qxd8† Kxd8 10.e5 Nd7
The pseudo-active 10...Ne4?! only succeeds in putting Black’s knight in danger. 11.a3 Bxc3† 12.bxc3 Nxc3



13.a4! Ne4 14.Be3 f6 15.Bd3 Ng5 16.0-0± White obviously has fantastic play for a pawn.

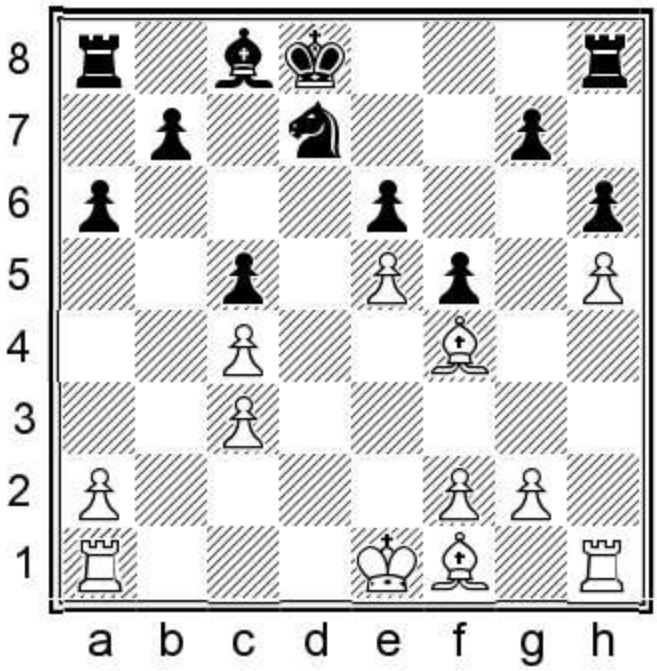
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11.Bf4
11.f4? is the only move covered in The Most Flexible Sicilian.

11...Bxc3†?!
I think this was a poor decision. The doubled pawns are not too weak and, after giving up the dark squares, Black is completely without counterplay.

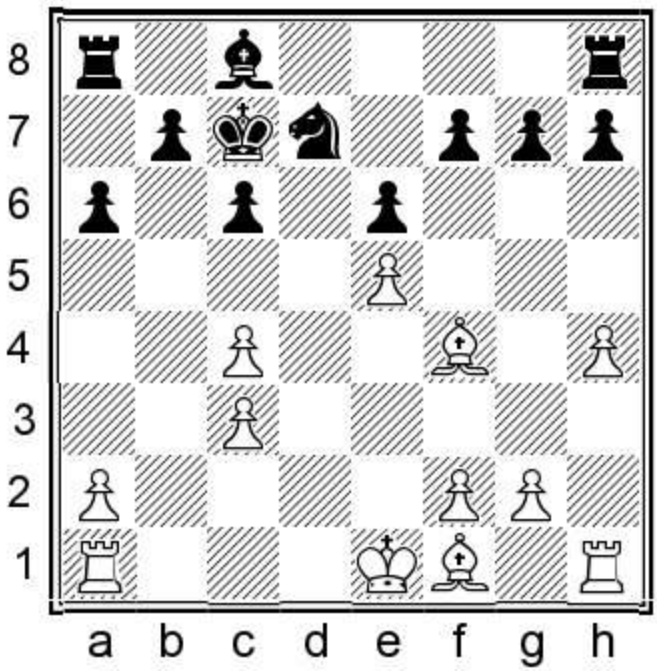
11...f5! has been played several times. A good example continued: 12.h4 Bxc3†?! Once again, trading the bishop for the knight is misguided from Black's point of view. (12...Kc7N is more logical, although White remains slightly better after 13.Rh3.) 13.bxc3 c5 14.h5 h6



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15.Rh3 Ke7 16.Rg3 Kf7 17.0-0-0 b6 18.Rd6 Ra7 19.Rgd3 White had an overwhelming position in Milliet –

Navrotescu, Saint Jacut de la Mer 2015.

12.bxc3 Kc7 13.h4![2]

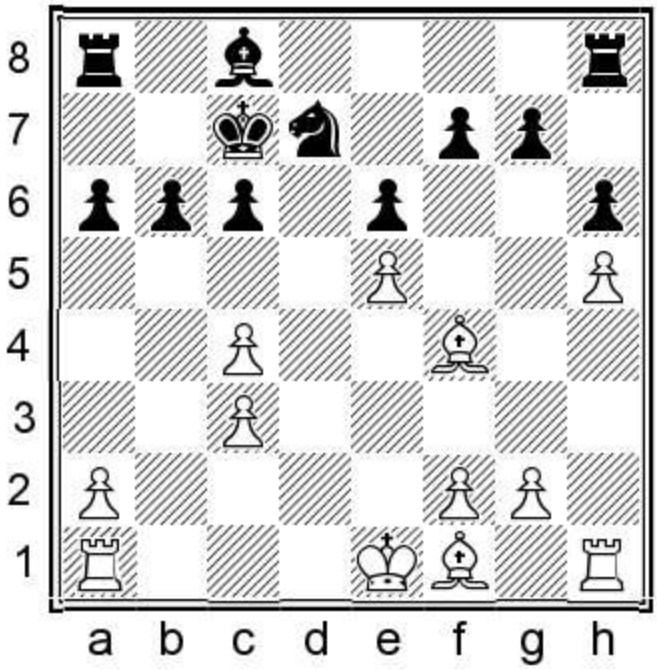


Advancing this pawn causes Black some discomfort. One way or another, he will be left with a fixed kingside structure and long-term weaknesses. Another advantage of White's last move is that his rook may join the action via the third rank.

13...b6
13...h5 prevents any further squeezing from the h-pawn but, as Kasimdzhanov points out, White plays 14.Rh3! and immediately forces Black to make further concessions on the kingside. He will most likely have to play ...g6 at some point, leading to chronic weaknesses on the dark squares and a long-term weakness on f7.

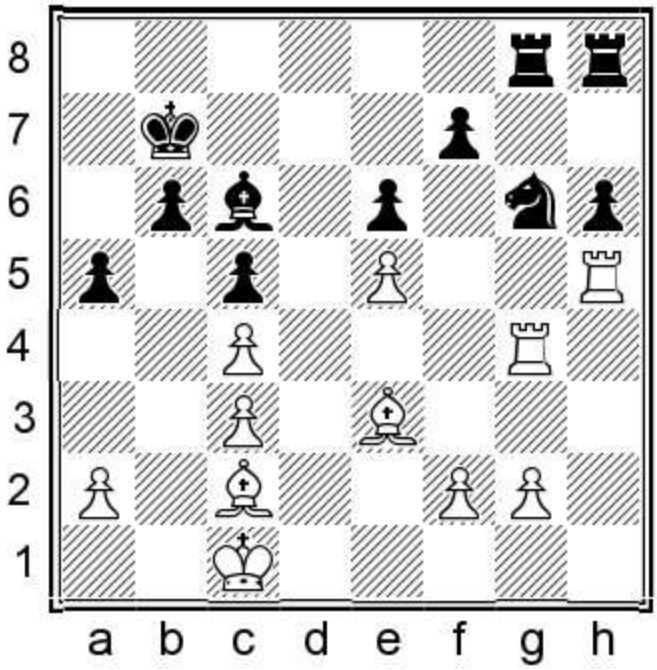
14.h5 h6
It is not obvious that the pawn should have been stopped here, as Black's pawn structure is now permanently fixed on the dark squares.

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15.0-0-0 Bb7 16.Rd3 c5 17.Rg3 Rag8 18.Bd3 Nf8 19.Be3 g6
Carlsen has organized his pieces excellently, making it so that each of Black's options involves a concession of some sort. Anand is not in a mood to wait and see, but this decision creates weaknesses in his position which are not easily repaired.

20.hxg6 Nxg6 21.Rh5 Bc6 22.Bc2 Kb7 23.Rg4 a5 24.Bd1 Rd8 25.Bc2 Rdg8



26.Kd2??
26.Rg3 would have maintained White's clear advantage.

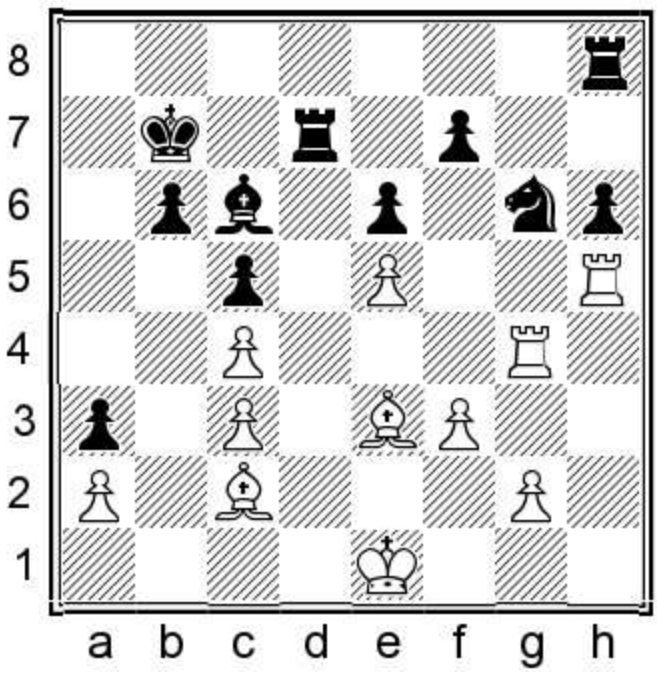
26...a4??
chesstouring.com
The moment he made his move, Anand saw what he had missed. Maybe it was the clear signs of relief in his

opponent’s face that alerted him.

The simple tactic 26...Nxe5! 27.Rxg8 Nxc4† 28.Kd3 Nb2† 29.Ke2 Rxg8 would have won a pawn and possibly regained the World Championship.

27.Ke2±
White has a safe advantage and converted it without further drama.

27...a3 28.f3 Rd8 29.Ke1 Rd7



30.Bc1 Ra8 31.Ke2 Ba4 32.Be4† Bc6 33.Bxg6 fxg6 34.Rxg6 Ba4 35.Rxe6 Rd1 36.Bxa3 Ra1 37.Ke3 Bc2 38.Re7† Ka6 39.Rxh6 Rxa2 40.Bxc5
1–0

Conclusion

The Kan is a flexible system, which is probably why the list of variations at the start of the chapter is so long. Still, our task is slightly eased by the fact that the rare options such as 5...b6, 5...g6 and other assorted moves, all enable us to obtain an easy game without much fuss.

This leaves 5...Nf6 as the most important option by far. After the obvious 6.Nc3, we analysed three main branches.

6...d6?! reduces Black’s active possibilities and gives White a great deal of freedom. 7.Be2 Be7 8.0-0 0-0 9.f4!? gives excellent attacking possibilities, as the analysis shows.

6...Qc7 is a typical move for the Kan, which keeps all kinds of options open. We reply with 7.a3, when 7...Nxe4?! 8.Nxe4 Qe5 is a dangerous pawn grab; 9.Qc2! gives White a powerful initiative, although some accurate moves are needed to prove it. We then looked at the safer alternatives, 7...b6 and 7...Nc6, each of which leads to its own unique possibilities. It is worth highlighting Kasparov’s plan involving Rac1-c2, with the second rook shadowing Black’s queen, followed by Na4-b2, as a regrouping method which is worth knowing

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about in several variations involving this type of structure.

Finally, we considered the active 6...Bb4, when 7.Qd3!? is our reply. Here it’s hard to give general guidelines, as the character of the game depends entirely on the choices made over the next few moves. For instance: 7...d5 leads to liquidation of the centre with White retaining a slight initiative; 7...d6 leads to more of a closed game with White enjoying a space advantage; and 7...Nc6 usually leads to an early queen exchange. So we have to be ready for anything; but we have decent chances of an opening advantage in all cases.

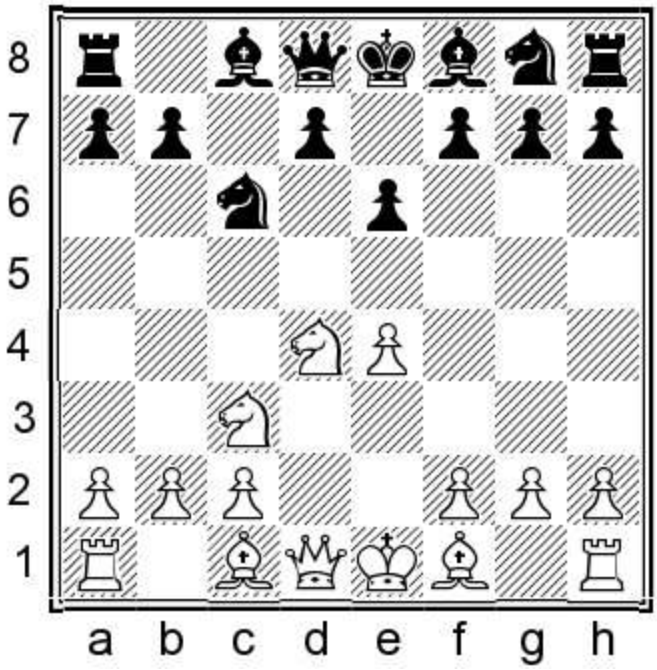
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# Chapter 3 - Taimanov

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3

A) 5...a6 92
B) 5...Qc7 6.Be3 94
B1) 6...Nf6 94
B2) 6...a6 7.Qf3 95
B21) 7...Bb4 97
B22) 7...b5 100
B23) 7...d6 8.0-0-0 105
B231) 8...Nf6 105
B232) 8...Bd7 109
B24) 7...Ne5 8.Qg3 h5!? 9.Nf5!? 113
B241) 9...exf5? 115
B242) 9...f6! 116
B25) 7...Bd6 8.0-0-0 Be5 9.Nxc6! bxc6 10.Bd4 122
B251) 10...Nf6 123
B252) 10...Bxd4 125
B26) 7...Nf6 8.0-0-0 127
B261) 8...b5?! 128
B262) 8...Bb4 130
B263) 8...Be7 132
B264) 8...h5!? 136
B265) 8...Ne5 9.Qg3 b5 138
B2651) 10.a3!? 138
B2652) 10.f4 Neg4 11.Bd2!? 142
B26521) 11...Qa7 143
B26522) 11...b4 145
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3

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The Taimanov combines theoretical soundness with solidity, flexibility and counterattacking chances; all this explains why it is one of the most popular Sicilians, from club level all the way up to the world elite. In this chapter we will meet it head on, using a set-up with Be3 and Qf3 which has emerged in recent years as the biggest threat to Black's system.

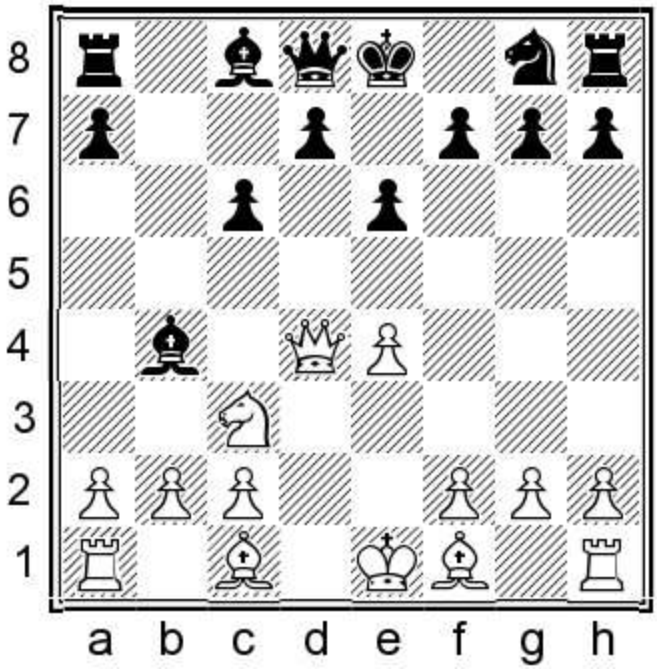
Black's two main options are A) 5...a6 and B) 5...Qc7. Other moves exist of course, but they can be dealt with fairly quickly:

5...Nf6 was covered in Chapter 1 and 5...d6 can be found in Chapter 10.

5...Qb6 is seen occasionally, but 6.Ndb5 Bc5 7.Qd2! gives Black big problems on the dark squares.

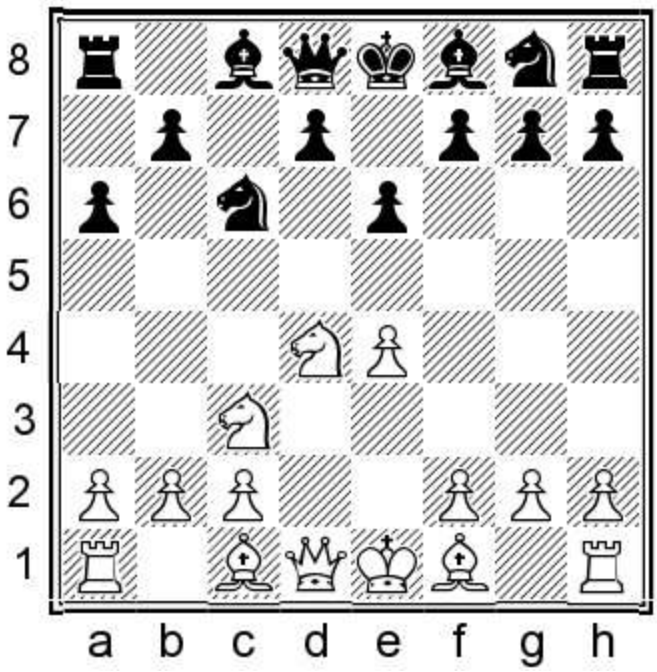
5...Bc5 can be met by 6.Nb3 (6.Ndb5 is a decent move which should lead to an edge, but 6...Nf6 leads to a variation of the Four Knights which lies outside of our repertoire) 6...Bb4 7.Bd3!? (the solid 7.Bd2 is also fine) and White has a promising lead in development, which is more significant than the possible doubling of his queenside pawns.
5...Bb4 is conveniently met by: 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.Qd4

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7...Bf8 (7...Bxc3†?! leaves Black too weak on the dark squares after 8.Qxc3 or even 8.bxc3!?) 8.Bf4 (or 8.Bd3) and White has a significant lead in development.

A) 5...a6



6.Be3!
6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.Bd3 is the main line and a good try for an advantage. However, for our purposes the text move is more convenient.

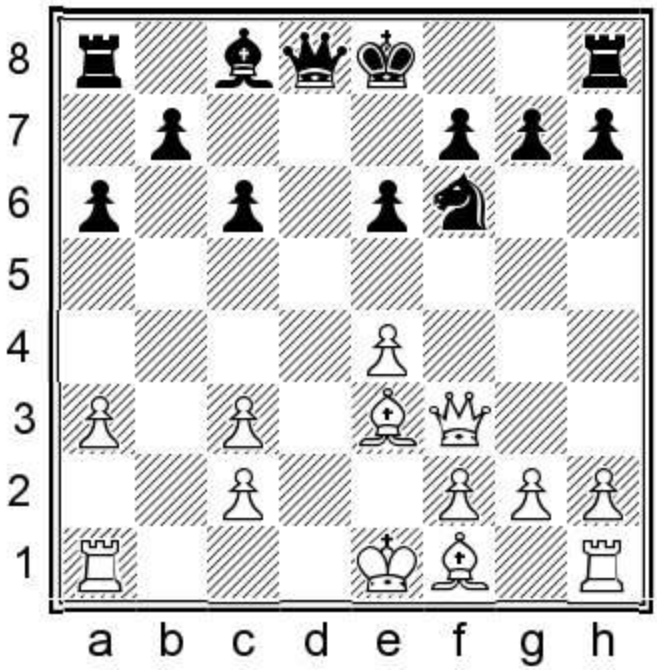
6...Nf6
6...Qc7 has been the most popular choice but 7.Qf3 leads straight to our main line: see variation B2 on page 95.

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6...Nge7 has been played in a bunch of games but 7.Nb3!? is promising for White. A similar idea can be found in Chapter 10 on page 335.

7.Qf3 Bb4
White is simply playing his intended Qf3 set-up and challenging Black to come up with something better than 7...Qc7, which transposes to variation B26. The text move is his main try but I like White's chances against it.

8.Nxc6! bxc6
8...dxc6 9.a3 Bxc3† 10.bxc3 leaves Black vulnerable on the dark squares, while White's doubled pawns are not really weak. A high-level game continued:

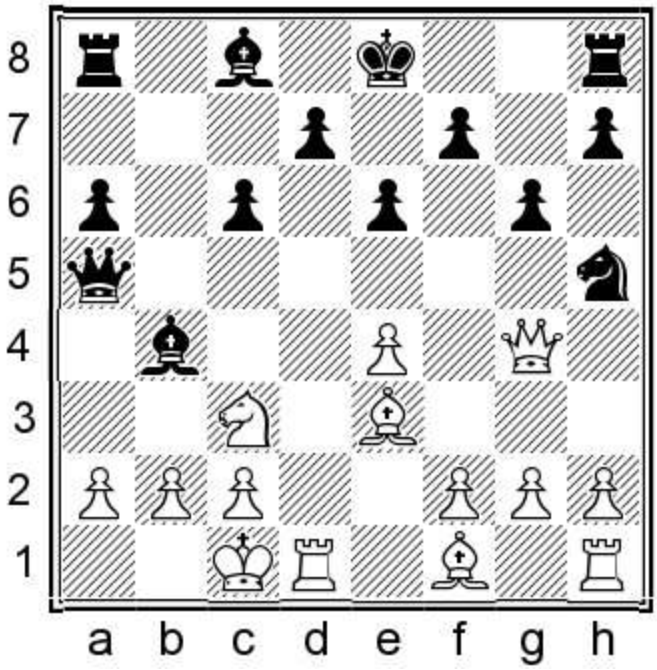



10...Qa5 11.Bd2 0-0 12.Bd3 e5 13.a4 Be6 14.c4 Qc7 15.a5 c5 16.0-0 Nd7 17.Rfb1 White enjoyed a pleasant edge in Grischuk – Grachev, Sochi 2017.

9.Qg3 0-0
This was Rublevsky's latest try.

Previously he played 9...Nh5 10.Qg4 (10.Qe5 is another good option which practically forces Black to go back with 10...Nf6) 10...g6 11.0-0-0 Qa5 in Oparin – Rublevsky, Moscow 2017. White has several good options but I like the look of:

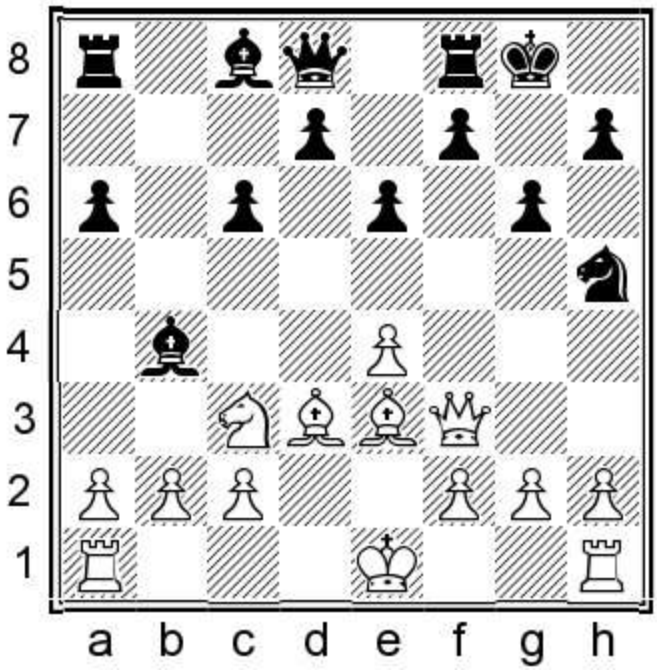
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12.Be2!?N Developing another piece while eyeing the knight on h5. Black is not really threatening to take on c3 as his dark squares will become too weak. (12.Qg5!?N is another possible approach, angling for a favourable endgame.)

10.Bd3 Nh5
10...d5 11.e5 Ne8 occurred in Kobo – Srijit, Escaldes 2017, when 12.0-0$f$ would have given White a lead in development and active prospects across the board.

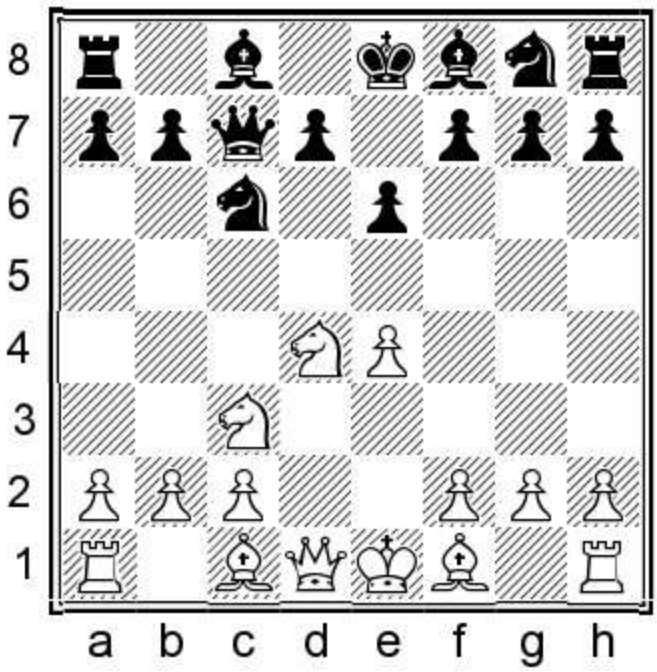
11.Qf3 g6



12.Bh6N
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Improving over 12.0-0 d5, when Black was close to equal in I. Popov – Rublevsky, Sochi 2017.

12...Ng7 13.h4!
White has excellent chances on the kingside.

B) 5...Qc7



This is the most popular and characteristic continuation of the Taimanov scheme. Black improves his queen and gives himself the option of meeting Nxc6 with ...dxc6, without allowing an unfavourable queen exchange.

6.Be3
We will consider B1) 6...Nf6 followed by the main line of B2) 6...a6.

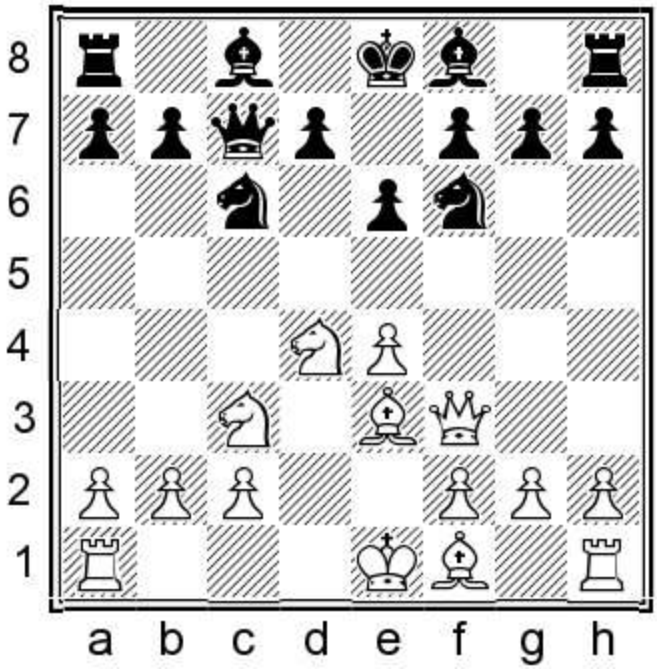
B1) 6...Nf6

This has been played in a few thousand games, but we can sidestep all of the main theory with:

7.Qf3
Once again, we are angling for a transposition to our main line, which would arise after 7...a6.

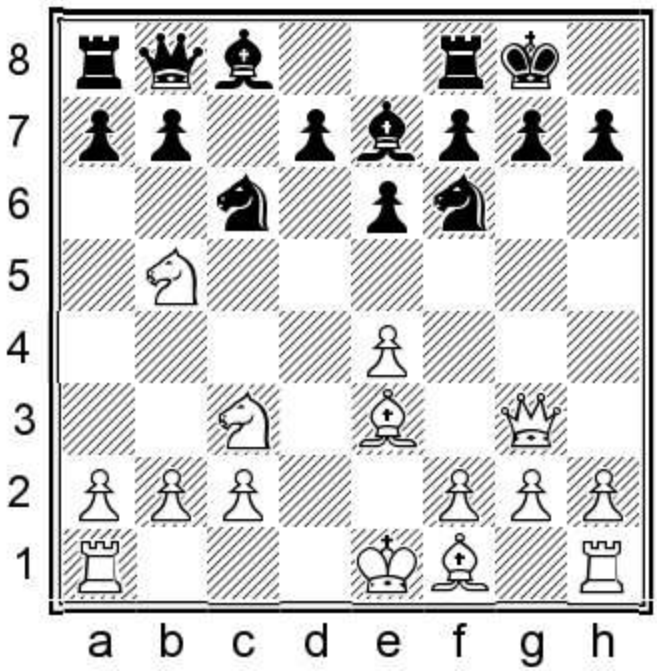
7.f4!? is a promising move, which is covered thoroughly by Negi in 1.e4 vs The Sicilian III, and is also recommended by Kotronias and Semkov. The text is far simpler for us though, as Black must either transpose to our main line with 7...a6 or allow us an easy game with one of the alternatives mentioned below.

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7...Bb4
7...Nxd4?! 8.Bxd4 e5 9.Qg3! d6 10.Be3 a6 occurred in Carstens Dobuchak – Cunha, Fraiburgo 2016, when 11. Bg5N would have given White easy play, as he will soon conquer the d5-square.

7...Be7 8.Ndb5 Qb8 9.Qg3! 0-0 is also excellent for White after:

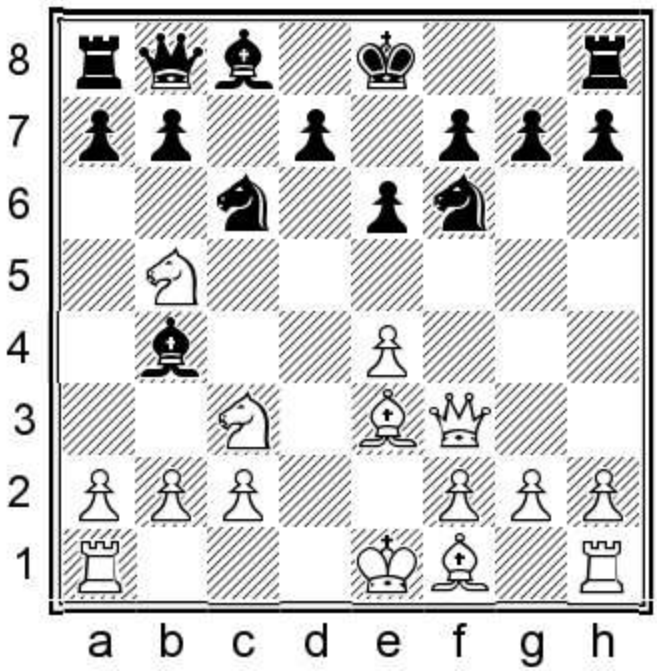


10.Bf4!?N (10.Qxb8 Rxb8 11.Nxa7 was somewhat better for White in Dragnev – Meszaros, Zalakaros 2015, but I would prefer the initiative over material) 10...e5 11.Bh6 Black will have to make a concession of some kind, as both the kingside and the d5-square are weak.

8.Ndb5
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The availability of this move, both here and in the note above, reminds us of why Black plays an early ...a6 in

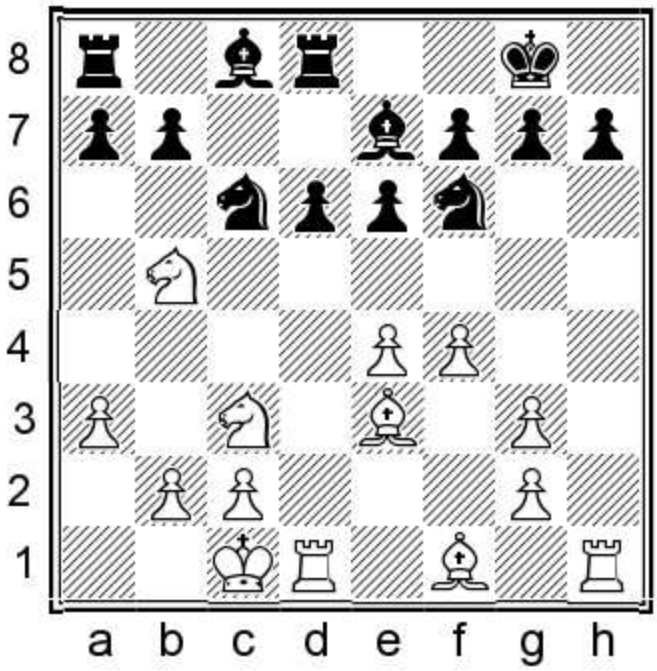
the great majority of games!

8...Qb8
In Marosi – Acosta, Montevideo 2017, White could have obtained a pleasant advantage with:



9.Qg3!N
As we will see, this move is a useful resource in the main Be3/Qf3 lines. See, for instance, variation B22 on page 100. Here White gets an even more pleasant version of the thematic endgame.

9...Qxg3 10.hxg3 0-0 11.a3 Be7 12.f4 d6 13.0-0-0 Rd8

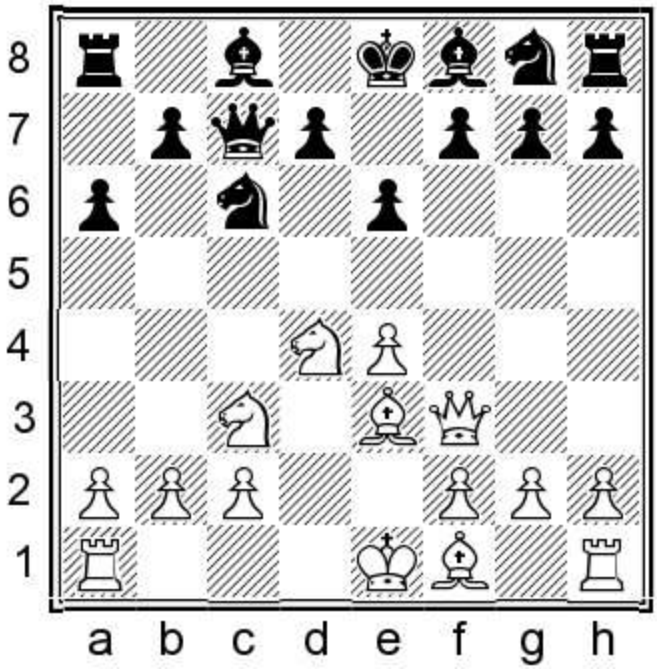


14.Be2 a6 15.Nd4²

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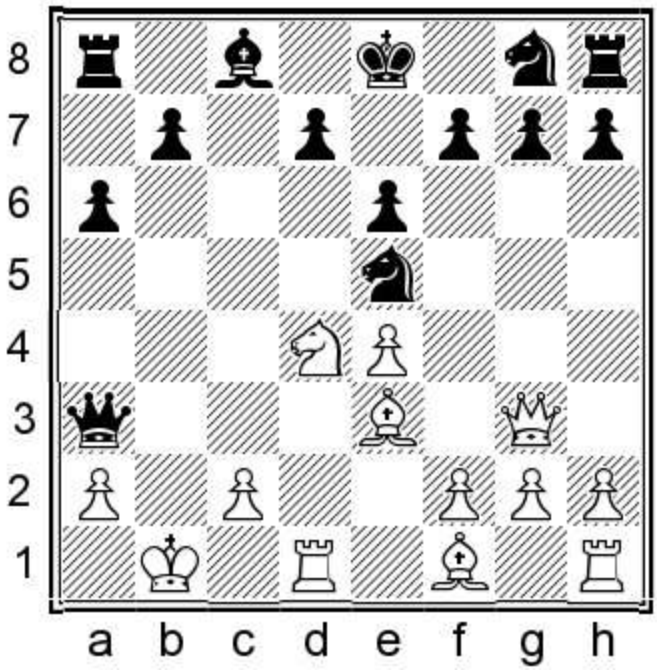
Kotronias and Semkov provide some further analysis but I am happy to stop here and say White is comfortably better.

B2) 6...a6 7.Qf3



This is the big main line of the chapter, and one of the most topical variations in the whole book. There are six main options, arranged in roughly ascending order of importance: B21) 7...Bb4, B22) 7...b5, B23) 7...d6, B24) 7...Ne5, B25) 7...Bd6 and B26) 7...Nf6. Other moves are not too difficult to meet:

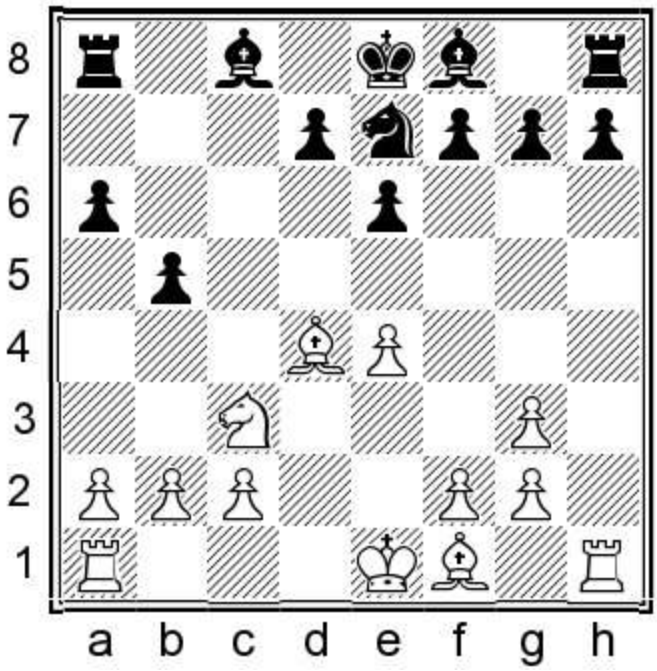
7...Ba3?! is not a good move, but it carries some shock value so it is worth seeing how to deal with it: 8.0-0-0! (8.bxa3? Ne5 is Black's idea of course) 8...Ne5 9.Qg3 Qxc3 10.bxa3 Qxa3† 11.Kb1



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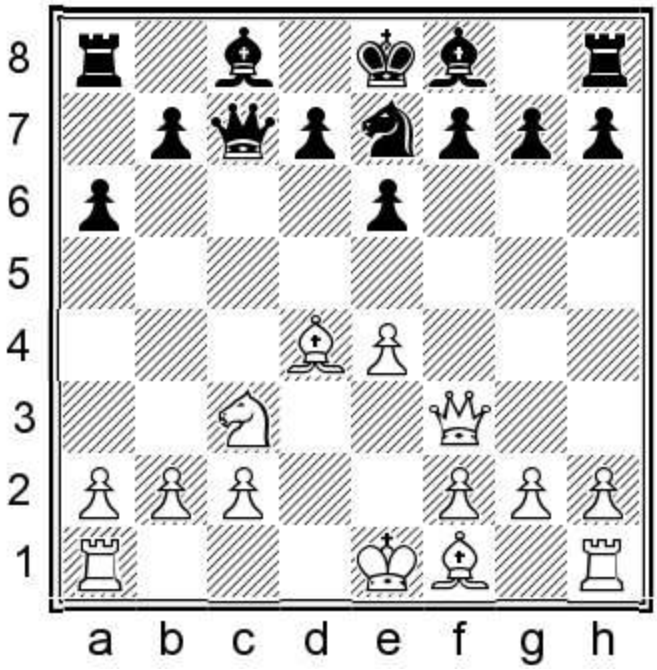
11...Ng6 12.Nb3 Nf6 13.f3± In Bogdanov – Q. Fontaine, Agneaux 2015, White's lead in development and threats on the dark squares were worth far more than Black's extra pawn.

7...Nge7
This enables White to get an easy edge with:
8.Qg3
If you prefer to keep the queens on, then Kotronias and Semkov's 8.Nb3!?N is a decent option.
K&S also mention in passing that 8.Nxc6!? Nxc6 9.Qg3 offers White a slightly improved version of the queenless position, assuming the play proceeds in parallel for a certain number of moves afterwards. He has a point, but I would prefer not to give Black the freedom to recapture on c6 with the b- or d-pawns, even though White is slightly better there too.
8...Qxg3 9.hxg3 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 b5
10...Nc6? 11.Bb6 puts Black in a bind.

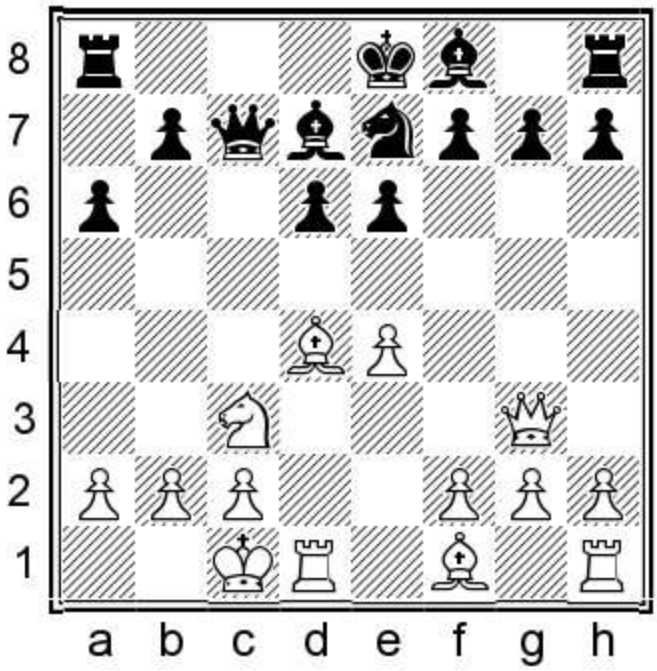



11.f3!
11.0-0-0 Bb7 12.f3 transposes to a line discussed on page 103, which I prefer to avoid.
11...Bb7
We have transposed to variation B22. You can find the continuation on page 103, along with an explanation of why it is beneficial for White to postpone castling.
A similar option is:
7...Nxd4 8.Bxd4 Ne7
8...b5 9.Qg3 Qxg3 10.hxg3 transposes to variation B22.
The text move should be met in typical fashion with:

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9.Qg3!
9.Qe3 has been played several times but the position after 9...b5 is nothing special for White.
9...d6?!
9...Qxg3 10.hxg3 transposes to the 7...Nge7 line above.
The text move is an independent try, but it's hard to believe that Black can benefit from keeping the queens on.
10.0-0-0 Bd7
This occurred in Bauer – Miezis, Flims 2016. White has several good options but I like:

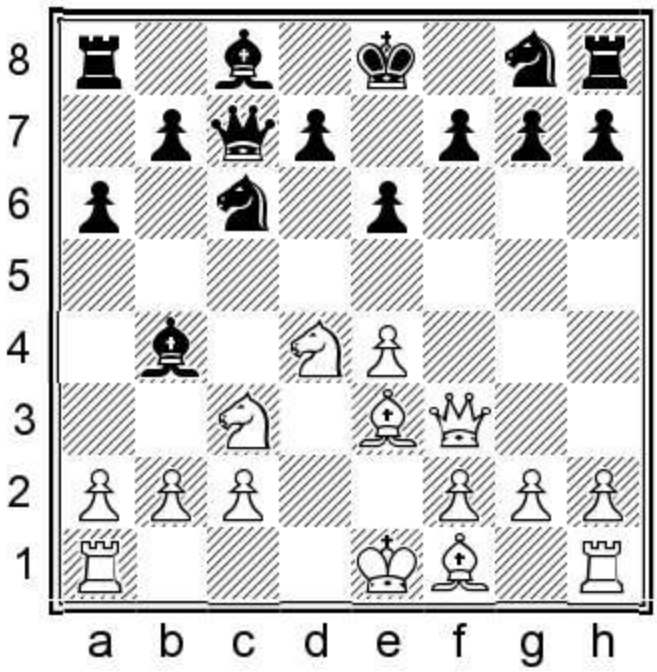


11.Be3N 11...Nc6 12.Be2 b5 13.Kb1²/±
White has improved his pieces and can think about doubling rooks and/or advancing his f- or h-pawns in the near future. The queen on g3 impedes the development of Black's kingside pieces, which is why Black generally prefers to exchange it.

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B21) 7...Bb4

This is an active move but it comes with certain risks, as exchanging on c3 will render Black vulnerable on the dark squares.



8.Nxc6
This seems like the simplest way of avoiding the threatened ...Ne5.

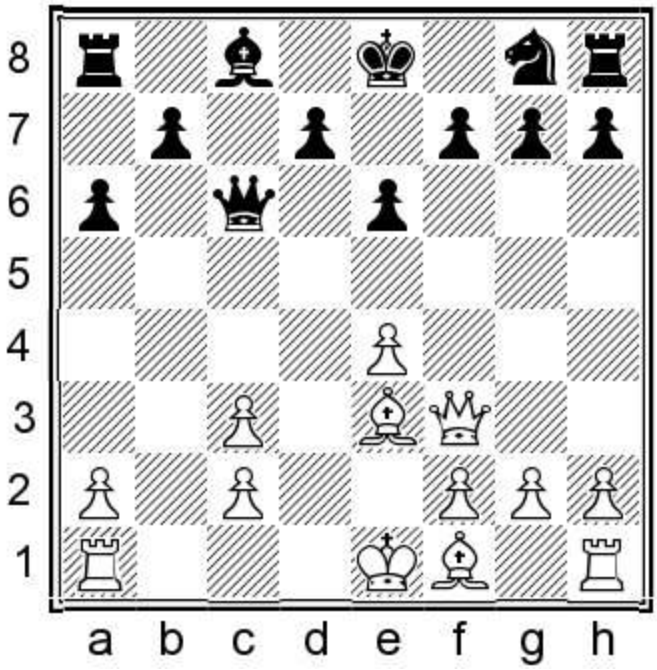
8.0-0-0!? is a promising alternative which the reader may also wish to investigate.

8...bxc6
Black has tried all three of the other playable moves:

8...Qxc6 9.Bd4 f6 (9...Nf6 10.0-0-0 is covered later on page 130 – see 9...Qxc6 10.Bd4 in the notes to variation B262) 10.a3 Be7 This was Markantonaki – Stefanidi, Hydra 2015, when 11.Qg3N± would have given White an obvious advantage.

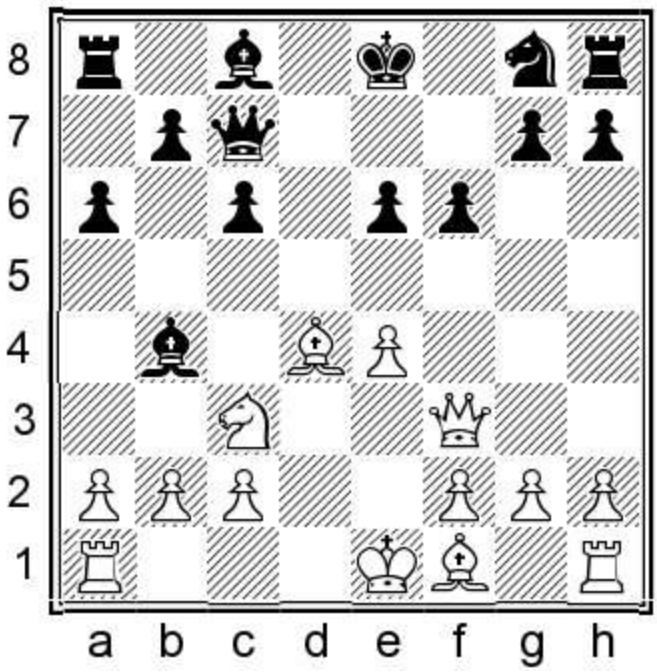
8...Bxc3† 9.bxc3 Qxc6 was played in Li Yankai – Zhang Shengyun, Harbin 2016. White continued 10.Bd4 and was successful, but more accurate would have been:

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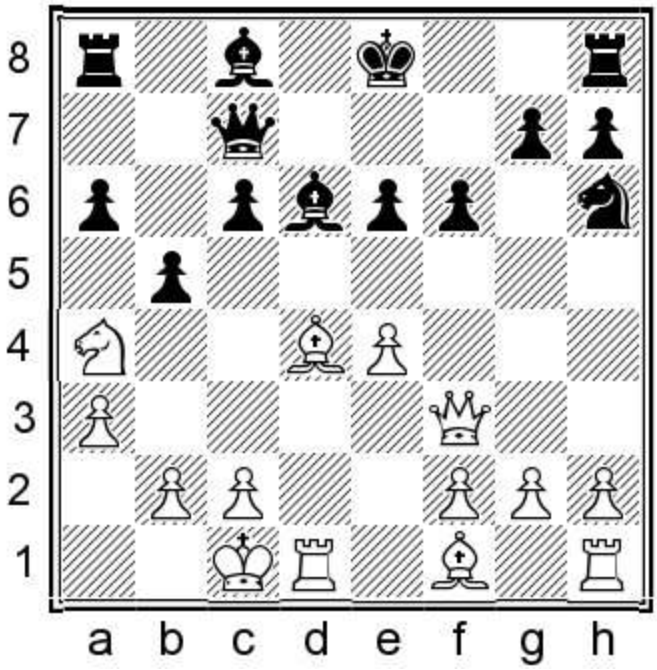
10.c4!N 10...Ne7 11.Be2² White's strong bishops and open queenside files are more important than the doubled pawns. 11...b5!? looks like Black's most challenging idea, but 12.0-0! bxc4 13.Rfb1© is a promising pawn sacrifice.

8...dxc6 9.Bd4 f6
9...e5 10.Qg3! f6 11.0-0-0N gives White a great game.

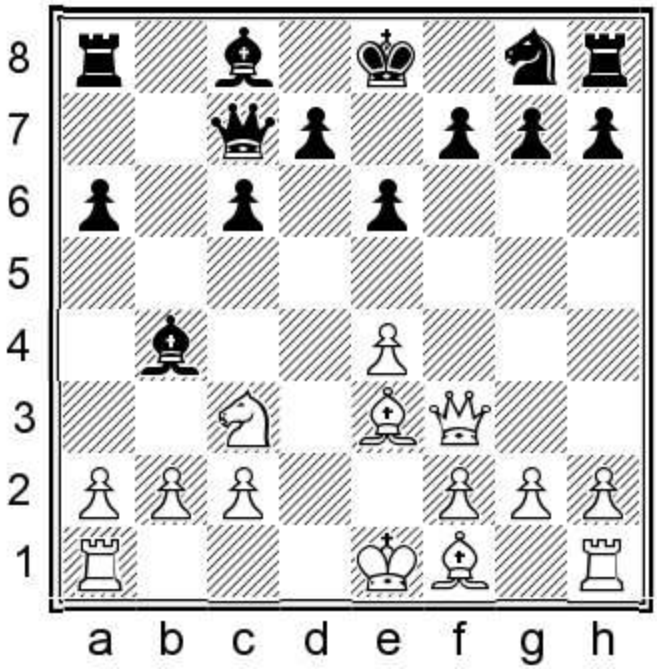


10.a3 Bd6 11.0-0-0 Nh6?!
11...e5N was the lesser evil although 12.Be3 still favours White due to his lead in development.
12.Na4 b5?
A mistake, but Black was in trouble anyway, as 12...c5 loses a pawn to 13.Bxc5! Bxc5 14.Qh5†.
In Suarez Uriel – Cori Tello, Utebo 2017, White overlooked the strongest continuation:

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13.Bb6!N 13...Qb8 14.e5!
With a decisive advantage.

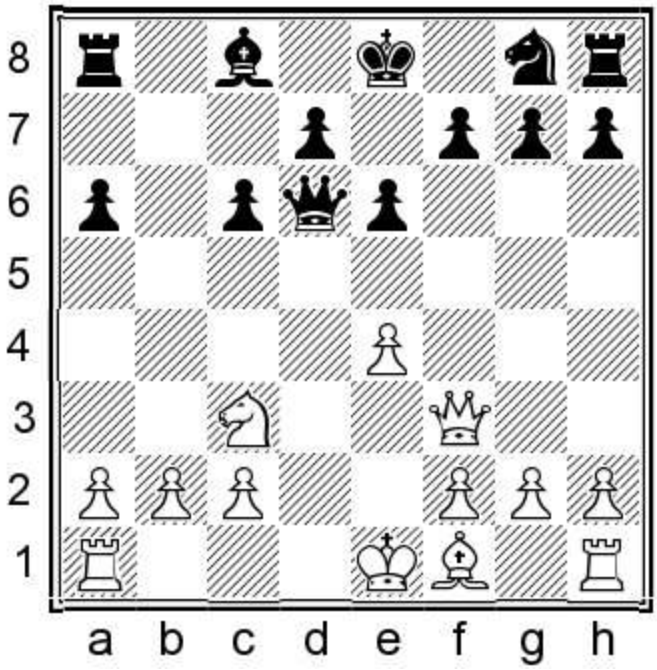


9.Bf4
White has a pleasant choice, with 9.Bd4 being the other good move. Kotronias and Semkov analyse both options and gives the latter an exclamation mark. I think the choice is mainly a matter of taste, and the text move just seems like a simpler route to an advantage, with no complicated variations to remember.

9...Bd6
9...Bxc3†? has not been played, for good reason, as the doubled pawns are far less weak than Black's dark squares. 10.bxc3 Qa5 11.Qg3!±

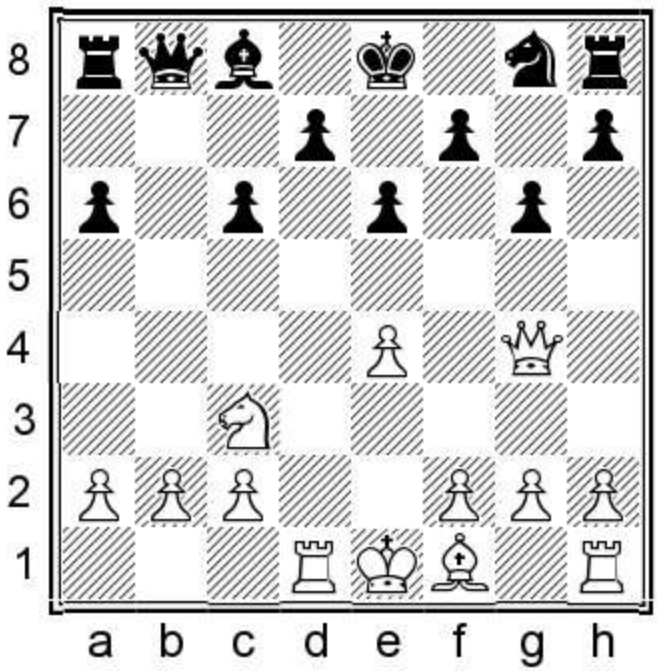
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10.Bxd6 Qxd6



11.Qg3
This virtually forces a queen exchange, leaving White with an easy positional edge.

11.Rd1!?N 11...Qb8 12.Qg4!? is a promising alternative for those who prefer a middlegame initiative. (12.Qg3 Qxg3 13.hxg3 d5² is the same as the main line except White has been given the Rd1 move for free. An extra developing move is always nice; on the other hand, White no longer has the option of long castling. The general evaluation is about the same though.) 12...g6 Now the most enterprising continuation is:



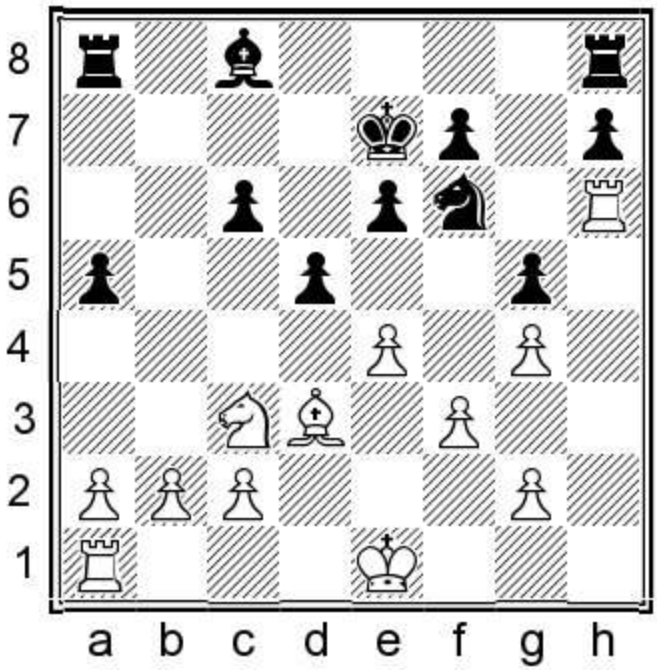
13.Be2!? Sacrificing a pawn in order to accelerate the lead in development. 13...Qxb2 14.Qf3 Qb8 15.0-0 Qe5 16.Qe3 Rb8 (16...Ne7 17.f4 Qa5 18.e5©) 17.f4 Qa5 18.Kh1© With promising play for the pawn.

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11...Qxg3 12.hxg3 d5 13.g4!²
Utilizing the spare g-pawn and open h-file to good effect. You certainly don't have to remember any more than this, but it is worth showing a few more moves of a well-played game.

13...Nf6 14.f3 g5
This prevents the further advance of the g-pawn but permanently weakens Black's kingside structure.

15.Rh6 Ke7 16.Bd3 a5

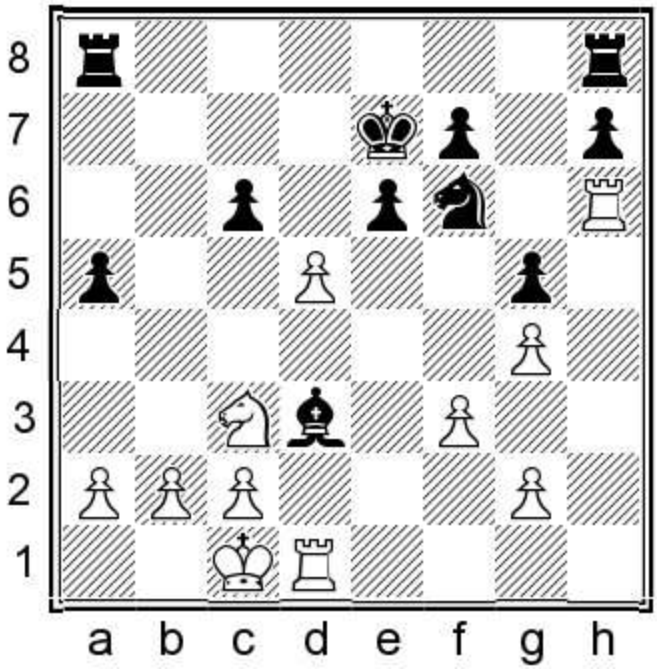



17.0-0-0 Ba6 18.exd5!?
White decides on a small transformation, taking into account a specific tactical idea.

18.b3 and 18.Na4 are sensible alternatives.

18...Bxd3
18...cxd5 is the move Black would like to play, but 19.Nxd5†! Nxd5 (19...exd5? is even worse after 20.Re1†) 20.Bxa6 is a nice trick to win a pawn.

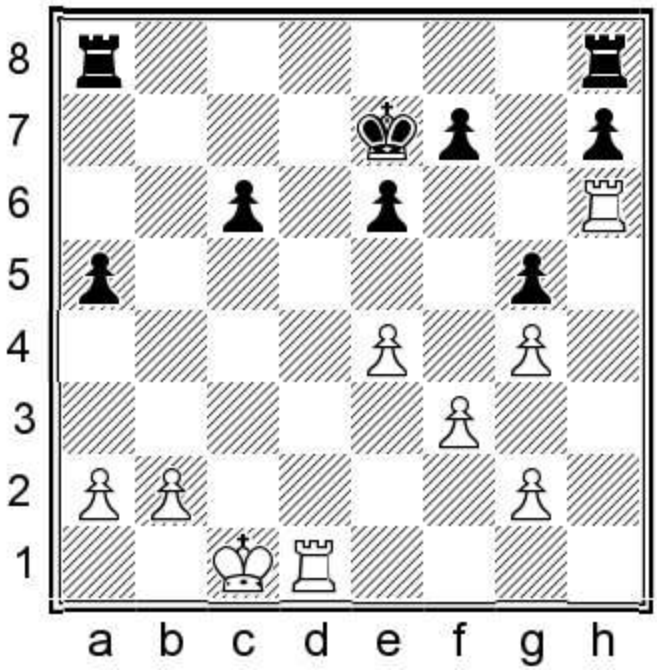
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19.d6†!
Of course White inserts this move in order to prevent Black from improving his structure with ...cxd5.

19...Kxd6 20.cxd3!?
The more obvious 20.Rxd3† Ke7 21.Na4 would also have retained a nice edge.

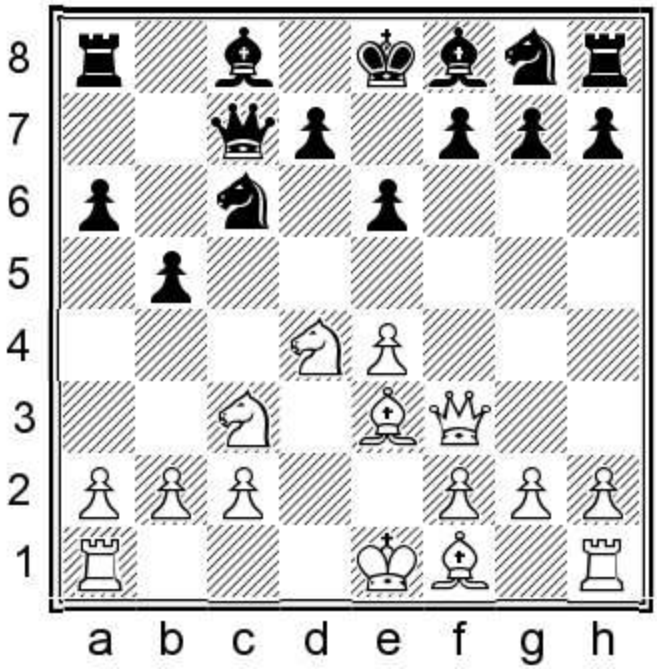
20...Ke7 21.Ne4 Nxe4 22.dxe4



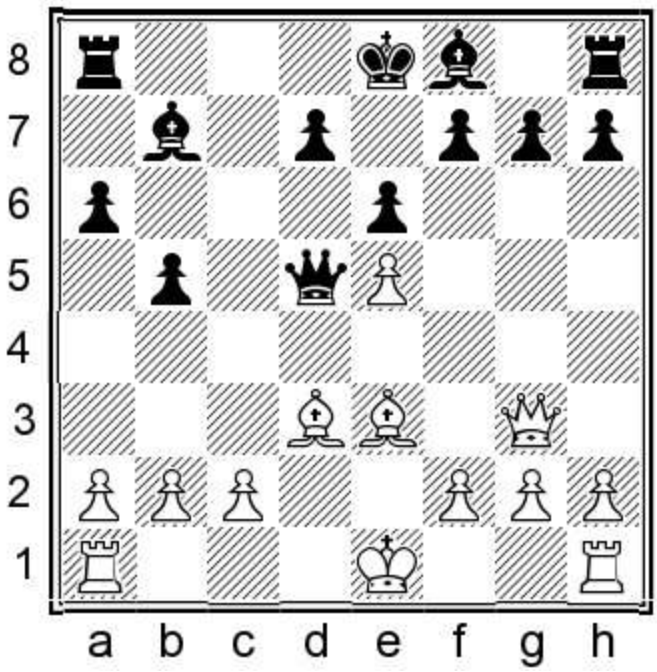
22...Rab8 23.Rd4 Rb5 24.Rc4²
White enjoyed a risk-free endgame advantage in Hammer – Werle, Fagernes 2015.

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B22) 7...b5



8.Qg3
This thematic move is an especially convenient choice, as the resulting positions might also be reached after some of Black's other options.
A reasonable alternative is: 8.Nxc6!? Qxc6 (8...dxc6 9.Qg3²) 9.Bd3 Bb7 10.Qg3 Nf6 11.e5 Nd5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5



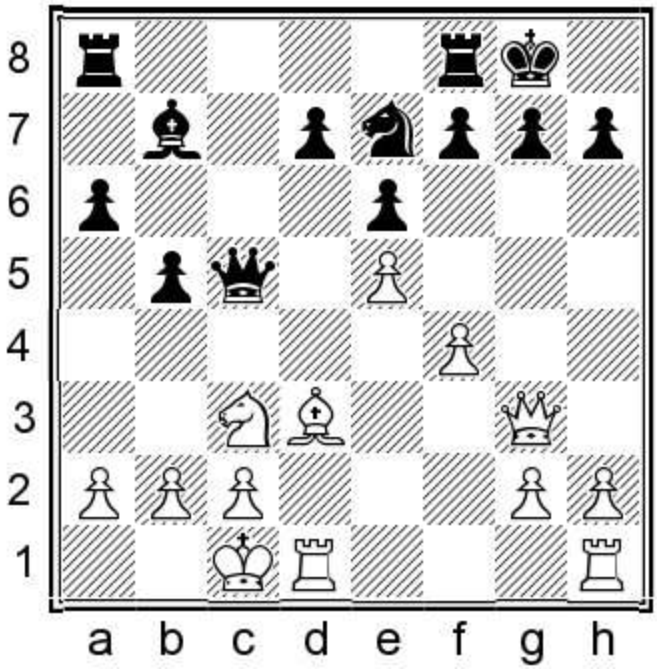
13.0-0² Karjakin – Ezat, Doha 2015.

8...Qxg3
Black may as well make the exchange, otherwise the queen on g3 may become quite annoying for him. I checked two other moves:

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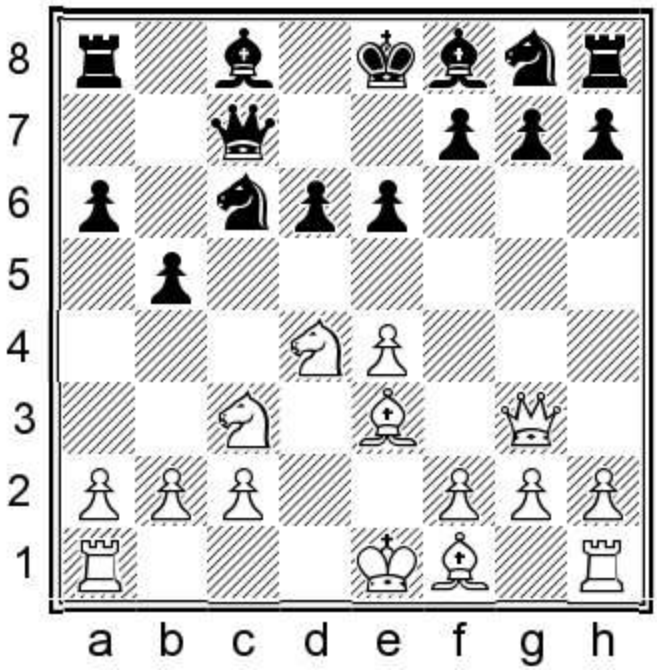
8...Bd6 9.f4 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Ne7

10...Bxf4? loses to 11.Qxg7+– of course.
11.e5 Bc5 12.Bxc5 Qxc5 13.Bd3 Bb7 14.0-0-0 0-0
Here I found a way to improve White's play.



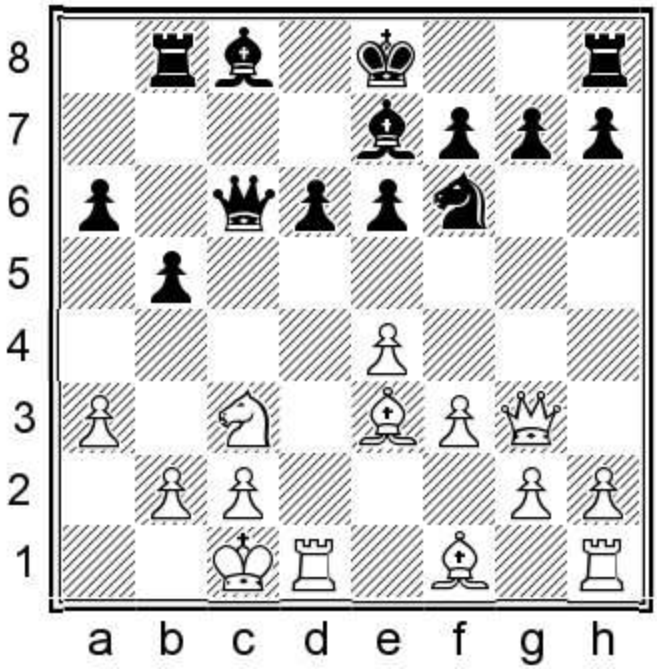
15.Ne4!N
15.Bxh7†? Kxh7 16.Rxd7 backfired after 16...Bc6 17.Qh4† Kg8 18.Rxe7 b4–+ in Lilov – Bilan, Kazan 2016.
15...Bxe4 16.Bxe4 Ra7 17.Qd3²
With lasting pressure along the d-file.

8...d6!?N
This has yet to be played but it immediately transposes to an existing game, Warmerdam – Leenhouts, Vlissingen 2015. A good continuation is:

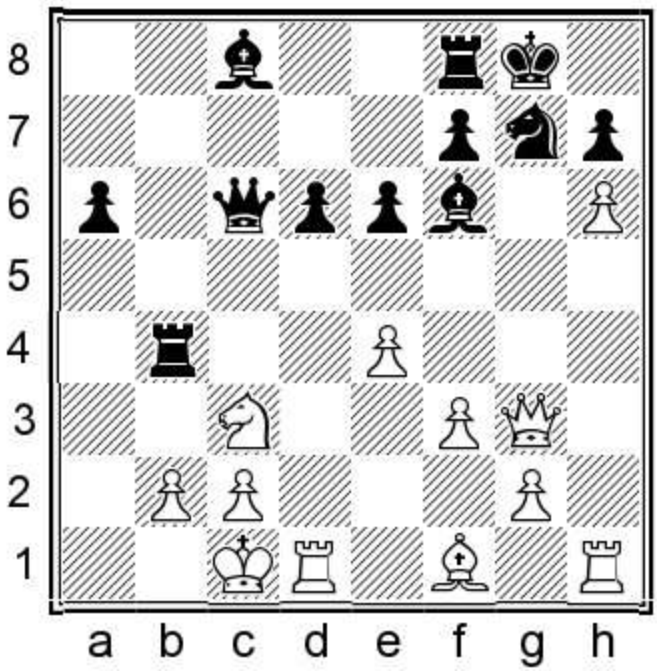


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9.Nxc6!?N 9...Qxc6 10.a3 Nf6 11.f3 Be7 12.0-0-0 Rb8
12...0-0 13.h4 gives White the faster attack, for instance: 13...Kh8 14.Qe1 Rb8 15.h5 a5 16.h6 g6 17.Bg5±



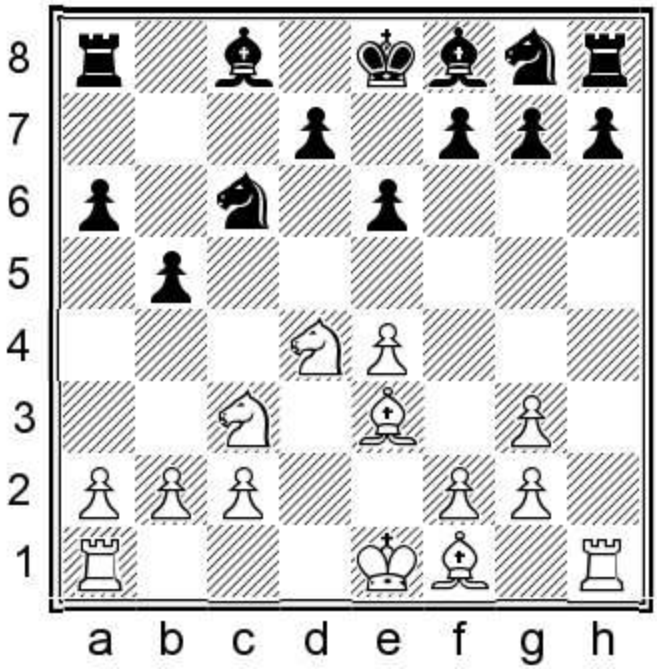
13.h4 b4 14.axb4 Rxb4 15.h5²
White has the better prospects and Black still cannot castle, as the following line demonstrates.
15...0-0? 16.Bh6 Ne8 17.Bxg7 Nxg7 18.h6 Bf6



19.f4! Qb6 20.Bd3
White is winning.

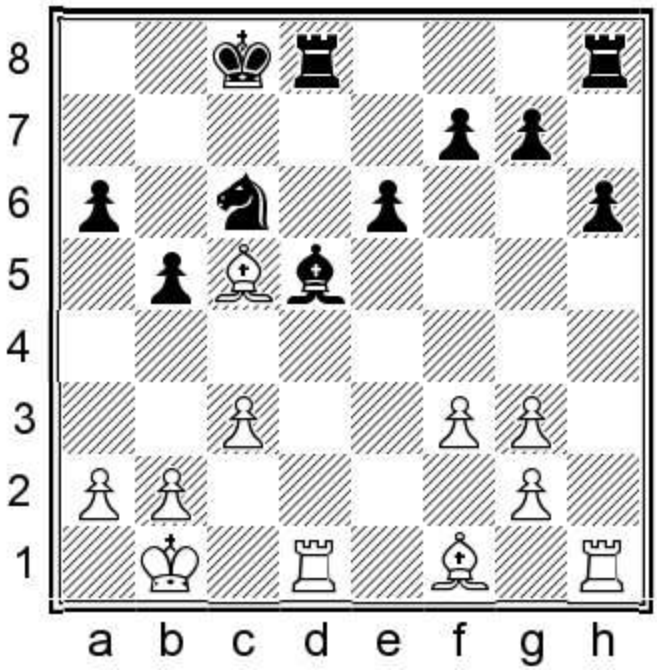
9.hxg3

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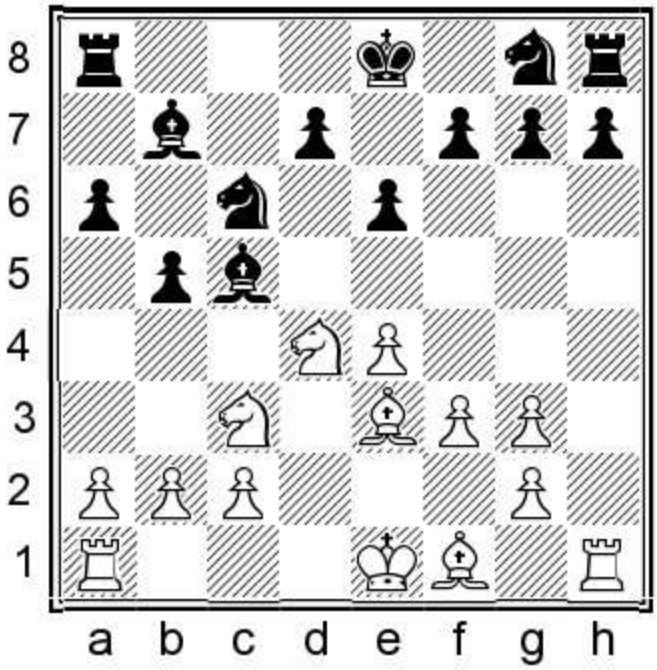
9...Nxd4
These knights will usually be exchanged at some point.

I also considered:
9...Bb7 10.f3
10.Nb3!? is an interesting attempt to exploit Black's hesitation in exchanging knights. A good example continued: 10...Nf6 11.f3 d5 12.exd5 Nb4 13.0-0-0 Nfxd5 14.Nxd5 Bxd5 15.Kb1 h6 16.c3 Nc6 17.Nc5 Bxc5 18.Bxc5 0-0-0

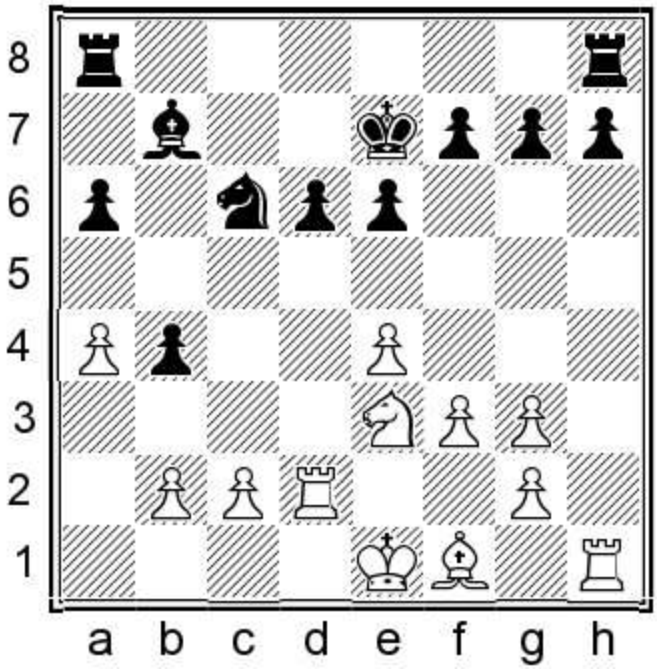


19.Be2 Kb7 20.b3 White's bishop pair gave him the edge in Bok – Spoelman, Amsterdam (rapid) 2015.
10...Bc5
10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 transposes to the main line below.

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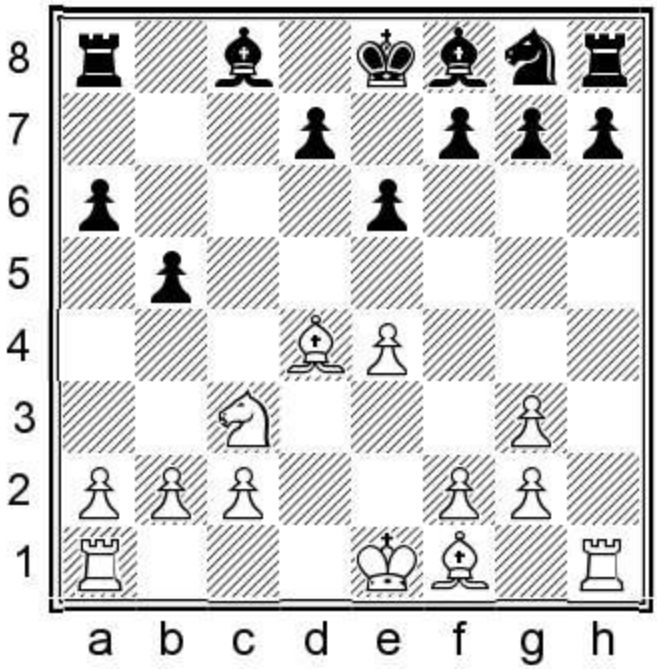
11.Rd1
11.Nf5 is playable but 11...Bf8!? leaves White nothing better than repeating with 12.Nd4.
11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 Bxd4 13.Rxd4 Ne7 14.a4 Nc6 15.Rd2 b4 16.Nd1 Ke7 17.Ne3 d6
In Demchenko – Kezin, Moscow 2015, White could have retained the upper hand with:



18.Nc4N
It is useful to play this before Black can consolidate his kingside with ...h6. Now he will have to put the 'wrong' rook on d8.
18...Rad8 19.Kf2²

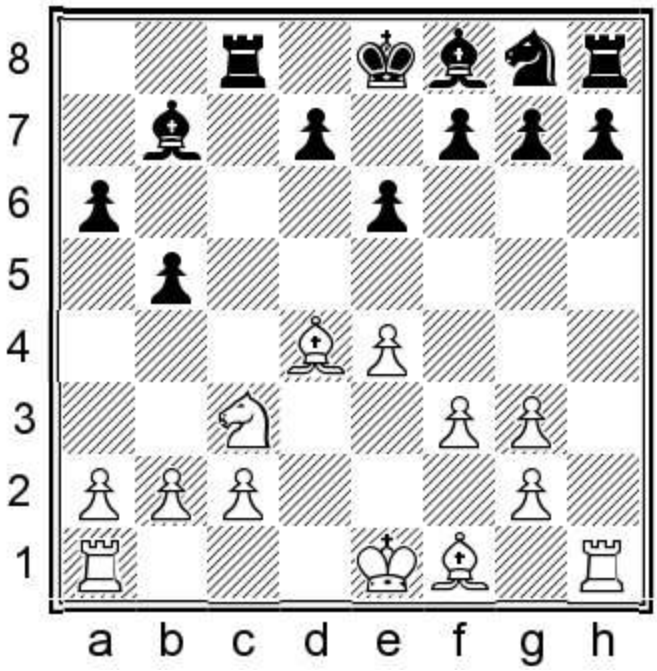
10.Bxd4

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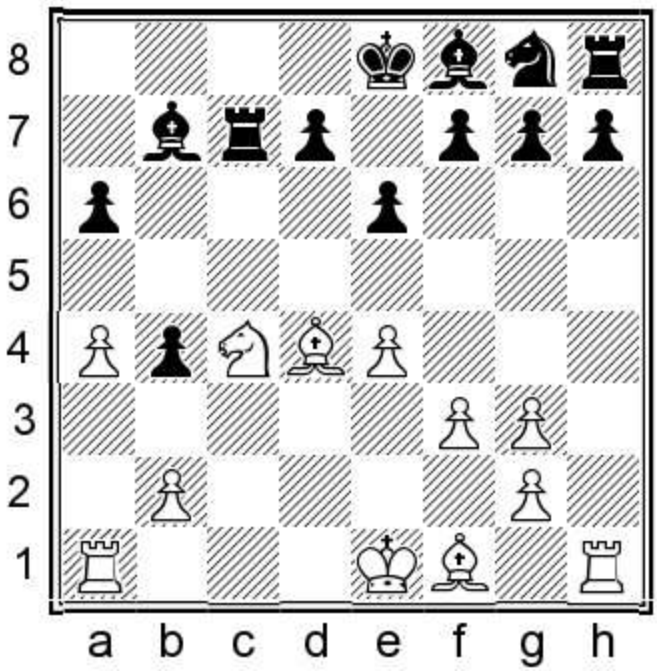
10...Bb7
10...Ne7 reaches a position which was briefly discussed on page 96, in a note under 7...Nge7. As I mentioned there, White should delay castling in favour of 11.f3!, when 11...Bb7 converts to our main line below.

11.f3 Ne7
Black might also try:
11...Rc8N
This transposes to a couple of games, both of which continued with 12.0-0-0. Even though White has good chances after that move, I like the following suggestion of Kotronias and Semkov even more:



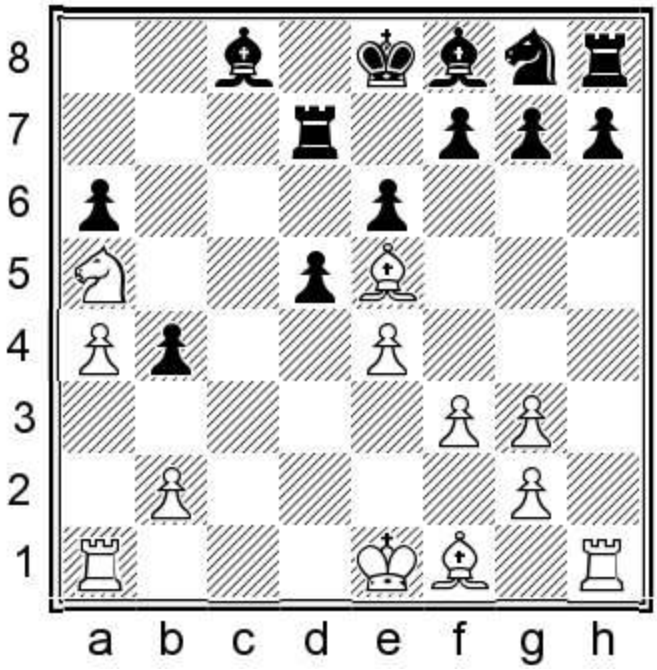
12.a4!N 12...b4 13.Nd1
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White offers a pawn sacrifice to obtain a considerable initiative. If Black does not accept it then he will stand

clearly worse, as should become clear by comparing the main lines below. Therefore we will focus on what happens if he grabs the c2-pawn.
13...Rxc2 14.Ne3 Rc7 15.Nc4
15.Rd1!? also gives White plenty of activity but the text move is natural and good.

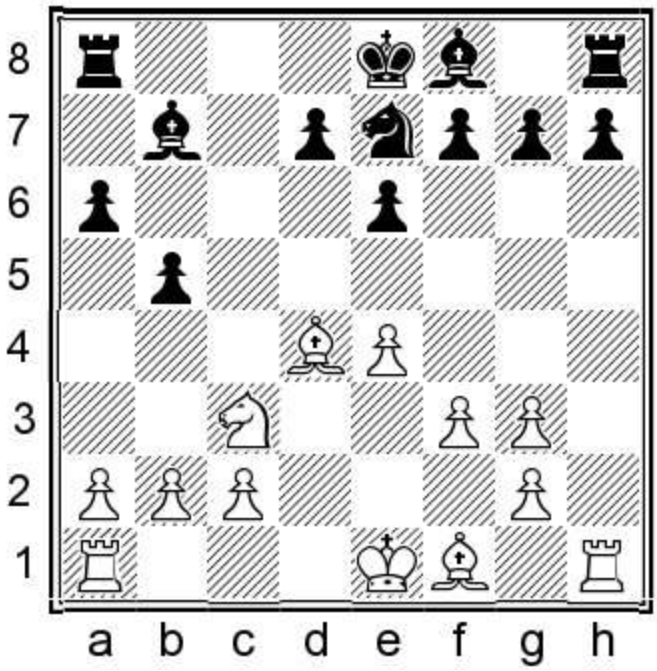


15...d5 16.Na5 Bc8
16...Ba8? 17.Bxa6 s much worse for Black.
17.Be5!?
This seems like the best way to maximize White's piece activity.
Kotronias and Semkov offer 17.exd5 exd5 18.Kd2± which would indeed be great if it was forced. However, Black can defend more resiliently by offering a counter-sacrifice: 17...Nf6! 18.dxe6 Bd6! 19.exf7† Kxf7 20. Bc4† Be6 21.Bxe6† Kxe6 22.Rh3² White keeps an extra pawn and some winning chances, but Black's pieces are quite active and he has reasonable drawing chances.
17...Rd7
17...Rc5?! 18.Nb3 Rc6 19.exd5 exd5 20.Nd4 Rc5 21.Bd3± is great for White, so Black has no real choice but to place his rook on an ugly-looking square.

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18.Rc1 Ne7 19.Bb8!?
19.Be2 is another good option which offers White a great deal of activity for the pawn.
19...dxe4 20.Nc4 exf3 21.gxf3 Bb7 22.Nd6† Rxd6 23.Bxd6 Nd5
23...Bxf3? 24.Rh4±
24.Bxf8 Kxf8 25.Kf2²
Materially Black is okay, with two pawns for the exchange, but White still has the upper hand thanks to his piece activity, which should enable him to pick up a pawn or force some other concessions.
After the text move we reach a critical position where the best move has yet to be tested in practice.



12.g4!N
I take my hat off to Vassilios Kotronias, not only for suggesting this novelty (to which he and co-author Semkov modestly attach a '!?') in Attacking the Flexible Sicilian, but also for accurately conveying the essence

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of the position. Having analysed it in some detail, I entirely agree with their assessment, except for preferring a slightly different continuation a bit further down the line.

As Kotronias and Semkov explain, White's most effective plan is to play a2-a4 to weaken Black's queenside, and meet ...b4 with one of a few possible knight regroupings. However, the immediate 12.a4 b4 13.Na2 allows 13...f5! when Black gets annoying counterplay. An obvious purpose of the text move is to discourage the ...f5-break.

Almost all of the games from this position have continued 12.0-0-0, with good results for White. However, Kotronias once again hits the nail on the head when he points out 12...d5!N as an improvement which solves most of Black's problems. I investigated this and played around with several lines; without going into details, my general assessment is that White can generate a bit of pressure but Black's defensive task should not be too difficult.

Having concluded that the above two lines do not quite work in the way we would hope for, the merits of the text move start to become clear. As mentioned already, we now have the option of playing a2-a4 without allowing the annoying ...f5 idea. A second benefit of the text move is that it gives White the option of g4-g5 to cramp Black on the kingside and create further weaknesses there.

12...f6
This seems the most logical choice, as Black deals with two issues at once: he prevents the g4-pawn from advancing any further, and shields the g7-pawn, enabling his dark-squared bishop to develop (once the knight has moved out of the way).

12...d5 does not solve Black's problems here. 13.exd5 and now Kotronias and Semkov mention 13...Nxd5 14. Nxd5 Bxd5 15.a4 b4 16.Bd3 h6 17.g5 with some advantage for White, while I would add that 13...b4 14.Ne4 Nxd5 15.g5 also leaves Black under pressure.

I also checked: 12...h6 13.a4 (13.g5!? could also be considered) 13...b4 14.Na2 Nc6 (14...a5 15.Bb5 Nc6 16. Be3 is unpleasant for Black) 15.Be3 Ne5 16.0-0-0 Although Kotronias and Semkov continue analysing more deeply, the position is not so forcing and I am quite happy to leave it here and say White has the better chances, with active possibilities on both flanks.

13.a4 b4 14.Na2!?
Kotronias and Semkov mention this move in a note but I would like to present it as my main line, as I slightly prefer it over the alternatives.

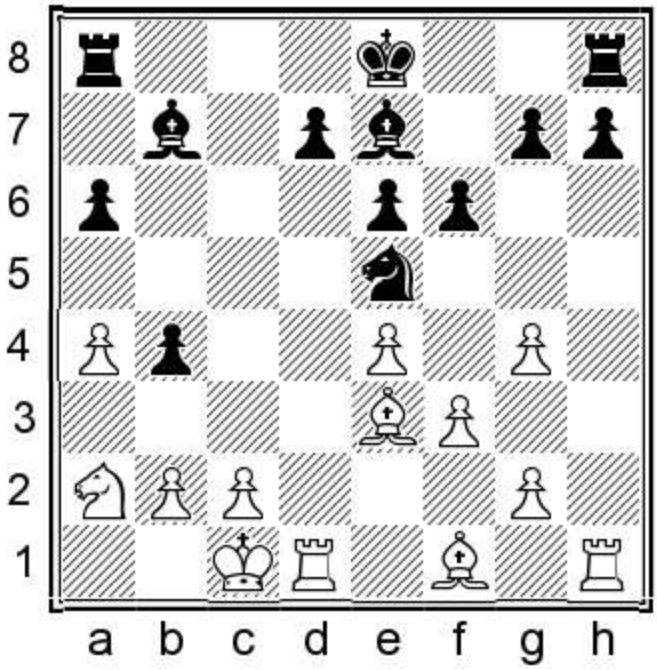
I briefly checked 14.Nd1 intending Ne3, but found 14...d5! to be a good answer.

14.Ne2 is Kotronias and Semkov's main line, which they analyse up to move 33(!). This is certainly a valid interpretation of the position but Black has many options along the way, and I regard the text move as a more straightforward way to keep some advantage.

14...Nc6 15.Be3
15.Bb6 Bd6 16.0-0-0 Ke7 may also offer White some edge, but I prefer the text move.

15...Ne5 16.0-0-0 Be7

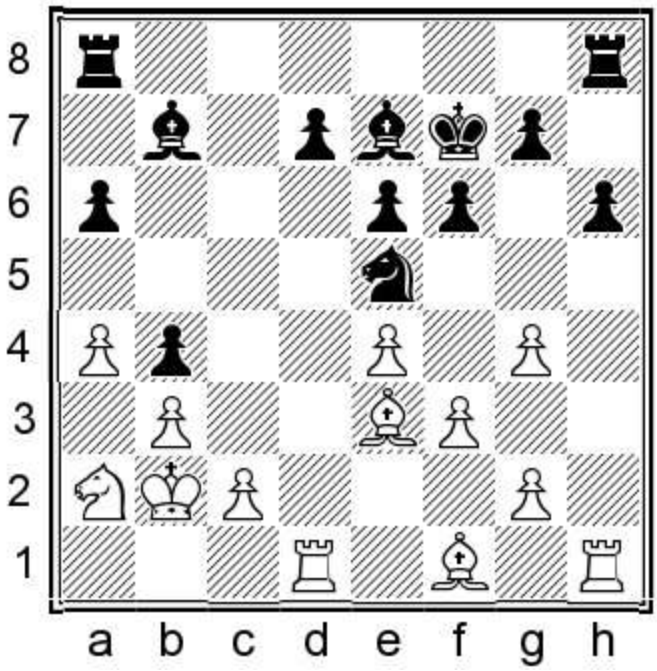
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17.b3!?
This is where my analysis deviates from that of Kotronias and Semkov and Semkov, who prefer a different plan with 17.Bd4. My idea is simply to tidy up the queenside by putting the king on b2 before deciding what to do next. There are many possible continuations and I will just mention a couple of noteworthy ideas.

17...Kf7
17...h6 18.Kb2 is similar.

18.Kb2 h6
18...Bc6 can be met by 19.a5[2] with ideas of Bb6 and Rd4.



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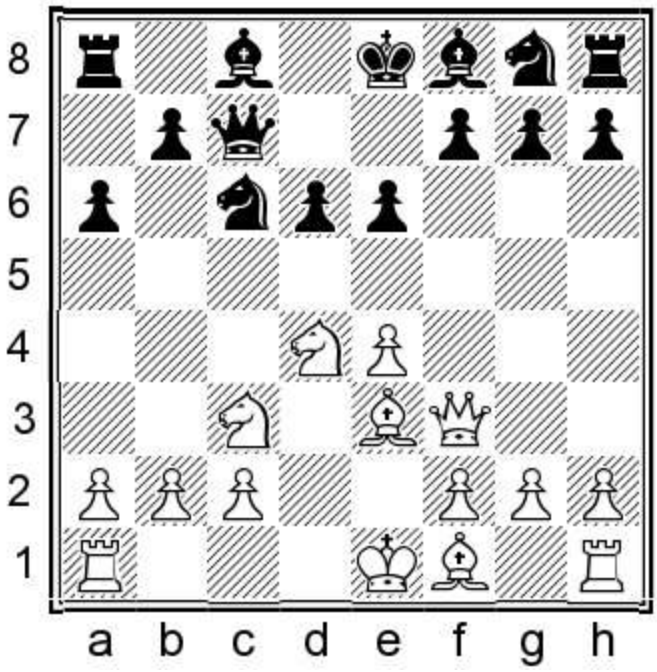
19.Nxb4!?

This is not only a strong move, but also the kind of tactical resource that could easily escape one's attention, so it is worth making a mental note of it.

A more straightforward plan would be 19.Be2², perhaps followed by Rd2 and Rhd1. Later White may transform the queenside with c2-c3, or reroute his knight to d3.

19...Bxb4 20.f4²
With complications favouring White.

B23) 7...d6



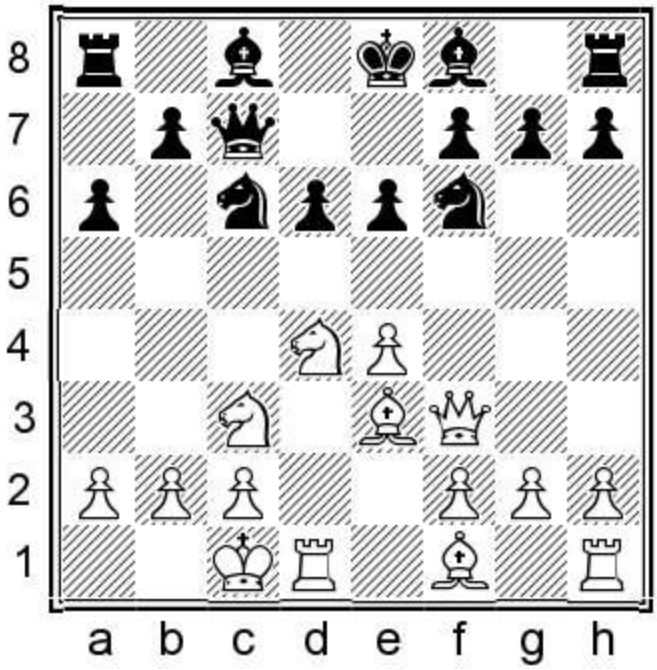
At first glance, this move may appear to be against the spirit of the Taimanov, as Black obstructs his dark-squared bishop and loses the option of recapturing on c6 with the d-pawn. However, it does have a couple of redeeming features. First, it takes the sting out of the Qg3 plan. And secondly, Black anticipates the arrival of our king on the queenside, and prepares to launch an attack with ...Bd7 and ...b5, while leaving his kingside pieces at home for the time being.

8.0-0-0
Despite Black's plan outlined above, I am happy to accept the challenge. 8.Nxc6!? bxc6 9.0-0-0 is an interesting alternative, when Black can choose between 9...Nf6 and 9...Rb8. I spent some time looking at this, but eventually decided I would prefer to keep the exchange on c6 in reserve until a more favourable moment.

There are two main moves to consider: B231) 8...Nf6 and B232) 8...Bd7.

B231) 8...Nf6

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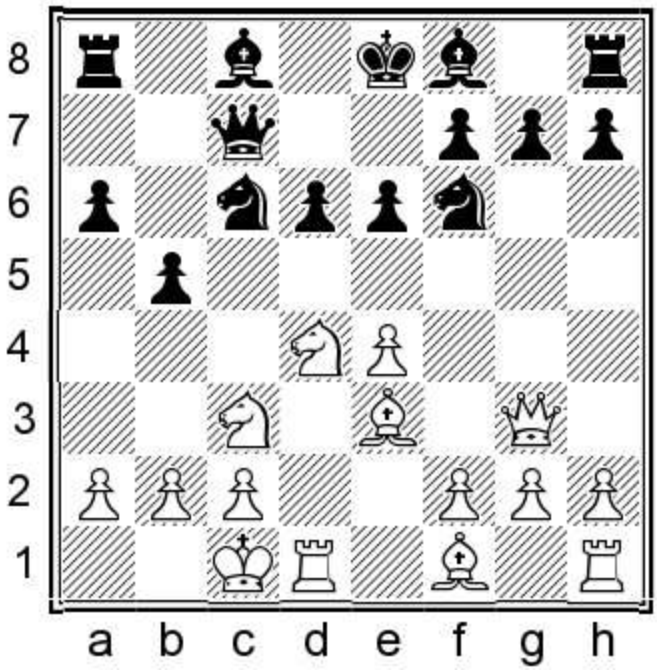


9.Qg3
This is a thematic choice for our Qf3 set-up. The queen sidesteps a possible ...Ne5 attack and eyes the g7-pawn, making it harder for Black to develop the f8-bishop.

9...Nxd4
9...Bd7 is Black's most popular choice, after which 10.Nxc6 Bxc6 leads to variation B232 below.

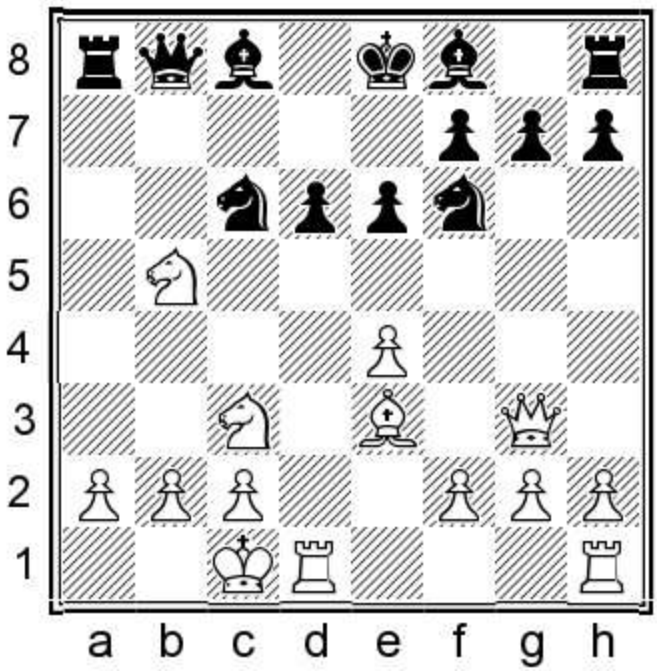
9...Nh5?! can hardly be a good idea. 10.Qh4 g6 11.g4 Be7 occurred in Jens – Lindam, Germany 2016, when 12. Bg5± would have been most unpleasant for Black.

9...b5
This runs into a nice idea:

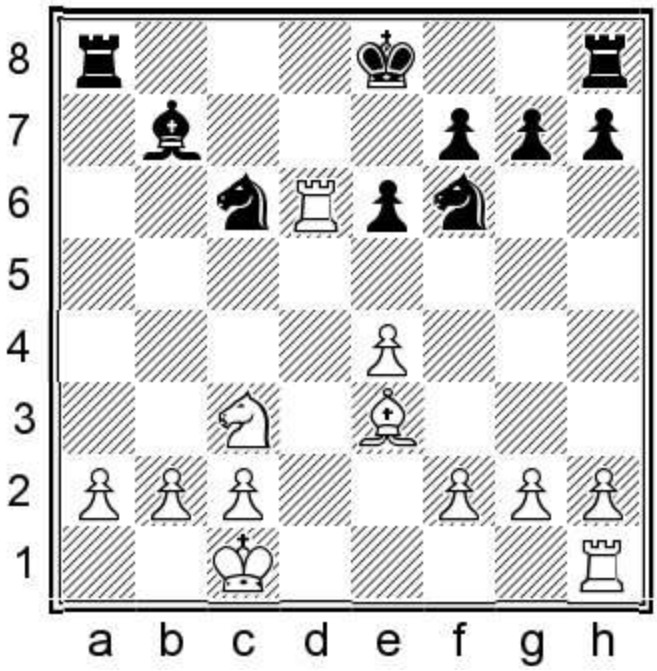


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10.Bxb5!
After 10.Nxc6 Qxc6 11.e5 dxe5 12.Qxe5 Bd7 White had no more than a tiny advantage in Jedryczka – Tomic, Patras 1999.
10...axb5 11.Ndxb5 Qb8



12.Nxd6†
White simplifies to a favourable endgame with three healthy passed pawns versus a knight.
White tried to be too clever with 12.Bc5?? in Ondok – Somogyi, Hungary 2016, when 12...Rxa2!!N–+ would have been an impressive tactical refutation. (12...Nxe4!N is a lesser, but still excellent continuation for Black.)
12...Bxd6 13.Qxd6 Qxd6 14.Rxd6 Bb7

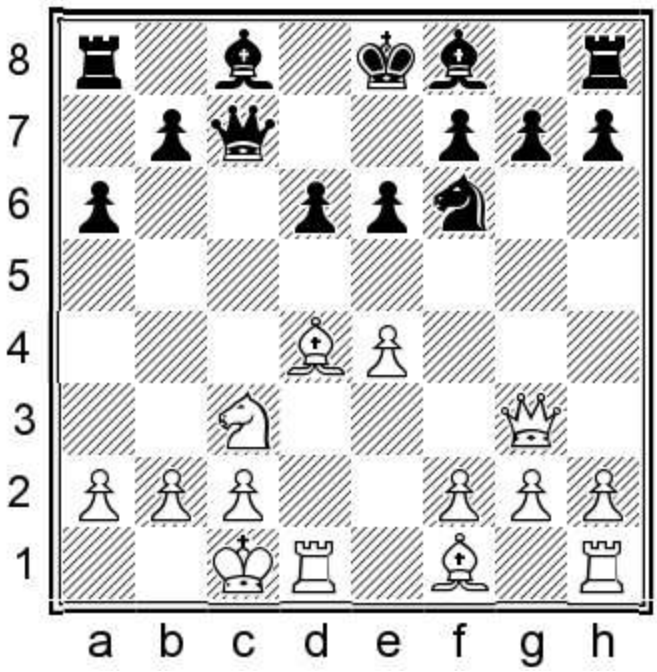


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15.f3 0-0 16.b3²

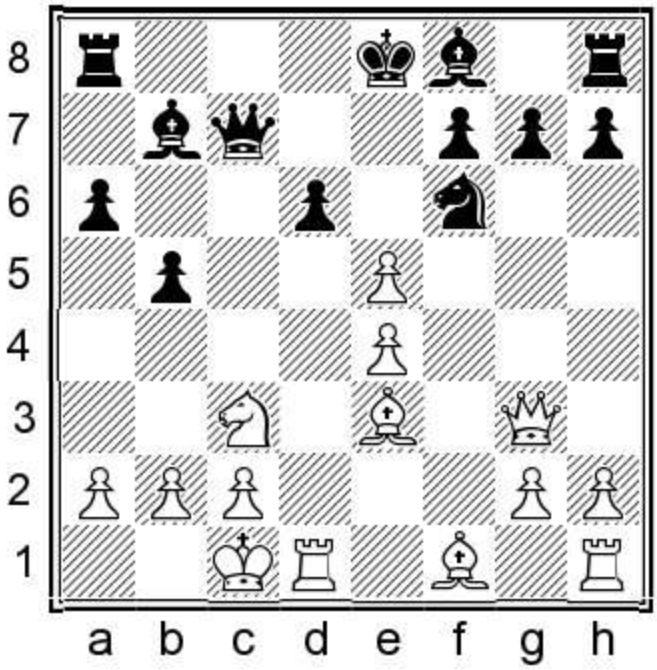
Black was unable to hold the endgame in Ilyasov – Garcia Rosales, corr. 2016.

10.Bxd4

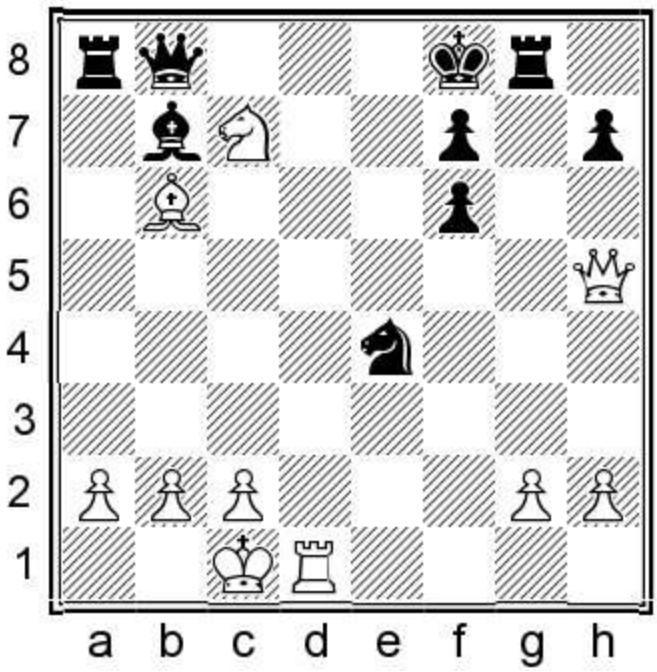


10...e5 11.Be3 Be6
I briefly considered 11...h6?! to stop the bishop from coming to g5, but 12.f4! opens the position to exploit Black's slow development.
Black has also tried:
11...b5 12.f4 Bb7
12...Be6 occurred in Moe – Bjerre, Fredericia 2015, when 13.Nd5N looks promising, for instance: 13...Bxd5 14.exd5 Rc8 15.c3²
13.fxe5
13.Bd3 also offers White some advantage but it is tempting to open the position.

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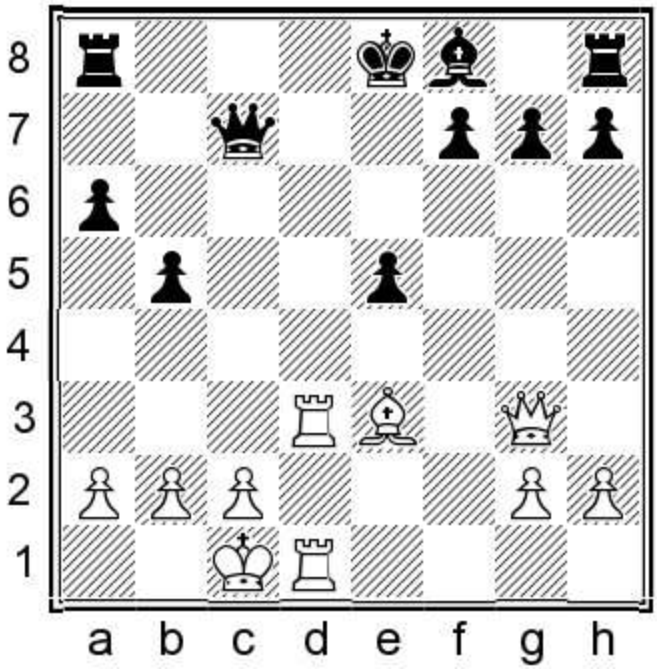


13...Nxe4
13...dxe5N 14.Bxb5†! axb5 15.Nxb5 gives White a dangerous initiative for the sacrificed piece. My main line continues: 15...Qb8 16.Bb6 Be7 17.Nc7† Kf8 18.Qxe5 Nxe4 19.Rhf1 Bf6 20.Rxf6 gxf6 21.Qh5 Rg8 (After 21...Rxa2 22.Kb1± Kotronias and Semkov give a long line where Black just about survives but still remains worse; I don't see this as an argument against White's play.)



22.Qh6† Ke7 23.Qe3± The game remains complicated but White is clearly on top.
14.Nxe4 Bxe4 15.Bd3 Bxd3?
Black should have settled for 15...d5, although 16.Rhf1± leaves him with nothing to compensate for White's considerable lead in development.
16.Rxd3 dxe5 17.Rhd1+–
Black is unable to get his king to safety and White easily broke through.

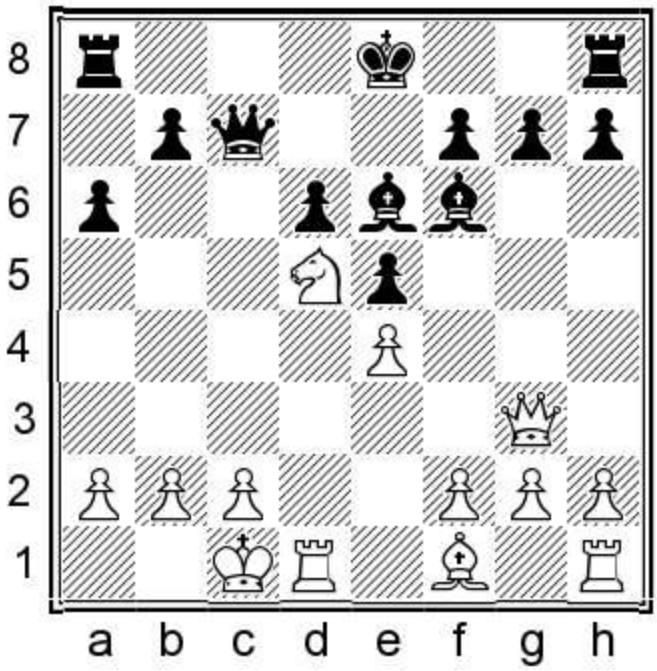
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17...f6 18.Qg4 Qf7 19.Qe4 Rc8 20.Qf5 Rb8 21.Rc3 Qb7 22.Qe6† Be7 23.Rcd3
1–0 Motylev – Meskovs, Tallinn 2016.

12.Bg5
12.f4!? also leads to interesting play, but the simplest approach is to conquer the d5-square.

12...Be7 13.Bxf6 Bxf6 14.Nd5

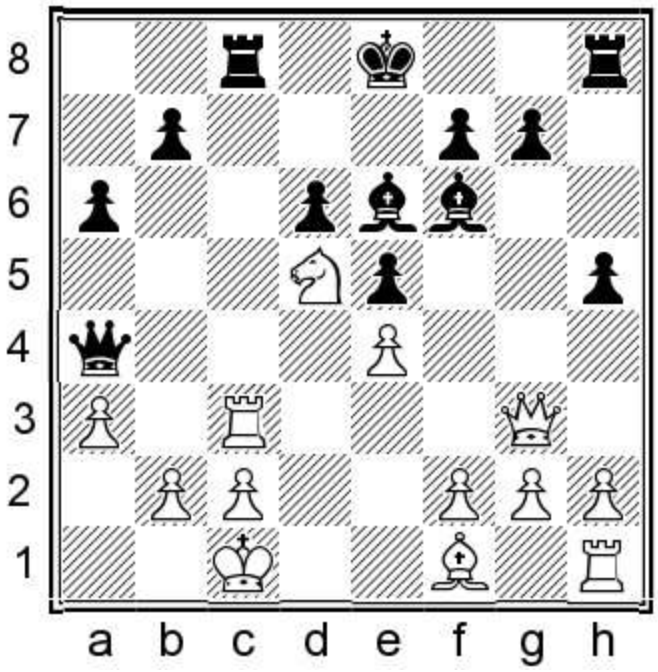


14...Bxd5
This is the most common and natural reaction for a human player.

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14...Qc6

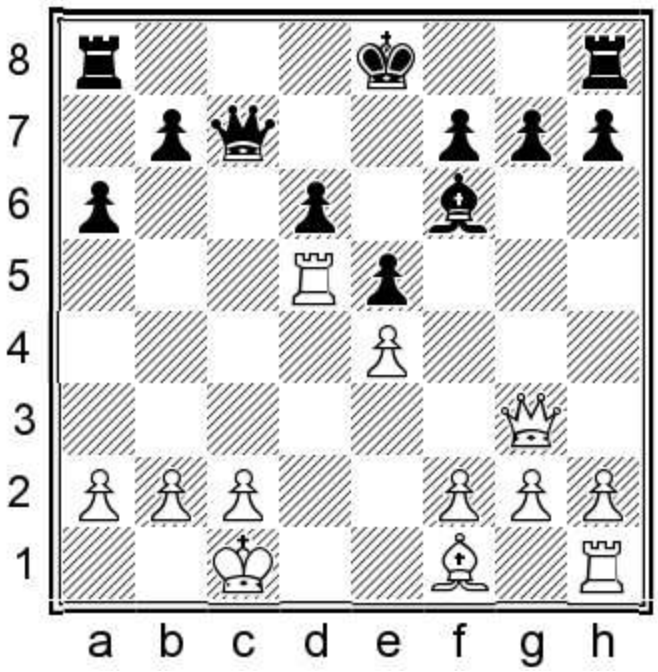
This has been tried in a couple of correspondence games.
15.a3
15.Kb1N also looks sensible.
15...h5
15...b5 16.Kb1 Rc8 occurred in Sisak – Vasconcellos, corr. 2017, when 17.c3N would have kept a nice edge for White.
16.Rd3 Rc8 17.Rc3 Qa4



18.Rxc8†!?N
The game continued 18.Nxf6† gxf6 19.Rxc8† Bxc8 20.Qg7 Rf8 21.Qxf6 Qxe4 and White was pressing, although Black managed to hold in Nekhaev – Pessoa, corr. 2016. The text move leads to a simpler position with a long-term advantage for White.
18...Bxc8 19.Bd3! Kf8!
Black has to play this to protect himself against a queen invasion on g7.
20.Nb6 Qc6 21.Nxc8 Qxc8 22.Kb1²
Black is under pressure, much as in the main line below. It will not take long for White's bishop to find its way to the a2-g8 diagonal.

15.Rxd5
Black's position is more unpleasant than it may appear at first glance. His bishop is impeded by the d6- and e5-pawns, whereas White has a clear plan of manoeuvring his bishop to b3 and perhaps later d5. Once his pieces are fully coordinated, he can think about gaining space and attacking on either flank.

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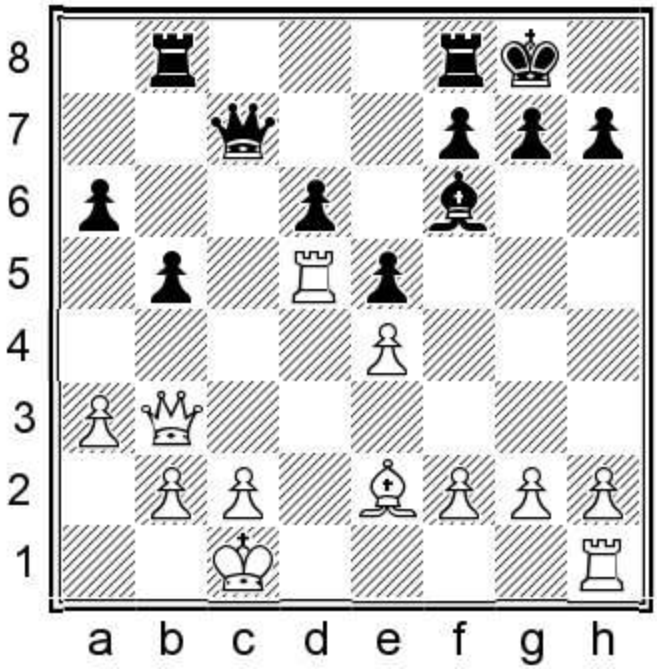


15...0-0 16.Be2 b5
In Attacking the Flexible Sicilian, Kotronias and Semkov suggest that Black should avoid this pawn advance in such positions, on the basis that the a6-pawn is permanently weakened and the a2-a4 pawn lever can be used to pry open the queenside in the future. Although these are valid points, it would be rather depressing to sit and defend a worse position with no hope of counterplay. At least after the text move, White has to consider the possibility of the enemy pawns advancing to b4 and a3, with potential threats against our king.

17.a3!?N
17.Kb1² has been played a few times and is also promising for White. However, I like the idea of taking countermeasures against Black's queenside advance. For the moment we are preventing ...b4; and if Black manages to play it after suitable preparation, we can simply block the queenside with a3-a4.

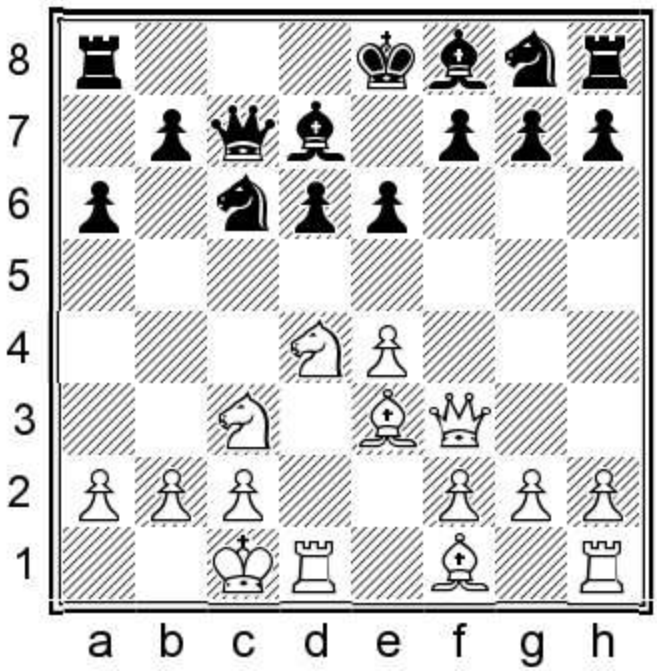
17...Rab8 18.Qb3
18.Kb1 b4 19.a4 is also good, but I would prefer to restrain the b5-pawn altogether for the time being.

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18...Qb6 19.Rf1 Rfc8 20.Kb1 Rc5 21.g3²
White can continue improving his position with moves like h2-h4, c2-c3, and eventually transferring his bishop to b3, while it is not clear what Black should be doing.

B232) 8...Bd7



This is the more common continuation. Although this and the previous line may transpose to one another, the text move somehow feels more thematic, as Black makes use of the ...d6 move to continue with his queenside development, while staying flexible on the kingside.

9.Nxc6!?
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This is a rather fresh idea, having only been tested in two games at the time of writing – although it is quite

likely to transpose to some other games within a few moves.

Naturally, I also spent some time looking at the most common 9.Qg3. Black usually replies with 9...Nf6, when 10.f4!? leads to rich play, while 10.f3 is a more restrained approach advocated by Kotronias and Semkov. At some point I came to realize that 10.Nxc6!? Bxc6 11.f3 contained some promise – but if I was going to aim for this position, I may as well exchange on c6 immediately, rather than give Black extra options such as ...Ne5.

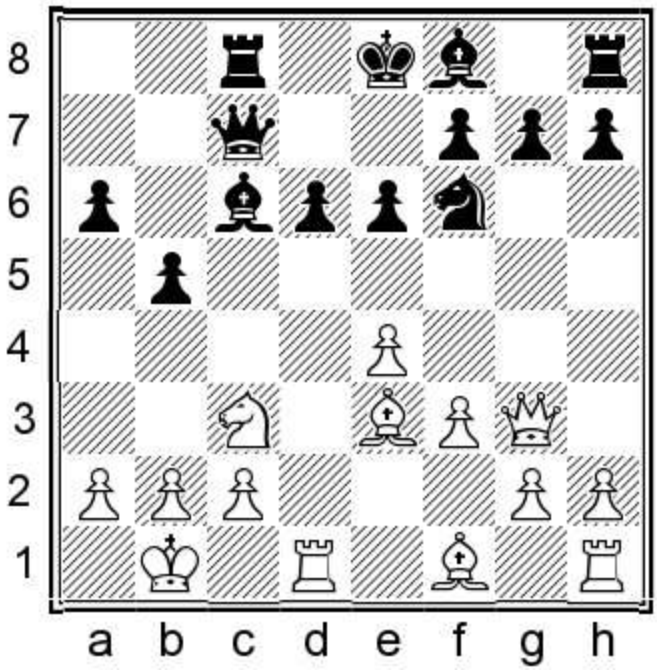
9...Bxc6
9...bxc6?! has not been played, for good reason. On page 105, in the note to White's 8th move, I noted that 8. Nxc6!? bxc6 9.0-0-0 was a valid option, when 9...Nf6 and 9...Rb8 would be sensible moves. In the current position, it's as if White has chosen that line and Black responded with 9...Bd7?!, which is clearly not the best use of a tempo. White has several good moves but I find 10.g4!?± the most appealing, effectively preventing ...Nf6.

The present position was reached in Fier – Ramirez, Medellin (rapid) 2017, and one other game so far. I suggest a thematic move for this variation:

10.Qg3N
A new idea in this position, although it is likely to transpose to some existing games after a few natural developing moves.

10...Nf6
I can't see a reason for Black to delay this move any longer.

11.f3 b5 12.Kb1 Rc8
Now we transpose to a couple of games.




13.Bd3!
This move was played in both of the aforementioned encounters, and it also transposes to a few other games. White has to do something to defend the c2-pawn against the threat of ...b4 followed by a nasty discovered attack after the knight moves away from c3. The bishop may appear passive on d3, but it is useful in making way for the king's rook to go to the centre if required, and it also supports the e4-pawn, thus facilitating f3-f4, as

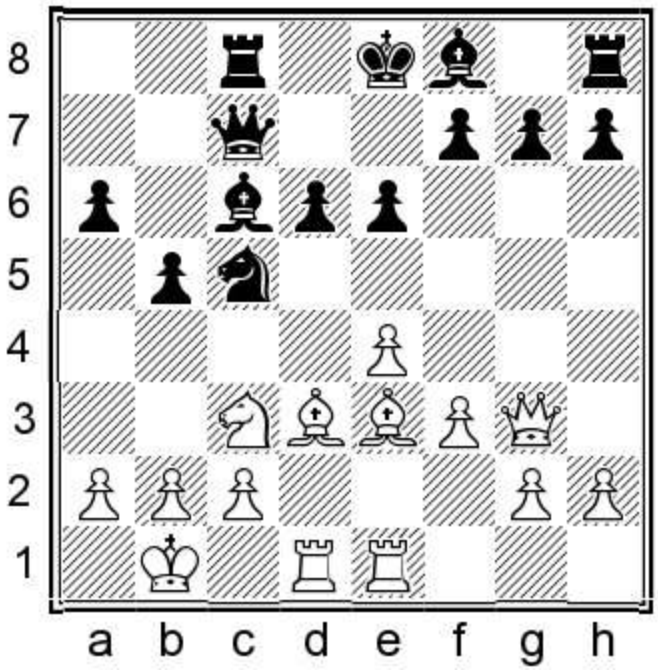
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shown in one of the lines below.

13...g6!?
Out of several candidate moves, this is the engine's top choice and is noted by Kotronias and Semkov as Black's best option. (Those authors actually recommend something else for White, while noting this variation as an interesting alternative, which they reach via a slightly different move order.)

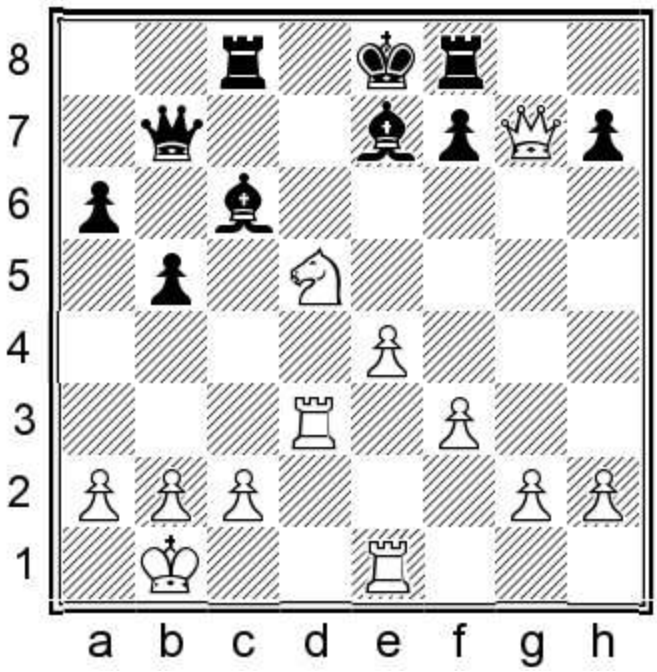
The first thing worth noting is that Black cannot solve his problems with the direct 13...d5? in view of 14.Bf4 Qb6 15.exd5 Nxd5 16.Nxd5 Bxd5 17.Rhe1± when Black is in big trouble with his king stuck in the centre.

13...Nd7?! 14.Rhe1 Nc5? was the choice of a strong GM, which was met forcefully with:



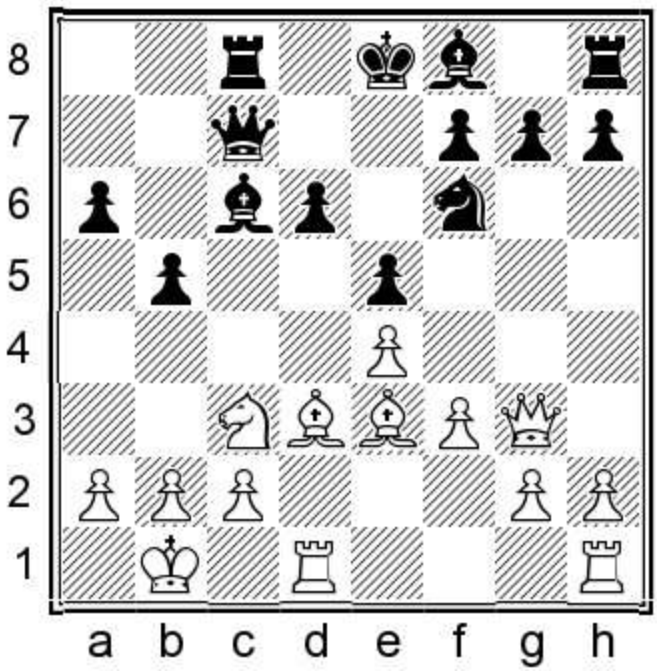

15.Nd5! Qb7 16.Bd4! Nxd3 17.Rxd3 e5 18.Bxe5! dxe5 19.Qxe5† Be7 20.Qxg7 Rf8 In Lopez Martinez – Ivanisevic, Sitges 2016, the simplest way to secure the victory would have been:

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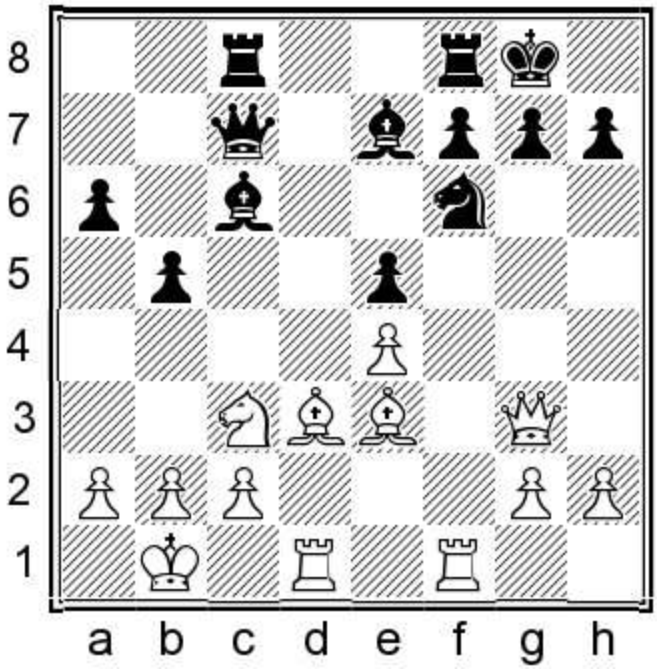
21.Qe5!N 21...Bxd5 22.exd5+– Followed by d5-d6.

13...e5
This was tried successfully by another 2600 GM, but White's play can easily be improved.



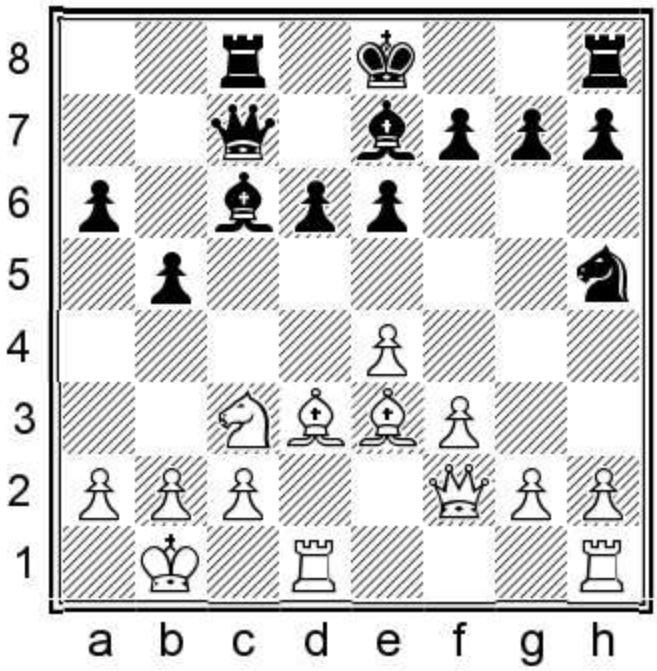
14.f4!N
14.a3?! was unnecessarily slow in Sarkar – Yilmaz, Reykjavik 2017.
14...Be7
14...Nh5 is met by 15.Qg4! Nxf4 (15...exf4? 16.Bd4+–) 16.Bxf4 exf4 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.exd5 g6 19.Rde1† Be7 20.h4, with tough times ahead for the black king.
15.fxe5 dxe5 16.Rhf1 0-0

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17.Bh6 Ne8 18.Nd5 Qd6 19.Bc1*f*
White has an obvious edge thanks to the great activity of his pieces.

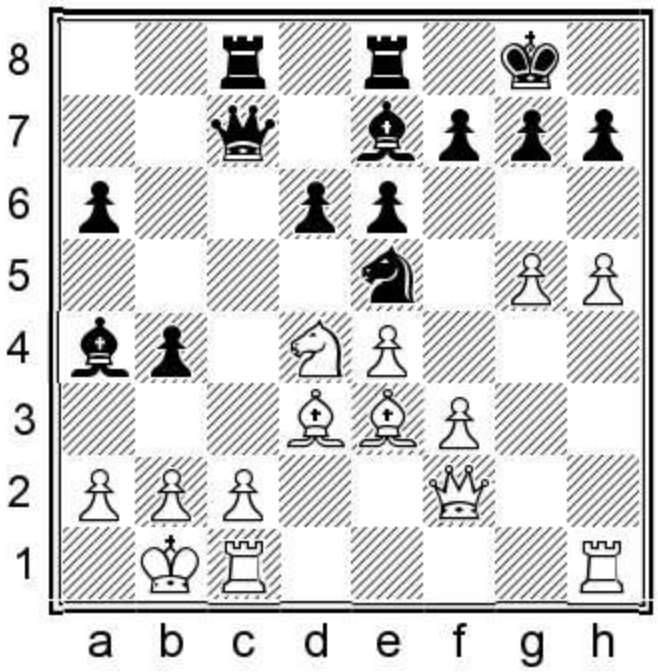
Another recent try is:
13...Nh5!? 14.Qf2
14.Qh4N also deserves consideration. 14...Nf6 (Black should offer to repeat the position, as 14...g6 15.g4 Be7 16.Qf2 leaves him weakened on the dark squares) 15.Ne2 Be7 16.Qg3 0-0 17.Bh6 Ne8 18.h4 The position is complex but I prefer White's chances, as he is closer to creating threats on the kingside than Black is on the queenside.
14...Be7



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15.g4

15.h4!?N is also worth considering, as Black may retreat the knight to f6 voluntarily.
15...Nf6 16.h4 Nd7 17.g5 Ne5 18.h5 b4 19.Ne2 Ba4 20.Rc1 0-0 21.Nd4 Rfe8

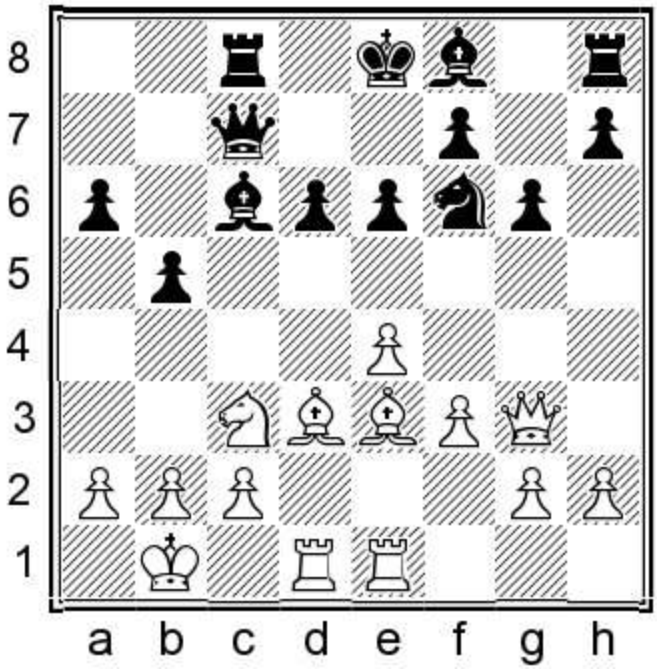


We have been following Abdumalik – Cramling, Riyadh (blitz) 2017. Obviously the last several moves were not forced, but it is fair to say that both sides have advanced their positions without committing any glaring errors. At this point, out of several possible continuations, the one I like most is:
22.Be2!?N±
White's kingside attack is far more threatening than Black's queenside play.
The text move has only been played in one game so far, Dobrowolski – Jaracz, Poland 2016, when White continued with 14.Qh4. I suggest the following improvement:

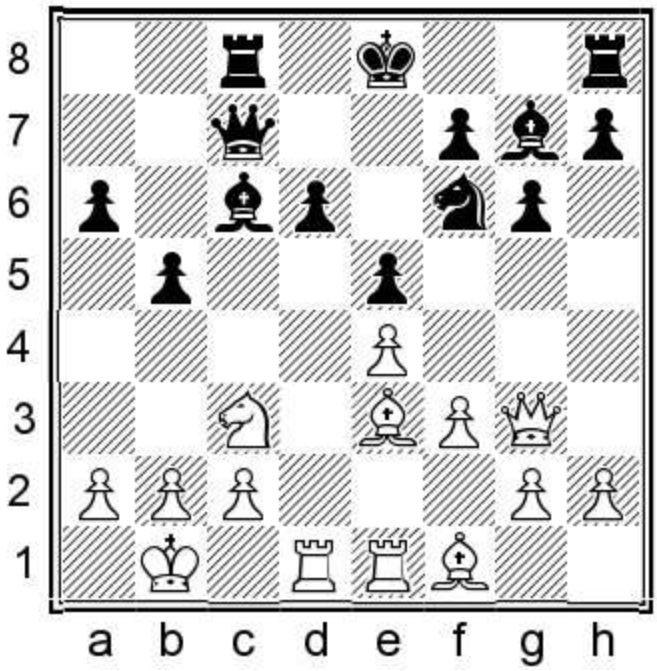
14.a3!?N
For the moment, it is not obvious what our plan of attack should be, so I think it is worth taking a moment to stabilize the knight on c3.

14.Rhe1N

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In their brief discussion of this line, Kotronias and Semkov indicate this rook move as White's best option, with the following idea in mind:
14...Bg7 15.Bf1
Targeting the d6-pawn. Naturally I gave this some attention too, but found that Black gets a decent game after:
15...e5!
15...b4? is much worse in view of: 16.Bxa6! bxc3 17.Bxc8 Qxc8 (17...e5!? 18.Ba6 0-0 19.Rd3±) 18.Qxd6 Nd7 (18...cxb2 19.Rd4!+–) 19.Bg5 Bf8 20.Qd4 e5 21.Qxc3+–

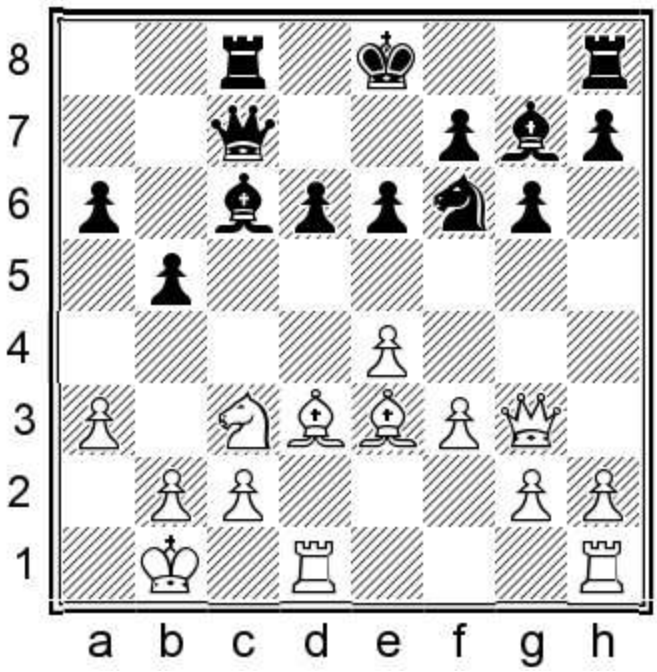


16.Qf2
This is the computer's top choice.
After 16.a3 0-0 17.Bg5?! a5 White does not have time to conquer the d5-outpost, as the c2-pawn will hang, and meanwhile Black threatens to open the queenside with ...b4.

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16...b4 17.Nd5 Nxd5!
After 17...Bxd5 18.exd5² the two bishops should count for something.
18.exd5 Bd7 19.Bxa6 Ra8 20.Bb6 Qb8
Black has full compensation for the pawn, and in a practical game his position would be much easier to handle.

14...Bg7

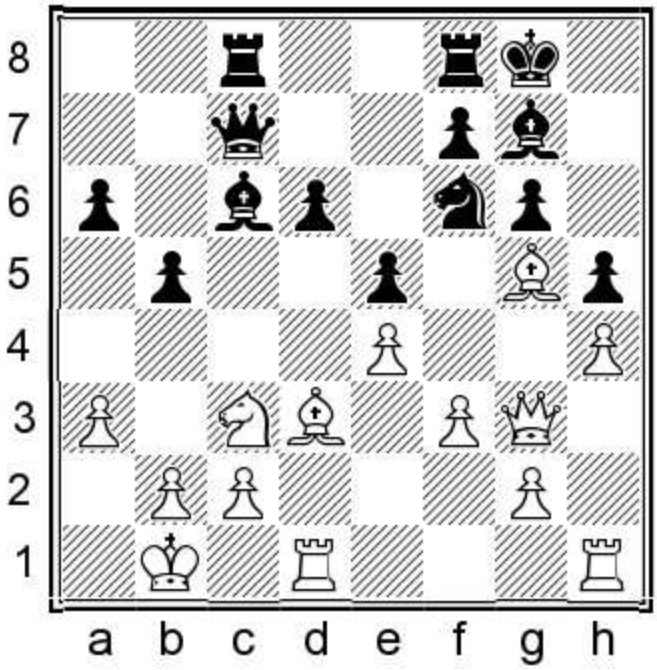


15.h4!
Having secured the knight on c3, I wondered if we could aim for an improved version of the previous note with 15.Be2, targeting the d6-pawn. However, the machine instantly points out that 15...Bxe4! is a good reply. White has nothing better than 16.Qxd6 Nd5! when only Black can hope to be better.

15...h5
15...0-0 is playable but risky. After 16.h5 Nxh5 White can choose between 17.Qh4 and a further material sacrifice with 17.Rxh5!? gxh5 18.Rh1, with full compensation in either case.

16.Bf4 e5 17.Bg5 0-0

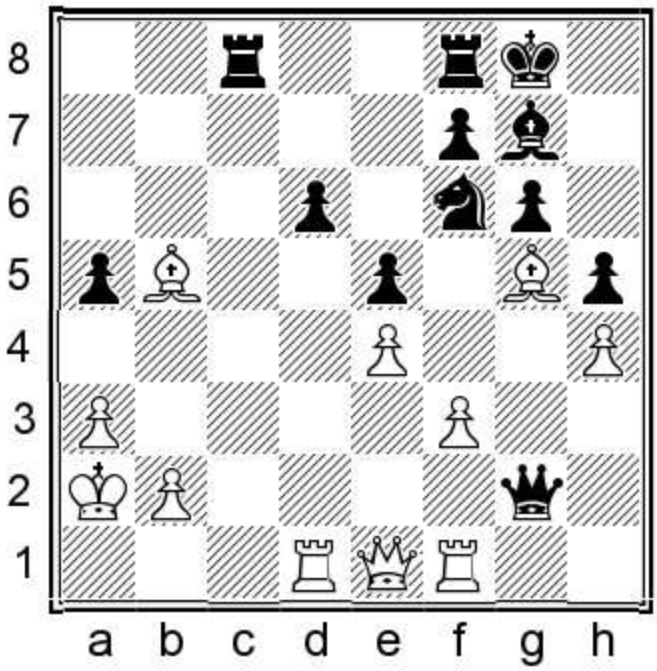
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18.Qe1! a5!?
In the event of 18...Rb8 19.Bxf6 Bxf6 20.g4, White is the first to open lines towards the enemy king.

19.Nxb5!
This leads to a favourable transformation of the position.

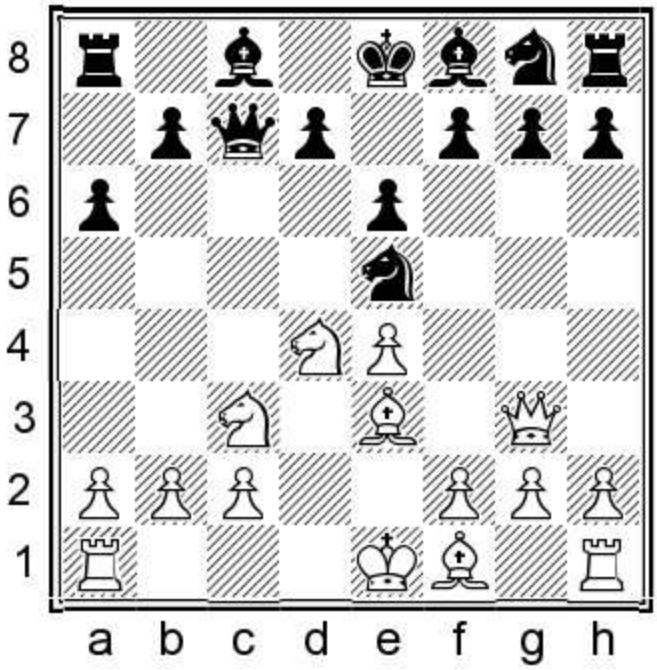
19...Bxb5 20.Bxb5 Qxc2† 21.Ka2 Qxg2 22.Rf1



22...Rc2 23.Rd2 Rxd2 24.Qxd2 Qxd2 25.Bxd2²
With the bishop pair and the chance to create a strong passed pawn in the near future, White has fine prospects in the endgame.

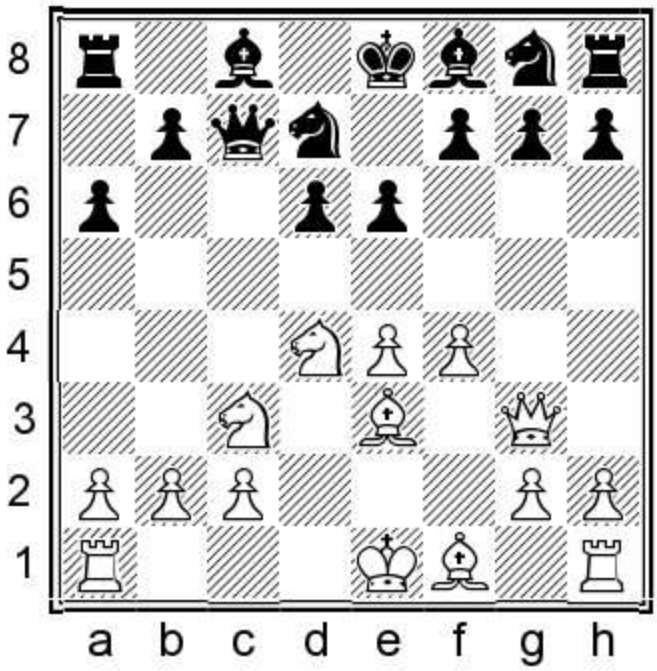
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B24) 7...Ne5 8.Qg3



8...h5!?
This quirky-looking move has been Black's most popular choice from this position; indeed, Kotronias and Semkov do not mention any alternatives. Black hopes to either dislodge the white queen from its excellent square, or provoke some concession such as h2-h4.

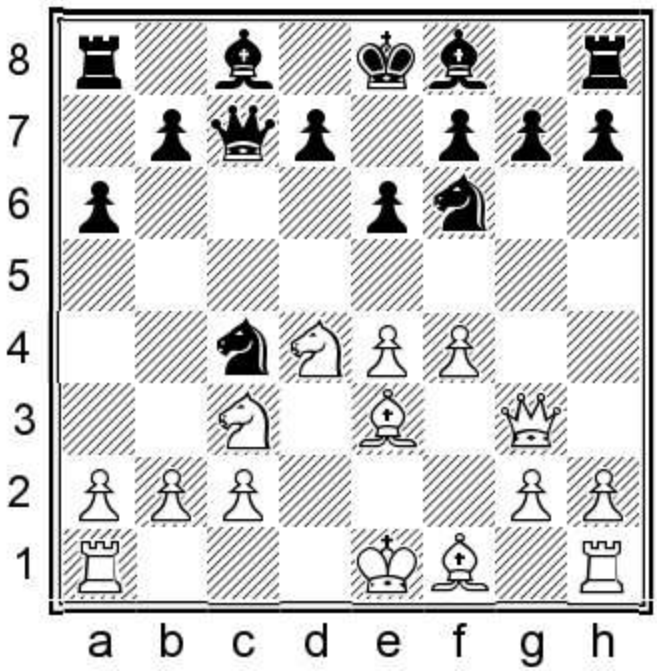
8...d6?! is hardly a serious option. 9.f4 Nd7 (9...Nc4 10.Bxc4 Qxc4 11.0-0-0 b5 12.a3 b4 13.axb4 Qxb4 14.f5±) This occurred in Madrigal – Song, Cappelle-la-Grande 2016, when White could have exploited his considerable lead in development with:



10.f5!N 10...Ne5 11.fxe6 fxe6 12.Be2 Nf6 13.0-0-0 Bd7 14.Qh3 0-0-0 15.Nxe6 Qa5 16.Rd5! Nxd5 17.exd5±

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8...Nf6 gives White a choice. The simplest option for our repertoire is 9.0-0-0, which leads straight to variation B265 on page 138. Alternatively, if you wish to try and exploit Black's move order then 9.f4!? is possible. 9...Nc4?! was seen in Wei Yi – Lei Tingjie, Zhongshan 2014, when White's strongest continuation would have been:



10.Bxc4N 10...Qxc4 11.e5 Nd5 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.0-0± With a serious lead in development and attacking prospects on the dark squares.

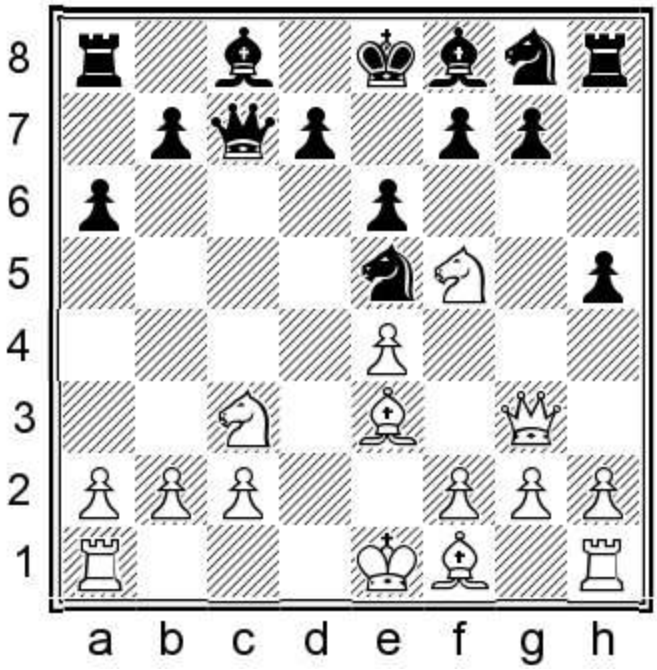
8...b5 is a sensible move which has been played by Caruana, but it usually just transposes to another of our main lines. 9.0-0-0 b4?! (9...Nf6 is normal; this will be analysed under variation B265) 10.Nf3! (10.Na4 is fine but the text move comes close to refuting Black's play) 10...bxc3 11.Nxe5 cxb2† 12.Kb1 d5 13.exd5 Nf6 14.d6! Bxd6 15.Qxg7 Rg8 16.Qxf7† Qxf7 17.Nxf7 Bb4 18.Nd6†± Vlasak – Hough, corr. 2015.

9.Nf5!?

First played by Mamedyarov in 2015, this sacrifice has not really caught on. I am not sure why this is so, as the idea is sound and it offers White a promising initiative in many lines. Perhaps the 'problem' is that there are a few long lines which engines assess as equal after perfect play, but I don't see this as a big drawback. There are no forced drawing lines and White will often be able to choose between two or more options offering good practical compensation, so Black will not simply be able to memorize his way to half a point.

Should you wish to investigate a different path, I would say 9.0-0-0 and 9.h4 are the most interesting directions, but I will say no more about them here.

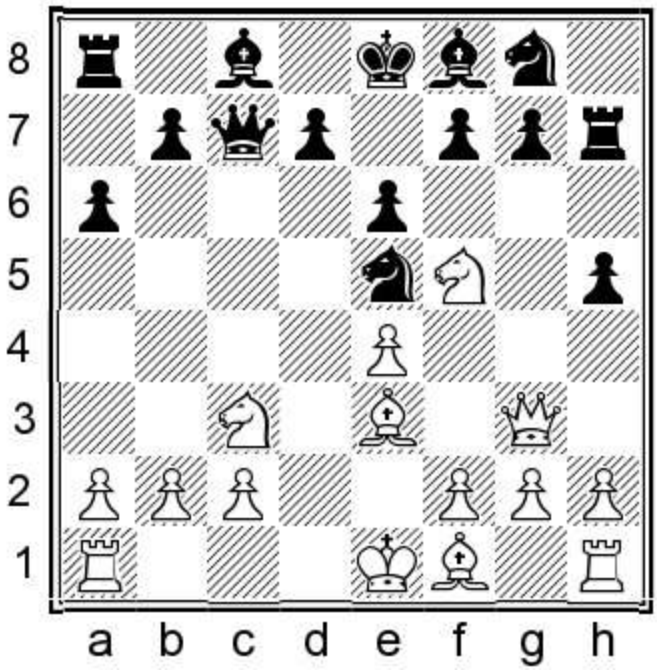
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We will analyse B241) 9...exf5? and B242) 9...f6!.

9...g5!?N is not completely crazy, but 10.Bxg5 f6 11.Bh4 exf5 12.f4 Nf7 13.0-0-0² offers White more than enough play for the sacrificed piece.

9...Rh7?! led to an eventual victory for Black in Firouzja – Banikas, Doha (blitz) 2016, but White can easily improve with:



10.Bd4! d6 11.f4 Ng6 (11...Ng4 12.h3±) 12.Ne3±

B241) 9...exf5?

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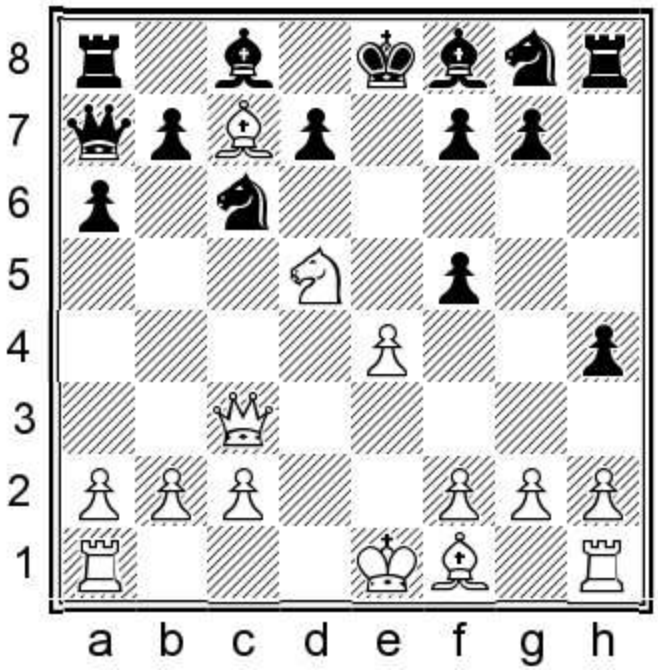
Black has wisely declined to eat the knight in all the games so far, but it is worth seeing how to refute it.

10.Nd5 Qb8
10...Qd6 11.Bb6, also puts Black in trouble.

11.Bb6 h4
11...Bd6? 12.Qxg7+– is hopeless for Black.

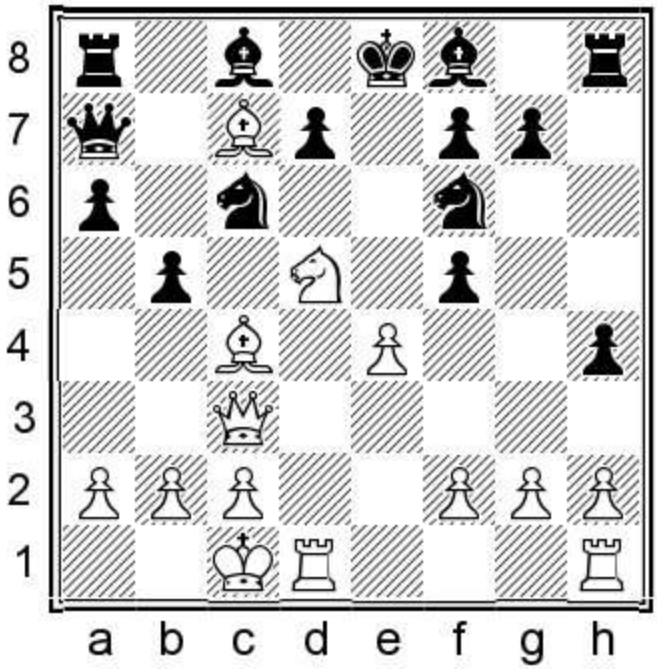
12.Qc3 Nc6 13.Bc7!
Kotronias and Semkov give 13.0-0-0 as leading to an eventual endgame with a plus for White, but the text move is even stronger.

13...Qa7
After 13...Bb4 14.Nxb4 Qxc7 15.Nd5 Qe5 16.Qxe5† Nxe5 17.Nc7† White will emerge with an extra exchange.



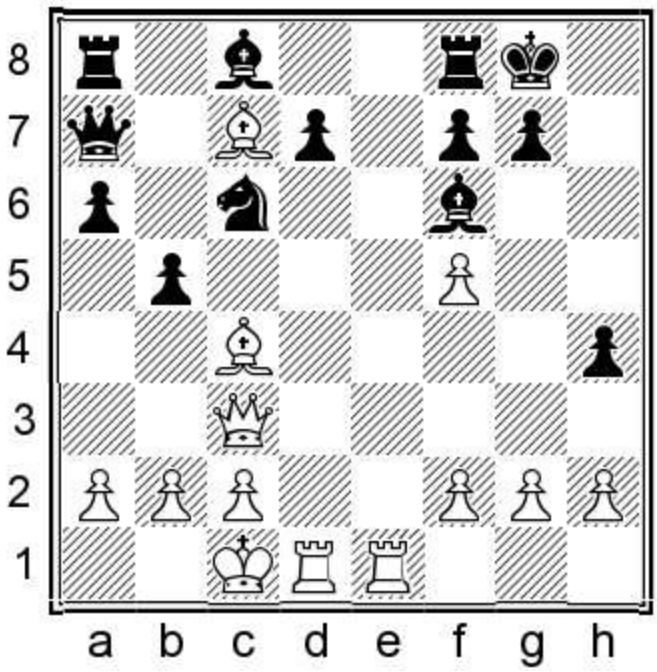

14.0-0-0 Nf6
14...Nge7 15.Re1 fxe4 16.Rxe4 Rh5 17.Bb6 Rxd5 18.Bxa7 Rxa7 19.Bc4 should be winning for White, as Black will hardly be able to get developed and coordinated without making serious concessions.
15.Bc4! b5
15...Be7 16.Nxe7 Nxe7 17.Bd6 Qxf2 18.exf5+– and the attack is decisive.

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16.Rhe1!! Be7
Black also loses after: 16...bxc4 17.exf5† Be7 18.Rxe7†! Nxe7 19.Nxf6† gxf6 20.Qxf6 Rg8 21.Bd6+–

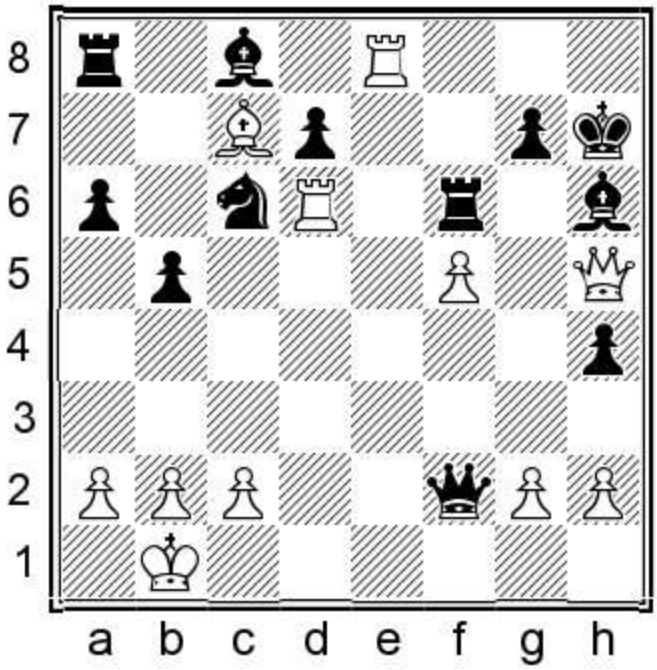
17.exf5 0-0 18.Nxf6† Bxf6



19.Bxf7†!!
This is the justification for White's earlier play. The attack is overwhelming, as the following line demonstrates.

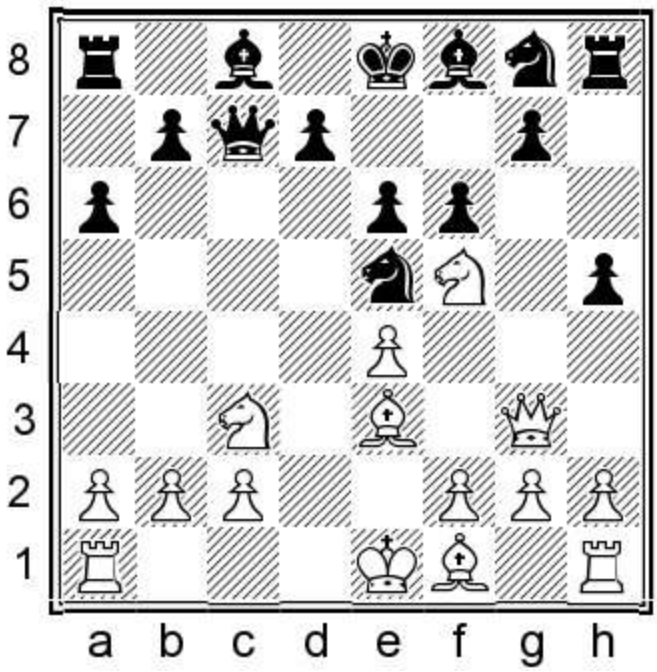
19...Rxf7 20.Re8† Kh7 21.Qf3 Bg5† 22.Kb1 Bh6 23.Qh5 Rf6 24.Rd6! Qxf2

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25.Qg6†! Rxg6 26.fxg6#
A simple but nonetheless beautiful finish.

B242) 9...f6!



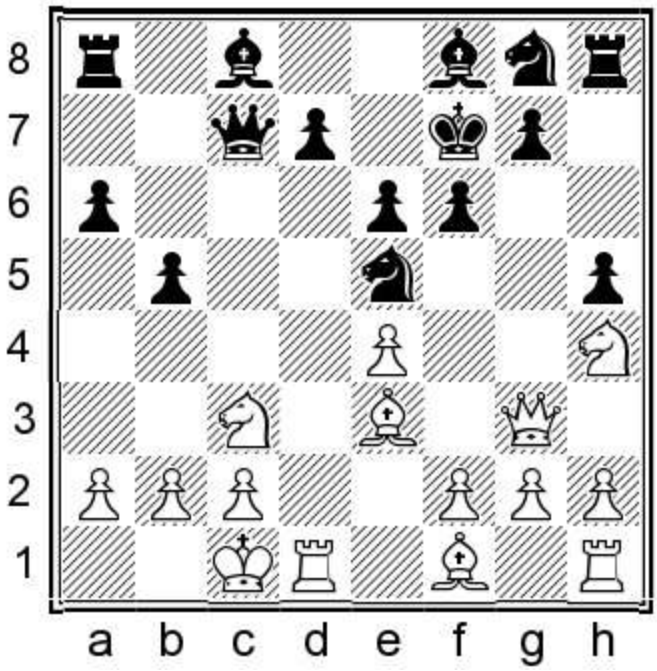
This is the critical reply to our last move. Now Black really is threatening to capture the knight.

10.0-0-0
10.Nxg7†?! Kf7 traps the knight. This isn't the end of the story, as 11.Nxh5 Rxh5 12.f4 leaves White with two pawns and some attacking chances for the piece; nevertheless, I rate his compensation as significantly less dangerous than in the main line, and White went on to lose both of the games in which this approach was tried.

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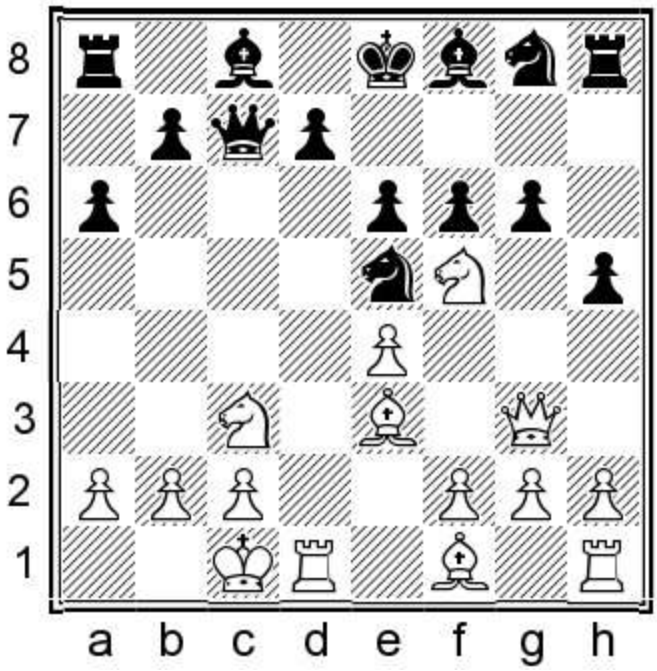
10...exf5
Capturing the knight is critical, and was Giri's choice in the stem game in 2015. At the time of writing, two other games have reached the same position. In both of them, Black was afraid to take the knight and tried to play more solidly, but the approach completely backfired.

10...Kf7? is a poor move: 11.Nh4 (11.f4!?N is also great for White) 11...b5 In Budima – Abbas, Antalya 2017, White could have got a huge advantage with:



12.f4!N 12...Ng4 13.Ng6! And since taking the knight would cost Black his queen, the second player is in deep trouble.

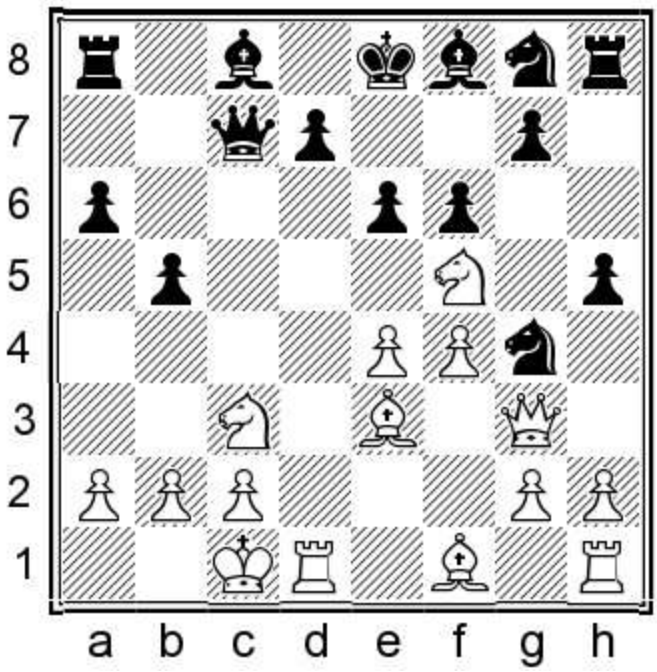
10...g6?! was not much better in Ciganovic – Skok, Pula 2016. White should have reacted with:



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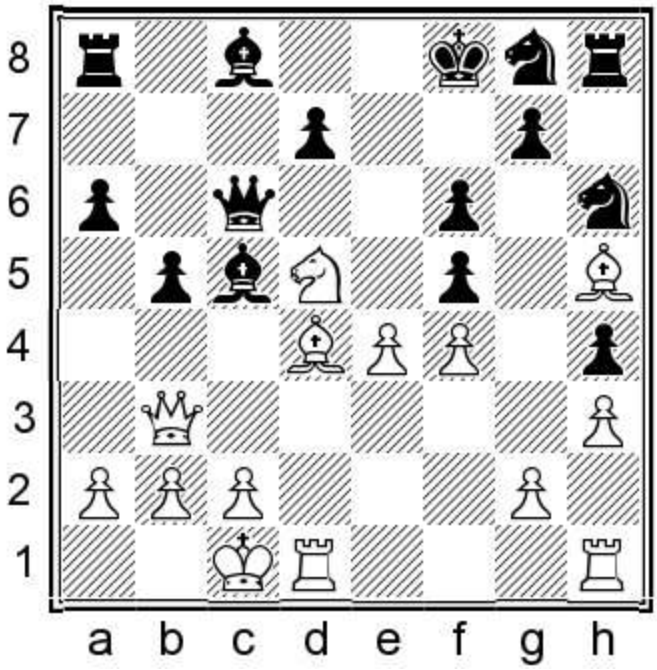
11.f4!N 11...Ng4 12.h3 Nxe3 (12...gxf5 13.hxg4 fxg4 14.Be2 Rh6 15.Qf2+–) 13.Qxg6† Kd8 14.Ng7!±

If Black wants to avoid capturing the knight, the only decent way to do it is with the following untested idea: 10...b5!?N 11.f4 Ng4



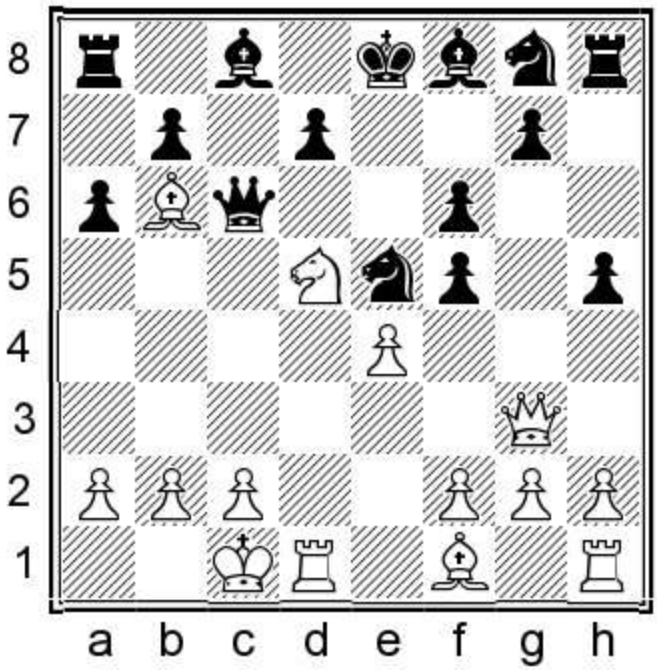
12.Bd4!?
Black's position is playable but risky, as White can choose between several tricky lines, including a few direct attacking options. The text move is arguably the trickiest for Black to deal with over the board.
12.h3 Nxe3 13.Qg6†!? (13.Nxe3 is also possible, leading to an unclear game with equal material) 13...Kd8 14. Nxg7! is a wild alternative; initially the computer gets excited about White's prospects, but eventually the line fizzles out to equality.
12...exf5
Black is unable to stay safe by choosing a quiet move in the hope of keeping the position closed, as White's last move created a nasty threat of h2-h3.
It is worth mentioning that 12...b4 13.Nd5! exd5 14.h3 g6 15.hxg4 gxf5 16.g5! is dangerous for Black, as Kotronias and Semkov point out.
13.h3 h4 14.Nd5! Qc6 15.Qb3 N4h6 16.Be2 Bc5 17.Bh5† Kf8

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18.e5!? fxe5
18...Bxd4 19.Rxd4 Qc5 20.Rhd1 also gives Black plenty to think about.
19.fxe5 Bxd4 20.Rxd4 Nf7 21.Bxf7 Kxf7 22.g4!©
White has full compensation at the end of this line by Kotronias and Semkov.

11.Nd5 Qc6 12.Bb6
The last few moves were clearly best on both sides, but now it is time for Black to improve his play:

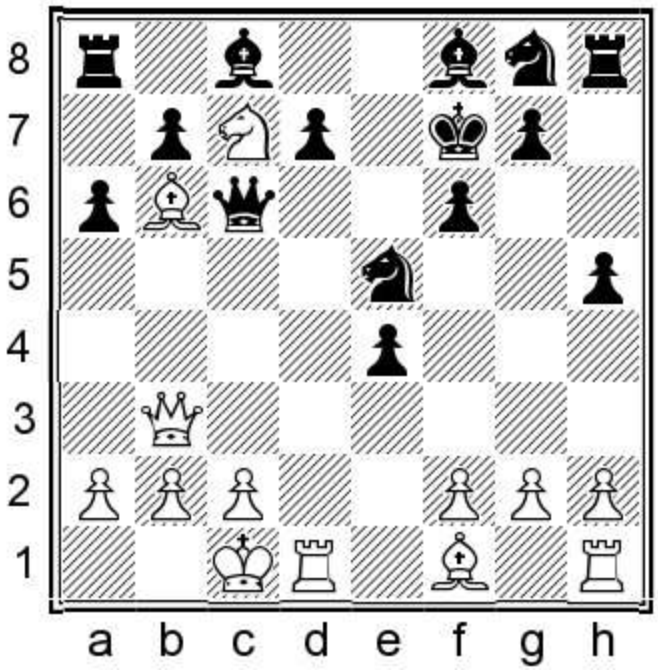


12...f4!N
Kotronias and Semkov also point out this clever idea, which offers a pawn in order to slow down White's attack.

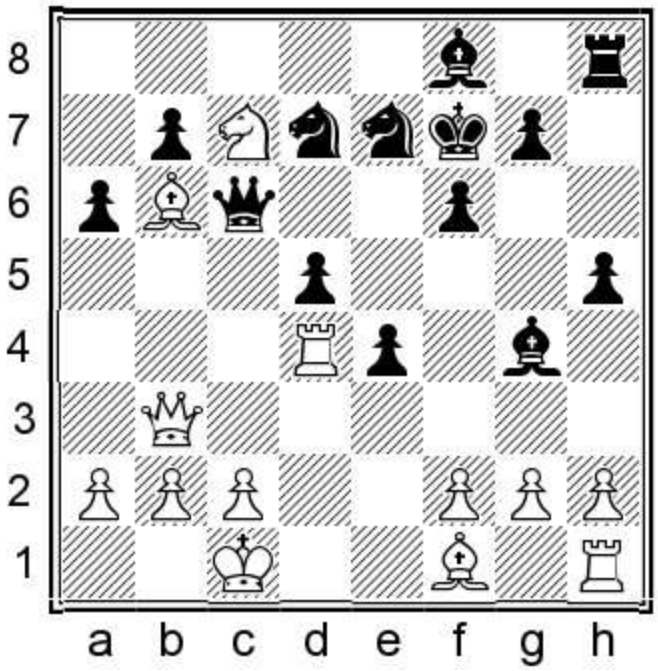
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12...Kf7? is the kind of move that the defending player might come up with over the board, but 13.exf5 Bd6 14.f4 Ng4 15.Qb3 Kf8 16.Bc4, leaves White with a virulent initiative for the material, while Black's pieces have no harmony whatsoever.

The one game from this position continued:
12...fxe4 13.Nc7† Kf7 14.Qb3†
14.Nxa8 d5 15.Qb3 transposes.

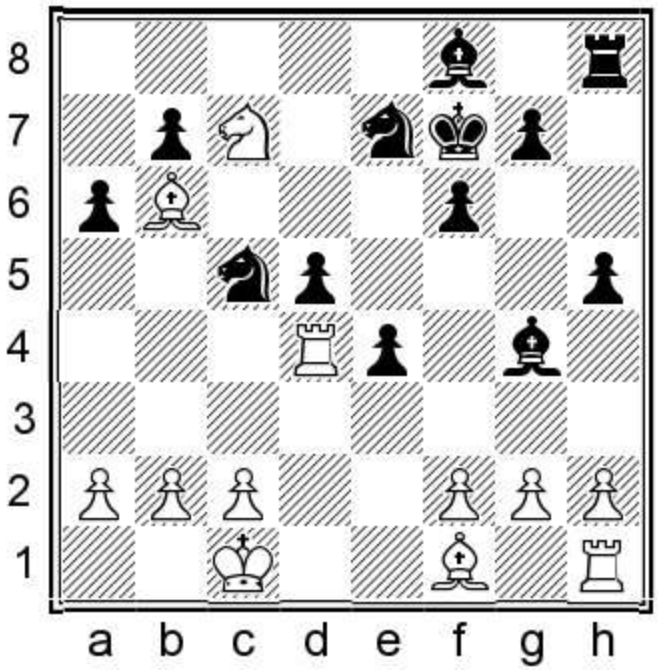



14...d5 15.Nxa8 Ne7 16.Nc7 Bg4!
16...Be6? 17.Nxe6 Qxe6 18.f3!± is unpleasant for Black.
17.Rd4 Nd7
Now White's play can be improved with:



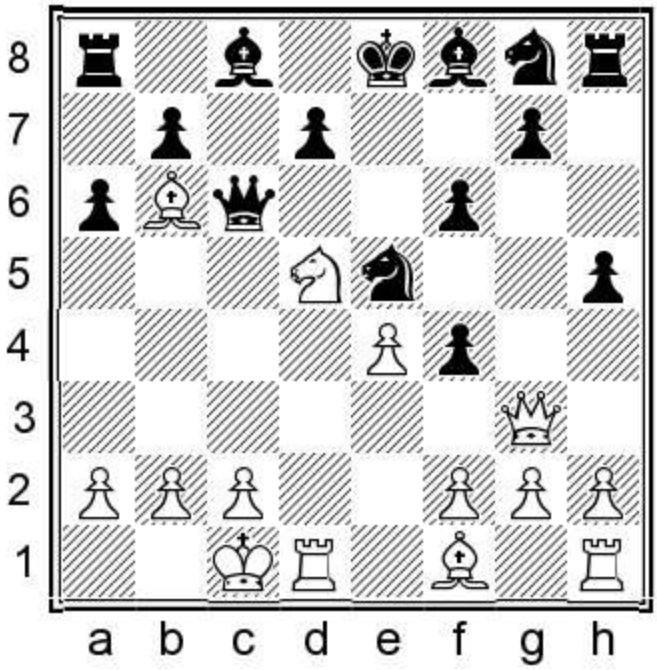

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18.Ba5!N
The game continued 18.Nxd5? Nxd5?! (18...Be6!N 19.Bc4 Nxd5 20.Bxd5 Nxb6 21.Bxe6† Qxe6 22.Qxe6† Kxe6 23.Rxe4† Kf7[3] would have left White fighting for half a point) 19.Rxd5 Be6 20.Rxd7† Qxd7 21.Bc4 with simplifications and a subsequent draw in Mamedyarov – Giri, Tbilisi 2015.
18...Nc5
18...b5 19.Qc3 Nc5 20.f3 is good for White, as Kotronias and Semkov point out.
18...g6 19.Nxd5! Nc5 20.Qc3 Nxd5 21.Rxd5[2] favours White as the rook is untouchable.
19.Qb6 Qxb6
Kotronias and Semkov mention 19...Ne6 20.Qxc6 Nxc6 21.Rxd5 Nxa5 22.Nxe6 Bxe6 23.Rxa5 and White is the exchange up.
20.Bxb6



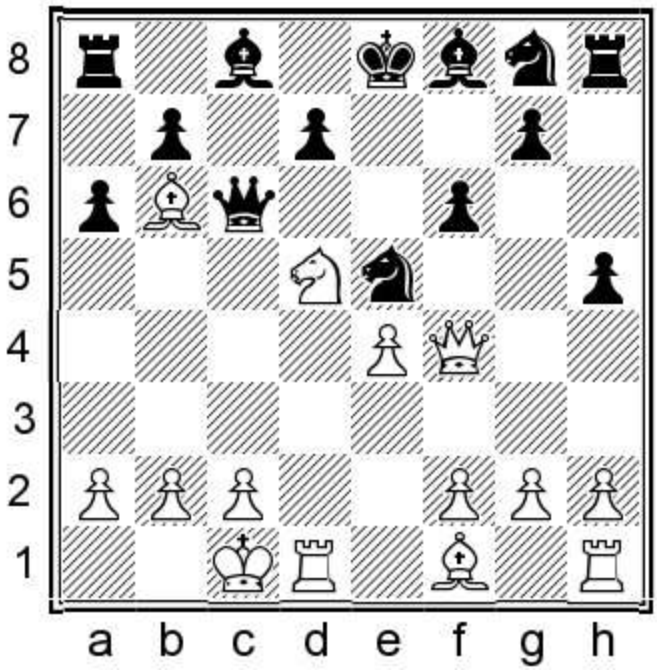

20...Ne6
20...Nd7 21.Ba5[2]
21.Nxe6 Bxe6[2]
Black has some compensation for the exchange, but not enough for equality.

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13.Qb3!?
Once again, we have one of those situations where White has no clear route to an advantage, but he can choose between a few decent approaches, while Black has to be ready for all kinds of tricks.

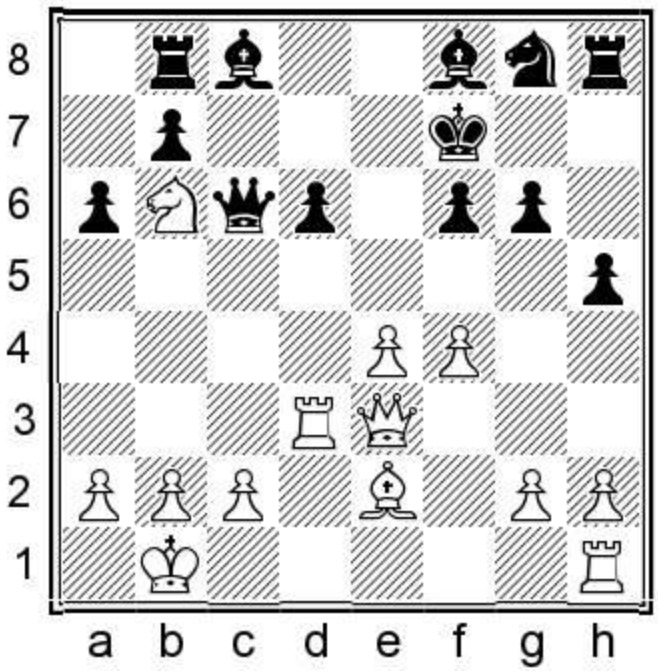
The alternative is:
13.Qxf4
This way, White collects a pawn and will prepare f2-f4, with a slower attack. The best defence is:



13...Kf7!
13...Bd6 14.Qg3 Kf8 15.f4² looks promising for White.
14.Qe3 d6 15.f4 Nd7 16.Be2!?
This is the most interesting of a few playable moves.

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16...g6 17.Kb1 Nxb6 18.Nxb6 Rb8 19.Rd3
Black's best defence is:

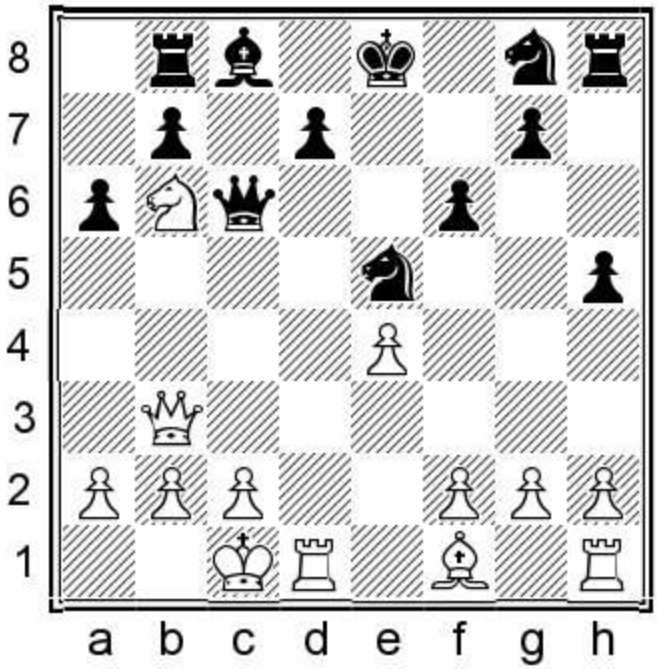


19...Qe8!!
Not an easy move to find.
Kotronias and Semkov point out that 19...Qc5? 20.Qxc5 dxc5 21.Rd8 Ne7 22.Bc4† Kg7 23.Be6 Bxe6 24.Rxb8 leaves Black in big trouble in the endgame.
I also checked 19...Qc7, when 20.f5! is dangerous.
20.Rc3 Qd8 21.Rd1 Ne7 22.f5÷
Kotronias and Semkov provide some further lines but I think this is enough to show the type of position you can expect. The position is roughly balanced and challenging for both sides.

13...Bd6 14.Nxf4 Qxe4!
It would be easy to suppose that, already being a piece up but behind in development, Black should avoid spending time grabbing additional material. However, the text move is his best defence.

14...Bc5?! 15.Nd5 Bxb6 16.Nxb6 Rb8 is unsatisfactory for Black due to:

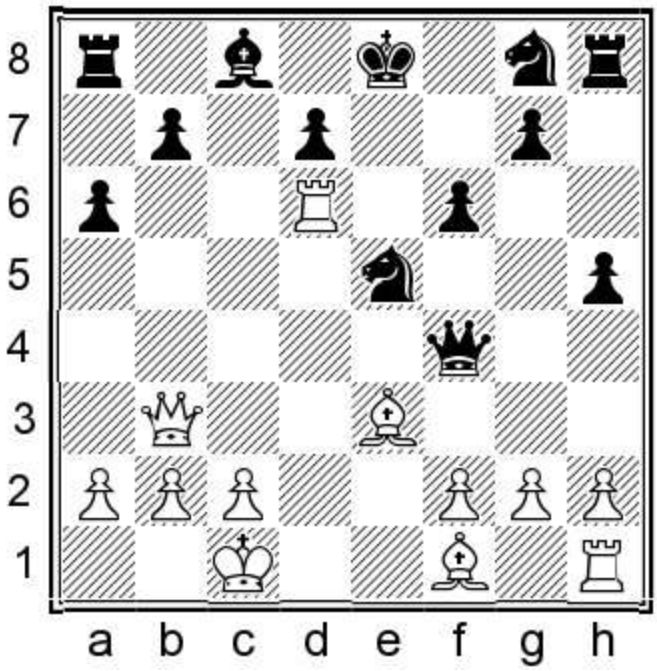
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17.f4 Nf7 18.Bc4 Ngh6 19.e5 fxe5 20.fxe5 White has a dangerous initiative in this line from Kotronias and Semkov.

14...Ne7 15.Nd5 Bb8 is not stupid, but 16.f4 N5g6 17.g3© leaves White with a clamp and Black struggling to complete development and get coordinated.

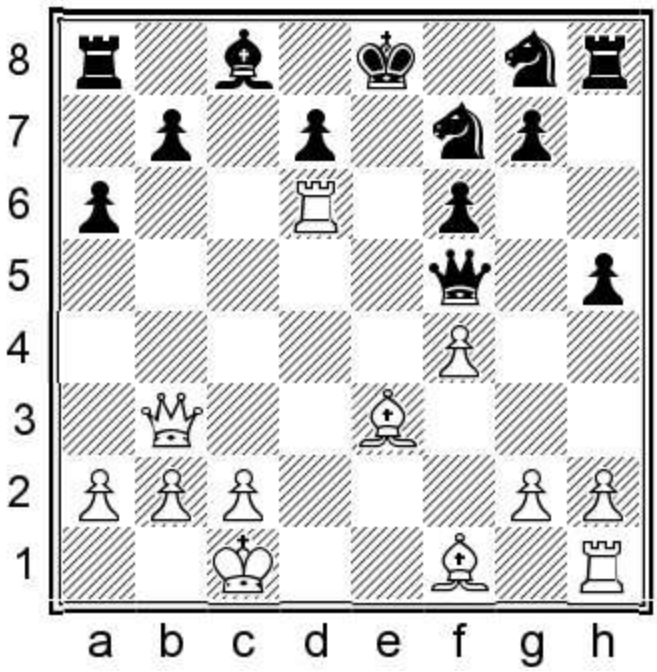
15.Rxd6 Qxf4† 16.Be3
Black has an extra piece but his position is pretty scary, due to his poor development and inability to find a safe haven for his king.



16...Qf5
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16...Qg4 and 16...Qe4 can both be met by 17.f3, when Black has nothing better than transposing to the main

line with 17...Qf5 18.f4.

17.f4 Nf7
Here I would like to present an idea which has, to my knowledge, not been analysed anywhere else.



18.Bd3!?
Kotronias and Semkov analyse 18.Rd5 Qe4 19.Rd4 and show some nice lines, eventually concluding that White has dangerous compensation but Black is objectively okay.

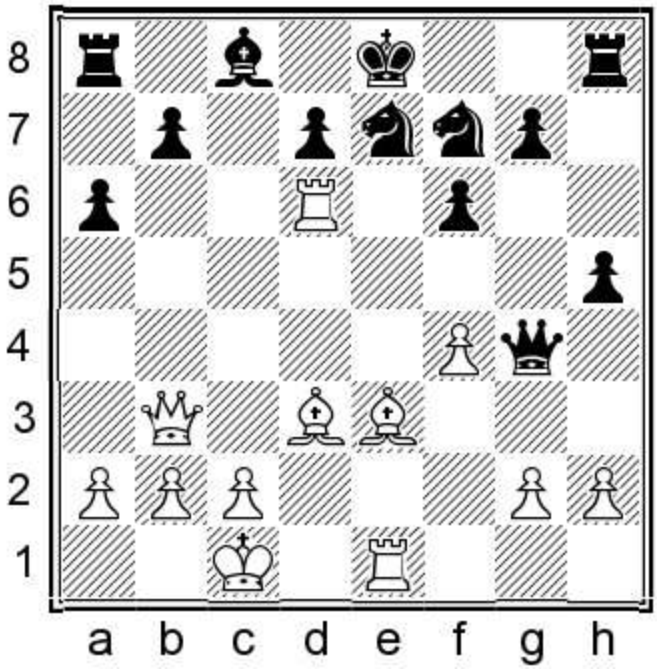
K&S's analysis seemed like an interesting path to explore, but then I realized that 18.Rd5 could be met by 18... Qg4!, when I was unable to find anything better than 19.h3 Qg3 20.Rd3 Qe1† 21.Rd1 Qg3 and a repetition. Of course I spent some time investigating alternatives such as 19.Bc4 and 22.Bc4, but in both cases White struggles to find adequate compensation against correct defence.

For this reason, I decided to go back a step and investigate the text move, which transforms the material balance.

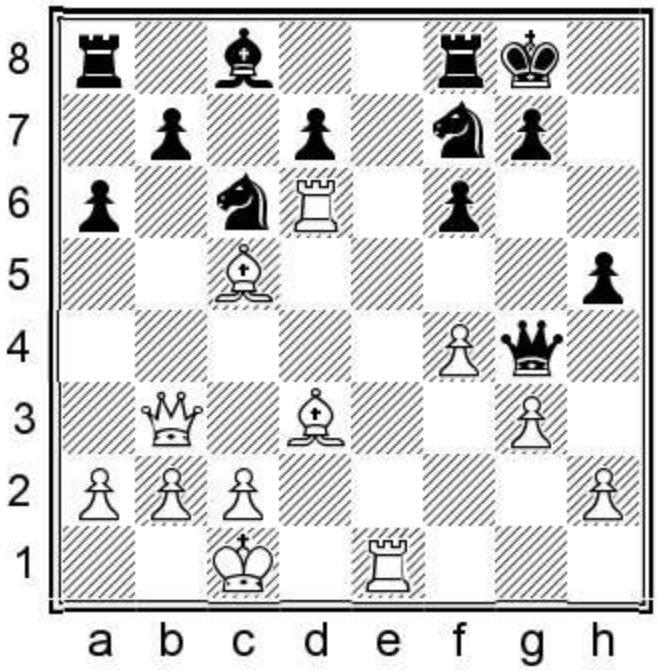
18...Nxd6
Black is virtually forced to give up his queen for some pieces.

Retaining the queen leads to a hopeless position:
18...Qg4? 19.Re1 Ne7

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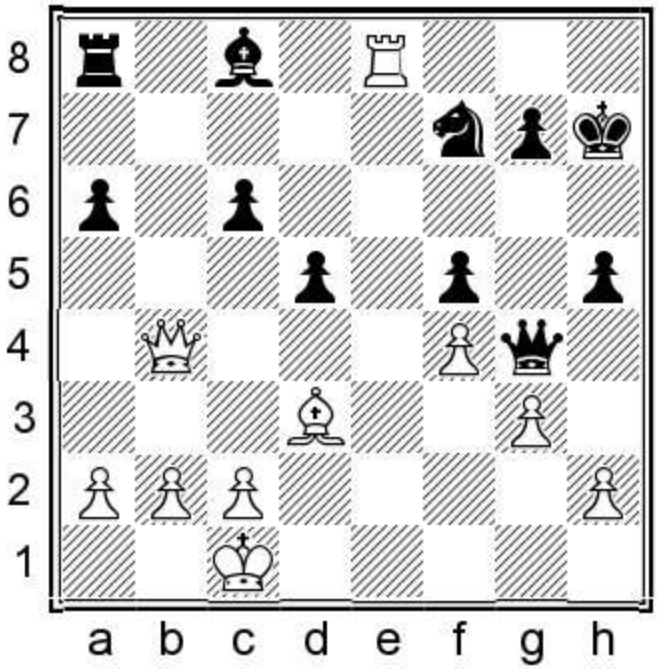


20.g3!
Amazingly, White can afford to spend a tempo guarding the f4-pawn, as his bishop will be fantastically powerful on c5.
20...0-0
After 20...Nxd6 21.Bc5+– Black is a rook and a piece up, yet he will have to pay an even higher price to avoid being mated.
21.Bc5 Nc6
21...Ng6 22.Be2 Qf5 23.Rd5 Qe4 24.Bb4! is also winning; my main line continues 24...a5 25.Bc4 Qxd5 26. Bxd5 axb4 27.Bxf7† Rxf7 28.Re8† Nf8 29.f5!+– with the deadly threat of Re7.



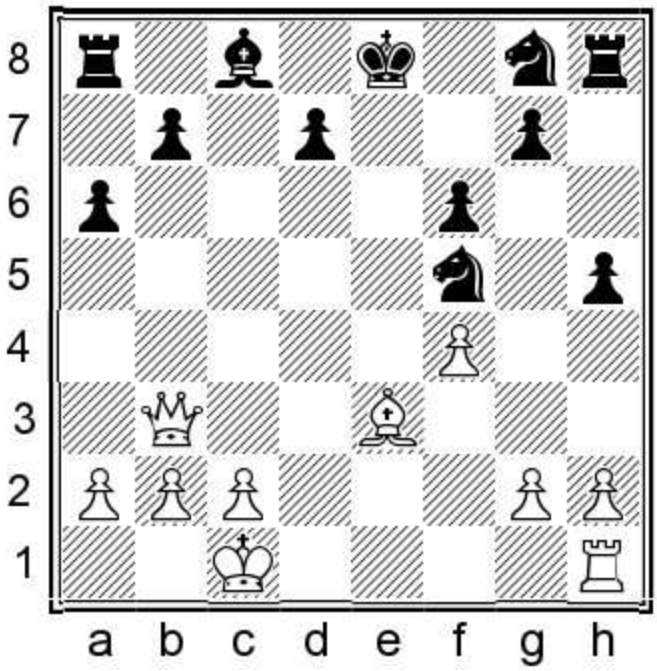
22.Rxc6!?
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22.Bb6! is the computer's favourite, and the most efficient winning continuation if followed up correctly. The

text move is also good enough though, and is simpler for a human to understand.
22...bxc6 23.Bxf8 Kxf8 24.Bc4 d5 25.Qb4† Kg8 26.Re8† Kh7 27.Bd3† f5



28.Qf8 Qg6 29.a4!?+–
White can win back the piece any time, and the resulting endgame will be winning thanks to the active queen and Black's many weak pawns.

19.Bxf5 Nxf5
Black has more than enough material for the queen, but he still has problems coordinating his pieces and getting his king to safety. The computer finds nothing better for Black than giving away a couple of pawns to relieve the pressure, as shown in the illustrative lines below.



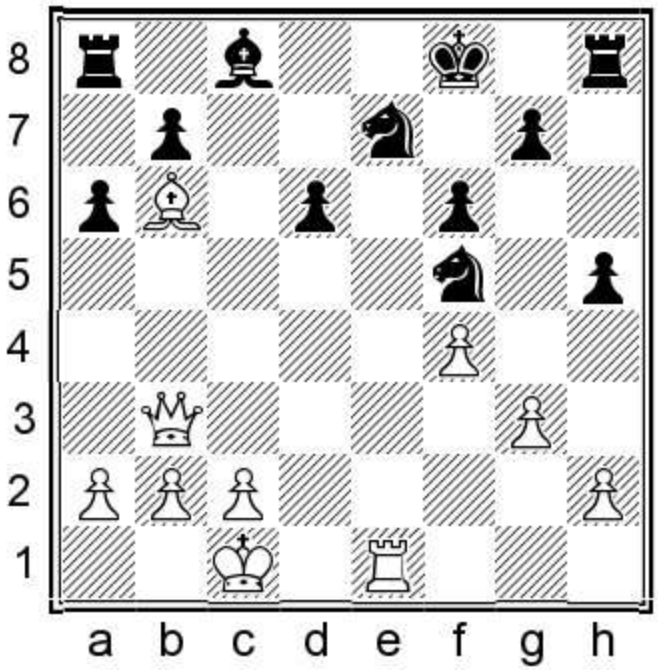
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20.Re1 Nge7
20...d6!? is possible, as the discovered check is nothing special, but White can instead play 21.g3! with a probable transposition to the main line.

21.Bb6 d6 22.g3!
White wants to drive the knight away from f5, so he prepares h2-h3 without allowing his pawns to be immobilized by ...h4.

22...Kf8
Since the h-file is likely to be opened soon, it makes a lot of sense for Black to keep his rook on h8.

22...Bd7 23.Bc7 Rc8 24.Qxb7 0-0 is another way for Black to mobilize his forces at the expense of a couple of pawns. Play continues: 25.Bxd6 Nxd6 26.Qxd7 Nef5 27.Qa4² White's queenside pawns make him the slight favourite.

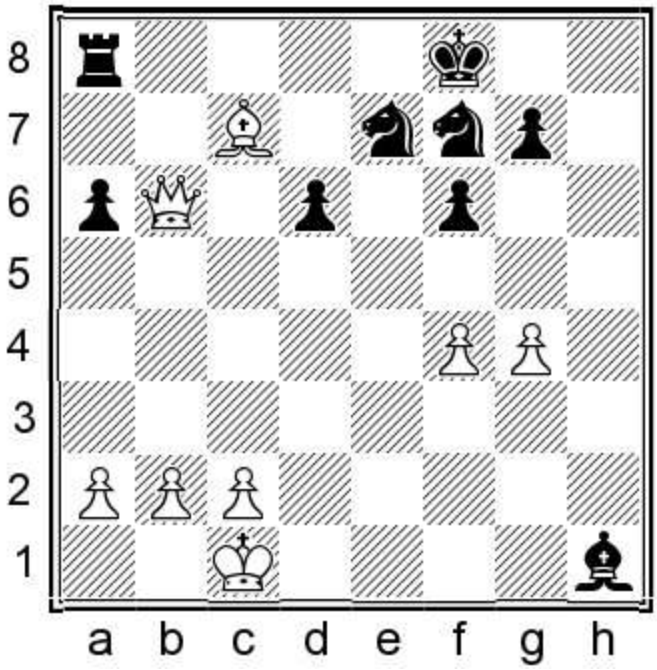



23.h3!
Continuing the plan.

23...Bd7 24.g4 hxg4 25.hxg4 Nh6 26.Bc7!
White cannot break through with a direct attack, but instead he can use his active pieces to target Black's weak pawns.

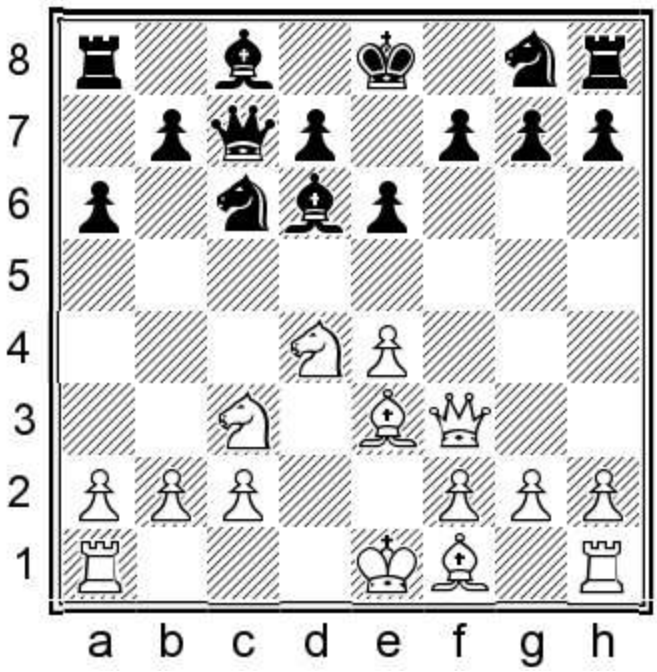
26...Nf7 27.Qxb7 Bc6 28.Qb6 Rh1 29.Rxh1 Bxh1

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30.Bxd6 Nxd6 31.Qxd6²
Again we reach an endgame with an unusual material balance, where White's active queen and three-to-one pawn majority offer him some winning chances.

B25) 7...Bd6



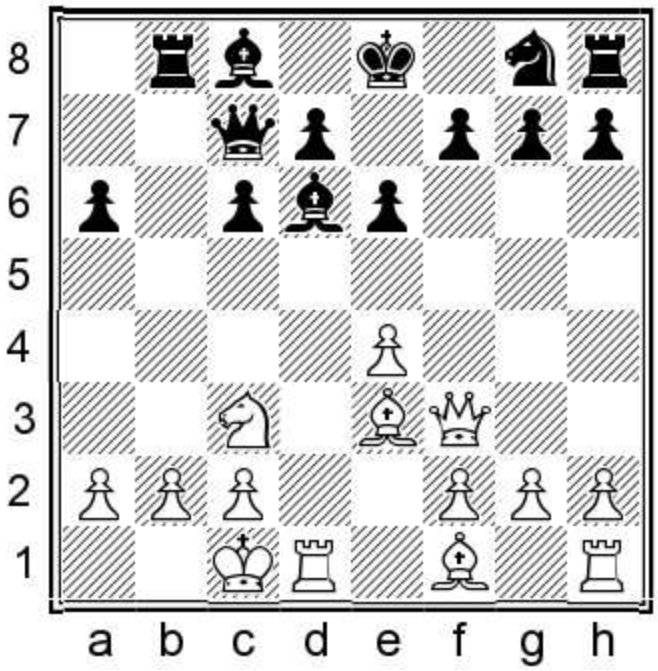
This is one of Black's most popular options, intending to bring the bishop to e5.

8.0-0-0
It seems most natural to start with this move.

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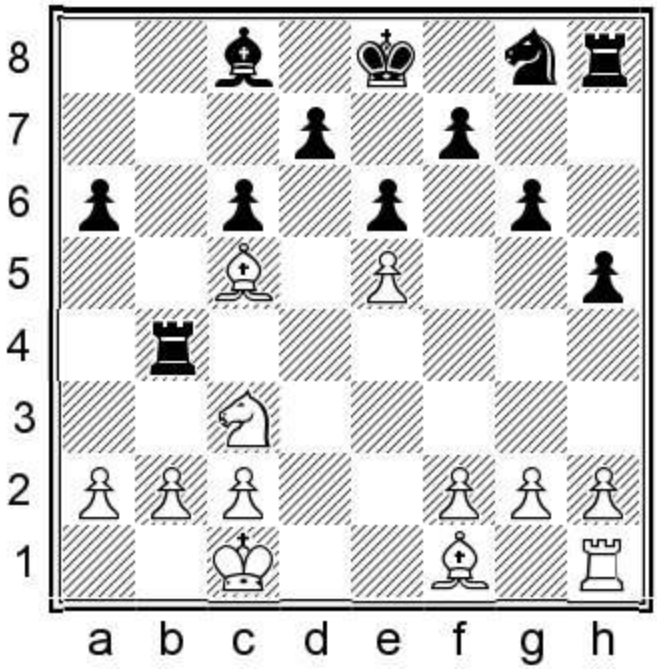
Nevertheless, you may also wish to consider:

8.Nxc6!? bxc6 9.0-0-0
Black may or may not transpose to our main line.
9...Rb8?!
9...Be5 is safer – see the main line below.
If Black wishes to play originally, then 9...Nf6!?N is the move to look at.
The text move was successful for Black in Tari – Eljanov, Reykjavik 2015, but things may have been different if White had found the following idea:



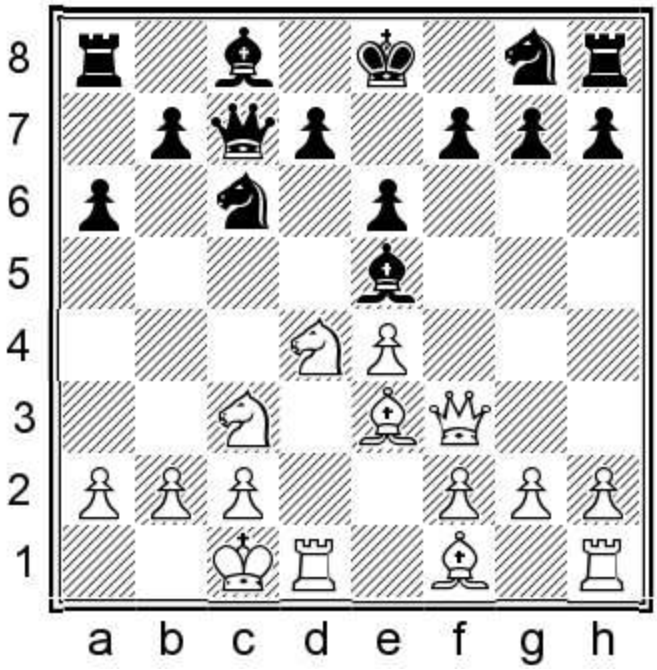

10.Rxd6!!N 10...Qxd6 11.Qg4
White has powerful compensation on the dark squares, for instance:
11...g6 12.e5! h5!
12...Qb4 13.Qxb4 Rxb4 14.Bc5± gives White a better version of the same type of position.
13.Qf4 Qb4 14.Qxb4 Rxb4 15.Bc5
Retreating the rook would allow Ne4 with a serious initiative for White, so Black should give back the exchange and accept a slightly worse position.

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15...a5 16.Bxb4 axb4 17.Ne4²

8...Be5



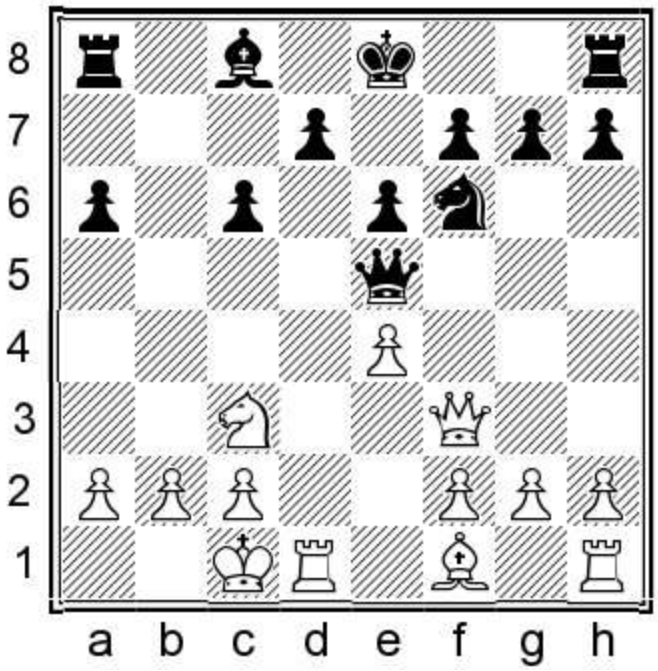
9.Nxc6!
This feels simple and effective. White gets a slightly more pleasant position without having to remember all manner of sharp variations.

9...bxc6
9...Qxc6 has been tried a couple of times but seems an odd choice. 10.Bd4 Bxd4 11.Rxd4 Ne7 12.Qg3 0-0 This position occurred in Mihok – Y. Vovk, Hungary 2017, when 13.Qd6N² would have given White a pleasant advantage.

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10.Bd4
The dark-squared bishops will soon vacate the board, and Black must decide whether to leave his bishop to be taken on e5 with B251) 10...Nf6 or to make the exchange himself with B252) 10...Bxd4. Each option has its own pros and cons, as explained below.

B251) 10...Nf6 11.Bxe5 Qxe5

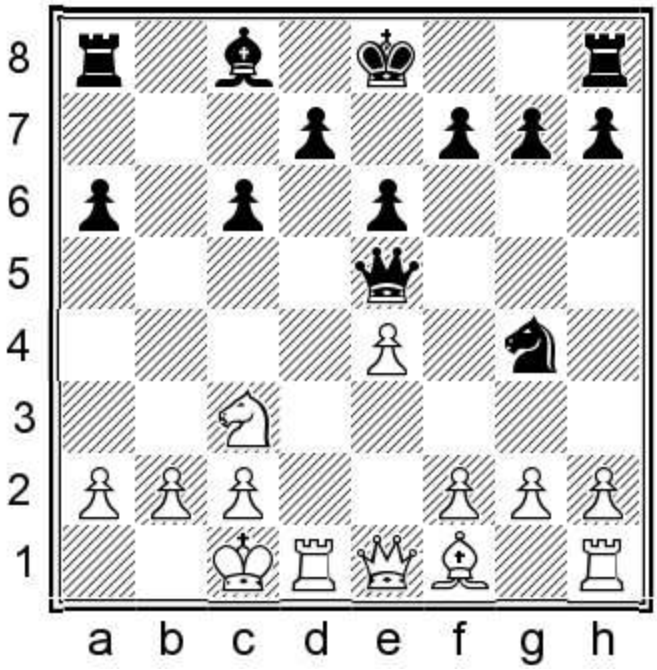


12.Qe3!
White can obtain a tiny endgame edge with 12.Qg3 Qxg3 13.hxg3, as played by Shirov in a couple of games. However, compared with variation B252 below, having the rook on d1 instead of d4 reduces White's active options. The text move is more challenging, as White aims to use the queen on e5 as a target for f2-f4.

12...Ng4 13.Qe1!
Kotronias and Semkov suggest 13.Qe2!?, intending to meet 13...Nxh2 with 14.Qe3!N when White develops a nice initiative. However, 13...Nf6!?N is more solid. The game continues, but I could not find anything special for White.

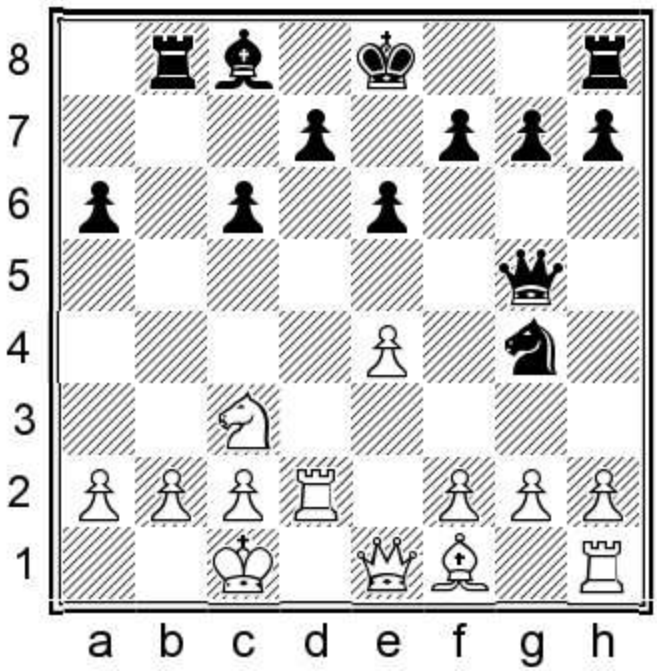
The text move is less forcing as the knight on g4 is not attacked, but sooner or later both the knight and the black queen will be driven away.

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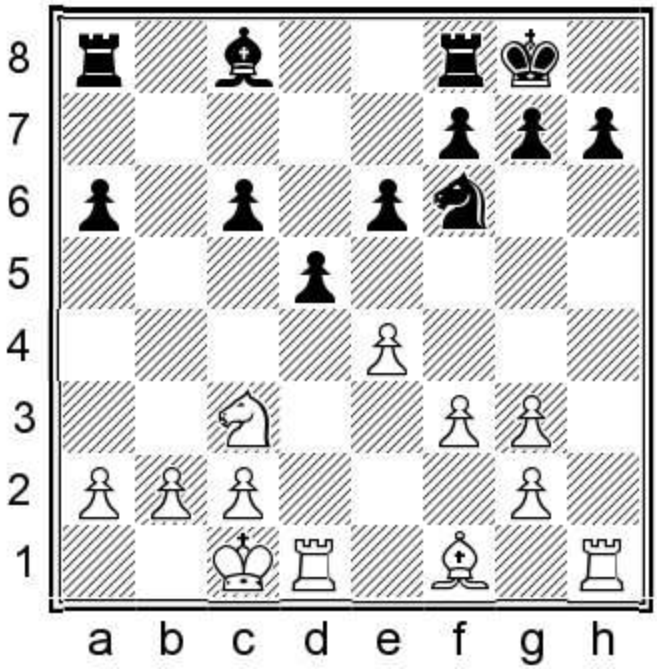
13...Qc5
This time the pawn is well and truly poisoned: 13...Nxh2? 14.Be2 and Black is in big trouble.

13...Qg5† 14.Rd2 Rb8 was played in Vishnu – Bogner, Gibraltar 2015. Here I suggest:



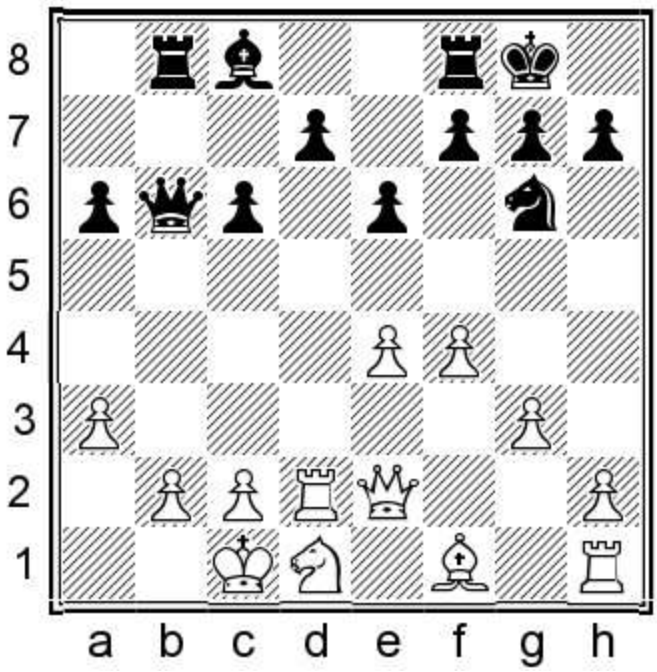
15.f3!N 15...Ne3 16.Bd3² Black's knight is in danger of being cut off from its army.
13...0-0 can be met by 14.f3 Nf6 15.Qg3! Qxg3 16.hxg3 d5 as in T.D.V. Nguyen – Kononenko, Pardubice 2016. White has a better version of the endgame from the note to move 12, as Black's king would have been better placed on e7. A good continuation is:

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17.Bd3!?N 17...h6 18.Na4² With a typical plus for such positions.

14.Rd2 Rb8 15.Qe2 Ne5 16.f4 Ng6 17.g3 Qb4 18.Nd1 0-0 19.a3 Qb6
We have been following Timman – Van Kampen, Wijk aan Zee 2015. White's most promising continuation would have been:

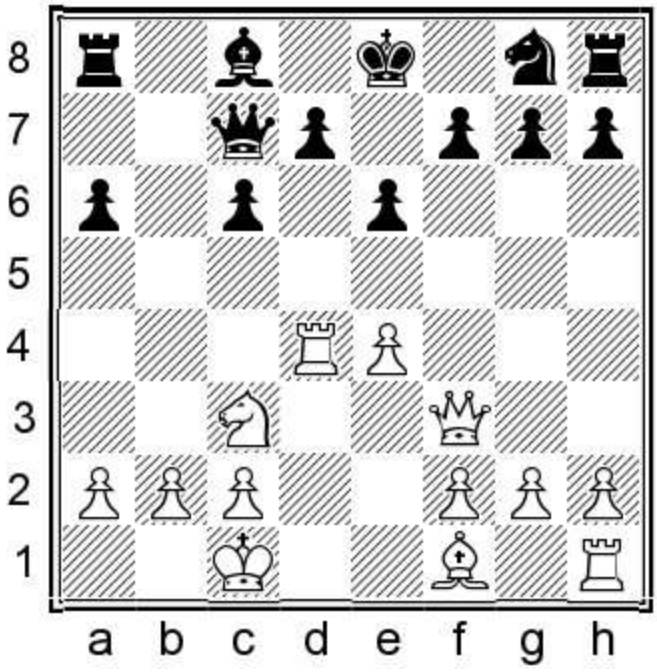


20.h4!N
Exploiting the misplaced knight to gain time for an attack. A sample continuation is:

20...d5 21.h5 Ne7 22.h6 g6 23.g4²
White has good attacking chances, and the h6-pawn also has the potential for greatness in a future endgame.

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B252) 10...Bxd4 11.Rxd4



Compared with the previous variation, Black's queen is less exposed, so we cannot use it to gain momentum for our attack. On the other hand, the plan of exchanging queens on g3 becomes more promising, as the rook on d4 can help to probe Black's queenside.

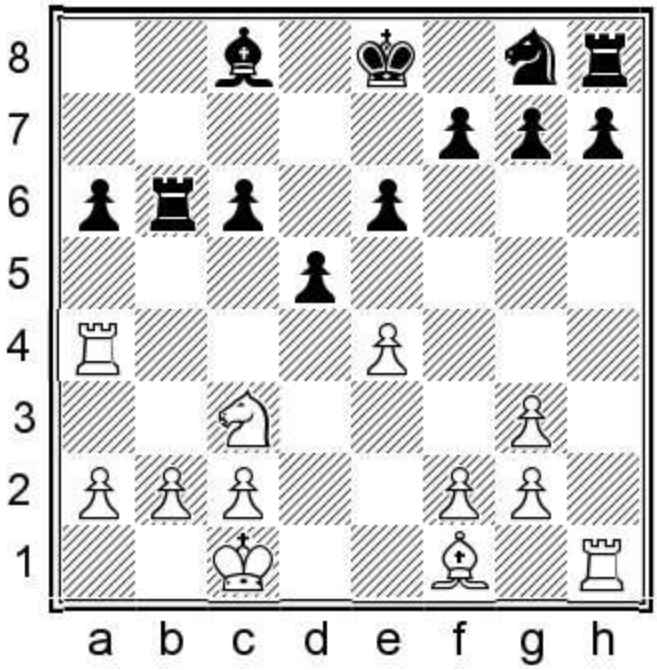
11...Nf6
This has been by far the most popular choice, and Black hardly has anything better.

11...e5 12.Rd2 Nf6 13.g4!± gave White easy play in Lorenzo de la Riva – Esposito, Barcelona 2017.

11...Ne7 12.Qg3 Qxg3 13.hxg3 d5 14.Na4² was pleasant for White in Liu Guanchu – Xiang Zeyu, Zhongshan 2014. The position here resembles the main line but the position of Black's knight on e7 makes it harder for him to challenge the c5-outpost.

11...Rb8 12.Qg3! Qxg3 13.hxg3 d5 14.Ra4 Rb6 occurred in Trent – Wirig, Germany 2015.

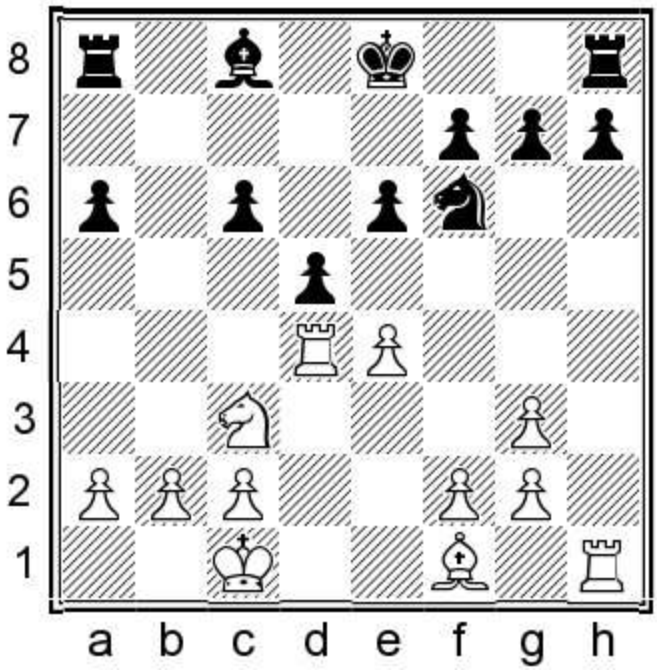
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White has a typical favourable endgame and I especially like his prospects after 15.g4!?N, making full use of the spare g-pawn and open h-file.

12.Qg3
If you are desperate for an attacking game then you can certainly investigate the alternatives 12.Qe3 and 12.g4!?. However, when we have the chance to get a favourable endgame, with genuine winning prospects and minimal risk, it is hard to resist it.

12...Qxg3 13.hxg3 d5



14.f3
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White has a few other possibilities. At first I was attracted by 14.Ra4 Ke7, as in Shubin – Zarubitski, Prague

2016, followed by 15.exd5!?N 15...cxd5 16.Ra5² when White can exert some pressure. However, Black can improve with 14...a5!?, preventing our rook from utilizing the a5-outpost. 15.b4 Ke7! 16.Rxa5 Rxa5 17.bxa5 Bd7 The rook comes to a8 and Black should be okay.

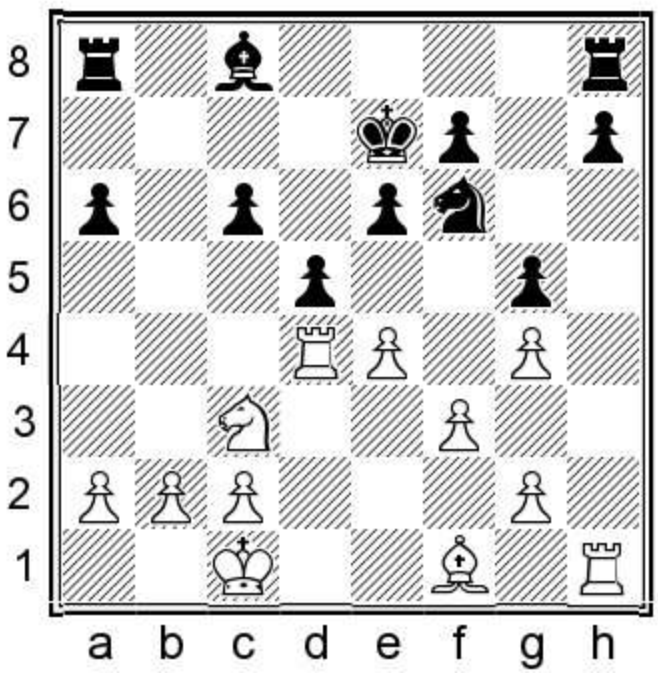
14.exd5!? is also interesting; it turns out that trading the central e4-pawn for the one on c6 is not as anti-positional as it may appear. 14...cxd5 (14...exd5 15.f3 0-0 16.g4 h6 17.Na4 Be6 18.Nc5² was good for White in Firouzja – Gholami, Tehran 2016) 15.f3 e5 This occurred in Abdumalik – Ju Wenjun, Chengdu 2015. Here I like 16.Ra4!?N 16...0-0 17.Ra5 Bb7 18.g4 h6 19.Na4 Nd7 20.Be2² and White keeps the better chances.

14...Ke7
This seems like the most natural move, and it was played in the only game in my database from this position.

14...0-0N is a possible alternative, when Black is ready to meet g3-g4 with ...h6. It looks interesting to try 15. Ra4!? a5 16.Ra3, with similar ideas as in the main line below. Here Black has not weakened his kingside, but on the other hand his king is not so well placed away from the centre.
15.g4!
White utilizes the spare g-pawn to provoke the following weakening move.

15...g5
15...c5 16.Ra4 d4 17.Nb1² gives White ideas on both sides of the board, with g4-g5, c2-c3 and perhaps Ra5 on the agenda.

All this happened in Dragnev – Bai, Graz 2016. White's play can be improved by means of:

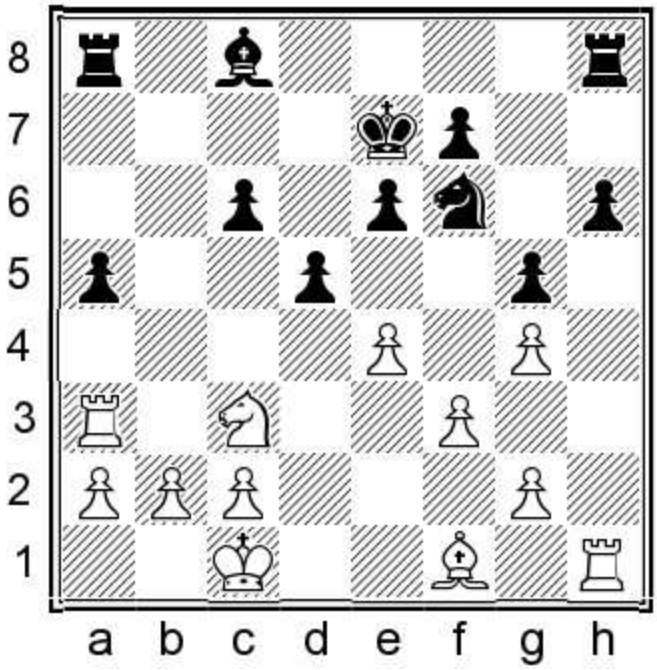



16.Ra4N 16...a5 17.Ra3!
White has good chances to develop some pressure due to Black's coordination problems. Kotronias and Semkov also recommended this continuation but I have my own ideas about how to follow it up.

17...h6
It is worth taking a moment to consider 17...dxe4 18.Nxe4 Nxe4 19.fxe4², leading to a weird pawn structure with numerous weaknesses on both sides. White keeps the better chances as his three kingside pawns do a de-

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cent job of holding up Black’s kingside majority, and Rah3 is a useful possibility.



18.Bd3 Bb7
18...c5?! weakens Black’s position: 19.exd5 (19.Re1!? is also promising) 19...exd5 20.Na4 c4 21.Nb6 Rb8 22. Nxc8† Rbxc8 23.Bf5*f*

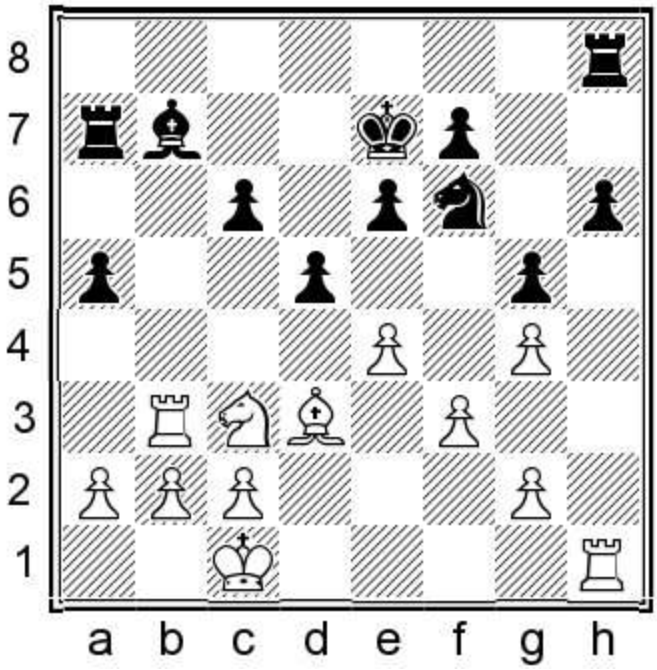
18...Nd7 is a sensible move, when I considered a couple of ideas:

a) Kotronias and Semkov give 19.exd5 cxd5 20.b4 Ba6 21.b5 Bb7 22.Na4 with an edge to White. However, I think 20...Bb7! is more annoying; White can pick up the a5-pawn but I doubt that he can claim an advantage with such a rancid structure. Another option is 21.b5, but then Black is a tempo up on K&S’s line.

b) For that reason, I prefer 19.Na4!?, when White keeps a slight edge in a quiet position. He might put his king on d2 next, and can think about c2-c4 when the time is right.

19.Rb3! Ra7
Kotronias and Semkov give 19...Bc8 20.Na4 Nd7 21.exd5 cxd5 22.Nb6 Nxb6 23.Rxb6². However, it seems more natural and critical for Black to avoid moving immediately back to c8 with his bishop. The text move challenges White to come up with something.

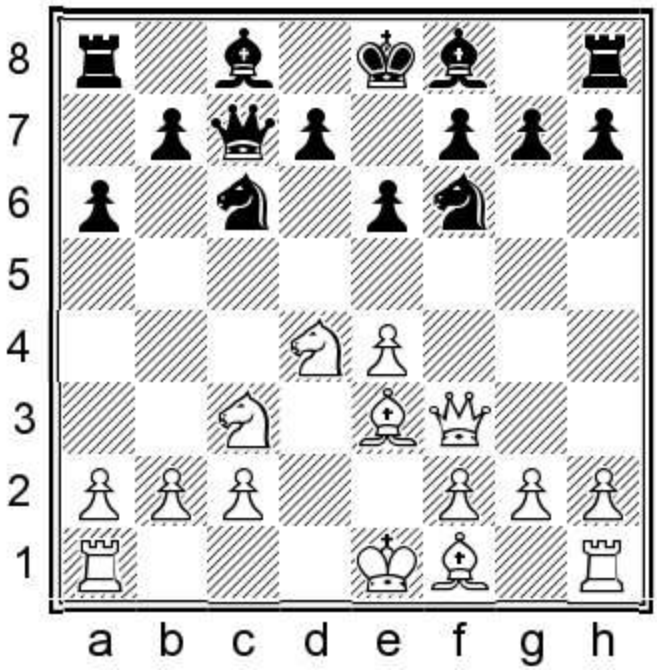
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20.exd5!?
Changing the pawn structure in order to occupy the b5-square with tempo.
The flexible 20.Kd2!? also offers White a slight edge.

20...cxd5 21.Nb5 Raa8 22.Nd4 Bc8 23.a4²
The position remains quite complex, but White's excellent piece activity and coordination should count for more than Black's central pawn majority.

B26) 7...Nf6



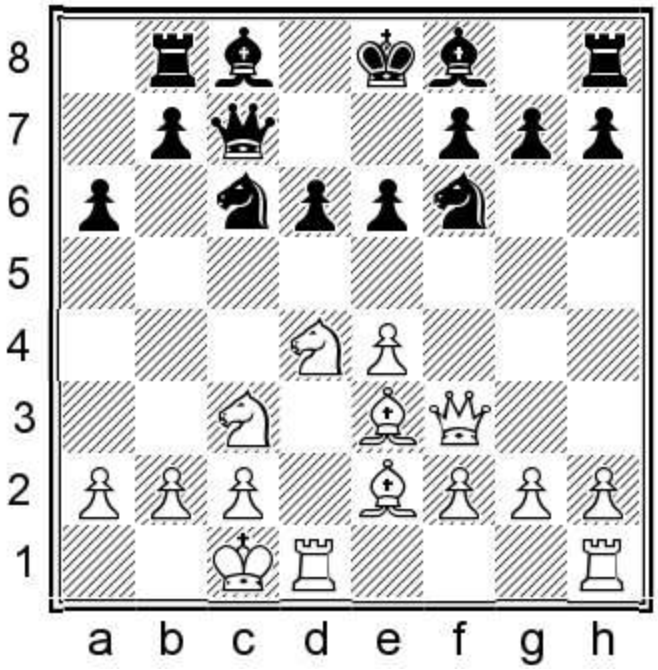
This natural developer has been Black's most popular choice of all.

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8.0-0-0
We have reached a major branching point, where I identified five main options for Black: B261) 8...b5?!, B262) 8...Bb4, B263) 8...Be7, B264) 8...h5!? and B265) 8...Ne5.

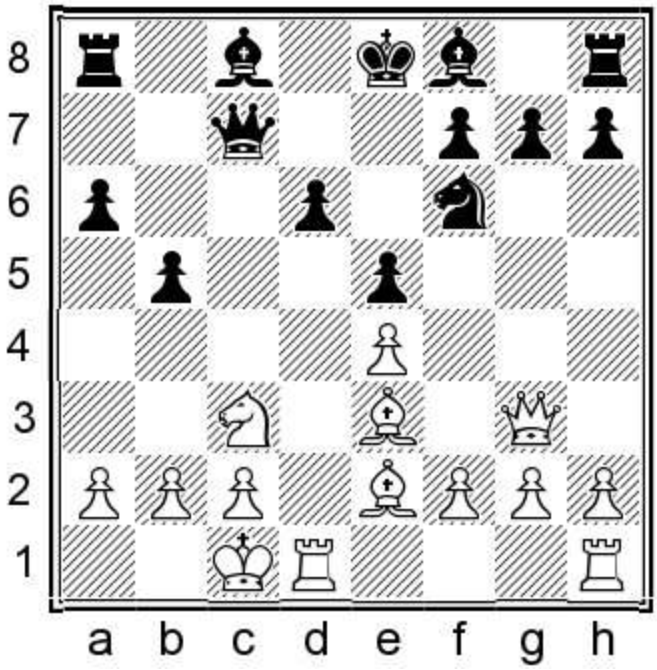
8...d6 has already been covered under variation B231.

8...Nxd4 has been played several times but the position after 9.Bxd4 has little independent significance. 9...e5 This has been the universal choice so far. (9...b5N can be met by 10.Qg3² with a typical plus for White) 10.Be3 d6 11.Qg3 We have transposed to the earlier variation B231, with the present position occurring on page 106.
8...Rb8!?
This quirky move has been tried by a few strong players.
9.Be2 d6
9...b5 10.Nxc6 dxc6 defeats the purpose of having the rook on b8, and 11.g4*f* gives White easy play.
9...Bb4 10.Nxc6 bxc6 occurred in Sethuraman – Fier, Fufeng 2017, when 11.Bg5!N would have given White better chances in a complex position.



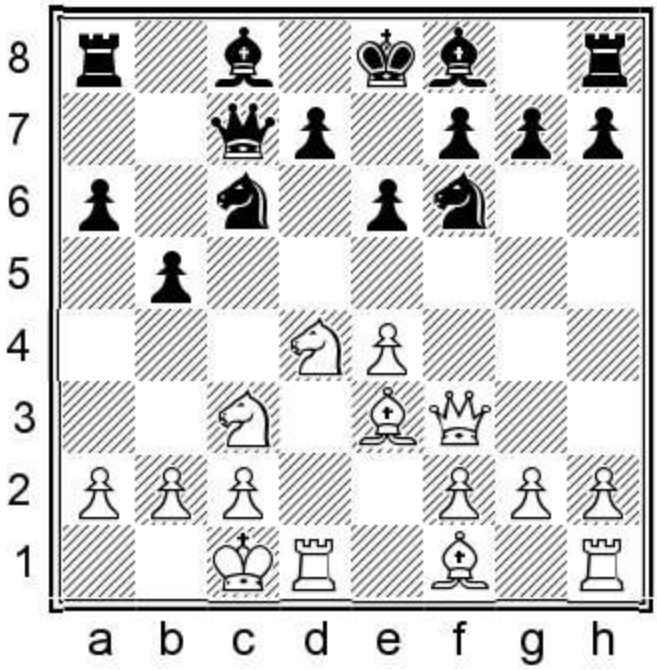

10.Qg3 Nxd4 11.Bxd4 e5 12.Ba7! Ra8 13.Be3 b5
This occurred in Nepomniachtchi – Adhiban, Doha (rapid) 2016. White's simplest path to an advantage is:

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14.a3N²
Intending Bg5, followed by conquering the d5-square.

B261) 8...b5?!

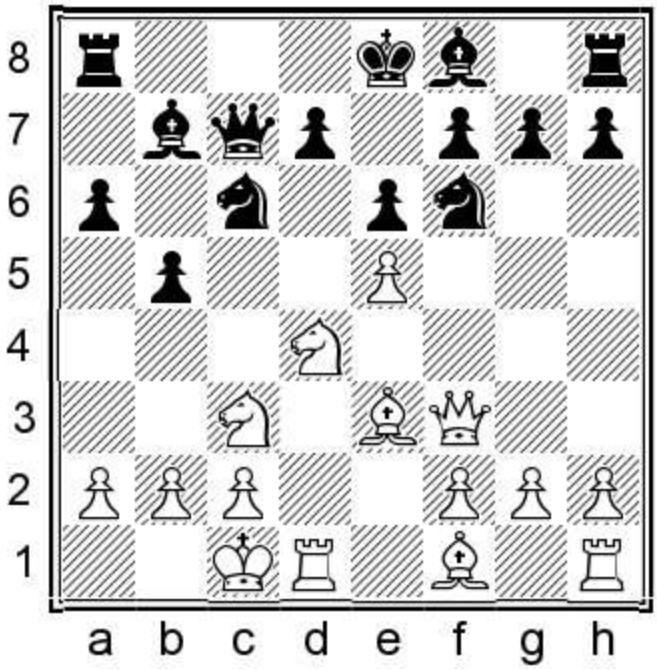


This move is poorly timed.

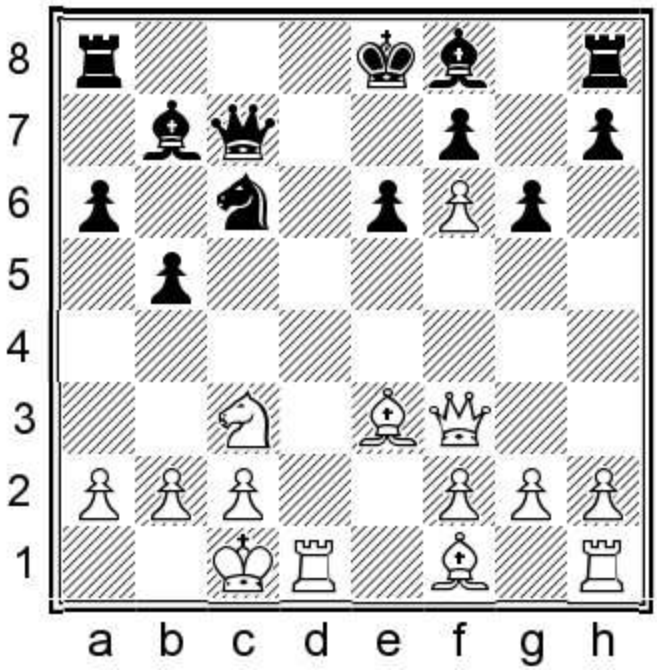
9.e5! b4
Retreating to g8 would hardly be a satisfactory way for Black to play the opening.

Black's only other attempt to make sense of his play is:
9...Bb7

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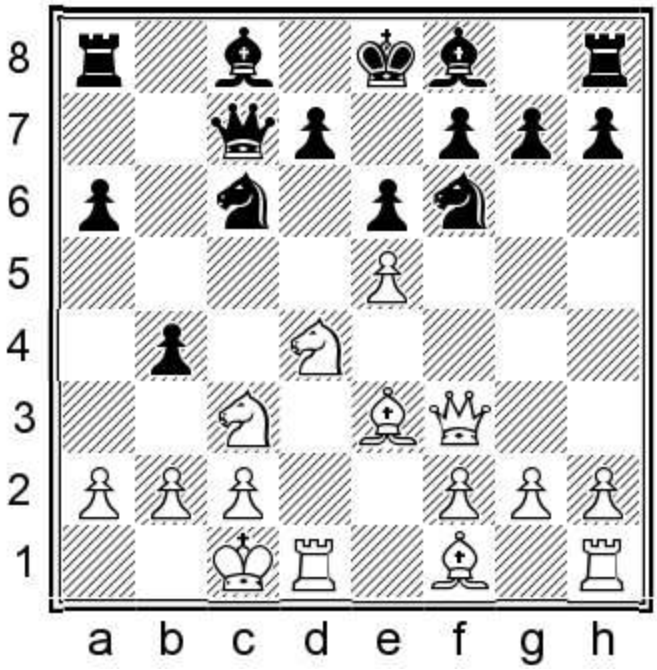


10.Nxe6
This leads to a clear advantage and has been played in all three games so far.
The computer likes 10.Ndxb5!?N 10...axb5 11.exf6 even more, so take your pick.
10...dxe6
10...fxe6 11.exf6 0-0-0 occurred in Ostrovskiy – Kolosowski, Lvov 2014, when 12.a4!N would have been strong.
11.exf6 g6
11...Rc8 was played in Vucinic – Skoulakis, Kavala 2014, when 12.Bxb5!N would have given White a huge advantage.



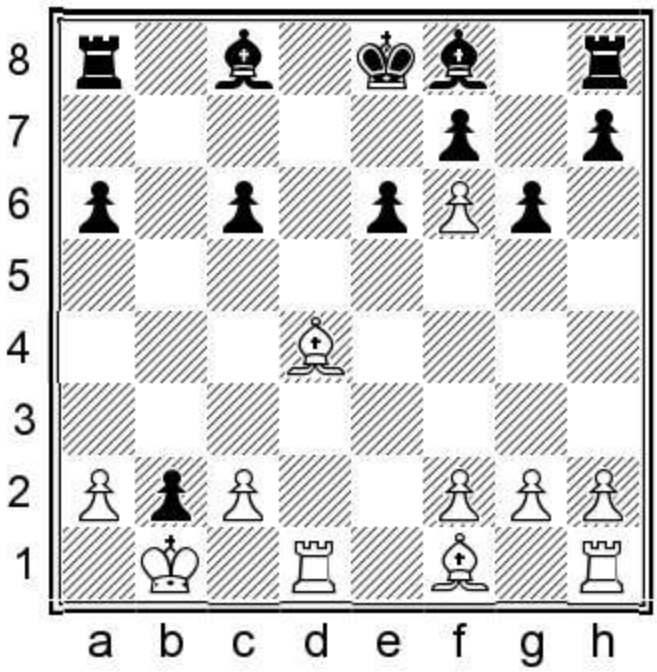
12.Qg3 Qa5 13.Kb1 h5
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Black's eventual victory in Adair – Klein, Internet (rapid) 2018, was nothing to do with the outcome of the

opening. Among other strong moves, White can simply continue:
14.Be2N+–
With an extra pawn and a safer king, White should be winning with best play.



10.exf6!
10.Ncb5!? is also good but the text move is most accurate. The next few moves are virtually forced.

10...bxc3 11.Nxc6 cxb2† 12.Kb1 Qxc6 13.Qxc6 dxc6 14.Bd4 g6
White's most accurate and energetic continuation is:



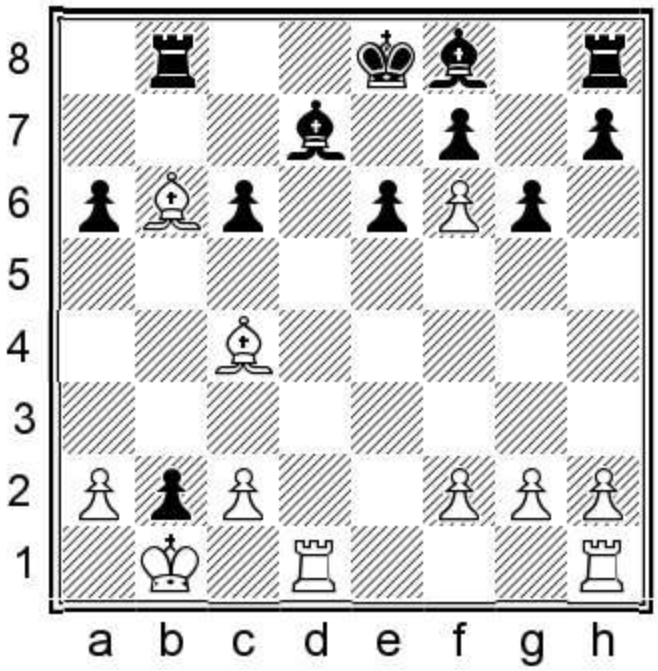
15.Bb6!N
The most incisive, although 15.h4 was also clearly better for White in Yegiazarian – Hayrapetyan, Yerevan

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2015.

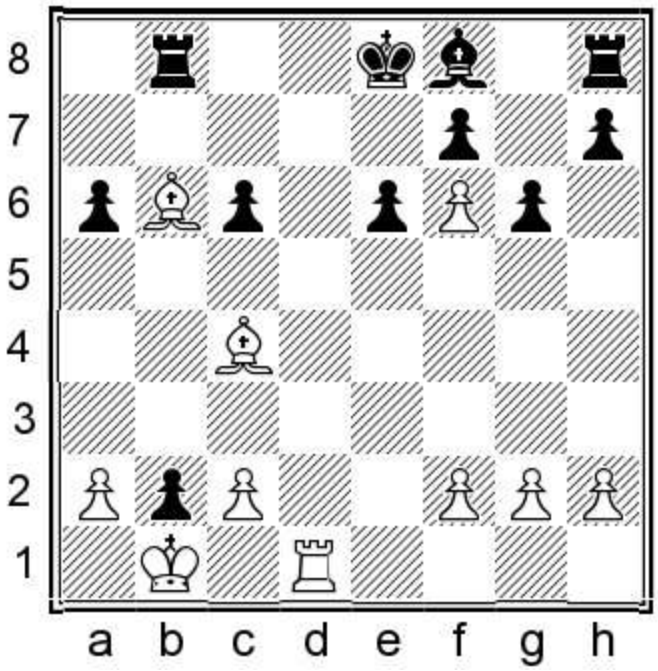
15...Bd7
15...Bb7 16.h4! prepares Rh3 or h4-h5, with a decisive advantage for White.

16.Bc4! Rb8
Otherwise White simply plays Rd3 and wins.



17.Rxd7!
Despite the reduced material, White can break through to the black king with a direct attack.

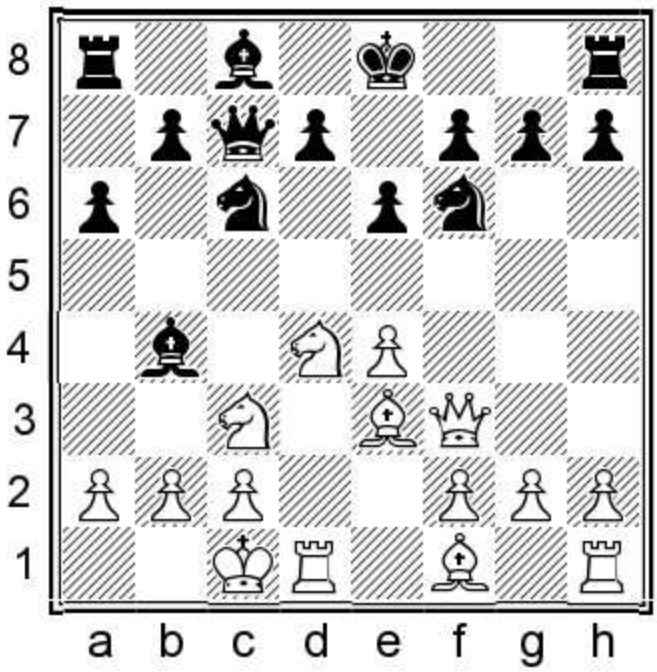
17...Kxd7 18.Rd1† Ke8



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19.Bc7! Rc8 20.Ba5+–
Followed by Bxa6, when Black will either be mated or suffer decisive material losses.

B262) 8...Bb4



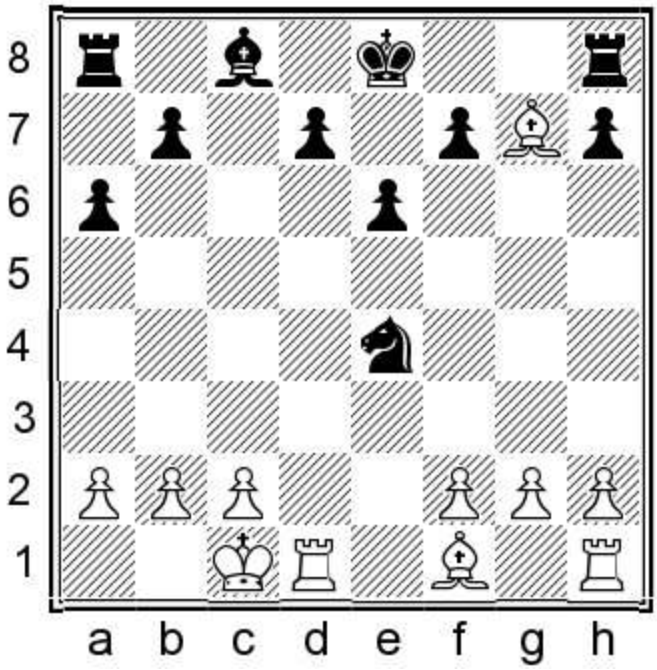
This has been played in lots of games but it has proven to be a risky choice.

9.Nxc6!
Forcing Black to make a difficult decision.

9...bxc6
This has been Black's most popular choice. It is not mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov, although I noticed that they do reach the same position via a different move order elsewhere. In any event, Kotronias reacted well when he encountered this move late in 2017, as shown in the note to Black's 10th move. Before we get to that, let's check Black's three other options:

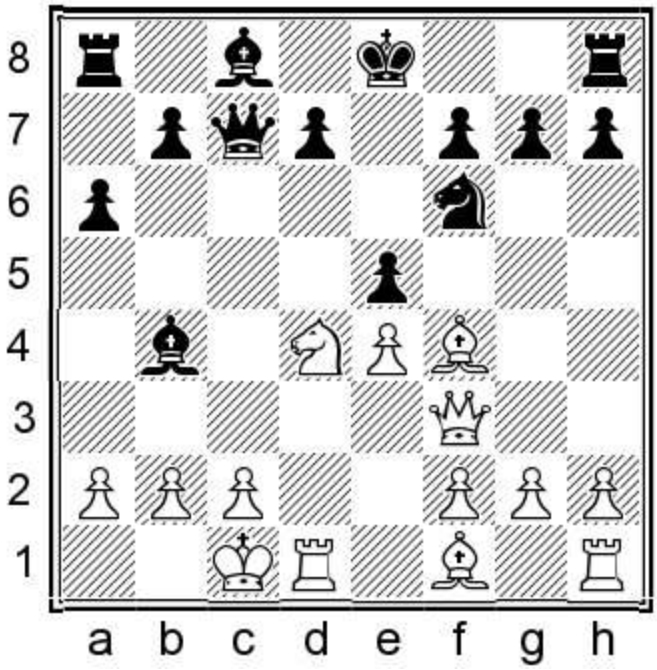
9...Qxc6 10.Bd4 Bxc3?! (10...b5 is better, although 11.Bd3² is pleasant for White) 11.Bxc3 Qxe4 12.Qxe4 Nxe4 13.Bxg7 is excellent for White, as his dark-squared bishop has great potential. A good example continued:

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13...Rg8 14.Bd4 d6 15.Bd3 f5 16.g4!± Potkin – Gutierrez Clares, Barcelona 2015.

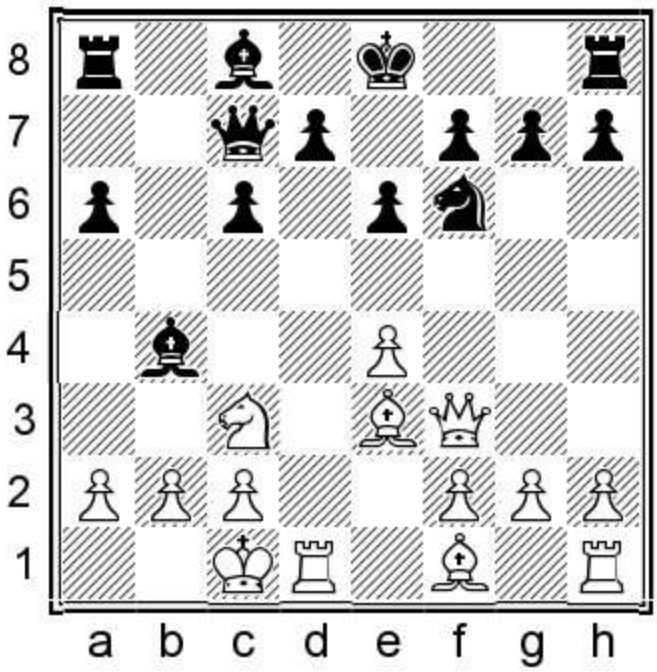
9...Bxc3 is strongly met by: 10.Nd4! Bb4 11.Bf4! e5



12.Bh6! Bf8 13.Nf5! Nxe4? (13...gxh6 14.Nd6† Bxd6 15.Qxf6 Rg8 16.Rxd6+–; 13...Rg8 14.Bg5±) 14.Bxg7 Bxg7 15.Nxg7† Kf8 This occurred in Hakobyan – Gokbulut, Yerevan 2017, when 16.Nf5!N+– would have been the most convincing of several winning moves.

9...dxc6 10.Bd4
10.Na4!?N 10...Nd7 11.Qg3 Qxg3 12.hxg3 b5 13.Nb6 Nxb6 14.Bxb6 is enough for a small, safe advantage, but White can play for more.
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10...Be7

10...e5? 11.Qg3 Ng4 12.f3 Qa5 13.Bg1 Bxc3 14.bxc3 Qa3† 15.Kd2 was winning for White in Antipov – Ameir, Abu Dhabi 2016.
11.e5 Nd5 12.Ne4 c5 13.Nd6† Bxd6 14.exd6 Qxd6 15.Bxg7 Rg8 16.Bf6±
White was much better in Colmenares – Joly, Monthey 2015, due to his powerful dark-squared bishop and safer king.

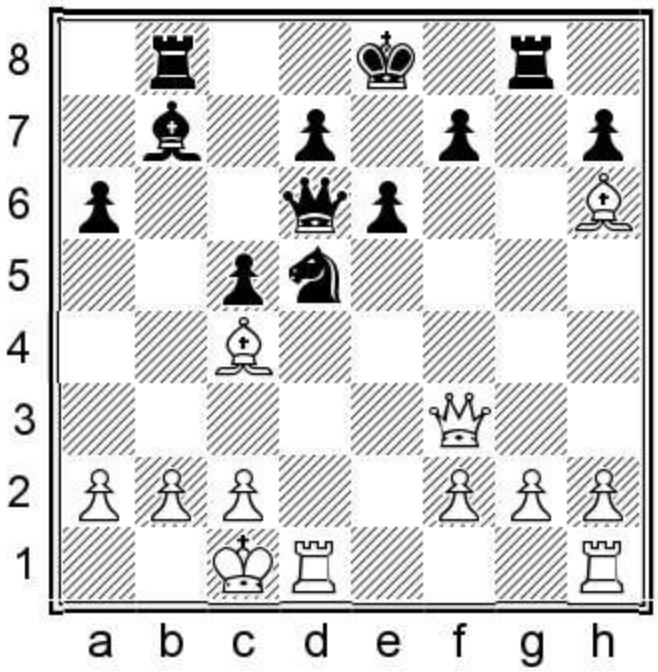


10.Bd4
White has a promising version of a thematic pawn structure, as the b4-bishop does nothing apart from blocking Black's play down the b-file.

10...d5
10...Bd6 is hardly satisfactory for Black. 11.Na4 Be5 12.Bxe5 Qxe5 13.Nb6 Rb8 14.Nc4 Qg5† was seen in Bakhmatsky – Volotovsky, Lvov 2017, when 15.Rd2N± would have been most accurate. Black has serious problems on the dark squares.

Kotronias's opponent continued: 10...Be7 11.e5 Nd5 12.Ne4 c5 13.Nd6† Bxd6 14.exd6 Qxd6 15.Bxg7 Rg8 16. Bh6 Rb8 17.Bc4 Bb7

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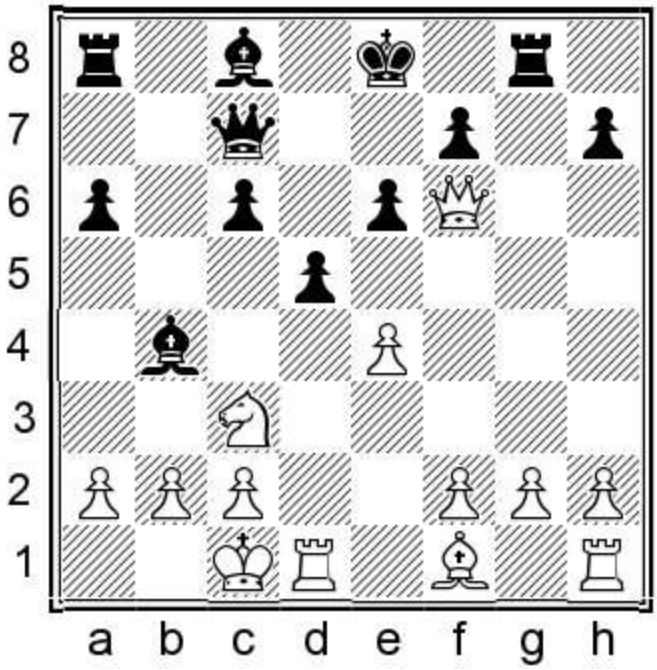


18.Bxd5!? This isn’t the computer’s top choice, but a good human move for a practical game. 18...Bxd5 19. Qc3² White had a lasting advantage due to his safer king in Kotronias – Munguntuul, London 2017.

11.Bxf6
11.Bd3!?N looks somewhat better for White but let’s stick with the more ambitious approach.
Kotronias and Semkov propose 11.exd5 cxd5 12.Bd3 and provide some analysis against 12...Be7, but 12...Bb7! is an improvement which was played in Grinberg – Antipov, Gibraltar 2018, after which I found nothing special for White.

11...gxf6 12.Qxf6 Rg8
White has won a pawn but Black has the makings of compensation, thanks to his unopposed dark-squared bishop, strong pawn centre and open b-file. The second player even went on to win in Staroske – Philippart, corr. 2009, and Kotronias and Semkov also caution against playing this way with White. However, the engine points out an excellent way to disrupt Black’s play.

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13.Qh4!N
Eyeing both the b4-bishop and the h7-pawn.

13...Rb8
13...Bxc3 14.bxc3 favours White.

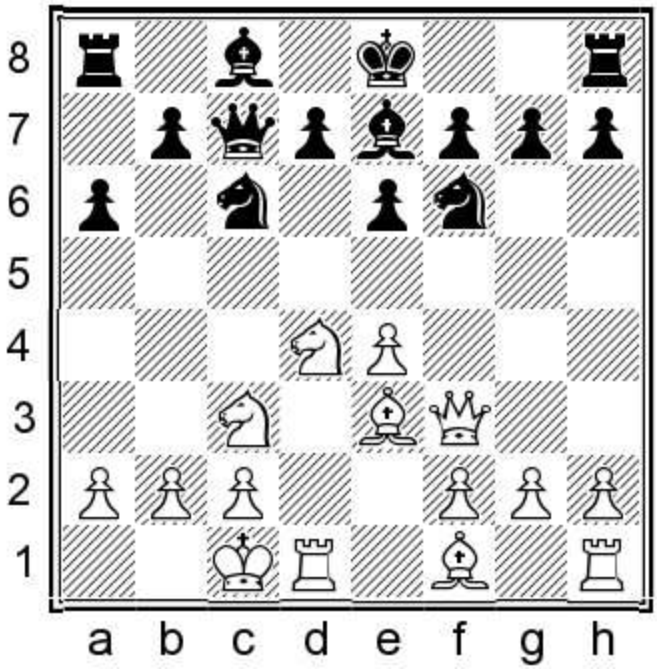
14.exd5! Bxc3
Black would love to play 14...cxd5 but 15.Bb5†!± reveals the tactical point of White's play.

14...exd5 keeps the dark-squared bishop but compromises Black's pawn structure and king safety. 15.g3!± is a strong move, preparing Bh3 followed by Rhe1(†), while also opening up the possibility of Qxh7 without allowing a troublesome check on f4.

15.bxc3 cxd5 16.Qd4
White keeps an extra pawn and his chances are clearly better. True, his king's shelter has been compromised, but Black has no serious threats and his own king is not entirely safe either.

B263) 8...Be7

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This has been Black’s most frequent choice overall, but it is not so popular among top players.

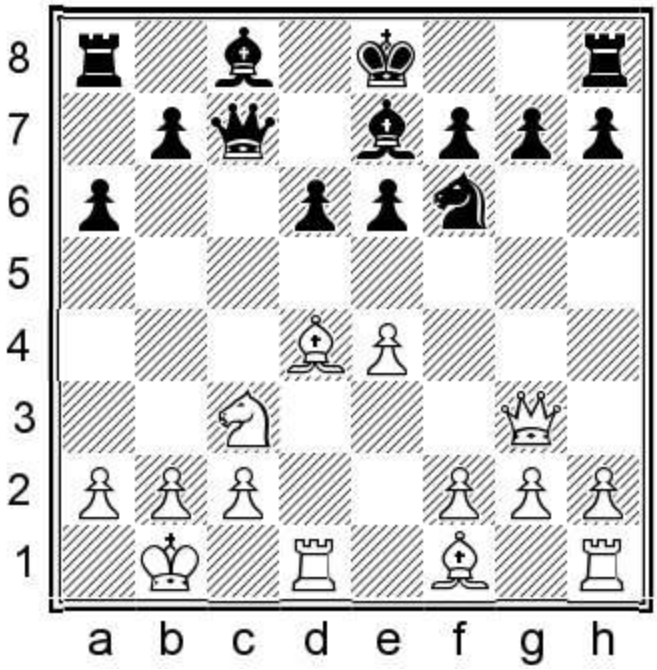
9.Kb1!
Kotronias and Semkov recommend this move, and I also believe it to be White’s most promising idea. A high-quality waiting move is exactly what is needed, since each of Black’s plausible replies comes with a drawback of some kind.

I also spent some time on the more popular 9.Be2, but was not satisfied after 9...0-0 10.Qg3 d6! 11.h4!? Kh8!, when White was unable to prove anything in Cheparinov – Zeng, China 2017.

9...0-0
This is the typical follow-up to Black’s last move. Certainly 9...b5? would be inadvisable in view of 10.e5. Incidentally, Black’s position is worse here than after 8...b5 9.e5, since here he cannot even muddy the waters with ...b4 or ...Bb7, as the presence of the bishop on e7 means that exf6 will attack another piece.

9...Nxd4 10.Bxd4 d6 11.Qg3 gives White easy play, for instance:

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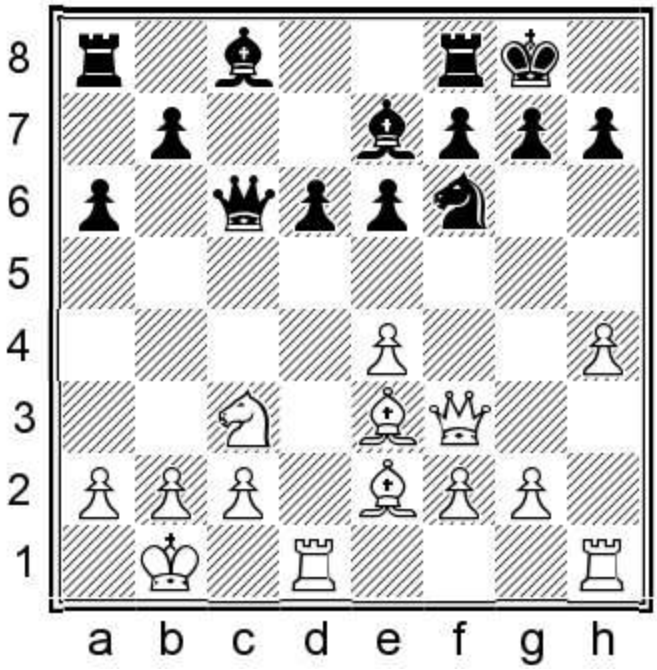


11...Bd7!?N This seems like the best try but it is not enough to solve Black's problems. (11...Nh5 occurred in Vetoshko – Zpevak, Slovakia 2017, when 12.Qe3N 12...Nf6 13.e5 would have been excellent for White) 12.e5 (12.Qxg7? Rg8 13.Qh6 e5! enables Black to force a draw if he wants it: 14.Be3 Rg6 15.Qh4 Rg4 16.Qh6 Rg6=) 12...dxe5 13.Bxe5*ƒ* White has excellent attacking chances.

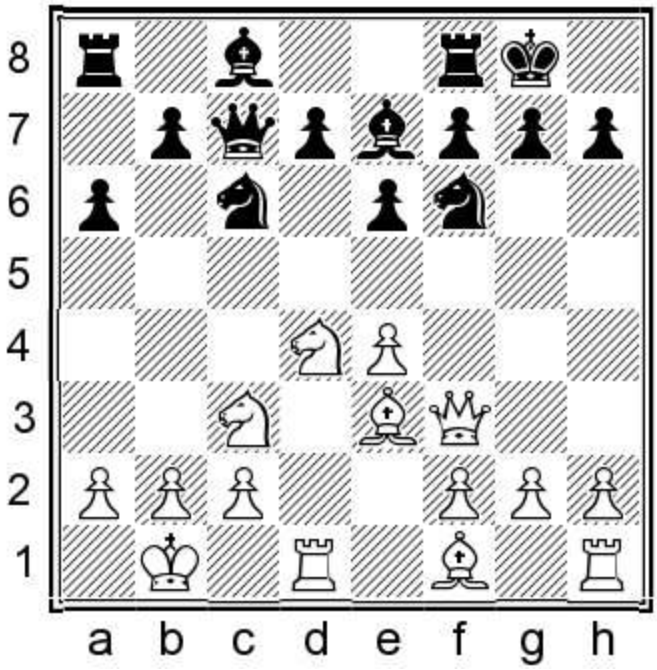
9...Ne5 also causes Black more harm than good: 10.Qg3 Nh5 (10...d6 11.f4 is great for White after 11...Ng6 12. Be2 or 11...Nc4? 12.Bxc4 Qxc4 13.e5 Nh5 14.Qf3 g6 15.g4 Ng7 16.Ne4+–) 11.Qh3 Nf6 (11...g6 is hardly an improvement after 12.f4,) 12.f4 Neg4 13.e5 Nxe3 14.Qxe3 Ng4 15.Qg3 f5 16.h3+– Gascon del Nogal – Harper, Port of Spain 2016.

Finally, 9...d6 has been played a few times but White gets easy play after: 10.Nxc6! This exchange is perfectly timed, since Black can no longer recapture with the d-pawn. 10...Qxc6 (10...bxc6 11.g4 gives White easy attacking play, while the b2-pawn is easy enough to defend) 11.Be2 0-0 12.h4

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12...e5 The best try, otherwise Black would have to reckon on plans such as h5-h6, intending to meet ...g6 with Bg5. However, now White can take over the d5-square while still keeping some attacking chances. 13.Bg5 Re8 14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.Nd5 Bd8 16.g4 Be6 17.g5 White was clearly better in Sueess – Leemans, corr. 2014.

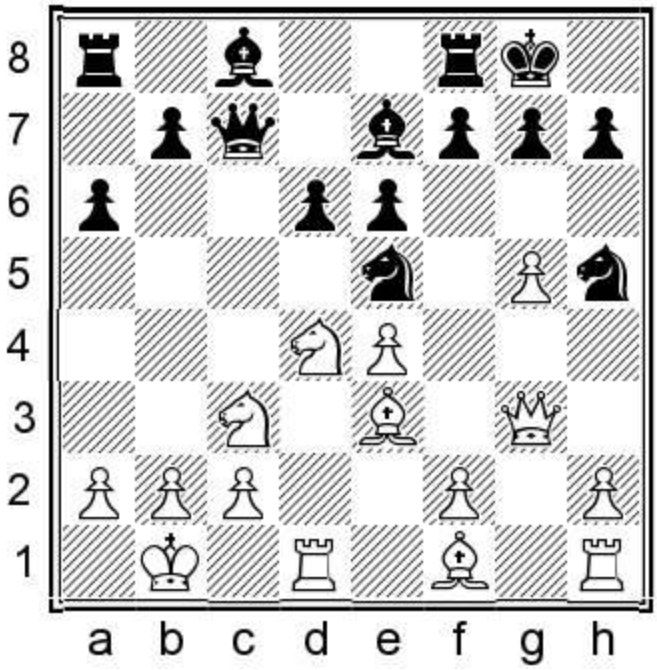


10.g4!
Once again, we have a way to expose the downside of the move chosen by Black. On the previous turn, this move would have amounted to no more than an unclear pawn sacrifice in view of the reply ...Ne5. However, with the king already on g8, it would be too risky for Black to grab the g4-pawn.

10...d6
I checked four other possibilities:

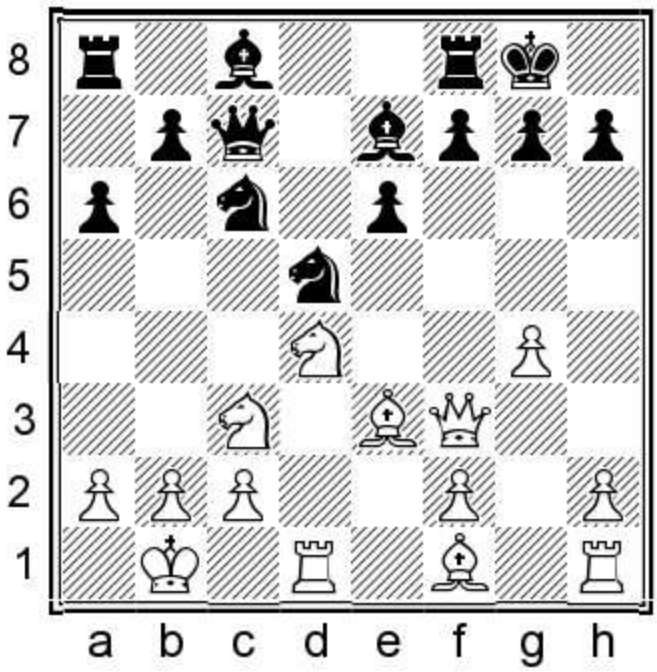
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10...Ne5?! 11.Qg3 d6 (11...Nfxg4? 12.Rg1 g6 13.Bc1 gives White massive attacking chances) 12.g5 Nh5 In Sekar – Mishra, Puchong 2017, the most accurate continuation would have been:



13.Qh4N 13...g6 14.Be2 Ng7 15.f4 Nc6 16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.Qg3 Followed by h4-h5, with a huge attack.

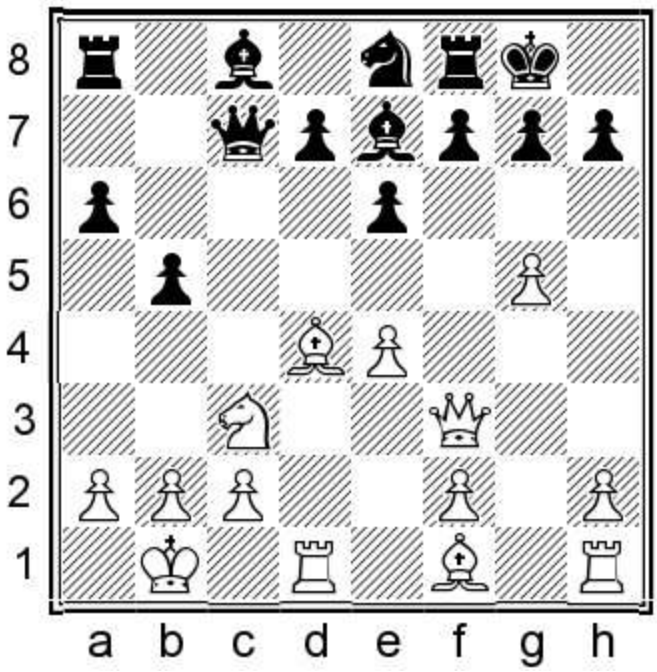
10...d5 avoids a mating attack but saddles Black with a permanently weak central pawn: 11.exd5 Nxd5N (11... Ne5 12.Qg3 Bd6 occurred in A. Smirnov – Ly, Melbourne 2014, when 13.Bf4N 13...exd5 14.h3± is great for White, as Kotronias and Semkov point out)



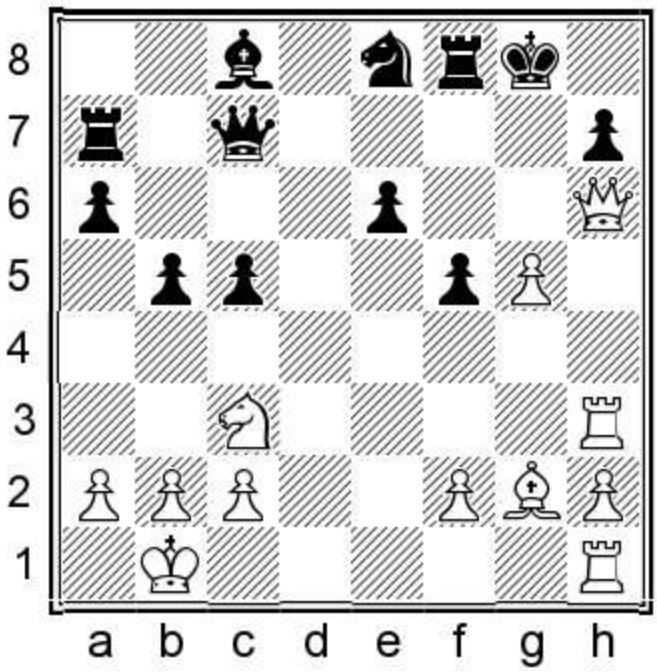
12.Nxd5 exd5 13.Bg2²/± The IQP is a long-term target, and White still has some attacking ideas such as Nf5 or advancing his g- and h-pawns.

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10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 12.g5 Ne8 occurred in Kreuzholz – Uksini, Germany 2016, when White could have obtained a huge attack as follows:



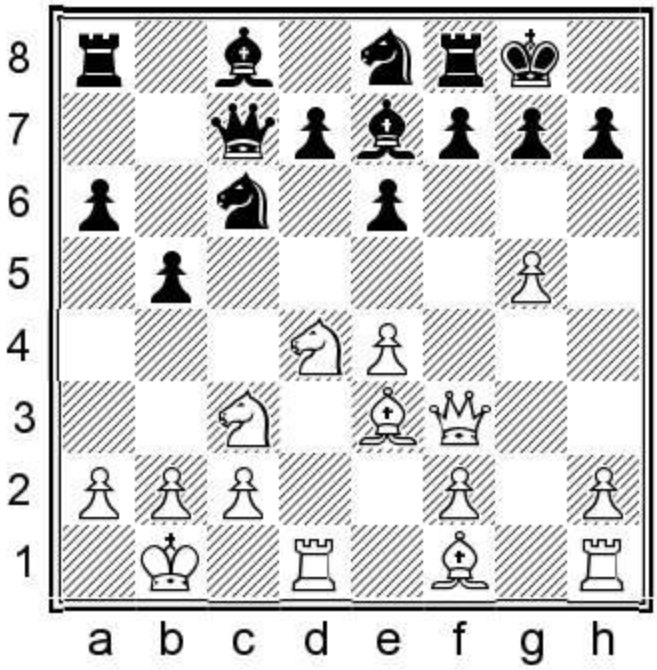
13.Qh5!N 13...g6 14.Qh6 Bc5 15.Rd3 f5 (15...Bxd4? 16.Rh3 and the game is over) 16.Rh3 d6 Black avoids being mated but his position falls apart after: 17.Bxc5 dxc5 18.exf5 gxf5 19.Bg2 Ra7



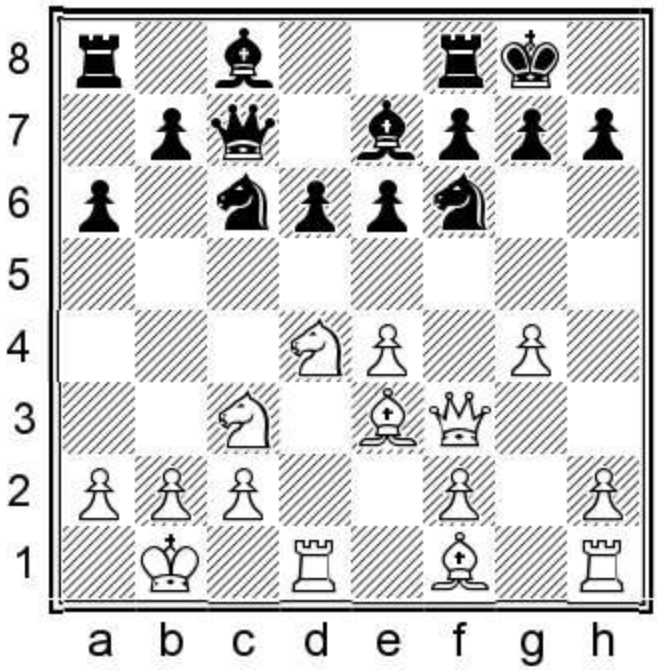
20.Nd5! Qg7 21.Nb6 Nd6 22.Nxc8 Qxh6 23.Rxh6 Rxc8 24.Rxe6+–

A final possibility is:
10...b5 11.g5 Ne8
Rather like the line above, this permits White to build a devastating attack.

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12.Nxc6 Qxc6 13.Bd3 f5
13...b4 occurred in Juhasz – Cech, Banska Stiavnica 2017, when White overlooked the crushing reply: 14.Nd5! exd5 15.exd5 Qb7 16.Qe4 g6 17.Qxe7+–
13...Bb7 14.Qh3 g6 15.Rhg1, is also extremely dangerous for Black.
14.Qh3 g6?
14...d5N is the only chance, although after 15.exd5 exd5 16.Ne2± it will be tough for Black to survive.
15.exf5 exf5 16.Be2 Bb7 17.Nd5 Bd8 18.Bf3 Qc8 19.Bd4+–
Praneeth – Tarini, Noida 2016.



11.Nxc6!
Once again, this exchange is well timed in response to ...d6. One advantage is that Black no longer has the option of recapturing with the d-pawn; another is that, after ...bxc6, the ...d5 advance will involve the loss of a

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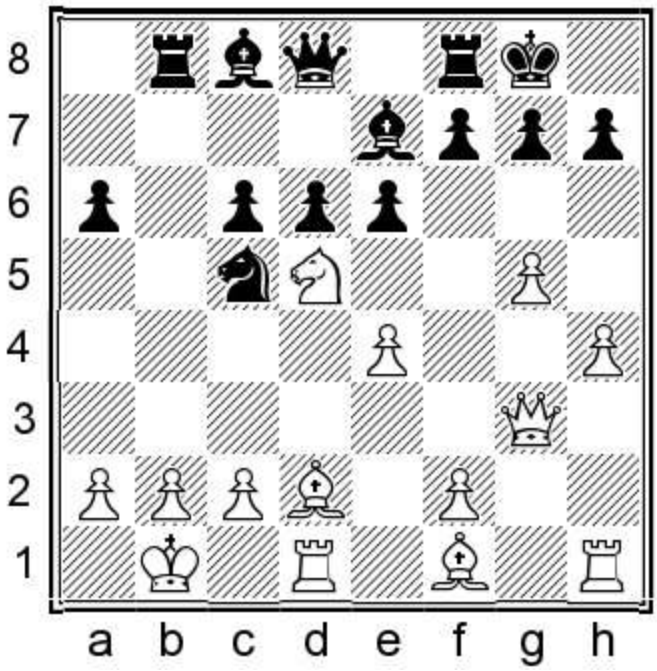
tempo.

11...bxc6 12.g5 Nd7
12...Ne8 13.h4 is hardly an improvement for Black.

13.Qg3 Rb8
13...a5 14.h4 Ba6 15.Bxa6 Rxa6 16.h5 Qb7 17.g6 Bf6 18.Bg5!+– is a nice line mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov.

14.h4 Qa5 15.Bd2 Nc5?
15...Qb6N is necessary, though after 16.b3 Nc5 17.h5± White is clearly ahead in the attacking race.

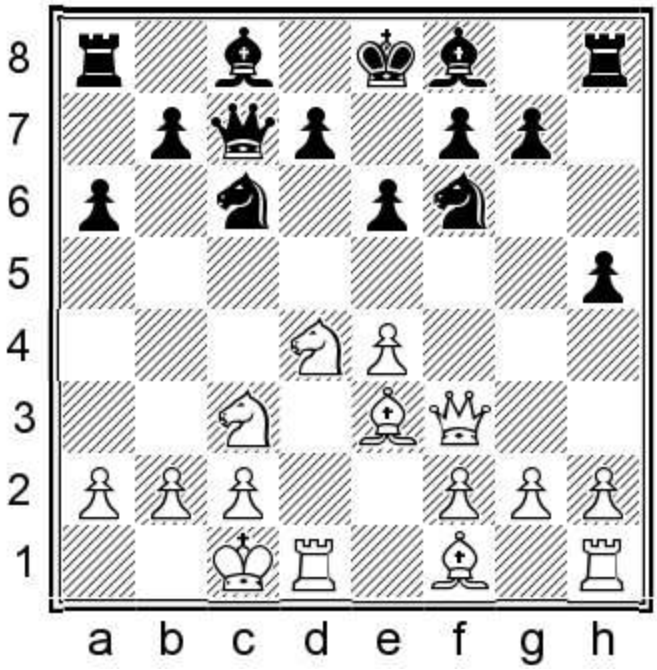
16.Nd5 Qd8
In Klek – Schleining, Dresden 2014, White missed the clearest winning line:




17.Ba5!N 17...Qxa5 18.Nxe7† Kh8 19.Nxc6 Rxb2† 20.Kxb2 Qb6† 21.Kc1 Nxe4 22.Qd3 Qxc6 23.Bg2+–
With a decisive material advantage.

B264) 8...h5!?

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This relatively rare move has been tried by several strong players, and I would not be surprised if it becomes more popular. Black's idea is to restrain our kingside play while angling for an improved version of variation B24, not least because the dangerous piece sacrifice from that line is not available to us here.

9.Nxc6
Ruling out any ...Ne5 ideas seems logical to me.

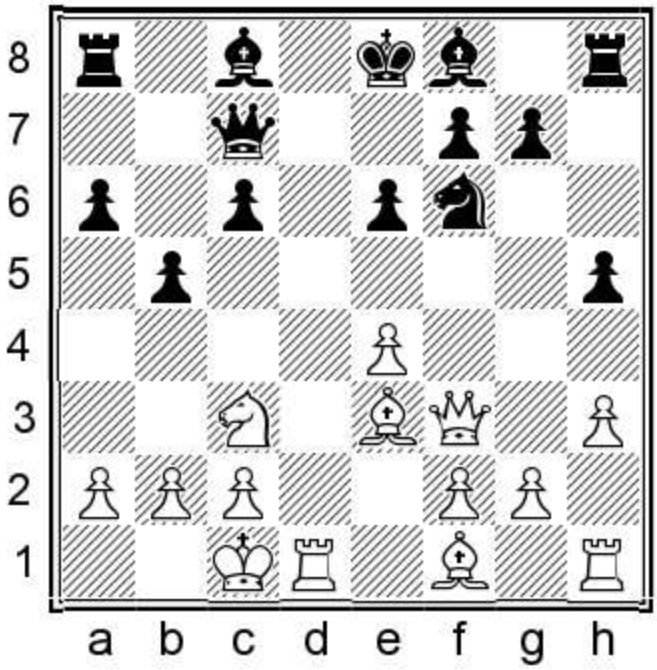
9.Be2 Ne5 10.Qh3 b5 11.f4 Nc4 would justify Black's concept, as after 12.Bxc4 Qxc4 White has lost a tempo by moving his light-squared bishop twice.

9...dxc6
9...bxc6 is less challenging, for instance: 10.Bc4 (10.Be2 also looks promising) 10...d6 11.Bg5 Be7 This was Nyysti – Meskovs, Stockholm 2016, when 12.Rhe1N² would have left White superbly centralized. Any threats along the b-file can easily be neutralized, and it will be hard for Black to connect his rooks because castling carries obvious risks.

10.h3!
I checked a few other ideas but found this to be the most promising. The idea is shown in the note below.

10...b5
Black would like to take some space in the centre with 10...e5?! but this currently allows 11.Na4!, when Black cannot cover the b6-square with 11...Nd7?? on account of 12.Bc4, which simply wins. Therefore he must either allow an annoying invasion on b6, or permanently weaken the d5-square with 11...c5. Of course, none of that would matter if Black could win an exchange with 11...Bg4, which explains why our previous move was important.

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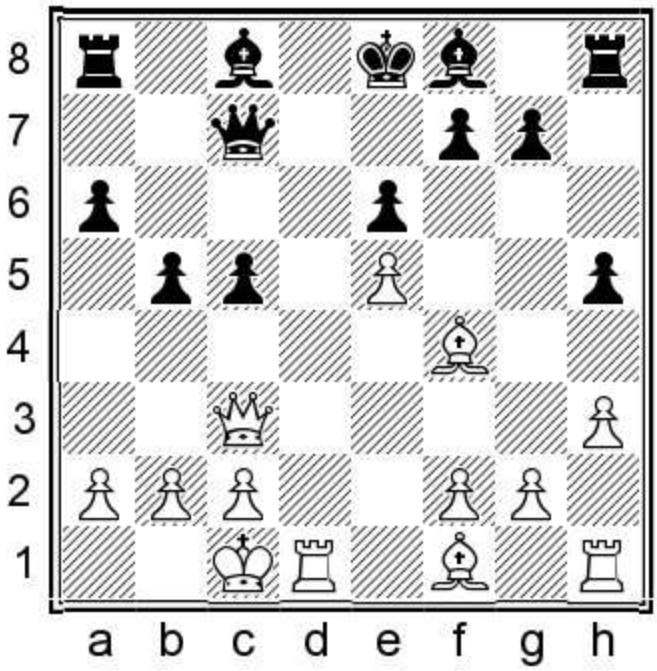


11.e5!
If Black had time to follow up with ...e5, he would have no problems.

11...Nd5 12.Bf4
White does not mind trading his bishop for the black knight, as the c3-knight could then head for d6.

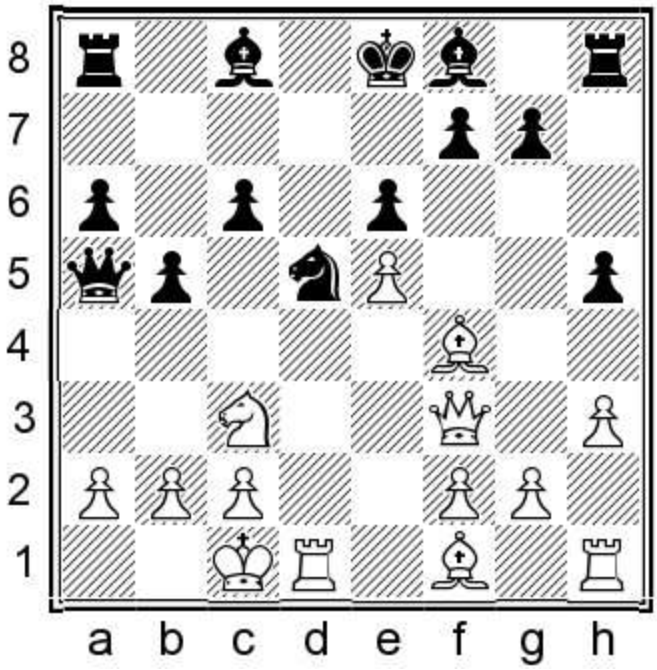
12...Qa5!
Black has to take care not to allow White to conquer the d6-square.

12...Bb7? 13.Ne4 would be great for White.
Another important point, mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov, occurs after: 12...Nxc3? 13.Qxc3 c5



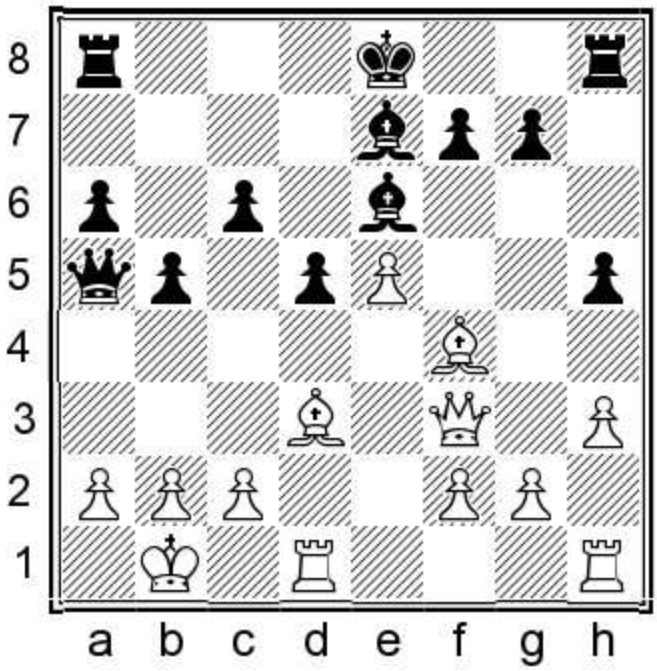
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14.Be2 Bb7 15.Rd6! Black is in big trouble, as the rook on d6 dominates the game and it is obvious that White will get more than enough compensation in the event that Black captures it.



13.Bd3
White cannot put his knight on e4 with the a2-pawn hanging, so he may as well develop another piece. So far, this position has occurred in two games, both of which took place towards the end of 2017.

13...b4
13...Be7 was the more recent try. 14.Nxd5 (14.g4!?N could also be considered) 14...exd5 15.Kb1 Be6 In Santos Latasa – Shankland, Sitges 2017, White's best continuation would have been:

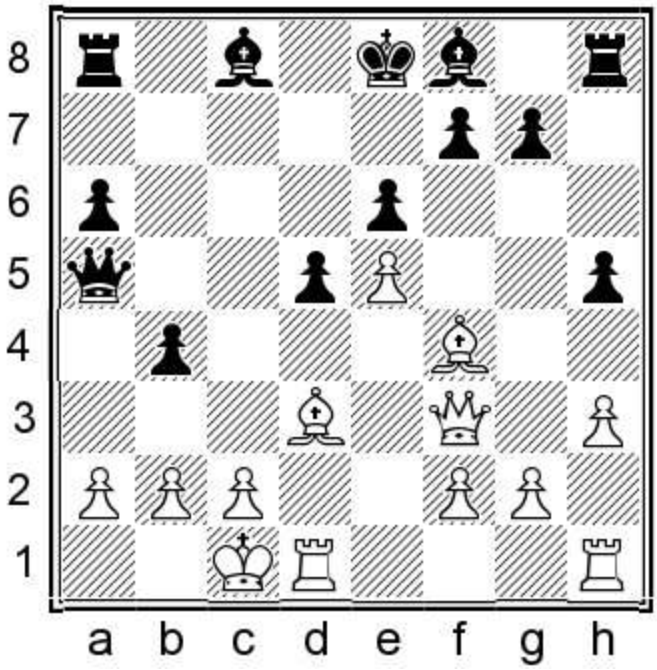


16.g4!N 16...g6 (16...hxg4 17.hxg4 0-0-0 18.Bf5 gives White a nice initiative) 17.Bd2 Qb6 18.Qg3 Black's po-

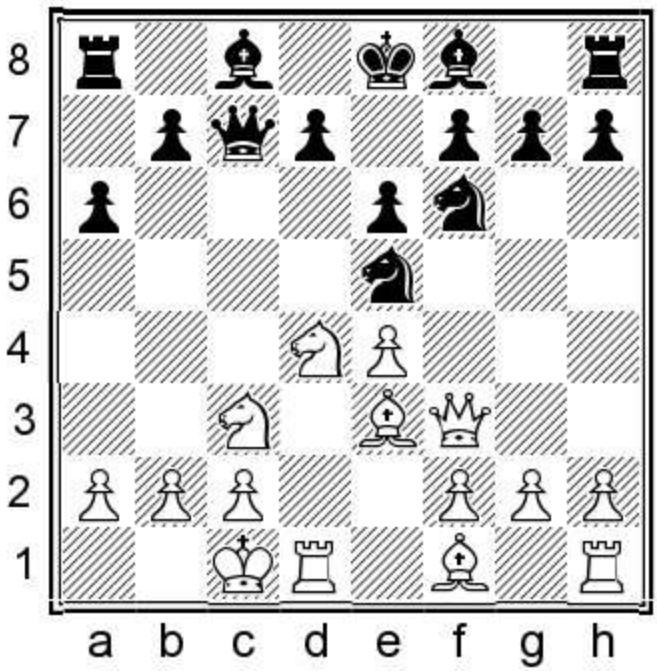
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sition remains playable but he is under some pressure, as f2-f4-f5 is a significant idea.

14.Nxd5 cxd5



15.Kb1 Bd7 16.g4*f*
This was Ragger – Rasmussen, Heraklio 2017. Once again, Black's position is playable but he faces the more difficult decisions, such as whether or not to simplify the kingside at the expense of the h-file. Meanwhile White's king is safe and his position is generally easier to handle.
B265) 8...Ne5



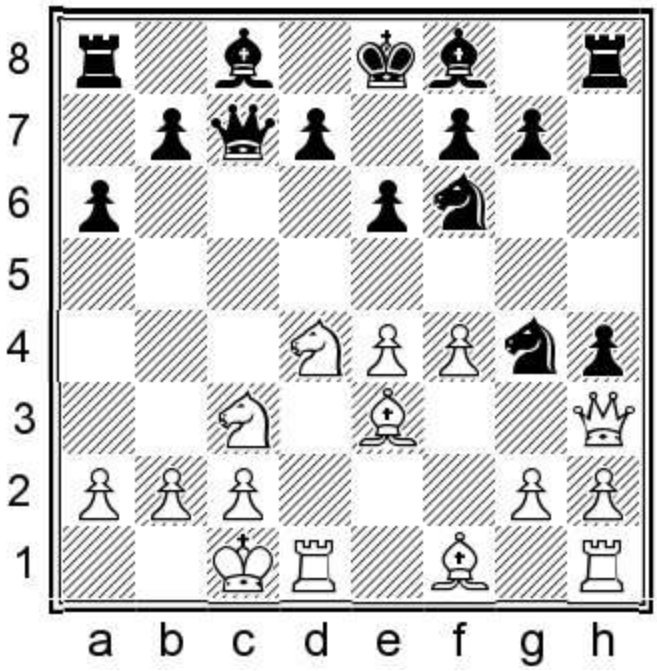
This is a thematic choice, fully in the spirit of the Taimanov. It has been a frequent choice among strong grandmasters, and may lead to some of the most complicated positions in the chapter.

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9.Qg3 b5
This is the only decent move – although straight away, it opens up possibilities of different piece sacrifices on b5.

9...d6? 10.f4 Neg4 11.Bg1± was rotten for Black in Holtman – Obsivac, Vysna Boca 2017.

9...h5? has been played in a number of games. For some reason, only one player responded in the best way: 10.f4! h4?! (10...Neg4N is the lesser evil, although 11.e5 Nxe3 12.Qxe3 Ng4 13.Qf3± still leaves Black in trouble) 11.Qh3 Neg4 Szyszylo – Klekowski, Katowice 2017.



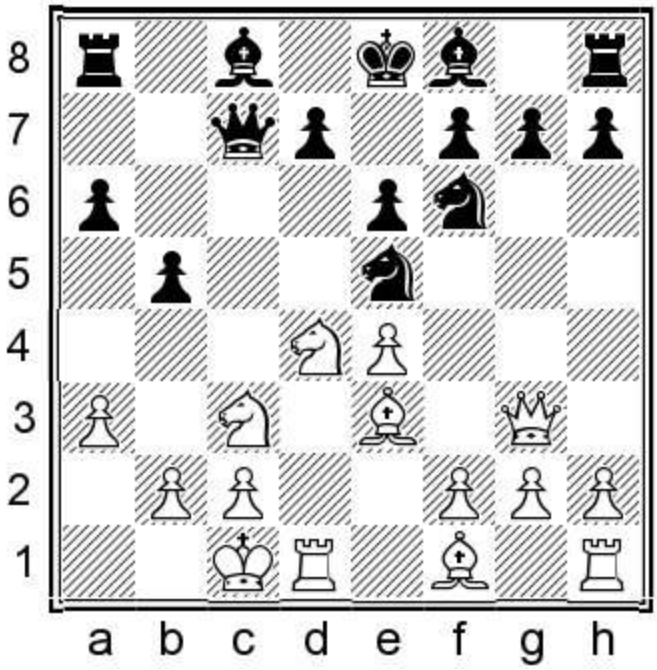

12.e5!N 12...Nxe3 13.Qxe3 Ng4 14.Qf3 Nh6 15.g4 White's advantage is close to winning.

Given the complexity and theoretical importance of this variation, I decided to cover two options for White: B2651) 10.a3!? and B2652) 10.f4.

10.Ndxb5!? is playable and 10.Bxb5!? leads to fascinating complications, but both moves have been extensively analysed and ultimately neutralized thanks to computers. It may still be possible to win some games by playing in this way, but I prefer to focus on other ideas.

B2651) 10.a3!?

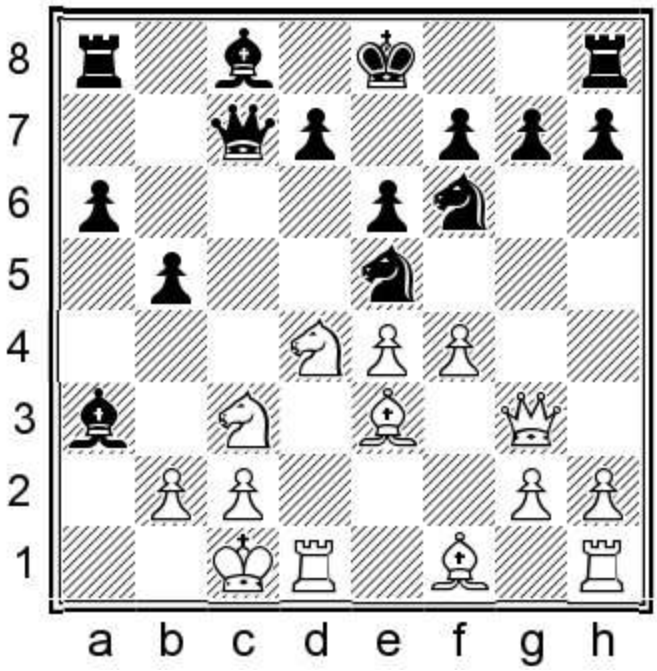
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This quiet-looking move is surprisingly tricky. At the time of writing it has only been played in four games, none of which featured the most accurate continuation. Thus, the great majority of the following analysis is original.

10...Bb7
This is surely Black's best reply.

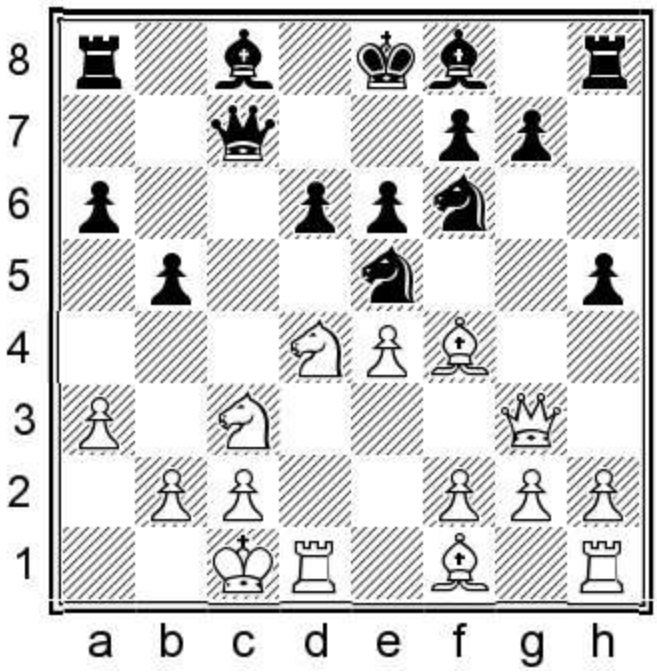
10...Be7? is weak: 11.f4 Bxa3 (I also checked 11...Neg4N 12.Bg1 e5 13.Nf5 exf4 14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.Qxg4 Nf6 16.Qxg7 Rg8 17.Qh6+– when Black's position is a wreck)



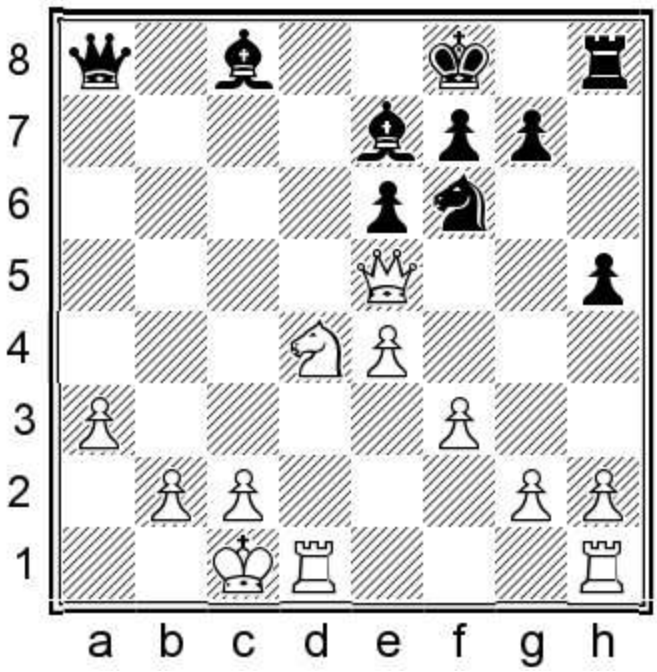
This was Peng – Rahul, Saint Louis 2017, when 12.Bd2!N+– would have refuted Black's play, as he is left with too many pieces hanging.

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10...h5?! was the choice of a strong GM in Borisek – Ribli, Slovenia 2016, but White missed a chance to cause serious problems with: 11.Bf4!N 11...d6

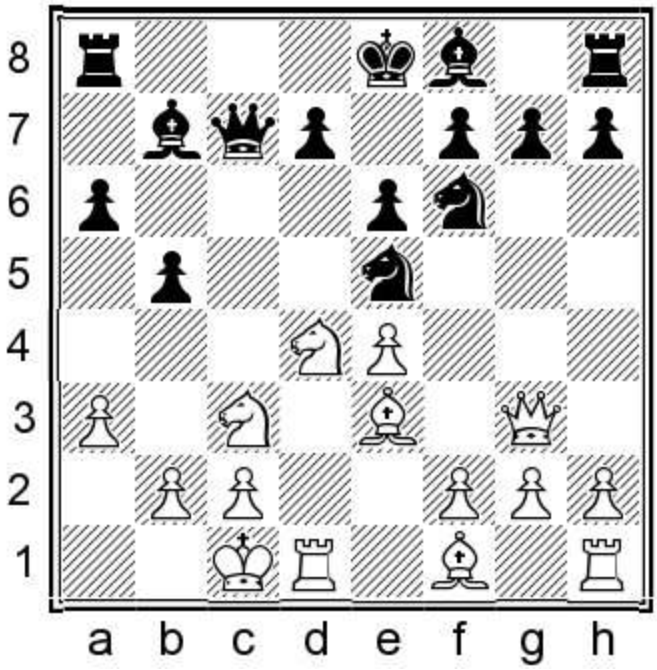


12.Bxb5†!†! axb5 13.Bxe5! dxe5 14.Ncxb5 Qb7 (14...Qb8? 15.Nc6+–) 15.Qxe5 Be7 16.Nc7† Kf8 17.Nxa8 Qxa8 18.f3±

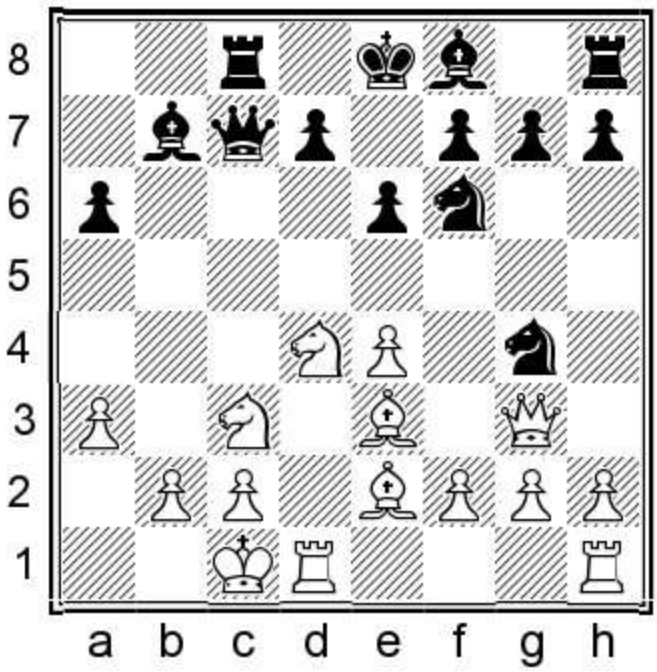


With a rook and three passed pawns versus two bishops, White is the clear favourite. Incidentally, this line illustrates one of the hidden points behind White's 10th move: the possibility of sacrificing on b5 under improved conditions.

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11.f3!N
11.Bxb5 has led to a couple of victories for White, but 11...Rc8!N is a significant improvement. (11...Bxa3 12. Bf4 Bd6 13.Nxe6 fxe6 14.Rxd6 Qxd6 15.Bxe5± was great for White in Admiraal – Leenhouts, Belgium 2017) 12.Be2 Neg4! Black has plenty of counterplay, as demonstrated in the following illustrative line:



13.Bf4 e5 14.Bxg4 exf4 15.Qh3 Bxa3! 16.Nd5 Bxb2† 17.Kxb2 Bxd5 18.exd5 0-0© Black has ample compensation for the piece due to White's exposed king.

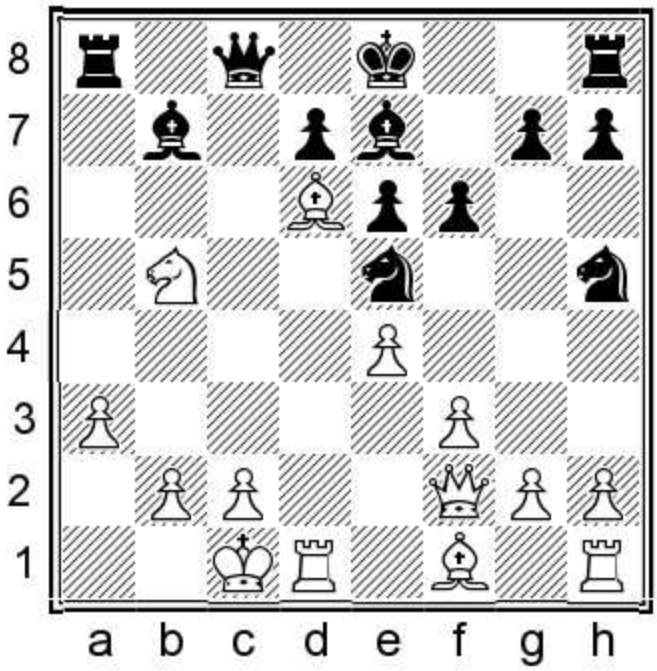
The text move is my improvement. I cannot promise it leads to an advantage against best play, but it certainly offers an interesting game while putting a few landmines in Black's path.

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11...Rc8

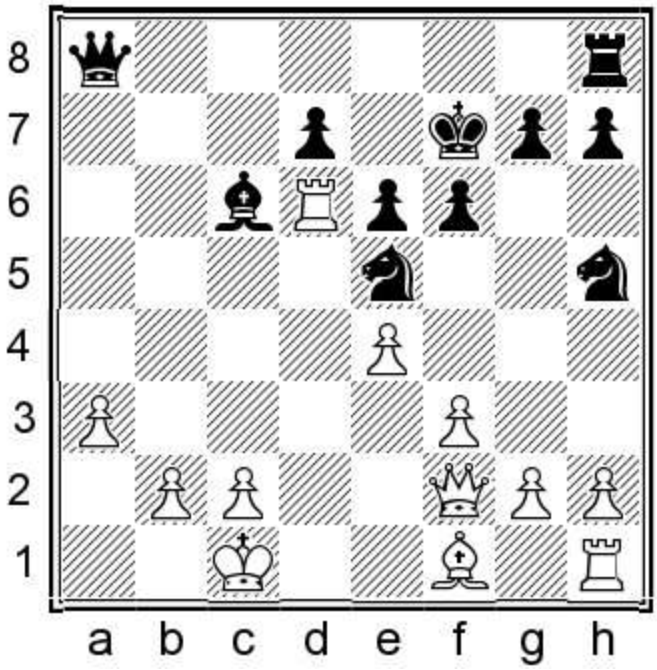
This seems best. I considered two other moves:

11...Be7 12.Ndxb5!
A nice example of the delayed piece sac on b5.
12.Qxg7? Rg8 13.Qh6 Rg6 14.Qh3 Bxa3µ is the point behind Black's last move.
12...axb5 13.Nxb5 Qb8 14.Bb6
The main threat is Bc7, winning the knight on e5. A secondary idea is to check on c7 and pick up the rook on a8. Black's best defence is:
14...Nh5 15.Qf2 f6
15...Bc6 16.Nc7† Kf8 17.Nxa8 Qxa8 18.Bc7± is excellent for White.
16.Bc7! Qc8 17.Bd6
Black still has no good way to avoid the check on c7, so it is worth rerouting the bishop to d6.



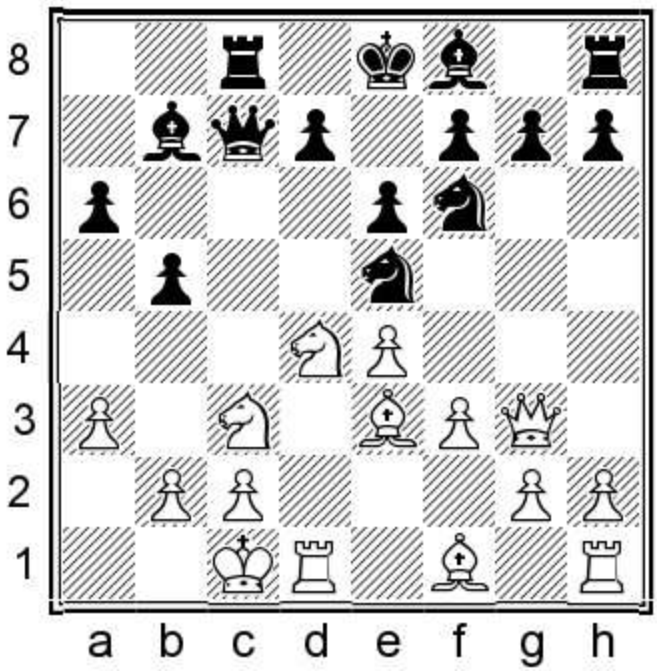

17...Bc6
17...Kf7?! runs into 18.f4 Nc4 19.Bxe7 Kxe7 20.Bxc4 Qxc4 21.Nd6 Qc7 22.Nxb7± intending 22...Qxb7 23. Qc5†.
18.Nc7† Kf7 19.Nxa8 Bxd6 20.Rxd6 Qxa8

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21.f4! Nxf4! 22.Qxf4 Bxe4 23.Ba6!?[2]
White keeps the better chances in this weird computer line, the point of the last move being to prevent ...Rc8.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that 11...Nh5 is playable. In that case, any of 12.Qe1, 12.Qf2 and 12.Qg5 would be reasonable. I will not go into further detail, as it seems more principled for Black to delay misplacing his knight until he has run out of other useful ideas, as happens in the main line below.

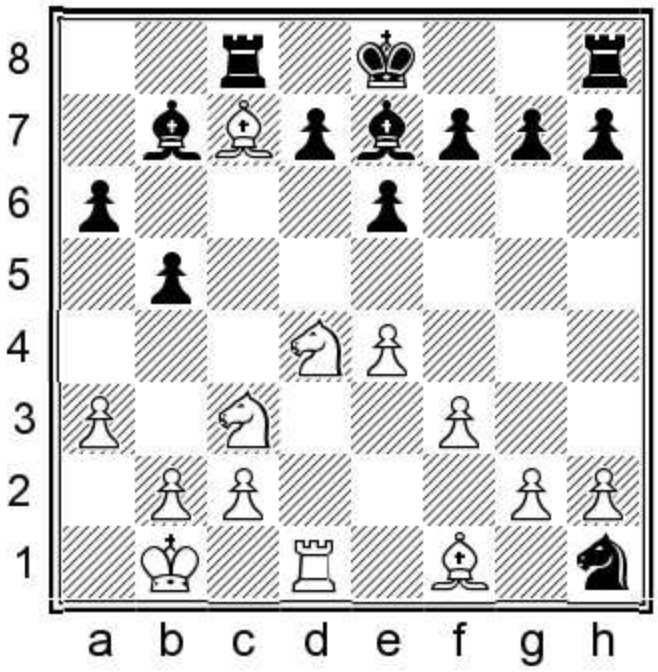


12.Kb1!
It is important to nullify the threat of ...Bxa3, which can be refuted in more than one way after the king move. It may seem as if White is playing rather slowly; indeed, moves like a2-a3, f2-f3 and Kb1 are not exactly setting the board alight. Nevertheless, Black still has to figure out a way to complete development and connect his rooks.

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12...Nh5
I doubt that Black has anything better.

12...Be7? is an attempt at a tactical solution which comes unstuck after: 13.Bf4! (13.Qxg7? Rg8 14.Qh6 Rg6 15.Qh3 Bxa3 would justify Black's idea) 13...Nh5 (13...d6 14.Qxg7 Rg8 15.Qh6 Rg6 16.Qh3± leaves White with a safe extra pawn; having provoked ...d6, he no longer has to worry about ...Bxa3) 14.Bxe5 Nxg3 15.Bxc7 Nxh1

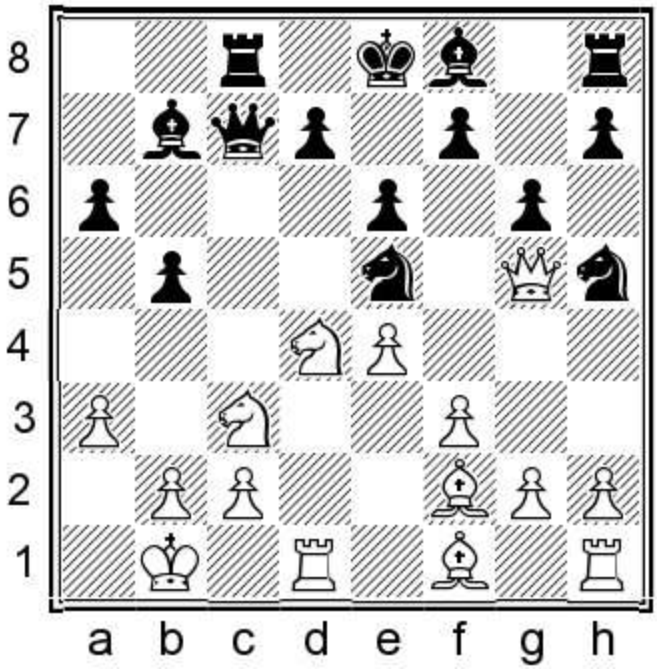



16.Bb6 Rb8 17.Nb3! Bxe4 18.Ba7! Ra8 19.Bd4± White will soon pick up the knight on h1, and his two knights will be stronger than Black's rook and pawn in the resulting endgame.

12...d6 is not stupid, although it reduces the influence of Black's dark-squared bishop and still leaves him needing to find a way to develop his kingside. I prefer White's chances after, say, 13.Be2 or 13.h4.

13.Qg5 g6 14.Bf2
14.g4 leaves Black with nothing better than forcing a draw: 14...Be7 15.Qh6 Bf8 16.Qg5=

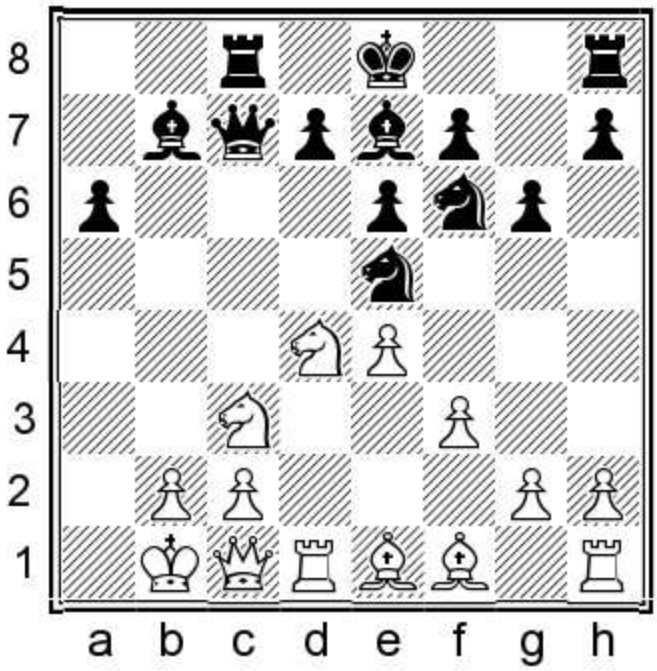
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14...b4 15.axb4 Bxb4 16.Be1
16.Qe3 0-0 (16...Bxc3 17.Qxc3 Qxc3 18.bxc3 Rxc3 19.Nxe6! dxe6 20.Bd4²) 17.Be1 also leads to interesting play.

16...Be7 17.Qc1!?
17.Qh6 can be met by 17...Bf6 18.g4 Bg7 followed by ...Nf6 and Black seems okay, although you could certainly try digging deeper here as well.

17...Nf6
17...0-0 18.g4 Nf6 19.h4 h5 20.gxh5 Nxh5 21.Rg1, looks promising for White.



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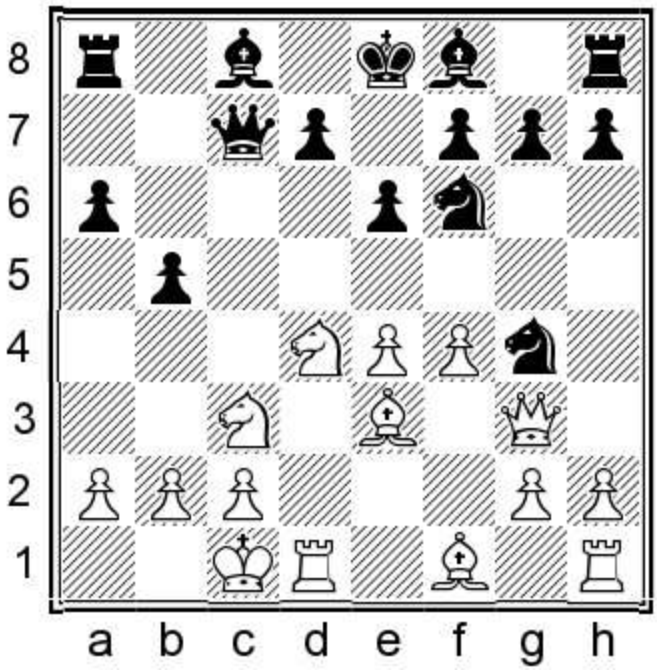
18.g4 h6 19.Bg3

19.h4 d5! is messy.

19...d6÷
Now 19...d5? would be refuted by 20.Qf4.

I decided to end the analysis here, having reached a rich middlegame with chances for both sides. We are a long way removed from any existing games or theory, and I have mentioned a few alternatives along the way. The whole line with 10.a3!? is very much in the experimental stages, so I will leave it for interested readers to build upon my analysis and give some of these ideas a try. Besides, we still have another line to analyse...

B2652) 10.f4 Neg4



This is one of the hottest lines in the Sicilian right now. Surprisingly, we have a dangerous option which has been mostly neglected so far.

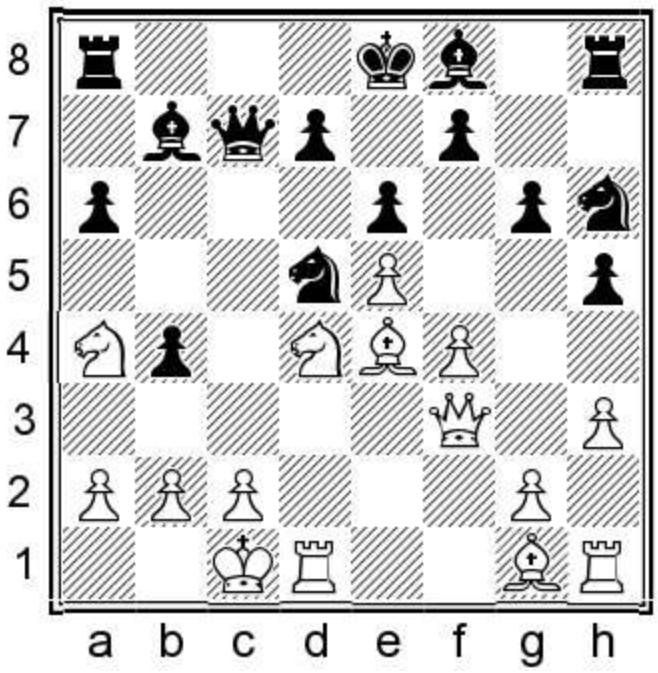
11.Bd2!?
This was introduced by Romain Edouard in 2016, and has only been repeated once at the time of writing. Despite its modest appearance, the move carries plenty of venom.

11.e5 has been tried in several games but after 11...Nxe3 12.Qxe3 b4! Black has no problems and has scored excellently.

11.Bg1
This is the more serious alternative, and has been by far the most popular choice. I will provide a brief summary of the theory from here, to serve as a starting point for interested readers to carry out their own investigations.
11...b4 12.Na4
12.Nb1 e5! 13.fxe5 Nxe5 was shown to be quite reliable for Black in Fressinet – Giri, Germany 2015.
12...h5
12...Nh6 is another significant option.
13.e5
13.Bd3 also deserves attention.

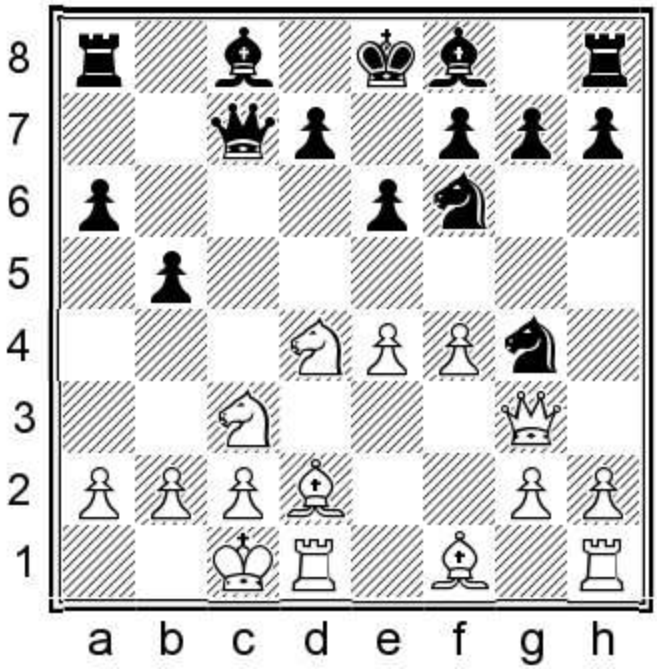
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13...Nd5 14.h3
Other moves have been tried but I will focus on what I consider the most promising option for White at each turn.
14...Nh6 15.Bd3 g6
15...Bb7 16.Be4 leaves Black nothing better than transposing with 16...g6.
16.Be4 Bb7 17.Qf3



17...Rc8N
The following game shows the cost of a single mistake in such a position: 17...Nf5? 18.Nxf5 gxf5 19.Bxd5 Bxd5 20.Rxd5 exd5 21.Nb6+– and Black's position was collapsing in Fier – Leenhouts, Amsterdam 2017.
18.Kb1
So far, there have been no practical tests from this position, but Kotronias and Semkov extend the analysis for a further twenty(!) moves, with many variations along the way. Ultimately the choice on move 11 is a matter of taste, and I felt it would be more interesting and useful for the readers if I focused on the less explored option, to which we now return.

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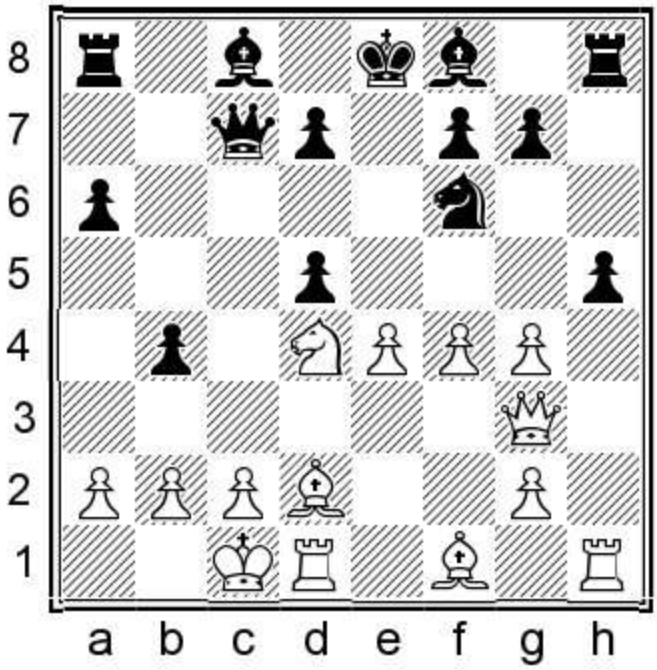


What is the reasoning behind moving the bishop to d2 instead of g1? At the most basic level, both moves have the same purpose: to leave the knight on g4 clutching at thin air, and vulnerable to e4-e5 and/or h2-h3. On g1, the bishop would maintain its influence on the diagonal towards a7, but it would leave the rook on h1 thoroughly restricted in the short term. By putting the bishop on d2, we aim for superior coordination and rapid piece play. One potential drawback is that our knight on d4 is currently undefended, and Black may try to exploit this by shifting his queen to a7, either before or after chasing the other knight with ...b4. When the d4-knight comes under attack, we will not bother moving or defending it, but will instead counter with either h2-h3 or e4-e5, leading to dynamic play with a shifting pawn structure and opening of new lines.

Black has two main options: B26521) 11...Qa7 and B26522) 11...b4. Kotronias and Semkov award the former an exclamation mark (yes, they analyse this line as well, but not in anything like as much detail as 11.Bg1) but I actually found the latter move to be the acid test, if Black follows it up correctly.

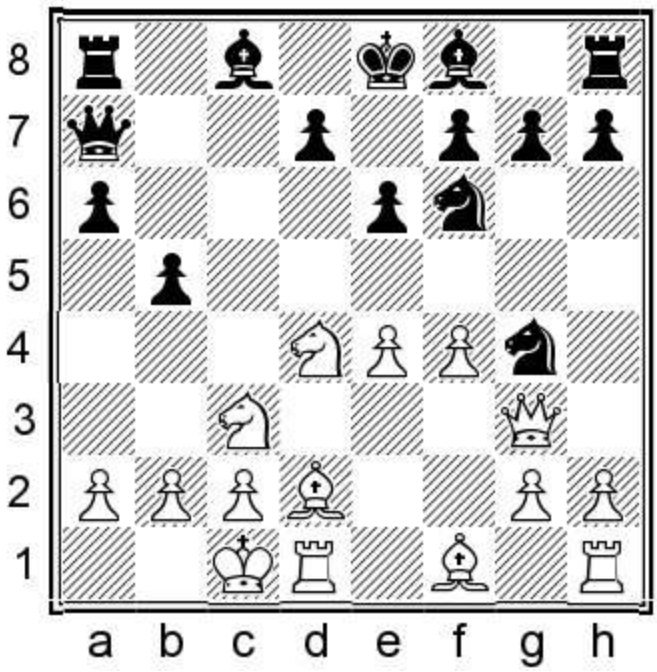
11...h5N has not yet been tried, but it's a thematic move which is worth considering. 12.h3 (12.Bd3 is also playable but I see no reason to refrain from the more forcing continuation) 12...b4 13.Nd5! is a nice detail pointed out by Kotronias and Semkov. (13.hxg4 bxc3 14.Qxc3 Qxc3 15.Bxc3 Bb7 looks fine for Black) 13... exd5 14.hxg4

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14...Nxe4 (14...dxe4 15.Be2ƒ also favours White) 15.Qe1 Bb7 16.Bd3 0-0-0 17.Rxh5!² White benefits from a clearly superior pawn structure, although the position remains quite complicated.

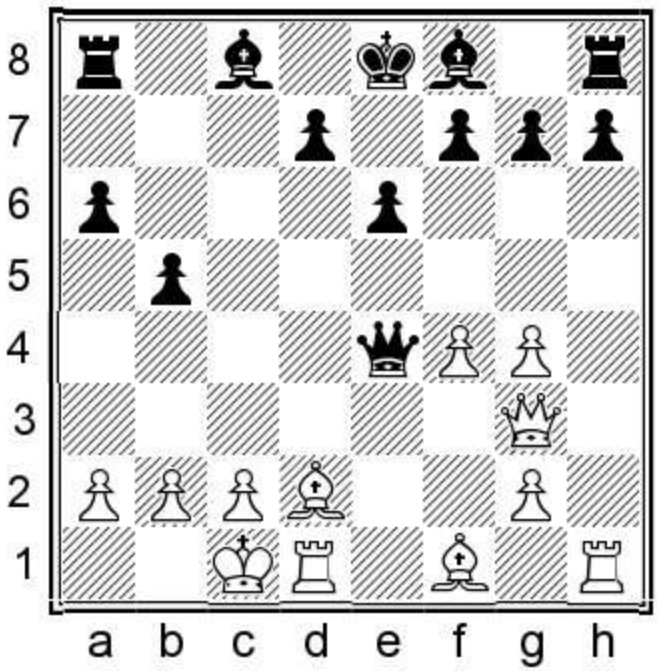
B26521) 11...Qa7



12.h3!N
12.e5 Qxd4 13.exf6 Nxf6 14.Be3 Qb4 15.f5 Bb7 was messy in Balcerak – G. Johansson, Stockholm 2017. The text move is a natural improvement which forces Black to make a tricky decision.

12...b4!
12...Qxd4 is playable but risky, as 13.hxg4 Nxe4 14.Nxe4 Qxe4 leaves Black far behind in development, although his extra pawn gives him something to play for. I suggest:

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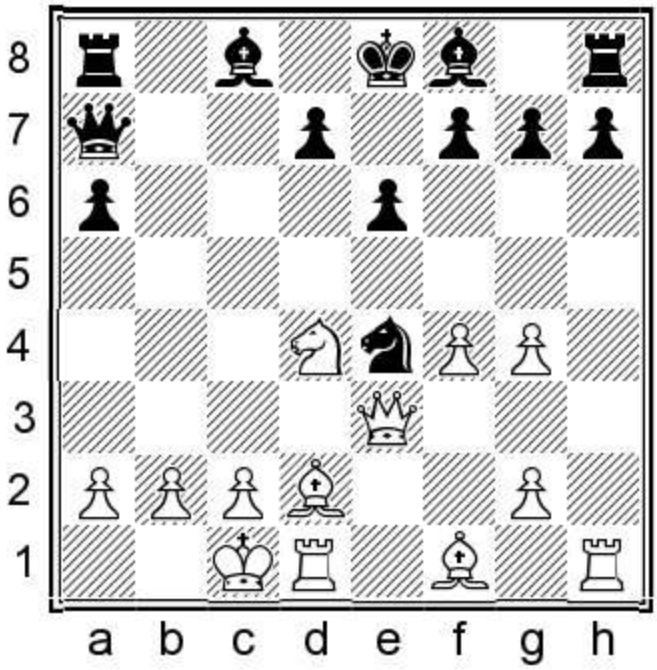


15.a3!? (15.Kb1 is also good) 15...Bb7 16.Bc3 Kotronias and Semkov briefly note this line and assess it as slightly better for White. Play might continue: 16...Rc8 17.Kb1 (17.g5!? Rxc3 18.Qxc3 Qxf4† 19.Kb1 Qxg5 20.Qc7 Bc6 21.Qc8† Ke7 also looks dangerous for Black, although I don't see a clear win) 17...h6 (17...Be7 would be met by 18.g5) 18.Rh3*ƒ* White has more than enough play for the pawn.

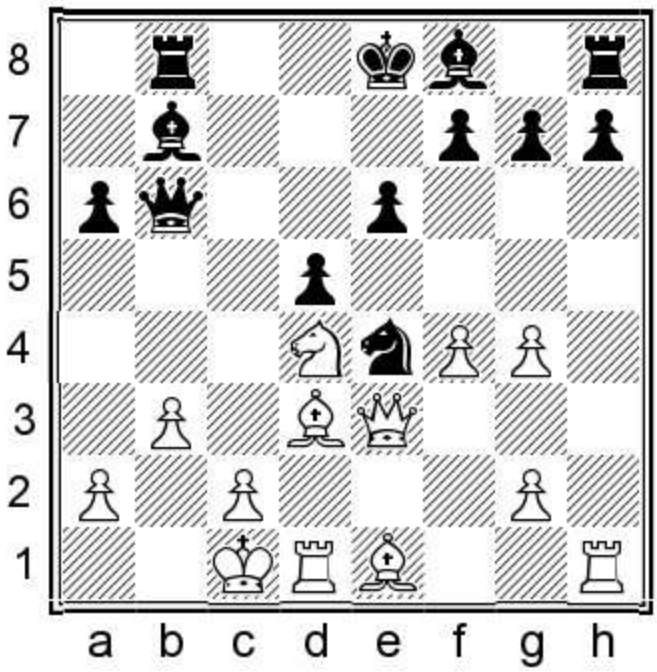
13.hxg4
I briefly considered 13.Nd5!?, but after 13...Nxe4 14.Qxg4 exd5 15.Be3 the position is merely unclear.

13...bxc3 14.Qxc3 Nxe4 15.Qe3
A most unusual pawn structure has arisen, where both sides may try to benefit from the open files available to them. White has a lead in development, although I hesitate to draw too many conclusions from that, as the evaluation will depend on concrete analysis. However, it is worth pointing out one recurring positional theme, namely Black's difficulty in completing development and castling, which will always be risky on account of the open h-file.

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15...Bb7
Against 15...d5, Kotronias and Semkov point out the following nice bishop shuffle: 16.Ba5! (16.Be1 Bc5 is decent for Black) 16...Qc5 (16...Bc5? 17.Be2±) 17.Be1 K&S end their analysis here, but it is worth including a few more natural moves. 17...Rb8 18.Bd3 Qb6 19.b3 Bb7

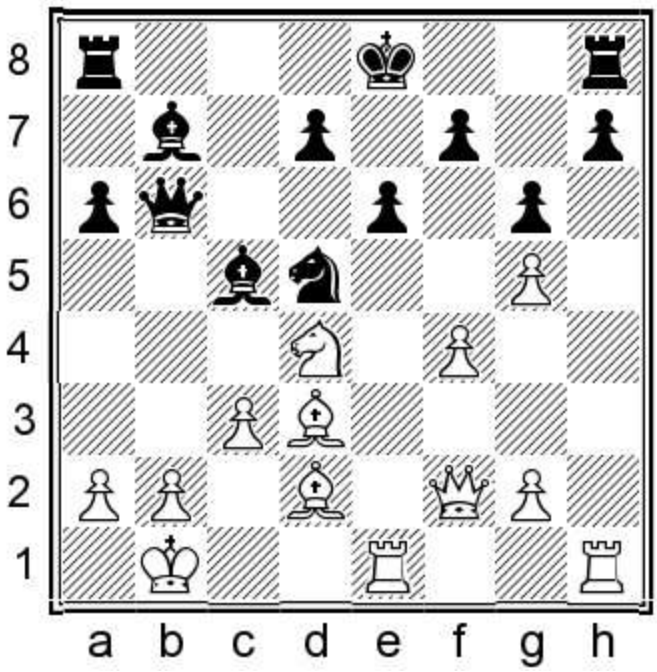


20.Bxe4 dxe4 21.Bc3² White's king is safe and he has fine prospects on the kingside, while it is hard to imagine Black's king ever finding a safe haven.

16.Bd3 Nxd2
This move is not mentioned by Kotronias and Semkov, but trading the knight for an enemy bishop feels like the more natural choice which one might expect to encounter over the board.

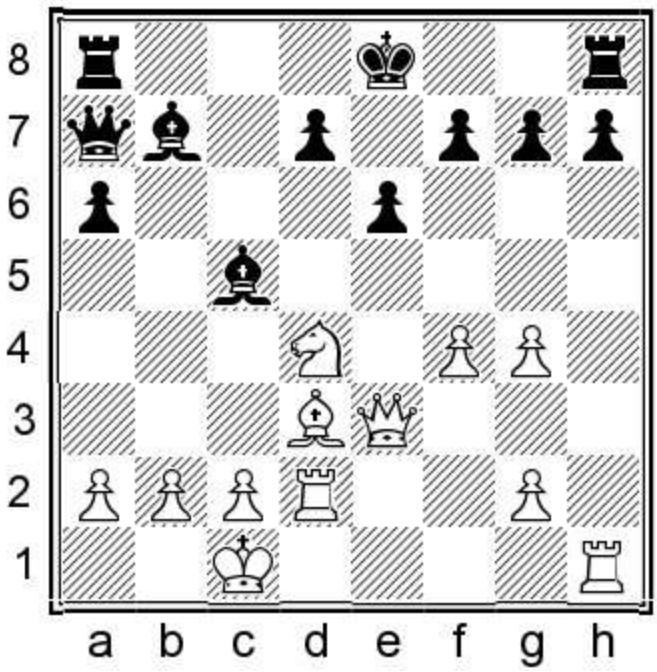
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16...Nf6!? leads to a complex position which also favours White. 17.g5 Nd5 18.Qf2 Qb6 19.c3 g6 (19...Bc5 gives White the extra option of 20.g6!?, aside from 20.Kb1 with a likely transposition) 20.Rde1 Bc5 21.Kb1



21...Nb4 (21...Bxd4?! 22.cxd4± leaves Black weak on the dark squares; 21...Rb8 22.f5 a5 23.fxe6 dxe6 24.b3² is also good for White, as K&S point out) 22.cxb4 Bxd4 23.Qe2² I found no fault with this line and assessment by K&S.

17.Rxd2 Bc5



18.Be4
18.c3 should also offer White an edge, but I like the simplicity of the text move.

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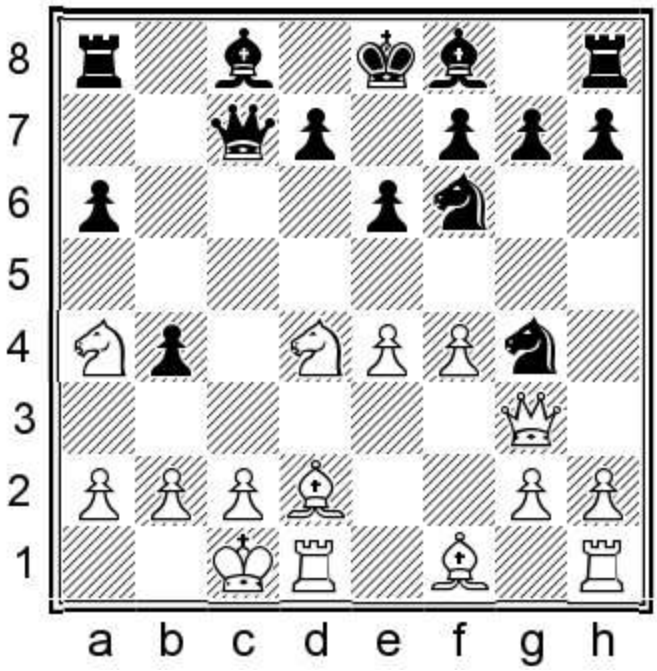
18...Bxe4
18...Rc8 19.c3² does not change much.

19.Qxe4 d5
19...Rb8 20.c3²

20.Qe5 0-0 21.g5²
White has good attacking chances along the h-file.

B26522) 11...b4 12.Na4

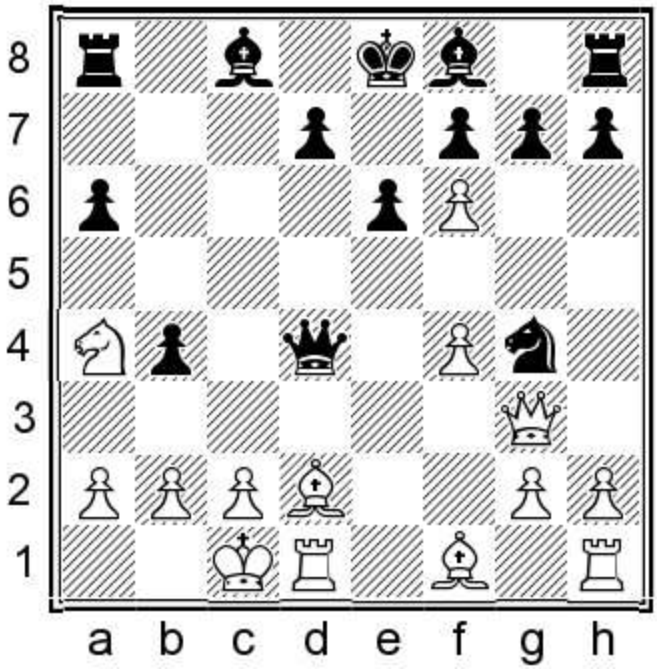
As I mentioned earlier, I believe this line to be theoretically the most critical choice, provided Black follows up correctly. The best move is:



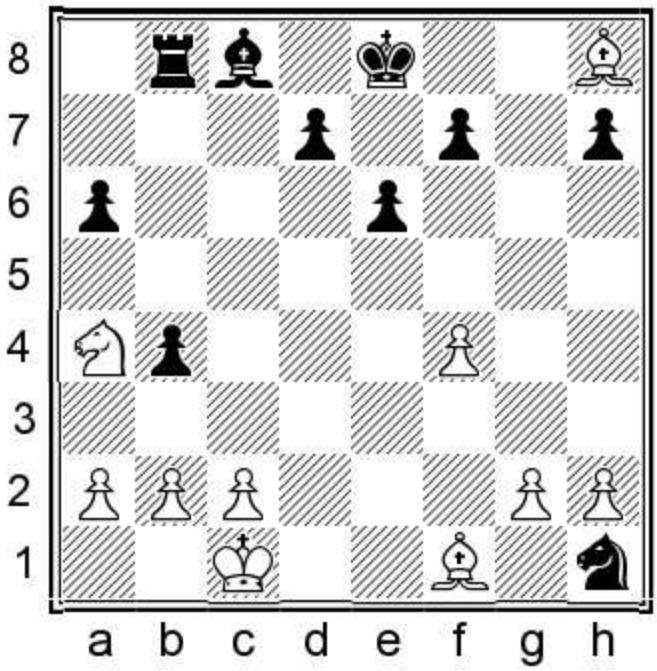
12...h5!N
Kotronias and Semkov do not consider this move. Edouard mentions it briefly in his annotations, but does not include the best follow-up for Black.

The game continued:
12...Qa7 13.e5! Qxd4
13...Nd5N is well met by 14.Bxb4! Nxb4 15.Qxg4 Nxa2† 16.Kb1 Nb4, and now White is better after 17.Bc4 as pointed out by Edouard, while the more aggressive 17.f5!? also looks promising.
14.exf6

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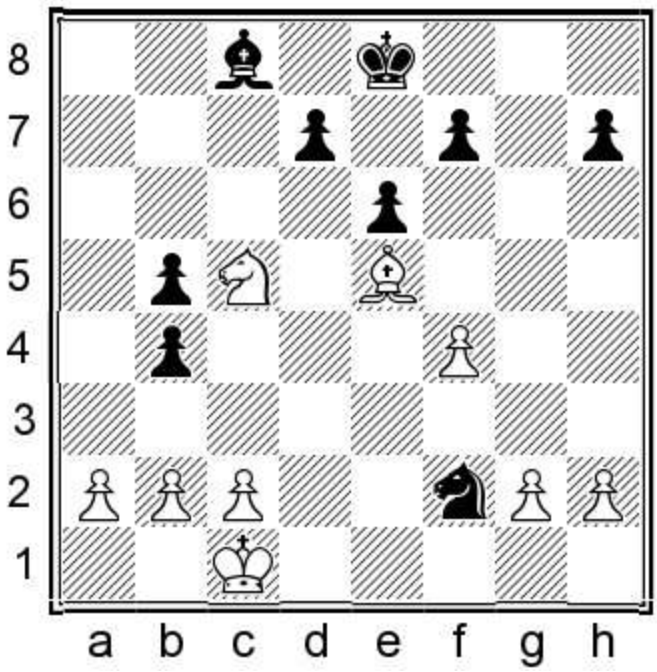
14...Nf2
Edouard mentions that 14...Nxf6 is well met by 15.Be3 Qe4 16.Nb6 Rb8 17.f5 d6 18.Bd3 when White has a huge lead in development.
15.Qf3! Rb8 16.Bc3!
This leads by force to an endgame with good winning chances for White.
16...Qxd1† 17.Qxd1 Nxd1 18.fxg7 Bxg7 19.Bxg7 Nf2
19...Rg8? 20.Bd4 leaves the knight trapped.
20.Bxh8 Nxh1



21.Be5! Rb5
21...Rb7N is slightly more complicated but White keeps a clear advantage: 22.Nc5!? (Edouard's suggestion of 22.b3 also puts Black under unpleasant pressure) 22...Rb6 23.Ne4 Ke7 24.Bf6† Kf8 25.Bd4 Rc6 26.g3 f5 27.

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Ng5 e5 Black keeps his knight alive with inventive play, but it still may not be enough to save the game. 28. fxe5 Rh6 29.Bg1 Bb7 30.Bc4 Rh5 31.Nf7± White remains clearly better at the end of this line by Kotronias and Semkov.
22.Bxb5 axb5 23.Nc5 Nf2
In his annotations, Edouard points out a nice finesse here:



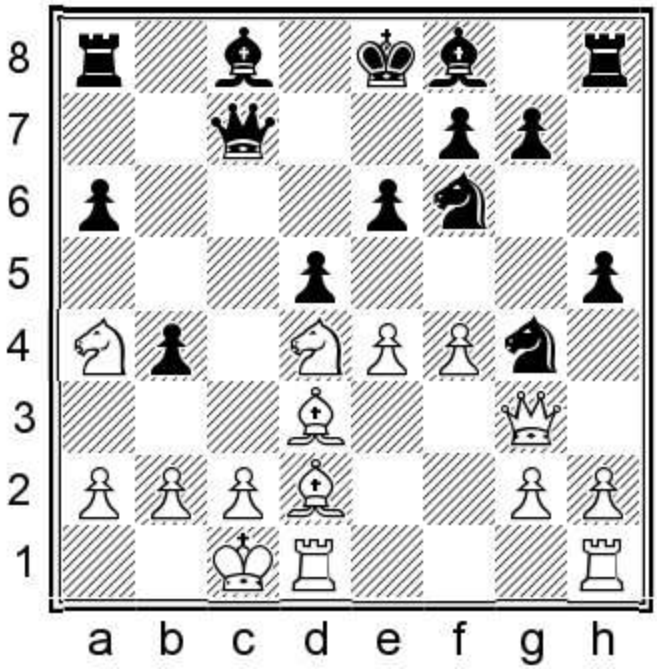
24.Kd2!N
The game continued 24.Bd4 d6! 25.Bxf2 dxc5 26.Bxc5 b3! 27.axb3 Kd7 and Black was able to salvage half a point in Edouard – Neiksans, Drancy 2016. The advantage of the text move is seen after:
24...Ke7 25.Bd4 d6 26.Bxf2 dxc5 27.Bxc5†
Edouard points out that this reaches a similar ending to the game, but with a better pawn structure for White on the queenside. I haven't analysed it to check if it's definitively winning, but I suspect it is – and I'm certain that I would not want to go near such a position with Black.

13.Bd3
We have reached another critical position.

13...d5!
This is not mentioned by Edouard in his annotations, although I am sure he must have analysed it privately.

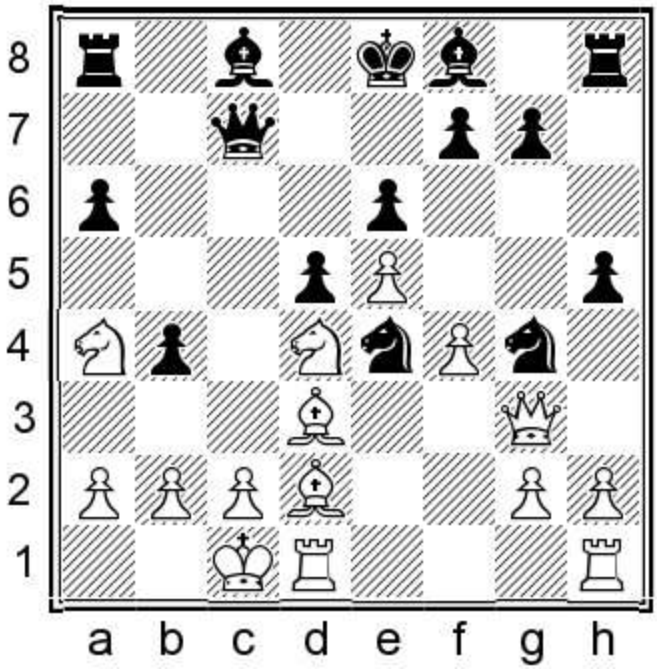
13...Qa7 gives White a pleasant choice between the simple 14.c3, as given by Edouard, and the equally promising 14.h3!? Qxd4 15.hxg4, leading to complications which favour White.

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14.e5
I spent a bit of time looking at 14.exd5 Nxd5 15.Kb1, on the basis that 15...Bd7?! 16.c4! works nicely. However, Black can improve with 15...Bd6, when he is at least equal.

14...Ne4
I will not spend time looking at weaker alternatives, as this active knight move is clearly the right choice.

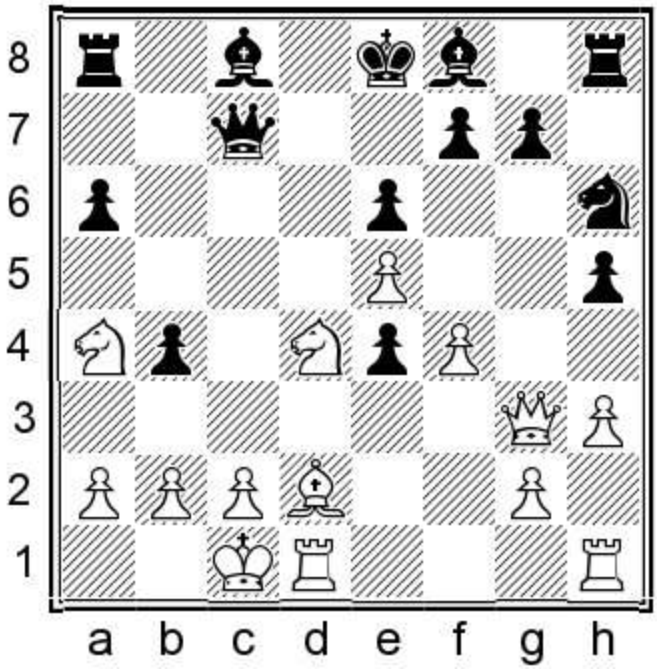


15.Bxe4 dxe4 16.h3
White should continue to force the play. A slower continuation such as 16.b3 Bd7 17.Nb2 Bc5 18.h3 Nh6 19. Be3 0-0 would offer Black at least equal chances.

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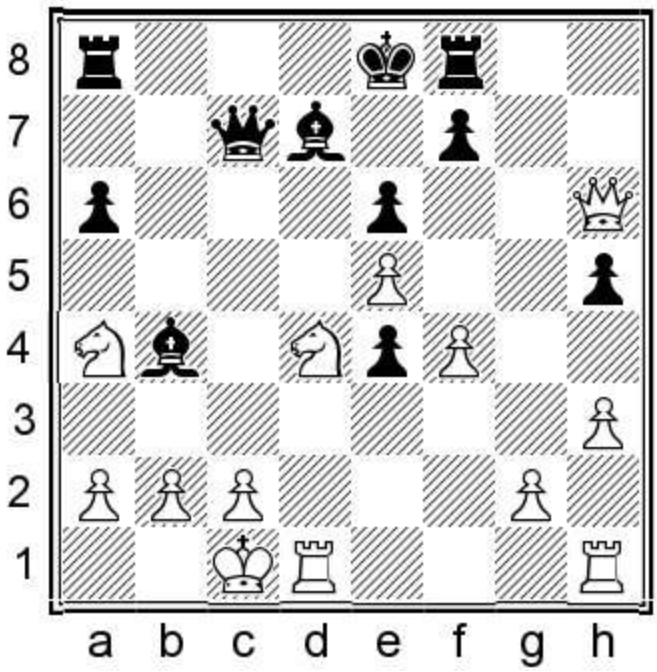
16...Nh6

16...Bd7? 17.hxg4 Bxa4 18.b3± is poor for Black, who has helpfully traded off White's bad knight while allowing the h-file to be opened.



17.Bxb4!
17.b3 leads to an interesting position but one where Black is not worse at all. The text move is more dangerous and almost wins outright, but Black has just enough resources as we will see.

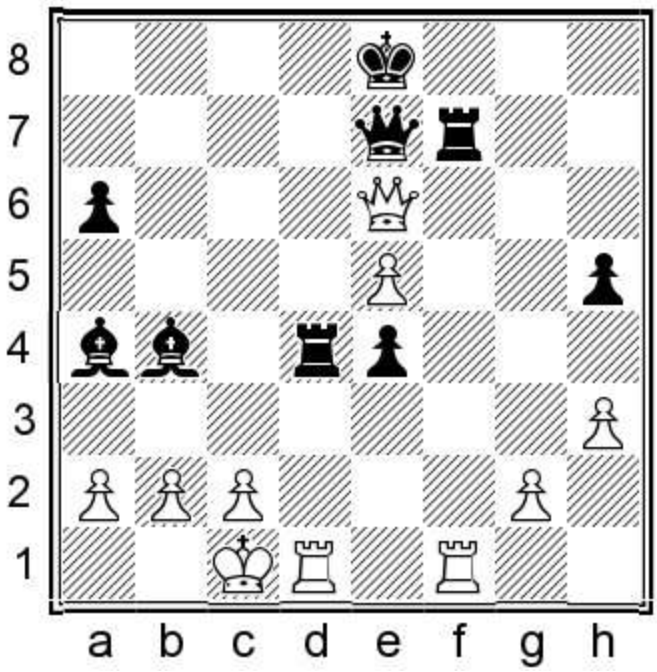
17...Bxb4 18.Qxg7 Rf8 19.Qxh6 Bd7!
This attack on the a4-knight is the only thing keeping Black in the game.



20.f5!
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20.a3 is just about okay, but hardly a try for an advantage. The text move is a good attempt to break through to

the black king, but the second player can survive with a series of only moves. The critical line goes as follows:

20...Bxa4 21.fxe6 Rd8 22.Rhf1 Rxd4! 23.exf7† Rxf7 24.Qe6† Qe7



25.Qc8† Rd8 26.Rxd8† Qxd8 27.Qxd8†!?
White can force an immediate draw with 27.Qe6† Qe7 28.Qc8† if he wishes it. The text move does not lead to an advantage but it offers a way to keep the game going for players who wish to fight to the death.

27...Kxd8 28.Rxf7 e3=
The computer maintains its '0.00' evaluation in all variations, although any result would be possible in a game between human players. Personally I see slightly more danger for White, due to the possibility of making a mistake and allowing Black to exploit his advanced passed pawn. So, if your opponent is fantastically well prepared and finds all the right moves in this line, it may be prudent to force a draw at noted above on move 27.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored in some detail the extremely trendy system which arises after 5.Nc3 Qc7 6.Be3 a6 7. Qf3. (The fact that we can head for this position against both 5...a6 and 5...Qc7 6.Be3 Nf6, as discussed in the early part of the chapter, certainly makes for a nice bonus to reduce our workload.)

At move 7, we considered several options, with 7...Bb4, 7...b5 and 7...d6 all having their own individual features and drawbacks. 7...Ne5 8.Qg3 h5!? is an especially interesting idea, when 9.Nf5!? is our move. Playing this way puts certain demands on us, in terms of both preparation and effort at the board, but I believe the investment is justified by the excellent attacking chances White obtains.

We then looked at the popular 7...Bd6 8.0-0-0 Be5, when 9.Nxc6! bxc6 10.Bd4 is promising. Depending on how Black proceeds, we will either develop a middlegame initiative or enjoy a slight endgame plus.

Finally we looked at the big main line after 7...Nf6 8.0-0-0, when Black has tried several moves. I would like to highlight 8...h5!? as a challenging option which I expect to gain in popularity, as well as 8...Ne5 9.Qg3 b5, when I analysed two interesting ideas for White. Even though a forcing route to an advantage remains elusive, I

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have shown plenty of fresh and dangerous ideas to pose problems for your opponents.

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# Chapter 4 - Lowenthal

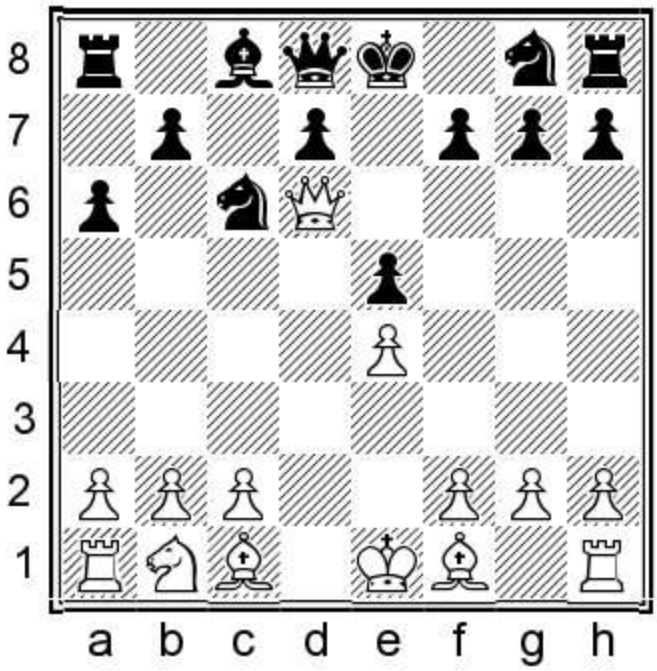
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 a6 6.Nd6† Bxd6 7.Qxd6

A) 7...Qe7 150
B) 7...Qf6 8.Qc7!? 151
B1) 8...Qg6?! 152
B2) 8...Nge7 Game 11 153
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 a6
This signals the Lowenthal Variation, which was the most popular continuation here, until Sveshnikov started playing 5...d6.

5...Nf6 is not bad. I recommend transposing to the Sveshnikov with 6.N1c3, avoiding the trick variation your opponent will no doubt have prepared if he plays this move order.

5...h6 6.N1c3 a6 is an inferior type of Lowenthal, which is saying something. (6...Nf6 transposes to a Sveshnikov sideline covered on page 172.) 7.Nd6† Bxd6 8.Qxd6 Qf6 9.Qd3 Black has no ...d5 tricks, so it's just strategic misery. For example: 9...Nge7 10.Be3 b5 11.0-0-0± Martins – U. Neumann, email 2009.

6.Nd6† Bxd6 7.Qxd6




White has the bishop pair while Black has holes on d5 and d6, so consolidating our gains is the plan for the next few moves. We will consider A) 7...Qe7 and B) 7...Qf6.

7...f5 8.Nc3 Qf6 is a rare try to give Black a Lowenthal with added f-file play, but after the simple 9.Qd1± the weakness incurred is clear, with Bc4 a likely follow-up.
7...Nge7 8.Nc3 0-0 has been played in lots of games. But as White is already strategically winning, I will save the ink and move on to something at least slightly challenging.

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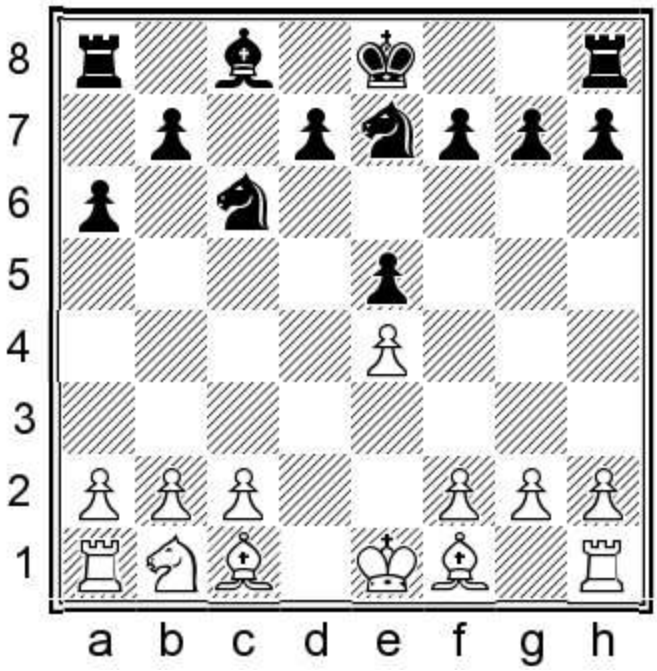
A) 7...Qe7

This move could not quite be called trendy, but it has found a few followers recently.

8.Qxe7†
Retreats to d2 and d1 are possible, but the queen exchange secures a pleasant edge, so we have no reason to duck it.

Note that our recommendation against 7...Qf6 does not work here: 8.Qc7? d5 and Black has equalized already, at the very least.

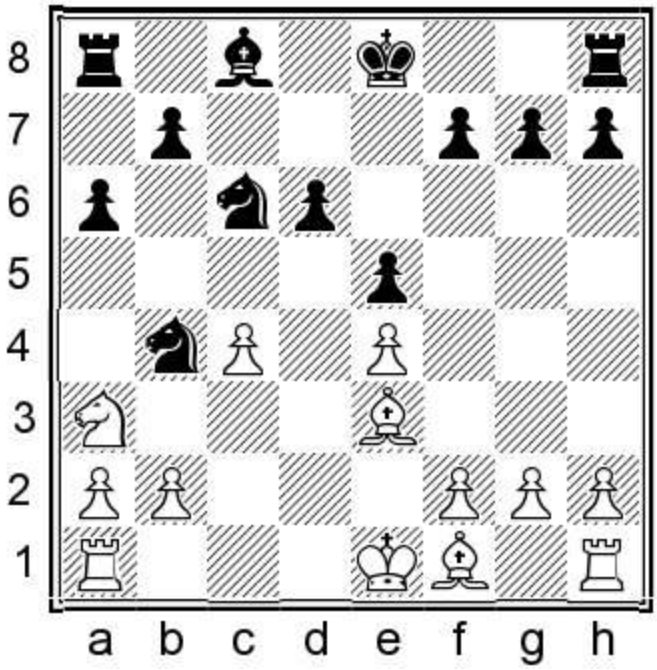
8...Ngxe7




9.c4!²
This is the difference with the knight being on e7 instead of f6. The e4-pawn is not attacked, so White has time to play this move. White has a slight but enduring edge, and a game played for two results is a big success in my book.

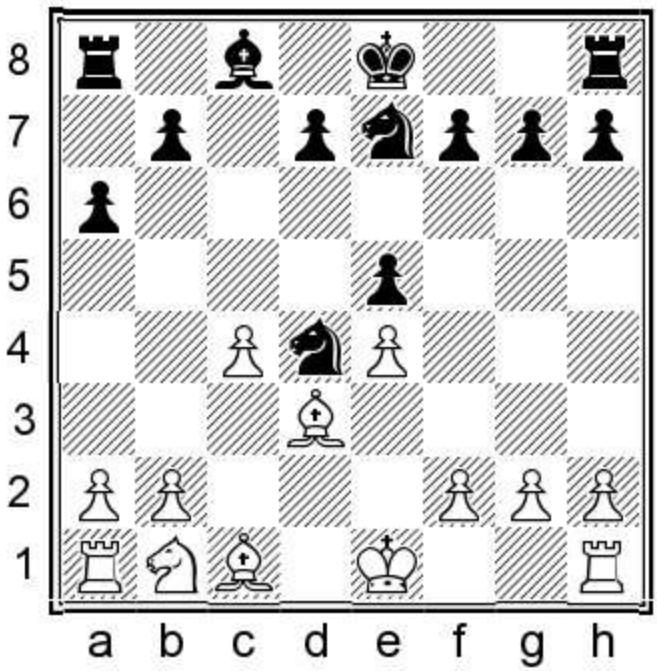
9...Nd4
Or 9...Nb4 10.Na3 is just a tiny temporary inconvenience. The lasting factors are White's bishop pair and d-file pressure. For example: 10...Nec6 11.Be3 d6

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12.0-0-0!? Nxa2† 13.Kb1 Nab4 14.Rxd6² Simple chess would be Be2 and Rhd1, but ideas such as c4-c5 and Nc4 are also in the air.

10.Bd3
The following is just one possible example of how the play may proceed:



10...Nec6 11.Be3 Nb4 12.Kd2 Rb8 13.b3 d6 14.Nc3 Ne6 15.Be2²
White had better chances in Pineda – L. Buchaillot, corr. 2010.

B) 7...Qf6

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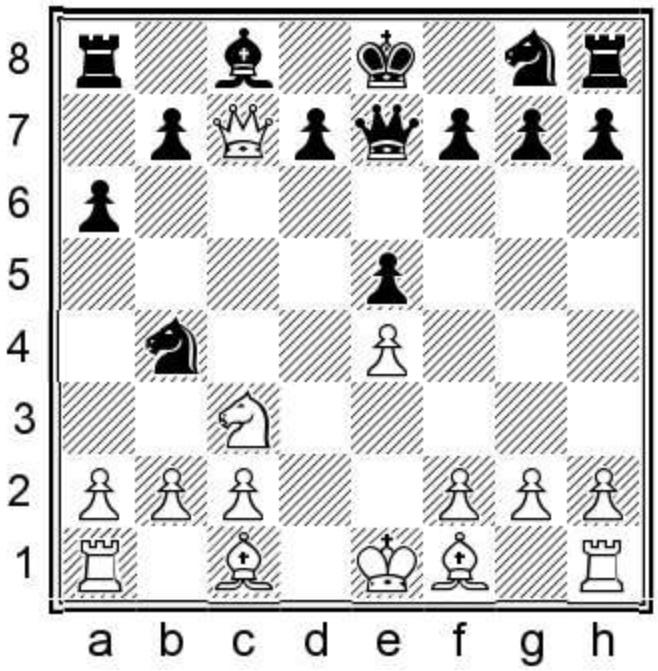
This is the main idea in the Lowenthal. Black has traded the bishop pair and taken on a slight structural disad-

vantage in order to gain some time. It is not surprising that this is not entirely bad; trading positional advantages for dynamic ones is, after all, part and parcel of chess strategy. In this position there are many moves and all of them have been suggested in the various 1.e4 books over the years: Qd1, Qd2, Qa3, Qxf6.

8.Qc7!?
I decided on this move, as I found a number of fun ideas that might surprise your opponent and specifically because it works extremely well against every line; Black has one line that is by far his best chance, and even that is a depressing slightly worse ending.

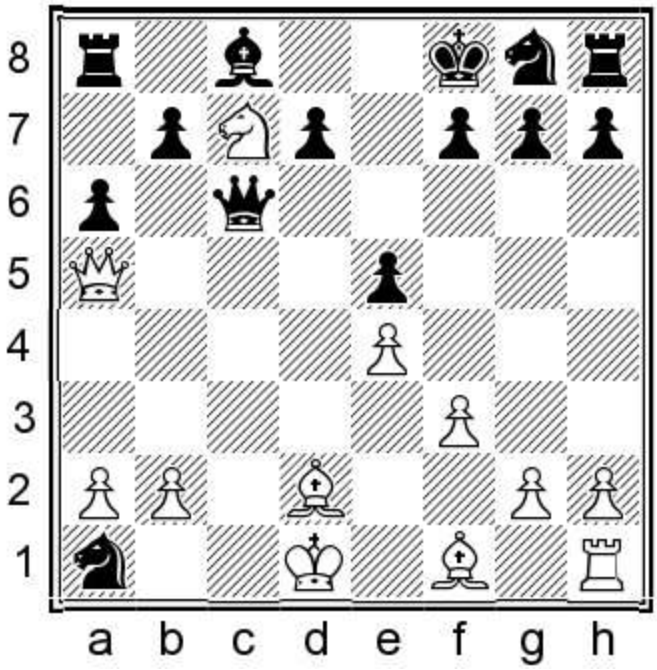
Black has two main options: B1) 8...Qg6?! and B2) 8...Nge7.

If you look in the database, then the following line looks respectable:
8...Qe7? 9.Nc3 Nb4
But we managed to refute the variation with a surprising novelty.



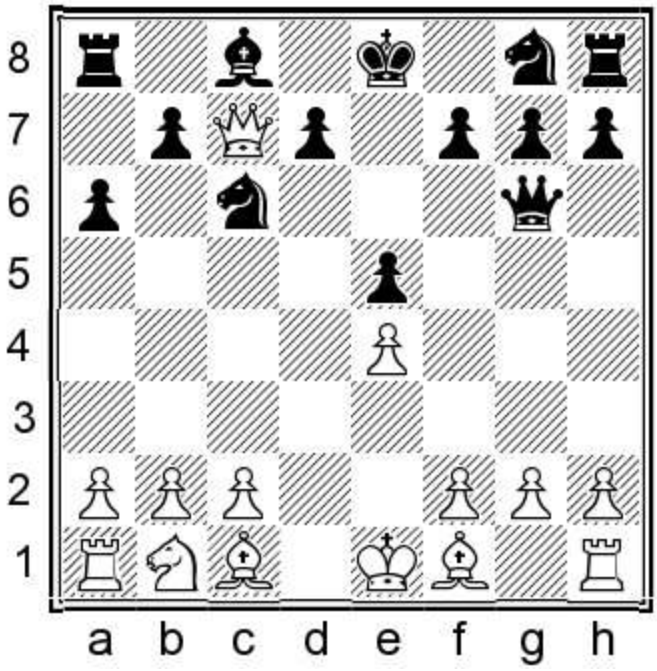

10.Bd2!!N 10...Nxc2†
Black has gone too far to go back.
10...d5 11.Nb5! axb5 12.Bxb5† Bd7 13.Bxd7† Qxd7 14.Qxe5† Qe7 15.Qxe7† Nxe7 16.Bxb4±
10...d6 11.Nb5! axb5 12.Bxb5† Bd7 13.Qxb7 Nxc2† 14.Kd1 Nxa1 15.Qxa8† Qd8 16.Bxd7† Kxd7 17.Qa4† Ke7 18.Ke2±
11.Kd1 Nxa1 12.Nd5 Qe6 13.Qa5! Qc6 14.Nc7† Kf8 15.f3±

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15...b6
15...Qc2† 16.Ke1 Rb8 17.Bb4† Ne7 18.Qxe5+–
15...Rb8 16.Nxa6 eyes a cheeky mate on d8.
16.Qxe5 Nf6 17.Nxa8 d6 18.Qc3 Qxa8 19.Bd3±

B1) 8...Qg6?!



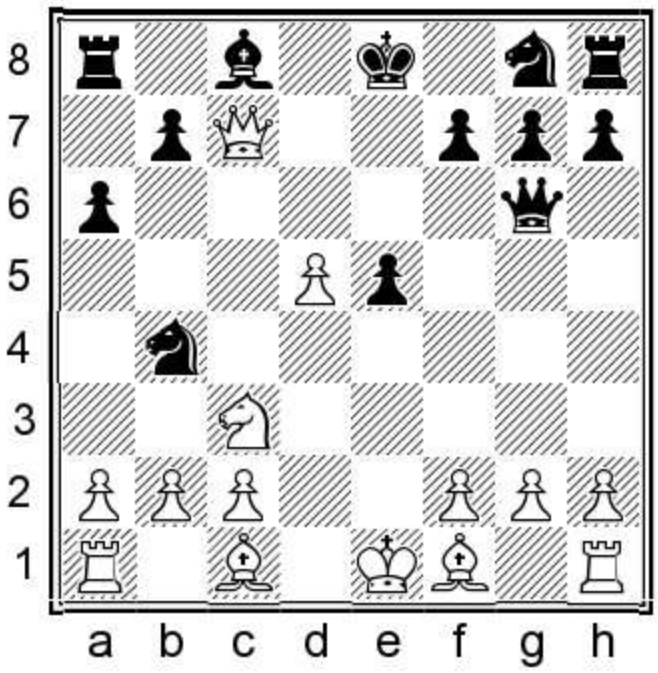
This is one of the traditional Lowenthal ideas, but it does not work.

9.Nc3 d5!?
This is the type of stuff club players want when they risk trying the Lowenthal.

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9...Nf6 10.Be3 0-0 11.Qd6! b5 12.f3± White is strategically winning.
9...Nge7 is a similar development to variation B2 below, but the move order here allows White to cover c2 easily by castling long, so no awkward Bd3 moves are required. That means the right move is: 10.Be3±

10.exd5 Nb4
As I said, this is what everyone wants to play, but it just does not work:



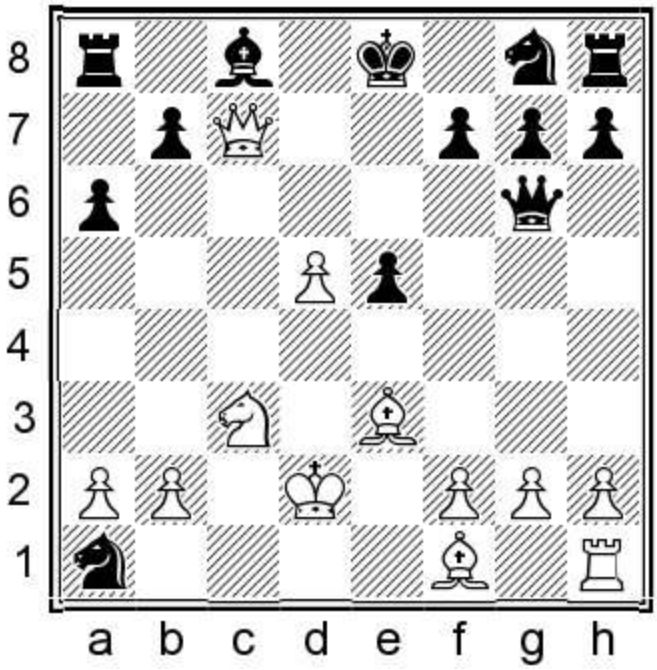
11.Be3!!
Played in only two games, but totally decisive.

11...Nxc2† 12.Kd2 Nxa1
Taking the rook at least challenges White to show he has all the answers.

Instead 12...Nxe3 13.Qxe5† Ne7 14.fxe3 simply leaves White a healthy pawn up. For example: 14...f6 15.Qg3 Qf7 16.Qc7±

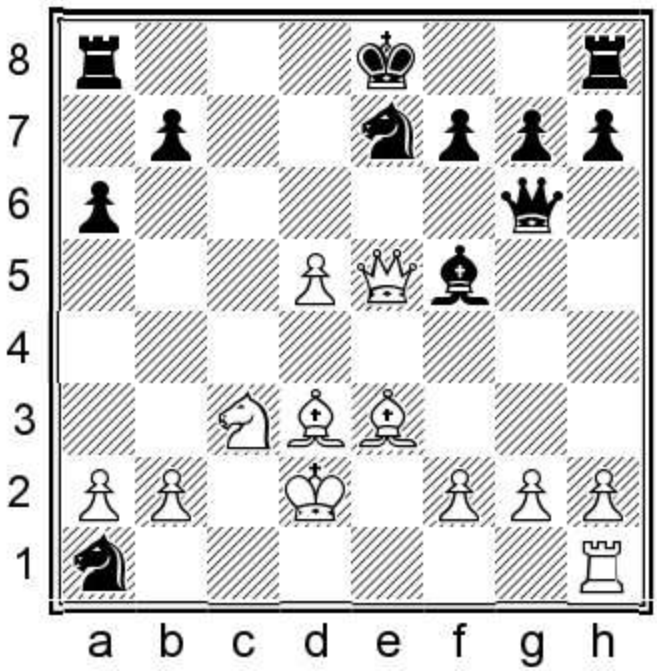
12...Bf5 fails comprehensively to the following precise sequence: 13.Qxe5† Ne7 14.Bc5 0-0 15.Rc1 Nc6 16. Qf4+– White's extra pawn is the least of it; threats include Bxf8, g2-g4, and both black knights are in danger.

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13.Bd3 Bf5 14.Qxe5†
In the other game White completely lost the thread with 14.Qxb7?? Rd8 15.Bxa6? Nf6 16.Bb5† Nd7 17.Rxa1 0-0–+ before somehow going on to win in Bures – Mrazek, Kouty nad Desnou 2010.

14...Ne7



15.d6+–
White's perfect handling of the opening gave her a winning position in Suchomelova – Nytra, Czech Republic 2013.

B2) 8...Nge7

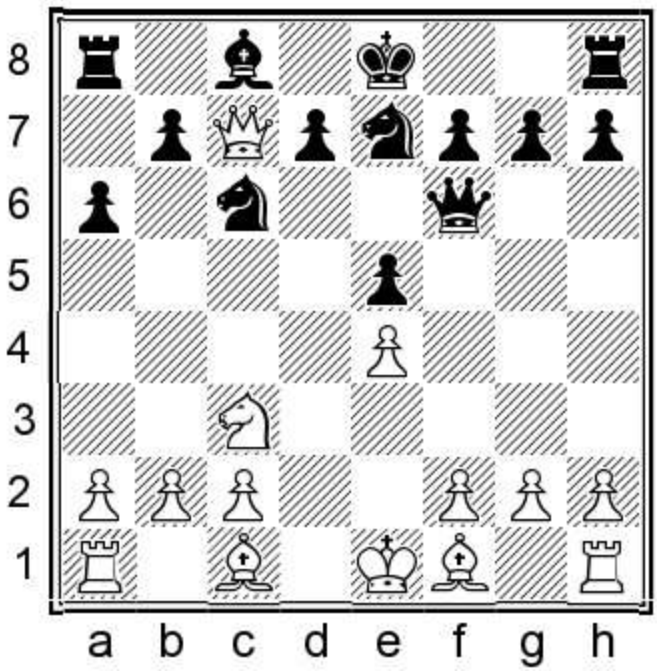
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This is the more serious move.

GAME 11

Guido Bresadola – Ivan Attard
email 2010

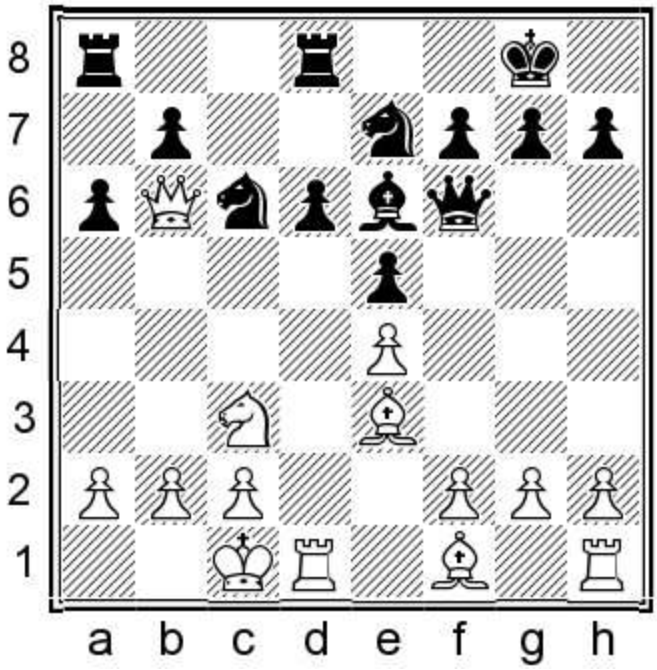
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 a6 6.Nd6† Bxd6 7.Qxd6 Qf6 8.Qc7 Nge7 9.Nc3



9...Nb4
Black, as ever, should strike at c2 before White can cover it by castling long.

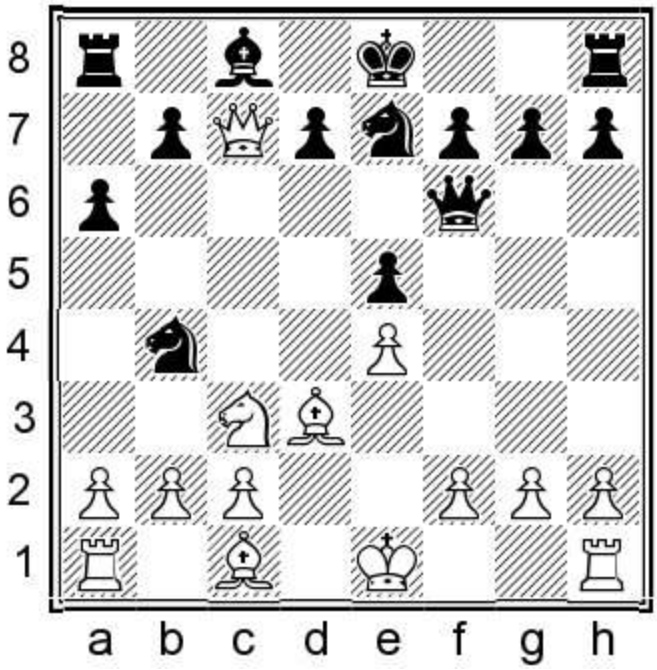
9...0-0? 10.Be3
Please, please do not lose as follows: 10.Bd3? b5= 11.0-0?? Rb8 and the queen is trapped.
10...d6
10...b5 11.0-0-0 Rb8 12.Bc5± shows the difference compared to 10.Bd3?; far from being trapped, the queen finds the ideal disruptive square on d6.
11.0-0-0 Rd8 12.Qb6 Be6
12...Bd7 13.h4± is easy for White.
So far this is Kalod – Zpevak, Czech Republic 1996.

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13.Nd5!N
13.h4 also looks good, but allowing 13...d5 needlessly complicates a simple and strong position.
13...Qh4 14.f3±
I do not see any serious prospects for Black to get a decent game.

10.Bd3



10...d5!
Finally a version where Black can play this break effectively.

10...0-0?! 11.0-0 d5 is an inaccurate move order due to: 12.f4! Nxd3 13.cxd3 d4 14.Na4 Bg4 15.Nb6 Rae8 E. Berg – G. Jones, Oslo 2008. Emanuel gives 16.b3!N± as even stronger than what he did in the game, where he

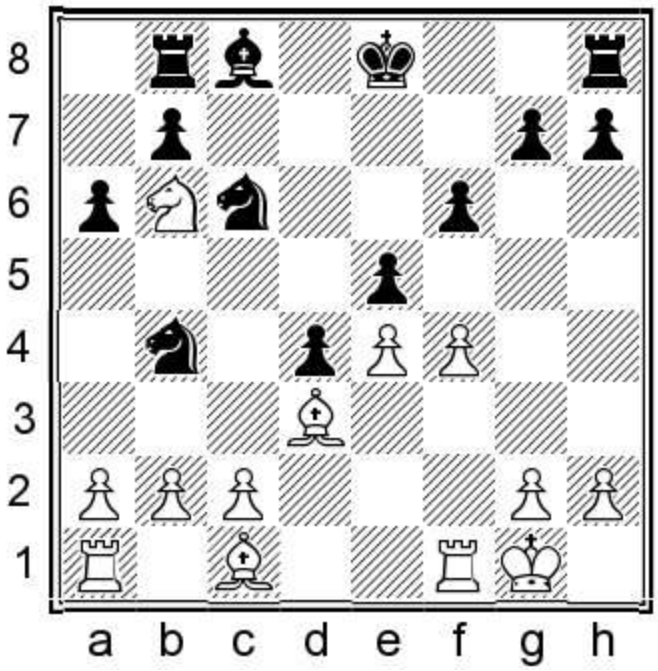
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managed to win convincingly all the same.

11.0-0 d4 12.Na4 Qc6!
This is what Black must play, and it shows exactly what we are dealing with. The Lowenthal is these days little more than a low-rent Petroff, where the hope is not to hold a roughly even position, but rather a slightly worse position. Our job is to discourage these Lowenthalers by grinding them down at every opportunity.

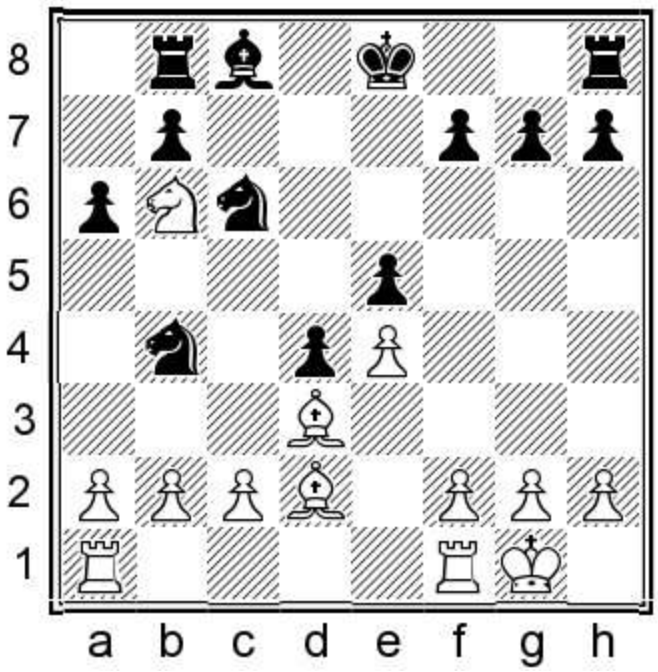
13.Qxc6† Nexc6 14.Nb6 Rb8 15.Bd2
Simple chess.

I also like:
15.f4!? f6
15...Be6 was Heissler – Rabiega, Germany 1995, when I suggest: 16.f5!?N 16...Bd7 17.b3 f6 18.Ba3² There are many ways for White to get a pleasant position, but as far as I can tell, none that refutes Black's play.




16.Rf2!?N
I shall extend this line far further than you need to know, to illustrate an interesting idea.
16...Be6
16...Nxd3 17.cxd3 0-0 18.b3²
17.b3!? exf4
17...0-0 18.f5±
17...Kd8 18.Bc4²
18.Bxf4 Ne5 19.Bxe5 fxe5 20.Bc4 Bxc4 21.bxc4! Ke7 22.a3 Nc6 23.Rb1²
White has shattered his own structure in return for piece activity.

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15...Nxd3!?
Taking on d3 before being nudged by a2-a3 feels odd, but it's not a bad move.

15...Be6 16.a3 Nxd3 17.cxd3, with some advantage to White because of the strongly placed knight on b6, is given by Berg. 17...f6 18.Rac1 Rd8 This was Ligterink – Sosonko, Nijmegen 1980, at which point Palliser remarks that "Black is again very solid". I would add that 19.Na4N followed by f2-f4 and/or Nc5 is evaluated by all modern engines as better for White. Claiming a theoretical advantage is not a problem in this line. The real issue is proving it over the board!

16.cxd3 Be6
Or 16...0-0 17.a4!² followed by b2-b4, as given by Parma.

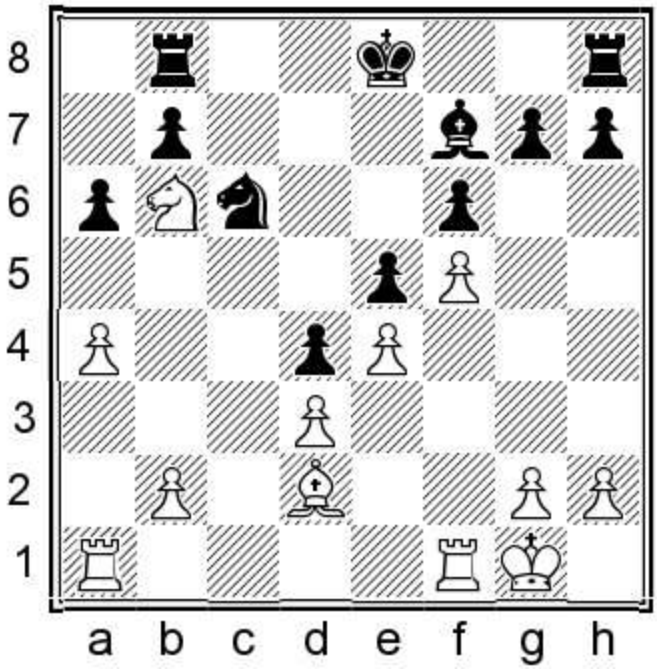
16...a5 was suggested by Palliser as a way to avoid Parma's plan. 17.Rfc1 Be6 18.Rc5 White nevertheless seems better here after 18...a4 19.Rb5!±; but not 19.Nxa4 b5 20.b4 bxa4 21.Rxc6 Kd7 22.Rac1 Rhc8 23.Rxc8 Rxc8 24.Rxc8 Kxc8 25.a3 which seems like a draw due to the opposite-coloured bishops.

17.f4!?
You can certainly start playing a game from here, with many different moves.
17.Rfc1N is another idea, for instance: 17...0-0 18.a4 f5 (18...f6 19.Rc5²) 19.f3 fxe4 20.fxe4 Rf7 21.b4 Rbf8 22.b5 Ne7 23.Bb4²

17...f6?
This is too compliant.
17...f5! is a better fighting move. For example, after 18.Na4!? fxe4 White should probably keep it simple with 19.dxe4 with slightly better chances and a long game ahead. Instead the fancy 19.Nc5 works fine after 19...Bc8 20.Nxe4 0-0 21.Rae1² but 19...e3 20.Nxe6 exd2 21.Rad1 Ke7 22.Nxg7 Rhf8= looks about level.

18.f5 Bf7 19.a4²
Let's see a demonstration of a squeeze.

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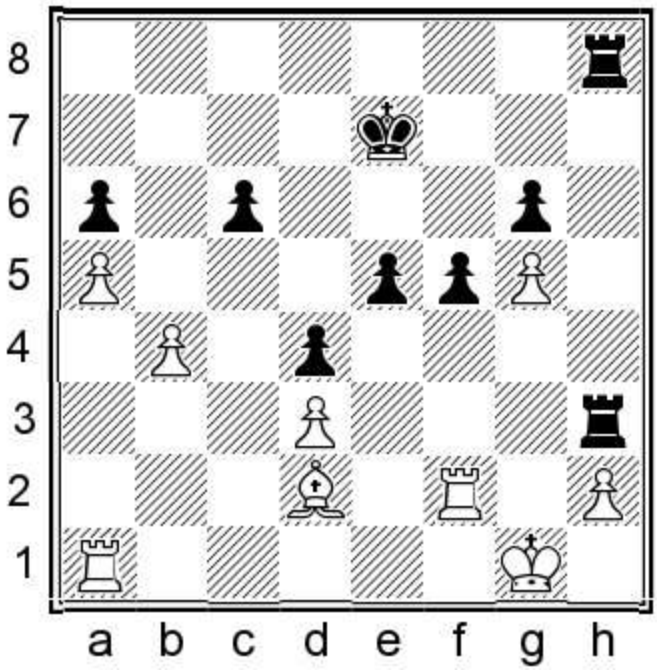


19...Bb3 20.a5 Ke7 21.g4 g5 22.fxg6 hxg6 23.Nd5† Bxd5 24.exd5 Rh4!?
A clever try to defend by building a fortress, but it fails. Nevertheless, moving the knight was no better:

24...Na7 25.Bb4† Kf7 26.Bd6 Rbe8 27.Rae1 Kg7 28.g5 Rh5 29.h4! Nb5 30.Be7!+–

Another knight sac idea is: 24...Rh3 25.dxc6 bxc6 26.Rae1! Rxd3 (26...g5 might delay the end, but should not change the result) 27.Bh6! Rg8 28.g5+–

25.g5 f5 26.dxc6 bxc6 27.b4 Rbh8 28.Rf2 Rh3



29.b5!
The fortress falls!

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Instead 29.Re1 Kd6 looks quite safe for Black.

29...cxb5 30.Re1 Kd6 31.Bb4† Ke6 32.Rfe2 Re3 33.Rxe3 dxe3 34.Rxe3 Rc8 35.Rh3 Rc1† 36.Kf2 Rb1 37.Be1 Rb2† 38.Kf3 Rb1 39.Bf2 Rd1 40.Rh6 Kf7 41.Ke2 Ra1 42.Be1 Ra2† 43.Kf1 f4 44.h4 Rh2 45.Rh7† Ke6 46.Ra7 Kf5 47.Rxa6 Kg4 48.Kg1 Re2 49.Bc3 e4 50.dxe4 Rc2 51.Be5 Kg3 52.Bxf4†
1–0

Conclusion

The Lowenthal is one of the less respectable members of the ...e7-e5 Sicilian family. For all that, Black is likely to suffer an unpleasant endgame rather than a quick mate. After 4...e5 5.Nb5 a6 6.Nd6† Bxd6 7.Qxd6 there are two queen moves to consider.

7...Qe7 allows White to exchange queens followed by an immediate c2-c4. White has the bishop pair and a solid grip on his space advantage; that’s a sure edge.

After the traditional 7...Qf6 I have chosen 8.Qc7!? as our move. It has the benefit that typical Lowenthal play, particularly starting with 8...Qg6?!, leads Black to disastrous positions. Black’s only correct reply is 8...Nge7 followed by a sequence that allows White a slight but definite endgame edge. Thus our repertoire choice reduces the Lowenthal into a grim struggle by Black to save a draw.

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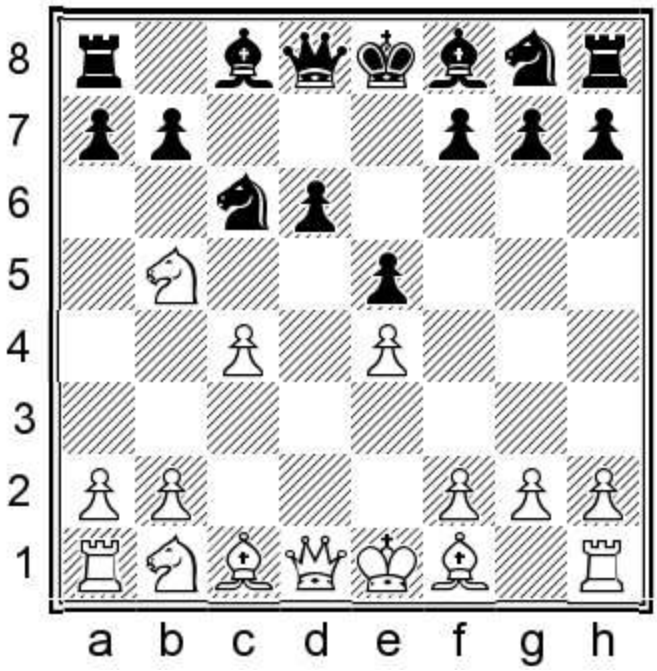
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# Chapter 5 - Kalashnikov

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6 6.c4

A) 6...g6!? 158
B) 6...Be7 7.N5c3!? 160
B1) 7...Be6 161
B2) 7...f5 162
B3) 7...Nf6 8.Bd3 163
B31) 8...Nd7!? 163
B32) 8...0-0 9.0-0 164
B321) 9...Be6 164
B322) 9...Nd7 Game 12 166
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6
The Kalashnikov is a structural cousin of the Sveshnikov but, by not using 4...Nf6 to force our knight to c3, White is offered the chance to seize space with c2-c4. And we will accept the offer.

6.c4
Note that 6.N1c3, offering Black a chance to reach the Sveshnikov with 6...Nf6, allows various interesting alternatives for Black, including 6...a6 7.Na3 Be7!?. And even if Black goes for 7...b5 8.Nd5, there is no need to transpose with 8...Nf6 as 8...Nge7 and even 8...Nce7 are both possible.




The c2-c4 move clarifies certain positional factors. White has a central grip, a great square on d5, and a backward pawn on d6 to target. Black has a fair share of the centre with his well-supported e5-pawn, and can spy a potential outpost on d4.

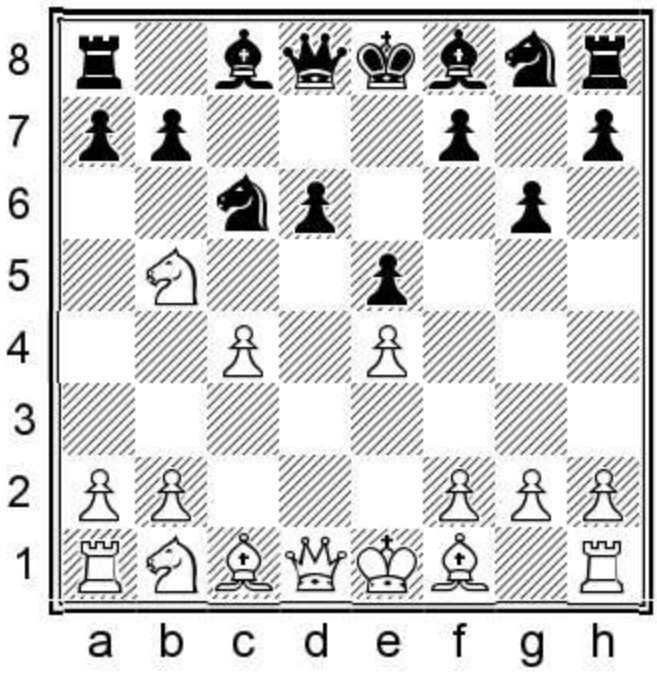
We should consider four moves: 6...a6 and 6...Be6 both require just a brief mention, though there is nothing wrong with the latter – it should just transpose to one of the more significant lines. A) 6...g6!? is rare but inter-

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esting, while B) 6...Be7 is overwhelmingly the main line.
The inflexible 6...a6 does not make much sense, especially when you see that we plan to play N5c3 anyway. After 7.N5c3 White has an improved version of our normal plan, as ...a7-a6 is not always essential against our repertoire.

6...Be6!?
In my Kalashnikov-playing days, I thought this was an inflexible move, cutting out the option of quick ...f7-f5 ideas because Black would lose a tempo recapturing after exf5. However, now that I am aware of the 6...g6!? line, I realize that 6...Be6 could be used as a way to delay a choice about the f8-bishop's future until Black has one more move's information.
7.Bd3!?
The most flexible move that stays within our planned repertoire.
Instead 7.N5c3 could be met by 7...g6!? when, unlike the 6...g6 variation, Black has not needed to spend a tempo on ...a7-a6.
Now both 7...Be7 and 7...g6 are almost certain to transpose to the 6...Be7 or 6...g6 variations.

A) 6...g6!?



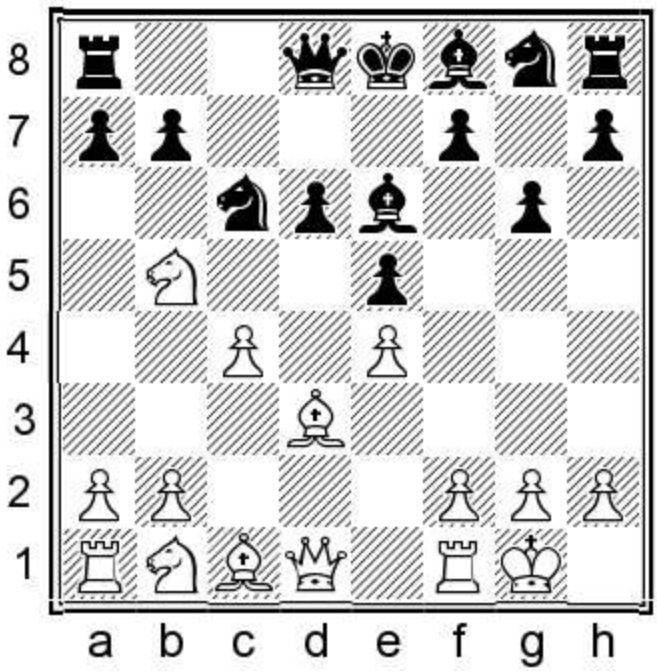

A rare but intriguing line that has been tried by GMs such as Jobava, Dubov and Belous. Later – probably much later – Black can try ...f7-f5, recapturing with a pawn if required. The f8-bishop looks likely to abandon the defence of the d6-pawn by going to g7, or perhaps even h6 to exchange itself. The latter idea suggests we should leave our bishop on c1 for now, to avoid a potential loss of tempo. The former idea suggests we should leave our knight on b5, and not voluntarily retreat to c3 as we do in the main line; the usefulness of the knight on b5 is shown in the note to 8 below.

7.Bd3²
Due to transpositional possibilities via the 6...Be6 move order, this move is most efficient for our repertoire.

Against this particular move order, White could also select a response that keeps the d-file open towards the d6-pawn. For example: 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 Bg7 9.Nc2 Nge7 10.Be2 0-0 11.0-0 Be6 12.Be3 f5 13.f3!? Lagno – Dubov, Moscow (blitz) 2015.

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7...Be6 8.0-0
Before Black can move his f8-bishop, he needs to waste a move playing ...a7-a6, as otherwise a move by the d3-bishop puts too much firepower against d6.

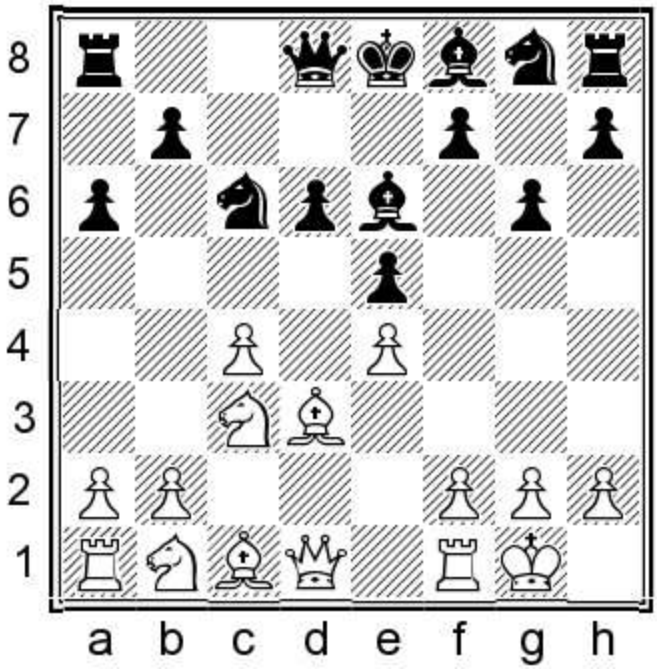


8...a6
8...Rc8 9.b3!? leaves Black facing the same problems over d6. One game concluded: 9...a6 10.N5c3 Bg7 11. Nd5 Nge7 12.Nbc3 0-0 13.Be3 Nd4 14.Nxe7† Qxe7 15.Re1 Qh4 16.Nd5 Bxd5² ½–½ G. Vazquez – Belous, Dallas 2016. Black was much higher rated, so we can guess he did not like his position. After 17.exd5!? one idea is g2-g3 followed by Bxd4, forcing an ugly pawn recapture.

The need to nudge the b5-knight is shown after 8...Bg7?! 9.Be2! when returning the bishop to f8 does not appeal, so instead Black could try: 9...Nd4 10.Nxd4 exd4 11.Na3² Black's structure is not impressive at all.

9.N5c3

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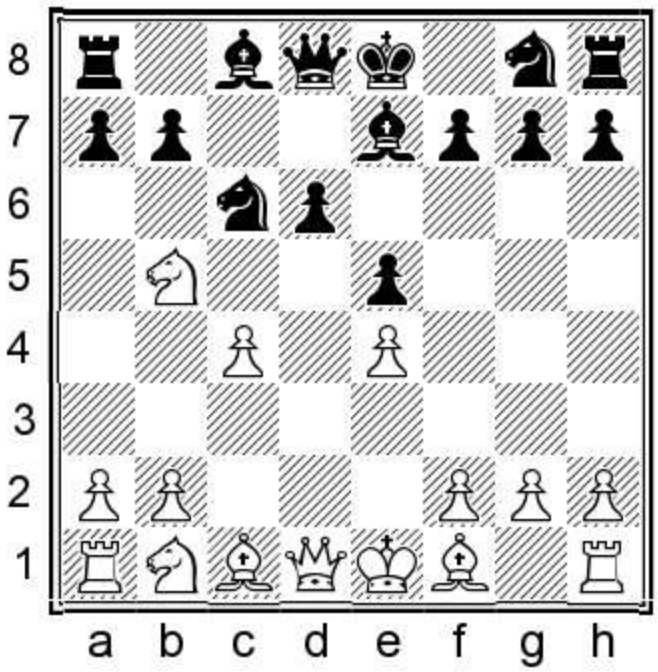


9...Bg7
This is a standard developing move, but we should also consider the bishop-swap plan:
9...Bh6
I recommend meeting it with:
10.Na3!?N
10.Nd2!? is an interesting way to avoid the swap, but after 10...Nf6 11.b3 0-0 12.Bb2÷ White had no advantage in Motylev – Belous, St Petersburg (rapid) 2015.
With ...g7-g6 played, an exchange of dark-squared bishops leaves some kingside weaknesses, while from c2 our knight will cover the potential hole on d4. One sample line is:
10...Bxc1 11.Rxc1 Nf6 12.Qd2 0-0 13.Nc2 Kg7 14.b3²
White can consider f2-f4 ideas.

10.Nd5 Nge7 11.Be3 0-0
In Alekseev – Belous, Khanty-Mansiysk (rapid) 2015, White put his knight on d2, but the more usual 12. Nbc3!? looks a simpler way to an edge.

B) 6...Be7

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Almost universally played; in reply, I recommend a rare option, which I believe is just as promising as the well-known theoretical main lines with 7.N1c3. I make that claim with some confidence, as we did reams of analysis on 7.N1c3 for use in this book before realizing that 7.N5c3!? was just as strong, but much less well known and requiring a fraction of the memorization.

7.N5c3!?

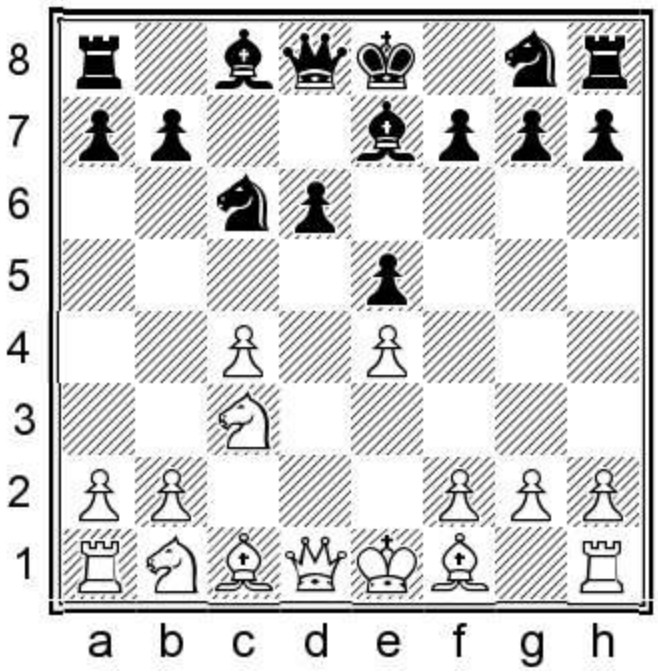
The sixth most popular move, with only around 70 games played, compared to over 3000 for the most common 7.N1c3. Or, to give another indicator, Rotella's excellent 464-page Kalashnikov repertoire, The Killer Sicilian, only spends one brief paragraph on 7.N5c3. I should also note that Rotella is not impressed by the move: "I doubt such a ponderous manoeuvre is critical to the Kalashnikov's survival".

I believe the Kalashnikov is a sound opening (I played it for several years) and no line will threaten its survival; the best we can do is to secure extra space and put Black under lasting pressure. Secondly, our planned manoeuvre, Nd5 and N1c3, is no more ponderous than the main line 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 when our offside knight will inevitably have to move again, probably to c2. Kalashnikov aficionados will know that the rather passive c2-square has some merit as it covers d4, a hole that often attracts a black knight. True, but in our line our c3-knight has the option of e2, which covers d4 and f4. And an f2-f4 break will be a key part of our resources.

In addition to Nd5 and N1c3, White's standard plan is Bd3 and 0-0. And where is the c1-bishop going? Maybe nowhere. One of Black's common ideas is ...Be7-g5, exchanging his bad bishop, so leaving our bishop on c1 might avoid wasting a move.

The expert on 7.N5c3 is GM Evgeny Alekseev, who has played it repeatedly with excellent results.

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We need a further split: B1) 7...Be6, B2) 7...f5 and the main line B3) 7...Nf6.
7...a6 is as illogical here as it is on move 6, and transpositions between the two are likely. In what my database claims is the first game with 7.N5c3, Fernandez Garcia – Sunye Neto, Buenos Aires 1990, White supposedly met that move with 8.Na3. I suspect a database input error, and that the real game featured the traditional move order of 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3, when the same position is reached but the moves make more sense.
For our purposes, 7...a6 should be met by 8.Nd5 when White has an improved version of the positions we will see in the normal lines.

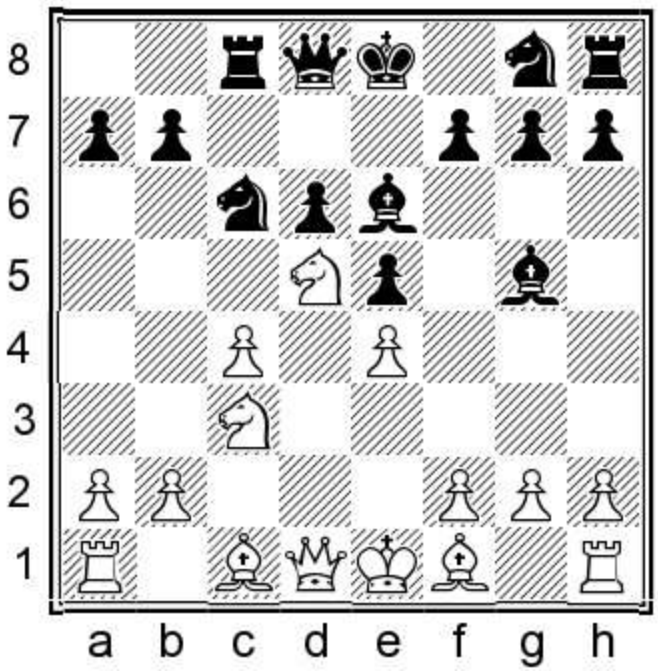
B1) 7...Be6

This will only be independent from the main line if Black avoids an early ...Nf6.

8.Nd5 Rc8
Developing, but also making ...Bg5 ideas possible without falling for a Nc7 fork.

9.Nbc3 Bg5
Keeping it independent. After 9...Nf6 10.Bd3 a transposition to the main line is almost certain.

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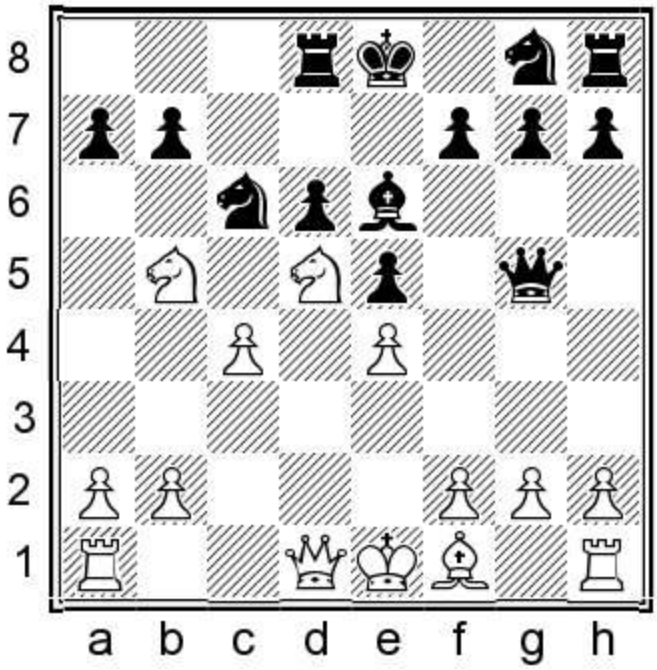
10.Bxg5!
A promising added option.

More typical would be 10.Bd3 Bxc1 11.Rxc1 Nf6 with a normal position for our line. It might seem that Black has gained by managing to play ...Bg5 without needing to play ...Nf6-d7 first, but in fact ...Nd7-c5 is a useful plan, and Black probably still wants to play it in this position.

10...Qxg5 11.Nb5 Rd8
The best choice.

11...Qd8
This allows a forcing line:
12.Qa4!
Threatening Nxa7.
12...a6 13.Na7 b5 14.Qxa6
The most ambitious choice.
But simpler to play is 14.Nxc6 bxa4 15.Nxd8 Kxd8 16.b4² with an endgame edge.
14...Nxa7 15.Qxa7 bxc4 16.Qa4† Kf8
Even worse is: 16...Bd7 17.Qb4±
17.Bxc4 Nf6 18.Ne3 Nxe4 19.0-0²
Black needs to spend time fixing his king position to develop the h8-rook; meanwhile White will put a rook on d1 then start exploiting the two connected passed pawns.

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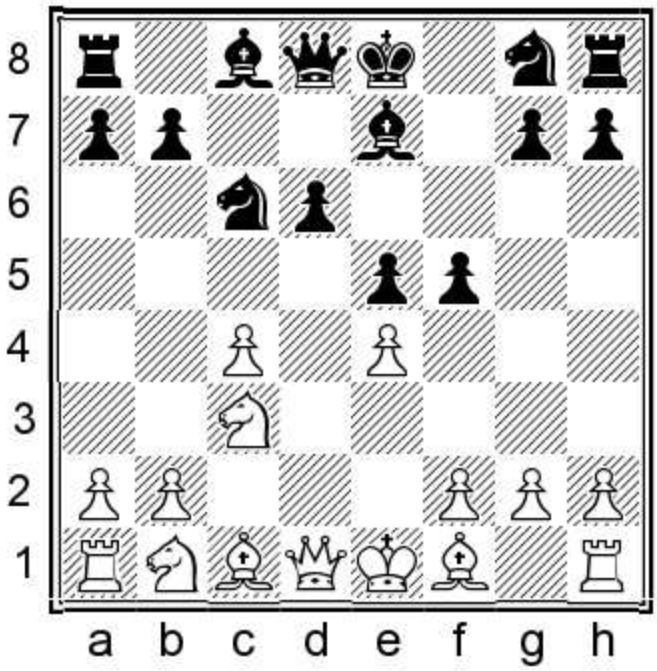
12.h4!?N
Keeping the option of checking with either knight on c7.

Instead 12.Nbc7† was unclear in Hagarova – Papadopoulou, Zanka 1995.

12...Qh6 13.g3²
White has an edge, with a plausible sample line being:

13...Nge7 14.Ndc7† Kf8 15.Nxe6† Qxe6 16.Qd3 a6 17.Bh3 Qf6 18.Nc3²

B2) 7...f5



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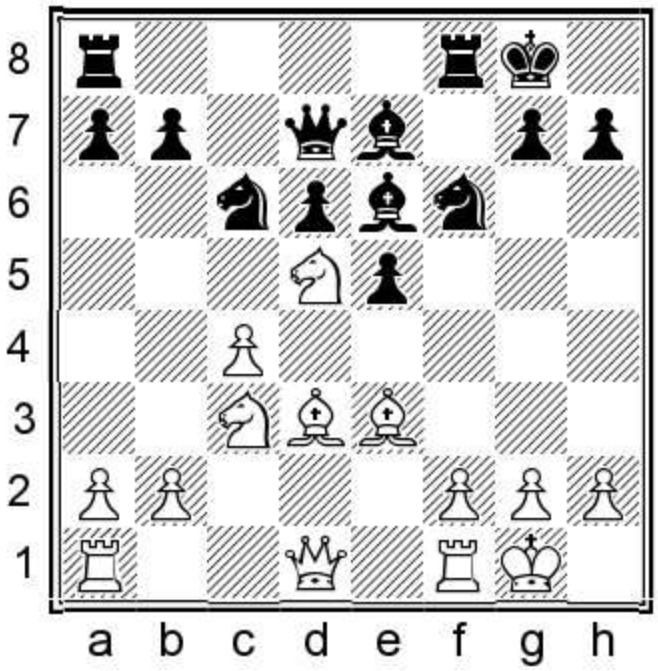
A standard idea in the Kalashnikov, but White's knights are well placed to meet it.

8.exf5 Bxf5 9.Bd3 Be6
Another standard sequence; Black needs to retain his light-squared bishop to cover the weaknesses created by the ...f7-f5 break.

10.Nd5
Our standard plan; the following moves are also typical.

10...Nf6 11.Nbc3 Nd4
This is frequently a double-edged move; the knight looks good on d4, but it can often be undermined by f2-f4 or challenged by Be3, when an exchange on d4 creates a weak pawn.

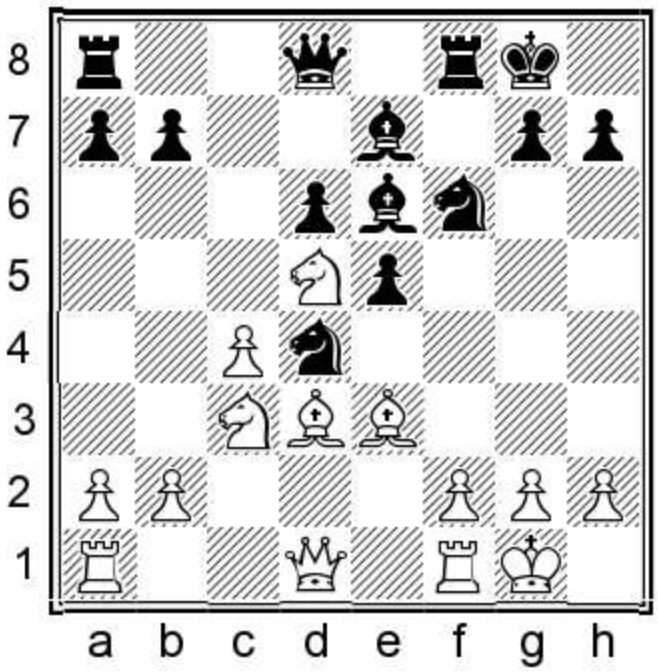
We can follow a recent game to see what might happen if Black avoids ...Nd4: 11...0-0 12.0-0 Qd7 13.Be3




13...Rae8 (A positional idea worth noting is that 13...Ng4 contains no threat. 14.Be4! Nxe3 15.fxe3± The new e3-pawn is not weak and does a great job controlling d4; a white rook should soon appear on d1.) 14.Rc1 Bd8 15.f3² In Lelumees – Kabisch, Stuttgart 2017, White had simply kept control of the position; expanding on the queenside was a logical next step.

12.Be3 0-0 13.0-0²
White has a pleasant edge, which grew rapidly in the only game to reach this position. Black needed to play:

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13...Nxd5
Instead the game continued 13...g6? which was a positional and tactical duff. 14.Nxe7† Qxe7 15.Bxd4 exd4 16. Nb5± In Alekseev – Klukin, St Petersburg (rapid) 2017, the d4-pawn was dropping.

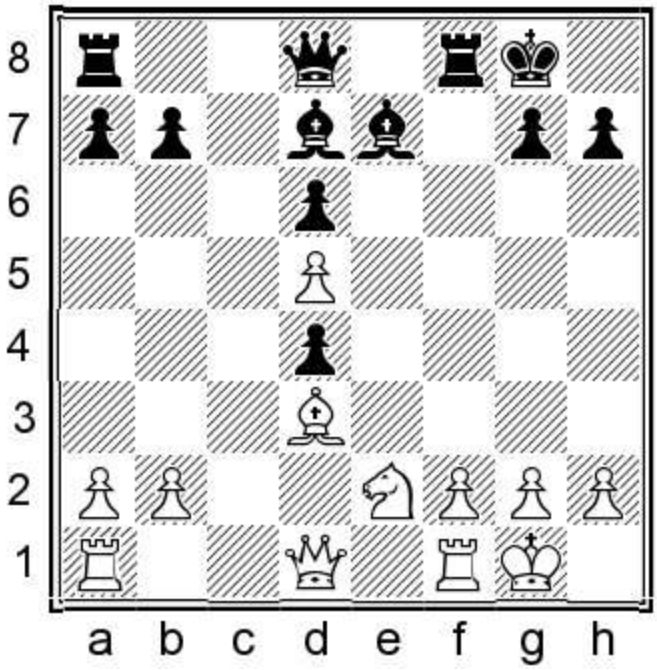
White has two promising recaptures:

14.cxd5
The greedy approach.

14.Nxd5 sees White playing to keep the positional grip. 14...Bxd5 15.cxd5 Nf5 16.Bxf5 Rxf5 17.Rc1² It's not much, but White is still asking questions.

14...Bd7 15.Bxd4 exd4 16.Ne2

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16...Qa5!
Correctly playing for activity.

Instead 16...Bf6?! allows 17.Nf4± quickly followed by Ne6, when Black will soon face a nasty opposite-coloured bishop middlegame.
17.Be4 Bf6 18.Qd3!
Unlike the variation above, 18.Nf4 Be5 19.Ne6 allows an equalizing trick: 19...Bxe6 20.dxe6 Bxh2† 21.Kxh2 Qe5† 22.Kg1 Qxe4=

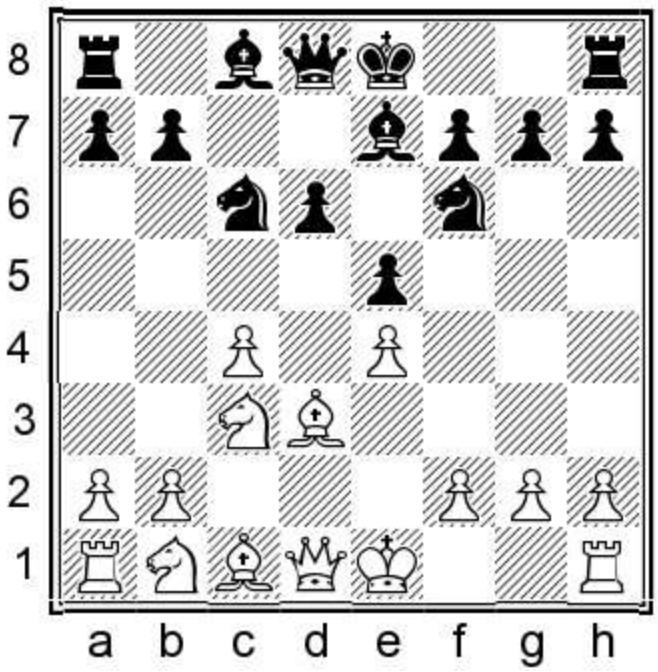
18...g6 19.Nxd4²
Black's f6-bishop gives him some compensation, but not enough for a full pawn.

B3) 7...Nf6

Simple development and preparing castling. This is the main line of our 7.N5c3 variation, but we are talking about a few dozen games instead of many thousands as in a typical main line. That means there is plenty of un-explored territory, even at the early stages.

8.Bd3

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We need a further split: B31) 8...Nd7!? and B32) 8...0-0.

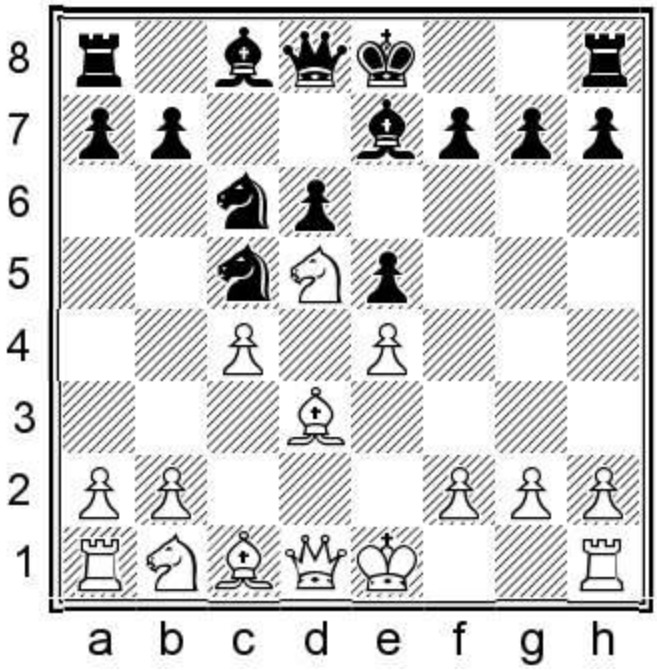
A minor option is: 8...Be6 9.Nd5 0-0 10.Nxe7†!? An added option (White could stay on normal paths with 10. Nbc3 or 10.0-0). 10...Qxe7 11.Nc3 Rac8 12.b3 Nd7 13.Be3² In Alekseev – Potapov, Sochi (rapid) 2017, Black was solid, but White has an edge.

B31) 8...Nd7!?

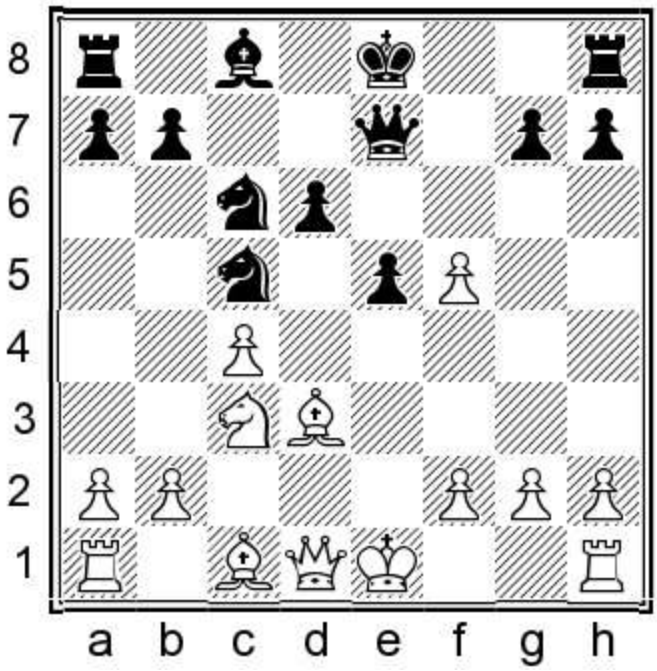
This was a suggestion of Rotella, and has been tried by Shirov, so it is certainly worth a look. The plan of ... Nd7-c5 is normal, but often with the bishop already on e6. With the bishop still on c8, Black has the option of ...f7-f5 ideas, recapturing on f5 in one move.

9.Nd5 Nc5

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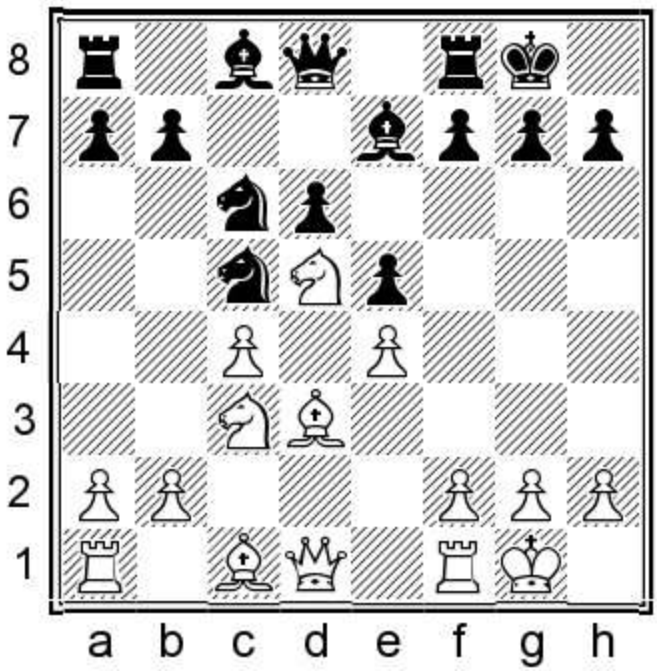


10.0-0!N
It’s worth comparing the following high-level example to the note on 8...Be6 on the previous page, to understand why it is best not to exchange on e7 in this case:
10.Nxe7 Qxe7 11.Nc3 f5!
This break is now an effective equalizer. It’s a point we see frequently: the ...f5 break does not lose time if the bishop is still on c8.
12.exf5



12...Nxd3†!N
12...0-0 13.Bb1! Bxf5 14.Bxf5 Rxf5 15.0-0 Nd4 was the continuation of Alekseev – Shirov, St Petersburg (rapid) 2013, when 16.Be3N² would have earned an edge.
chesstouring.com
13.Qxd3 Nd4=

With ...Bxf5 to follow. Since White has no advantage here, we can see why simple development at move 10 is correct.
10...0-0 11.Nbc3



11...f5!?
11...Bg5 is covered on page 166 – see 11...Nc5 in the notes to Game 12.

It is logical to consider the text move, by analogy with the Alekseev – Shirov game, but things are quite different when there is still a big knight on d5.

12.exf5 Nxd3
12...Bxf5?! 13.Bxf5 Rxf5 14.Be3± is even worse for Black.

13.Qxd3 Bxf5 14.Ne4²
White has a positional edge; the coming moves are likely to be Be3, f2-f3 and Rad1.

B32) 8...0-0

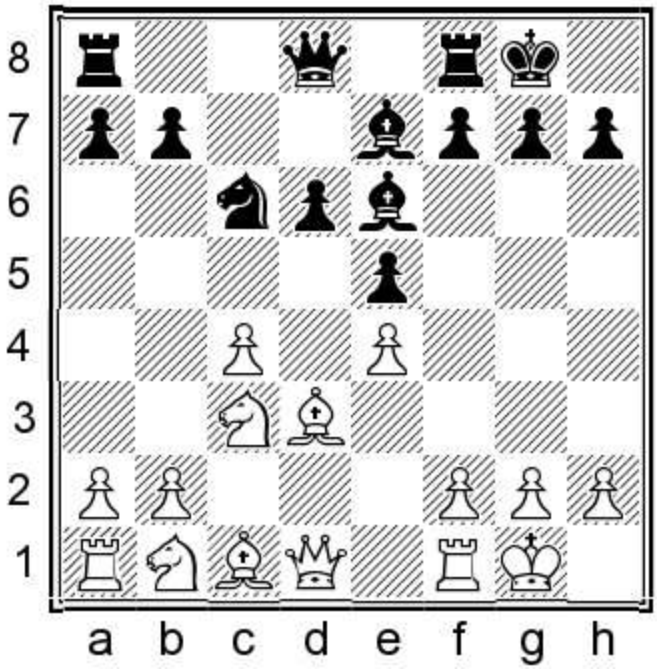
The most flexible option.

9.0-0
We need one last split: B321) 9...Be6 and B322) 9...Nd7.

B321) 9...Be6

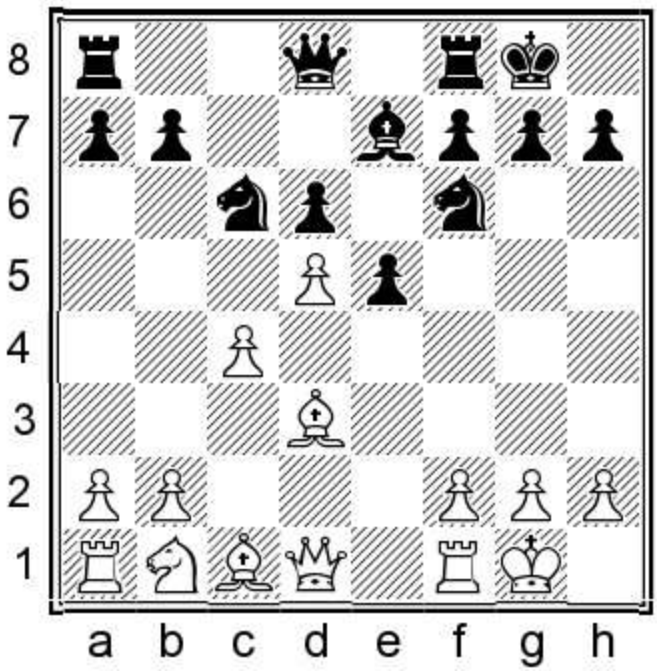
A natural development, but we now know that it makes a quick ...f7-f5 less appealing for Black.

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10.Nd5 Nd7
The standard idea.

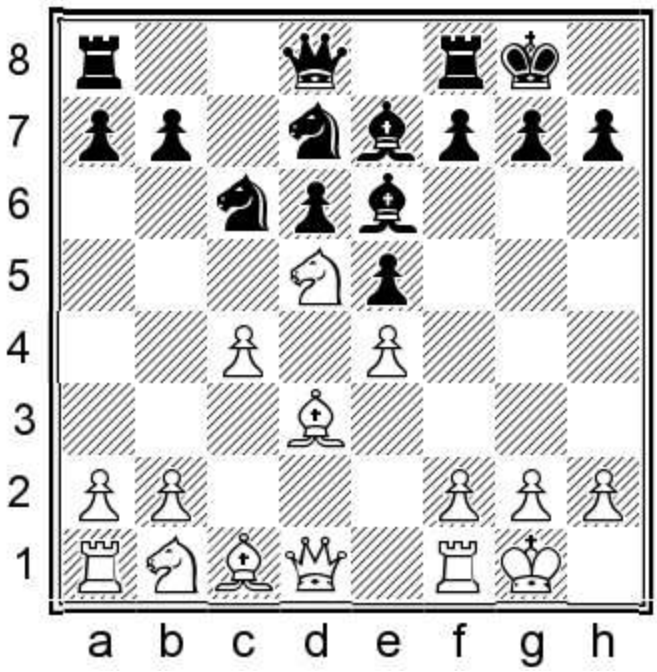
Exchanging on d5 loses too much time:
10...Bxd5 11.exd5



11...Nb8
Or 11...Nd4 12.Be3² when White does not need to rush to take on d4, though that is certainly a promising option, along with Nc3 and b2-b4.
12.Nc3 Nbd7 13.Be3²
We will see somewhat similar positions in the ...e5-Najdorf chapter, but White is well ahead here. In the real Najdorf the pawn is on a6 (of course!) but Black has moved his knight directly from b8 to d7, and not wasted

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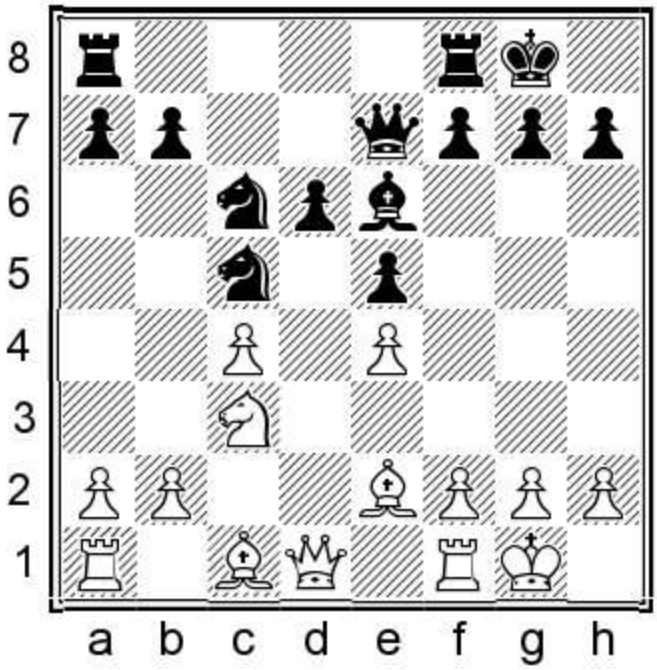
two moves going to c6 and back. The extra time gives White a decent advantage. For example:
13...Ne8 14.Qd2 f5 15.f3²
White will advance strongly on the queenside; Black's hoped-for kingside counterplay suffers from his lack of a single active piece.



11.Nxe7†!
A good moment to take on e7, as with the bishop on e6, we do not need to worry about a quick ...f5-break equalizing.
Instead 11.Nbc3 Bg5 12.Re1 was Dolmatov – Moiseenko, Tripoli 2004, when Rotella suggested 12...Bxc1 13. Rxc1 and then 13...Nd4. That's close to level, but after 14.Ne3!? White can press, as in the 12...Nf6 13.Ne3!? line on page 167.
Instead, this feels an ideal moment for 13...Bxd5 taking most of the tension out of the position. For example: 14.Nxd5 Nd4=

11...Qxe7 12.Nc3 Nc5 13.Be2²

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With ...f7-f5 losing time when the bishop recaptures, White can afford to consolidate his bishop-pair edge. One game continued:

13...Rad8 14.Be3 Qh4 15.f3 f5 16.Qd2 f4 17.Bf2 Qh5 18.Nd5²
In Lovakovic – Rawlings, email 2015, Black's kingside play was never a threat, while White could build up on the queenside; White eventually broke through to win.

B322) 9...Nd7

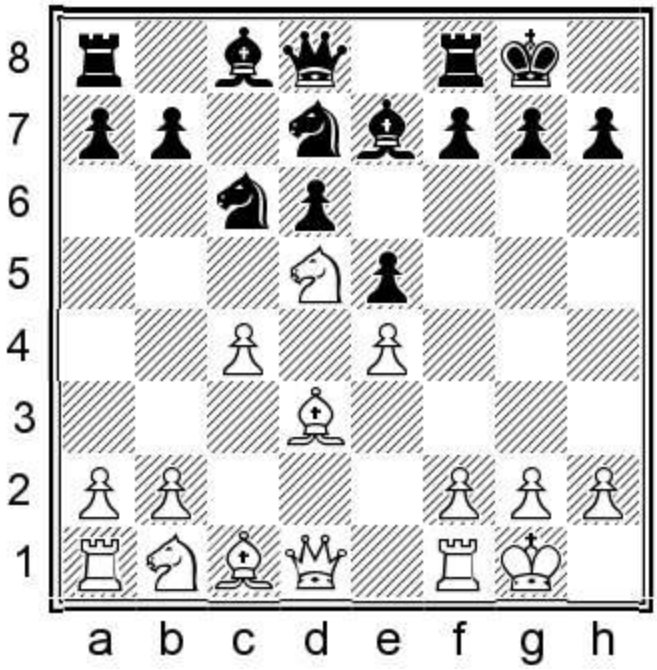
GAME 12

Evgeny Alekseev – Denis Yevseev
St Petersburg 2012

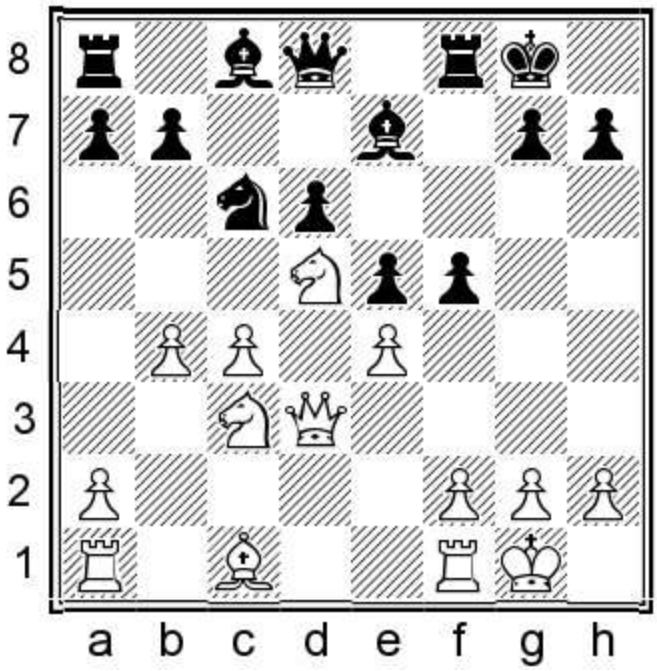
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6 6.c4 Be7 7.N5c3 Nf6 8.Bd3 0-0 9.0-0 Nd7
Starting the usual regrouping and preparing ...Bg5.

10.Nd5
Business as usual.

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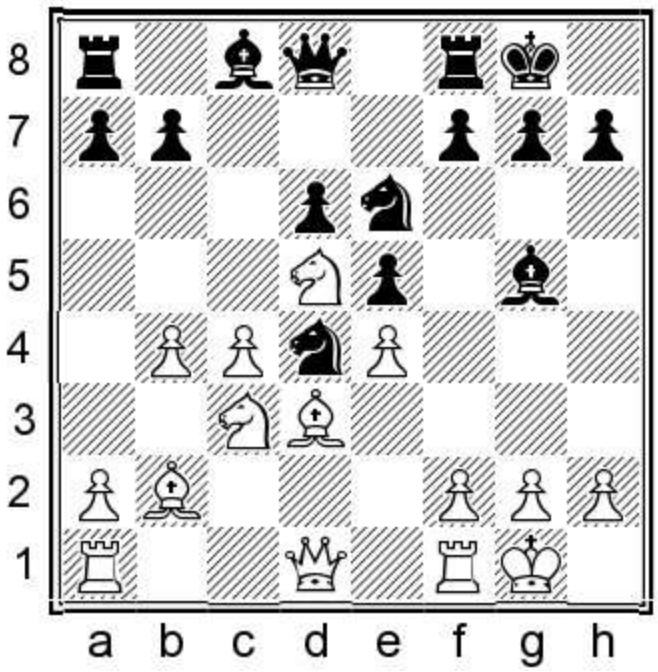
10...Bg5
If Black wishes to play a ...Bg5 plan, it makes sense to play it now, while remaining flexible about the d7-knight's destination.
But also playable is:
10...Nc5 11.b4!? Nxd3
We will see 11...Ne6 12.Nbc3 Bg5 in the note to the next move in the main game.
12.Qxd3 f5 13.Nbc3²



An irritating position for Black: he needs to move the c8-bishop to complete development, but then White takes on f5, when Black has wasted a move.
13...Be6
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The logical 13...f4?! has a tactical flaw: 14.b5! Na5 (the square the knight wants is 14...Nd4? but 15.Bxf4 is the

problem) 15.Nxe7† Qxe7 16.Ba3±
14.exf5 Bxf5 15.Ne4
White has a positional grip, in similar style to various other positions we see in this chapter. Once again, note how much happier Black would be if the d5-knight and e7-bishop had been exchanged.

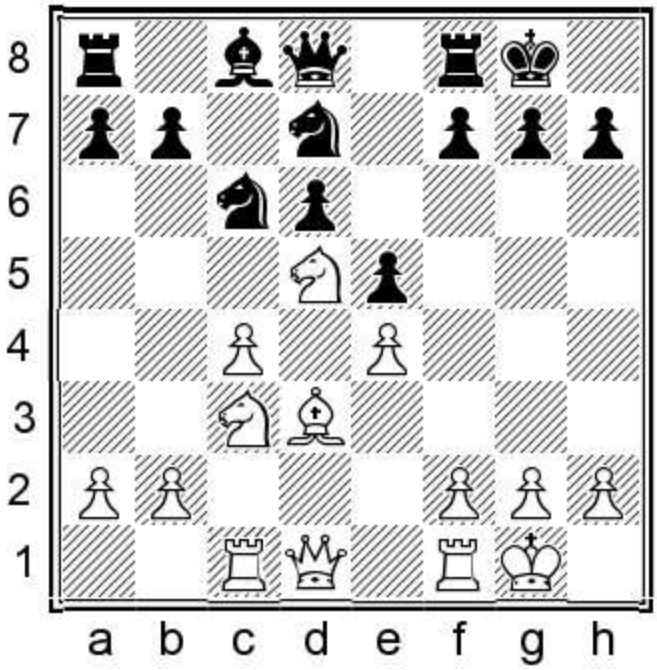
11.Nbc3 Bxc1
Again we should consider the knight move:
11...Nc5 12.b4!?
And once again this space-gainer is logical.
Instead 12.Bc2 Bxc1 13.Rxc1 is a clumsy version of the game; we would rather have the bishop well out of the way on b1.
12...Ne6
12...Nxd3 13.Qxd3 leads to a simpler position with a typical slight edge for White.
Black could consider 12...Bxc1!?N 13.Rxc1 Ne6 when 14.Bb1 is similar to the game, except with b2-b4 added, which is generally a useful move though not always immediately essential.
13.Bb2 Ncd4




This position occurred in Alekseev – Tekeyev, Sochi (blitz) 2016, and now I like:
14.g3!?N
Preparing f2-f4, though it makes sense to tuck our king safely away on h1 first. For example:
14...Bh6 15.Kh1 a5 16.a3 Kh8 17.Qh5 axb4 18.axb4 Rxa1 19.Bxa1 Bd7 20.f4,
Black is under immense pressure.

12.Rxc1²

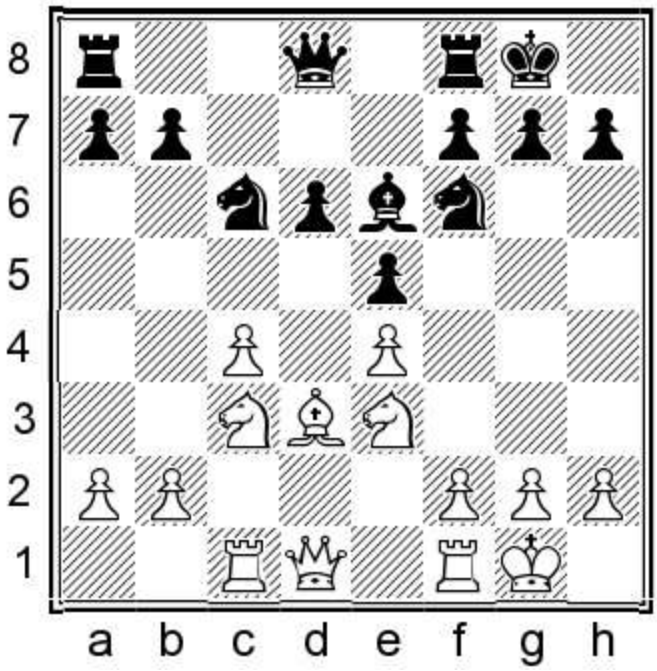
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The exchange of dark-squared bishops has eased Black's cramped position, but it also means the d6-pawn can be weak. If Black could reach this position except with his bishop sitting on e6, he would be about level. See page 165, note to White's 11th move in variation B321.

12...Nc5
The more active of the two likely posts for the knight.

12...Nf6 13.Ne3!?
Keeping more tension in the position, and also making the point that the f6-knight blocks a potential ...f5-break. All Black's pieces look sensible, but he has no pawn breaks and no clear plan; in contrast, White can slowly build up against d6.
13...Be6

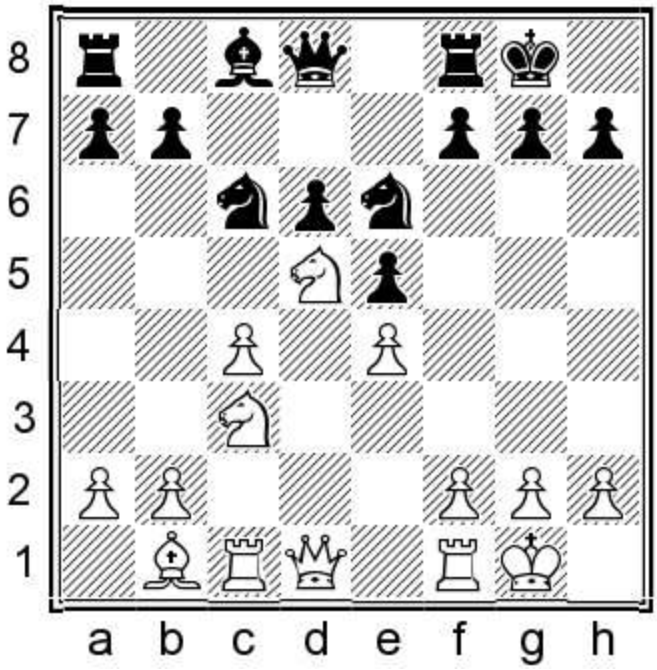


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14.f3!?N
An odd-looking move, but I want to prepare Qd2 and Rfd1 without allowing a freeing ...Ng4.
Instead 14.Bb1 was played in Alekseev – Andriasian, Kallithea 2008, but the bishop move does not seem necessary here.
As mentioned, if 14.Qd2 then 14...Ng4 eases Black's position.
A typical continuation would be:
14...Rc8 15.Qd2 Qb6 16.Rfd1 Nd4 17.Ne2 Nxe2† 18.Bxe2²

13.Bb1!
We will see that this bishop has more potential than may be immediately apparent. Also, the c5-knight is not stable, with b2-b4 on the cards.

13...Ne6
Don't be fooled by the seeming balance of power between the knights. White occupies d5 with total control, while moving either black knight to d4 could be met by f2-f4.




14.Qd3!
A multipurpose move; it prepares Rcd1 eyeing the weak d6-pawn, while adding more fuel to the planned f2-f4 break.

14...Qg5
Trying to clamp down on f4, but the break cannot be stopped.

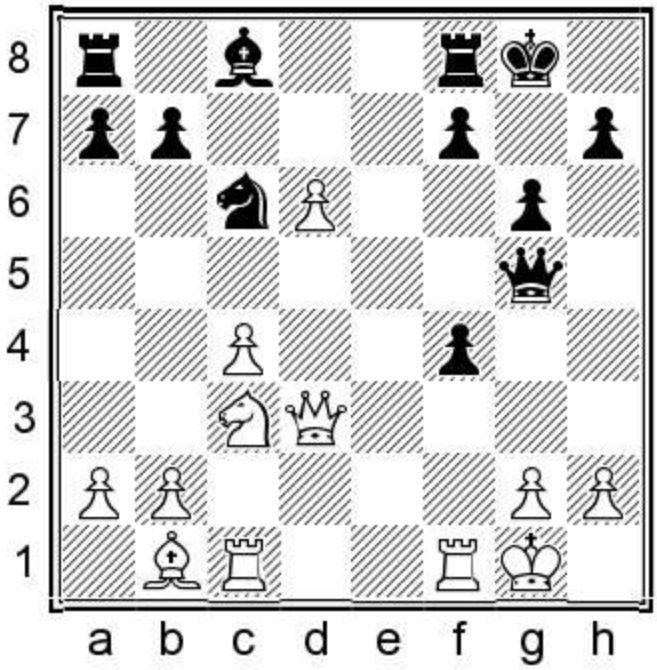
Black could try a line such as: 14...Ned4 15.f4! f6 when one of many options is: 16.f5!?² White can slowly build up with Qe3, Bd3, and perhaps g2-g4 and h2-h4, though expanding on the queenside with b2-b4 is also tempting.

14...f6 15.f4 is similar.

15.f4!
Making use of the queen-and-bishop battery.

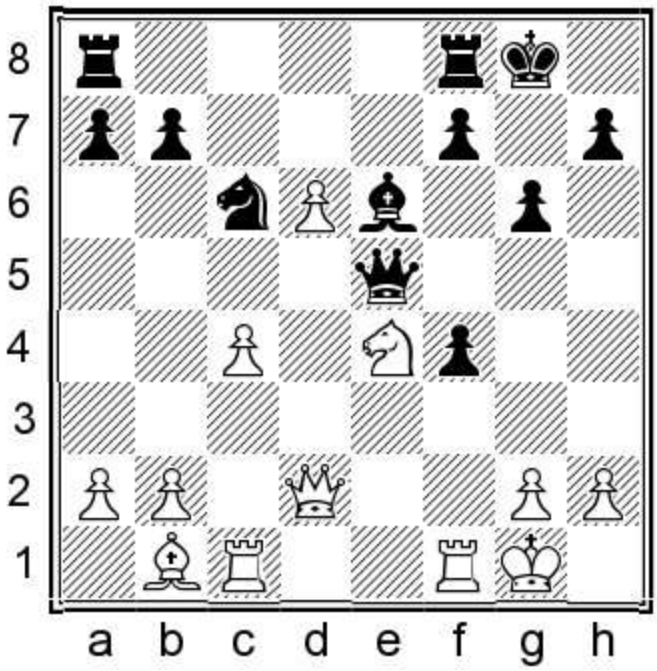
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15...Nxf4 16.Nxf4 exf4 17.e5 g6 18.exd6
An amazing transformation; the d6-pawn is a fine asset.



18...Be6?!
Too slow. Black needed to put pressure on the d6-pawn at once.
18...Rd8 would have minimized Black's disadvantage. For example: 19.Rcd1 (unlike the game, after 19.Ne4 Qe5 20.Qd2?! Black has time for 20...f5÷) 19...Bg4 20.Rd2 Qc5† 21.Rff2² The d6-pawn is still strong, but at least it is not supported by a pawn from c5.

19.Ne4 Qe5 20.Qd2±

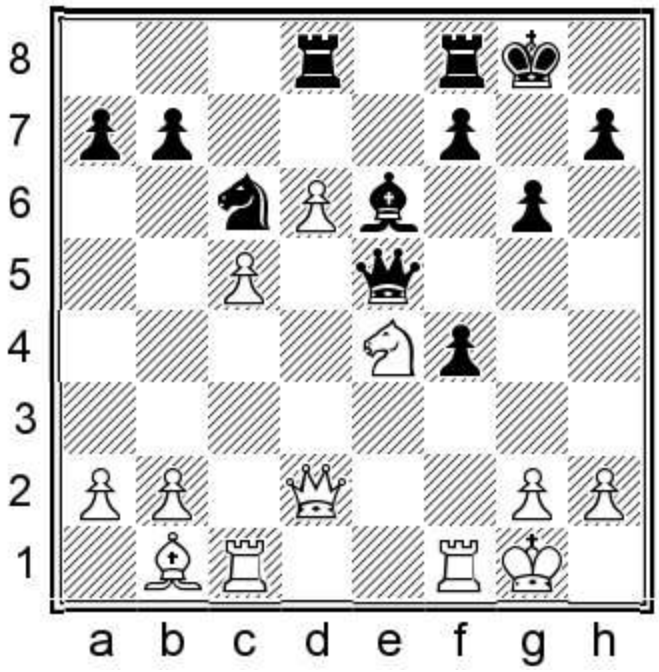


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Another masterful multipurpose queen move: defending b2, hitting f4, and freeing the b1-bishop.

20...Rad8?!
There is no longer any time for this move.
20...f5 was essential, even though 21.Ng5 is highly unpleasant.

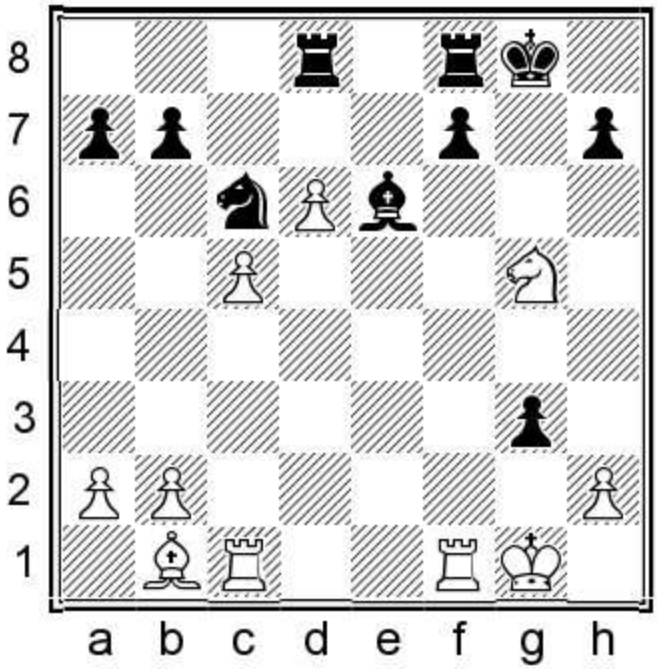
21.c5+–
White's protected passed pawn on the sixth is a monster while Black's kingside is weak.




21...g5 22.g3!
Slow play with b2-b4 would also have worked, but the text move is the fastest winner. The position is giving me flashbacks to the 3...g5 lines of King's Gambit.

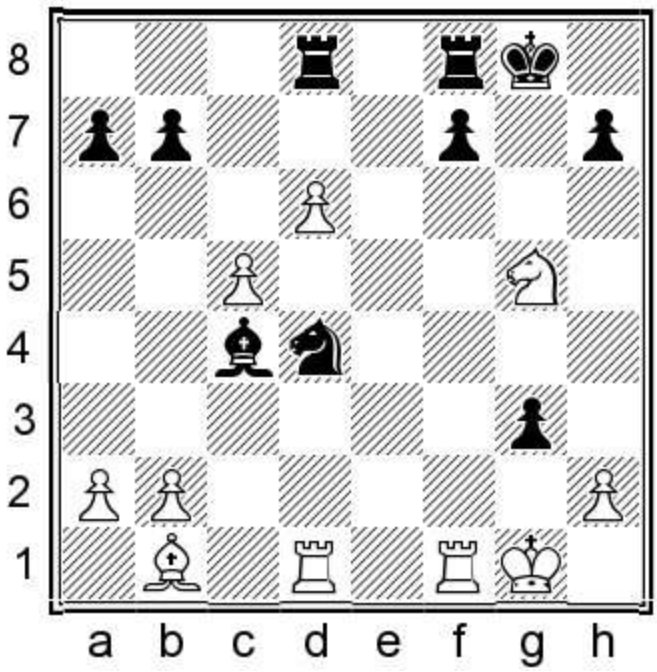
22...fxg3 23.Qxg5† Qxg5 24.Nxg5
It soon becomes apparent that Black's queen was the only piece holding his position together.

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24...Nd4
After 24...gxh2† 25.Kxh2 White has a killing attack, even without queens.

25.Rcd1 Bc4



26.hxg3
This wins, but then so does every other plausible move.

26...Bxf1 27.Rxd4
Black resigned as 27...Bb5 28.Nxh7 wins back the exchange, leaving White two pawns up. A great game by Alekseev, demonstrating the power of his favourite anti-Kalashnikov weapon.

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1–0

Conclusion

We meet the Kalashnikov, 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6, with the space-seizing 6.c4.

Then 6...a6 is needlessly inflexible, while 6...Be6 is likely to transpose to one of the two main lines, as long as White replies with the sensible 7.Bd3.

A) 6...g6!? is odd but not absurd. We should simply develop with Bd3 and 0-0, leaving our knight on b5 until it is nudged back to c3 by ...a7-a6.

In contrast, I recommend meeting the main line of B) 6...Be7 with the voluntary retreat 7.N5c3!?, when Black has three main paths.

B1) 7...Be6 8.Nd5 has many transpositional possibilities, but if Black tries the independent 8...Rc8 9.Nbc3 Bg5 then White has the excellent option of 10.Bxg5! Qxg5 11.Nb5.

B2) 7...f5 is a common Kalashnikov idea, but our knights are perfectly placed to meet it. After 8.exf5 Bxf5 9. Bd3 Be6 10.Nd5 Nf6 11.Nbc3 White has a controlled edge.

After B3) 7...Nf6 8.Bd3 if B31) 8...Nd7!? 9.Nd5 Nc5 then White should avoid 10.Nxe7, as 10...Qxe7 11.Nc3 f5! is an effective equalizer. Instead 10.0-0 0-0 11.Nbc3 will transpose to later lines.

After B32) 8...0-0 9.0-0 we saw a final split.
After B321) 9...Be6 10.Nd5 Nd7, in contrast to the previous line, this is a fine moment to take on e7, as with the bishop on e6, we do not need to worry about a quick ...f5-break equalizing. After 11.Nxe7†! Qxe7 12.Nc3 Nc5 13.Be2 White has an edge.
After B322) 9...Nd7 10.Nd5 we saw various tries for Black, with one of the most solid and logical being 10... Bg5 11.Nbc3 Bxc1 12.Rxc1 Nc5. But even here, after 13.Bb1! White has good prospects of building up pressure, as Alekseev brilliantly demonstrated.

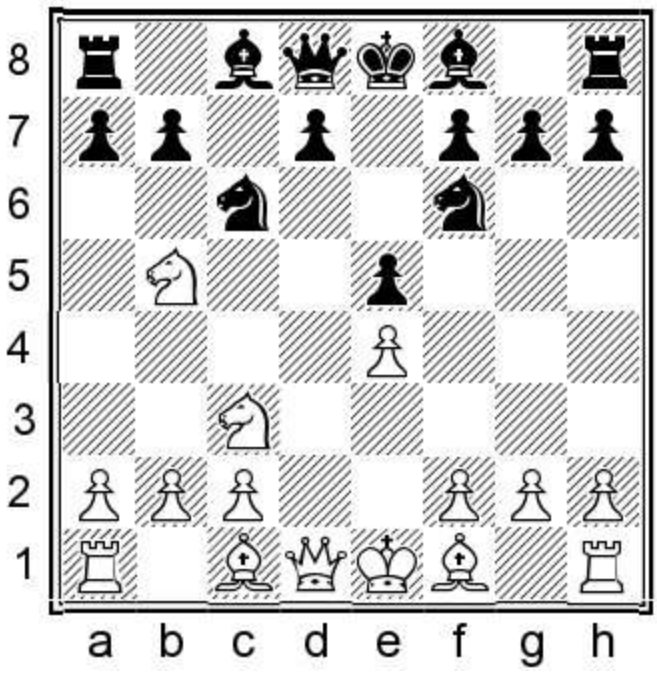
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# Chapter 6 - Sveshnikov

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5

6...h6 Game 13 172
6...a6?! Game 14 176
6...d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 180
Minor 8th Moves: 8...Be6 (8...d5?; 8...Rb8; 8...Be7) Game 15 180
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14...Bb7?! (14...Rb8?!; 14...Ne7!?) Game 19 214
14...a5 15.Bc4 Rb8 16.b3 Kh8 17.Nce3 219
17...Bxe3 (17...Be6; 17...f5?) 219
17...Ne7 Game 20 222
17...g6 Game 21 224
In this chapter we shall concentrate on the position after:
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5




And in particular the move 6...d6, which leads to the main lines of the Sveshnikov. The Sveshnikov is as tough

a test as a 1.e4 player will face – it is right up there with the Najdorf in terms of theoretical respectability. Many grandmasters duck the challenge with 3.Bb5, the Rossolimo, which to be fair is one of the better anti-Sicilians. However, we shall stick to our Open guns with 3.d4.
Before we face the true challenge, we will deal with a couple of easier moves, 6...h6 and 6...a6. Then it's time for the many branches of the real Sveshnikov.
The main line continues with 6...d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 when we take a brief look at the Lasker variation 8...Be6 (Game 15) before continuing on to the normal 8...b5 9.Nd5 when again there is a sideline, 9...Qa5† (Game 16), before we reach the main tabiya after 9...Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3. I will explain later why this is the line I recommend.
Then we need an extended study of the sharp 11...Ne7, followed by 11...Bb7 (Game 18), and 11...Bg5 (page 205). With those moves out of the way, we will finally be ready for the main line, which starts 11...0-0 12.Nc2 Bg5 13.a4 bxa4 14.Rxa4.

6...h6

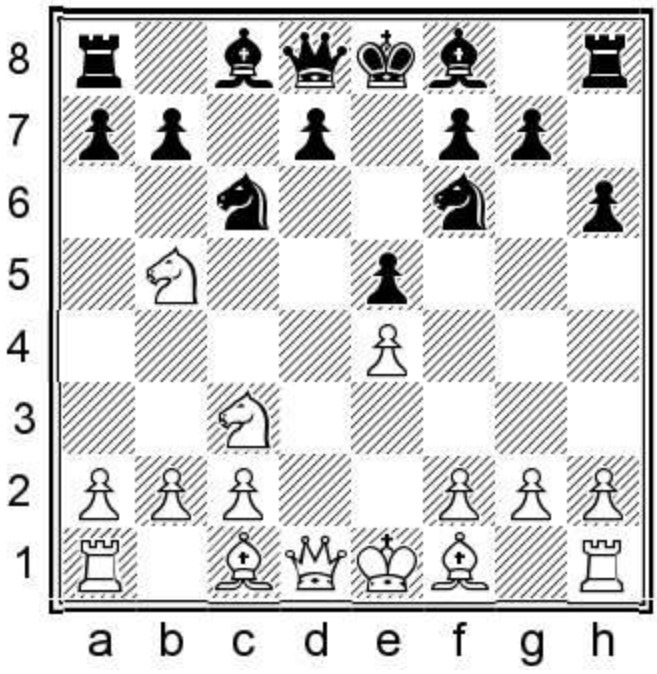
GAME 13

Daniel Alsina Leal – Joaquin Antoli Royo
Villava 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 h6
I was amused by the following comment by Cyrus Lakdawala in Larsen Move by Move: "I tearfully pleaded with Everyman to allow me to write a book on the rarely-played pseudo-Pelikan 6...h6, which I call The Ulfie, since GM Ulf Andersson has zillions of online games with it and has convinced me it is absolutely playable for Black."

Zenon Franco in Spassky Move by Move was calmer: "An unusual move."

I should admit I played 6...h6 a few times about ten years ago. I like endgames and was willing to suffer a slight disadvantage just to provoke an exchange of queens.



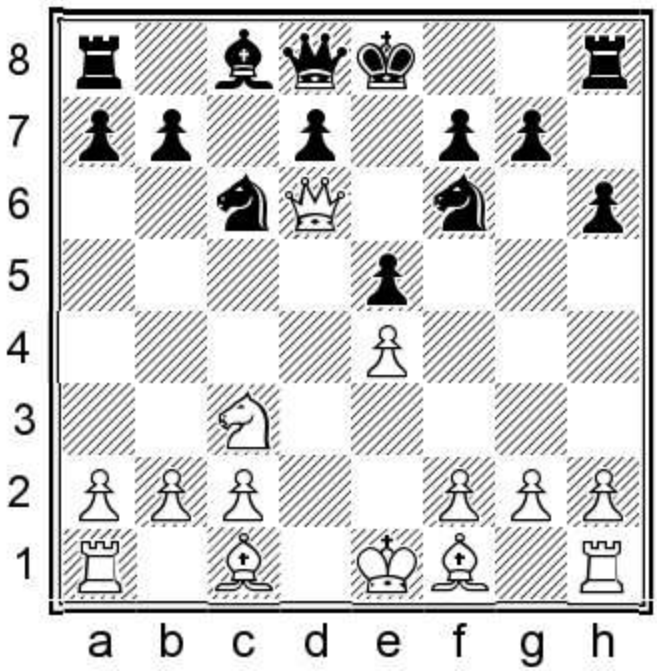

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7.Nd6†
Sometimes the simple way is also the best.

7.Nd5?! Nxd5 8.exd5 a6! has been played in lots of games and is not dangerous for Black.

7.Be3
I dislike this ambitious approach because of the dangers it includes for White.
7...d6
7...Qa5? has a good score in the database, which serves as an example of how misleading statistics may be. After 8.f3 Black's position is simply horrible.
8.Nd5 Nxd5 9.exd5 Ne7!
Contrary to the Sveshnikov, this move is attractive here, as the knight will attack the bishop on e3 quickly.
10.c3
This move, threatening the a7-pawn and Qa4, is well-known from the Sveshnikov.
10...Nf5 11.Bxa7 Bd7 12.a4 b6
This has been played in a few games and might offer White a chance to play for an advantage, but in practical terms I find Black's counter-attacking chances attractive.

7...Bxd6 8.Qxd6




8...Qe7
Again the simple move is best.

The apparently more aggressive 8...Qb6?! leads only to pain if White refuses to be cowed: 9.Bd2! Qd4 (9...Qxb2? 10.Rb1+–) 10.Qxd4 Nxd4 (10...exd4 11.Nb5 looks grim) 11.0-0-0 0-0 12.f3 b6 13.Be3 Ne6 14.Nd5± Jasnikowski – Zoltek, Zielona Gora 1982.

8...Qa5?! 9.Bd2± is similar to a weak line featured on page 176; see the Tarrasch – Mieses game in the notes there.

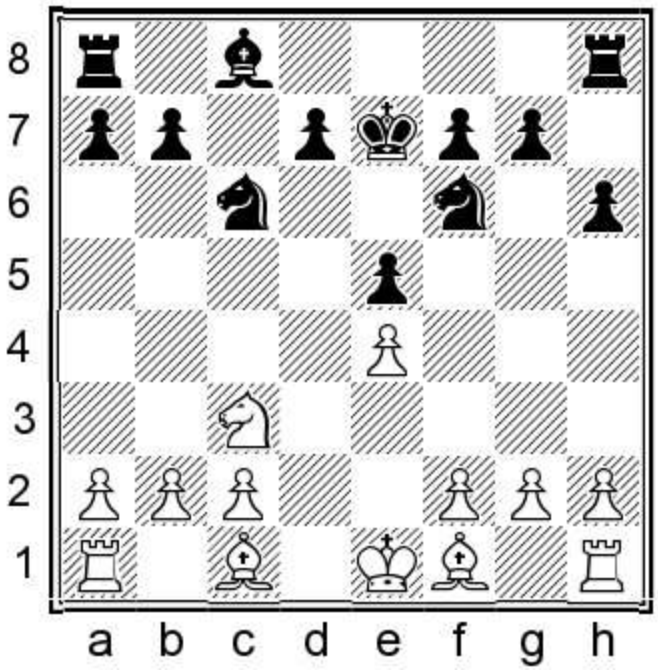
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9.Qxe7†

This is absolutely the right move.

9.Nb5 is less threatening than it looks after: 9...Rb8! For example: 10.Be3 Nxe4 11.Qxe7† Kxe7 12.f3 a6 13. fxe4 axb5 14.Bxb5 d6 15.0-0-0 Peters – Lakdawala, Costa Mesa 2003. If this was all White had, I would consider playing 6...h6 again.

9...Kxe7

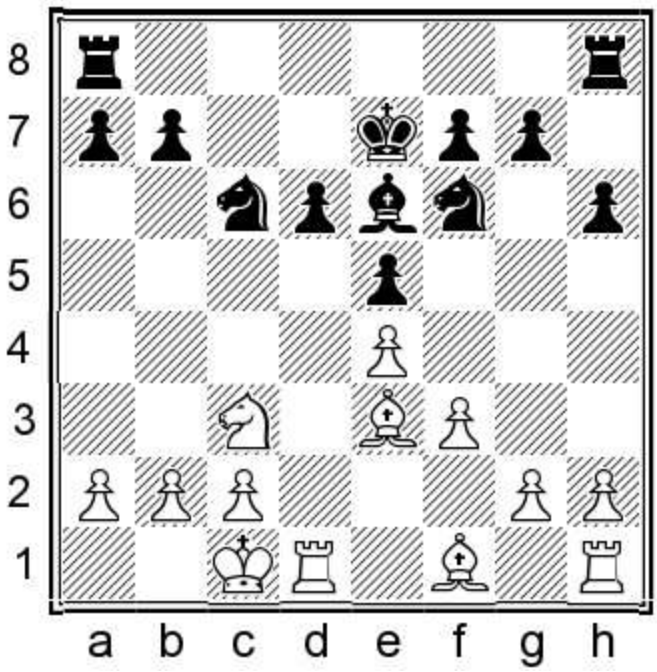



10.Be3
10.b3!? is interesting. One idea is Ba3(†) of course, but covering the c4-square against ...Nc4 incursions is also handy, as we shall see in the note to Black's 12th move below.

10...d6
Black's pieces develop easily: ...Be6 and usually rooks to c8 and d8, but White has the pair of bishops and an advantage in space.
10...Rd8?! as in Suetin – Klavins, Minsk 1957, is an inaccurate move order due to: 11.Nd5†!N 11...Nxd5 12. exd5 Nb8 (12...Nd4 13.Bxd4 exd4 14.0-0-0) 13.f4! d6 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.c4²

11.f3 Be6 12.0-0-0
Black has tried a number of moves from here.

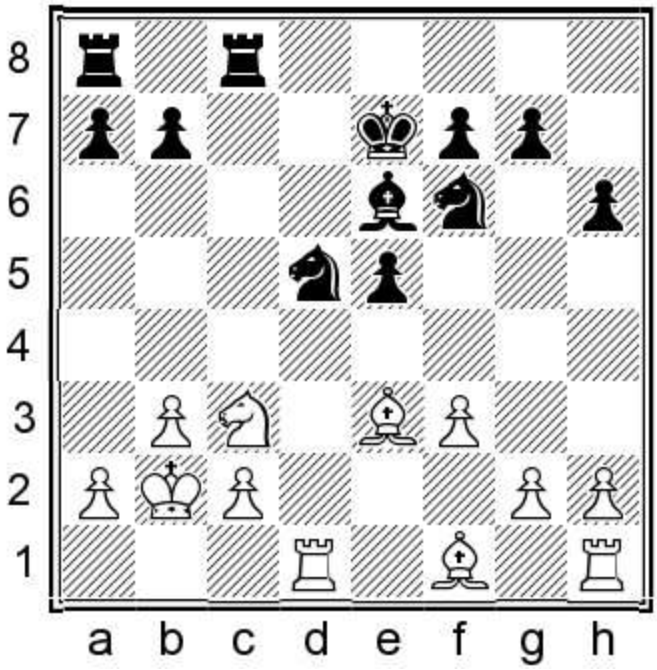
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12...a6
12...Rac8 13.Kb1 a6 is just a transposition.

12...Rhc8!?
This move deserves particular attention. I recommend meeting it with:
13.b3!
The natural 13.Kb1 runs into 13...Na5!÷ which has been played just once, in Eremin – Helmer, email 2012. Black stops b2-b3 and discourages Nd5 (Black can now take with the knight without losing a piece!) while furthering his own plan of ...Nc4. White may yet find an edge with some plan involving g2-g4 and h2-h4, but it is less clear and controlled than I want.
In such queenless Sicilian middlegames, b2-b3 is often a useful move for White. It gives a great square on b2 for the king, while keeping Black's knight out of c4. If Black plays slowly then White can neaten up his position with Kb2 and consider a later Nd5. So the attempt to "do something" is:
13...Nb4 14.Kb2 d5 15.exd5 Nbxd5
15...Nfxd5 should lead to the same thing.
In I. Petrov – Horse, corr. 2011, the simplest continuation would have been:

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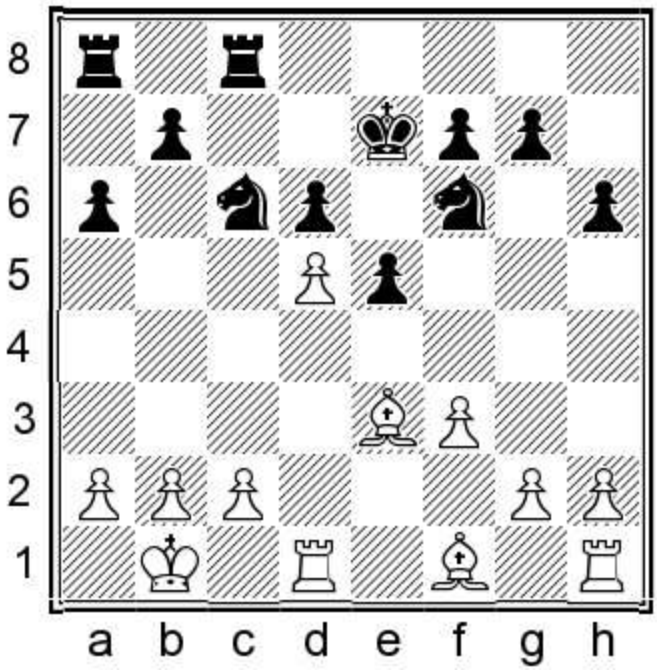


16.Nxd5†N 16...Nxd5 17.Bd2²
The bishop pair is the dominant feature, as Black's pseudo-initiative is over.

12...Rhd8 13.b3 followed by Kb2 is similarly fine, as again ...d6-d5 is no threat.

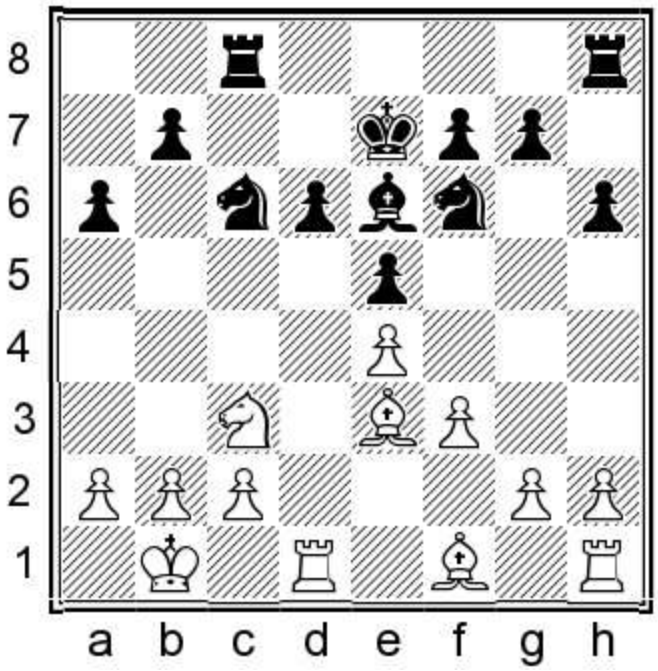
13.Kb1
The cleanest way to play for White is to go Nd5† next and get the advantage of two bishops versus two knights.

13...Rac8
Ptting the other rook on c8 no longer has as much point as one move ago:
13...Rhc8 14.Nd5† Bxd5 15.exd5
The knight has a few squares available but none of them is ideal.



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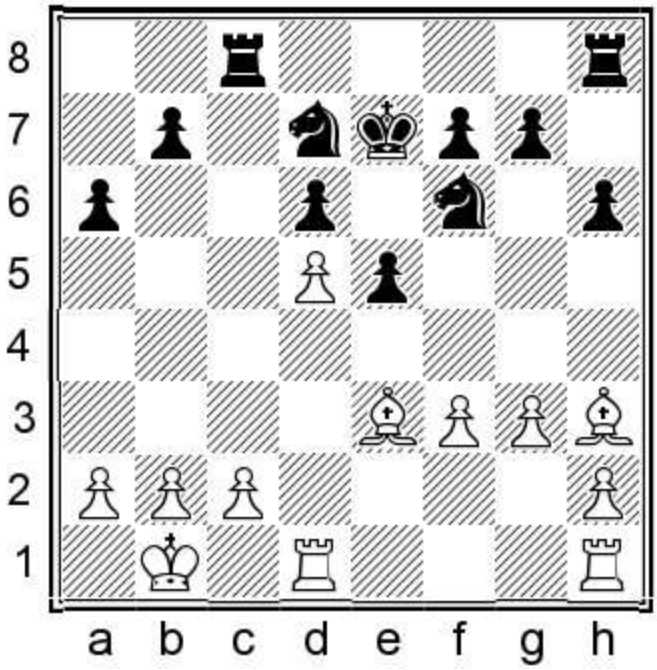
15...Na5
15...Nb4 16.c4 a5 17.g4² with h4 to follow.
15...Nb8 16.g4 Nbd7 17.h4²
16.b3 b5
Rodriguez Lopez – Gomes, Famalicao 2015. Now a promising option is:
17.a3!?N
Preventing ...b4 and intending Kb2, followed by h2-h4, g2-g4 and so on.



14.Nd5† Bxd5 15.exd5 Nb8 16.g3!?
16.g4!?N 16...Nbd7 17.h4² was another suitable plan.

16...Nbd7 17.Bh3
On almost every move there will be options for both sides; for instance, 17.c4!? looks promising. With two bishops versus two knights, White will be pressing in every case.

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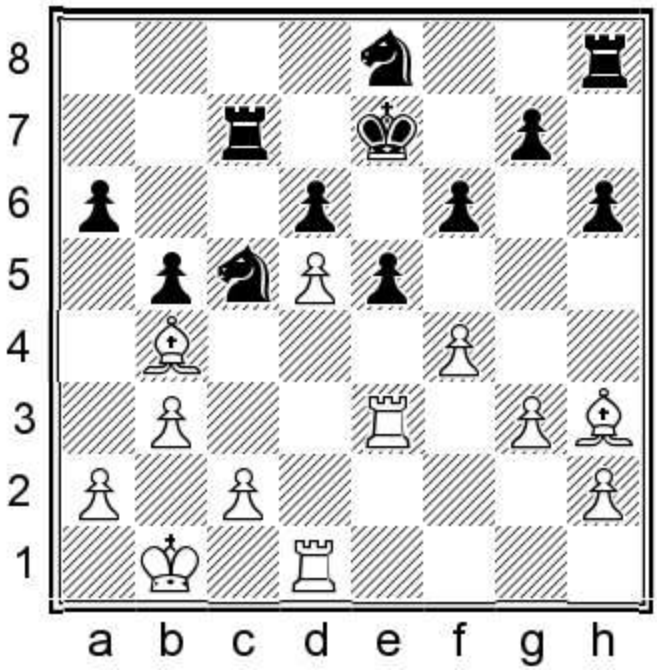


17...Ne8?!
This retreat makes the central break even more potent.

17...b5 was more resilient, but after any of various moves, including 18.Rhe1², White has a sure edge.

18.f4!±
We do not need detailed notes on the rest; White just keeps tacking back and forth, improving his pieces, until Black cracks under the pressure.

18...Rc7 19.Rhe1 f6 20.b3 b5 21.Bd2 Nc5 22.Ba5 Rb7 23.Bb4 Rc7 24.Re3



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24...g5?

This accelerates the end, but it could not have been fun to sit passively with the knight on e8 having no legal moves.

25.Rde1 h5 26.Rc3 Nd7 27.Rc6 Ra7 28.fxg5 fxg5 29.Be6 Rh7 30.Bd2 Rg7 31.h4 gxh4 32.gxh4
Black could have played on for a few more moves, but the outcome was clear.
1–0

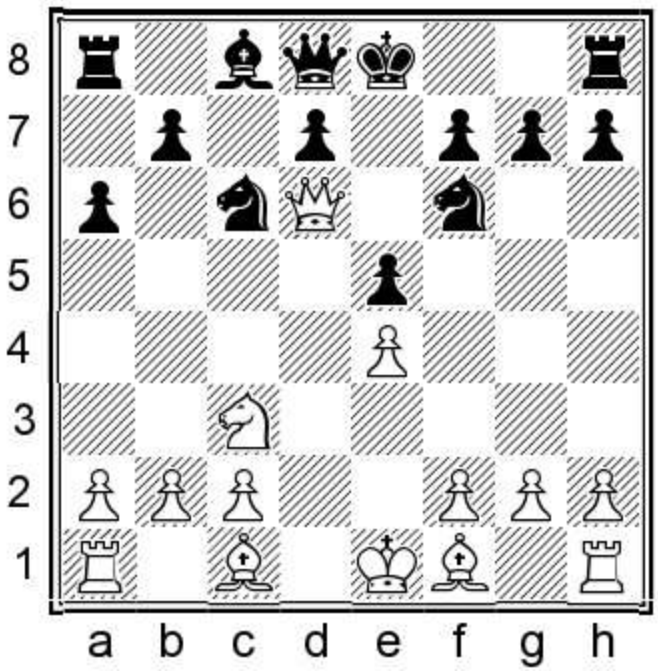
6...a6

GAME 14

Dmitry Jakovenko – Jaime Cuartas
Khanty-Mansiysk Olympiad 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 a6?!
This is an inferior form of Lowenthal, as Black has the same structural problems but less activity.

7.Nd6† Bxd6 8.Qxd6




8...Qe7
The best of an unappealing selection:

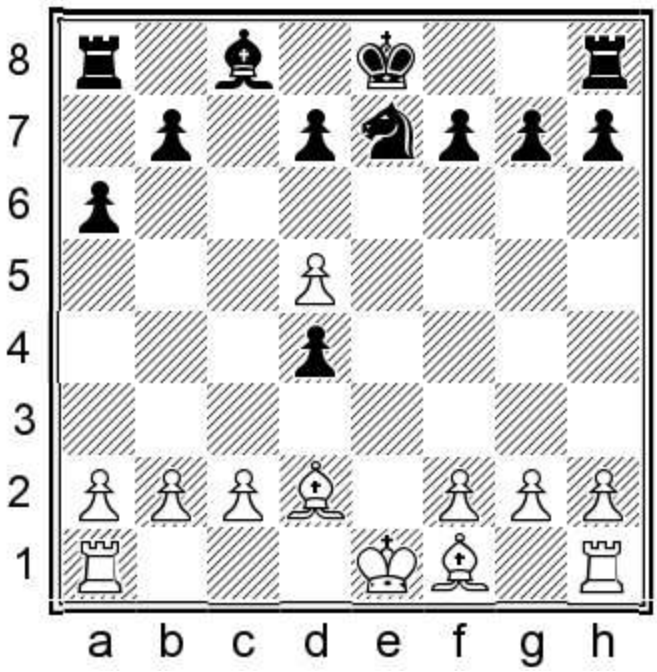
The slow 8...h6?! is effectively refuted by: 9.Be3! Qe7 10.Bc5 Qxd6 11.Bxd6 b5 12.0-0-0± Illingworth – Smirnov, Sydney 2010.

8...Qa5?! 9.Bd2! With the terrible threat of Nb5. 9...Qb4 10.Qxb4 Nxb4 11.0-0-0 b5 12.Bg5 Ng4 13.Bh4 f6 14. Be2 Nh6 15.a4± Tarrasch – Mieses, Nuremberg 1888.

8...Qb6 9.Bd2! Qd4 10.Qxd4 exd4
10...Nxd4 11.0-0-0 0-0 12.f3± was great for White in Schubert – R. Meijer, email 2011.

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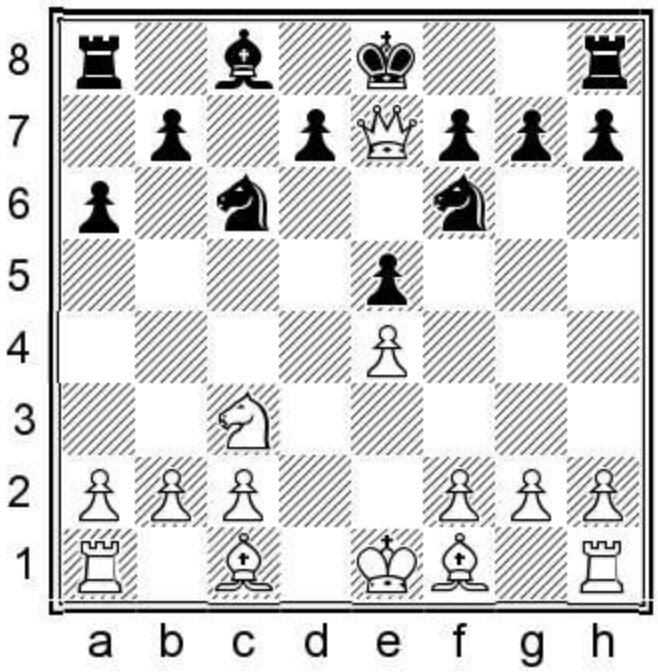
11.Nd5
In the 6...h6?! variation White can play Nb5 and here this is obviously not possible, but White is much better even so. For example:
11...Nxd5 12.exd5 Ne7
In Pawlak – K. Nielsen, Copenhagen 2010, White should have continued:



13.0-0-0!N
White is close to winning on account of:
13...Nxd5 14.Bc4
Followed by Rhe1(†) with a deadly attack.

9.Qxe7†
In the real Lowenthal, Black could at least accelerate his development by recapturing on e7 with the g8-knight, but no such option is available here.

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9...Nxe7
So backwards it is.

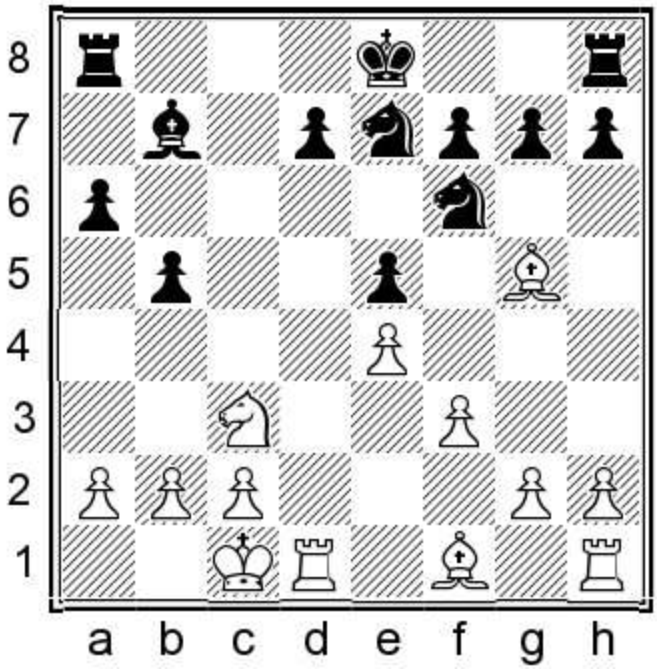
9...Kxe7? steps directly into trouble: 10.Bg5± We could stop here, but I will give a few more moves just to show how quickly Black's position can be squeezed to death: 10...Nb4 11.0-0-0 h6 12.Bxf6† Kxf6 13.a3 Nc6 14.Nd5† Kg6 15.Nb6 Rb8 16.Bc4 Rd8 17.Rd6† f6 18.Rhd1+– Iodice – Benetti, corr. 1988.

10.Bg5 b5
The best chance, but instead the wacky 10...Nfg8 has been played 15 times, which is baffling. I realize doubled pawns can be a worry, but ...Nf6-g8 is not a move you should volunteer. One simple reply is 11.0-0-0 f6 12.Be3 b5 13.Bc5± as in Hegedus – Cvirik, Slovakia 2006.

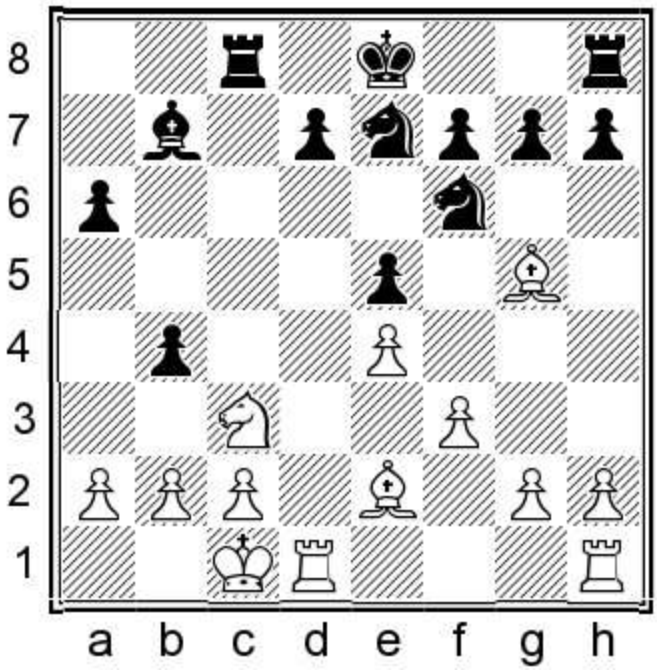
11.f3 Bb7
Instead 11...b4 12.Na4± as in Meissner – Riefer, Troisdorf 2011, does not trouble White.

12.0-0-0
White looks and is better, but we should show a modicum of care; Black has ideas of ...Rc8, ...b4 and ...d5, so if we get smug and complacent, we could easily lose control.

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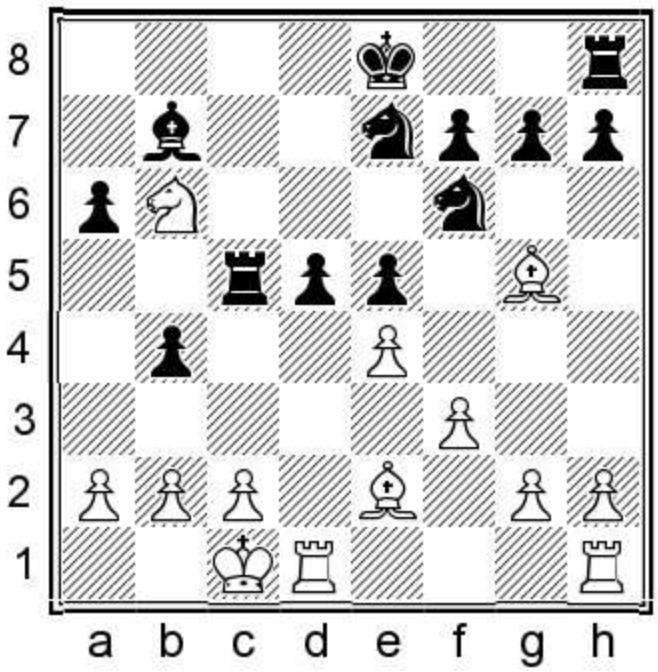


12...h6
Nudging our bishop is well-timed here.
Also sensible is:
12...Rc8 13.Be2 b4
I considered 13...Nh5N but found 14.Rd6! f6 15.Be3± to be a convincing reply.
13...h6 14.Bxf6! Here White is ready for this exchange. If instead we retreated then ...Nh5-f4 would make more sense. 14...gxf6 15.Rd6 Ng6 (15...Rc6 16.Rhd1 Bc8 17.a4 b4 18.Rxc6 dxc6 19.Nb1 Ng6 20.g3 Ke7 21.Nd2 Be6 22.Nf1±) 16.Rb6± Rc7? 17.Bxb5!+– Samraoui – Kagiyama, email 2000.

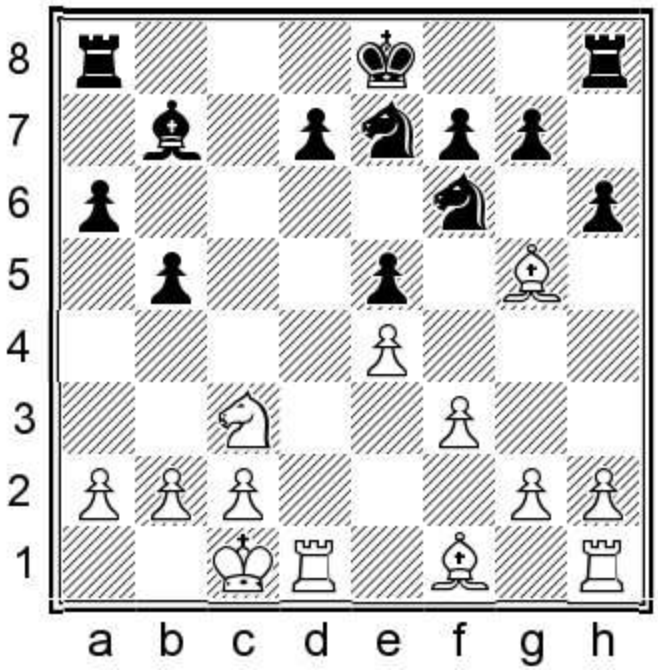


14.Na4 d5 15.Nb6
Improving the knight's location is the best approach, as well as the easiest to play.
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15.Bxf6 gxf6 16.exd5 Bxd5 17.Bxa6 Rc7 18.Bb5† Kf8 19.Kb1 Kg7 20.Nb6 Be6© was not so clear in Knebel –

Kainz, email 2002, even though computer-like play might reveal an edge for White.
15...Rc5



16.exd5!N
Instead 16.Bxf6?! was far less convincing in V. Dimitrov – Simonovic, Mataruska Banja 1996. There is no need to give up the bishop just yet.
16...Nexd5
16...Nfxd5 17.Nc4± leaves Black with even greater problems. For example: 17...0-0 18.Bxe7 Nxe7 19.Rd7 Bd5 20.Nb6 Re8 21.Rd1 Bc6 22.Rc7+–
17.Nc4 0-0 18.Rhe1±
It’s all under control now.

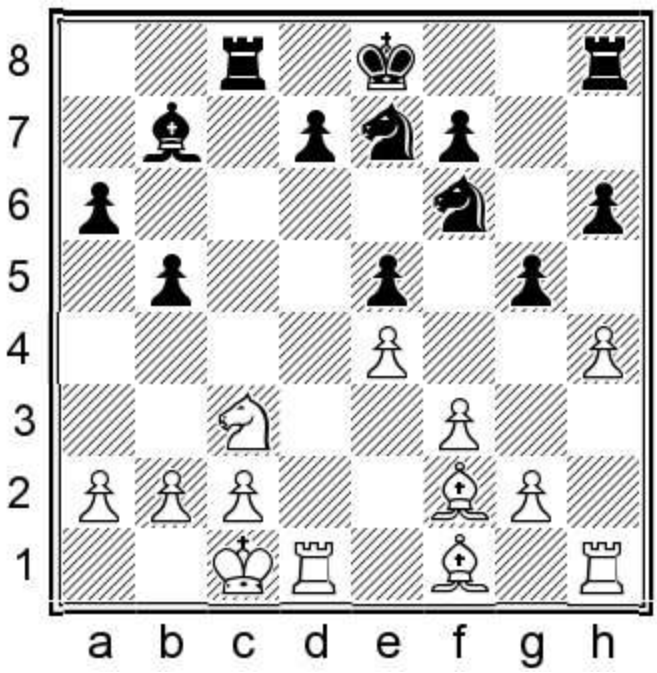


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13.Bh4
As the lines above showed, a common response is 13.Bxf6 gxf6 14.Rd6 but in this case 14...f5 is not so bad for Black. The frequently desirable 15.Rb6? would turn into an accidental exchange sac after 15...Bc6!.

13...g5
The consistent choice.
13...0-0-0 14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Rd6± Bukvic – Jakic, Cetinje 2010.
13...Rc8 14.Rd6 Rc6 15.Rd2 Ng6 16.Bf2 0-0 17.g3± Grabowski – Belter, email 2011.

14.Bf2 Rc8 15.h4±
Despite Black's efforts, White remains clearly better; he has the bishop pair and the more secure pawn structure.



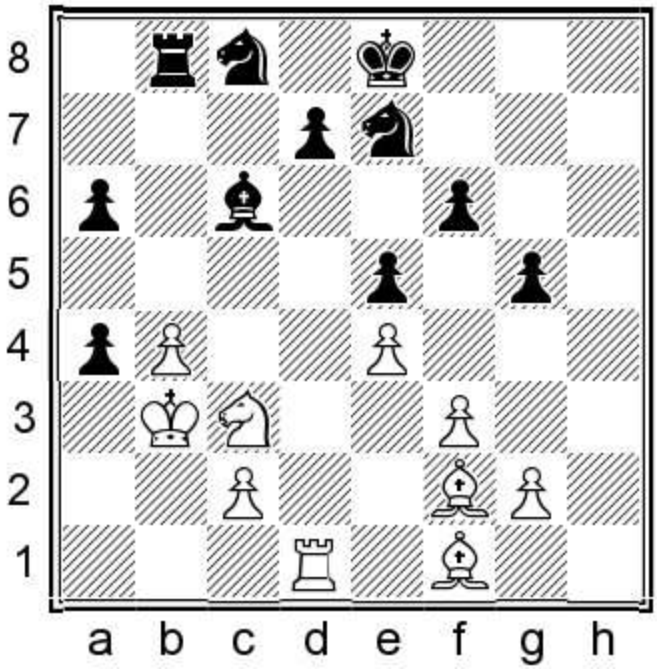

15...Rg8
No better is: 15...g4 16.h5±

16.hxg5 hxg5 17.Rh6
I will not give detailed notes on the rest of the game, but it is instructive to watch how a world-class player exploits his bishop pair and mobile queenside pawns.

17...Rg6 18.Rh8† Rg8 19.Rh6 Rg6 20.Rh8† Rg8 21.Rxg8† Nfxg8 22.Bg3 f6 23.Be1 Bc6 24.b4!?
Fixing the b5-pawn and getting White's pawns in motion.

24...Ra8 25.Kb2 Nc8 26.Bf2 Nge7 27.Kb3 Rb8 28.a4 bxa4†

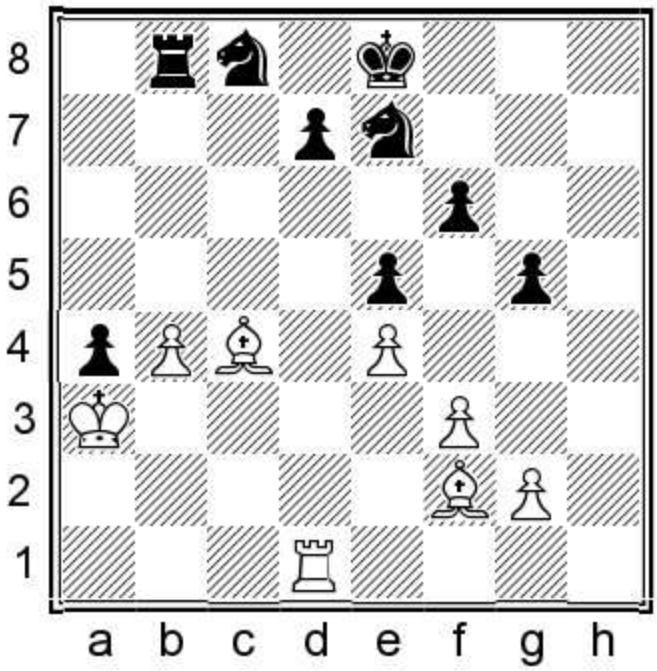
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29.Ka3!
Keeping control.

29.Nxa4?! a5 30.c3 axb4 31.cxb4 d5 is getting messy.

29...Bb5 30.Nxb5 axb5 31.c4 bxc4 32.Bxc4
Just for a moment White is a pawn down, but the a4-pawn will not last, while the passed b5-pawn is a long-term asset.



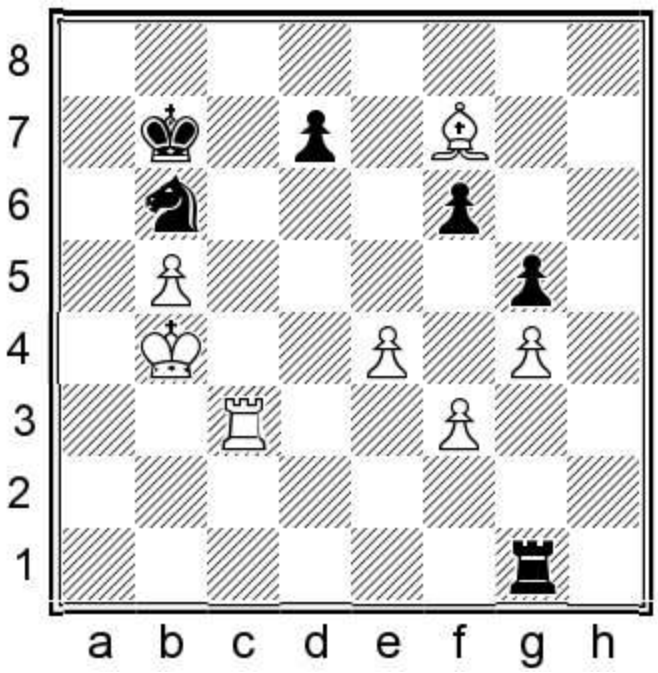
32...Nc6
After 32...Nb6 White could simply move the c4-bishop to various faraway safe squares, but a direct option is: 33.Bxb6 Rxb6 34.b5± Then Kxa4 will follow when the pawn is threatening, while the black knight is domi-

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nated.

33.b5 Nd4 34.Bxd4 exd4 35.Kxa4 Nb6† 36.Kb4 Ra8 37.Bb3 Kd8 38.Rxd4+–
Black gave up a pawn, hoping that the b5-pawn would be difficult to advance; indeed it is, but it ties down Black's king and knight. To win, White needs to open a second front.

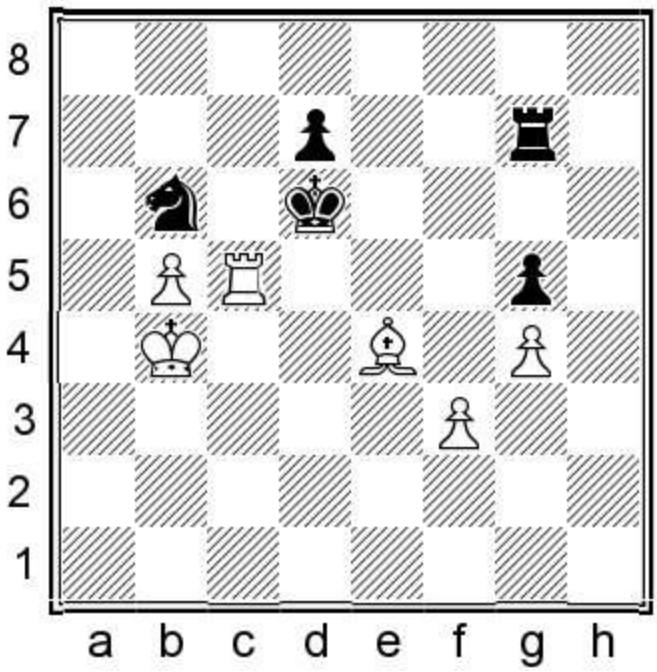
38...Kc7 39.Rd1 Rh8 40.Rc1† Kb7 41.g4 Rh3 42.Rc3 Rg3 43.Bf7 Rg1
This allows the white rook to hop up to f5, but keeping an eye on f3 allowed a different disaster: 43...Rh3 44. Ra3! Rh1 45.Kc5+– And the white king infiltrates, since ...Kc7 fails to the rook check on a7.



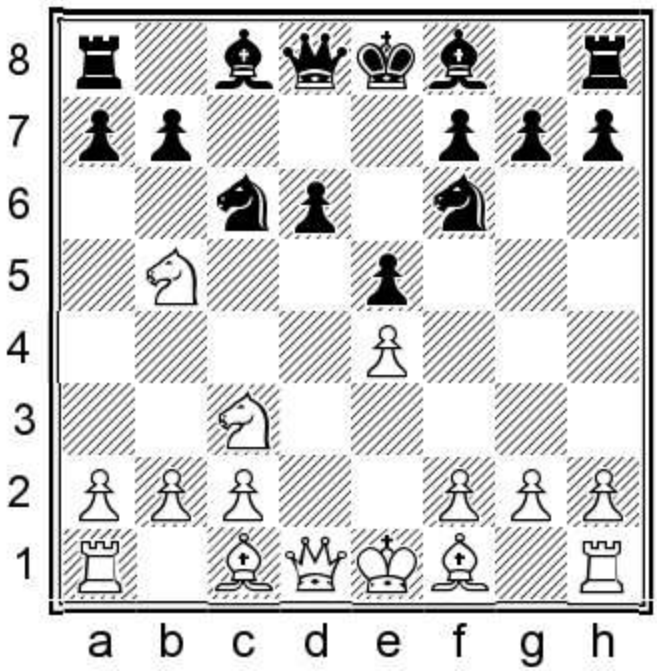

44.Rc5 Rb1† 45.Bb3 Rh1 46.Rf5 Rh6 47.e5 fxe5 48.Rxe5 Rg6 49.Bc2 Rg7
With a second weakness created (the g5-pawn) now all Black's pieces are working full-time in defence. A delicate tap from Jakovenko, and it all falls apart.

50.Be4† Kc7 51.Rc5† Kd6
Or 51...Kb8 52.Ka5 and the blockade on b6 falls: 52...Nc8 53.b6+–

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52.Rc1 Ke5 53.Ka5 d5 54.Kxb6 dxe4 55.Re1 Kf4 56.Rxe4† Kxf3 57.Rb4 Rg8 58.Ka7
1–0
Now let's consider the main line at move 6:
6...d6



7.Bg5 a6
Almost universally played, for good reason. 7...Be7? 8.Bxf6 gxf6 9.Nd5± is certainly not acceptable for Black. Similarly, 7...Be6? is a known position from the Taimanov, but with Black to move. With White to move it is simply great for us: 8.Nd5 Rc8 9.c3!? a6 10.Bxf6 gxf6 11.Na3±

8.Na3
We have almost reached the real Sveshnikov, but first we must consider some sidelines.

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Minor 8th Moves

GAME 15

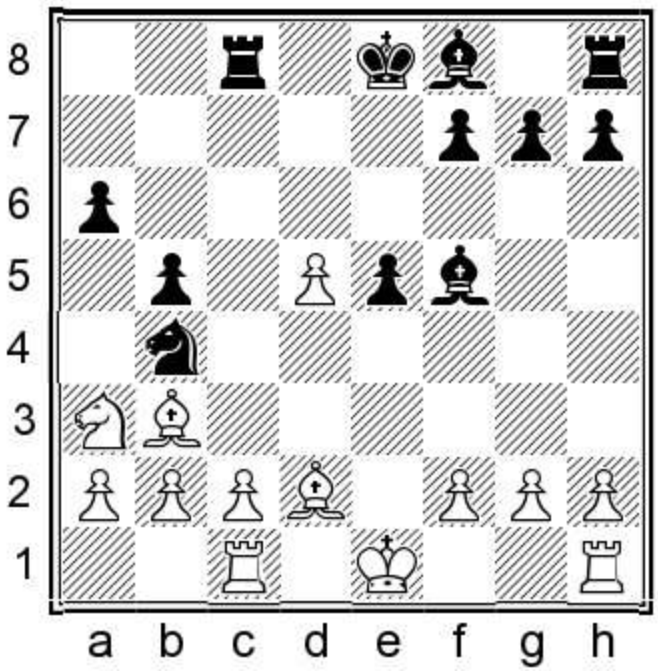
Vasily Yemelin – Andrei Kharlov
St Petersburg 1998

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 Be6
This move has been played in thousands of games but is currently out of fashion. It used to be called the Pelikan or Lasker variation, as both played it. Later on it was refined by 9...Rc8, as we shall see below.
8...b5 is the usual move, which will be featured in Games 16-21. Apart from that, Black may try:

8...Rb8 9.Nc4 b5 10.Bxf6 Qxf6 11.Ne3² is a typical Pelikan; rather like a modern Sveshnikov, except Black is less active.

8...Be7 9.Nc4 Bg4 10.Be2 Bxe2 11.Qxe2² has been played in some games. I doubt there is any need to know any theory here.

8...d5? fails to impress; in return for a pawn Black gets a few one-move threats, but they soon run out. 9.Nxd5 Qa5† 10.Qd2 Qxd2† 11.Bxd2 Nxd5 12.exd5 Nb4 13.Bc4 Bf5 14.Bb3 Rc8 15.Rc1 b5




In R. Jones – Ajvazi, Plovdiv 2010, White castled and later won, but I also like: 16.Ke2!?N 16...Rd8 17.Bxb4 (17.Rhd1!? Nxd5 18.c4 gives White a rolling initiative, but an extra pawn is also handy) 17...Bxb4 18.c4 White has a clear advantage. For example: 18...bxc4 19.Rxc4 Bxa3 20.bxa3 Rxd5 21.Rc7! Rd7 22.Rc8† Rd8 23. Rxd8† Kxd8 24.Bxf7 We are playing for two results, both of them probably equally likely.

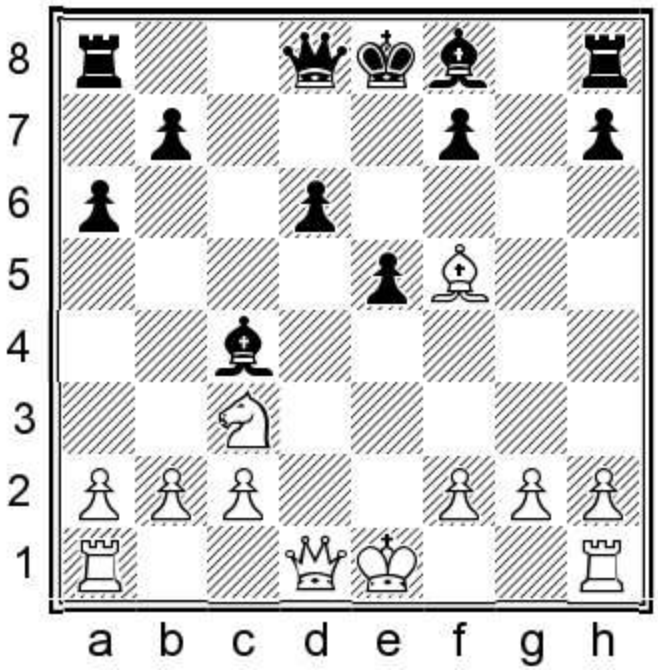
9.Nc4!
Exploiting that Black has not yet played ...b5.

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9.Nd5?! is far less convincing. Black can consider various moves, including 9...Qa5† or even 9...Bxd5 10.exd5 Qa5† 11.c3 Qxd5.

9...Rc8
This is traditionally called the Larsen Variation, as he was one of the first grandmasters to play it. But it had already been tried a few times, most notably by the strong Danish master (and later IM) Bjorn Brinck-Claussen, which is no doubt where Larsen got the idea. When Larsen tried this variation against Robatsch in the 1963 Halle Zonal, the Austrian thought for almost one hour before making his next move.

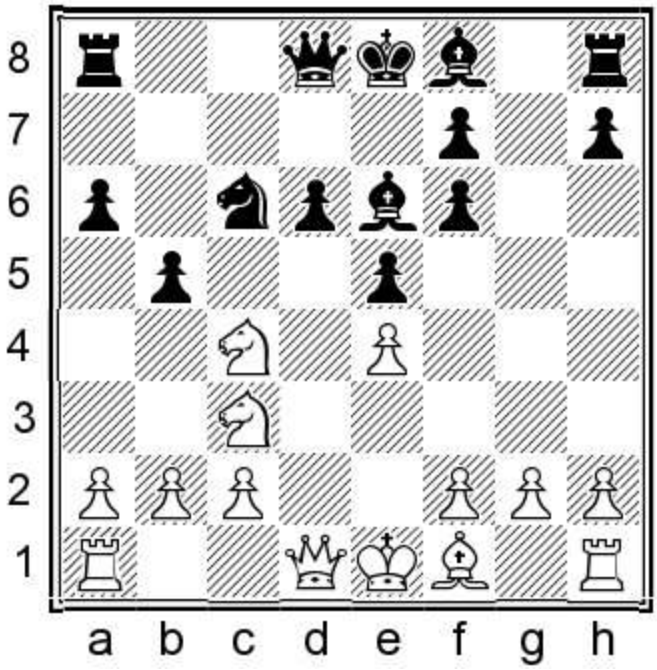
9...Nd4?! is the old Pelikan move. 10.Bxf6 gxf6 (10...Qxf6 11.Nb6 Rb8 12.Ncd5 Qd8 13.c3 Nc6 14.Qa4 has been played in a few games and is most unpleasant for Black. He will have to enter an inferior opposite-coloured bishops position by taking on d5, as 14...Be7? 15.Bxa6 was a straight refutation in Muller – Zunker, Oberursel 1972.) 11.Bd3!? White is a tempo up on one of the games from the devastating Fischer – Taimanov Candidates match. 11...f5 12.exf5 Nxf5 13.Bxf5 Bxc4



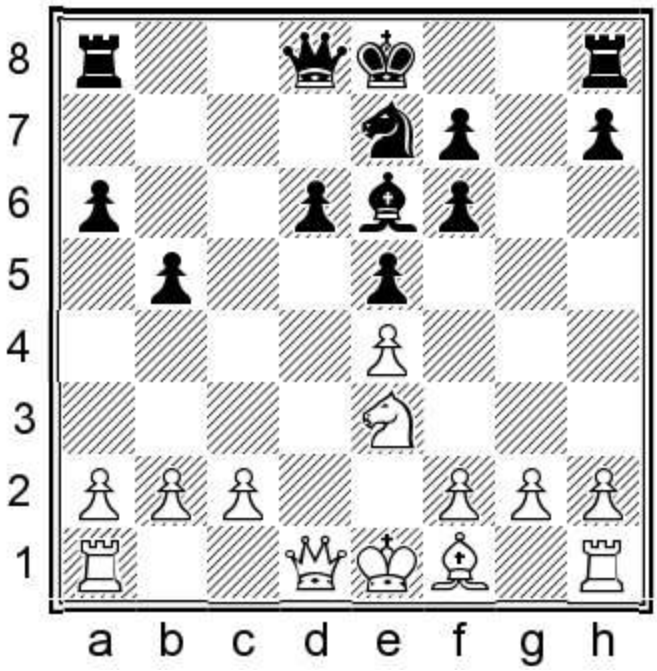

14.Qg4!N (More energetic than the also pleasant 14.Bd3 Be6 15.Be4², as played in Olafsson – Solin, Prague 1954, and the later Korneev – Favarel, Pau 2009.) 14...Qc7 15.0-0-0± Black has nothing good to write home about. His position is full of weakness, he is uncoordinated and underdeveloped, and his king is stuck in the middle.

9...b5?!
This idea does not work, although the assessment relies on a few important details.
10.Bxf6! gxf6
10...Qxf6 11.Ne3 (This is not a moment to get greedy: 11.Nxd6†? Bxd6 12.Qxd6 Nd4 13.Bd3 Rd8 14.Qxa6 0-0 15.Nd5 Qg5 16.Ne3 f5 gave Black enough compensation for the pawns in Trembecki – Leroy, email 2009.) 11...Qd8 12.Ncd5 g6 13.a4! b4 14.Bc4 Bh6 15.Qd3± Bednarski – Kavalek, Krakow 1964.

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11.Ne3 Bh6
11...Nd4 12.Ncd5 f5 13.exf5 Nxf5 14.Nxf5 Bxf5 15.Qf3! Bxc2 16.Nc7† Qxc7 17.Qxa8† Ke7 18.Qxa6± was another opening failure for Black in Casella – Simpson, Long Island 1995.
12.Ncd5
Compared to the Sveshnikov variation, the knight is on e3 rather than a3 – a significant difference.
12...Bxe3
This seems like a confession of guilt, but the evidence was overwhelming.
13.Nxe3
White is obviously better; Black is lacking the two bishops to create counterplay.
13...Ne7
Honfi – Jo. Piket, Wijk aan Zee 1970

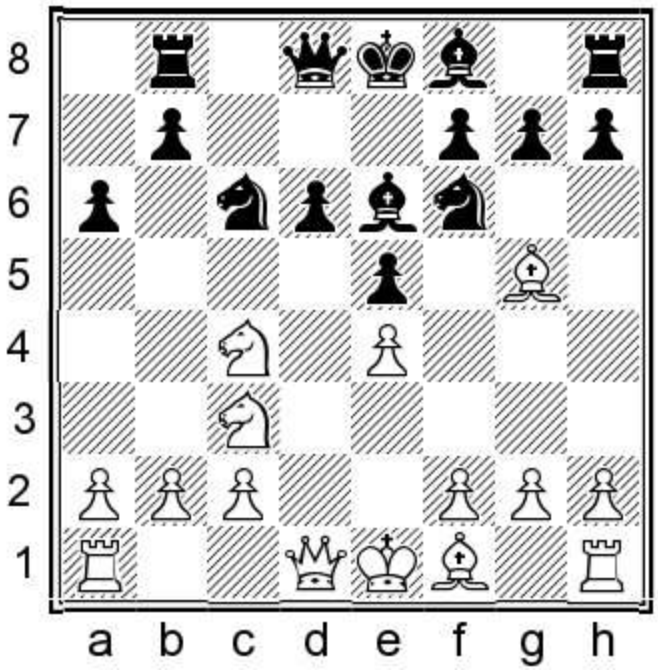


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14.Bd3!N±
This is more accurate than 14.a4, as was played in the game, although White's advantage is not in doubt either way.

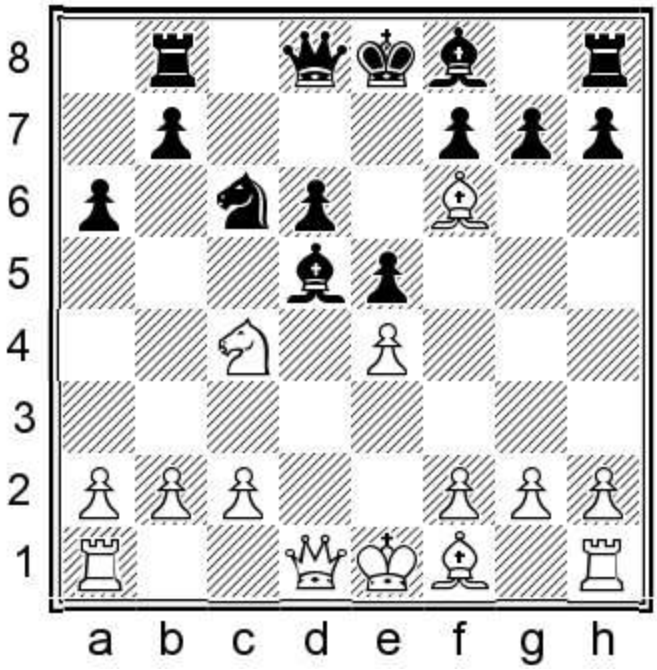
9...Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.Qxd6 Be7 12.Qxd8† Rxd8 13.a3² is virtually equal according to Komodo 10. One draw in 11 games is what that has given Black. Where I come from, we call it "a pawn up".

9...Rb8!?

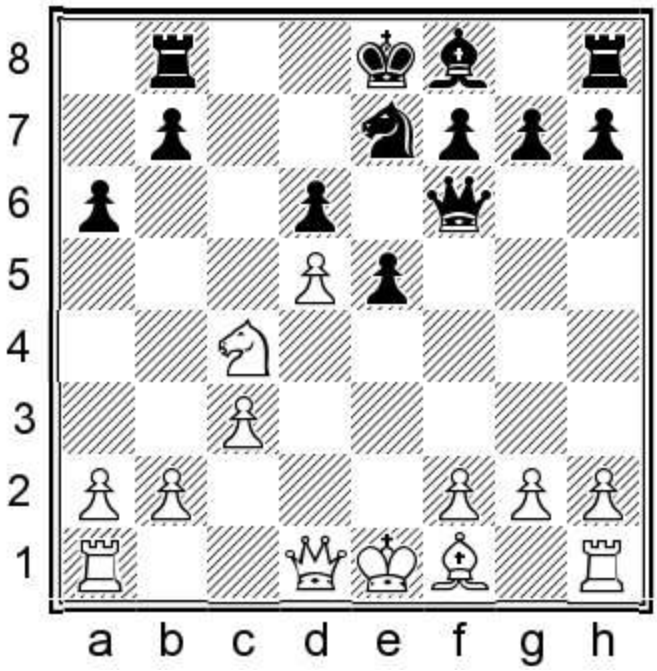


A very rare move, but worthy of attention because recently it was played by various strong players, including Gelfand, Radjabov and Iturrizaga. The Gelfand game was just blitz, but the other two were classical games. Where the elite go, many will follow. It may seem odd to put the rook on b8 when the half-open c-file is beckoning, but on c8 the rook can be vulnerable to a Nb6 tempo-gainer. And even more simply, on b8 the rook defends the b7-pawn, which is vital in one tactical line.
10.Nd5
I will plump for this natural move, but we need to be wide awake with our move order in what follows: Alternatively, Negi's suggestion is also promising and remains almost unexplored. 10.a4!? I will not repeat all Negi's analysis, but a couple of key lines were 10...h6 11.Bxf6 Qxf6 12.Nd5 Qg6 13.Qd3² and 10...Nb4 11.Nd5 Nbxd5 12.exd5 Bf5 13.Bd3 Bxd3 14.Qxd3 Be7 15.Be3².
10...Bxd5 11.Bxf6
Instead 11.exd5 Ne7 12.Bxf6 gxf6 13.a4 f5 14.a5 Bg7 15.g4!?*ƒ* worked well in Kryvoruchko – Iturrizaga Bonelli, Monzon 2016, but it's wild stuff, not the controlled edge I would prefer.

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11...Qxf6
After 11...gxf6 we avoid the chaos by taking with our queen: 12.Qxd5N 12...Nb4 13.Qd2 d5 14.exd5 Qxd5 15. Qxd5 Nxd5 16.0-0-0± We will see a similar position below, except with the rook on c8; it must be preferable for Black to have the rook on c8, but both versions are excellent for White.
12.exd5!?
But in this case 12.Qxd5 is much less controlled than it looks: 12...Nb4 This is one point where the b7-pawn being defended is vital. 13.Qd2 d5!÷ This position has led to three draws, most recently Harikrishna – Radjabov, Monzon 2016.
12...Ne7 13.c3²

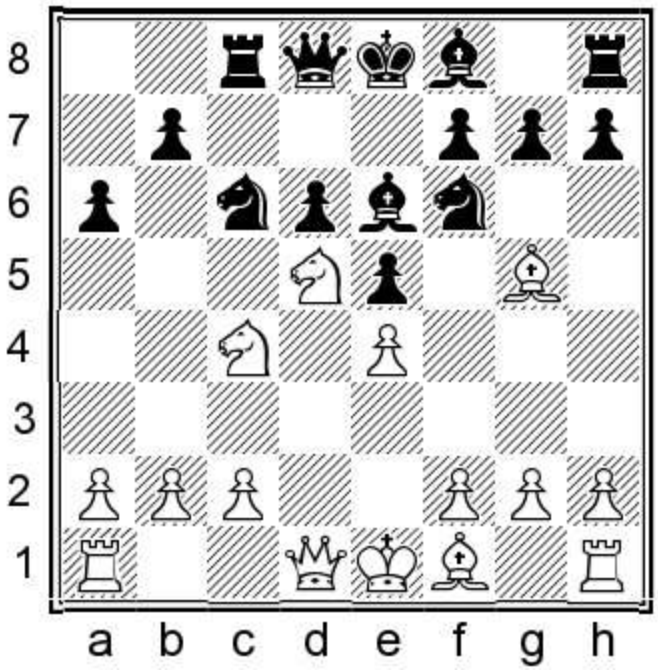


Black's pieces are somewhat tangled, leaving his queenside vulnerable. For example:
13...b5

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The computer's suggestion is 13...Nc8N but that's a grim way to defend some squares. I suggest 14.a4² planning a4-a5 and Qa4†.
14.Ne3 Nf5 15.Nc2 Nh4 16.Nb4 Be7 17.Nxa6 Rb7 18.Qg4²
Black did not have enough play for the missing pawn in S. Zielinski – M. Szabo, email 2010.

10.Nd5
The pressure is building so Black must react.

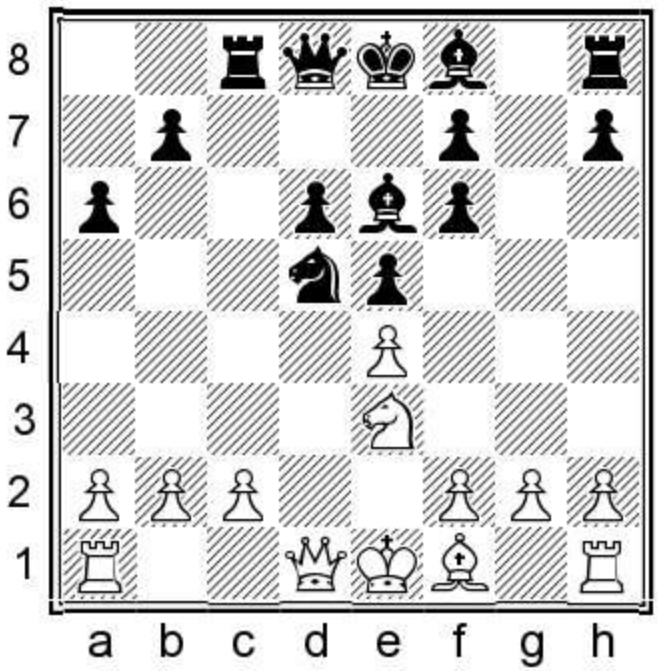



10...Bxd5
The critical test.

10...b5 11.Bxf6 gxf6 12.Nce3 and we have our standard advantage.

10...Nb4 11.Bxf6 gxf6 12.Nce3 Nxd5

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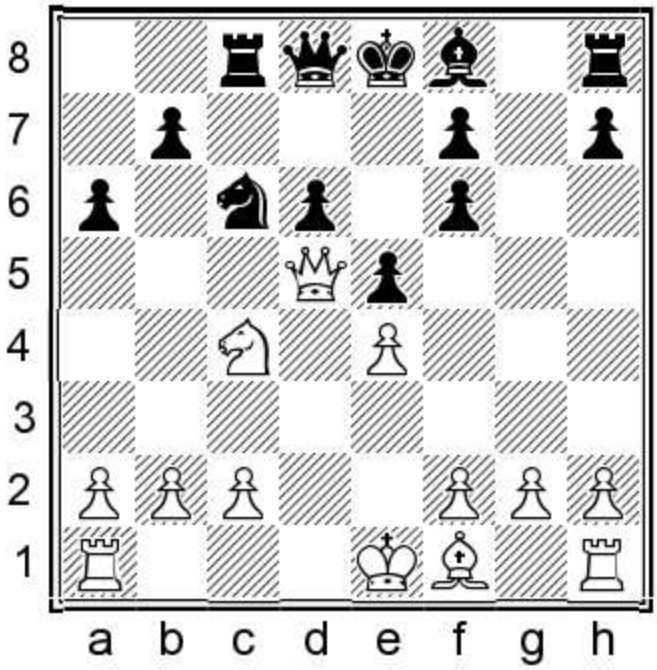
13.exd5! (Instead 13.Nxd5? f5³ is a positional disaster) 13...Bd7 14.Bd3 Bh6 This is a key moment to understand this variation. Usually people shy away from positions with opposite-coloured bishops when trying to prove an advantage, but in this line the light-squared bishop is superior to Black's dark-squared bishop, so the exchange is often to be encouraged. 15.Nf5! Bxf5 16.Bxf5 Rc5 17.0-0 Ke7 18.Qh5 Qf8 19.Rad1 Rg8 20.c3 Rc4 21.g3± Brnas – Kristovic, Dubrovnik 2008.

11.Bxf6 gxf6
Black has to create complications.

After 11...Qxf6 12.Qxd5 then 12...Be7 13.c3 leads to a straightforward advantage. For example: 13...0-0 14. Nb6 Rc7 15.Qd3 Qg6 16.g3± Leko – R. Jamieson, Sydney 1992.
Instead 12...Nb4? fails to 13.Qxb7, in contrast to the 9...Rb8 line mentioned above.

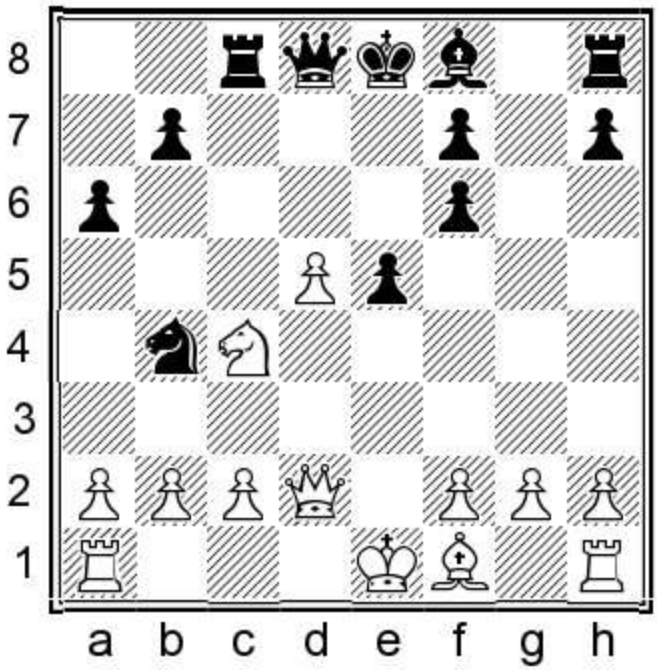
12.Qxd5
The right capture; Robatsch took with the pawn.

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12...Nd4
12...b5?! 13.Ne3 Ne7 14.Qd3 Bh6 15.Be2 Bxe3 16.fxe3 d5 occurred in Korneev – Hernandez Montalvo, Padron 2002. In the game White castled queenside, but my eye is drawn to exploiting the open f-file, so I suggest 17.0-0!?N. Either way, White has a huge advantage.

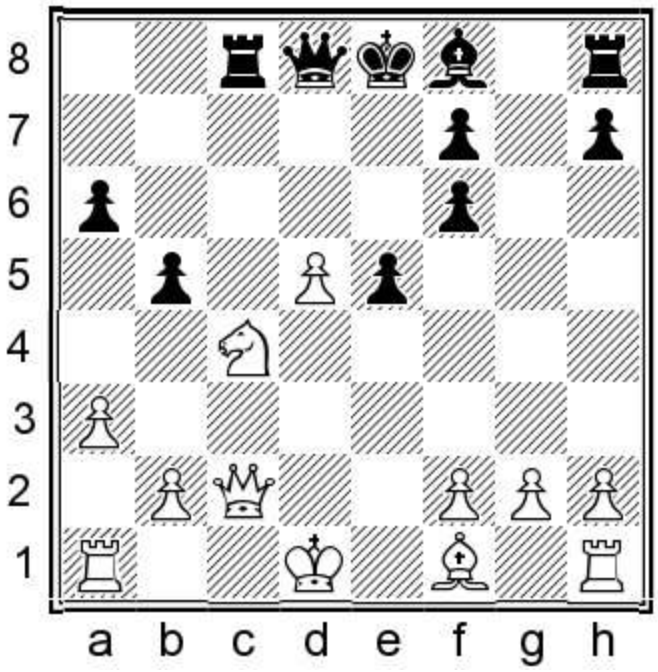
The other knight hop is also possible, but no better:
12...Nb4 13.Qd2 d5 14.exd5



14...Nxc2†
14...Qxd5 15.Qxd5 Nxd5 16.0-0-0± is the kind of position you want from the opening. For example, the top choice: 16...Rd8 17.Bd3 b5 18.Na5 led to 1–0 in Gritsaenko – Dorer, email 2006, and every game since then.
15.Qxc2 Bb4†

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15...b5 16.0-0-0!? bxc4 17.Bxc4± was excellent for White in Calistri – San Marco, Issy les Moulineaux 2007.
16.Kd1
Negi wrote in 1.e4 vs the Sicilian II that he would rather avoid such lines. It does look wild, but we have it under control with a few precise moves; then we almost win by force.
16...b5 17.a3 Bf8
17...Qxd5†? 18.Kc1 Be7 19.Nd6†+– Lemke – Rauch, East Germany 1981.
This is Woller – Stutz, Mecklenburg 2000.



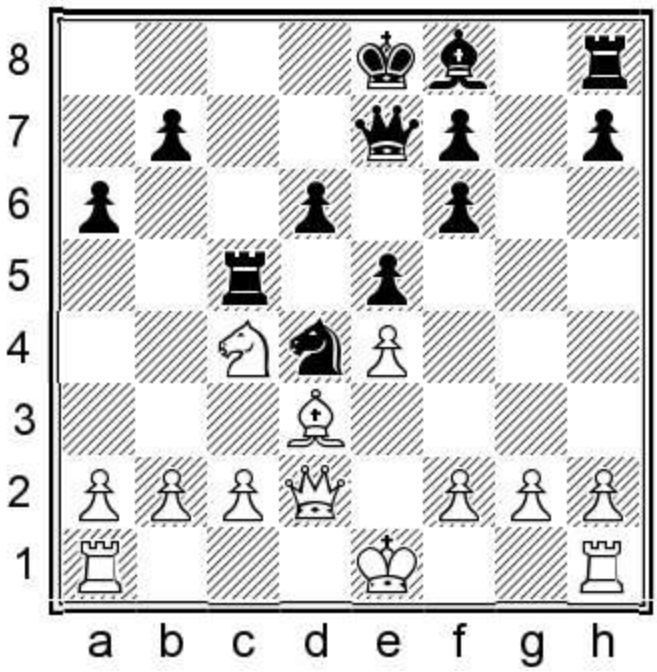

18.Rc1!N
A small refinement.
18...bxc4 19.Qa4† Qd7 20.Rxc4 Rxc4 21.Qxc4±
White is a pawn up and will soon solve the problems with the king.

13.Bd3 Qe7
Trying to snare our queen with ...Rc5.

13...b5 leads to an unusual pawn structure: 14.Ne3 Bh6 15.c3 Bxe3 16.fxe3 Ne6 17.0-0± The first game to reach here was Belikov – Seres, Gyor 1991, and nothing much has changed since. White's doubled pawns are doing fine work.

14.Qa5 Rxc4
This is the critical attempt. Although it does not quite work, it is crucial to know the details, and thus it is our main line...
We must also consider:
14...Rc5 15.Qd2
What follows below may look complicated, but it follows standard themes, with c2-c3 kicking the knight the usual starter.

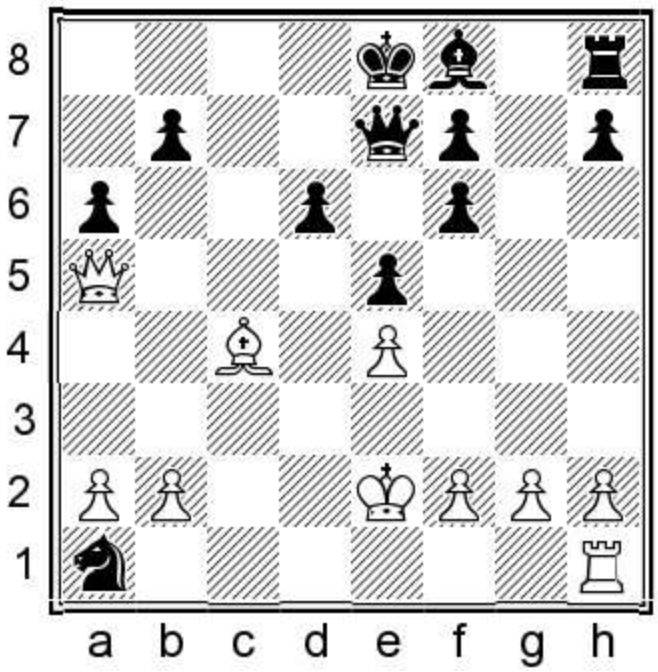
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15...d5
I checked four other moves:
a) 15...b5 16.Ne3 Bh6 17.c3 Ne6 18.0-0 Rg8 19.a4!N (Unsurprisingly, White can improve on the rather mysterious 19.Re1?! as played in Koguchi – Oliver, Singapore 2007) 19...Qb7 20.axb5 axb5 21.Ra5± White is ready to invade on the queenside.
b) 15...h5 16.Nb6 Qd8 17.Nd5 h4 18.c3 Bh6 19.Qd1 Ne6 20.Qb3± Bernal Varela – M. Szabo, email 2009.
c) 15...f5 16.c3 Ne6 17.exf5 Nf4 Morales – Munoz, Cali 2009. 18.Ne3!?N 18...Bh6 19.0-0-0±
d) 15...Qc7 16.c3 Ne6 17.Ne3 Bh6 18.0-0-0 Bxe3 (18...d5 19.exd5 Rxd5 20.Kb1 Bxe3 21.Qxe3± Khorunzhy – Palmateer, email 2013) 19.fxe3 Rg8 20.Rhf1 Rg6 21.Rf5 Ng7 22.Rf3 Ke7 23.Kb1 Ne6 24.Rdf1± De Bari – Gildred, email 2009.
16.Ne3 Bh6 17.c3 Ne6 18.b4 d4 19.cxd4 exd4 20.bxc5 Qxc5 21.Qc1 dxe3
Klapp – Meller, email 2009.
22.Qxc5!?N 22...Nxc5 23.Bc2±
Black has drawing chances, but without an engine and an encyclopaedia to help him, he is in even more trouble than it looks on the surface.

15.Bxc4 Nxc2† 16.Ke2 Nxa1

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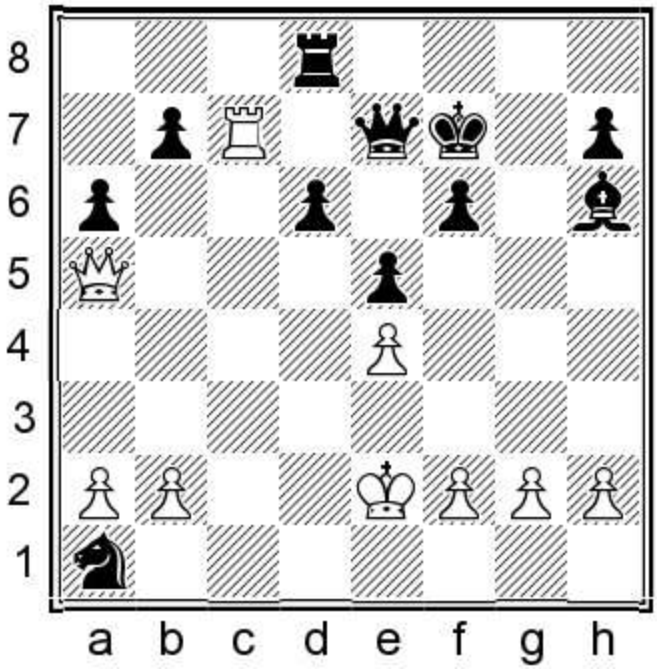
17.Rc1!!+–
This is the refutation of the main line of the Larsen variation.

17...Bh6
17...f5 once led to a win for Black:
a) After 18.Bxf7†? Kxf7 19.Rc7 Nc2 in Kosztolanczi – Gaal, Hungary 2012, the knight had escaped, and only Black could try for an advantage.
b) White misunderstood how the Bxf7† tactic works; we need the f8-bishop to have moved first. So 18.exf5!N, taking the pawn and passing the move to Black, is a clean winner. Now if 18...Bh6 then 19.Bxf7†! Kxf7 20.Rc7 works as planned. Of course it's not the only way: moves such as 18.Bd5 or even 18.Bxa6 are also quite decent.

18.Bxf7† Kxf7
Black has no choice, since 18...Kf8 allows 19.Rc7 Qd8 20.Bh5 and mate is only a few moves away.

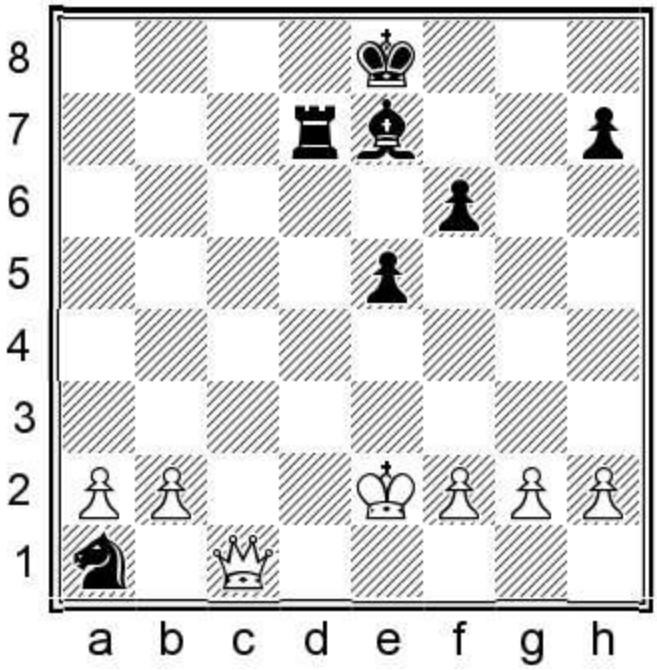
19.Rc7 Rd8
Compared to the game mentioned in the note to move 17, the obvious difference is that 19...Nc2 fails to 20. Rxe7† Kxe7 21.Qc7†.

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20.Qd5† Kf8 21.Rxe7 Kxe7 22.Qxb7† Rd7 23.Qc8 d5
Curiously, there was a recent example of this long lost line: 23...Rd8 24.Qc3 d5 25.Qc5† In Kunal – Sriram, Noida 2016, Black's position was just as hopeless as in our main game.

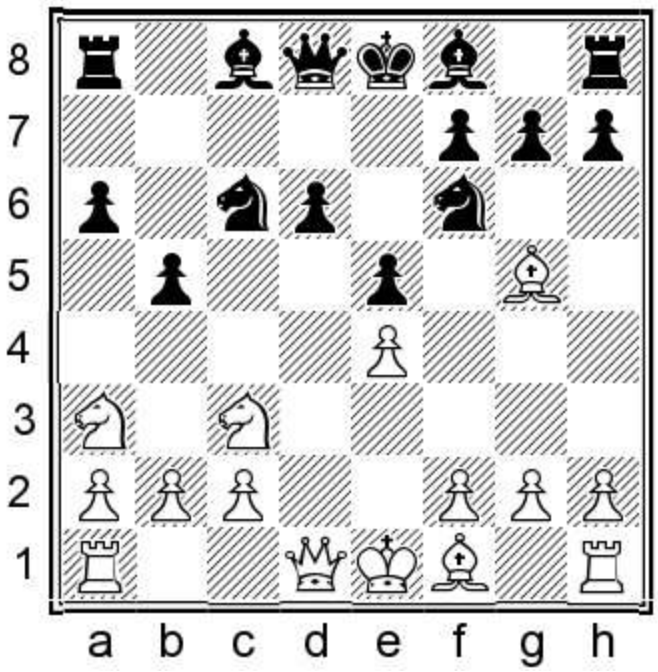
24.Qg8 Bf8 25.exd5 Ke8 26.Qe6† Be7 27.Qxa6 Rxd5 28.Qc6† Rd7 29.Qc1
Having munched through the loose pawns, White will now dine on the stranded knight.



29...Nb3 30.axb3 Kf8 31.b4 Rd4 32.Qc8† Kf7 33.b5 Rb4 34.b3 h5 35.g3 Bd6 36.Qd7† Be7 37.Qc6 Bd8 38. Qd5† Ke8 39.Qd6 Rd4 40.Qe6†
The b-pawn is going through.
1–0
8...b5

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With this move, we finally reach the main tabiya of the Sveshnikov.



9.Nd5
This positional approach offers a logical way to seek an advantage, without taking too many risks. If you are into Xtreme Sports and wild complications, Negi has some fascinating stuff for you with 9.Bxf6 in 1.e4 vs the Sicilian II.

9...Be7 is the main line – see page 193. Before then, we must analyse the alternative:

9...Qa5†

GAME 16

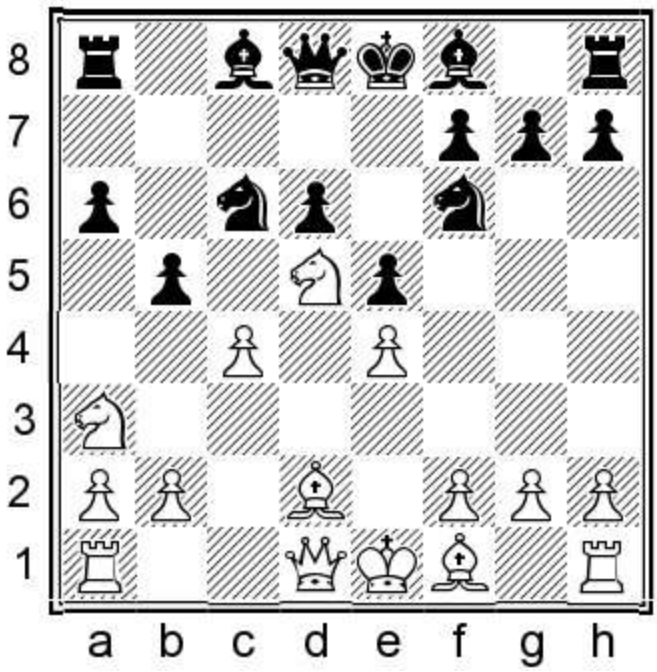
Hagen Tiemann – Brian Jones
Correspondence 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Qa5† 10.Bd2 Qd8
Black invites a repetition of moves.

11.c4!
This leads to plenty of complications and forcing play. Since 9...Qa5† is a relatively rare line, I would prefer to have a low-maintenance answer to it, but they don't work as well.

11.Bd3
We tried to make this calmer move work, but found that Black has a convincing equalizer:
11...Rb8!
Preparing for c2-c4 by protecting the b-pawn. I looked at a few lines, which you might find interesting for reference.
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12.c4

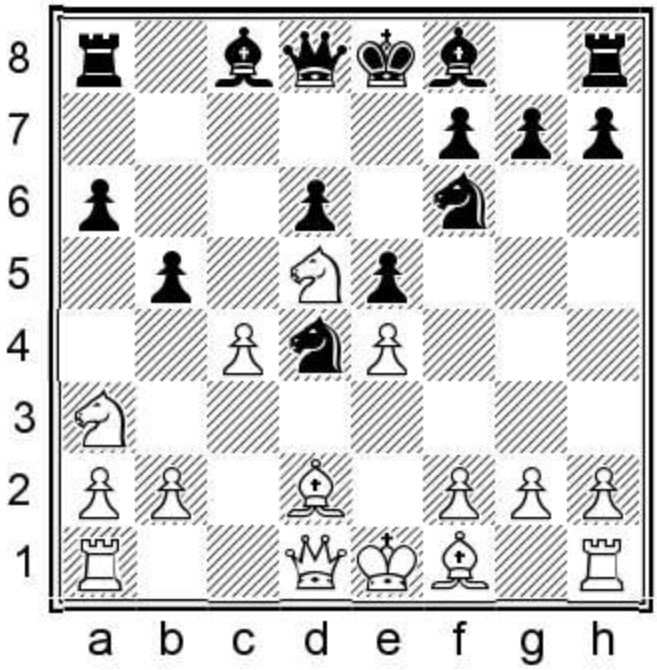
12.0-0 occurred in Grage – Konstantinov, email 2006. After 12...Be7!N 13.c4 Nxd5 14.exd5 Nd4 15.cxb5 axb5 16.Be3 b4 17.Nc2 Nxc2 18.Qxc2 h6= Black has the sounder pawn structure, so his long-term chances are good.
12...Nxd5 13.cxd5!?N
13.exd5 is a principled try, but after 13...Nd4 14.0-0 Be7= Black was okay in Chauhan – Kilani, email 2013.
13...Nd4 14.Nc2 Nxc2† 15.Qxc2 Bd7 16.Be3 Be7 17.Qd2 h6! 18.0-0 Bg5
White's advantage is modest, if it even exists at all.




11...Nxe4
This is the critical line and it is really interesting. In even better news, White should be able to claim an advantage with accurate play.
11...bxc4?! just helps White. 12.Nxc4 is strong, as is the simple 12.Nxf6† Qxf6 13.Bxc4±.

11...Nd4 as in Kotronias – Beshukov, Agios Nikolaos 1995, is rather rare.

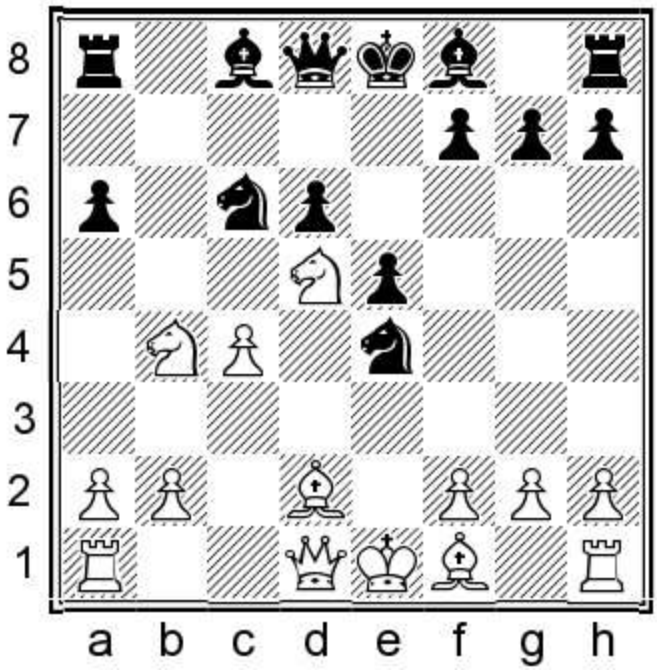
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A convincing reply is: 12.cxb5N 12...Nxd5 13.exd5 Be7 14.Bd3²

11...Nxd5 12.exd5 Nd4 13.cxb5 Be7 14.Bd3 0-0 15.0-0² has been played in a few games. I do not see a lot of compensation for the pawn, but on the other hand, it is not all straightforward. I used to play positions like this with Black (from the Kalashnikov) and honestly, I never really felt they were OK for Black.

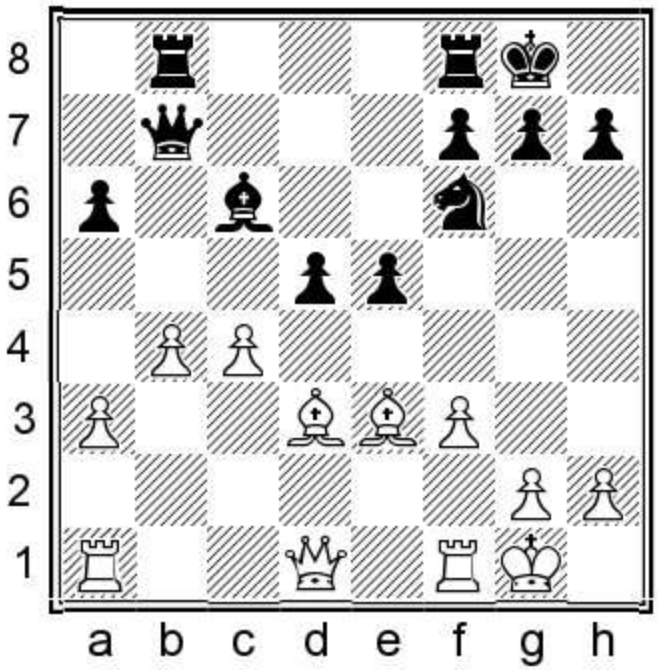
11...b4 12.Nc2 Nxe4 13.Ncxb4



13...Bb7
13...Nxb4 14.Bxb4 Nf6 15.Nxf6† gxf6 16.Be2 f5 17.0-0² Muharemagic – Cardelli, Internet 2003. Without knights I don't think Black will create a strong enough attack to fully outweigh the many weaknesses he has accepted in his position.

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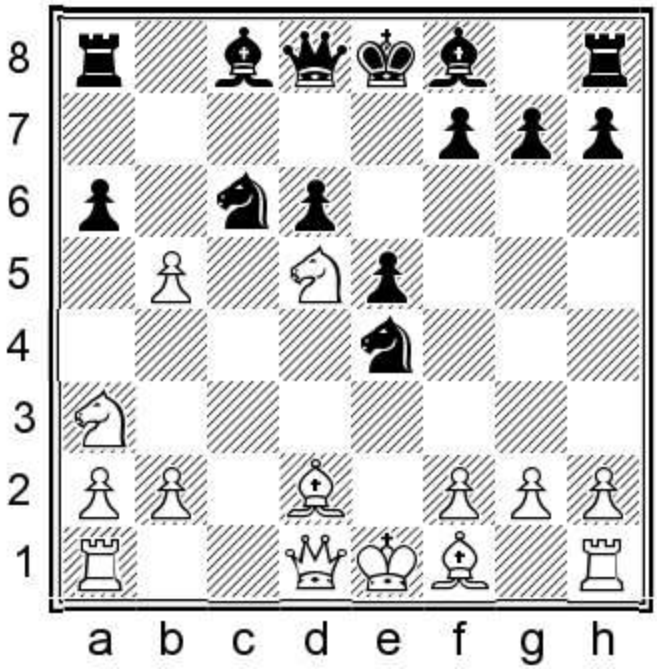
14.Nxc6 Bxc6 15.Be3 Rb8 16.b4²
White has a mobile queenside majority and a grip on d5; you could stop your study of this line here and feel well enough prepared, but I will offer some further analysis should you wish to look deeper. The lines also contain interesting positional and tactical ideas:
16...Be7 17.Bd3 Nf6 18.Nxe7 Qxe7 19.a3 Qb7
19...Bxg2N is not a problem if White is precise: 20.Rg1 Be4 21.Bxe4! Making sure the rook is not trapped on g7. (21.Rxg7 Bg6 22.Qa4† Qd7! 23.Qxd7† Nxd7 24.0-0-0 Nf6=) 21...Nxe4 22.Rxg7²
20.f3 0-0 21.0-0 d5




In Freeman – Turati, email 2009, White played 22.Re1 and agreed a draw. But there was an advantage available:
22.c5!N
Black's strong-looking centre can be effectively undermined.
22...Bb5
22...d4 23.Bg5 Nd5 24.Qe2² The double attack on a6 and e5 collects a pawn; Black's passed d-pawn offers some compensation, but not enough.
22...Rfe8 23.f4 Of course this is how we break up the black centre. 23...e4 (23...d4? 24.fxe5 dxe3 25.exf6 e2 26.Bxe2 Bxg2 27.Bf3 Bxf3 28.Qxf3+–) 24.Be2²
23.f4 e4 24.Bxb5 axb5 25.Bd4²
Black faces the prospect of doubled f-pawns and a weakened king position, especially as 25...Nd7? is routed by: 26.Qg4 g6 27.f5+–

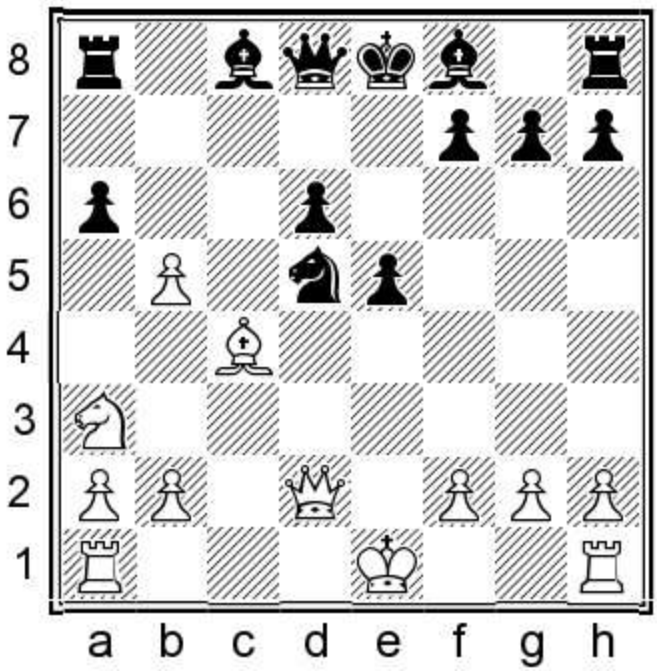
12.cxb5

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12...Be6
This counterattack is the usual choice, as simply moving the c6-knight gives White extra options:

12...Ne7 13.Bc4 (13.bxa6 Nxd5 14.Qa4† Bd7 15.Qxe4² has also been played in a few games) 13...Nxd2 (13... Be6 transposes to the bolded main line) 14.Qxd2 Nxd5 So far this is D. Toth – Z. Kiss, Miskolc 1997.

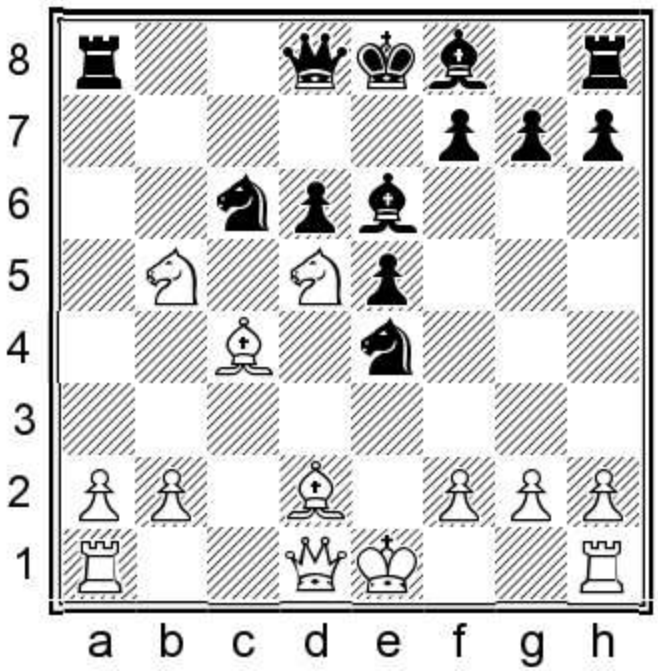


15.Bxd5!N Not a difficult improvement. 15...Rb8 16.bxa6 Bxa6 17.Bc6† Ke7 18.b4! d5 19.b5 Bb7 20.0-0±

13.Bc4 Ne7
Challenging White's grip on d5 is the logical try. The alternatives are certainly no better:

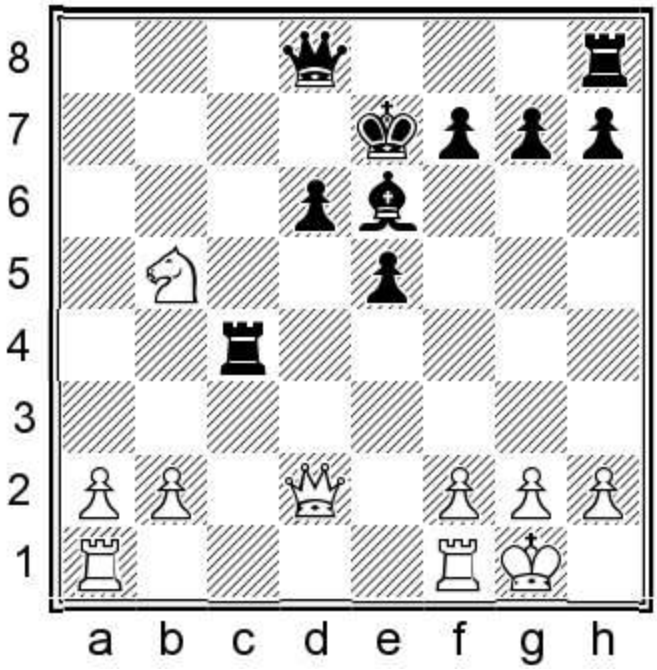
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13...axb5 14.Nxb5



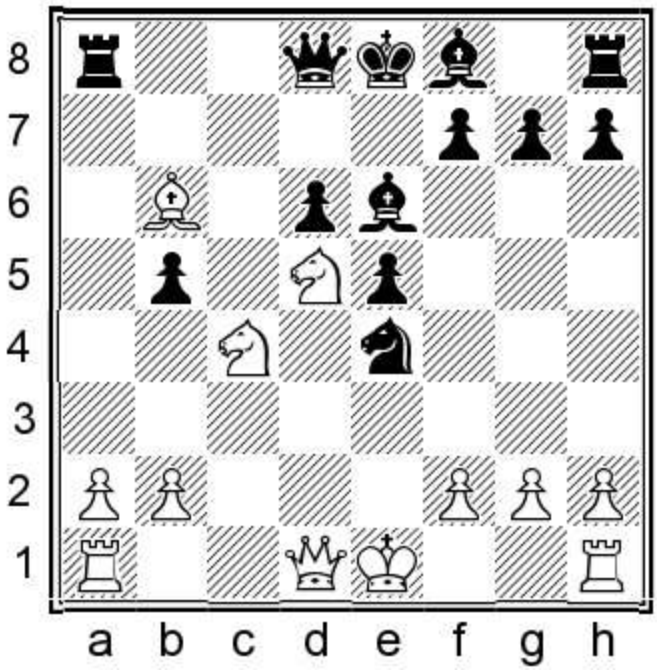
14...Rc8
The tactical try 14...Qh4 15.Be3 Nxf2 is just an unsound trick: 16.Nbc7†! Kd8 17.Nxe6† fxe6 18.Bb6† Ke8 19. Nc7† Ke7 20.Bxf2 Qxc4 21.Nxa8 Nb4 22.Qe2 Nd3† 23.Kf1 e4 24.Nb6+– Gallenweiler – Voyage, Freestyle 2008.
15.0-0 Nxd2
15...Be7 16.Be3 0-0 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Bxe6 Qxe6 19.f3 Rb8N (19...Nf6? 20.Qxd6± Vaculik – Buchar, Czech Republic 1998) 20.a4 Nc5 21.f4 exf4 22.Bxf4 Rbd8 23.Ra3²
16.Qxd2 Nd4
16...Be7? 17.Nxe7± would force Black to recapture with the king, then suffer.
17.Nxd4!
Instead 17.Qb4 Bxd5!N 18.Bxd5 Qb6 allows Black to escape with reasonable chances.
17...Rxc4 18.Nb5!
18.Nxe6 fxe6 19.Ne3² Malzinskas – Petraitis, corr. 1999.
18...Be7
18...Rc5 19.Nbc3 Be7 20.a4²
19.Nxe7 Kxe7

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20.Qg5†!N
Improving over 20.Rfd1² as played in Sethuraman – Tiwari, Chennai 2011.
20...Kd7 21.Qe3 Qa5 22.b3 Rc6 23.a4±

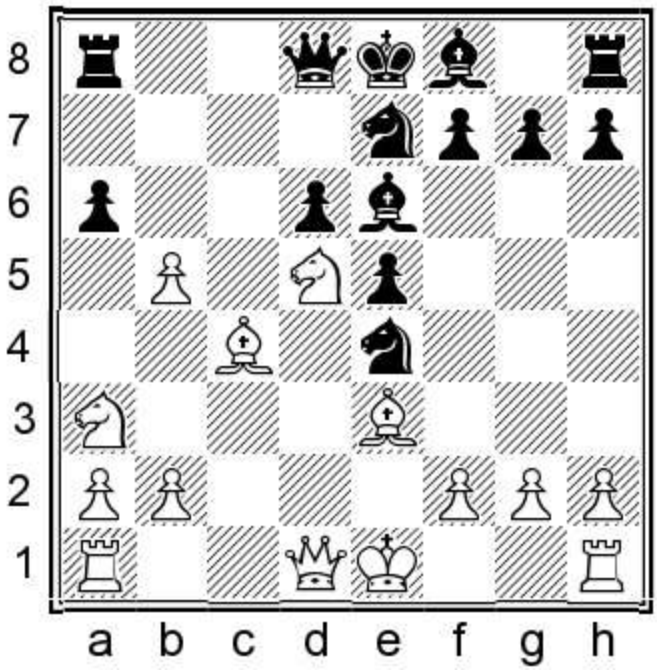
13...Na5?
This may look messy, but White has it all covered.
14.Be3
14.b6 also looks good.
14...Nxc4 15.Nxc4 axb5 16.Bb6



16...Qb8
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16...Qg5 17.Nce3 Rc8 occurred in Marjanovic – Nathanail, Korinthos 1999. I propose: 18.Rc1!N 18...Rxc1

(18...Nc5 19.0-0 Be7 20.Nc7† Kf8 21.Nxe6† fxe6 22.b4+–) 19.Qxc1 f5 20.Nc7† Ke7 21.Nxe6 Kxe6 22.Qc8† Kf7 23.0-0±
16...Nxf2?! 17.Kxf2 Qh4† does not work: 18.g3! Qxc4 19.Nc7† Ke7 20.Nxa8 Qe4 21.Nc7 Qb7 22.Nxe6 Qxb6† 23.Nd4! White went on to win easily in Fass – Iriarte Gomez, email 2006.
The text move was played in Calzetta Ruiz – Hernando Rodrigo, Montanchez 1998, and now I suggest:
17.Nc7†!N 17...Ke7
17...Kd7? 18.Nxe5†
18.Ne3 Nf6 19.Nxa8 Qxa8 20.a4±

14.Be3

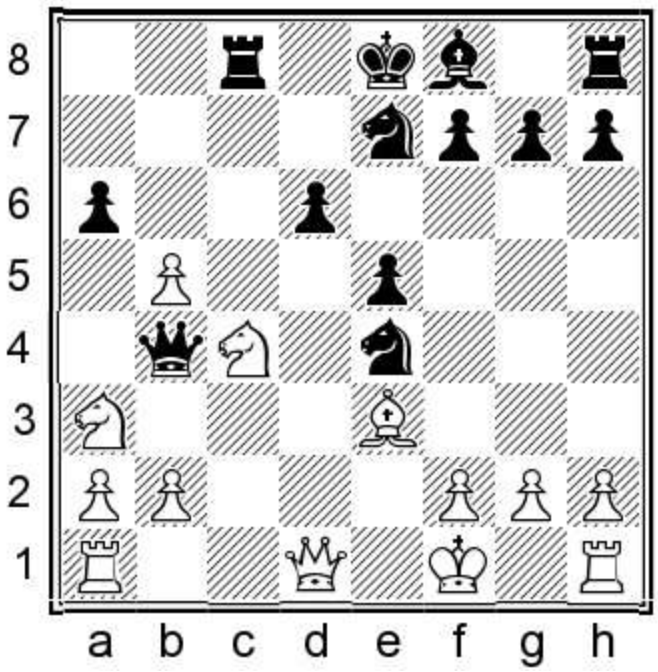


14...Rc8
The best chance.

14...Rb8? 15.0-0 axb5 16.Nxb5 Nxd5 17.Bxd5 Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Nf6 19.Qc4! Be7 (19...Rc8 20.Qa4 Qd7 21. Rac1+–) 20.Nc7† Kf8 21.Rfd1± White was much better in Petrushin – Timoscenko, Tbilisi 1974, one important point being that 21...Rxb2? 22.a4+– is overwhelming.

14...Qa5†? 15.Kf1! Rc8
The other rook move does not help either: 15...Rb8 16.Rc1 Nf5 17.Qd3 Nxe3† (17...Nc5 18.Bxc5 dxc5 19.b6 Bd6 20.Nc7† Ke7 21.Nd5† Ke8 22.Ne3 Nxe3† 23.fxe3 Be7 24.Bxe6 fxe6 25.Nc4+– C. Koch – Nenciulescu, email 2009) 18.Qxe3 Nd2† 19.Ke2 Nxc4 20.Nxc4 Qxa2 (Black suffered another defeat after: 20...Qd8 21. Nxe5! dxe5 22.Nc7† Kd7 23.Rhd1† Bd6 24.Rxd6† 1–0 Y. Xu – Hong, Hefei [rapid] 2010) 21.Qa7! Rc8 Henrichs – Hausrath, Germany 2008, and now White wins with: 22.Qxa6!N 22...Qxa6 23.bxa6 Rxc4 24.Rxc4 Bxd5 25.Rc8† Kd7 26.Rhc1+–
16.Nb6 Bxc4†
16...Rc7N 17.Qb3 Nd2† 18.Bxd2 Qxb6 19.Be3 Bxc4† 20.Nxc4 Qxb5 21.Qxb5† axb5 22.Nxd6† Kd7 23. Nxf7+–
17.Nbxc4 Qb4

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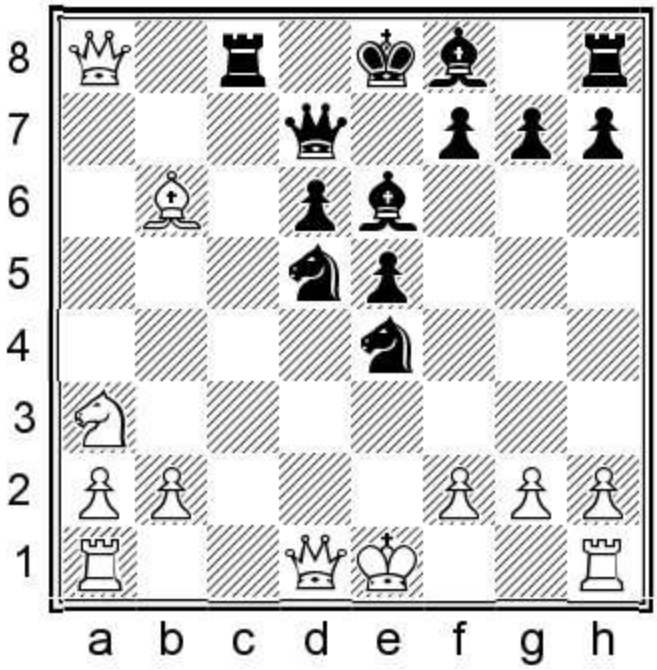
18.bxa6!N
18.Nb6 is also decent, as in S. Andersson – Novoa, Internet 2003.
18...Nf5 19.a7 Nxe3† 20.fxe3 Qb7 21.Qa4† Ke7 22.Qa5 Kf6 23.Nb6 Be7 24.Kg1+–

15.Bb6 Qd7 16.bxa6 Rxc4
Black's best hope is to create complications.

The straightforward 16...Bxd5 17.Bxd5 Nxd5 18.Qxd5 is simply winning. For example, 18...Nf6 19.Qa5 Be7 20.0-0 0-0 21.Rac1+– Mista – Z. Markovic, Kraljevo 2011.

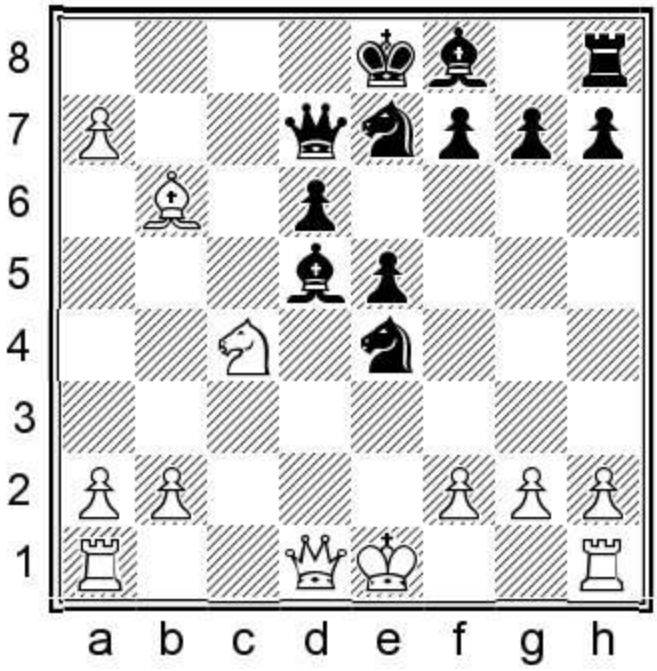
17.a7 Bxd5
There have been 18 games with the bishop capture, and none with the knight capture. A surprising tally, as the knight recapture is not ridiculous, despite the apparent lunacy of allowing a pawn to promote.
17...Nxd5!?N was analysed by a young Garry Kasparov together with Timoschenko, one of the two founders of the Sveshnikov Variation; or the Chelyabinsk Variation, as the Russians call it. 18.a8=Q† Rc8 White has at least a couple of options of roughly equal value.

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19.Qaa4 (19.Qa5!? Nxb6 20.Qxb6 d5 21.0-0 Bxa3 22.bxa3 0-0 also favours White; compared with the other line, White does not get a pawn, but his king gets to castle...) 19...Nxb6 20.Qxe4 d5 21.Qxe5 Bb4† 22.Kf1 0-0 23.Kg1² Black has two extra bishops and a lot of play – but White has an extra queen! I like White, but would not deny that it is a messy position.

18.Nxc4



18...Ba8
Going all the way back to a8 at least offers Black one tactical resource.

Instead after 18...Bc6 19.f3 then 19...d5?? 20.Nxe5 is obviously hopeless, so Black has to move the e7-knight somewhere. For example: 19...Nc8 20.fxe4 Bxe4 21.Qe2 Ba8 22.Be3± Abreu Delgado – Gomez Jurado, Mis-

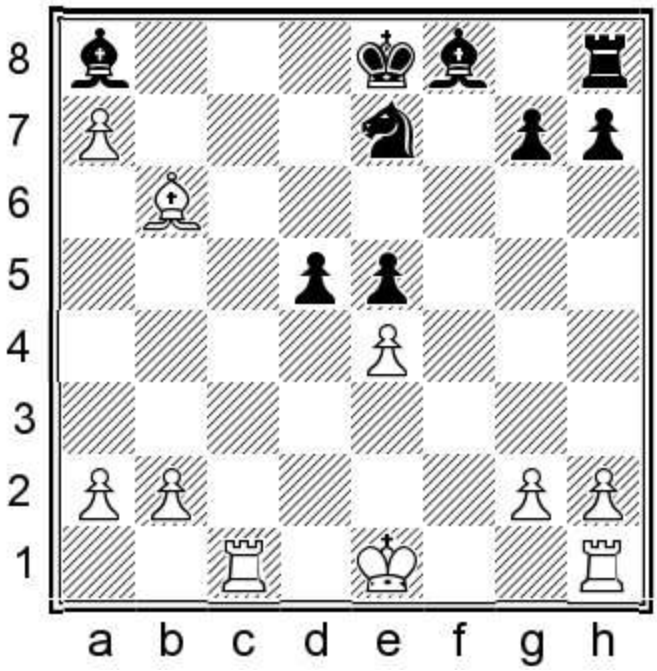
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lata 2008.

19.f3 d5
This is the resource mentioned above; it does not solve Black's problems but is by far the best attempt.

20.Nxe5
20.fxe4 also looks fine.

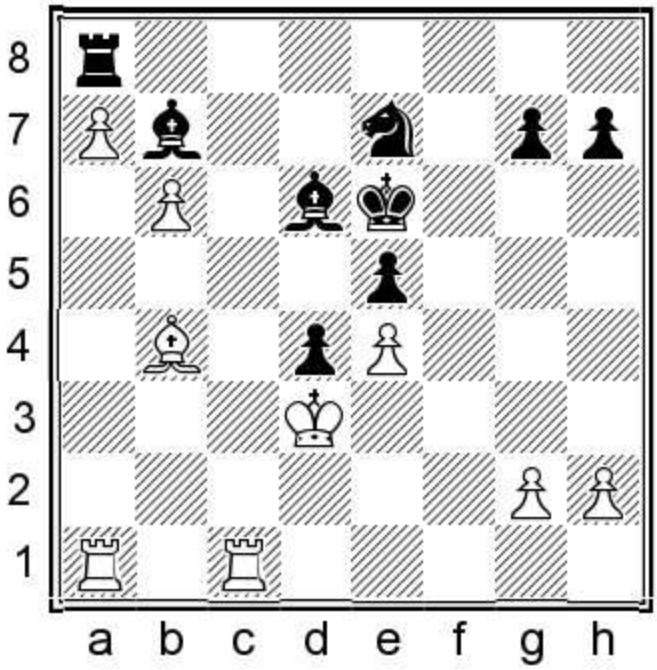
20...Qe6 21.Qd4 f6 22.fxe4 Qxe5 23.Qxe5 fxe5 24.Rc1±




All the confusion has subsided and we can take stock: White has a rook and two pawns against two minor pieces. Materially not so much in it, but the a7-pawn is obviously huge. I will conservatively say "clear advantage" though Black is teetering on the edge of lost. I will pass briefly through the rest of the game, even though it's fun.

24...d4 25.Ke2 Nc6 26.a3 Kd7 27.b4 Bd6 28.Kd3 Ne7 29.Rhf1 Ke6 30.b5 Bxa3 31.Ra1 Bd6 32.Rfc1 Rc8 33. Ba5 Bb7 34.b6 Ra8 35.Bb4!!
A beautiful blockade-breaker, but not yet a clean winner.

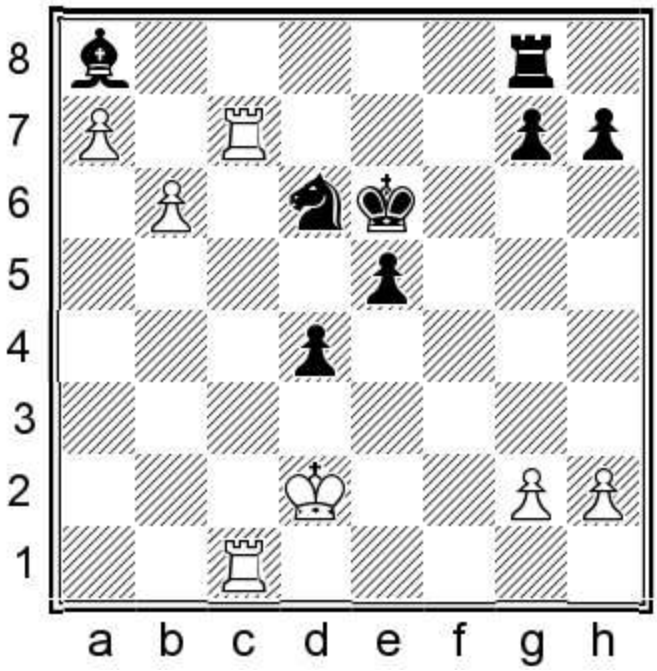
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35...Nc8!
Refusing to buckle.

After 35...Bxb4 36.Rc7 Bc6 37.b7 Bxb7 38.Rxb7 White is almost home. For example: 38...Bc5 39.Ra6† Bd6 40.g4 g5 41.Ke2 h6 42.Kd3 Nc8 43.Rh7+–

36.Bc5 Bxc5 37.Rxc5 Nd6 38.Re1 Rg8 39.Rc7 Ba8 40.Rec1 Bxe4† 41.Kd2 Ba8

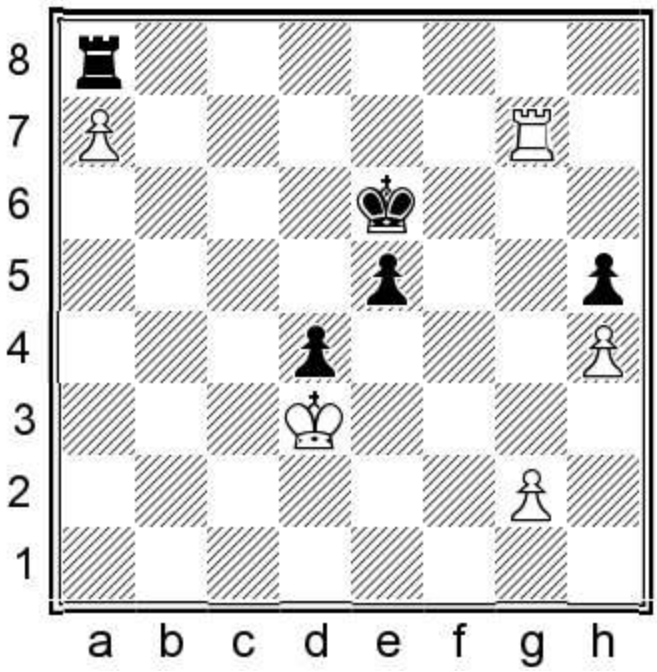


42.R1c6 Kd5
The only try.

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After 42...Bxc6? 43.Rxc6 Kd5 44.Rxd6† Kxd6 45.b7 the pawns land.

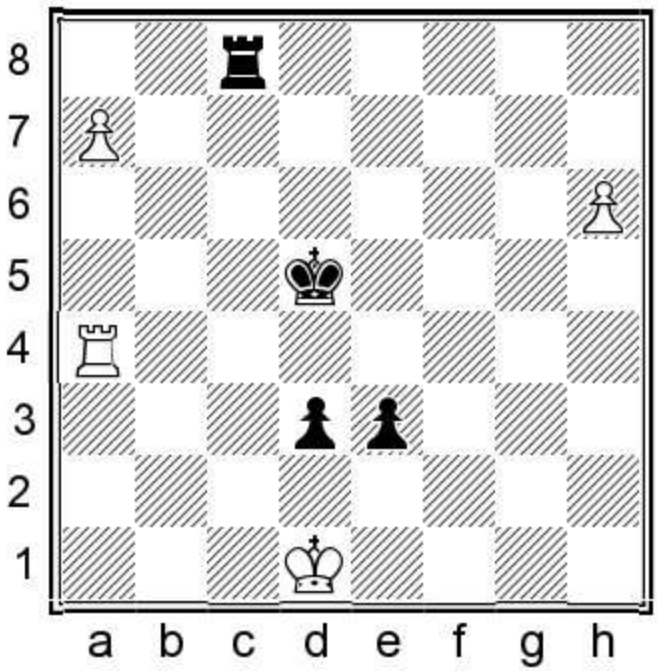
43.b7 Bxb7 44.Rxd6† Kxd6 45.Rxb7 Ra8 46.Rxg7 h5 47.h4 Ke6 48.Kd3



48...Kd5?
Black cracks (or maybe he made a typo?) after a titanic defensive effort.

48...Kf5 might well have held the draw.

49.g4 e4† 50.Kd2 hxg4 51.h5 Rc8 52.h6 e3† 53.Ke2 Rc2† 54.Kd1 Rc8 55.Rxg4 d3 56.Ra4



Black's pawns are beautiful but it's White that will promote. Unfortunately for Black, 56...e2† 57.Kd2 Rc2† 58. Kxd3 e1=N† is not quite mate. Or 56...Ra8 57.h7 Ke6 58.h8=Q Rxh8 59.a8=Q and the mate on h1 is covered.

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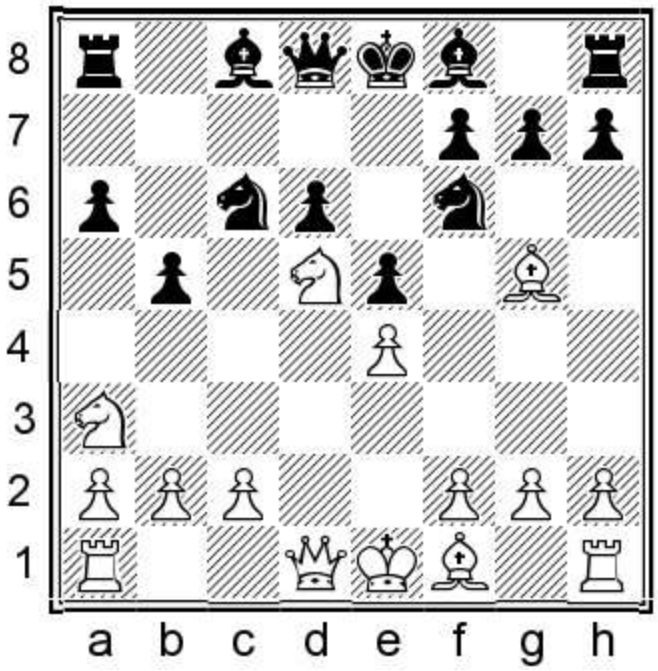
1–0

Introduction to 9...Be7 – 11...Ne7

GAME 17

Detlev Kuhne – Maxim Konstantinov
Correspondence 2013

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5




9...Be7
Against 9...Be6? you can choose two different paths.

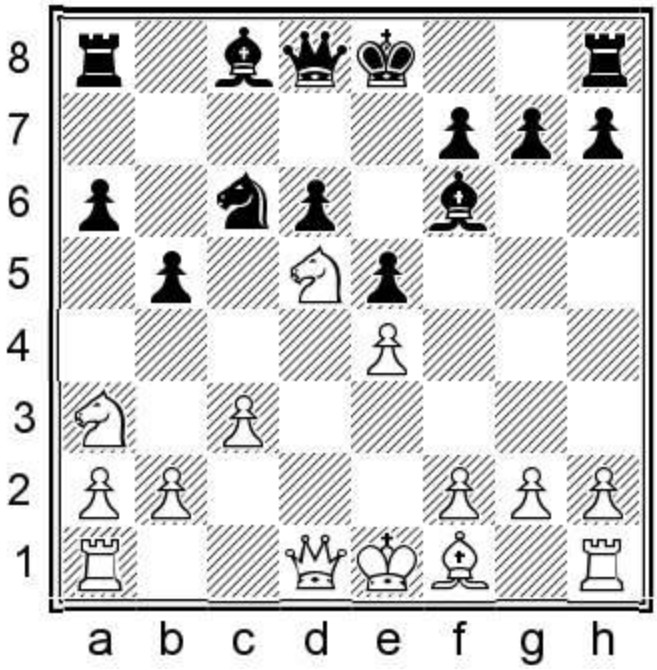
10.c4 b4 11.Bxf6!? gxf6 12.Nc2 Rb8 13.b3± Tyner – Galant, Broken Arrow 2012.

10.Bxf6 gxf6 11.g3!? is also good. The comparison here is with the lines with 9.Bxf6 gxf6 10.Nd5 f5 11.g3, where White will take on f5 and Black will play ...Bc8xf5. Here he will lose a tempo, and so White will gain a pleasant advantage. 11...Bg7 12.Bg2 Ne7 13.Nxe7 Qxe7 14.c3² followed by Nc2-e3.

10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3
The usual move; controlling the centre better while allowing the offside knight to find a better square on c2.

The trendy 11.c4 would offer a much more compact repertoire, but our analysis suggested it was less promising.

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11...Ne7
A sharp line that is a favourite of Krasenkow; Carlsen gave it a go in 2015.

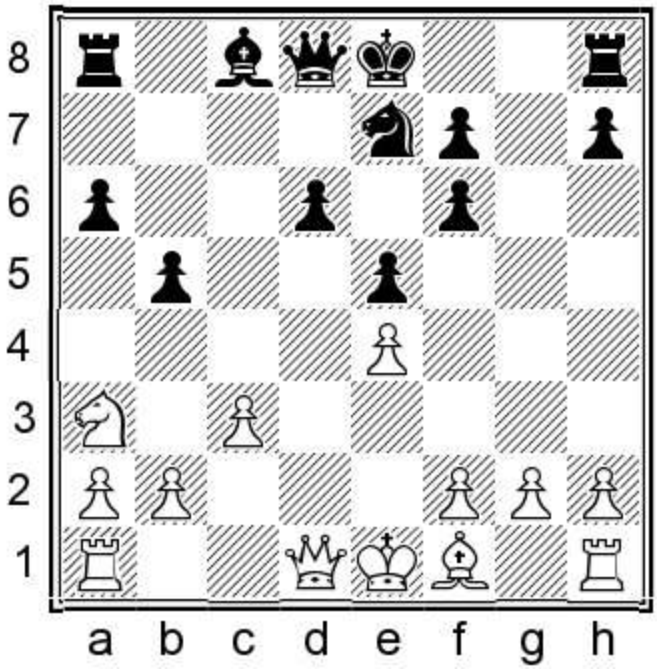
We shall see various other moves on the following pages, including 11...Bb7, 11...Bg5 and 11...0-0.

11...Rb8 12.Nc2 will transpose after 12...Bg5 (or 12...0-0). An independent option is 12...a5 but that offers White an easy opportunity: 13.Nxf6†!? Qxf6 14.Qd5 Na7 Awkward but otherwise a pawn drops. 15.a4² In Vrbljanac – Kosanovic, Belgrade 2010, White had a pleasant edge; of course 15...bxa4? 16.Qxa5 would be hopeless.

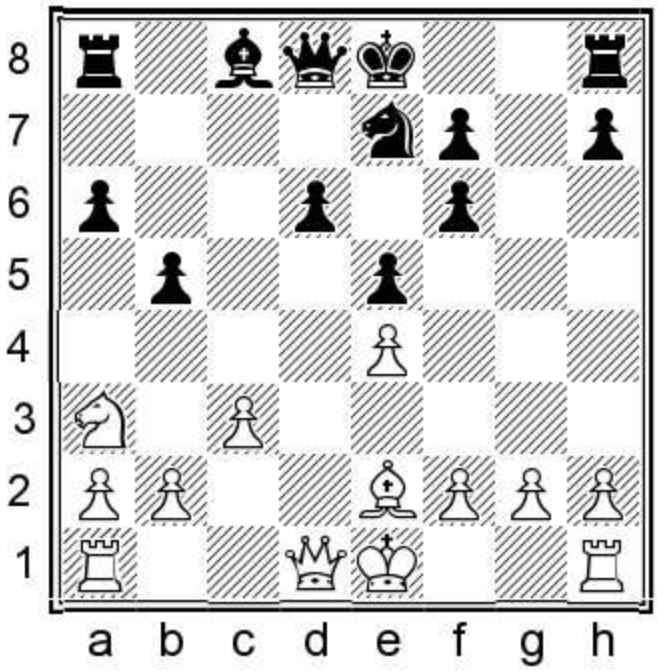
12.Nxf6†
Again we need to be principled.
12.Nc2 is quite often played, but White has precisely nothing after 12...Nxd5 13.Qxd5 Rb8= as in Giri – Carlsen, Saint Louis 2015, and many other games.

12...gxf6

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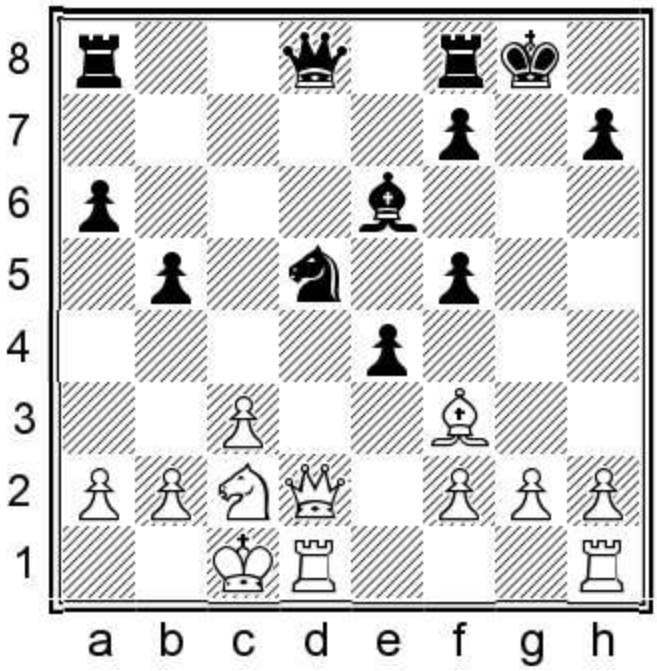


13.Bd3
An interesting alternative is:
13.Be2!?
I want to give my reasons for not making it my main recommendation, as many might want to play it anyway, for practical reasons. It would make my life easier to recommend this shortish 13.Be2 line, and move on. The problem is our analysis suggests Black can just hold a draw, while the much more complicated main line appears promising for White. So we shall do the hard work and study 13.Bd3; if you feel less fanatical, then 13. Be2 is your move.



13...d5
This is the critical line.
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13...Bb7 14.Bf3 Qb6 15.Nc2 0-0-0 16.Ne3 d5N (16...f5?! was Skaroupka – Nepomucky, Chrudim 2001; after

17.exf5 d5 18.0-0± Black is in trouble) 17.Qc2 Kb8 18.exd5 Nxd5 19.Bxd5 Bxd5 20.Nxd5 Rxd5 21.0-0² Black has a number of weaknesses and will suffer slowly.
13...f5 14.exf5 Bxf5 15.0-0 0-0 16.Nc2 d5 17.a4!² White is simply better in such a position. Black does not have an attack or the two bishops to justify his weaknesses. One example continued: 17...bxa4 18.Rxa4 a5 19. Ne3 Be6 20.Qd2 Qb6 21.Rfa1 Rab8 22.Nd1 d4 23.Rxa5± S.B. Hansen – Krasenkow, Koszalin 1998.
After the text move White has a clever sequence:
14.exd5 Nxd5 15.Bf3 Be6 16.Nc2
In general I like White here, but Black is just barely OK if he plays like a machine.
16...0-0 17.Qd2 f5 18.0-0-0 e4




It looks as if Black has equalized, but White has:
19.g4!! exf3 20.gxf5 Bxf5 21.Qxd5 Qxd5 22.Rxd5 Bxc2 23.Kxc2 Rfe8 24.Rg1† Kf8 25.Rg3 Re2† 26.Rd2 Rd8 27.Rxe2 fxe2 28.Re3 Rd1 29.Rxe2 Rh1 30.f3 Rf1 31.Kb3 Rxf3 32.a4 Rf5 33.axb5 Rxb5† 34.Kc4²
This rook ending is unpleasant for Black and in a practical game, had he found/remembered all of this, he would still have to play accurately to avoid defeat. This is possible when you have an engine at hand, so in this correspondence game he did escape, even though I have to say that a lot of the endings that hold are a pawn down and look very ugly until you go really deep (with computer assistance of course).
34...f5 35.Kd4 Kf7 36.b4 Kf6 37.Ra2 Rb6 38.Kc5 Re6 39.Rf2 Re8 40.c4 Rc8† 41.Kd4 Rd8† 42.Kc5 Rc8† 43. Kd4 Rd8† 44.Kc3 Rf8 45.Ra2 f4 46.Rxa6† Ke5 47.Ra5† Ke4 48.Ra1 f3 49.Re1† Kf4 50.b5 f2 51.Rf1 Ke5 52. Kd3 Rf4 53.c5 Rf7 54.c6 Kd6
Draw agreed in Hatzl – S. Larsen, email 2012.

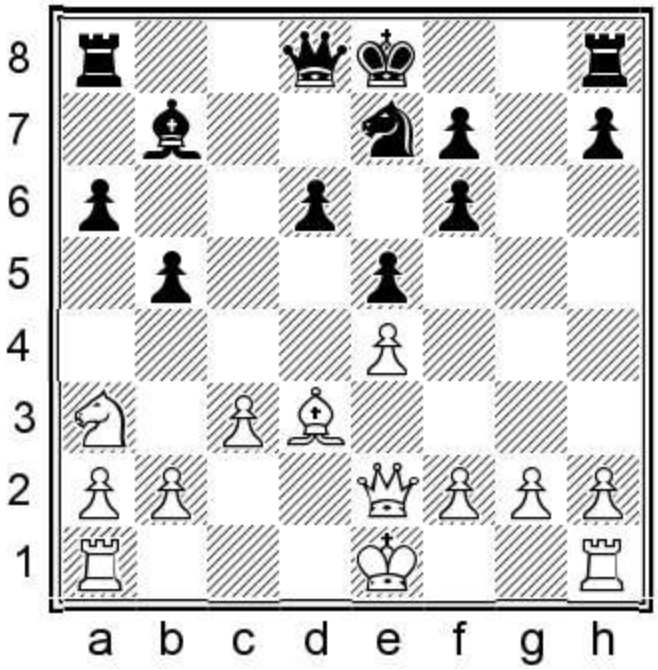
13...d5!
The most resilient.

13...Rg8 14.g3 d5 is a rare line that requires just a touch of care: 15.Nc2!N (15.Qe2 d4 16.cxd4 Nc6!N equalizes) 15...Bb7 16.Qe2²

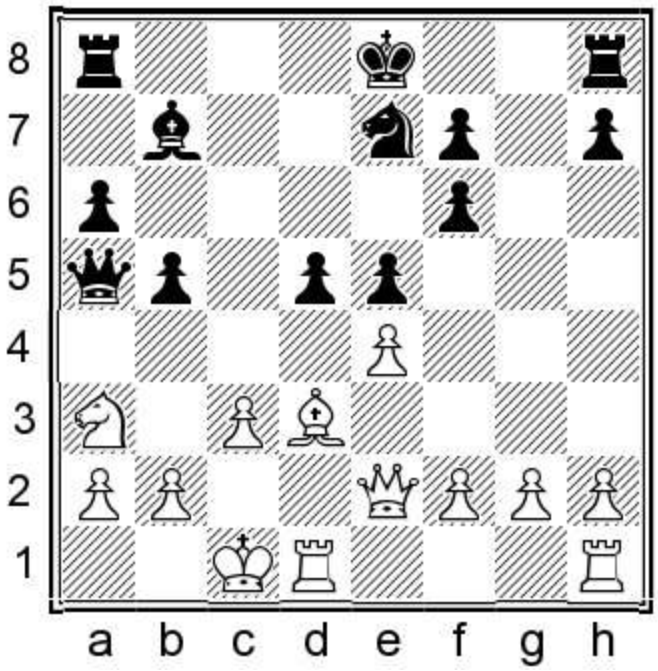
13...Bb7
This clearly points the bishop at White's kingside, so perhaps it is not such a shock that in most of the following lines White castles queenside.

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14.Qe2



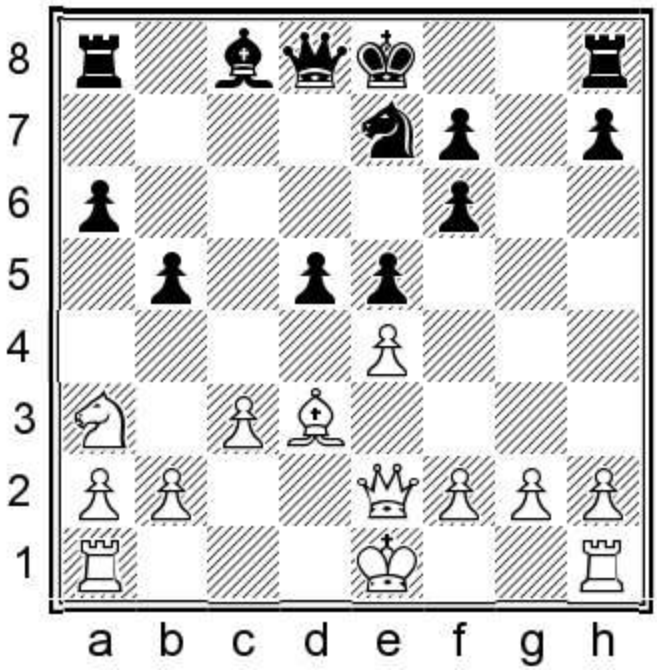
14...d5
14...Rg8 15.g3 Qb6 16.0-0-0 0-0-0 17.Nc2 Kb8 18.Rhe1± was great for White in Korneev – Felgaer, Dos Hermanas 2005.
Black is also under serious pressure after: 14...Qc7 15.Nc2 d5 (15...f5 16.f3 fxe4 17.fxe4 d5 18.0-0-0 d4 19. cxd4 exd4 20.Kb1 Nc6 21.Rc1 Qe7 22.Rhe1 0-0-0 23.a4! bxa4 24.Bxa6 Kb8 25.Na3± Selen – S. Larsen, email 2012) 16.0-0-0 0-0-0 17.a4! dxe4 (17...bxa4 18.Bxa6±; 17...f5 18.axb5 fxe4 19.bxa6 Ba8 20.Bb5±) 18.Bxe4 bxa4 19.Qg4† Kb8 20.Bxb7 Qxb7 21.Qxa4± Kraft – Krebs, email 2012.
15.0-0-0 Qa5
15...d4 16.cxd4 exd4 17.Nc2² Kloster – Siebarth, email 2012.
15...Qb6 16.f4! 0-0-0 17.fxe5 fxe5 18.exd5 Rxd5 19.c4± Shapiro – Oliveira, corr. 2002.



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It is time for a powerful, if not fully original, novelty:
16.f4!N
16.exd5 Nxd5 17.Qf3 as in Rowson – Vallejo Pons, Selfoss 2003, also looks promising for White, and he did win, making it the greatest single victory for a Scottish player, until Vallejo, then rated a bit higher, lost to my colleague Jacob Aagaard four years later, also as Black in the Sicilian... But here Black can play: 17...Rc8! 18. Be4 Rxc3† 19.bxc3 Qxa3† 20.Kd2 Qb2† 21.Ke1 Nxc3 22.Bxb7 Nxd1 23.Qxd1 Ke7 and White has no advantage at all. For example: 24.Qb3 Qa1† 25.Qd1 Qb2=
16...exf4 17.exd5±
With the point: 17...Bxd5 18.Bxb5† axb5 19.Rxd5+–

14.Qe2
We have reached a significant branching point, with four main options. We will deal with two in this game, and the other two in the analysis section that follows.



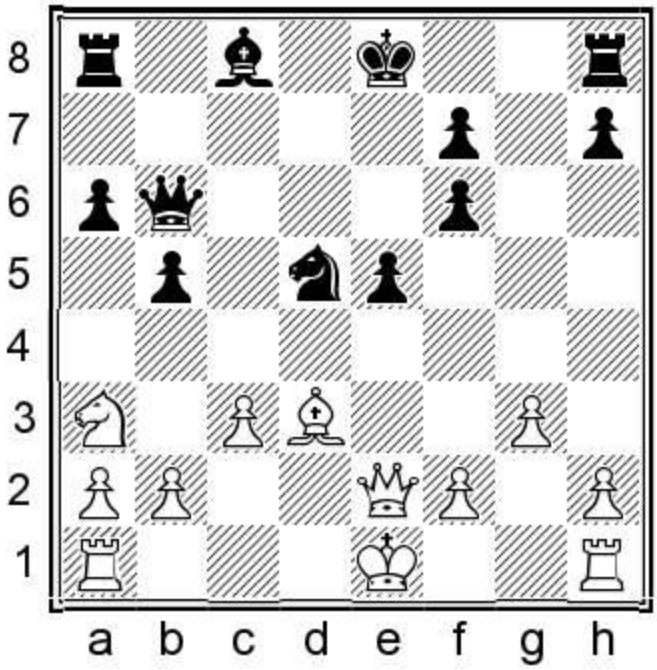

14...d4
The most common choice.

14...Bb7 transposes to the 13...Bb7 line in the note to move 13.

14...Be6 and 14...dxe4 are covered next on page 199.

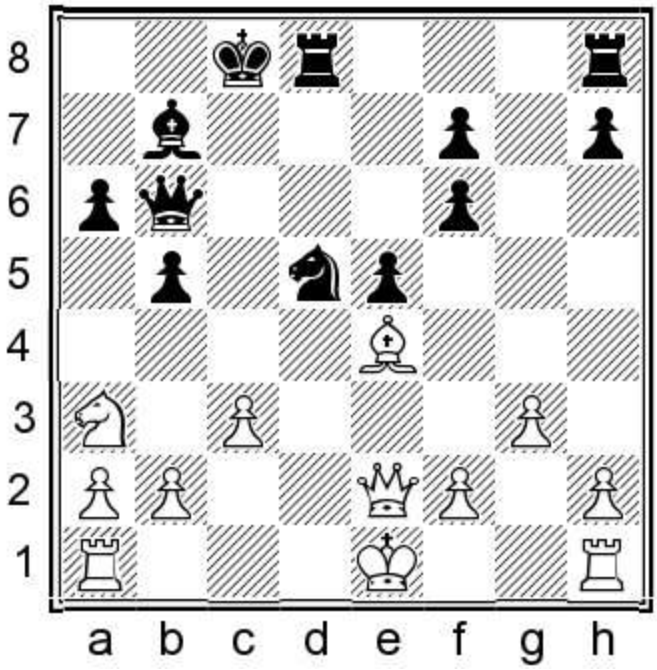
14...Qb6
A less active square than d4 (where the black queen goes in the game) but certainly more secure.
15.exd5 Nxd5
15...Bb7 16.Be4 Bxd5 17.0-0-0 0-0-0 18.c4!? is promising for White, for instance: 18...Qc6 19.Bxd5 (19.Rxd5 Nxd5 20.Qf3 b4 21.Kb1 bxa3 22.Bxd5 Qc5 23.Qxf6 Qd6 24.Qxf7 Qg6† 25.Qxg6 hxg6 26.b4²) 19...Nxd5 20. Qc2² Noble – Vidalina, email 2008.
16.g3
In this line, and many other Sveshnikov lines, Black's bishop faces a close decision: e6 or b7?

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a) 16...Be6 17.Nc2² I think White is in general slightly better in such positions. His structure is superior and I do not fear Black's counterplay. The following game could be one to follow: 17...h5 18.Be4 0-0-0 19.a4! h4 20. axb5 axb5 21.0-0-0 f5 22.Bd3 f6 23.Bxb5± V. Ivanov – Troia, email 2013.

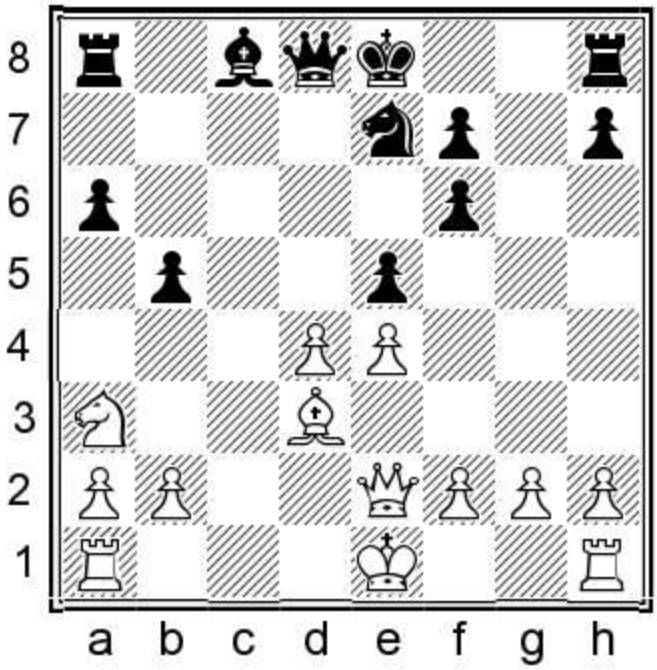
b) 16...Bb7 A bishop always looks pretty on the long diagonal, but now the ...f6-f5 advance is harder to carry out. 17.Be4 0-0-0



18.0-0-0 (18.0-0!?N is riskier but may be objectively stronger, for instance: 18...Rhg8 19.Bxd5 Rxd5 20.c4²) 18...Kb8 19.Kb1!?N (19.Nc2?! Ne3!= Jensen – Brugger, email 2009) 19...b4 20.Nc4 Qc6 21.Rxd5 Rxd5 22. Bxd5 Qxd5 23.Rd1! Qe4† 24.Qxe4 Bxe4† 25.Kc1 bxc3 26.b3² White will have a good ending. At some point he will win the c3-pawn, leading to a position with level material where Black has further pawn weaknesses.

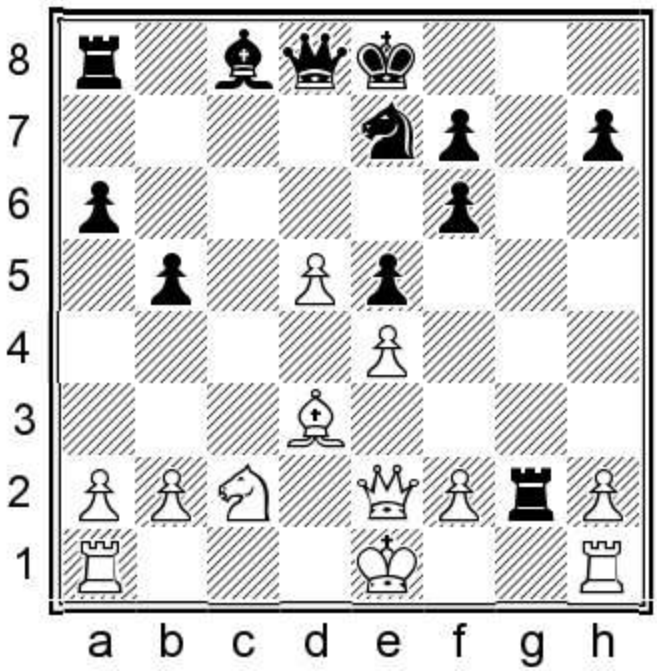
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15.cxd4



15...Qxd4
The black queen looks strong, but will not be allowed to rest on d4 for long.

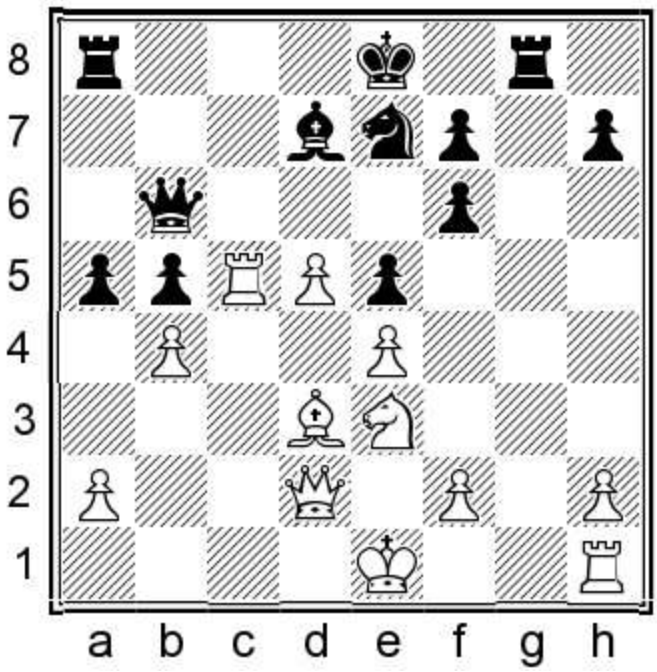
The following game shows the problems with Black's position excellently:
15...Rg8 16.Nc2! Rxg2
16...exd4 17.0-0±
17.d5²



If your plan is just to memorize a few good moves, then here is enough, but for a boost in chess understanding, play through the rest also.

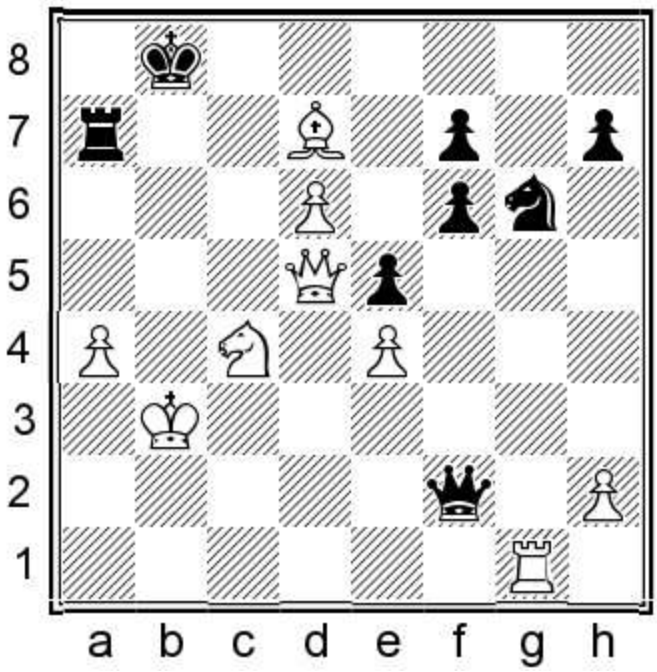
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17...Qa5† 18.b4 Qc7 19.Qd2 Bd7 20.Ne3 Rg8 21.Rc1 Qb6 22.Rc5 a5
Here White found a striking idea:

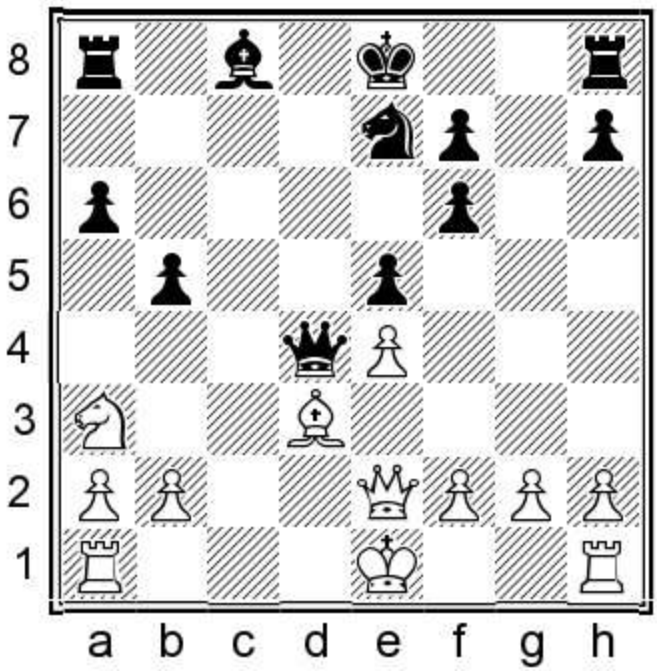


23.a4!! axb4
Perhaps Black should have settled for 23...bxa4 24.Rxa5 Rxa5 25.bxa5 Qc5 26.Ke2 Ng6 27.Rb1 Nf4† 28.Kf3².
24.Rxb5!
The typical exchange sacrifice.
24...Bxb5 25.Bxb5† Kd8 26.d6 Ng6 27.Qd5 Ra7 28.Rg1 b3
Or 28...Rf8 29.Nc4 Qd4 30.Qxd4 exd4 31.Nb6± and Black is threatened by Ke2 and Rc1-c8#.
29.Kd2 Kc8
The desperate attempt 29...Rxa4 also fails to save Black: 30.Bxa4 Qb4† 31.Ke2 Qxa4 32.Qb7 Qa2† 33.Kd3 Nf4† 34.Kc3 Qa5† 35.Kxb3 Rxg1 36.Qe7† Kc8 37.d7†+–
30.Kc3 Kb8
30...Rd8 31.Nc4 Qd4† 32.Qxd4 exd4† 33.Kxd4 is unlikely to change the outcome.
31.Kxb3 Rd8 32.Nc4 Qxf2 33.Bc6! Rdd7 34.Bxd7

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Black resigned in Schnabel – Nogga, email 2014, on account of: 34...Rxd7 35.Na5! Qb6† (35...Qxg1 36.Qb5† Ka8 37.Qc6†! Kb8 38.Qxd7+–) 36.Kc4 Qa6† 37.Kc3 Rxd6 38.Rb1† Kc8 39.Qc5† Kd7 40.Nc4 Rc6 41.Qd5† Ke7 42.Rb8+– That was a fine computer-aided resignation.



16.0-0!
After 16.0-0-0 Qb6 17.Kb1 Be6 18.Nc2 Nc6 Black most probably has enough to hold a dynamic balance.

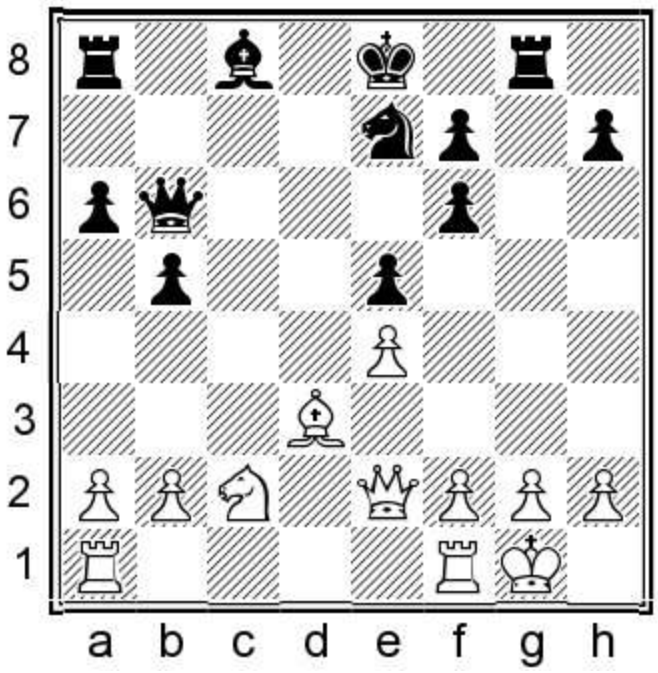
16...Rg8
Trying to create counterplay, but White has it in hand.

The tranquil 16...0-0 places no pressure on White. For example: 17.Rfd1 Qb6 18.Nc2 Be6 19.Ne3² Barua – Ramnath, Chennai 2012.

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17.Nc2 Qxb2
Grabbing the pawn and stepping into the cage is principled but dangerous.

17...Qb6 is not an ideal solution either. I found a nice way to improve on a centaur game:



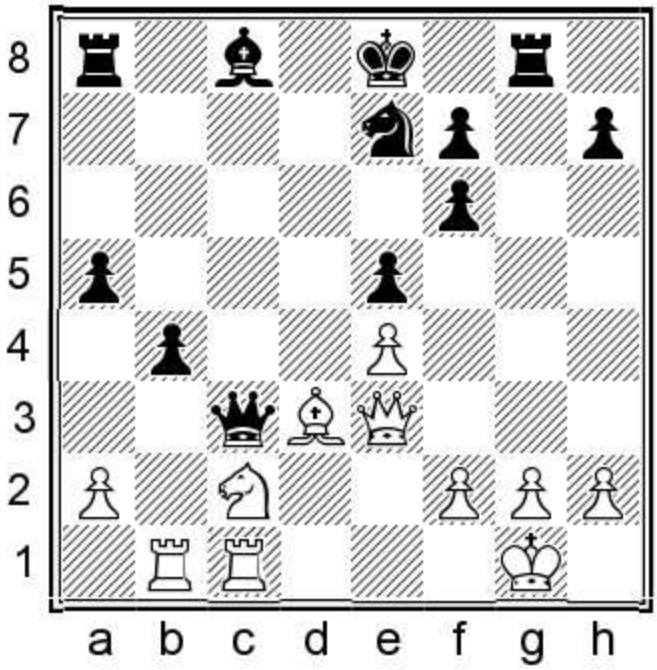
18.Ne3!N Useful prophylaxis against ...Bg4, which would annoy White. 18...Be6 19.Qf3 Ng6 20.Rfd1±

18.Qd2 b4
Now the queen escapes to c3 but that is far from the end of the story.

18...Bh3 runs into a wonderful combination. 19.Rfb1! Bxg2 and now the fabulous point is: 20.f3!! Bh3† 21. Kh1 Bg2† 22.Qxg2 Rxg2 23.Rxb2 Rd2 24.Rb3 Rd8 25.Nb4± The rest is a matter of technique.

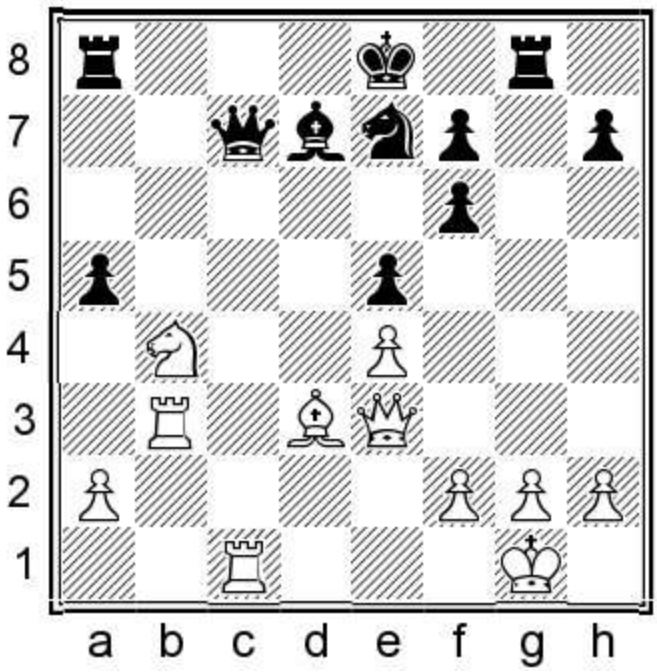
19.Rab1 Qc3 20.Qe3 a5 21.Rfc1
Still kicking that queen around.

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21...Bd7
Also deeply unpleasant is: 21...Be6 22.Nxb4 Qd4 23.Qxd4 exd4 24.Na6±

22.Rb3 Qc7 23.Nxb4±
With material equality restored, it is obvious that White is much better due to Black's weak structure.

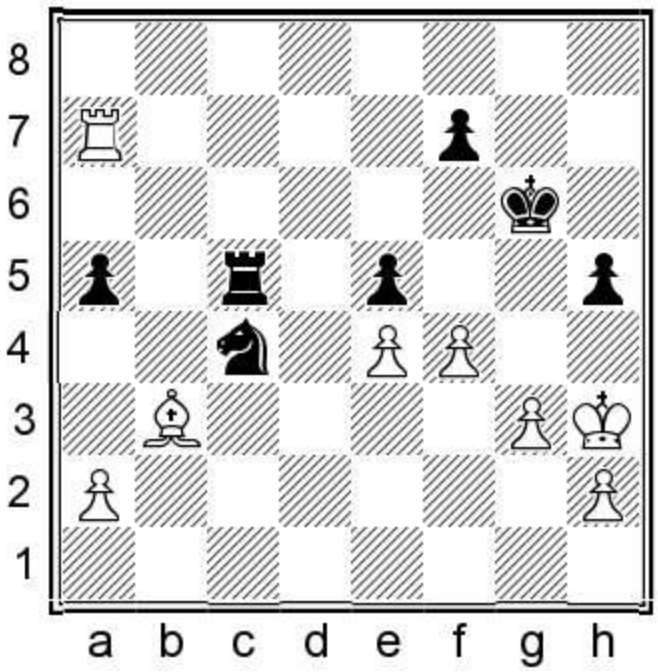


23...Qa7 24.Qxa7 Rxa7 25.Nd5 Kf8
Otherwise a check on b8 is fatal.

26.Nxf6 Rg6 27.Nxd7† Rxd7 28.g3
White is a pawn up for nothing and finished smoothly.

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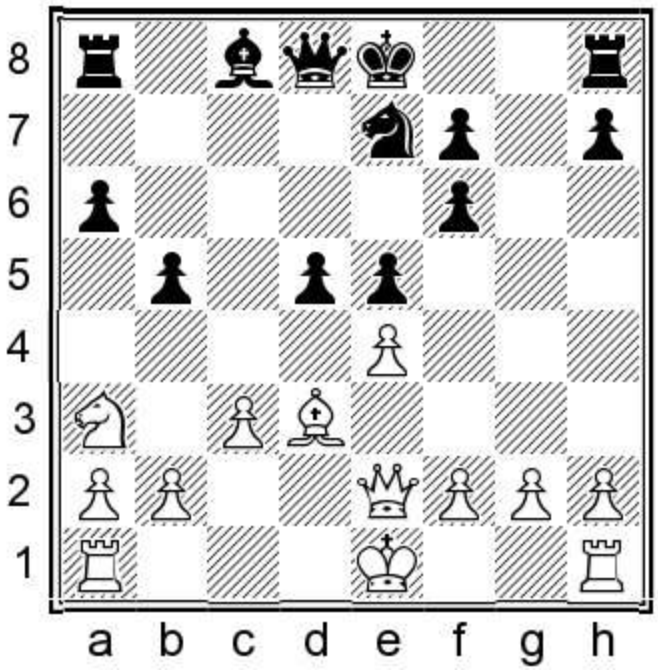
28...Rc6 29.Rcc3 Rd4 30.Kg2 Rb4 31.Rxb4 Rxc3 32.Rb8† Kg7 33.Bb5 Rc8 34.Rb7 Rc5 35.Ba4 Nc8 36.f3 Nd6 37.Ra7 Nc4 38.Bb3 h5 39.Kh3 Kg6 40.f4



Over-the-board Black may not have resigned here, but he will soon run out of moves. For example, 40...exf4 41.gxf4 f6 42.Kh4 Rc6 43.f5† Kh6 44.h3 Rc5 45.Rf7 Rc6 46.Bxc4 and pawns start dropping.
1–0

11...Ne7 – 14...dxe4 and 14...Be6

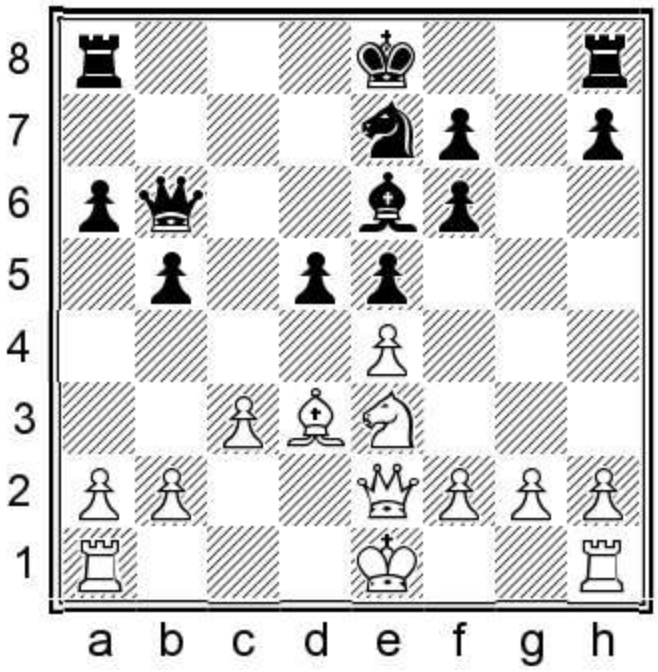
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 Ne7 12.Nxf6† gxf6 13.Bd3 d5 14.Qe2
And here we are again.



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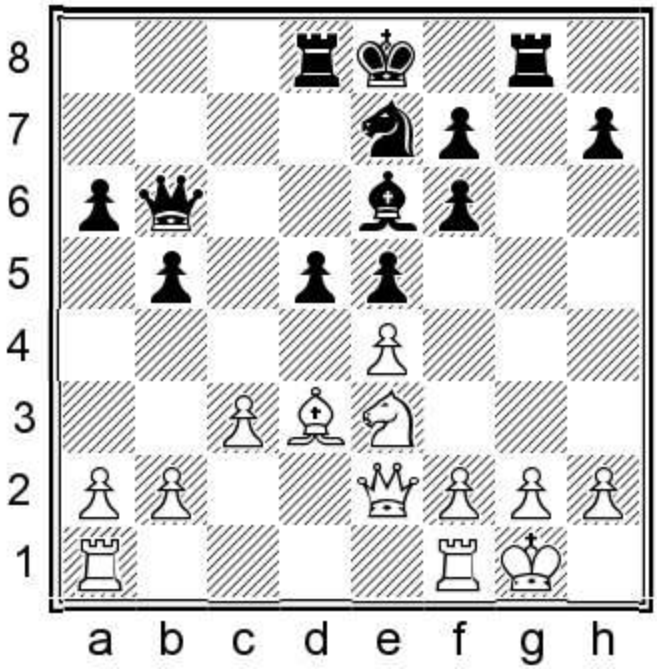
14...dxe4
Provoking the bishop to e4 where it will gain a tempo on the rook then lose it back to ...f6-f5.

14...Be6
This move is rare but it was tried by Krasenkow a few years ago, so is certainly worth a look.
15.Nc2 Qb6 16.Ne3
Now the rook belongs on d8, but whether or not the black king should jump over it to c8 is a debate.

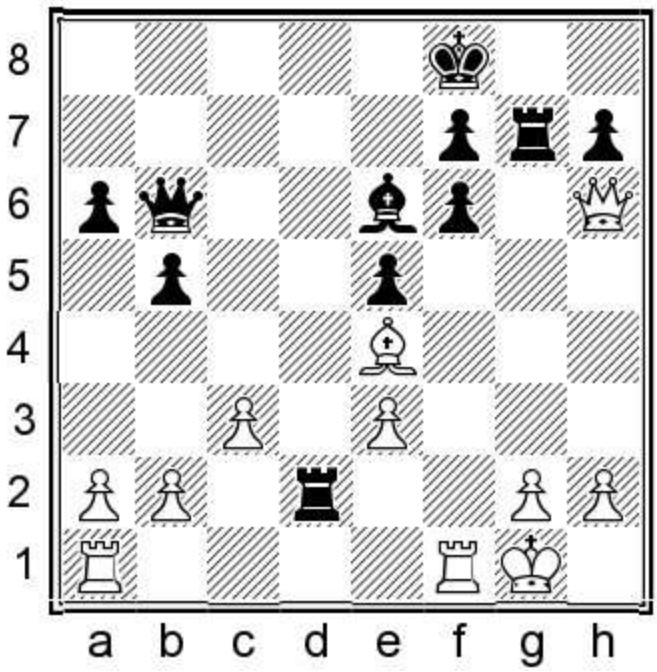



16...Rd8
My guess is that the king is safer on e8 than c8.
16...0-0-0 17.a4 This must be the right move. 17...dxe4 18.Bxe4 f5 19.axb5! Qxb5 (19...fxe4 20.Rxa6 and White will follow up with 0-0 and Rfa1, which will be too much for the defence to bear) 20.Bf3!? Planning to sac the bishop (a tiny but safe edge was achievable via 20.Qxb5 axb5 21.Bd3²). 20...e4 21.Rxa6 Qc5 22.Bxe4 fxe4 23.0-0$f$ Over the board I would expect a White win, but Black eventually held a draw in Dogan – Troia, email 2011.
17.0-0²
I prefer White for the usual structural reasons, which also mean we have the safer king.
17...Rg8

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18.Qh5!?N
Crude and annoying.
Blomqvist – Krasenkow, Cappelle-la-Grande 2016, instead continued: 18.Rfd1 dxe4 19.Bxe4 f5 20.Rxd8† Qxd8 21.Rd1 Qc8 and Black was over the worst, and drew soon enough.
After the text move one possible line is:
18...Rg7 19.Qh6 Kf8 20.exd5 Nxd5 21.Be4!? Nxe3 22.fxe3 Rd2



23.Rxf6±
White has won a safe pawn, as 23...Rxb2?? 24.Raf1 is a clean winner due to the many pins and the following trick: 24...Kg8 25.Bxh7†! Rxh7 26.Rg6† fxg6 27.Rf8#

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15.Bxe4

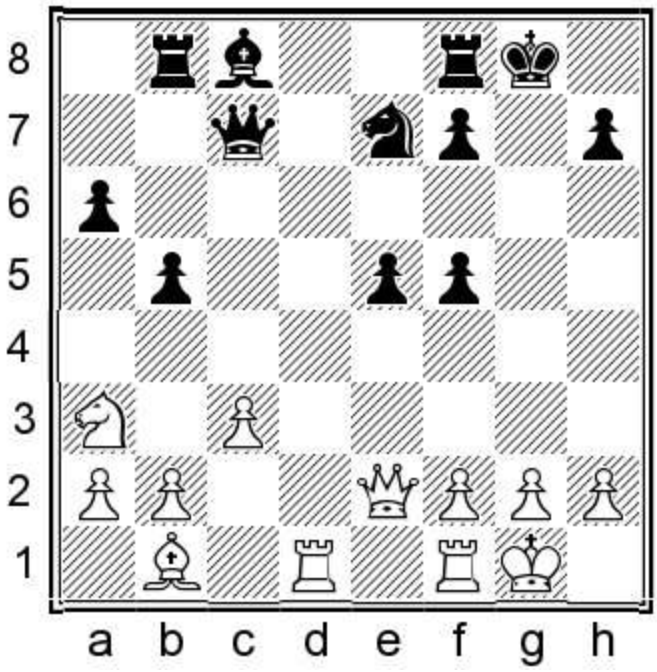
The next couple of moves are natural and obvious.

15...Rb8 16.0-0 f5 17.Rad1
It makes sense to nudge the queen before deciding where the bishop belongs.

17...Qc7
But now it's decision time for the bishop.

18.Bb1
Another idea is:
18.Bd5
I like White's chances even though it's not totally clear.
18...0-0 19.c4!?N 19...b4
19...Nxd5 20.cxd5 Rb6 21.Rc1 Qd6 22.Rfd1 and White has something to play for.
20.Nc2 b3 21.axb3 Rxb3 22.Ne3 f4 23.Ng4 Bxg4 24.Qxg4† Kh8 25.Qh5 f6 26.c5!²
White has an advantage. The c-pawn is strong and the black king is weak. The b2-pawn and the a6-pawn are both irrelevant.
26...Nxd5
26...Rxb2? does not work. 27.Be6! Qc6 28.Rd6 Qe8 (28...Qxc5? 29.Rd7 and White wins because of Be6-f5 coming.) 29.Qh3± Black has an extra pawn, the one on a6, which is entirely useless; meanwhile White's c-pawn is looming, and Black's king is insecure.
27.Rxd5 Qf7
27...Rxb2 28.Rfd1 Rb7 29.g3²
28.Qd1! Rxb2 29.c6 Qc7 30.Qc1 Rb6 31.Qc5 Rg8 32.Rc1±
Black is in a lot of bother.

18...0-0




19.Nc2!?N
The rooks might double on the d-file or get to the two central files. We don't know yet, but we do know that we have to bring the knight back to the game!

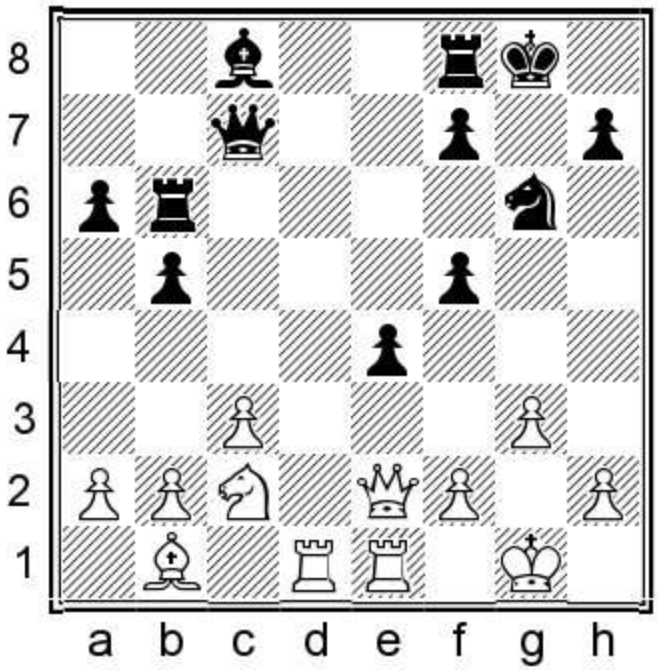
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19.Rfe1 Ng6 20.Nc2 Be6 21.Nb4 Rb6! and Black held without problems in the high-level correspondence games Sochor – Bubir, email 2013, and Poehr – Hedlund, email 2014.

19...Rb6
Also after 19...Kh8 20.Ne3 f4 21.Nd5 Nxd5 22.Rxd5 f6 23.Rfd1 Black has not succeeded in fully equalizing.

20.Rfe1 e4
Or 20...Ng6 21.g3 is similar.

21.g3 Ng6



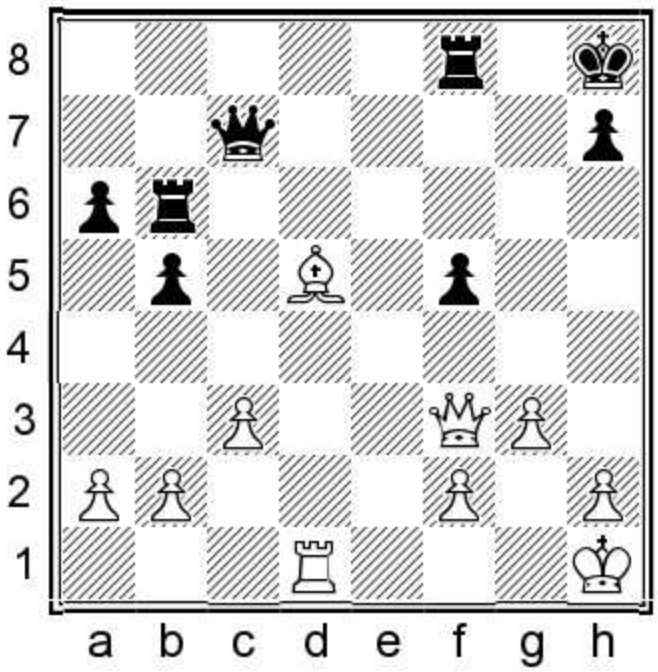

22.Ne3!
Instead 22.Nb4 Bb7 23.Nd5 Bxd5 24.Rxd5 Ne5 should lead to a draw by force. 25.Red1 Nf3† 26.Kg2 Rh6 27.h3 Rg6 28.Qe3 h5 29.h4 Nxh4† 30.Kf1 Nf3 31.Rxf5 Qc4† 32.Bd3 Rd8 33.Bxc4 Rxd1† 34.Kg2 Rg1† 35. Kh3 Rh1† is one example of how this could happen.

22...Be6 23.Qh5 Ne5 24.Kh1!
The correct move order.

24.Nxf5?! Bxf5 25.Qxf5 Nf3† 26.Kh1 does not work as well, as 26...Rh6! puts White under pressure.

24...Nf3 25.Nxf5 Bxf5 26.Rxe4 Bxe4 27.Bxe4 f5 28.Bd5† Kh8 29.Qxf3©

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With a powerful bishop and two healthy extra pawns versus a rook, White has promising play.

11...Bb7 with ...Nb8-d7

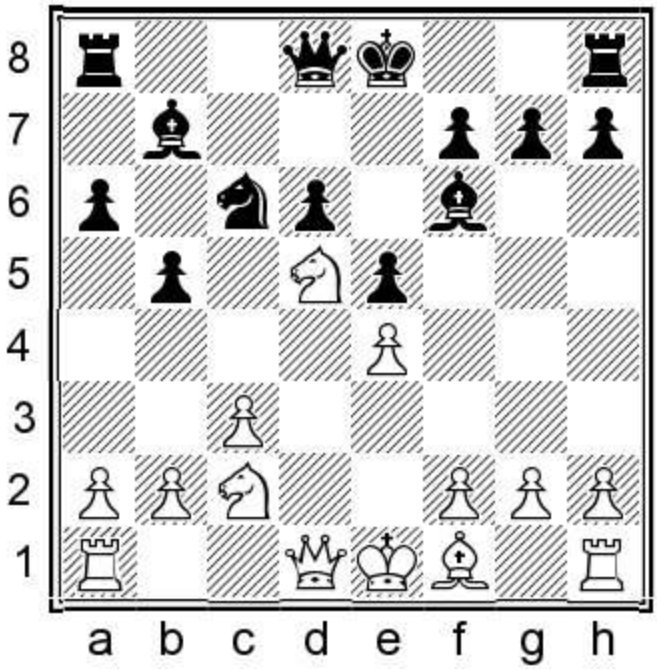
GAME 18

Oleg Korneev – Julen Arizmendi Martinez
Albacete 2001

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 Bb7
Black's idea is to control the central light squares with the help of the manoeuvre ...Nb8-d7, but this is too slow.

12.Nc2

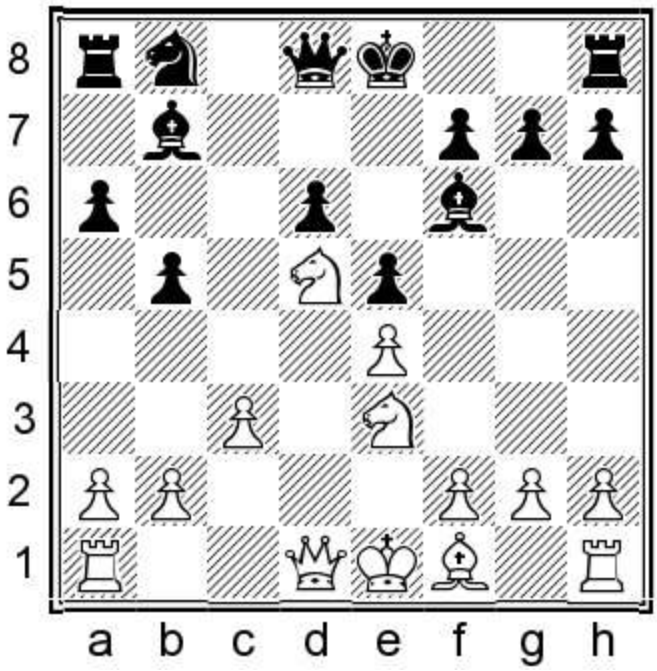
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12...0-0
12...Bg5 13.a4 bxa4 14.Rxa4 0-0 transposes to page 216.

12...Ne7 is a worse version of the previous game: 13.Ncb4!? (13.Nce3 Bg5!÷ is less precise) Keeping control of d5 with an edge, for example: 13...Nxd5 14.Nxd5 0-0 15.Be2² Gildardo Garcia – Nijboer, Wijk aan Zee 1996.

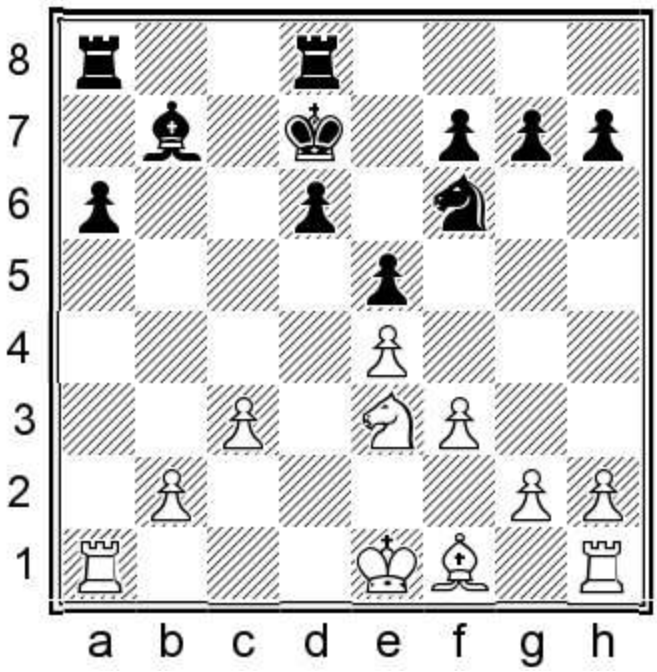
12...Nb8
This was an old favourite of John Nunn, but it can now be said to have been laid to rest, at least if Black intends to avoid transposing.
13.Nce3!



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13...Nd7?

Black should settle for 13...0-0 14.a4 bxa4 15.Rxa4 Nd7, which transposes to the bolded main line on the next page.
13...Bg5? is hit by an idea we will see again. 14.Nf5 g6 15.h4! File this little sequence in your memory for future use. 15...Bf4 16.g3 gxf5 17.gxf4 Nd7 18.Bh3± Firman – Volodin, Alushta 2001.
14.a4 bxa4 15.Nxf6†!
Knight takes bishop on f6 is unusual in these Sveshnikov lines; but in this particular case, either piece recapture leads to trouble.
15...Nxf6
No better is: 15...Qxf6 16.Qxa4 Qd8 17.Nf5 (17.0-0-0!N is even stronger) 17...0-0 18.Nxd6² Black did not have enough for the pawn in Iordachescu – Timoshenko, Tusnad 2004.
16.Qxa4† Qd7
Or 16...Kf8 17.f3! and Black will drop material (probably the d6-pawn) before he can complete development. For example: 17...g6 18.0-0-0 Kg7 19.Qb4± We could stop here, but I will show a few more moves as White keeps control perfectly in the following game: 19...Qc7 20.Rxd6 Rhb8 21.Qa3 Rd8 22.Rxd8 Rxd8 23.Bc4 Nh5 24.Bd5 Bc8 25.g3 Nf6 26.Rd1+– Keuter – De Carlos Arregui, email 2009.
17.Qxd7† Kxd7 18.f3 Rhd8
18...d5? loses more or less by force: 19.exd5 Nxd5 20.0-0-0 Ke6 21.Bc4 Rhd8 22.Rd2 Rd7 23.Rhd1 Rad8 24.b4 and Black is lost. The first threat is Nxd5 and Bxa6. 24...Rd6 25.Kc2 g6 (25...f5 26.Bxd5† Bxd5 27.c4 and wins) 26.Nxd5 Bxd5 27.Rxd5 Rxd5 28.Ra1 R8d6 29.Ra5 and White wins easily.

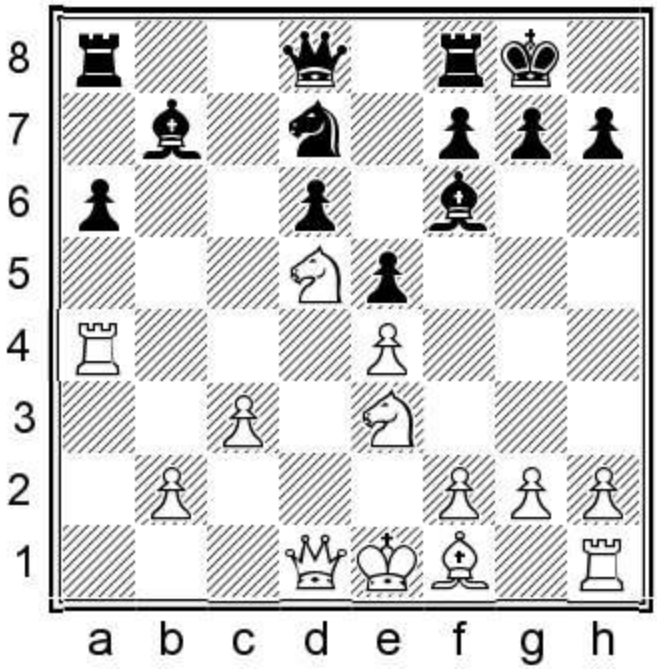



Finally we should vary from Chandra – Bernard, Paracin 2014:
19.Ra5!N 19...Ke7 20.Bc4±
White is in complete control.

13.a4
The standard plan to improve our rook while creating a target on a6.

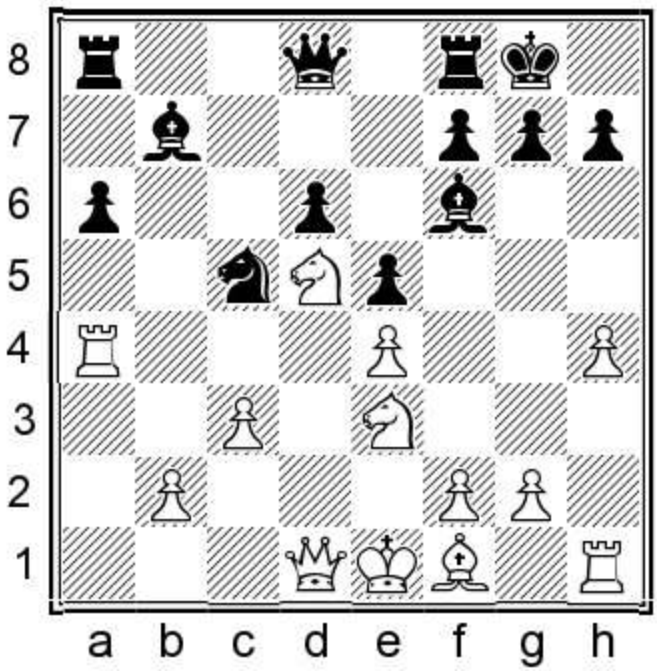
13...bxa4 14.Rxa4 Nb8 15.Nce3 Nd7
White's advantage may appear strategic and restrained, but it can quickly transform into a vicious attack. For example: 15...Bg5 In this and similar positions, Black would love to have a chance to play ...Bxe3. 16.Nf5! g6 17.h4!±

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16.h4!
This was suggested by Garry Kasparov and should give White the better chances.

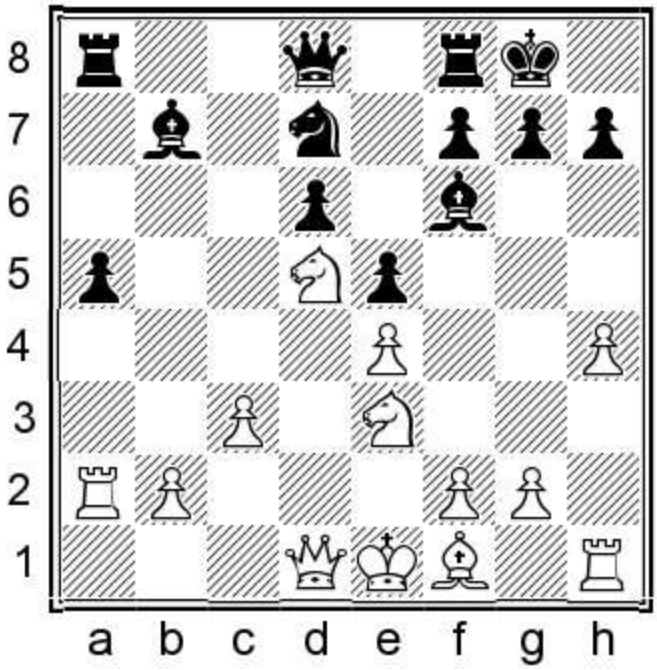
16...a5
The only other played move is: 16...Nc5



17.Ra2!N (17.Rc4 a5 18.b4 axb4 19.cxb4 Ne6 was nothing special for White in Zagrebelny – Gagarin, Moscow 1995) 17...Nxe4 The critical test. 18.Qf3 Nc5 19.b4 Bxd5 20.Nxd5 Ne6 21.Rxa6² Black has a short-lived initiative, but in the long run the b-pawn will offer White the better chances.

17.Ra2²
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White has a solid grip on d5 and clearly the healthier pawn structure. Black could mention his bishop pair, but

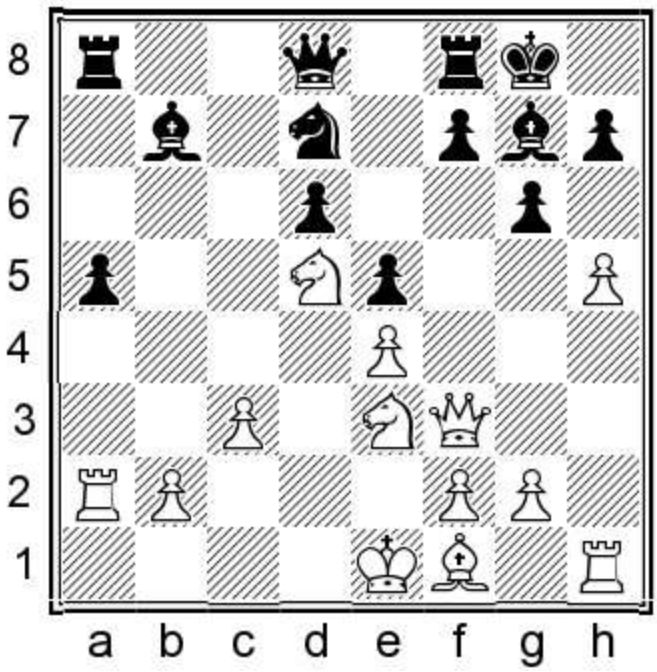
the f6-bishop is obviously inferior to White's knights.



17...g6
Perhaps dreaming of ...f7-f5 one day.

Another way is to challenge d5 directly. 17...Nb6 18.Bc4! Controlling d5 is far more significant than any bishops-are-better-than-knights maxim. 18...Rc8 19.Nxb6 Qxb6 20.Qd3² Khorunzhy – Orlovtsev, email 2012.

18.Qf3 Bg7 19.h5

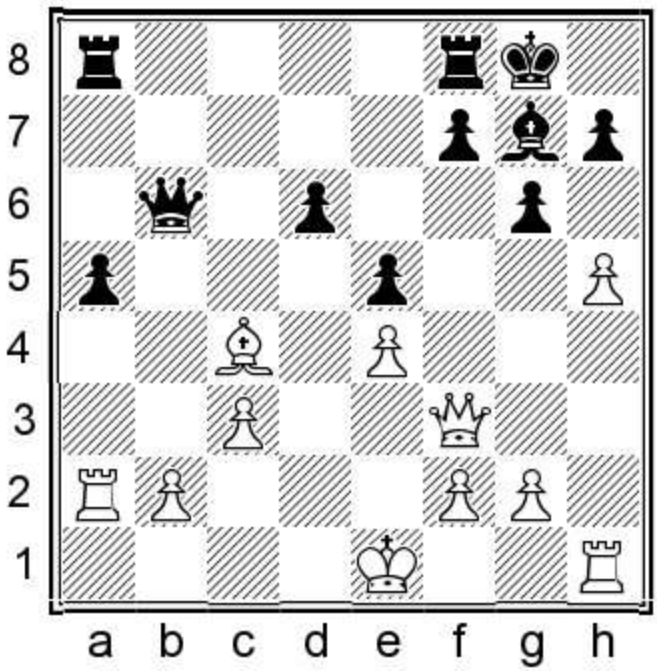


19...Bxd5?!
Black purifies his position so that only his worst minor piece is left; this should have been White's job.

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More resilient was 19...h6 but 20.Bc4² is still highly unpleasant for Black.

20.Nxd5 Nb6 21.Nxb6 Qxb6 22.Bc4±
This is not at all drawish, whatever you think of opposite-coloured bishops.



22...Rac8?
Now it's a positional apocalypse.

22...Ra7 at least gives White a chance to err. The hasty 23.h6?! allows 23...Rc8! 24.Bd5 Bf8 and the black bishop is not quite as bad as in the game. But instead 23.hxg6 hxg6 24.Qg4± simply wins a pawn.

23.Bd5+– Rc5 24.h6 Bh8
This looks like the sort of unrealistic position a trainer might compose to show a bad bishop versus a wonder bishop.

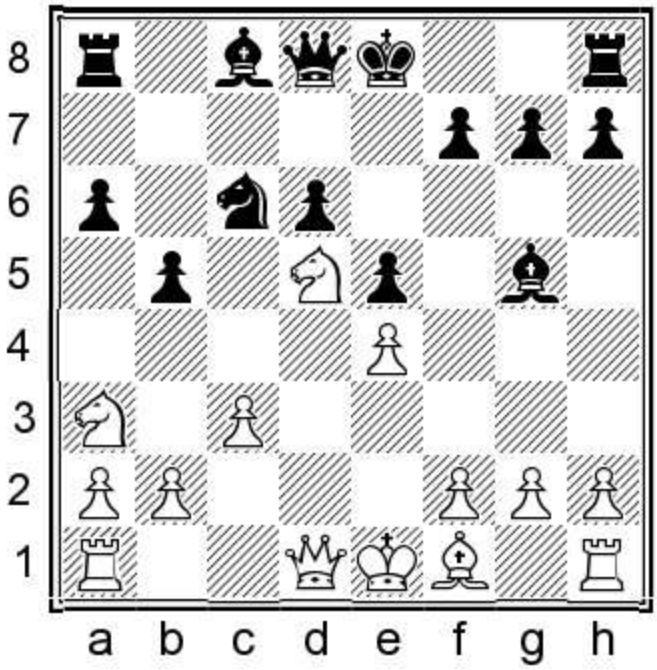
25.0-0 Qc7 26.Rfa1
It's almost zugzwang. The bishop is frozen. Moving the f8-rook overloads the black queen, allowing Rxa5. And moving the queen or c5-rook will either allow Rxa5 or set up a b2-b4 and Ra7 killer.

26...Qe7 27.Rxa5 Rxa5 28.Rxa5 Qg5
I strongly suspect Black saw the following move, and decided to end it all.

29.Qxf7†
1–0
11...Bg5 12.Nc2 Ne7

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 Bg5

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This move offers Black various options. We shall start with the plan to challenge the dominant knight with ... Ne7, but without allowing his structure to be shaken by a pawn-doubling exchange on f6, of the sort we saw in the 11...Ne7 section. Then we shall move on to ...Rb8 ideas.

12.Nc2 Ne7

This line was played by Magnus Carlsen when he was younger, perhaps inspired by Sveshnikov specialists such as Radjabov, Jakovenko and Halkias. Today the biggest expert in this line is probably Sergei Zhigalko of Belarus. In my opinion it is the most solid and durable line I have analysed for this book. This does not mean that White cannot create problems for his opponent though...

13.h4!

This is the most accurate move order, although it took some effort (not to mention an important novelty) to reach this conclusion.

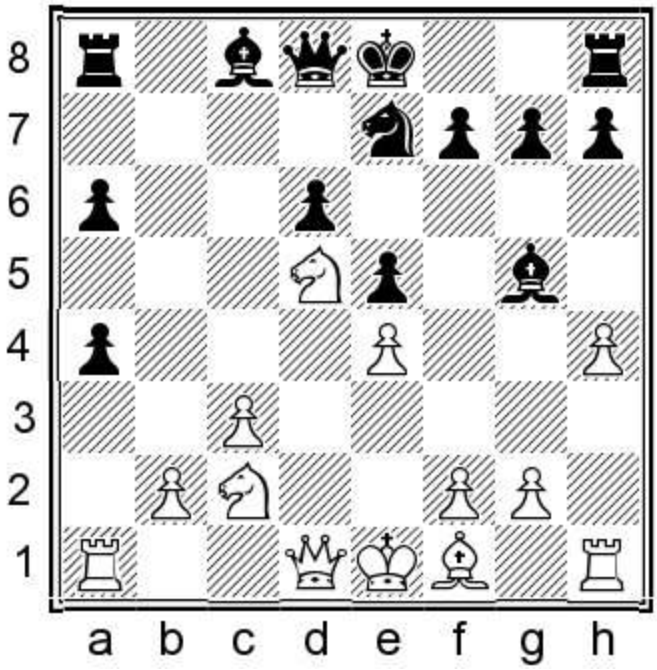
It is worth seeing the problem with the alternative sequence:

13.a4?! bxa4 14.h4

As GM Dorian Rogozenko has pointed out, this is only a sensible move when the bishop cannot return to e7. Feeble is: 14.Rxa4? Nxd5 15.Qxd5 Be6³

In order to understand why the move h2-h4 is desirable for White, the following is a model game from Black's point of view: 14.Ncb4 0-0 15.Rxa4 a5 16.Nxe7† Qxe7 17.Bc4 Bd7 18.Nd5 Qe8 19.Ra2 Bd8! The bishop finds a better job to do than just guarding the empty h6-c1 diagonal! 20.0-0 Rc8 21.Bb3 Rb8 22.Qc2 Kh8 23.Rfa1 f5 24.Ba4 Bxa4 25.Rxa4 fxe4 26.R4a2 Qf7 27.c4 Rb3³ Smeets – Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2006.

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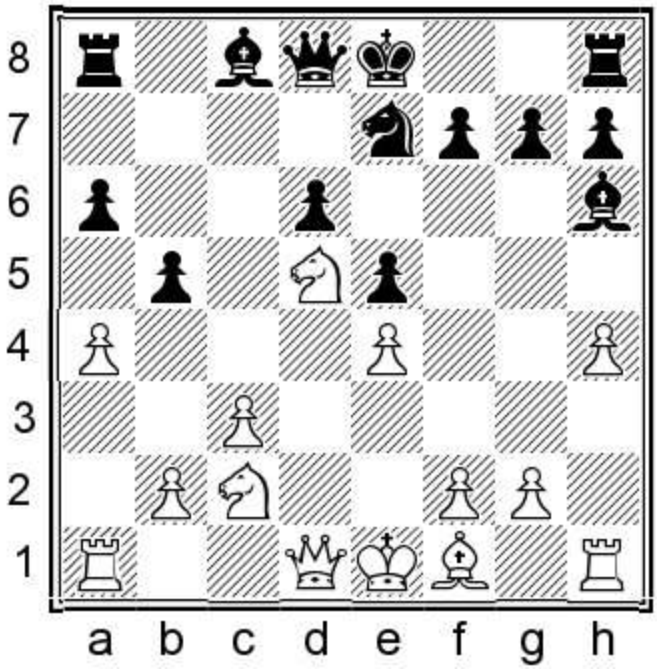
14...Nxd5!N
14...Bh6 would lead to our target position.
The text move is the big idea which changes the evaluation of this move order.
15.hxg5
15.Qxd5 Be6 16.Qc6† Bd7 17.Qxd6 Be7 18.Qxe5 0-0 would give Black excellent compensation. In the related variation mentioned in the notes to our main line below, White can castle queenside in safety. But in the present case, the addition of a2-a4 and ...bxa4 leaves the white king without any safe haven.
15...Nb6 16.Ne3 Rb8
I doubt that White has any advantage in this wildly unclear position.

13...Bh6
13...Nxd5? is a poor relation of the strong novelty mentioned on the previous page. 14.Qxd5 Be6 15.Qc6† Bd7 16.Qxd6± Black has no compensation here, as 16...Be7 17.Qxe5 0-0 18.0-0-0! is excellent for White.

13...Bxh4? loses a piece as Black's planned trick backfires: 14.Rxh4 Nxd5 15.Qxd5 Be6 16.Qb7! (16.Qc6† Bd7 is less convincing) 16...Rb8 17.Qc6† Bd7 18.Qxd6+–

14.a4

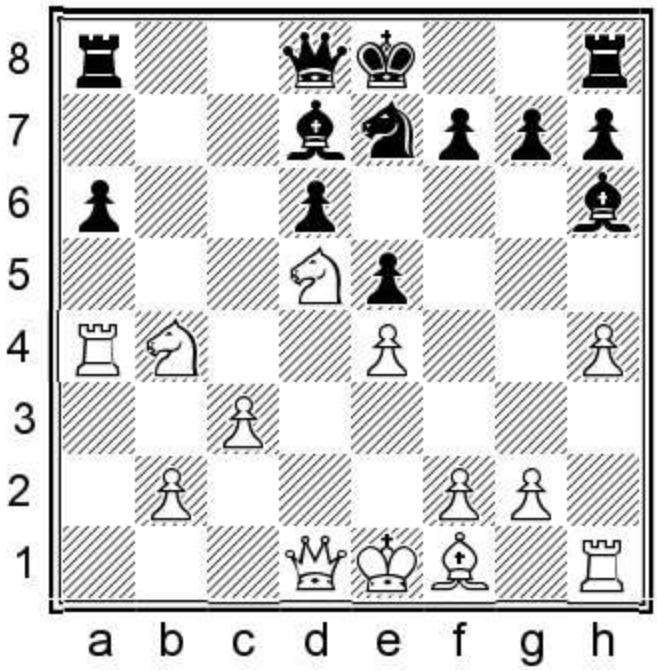
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14...bxa4
Our chosen move order gives Black an extra option of 14...Nxd5!? but I like White after: 15.Qxd5 Rb8 16. Qc6†!²

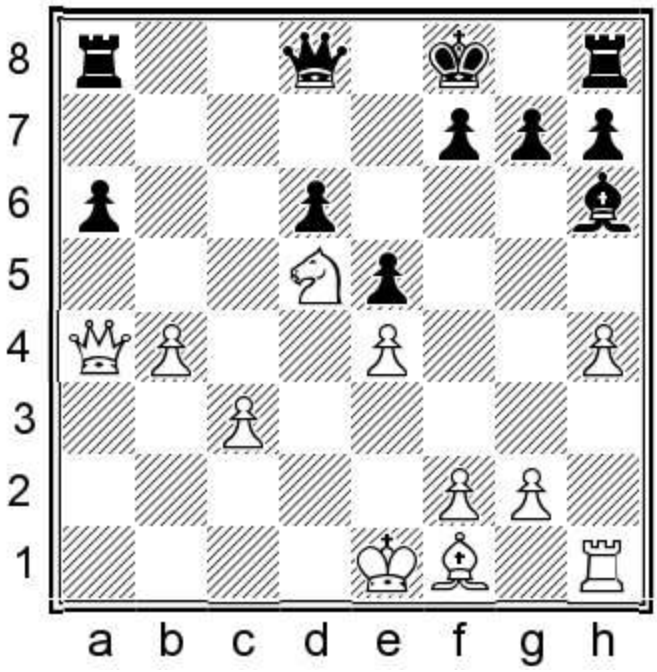
The text move reaches our target position, which has also occurred via the less accurate move order with 13.a4.

15.Ncb4 0-0
Castling is the right choice, but we should note why the following alternative is misguided:
15...Bd7?!
This does not stop us taking the a4-pawn, so it is a waste of time.
16.Rxa4!



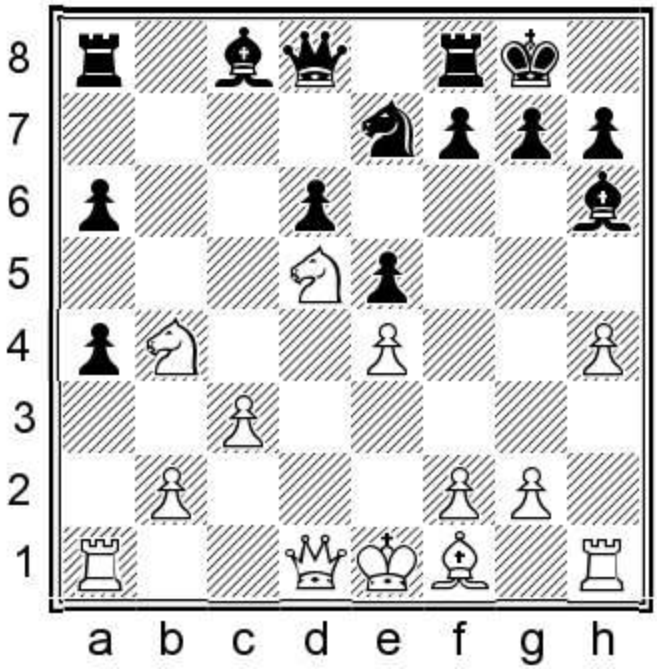
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16...Nxd5
16...Bxa4 17.Qxa4† Kf8 18.Nxe7 Qxe7 19.Qc6 Ra7 20.Bxa6² gives us our typical exchange sacrifice scenario. White is better, but the game continues. For example: 20...g6 21.Nd5 Qd7 22.Qxd7 Rxd7 23.Ke2 Kg7 24.Ra1 f5 25.Bd3 Rb8 26.b4 Caliskan – Shivdasani, email 2012. A clear demonstration of the ineffectiveness of the h6-bishop. White won without it feeling as if it was a challenge at all.
16...a5 17.Nxe7 axb4 18.Rxa8 Qxa8 19.Nd5 0-0 20.cxb4 is good for White. Black has to sacrifice an exchange to stay in the game: 20...Rc8! 21.Ne7† Kf8 22.Nxc8 Qxe4† 23.Be2 Qxb4† 24.Kf1 Bxc8 25.g3² Black has some compensation for the exchange, but the simplified nature of the position means that White will untangle himself and try to convert the extra exchange. Having a passed pawn matters a lot in that respect.
17.Nxd5 Bxa4 18.Qxa4† Kf8 19.b4²



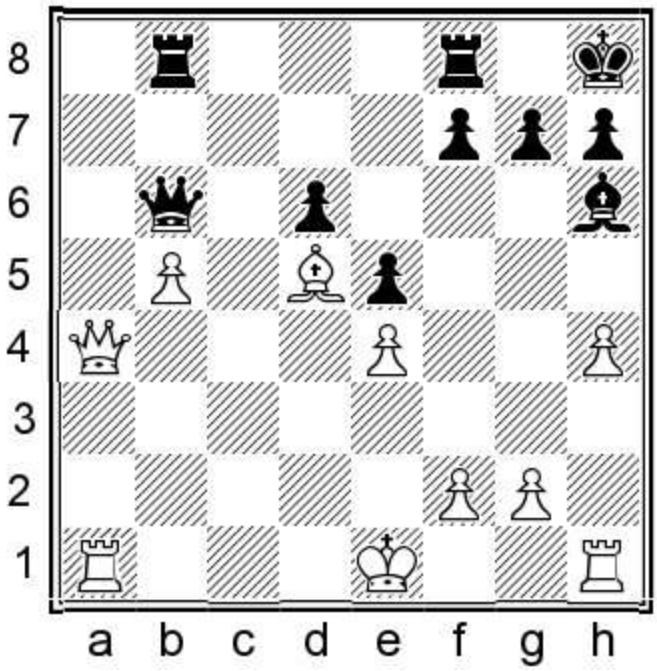

White has the advantage, which has been confirmed in a number of games. Despite the sacrifice, he has still to lose a single game while winning several.
The first game in this variation is worth blitzing through to cement some themes in your head:
19...a5 20.b5 Rb8 21.g3 g6 22.Bh3 Kg7 23.0-0 Rf8 24.Ra1 Kh8
As Rogozenko mentioned, this is too slow and Black should have played the direct 24...f5 25.exf5 gxf5 though White is still better, as Rogozenko also pointed out. 26.Qxa5² is simple and good.
The trick Black was avoiding with 24...Kh8 was 26.Bxf5?! but Black has a counter-trick: 26...Qe8! with a likely draw as both f5 and b5 are under attack, and ...Qf7 is another possible source of counterplay.
25.Qxa5 Qe8 26.c4 f5 27.Qc7 Qf7 28.exf5 Qxc7 29.Nxc7 gxf5 30.Ra6 Rf7 31.Nd5 Bf8 32.Rc6 f4 33.Be6 Rg7 34.g4 Re8 35.Bf5 Be7 36.h5 Bg5 37.b6 e4 38.Rc8 Rxc8 39.Bxc8 e3 40.fxe3 fxe3 41.b7
1–0 Karjakin – Radjabov, Warsaw 2005, was smooth and convincing all the way.

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16.Rxa4
This is the most interesting try, as far as I am concerned. The position is quite depressing for Black, who is trying to hold on to a draw, with no activity, or purpose, or will to live...

The more analysed variation is:
16.Qxa4 a5 17.Bb5 Nxd5 18.Nxd5 Be6 19.Bc6 Rb8 20.b4 axb4 21.cxb4 Kh8 22.b5 Bxd5 23.Bxd5 Qb6
But it is not really going anywhere.

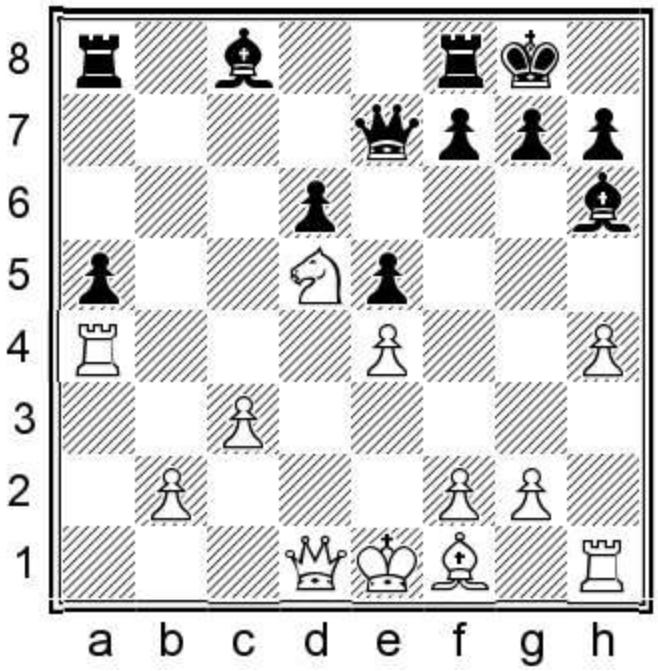


A recent rapid game saw a fine idea, but I doubt it is enough to carry the day:
24.Rh3!
24.Bc6 Be3! is an important point; Black has equalized.
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24.0-0 Qxb5 25.Qxb5 Rxb5 has led to dozens of dull draws, most recently Kulaots – Zhigalko, Tallinn 2016.

24...Qxb5 25.Qxb5 Rxb5 26.g4 f6 27.Ra7 Rc8 28.Be6 Rc1† 29.Ke2 Rb2† 30.Kf3 Rb8 31.Kg2 Rc2?
It is easy to blunder in rapid chess.
31...Rcb1 32.Rd7 R1b7 33.Rxd6 Rb6 and Black holds a draw.
32.Rb3! Rf8 33.Kf3 Rd2 34.Rbb7 Rc2 35.Rf7 Re8 36.Bd5 Rc3† 37.Kg2 Rcc8 38.g5 fxg5 39.hxg5 Bxg5 40. Rxg7 Re7 41.Rgxe7
1–0 Dominguez Perez – Zhigalko, Berlin (rapid) 2015.

16...a5
16...Nxd5 17.Nxd5 a5 transposes.

17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Nd5



18...Qd8!
Also fairly solid is: 18...Qb7 19.b3 Kh8 20.Bc4 Bd7 21.Ra2 f5 22.exf5 Bxf5 23.0-0 Be6?! In Zhang – Ushenina, Sochi 2015, Black was provoking an unfavourable exchange (wiser was 23...Bd7²). 24.Ne3!±N would have been a big improvement. Once the light-squared bishops come off, the advantage is obvious. And 24...Bxe3? 25.Bxe6 Qe7 26.Bd5 wins the exchange.

I believe the text move to be Black's most resilient option. Having made the decision to avoid the drawish paths of the 16.Qxa4 variation, this is a key position where White needs to come up with a good plan.

19.g3!
This is the natural way to make sense of having played h2-h4.

19.Bc4 Kh8! with the intention of ...f7-f5 equalizes easily; Black had no problems in Herrera – Secer, email 2007.

19...Rb8
There are other lines, but still problems for Black to solve everywhere. For example:

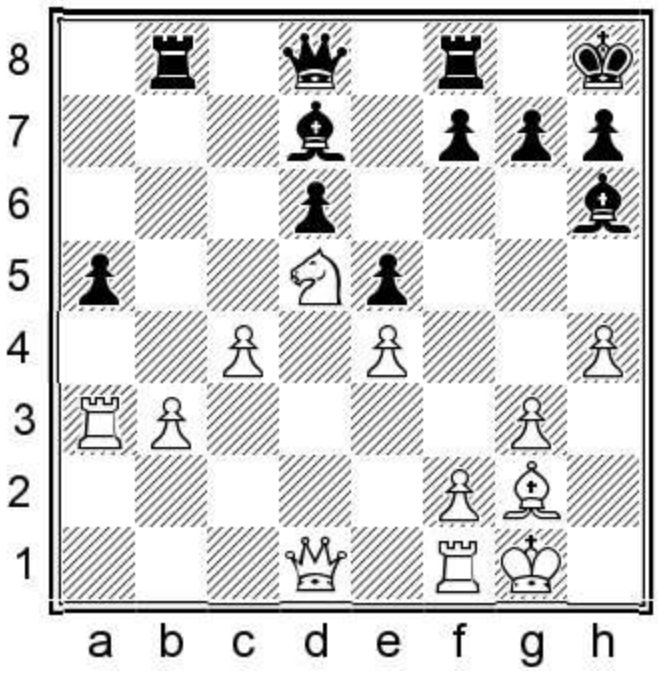
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19...Kh8 20.Bg2 f5 (20...Ba6 21.c4²) 21.exf5 Bxf5 22.0-0²

19...Bd7 20.Ra2 Kh8 21.Bg2 Bb5 22.b3 a4 23.c4 Bc6 24.b4²

20.b3 Bd7 21.Ra3
21.Ra2!?N might be more flexible. It is not obvious to me that the b3-pawn needs defending.

21...Kh8 22.Bg2 Bb5 23.c4 Bd7 24.0-0²



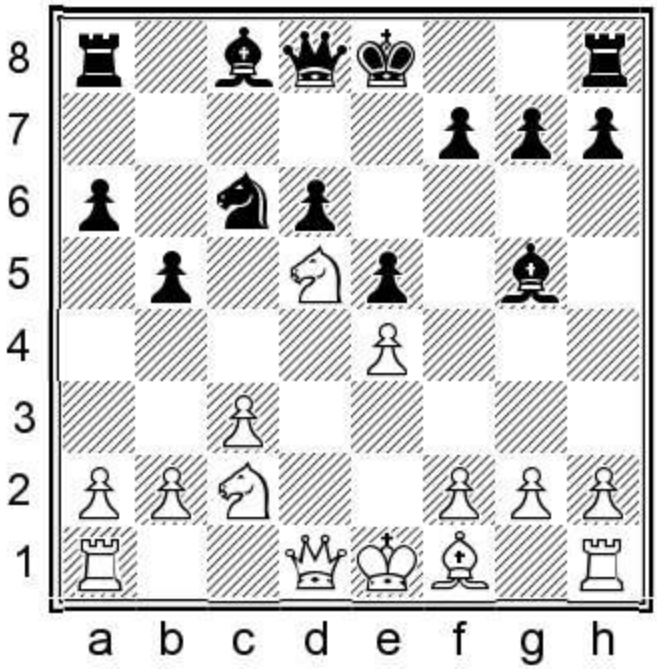
In Fusco – Real de Azua, Vicente Lopez 2007, White had a slight but definite edge; the h6-bishop is far from ideally placed, hitting nothing but fresh air.

11...Bg5 12.Nc2 Rb8

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 Bg5
Note that 11...0-0 12.Nc2 Rb8 was the classical way to get into this line, leaving the bishop on f6 for now, where White often tried to prove something with moves such as 13.h4!?. But as we “just play the position” with 13.Be2 rather than trying to prove any deficiency with this move order (or the one given as the main line), it becomes largely irrelevant, as we shall see on page 214.

12.Nc2

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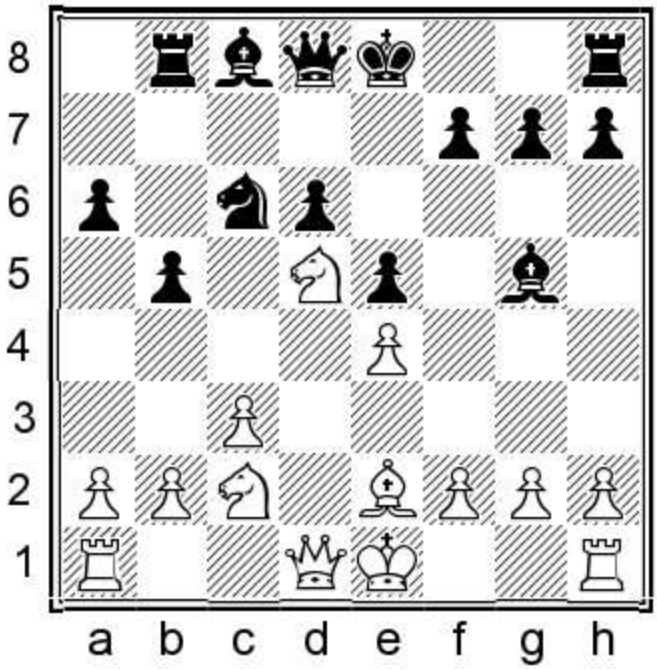
12...Rb8
This is one of the two classical main lines. Black is basically preventing White's a2-a4 break, but on the other hand, the rook is often not doing much else on b8.

12...0-0 reaches the big main line, coverage of which begins on page 214, when 13.a4! is our reply. I should mention that if 13.Be2 then Black would be better off playing something like 13...Ne7!? to clarify the position in the centre straight away.

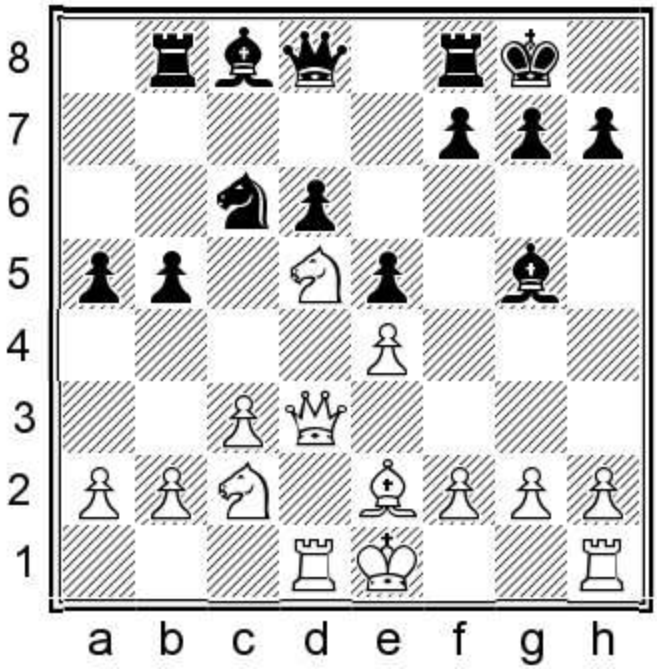
13.Be2
White has a simple plan of development in mind: 0-0 and then put all his pieces on the light squares starting with Qd3 and a rook to d1 (sometimes the a-rook, sometimes the f-one).

The critical main line has been played out. 13.a4 bxa4 14.Ncb4 Nxb4 White has two tries in this position, but neither will promise us a game. 15.cxb4 and 15.Nxb4 were studied by us in great depth, but with no success in finding an edge or promising unexplored territory.

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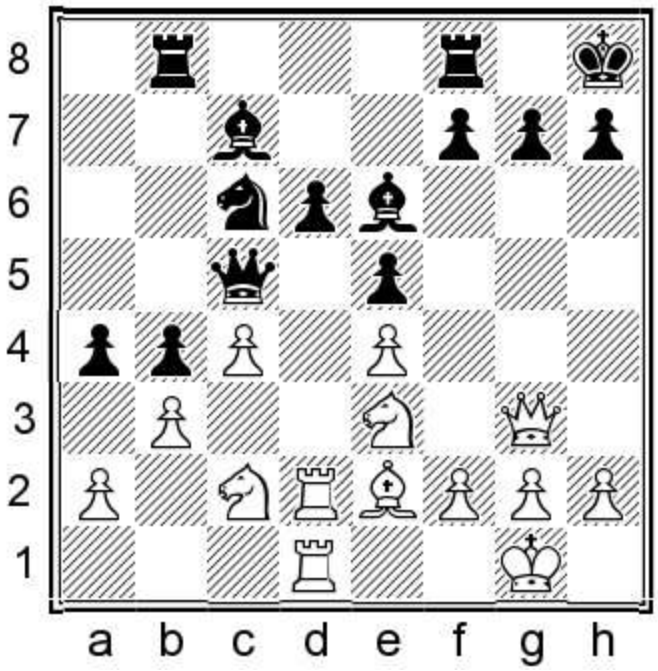


13...0-0 14.0-0
An interesting alternative is:
14.Qd3!? a5 15.Rd1
A move order suggested by the great theoretician Lanka.



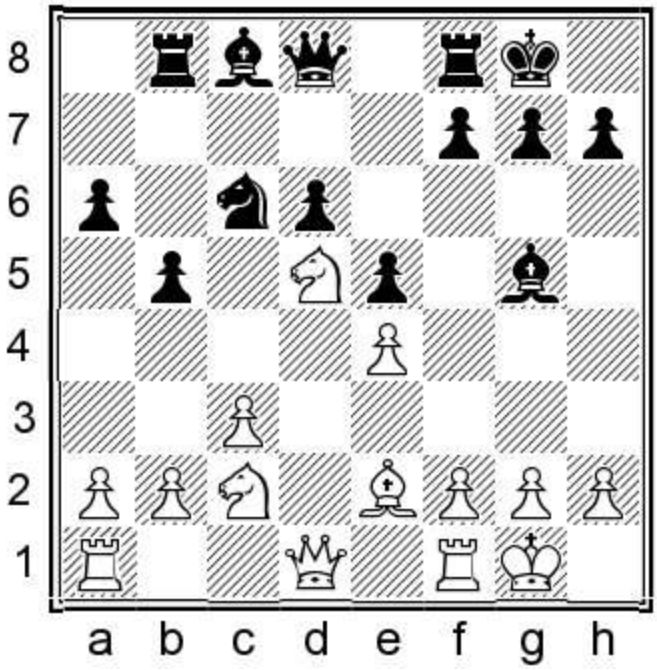
15...Be6
15...Ne7 16.Nce3 Bxe3 17.Nxe3 Be6 18.Qxd6 shows the idea behind Lanka's move order. 18...Qxd6 19.Rxd6 Bxa2 20.0-0 b4 21.Ra6 Ra8 22.Ra1 (22.Rxa8! appears to be a bit more accurate. 22...Rxa8 23.Ra1 b3 24.Rd1± and we have the same structure as in the game.) 22...b3 23.Rd1 a4 24.Rxa8 Rxa8 25.Nc4 h6 26.Na3 Kf8 27. Bc4+– The a2-bishop was dead in Lanka – Nokso Koivisto, Cappelle-la-Grande 1992.
15...b4 16.0-0 Be6 17.c4 transposes to the Huschenbeth – Caruana game below.
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16.0-0 b4 17.c4 a4

With the threat to oust the c2-knight from the protection of d4.
18.b3
This position is occasionally reached with White to move in the 11.c4 variation. If every 11.c4 line was as appealing, it would be my favoured line, but sadly Black has better ways to play against it.
18...Qa5?!
An instructive mistake by Black. The queen should keep contact with her kingside.
19.Qg3! Bd8
19...Bh6 20.Bg4!²
20.Rd2!? Qc5 21.Rfd1 Kh8 22.Nde3 Bc7
So far we are following Huschenbeth – Caruana, Chur 2010, and now the German GM recommends the improvement:



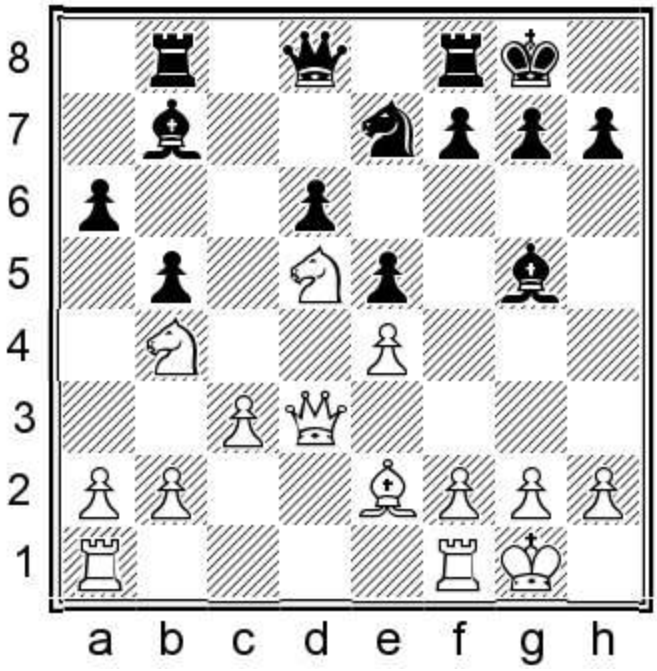

23.Nf5!
23.Bg4 also gives White a good edge.
23.h4 Ne7 24.h5 f5 was OK for White in the Huschenbeth – Caruana game, perhaps even worth an edge, but Black's extra rating points told in the end.
23...g6 24.Qh4! gxf5
24...Bd8 25.Qh6 Rg8 26.Nxd6±
25.exf5 Bd8 26.Qe4 Bc7
26...Bc8 27.Rd5 Qa7 28.f6 Ne7 29.Rxd6 Bb6 30.fxe7 Qxe7 31.Nxb4 Bxf2† 32.Kxf2 Rxb4 33.Qd3±
27.fxe6 fxe6 28.Bf3²
Huschenbeth thinks that due to the fact that White has the better bishop, he should be able to prove an advantage.

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14...Be6
I checked three other options.

14...Ne7 15.Ncb4 Bb7 16.Qd3
Also good for White is 16.Nxe7† Qxe7 17.Nd5 Qd7 18.Qd3 a5 19.Rfd1 Bc6 20.b4² Almasi – Van Wely, Monte Carlo 2003, but White can wait a bit for ...a5 before he exchanges on e7.

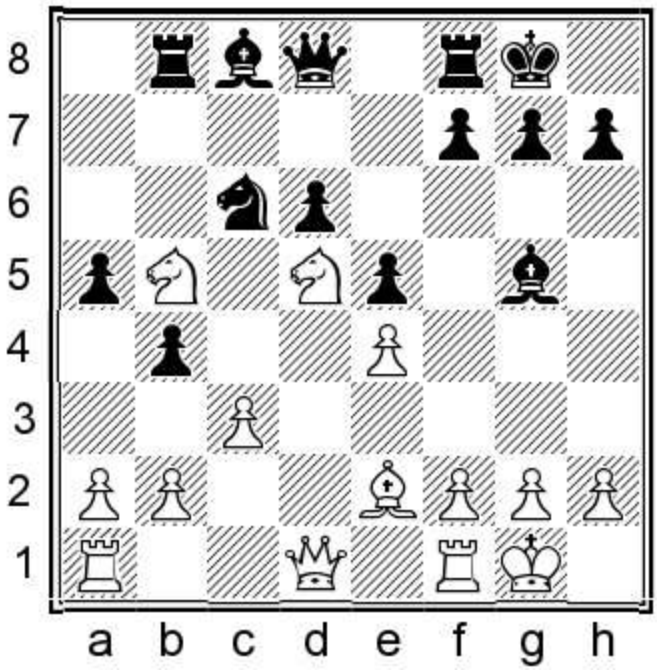


16...Nxd5 17.Nxd5 g6 18.Rad1 f5 19.Bf3!?
19.exf5 was also strong, as if the rook takes White has Bg4 and if 19...gxf5 then 20.f4!.
19...Kh8 20.a3 f4?! 21.Rd2 Rg8 22.Rc1 Bh6 23.c4 g5? 24.Bg4! Bc8 25.h3!+–
Korneev – Capo Vidal, Salou 2006.

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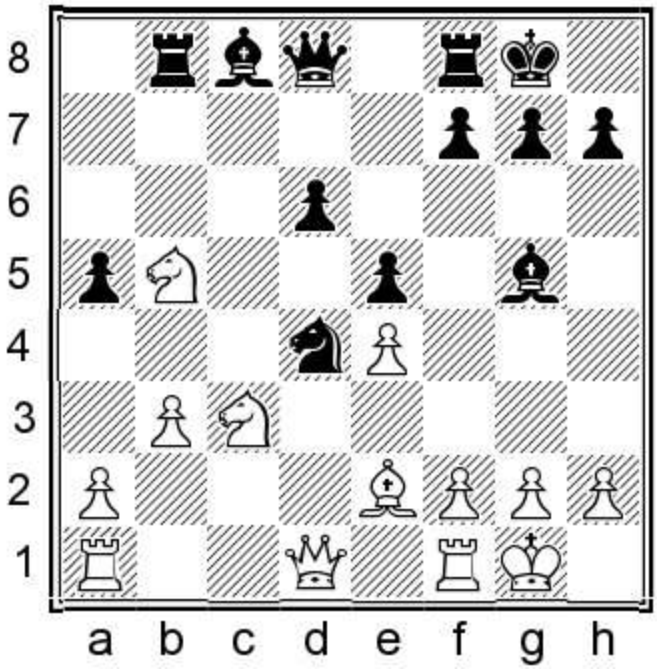
14...g6 15.Qd3 f5 16.Bf3² is similar to the Korneev game above.

14...a5
This was supposed to be fine for Black for many years, but recent practice proves that White keeps some advantage.
15.Na3! b4
If 15...Na7 White can continue his plan with 16.Qd3.
16.Nb5

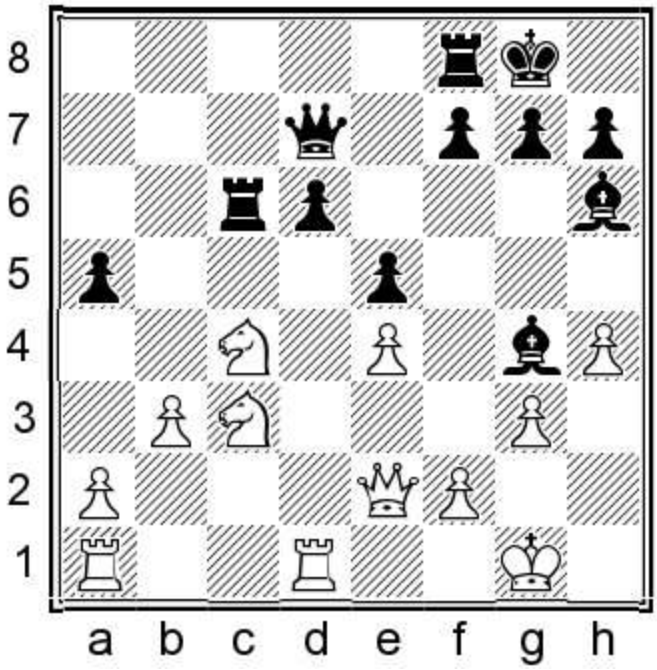



16...bxc3
The usual choice.
16...Ne7 has been seen only once, but is worth a closer look as it was a high-level and interesting game: 17.cxb4 axb4 18.Qa4 f5 19.Qxb4 Nxd5 20.exd5 Ba6 21.a4! e4 22.f4! exf3 23.Rxf3 Qe7 24.Bf1 Be3† 25.Kh1 Bxb5 26.Bxb5 f4 27.Re1 g5 28.h3 (I suggest improving with 28.Qc4!N and if 28...g4 29.Rxf4 Rxf4 30.Qxf4±) 28...Rfc8 29.Rfxe3!? fxe3 30.Qd4© Laznicka – Sutovsky, Poikovsky 2015.
17.Ndxc3 Nd4 18.b3

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18...Nxe2†
18...Nxb5 19.Nxb5 Rb6 20.Bc4± Schuster – Saboia Amorim, Brazil 1992.
19.Qxe2 Be6 20.Rfd1 Rb6 21.g3 Qd7 22.h4 Bh6 23.Na3 Rc6 24.Nc4 Bg4



25.Qd3!N
No need to weaken the dark squares yet!
25.f3 Be6 26.Nd5 was slightly better for White in Caire – Dorer, email 2010, but nothing much.
25...Rfc8!
After 25...Bxd1?! 26.Rxd1² White will get the d6 pawn and the a5 and e5-pawns will remain weak.
26.Re1
26.a4 allows Black to take the exchange and bail out by giving it back on c4: 26...Bxd1 27.Rxd1 Qe6 28.Nb5 Rxc4!=

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26...Be6 27.Nd5²
White has a slightly improved version of the Caire – Dorer game quoted above, as he has avoided weakening himself with f2-f3.

Returning to the main line, White can proceed in accordance with the plan described on page 209 in the notes to move 13.

15.Qd3! a5
The usual response.

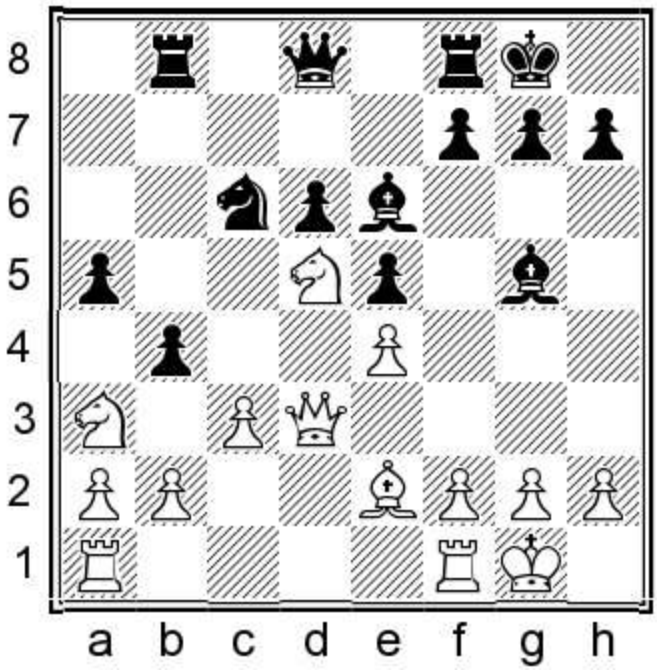
15...Bxd5?! 16.Qxd5 Qb6 17.Rfd1² was a positional concession from Black in Korneev – Pogorelov, Dos Hermanas 2003.
15...Qd7 16.Qg3! is reminiscent of the Huschenbeth – Caruana game mentioned on page 210. 16...f6 17.Rfd1 a5 18.Na3 Na7 19.h3 Kh8 20.Bg4 was Karpov – Dolmatov, Amsterdam 1980. White has a big advantage and went on to covert it in fine clear-cut fashion, offering a textbook example of how to play with a good knight versus a bad dark-squared bishop.

16.Na3!?
A rare move, but undeservedly so, as it forces Black to make an uncomfortable choice.

16.Rfd1 is the usual move and has been extensively analysed and explored: White has decent chances of an edge.

16...Na7
Rather awkward-looking, but the correct choice.

16...b4?! has been played in a few games.

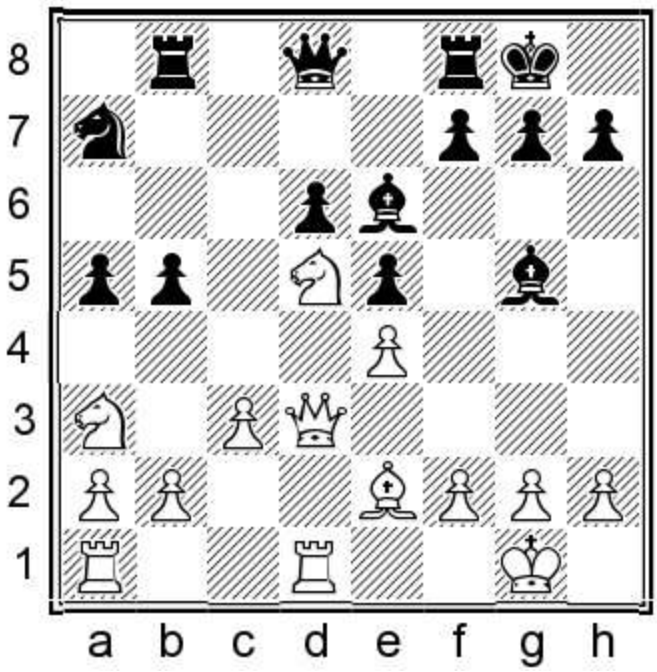



Now 17.Nb5!N is unpleasant for Black. Why everyone has gone to c4 I do not know.

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17.Rfd1!

The queenside rook will be needed on one of the three queenside files, while the kingside rook will hopefully not be needed on f1.



17...g6
One of many options.

17...b4 18.Nc4 Nb5 19.Qc2! favours White, and the following lines show the usefulness of having the other rook on the queenside: 19...g6 (19...bxc3 20.bxc3 a4 21.Rab1!²) 20.a4 bxa3 21.Nxa3 Nxa3 22.Rxa3²

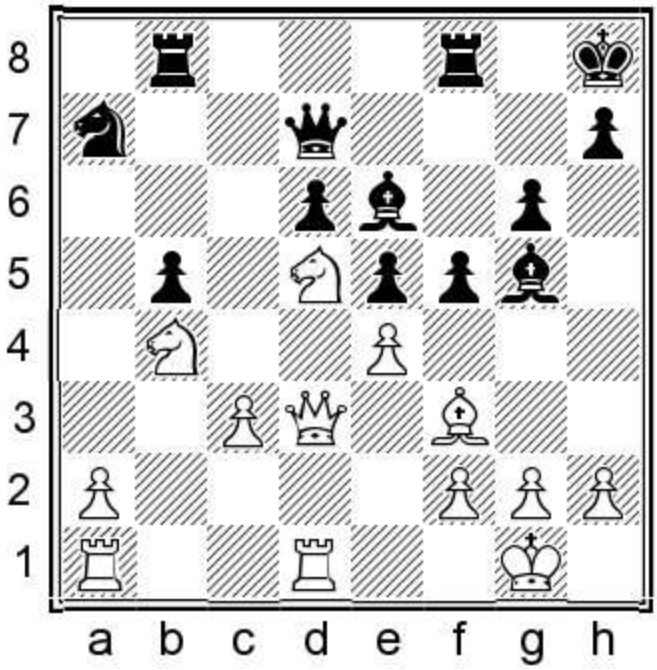
17...Qd7 18.Qg3 h6 (The engine suggests the appropriately cold-blooded 18...Qd8!? offering an odd repetition if we go back to d3. One idea is 19.Bg4!? perhaps with b2-b4 to follow.) 19.h4 Bd8 20.Rd2 Kh8 21.Rad1² Nunn – Vukic, Reggio Emilia 1983.

17...f5N is untested. One idea is 18.Bf3 provoking 18...f4 when after 19.b4 White has play on the queenside, while Black's kingside ambitions are stymied. We will see a similar idea in the note to move 18 below.

18.Ne3
Putting pressure on d6, but not the only promising path.

18.b4!? is also a common plan. For example: 18...f5 19.Bf3 Kh8 20.Nc2 axb4 21.Ncxb4 Qd7

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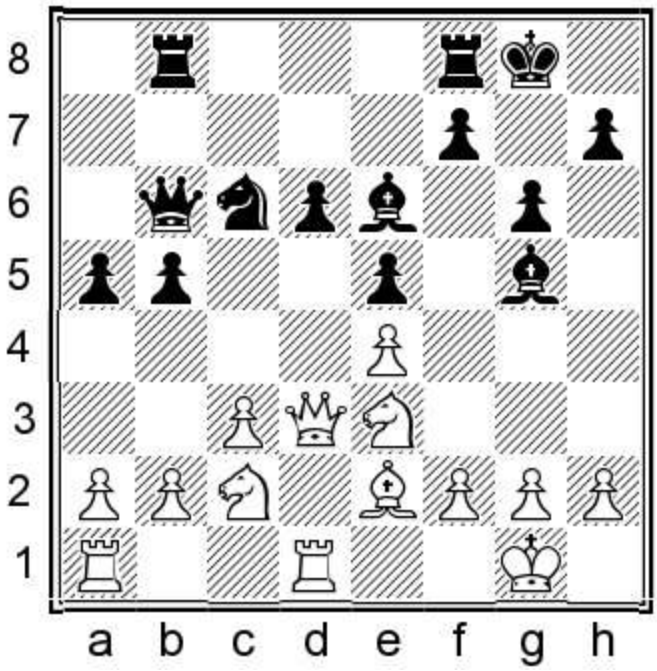


Now we can profitably vary from Smirnov – Kuzubov, Rivne 2005: 22.exf5!?N 22...gxf5 (22...Bxf5 23.Be4 Bg4 24.f3 Be6 25.Na6 Rbd8 26.Nac7²) 23.Ne3 e4 24.Qxd6 Qxd6 25.Rxd6 Bg8 26.Bd1²

18...Qb6
Also possible is 18...b4 19.Nac4 Nb5 when 20.Bg4!? is an idea which should become a familiar ploy.

19.Nac2 Bc4
One of just two moves to have been tested in this position.

19...Nc6 was seen in Piscitelli – Portilho, Brazil 1980. My improvement is:

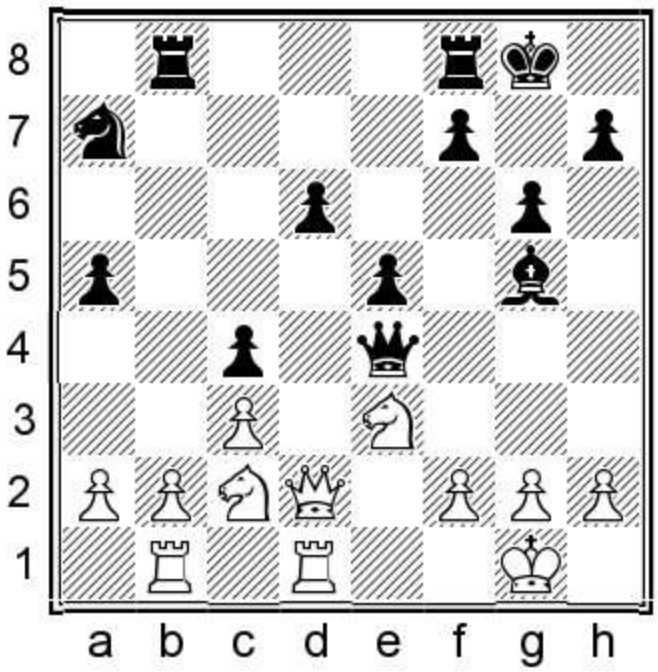


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20.Bg4!N The exchange of the bishops is a natural part of making slow but steady progress; Black has not fully

equalized. For example: 20...Rfd8 21.Qe2 Qb7 22.g3 and White has clear ways to improve his position and create weaknesses in the black position; Black not so much.

20.Qd2! Qc6 21.Bxc4 bxc4 22.Rab1 Qxe4
Now a vital improvement is:



23.f3!N
This tricky new move is necessary to retain an advantage.

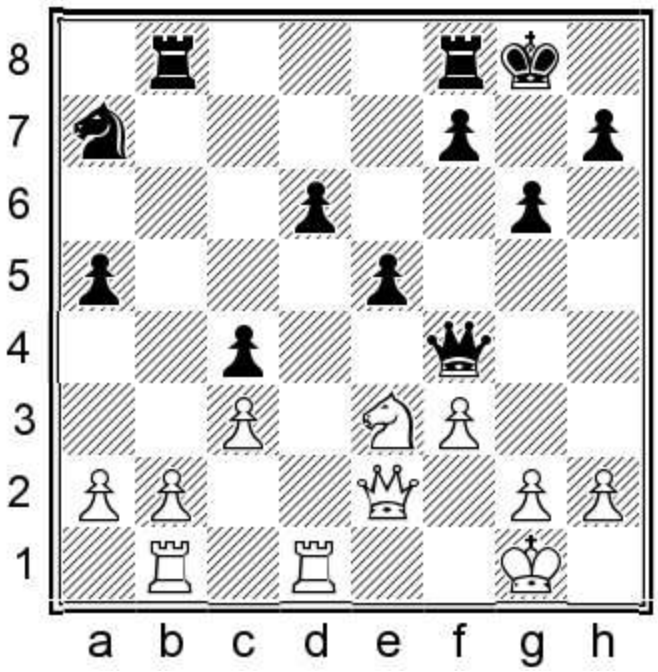
Instead after 23.Qxd6 Nb5! 24.Qd5 Qxd5 25.Nxd5 (25.Rxd5?? is the active move White would like to be possible, but 25...Nxc3 wins of course) 25...Rfc8 White had nothing in Tseshkovsky – Giorgadze, Tbilisi 1978.

23...Bxe3†
This is the most complicated option, but not the best.

23...Qc6 allows White to play easy moves, but after 24.Qxd6 Qxd6 25.Rxd6² White has just an edge. Note that after 25...Nb5, which was so effective in the Tseshkovsky game above, White has a strong reply in the retreat: 26.Rdd1 The c4-pawn is threatened and 26...Rfc8 27.a4 leaves Black with the grim choice of 27...Na7 28.Rd5 or 27...Nc7 28.Nxc4.

24.Nxe3 Qf4 25.Qe2

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White will soon win back the pawn while keeping some advantage. The following forcing line also works to our advantage:

25...e4 26.Nd5 exf3 27.Qf2 Qg5 28.h4 Qxg2† 29.Qxg2 fxg2 30.Nf6† Kg7 31.Nd7±
Only one side is playing for a win in this endgame.

Introduction to the Main Line 11...0-0 12.Nc2 Bg5

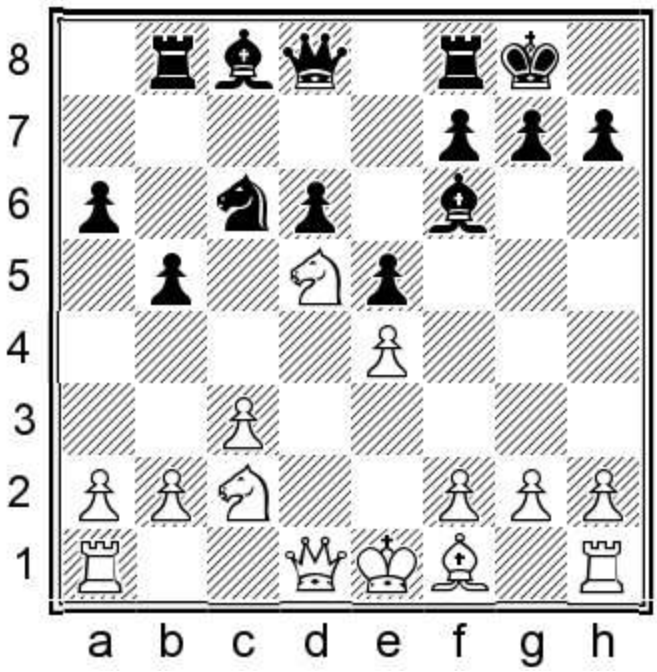
GAME 19

Vassilios Kotronias – Georgy Timoshenko
Thessaloniki 2007

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 0-0 12.Nc2 Bg5
The text move is a vital line, but we also need to consider another option:

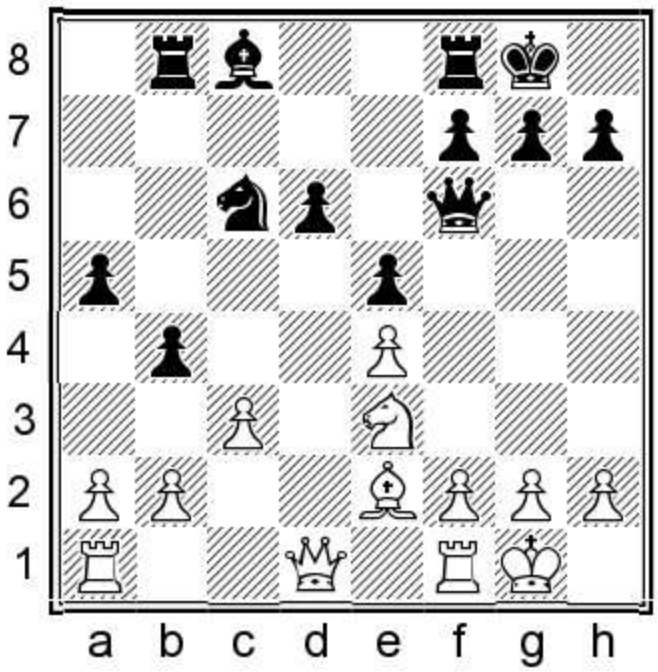
12...Rb8
This is the move order mentioned on page 208.

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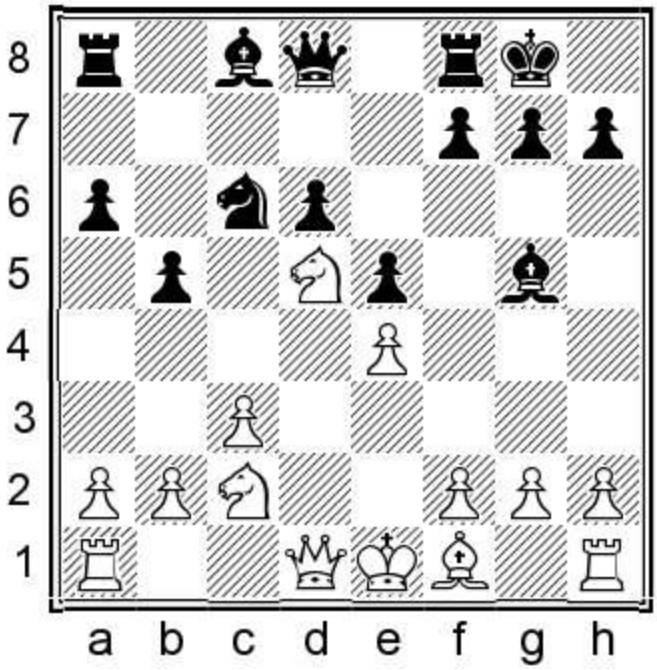
13.Be2!?
And also as mentioned, we play normally, rather than try to claim Black has used an inferior move order.
The move to stop any ...Bg5 ideas is 13.h4, but 13...Be7 has been played and analysed intensively, with nothing convincing found for White.
13...a5
An independent try.
By far the most common move is 13...Bg5 transposing back to page 209.
13...Ne7?! mixes up two ideas to poor effect; if Black wants to play a ...Ne7 plan, allowing doubled f-pawns in return for quick central play, then the slow ...Rb8 cannot be the most useful move to combine it with. 14.Nxf6† gxf6 15.Ne3!? (or 15.Bf3!?² also makes sense) 15...f5 16.exf5 Nxf5 17.Nxf5 Bxf5 18.0-0² Black's weaker structure will be a lasting nuisance.
14.0-0 b4
Once again, 14...Bg5 transposes to more normal territory.
15.Nxf6†!?N
Making room for the second knight on d5.
The only line to have been tested, twice, is 15.cxb4 axb4 which is also reasonable, but I would rather not weaken our d4-square.
15...Qxf6 16.Ne3²

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White has a slight but pleasant edge, with a grip on d5. I will offer a few brief sample lines:
16...Ne7
16...bxc3 17.bxc3 Qd8 18.Qa4²
16...Bd7 17.Bc4 Rfc8 18.Qd3²
17.Bc4 Be6 18.Qd3!²
The most controlled way to keep our edge secure.
18.Qxd6 is possible, and after 18...Rfd8 19.Qa6 Ra8 White can avoid a repetition with 20.Rfd1. But following 20...Ng6 21.Qb5 Rdb8 22.Qa4 our queen is kicked off-side, and Black has counterplay after: 22...Bxc4 23.Nxc4 Nf4„
Black has many options, one of which is:
18...Ng6!?
But again White has a controlled response:
19.g3!

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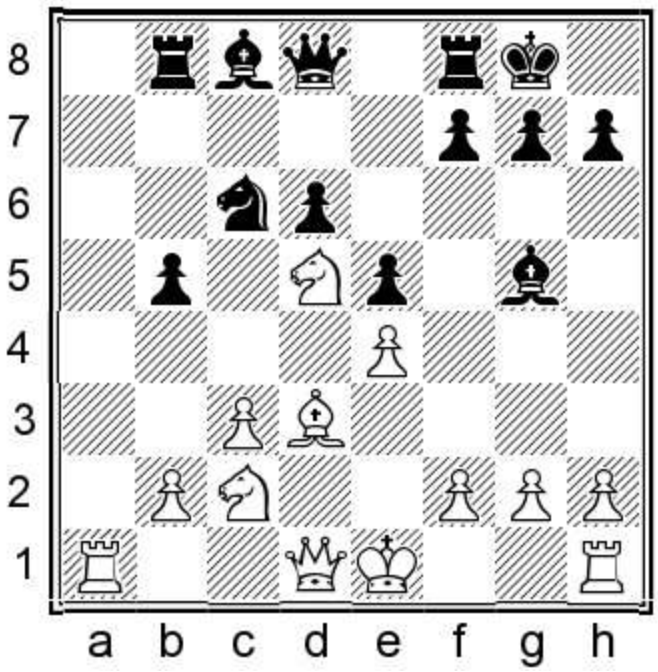


This is the classical main line and is recommended many places, including in Kotronias's The Sicilian Sveshnikov from 2014 (see next game). It was played by Kramnik, Leko, Kasparov, Topalov and so on. In this game we will mainly deal with the sidelines, which are generally not attractive for Black, but you need to know what to do with White.

13.a4 bxa4
The standard move, and for good reason.

13...Rb8?!
Doubly ill-advised, as it surrenders the a-file and leaves the b5-pawn as a fixed target.
14.axb5 axb5 15.Bd3!
We have seen enough to know that 13...Rb8 is a bad idea, but I will show a few more possible moves to illustrate some typical plans and tactics.

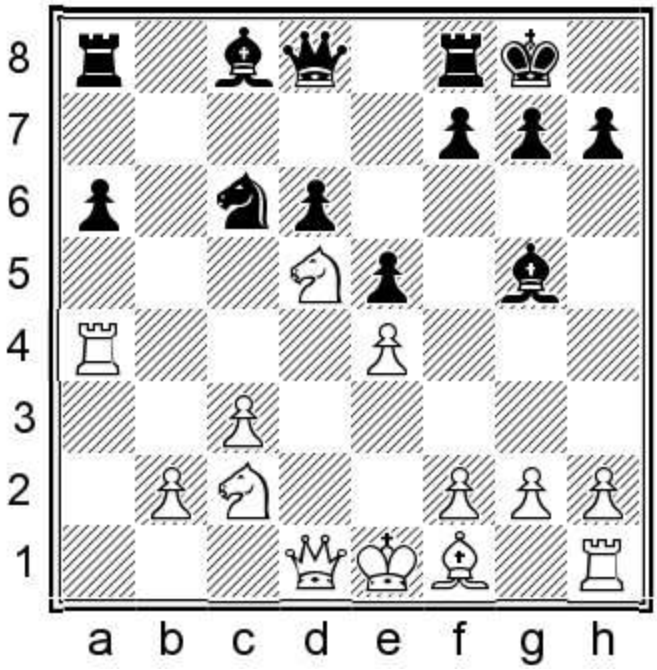
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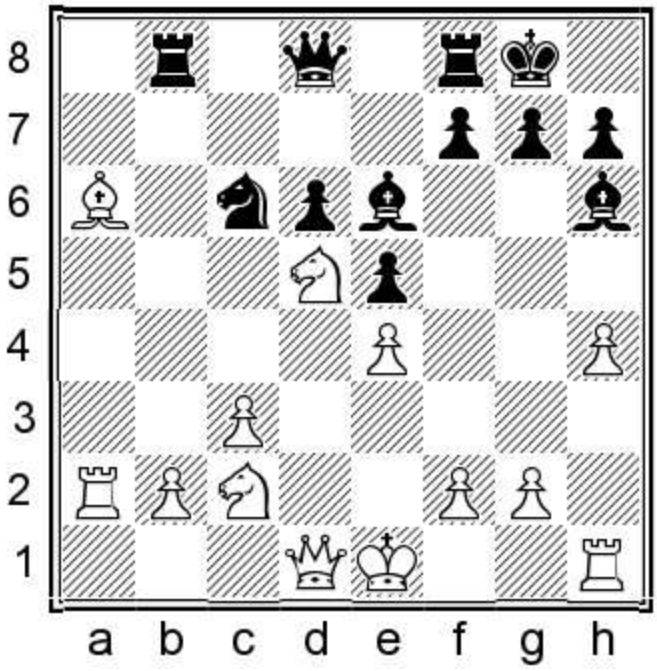
15...Be6 16.Ndb4
More usual is 16.Ncb4. For example: 16...Nxb4 17.Nxb4 Qd7 18.0-0 g6 19.Qe2² Ganguly – Wajih, New Delhi 2007.
16...Ne7
16...Na5 is not so scary, but maybe just annoying enough to make 16.Ncb4 preferable.
16...Nxb4 would transpose to the Ganguly game after 17.Nxb4.
17.0-0 Rb6
White still has enough control of d5, albeit indirectly: 17...d5? 18.exd5 Bxd5 The knight cannot take due to the fork on c6. 19.Qe2 With a double attack; White wins a pawn.
18.Qe2
The b5-pawn feels the pressure, so Black decides to try to counter-attack, but White is positionally dominant.
18...f5 19.exf5 Bxf5 20.Bxf5 Rxf5 21.Rfd1±
Fedorchuk – Abergel, Palma de Mallorca 2015.

14.Rxa4
At this point the logical move is 14...a5, which we will cover below. But let’s look at some alternatives first.

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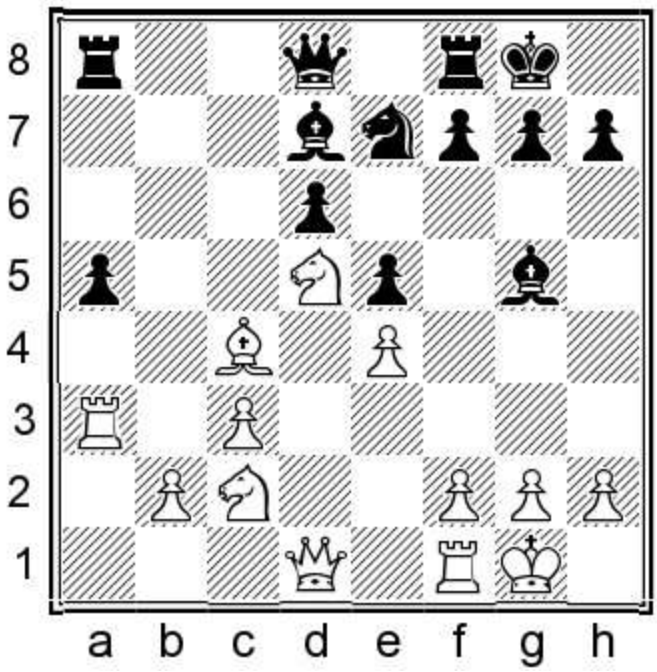
14...Bb7?!
As a method of challenging d5, this move is ineffective. As we shall see below, there is a pleasingly odd idea of zigzagging the bishop to b5, but this looks better than it is.
The counter-attacking 14...Rb8?! has been considered refuted for decades. 15.h4! Bh6 16.Bxa6! Bd7 (16...Rxb2 was a slightly more recent attempt, but it also does not work: 17.Bxc8 Qxc8 18.Rc4 Qb7 19.0-0 Nd8 20.Rc7 Qb3 21.Ncb4 Ne6 22.Rc6 Qxd1 23.Rxd1 Nc5 24.f3± Pugh – Saksis, corr. 2001) 17.Ra2 Be6



So far Volzhin – Chevallier, Metz 1994, and now 18.Bc4!±N is a good simple improvement.

14...Ne7!? 15.Bc4 a5
A perfectly reasonable way to play.
16.0-0 Bd7 17.Ra3

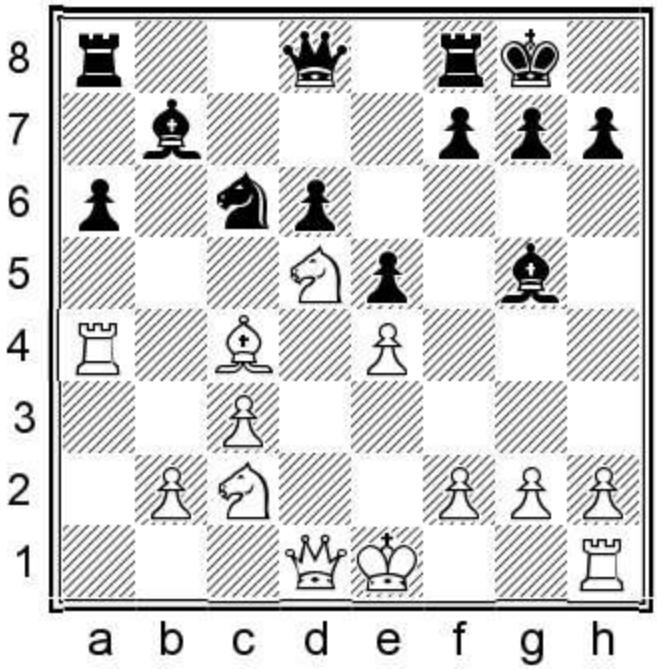
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17...Nxd5
I wondered what would happen after 17...a4, when the a4-pawn can seem annoying, but soon realized that it is a positional mistake, as the b4-square is highly useful for White and the a-pawn quickly becomes vulnerable. 18. Ncb4 Rb8 (18...Kh8 19.Nxe7 Bxe7 20.Qe2 Qb8 21.Bd5 Ra7 22.Bc6±) 19.g3 This seems the most flexible, but there are many good moves here. The following line should only be seen as an illustration. 19...Nxd5 20.Bxd5 Heading down a specific path with one idea in mind. (20.Qxd5²) 20...Qc8 21.Rxa4!? Bxa4 22.Qxa4© White has a good game.
18.Bxd5 Rb8 19.b4
19.b3!? is another possible move; White is just enjoying a pleasant moment here. As I see it, White can improve his position on both flanks with ease, while Black's task is more difficult.
19...axb4 20.Nxb4²
Shirov – Topalov, Morelia/Linares 2008. Black is almost OK, but he will have to defend for the entire game. Topalov had to find many accurate moves in order to hold – and failed to do so...

15.Bc4

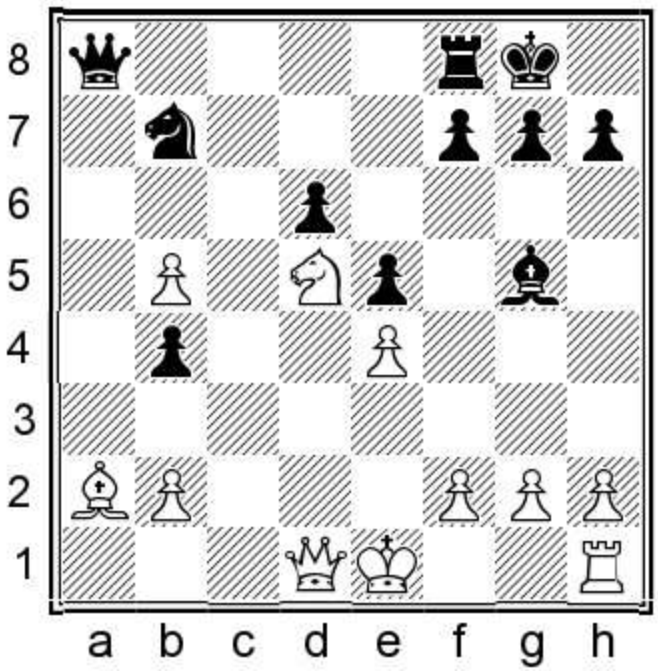
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15...Na5
Starting the bishop-hopping plan mentioned above.
15...Ne7 The more standard plan, but in an ineffective version as White easily keeps control of d5. 16.0-0 a5 17.Qd3 Bc6 18.Ra2 Rb8 19.Rfa1² White has the traditional grip. For example: 19...Nxd5 20.Bxd5 Bb5 21.Qd1 a4 22.g3 Bd7 23.Na3 Qc7 24.Nc4 Kh8 25.h4 Be7 We have arrived at Dorer – Scharf, email 2011, where White gained a big advantage with 26.Rxa4!±.

16.Ba2 Bc6 17.Ra3 Bb5
Just for a moment, this looks interesting: White is prevented from castling. But Black's queenside set-up is easily challenged.
17...Nb7 18.Ncb4 Bb5
This is an even ropier version of the same idea:
19.c4 a5 20.cxb5 axb4 21.Rxa8 Qxa8
Now we should vary from Schlachetka – Hamann, Germany 2002.

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22.Bc4!N 22...Nc5 23.0-0!±
With the point being:
23...Nxe4 24.Qg4
And the tactics all work in White's favour:
24...Nd2
24...f5 25.Nb6† Kh8 26.Qxg5 Nxg5 27.Nxa8 Rxa8 28.Rd1+–
25.Qxg5 Nxc4 26.Ne7† Kh8 27.Nf5 Rg8 28.b3! f6
28...Nb6 29.Nxd6 Qd5 30.Qe7+–
29.Qc1 Nb6 30.Nxd6 h6 31.Qc5+–

18.h4 Bh6
Or 18...Bf4 19.Nce3 should transpose.

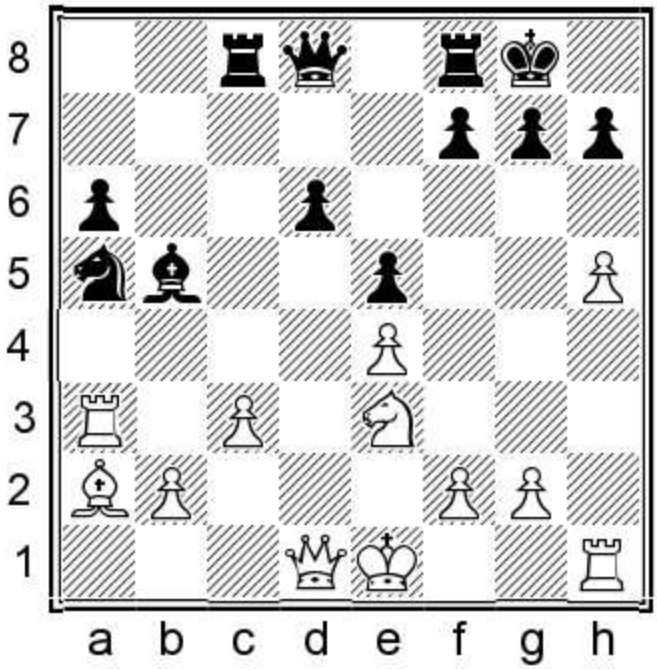
19.Nce3 Bxe3 20.Nxe3
The immediate threat is b2-b4 followed by Bd5 and likely c3-c4.

20...Rc8
Allowing the a5-knight to advance to c4, if needed, takes some of the sting out of White's b2-b4 idea. But White can play on both sides of the board...

20...Nb7 is a grim retreat-and-hang-on plan. For example: 21.Bd5 Ra7 22.b4± De Holanda – Rivas Romero, email 1999, was well on its way to being a positional crush.

21.h5!±
Black is totally squeezed.

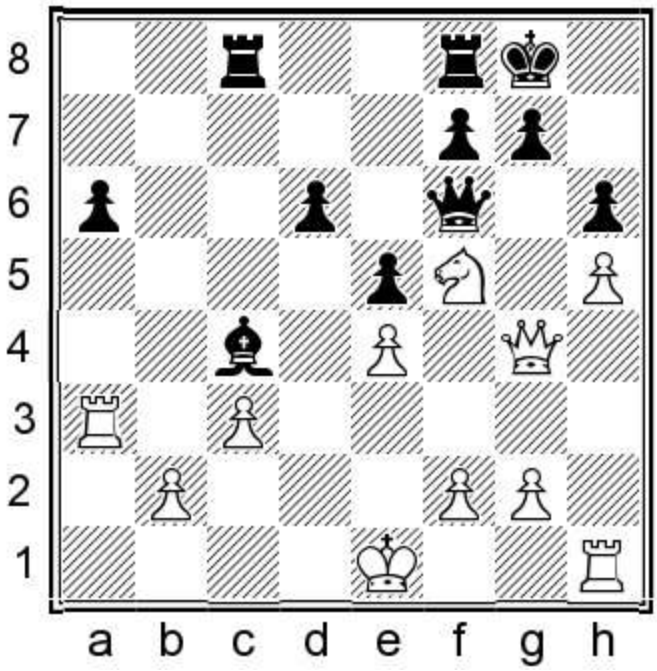
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21...h6
Now the f5-square belongs to White's knight, but allowing the white pawn to reach h6 would create fresh problems.

21...Nc4 22.Bxc4 Bxc4 23.h6 g6 The idea of Qg7 mate is a hidden menace in many lines, which limits Black's options greatly. 24.Nxc4 Rxc4 25.Qd3 Qb6 26.0-0± We have seen enough to prove White's advantage, but the following sequence is instructive: 26...Qc6 (26...Qxb2 27.Qxd6!+– illustrates the value of the h6-pawn.) 27.Rd1 Rd8 28.Ra5 Qxe4 29.Rxa6 Qh4 30.Rxd6 Rxd6 31.Qxd6 White had a winning position in Ould Ahmed – Durandal, corr. 2009. The key point is that 31...Qxh6 loses to 32.Qb8†! Qf8 33.Rd8.

22.Qg4 Bd7
There is no longer time to play: 22...Nc4 White wins material by force after: 23.Bxc4 Bxc4 24.Nf5 Qf6

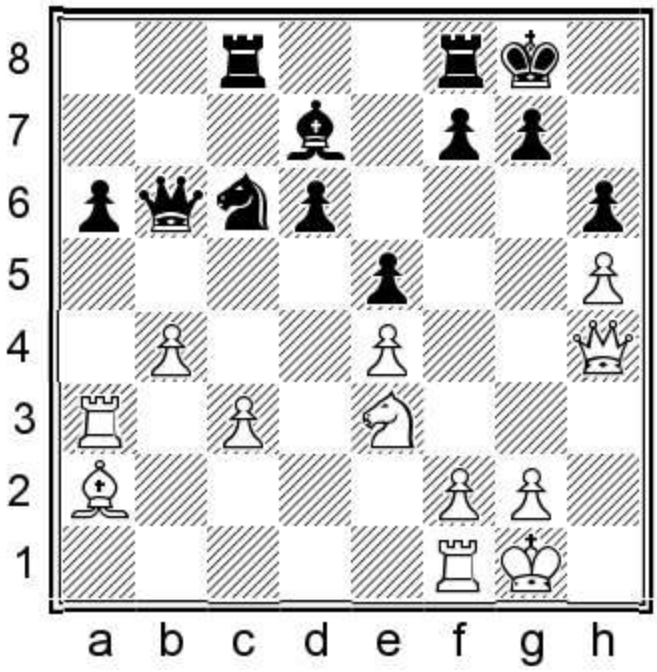


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25.Qh4! Removing Black's best defender. 25...Qxh4 26.Rxh4± Threatening Ne7† and Nxd6, plus Rg4; at least one pawn will drop.

23.Qh4
Also strong is 23.Nf5 Bxf5 24.exf5± as Black's queen is once again overstretched, trying to hold both sides of his position together; f5-f6 is one threat.

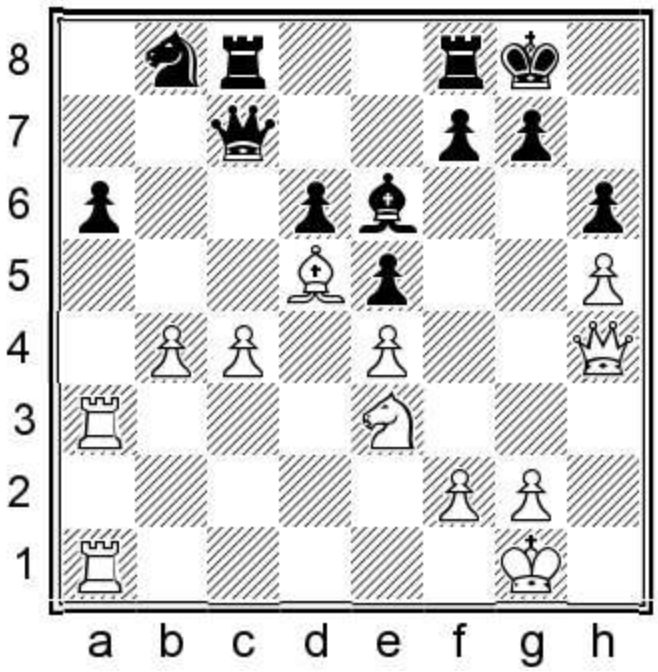
23...Qb6 24.b4 Nc6 25.0-0±
A dream position for our anti-Sveshnikov repertoire: a6 and d6 are weak, d5 is dominated, and a potential king-side attack is thrown in as a bonus.




25...Be6
The attempt to break free is 25...a5 but White has a lovely refutation: 26.Nd5 Qb7 27.b5! Qxb5 28.Nf6† gxf6 29.Qxf6 (29.c4+– would also get the job done, though not as quickly.) Now the two main threats are c3-c4, freeing the rook, and Qg6†; Black cannot stop them both. For example: 29...Qd3 30.Qg6† Kh8 31.Qxh6† Kg8 32.Qg6† Kh8 33.Qf6† Kh7 34.Bxf7+–

26.Bd5 Nb8 27.Rfa1 Qc7 28.c4
Black is completely dominated. The rest of the game is a simple mopping-up process.

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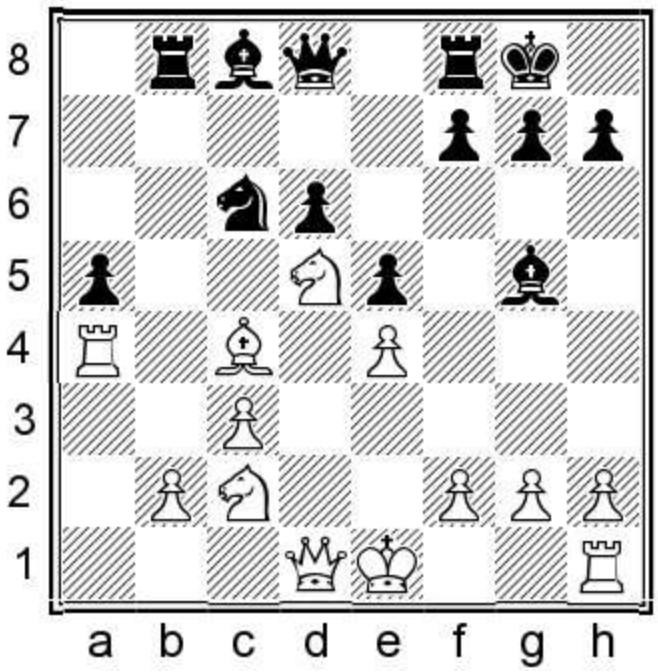
28...Kh8 29.Nf5 Bxf5 30.exf5 Nd7 31.Rxa6 Nf6 32.Ra7 Qb6 33.Rb7 Qd4 34.Qxd4 exd4 35.Bxf7 Ra8 36.Rxa8 Rxa8 37.f3
A beautifully controlled crush, and a perfect illustration of White's aims with the 9.Nd5 system.
1–0

Main Line – Rare 17th Moves

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 0-0 12.Nc2 Bg5 13.a4 bxa4 14.Rxa4 a5
This move is certainly more challenging than the alternatives mentioned on page 216.

15.Bc4
Other options have been tried here, but the text move has been the main choice since the birth of the Svesh-nikov Variation in the 1970s.
15...Rb8

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16.b3
The most logical move.

16.Ra2 is the other main line here. This is more dangerous in the attacking lines where Black weakens his king's cover with ...g6 and White sacrifices a pawn with h4 (such as the modern classic Esserman – Fedorowicz in 2011, where White opened the second rank for the rook with b2-b4! at the right moment), but in the more positional lines where Black takes on e3 (as in the lines presented here) the rook is not so active at a2 and the move b2-b3 is much more useful. As White has good play in the attacking lines anyway (see Game 21) it is best to choose 16.b3, as most of the elite players do these days.

16...Kh8 17.Nce3
This move "may be regarded as the ultimate main line of the Sveshnikov according to current theory" wrote Kotronias. With an opening as sound as the Sveshnikov, we need to use the best available weapons.

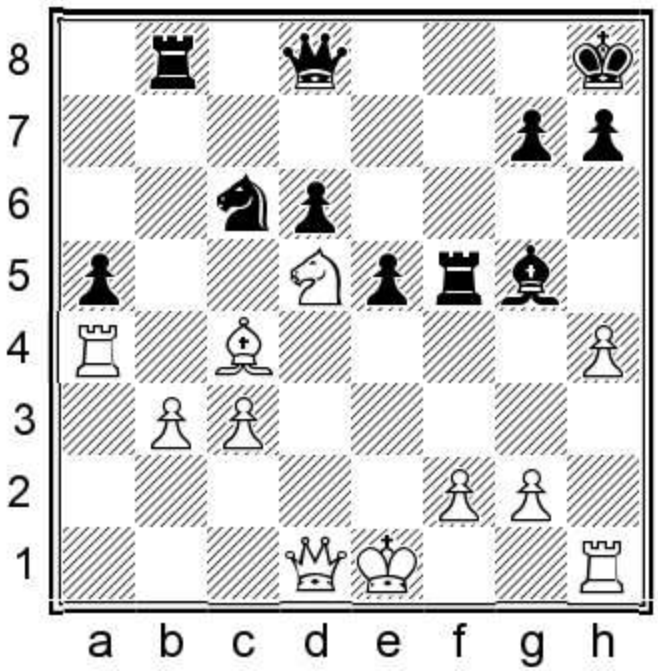
Black has tried a number of options. In the next game we will see 17...Ne7, before moving on to the absolute main line 17...g6. Before all that though, we will start with a few sidelines.

17...Bxe3
With the rook on a2, this is playable and most probably fine for Black, but with the rook active on a4, Black cannot equalize.

17...Be6 18.h4!? also leaves Black short of equality. For example: 18...Bxe3 19.Nxe3 Bxc4 20.Nxc4 f5 21. Nxd6²

17...f5?
This has been played quite often, but only by lower-rated players. In this case the ...f5-break merely opens lines for White's attack.
18.Nxf5 Bxf5 19.exf5 Rxf5 20.h4!
White has scored 6/6 from here, and indeed his position is already overwhelming.

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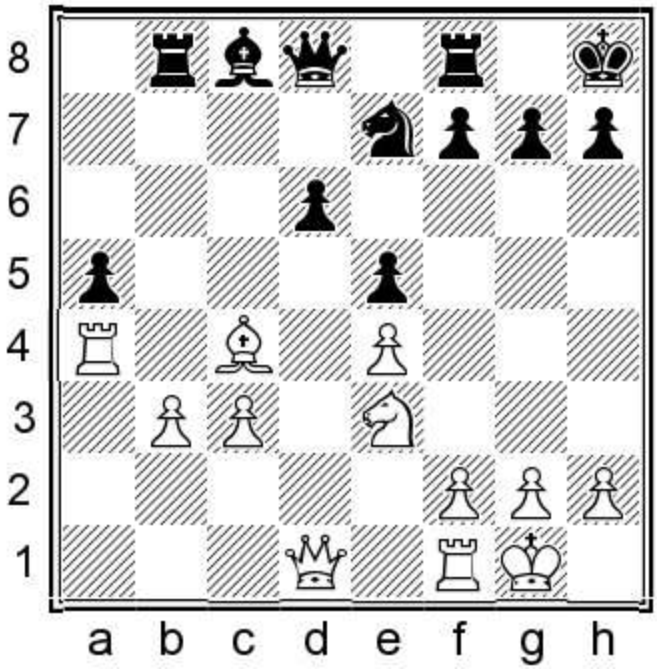


20...Bxh4
Or 20...Be7 21.Bd3 Rf7 White can crash through with either 22.Rc4 or 22.Qh5 Qg8 23.Rc4.
21.g3
And h7 is going. We can follow a Lanka game (often a good idea) to its quick end:
21...Bxg3 22.fxg3 e4 23.Qg4 Rg5 24.Rxh7† Kxh7 25.Qh4† Kg6 26.Nf4†
1–0 Lanka – Korsus, Kiel 2003.

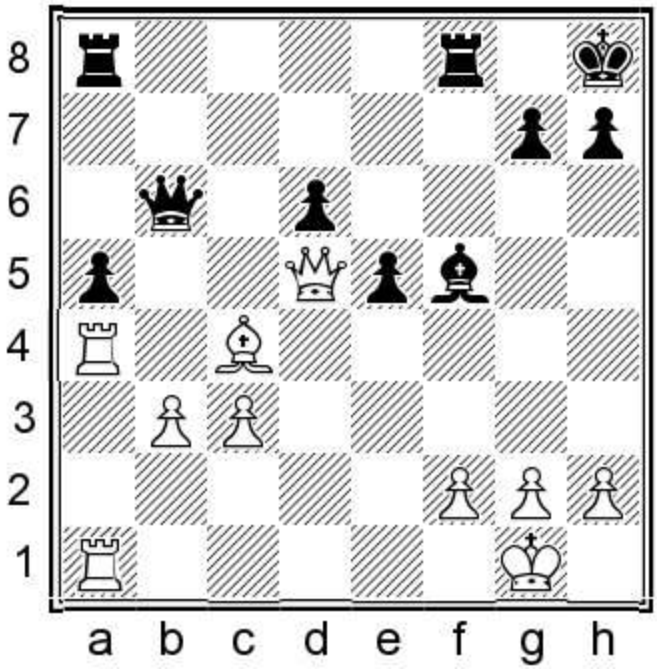
18.Nxe3 Ne7
Or 18...f5 is likely to transpose. Following 19.exf5 Bxf5 20.0-0 Black has no better option than 20...Ne7. Instead 20...Bg6 21.Qd2 followed by Rd1 puts quick pressure on d6.

19.0-0[2]
To quote Rogozenko on this position: “White can play for a win without any risk of losing.”

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19...f5 20.exf5 Bxf5
Instead 20...Nxf5?! is the main line with the rook at a2 and the pawn on b2 (see for example the game Carlsen – Van Wely, Schagen 2006) but here it is not good. 21.Nxf5 Bxf5 22.Qd5 Ra8 23.Rfa1 Qb6



24.R1a2! (Just for the record, 24.Rxa5 is also possible as 24...Be4 can be met by 25.Qf7. Clever stuff, but White's advantage is greater after the text move.) 24...Bb1 25.Rd2 Qd8 26.Ra1 Bg6 27.Qxd6± Vuckovic – Bogosavljevic, Mataruska Banja 2008.

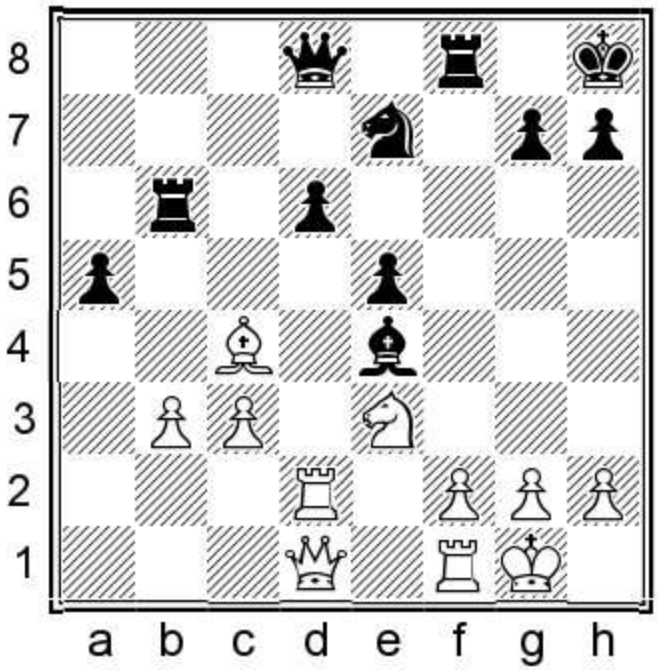
21.Ra2!
Rerouting to d2 is the most effective plan.
After 21.Nxf5 Rxf5 22.Bd3 Rf6 23.Bc2 Qb6 24.b4 axb4 25.Rxb4 Qc7 26.Qd3 White's edge was not so big in Karjakin – Khalifman, Amsterdam 2007.

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21...Be4
Here and on the following moves, both sides (but especially White!) have various plausible options.

For example, 21...Rf6 22.Re1² is the usual pleasant niggle.

22.Rd2 Rb6



23.Re1
One of several promising moves.

23.Qa1!? is a useful move in this and similar positions.

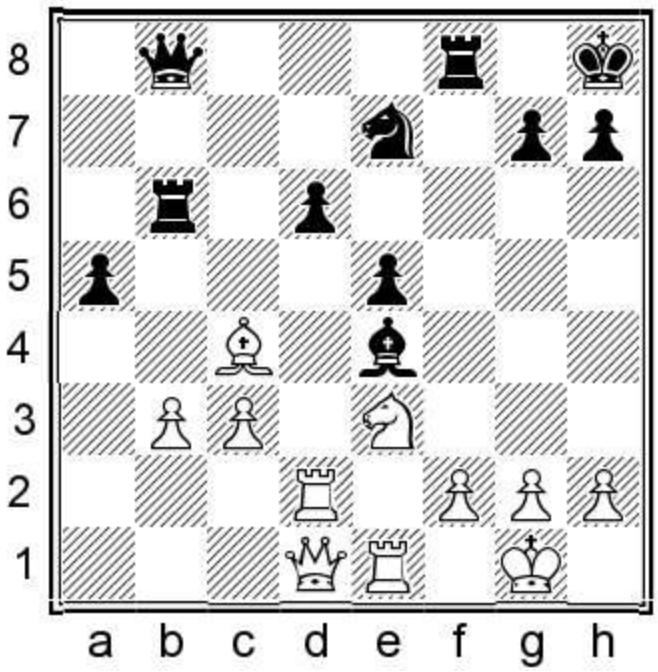
23.Be6!? Rf6 24.Bd5 is more purposeful than it may at first appear. After 24...Bxd5 25.Nxd5 Black must exchange again, so 25...Nxd5 26.Rxd5 and the presence of the rook on f6 weakens the back rank. 26...h6 (The back-rank issue shows up after 26...Qb8 27.c4 Rxb3 28.c5² and a strong pawn will appear on d6.) Now in Kasimdzhanov – Tregubov, Bastia (rapid) 2006, White, no doubt due to time shortage, wasted his chance with: 27.Rxe5?! Rxb3 28.Rxa5 Rxc3= Instead 27.c4² would have kept a handy edge.

In contrast, the apparently more direct 23.Bd5 Nxd5 24.Nxd5 allows Black to avoid the second exchange with 24...Rb7 when Black is close to level.

In what follows I will give several examples to give a better picture of how to play this variation.

23...Qb8

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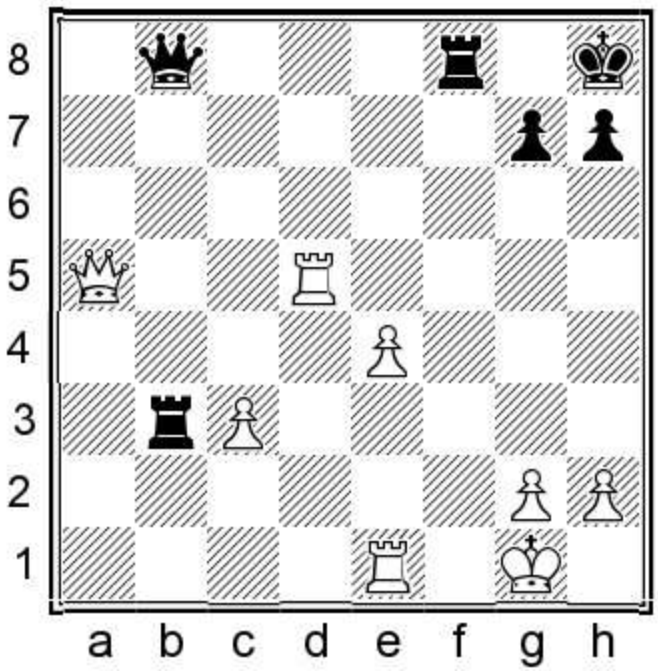
24.f3
24.Qa1 is again a good alternative. For example: 24...Qc7 25.Red1 (25.Qa3!?) 25...d5 A cold-blooded way to simplify into an inferior but holdable ending. (Instead 25...h6 26.h3 Bb7 27.Qa3 Rd8 28.Be6 Qxc3 29.Rxd6± led to a convincing win in Leko – Radjabov, Morelia/Linares 2008.) 26.Nxd5 Nxd5 27.Bxd5 Bxd5 28.Rxd5 Rxb3 29.Rxa5 (29.Qxa5 Qxa5 30.Rxa5 Rxc3 31.Rxe5 gives White the better side of a draw, as in Pawlowski – Schwenck, email 2008.) 29...Rxc3 30.Ra8 Rg8 31.Rxg8† Kxg8 32.Qa2† Kf8 33.h4² Black's position is unpleasant, but should be defendable.

24...Ba8 25.Qa1 d5?!
Another 'simplify and grimly hang on' approach, but the resulting position is nasty.

More reliable was 25...e4 26.fxe4 Bxe4 when White keeps an edge with 27.Qa3!². However, please note that the hasty 27.Qxa5? allows drawish liquidation after 27...d5.

26.Nxd5 Bxd5 27.Bxd5 Nxd5 28.Rxd5 Rxb3 29.Qxa5 e4 30.fxe4±

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In Gappel – Balosetti, corr. 2009, Black somehow managed to hold this endgame, but it is clearly a borderline case: engines will find defensive resources, but try to defend it yourself and you will find how difficult it is.

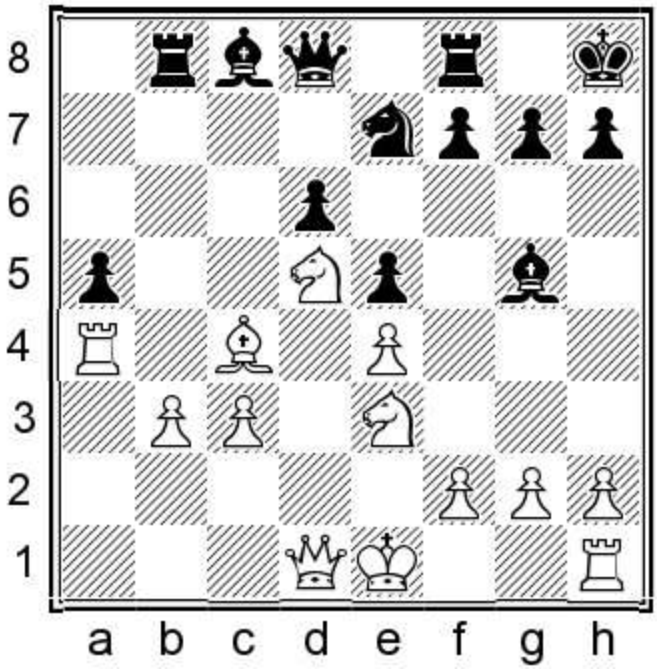
17...Ne7

GAME 20

Juergen Stephan – Sakae Ohtake
Correspondence 2008

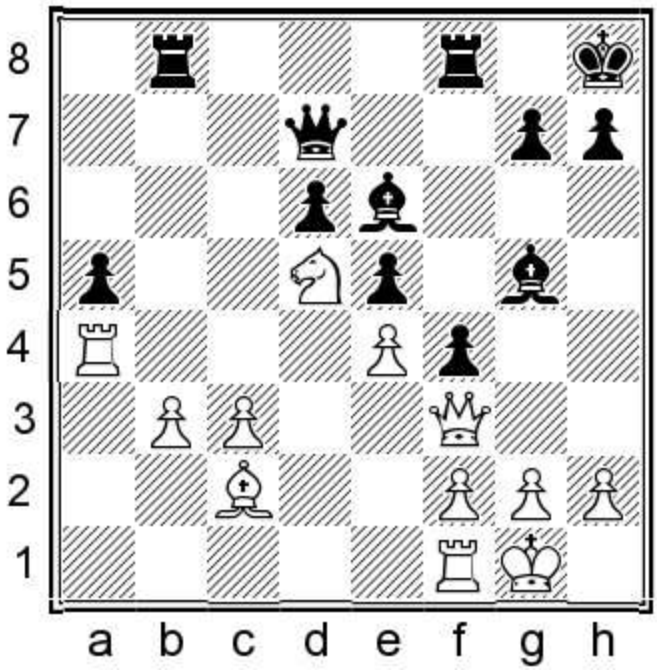
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 0-0 12.Nc2 Bg5 13.a4 bxa4 14.Rxa4 a5 15.Bc4 Rb8 16.b3 Kh8 17.Nce3 Ne7
This was recommended by Kotronias in The Sicilian Sveshnikov. It's the second-most-common move in the position, a long way behind 17...g6.

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18.Nxe7 Qxe7 19.Nd5 Qd8 20.0-0 f5
Black needs to create counterplay, and in this position that means ...f7-f5.
20...Bd7 21.Ra2 f5 22.Qe2! is just a transposition.

21.Qe2!
The most promising as far as I am concerned, but very rarely played and not mentioned in Kotronias's book. 21.Bd3 Be6 22.Bc2 f4! 23.Qf3 Qd7 and Black had a strong attack in Kuzmin – Khan, email 2013. Black won this game in great style after a pawn advance on the kingside. But what matters is of course what happens if White takes the a-pawn.



24.Rxa5N 24...Bg4 25.Qd3 f3 26.g3 Bh3 27.Rfa1 Bg2 28.Ra7 Qh3 29.b4 Bh1 30.Qf1 Bg2 with a draw by repetition. Black does not have anything more, but this is scary enough!

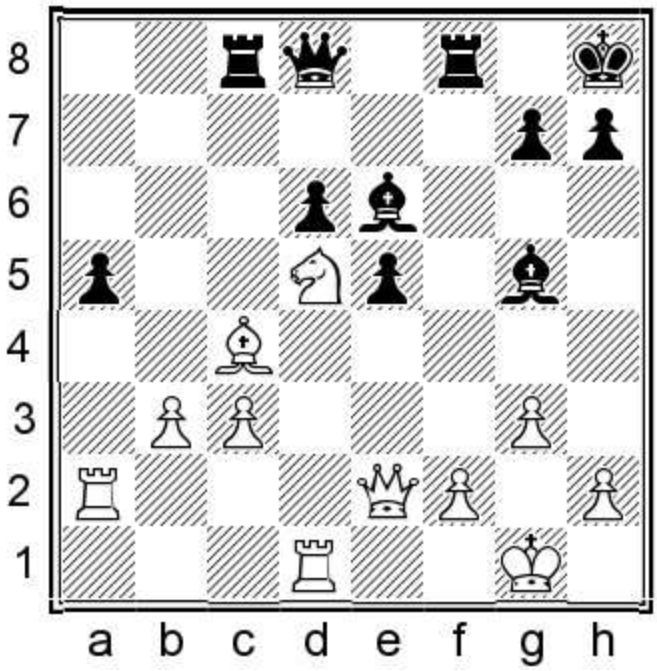
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21.exf5 Bxf5 22.Qe2 is the main line given by Kotronias. I suspect White can put a bit of pressure on Black here as well, but overall it is not much.

21...Bd7 22.Ra2 fxe4 23.Qxe4
Natural but not compulsory.

23.Rfa1!? is one of the ideas behind the Qe2 move; White does not need to take back on e4 at once, as the pawn is going nowhere. For example: 23...a4 (23...Qe8 24.Rxa5 Qg6 25.b4 Bd8 26.Ra8 and White went on to win in Ivanov – Dobrica, email 2009) 24.bxa4 e3 25.Nxe3 Qa5 26.Nd5 Bc6 27.Rd1 Qc5 28.Qd3 Be8 29.Bb5 Bh5 30. Rf1 And we have another long correspondence win in Schumacher – Langheld, email 2013.

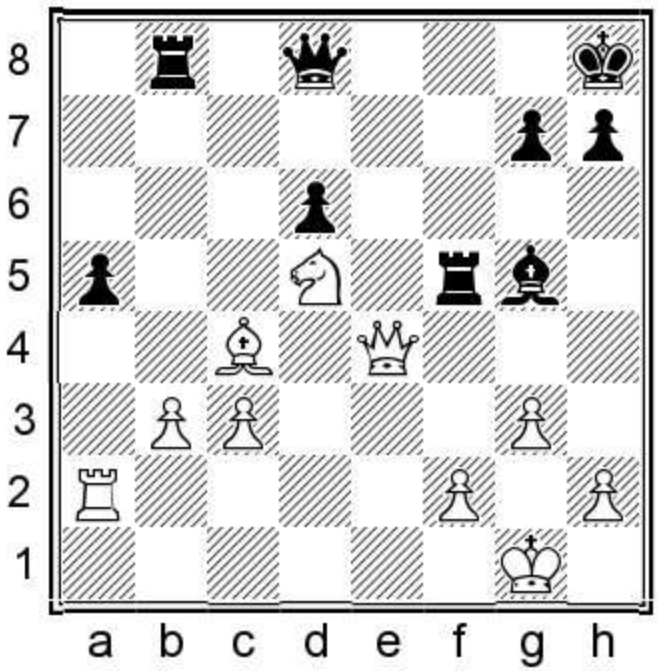
23...Bf5 24.Qe2 Be6 25.Rd1 Rc8 26.g3



26...Rc5?!
Donating a tempo or two to White's cause.

26...Rb8
This is Black's best.
27.Rd3!
With the idea to reduce Black's counterplay by exchanging one pair of rooks on f3.
Another move that has been tried here is 27.Qe1 but after 27...Bg4 28.Rda1 Qc8 29.Rxa5 Bf3! Black has the same type of counterplay as can occur in the 21.exf5 line mentioned above. This type of position could easily cost White a loss in a practical game. My proposed 27.Rd3 is also prophylaxis against this type of idea.
27...Bf5
After 27...Qd7 28.Rxa5 Black doesn't seem to have enough for the material he just gave up.
28.Rf3 e4
Black's only chance to obtain counterplay.
29.Rxf5! Rxf5 30.Qxe4²

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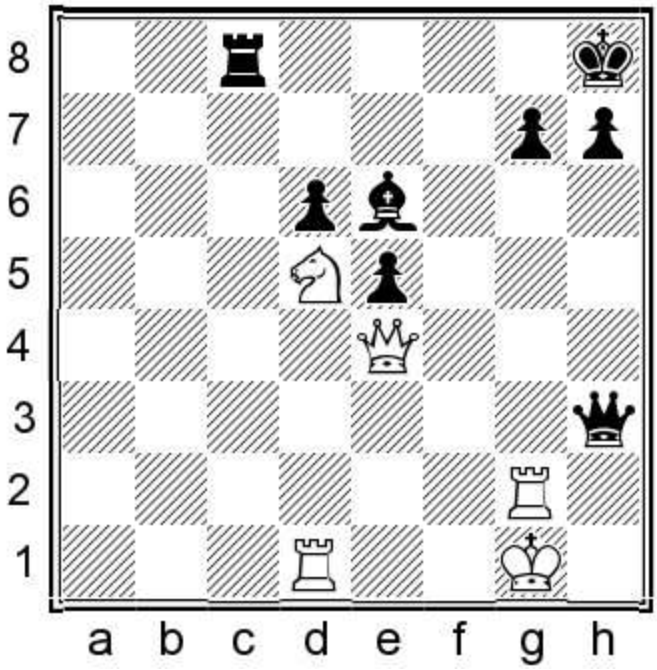
White has excellent compensation for the exchange and he is effectively the only one playing for the full point, as Black's attacking potential has been significantly reduced. One sample line is:
30...Re5 31.Qd4 Bf6 32.Qd3 g6 33.b4 axb4 34.cxb4
White plans a gradual expansion, probably with Kg2, f2-f4 and b4-b5.

27.b4! axb4 28.cxb4 Rc8 29.b5[2]
White scores pretty well from here in correspondence chess. With the main game, and another in the notes, we will see two crazy games between strong correspondence GMs.
29...Rc5 30.h4 Bxh4
If Black retreats then the b-pawn is strong, so exposing the white king is a worthy try.

31.b6 Qg5 32.Qe4 Bxg3 33.fxg3 Qxg3† 34.Rg2 Qh3 35.b7 Rxc4 36.b8=Q Rxb8 37.Qxc4
After a flurry of tactics, it's time to count the pieces: Black has four pawns for a rook. It's not enough as the pawns are no threat. The white king has zero pawn cover, but is secure on g1; Black cannot even create a check. So the rest of the game is a mopping-up procedure.

37...Rc8 38.Qe4

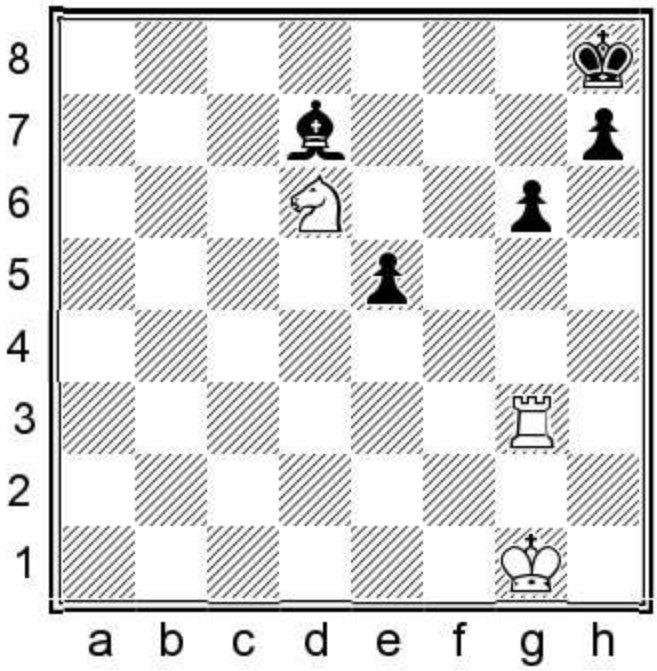
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38...Qh5
The other correspondence game finally deviated with 38...Qb3 but it was the same story: 39.Ne3 Rc4 40.Qd3 Qb6 41.Rf2 Rf4 42.Ra1 Qc6 43.Qc2 Qxc2 44.Rxc2 h5 45.Rd2 Rd4 46.Rxd4 exd4 47.Nc2 In Stalmach – V. Grigoryev, email 2008, Black could have called it a day here, but he went to a bitter end 20 moves later.

39.Ra1 Bh3 40.Rg3 Be6 41.Nc3 Rg8 42.Qb4 Rd8 43.Qb7 Qf7 44.Ra7 Qxb7 45.Rxb7
I would have given up here.

45...g6 46.Re7 Bf5 47.Nb5 Rd7 48.Rxd7 Bxd7 49.Nxd6
Or failing that, here.



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49...Kg7 50.Ra3 Kf6 51.Ra7 Ke6 52.Nf7 Bc8 53.Kf2 Kd5 54.Re7 Kd4 55.Rxe5 Bf5 56.Re7 h5 57.Kg3 Bb1 58.

Kh4
1–0

17...g6

GAME 21

Anish Giri – Alexei Shirov
Hoogeveen 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3 0-0 12.Nc2 Bg5 13.a4 bxa4 14.Rxa4 a5 15.Bc4 Rb8 16.b3 Kh8 17.Nce3 g6
The big main line; obviously Black has ...f7-f5 in mind.

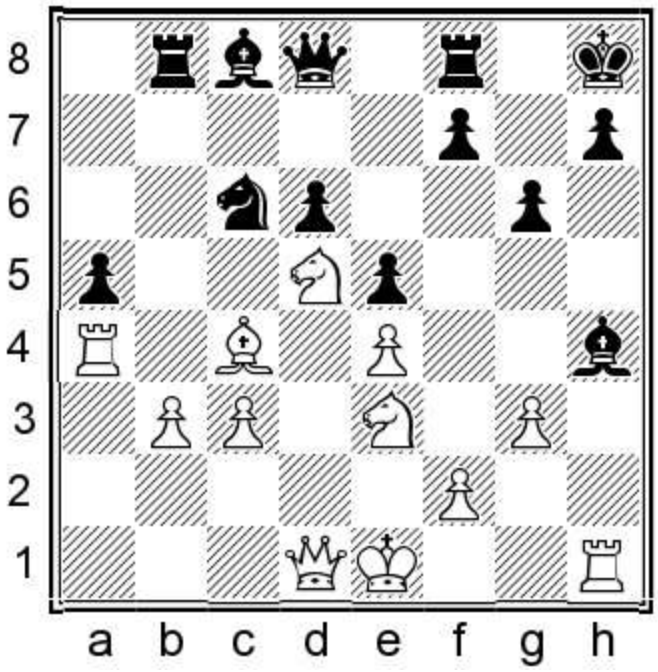
18.h4!
This bold move was first played by Gyula Sax in 1996. We will use the half-open h-file, and prove that 17...g6 weakened the h7-pawn.

Instead after 18.0-0 f5 there would be a double-edged battle, where 17...g6 has made a positive contribution.

18...Bxh4
The critical test, and almost universally played.

18...Bxe3 19.Nxe3 Ne7 20.h5² leads effortlessly to pleasant play for White.

19.g3
The h-file is key to our plan, with f2-f4 the other big idea, so this tempo-gainer is automatic.

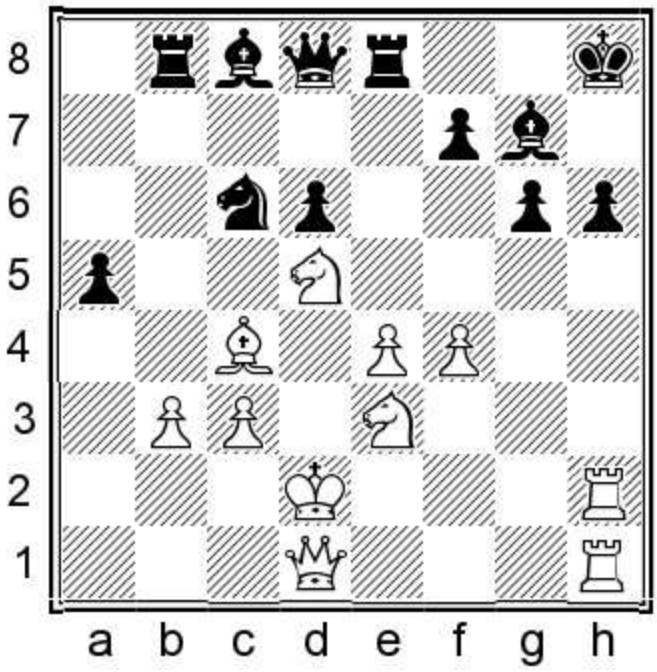



19...Bg5
The most combative reply.

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19...Be7? is a feeble move which allows White a similar attacking scheme to the game, except with his king far more secure. The right reply is 20.Ra2! followed almost certainly by f2-f4.

Black hardly does any better with:
19...Bf6?! 20.Ra2! Bg7 21.f4 exf4 22.gxf4 Re8
The correspondence players have shown White the right path:
23.Rah2!
23.Qf3 was less convincing in Ponomariov – Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2005.
23...h6 24.Kd2!+–



With the king clear of the e-file, White has overwhelming threats, including Nf5 or f4-f5. Here are some sample lines:
24...Rxe4
24...Kg8 25.Nf5! gxf5 26.Rg2 Kh8 27.Qh5 Re6 28.exf5 Rf6 29.Qg5 and White wins with the sheer brute force of the heavy pieces.
25.Rxh6†! Kg8
25...Bxh6 26.Rxh6† Kg7 27.Qh1 and White wins. The last move shows another point of the wonderful 24.Kd2! in clearing the back rank.
26.Qg1! Rxe3 27.Rh8†! Bxh8 28.Qxg6† Bg7 29.Qh7† Kf8 30.Rg1+–
Black may be a rook and bishop up, but far more than that will soon drop.

20.f4!
I mentioned Sax played 18.h4 in 1996, but it was not until 2005 that 20.f4 was played (by Topalov) after which the line really took off. Today I consider this promising for White, even though the last word has not been spoken yet.

20...exf4 21.gxf4 Bh4†
Almost universally played, and for good reason.

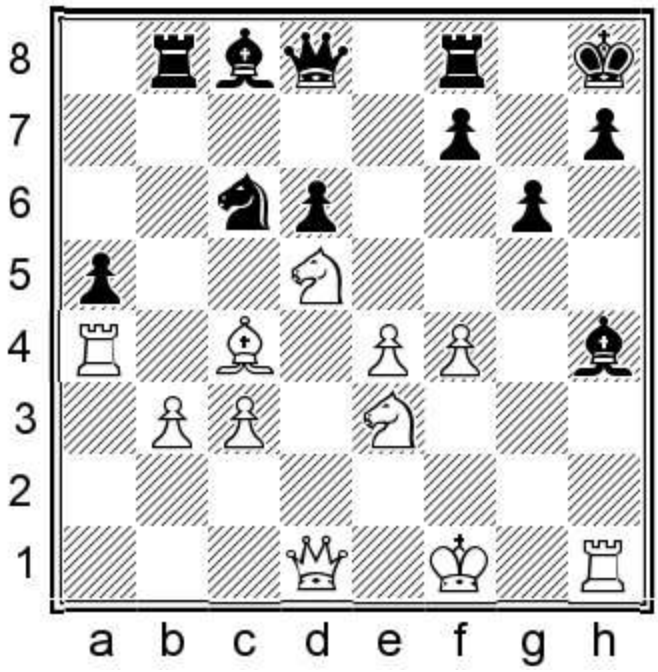
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21...Bf6? 22.Ra2! The attacking themes are, unsurprisingly, similar to the 19...Bf6 line mentioned above. For

example: 22...Rg8 (22...Kg7 23.Nf5†! Bxf5 (23...gxf5 24.Rg2† Kh8 25.Rxh7† Kxh7 26.Qh5#) 24.exf5 a4 25. Rah2+– was played in a freestyle game.) 23.Rah2! Rg7 24.Rh6!+– Gulevich – Nadeev, email 2010. Followed by Qe2-h2 and f4-f5; White has a winning attack.

22.Kf1!
This game was not the first time this move was played, but it was the first high-profile game. White has a very strong attack.

Practice has shown that 22.Kd2 Ne7! defends for Black, so White's idea is to leave the second rank clear for the time being.




22...f5
This is forced; Black needs counterplay fast.

22...Ne7?! 23.Ra2!+– and White's attack is unstoppable.

22...g5 23.Qh5 f6 24.Ng2± looks great for White.

Finally, 22...Rg8 23.Ra2 Rg7 24.Rah2 g5 25.Ng2± is also ugly for Black.

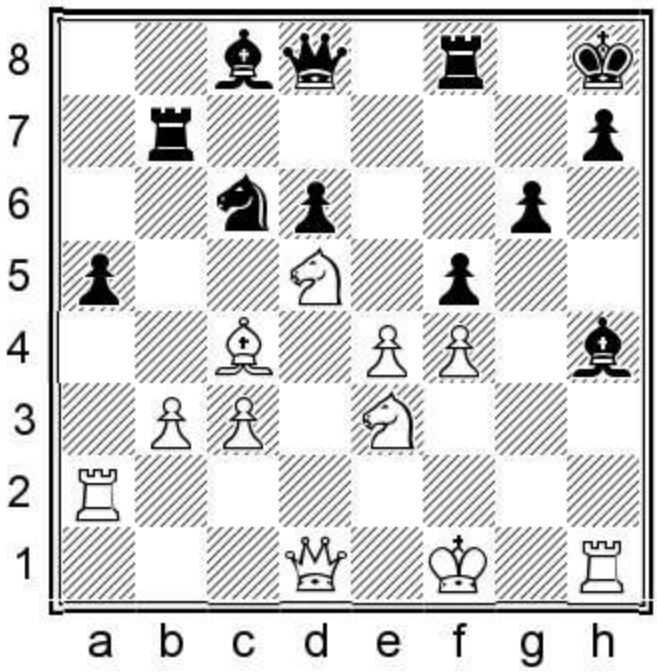
23.Ra2!
With our king exposed, total precision is required.

23.exf5?! Bxf5 24.Nxf5 Rxf5 gives Black enough play for at least equality.

23...fxe4
The move that is almost always played.

23...Rb7

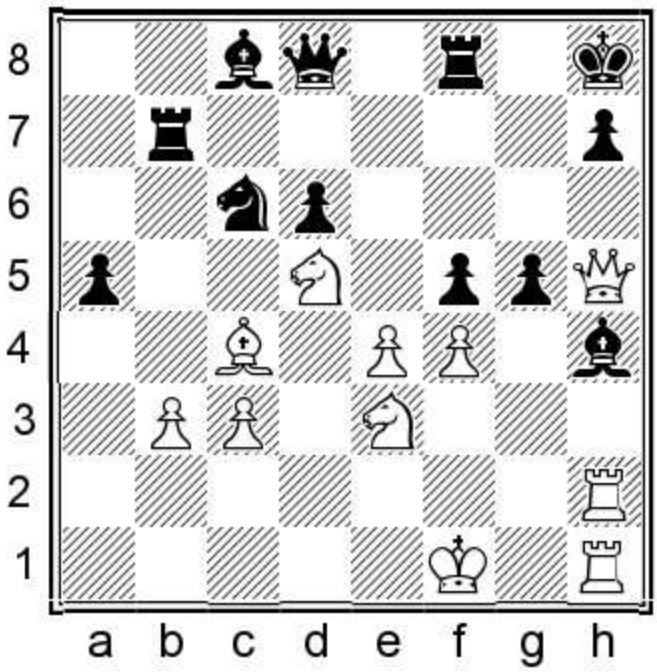
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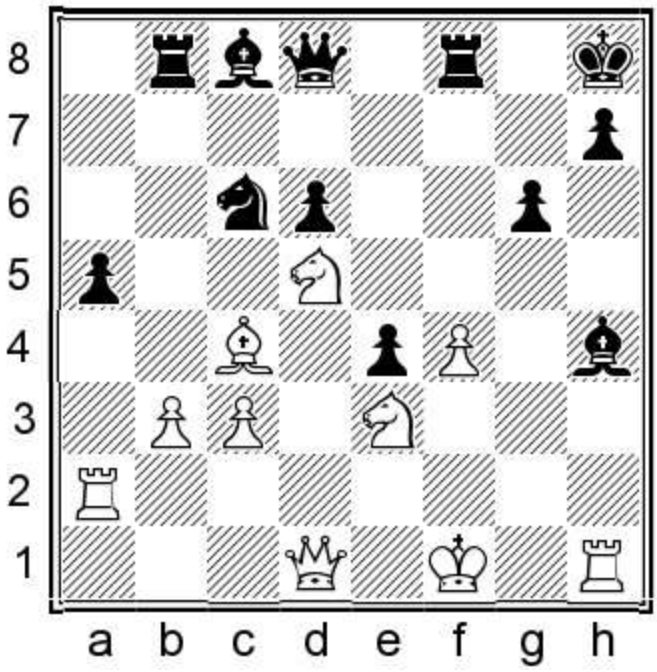
This has been played in two games, but it does not work:
24.Ba6!N 24...Rbf7 25.Bxc8 fxe4 26.Kg1!
As usual, our shaky king means we must be precise before reaping the rewards.
26.Be6? is just one example to show how a seemingly obvious move can throw away all our advantage: 26... Rxf4† 27.Nxf4 Rxf4† 28.Kg1 (28.Kg2 Qg5†) 28...Qg5† 29.Ng4 (29.Ng2 Qc5† 30.Kh2 Qg5 and White has nothing better than repeating with 31.Kg1) 29...Ne5 30.Qxd6 Rxg4† 31.Bxg4 Qxg4† 32.Rg2 Qf4 and White has to take the perpetual.
26...Bg3 27.Be6 Rxf4 28.Nxf4 Bxf4 29.Ng4±
It's messy enough to stop me claiming a clear win, but Black is out of checks, so White's rook outweighs Black's three pawns.

23...g5
This has many transpositional possibilities, but Black should avoid the independent lines. Let's see:
24.Rah2 Rb7
24...fxe4 transposes to the game.
25.Qh5

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25...Be6?!
Wiser is 25...fxe4 26.Ke2 Be6 and we have transposed to our main game.
26.fxg5 fxe4† 27.Nf6 Rxf6†
This has to be tried.
28.gxf6 Qxf6† 29.Ke2
It feels messy but in fact White has it under control.
29...Bxc4†
29...Qf3† 30.Qxf3 exf3† 31.Kxf3 Ne5† 32.Ke4 Nxc4 33.bxc4±
30.Nxc4!
30.bxc4 Nd4†! looks about level.
30...Re7 31.Rc1!±
One last careful move. Instead 31.Rxh4? Qxc3© might spoil all our efforts.



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24.Rah2 g5
The only move.

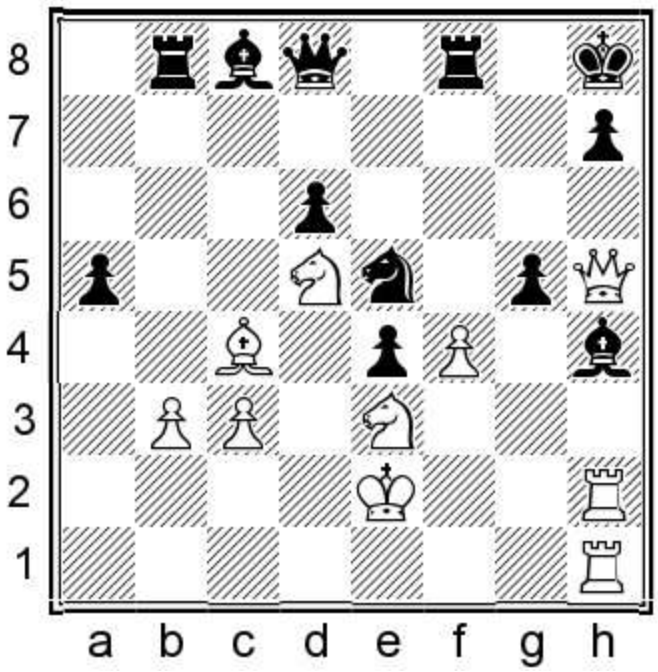
25.Qh5!
It takes both engines and humans quite a while to appreciate the power of the queen jump to h5, but it works beautifully.

In his ChessBase analysis, Rogozenko only mentions 25.Ng2 Rb7 26.Nxh4 gxh4 27.Rxh4 Rg7 and correctly states that Black is fine.

25...Rb7
Lending support to h7 looks logical, but the tactics work in White's favour.

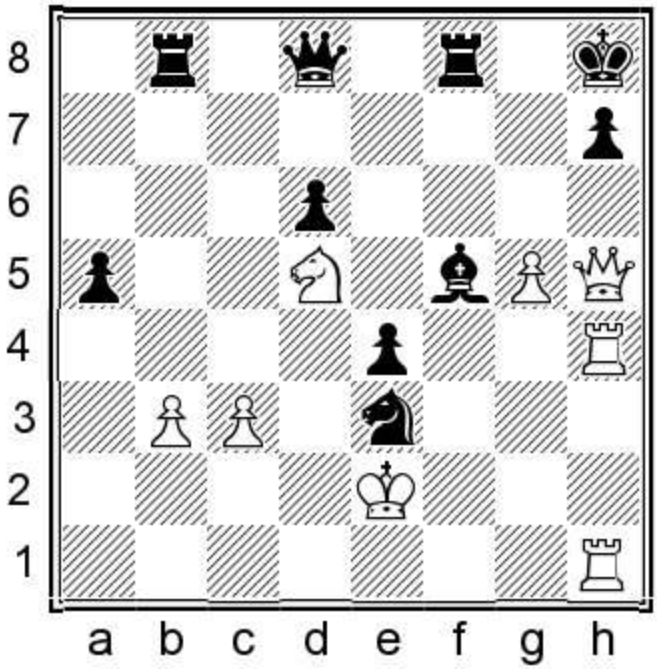
25...Be6 26.Ke2 gives Black nothing better than 26...Rb7!, transposing to our main game.

25...Ne5!
The only move that survives in correspondence chess. According to Giri, this leads to a bad endgame, but even so, this is Black's best bet. Otherwise he is practically lost. The analysis that follows is necessarily detailed; to take on the Sveshnikov we need a sharp-edged weapon.
26.Ke2!
Absolutely the only move.

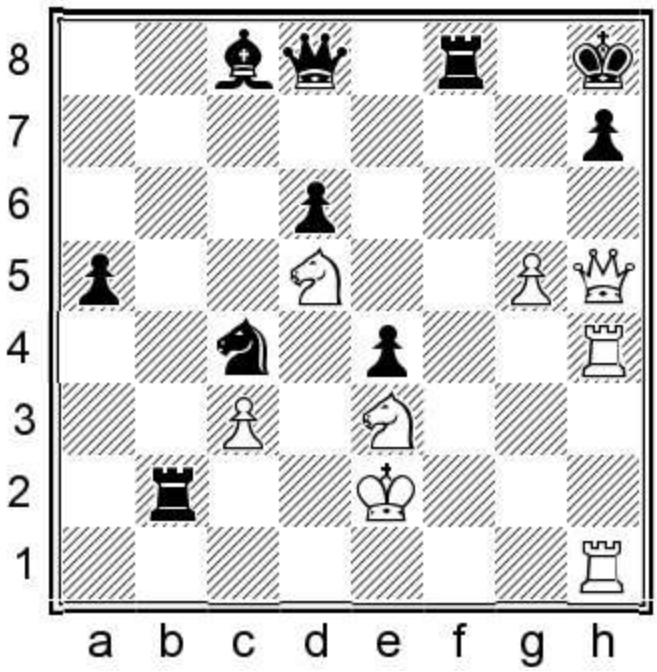



26...Nxc4
One of two main options.
26...Bg4† 27.Nxg4 Nxc4 28.bxc4 Qc8 The best try. (Instead, for example, 28...Qd7? 29.Ngf6+– is disastrous.) 29.Nge3 Black has no effective continuation. For example: 29...Qd7 30.Qh6 Rf7 31.Nc2!? (31.Nd1!?N 31...Rbf8 32.Kd2± is also promising) 31...Rxf4 32.Kd2 Rf7 33.Re2 a4 34.Rxe4 a3 35.Re2 Re8 36.Rhh2 Rb8 37.Nxa3 Bg3 38.Rhg2 Qf5 39.Nc2 White went on to win in Manso Gil – Korze, corr. 2012.
27.fxg5! Rxb3
The only move to avoid instant disaster.
27...Nxe3? 28.Rxh4 Bf5 was Gantsooj – Bigabylov, Chalkidiki 2016.

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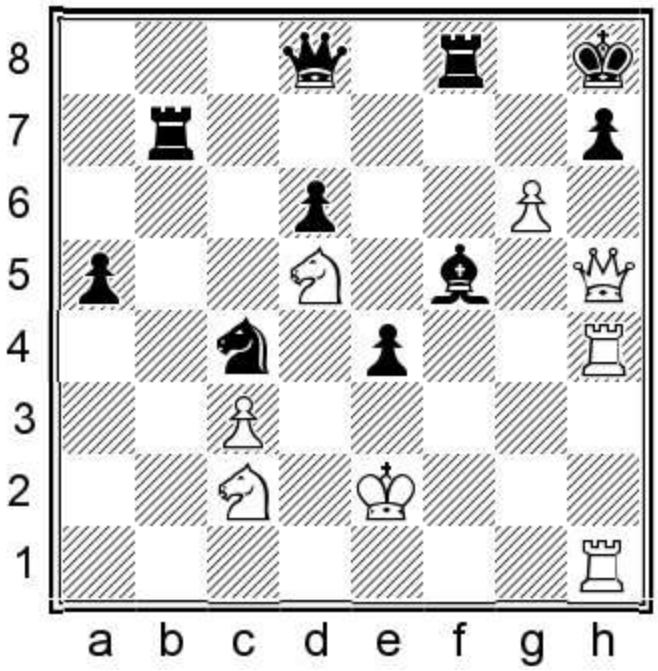
29.Nxe3!N A winning novelty. 29...Qc8 Allowing one of the main threats. (But the alternative allows the other: 29...Rb7 30.Nxf5 Rxf5 31.Qxh7†+– and White will soon have an extra rook.) 30.g6! Rb7 31.Qxh7† Not the only way, but forcing and fun. 31...Rxh7 32.Rxh7† Kg8 33.Nd5 Qd8 (Or 33...Qa6† 34.c4 Rd8 saves the queen but loses the king: 35.Nf6† Kf8 36.Rf7#) 34.Ne7† Qxe7 35.Rxe7 Bxg6 36.Re6+–
28.Rxh4 Rb2†



Now White has a choice between two promising options:
29.Nc2!?N
29.Ke1 Rb1† 30.Nd1 Bf5 31.g6 Rb7 32.Rf4 (White is also better after 32.Qe2!?N Bxg6 33.Qxc4 Qg5 34.Qd4† Kg8 35.R4h2²) 32...Be6 (32...Bxg6?! 33.Rxf8† Qxf8 34.Qxg6 Rg7 35.Qxe4± led to the conversion of the extra piece after an additional 30 moves in Korneev – Huerga Leache, Linares 2015. Korneev really knows his theory and is worth following for excellent repertoire recommendations.) 33.Rxf8† Qxf8 34.Qxh7† Rxh7 35.Rxh7†

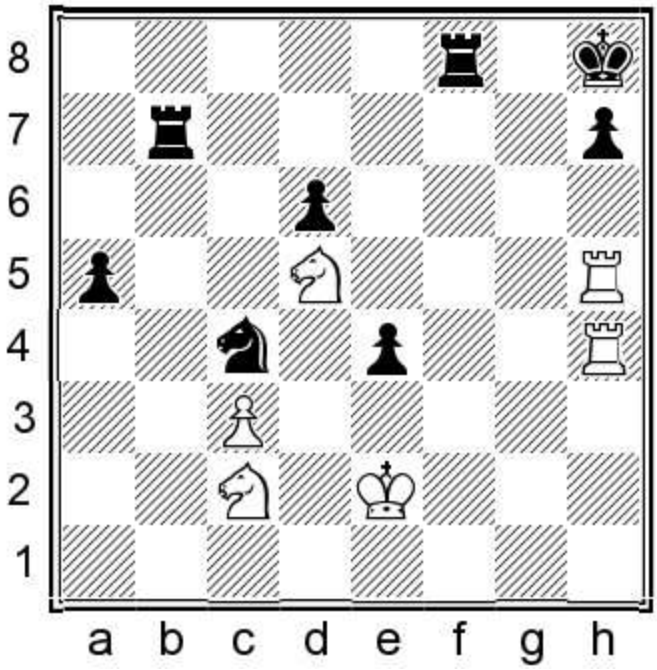
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Kg8 36.Ne7† Qxe7 37.Rxe7 Bf5 38.g7 (38.Rc7!?±) 38...a4 39.Kf2 a3 40.Ne3 Nxe3 41.Kxe3 a2 ½–½, Zemlyanov – Gilbert, email 2013. Now 42.Ra7 Be6 43.Kxe4 Bf7 44.Kd4 Kxg7 45.c4 Kf6 46.Rxa2 may look like progress, but the endgame is a tablebase draw – and not a very difficult one.
29...Bf5
29...Rxc2†? 30.Kd1 wins easily, as the rook can no longer defend along the 7th rank.
29...Rb7 30.g6 Ne5 31.Nce3± also puts Black under serious pressure.
30.g6 Rb7



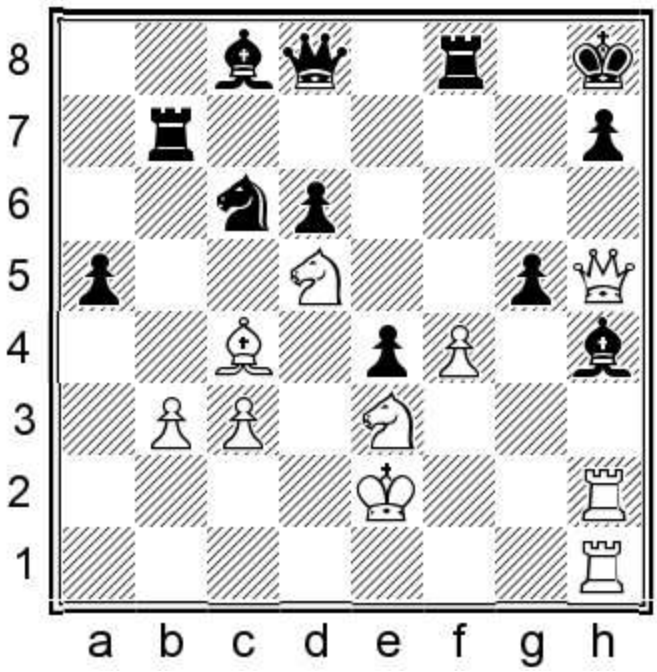
31.Rg1!
I noticed that someone had analysed 31.Rb1 on the Playchess engine-sharing function. It seems to me that, although 31...Bxg6 32.Rxb7 looks very fancy, there is a potential problem after: 32...Bxh5† 33.Rxh5 Rf7 34. Rxf7 Qg8 35.Rfxh7† Qxh7 36.Rxh7† Kxh7 37.Nf6† (37.Nce3!?) 37...Kg6 38.Nxe4± My concern here is that Black may be able to give up his knight for the c-pawn under circumstances that are within the drawing parameters.
31...Bxg6 32.Rxg6 Qe8 33.Rh6 Qxh5† 34.R6xh5±

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With good winning chances for White. It is true that Black has some drawing chances as well. But for the outcome of the opening, this is almost as good as it gets.

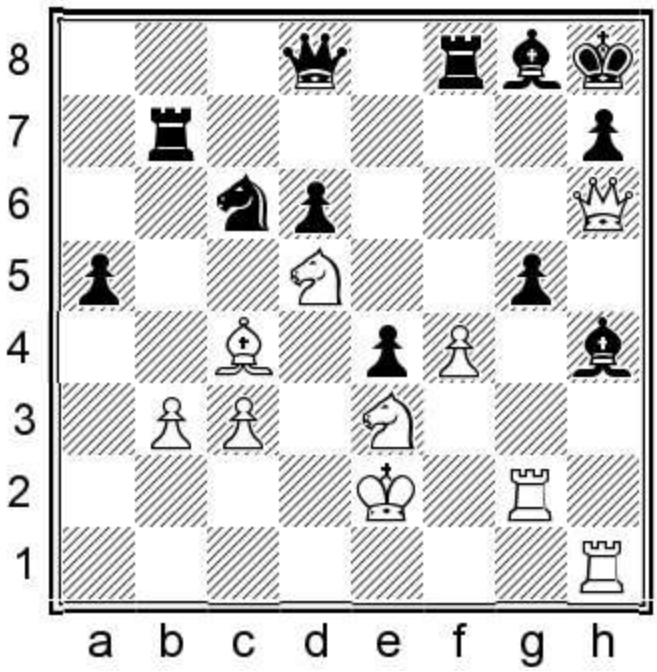
26.Ke2±
As ever, our king requires care, but it really is a clear advantage to White if you look deeply enough.



26...Be6 27.Qh6 Bg8
No better is 27...Bxd5 28.Nxd5 Rff7 29.Qe6± Black remains two pawns up, but his pieces are dominated, while facing many threats. One quiet idea for White is Kd1, stepping away to safety from the potentially-opening e-file, while retaining all the threats.

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28.Rg2



28...Rbf7?
Allowing a big tactical punch.

Giri wrote that he had studied some correspondence games in his preparation. One of them went like this: 28... Bxd5 29.Nxd5 Ne7 30.Rxg5 Nxd5 31.Rxd5 Bf6 32.Rdh5 Qe7 33.Bd5± Agrafenin – Trebizan, email 2012. Black held this game, but I would not build my Black repertoire on this. Even Houdini would not suggest it!

29.Rxh4! gxh4 30.Nf5
Good enough, but perhaps 30.f5 planning f5-f6, was simpler.

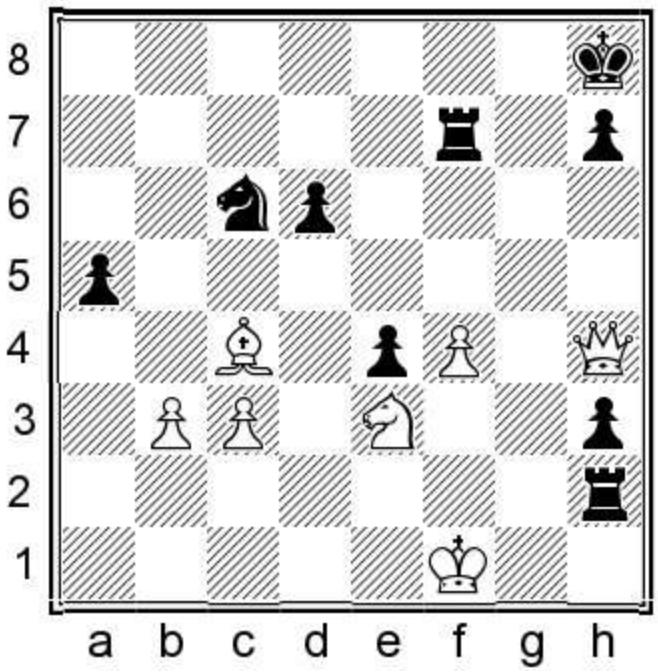
30...h3 31.Nh4!
Forcing play limits Black's options, and secures the win.

But even the less direct 31.Rg3 also won. For example: 31...Qd7 32.Nf6!+–

31...Qxh4
Black had no choice due to the threat of Ng6#.

32.Rxg8† Rxg8 33.Qxh4 Rg2† 34.Kf1 Rh2 35.Ne3+–
Finally all is clear. Black manages a few checks, but the outcome is certain.

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35...Rg7 36.Qf6 Rh1† 37.Kf2 Rh2† 38.Ke1 Rh1† 39.Kd2 Rh2† 40.Kc1 Ne7 41.Nf5 Rhg2 42.Nxg7 Rxg7 43. Qf8† Ng8 44.Bxg8 Rxg8 45.Qf6† Rg7 46.Qh4
1–0

Conclusion

After 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 we had a brief look at 6...h6 and 6...a6. The former allows White a pleasant endgame, while the latter is a poor version of the Lowenthal.

After 6...d6 7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3 we saw why 8...Be6, the Lasker variation, is far less respectable than the main line, though note the tricky 9...Rb8!?, which is a modern attempt to revive it.

Normal is 8...b5 9.Nd5 when the sideline 9...Qa5† effectively offers a draw. Naturally we decline, but to gain promising play we need to learn a few forcing lines. That’s an annoying workload against a mere sideline, but it’s the only way to make the most of our chances.

The main tabiya of the positional Sveshnikov is reached after 9...Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c3.

11...Ne7 is a Krasenkow favourite; Black allows doubled f-pawns but plans to break in the centre. After 12. Nxf6† gxf6 I mentioned two lines: 13.Be2!? is easy to learn, but Black might just hold; 13.Bd3 requires a lot of work, but looks good for White.

We then saw 11...Bb7 when Black can try a couple of versions of a ...Nc6-b8-d7 plan; both are too slow, with a quick a2-a4 the key idea.

11...Bg5 followed by ...Ne7 is as solid a defence as White will ever face. We cannot refute it, but we can force Black into an unpleasant defensive task where a draw is the height of his ambition. White should note that 13.h4! is the right move order, avoiding a nasty novelty in the 13.a4 move order.

11...Bg5 followed by ...Rb8 forces us to switch off auto-pilot, as a2-a4 has been discouraged. However, we have a simple yet powerful plan with Be2, 0-0 and Qd3.

Then finally we saw the main line of the Sveshnikov, which starts 11...0-0 12.Nc2 Bg5 13.a4 bxa4 14.Rxa4, and continues in great detail and depth. This is a line where White needs precise knowledge, as there are several sharp variations where White's king is exposed. It's all under control if you know what you are doing, so this is a topic that demands serious homework. The Sveshnikov is a tough defence: we need a heavyweight weapon against it.

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# Chapter 7 - Accelerated Dragon

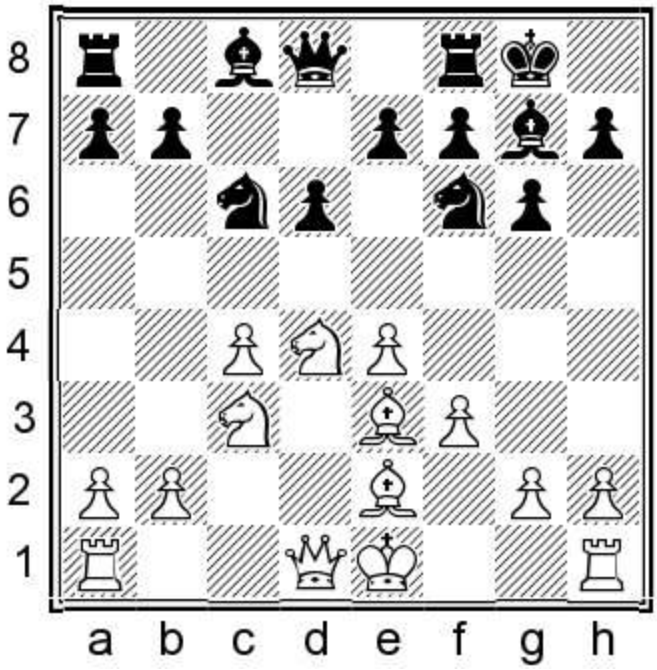
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4

A) 5...Nf6 6.Nc3 d6 7.f3! Nxd4 (7...Bg7) 8.Qxd4 Bg7 9.Be3 0-0 10.Qd2 233
A1) 10...Be6 (10...Qa5) 235
A2) 10...a5 236
B) 5...Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 (6...Nh6) 7.Nc3 (7...d6) 238
B1) 7...Ng4 8.Qxg4 Nxd4 (8...Bxd4?) 9.Qd1 (9...Nc6) 239
B11) 9...e5 240
B12) 9...Ne6 244
B2) 7...0-0 8.Be2 247
B21) 8...b6 248
B22) 8...d6 9.f3! (9...Nh5; 9...Qb6?!) 250
B221) 9...Nxd4 10.Bxd4 252
B2211) 10...a6 11.Qd2 Be6 12.Nd5! 252
12...Nd7 (12...b5N; 12...Nxd5) 252
12...Bxd5 Game 22 254
B2212) 10...Be6 257
B222) 9...Bd7 10.Qd2 260
B2221) 10...Qa5 261
B2222) 10...a6 262
B2223) 10...Nxd4 263
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6
This is the Accelerated Dragon. Compared with a normal Dragon, it has the advantage of allowing Black to play ...d7-d5 (without wasting a tempo on ...d6) in certain lines. The disadvantage is that it allows White to establish a clear space advantage with the following move.

5.c4
5.Nc3 is the main alternative and Negi's recommendation in 1.e4 vs. the Sicilian II, but it is not compatible with the set-up I am recommending against the Dragon.

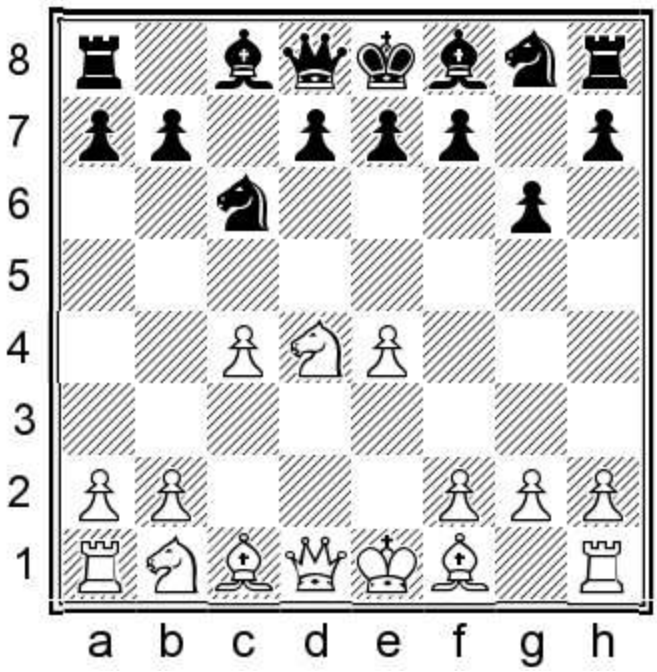
The text move introduces the Maroczy System, which is the main reason why Black's set-up is not more popular. (In other words, if 5.c4 wasn't a good move and everybody played 5.Nc3, then every Dragon player would favour the 'Accelerated' move order.) In most of the lines, White tends to get a small but lasting advantage. I was also attracted to a much more recent concept involving long castling in certain lines, which can be surprisingly effective in the right circumstances. If Black goes for simple development, we will aim for the following target position:

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By playing an early f2-f3 instead of 0-0, White keeps the option of castling on either side. We will continue the discussion of this position in variation B22; for now though, just keep it in mind as a memory marker, as it can arise via several different move orders.

Let’s return to our main tabiya of the chapter.

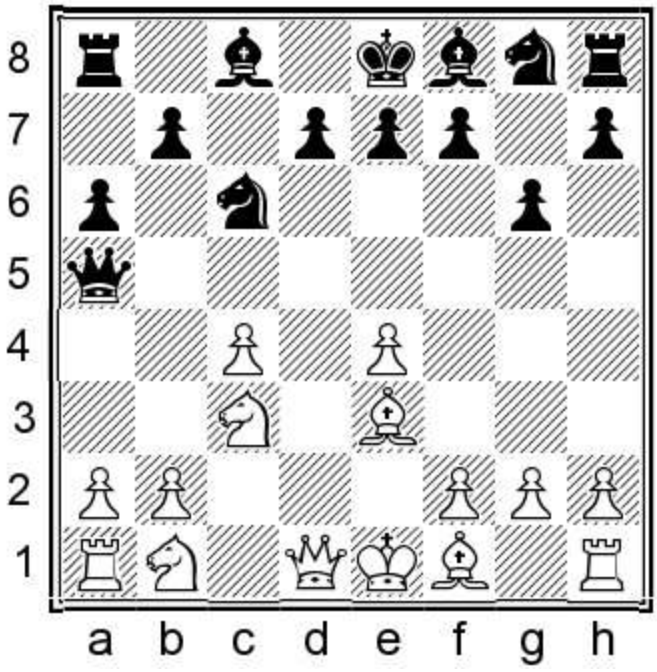


Black has two main options: A) 5...Nf6 and B) 5...Bg7. Each has its own pros, cons and unique possibilities. In both cases, we will aim for the target position noted above. First though, we will take a quick look at a few side-lines:

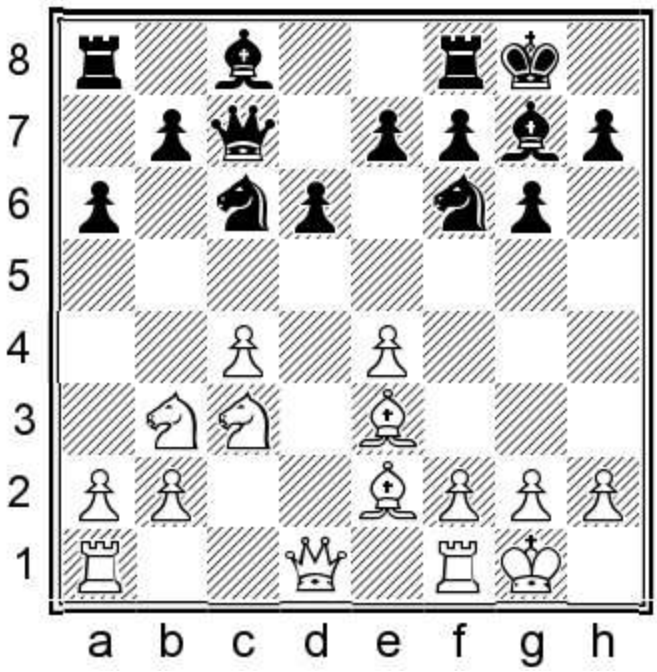
5...Qb6 6.Nb5 a6 7.Be3 Qa5† 8.N5c3 is an unusual sequence; Black wastes a few tempos with his queen and White wastes a few with his knight, but the end result tends to be fairly close to a normal Maroczy position. For

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example:



8...Nf6 (8...Bh6!? 9.Bxh6 Nxh6 10.Qd2 Ng4 occurred in Lenz – Bakre, Oberwart 2005, when 11.Nd5!?N 11... Qxd2† 12.Nxd2 Rb8 13.c5² would have been pleasant for White) 9.Nd2 Bg7 10.Be2 d6 11.0-0 0-0 12.Nb3 Qc7 In Holfelder – Krolla, Wiesbaden 1992, White could have obtained a pleasant advantage with:

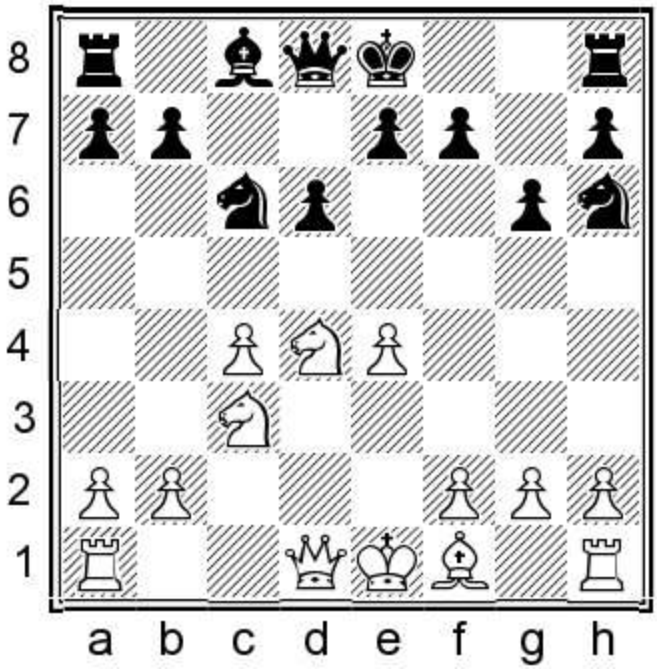


13.Nd5!?N 13...Qb8 (13...Qd8?! 14.Bb6 Qd7 15.f3±) 14.Qc2²

5...Bh6!? looks odd, but even Tiviakov has tried it out. There are certain variations of the Maroczy in which Black tends to benefit from an exchange of the dark-squared bishops, but here White can use it to his own advantage, especially with the help of a timely c4-c5 break. For instance: 6.Nc3 d6 (6...Bxc1 7.Rxc1 d6 8.c5!?N 8...dxc5 9.Nxc6 Qxd1† 10.Rxd1 bxc6 11.Na4²) 7.Bxh6 Nxh6 In Boxberg – Stuemer, Goch 2013, White could

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have obtained excellent chances with:



8.c5!?N 8...dxc5 9.Nxc6 bxc6 10.Qxd8† Kxd8 11.f3 f5 12.0-0-0† Kc7 13.Bc4²

A) 5...Nf6 6.Nc3 d6

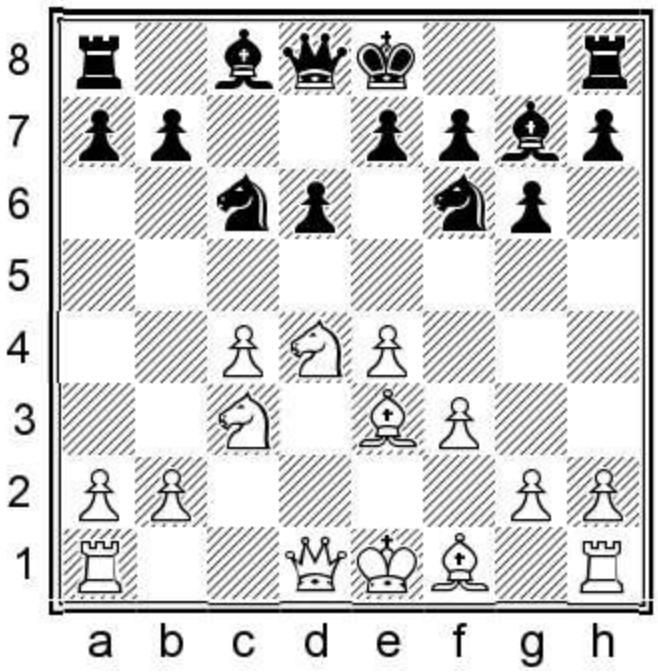
The rationale for this move order (instead of an early ...Bg7) is that Black wants to swap knights on d4 and force White to recapture with the queen rather than a bishop. White cannot really prevent this plan with 7.Be3, as 7...Ng4 would be awkward; that's why Black played ...d6 on the last move.

7.f3!
Recently this move order has become more popular, as Black has achieved good results after 7.Be2 Nxd4 8. Qxd4 Bg7 9.Be3 0-0 10.Qd2 a5! followed by ...a4. Unlike in variation A2 below, here White cannot block the pawn with Na4 because the e4-pawn will be left hanging.

7...Nxd4
Black continues with his plan.

7...Bg7 is a major alternative. 8.Be3 is obvious and good, but it is important for White to follow up correctly. I would like to emphasize two important details:

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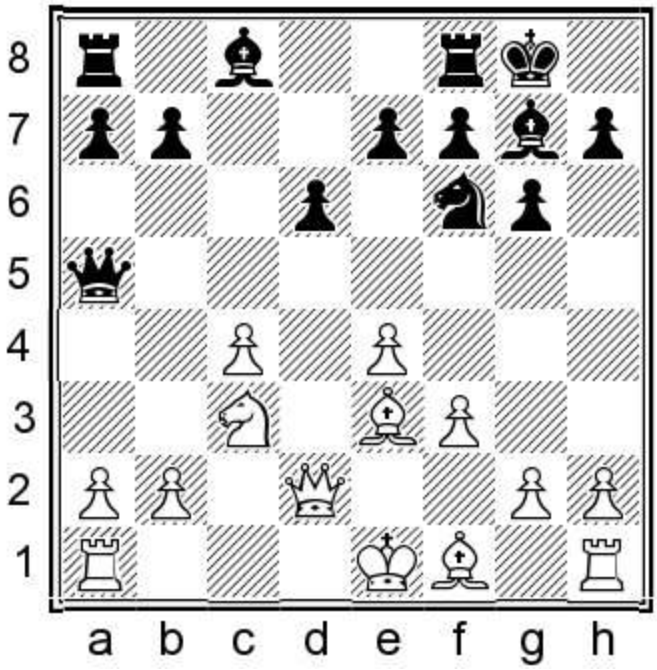
a) 8...Nxd4 should still be met by 9.Qxd4, transposing to our main line below. With the bishop already on e3, it may seem tempting to recapture with the bishop, but it's less accurate for reasons explained in the note below.
b) 8...0-0 should be met by 9.Be2!, reaching the target position identified on page 232, which will be covered later under the 5...Bg7 move order; see variation B22 on page 250.
It is important to understand that 9.Qd2?! would lead to a worse version of the main line below after 9...Nxd4! 10.Bxd4 Be6, followed by ...Qa5, ...Rfc8 and so on. The difference here is that White's dark-squared bishop sits on the unfavourable d4-square rather than e3, which is enough to reduce his advantage to zero. Whenever the knight moves from f6, White will either have to exchange bishops or waste time retreating to e3, either of which helps Black.

8.Qxd4 Bg7
Black carries out his plan. For the moment, Black is not threatening a discovered attack, as the g7-bishop is undefended. Obviously Black intends to castle on the next move, so White should be ready to retreat his queen once that happens.

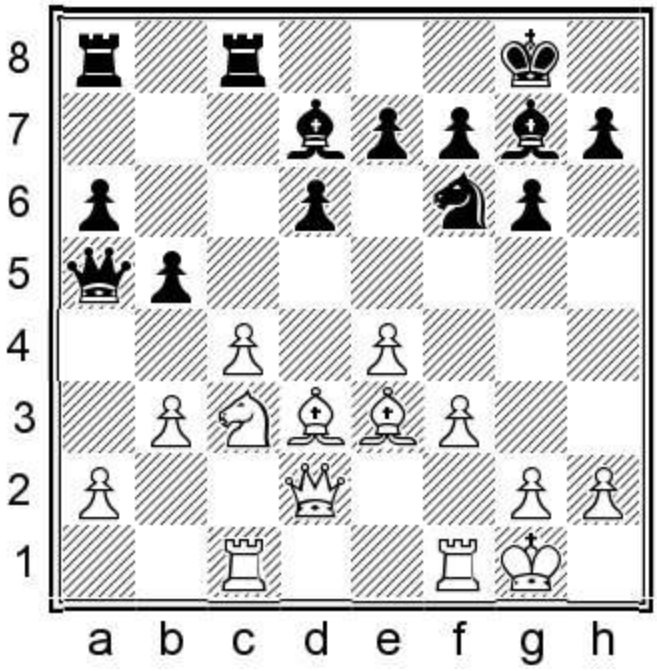
9.Be3 0-0 10.Qd2
Black's two most important options are A1) 10...Be6 and A2) 10...a5.

10...Qa5

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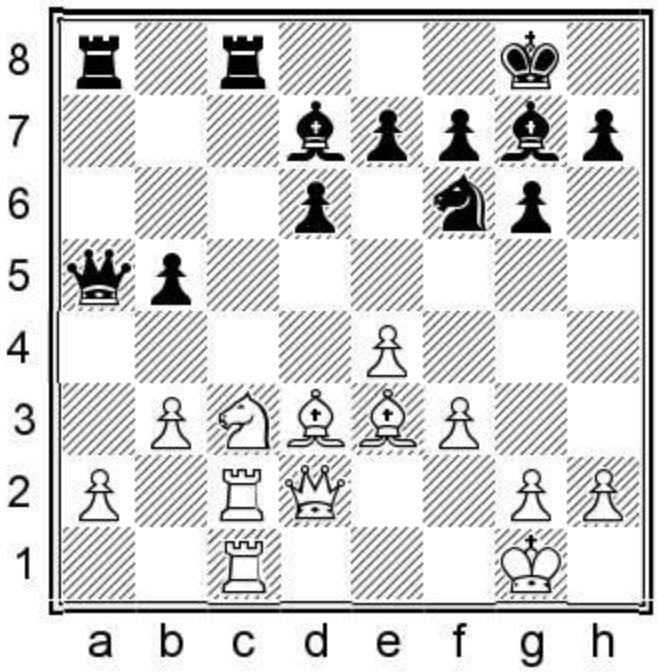


This is also quite popular, but it usually transposes to variation A1.
11.Rc1 a6
11...Be6 has been by far the most popular choice, leading straight to variation A1.
12.b3 Bd7
12...Be6 13.Bd3! transposes again.
13.Bd3 Rfc8 14.0-0 b5



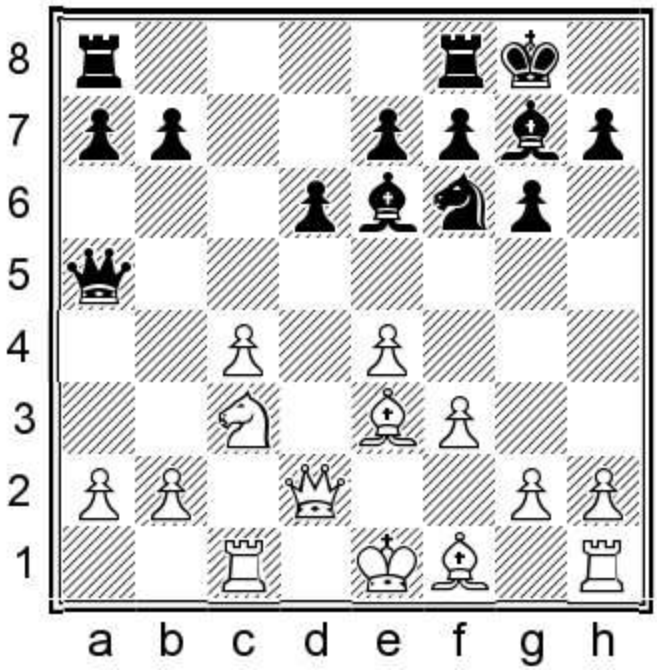
15.Rc2!²
Now we see the drawback of Black's choice of the d7-square for his bishop. True, it helped to support the ...b5 break, but White can safely ignore it, as exchanging on c4 would only help to activate White's light-squared bishop.
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15...Be6

This was Black's choice in the original game from this position. Now the threat of ...bxc4 forces White to react, but the loss of time with the bishop is an important detail.
15...b4 was tried in some later games, but 16.Nd5 and 16.Ne2 both favour White; the choice is a matter of taste.
16.cxb5 axb5 17.Rfc1 Bd7



Black has spent several tempos moving his bishop back and forth, but he probably thought it was worth it due to the improvement in his structure. However, he was in for an unpleasant surprise.
18.Nxb5!! Rxc2 19.Rxc2 Bxb5 20.Rc8† Rxc8 21.Qxa5 Bxd3 22.b4±
Normally a rook and two minor pieces would be more than a match for a queen, but White's passed pawns on the queenside tip the balance in his favour, and he soon won in Portisch – Gheorghiu, Siegen (ol) 1970.

A1) 10...Be6 11.Rc1 Qa5



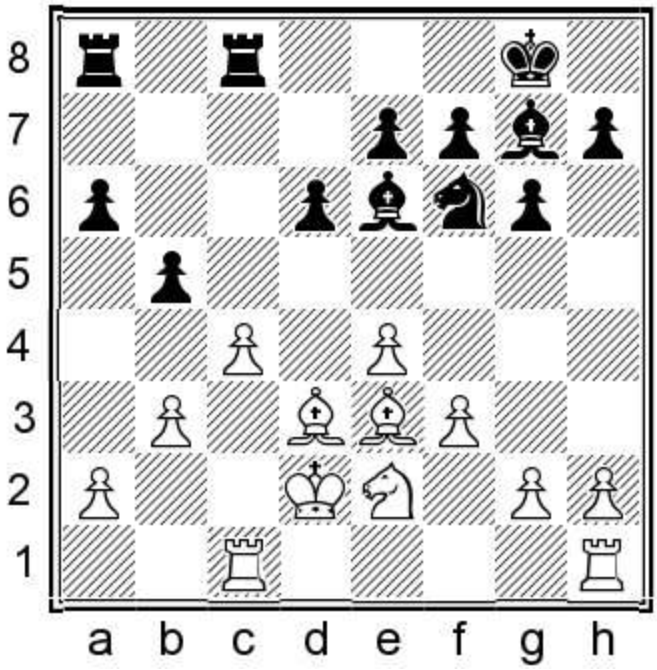
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Black sets in motion a thematic plan of ...Rfc8, ...a6 and ...b5, but White is well placed to meet it here.

12.Bd3!
12.Nd5 is a decent alternative, when 12...Qxa2! 13.Nxe7† Kh8 is the key line. The theory runs quite deep, and the general picture is that Black is under some pressure but can probably hold with good defence. I prefer the text move, as it avoids any long theoretical lines while still posing quite a lot of problems for Black. Peter Lalic does not consider this possibility in Play the Accelerated Dragon.

12...Rfc8 13.b3 a6 14.Ne2!
Now we see the advantage of developing the bishop on d3 instead of e2. The knight is heading for either f4 or d4, depending on circumstances.

14...Qxd2† 15.Kxd2 b5
15...Nd7 16.Nf4 Nc5 17.Be2 (17.g4!?N also looks promising) 17...a5 18.h4² gave White an enduring edge in Kasparov – Kasimdzhanov, Batumi 2001.

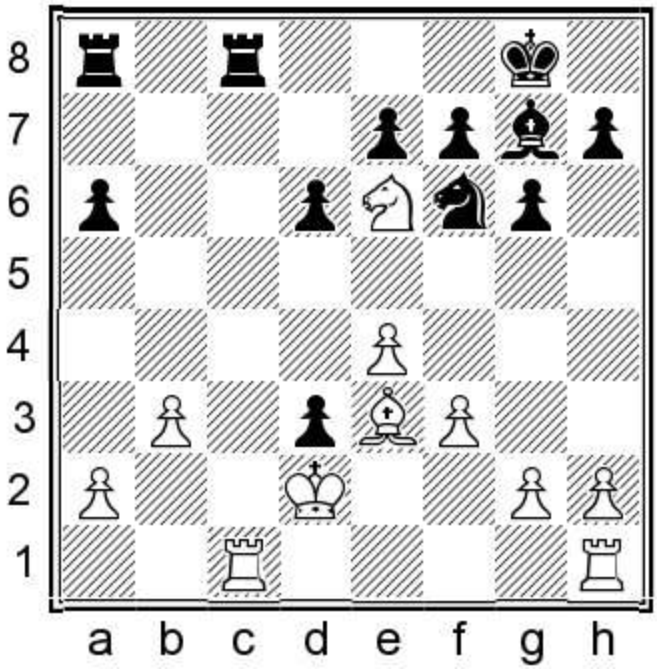



16.Nd4 bxc4?
Black has committed this mistake in two games so far.

16...Bd7N was better, although White retains the better chances after: 17.cxb5 (17.Rhd1!? is also decent) 17...axb5 18.Rxc8† Bxc8 19.Rc1! Rxa2† 20.Rc2 Rxc2† 21.Kxc2² White will restore material equality by picking up the b-pawn (bearing in mind that 21...b4 can be met by 22.Nc6). In the resulting endgame, he will have some winning chances due to his passed b-pawn and more active king.

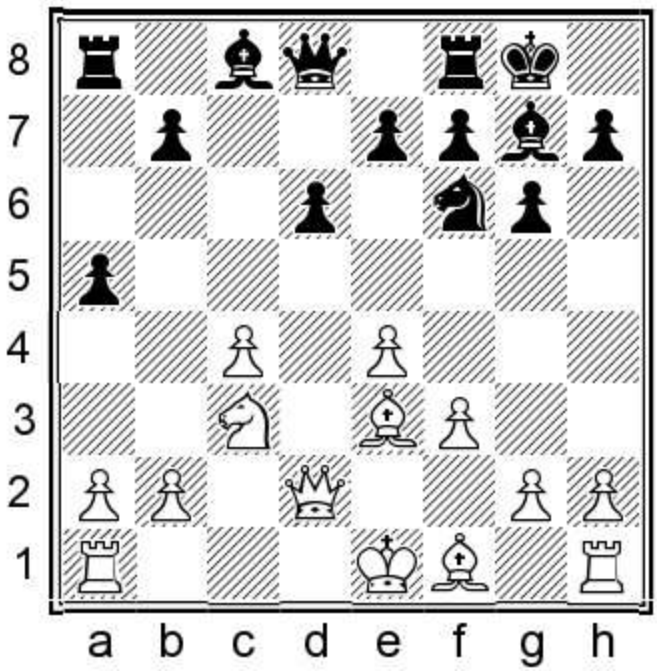
17.Nxe6 cxd3
17...fxe6 18.Rxc4 gave White a clear advantage due to his bishop pair and potential for a passed pawn on the queenside in Vasiesiu – Ursan, Cap Aurora 2017.
In Mareco – Garnier, Esperanza 2003, White missed a good opportunity:

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18.Nc7!N 18...Rab8 19.Nxa6 Ra8 20.Rxc8† Rxc8 21.Rc1 Ra8 22.Nb4+–
Winning a pawn and, most likely, the game.

A2) 10...a5

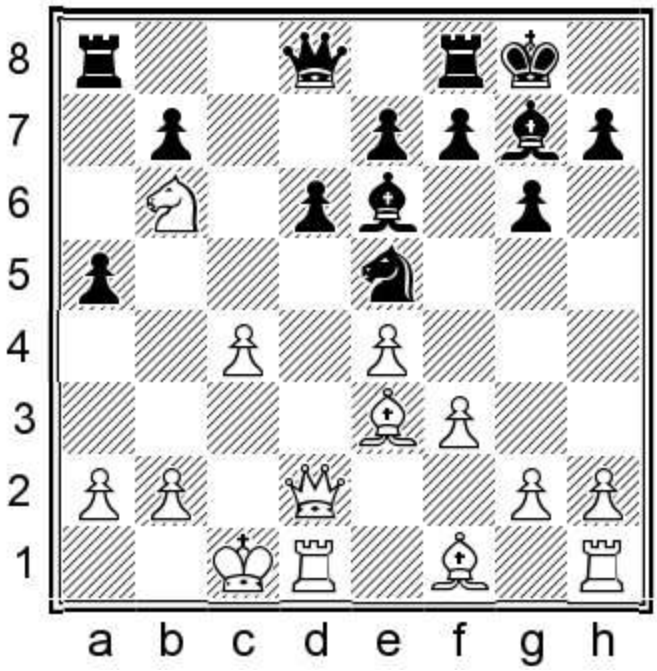


This has been a popular choice, intending ...a4 and ...Qa5 with counterplay. My colleague Andrew Greet recommended this approach in his 2008 book Starting Out: The Accelerated Dragon, and showed that Black has good prospects against White's two most popular continuations, namely 11.Be2 and 11.b3. However, he did not take the following idea into account.

11.Na4!
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This is a pretty modern invention, having first been played in 2006. It has become more popular in the past five

years or so, and White's results have been excellent. The knight blocks the a-pawn and takes aim at the weakened b6-square.

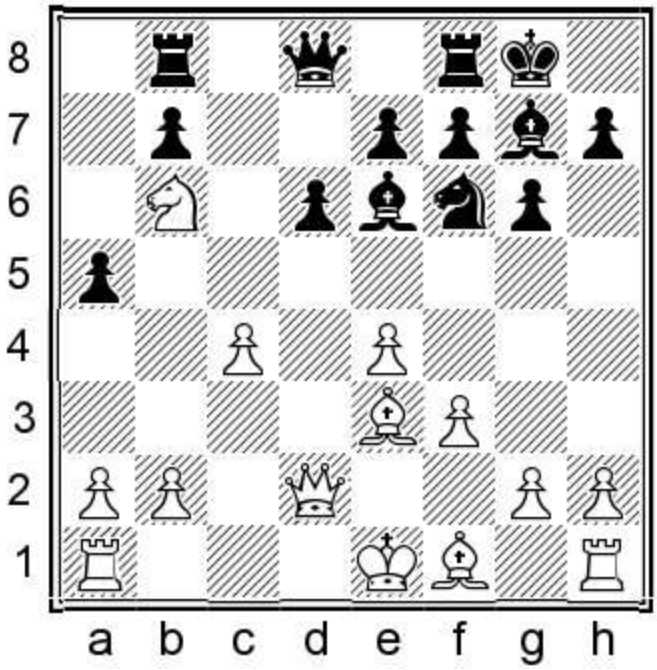
11...Be6
11...Nd7 has been played in lots of games but the surprising 12.0-0-0! is an excellent reply. Funnily enough, this happened in the very first game in which White's 11th move was played; but despite White's convincing win in that game, the plan of long castling in this position has never been repeated. 12...Ne5 (12...b6N is a possible attempt to improve but 13.h4 h5 14.Kb1 offers White good attacking prospects; I can't see where Black's counterplay is coming from.) 13.Nb6 Be6




14.Kb1!? (14.Nxa8 Qxa8± leaves Black with insufficient compensation for the exchange, but White prefers to keep his strong knight and play for an attack) 14...a4 15.a3 Qc7 16.Rc1 Nc6 17.h4 Na5 18.Rc2 Nb3 19.Qf2 Ra5 20.Nd5 Bxd5 21.exd5± White was ready to press on with his kingside attack in Van den Doel – Hendriks, Netherlands 2006.

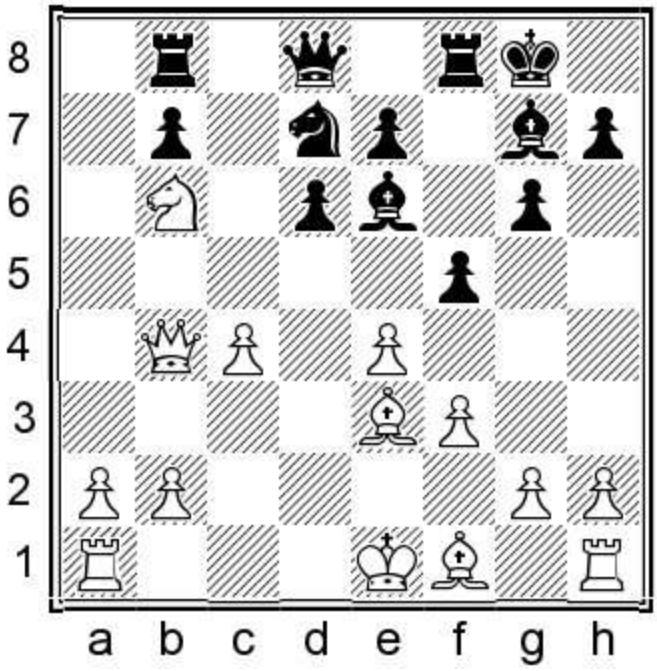
12.Nb6 Rb8

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13.Qxa5
13.Be2!?N 13...Nd7 14.Nd5 Nc5 15.0-0² is a safe route to a positional edge, but taking the pawn is more ambitious.

13...Nd7 14.Qb4 f5
Here I found a useful improvement over two existing games.



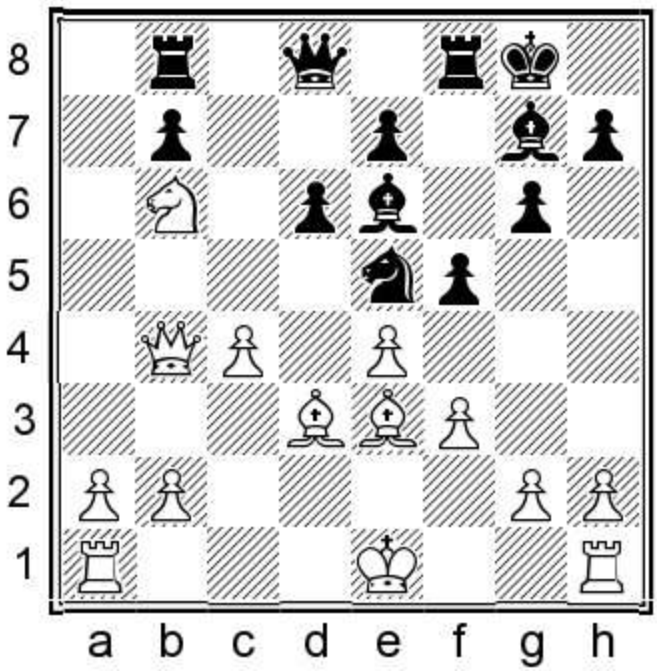
15.Bd3!N
After 15.Nxd7 Qxd7 16.Bd3 fxe4 17.fxe4 White went on to win in Cheparinov – Vachier-Lagrave, Porto Carras 2011, but Black had reasonable compensation for the pawn at this stage.

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15.exf5 Rxf5 also gave Black counterplay in Gong – Dewi, Tashkent 2016. I wondered if White could improve

with 16.Be2N, but found that 16...Re5 17.Nxd7 Bxd7 18.Qd2 Qa5 19.a3 Qxd2† 20.Kxd2 Ra5© offers Black enough activity for the pawn.

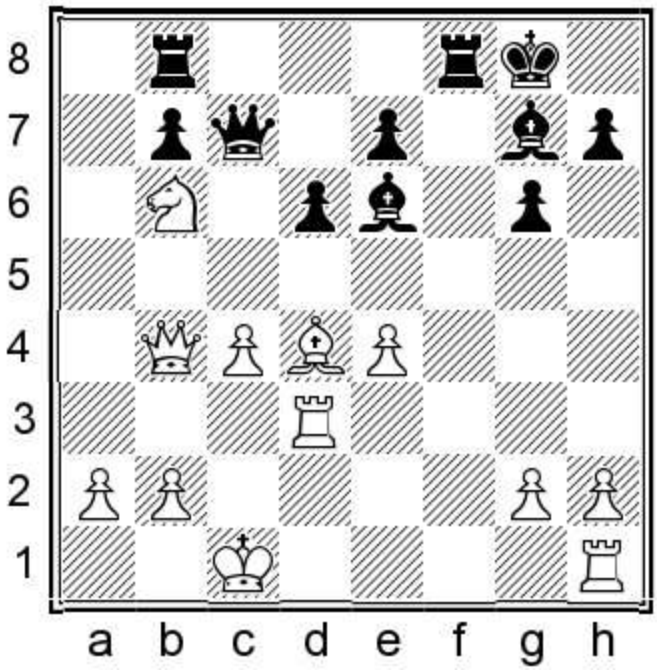
15...Ne5



16.0-0-0!
Once again, queenside castling proves a useful option.

16.Bc2 f4 17.Bf2 Nc6 18.Qd2 Bxb2 19.Rb1 Be5 20.0-0 g5 offers Black decent prospects on the kingside.

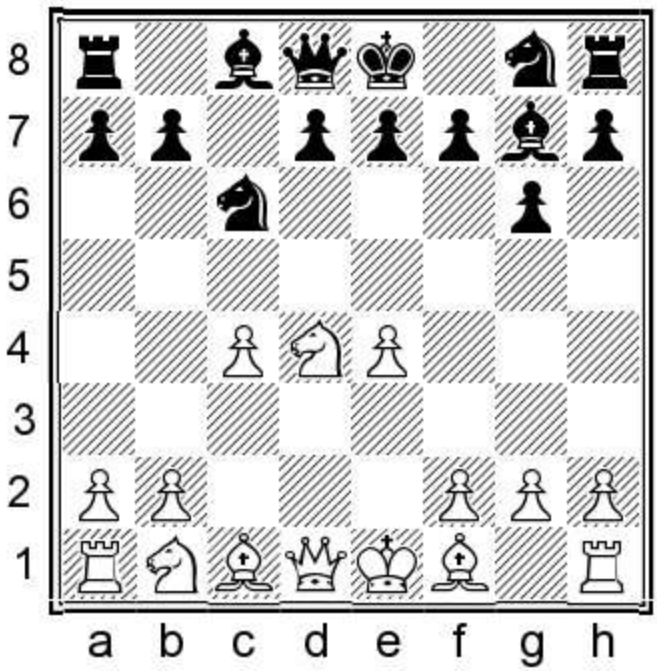
16...Nxd3† 17.Rxd3 fxe4 18.fxe4 Qc7 19.Bd4!?
19.Kb1² is also good.



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19...Bxd4 20.Rxd4 Rf2 21.Rd2 Rbf8 22.Re1±
Black's counterplay is not enough, as it is hard for him to get his queen involved in the action. White has good chances to convert his extra pawn.

B) 5...Bg7

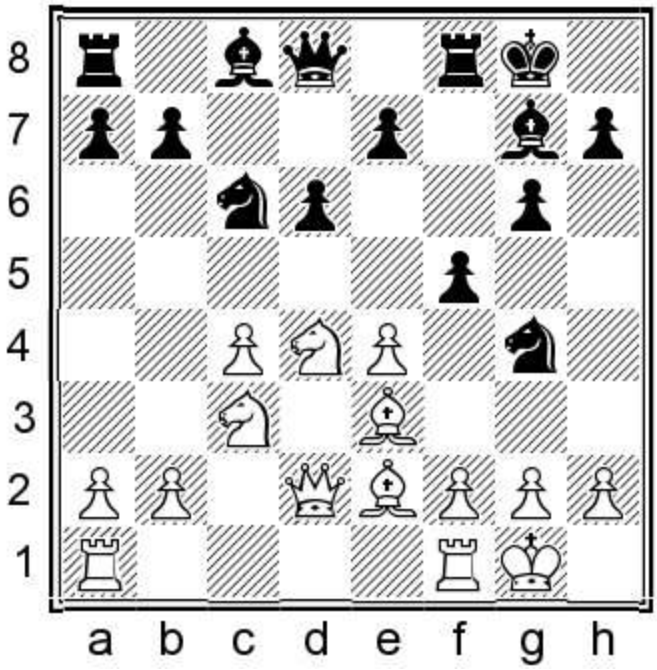


This has been a more frequent choice than the previous line, although the two moves can transpose. Once again, we will head for the target position identified on page 232.

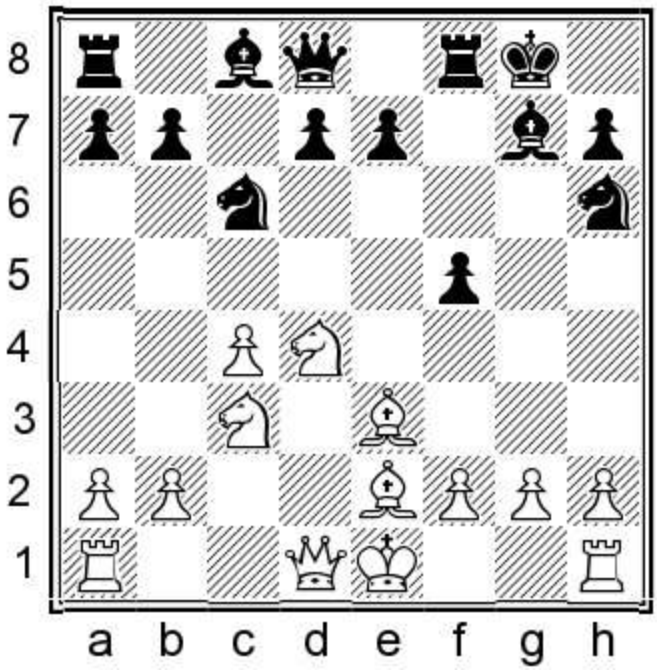
6.Be3 Nf6
Black almost always develops the knight to this square, either immediately or after 6...d6.

A quirky alternative is:
6...Nh6
The idea of this move is to go for counterplay with ...f5, but Black takes quite a risk in opening up his kingside.
7.Nc3 0-0
7...Ng4 is an unusual way of getting to variation B1 below.
8.Be2 f5
Black can also delay this advance until the next move with: 8...d6 9.0-0 f5 10.Qd2 Ng4 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 e5 does not trap the bishop on account of 12.Be3 f4 13.Qd5† Nf7 14.Bd2², as seen in Fabiani – Aleshnia, email 2000; 10...Nf7 11.exf5 gxf5 12.f4² also favoured White in Ponomariov – Kassimski, Dagomys 2004)

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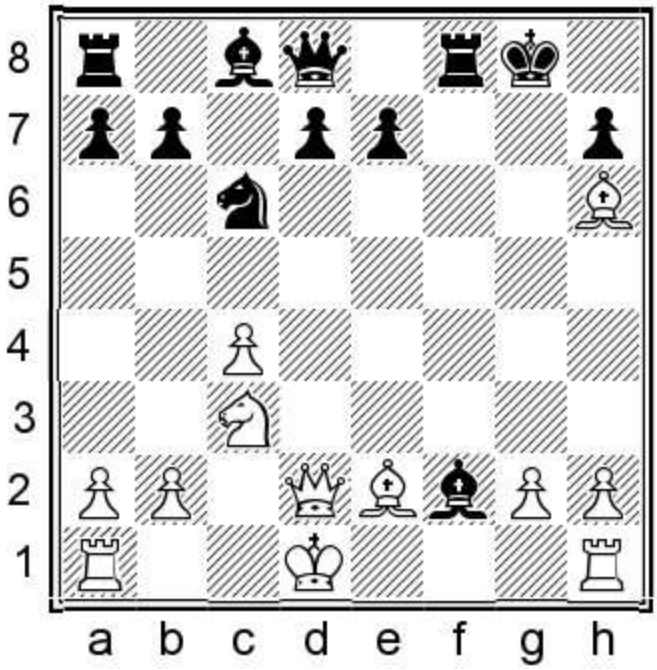
11.Bxg4 fxg4 12.Nd5² White's minor pieces are well centralized and he was ready to improve the rooks next in Broyles – Nett, email 2007.
9.exf5
9.Qd2? f4 10.Bxf4 Bxd4 11.Bxh6 Bxf2† 12.Kd1 Rf7÷
9...gxf5
This position was reached in Yermolinsky – Chepukaitis, Leningrad 1980, and several subsequent games. I found a new and surprising way for White to seize the advantage:



10.Qd2!N 10...f4
10...Ng4 11.Nxf5! Nxe3 12.Nxe3± is a safe extra pawn.
11.Bxf4 Bxd4 12.Bxh6 Bxf2†
12...Rxf2 leaves Black's pieces too unstable after: 13.Nb5! Rf6 14.Nxd4 Nxd4 15.Qg5† Rg6 16.Qd5† e6 17.

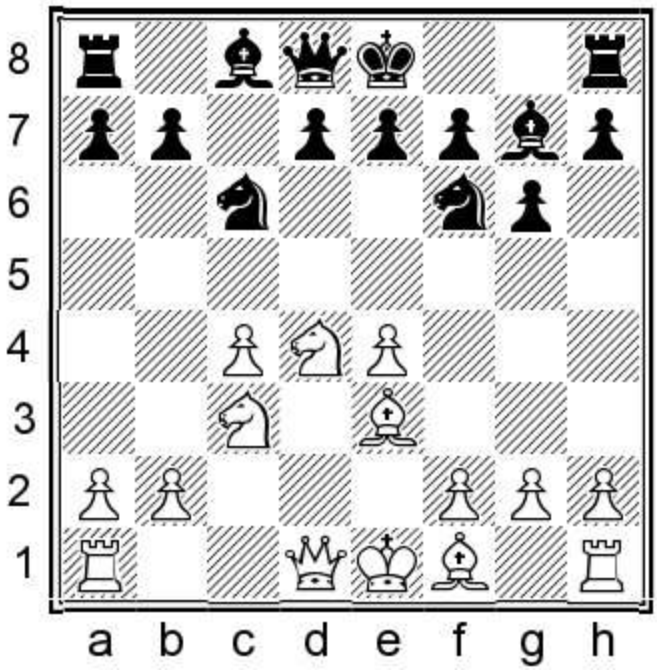
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Qxd4 Rxh6 Black avoided losing material but 18.0-0+– still leaves him in a hopeless position.
13.Kd1
White may have lost the right to castle, but Black's king is much more exposed.



13...Bd4
Both 13...Rf7 14.Bh5+– and 13...Rf6 14.Ne4+– are hopeless for Black.
14.Qg5† Kh8 15.Bxf8 Qxf8 16.Rf1+–
Black is the exchange down and will probably have to exchange queens, leading to a lost endgame.

7.Nc3



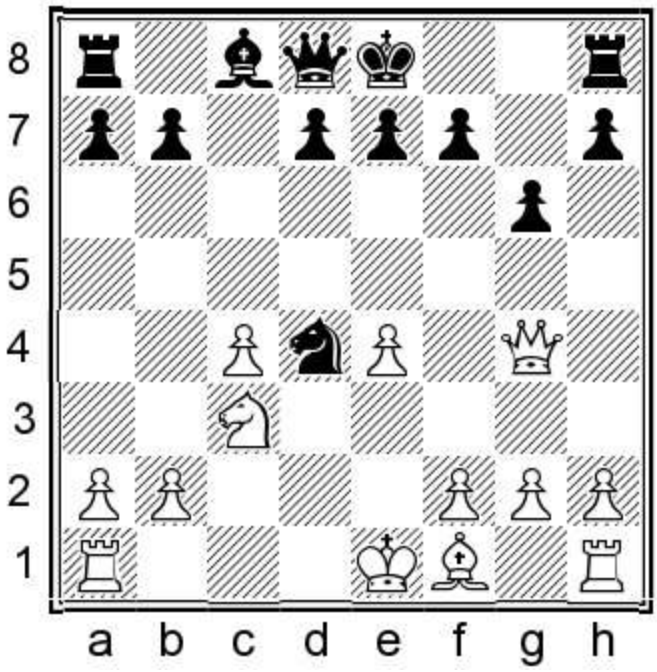
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We have reached an important junction, where B1) 7...Ng4 is a significant alternative to B2) 7...0-0. Both of

these moves are covered from Black's perspective by IM Panjwani in his recent book The Hyper Accelerated Dragon.

7...d6 gives White a choice. 8.f3 is one good option, transposing to the note to Black's 7th move in variation A. There is also nothing wrong with 8.Be2, when it is hard to believe that Black has anything better than 8...0-0, which transposes to the later variation B22.

B1) 7...Ng4 8.Qxg4 Nxd4

8...Bxd4? 9.Bxd4 Nxd4 is well known to be dodgy for Black after:

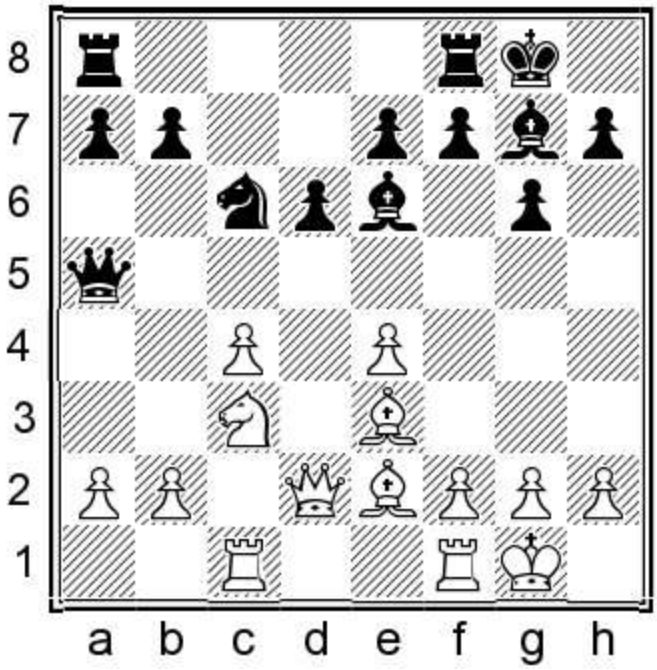


10.0-0-0! e5 11.Qg3 d6 12.f4! This is an attempt at a direct refutation. (12.Ne2 Nxe2† 13.Bxe2² was a simple route to an edge in Levin – Pajeken, Hamburg 2001) 12...f6 13.f5 Kf7 (13...gxf5? 14.Qg7 Rf8 15.Nd5 gives White a huge attack) 14.Ne2 White has excellent attacking chances and has achieved a heavy plus score from here.

9.Qd1
Here Black has two main tries: B11) 9...e5 and B12) 9...Ne6.

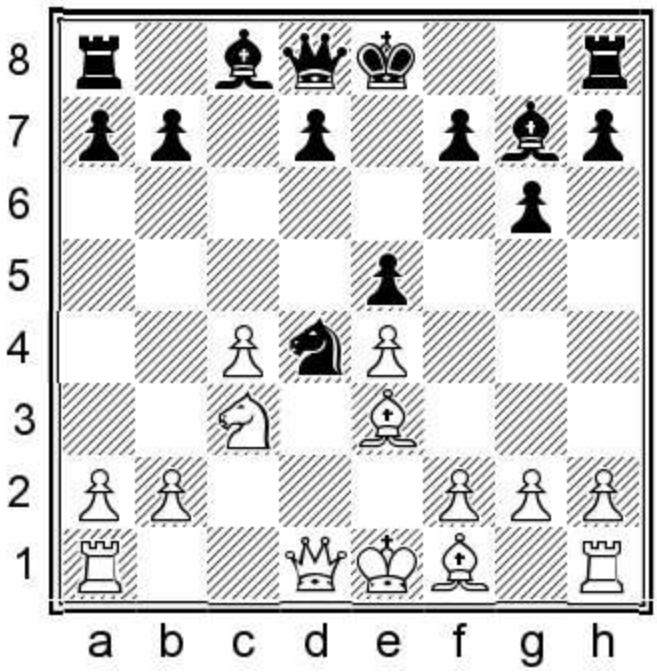
9...Nc6 is playable but rather passive. 10.Be2 0-0 11.0-0 d6 12.Qd2 Be6 13.Rac1 Qa5

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14.b3 (14.Rfd1 is also good, for instance: 14...Rac8 15.b3 f5 16.exf5 Qxf5 17.Bf3 b6 18.Nb5 Ne5 19.Bb7±) 14...a6 15.f4 f5 16.Bf3 Kh8 17.exf5 gxf5 18.Rfe1 Bf7 19.Kh1 e5 20.Bxc6 bxc6 21.Qxd6± Roiz – Cmilyte, Helsingor 2008.

B11) 9...e5



This move is recommended by Panjwani.

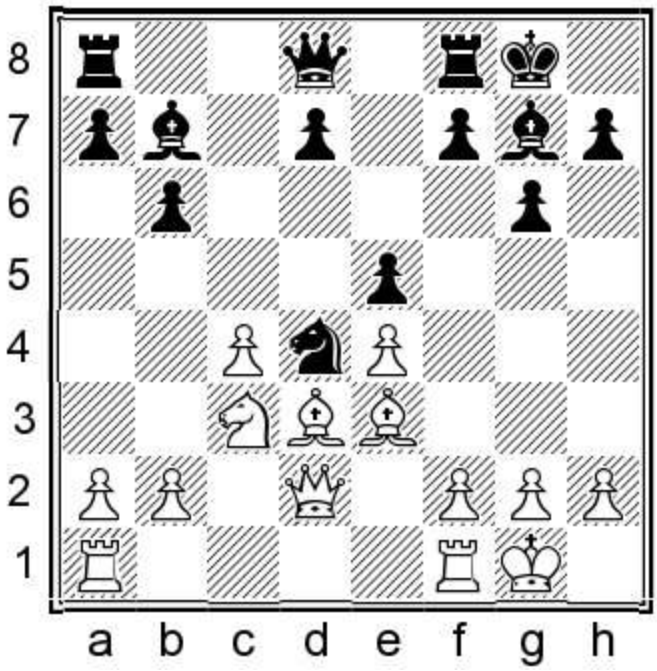
10.Bd3
I favour a simple plan of development with 0-0, Qd2 and bringing at least one rook into the centre. According to circumstances, White can either challenge the enemy knight with Nb5 or Ne2, or plonk his own knight on d5.

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10...0-0 11.0-0 d6
This is the most natural choice, opening a path for the c8-bishop. I also investigated a couple of other tries:

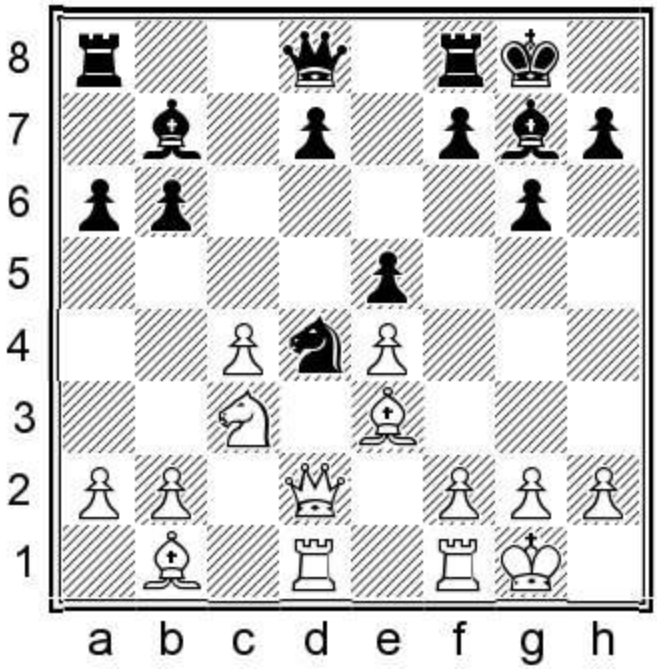
11...a6 12.Rc1 d6 13.Qd2 Be6 is covered on page 242 – see the note on 13...a6.

Black has also tried a double fianchetto development;
11...b6 12.Qd2
12.Rc1 Bb7 13.Qd2 is also possible.
12...Bb7

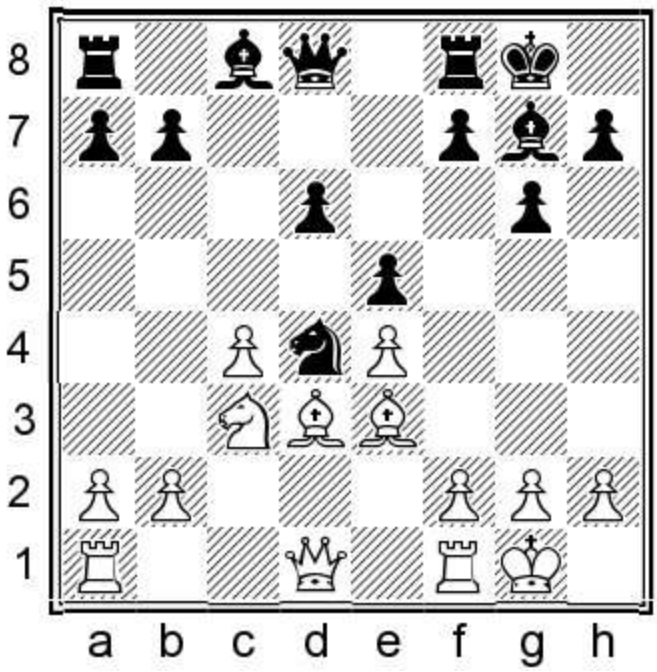


13.Rad1!?
The familiar plan of 13.Rac1 followed by Rfd1 and Ne2 is also possible.
Greet's suggestion of 13.f3 a6 14.Ne2 b5 15.cxb5 axb5 16.Nxd4 exd4 17.Bh6 is also reasonable.
The justification for moving the queen's rook to d1 is that there is no real pressure against the c4-pawn now that Black's bishop has gone to b7 rather than e6, which means the rook is not really needed on c1. White's plan from here will be to drop his bishop back to b1, after which he will be able to think about Bxd4 and Ne2, winning the d4-pawn.
13...a6
13...Ne6 14.Bb1 Bc6 15.b4 Rc8 16.a3 Rc7 17.Ba2$f$ was good for White in Smyslov – Bagirov, Leningrad 1960.
I also considered 13...f5!?N 14.exf5 Qh4!? but 15.f3! gxf5 16.Ne2 is a good answer. The bishop drops back to f2 and Black's attack runs out of steam.
14.Bb1

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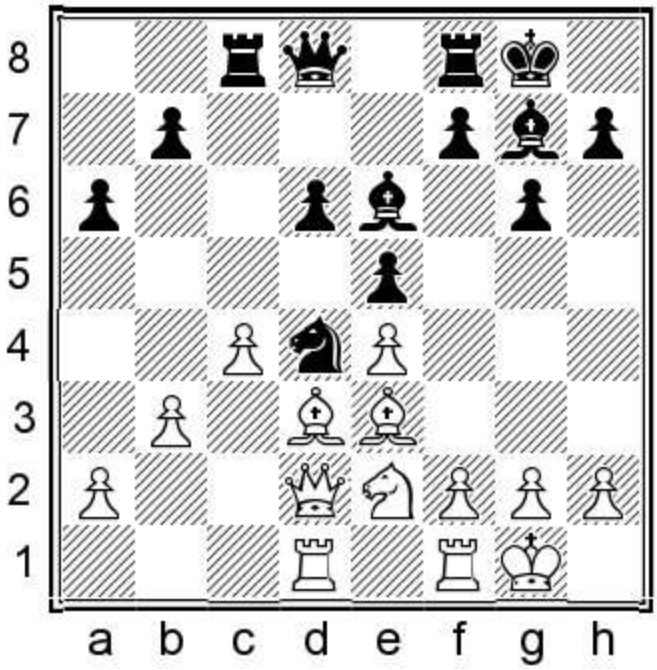


14...Rc8
14...d6? allows White to carry out his plan: 15.Bxd4 exd4 16.Ne2 Qc7 17.b3 Rae8 18.f3 f5 19.exf5±
14...Re8 is a reasonable try, but 15.f4! d6 16.Qf2 Rf8 17.f5, shows another advantage to leaving a rook on f1.
15.b3 b5 16.Bd3!
White keeps the better chances, as Psakhis points out.

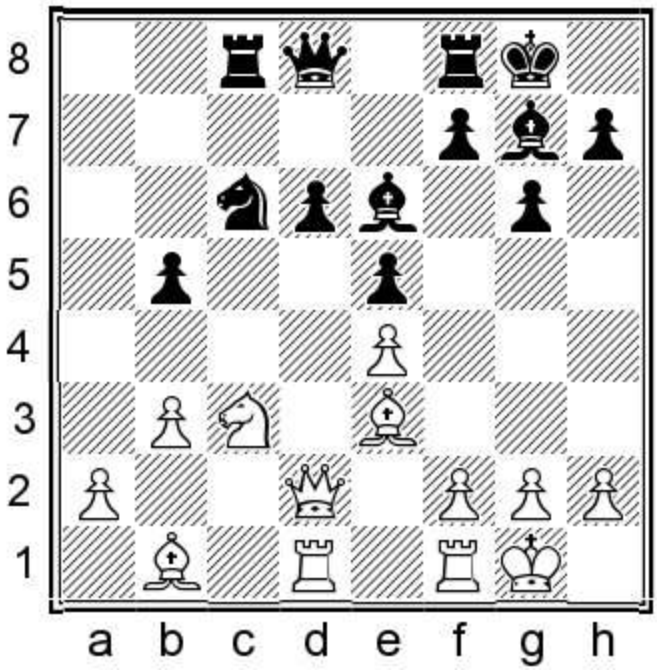


12.Rc1
White can also consider:
12.Qd2 Be6 13.Rad1!?
The plan involving Rad1 and Bb1 is not quite as strong here as it is after ...b6, because Black can still prepare ...b7-b5. Nevertheless, White still does well in the following line:
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13...a6

Otherwise White may soon be tempted to try Bxd4 followed by Nb5; besides, Black needs this move to prepare ...b5.
14.b3 Rc8 15.Ne2



15...Nc6
15...b5 is awarded a '!' Panjwani but I'm not convinced. 16.cxb5 (Panjwani mainly focuses on 16.Bxd4 bxc4 17.Bxc4 Bxc4 18.Be3 Be6 19.Qxd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6 Rc2 when Black has enough compensation to hold) 16... Nxb5 This position was reached in Toropov – Vakhlamov, Moscow 2007. Panjwani covers this in a brief note, saying Black has counterplay. However, after 17.Qb4N² Black is under pressure on the queenside. His knight is oddly placed and the pawns on a6 and d6 are weak.
16.Bb1 b5 17.cxb5 axb5 18.Nc3

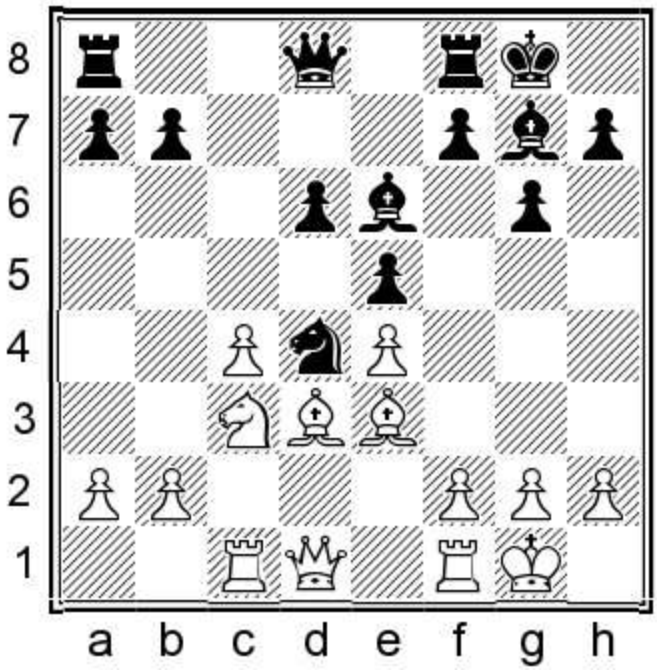


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18...Qa5 19.Nd5 b4 20.Bg5 f6 21.Be3 f5
All this happened in Polugaevsky – Piket, Aruba 1994. Some older theoretical sources favoured Black's dynamic counterplay but modern engines show that this is not the case after:
22.Bb6!N
Followed by Nc7, and White wins material for insufficient compensation.

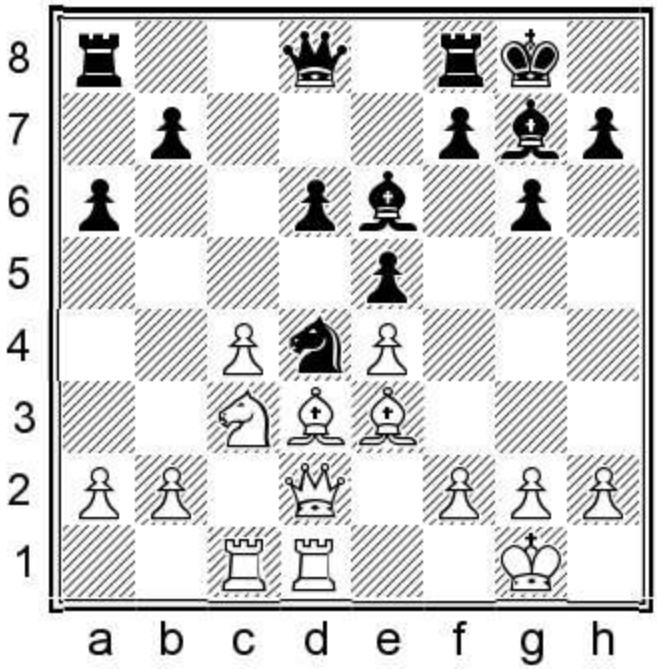
12...Be6
For the moment, Black should improve his pieces without doing anything too committal.

12...f5 creates weaknesses, and 13.exf5 gxf5 14.f4!? leaves Black positionally worse.

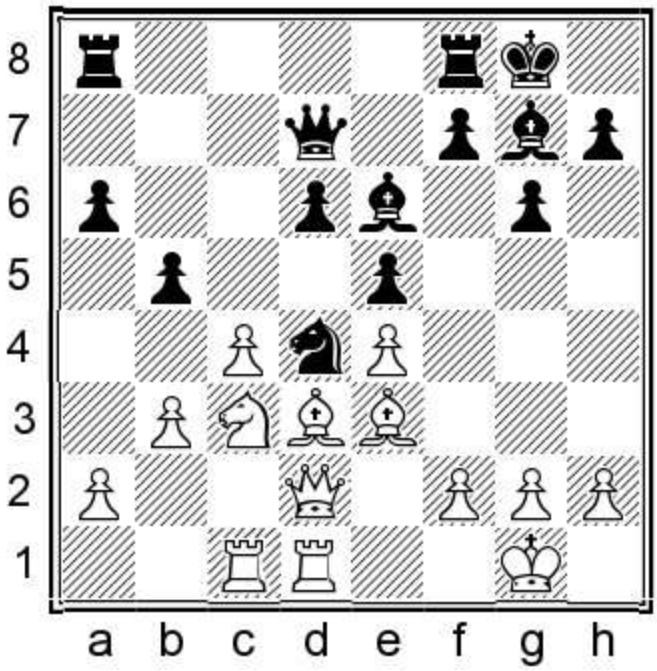



13.Qd2 Rc8
I also considered:
13...a6
This does not change much, and White has more than one promising continuation.
14.Rfd1
Or 14.b3 with a split:
a) 14...Rb8 15.Rfd1 Qh4 16.Ne2 was better for White in S. Foisor – Congiu, Herceg Novi 2005.
b) 14...Qa5 15.Nd5 (15.Qb2!? is a good alternative which resembles our bolded main line) 15...Qxd2 16.Bxd2 Bxd5 17.cxd5 Rfc8 18.Bb4 Bf8 19.f3 f5 20.Kf2² Saravanan – Turner, Scarborough 1999. This type of endgame offers White a risk-free edge thanks to his bishop pair and space advantage. Black's knight occupies a nice outpost, but it can't really do anything and White can swap it off if and when he feels like it.

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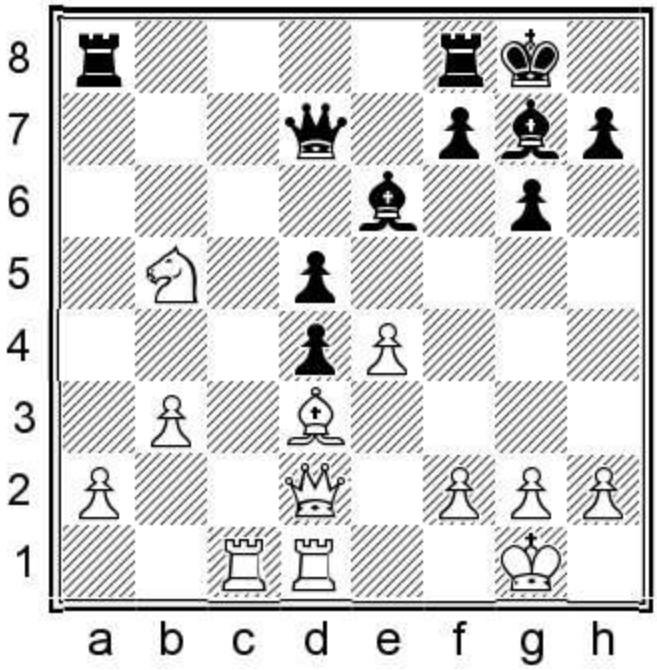


Having developed all his pieces on good squares, White is ready to follow up with Ne2.
14...Qd7
14...Bg4!? can be met by 15.Ne2!² (but not 15.f3? Bxf3!µ) intending h2-h3, when any subsequent exchanges on e2 will benefit White.
15.b3!?²
15.Ne2 b5 16.Nxd4 exd4 17.Bh6 Bxh6 18.Qxh6² is a good alternative.
The text move was played in Ivanchuk – Bogdanovich, Odessa 2006. White keeps a slight advantage, in view of the following line:
15...b5?

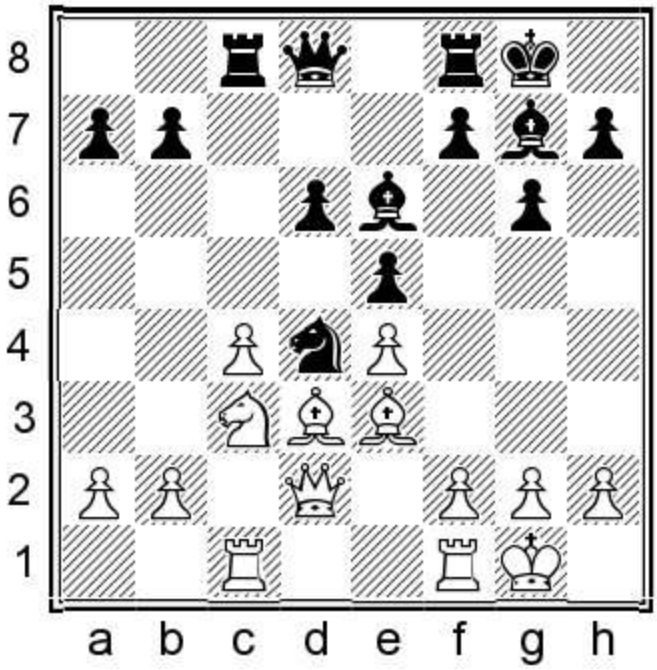


The is the move Black would like to play, but it doesn't work.
16.cxb5 axb5 17.Bxd4 exd4 18.Nxb5 d5

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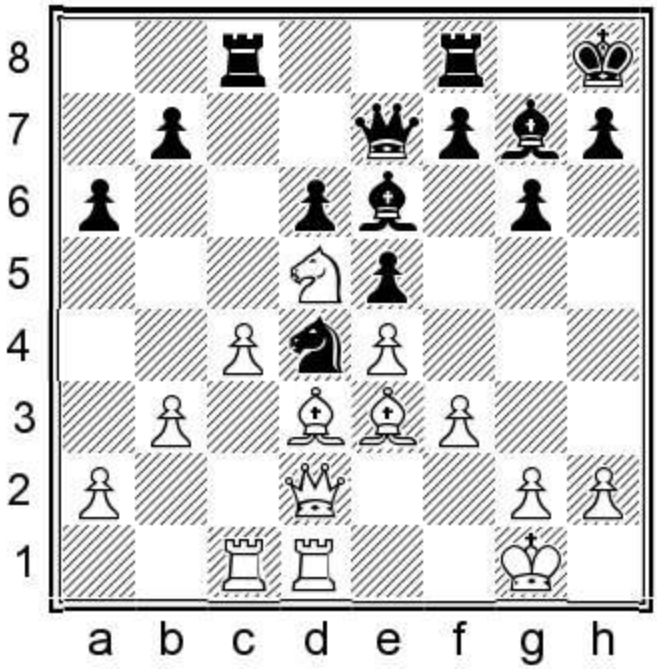
19.Nc7!
Black has no compensation for the material deficit.



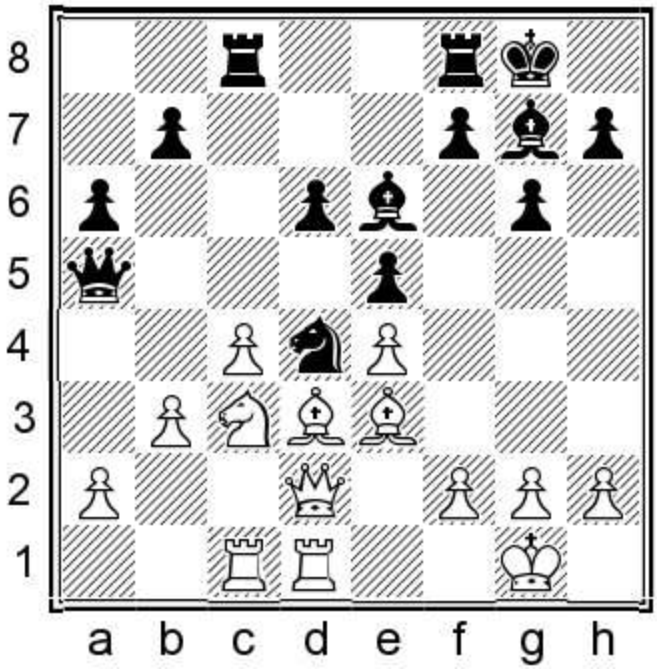
14.b3 a6 15.Rfd1
As far as I can see, this move is not covered in Panjwani's book, although I may have overlooked it amid the jungle of variations and different move orders.
With that being said, the exact move order doesn't matter too much. In most of the lines we are looking at, White goes for pretty much the same set-up, with queen on d2 and rooks on d1 and c1, followed by either Nd5 or Ne2 at a suitable moment, offering good chances of an edge regardless of what Black does.

15...Qa5
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Black has also tried: 15...Qe7 16.f3 Kh8 17.Nd5 (17.Ne2!?N 17...Nc6 18.Bb1 is a possible improvement which

also favours White)

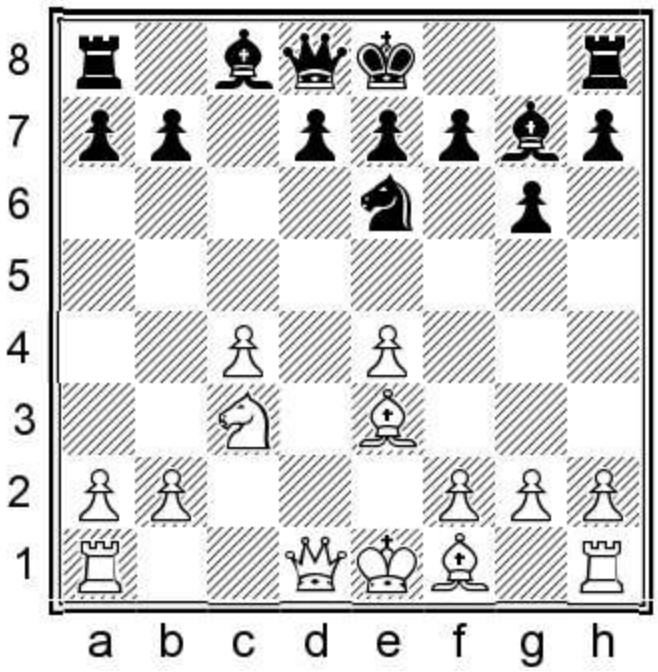


17...Bxd5 18.cxd5 h5 This occurred in Dizdar – Smirin, Dresden 1998, when 19.Qb4N² would have maintained an edge for White.



16.Qb2!?²
White kept the better chances in Felgaer – Stokke, Pula 2010. His last move is the most ambitious option, which prepares either Nd5 or Ne2 without allowing a queen exchange.
A decent alternative is 16.Nd5 Qxd2 17.Bxd2 Rfe8, as seen in Psakhis – Berkovich, Israel 2002, when 18. Bb4!?N² would be my choice. The position resembles the Saravanan – Turner game, and may appeal to technically minded players.
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B12) 9...Ne6

This has been the most popular choice, and is a good deal more enterprising than retreating to c6.



10.Rc1!
It is important to realize that 10.Be2? is a mistake due to 10...Bxc3†! 11.bxc3 d6, when Black has excellent chances to exploit White's ruined pawn structure.

10.Qd2 is less accurate than the text move because 10...Qa5 virtually forces 11.Rc1 anyway. Therefore White should make the rook move first in order to keep some other options open for his queen.

10...Qa5
This is Black's most interesting way of handling the position. The main point of the queen move is to support a dark-squared strategy with ...g5, making full use of the knight on e6. Other moves are easier to deal with:

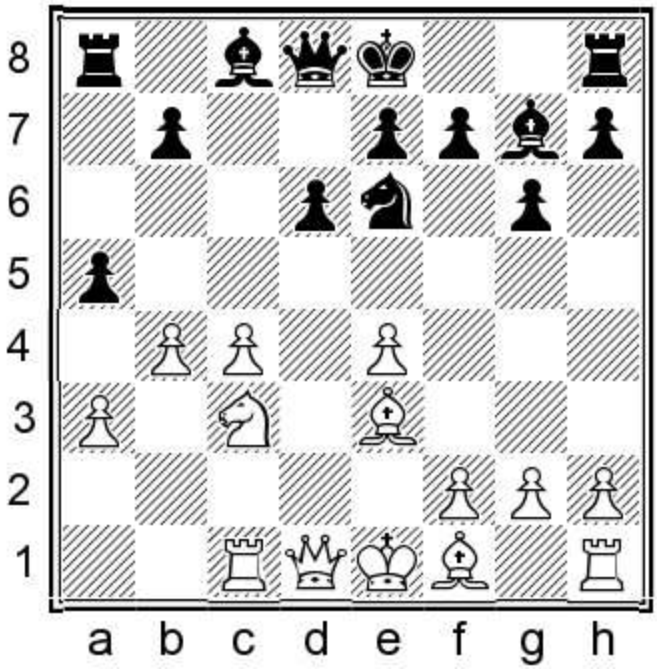
10...a5? is a thematic move but it is poorly timed here, as 11.c5! gives White a powerful grip on the queenside.

10...0-0 gives White a pleasant choice between 11.b4 and 11.Bd3, with similar ideas (and a possible transposition) to the next two lines below.

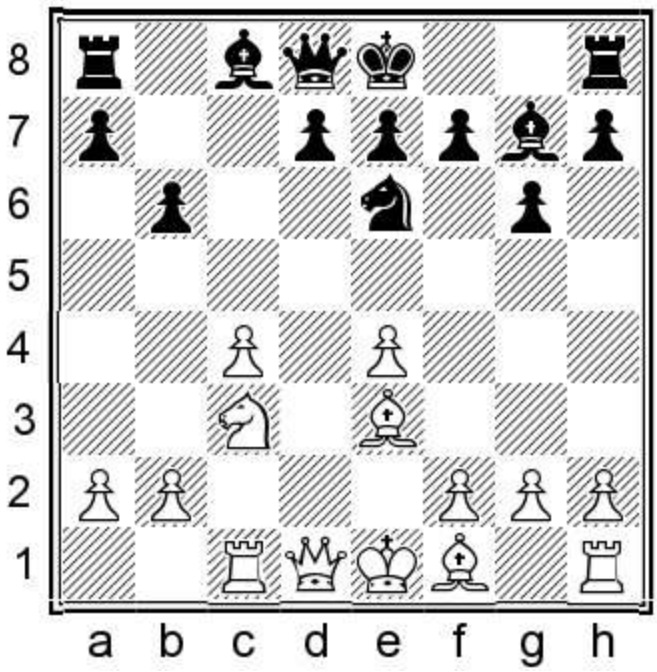
10...d6
White can meet this move ambitiously with:
11.b4!?
The point of this move is to deprive Black's knight of the c5-square.
11.Be2 has been the most common continuation, and should lead to a slight edge after something like 11...0-0 12.0-0 a5 13.b3 Bd7 14.Qd2 Bc6 15.f3 Nc5 16.Rc2 Qb6 17.Rb1 Rfc8 18.Bf1 Qd8 19.a3 b6 20.Qf2 Rcb8 21. Nb5². This is a thematic type of position which favours White; my only reservation about it is that I will be recommending an entirely different plan in variation B22.
11.Bd3!? is another interesting attempt to improve on the above set-up with the bishop on e2. After 11...0-0 12.0-0 White intends Bb1 followed by f2-f4, with good prospects on the kingside.
11...a5
After 11...0-0 12.Be2 it is hard to suggest an active plan for Black, apart from ...a5.

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12.a3



12...axb4 13.axb4 Ra3
13...Bd7 is met by 14.Be2 followed by 0-0.
14.Nd5²
Black's pieces are short of space. True, he controls the a-file, but it is hard to see any way for him to exploit it.
10...b6
This is similar to the above line, and can be met in exactly the same way:



11.b4
Once again, 11.Be2 is playable but less ambitious than the text move.
11.Bd3!? Bb7 12.0-0 0-0 13.Bb1 can also be considered.

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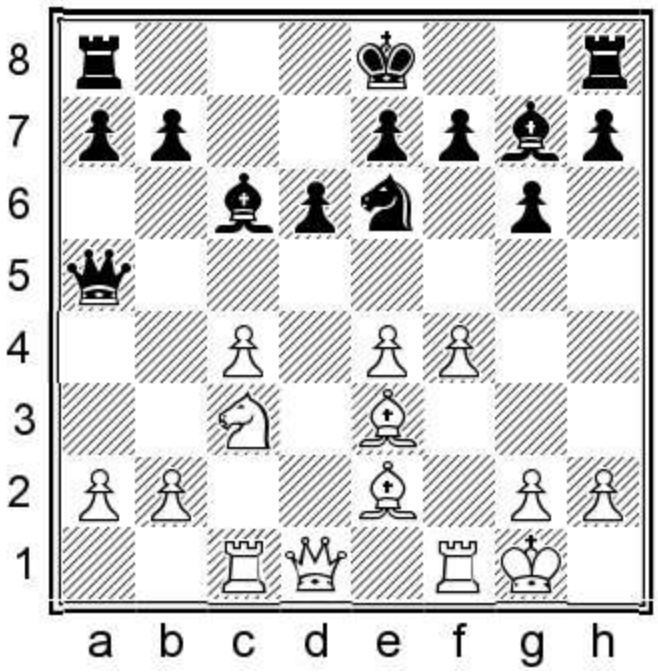
11...Bb7 12.Bd3 0-0 13.0-0 Rc8 14.Qd2²
White is in control and it is not obvious how Black will generate counterplay.

11.Be2
11.Bd3!? is a good alternative which Greet offers as an antidote to Black's set-up. Play may continue 11...g5 (after 11...b6 12.0-0 Bb7 the e4-pawn is defended, so 13.f4! is excellent for White) 12.0-0 b6 13.Bd2! with the better chances for White. However, I have chosen to focus on the text move, which also seems excellent.

11...b6
Before playing the committal ...g5, it makes sense for Black to develop his bishop and attack the e4-pawn, provoking a slight weakening with f2-f3.

11...Bxc3†? 12.Rxc3 Qxa2 13.Qc2 gives White an overwhelming initiative for a pawn.

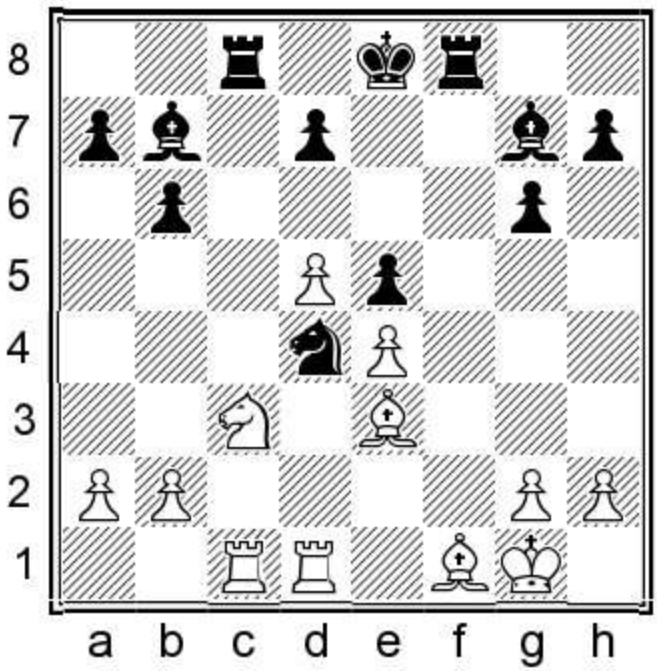
11...d6 12.0-0 Bd7 allows White to play more aggressively with 13.f4, for instance: 13...Bc6 (13...Nc5 is well met by 14.Bd4!)



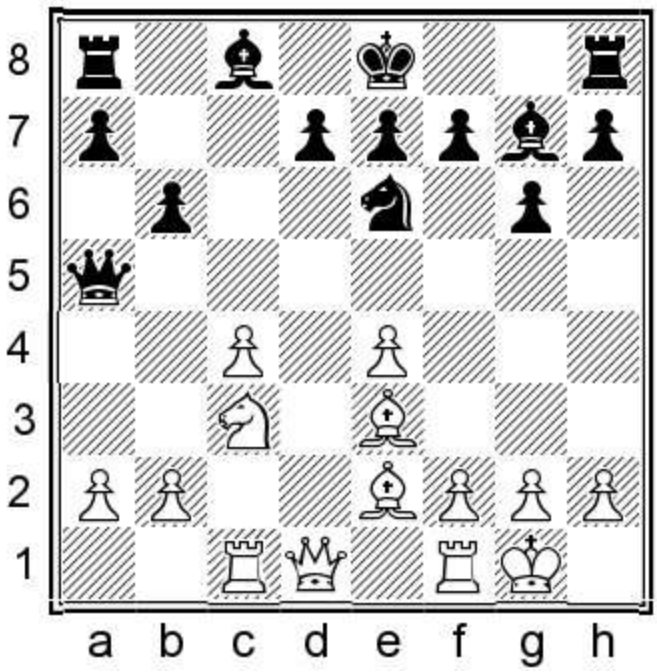

14.f5 Nc5 15.f6! Bxf6 (15...exf6 16.b4 Qxb4 17.Qxd6 Na6 18.Qxb4 Nxb4 19.Nd5± Mesko – Penades Ordaz, corr. 2009) 16.Rxf6 exf6 17.b4 Qxb4 18.Qxd6± Na6 19.Qxf6 Rg8 20.Nd5 1–0 Richter – Trautmann, corr. 1983.

12.0-0
12.Qd5 is also quite promising. A good example continued: 12...Qxd5 (12...Rb8 is safer, although 13.Qxa5 bxa5 14.b3 should be slightly better for White) 13.cxd5 Nd4 14.Bd3 f5 15.f3 Bb7 16.0-0 Rc8 17.Rfd1 fxe4 18. fxe4 Rf8 19.Bf1 e5

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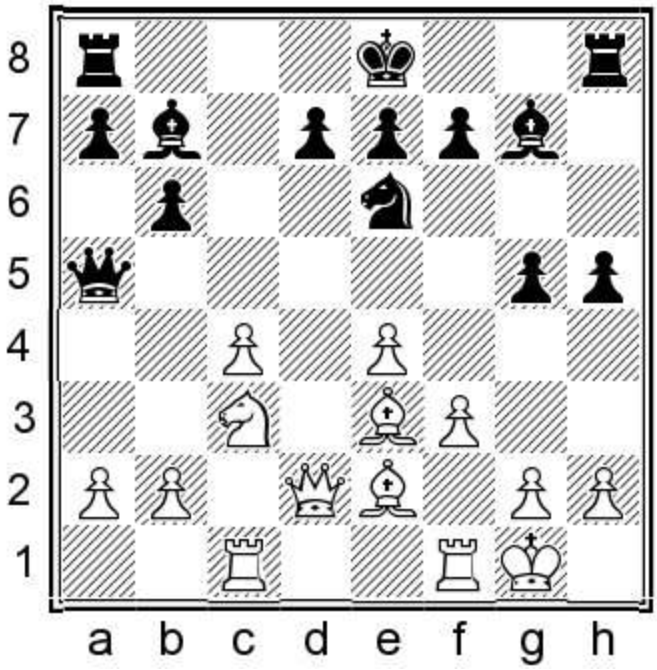


20.a4! Ke7 21.Nb5 White won in instructive fashion in Muck – Weber, corr. 2010.



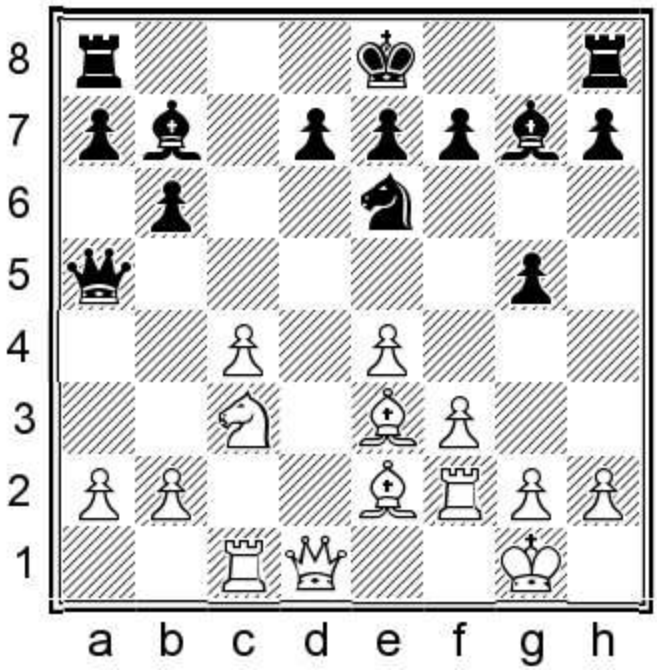
12...Bb7 13.f3 g5 14.Rf2!
This move prepares a highly effective regrouping plan, which was first played by Nigel Short.
To appreciate the effectiveness of White's plan (beginning with the accurate 10.Rc1! instead of 10.Qd2), it is worth comparing the following position from the game in which Bent Larsen first introduced the ...g5 plan:

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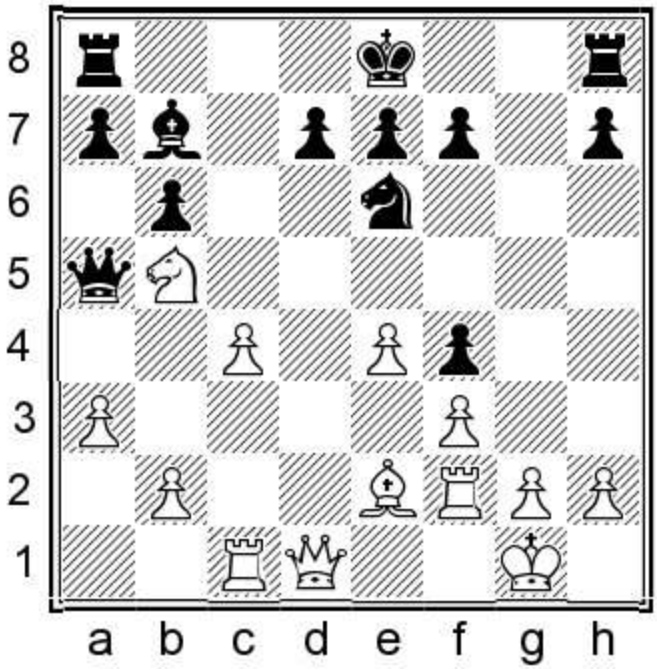
15.Rfd1 d6 16.Nd5 Qxd2 17.Rxd2 Be5 18.b4 Rc8 19.a4 h4 20.Bf1 f6 21.Ra2 Bd4 Black was doing fine and went on to make a comfortable draw in Karpov – Larsen, Brussels 1987. Once the queens were exchanged, he had no real problems.

Now let's return to our main line. The big difference here is that, rather than Qd2 followed by Rfd1, White intends (after Bf1) to put his rook on d2 with the queen on d1. Crucially, he will be able to follow up with Nd5 without allowing a queen exchange. This makes things much trickier for Black, as we will soon see.



14...h5
14...Be5 15.a3 Bf4 is positionally desirable but 16.Bxf4 gxf4 17.Nb5! gives Black problems with his queen:

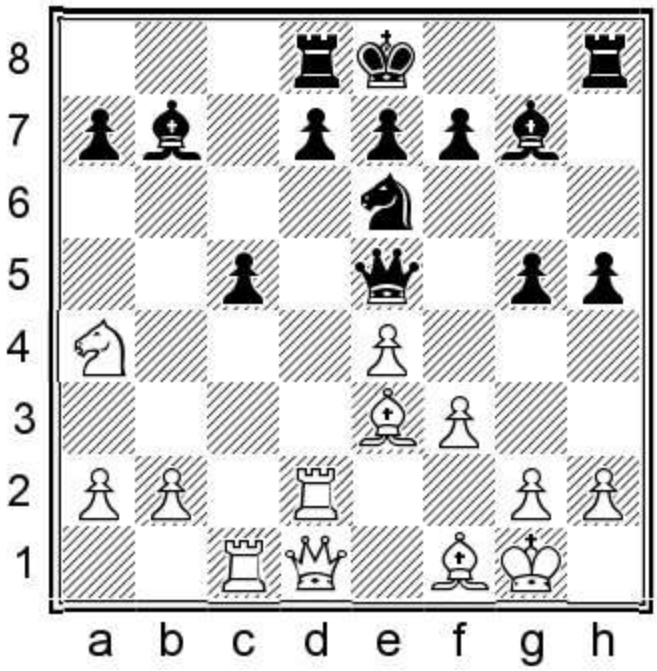
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17...Bc6 18.Rc3 Rc8 19.b4 Qa6 20.Nd4 Ba4 21.Qd2 Qb7 22.Nxe6 dxe6 23.Qxf4± Zakhartsov – Mankeyev, Olomouc 2007.

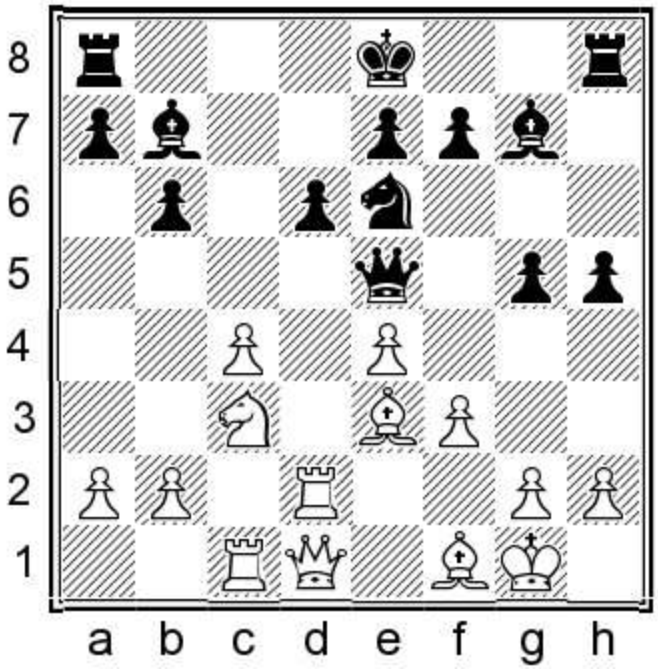
15.Bf1 Qe5
Black must not delay this move. After 15...h4? 16.Rd2 d6 17.Nd5 Black's queen was misplaced and short of squares in Enjuto Velasco – Dobierzin, Krynica 1999.

16.Rd2 d6
Greet criticizes this move and instead proposes 16...Rd8, in order to give Black the option of ...Qb8 followed by ...Be5. However, he overlooked a surprising resource: 17.c5!N (17.Nd5 Qb8 has occurred in a couple of games) 17...bxc5 (17...Nxc5?? 18.Bd4 wins immediately) 18.Na4!



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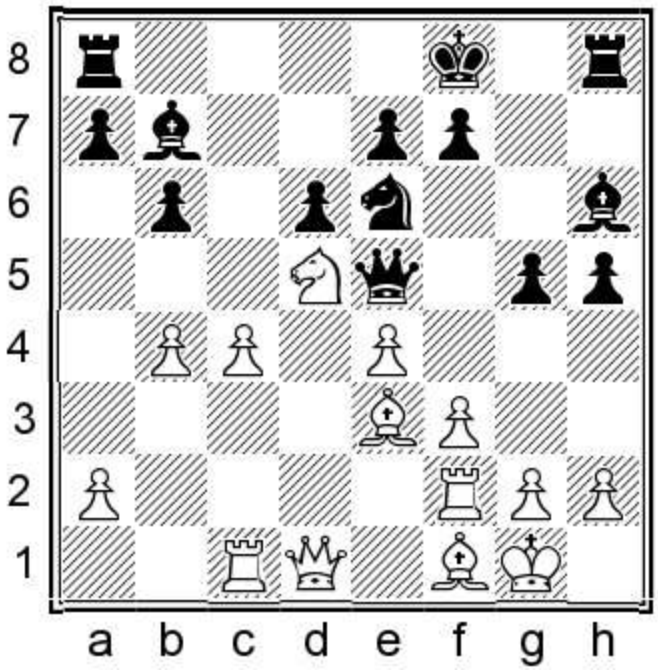
18...0-0 (18...d6? 19.Nxc5! is even worse for Black) 19.Nxc5 Nxc5 20.Rxc5 d5 21.Qb3± White wins a pawn.



17.Nd5 Kf8 18.b4 Bh6
This position was reached in Short – Larsen, Hastings 1987, and a bunch of later games. White has several good options but I like:

19.Rf2N
As recommended by a few commentators.
Short's 19.Qb3 was also good for White.

19.c5!? is also interesting, but one good option is enough.

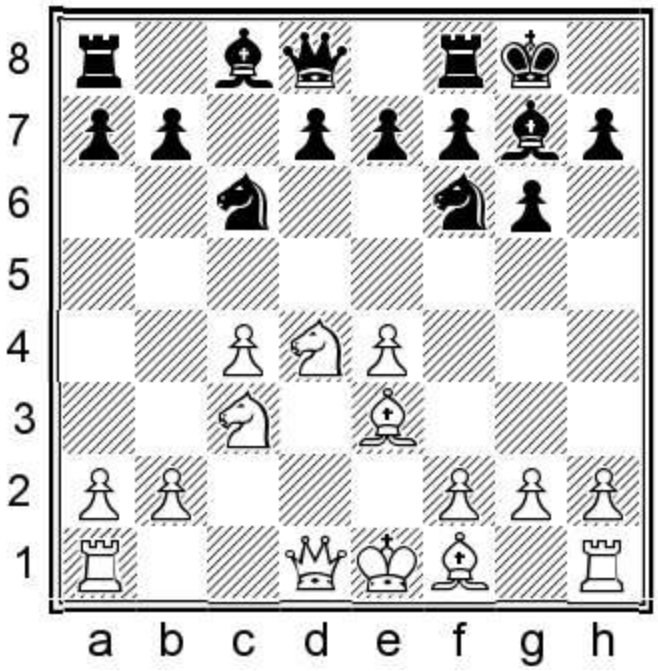


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19...Bg7
19...g4 20.f4! Qxe4 21.Bd3 is a nice variation given by Greet.

20.Qa4±
White is much better, as Bologan points out.

B2) 7...0-0

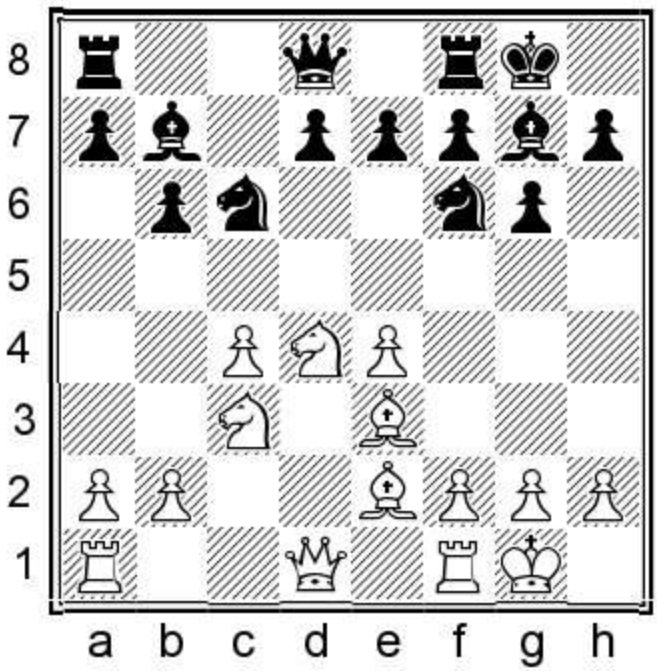


This natural move has been Black’s most common choice.

8.Be2
This prevents ...Ng4 while developing another piece. We will consider the double fianchetto with B21) 8...b6, followed by the main line of B22) 8...d6.

B21) 8...b6 9.0-0 Bb7

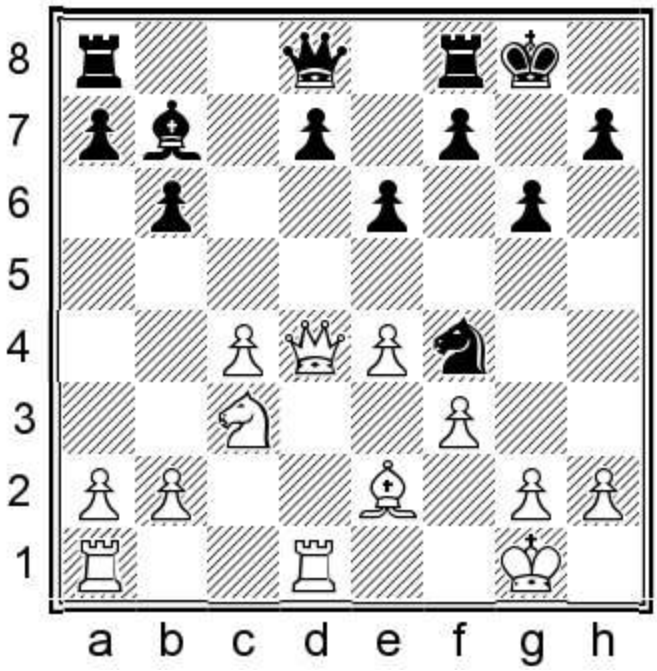
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10.f3
It is useful to overprotect the e4-pawn.

10...e6
This has been Black's most popular try. Preparing ...d5 is a natural idea but it does not equalize.

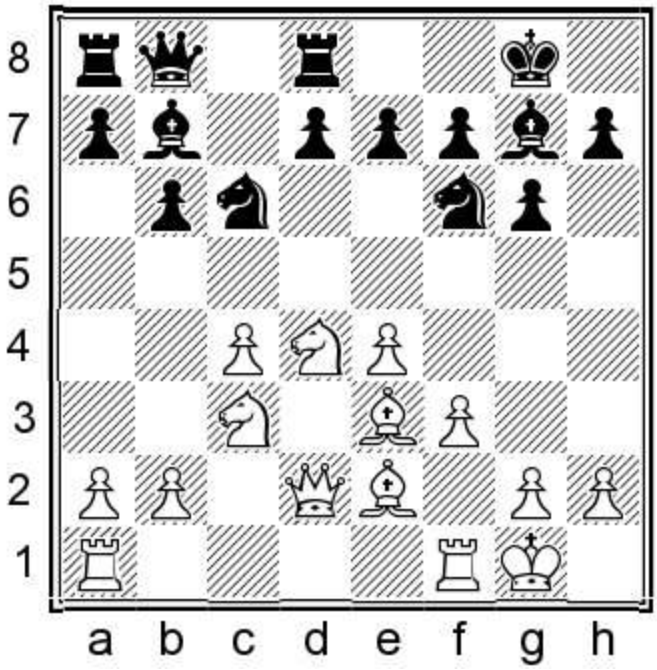
10...Nh5 looks tricky but White can safely ignore it with 11.Qd2 Nf4 12.Rfd1, for instance: 12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 Bxd4† 14.Qxd4 e6



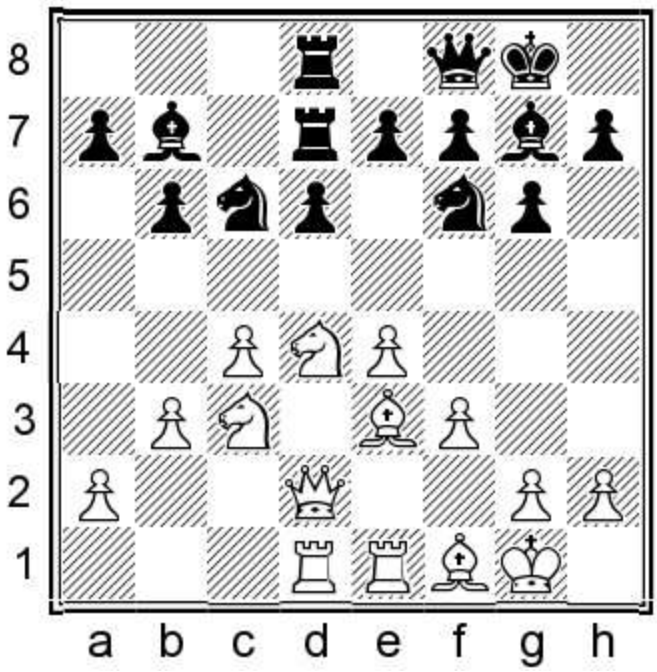
15.Qe5 Nxe2† 16.Nxe2 Rc8 17.b3 f5 18.Nc3 Bc6 19.Rd4 Rf7 20.Re1 White was much better in Stojanovic – Miralles, Switzerland 2012.

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10...Qb8!? 11.Qd2 Rd8
This looks odd until you understand Black's masterplan, which involves ...d6, ...Rd7, ...Qf8, ...Rad8, ...e6 and, finally, ...d5!. It's rather long-winded though, and White has a few good ways to play against it.



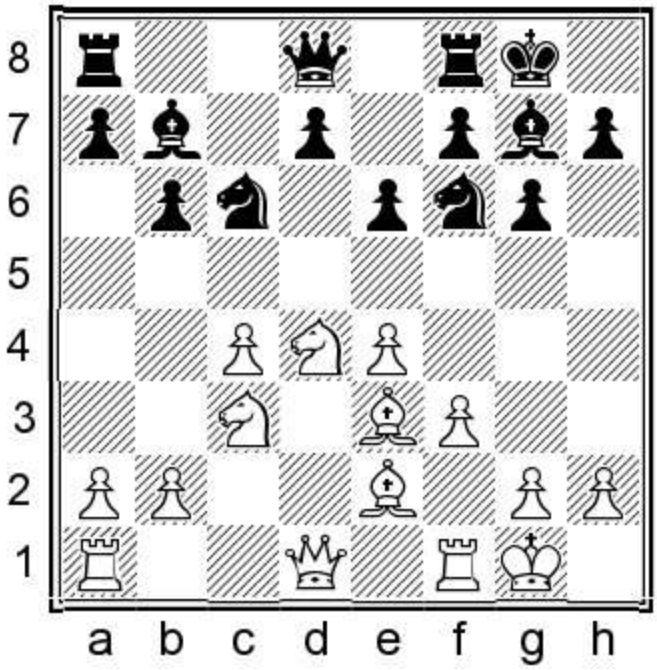
12.Rad1
Greet likes 12.Rfd1, with the idea of using the rook on a1 as follows: 12...d6 13.Nb3! Intending to advance the a-pawn. 13...e6 14.a4 Na5!? 15.Nxa5 bxa5 16.Nb5 d5 This has been recommended for Black, but Greet correctly points out that 17.Qxa5, threatening both Nc7 and Bxa7, is much better for White.
12...d6 13.Rfe1 Rd7 14.Bf1 Qf8 15.b3 Rad8



Black is two moves away from completing his plan, but White is just in time to stop it.
16.Nc2! e6 17.Bg5!

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The c2-knight is ready to come to e3, keeping an edge for White in M. Socko – Lind, Warsaw (rapid) 2007.



11.Qd2
11.Ndb5 has been the most popular move but 11...d5! is a good answer.

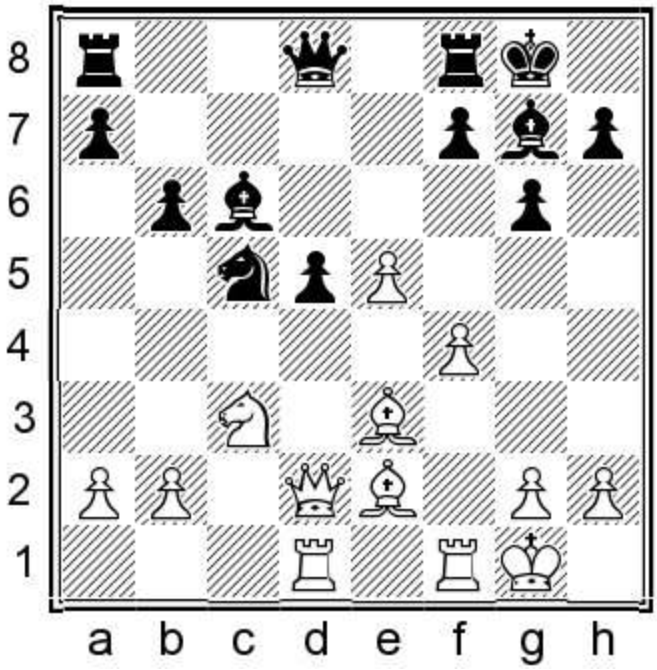
11.Rc1 is a sensible alternative which is recommended by Greet. It works well against the ...d5 break, but recently Black has achieved decent results with the more patient 11...Qe7!?.

Finally, White can consider exchanging knights by taking on c6, either here or on the previous move. This approach should lead to a slight edge as well, but I prefer not to give Black the freedom to choose whether or not to change the pawn structure by recapturing with the d-pawn.

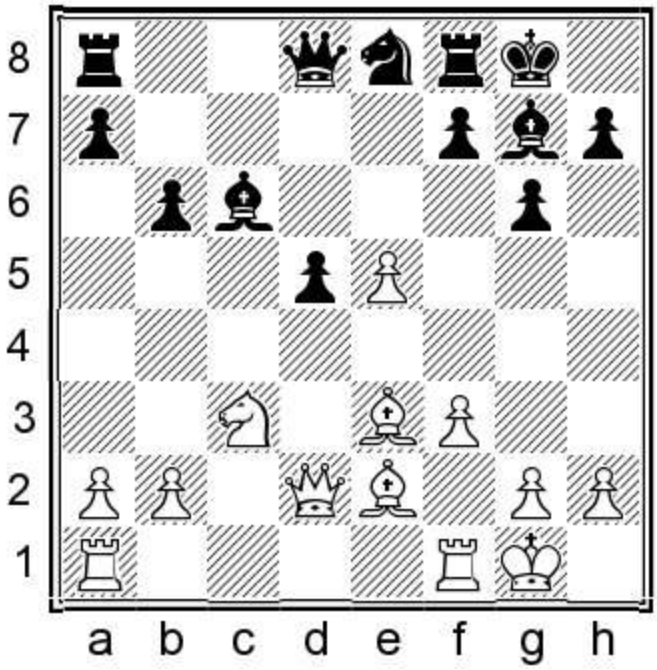
11...d5
Black had better not delay this move. If he plays slowly with a move like 11...Qe7, then 12.Ndb5 Ne8 13.Rad1 gives White a clear advantage.

12.cxd5 exd5 13.Nxc6 Bxc6 14.e5 Ne8
14...Nd7?! 15.f4 Nc5 16.Rad1 makes life difficult for Black:

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16...Ne4 (16...f6 17.Nxd5 fxe5 occurred in Kuporosov – Yakovich, Soviet Union 1984, when 18.fxe5!N would have been strongest, as 18...Bxe5? 19.Bc4 is winning for White) 17.Nxe4 dxe4 18.Qxd8 Rfxd8 19.Rxd8† Rxd8 20.Rc1± Black was facing a miserable endgame in Jansa – Velimirovic, Bor 1985.



15.f4

15.Bd4 is a good alternative, after which 15...Nc7 16.Rad1 f6 17.exf6 Bxf6 18.Rfe1 Qd6 19.Bxf6 Qxf6 20.Bb5! was better for White in Marin – Gashimov, Spain 2007.

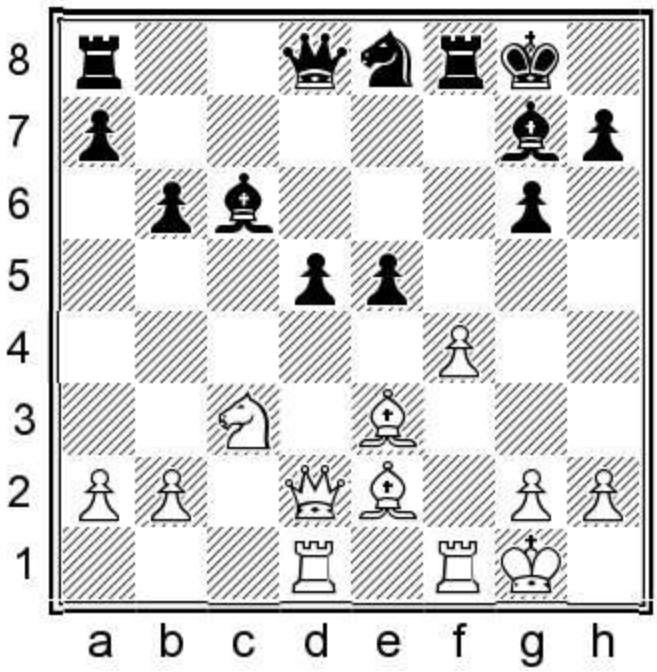
15...f6

After 15...Nc7 White keeps the better chances with: 16.Bf3 (16.Rac1!?N also looks promising) 16...f6 17.exf6 Bxf6 18.Rad1²

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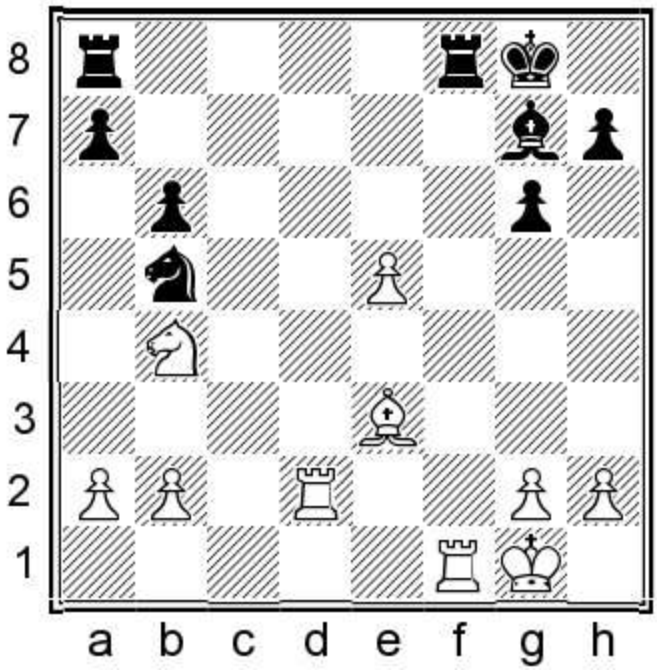
16.Rad1!
After 16.exf6 Nxf6 I failed to find any advantage.

16...fxe5



17.Nxd5!
White clearly has the edge in piece activity.

17...Nf6
17...exf4? 18.Nxf4 Qxd2 19.Rxd2 Nf6 20.Bc4† Kh8 21.Ne6 Ne4 22.Rc2 Rxf1† 23.Bxf1+–
17...Nc7 did not solve Black's problems in the following game: 18.Nb4 Qxd2 19.Rxd2 Bb5 20.Bxb5 Nxb5 21. fxe5

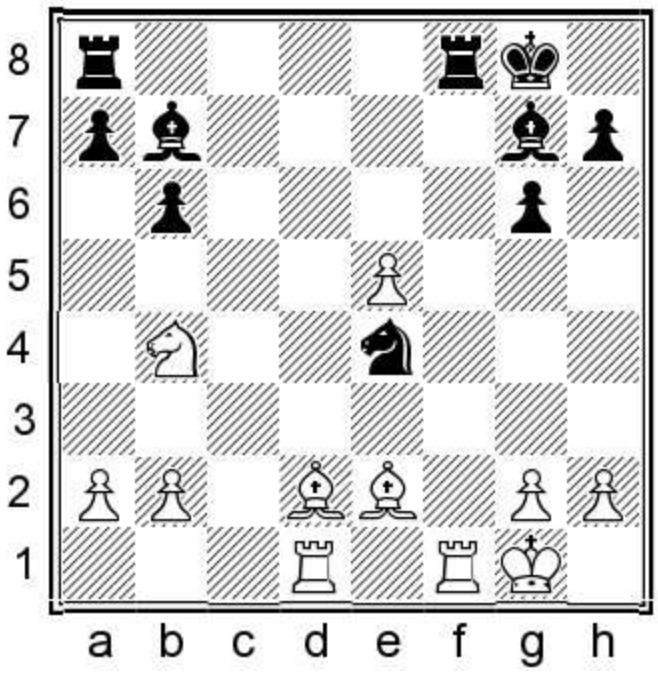


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21...Rxf1† 22.Kxf1 Rf8† 23.Ke2 Re8 24.Nc6 Bxe5 25.Nxe5 Rxe5 26.Rd7± Bogner – Kountz, Germany 2010.

18.Nb4! Qxd2
18...Bb7? 19.fxe5 Ne4 20.Bc4† Kh8 21.Qxd8 Raxd8 22.Rxf8† Rxf8 23.e6 is winning for White.

19.Bxd2 Bb7 20.fxe5 Ne4

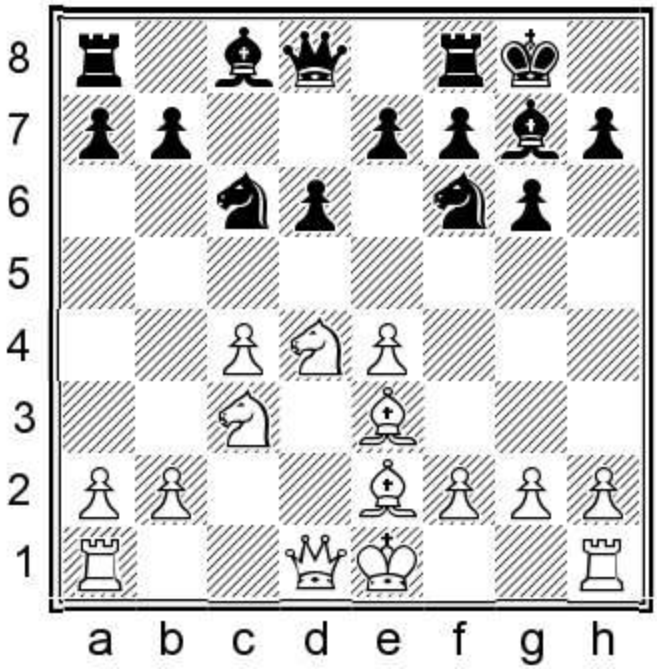



21.Bf4
I also checked 21.Bc4†N 21...Kh8 22.Nd3, but after 22...Rxf1† 23.Kxf1 Rd8 Black has reasonable play for the pawn.

21...g5 22.Be3 Bxe5 23.Rd7²
White kept some initiative in Ragger – Greenfeld, New Delhi 2011.

B22) 8...d6

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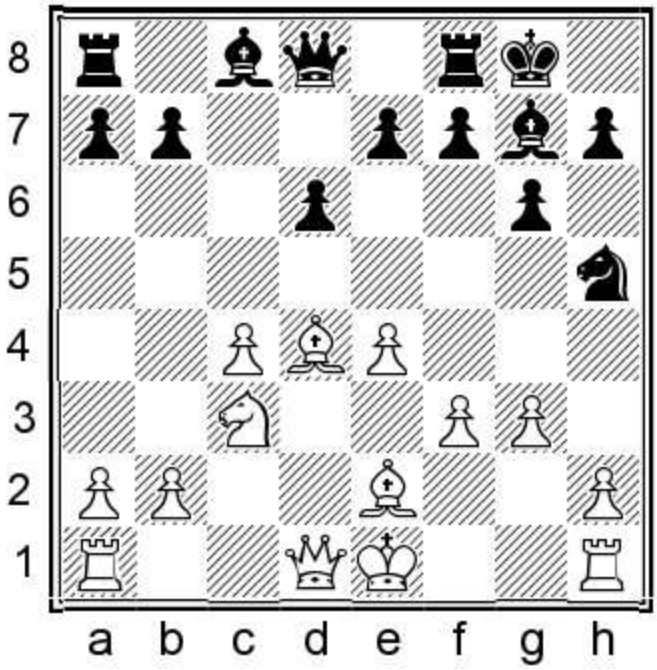


This is the main line. It has a reputation for being safe and solid, but I have some ideas to challenge that assessment.

9.f3!?
Panjwani covers the main line of 9.0-0 over several chapters but does not consider the text move at all. I think it's an excellent choice for White though. Overprotecting the e4-pawn is almost always useful, and the text move also allows for the possibility of queenside castling in some lines. For a long time this possibility went overlooked, as it was always assumed that it would be too risky to put the king on the queenside having already played c2-c4. However, as we will see, it can be extremely effective in the right situation.
Black's two most important replies are B221) 9...Nxd4 and B222) 9...Bd7.

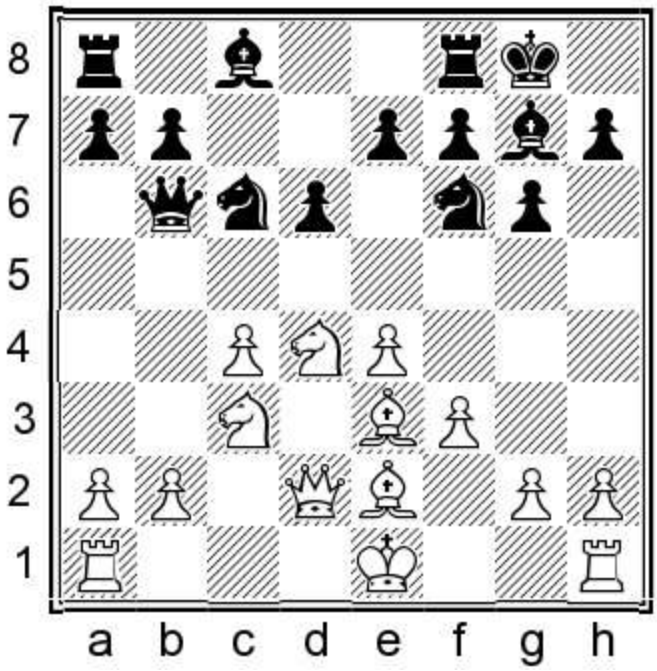
9...Nh5 has been tried a few times but after 10.g3 it's not clear what the knight is doing. 10...Nxd4 (10...Bh3?! 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.g4±; 10...Bd7 11.Qd2²) 11.Bxd4

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11...Be6 12.f4 Nf6 13.0-0 Rc8 14.b3 Qa5 (14...Bh3 15.Rf3 is good for White) 15.f5 Bd7 16.a3 White had a nice initiative in So – Mamedov, Shamkir 2015.

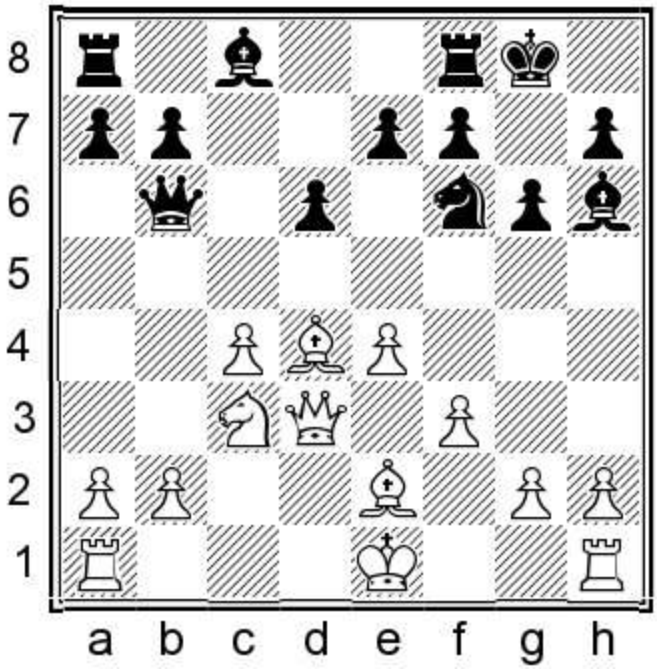
9...Qb6?!
This can sometimes be a problem in similar positions, but here it is misguided as none of Black's tactical ideas work.
10.Qd2!



10...Nxd4
10...Nxe4?? is refuted by 11.Nxc6 and White wins material.
11.Bxd4 Bh6!?
This seems to me like the only real attempt to make sense of Black's play.

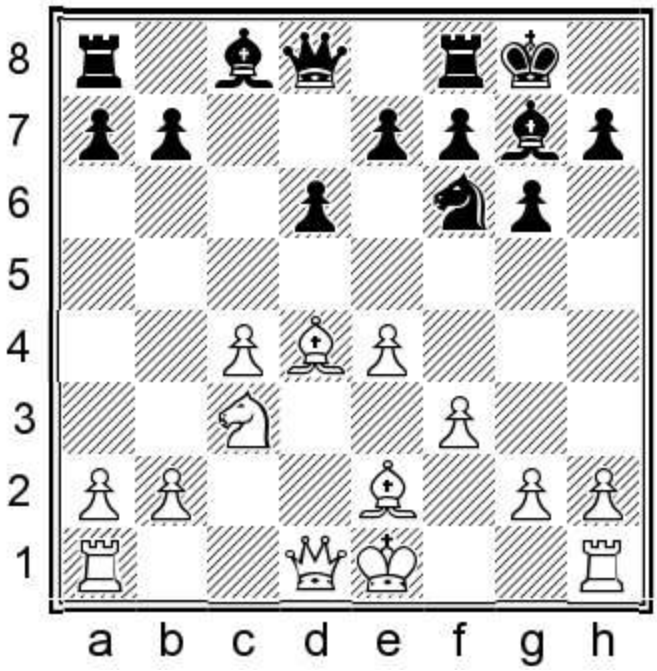
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After 11...Nxe4? 12.Bxb6 Nxd2 13.Be3 Black's knight is trapped.
12.Qd3!
12.Bxb6 Bxd2† 13.Kxd2 axb6 14.a4² is a tad better for White, but not the most ambitious way to play the position.



12...Qa5 13.0-0
White has better development and good prospects in the middlegame. For example:
13...Be6 14.f4 Rac8 15.b3±
Black is clearly suffering from misplaced pieces.

B221) 9...Nxd4 10.Bxd4



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From here I examined two continuations. B2211) 10...a6 is an immediate attempt to prepare ...b5, whereas B2212) 10...Be6 sees Black concentrate on piece development.
10...Bd7 11.Qd2 transposes to the later variation B2223.

B2211) 10...a6 11.Qd2

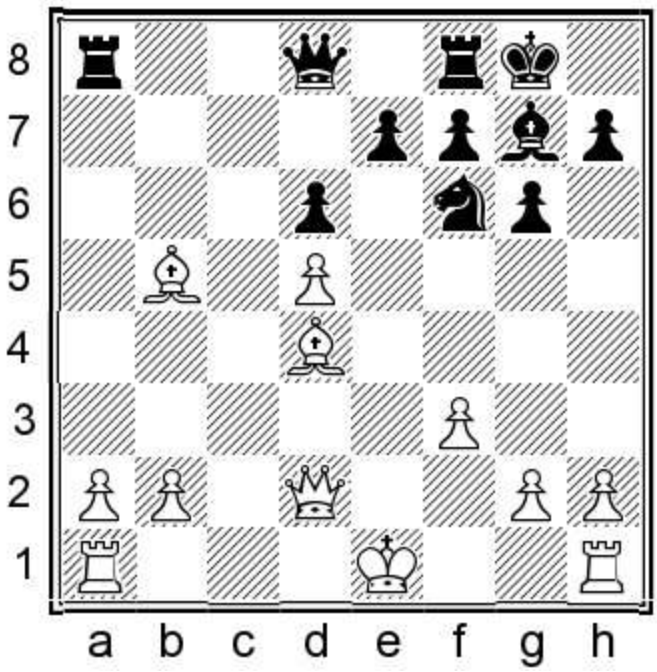
White makes a useful move and avoids committing his king for the moment. It is not so easy for Black to carry out ...b5, so he usually develops his bishop while waiting to see what White does.

11...Be6 12.Nd5!
This is both simple and powerful.

12...Nd7
This was played in a correspondence game against our good friend Nikos Ntirlis.

12...Bxd5 can be found in Game 22 below.

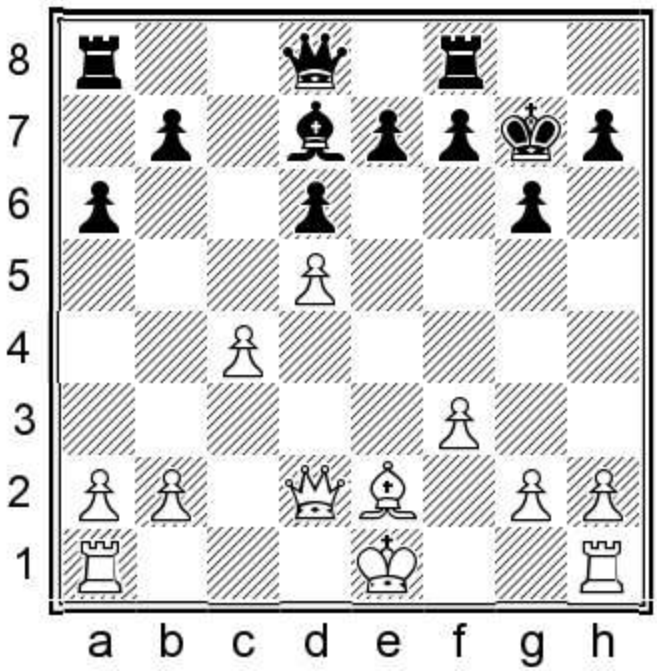
12...b5N has yet to be tried, but this is no excuse not to check it out. After all, if it worked, White's play up to this point would have been meaningless. The simplest reply is: 13.cxb5 axb5 14.Bxb5 Bxd5 15.exd5



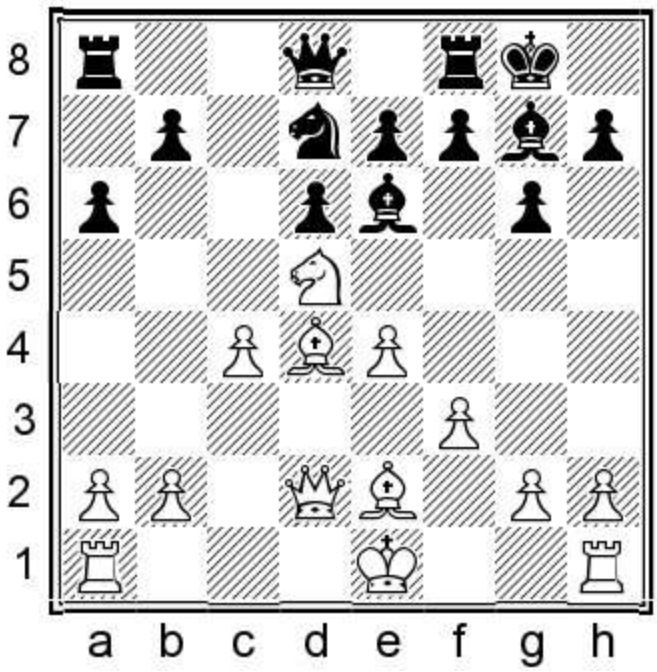

15...Bh6!? Black has to do something quickly, otherwise he will find himself both a pawn down and positionally lost after Bc6. 16.Qxh6 Qa5† 17.Kf2 Qxb5 18.Rhd1² White is obviously better.

12...Nxd5 has only been tested in Kozlowski – Krystofiak, Poland 2012, but is certainly not stupid. I suggest: 13.Bxg7N 13...Kxg7 14.exd5 Some sort of imbalance is needed to play for a win. White is only a bit better, but Black has a passive position without much counterplay, so White is still the one having all the fun. 14...Bd7

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15.h4! h6 (15...f6 16.h5 g5 17.Qd4²; 15...h5 16.g4 Rh8 17.0-0-0²) 16.h5 g5 17.Qd4† Kg8 18.0-0² White can consider attacking with f3-f4 in the future.



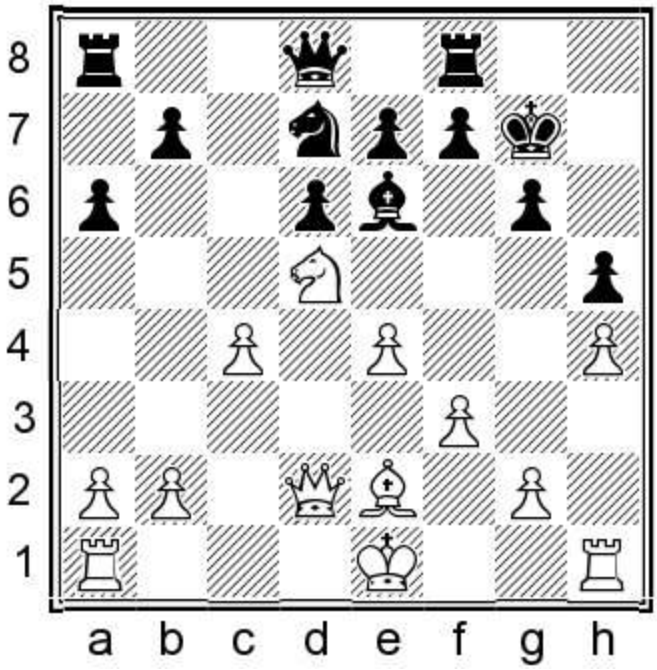
13.Bxg7!
Keeping the good bishop with 13.Be3 would be the traditional strategy. In this position though, because White has not castled, he can justify the bishop exchange by launching an attack on the kingside.

13...Kxg7 14.h4! h5
This is the principled approach but, as the game demonstrates, White has fantastic attacking potential.

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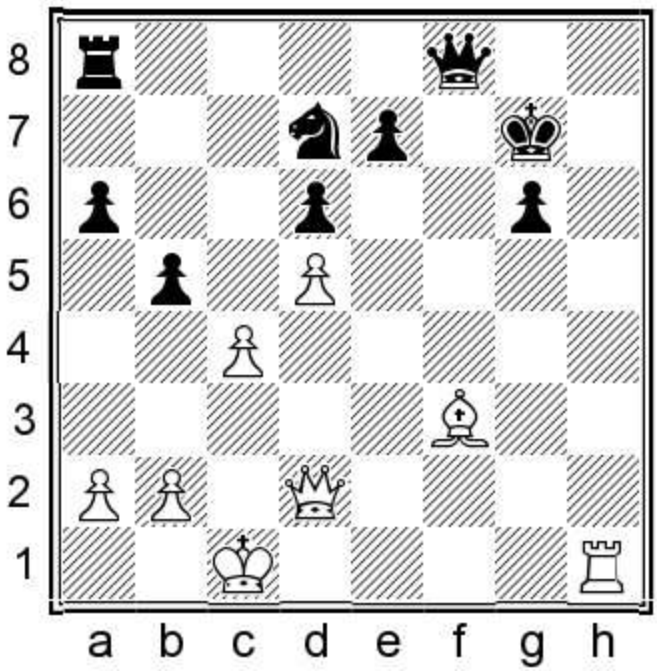
14...f6 might be a better move but 15.0-0-0² leaves White with a pleasant advantage. Even if Black makes it to

the endgame, he will still have a cramped position with numerous weaknesses.



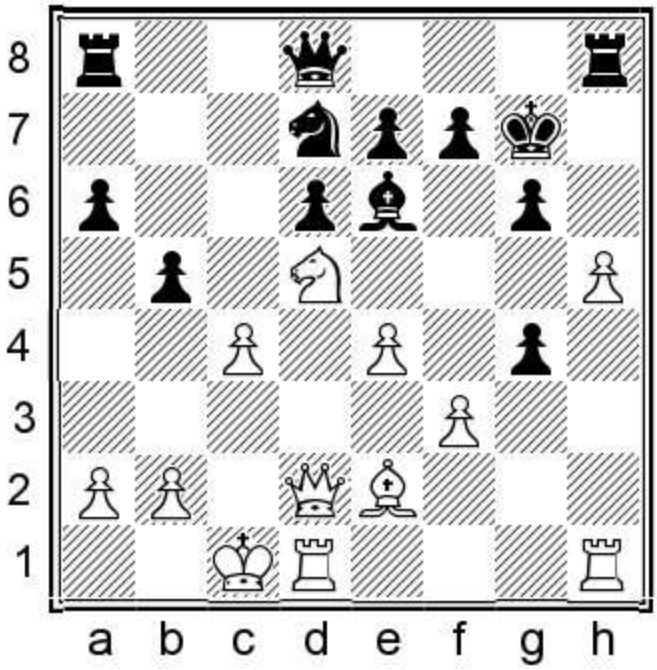
15.0-0-0 b5
Black seeks active counterplay but White can simply ignore it.

16.g4! hxg4 17.h5 Rh8
It is hard to imagine that there is any way for Black to keep his position together.
Another possible line is: 17...gxf3 18.Bxf3 Bxd5 (or 18...Rh8 19.hxg6 fxg6 20.Rxh8 Qxh8 21.Nc7 and White wins) 19.exd5 Rh8 20.hxg6 fxg6 21.Rxh8 Qxh8 22.Rh1 Qf8



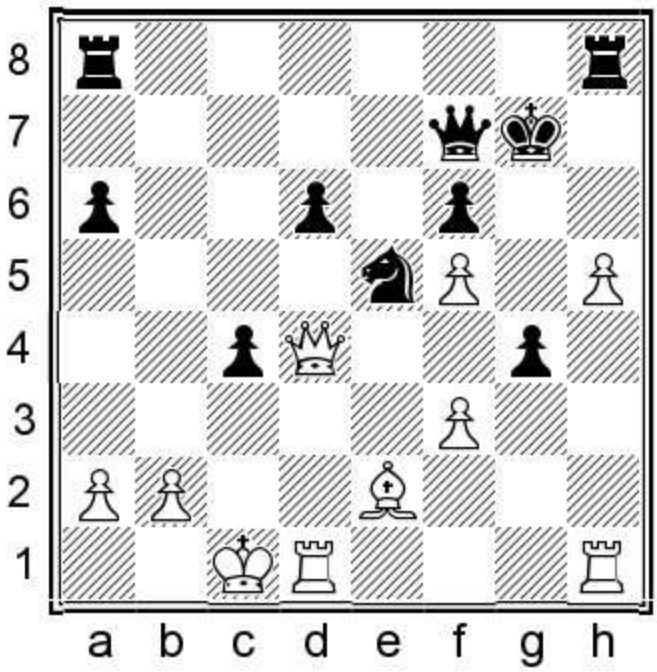
23.Bg4! Nf6 24.Qh6† Kf7 25.Be6† Ke8 26.Qxf8† Kxf8 27.Rh8† and White wins.

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18.Qd4† f6 19.Nf4 Qg8 20.Nxg6 Ne5 21.Nxe7+–
Black has avoided being mated but he has lost a few pawns, making the rest of this game an exercise in good technique.

21...Qf7 22.Nf5† Bxf5 23.exf5 bxc4



24.f4! Nd3† 25.Kb1 Rhg8 26.Bxg4 Qa7 27.Qxa7† Rxa7 28.Be2 Kh6 29.Bxd3 cxd3 30.Rxd3
White soon won the endgame in Ntirlis – Ruiz-Jarabo, corr. 2014.

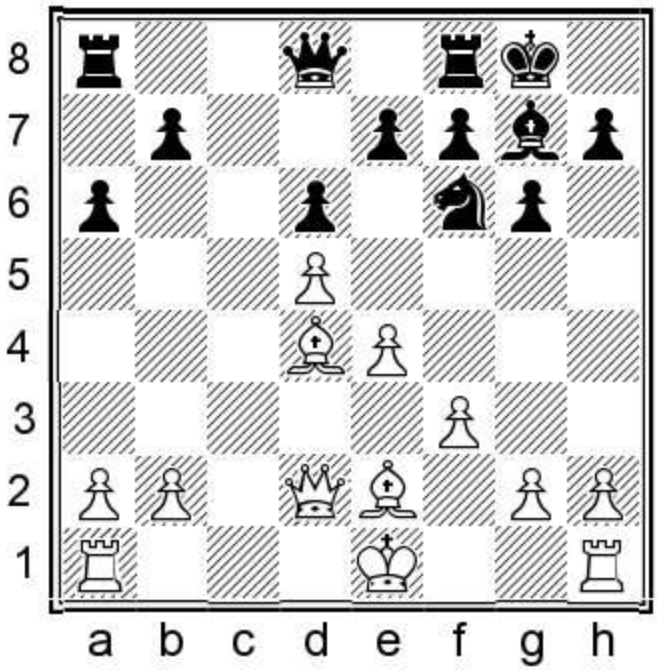
Now let's rewind to move 12 and see a game where 12...Bxd5 was played.

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GAME 22

Dmitry Svetushkin – Georgios Tzambazis
Aghios Kirykos 2004

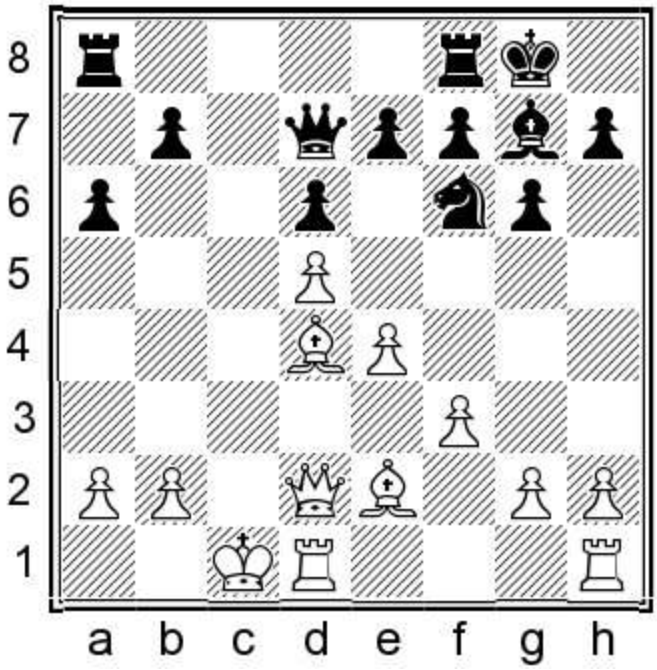
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4 Nf6 6.Nc3 d6 7.f3 Bg7 8.Be3 0-0 9.Be2 Nxd4 10.Bxd4 a6 11.Qd2 Be6 12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.cxd5
I chose this as an illustrative game not just because White played the exact line I am recommending, but mainly because the trade of a black bishop for a white knight on d5 is something that can happen in many Maroczy lines, so it is worth exploring the ensuing structure in some detail.
White has the better prospects, for a number of reasons:



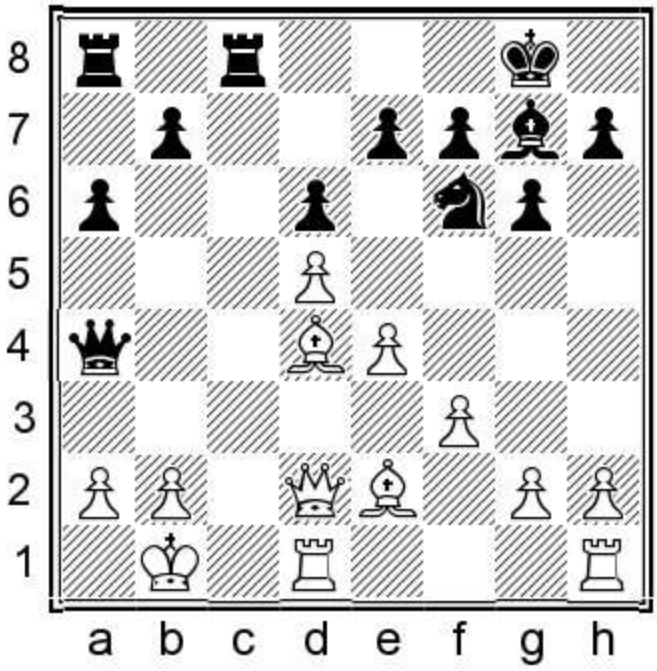
a) He has a significant space advantage. The fact that two sets of minor pieces have been exchanged certainly eases Black's discomfort; but even so, he will still have problems finding good squares for all his pieces.
b) The bishop pair is an important long-term advantage. Thinking far ahead to the endgame, note that the light-squared bishop is the one with no opponent. For the moment it may seem that this is a bad bishop, but actually it has great potential, especially if it can be successfully rerouted to the h3-c8 diagonal.
c) White has a few possible pawn levers, whereas it is hard to imagine Black benefiting from playing ...e6 or ...f5, as these will tend to open the game for White's bishops. Thus White has more freedom to change the pawn structure to suit his own purposes.

13...Rc8
I also considered:
13...Qd7!?
This has been played in an engine game. I would be tempted to castle long.
14.0-0-0!?
The game continued 14.0-0 Qa4 15.Be3 Rfc8 16.b3 Qa3 17.Rfc1 Nd7 18.Rab1 and White had the better chances here too. Transferring the light-squared bishop to h3 is almost always a good plan in such positions.

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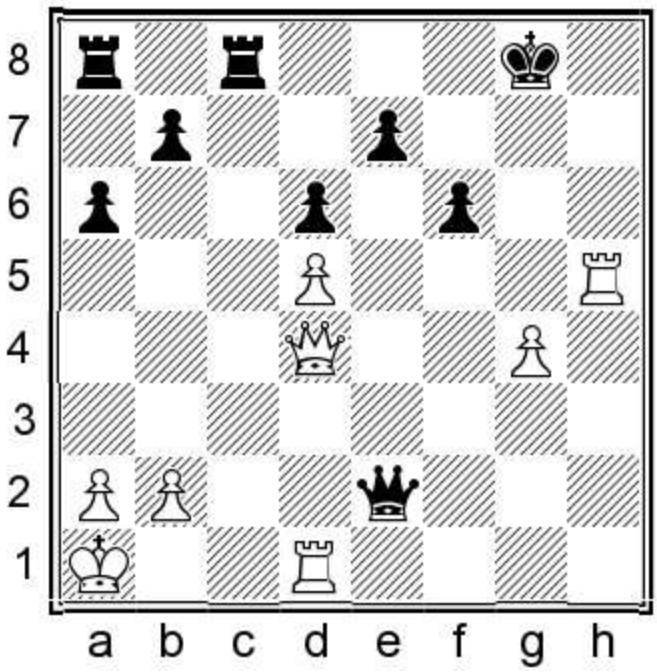
14...Qa4
14...Rfc8† 15.Kb1 Nh5 is the top engine choice. (15...e6 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.dxe6 Qxe6 18.Qxd6± and White can play for a win without the slightest risk) 16.Bxg7 Nxg7 (16...Kxg7 17.g4 Nf6 18.h4 h6 19.g5 Nh5 20.Bf1!± followed by Bh3-g4 gives White an overwhelming position) 17.h4² White is obviously better.
15.Kb1 Rfc8
Now White can use his space advantage to create dangerous threats on the kingside.



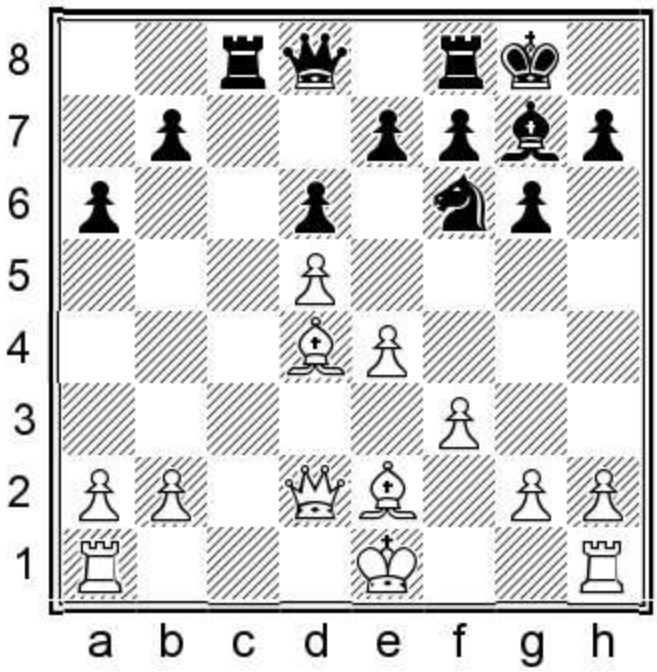
16.h4!
I find White's attacking potential quite impressive.
16...h5
16...Nd7? 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.h5 gives White an overwhelming attack.
16...Nh5 17.Bxg7 Kxg7 18.Bd3± allows White to develop his attack without offering Black any counterplay.

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17.g4! hxg4 18.h5! gxh5?!
18...gxf3 19.Bxf3 Rc4 is a slightly better try, although 20.hxg6 fxg6 21.Bxf6 exf6 22.Qh2± leaves Black in a pretty desperate state.
19.fxg4! Nxe4 20.Qe3
I cannot find a decent move for Black. For example:
20...Nf2!? 21.Qxf2 Qc2† 22.Ka1 Bxd4 23.Qxd4 Qxe2 24.Rxh5 f6



25.Qg1!+–
The threats of g4-g5 and Qh1 are too much for Black to handle.

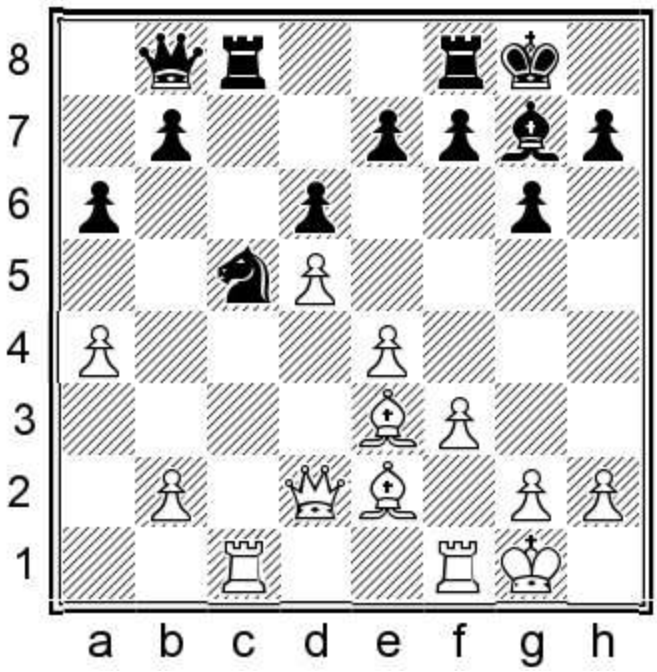


14.0-0 Nd7 15.Be3 Qc7
15...Nc5 16.Rac1 a5?! weakens the light squares, and after 17.b3 b6 18.Bb5 f5 19.exf5 Rxf5 20.Rfd1 Qf8 21.

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Rb1 Be5 22.a3 (intending b3-b4) White had a huge advantage in Hasangatin – Jedlicka, Tatranske Zruby 2000.

16.Rac1 Qb8 17.a4 Nc5



18.a5
I would have preferred 18.Qb4!N 18...Rc7 19.b3 Rfc8 20.a5² to reduce Black's activity. White has the advantage and will be able to make Black's life difficult for a long time.

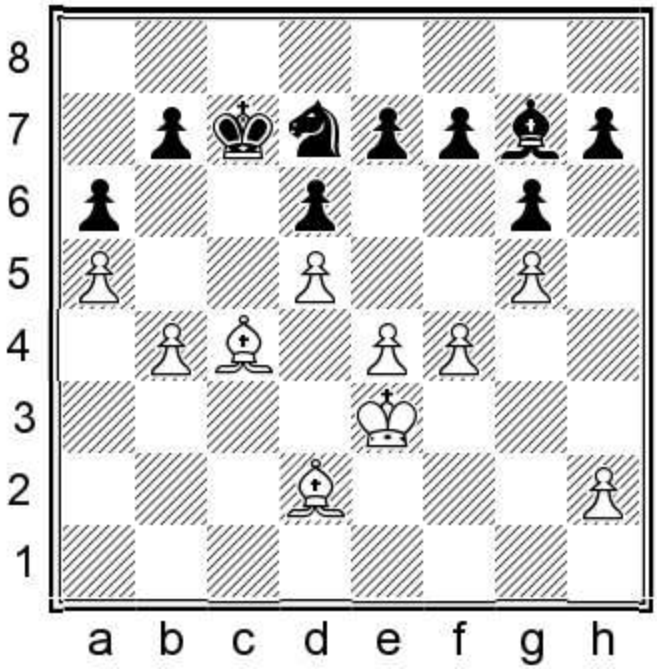
18...Nb3 19.Rxc8 Rxc8 20.Qb4 Nc5 21.Rc1 Nd7 22.Qd2 Rc7 23.g4 Qc8 24.Kg2 Rxc1 25.Qxc1 Qxc1 26.Bxc1
The ending is better for White, but this version is slightly better for Black than I would have wanted to allow. The c1-bishop is not well placed and the a5-pawn needs to be monitored. However, in the game Black makes it easy for White to improve his position and achieve optimal coordination.

26...Nc5?! 27.Bc4! Kf8 28.Kf2 Ke8 29.g5
White's position is improving with every move.

29...Kd8 30.Ke3 Kc7 31.b4 Nd7 32.Bd2 Be5?!
It's hard to be sure, but I have a feeling this may be the moment where Black's position slips from clearly worse to outright lost. He had to try 32...f6!? to obtain some breathing space.

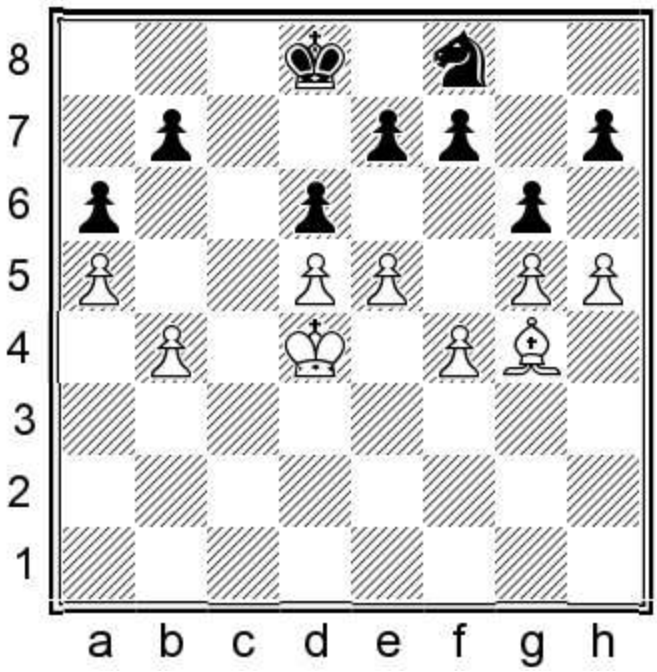
33.f4 Bg7

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34.Be2!
The bishop transfers to its best diagonal. Svetushkin’s handling of the technical challenges is impressive.

34...Bh8 35.Kd3 Bg7 36.Be3 Bh8 37.Kc4 Bg7 38.h4 Bh8 39.h5 Bg7 40.Bg4 Bh8 41.Bd4 Bxd4 42.Kxd4 Nf8 43.e5 Kd8

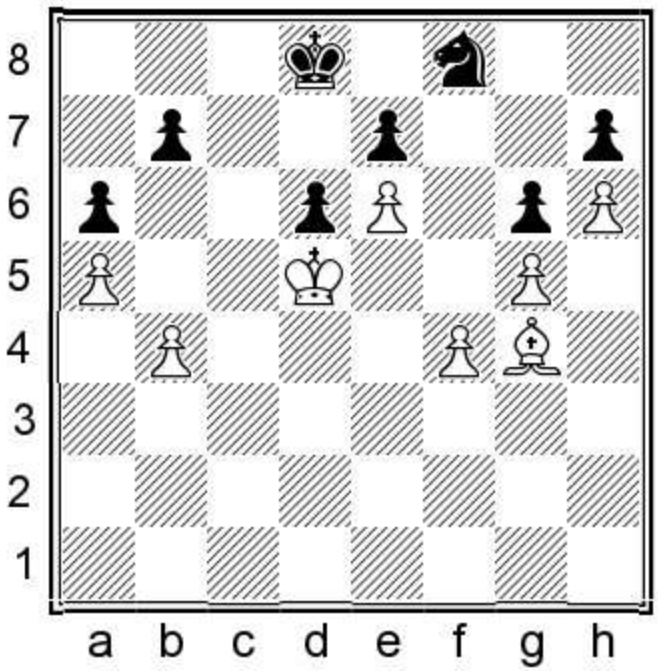


44.h6!
This pawn is destined for greatness.

44...Kc7 45.Kc4 Kd8 46.e6!
Now Black’s knight is completely paralysed. Even if Black could eliminate all of the queenside pawns, he would end up in zugzwang and lose.

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46...fxe6 47.dxe6 Kc7 48.Kd5 Kd8



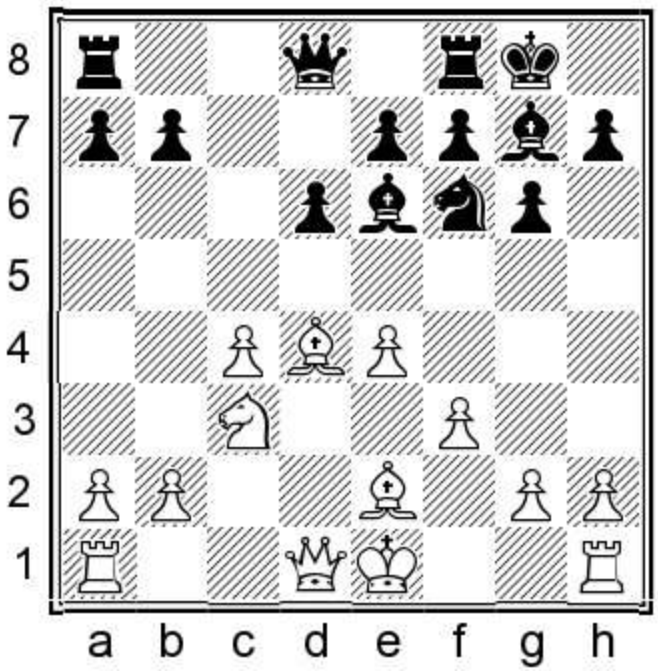
49.f5!
White could have won by slower means, but this breakthrough wins easily.

49...gxf5 50.Bxf5 Kc7 51.Bd3 Kd8 52.Bxh7 Nxh7 53.g6 Nf6† 54.Kd4
1–0

B2212) 10...Be6

This seems like a more accurate choice than 10...a6, based on the principle that pieces should come before pawns.

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11.0-0!
Here the plan of Qd2 and Nd5 (or 0-0-0) doesn't work, as Black can make good use of the tempo he saved by omitting ...a6. However, White can instead revert to a favourable version of the traditional set-up with short castling, as Black's bishop is not so well placed on e6 here.

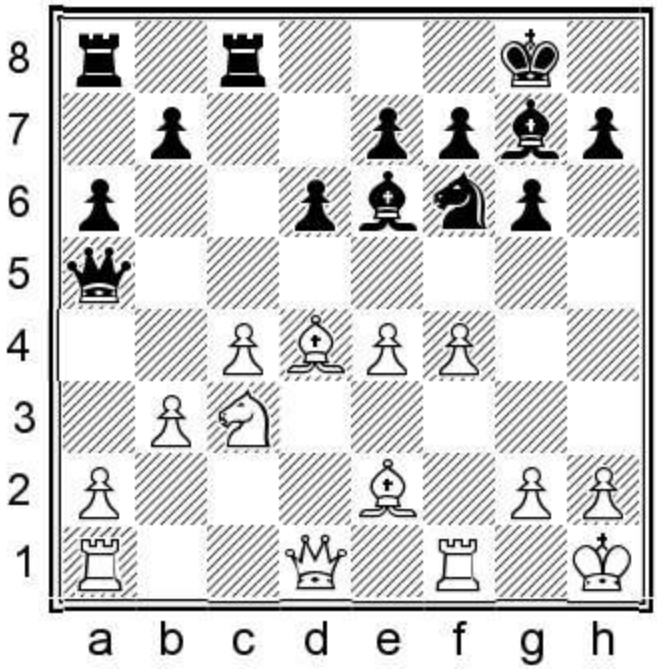
11...Qa5 12.Kh1 Rfc8 13.b3²
It is hard to say exactly how much better White's position is, and it hardly matters anyway. What's more important is that Black is unable to get his counterplay working if White plays accurately.

13...Nd7
This is a thematic idea but it does not work well. That said, I'm not sure exactly how Black should improve.

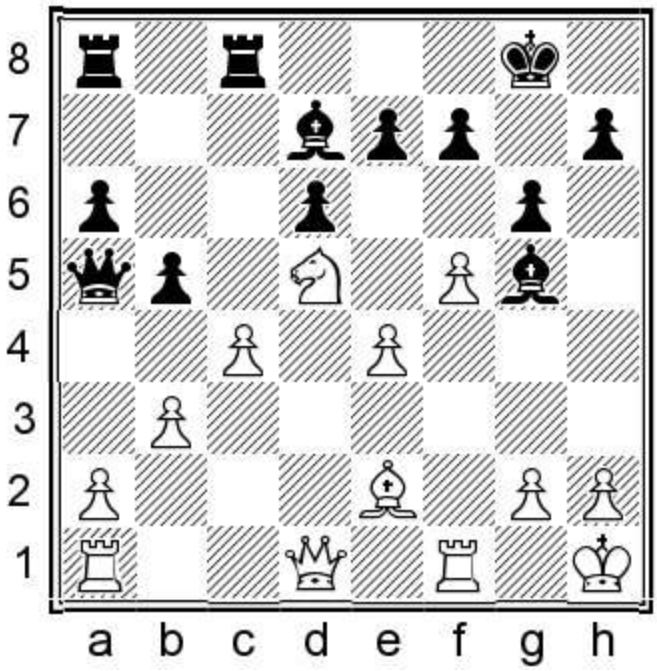
13...b5? clearly doesn't work; I only mention it because the same move is something to watch out for in similar positions when White's queen is on d2. Here we simply play 14.Nxb5 and enjoy being a pawn up.

13...a6
Preparing ...b5 is an obvious idea but White has a good way to meet it.
14.f4!
With the following idea in mind:

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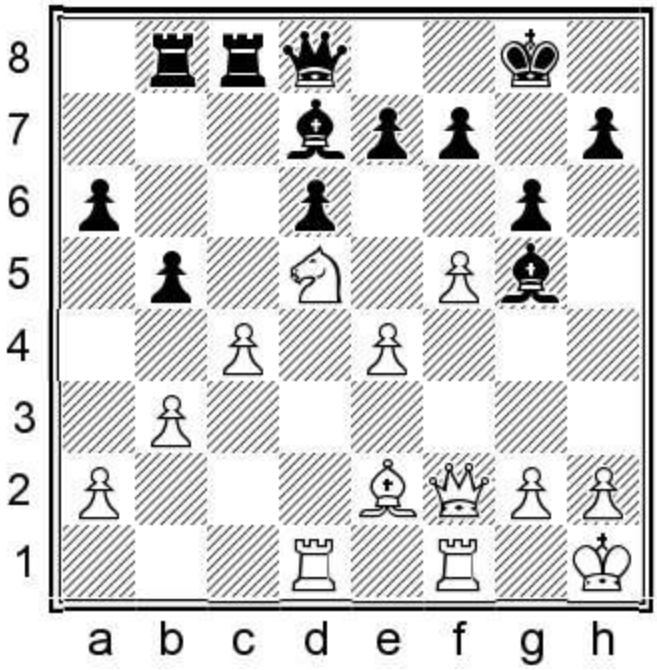
14...b5
This is clearly the move Black would like to play, but White is perfectly placed to deal with it.
15.f5 Bd7 16.Bxf6! Bxf6 17.Nd5±
Black's position is falling apart.
17...Bg5
17...bxc4 18.fxg6 hxg6 19.Rxf6+–
17...Bxa1 18.Nxe7†+–
17...Qd8 18.fxg6 hxg6 19.Nxf6† exf6 20.Qxd6±



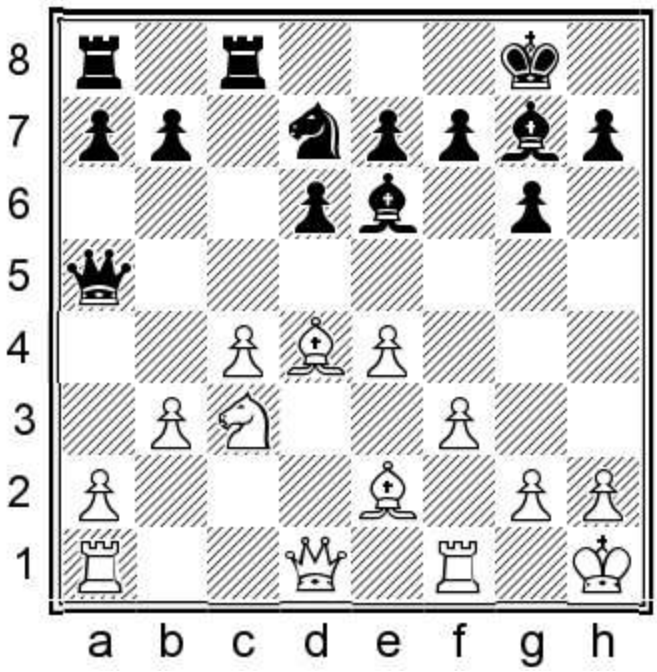
18.Qd4! Qd8
18...Bc6 19.e5! (19.Nb6 Bf6) 19...Bxd5 20.Qxd5 Rf8 21.Bd3 gives White a powerful attack.
18...bxc4 19.fxg6 hxg6 20.Nb6± and White wins the exchange.

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19.Rad1 Rab8 20.Qf2



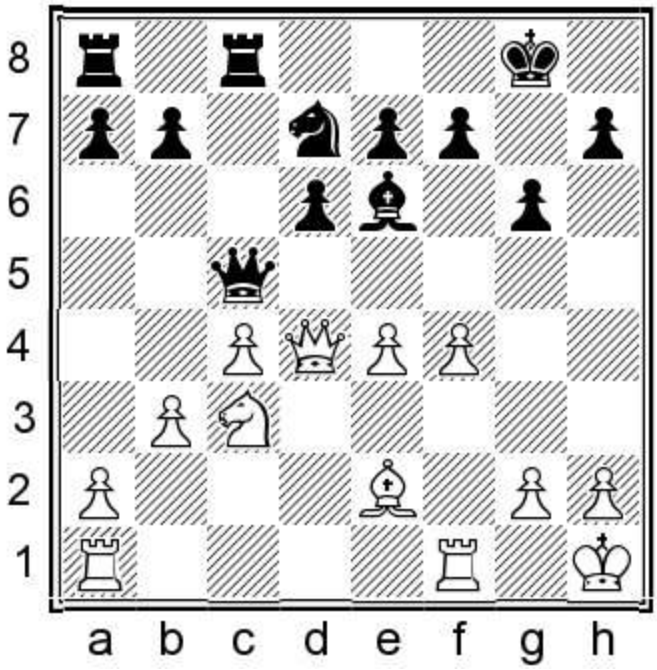
20...f6
20...Qf8 21.Qg3 Bh6 22.f6! is winning for White.
21.Qg3 Kg7 22.h4 Bh6 23.fxg6 hxg6 24.Bg4±
Black remains under pressure and suffers from serious weaknesses in his position.



14.f4!
Making life uncomfortable for the bishop on e6.

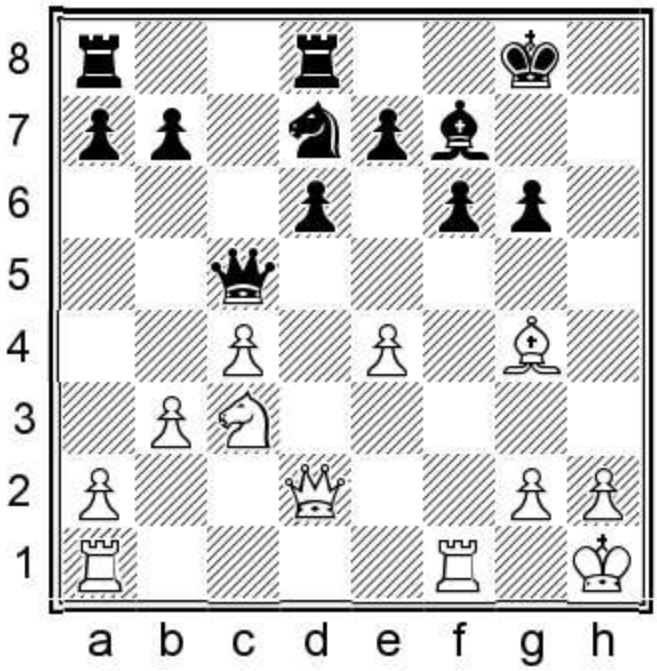
14...Bxd4 15.Qxd4 Qc5
15...f6 16.f5 Bf7 17.fxg6 hxg6 18.Bg4 Rd8 19.Bxd7 Rxd7 20.Nd5± is also tough for Black.

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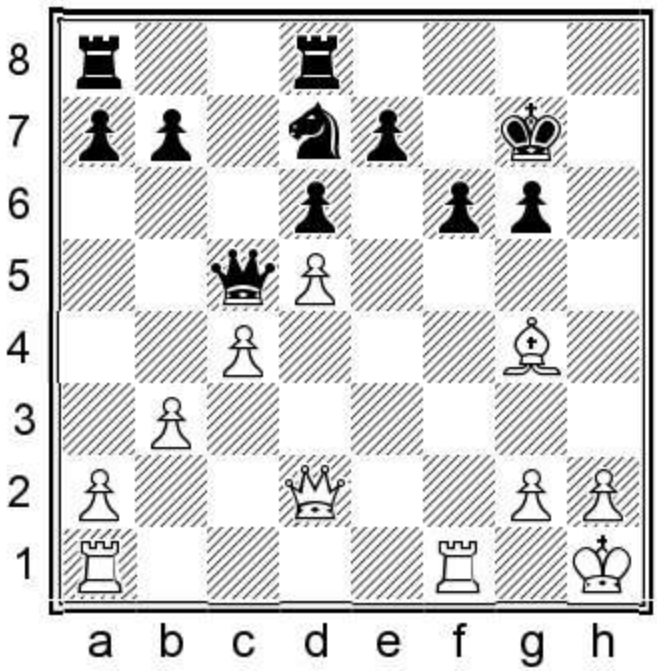
16.Qd2!N
16.Qd3?! f6 17.Qg3 Rf8² was somewhat better for White in Kasparov – Hracek, Prague (simul) 2001, but the text move is even better.

16...Nf6
The alternative is:
16...f6 17.f5! Bf7
17...gxf5 18.exf5 Bf7 19.Bf3± is highly unpleasant for Black.
18.fxg6 hxg6 19.Bg4 Rd8

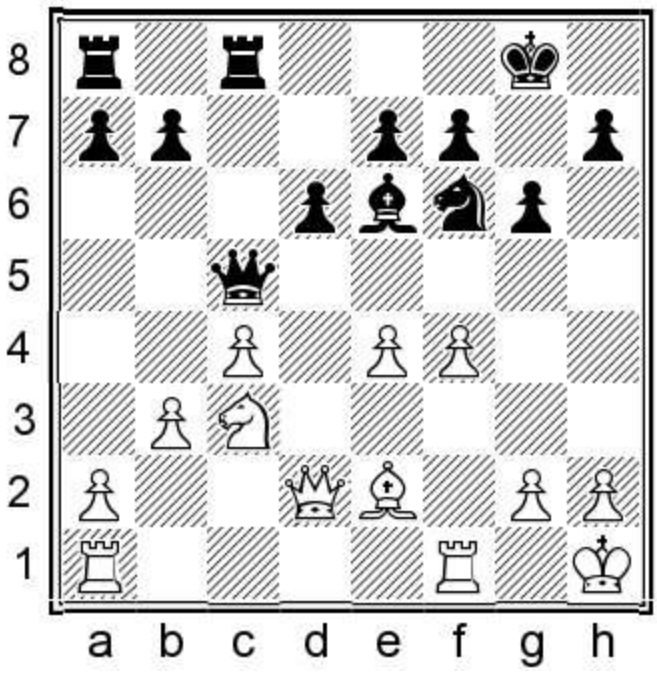


20.Nd5
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20.Qh6 Qg5 21.Qxg5 fxg5 22.Bxd7 Rxd7 23.Rf2 gives White a favourable endgame but there is more to be

gained by keeping the queens on.
20...Bxd5 21.exd5 Kg7
21...Ne5 allows 22.Qh6! and White wins.



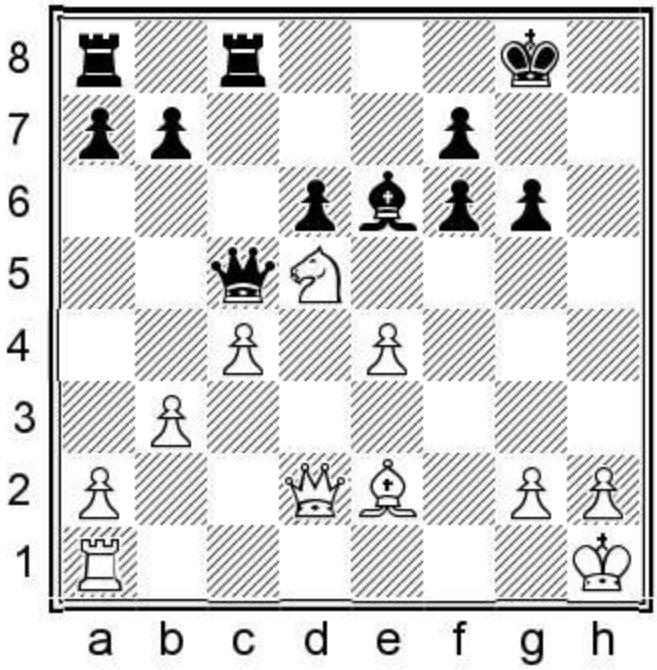
22.Bxd7
Preventing Black from establishing a strong knight on e5.
22...Rxd7
White keeps an overwhelming advantage after 23.Rae1, or the even stronger 23.Rf3!.



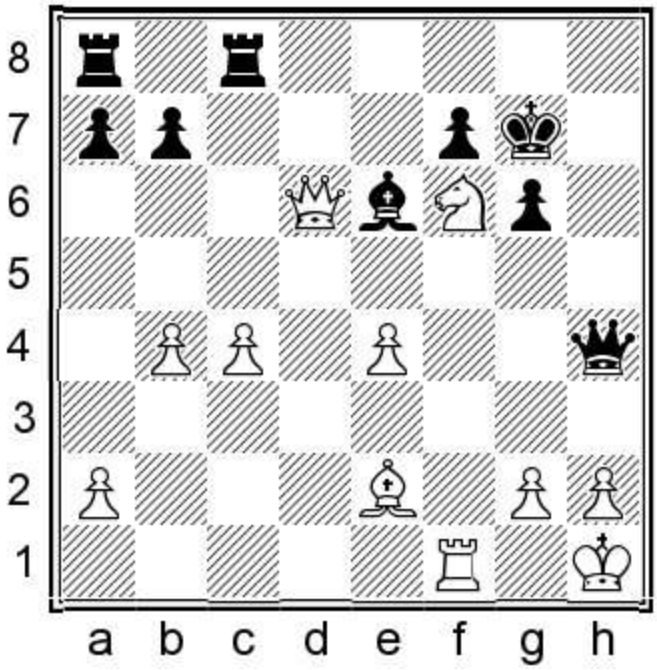
17.f5! Bd7 18.fxg6 fxg6
18...hxg6 allows us to get flashy with: 19.Rxf6!? (19.Nd5 Nxd5 20.exd5 also leads to a great advantage) 19...

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exf6 20.Nd5 Be6

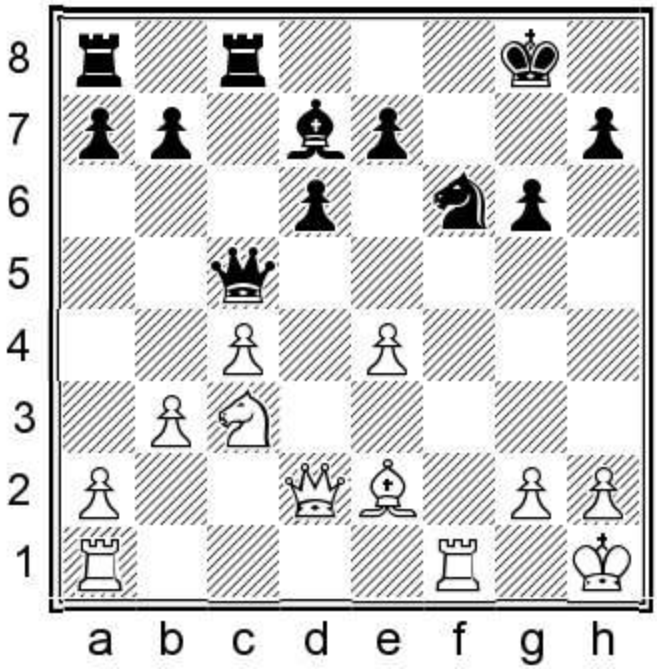


21.b4! An important detail. The queen is short of squares, giving White a few extra tempos. 21...Qf2 22.Rf1 Qh4 23.Nxf6† Kg7 24.Qxd6 Black is in trouble, for instance:



24...Bxc4 25.g3 Qh8 26.Bxc4 Rxc4 27.Qe5 White has an overwhelming advantage.

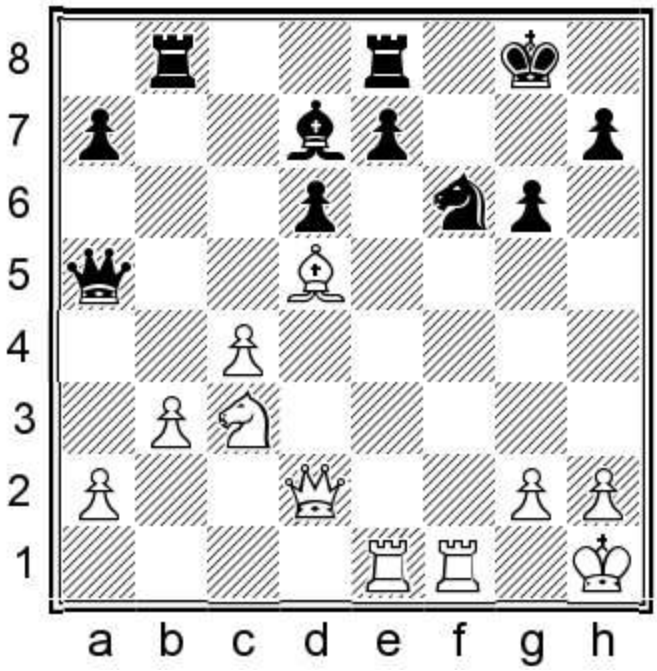
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19.e5!!
A great move, leading to serious problems for Black.

19...Qxe5 20.Bf3
An elegant double attack, hitting the pawns on b7 and (indirectly) e7. Black has nothing better than:

20...Re8 21.Rae1 Qa5 22.Bxb7 Rab8 23.Bd5†



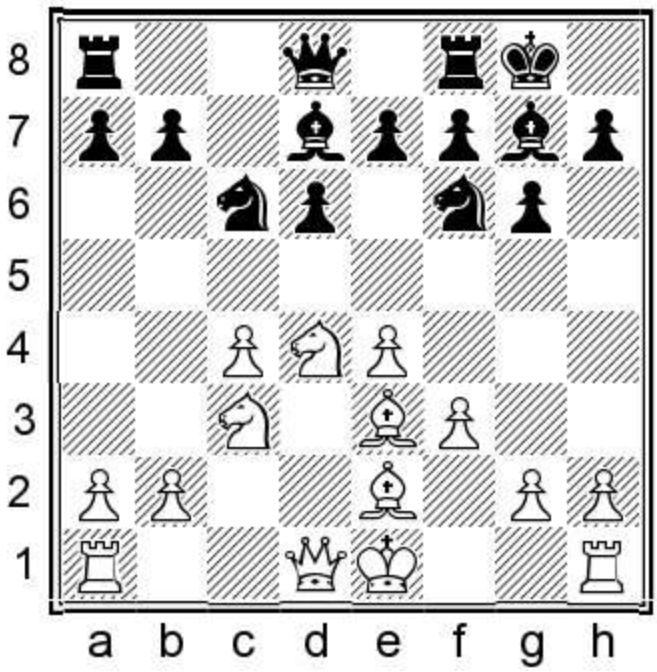
23...Nxd5
23...Kg7 24.Qb2± followed by Be6 is also terrible for Black.

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24.Qxd5† Qxd5 25.Nxd5±

White wins a pawn for starters.

B222) 9...Bd7



This is Black’s most flexible continuation.

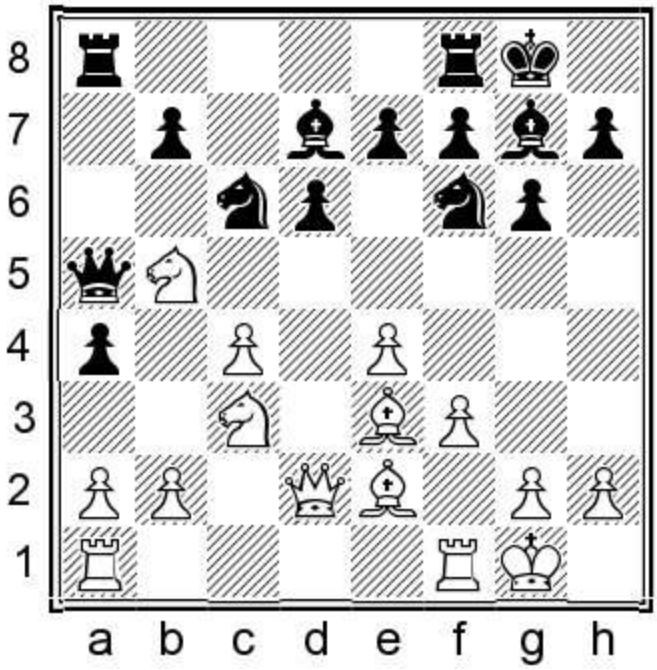
10.Qd2
We reply with a flexible move of our own. Please note that 10.0-0 would be less accurate, as White gives up the often alluring possibility of long castling. Moreover, 10...Qb6!? is an interesting reply, leading to tactical complications.

We will analyse three main continuations. Against both B2221) 10...Qa5 and B2222) 10...a6, we will castle on the kingside, having lured Black into a suboptimal set-up. We will finish by analysing the most popular and thematic continuation, namely B2223) 10...Nxd4, which allows us to castle queenside to good effect.

10...Rc8 should be met by 11.0-0! (11.g4 Ne5 12.b3 a6 offers Black plenty of counterplay) 11...Ne5 (11...a6 leads straight to variation B2222) 12.b3 and it is not clear what Black is doing next.

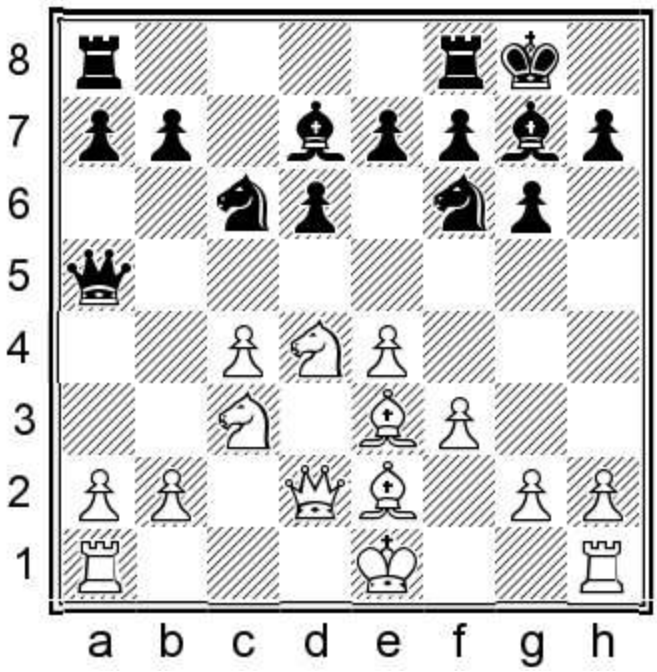
10...a5 allows White to exploit the b5-outpost with: 11.Ndb5! (11.0-0 allows 11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 Bc6, when Black transposes to a solid main line) 11...a4 12.0-0 Qa5

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13.Rac1 (White has several good options, 13.f4!? and 13.Rad1 being a couple of them) 13...Rfc8 14.f4 Be6
This was Adhiban – Guseinov, Khanty-Mansiysk (ol) 2010, when 15.h3!?N would have kept a pleasant advantage for White, as Black suffers from a lack of space.

B2221) 10...Qa5



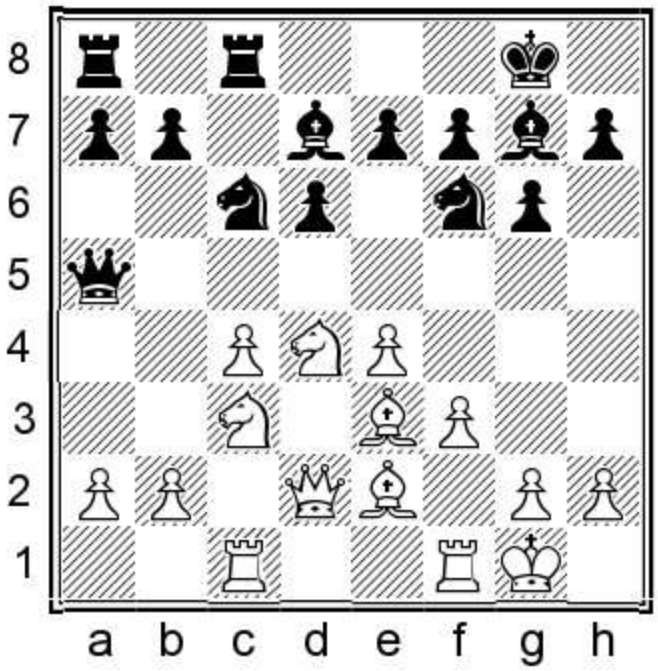
11.0-0
If we castled on the queenside then Black's last move would make a lot of sense, whereas now he simply has an inferior version of a standard Maroczy Bind set-up.

11...Rfc8
This is consistent with Black's previous move.

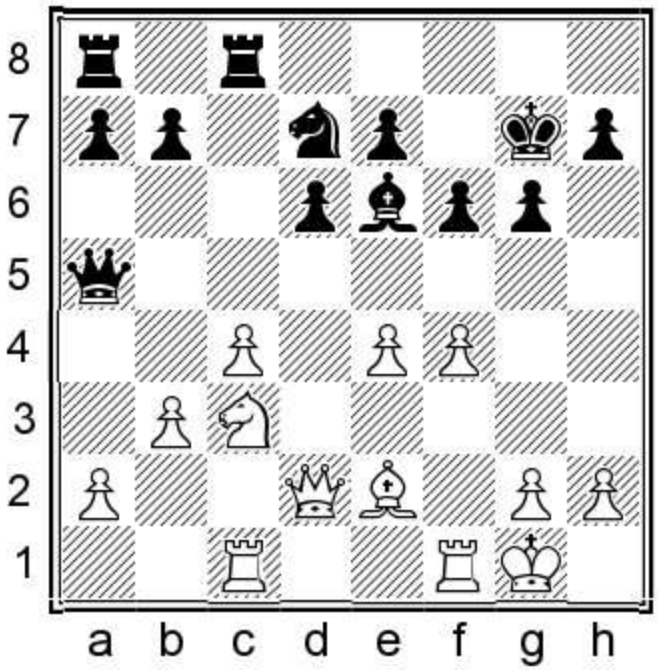
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11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 is a thematic exchange, but Black usually combines it with ...a5, ...Bc6 and ...Nd7-c5, so here the queen on a5 just gets in the way.

12.Rac1!
I also checked 12.Rfd1 and found that 12...a6 13.Nb3! gives White a nice advantage. However, 12...Nxd4 13. Bxd4 Be6 14.b3 Nd7 is more annoying; normally we would look to threaten f4-f5 against Black's set-up, but the plan is less effective now that the rook has moved away from f1.



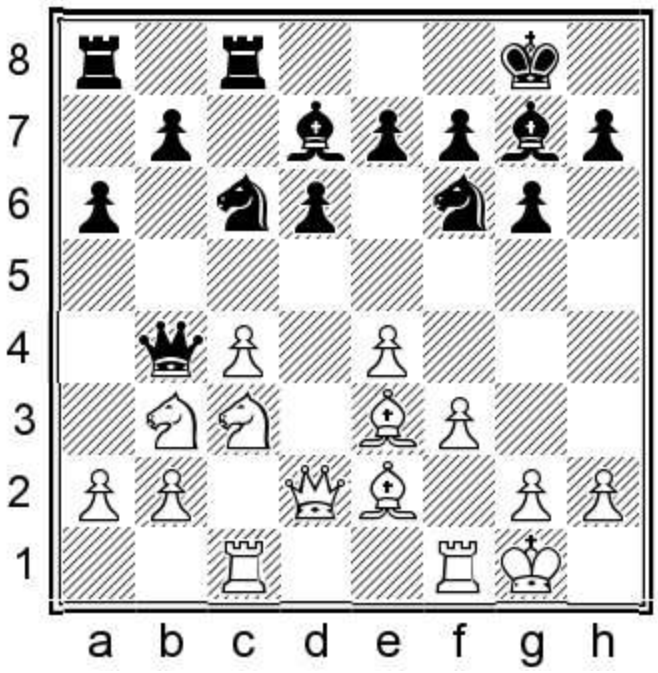

12...a6
Here we are better placed to meet 12...Nxd4 13.Bxd4 Be6, although some precision is needed. Play continues 14.b3 Nd7 15.Bxg7 Kxg7 16.f4 f6 and now a key idea is:




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17.Qd1! Preparing Bg4 to expose Black’s weaknesses on the light squares. 17...Nc5 This occurred in Nguyen Huynh Minh – Nguyen, Dalat City 2004, when for some reason White rejected the obvious move: 18.Bg4N Black is clearly under pressure.

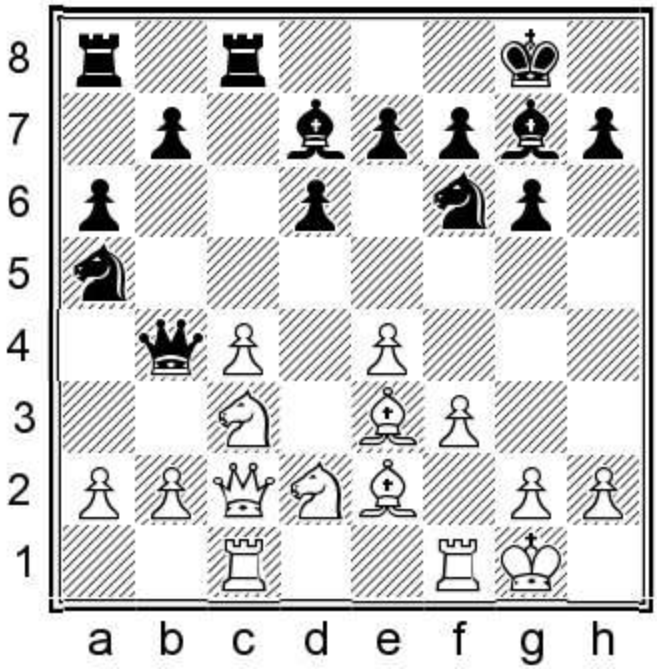
13.Nb3 Qb4!?
13...Qd8 has been more common but White keeps a nice edge with 14.Na4 or 14.Nd5.




14.Qc2!N
14.c5 Be6 was not so clear in Fodor – Glatt, Hungary 2006. The text move threatens to trap Black’s queen; his next couple of moves are forced.

14...Na5 15.Nd2!
Threatening a2-a3.

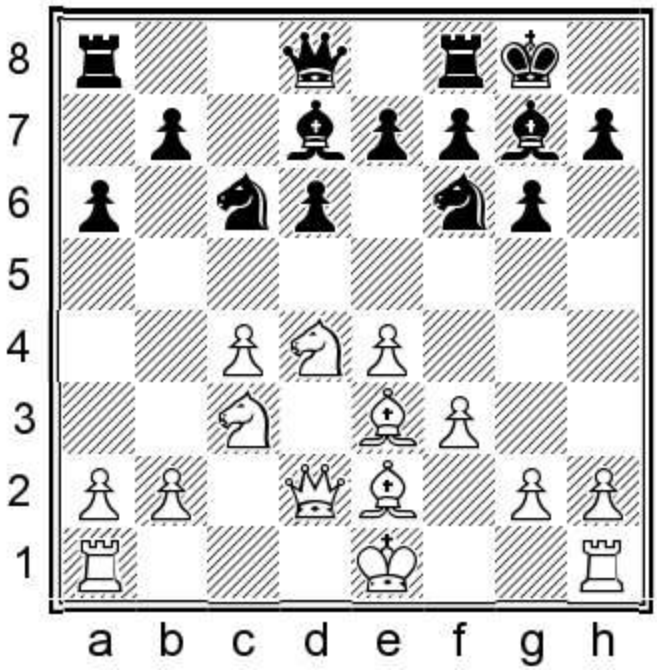
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15...Nc6 16.a3
16.Qb1 also favours White.

16...Qa5 17.Rfd1²
Black suffers from a cramped position with no obvious counterplay in sight, and ideas of Nb3 and c4-c5 are in the air.

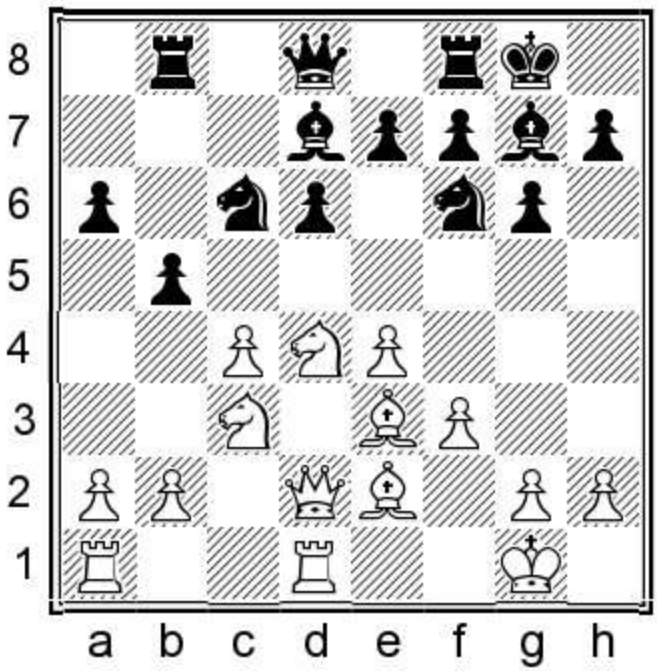
B2222) 10...a6



11.0-0
11.g4!? has been played a few times but 11...b5!N offers Black decent counterplay. So once again, we should be happy to play a traditional Maroczy set-up, having lured Black into a suboptimal set-up with ...a6.

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11...Rc8
11...Rb8 12.Rfd1 b5 is a thematic plan but White has no problem getting an advantage against it:



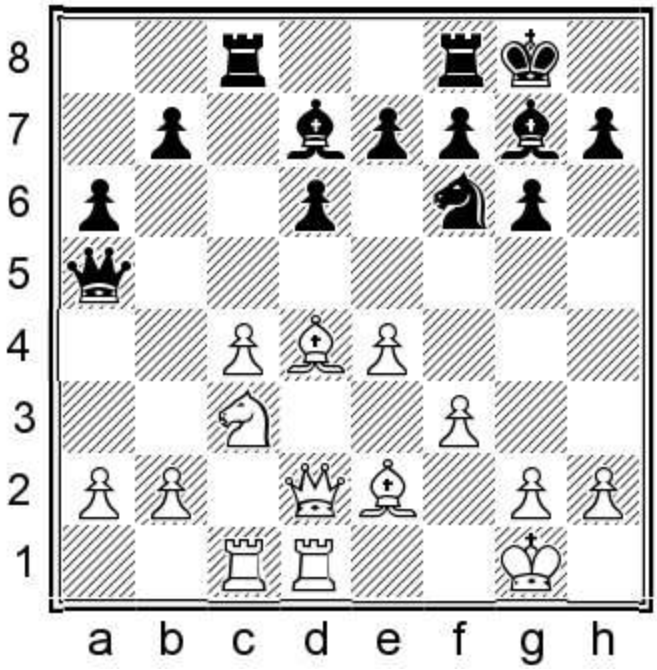
13.cxb5 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 axb5 and now either 15.a3 or 15.b4 leaves White with a pleasant position and good prospects on the queenside. The b5-pawn may become weak, or White may simply swap it off to create a strong passed pawn.

12.Rac1 Nxd4
In the event of 12...Ne5 13.b3 Black is running out of ideas.

12...Re8 has been tried in some games, but 13.Rfd1 develops another piece and asks Black what he is doing. (13.Nxc6!? also gives White the upper hand, but I would not be in a hurry to exchange pieces with such a space advantage.)

13.Bxd4 Qa5 14.Rfd1
14.a3 is also promising but it seems logical to develop the last piece, while also creating a threat.

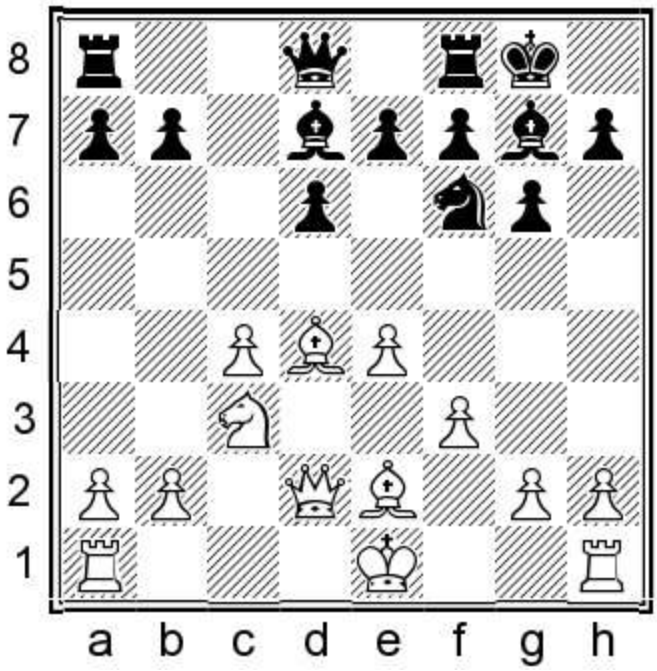
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14...Rfe8
14...b5? 15.Nd5! is a typical trick.

15.a3²
White keeps a pleasant advantage and has achieved a huge practical score of well over 80% from here.

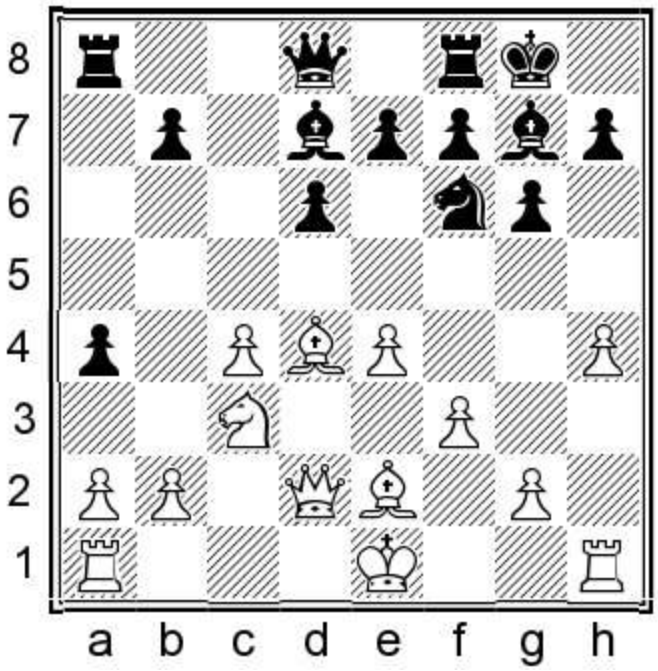
B2223) 10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4



11...Bc6
This has been the most popular continuation. Black's typical plan involves ...a5 and ...Nd7-c5, but White can take advantage of the fact that he has not yet castled.

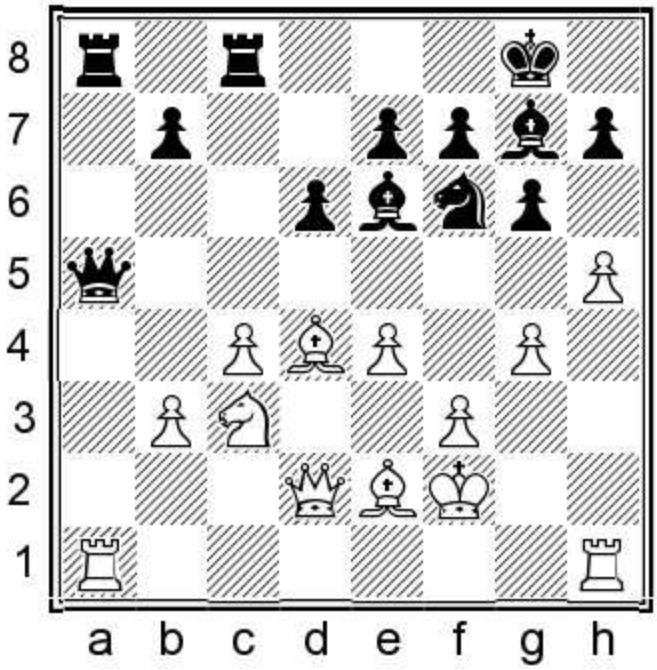
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Another move order is:
11...a5 12.h4!
Just as in the main line, White can play the Maroczy Bind in the spirit of the Yugoslav Attack!
12...a4
I considered three other options:
a) 12...Bc6 13.0-0-0! (13.h5 is playable although 13...e5! keeps Black in the game, with ...Nxh5 to follow) 13...Qc7?! 14.h5, and Black was in trouble on the kingside in Arutyunova – Finkelshtein, Evpatoria 2005.
b) 12...Nh5 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.g4 Ng3 15.Rh2 Nxe2 16.Nxe2 h6 occurred in Pasztor – Celustkova, Liptovsky Mikulas 2015. White has no immediate breakthrough, but 17.Qd4†N 17...Kg8 18.Nc3± keeps a clear advantage.
c) 12...h5N has not yet been tried, but 13.0-0-0 a4 14.g4! transposes to an existing game which continued: 14...e5?! (14...hxg4? 15.h5 gives White a devastating attack; 14...a3 15.b3 Bc6 is a better try, but 16.Rdg1!? still gives White excellent chances) 15.Be3 hxg4 This was Asabri – S. Ali, Taza 2005, when 16.Bg5!N, would have posed insurmountable problems to Black.



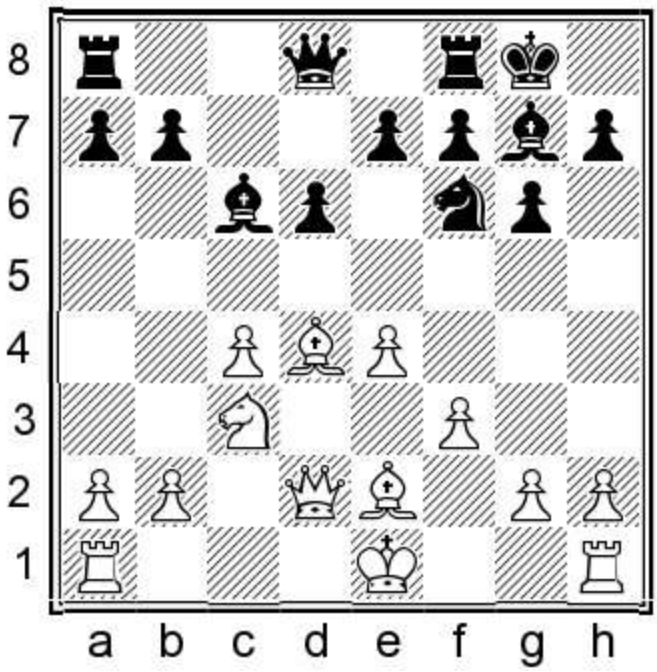

13.h5 Qa5
This position was reached in Knezevic – Silva Lillo, Argenteuil 1997. I like the following way of building up White's position:
14.g4!N 14...Rfc8 15.Kf2 Be6 16.b3 axb3 17.axb3
Black should retreat his queen and accept that he stands clearly worse. The alternative leads to disaster:

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17...Qxa1? 18.Rxa1 Rxa1 19.Nd5+–
With decisive material gains.

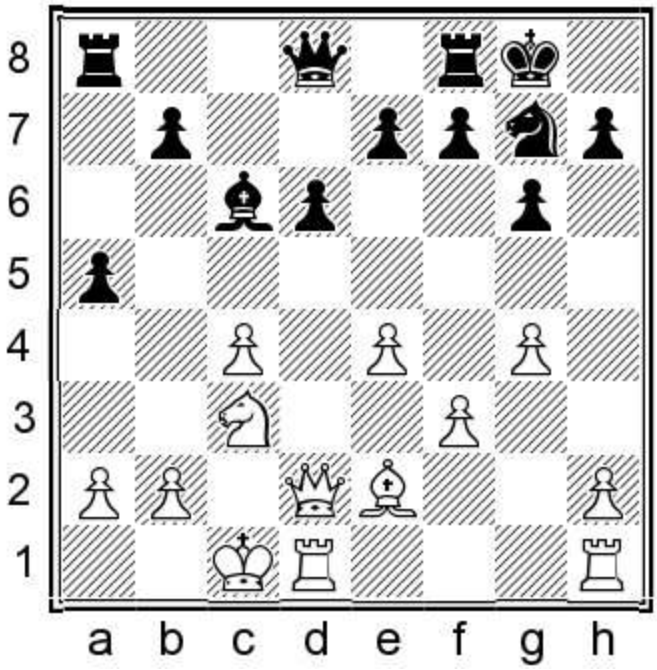
Let’s return to the main line, where Black’s thematic continuation plays right into our hands.



12.0-0-0!
If White was going to castle on the kingside, then 12.b4!? would be the most accurate move order, preventing the thematic ...Nd7 on account of b4-b5, trapping the bishop. Black must therefore try something like 12...b6, when 13.0-0² gives White a pleasant advantage. This would be a fully satisfactory outcome from the opening, but I like the plan of attacking on the kingside even more.

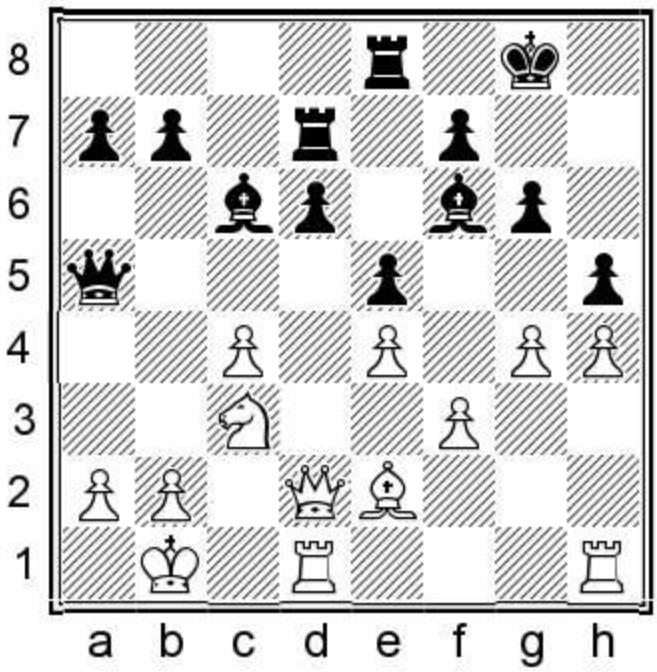
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12...a6
12...Nh5 is not a stupid move but it is well met by: 13.Bxg7 Nxg7 14.g4 a5



15.h4² White had an obvious edge in O'Donnell – Monteverde, email 2003.

Black soon got into trouble in the following game: 12...Qa5 13.Kb1 Rfe8 14.g4 e5 15.Be3 Rad8 16.h4 h5 17. Bg5 Rd7 18.Bxf6 Bxf6 In Bicskei – Majstorac, Senta 2010, White made several mistakes and somehow ended up losing. At this point, the simplest win would have been:



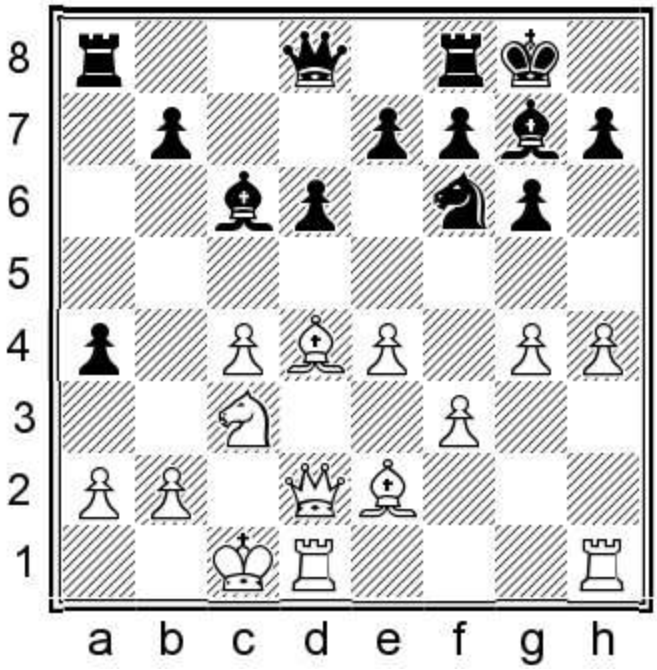
19.gxh5N Black's position will soon fall apart.

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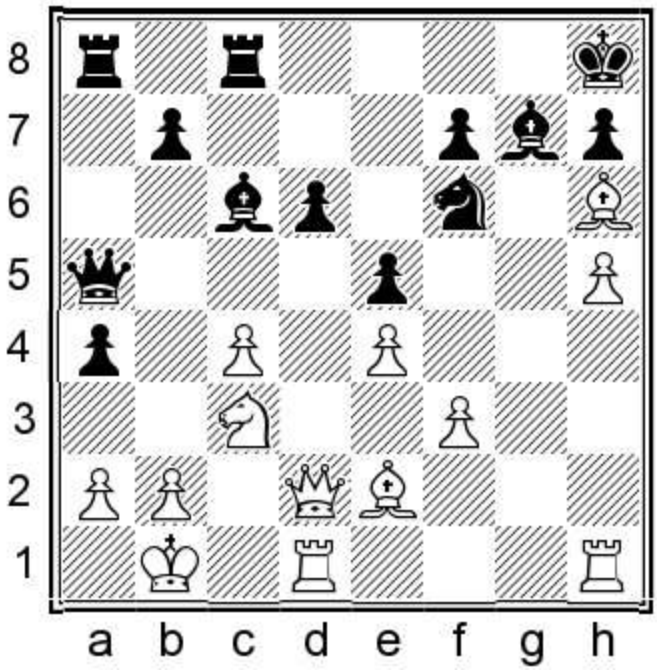
12...Re8?! is hardly satisfactory: 13.g4 Nd7 14.Bxg7 Kxg7 15.h4 Rh8 This occurred in Saucey – Uhl, Calvi

2005, when 16.h5N 16...Qa5 17.g5± would have been excellent for White.

Another game continued:
12...a5 13.g4 a4 14.h4

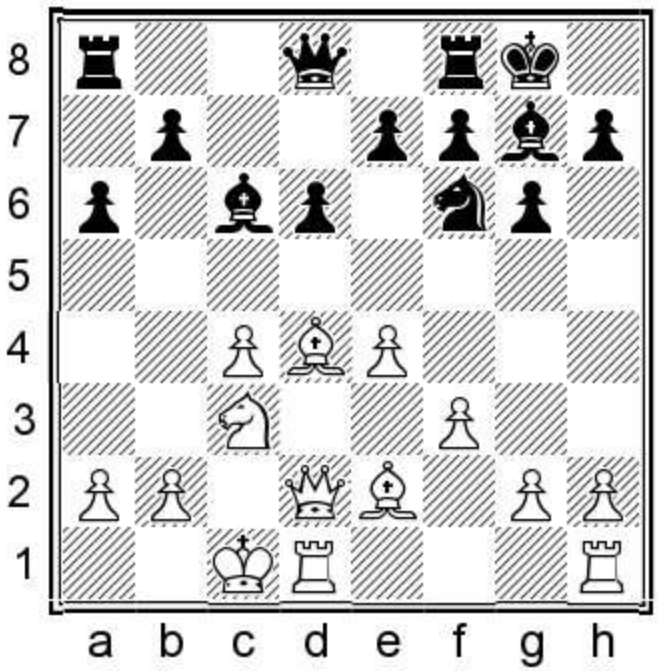


14...Qa5?!
14...a3 can be met by: 15.b4!? h5 (15...Rc8 16.Kb1²) 16.g5 Ne8 17.f4²
14...h5 15.gxh5 Nxh5 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.f4 Rh8 18.Rhg1² also favours White.
15.h5± Rfc8 16.Kb1 gxh5?
Black was already in trouble, but opening the g-file like this is suicidal at best.
17.gxh5 e5 18.Be3 Kh8 19.Bh6
19.Qxd6+– is also good enough.



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19...Rg8 20.Bxg7† Rxg7 21.Qxd6 Ne8 22.Qf8† Rg8 23.Qxf7 Ra6 24.Rhg1
1–0 Wagner – Fritzer, Vienna 2008.



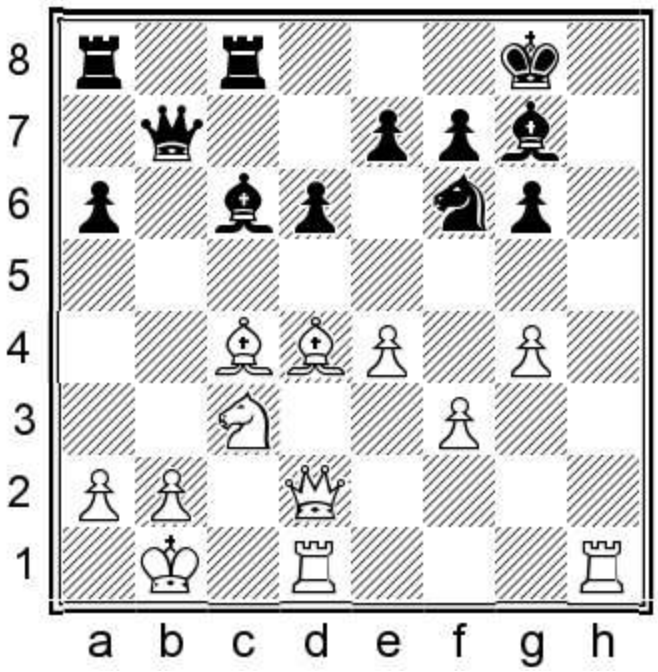
13.Kb1
13.g4 h5 14.h4 was not so convincing after 14...hxg4 15.fxg4 e5! in Vani – Mateus, Mureck 2009. White could easily improve on move 14 of this game, but I also like the text move, just taking a moment to improve the king's position.

13...Qd7
13...b5 occurred in Putzbach – Nolting, Bad Woerishofen 1988. The trouble for Black is that the bishop on c6 just gets in the way of his attack, so White can simply get on with his own plans: 14.g4!N 14...bxc4 (14...Rb8 15.h4±) 15.Bxc4 Qc8 16.Rc1²

14.g4 b5
Once again, there is no need to react to Black's queenside play.

15.h4 bxc4 16.h5 Qb7 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.Bxc4 Rfc8
In Bilic – Cebalo, Bizovac 2004, White missed a clear way to break through:

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19.g5!N 19...Nxe4
Other moves lose more quickly.

20.fxe4 Bxe4† 21.Nxe4 Qxe4† 22.Ka1 Rxc4
Black's combination has netted him a couple of pawns, but the open h-file proves his undoing.

23.Bxg7 Kxg7 24.Qh2+–

Conclusion

The Maroczy Bind has long been established as a quality choice. In this chapter, we saw how modern nuances can be used to imbue this vintage system with added punch.

After 5.c4, our first main line continued 5...Nf6 6.Nc3 d6, when 7.f3! is the most accurate way to steer the game towards the target position identified on page 232. After the further 7...Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Bg7 9.Be3 0-0 10.Qd2 there are a couple of important details. First, 10...Be6 11.Rc1 Qa5 12.Bd3! has significant advantages over the more common bishop development to e2. Secondly, 10...a5 should be met by 11.Na4!, leading to excellent prospects for White.

Black's other main option is 5...Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Nc3, leading to a further split.

7...Ng4 is an interesting way of exchanging knights. Play continues 8.Qxg4 Nxd4 9.Qd1 and now both 9...e5 and 9...Ne6 are valid options, although I like White's chances in both cases.

Finally, 7...0-0 8.Be2 d6 is a well-known main line with a reputation for solidity, but 9.f3! is an excellent move which reaches the target position identified early in the chapter. The big idea is to retain the option of castling on the queenside and launching a vicious kingside attack – an approach which has been overlooked in many books, making it an even more dangerous practical weapon. If Black anticipates this plan and prepares to launch his own queenside attack, White can happily revert to kingside castling, having lured Black into a sub-optimal set-up for that type of position.

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# Chapter 8 - Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3

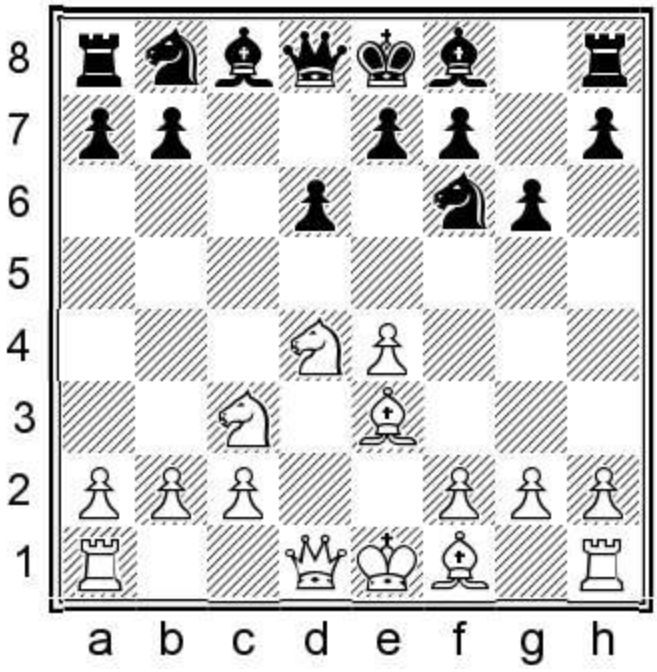
A) 7...a6 8.Qd2 (8...Nc6; 8...b5) 269
A1) 8...h5 269
A2) 8...Nbd7 Game 23 271
B) 7...Nc6 Game 24 275
C) 7...0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.0-0-0 (9...Qa5; 9...Be6) 278
C1) 9...Bd7 278
C2) 9...Nxd4 281
C3) 9...d5 10.Qe1!? (10...dxe4??; 10...Be6?!) 286
C31) 10...e6?! 11.h4! (11...Bd7?!; 11...h5?!; 11...Re8?!) 287
C311) 11...Qe7?! 288
C312) 11...Qc7 Game 25 290
C32) 10...e5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5 293
C321) 12...cxd5 Game 26 294
C322) 12...Nxd5 13.Bc4 Be6 14.Ne4 298
(14...Re8?!; 14...h6) 299
C3221) 14...Qb8 300
C3222) 14...Qc7 302

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6

The Dragon is an exciting system which continues to defy all White's attempts at a direct refutation. In this chapter I will advocate a policy of controlled aggression. The general plan will be to aim for a kingside attack, while being ready to switch to a positional strategy when the position demands it.

6.Be3

Preparing a Yugoslav Attack with 7.f3 and 8.Qd2.

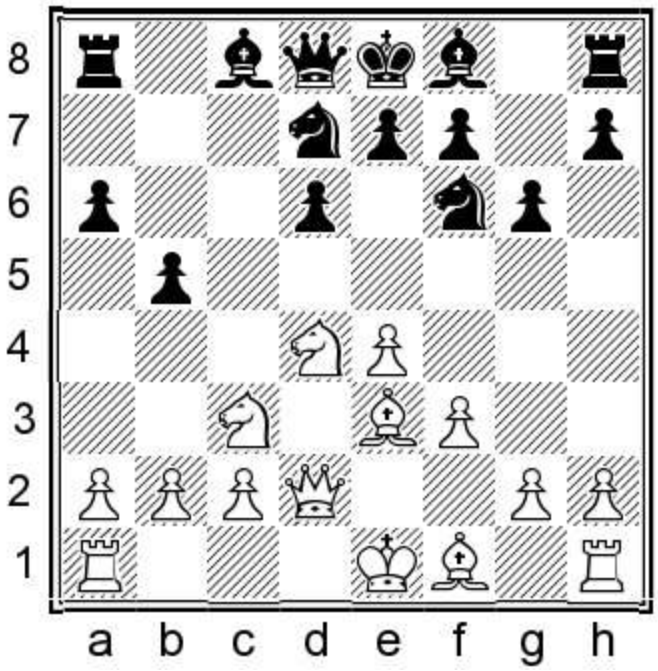



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6...Bg7
We don’t have to worry about 6...Ng4?? yet, as 7.Bb5† wins material.

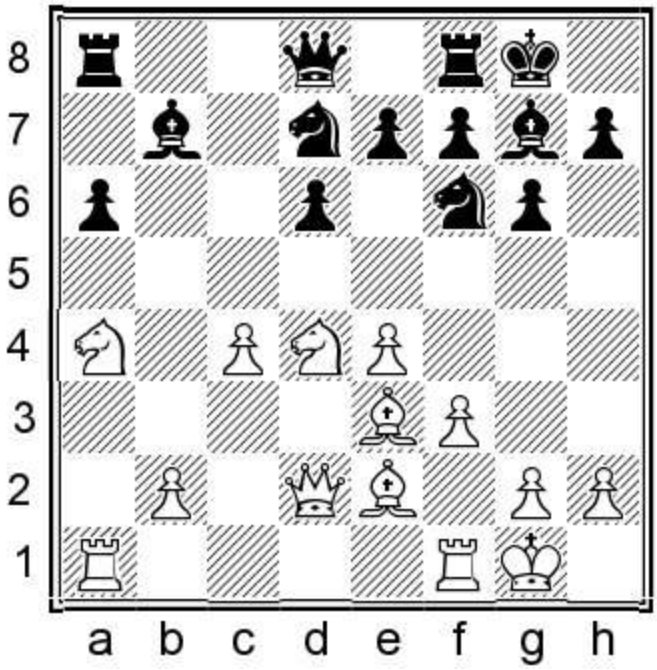
6...Nc6 7.f3 will almost certainly convert to one of the main lines, as Black can hardly delay ...Bg7 indefinitely.

The only other option worth mentioning is:
6...a6!?
With this move, Black goes for an ‘accelerated’ version of the Dragadorf System, which will be discussed in Variation A below. However, it’s likely to come to the same thing.
7.f3 Nbd7 8.Qd2 b5?!
Black should prefer 8...Bg7, with a transposition to variation A2 on page 271.

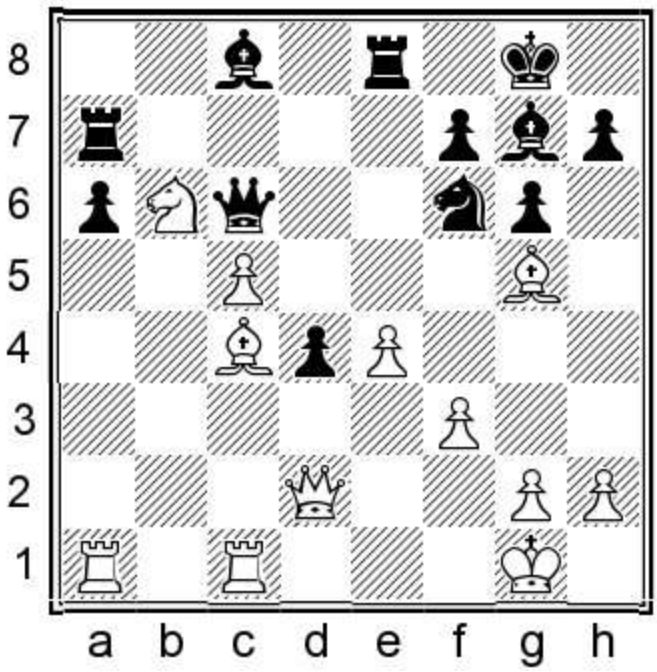



9.a4!
This is an important motif to remember in situations where Black plays ...b5 before White has committed to queenside castling.
9...bxa4
9...b4 10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.Nc6 Qc7 12.exd5 is clearly better for White.
10.Nxa4 Bg7 11.Be2 Bb7 12.c4 0-0 13.0-0
White has a pleasant position with good chances to exert pressure against Black’s weakened queenside. This is why, as a general rule, Black should wait for White to castle on the queenside before playing ...b5. You don’t need to know any more than this, but I will include a bit more of the game to show how Kasparov increased his advantage.

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13...Nc5 14.b4 e5 15.bxc5 exd4 16.Bg5 Re8 17.cxd6 Qxd6 18.c5 Qc6 19.Bc4 Bc8 20.Nb6 Ra7 21.Rfc1



21...Nd7 22.Bd5 Qc7 23.Nc4 Qxc5 24.Na5 Qf8 25.Nc6
White's pieces are dominating and Black was unable to resist for much longer in Kasparov – Ki. Georgiev, Sarajevo 2000.

7.f3
We have reached our first major branching point, where A) 7...a6, B) 7...Nc6 and C) 7...0-0 must be considered.

7...Bd7 reaches a position discussed on page 375 of the previous volume – see the note on 6...g6 in the coverage of the Kupreichik System.

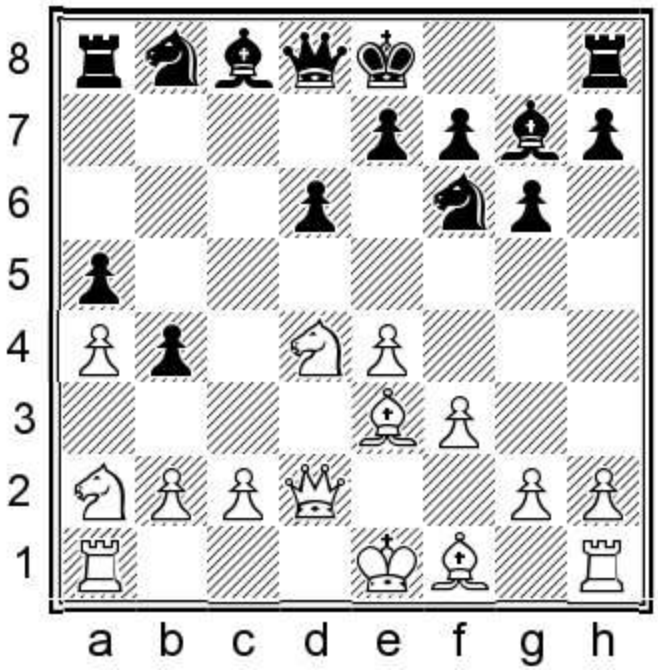
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A) 7...a6

This move introduces the Dragadorf System, so called because it combines elements of the Dragon and Najdorf. Simon Williams recommended it in his 2009 book The New Sicilian Dragon. For a while Black's set-up became quite popular and presented White with a lot of challenges, but I believe my recommended scheme causes serious problems for the defence.

8.Qd2
We will consider two main options: A1) 8...h5 is an attempt to restrain White's kingside ambitions, and the more natural A2) 8...Nbd7 is the main line.
8...Nc6?! simply gives Black a bad version of a normal Dragon.

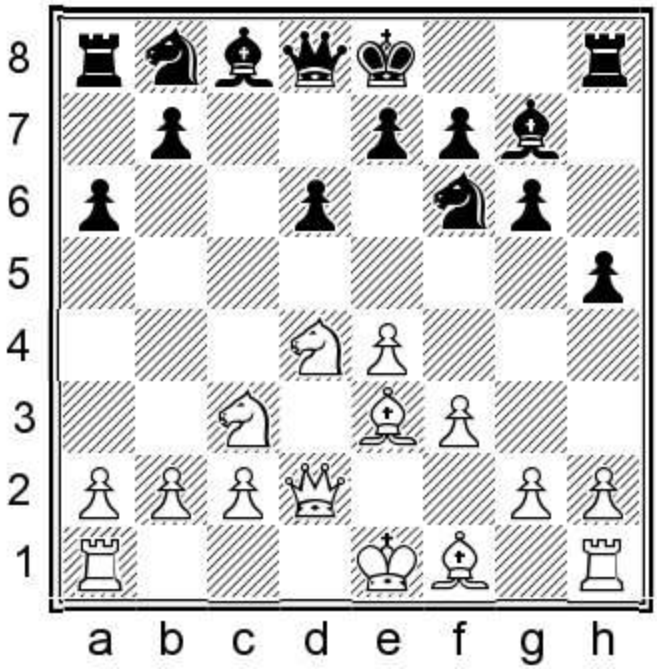
8...b5 is once again premature due to: 9.a4! b4 (9...bxa4 is likely to transpose to the Kasparov – Georgiev game noted above) 10.Na2 a5




11.Bb5† Nbd7 12.c3 bxc3 13.Nxc3² White had an easy edge in Galkin – Motylev, Novokuznetsk 2008.

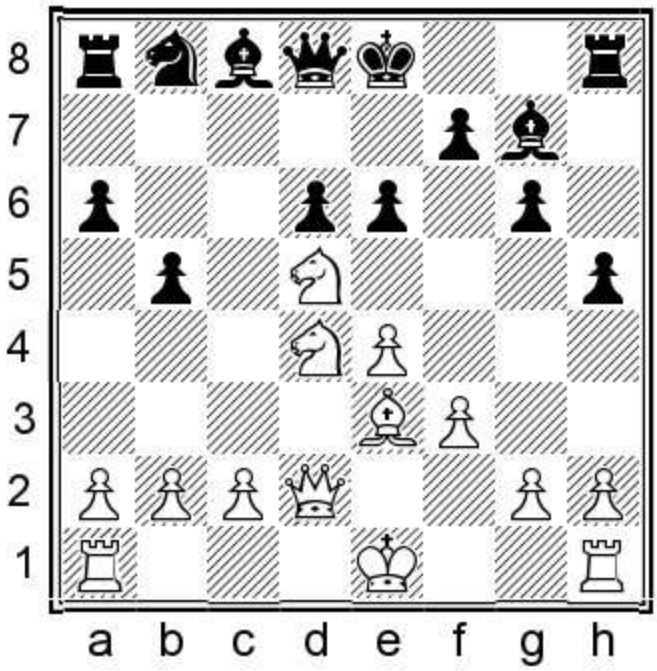
A1) 8...h5

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9.Bc4!
9.0-0-0 b5 10.Nd5 offers decent chances for an edge, but this is a rare case where I prefer to develop the bishop to c4. As you will see throughout the chapter, I usually recommend doing without this move, but here it makes a lot of sense. Black's last move may have prevented ideas such as Bh6 and g2-g4, but it leaves him vulnerable to a central attack with Bg5, Rhe1, f3-f4 and e4-e5; the bishop on c4 nicely supports this plan. Moreover, if Black chases the bishop with ...b5, then Bd5 often proves an effective reply, as we will see.

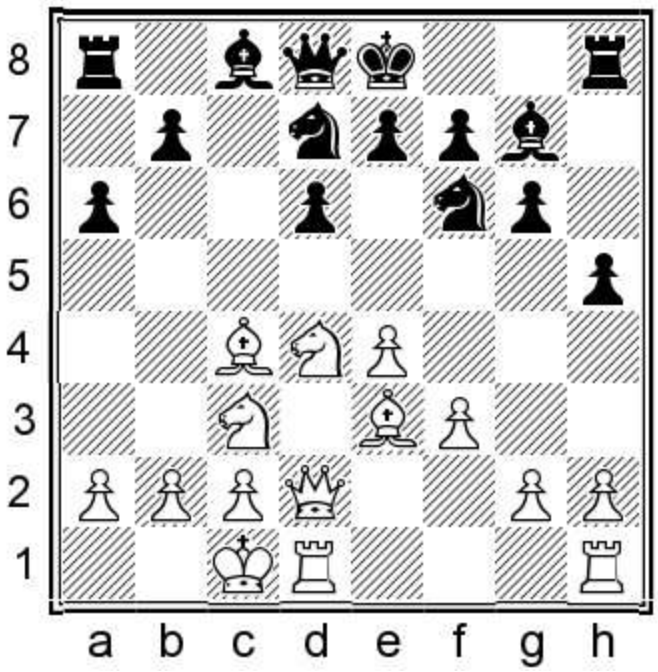
9...Nbd7
9...b5 is well met by: 10.Bd5! (10.Bb3 should favour White too but the text move is more forcing) 10...Nxd5 11.Nxd5 e6



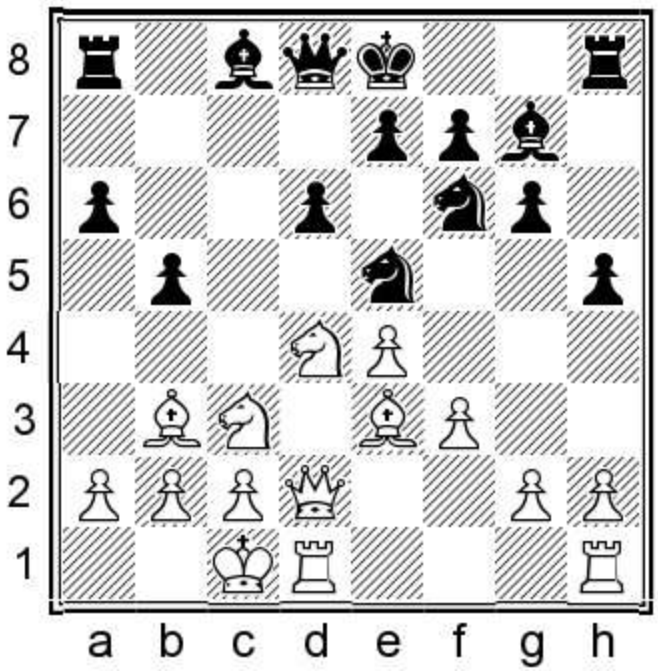
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12.Nb6! Ra7N (12...Qxb6 13.Nxe6 Qxe3† 14.Qxe3 Bxe6 occurred in Zlotov – Borhy, Hajduboszormeny 2016,

when 15.0-0-0N would have been close to winning for White) 13.Nxc8 Qxc8 14.Nxb5 axb5 15.Bxa7 Bxb2 16. Bd4 Bxa1 17.Bxa1 0-0 18.Qxd6± Black may win back the lost pawn but his dark-square weaknesses will remain.

10.0-0-0



10...b5
Sometimes Black prefers 10...Ne5 11.Bb3 b5, in order to discourage Bd5, which would now lose a tempo. However, White has another strong idea which, surprisingly, has yet to be tested.



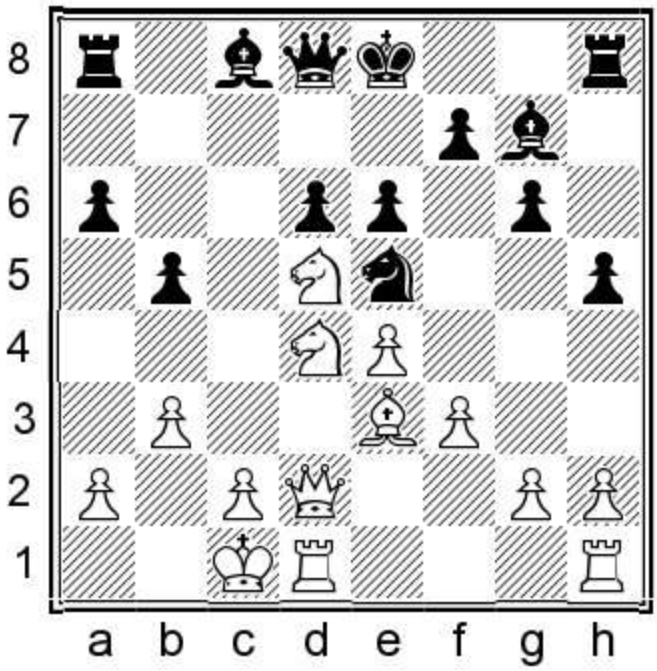
12.Bg5!N White has excellent prospects in the centre with f3-f4, Rhe1 and e4-e5 coming.

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11.Bd5!
Again this is our preferred reply to ...b5.

11...Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Ne5
12...Bb7 13.Bg5 Bxd5 14.exd5 Ne5 15.b3 Rc8 16.Rhe1± left Black hard pressed to defend against f3-f4 in Guizar – Ensor, corr. 2011.

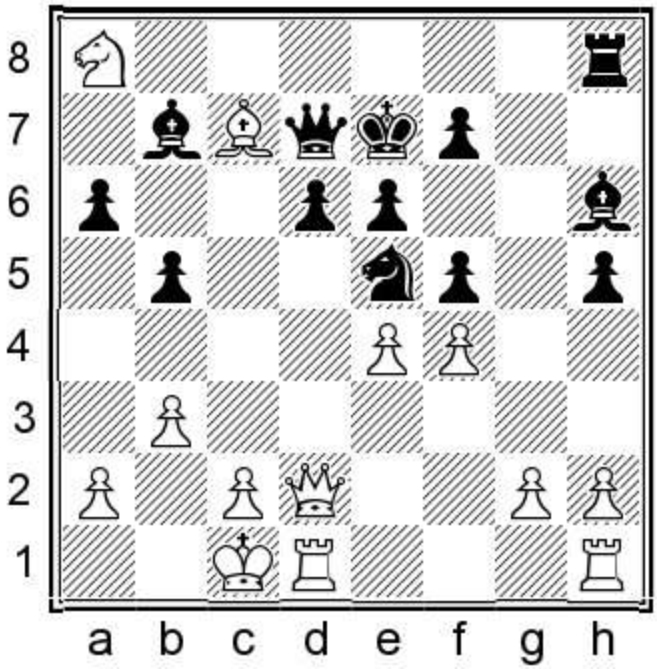
13.b3 e6



14.Nf5!
This spectacular move leads to a big advantage by force.

14...gxf5 15.Bb6 Qd7 16.Nc7† Ke7 17.Nxa8 Bb7 18.Bc7 Bh6 19.f4

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19...Nd3†!?
This tricky move is as good a try as any, but White deals with it efficiently.

20.cxd3 Rc8 21.Kb1 Bxa8 22.Ba5 fxe4 23.Rhe1 f5 24.Qe2 Qe8 25.Qe3 Kf8 26.Rc1+–
Black failed to demonstrate compensation for the exchange and White converted his advantage in Riccio – Gerola, corr. 2009.

A2) 8...Nbd7

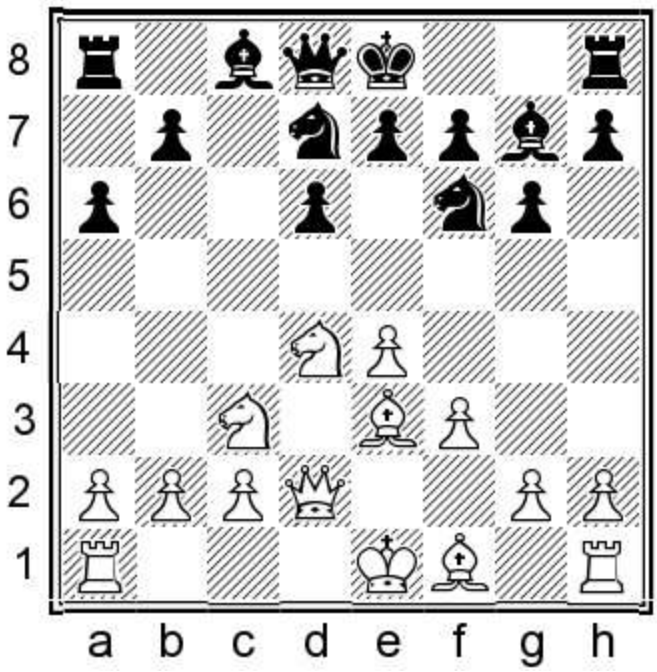
This natural move is the main line, but the following game shows an excellent way for White to meet it.

GAME 23

Peter Catt – Richard Sutton
Correspondence 2010

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 a6 8.Qd2 Nbd7

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9.g4!
9.0-0-0 has been the most popular choice but the text is more accurate. White not only starts his attack a move earlier, but also keeps the option of short castling, which may prove useful in some lines, as we will soon see. Before moving on, I will mention a few other ideas which I rejected for one reason or another.

9.a3!? comes with the sneaky idea of meeting 9...b5 with 10.a4!. However, a more flexible move such as 9...0-0N makes it harder for White to justify his last move.

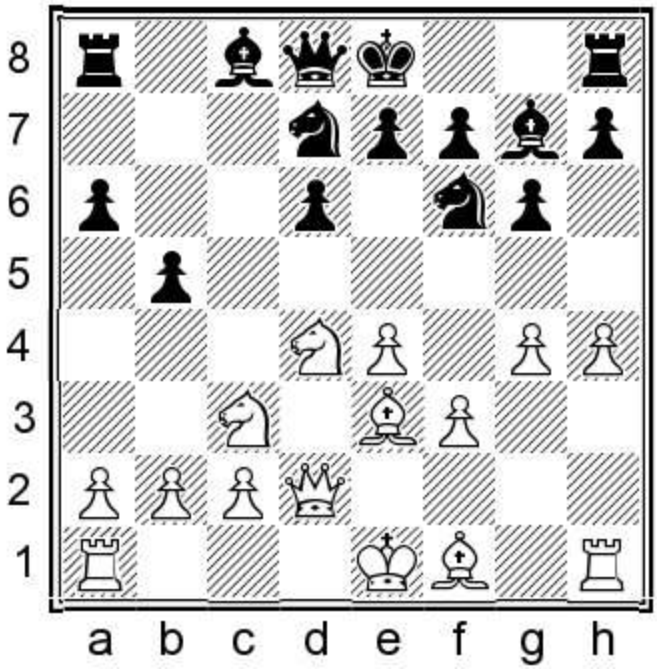
9.a4!? offers White chances for a slight plus but it's hardly the kind of move that will keep Dragadorf players awake at night.

9.Be2 b6 10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.exd5 Bb7 12.c4 0-0 13.0-0 Re8 14.Rac1² gave White a small edge in Efimenko – Nakamura, Gibraltar 2007. Once again though, I prefer a more ambitious treatment of the position.

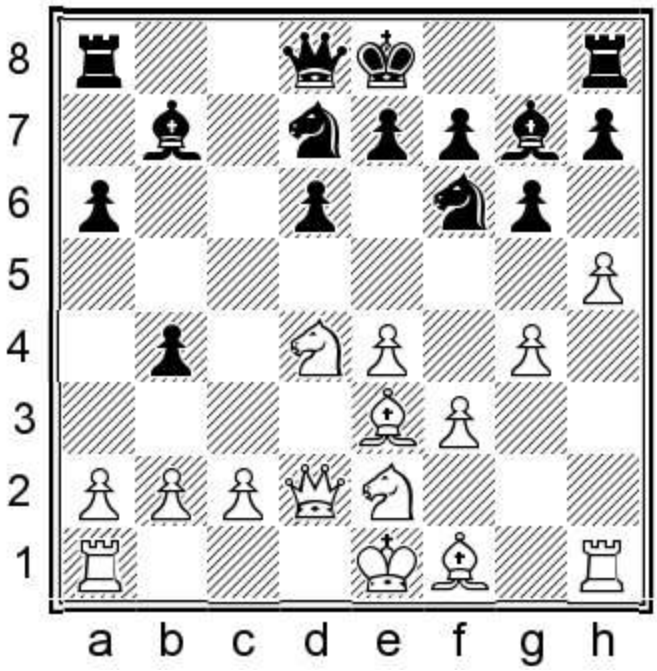
9...b5 10.h4!
Khalifman recommends 10.g5 Nh5 11.a4, but I am not so keen on the idea of advancing pawns on both sides of the board. Even if White develops strong pressure on the queenside, Black will always have chances for counterplay against White's overextended kingside structure.

10.Nc6!? Qc7 11.Nxe7 leads to interesting complications but Black seems to be okay after: 11...Bb7! (11...Kxe7?! 12.g5 Bb7 13.gxf6† Bxf6 14.0-0-0 favoured White in Kotronias – Gelashvili, Thessaloniki 2007. We analysed this more deeply and found some beautiful ideas for White, but sadly they are irrelevant as both sides can improve earlier.) 12.g5! b4 13.Ncd5 Nxd5 14.Nxd5 Bxd5 15.Qxd5 0-0 16.Rd1 Bxb2 17.Be2 Be5 18.Kf2 It looks like White may have chances to press; however, after 18...Nb6 19.Qa5 Rab8 20.h4 d5 21.Bxb6 Rxb6 22.Rxd5 Bc3 Black was able to hold in Strehlau – Goebert, corr. 2010.

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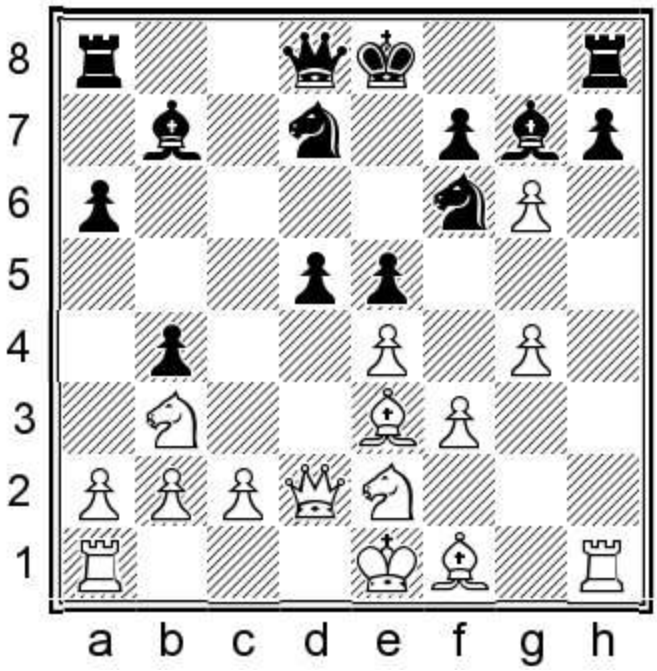


10...h5
This is the most common move and the recommendation of Williams, although he does briefly consider the following alternative:
10...Bb7 11.h5 b4
11...Rg8 is more solid; but if Black has to resort to this, it says something about the difficulty of his position.
12.0-0-0 (the computer's suggestion of 12.h6!? Bh8 13.g5 also looks promising) 12...Rc8 13.hxg6 hxg6 14.g5 Nh5 15.Bh3 Black's position was unpleasant in Hernandez Guerrero – Gulko, Lubbock 2007.
12.Nce2
12.Na4 is clearly better for White but I like the text move even more.

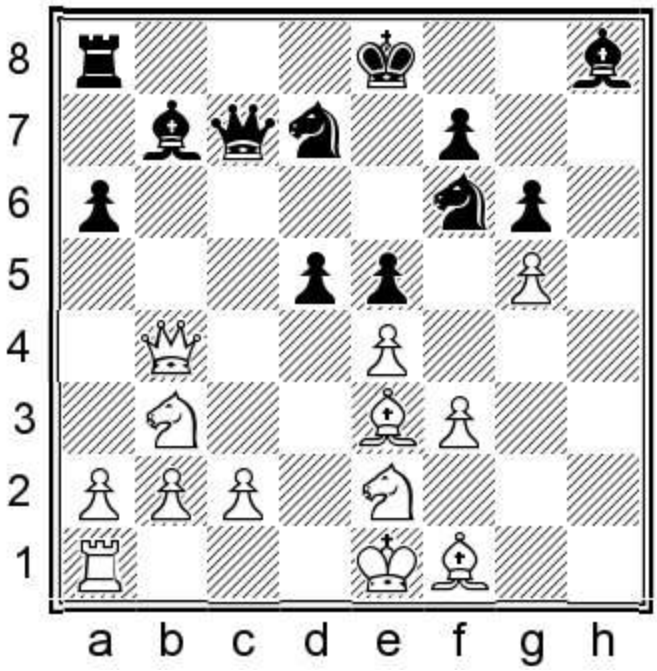


12...e5
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Another game continued 12...d5 13.h6 Bf8 14.g5 e5 and now in Bitoon – Shanava, Vung Tau 2008, 15.gxf6N

15...exd4 16.Bxd4 dxe4 17.0-0-0, would have given Black huge problems.
13.Nb3 d5?
This is the move Black would like to play and is given by Williams, but Black is taking too many liberties.
13...a5 is a slight improvement, although 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.Rxh8† Bxh8 16.g5± was still unpleasant for Black in Fuller – Hein, corr. 2010.
14.hxg6
Williams briefly reaches this position in a note and calls it unclear, but Black is in serious trouble.



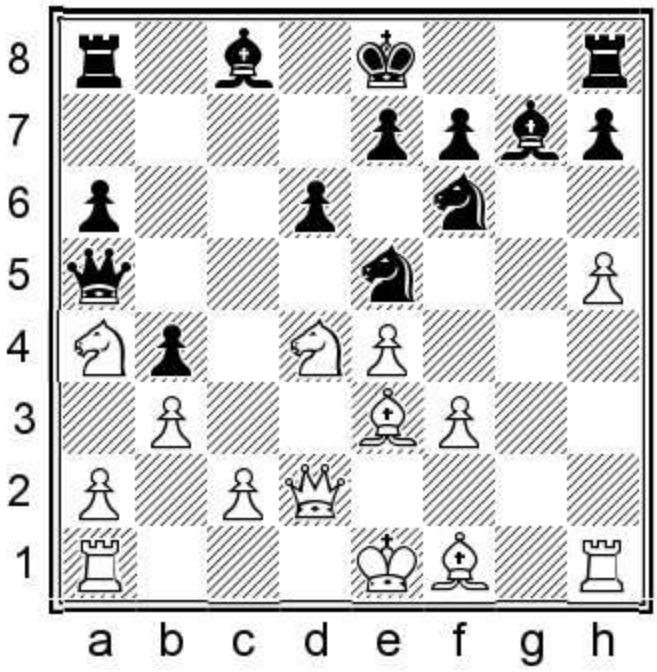
14...hxg6
14...fxg6 15.Qxb4+–
15.Rxh8† Bxh8 16.Qxb4 Qc7 17.g5



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17...d4
17...Nh5 18.Na5 also leaves Black in big trouble, as 18...Rb8 runs into 19.Ba7.
18.gxf6 Bxf6 19.Bf2+–
Palac – Romero Holmes, Arvier 2008.

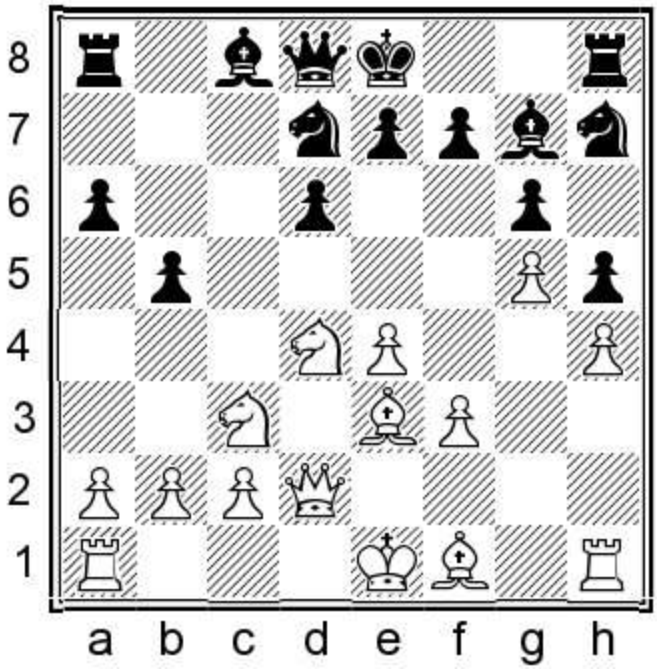
If Black is determined to avoid ...h5, then 10...b4 looks like a slight improvement on the above line, as a subsequent Qxb4 will not attack a bishop on b7. Nevertheless, White still has excellent prospects after: 11.Na4! (11.Nce2 Ne5! offers Black reasonable counterplay) 11...Qa5 (11...Bb7 occurred in Kryvoruchko – Shanava, Olomouc 2006, when 12.h5N± would have been excellent for White) 12.b3 Ne5 13.h5 gxh5 14.gxh5 (14.g5!?N could also be considered)




14...Nxf3†!? 15.Nxf3 Nxe4 16.Qd3 Bxa1 17.Qxe4 Rb8 18.Bd3ƒ Black eventually held a draw, but at this stage White's active minor pieces were clearly stronger than the rook in Efanov – Sergeev, corr. 2010.

11.g5 Nh7

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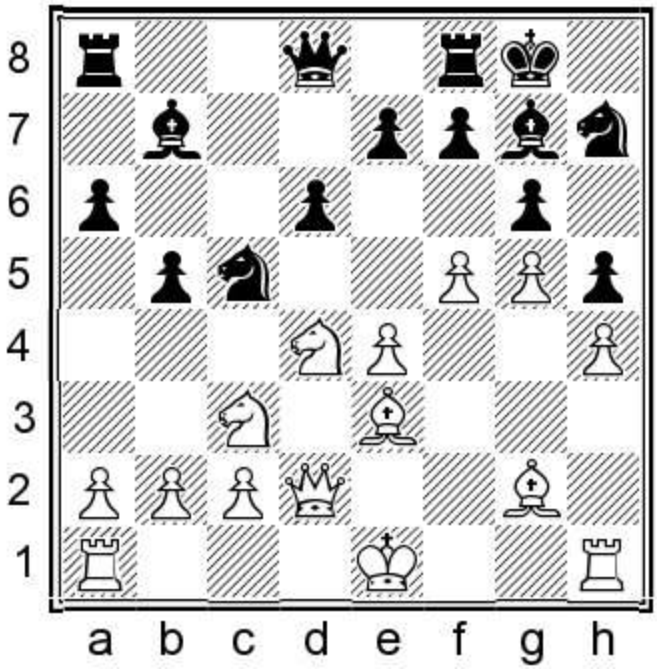
12.f4!
12.0-0-0 has been the more common choice and the two moves often transpose, but Williams points out that the text has an important advantage of keeping the option of short castling. The attacking plan of f4-f5 is a powerful one, which is helped by the fact that the knight on h7 is severely misplaced.

12...e5
Williams suggested this move as a novelty in his 2009 book. It's an interesting idea but the continuation of the present game more or less refutes it. Black also has a hard time after other moves:

12...0-0? was tried in Hoeksema – J. Hanley, Groningen 2006, when 13.Nc6!N would have been crushing. Black has to take the practically suicidal measure of exchanging his Dragon bishop for the knight on c3, as 13... Qe8 14.Nd5+– leads to an immediate loss of material for him.

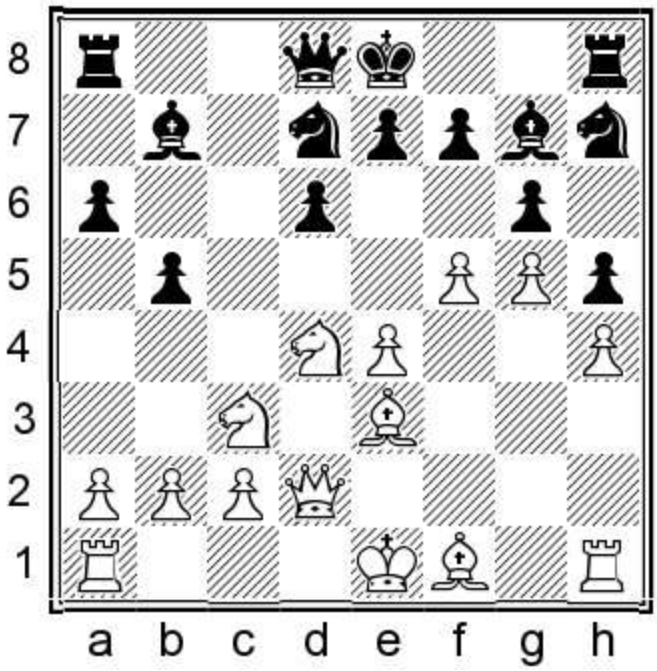
12...Nc5 allows White to press ahead with his attack: 13.f5! Bb7 14.Bg2 0-0 (14...b4 15.Nd5 0-0 16.0-0-0 was great for White in Franklin – Caglar, London 2016, and 16.0-0!?N would also have been excellent)

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15.0-0!? (15.0-0-0 is the computer's favourite and is certainly a good move, but there is something to be said for keeping our king away from Black's region of activity) 15...b4 16.Nd5 e6? (Black should prefer 16...a5 although 17.a3 leaves him with big problems) 17.f6 exd5 18.fxg7 Re8 19.exd5+– Black was positionally busted in Guseinov – Shanava, Baku 2006.

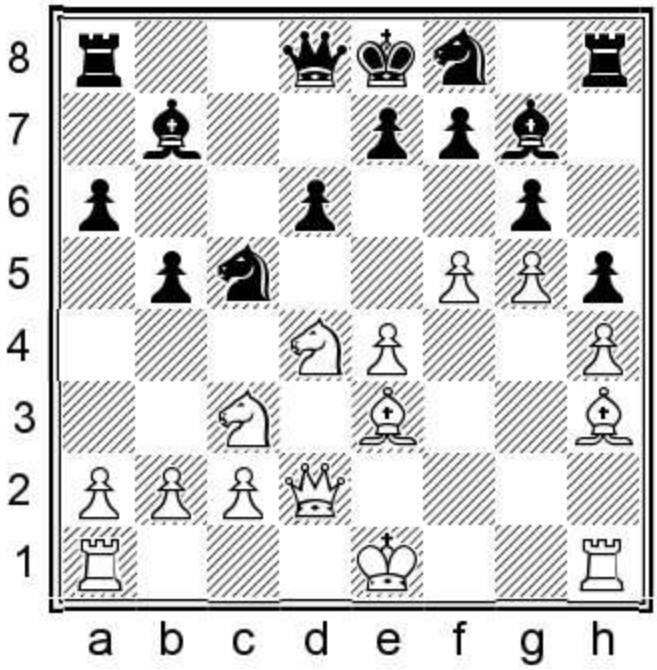
White also gets a powerful attack after:
12...Bb7 13.f5!



13...Nhf8
13...Qa5 14.fxg6 fxg6 15.Bh3 (15.Nd5!?N 15...Qxd2† 16.Kxd2± is simple and strong) 15...Ne5 16.Be6 Nf8 17.0-0± Danzanvilliers – Hryniw, corr. 2013.
13...Ne5 14.0-0-0 0-0 15.Nd5 Bc8 occurred in Motylev – Carlsen, Wijk aan Zee 2006. White has several excel-

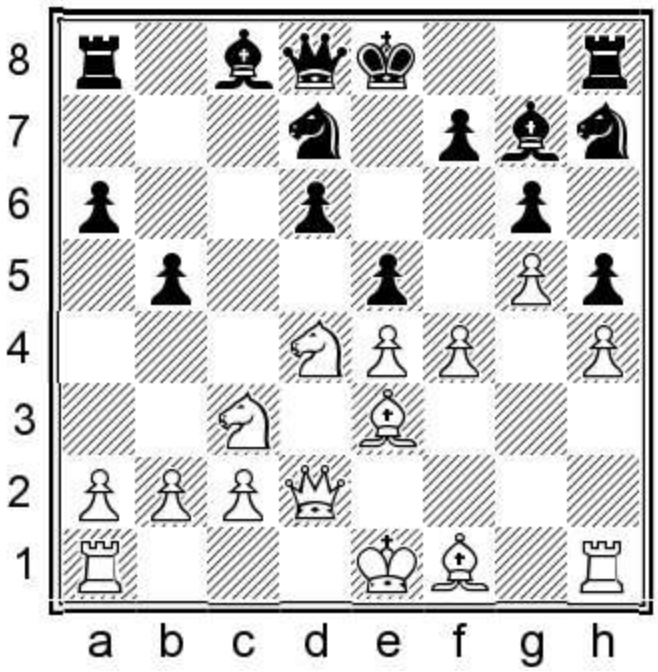
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lent continuations but 16.Bh3N looks best to me; White is already close to winning.
14.Bh3 Nc5
Grayland – Bekkesletten, corr. 2013. Here I found a nice improvement for White:



15.0-0!N
In the game White retreated the bishop to g2 and kept some advantage, but there's actually no need to defend the e4-pawn.
15...b4
15...Nxe4? 16.fxg6! gives White a huge attack.
16.Nce2 Rb8
16...Nxe4 17.fxg6 Nxg6 18.Qxb4+–
17.a3!?,
White has several good options but I like this idea of bringing another piece into the attack. Black is in serious trouble; he has no real hope of getting his king to safety and the loss of the e4-pawn is hardly relevant.

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13.Nc6 Qc7 14.Ne7!
A most unusual outpost for a knight! This is stronger than 14.Nb4 exf4, although even that is no picnic for Black.

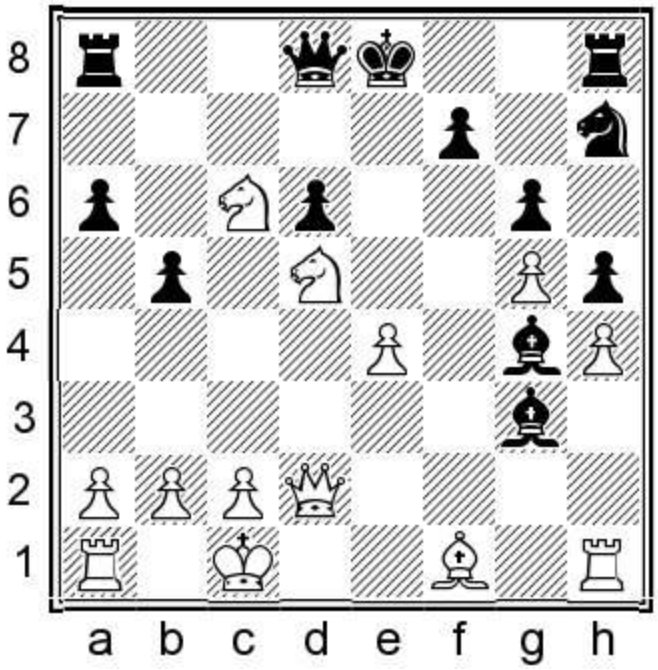
14...exf4 15.Ncd5!
Williams gave 15.Ned5 Qa5 16.Bxf4 Ne5 as a possible continuation needing practical tests. My assessment is that 17.Be2 leaves White with a clear advantage, but the game continuation is even stronger.

15...Qd8
15...Qb8 16.Bxf4 is equally horrible for Black. The knights on d5 and e7 prevent him from castling, and White will soon be able to complete development and break through.

16.Bxf4 Ne5 17.Bxe5 Bxe5 18.Nc6 Bg3†
18...Qd7 19.Nxe5 dxe5 20.Qb4 is crushing.

19.Kd1 Bg4† 20.Kc1
White's king is oddly placed but it is in no real danger, unlike its counterpart.

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20...Qc8 21.Qc3 Be5
Obviously Black cannot castle as it's mate on e7.

21...Rf8 22.Nb6 is hopeless for Black, as is 21...Rg8 22.Nde7 Be5 23.Nxc8 Bxc3 24.Nb6.

22.Nxe5 Qxc3 23.bxc3 dxe5 24.Nc7†
Faced with the prospects of a hopeless endgame the exchange down, Black resigned.
1–0

B) 7...Nc6

GAME 24

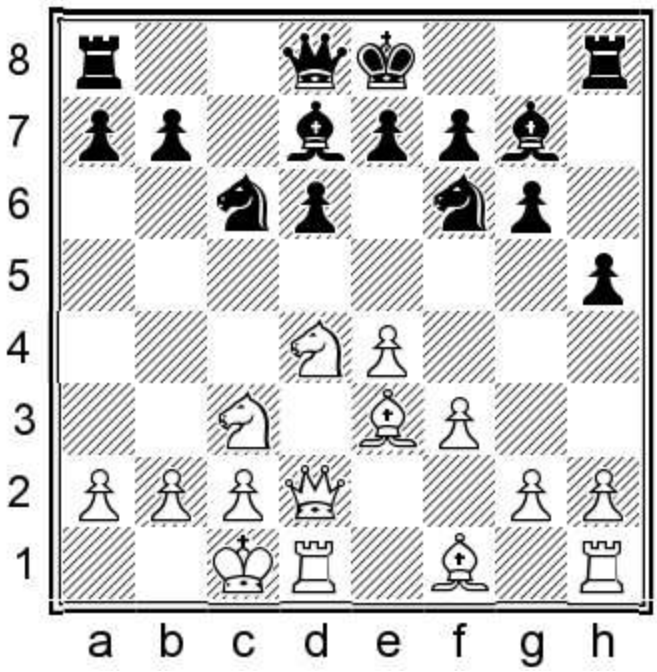
Norman Rogers – Teddy Coleman
Washington DC 2003

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2
Now 8...0-0 leads to our main line, as covered in variation C, but in this section we will see a different approach.

8...Bd7
Black's idea is to postpone castling and develop his queenside play, avoiding giving White a target on the kingside. Tiviakov has played this with good results, especially in open tournaments, although he never pretended it was objectively Black's best line.

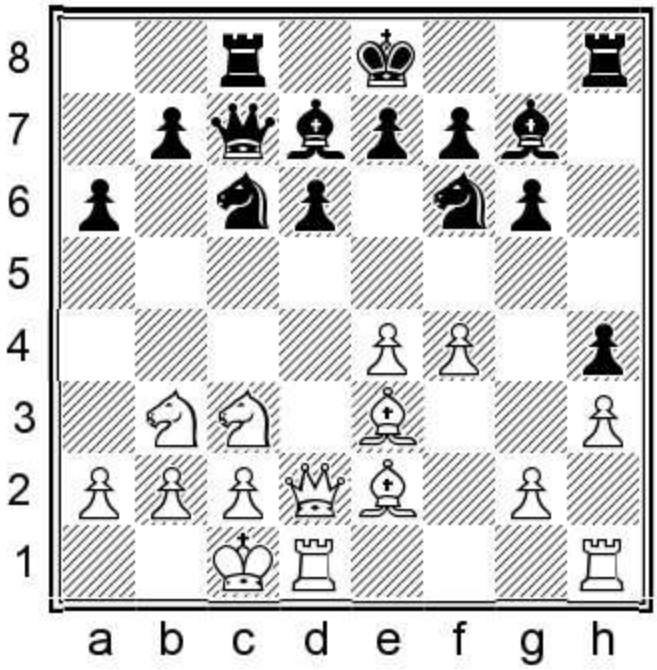
Another version of the same idea is:
8...h5 9.0-0-0 Bd7

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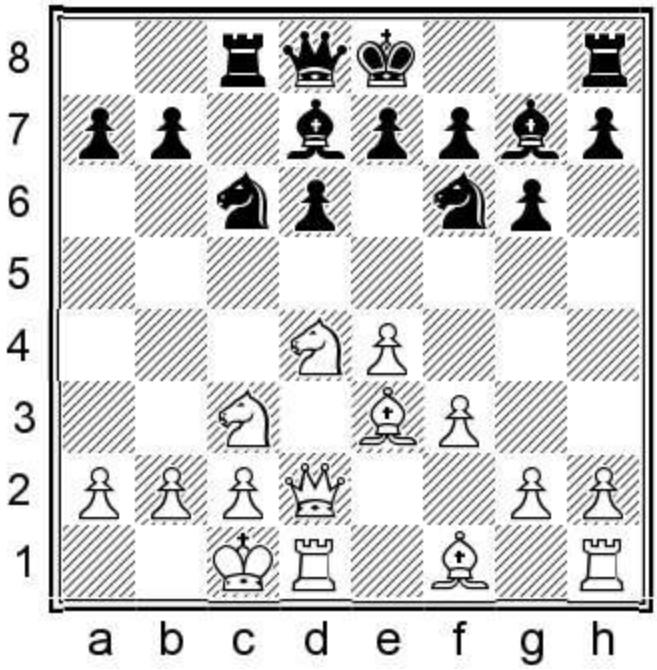
10.h3!
White intends Be2 next, when g2-g4 will be a positional threat. If Black prevents it with ...h4, then we will switch to central play with f3-f4.
It is also possible to play 10.Kb1 followed by h2-h3, with the same ideas.
10...a6
10...Rc8 11.Kb1 a6 does not change much. 12.Be2 h4 (12...Ne5? 13.f4 Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4 15.e5 would be devastating for Black) 13.f4 Nh5 14.Rhe1 Ng3 In Antoniou – Erdogan, Leon 2001, White should have played 15. Bf3!N with clearly better chances, for instance: 15...0-0 16.f5 Ne5 17.Bh6 Nc4 18.Qc1 Na3† 19.Ka1 Rxc3 20. bxc3 Qa5 21.Bxg7 Kxg7 22.Rd3 Nc4 23.Qg5±
11.Be2 h4
In the event of 11...0-0 12.g4 b5 13.Nd5!± Black is forced to make an unpleasant concession on the kingside. 11...Rc8 12.g4± is also excellent for White.
12.f4! Qc7
12...Nh5 13.Bf3 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 e5 15.fxe5 dxe5 occurred in Kudrin – Brjuhin, Dubna 2009, and now after 16. Bb6!?N 16...Bh6 17.Be3 Bxe3 18.Qxe3 Nf6 19.Nd5 White is close to winning.
12...Rc8N 13.Bf3 0-0 14.Rhe1± is also excellent for White. 14...Na5!? is a reasonable attempt to complicate matters, but 15.e5! Nc4 16.exf6! Nxd2 17.fxg7 Kxg7 18.Rxd2 maintains White's big advantage.
13.Nb3 Rc8

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14.Kb1!N
White needs to improve on the disastrous 14.Nd5?? Nxd5 15.exd5 Nb4 16.c4, as seen in Czarnota – Bakalarz, Krakow 2004, when 16...Qxc4†!N 17.Bxc4 Rxc4† 18.Kb1 Bf5† would have been winning for Black.
14...0-0 15.Bf2±

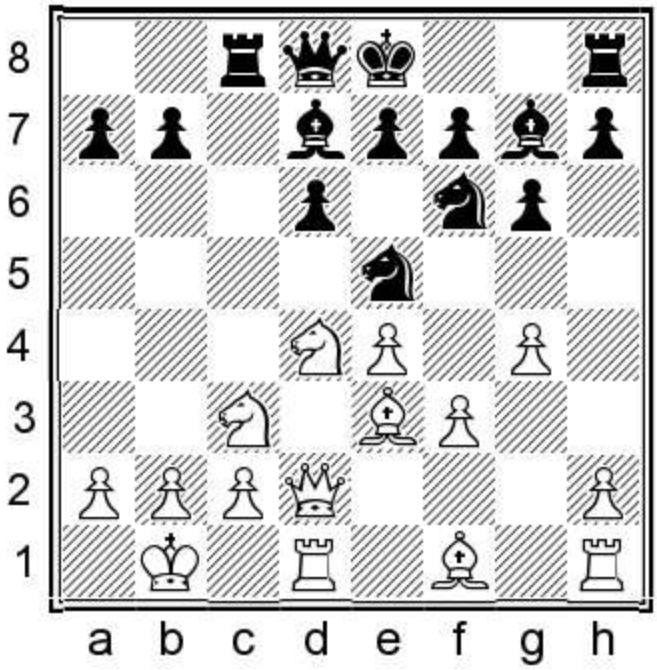
9.0-0-0 Rc8



10.g4
White should start with this pawn, rather than allow Black to block the kingside with 10.h4?! h5.
10.Kb1 is perfectly valid, and is likely to transpose to our main line within a few moves.

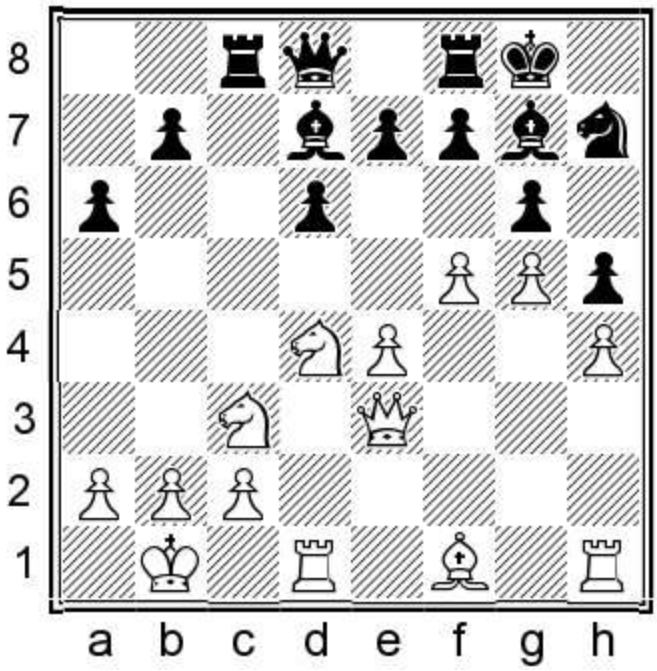
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10...Ne5 11.Kb1



11...a6
11...0-0 has been the most common continuation; we will analyse this position under variation C1.
The text move sees Black continue to postpone castling. The trouble is that he needs to bring the h8-rook into the game at some point.

12.h4 b5
12...h5 13.g5 Nh7 also leads to big trouble for Black after: 14.f4 Ng4 15.f5! Nxe3 16.Qxe3 0-0

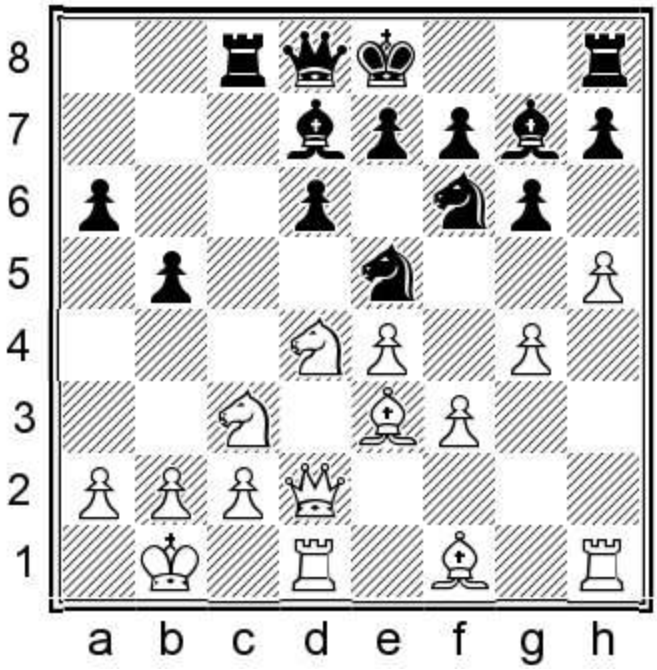


This was Vaibhav – Wang, Kemer 2009, when 17.Bh3!N+– would have left Black unable to defend his light-square weaknesses.

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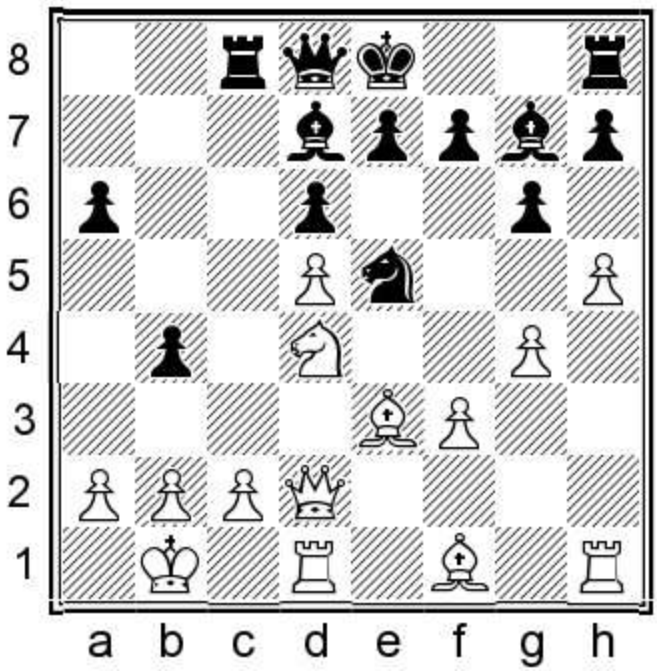
13.h5

Now Black must take into account the possibility of h5-h6.



13...b4
13...Rg8 14.a3 Nc4 15.Bxc4 bxc4 16.hxg6 hxg6 17.Nde2± was also highly unpleasant for Black in Petrovic – Baklanov, email 2008.

14.Nd5 Nxd5 15.exd5±

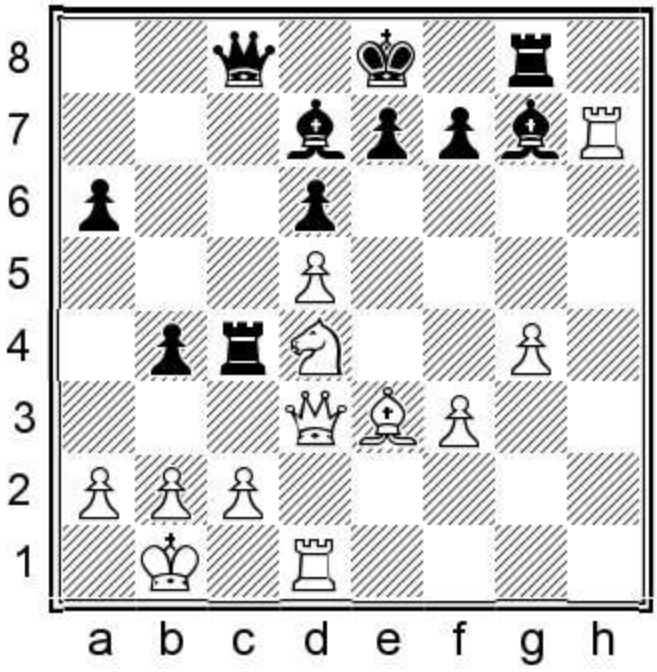


15...gxh5
This must have been a horrible move to make, but it is obvious that Black's opening strategy has failed.

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16.Rxh5 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Qd3 Qc8 19.Rxh7 Rg8

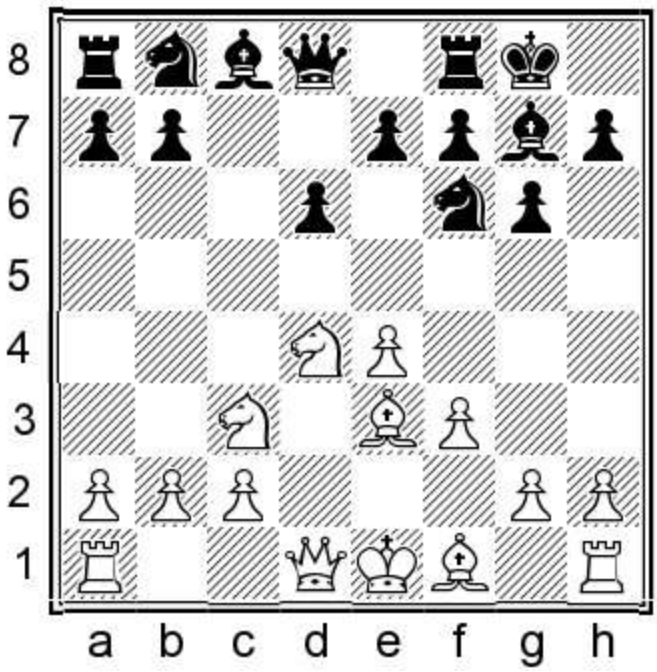
White can win in many different ways, but he finds the quickest and most stylish method.



20.Rxg7! Rxg7 21.Rh1 Rg8 22.Qh7 Rf8 23.Qg7 Rxd4 24.Bxd4 e5 25.Be3 f6 26.Rh7
1–0

It is time to move on to the main lines where Black castles.

C) 7...0-0



8.Qd2 Nc6 9.0-0-0
9.Bc4 is a serious option but I find the text move more appealing.

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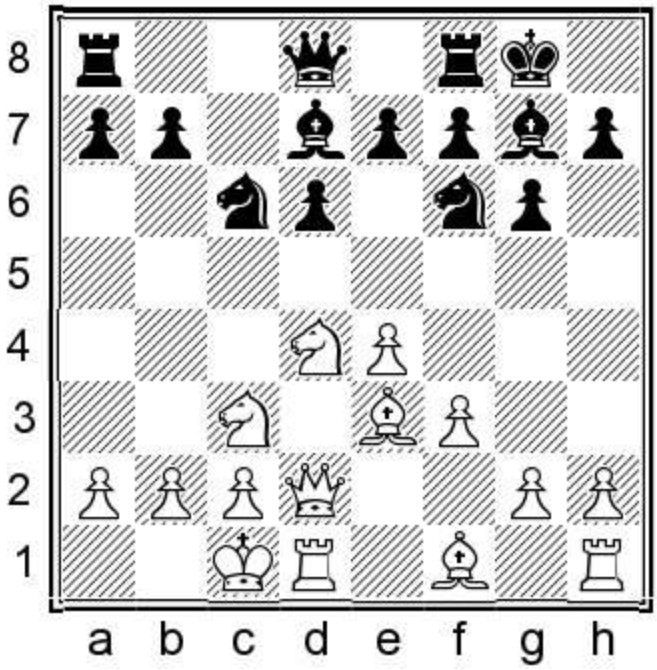
There are three main options to analyse. C1) 9...Bd7 has been played in a lot of games but is rather dubious. C2) 9...Nxd4 makes a bit more sense, as Black prepares to develop the bishop on e6, but White still has excellent prospects against it. And finally, C3) 9...d5 is the most critical move, and quite rightly the main line.

Other moves have been tried, but I don't see anything that warrants detailed analysis. Here are a few brief examples:

Black gains nothing from 9...Qa5 10.Kb1, when he will have to watch out for Nd5 tricks whenever the knight moves away from c6.

9...Be6 gives White a few good options: 10.Nxe6 (10.Kb1 is also fine, when it is hard to believe that Black can do better than transpose to variation C2 by exchanging on d4) 10...fxe6 11.g3!? is a nice idea, intending Bh3 with pressure on the light squares.

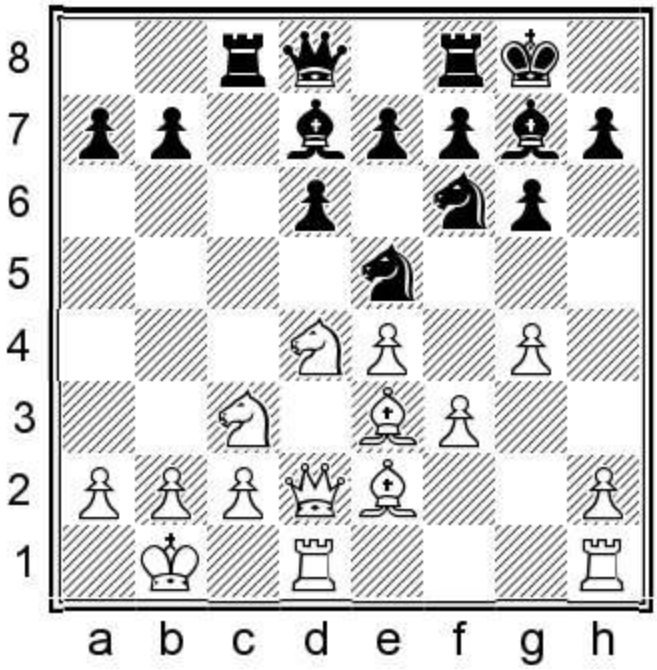
C1) 9...Bd7



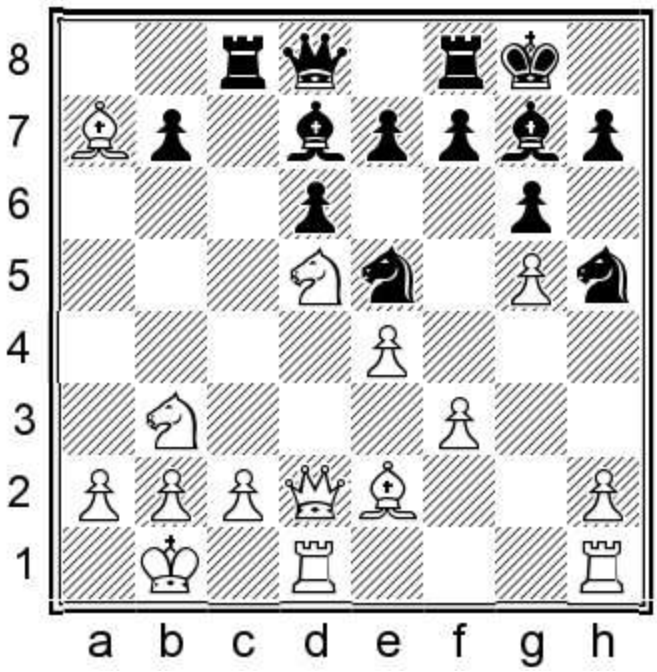

This move makes more sense when White's bishop has gone to c4, as in that case Black can follow up by attacking that piece with ...Rc8. With the bishop still on f1, Black's plan is too slow.

10.g4 Rc8 11.Kb1 Ne5 12.Be2!?
I find this a simple and effective way to play.

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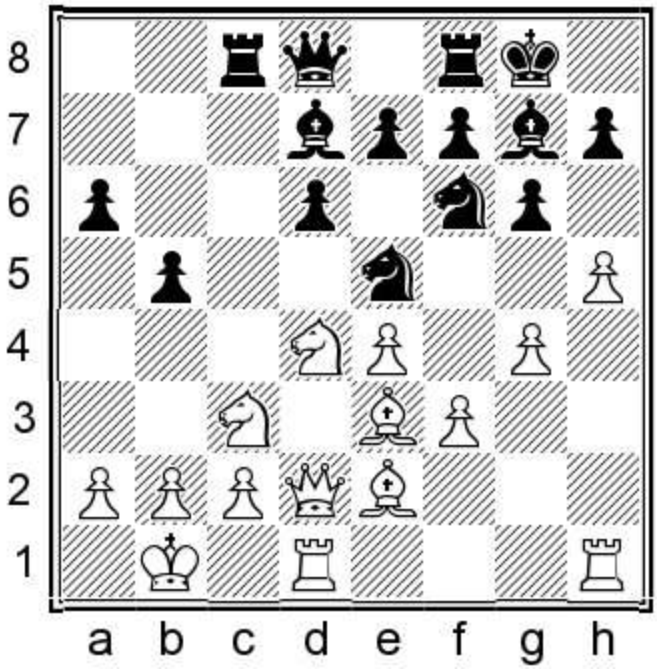


12...b5
Black does not really get enough compensation with this pawn sacrifice, but it is hard to suggest a satisfactory alternative. Here are a few examples:
12...Qa5 13.Nb3 Qc7 14.g5 Nh5 15.Nd5 Qd8 16.Bxa7 is a safe pawn grab, as Black is unable to mount much of an offensive on the queenside. For instance:

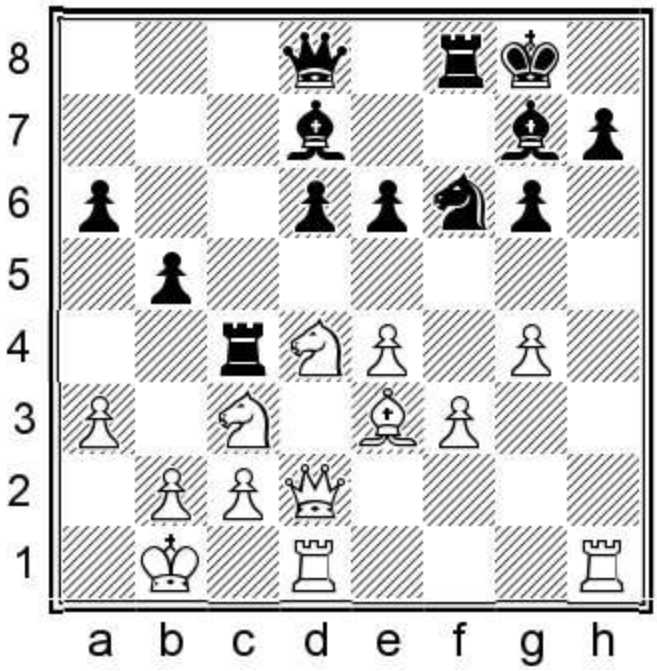


16...b5 17.Bb6 Qe8 18.Bd4 Nc4 19.Bxc4 bxc4 20.Na5 Be6 21.Bxg7 Nxg7 22.Qb4± Korneev – Getta, San Sebastian 2000.
12...a6 13.h4 b5 14.h5
White's attack is much faster, as the following lines demonstrate.

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14...e6
14...Re8 15.hxg6 hxg6? (15...fxg6 is a better try although 16.g5 is still close to winning for White) 16.Bh6 Bh8 17.Bf8 Rxf8 18.Rxh8† Kxh8 19.Qh6† Kg8 20.Rh1 Nh5 21.gxh5 g5 This occurred in Falcon – Titichoca Daza, Montevideo 2016, when 22.f4!N would have been the quickest route to victory.
15.a3
Black's last move threatened to trap the knight with ...b4, so White takes a moment to prevent it before continuing with the attack.
15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4 17.hxg6 fxg6

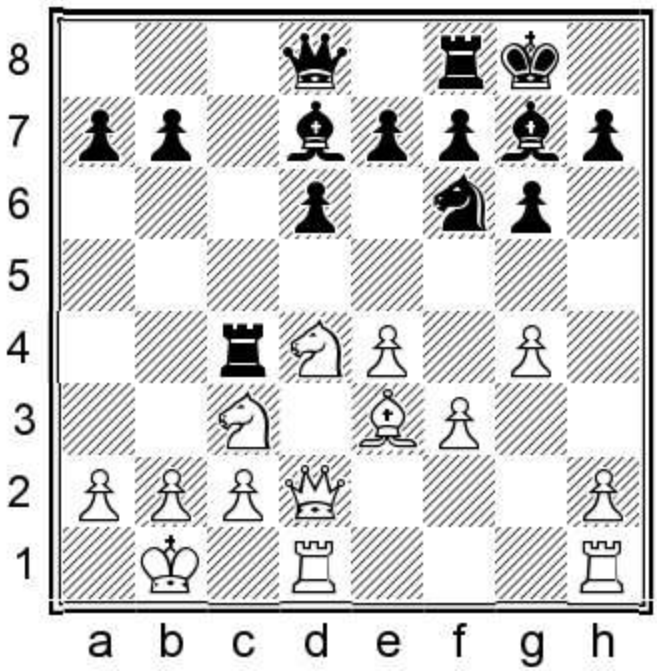


18.e5! Nd5
18...dxe5 19.Nxe6 wins easily.
19.Nxd5 exd5 20.e6 Bxd4 21.Bxd4 Bxe6

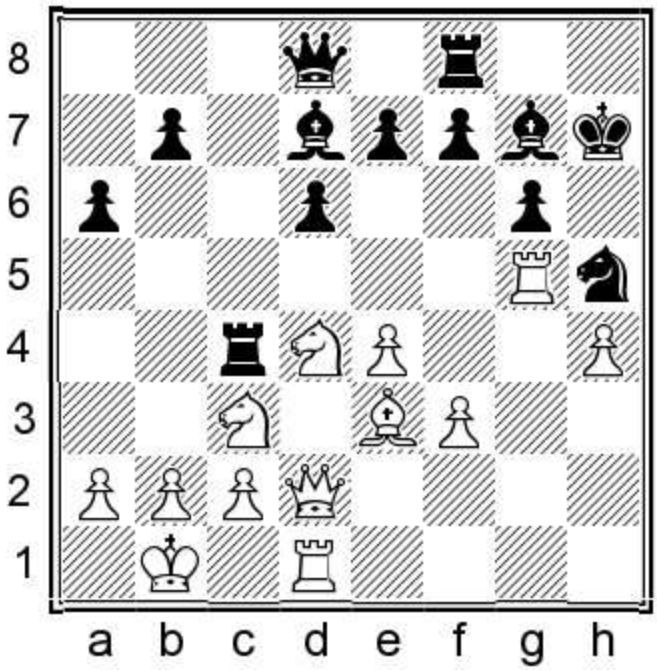
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In Zielinski – Sypien, Krynica 2001, White had several winning continuations, the simplest being: 22.b3N+–

A final alternative is:
12...Nc4 13.Bxc4 Rxc4



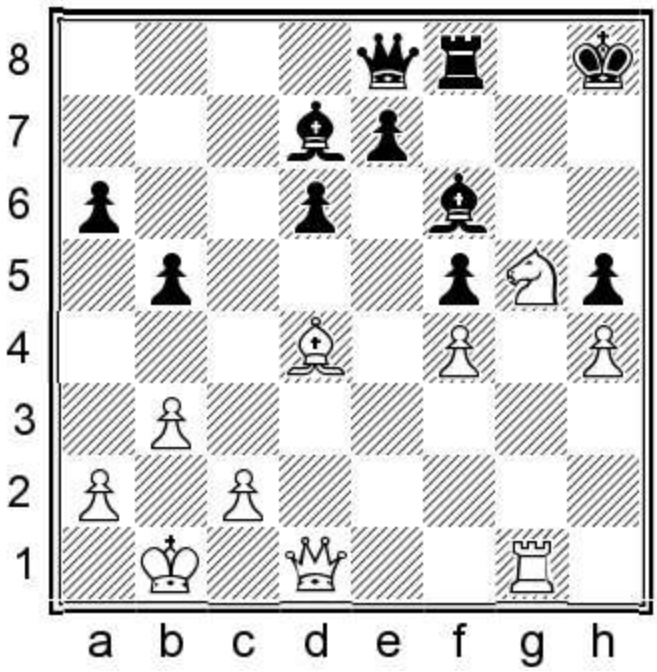
This leads to a well-known variation with an extra tempo for White, since his bishop took the route of Be2xc4 rather than Bc4-b3xc4. It would have been possible to end the line here, but I couldn't resist including the following correspondence game, which White won in great style.
14.h4 h5 15.gxh5 Nxh5 16.Rhg1 a6 17.Rg5 Kh7



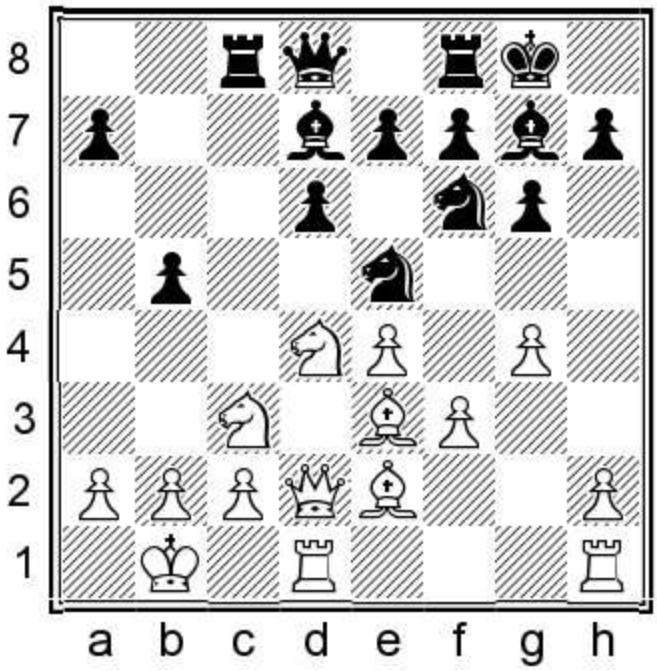
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18.e5! b5

18...dxe5 19.Nb3! is winning.
19.Qd3 Kg8 20.Ne4 Bxe5 21.Rxh5! gxh5 22.Rg1† Kh8 23.Ng5 f5 24.b3 Qb8 25.f4
Not only attacking the bishop on e5, but also preparing to target the h5-pawn with the queen.
25...Rxd4 26.Bxd4 Bf6 27.Qd1 Qe8



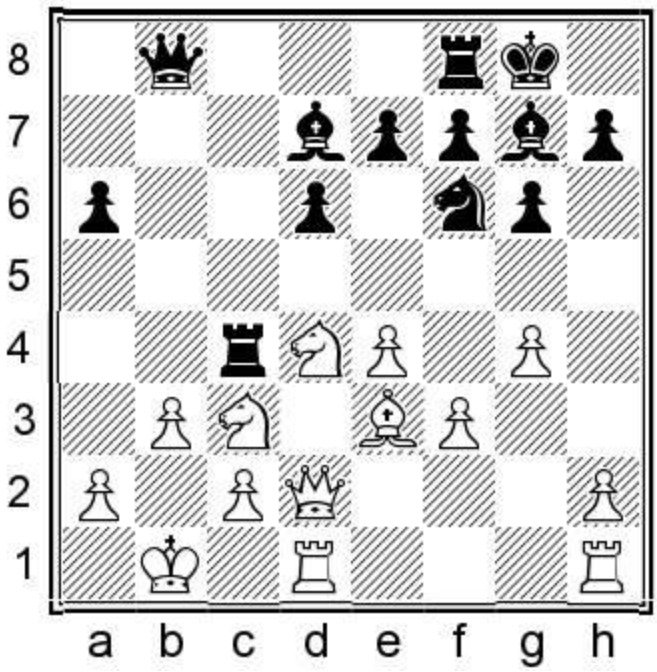
28.Rg3!
Black can hardly move a piece.
28...Bxd4
If Black marks time with a move like 28...a5, White plays 29.Re3, intending Bxf6† followed by Qe2 or Qe1, and the defence will soon crack.
29.Qxd4† Rf6 30.Qa7+–
Black soon had to resign in Pessoa – Lopes, corr. 2012.



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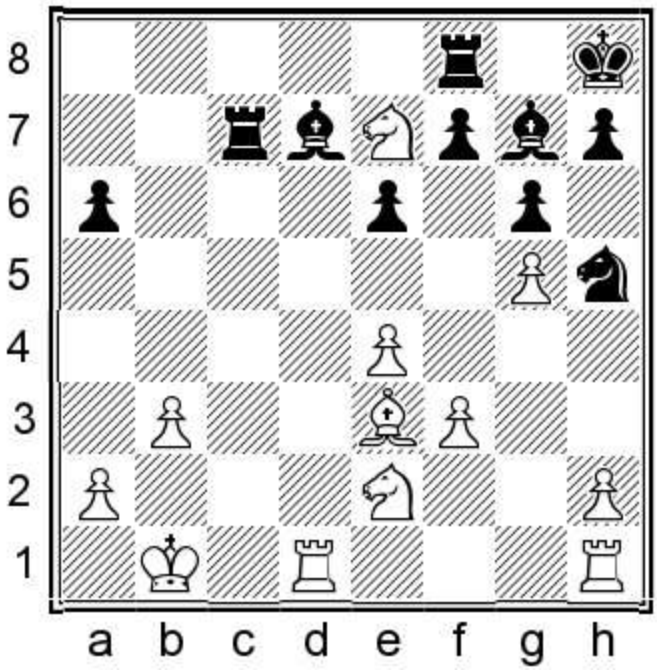
13.Ncxb5
White can grab the pawn quite safely.

13...a6 14.Nc3 Nc4 15.Bxc4 Rxc4 16.b3 Qb8
In Korneev – Carlsen, Reykjavik 2004, White's most convincing continuation would have been:



17.g5N 17...Nh5 18.Nd5 e6
18...Re8 is well met by 19.Qa5!± intending Qb6.

19.Ne7† Kh8 20.Ne2 Qc7 21.Qxd6 Rxc2 22.Qxc7 Rxc7



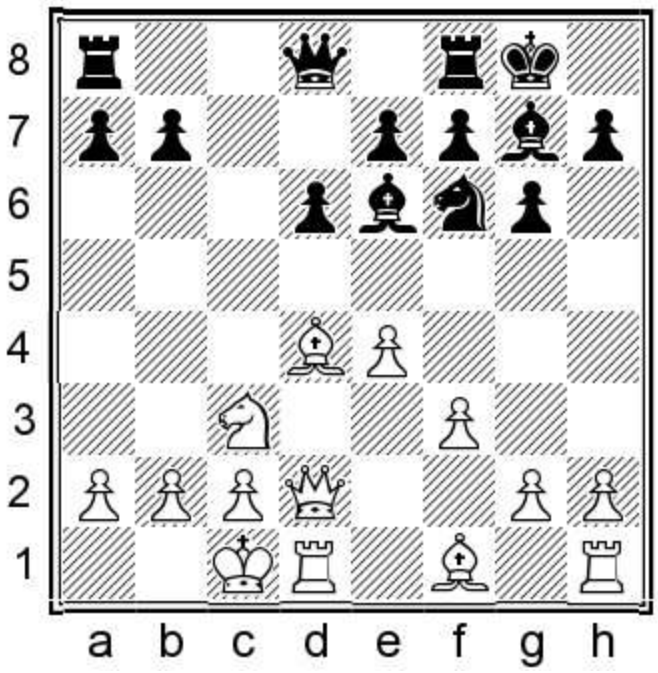
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23.Rc1

The knight on e7 is not in any real danger, and it even prevents Black from challenging for the c-file.

23...Rxc1† 24.Rxc1 Bb5 25.Nd4 Bd3† 26.Kb2±
White has good chances to convert his extra pawn.

C2) 9...Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Be6

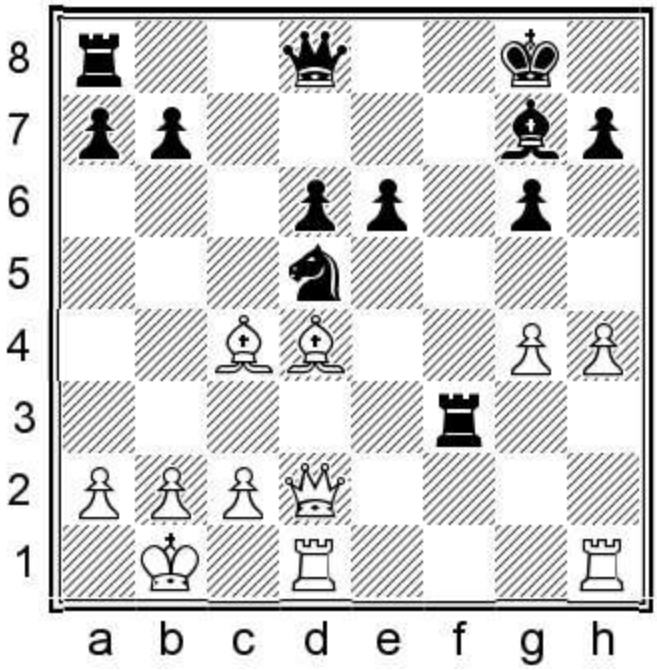


This used to be regarded as the main line but these days Black has a lot of problems to solve.

11.Kb1
A well-known finesse, forcing Black to waste a tempo with his queen.

11...Qc7
To develop his attack, Black must play ...Rfc8 followed by ...Qa5.
White's last move ensures that the immediate 11...Qa5? runs into 12.Nd5, when 12...Qd8 is the only way to avoid losing the e7-pawn. 13.h4! is the most logical continuation, when Black has no counterplay available. For example: 13...Bxd5 14.exd5 e5 15.dxe6 fxe6 16.g4 Nd5 17.Bc4 Rxf3

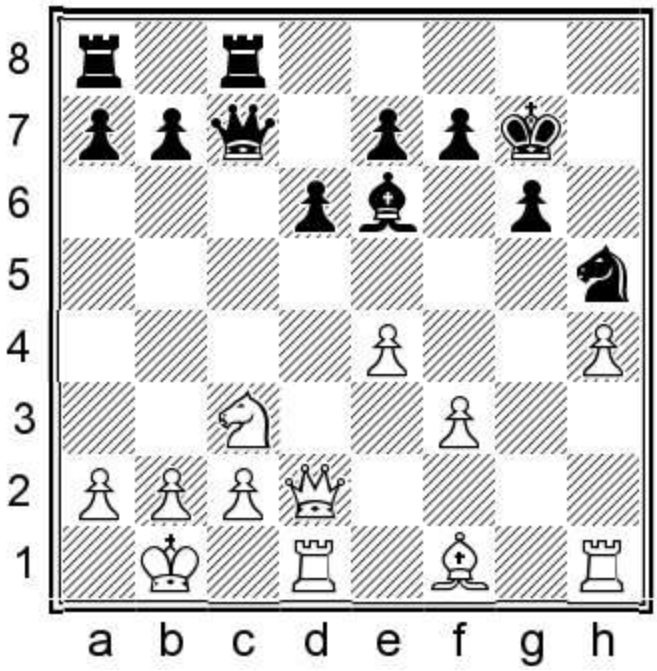
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This occurred in Jenni – Baer, Winterthur 2004, when 18.Qe2!N would have won on the spot.

12.h4!
12.g4 has been played in about the same number of games but the text move is more efficient, as h4-h5 can be played without the support of the g-pawn.

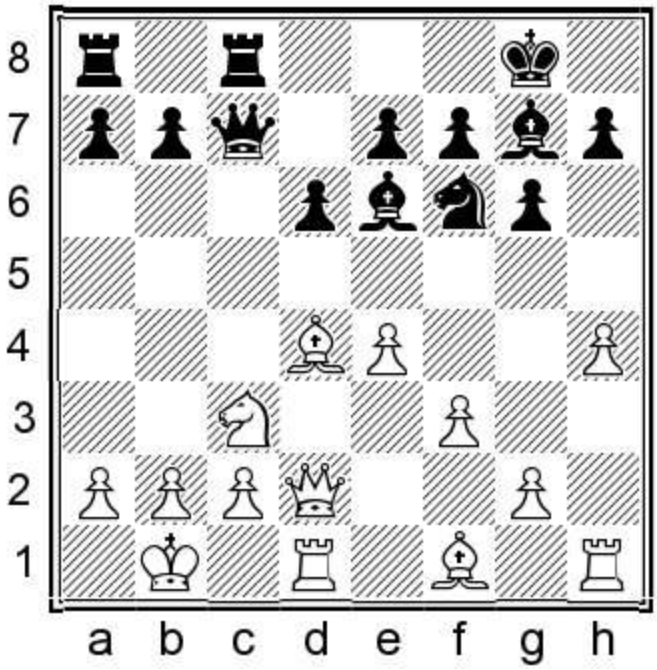
12...Rfc8
12...h5 does not hold up the attack: 13.g4! Rfc8 (13...hxg4? 14.h5 gxh5 15.Qg5 Rfc8 16.Bd3 gave White a crushing attack in Blodstein – Serper, Soviet Union 1982, and a few subsequent games) 14.gxh5 Nxh5 15.Bxg7 Kxg7



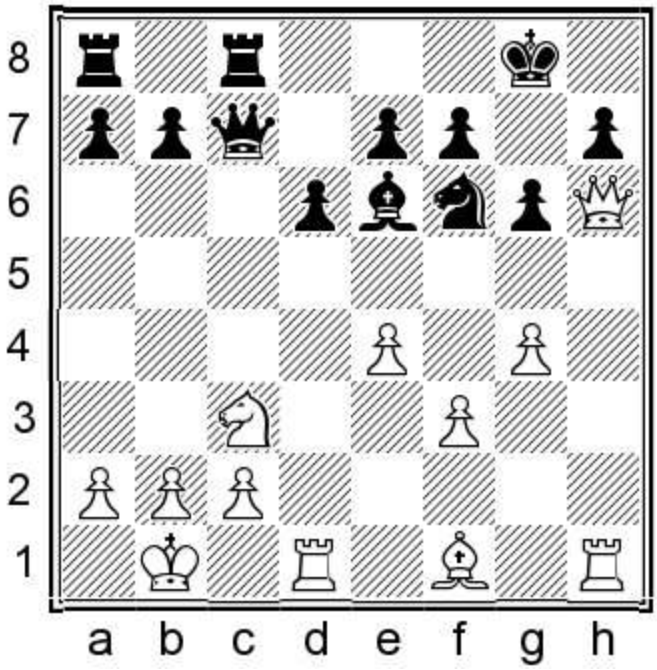
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16.f4! Qa5 17.f5 Rxc3 Otherwise Black will succumb to the attack. 18.Qxc3† Qxc3 19.bxc3 gxf5 20.exf5 Bxf5

21.Rg1† Kf6 22.Bd3± Foote – Needham, corr. 2005.

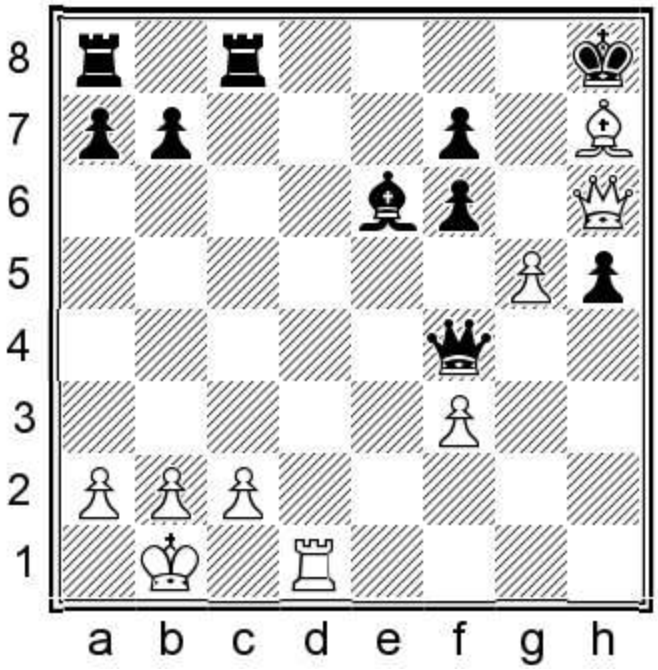


13.h5 Qa5
13...Nxh5? is a losing move: 14.Bxg7 Kxg7 15.g4 Nf6 16.Qh6† Kg8



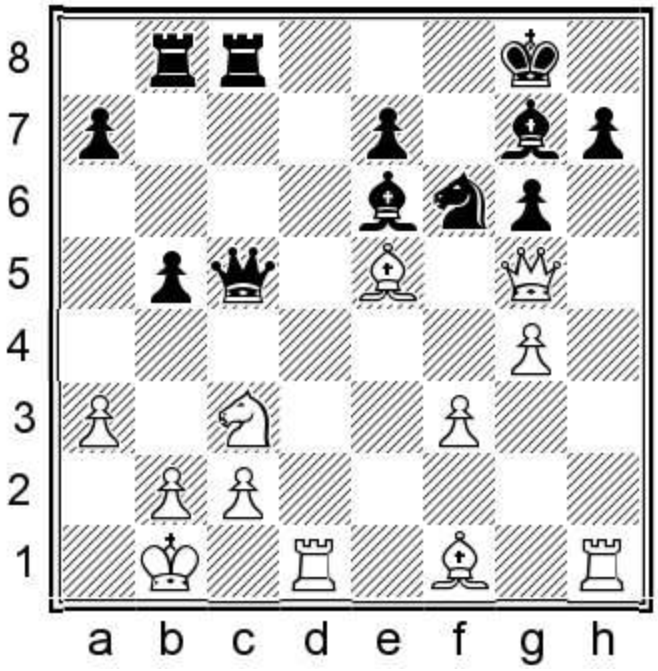
17.e5! The point of this finesse will become clear in a few moves. 17...dxe5 18.g5 Nh5 19.Rxh5 gxh5 20.Bd3 This is why the e4-pawn had to be removed. 20...e4 21.Nxe4 Qf4 22.Nf6† exf6 23.Bxh7† Kh8

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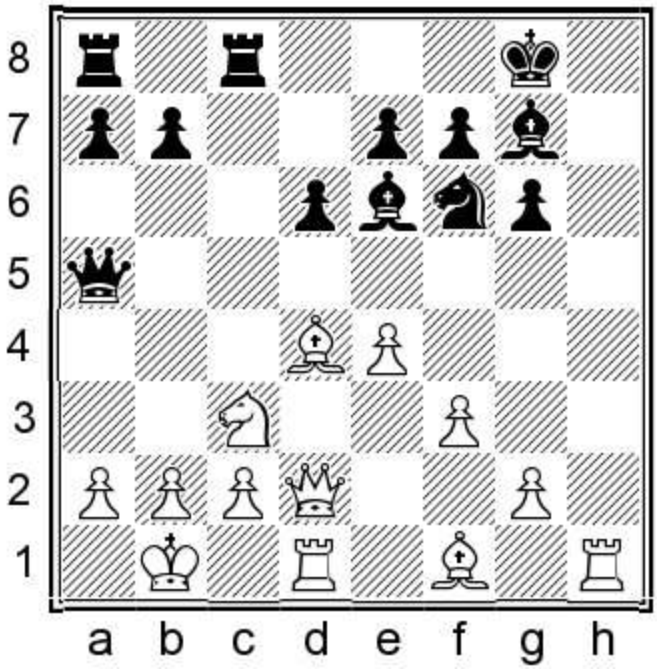
24.Bf5†! Kg8 25.Qh7† Kf8 26.Qh8† Black resigned in Evans – Zuckerman, New York 1966, on account of 26...Ke7 27.gxf6#.

14.hxg6 hxg6
14...fxg6 15.a3 also leaves Black well behind in the attacking race. A good example continued: 15...Rab8 16.g4 b5 17.Qg5 Qc7 18.e5 dxe5 19.Bxe5 Qc5



20.Bxf6 exf6 21.Rd8†! White won the queen and the game in Volokitin – Kovalenko, Kharkov 2001.

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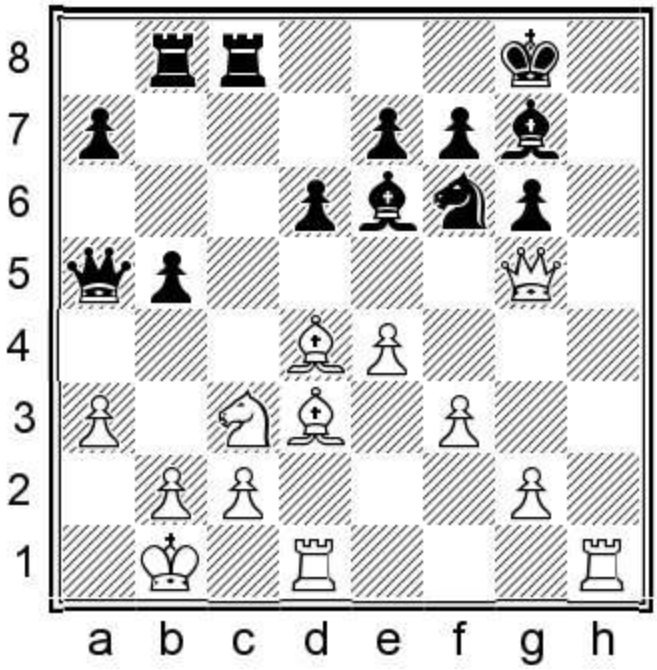
15.a3
There is no reason to allow ...Rxc3 followed by ...Qxa2†.

15...Rab8
Preparing ...b5-b4.

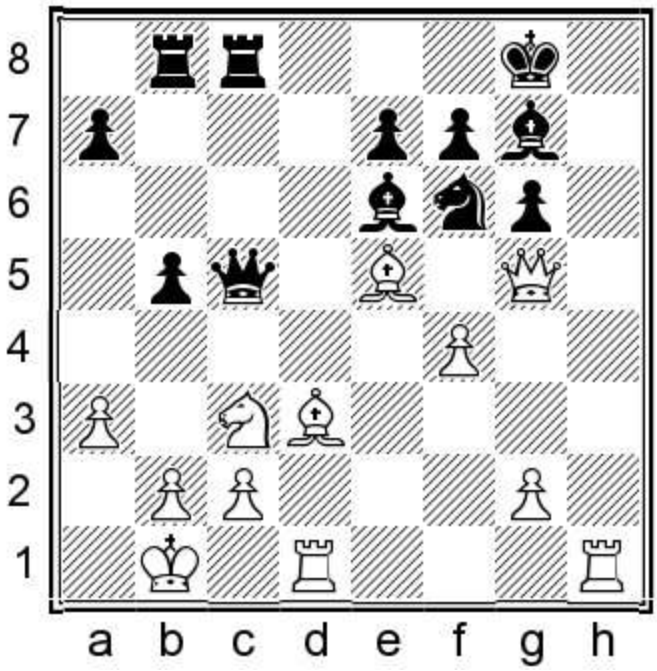
16.Bd3!
This has proven to be the best way of developing White's play. The immediate threat is Rh4 followed by Rdh1, with an unstoppable attack. The bishop may also participate in the attack after a subsequent e4-e5.

16...Bc4
Black has also taken a pounding after the alternative:
16...b5 17.Qg5!
Black has tried several moves but with little success. Here are a few examples:

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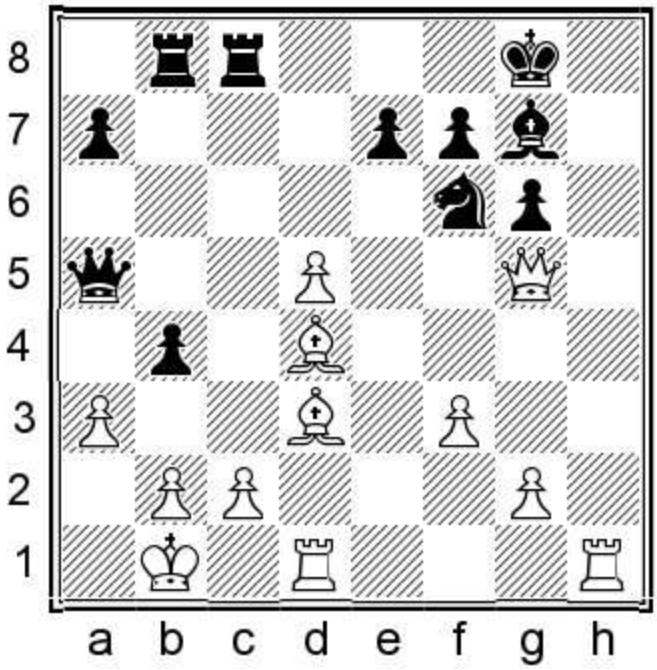
17...Rc5!?
This exchange sacrifice is objectively not good enough, but it seems to be Black's best practical chance to complicate matters. I checked three other options:
a) 17...Nh7? loses quickly: 18.Rxh7 Kxh7 (after 18...Bxd4 19.e5! Black resigned in Lobanova – Zhikhareva, corr. 2009, in view of 19...Kxh7 20.Rh1† Kg8 21.Bxg6+–) 19.Rh1† Kg8 20.Bxg7 Kxg7 21.Qh6† Kf6 22.e5† Kxe5 23.Qe3† Kf6 This was Ruiz Castillo – Perez Lujan, Guatape 2016, when 24.Qd4†N 24...Kg5 25.Qh4# would have been the quickest mate.
b) 17...Qc7 18.e5 dxe5 19.Bxe5 Qc5 20.f4 is well known to be bad for Black:



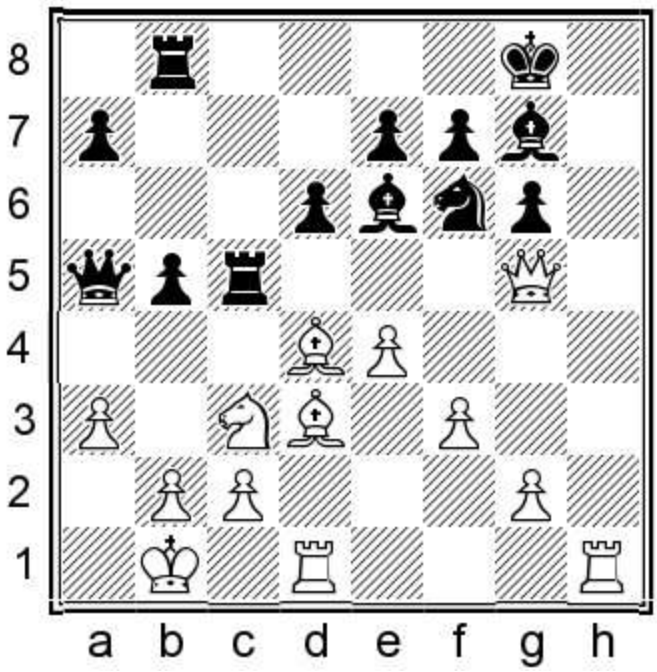
20...Ng4 (the original model game in this line ended quickly after 20...Rb7 21.Bxg6 fxg6 22.Qxg6 Bf7 23.Rh8† 1–0 Van der Wiel – Sax, Plovdiv 1983) 21.Bxb8 Qxg5 22.fxg5 Rxb8 23.Ne4± White converted his extra exchange in Betker – Noeth, corr. 2009.

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c) 17...d5 18.Nxd5 Bxd5 19.exd5 b4



20.Bxg6! So far, White has scored a perfect 8/8 from here. The stem game continued: 20...bxa3 (Another possible line is: 20...fxg6 21.Qxg6 Qa4 22.Bxf6 exf6 23.Rh7 Qxc2† 24.Qxc2 Rxc2 25.Rxg7† Kxg7 26.Kxc2+–) 21. Rh7! Rxb2† 22.Bxb2 Qb4 23.Bxf7† Kxf7 24.Qxg7† Ke8 25.Qxe7† Qxe7 26.Rxe7† Kxe7 27.d6† 1–0 Seger – Ljungberg, corr. 1984.

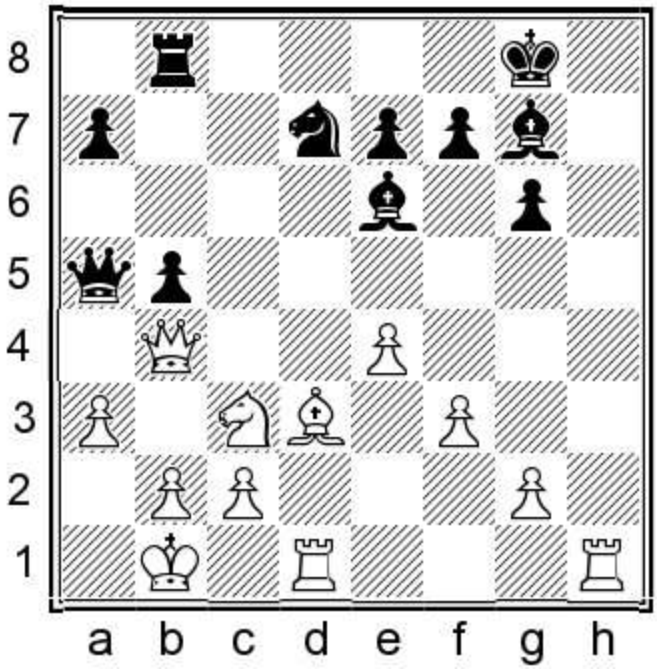


18.Bxc5 dxc5

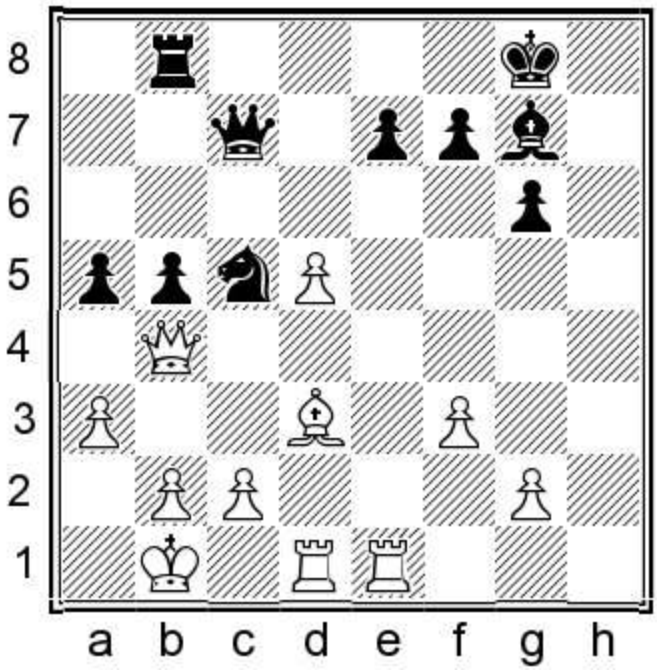
18...b4!? has some shock value but White can refute the attack with a few accurate moves: 19.Be3! Bf5 (19... Qxg5 20.Bxg5 bxc3 21.b3+– left Black with nothing for the exchange in Hoffmann – Brajdic, Zagreb 2006) 20. Nb5 (20.Bc4 bxc3 21.Bb3+– is also fine) 20...bxa3 21.exf5 axb2 22.c3!+– Black had too few pieces remaining in Chow – Van de Mortel, Chicago 2005.

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19.Qxc5 Nd7 20.Qb4
White is objectively winning but he still needs to find a few good moves before Black can create threats on the queenside. The most effective plan is to play Nd5, meeting ...Bxd5 with exd5 and then open lines with d5-d6 at the right moment, as the following lines demonstrate:



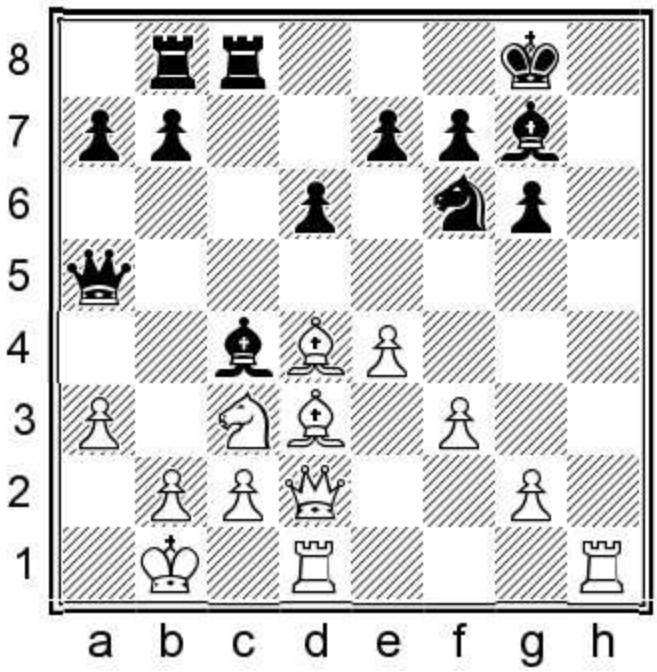
20...Qc7
20...Qb6 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.exd5 Nc5 occurred in Atakisi – Citak, Antalya 2004. White has a few ways to win but the most effective (as well as the most stylish) is 23.d6!N 23...exd6 24.Bxg6!! fxg6 25.Qg4+– when White is the first to break through with his attack.
21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.exd5 Nc5 23.Rhe1 a5
In Bartholomew – Van de Mortel, corr. 2009, White should have continued:



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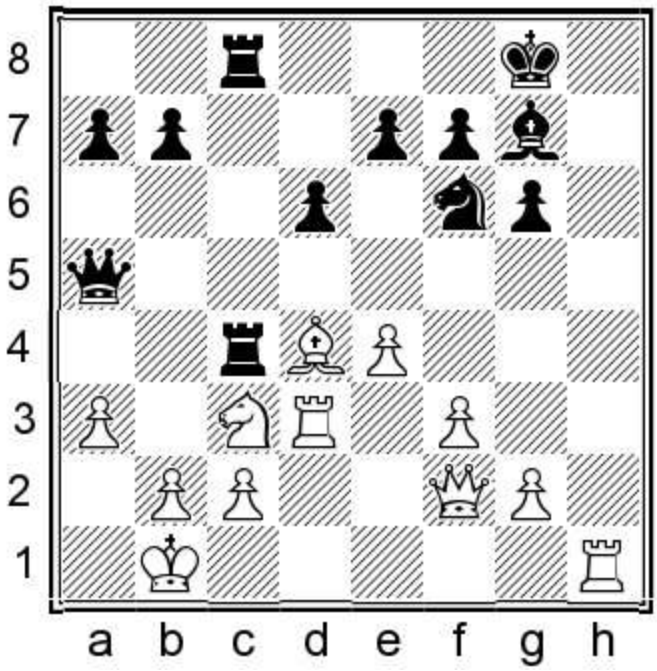
24.d6!N 24...exd6 25.Qh4+–
Threatening Re7. White keeps an extra exchange and should win with careful play.

After the text move White has several tempting and promising ideas, but I think the following continuation stands out as the final refutation of Black's play.



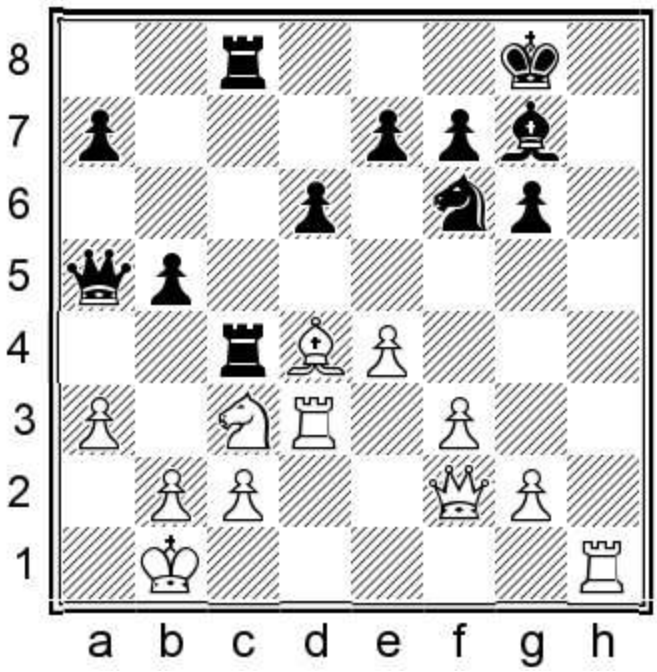
17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Qf2!
18.Qc1 is the most popular move and has scored well, but the text is even stronger. The main threat is Bxf6 followed by Nd5, and a secondary idea is Qh4 followed by Nd5.

18...Rbc8 19.Rd3!
Preventing the (double) exchange sacrifice on c3. In some lines the rook can swing to the h-file after f3-f4.

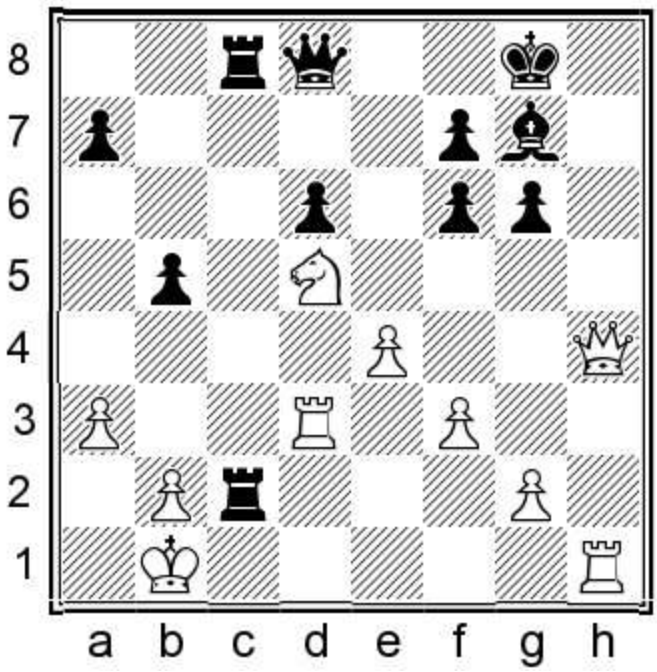


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19...Kf8
19...b5 occurred in Vachtfeidl – Johansson, London 2012, when White missed the strongest continuation:



20.Bxf6!N 20...exf6 (20...Bxf6 21.Nd5+–) 21.Qg3 R4c6 22.Nd5 Qd8 23.Qh4! White can afford to abandon the c2-pawn as the kingside attack will decide. 23...Rxc2

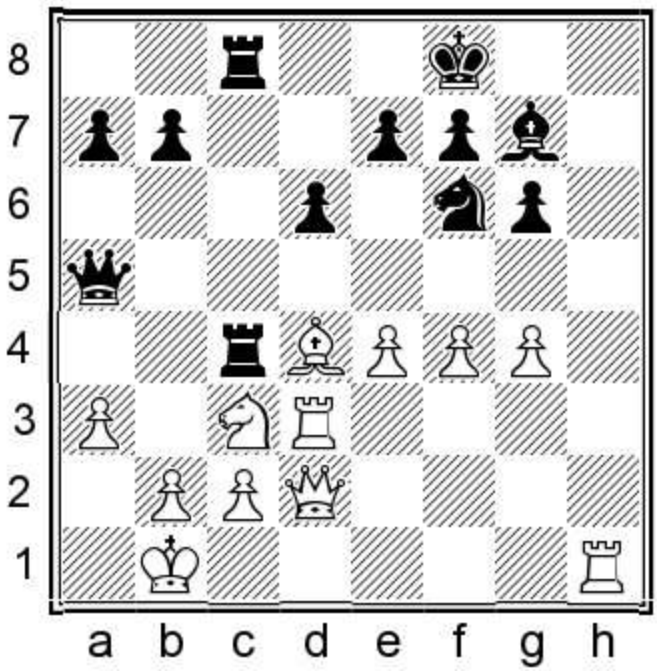


24.f4! Kf8 (24...f5 is no good due to the simple 25.Qxd8† followed by Kxc2) 25.Rdh3 Ke8 26.Qh7 Bf8 (26...Kf8 27.Qh8† leads to a quick mate) 27.Qg8 and Black can resign.

20.g4!
At the moment White has no immediate way to break through, so he makes a useful attacking move while waiting to see what Black does.

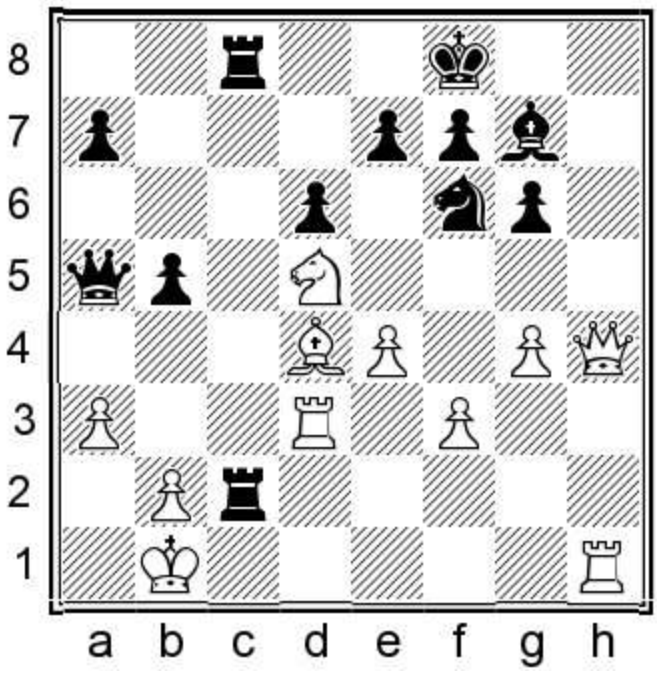
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20...b5
20...R4c6 can be met by 21.Qd2 Rc4 22.f4 with a decisive attack, for instance:



22...Ke8 23.e5 Nd5 24.Rh7 1–0 Harney – Blittkowsky, corr. 2012.

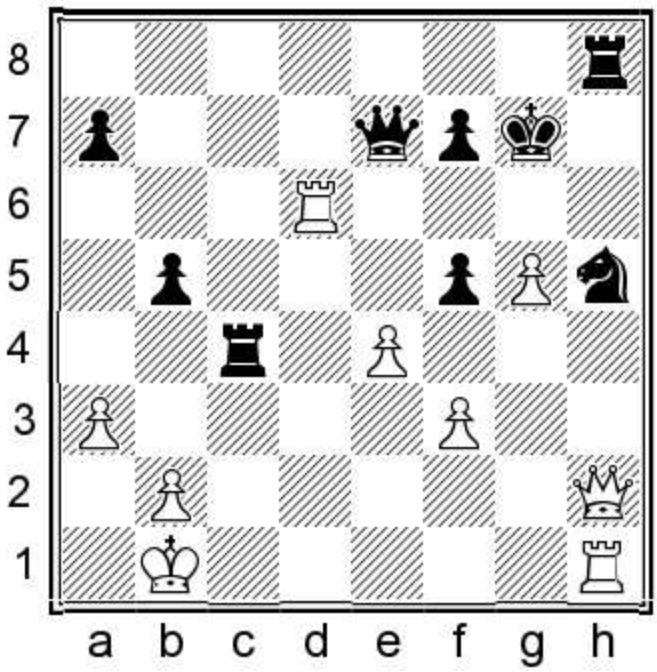
21.Nd5! Rxc2 22.Qh4±
It was essential to wait for Black to play ...b5 before making this pawn sacrifice. If the pawn was on b7, then ... Qb5 would give Black a winning position.



22...R2c4 23.g5 Nh5 24.Bxg7† Kxg7 25.Nxe7 Rh8
Material is level but Black's defences will soon be ripped open.

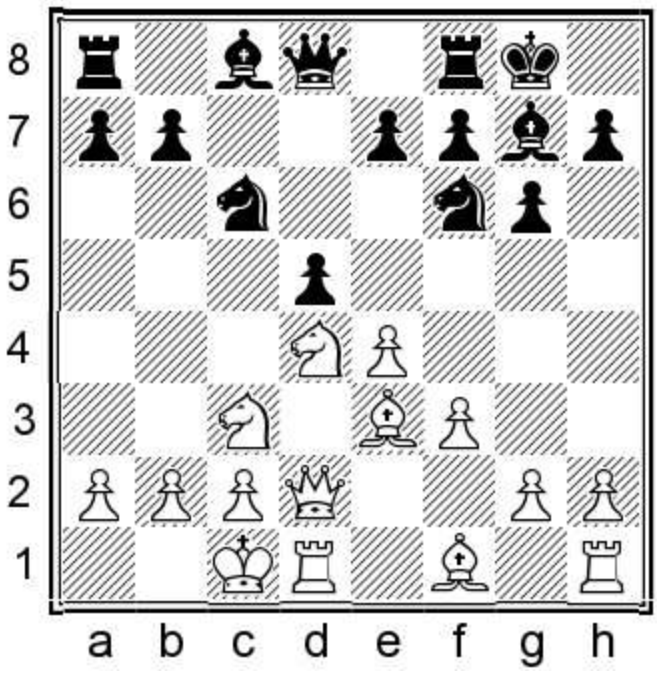
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26.Qh2! Qd8 27.Nf5†! gxf5 28.Rxd6 Qe7



29.Rh6! Rxh6 30.gxh6† Kh7 31.Qxh5 fxe4 32.Rg1 exf3 33.Rg7† Kh8 34.Qxf3 Qe4† 35.Qxe4 Rxe4 36.Rxf7 Black avoided the mating attack but ended up in a lost rook endgame, which White soon converted in Quattrocchi – Joppich, corr. 2010.

C3) 9...d5



Finally we come to the critical test of the 9.0-0-0 variation.

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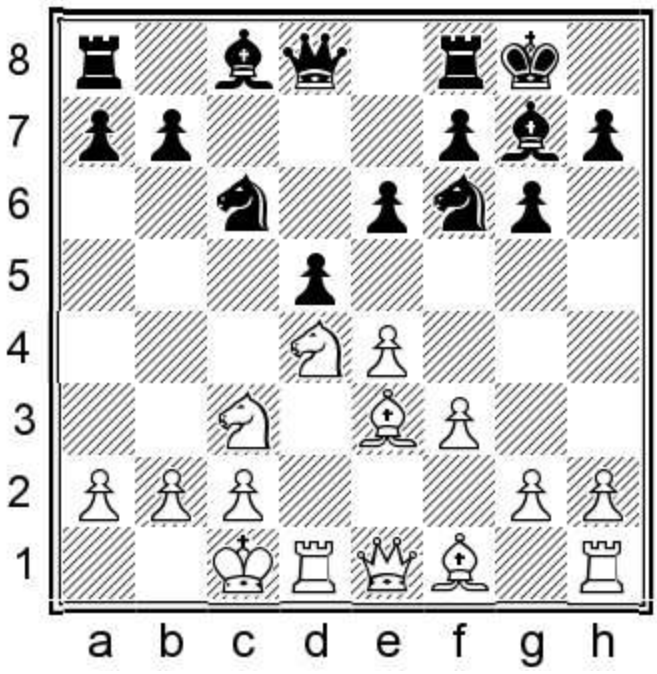
10.Qe1!?
White has tried several other moves. It is worth mentioning that 10.exd5 Nxd5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.Bd4 is usually thought of as the main line, when 12...e5 13.Bc5 reaches a position I would be happy to recommend for White; indeed, we will see something similar in variation C322. The problem with all this is the modern 12...Bxd4! 13. Qxd4 Qb6, which continues to hold up well for Black.

The 10.Qe1 variation was developed in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and is still popular today. Usually it leads to the same pawn structure as the 12...e5 13.Bc5 line noted above, but with some small differences in piece placement, as will be discussed later. However, there are some possible deviations along the way.
We will analyse C31) 10...e6?! and C32) 10...e5.

10...dxe4?? loses to 11.Nxc6 of course.

10...Be6?! occurred in Navara – Hou Yifan, Prague (blitz) 2013, when 11.Kb1!N 11...Rc8 12.Nxe6 fxe6 13. Bf2± would have been the most convincing way of meeting Black's dubious experiment.

C31) 10...e6?!

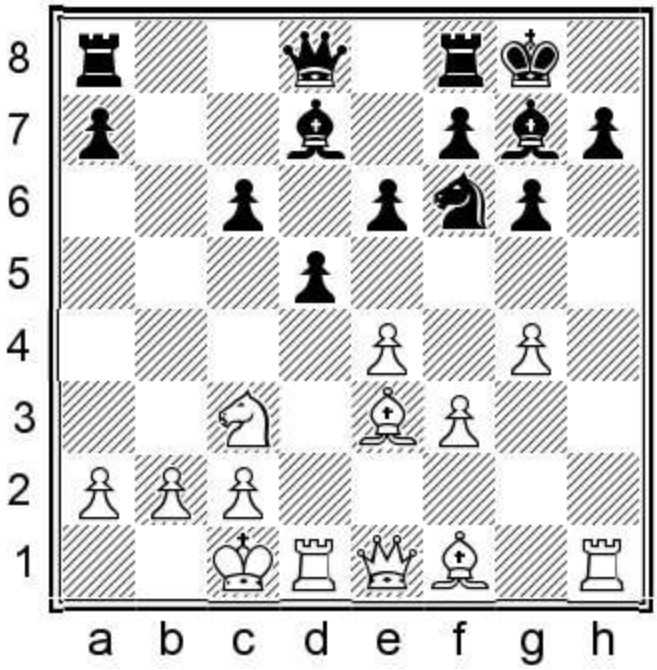



This was recommended by Peter Heine Nielsen in his ChessBase DVD series, but our analysis indicates that it is too slow.

11.h4!
Launching a dangerous attack. I considered two main tries: C311) 11...Qe7?! and the somewhat more resilient C312) 11...Qc7. Most of Black's other options belong on the scrap heap, as the following lines illustrate:

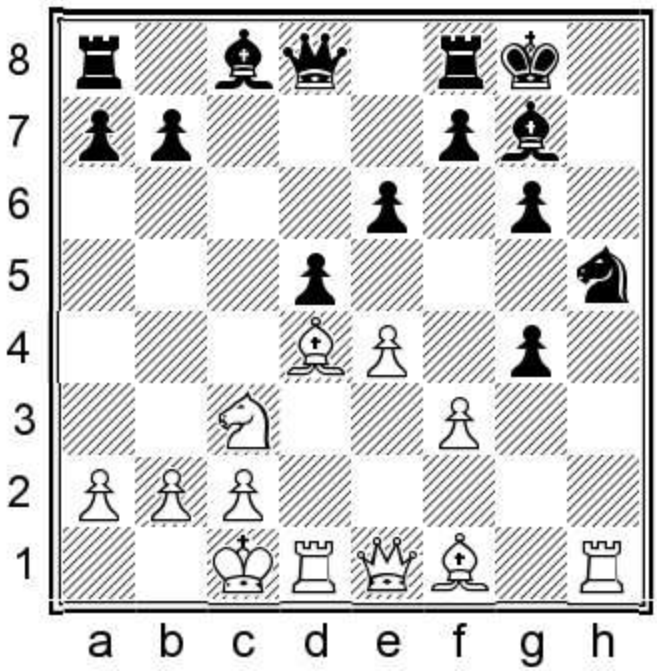
11...Bd7?! 12.h5 Nxh5 13.Nxc6 bxc6 14.g4 gives White a virulent attack: 14...Nf6N (14...d4 15.Bxd4 Bxd4 16. Rxd4 Qg5† 17.Kb1 Nf6 18.e5 Nd5 19.f4 Nxc3† 20.Qxc3 Qe7 21.Bc4 was terrible for Black in Luther – Wallinger, Germany 1990)

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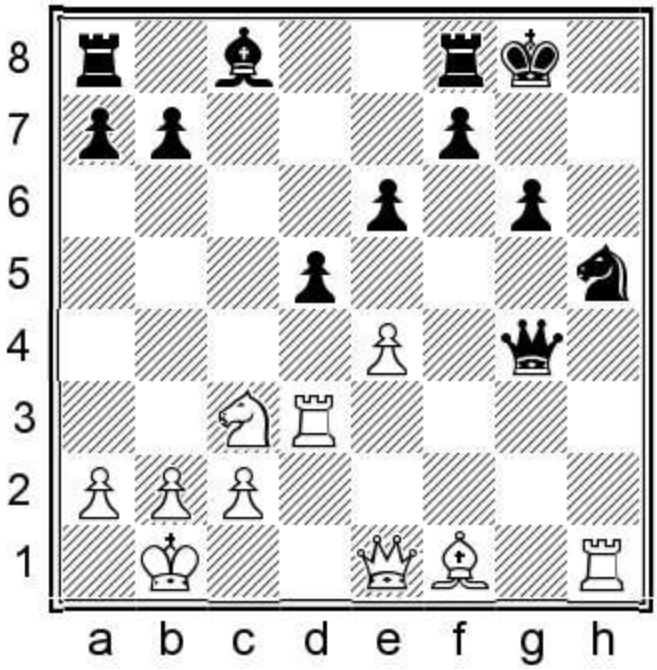
15.e5 Ne8 16.Qg3 f6 17.Qh2 Kf7 18.f4 Rh8 19.Bd3 f5 20.Rdg1 Black's extra pawn is irrelevant and it is unlikely that he will survive the attack for much longer.

11...h5?! 12.g4 hxg4 13.h5 Nxd4 14.Bxd4 Nxh5 occurred in Bruun – Christensen, Helsingor 2009. A simple improvement is:

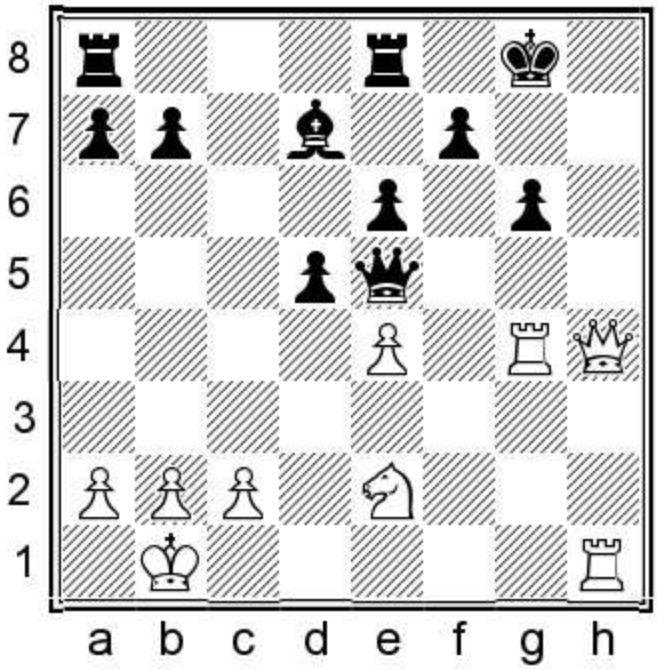


15.fxg4!N 15...Qg5† 16.Kb1 Bxd4 17.Rxd4 Qxg4 18.Rd3! White is completely winning. For example:

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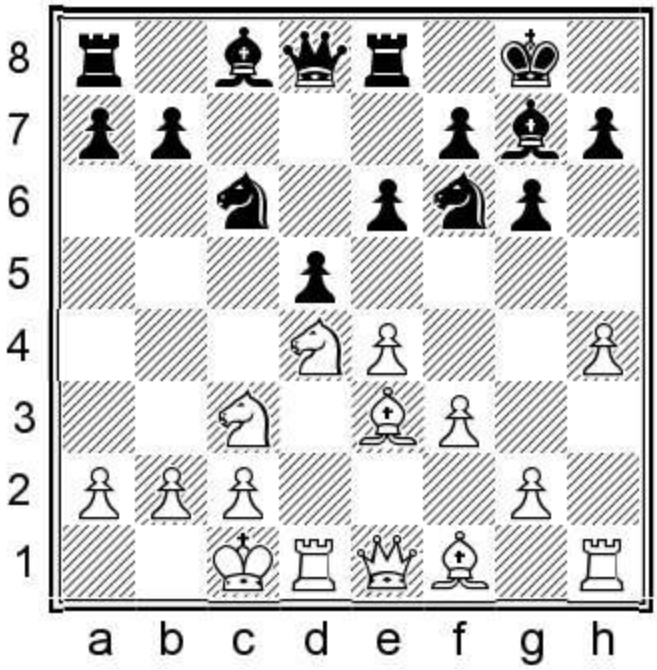
18...Qg5 19.Be2 Nf4 20.Rg3 Qe5 21.Rg4 Nxe2 22.Nxe2 Bd7 23.Qh4 Rfe8



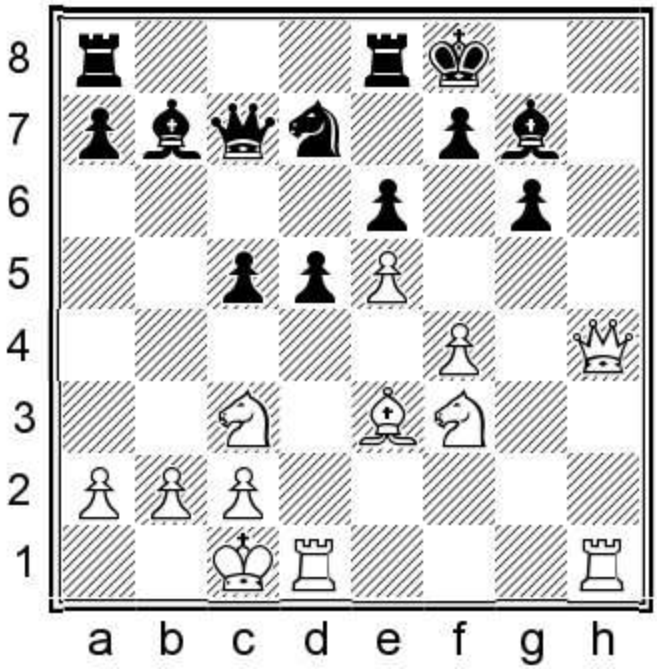
24.Rxg6†! fxg6 25.Qh7† Kf8 26.Rf1† Qf5 27.Nf4 and Black is mated.

11...Re8?! has been played in quite a few games but, for some reason, no one found the strongest reply:

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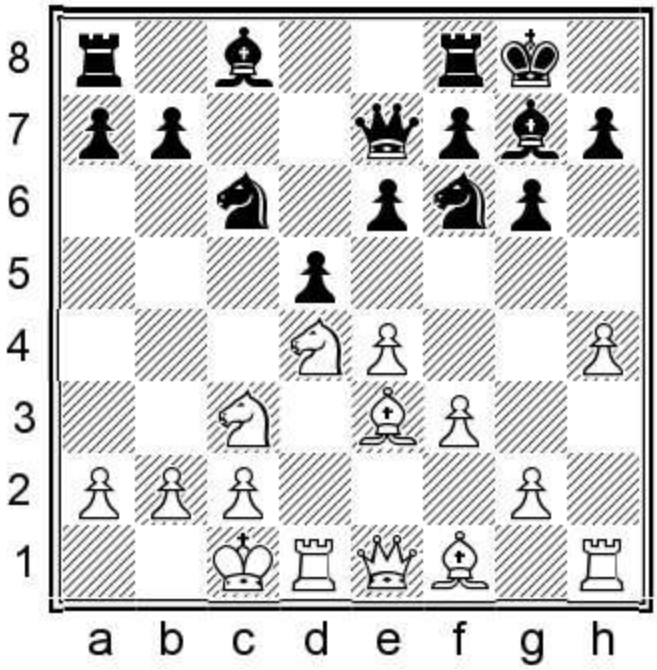
12.Bb5!N 12...Qc7 13.h5± Black is already in big trouble. Here is a nice illustrative line: 13...Nxh5 14.g4 Nf6 15.Qh4 h5 16.gxh5 Nxh5 17.Qg5 Nf6 18.Bxc6 bxc6 19.e5 Nd7 20.Qh4 Bb7 21.f4 Kf8 22.Nf3 c5



23.f5! The defence soon falls apart. 23...exf5 24.Nxd5 Bxd5 25.Rxd5 Nxe5 26.Ng5+– The threats are too many and too brutal to speak of.

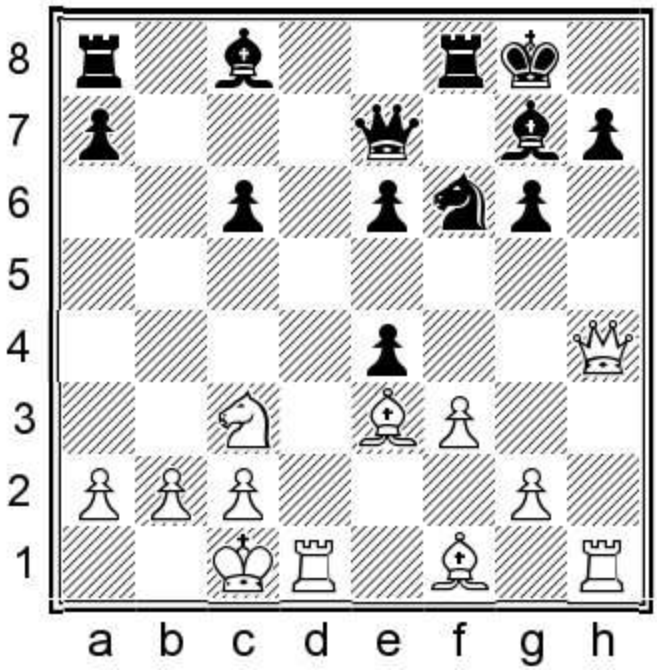
C311) 11...Qe7?!

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12.h5!
As usual in this line, Black faces urgent problems on the kingside.

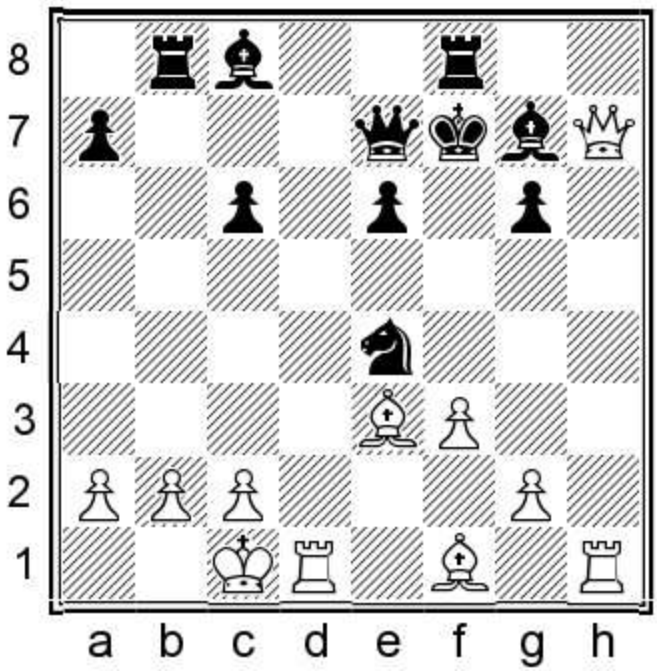
12...Nxh5
Black also has problems after:
12...dxe4 13.hxg6 fxg6 14.Nxc6 bxc6 15.Qh4
The queen often comes to this excellent attacking square in these lines, showing one of the advantages of the 10.Qe1 variation.



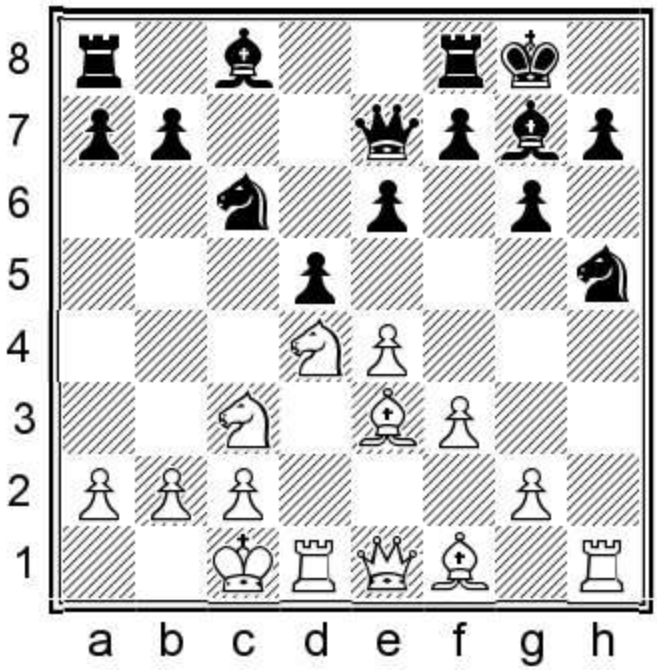
15...Rb8
15...exf3? 16.Ne4! wins.
16.Nxe4 Nxe4

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16...Rxb2!?N may have been a better try but 17.Bc4! is a good answer. The continuation might be 17...Rxa2!? 18.Bd4! Ra4 19.Bxf6 Rxf6 20.Nxf6† Bxf6 21.Bxe6† Qxe6 22.Qxa4 Qe3† 23.Rd2 Bc3 24.Rhd1 and White is winning.
17.Qxh7† Kf7
White has a few winning lines but the simplest is:



18.Bh6!N
18.fxe4!? Rh8 19.Qxh8 Bxh8 20.Rxh8 Qf6 21.Bd4 e5 22.Bc4† Be6 23.Rxb8 was also good enough in Pietzsch – Gempe, Leipzig 2013.
18...Qf6 19.Bxg7 Qxg7 20.fxe4+–
White has an extra pawn plus a big initiative.



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13.g4!N
White exchanged on c6 in D. Richter – Alvarez, corr. 1995, but there is no reason to give Black chances along the b-file. The justification for the text move is revealed in the line that follows.

13...Nxd4
13...Nf6 14.Qh4+– gives White everything he wants.

14.Rxd4!! Bxd4
After 14...Nf6 15.Qh4 the threat of e4-e5 is devastating. 15...Re8 16.Bb5 Bd7 17.e5+–

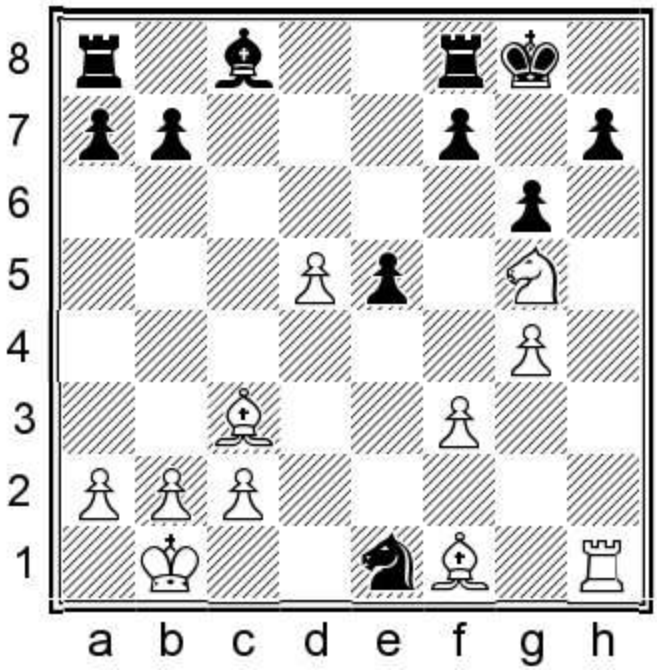
14...Qc5 15.Rxd5 Bxc3 16.Rxc5 Bxe1 17.gxh5 also leaves Black with insurmountable difficulties.

15.Bxd4
White has an overwhelming initiative for the exchange. You don't need to know any more than this, but I have included some lines to illustrate how the game might go.

15...Nf4 16.exd5
16.Qe3 is also good enough.

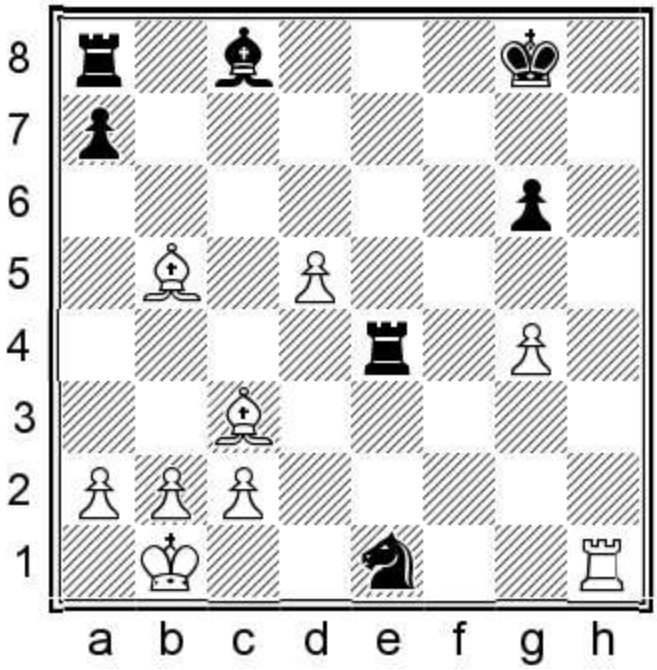
16...Qg5
16...f6 17.g5 e5 18.Ne4! fxg5 19.Bc4 Qd8 20.Bxe5 is winning.

17.Ne4! Nd3† 18.Kb1 Nxe1 19.Nxg5 e5 20.Bc3!?
20.Bxe5 f6 21.Bc4 is a simple route to a big advantage. The text move is more entertaining: White temporarily goes a rook down but is nonetheless winning.




20...f6 21.Nxh7 Rf7 22.Nxf6† Rxf6 23.Bxe5 Rxf3 24.Bc4 b5 25.Bxb5 Re3 26.Bd4 Re4 27.Bc3

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27...Rb8
27...Nf3 28.Bc6 Rb8 29.d6 wins.
28.Bc6 Rxg4 29.d6 Rg5 30.Rxe1 Bg4 31.b4+–
Let’s move on to Black’s most popular option on move 11.

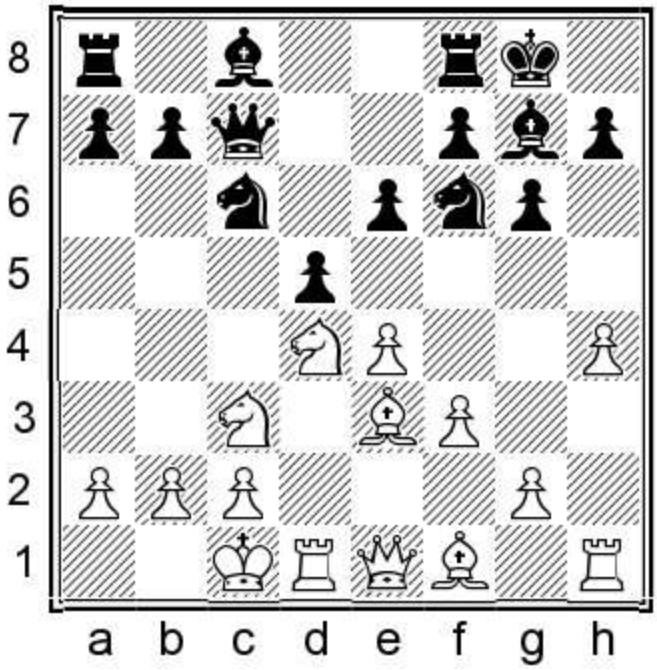
C312) 11...Qc7

GAME 25

Veselin Topalov – Lu Shanglei
Baku 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.0-0-0 d5 10.Qe1 e6?! 11.h4! Qc7
This is Black’s best try but it runs into a strong idea.

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12.Ndb5!
Peter Heine Nielsen, Carsten Hansen and David Vigorito all overlook this move in their respective Dragon works.

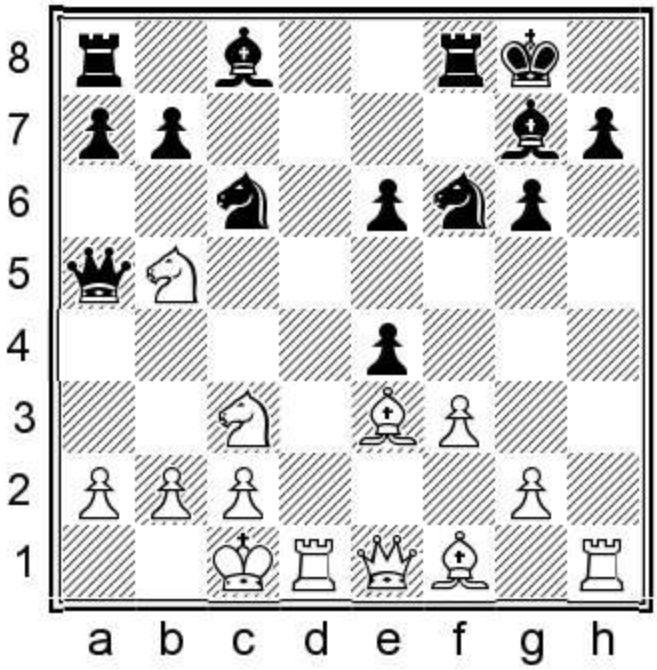
White's most popular continuation has been 12.h5 Nxh5 13.g4 but Black is fine after 13...Ng3! 14.Ndb5 Qb8 15.Rh3 a6! as in Georgiadis – Liu, Arlington 2015.

12.Kb1!? is a good move which would have been worth investigating, but the text is simply stronger.

12...Qb8
12...Qe5? 13.f4+– makes no sense for Black.

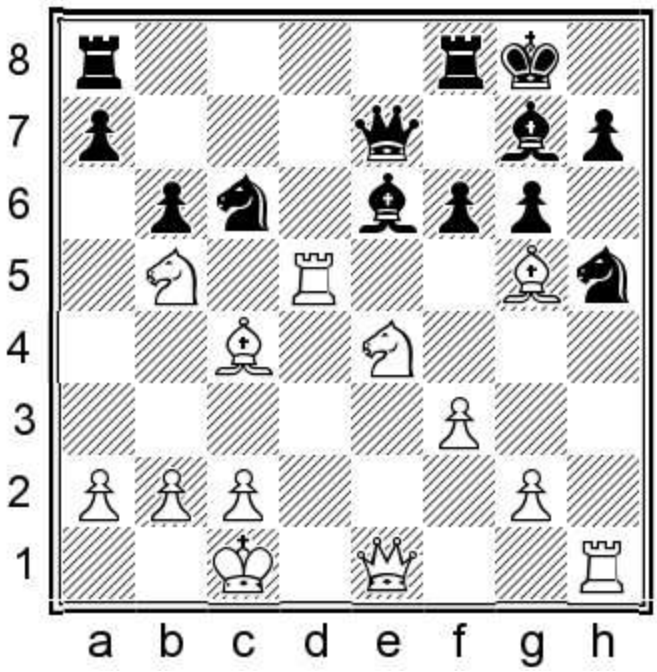
12...Qa5?! has been the most common choice but it's also a mistake. 13.h5 dxe4 14.hxg6 fxg6 This has occurred in two games and White has several good continuations, the most accurate being:

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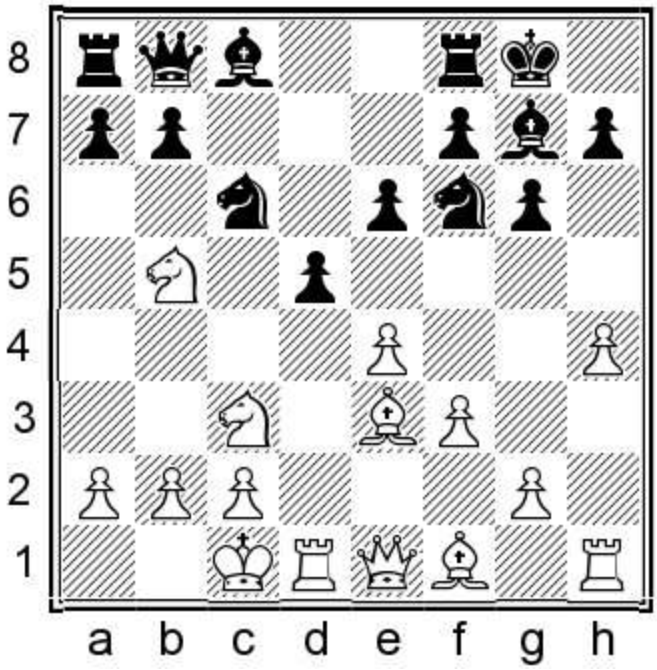
15.Be2!N± White is clearly better, with a development advantage and several potential targets to attack.

Finally, 12...Qd8N seems like an admission that things have gone wrong for Black, but I checked a few lines anyway: 13.h5! Nxh5 (13...a6 is met by 14.Nd4± and Black has essentially just wasted a tempo with ...a6) 14. exd5 exd5 15.Rxd5 Qe7 16.Ne4 b6 17.Bg5 f6 18.Bc4 Be6

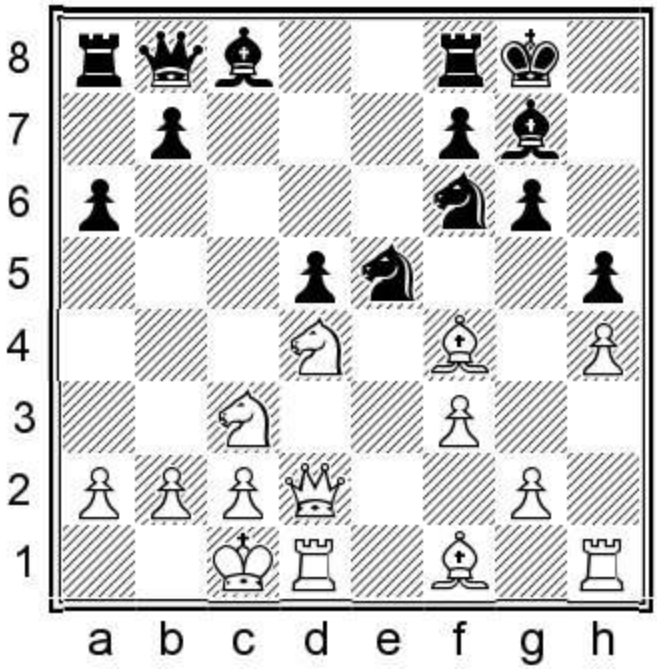


19.Bd2! Black has serious difficulties, for instance: 19...Rfd8 20.Rxd8† Rxd8 21.Nxf6† Bxf6 22.Qxe6† Qxe6 23.Bxe6† Kh8 24.c3+–

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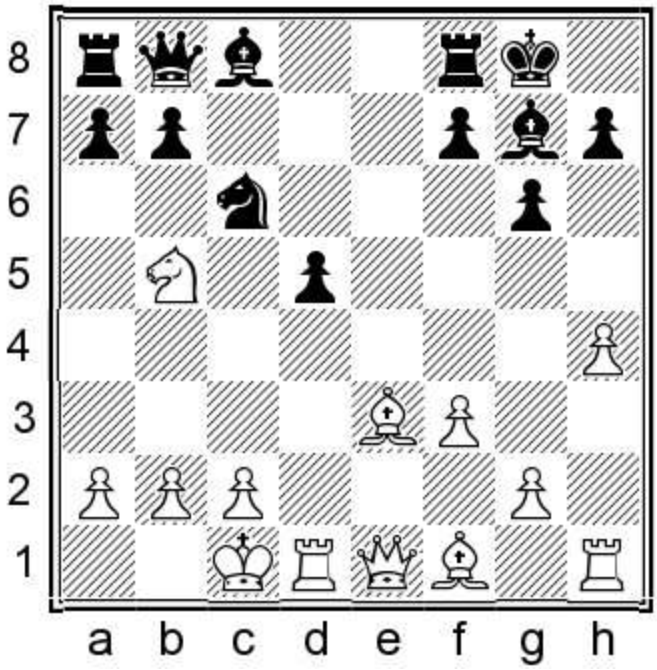
13.exd5 Nxd5
Against 13...exd5 as played in Gesicki – Nemec, email 2012, I would recommend 14.Qd2!?N, mirroring Topalov's idea in the main game. (14.g4!?N 14...a6 15.Nd4 also looks strong. I think White is better after most sensible moves in this structure, although I'm not entirely convinced by the engines' suggested plan of h4-h5-h6, which could be useful for a future endgame but reduces our attacking chances in the middlegame.) 14...a6 15.Bf4 Ne5 16.Nd4 h5



17.g3! White intends to finish development, either by swinging the rook to the centre via h2, or by playing Bg2 and Rhe1. Black will have a hard time coordinating his pieces and finding a good plan.

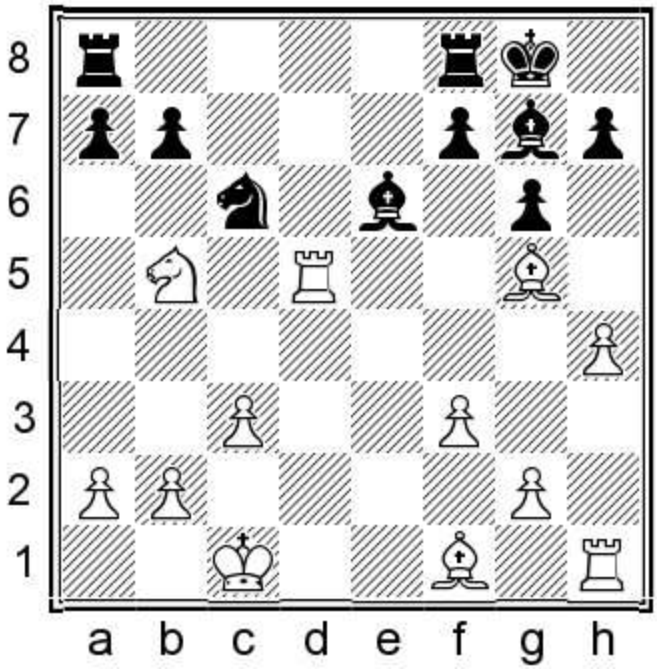
14.Nxd5 exd5

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15.Qd2!
White reverses his 10th move to prepare Bf4.

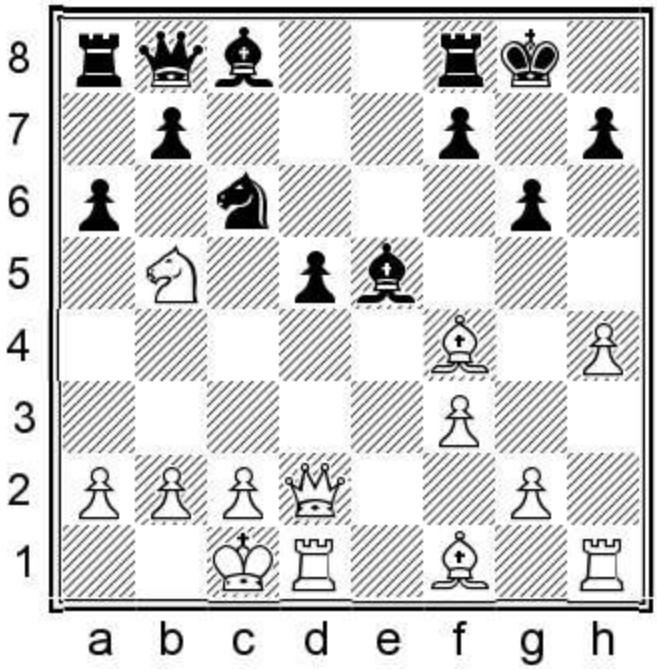
15...a6
15...Qe5!N is Black's best chance although White keeps the upper hand. My analysis continues: 16.c3 Qe7 17. Bg5 Qc5 18.Qxd5 Qxd5 19.Rxd5 Be6



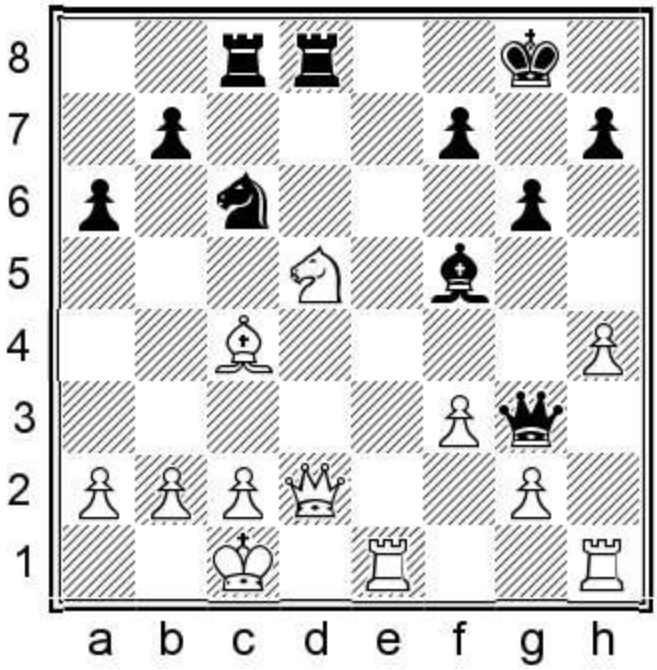
20.Rc5 Bxa2 (20...Rad8 21.Bc4±) 21.Nd6² Black is under a lot of pressure.

16.Bf4 Be5
16...Ne5 17.Nc3 Be6 18.Bh6± was incredibly dangerous for Black in Fabig – Kausch, email 2010. White is threatening to open up the h-file with a dangerous attack, as well as simply taking the d-pawn.

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17.Bxe5 Qxe5 18.Re1 Qg3 19.Nc3 Bf5 20.Nxd5 Rfd8 21.Bc4 Rac8

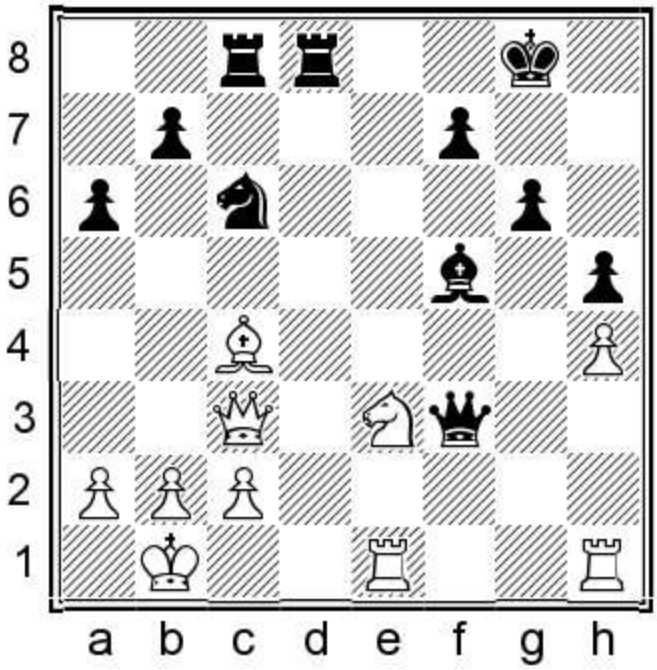


22.Kb1
This is good enough to maintain a clear advantage.
22.h5!N intending h5-h6 is even stronger. For example, 22...Ne5 23.Kb1!! Nxc4 24.Ne7† Kg7 25.Qc3† f6 26. Nxc8 Rxc8 27.Re7† and mate is approaching.

22...h5?!
22...Qd6± is more resilient.

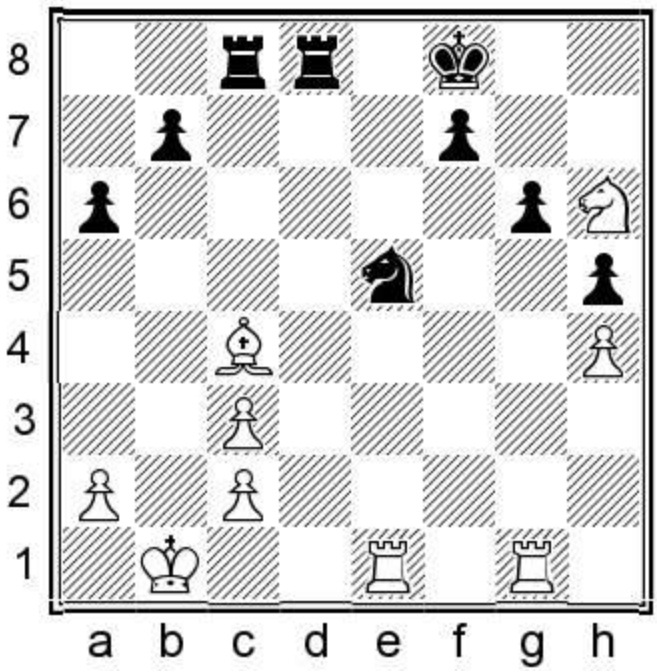
23.Qc3 Qxg2 24.Ne3 Qxf3

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25.Rhf1?!
25.Ref1! would have been crushing, as 25...Qg3 26.Qf6! leaves Black defenceless.

25...Qg3 26.Rg1 Qe5 27.Nxf5 Qxc3 28.bxc3 Kf8 29.Nh6 Ne5
Suddenly things are not so simple, although White is still winning.



30.Bxf7?
30.Bb3! is stronger: 30...Nc4 (30...Nf3 31.Nxf7+–) 31.Bxc4 Rxc4 32.Ref1 and the knight will get out eventually.

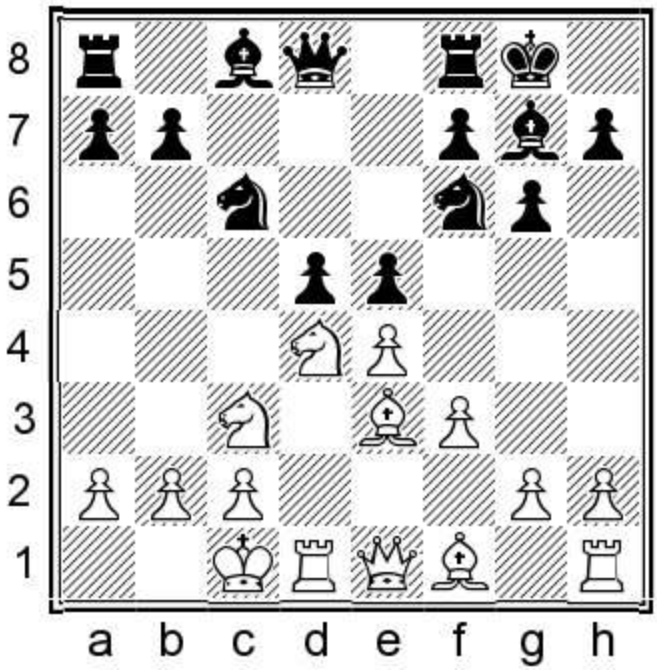
30...Nf3 31.Bxg6 Nxe1 32.Rxe1?
32.Bxh5!±

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32...Kg7 33.Bf5 Rc6
White's advantage has evaporated and, despite Topalov's heroic efforts, it never returned.

34.Re7† Kf8 35.Rf7† Ke8 36.Rh7 Rd1† 37.Kb2 Rb6† 38.Ka3 Rdd6 39.Rh8† Ke7 40.Ng8† Kf7 41.c4 Rdc6 42. Bd3 Kg7 43.Rxh5 Kxg8 44.Rd5 Rc7 45.h5 Kg7 46.c5 Rb1 47.c4 Rh1 48.Kb4 Rh2 49.a4 Kh6 50.Ka5 Rb2 51. Be4 Rb3 52.Re5 Rb2 53.c6 bxc6 54.Re6† Kxh5 55.Rxc6 Re7 56.Bd5 Kg5 57.Rxa6 Kf5 58.Bc6 Ke5 59.Bb5 Rb7 60.Ra8 Kd6 61.Ka6 Rc7 62.Rd8† Kc5 63.a5 Rh7 64.Rb8 Ra2 65.Rb6 Rg7 66.Rc6†
½–½
Even though Black got off the hook in this game, he was clearly in big trouble and the whole approach of 10...e6?! seems to me to be too slow. Now let's move on to his best and most popular option.

C32) 10...e5



11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5
After a couple of virtually forced moves, Black must make a choice. C321) 12...cxd5 looks like a tempting way to construct a nice pawn centre, but C322) 12...Nxd5 is the main line and the best move.

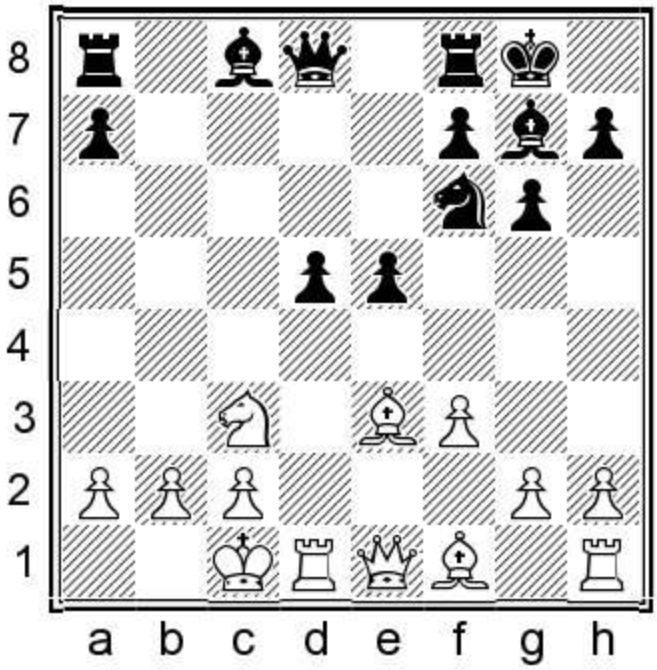
C321) 12...cxd5

GAME 26

Juergen Hess – Anatoly Spirin
email 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.0-0-0 d5 10.Qe1 e5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5 cxd5
White should be happy to see this move. Black will not be able to maintain his nice pawn centre and will have to either weaken himself or offer a questionable pawn sacrifice.

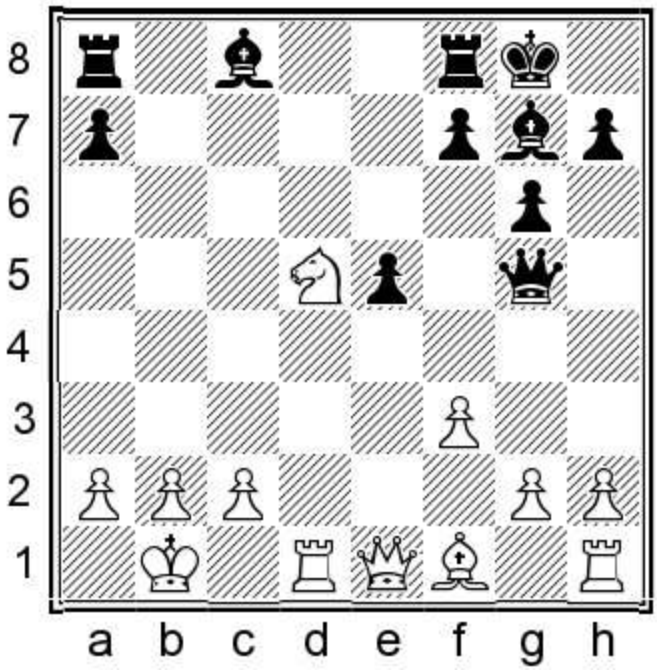
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13.Bg5 Be6
This is virtually forced. Other moves make White's life much easier, for instance:

13...Qe8? 14.Bxf6 Bxf6 15.Nxd5 Bg7 16.Bc4± Walczak – Kopacz, Zakopane 2001.

13...d4?! 14.Qxe5! Ne4!?N (14...Ng4? 15.Qxg7† Kxg7 16.Bxd8+– made things easy for White in Perunovic – Myo, Istanbul [ol] 2012) 15.Qxg7† Kxg7 16.Bxd8 dxc3 17.Bh4 cxb2† 18.Kxb2 Rb8† 19.Ka3 Nc3 20.Bg3! Nxd1 21.Bxb8±
13...Qb6?! is a dodgy pawn sacrifice: 14.Bxf6 Qxf6 15.Nxd5 Unlike some well-known lines where Black gets fair compensation for a pawn, here he is hampered by the ...e5 move, which blocks the g7-bishop and gives White a perfect outpost on d5. 15...Qg5† 16.Kb1



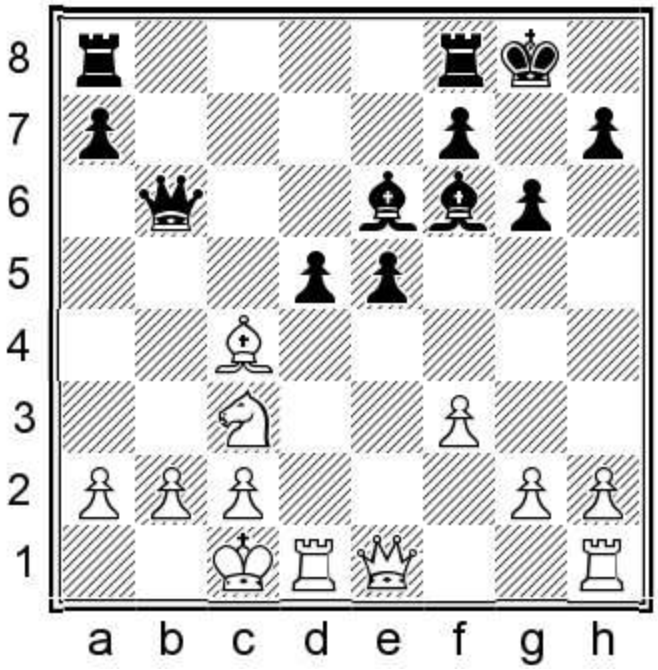
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16...Rb8 (16...e4!?N is a suggestion of Carsten Hansen but 17.Qg3!± is a good answer; Black will soon have to enter a tough endgame) 17.h4 Qd8 This was Savelli – Boudignon, France 1994, and now 18.Bc4!N would have left White with an extra pawn for hardly any compensation at all.

14.Bc4!
Utilizing the pin along the d-file – another advantage of the 10.Qe1 move.

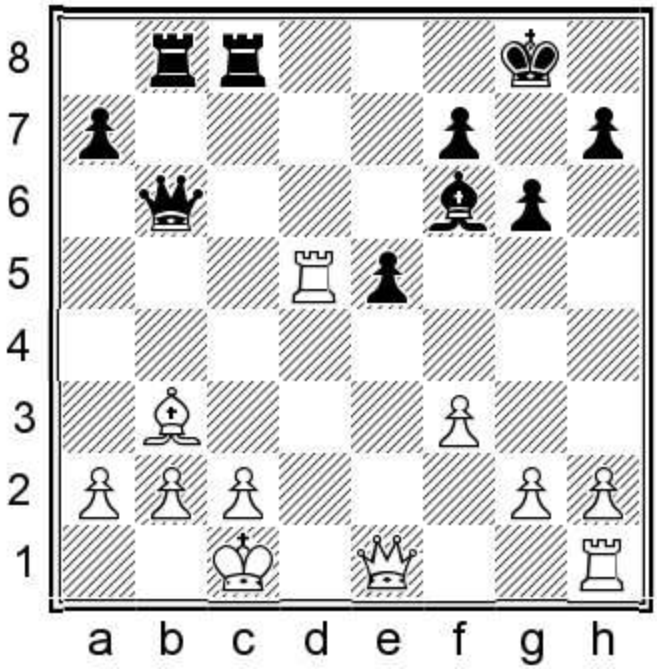
14...Qc7
This is the soundest move, although it does not equalize.

14...Qb6?!
This is another version of the dodgy pawn sac.
15.Bxf6
15.Nxd5? Nxd5 16.Bxd5 e4µ
15...Bxf6

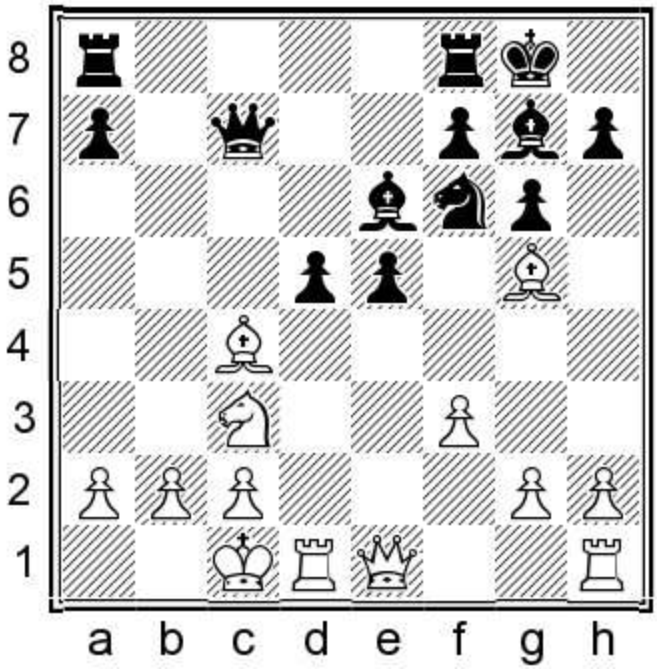


16.Bxd5!?
White has a pleasant choice, as 16.Nxd5 also leads to some advantage: 16...Bxd5 17.Rxd5 e4 18.Rb5 Qc7 19. Qxe4 Rae8 20.Qd3 Qf4† 21.Kb1 Re3 22.g3 (22.Qf1!? is also worth considering) 22...Rxd3 23.gxf4 Rxf3 24.f5 g5² Tan – Vea, Gibraltar 2016.
16...Rab8 17.Bb3 Rfc8
17...a5 is mentioned by Vigorito as leading to reasonable compensation for Black, but I don't think it's enough for a pawn. For instance, 18.Na4 Qc6 19.Qc3 and White went on to convert his advantage in Kravtsov – Mujica, corr. 2010.
18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5

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White has an extra pawn plus the safer king, and has won all three games from this position. One example continued:
19...Qc6?! 20.Qe4 Rc7 21.h4±
Davila – Madrid, Calvia (ol) 2004.

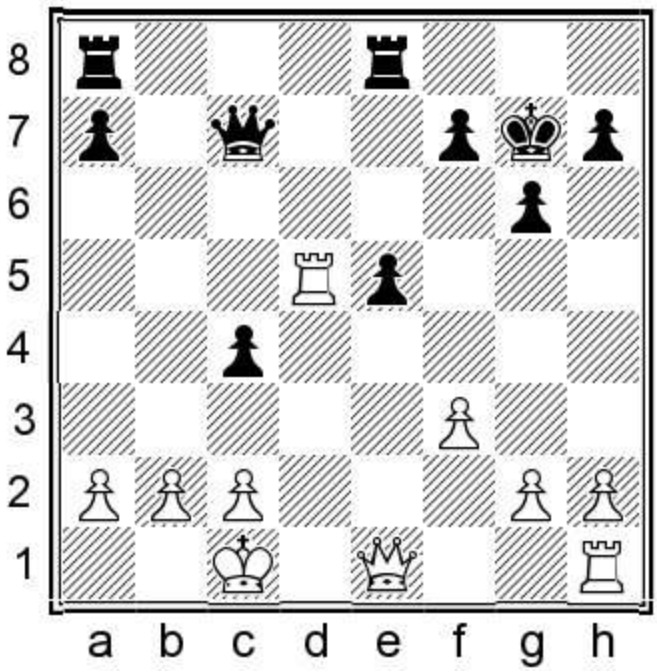


15.Bxf6
Black gets enough compensation after 15.Bxd5 Nxd5 16.Nxd5 Bxd5 17.Rxd5 a5! as in Krivic – Moreira, email 2009.

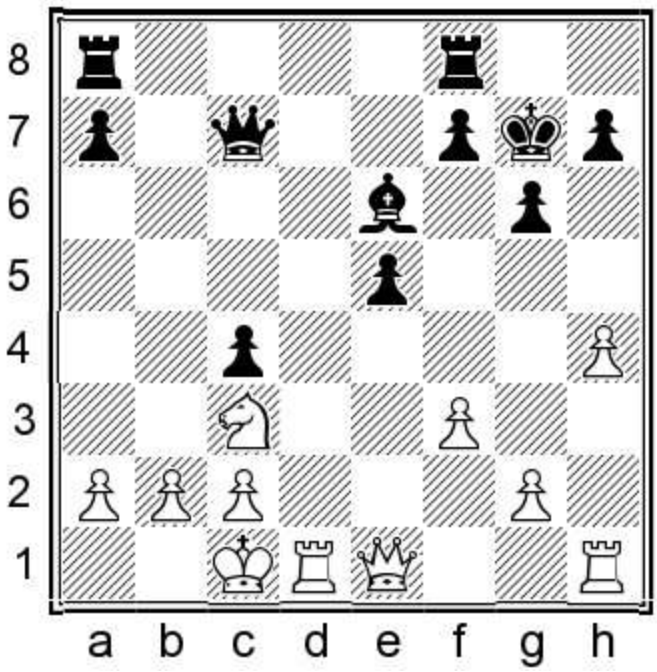
15...dxc4 16.Bxg7 Kxg7 17.h4!?
17.Nd5 is a safe route to a positional edge. 17...Bxd5 18.Rxd5 Rfe8 (18...f6 19.Qc3 Rad8 occurred in Berthelot – Mohr, Paris 1993, when 20.Qa5!N 20...Rc8 21.Qxc7† Rxc7 22.b4!² would have given White a pleasant

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endgame playing for two results) This position was reached in Mortensen – P.H. Nielsen, Tjele 1991, and several subsequent games. I found an interesting new idea:

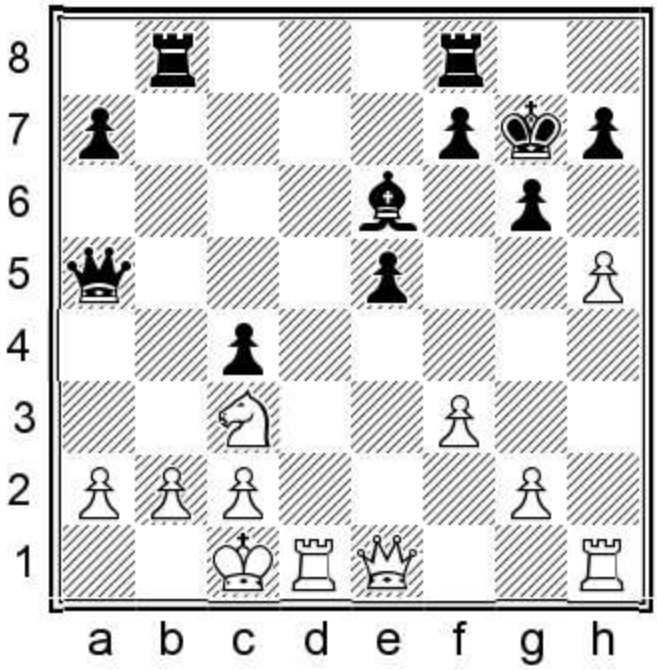


19.Qe3!?N So far everybody has put the queen on the natural c3-square but I think it may be better placed on e3, as prophylaxis against the possible plan of ...e4. 19...Rab8 20.Rhd1²
Although the above line is good for White, I think he has every reason to play more ambitiously.



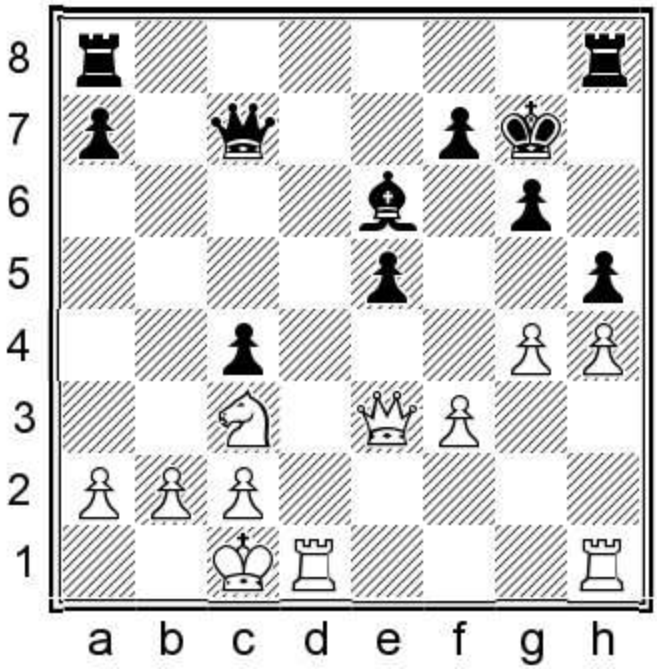
17...Rab8
17...Qa5?! is inaccurate. 18.h5 Rab8 In Ponkratov – Dimukhametov, Nabereznye Chelny 2008, White should have continued:

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19.Rd6!N Threatening Qh4. (The immediate 19.Qh4 enables Black to stay in the game with 19...Qb4.) 19... Rfd8 20.Rxd8 Rxd8 21.Qh4 White has a winning attack.

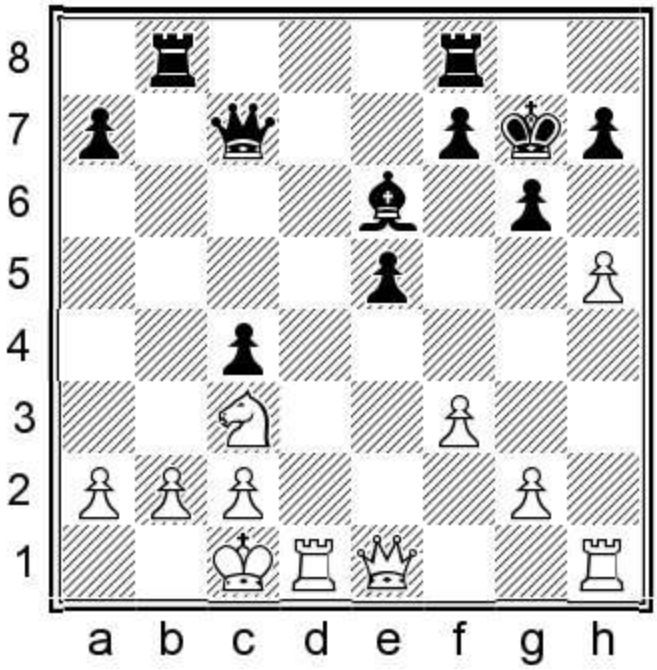
17...h5 has been tried a few times. Surprisingly, nobody went for the direct attacking option: 18.g4!?N (18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Rfe8 20.Qe3² gave White a typical slight edge in Narayanan – Dodeja, Pune 2016, much like the 17.Nd5 line noted above.) 18...Rh8 (18...hxg4? 19.h5± is too dangerous for Black) 19.Qe3!?



19...hxg4? (19...Rab8 should be preferred although 20.g5² still favours White) 20.h5 f6 21.fxg4 Bxg4 22.Rdf1! f5 23.hxg6± The position remains complicated but the difference in king safety is the defining factor.

18.h5
Black is under pressure and it is not easy to determine the best defence.

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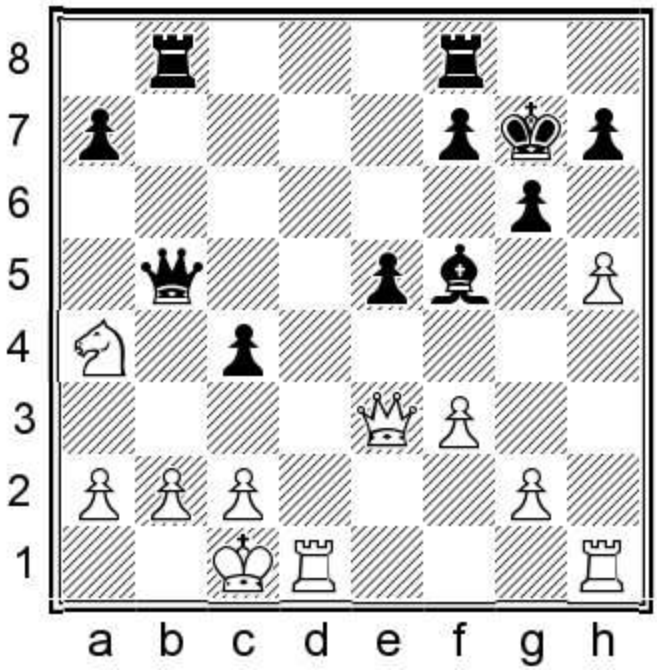


18...Qb6?!
This tempting move has been made in all three games from this position, but it only compounds Black's difficulties.

18...f6N is the lesser evil although White keeps the upper hand after: 19.hxg6 hxg6 20.Ne4 g5 (20...Rh8?! 21. Rxh8 Rxh8 22.Rd6±) 21.Rd6 Bf5 22.Qd2²

19.Na4! Qb5 20.Qe3!
Black does not have time to capture the knight, as hxg6 would be devastating.

20...Bf5
Black prepares to recapture on g6 with the bishop, but White smartly changes the focus of his attack.



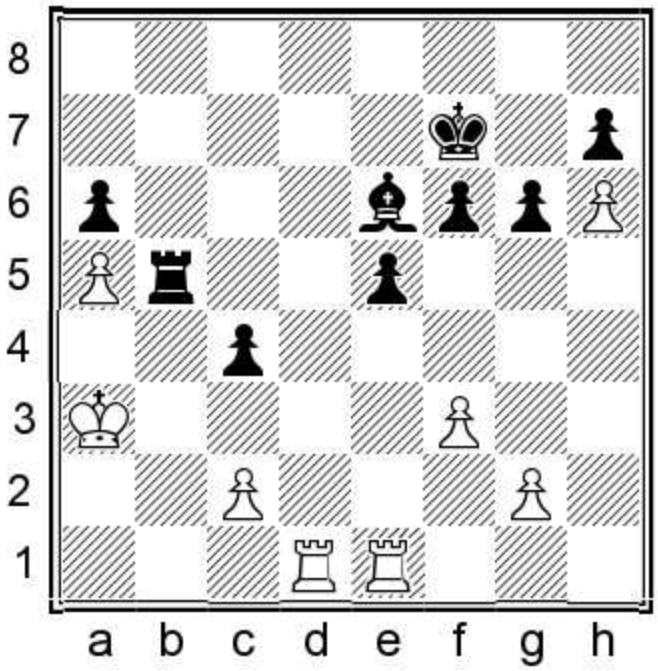
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21.h6†! Kg8 22.Qa3±
White has the superior minor piece and the h6-pawn is a source of worry for Black. This explains why he hurried to exchange queens, but the endgame is also no fun for him.

22...Qb4 23.Qxb4 Rxb4 24.Nc3 Rfb8 25.b3 Be6 26.a3 R4b6 27.b4
White controls the only open file, his knight is stronger than the enemy bishop and he has a far more effective pawn majority, all of which adds up to a decisive advantage.

27...Kf8 28.Rhe1 Ra6 29.Kb2 f6 30.b5 Kf7 31.a4 Rab6 32.Ka3 a6 33.a5
White had other winning continuations which may have been more suitable for a practical game, but evidently he decided that winning the exchange would be the clearest way when using a computer for assistance.

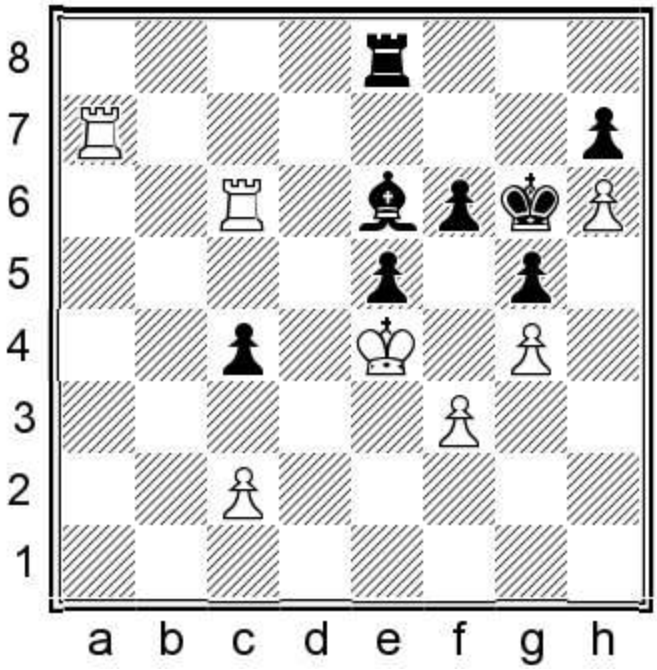
33...Rxb5 34.Nxb5 Rxb5
Black is almost in time to save himself, but White has worked everything out.




35.Rd6! Rxa5† 36.Kb4 Ra2 37.Rc6 g5 38.Rd1 Rb2† 39.Kc3 Rb7 40.Rxa6 Re7 41.Rdd6
Black has nothing to do except shuffle his rook back and forth.

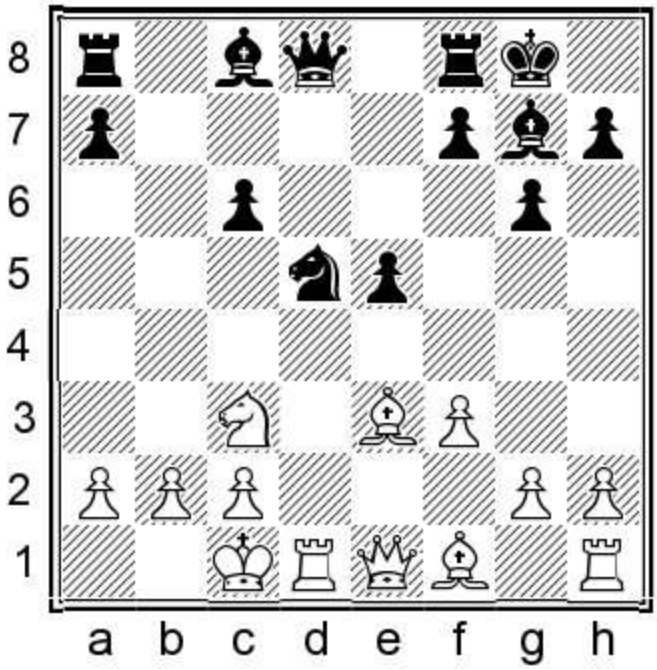
41...Re8 42.g4 Re7 43.Kd2 Re8 44.Ke3 Re7 45.Ke4 Re8 46.Rdb6 Re7 47.Rc6 Re8 48.Ra7† Kg6

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49.Rg7† Kxh6 50.Rcc7
1–0

C322) 12...Nxd5



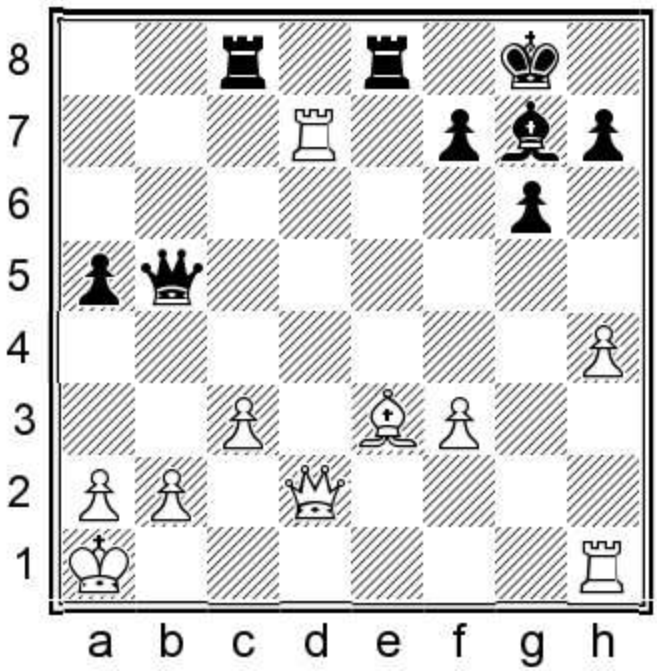
This is the more reliable choice for Black, avoiding an overextended pawn centre.

13.Bc4 Be6 14.Ne4
Centralizing the knight is the most popular idea and the one that makes the most sense to me.

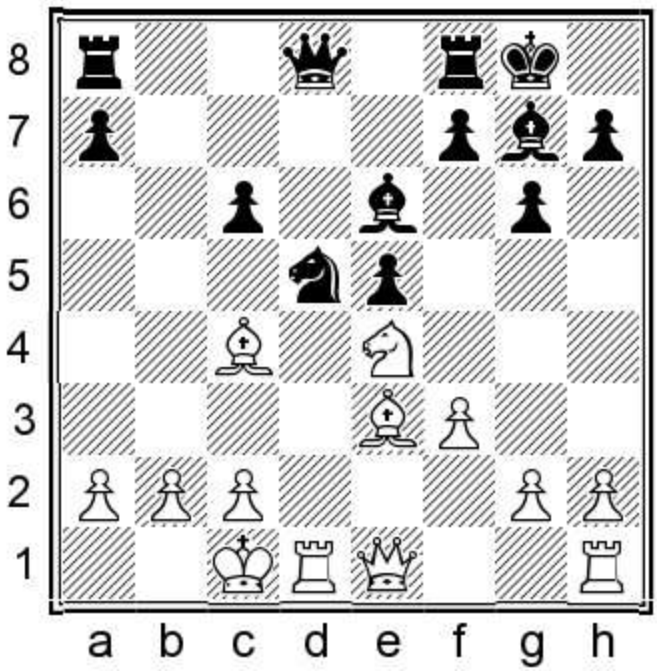
14.Kb1!? is the currently trendy move and also seems quite playable. However, after 14...a5!? the play takes on a decidedly forcing character. We spent some time analysing 15.h4 Qc7!N 16.Nxd5 cxd5 17.Bxd5 Rac8 18.c3

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Bxd5 19.Rxd5 Qb7 20.Qd2 e4! 21.Rd7 Qb5 22.Ka1 exf3 23.gxf3 Rfe8 and found that Black should have enough compensation. Our main line continues:



24.Qd3 Qc6 25.Bf2 h5 26.Rd1 Re6 27.Rd5 Rb8 28.Rxa5 Rxb2 29.Kxb2 Re2† 30.Rd2 Qxc3† 31.Qxc3 Rxd2† 32.Kc1 Bxc3 33.Ra8† Kh7 34.Be1 Rxa2 35.Rxa2 Bxe1= Black will easily hold this endgame.



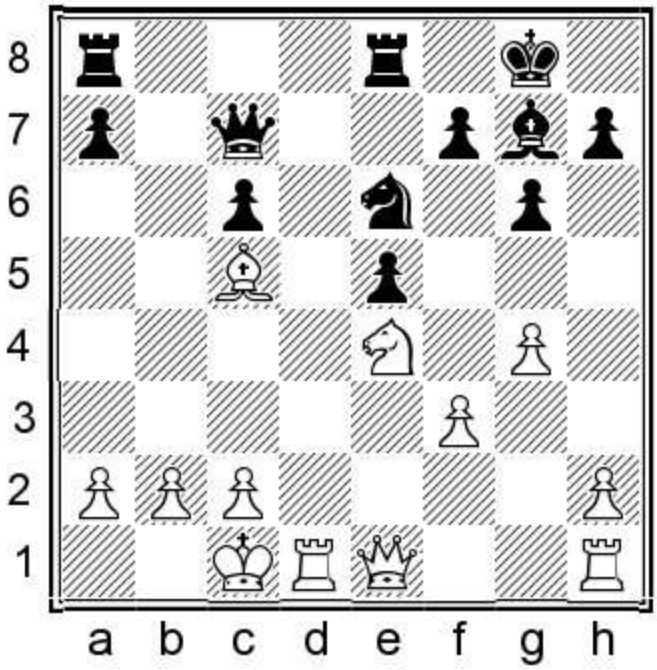
We have reached a thematic structure for the 9.0-0-0 d5 variation, and it is worth pausing to consider the approximate plans for both sides. Unlike some other Dragon lines, the game is unlikely to be decided by brute-force attacking. White will normally continue with g2-g4 and h2-h4, threatening to create a huge attack with h4-h5, but Black will nip this idea in the bud with ...h6. Our plan from there will be to block the kingside, usually with g4-g5 (inviting ...h5), but sometimes with h4-h5 (inviting ...g5). Once that has occurred, we will look to build a positional advantage by occupying the c5-square and doubling rooks on the d-file. In an ideal world,

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we will shut down Black's counterplay and eventually obtain a winning endgame, thanks to dominant minor pieces and a far superior queenside structure.
Obviously Black will also have a say in things. Over the next few moves, he will generally move his queen off the d-file and replace it with the f8-rook. He will keep his king safe by meeting h2-h4 with ...h6, as mentioned above. He often exchanges the light-squared bishops by means of ...Nf4, followed by recapturing on e6 with the knight, after which White will have to watch out for ...Nd4 ideas. And with it being a Dragon, Black will always be looking for opportunities to unleash the g7-bishop with a timely ...e4.

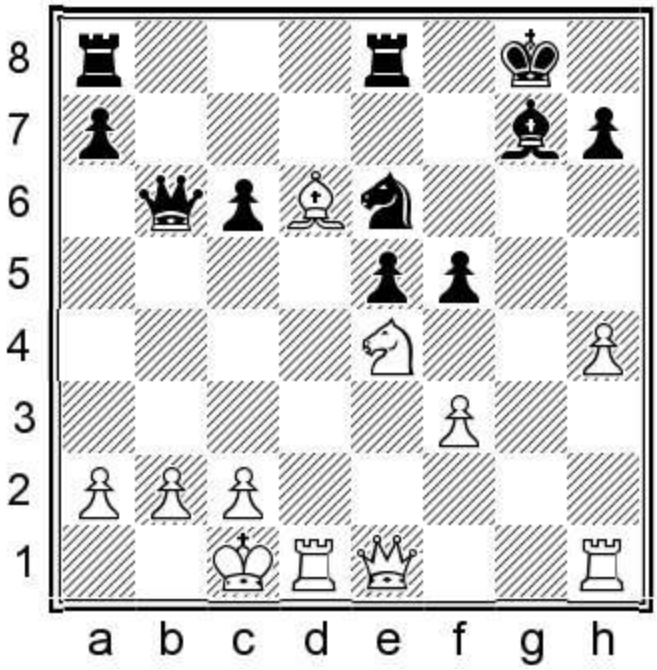
Black has tried several moves here but we will focus on the main lines of C3221) 14...Qb8 and especially C3222) 14...Qc7. I also checked a couple of minor options:

14...Re8?!
The rook usually belongs on d8, and there is no reason for Black to commit it to the 'wrong' square so soon.
15.g4 Qc7 16.Bc5 Nf4
16...h6 transposes to the Van den Doel – Habibi game in the next note.
16...Rad8 has been played a few times but 17.Kb1N keeps a nice edge for White: 17...h6 (17...Nf4 18.Bd6±)
18.Rg1!?² Discouraging ...f5 while keeping the usual positional advantages.
17.Bxe6 Nxe6



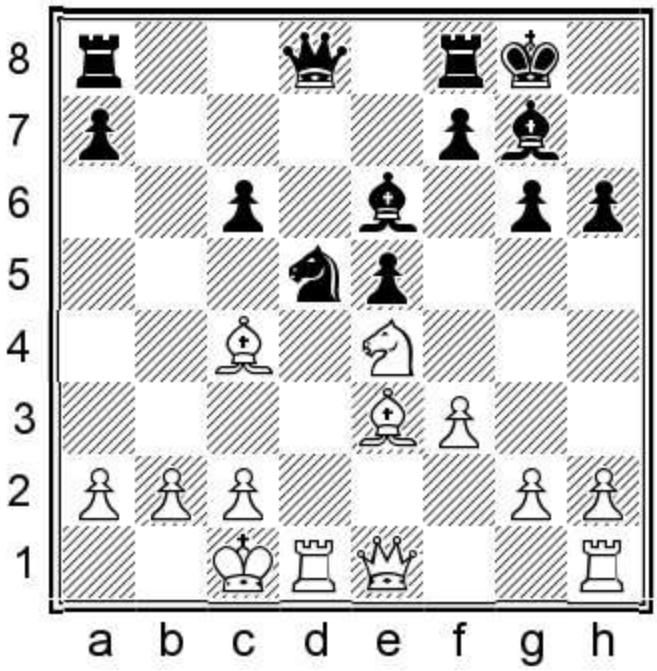

18.Bd6 Qb6 19.h4± f5
This seems like Black's only chance to get some counterplay but the open g-file leads to great problems for him.
19...Nd4 was well met by 20.c3! Nxf3 21.Qe2+– and the knight was trapped in Oral – Hamberger, Graz 1994.
20.gxf5 gxf5

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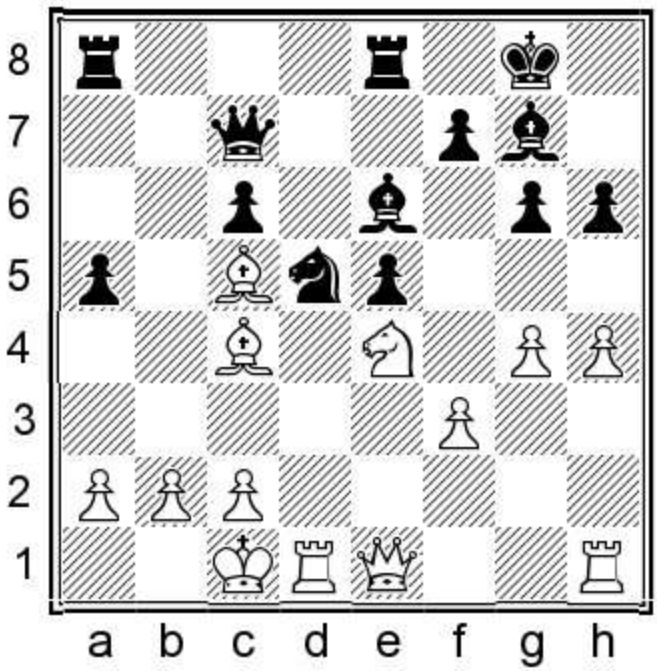
21.Ng3!
21.Nc3 was less convincing in Babaev – Alford, Dos Hermanas 2004.
21...Nd4
21...e4 22.c3 exf3 23.Nxf5 Qb5 24.Ne7† Rxe7 25.Bxe7 Nf4 26.Kb1 is winning for White.
22.Nh5 Rad8N
22...Re6 23.Rg1 was hopeless for Black in Kerek – Medvegy, Paks 1997.
23.Nxg7 Kxg7 24.Bxe5† Kf7 25.f4
With an extra pawn and the safer king, White should be winning.

14...h6
This has been played a few times but it usually transposes to the main line.



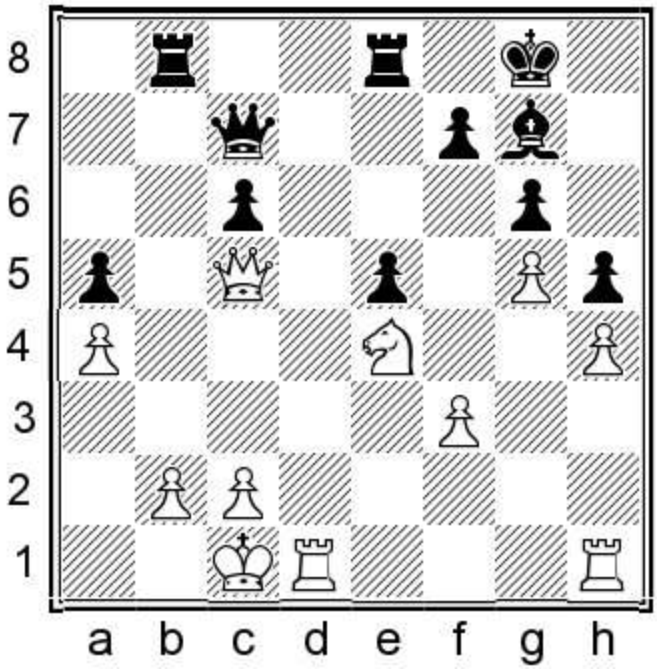
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15.g4 Qc7 16.Bc5 Rfe8?!
16...Rfd8 17.Qh4 transposes to variation C3222.
I guess the idea of the text move is to place the rook opposite White's queen, but it doesn't work as there are too many pieces blocking the e-file.
17.h4 a5



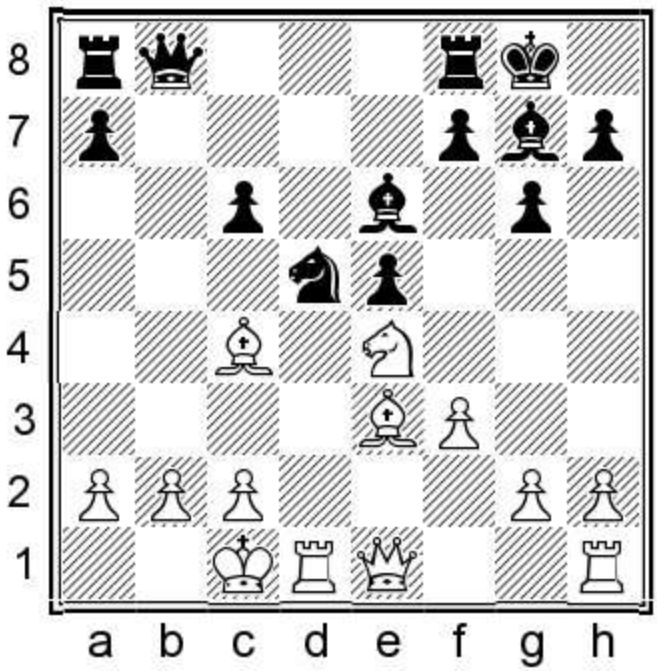
18.a4
18.h5!?N threatens to blast open the kingside with g4-g5, so Black is virtually forced to play 18...g5, when 19.a4!± gives White an even better version of the game. The game continuation is still good though, and it is worth including a few more moves to show the dream position that White soon obtains.
18...Nf4 19.Bxe6 Nxe6 20.Qe3! Rab8 21.g5 Nxc5
Also after 21...h5 22.b3± White is dominating.
22.Qxc5 h5
22...Rb4 23.b3± does not change much.

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23.Rd6 Rec8 24.Rhd1 Rb4 25.Rd7 Qb6 26.Qe7 Rf8 27.Rd8+–
Black was unable to do much about the threat of Rxf8† followed by Rd8 in Van den Doel – Habibi, Zwolle 1998.

C3221) 14...Qb8



This is less popular than the main line below, with good reason, as Black cannot create meaningful threats against the b2-pawn.

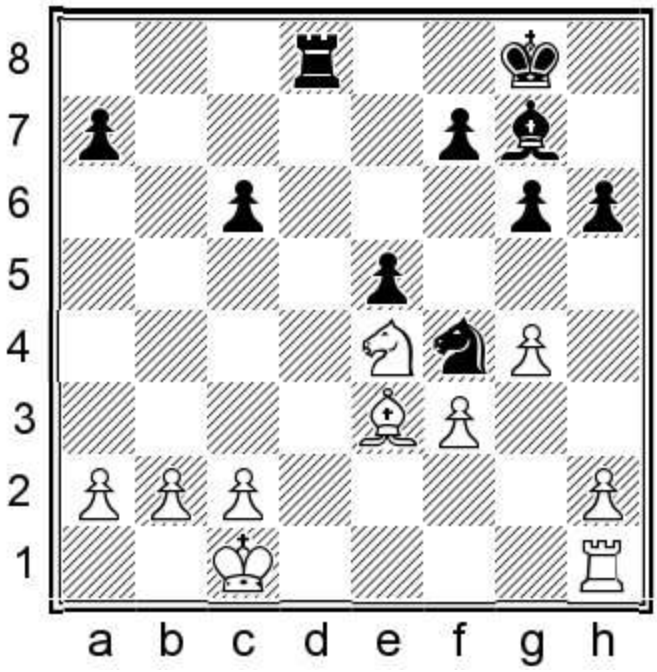
15.Bc5
15.Bd2!? was seen in Rowson – Ward, Plymouth 1992, and the engines approve of it. However, I will focus on the more human move which has been played by virtually everyone else.

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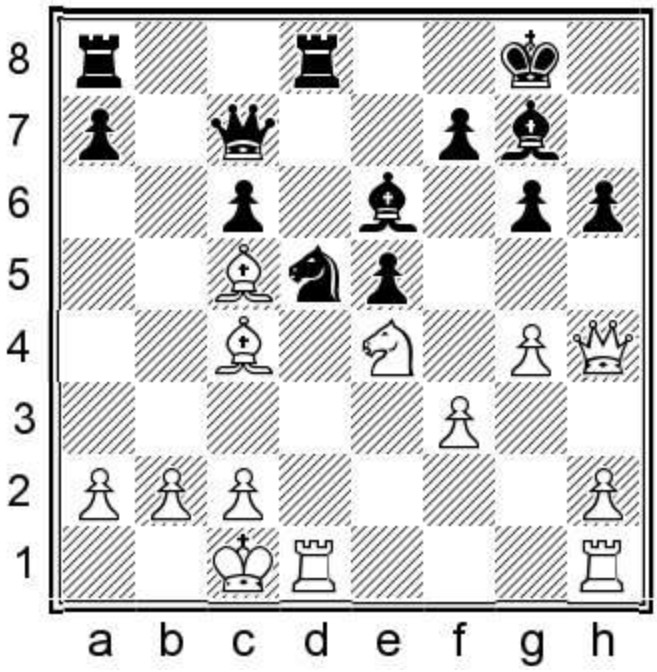
15...Rd8 16.Qh4
16.Qa5 is another good option; see Panarin – Antipov, Sochi 2012.

16...h6 17.g4 Qc7
17...a5 occurred in Al Modiahki – West, Penang 1991, when 18.a4!N would have been strong; compare the main line below.

17...Nf4 18.Bxe6 Nxe6 19.Be3 Nf4 20.Rxd8† Qxd8 21.Qxd8† Rxd8 reaches a typical endgame which should favour White. In Mannion – Helmer, Hastings 2013, White should have continued:



22.c3!N Threatening Bxf4 followed by Rd1. 22...Ne6 23.Kc2±

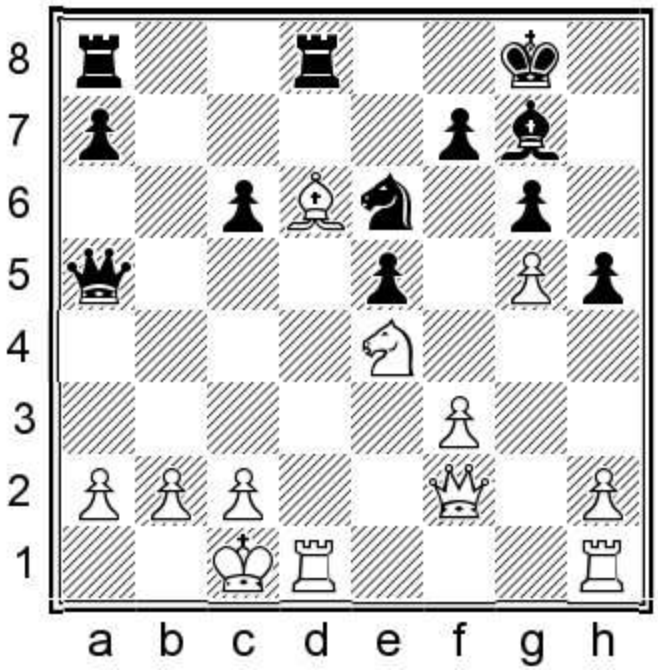


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18.g5
This is our thematic plan. Black is virtually forced to block the kingside with ...h5, leaving the knight on e4 with improved stability.

18.Kb1!?N is another good option. A logical sequence is 18...Rd7 19.Rd3 Rad8 20.a3 Nf4 21.Rxd7 Rxd7 22. Bxe6 Nxe6 23.Be3 Nf4 24.Qf2² and White keeps some edge.

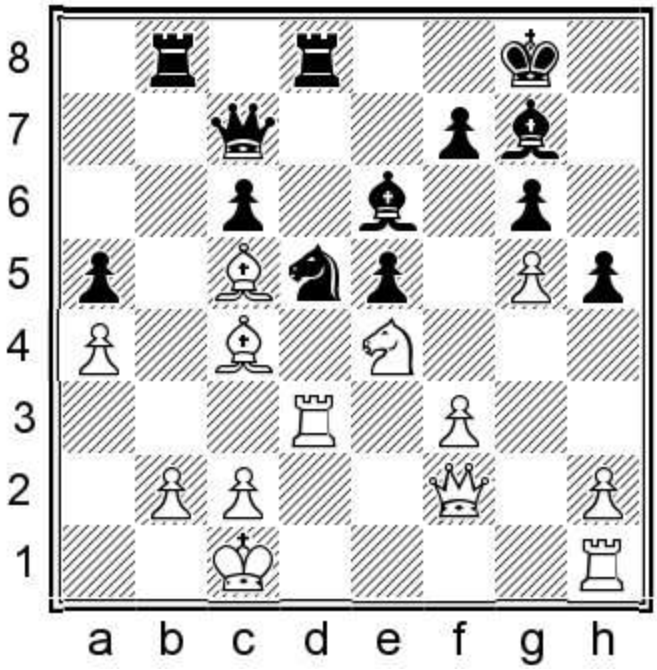
18...h5 19.Qf2 a5?!
Sometimes this is a good move and other times it's bad; it all depends on the situation on the board. In this case, White can conveniently block the pawn with a2-a4, stifling Black's activity and fixing the a5-pawn as a target for a future endgame.
19...Nf4 is a better try although White keeps the upper hand with: 20.Bxe6 (but not 20.Bd6?? as played in Mueller – Golziow, corr. 1989, when 20...Rxd6!N 21.Nxd6 Bd5!! 22.Bxd5 cxd5 23.Nb5 Qa5 would have been winning for Black) 20...Nxe6 21.Bd6 Qa5




22.a3!?N (22.Kb1² was also good in Karatorossian – S. Farago, Budapest 1997) White's last move prepares to meet 22...Rd7 with 23.Bb4! Rxd1† 24.Rxd1 Qb5 25.Be7², keeping the upper hand.

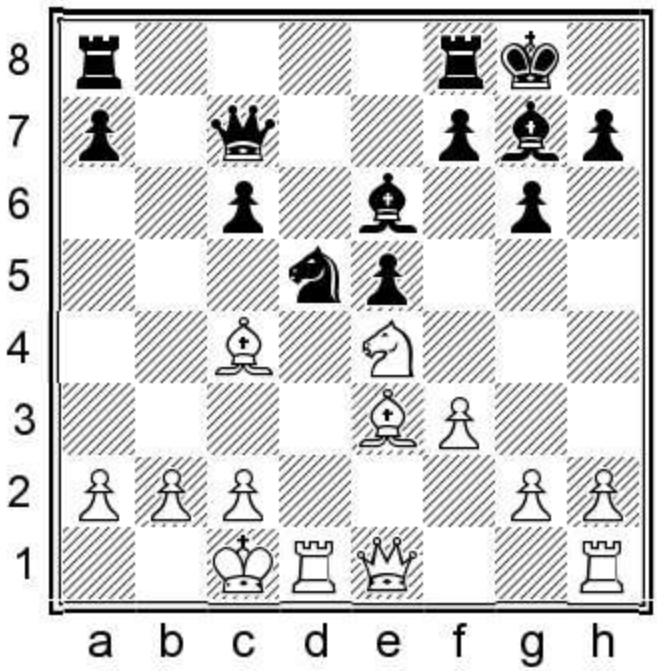
20.a4! Rab8 21.Rd3±

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21...Kh8 22.Rhd1 Nf4 23.Rxd8† Rxd8 24.Rxd8† Qxd8 25.Bf1 Qd5 26.b3
White is dominating. In Dvoirys – Basin, Simferopol 1988, he soon obtained a winning position by targeting the weak a5-pawn.

C3222) 14...Qc7



This is the most popular move by far, and is recommended by Gawain Jones in The Dragon Volume Two.

15.Bc5 Rfd8
Jones argues that Black has a slightly improved version of the old main line after 9...d5, which occurs after 10. exd5 Nxd5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.Bd4 e5 (12...Bxd4! 13.Qxd4 Qb6 is the modern line which I prefer to avoid) 13. Bc5 Be6 14.Ne4 Re8. Jones points out that Black has benefited from being able to move his rook directly from

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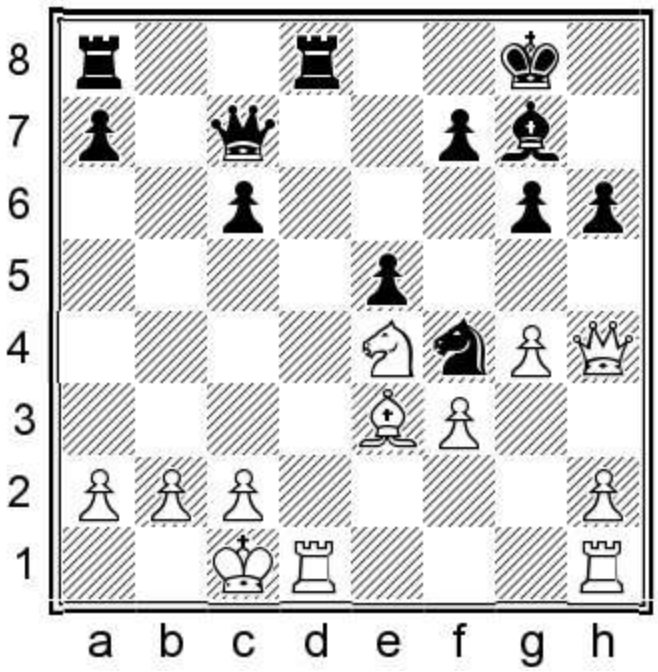
f8 to d8, rather than the inferior e8-square. However, I think White should be happy with the trade-off, as he has avoided the 12...Bxd4! line mentioned above, while reaching a pawn structure which should favour him in the long run. A tough battle lies ahead, but I believe White should have the better chances if he knows what he is doing.

16.Qh4 h6
This is virtually forced, as Black needs to prevent Ng5.

17.g4
Preparing g4-g5, leading to the usual kingside blockade after ...h5.

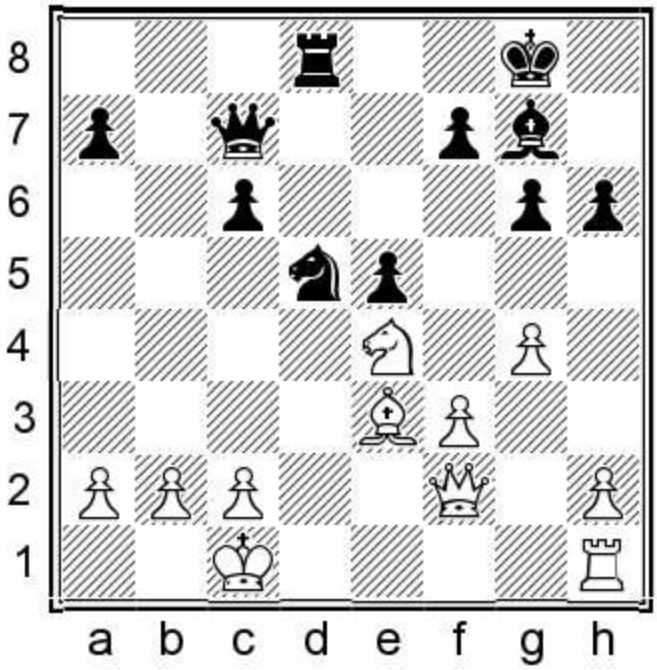
17...Rd7
Doubling on the d-file seems normal and is recommended by Jones.

A thematic alternative is:
17...Nf4 18.Bxe6 Nxe6 19.Be3 Nf4

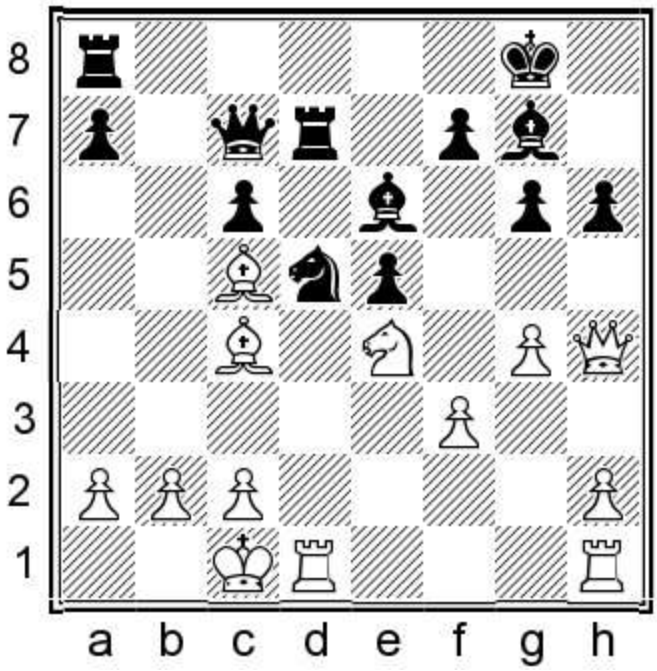



20.Rxd8†!
20.Qf2 Rd5! was not so easy in Stull – Prizant, corr. 1994. When permitted, Black will often look to utilize the d5-square for his pieces, including the rooks as well as the light-squared bishop in any lines where White does not exchange it after ...Nf4.
20...Rxd8 21.Qf2!
I believe that White preserves an edge after this accurate move. I will present a few illustrative lines.
21...Nd5
21...Ne6 22.h4²
21...Nh3 22.Qf1 Qa5 23.Kb1 Nf4 24.Qc4²

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22.Bd2!?N
After 22.Bc5 a draw was agreed in Mroczek – Sodomski, corr. 2017. In this somewhat simplified position, I like having the bishop on d2 where it monitors some important squares on both flanks.
22...Qb6
22...Nf4 23.h4² also looks pleasant for White.
23.Re1 Nf4 24.Qxb6 axb6 25.Bxf4 exf4 26.c3²
The illustrative line ends in another favourable endgame for White.

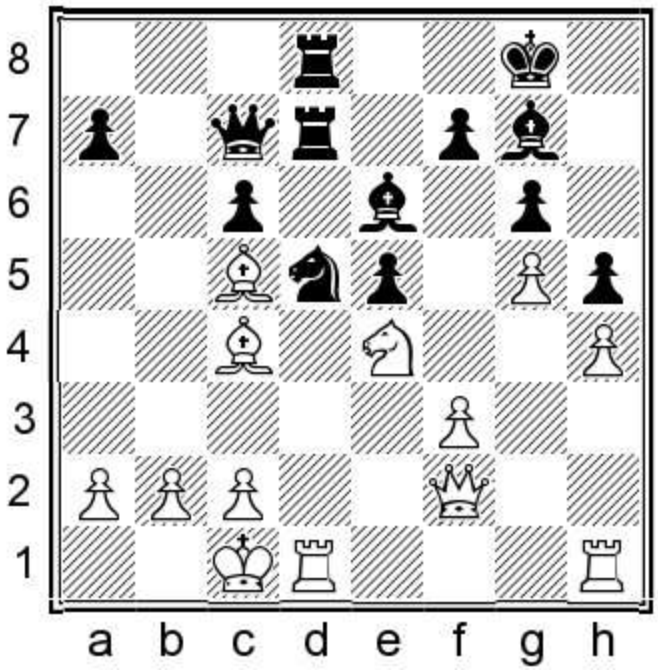


18.g5
White carries out the typical plan of blocking the kingside to prevent ...f5.

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I also considered 18.Qf2!?N 18...Rad8 19.h4, intending h4-h5, but found 19...f5! to be a good reply.

18...h5 19.Qf2
Having blocked the kingside, White brings his queen to a better square.

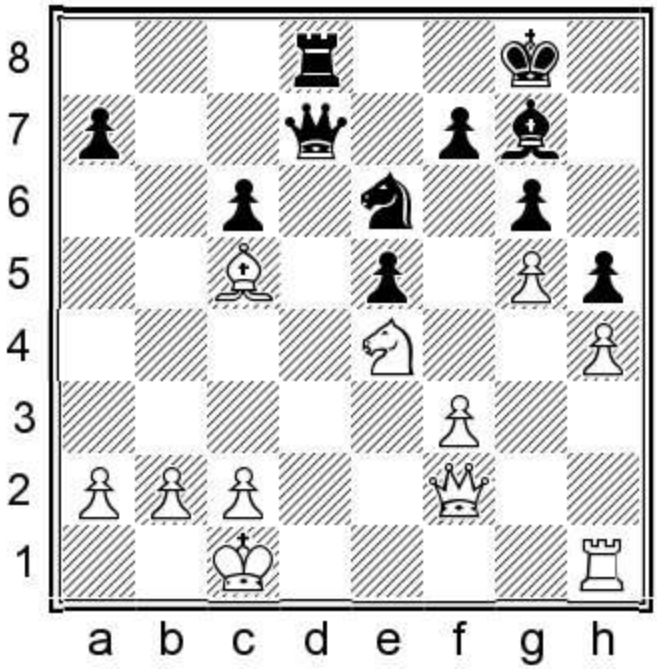
19...Rad8 20.h4!
Jones covers this line in a note and only considers 20.Rhe1. Having explored some lines after both moves, I believe the text move to be slightly more useful for White.



20...Nf4 21.Rxd7
21.Bxe6!? Nxe6 22.Rxd7 Rxd7 23.Be3² was also promising for White in Sgherri – B. Thompson, email 2016.

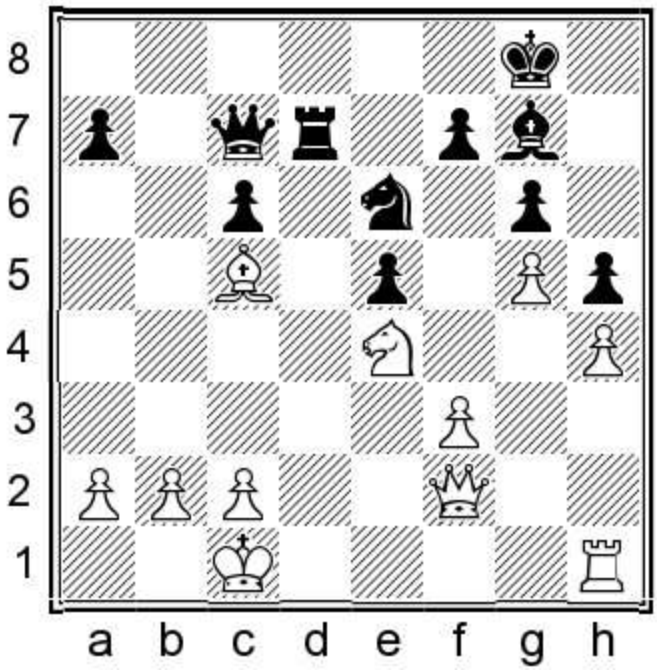
21...Rxd7
I also examined:
21...Qxd7N 22.Bxe6 Nxe6

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23.b3!
Obviously White must avoid 23.Kb1?? Qd1† and mate.
23.Be3 looks like a normal move but 23...Nd4! is a good reply. 24.c3 Nf5 and now 25.Bxa7? would be a mistake allowing 25...Ra8 26.Bc5 Rxa2, with obvious problems for White.
23...Nd4 24.c3 Ne6
Now 24...Nf5 can safely be met by 25.Bxa7! Ra8 26.Bc5+– when the a2-pawn is defended; this is why White's 23rd move was so important.
25.Bxa7 Nf4 26.Kb1 Qd3† 27.Kb2 Qd5 28.Qe3±
Black has no real compensation for the pawn.

22.Bxe6 Nxe6



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23.Be3!N
After 23.Kb1 Rd5 24.Be3 a draw was agreed in Sorcinelli – Susla, corr. 2014. I believe the text move to be more accurate.

23...Nd4
23...Qb7 24.Qe2 a5 25.Qc4² is nice for White.

24.c3 Qa5 25.Kb1 Nf5 26.Qe2 Rd5 27.Bf2²
White keeps an edge thanks to his bind on the kingside and his long-term chances to create a passed pawn on the queenside.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have recommended meeting the Dragon with the Yugoslav Attack. After 6.Be3 Bg7 7.f3 we considered the following options.

7...a6 is the Dragadorf, a modern, hybrid system. We react with 8.Qd2, keeping the option of meeting an early ...b5 with a2-a4. The flexible 8...Nbd7 is the main line, when 9.g4! b5 10.h4! seems excellent for White.

7...Nc6 introduces another sideline where Black delays castling. The whole concept is dubious, as Game 24 demonstrates.

We then moved on to the main lines with 7...0-0 8.Qd2 Nc6, when 9.0-0-0 is our choice, leading to a further branching.
9...Bd7 is occasionally tried by strong players but it makes a lot less sense here than it does against 9.Bc4. The simple plan of 10.g4, followed by Kb1 and Be2, gives White excellent chances.
9...Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Be6 used to be a main line but it is currently experiencing a theoretical crisis. If you do your homework, you will have excellent chances to score a convincing victory.

Finally, 9...d5 is the critical test, when 10.Qe1!? is our choice.
Then 10...e6?! 11.h4! gives White fine prospects, with 11...Qc7 12.Ndb5! being an important detail, as we saw in Game 25.
10...e5 is the main line, when 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5 cxd5 enables White to obtain positional pressure, as Game 26 demonstrated. 12...Nxd5 is more reliable, when we continue 13.Bc4 Be6 14.Ne4. The position is full of complexity but I like White’s prospects in the lines I have analysed. With careful play, White can neutralize his opponent’s activity, with good chances to exploit his queenside superiority later in the game.

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# Chapter 9 - Classical

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.f3

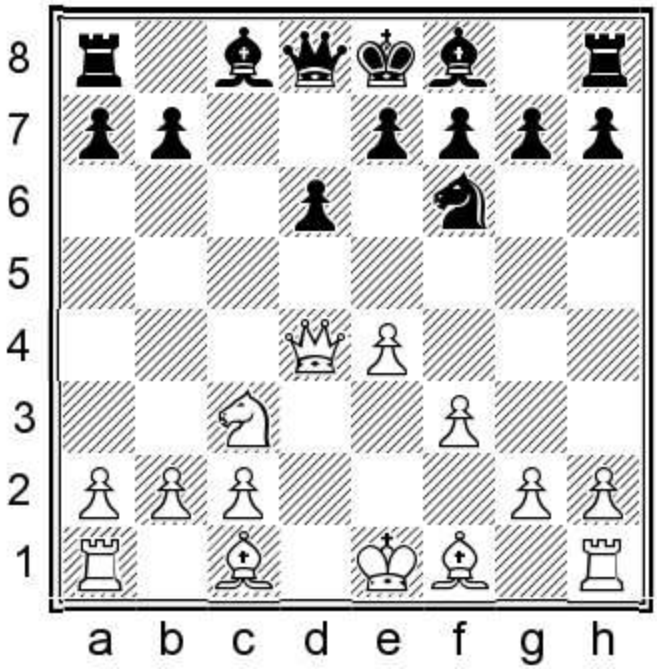
A) 6...Nxd4 306
B) 6...a6 307
C) 6...Qb6?! 310
D) 6...e5 7.Nb3 312
D1) 7...h6?! 313
D2) 7...a5 314
D3) 7...Be6 315
D4) 7...Be7 8.Be3 317
D41) 8...Be6 9.Nd5 318
D411) 9...Bxd5 318
D412) 9...0-0 320
D42) 8...0-0 9.Qd2 323
D421) 9...Be6 323
D422) 9...a5 10.Bb5 Na7 11.Bd3! 325
D4221) 11...Nc6 326
D4222) 11...Be6 328
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.f3
Considering that the English Attack is our choice against both the Najdorf and Scheveningen, it was natural to use it against the Classical Sicilian as well.

I analysed four main options: A) 6...Nxd4, B) 6...a6, C) 6...Qb6?! and D) 6...e5.

6...g6 7.Be3 leads to the Dragon of the previous chapter, and 6...e6 to the Scheveningen of Chapter 10.

A) 6...Nxd4 7.Qxd4

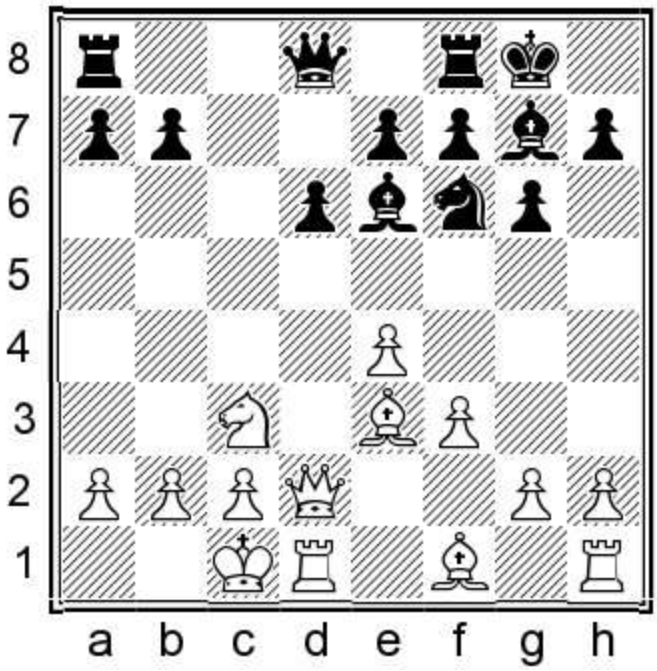
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7...g6
This Dragon-esque set-up has been tried by some strong players but White has more than one way to get an edge against it.

8.Bg5!?
This active move prepares long castling followed by a quick e4-e5 break.

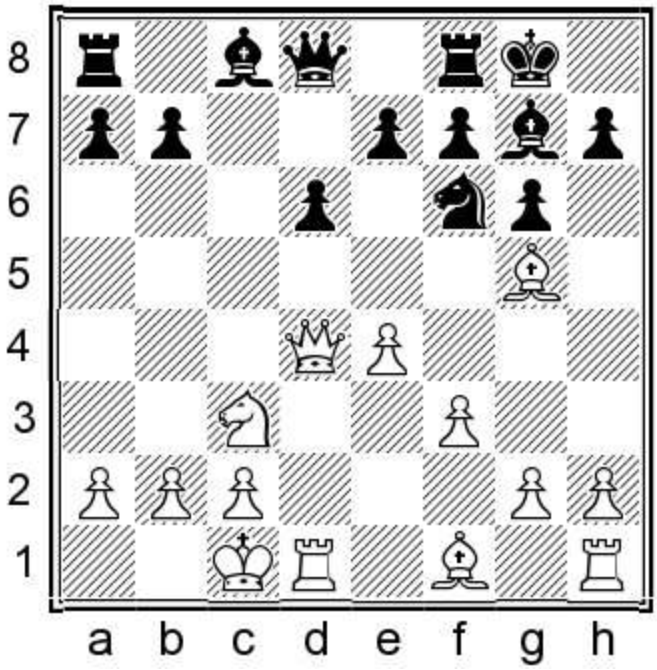
8.Be3 is also possible, when 8...Bg7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 Be6 reaches a position almost identical to variation C2 of the previous chapter, except that here White's bishop is on e3 instead of d4, which has some minor pros and cons but should not change the evaluation too much. Just as in the Dragon line, White should proceed with:



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11.Kb1! Consolidating the queenside while discouraging ...Qa5 due to the Nd5 trick. 11...Qc7 12.Nb5! Qc8

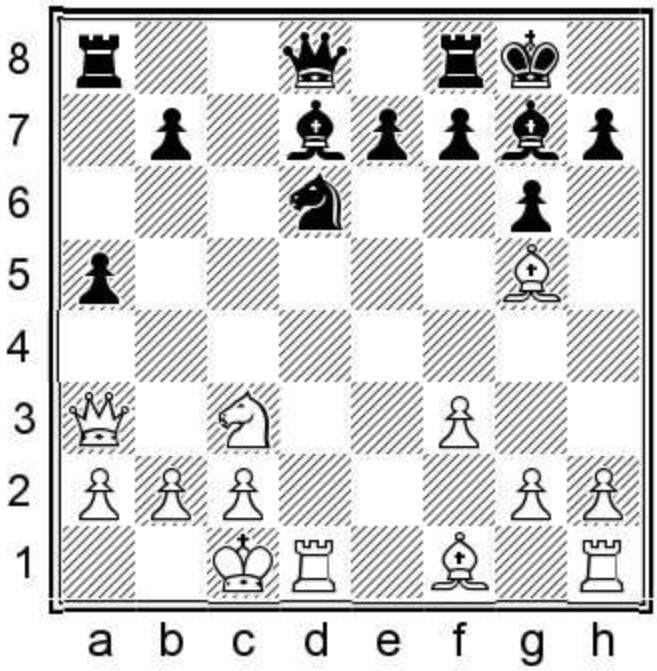
This occurred in Krivec – Sudakova, Rijeka 2006, when 13.g4!?N 13...Bc4 14.Bd4² would have kept the better chances for White.

8...Bg7 9.0-0-0 0-0



10.Qb4!
Threatening to push the e-pawn.

10...a5 11.Qa3 Be6
11...Bd7? led to a quick collapse for Black in one game: 12.e5! Ne8 13.exd6 Nxd6

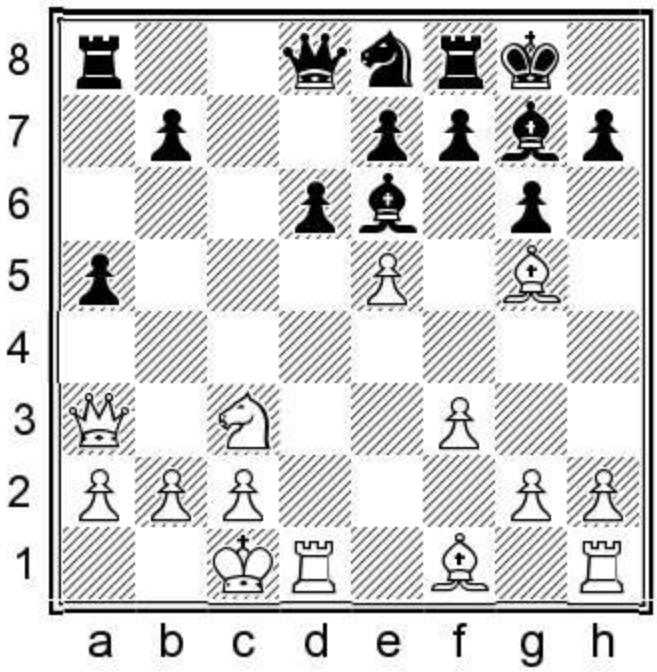


14.Rxd6! This elementary tactic highlights the power of the bishop on g5. 14...h6 15.Bb5 hxg5 16.Rxd7 Qb6

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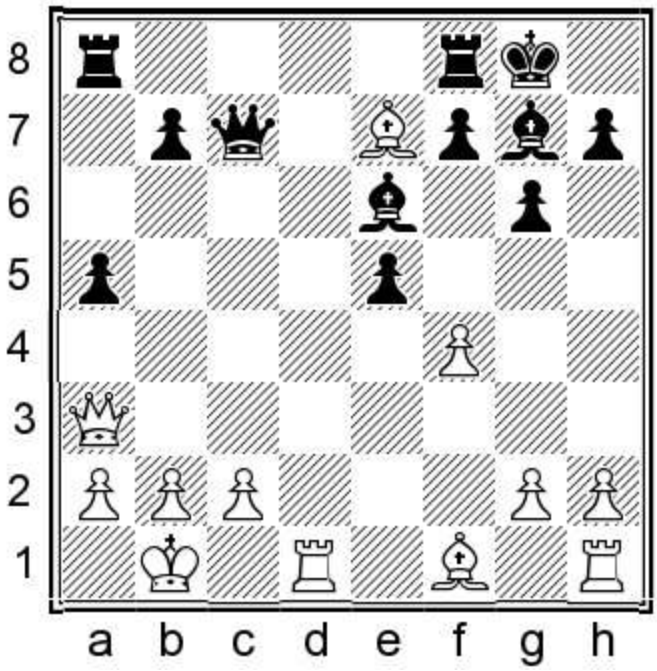
17.Qxe7 Bxc3 18.Rxb7+– White kept his extra piece in Kulaots – Pataki, Paks 2003.

12.e5 Ne8
Here I found an improvement over Ehlvest – Kotsur, Istanbul (ol) 2000.



13.f4!N 13...Qc7
After 13...Rc8 14.Bd3 White is ready to mobilize his last piece with Rhe1. Play may continue 14...f6 15.exf6 Nxf6 16.Rhe1 Bf7 17.f5± and Black is in trouble.

14.Kb1 dxe5 15.Nb5 Qc6 16.Bxe7 Nc7 17.Nxc7 Qxc7

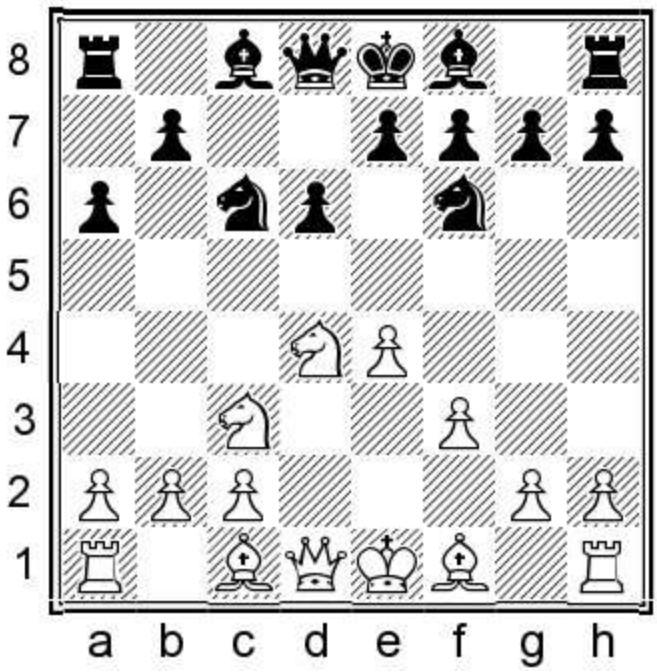


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18.Bxf8 Bxf8 19.Qa4 exf4 20.Bb5 Bg7 21.Rhf1²

Black has less than full compensation for the exchange.

B) 6...a6



This position could also be reached via a Najdorf. The combination of ...Nc6 and ...a6 looks weird, but its purpose becomes clearer after Black's next move.

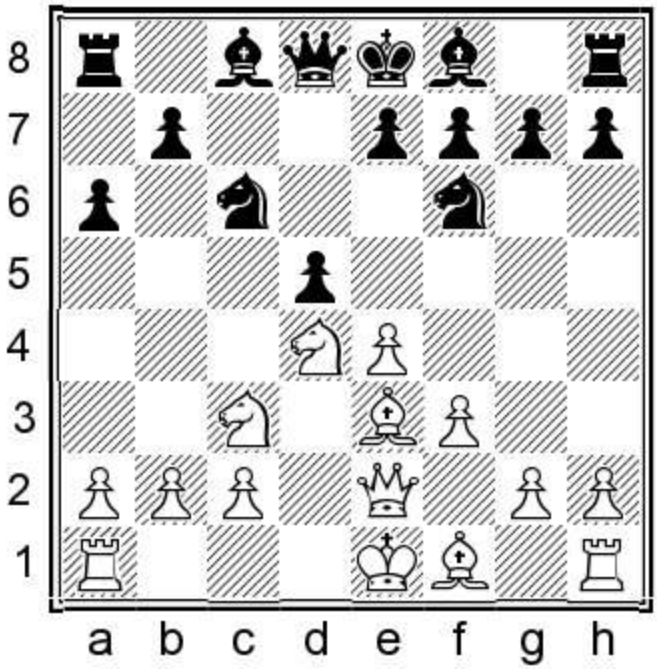
7.Be3 d5!?
Without the pawn on a6, this move would have allowed Bb5, leading to material gains for White.

7...Qb6?! leads straight to variation C below, while other normal moves such as 7...e6, 7...e5 and 7...g6 all transpose to other chapters.

7...Bd7 8.Qd2 gives White a good version of a standard English Attack.

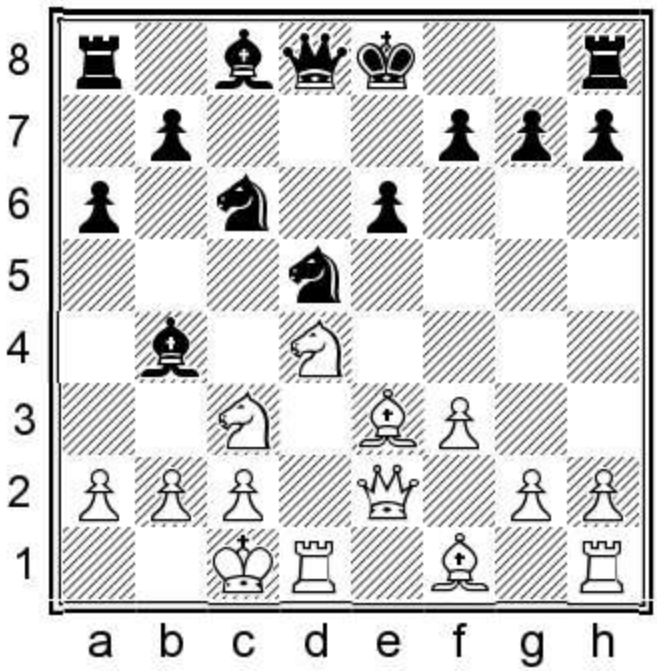
8.Qe2!
This move is rare but effective, for reasons that will become clear.

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8...e5
After 8...Nxd4? 9.Bxd4 dxe4 10.0-0-0± the open d-file spelled trouble for Black in Gulevich – Hoch, email 2006.

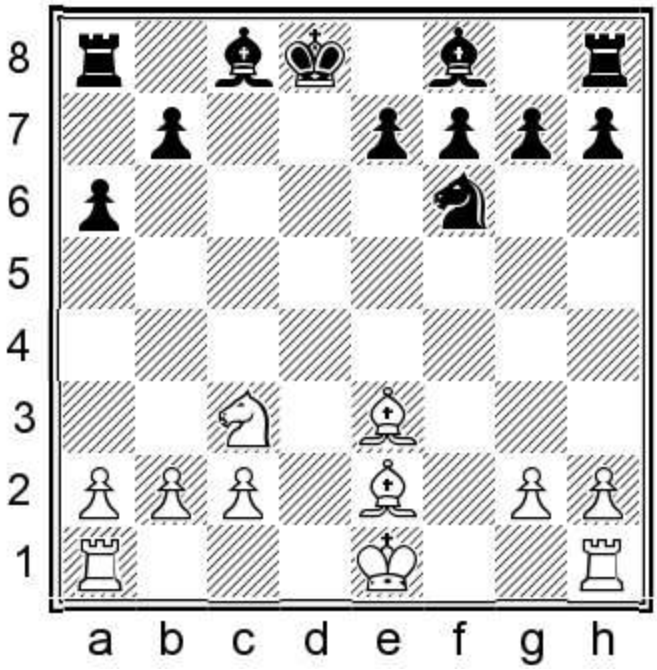
8...e6 9.0-0-0 Bb4?! (9...Be7N is better although 10.g4 clearly favours White) 10.exd5 Nxd5 occurred in Teran Alvarez – Abreu Delgado, Santa Clara 2000, when White should have continued:



11.Nxd5!N 11...Qxd5 12.Nb3 Qe5 13.f4± With an obvious initiative.

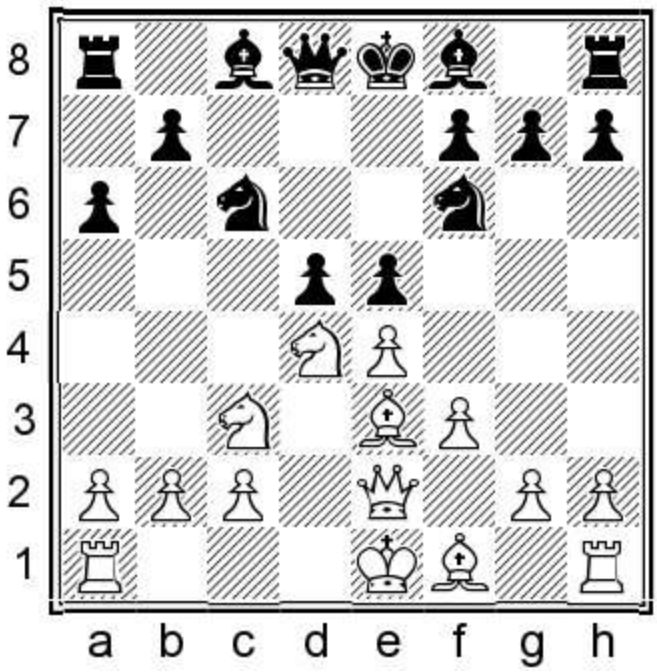
8...dxe4 also fails to equalize after: 9.Nxc6 exf3?! (9...bxc6N is preferable, although 10.Nxe4 Nxe4 11.fxe4 e5 12.Qc4! Qc7 13.0-0-0 Be7 14.Qa4 0-0 15.Bc4² gives White a clear positional edge) 10.Nxd8 fxe2 11.Bxe2 Kxd8

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12.0-0-0† Ke8 13.Bf3± Black's extra pawn was little consolation for White's enormous lead in development in Avotins – Siigur, corr. 2004.

After the text move I found a significant improvement over the few existing games.

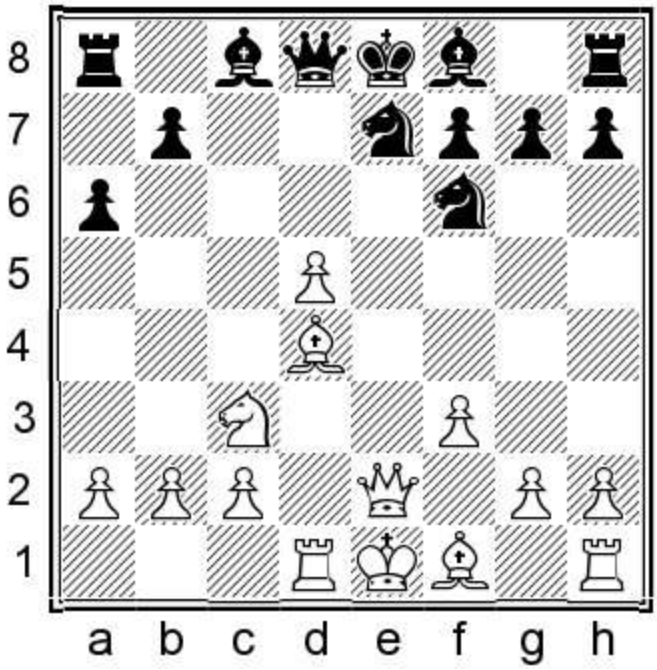


9.exd5!?N
Making full use of the queen's positioning on the e-file.
9.Nxc6 bxc6 10.exd5 Nxd5 11.0-0-0 has scored heavily for White but I think Black is okay after: 11...Be6 12. Qe1 Qc7! (12...Bb4? 13.Qg3 Bxc3 14.Qxg7 Bxb2† 15.Kxb2 Qb8† 16.Ka1 Kd7 17.c4+– De la Villa Garcia – Sutovsky, Pamplona 1998) 13.Ne4 Nxe3 14.Qxe3 Be7= Marotta Moraes – Miraglia, email 2002.

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9...Nxd5

Accepting the sacrifice gives White too strong an attack:
9...exd4? 10.Bxd4† Ne7 11.Rd1!
11.0-0-0 offers great compensation but the text move is even more accurate.

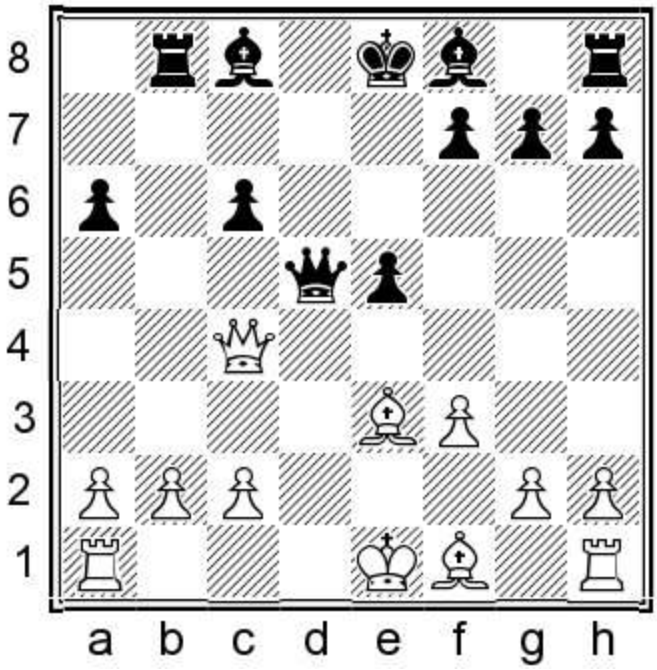


11...Qd6
11...Nfxd5?! 12.Nxd5 Qxd5 13.Bb6!+– is the difference from the variation with castling. Black loses his queen, as there is no saving check on g5.
12.Qe3! Kd8
Otherwise White plays Bc5 and d6, winning.
13.Bb6† Kd7 14.Bc4±
Black's future is entirely bleak.

10.Nxd5 Qxd5 11.Nxc6 bxc6
11...Qxc6 is conveniently met by 12.Qc4!, for instance: 12...Be6 (12...Qxc4? 13.Bxc4 Bd7 14.0-0-0 Bc6 15. Bb6± leaves Black in serious difficulties) 13.Qxc6† bxc6 14.0-0-0² White will continue with Bd3-e4, with a safe positional advantage.

12.Qc4! Rb8

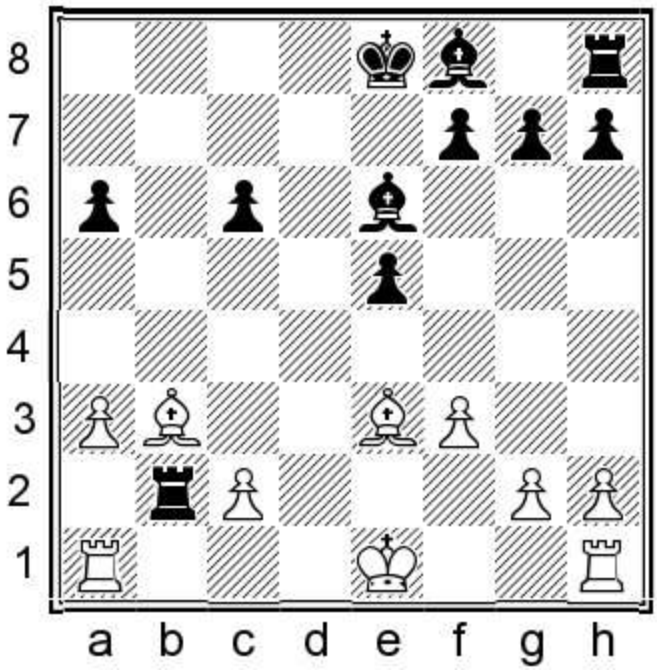
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13.a3! Qxc4
13...Rxb2?! is risky in view of 14.Qc3 Rb8 15.Rd1 Qe6 16.Bg5! f6 17.Be3± when Black will have a hard time getting his king to safety.

13...Be7 is safer although 14.Qc3² once again gives White a pleasant edge.

14.Bxc4 Rxb2 15.Bb3 Be6



16.Bc1 Rxb3 17.cxb3 Bxb3 18.Rb1 Bc4 19.Be3²
For the moment Black has enough material with two pawns for the exchange, but he is under pressure due to White's active rook and the weakness of the a6- and c6-pawns.

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C) 6...Qb6?!

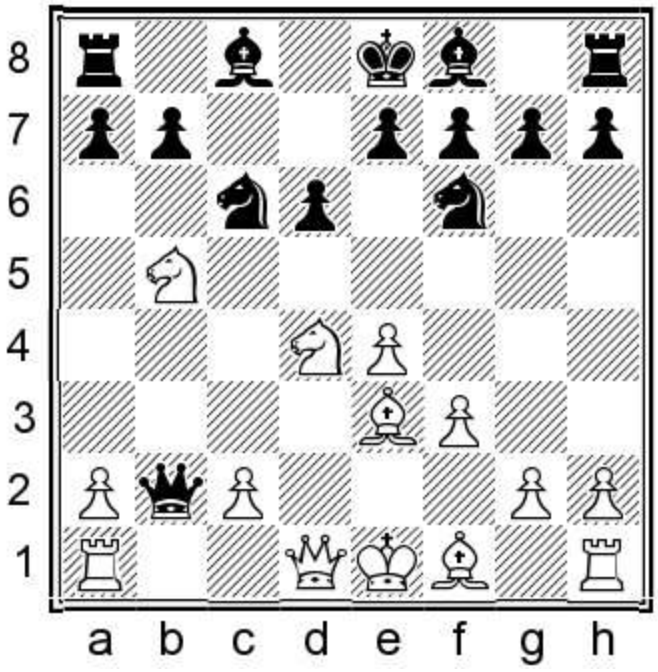
This is a serious move which has been played in well over 200 games. However, I believe it to be a mistake, based on the strength of White's reply.

7.Be3!
This comes close to refuting Black's concept, as it turns out that taking on b2 is too dangerous for him.

7.Nb3 has been by far the most popular choice, followed by Qe2 and Be3 with mutual chances.

7...a6
This is the critical choice according to the database statistics, with Black achieving a healthy plus score so far. However, this has nothing to do with the objective strength of Black's opening scheme.

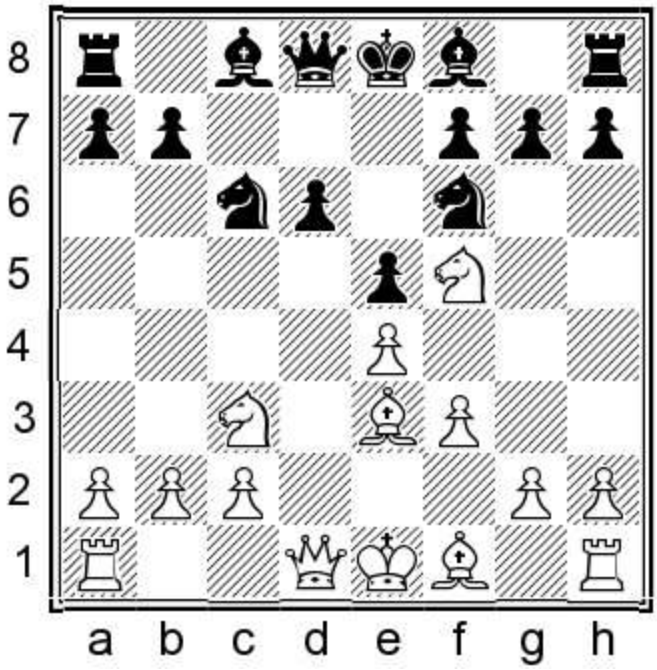
7...Qxb2? is refuted by 8.Ncb5 when Black loses material by force, for instance:



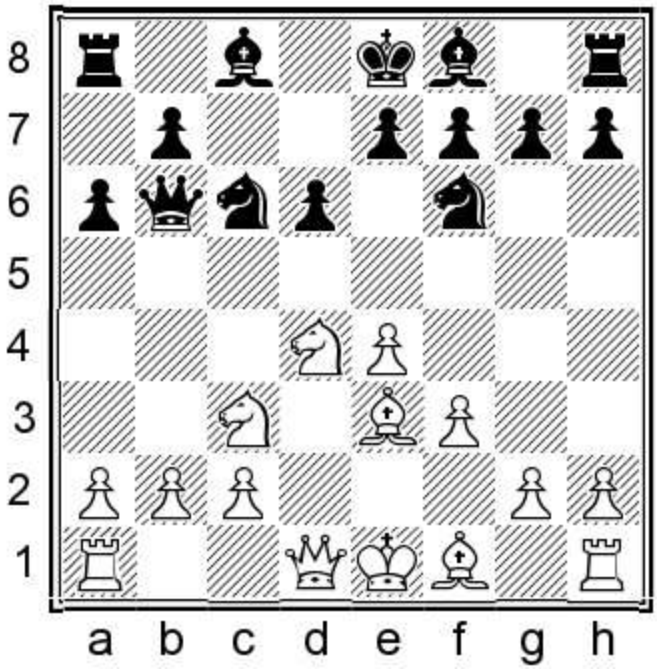

8...Qb4† (8...Kd8 9.a3+– Accinelli – Chiu Lelyen, La Paz 2017; 8...Nxd4 Summakoglu – Kilic, Aksu 2017, 9. Nc7†!N 9...Kd8 10.Bxd4+–) 9.Bd2 Qc5 10.Nc7† Kd8 11.Nb3+– Cucu – Breahna, Bucharest 2007.

7...e5 isn't so terrible but White gets an easy positional edge after: 8.Nf5 Qd8 (8...Qxb2? is once again a losing move: 9.Nb5 Bxf5 10.Rb1 Qxa2 11.Nc7† Kd8 12.Nxa8 Bc8 13.Bb5 Bd7 Ambarcumova – Ivanova, Vladimir 2007. 14.0-0N+–)

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9.Bc4 Be6 (9...Bxf5?! 10.exf5 Qc8 11.g4± Vicicko – Kulmany, Hungary 2010) Now in Costantini – V. Georgiev, Reggio Emilia 2001, 10.Bb3N² would have been simple and strong.

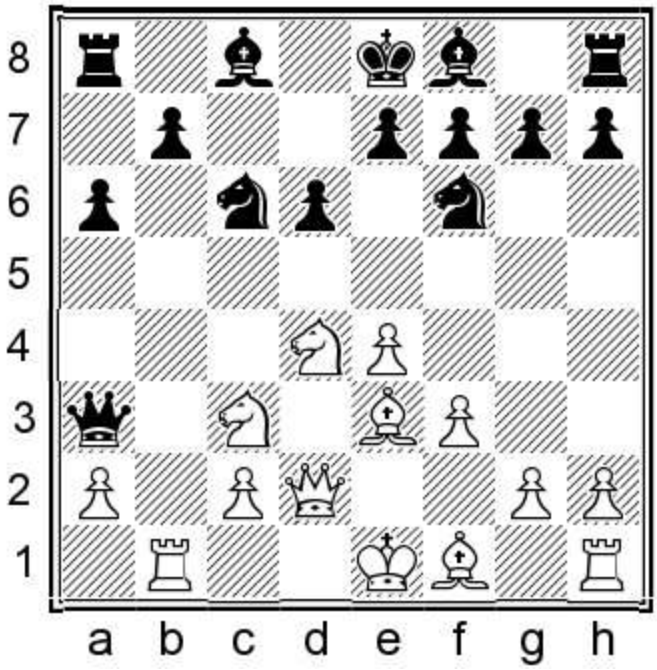


8.Qd2!
Initially I spent some time analysing 8.a3, when 8...e5 9.Nf5 Qc7 leads to an interesting game where White has chances for an edge. But then I came back to the text move and realized it was simply a big improvement, as White gets a powerful initiative to compensate for the sacrificed pawn.

8...Qxb2
Otherwise what was the point of putting the queen on b6?

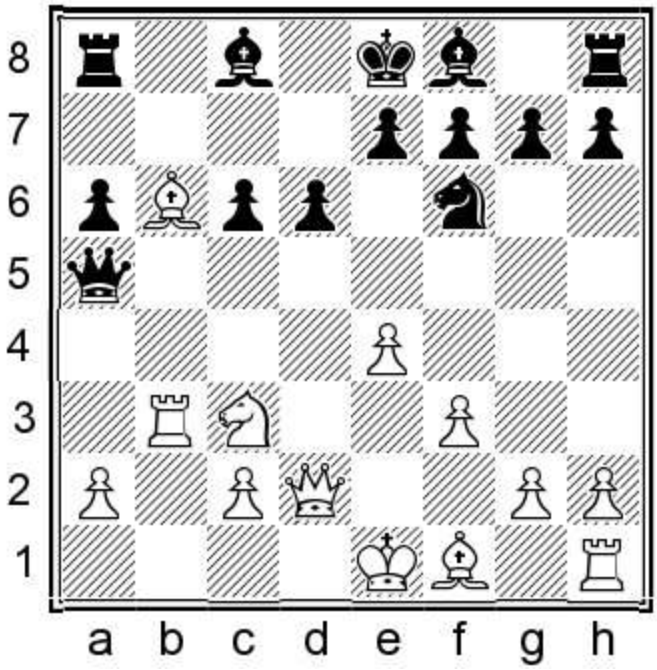
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9.Rb1 Qa3



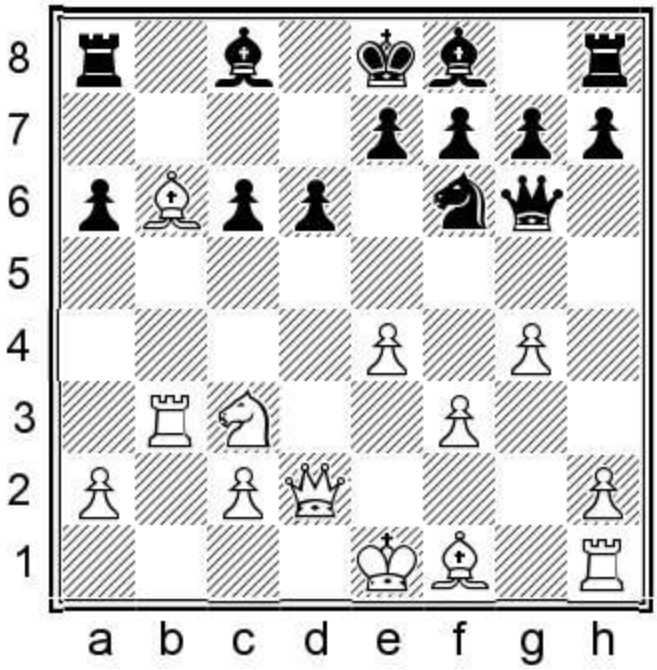
10.Nxc6!
10.Bb5?! axb5 11.Ndxb5 Qa5 12.Bb6 may seem like an attractive idea, but after 12...Qxb6 13.Nxd6† exd6 14. Rxb6 White has no advantage.

10...bxc6 11.Rb3 Qa5 12.Bb6
White has a useful lead in development and Black's queen will have to take up an awkward position.



12...Qe5!?N
This is perhaps the trickiest move to crack.
12...Qh5 13.g4! Qg6 occurred in Abuin Boullon – Rodriguez Lopez, Ferrol 2002, and now White has a significant improvement:

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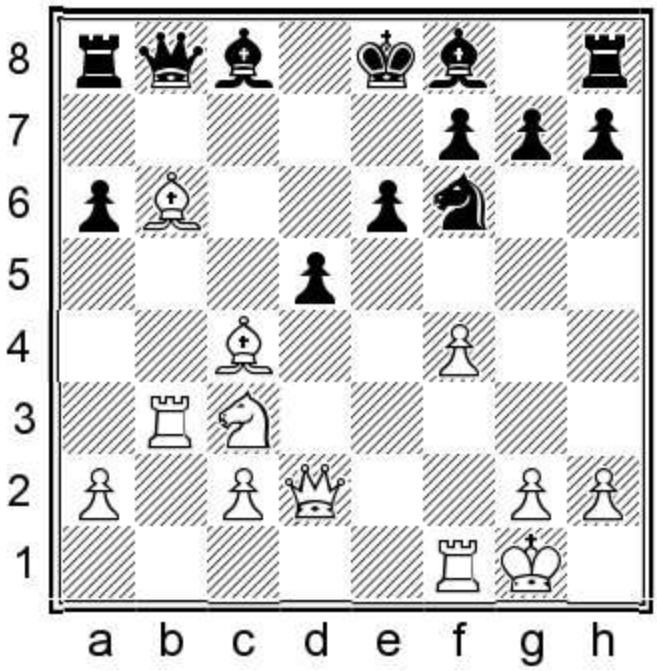


14.Be3!N 14...e5 (14...e6 15.e5! dxe5 16.Bd3 is White's big idea) 15.Rb6 Bd7 16.h4 h6 17.Bxa6 Be7 18.Bb7 Rb8 19.a4± The position is still messy but White has a considerable advantage.

13.Bc4 Be6
Alternatives are no better, for instance:

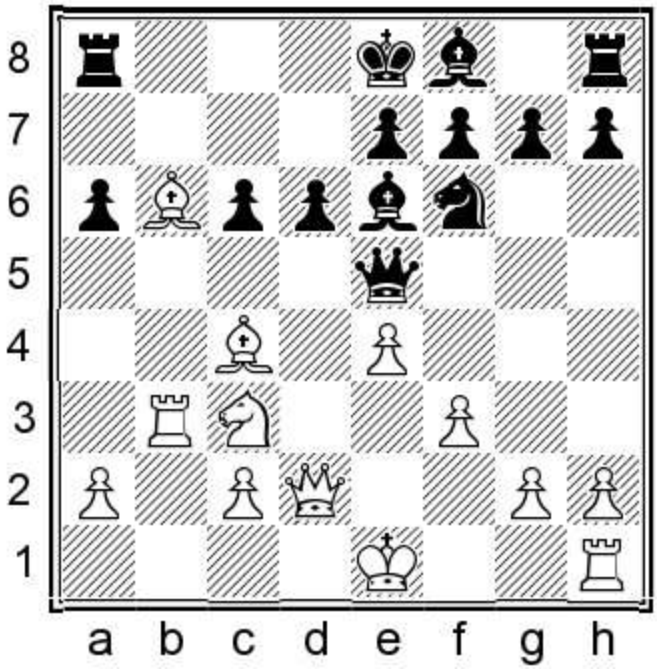
13...e6 14.f4 Qh5 15.Be2 Qg6 16.e5 Nd7 17.exd6 is clearly better for White.

Another nice line is: 13...d5 14.0-0 e6 15.f4 Qb8 16.exd5 cxd5 (16...Qd6 17.Qe3±)



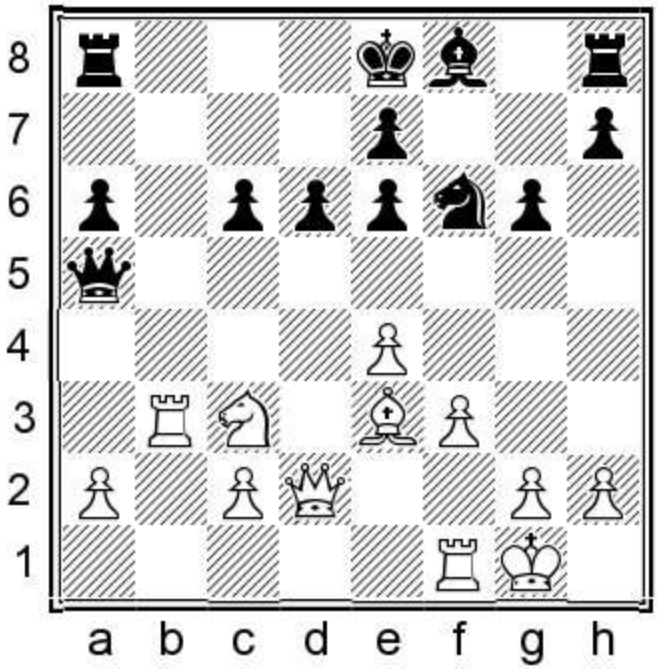
17.Nxd5! Nxd5 18.Bxd5 exd5 19.Re1† and White wins.

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14.Bd4 Qa5 15.Bxe6 fxe6 16.Bb6 Qh5 17.Be3 Qa5
17...g6 18.Ne2!+– forces Black to make horrible concessions.

18.0-0 g6
Just when it seems as though Black is ready to complete development, White can strike with the following hammer blow.

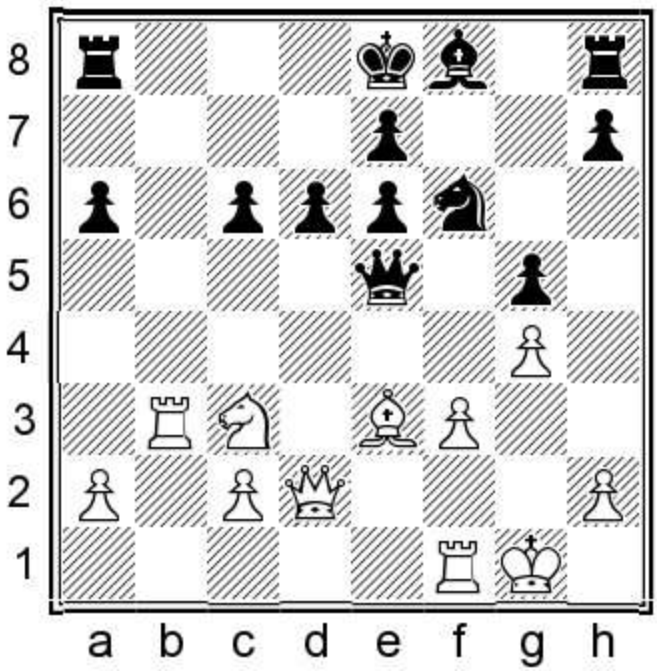


19.e5!! Qxe5
19...Nd7 20.Rfb1± and Black cannot complete his development.

20.g4!
Black's queen is close to being trapped. His best attempt is:

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20...g5

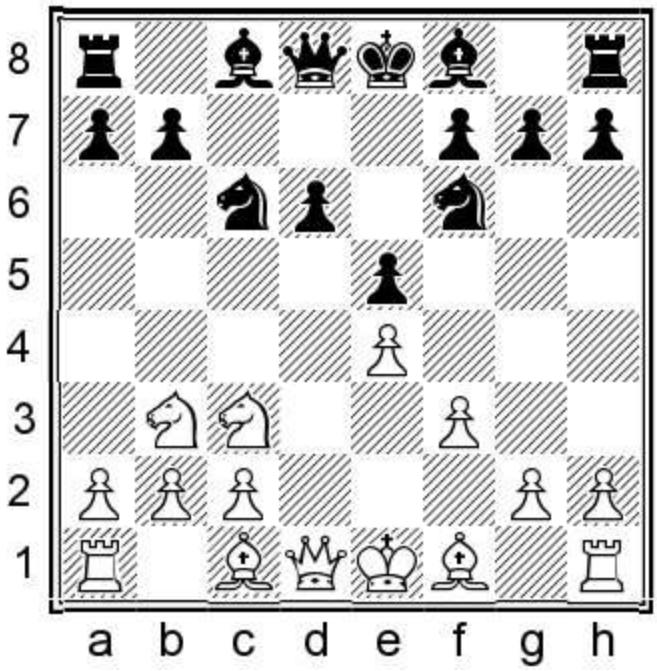


21.Bd4 Qf4 22.Qd3 d5 23.Ne2 Qc7 24.Qe3±
Black's position is on the verge of falling apart.

D) 6...e5

This is the main line and the most challenging response.

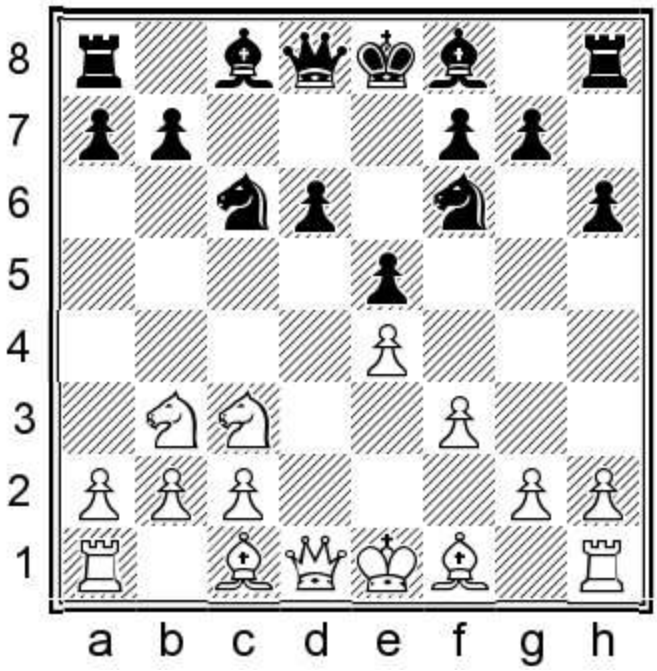
7.Nb3



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The position is similar to the famous 6.f3 (or 6.Be3) 6...e5 Najdorf, which will be analysed in Chapter 11, but there are some key differences. Here there is not much sense in Black aiming for queenside play with ...a6 and ...b5, as that will only give him an inferior version of a Najdorf, having committed his knight to c6 rather than the often preferable d7-square. On the other hand, having ...Nc6 on the board instead of ...a6 has some positive features for Black. For the moment, he is slightly better developed than in the Najdorf line. More concretely, ...a5-a4 is an important resource, expanding on the queenside while targeting the knight on b3. Compared with the Najdorf, Black has avoided losing a tempo with an early ...a6, so the ...a5-a4 plan carries a lot more bite here.
We will analyse D1) 7...h6?!, D2) 7...a5, D3) 7...Be6 and D4) 7...Be7.

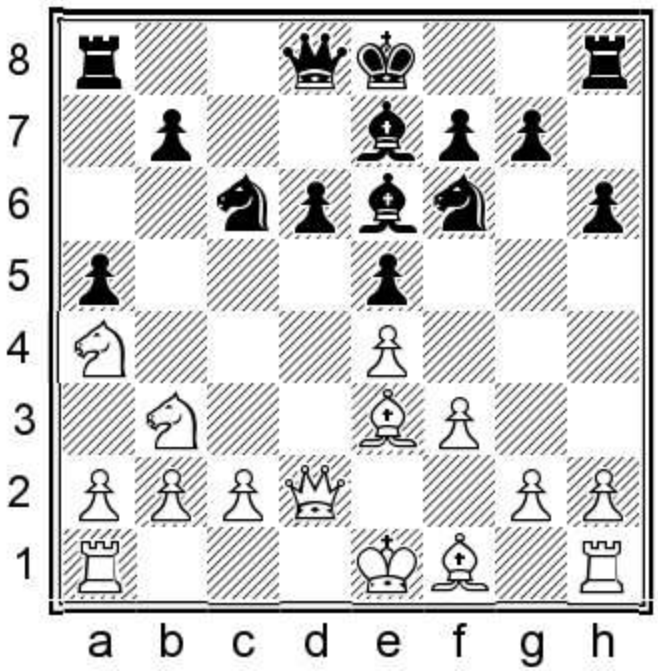
D1) 7...h6?!



This a typical follow-up to ...e5 in certain Sicilian variations, but I include it here as an example of what Black should not do, and how we should punish him if he does it. As we will see, White does not generally develop his bishop to g5 in this variation, so the text move loses an important tempo. Moreover, it renders Black's king-side more vulnerable to an attack with g4-g5 in some lines.

8.Be3 Be7 9.Qd2 0-0
It is also worth considering:
9...a5?!
For the second time in a short period, Black makes a thematic yet ill-advised pawn move. White can reply in his preferred fashion with:
10.Na4!
An important motif which is worth knowing about. White intends to complete development with Bb5 and 0-0, followed by taking advantage of Black's seriously weakened queenside.
10...Be6N
This is surely Black's best try.
10...Nd7?! occurred in Morozevich – Milos, Internet 2000, when 11.Bb5!N 11...0-0 12.0-0 Qc7 13.Qc3 Bg5 14. Bf2± would have left Black in a stranglehold on the queenside, with White having a free hand to increase the pressure with Rfd1 and so on.

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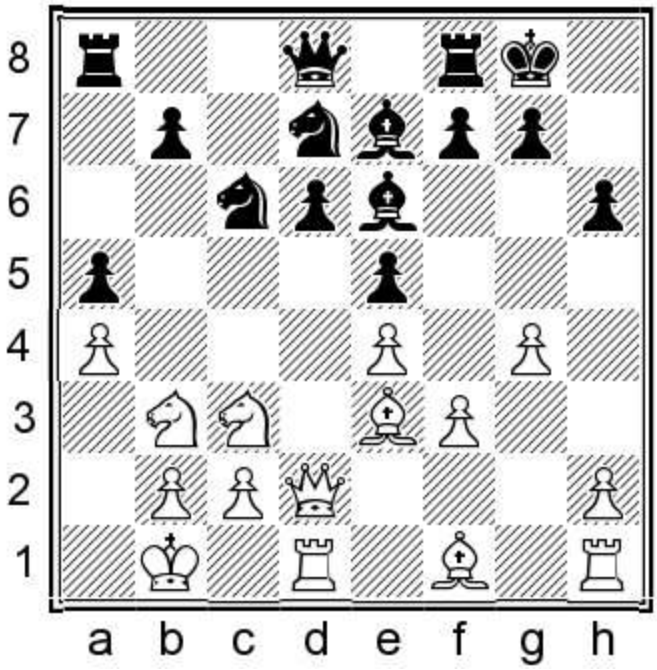
11.Bb5!
11.Nb6 allows 11...a4!! 12.Nxa8 Qxa8 13.Nc1 a3 when White is still somewhat better with best play, but Black has been given too much counterplay out of the blue.
11...0-0 12.c4!
White has a pleasant advantage, with excellent control over the queenside.

10.0-0-0 a5
This move is more logical here than on the previous turn, as White's positional plan of playing on the queenside does not work as well after committing his king to that side of the board. Fortunately, he has a different way to halt Black's play.

11.a4!
11.Bb5?! is less effective due to 11...Na7 12.Be2 Bd7! 13.a4 b5! and Black gets plenty of counterplay.

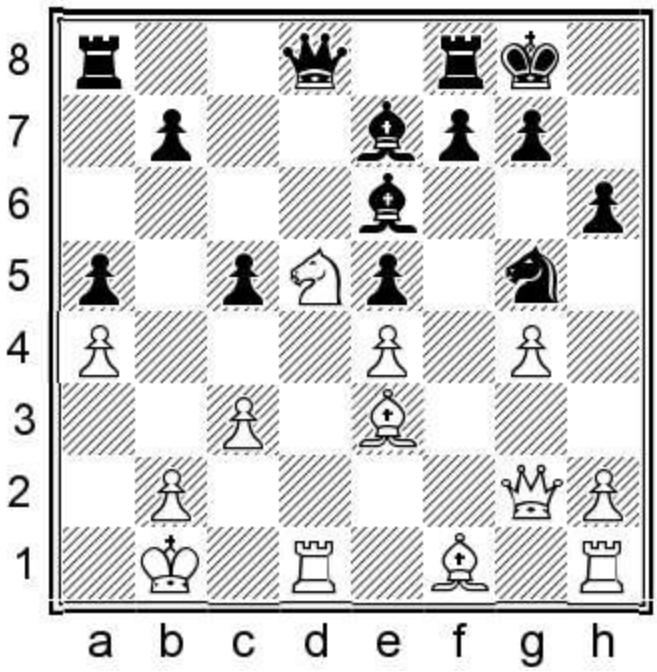
11...Be6 12.g4 Nd7 13.Kb1
White's attack is faster, as was shown in a correspondence game.

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13...Nc5 14.Nxc5 dxc5 15.Nd5 Nd4 16.c3!
White can afford to give up a pawn, as his positional advantages are huge.

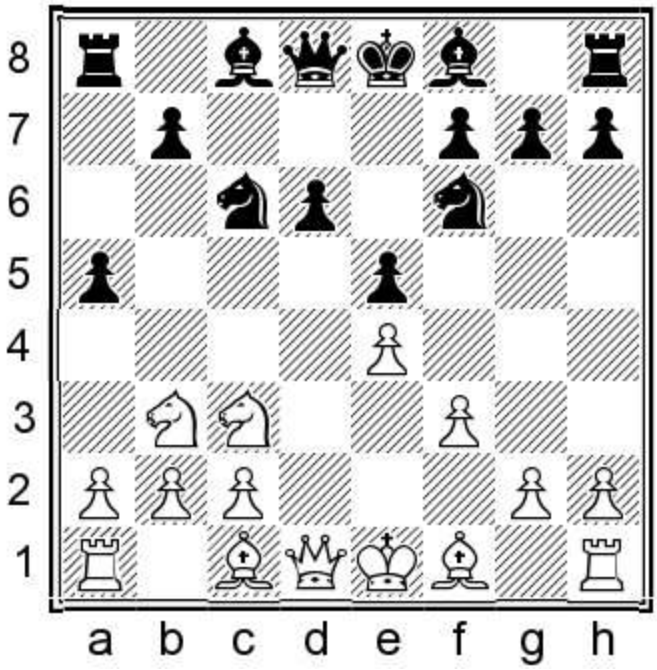
16...Nxf3 17.Qf2 Ng5 18.Qg2



18...Nh7 19.h4 Bxh4 20.Bxc5+–
White was dominating and soon picked up material in Gusakov – Rychkov, corr. 2012.

D2) 7...a5

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Usually Black waits for a few moves before launching the a-pawn, but it is worth considering this early version of the idea.

8.Be3!
8.Bb5 is the obvious reply but in that case White has to be careful not to transpose to some other line where it is preferable to meet ...a5 in a different way.

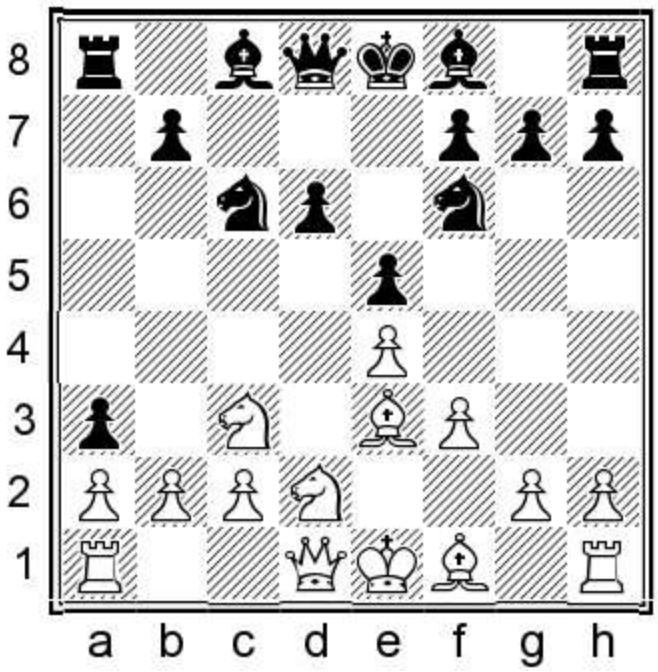
The text move avoids this problem while showing complete disdain for Black's supposed threat of pushing his rook's pawn down the board.

8...a4 9.Nd2
The knight is heading for c4, where it will be superbly placed.

9...a3
9...Be6 10.Nc4 d5 11.exd5 Nxd5 12.Nxd5 Bxd5 13.Nb6 (13.Bb6!?N 13...Qd7 14.Ne3²) 13...Ra5 14.c3!?² was also promising for White in Akatova – Abramov, St Petersburg 2006.

The text move seems most consistent, but White can continue his policy of ignoring Black's a-pawn.

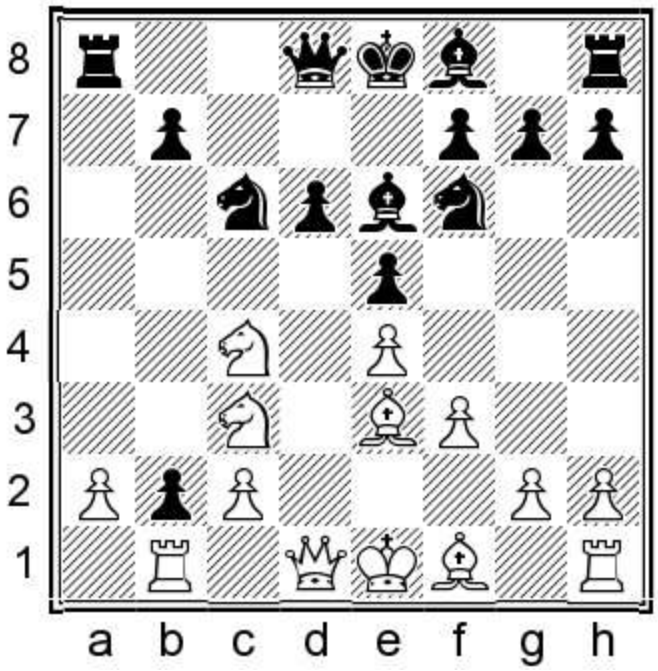
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10.Nc4! axb2 11.Rb1 Be6
11...Be7 12.Bb6 Qd7 13.Rxb2 0-0 14.Be2 Bd8 15.Qxd6 Qxd6 16.Nxd6 Be7 17.Ncb5± was also great for White in Obolenskikh – Shushpanov, Novosibirsk 2003.

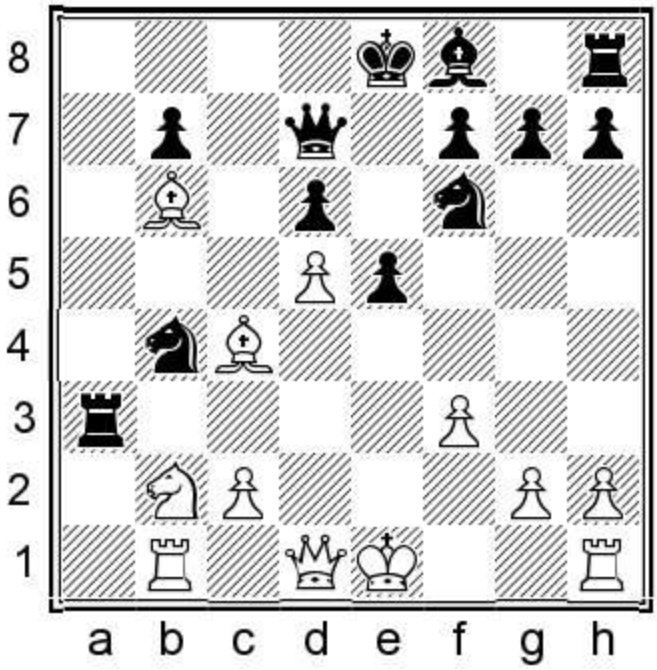
11...d5!?N may be the best try, although 12.Nxd5 Nxd5 13.exd5 Bb4† 14.Kf2² still favours White.

We have been following Zimmermann – Humburg, Oberhof 2012. Instead of taking on b2 immediately, White should have preferred:



12.Nd5!N 12...Rxa2 13.Bb6 Qd7 14.Nxb2 Bxd5 15.exd5 Nb4 16.Bc4 Ra3

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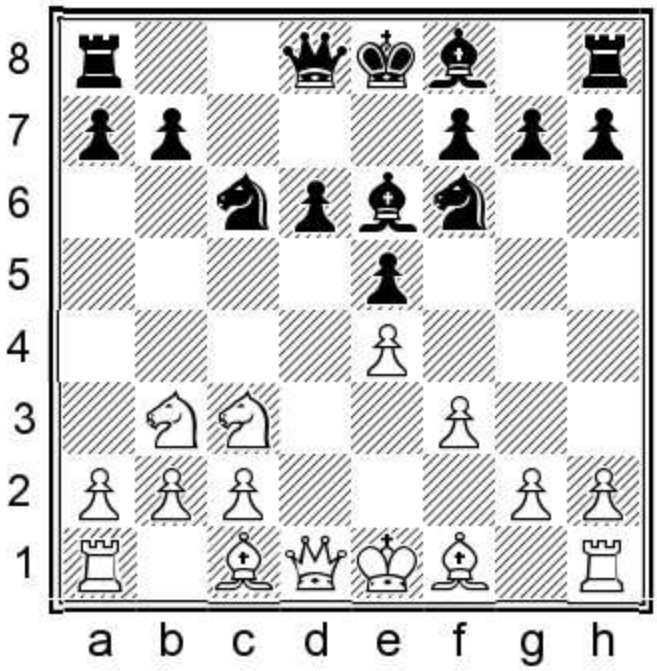


17.c3!
This computer move is the most accurate.

The more obvious 17.0-0 is also fine, for instance: 17...Be7 18.Qd2 Na6 19.Bb3 Qb5 20.Nc4 Rxb3 21.cxb3 Nxd5 22.Bf2²

17...Rxc3 18.Qd2 Rxc4 19.Nxc4 Nbxd5 20.Qa2±
Black has plenty of pawns but he is in serious trouble due to his poor development and weak king.

D3) 7...Be6



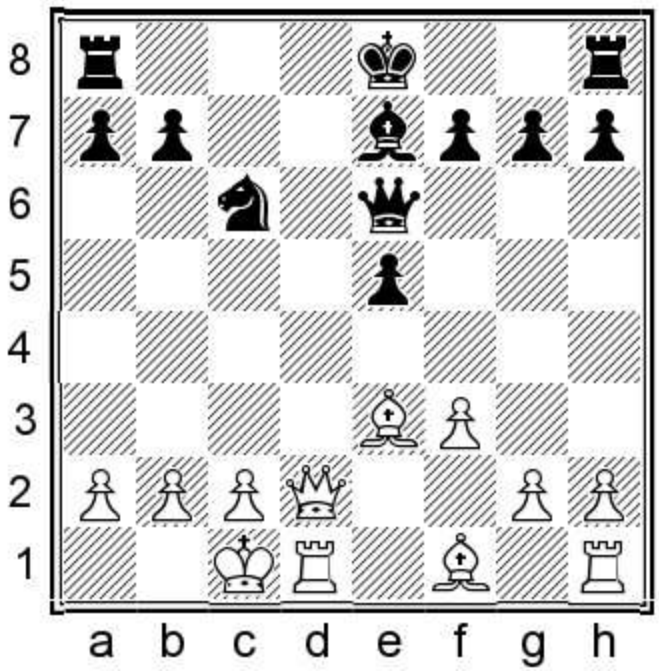
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This is less popular than the other main bishop development (covered in variation D4 below) but it presents us

with an interesting dilemma.

8.Be3!
On this occasion, I don’t feel the need to prevent ...d5.
8.Nd5 is the main line but after 8...Bxd5 (8...Be7 9.Be3 transposes to variation D41) 9.exd5 Ne7 (instead of 9...Nb8, which is similar to 10...Nb8 in the notes to variation D411) we reach an interesting position where, unlike the later variation D411, Black’s knight will go to g6 to assist with kingside counterplay, rather than regrouping on the queenside. It is quite possible that White can obtain an advantage here somehow, but his task is not simple and ultimately I found the text move to be the more practical choice.

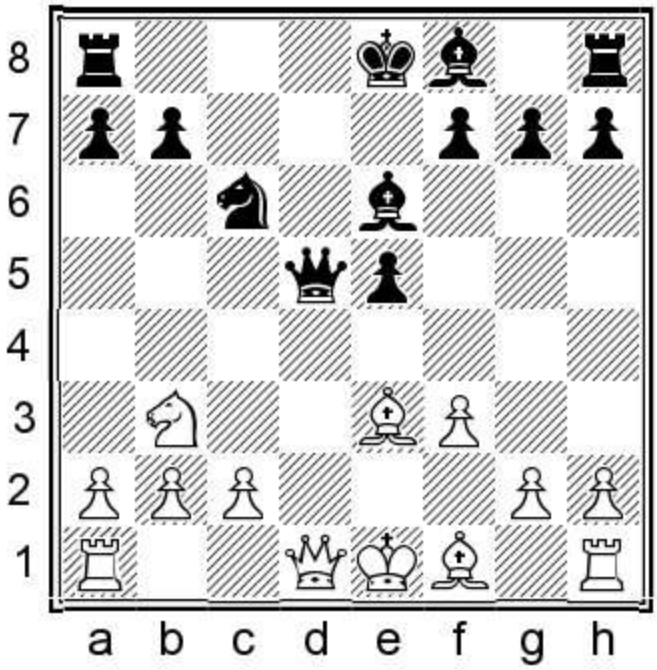
8...d5
This is the most important option for us to consider.
8...Be7 leads straight to variation D41.

9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Nxd5 Qxd5!
Database statistics are rather misleading here: the text move scores significantly worse than the alternative, yet I find it the more challenging option.
10...Bxd5 11.Qd2 gives White a pleasant edge with natural moves. A good example continued: 11...Be7 12.0-0-0 Be6 13.Nc5 Qc8 14.Nxe6 Qxe6



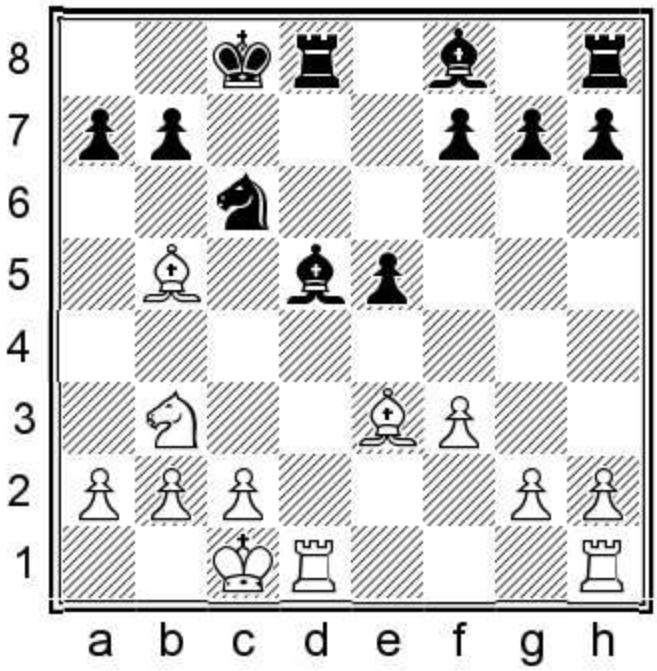

15.Qd5 Qxd5 16.Rxd5 a6 17.c3 0-0 18.Rd7 b5 19.Be2 Rad8 20.Rhd1² Kryvoruchko – Zeleny, Pardubice 2005.

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11.Qxd5 Bxd5 12.0-0-0 0-0-0
After the last few obvious moves, White now has to be quite accurate if he is to cause problems for his opponent.

13.Bb5!
Now the a7-pawn is indirectly threatened, and c2-c4 may prove strong in some lines, now that the bishop has been developed actively.
The immediate 13.c4 is premature. 13...Be6 14.Rxd8† Kxd8 15.Nc5 Bc8 16.Be2 White has no real advantage and all the games on my database which reached this position ended in draws.

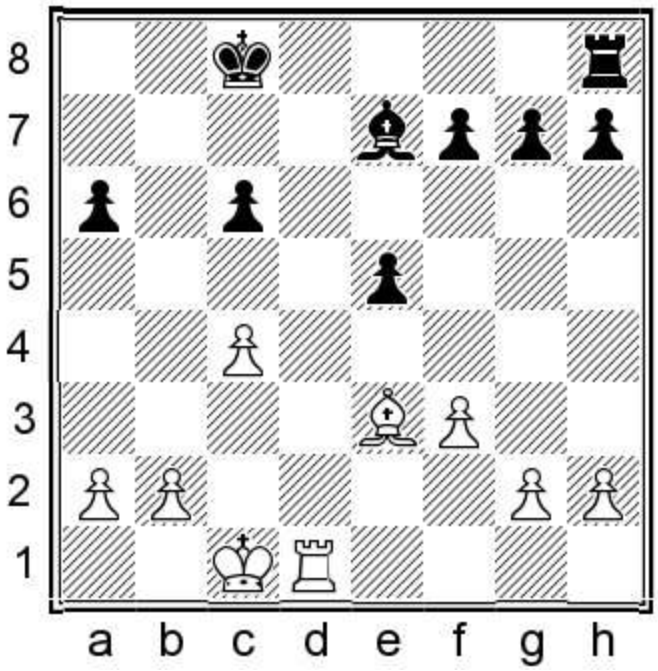


13...a6
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13...Kc7 was seen in Paragua – Maksimenko, Milan 2001, when 14.Bxc6!?N 14...bxc6 15.Rd3 would have

been problematic for Black.

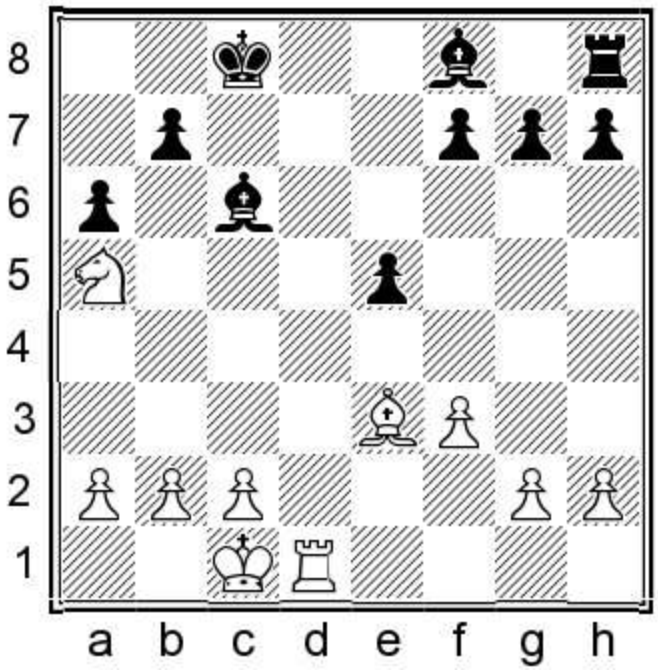
14.Bxc6 Bxc6 15.Na5 Rxd1†!
This is the best defence, although giving up the open file in this way would not be an easy decision to make over the board.

15...Be7 was played in another game, which continued: 16.Nxc6 bxc6 17.c3 Rd5 18.c4 Rxd1† 19.Rxd1




19...Rd8 20.Rxd8† Kxd8 21.Bd2 Bc5 22.Kc2 White successfully converted his endgame advantage in Cilloniz Razzeto – Cowling, corr. 2013.

16.Rxd1

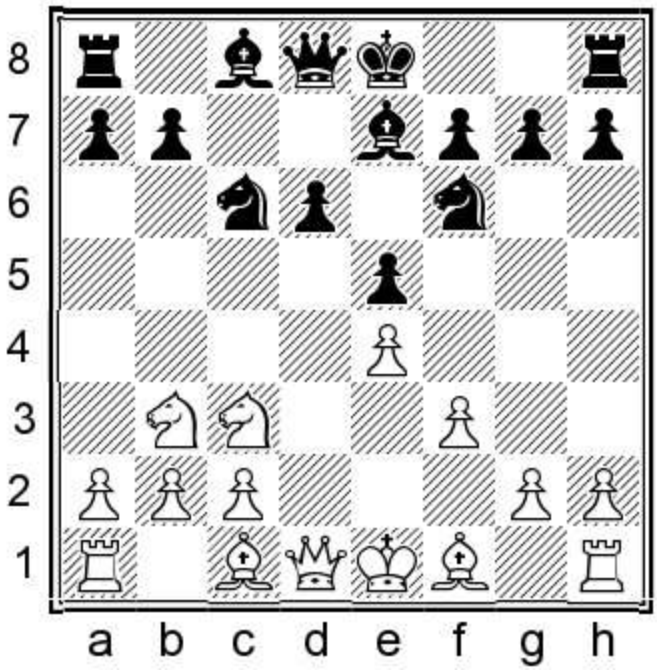



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16...Bb5!
Preventing Rd3 in order to provoke White's next move.
16...Be8 17.Rd3 is a bit awkward for Black, with Rc3† and Bb6 coming.

17.c4 Be8 18.Bb6 Be7 19.c5[2]
Black went on to hold a draw in Sutton – Sitorus, corr. 2016. Nevertheless, my general assessment of this line is that White is generally the one exerting slight pressure with little to no risk.

D4) 7...Be7



This is Black's most flexible and popular choice.

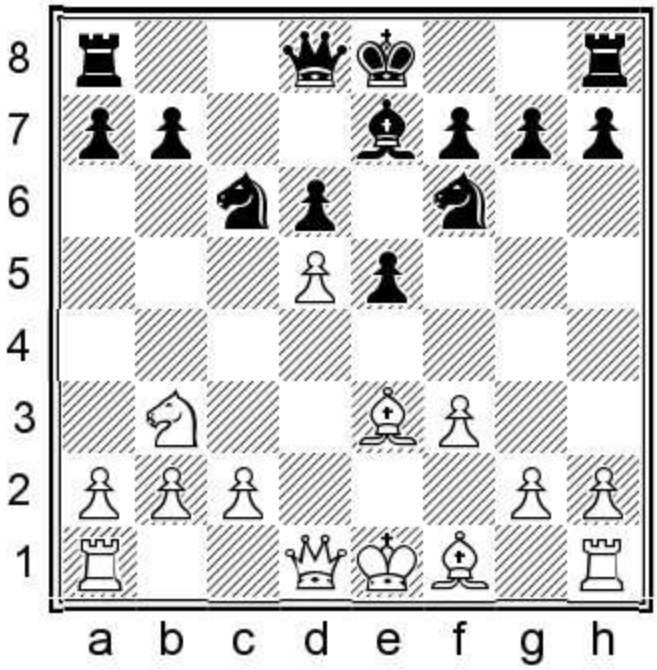
8.Be3
And now we have a split between D41) 8...Be6 and D42) 8...0-0.

D41) 8...Be6 9.Nd5

This is our typical reaction when the enemy bishop arrives on e6. The point, of course, is that removing the knight will now cost Black his bishop pair.
We will consider D411) 9...Bxd5 and D412) 9...0-0.

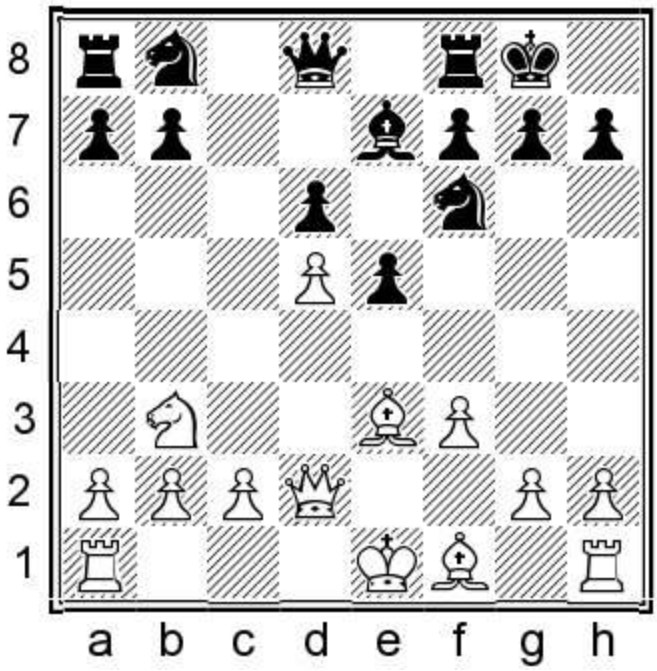
D411) 9...Bxd5 10.exd5

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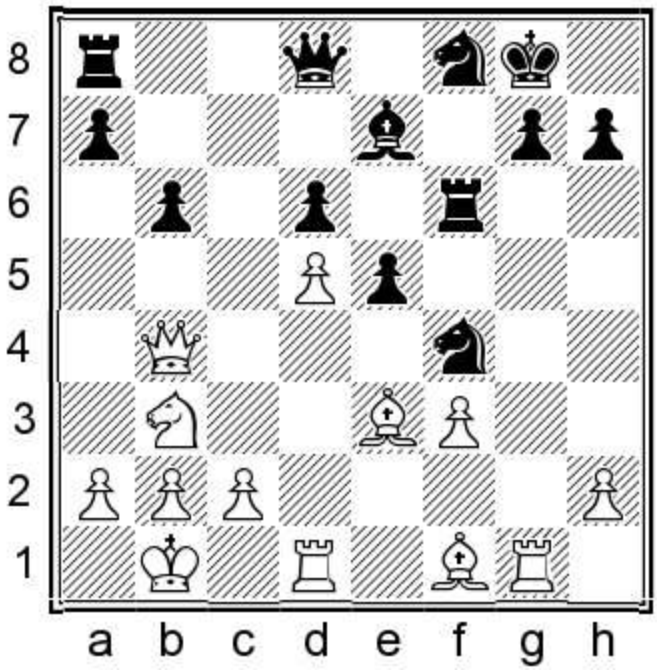
10...Nb4
This is the usual choice: Black attacks the d5-pawn, thus forcing c2-c4, and will later reroute the knight via a6-c5.

The alternative is:
10...Nb8
This gives White additional freedom to decide on which part of the board he wants to play.
11.Qd2
White can also consider delaying the queen move with 11.Be2, for instance: 11...0-0 12.0-0 Nbd7 13.a4!², when 13...Nh5 is strongly met by 14.g3 f5 15.f4!±.
11...0-0



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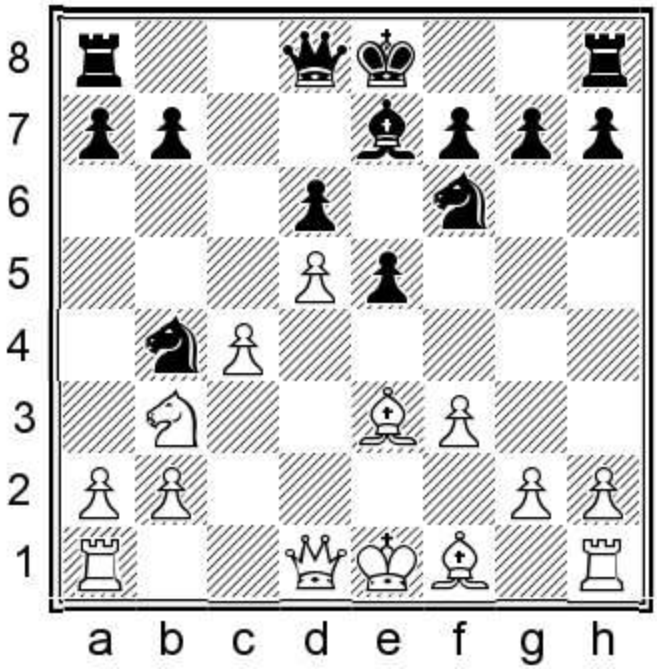
12.g4!?
If White prefers to attack on the queenside, he can play 12.Be2 Nbd7 13.0-0 Qc7 14.Na5!?² as in Mamedov – Baches Garcia, Balaguer 2005. The last move targets b7 (or the c6-square if Black plays ...b6) and stops ...a5, while preparing a typical pawn roller with b2-b4 and c2-c4.
12...Nbd7 13.g5 Nh5 14.0-0-0
White has a favourable version of a Najdorf-style position. The following game is a good example:
14...f5 15.gxf6 Rxf6 16.Kb1 Nf4 17.Rg1
The computer points out that 17.Nd4!N is even stronger but the game continuation is fine.
17...Nf8 18.Qb4 b6




19.Nd2 N8g6 20.Ne4 Rf8 21.Bb5 Nh4 22.Rdf1 Kh8 23.Qd2 Rb8 24.c3 Qc8 25.Qd1 Qf5 26.Ba4 a6 27.Bc2
White was in control in Svidler – Karpov, Odessa (rapid) 2009.

11.c4

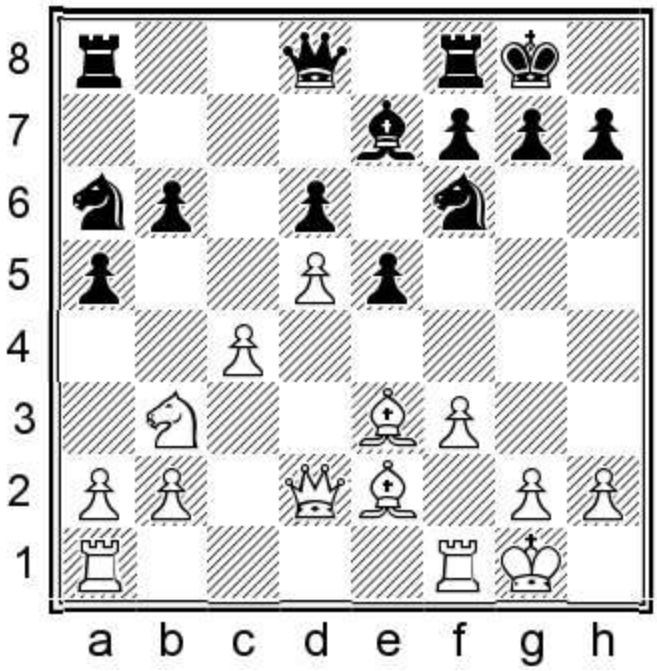
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11...a5 12.Qd2 b6
Black sets up a dark-squared pawn wall, partly to slow down White's future queenside attack and partly to secure the c5-square for his knight(s).

12...0-0?! 13.a3 wins a pawn.

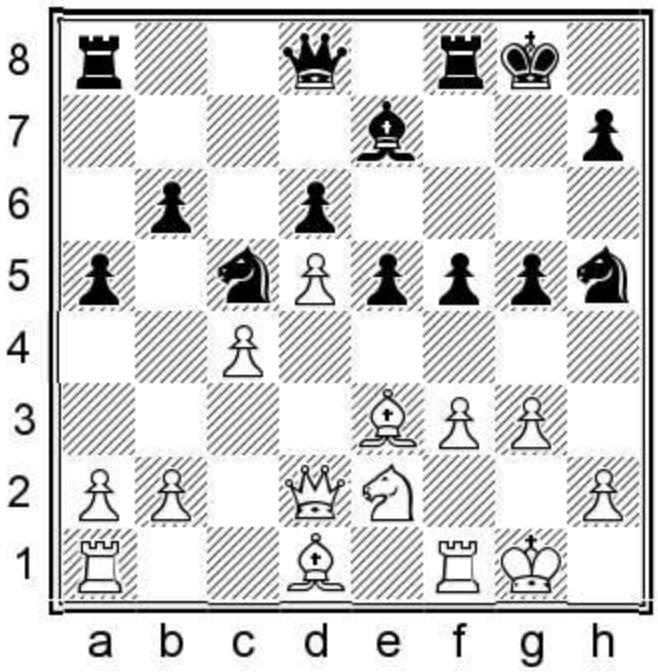
13.Be2 0-0 14.0-0 Na6



15.Nc1!
15.Rae1 Nd7 16.f4 Nac5 17.fxe5 Nxb3 18.axb3 Nxe5 was decent for Black in Ivanchuk – Dominguez Perez, Wijk aan Zee 2009.

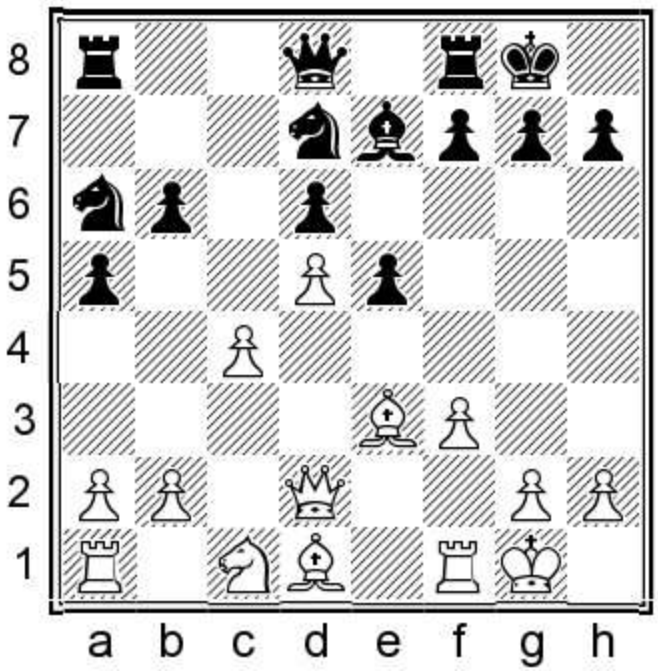
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15...Nd7
Another nice example continued: 15...Nc5 16.Bd1 Nh5 17.g3!? f5 18.Ne2 g5



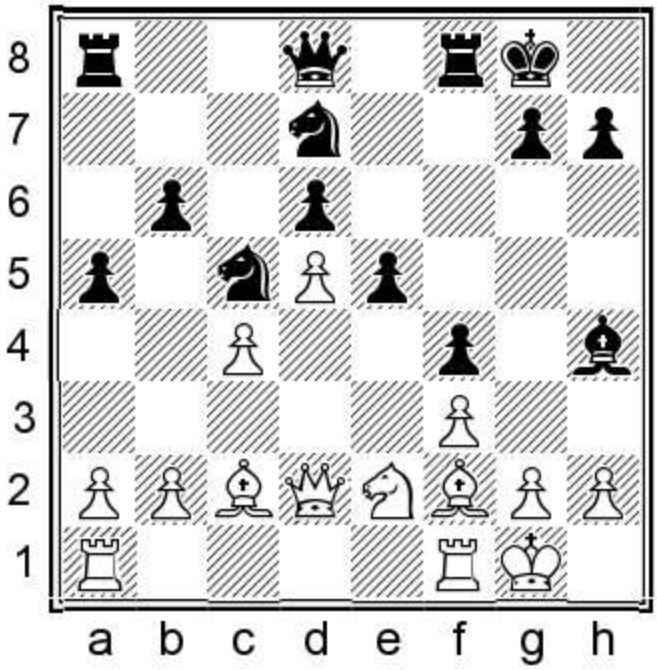
19.Nc3!? f4 20.Bf2 Nf6 21.Bc2² White went on to win a fine game in Cubas – Tsuboi, Sao Paulo 2005.

16.Bd1!
Just as in the example above, the bishop is heading for the superior c2-square, while making room for the knight to go to e2.



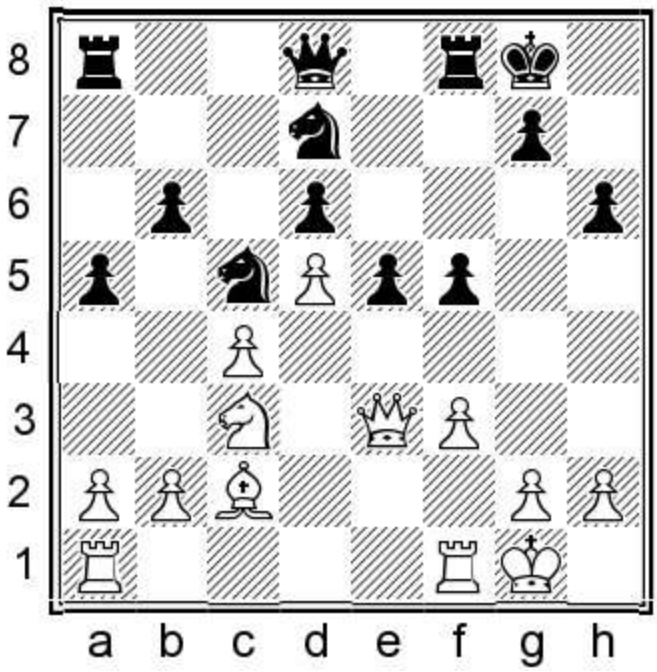
16...Nac5 17.Ne2 h6
17...f5 18.Bc2 f4 19.Bf2 Bh4 was played in Gallagher – McShane, Torquay 2002. Here, instead of weakening his kingside with 20.g3?!, White should have played:

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20.Nc3N² Intending b2-b3, a2-a3 and b3-b4. Black has some ideas on the kingside, but White's chances are higher.

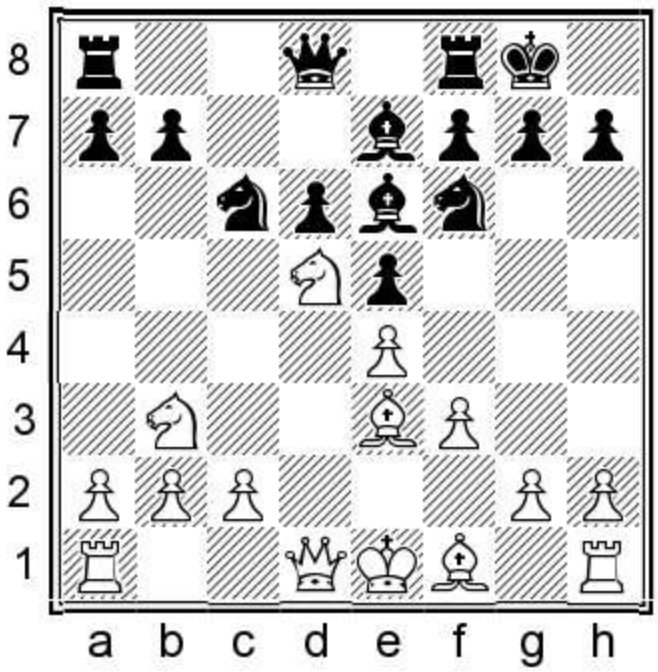
18.Bc2 Bg5 19.Nc3 Bxe3† 20.Qxe3 f5



21.b3 Rf6 22.a3 Nf8 23.b4 Ncd7 24.Ba4 g5 25.Bc6²
White was making significant gains on the queenside in Perunovic – Lupulescu, Dresden (ol) 2008.

D412) 9...0-0

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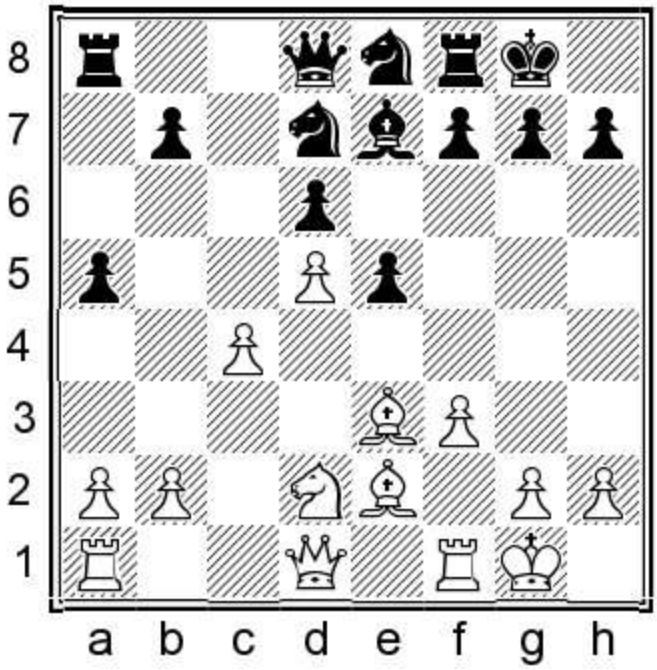
10.Be2!?
10.Qd2 is also possible, and it actually transposes to the later variation D421, which arises after 8...0-0 9.Qd2 Be6 10.Nd5. However, when the present move order arises, I would be tempted to develop the bishop first in order to keep some extra flexibility, both in terms of the queen's placement and of using the d2-square to reroute the b3-knight in some lines.

10...a5
This pawn move is one of Black's main resources and we will see plenty more of it throughout the rest of the chapter. I checked two other possibilities:

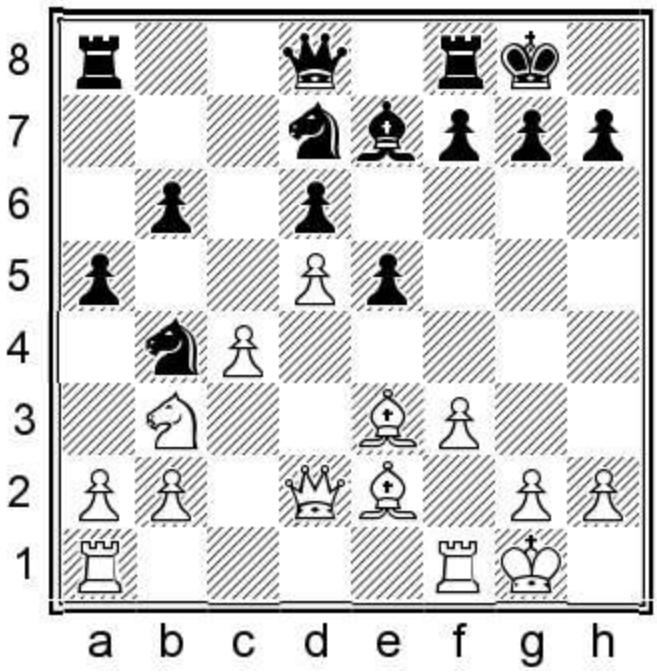
10...Nd7 11.Nxe7† (11.Qd2N and 11.0-0N also deserve consideration) 11...Qxe7 12.0-0 f5 13.exf5 Rxf5 14. Bd3 Rf7 15.c3 gave White a nice edge with the two bishops in Mirasov – Matsenko, Chelyabinsk 2009.

10...Bxd5
This has been the most popular choice but White gets a promising version of a thematic structure.
11.exd5 Nb4
11...Na5 12.0-0 Qc7 13.Nxa5 Qxa5 14.c4² was pleasant for White in Vuckovic – Rashidian, Wiesbaden 1993.
11...Nb8 12.0-0 Nbd7 13.c4 a5 14.Nd2 Ne8 occurred in Jirovsky – Bielczyk, Ceske Budejovice 1993. Here my suggestion would be:

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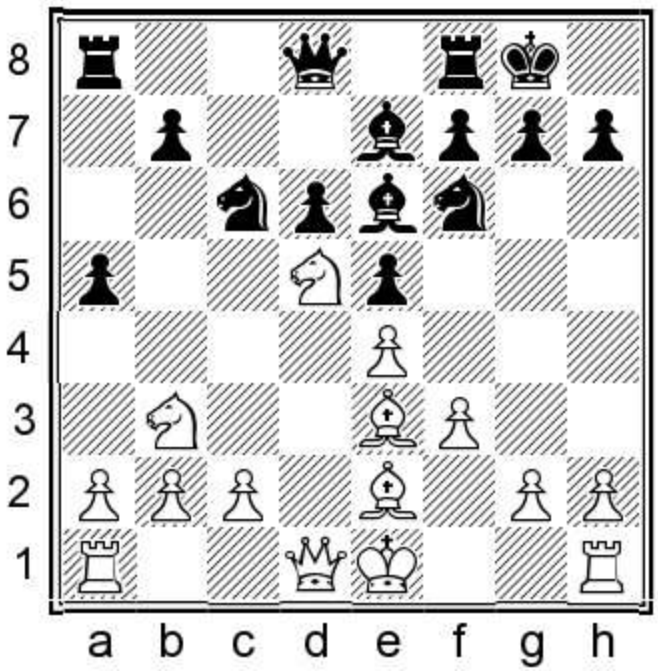


15.Ne4!?N The knight is heading for c3. (15.Nb1N is also possible, but we may as well prevent ...Bg5 for another move.) 15...f5 16.Nc3² Having improved the knight, White is ready to expand on the queenside. If Black tries to exchange bishops with ...Bg5, then we should of course avoid it with Bf2.
12.c4 a5 13.0-0 Nd7 14.Qd2 b6



15.f4!
With the b4-knight out of play, this is a good moment to open the kingside and win the use of the d4-square for our knight.
15.Nc1 Na6 16.b3 h6 17.a3 Bg5 18.Rb1 f5 19.Bxg5 Qxg5 20.Qxg5 hxg5 21.Na2 Kf7 22.Nc3 Nc7 23.Rfc1 Ke7 was pleasant for Black in Chandler – Kramnik, Germany 1994.
15...Rc8 16.a3 Na6 17.fxe5 Nxe5 18.Nd4 Nc5 19.b4±
White had an ideal position in Motylev – Kosteniuk, Moscow 2002.

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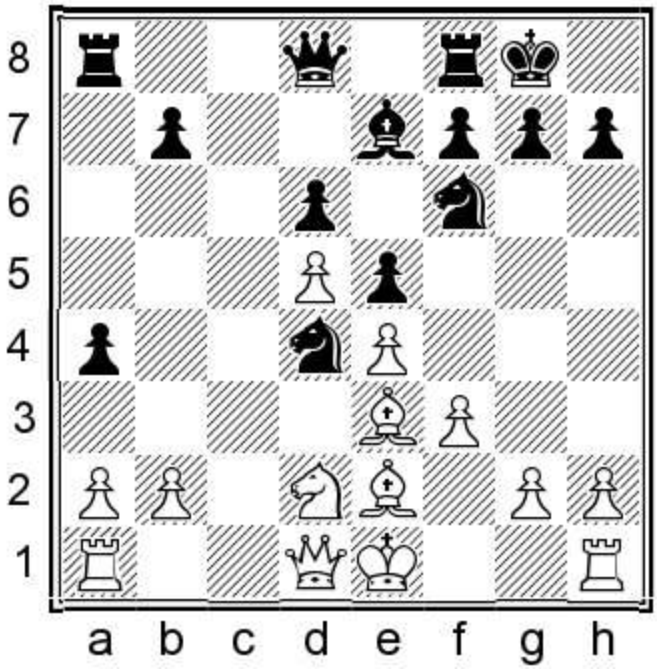
11.c4!?N
Despite being a novelty, this move immediate transposes to a bunch of existing games, some of which involved the somewhat unusual Open Sicilian move order with 5.f3!? (instead of 5.Nc3).

11.Bb6 has been played in all games so far, but I'm not convinced that White gains anything worthwhile with this move.

I also considered: 11.Nb6N 11...Rb8 12.0-0! (There is no need to prevent ...d5. Besides, 12.c4?! Nd7 13.Nd5 Bg5³ is excellent for Black.) 12...d5 13.exd5 Nxd5 14.Nxd5 Bxd5 15.c3 b5 16.Qd2 White can aim to take the d-file and perhaps utilize the c5-square, but it would be stretching the bounds of reality to claim any theoretical advantage.

11...Nd7
Black has also tried: 11...a4 12.Nd2 Bxd5 (12...Nd4 gives White a choice between simple development with 13.0-0 and playing to win a pawn with 13.Nxe7† Qxe7 14.Bxd4 exd4 15.Nb1!?) 13.cxd5 Nd4

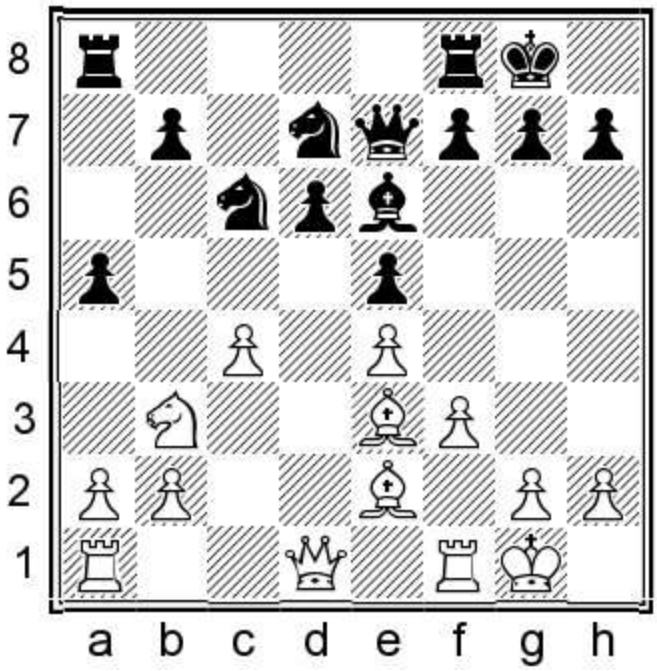
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14.Nc4 b5 This occurred in K. Yang – Zhou Jianchao, Philadelphia 2017, when 15.Na3!N² would have been good for White.

12.Nxe7†
12.0-0 is playable but I would rather prevent ...Bg5 and put my faith in the long-term power of the bishop pair.

12...Qxe7 13.0-0



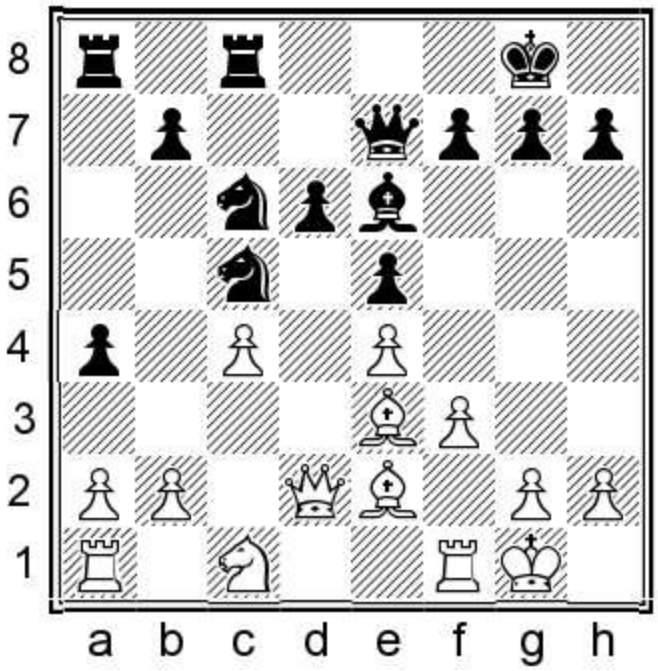
13...Nc5
13...a4 14.Nd2 does not really help Black, for instance: 14...Nc5 (14...f5 15.exf5 Bxf5 16.Nb1²) 15.Nb1 f5 (15...Na5?! 16.Na3± Fedorov – Parligras, Mamaia 2012) 16.exf5 Bxf5 17.Nc3² Lupulescu – Cosma, Calimanesti 2014.

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13...f5!?N is worth checking. My main line continues 14.exf5 Bxf5 15.Bd3!? e4 16.fxe4 Bxe4 17.Bf2 a4 18. Bxe4 Qxe4 19.Nd2 and White keeps an edge, as his bishop has the potential to outwork the black knights. Initially the engine gives an evaluation of more or less dead equal, but it creeps up in White's favour when given more time.

14.Qd2
14.Nd2!? is another good option, for instance: 14...f5 15.exf5 Bxf5 16.Nb1 Nd4 17.Nc3 Nc2 18.Nd5 Qd8 19. Rc1 Nxe3 20.Nxe3² I. Petrov – Woznica, corr. 2012.

14...a4 15.Nc1 Rfc8
15...f5 16.exf5 Bxf5 17.Rd1² looks good for White.
This position was reached in Grabner – Havumaki, corr. 2014, and one subsequent correspondence game, both of which continued with 16.Rd1, after which 16...Na5! left White with no advantage. I prefer a different idea:

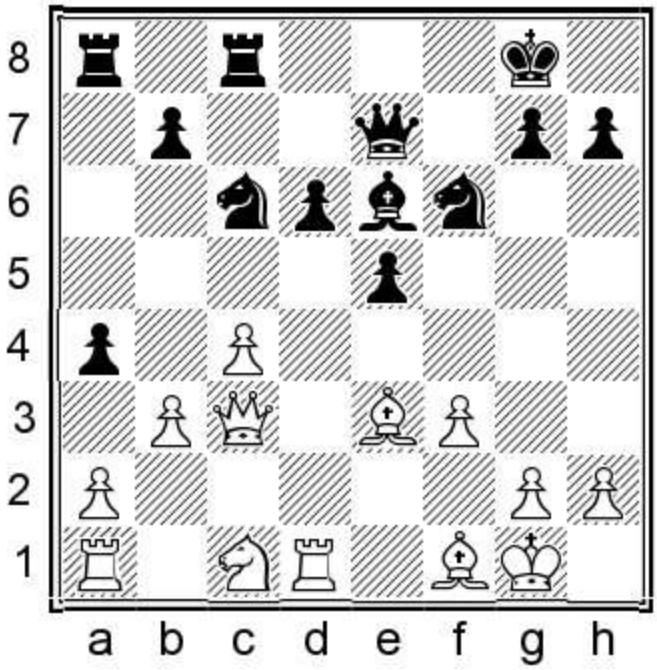



16.Qc3!N
Black has been gearing up for counterplay against the c4-pawn, so I want to play b2-b3 as soon as possible.

16...Nd7
This seems best to me. If Black tries the immediate 16...f5, White plays 17.exf5 Bxf5 18.Re1 and may consider exchanging on c5 at any moment. By retreating the knight first, Black removes this possibility and clears the c-file, inducing White to spend a tempo stabilizing the queenside with b2-b3.

17.b3 f5 18.exf5 Bxf5 19.Rd1 Nf6 20.Bf1 Be6

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21.Nd3!
I also considered 21.Qd2 d5 22.cxd5 Nxd5 23.Bc4 Nxe3 24.Bxe6† Qxe6 25.Qxe3 when White can try to grind out an advantage based on the isolated e-pawn, but the position is basically equal.

21...e4 22.fxe4 Nxe4 23.Qb2²
Even if Black manages to swap off his isolated d-pawn, he will still have to contend with the power of White's two bishops on a relatively open board.

D42) 8...0-0

This is Black's most popular move order.

9.Qd2
Black has tried several moves but we will focus on the two most popular: developing with D421) 9...Be6, and commencing counterplay with D422) 9...a5.

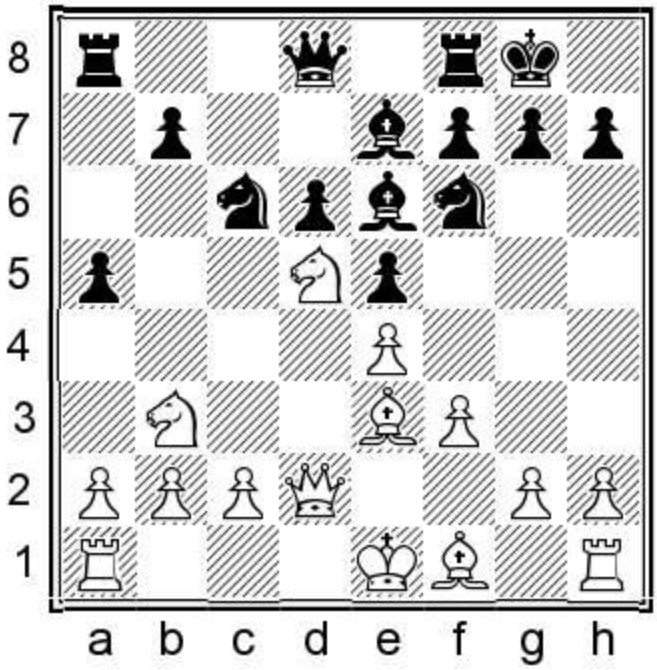
D421) 9...Be6 10.Nd5

Once again, the bishop's arrival on e6 is the cue for us to plug the hole on d5.

10.0-0-0 takes the game in a different direction, where 10...a5 has yielded good results for Black.

10...a5
10...Bxd5 11.exd5 Nb8 is the Svidler – Karpov game, as noted earlier on pages 318-9.

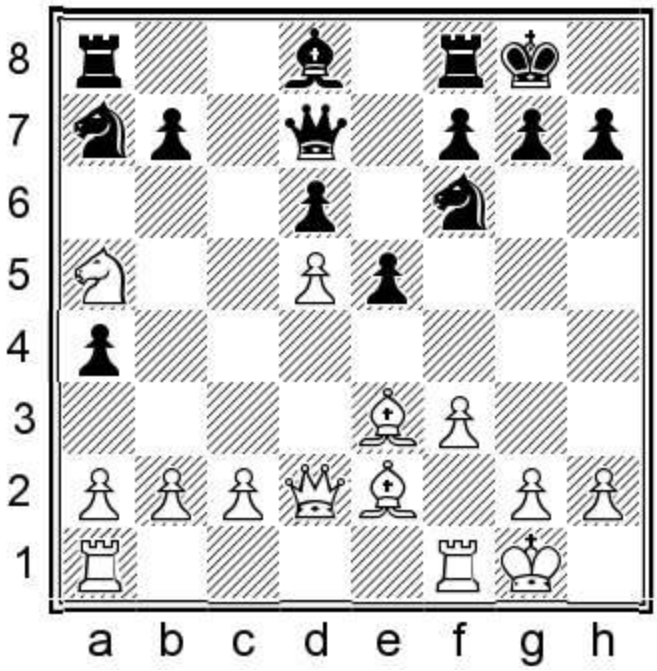
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11.Bb5!
Strangely, the database only shows one game in which this move was played, although it immediately transposes to a few dozen other games.

11...a4!?
This has only been played once but it is the most critical choice, leading to an odd tactical sequence.

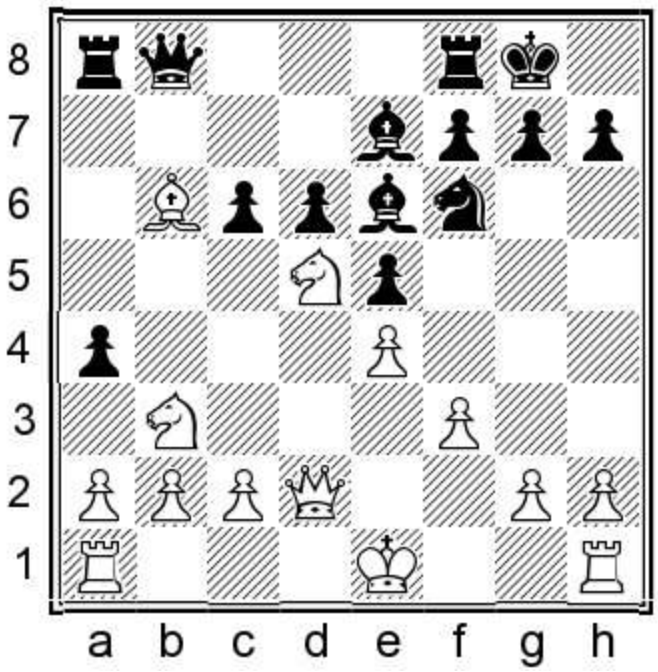
The more common 11...Bxd5 12.exd5 seems promising for White. For instance: 12...Na7 13.Be2 a4 14.Na5! Qd7!?N 15.0-0 Bd8



16.b4 (16.Nc4!?) 16...Nc8 17.c4²

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12.Bb6 Qb8 13.Bxc6 bxc6
In Brendel – Tischbierek, Deizisau 2000, White should have continued:



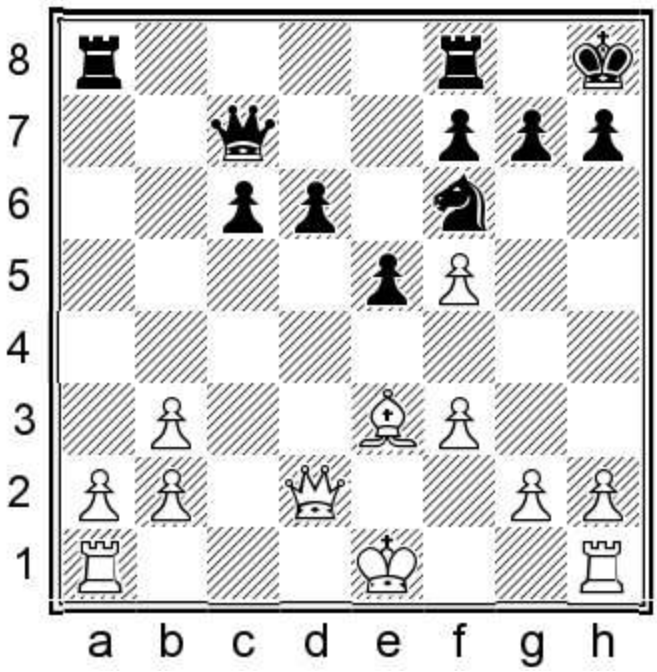
14.Nxe7†N 14...Kh8
Okay, capturing a hanging piece with check may seem like an easy choice, and it would be easy to assume that Black must have blundered. But when we look more closely we see that the b6-bishop and b3-knight are both hanging (with the a2-pawn pinned), and the e7-knight is short of squares. White can still keep the better chances but some care is needed.

15.Be3 axb3 16.cxb3 Qc7
16...d5 17.0-0 Qc7 18.Nf5 d4 19.Bf2 Bxf5 20.exf5 Nd5 21.Rfc1² sees White keep an extra pawn while c6 remains weak.

17.Nf5 Bxf5
17...Rfd8? 18.Bg5 is unpleasant for Black.

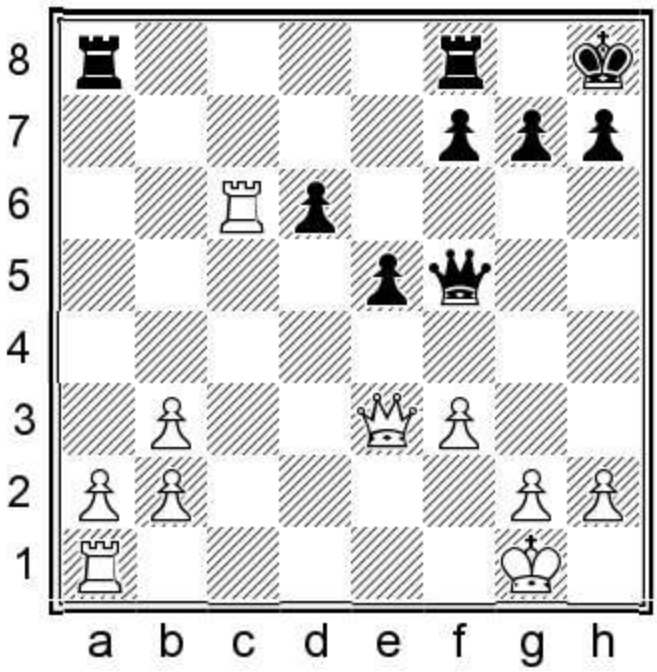
18.exf5
Black's strong centre gives him a certain amount of compensation for the missing pawns, but objectively he is still not fully equal. There are many possible moves and it's not the kind of position we can analyse exhaustively; however, it is worth including one forcing line where Black insists on regaining his pawn.

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18...Qd7 19.0-0 Nd5 20.Rfc1
20.g4?! Rfb8 gives Black decent prospects.

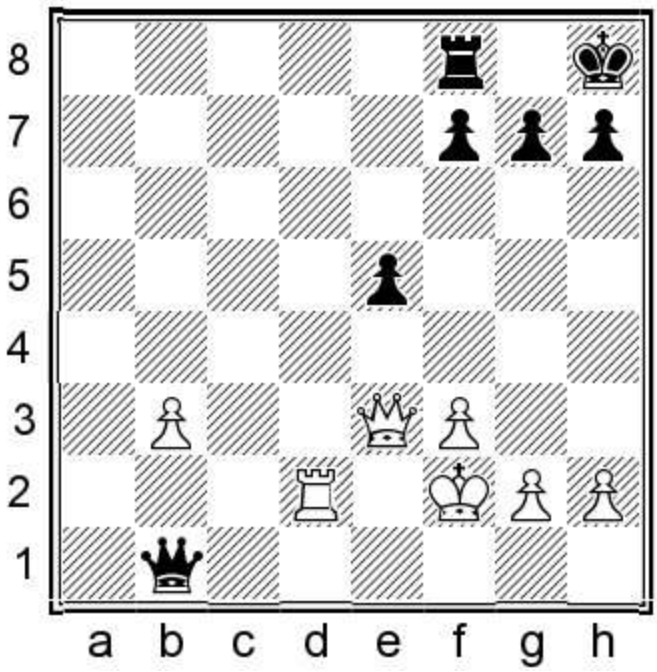
20...Qxf5 21.Rxc6 Nxe3 22.Qxe3



22...Rxa2!
This trick enables Black to restore material equality, but the draw is still some way off.

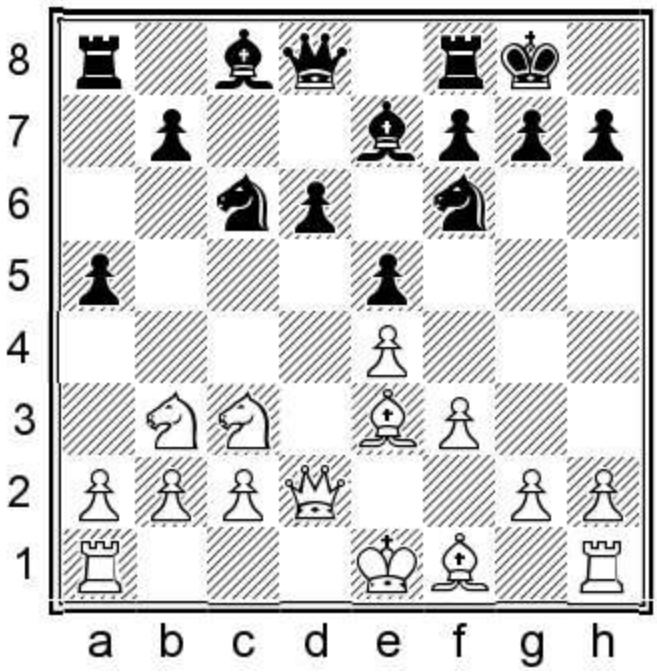
23.Rxa2 Qb1† 24.Kf2 Qxa2 25.Rxd6 Qxb2† 26.Rd2 Qb1

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27.Qd3 Qxd3 28.Rxd3²
Despite the reduced material, Black is under pressure due to his distant king and the passed b-pawn. Note that White will have time to play b3-b4 and Rb3, even after 28...Rb8, due to the weak eighth rank.

D422) 9...a5



This is perhaps the most testing move order, and is recommended by Mihail Marin in his The Classical Sicilian DVD. White needs to be extremely precise to secure an edge against it.

10.Bb5 Na7
10...Be6 11.Rd1! should transpose to variation D4222 after 11...Na7 12.Bd3. (Instead, 11.0-0-0 allows Black good counterplay after 11...Na7 or 11...Nb4.)

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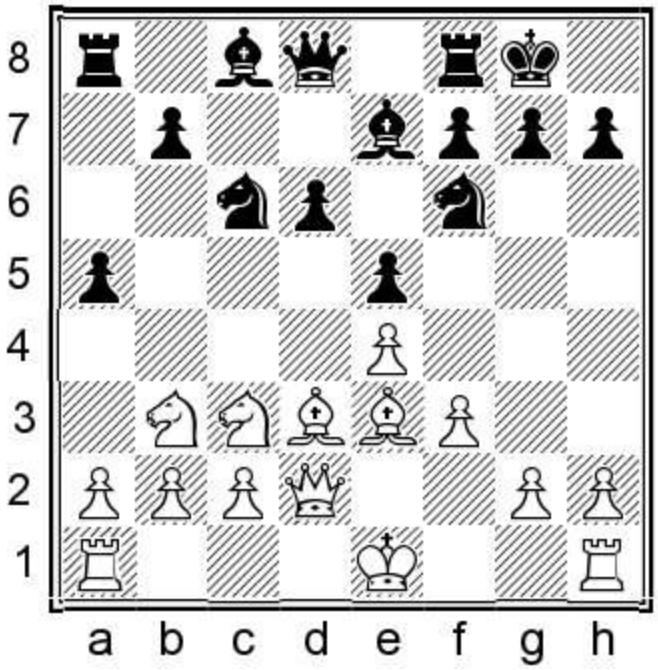
11.Bd3!
This has been White's most popular choice, although it seems paradoxical at first – why should we give up the fight for the d5-square by blocking the d-file? One advantage of the d3-square is that the bishop helps restrain the ...f5 break, which tends to be a good source of counterplay in these positions, as well as keeping the f2-square available for the queen, which would not be the case if the bishop retreated to e2. This move is not mentioned on Marin's DVD.

It is worth briefly showing Black's ideas after the other popular bishop retreat: 11.Be2 Be6 12.Rd1 Nc8 13.Qc1 Qc7 14.Nb5 Qc6 15.c4 Nb6 16.Nd2 Nh5 With ...Nf4 and/or ...f5 on the cards, Black had enough counterplay in Akatova – N. Kosintseva, Dagomys 2008. (Alternatively, 16...Rfc8 17.0-0 Nxc4 18.Bxc4 Bxc4 19.Qxc4 Qxc4 20.Nxc4 Rxc4 21.Nxd6 Rc2 22.Nf5 Kf8 23.Rf2 Rac8= was good enough for equality in Morozevich – Korotylev, Moscow 2004.)

Before moving on, it is worth mentioning a secondary idea: 11.Bxa7 Rxa7 12.a4!?N may be marginally in White's favour, although giving up the dark-squared bishop will not be to everyone's taste, so I will leave it for interested readers to explore this for themselves.

Black has two main options at this juncture: D4221) 11...Nc6 and D4222) 11...Be6.

D4221) 11...Nc6



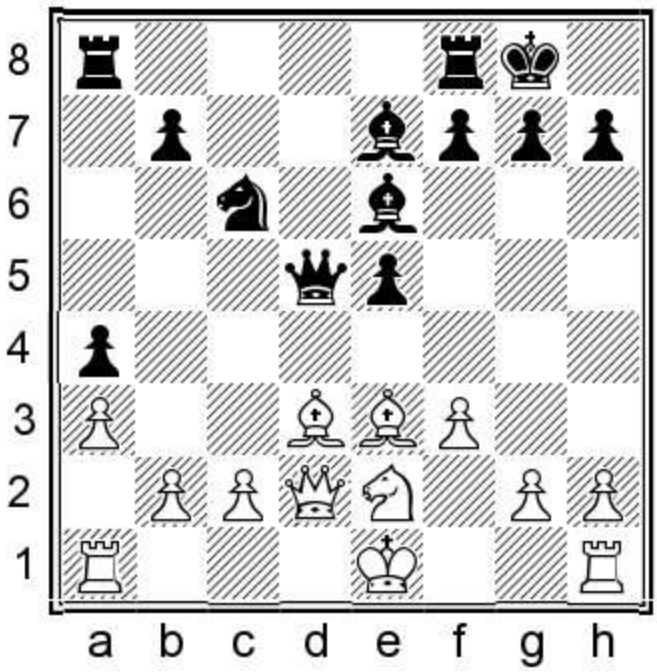

12.a3
White anticipates ...a4 and makes sure the black pawn will not get any further.

12.Bb5!? repeats the position. Even if you don't want a draw, you could consider repeating once, just to see if your opponent is willing to 'risk' allowing a threefold repetition.

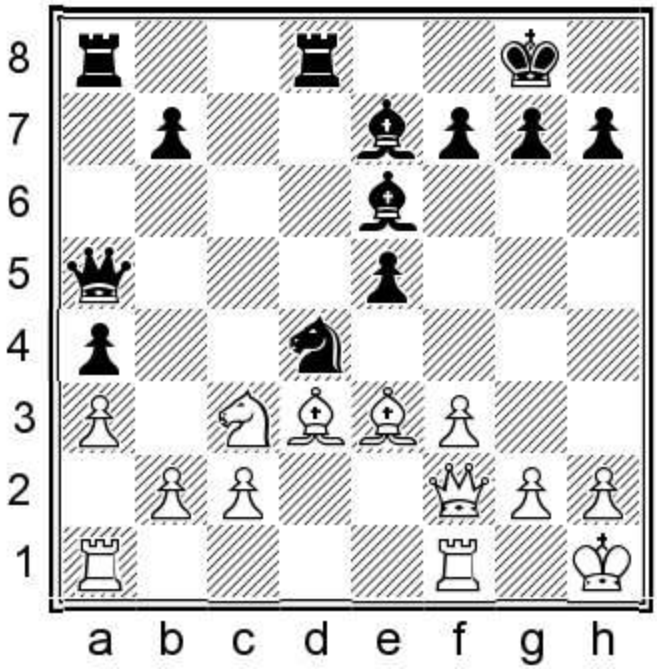
12...Be6
Another popular continuation is:
12...a4 13.Nc1 Be6 14.N1e2 d5 15.exd5 Nxd5 16.Nxd5 Qxd5

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Black may have freed himself in the centre but White can look to exploit the many holes on Black's queenside, caused by the advancing a-pawn. For example:

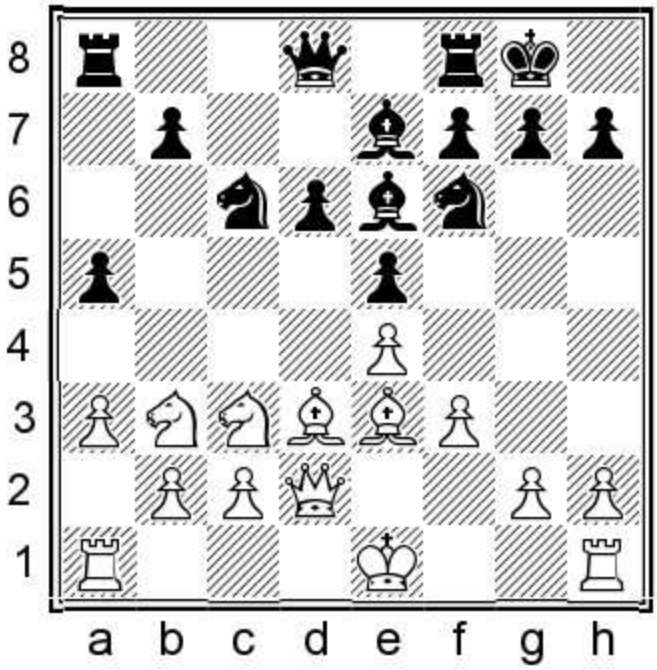


17.Nc3
17.Rd1!? is another possible direction.
17...Qa5 18.Qf2 Nd4 19.0-0 Rfd8 20.Kh1
20.f4!? is also worth considering, and led to success for White in S.M. Larsen – Varberg, corr. 2008.

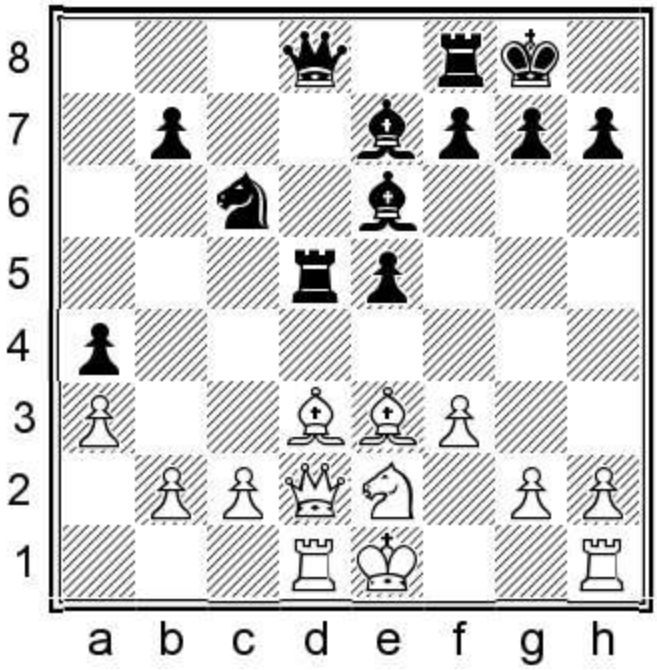


20...Qb6 21.Rab1 f5
Movsesian – Avrukh, Ohrid 2001. Here my suggestion would be:
22.Rfe1N²
With some pressure against Black's overextended central position.

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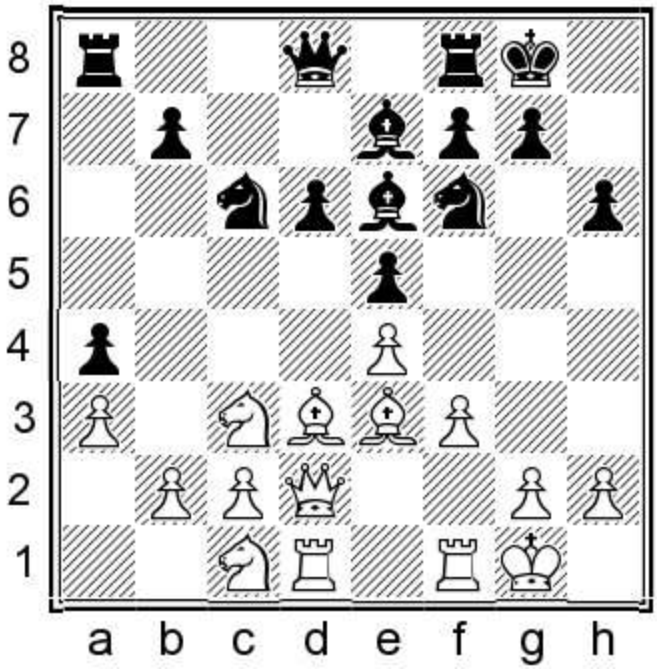
13.Rd1 h6
13...a4 14.Nc1 Ra5!? is an interesting way to activate the rook. Still, White keeps the usual slight edge after: 15.N1e2 d5 16.exd5 Nxd5 17.Nxd5 Rxd5



18.Nc3 Ra5 (otherwise 18...Rd6N 19.Qf2² leaves the a4-pawn weak) 19.0-0 Nd4 This was Oleksienko – Melia, Paleochora 2008, and now the machine points out the subtle 20.Kh1!N², keeping the options of direct action with f3-f4, or continuing improvement of the pieces with Qf2 or Ne4.

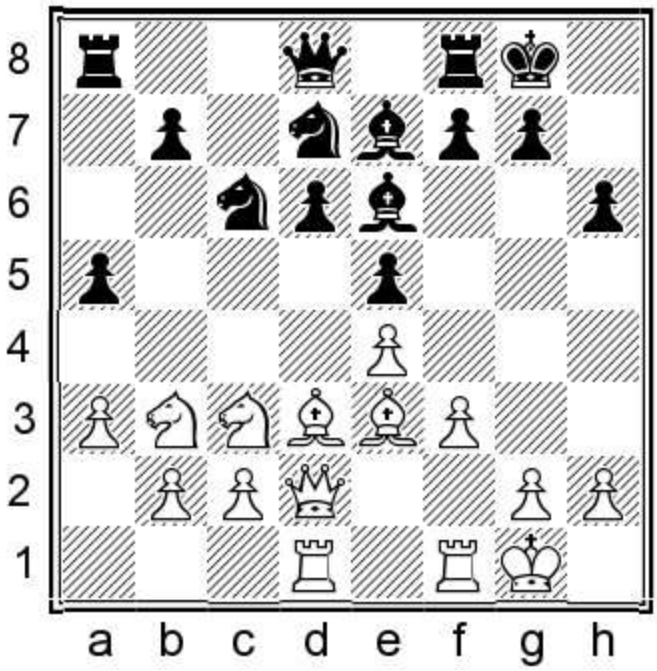
14.0-0 Nd7
Once again Black can throw in 14...a4 15.Nc1, and here I checked a new idea:

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15...Na5!?N (Black needs to improve on 15...d5 16.exd5 Nxd5 17.Nxd5 Qxd5 18.Qf2 Kh8 19.Ne2 Qd7 20.f4± as in Kovacevic – Ermenkov, Zadar 2006) The text move is an interesting suggestion from the machine, but 16. Qf2 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Bxc4 18.Rfe1² keeps some edge for White.

The text move was played in a slightly older game, in which Black decided to avoid the ...d5 plan altogether, presumably as he was wary of coming under pressure along the central files, as featured in some of the lines above. However, the closed strategy also left him struggling to equalize.

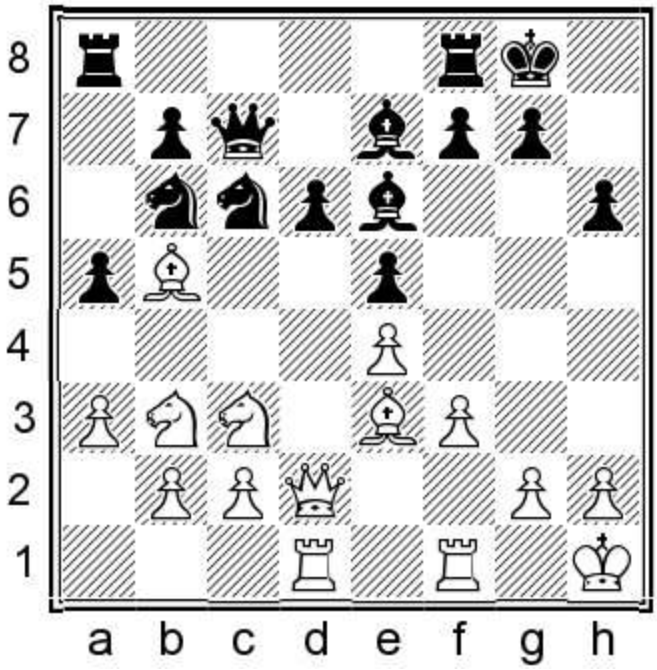


15.Bb5 Qc7 16.Kh1 Nb6
16...Nc5 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Rfd8 19.c3 Ne6 20.g3² leaves White with two bishops and excellent control.

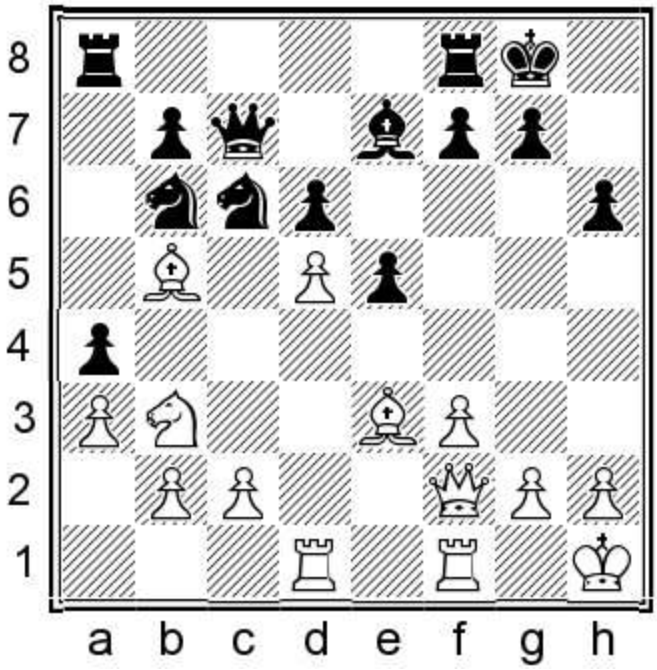
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We have been following Ivanchuk – Khalifman, Elista 1998. This would have been a good moment for White

to force a change in the position with:



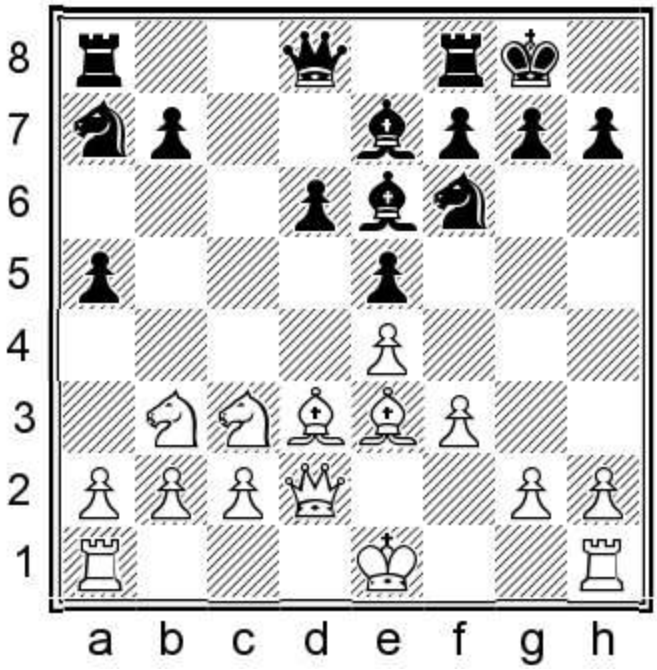
17.Nd5!N 17...Bxd5 18.exd5 a4 19.Qf2!
19.dxc6 bxc6 20.Bd3 axb3 21.cxb3² also favours White but the text move is stronger.



19...Nxd5 20.Rxd5 axb3 21.cxb3±
White has two strong bishops and a powerful blockade on the light squares, while his doubled pawns are not weak at all.

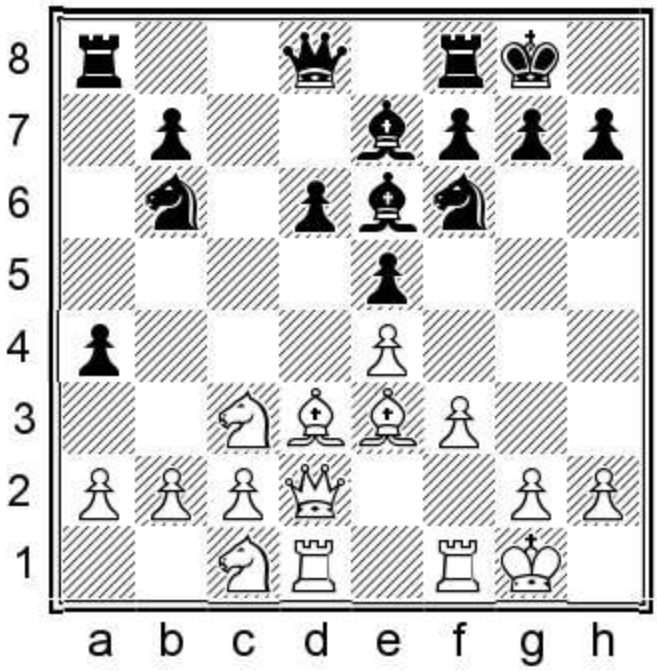
D4222) 11...Be6

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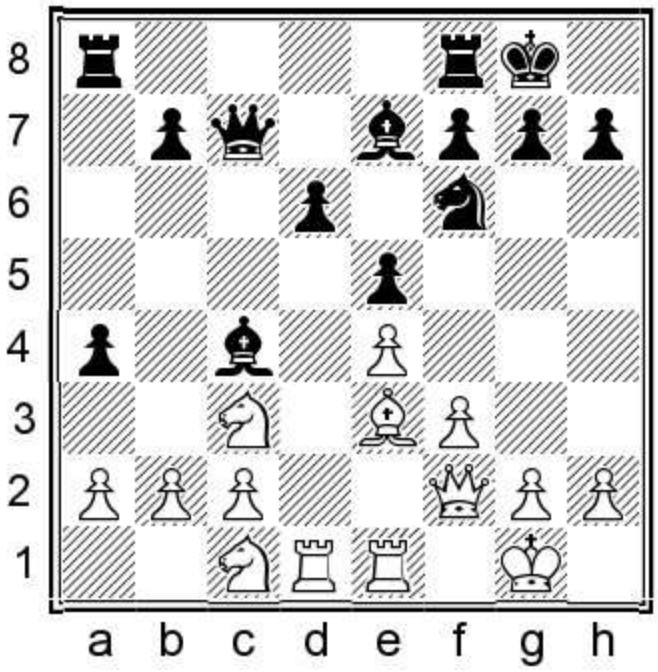
This is Black's most popular move. In contrast to the previous line, Black not only avoids offering a repetition of moves, but also prepares to turn the seemingly misplaced knight on a7 into a positive feature, by rerouting it via c8-b6.

12.Rd1 Nc8 13.0-0 Nb6
Black may also advance his a-pawn one or two more squares:
13...a4 14.Nc1 Nb6
14...a3?! has scored well but seems too optimistic: 15.b3 Qa5 (15...Nb6 16.Qf2 Nfd7 occurred in Kojovic – Todorovic, Kragujevac 2016, when 17.Rd2N± followed by Rfd1, N1e2 and so on, would have been excellent for White) 16.Nb5 d5 17.Qxa5 Rxa5 This was McClement – Iovcov, Kocaeli 2011, when 18.exd5N 18...Nxd5 19.Bd2 Nb4 20.c4± would have made it hard for Black to justify his queenside weaknesses – one active knight on b4 is not enough.



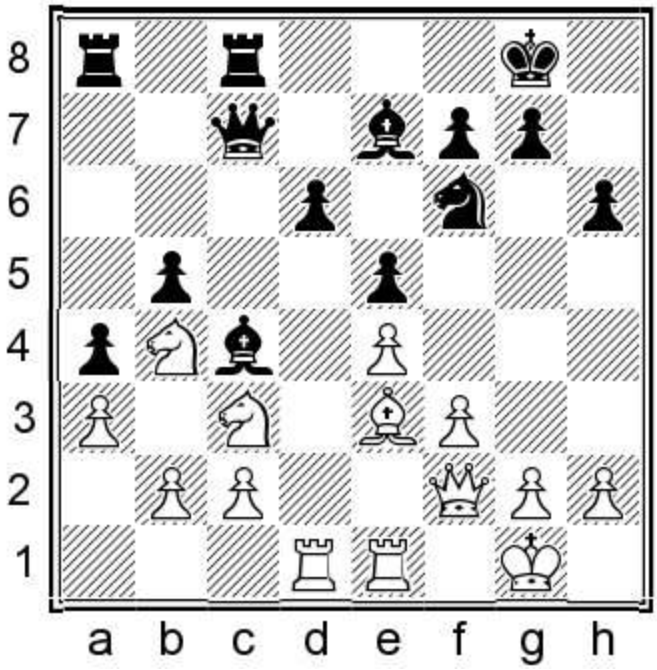
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15.Qf2
15.Rfe1!? is also possible, by analogy with the note to White's next move in the main line below.
15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 Bxc4 17.Rfe1 Qc7
17...Qc8 18.a3 does not change much: White will carry out the exact same plan of Nd3-b4.
Another game continued: 17...Be6 18.a3 h6 (18...Qc7 19.Nd3 Rac8 20.Nb4² Simon – Kopylov, Hannover 2016) 19.Nd3 Qc8 20.Nb4 Bc4 This was Broekmeulen – Decoster, Maastricht 2015, where Black found nothing better than returning with his bishop to c4. Surprisingly, the loss of time doesn't harm him too much, as he doesn't have many active ideas in any case. I like the idea of 21.Rd2N² followed by continuing the squeeze.

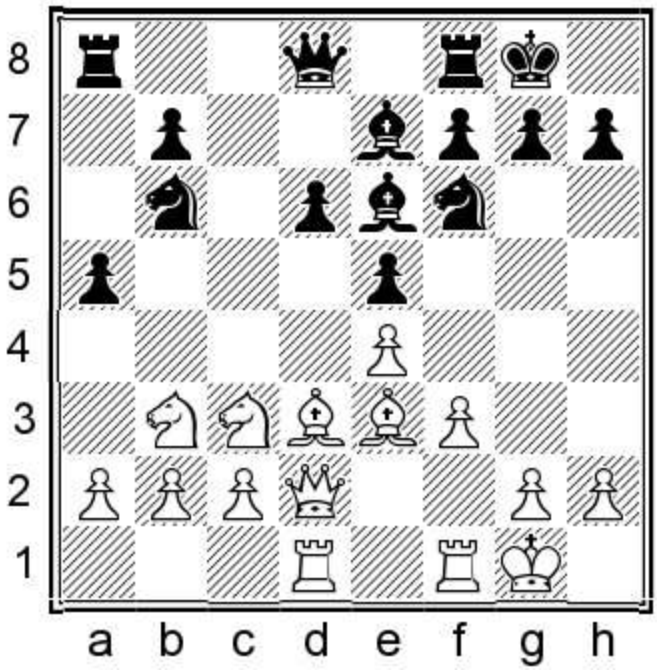



18.a3 b5 19.Nd3
19.N1a2 is also sensible and may transpose.
19...h6
Black can also eliminate the knight. 19...Bxd3 20.Rxd3 Qc4 21.Red1 Rfc8 This was Stiri – Papadopoulou, Aspropyrgos 2003, when 22.g4!± would have been best. Black will have to worry about g4-g5 to conquer the d5-square, and White may even be able to build an attack later in the game.
20.Nb4 Rfc8

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21.Rd2!N
21.Bb6 Qb7 22.Ncd5? is an instructive mistake. White wants to exchange some minor pieces to reach a dominant position with control over the d5-square, but fails to take into account dynamic factors. 22...Bxd5 23.Nxd5 Nxd5 24.Rxd5 Now in Borisov – Zinchenko, Kharkov 2004, both players overlooked 24...f5!N 25.Be3 b4!µ when White is in trouble: his supposed positional advantage means nothing when his queenside is falling apart. The text move is much better: once again, White simply strengthens his position by doubling rooks before taking any direct action.
21...Qb7 22.Red1²
Black has no counterplay and has a tough defence in store.



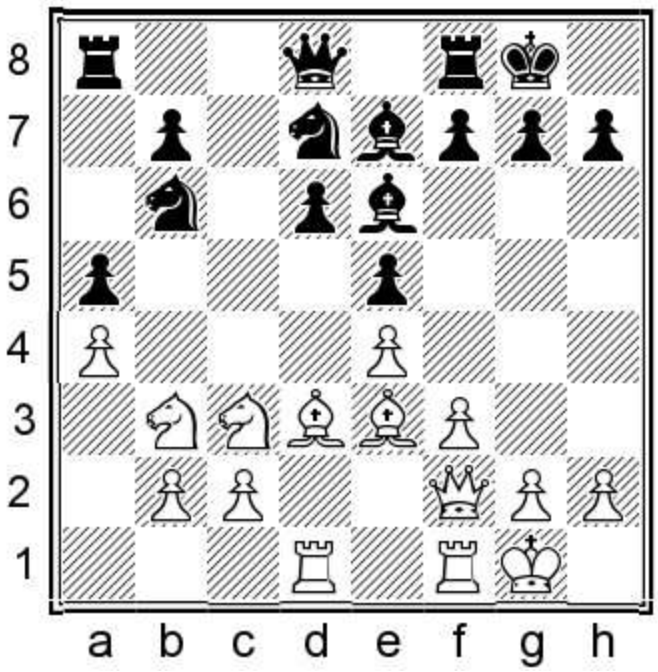
14.Qf2
This natural move has been the most popular choice.

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Another idea is:
14.Rfe1!?
This has not been played many times but it deserves consideration. White anticipates the upcoming exchange on c4 and removes his rook from the potential attack from Black's bishop.
14...Nc4
14...d5?! 15.exd5 Nbxd5 occurred in Talukdar – Kopylov, Montevideo 2017, when 16.Nc5!N would have been unpleasant for Black.
14...a4 15.Qf2 Nbd7 16.Nd2 Qb8 was played in Santos Ruiz – Lopez Martinez, Linares 2016. Out of a few playable options, I like 17.Ndb1!?N, clearing the d-file and preparing to put the knight on a3.
15.Bxc4 Bxc4 16.a4
White had slightly the more pleasant position in Baklan – Miton, Bled (ol) 2002. (16.Nc1!? is also interesting.)

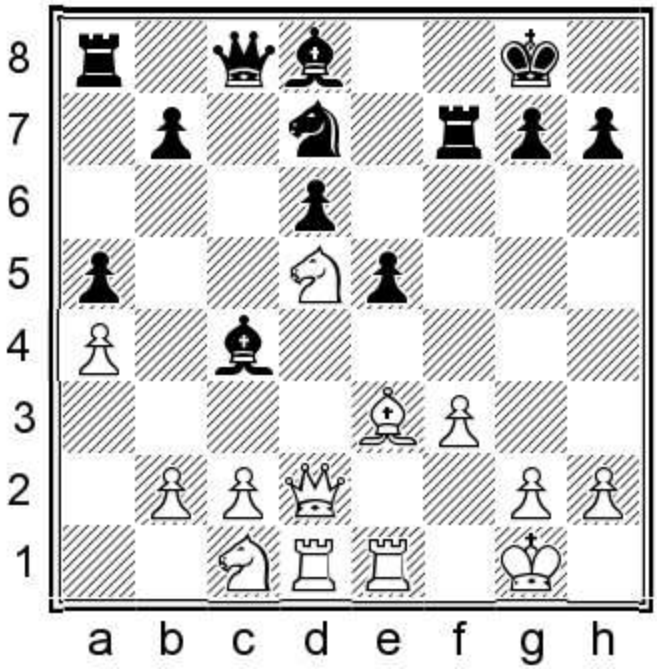
14...Nc4
This is certainly the most natural move.

14...Nfd7
This has also been tried by some strong players. I suggest:
15.a4
15.Rd2 Bh4!? 16.g3 Be7 17.Rfd1 a4 18.Nc1 was seen in Kryvoruchko – Savchenko, Plovdiv 2012, when 18...f5! 19.exf5 Bxf5 20.a3 Bxd3 21.Nxd3 Nc4 22.Re2 Qa5$^{\infty}$ would have been promising for Black.



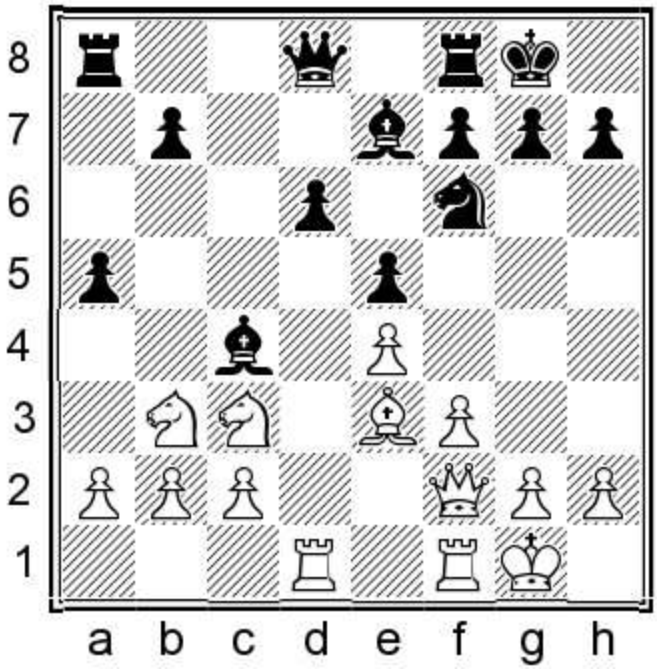

15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 Bxc4 17.Rfe1 Qc8 18.Nd5 Bd8 19.Nc1 f5 20.exf5 Rxf5 21.Qd2 Rf7
In Schneider – Zinchenko, Pardubice 2008, White should have continued:

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22.Ne2!N²
With the following point:
22...Bxd5 23.Qxd5 Qxc2 24.Qb5
White will soon regain the pawn while keeping some initiative.

15.Bxc4 Bxc4



16.Rfe1 Qc8
I checked a bunch of other moves:

16...a4 gives White a choice. 17.Nc1 is the simple option, transposing to the 13...a4 line analysed in the notes above. However, the current move order gives White the additional option of 17.Nc5!?, which also looks quite

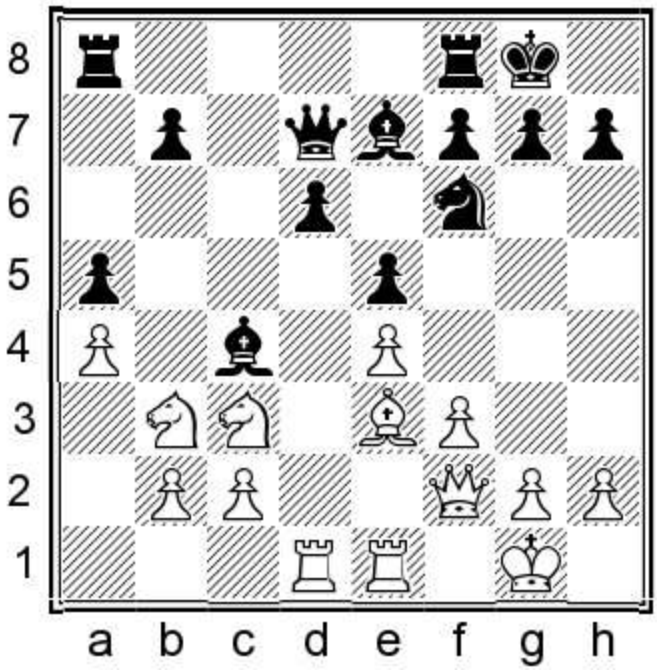
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promising.

16...b5 is no problem in view of 17.Nd2! Qc8 18.Nxc4 Qxc4 19.Qe2 Rfc8 20.Qxc4 Rxc4 21.Nxb5 (21.Re2!?N) 21...Rxc2 22.Rd2 Rxd2 23.Bxd2 and White had an easy endgame edge in Wei Yi – Gao Rui, China 2015.

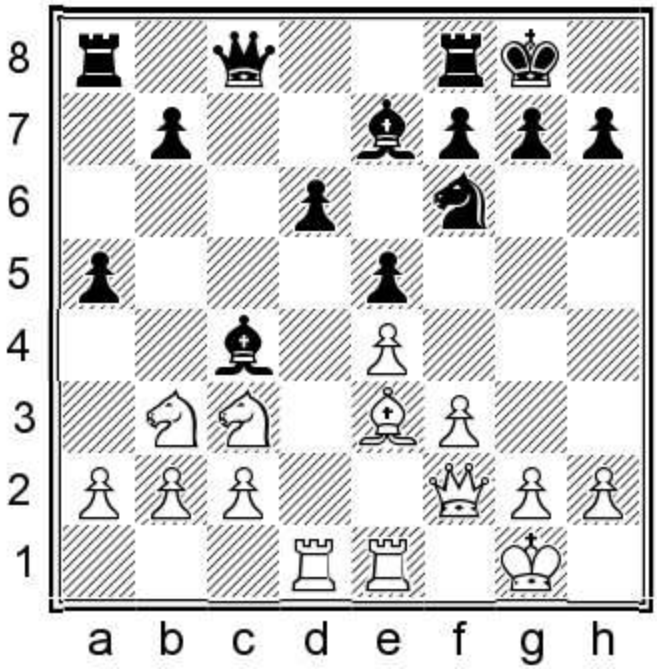
16...Qb8 17.a4 b5 is well met by: 18.Nd2! Rc8 19.Nxc4 bxc4 20.Nb5² White kept a pleasant edge in Kovacevic – Vuckovic, Budva 2003.

16...Qd7 gives White more than one good option. 17.a4!? (White can also consider 17.Bb6N 17...Bd8 18.Bxd8 Rfxd8 19.Nd2 Be6 20.a4 intending Ndb1-a3. Black cannot free himself with 20...d5? as 21.Nc4! is nasty.)




17...Rfc8!?N (after 17...b5 18.Nd2! Rfc8 19.Nxc4 Rxc4 20.axb5 White won a pawn in Mamedov – Nuri, Aix-les-Bains 2011) The text move was suggested as an improvement by an anonymous ChessBase annotator, but 18.Nd2!? Be6 19.Ndb1² is promising for White, with the knight coming to a3 next.

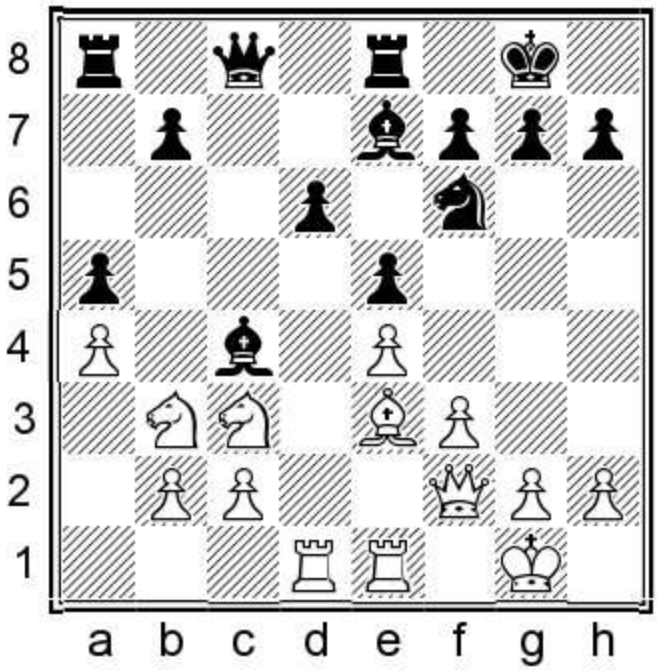
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17.a4
White clamps down on the queenside and prepares to manoeuvre the b3-knight to d2, b1 and a3.
The immediate 17.Nd2 Be6 18.Ndb1 allows Black an interesting opportunity: 18...b5! 19.Nxb5 d5 20.exd5 Nxd5© Black had plenty of play for the pawn in Tauscher – Tomek, email 2012.

17...Re8!?
17...Qc6 18.Bb6 Bd8 19.Bxd8 Rfxd8 20.Nd2 Be6 21.Ndb1 Rac8 22.Rd2² was pleasant for White in Panarin – Y. Vovk, Cappelle-la-Grande 2008.

The text move seems to me like Black's most promising idea, as the rook will be well placed in the event of a future ...d5 followed by opening the centre. After some experimentation with the computer, I came up with a new concept:



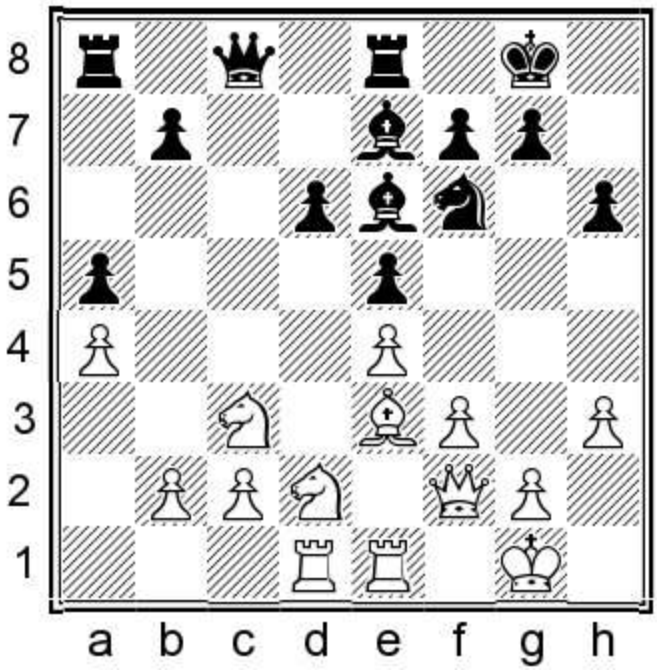
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18.h3!?N
The idea is to play Nd2, with a view to following up with f3-f4 after the bishop goes to e6.

The typical plan of 18.Nd2N 18...Be6 19.Ndb1 allows 19...Qc6 20.Na3 d5! 21.exd5 Nxd5 22.Nxd5 Bxd5 23. Nb5 Be6 and Black is okay.

18.Bg5 Qc6 (18...Ng4!?N is also playable; after 19.Qd2 Bxb3 20.fxg4 Bxg5 21.Qxg5 Bxc2 22.Rc1 White has enough play for a pawn but no advantage according to my analysis) 19.Bxf6 Bxf6 20.Nd2 This occurred in Oleksienko – Durarbayli, Minsk 2014, and now 20...Be6N 21.Nf1 Bd8! 22.Ne3 Bb6 would have been fine for Black.

18...h6 19.Nd2 Be6



20.f4 exf4 21.Bxf4²
I like White's prospects: the loss of the bishop pair does not harm his chances too much, and he can improve his position with Nf3-d4 and possibly putting a knight on b5.

Conclusion

I suggest meeting the Classical Sicilian with 6.f3 intending Be3, since the English Attack is our weapon of choice against other Sicilians too.

We started by considering sidelines such as 6...Nxd4 7.Qxd4 g6 and 6...a6 7.Be3 d5!?, both of which require accurate handling if White is to obtain an opening advantage. We then considered 6...Qb6?!, which is quite a popular attempt to drive the knight back to b3, but it proves to be a mistake after 7.Be3! when eating the b2-pawn leads to trouble for Black, whether he does it immediately or on the next move.

The big main line occurs after 6...e5 7.Nb3, when there are many branches to consider. It is hard to give much general advice, as each move order has its own possibilities and nuances. However, there is one particularly important issue to keep in mind, which is how to respond to the ...a5 thrust, which may come at practically any moment in these lines. There is no set 'rule' for how to react – it all depends on the specifics of the position. For

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instance, in variation D1 we met ...a5 with a2-a4; in variation D2 we completely ignored it; in variation D412, when our knight was already on d5, we ignored ...a5 and responded with c2-c4; and in variation D422 we met 9...a5 with 10.Bb5. So please pay attention to the explanations of why each reaction makes sense in one position but not another, as simply trying to memorize the moves may only lead to confusion.

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# Chapter 10 - Najdorf-Scheveningen

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4

4...Nc6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Be3 (6...Be7) 335
6...Nge7 335
6...a6 336
4...Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Be3 Be7 7.f3
7...e5 337
7...Nc6 The Classical Scheveningen line 338

Najdorf – 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3
Early deviations 6...Qb6!? Game 27 344
6...e6 7.Be3
7...Be7 The English Attack at club level Game 28 351
7...d5!? (7...Qb6?!) Game 29 353
7...h5 (7...b5 8.Qd2 h5?!; 7...Nbd7) Game 30 356
7...Nc6 8.Qd2 360
8...h5!? (8...Bd7; 8...Qc7) 361
8...Be7 Game 31 364
7...b5! 8.Qd2 367
8...Bb7 368
8...b4 9.Na4 Nbd7!? 10.0-0-0 374
10...Qc7 (10...d5?!; 10...Ne5?) Game 32 374
10...Qa5 Game 33 376
8...Nbd7! 9.g4! 379
9...Nb6?! (9...Bb7?!) Game 34 379
9...h6 384
10.a3!? Game 35 384
10.Rg1!? 390
10.0-0-0 392
10...Bb7?! Game 36 392
10...b4! Game 37 399

When we published Experts vs the Sicilian in 2004, GM Thomas Luther chose 6.Bg5 against the Najdorf, and GM Viktor Gavrikov chose 6.g4 against the Scheveningen. Already then, but to a greater extent now, the Scheveningen has become a marginal opening – played so rarely that it has become a subsection of the Najdorf in this book.

While the Najdorf is not as popular as a decade ago, it is still one of the best and most important openings in chess. After 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 there are many options. Popular at the moment are 6.h3 and 6.Bg5, but also 6.Nb3, 6.a4, 6.a3, 6.h4 and every other weird touch-move-move seems to deserve a go at least once.

We debated a lot what to go for, with only 6.Bg5 excluded (as Parimarjan Negi did a full book on this quite recently – Grandmaster Repertoire – 1.e4 vs The Sicilian I). Eventually we settled on the English Attack – the set-up with Be3 and f2-f3. We shall choose 6.f3 against the Najdorf move order and 6.Be3 against the Scheveningen move order (we shall discuss the reason for these move orders shortly). This line was popularized in the 1980s by Short, Nunn and other English players. If Black does not know how to play against it, he can get crushed quite rapidly, while even against strong computer preparation, it remains very dangerous. While not the

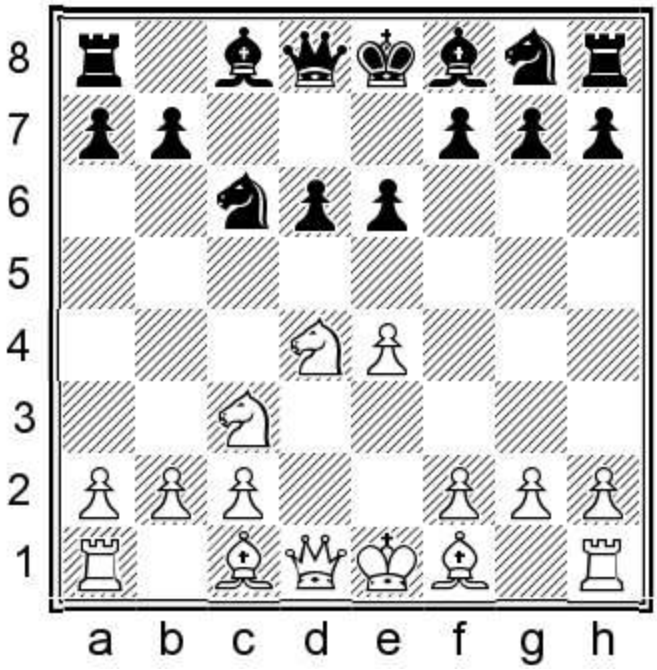
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most popular move at the moment, my opinion is that this is the best line available for White.

In this chapter we shall look first at the Scheveningen lines and then the Najdorf-Scheveningen lines. I had no illusion that I would be able to present the reader with an advantage everywhere, but was quite satisfied to find that Black's life is far less comfortable than is perhaps commonly thought. So many lines have been attempted, but as I shall demonstrate, only one gives Black a serious chance of equalizing. There too he will have to be well-prepared and accurate, while White has many ways to create an interesting game, so this should not be discouraging. With computers it is frequently possible to prove equality in the opening, but unless you take it with you to the game (which I hope you do not), this is of little use.

Before we get to the Najdorf version of the Scheveningen, I wish to cover an attempt by Black to reach a Scheveningen-type position using either a 2...e6 or 2...Nc6 move order. I realize that starting a Najdorf chapter with a move order other than 2...d6 is a jolt (especially as Black's a-pawn may remain on a7!) but in its plans and intentions, the following Scheveningen-style try belongs next to its Najdorf-Scheveningen cousins.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 d6
Of course Black could reach the same position in various move orders, particularly 2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e6 5.Nc3 d6.




Black is playing a version of a Scheveningen while delaying ...Nf6. This is more of an issue for fans of the Keres Attack, as g4-g5 would not come with the same force.

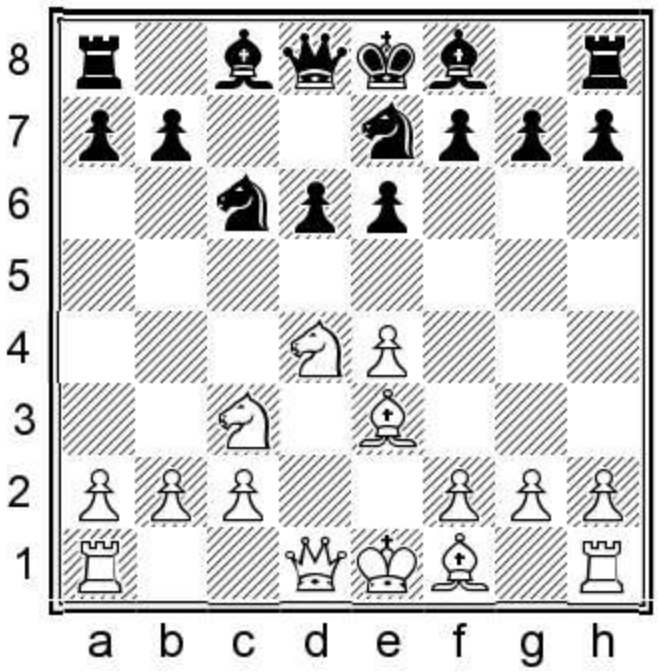
6.Be3
With the Keres Attack no longer on the menu, the great majority of Black players have continued with 6...Nf6, transposing to normal positions which we will see later.

I checked a couple of independent lines: 6...Nge7 and 6...a6.

6...Be7 was played by Tal on a couple of occasions, but it is not much more than a transpositional possibility. In the event of 7.Qd2 a6 8.0-0-0 Qc7 9.g4N 9...h6 10.h4 Black has a much less active position than in most main lines, and he can hardly leave the knight on g8 forever.

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6...Nge7



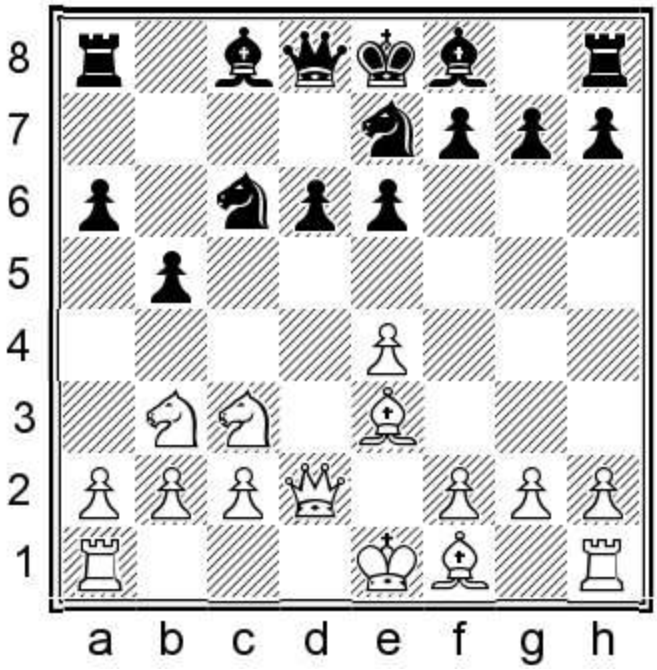
7.Nb3!
By avoiding the knight exchange, we highlight the fact that Black's knight is not well placed on e7.

7.Qd2 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Nc6 is Black's main idea – although even then, 9.Qd2 Be7 10.0-0-0 gives White good chances.

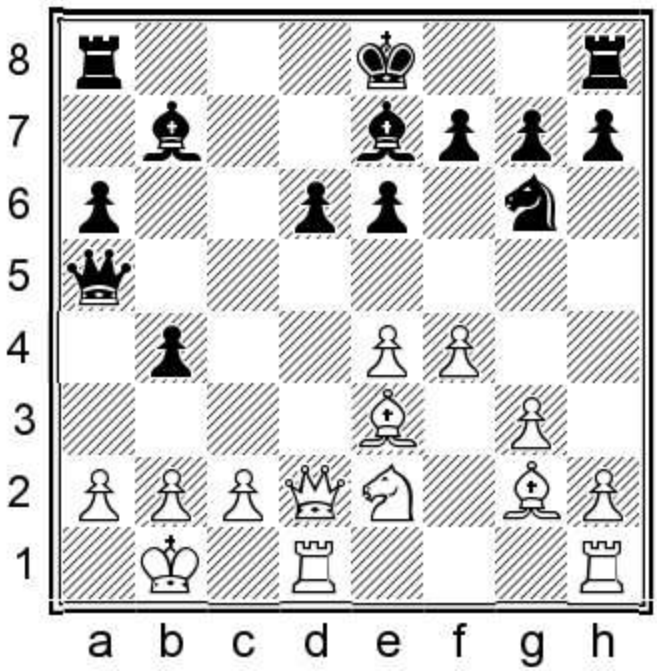
7...a6
I also considered 7...Ng6 8.f4 Be7 and now 9.Qf3, 9.g3N and 9.Qd2N are all excellent options.

8.Qd2 b5
8...Ng6 9.f4 Be7 10.g3 is likely to transpose, as Black will surely play ...b5 at some point.

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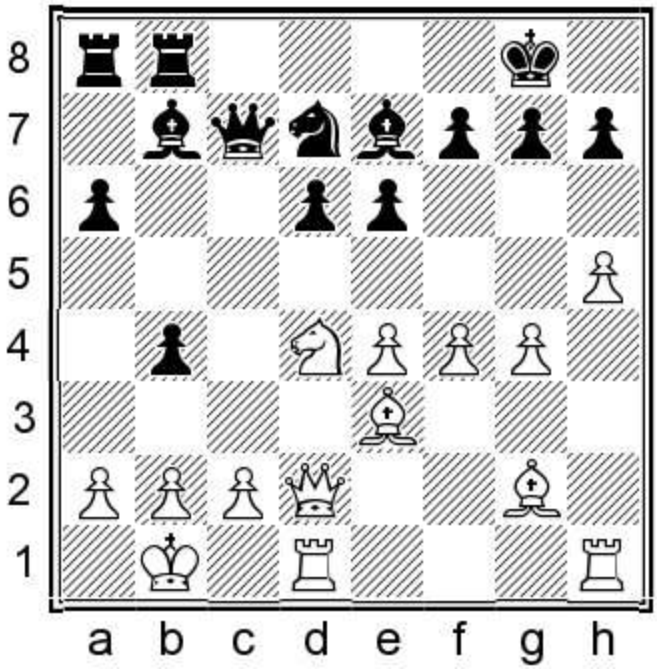


9.0-0-0 Ng6 10.f4 Be7 11.g3 Na5 12.Nxa5 Qxa5 13.Kb1 Bb7 14.Bg2 b4 15.Ne2
These moves were not forced, but they represent sensible play on both sides. The prevailing theme is the misplaced knight on g6, which serves no purpose other than presenting a target which enables White to advance on the kingside with gain of tempo.



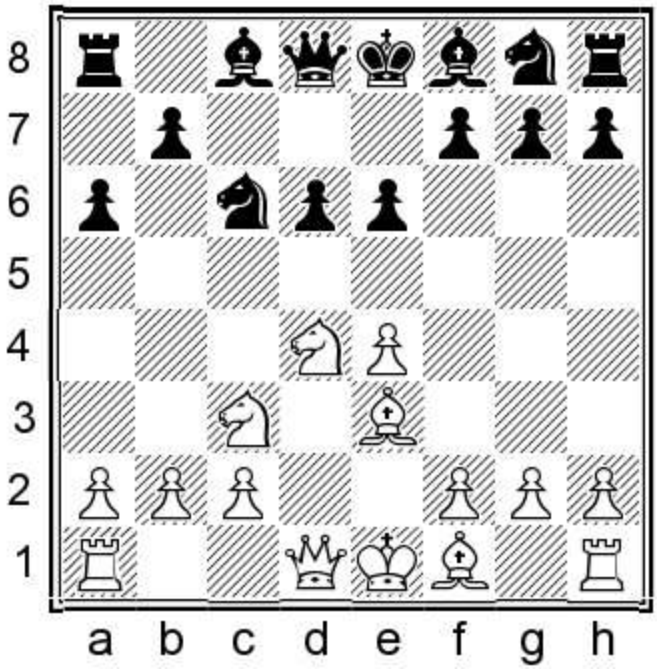
15...0-0 16.h4 Rfb8 17.h5 Nf8 18.Nd4 Qc7 19.g4 Nd7
In Wang Jue – Xu Yinglun, Zhongshan 2014, White should have continued:

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20.Bf3!N 20...Nc5 21.Qg2±
White stabilizes the centre and has a clear advantage in the attacking race.

6...a6

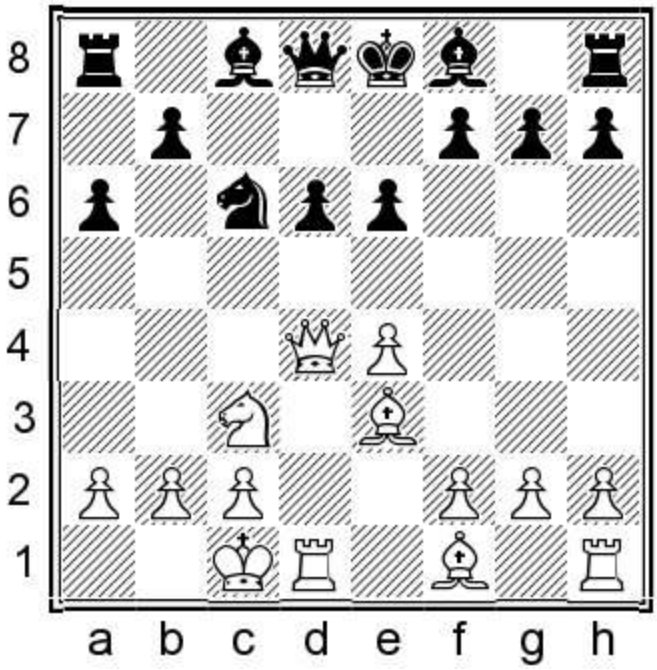


This time Black leaves his knight on g8 for a while and tries to accelerate his queenside play.

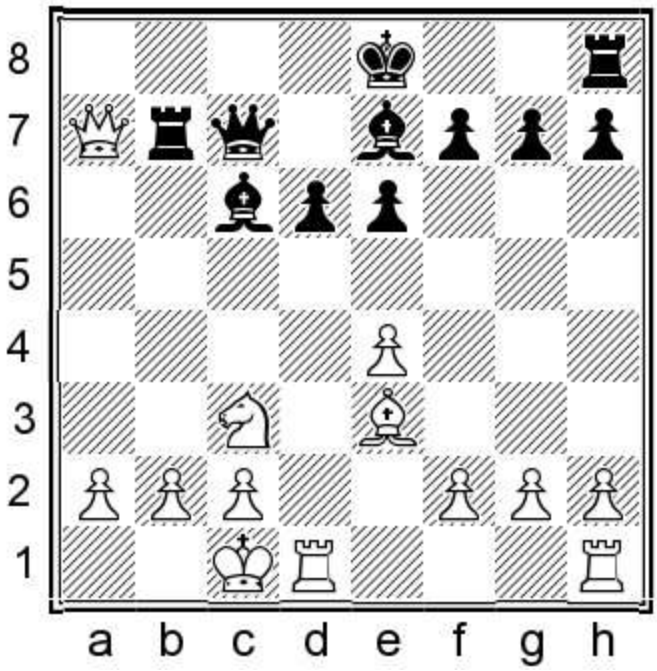
7.Qd2 Bd7
7...Nge7 8.Nb3! transposes to the previous variation.

I also considered:
7...Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Ne7 9.0-0-0 Nc6

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10.Qb6! Bd7
10...Qxb6 11.Bxb6 Bd7 12.Bc7! wins a pawn.
11.Qxb7
11.f4!? is also promising.
11...Rb8 12.Qxa6 Be7 13.Bb5 Qc7 14.Bxc6
White is spoilt for choice, with 14.Bf4± and 14.Qa3 d5 15.Bc5± being tempting alternatives.
14...Bxc6 15.Qa7 Rb7



In Bakunts – Babujian, Yerevan 2016, White should have continued:
16.Qa6N 16...0-0 17.Rd4!±
The game goes on, but Black hardly has enough compensation for two pawns.

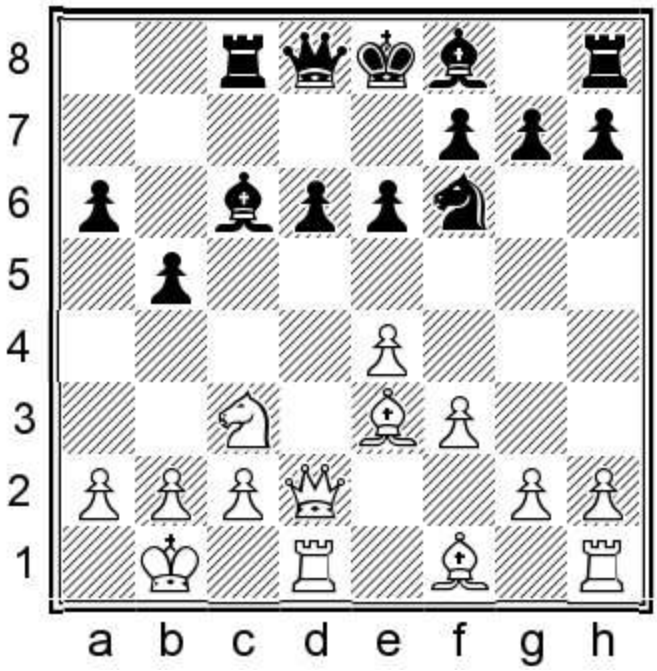
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8.0-0-0
For the moment, we continue our normal development. As a general rule, our plan will be to meet ...b5 by exchanging knights on c6, after which we may or may not reroute the other knight to d4.

8...Rc8
8...b5 9.Nxc6 Bxc6 10.f3 Nf6 (10...b4 11.Ne2 d5 12.Nd4 Bb7 13.e5²) 11.g4 occurred in Najer – Milov, Philadelphia 2007. White has a promising position, in accordance with the plan outlined above.

9.Kb1 b5
Once again, this is our cue to exchange knights.

10.Nxc6! Bxc6 11.f3 Nf6




12.g4
12.Ne2 Be7 13.Nd4 Bb7 14.g4² also favoured White in Vallejo Pons – Bischoff, Mainz (rapid) 2003.

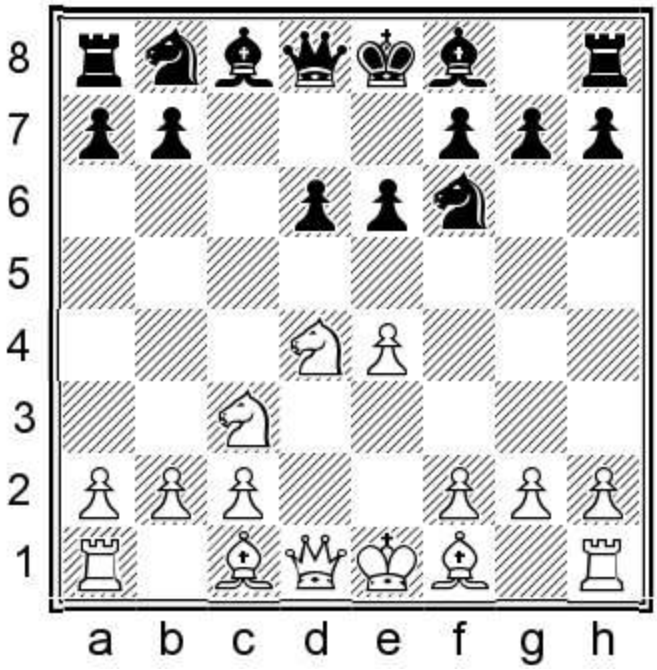
12...h6 13.h4 Qc7 14.Bd3²
In Von Hoesslin – De Mol, Bad Woerishofen 2003, White was ready for g4-g5. I consider this a more flexible way of playing than the Vallejo game – although White is doing well in either case, so take your pick.

Avoiding the Najdorf

One of the practical advantages of the English Attack is that the Scheveningen almost disappears as an independent opening. After 6.Be3 Black's best move is 6...a6 without a doubt. However, this does not mean we should not have a look at what happens if Black refrains from this transposition.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6

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This is the pure Scheveningen move order. In the old days, everyone recommended the Keres Attack with 6.g4!?, but as we are recommending the English Attack with 6.f3 against the Najdorf, it makes sense to play in the same way against the Scheveningen. Except, there is no reason to fear ...Ng4, so we can put the bishop on e3 first.

6.Be3 Be7 7.f3
At this juncture, all variations including castling and so on, transpose to the Najdorf or Classical Scheveningen lines below.

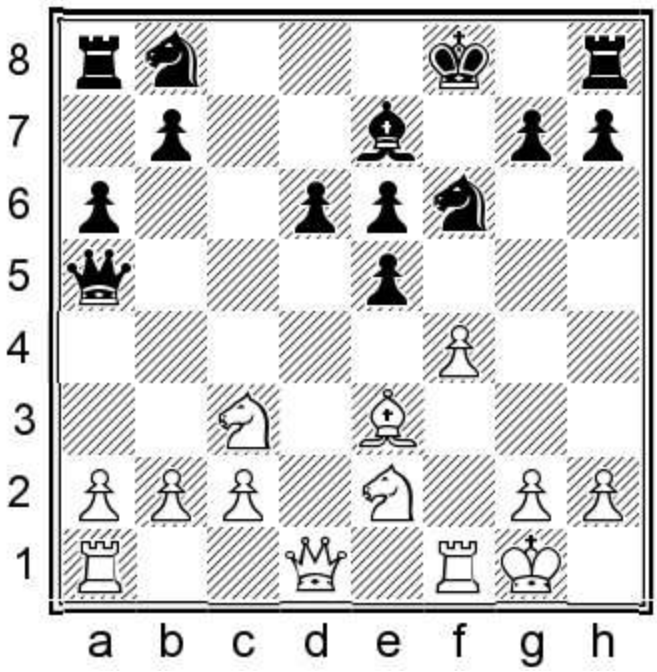
7...e5
This is the only independent line.
7...0-0 8.Qd2 d5 9.e5 Nfd7 10.f4 Nc6 11.0-0-0 is a favourable version of the French Steinitz. The bishop is misplaced on e7; in the ...Be7-lines there, Black does not take early on d4.

8.Bb5†! Kf8
8...Bd7? 9.Nf5 is already winning for White.

9.Nde2 Be6 10.f4[2]
White already has a fine advantage. One example continued:

10...a6 11.Ba4 Qa5 12.Bb3 Nxe4?! 13.0-0 Nf6 14.Bxe6 fxe6
Borgo – Rasik, Bad Woerishofen 1993. At this point the strongest was:

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15.f5!N
For example:

15...exf5 16.Rxf5 Nbd7 17.Nd5 Rc8 18.Nef4! Ke8 19.a4!
White has a winning attack.

There is no reason to fear such artificial play.

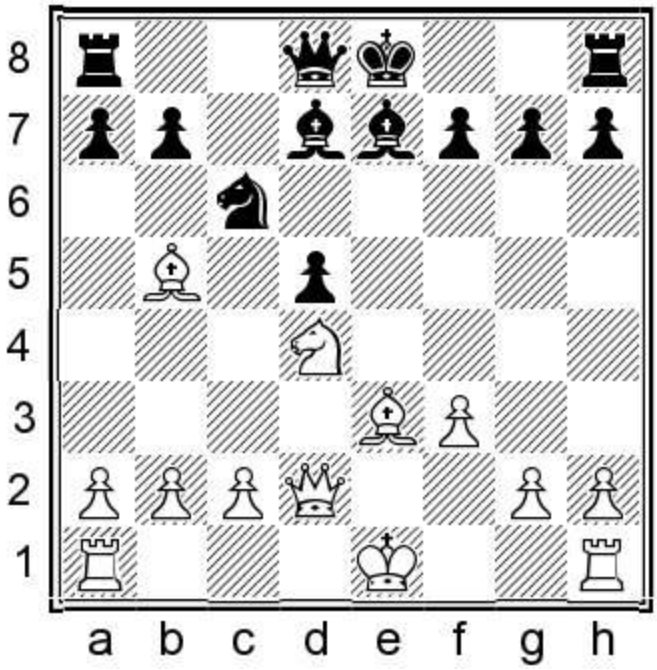
The Classical Scheveningen line

Earlier I gave the impression that there was no serious way to avoid the Najdorf when playing the Scheveningen. This is partially true, as hardly anyone would ever play the Scheveningen in the spirit of the Classical Sicilian. However, as we go 6.f3 against the Classical, we should anticipate 6...e6 as a serious move in that position. Once again a quick ...a6 is to be expected, but it is not the only line. Black can also go for quick kingside development, leaving us with a hybrid line:
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Be3 Be7 7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 0-0
The neutral approach.

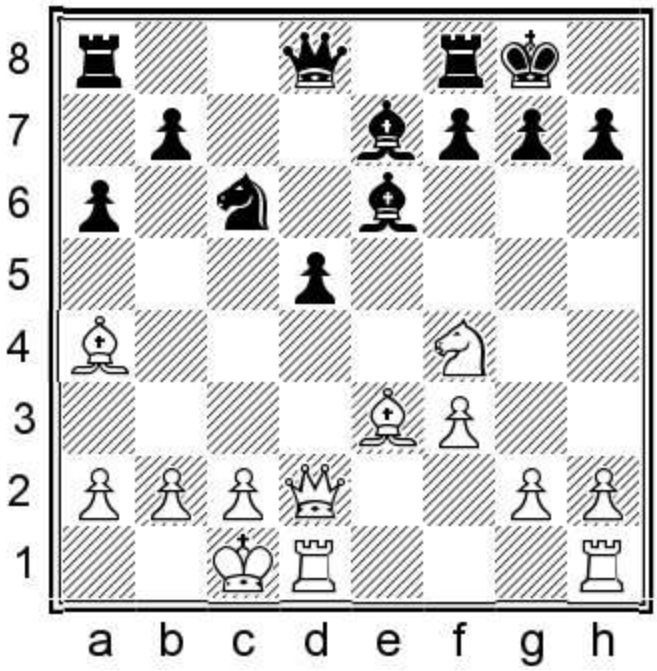
8...a6 transposes to Game 31.

8...Bd7?! is a dubious move order which gives White more than one good option: 9.Ndb5!? has scored highly, while simple play with 9.0-0-0 is also strong.

8...d5
Trying to solve all Black's problems at once, but it is foiled by an accurate and obvious reply:
9.Bb5! Bd7
The best chance, but now an IQP is inevitable.
10.exd5 Nxd5
Of similar strength is 10...exd5 11.0-0-0 0-0 12.Kb1 a6 as in Hossain – Sahu, Mumbai 2011, when 13.Ba4N was logical, heading for b3 to pressure the IQP.
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11.Nxd5 exd5



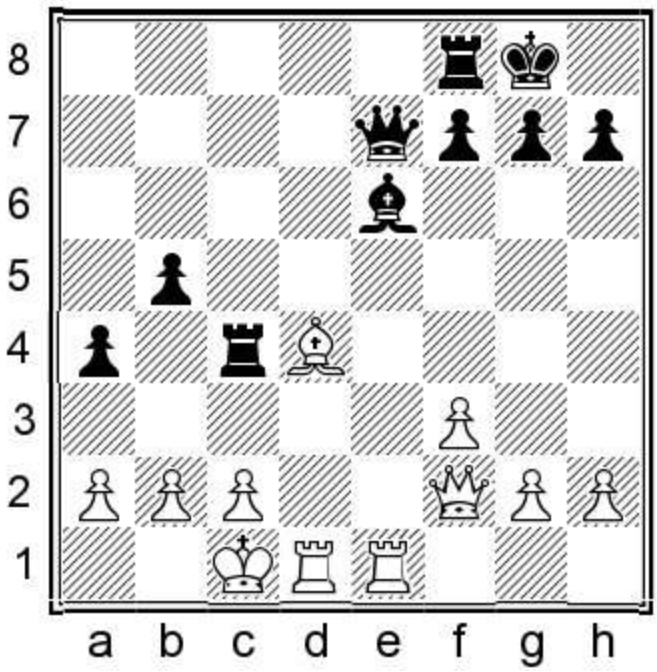
12.Ne2!?
Playing to attack the IQP rather than merely blockade it.
12.0-0-0 Rc8 could be similar after 13.Ne2!? but the independent option 13.Bxc6 bxc6 14.Nb3 0-0 15.Bc5 Re8 16.Rhe1 Be6 gave White no more than a tiny edge in Svidler – Shengelia, Warsaw 2013.
12...0-0
No better is 12...Be6 13.0-0-0 Qc7 14.Nf4 0-0-0 as in Simmelink – Shishkin, email 2007, when simply 15. Kb1± was good.
13.0-0-0 Be6
Or 13...a6 14.Ba4! planning Bb3 and Nf4 is similar.
14.Nf4 a6 15.Ba4



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It’s worth continuing the line as the play is forcing:

15...Na5 16.Nxd5 Nc4 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Qf2 b5
Trying to keep more tension.
After the simple 18...Nxe3 19.Qxe3 Qc7 20.Kb1 b5 21.Bb3² White keeps an extra pawn.
19.Bb3 Rac8 20.Bd4 a5 21.Rhe1 a4 22.Bxc4 Rxc4

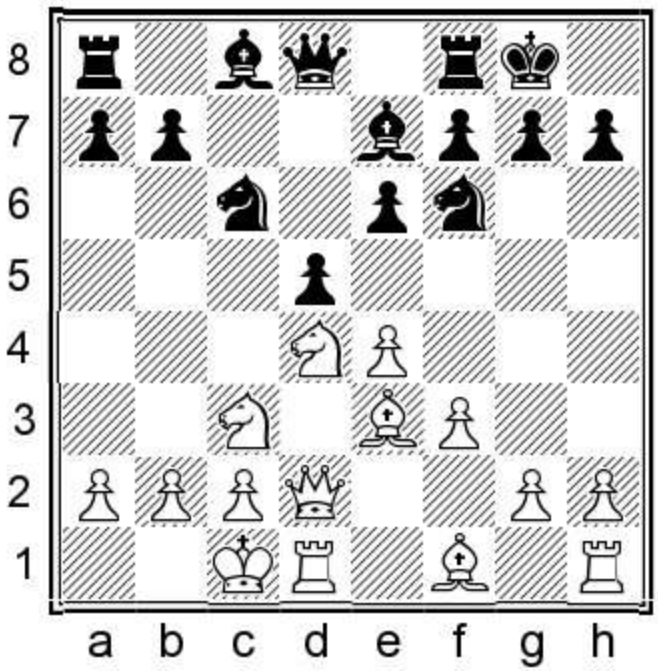


In Wang Yu – Dembo, Moscow 2004, the best way to fight for the initiative in this opposite-coloured bishop position was:
23.f4!±

9.0-0-0
9.g4 d5 10.g5 is possible, but I see no need to take special countermeasures against Black's next move.

9...d5
9...a6 transposes to Game 31 while most other moves are met by 10.g4 with a typical kingside attack.

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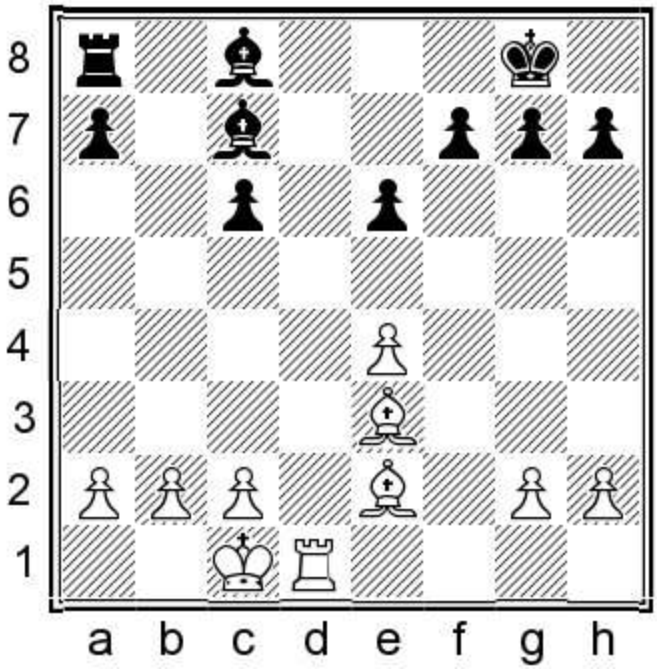
10.Be2!
Keeping the tension creates problems for Black.

10.exd5 is much more common but I find it less convincing after 10...Nxd5 11.Nxd5 Qxd5.

10...Nxd4
Keeping the queens on allows Black more hope of seeing a middlegame blunder.

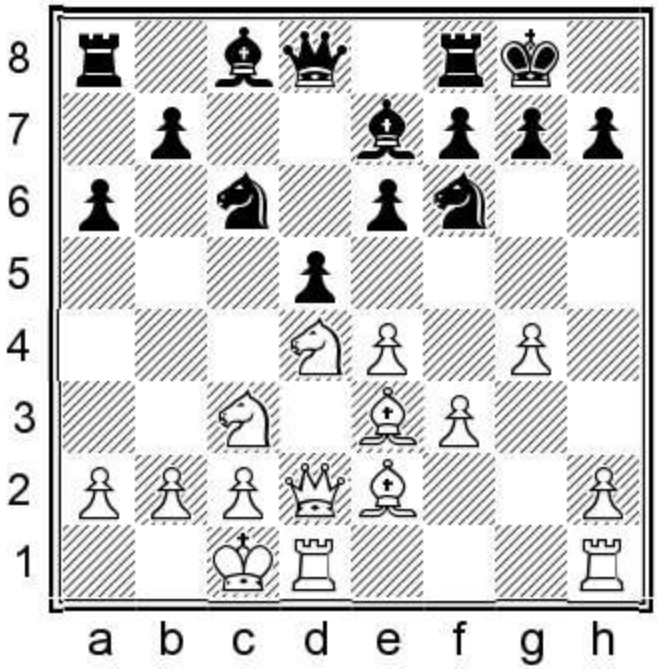
10...dxe4 11.Nxc6
This leads to a simplified position with a pleasant edge for White:
11...bxc6
11...Qxd2† 12.Rxd2 bxc6 13.Nxe4 Nxe4 14.fxe4² leads to similar play. After 14...e5 15.Bc4 Black has somehow scored 2/2 in practice, but it's obvious that White stands better.
12.Qxd8 Rxd8 13.Rxd8† Bxd8 14.Rd1 Bc7
14...Be7 15.Nxe4 Nxe4 16.fxe4 e5 17.Bc4² Navara – Movsesian, Rijeka (rapid) 2010.
15.Nxe4 Nxe4 16.fxe4²

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Bologan – Tosic, Rijeka 2010.

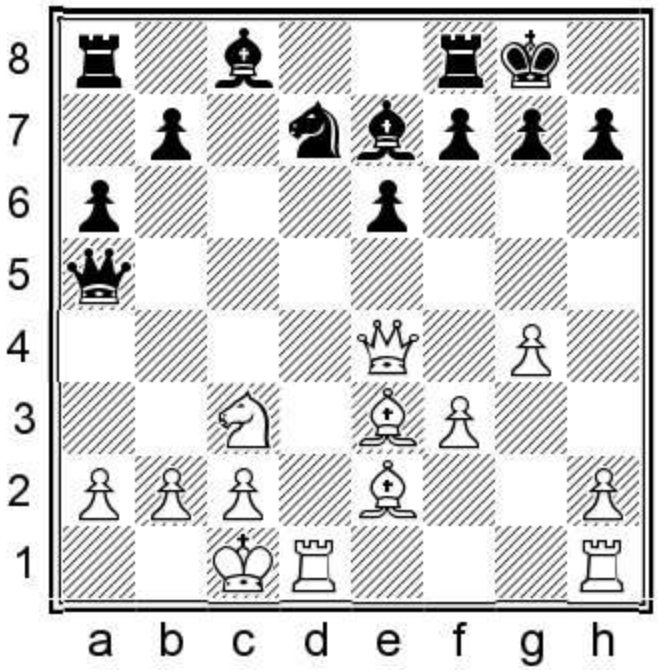
10...a6 11.g4!?
The most promising option.
Instead 11.Kb1 Qc7 transposes to a Giri – Van Wely game I will mention on page 364, but which is not part of our repertoire, as I believe it does not offer White much.



11...Nxd4
The most testing response, keeping his queenside as one pawn island.
After 11...dxe4 12.Nxc6 Qxd2† 13.Rxd2 bxc6 White can secure a pleasant endgame edge with: 14.fxe4!N (instead 14.Nxe4 Nxe4 15.fxe4 e5 was next to nothing for White in T. Kosintseva – Timofeev, Moscow 2010) 14...e5 15.Rg1² Intending g4-g5 without allowing ...Ng4. And note that 15...Bb4 16.Rd3 does not trouble

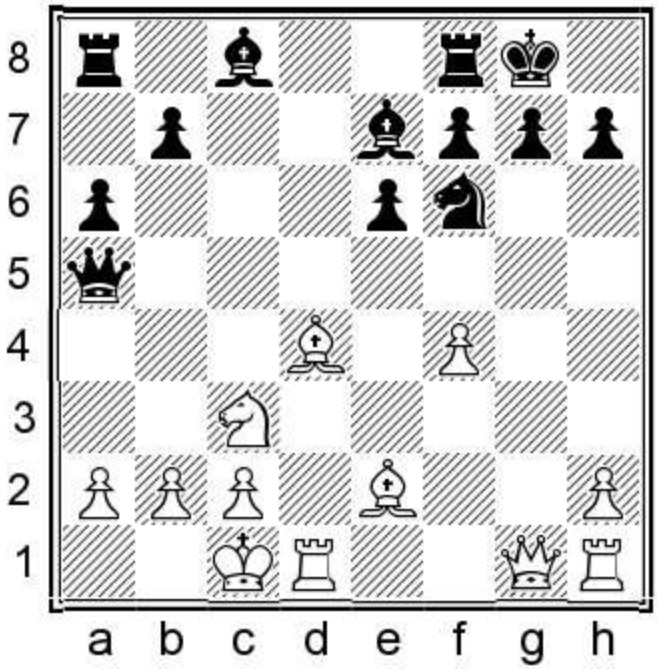
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White.
12.Qxd4 dxe4 13.Qe5!
In this case, without a weak pawn on c6, the endgame would give White little.
13...Nd7
The best defence.
13...Qe8?! 14.Bd4!± is unpleasant for Black, and 14...Bd7?! as in Pucher – Riff, Mulhouse 2011, was already losing: 15.g5!N 15...Nh5 16.f4 f6 17.gxf6 Nxf6 18.Rhg1+– The kingside attack is overwhelming.
14.Qxe4 Qa5



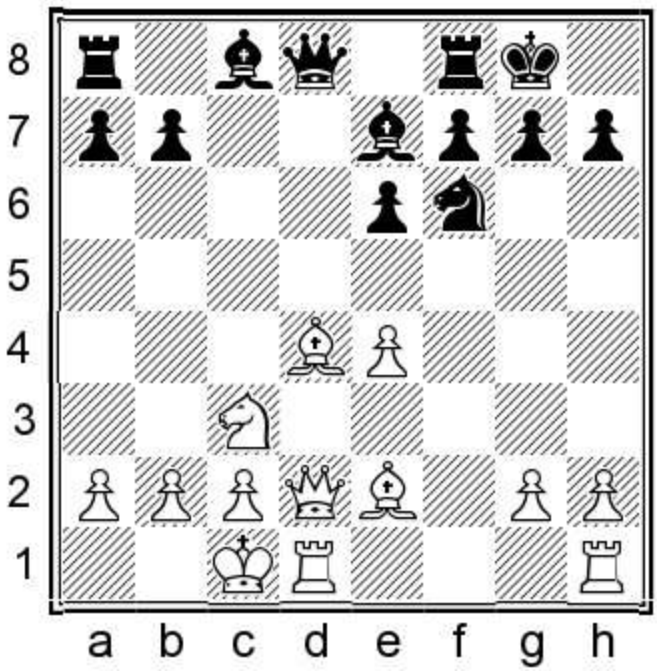
15.Bd4!?N
More aggressive than the previously-played tries. The best defence still leaves White better, and finding that defence without computer assistance would be tough.
15.Kb1 Nf6 16.Qf4 e5 17.Qa4 Qxa4 18.Nxa4 Be6 left Black almost level in Wang Hao – Timofeev, Ningbo (rapid) 2010.
15...Nf6
One of two moves of equal value.
15...e5 allows a forcing line: 16.Nd5! Bg5† 17.f4 Bxf4† 18.Nxf4 exd4 (not 18...exf4?? 19.Bd3+–) 19.Nd5 Nc5
The right choice (surprisingly, to me at least, 19...Qxa2?! fails to trouble the white king after: 20.Bd3 f5 21. Qxd4±). 20.Qxd4² White has the more active pieces.
16.Qe3!
Threatening Bb6 and preparing f3-f4, but apparently falling for a trick.
16...Nxg4 17.Qg1
That newly opened g-file is handy.
Certainly not 17.fxg4?? Bg5.
17...Nf6 18.f4²

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White’s kingside play is worth much more than a pawn. The best the engine can suggest is:
18...Rd8 19.Kb1 g6 20.Qe3 Rxd4 21.Rxd4
But Black does not have enough for the exchange.

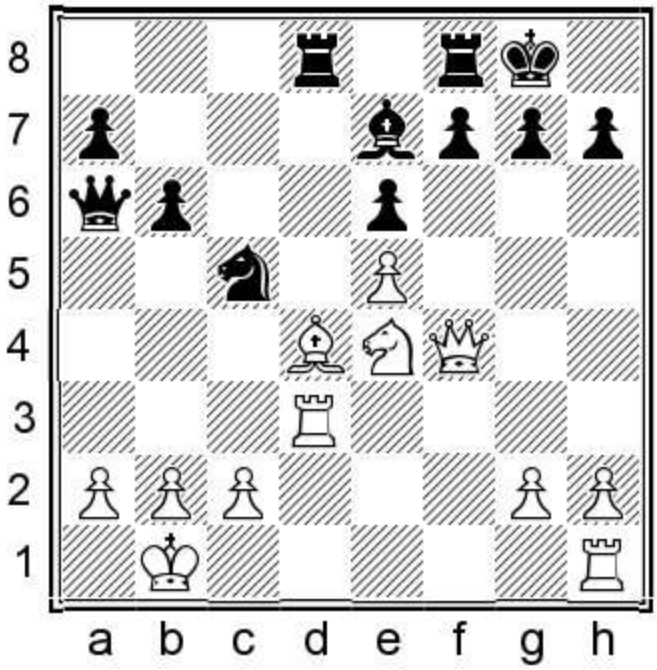
11.Bxd4 dxe4 12.fxe4



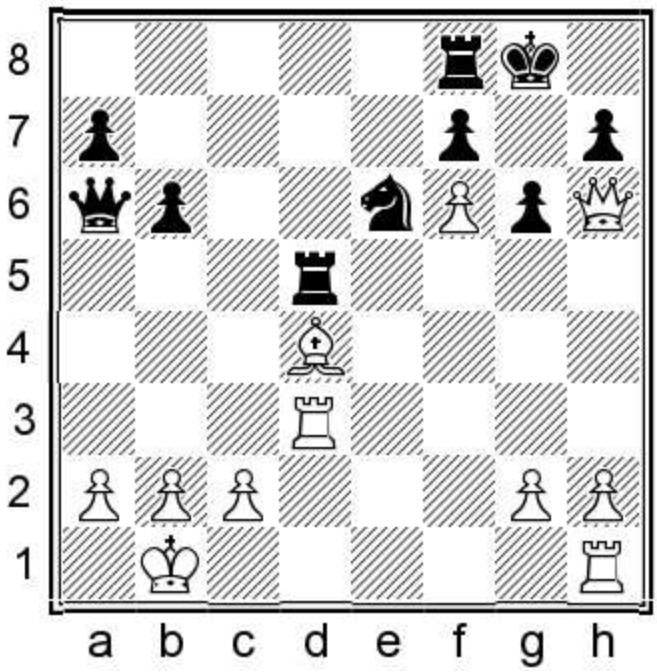
12...Nd7
This has been played in almost every game so far.
12...Qa5
This has been played in one game, which White won in great style:
13.Kb1 b6 14.e5 Nd7 15.Qf4 Ba6 16.Bxa6 Qxa6 17.Ne4[2]
The e5-pawn gives White useful attacking prospects.

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17...Rad8 18.Rd3 Nc5?!



19.Nf6†! Bxf6 20.exf6 e5! 21.Qxe5 g6?
The only way to stay alive was 21...Ne6 though after various moves, including 22.b3!?± White is obviously much better.
22.Qg5+–
Black's king is too weak.
22...Ne6 23.Qh6 Rd5



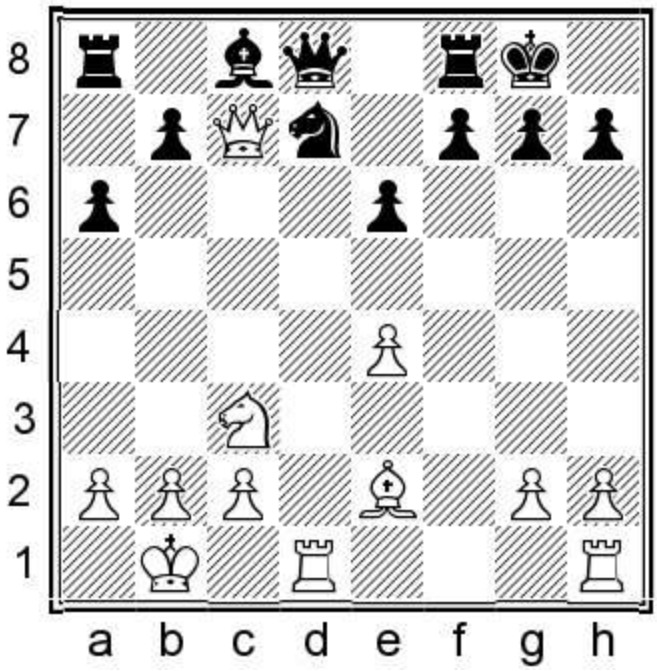
24.g4!
Cutting out ...Rh5 ends the contest rapidly.
24...Qb7 25.Re1 Rfd8 26.Rh3 Rh5 27.gxh5 Rxd4 28.hxg6 fxg6 29.Rhe3

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1–0 Navara – Rasik, Ostrava 2010.

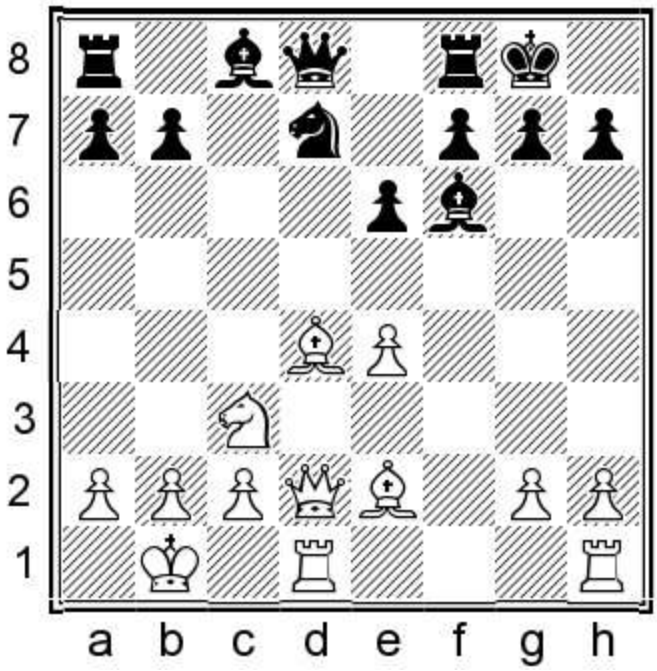
13.Kb1 e5
The most direct option, but there are others:

13...a6 14.Qf4 Bf6 15.Bxf6 (also appealing is: 15.Qg3 Bxd4 16.Rxd4 b5 17.Rhd1 Ra7 18.a4!?²) 15...Qxf6 16. Qc7 Qd8 Pavlovic – Ki. Georgiev, Vrnjacka Banja 2010.



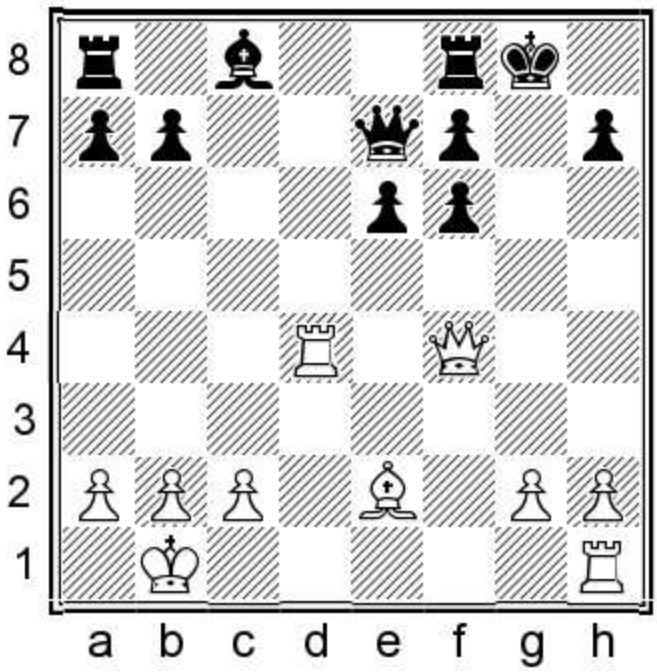
17.Qxd8N 17...Rxd8 18.Rd6 The d-file pressure is annoying. For example: 18...b5

13...Bf6?! as in Rydstrom – Laustsen, Helsingor 2014, allows a vicious novelty:



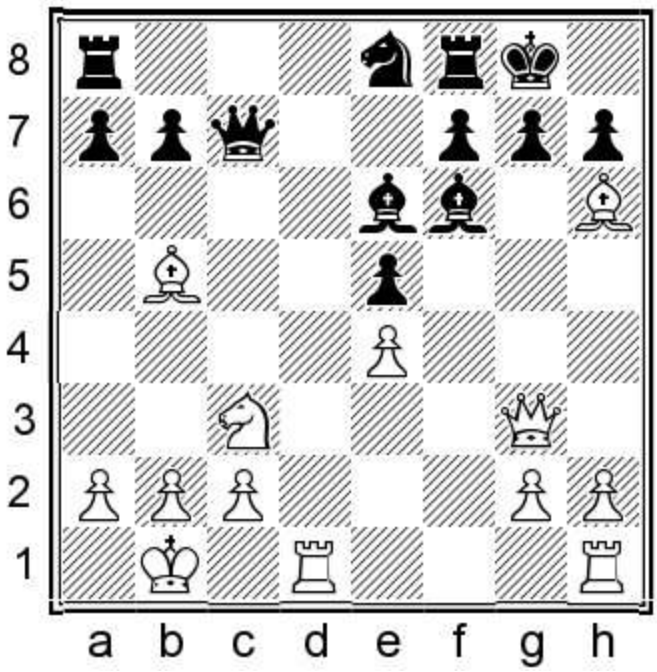
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14.e5!!N 14...Nxe5 (14...Be7 15.Nb5±) 15.Ne4 There is no way to escape all the threats. 15...Nc6 (even worse is: 15...Nd7 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.Qh6+–) 16.Nxf6† gxf6 17.Qf4 Nxd4 18.Rxd4 Qe7



19.Qh4 Threatening Bd3 so the following moves are forced: 19...Re8 20.Bb5 e5 21.Rd3 Rd8 22.Rg3† (22. Rxd8† Qxd8 23.Bd3 Kf8 24.Rf1+– also gives White a winning attack) 22...Kh8 23.Bd3+– Black must give up the exchange to avoid mate.

14.Be3 Nf6 15.Qe1 Qc7 16.Qg3 Be6 17.Bh6 Ne8 18.Bb5 Bf6
18...Kh8 is stronger, but 19.Bxe8 gxh6 20.Ba4[2] is still appealing for White.



19.Rdf1!N
This is the right rook, as the h1-rook is valuable where it is, as we shall soon see.

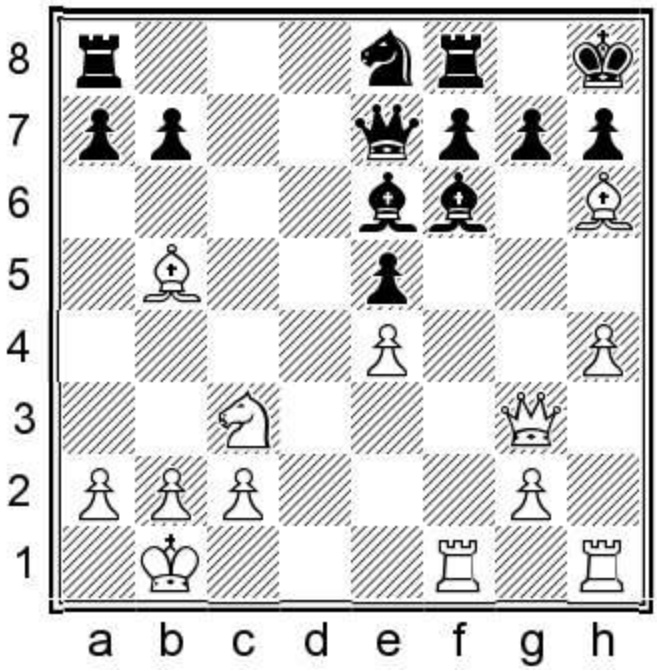
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19.Rhf1?! gives away some of our advantage. For example: 19...Qe7 20.Nd5!?N (20.Bxe8 Rfxe8 21.Nd5 Bxd5 22.exd5 Rad8 was about level in De la Villa Garcia – Franco Alonso, Tossa de Mar 2010) 20...Bxd5 21.Rxd5 Rd8 22.Rxd8 Qxd8 23.Bc4²

19...Qe7 20.h4!
Threatening to trap the queen with h4-h5 in the key line.

20...Rc8
The best defence.

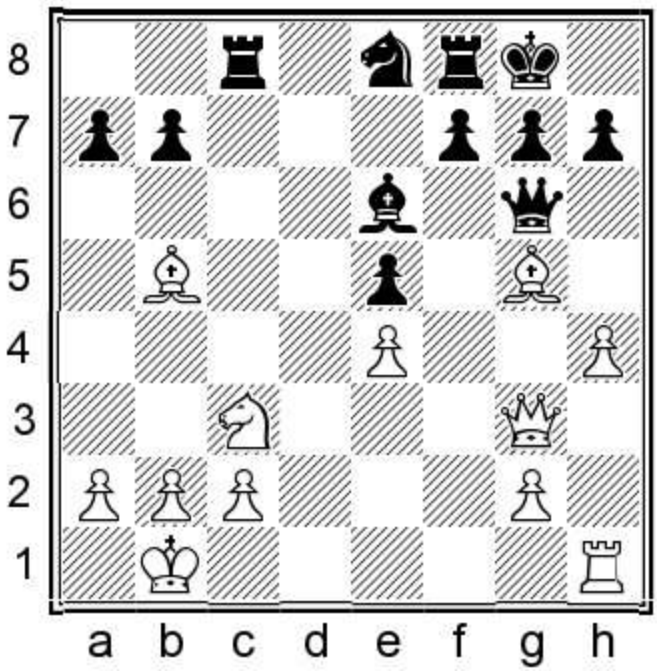
20...Kh8



21.Rxf6! gxf6 (we see the h1-rook in action after: 21...Qxf6? 22.Bg5 Qg6 23.h5+–) 22.Bxf8 Qxf8 23.Qf2! Effectively a double attack, based on the idea: 23...Qg7 24.Bxe8 Rxe8 25.Qxa7+–

21.Rxf6 Qxf6 22.Bg5 Qg6

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23.h5
Now we see the point of Black's 20th move.

23...Rxc3
Otherwise Black would have to resign.

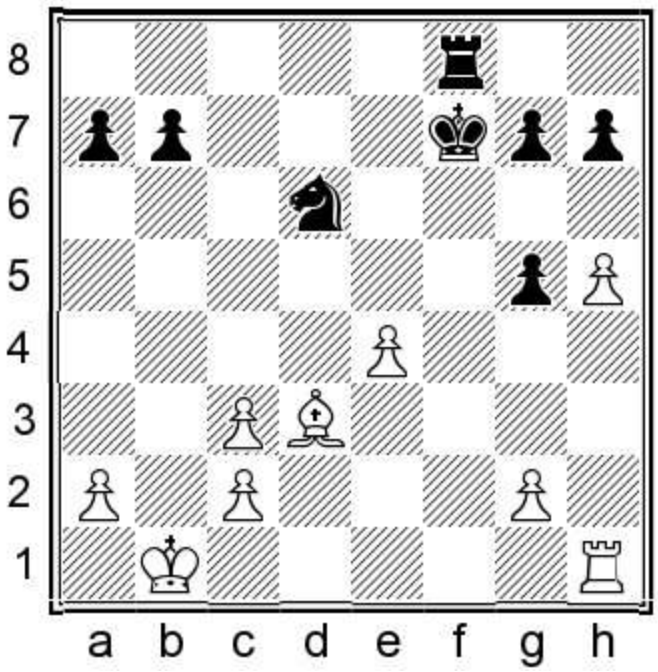
24.Qxe5 f6 25.Qxe6†
The simplest, as the following line is forced.

25.hxg6 fxe5 26.gxh7†± is also fine.

25...Qf7 26.Qxf7† Kxf7 27.bxc3 Nd6
Or 27...fxg5 28.Rf1† leads to a winning pawn ending.

28.Bd3 fxg5

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29.e5 Nc8 30.Rf1† Ke8 31.Rxf8† Kxf8 32.Bxh7
White's two extra pawns should win.

The Classical Scheveningen line is a sideline for a reason. Black's best option there is to play ...a6 at some point and return to the Najdorf-Scheveningen, but as we shall see, the knight is a bit misplaced on c6 then.

It's time to move on from the purely Scheveningen lines to the Najdorf-Scheveningen lines.

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# Chapter 10.2 - The Najdorf

The Najdorf

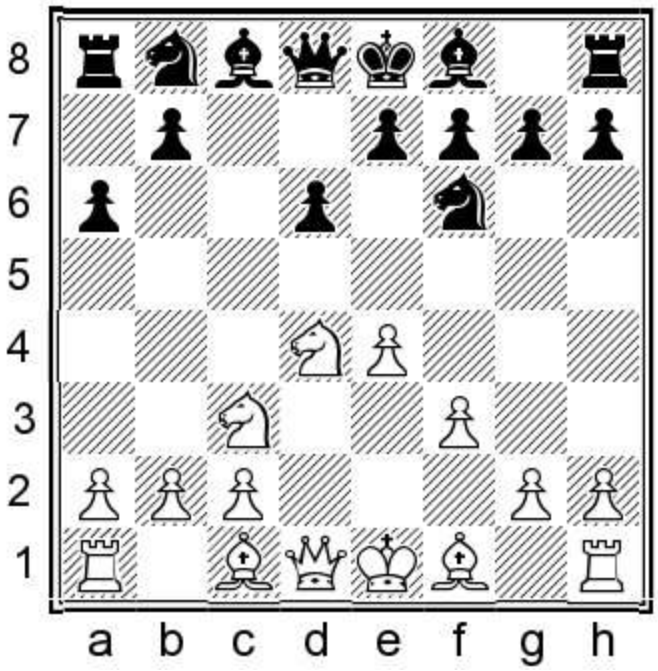
Najdorf – 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3
Early deviations 6...Qb6!? Game 27 344
6...e6 7.Be3
7...Be7 The English Attack at club level Game 28 351
7...d5!? (7...Qb6?!) Game 29 353
7...h5 (7...b5 8.Qd2 h5?!; 7...Nbd7) Game 30 356
7...Nc6 8.Qd2 360
8...h5!? (8...Bd7; 8...Qc7) 361
8...Be7 Game 31 364
A small point about the move order

When the English Attack became popular in the 1980s and 1990s, White always played 6.Be3 followed by 7.f3. Black had the possibility of playing 6...Ng4, but until Kasparov started playing it religiously and proved its validity, it was not a main concern for White. However, once it became so, 6.f3 was seen as a more sophisticated move order. There are pluses and minuses. The minuses are covered in the following game.

GAME 27

Peter Leko – Judit Polgar
Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2003

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3

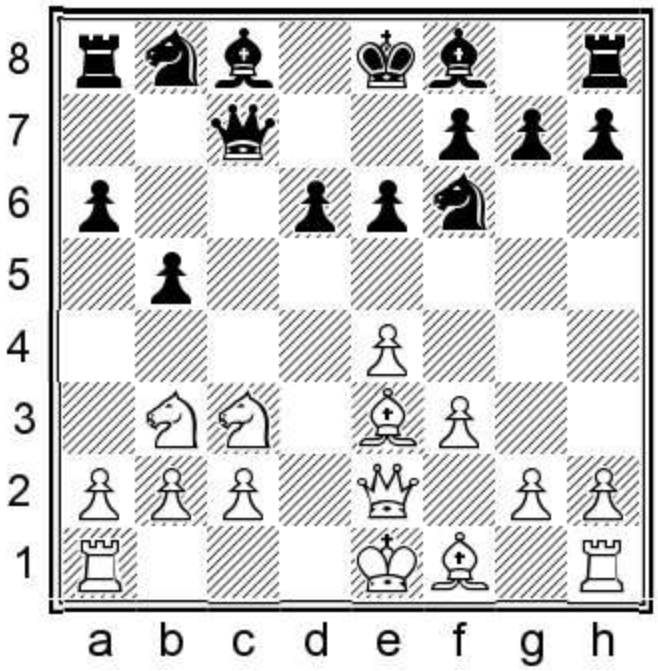



6...Qb6!?
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This is the only extra option offered to Black after 6.f3 instead of 6.Be3. This of course does not account for the

various limitations White has already forced on himself; 6...e5 cannot be met with 7.Nf3, 6...e6 not with 7.g4, and so on.
Luckily, if you do find a good way to play after 6.Be3 Ng4, you can transpose well between variations, while building up a repertoire with these extra options, should you wish so.

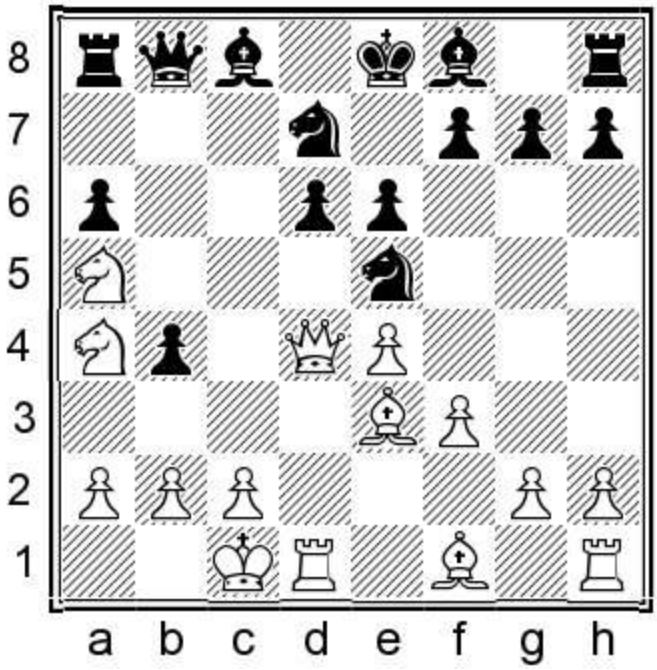
7.g4
An equally valid move order is:

7.Nb3 e6 8.Qe2
After 8...Nc6 9.g4 we have transposed to our main line. There is one alternative set-up for Black.
8...Qc7
Black has a good score with this flexible approach, but I believe in White's chances.
9.Be3 b5

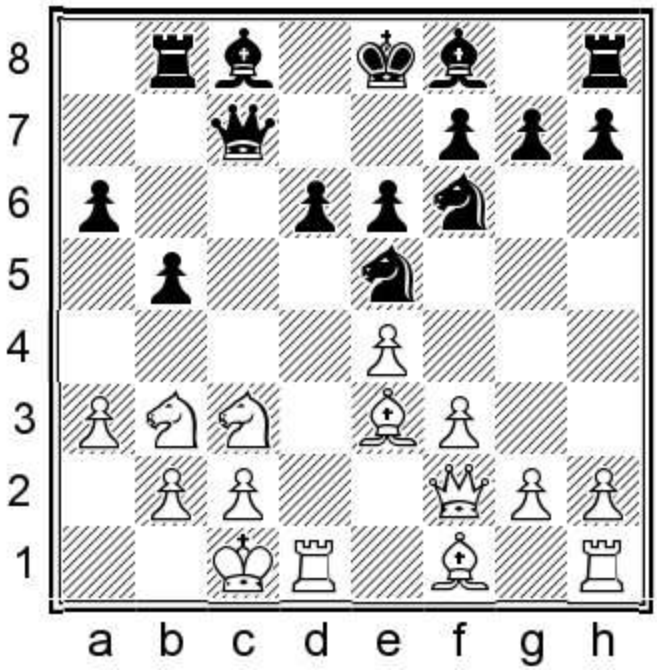



10.0-0-0 Nbd7
Now we play similarly to the main line.
10...b4? is premature. 11.Na4 Nbd7 12.Qc4! Qb8 13.Na5 Ne5 14.Qd4 Nfd7 Manole – Hajbok, Brasov 2011.

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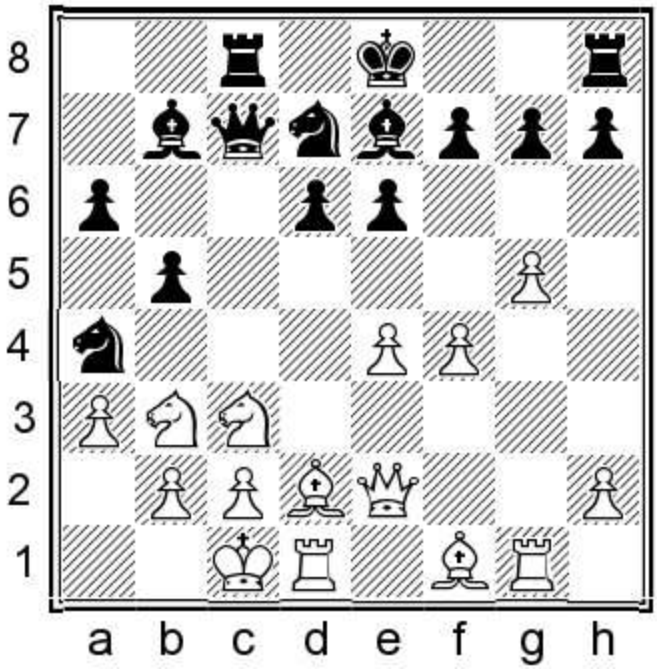


15.Bd2!N Winning a pawn. The key point is: 15...Nc5 16.Nxc5 dxc5 17.Qd8†!! Kxd8 18.Bg5† Kc7 19.Bd8#
11.a3!
Having defended the b6-square, Black was threatening ...b4.
11...Nb6
The most flexible.
11...Ne5 12.Qf2 (12.g4!?N 12...Nc4 13.g5 Nd7 14.Bd4² also feels pleasant for White) 12...Rb8 Delorme – Gerard, Sautron 2001.



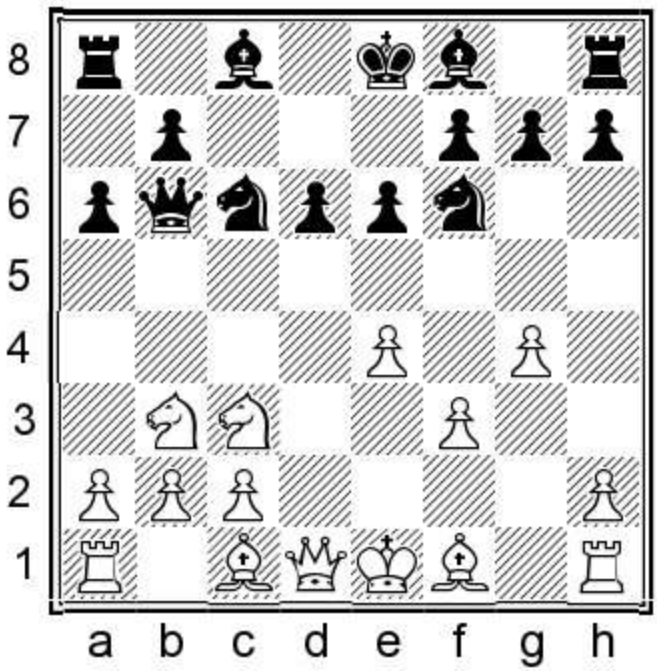
13.g4!N 13...Nfd7 14.Rg1²
12.g4 Be7 13.g5 Nfd7 14.f4!?
14.h4 Nc4 15.Bd4² also looks great.
14...Bb7 15.Rg1 Na4 16.Bd2 Rc8

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17.Rg3!²
Wurschner – Szczepankiewicz, email 2012. If Black castles, White arrives quickly with f4-f5 and a serious attack.

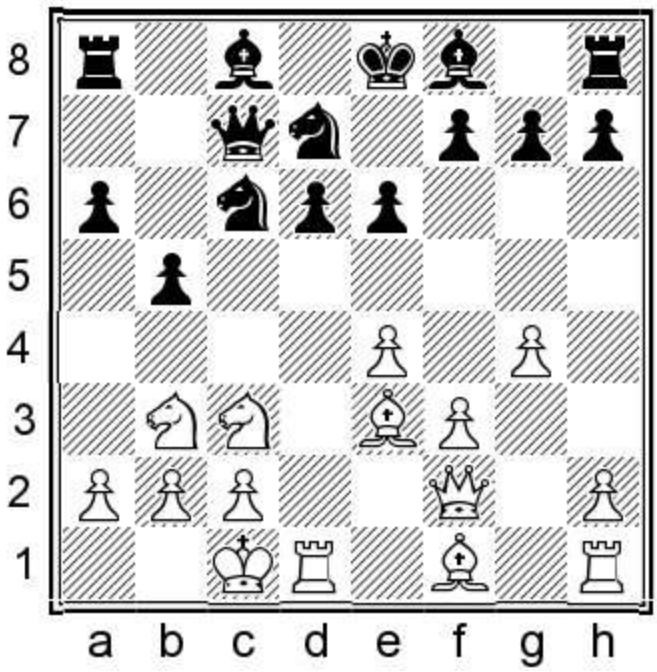
7...Nc6 8.Nb3 e6



9.Qe2
Placing the queen on e2 is not much worse than placing it on d2. The reason for this is that it often belongs on f2 or g2. This usually costs a tempo. The real question about this variation is if it is worth it for Black to spend time pushing the knight from d4 to b3. My guess is that it is not.

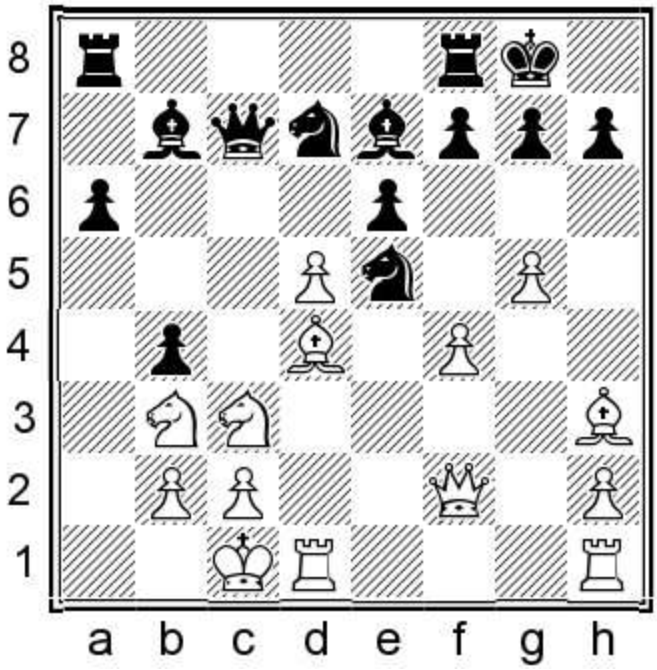
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9...Qc7 10.Be3 b5 11.0-0-0 Nd7 12.Qf2!

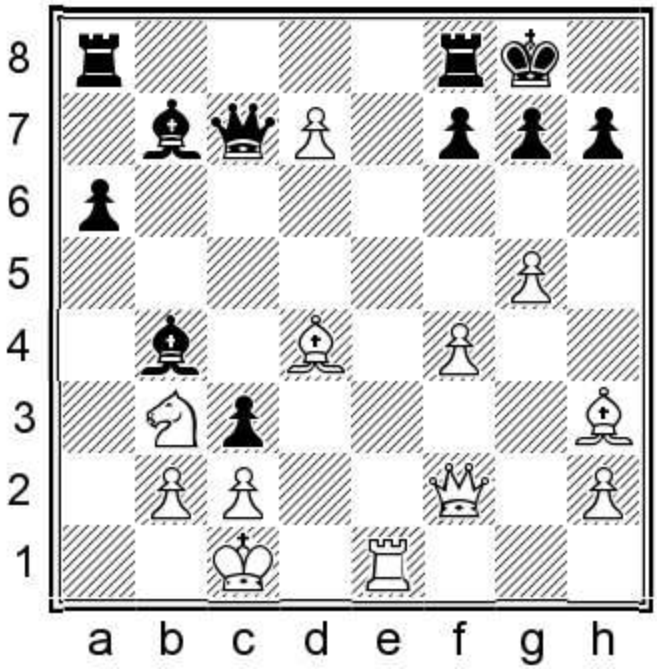


12...b4
The only decent alternative for Black is probably:
12...Nce5 13.a3!
Black's counterplay on the queenside seems slower than White's kingside attack. We will analyse a) 13...Bb7?! and b) 13...Be7.
a) 13...Bb7?!
This looks very natural, but most Najdorf players know that the bishop needs to "do something" here for this move to be good, and at the moment the e4-pawn is rock solid, so this is not the case. Usually Black's most obvious counterplay is with ...Rb8 and ...b4.
14.g5 Be7
The way to make sense of 13...Bb7 is to try to blow up the centre, but after 14...d5 15.exd5 Bxa3 16.Bd4 Be7 White has a lot of tempting options. I like: 17.Bh3! 0-0 18.f4² White has an advantage here; only one variation looks critical. 18...b4?! (18...Ng6 19.Rhf1²)

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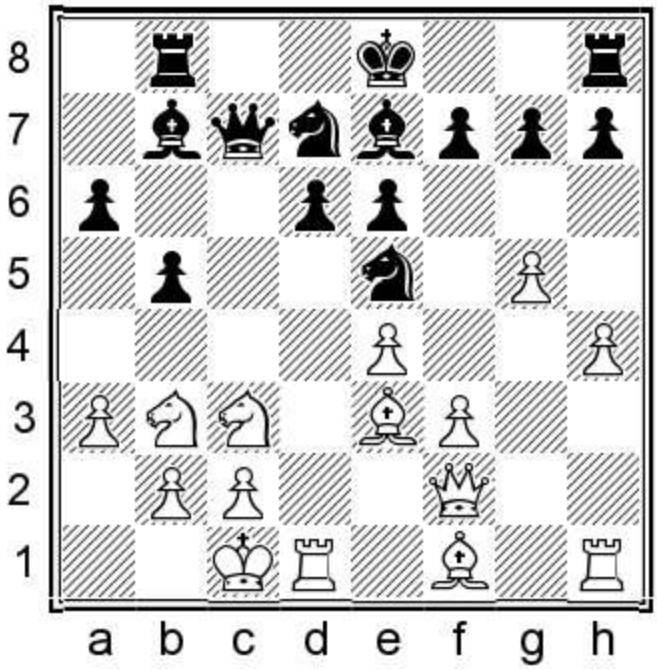


19.Rhe1!! bxc3 20.dxe6 Nf3 (20...fxe6 21.Bxe6† Kh8 22.Bxd7 Bd6 23.Bc5 cxb2† 24.Kb1 Bxc5 25.Qxc5 Qxc5 26.Nxc5 Nxd7 27.Nxb7 Nb6 28.Rd4±) 21.exd7± Nxe1?! 22.Rxe1 Bb4



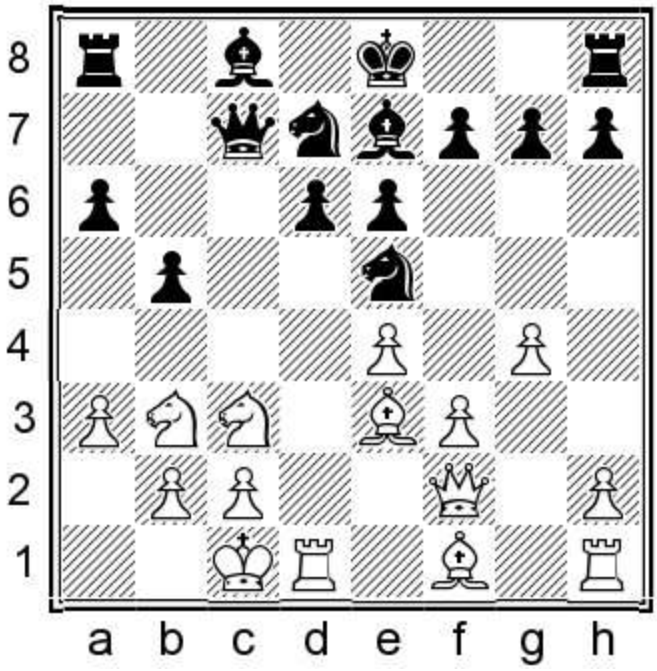
23.Bf5! cxb2† 24.Bxb2 Bxe1 25.Qd4 f6 26.Be6† Kh8 (26...Rf7 27.f5+–) 27.gxf6 Rxf6 28.Qxf6! Qxd7 (28... gxf6 29.Bxf6#) 29.Qh6 Qe7 30.Bf5! White has a winning attack.
15.h4 Rb8

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16.Rg1
16.Kb1!N followed by h4-h5 looks more accurate to me.
16...Nc4 17.Bxc4 bxc4 18.Nd2 0-0 19.h5 d5 20.exd5 exd5 21.Bd4²
Black survived in Juan – Fenollar Jorda, email 2010, but his prospects look grim to me.

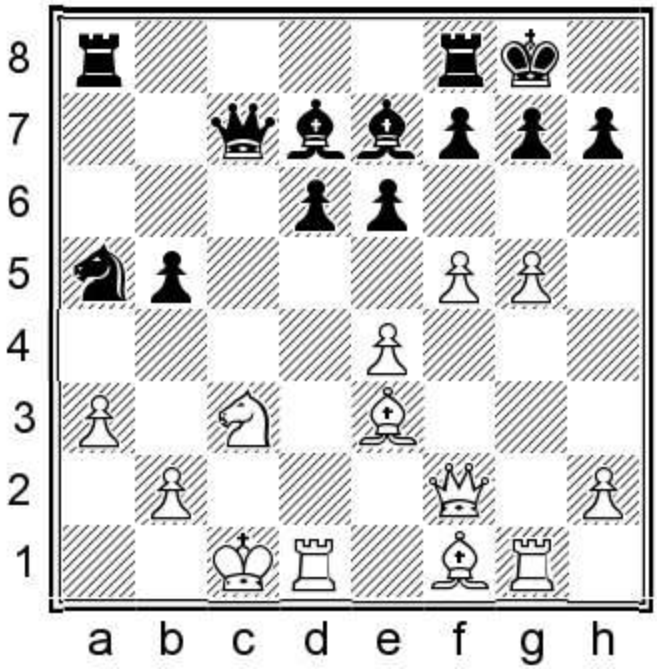
b) 13...Be7 can be met in several ways.



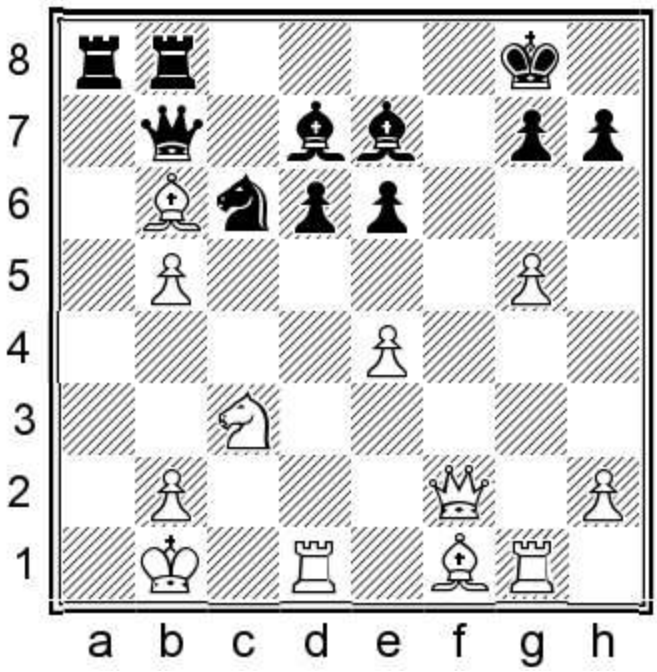
Normally I would say “one good option is enough”, but learning about the different methods available here should help to enhance your understanding of these positions in general.So we will consider b1) 14.Rg1!?N, b2) 14.g5!?N and b3) 14.h4.
b1) 14.Rg1!?N
The idea here is to launch the f-pawn.

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14...Nc5 15.f4 Nxb3† 16.cxb3 Nc6 17.b4² 0-0 18.g5 a5 19.bxa5 Nxa5 20.f5 Bd7



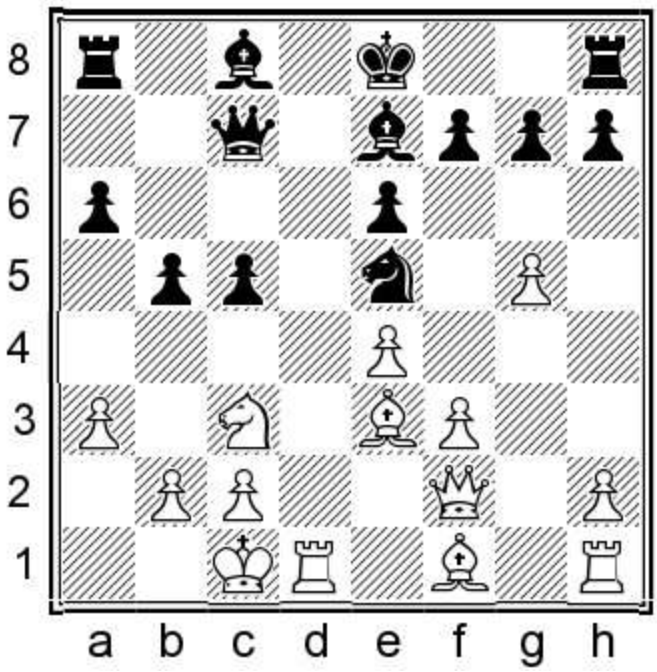
21.Kb1!
21.f6 allows the amazing 21...Rfb8!! 22.fxe7 b4 23.axb4 Rxb4 with crazy complications: 24.Bd3 Be8 25.Rde1 Qxe7 26.Rg3 Qb7 27.g6 Nb3† 28.Kd1 hxg6 29.Rh3 Ra5÷
21...b4! 22.Bb6!
I checked 22.axb4 but only found equality after: 22...Rfb8 23.g6 fxg6 24.fxg6 hxg6 25.Rxg6 Bf8 26.bxa5 Qxa5 27.Bc4 Qxc3 28.Rf1 Qxc4 29.Rxg7†=
22...Qb7 23.axb4 Nc6 24.b5 Rfb8 25.fxe6 fxe6



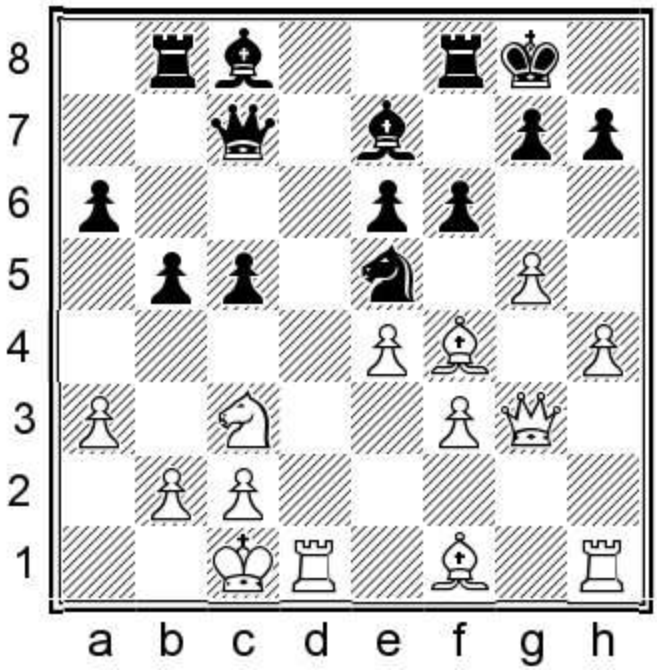
26.Bd4 Nxd4 27.Qxd4²
White keeps the better chances although the position remains complicated.

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b2) 14.g5!?N
I also like this move, which has an interesting strategic concept behind it.
14...Nc5 15.Nxc5 dxc5

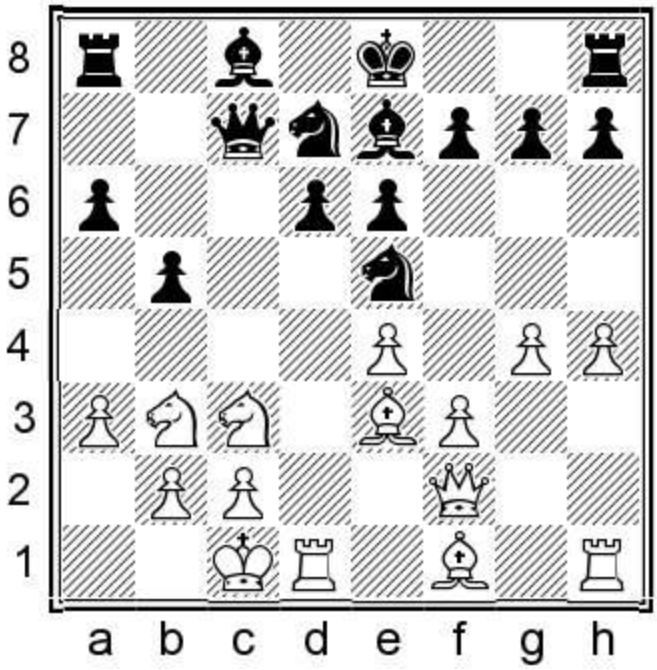


16.Qg3!
The h2-pawn defends the queen, which is rather important.
16...0-0
16...b4?! leads to a poor position after: 17.Bf4! bxc3 18.Bxe5 cxb2† 19.Kxb2 Qb6† 20.Ka2 0-0 21.Bc4 Ra7 22.h4±
17.Bf4 f6 18.h4² Rb8
18...b4? 19.Nb1± White is preparing Bc4. 19...c4!? 20.Bxc4 Qxc4 21.gxf6 Bxf6 22.Bxe5 Bxe5 23.Qxe5±



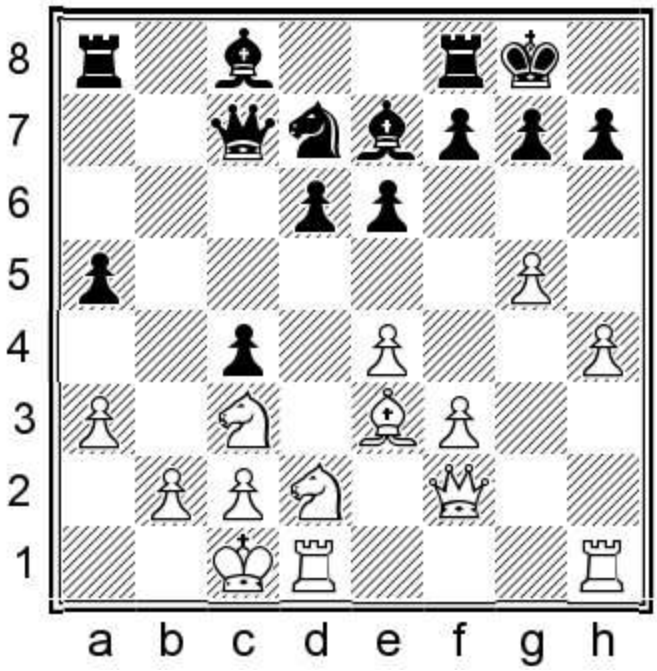
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19.Rd5!! exd5 20.Nxd5 Qd6 21.gxf6 Bxf6 22.Nxf6† Qxf6 23.Bxe5 Qh6† 24.Kb1²
White has given up an exchange for a pawn, but the dark-squared bishop is more powerful than any minor piece I have seen recently.
b3) 14.h4



This leads to a further split between b31) 14...0-0, b32) 14...Nc4 and the untested b33) 14...Nc5!N. The last option is Black's only decent way to create counterplay, as far as I can see.

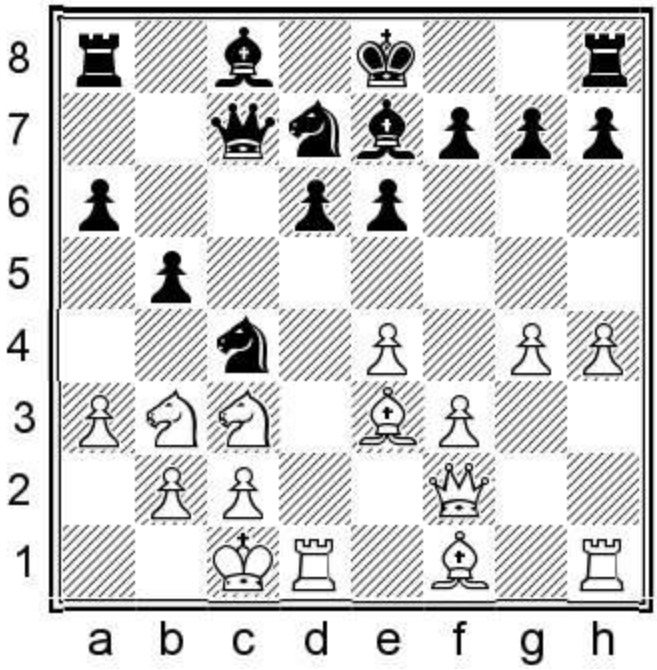
b31) 14...0-0 15.g5 is probably all bad news. 15...Nc4 (15...Rb8 16.Rg1² b4 17.axb4 Rxb4 18.f4 Nc4 19.Bxc4 Rxc4 20.f5!±) 16.Bxc4 bxc4 17.Nd2 a5 (17...Rb8 18.Ba7 Ra8 19.Bd4²)



18.Kb1!² The king goes to a1; White has a more dangerous attack on the kingside.

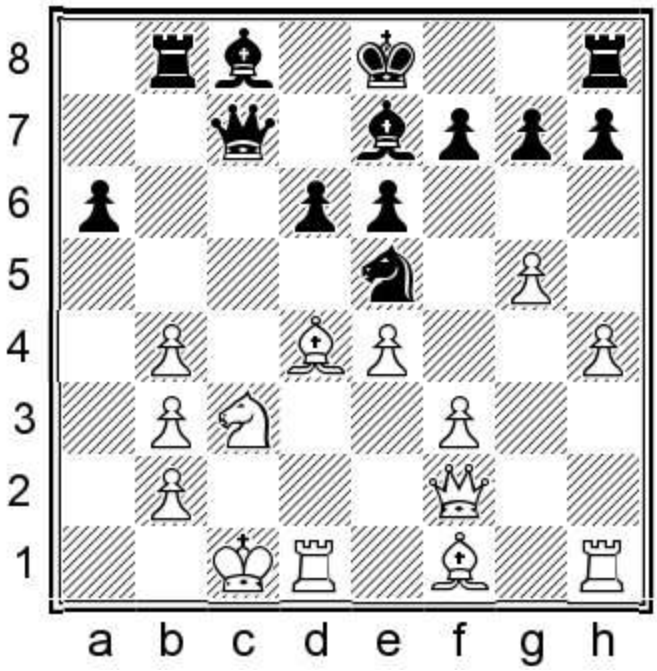
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b32) 14...Nc4 occurred in Nijboer – Van der Stricht, Vlissingen 2002, when White should have played:



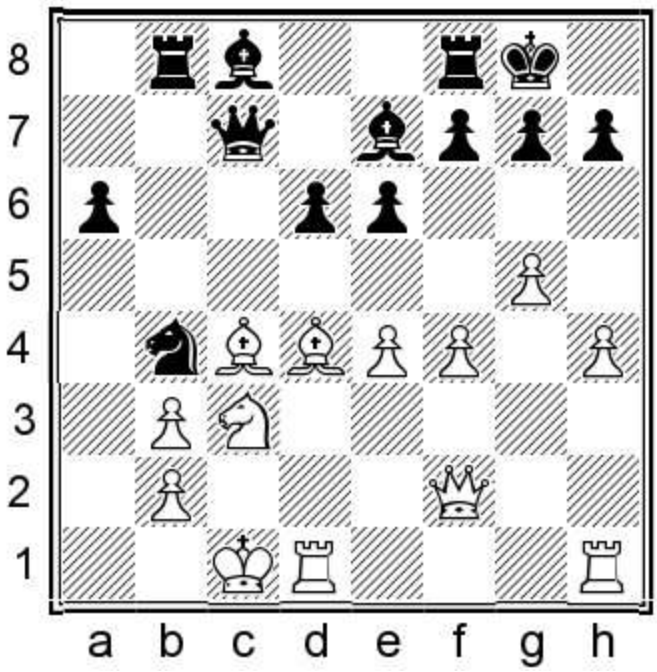
15.Bxc4!N White is simply better in this structure. For example: 15...bxc4 16.Nd2 Rb8 17.Ba7 Rb7 18.Bd4² But obviously the game has just begun.

b33) 14...Nc5!N 15.g5!²
Analysis has convinced me that this is the strongest continuation. Play could continue in many directions, but White generally wants to play Bd4 and f3-f4. I have analysed the most direct continuation in detail.
15...Nxb3† 16.cxb3 b4!?
16...Rb8 17.b4²
17.axb4 Rb8 18.Bd4



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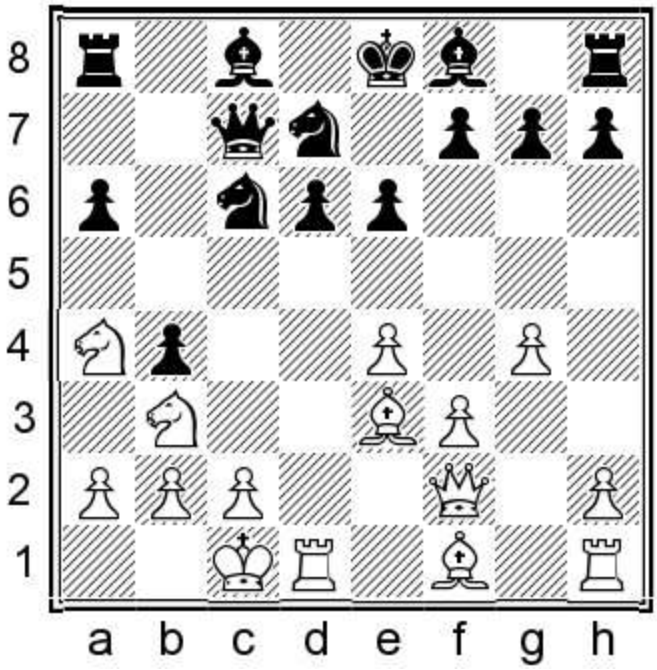
18...0-0
18...Rxb4 19.f4 Nc6 20.Bc4! is very similar. (20.Bxg7 Rg8 21.Bd4 Rxb3 is probably also to White's advantage, but seems less clear to me) 20...Na5 21.Bxg7 Rg8 22.Bd4 Nxc4 23.bxc4 Qxc4 24.Kb1 Bb7 25.Rhe1 a5 26.e5 d5 27.f5±
19.f4 Nc6 20.Bc4! Nxb4
20...Nxd4? 21.Qxd4 Rxb4 22.h5± gives White good attacking chances.



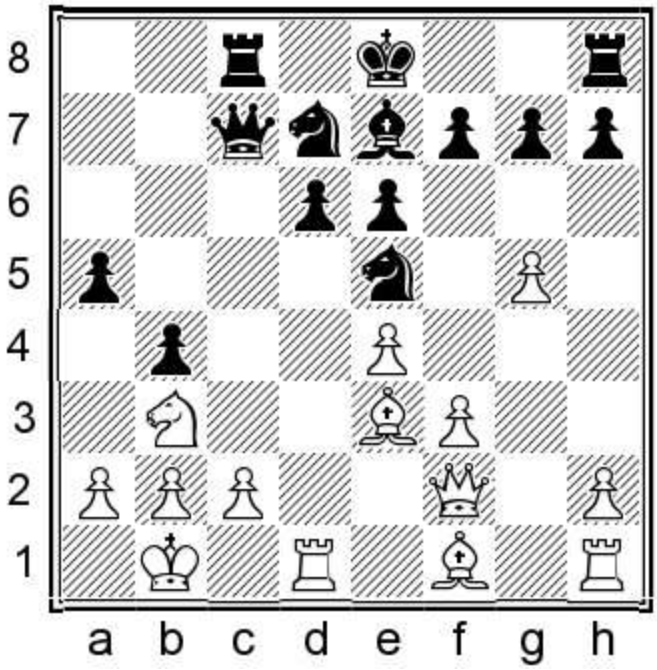
21.f5! exf5 22.g6! hxg6?!
22...d5 23.exd5 Bd6± is the last try according to the computer, but hardly something that scares us. After 24.gxh7† Kh8 25.Rhg1 f6 26.h5 Bd7 27.Qh4+– White is ready for both Rg2 and Rdg1, and the more direct Rxg7!?.
23.h5 d5 24.hxg6! dxc4 25.Rh7! Bg5† 26.Kb1 fxg6 27.Rxg7† Qxg7 28.Bxg7 Kxg7 29.Qg3
White wins.

13.Na4!

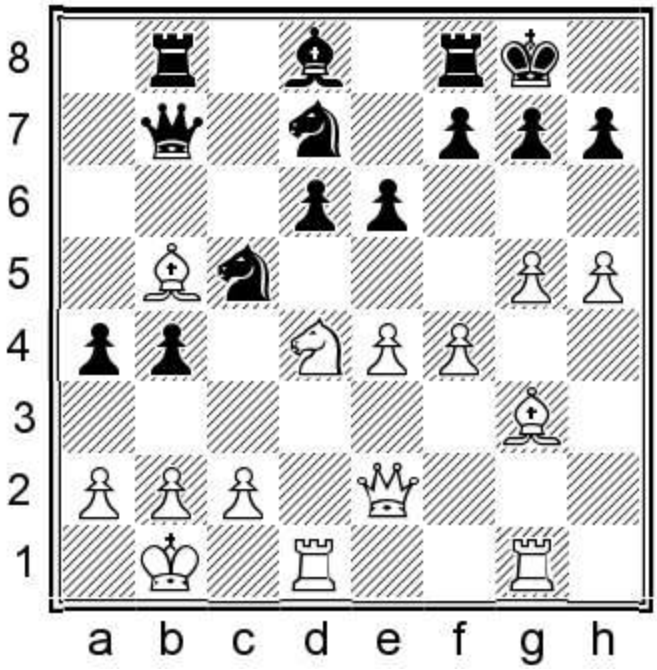
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13...Rb8
As ever, there is an alternative:
13...Be7 14.g5 Nce5
This is very natural, but I like White's chances here as well.
14...Rb8 15.Rg1 is similar to our main illustrative game.
15.Nb6 Rb8 16.Nxc8 Rxc8 17.Kb1 a5

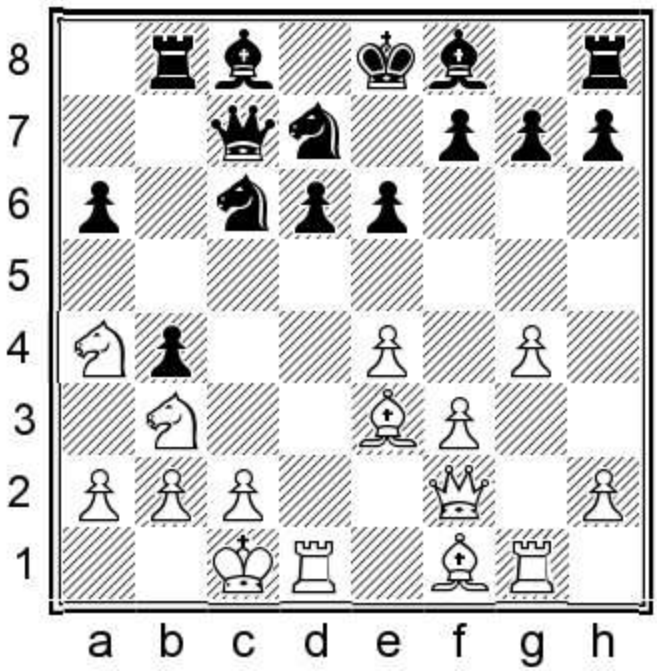


18.Nd4²
18.h4²
18...Nc5?
18...0-0 19.h4² with a complicated game was essential, even if more attractive for White.
chesstouring.com
19.Bb5† Ned7 20.h4± Qb7 21.Qe2 0-0 22.h5 a4 23.Rhg1 Bd8 24.Bf2 Rb8 25.Bg3 Ne5 26.f4 Ned7



27.g6 b3 28.cxb3 axb3 29.a4 Nf6 30.e5 dxe5 31.Nc6 Rc8 32.gxh7† Kxh7 33.Bh4 exf4 34.Qe5 Rg8 35.h6 g6 36.Bxf6 Bxf6 37.Qxf6 Rxc6 38.Bxc6 Qxc6 39.Qxf7† Kh8 40.Qxf4 Qxa4 41.Qe5†
1–0 Engwall – Edwards, email 2014.

14.Rg1!



A flexible move that discourages either knight from coming to e5.

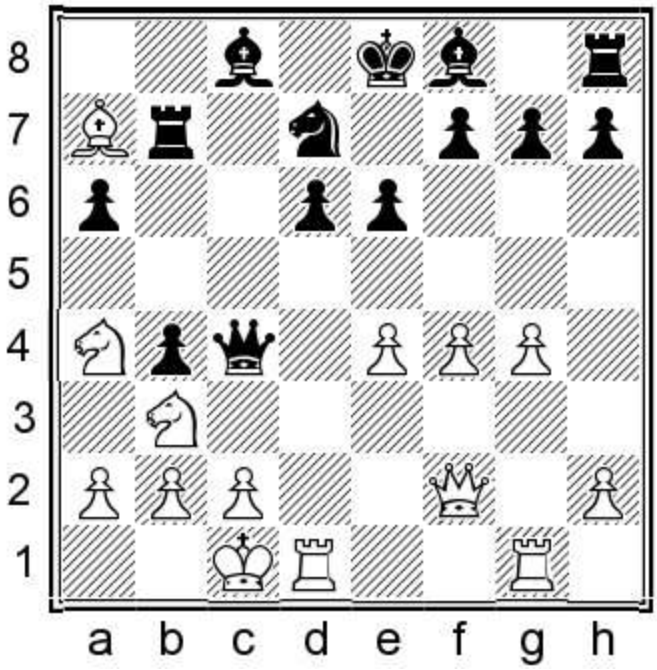
14...Be7
We should also consider the following options:

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14...h5 15.gxh5 Rxh5 16.Kb1 Ne7 17.Nd2 d5 18.h4 e5 19.Qh2 Bb7 20.Nb3 Qc6 21.Nac5 Nxc5 22.Bxc5 Qf6

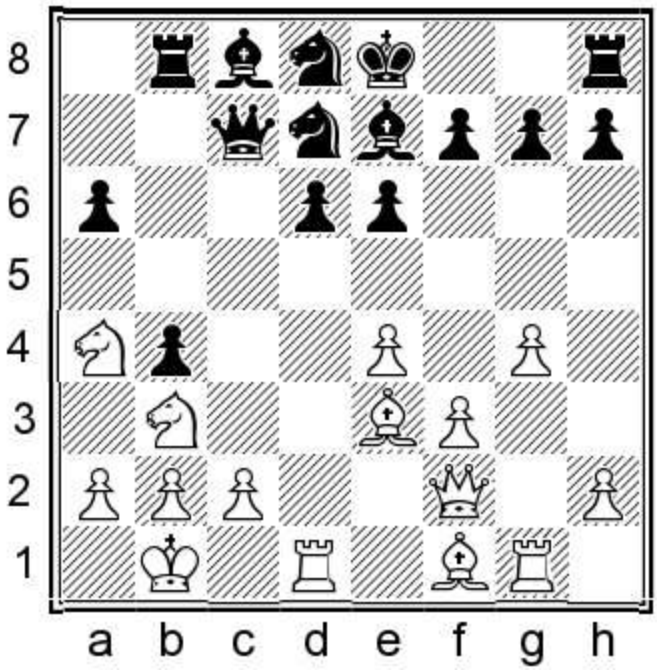
23.Qd2 Ba8 24.f4± Fagerstrom – Slawinski, email 2009.

14...Nce5 If Black was allowed two moves in a row, then ...Qc6 would be winning. 15.f4 But now we have time for this, and we are better: 15...Nc4 16.Ba7 Rb7 17.Bxc4 Qxc4



18.Nb6! Nxb6 19.Bxb6 Qc6 20.Be3 Rd7 (20...Qxe4 21.Rd4 Qg6 22.f5 Qf6 23.h4±) 21.Rd4²

15.Kb1 Nd8?!
This looks like a bad move, even though it is of course played with an idea. But I think it is just too slow. 15...Nce5 16.f4 Ng6 is the suggestion of many engines. White looks good to me after 17.Nd4² with the point: 17...Nc5?! 18.Nxc5 dxc5 19.Nf5!±

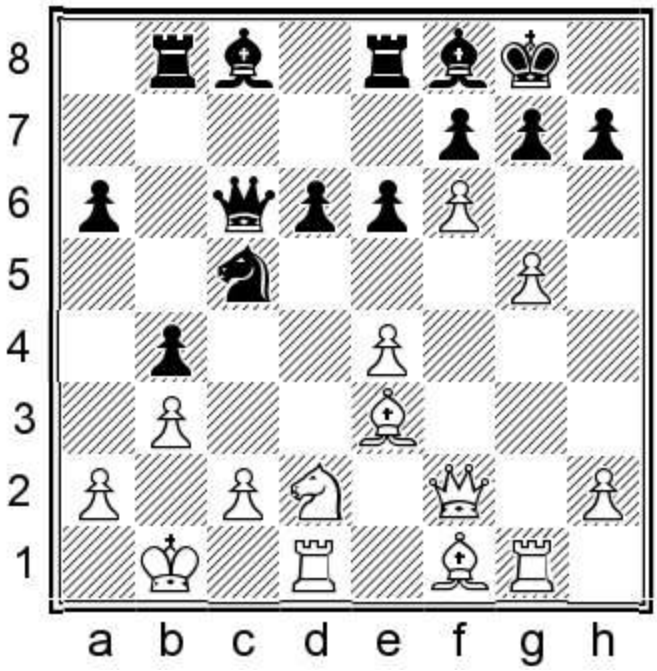


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16.Nd2!± Qc6 17.b3 0-0
This moves the king into the firing line, but it is also hard to continue the game with the king stuck in the centre.

18.g5 Nb7 19.f4 Nbc5 20.Nxc5 Nxc5 21.f5!+– Re8 22.g6!?
This is very powerful and enough to win the game, but there was an even stronger and somewhat unusual continuation, which is worth remembering for another time.

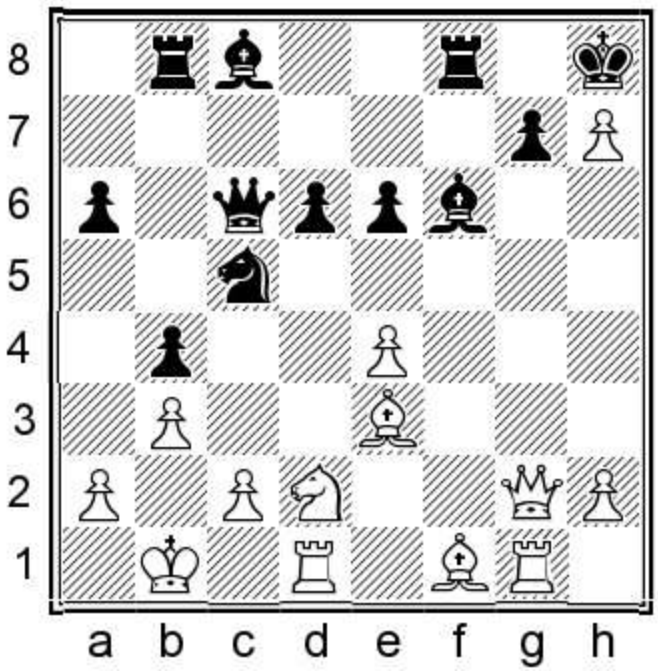
22.f6 Bf8




23.g6!! hxg6 24.Rxg6 Black is mated in short order.

22...fxg6 23.fxg6 Rf8 24.gxh7† Kh8 25.Qg2 Bf6
Despite missing a direct win, Leko still managed to win the game with a nice trick.

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26.e5! Qxg2 27.Bxg2 Bxe5 28.Nc4 Bf4 29.Rgf1 g5 30.Nxd6 Bb7 31.Bd4† Kxh7 32.Nxb7 Nxb7 33.Ba7 Kh6 34.Rd7 Rfd8 35.Bxb8 Rxd7 36.Bxf4 gxf4 37.Rxf4 a5 38.Bxb7 Rxb7 39.Rf6† Kg5 40.Rxe6 Rb5 41.Kb2 Rc5 42.Re4 Kf6 43.Rc4 Rf5 44.a3 Rb5 45.axb4 axb4 46.h4 Ke6 47.h5 Kf6 48.h6 Kg6 49.Rc6† Kh7 50.c3
1–0

6...Qb6 is a serious alternative to the standard Scheveningen/Najdorf lines, but with good preparation, White should leave the opening with sunny prospects. The real downside of playing 6.f3 against the Najdorf is the loss of 6...e5 7.Nf3 and 6...e6 7.g4, but as we recommend neither line in this book, that is not a serious drawback for us.

The English Attack at club level

The grandmasters reading this book will look mainly at the detailed overview of the critical variations, but for the club player, the English Attack is also very attractive. The following game is an illustration of why.

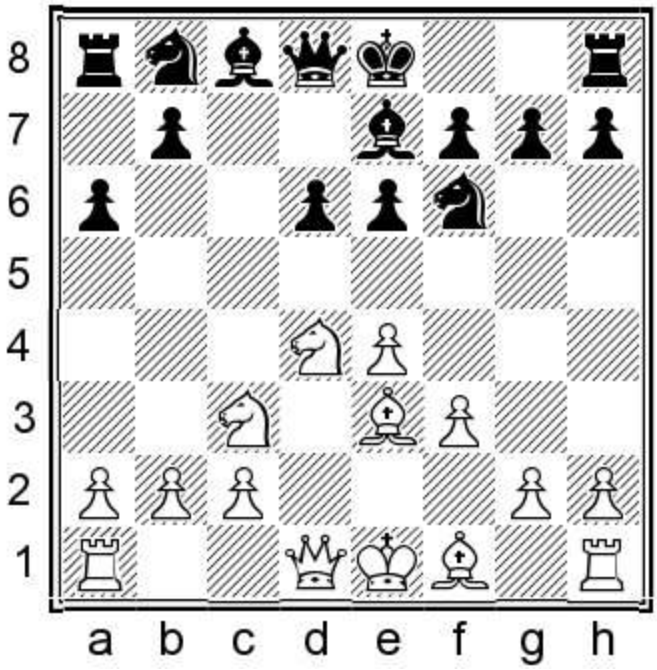
GAME 28

Valeri Pliskine – Alexandar Budnikov
St Petersburg 1999

I have included this small game because this is the way most club players under 2000, who are unfamiliar with the English Attack, have played against it – that is, the same way they were playing against 6.Be2 and similar systems. This positional approach does not work against the English Attack; the mating conspirators arrive way too early... But this game was played before the English Attack became commonplace, so for this reason an unrated player managed to win a miniature against a grandmaster.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 Be7

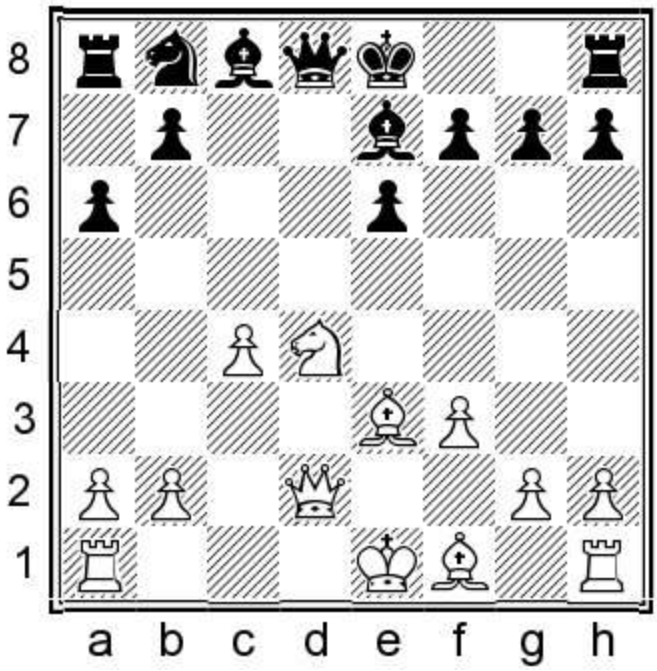
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Later on it was understood that this seemingly obvious move was highly inflexible. In some lines, where Black plays ...h6, the bishop is needed on f8 to defend the king from an invasion down the h-file. In other lines, moving the bishop is simply a loss of tempo.

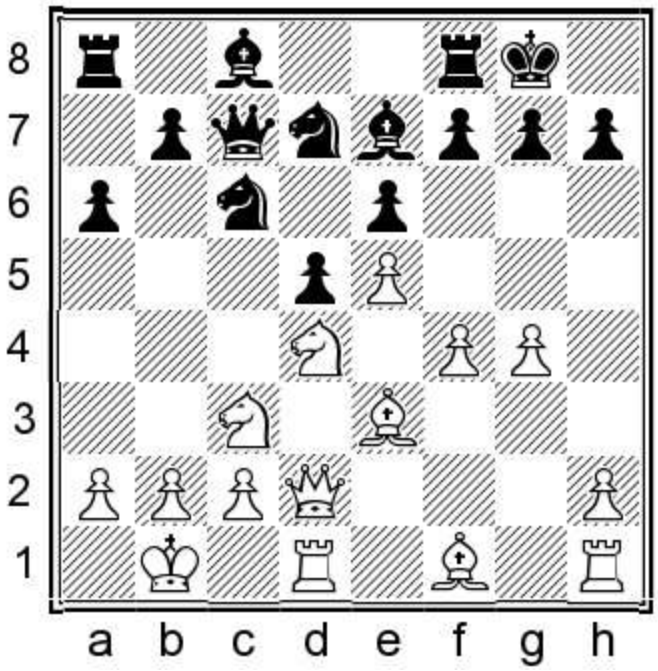
8.Qd2 0-0
Black can try to break in the centre with the d-pawn, but it is not likely to offer equality.

8...d5 9.e5
The principled move.
9.exd5 I find this simplest, but the advantage may not be the most obvious. 9...Nxd5 10.Nxd5 Qxd5 Schmitzer – Dietze, Germany 1994. 11.c4N 11...Qd8



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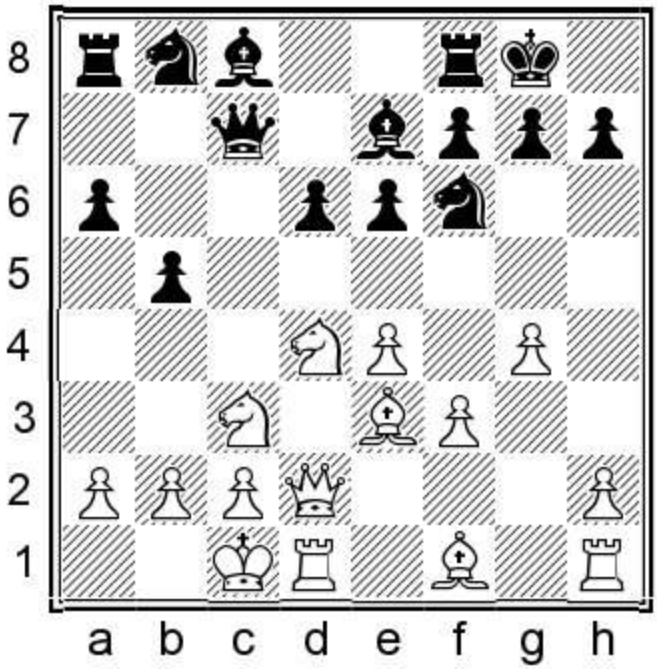
12.Bd3² White is better, but not a lot. But every time we have an edge from the opening these days, is a champagne moment, as Boris Gelfand famously said.
9...Nfd7 10.f4
We have achieved a strange version of the French Defence, Steinitz Variation. Black has taken on d4 and placed his bishop on e7.
10...Nc6 11.0-0-0
Other plans are possible here, but this is the most obvious.
11...Qc7
11...Nxd4 12.Bxd4 b5 13.Kb1 Bb7 14.Bd3 Nc5 Naiditsch – Kovalyov, Montreal 2009. 15.g4!?N (also 15.Ne2 is good) 15...Nxd3 16.Qxd3 b4 17.Ne2 a5 18.Qe3²
12.Kb1 0-0
12...b5 13.Nxc6 Qxc6 14.Ne2² Dgebuadze – Cvetkovic, Patras 1998.
13.g4




13...Nxd4N
After 13...Bc5?! in A. Zhigalko – Ziyaev, Calvia (ol) 2004, White should have played 14.Nce2!N when Black's position would be quite difficult.
14.Bxd4 b5 15.Bd3²

9.0-0-0 Qc7 10.g4± b5

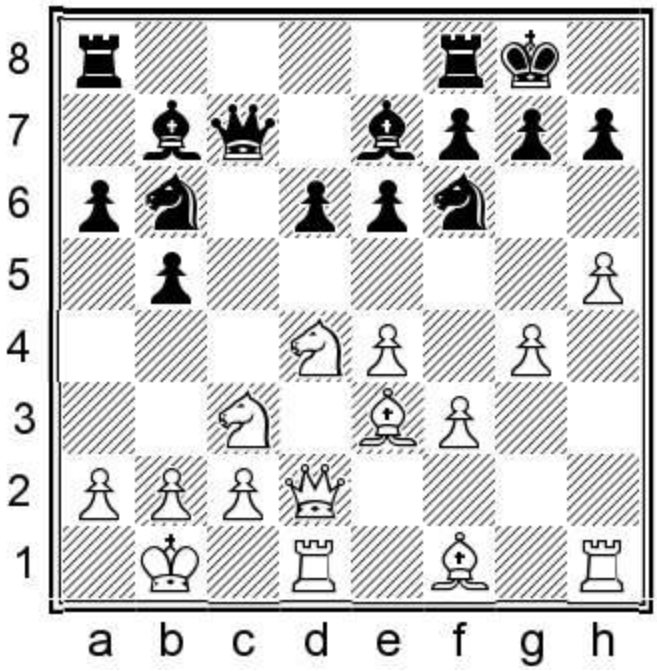
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11.Kb1
11.g5! Nfd7 12.h4 would be more efficient, but White still has a big advantage.

11...Bb7 12.h4
12.g5! Nh5 13.Bh3 and Bg4 is devastating.

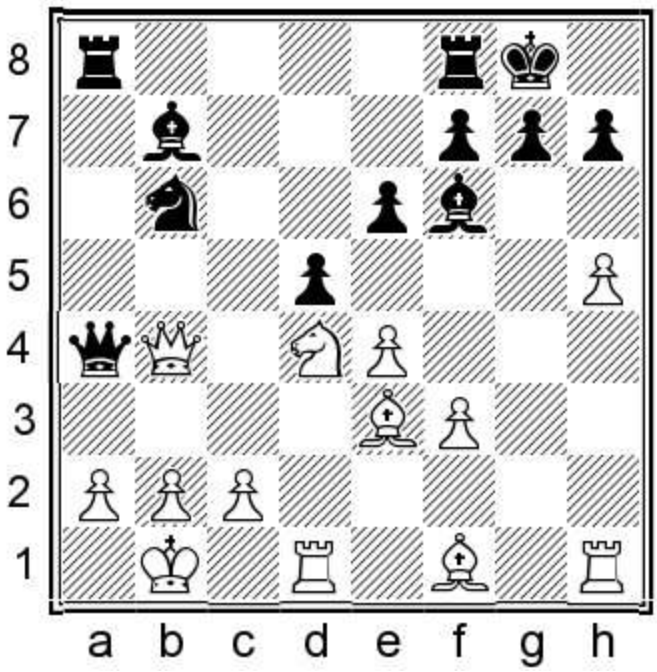
12...Nbd7 13.h5 Nb6



14.g5?!
14.Qh2! was a better move. Black no longer has a knight fork on c4.

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14...Ne8?
After 14...b4! White would have had to find a lot of accurate moves to prove a win. 15.Ncb5! (15.Nce2 Nc4± would make it a fight again) 15...axb5 16.gxf6 Bxf6 17.Nxb5 Qc6 18.Qxb4 d5 19.Nd4 Qa4



20.Qxb6! Qxa2† 21.Kc1 Rfb8 22.e5! Bxe5 23.Kd2 White is winning, but it is still messy and things could go wrong.

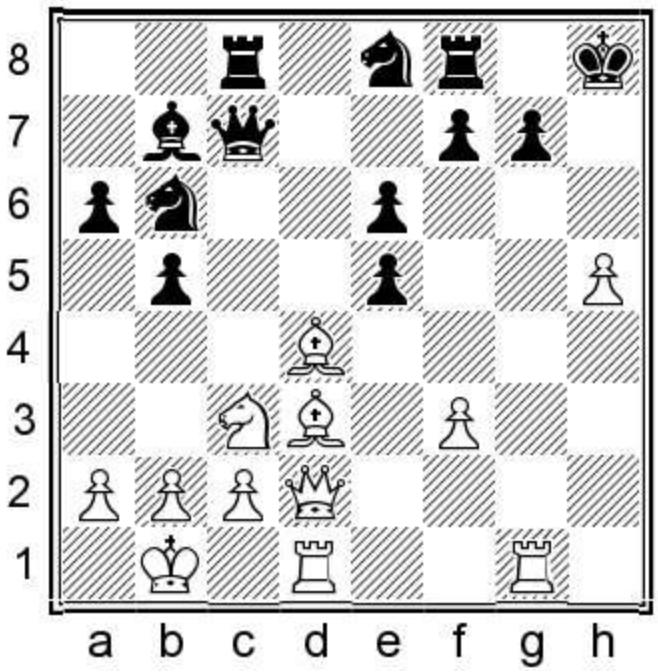
15.g6 Bf6 16.Rg1?
16.h6! was stronger. The key idea is that 16...hxg6 17.Qh2 is over.

16...Rc8?!
16...b4 17.Nce2 Nc4 18.Qd3 d5²

17.Bd3± Bxd4? 18.gxh7† Kxh7
18...Kh8 19.Bxd4 e5 20.Bxb6 Qxb6 21.h6 g6 22.f4 would also give White a winning attack.

19.e5† Kh8 20.Bxd4 dxe5

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21.Rxg7! Nxg7 22.Qh6†
1–0
White did not take his first chances, yet still won quickly. The potency of the English Attack should be obvious to all.

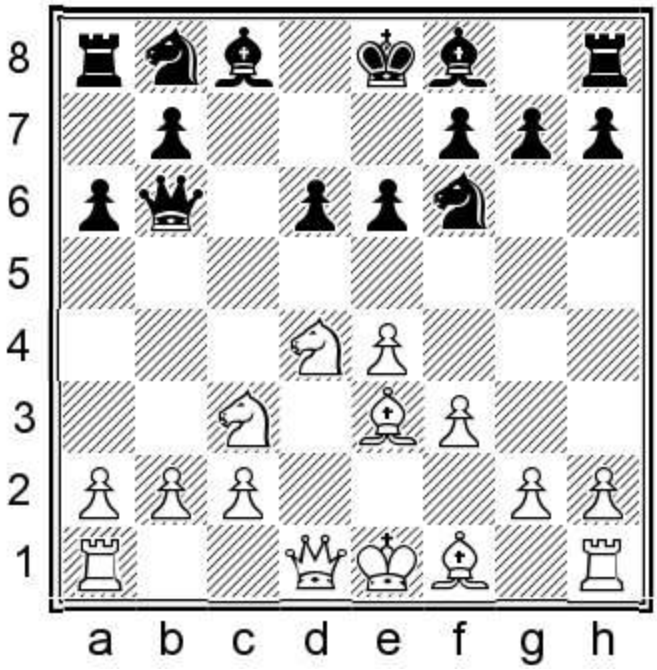
In the next game we shall look at some rare deviations after 6...e6 7.Be3.

GAME 29

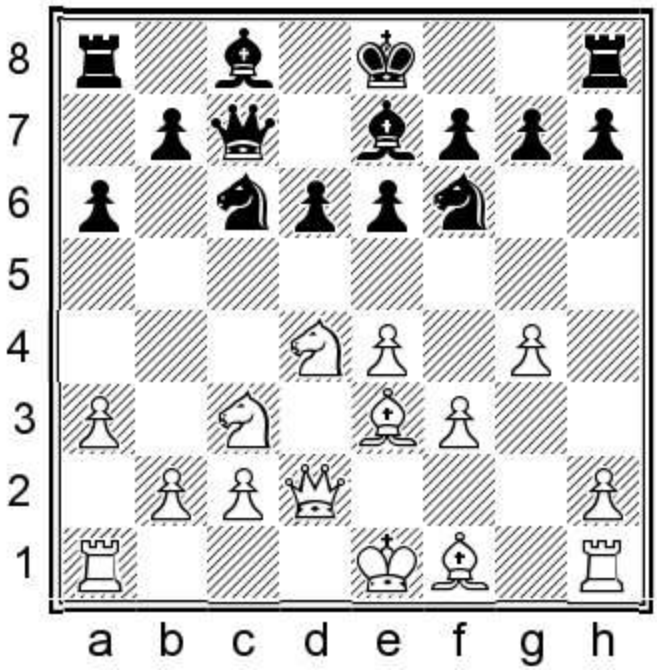
Vladisa Zivkovic – Svetislav Marinkov
Belgrade 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 d5!?
Totally misguided is the greedy:
7...Qb6?!

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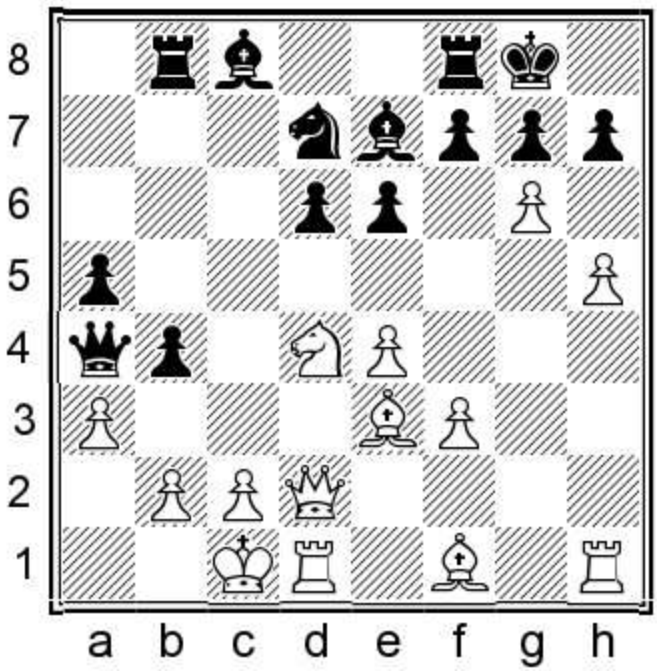


8.a3!
White does not have an advantage after: 8.Qd2 Qxb2! 9.Nb3 Qa3 10.Bb5† axb5 (10...Nbd7 11.Nb1!) 11.Nxb5 Qa4 12.Nc7† Ke7 13.e5 Nd5÷
8...Nc6
8...Qxb2 9.Na4+–
9.Qd2± Qc7
White wins after 9...Qxb2 10.Ra2 Qb6 11.Nxe6+–.
10.g4 Be7

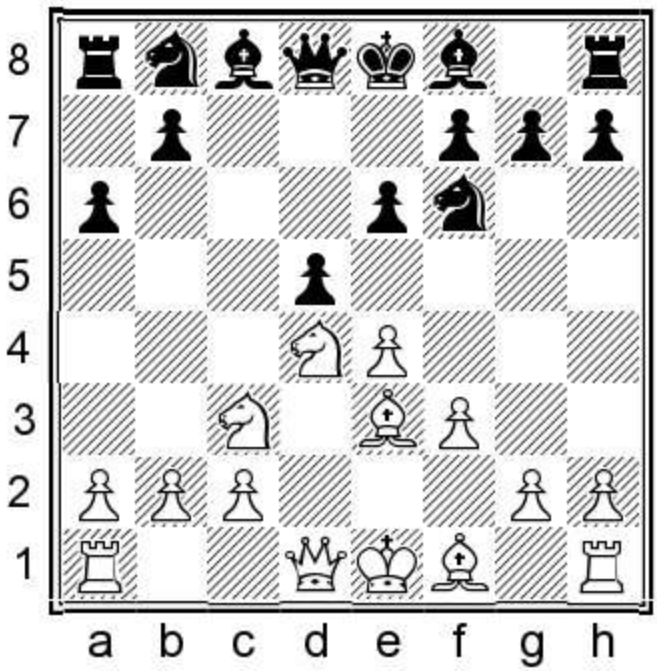


We have reached a typical position from the English Attack, where White has won a meaningful tempo in a2-a3 and Black has chosen a less than perfect line.
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11.g5 Nd7 12.0-0-0 0-0 13.h4 b5 14.Nxc6 Qxc6 15.h5 Rb8 16.g6 a5

16...Qb7 17.Bd4!± b4? 18.h6!+–
17.Ne2
17.Bg5!N 17...Bxg5 18.Qxg5 b4 19.h6!! would have won quickly, but is somewhat speculative, of course.
17...b4 18.Nd4 Qa4
18...Qb7 19.a4!



19.h6! bxa3 20.gxh7† Kh8 21.hxg7† Kxg7
In what was probably a blitz game, Molner – Krush, Internet 2010, White missed 22.h8=Q† with immediate mate.



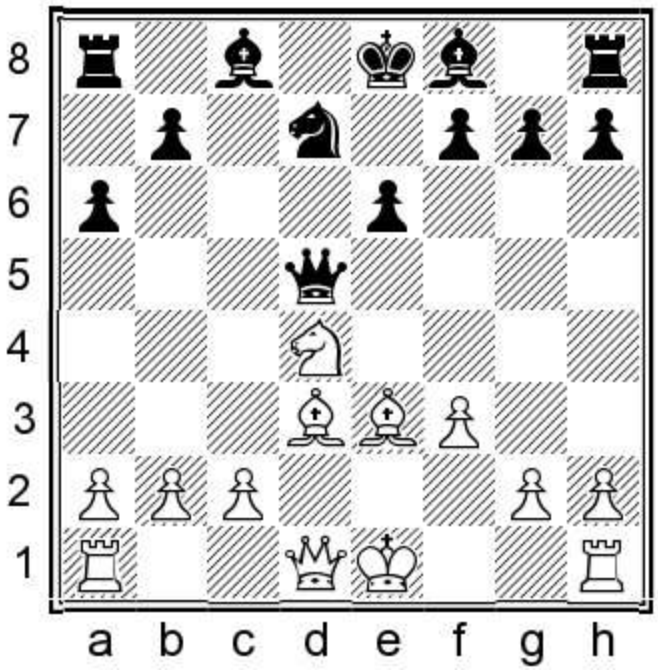
8.exd5
8.e5 Nfd7 9.f4 transposes to a sideline of the French Steinitz, which lies outside of our Tarrasch repertoire.

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Black seems okay after: 9...Qb6! (9...Nc6 10.Qg4!? and 9...Bc5 10.Qh5!? both look hopeful for White) 10.a3 Nc6 11.Be2 (11.Qd2 Qxb2 12.Ra2 Qb6 13.Nxe6 d4!=) 11...Bc5 12.Na4 Qa5† 13.c3 Bxd4 14.Bxd4 Nxd4 15. Qxd4 0-0=

8...Nxd5
8...exd5? 9.Qd2± is positionally disastrous for Black.

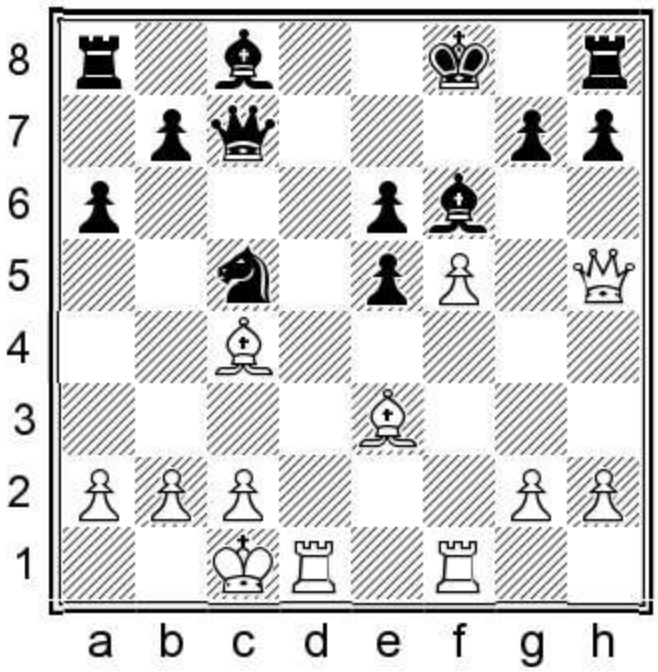
9.Nxd5 Qxd5 10.Bd3 Nd7




11.0-0
I have some preference for 11.Qe2!?N, which gives White a nice start to the game. I have analysed a few lines, but see no big problems. 11...Nc5 is most critical, but after 12.Bc4 Qe5 13.f4 Qc7 14.f5! White stands better, as the following brief lines demonstrate:

a) 14...e5?! is met strongly with 15.0-0-0! Be7 16.Ne6!!± with the point 16...fxe6 17.Qh5† Kf8 18.Rhf1 Bf6

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19.Rd8†!! Qxd8 20.Bxc5† Kg8 21.fxe6 and it is all over.

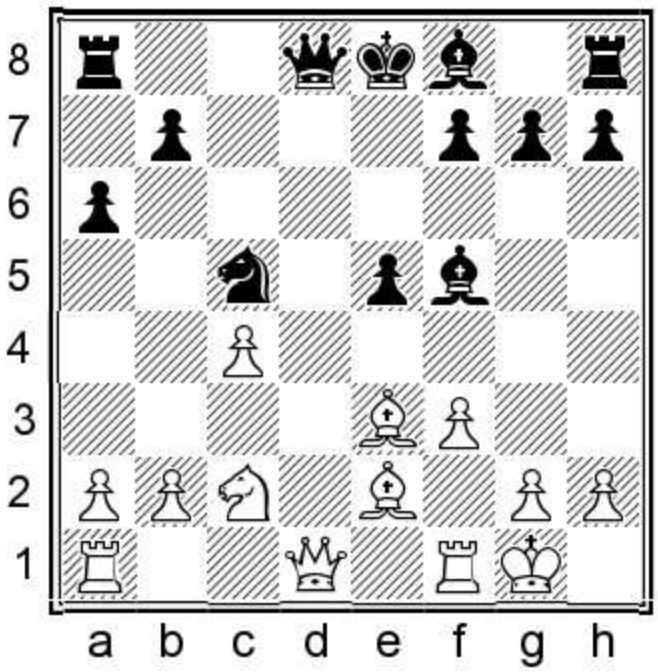
b) 14...Be7 15.0-0-0 0-0 16.fxe6 Bxe6 17.Nxe6 Nxe6 18.Kb1² Black will need to defend a lousy position for a long time.

11...Nc5 12.Be2 e5
Or 12...Be7 13.f4 0-0 14.Bf3 Qd6 15.Qd2 is very marginally better for White too.

13.c4
13.Nb3 was the last chance to play for an advantage.

13...Qd8 14.Nc2 Bf5?!
14...Qxd1 15.Raxd1 Na4 would have equalized.

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15.Nb4² Qd6?! 16.Nd5± a5?! 17.Kh1
17.f4! e4 18.Qd4 would have given White a winning position.

17...Be7 18.a3 a4 19.f4 e4 20.Nxe7 Qxe7 21.Qd5 Rc8 22.Qxf5 0-0 23.Rad1 Rc6 24.Bxc5 Rxc5 25.Rd5 g6 26.Qe5 Qxe5 27.fxe5 Rc6 28.Rfd1 h5 29.Kg1 Re6 30.R1d4 f5 31.exf6 Rfxf6 32.c5 e3 33.Rd6 Kg7 34.Rxe6 Rxe6 35.Rd7†
1–0

We have nothing to fear here; White is better out of the opening.

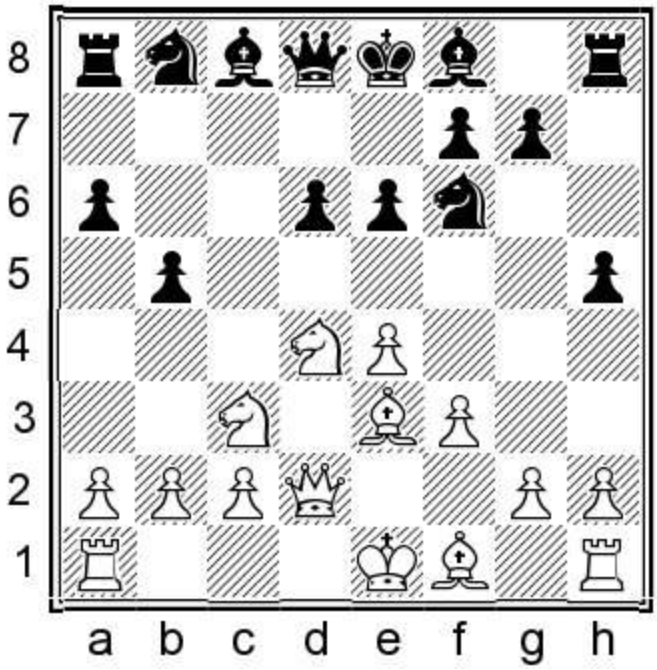
GAME 30

Fabiano Caruana – Hikaru Nakamura
Saint Louis 2016

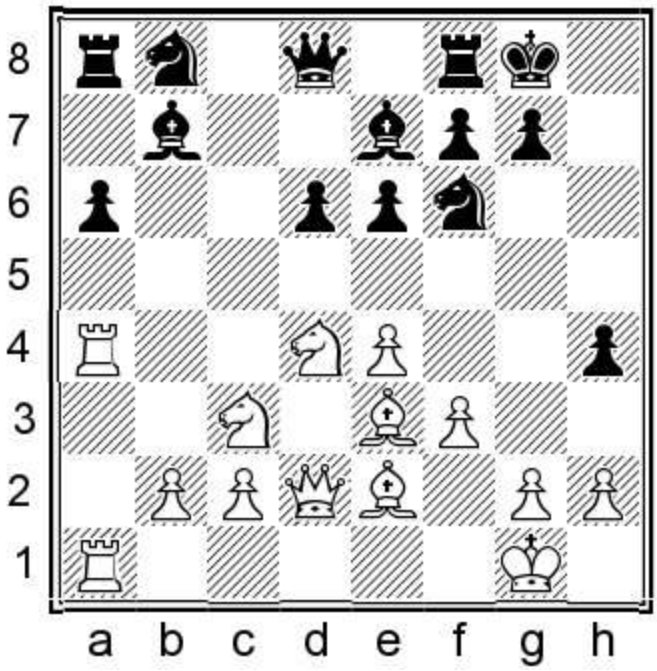
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 h5
Nakamura has used this line on occasion. Played well, it is not directly bad, but it is still a sideline for a reason.

Worse is:
7...b5 8.Qd2
8.g4?! is premature when the d7-square is free for the queen or bishop. The most obvious example is 8...b4 9.Na4 Bd7! and Black has great counterplay.
8...h5?!

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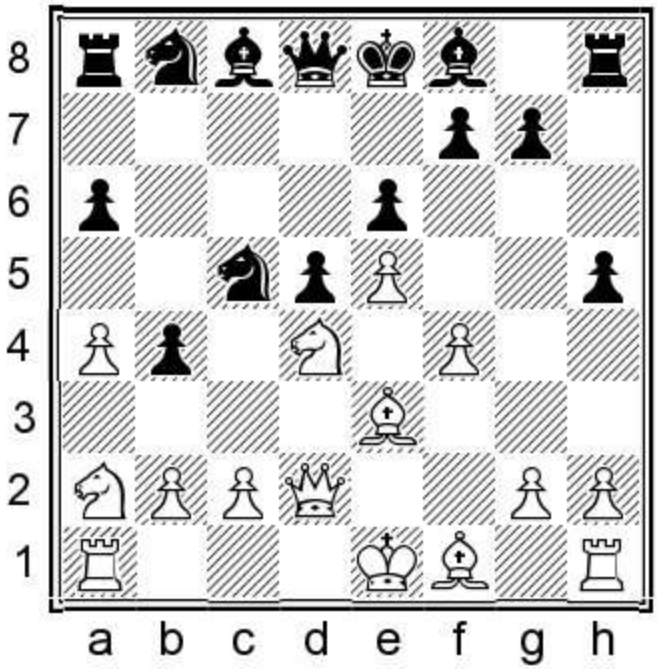
I do not think this works in this position. Black cannot afford to weaken his kingside after he has already weakened the queenside.
9.a4!
We should always consider the strength of this push.
9...b4
9...bxa4 10.Rxa4! Be7 11.Be2 0-0 12.0-0 Bb7 13.Rfa1 is a positional disaster. After 13...h4 in Fressinet – Nevednichy, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007, White should have continued:



14.b4!N 14...d5 15.b5! This is overwhelmingly strong. Black is surprisingly lost at the end of the following line: 15...e5 16.Nf5 d4 17.Bf2! dxc3 (the way to stay almost alive is: 17...Nfd7 18.Nxe7† Qxe7 19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.exd5 Nb6 21.Ra5 Nxd5 22.Bd3±) 18.Qg5 g6 19.Be3! White is totally winning; next comes Bc4.
10.Na2 d5 11.e5 Nfd7 12.f4 Nc5

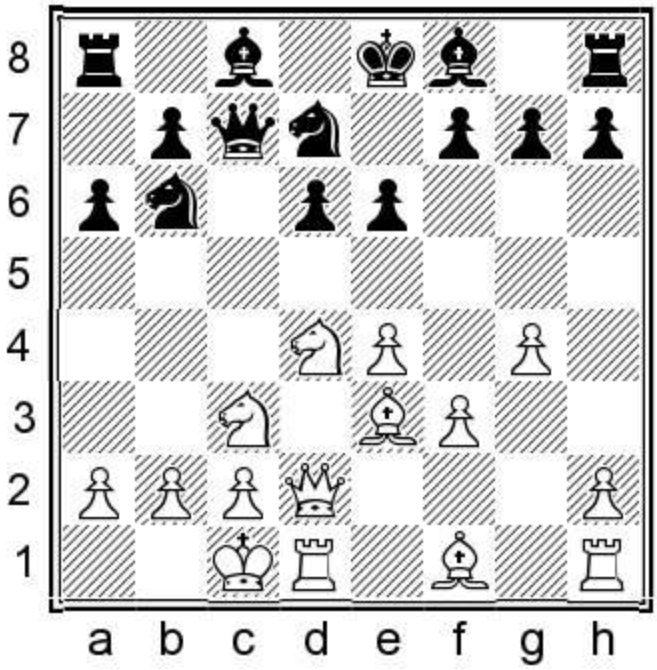
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This was played in De la Villa Garcia – Spraggett, Burguillos 2007.

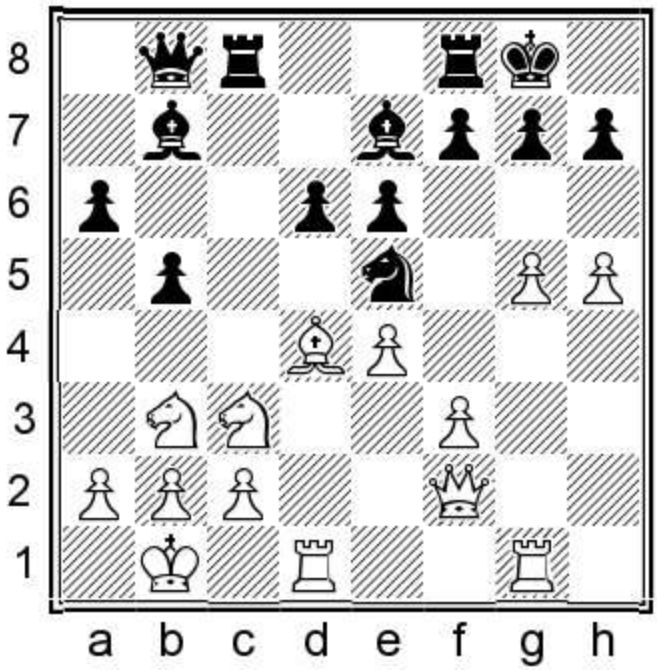


The critical line is the same as always in these positions:
13.c3!N
This would destroy Black's position.
13...Ne4
13...bxc3 14.Nxc3 Be7 15.b4±
13...Nxa4 14.Nxb4 Nc5 15.Be2±
14.Qc2 bxc3 15.Nxc3 Nxc3 16.Qxc3 Be7 17.Bd3 0-0 18.0-0
White's position is overwhelming.
7...Nbd7 8.g4
Now 8...h6 9.Qd2 b5 transposes to lines covered later in this chapter. But I should mention an independent line:
8...Nb6 9.Qd2 Nfd7 10.0-0-0 Qc7

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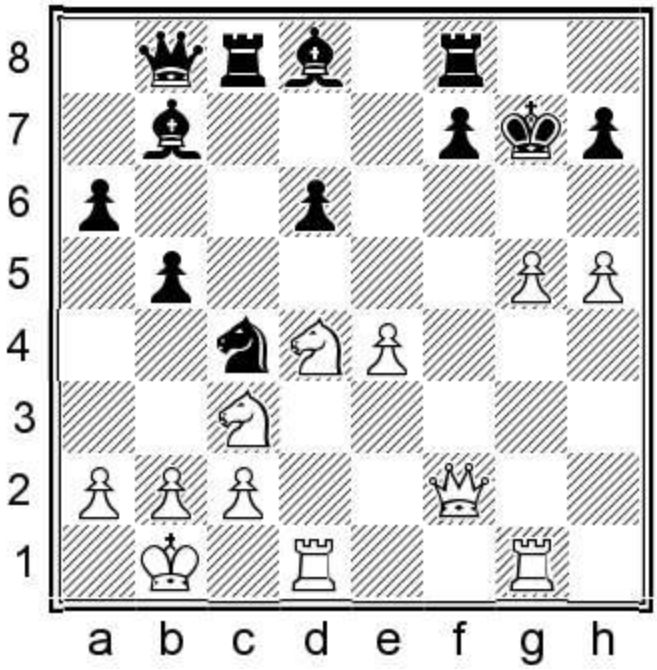
11.Qf2
If you are looking for more, you could check out: 11.f4!?N 11...Nc4 12.Bxc4 Qxc4 13.Rhf1! b5 14.b3 Qc7 15.f5 Ne5 16.g5± White is likely to play Nc3-e2-f4.
11...Nc4 12.Bxc4 Qxc4 13.Kb1 b5 14.h4 Bb7 15.Nb3 Qc7 16.g5
16.a3!
16...Rc8
Black should have pushed ...b5-b4 at some point; just as White should have prevented it with a2-a3.
17.h5 Be7 18.Rhg1 Ne5?! 19.Bb6! Qb8 20.Bd4 0-0
So far we have been following Leko – Zhang Zhong, Berlin (blitz) 2015.



21.f4!N 21...Nc4 22.f5!
White crashes through. For example:

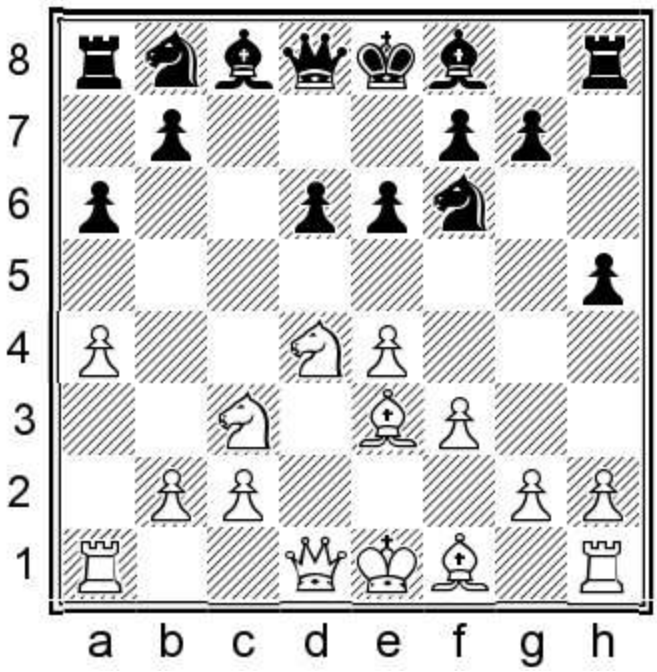
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22...e5 23.f6! exd4 24.Nxd4 Bd8 25.fxg7 Kxg7



26.g6!
Black's position collapses.

8.a4!?

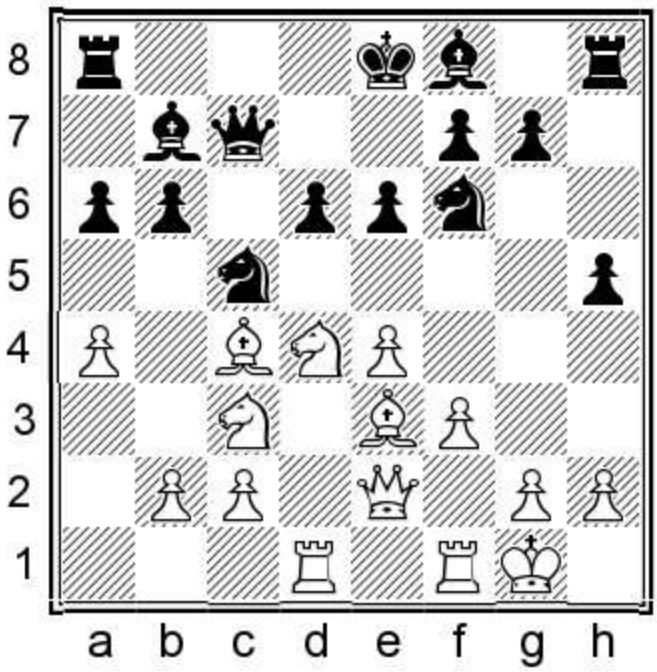


If Black can make pointless pawn moves on the flank, we can make reasonable ones. The main difference is that the ...h5 move exposes the black king, while White will castle to the opposite side of where he has weakened his position.

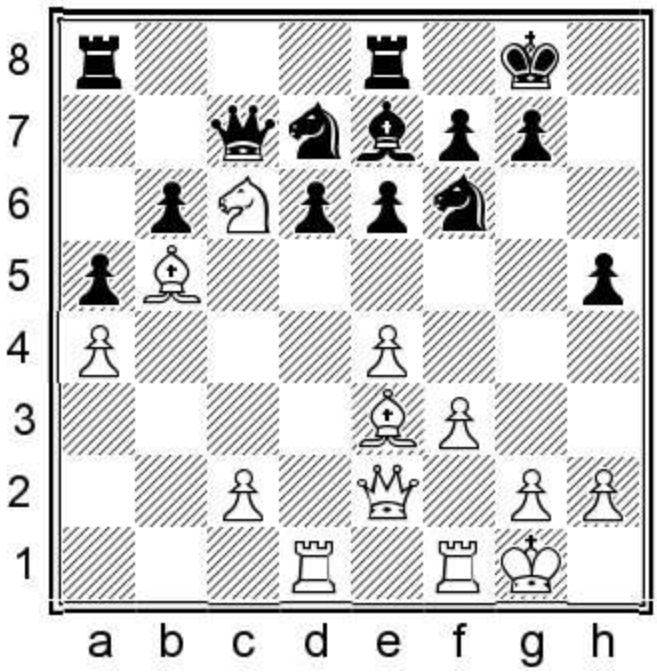
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8...Nc6

I also think White is better after 8...b6 9.Bc4 Bb7 10.Qe2 Nbd7 11.0-0². For example: 11...Qc7 12.Rad1 Nc5 Berescu – Baramidze, Kusadasi 2006.



At this point I have a very ambitious idea: 13.b4!N 13...Ncd7 14.b5 a5 15.Nc6! This pawn sacrifice sharpens the position. 15...Bxc6 16.bxc6 Qxc6 17.Nb5 Be7 18.Nd4 Qc7 19.Bb5 I prefer White. For example: 19...0-0 20. Nc6 Rfe8



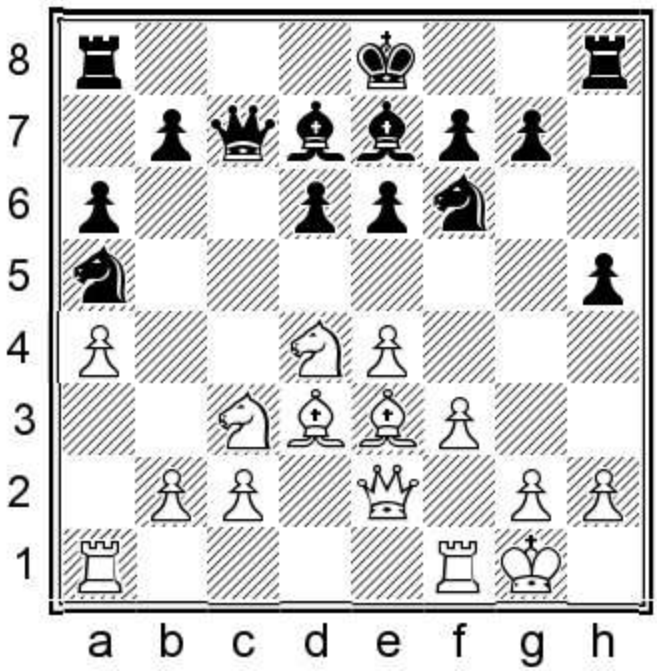
21.g4!± hxg4? 22.fxg4 Nxe4 23.Qf3+–

9.Bc4
The positional approach.

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9...Qc7
9...d5N 10.exd5 exd5 11.Ba2²

10.Qe2 Be7 11.0-0 Ne5
Maurice Ashley recommended 11...Na5, but I think White is better after: 12.Bd3 Bd7

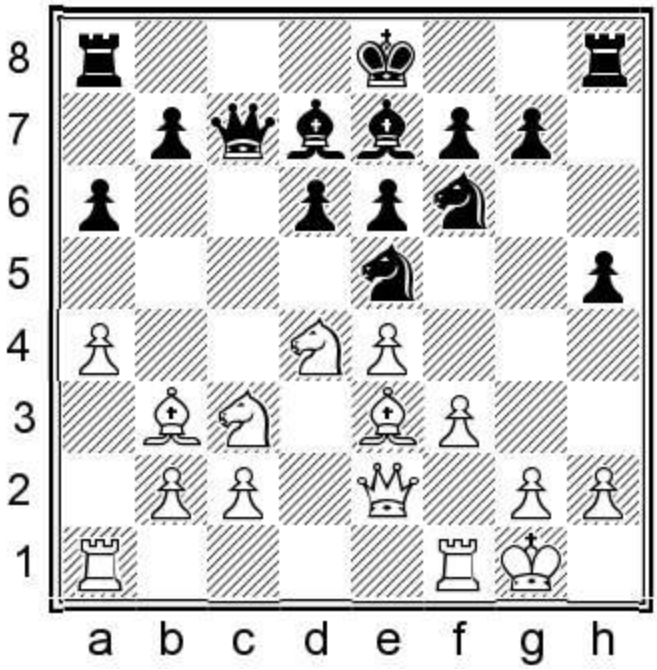


13.Nb3! Opening the c-file would benefit White, and also fine is: 13...h4 14.Nxa5 Qxa5 15.Qf2 Qc7 16.Bb6 Qc8 17.h3 Nh5 18.a5²

11...0-0 followed by ...Rfe8 was Roiz's recommendation for Black, but I think that Caruana had in mind 12. Nxc6! Qxc6 (12...bxc6 13.a5 d5 14.Bb6 Qb8 15.Bd3²) 13.Bb3, when White is better.

12.Bb3 Bd7

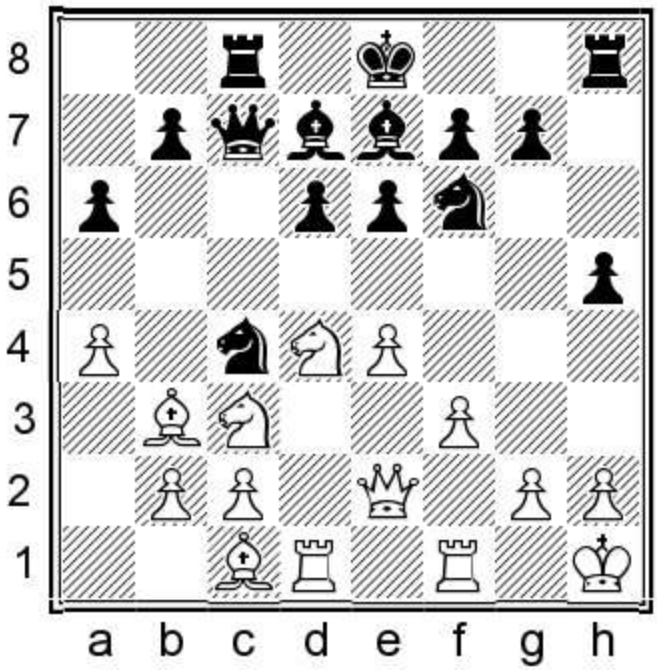
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13.f4?!
This weakens the position prematurely.

GM Roiz recommended 13.Rfd1!?N on chesspublishing.com. This great analyst is always worth listening to. His variation goes: 13...Rc8 14.a5 0-0 15.Qe1 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Qxc4 17.Nb3 Qc7 18.Bg5² “Despite the pair of bishops, Black suffers from a lack of active play.” – Roiz. I find this quite attractive.

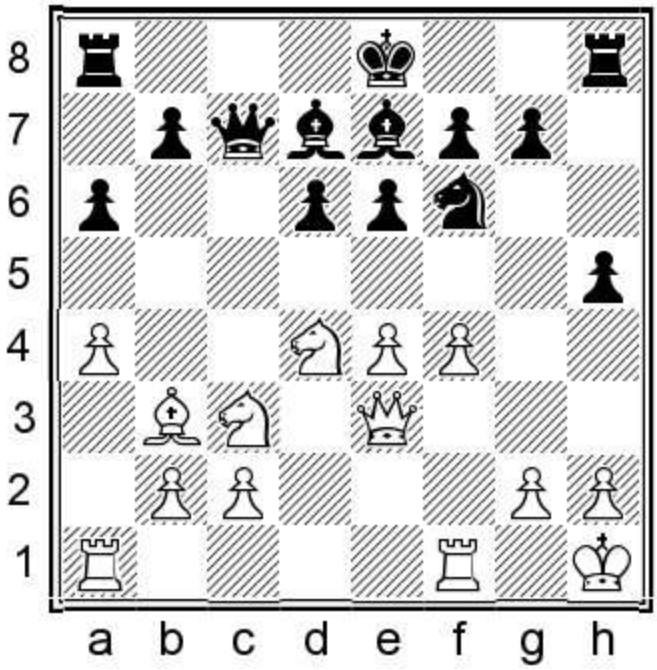
White is also better after 13.Kh1!?N 13...Rc8 14.Rad1 Nc4 15.Bc1², which is my preference.



I think this is the best way for White to place his pieces. It is important to point out that Black cannot play 15...h4 16.f4 h3? on account of 17.g4!±, when White has a very strong attack.

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13...Neg4 14.Kh1 Nxe3 15.Qxe3



15...Qc5
15...0-0-0!³ was even better.

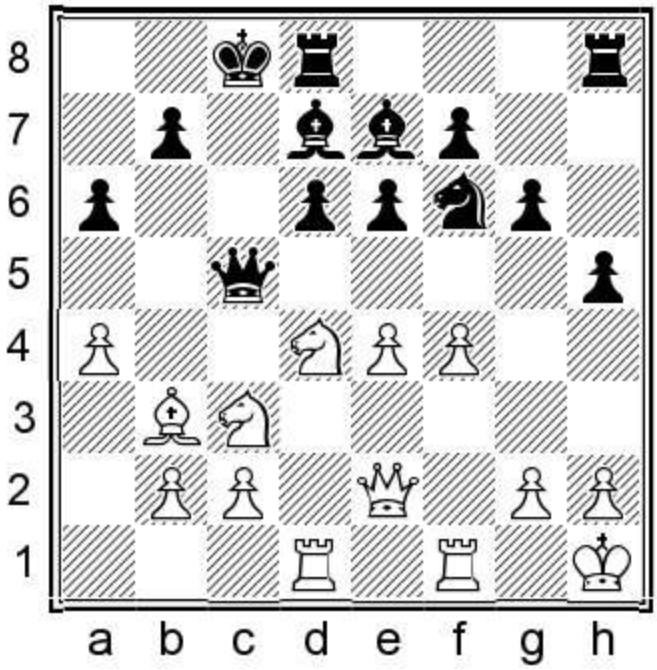
16.Rad1 g6?!

I do not see the reason for this move. I am sure Nakamura had a reason to play like this, but it looks like a waste of time.

16...0-0-0 still looks fine.

17.Qe2 0-0-0
17...Ng4 18.Rd3²

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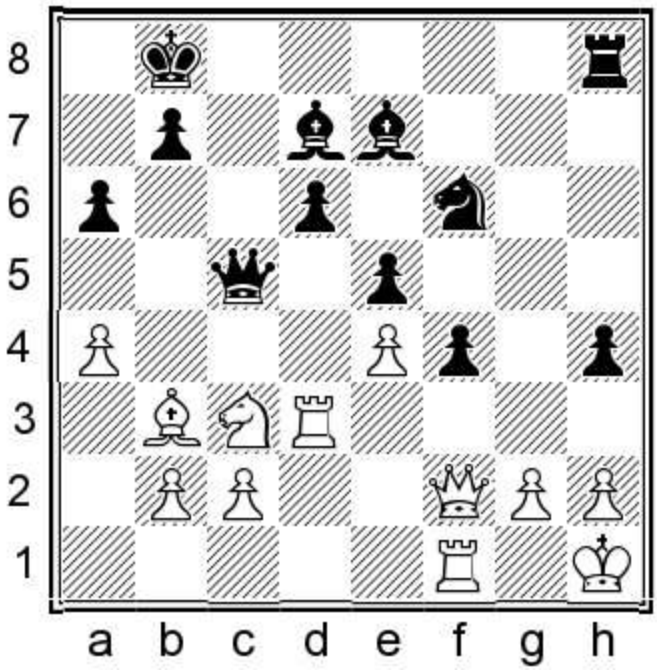


18.f5?!
Stronger was: 18.e5! dxe5 19.fxe5 Ng4 20.Rxf7 Rde8 21.Ne4 (21.h3!?²) 21...Qxe5 22.Qc4† Kb8 23.Nf3 Qc7 24.Qxc7† Kxc7 25.Nfg5²

18...e5
Taking on f5 first made more sense as White gets extra options from the game's move order, but this is OK too.

19.Nf3 gxf5 20.Ng5!? f4! 21.Rd3 Kb8
The more accurate 21...Bg4 22.Qd2 Rd7! would have kept the balance without need for great play.

22.Nxf7 h4 23.Nxh8 Rxh8 24.Qf2



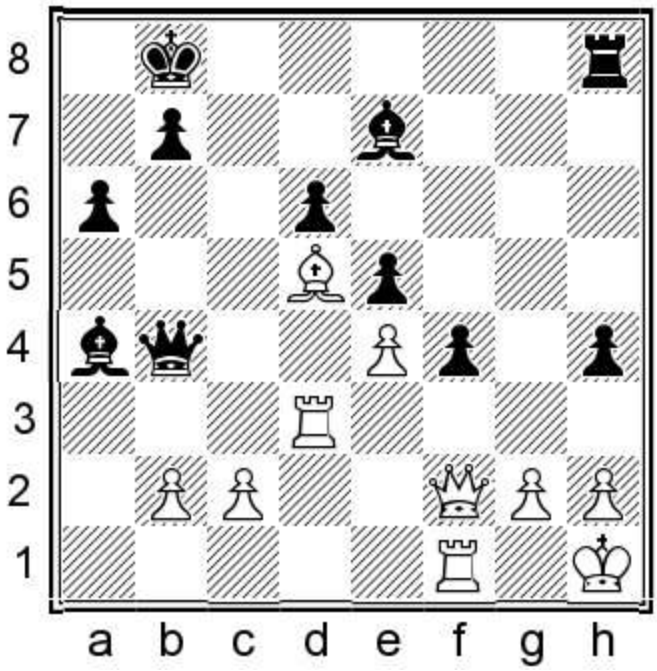
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Black must be careful not to end up without compensation for the exchange, but things really went downhill from here.

24...Qb4?
24...d5!! would have equalized. 25.Bxd5 Qxf2 26.Rxf2 Bc5 27.Rff3! (27.Rf1? Nh5! 28.b4 Ba7 29.Ne2 Ng3† 30.Nxg3 hxg3 31.h3 Bg4!³) 27...Bg4 28.h3 Bxf3 29.gxf3! White has slightly better practical chances, but it should be a draw.

24...Qxf2 25.Rxf2 d5! simply transposes.

25.Nd5 Nxd5 26.Bxd5 Bxa4?
26...Bc8 would have lasted longer.




27.Ra3!
There is no defence against trapping the bishop.

27...h3 28.c3 Qb5 29.b3 Bh4 30.bxa4 Qd3 31.g3
1–0

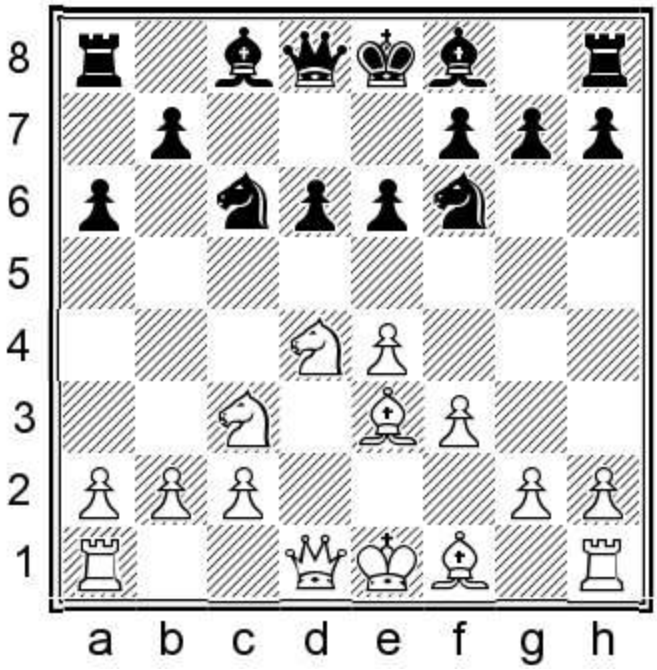
The Nakamura line, should he wish to claim ownership of it, is not ridiculous. It's just not very good either. As White I would be optimistic that I was on the path to an opening advantage if I saw my opponent play this. If my opponent was Nakamura, he would then destroy me in the middlegame, but that's another story.

...Nc6 lines

In the 1990s, variations with ...Nc6 were fashionable, with Kasparov one of the main defenders. But by the 2000s the variation was running out of steam. New ideas would surface briefly, but even when they worked, they always seemed to rely as much on luck as on the qualities of the position. I see no great reason to change this point of view today.

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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 Nc6

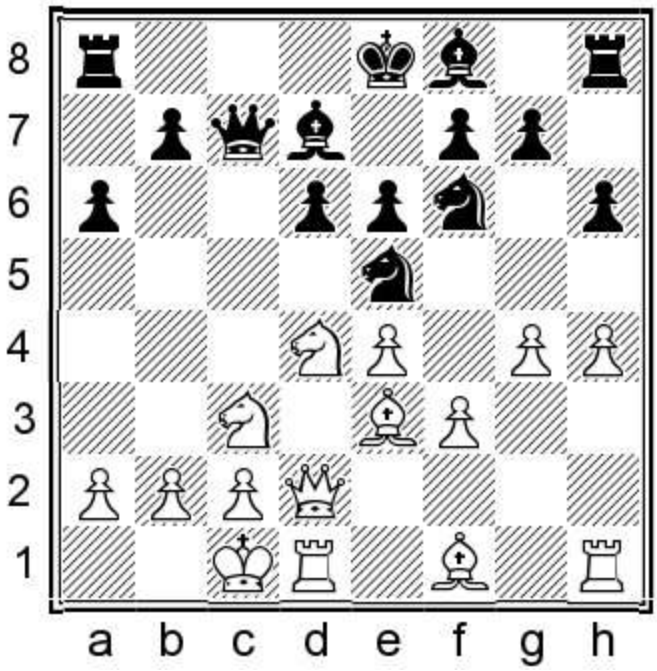


8.Qd2 h5!?
Lines with ...h5 have become trendy in the Sicilian, but I do not like this version of it.

8...Bd7 9.g4 would show how misplaced the black pieces are. I cover this briefly under the 8...Qc7 move order.

8...Qc7 9.0-0-0 is flexible and gives Black several options, none of which is terribly attractive. We will consider a) 9...Bd7?!, b) 9...Ne5 and c) 9...Be7:

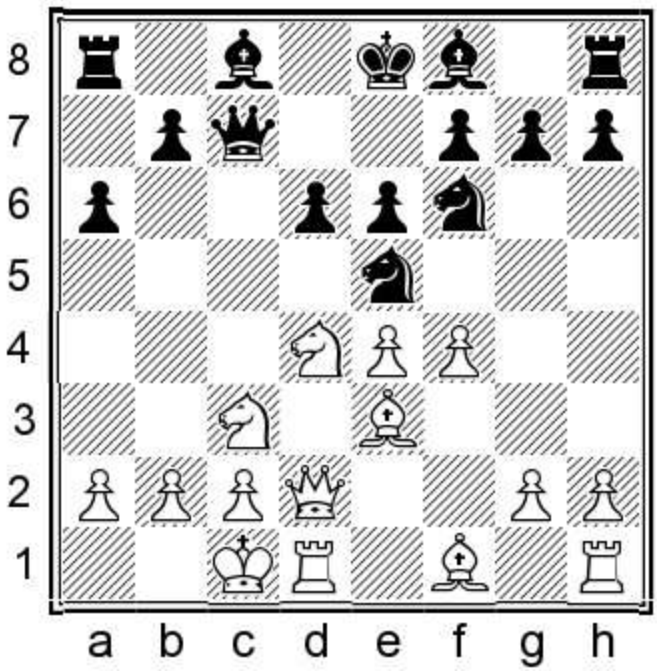
a) 9...Bd7?! is a simple disaster. 10.g4! h6 11.h4 Ne5



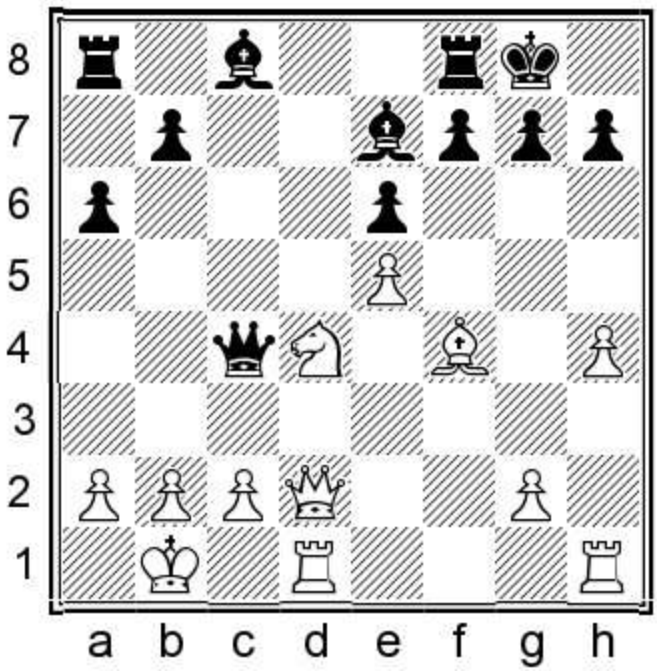
12.Rg1! g6 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxg5 Nh5 15.f4 Nc4 16.Bxc4 Qxc4 17.f5 White is essentially winning, Doluhanova – Deszczynski, Warsaw 2011.

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b) 9...Ne5 10.f4
This is great for White, as we will see.



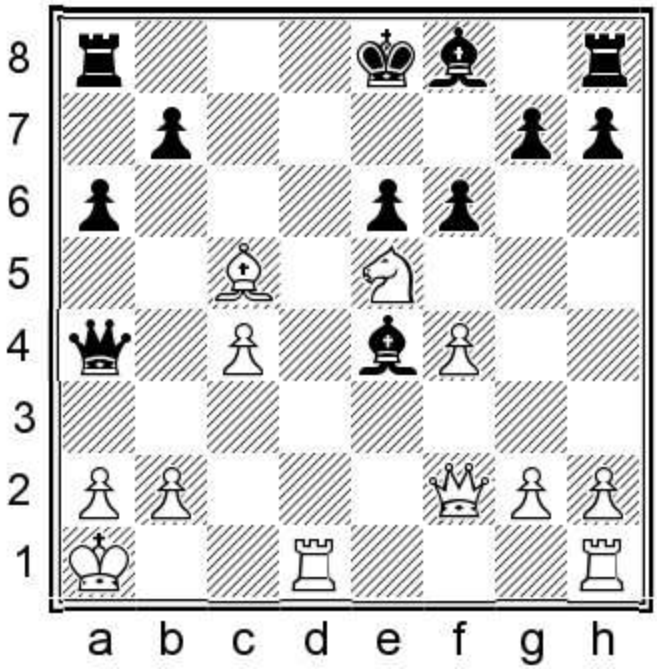
10...Ned7!?
A weird but necessary move.
10...Nc4?! is punished brutally: 11.Bxc4 Qxc4 12.e5 Nd5 13.Nxd5 Qxd5 14.Kb1 with a split:
b1) 14...dxe5 15.fxe5 Be7 16.Bf4 Qc4 17.h4 0-0 Kulaots – Leito, Harjumaa [rapid] 2010.



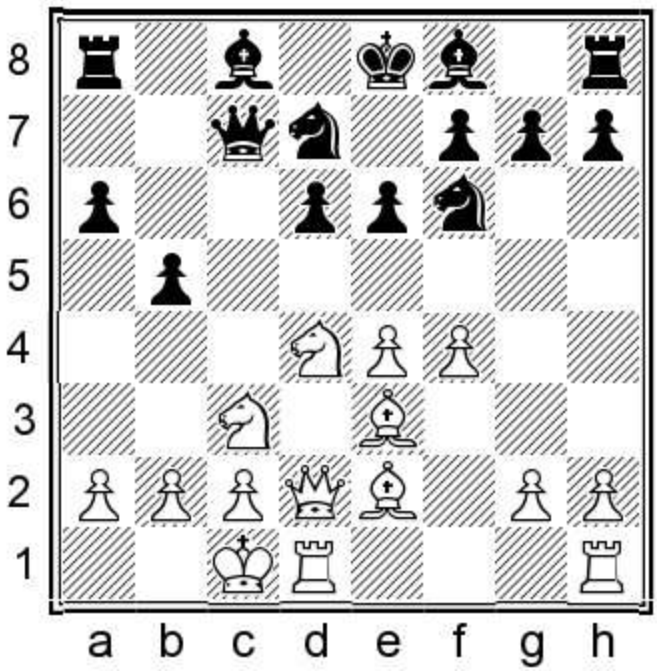
At this point 18.Rh3!N with ideas such as Rg3 or Rc3 is essentially winning. Kulaots found a less obvious path, but still took the full point.
b2) 14...Bd7 15.Qf2 dxe5 16.Nf3 Qb5 17.Nxe5 Bc6 18.c4 Be4† 19.Ka1 Qa4 20.Bc5 f6 was Kulaots – Leito,

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Puhajarve (rapid) 2017; Black survived from this second attempt at this bad variation.

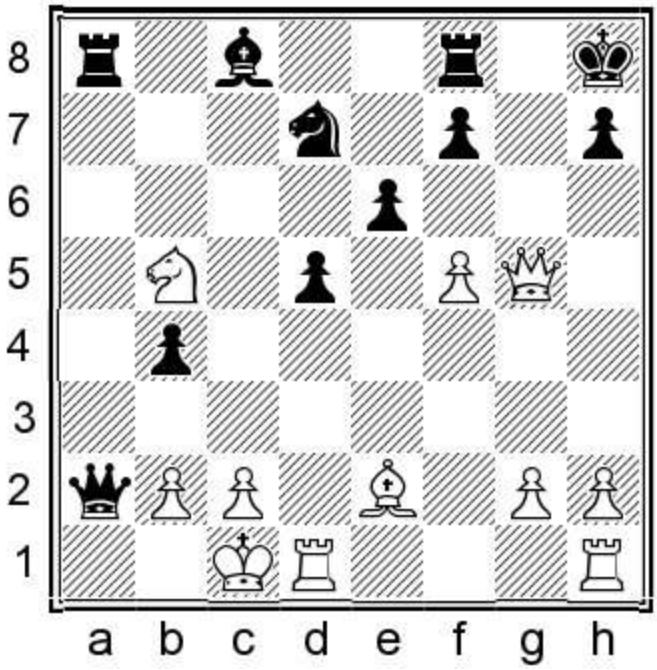


But here 21.Bxf8!N 21...Rxf8 22.Qb6 would have won the game.)
11.Be2 b5
In Fedorchuk – Kozul, Ohrid 2001, White should have continued:

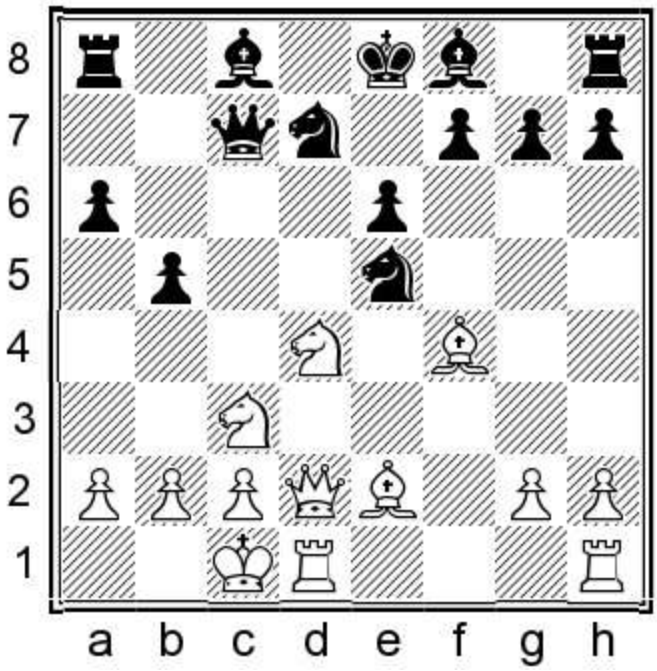


12.e5!N 12...dxe5
Black has a critical line, which requires accuracy to be refuted. 12...b4 13.Ncb5! axb5 14.Nxb5 Qa5 15.exf6 d5 The only move (15...Qxa2 16.Nxd6† Bxd6 17.Qxd6 gxf6 18.Bc5 leads to mate). 16.fxg7 Bxg7 17.Bd4± 0-0 18. Bxg7 Kxg7 19.f5! White has a winning attack. For example: 19...Qxa2 20.Qg5† Kh8

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I continued the variation this far because White still has to play accurately in order to win: 21.fxe6! fxe6 22. Qe7! White is ready to play Bd3. 22...Ba6 23.Bd3 Nf6 24.Rhf1 Rae8 25.Qd6 White is ready for Qe5, winning.
13.fxe5 Nxe5
13...Qxe5 14.Bf3 and White wins.
14.Bf4±
Black is entirely unready for the tactics; White is ready for Nf3, Bf3 and Qe3.
14...Nfd7

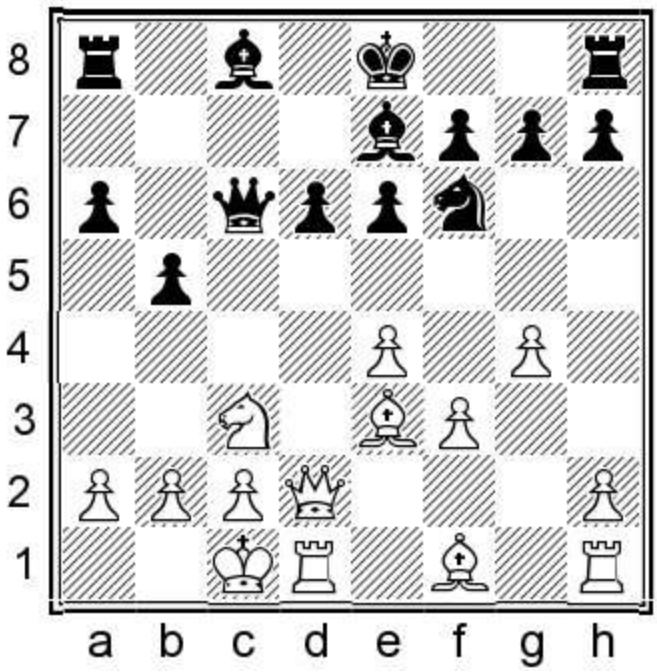


15.Ndxb5!
15.Rhe1 is better according to the computer, but I find the complications inhuman.
15...axb5 16.Bxb5©
Black has an indefensible position. For example:

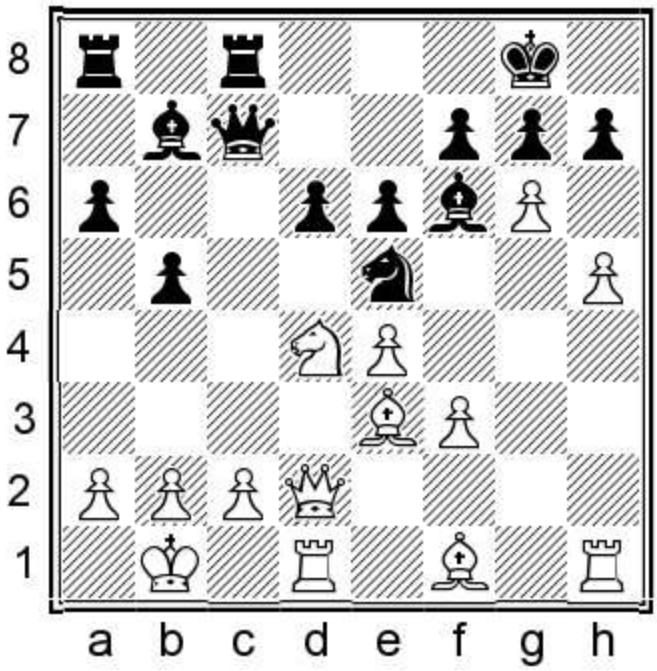
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16...Ra7 17.Qe3 f6 18.Bxe5 fxe5 19.Rhf1 Be7 20.a4!±
Black is a piece up, but nothing in his position works.

c) 9...Be7 10.g4 b5
This gives us a good moment to trade knights.
11.Nxc6 Qxc6

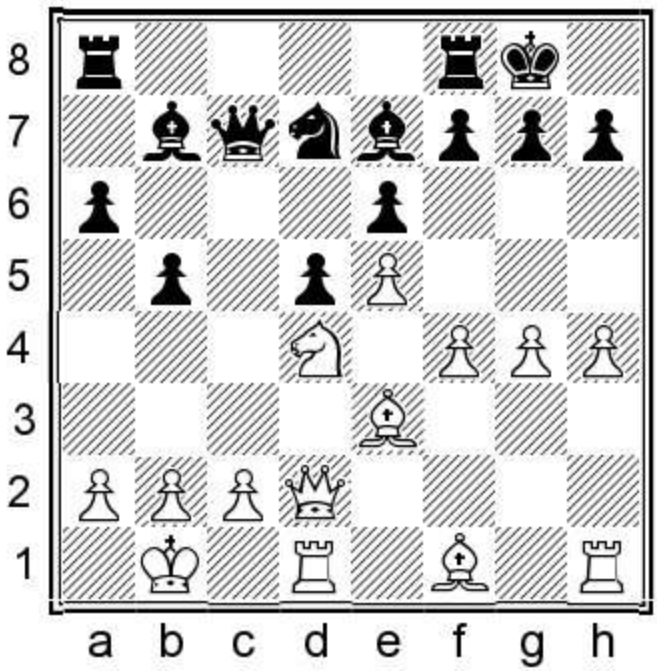


12.Ne2!
This typical manoeuvre gives White a plus.
12...Bb7 13.Nd4 Qc7 14.Kb1 0-0 15.h4 d5
Black has to do something, as White is ready for the assault. For example: 15...Nd7?! 16.g5± Ne5 17.h5 Rfc8 18.g6 Bf6 was Novgorodskij – Kamov, Kazan 2008, when White can improve on his play with:



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19.h6!N 19...hxg6 (19...fxg6 20.Bh3 and White is doing swimmingly) 20.hxg7 Bxg7 21.Bh6 Bf6 22.Qh2 White's attack is overwhelming. For example: 22...Nd7 23.Bd3 Nf8 24.Bf4 e5 25.Bg5 Bg7 26.Nf5! gxf5 27. Rdg1 and mate will follow. Look at how far along Black is (or rather is not) with his attack.
16.e5 Nd7 17.f4²

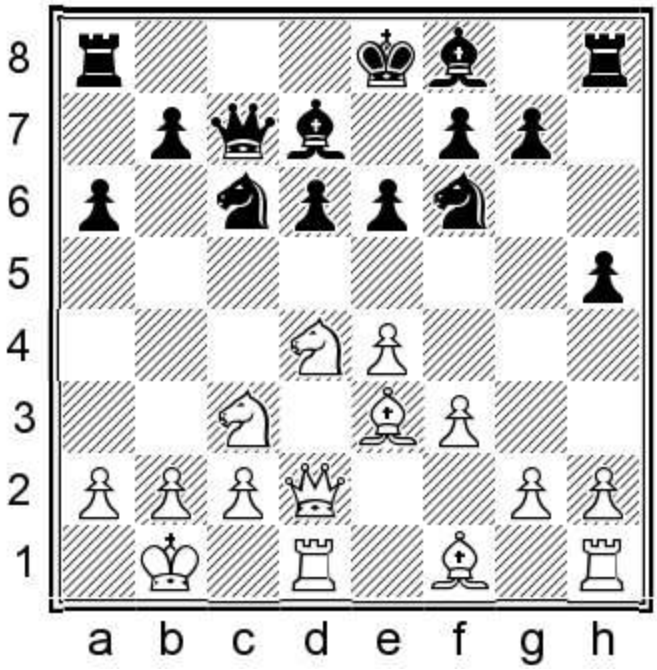


Korneev – Lloret Climent, Valencia 1998. These types of positions are unattractive for Black as far as I am concerned.

9.0-0-0 Bd7
There is a somewhat similar position in the Classical Sicilian after 5...Nc6 6.Bg5 e6 7.Qd2 a6 8.0-0-0 Bd7 9.f3 Be7 10.h4 h6 11.Be3 h5. There the ...h5 plan makes good sense, as White had already committed his h-pawn. But in our case, White can do better than h2-h4.

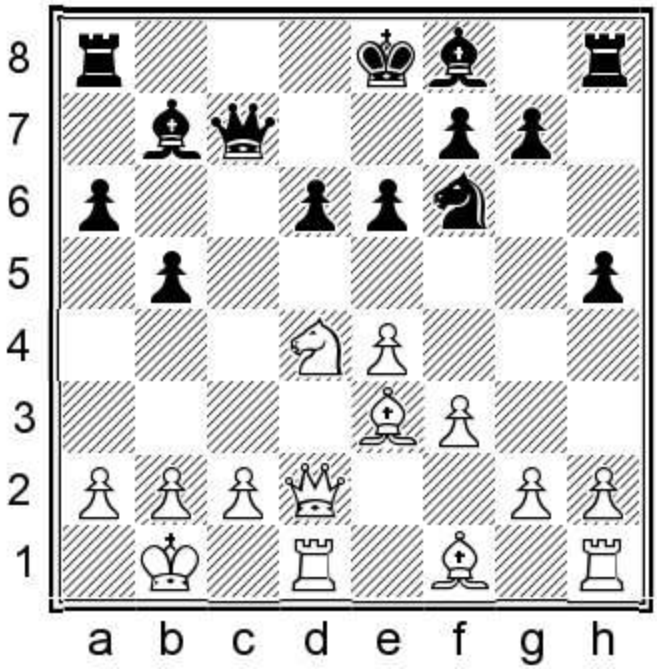
10.Kb1 Qc7

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11.Nxc6! Bxc6
11...bxc6?! 12.Bc4! gives White a pleasant advantage. Black's centre may look solid and strong, but it cannot do anything; meanwhile the white king will be very safe with the bishop placed on b3.

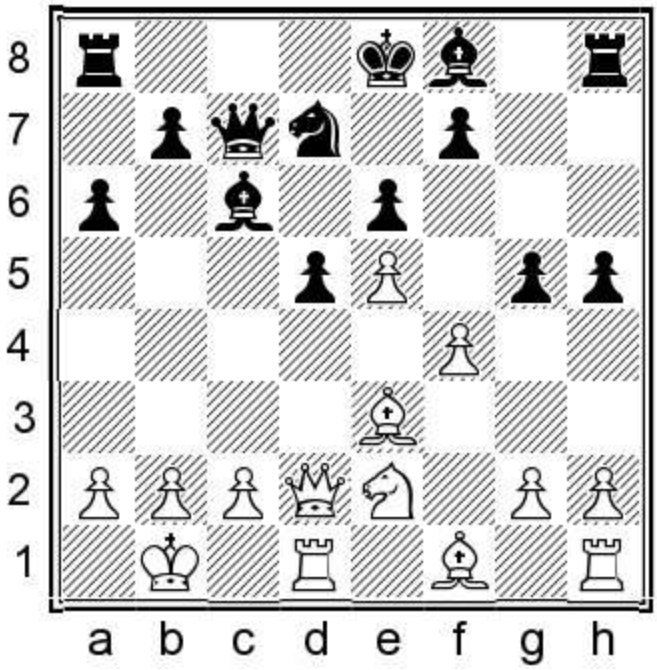
12.Ne2 d5
12...b5 13.Nd4 Bb7 happened in Openshaw – Byrn, Gibraltar 2013.



After 14.Bd3!N 14...Be7 15.Rhe1[2] White is somewhat better. For example 15...0-0 16.h3 or 15...Rc8 16.Bg5.

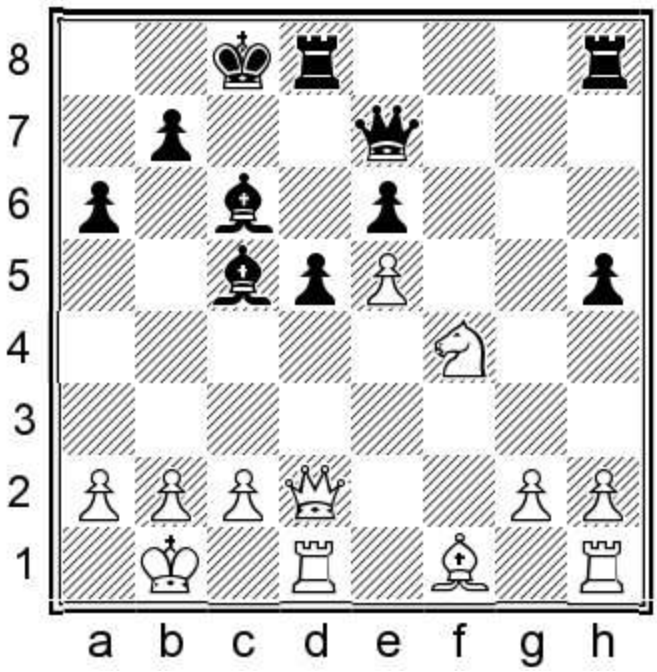
13.e5 Nd7 14.f4 g5?
Trying to undermine the e5-pawn, but it backfires.
14...Nc5 15.Nd4 Be7 16.g3[2] would have been normal play.

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15.f5! Nc5
This was probably not the original plan, but the consistent 15...Nxe5?! 16.Bxg5 is hopeless for Black. For example: 16...Nc4 (or 16...Be7 17.fxe6 fxe6 18.Nd4+–) 17.Qc3 e5 18.Nf4! Rg8 19.h4+–

16.fxe6 fxe6 17.Bxc5 Bxc5 18.Qxg5 Qe7 19.Qd2 0-0-0 20.Nf4±



White was much better in Cheparinov – Al-Modiahki, Sochi 2008.

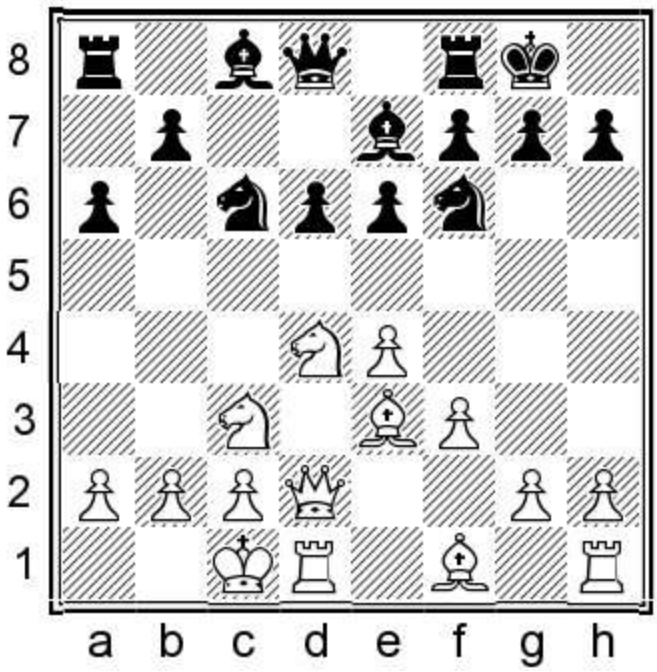
The next game covers the main line of the ...Nc6-variation.

GAME 31

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Robert James Fischer – Boris Spassky
Belgrade (25) 1992

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 Nc6 8.Qd2 Be7 9.0-0-0 0-0



10.g4!
The main line. This game actually used a different move order to reach this position, but I changed it to fit our repertoire.
I was tempted to recommend 10.Kb1 as a more flexible approach, with the idea 10...Nxd4 11.Qxd4 Nd7 12.h4 b5 13.Bg5! with serious pressure on the dark squares, but I failed to find anything special for White after 10...d5 11.Be2 Qc7! 12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Nxd5 exd5 as in Giri – Van Wely, Amstelveen 2017.

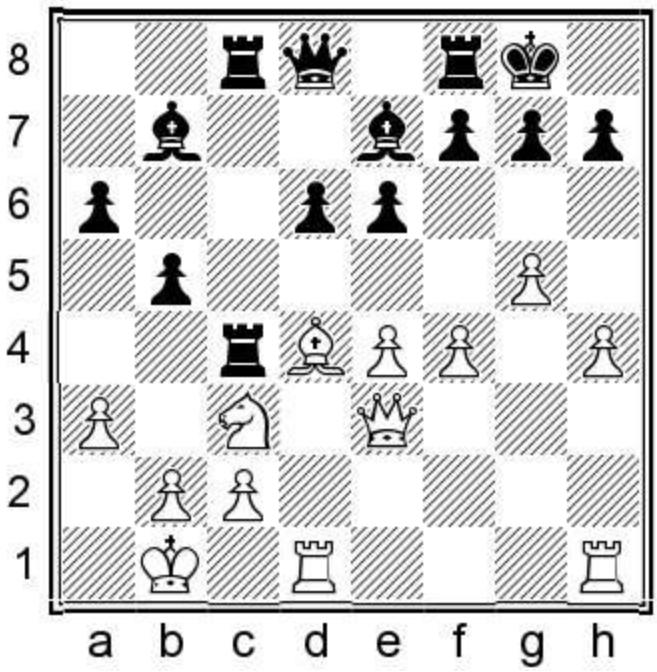
10...Nd7
10...Nxd4 11.Bxd4 b5 12.g5 Nd7 13.h4 transposes to our main game.

11.h4 Nxd4
After 11...Nde5 12.Nxc6! bxc6 13.Be2 Rb8 14.f4 Nd7 15.h5 Qa5 16.Qe1 Qb4 17.b3± White's prospects on the kingside are far superior to those of Black on the queenside, Da Riva Alonso – Kratochvil, email 2011.

12.Bxd4 b5 13.g5 b4
I also considered two lines in which Black develops more slowly on the queenside.

13...Bb7 14.a3!
14.Kb1 is playable but after 14...b4 Black avoids the Na4-b6 idea from the main game.
14...Rc8 15.Kb1 Ne5 16.Qe3 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.f4!
This is much more incisive than 18.Rhg1, the move which was mentioned by Emms in Play the Najdorf: Scheveningen Style. White will soon build a deadly initiative in the centre and on the kingside.

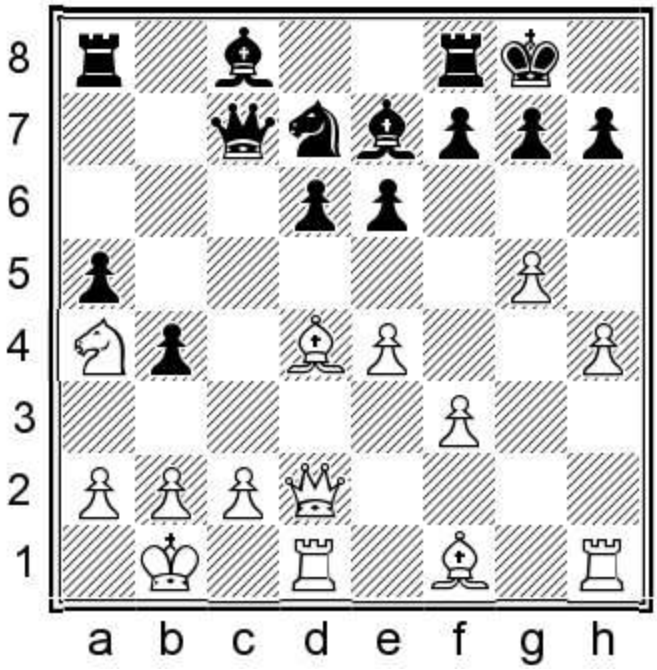
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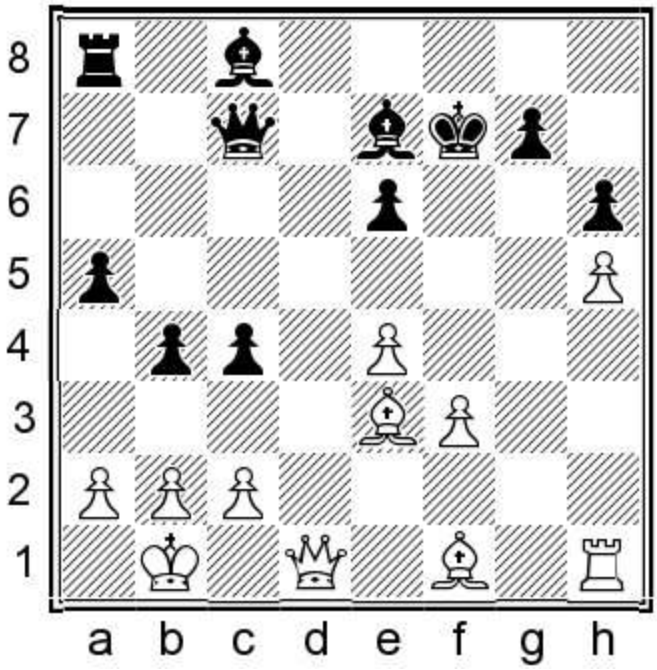
18...b4 19.axb4 Rxb4 20.f5! exf5 21.Rhe1! fxe4 22.Nxe4 Bd5
In the event of 22...Bxe4 23.Qxe4 Re8 24.Re2+– the pin decides.
23.Nf6†!?
The computer confirms that this is the most direct route to victory. However, the simpler 23.Ng3 Be6 24.Nh5 Bg4 25.Nxg7 Bxd1 26.Rxd1 should also do the trick.
23...gxf6 24.Bc3 Rb5 25.Rg1 fxg5 26.Qd4
White went on to win convincingly in Ustimenko – Susla, corr. 2014.

13...Qc7 14.Kb1 b4 15.Na4 a5
Gelfand suggested a pawn sacrifice, but it does not quite work: 15...Bb7 16.Qxb4 Bc6 17.Nc3 Rfb8 18.Qc4 Ne5 19.Qe2 Bb5 20.Qf2 Bxf1 21.Rhxf1 Nc4 22.b3 Rb4 23.Rd3 Rc8 Aagaard – P.H. Nielsen, Malmo/Copenhagen 2004. This gave compensation for Black, according to Gelfand 15 years ago. But after 24.f4!N 24...Na3† 25.Kb2 Nc4† 26.Ka1 Na3 27.Be3!+– with Bc1-b2 coming, White has a winning position. The extra pawn is only a small part of it.

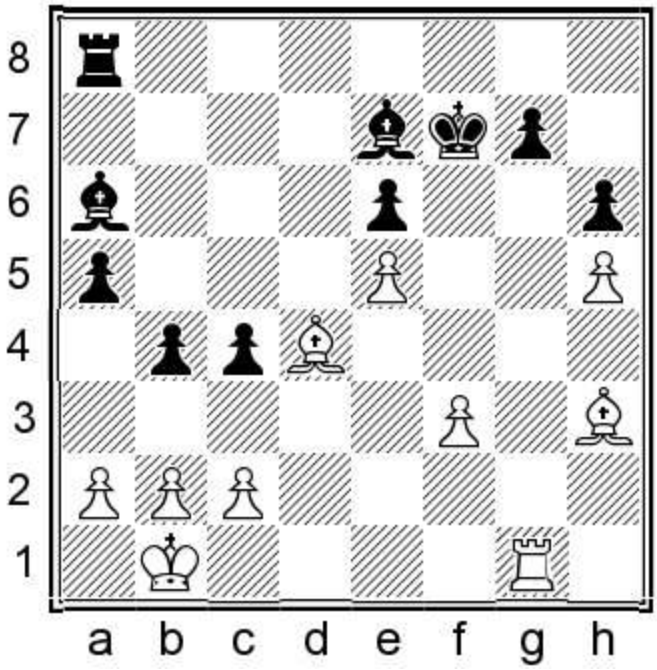
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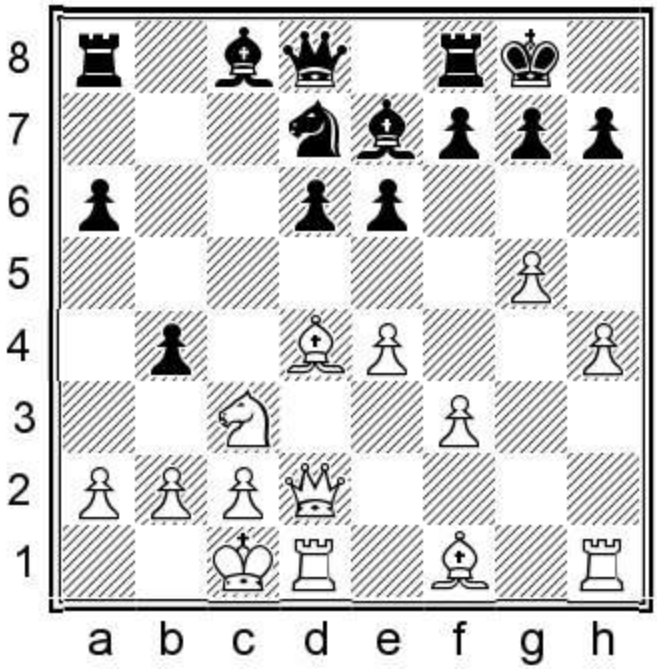
16.h5 Nc5 17.g6!! h6
17...Nxa4? 18.h6! leads to a mating attack instantly.
18.Nxc5 dxc5 19.Be3 Rd8 20.Qc1 Rxd1 21.Qxd1 c4 22.gxf7† Kxf7
Nechepurenko – Seeman, Moscow 2006. This is awfully concrete, but also totally desperate for Black.



23.Qd4!N 23...Ba6
23...c3 24.e5 Bb7 25.Bc4 Rd8 26.Qf4† Ke8 27.Bb5† Bc6 28.Qc4 Rc8 29.Qxe6 Bxb5 30.Qg6† Kf8 31.Bxh6 Qxe5 32.Bxg7† Qxg7 33.Qf5† Qf7 34.Qxc8†±
24.Bh3 Qd6
24...Rd8 25.Bxe6†! Kxe6 26.Qxg7± and White has excellent winning chances with the three pawns for the bishop.
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25.Rg1 Qxd4 26.Bxd4 Bf6 27.e5 Be7



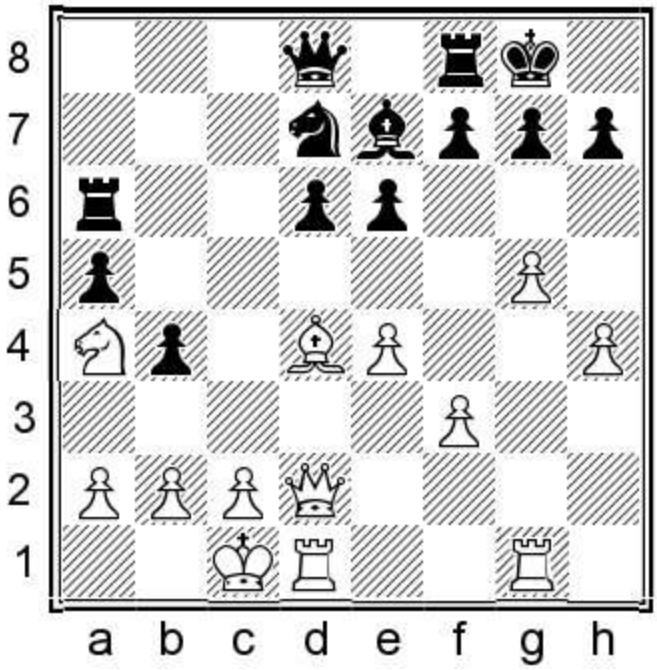
28.Rg4! Bc8 29.Rf4† Ke8 30.Bf2 c3 31.Bf1 Ba6 32.Bxa6 Rxa6 33.bxc3 bxc3 34.Rc4±
White picks up a pawn and has a good chance of winning the endgame.



14.Na4!
14.Ne2!? was successful in Anand – Andreikin, Moscow 2013. But the best way to play is like Fischer, of course.

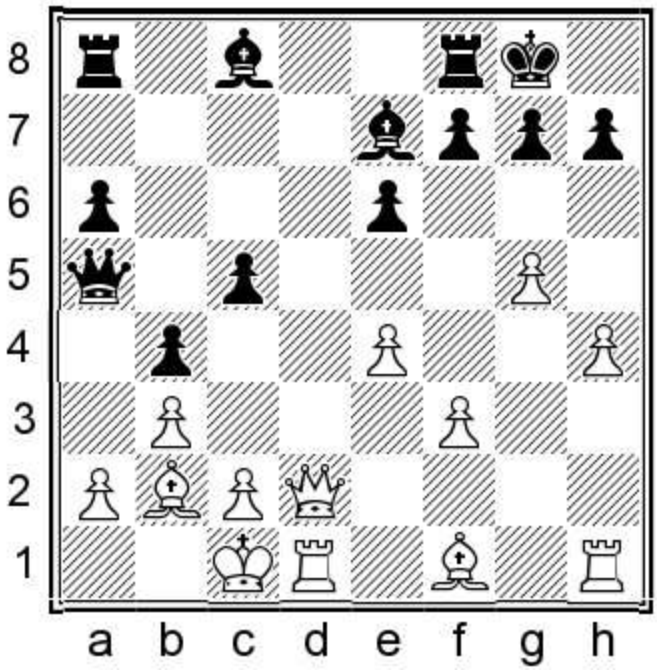
14...Bb7?
We now know this to be a positional blunder. Let's look at the serious moves.
14...a5 15.Rg1 Ba6 is a reasonable strategy, in similar style to the French Defence. After 16.Bxa6 Rxa6 as in A. Horvath – Efimenko, Zalakaros 2015, White should play:

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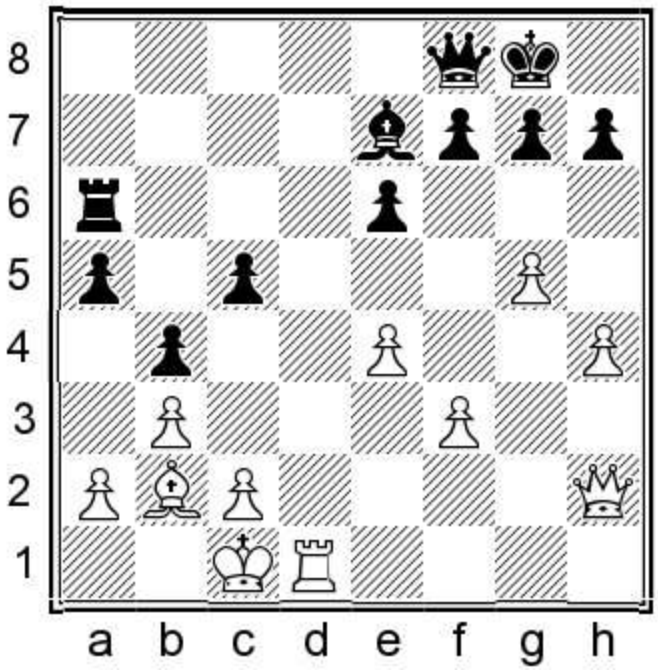
17.Qh2!?N 17...Rc6 (17...Qb8 18.Kb1) 18.Kb1 Qc7 19.b3! White has the better prospects. The following fantasy variation is worth inspecting. 19...e5 20.Be3 Rc8 21.Rd2 Nf8 22.h5 Ne6 23.Nb2 Rc3 24.Qe2 Nc5 25.g6 fxg6 26.hxg6 h6 27.Bxc5!? Qxc5 28.Rgd1² White has a positional advantage.

14...Qa5 15.b3 Nc5
15...Bb7 16.a3 (16.Kb1 is also interesting. Emms mentions 16...d5 but 17.g6!N is a killer response.) 16...d5 Emms reaches this position in a note and gives Black's last move an exclam, but modern engines show a refutation: 17.g6! fxg6 (or 17...e5 Kurgansky – Polishchuk, email 2007, 18.Be3N 18...d4 19.gxh7† Kh8 20.Bh6! Bf6 21.axb4±) 18.Bh3 e5 19.Be6† Kh8 20.h5 g5 21.h6 g6 22.Ba1 d4 23.Bxd7 1–0 Potrata – Wagner, corr. 2012. This is the critical line. But here too White is simply better if he knows what he is doing.
16.Nxc5! dxc5 17.Bb2²

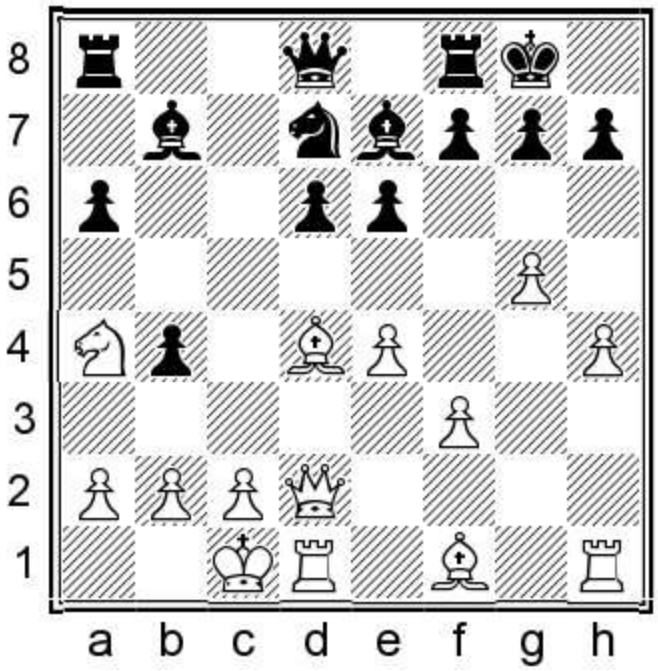


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17...Rd8
17...Qxa2? is surprisingly just lost after 18.Qf4 Qa5 19.Bc4+– when Black has no defence against the attack on the kingside.
18.Qh2 Rxd1† 19.Kxd1 Qd8†
If 19...Qxa2 20.Kc1 Qa5 White has: 21.g6! h6 (or 21...fxg6 22.h5 Qd8 23.hxg6 h6 24.Bxg7! with a winning attack) 22.gxf7† Kxf7 23.Rg1 Bf6 24.Qf4 Black is defenceless.
20.Kc1 a5 21.Bc4 Ba6 22.Rd1 Qf8 23.Bxa6 Rxa6



24.Qc7! Rd6 25.Rg1 Qd8
25...Bd8 26.Qb7 Qe7 27.Qb5 Qd7 28.Qc4! (28.Qxc5?? Bb6) 28...Qc6 29.a4±
26.Qxc5±
Moll – Punzon Moraleda, email 2009.

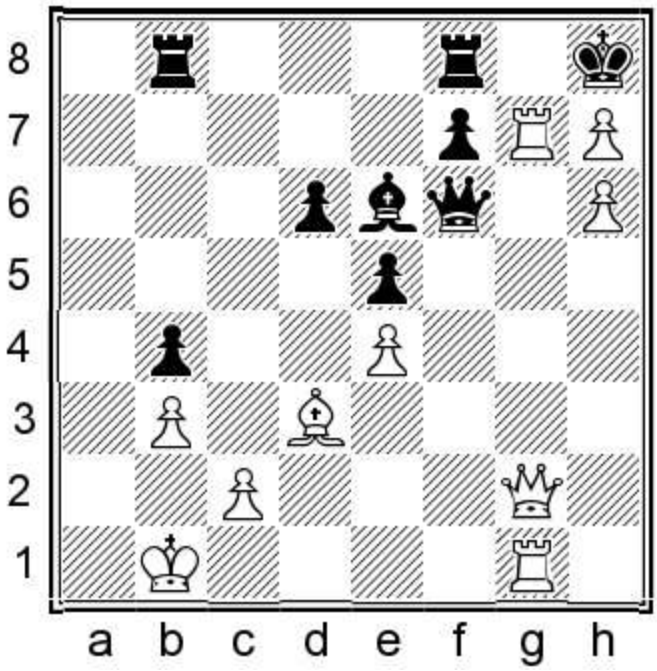


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15.Nb6! Rb8
Of course the simple tactical point is: 15...Nxb6 16.Qxb4±

16.Nxd7 Qxd7 17.Kb1±
With the knights gone, Black has no way to break through on the queenside in time.

17...Qc7 18.Bd3 Bc8 19.h5 e5 20.Be3 Be6 21.Rdg1 a5 22.g6 Bf6 23.gxh7† Kh8 24.Bg5 Qe7 25.Rg3 Bxg5 26. Rxg5 Qf6 27.Rhg1 Qxf3 28.Rxg7 Qf6 29.h6 a4 30.b3 axb3 31.axb3 Rfd8 32.Qg2 Rf8




33.Rg8† Kxh7 34.Rg7† Kh8 35.h7
1–0
The ...Nc6-line has gone out of fashion for good reason: White is better and has an attack. It is a long time since Black had any fun in this variation.

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# Chapter 10.3 - The Najdorf

The Najdorf

Najdorf – 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3
7...b5! 8.Qd2 367
8...Bb7 368
8...b4 9.Na4 Nbd7!? 10.0-0-0 374
10...Qc7 (10...d5?!; 10...Ne5?) Game 32 374
10...Qa5 Game 33 376
8...Nbd7! 9.g4! 379
9...Nb6?! (9...Bb7?!) Game 34 379
9...h6 384
10.a3!? Game 35 384
10.Rg1!? 390
10.0-0-0 392
10...Bb7?! Game 36 392
10...b4! Game 37 399
7...b5! – sidelines

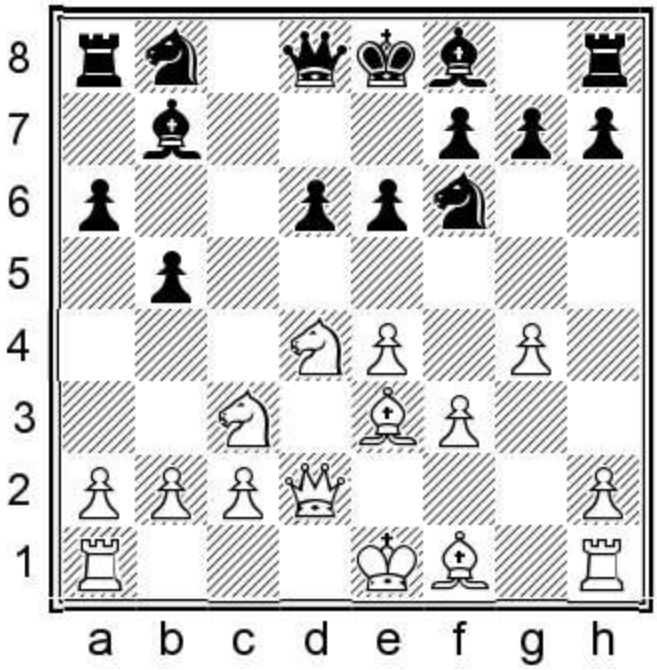
It is not clear where the black knights and bishops belong at this early point in the game. In less dynamic lines, Black needs to develop, castle and stay away from early commitments with the pawns. But in the English Attack that logic is turned upside down. Black does not want to commit his king too soon. And if he wants to stay on e8, then the bishop belongs on f8. And if White castles queenside, which seems very likely, Black will want to attack with his pawns there. In that case the bishop is not naturally placed on b7, where it is blocking the b-file.
Obviously Black will have to develop and none of these piece moves are truly bad on their own, but White's attack is dangerous and should be respected. Active counterplay is desperately needed. So in comes 7...b5!.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5!
It is not surprising that, in an opening defined by a thirst for blood, the most aggressive and dynamic move is also the best.

8.Qd2 Bb7
This move is what Jacob Aagaard calls "an aesthetic move" and that is not a compliment. It looks entirely natural to put the bishop here, but in time we shall understand that this is not a great square for the bishop. Black is better off playing 8...b4 or 8...Nbd7!, which we will consider in the remainder of the chapter.

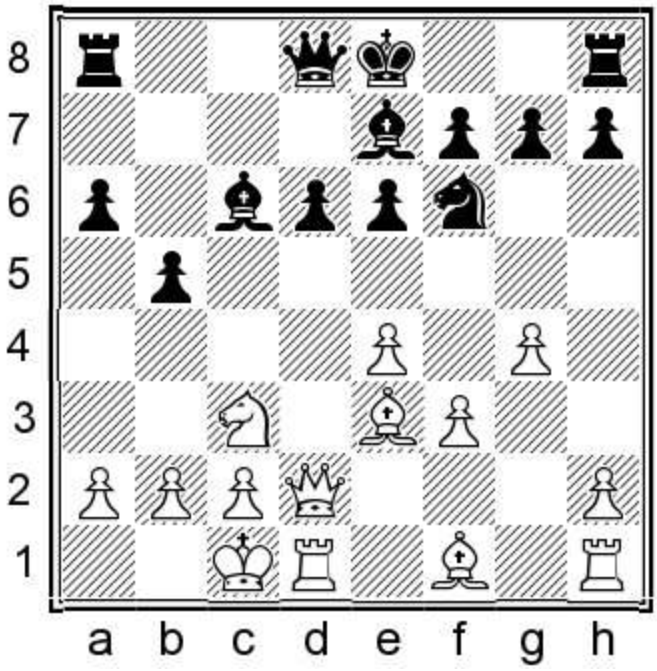
9.g4

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9...Nfd7
This may look a bit weird, but at least it makes sense of Black's play.

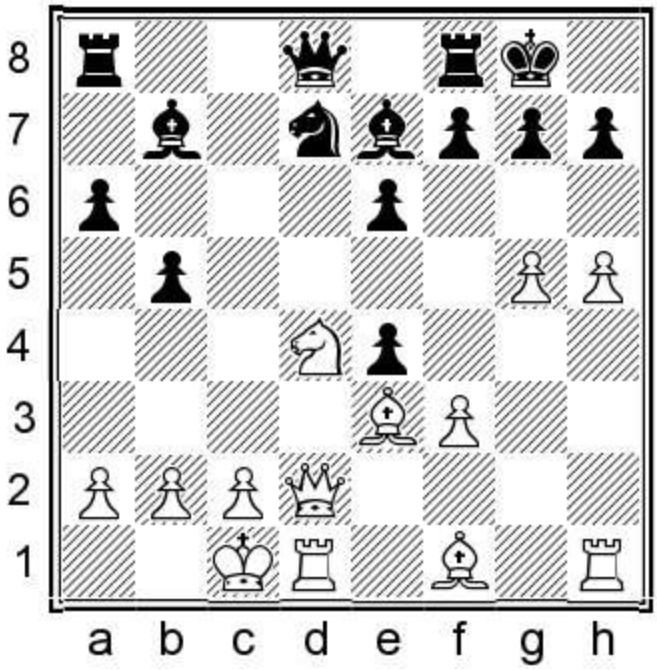
9...Nc6
This is similar to the 7...Nc6-lines. White is simply better after normal play:
10.Nxc6! Bxc6 11.0-0-0 Be7



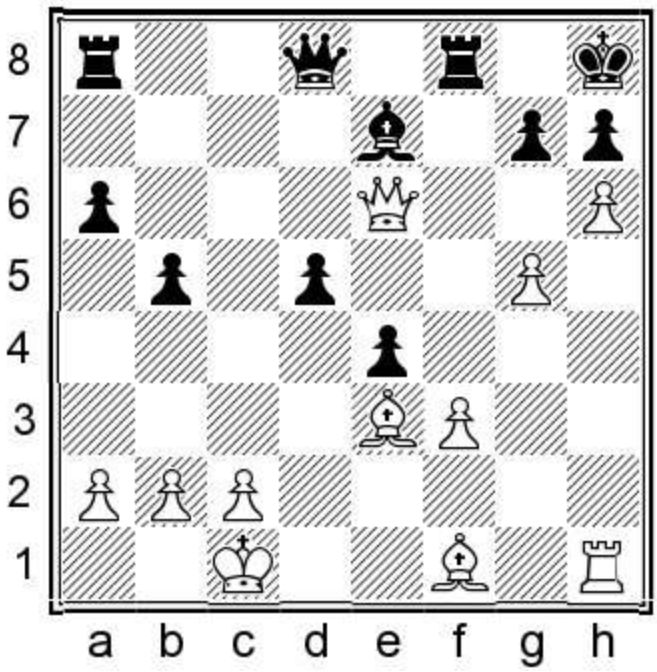
12.Ne2!²
I like this way of playing the position. Once again, it is very similar to the 7...Nc6 lines.
12.g5² is also decent.
12...0-0 13.g5 Nd7 14.Nd4 Bb7 15.h4 d5 16.h5! dxe4?!
Denisov – Avdeeva, Kaluga 2003.

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16...Ne5 17.g6! Bf6 (Black is also in trouble after 17...dxe4 18.h6!. For example: 18...Nxg6 19.hxg7 Re8 20. Qh2 Bh4 21.f4 Qf6 22.Be2 Qxg7 23.f5+–) 18.h6! Nxg6 19.hxg7 Bxg7 20.Qh2 Re8 21.Qxh7† Kf8 This is Dimitrov – Le Quang, Chalkidiki 2003. White is totally winning, with the strongest choice being 22.f4!N 22...Qc7 23.f5 and Black's position collapses.



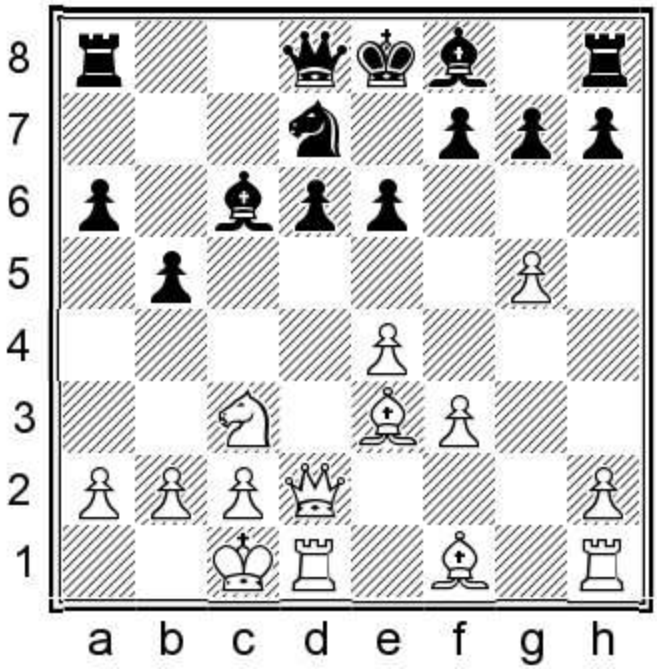
At this point White missed a nice combination.
17.Nxe6!!N 17...fxe6 18.Qxd7 Bd5 19.Rxd5!
This is certainly the move that escaped White.
19...exd5 20.Qe6† Kh8 21.h6!



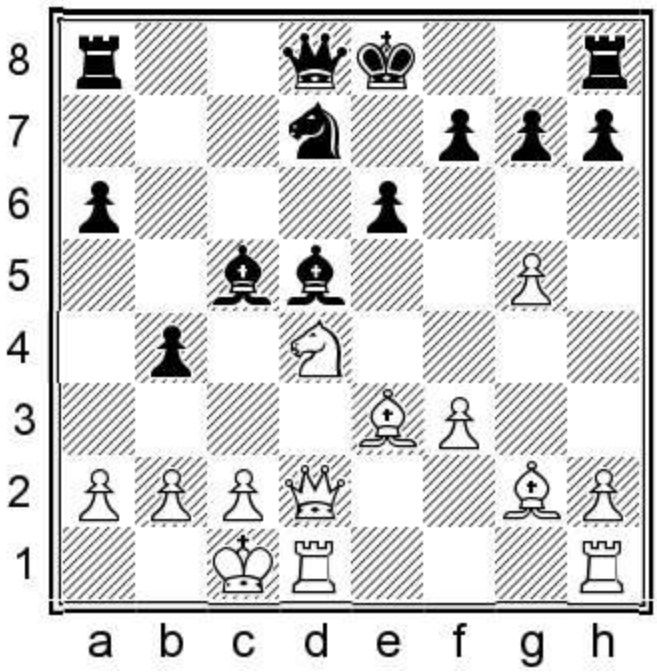
White's attack is winning. For example:
21...Bxg5 22.hxg7† Kxg7 23.Rg1 h6 24.f4+–

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10.0-0-0 Nb6
10...Nc6 is not much different from the usual; White has a great attacking position. 11.Nxc6! Bxc6 12.g5



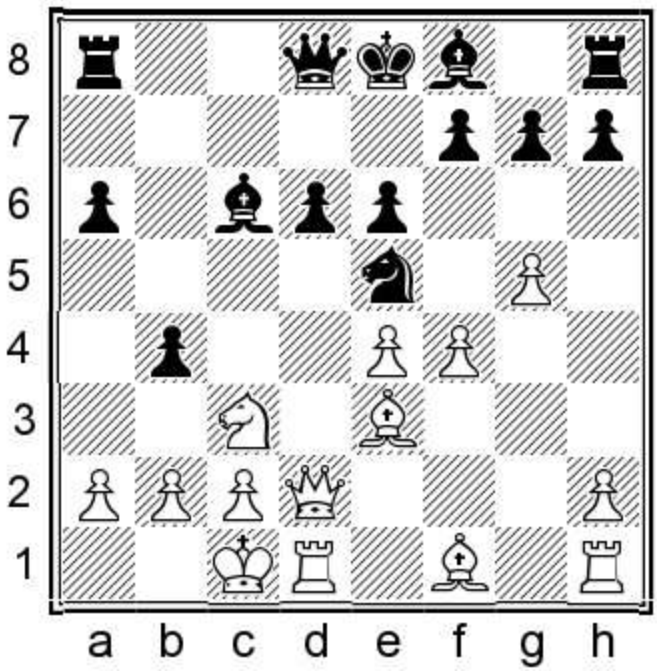
a) 12...b4 13.Ne2 d5 14.Nd4 Bb7 15.exd5 Bxd5 16.Bg2 Bc5 (16...Qa5 17.Nb3 Qxa2 18.f4 and Black's position collapses) And now we should vary from Sawadkuhi – Putzbach, Hamburg 2004:



17.Nf5!N 17...0-0 18.Bxc5 Nxc5 19.f4 (19.Nxg7?? Qc7! would be bad news. 20.Nh5 Bxa2 and the check on b3 is decisive.) 19...Qc7 (19...Bxg2? fails to 20.Nh6†!! winning on the spot) 20.Bxd5 exd5 21.Qd4 Ne6 22.Qxb4 White has won a pawn. There are some obstacles to converting it, but these are luxury problems.

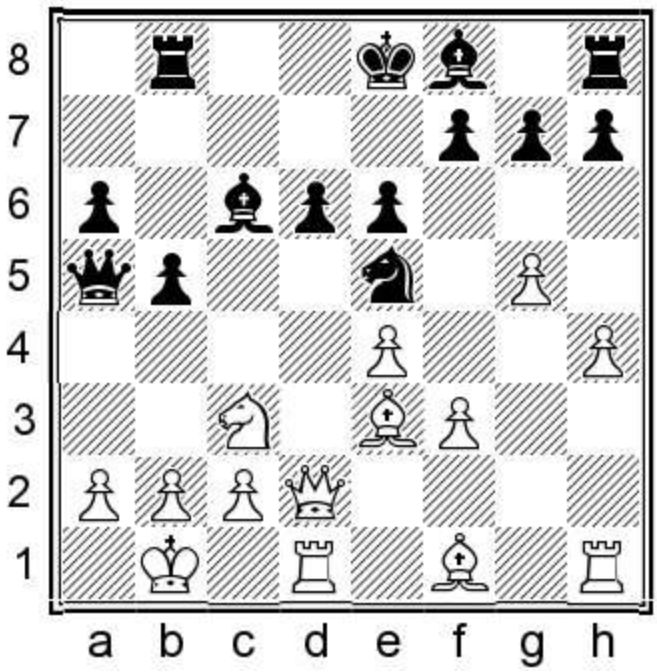
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b) 12...Ne5 13.f4 b4 Melnikov – Lelekova, St Petersburg 2002. White could have crashed through with:



14.Nd5!N 14...Nd7 15.Qxb4! with the idea 15...exd5 16.exd5 Bb5 17.c4+– and White is simply winning.

c) 12...Qa5 13.Kb1 Rb8 14.h4 Ne5 This was Wang Hao – Vescovi, Taiyuan 2006.

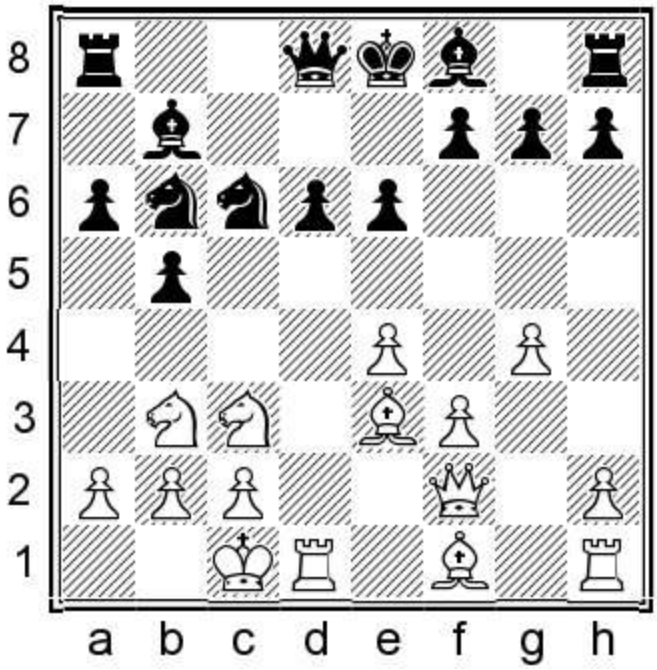


White could have punished Black with: 15.Qf2!N 15...b4 (15...Be7 16.Ne2 0-0 17.Nd4 Bd7 18.h5± is a big attacking position) 16.Ne2 Nc4 17.Nd4! Nxe3 (17...Bb5 18.f4+– is even worse for Black) And now both 18. Qxe3± and 18.Nxc6!? Nxd1 19.Qa7± give a big advantage. It depends if White wants an endgame or not.

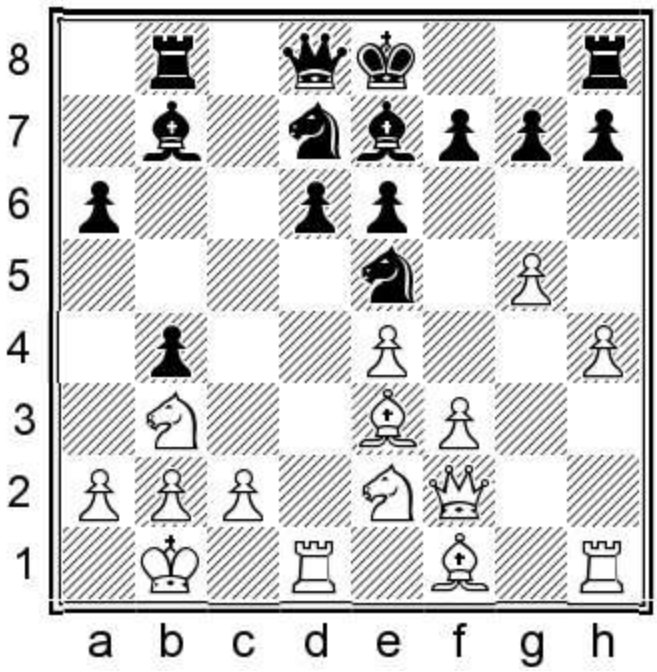
11.Nb3 N8d7
White needs to play accurately to refute the following concept:

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11...Nc6!? 12.Qf2!



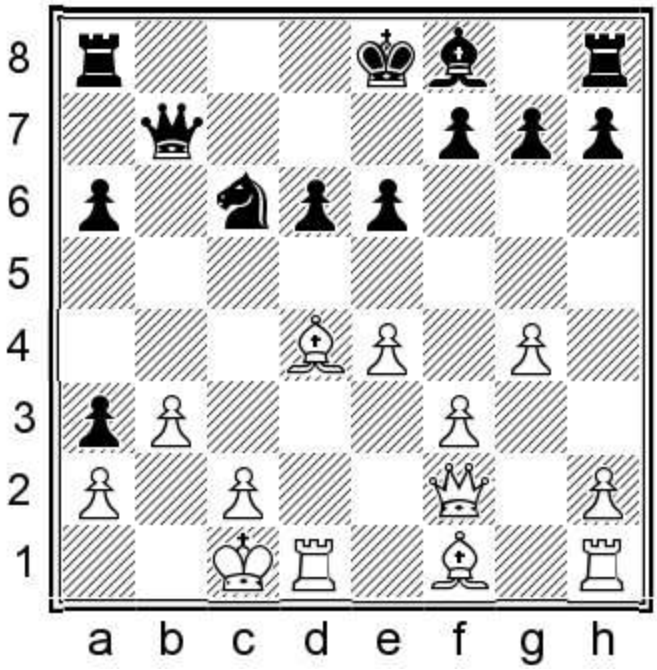
12...Na4!
Active counterplay is necessary.
12...Nd7? has for some reason been played a lot. It is obvious that Black has big problems, having lost a lot of time. 13.Kb1 Be7 (13...Nce5 14.g5± Rb8 15.h4 b4 16.Ne2 Be7 Bologan – Akopian, Stratton Mountain 1999.



17.Ned4!N would have secured White a big advantage.) 14.h4 0-0 15.g5 Rc8 16.Rg1 Nce5 Grischuk – Grachev, Internet 2006. White is better in a lot of ways, but most convincing is: 17.f4!N 17...Nc4 (17...Rxc3 18.bxc3 Nc4 19.f5!+–) 18.Bxc4 Rxc4 19.f5! b4 20.Nd2! Rxc3!? 21.bxc3 bxc3 22.Nb3±
13.Nxa4 bxa4 14.Nc5 a3! 15.b3! Qc7!?N
15...Bc8?! 16.Na4!± G. Shahade – I. Novikov, New York 2002.

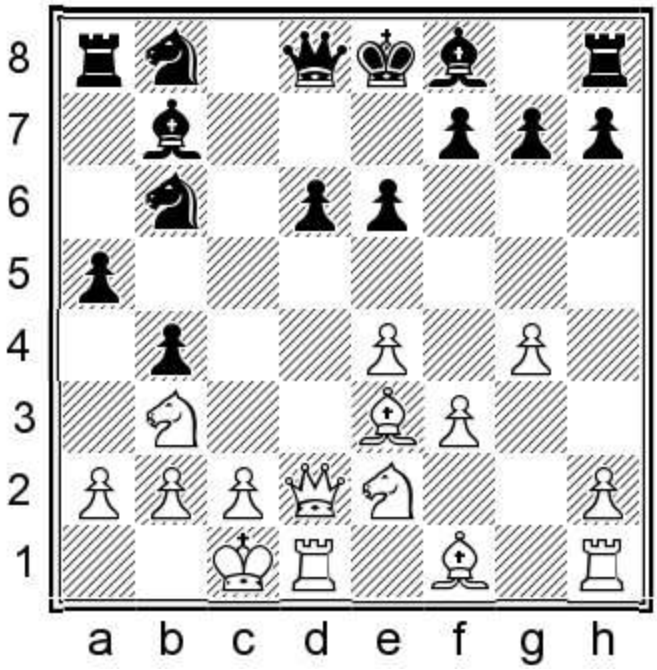
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16.Nxb7 Qxb7 17.Bd4!²



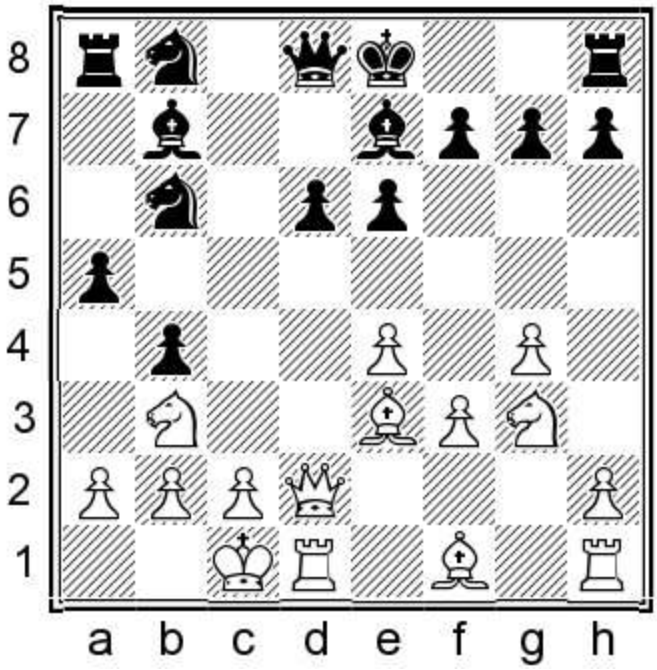
White is better, but the position is rather complex and not without pitfalls.

11...b4!? 12.Ne2 a5

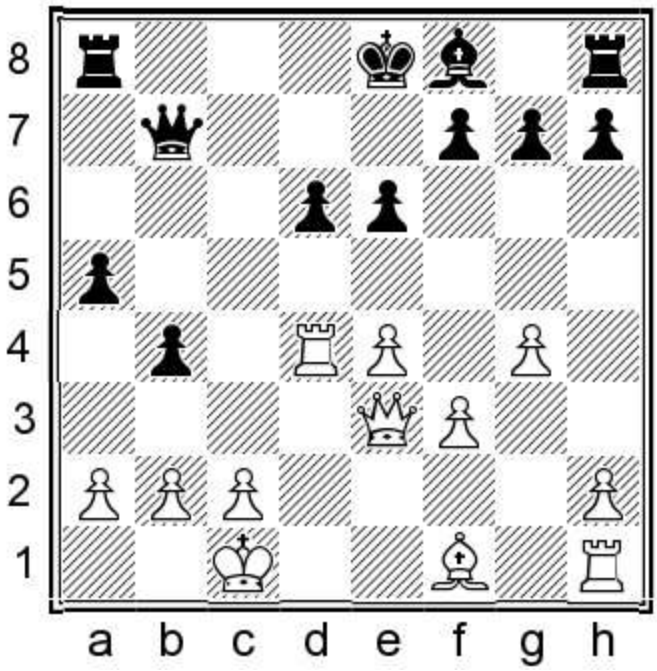


This is very natural, but White is also better here.
13.Nc5!N
13.Ng3 Be7? happened in Rasik – Sikora, Ostrava 2014.

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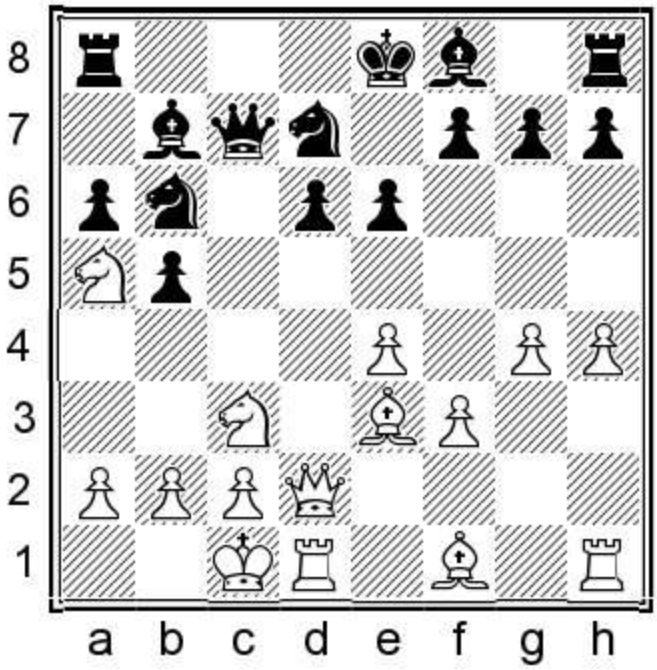
I mention this only because I would never want one of the readers of this book to overlook a move like 14. Qd4!N.
13...Nc4
The only challenge.
14.Nxb7 Qc7 15.Qd4 Nxe3 16.Qxe3 Nc6!
This allows Black to fight.
16...Qxb7? 17.Nd4 Nd7 18.Bb5 is flowing well for White. For example: 18...Rc8 19.Qd3 Rc5 (19...Rc7 20.f4± followed by f4-f5) 20.Ba4! Be7 21.Kb1± Black lacks active prospects, so his position is deeply unpleasant.
17.Nd4 Nxd4 18.Rxd4 Qxb7
Black just needs to play ...Be7 to be OK. So we need to find one move to be better:



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19.Qg5!²

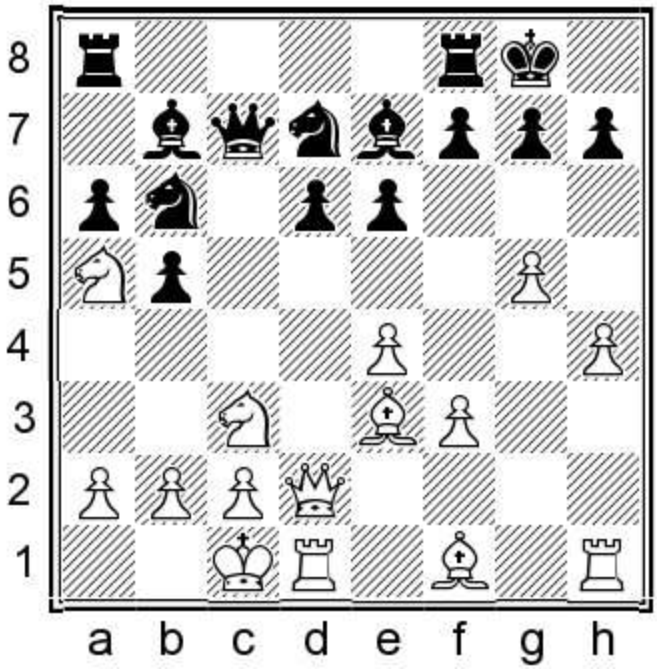
12.Na5! Qc7 13.h4
13.Bf4 has been very successful in practical play, but after the natural 13...Ne5! I have not found anything.



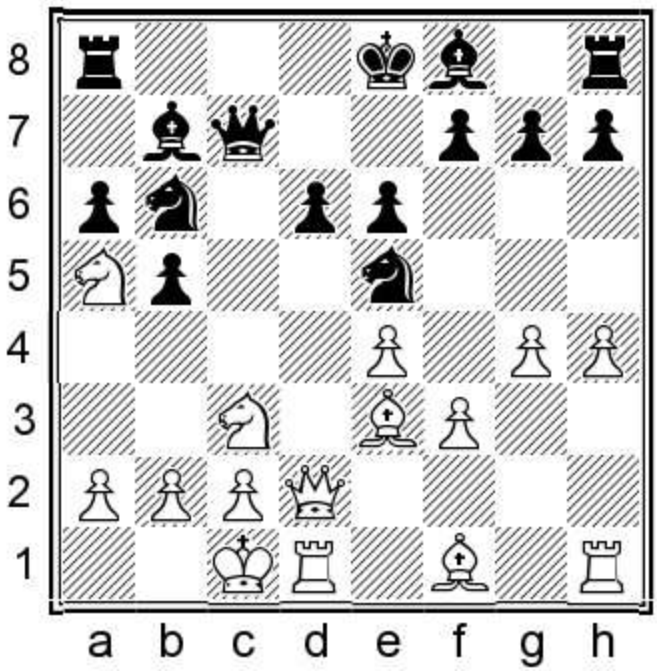
13...Ne5!?N
This is a significant improvement. Black plays more directly, keeping his position flexible.

13...Be7 14.g5 0-0
The most natural move, but there is no unnatural path to equality either.
14...Ne5? 15.Qd4!± with f3-f4 to come.
14...b4 15.Ne2 d5 (15...Nc4 16.Nxc4 Qxc4 17.Kb1±) 16.Nxb7 Qxb7 17.exd5 Nxd5 18.Bd4 0-0 19.Bg2²
14...Rc8 15.Bxb5! axb5 16.Nxb5 Qb8 17.Nxd6† Bxd6 18.Qxd6 Ba6 19.Rhe1± Such endgames have been known to be better for White for at least 50 years.

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15.h5!N
An improvement over 15.g6?! as in Karakas – Morley, email 2013, when 15...Ne5! would have been decent for Black.
15...b4 16.Ne2 Ne5 17.Nd4 Nbc4 18.Nxc4 Nxc4 19.Bxc4 Qxc4 20.b3 Qc7 21.g6
With a strong attack.

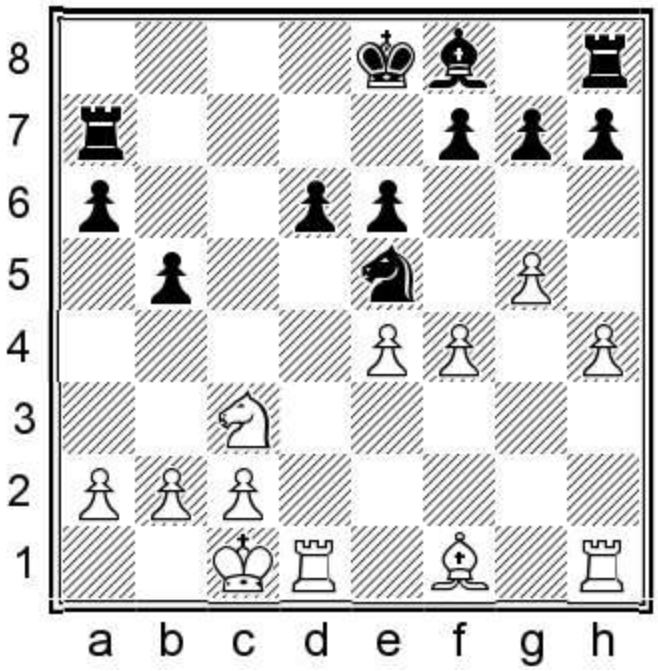


14.Qf2!?
14.g5?! is inaccurate. After 14...b4! Black has his full share of the chances.

The bolded move is my recommendation, but not the only promising continuation here:
14.Nxb7 Nbc4 15.Qe2!?
15.Qf2 transposes. The idea of putting the queen on e2 is that after 15...Qxb7 16.Bd4, White is better and ready

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for f3-f4 in some lines. But on the other hand, from f2 the queen protects the bishop on d4. Both moves are good.
15...Nxe3
15...Qxb7 16.Bd4²
16.Qxe3 Qxb7 17.g5 Qa7
Necessary, as after 17...Be7 18.f4± White is in full control.
18.Qxa7 Rxa7 19.f4²



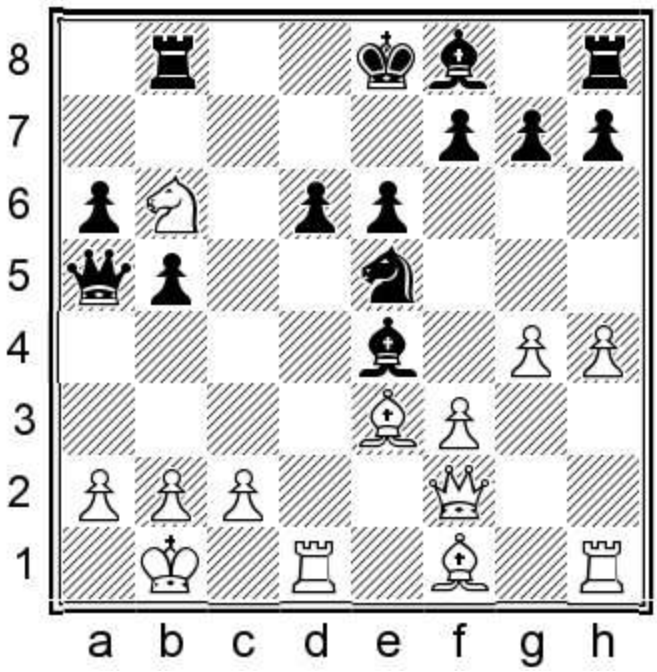
The endgame is better for White for sure, but not everyone dreams of a slightly better endgame when opening with 1.e4.

14...Na4 15.Nxa4 Qxa5 16.Nb6 Rb8
16...Qxa2? 17.Nxa8 Bxa8 18.Bd4± gives White full control of the position; and extra material.

17.Kb1 Bxe4!
Black has to go for the sharpest continuation, even if it costs a lot of time.

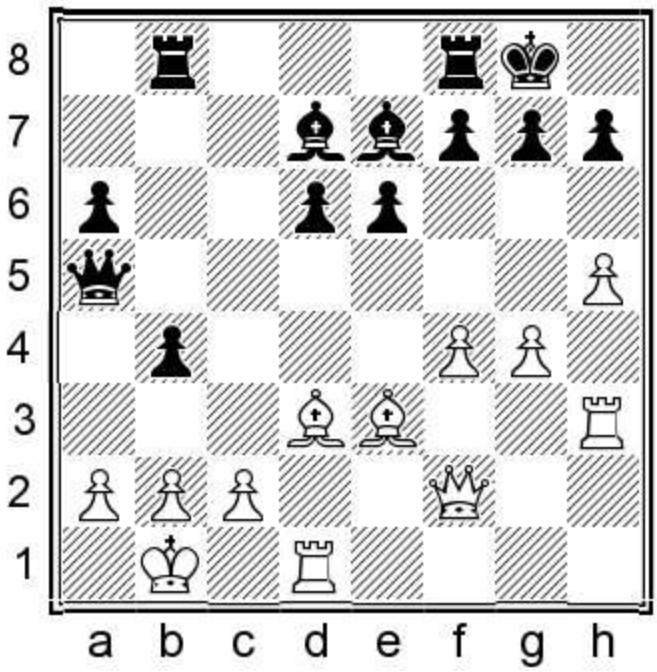
17...Be7 18.Rg1² does not challenge White at all.

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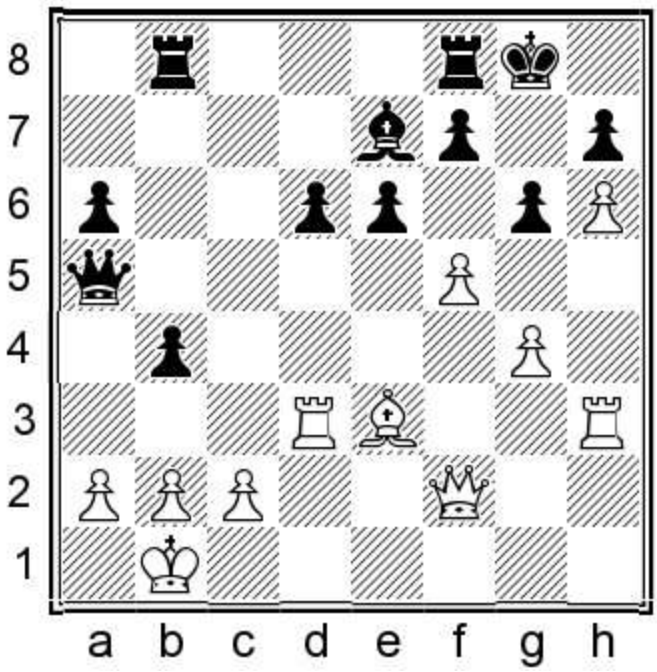
18.Be2! Bc6 19.h5 Be7 20.Rh3 0-0 21.f4 Nd7
Or 21...Nc4 is comfortably met by: 22.Nxc4 bxc4 23.Bxc4²

22.Nxd7 Bxd7 23.Bd3© b4



24.g5!?
This is the most dangerous attacking move. But it is stronger to play: 24.f5! Bb5 (24...exf5 25.gxf5 Bf6 26.h6, is hazardous for Black) 25.h6 Bxd3 26.Rxd3 (26.hxg7?! Bxc2† 27.Qxc2 Rfc8 28.Qh2 Qe5! allows Black to neutralize White's pressure) 26...g6

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27.f6 Bd8 28.Rxd6² White has a positional advantage. Black's future will be a fight for a draw that will last for a very long time.

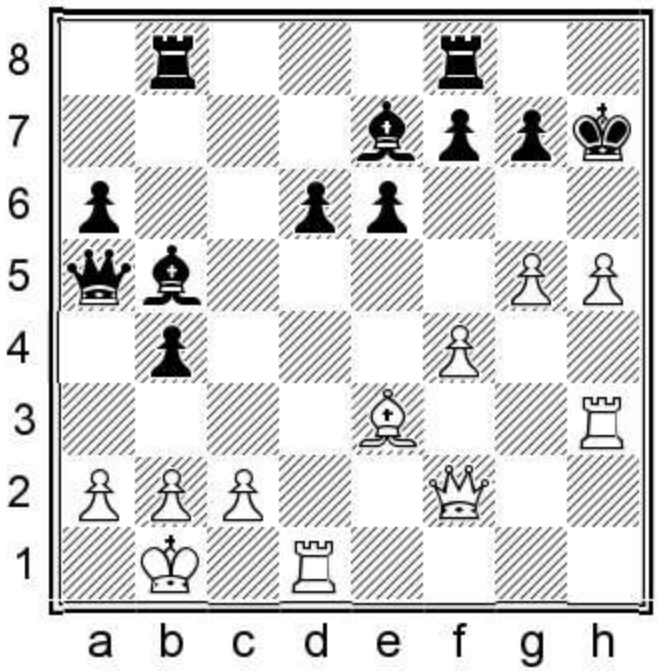
24...Bb5?
I show this move just for entertainment value.

Black might be able to hold the balance with 24...f5!÷. It seems the best White has is 25.Ba7 Rb7 26.b3 d5 27. Bd4 Bd6 28.h6 g6, but we have not found an advantage. 29.Bb2 Qc5 30.Bd4 Qa5 31.Bb2= This is why 24.g5 is not my main recommendation. If it were not for this line, it would be.

25.Bxh7†
Not a difficult move.

25...Kxh7

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26.f5!
But this is difficult. White's attack is overwhelming. For example:

26...exf5?! 27.Qxf5† Kg8 28.h6!
And mate is near.

8...Bb7 is not a great line. White is better in a number of ways, but if Black plays the novelty mentioned above, the game remains complicated. If you are unhappy with this, I suggest you take up the Exchange Slav or Ludo.

8...b4 and 9...Nbd7

In his prime, in the first decade of this century, World Champion Veselin Topalov worked very hard, especially on the Sicilian Defence, where he found many important novelties for both colours. One of these was for Black to push the b-pawn and then leave it hanging. We shall encounter this later on, with g2-g4 and ...h6 included, which is the main line of this chapter. These inclusions seem to be to Black's advantage, so it is not a surprise that White is fighting seriously for an advantage in this section.

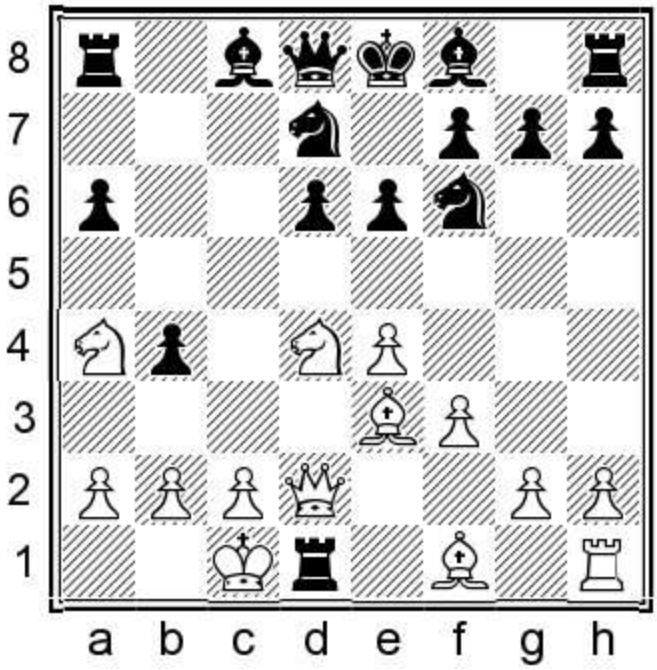
GAME 32

Alexander Lastin – Alexander Petrushin
Sochi 2005

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5 8.Qd2 b4 9.Na4 Nbd7!?
As mentioned above, this variation was invented by Topalov.

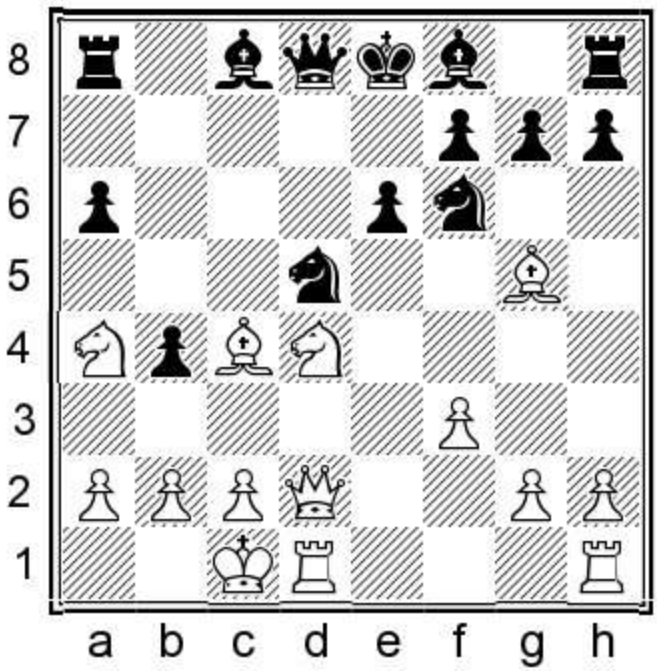
10.0-0-0
The most natural way to continue. Other lines exist, but after looking through all of them, we concluded this was best. We were rather surprised about this, as we originally looked at 9.Nd1!? earlier or 10.c4 here.

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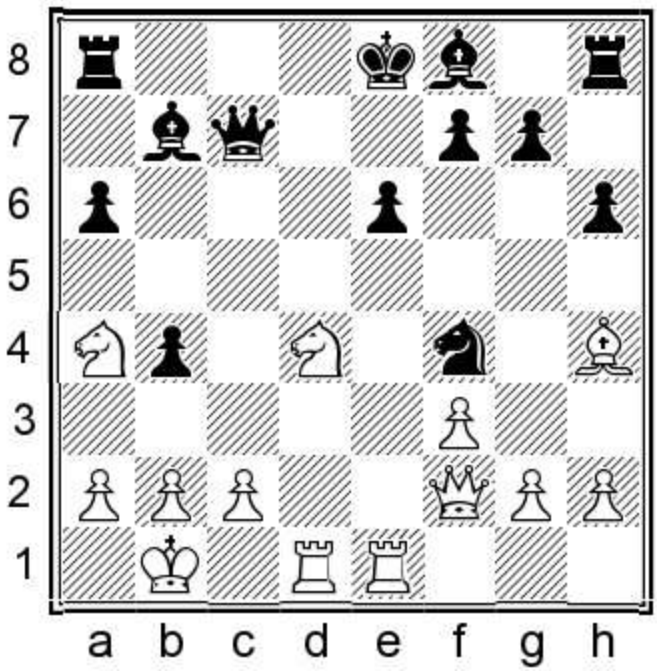
10...Qc7
Flexible play is frequently the right way for Black to play in the Sicilian.

10...d5?! 11.exd5 Nxd5 12.Bc4! N7f6 13.Bg5±



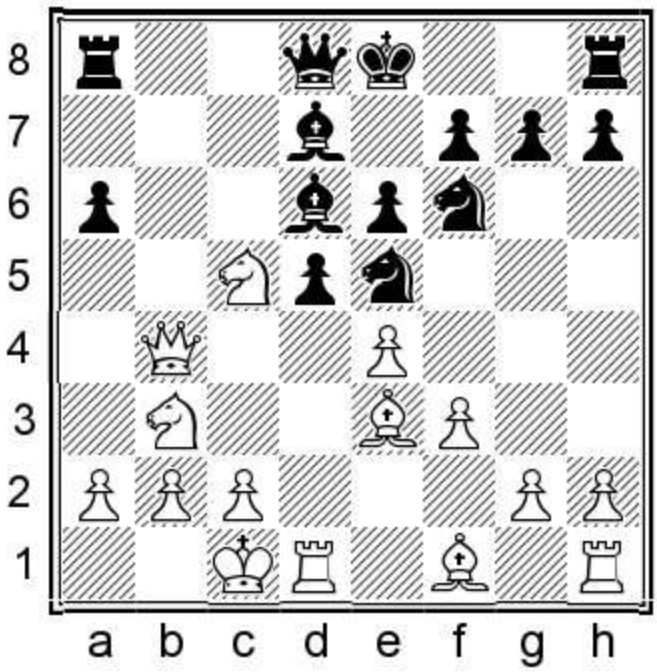
This is all we need to know. White crashes through in the centre.
13...Qc7 14.Bxd5!
Time should not be wasted when exploiting a lead in development.
14...Nxd5 15.Rhe1 Bb7 16.Qe2!
Threatening to take on e6.
16...Qd6 17.Kb1!?
chesstouring.com
White is better after this move and in the game he could have won a miniature. But it later turned out that White

could react even more aggressively with: 17.f4! Rc8 18.f5 Be7 19.Bxe7 Qxe7 20.fxe6 0-0 21.g3± Potrata – Villar Ramos, email 2007.
17...h6 18.Bh4 Nf4 19.Qf2 Qc7
In Leko – Topalov, San Luis 2005, White famously missed a winning combination:



20.Nb6!! Qxb6 (20...Rb8 21.Nf5 Bc6 22.Qd4+–) 21.Nxe6 Qxf2 22.Nxg7#

10...Ne5? does not work. 11.Qxb4 Bd7 12.Nb3 a5 (12...d5 13.Nac5 Bd6 was tried in A. Smirnov – Vikharev, Ishevsk 2005:

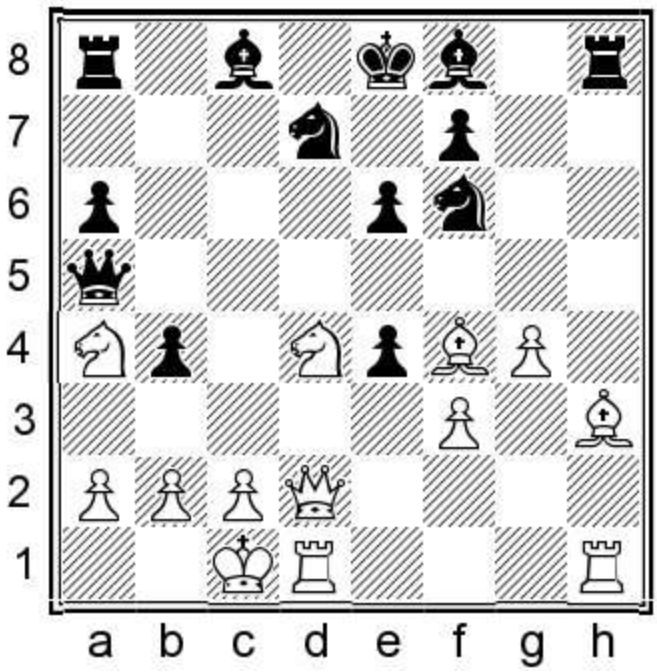


After 14.Qe1!?N White seems to be a pawn up for not very much.) 13.Qd4 Rb8 14.Nc3 Be7 15.a4± White was simply a pawn up in Lafarga Santorroman – Mrkvicka, email 2006.

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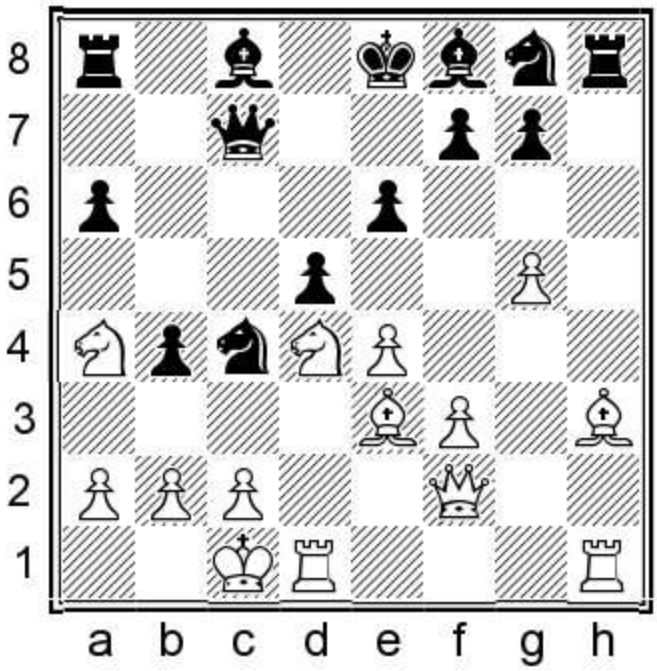
10...Qa5 will be covered in the next game.

11.g4! h6 12.h4 d5 13.Bh3 Ne5
13...g5 looks hopeless, but 14.hxg5 hxg5 15.Bxg5 dxe4 16.Bf4 Qa5 still happened in Matsuura – Vescovi, Belo Horizonte 2010.



At this point White should have played 17.g5!N 17...Qxa4 18.gxf6 Qxa2 19.Nb3, when he is completely winning. For example: 19...Qa4 20.Bxe6! Rxh1 21.Bxf7† Kxf7 22.Qd5† Kxf6 23.Bg5† Kg7 24.Rxh1 and mate follows.

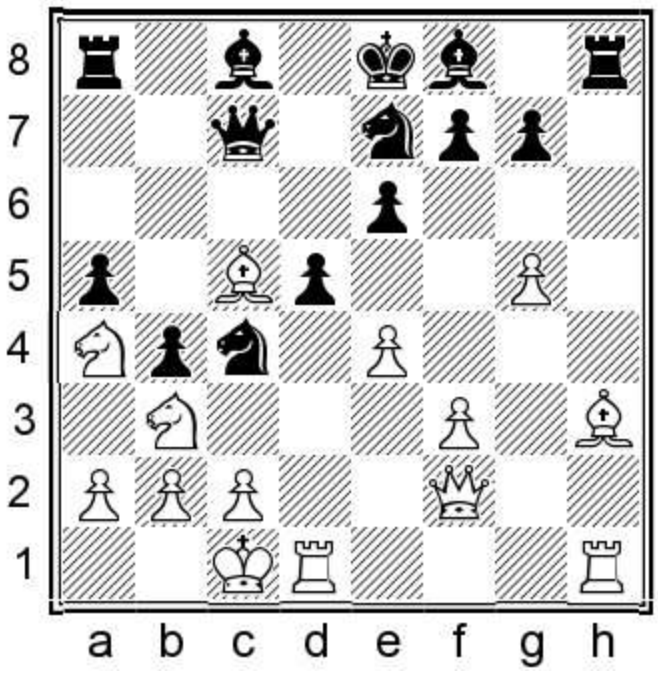
14.g5 Nc4 15.Qf2 hxg5 16.hxg5 Ng8



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17.Nb3±
White has a big advantage.

17...e5?!
17...Ne7 18.Bc5± is also great for White. For example: 18...a5?!

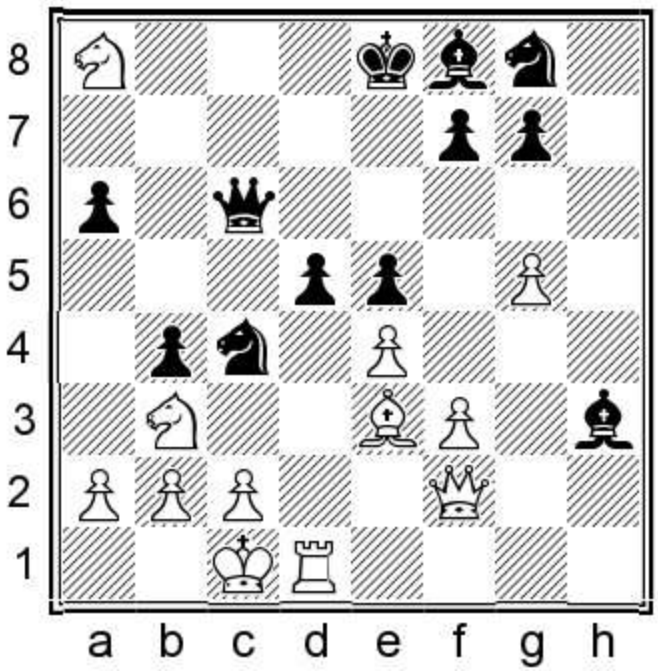


19.exd5! Nxd5 20.Rxd5! exd5 21.Bd7† Kxd7 22.Rxh8 Qf4† 23.Kb1 Bxc5 24.Nbxc5† Kc6 25.Nb3 Qe3 26. Nd4† Kc7 27.Qxe3 Nxe3 28.Rg8 g6 29.Rf8 White wins.

18.Nb6 Rxh3
Or 18...Nxb6 19.Bxb6 Qc4 20.Bd7† and White wins.

19.Nxa8 Qc6 20.Rxh3 Bxh3

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21.Bc5 d4 22.Bxf8 Kxf8 23.Nxd4! Qxa8 24.Nf5 Bxf5 25.Qc5†
1–0

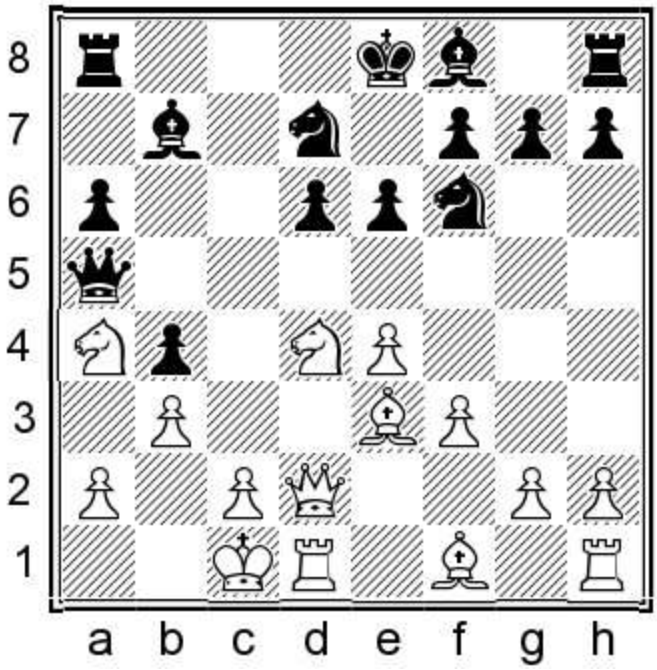
We continue looking at this variation with the latest scream and some important original analysis in the annotations to move 14.
GAME 33

Hikaru Nakamura – Nils Grandelius
Gibraltar 2018

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5 8.Qd2 b4 9.Na4 Nbd7 10.0-0-0 Qa5
This is the critical line. But right now, it does not look sufficient for equality for Black.

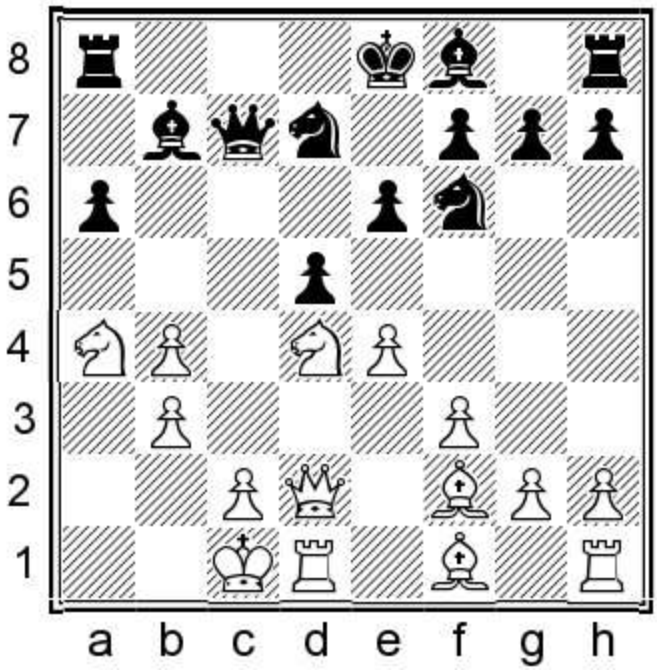
11.b3 Bb7
Move orders matter. 11...Nc5?? 12.Nc6 Qc7 13.Bxc5 Qxc6 14.Bxb4+– Warakomski – Gajek, Warsaw 2012.

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12.a3!
For a while my choice was 12.Kb1!? Nc5 13.a3 Nxa4 14.axb4 Qc7 15.bxa4 Be7 16.Rc1 0-0 17.c3, but after 17...Rfb8! I was unable to find an advantage. The model game continued: 18.a5 Bc8 19.Bd3 e5 20.Nf5 Bxf5 21.Bb6 Qc6 22.exf5 d5! 23.Rhe1 Nd7 24.Bf2 d4 25.Bxd4 exd4 26.Rxe7 Qa4 27.Bc2 dxc3 28.Bxa4 Rxb4† 29. Kc2 cxd2 30.Kxd2 Rxa4 31.Rxd7 Rxa5 ½– ½ Kozenko – Seric, email 2016.

12...Qc7 13.axb4 d5 14.Bf2!

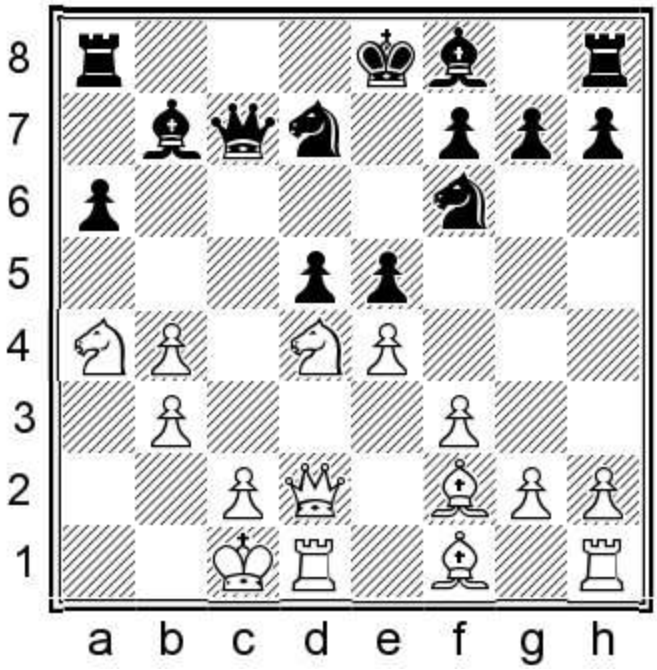


The modern treatment. This is really the critical moment for this line. And I do not think Black is in great shape.

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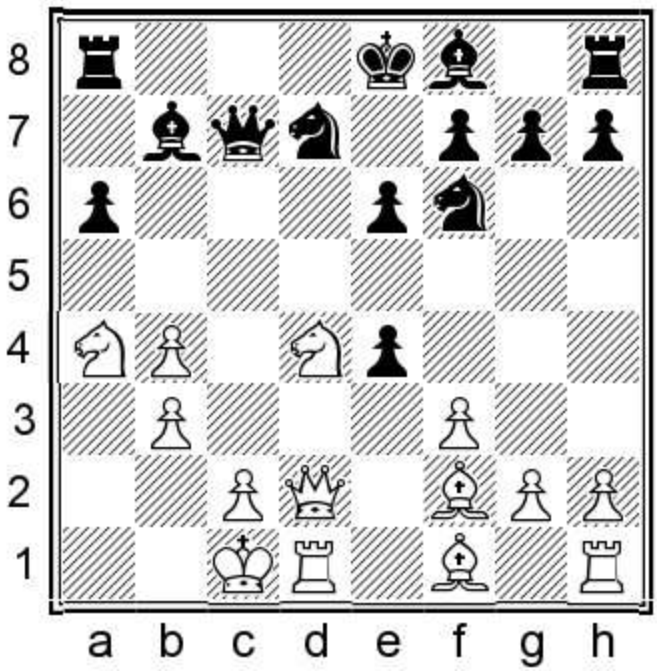
14...Bd6?

14...e5 as in Bok – Gordievsky, Wijk aan Zee 2018, allows White to crash through in the centre with great force:



15.exd5!N 15...exd4 16.Qe1†!? (16.Re1† Kd8 17.Bxd4 Nxd5 18.Bc4 Bxb4 19.c3© is also better for White if you go deeper, but it seems riskier) 16...Kd8 17.Bg3 Bd6 18.Bxd6 Qxd6 19.Rxd4² With three pawns for the piece, White is definitely for choice.

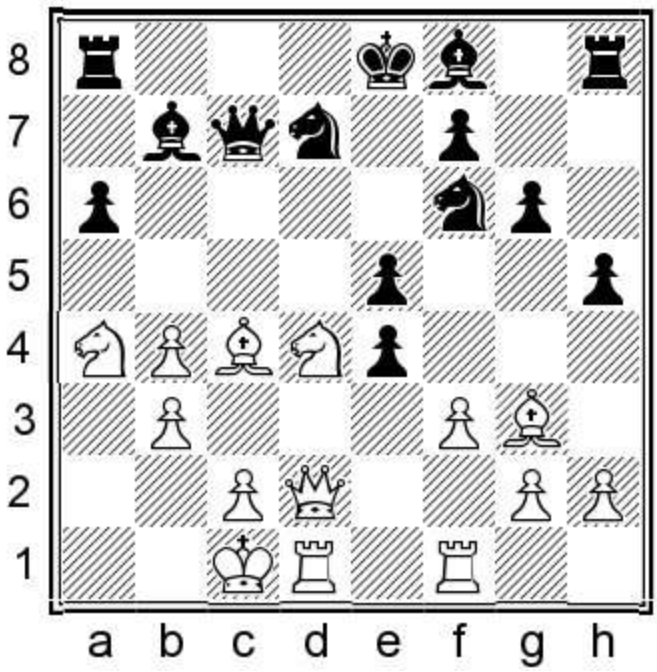
The most critical option is:
14...dxe4



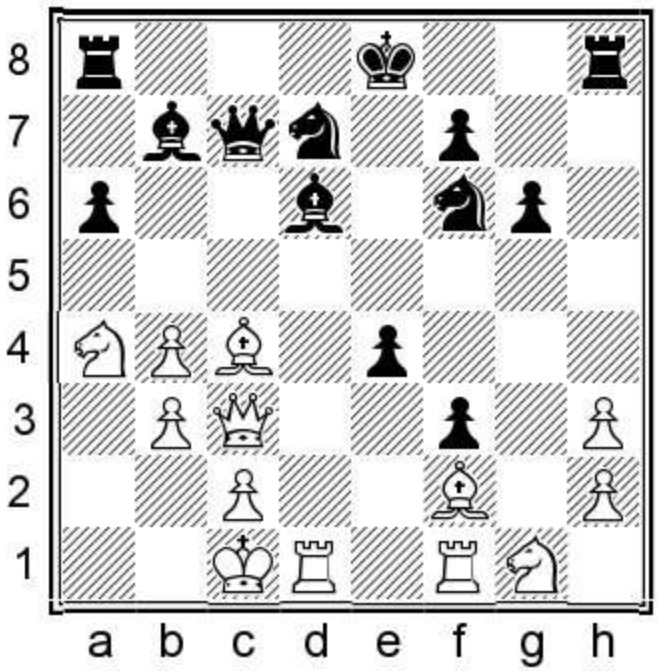
We spent a lot of time on this position and came up with a number of ideas for White.
15.Bc4!N

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I also think Black is in danger after 15.Bg3, but he should be able to solve his problems with accurate play. 15...e5 (15...Qc8? 16.Bc4 Bd5 17.Bxd5 Nxd5 18.Nf5!± Yoo – Preotu, Calgary 2017) 16.Bc4 g6 17.Rhf1 17...h5 Donmez – CrimsonKnight, engine game 2015. (17...Be7 18.Qh6! Bd5 19.Bxd5 Nxd5 20.Nf5! Nxb4 21. Ng7† Kd8 22.Rd2 Kc8 23.fxe4² oops – Asterix_2006, engine game 2015)



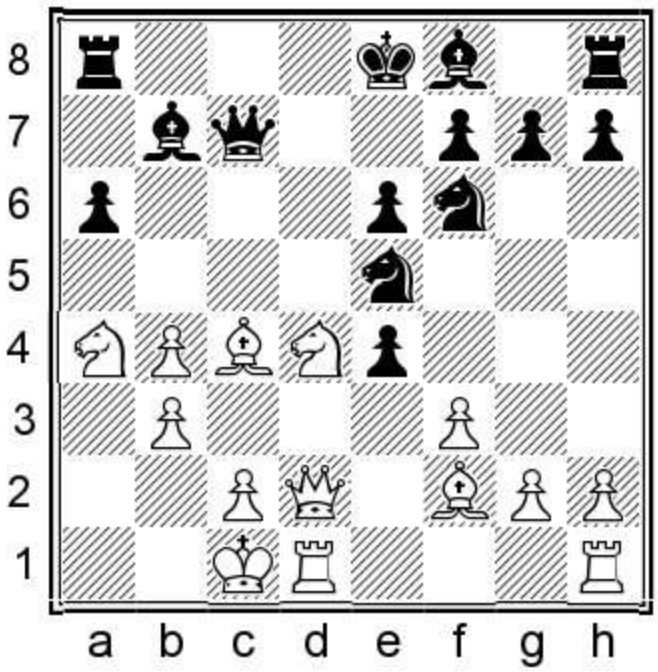
18.Qc3!?N The position is rather unclear, but in practical terms, I prefer White. My engine suggests 18...Bd6 19.Ne2 h4 20.Bf2 h3 as an active reply, but after 21.gxh3! exf3 22.Ng1 e4 White can blow Black's position wide open:



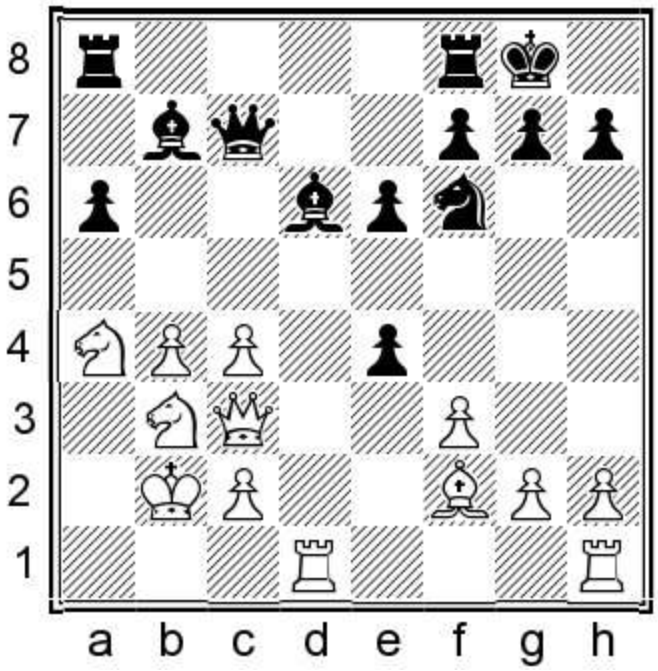
23.Rxd6!! Qxd6 24.Nc5 Nxc5 25.Bxc5 Qf4† 26.Be3 Qf5 27.Bd4± White will win material. For example, 27... Ke7? 28.Nxf3! exf3 29.Bxf6† Qxf6 30.Re1†. But if you go back earlier in this line, improvements will be available for Black for sure.

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Returning to the position after 15.Bc4!N, Black's best reply is:
15...Ne5!



16.Qc3!
An important move.
16.Rhe1 Nxc4 17.bxc4 Qxc4! gives Black a good fighting position. After 18.Nb6 Qxb4! 19.Nxa8 Bxa8 Black is not worse.
16...Nxc4 17.bxc4 Bd6 18.Nb3
The engines are not impressed at first, but after looking deeper we found out that White is better.
18...0-0 19.Kb2



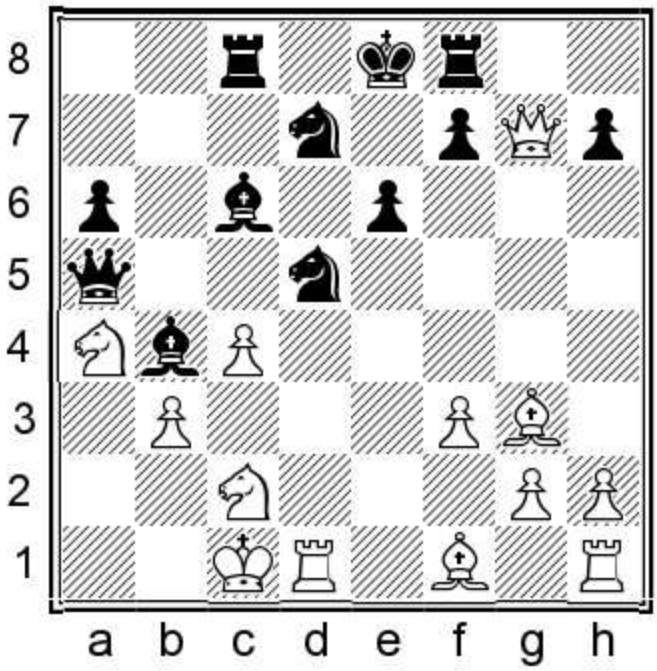
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19...Rfc8

Other lines also lead to an advantage for White.
19...Nd7 20.Rxd6!? Qxd6 21.Nbc5© White has delicious compensation.
19...Be5 20.Bd4 Bxd4 21.Rxd4 Bc6 22.Nac5 a5 23.bxa5 Rfb8 24.Kc1 exf3 25.gxf3²
19...exf3 20.gxf3 Bxb4 21.Qxb4 Bxf3 22.Bg3²
20.Rxd6!?
20.Nac5 is also sensible.
20...Qxd6 21.Nb6 Nd5 22.Nxc8 Rxc8 23.Qd4 Qc7 24.c5 exf3 25.gxf3 e5 26.Qc4 Nb6 27.Qd3 Nd5 28.Be1²

15.exd5 Nxd5
After 15...Bf4 16.Be3 Bxe3 17.Qxe3 Nxd5 18.Qd2± White is a pawn up.

16.Bg3 Rc8 17.c4 Bxb4 18.Qg5 Qa5 19.Qxg7 Rf8 20.Nc2 Bc6




21.Qa1 Nc5
Black would also not hold after 21...N7b6 22.Nxb6 Qxa1† 23.Nxa1 Nxb6 24.Nc2±, when the extra pawn counts.

22.Nxc5 Qxa1† 23.Nxa1 Ba3† 24.Kd2 Bb4† 25.Kd3 Nc3 26.Nxa6 Rd8† 27.Kc2 Rxd1 28.Nxb4 Rxa1 29.Kxc3 Kd7 30.Nc2 Rb1 31.Ne1 Ra8 32.Bd3 Rc1† 33.Kd2 Raa1 34.Be5 Rd1† 35.Ke2 Rac1 36.Bb2
1–0

8...Nbd7!

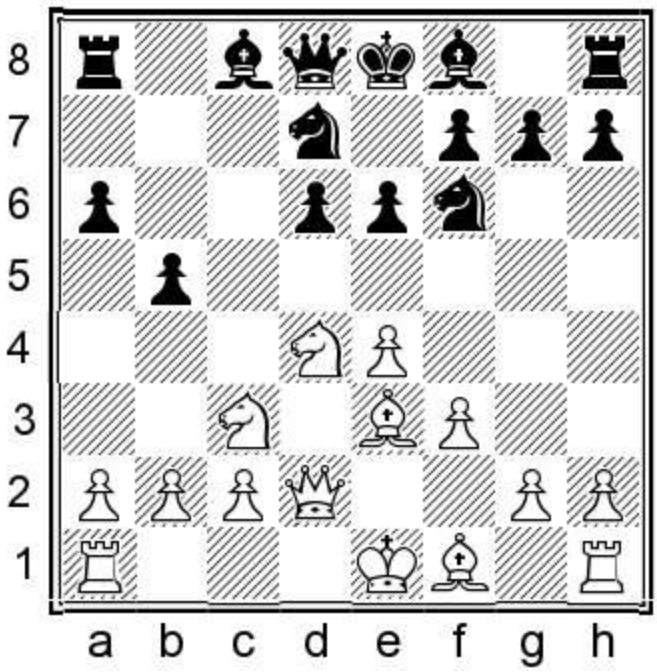
Experience has shown that the b8-knight is most frequently best when placed on d7. As Black has to do something, 8...Nbd7 is the most logical choice. This is where White will meet his greatest challenges. We will continue with 9.g4, when 9...h6 is the best move. Instead 9...Nb6 would be great if White castled queenside automatically, but 10.a4! puts Black under a lot of pressure.

GAME 34

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Pavel Volosov – Justin Paul
email 2013

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5 8.Qd2 Nbd7

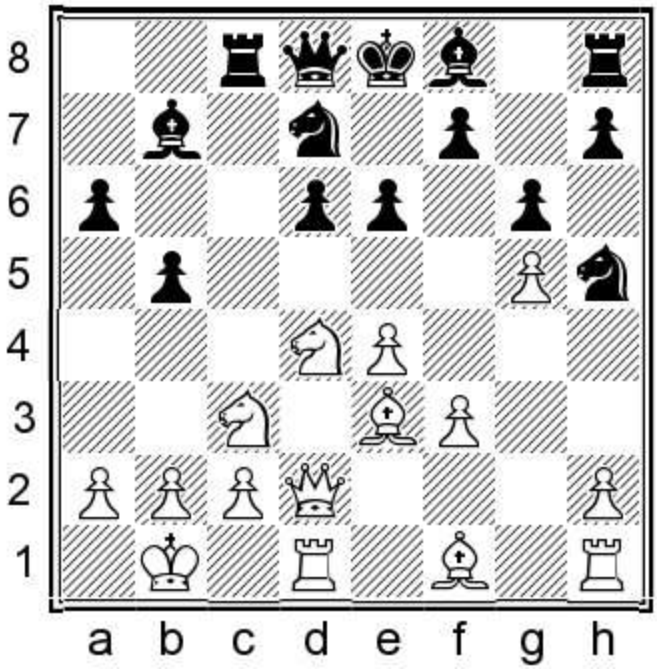


9.g4!
It is important to know the right move orders to play this variation. At this point 9.0-0-0 gives Black a great game after 9...Nb6! when Black's play on the queenside is really easy. Would you like to know more? Then look up games such as Movsesian – Kasparov, Sarajevo 2000.

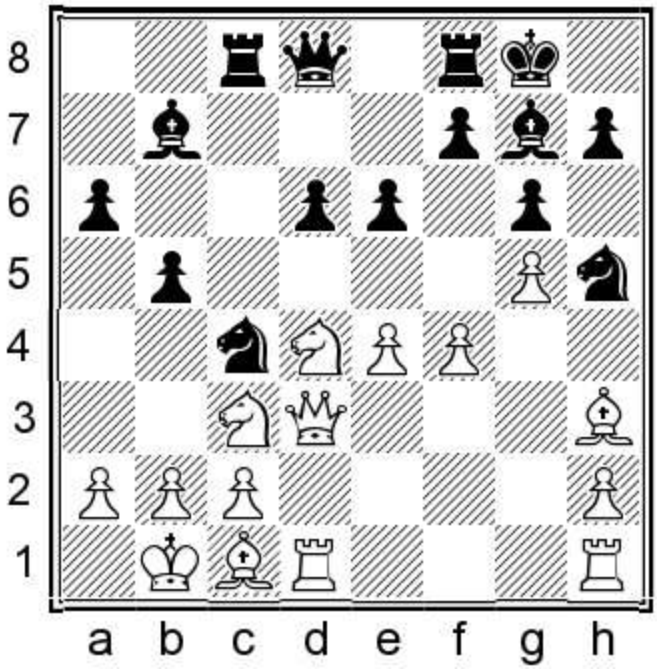
9...Nb6?!
But as we shall see, here this move does not work.

9...Bb7?!
This is a misconception of how the position needs to be played. White is simply better.
10.g5 Nh5 11.0-0-0 g6 12.Kb1 Rc8
Vallejo Pons – Hracek, Ohrid 2009.

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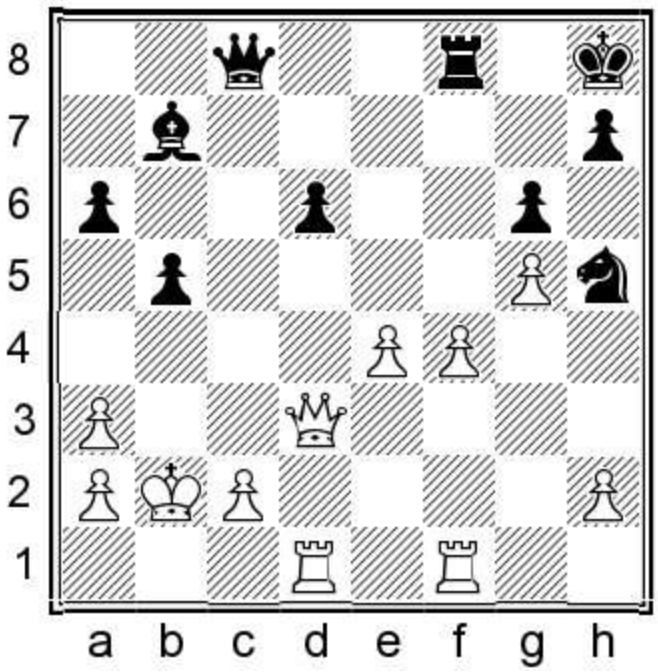
A not very surprising improvement was:
13.Bh3!N 13...Ne5 14.f4 Nc4 15.Qd3 Bg7
15...Nxe3? 16.Qxe3± Bg7 17.f5! gxf5 (17...Bxd4±) 18.exf5! Bxh1 19.fxe6+–
16.Bc1!²
And not: 16.f5?! gxf5 17.exf5 Bxd4! 18.Bxd4 e5÷
16...0-0



17.Nxe6!? fxe6 18.Bxe6† Kh8 19.Bxc8 Qxc8 20.Rhf1
If White is allowed to play Nd5, he will dominate the position.
20...Na3† 21.bxa3 Bxc3
21...Qxc3 22.Qxc3 Bxc3 23.Rxd6 Bxe4 24.Bb2 Bxb2 25.Kxb2 Nxf4 26.Rxa6 gives an endgame only White can win; and there are good chances he will do just that. For example: 26...Nd3† 27.cxd3 Rxf1 28.dxe4 Rf2†

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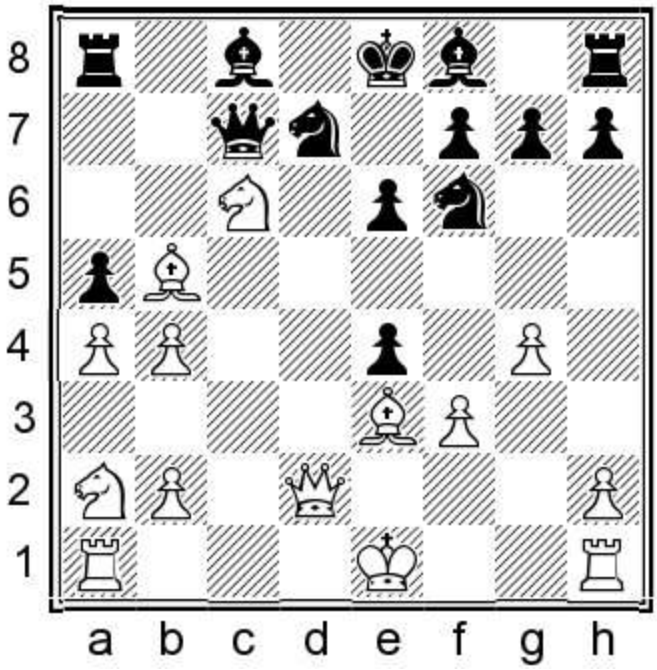
29.Kc3 Rxh2 30.a4 bxa4 31.Rxa4 and things are becoming desperate for Black.
22.Bb2 Bxb2 23.Kxb2±



The white king is exposed, but Black has no way to attack it. The bishop is on the wrong colour of squares, while the knight is stuck on the wrong side of the board. White's positional advantages are far more tangible.

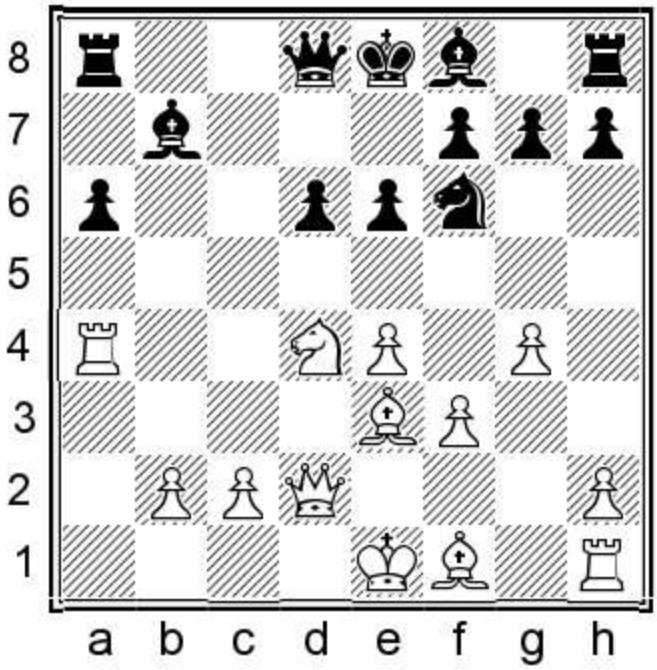
10.a4! Nc4
This is more or less forced.
10...b4? 11.Na2 a5
11...d5 12.g5 Nfd7 13.a5± Forcen Esteban – Silva Lucena, Linares 2017
12.c3 d5 13.cxb4 dxe4 14.Bb5†! Nbd7?
14...Bd7 15.Nc6! Qc7 16.Bxb6 Qxb6 17.bxa5 Qb7 18.Rc1 exf3 19.0-0±
15.Nc6 Qc7
In Barbosa – Aliaga Fernandez, Praia da Pipa 2014, White could have played:

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16.Bf4!N+–
A small improvement in an already winning position.

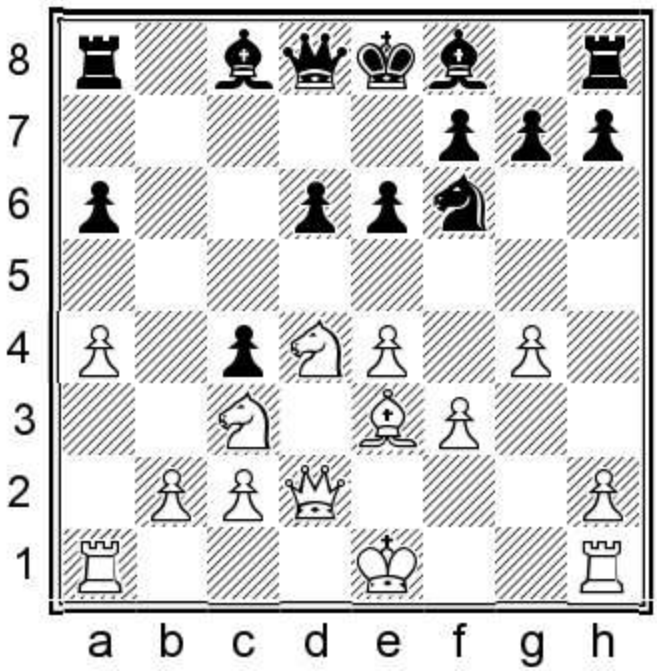
10...bxa4?! is also poor. 11.Nxa4 Nxa4 12.Rxa4 Bb7



13.Nb3!² This simple move shows who is in charge on the queenside. 13...h6 (13...Be7?! 14.Na5 is to White's advantage of course) 14.Na5 Bc8 15.Be2 Bd7 16.Ra2 Be7 Dunlop – Kleiser, email 2012. After the natural 17.0-0N 17...0-0 18.b4², White is ready for c2-c3, Rfa1 and Nb3, winning a pawn. This is not his only plan, but certainly Black has something to worry about.

11.Bxc4 bxc4

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12.g5!
The positional 12.a5 has been played many times but the attacking plan is stronger.

In The Sicilian Scheveningen: Move by Move, Lorin D'Costa offers recommendations against 12.0-0 followed by g4-g5 and f2-f4, as well as 12.g5 followed by h2-h4. However, our analysis indicates that the combination of 12.g5 and 13.f4, which the English IM does not consider, is strongest.

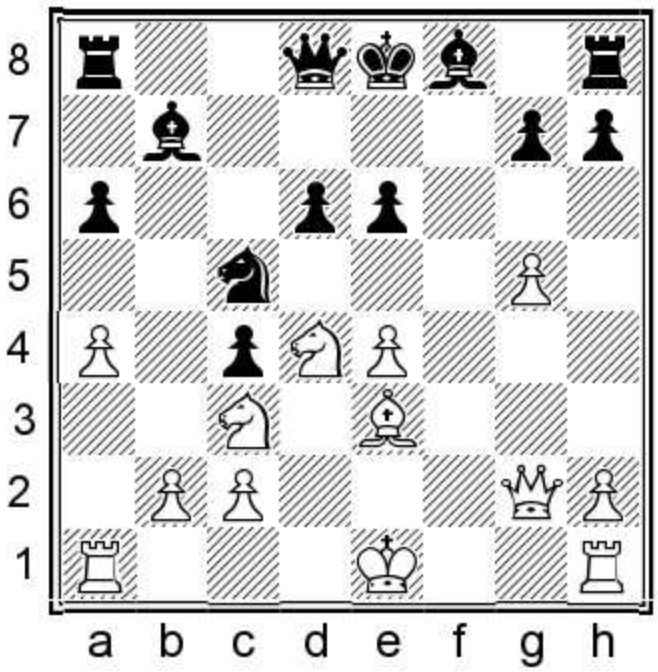
12...Nd7 13.f4
This position is strategically complex, but also a lot better for White if you go deep enough.

13...Qc7
13...Nc5 14.f5 Bb7 transposes to 13...Bb7 below.

After 13...Qa5 14.0-0 Bb7 I like the following idea: 15.Rab1!? Rc8 16.Qg2!² The queen generally belongs here. 16...Nc5 (16...g6 17.Qh3 Bg7 18.f5²) 17.f5 e5 18.Nde2± Kuosa – Karg, email 2009.

13...Bb7 14.f5
This is very sharp, but at the same time very promising for White.
14...Nc5
14...e5 15.Nde2 (15.Nf3!? Qa5 16.0-0²) 15...h6 16.gxh6 gxh6 17.Ng3 Nf6 18.a5! h5 19.Bg5 h4 20.Nf1 Rg8 21. Bxf6 Qxf6 22.Ne3 Bh6 23.0-0-0±
15.fxe6 fxe6 16.Qg2

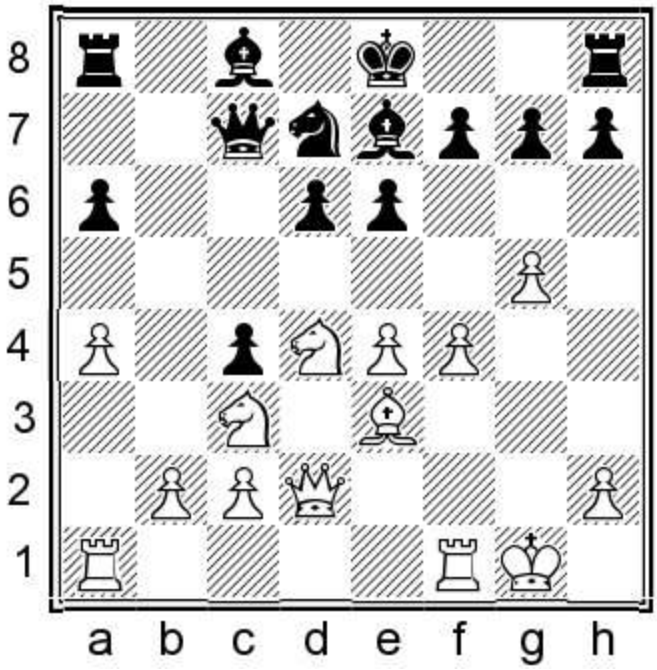
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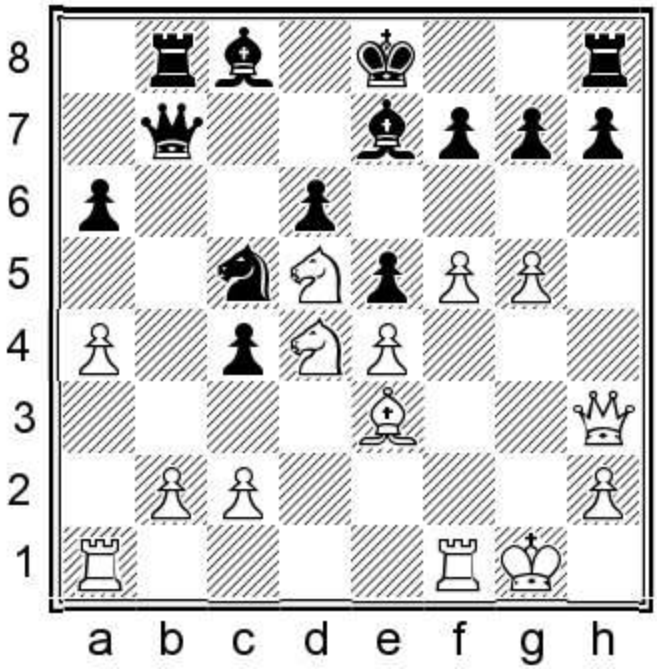
White has an overwhelming advantage; Black will rapidly regret putting the bishop on b7. I think the following lines are rather illustrative of this variation, so the extra effort to play through them is worth the time investment.
16...Qd7
16...g6 17.0-0-0 Qe7 18.Rhf1 Bg7 19.Qg4 Rf8 20.Rxf8† Kxf8 21.Nf3! Black is being slaughtered here. 21...Bxc3 (21...Kg8 22.Bxc5 dxc5 23.Nd2±) 22.Bxc5 Bxb2† 23.Kxb2 dxc5 24.Ne5 White is just winning.
16...Nxe4 17.Nxe4 Qa5† 18.Ke2! Qd5 19.Nxe6! Qxe6 20.Nf6† gxf6 21.Qxb7 Rd8 22.Rae1 Rd7 23.Qc6 White has a winning attack.
17.Rf1 0-0-0 18.0-0-0 Nxa4 19.Nxa4 Qxa4 20.Kb1 Re8
20...Qd7 21.g6!±
21.Rf7 Re7 22.Rxe7 Bxe7 23.Nxe6 c3 24.Rd4 Qd7 25.Nxg7
1–0 Brzezinski – Hueser, email 2015.

14.0-0 Bb7
The critical move is 14...Be7!? as played in Zundel – Shapiro, email 2007. We spent a lot of energy finding out that the strongest way to play the position is to fight hard for the light squares. Those same light squares you might have thought we had given up together with our light-squared bishop.

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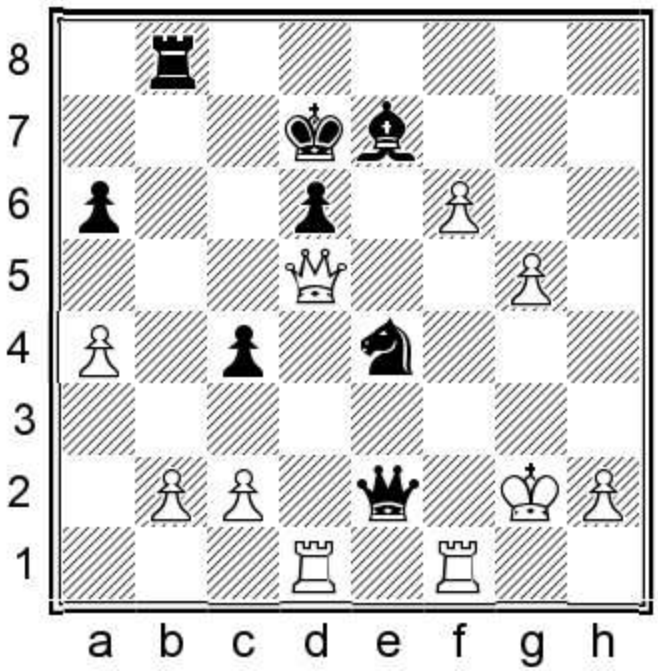
15.Qg2!?N 15...Rb8
15...Bb7 16.Rad1² is also a plausible line, but because it is less forcing, I will just claim that White is better and leave it at that.
16.Qh3! Nc5
Not 16...0-0? due to 17.f5 Kh8 18.Qh5 with Rf4-h4 coming, with a winning attack.
17.f5 e5 18.Nd5 Qb7



19.Rad1!!± exd4
19...Nxe4 20.Ne6!! fxe6 21.fxe6 Rf8 22.Rxf8† Bxf8 23.Rf1 Be7 24.Qxh7 Bxe6 25.Nxe7+–
20.Bxd4 Nxe4
This leads to a very long forced variation.
21.Bxg7 Rg8 22.Qxh7 Qa7† 23.Kg2 Rxg7 24.Qxg7 Bb7 25.Qg8† Kd7

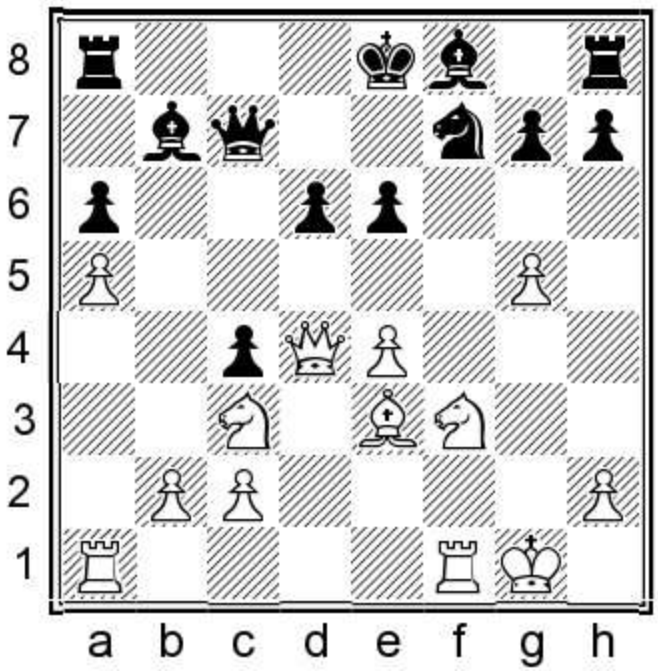
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25...Bf8 26.g6! Bxd5 27.Rxd5 Qe7 28.Rd4 Kd7 29.g7 Bxg7 30.Qxg7 Nf6 31.Kh1+–
26.Qxf7 Bxd5 27.Qxd5 Qe3 28.f6 Qe2†



29.Kg1!
The text move sidesteps a lovely drawing trick: 29.Kh1 Qxc2!! 30.fxe7 Ng3†! 31.Kg1 Ne2†=
29...Bd8 30.Qf5† Kc6 31.Kh1±
Followed by Qf3 with good winning chances for White.

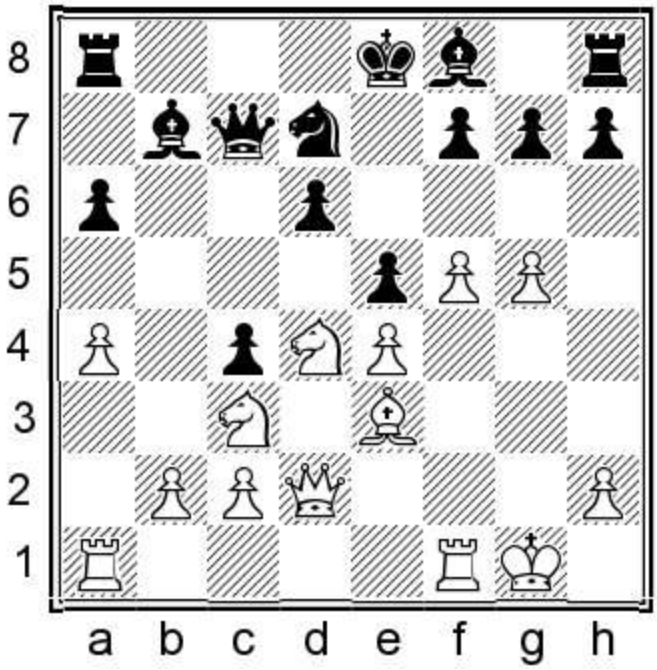
14...Qb7N 15.f5 Ne5 16.fxe6 fxe6 17.Nf3! Nf7 18.Qd4 Qc7 19.a5 Bb7



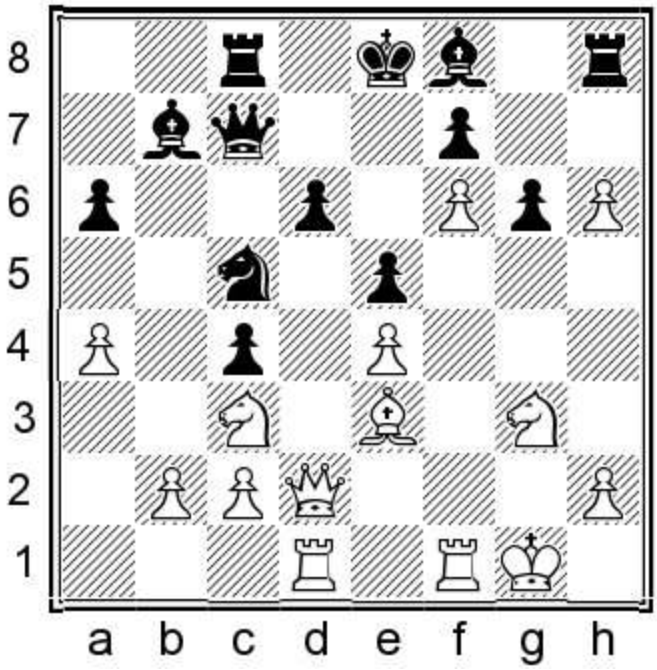
20.Ra4!? Rc8 21.Rb4±

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15.f5 e5

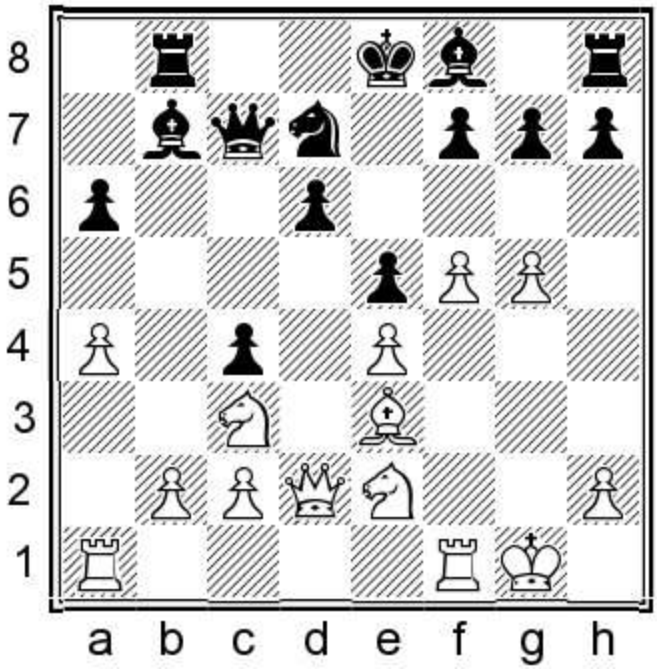


16.Nde2 Rb8
16...h6 is met strongly with 17.f6!. Black has to play: 17...g6 (17...hxg5 fails to 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Qxd5 Nb6 20. fxg7 Bxg7 21.Qa5 Rb8 22.Qxa6+–) 18.gxh6 Nc5 19.Ng3 Rb8 20.Rad1 Rc8 Sherwood – Benassi, email 2012.



At this point I must confess to being somewhat confused about selecting the strongest line. I have come around to 21.Kg2!N being the best move. This idea is attractive because Black wants to play ...Qd7-g4 in many lines and we need to be ready with h2-h3 immediately to knock the queen back. 21...Qd7 22.a5 Na4 23.Rb1!± is one line. This is all very difficult to evaluate correctly, but clearly Black has difficulties getting his pieces into the game.

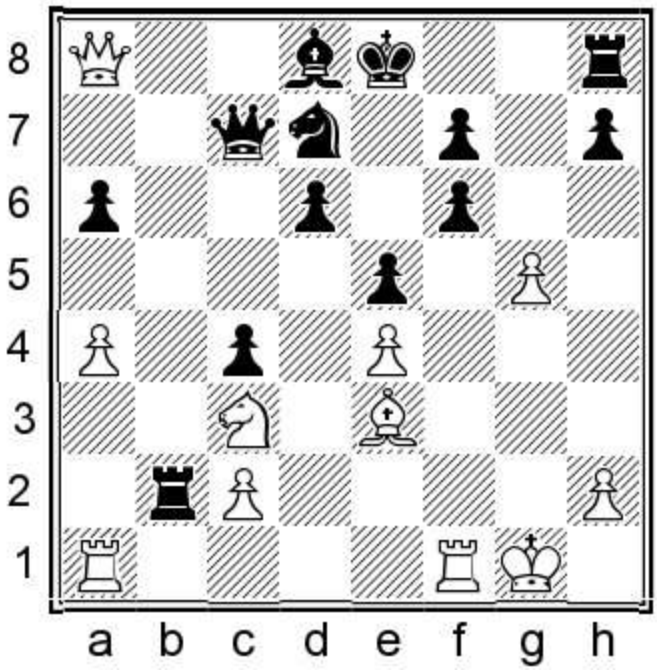
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17.Nd5!?
17.Ng3!N transposes to 16...h6 above after 17...h6 18.f6! g6 19.gxh6 Nc5.

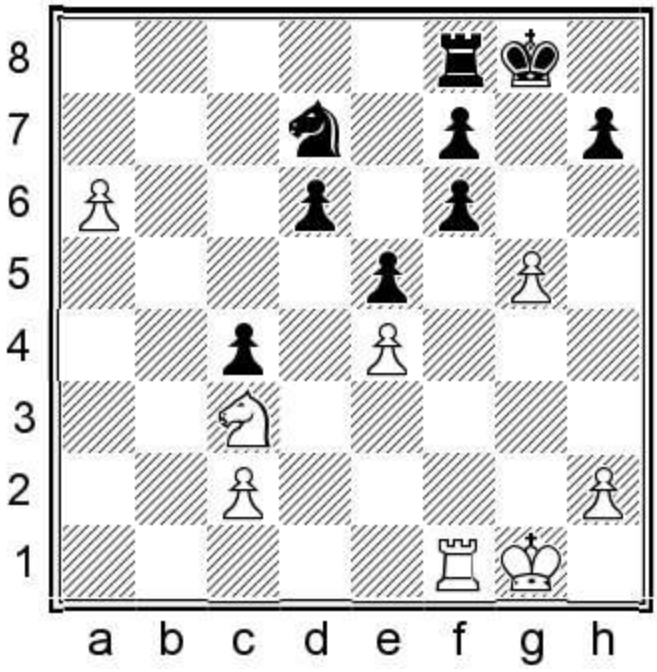
17...Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Be7?!
Black's best chance is: 18...h6! 19.g6 Nf6 20.gxf7† Qxf7 21.Qc6† Qd7 22.Qxa6 Nxe4 23.Nc3 Nxc3 24.bxc3²
The a-pawn secures White an edge. It's hard to say how serious that edge is without some practical tests. But I will take the extra pawn without hesitation.

19.Nc3! Rxb2 20.f6 gxf6 21.Qa8†! Bd8



22.Rab1! Qa5
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Black's position cannot be saved. For example, 22...Qb8 23.Qxa6 0-0 24.Ba7 Qxa7† 25.Qxa7 Bb6† 26.Qxb6

Rxb6 27.Rxb6 Nxb6 28.a5 Nd7 29.a6 and the endgame more or less wins itself.



One finish could be 29...Ra8 30.Ra1 fxg5 31.a7 Nb6 32.Rb1.

23.Nd5 Rxb1 24.Rxb1 Qxa4 25.gxf6+– 0-0 26.Bh6 Qxc2 27.Re1 Qc3 28.Re3 Qxe3† 29.Nxe3 Bb6 30.Qc6 Bxe3† 31.Bxe3
1–0

9...h6

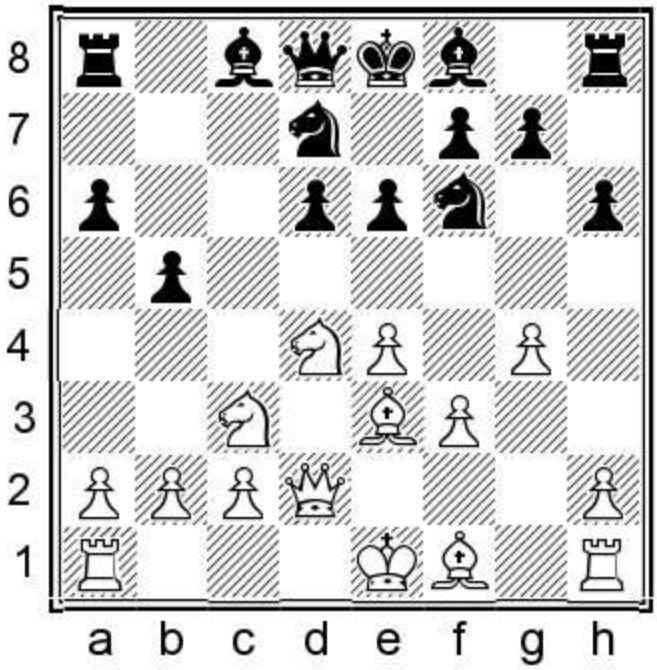
Finally, we have reached the apex of the Najdorf-Scheveningen. Against 9...h6 there is no provable path to an advantage, at least as far as our team has been able to work out. We have many ideas that we will share with you below, and there are pitfalls for Black all over. But no guaranteed advantage for White. The correspondence players might object to this, but our problem is simple: we just cannot find an advantage. The tournament player should not be distressed, as we have many ideas about how to play and it will be uncomfortable for Black everywhere. We have complex lines with chances for both sides, where it is easier to play White, and we have lines where White gets a slight pull, but reasonable defence will hold. I suggest you choose on the day which line suits your mood and the tournament situation.

GAME 35

Blazo Kalezic – Nenad Karisik
Bijelo Polje 2016

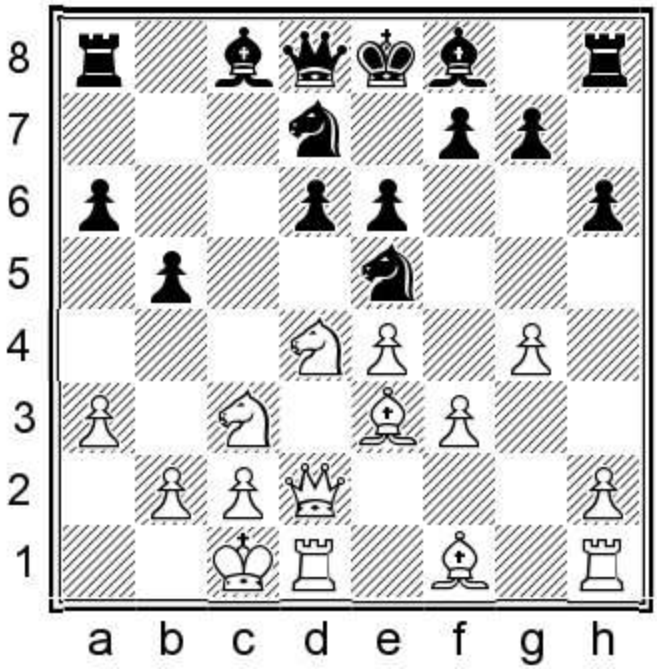
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5 8.Qd2 Nbd7 9.g4! h6

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10.a3!?
This is a sharp approach to fighting for an advantage. We will cover both 10.Rg1 and 10.0-0-0 below.

10...Bb7
A very instructive example is the following: 10...Ne5?! 11.0-0-0 Nfd7 Dominguez Perez – Ponomariov, Moscow 2009. The following set-up seems both very practical and very strong.

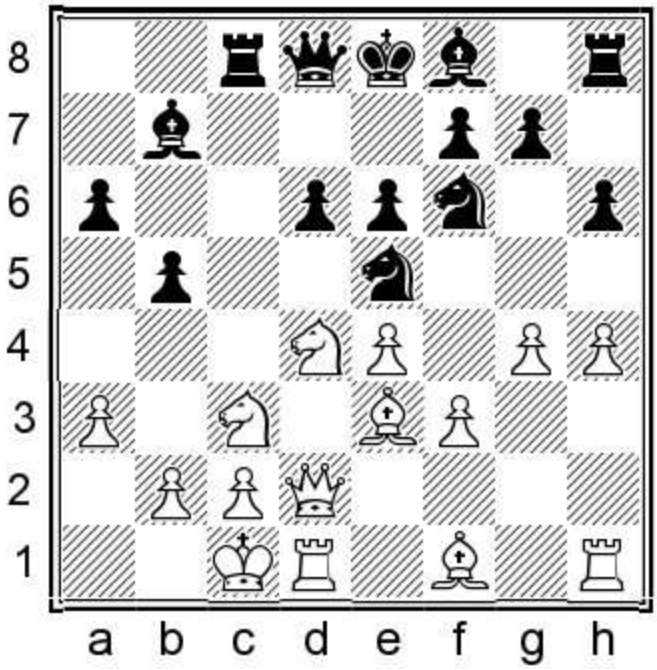


12.Qe1!N 12...Nb6 (12...Bb7 13.h4 Nb6 14.Kb1 Rc8 15.Bc1 Be7 16.Rh3!±) 13.h4 Nbc4 14.Bg1 Bb7 15.Be2 Rc8 16.f4 Nd7 17.Rh3² Black's position is not just unpleasant, it is also very hard to play.

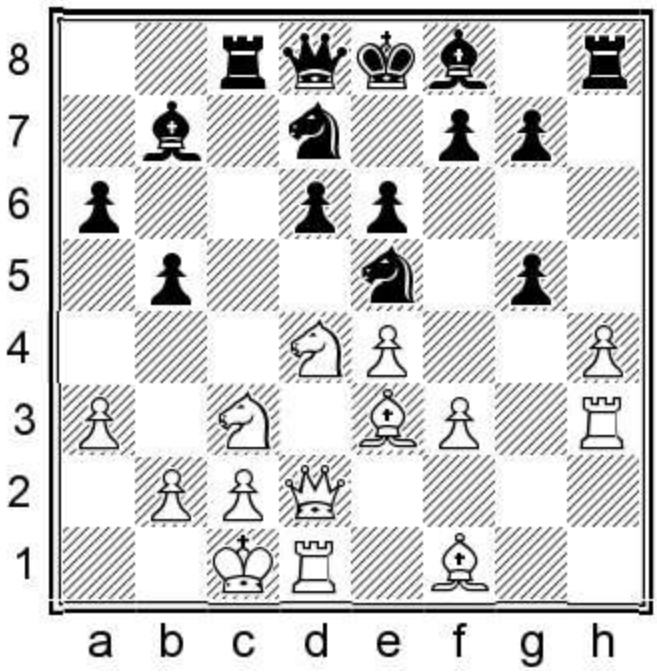
11.0-0-0 Rc8
Weaker is:

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11...Ne5?! 12.h4 Rc8

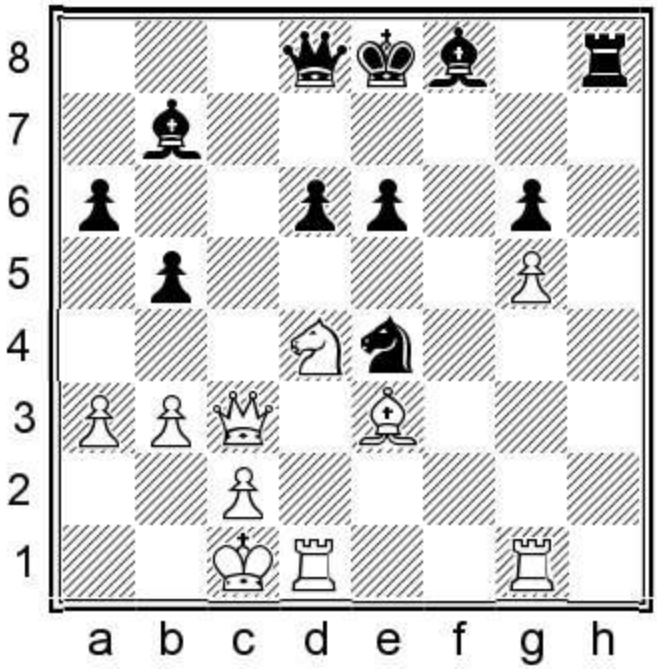


13.Rg1
Also interesting was 13.Rh3!? Nfd7 14.Qe1!N. I am in love with this set-up. (It’s an improvement over 14.g5 hxg5 as in Hirneise – Al Sayed, Doha 2016, though even here White could have been better:

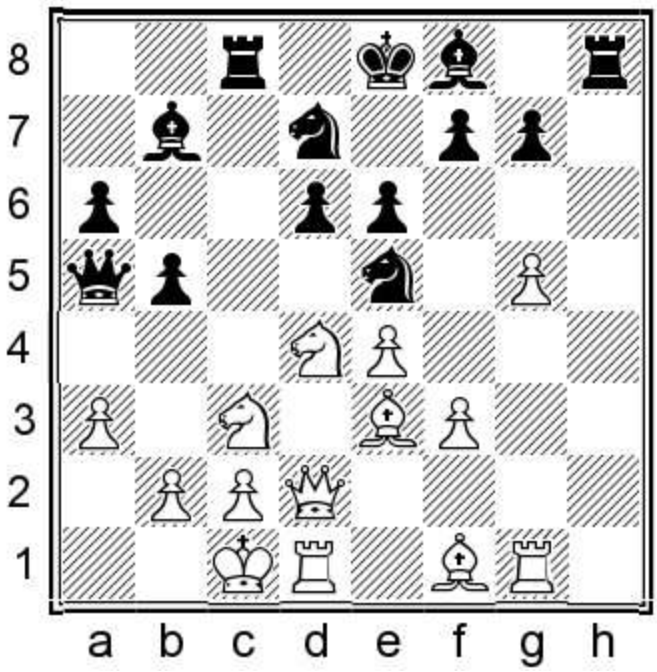


15.Bxg5!N 15...Qb6 16.h5 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.Be3 Qc7 19.Nde2²) 14...Nc4 15.Bg1 Nde5 16.Be2²
13...Qa5
13...Nfd7 is in trouble against direct play: 14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 g6 16.f4 Nc4 17.Bxc4 Rxc4 18.f5!± Nc5 19.fxe6 fxe6 (19...Nxe6 does not work either: 20.Nxe6 fxe6 21.Bd4 Rh5 22.Be5 Rc6 23.Bf6 Qa5 24.Kb1 Rh3 25.Rh1 Rxh1 26.Rxh1 Qc7 27.Rh8 Qf7 28.e5 Kd7 29.Qh2 Ke8 30.Rh7 1–0 Bologan – Dobrov, Internet 2004.) 20.b3 Rxc3 21.Qxc3 Nxe4

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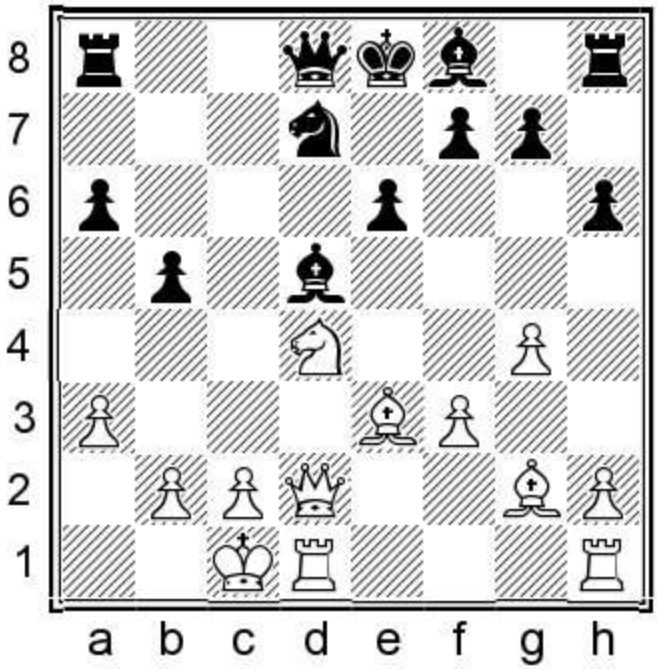
22.Qd3 Qc8 The best try. (22...Qe7 as in Guliyev – Guilleux, Dieppe 2012, loses to 23.Rg4!N 23...d5 24.Nxb5! axb5 25.Rxe4+–; 22...Qd7 loses to 23.Rg4!N 23...d5 24.Nxb5 Qxb5 25.Qd4! Rh7 26.Rxe4+–) 23.Ne2 e5 24. Ng3 Rh4 Resourceful defence, but after 25.Rh1! Qg4 26.Rxh4 Qxh4 27.Nxe4 Bxe4 28.Qc3± White remained in control in Walczak – Svidersky, email 2013.
14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 Nfd7



16.g6! Nxg6
16...Rxc3 17.Qxc3 Qxc3 18.gxf7†±
17.Nxe6 fxe6 18.Rxg6 Kf7 19.Rg3+–
White had a winning attack in Norrelykke – Sielaff, email 2010.

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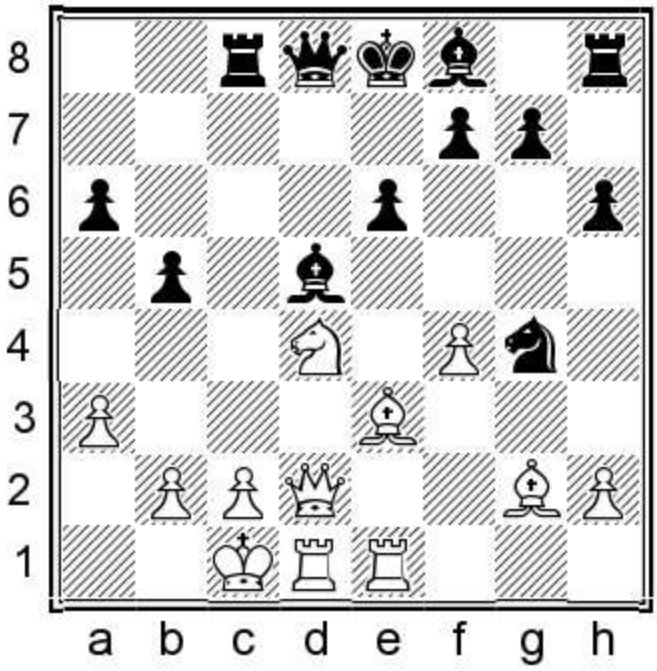
11...d5?! is premature, as 12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Nxd5 Bxd5 14.Bg2² looks great for White.



Below are a few examples:

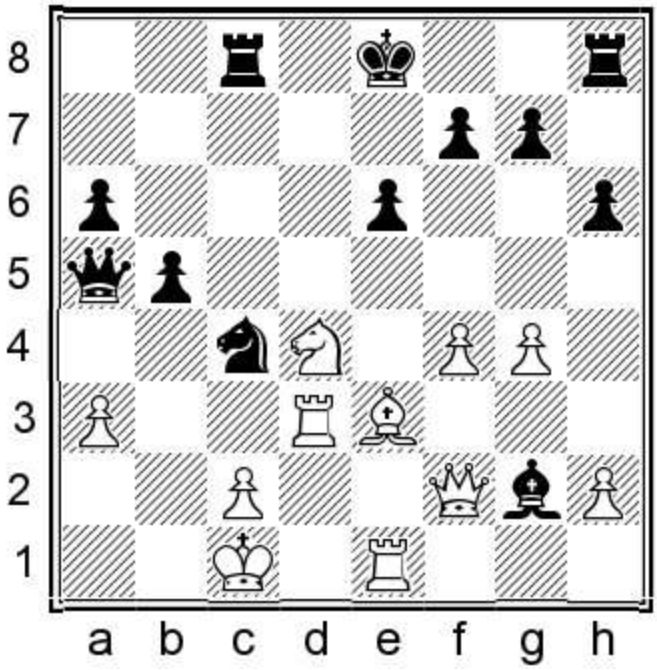
a) 14...Ne5 15.Qe2! Nc4 16.Nf5! Qc8 17.Bd4 f6 18.f4 Bxg2 19.Qxg2+– Velmarin – Quirk, email 2012. 19... exf5 20.gxf5! is an important point.

b) 14...Nf6 15.f4 Nxg4?! (15...Rc8 16.Rhe1 Be7 17.f5²) 16.Rhe1± This is bad for Black. For example: 16...Rc8



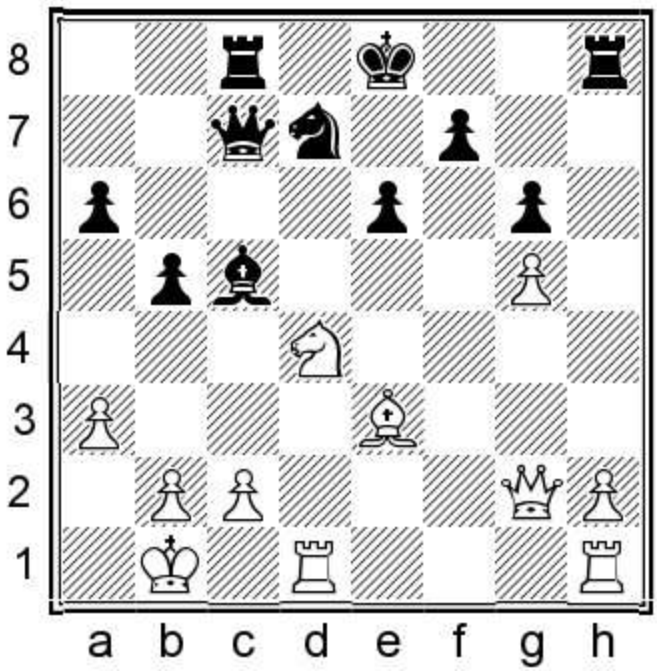
17.Nxe6!! fxe6 18.Bb6 Qxb6 19.Qxd5 Be7 20.Qd7† Kf7 21.Rxe6 Rxc2† 22.Kb1 Qd8 23.Rxe7† Qxe7 24.Qf5† Nf6 25.Bd5† Kf8 26.Qxc2+–
c) 14...Rc8 15.Rhe1! Ne5 16.f4! Nc4 17.Qf2 Bxa3!? 18.bxa3 Qa5 19.Rd3 Bxg2

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20.Nf5! 0-0 21.Ne7† Kh7 22.Nxc8 Rxc8 23.Bd2! Nxd2 24.Qxd2 Qxd2† 25.Kxd2±

d) 14...Qc7 15.f4 Bxg2 16.Qxg2 Rc8 17.Kb1± Bc5 18.g5 hxg5 19.fxg5 g6 Cilloniz Razzeto – Salcedo Mederos, email 2011.

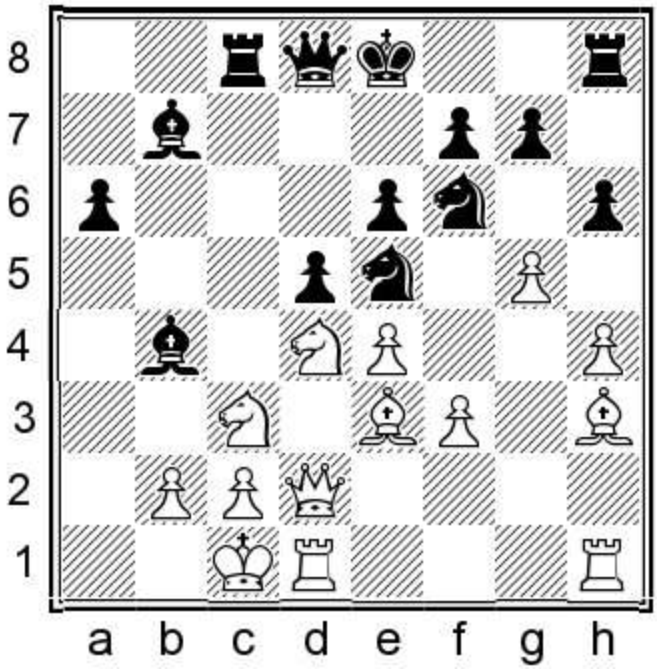


20.h4!N is a strong improvement. The key point is 20...e5 21.Qe4 Bb6 22.h5!! Nc5 23.Qd5 exd4 24.Bxd4 Rxh5 25.Rxh5 gxh5 26.g6! and Black's position collapses.

12.Kb1
After 12.h4 d5 (12...Nb6 13.Rh3!?[2]) there are a few options for White to ponder:

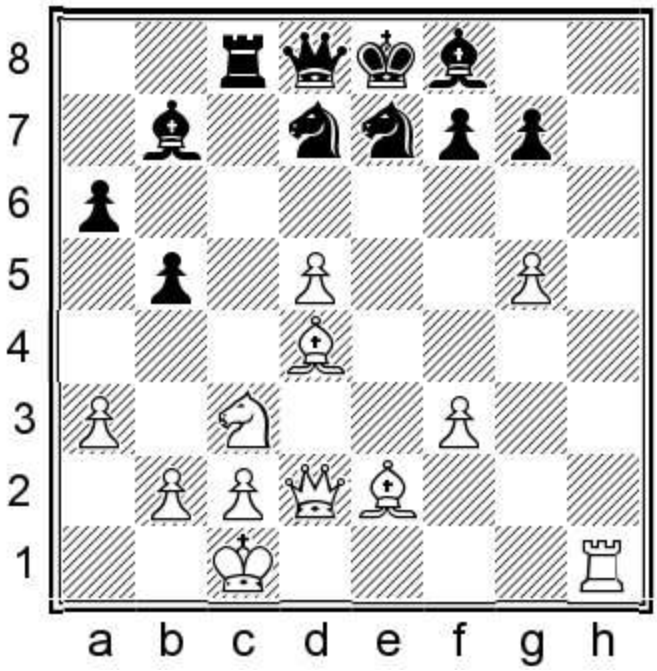
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a) 13.Bh3 allows Black to equalize with: 13...b4! 14.axb4 Bxb4 15.g5 Ne5!



There is more than one move order, but this is the key point. 16.gxf6 Bxc3 17.bxc3 Nc4 18.fxg7 Rg8 19.Qe1 Qa5 A draw was agreed in Eldridge – Petrov, email 2011, due to: 20.Kb1 Na3† 21.Kb2 Nc4†=

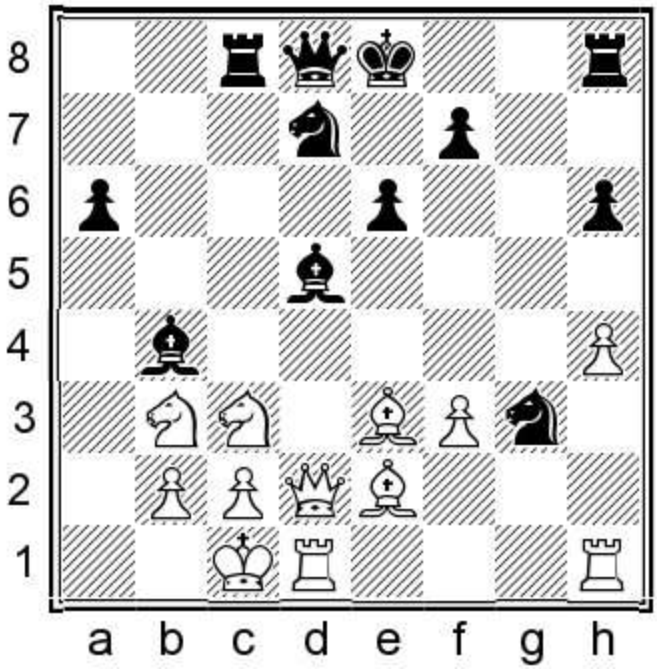
b) 13.Be2!?
This is interesting, even if not critical.
13...b4
13...e5 14.g5 exd4 15.Bxd4 hxg5 16.hxg5 Rxh1 17.Rxh1 Ng8 18.exd5 Ne7 Morrow – Figlio, email 2016.



19.f4!?N 19...Nb6 20.Re1÷
14.axb4 Bxb4 15.g5 Nh5
15...dxe4 16.gxf6 Nxf6 17.Nb3 Qe7 18.f4 Nd5 19.Qd4 Bxc3 20.bxc3 Nxc3 21.Qxg7 Rf8 22.Kd2 Qb4 23.Qd4 Qxd4† 24.Nxd4 Nxd1 25.Rxd1² Gysi – Koskela, email 2007.

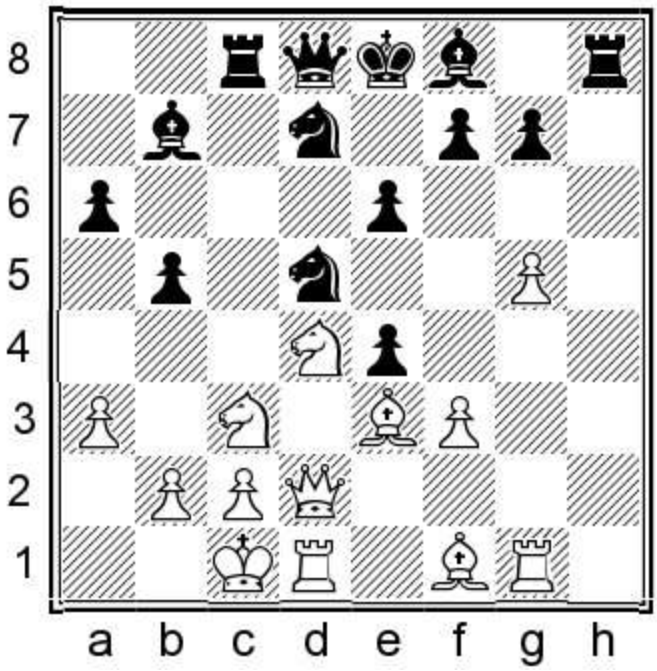
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16.gxh6 gxh6 17.exd5 Bxd5 18.Nb3 Ng3
Kvassay – Beykirch, email 2012.



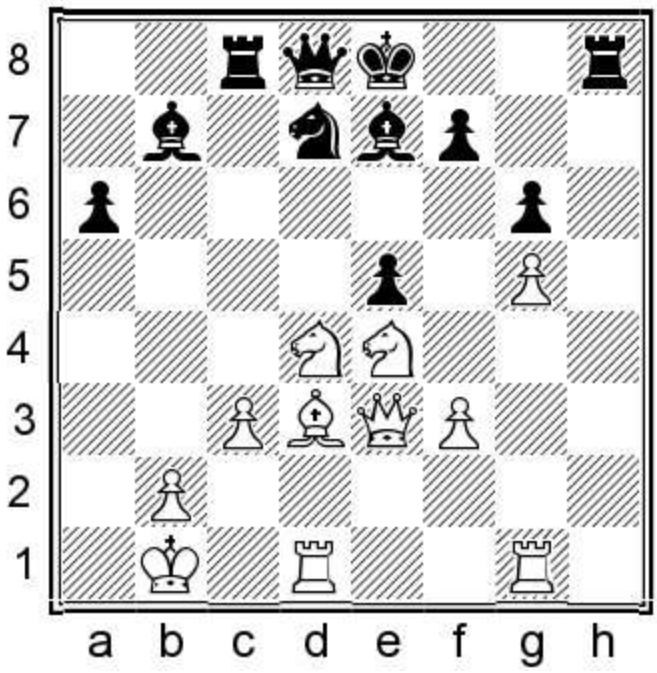
19.Bd4!N 19...Rg8 20.Rhg1 Nxe2† 21.Qxe2 Rxg1 22.Rxg1 Bxb3 23.cxb3 Qa5 24.Kb1
This looks more dangerous for Black than for White.

c) 13.Rg1!?
This appears to be the most dangerous.
13...dxe4
13...e5?! does not work here. 14.g5! exd4 15.Bxd4 hxg5 16.hxg5 Nh5 17.Bh3± gave White a raging attack in Campian – Grabner, email 2014.
14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 Nd5

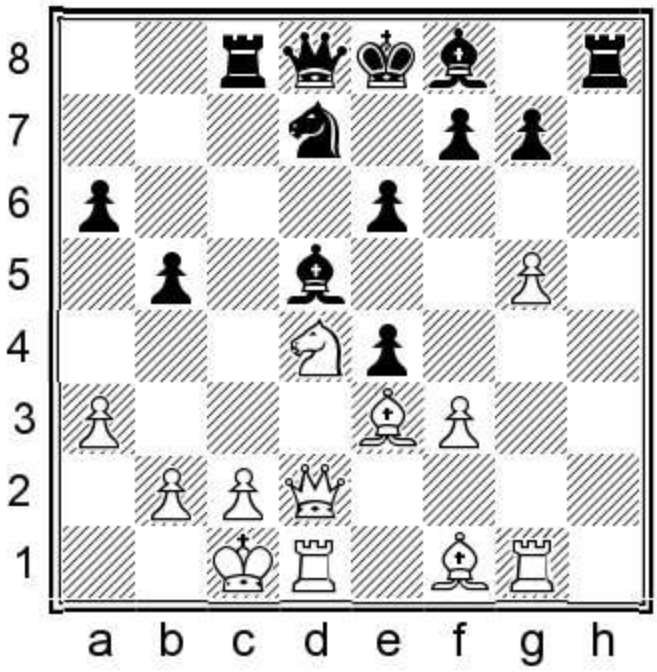


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16.Nxd5
Black is holding on after 16.Nxe4 g6 17.Kb1. We analysed this in immense depth, but I shall just give a summary of the key line: 17...b4! 18.axb4 Bxb4 19.c3 Nxe3 20.Qxe3 Be7 21.Bd3 (21.Nxe6 fxe6 22.Nd6† Bxd6 23. Rxd6 looks dangerous, but Black can save the game with 23...e5! and all White has is a draw after something like: 24.Bd3 Ke7 25.Rxg6 Bd5 26.Rd1 Bf7 27.Bf5 Bxg6 28.Rxd7† Qxd7 29.Qxe5† Kd8 30.Qxh8† Kc7 31. Qe5† Kb6 32.Bxg6 Qd1† 33.Ka2 Qa4†=) 21...Qb6 (21...e5 Steinke – Claridge, email 2013.



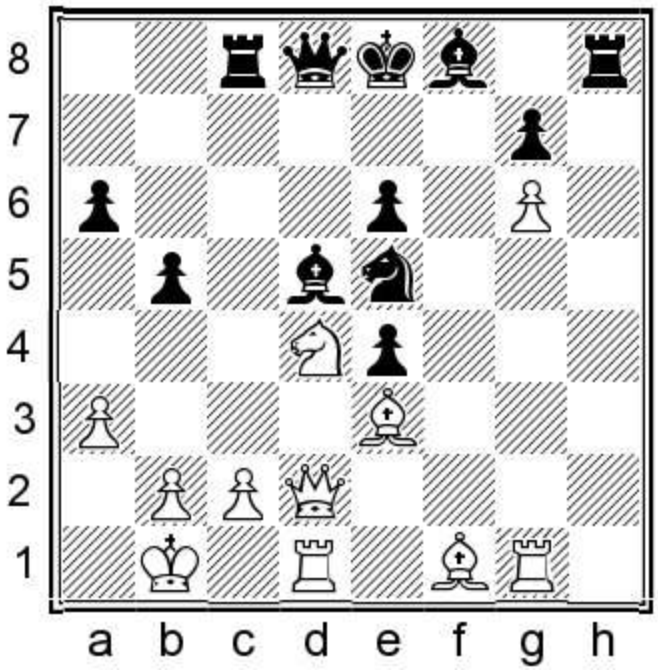
22.Nc2!?N 22...Kf8 23.Qe2 would be a decent way to play for an advantage.) 22.Rh1 Rxh1 23.Rxh1 Bxe4 24. Rh8† Nf8= White has no advantage here, as proven in a number of correspondence games.
16...Bxd5



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17.g6!

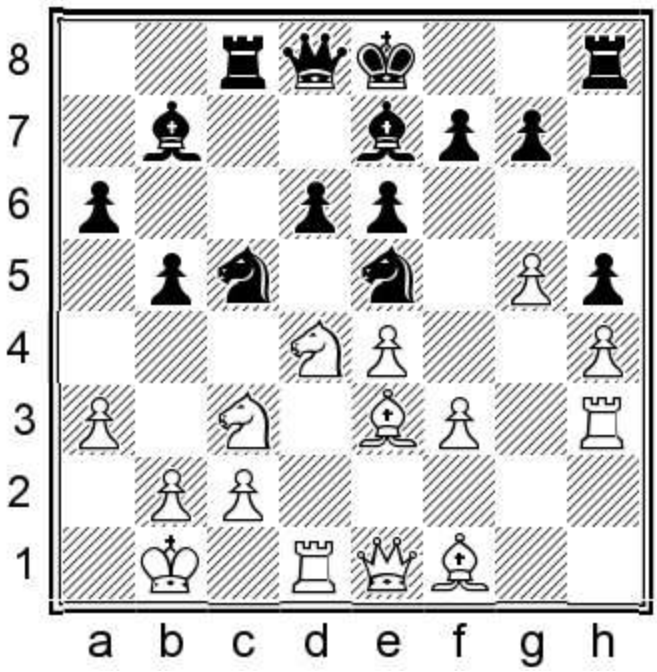
17.fxe4 Bxe4 18.Bg2 Nc5= Malashenkov – Konstantinov, email 2012.
17...f5
17...f6!? could be the right path for Black, but it is wildly unclear.
18.fxe4! fxe4?
18...Bxe4 19.Nxe6 Bxc2 20.Nxd8 Be4† 21.Qc3 Rxc3† 22.bxc3 Bxa3† 23.Kd2²
19.Kb1 Ne5
Morozevich – Nakamura, Thessaloniki 2013.



20.a4!!N
This would have made Black's structure collapse.
20...Qc7
20...bxa4 21.Bxa6+–
21.axb5 Nf3 22.Nxf3 Bb4 23.Qc1 exf3 24.Rxd5 exd5 25.b6+–

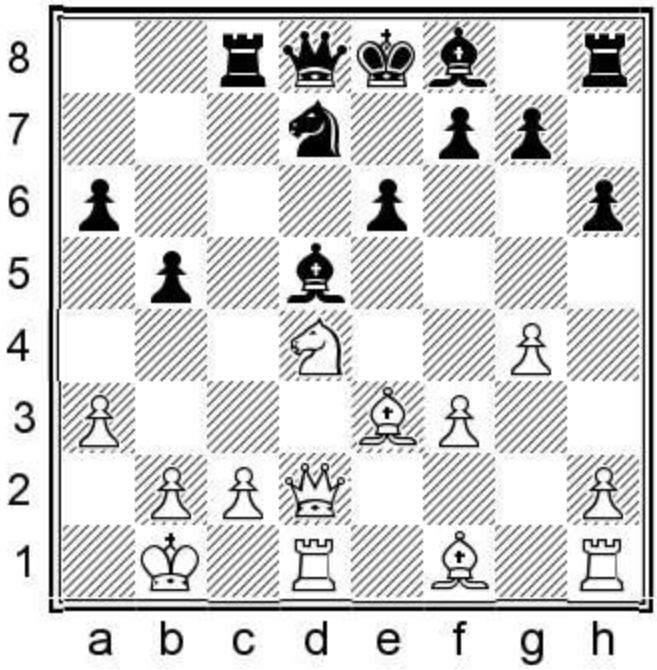
12...d5!
12...Ne5 13.Qe1 gives us our standard set-up. 13...Nfd7 (13...d5N 14.Bf4! Bd6 [14...Ng6 15.Bg3²] 15.Ncxb5! axb5 16.Bxb5†± Nfd7?! 17.exd5 Bxd5 18.Nf5!+–) 14.h4 Be7 15.Rh3 Nc5 16.g5 h5 Gueci – Noble, email 2012.

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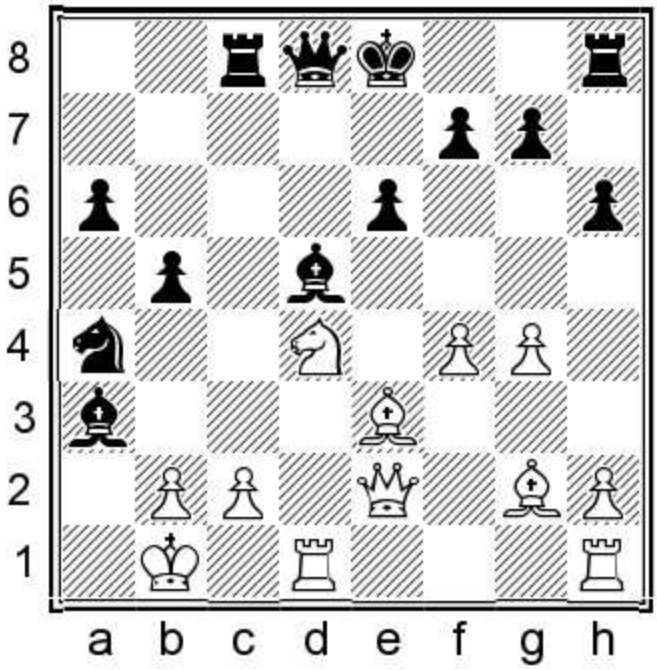
17.f4!N 17...Ng4 18.Bg1±

13.exd5 Nxd5 14.Nxd5 Bxd5



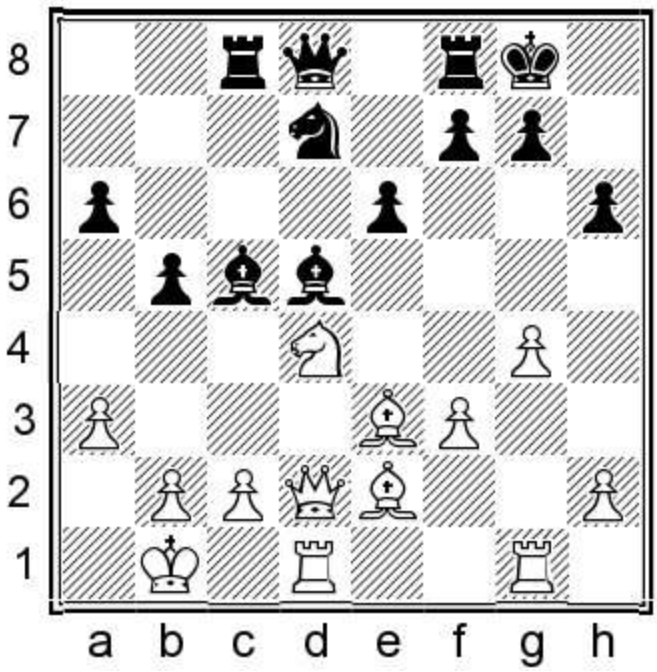
15.Be2
Very sharp and very important to know well in order to play it, is the following try: 15.Bg2!?N 15...Nb6 16. Qe2! Bc5 (16...Na4 17.f4 Bxa3 looks strong, but White has:

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18.Nxe6!! fxe6 19.Bxd5 Qe7 20.Rd3!²) 17.f4 0-0 18.g5 hxg5 (18...h5 19.Rhe1²) 19.fxg5÷

15...Bc5 16.h4
Also interesting was 16.Rhg1 0-0, which was the move order in Ponomariov – Wojtaszek, below.

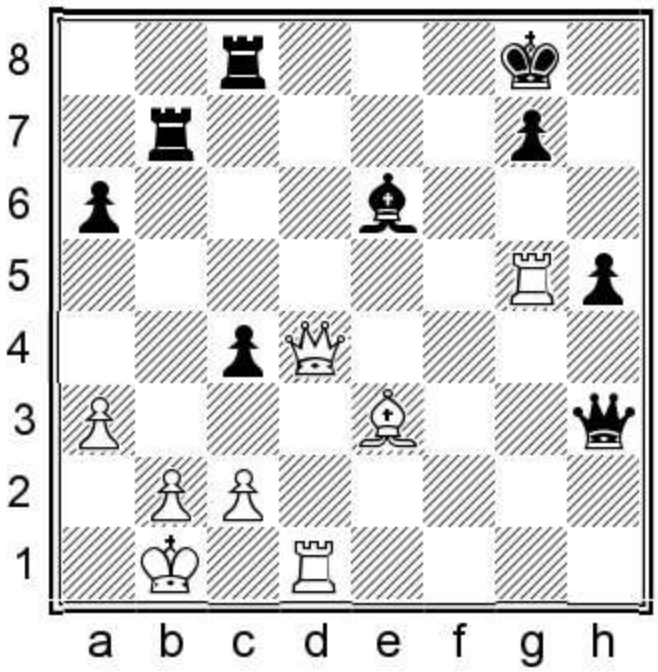


17.g5!?N looks promising. 17...g6!? (17...h5 18.g6 f5 19.c3²) 18.gxh6 Kh7 19.f4 Nf6 20.Bd3 (20.f5 exf5 21. Nxf5 Be4!=) 20...Ne4 21.Qe1 Qb6 22.c3²

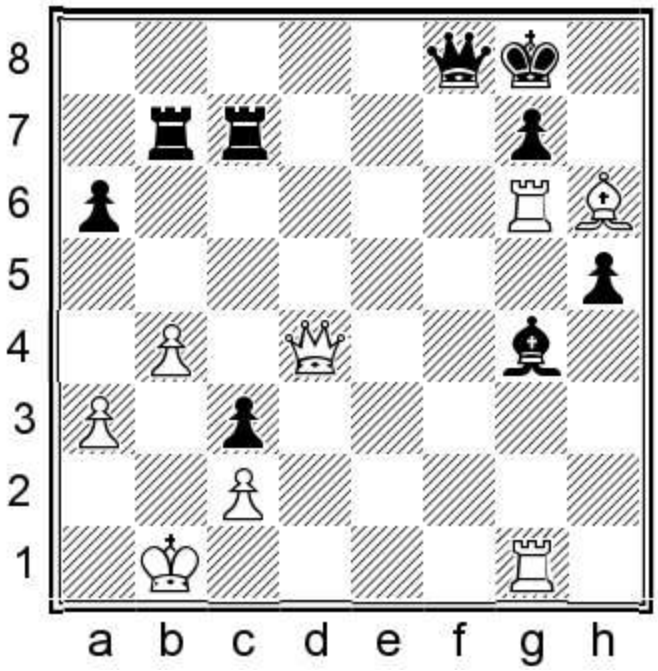
16...g6?
A better choice would have been:
16...0-0!?÷

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Let’s follow one example from this wild position:
17.Rhg1 Ne5 18.f4 Nc4 19.Bxc4 bxc4 20.g5 h5 21.g6 Qxh4
21...Qf6!?÷ looks preferable.
22.f5² Qh3 23.gxf7† Rxf7 24.fxe6 Rb7 25.Rg5 Bxd4 26.Qxd4 Bxe6

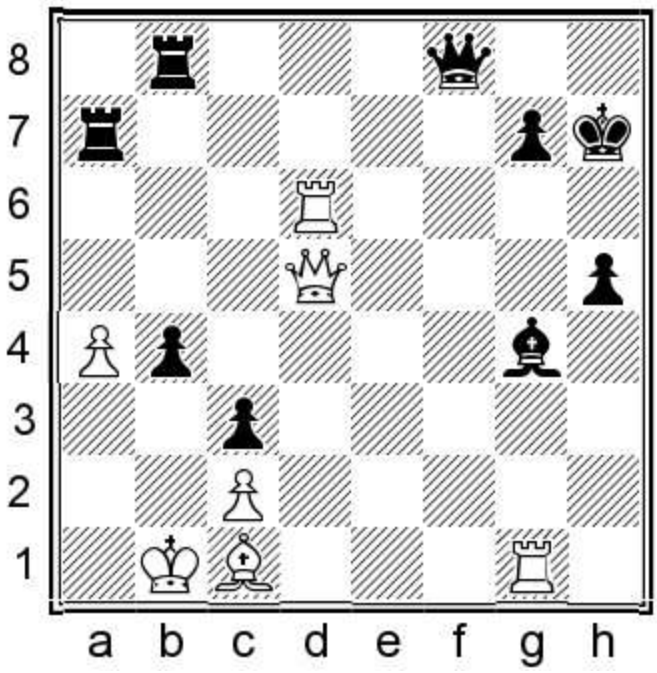


27.Rdg1?!
27.Qe5! followed by Bd4 won rather quickly. Note also the threat to the h5-pawn.
27...Rcc7 28.R5g3?
28.Bd2! was stronger.
28...Qf5 29.Bh6 Qf8 30.Rg6 c3?
30...Bg4=
31.b4 Bg4



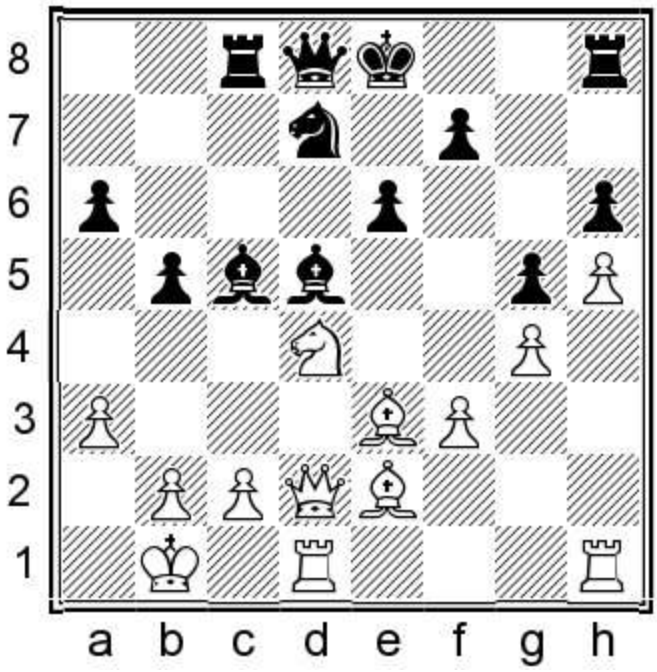
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32.Bf4?÷
32.Qd5† Kh8 33.R6xg4 hxg4 34.Bc1 Rf7 35.Rh1† Kg8 36.Qe4 would have given White excellent winning chances.
32...Rf7 33.Bc1? a5!
The game has turned sour.
34.Rd6 Rb8 35.Qd5 Kh7 36.Ka1 axb4 37.a4 Ra7 38.Kb1



38...b3 39.cxb3 Rxb3† 40.Kc2 Rb8 41.Be3 Bf5† 42.Kxc3 Rc7† 43.Bc5 Rbc8
0–1 Ponomariov – Wojtaszek, Khanty-Mansiysk 2017.

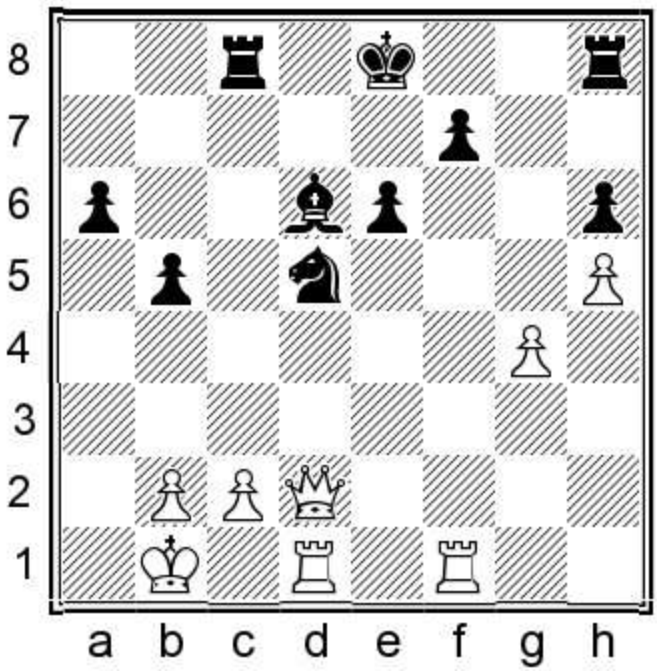
17.h5 g5



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18.Rhf1!?±
18.Rhe1!N is even stronger.

18...Qe7?! 19.f4+– gxf4 20.Bxf4 Bxa3 21.Nf5 Qb4 22.Nd6† Qxd6 23.Bxd6 Bxd6 24.Bf3 Nf6 25.Bxd5 Nxd5



26.g5 hxg5 27.Qxg5
1–0

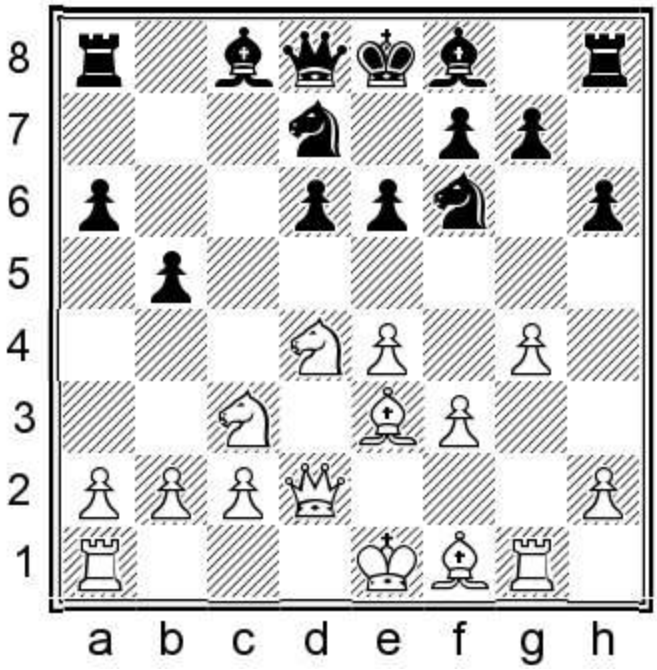
10.Rg1!?

This is not a main line, but sometimes it is good to have an extra option up your sleeve.

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5 8.Qd2 Nbd7 9.g4! h6
I want to throw in an additional idea, which is not mainstream, but can be used successfully as a surprise weapon.

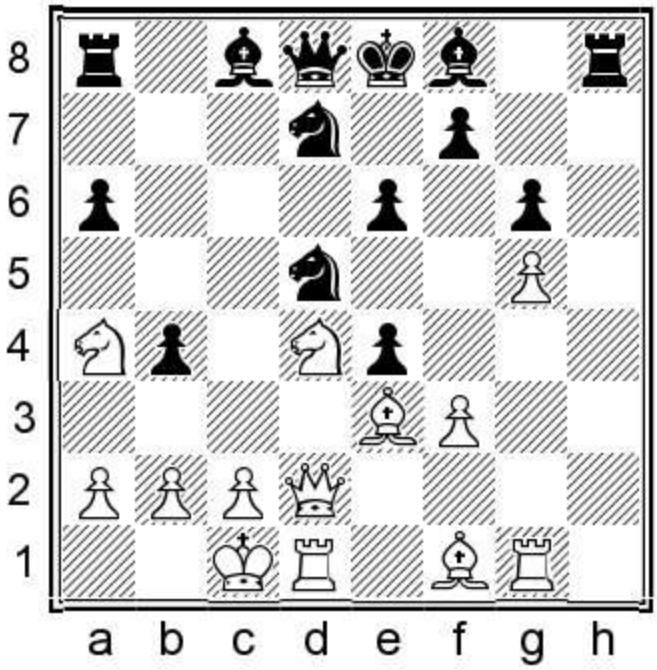
10.Rg1!?

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10...b4 11.Na4 d5
11...Ne5 is a sensible option. After 12.h4 Bd7 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxg5 Nxe4 15.fxe4 Bxa4 16.0-0-0 g6 17.Qxb4 Bd7÷ both sides have their chances.

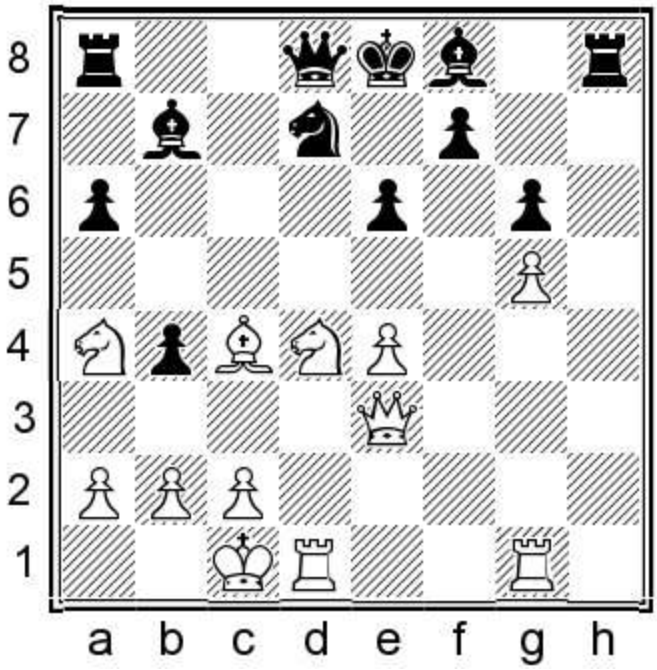
12.h4 dxe4 13.g5 hxg5 14.hxg5 Nd5 15.0-0-0 g6
So far we have followed Pena Duarte – Fernandez, Bogota 2014.



The critical line is impossible for someone to play with Black without great preparation – AKA, having read this book...

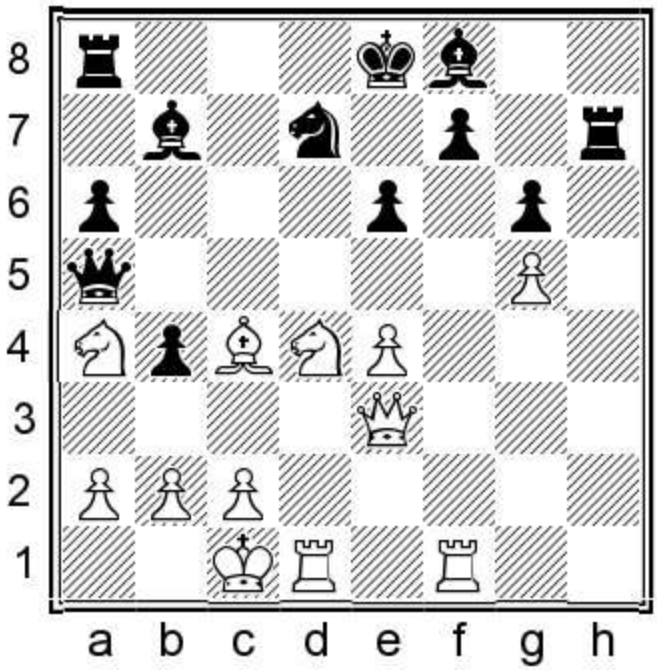
16.Bc4!N 16...Bb7 17.fxe4 Nxe3 18.Qxe3

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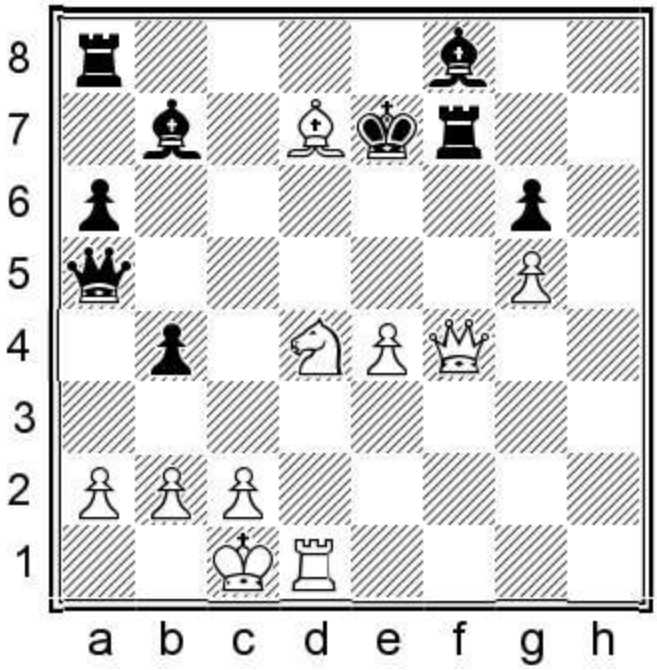
At this point we will analyse two lines in detail.

a) 18...Qa5!?
This allows some beautiful ideas, but Black might survive in one line:
19.Rgf1!! Be7!
Everything else goes down in flames.
19...Rh7?

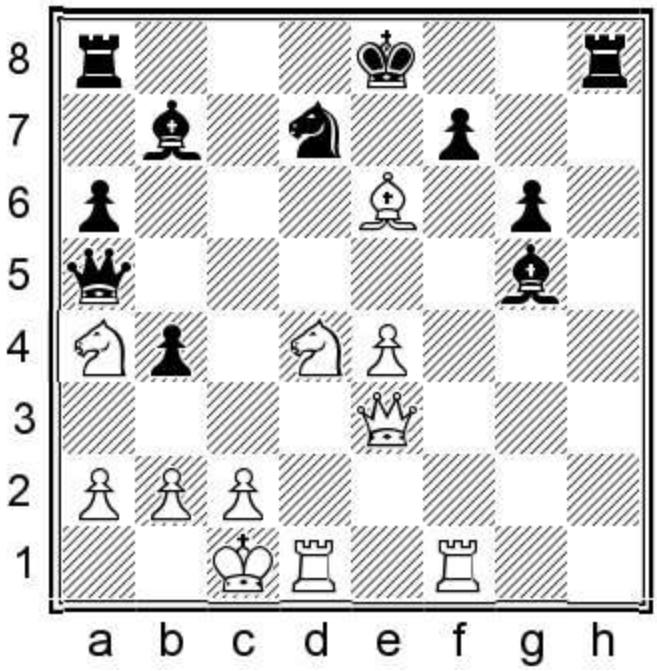


20.Bxe6! fxe6 21.Nxe6 Rc8 22.Rxd7!! Qxa4 23.Rxf8† Kxd7 24.Qd4† Ke7 25.Rxc8 Bxc8 26.Qf6† Kd7 27. Nc5† and wins.
19...Qxa4? 20.Rxf7! Kxf7 21.Bb3! Qa5 22.Bxe6† Ke7 23.Qf4! Rh7 24.Bxd7 Rf7

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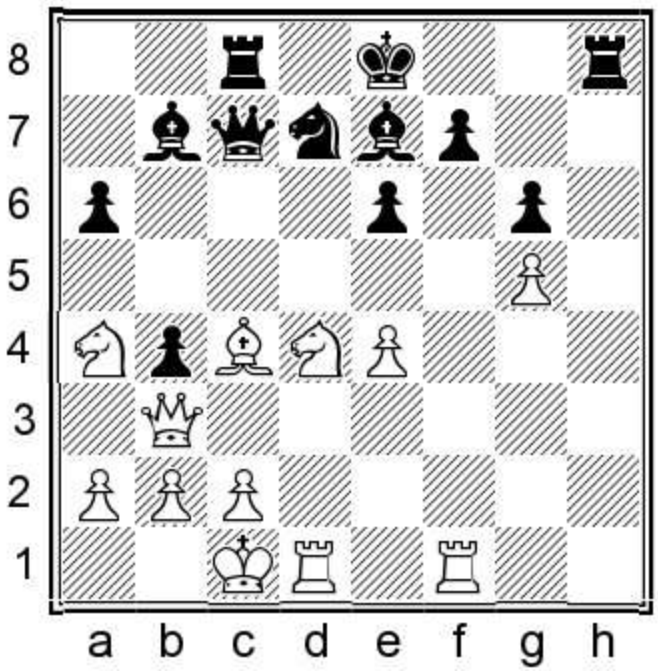
25.Nc6† Bxc6 26.Qd6† Kd8 27.Qxc6 and the next check will hurt.
20.Bxe6
Demanding that Black finds some tough moves to equalize.
Or 20.Kb1!?÷ is one way to keep the tension.
20...Bxg5
20...fxe6 21.Nxe6 Qe5 22.Qb3 Rc8 23.Nb6 Rxc2†! (23...Nxb6?? 24.Nc7† Rxc7 25.Qf7#) 24.Kb1 Bxe4 25.Ka1 Rc6 26.Nc5 Rf8 27.Ncxd7 Rxf1 28.Rxf1 Qe6 29.Qd1 Qd6 30.Qb3 Qe6=



21.Bxd7† Ke7! 22.Nf5† Qxf5 23.exf5† Bxe3† 24.Kb1 Kf6=
The real drama is over.

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b) 18...Qc7!? 19.Qb3 Be7 20.Rgf1 Rc8



21.Bxe6 fxe6 22.Nxe6 Qe5 23.Nb6! Rxc2†! 24.Kb1 Bxe4 25.Ka1 Rc6! 26.Nc5! Rf8 27.Ncxd7 Rxf1 28.Rxf1 Qe6 29.Qd1 Rd6 30.Qc1 Rc6= Chess is a draw.

10.0-0-0

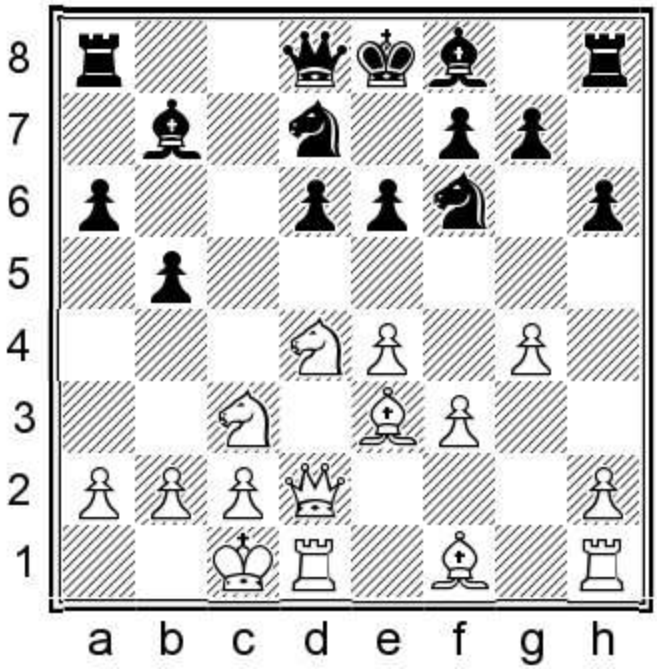
This is the main line. Its theory is well developed and Black holds his own with very accurate play. But it is not a pleasant existence.

GAME 36

Alexander Grischuk – Tongsen Wang
China 2017

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5 8.Qd2 Nbd7 9.g4! h6 10.0-0-0 Bb7?!

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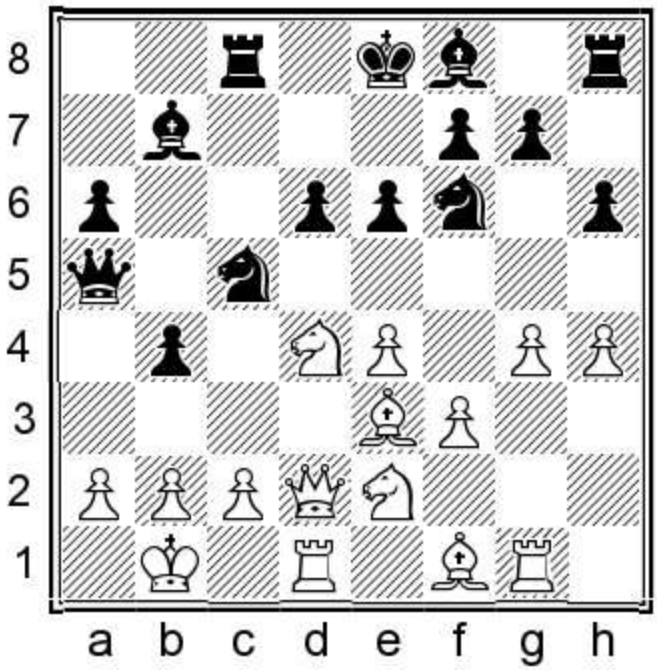
This was the main line for what seems like a generation. However, now it looks like it is not really working for Black. We shall look at the critical 10...b4! in the next game.

11.h4 b4
The main line. I do not think any of the alternatives are feasible.

11...Ne5 12.a3! transposes to a 10.a3 line that is good for White; see page 385.

11...Nb6 12.a3! is similar.

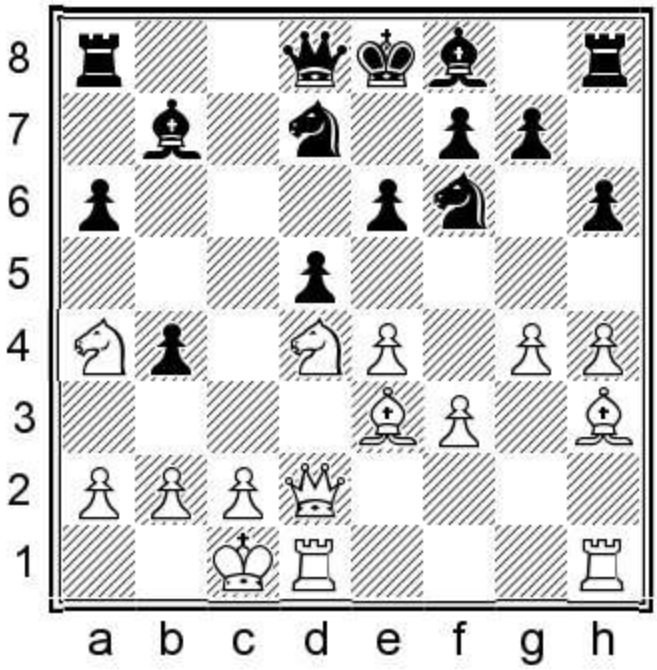
11...Rc8 12.Rg1² b4 13.Nce2 Qa5?! 14.Kb1± Nc5? occurred in Sanchez Naranjo – Martin Rueda, Madrid 1999.



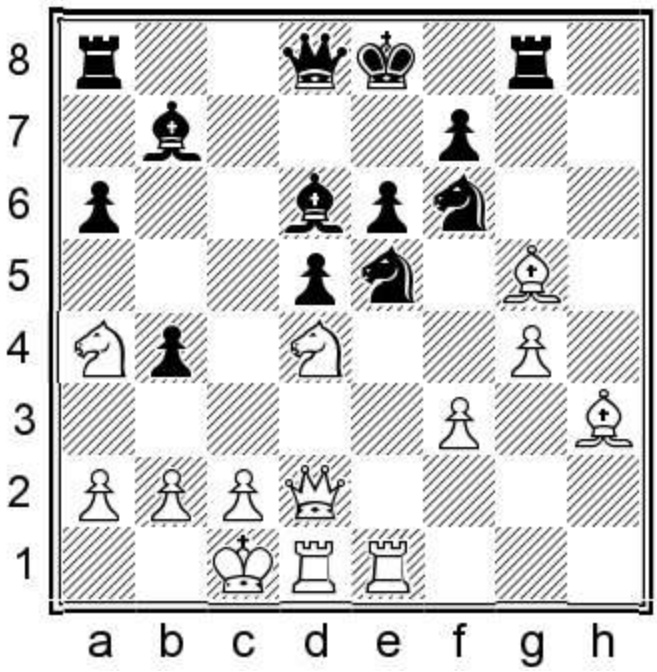
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Now after 15.a3!N White wins.

11...d5 12.Bh3 b4 13.Na4 This position was tested a lot before computers reached the depth needed to confirm that Black is just gone.



a) 13...g5 is refuted by direct action. The following game is more or less perfect play by White as far as I can tell. 14.hxg5 hxg5 15.e5! Nxe5 16.Bxg5 Rg8 17.Rhe1 Bd6

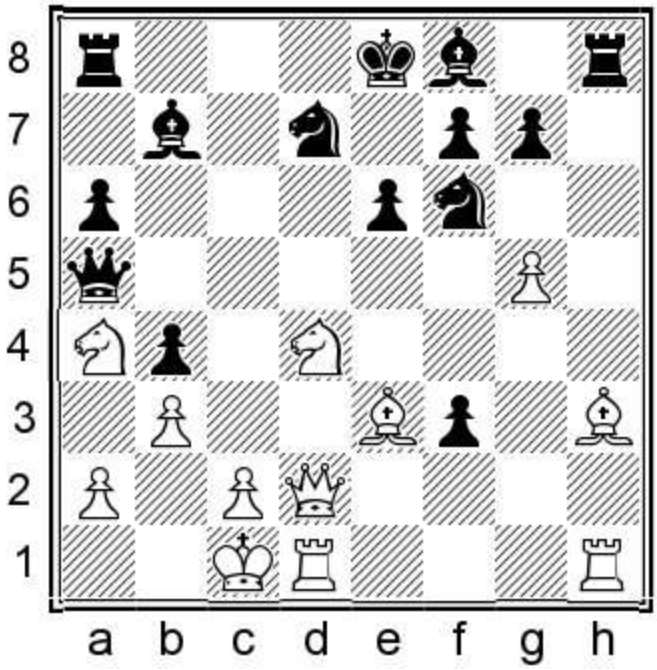


18.Nc5! Bxc5 19.Rxe5 Kd7 20.Rde1 Rc8 21.Rxe6 Ne4 22.R6xe4 Qxg5 23.f4 Qh4 24.R4e3 Rce8 25.g5† Kd8 26.Nf5 Qh7 27.Nh6 Rxe3 28.Rxe3 Rf8 29.Rd3 Kc7 30.a3 1–0 Hertel – Tiemann, email 2001.

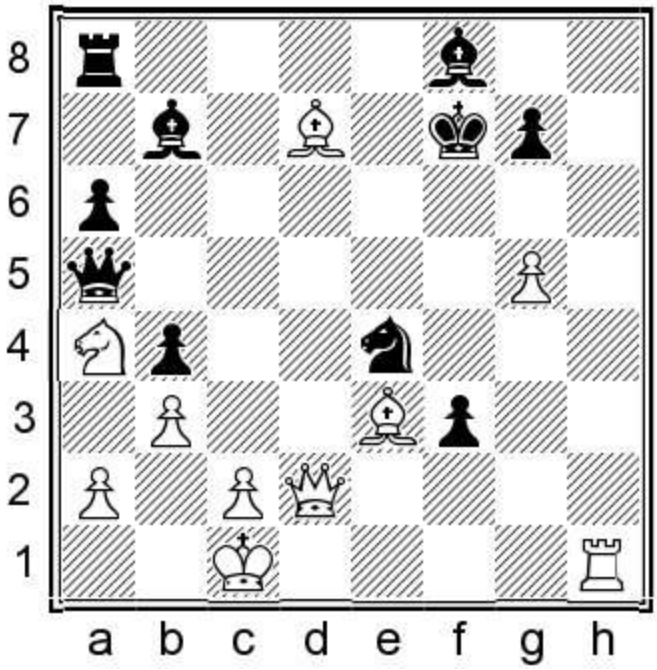
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b) 13...Qa5

An intermediate move that slightly changes the refutation, but not the evaluation.
14.b3 dxe4 15.g5 hxg5 16.hxg5 exf3

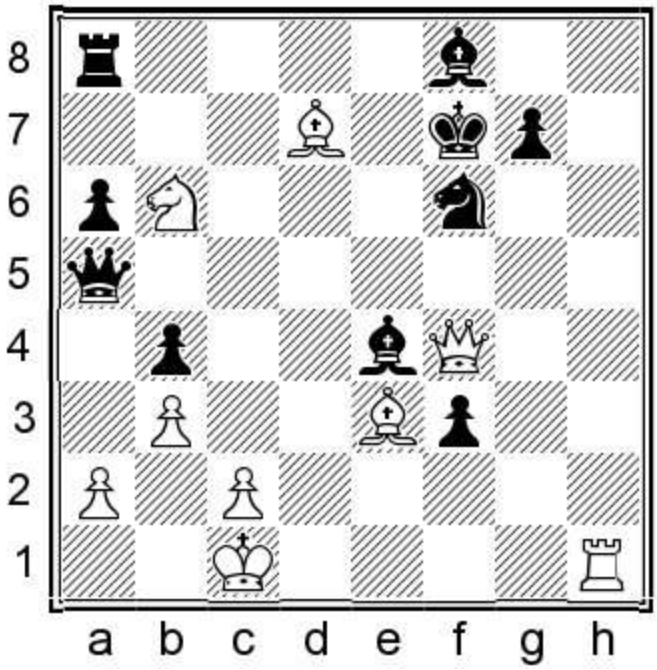


17.Nxe6! fxe6 18.Bxe6 Rxh1 19.Bxd7† Kf7 20.Rxh1 Ne4



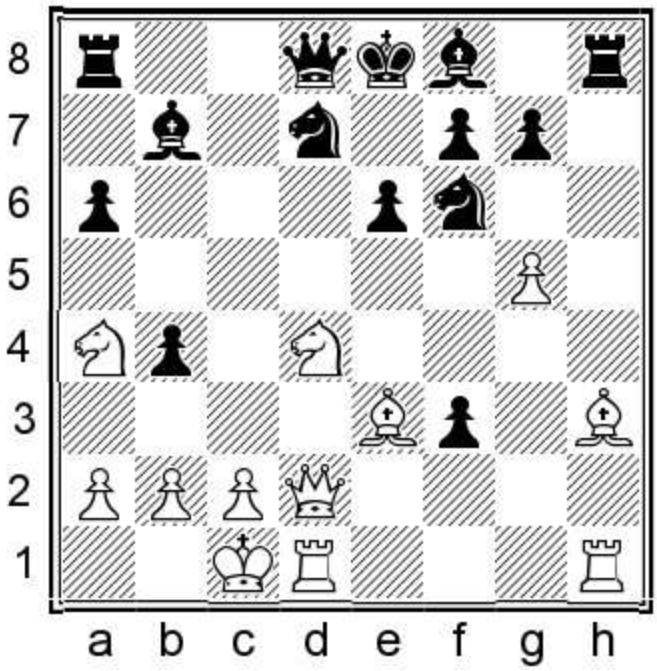
21.g6†! Kxg6
21...Ke7 22.Qd3 Qe5 23.Kb1 White is ‘simply’ winning. But yeah, it is rather complicated. 23...Qd5 24.Nb6! Qxd3 25.cxd3 Nf6 26.Bf5 Re8 27.Nc4 f2 28.Rf1 Bc8 29.Rxf2 Bxf5 30.Rxf5+– White won in Rocca – Millstone, email 2007.
22.Qh2
Black is busted.
22...Kf7 23.Qf4† Nf6 24.Nb6 Be4

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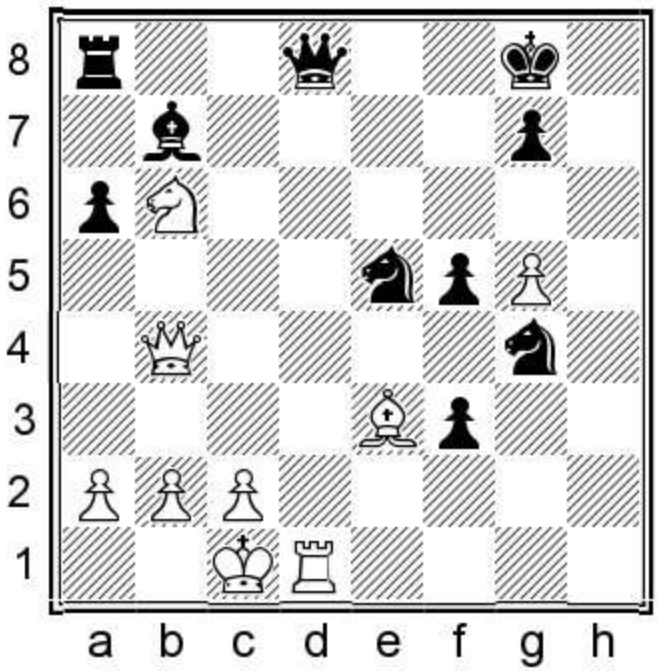
25.Kb2?
A human error.
25.Bd4!N 25...Qxa2 26.Bb2+– was correct.
25...g5 26.Qc7 Ra7?
Black misses a chance to save himself with: 26...Be7! 27.Qc4† Bd5=
27.Qc4† Kg6 28.Bd4 Bg7 29.Qe6 Rxd7 30.Nxd7 f2 31.Nf8†
1–0 Lutz – Sammalvuo, Calvia (ol) 2004.

c) 13...dxe4
This was refuted brilliantly just after Sammalvuo had released his big book on the English Attack.
14.g5 hxg5 15.hxg5 exf3

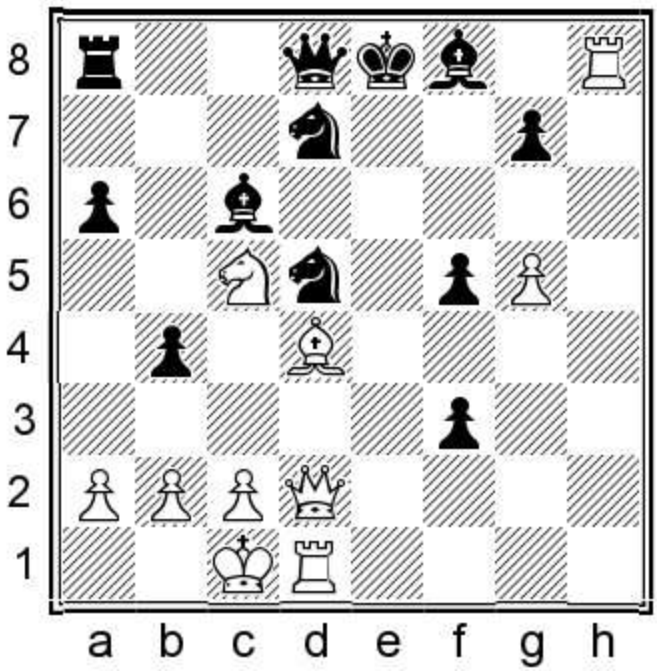


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16.Nxe6! fxe6 17.Bf5!! exf5
17...Rxh1 18.Bg6† Ke7 19.Qd6#
18.Rxh8 Nd5
18...Ng4 19.Nb6! Nde5 20.Rxf8† Kxf8 21.Qxb4† Kg8 occurred in Cento – Beth, email 2010.



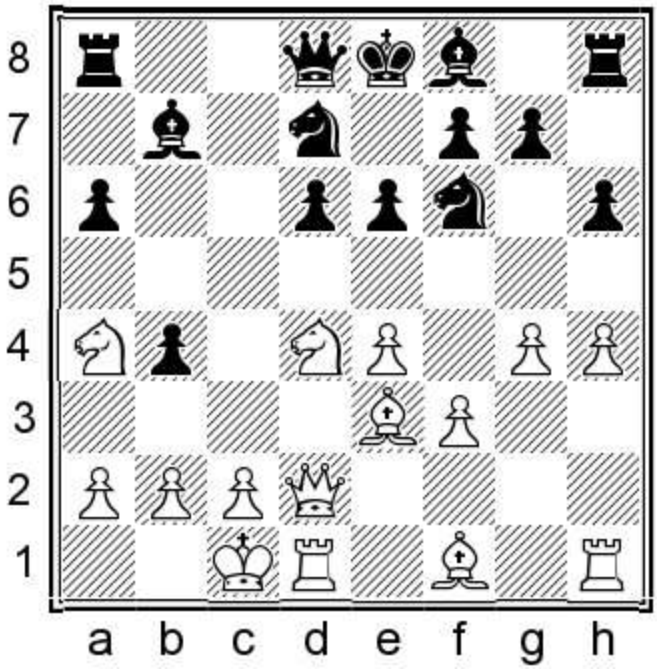
The following improvement ends all the arguments: 22.Qb3†!N 22...Kh7 23.Rh1† Kg6 24.Qe6† Nf6 25.Qxe5 f2 26.gxf6 Bxh1 27.Qg3† Kxf6 28.Qh4† Kf7 29.Qxh1 Rb8 30.Nc4+–
19.Nc5 Bc6 20.Bd4



White is winning.
20...Qa5 21.Qe1† Kd8 22.Qe6 Kc7 23.Nxd7 Bd6 24.Bb6† Qxb6 25.Nxb6
1–0 Erenburg – Sammalvuo, Budapest 2004.

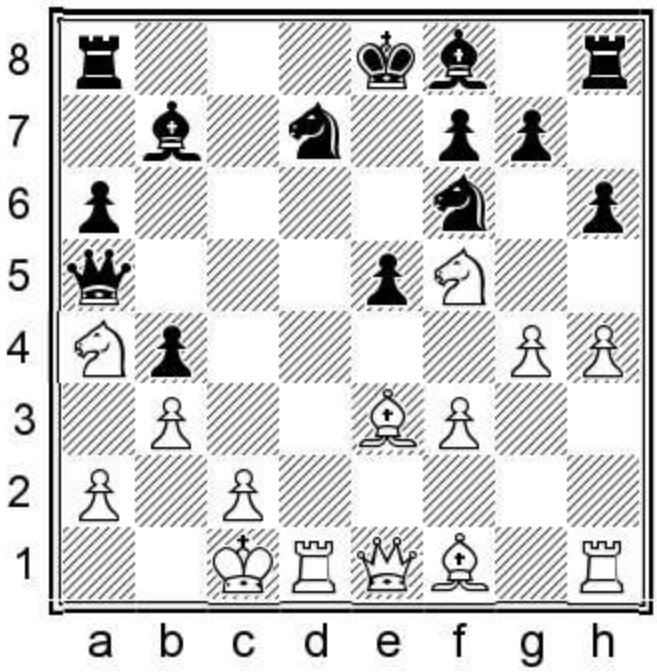
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12.Na4



12...Qa5
12...d5 13.Bh3 transposes to the previous note.

Black has a very concrete line in 12...e5 13.Nf5 d5 14.exd5 Qa5 15.b3 Qxd5, but after 16.Qe1! Black is busted. 16...Qa5 (16...Qxf3 17.Rg1 Qc6 18.Bc4+– gave White an overwhelming attack in Lovakovic – Lozano Kafure, email 2014)



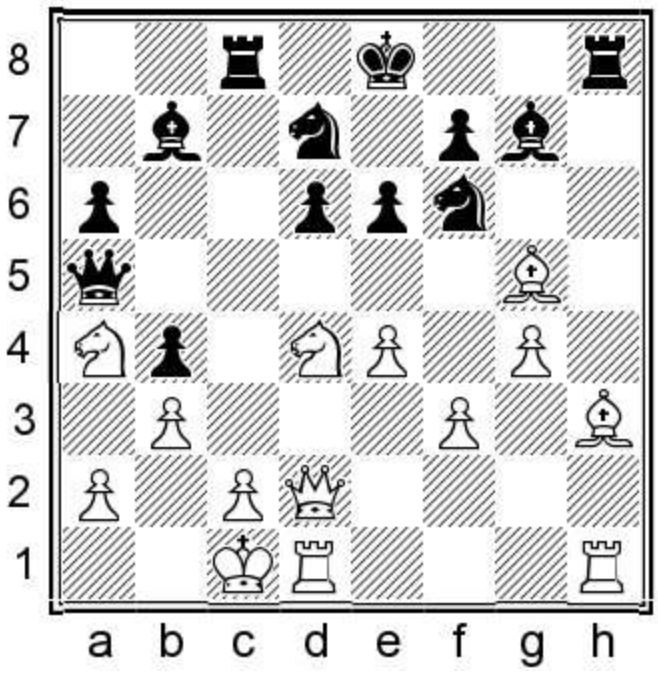
17.Bc4!N A marginal improvement. (17.Rh3, with a big advantage, was good enough to win in Hefka – Ninov, email 2010) 17...Bxf3 18.Rf1 Bxd1 19.Qxd1 White is an exchange down, but look at his pieces; Black is lost.

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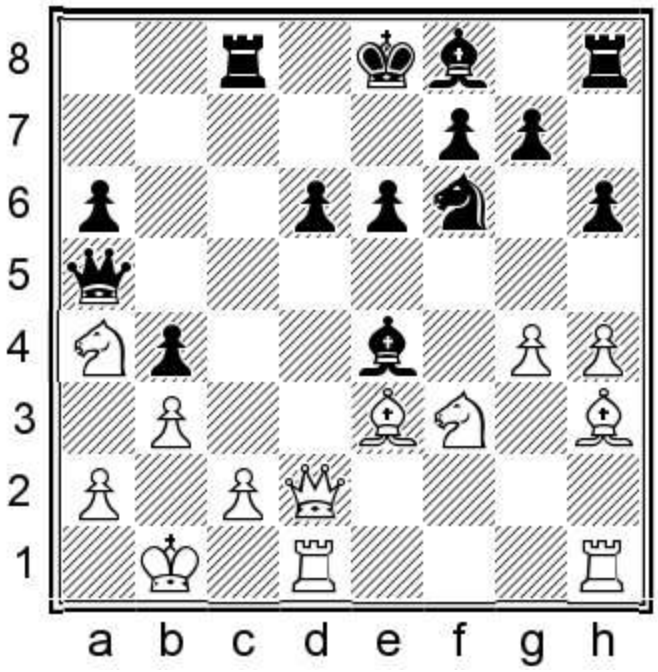
For example: 19...0-0-0 20.Nd6† Kb8 21.g5 and it all collapses.

13.b3 Nc5
Black has attempted other moves here, but they have not worked out.

13...Rc8 14.Bh3 Ne5 (One other attempt was 14...g5, which is refuted by: 15.hxg5 hxg5 16.Bxg5 Bg7



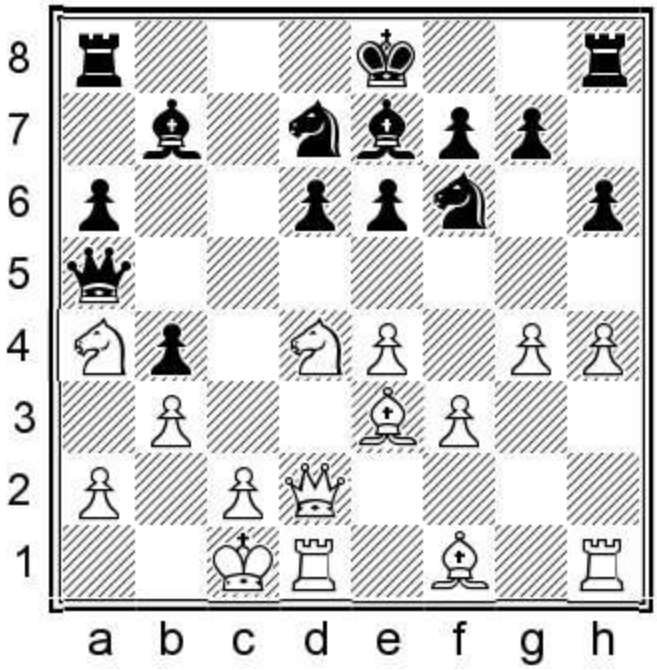
Caruana – Vachier-Lagrave, Cap d'Agde 2008. After 17.Bg2!N White is winning.) 15.Kb1! White has a big advantage. One game went: 15...Nxf3!? 16.Nxf3 Bxe4



17.Nd4! Bxh1 18.Rxh1± Balabaev – Joao, corr. 2002.

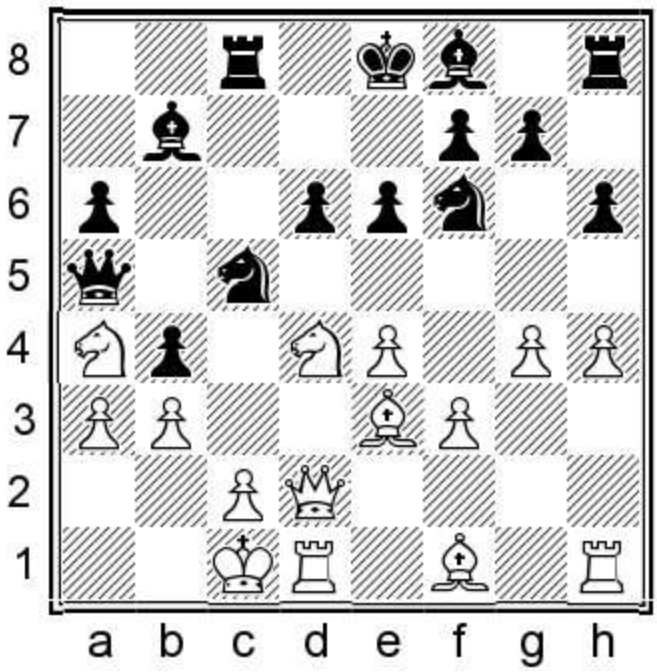
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Van Wely has tried to resurrect various lines. The following is one of his attempts: 13...Be7



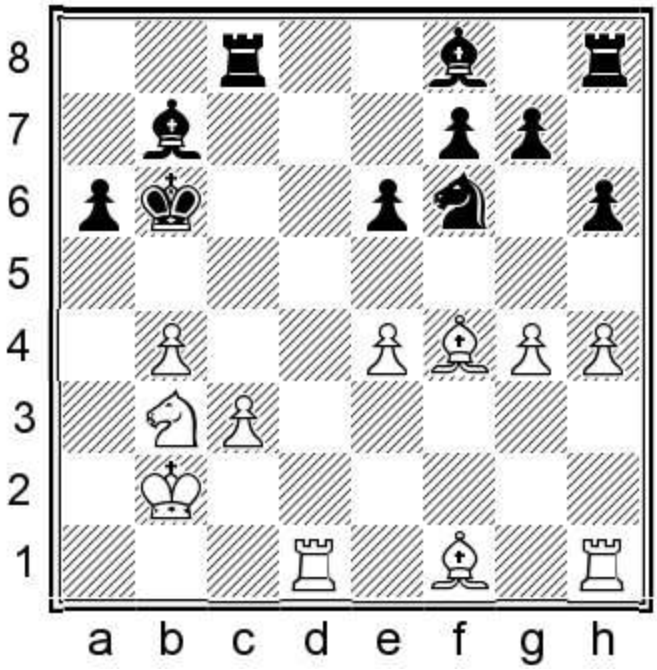
14.Rh3! Nc5 15.a3! Rc8 16.axb4 Nxb3† 17.Nxb3 Qxa4 18.Kb2 d5 19.Bc5± Caruana – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2016.

14.a3! Nxa4
14...Rc8 was a great invention at one point, but has finally been buried.



15.axb4 Nxb3† 16.Nxb3 Qxa4 17.Kb2 d5 18.c3 dxe4 19.Ra1 Qd7 20.Qxd7† Kxd7 (20...Nxd7 21.Na5±) 21. Rd1† Kc7 22.Bf4† Kb6 23.fxe4±

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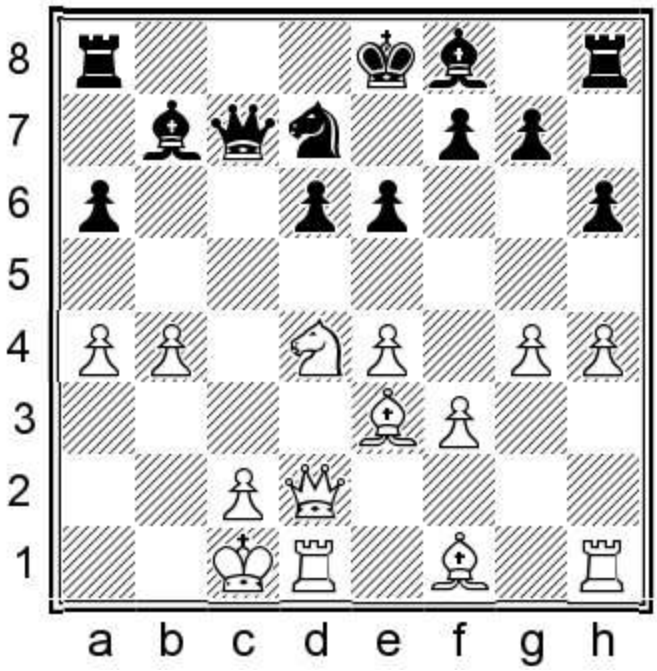


White has a huge advantage, although we should not underestimate that the position is still very complicated, at least to play over the board. In correspondence chess, this is entirely gone for Black: 23...Nxg4 24.Rg1 Nf6 25. Nd2 Bxe4 26.Be3† Kc7 27.Nxe4 Nxe4 28.Bxa6 Rb8 29.Bd4 Bd6 30.Rxg7 1–0 Ferreira – Almiron, email 2005.

15.axb4 Qc7 16.bxa4 d5
The correct central advance.

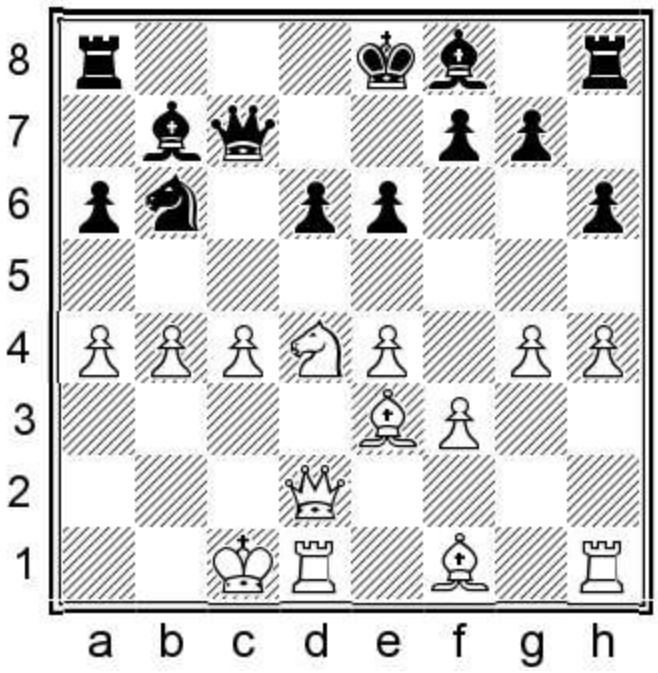
16...e5?! does not really work: 17.Nb3 d5 18.exd5 Bxd5 19.Nc5+– Bxf3 20.Nxa6 Qc8 21.Bb5† Bc6 22.Bb6 1–0 Perez Garcia – Leyva Proenza, Havana 2001.

16...Nd7



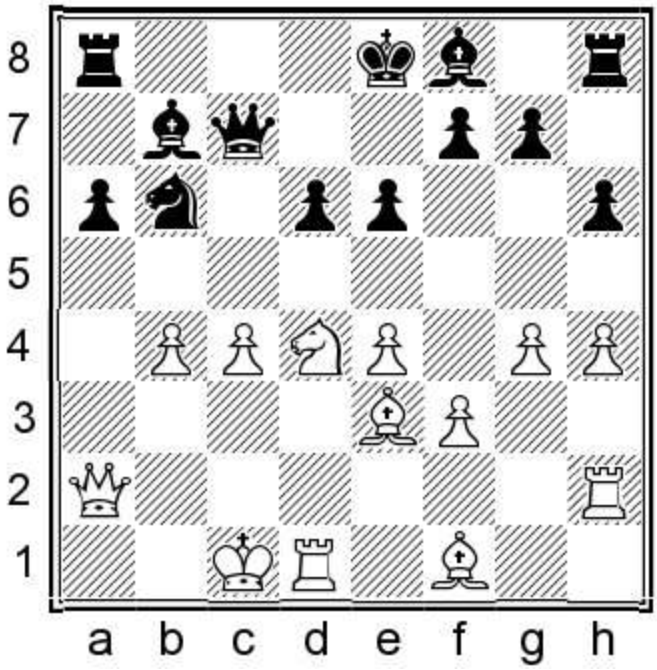
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This seems to have gone out of fashion. I am sure many top players are looking forward to playing:
17.c4!N
White is strategically winning, it seems. Black has no real compensation for the pawn. Obviously, White will have serious practical challenges with such an open king, but without risk there is no reward.
17...Nb6
17...Be7 18.Kb2 Rb8 19.Rc1±

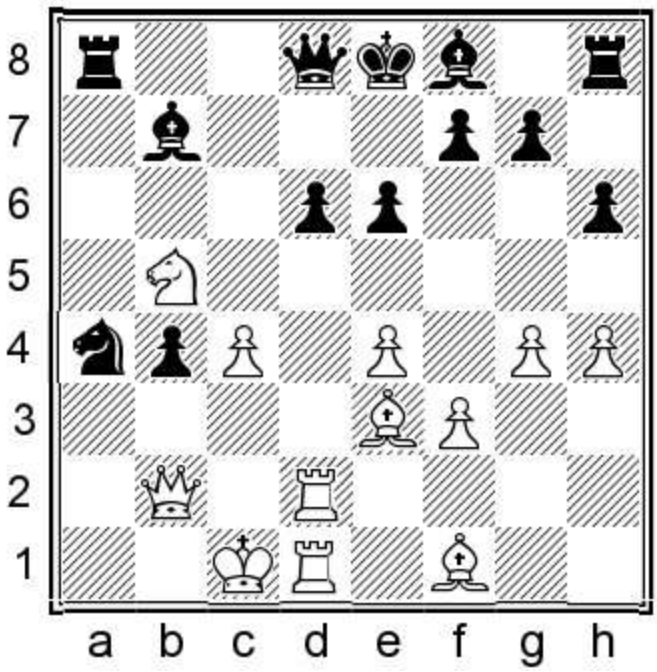



18.Rh2!!
This is the key idea. This rook is the last piece to enter the game.
18...Nxa4
18...Nxc4 is the critical line, but the pin on the c-file is mighty. 19.Qc3 d5 20.Rc2 Rc8 21.exd5 Bxd5 22.Bxc4 Bxc4 23.Nxe6! fxe6 24.Rd4±
19.Qc2 Nb6 20.Qa2!

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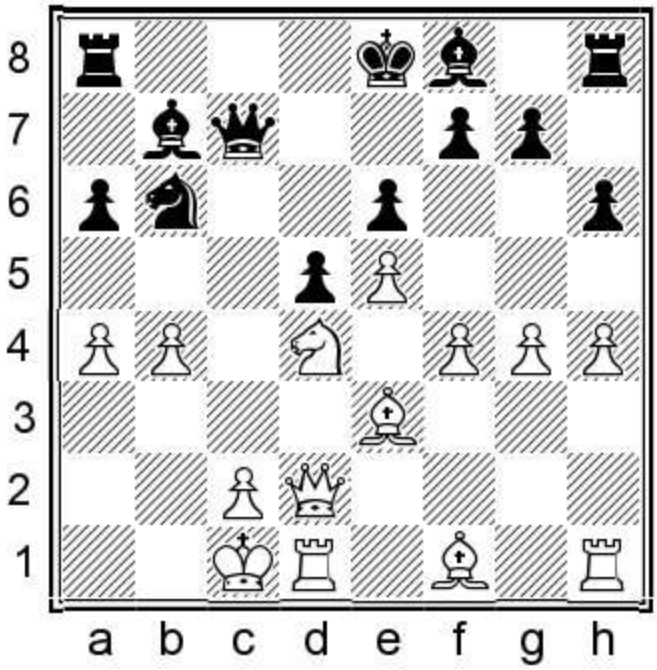
A great positional decision; the a5-square is wonderful for White.
20...Be7
20...a5 needs to be covered of course. 21.Nb5 Qd8 22.Rhd2 Yes, the white king is exposed to some extent, but all his pieces are playing. And boy are they playing! 22...axb4 23.Qb2 Na4



24.Rxd6!! Nxb2 (24...Bxd6 25.Qxg7) 25.Rxd8† Rxd8 26.Nc7† Ke7 27.Bc5† Kf6 28.Rxd8 Bxc5 29.Rxh8
White has a winning endgame.
21.Qa5 0-0 22.Nb3 Bd8 23.Rc2 Qc6 24.Qa3 Nd7 25.Na5 Bxa5 26.bxa5! Ne5 27.Rxd6 Qc7 28.c5 Nxf3 29.c6 Bc8 30.g5 hxg5 31.hxg5 Qe7 32.Qc5+–
White is totally winning.

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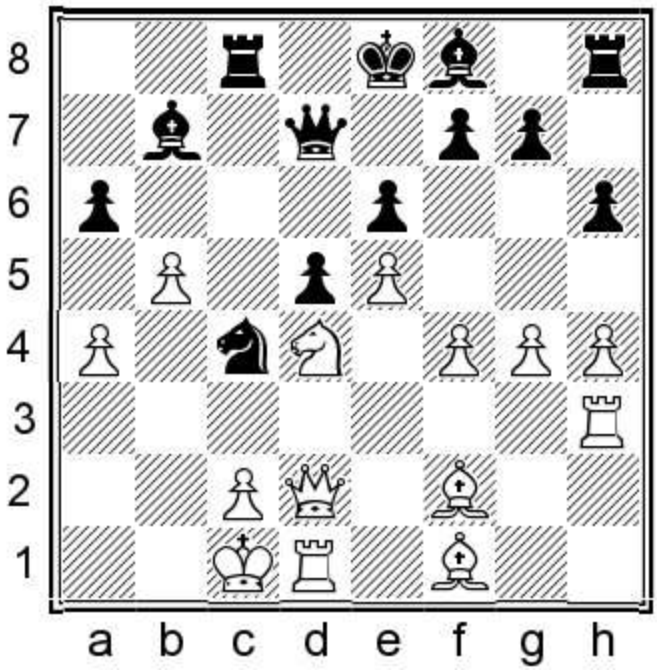
17.e5 Nd7 18.f4 Nb6



19.Rh3!
At first Topalov played 19.a5 against Kasparov. Then 19.f5 became the big main line. Finally, Kasparov with White found that 19.Rh3! was the right way to play the position... and that game was against Topalov. All the time everyone followed Kasparov, of course.

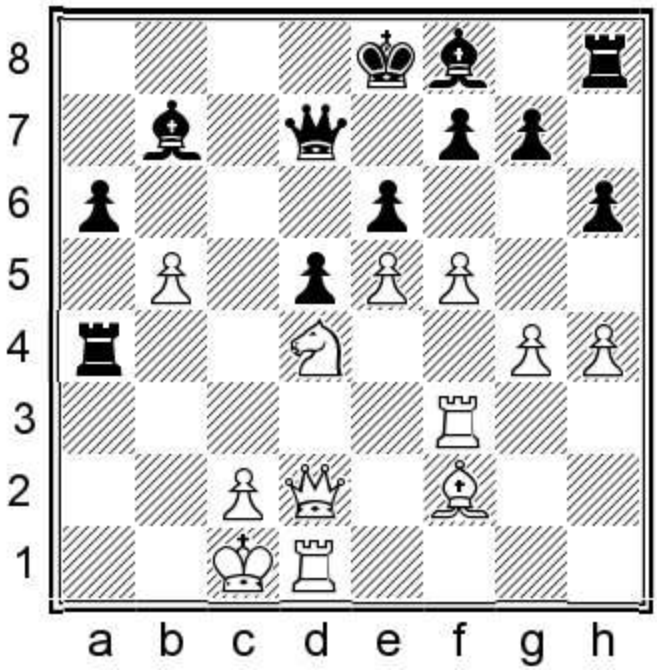
19...Rc8
19...Nxa4 20.Bf2 Be7 21.f5 Rc8 22.Be1± is almost overwhelming for White.

20.Bf2 Nc4
20...Qd7 21.b5! Nc4
This happened in Szafranski – Wuerzebesser, email 2002.



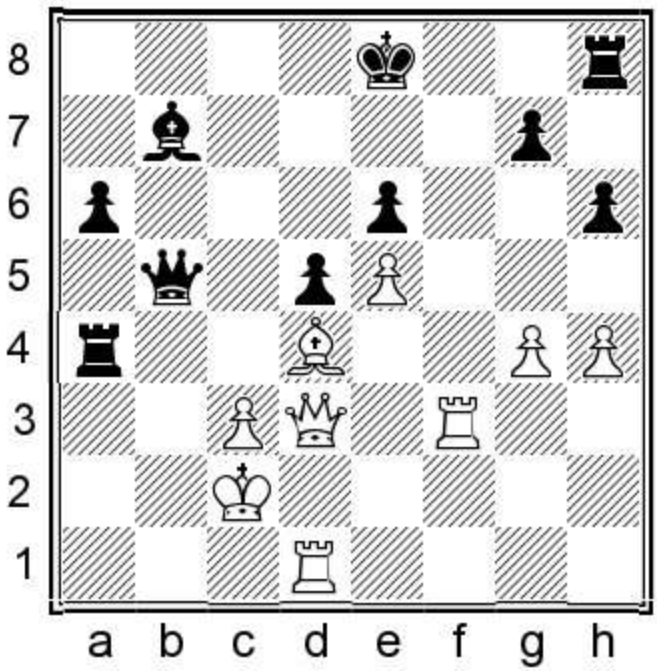
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At this point I suggest a not very surprising novelty.
22.Bxc4!N 22...Rxc4
22...dxc4 23.Qa5! would be a disaster for Black.
23.f5!
The a-pawn is not the most important thing in the world.
23...Rxa4 24.Rf3!²
We could stop here, but I want to go a little deeper than just saying that White has a strong attack. Actually, a lot deeper – depth 48 at some points, if you are into computers.

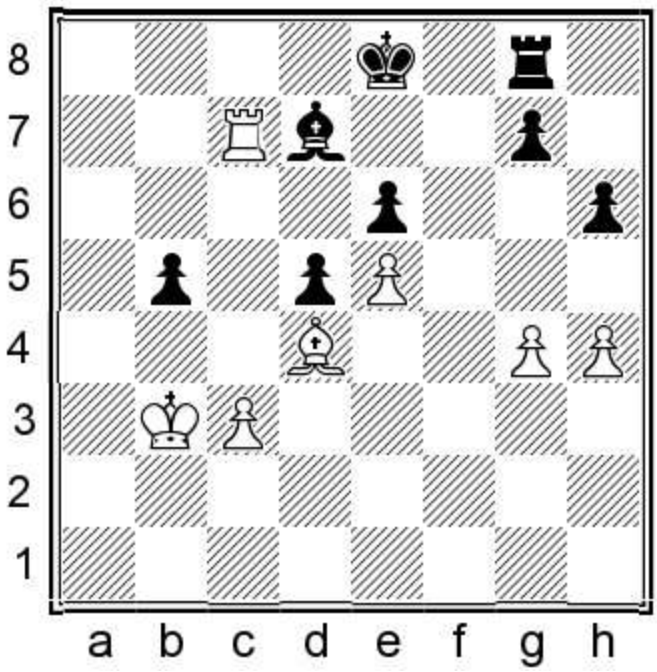


24...Bb4
24...Ra3 25.Rxa3 Bxa3† 26.Kb1 Bc5 27.f6! Bxd4 28.Bxd4 Qxb5† 29.Kc1 g6 30.Qe3 a5 Preparing ...Qb4. 31. Rd3! Provoking ...a4, which would be met with 32.Rd2!. And after 31...Kd7 32.Rb3 Qf1† 33.Kb2 Ba8 34.Bc3! ± White has a strong attack.
25.c3 Ba3† 26.Kc2 Bc5
26...0-0 27.Ra1 axb5 28.f6±
27.fxe6 fxe6 28.Qd3!
We now see why the a-pawn was less relevant than the lead in development.
28...Bxd4 29.Bxd4 Qxb5

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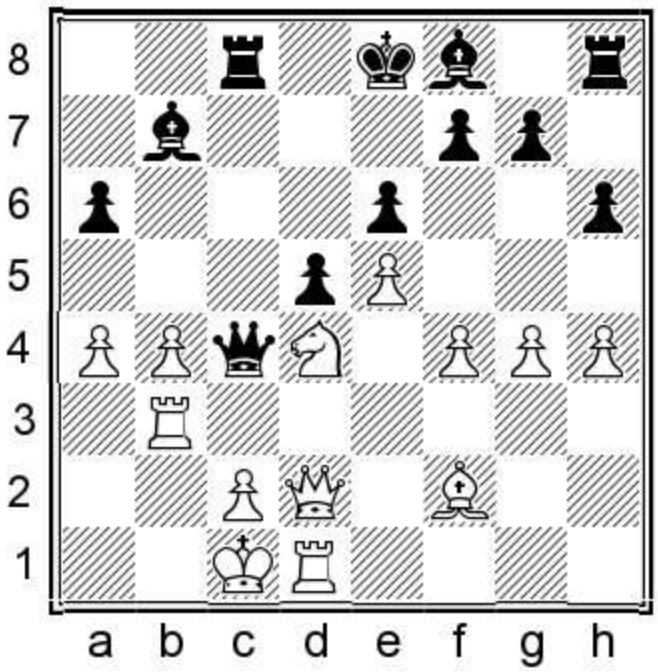
30.Qxb5†! axb5 31.Rdf1
Black is a pawn up, but plagued by endless problems.
31...Bc6 32.Rf7 Rg8 33.Rc7 Bd7 34.Kb3 Rc4 35.Ra7 Ra4 36.Rb7 Bc8 37.Rc7 Rc4 38.Rff7 Rxc7 39.Rxc7 Bd7



40.Bc5±
Can Black hold this? I would guess not.

21.Bxc4 Qxc4 22.Rb3±

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White has an extra pawn and Black has nothing to show for it.

22...Be7 23.Kb2 Kd7 24.f5 Rc7 25.Be1 a5 26.Qf2 axb4 27.fxe6† fxe6 28.Nxe6 Qxg4 29.Nxc7 Qxd1 30.Bxb4 Qh5 31.e6† Kxc7 32.Qf4† Kc6 33.Bxe7
1–0

Finally, the time has come for us to look at the main line with 10...b4!.

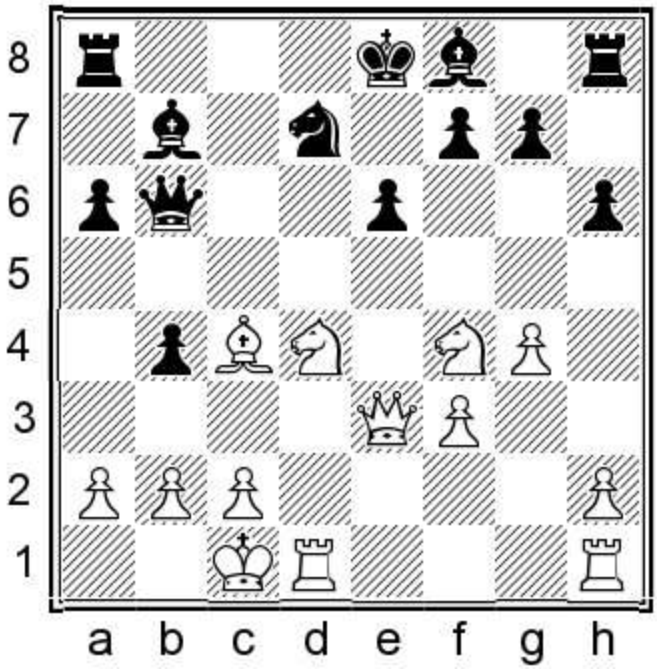
GAME 37

Gert Jan Timmerman – Florin Serban
email 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5 8.Qd2 Nbd7 9.g4! h6 10.0-0-0 b4! 11.Nce2 11.Na4 Ne5! 12.Qxb4 Bd7 has been tried a number of times, but we could not find even a shadow of an advantage for White here.

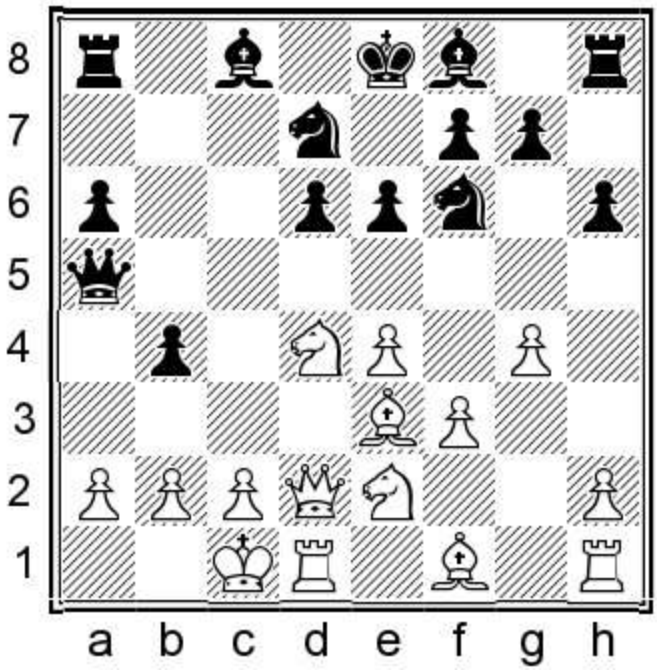
11...Qc7
11...d5?
This leads to rapid destruction.
12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Nf4!±
White has a very dangerous attacking position. For example:
13...Bb7 14.Bc4 Nxe3
14...N7f6 15.Rhe1±
15.Qxe3 Qb6

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16.Bxe6! fxe6 17.Nfxe6
White has a winning attack.
17...Kf7 18.Qb3 Kf6 19.h4 Nc5 20.g5† hxg5 21.hxg5† Kg6 22.Nf4† Kxg5 23.Rhg1† Kxf4 24.Rg4† Ke5 25. Rg5† Kf6 26.Rf5† Ke7 27.Nc6†
1–0 Kr. Szabo – Guliyev, Zalakaros 2008.

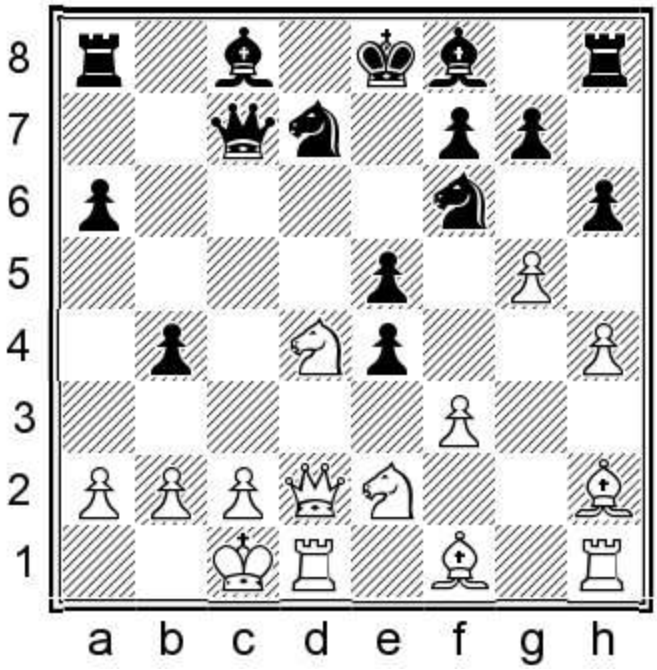
11...Qa5 has been played in 20 games.



But no one has found 12.Nb3!N 12...Qc7 (12...Qxa2? 13.Qxb4 d5 14.Qe1! Qa4 15.Nc3 Qb4 16.Rd4 Qb8 17. exd5+–) 13.Qxb4 d5 14.Qc3 Qxc3 15.Nxc3 dxe4 16.Nxe4 Nxe4 17.fxe4 Bb7 18.Nd2 Be7 19.h3² Black does not have enough compensation for the pawn, even though he definitely has some.

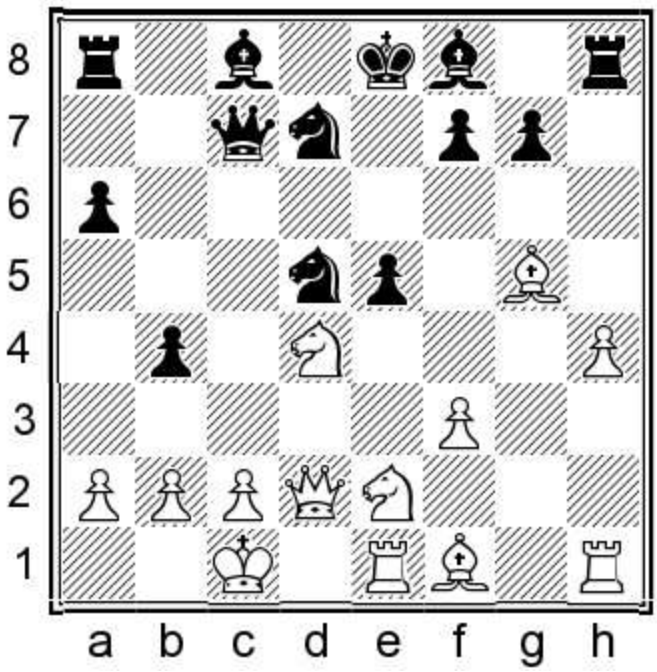
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12.h4 d5 13.g5
Khalifman recommended 13.Bf4 e5 14.Bh2 dxe4 15.g5 but failed to consider:



15...hxg5! 16.hxg5 Rxh2! We found this to be fully OK for Black. For example: 17.Rxh2 exd4 18.Rh8 Nd5 19. Qxd4 Bb7 20.fxe4 N5b6 21.Bh3 0-0-0 22.Kb1 Kb8 23.Bxd7 Nxd7 24.Rxf8 Rxf8 25.Qxd7 Bxe4=

13...hxg5 14.exd5 Nxd5 15.Bxg5 e5 16.Re1

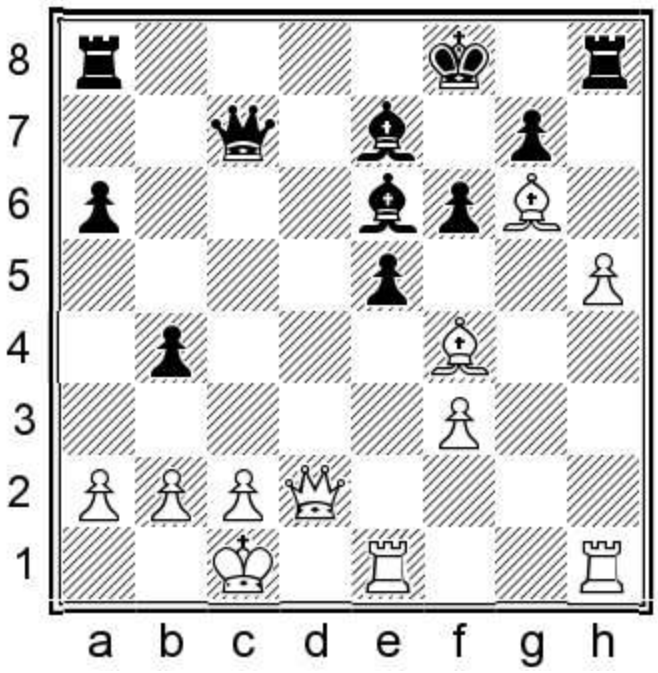


16...Bb7
Not surprisingly, Black needs to develop his pieces and get his king to safety.

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Another email game went:

16...f6 17.Nf4 Nxf4 18.Bxf4² Nc5
18...Qd6 19.Bd3!± Qxd4? 20.Bg6† Kd8 21.Qxd4 exd4 22.Re8#
19.Bd3 Be7?
A rare mistake in these computery times.
19...Bd7 20.Bg6† Kd8 21.Bg3²
20.Bg6† Kf8 21.h5 Ne6 22.Nxe6† Bxe6



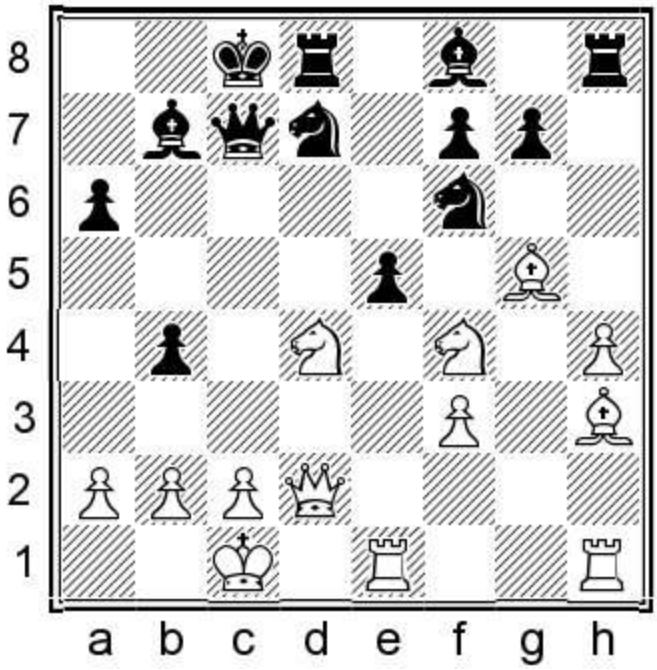

23.h6!+– exf4 24.hxg7† Kxg7 25.Qg2 Rxh1 26.Be4† Kf8 27.Rxh1 Bd6 28.Bxa8 Bf7 29.Rh7 Qc4 30.b3 Qe6 31.Be4 f5 32.Qg7†
1–0 Langer – Bartsch, email 2015.

Another noteworthy example continued: 16...N7b6 17.Nf4! Nxf4 18.Bxf4 f6 19.Bd3± Robson – Zherebukh, Internet 2017.

17.Nf4 N5f6
Black needs to avoid: 17...Nxf4? 18.Qxf4 f6 19.Ne6 Qd6 20.Qf5±

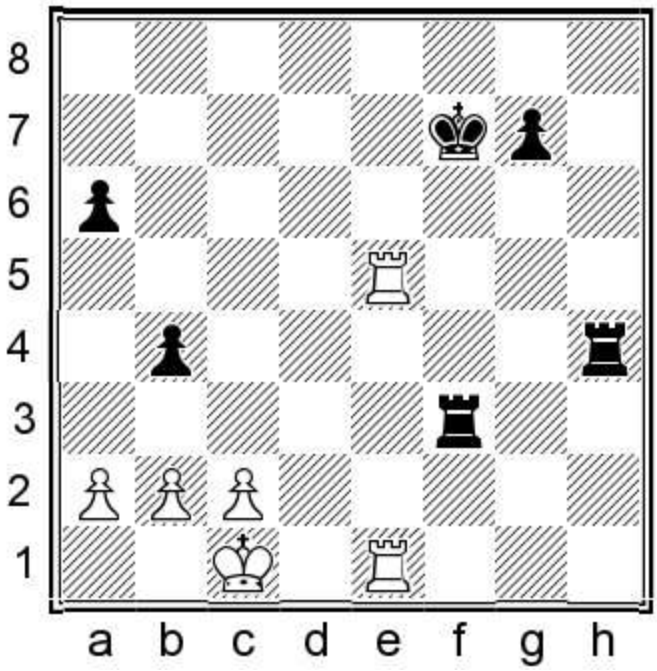
18.Bh3 0-0-0

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19.Nfe6 fxe6 20.Nxe6 Qd6 21.Qe2 Re8!
21...Bd5 22.Nxd8 Kxd8 23.Bxd7 Kxd7 24.Rd1 Kc7 25.Rd2²

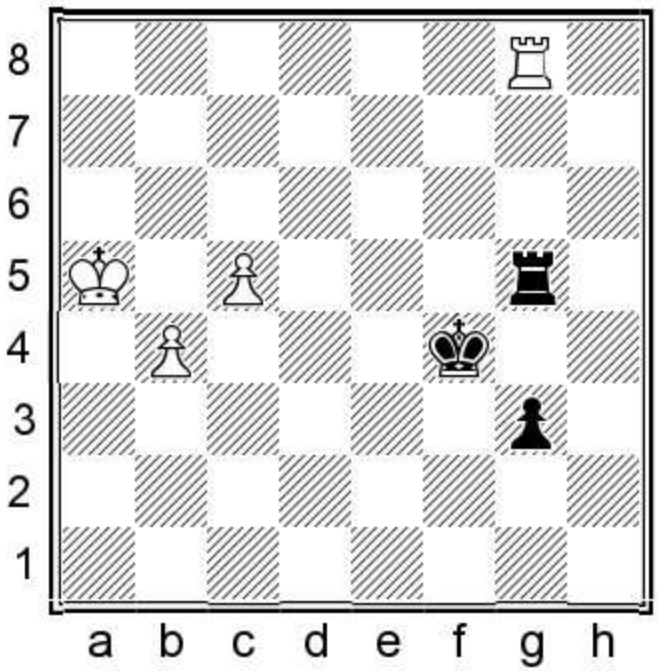
22.Rd1 Bd5 23.Nxf8 Rexf8 24.Qd3 Kc7 25.Bxd7 Kxd7 26.Bxf6 Rxf6 27.Qxd5 Qxd5 28.Rxd5† Ke6 29.Ra5 Rxf3 30.Re1 Rxh4 31.Raxe5† Kf7
This endgame should of course be drawn. But in practice it is not without dangers for Black. So White has a "better draw", as our ex-Soviet friends would say. I have included this email game in full, to give you a chance to see how tablebases are useful in defence, although not available to everyone at every event.



32.b3 Rg4 33.Re7† Kg6 34.Ra7 Rf6 35.Kb2 Rg2 36.Rc7 a5 37.a3 bxa3† 38.Kxa3 Rf7 39.Rc6† Rf6 40.Rc7 Rf7 41.Rc8 Rff2 42.Re6† Kh5?
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42...Kf7 43.Rec6 Rf5 was the right defence.

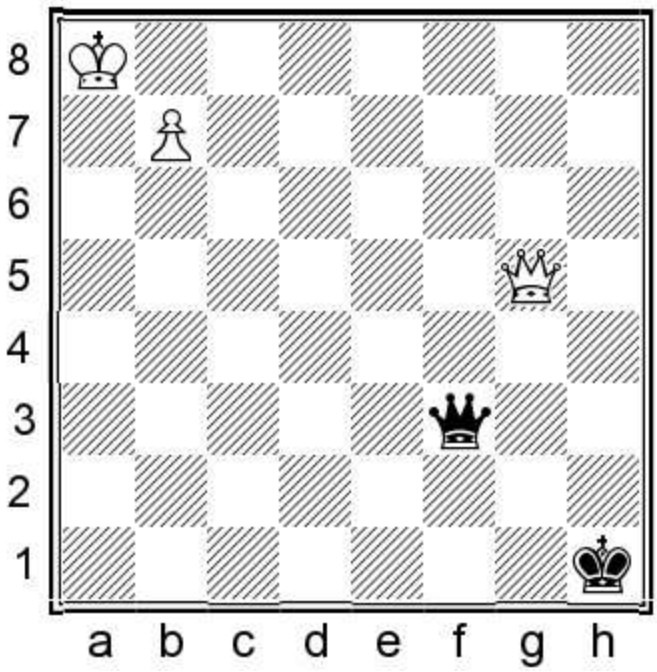
43.Re5† Rg5
43...g5 44.Kb2 Kh4 45.Rxa5 g4 was more human, but after 46.b4 Black will still have to defend an unpleasant endgame.

44.Rxg5† Kxg5 45.Ka4 Rf5 46.c4 Kf4 47.c5 g5 48.Kxa5 g4 49.b4 g3 50.Rg8 Rg5




51.Rxg5 Kxg5 52.c6 g2 53.c7 g1=Q 54.c8=Q Qa1† 55.Kb6 Kh4 56.Qc4† Kg3 57.Qg8† Kh2 58.Qh7† Kg1 59. Qg6† Kh1 60.Qh5† Kg1 61.Qg4† Kh1 62.Qh3† Kg1 63.Qg3† Kh1 64.Qf3† Kg1 65.Qe3† Kh1 66.Qe4† Kg1 67.Qe3† Kh1 68.Qh6† Kg1 69.Qg5† Kh1 70.Qh4† Kg1 71.b5 Kg2 72.Qe4† Kg1 73.Qg4† Kh1 74.Qh5† Kg1 75.Qg5† Kh1 76.Qh5† Kg1 77.Qg5† Kh1 78.Kb7 Kh2 79.b6 Kh1 80.Qh6† Kg1 81.Qg6† Kh1 82.Qh5† Kg1 83.Kb8 Kg2 84.Qg5† Kh1 85.Qd5† Kh2 86.Qd6† Kh1 87.Qc6† Kh2 88.Qc7† Kh1 89.Qb7† Kg1 90.Qd5 Kh2 91.Qh5† Kg1 92.b7 Qc3 93.Qg6† Kh1 94.Qa6 Kh2 95.Qa2† Kh1 96.Ka8 Qc6 97.Qa5 Qf3 98.Qe1† Kg2 99. Qd2† Kh1 100.Qc1† Kg2 101.Qg5† Kh1

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102.Qg3!? Qxb7†!? 103.Kxb7
½–½

Conclusion

Let’s be honest – this chapter is hard work. So many long, sharp lines; so many moves, moves, moves. The reality is that seriously challenging the Najdorf-Scheveningen requires a heavy-duty weapon. Console yourself with the thought that if you put in the effort to study the material in this chapter, you are highly likely to be rewarded over the board for your industry.

Rather than repeat all the details about the lines in this chapter where White is happily better, I will focus on the one big problem line. And that is 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e6 7.Be3 b5! 8.Qd2 Nbd7! 9.g4! h6. I can assure you that we worked like maniacs to force an advantage for White here, but could not find it. Maybe it does not exist. What we offer instead are three lines full of new ideas – 10.a3!?, 10.Rg1!? and 10.0-0-0. All three are dangerous for Black, and before your vital game, you can study the one you like best, while Black must be ready for everything. We may not have a theoretical advantage, but we do have a practical one.

In the English Attack against the Najdorf-Scheveningen, Black’s respectable choices are narrow and his existence not one of fighting for glory, as much as it is fighting for survival.

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# Chapter 11 - Najdorf with the 6...e5

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5

7.Nb3 Be6 (7...b5, 7...Be7, 7...Nbd7, 7...Nc6) 8.Be3 404

8...Nbd7 (8...d5, 8...Nc6!?) 9.g4! 405
9...h6 Game 38 404
9...Nb6 Game 39 411
9...b5 Game 40 412

8...Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0
10...a5?! Game 41 414
10...b5 11.g4 b4 Game 42 417
10...Nbd7 11.g4 b5 (11...Qc7, 11...Nb6) 12.g5 420
12...b4 Game 43 420
12...Nh5 13.Kb1 426
13...Nb6 Game 44 426
13...Rc8 Game 45 431

8...h5!? Game 46 436
8...Be7 9.Qd2 h5 Game 47 442
The variations with 6...e5 can truly be said to be the pure Najdorf lines in the English Attack. Again, I worked through the variations with the assistance of Nikos Ntirlis and only at the end, when everything had been decided, we checked what Khalifman had done, to make sure we did not omit any important lines. Again, we did in a chapter what he did in a whole book, which necessarily means some reductionism. There are a lot of plausible, but ultimately poor, variations that I covered very briefly, which filled many pages or even a chapter in Khalifman's book. I prefer to have it all in one chapter, even if it is a rather large chapter.
In this chapter I rely a lot on correspondence games. B90 was at some point the New World for engine games and now it seems to be where correspondence players like to dig deep. Looking at these games has given me the distinct impression that the engines underestimate White's long-term chances in these positions. From a human perspective, things look even brighter for White.

The structure of this chapter starts with various alternatives to the most natural set-up for Black: 6...e5, 7...Be6 and 8...Be7, followed by ...b5 and ...Nbd7. They are not all bad, but I still hope to demonstrate why they are unattractive for Black and give a decent direction of travel for White.

Then we deal with the main lines after 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 Nbd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5, where both 12...b4 (Game 43) and 12...Nh5 (Games 44 and 45) are covered. The former was almost the main line after 1.e4 for a few years, but at the moment it looks rather unattractive for Black.

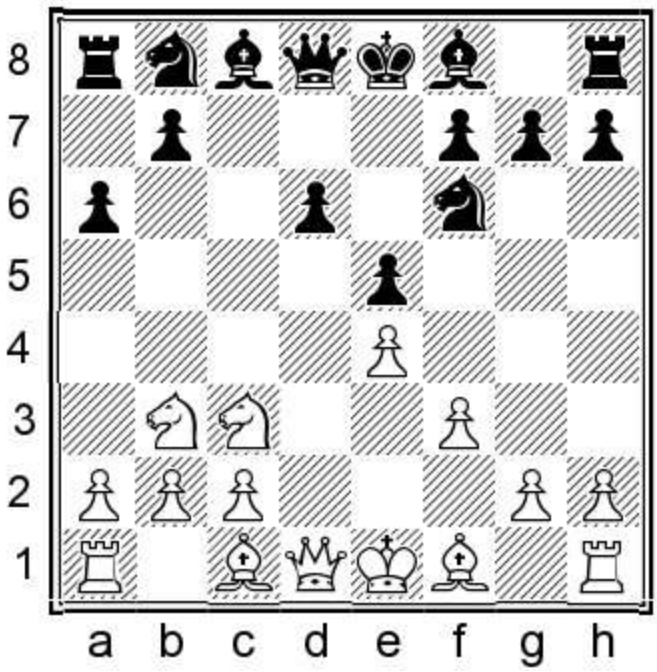
What has become the modern main line are positions where Black plays ...h7-h5 at some point. We will cover both 8...h5 (Game 46) and 8...Be7 9.Qd2 h5 (Game 47).

GAME 38

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Jiri Stocek – Valeriy Neverov
Prerov 2001

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3



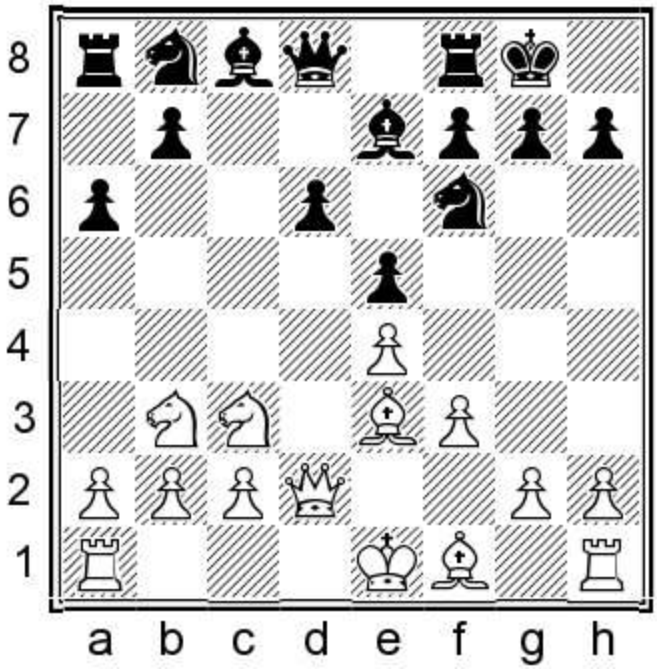
7...Be6
The bishop belongs here. Black of course has other ways to play these positions, but in general, without controlling the d5-square, things don't really work out for him.

Let's look at a few examples:

7...b5 is premature on account of 8.a4!² b4?! 9.Nd5 Nxd5 10.Qxd5 Ra7 11.Be3 Be6 12.Qa5! Qxa5 13.Nxa5± Magem Badals – Ayas Fernandez, Andorra 1997.

7...Be7 8.Be3 0-0 9.Qd2

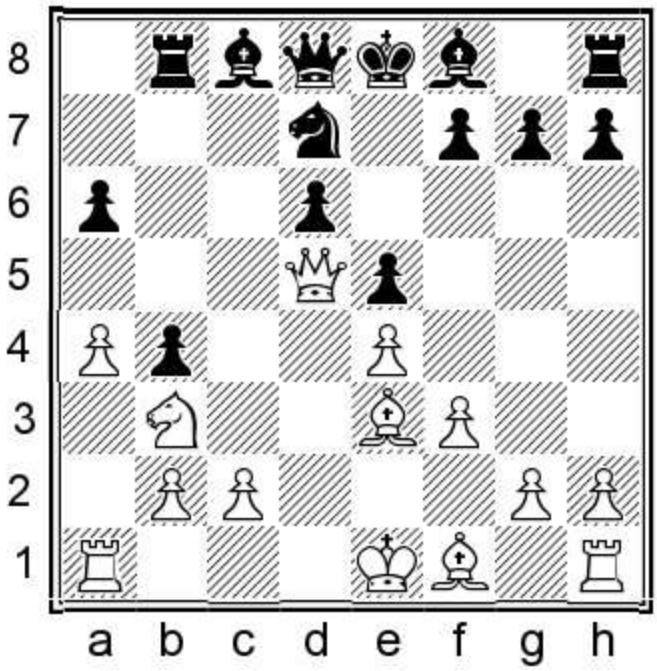
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a) 9...Nc6 10.0-0-0 b5 all look natural moves, but after 11.Kb1! Bb7 12.g4± White has a great advantage: g5 and Nd5 will come and Black will be dominated.

b) 9...Qc7 For some reason, no one has found the best continuation here: 10.Na4!N 10...Nbd7 11.c4, White enjoys a pleasant structural advantage. And after 10...Be6 11.Nb6 Nc6 12.Nxa8 Rxa8 13.Bd3² Black has insufficient compensation for the exchange.

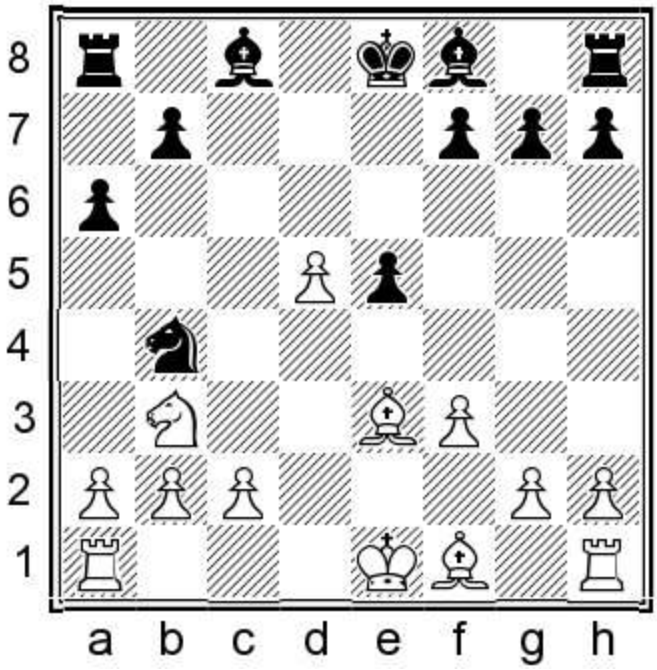
7...Nbd7 8.Be3 b5 was an experiment that went all wrong: 9.a4!² b4 10.Nd5 Nxd5 11.Qxd5 Rb8



12.Bc4 Qf6 13.Na5 Be7 14.Ba7+– Tiviakov – Gelfand, Elista 1998.

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7...Nc6 8.Be3 d5 also did not work out for Black. 9.Nxd5 Nxd5 10.Qxd5 Qxd5 11.exd5 Nb4

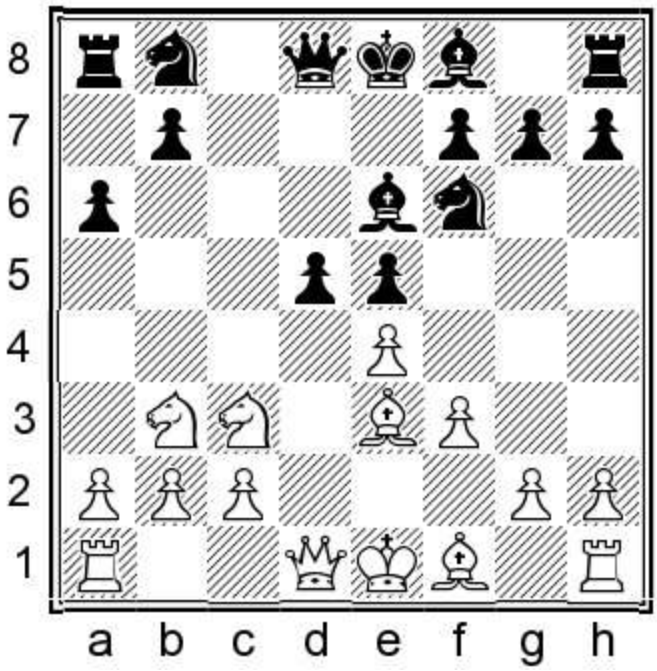


12.0-0-0 Black’s opening play proved a failure in Krueger – Sidenko, email 2004. For example: 12...Nxa2† 13. Kb1 Nb4 14.g4!±

8.Be3 Nbd7
Honestly, I do not like this move much. A quick g4-g5 is unpleasant for Black and he will have to react to it.

The main moves are definitely 8...Be7 and 8...h5, but Black has tried a few other things as well.

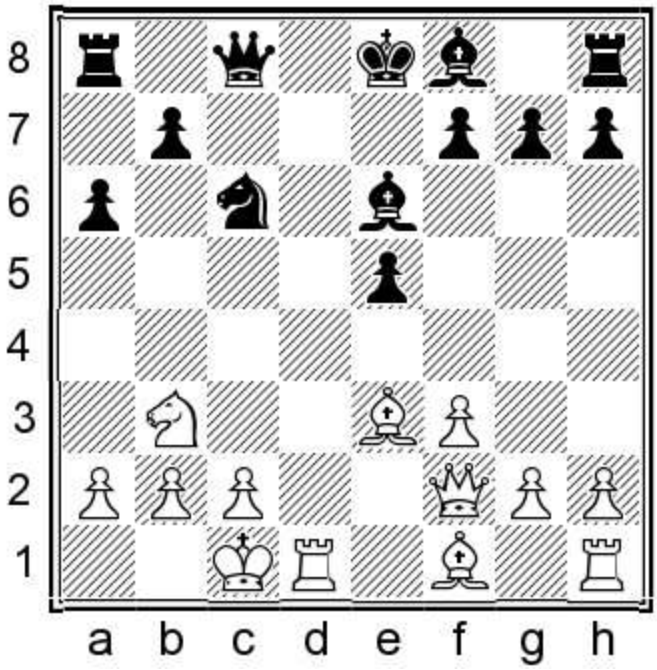
8...d5



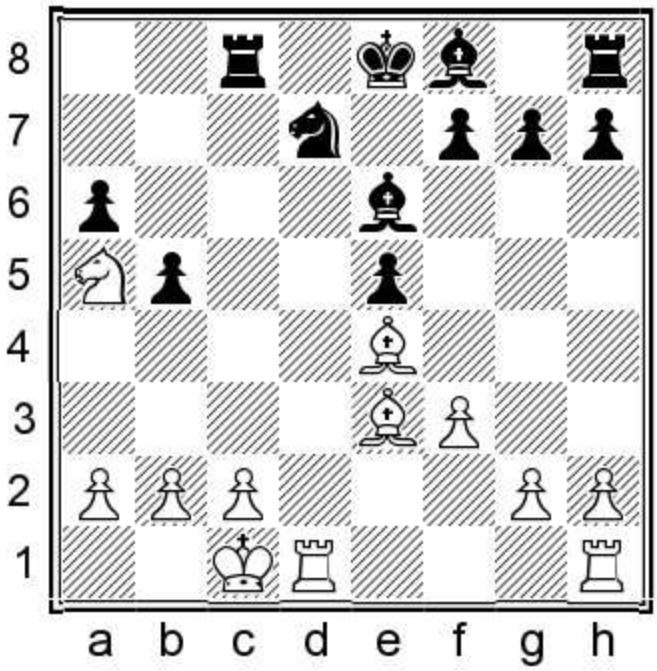
This is an attempt to solve all of Black’s problems immediately. It is the nature of chess that such strategies to neutralize the game only work when White has done something slow or unnatural. But as he has not, Black will

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always find himself a move too slow.
9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Nxd5 Qxd5
10...Bxd5 11.Qd2 Nc6 12.0-0-0 shows how Black is suffering for being second off the starting block. After 12...Be6 13.Qf2 Qc8 as in Gerhardt – Mueller, Germany 2013, White should continue:



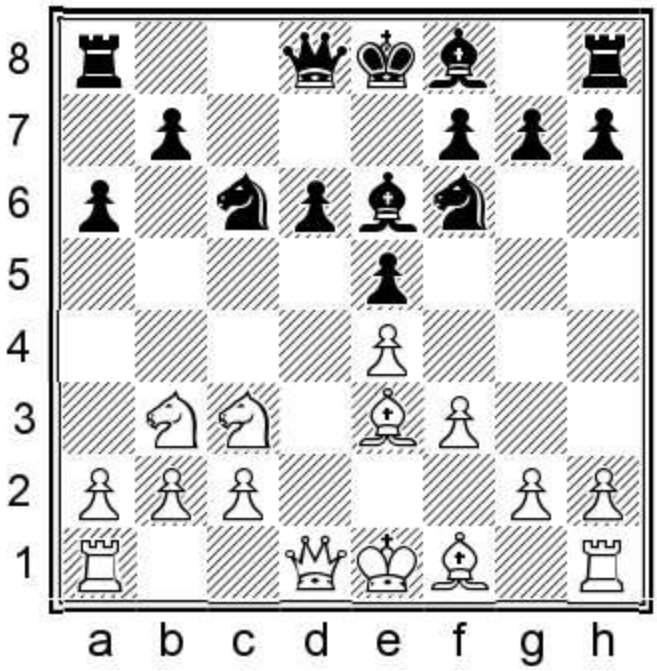
14.Nc5!N Black should settle for 14...Be7, when he is simply a bit worse. There are many ways for Black to get such compromised positions from the opening, where he is hoping for a draw in a technically worse position. Fighting for equality is always dangerous for Black; it may backfire. Instead he can try 14...Bxa2, but White gains an advantage with: 15.Nd7! Nd4 16.Bxd4 Qxd7 17.Bxe5 Qa4 18.Qb6! Rc8 19.Bc7 Be6 20.Rd4 Qc6 21. Qxc6† bxc6 22.Ba5± Black is in serious trouble.
11.Qxd5 Bxd5 12.0-0-0 Be6 13.Na5! b5 14.Bd3 Nd7 15.Be4 Rc8



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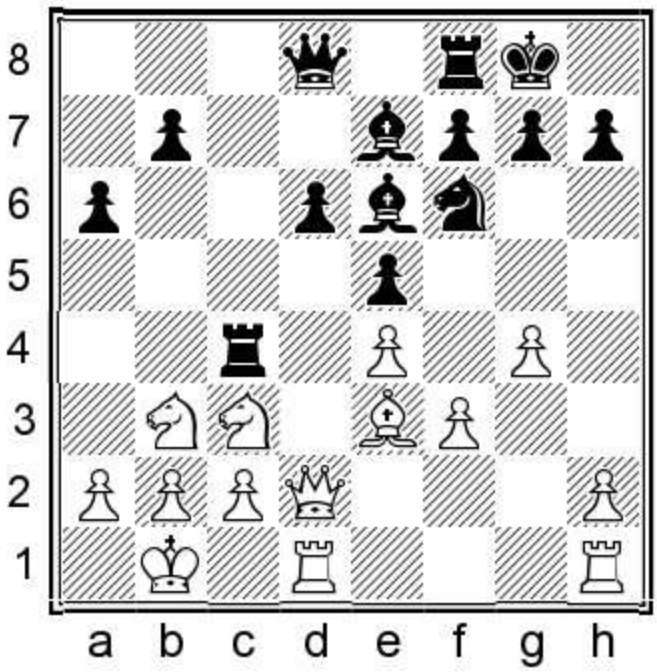
Vieira – Morato, email 2005. White has several strategies at this point. Most obvious to check is:
16.Bb7!?N
Taking the pawn is the first instinct. If it works, it works. And it works!
16.Rhe1 Be7 17.a3± is also extremely pleasant for White.
16...Rc7 17.Bxa6 Bb4 18.Bd2 Bxd2† 19.Rxd2 Ra7 20.Rd6 Ke7 21.Rhd1 Nb8 22.Nc6† Nxc6 23.Rxc6 Rb8 24.Rdd6 b4 25.Rb6 Rxb6 26.Rxb6 Kd7 27.Rb7†
White should win this endgame; a pawn is a pawn.

8...Nc6!?

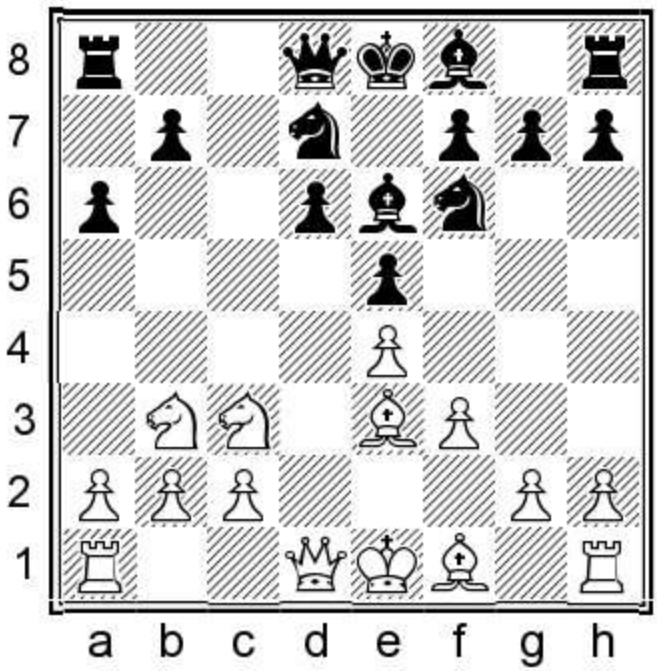



This is a serious option. The key idea is to prepare ...d5, which White has to do something about.
9.Qe2!?
I like this move, keeping the d-line clear for the time being, preparing queenside castling. The key idea is that the knight is not well-placed on c6.
9.Nd5 Bxd5 10.exd5 Ne7 11.c4 g6 12.Bd3 Bg7 13.0-0 0-0 was the recommendation of Khalifman, but I cannot see why White should be better here.
9...Be7 10.0-0-0 0-0
10...Nd7 was Fedorov – Loginov, Minsk 2008. After 11.Kb1!N White looks much better to me.
11.g4
The black pieces do not look well coordinated.
11...Rc8 12.Kb1 Na5
White should not allow the sacrifice on c3. He is better after:
13.Qd2! Nc4 14.Bxc4 Rxc4

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As in Kritz – Guliyev, Echternach 2004. Now it makes sense to simply play natural moves with: 15.h4!?N 15...b5 16.g5 Nh5 17.Nd5 Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Qc7 19.c3 Rb8 20.Rhf1²
Black's position might not be objectively horrible, but it looks unappealing to me.



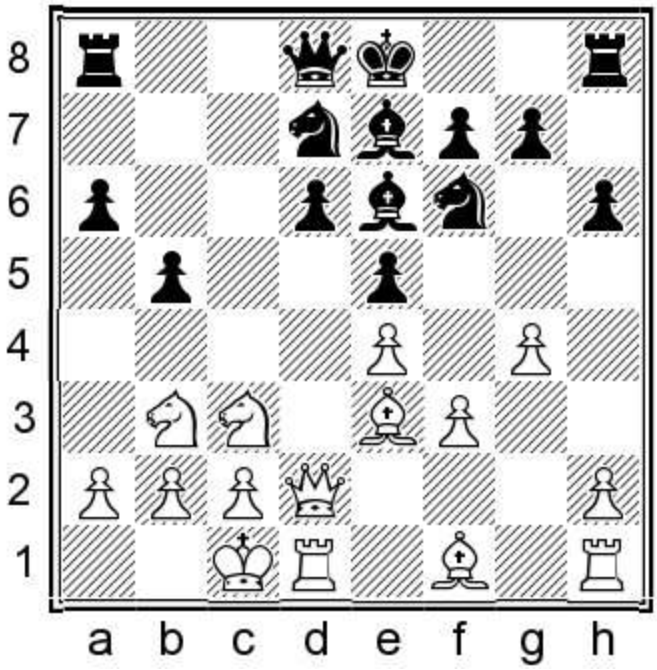
9.g4!
It is important to get the move order right. After 9.Qd2 b5 10.g4 Black is in time with: 10...b4! 11.Nd5 Bxd5 12.exd5 Nb6, which has proved to be good for Black in quite a number of games.

9...h6
This is a considerable concession; castling will never ever be fun after this.

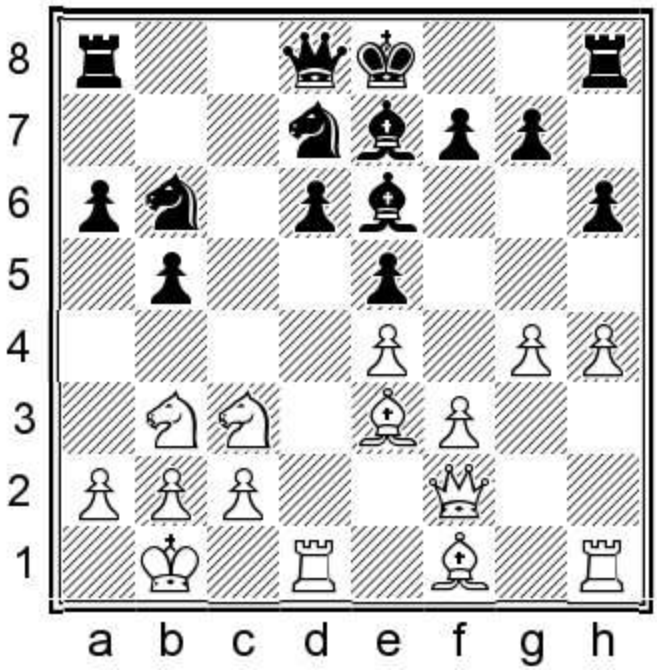
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We will see 9...Nb6 in the next game, and 9...b5 in the game after that.

10.Qd2 b5
Black has also tried:
10...Be7 11.0-0-0 b5

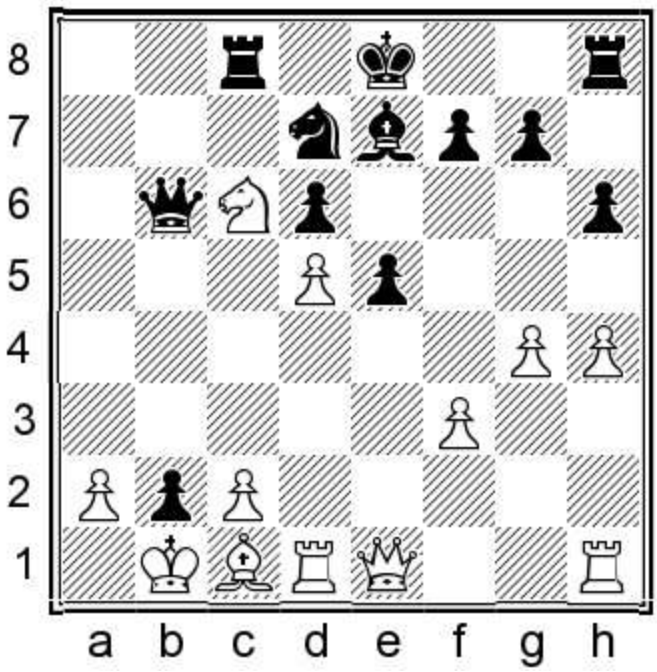


12.h4 Nb6
But this set-up is not great for Black either.
13.Qf2 Nfd7
13...Na4 would make sense if White took the knight, but after 14.Nd5± Black has not managed to generate real counterplay.
14.Kb1

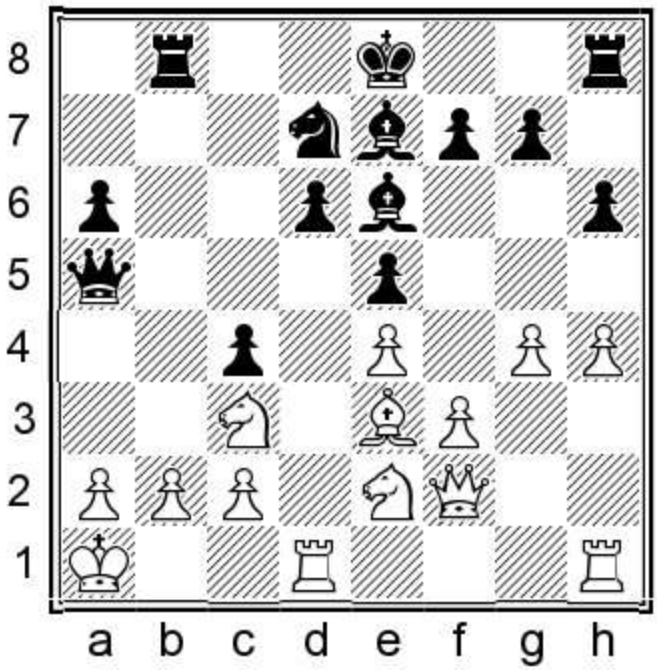


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14...Nc4
14...Rc8 15.Nd5 Bxd5 16.exd5 Nc4 17.Bc1± is everything Black wants to avoid. White has control over the light squares and Black still cannot castle without getting assaulted. 17...Qb6 18.Qe1 a5 19.Bxc4 bxc4 20.Nxa5 c3 21.Nc6 cxb2 was Kasparov – Huzman, Tel Aviv 1998.

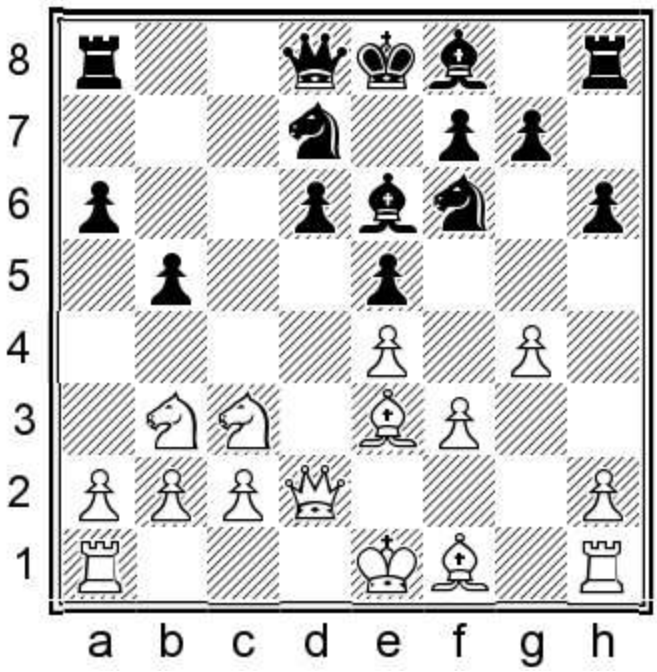


White should continue with: 22.Bxb2N 22...Bf6 Now the strongest is: 23.f4! (White can also play 23.Rd3!? Nc5 24.Rd4 0-0 25.Rb4, when play is really sharp. But White is better. 25...Rxc6! 26.Qd2!! Qa6 27.dxc6 Qxc6 28.Rd1 Qxf3 29.Qxd6 Be7 30.Qd5 e4 31.Rc1 Qxg4 32.Rc4±; 23.Rh3± was Khalifman's recommendation.) 23...e4 24.Qxe4† Kf8 25.c3! Bxc3 26.Rh2 Re8 27.Qd3 Bf6 28.Qf5 Qb7 29.Ka1 Qc8 30.h5± White is technically winning, although some practical obstacles remain.
15.Bxc4 bxc4 16.Nc1 Rb8 17.N1e2 Qa5 18.Ka1



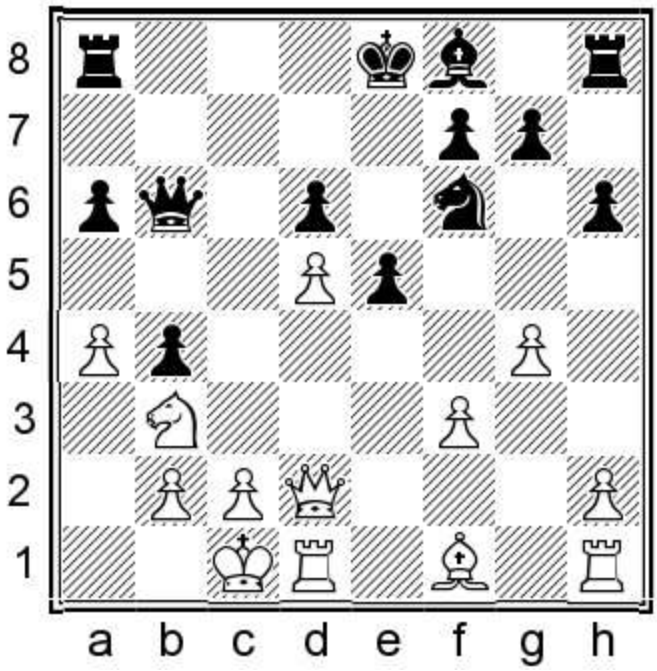
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A standard set-up for White in these positions. With the control of the d5-square and Black having no real attack, things look promising for us.
18...Rb7 19.Nd5 Qb5 20.Rb1 Qc6 21.Nec3±
Papenin – Ryan, email 2011.



11.a4!
This is an important finesse.
After 11.0-0-0 Nb6 Black is well coordinated, although White can fight for an advantage there as well.

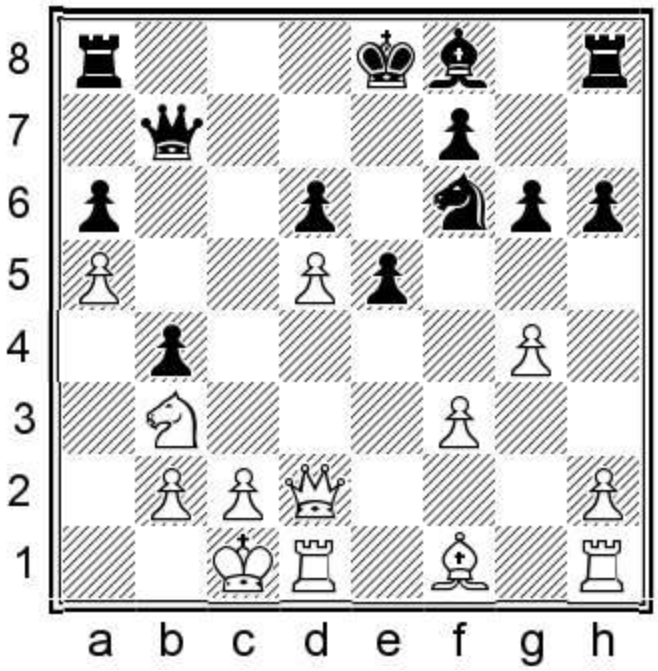
11...b4 12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.exd5 Nb6 14.Bxb6 Qxb6 15.0-0-0
15.a5!? Qb7 16.0-0-0 Be7 17.h4 was better for White a lifetime ago in Hjartarson – Haces, Thessaloniki (ol) 1984.



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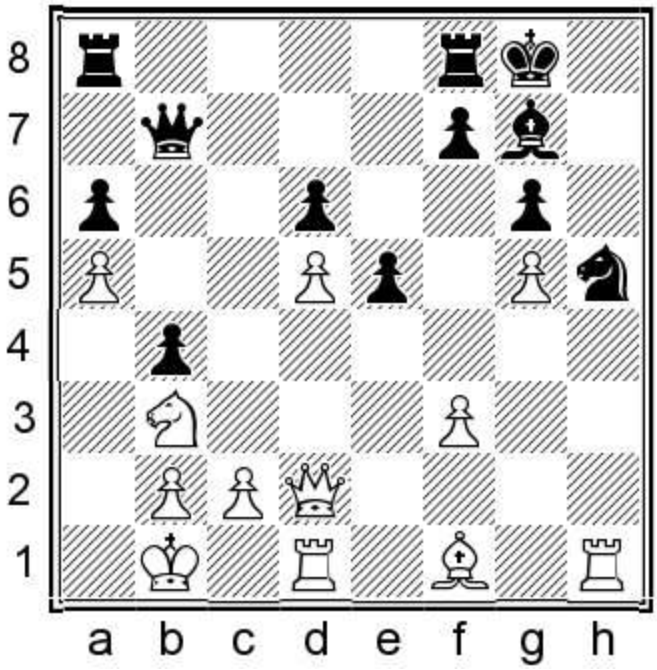
15...Be7?!
This is inflexible.

Black would be better off playing:
15...g6 16.a5 Qb7
As in Grout – Gutovskyi, email 2012. But I like White a lot here too. White can play many different ways. I suggest:



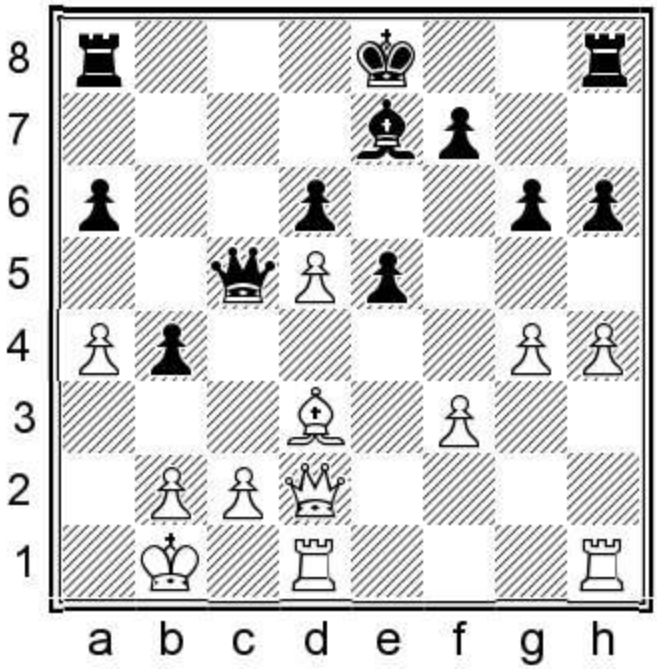
17.Kb1!?N 17...Bg7 18.h4²
You could imagine play continuing:
18...0-0 19.g5 hxg5 20.hxg5 Nh5
20...Nd7?! 21.Rh4! Rab8 22.Bd3 Rfc8 23.Rdh1 gives a winning attack. A small point is 23...Kf8 24.Rh7! followed by Qh2 and Rxg7 wins.

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21.Bd3! Qxd5 22.Be4! Qxd2 23.Rxd2±
As so often in this variation, the opposite-coloured bishops give Black no comfort.

16.h4 Nd7 17.Kb1± g5!?
17...Nc5! was suggested by Ftacnik as OK for Black. But after his 18.Nxc5 Qxc5 19.Bd3 g6, White has a very nice continuation:



20.f4! Bf6 21.f5! Black is strategically busted.

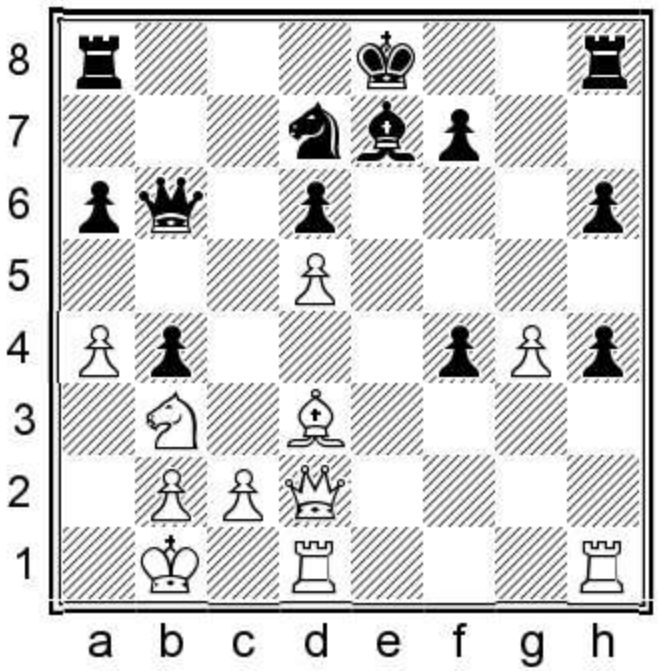
18.Bd3 gxh4
Black is under a lot of pressure.

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18...Nc5? loses to 19.Nxc5 Qxc5 20.hxg5!, on account of 20...Bxg5 21.Qxg5!.

18...Rg8 may be objectively best, but 19.a5 Qb7 20.Rhe1± gives an immense advantage.

19.f4 exf4



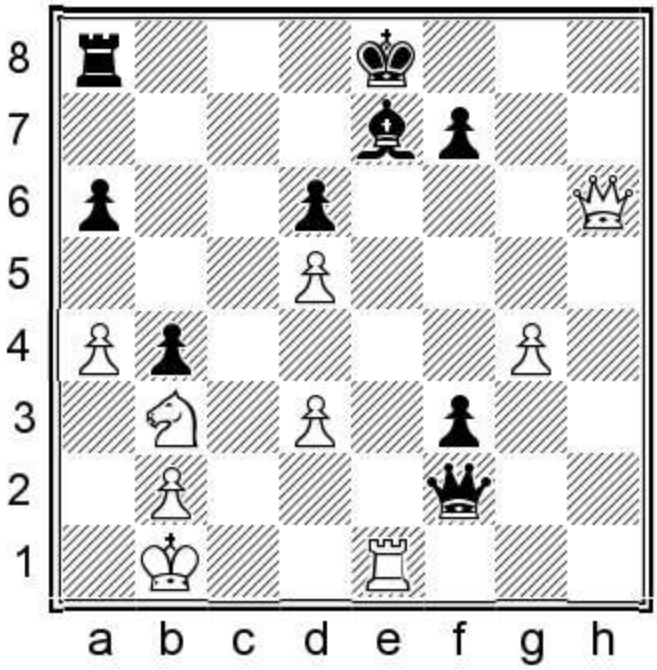
20.Rde1! f3
20...Ne5 21.Qxf4 gives White a winning advantage as well.
21.Rxh4
There was always a chance to throw in 21.a5! at some point.

21...Ne5 22.Rxh6 Rxh6 23.Qxh6 Nxd3
23...Rc8?! is immediately refuted by 24.Rxe5! Qg1† 25.Ka2 dxe5 26.Qh8† Bf8 27.Qxe5† Kd8 28.d6 and White has too many threats. For example: 28...f2 29.Bf5!+–

Objectively best was 23...0-0-0, when after 24.a5 Qa7 25.Qf4 White dominates.

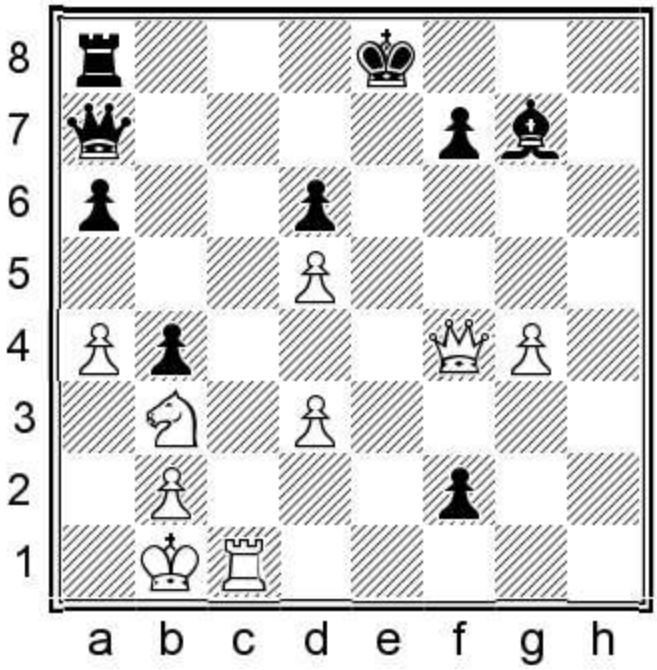
24.cxd3 f2
After 24...Qf2 White wins as follows:

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25.Re4! Qf1† 26.Ka2 Qxd3 27.Qh8† Kd7 28.Qxa8 Qxe4 29.Qc6† Kd8 30.Na5! with a mating attack.

25.Rc1 Qb7 26.Qh8† Bf8 27.Qd4 Qa7 28.Qf4 Bg7



29.Rc2?
29.Rf1 would eliminate the passed pawn and give White an easily winning position.

29...Qb7! 30.Re2†?!
A pointless check. After 30.Rc6! Qa7 31.g5± White keeps the pressure going.

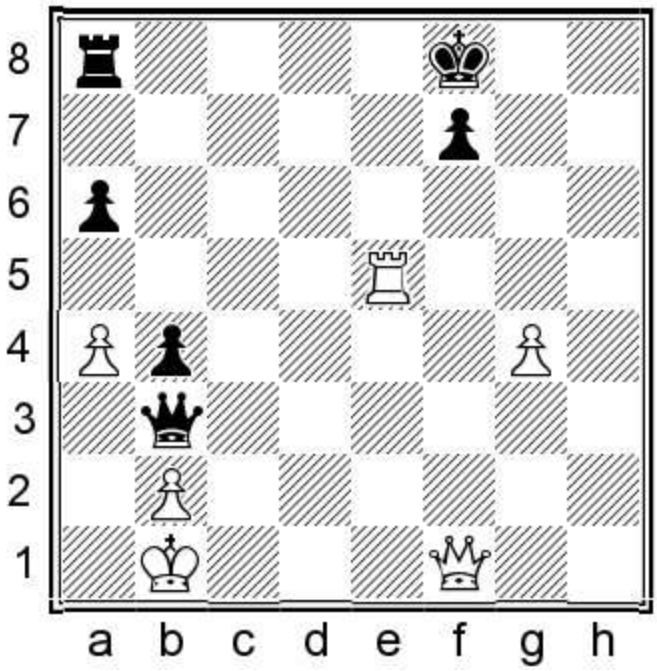
30...Be5 31.Qf3
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Surprisingly White has no advantage after 31.d4 Qxd5 32.Ka2 Qc6! 33.dxe5 Qxa4† 34.Kb1 Qxb3 35.exd6†

Kf8! 36.Qh6† Kg8 and White should give perpetual check.

31...f1=Q†?
31...Qxd5 32.Qxd5 f1=Q† would have given Black decent chances in a highly unclear position.

32.Qxf1 Qxd5 33.d4 Qxb3 34.dxe5 dxe5?
34...Qd3† 35.Ka2 0-0-0± would have kept the fight going.

35.Rxe5† Kf8



36.Qh1! Kg7
36...Qd3† 37.Ka1 Kg7 also does not save the game. After 38.Rg5† Kf6 39.Qh6† Ke7 40.Re5† Kd7 41.Qh1! Kd6 42.Re1 White has too many threats for Black to handle.

37.Rg5† Kf6 38.Qh6† Ke7 39.Re5† Kd7 40.Qd2† Kc6 41.Qd4
1–0

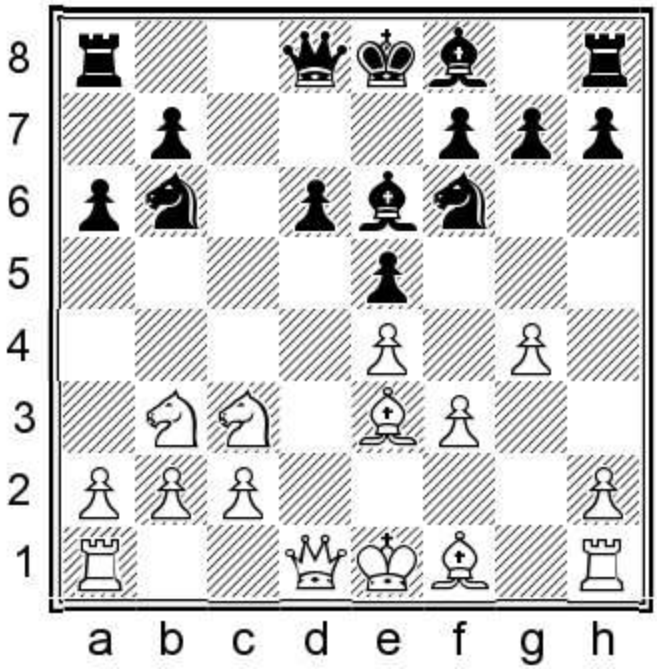
The positions with an early ...h6 do not really work for Black. If White is well-prepared, he has good reasons to be optimistic.

GAME 39

Ding Liren – Ruslan Ponomariov
Khanty-Mansiysk 2017

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Nbd7 9.g4 Nb6

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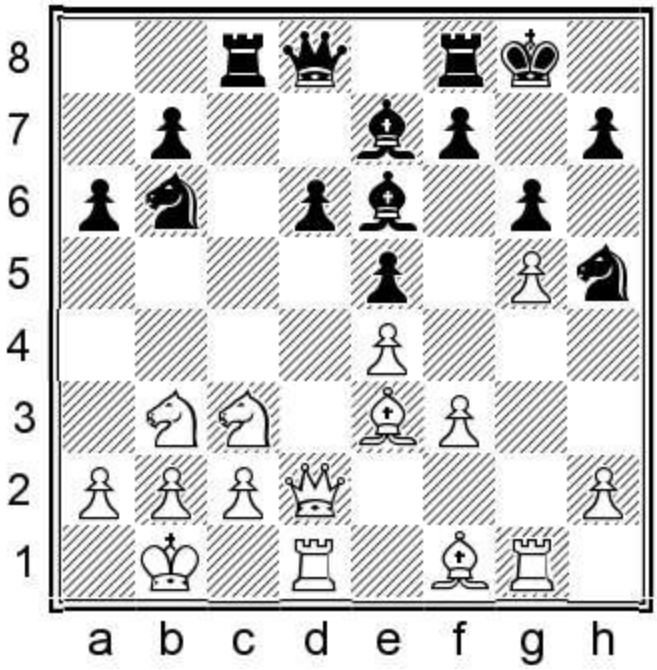
This is another way to create counterplay. But it looks artificial to me – too slow. It is not surprising that White is better everywhere.

10.g5 Nh5
Going to d7 is not the idea. The knight would have no future there, unlike in the ...e6-lines, where it can jump to e5.

11.Qd2 Be7 12.0-0-0 0-0
White has an improved version of the main lines with ...Nh5.

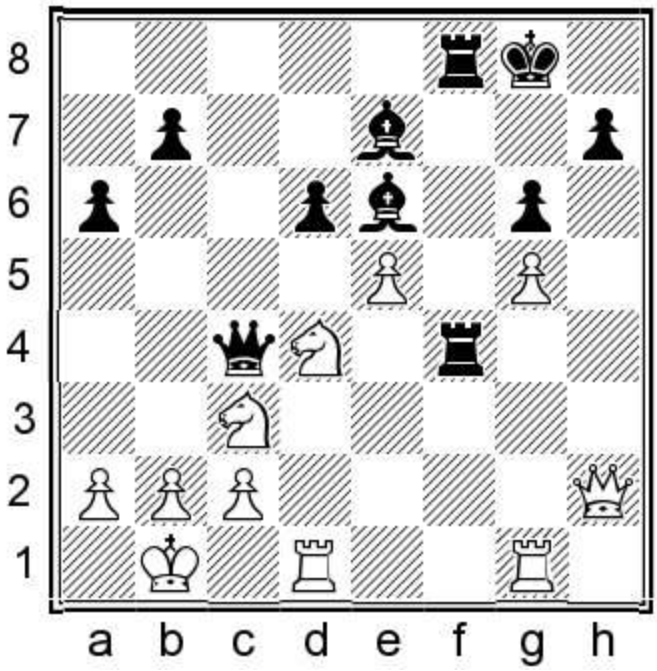
13.Kb1 Rc8 14.Rg1 g6
14...Qc7 has also been played. Out of many reasonable options, 15.h4!? seems simplest, when I doubt that Black has better than transposing to the next note with 15...g6. Instead the attempt to break free with 15...d5?! did not quite work after: 16.Bxb6 Qxb6 17.exd5 Qxg1 18.dxe6 fxe6 19.Qd7 Bb4 20.Bh3 Qh2 21.Bxe6† Kh8 22.Qa4 Rxc3 23.bxc3 Bxc3 24.Qc4 Nf4 25.Qxc3 Nxe6 26.Rd6± Van Oosterom – Joao, corr. 2005.

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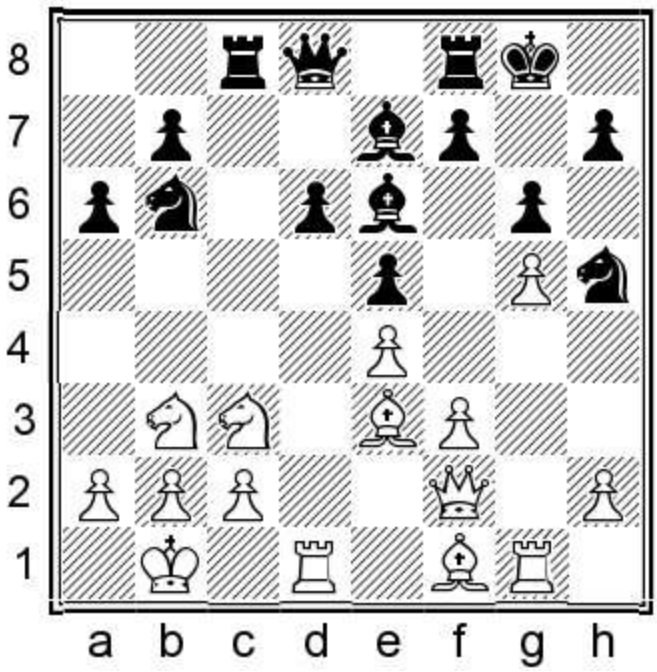
15.Qf2!?
I am honestly not clear on whether I should recommend this or a slightly different move order, so I will leave it to you, the reader, to choose your favourite. Sometimes moves can be equally strong.

15.h4 Qc7 16.Qf2
16.Qh2 is also a serious move according to correspondence players, although I do not understand why you would put the queen on h2.
16...Nc4 17.Bxc4 Qxc4 18.f4²
White is better, as I see it.
18...exf4 19.Bxf4 Nxf4 20.Qxf4 f6
If 20...Rfe8 then 21.h5! is essential, to meet ...Bf8 with h5-h6.
21.Qh2 fxg5 22.hxg5 Rf7 23.Nd4 Rcf8 24.e5 Rf4



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Dominguez Perez – Quesada Perez, Santa Clara 2005. Strongest here may be:
25.Rh1!?N 25...h5 26.exd6 Bxd6 27.Nde2²
Black will struggle to prove compensation for the exchange.



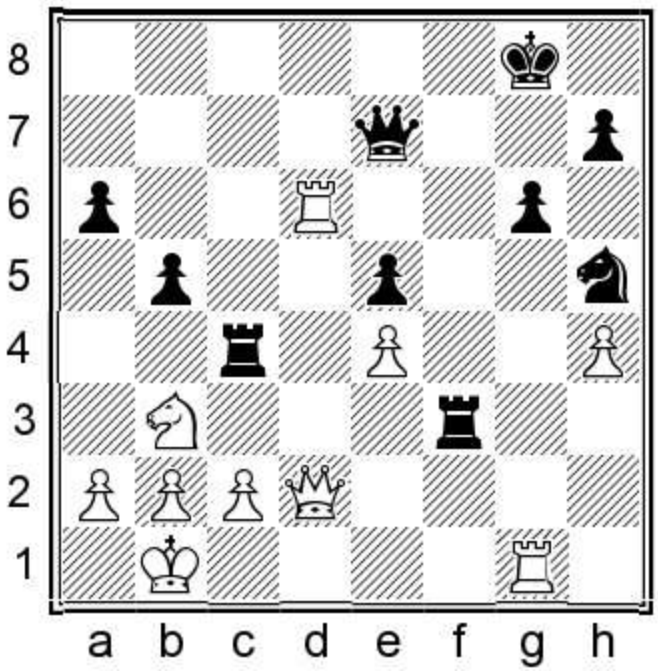
15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 Rxc4
After 16...Bxc4 I like the rare idea: 17.Qg2!? (17.Nd5?! Bxd5 18.Rxd5 f5 19.gxf6 Nxf6 left d5 and e4 hanging in Rahde – Rakovic, corr. 2008) 17...b5 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5 f5 20.gxf6 Rxf6 Mamedov – Nitin, Sort 2008. 21.Nc1!N² The knight will be activated via e2-g3 (or -c3, while watching out for exchange sacs) or after a2-a3 and Na2-b4-d5.

17.Nd5! Bxd5 18.Rxd5 b5
After 18...f5 19.gxf6 Nxf6 White can utilize the hanging rook on c4 with: 20.Qd2! Qc7 21.Rd3 Nh5 22.Bh6 Rc8 23.Rc1² Reppmann – Mielke, email 2009. This is not a particularly special game; White has an edge, just as in many other examples.

19.h4 f6
19...f5 20.Nd2 Rc8 21.Qe2² is also better for White. A fantasy variation continues: 21...Qe8 22.Qd3 fxe4 23. Nxe4 Qc6 24.Rd1 Rxf3 25.Nxd6 Rcf8 26.Qb3 Kh8 27.a4 bxa4 28.Qc4 Qxc4 29.Nxc4±

20.Qd2 fxg5 21.Bxg5 Rxf3 22.Bxe7 Qxe7 23.Rxd6²

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The black position has too many weaknesses and Ponomariov is unable to keep it together.

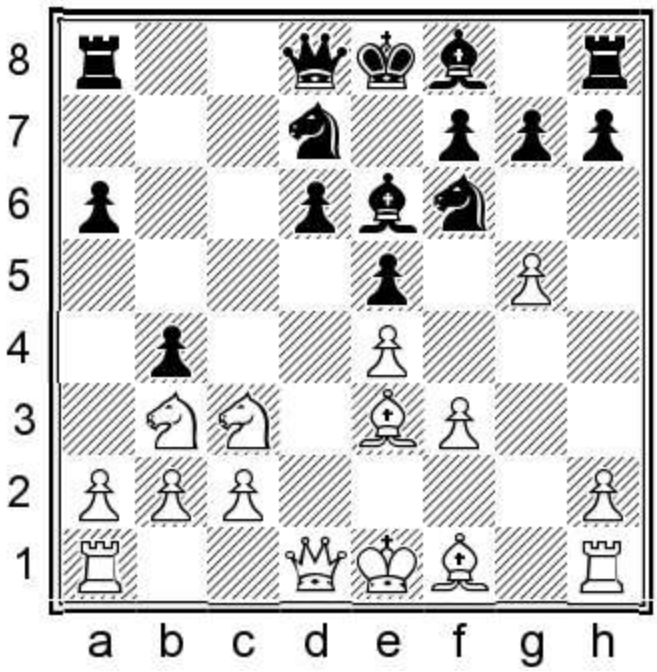
23...Rf7 24.Rxa6 Rxe4 25.Qd5 Rxh4 26.Qxb5 Nf4 27.a4 e4 28.Ra8† Kg7 29.Re8 Qa7 30.Qe5† Kh6 31.Qg5† Kg7 32.Rxe4 Rh5 33.Qg3 Rh3 34.Qe1 Nd5 35.Nd4 Qb6 36.a5 Qb7 37.Ne6† Kg8 38.Nd8 Qb5 39.Re8† Kg7 40.Qe5†
1–0

9...Nb6 is somewhat artificial, but the knight is not traveling on the wrong path; it's just that Black's options are limited. As I see it, White should get an advantage from the opening, but I would not characterize the variation as directly refuted.
GAME 40

Adrian Schilcher – Maigonis Avotins
email 2013

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Nbd7 9.g4 b5 10.g5 b4

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This is another way for Black to react to the fact that g4-g5 is coming quickly. The ensuring structure is like many others in this chapter: sad for Black, but not necessarily unplayable. The jury may still be deliberating over the final verdict, but in the meantime White will scoop up a lot of nice wins.

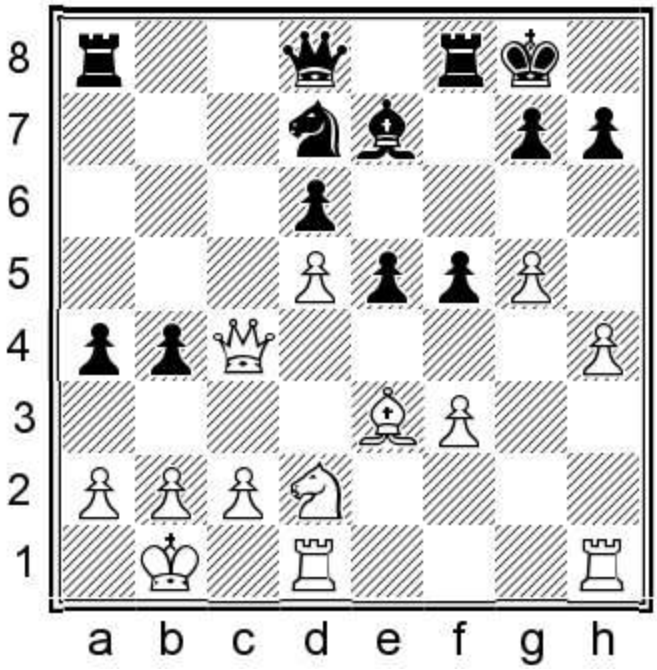
11.Nd5
11.Ne2 Ng8! seems to be playable for Black. The key idea is 12.f4 h6! with a sharp game.

11...Nxd5 12.exd5 Bf5 13.Bd3 Bxd3 14.Qxd3 Be7 15.h4 0-0
15...a5 16.Nd2 0-0 17.0-0-0 a4 18.Kb1 f5 19.Qc4 transposes to our main line.

16.0-0-0
This feels like the most accurate move, but White can also try 16.f4!?N to mix things up.

16...a5 17.Nd2 a4 18.Kb1 f5 19.Qc4

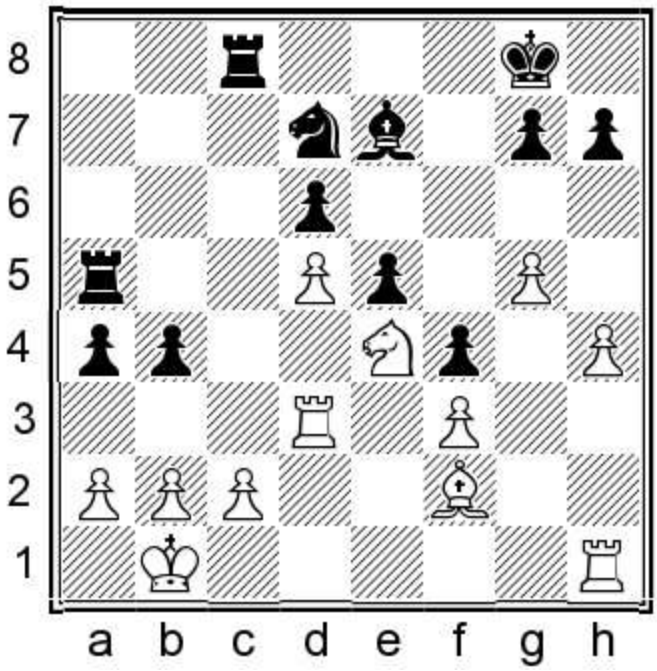
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Black is close to equality here, but in practice things are far from simple. One thing that attracted me to the English Attack was the way Black is continuously equal according to Stockfish, but losing game after game, even in correspondence chess.

19...Rb8
19...a3 20.b3 Rb8 21.Rhf1 Rb7 22.f4 Qa5 23.Qd3 e4 24.Nc4² favoured White in Firsching – Raap, email 2013.

Another game continued: 19...Qa5!? 20.Qc6 f4 21.Bf2 Rfd8 22.Nc4 Qa6 23.Rd3 Rdc8 24.Qxa6 Rxa6 25.Nd2 Ra5 26.Ne4²



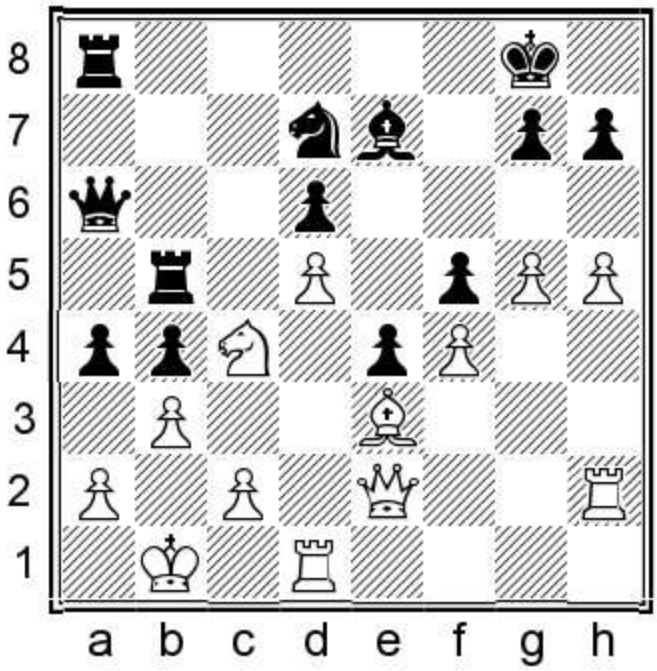
This is Kurgansky – Schmidt, email 2008. The engine can tell me this is equal as many times as it wants, but I would much rather be White and have that fantastic knight dominating everything.

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20.f4 Rb7 21.Qe2 Qa5?!
21...Qa8 22.b3 Re8!? was better, when White has a pleasant position, but Black can claim to be in the game as well.

22.Nc4 Qa6 23.b3 e4?!
23...Re8² was a better defensive try.

24.Rh2± Rb5 25.h5 Ra8



26.Qf1!
A clever reorganization of the pieces.

26...Qb7 27.Rhd2 Qa6 28.Qh3 Rf8 29.Bg1 Qc8 30.Re1 Nc5 31.Bd4 axb3 32.cxb3 Na6 33.Rc1 Nc7 34.Nb6 Qb7 35.g6 h6 36.Nd7 Rxd5 37.Nxf8 Bxf8 38.Qf1 Nb5 39.a4 Nc3† 40.Kb2 Qc6 41.Qh3
1–0

9...b5 10.g4 b4 looks sharp at first glance but quickly results in a typical structure, where White has an enduring positional advantage. The apparent “attack” against the white king is not real, because the black pieces are much too passive – in the long term, White is the favourite.
In essence, this is another of those positions that can arise from the opening where Black has compromised his position somewhat for clarity. It is still a complex battle, but one which White should engage in with glee.

GAME 41

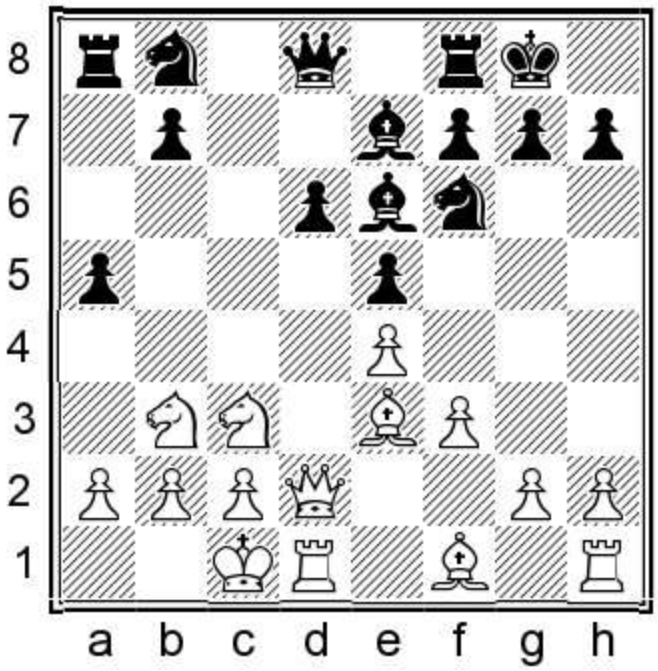
Maksim Pundak – Heinrich Hoexter
email 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7
chesstouring.com
This is the first we have seen of this standard move. It leads to the big main lines – but before we get to them,

we shall start with some unusual 10th move deviations.

9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 a5?!
This line was recommended in many books and became rather popular at some point. However, it has since been almost refuted in correspondence chess, and I doubt that there will be a serious change in this evaluation.

10...Nc6? does not work here. After 11.Nd5± it is clear that Black has move-ordered himself.

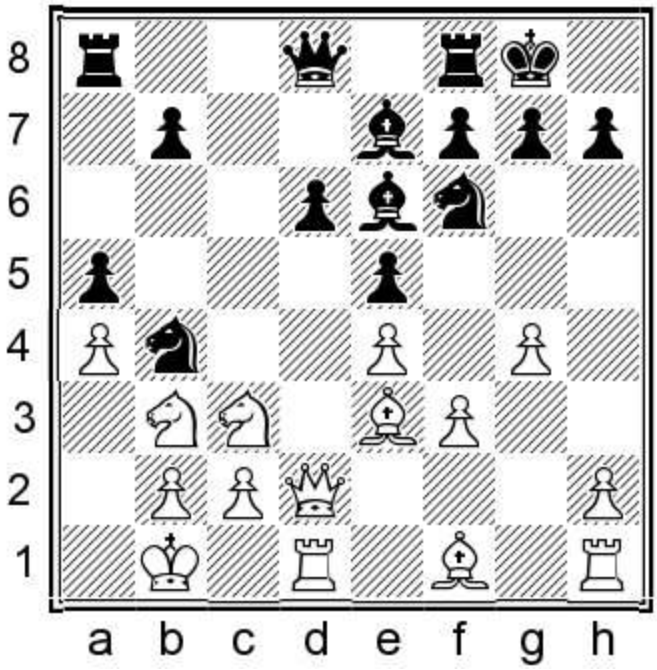



11.a4! Nc6
11...Na6 12.g4 Nb4 makes little difference.

12.g4! Nb4
12...Rc8 13.Kb1 Nb4 transposes to the game.

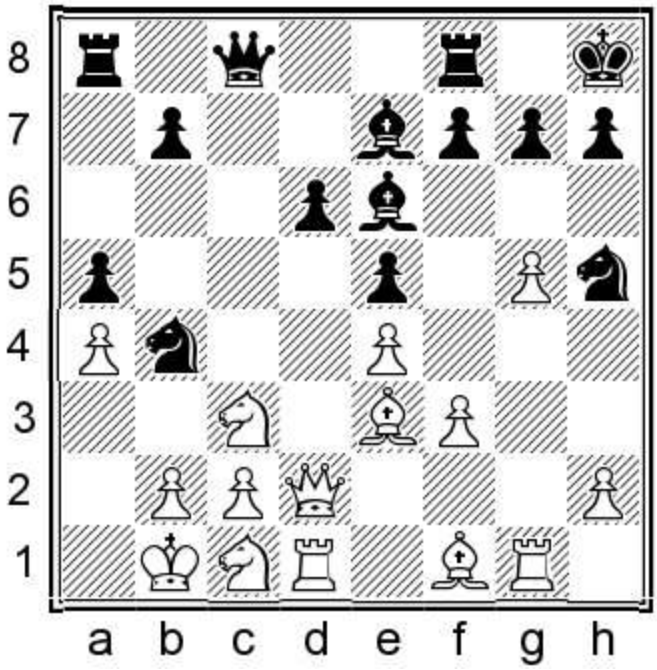
13.Kb1!

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13...Rc8
Black has also tried:

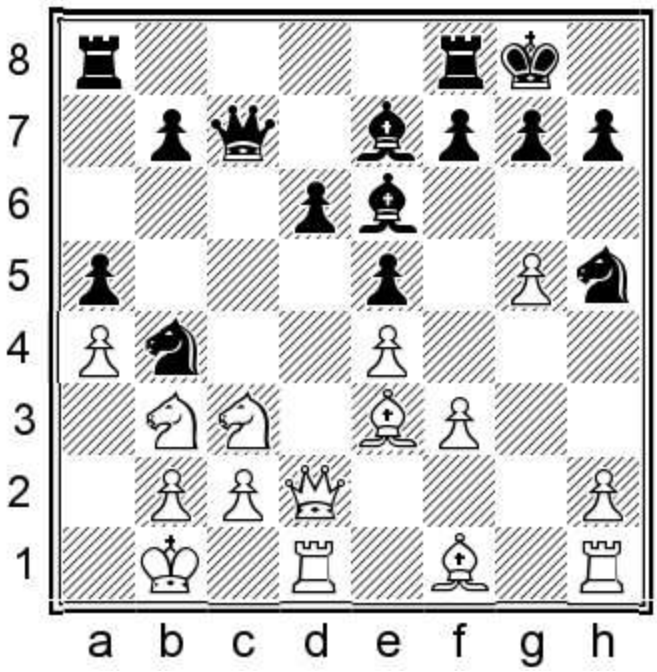
13...Qc8 does not make a lot of sense. Normal play works wonders for White: 14.g5 Nh5 15.Rg1 Kh8 16.Nc1!



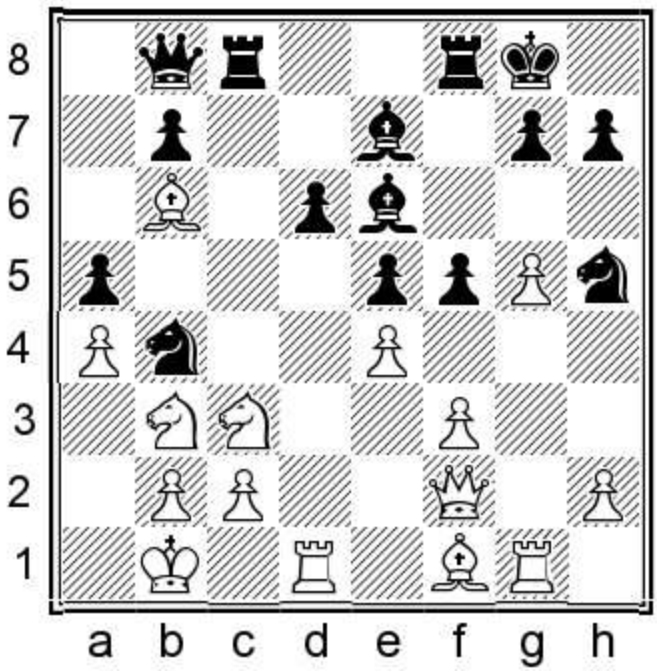
If White had all the time in the world, he would play Bb5 and then Nd3xb4 with a clear advantage. Black tried breaking in the centre, but it did not work. 16...d5?! 17.Nxd5 Bxd5 18.exd5 Rd8 19.c4 Bc5 20.Bxc5 Qxc5 21. Rg4 Nf4 22.Re1 Re8 23.Na2± Bes – Koopmans, email 2014.
Things are similar after the other queen move:
13...Qc7 14.g5
Sticking with the programme.
14...Nh5

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14...Nd7?! allows 15.f4! exf4 16.Bxf4 Ne5 17.Nd4±, which was simply horrible for Black in Dominguez Perez – Wojtaszek, Havana 2008.



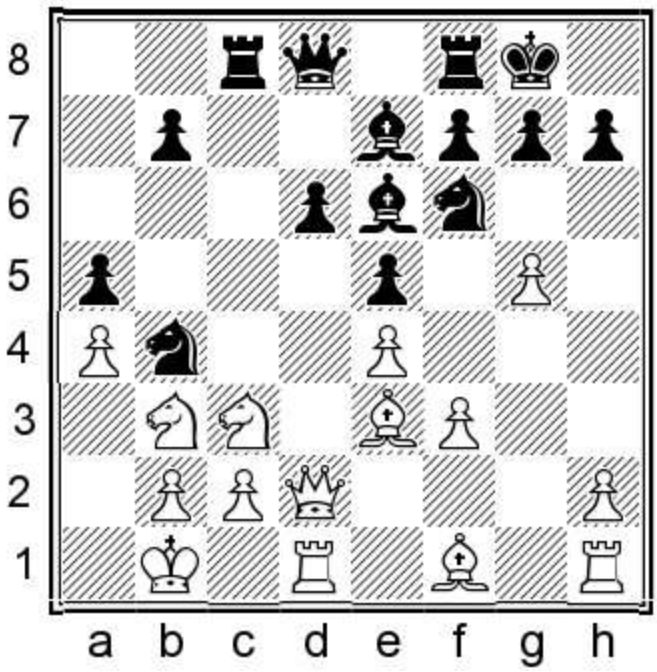
15.Rg1
15.Bb5 f6 16.h4 Rac8 17.Qf2± was also strong in Kolesnikova – Lukasevicius, email 2017.
15...Rac8 16.Qf2 f5
Black has to seek active counterplay.
16...Bd8 17.Nc1 f5 18.Qd2!± Schlenther – Konstantinov, email 2013.
17.Bb6 Qb8



18.Qe2! Nf4 19.Qb5 fxe4 20.fxe4 d5!? 21.exd5 Bf5 22.Rd2 Qd6 23.Bxa5 Nxc2 24.Rxc2 Qg6 25.Na1!± Mackintosh – C. Sadler, email 2016.

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14.g5

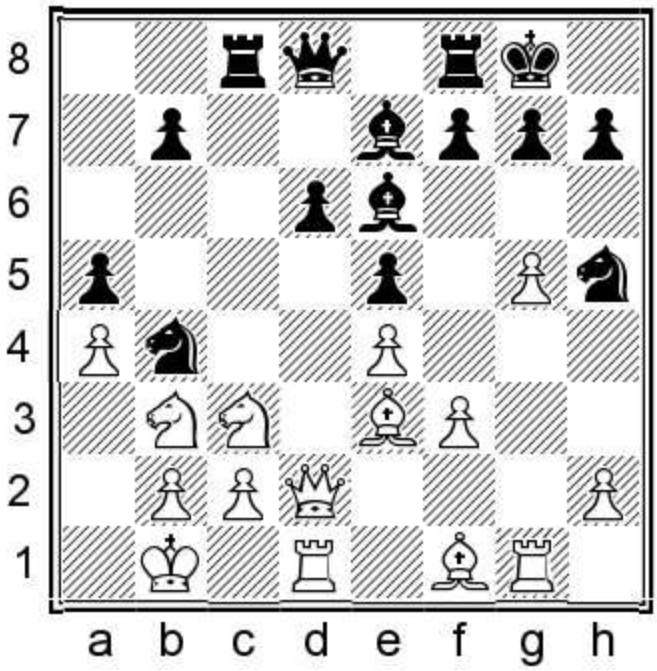


14...Nh5
This prevents White from playing f3-f4. Other moves have not fared better:

14...Ne8 15.f4 exf4 16.Bxf4 Bg4 17.Re1± Zambor – Hefka, corr. 2010.

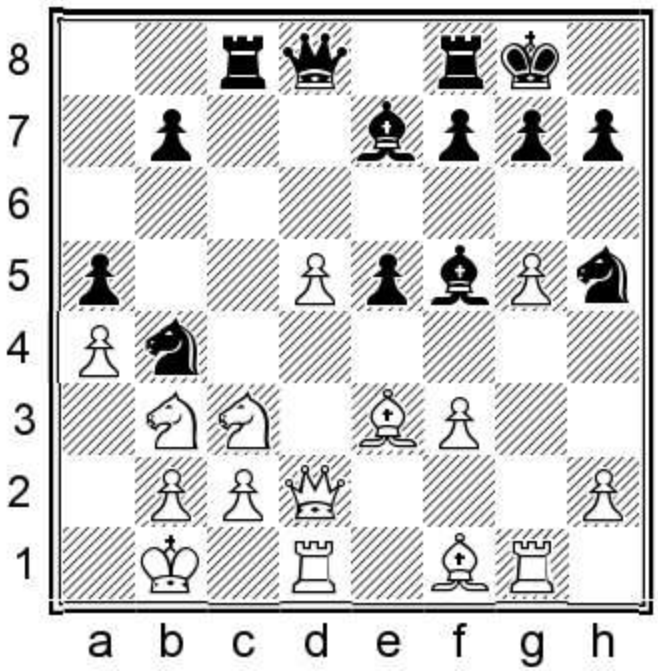
14...Nd7 15.f4 exf4 16.Bxf4± Saric – Shirov, Reykjavik 2015.

15.Rg1!



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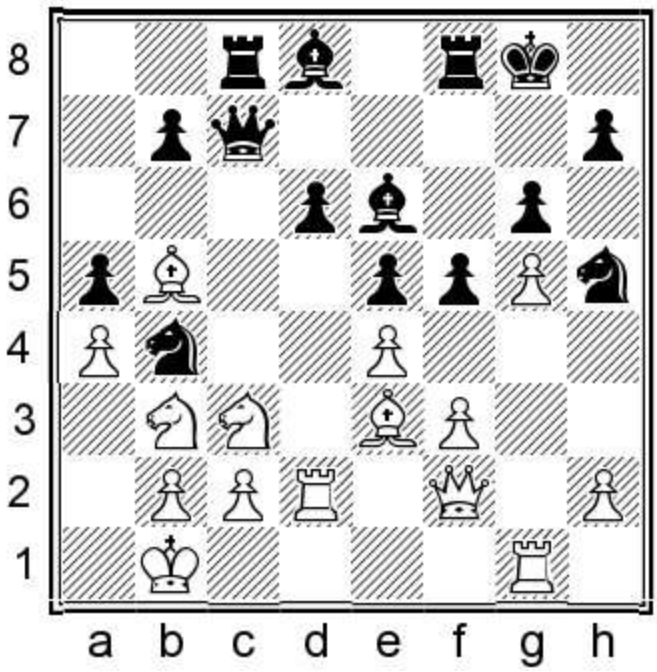
15...f5
Black seeks counterplay, but it does not work out. Neither do any other lines:
15...d5? 16.exd5 Bf5 is not too difficult to refute. As so often, White has an ugly move that can be fully justified by the extra pawn he has just won:



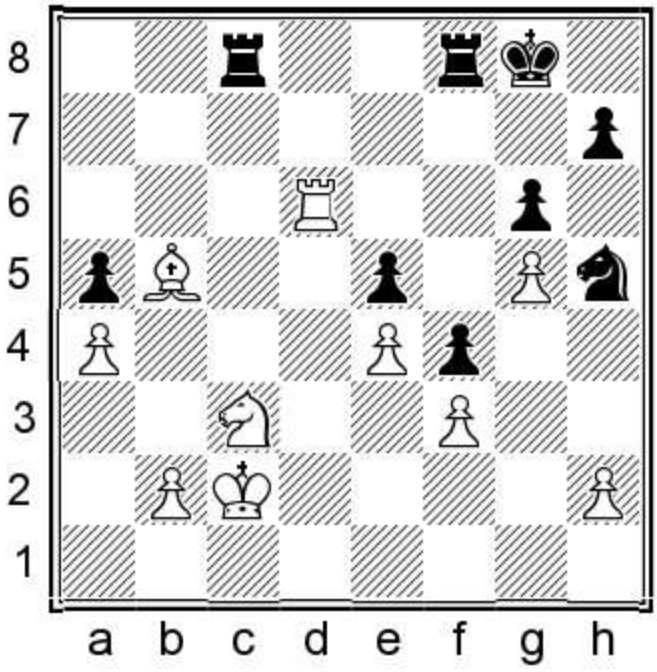
17.Na1! Bc5 18.Bb5 Qd6 19.Rge1 Nf4 20.Ne4 White was completely winning in Duchardt – LeSavouroux, email 2015.

The sharpest variation comes after the calm:
15...g6
White plays in the most direct way with:
16.Bb5 Qc7 17.Qf2 Bd8
17...Nf4 18.Bxf4 exf4 19.h4± Massy – Akrill, email 2017.
18.Rd2 f5

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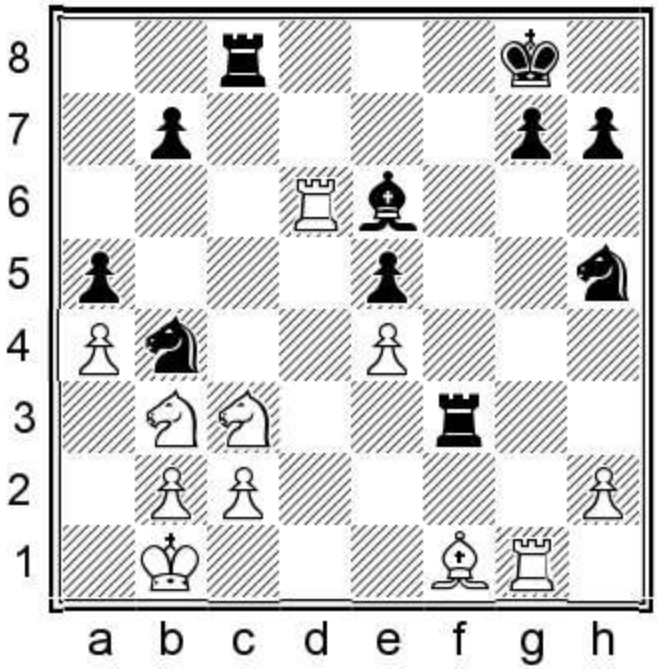
19.Rgd1!! f4 20.Ba7 b6 21.Rxd6 Bxb3 22.Bxb6 Bxc2† 23.Qxc2 Nxc2 24.Bxc7 Bxc7 25.Kxc2 Bxd6 26.Rxd6± White is technically winning. The exchange does not matter a lot; what matters is that Black cannot get his pieces playing.



26...Rfd8
26...Ng7 27.b3 Kh8 28.Bc4 Rfd8 29.Nb5! is an important point. For example: 29...Ne8 30.Ra6 was winning for White in Merrheim – Witzschel, email 2013.
27.Re6 Rc5 28.Ra6 Ng7 29.b3 Kf8 30.Rf6† Ke7 31.Bc4
White went on to win in Bennett – Vaitonis, email 2014.

16.gxf6 Rxf6 17.Bg5 Rxf3 18.Bxe7 Qxe7 19.Qxd6 Qxd6 20.Rxd6±

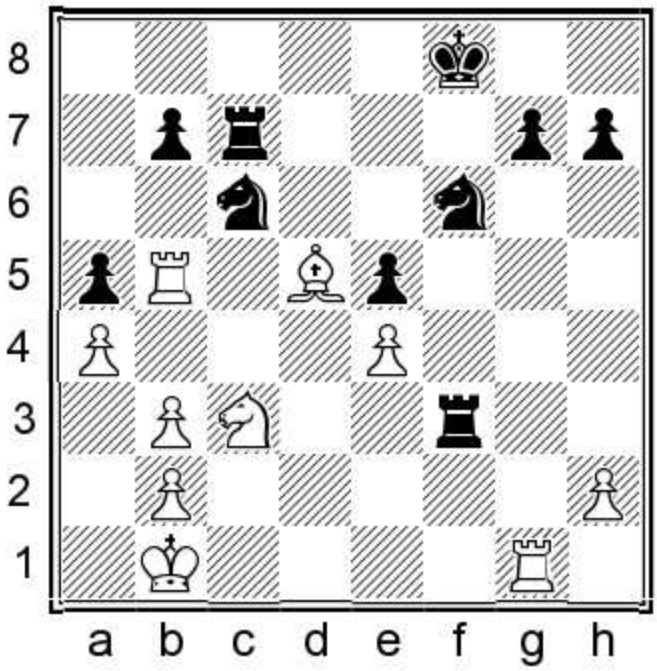
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20...Bxb3
20...Nf4 21.Nxa5 Rf2 is active, but no improvement. After 22.Nxb7 Rxc2 23.a5 White was winning in Inarkiev – Andriasian, Gjakova 2016.

21.cxb3 Nf6 22.Rb6
After 22.Bc4† Kf8 23.Rb6 Rb8 24.Rb5! Nc6 25.Rd1 Rh3 26.Rd6 Rd8 27.Rxd8† Nxd8 28.Rxa5 Rxh2 29. Rxe5± White won on move 74 in Schuller – Demian, email 2014.

22...Rc7 23.Rb5 Nc6 24.Bc4† Kf8 25.Bd5±



White has a technically winning position.

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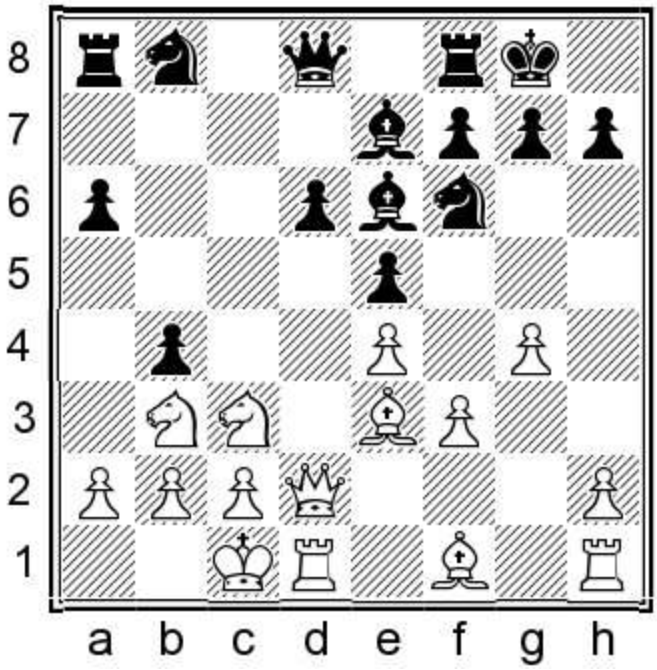
25...Nb4 26.Rxa5 Nbxd5 27.exd5 Rd7 28.Rb5 Rf2 29.h3 Rf3 30.a5 Rxh3 31.d6 e4 32.Na4 e3 33.Nc5 Rxd6 34.Re1 Nd7 35.Nxb7 Rdh6 36.Re2 Rh1† 37.Ka2 R1h5 38.Rxh5 Rxh5 39.b4 Rb5 40.Nd6 Rxb4 41.Rxe3 Rb8 42.b4 g5 43.Kb3 Ra8 44.Kc4 g4 45.b5
1–0

10...a5 seems busted. I do not expect this line to come back to life. If you encounter it, think of zombie movies...

GAME 42

Horst Vennemann – Peter Grott
email 2004

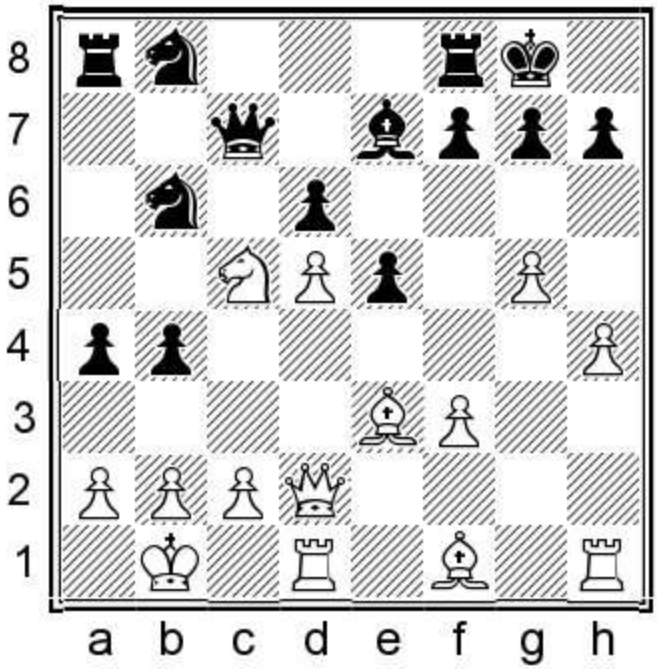
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 b5 11.g4 b4
11...Nbd7 is the big main line – we will return to that position in the coming games. But when we get to it, I will use the move order 10...Nbd7 11.g4 b5, as I also need to cover some 11th move alternatives to 11...b5.



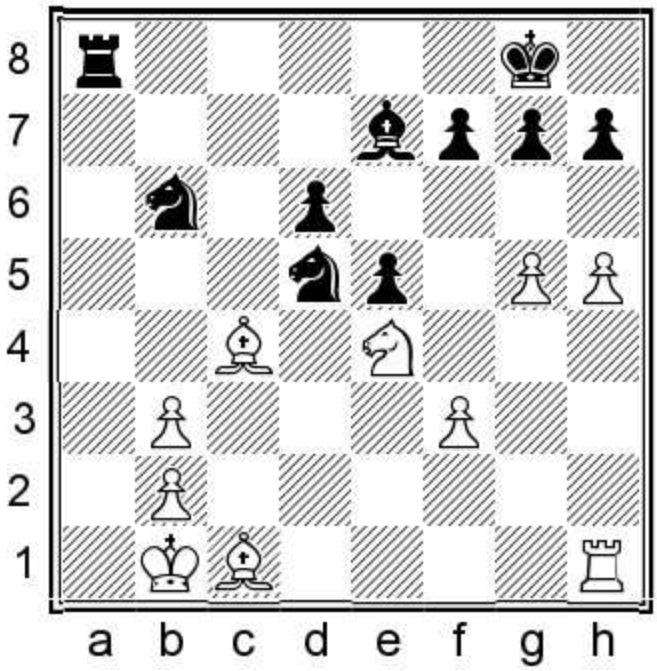

12.Nd5 Bxd5 13.exd5 a5 14.Kb1 a4
This is the most meaningful way of playing the position as far as I am concerned. But as it is not really working, slow play needs to be checked as well.

14...Qc7 15.g5 Nfd7 16.h4 Nb6 17.Nc5! a4

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This has been played in a few games, with the strongest player defending the black side being Tazelaar.
At this point I recommend a new idea:
18.Ne4!?N 18...Rc8 19.Rc1!
Prophylaxis against ...b4-b3.
19...N8d7
19...Nc4 20.Bxc4 Qxc4 21.h5± would give White an attack without any real counterplay for Black. Next up comes g5-g6.
20.h5 b3 21.cxb3 Qxc1† 22.Qxc1 Rxc1† 23.Bxc1 axb3 24.axb3
24.a3!? could also be considered.
24...Nxd5 25.Bc4 N7b6

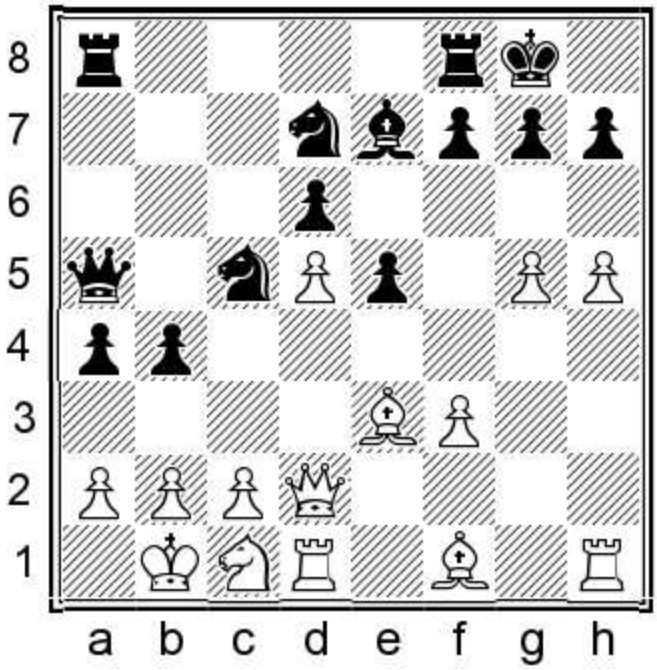


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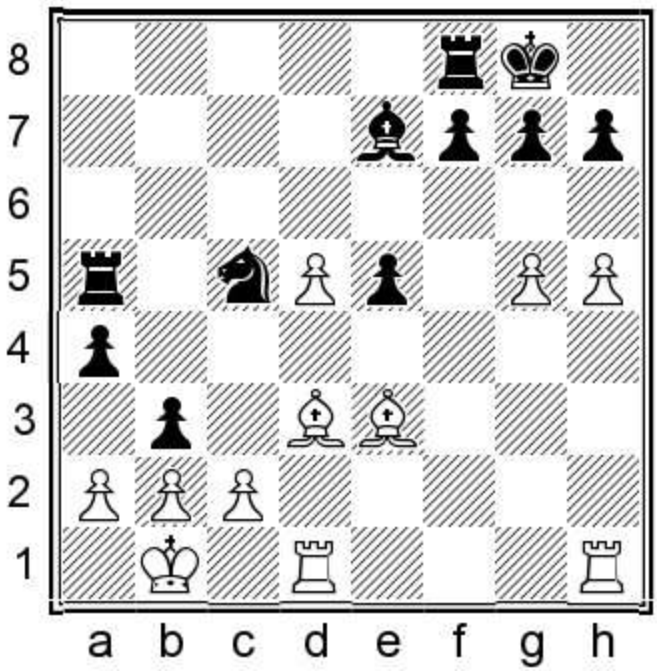
26.Rd1²

Black’s king has little chance of entering the game. He will have to defend for a long time.

15.Nc1 Qa5 16.g5 Nfd7 17.h4 Na6 18.h5 Nac5



19.g6!?
I believe White could have played better here with: 19.Nd3!N 19...Nxd3 (19...Rfb8 20.g6 Bf6 21.Bh3 a3 22.b3 Nxd3 23.gxf7† Kxf7 24.Be6† Ke7 25.Qxd3+–) 20.Bxd3 Nc5 21.f4! White has a great position. A nice point is that after 21...b3, White can play: 22.Qxa5 Rxa5 23.fxe5 dxe5

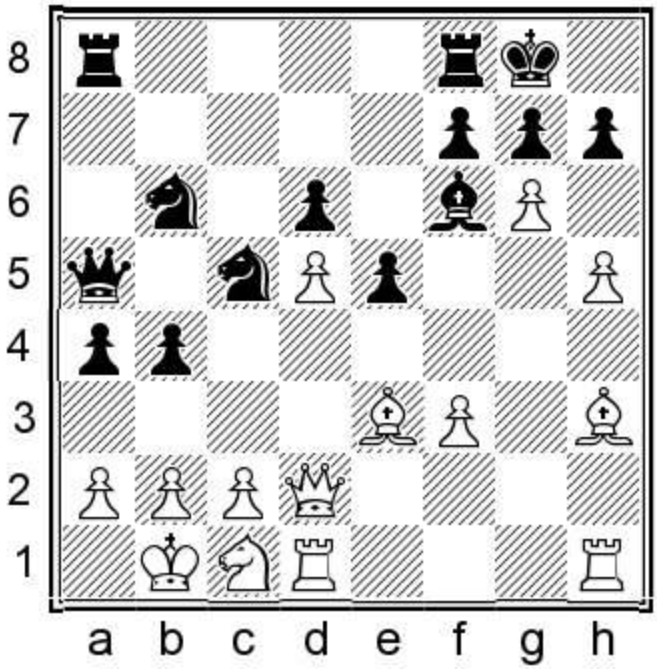


24.d6! Bxd6 25.Bc4 with g5-g6 as just one of the many ways forward.

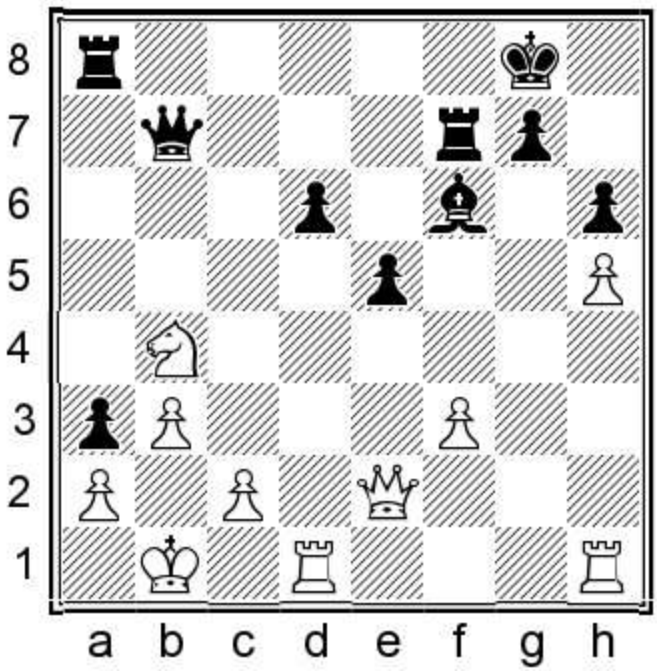
19...a3?!

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More resilient was 19...Bf6 20.Bh3 Nb6, as in Tiviakov – Gormally, Kilkenny 1998.



I have seen this game quoted as being the right way for White to play. But here the right way forward was different from what Tiviakov did: 21.Qe2!N is the way to go. The critical line seems to be 21...h6 22.gxf7† Rxf7 23.Bxc5 Qxc5 24.Be6 a3 25.Nd3 Qa5 26.b3 Nxd5 27.Bxd5 Qxd5 28.Nxb4 Qb7

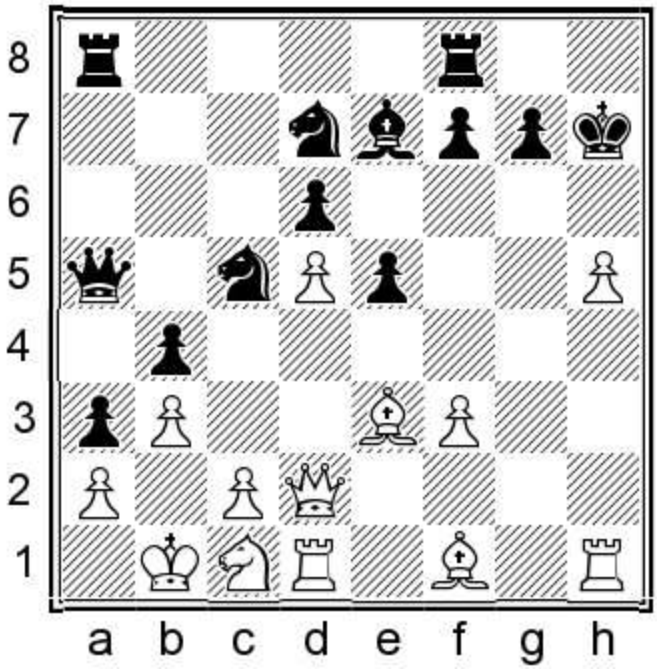


29.Nd5² and White can press forever, although Black has his chances.

20.gxh7† Kxh7
20...Kh8N 21.b3 is also great for White.

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21.b3±



White has a large advantage and won convincingly. Actually, there was hardly any fight.

21...Rfb8 22.Bh3 Bf6 23.Bf5† Kg8 24.Rdg1 Kf8 25.Bg5 Ke7 26.Bxf6† gxf6 27.h6 Rh8 28.Rg7 Raf8 29.h7 Na6 30.Rhg1 Nc7 31.Rg8 Qa8 32.Rxf8
1–0

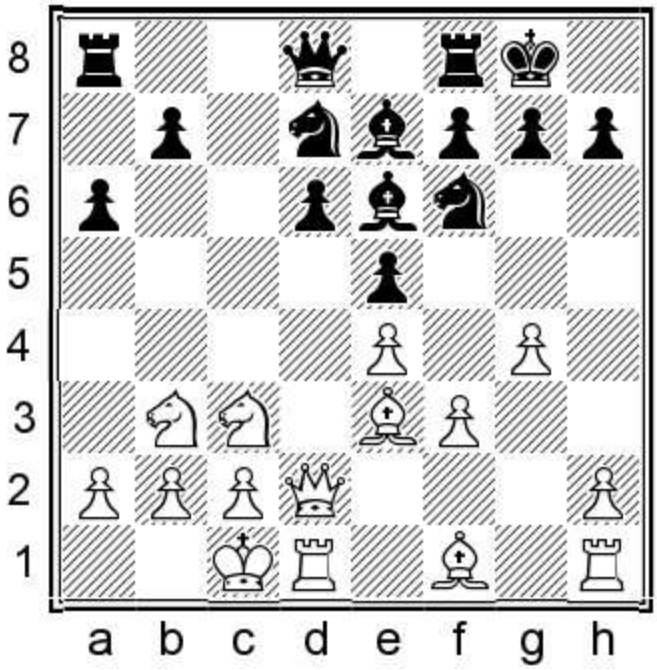
11...b4 seems mistimed. Played on an earlier move, Black has more flexibility with the structure; played later, he is fully developed and ready for the main lines. But played at this point, White gets a structural advantage and results have reflected that.

GAME 43

Panayotis Frendzas – Pascal Roques
email 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 Nbd7 11.g4

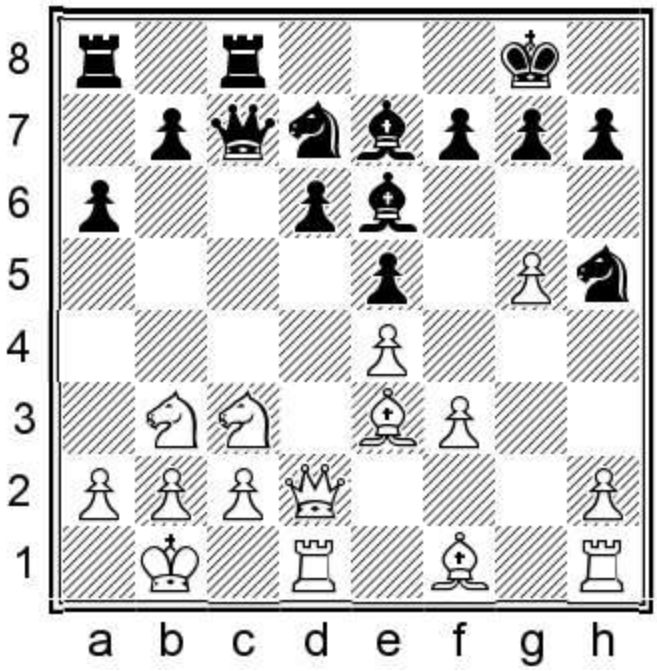
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11...b5
To me this is the only sensible move. White is progressing quickly on the kingside, so Black urgently needs to create counterplay on the queenside. This position also commonly arises via the move order 10...b5 11.g4 Nbd7.

I will offer a few examples where Black played in more relaxed style – and got kicked because of it.

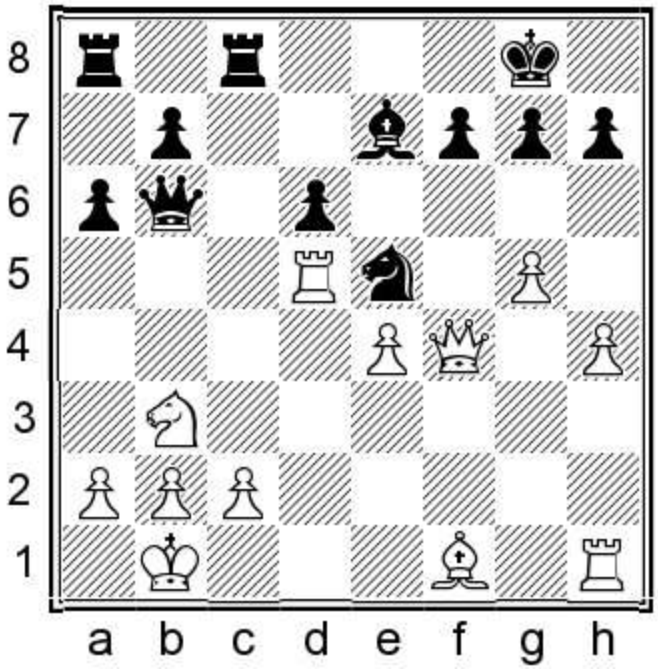
11...Qc7 12.Kb1 Rfc8 13.g5 Nh5
It looks as if the kingside is blocked, but White has more than one way to break through:



14.f4! exf4 15.Bxf4 Nxf4 16.Qxf4 Ne5
16...b5 17.Nd4 b4 18.Nd5±

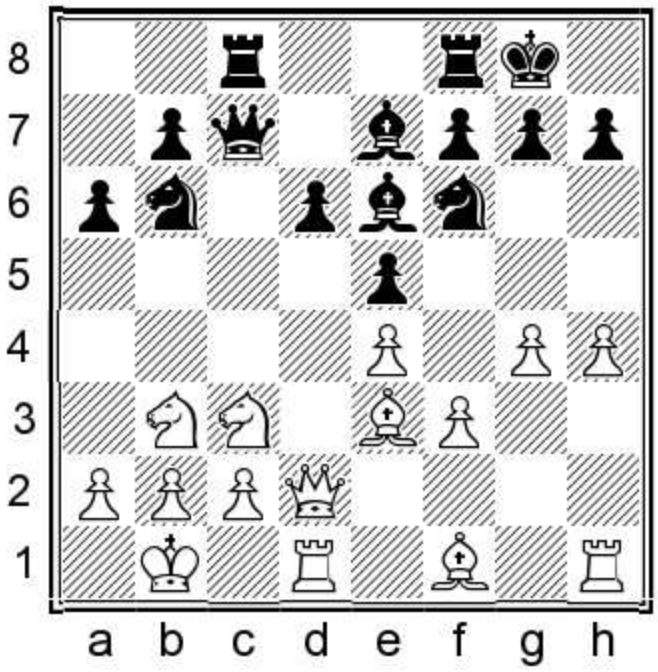
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17.h4 Qb6 18.Nd5 Bxd5 19.Rxd5!



White had a big plus in Grischuk – Sjugirov, Moscow 2009. I should mention that taking with the pawn is also good for White, but it makes less sense to do so. Another point about this type of position is that if Black is preparing ...Bf8-g7, White should be ready with h4-h5-h6, with a crushing advantage, as famously seen in Karjakin – Kramnik, Dortmund 2004.

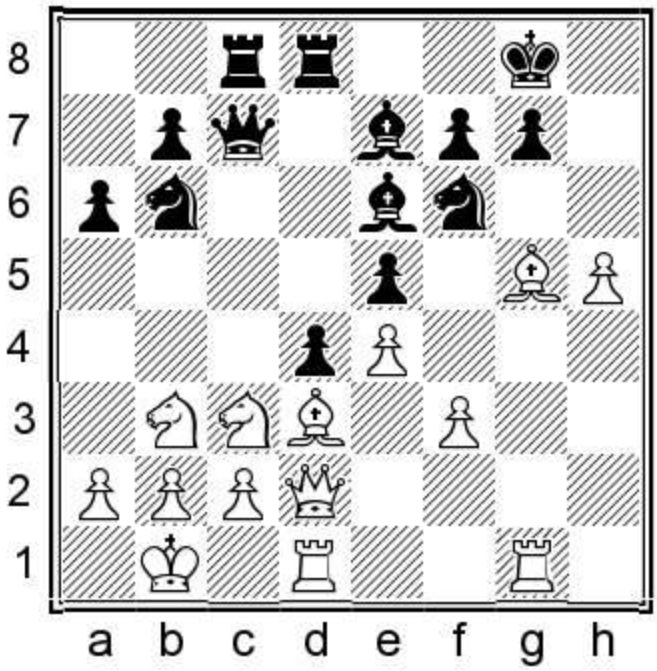
11...Nb6
This is also awkward; White has several ways to play for an advantage. The following game is a good example: 12.Kb1! Rc8 13.h4 Qc7



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14.h5!

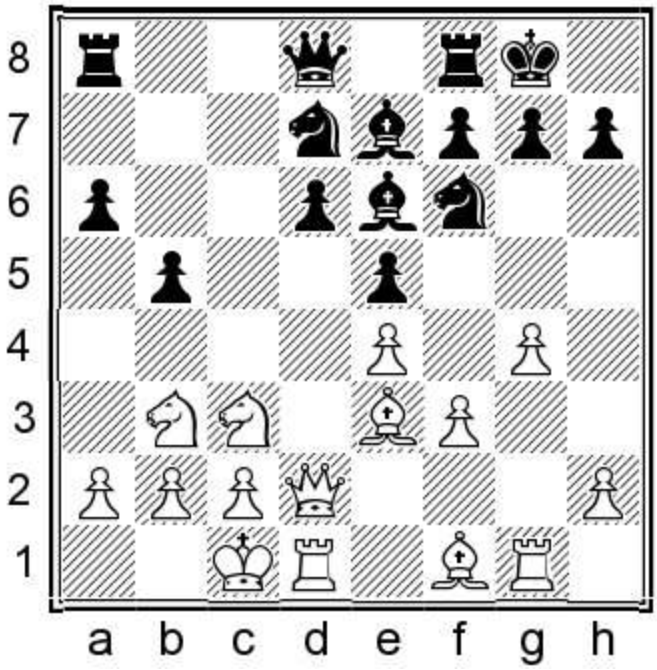
When White is given so much extra time, he should exploit it.
14...h6
14...Nfd7 15.g5 f5 is an idea seen at times. But here it weakens the light squares too much: 16.exf5! Bxf5 17. Rh2 Rfe8 18.Na5 Bf8 19.Bd3 Bxd3 20.Qxd3± Voss – Romanov, corr. 2004.
15.g5 hxg5 16.Bxg5 d5
At first the engine believes White has overplayed his hand by allowing this advance, but the game shows otherwise.
17.Rg1 Rfd8
17...d4 fails to: 18.Bxf6! Bxf6 19.Qh6 Qe7 20.Nd5 Nxd5 21.exd5 Bf5 22.Bd3 Bxd3 23.Rxd3+– Black has no way to stop Rd2-g2xg7. When it happens, the king can run, but the h-pawn will be passed and the black king exposed.
18.Bd3 d4?!
18...Kf8± was more tenacious.



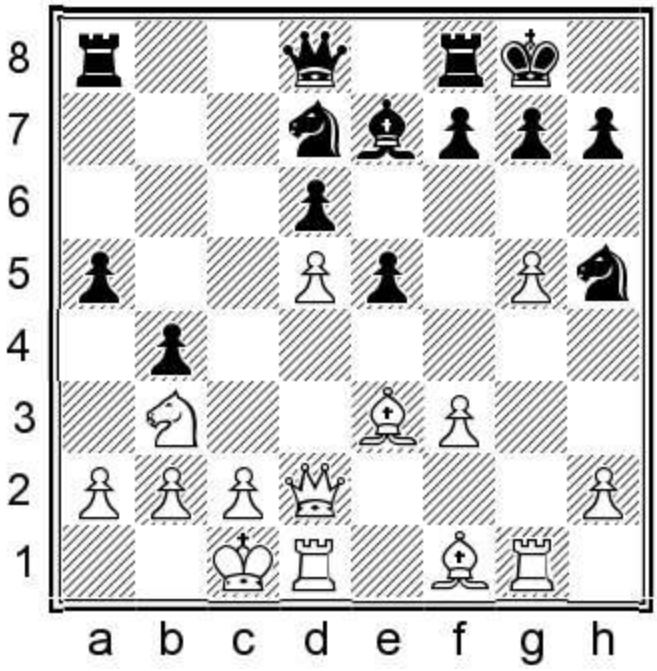

19.Nd5! Bxd5 20.exd5 Nbxd5 21.Bh6 Ne8 22.Bxg7 Nxg7 23.h6
23.Rxg7†! is even quicker.
23...Bf6 24.hxg7 Bxg7 25.Qh6 f6 26.Nc5 Rd6 27.Qh7† Kf8 28.Bc4 Re8 29.Ne4 Re7 30.Bxd5
1–0 Grischuk – Ftacnik, Calvia (ol) 2004.

12.g5
According to Anand, a more human way to play the position is:
12.Rg1!?

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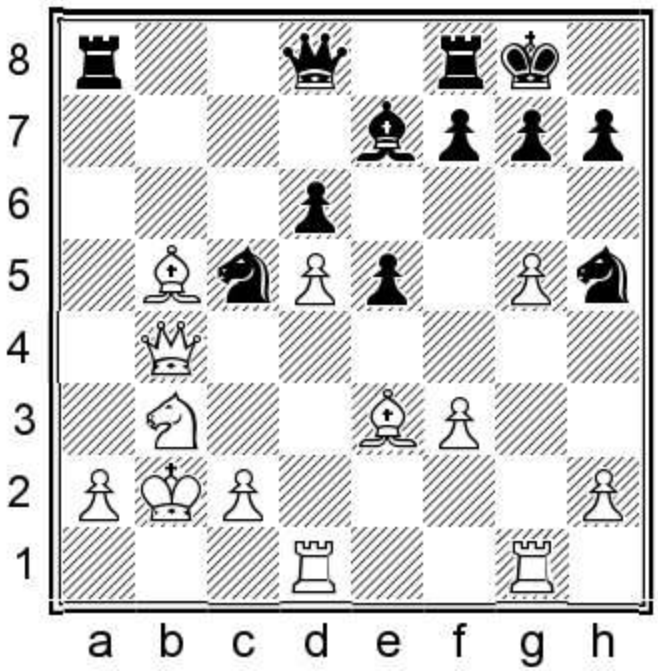
This is likely to transpose to our main lines if Black doesn't play:
12...b4 13.Nd5 Bxd5 14.exd5 a5
Black has to do something; the b-pawn is hanging after all.
14...Nb6 15.Na5 Qc7 Taking on d5 first does not change anything. 16.Nc6 Nfxd5 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Bxb6 Nxb6 19.Qxd6 Qg5† 20.Qd2² Ter Sahakyan – Zhou, Martuni 2008.
15.g5 Nh5



16.Bb5!
This is definitely the downside to advancing the pawns on the queenside too early.
16...a4 17.Na1
Now there is no way to defend the pawns.
17...a3

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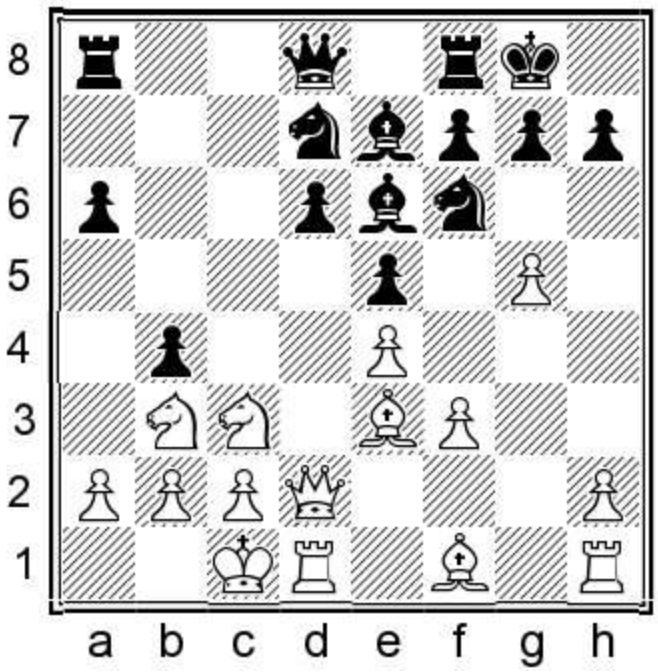
17...Nf4 18.Qxb4² Ovall – Thomas, email 2011.
18.Qxb4 axb2† 19.Kxb2 Nc5 20.Nb3²



Black will have to play extraordinarily well to justify the pawn deficit, Vrana – Bas Fortuny, corr. 2016.

I recommend 12.g5, but there is nothing wrong with 12.Rg1.

12...b4
This became an important main line in recent years.



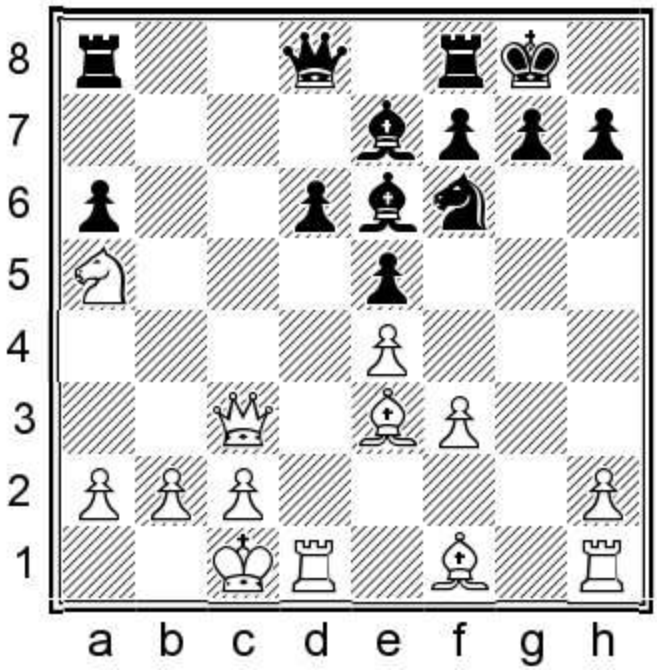
13.gxf6!?
This move is what has dampened Black's attraction to playing this line. As with so many modern opening sys-

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tems, we end up in a position where correspondence players hold with Black most of the time (but not always) and where over-the-board players will have to suffer endlessly. Immensely strong players such as MVL, Grischuk and others have got into big trouble as Black in this line; I have a feeling your opponents will fare not much differently.

13.Ne2 Ne8 14.f4 a5 15.f5 a4 is another deeply-analysed main line that was popular for years. In fact, it is too deeply analysed, with too much to remember and no advantage to speak of.

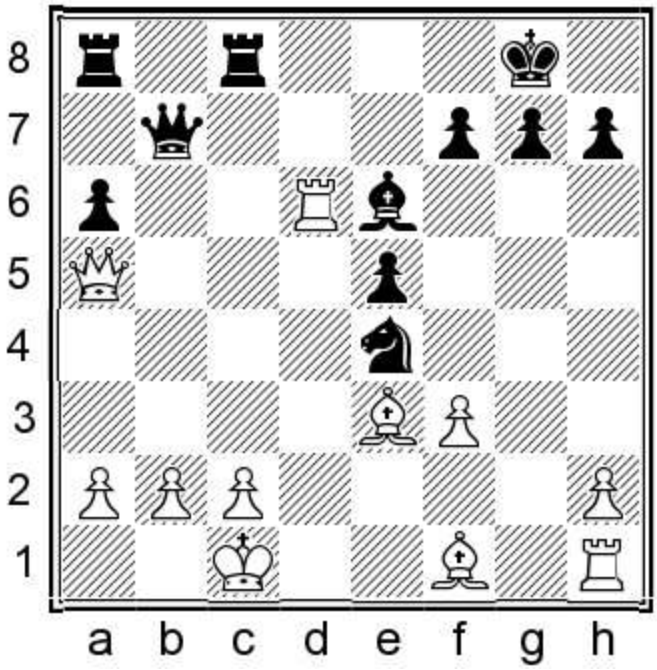
13...bxc3 14.Qxc3 Nxf6 15.Na5



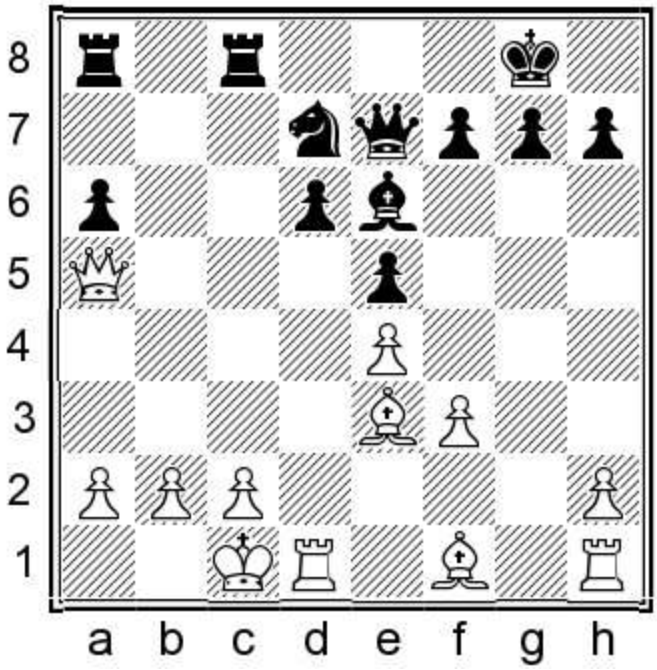

15...Qe8
There are a few move orders that all lead the same place, but one real alternative.

15...Qd7 16.Nc6 Rfc8
Bringing the other rook to c8.
17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Qa5 Nd7
18...Qb7 19.Rxd6 Nxe4 was played in Wei Yi – Lu Shanglei, China 2014.

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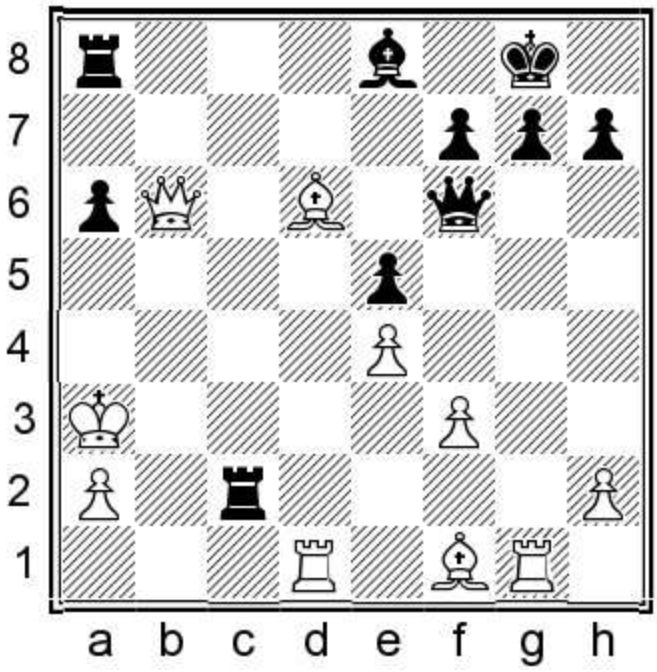
20.Rxe6!N 20...fxe6 21.Qxe5 Nf6 22.Qxe6† Khalifman recommends 22.Rg1 here, which is also good, but taking the pawn with check is more natural; White is simply better with two pawns for the exchange and two strong bishops. 22...Kh8 23.Qf5!²



19.b3
Warning: This is not my recommendation! The fact that Black can make a draw with perfect play or stunning preparation is a downside.
19.Kb1! has been played twice and would be my default choice. The games are far from memorable.
19...Nc5
Kribben – Soderberg, email 2010. Here I would consider:
20.Qb6!?N
The engine now recommends a big combination with:

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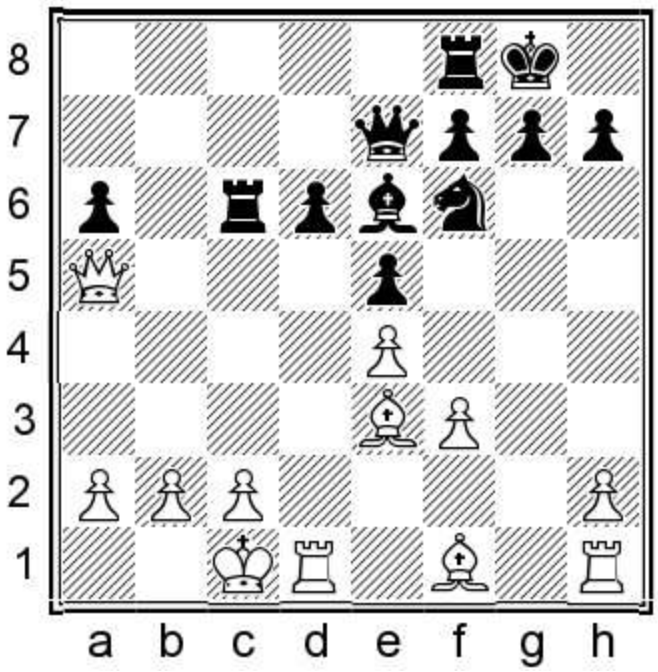
20...Bxb3!
Black makes a draw, but only after a scare.
After something like 20...Rd8 21.Bxc5 dxc5 22.Rxd8† Rxd8 23.Bxa6² Black will have to do a lot of work to fully justify the pawn deficit. Even if the computer at depth 24 thinks Black is equal, it is less certain at greater depths. And as a puny human, I see only two possible results.
21.Bxc5 Ba4 22.Bxd6 Qg5† 23.Kb2 Rxc2† 24.Ka3!
24.Ka1 Rc1† is an immediate draw.
24...Be8 25.Rg1 Qf6




26.Bc4! Rxc4 27.Rxg7†! Qxg7 28.Rg1 Qg6! 29.Rxg6† hxg6 30.Bxe5 Rc6
Black will make a draw with counterplay against the white king, although the position still looks rather uncomfortable.

16.Nc6 Rc8 17.Nxe7† Qxe7 18.Qa5 Rc6

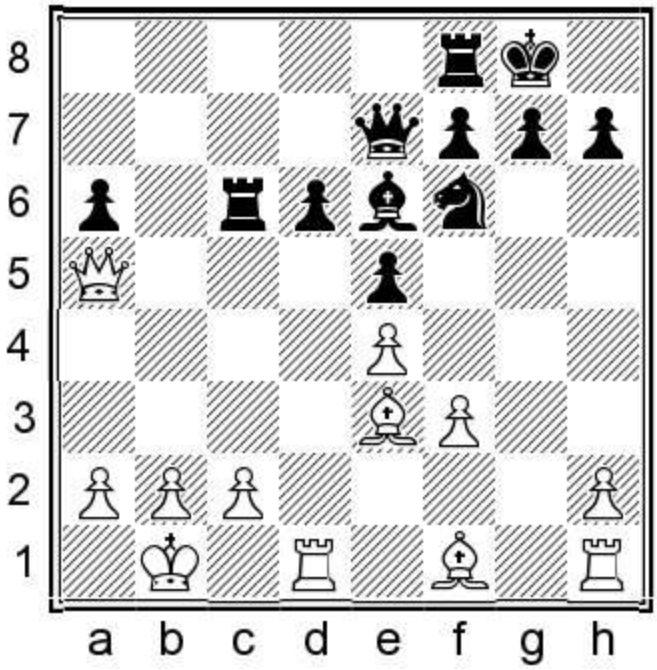
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19.Kb1!
I strongly prefer this prophylactic move. Black's counterplay is mainly down the c-file and White's chances are mainly on the queenside, as I see it.

White has also tried:
19.Rg1
But it is clear from practical experience that Black equalizes with accurate play.
19...Rfc8 20.Kb1
20.c3 Nd7 21.Bg5 f6 22.Bh6 g6 23.Be3 was the recommendation by Alexander Khalifman. But practical play has not been kind to this suggestion. In a dozen games, only Black has been able to squeeze out a few wins.
20...d5! 21.Bg5
21.b3 d4 22.Bc1 Nd7 23.f4 Rxc2! 24.f5 Bxb3 25.axb3 Nc5 has led to draws in five games. A possible line could be: 26.Bc4 Rxc4 27.bxc4 Qb7† 28.Bb2 Qxe4† 29.Ka2 Qc2 30.Qb4 a5 31.Qb5 a4 32.Rc1 Qxh2© In practical play this is far from over, but White has no advantage according to Stockfish.
21...dxe4
21...d4? 22.f4!± Topalov – Grischuk, Monte Carlo (blindfold) 2011.
22.fxe4 Kh8 23.Bd3 h6
Black has had no problems whatsoever in a dozen games.

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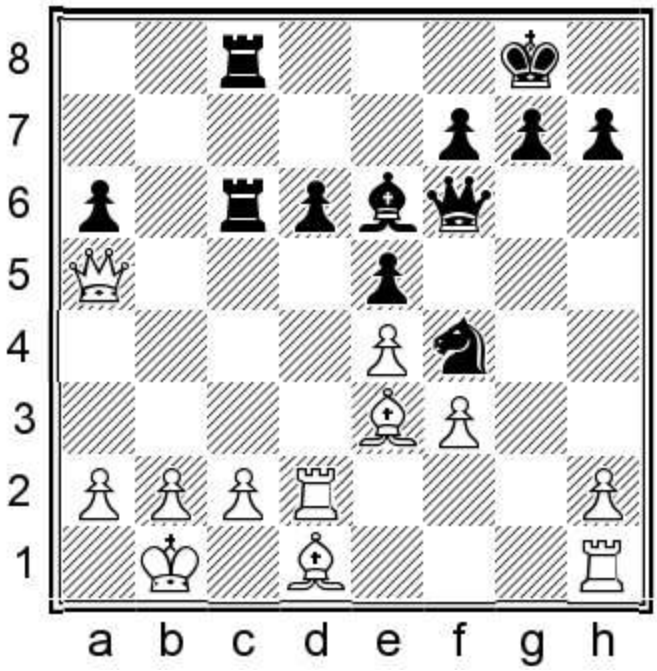


19...Nh5
Other games have continued:

19...d5? 20.exd5 Nxd5 21.Rxd5 Bxd5 22.Qxd5 Rd6 23.Qe4 Rd1† 24.Bc1 Qg5 25.f4 Qxf4 26.Qxf4 exf4 27. Bg2± White won easily in Robson – Troff, Saint Louis 2015.

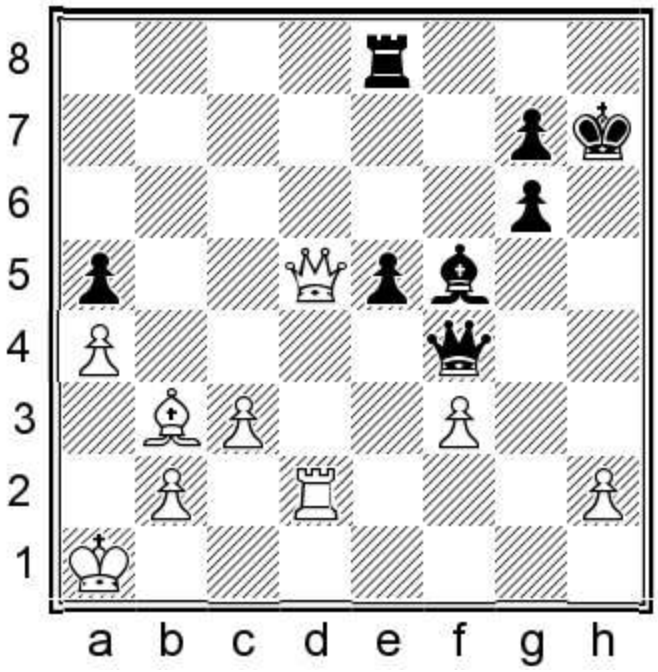
19...Rb8 20.Rg1 Qb7 21.b3 Ne8 22.Rg2² Serafim – Da Maia, email 2007.

19...Rfc8 20.Rd2 Nh5 21.Rg1
21.Be2 I like this move even more than Giri's choice, although he was very close to winning his high-level encounter. 21...Nf4 22.Bd1 Qf6 (22...Qb7 23.h4 h6 24.h5 Kh8 25.b3² has been played in two correspondence games. The score for White is one each – one win, one draw.)



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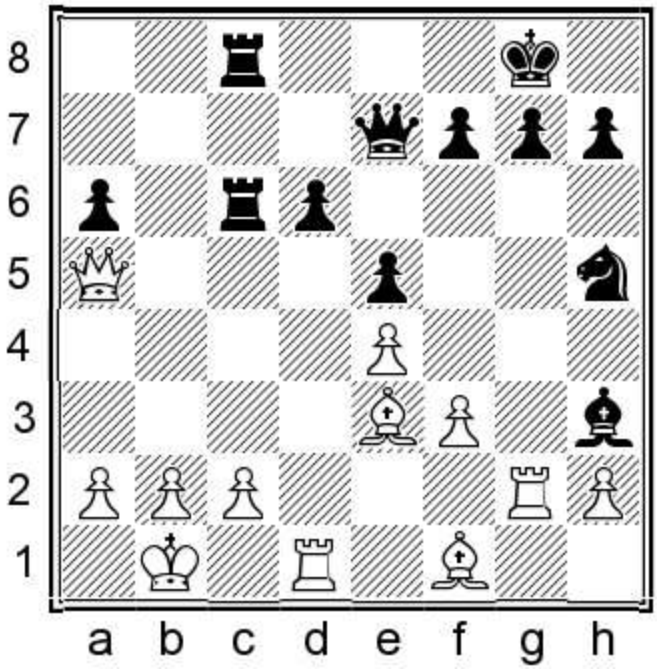
23.c3 This modest set-up is very attractive. 23...Nh3 24.Ka1 h6 25.Qa3 Bc4 26.b3 Be6 27.c4² Zugrav – Nataf, email 2016.
21...Qh4
21...Qf6 22.Be2 Nf4 23.Bd1² happened in a few email games that White won. It may not look much, but Black has no active play whatsoever.
22.Be2 Nf4 23.Bd1²
White has an edge, which grows rapidly after the following move:
23...f5?! 24.exf5 Bxf5 25.Ka1 d5 26.c3 Rg6 27.Rxg6 hxg6 28.Bxf4 Qxf4 29.Qxd5† Kh7 30.Bb3 a5 31.a4 Re8




Up to this point Anish Giri has played perfectly, but here he fails to find the right path.
32.Ka2??
32.Qb5!+– would have consolidated.
32...Be6 33.Qc6 Bxb3† 34.Kxb3 Rb8† 35.Kc2 Rxb2†!=
The draw was inevitable in Giri – Vachier-Lagrave, Saint Louis 2016.

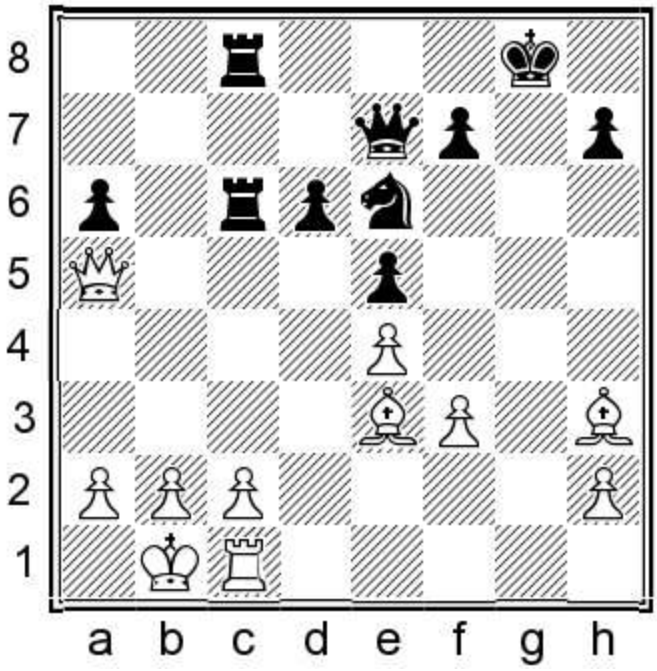
20.Rg1 Rfc8 21.Rg2 Bh3

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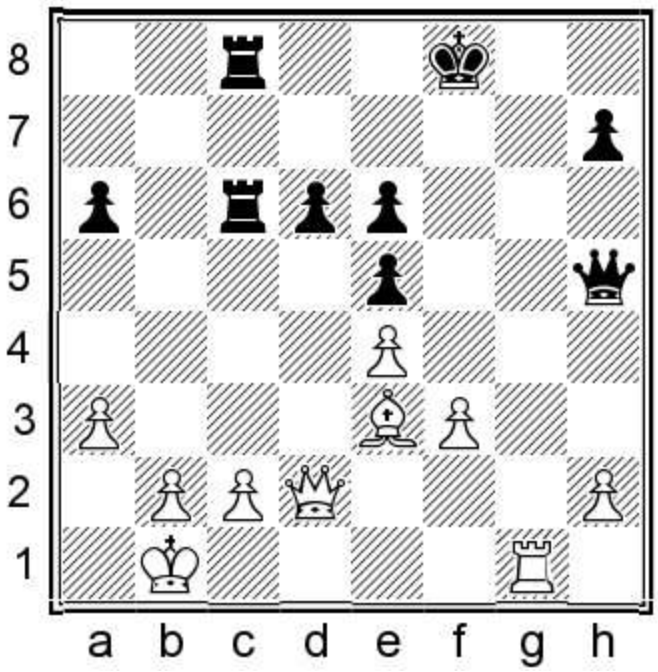
This position has occurred in two email games. White is probably better after a noncommittal move, but he is doing brilliantly after:

22.Rxg7†!! Nxg7 23.Bxh3 Ne6 24.Rc1!
This is most accurate, although White also eventually won after 24.Rg1† Kh8 25.Rg2 in Baranowski – Borisovs, email 2011.



24...Qh4 25.Rg1† Kf8 26.Bxe6 fxe6 27.Qd2 Qh5 28.a3²
At a low depth, the engines believe in Black; once they go deep, they run away screaming.

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28...Qxf3
Or 28...Ke7 29.Rg7† Ke8 30.Qg2 with a deadly attack.

29.Qd3 Qh5 30.c4 Ke8 31.c5 dxc5 32.Rg8† Ke7 33.Rg7† Kf8 34.Rg3 Ke8 35.Qf1 c4 36.Ka2 R6c7 37.Bd2 Qxh2 38.Rg2 Qh5 39.Bb4 Qh6 40.Rg8† Kd7 41.Ba5 Ke7 42.Rg2 Rc5 43.Bb4 a5 44.Bxc5† Rxc5 45.Qg1 Kd6 46.Rg8 Qf6 47.Ra8 Qe7 48.Qg8 Rc7 49.Ra6† Kd7 50.Qh8 c3 51.Qxe5 c2 52.Qd4† Kc8 53.Ra8† Kb7 54.Qa7† Kc6 55.Qa6† Kc5 56.Qxa5† Kd4 57.Qd2† Kxe4 58.Ra4† Kf5 59.Qf2† Kg5 60.Qh4† Kg6 61.Rg4† Kf7 62. Qxh7† Ke8 63.Rg8† Kd7 64.Qd3† Kc6 65.Qxc2† Qc5 66.Qa4† Qb5 67.Qa8† Rb7 68.Qc8† Kb6 69.Qxe6† Ka7 70.Qe3†
1–0

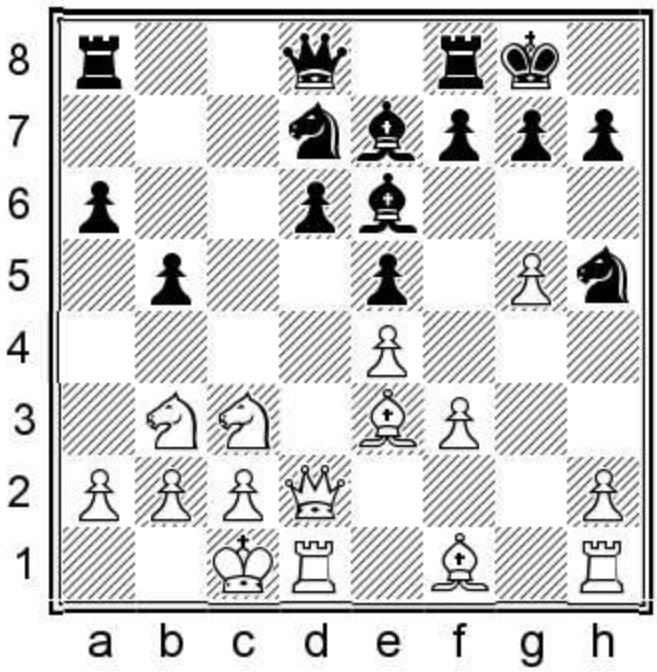
12...b4 was once one of the main lines of opening theory. 13.gxf6 is not a refutation, but the ensuing structure is impractical for Black – equality may be promised by the engines, but results show that it is elusive in practice.

GAME 44

Vyacheslav Lyukmanov – Marco Cusicanqui
email 2016

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 Nbd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5 Nh5

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This is the trendiest line in correspondence chess right now. Mainly because it is a mess and the computers have problems evaluating the positions correctly. We know this because the computer will give a position a 0.00 evaluation at a ridiculous depth like 57 or something (I have done my homework) and still White wins one correspondence game after the other.
I suppose the Black players go for this line because the computer does not find any advantage for White. It is only later on they realize that positions with no counterplay and passive pieces are difficult to defend, even with engine assistance.

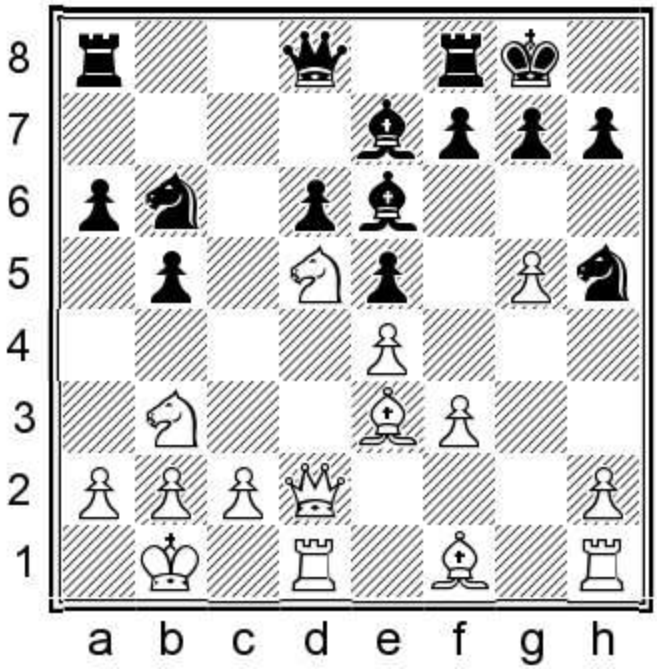
13.Kb1
This is the more relaxed line. The key idea is that this king move always improves White's position, while Black is sort of waiting for White to put the knight on d5.

13.Nd5!? forces Black to give up his bishop. But after 13...Bxd5 14.exd5 f6! the game is not clear at all. Recently there was a big fight between Caruana and Mamedyarov in the 2018 Candidates in this line, where Black was OK from the opening. Caruana could have won this game many times though, so the line should not be entirely abandoned on this account.

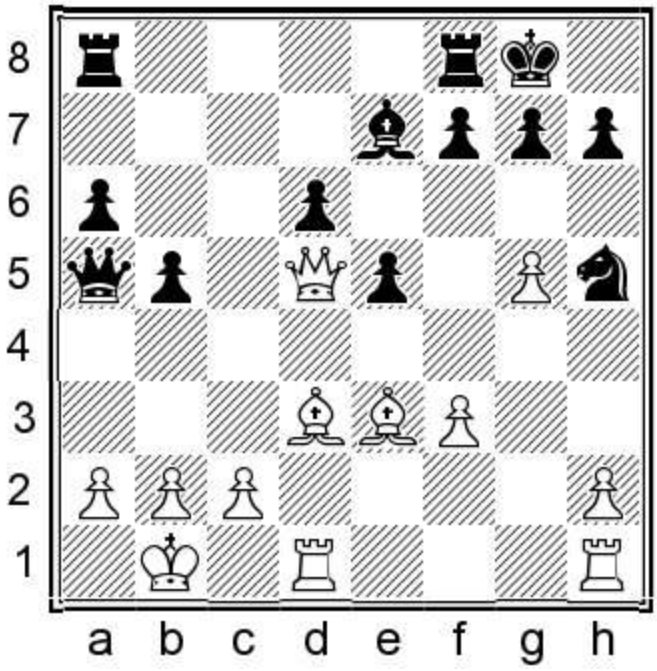
13...Nb6
On the surface it looks desirable to take on d5 with a knight, but I would personally prefer to face the game move rather than 13...Rc8, which we will cover in the next game.

14.Nd5

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14...Nxd5
Taking with the bishop does not make a lot of sense at this point.
14...Bxd5?! 15.exd5 Qc7
Black also got into trouble after: 15...Nc4 16.Bxc4 bxc4 17.Na5 c3 18.Qxc3 Bxg5 19.Nc6 Qf6 20.Bxg5 Qxg5 21.Qa3 Qf6 22.c4! Kh8 23.c5± Karakas – Chomicki, email 2013.
16.Na5 Nxd5 17.Qxd5 Qxa5 18.Bd3²

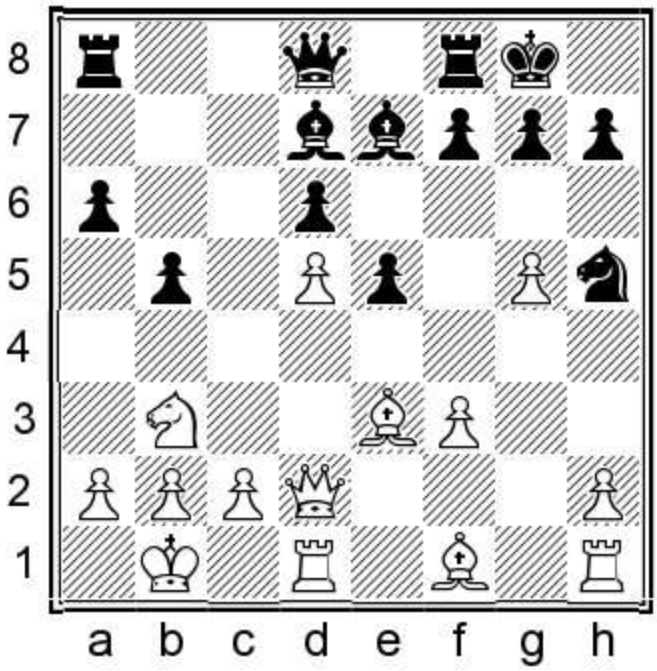


White has sacrificed a pawn but taken control of the light squares: a typical scenario for this variation, and we will see many more examples of it in the pages ahead. The following game is included merely as illustration.
18...Rac8 19.c4 Qd8 20.cxb5 axb5 21.h4 b4 22.Rhe1 g6 23.Ba6 Rb8 24.f4! Nxf4 25.Bxf4 exf4 26.Bc4 Rc8 27.Bb3 Kg7 28.Qd4† f6 29.h5 Rc5 30.h6† Kh8 31.Bd5 Rc8 32.Re6 Qc7 33.Bb3 d5 34.gxf6 Bc5 35.Qxd5 Rfd8 36.Qf3 Rxd1† 37.Qxd1 Rf8 38.Qd5 f3 39.Qxf3 Qh2 40.f7 Qxh6 41.Qd5

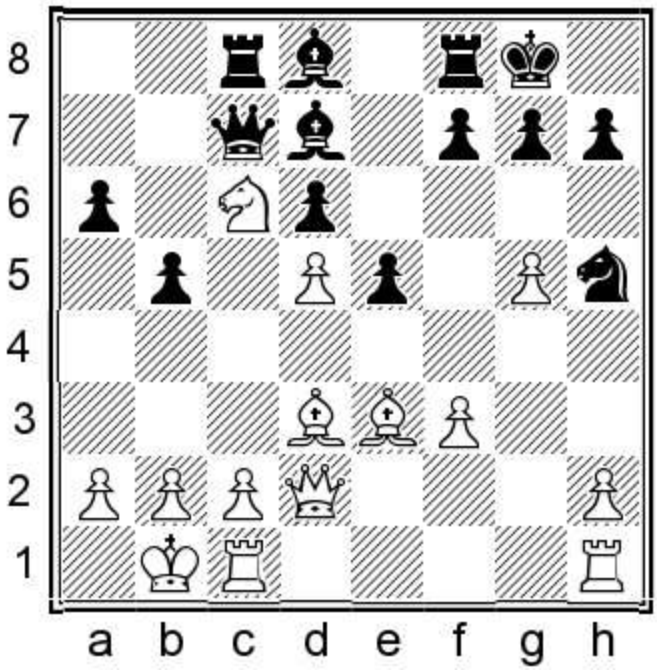
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1–0 Compagnone – Stewart, email 2016.

15.exd5 Bf5
The main alternative is:
15...Bd7
Guarding the c6-square looks natural, but White will be happy to plant his knight there anyway and sac a pawn. What we are really playing for is domination over the light squares. It is important to understand that opposite-coloured bishops are not necessarily a relief for Black; White's unopposed light-coloured bishop can totally dominate the position under the right circumstances.

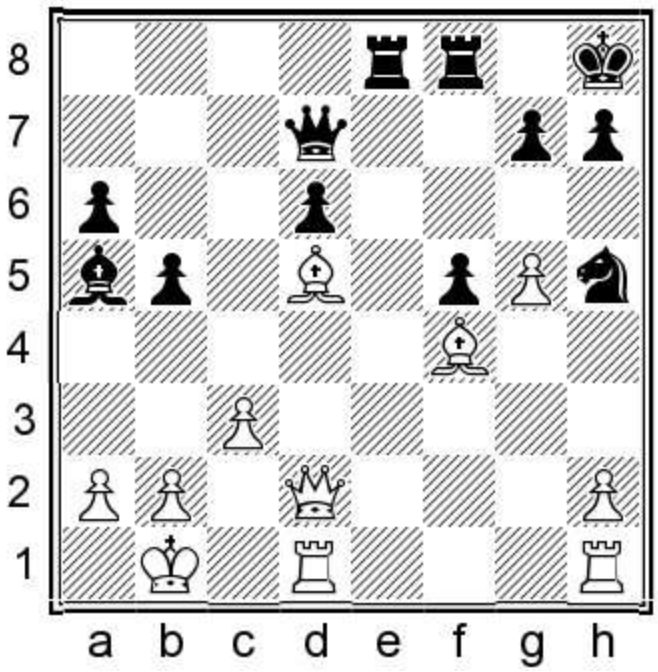



16.Na5! Qc7
Thematic play arises after: 16...Rc8 17.Bd3 Qc7 18.Rc1 Bd8 19.Nc6!

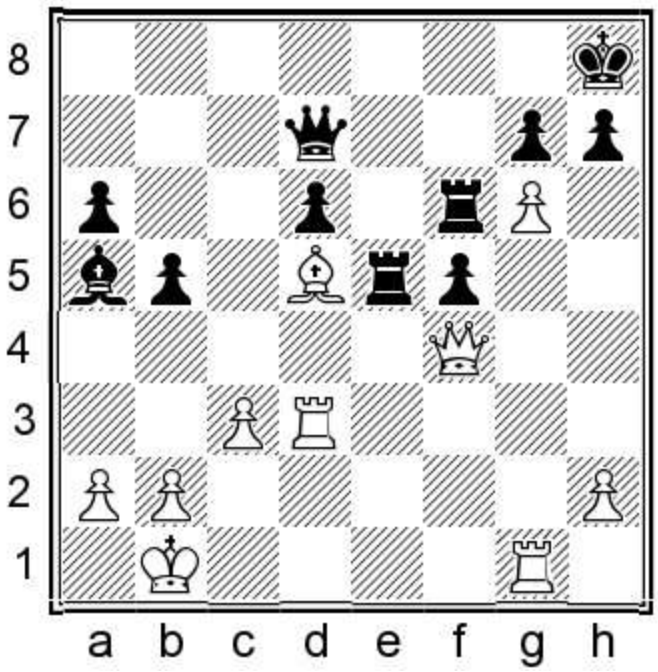



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This is the big idea which we will see again and again. 19...Bxc6 20.dxc6 Qxc6 21.Be4© Qd7 22.Rcd1 f5 23. Bd5† Kh8 24.f4! exf4 25.Bxf4 I am sure that Black can hold this position with perfect play – but this is hard to achieve, even in correspondence chess. 25...Ba5 (25...Nxf4 26.Qxf4 Bb6 27.Rhe1 Rce8 may have been better, but after 28.a3² Black has not solved all his problems.) 26.c3 Rce8 In correspondence chess you can sometimes get really deep ideas, as occurred on the following move:

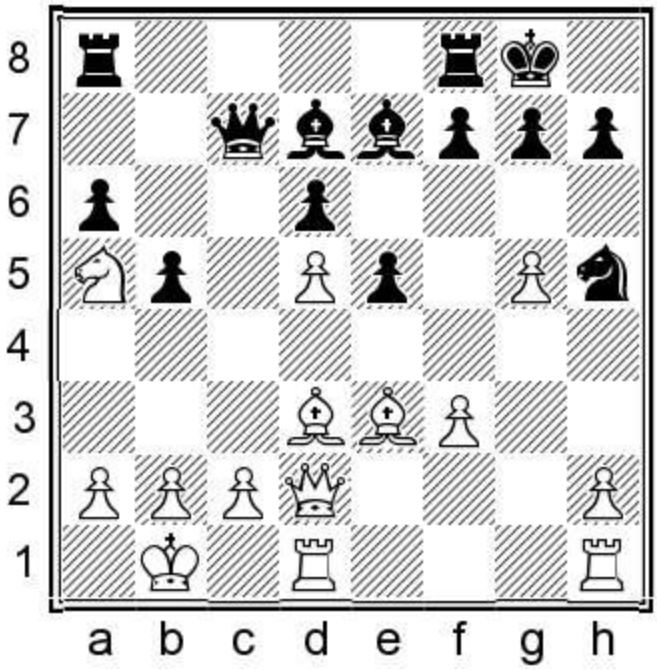


27.g6!! Nxf4 There are no easy choices.(27...hxg6 28.Rhg1²; 27...h6 28.Bf7!±) 28.Qxf4 Re5 29.Rd3 Rf6 30. Rg1±

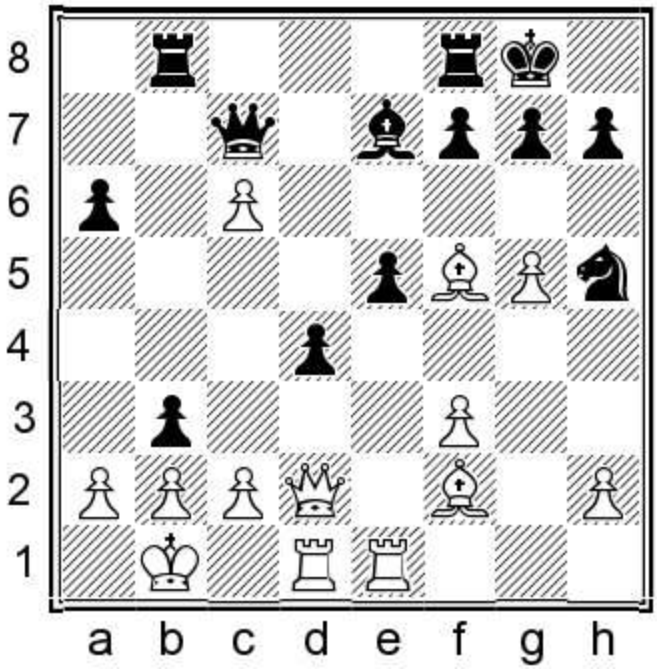


White has an enduring initiative and went on to win in Broniek – Vohl, email 2016.
17.Bd3

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Let’s inspect a few examples from this position after a) 17...Rab8, b) 17...f5 and c) 17...g6:
a) 17...Rab8 18.Rhe1 b4 19.Nc6 Bxc6 20.dxc6 d5 (20...Qxc6 21.Be4 Qc8 22.h4² is our standard dream scenario) 21.Bf5 d4 22.Bf2 b3!?

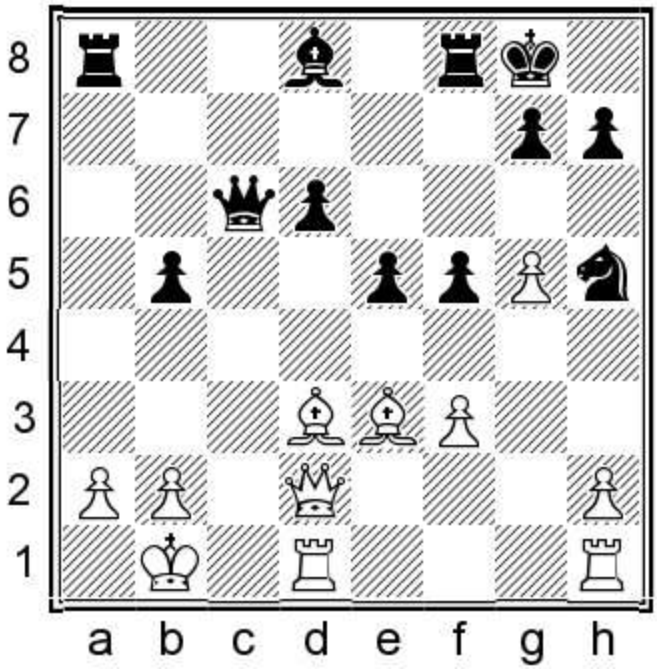


Winning the exchange will prove much less of a success that Black was likely hoping. 23.cxb3! Bb4 24.Qc2 Bxe1 25.Bxe1 g6 26.Be4 Nf4 27.h4 Ne6 28.Qc4± Kitson – Ewan, email 2017. White is in full control and soon the pawns will start rolling.

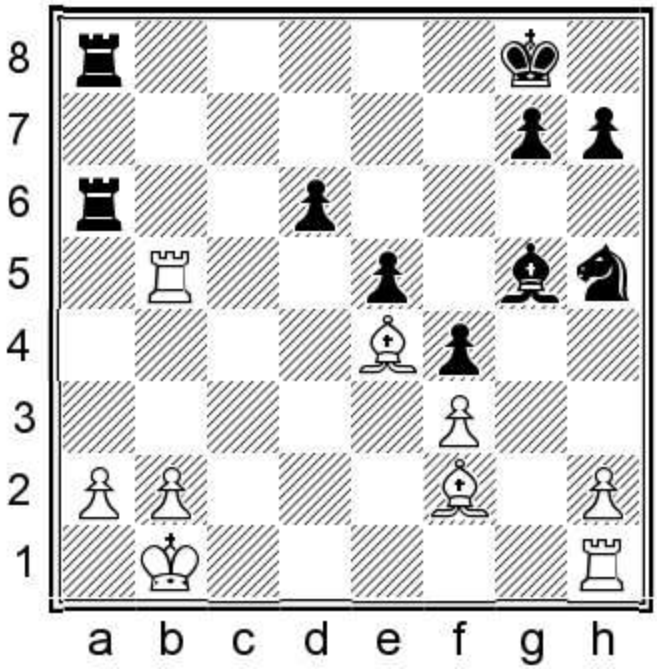
b) 17...f5 18.c4 Bd8
18...f4 19.Bf2 Bd8 happened in Wapniewski – Savoca, email 2017. I think logical play is best: 20.Nc6!N 20... bxc4 21.Rc1! Bf5 (21...Bxg5 22.Rxc4 followed by Nxe5 gives an advantage as well) 22.Bxf5 Rxf5 23.Rxc4 Qd7 24.h4²

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19.Nc6 Bxc6 20.dxc6 Qxc6 21.cxb5 axb5



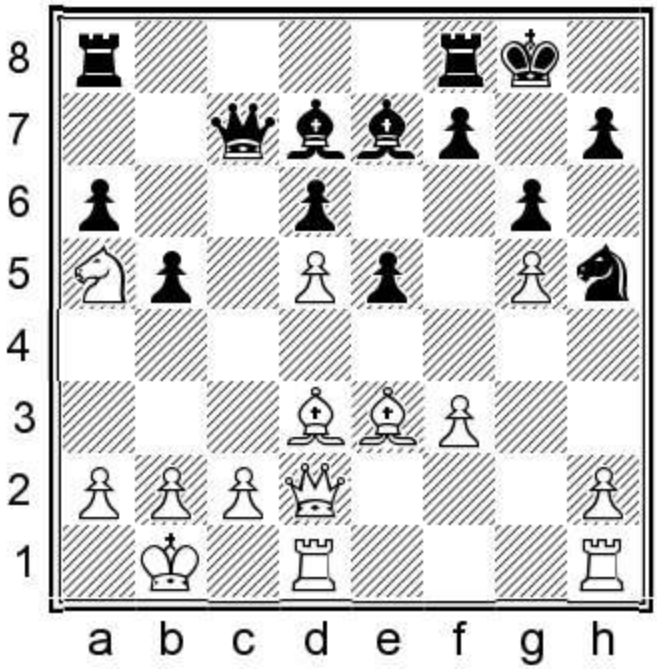
White continues pursuing his thematic plan of taking control over the light squares.
22.Bc2! Ra6 23.Qd5†!± Qxd5 24.Rxd5 f4 25.Bf2 Bxg5 26.Rxb5 Rfa8 27.Be4



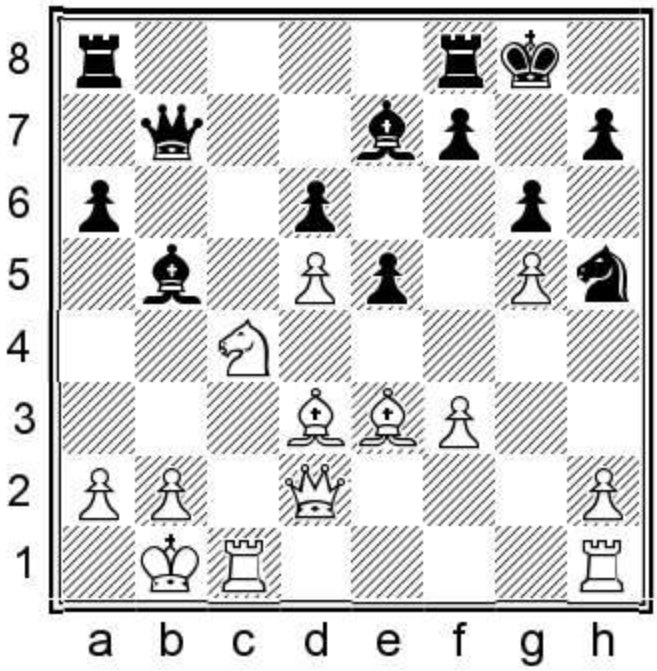
I think correspondence games tended to be shorter in the days when you had to pay for stamps, although the absence of computers made it possible to swindle your opponent from a bad position. Many correspondence games these days seem to last longer because it's so easy to send off an extra move on a server. However, in this position, Black did not waste his opponent's time: 1–0 Lee – S. Jones, email 2017.

c) 17...g6

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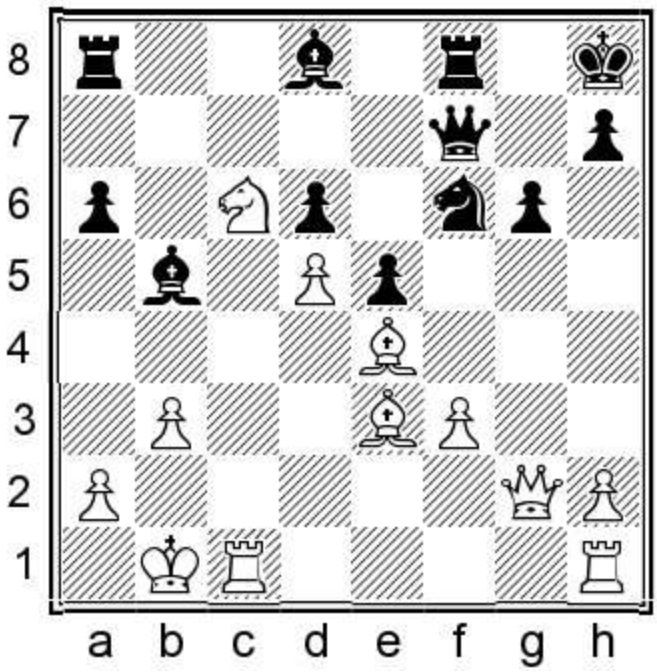
18.c4
18.h4 is also a decent move. One game was a flying success for our team: 18...Rab8 19.a3 Rbe8 Stupid computer moves. 20.Be4 Ng3 21.Rhg1 (21.h5!? was also very tempting) 21...Nxe4 22.fxe4 Bd8 23.b4 Qc8 24. Rdf1± Black had no counterplay whatsoever in Anokhin – Offenborn, email 2016.
18...bxc4
After 18...Rab8 19.cxb5 Bxb5 it is not difficult to find 20.Be4!, which takes control of the c6-square. 20...f5 21. gxf6 Nxf6 22.Nc6 Bxc6 23.dxc6 Kh8 24.Rc1² with a lasting positional advantage, Compagnone – Bolignano, email 2017.
19.Rc1 Bb5 20.Nxc4 Qb7



21.Be4 f5 22.gxf6 Nxf6 23.Qg2 Kh8 24.Na5
White also had success with 24.a4 Bd7 25.Na5 Qb8 26.Nc6² in Zawadka – Wojcik, email 2017.

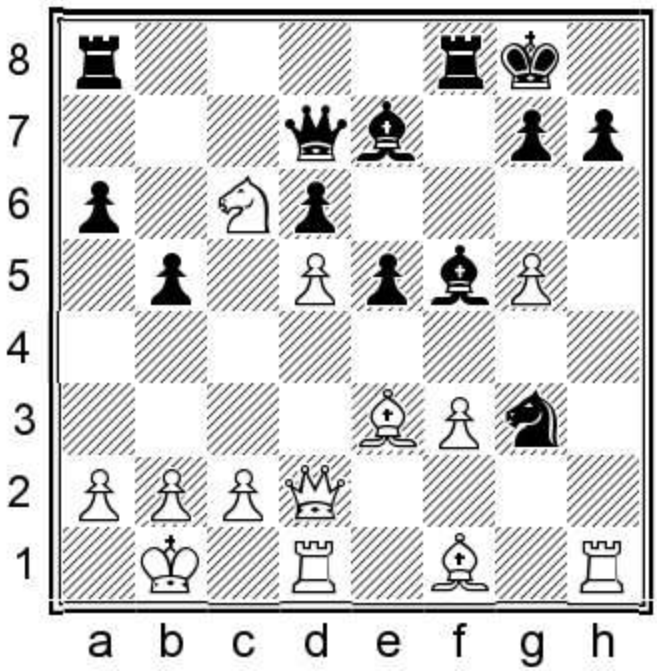
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24...Qd7 25.b3 Bd8
White was also doing well after 25...Rf7 26.h4 Bf8 27.Rc3 Rc8 28.Rxc8 Qxc8 29.Rc1 Rc7 30.Nc6² in Doderer – Jarecki, email 2016.
26.Nc6 Qf7



27.Nxd8 Rfxd8 28.Bg5 a5 29.h4 a4 30.b4 a3 31.h5²
Bergmanolson – Bolignano, email 2017.

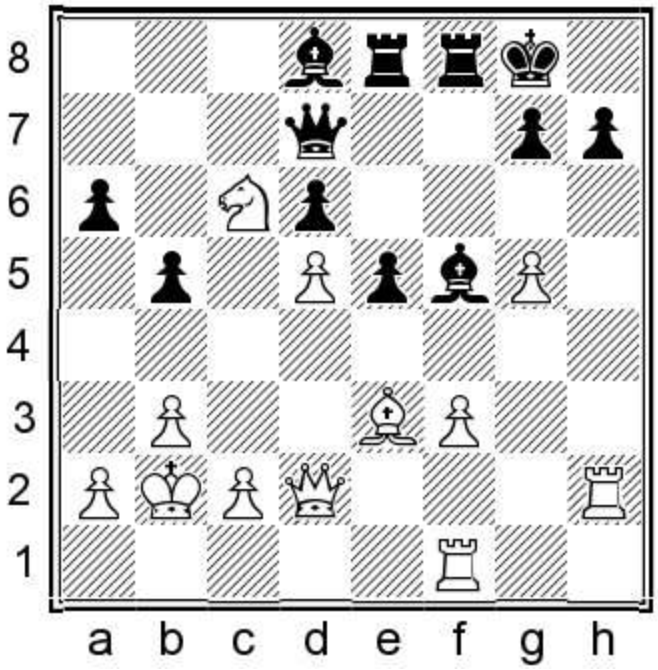
16.Na5 f6 17.Nc6 Qd7 18.h4 fxg5 19.hxg5 Ng3



20.Rh2!
This is a more useful square than g1. To fight for equality, Black has to take on f1 anyway.

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20...Nxf1 21.Rxf1 Rae8 22.b3 Bd8 23.Kb2²

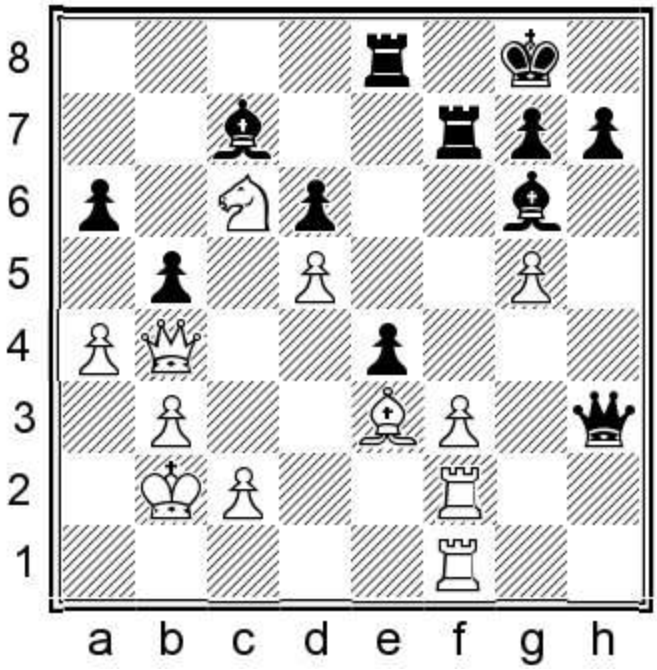


White is better, no matter what the over-confident engines believe. White has three active plays: f3-f4, Qa5 and Ra1 followed by a2-a4. All of them can put Black under pressure. His position is difficult to hold together in practice, even in correspondence chess.

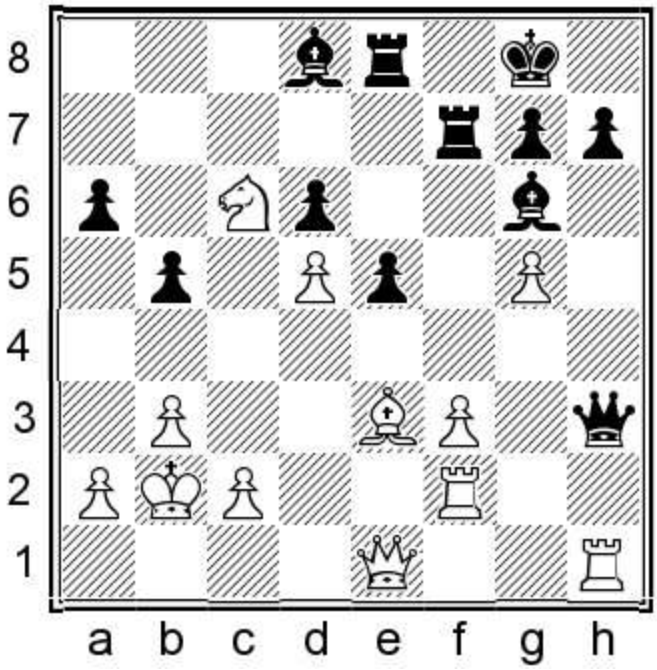
23...Bg6 24.Rhf2 Qh3
Heading for opposite-coloured bishops is not necessarily an escape route for Black. White is better after: 24...a5 25.Nxa5 Bxa5 26.Qxa5 Ra8 27.Qb4² In Rallabandi – Sherwood, email 2017, White won on move 54.

25.Qe1 Rf7 26.Rh1
White was also able to press in another game, after: 26.Qb4 Bc7 27.a4 e4

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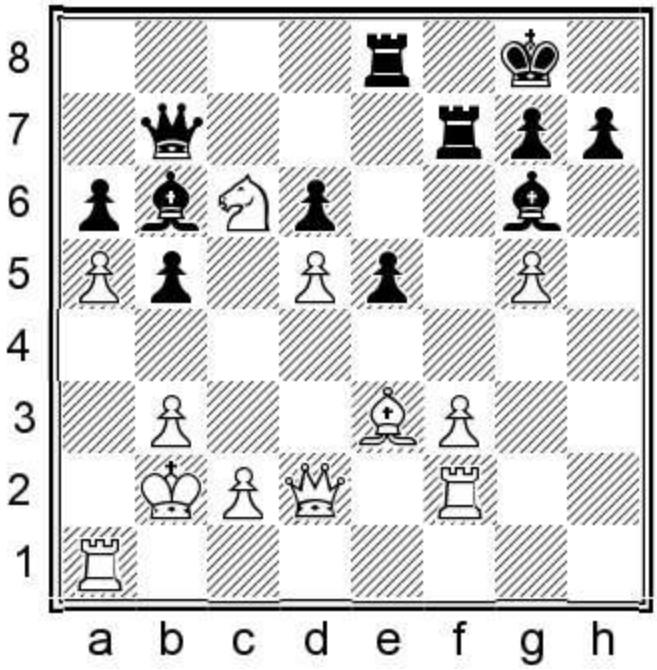
28.a5!² In Dunlop – Nekhaev, email 2017, Black managed to draw the game, but this is not guaranteed to be replicated.



I will not annotate the rest of the game deeply, as the opening is over, but I want to include it anyway, to show White's potential.

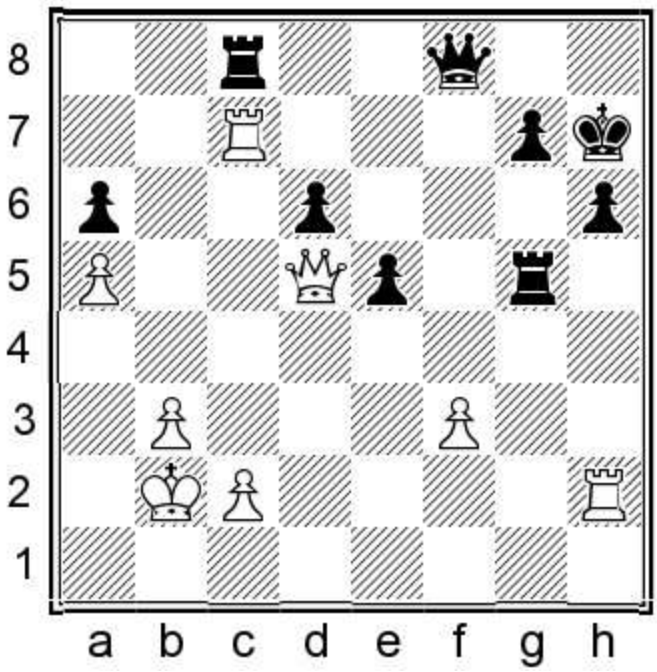
26...Qg3 27.Rg1 Qh3 28.Rgf1 Bc7 29.Rh1 Qd7 30.Qd2 Bd8 31.Ra1 Qb7 32.a4 Bb6 33.a5!

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33...Bxe3
33...Bd8 34.f4 exf4 35.Rxf4 Rxf4 36.Bxf4 Qd7 37.Re1 would also see White on the path to victory.

34.Qxe3 Qd7 35.Qb6 Ra8 36.Re1 Rf4 37.Re3 Qf7 38.Rh2 Qf8 39.Rc3 b4 40.Re3 Rf5 41.Qxb4 Rxg5 42.Qb7 h6 43.Rc3 Kh7 44.Ne7 Bf7 45.Rc7 Re8 46.Nc8 Bxd5 47.Qxd5 Rxc8



48.Rxh6†! Kxh6 49.Qe6† Kh7 50.Rxc8 Qxf3 51.Rd8 Rg6 52.Qc8 Rf6 53.Qxa6 e4 54.Qc4 Rg6 55.Qg8† Kh6 56.Qh8† Kg5 57.Rf8
1–0

12...Nh5 is the current main line in correspondence chess; with good reason, but 13...Nb6 is impractical, it seems. The weakness of the c6-square is the dominating positional feature. Whether Black is objectively OK or

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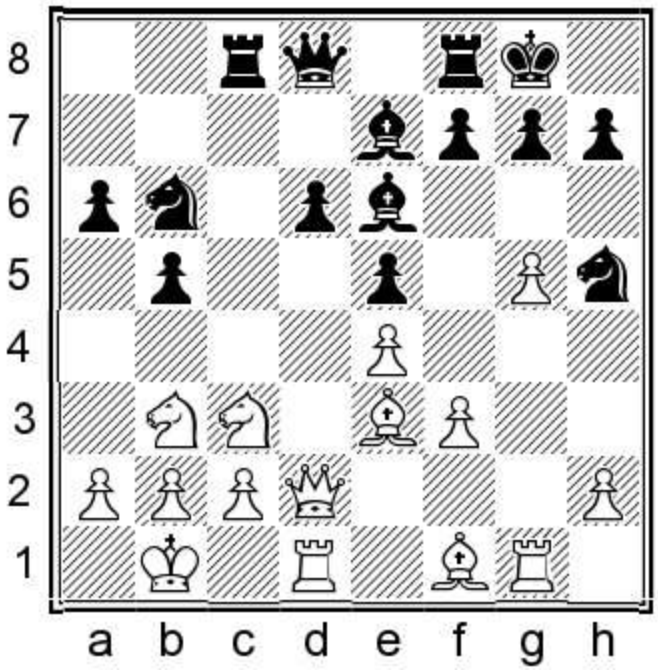
not is less relevant than White's pleasant play in practice.

Now let's move on to the more challenging 13...Re8.

GAME 45

Peter Svidler – Sanan Sjugirov
Loo 2014

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 Nbd7 11.g4 b5 12.g5 Nh5 13.Kb1 Rc8 14.Rg1! Nb6

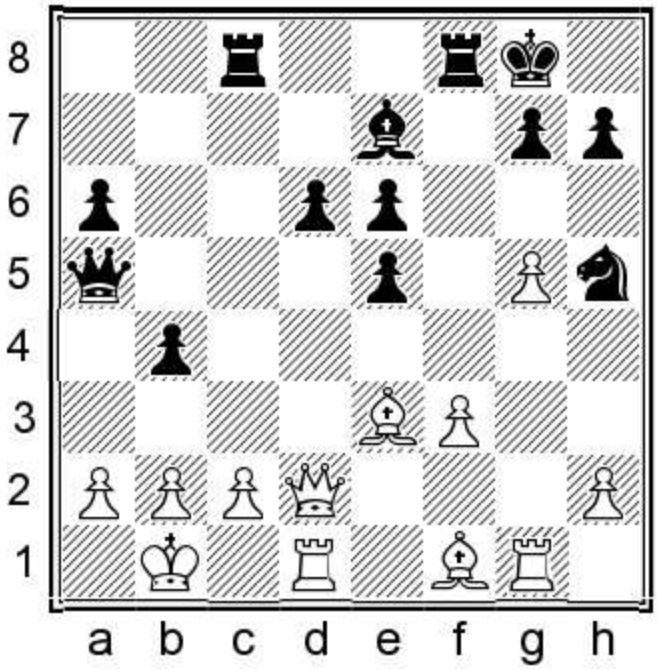


15.Na5
I also spent some time analysing 15.Qf2!? Nc4 16.Bxc4 bxc4 17.Nc5, which could be a future direction. But as it is quite different in character from the main line, I decided to let it be.

15...g6
The most solid option.

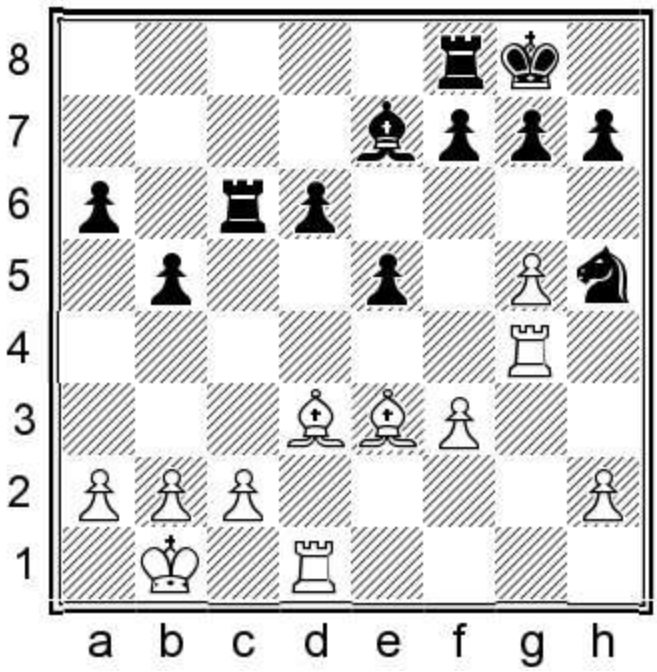
15...b4? is premature on account of: 16.Nd5! Nxd5 17.exd5 Qxa5 18.dxe6 fxe6 (18...g6?! 19.exf7† Kxf7 was Majhi – Zepeda, Hoogeveen 2015, when 20.a3!N 20...Rb8 21.Rg4! would have given White a totally winning position.)

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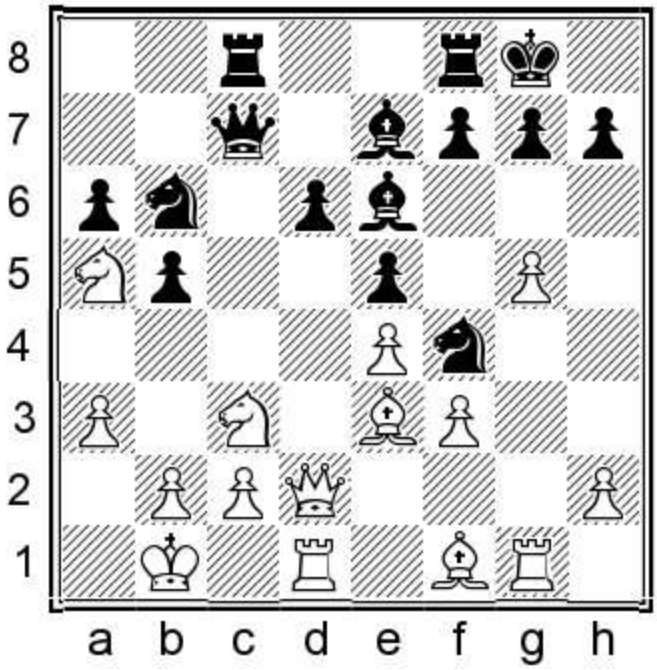
19.Bh3± Black is in trouble, for instance: 19...Kf7? 20.g6†! hxg6 21.Qg2 White wins.

15...Qc7 introduces us to the following fantastic pawn sacrifice: 16.Nd5! Nxd5 17.exd5 Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Qxa5 19.Rg4!? (19.Bd3!?) 19...Qc7 20.Bd3 Qc6 (20...g6 21.a4!?) 21.Qxc6 Rxc6

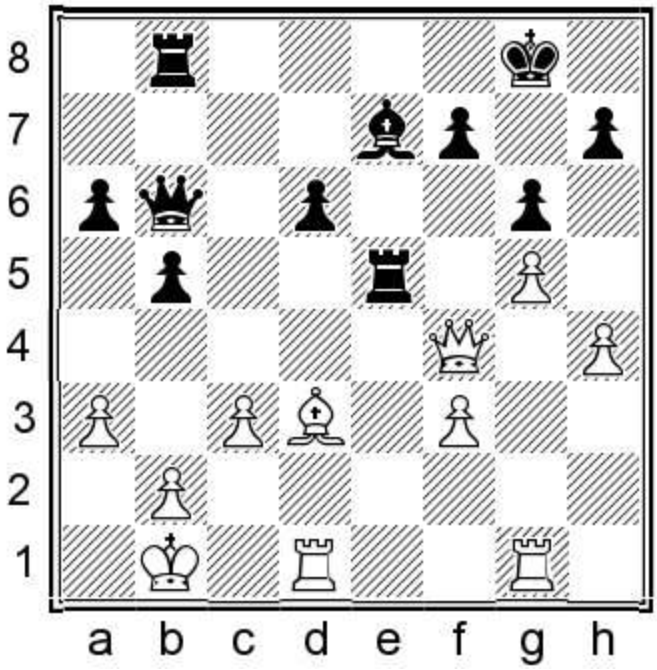


22.a4² Kramnik – Vallejo Pons, Monte Carlo 2004. Black is a pawn up, but his pieces are bad, especially his bishop, and White has a serious intitiative on the queenside. This is thematic for this variation.
After 15...Nf4?! 16.a3! the crazy engine at first wants to return to h5 with the knight! One game went: 16...Qc7

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17.Bxf4! exf4 18.Nd5 Nxd5 19.exd5 Bxd5 20.Qxd5 Qxa5 21.Bd3 g6 22.h4 Rc5 23.Qe4 Re5 24.Qxf4 Rb8 25.c3 Qb6 Dominguez Perez – Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2010.



If White had played 26.Qh2!N followed by f3-f4, h4-h5 and f4-f5, he could have won the game quickly, as the black king is much too exposed. A possible line goes 26...a5 27.f4 Rc5 28.h5 b4 29.cxb4 axb4 30.hxg6 fxg6 31. Rh1 h5 32.a4 d5 33.f5! and Black's position collapses.

16.a3

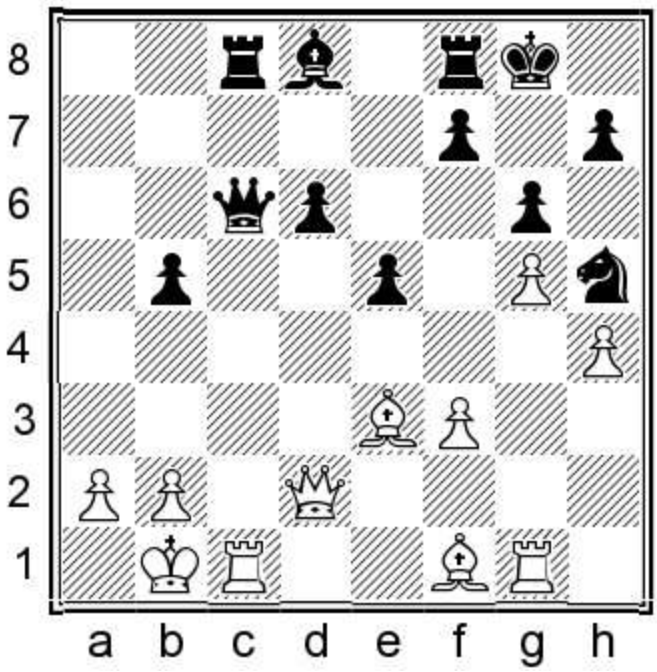
I do not like 16.Nd5?! Nxd5 17.exd5 Bxd5 18.Qxd5 Qxa5 19.c4, on account of 19...Nf4! as in Wojnar – Holroyd, email 2015, where nothing really works for White.

16.h4!?

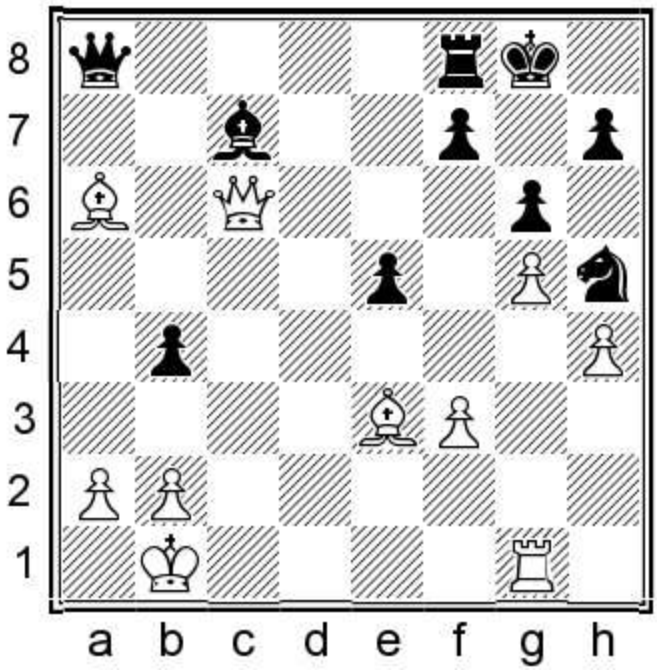
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This makes a lot of sense now that the rook is on g1 and Black does not have the ...Ng3 resource; so it should

be considered as an alternative. Here are a few examples:
16...Qc7!
16...b4 is premature: 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Qxa5 19.dxe6 fxe6 20.Bh3 Ng7 21.h5! Qc7 22.hxg6 hxg6 23.f4! gives White the initiative, as in Morozov – Glushenkov, email 2015, a game he won.
17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Bd7 19.c4 Bd8 20.Nc6 Bxc6 21.dxc6 Qxc6 22.cxb5 axb5 23.Rc1



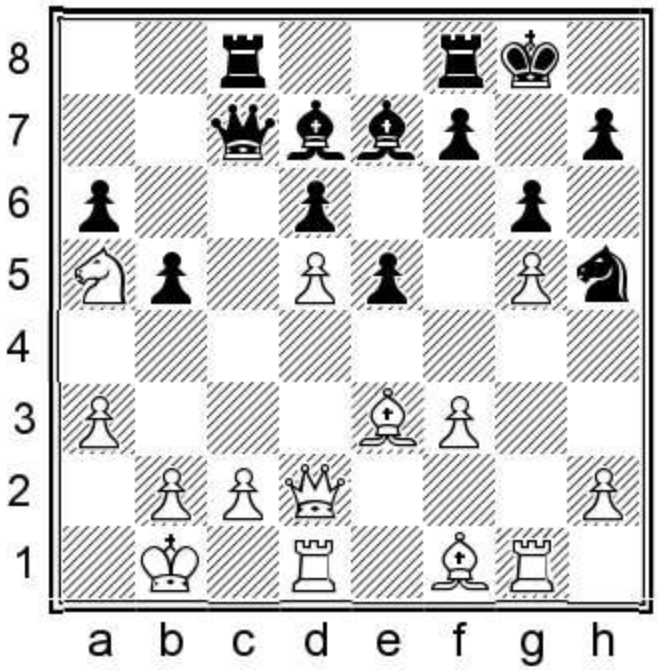
23...Qb7?!
A mistake, but 23...Qxc1† 24.Qxc1 Rxc1† 25.Bxc1² gives an endgame only White can win.
24.Rxc8 Qxc8 25.Qxd6 Bc7 26.Qc6±
White has an overwhelming position and Black soon buckles under the pressure.
26...b4 27.Ba6 Qa8?



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28.Rc1!
1–0 In Sevian – Vazquez, Medellin 2017, Black hated his position so much he resigned. If he had continued, he had no choice but to play 28...Qxc6 29.Rxc6 Ba5, when 30.Bc4 Nf4 31.Bc5 Ra8 32.Rf6 Ne6 33.Bxe6 fxe6 34. Rxe6 is two pawns up for White.

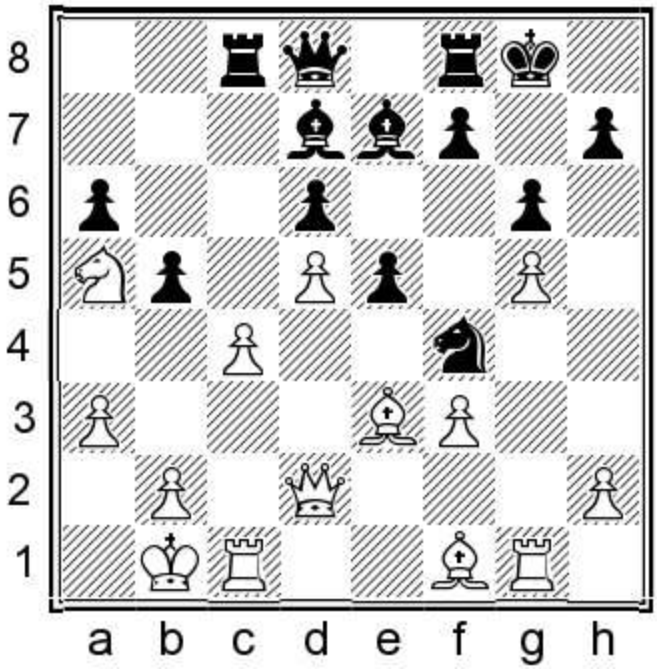
16...Qc7 17.Nd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Bxd5
A respectable alternative is 18...Bd7.



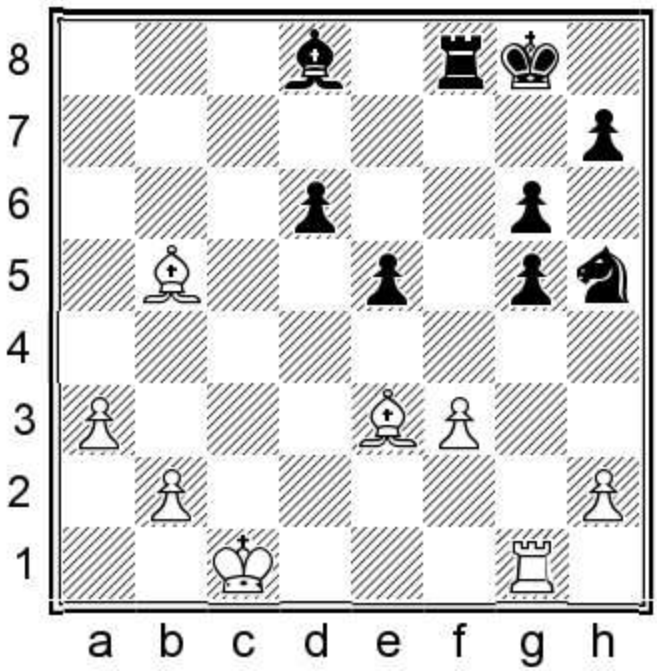

From a practical perspective, I would be more than happy to take White's position, as I find his play far more natural and enjoyable. There are different ways to interpret the position, so I will show some examples and analysis of two options: a) 19.c4!? and b) 19.Bd3.

a) 19.c4!? Bd8
19...Nf4 20.Rc1 Qd8

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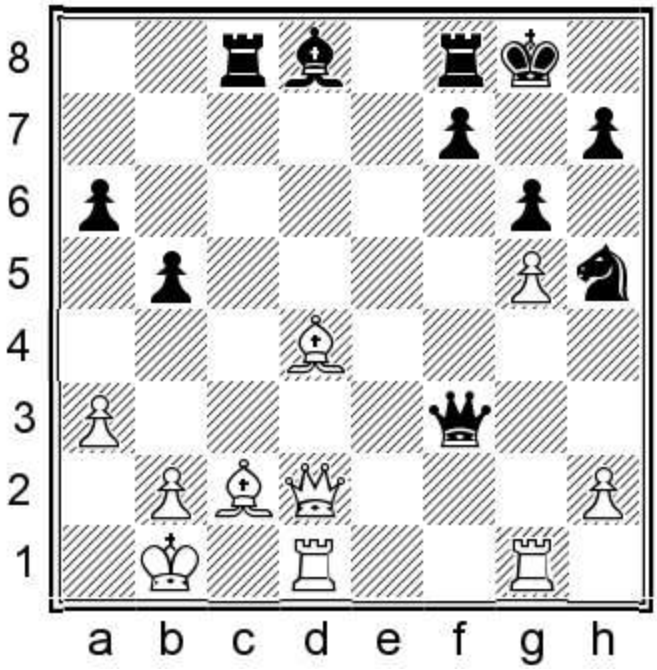
21.Nb7 led to an immediate draw in Straka – Dothan, email 2016.
It is important not to fall for: 21.h4? Bf5† 22.Ka1 Nxd5!! 23.Nb7 Qc7 24.Qxd5 Be6 25.Qe4 bxc4![3]
But I personally think 21.Bxf4!?N 21...exf4 22.h4 Qb6 23.Bd3 looks quite pleasant for White. I would play like this in a tournament game for sure.
20.Nc6 Bxc6 21.dxc6 Qxc6 22.cxb5 axb5 23.Rc1 Qxc1† 24.Qxc1 Rxc1† 25.Kxc1 f6 26.Bxb5 fxg5



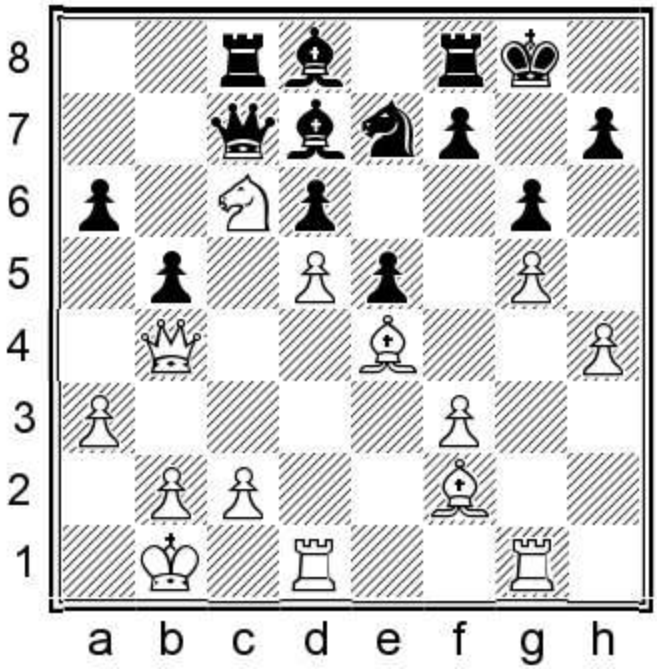
27.Bc6[2]
Tischenko – Audie, email 2012.

b) 19.Bd3 Ng7
19...Bd8 20.Nc6 Bxc6 21.dxc6 d5 22.c3 Qxc6 23.Bc2 d4 24.cxd4 exd4 25.Bxd4 Qxf3 occurred in Dominguez Perez – Vachier-Lagrave, Beijing (rapid) 2014.

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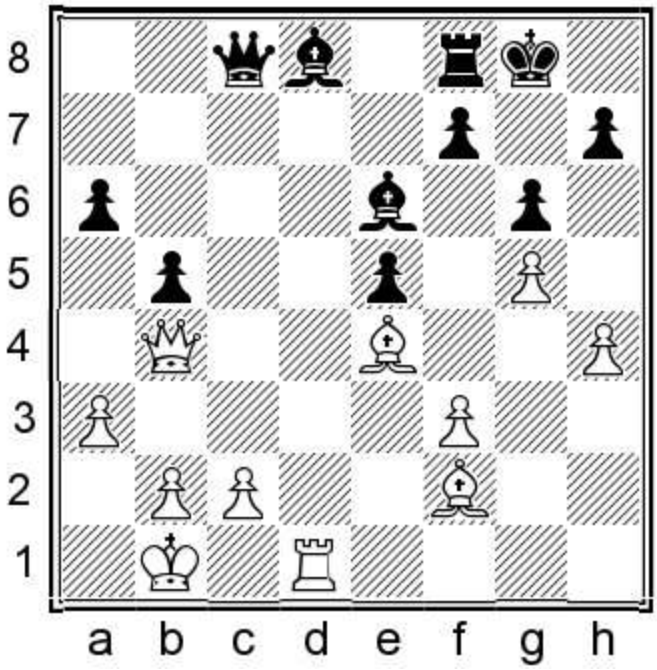


26.Bc3!N² would have been a strong improvement; the bishops are powerful.
20.Be4 Bd8 21.Nc6 Qb7 22.Qb4 Qc7 23.h4 Nf5 24.Bf2 Ne7
Ponomariov – Amonatov, Almaty 2016. At this point the former FIDE World Champion chose not to play:



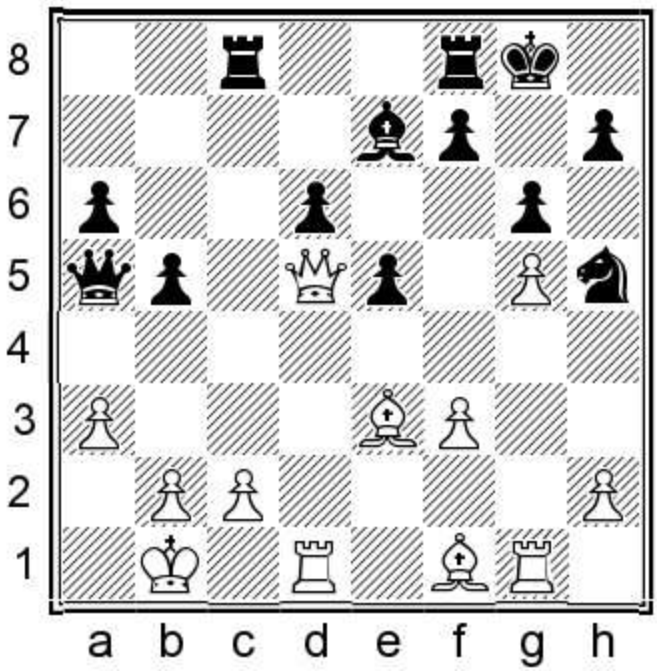
25.Nxe5!N 25...Nxd5 26.Rxd5 dxe5
Presumably Ponomariov misevaluated this position, as in fact White is much better. A possible continuation is:
27.Rgd1 Be6 28.Rc5 Qb8 29.Rxc8 Qxc8

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30.a4! bxa4 31.Bc5! Re8 32.Qxa4 Be7 33.Bxe7 Rxe7 34.b3
With a technically winning position, even though good technique would be required to convert it.

19.Qxd5 Qxa5

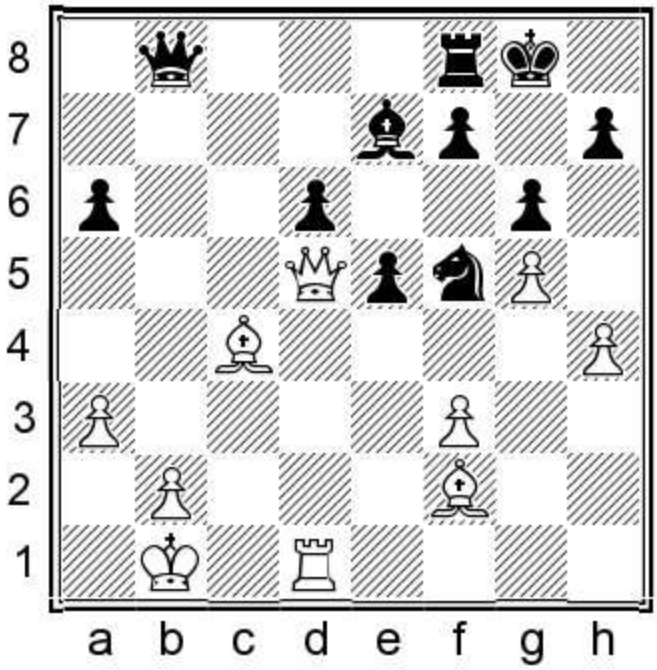


20.Rg4!?
20.Bd3 Qc7 21.Be4© led to a win for White in Keskowski – Siebarth, email 2015. I am not sure if White was objectively better at this stage, but Black's position is evidently not easy to handle, even with the help of a computer, which is good news for us.

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20...Ng7 21.h4 Qc7 22.c4 Ne6

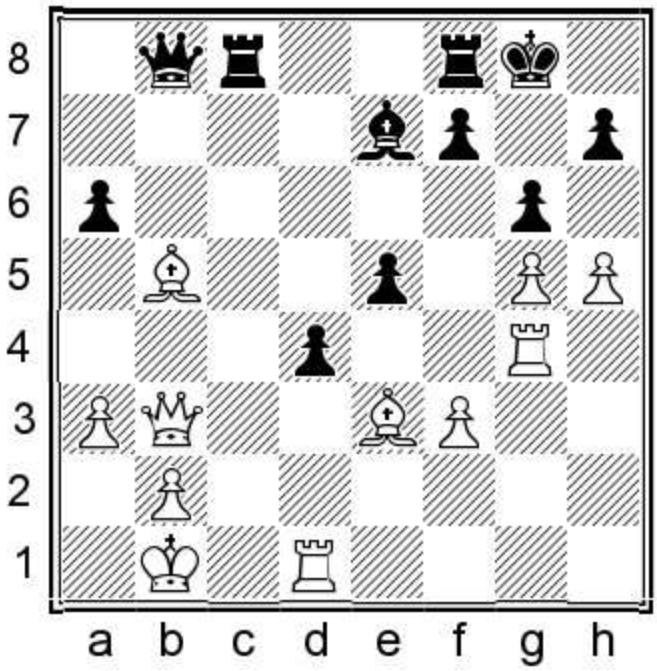
No better is: 22...Nf5 23.Bg1 bxc4 24.Rxc4 Qb8 25.Bf2 Rxc4 26.Bxc4²



White's position is much easier to play, as well as objectively better. Three correspondence games have been played here – White won them all.

23.Bd3² Qb8 24.cxb5 Nc7 25.Qb3 d5 26.h5 Nxb5 27.Bxb5
Naturally White avoids 27.hxg6? Nc3†!.

27...d4?!
27...gxh5 28.Rh4 d4 would have kept the game sharp.



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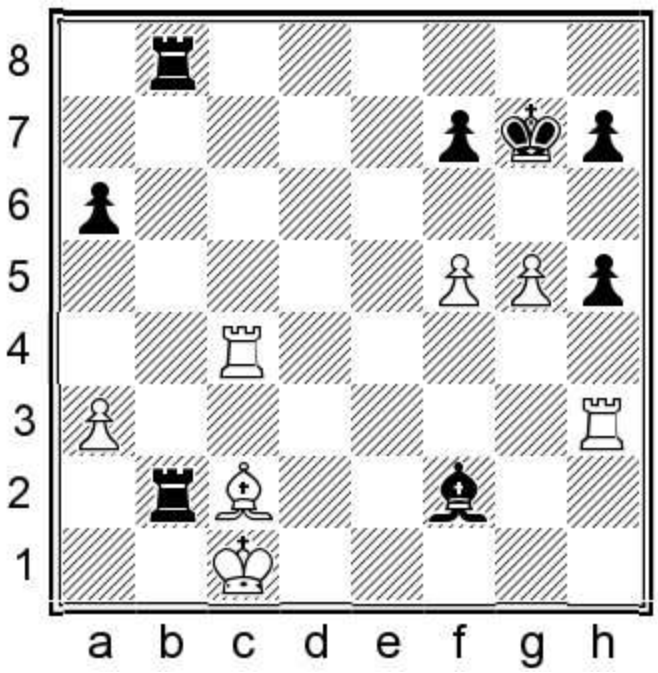
28.Bxd4?!

28.hxg6! hxg6 29.Bxd4 exd4 30.Bc4² was the right path.

28...exd4 29.Ba4 Qxb3 30.Bxb3 gxh5 31.Rgxd4 Kg7
31...Rfd8! would have given Black excellent drawing chances.

32.f4 Rcd8 33.Re4! Bc5 34.Rh1?!
34.f5!² was more precise.

34...Rd2 35.Rc4 Rb8 36.Rh3 Bd4 37.Kc1 Rxb2 38.Bc2 Bf2 39.f5




39...Ra2?
39...R2b5! 40.Rxh5 Kg8 would have kept the balance.

40.f6† Kg8 41.Rb3 Re8 42.Kb1 Rxc2 43.Rxc2 Bh4 44.Rc5 h6 45.gxh6 Bxf6 46.Rxh5 Bd4 47.Rb7
1–0

The above is one of the absolute main lines in the English Attack at the moment. I like White's prospects, but certainly the Sicilian Najdorf is alive and ready for more battles.

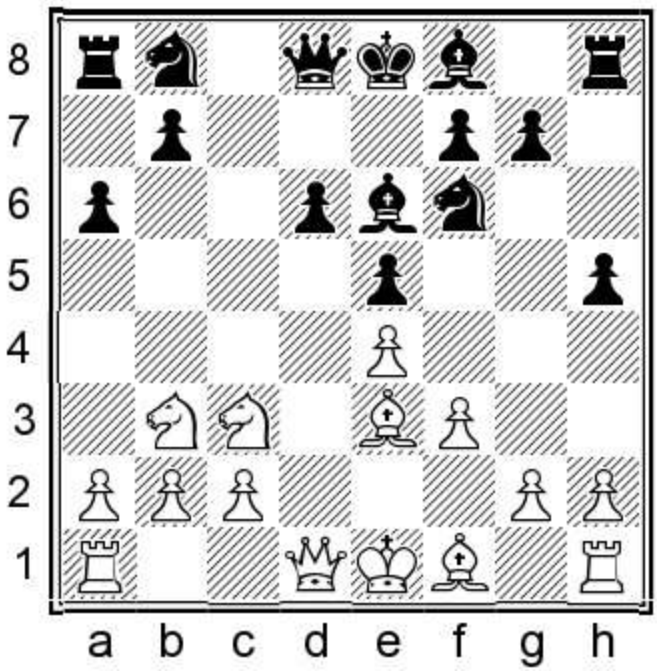
...h5 Lines

GAME 46

Alexander Areshchenko – Saleh Salem
Abu Dhabi 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 Nf6 4.Nc3 cxd4 5.Nxd4 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 h5!?

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An unknown move in the early 1990s, but now as trendy and mainstream as it gets. Naturally the main idea is to stop g2-g4, but there is a secondary idea of a later ...g7-g6 and ...Bf8-h6, exchanging Black's potentially more passive bishop.

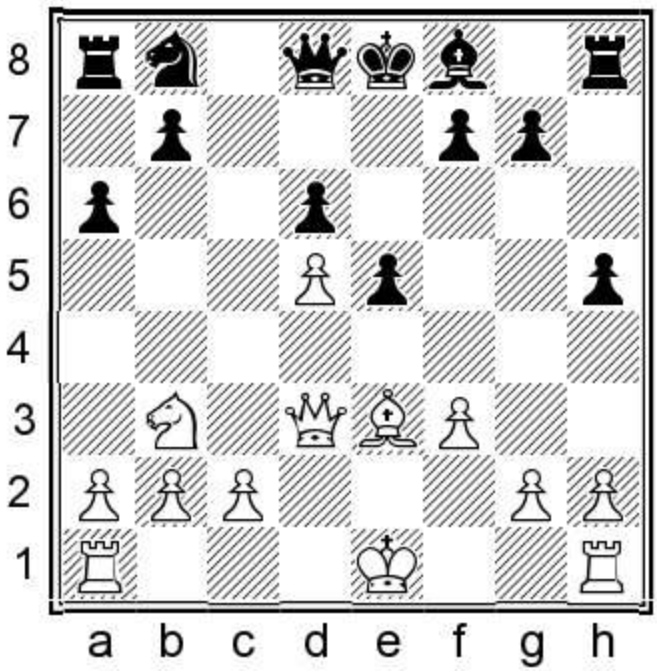
9.Nd5
I like this direct move, making it likely White will gain the bishop pair.
If instead we use the move order 9.Qd2 Nbd7 10.Nd5 then 10...Nxd5 11.exd5 Bf5 becomes more of an option, for reasons we shall see in a moment.

9...Bxd5
The standard choice.

Black needs to take on d5 one way or another, as a move such as 9...Nbd7?! allows 10.c4 cementing the monster knight in place.

The problem with 9...Nxd5 10.exd5 Bf5 is that both White's queen and f1-bishop have not moved, meaning the following plan does not lose a tempo, unlike the related 9.Qd2 variation. 11.Bd3 Bxd3 12.Qxd3

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The position is more pleasant for White after, for example: 12...Nd7 13.0-0-0²

10.exd5 Nbd7 11.Qd2 g6
The most common move order as it's highly flexible.
After 11...Qc7 I suggest 12.Rc1 with a likely transposition to our main line. (Instead 12.c4 a5! would head towards a type of position I recommend we avoid. I will explain more about the move orders in the note to White's 13th move.)

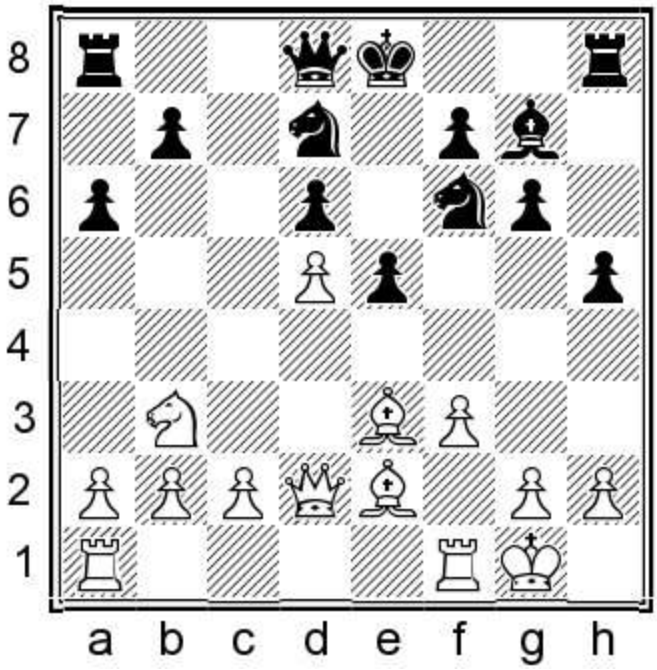
12.Be2
This is the best practical choice to fight for the advantage without mind-bending levels of theory.

Instead 12.0-0-0 Nb6 13.Kb1 is an interesting pawn sacrifice, but both knight captures on d5 are playable, and have been played and analysed intensively.

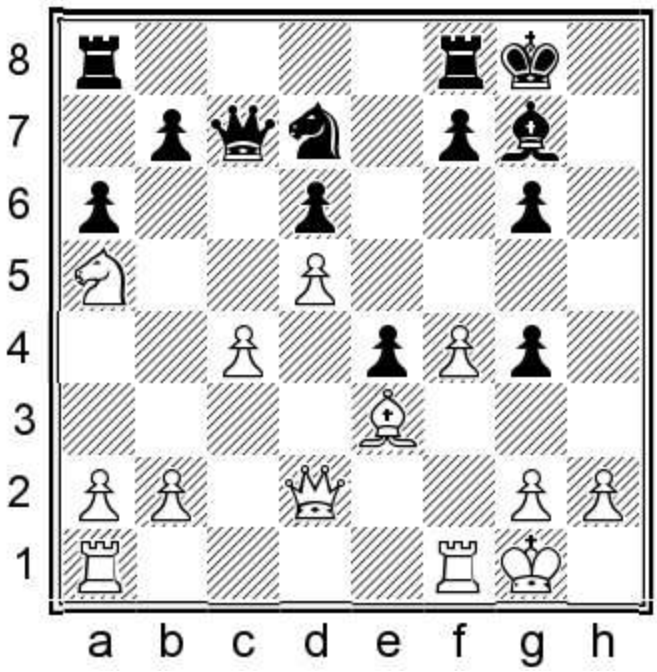
12...Qc7
This is the recommended line in The Sharpest Sicilian 2012.

12...Bg7
Remaining flexible with the queen makes a lot of sense. This is a highly popular line, and leads to tense middlegames fights.
13.0-0
When we see Black's next move, it will be obvious why 13.Na5 is a move I would like to work, but there is a problem line: 13...Qc7 14.c4 e4!÷ If we allow Black to take on f3 then he will have plenty of play along the e-file, after he castles and puts a rook on e8. Exchange sacs on e3 crop up alarmingly, with vicious dark-square play. We want nothing to do with that, but instead 15.f4?! Ng4 is even worse, and highly unpleasant for White.

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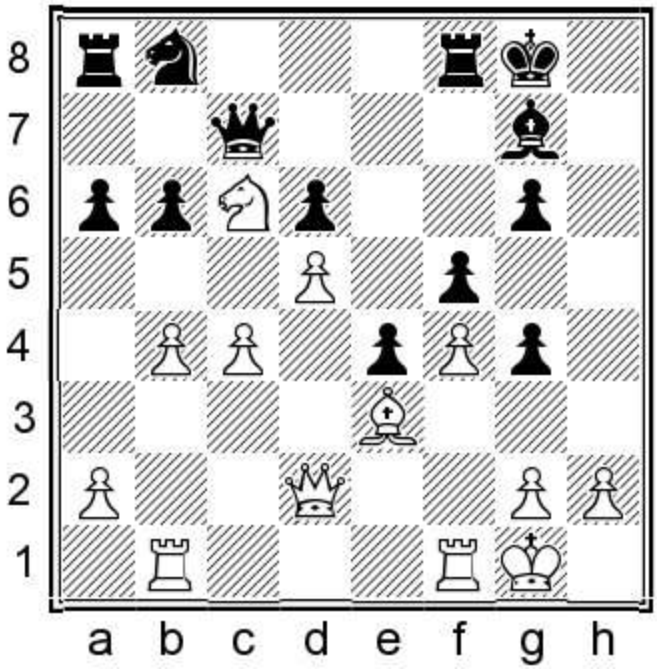


13...b6
Stopping our Na5 expedition.
13...0-0 14.Na5 is a position I would be happy to reach as White. For example: 14...Qc7 15.c4 The a5-knights supports our queenside advance, and of course hitting it with ...b7-b6 allows Nc6. 15...e4 16.f4 Ng4 17.Bxg4 hxg4

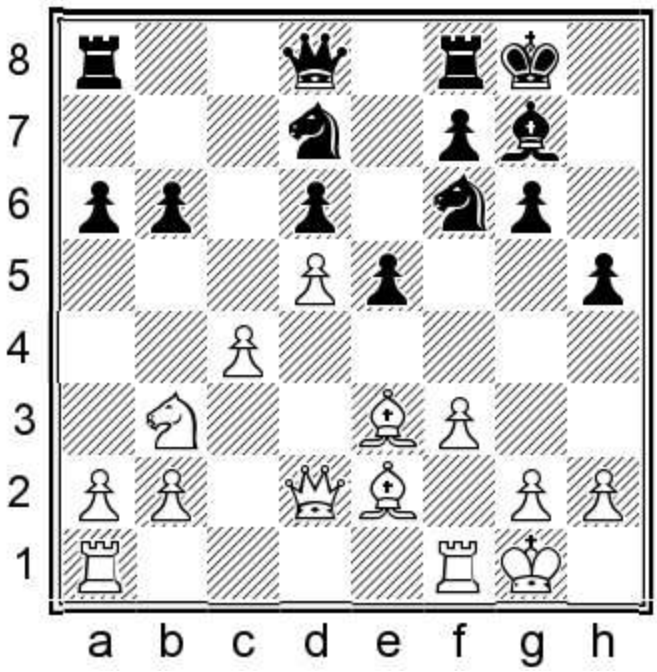


It’s a very different story with no rook on h8 and a king on g8 as a potential target. 18.Rab1!? One of several promising options. White has ideas of b2-b4 and f4-f5; the former is our standard advance, but in this case, it also stops the black knight hopping from c5 to d3, while the latter targets the black king. 18...f5 (Black should try 18...Nc5! when 19.f5 gxf5 20.Rxf5 Nd3÷ looks dangerous for Black, with his exposed king, but perfect defence might allow him to hold the balance.) 19.b4 b6 Otherwise c4-c5 was coming. 20.Nc6 Nb8

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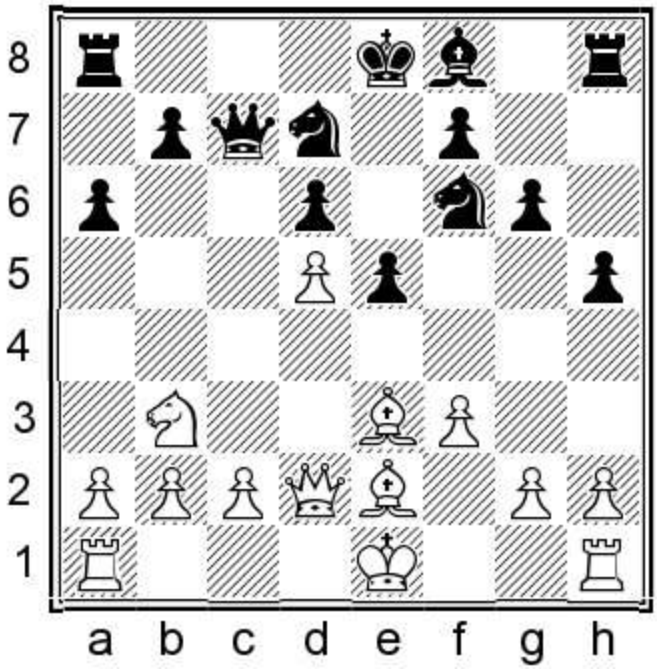


21.c5! Perfect thematic play. 21...bxc5 22.bxc5 Nxc6 23.dxc6 dxc5 24.Qd5† Qf7 25.Qxc5± The c-pawn was mighty in M. Yusupov – Bronnikov, email 2011.
14.c4
There is always room for a less usual approach, so 14.a4!? is interesting.
14...0-0



15.Rac1
The normal way, but there's plenty of scope for experimentation.
For example, 15.Rae1 Rc8 16.Bg5 was Inarkiev – Korobov, Eilat 2012.
15.h3!? is another idea that crops up many places, demanding that Black be ready for g2-g4 plans.
15...a5÷
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In Topalov – Vachier-Lagrave, Paris (rapid) 2017, White tried 16.Qd1 with the idea Nd2-b1-c3-b5, but it's a

mystery to me why he didn't use the more usual route: 16.Na1!N then on to c2-a3-b5.



13.Rc1!
This precise move cuts out Black's queenside ideas and steers him back towards play on the kingside.

Instead 13.c4 allows the line suggested in The Sharpest Sicilian 2012: 13...a5!? 14.Rd1 (14.Rc1 a4 is similar; 14.a4 is uninspiring when our bishop is passive on e2 instead of sitting proud on b5: compare 13...a5?! in the notes below.) 14...a4 15.Na1 Qa5 The exchange of queens combined with Black's gain of space takes a lot of the sting out of White's position.

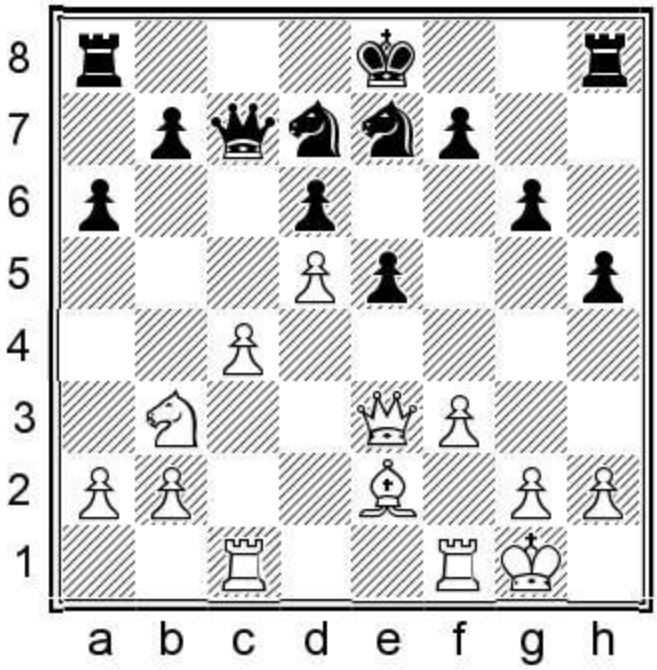
13.0-0? is a move-order blunder. 13...Nb6! Since 14.c4 would be en prise, the only way to save the d5-pawn is the positionally disastrous: 14.Bxb6 Qxb6† 15.Kh1 h4!?µ Black has the vicious idea of ...Nh5-g3†, but even simple play with ...Bh6 is excellent.

13...Bg7
The point of our previous move becomes clear after 13...a5?! 14.a4 when Bb5 will quickly follow, with a powerful and secure outpost.

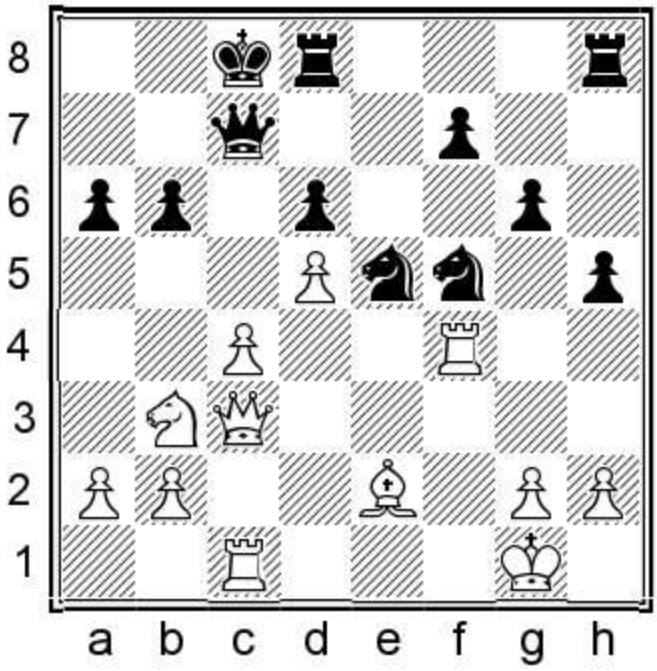
13...Nb6?! 14.c4 now makes no sense for Black, as the knight is misplaced on b6 when c4 is defended.

13...Ng8
Black wants to play ...Bh6 and doesn't mind spending an age to do so.
14.c4!
The most precise move order.
Instead 14.0-0 Ne7!÷ was messy in Topalov – Dominguez Perez, Tromso (ol) 2014, as Black plans ...Nf5, and White cannot play Bd3 as it would hang the d5-pawn.
14...Bh6
On with his plan.
With the d5-pawn secure, 14...Ne7 15.Bd3! is good for White.
15.0-0 Bxe3† 16.Qxe3 Ne7

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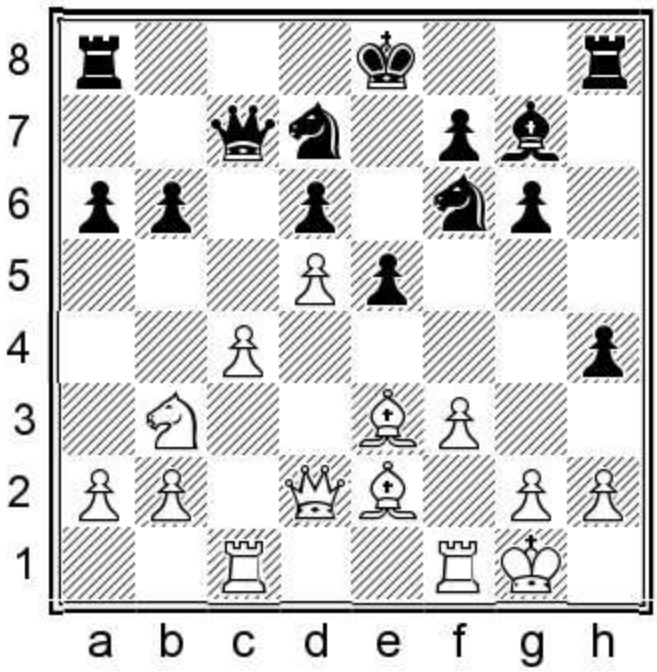
17.f4!*f*
The downside to Black's slow play is that his king has no safe haven. We can follow an email game to illustrate White's play:
17...Nf5 18.Qc3 0-0-0
A temporary solution, but even worse was: 18...0-0?! 19.fxe5 Nxe5 20.Rxf5! gxf5 21.Nd4±
19.fxe5 Nxe5 20.Rf4 b6



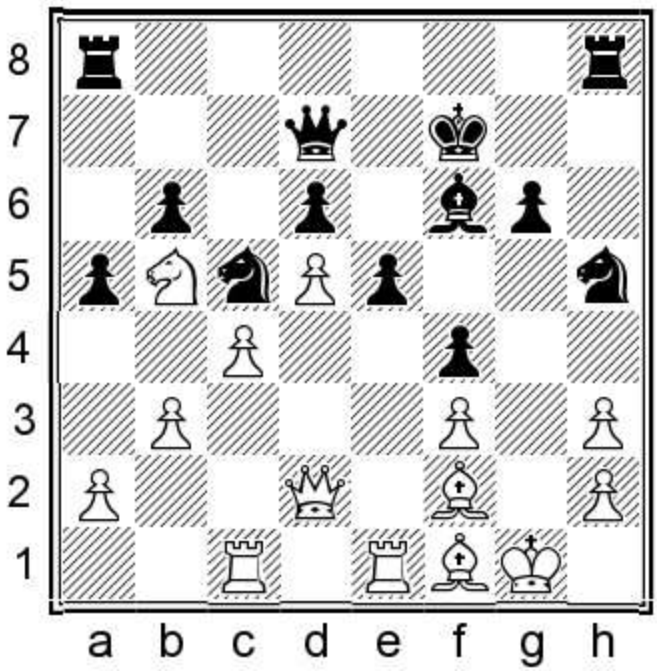
21.Nd4 Nxd4 22.Rxd4
Since it is clear the black king is insecure, 22.Qxd4? Qc5 would be dopey from White.
22...a5 23.a3 Kd7 24.b4*f*
In Roques – Petersons, email 2015, Black had a pretty knight and an ugly king.

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14.0-0 0-0
Almost universally played, but a recent game saw a creative deviation:
14...h4 Hoping to make use of the rook on h8. White met this with our standard plan: 15.c4 b6



16.Na1 A plan we shall become used to. 16...a5 17.Nc2 Nh5 18.Rfe1 Nc5 19.b3 f5 20.Bf1 Kf7 21.Na3 f4 22. Bf2 h3 Black is trying hard to make sense of the rook on h8, but it never really gets into the game. 23.Nb5 Qd7 24.gxh3 Bf6

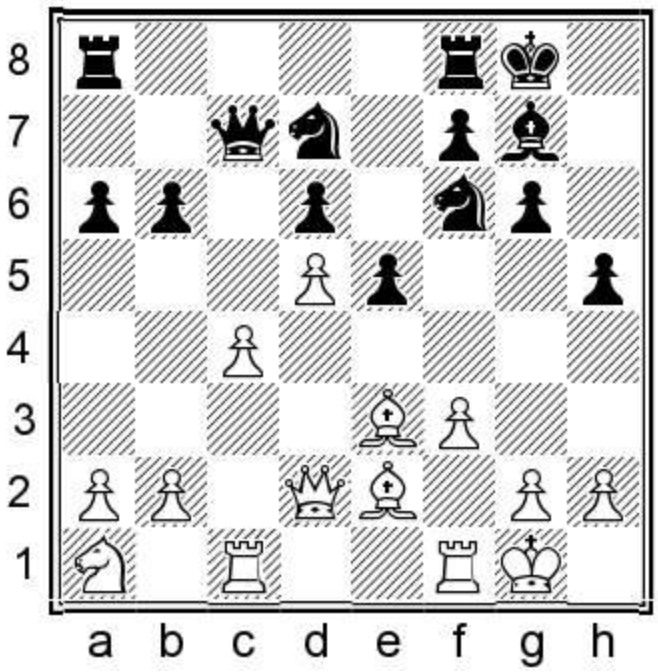


25.Qc2!± In Forcen Esteban – Volokitin, Minsk 2017, a2-a3 and b2-b4 was coming.

15.c4 b6 16.Na1÷
A common re-routing plan; the knight is heading for c6 via c2 and b4. It also makes way for the b-pawn, as a

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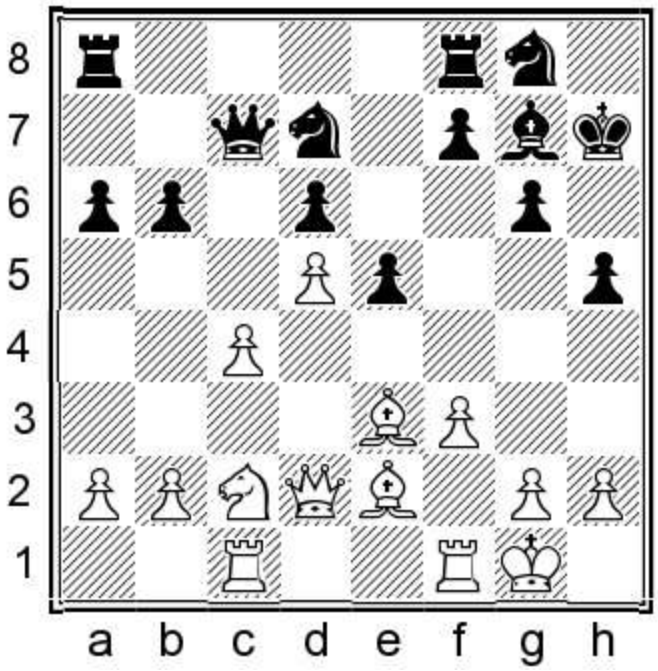
general queenside advance is White's usual plan. White has scored well from this position, and I am tempted to claim an edge, but 'unclear' feels most accurate.



16...h4
One of many ways the game could go, and in reply White usually has several options, so comprehensive coverage is impossible. Both sides can start playing from here. So what follows are examples of typical ideas.

16...Rfe8 is a sensible developer when 17.Nc2 is our usual plan. The result will be decided in a tense middlegame.

16...Kh7?! 17.Nc2 Ng8 is an overly sophisticated way to prepare ...Bh6.



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18.g4! An appropriately crude response. 18...hxg4 19.fxg4 Ne7 Understandably abandoning the original plan (instead 19...Bh6?! 20.Rf3 leaves the black king needing its bishop defender). 20.Rf3$\mathit{f}$ Black's plan has clearly failed.

17.Nc2 Nh5
As on most moves, Black has several reasonable options.

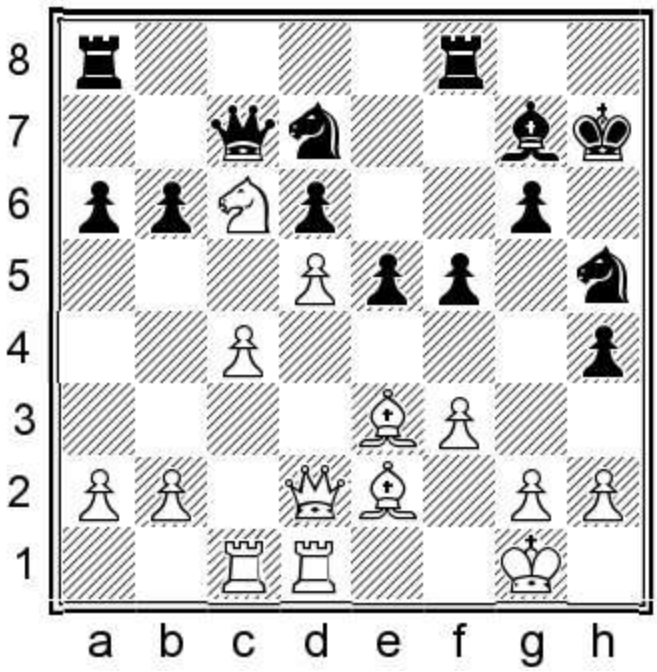
17...Rfe8 18.Nb4 has been tested several times, and is similar to the game. 17...a5?! stops the knight reaching c6, but after 18.Na3 the b5-square is even more valuable.

18.Rfd1
Moving the f1-rook is wisest, though going to the e1-square also looks sensible.

The point is that 18.Nb4 Nf4! is irritating when the d3-bishop has no sensible retreat.

18...f5
Naturally 18...Nf4 would be met by 19.Bf1 when Black has gained nothing.

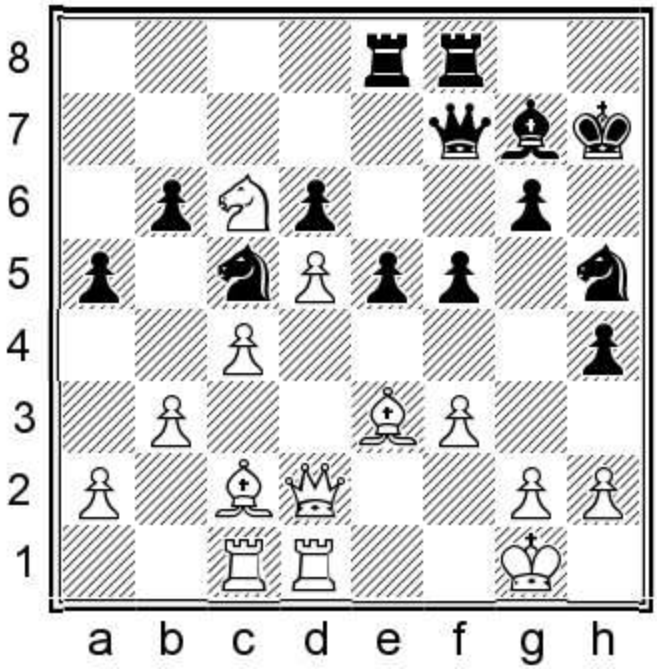
19.Nb4 Kh7 20.Nc6




Reaching the destination; now it's time to start thinking about advancing the b- and c-pawns, though of course White also needs to keep an eye on Black's kingside tries.

20...a5 21.Bd3 Rae8 22.Bc2 Nc5 23.b3 Qf7

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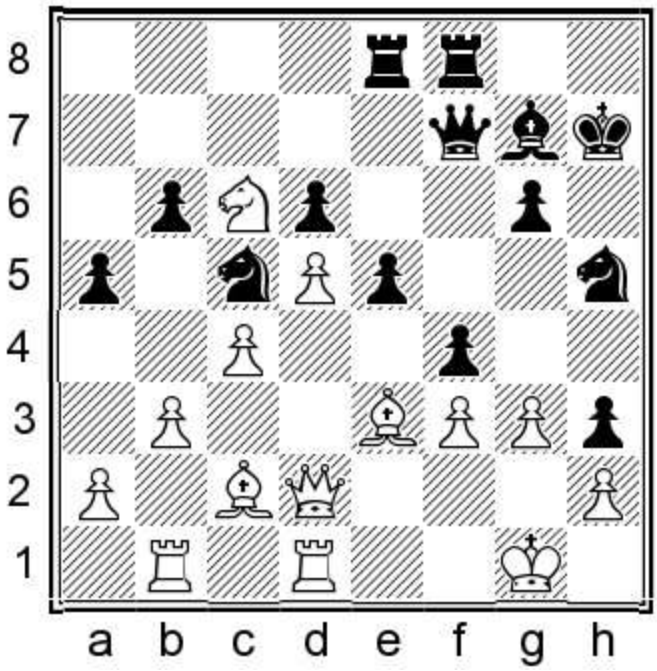


24.Rb1?
White has played in fine logical fashion, but this slip allows Black to show his idea.

Correct was 24.Rf1!± when we will soon see why defending f3 is essential. If Black tries the same idea as in the game: 24...h3 White keeps control with 25.g3 f4 26.Bxc5. Now 26...fxg3? 27.Bxb6 loses for Black, as f3 is covered, so Black must try 26...bxc5 allowing 27.g4! ending Black's attacking dreams.

24...h3!÷
Now it's just an unpredictable mess.

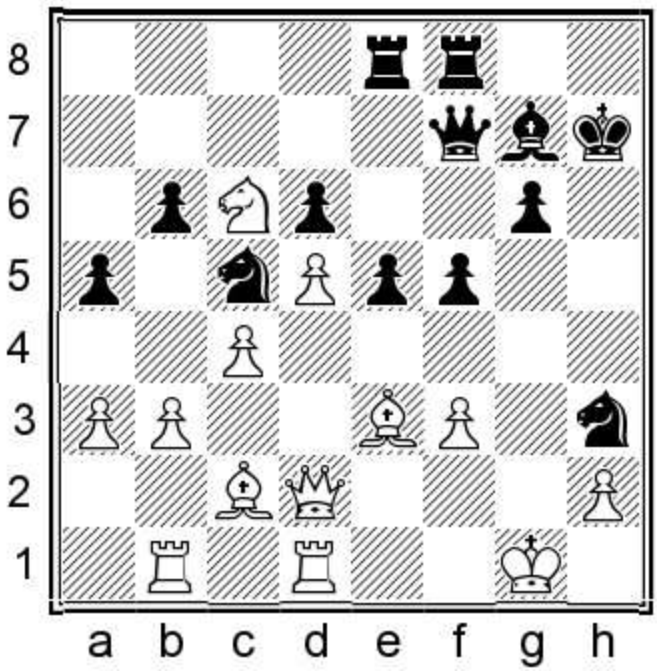
25.gxh3
It's too late to try to close the kingside with 25.g3 f4 due to the following point:



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26.Bxc5? Instead of recapturing on c5, Black has the killing 26...fxg3! 27.Bxb6 Qxf3 and the attack crashes through; ...Bh6 is just one of the resources.

25...Nf4 26.a3 Nxh3†



27.Kh1
No better is 27.Kg2 e4! 28.Kxh3 f4 which leads to wild drawing lines, as the white king is too exposed to hide from all the checks indefinitely.

27...Qf6 28.b4 axb4 29.axb4 Nd7 30.Qg2 Nf4?
Letting White off the hook.

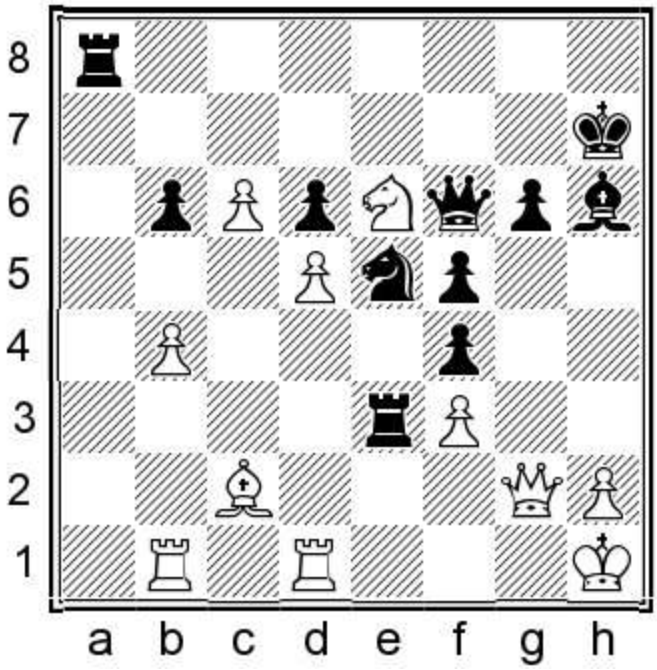
30...Qh4![3] supports the nasty knight, and offers dangerous play.

31.Bxf4 exf4 32.Nd4 Re3 33.Ne6
More precise was 33.Rg1! Qxd4 34.Qxg6† Kg8 35.Bxf5 Rxf5 36.Qxf5±.

33...Ra8 34.c5 Bh6?
Black needed to take on c5 one way or the other, with roughly even chances.

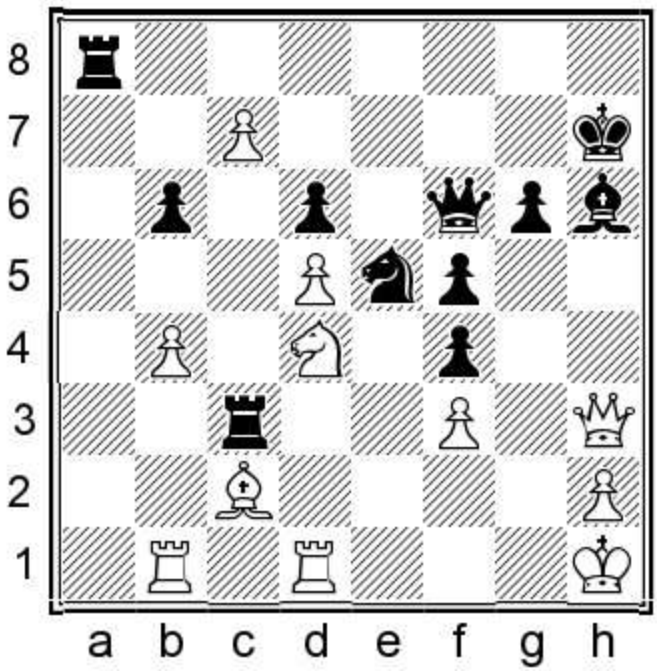
35.c6 Ne5
Attacking f3 and c6, but I suspect Black overlooked the following double defence.

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36.Nd4!±
Obvious after the event, but a backwards move by an apparently perfectly-placed piece is missable. Now White is back in control.

36...Qf7 37.Qh3 Qf6 38.c7 Rc3



39.Nxf5!
Ripping open the black king's defence, but it's the power of the c-pawn that makes it work.

39...Rxc2
After 39...gxf5 40.Bxf5† Kh8 41.Rbc1 the c-pawn decides.

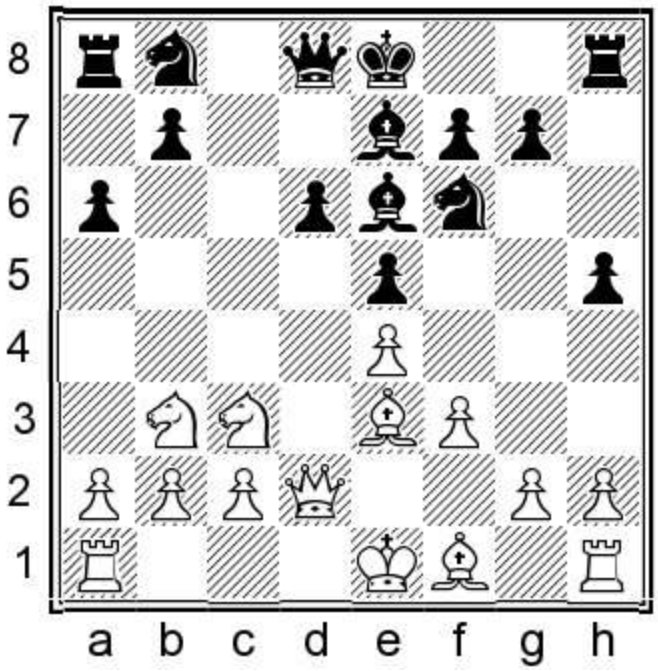
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40.Nxh6 Kg7 41.Rbc1 Rxc1 42.Rxc1 Nd3 43.Ng4 Qg5 44.c8=Q Rxc8 45.Rxc8
1–0
White had a tactical wobble in the middle, but he started and finished in fine thematic style. Areshchenko is a Najdorf expert who plays 8...h5 with Black, so he is likely to know the most testing reply to it.

GAME 47

David Roubaud – Daniel Perry
email 2015

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 Nf6 4.Nc3 cxd4 5.Nxd4 a6 6.f3 e5 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 Be7 9.Qd2 h5



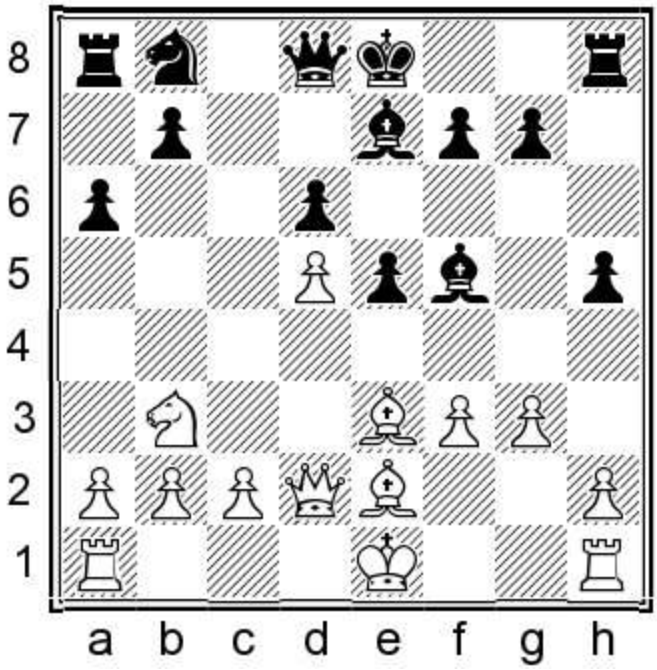

A related idea to 8...h5, but a seemingly less logical version, as the option of ...Bh6 is gone. However, we will see one idea to improve the dark-squared bishop's prospects.

10.Nd5
Once again, I like this direct reply to ...h7-h5 plans.

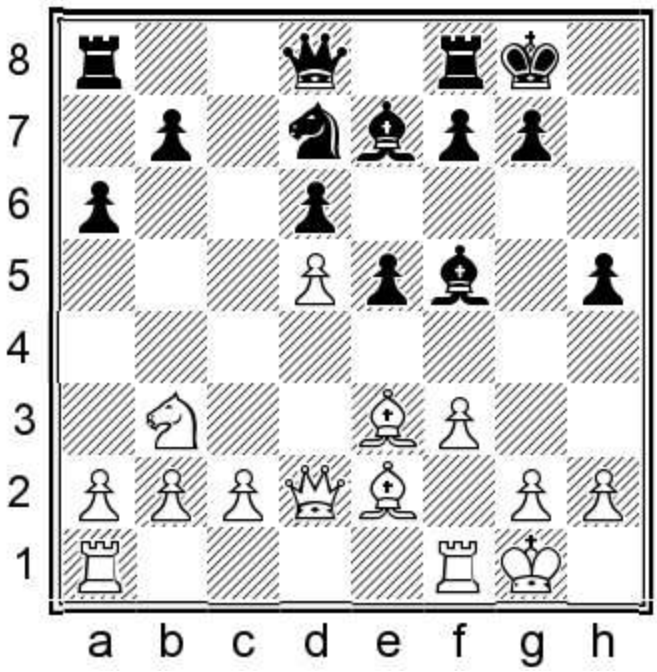
10...Bxd5
The same choice Black made in the 8...h5 line.

10...Nxd5
This is a more serious option than its cousin in the 8...h5 variation.
11.exd5 Bf5 12.Be2!?
In this case the exchange of light-squared bishops is not a simple solution, as after 12.Bd3 Bxd3 13.Qxd3 White has lost a tempo with his queen.
12...Nd7
This is the usual move, but also surprisingly popular is: 12...Bh4† 13.g3 Be7

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I find it hard to believe that provoking g2-g3 is worth two tempos. It does weaken White's kingside, so a logical response is: 14.0-0-0!? The game could develop in many ways, but one instructive game continued: 14...Nd7 15.h3 Rc8 16.Bd3 Black has been free with his tempos, so we can be too. 16...Bxd3 17.Qxd3 Qc7 18.Nd2 g6 19.g4² In Ter Sahakyan – Gabuzyan, Yerevan 2016, White had a pleasant positional edge.
13.0-0 0-0

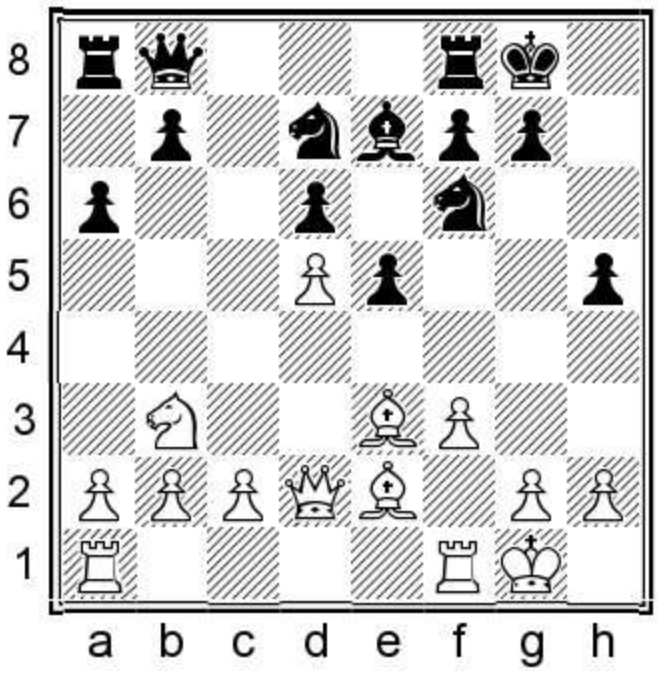


14.Na5!
After this thematic move, White's queenside play gives him the better chances in this well-tested position. For example:
14...Qc7 15.c4 Bg6 16.b4²
In Jakovenko – Kantans, Germany 2016, White's c4-c5 break was imminent.

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11.exd5 Nbd7 12.Be2
We play in similar style to the 8...h5 line.

12...0-0 13.0-0 Qb8!?
This has been played by Nepomniachtchi a couple of times. Black seeks to exchange his poor bishop via d8 and b6. I like the way White fought against this plan.

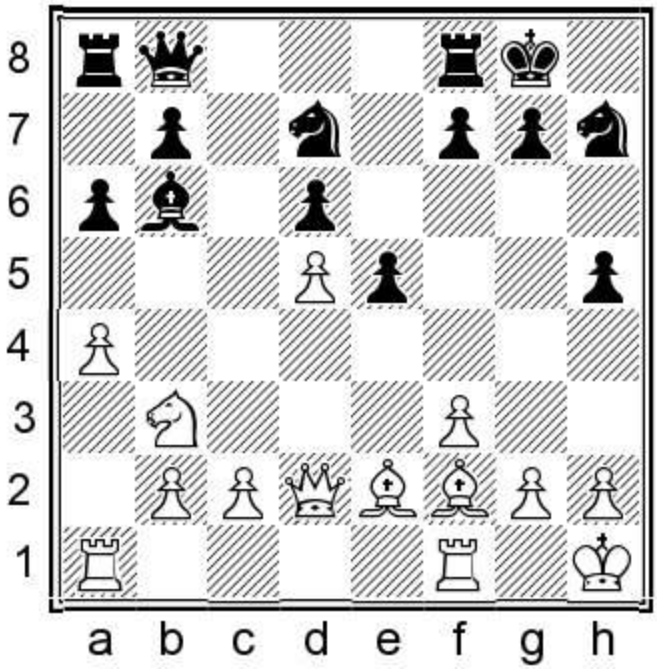



14.a4!? Bd8 15.Kh1
Freeing our bishop from the g1-a7 diagonal.

15...Bb6 16.Bg5 Nh7
Not forced, but against quiet play White would continue a4-a5 and c2-c4, with the queenside pawn advance typical of this structure.

17.Bh4 Bd8 18.Bf2 Qc7
Giving up on the original plan.
After the consistent 18...Bb6?!, the fact that White has provoked the knight from f6 to h7 makes a key difference:

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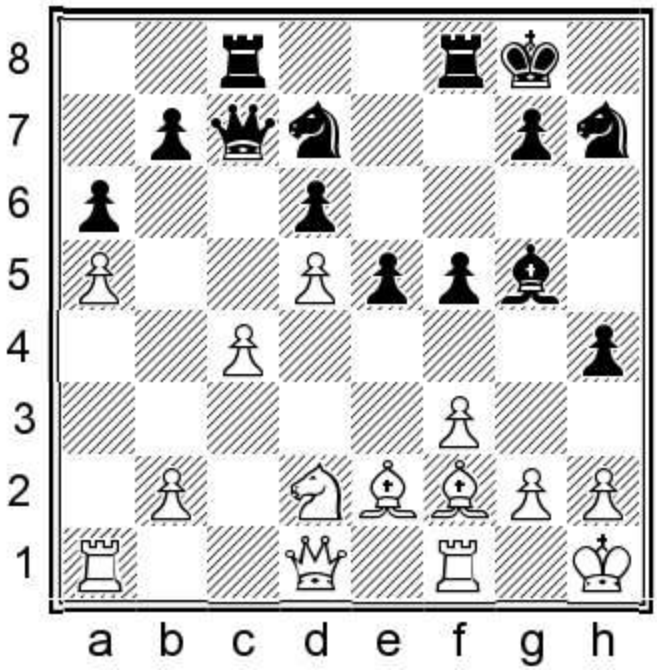


19.Bxb6! Nxb6 20.f4!± Hitting h5. It almost goes without saying that 20...Nf6?? would lose to 21.fxe5 dxe5 22. Rxf6 gxf6 23.Qh6.

19.a5 Bg5
Yes, the bishop has found an active square, but Black's kingside pieces are not working as a team.

20.Qd1 Rac8
White no longer needs to be creative, as it's time to play the usual queenside advance plan:

21.c4 h4 22.Nd2 f5



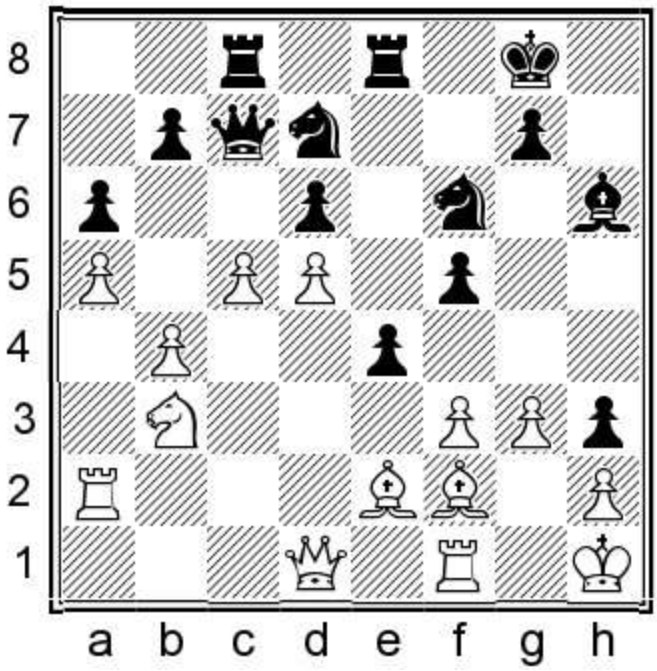
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23.b4²

After all the dancing around, White's play is flowing smoothly. We don't need extensive notes on the rest of the game, as we are well into the middlegame.

23...Nhf6 24.Nb3
An excellent square for the knight, supporting c4-c5, but also discouraging Black's most natural central advance, ...e5-e4, as the knight could then leap into d4, then on to e6 or f5.

24...h3 25.g3 Rfe8 26.Ra2 Bh6 27.c5 e4
Allowing the following knight lift, but the alternative was to sit and watch while White advanced his queenside.




28.Nd4!
This leads to a wild tactical sequence, but White has assessed the resulting position perfectly.

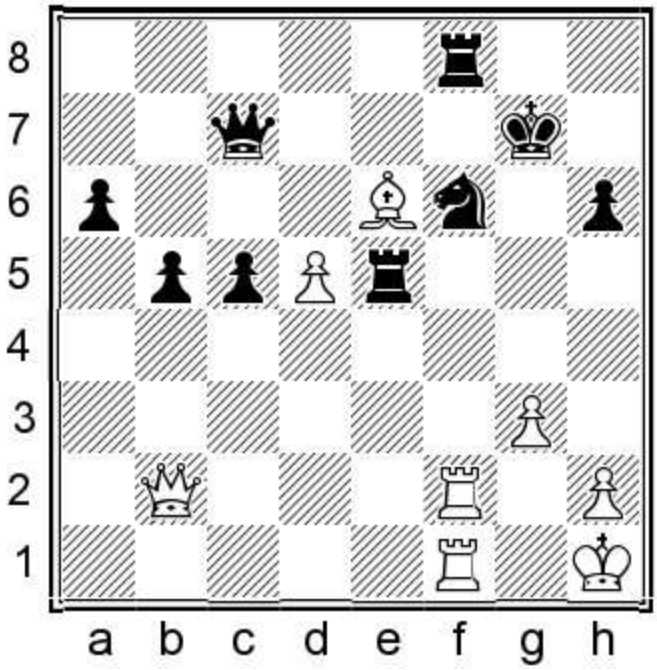
28...dxc5 29.Nxf5 Qe5 30.Nxh6† gxh6 31.fxe4 Qxe4† 32.Bf3 Qc4 33.Rc2 Qxb4 34.Qc1±
For the moment, Black is a pawn up, but his king is too exposed.

34...Qb5 35.Bd4!
Using the c-file pin to remove a vital defender.

35...Ne5 36.Bxe5 Rxe5 37.Rcf2 Rf8 38.Bg4 Kg7 39.Bxh3
With the annoying pawn gone, White's king is safe, while the black king has no shelter.

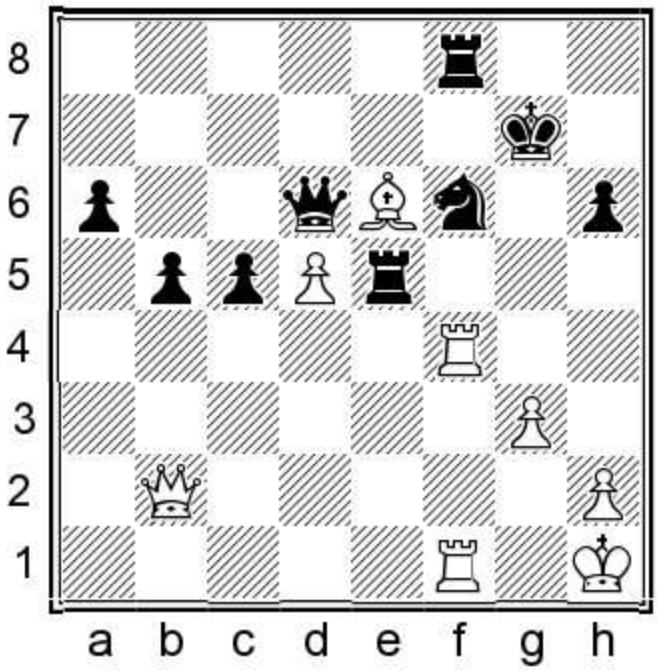
39...Qxa5 40.Qb2 Qc7 41.Be6 b5
In a reversal of the normal plans, Black has queenside passed pawns while White has a kingside attack; the latter is much faster.

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42.Rf4!
This move is icily precise, as instead the immediate 42.Rf5? would allow 42...Rxf5 43.Rxf5 c4= when Black threatens ...c4-c3.

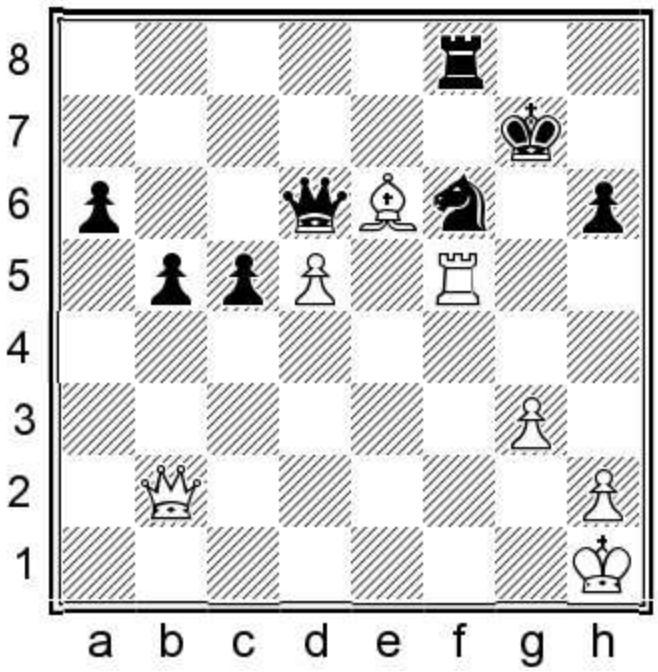
42...Qd6
After 42...c4 43.Qf2 Qe7 44.Qd4 Qc7 45.Rg4† Rg5 46.Rxg5† hxg5 47.Rf5 the attack breaks through before the pawns can touch down.



43.Rf5!+–
Removing another key defender.

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43...Rxf5 44.Rxf5



44...Kg6
Unlike the line above, 44...c4 is no threat to advance further, so White has time for 45.Rf4+–.

45.Rf4 b4 46.Kg2 Qc7 47.h4
Black is defenceless, with h4-h5† just one of the threats.
For example, 47...h5 48.Qb1† Kg7 49.Rf5 Kh8 50.Qc1 Qg7 and everything wins, but it feels appropriate to return to the traditional queenside advance plan with 51.d6!.
1–0
Conclusion

After 1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.f3 this chapter was all about the 6...e5 Najdorf. We play 7.Nb3 Be6 8.Be3 when there are three options: 8...Nbd7 lines, 8...Be7 lines and ...h5 lines.

Following 8...Nbd7 9.g4! we saw three moves. 9...h6 creates a weakness that makes castling kingside scary, while 9...Nb6 is rather slow and clumsy. 9...b5 followed by 10...b4 should be playable for Black, who gets close to equality, but practical results have been great for White.

After 8...Be7 9.Qd2 0-0 10.0-0-0 there are various ways to play.
We started with 10...a5?! which used to be totally respectable, but no longer. The key moves are 11.a4! then usually 12.g4 and 13.Kb1, with email games showing the way for White.
10...b5 11.g4 b4 leads to sharp play, but I like White's chances, especially with the suggested novelty at move 19.
10...Nbd7 11.g4 b5 is a vital position, and we noted that Black's 10th and 11th moves can be played in either order. After 12.g5 we started by looking at the counterattack 12...b4 when 13.gxf6!? is the move that is troubling Black. If Black instead moves the knight with 12...Nh5 then after 13.Kb1 we saw both 13...Nb6 and 13...Rc8. Neither line has been refuted, but White's practical chances look excellent.

Finally, we saw two varieties of ...h7-h5 lines.
After 8...h5!? we can use a clever move order to sidestep the recommendation in The Sharpest Sicilian 2012. Also vital are lines where Black leaves his queen on d8 with 12...Bg7 – the line I recommend in response leads to a tense middlegame fight.

8...Be7 9.Qd2 h5 could of course have been covered next to its 8...Be7 cousins, but its ideas are easier to understand after seeing the 8...h5 line. Of particular interest is Black's idea of ...Qb8, clearing a path for the e7-bishop to exchange via d8 and b6. But we also saw how to fight against that idea.

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