

The Modernized French Defense

Against the Tarrasch

David Miedema



Volume 2



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The Modernized French Defense

Volume 2: Against the Tarrasch

by
David Miedema

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Key to Symbols

- ! a good move
- ? a weak move
- !! an excellent move
- ?? a blunder
- ! ? an interesting move
- ? ! a dubious move
- only move
- N novelty
- ⊙ lead in development
- ⊖ zugzwang
- = equality
- ∞ unclear position
- ∞ with compensation for the sacrificed material
- ± White stands slightly better
- ∓ Black stands slightly better
- ± White has a serious advantage
- ∓ Black has a serious advantage
- +− White has a decisive advantage
- −+ Black has a decisive advantage
- with an attack
- ↑ with initiative
- ↔ with counterplay
- Δ with the idea of
- ⊂ better is
- ≤ worse is
- + check
- # mate

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Preface

Dear reader,

Let me share here how I have made my choices for this second volume. Ten years ago, I would sometimes even play the Petroff against people who had games with 3.♠d2 in the database. I actually thought that the Petroff gave me better winning chances! You might have a similar story. 3.♠d2 gives White a very nice pawn structure so it is difficult to get a grip on the position as Black. For many years I have tried moves like 3...♗f6 from the GM Repertoire book or the more drawish 3...c5 and 4...♞xd5 line. It has taken me a lot of time to find the variation against 3.♠d2 which best fits my playing style. After trying virtually every possibility, there is only one satisfactory variation for me – the isolated pawn!

The reason why I had left this option at the bottom of my list initially is because there was a firm belief at the time that Black was worse in these isolated pawn positions. On the flipside, players on the white side have usually studied the lines after 3...♗f6 or 4...♞xd5 in much greater depth. This is one reason why people often mix up their theory as White. Typically they assume they are already better, so why would they need to remember any subtle details? The whole point of 3.♠d2 is to be microscopically better. Fortunately, this can all be easily neutralized with good opening knowledge.

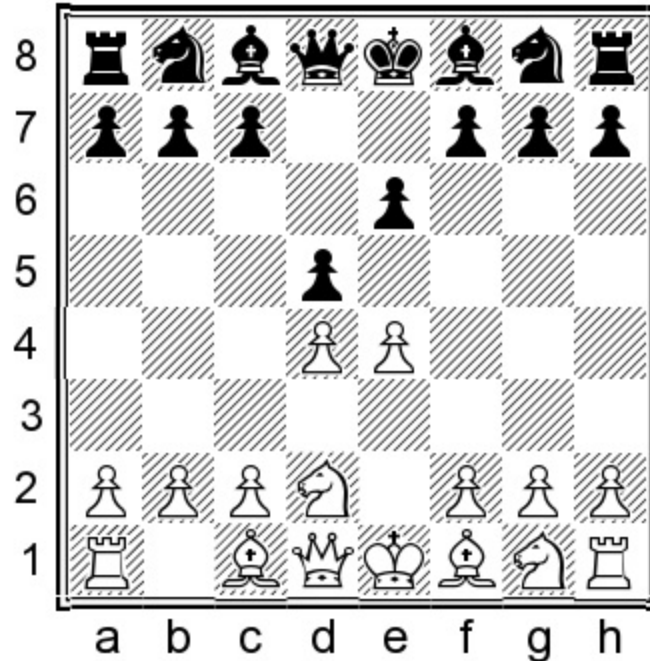
Whilst studying most of the existing literature, I have noticed that there is hardly any recent analysis on the systems with 3...c5 and 4...exd5. Still, many authors who have been covering them from White's perspective have a lot of respect for the variations and hardly achieve anything against them. When I started to play with the isolated pawn myself, my results against 3.♠d2 became better. My score against 3.♠d2 is actually better than my score against 3.♠c3 now. I have noticed that in correspondence chess, these isolated pawn lines are favored by black quite often. That is when I realized that this small advantage was just a prejudice.

I have to admit, the positions are slightly harder to play for Black. However, that is probably also true for the other lines against 3.♠d2. It just takes some time to become familiar with all the possibilities and ensuing middlegames. But once you finally master the isolated pawn structure, it will serve you well and equip you with a wide selection of tools with which you can outplay your opponent. My original plan for this book was to cover 3.♠d2 as well as all the other options besides 3.♠c3, but I believe it is much more important to focus on showing as many examples as possible of how to play with different versions of the French isolated pawn. All the material in this book is designed for you to be able to pick your favorite line in the 3...c5, 4...exd5 system. Consequently there will be a third volume in this series, covering the rest of White's options against the French.

Finally, a word of thanks. I would like to thank my roomies at Schaakhuis Amsterdam for being a team; Teele Kuusk for getting me out of some dead ends without even knowing; Peter and Thomas from K41 for the great meals and nine avocados; Sivert, for his silly behavior which always makes me laugh; My uncle Chris and aunt Elles for the best bed and breakfast anyone could wish for; and last but not least, my brothers and sister just for being there.

Overview of the variations

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2



Position after: 3.♘d2

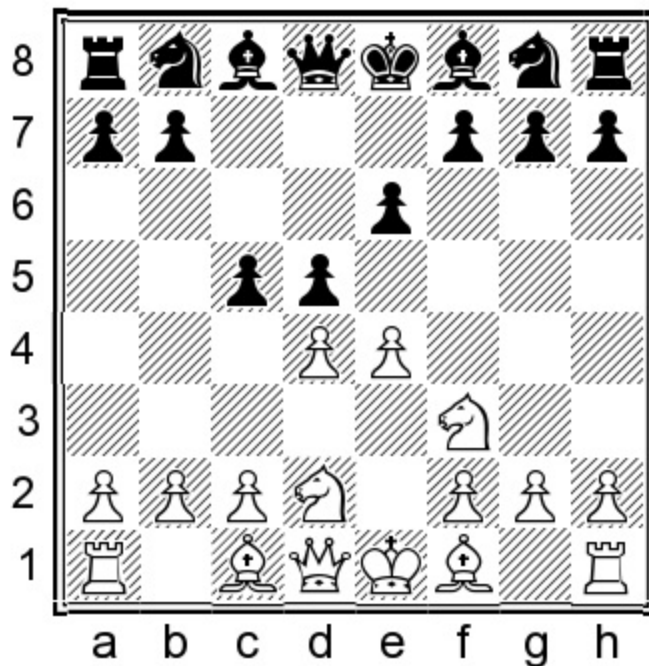
This is the starting point of the book.

3...c5

In this book you will see a lot of versions of isolated pawn positions. The best way to enter these lines is with 3...c5.

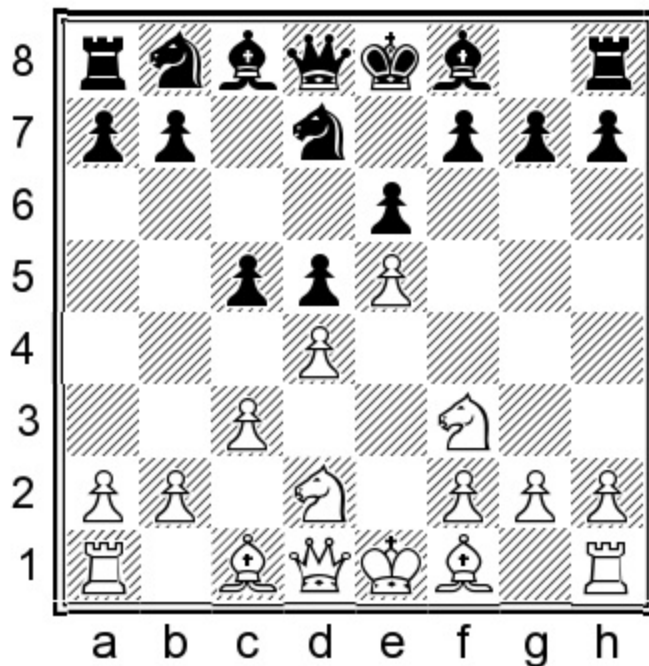
4.exd5

A) 4.♘gf3



Position after: 4...Bg3

This line is a clever way for White to postpone his decision. It avoids the 5...a6 line in the IQP variations. 4...Bf6 [4...Bc6 5.exd5 exd5 transposes to the main line.] 5.e5 Bfd7 6.c3



Position after: 6.c3

Here we have entered the 'universal variation'. If you play 5...Bf6 then you need to be well prepared in these positions as well as the IQP positions. After analyzing them, I must say that it is a lot of fun to play these lines as Black. Hopefully you will share this view after a detailed studying of

Chapters 3 and 4! 6...♞c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5! This will be the focus of our study in Chapters 3 and 4. A fresh new waiting approach!

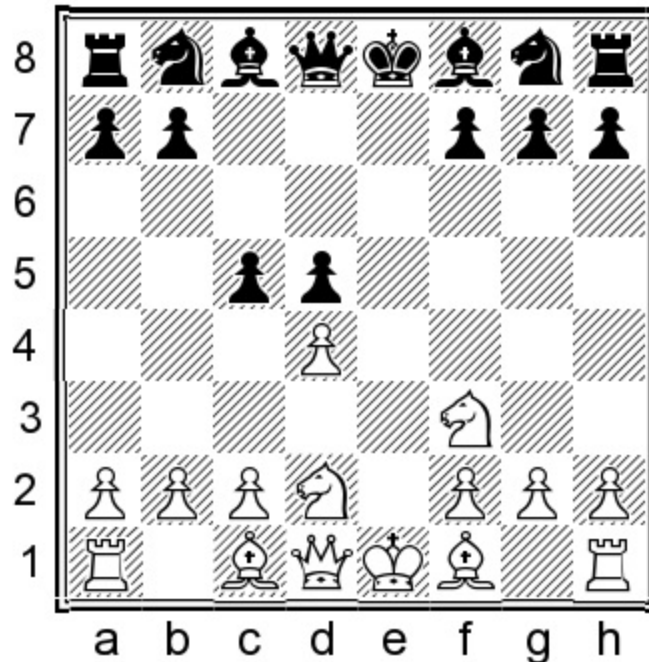
B) 4.c3 is covered in Chapter 1.

4...exd5

Entering the isolated pawn positions!

5.♘gf3

5.♙b5+ This attempt at getting a unique position is covered in Chapter 2.



Position after: 5.♘gf3

The most common move. Black now has an important choice to make and I have covered all possible options in this position. There are no inferior choices but 5...♞c6 is the easiest to learn.

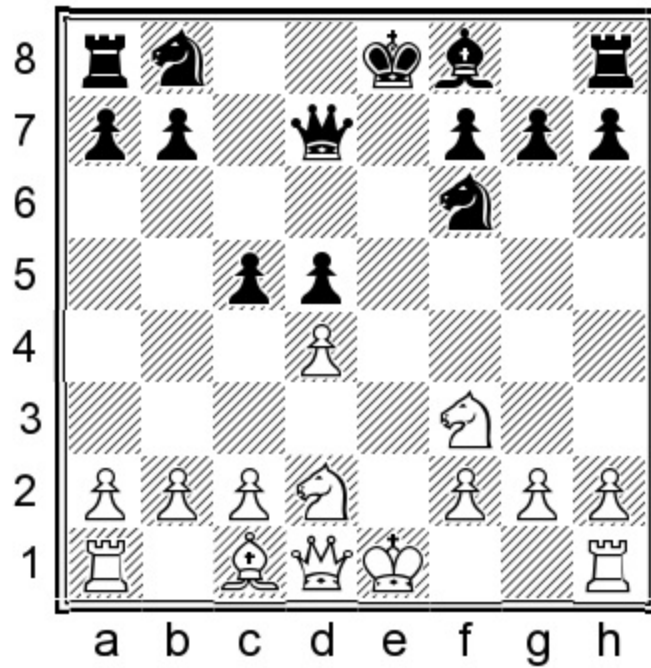
5...♞c6

A) 5...a6 This move is covered in Chapter 12.

B) 5...cxd4 This move is also covered in Chapter 12, but it usually transposes to Chapter 8.

C) 5...c4 is, yet again, covered in Chapter 12.

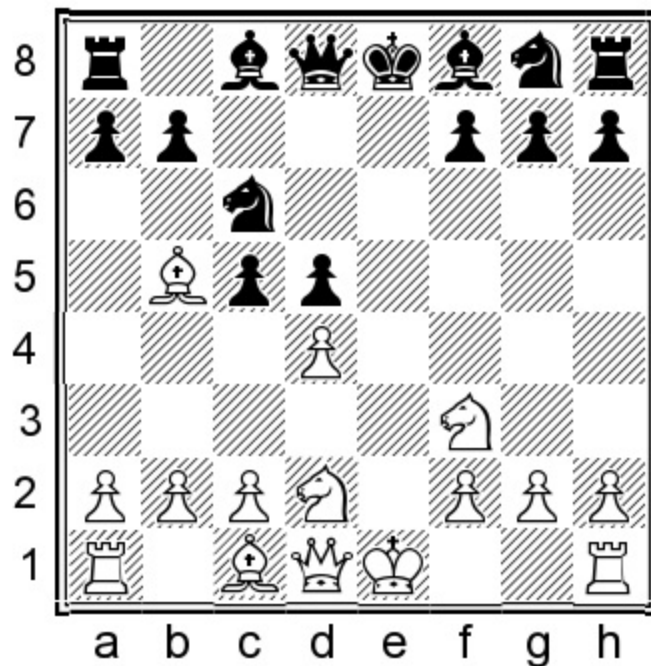
D) 5...♞f6 will be our focus in the first half of the book. Chapters 5-7 will cover the positions arising after this move. 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.♙xd7+ ♞bxd7 [7...♚xd7!?



Position after: 7... ♔xd7!?

This move is a diamond in the rough and will be covered in Chapter 5.] 8.0-0 ♕e7 9.dxc5 ♞xc5 10.♖e1 is the slow approach and will be the subject of Chapter 7. All other tenth moves like 10.♞b3 will be covered in Chapter 6.

6. ♕b5



Position after: 6. ♕b5

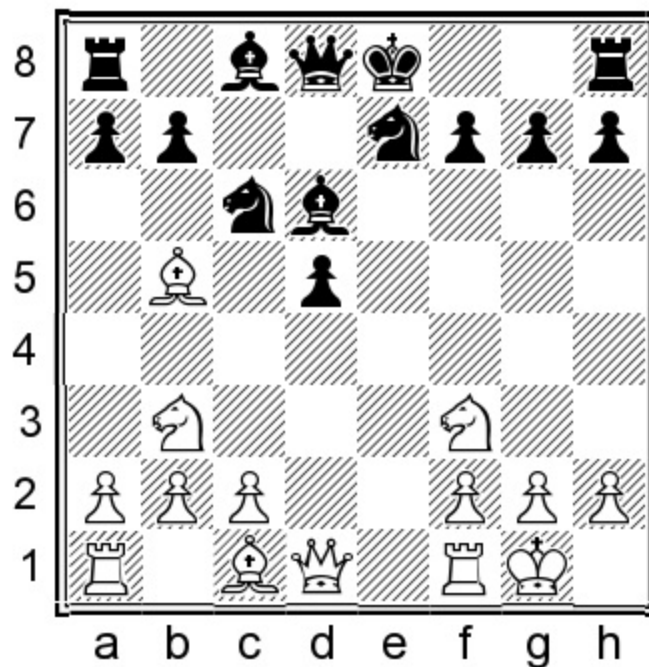
6...♗d6

This move is covered in Chapters 9 and 10. Even though we will cover a lot of material on this move, I would not say it is the easiest to play.

A) 6...cxd4 is Marin's recommendation and it is covered in Chapter 8. Black tries to trick White into a bad version of the 6...♗d6 line. However, with the right knowledge White should be able to get an advantage.

B) 6...♕e7+!? This check is covered in Chapter 11. The major advantage of this move is that it is the easiest to learn. Black hardly has to know anything because there has been so little analysis of yet.

7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.0-0 ♘ge7 9.♗b3 ♗d6



Position after: 9...♗d6

This is the position I call the 'central station'. There are a lot of new ideas to be discovered here. In Chapter 9 we will see what happens when White occupies d4 with a knight and we will also take a look at all of White's other tries besides 10.h3!. Finally, in Chapter 10 we will come to deal with the strongest move, 10.h3!.

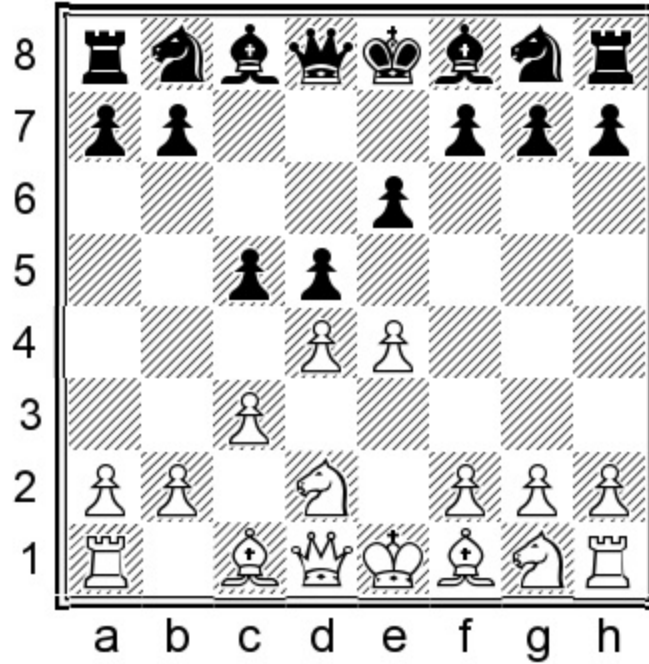
By the time you have finished reading this book, you will have been presented with a number of different repertoires against 3.♗d2. Chapters 1 and 2 are a core part of each possible repertoire. Chapters 3-7 cover the repertoire with 5...♗f6. Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the the tricky 6...cxd4 line. In Chapters 9 and 10 we reach the 'central station' with 6...♗d6 (there is some overlap between 6...cxd4 and 6...♗d6). Chapter 11 is a repertoire for the lazy based on 6...♕e7+. Finally, Chapter 12 is a diverse dessert menu which we can choose from to surprise our opponents. In my view, surprising our opponents is key because when you know the isolated pawn positions better, you can use your

extra knowledge to compensate for your slightly worse position.

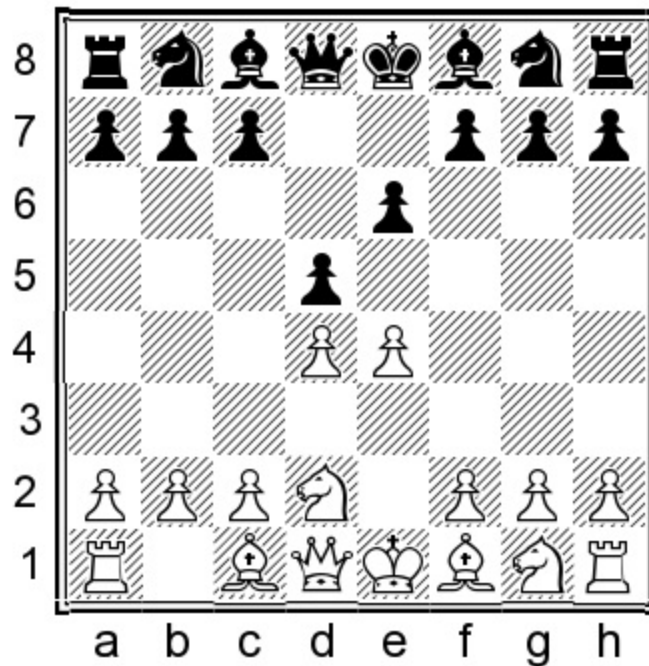
Chapter 1

4.c3 – The bad Caro-Kann

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.c3



1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2



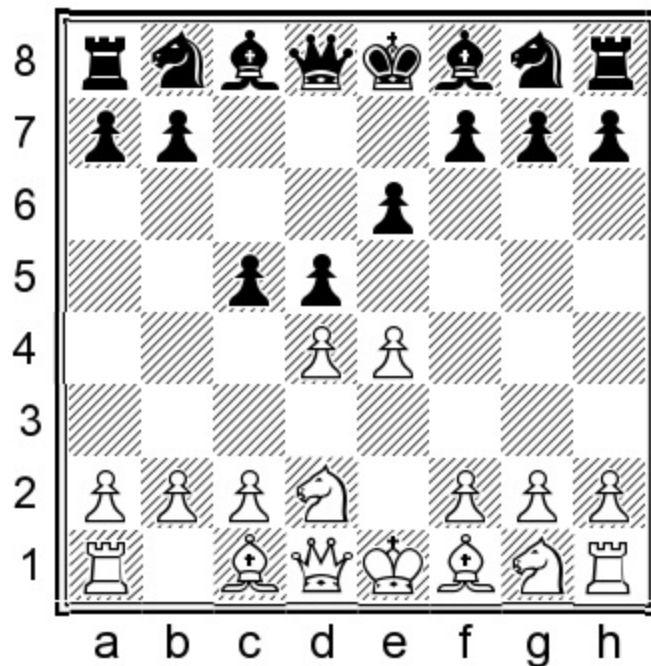
Position after: 3.♖d2

Facing this move has always been a moment to sigh. Because although 3.♖c3 is objectively stronger, it also gives Black a lot more fun. There is some hidden danger to this modest knight move. It leaves the option of playing c2-c3 open, supporting the center against Black's pawn break ...c5. This is especially annoying when you would like to unbalance the game in order to play for a win. So, what to do against the Tarrasch? My own personal experience is not particularly encouraging. I have tried most systems against it, yet I was rarely satisfied with the outcome of the opening. At some point, when I had an alternative option to play the Petroff, I would rather play for a win with that than against 3.♖d2 in the French.

Black is immediately given a wide selection of moves to choose from when facing the Tarrasch. It's like a candy store, everything looks great and tastes sweet: 3...c5, 3...♖f6, 3...a6, 3...♗e7, 3...h6, 3...♖c6, and Rapport even played 3...♗d7 once! However, there is a flipside to all this candy: refined sugar! And in the middlegame we face the effects of it, a slightly dull position, an inability to motivate oneself and often this could lead to a loss.

So here we are, trying to suitably solve the 3.♖d2 question. Many books give 3...♗e7 as a fighting repertoire and 3...c5 as a solid repertoire. 3...♖f6 reminds me of the classical French and it gives White a wide range of strong options to choose from. At some point I became a little happier with a certain variation, namely the one arising after 3...c5 4.exd5 exd5. When the world's strongest players are playing this position for a win, they are highly likely to choose this isolated pawn position. The isolated queen's pawn (or isolani or IQP) is a great way to unbalance the game and that is the first step towards playing for a full point. Hence the following repertoire is fully centered around all versions of the IQP. If you are looking for the 3...♖f6 system, this was covered by Emanuel Berg in his GM repertoire series as well as by Viktor Moskalenko in the Flexible French series. 3...c5 has been favored by Aagaard and Ntirlis, who have discussed the line with 4...♙xd5 in great detail. I would recommend you investigate these options too, to broaden your knowledge and to give you some alternatives. The best policy is to diversify your repertoire and prepare different systems for different types of opponents. As a bonus, you might find out which types of position best suit your playing style. Now before examining our intended black IQP positions, let's first take a look at what happens if White insists on playing with the isolani himself instead. Spoiler alert, it does not go very well!

3...c5

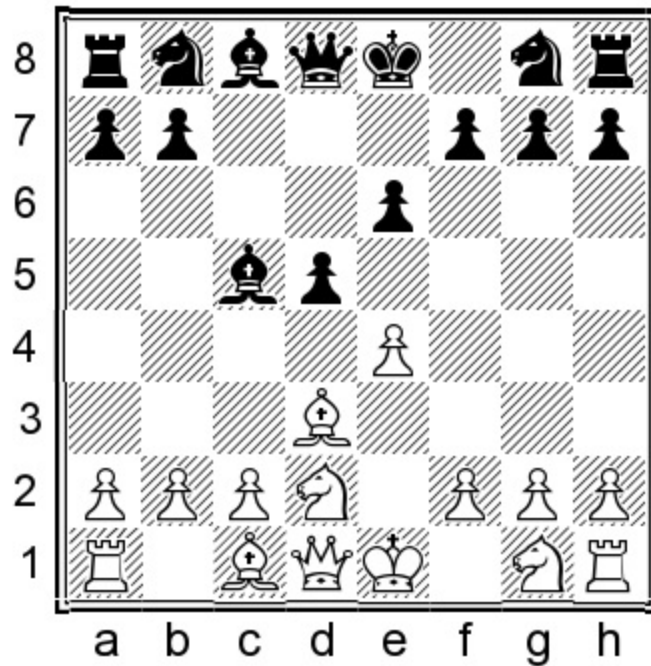


Position after: 3...c5

Of course we attack the center directly. It should be a no-brainer that this active move is best! At this point, White typically chooses between the two main moves, 4.exd5 and 4.♘gf3, both of which will be dealt with in subsequent chapters. We will first deal with the alternatives 4.c3 and 4.dxc5. 4.c3 is still occasionally recommended in White repertoire books, usually in conjunction with the 2.c3 Sicilian. This line leads to different types of position than usual, but on the other hand Black might already be able to push for an edge.

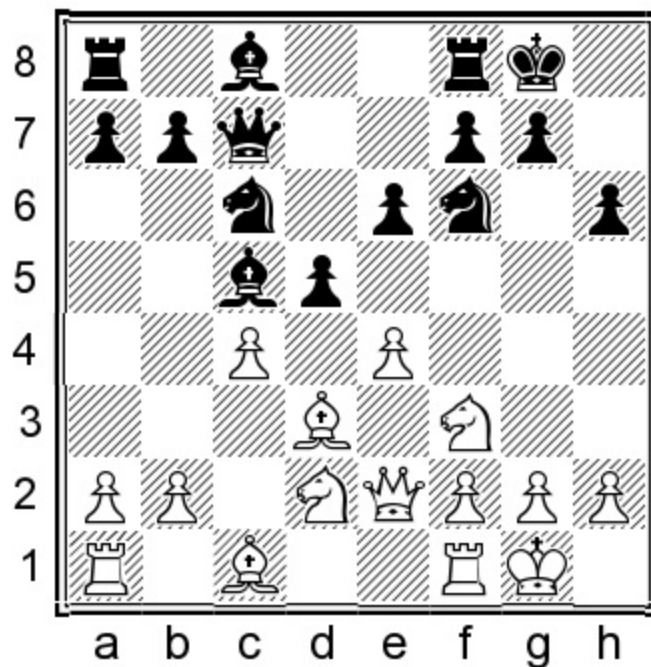
4.c3

4.dxc5 can be a very tricky sideline because it takes us to a unique pawn structure. With accurate play Black can put White under slight pressure. It is worth remembering the well-timed ...h6. 4...♙xc5 5.♙d3 [5.exd5 exd5 will be considered later via the 4.exd5 move order.]



Position after: 5. $\text{d}3$

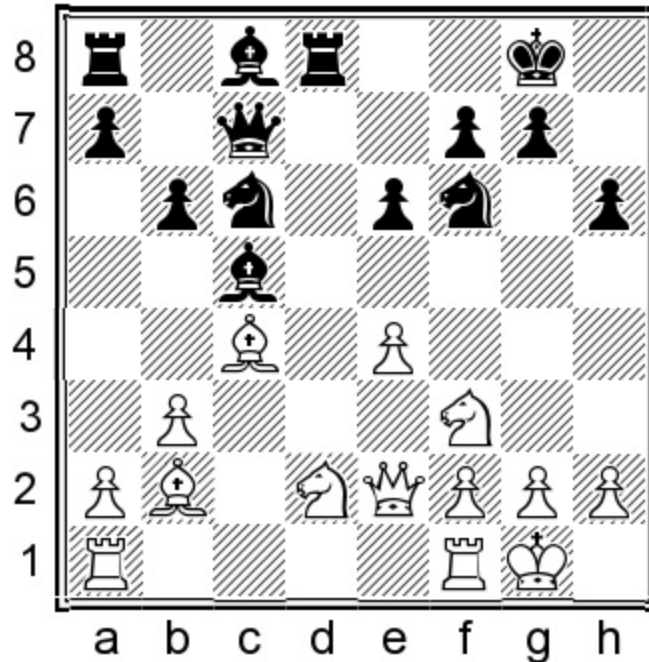
5... $\text{d}f6$ [5... $\text{d}c6$ 6. $\text{d}gf3$ $\text{d}f6$ 1-0 (53) Munoz Pantoja, M (2473) – Potkin, V (2597) Tallinn 2016.]
 6. $\text{w}e2$ $\text{d}c6$ 7. $\text{d}gf3$ 0-0 [7... $\text{w}c7$ 8. 0-0 transposes to the Munoz Pantoja – Potkin game mentioned above.]
 8. 0-0 $\text{w}c7!$ This move is the choice of the strongest players. 9. $c4$ $h6!$ [9... $\text{d}d8?!$ 10. $e5$ $\text{d}g4$
 11. $\text{d}xh7+$ $\text{c}xh7$ 12. $\text{d}g5+$ $\text{c}g8$ 13. $\text{w}xg4$ $\text{w}xe5$ 14. $\text{w}h5$ $\text{w}f5=$ White's inaccuracy has squandered the chance for an advantage.]



Position after: 9... $h6!$

This is definitely not the most intuitive move to make! The idea is to be able to meet e5 with ...♘g4. With the pawn on h7, this would allow ♕xh7 ideas similar to the line we saw after 9...♞d8. Black might already be for choice after this careful move. 10.b3?!

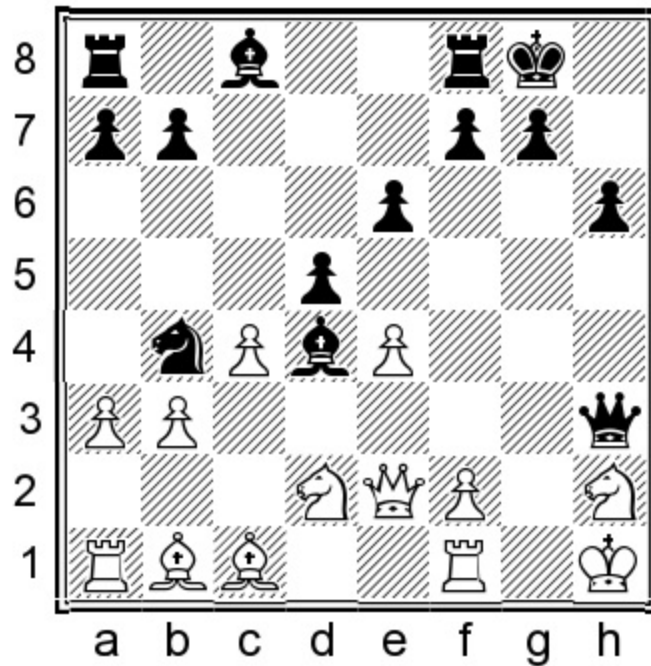
A) 10...♞d8! 11.♕b2 dxc4 12.♕xc4 b6! ♞ Black has an advantage here.



Position after: 12...b6! ♞

Why? Well, having a pawn on e6 has some merits. White would love to move his own pawn back to e3. Black has some slight dominance in the center and will be able to exert a little pressure.

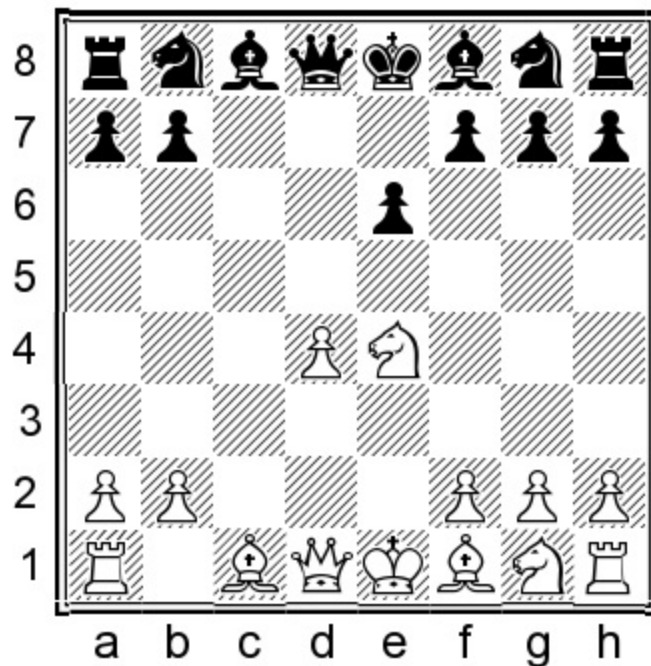
B) 10...♘h5?! This is an incredibly aggressive line. It could very well be the case that Potkin was still in book here. Unfortunately for him, his computer was probably fooling him and saying 0.00. However, as you will see, the position is very difficult for Black to play in a practical game, and even more so in a blitz game. 11.g3 ♘b4 12.♕b1 ♘xg3 13.hxg3 ♙xg3+ 14.♔h1 ♙h3+ 15.♘h2 ♕d4 16.a3



Position after: 16.a3

16...♙xa1?! [16...♙e5!? 17.♘df3 ♚h5 18.♖e1 ♙xa1±] 17.axb4 f5 18.exf5 exf5 19.♚d3 ♚xd3 20.♙xd3± and White was clearly better. The knights have a lot of support and as a result Black had to face a big attack in 1-0 (53) Munoz Pantoja, M (2473) – Potkin, V (2597) Tallinn 2016.

4...cxd4 5.cxd4 dxe4 6.♘xe4

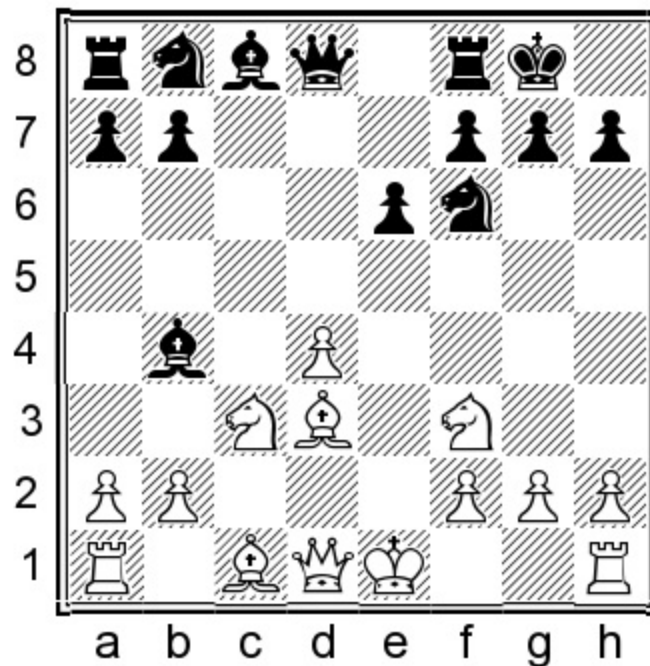


Position after: 6.♘xe4

6...♟f6!

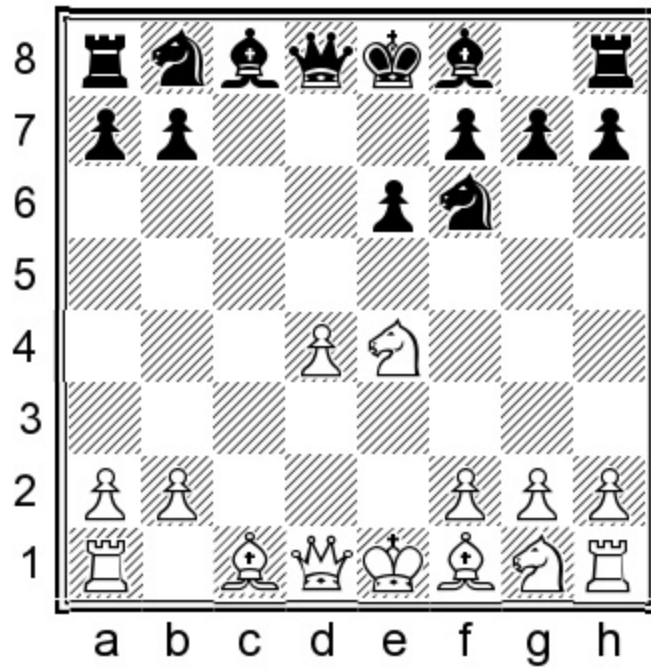
This forced sequence is the only bid for an advantage. In this position White has a difficult choice to make. 7.♞d3 is the only way to solve problems with development. 7.♞c3 enters a Caro-Kann position a tempo down. While after 7.♞xf6+ ♚xf6, White needs to play 8.a3 to prevent ...♞b4+. Black is ahead in development in all cases!

6...♞b4+ is the most common way to 'punish' this line. Still I do not like my bishop on b4 too much. I believe the best setup is to play either ...♞e7 or ...♞d6 combined with ...h6, which is why 6...♞f6! should be preferred here. 7.♞c3 ♞f6 8.♞f3 0-0 9.♞d3



Position after: 9.♞d3

This resembles a hybrid between the Caro-Kann and the Nimzo-Indian! The main difference being that the bishop can go to d3 without the need to recapture on c4. On c4 it is slightly more exposed, yet both positions should be within the range of equality. 9...b6=

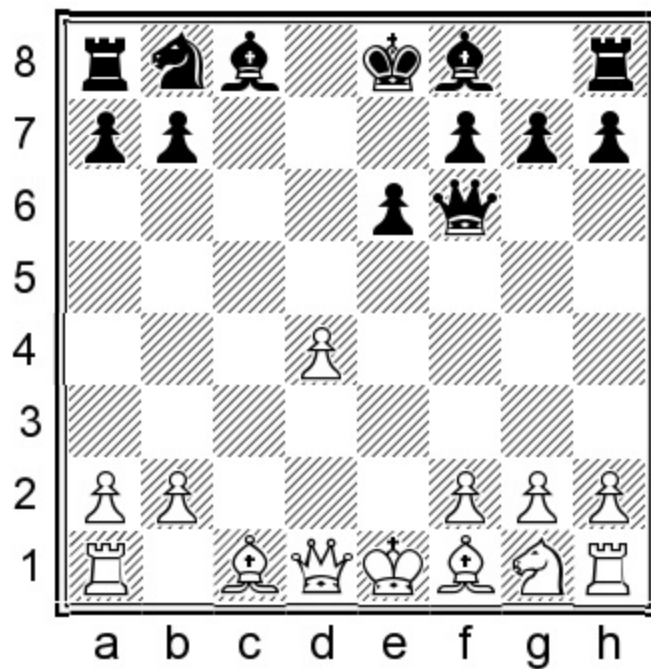


Position after: 6... Nf6!

7. Kd3

This might be the most sensible way for White to handle the position, trying to solve their development problems.

A) 7. Nxf6+ ♔xf6

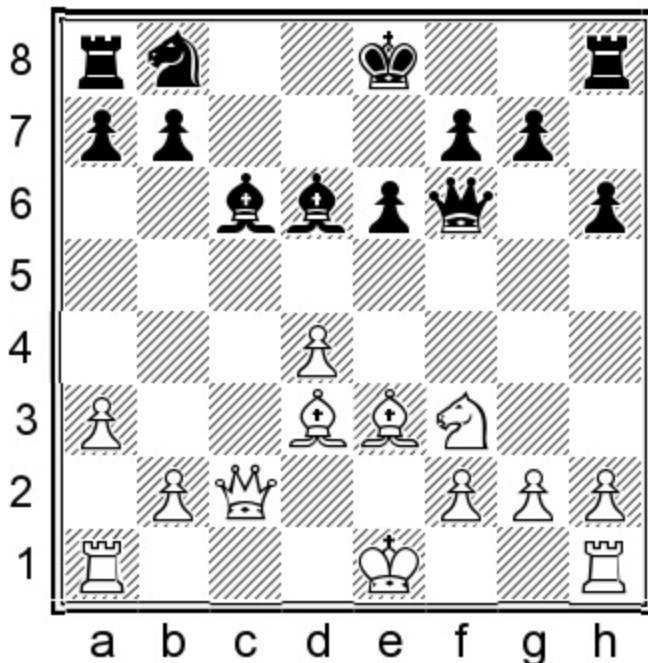


Position after: 7... Kxf6

Ordinarily the queen would not feel too comfortable on this square. Here however, it will combine very well with the plan of ...♔d7-c6xf3, crippling White's pawn structure.

A1) 8. ♖f3!? This was originally the most common move order. Black should probably exchange a set of minor pieces here. 8... ♗b4+ 9. ♕d2 ♗xd2+ 10. ♙xd2 ♕d7= Once this bishop finds its way to d5, White will have to fight to maintain equality.

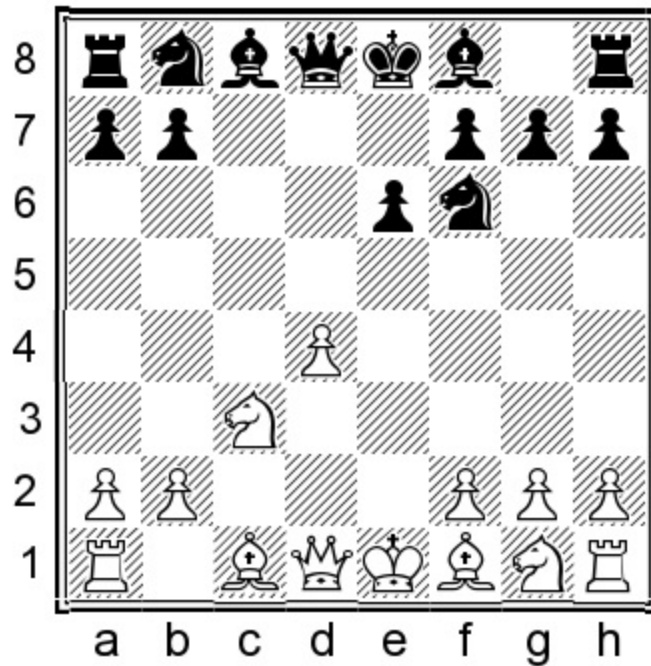
A2) 8.a3 The check is rather annoying once the knights have been exchanged, so White takes measures to prevent it. 8... ♕d6 [8... ♕d7!? might even be better!] 9. ♖f3 h6 10. ♕d3 ♕d7! White is already in a little trouble. 11. ♗e3 ♗c6 12. ♙c2!? Eyeballing c8 and preparing ♗e4.



Position after: 12. ♙c2!?

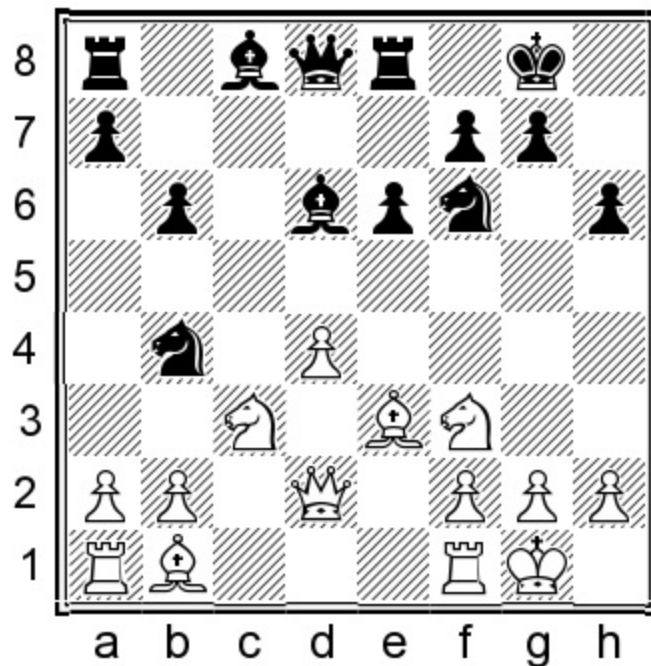
This seems like the only way to prevent the capture on f3, but does it really? 12... ♖d7! [12... ♗xf3 13. ♙c8+ ♙d8 14. ♙xd8+ ♔xd8 15. gxf3= Here White might sacrifice a pawn in the center and play for compensation with the bishop pair. Still I would take the black side any day.] 13. ♗e4 This is actually my favorite trade when on the black side of any IQP position. I consider White's light squared bishop to be a very prominent general leading the attack. After its exchange we gain full control over d5, with a stable positional plus. 13... ♗c8 14. ♕xc6 ♗xc6= Black's advantage is beyond doubt.

B) 7. ♖c3 This leaves us with a position similar to the Panov-Botvinnik attack in the Caro-Kann.



Position after: 7...Nc3

The main difference is that White has lost some time moving the knight and is basically a tempo down. Black can just play sensible moves in this position. I will give a nice sample line. 7...♘d6! [7...♘e7!?= Simple development is also enough for comfortable equality.] 8.♖f3 h6! I like this plan a lot, restricting the c1-bishop to a passive role, although you do need to remember a key move. 9.♘d3 0-0 10.♘e3 ♘c6 11.♙d2 ♖b4 12.♘b1 ♜e8! The crucial move, enabling the ...♘d6-f8 resource in case of ♘xh6. Black enjoys a pleasant edge. 13.0-0 b6



Position after: 13...b6

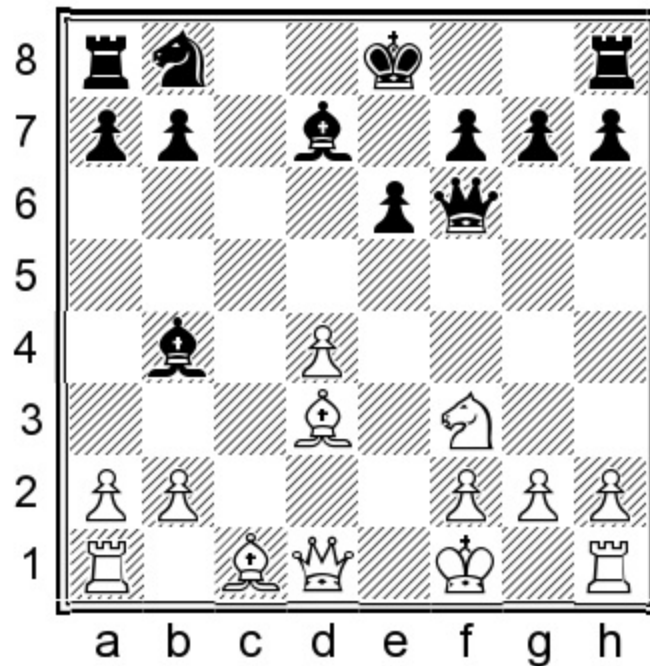
7...♔d7

This aggressive move solves most of our problems and gives a huge score for Black in my database. White needs to find a very difficult plan in order to equalize.

8.♘xf6+!N 8...♚xf6 9.♘f3

Now we have transposed to ½–½ (41) Hellmann, D – Urlau, T DESC email 2006.

9...♔b4+ 10.♔f1!!



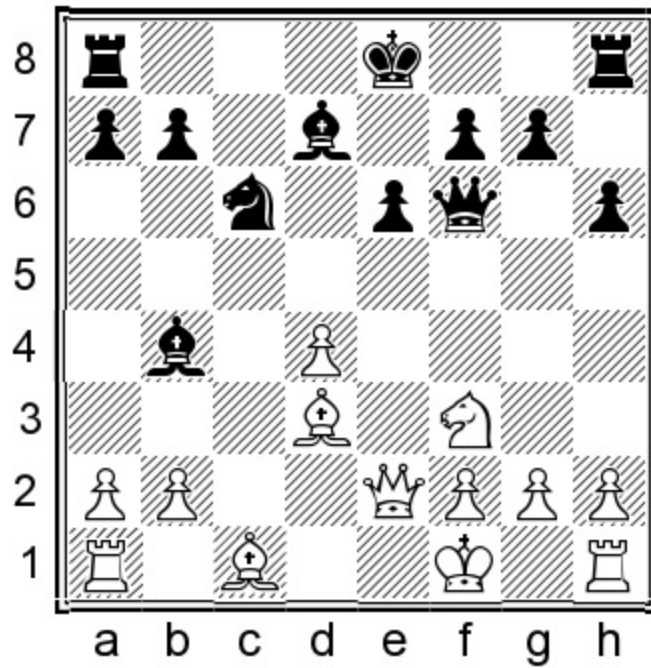
Position after: 10.♔f1!!

A new approach to chess which we are seeing more and more in recent times. The h1-rook will aid in a kingside attack while the king will easily find shelter on g2. Yes, White spends an extra tempo on king safety, but our bishop on b4 is a target as well.

10...h6N

10...♚e7? 11.h4!± This was seen in the aforementioned correspondence game.

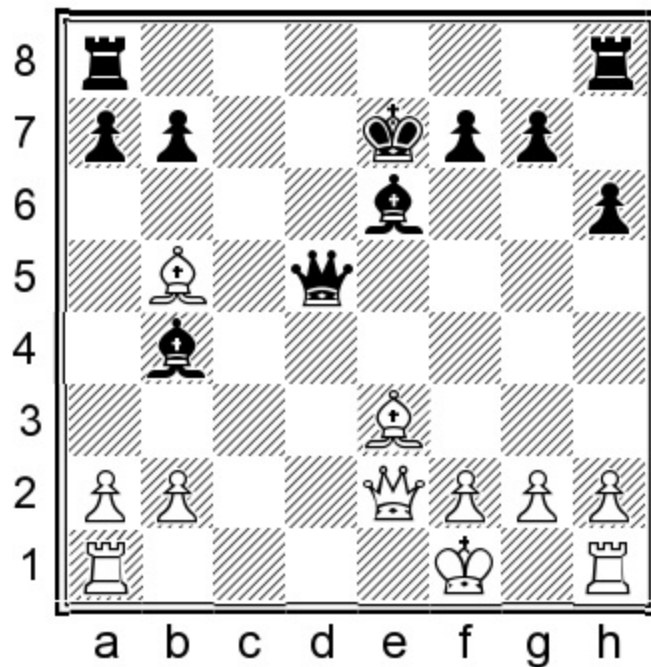
11.♚e2 ♘c6



Position after: 11... Nc6

12. Qe3

12.d5 $\text{N}d4$ 13. $\text{N}xd4$ $\text{Q}xd4$ 14. dxe6 $\text{Q}xe6$ 15. Qe3 $\text{Q}d5$ 16. Qb5+ Qe7 Black has connected his rooks first and holds a slight advantage.

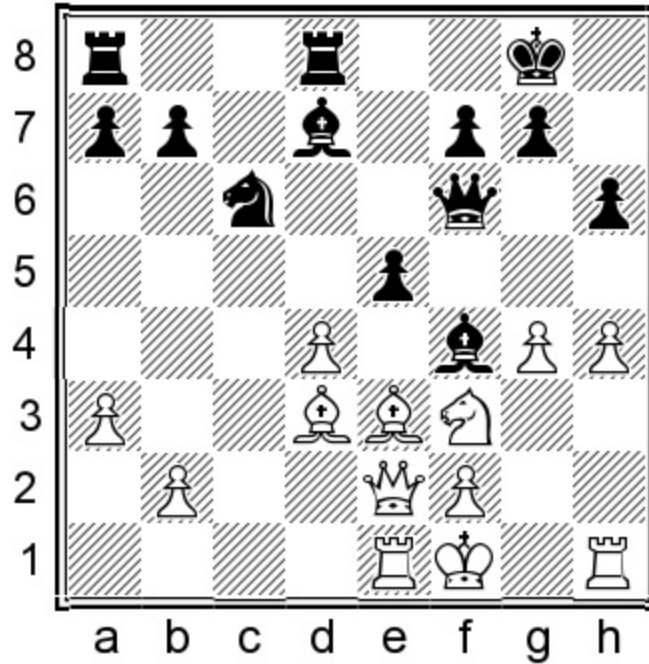


Position after: 16... Qe7

12...0-0

12...0-0-0!? probably leaves the Black king a bit too unsafe in the long run.

13.h4 ♖fd8 14.a3 ♗d6 15.♞e1! ♗f4 16.g4 e5∞



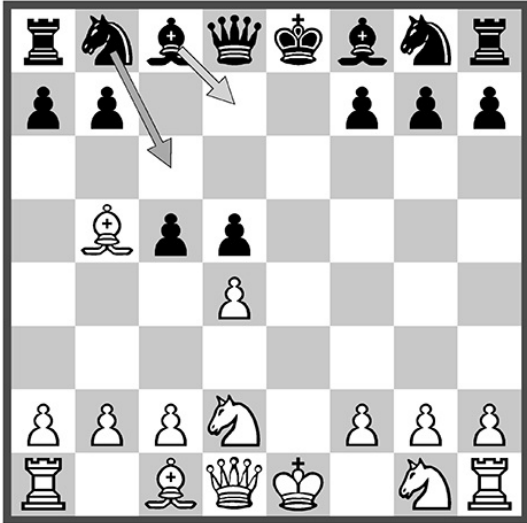
Position after: 16...e5∞

We have reached a complicated middlegame, but one which I would prefer to play as Black. Do not worry about the equal outcome, as White was the one needing precise play to equalize throughout the chapter.

Chapter 2

5.♞b5+ – A cheeky check

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞b5+



Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – 5.♞b5+ (A cheeky check)

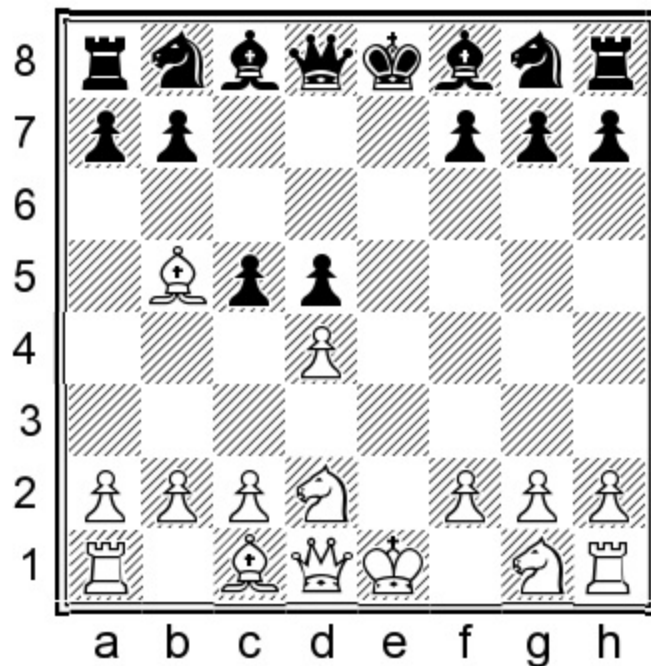
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞b5+

a) 5...♞c6

b) 5...♞d7

a) 5...♞c6

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞b5+!?



Position after: 5. ♙b5+!?

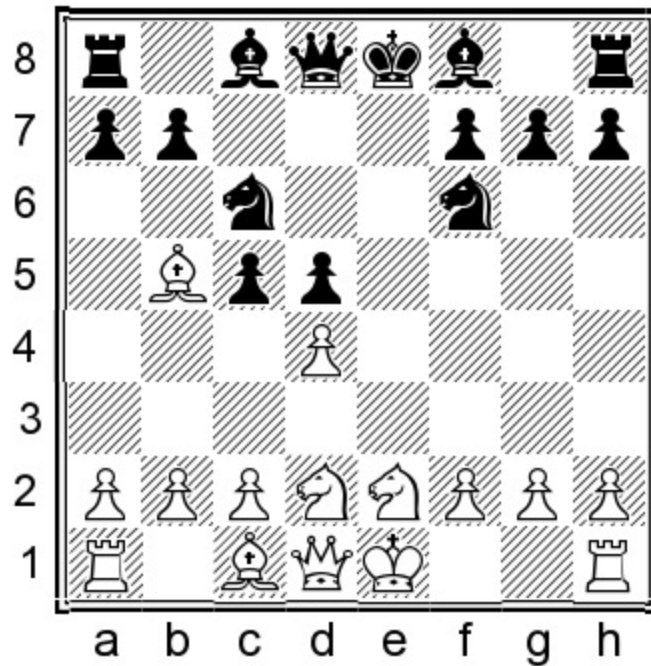
This is an interesting ‘improvement’ which many people will play because it’s Leela’s choice at the moment. Personally I would say it is just another move, nothing to fear. Though it is always wise to come to battle prepared, and I predict this will be a popular continuation for some time to come.

5... ♞c6

This is the main alternative to 5... ♙d7, coherent with the 5... ♞c6 main lines.

6. ♚e2+

6. ♞e2 Blocking the e-file is not the way for White, as Black can develop more favorably with less threats against his king. 6... ♞f6 As a result of White’s slow play, Black is able to develop his knights to their optimal squares.



Position after: 6... Nf6

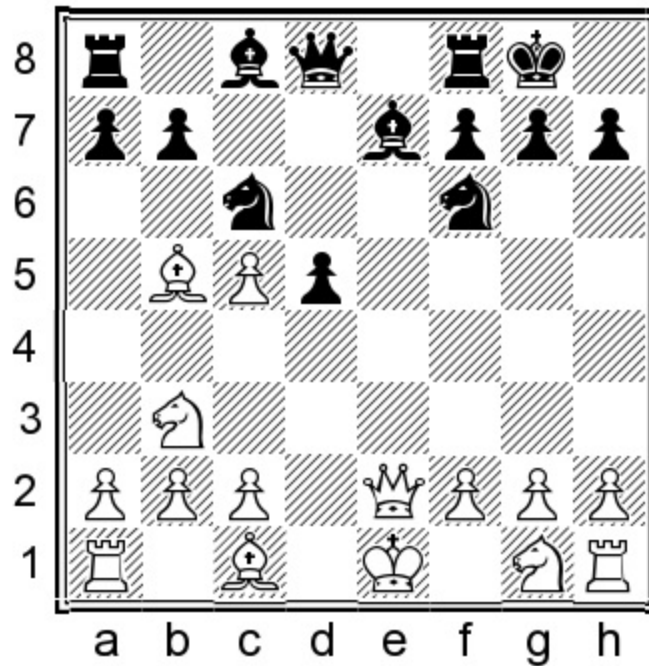
7.0-0 Qd6 8.dxc5 Qxc5= It is quite apparent that Black has equalized already.

6... Qe7

A bit dramatic but it is the only move to avoid getting a worse position.

6... Qe7?! is a bad version of the 6... cxd4 line because White just answers 7.dxc5 which causes a lot of problems. The worst part is, I have played this move myself in a real game once!

7.dxc5 Nf6 8.Nb3 0-0



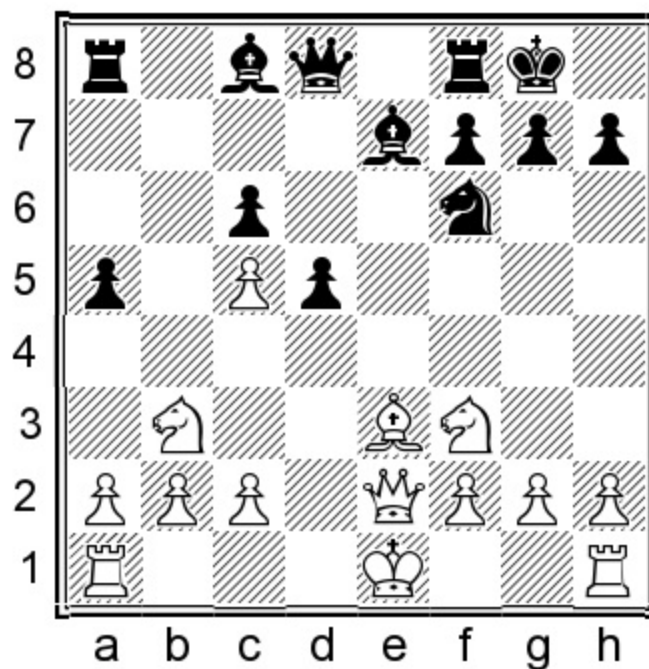
Position after: 8...0-0

9.♘f3

It is slightly more accurate to delay playing ♕e3 until it is required, which is after ...♖e8.

9.♕e3 a6! This move is significantly better than ...♖e8 because the e-file is blocked at the moment.

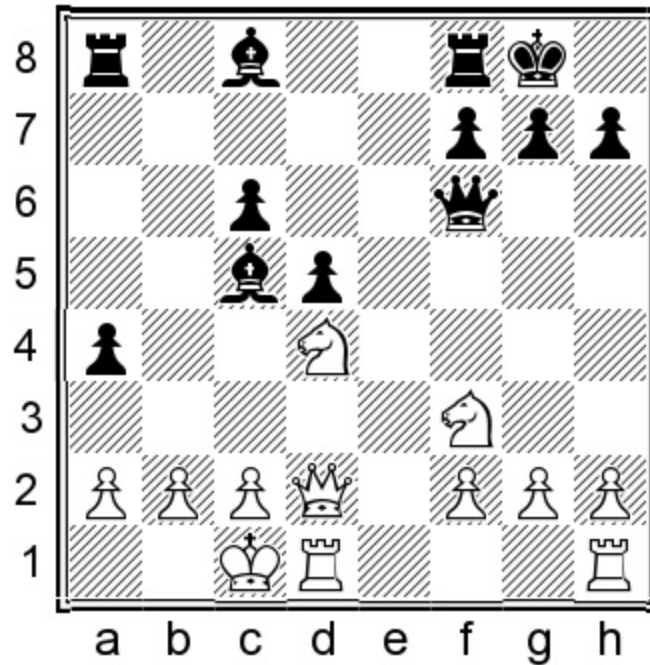
10.♕xc6 bxc6 11.♘f3 a5



Position after: 11...a5

In all recent games this move was the preferred option.

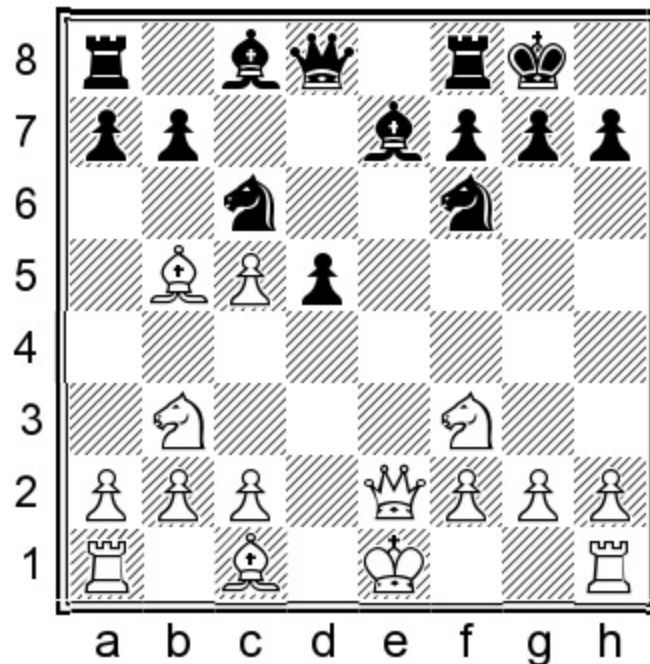
A) 12.0-0-0? Strangely enough this move was played three times with great results, even though Stockfish gives a large advantage to Black. 12...a4 13.♘bd4 ♔c7 [13...♙xc5!?] 14.♙g5 ♙xc5 15.♙xf6 ♔f4+ 16.♔d2 ♔xf6



Position after: 16...♔xf6

1-0 (52) Illingworth, M (2434) – Cheng, B (2433) Melbourne 2014.

B) 12.♘e5 ♔c7 13.♘d3 a4 14.♘d4 ♙a6= 1/2-1/2 (22) Melia, S (2473) – Javakhishvili, L (2486) Tbilisi 2015.



Position after: 9. ♖f3

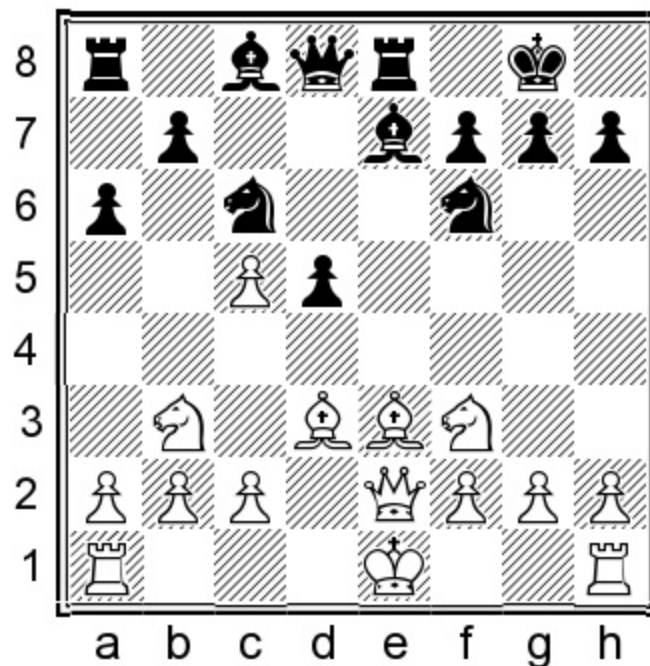
9...a6

This is similar to ...♞e8 however it is more forcing, therefore it cuts down on White's options, for example a setup with queenside castling.

9...♞e8 10.♙e3 a6

A) 11.♙a4 ♜e4 [11...♞d7!?] 12.0-0 ♞xc5=

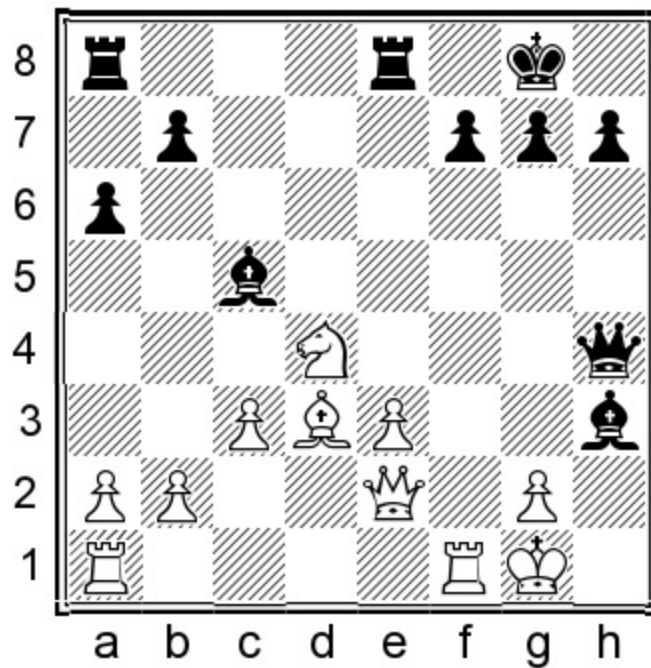
B) 11.♙d3 This position can also arise from 9...a6, in case White retreats the bishop to d3. There are many transpositions possible. Black can now choose the course of the game, by either liquidating the center immediately with ...d4 or steering the game towards more complex terrain.



Position after: 11. ♙d3

B1) 11...♞a5!? This move keeps the game more interesting and winnable for Black. 12.♞fd4 ♞g4N [12...♙g4?! 13.f3 ♞xb3 14.♞xb3± 1-0 (35) Sax, G (2590) – Vaganian, R (2570) Rio de Janeiro 1979.] 13.0-0 ♞xb3 14.♞xb3 ♙f6=

B2) 11...d4 12.♞bxd4 ♞xd4 13.♞xd4 ♙xc5 14.c3 ♞g4 15.0-0 ♞h4 16.h3 ♞xe3 17.fxe3 ♙xh3=



Position after: 17... ♖xh3=

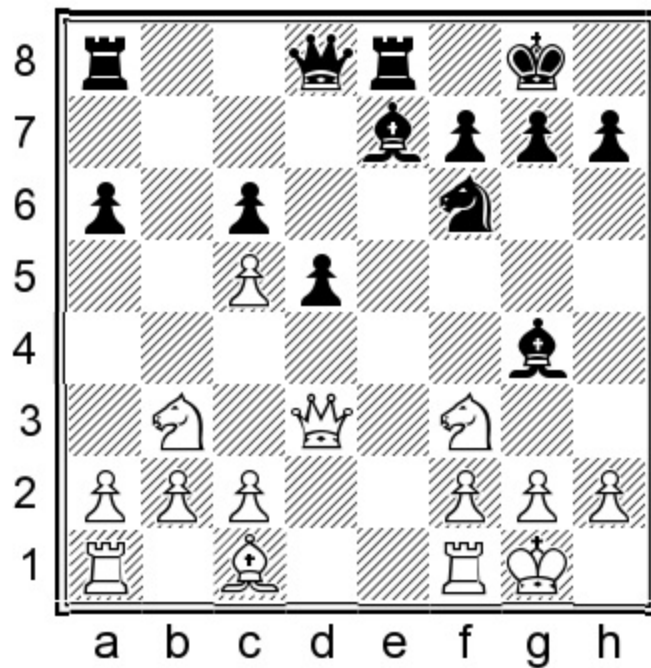
For a lazy day at the office. ½–½ (40) Zapata, A (2515) – Stojanovic, M (2445) Ubeda 1997.

10. ♖xc6

10. ♖d3 transposes to the previous line.

10... bxc6 11. 0-0 ♜e8 12. ♖e3

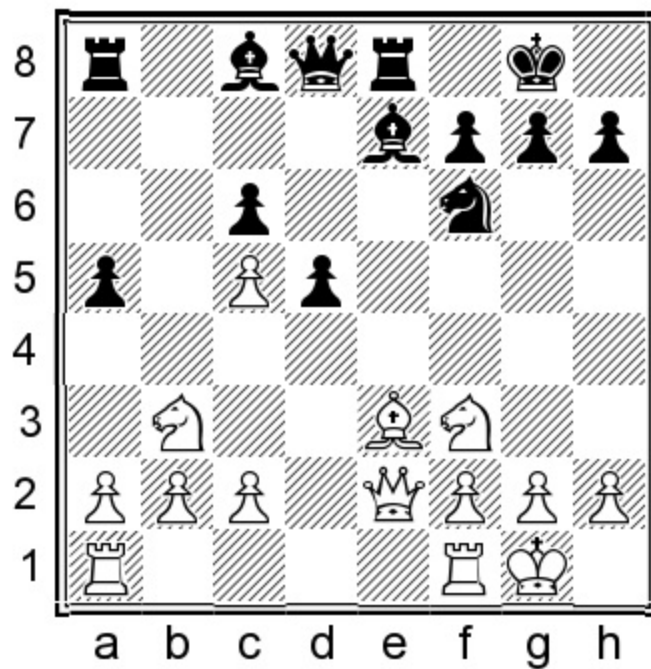
12. ♛d1!? ♖g4 13. ♛d3



Position after: 13. ♔d3

13... ♘e4?! [13... ♘d7=] 14. ♘e5± 1-0 (57) Satyapragyan, S (2415) – Hariharan, V (2245) Calicut 2003.

12...a5



Position after: 12...a5

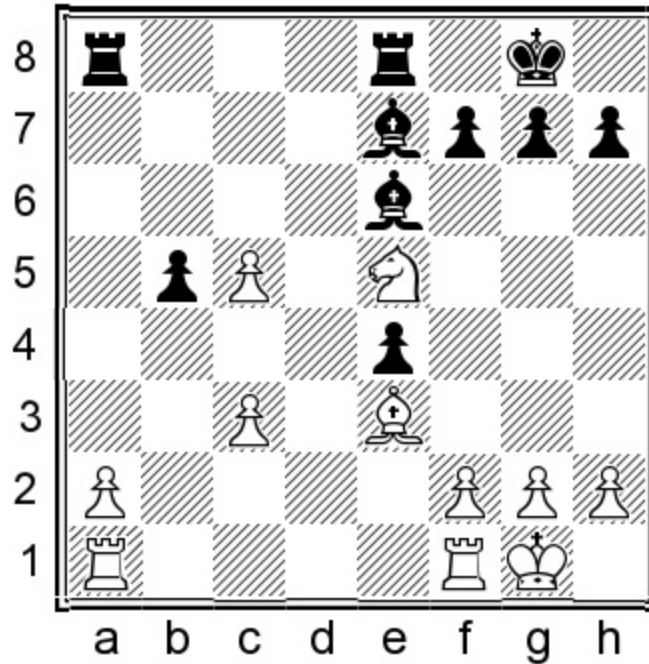
13. ♔d1

13. ♖fe1 a4 14. ♗bd4 ♕xc5 15. ♗xc6 ♖c7 16. ♗cd4 a3 17. c3 ♕a6 18. ♖c2 ♗g4=

13...a4

13...♕g4!?

14. ♗bd2 ♖a5 15. c3 ♗e4 16. ♗e5 ♖b5 17. ♗xe4 dxe4 18. b3 axb3 19. ♖xb3 ♕e6 20. ♖xb5 cxb5=

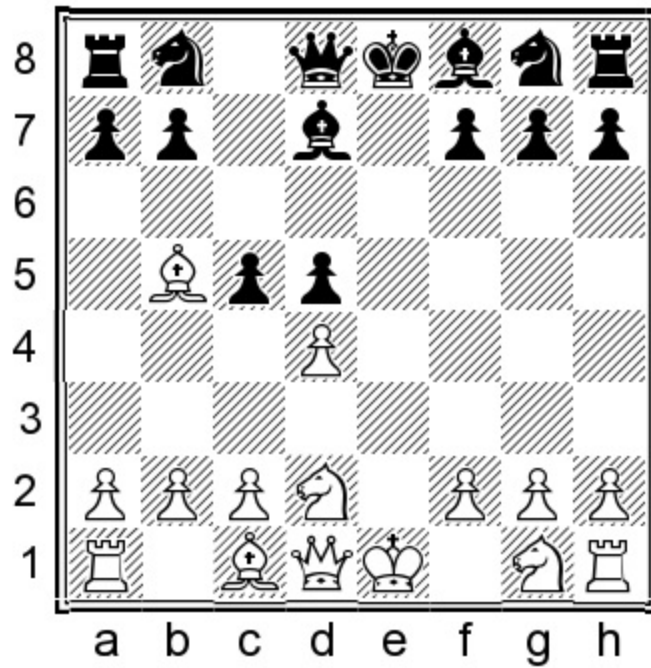


Position after: 20...cxb5=

White managed to hold on to the pawn, but nothing more. The 5. ♕b5+ variation is harmless if Black knows what he's doing.

b) 5...♕d7

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♗d2 c5 4. exd5 exd5 5. ♕b5+!? ♕d7

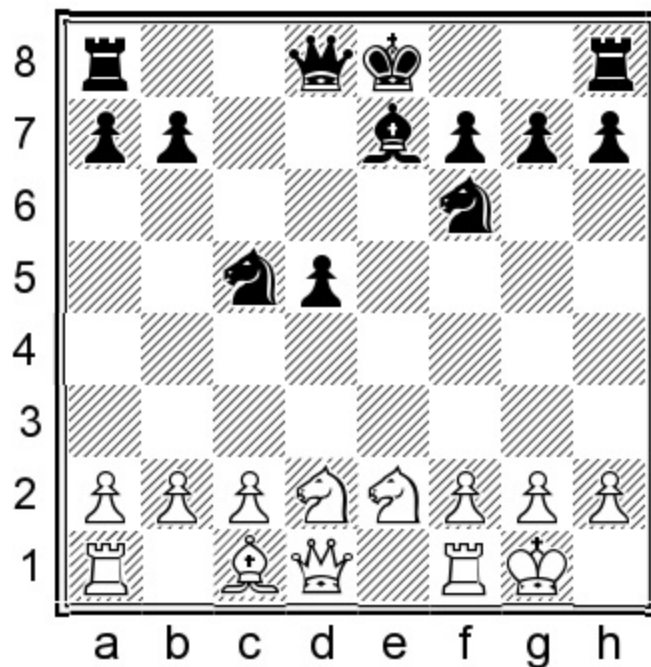


Position after: 5...♔d7

6.♙e2+

6.♔xd7+!? This option will most likely transpose to the lines with 5...♖f6, although there are some unique paths.

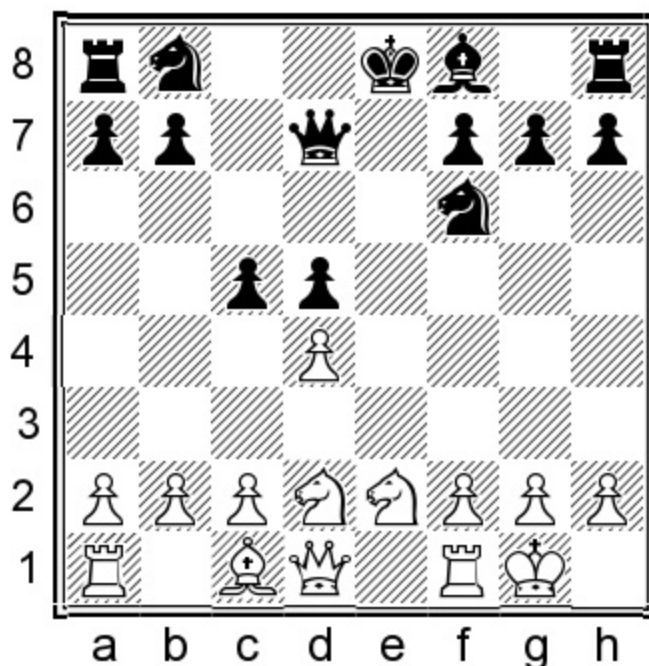
A) 6...♖xd7 7.♖e2 7...♖gf3 ♖gf6 would transpose. 7...♖gf6 8.0-0 ♔e7 9.dxc5 ♖xc5



Position after: 9...♖xc5

Despite the fact that White has placed his knights slightly differently, there are no extra options for White but to transpose by putting either of the knights on d4.

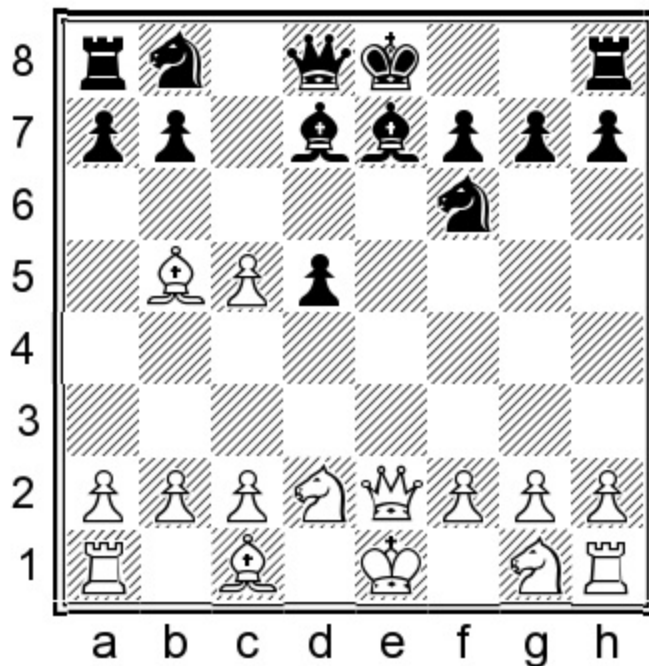
B) 6...♙xd7 7.♘e2 ♘f6 [7...c4 is another option leading to the characteristic pawn structure. 8.0-0 ♙d6 9.b3 cxb3 10.axb3 ♘e7 ½-½ (60) Zapata, A (2454) – Psakhis, L (2581) Las Vegas 1999.] 8.0-0



Position after: 8.0-0

8...cxd4! This will transpose to the 7...♙xd7 line covered in Chapter 5. [8...♙d6 9.dxc5 ♙xc5 10.♘b3 ♙b6 11.a4 0-0 12.a5 ♙c7 13.♙g5 ♘e4 14.♙f4±] 9.♘xd4 ♙e7 and we have transposed.

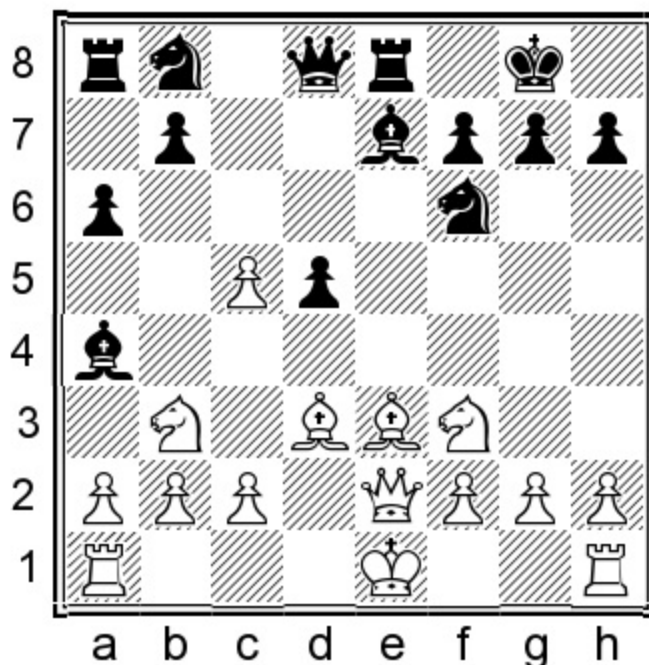
6...♙e7 7.dxc5 ♘f6



Position after: 7... Nf6

8. Nf3

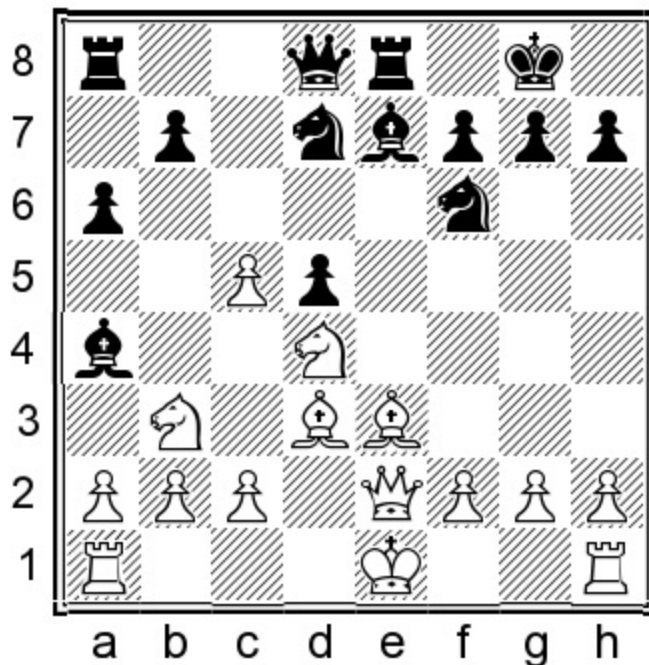
8. Nf3 Now we have a transposition to the position after 5. Nf3 Nf6 6. Bb5+ Nd7 7. We2+ Ne7 8. dxc5. 8...0-0 9. Nf3 Re8 10. Ne3 a6 [10... Qxc5?! 11. Nxc5 Wa5+ 12. Wd2 Wxb5 13.0-0-0±] 11. Nd3 [11. Qxd7 Nbx7 12.0-0 Nxc5 13. Rfe1 Wc7 14. Nfd4 Na4= 0-1 (69) Matanovic, A (2495) – Henley, R (2460) Surakarta 1982.] 11... Qa4



Position after: 11... Qa4

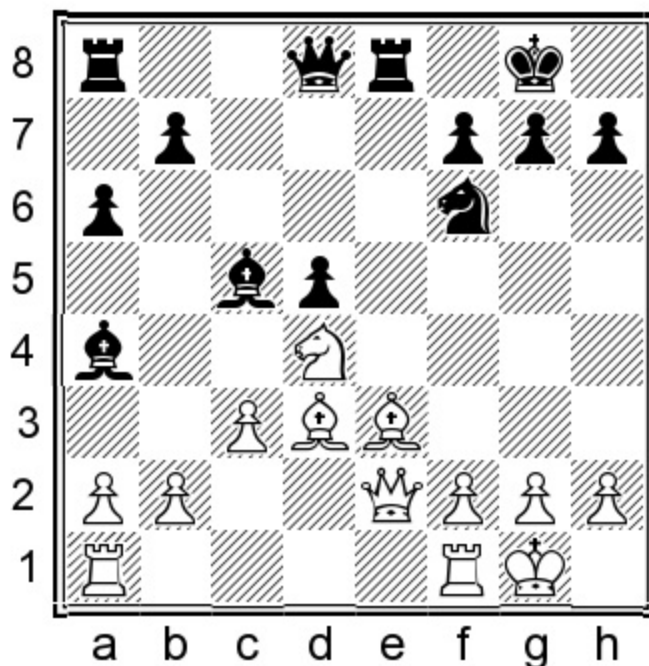
A) 12. ♖bd4 ♙xc5 13. 0-0 ♜c6!? 14. c3 ♜xd4 15. ♖xd4 ♙xd4 16. cxd4 ♚d7= 1-0 (41) Preotu, R (2501) – Sambuev, B (2522) Calgary 2017. [16... ♚b6= is another option. ½-½ (33) Vastrukhin, O (2315) – Ponfilenok, V (2440) St Petersburg 2009.]

B) 12. ♖fd4 The only real try for an advantage. 12... ♖bd7 At this point White has an important decision to make about where to put his king.



Position after: 12... ♖bd7

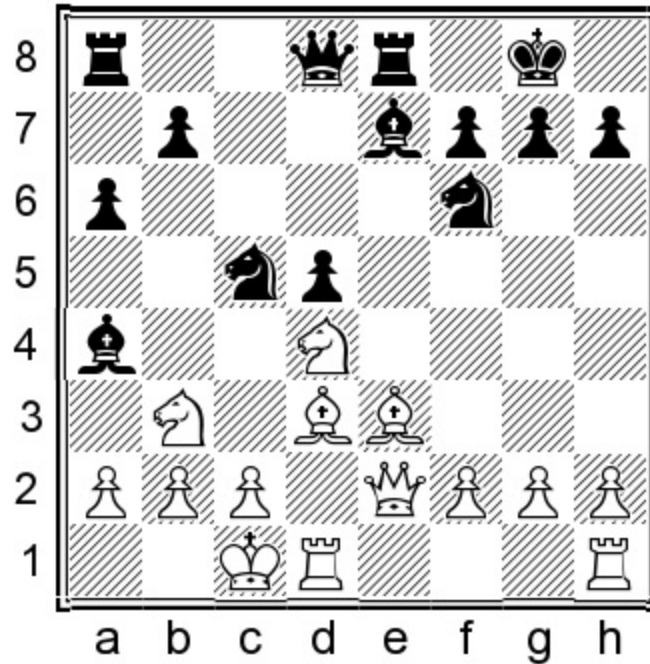
B1) 13. 0-0 ♜xc5 [13... ♙xb3 14. ♖xb3 ♜xc5 15. ♚f3 ♜xd3 16. cxd3 ♚d7= ½-½ (41) Nikolenko, O (2495) – Dolmatov, S (2570) Moscow 1998.] 14. ♜xc5 ♙xc5 15. c3



Position after: 15.c3

15...♙xd4! [15...♚b6!?] 16.cxd4 With a transposition to an equal position covered previously in line A.

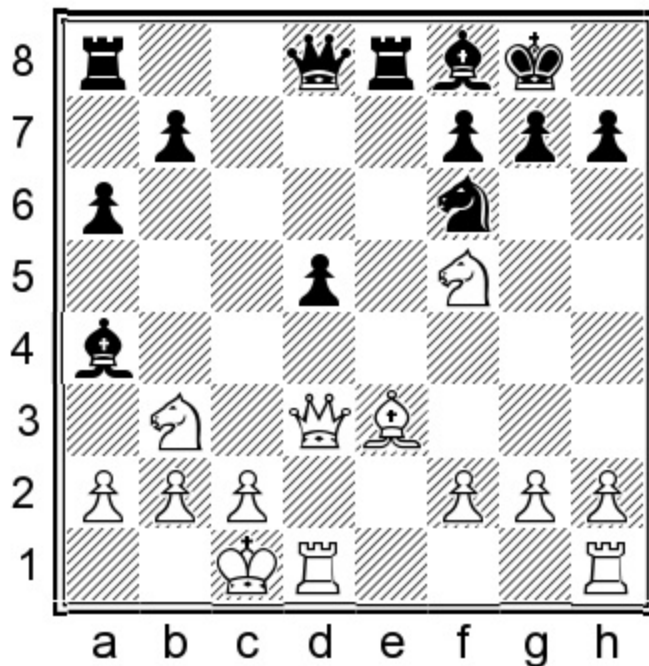
B2) 13.0-0-0 This has been played the most and is consistent with the strategy of getting an original game. 13...♘xc5! [13...♙xb3 14.♘xb3 ♘xc5 15.♚d2 ♘xd3+ 16.♚xd3 a5 17.♘d4 ½-½ (17) Kirkov, T (2392) – Galanov, S (2589) ICCF email 2010.]



Position after: 13...♘xc5!

This strong move allows Black to press for an advantage.

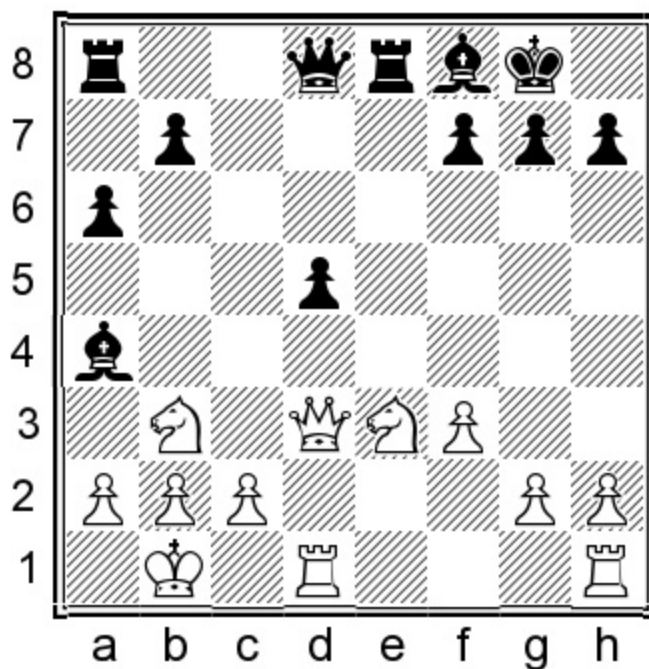
B2.1) 14.♘f5 The most common response, but seemingly not the best. 14...♘xd3+ 15.♚xd3 ♙f8



Position after: 15...♙f8

16.f3 [16.♖b1 ♘b5 17.♗d2 ♞e4 18.♗xd5 ♗c7±; 16.♙g5?! h6 17.♙h4 g5 18.♙g3 ♘b5 19.♗d4 ♞e4 20.♗d2 ♞e2 21.♗d4 ♞e4 (21...♞c8!±) 22.♗d2 ♞e2 23.♗d4 and an inexplicable draw was agreed. ½-½ Rublevsky, S (2662) – Bareev, E (2709) Frankfurt 2000.] 16...♗c8 17.♞g3! ♗c7= ½-½ (45) Tellier, B (2125) – Schwarz, R (2229) ICCF email 2015.

B2.2 14.♖b1 ♞xd3 15.♗xd3 ♞g4 16.♞f5 ♙f8! [16...♙f6?! 17.♙d4± ½-½ (115) Rasulov, V (2526) – Nakar, E (2344) Plovdiv 2012.] 17.f3 ♞xe3 18.♞xe3



Position after: 18.♞xe3

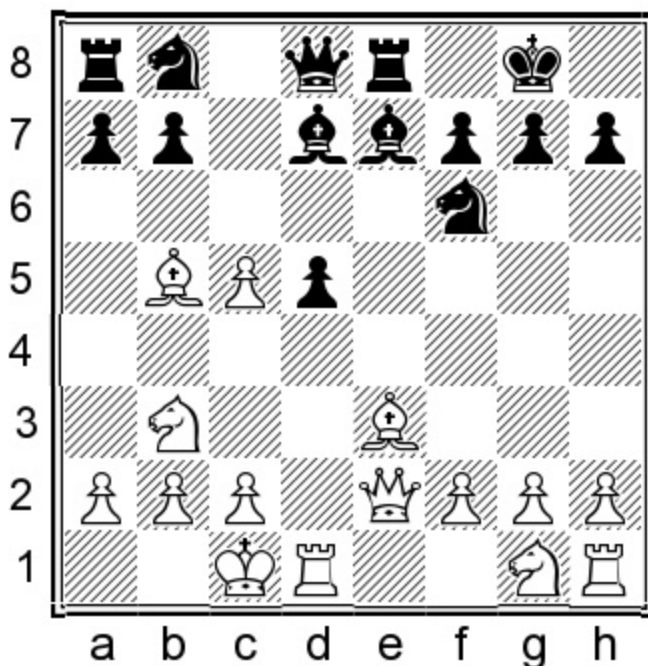
18...d4! With our pair of bishops playing against a pair of knights, we are very willing to give up this pawn to open the position. [18...♙b5!?] 19.♗xd4 ♚g5 20.♗ef5 ♜ad8= with more than enough compensation.

8...0-0 9.♙e3

The idea of this move is to castle queenside as soon as possible, leading to unique positions.

9.♗f3 transposes to the usual lines with 5...♗f6.

9...♞e8 10.0-0-0!?



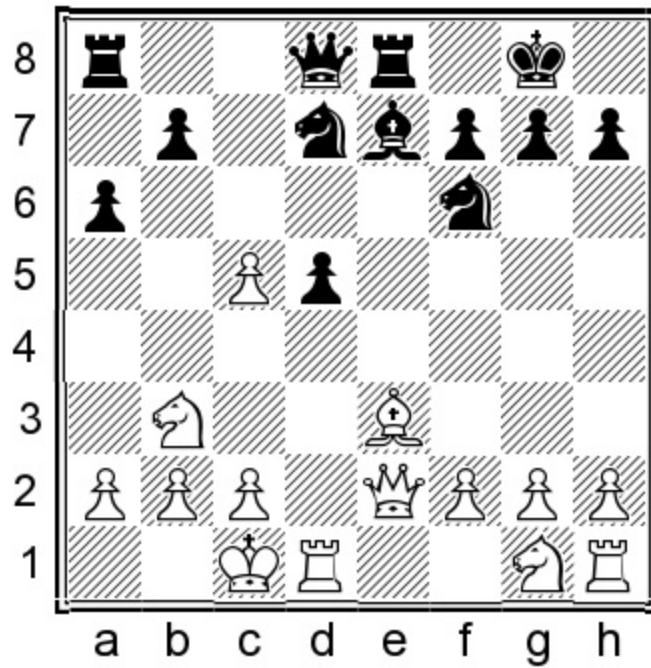
Position after: 10.0-0-0!?

10...a6

The safe option. 10...a5! is the more entertaining option which scores extremely well for Black. 11.a4 ♗a6 [11...♙c6! 12.♗f3 ♗bd7 13.♗fd4 ♚c7 14.♙xc6 bxc6= 1/2-1/2 (59) Manik, M (2395) – Sulskis, S (2515) Pardubice 1996.] 12.♙xd7 ♚xd7 13.♚b5 ♚xb5 14.axb5 ♗c7 [14...♗b8! 15.c6 bxc6 16.bxc6 a4 17.♗d4 a3 18.b3 ♗e4= This position was reached in 1/2-1/2 (21) Holmsten, A (2435) – Psakhis, L (2598) Linares 2001. No one would ever win this position in correspondence chess!

11.♙xd7 ♗bxd7

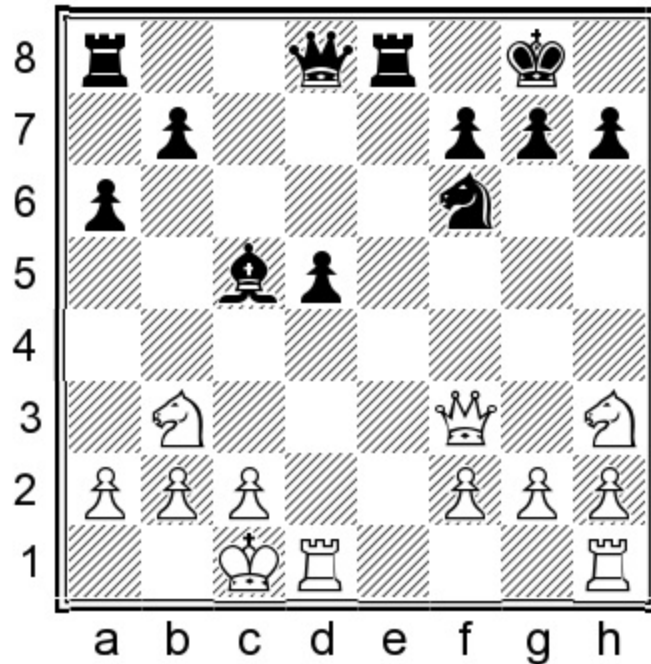
11...♚xd7! N 12.♗f3 a5 13.a3 a4 14.♗bd4 ♙xc5 15.♚b5 ♚xb5 16.♗xb5 ♙xe3+ 17.fxe3 ♜xe3=



Position after: 11... Nbd7

12. ♖d3

12. ♖h3!? ♗xc5 [12... a5!? N 13. a4 ♗xc5 14. ♖b5 ♗xb3+ 15. cxb3 b6! 16. ♔b1 ♕c5! =] 13. ♕xc5 ♕xc5
 14. ♖f3



Position after: 14. ♖f3

A) 14... ♕d6 15. ♖f4 ♕xf4+ 16. ♖xf4 ♖e4 17. ♖d2 ♖c7 gave White an edge but he agreed to a draw in

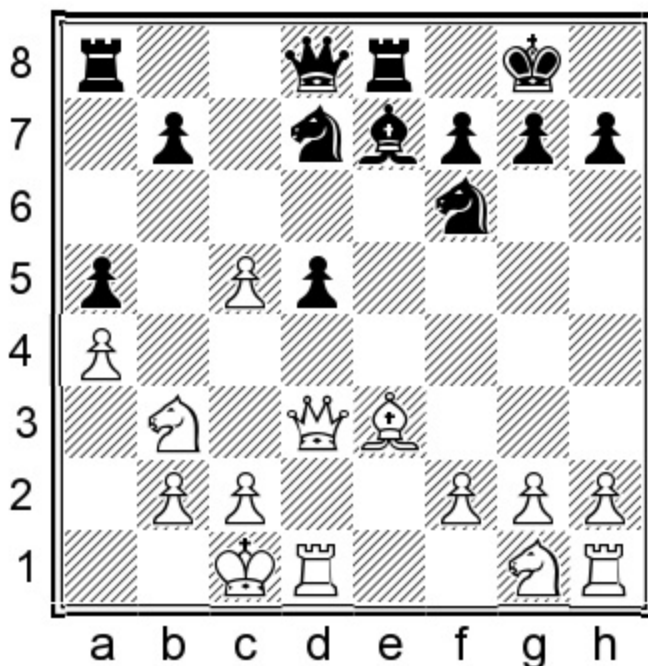
½-½ Gonzalez Vidal, Y (2420) – Nogueiras Santiago, J (2560) Santa Clara 2000. There is always a reason whenever the higher rated player offers a draw!

B) 14...♔a7 15.♘f4 ♖e5 [15...♘e4!?] 16.♗he1 ♖xe1 17.♖xe1 ♚c7 18.♗d1 ♗d8= 1-0 (41) Kuzmin, G – Korchnoi, V Moscow 1973.

12...a5!

12...♚c7 13.♘e2 ♘xc5 14.♙xc5 ♙xc5 15.♘xc5 ♚xc5 This position scores surprisingly well for Black. In my view, White retains a slight edge here. 0-1 (58) Barua, D (2520) – Dolmatov, S (2610) Kolkata 1996.

13.a4

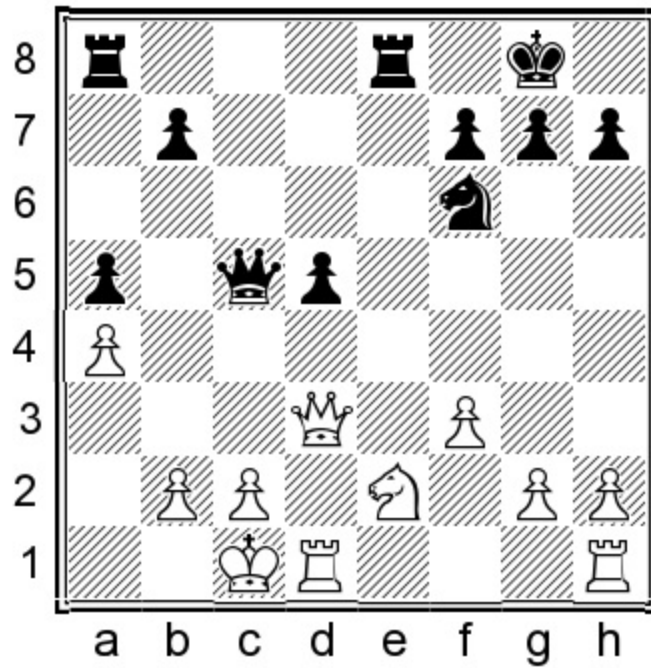


Position after: 13.a4

13...b6!N

Opening the queenside and beginning an attack. I believe the position is easier to play for Black here, with great compensation for the pawn.

13...♚c7 14.♘e2 ♘xc5 15.♙xc5 ♙xc5 16.♘xc5 ♚xc5 17.f3



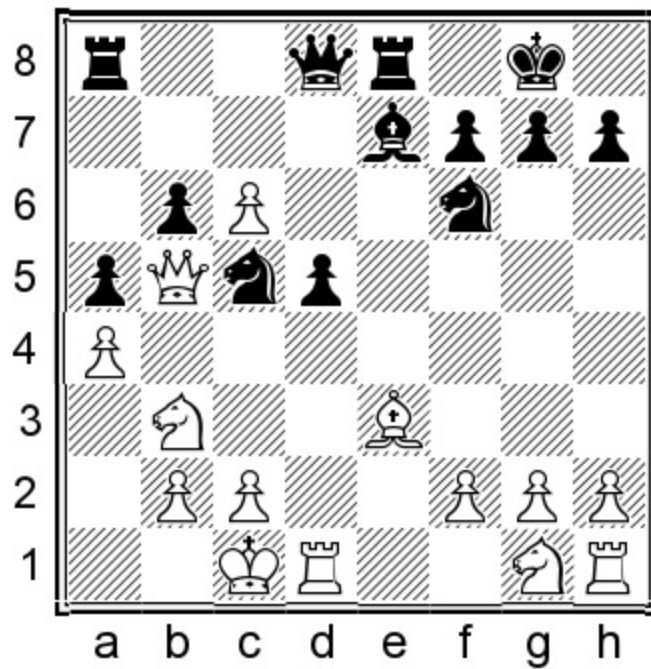
Position after: 17.f3

The inclusion of a4 and ...a5 did not favor Black. 17...♙b4 18.♘c3 ♜ec8 19.♞he1±

14.c6

14.cxb6 ♞xb6 15.♙xb6 ♚xb6± gives Black more than enough compensation for the pawn.

14...♞c5 15.♚b5

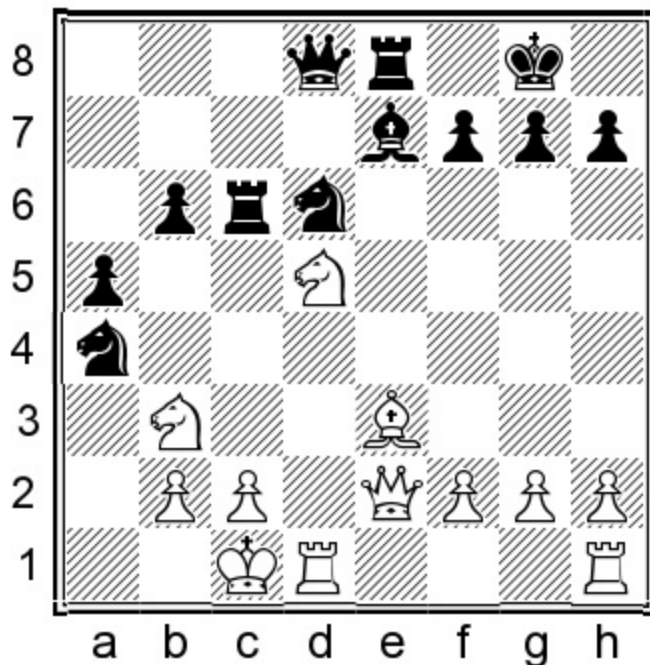


Position after: 15. ♖b5

Now we are entering the domain of pure chaos.

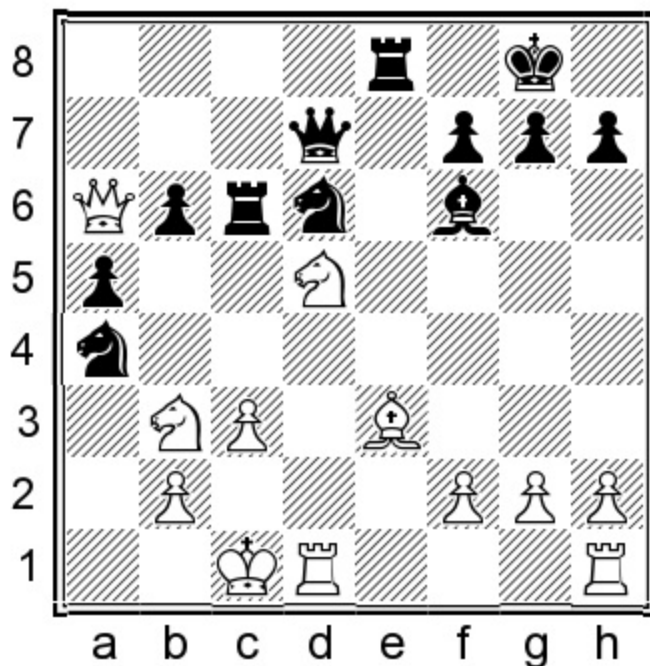
15... ♗fe4 16. ♗e2 ♕f6

16... ♖c8 might be an easier solution. 17. ♗f4 ♗d6 18. ♖e2 ♗xa4 19. ♗xd5 ♖xc6=



Position after: 19... ♖xc6=

17. ♗f4 ♗d6 18. ♖f1 ♗xa4 19. c3 ♖c8 20. ♗xd5 ♖xc6 21. ♖a6 ♖d7



Position after: 21... ♖d7

22. ♖d3

22. ♘xf6+ gxf6 23. ♖d3 ♖c7=

22... ♖d8=

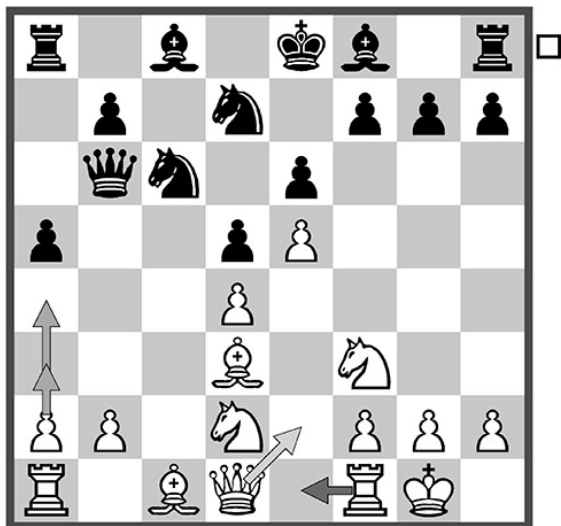
Conclusion

We have seen two different ways to play against 5. ♘b5+, each corresponding with one of the systems starting with 5... ♘f6 or 5... ♘c6 in the mainlines. Unfortunately there is no possible equivalent to 5...a6, for obvious reasons! If you consider 5...a6 as a bonus option in the mainline, then it suggests that 5. ♘b5+ might be quite a clever move-order. It is no surprise that Leela gives it as the best move! In this chapter we have seen the unique lines that are possible after 5. ♘b5+. White tries to hold on to the pawn he took on c5, but in the end we can say that there are many ways to equalize for Black. Still, it is important to remember the 13...b6!N resource as other moves allow White a slight edge and it is also a good way to complicate the game.

Chapter 3

4. ♖gf3 ♜f6 – Universal line, waiting to take the candy

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.♖gf3 ♜f6 5.e5 ♞fd7 6.c3 ♝c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 3 – 4. ♖gf3 ♜f6 (Universal line, waiting to take the candy)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.♖gf3 ♜f6 5.e5 ♞fd7 6.c3 ♝c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5

a) 10.a3, 10.a4

b) 10.♙e2

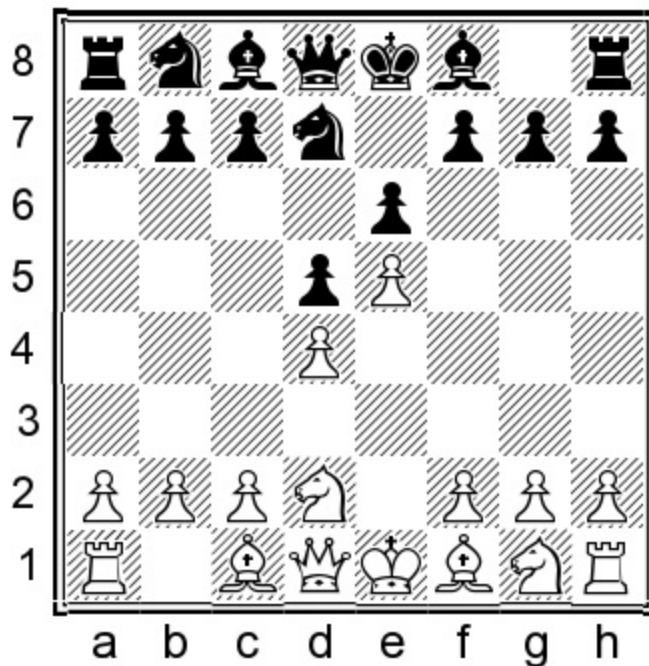
c) 10.♞e1 ♙e7 11.♙e2, 11.a4

d) 10.♞e1 ♙e7 11.h3

a) 10.a3, 10.a4

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5

Just in case you were wondering why I recommend 4... ♜f6 after 3...c5 instead of 3... ♜f6 immediately, let me enlighten you. 3... ♜f6 4.e5 ♞fd7

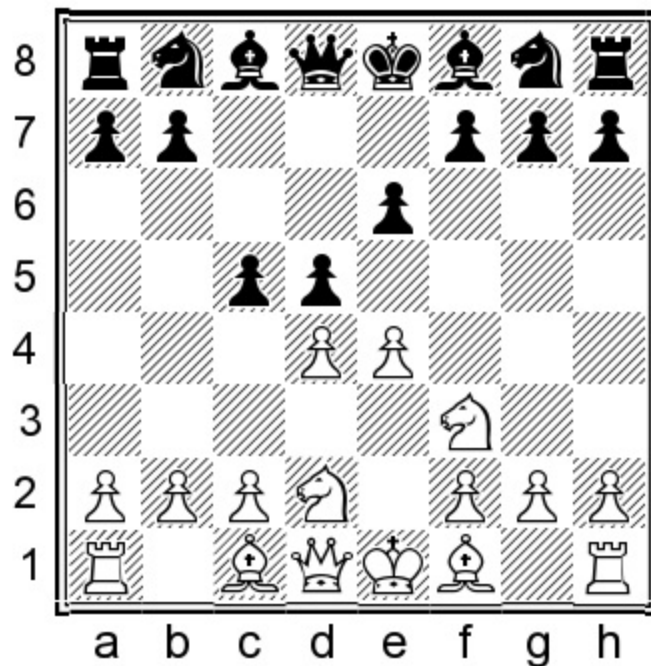


Position after: 4... Nfd7

Here White has a lot of options. The dangerous 5.f4, 5.Ngf3 transposing to our main line after 5...c5, 5.c3 transposing to one of our other lines, and finally 5.Qd3, the main line in this position. 5.Qd3 [5.f4 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ndf3 Fortunately for us, my move order with 3...c5 avoids this annoying line.

Therefore we can focus on 5.Nfg3 only!] 5...c5 6.c3 Nc6 7.Ne2! I believe it is incredibly hard to find anything tangible here for Black. Most continuations are very well known and it will be hard to surprise your opponents. Many authors have gone before me writing about this system, but in the end I believe we will be much better served trying to play for a win in the labyrinth of the IQP. So, let's go back to our repertoire!

4.Ngf3



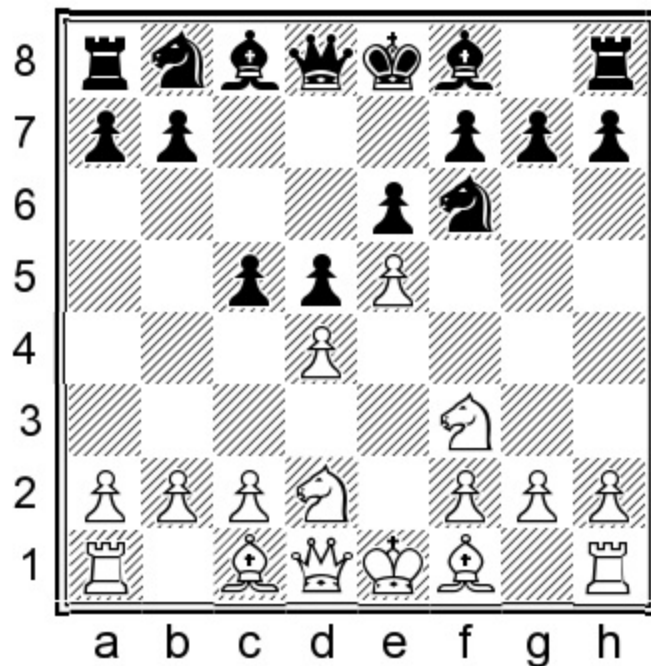
Position after: 4. Nf3

This move is quite tricky and it requires a dramatically different approach from the other lines in this repertoire. 4...cxd4 does not fit in with our proposed 4...exd5/5...Nf6 repertoire because it would transpose to the main continuation of the 4.exd5 Qxd5 line, which is outside the realms of this book. I will further justify my choice for 4...exd5 and 5...Nf6 in the next chapter.

In this position, 4...Nf6 is the only move which fits into our repertoire and transposes into 3...Nf6 4.e5 Nf3. Here we will see the latest developments in the line where White has committed himself to Nf3 instead of the main line Ne2.

4...Nf6 5.e5

5.exd5 exd5 is more commonly played, transposing to Chapters 5-7.

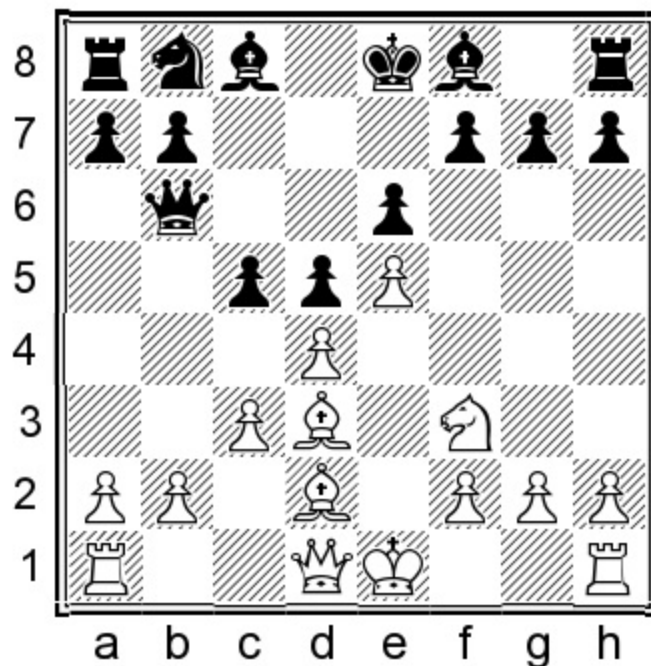


Position after: 5.e5

5...♞fd7

5...♞e4!? also deserves some special attention because it is rare and scores quite well in correspondence chess. Unfortunately, that was all the good news! Let's see why.

A) 6.c3 is what we are hoping for, and actually a lot of opponents will play this way. 6...♞xd2
 7.♙xd2 ♚b6!N Showing some aggression. This move is better than 7...♞c6 because we still keep the path open to exchange our 'bad' bishop on b5. 8.♙d3

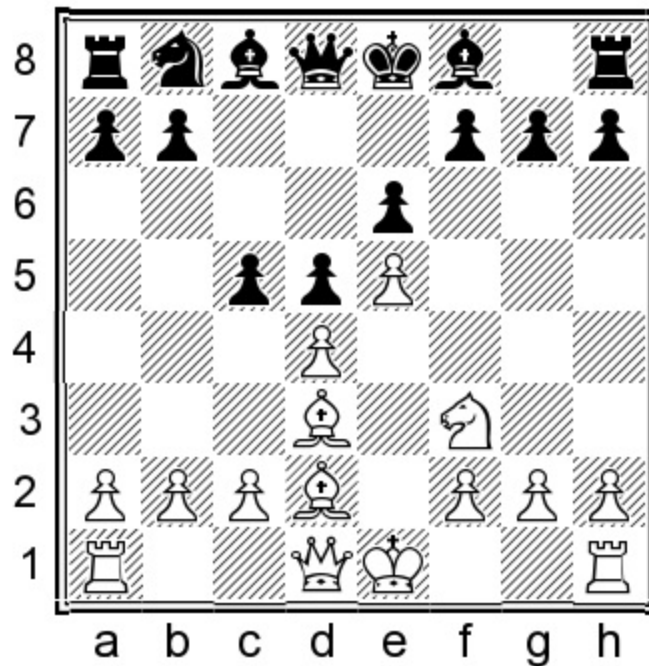


Position after: 8. ♖d3

A1) 8...cxd4! It is important not to allow 9.dxc5 after which White would be clearly better. White could simply follow up with b2-b4, taking over the dark squares because ...♙xf2+ would lose the bishop in most cases. 9.cxd4 ♙d7! 10.0-0 ♙b5 11.♙xb5+ ♚xb5 12.a4 ♚b6!= Black's better minor pieces in this closed position compensate for the lack of development. Therefore it is equal, but harder to play with White.

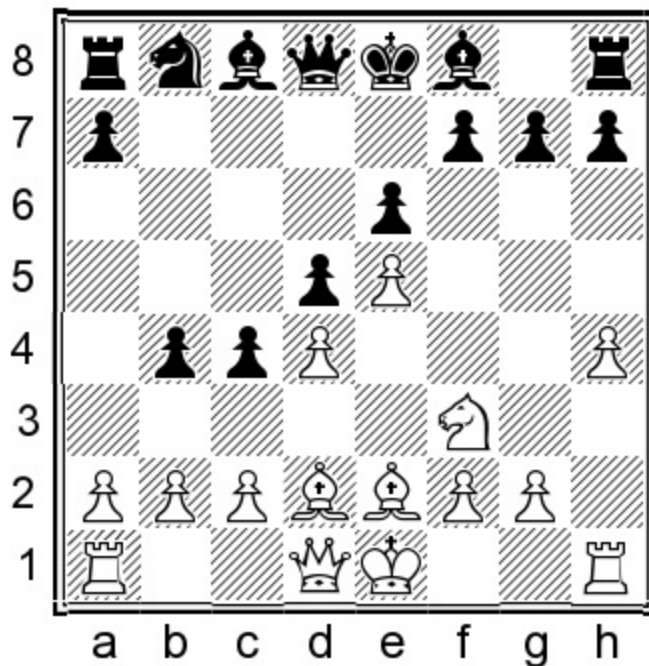
A2) 8...c4 9.♙c2 ♚xb2= The computer says equal, but Black lost in every human game that reached this position. Therefore this continuation could only be recommended if you are happy to remember a lot of variations and to settle for a draw.

B) 6.♙d3 ♘xd2 White has two options to recapture. 7.♙xd2 [7.♚xd2±]



Position after: 7. ♙xd2

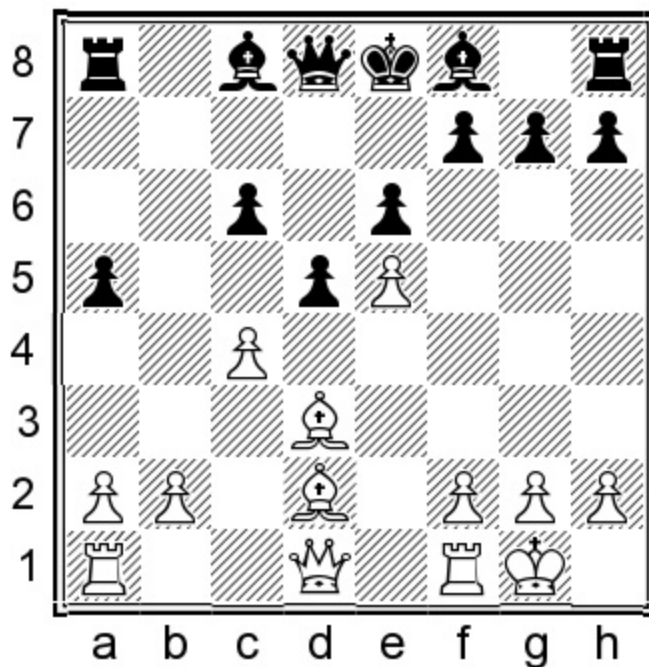
B1) 7...c4! is the fighting option, after which I am quite certain the game will not end in a draw. That being said, Black's chances are rather poor! 8.♙e2 b5 9.h4! b4±



Position after: 9...b4±

I have analyzed several moves for White here and came to the conclusion that all of them maintain an advantage. It is actually very difficult for White to mess up. We definitely do not want that!

B2) 7...cxd4 8. ♘xd4 ♘c6 [8... ♖b6 9. ♖g4!±] 9. ♘xc6 bxc6 10.0-0 a5 11.c4±



Position after: 11.c4±

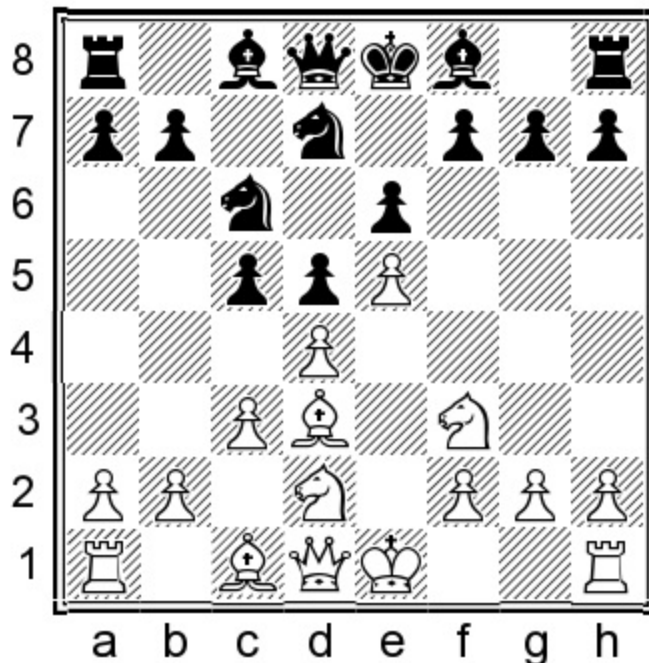
White is better developed and has the better pawn structure. This does not feel good. Therefore I believe we should only play 5...♘e4 in blitz games, and even there, it's usually not that much fun. I

have played this way for a long time online, with an awful score. Don't try this at home, or anywhere else for that matter!

6.c3

6.c4?! ♖c6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♙b5 ♚b6 9.♙xc6 bxc6 10.0-0 cxd4 ♞ Black has a slightly better position with the bishop pair.

6...♗c6 7.♙d3



Position after: 7.♙d3

This is basically the standard position which arises in most games where 4.♗gf3 and 5.e5 are played. Black has many possible plans and setups, however a number of them have been struggling over the last couple of years. Viktor Moskalenko and Emanuel Berg were great advocates of the inferior 7...g6. Unfortunately, this move has simply not stood the test of time and seems to allow White to get a better version of our main lines. In the next two chapters I will analyze the main move 7...♚b6. Deep analysis of this system will leave you well equipped to handle the black side, even against opponents who have all day to prepare.

7...♚b6! 8.0-0

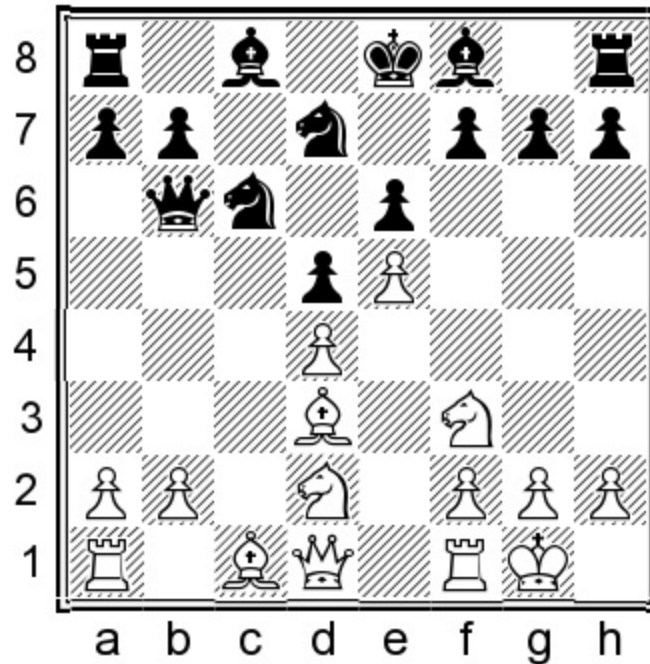
8.dxc5? ♗xc5 9.♙c2 ♗d7 10.♚e2 ♚c7 ♞

8...cxd4

8...a5!? could be an interesting way to give White extra options. But why would we do that? 9.dxc5

9...xc5 10.♔e2 a4 11.♖e1± This is not the extra option that Black was hoping for.

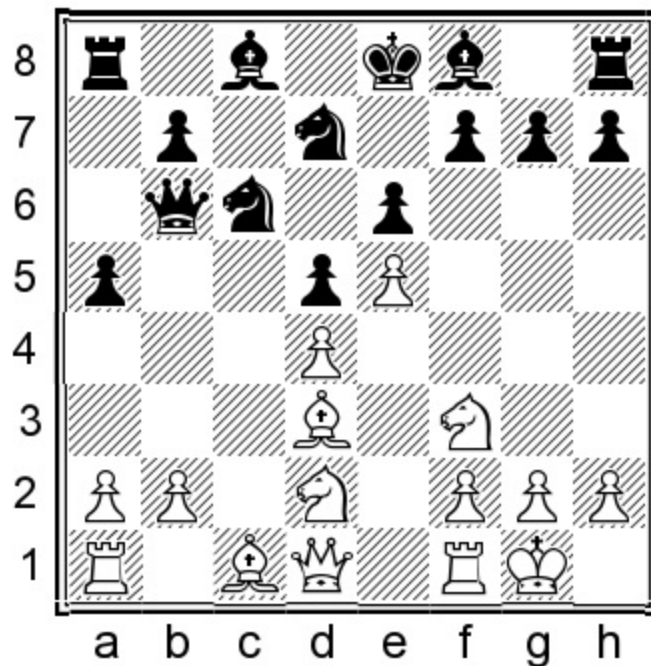
9.cxd4



Position after: 9.cxd4

We have arrived at an important moment for our understanding of the position. Please take your time to study the ideas. White is offering a famous pawn sacrifice, which was a favorite of Korchnoi. Taking 9...♘xd4 immediately seems to be the most straightforward idea, but in practice it is quite difficult to play as Black. The reason for this is that the move 9...♘xd4 solves White's problem of the awkward knight on d2 which gets to f3 with a tempo. Therefore, the best move in recent years has proven to be 9...a5!. This pawn thrust is directed against the knight on d2. Black simply poses the question, what useful moves does White have? The answer is difficult, White has tried several things, but it seems that there is no advantage.

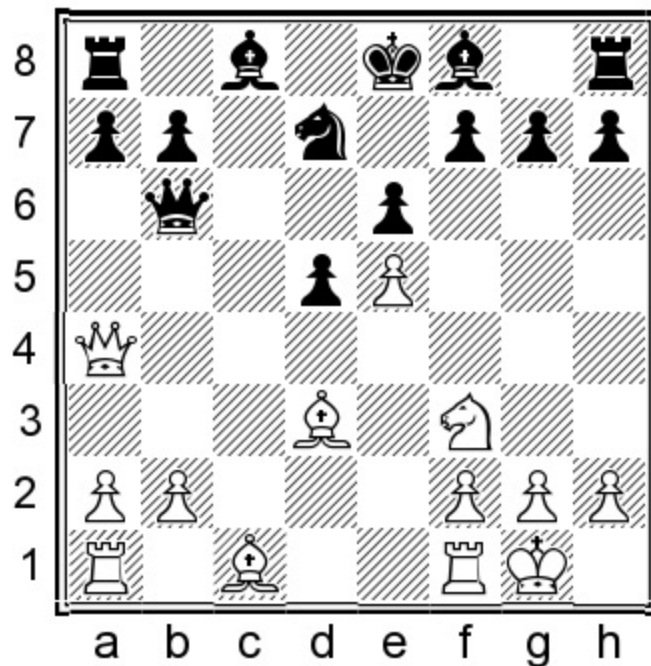
9...a5!



Position after: 9...a5!

This move is deep, cool and scores better than Trump in the 2016 elections! Now White has a difficult choice to make. 10.♘b3 has been prevented and there is no apparent plan for White. After an overnight think, the computer even chooses the timid 10.h3. In practice White often goes for 10.♝e1, a sensible developing move. Then there is also 10.♞e2, which loses a tempo if White later chooses to put the queen on g4, which he often does. Sometimes White goes 10.a3 if they are keen on playing ♞a4. And finally, we will take a look at 10.a4, making ♘b3 possible again and therefore forcing Black to decide about taking the pawn on d4, now or never!

Important: 9...♘xd4 10.♘xd4 ♞xd4 11.♘f3 ♞b6 12.♞a4!



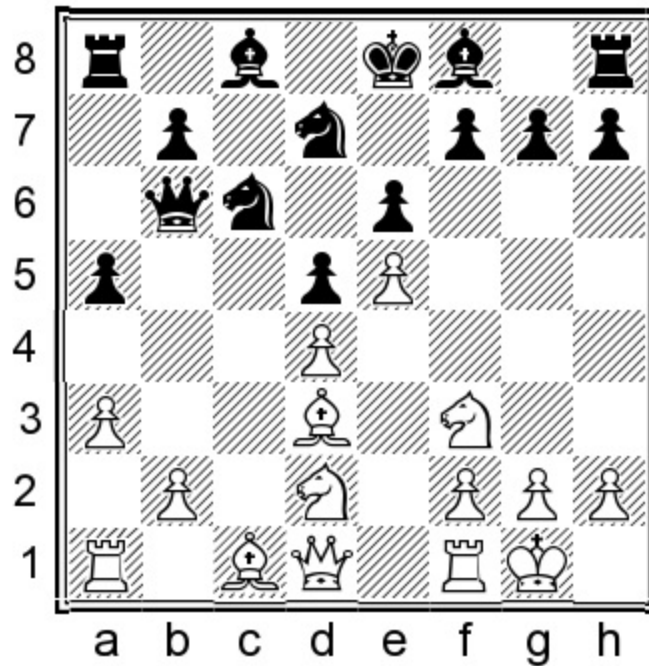
Position after: 12. ♕a4!

This is the main continuation after 9... ♖xd4 instead of 9... a5. We will soon see that the inclusion of ...a5 and a4 will make a number of important differences, such as making this queen maneuver impossible.

10.a4

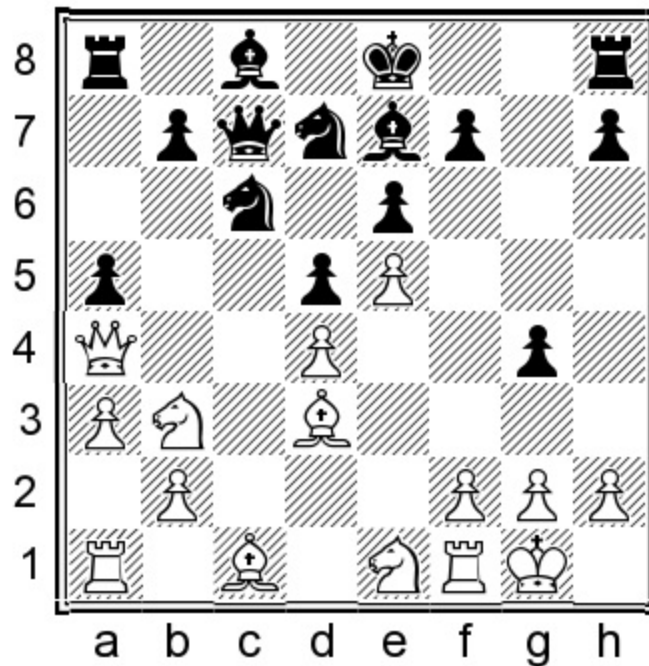
A natural move, as players on the white side are often afraid of Black pushing a5-a4 himself. By preventing ...a4 and therefore making ♖b3 next move possible, White forces matters. On the other hand, White can now no longer maneuver to the g4-square via a4. So we can already see that when compared to the 9... ♖xd4 variation, the inclusion of a4 and ...a5 is favorable for Black.

10.a3 This is a tricky and sophisticated line. White plays prophylactically against the three black pieces that could've potentially used the b4-square. It also retains the possibility of the ♕a4-g4 maneuver in the future, a move which would usually be countered by ... ♗b4. White players who are not aware of the power of 9... a5! might come up with this move themselves using the above logic.



Position after: 10.a3

NOTE: Black does not win the d4-pawn in this line but gets a better position. 10...♗e7 Against a slow move like a3, Black should act fast. Developing the bishop and preparing ...g5 is exactly what is needed here. 11.♙a4 g5! 12.♞b3 g4 13.♞e1 ♚c7 White will have some problems with his queen after ...♞b6 and ...♗d7. Therefore the b3-knight has to move it-move it.

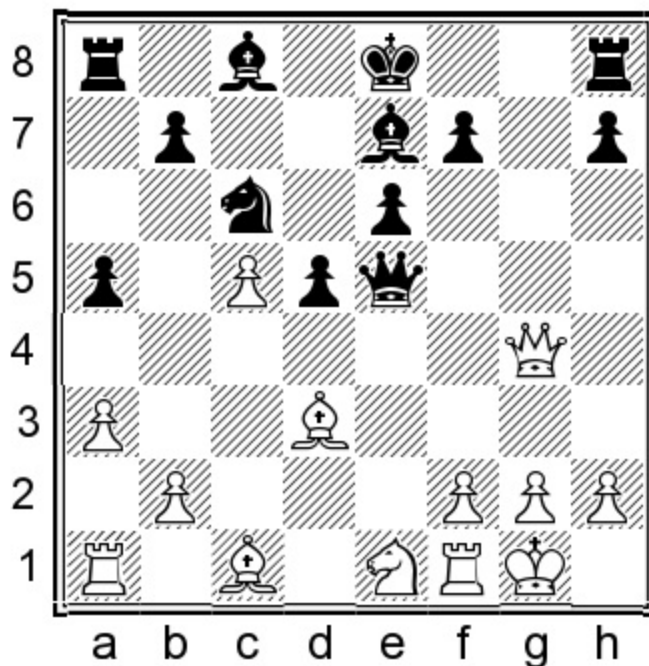


Position after: 13...♚c7

A) 14.♞d2 If White is not ready for the wild madness of 14.♞c5, then this should be the go-to

option. 14...h5 15.♘c2?! [15.♙b5!]=] 15...♘b6 16.♚b3 ♙d7= 0-1 (54) Boersma, J (2057) – Elgersma, O (1884) Hooegeveen 2017.

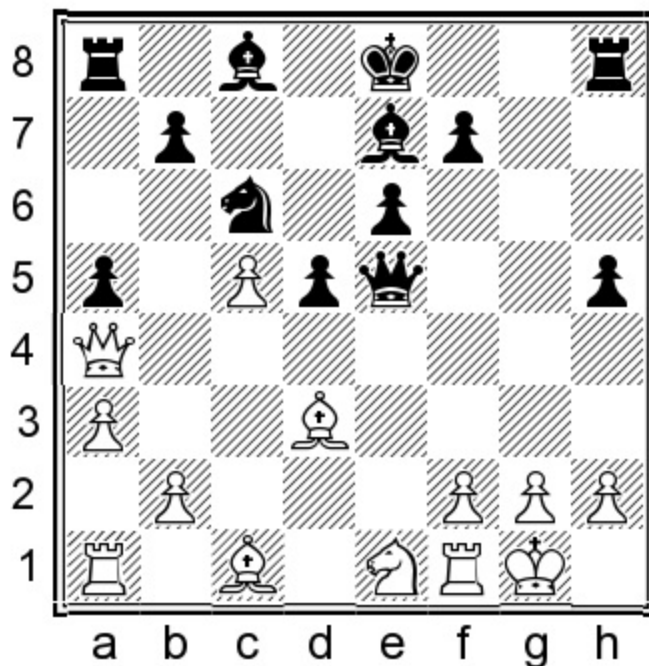
B) 14.♘c5 ♘xc5 15.dxc5 ♚xe5 16.♚xg4



Position after: 16.♚xg4

One of the stranger positions in chess. As a French player you should become used to the idea of giving away the g- and h-pawns to obtain the center. 16...h5!? now brings us to a rather unclear position. [16...♚f6!? or 16...♚d4!? are also worth investigating.]

B1) 17.♚a4?

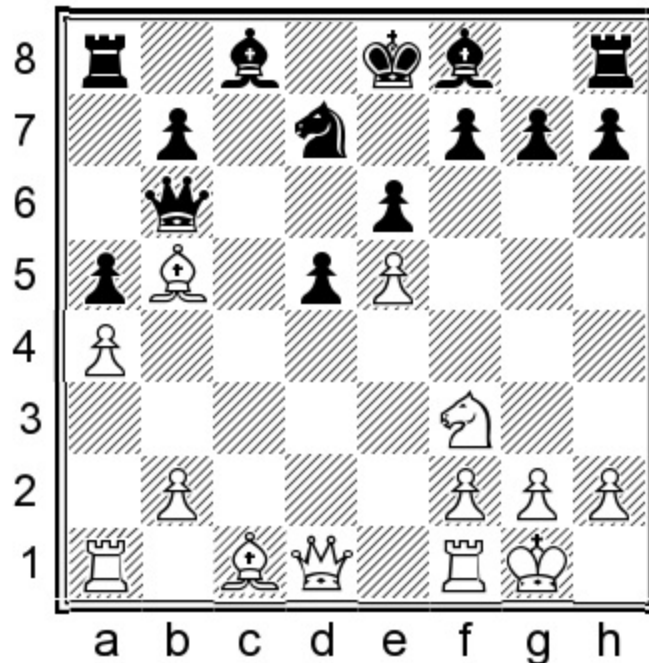


Position after: 17. ♖a4?

17... ♗xc5? Black got tempted by material, but the initiative was more important. [17... ♖g8♣ should have been preferred, with a powerful position.] 18. ♗b5± 1-0 (37) Damaso, R (2438) – Reis, L (2250) Lisbon 2007.

B2) 17. ♖d1= Stockfish prefers this move, keeping an eye on the weak h5-pawn and not running into ... ♗d7 as it would from a4. There are several ways for Black to play this attack and I believe both sides have their chances here. Let us see a crazy sample line. 17... ♖g8! 18. ♗e3 ♖xb2 19. ♖b1 ♖xa3∞ with a chaotic position on the board. White has to prove that the initiative is enough compensation.

10... ♗xd4 11. ♗xd4 ♖xd4 12. ♗f3 ♖b6 13. ♗b5



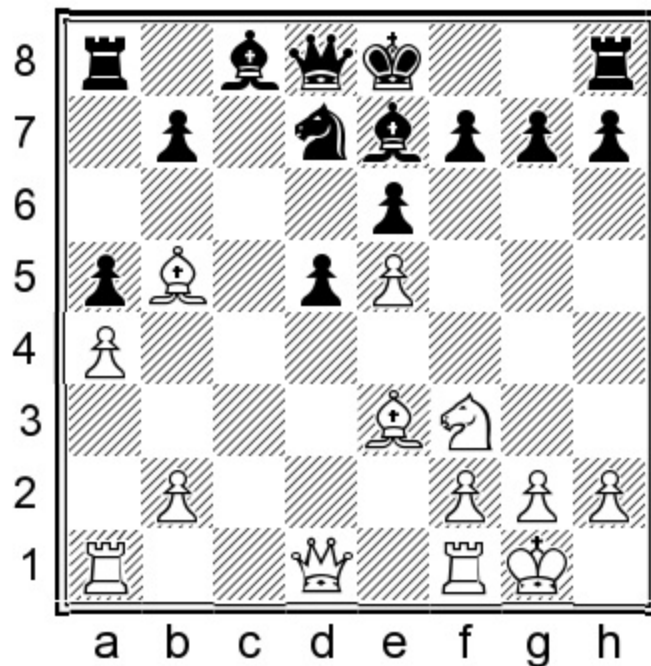
Position after: 13. ♗b5

White prevents Black from developing his minor pieces easily.

13... ♗c5!?N

This may very well be better than the other possible square for the bishop. I mean who does not like active moves, right? (Which Super-GM does not like active moves? Search for Chess_Nomad on Lichess. But please, don't get distracted!) Black wants to play ...h6 later, firmly controlling g5. This means we do not really need a passive bishop on e7!

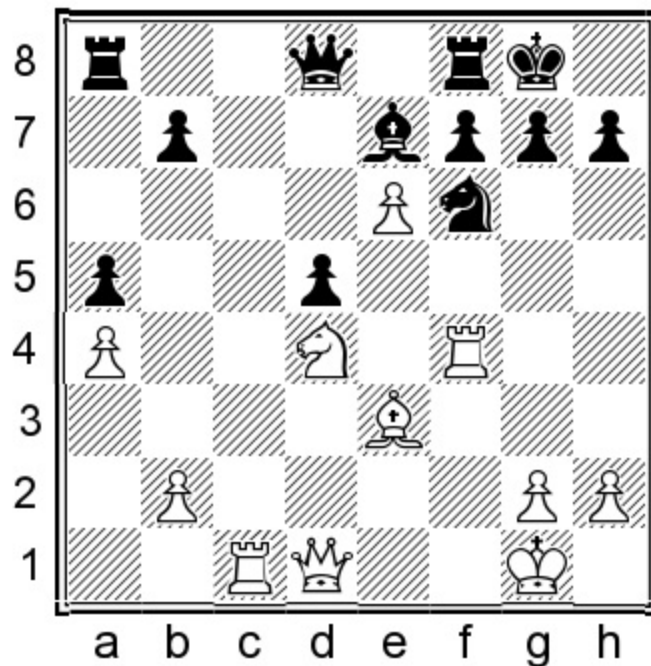
13... ♗e7 has been played five times. It must be said that Black got the better half of the draw in most cases. 14. ♗e3 ♖d8



Position after: 14... ♔d8

A) 15. ♖c2!? 0-0 16. ♕d3 Here Black went wrong with 16...g6? [16...h6!♞] 17. ♕h6± 1-0 (32) Narayanan, S (2475) – Kislik, E (2345) Pardubice 2013.

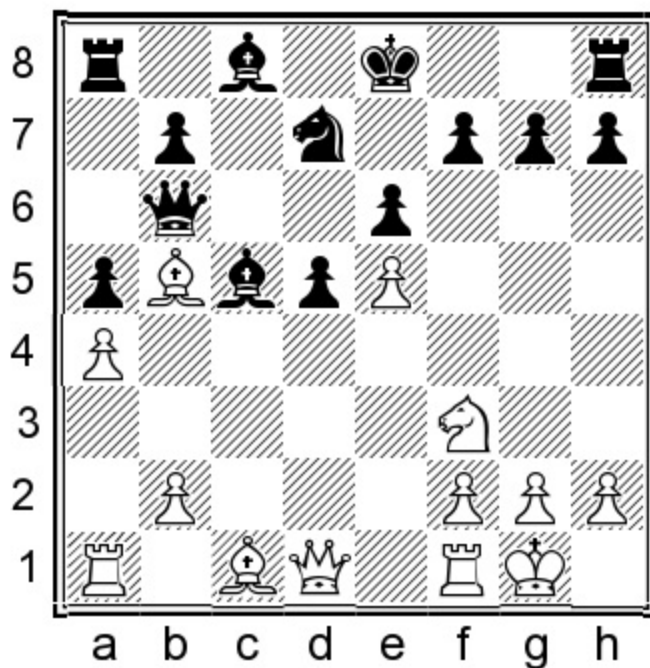
B) 15. ♘d4 0-0 16. f4 ♘c5 17. ♝c1 ♕d7 [17...g6!?= ½-½ (36) Masek, J (2414) – Leimgruber, R (2452) ICCF 2017.] 18. f5 exf5 19. ♕xd7 f4 20. ♝xf4 ♘xd7 21. e6 ♘f6



Position after: 21... ♘f6

This was all approved by the computers. 22. ♖d3♞ Black has kept the extra pawn on d5, but it is

weak and the white pieces are active. The compensation is almost enough. ½-½ (36) Dumortier, T (2169) – David-Bordier, C (2318) ICCF 2017.



Position after: 13...♙c5!?N

14.♙f4

With 14.♘g5 running into trouble, it is not at all clear how to follow up with White.

14.♘g5 This direct attack can be very uncomfortable from the black side for an unprepared player.

14...h6 15.♙h5 g6! 16.♙h3 ♔f8! ♞ Castling by hand and maintaining an active position. It seems that Black is definitely better!

14...♙d8!

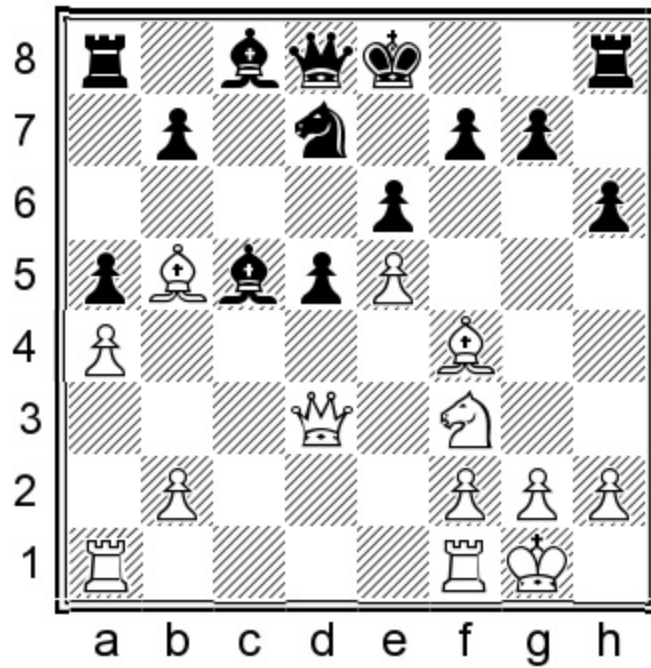
The plan is to follow up with ...b6 and ...♙a6. The key difference is that with the bishop on c5 instead of e7, it is not getting hit by a knight on c6.

15.♙d3

Preventing the plan of ...b6 and ...♙a6. However, the queen will be exposed to ...♘c5 ideas later.

15...h6

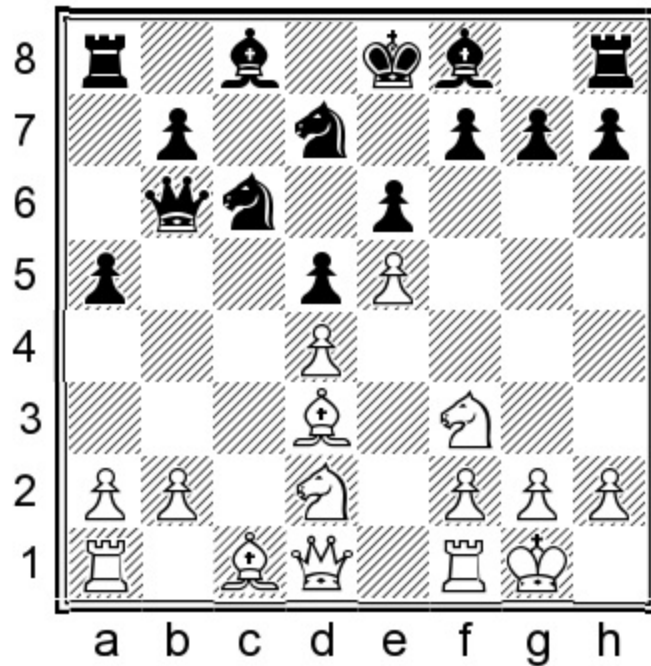
Black has a solid edge.



Position after: 15...h6

b) 10.♔e2

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.♘gf3 ♘f6 5.e5 ♘fd7 6.c3 ♘c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5



Position after: 9...a5

10.♔e2

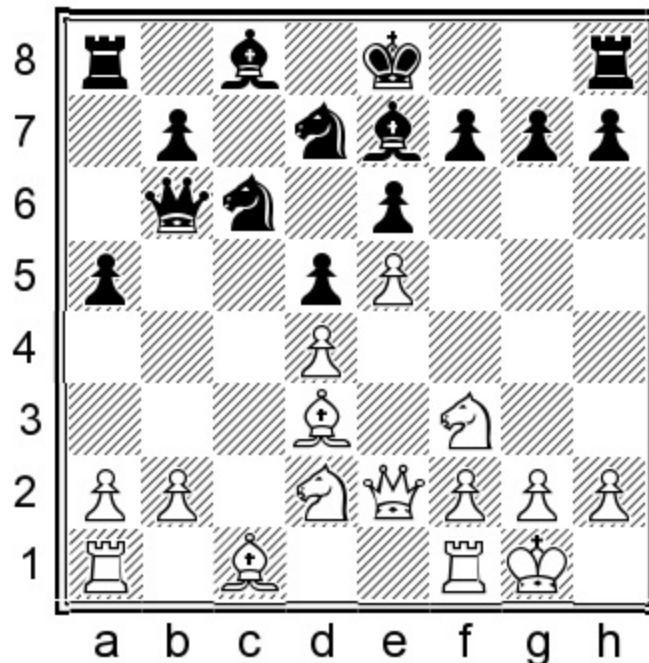
This leads to a transposition to the 7...♙e7 8.0-0 a5 system. It is interesting to note that it has never occurred in the move-order we have chosen here. On the other hand, Stockfish gives it as the second top move. And after further examination, I am unable to see why 10.♚e2 has hardly been played since 2010.

10.h3 will transpose to 10.♖e1 ♙e7 11.h3 – see the next subchapter.

10...♙e7

10...♘d4!? This avoids a transposition, but I believe Black is better off maintaining the tension for a little while longer. 11.♘xd4 ♚xd4 12.♘f3 ♚b6 13.♙e3 ♙c5 Developing the bishop in one go.

14.♖ac1 ♙xe3 15.fxe3 h6= This should be equal, but don't get your hopes up too much. The half-open f-file could potentially be quite dangerous.



Position after: 10...♙e7

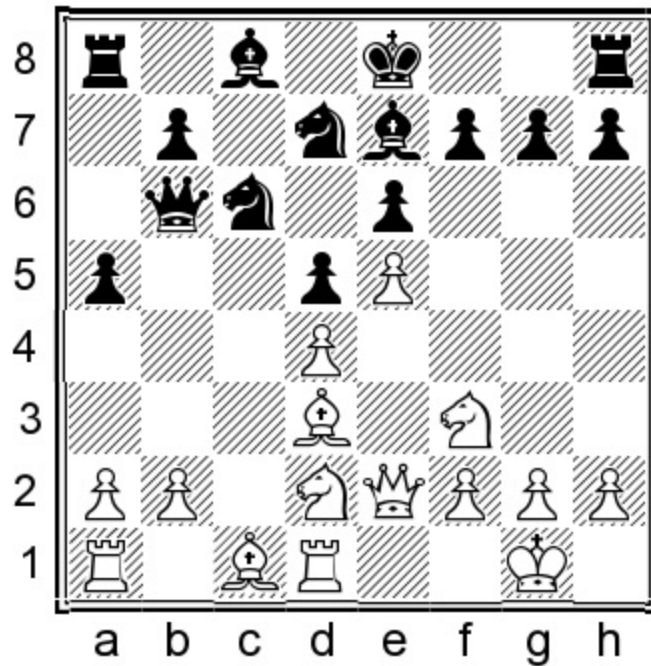
White has played a few different moves here, with various degrees of success. Most players are tempted by the 11.♚e3 or 11.♖d1 ideas, yet it is not all that obvious what to do against 11.a4!? which appears in my Chessbase database only a few times, and exclusively through transpositions.

11.♚e3

The most popular choice.

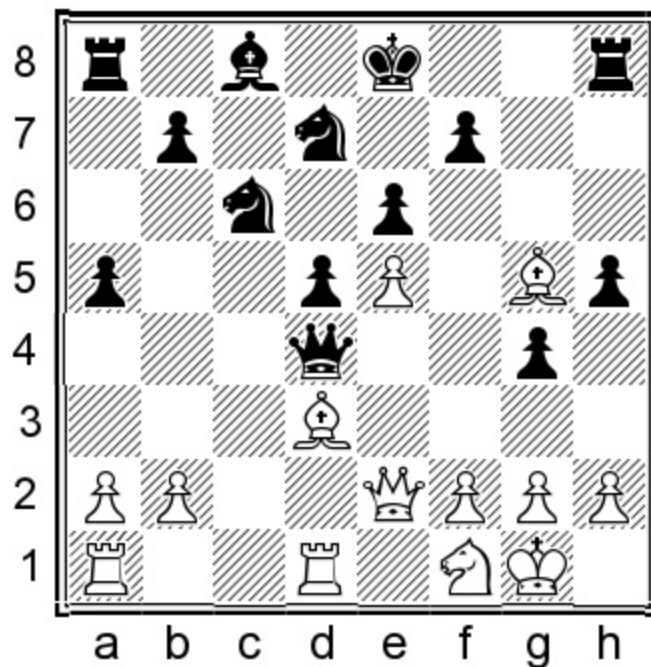
A) 11.♖e1 transposes to 10.♖e1.

B) 11.♖d1



Position after: 11. ♖d1

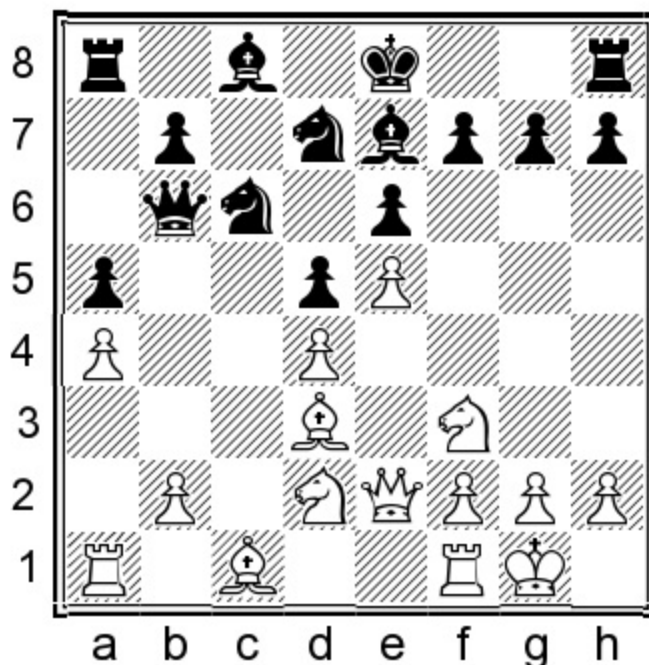
11...g5! When White prepares for the opening of the position, we play this pawn advance and keep it closed. [11...♘xd4?! This approach is incompatible with the needs of the position. White has made too many useful preparatory moves in anticipation of this capture. 12.♘xd4 ♙xd4 13.♘f3 ♙b6 14.♙e3 ♙d8 15.♖ac1± Black certainly faces some difficult times ahead.] 12.♘f1!N The start of an interesting concept. 12...g4 13.♘g5 h5 14.♙e3 ♙xg5 15.♙xg5 ♙xd4



Position after: 15... ♙xd4

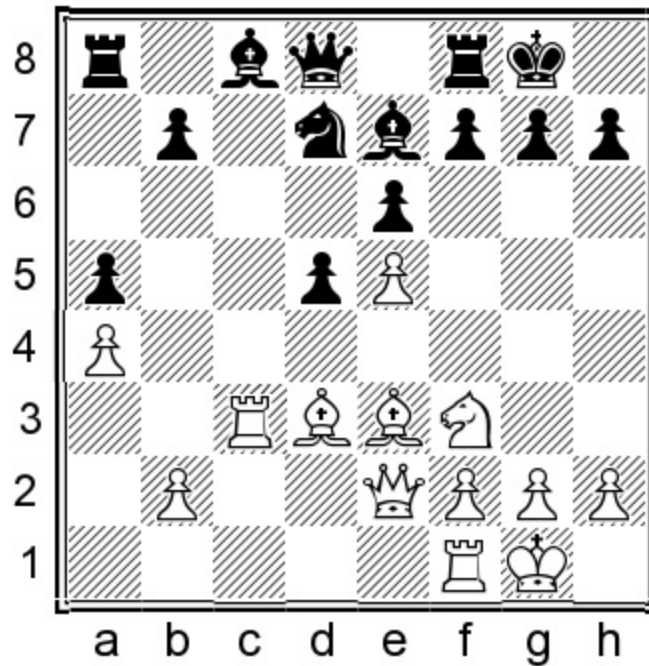
If Black does not accept the buffet of pawns, there is no hope for him. 16.♖ac1 ♕xe5 17.♔d2 ♖g7= Black is at least equal objectively, however this position might be very tricky to play over the board. Still, this is probably the best you can do, and it is not easy for White to keep their cool and go 12.♘f1!N in the first place.

C) 11.a4!?N This move has never been played in this position, but it transposes to three games with 8...a5.



Position after: 11.a4!?N

C1) 11...♘xd4 seems to be quite good, and it would usually be my automatic response to any a4 move, but my Stockfish clearly underestimates White's attack. 12.♘xd4 ♕xd4 13.♘f3 ♕b6 14.♙e3 ♕d8 15.♖ac1 0-0 16.♖c3!↑

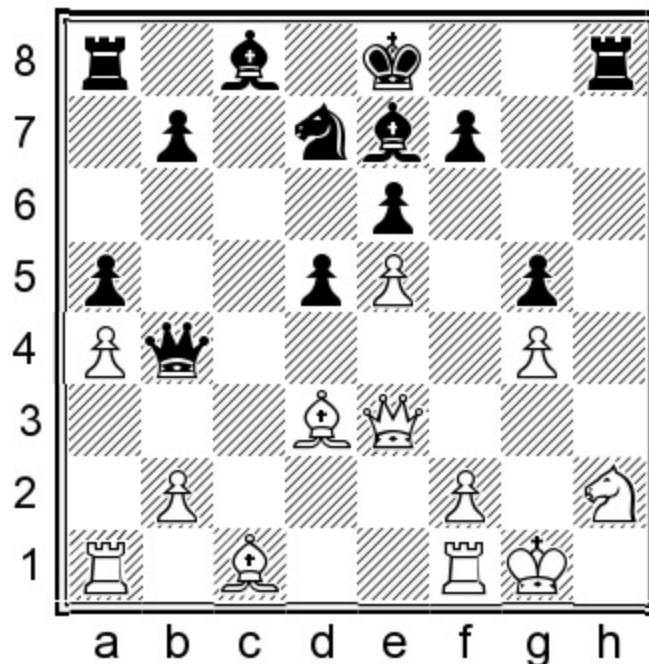


Position after: 16. ♖c3!↑

This strong move prepares a big attack, while any other move would leave White worse. I do not feel safe and the engine confirms this suspicion. For example: 16...b6 17. ♕f4! Now ♕xh7 is threatened! 17...g6 18. ♕h6 ♖e8 19. ♕b5 ♘c5 20. ♕xe8 ♚xe8 21. ♖fc1± I would definitely prefer to play White, having activated all the pieces.

C2) 11...g5! We are still able to wait because the queen on e2 no longer facilitates the ♘b3 possibility.

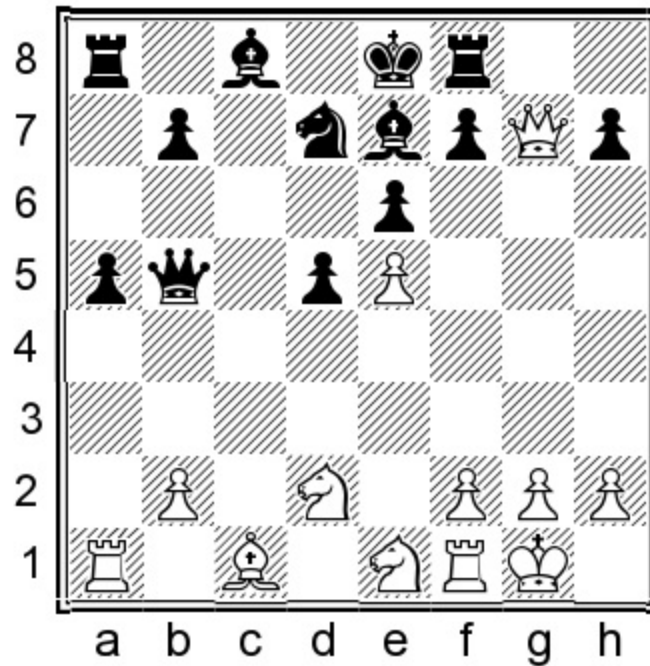
C2.1) 12.h3? h5 13.g4? hxg4 14.hxg4 ♘xd4 15. ♚e3 ♘xf3+ 16. ♘xf3 ♚b4 17. ♘h2



Position after: 17. ♖h2

17... ♗c5!N After this powerful novelty, my Stockfish screams -4 for Black. [17... ♖h4—+ Although Black blundered later in the game and lost, I am sure Naroditsky will not repeat this ever again. 1-0 (38) Naroditsky, D (2479) – Bove, A (2362) Forni di Sopra 2012.]

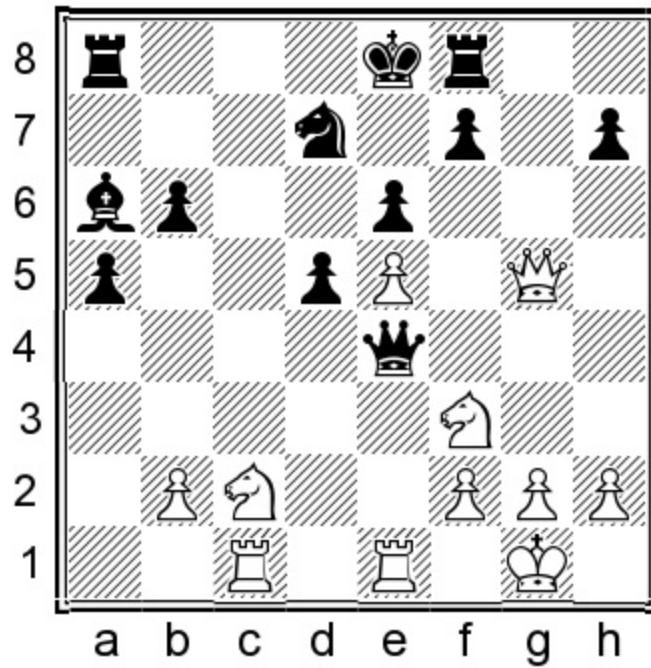
C2.2) 12. ♕b5!N 12... g4 13. ♗e1 ♗xd4! 14. ♖xg4 ♗xb5 15. ♖g7 ♖f8 16. axb5 ♖xb5



Position after: 16... ♖xb5

These kinds of positions are what give me joy in life, while others prefer to play Fortnite.

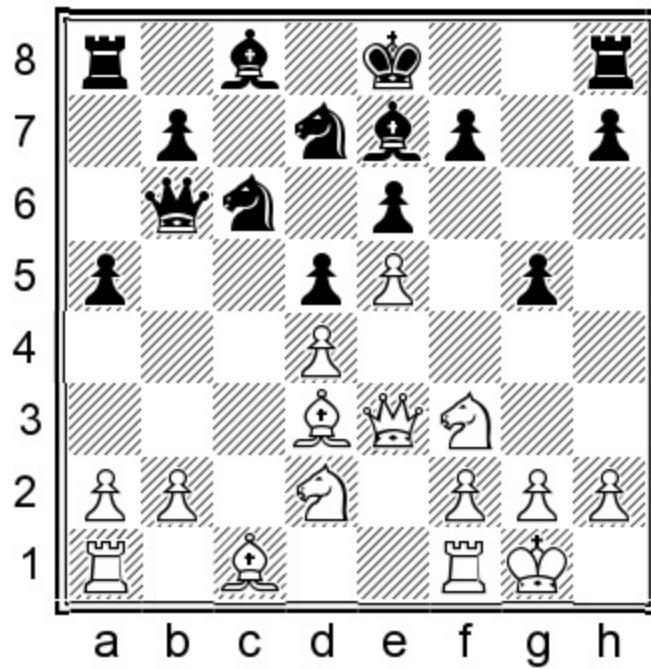
17. ♗df3 [17. ♗b1?! ♖e2⚡] 17... ♖e2! An important move, hitting all the weaknesses in the white camp at once and preventing the e1-knight from developing! White has to be really careful to maintain the balance if this is even possible at all. 18. ♕g5 [18. ♕h6] 18... ♕xg5 19. ♖xg5 b6 20. ♖c1 ♕a6 21. ♗c2 ♖e4 22. ♖fe1



Position after: 22. ♖fe1

Note that White's moves up to this point have mostly been 'only' moves. 22... ♔g6 23. ♕h4 ♖g8 24. ♘e3 ♗e4! ♠ Black is clearly doing excellently here.

11...g5!



Position after: 11...g5!

The most critical.

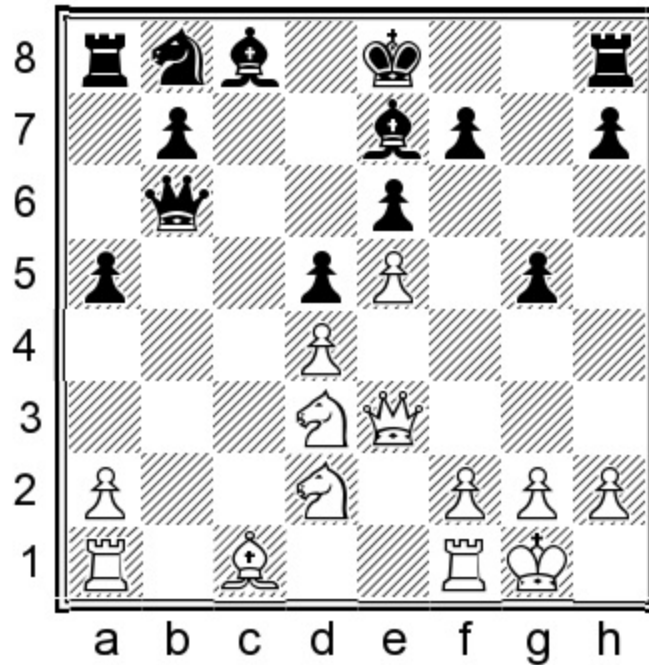
12.b4!

Without this move, White would be in trouble.

A) 12.h3 h5 13.g4?! [13.b4 is a favorable version for Black after the inclusion of h3 and ...h5.]
13...hxg4 14.hxg4 ♖f8?! [14...f5!? 15.exf6 ♖xf6] 15.♖d1 ♔d7= ½-½ (45) Smirin, I (2661) – Holt,
C (2417) Philadelphia 2011.

B) 12.♘xg5?! would be giving away the center too easily. 12...♙xd4 [12...♙xg5 13.♙xg5 ♙xd4= 1-
0 (32) Van Eijk, S (2274) – Meessen, R (2298) Germany 2008.] 13.♙xd4 ♘xd4

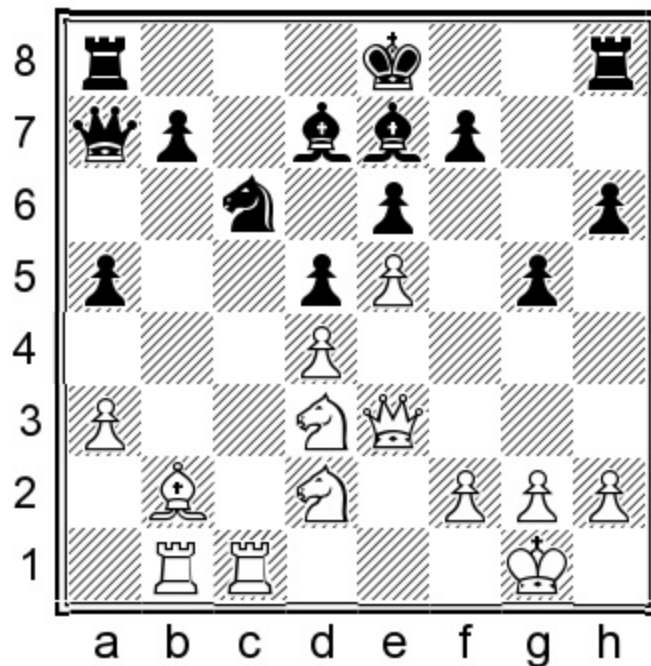
12...♗xb4 13.♗e1 ♗xd3 14.♗xd3 ♗b8!



Position after: 14...♗b8!

A necessary move in order to redevelop the knight and make room for the bishop to go to d7.

15.♖b1 ♙a7 16.♙b2 ♗c6 17.♖fc1 ♔d7 18.a3 h6=

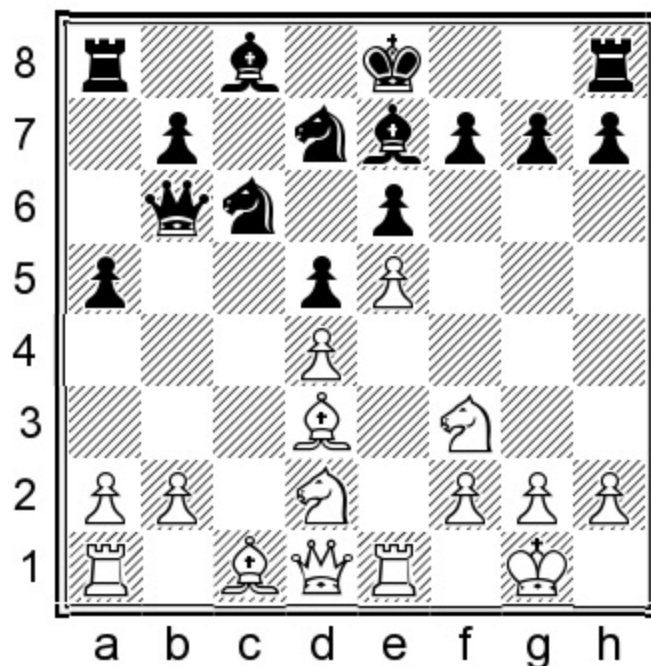


Position after: 18...h6=

The game was level in ½-½ (29) Leung, H (2307) – Hauser, J (2303) ICCF 2008.

c) 10.♖e1 ♔e7 11.♚e2, 11.a4

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.♘gf3 ♘f6 5.e5 ♘fd7 6.c3 ♘c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5 10.♖e1 ♔e7



Position after: 10...♔e7

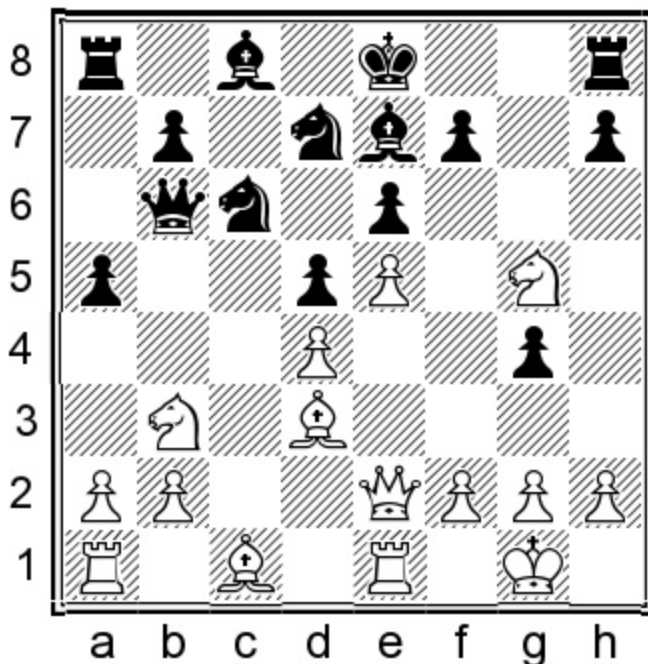
Again we see a transposition to the systems with an early ...♙e7 and ...a5.

As before, we are in an interesting little zugzwang battle with interesting options for both sides. It is more important to understand why you react to particular moves in a certain way rather than learning all the variations off by heart.

11.a4!?

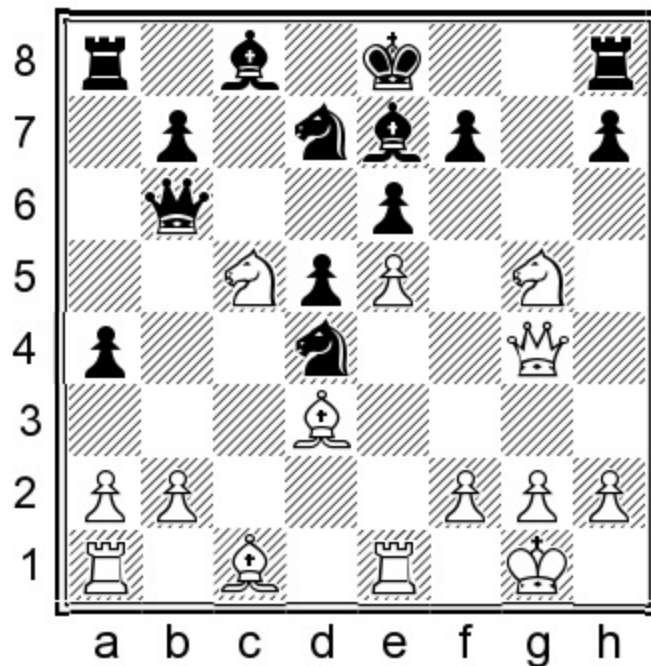
A very popular and typically human move, important for us to study.

A) 11.♙e2?! Overloading on the e-file does not prevent things from becoming wild. 11...g5! I hope you guessed this move! 12.♘b3 g4 13.♘g5



Position after: 13.♘g5

13...a4 [13...♖g8!? 14.♙xh7 ♖g7 15.♙xg4 a4 16.♘c5 ♘xc5 17.♙h5 ♘xd4 18.♘xf7 ♖xf7 19.♙g6 ♘d7 20.♙xf7 ♘c7! ♞ After acquiring king safety and finishing development, Black will have the better chances.] 14.♘c5 ♘xd4 15.♙xg4



Position after: 15. ♖xg4

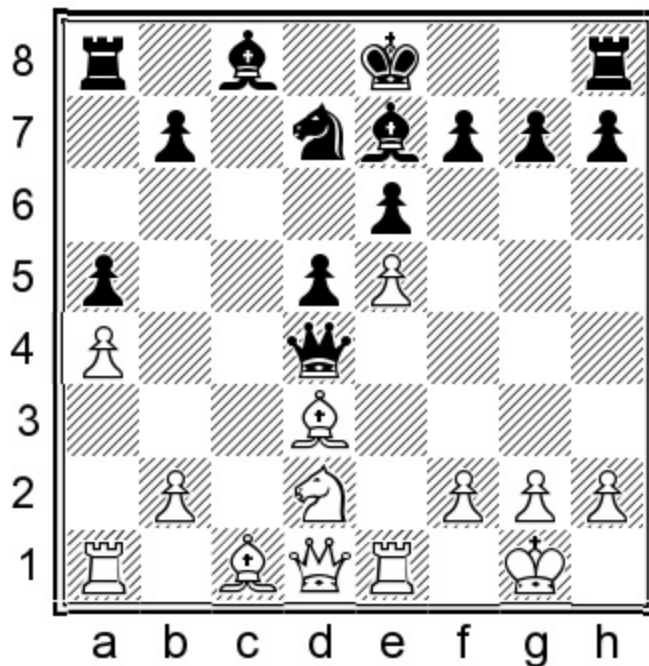
15... ♖b4! [15... ♗xc5+ This is still very difficult. 1-0 (35) Sznajik, A (2485) – Strzelecki, K (2415) Warsaw 1990.] 16. ♗e3 ♘xc5 17. a3 ♖b3! 18. ♘xf7 ♘xd3 19. ♘xh8 ♘e1 20. ♗xe1 ♘f5—+ After a lot of complications, White has hardly any remaining compensation for the piece.

B) 11.h3! – see the next subchapter.

11... ♘xd4

The automatic reaction, it is the last chance to snatch the pawn.

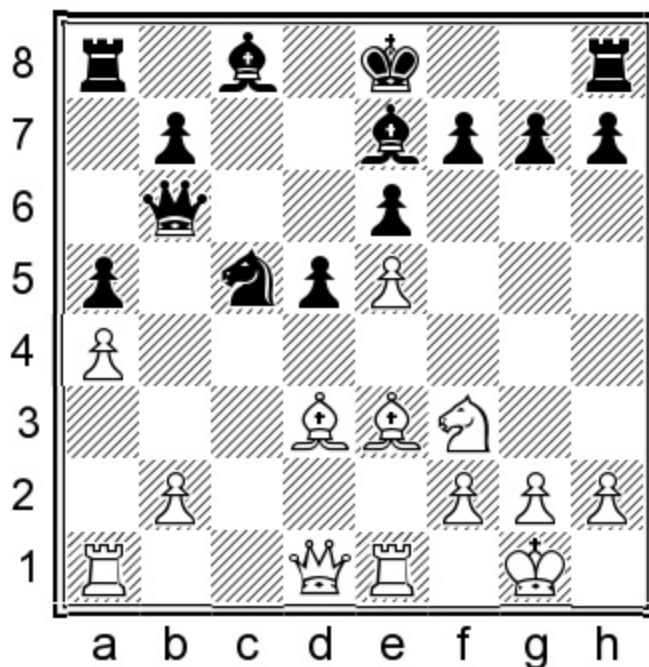
12. ♘xd4 ♖xd4



Position after: 12... ♔xd4

13. ♘b3

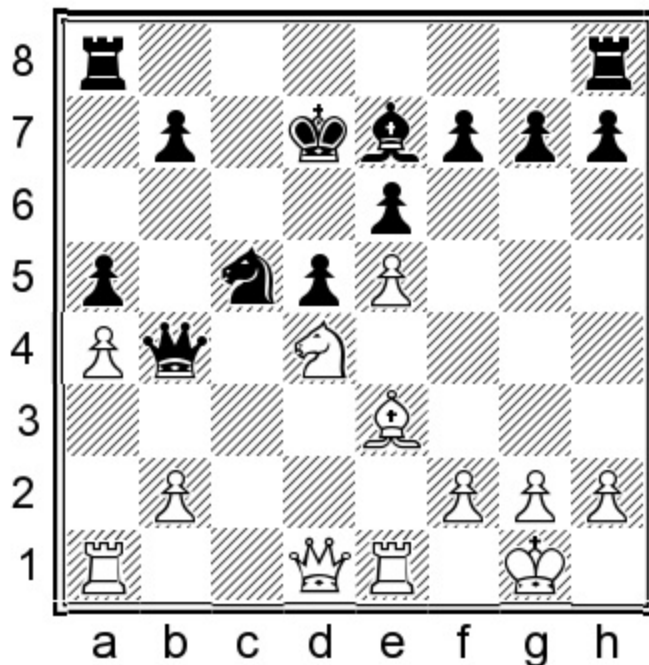
13. ♘f3 You will probably face this inferior move more often. Although it feels natural, it closes the diagonal for the queen. 13... ♔b6 14. ♕e3 ♘c5!



Position after: 14... ♘c5!

This is the precise reason why 13. ♘b3 is better.

A) 15. ♖b5+ This move is very common. 15... ♕d7 16. ♖xd7+ ♔xd7 17. ♗d4 ♚b4! =

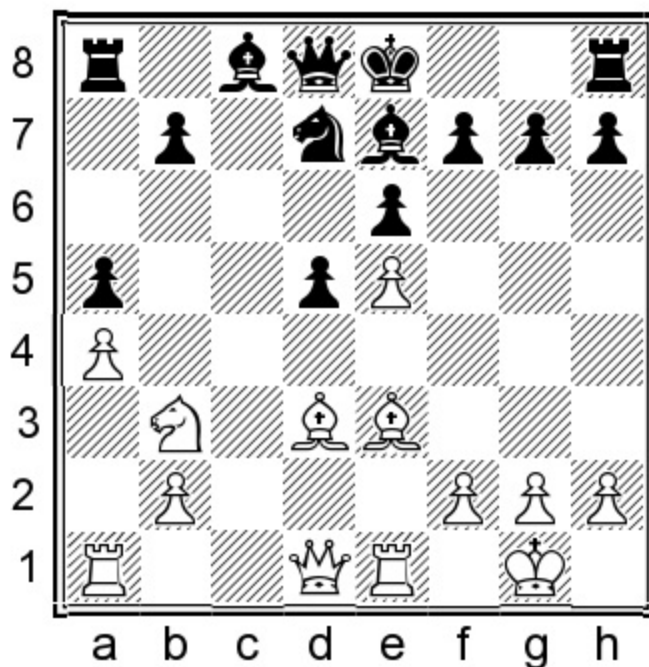


Position after: 17... ♚b4! =

Before moving the rooks, it is more important to first unpin ourselves. Black anticipates the coming ♗b5 and gives the queen a bit of breathing room. White is the one fighting for equality.

B) 15. ♗g5 ♚d8 16. ♚f3 ♖xg5 17. ♖xc5 ♗e7 18. ♖d4 ♖d7 = Despite the obvious compensation, I would say Black has the slightly better chances. And more importantly, Black is out of trouble.

13... ♚b6 14. ♖e3 ♚d8



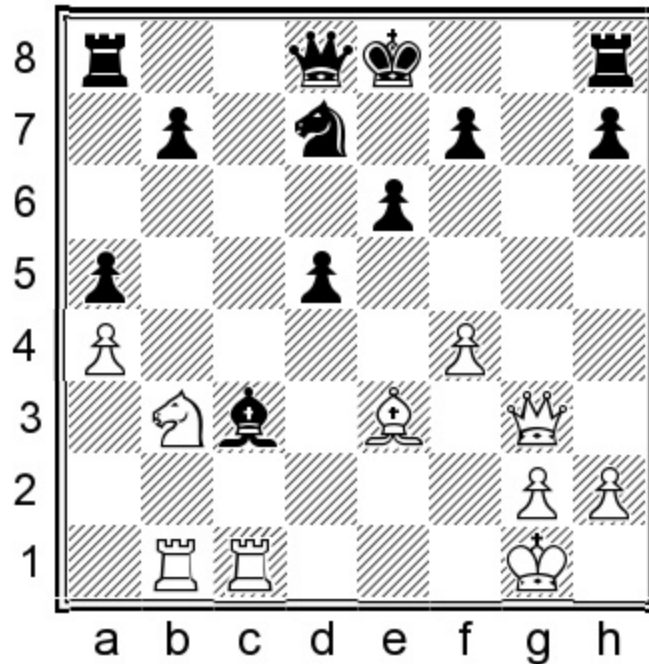
Position after: 14... ♖d8

It will likely come as no surprise that this position has only been reached in e-mail games.

15. ♗h5

This was played in all six games, but let's first look at an interesting alternative.

15. ♗g4!? N 15... ♘xe5!? [15... ♙f8 might be more in the spirit of the position. Black can continue with ..h7-h5-h4 and build a solid position. 16. ♗f4 ♙g8 17. ♖ac1 h5=] 16. ♗xg7 ♘f6 17. ♘b5+ ♘d7 18. ♘xd7+ ♘xd7 19. ♗g3 ♘xb2 20. ♖ab1 ♘e5 21. f4 ♘c3 22. ♖ec1=



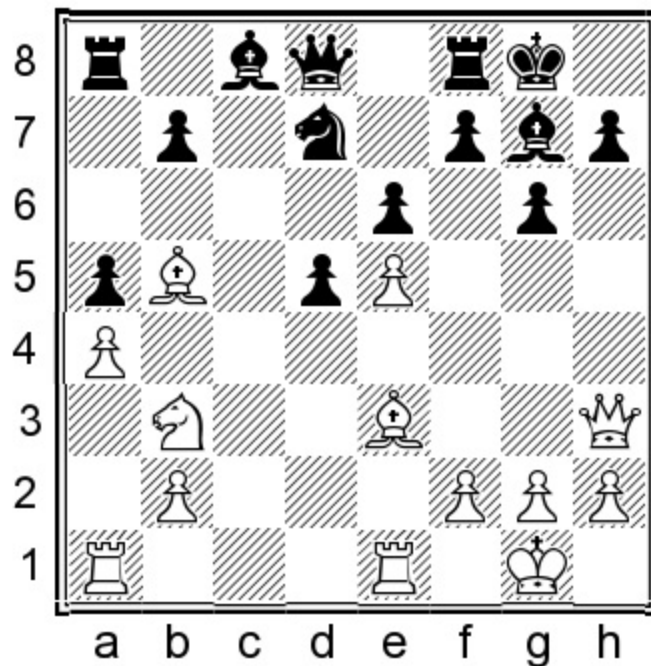
Position after: 22. ♖ec1=

White's better king safety ensures enough compensation. For example: 22... ♖c8 23. ♘c5 ♘b4 24. ♘d3 ♖xc1+ 25. ♖xc1 ♘a3! Weakening the back rank. 26. ♖c2 ♘d6= White still has compensation.

15...g6 16. ♗h6 ♘f8 17. ♗h3 ♘g7 18. ♘b5

18. f4 0-0 ½-½ (32) Calonge González, A (2306) – Sanz Algarrada, J (2305) ICCF 2012.

18...0-0



Position after: 18...0-0

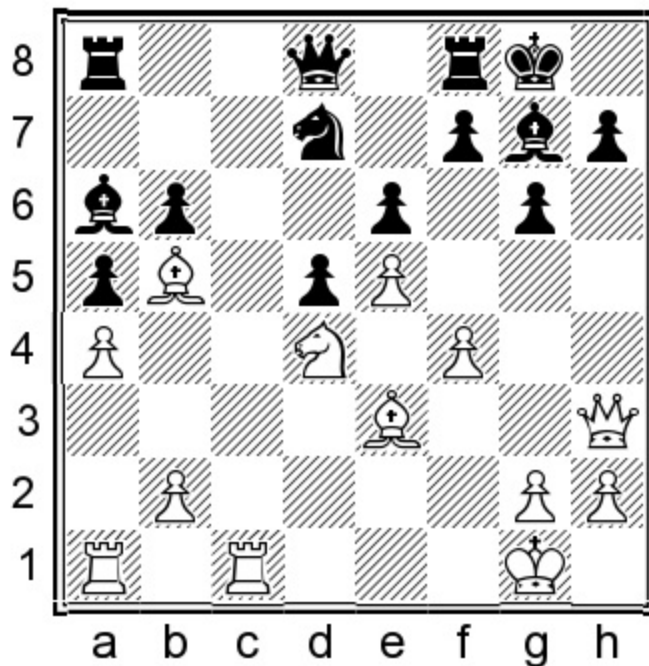
19.f4

19.♘d4!?N 19...b6 20.♚e3 ♘a6 21.♘xd7 ♚xd7 22.♘xb6 ♜fb8 23.♘d4 ♚d8= Black has finished development and gained some activity in return for the pawn. Maybe the bishop pair could be worth something later on, although the d4-bishop is very strong for the moment.

19...b6

Black had few alternatives up to this point.

20.♜ec1 ♘a6 21.♘d4



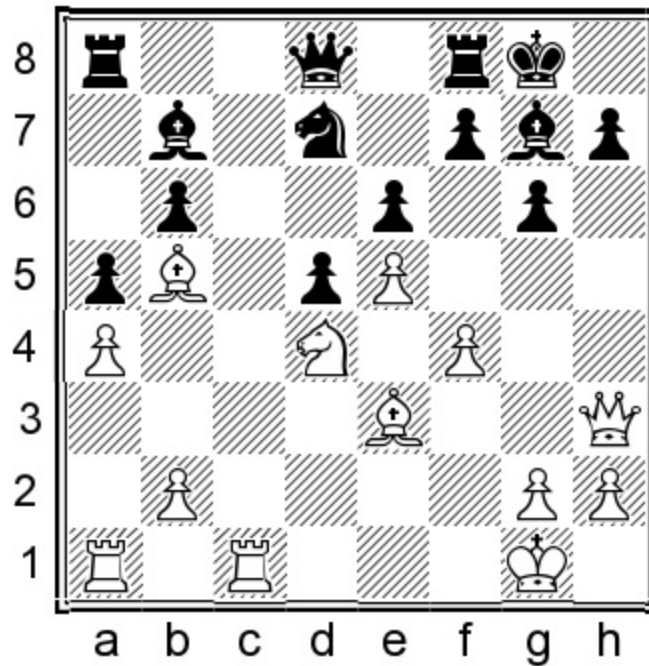
Position after: 21. d4

21... ♖b7!N

A seemingly insane move by Leela at first glance, but with the c5-square free for our knight, we would probably rather trade this bishop for the knight on c6 than for the bishop on b5!

A) 21... ♖c5 22. ♗c6 ♕c7 23. ♗xa5 bxa5 [23... ♗xb5!= transposes to the main game.] 24. ♖xc5 ♕b7 25. ♖ac1 [25. b4!N is a way to create some slight pressure.] 25... ♗xb5 26. ♖xb5 ♕d7= ½-½ (32) Calonge González, A (2306) – Sanz Algarrada, J (2305) ICCF 2012.

B) 21... ♗xb5 22. axb5 ♗c5 23. ♗c6 ♕c7 24. ♗xa5 ♕d7 25. ♗c6 ♗b3 26. ♖xa8 ♖xa8 27. ♖d1 ♗a5 28. ♖c1 ♗b3 was a flawless game: ½-½ Richter, W (2341) – Byrne, M (2333) ICCF 2019.



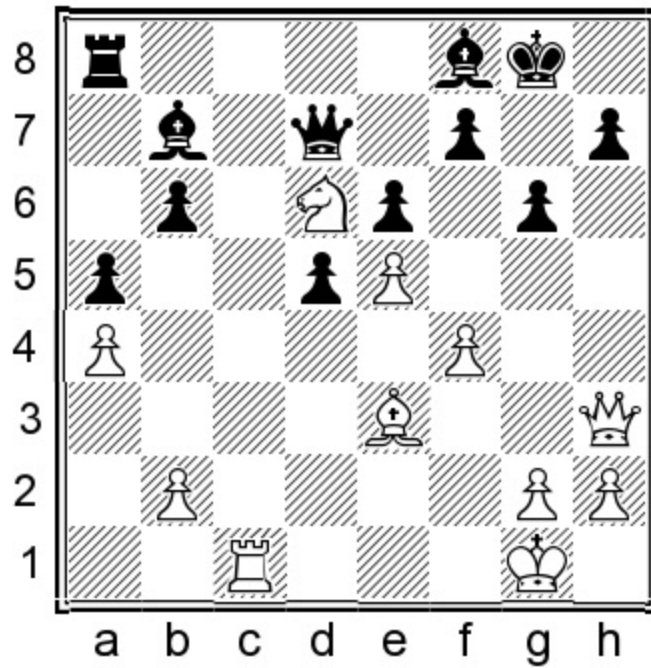
Position after: 21...♙b7!N

22.♙xd7!

22.♘c6? is actually exactly what we are hoping for. 22...♙xc6 23.♖xc6 ♘c5 24.♙xc5 bxc5 25.♖xc5+ Because of the opposite-colored bishops, the backward b-pawn is permanently blocked. We could consider it to be virtually lost, which means Black can try to make something of his d-pawn in the long run!

22...♙xd7 23.♘b5 ♖fc8 24.♘d6 ♖xc1+ 25.♖xc1 ♙f8=

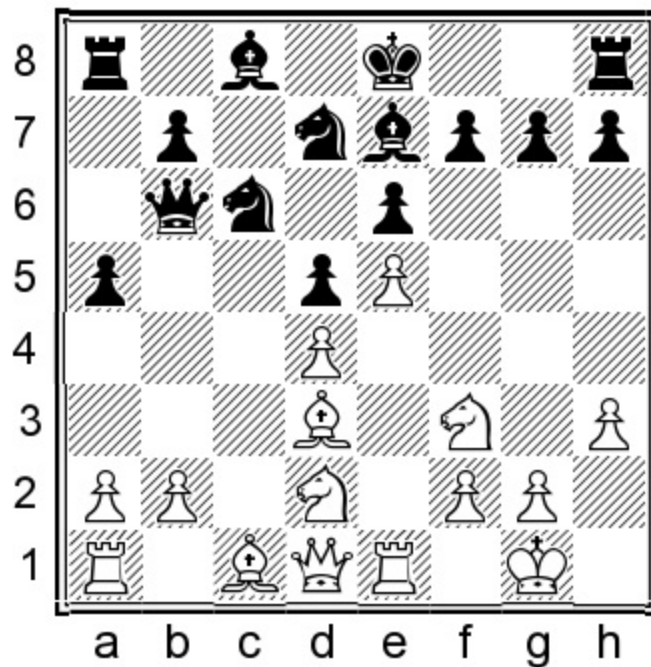
All the black pieces are happy and I am still dreaming about a beautiful win.



Position after: 25...♙f8=

d) 10.♞e1 ♘e7 11.h3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.♘gf3 ♘f6 5.e5 ♘fd7 6.c3 ♘c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5 10.♞e1 ♘e7 11.h3!



Position after: 11.h3!

The computer recommends this extremely rare move, which has only been seen twice in chesstouring.com

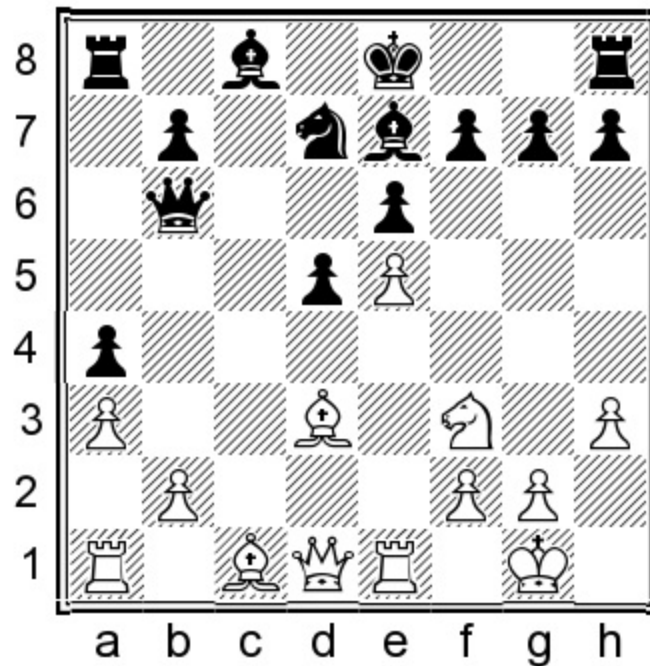
correspondence games. White can play for an advantage without too much risk, which is why this is probably the best move objectively. We will take a look at the main line 11.♘b1 in the next chapter.

11...a4!

Another patient waiting move, claiming some important space.

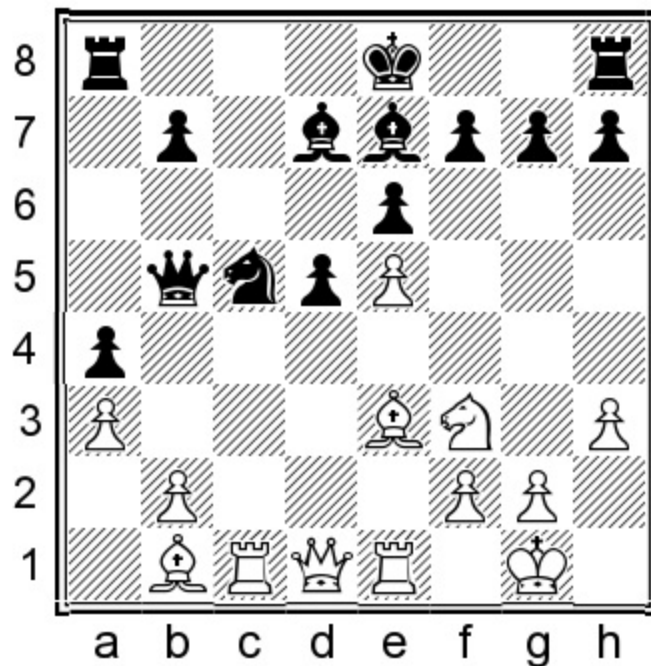
12.♖b1

12.a3 This is probably not as critical as 12.♖b1, because Black will now get a pawn for his suffering. Now it is time to take the candy. You have satisfied the researchers who told you to wait before eating it. The reward is that your patience will get you far in life. 12...♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♕xd4 14.♗f3 ♖b6



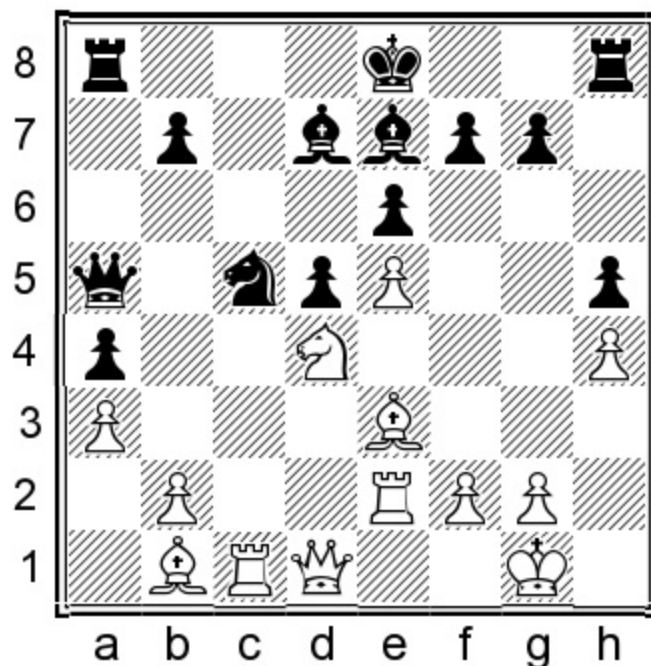
Position after: 14...♖b6

A) 15.♗e3!?N 15...♗c5 16.♖c1 ♗d7 17.♗b1 might be an improvement, but I am not making it the main line because Killer's move order is extremely cunning. 17...♖b5! This move gives Black an easier time, which I believe is what Killer wanted to prevent. [17...♖a5?! 18.♗d2!↑]



Position after: 17...♙b5!

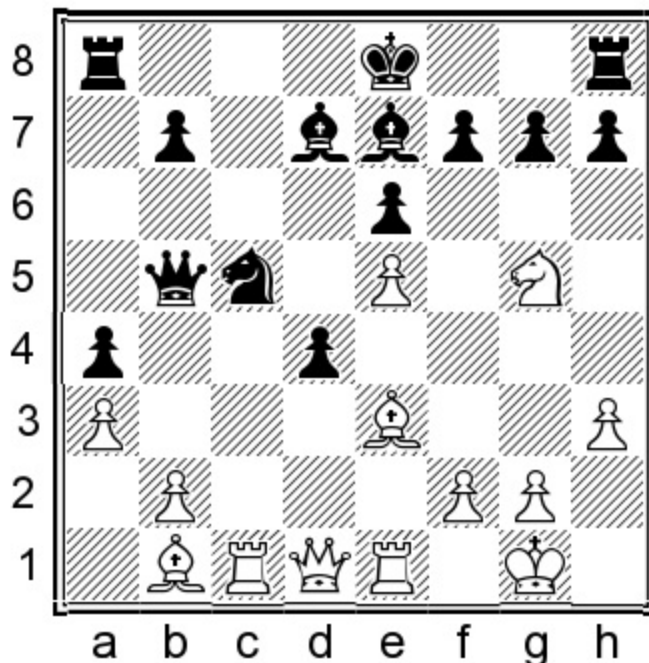
A1) 18.h4 h6 19.♞e2! The duel is about the c-file. If Black plays ...♞c8, then ♞d4-g4 becomes a possibility. 19...♞a5! Avoiding ♜d4 and retreating to d8. [19...♞b3 20.♞d4!±] 20.♞d4 h5!∞



Position after: 20...h5!∞

The moves for both sides are difficult to find. Even though I am assessing the position as unclear, I would say it is about equal. Black will play moves like ...♞d8, ...♞f8-g8 and then the position becomes very exciting. It is important not to play ...g6 as we need to keep ...f6 as a resource.

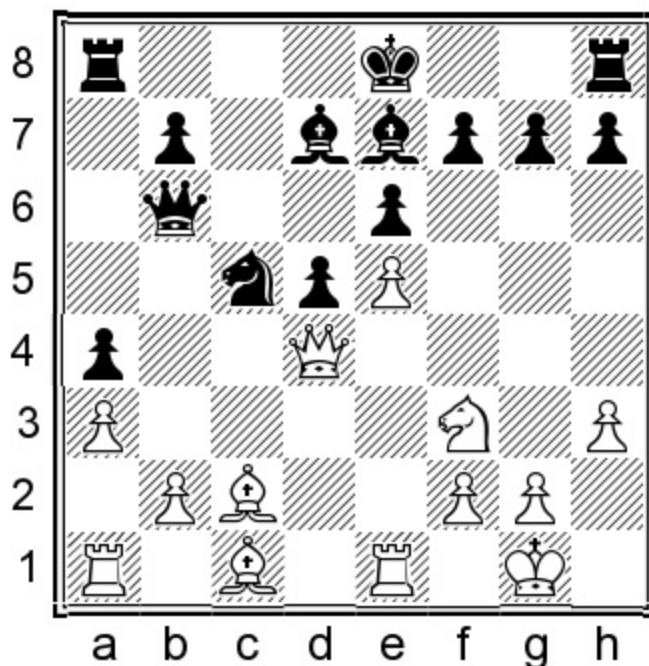
A2) 18. ♖g5 This move leads to a long forcing line. 18...d4!



Position after: 18...d4!

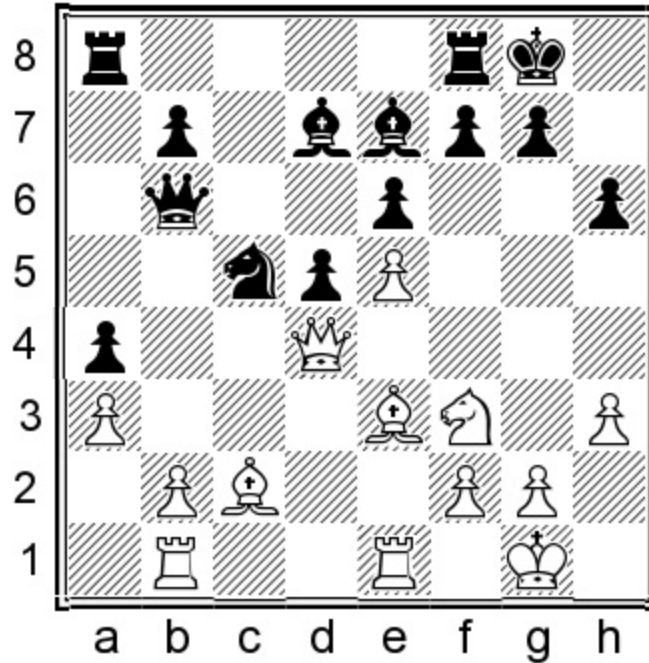
19. ♙xd4 [19. ♗xd4 ♘b3 20. ♘e4 ♘xc1 21. ♙xc1 ♙d5 22. ♙f4! ♖] 19...h6 20. ♘e4 ♘b3 21. ♘d6+ ♗xd6 22. ♙xd6 ♘xc1 23. ♙xc1 ♙d5 24. ♙c7 ♙xd6 25. exd6 ♙a6 26. ♙xb7 ♙xd6 27. ♙b8+ ♘e7 28. ♙xh8 ♙d1+ 29. ♘h2 ♙xb1= Now that the smoke has cleared the game will likely end in a draw.

B) 15. ♗c2 Somehow Mr. Killer (an amazing name for a chess player!) did not see the ‘killer’ ♗e3 blow which was possible at several moments. 15...♘c5 16. ♙d4 ♗d7



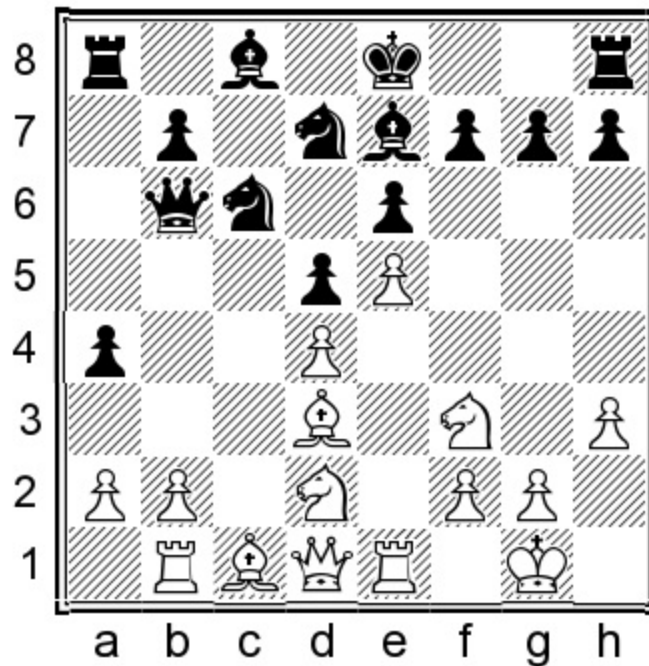
Position after: 16...♔d7

17.♖b1 This is an extremely sneaky move preventing ...♗b6-b5-c4. [17.♕e3 ♗b5! 18.♗g4 g6= Using the fact that the bishop has moved already.] 17...h6 18.♕e3 0-0!N [18...♗a6= was also close to complete equality: ½-½ (35) Killer, O (2306) – Egger, R ICCF 2018.]



Position after: 18...0-0!N

No fear! 19.♗g4 ♔h8 20.♘g5 [20.♕xh6 gxh6 21.♗h5 ♔g7 22.♗g4+ ♔h8=] 20...g6! Preventing ♘h7!. 21.♘f3 ♔g7 22.h4 ♗d8= with an interesting level game.



Position after: 12. ♖b1

12... ♗b4!N

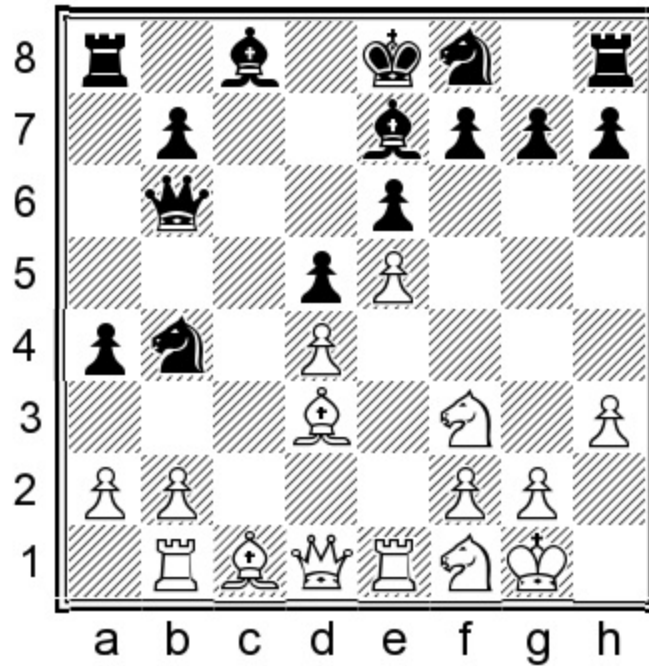
This move is much more obvious than the alternative below. It should not be a novelty.

12...h6 This is too slow. 13.b4 axb3 14.♖xb3± The game eventually ended in a draw, but Black was under constant pressure for a long time. ½-½ (31) Lovakovic, F (2355) – Voveris, G (2354) ICCF 2017.

13. ♗f1!

Heading for h5, the most dangerous square for white knights in the French.

13... ♗f8!

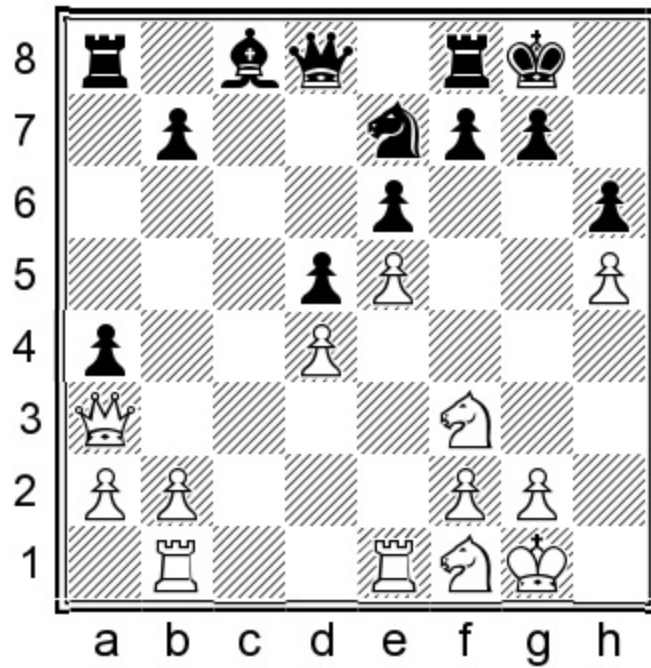


Position after: 13... ♗f8!

When Black does not take on d4, the piece development is different. It is important to realize that we do not want to take the bishop on d3. The knight on b4 is simultaneously stopping b4 and pressuring a2. We should only capture the bishop once we are provoked.

14. ♗g3

14. ♗g5 ♗xg5 15. ♗xg5 ♗xd3 16. ♖xd3 ♗g6 Black still has some small issues finishing his development. 17. ♗f3! Preparing h4 as soon as possible. 17...0-0 18.h4 h6 19.h5 ♗e7 20. ♖a3 ♖d8! We are facing an attack, so we need the knight in our defense.



Position after: 20... ♔d8!

21. ♖bc1 ♕d7 22. ♘e3 ♕e8! ⇒ Slowly Black finds a weak point in White's position, and we can conclude that there is enough counterplay.

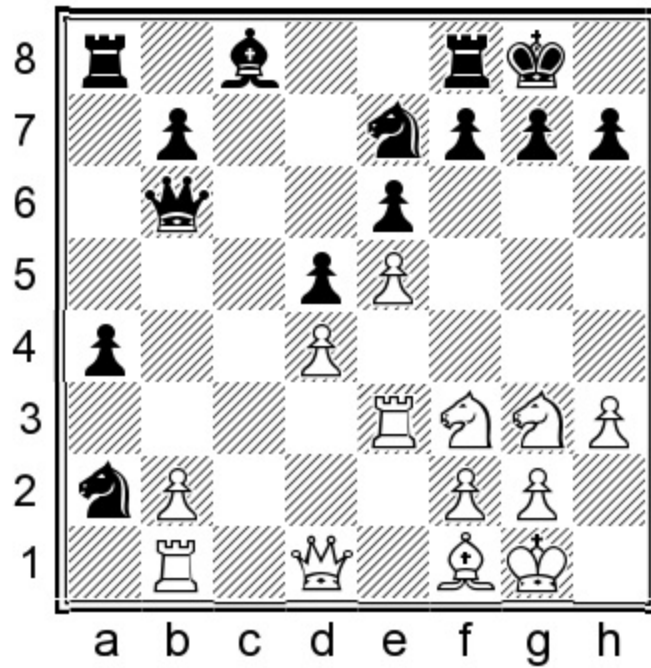
14... ♘g6 15. ♕f1

15. ♕g5 ♕xg5 16. ♘xg5 ♘xd3 17. ♙xd3 h6=

15... ♘xa2 16. ♕g5 0-0

16... ♘b4?! 17. ♘h5!↑

17. ♕xe7 ♘xe7 18. ♖e3!



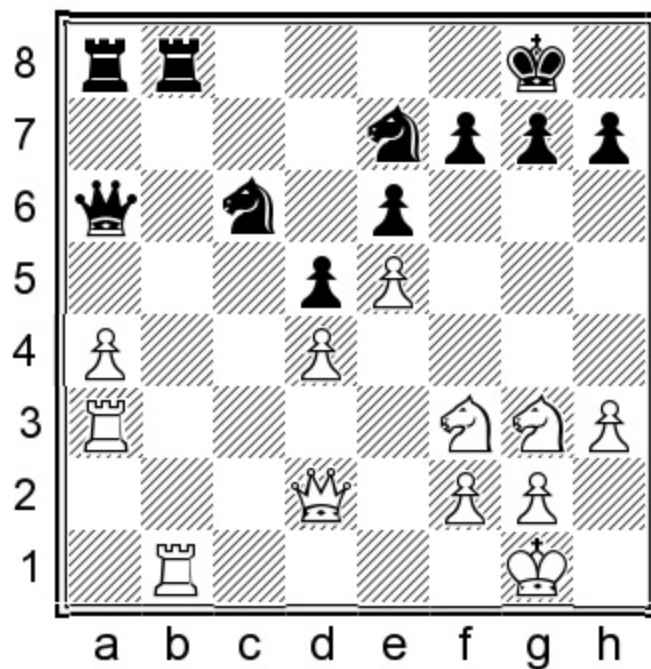
Position after: 18. ♖e3!

The only dangerous move. Black needs to be careful here.

18... ♘b4

18... ♙d7 allows an extra option: 19. b4!?

19. ♖a3 ♙d7 20. b3 ♙b5 21. ♙xb5 ♖xb5 22. bxa4 ♖a5 23. ♙d2 ♘bc6! 24. ♖xb7 ♖a6 25. ♖b1 ♖fb8



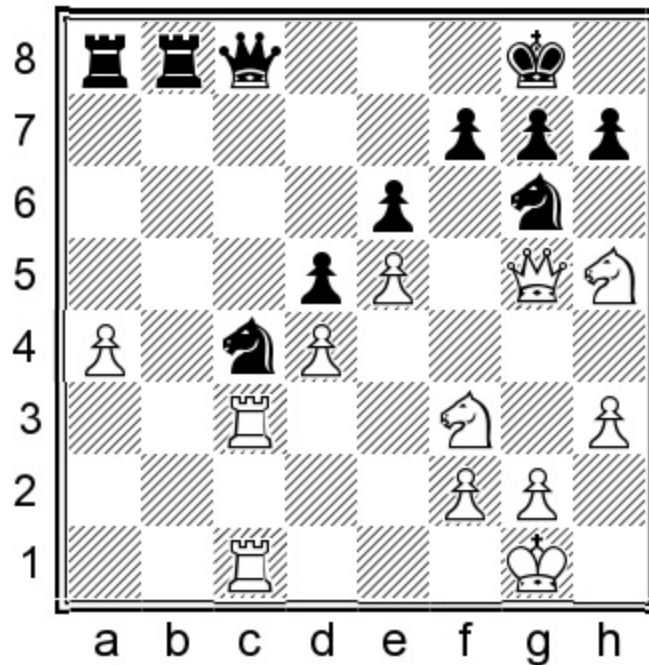
Position after: 25... ♖fb8

Now it is Black who has compensation for a one pawn deficit. The d4- and a4-pawns are quite weak, but it is still difficult.

26. ♖c1 ♗a5! 27. ♕g5 ♗g6 28. ♗h5!

Knights on h5 always mean business in the French.

28... ♗c4 29. ♖ac3 ♕c8



Position after: 29... ♕c8

Intending ... ♕f8, as Black desperately needs extra defenders. After this the worst is over.

30. h4

30. ♗f4 ♗xf4 31. ♕xf4 ♖xa4=

30... ♕f8!=

Enabling ...h6 and preventing ♗xg7 at the same time. The chances of a white victory are now very slim.

Conclusion

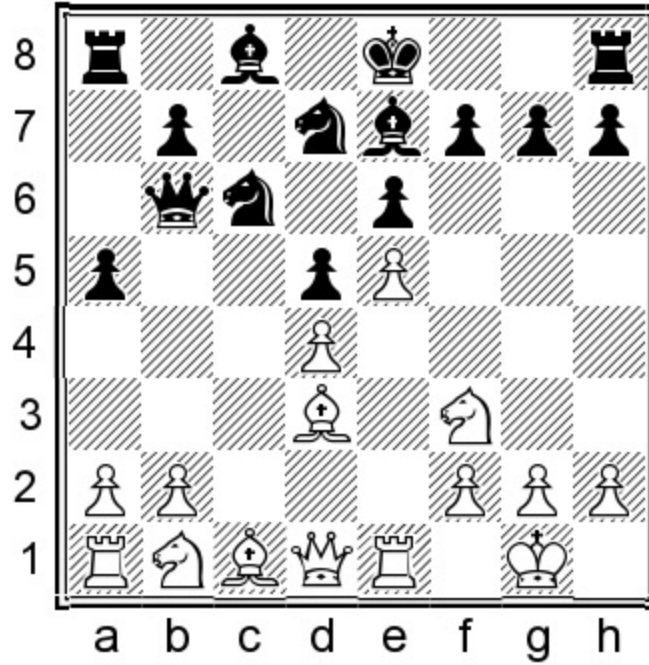
We have seen that if we would like to play the 5... ♗f6 line in the IQP positions, then we need to enter 3... ♗f6 territory when White opts for 4. ♗g3. Fortunately, these positions are very lively.

and suitable to play for a win with Black. The chosen move order with 9...a5! is quite fresh, after which we have examined several different options for White. 10.a3 and 10.a4 are nothing to worry about but will be the default go-to options for most players new to the position. 10.♖e2 is interesting and complicated but has not been played for ages. In the end 10.♗e1 seems to be the best, though with precise play Black is able to generate enough counterplay there too. Just remember to play another important waiting move with 11...a4!

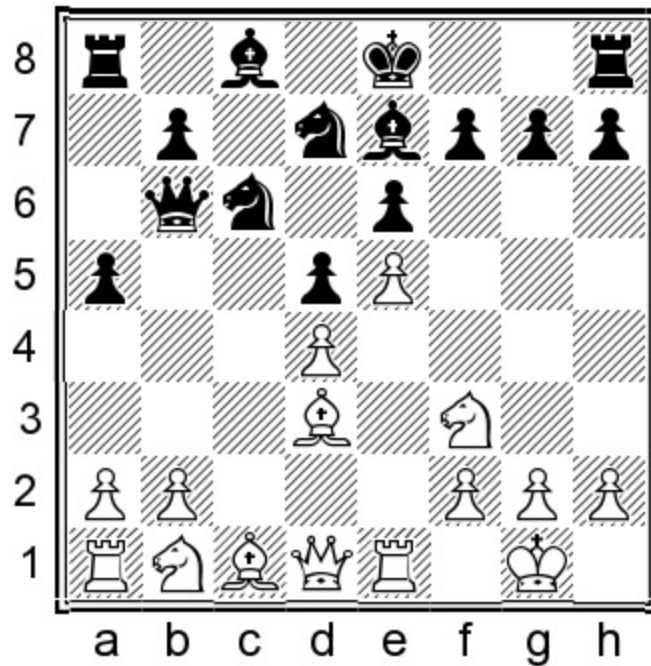
Chapter 4

11. ♖b1 – Drawing guns

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗d2 c5 4.♗gf3 ♗f6 5.e5 ♗fd7 6.c3 ♗c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5 10.♞e1 ♙e7 11.♖b1



1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗d2 c5 4.♗gf3 ♗f6 5.e5 ♗fd7 6.c3 ♗c6 7.♙d3 ♚b6 8.0-0 cxd4 9.cxd4 a5 10.♞e1 ♙e7 11.♖b1

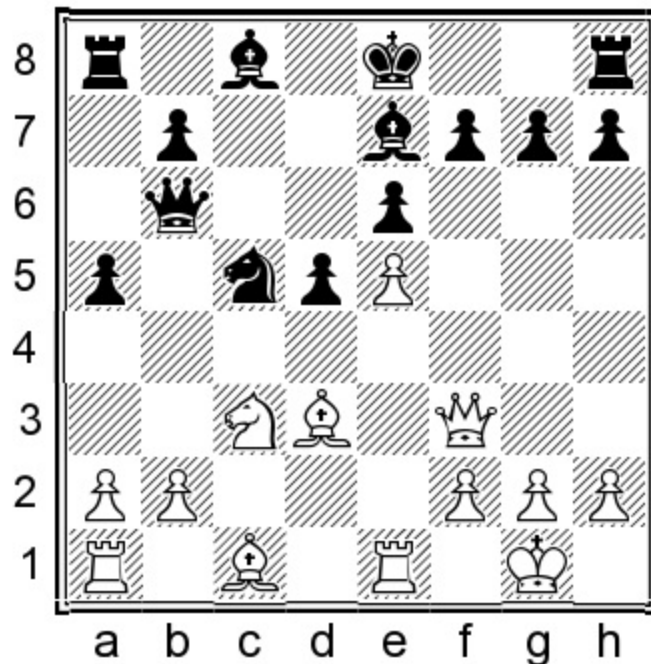


Position after: 11. ♖b1

White decides he has had enough of the standoff. This is the moment in a Spaghetti Western when the gun is drawn. Let's see which side will be the one left standing.

11... ♗xd4 12. ♗xd4

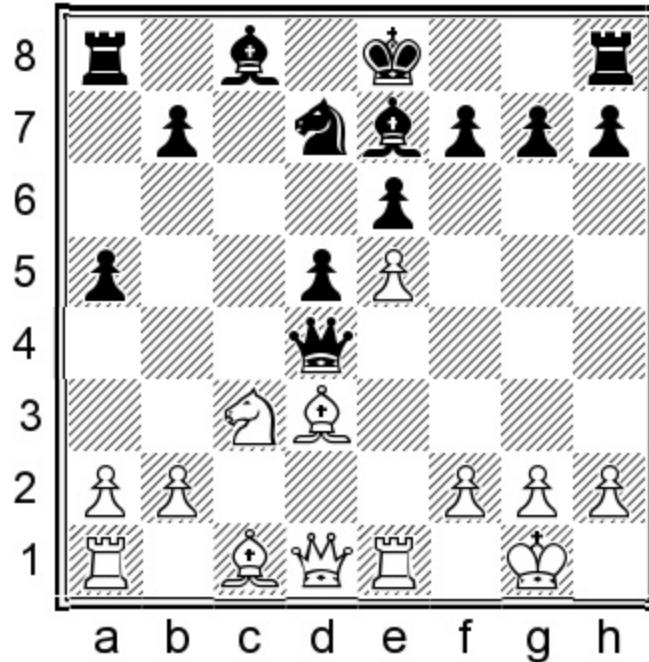
12. ♗c3?! hands the initiative over to Black. 12... ♘xf3+ 13. ♙xf3 ♗c5



Position after: 13... ♗c5

Now we have a similar position to the main lines, but we have saved ourselves the hassle of playing ...♙xd4 followed by retreating back to b6.

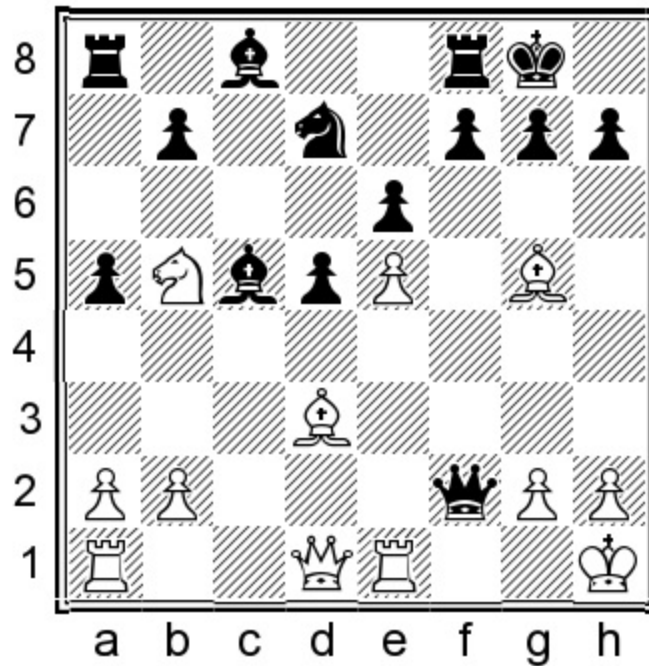
12...♙xd4 13.♘c3



Position after: 13.♘c3

13...♙b6

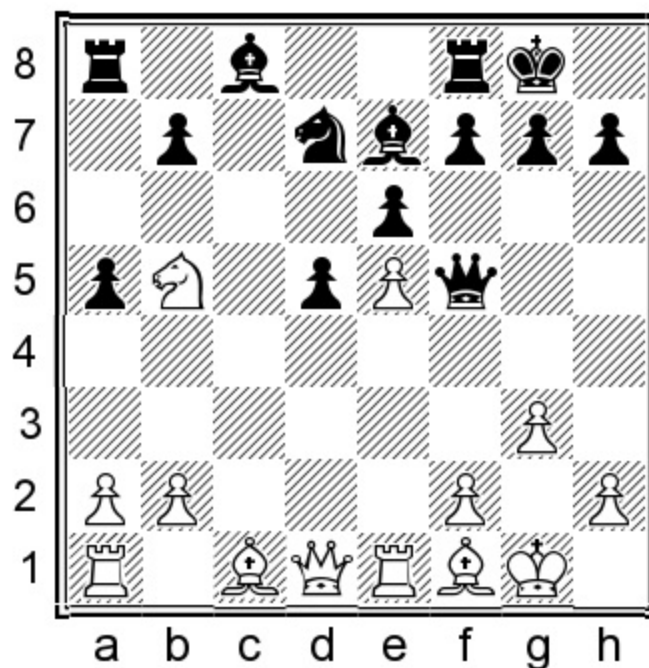
A) 13...♙c5? Only arrogance could lead us down this path. Icarus starts flying too close to the sun here. 14.♘b5!+- The wax starts melting! My humble Stockfish already thinks it's over here.
14...♙xf2+ 15.♙h1 0-0 16.♙g5!+-



Position after: 16. ♖g5!+-

Another ‘only’ move to win; however we are completely defenseless against the supreme coordination of the white pieces.

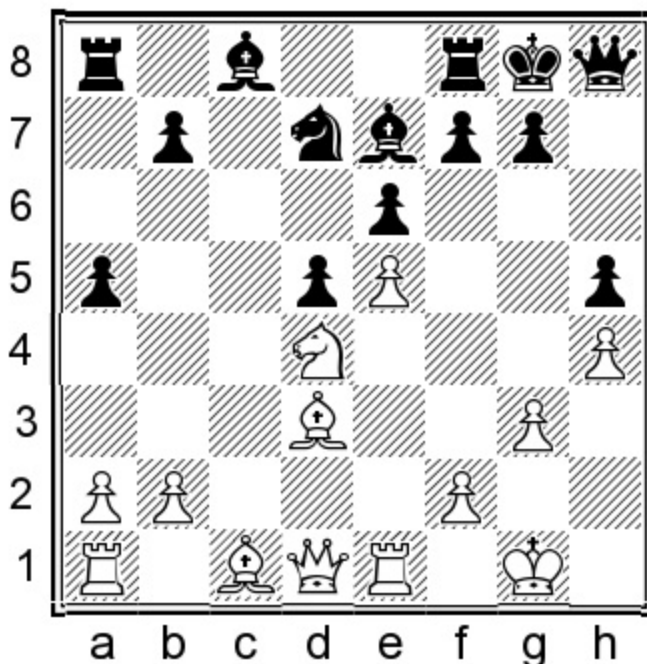
B) 13... ♔h4?!N To a human, this intuitively feels like placing the queen in a precarious position. But the engine does not have a central nervous system capable of worrying. Despite the fact that the queen is ‘asking for it’, there might actually be some merit to this peculiar move. 14.g3 ♔h3 15. ♘b5 0-0 16. ♖f1 [16. ♘d4 h5] 16... ♔f5



Position after: 16... ♔f5

17.h4 [17.♔d3! Psychologically, it would have been better to repeat moves once before deviating. Or if White was happy to settle for a draw (another reason not to play 13...♕h4!?!N too often).] 17...h5

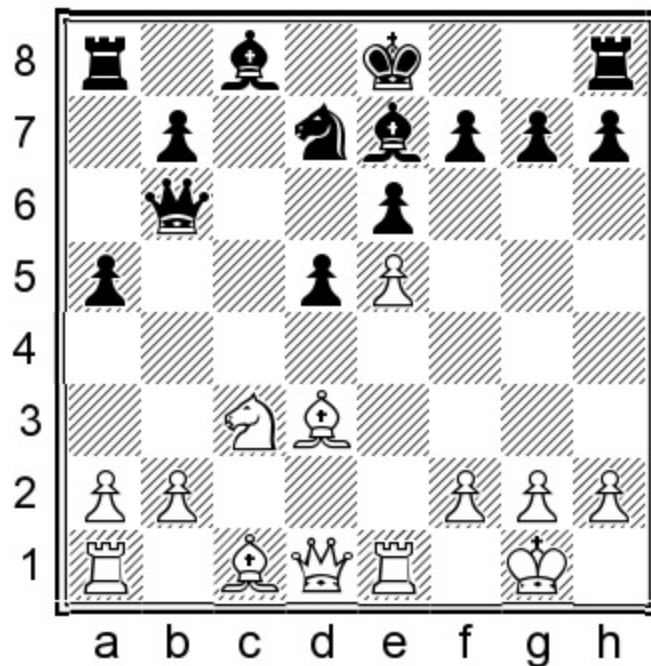
B1) 18.♘d4!? ♖h7 19.♔d3 ♕h8!!



Position after: 19...♕h8!!

What a move, seriously. Good luck finding this over the board. Just play through the sample line for fun. Don't try this at home, or in a café, or on the bus. Especially never at a chess tournament! 20.♔g5 ♔b4 21.♞e3 ♔c5 22.♔b5 b6 23.a3 g6 24.♔f4 ♘b8 25.b4 axb4 26.axb4 ♞xa1 27.♕xa1 ♔xb4 28.♕a7 ♔c5 29.♘f3 ♕g7=

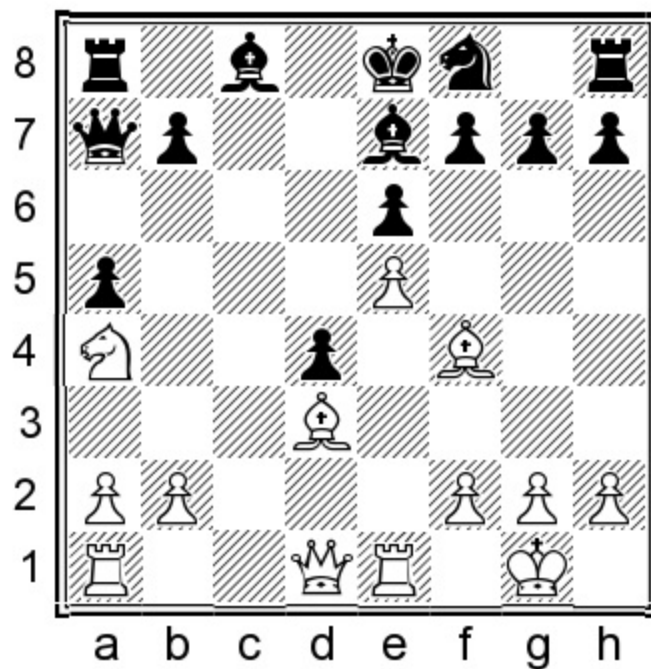
B2) 18.♔d3 ♕g4 19.♔e2 ♕f5 20.♔xh5 b6 21.♘d6 ♔xd6 22.♔g4 ♕g6 23.exd6= I must say, I gave 13...♕h4 the '?!' annotation only because it is too difficult to play in a practical sense. I believe picking up this line is like starting to play a strange musical instrument which makes an awful sound. It's as far from practical as it gets.



Position after: 13... ♔b6

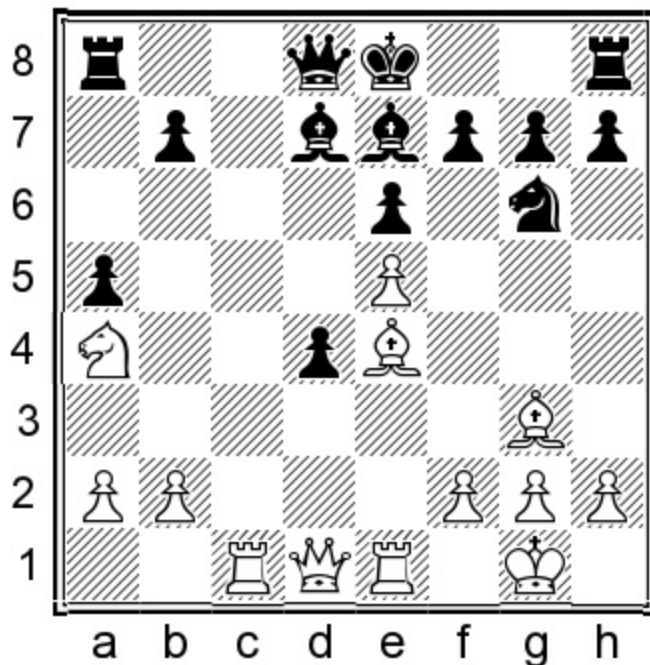
14. ♖g4

14. ♕e3!? d4 15. ♘a4 ♖a7 16. ♕f4 ♘f8! In the absence of a white knight landing on b5, we can afford ourselves the luxury of postponing castling. This position has been reached in two correspondence games.



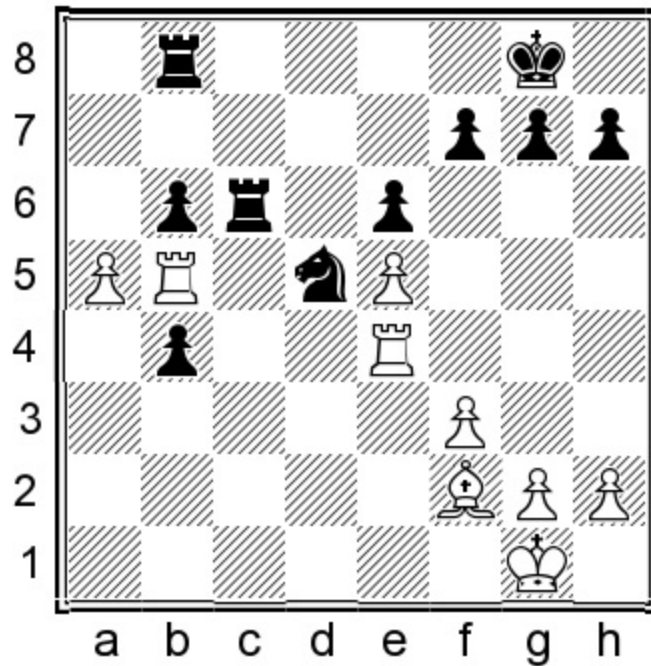
Position after: 16... ♘f8!

A) 17.♖c1 ♕d7 18.♖c7 ♜b8 19.♖c1 and now a draw was agreed in Serradimigni, R (2497) – Verde, P (2479) ICCF 2015, although Black could have continued to play for an advantage. 19...♜d8
 20.♗e4 ♘g6 21.♗g3



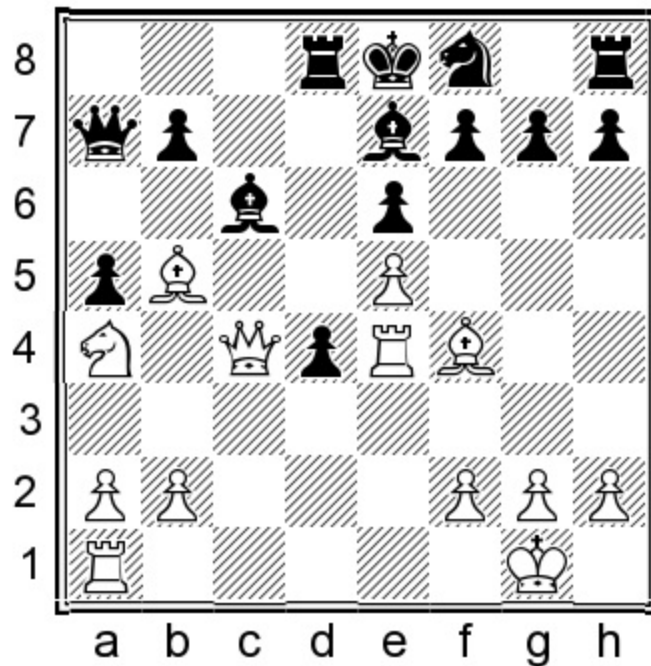
Position after: 21. ♗g3

Black has a pleasant choice here. 21...♗b4 [21...0-0 22.♜xd4 ♗b5 23.♜xd8 ♖axd8 24.♘c5 ♗c6= with at least equality.] 22.♘c5 0-0 23.♜xd4 ♗c6 24.♖ed1 ♜xd4 25.♖xd4 ♗xc5 26.♖xc5 ♗xe4 27.♖xe4 b6 28.♖b5 ♖ac8 29.f3 ♖c6 30.♗f2 ♖b8 31.a4 ♘e7 32.b4 axb4 33.a5 ♘d5 ♖ White was trying to equalize in this long variation. He may succeed in a few moves time, but it is very difficult because when all the pawns are on one side of the board, the knight is better than the bishop. What's more, with two pairs of rooks present, the knight enjoys enough support to flourish.



Position after: 33... Nxd5

B) 17. Qb5+ Kd7 18. Wd3 Rd8 This move is the initial choice of Stockfish, but the alternative leaves White with less options. [18... Qc6! 19. Re4 Rd8 and we have transposed back to the main game. This is my recommended move order.] 19. Re4 Qc6 20. Wc4

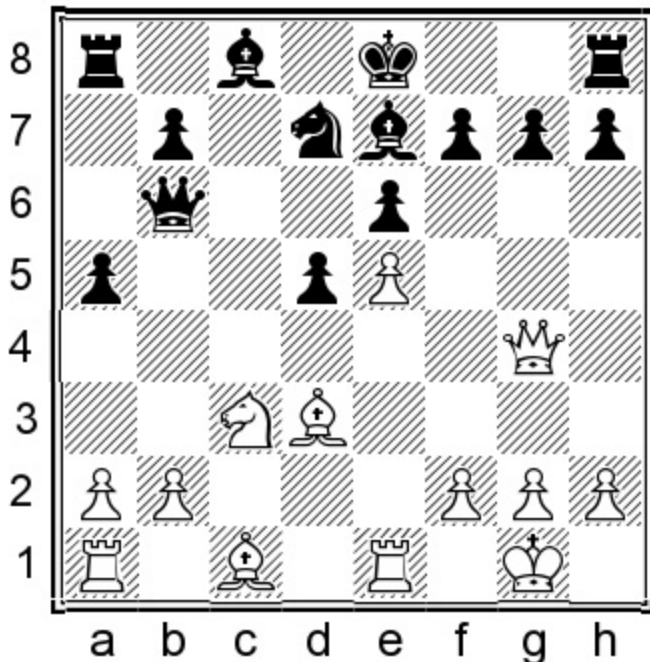


Position after: 20. Wc4

B1) 20... Rc8 21. Rxd4 Ng6 22. Qxc6+ Rxc6 23. Wd3 0-0 [23... Nxf4 24. Rxf4 0-0 25. Rd1 transposes again.] 24. Rd1 Nxf4 25. Rxf4 Wb8 26. Wb5 Rd8 27. Rxd8+ Wxd8 28. g3 Rc1+ 29. Kg2 h5 30. Qc3

the Black advantage had slowly evaporated and so the players agreed to a draw. ½-½ (30) Gubás, J (2245) – Speisser, P (2192) ICCF 2019.

B2) 20...♖d5!N This move leads to a long forced line. 21.♙xc6+ bxc6 22.♚xc6+ ♘d7 23.♚c8+ ♙d8 24.♙g5 ♘b6 25.♘xb6 ♚xb6 26.♙xd8 ♖xd8 27.♚c2 0-0 28.♖d1 d3 29.♚b3 ♚xb3 30.axb3♚ White will have to suffer some more!



Position after: 14. ♚g4

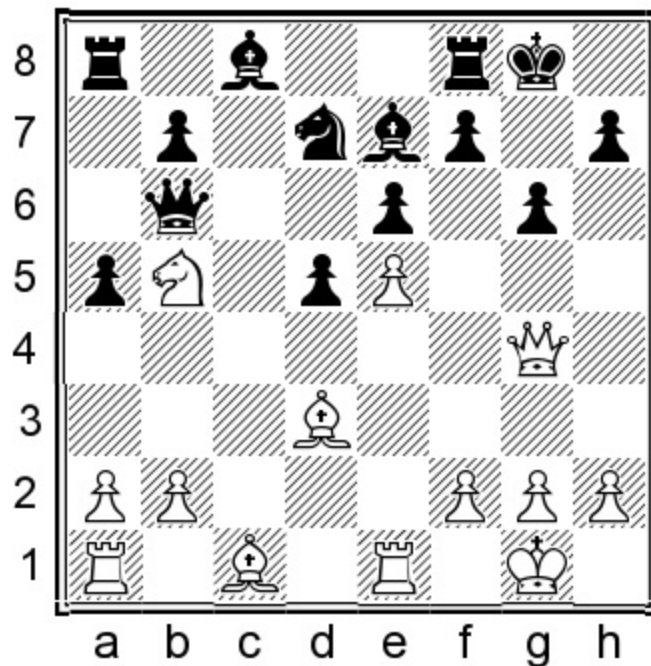
14...♔f8!

Now we're talking. It almost feels like a Winawer 7...♔f8 variation, except that we still have our dark squared bishop tucked safely away on e7.

White can choose between several moves here, but the fact that Leela encourages 15.♙d2 makes me very optimistic. In general this is a highly complicated position, which is exactly what we were hoping for when we selected the French as our opening of choice!

A) 14...0-0? 15.♙h6 g6 16.♙xf8 ♙xf8 17.♙b5± I mean, why would anyone give up the exchange like this? If you sac the exchange in a closed position, be sure to obtain the opponent's good bishop, not their dubious one!

B) 14...g6 This move weakens the dark squares too much to be considered as the main choice. 15.♘b5 0-0



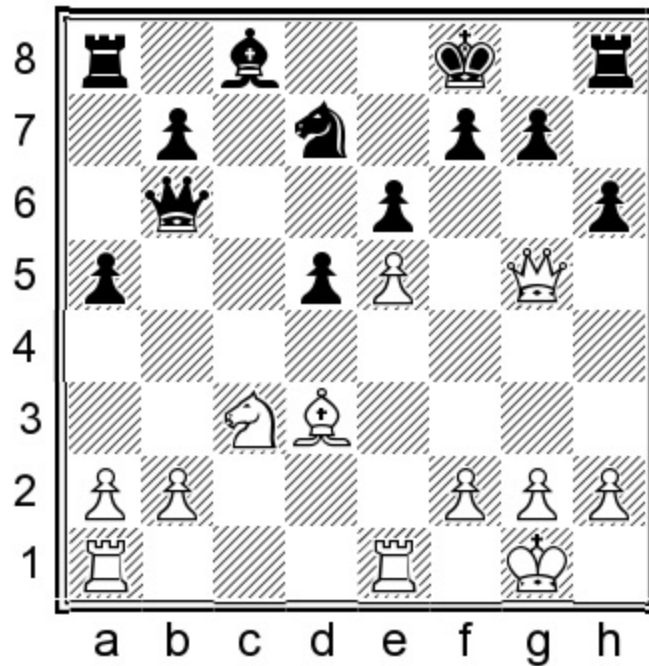
Position after: 15...0-0

B1) 16.♔h6 This is inaccurate. 16...♘c5! 17.♕xf8! [17.♚d4?! was played in an ‘ancient’ correspondence game. ½-½ (52) Hömske, M (2205) – Santamaría Pérez, T (2269) ICCF 2009.] 17...♕xf8 18.♚d4 ♕d7 19.a4 ♚d8 20.♖ad1= It is probably still slightly more comfortable to play as White, even though they have weakened the dark squares more compared to the main line.

B2) 16.♕e3!N 16...♚d8 17.♕h6 ♘c5 18.♕xf8 ♕xf8 19.♚d4 ♕d7± Again, who would not like to play an exchange up?

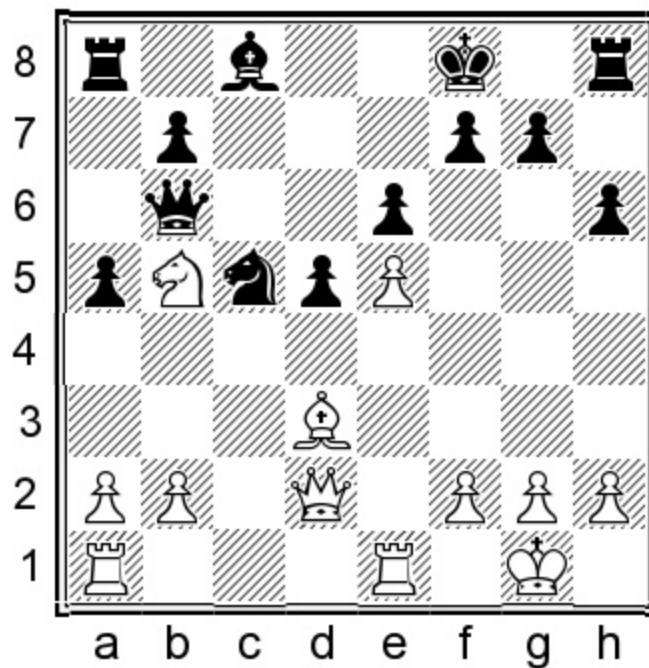
15.♘b5

15.♕g5 ♕xg5 16.♚xg5 h6!



Position after: 16...h6!

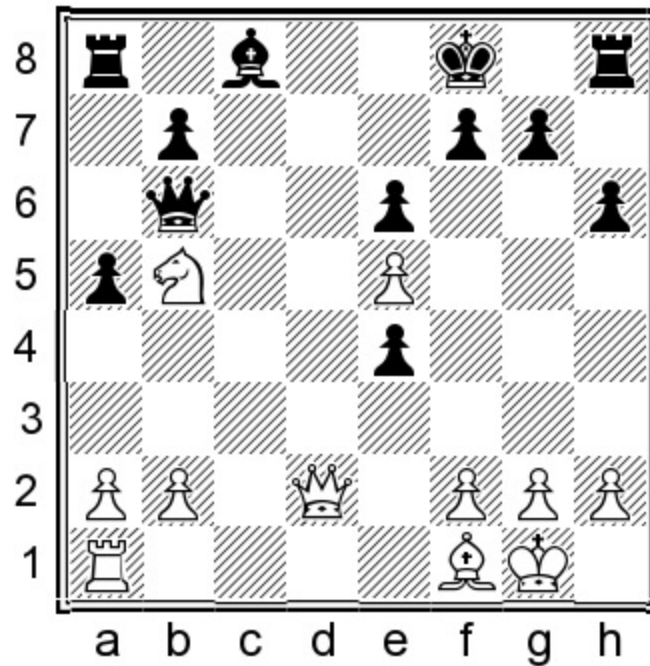
It's important to make use of these small tempo-gaining moves when possible. Baby steps! 17.♔d2 [17.♔f4 ♔b4! Note that this move is usually a desirable improvement. 18.♔g3 b6 19.a3 ♔e7=] 17...♘c5 18.♘b5



Position after: 18...♘b5

18...♘e4 [18...♘d7!? may have been somewhat better. 19.♘d6 ♘xd3 20.♔xd3 ♔g8 21.♖e3 ♔xb2 22.♖b1 ♔xa2 23.♖e1 b5 24.♖a1 ½-½ de la Rosa Solórzano, J (2323) – Heilala, T (2259) ICGF.com

2018.] 19.♖xe4!? [19.♙xe4 ♜xb5 20.♙d3 ♜b6= If White loses focus, Black might just consolidate and win the game.] 19...dxe4 20.♙f1

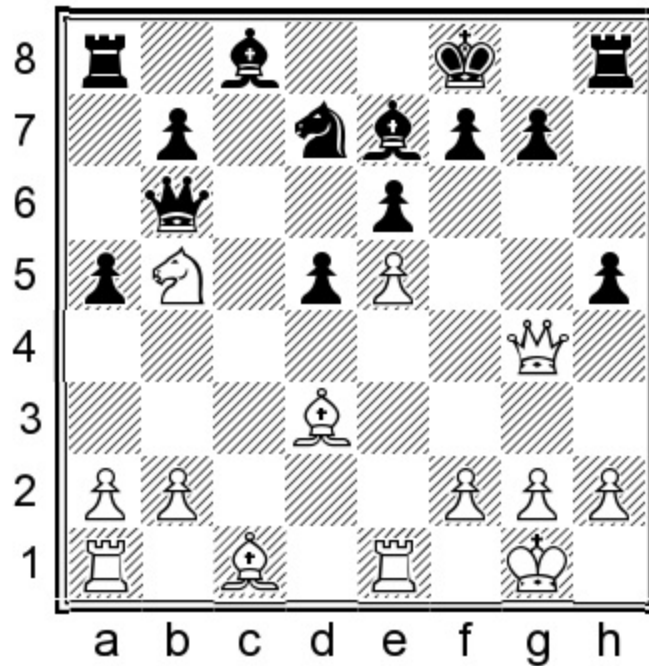


Position after: 20. ♙f1

20...e3 [20...♔e7!?, 20...♔g8!?] 21.fxe3 and the players agreed to a draw in Cañamas Soler, J (2275) – Lukas, N (2310) ICCF 2017. After 21...f5! the position would be unclear.

15...♘c5

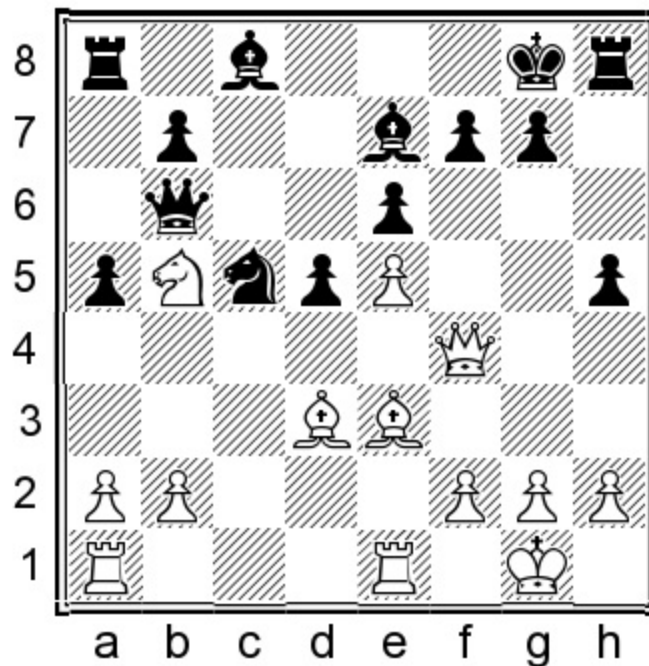
15...h5!?!N This move deserves serious attention as a sensible way to avoid the more drawish main line. But before you get too excited and start sending pictures of this analysis to all your friends, please compare the differences between 15...h5!?!N and 16...h5N.



Position after: 15...h5!?

A) 16. ♖f3 gives White a slightly inferior version because the e5 pawn will feel a little less secure. White needs to play ♕e3 to avoid being worse. 16... ♖g8 17. ♕e3 [For example, 17.a3 a4! ♖.] 17... ♗d8 18. ♕d4= Black can cautiously start dreaming of something more than just equality.

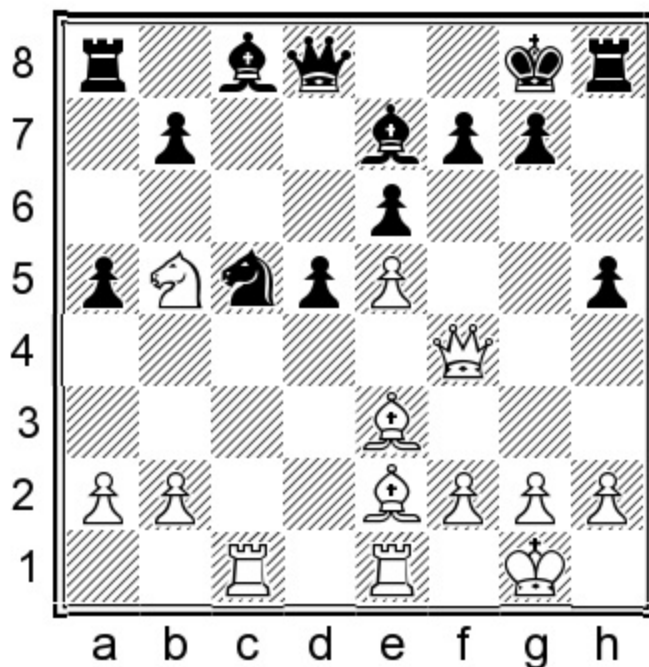
B) 16. ♗f4 ♖g8 [16... ♗c5?? 17. ♕g6+–] 17. ♕e3 ♗c5



Position after: 17... ♗c5

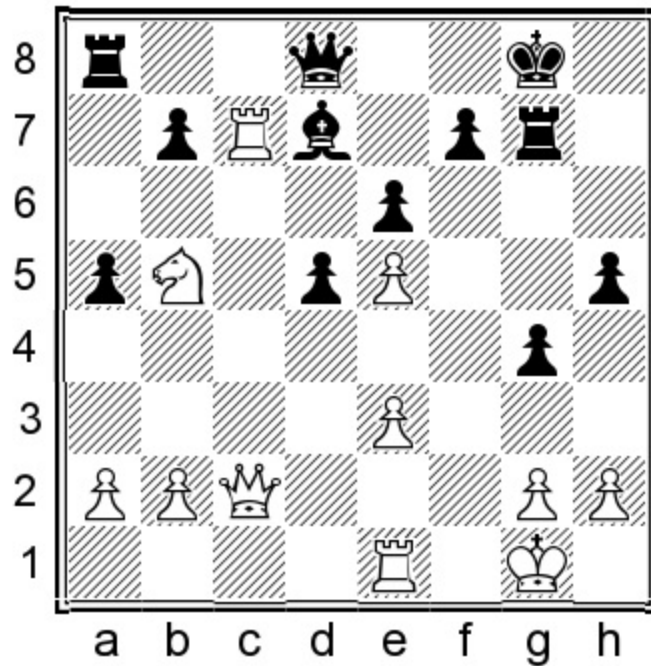
B1) 18. ♕e2 The bishop is more passive on this diagonal than on c2, but it had to maintain support

of the knight on b5. As a result, Black has obtained the all-important central e4 square for his knight, from where it will hinder White's attack! I am optimistic for Black here and even though it hasn't been tested over the board yet, I would happily try it myself. 18...♔d8= You can also study the other lines instead if you do not like fun. 19.♖ac1



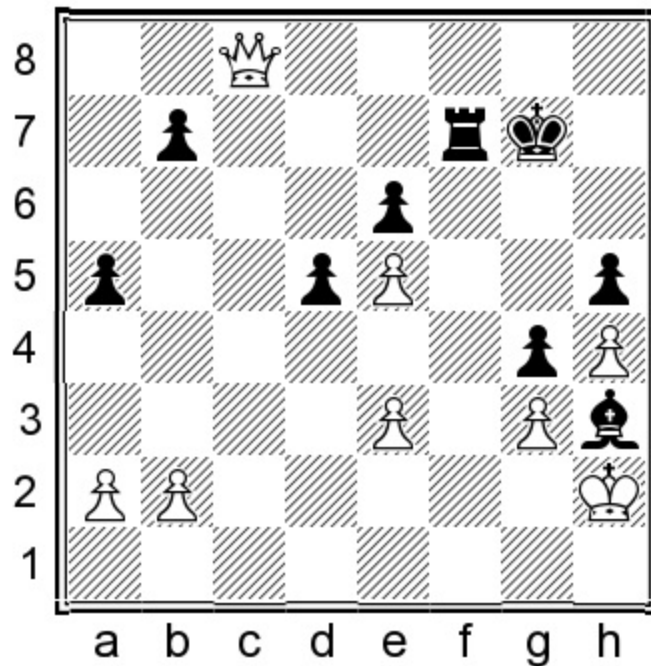
Position after: 19. ♖ac1

19...g5!/? Making our aggressive intentions crystal clear. [19...b6 should have been the main line objectively, but it is a lot less fun! 20.♘d6 ♙xd6 21.exd6 ♚f6! 22.♗xf6 gxf6 23.♙xc5 bxc5 24.♞xc5 ♔g7= Keep this option in mind if you prefer something quieter than the chaos of the main line.] 20.♗f3 g4 21.♗f4 ♘e4 22.♞c7 ♞h7 [22...♙d7!/? 23.♘d6 ♙e8 24.♞xe7 ♗xe7 25.f3 ♘xd6 26.exd6 e5 27.dxe7 exf4 28.♙xf4 gxf3 29.♙xf3 ♙c6 30.♙xd5 ♔g7=] 23.♙d3 [23.♞xe7? ♗xe7 24.f3 gxf3 25.♙xf3 ♘c5= Of course anything can still happen in a position like this.] 23...♙g5 24.♙xe4 24...♞g7 25.♙h7+ ♔xh7 26.♗a4 ♙xe3 27.♗c2+ [27.fxe3 ♙d7 28.♗c2+ transposes.] 27...♔g8 28.fxe3 ♙d7



Position after: 28...♔d7

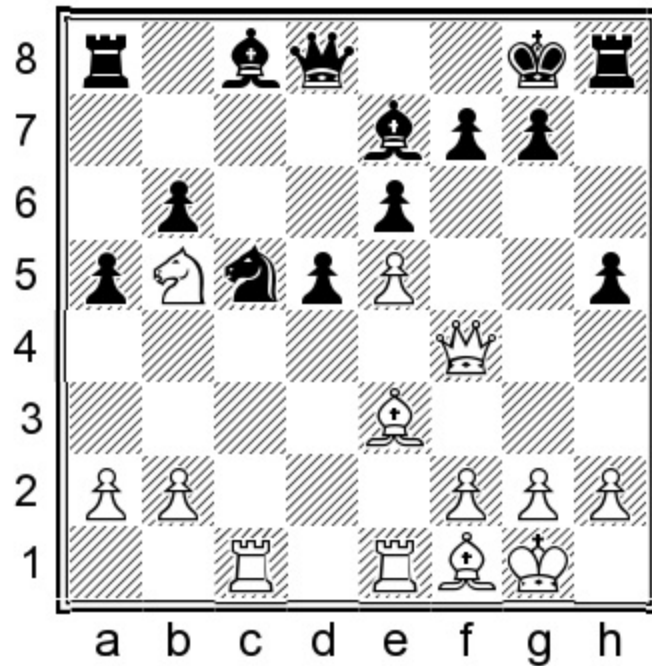
29.♖f1 [29.♘d6 ♕c6 30.♖xf7 Just take note of how hard to find all of these moves are! I am quite convinced that if you memorized and blitzed out every move up to this point, your opponent would surely suffer a nervous breakdown eventually. 30...♔g5∞] 29...♕e8 30.♖f6 ♕xb5 31.♖xf7 ♔xc7 32.♖xc7 ♖xc7 33.♔xc7 ♖f8 34.g3 ♖f1+ 35.♔g2 ♖f7 36.♔c8+ ♔g7 37.h4 ♕f1+ 38.♔h2 ♕h3=



Position after: 38...♕h3=

This is actually a fortress.

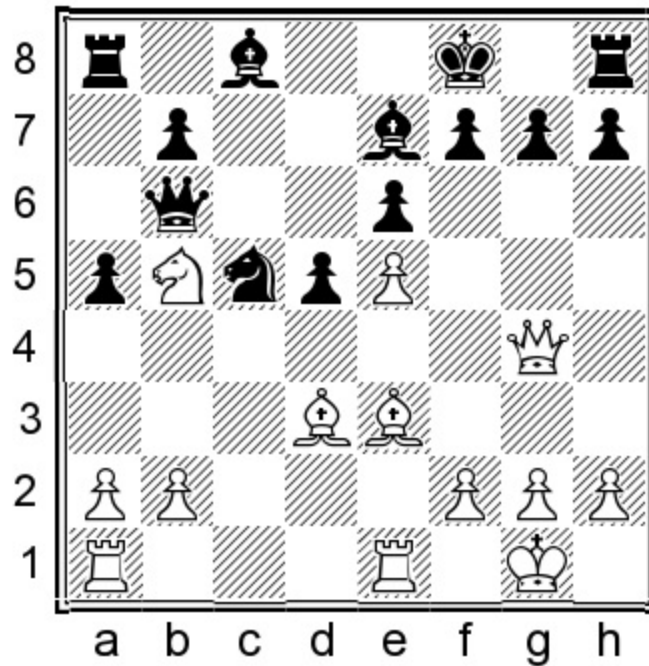
B2) 18.♔f1 is another option. 18...♕d8 19.♖ac1 b6 The difference is that 19...g5 followed by 20...g4 does not work as well as before.



Position after: 19...b6

Of course a real maverick would play it anyway, but in this case White can safely retreat the queen to d1, after which White has an easy life. 20.♘d6 ♙xd6 21.exd6 ♕f6 22.♗xf6 gxf6 23.♔xc5 bxc5 24.♞xc5 ♔g7= Here the difference between the two bishop moves has some significance, despite the position still remaining equal.

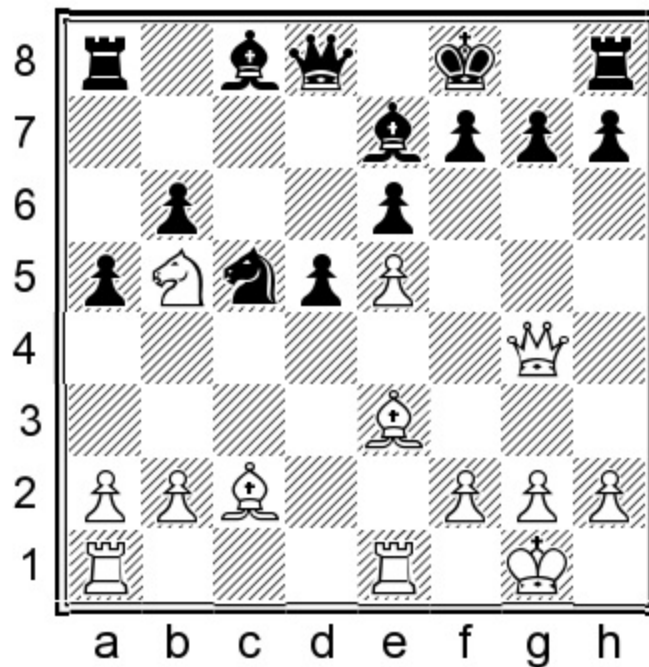
16.♔e3



Position after: 16. ♕e3

16... ♕d7

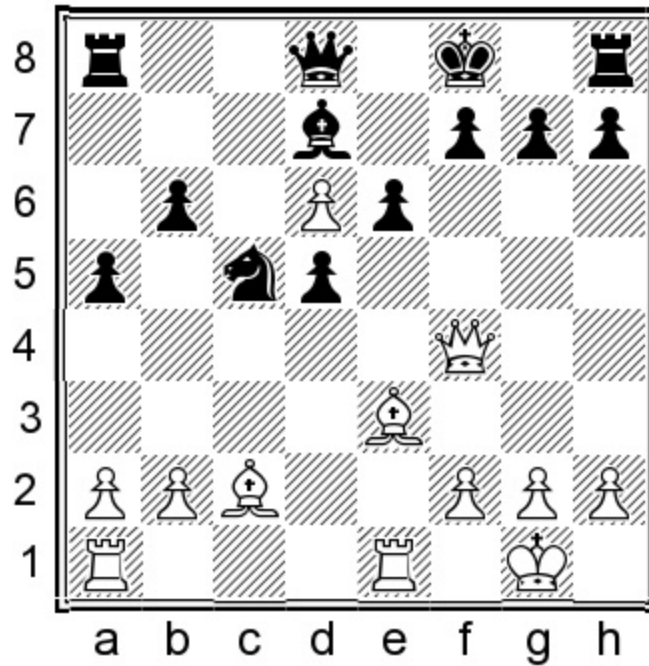
A) 16... ♖d8?! is inferior to the alternatives. 17. ♕c2! b6



Position after: 17... b6

A1) 18. ♖ac1 was not critical enough. As we often see, the white queen belongs on f4 in the French, especially after Black has played ... ♔f8. 18... ♖d7 19. a4 ♕a6 20. ♖d6 h5 21. ♗f4 f6 ½-½ (21) Laine,

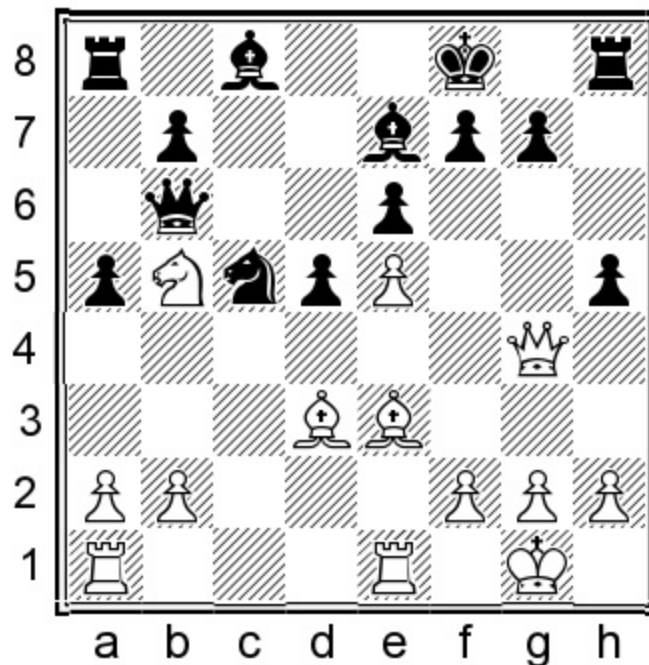
A2) 18. ♔f4! N 18... ♗d7 [18... ♖g8!?± is also worth a look.] 19. ♘d6! ♗xd6 20. exd6±



Position after: 20. exd6±

One cannot help but notice the similarities between this position and the Bayonet line of the King's Indian. The pawn is rather precarious on d6, but on the other hand the center is opened for the two bishops which are White's biggest asset in this position. Meanwhile the black pieces are not coordinating very well.

B) 16...h5!?N



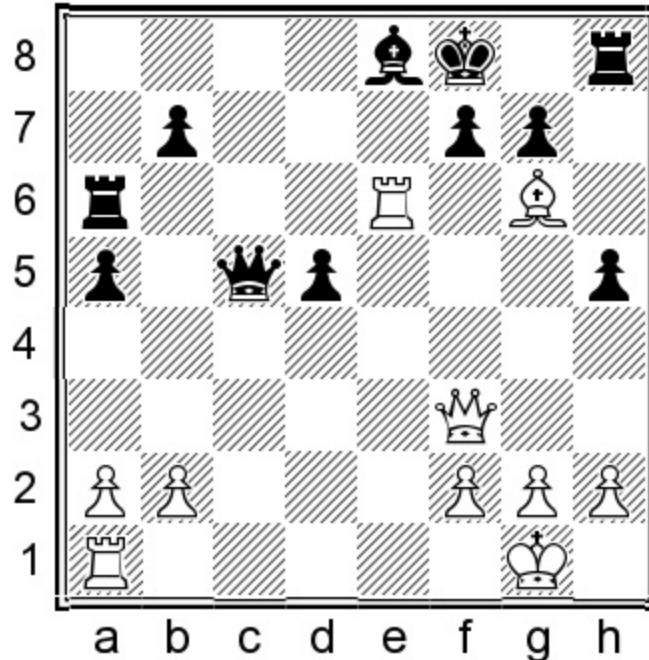
Position after: 16...h5!?N

Again this move is worth considering, even though the situation is a bit different compared to one move previously.

B1) 17. ♖f4?? simply drops a piece now! Which might make you conclude that this was the right moment for ...h5. 17... ♜xd3 18. ♙xb6 ♜xf4+ Oops!

B2) 17. ♕e2 ♖d8 18. ♜ac1 b6= The queen on e2 is misplaced and will be hit by the annoying ...♙a6. White needs to fight to maintain the balance.

B3) 17. ♖f3 With the knight already on c5, the e5 pawn is now much safer. This enables the move 17... ♙d7! [Beware! 17... ♔g8? is too slow. 18. ♜ac1 ♙d7 19. ♞d6 ♙xd6 20. exd6 ♜c8 21. ♜xc5! ♜xc5 22. ♖f4 ♜c4 23. ♙xc4 ♖b4 24. ♜c1 dxc4 25. h3± and Black is in trouble.] 18. ♙g6 Again we are entering some rather forced lines. 18... ♙e8 19. ♞d6 ♙xd6 20. exd6 ♖xd6 21. ♙xc5 ♖xc5 22. ♜xe6 ♜a6!



Position after: 22... ♜a6!

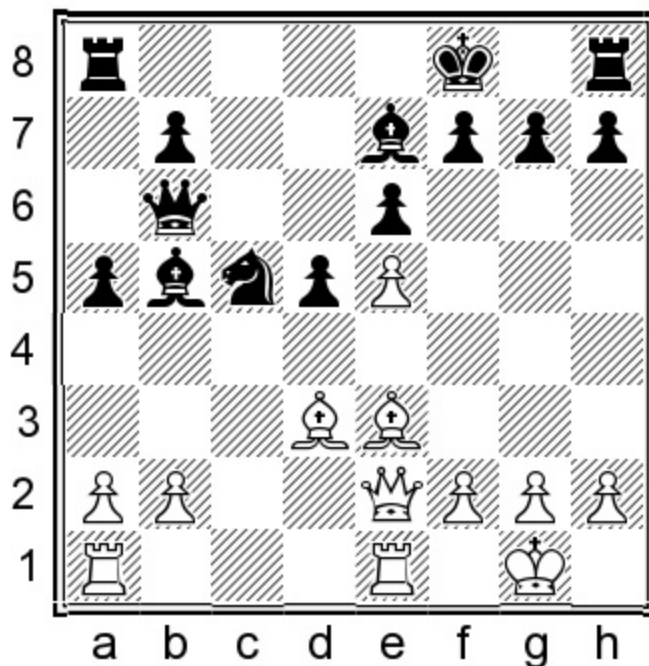
What a save! 23. ♜xa6 [23. ♜xe8+? Falling for the temptation of the forbidden fruit. 23... ♔xe8 24. ♙xf7+ ♔d8 25. ♙xd5 ♜f8± Surprisingly enough, the king is safe.] 23... bxa6= We have reached an interesting unbalanced position with chances for both sides.

17. ♞d6

17. ♕e2 This voluntary retreat makes some sense, as the queen has already done its job of luring our king to f8. Fortunately for us this is not such a big deal. We can easily activate the rook with ...h5 later.

A) 17...♔d8?! 18.♖ac1?! ♘xd3 [18...♙xb5!] 19.♔xd3 ♕g8= ½-½ (45) McKenzie, C (2345) – Johnston, A (2366) ICCF 2015.

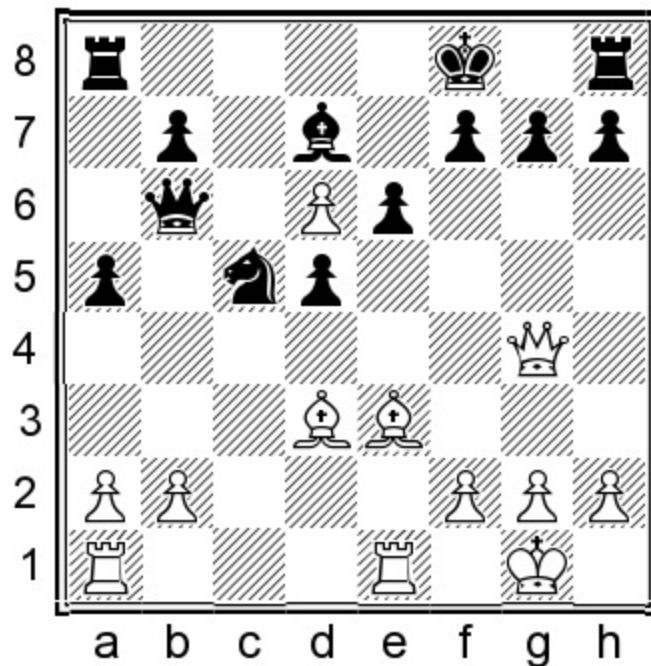
B) 17...♙xb5!



Position after: 17...♙xb5!

It is quite important to understand the reasoning behind this exchange. The knight on b5 is a very important piece in this position. ♘d6 will nearly always be a good move, so if White leaves it on b5 we should jump at the chance to trade off our ‘bad’ bishop for it. We can then construct a huge pawn chain on the light squares, hindering White’s light squared bishop for the rest of the game. 18.♙xb5 ♔d8 White will have an uncomfortable time ahead as their bishops will be permanently blocked by the fixed center. [18...g6; 18...h5]

17...♙xd6 18.exd6

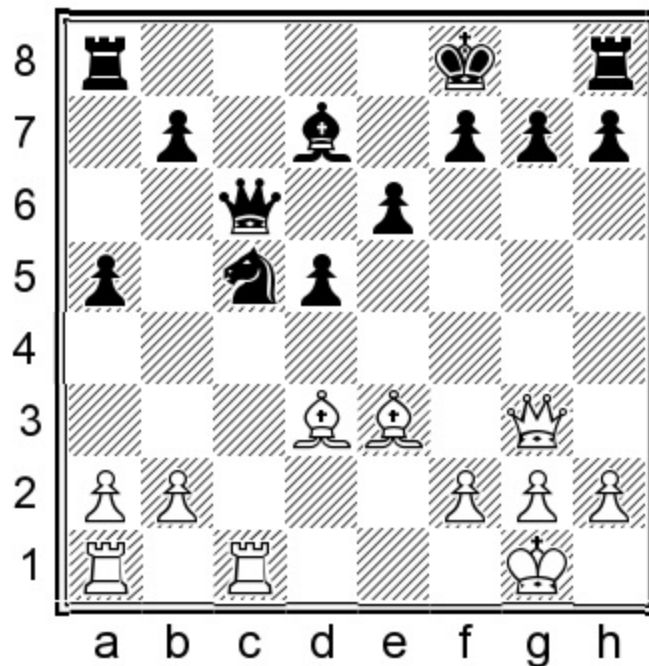


Position after: 18.exd6

18...♖c8

A) 18...♔c6!? It makes sense to remove yourself from the pin as soon as possible. 19.♖ac1 b6 20.♔g3 f6 21.♗d4 ♖e8 22.a4 e5 23.♗xc5 bxc5 24.♗b5 ♔xd6 25.♗xd7 ♔xd7 26.♖xc5 ♔f7= The central advantage is offset by the weakened king and lack of development. Both sides had their chances in ½-½ (40) Meier, K (2344) – Höbel, H (2358) ICCF 2014.

B) 18...♔xd6?! This was the choice of computers back in the days when they were still very materialistic. 19.♔g3! ♔c6 20.♖ec1! [20.♖ac1 b6± ½-½ (31) Houska, J (2252) – Hernández Muñoz, J (2326) ICCF 2007.]



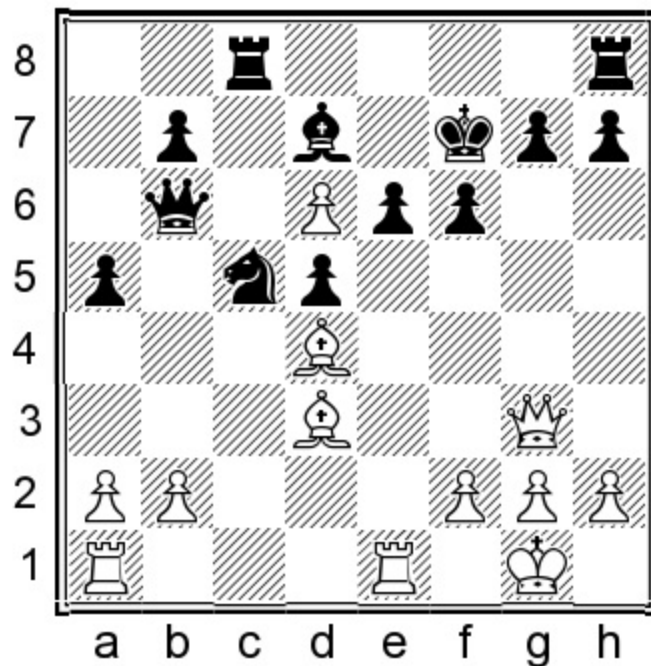
Position after: 20. ♖ec1!

This is an extremely deep move, choosing the correct rook to put on c3 via c1. Black is hoping to entangle himself with the pawn sac ...e5 followed by ...♖e8. But this relies on the tactical trick of the bishop on e3 being pinned to the rook on e1 at the end. What a detail! 20...b6 21.♖c3 h5 22.h4 e5 23.♙xe5 ♗e6± Here White could afford to take on e5 because of ♖ec1! Though there are still reasonable drawing chances for Black.

19. ♗g3!

This is a very logical move, protecting the pawn and moving out of the scope of the bishop. It is an important move to deal with. Black still needs to solve some problems.

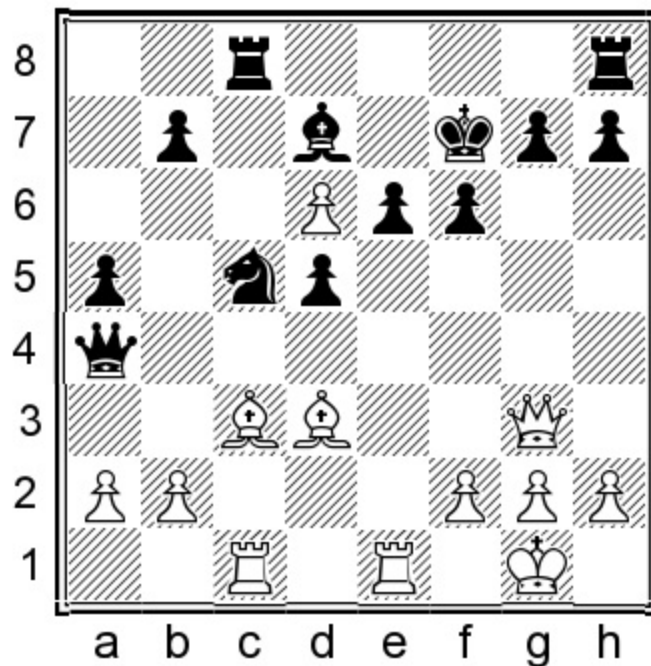
19.♘d4 Compared to the main line, this is a slight waste of time. Black wants to play ...f6 anyway. 19...f6 20.♙f3 ♔g8 21.♗g3 ♔f7 Even without any huge bribes, I have included this game from our editor Romain Edouard. In his original 2012 analysis he was quite sceptical of this move.



Position after: 21...♔f7

However Leela, who has been my girlfriend for quite some time now, likes this plan a lot. So I would award it ‘!’ instead of ‘?!’. It seems like Black has gotten this desirable move in for free!

A) 22.♖ac1 This is the move Edouard was most afraid of. I hope to convince him otherwise.
 22...♜b4 23.♙c3 ♜a4! The move Romain missed in his original analysis.

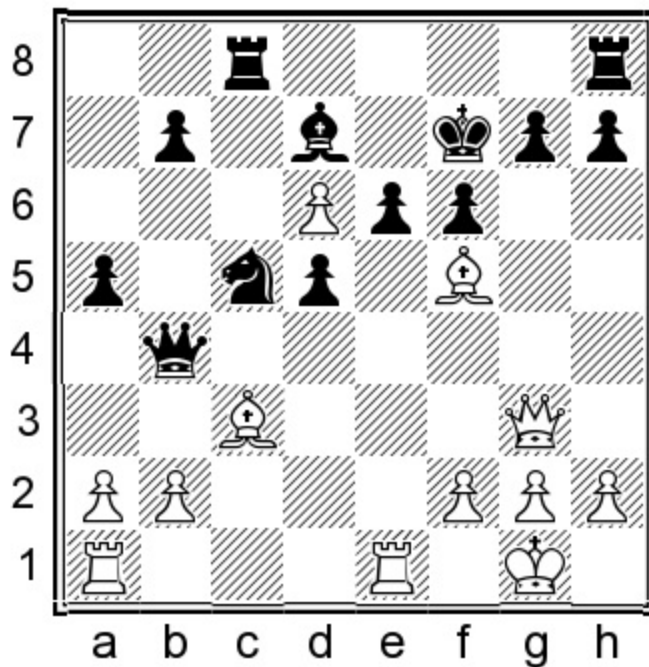


Position after: 23...♜a4!

24.♙c2 ♜xa2!? [24...♜b5 25.♜g4 ♘d3! 26.a4 ♜a6 27.♙xf6! gxf6 28.♜h5+ ♔g7 29.♜g4+ = with a

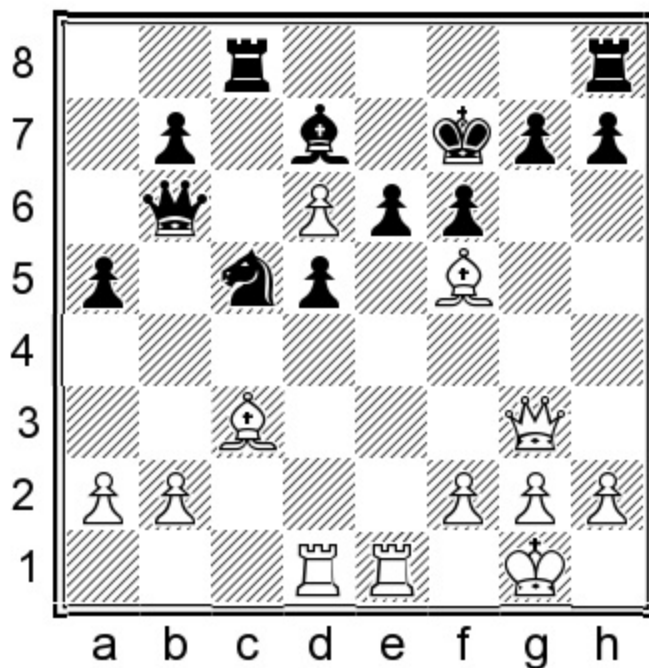
draw. Unfortunately Black did not have anything better before. This tactical motif is often present.]
 25. ♖g4 ♜c4 26. ♗h5+ ♔g8! 27. ♞cd1 ♞f4! 28. ♞xd5 g6 29. ♞d1 exd5 30. ♞xd5+ ♖e6 31. ♞xe6 ♙xe6
 32. ♞xe6+ ♔g7 33. g3 ♞c1+ 34. ♔g2 ♞xc3 35. ♞d7+ ♔h6 36. ♞h3+ ♔g7= The draw is quite deep
 into the variation, and who would be able to come up with this ♞cd1 idea anyway?

B) 22. ♙f5! ♞b4 23. ♙c3



Position after: 23. ♙c3

B1) 23... ♞b6 24. ♙d4 ♞b4 25. ♙c3 ♞b6 26. ♞ad1



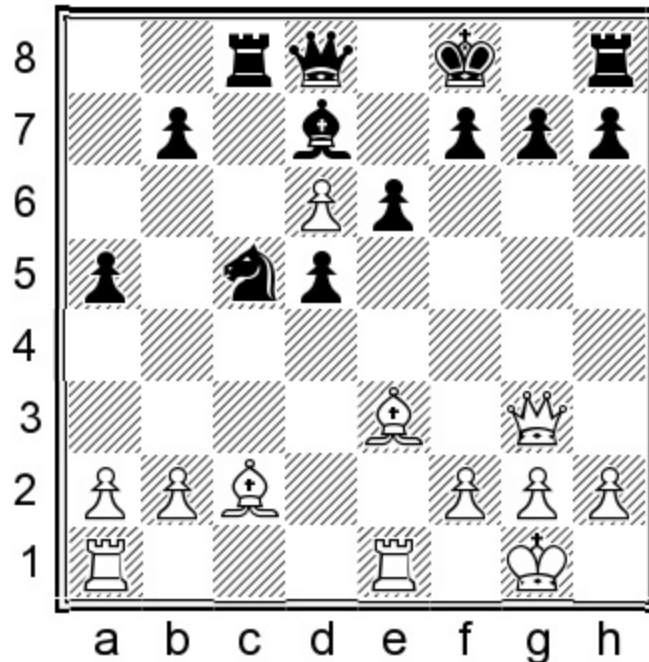
Position after: 26. ♖ad1

26... ♘e4!N [26... ♜ce8 27. ♙c2± Black managed to hold on but had to survive some bad positions. ½-½ (58) Bauer, C (2679) – Edouard, R (2616) Nancy 2012.] 27. ♙xe4 dxe4 28. ♜xe4 h5!= with a surprisingly balanced position. Black will lift the rook towards g6 and actually have some pretty nice play.

B2) 23... ♚a4!N 24. b3 ♚c6 25. ♜ac1 ♜ce8 26. ♙b1 e5 27. b4 ♘a4 28. ♙d2 ♚xd6 29. bxa5 ♘b2! 30. a3 ♘c4 31. ♙b4 ♚c6= I believe Black is the one playing for a win here, although anything could happen.

19...f6!

19... ♚d8 This natural response is also possible, but it is less active. 20. ♙c2! [20. ♙xc5 is harmless. 20... ♜xc5 21. ♜ac1 ♜xc1 22. ♜xc1 ♙c6 23. ♜c5 g6 ½-½ (23) Nevednichy, V (2533) – Sumets, A (2560) Cesme 2017.] Staying on the right diagonal, this is the only move that can cause problems.

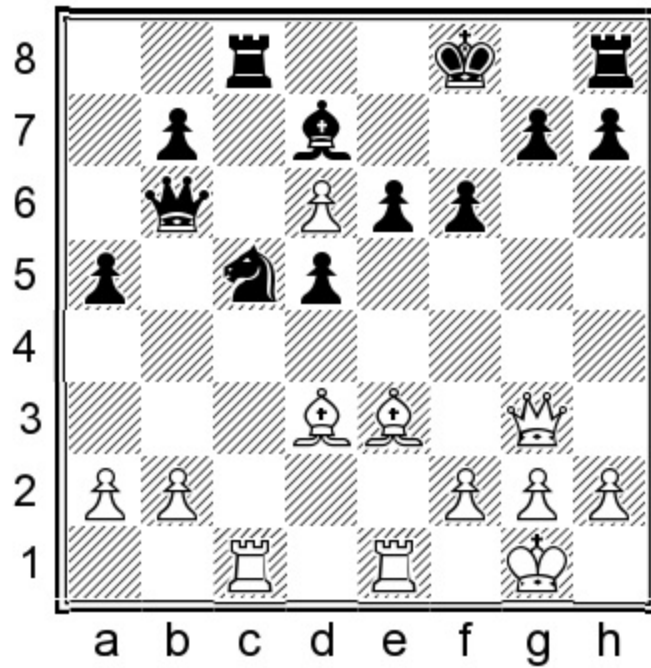


Position after: 20. ♙c2!

A) 20...b6? is missing the point. 21. h4± [21. b4!?!± ½-½ (46) Ivanov, V (2321) – Tauber, H (2426) ICCF 2010.]

B) 20...f6!N The biggest problem for Black is developing the kingside, so he should get to work on that immediately. 21. ♜ac1 ♜c6! 22. h4 ♘e4 23. ♙xe4 dxe4 24. ♚g4 ♙f7= Black gives back the pawn and solves all his problems.

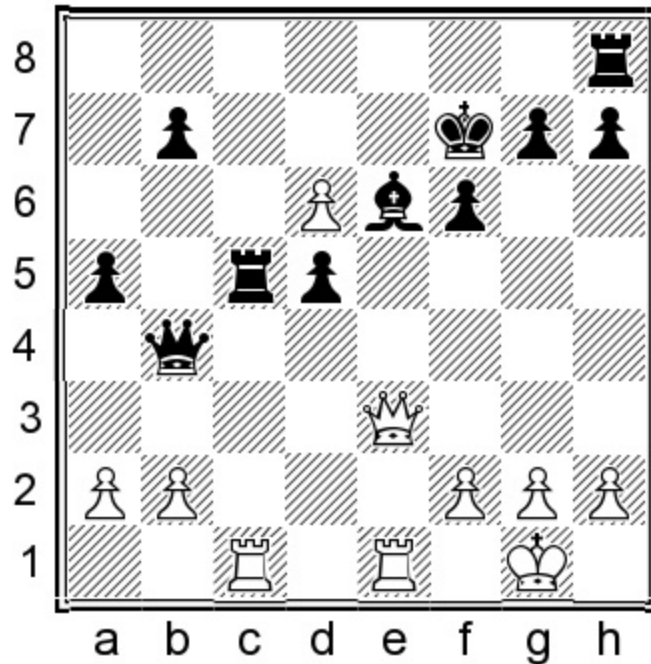
20. ♜ac1



Position after: 20. ♖ac1

20...e5 ♞N

20...♔f7?? Your Stockfish would likely commit this error as well. 21.♙f5!+- Now it is winning for White because of the following trick: 21...♚b4 22.♙xc5 ♜xc5 23.♙xe6+ ♙xe6 24.♚e3



Position after: 24. ♚e3

And White won after this unexpected fork. 1-0 (31) Bok, B (2591) – Das, A (2467) Hoogeveen 2015.

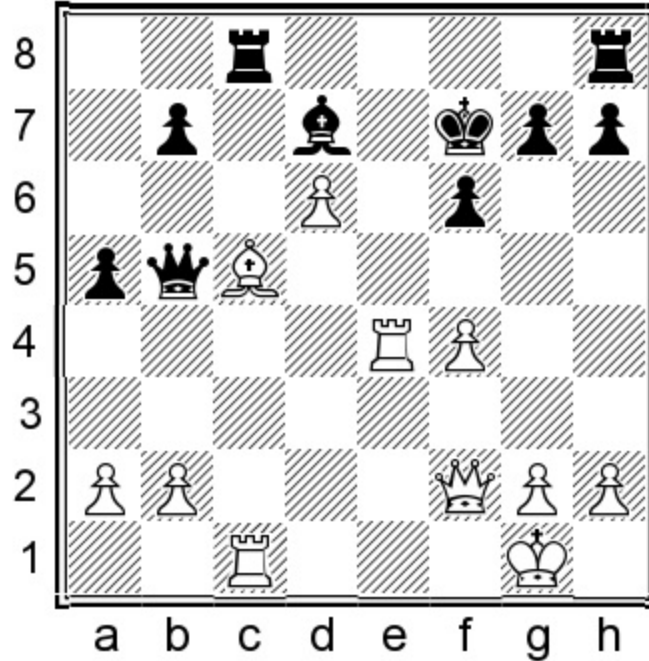
21.f4 e4 22.♙xe4 dxe4

22...♚xd6!? 23.♙b1 ♘e4=

23.♚f2!

23.♖xc5 ♚xd6!=

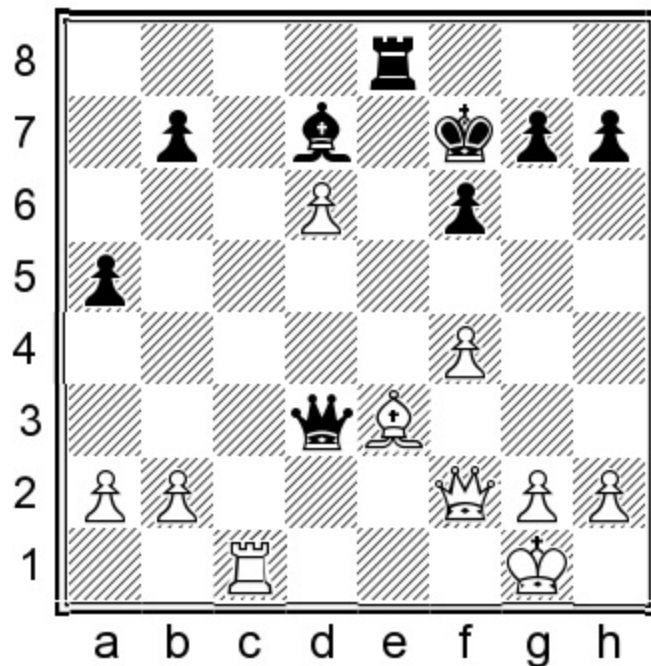
23...♔f7 24.♙xc5 ♚b5 25.♖xe4



Position after: 25.♖xe4

At first glance White is doing extremely well. Fortunately there are second and third glances! Despite being a pawn down, it is Black who has the better bishop and an attack which provides enough compensation.

25...♖he8 26.♖xe8 ♖xe8 27.♙e3 ♚d3=



Position after: 27...♕d3=

I believe this is the clearest way to achieve an equal position after 19.♕g3.

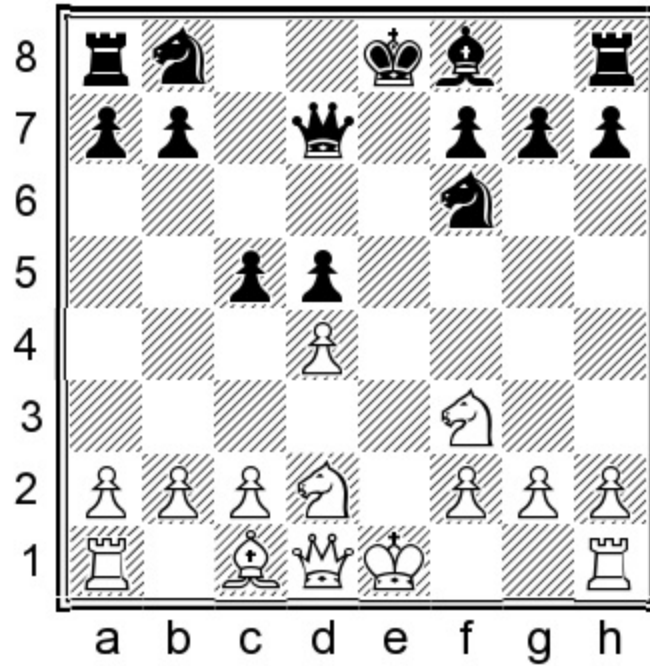
Conclusion

We have now come to the end of the wild 4.♘gf3 ride. This chapter has covered 11.♘b1, which is by far the main move in this system. Fortunately Black seems to be doing well in the lines with 14...♔f8!. There are several decent ways to obtain a solid equal position. Still, I would like to emphasize that it is important to develop the kingside quickly. Most of the successful lines we have seen have involved active kingside play, either with ...f6 and ...♔f7, or with ...h5 and even ...g5. I would recommend studying both plans and judging afterwards which works best for you. Finally, we have to address the question, who died after White drew their gun in this cowboy duel? Well it depends on which side has the better marksmanship. Which is probably you after studying this chapter!

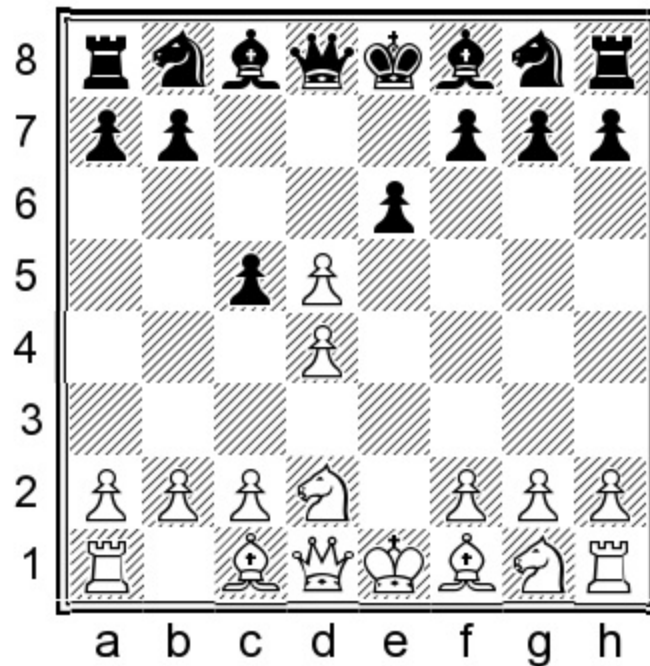
Chapter 5

4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♖f6 – A new plan with 7...♙xd7

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♖f6 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.♙xd7+ ♚xd7



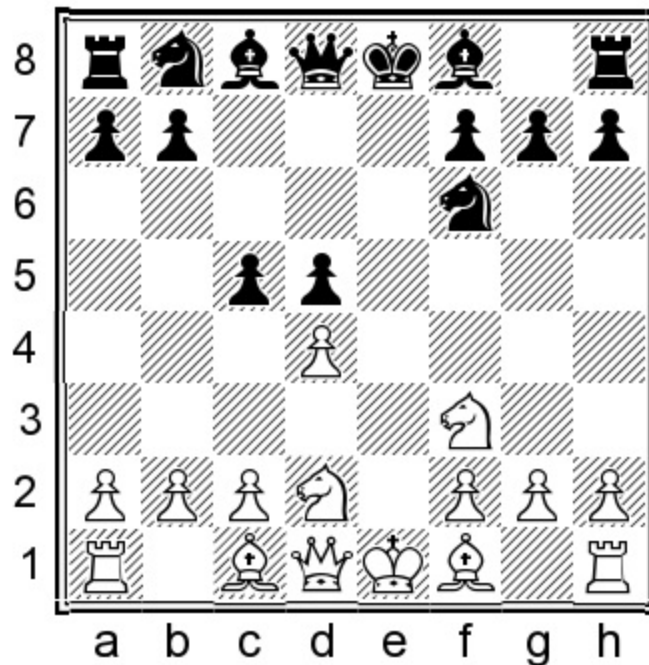
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5



Position after: 4.exd5

This is by far the main choice, leaving Black with two good options. Either the ‘Scandinavian’ option with 4...♞xd5, or entering an isolated queen’s pawn position (from now on called IQP or isolani) with 4...exd5. In most recent books on the French Defense, 4...♞xd5 has been the preferred choice. It is probably the most solid system out there and you could stick with it if it has been giving you satisfactory results. However, let us address two problems with the 4...♞xd5 system. Firstly, there are many forced lines analyzed out to a draw. And secondly, Black is always slightly more passive in these positions, which is not exactly my cup of tea. Therefore I have made the choice to play with the isolani. I admit this is not the most popular decision. For most of my life I have been a bit wary of choosing the IQP as Black. But that changed once I started playing more and more games in this line and began to like it a lot. If you are still more interested in studying the solid 4...♞xd5 line instead, I believe the work by Ntirlis and Aagaard is still standing strong and there are hardly any improvements to be found there.

4...exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘f6



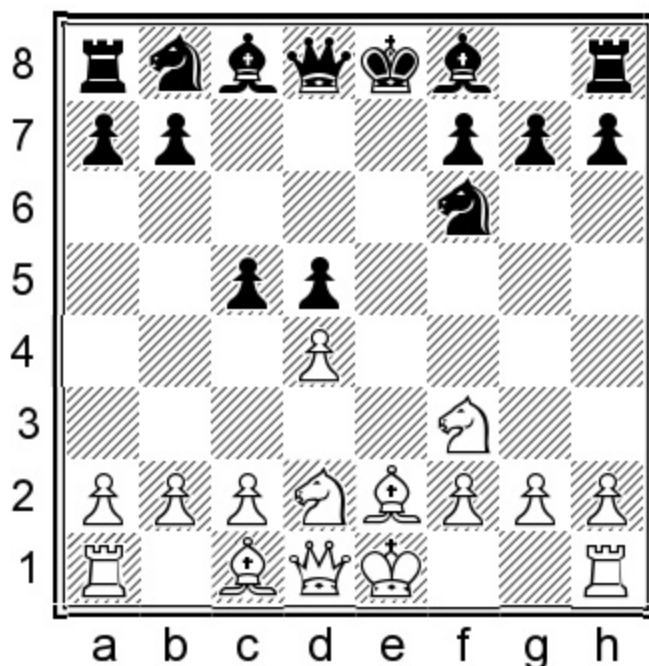
Position after: 5...♘f6

My personal favorite 5...♘f6 seems to be the soundest choice, as evidenced by being the top choice in correspondence games. Despite that, it is still slightly under the radar. John Shaw in his book, for example, only dedicates one game to this move while giving many more to 5...♞c6. So what’s the big difference between real chess and correspondence chess? Why is 5...♘f6 such an unpopular choice, especially at the lower levels? Throughout the chapter I will try to determine and explain the answers to these questions. But all in all, this makes the 5...♘f6 system an ideal weapon. It is rare and knowledge-based, which means that after studying the pawn structure in detail, your experience will

give you a clear edge over your opponents. Also, it is not overloaded with very heavy theory, so walking into super-sharp preparation is not a big concern. I admit, you really do need to acquire the requisite middlegame knowledge, which might take some painful losses before you get there, but in the end it is worth it. And now to my final point. In our hands, the IQP will be seen not as a structural disadvantage, but rather as an advantage in space! We can often put knights on e4 and/or c4 and exert a lot of pressure on the white position. This makes the 4...exd5/5...♞f6 system my favorite way to play for a win against 3.♞d2.

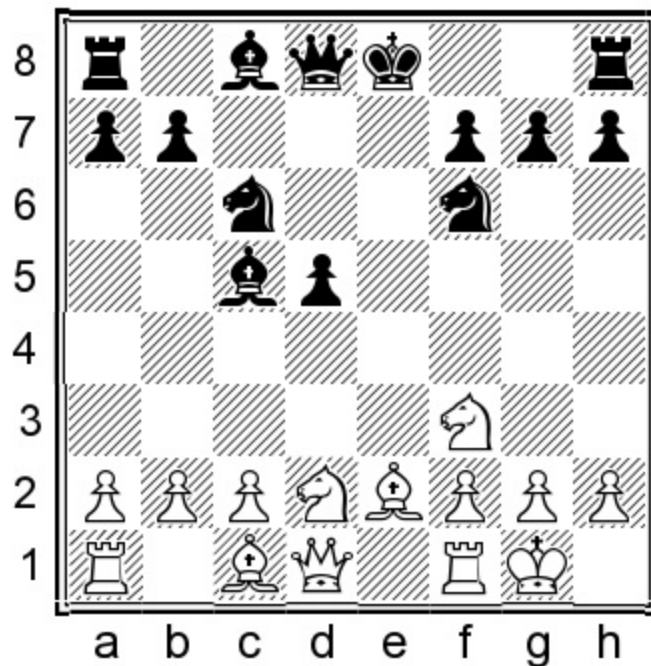
6.♞b5+

6.♞e2!?



Position after: 6.♞e2!?

If the idea of 3.♞d2 is to settle for a very tiny but long-lasting advantage, this move makes that advantage even tinier. Still, this move is played by Sergei Tiviakov, which means we can't just write it off as equality and move on, even though you will probably only meet this line if you face Tiviakov! 6...♞c6 [6...♞e7! avoids the extra option with 9.a3. 7.dxc5 ♞xc5 8.♞b3 ♞b6] 7.0-0 ♞e7 8.dxc5 ♞xc5

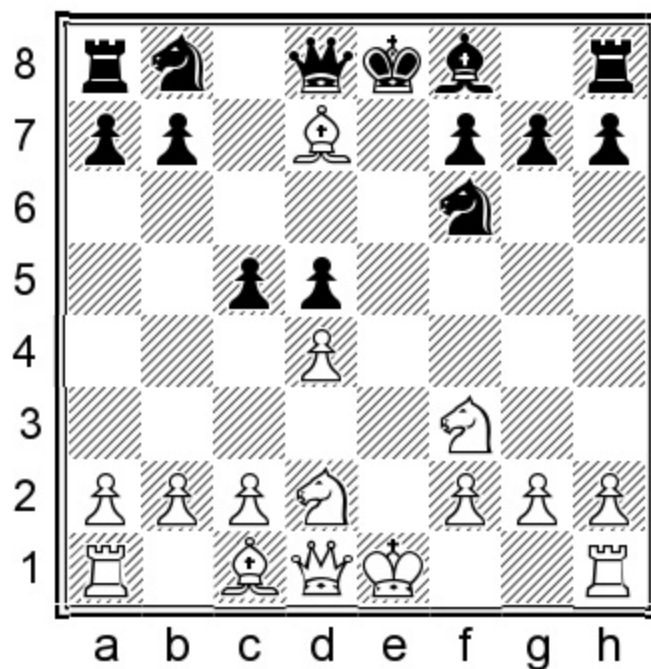


Position after: 8... ♖xc5

9. ♘b3 [9.a3!? a5 10. ♘b3 ♖b6=] 9... ♖b6 10. ♖g5 0-0= and Black has hardly any trouble. ½-½ (41)
 Onischuk, A (2625) – Kramnik, V (2770) Tilburg 1997.

6... ♖d7 7. ♖xd7+

7. ♔e2+ is an attempt to snatch the c5 pawn at the cost of development. This position has been covered in Chapter 2.



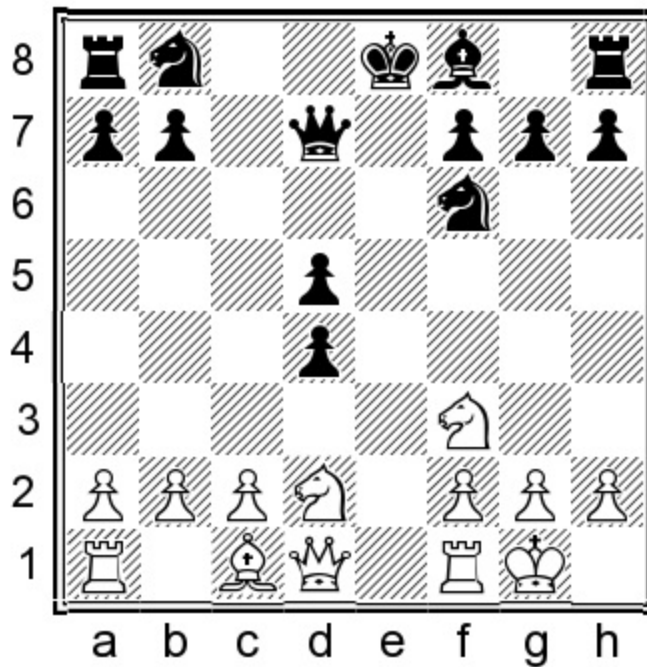
Position after: 7. ♕xd7+

7... ♖xd7!

I believe this might be my biggest discovery over my old main repertoire. 7... ♖bxd7 was considered an automatic move for years, however it now turns out that Black actually does have the time to play like this. Often when one pair of bishops gets exchanged, it makes sense to put the queen on a square of that color. This has been achieved already now, and our knight can still go to the optimal c6-square.

7... ♖bxd7 is the main line and will be dealt with in the next chapter. I still chose to give 7... ♖xd7 an exclamation because it is the fresher option. Both moves are equally good!

8.0-0 cxd4



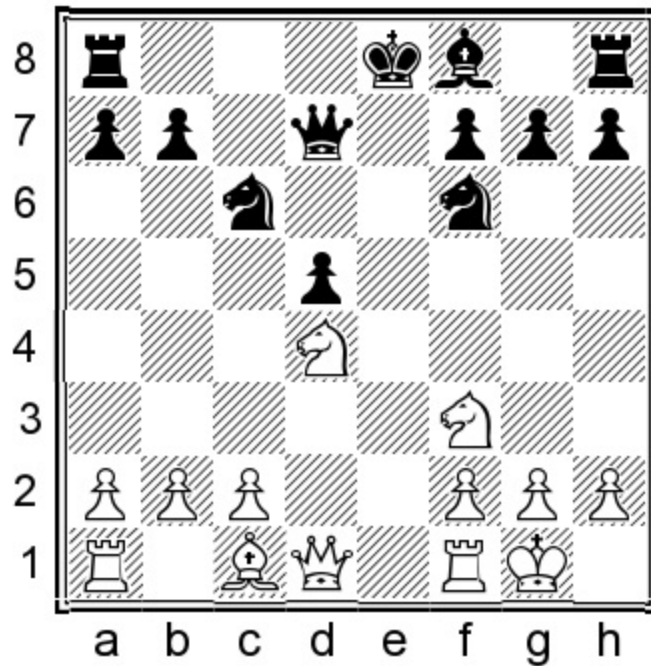
Position after: 8... cxd4

If you decide to play 7... ♖xd7, you should never forget to include this. Fortunately our queen is already covering b5 and f5 so we are not afraid of any knight recaptures on d4. At this point there are only two games from this position in Chessbase's livebase, isn't that exciting?

9. ♖xd4

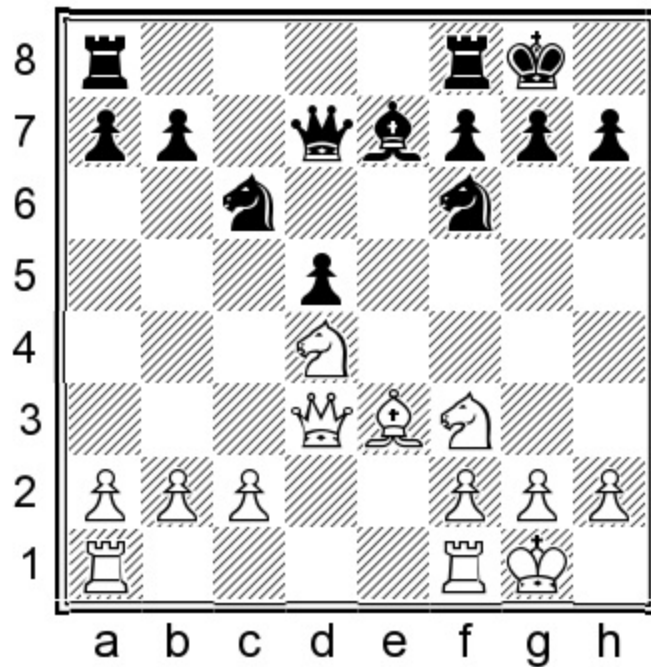
Many options eventually transpose here. Therefore I will limit myself to the variations with independent significance. The most important questions for White are whether to go for the aggressive ♖e5 idea, and if not, which knight should he recapture on d4 with?

A) 9. ♖b3 ♖c6! 10. ♖bxd4 [10. ♖fxd4 ♕e7 11. ♖e1 0-0 transposes to the main line.] [chessstouring.com](http://www.chessstouring.com)



Position after: 10. $\text{N} \times \text{b}4$

The disadvantage of capturing with the b3-knight is that Black can now play very actively with both knights. The f6-knight will go to e4 from where it will not need to fear being chased with f3, and the c6-knight can move towards c4 via a5 which is no longer covered by the b3-knight. 10... $\text{K} \times \text{e}7$
 [10... $\text{K} \times \text{c}5$!? 11. $\text{R} \times \text{e}1 + \text{N} \times \text{e}4$ 12. $\text{Q} \times \text{d}3$ 0-0 13. $\text{K} \times \text{e}3 \text{ R} \times \text{f} \text{e}8 =$] 11. $\text{Q} \times \text{d}3$ 0-0 12. $\text{K} \times \text{e}3$! I believe this is the most dangerous strategy to face.

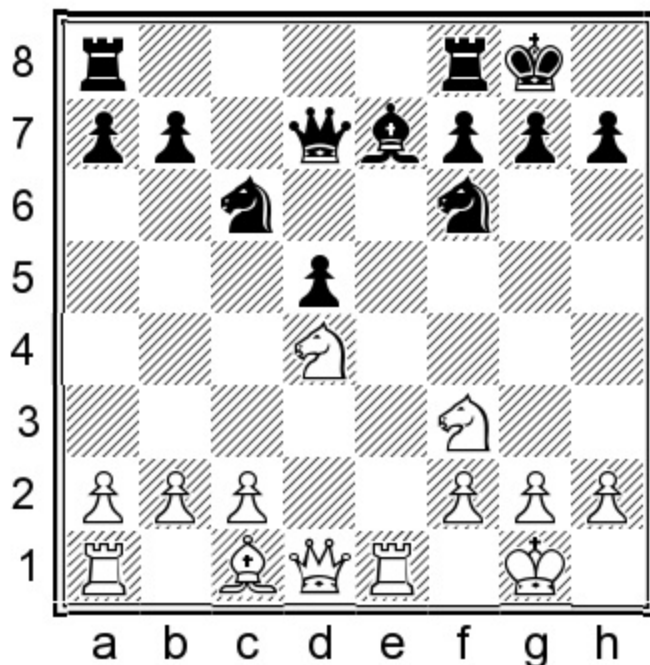


Position after: 12. $\text{K} \times \text{e}3$!

White's plan is to put a bishop on d4, which is annoyingly solid. 12...♖fe8 [12...♘g4!? 13.♘xc6 bxc6 14.♙d4 c5 15.♙c3 ♙f6= Black has one weakness, but slightly more space.] 13.♞ad1 ♞ad8 14.c3 ♘e4 15.♞fe1 h6= Black would like to wait a bit before choosing a plan for his bishop. This is a position where strategic knowledge trumps remembering exact variations.

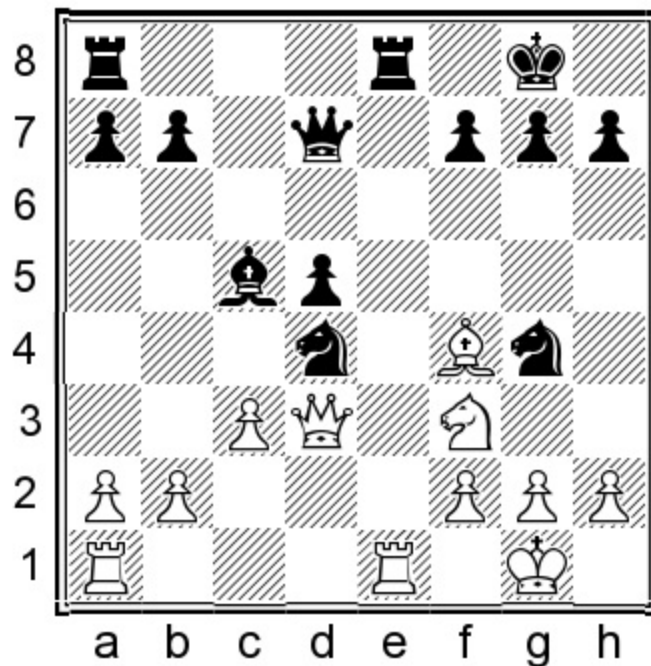
B) 9.♘e5 The most direct attempt at punishing us. 9...♚c7 10.♞e1 ♙e7 11.♘df3 0-0 12.♘xd4 ♞e8 13.♘d3 ♘c6 14.♙e3 ♙d6 15.h3= Again Black has nothing to worry about in this position.

C) 9.♞e1+ White often includes this check sooner or later. 9...♙e7 10.♘b3 ♘c6 11.♘bxd4 [11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.♞xe5 0-0 13.♘xd4=] 11...0-0



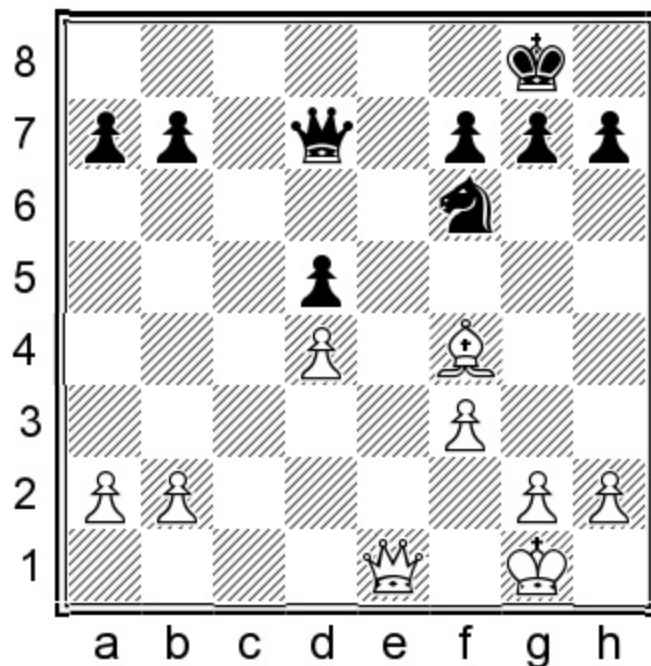
Position after: 11...0-0

12.♚d3 [12.♘xc6 At first glance it seems Black has been tricked. 12...bxc6 13.♘e5 ♚c7 14.♘xc6 ♙d6= But now we see the counter-trick.] 12...♖fe8 13.c3 ♙c5 14.♙e3 ♘g4 15.♙f4 ♘xd4!



Position after: 15... ♖xd4!

Again it is worth considering exchanging minor pieces as Black. 16. ♖xd4 ♗xe1+ 17. ♗xe1 ♖e8 18. ♕d2 [18. ♖c1!? When the computer starts opting for moves like this, you can be sure you're on the right track.] 18... ♗xe1+ 19. ♕xe1 ♘xd4 20. cxd4 ♘f6 21. f3



Position after: 21. f3

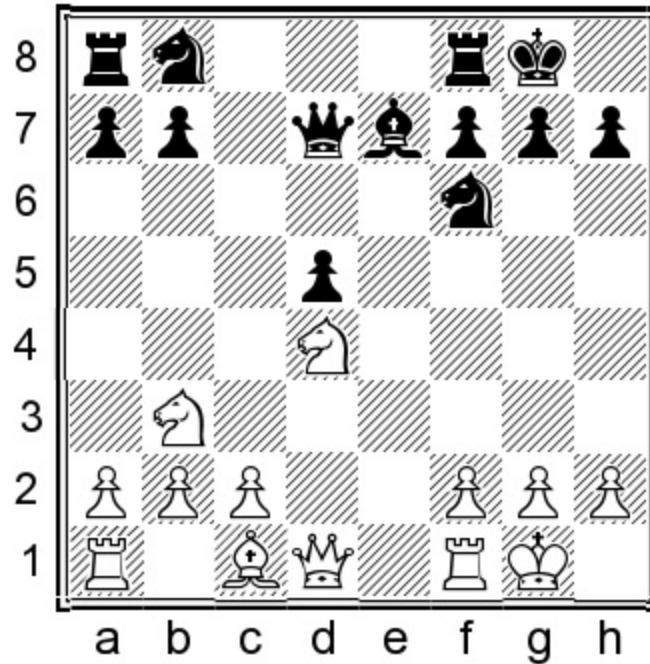
A draw was agreed in 1/2-1/2 (21) Talpak, T (2468) – Pessoa, F (2520) ICCF email 2016. However, in a human game I believe only Black can try to win this, because it is a good knight vs bad bishop

position!

9...♙e7

With ♘e5 off the table, there is no need to rush with ...♘c6.

10.♘2b3 0-0



Position after: 10...0-0

11.♙g5

The most natural move in the position.

11.♙d3 ♜e8 12.♙f5!? is an attempt to get a long-term advantage, but the position does not seem hard to play for Black at all. 12...♙a4!? 13.c3= Reaching an equal IQP position where Black has a lot of different possible plans.

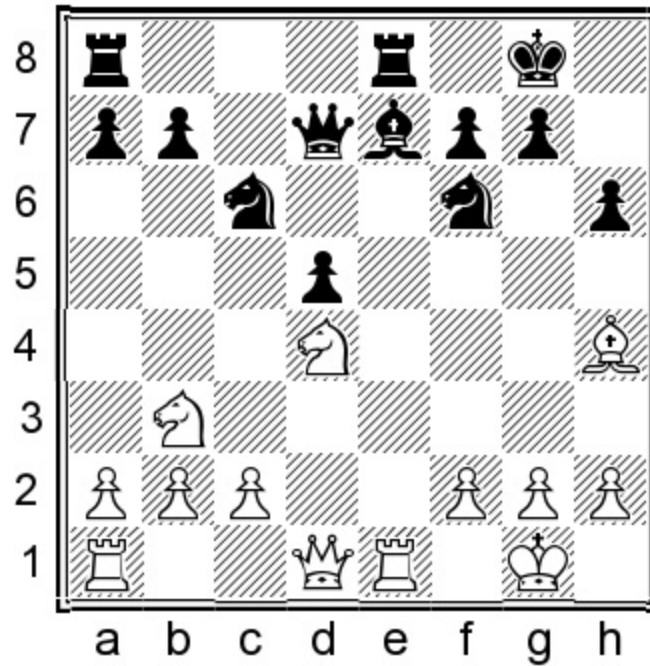
11...♘c6

11...h6 probably transposes.

12.♜e1

12.♙d3 h6 13.♙h4 ♘e4 [13...g5!? is always an option if you feel like rolling the dice.] 14.♙xe7 ♘xe7 15.♜ad1 White has probably kept his miniscule advantage, but in practice the best player usually wins.

12...h6 13.♙h4 ♖fe8



Position after: 13...♖fe8

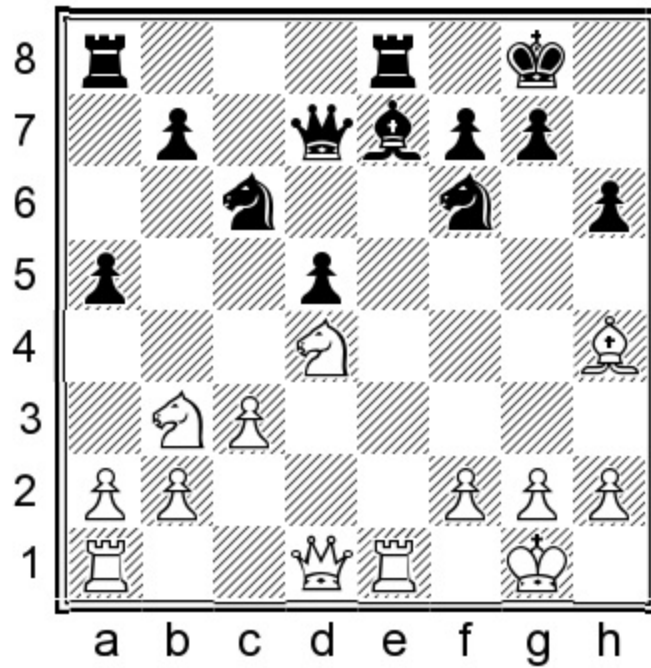
14.c3

14.♙d3 ♘e4 [14...g5!? 15.♙g3 a5 16.a4 ♘xd4! 17.♙xd4 ♙c6 18.c3 ♘e4 19.♙d3= is more double-edged.] 15.♙xe7 ♖xe7 16.♖e2 a5 17.a4 ♘b4 18.♙b5 ♙d8=

14...g5!?

I am quite fond of this risky plan. Black pushes hard and we get a real game on our hands.

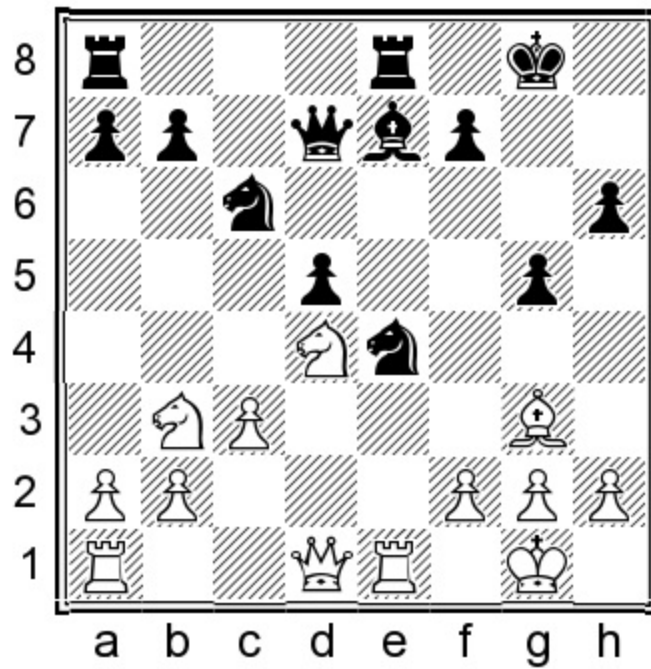
14...a5



Position after: 14...a5

This is an important resource whenever there is a knight on b3. 15.a4 ♞xd4 16.♚xd4 [16.♞xd4 g5 17.♙g3 ♜c5 Black is exerting pressure here.] 16...b5= With enough counterplay.

15.♙g3 ♞e4

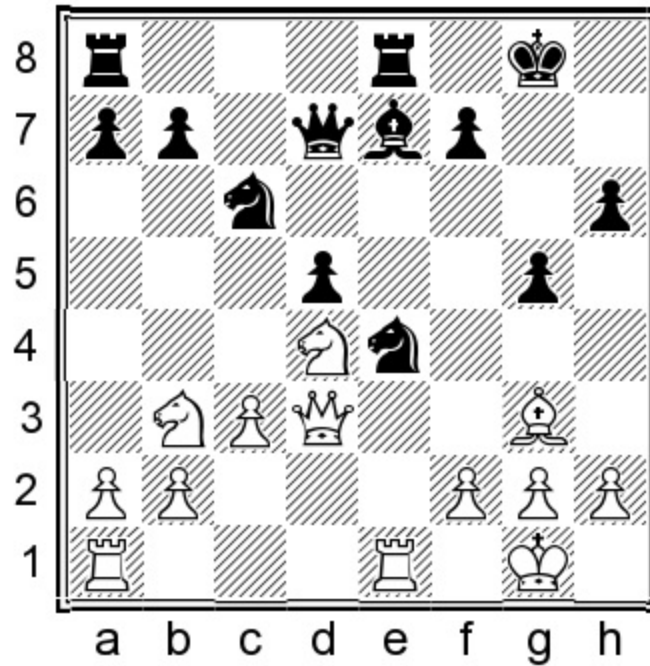


Position after: 15...♞e4

16.♞xc6

White chooses the wrong plan. The old strategy of exchanging minor pieces is not always the best against an isolated pawn!

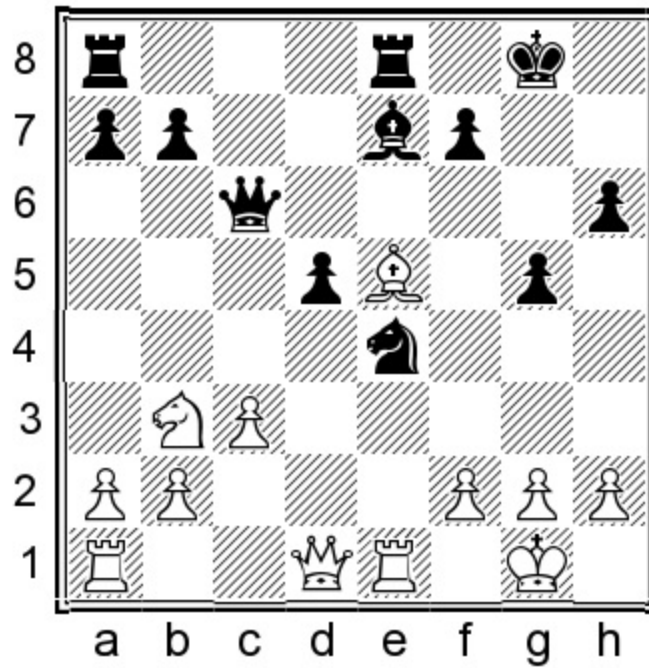
16. ♔d3



Position after: 16. ♔d3

Here most options are equal. 16... ♖f8 [16... ♗xd4!? 17. ♗xd4 ♘c5 18. ♖ad1 ♘b6 19. f3 ♗xg3 20. hxg3 ♖xe1+ 21. ♖xe1 ♖e8=; 16... ♘d8!? 17. f3 ♗xg3 18. hxg3 ♘b6=] 17. ♗c2 ♖ad8 18. ♖ad1 ♘g7= I like putting the bishop here, it feels a little safer.

16... ♗xc6 17. ♘e5?!



Position after: 17. ♕e5?!

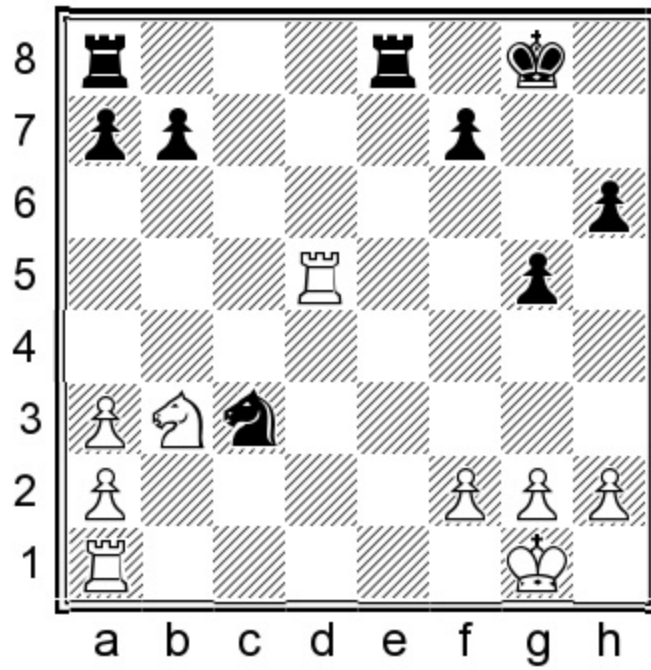
17... ♖a3!?

An important resource to keep in mind when you play with ...g5!?

18. bxa3 ♜xe5 19. ♖d4 ♜ee8

19... f6!? 20. ♜e3 ♜ae8

20. ♜e3 ♘d6 21. ♜d3 ♘b5 22. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 23. ♜xd5 ♘xc3

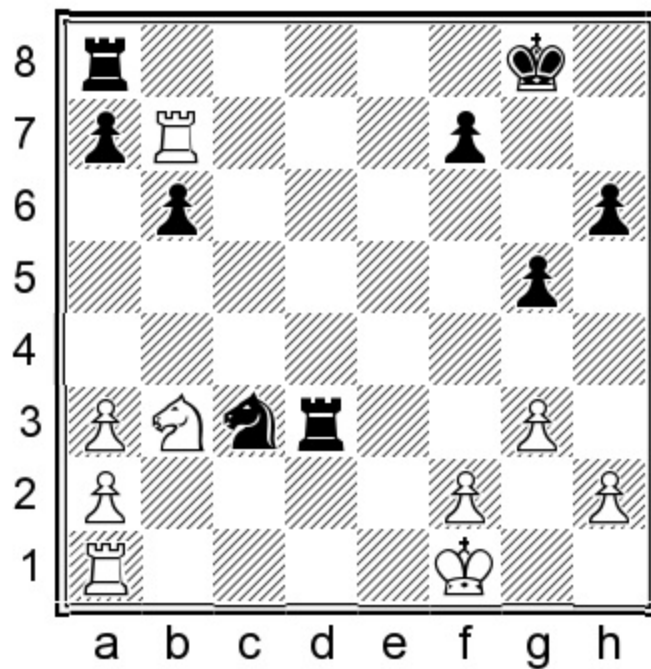


Position after: 23... Nxc3

24. Rxd7

24... Rxd3! Nxe4=

24... b6 25. Qf1 Rxd8! 26. Rb7 Rxd3 27. g3



Position after: 27.g3

27...♘xa2?

Too greedy.

27...♙g7!♠ This was the moment to slowly improve the position. White remains under some pressure.

28.♞xa2 ♞xb3=

In a final attempt to win this drawish endgame, I managed to even lose it in 1-0 (44) Blohberger, F (2467) – Miedema, D (2371) Vienna 2019. Of course the final result had nothing to do with the outcome of the opening, which was quite successful.

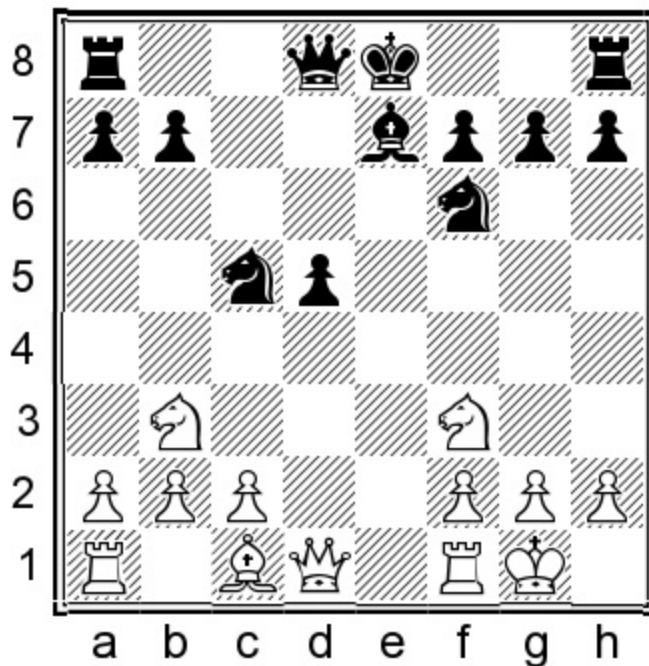
Conclusion

This leads us to the final words of this chapter, which is probably my favorite one of the book. This is a very complicated line to play because even the simple laws of IQP positions do not fully apply. If you try it yourself, I'm sure you will find that most players on the white side like to sit back and relax when facing the isolani. That will present you with the chance to grab the initiative, active outposts and the e-file. This chapter has shown a whole new line in the 5...♘f6 system: 7...♙xd7!. This may even be the safest and most solid answer, provided you don't forget to play the essential move 8...cxd4. I have tried to establish and highlight the theoretical nuances in the first moves, in order to get an equal game. We really need to see some more practical tests in this line before we can draw any real conclusions.

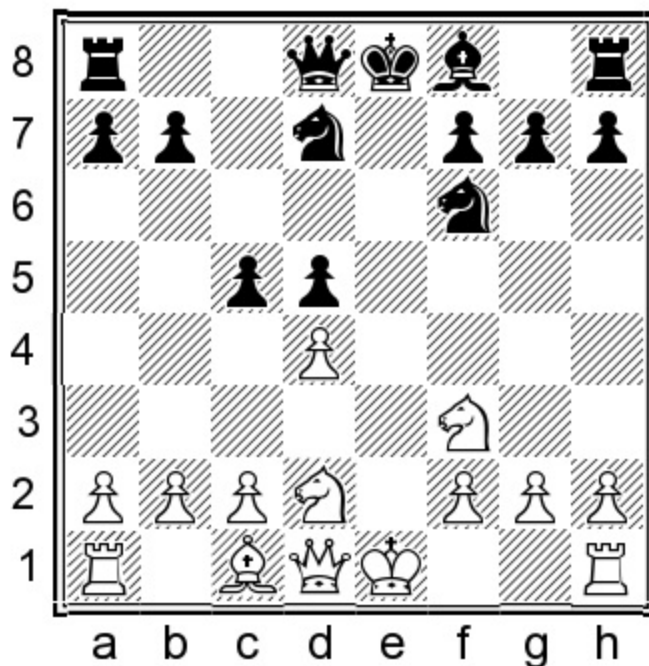
Chapter 6

7...♖bxd7 – The common lines with 10.♘b3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♖f6 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.♙xd7+ ♘bxd7 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.dxc5 ♘xc5 10.♘b3



1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♖f6 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.♙xd7+ ♘bxd7



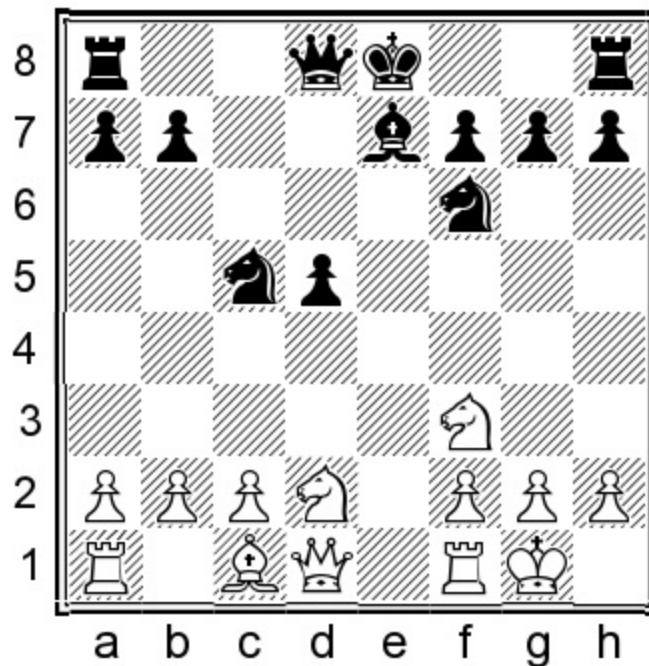
Position after: 7... ♖bxd7

This move has been tested for years and years. It is the main line against 3. ♘d2 in correspondence chess. Yet I am still unable to recall any authors recommending this line. And yes, that is probably because it is difficult to play with the IQP. Many players are afraid of this and tell themselves that playing with such a weakness is not for them. I was one of those players for several years. But that all changed after reading 'Isolani Strategy' by Beliavsky, Mikhalchisin and Stetsko. Suddenly I got what it was all about and I started playing the IQP even when it was not a good version! Therefore this position has been close to my heart for years. It's really just a position to play, and with more knowledge you will have a huge advantage over your opponents. Think about all the battles in history. The side with the better knowledge of the battlefield usually emerges victorious, even when having inferior forces or weaponry. An isolated pawn is not such a big 'price' to pay! Another reason why this specific line might not have been recommended lately is because it has quite a drawish reputation. Well, I have not really encountered any problems with that myself. Opponents with a lower rating typically know less about the isolated pawn or they fall for a trick. And higher rated opponents will have to grind their teeth at the solidity of our setup.

8.0-0 ♙e7 9.dxc5

9. ♖e1 will probably transpose to 10. ♖e1, however Black has an extra option here. 9...0-0 10.dxc5 ♙xc5!?

9... ♘xc5



Position after: 9... ♘xc5

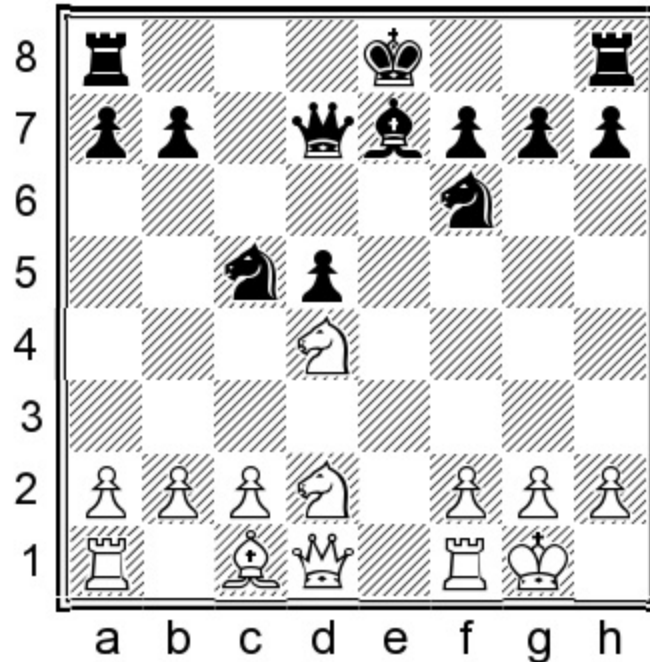
Here White has an interesting choice to make between the popular 10. ♘b3 and the independent and

probably critical 10.♖e1, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

10.♘b3

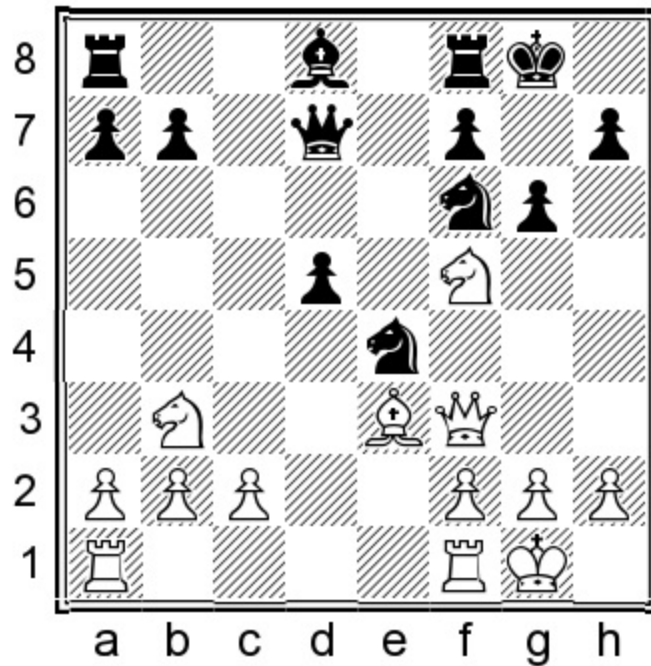
You will face this move in about 95% of your games, even though 10.♖e1 scores better.

10.♘d4!? This move is quite interesting, intending to go after our bishop on e7, the piece which is literally connected with all our chances of winning the game. 10...♔d7



Position after: 10...♔d7

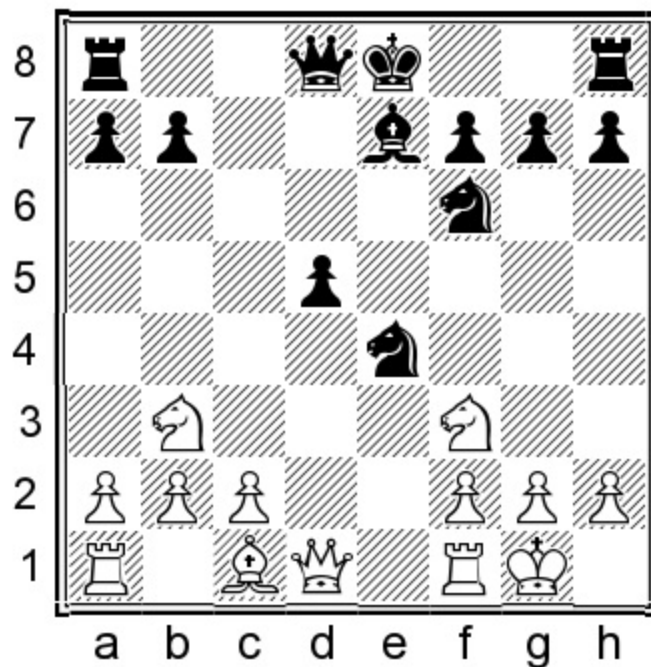
- A) 11.♘2f3!? 0-0 12.♗e5 ♔c8 Stopping ♘f5 is crucial, don't let your bishop get stolen!
- B) 11.♔f3!? 0-0 12.♘f5 [12.♔f5 ♔c7=] 12...♙d8 No real problems here for Black.
- C) 11.♘2b3 0-0! Note that the usual reaction ...♘ce4 would transpose to the main line with the 'wrong' move order 11...♔d7 instead of 11...♘d6!. 12.♔f3 ♘ce4 13.♘f5 ♙d8 14.♙e3 g6! In the absence of our light squared bishop, I like to control as many light squares with pawns as I can. Still, the move ...g6 is only played to kick the knight away, not as general prophylaxis.



Position after: 14...g6!

15.♘h6+ ♔g7 16.♞ad1 ♚b6! = Graf was the only one to play this very precise move. This is an example of a position where specifics are more important than general principles. 0-1 (32) Martin Del Campo C, R (2435) – Graf, A (2574) Merida 2007.

10...♘ce4

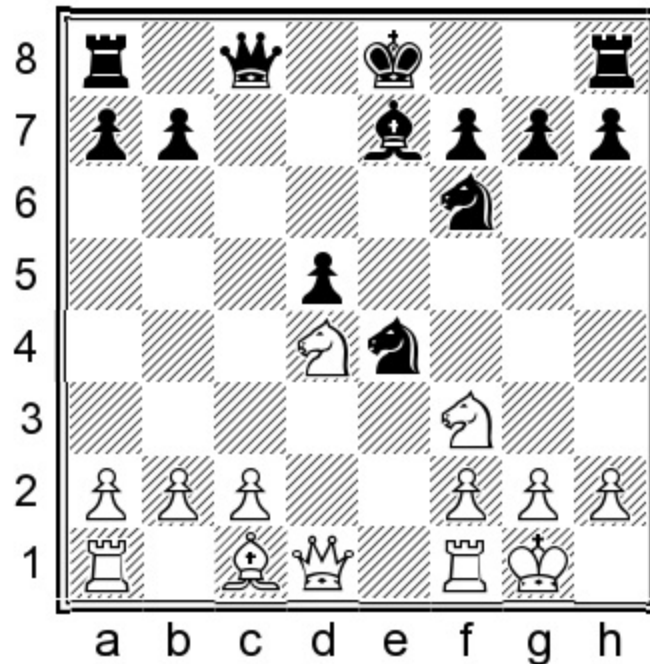


Position after: 10...♘ce4

11. ♖fd4

11. ♖bd4!? This is mostly played by people with lower ratings. I face this move quite often online and I believe it is equally good as the other knight jump. However, hardly any correspondence players have favored this way of playing.

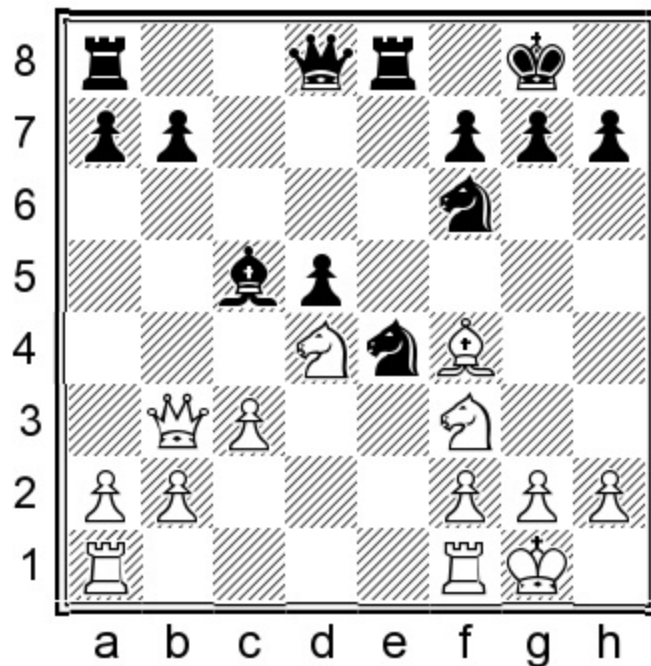
A) 11... ♕c8!?



Position after: 11... ♕c8!?

This natural move preventing ♖f5 is played in most human games. I believe I have even played it too. The bottom line is that it is slightly less efficient to play this way because it is not a developing move, even though it is perfectly playable and leads to equal positions. The disconnected rooks just add to the difficulty in a position which is already a tiny bit more difficult for Black. 12. ♖h4!? 0-0 13. ♖hf5 ♕c5= This should be equal, but it is clear to see that Black would have preferred to play ... ♜e8 instead of ... ♕c8, especially if a knight is going to be landing on f5 anyway.

B) 11... ♕c5! This approach is quite rare but I believe it gives Black the most chances to win the game. 12. c3 0-0 13. ♕f4 For some reason this move is played all the time. The computer prefers the h3 and ♕e3 plan. 13... ♜e8 14. ♗b3 This is an interesting moment because Black has a powerful way to create something.



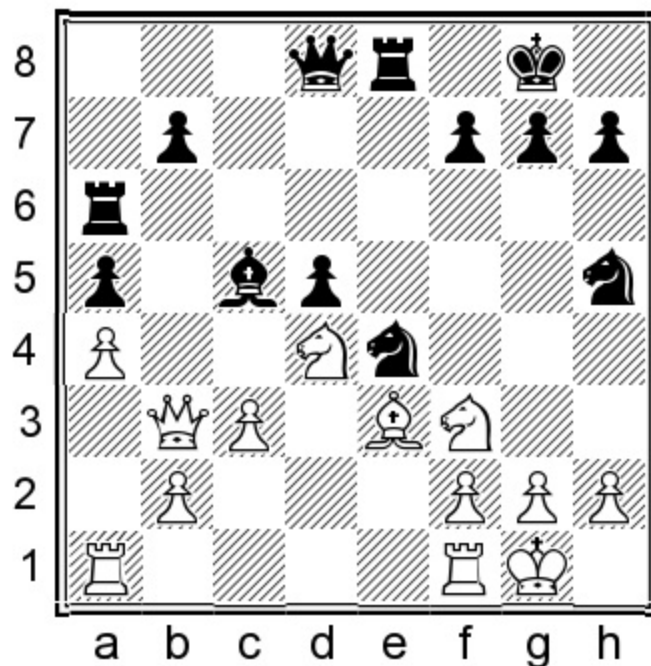
Position after: 14. ♙b3

My experiences online with the move ...♘h5 have been positive.

B1) 14...♙d7 15.♘e5 ♙c8± leaves the queen in this slightly awkward position again.

B2) 14...♙b6 15.♞ad1 ♙d7 16.h3 [16.♘e5! ♙c8 There we have it again.] 16...♞ad8 17.♞fe1 h6 18.♙e3 ♙c8 19.♘c2± The computer might say equal but I am not happy with this line. Although Black has a very harmonious position, it is passive as well. ½-½ (48) Dimitrov, V (2530) – Gurevich, M (2605) Niksic 1996.

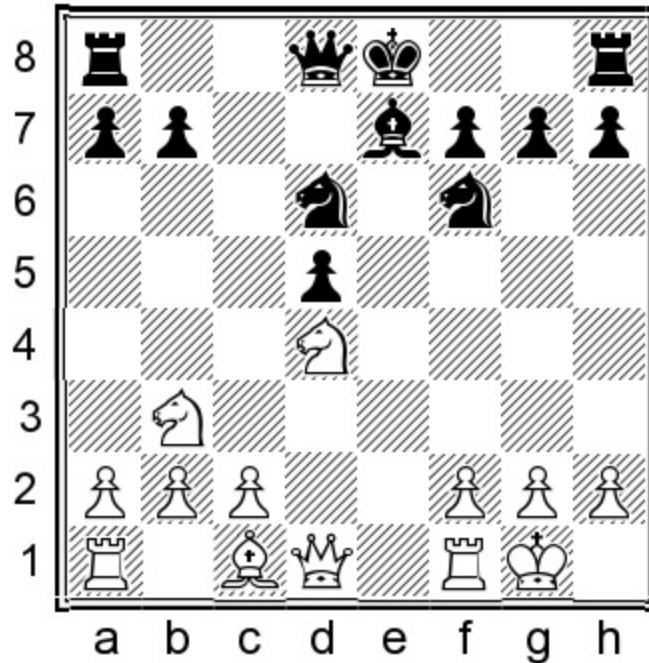
B3) 14...♘h5!N 15.♙e3 a5! 16.a4 ♞a6! =



Position after: 16...♖a6!=

This is one of the most important resources to involve the queen's rook in this line. 17.♞fe1 ♜b6 18.♞c2 ♞d7 19.♘h4 g6 20.♘hf3 ♞f6= with ...♘f4 to follow. This is only one possible path the game can take. Yet I believe that when Black can play ...b6 and ...♞c8, then everything should be more than okay.

11...♘d6!



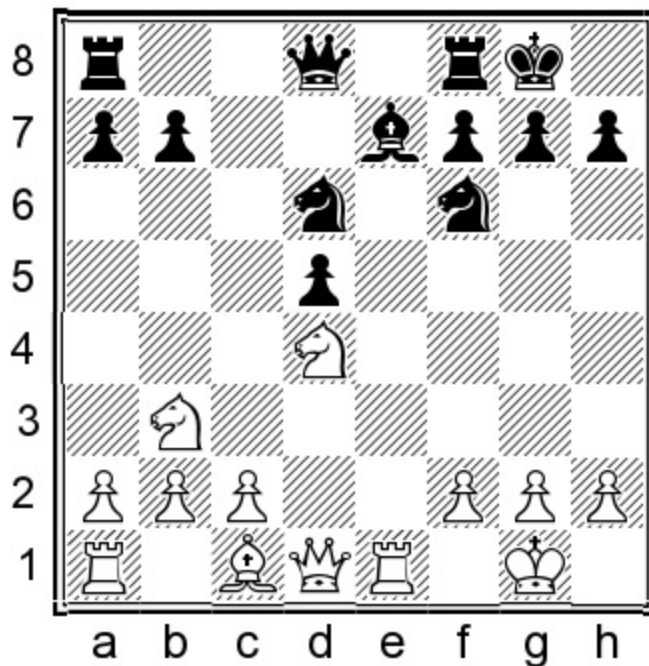
Position after: 11...♘d6!

Shaw comments: “The d6-knight looks awkward just for a moment, but it stops ♘f5 while later heading for the ideal c4-square, so it all makes sense. I think Black has few problems in this position, which is why I switched my recommendation” (to 10.♞e1).

12.♞f3!?

Although this move simplifies the position considerably, the presence of the queen on f5 is a bit annoying. Hence, I have selected this as my main line.

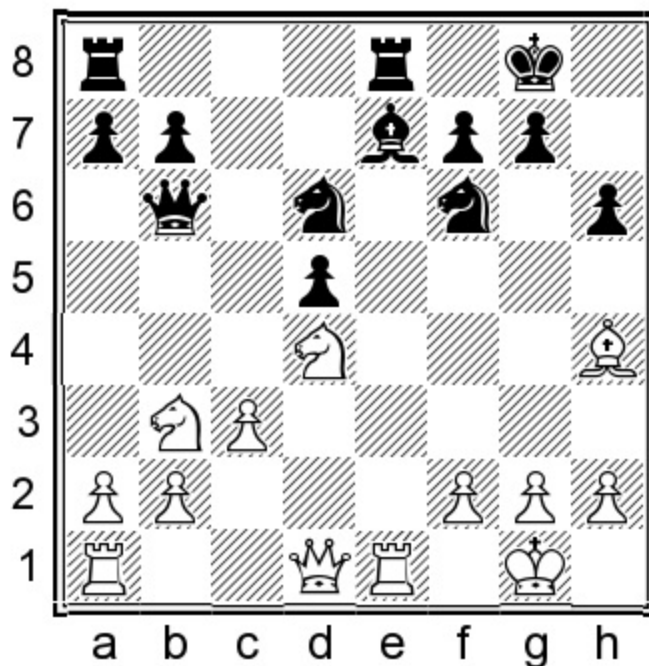
A) 12.♞e1 0-0



Position after: 12...0-0

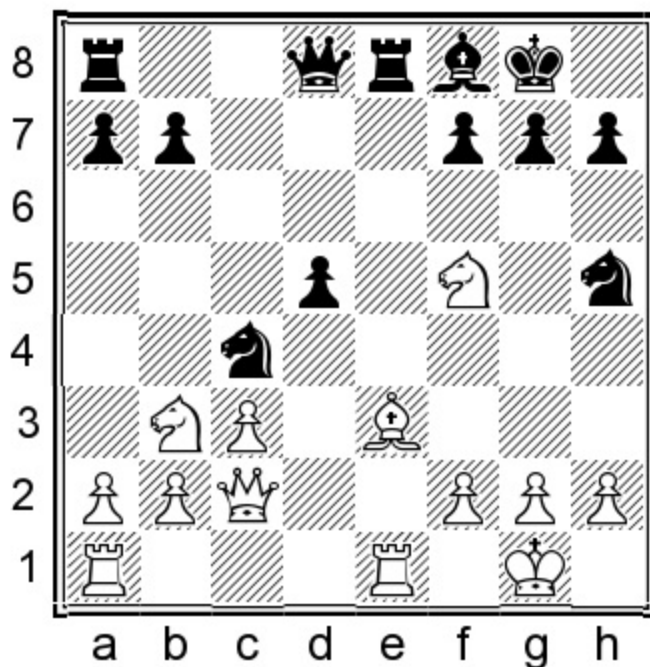
In this position White has three options: 13.♘g5, 13.♘f4 and the waiting move 13.c3, which almost always transposes to one of the other two options. So, I've decided not to pay too much attention to that move order.

13.♘f4!? I have made this the main line as it is quite unexplored. Throughout my study, I have found that the bishop on g5 is usually welcomed by Black because it often gives him the useful h6 tempo for free. [13.♘g5 ♖e8 14.c3 h6 15.♘h4 ♚b6!]=



Position after: 15...♚b6! =

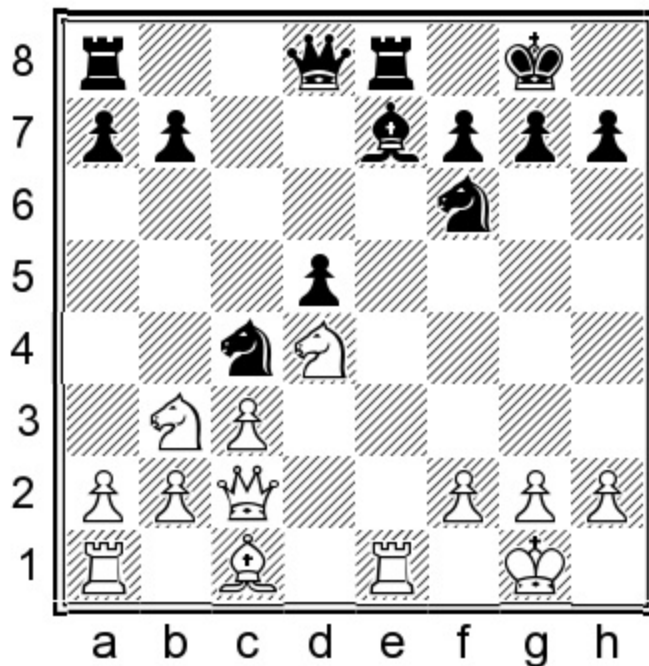
An important move to equalize. In over 40 correspondence games, White has not managed a single win. Black has enough counterplay.] 13...♖e8 14.c3 ♘c4 15.♚c2! [15.♖b1!? ♚d7 16.♚d3= was seen in 0-1 (49) Van Foreest, M (2141) – Miedema, D (2370) Dieren 2018 where instead of 16...♙f8, I should have gone for something more active like 16...♘h5N.] 15...♘h5! 16.♙e3 ♙f8 17.♘f5



Position after: 17.♘f5

17...♚d7= This is a slight improvement. Boris Savchenko might be the biggest expert in the 5...♘f6 system, but here he missed a chance to gain a better position. [17...♚f6= 1-0 (73) Mosadeghpour, M (2488) – Savchenko, B (2602) Hamedan 2017.]

B) 12.c3 0-0 13.♚c2 The only move of independent significance, even though most lines are very recognizable. 13...♖e8 14.♖e1 ♘c4!

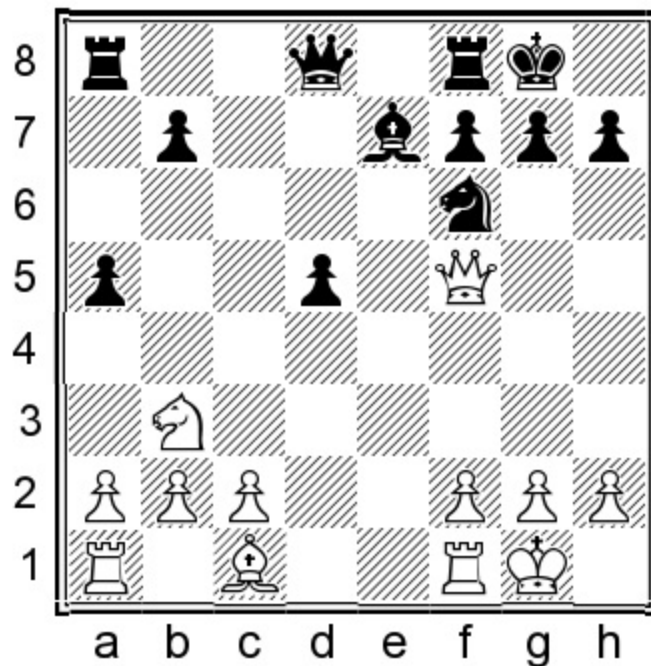


Position after: 14... ♖c4!

The reason why the knight was so well placed on d6. Once we have freed up the f8-square for the bishop, then we are able to launch this counter. 15. ♘g5 [15. ♘f4!? ♚b6= Preparing ♘f8 and contesting the all-important e-file.] 15...h6!? [15...♚b6 The queen move works here as well. 16. ♜e2 ♘f8 17. ♜ae1 ♜xe2 18. ♜xe2 ♖e4=] 16. ♘h4 ♚b6= This has transposed to the correspondence main line where White has not managed to win a single game in 40 attempts. I believe this is simply the point where the game begins. No further analysis is needed.

12...0-0 13. ♖f5 ♖xf5 14. ♚xf5 a5!

14...♚c7!? 15. ♘e3 g6 16. ♚f3 ♖e4=

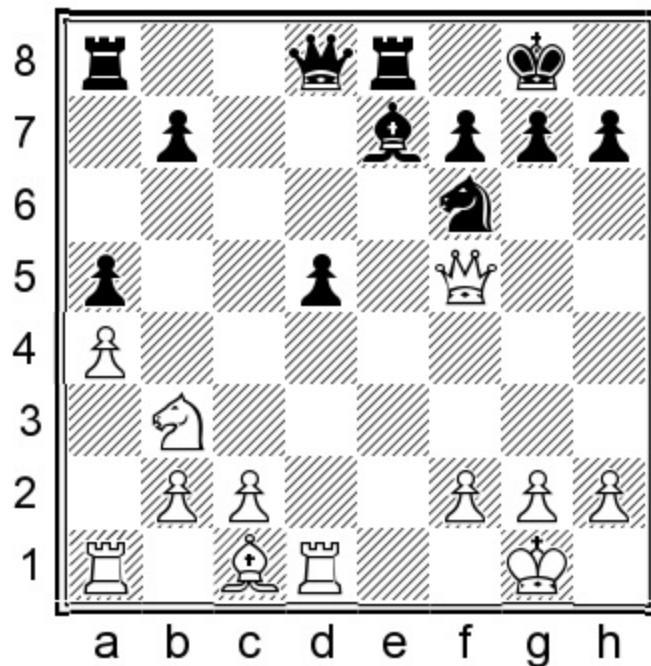


Position after: 14...a5!

Tomczak inserted this pawn push against Adams, and I like his train of thought. In the eventuality that White maneuvers his bishop to d4, this advance makes sense. Black not only creates counterplay on the queenside, but also removes the a7-pawn from the potential scope of the bishop.

15.a4 ♖e8 16.♗d1

16.♗e3N might make more sense than the game continuation, which allowed Black to take control of the all-important e-file. 16...♗d6 This is just one of the possible plans. Another plan is to go for ...♖a6 and try to swing the rook into the attack later on. 17.♗d4 ♖e4= with a level position. These kind of positions are exactly the type where you can gradually outplay your opponent.



Position after: 16. ♖d1

16...♔c7!

Suddenly the landscape has changed and we no longer mind the exchange of dark squared bishops, because our pawn on a5 is targeted.

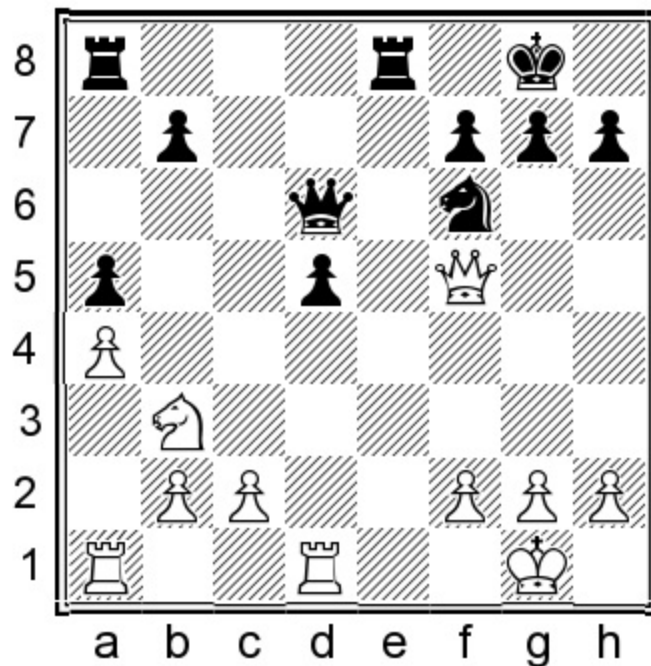
16...♖c8!? 17.♘d2 [17.h3±] 17...♔c7 18.♗ac1 ♔c4 19.♘xa5 ♔xa4= ½-½ (39) Adams, M (2758) – Tomczak, J (2560) Germany 2015.

17.♘f4

White does not have much without this move.

17.c3?! ♘d6 18.g3 ♔b6= allows Black to start pushing.

17...♘d6! 18.♘xd6 ♔xd6=



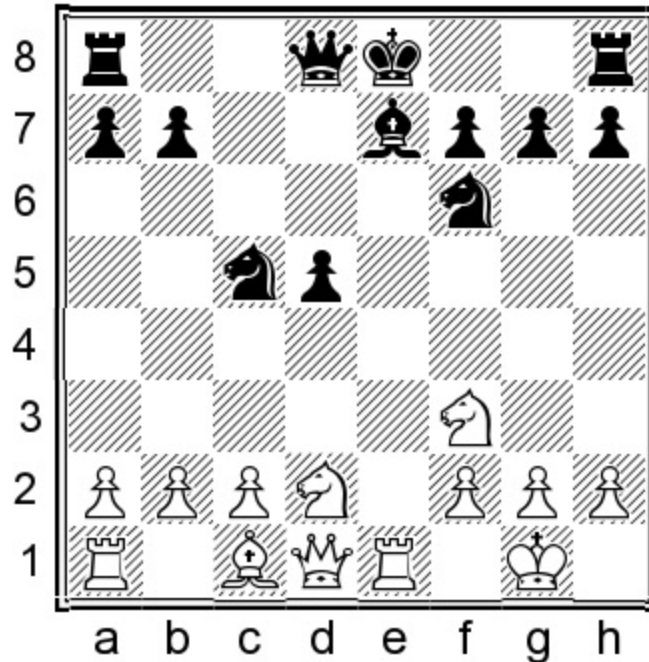
Position after: 18... ♔xd6=

This might be the best position White is able to get against our system. Our key minor piece has been exchanged but that is no reason to despair, as we have the e-file under control in return. That is the big difference between this position and more typical isolani positions. The counterplay on the e-file is extremely significant and much more powerful than the usual counterplay on the c-file. Also, Black is targeting a4 and c2 just as much as White is firing at d5.

Chapter 7

10.♞e1 – Mimicking Ruy Lopez

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘f6 6.♙b5+ ♚d7 7.♙xd7+ ♜bxd7 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.dxc5 ♜xc5 10.♞e1



Chapter Guide

Chapter 7 – 10.♞e1 (Mimicking Ruy Lopez)

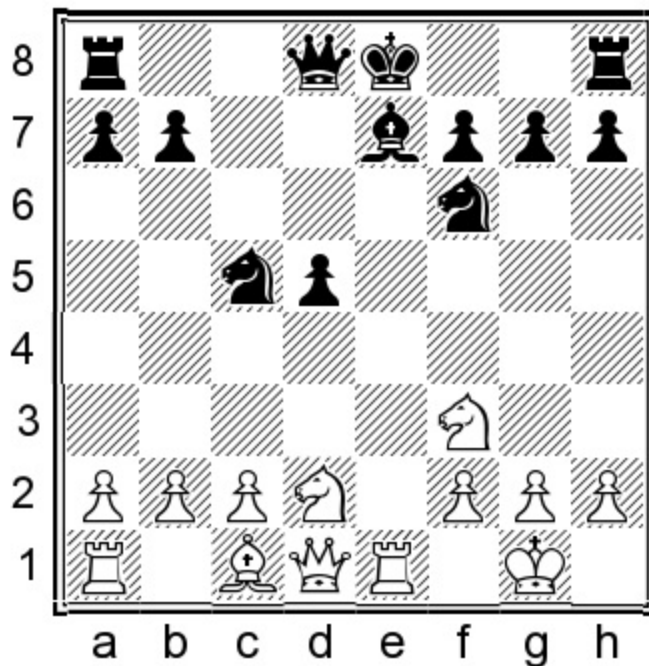
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘f6 6.♙b5+ ♚d7 7.♙xd7+ ♜bxd7 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.dxc5 ♜xc5 10.♞e1 0-0 11.♘f1

a) 11...♘ce4, 11...a5

b) 11...♞e8

a) 11...♘ce4, 11...a5

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘f6 6.♙b5+ ♚d7 7.♙xd7+ ♜bxd7 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.dxc5 ♜xc5 10.♞e1



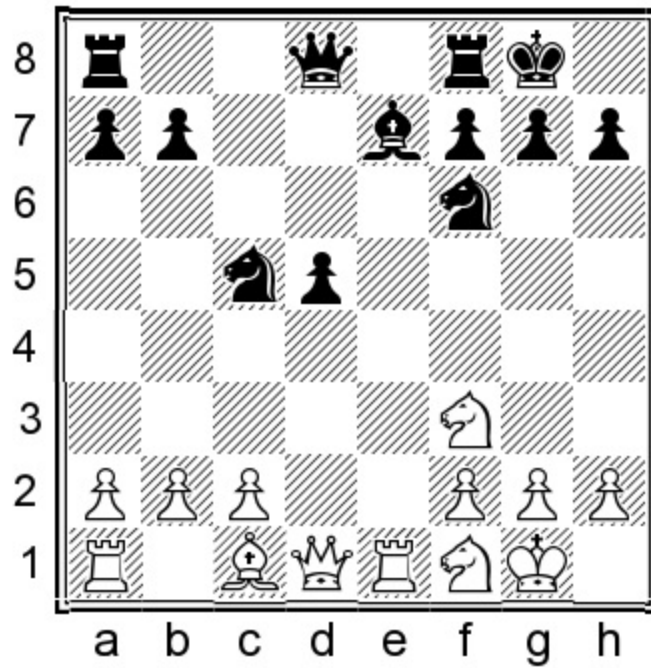
Position after: 10. ♖e1

Even though this move scores slightly better than the alternatives, it is not played that often. Obviously it is still automatic for most players to go 10. ♘b3 followed by parking one of the knights on d4. The plan with 10. ♖e1 is completely different, and that's why the rook move deserves a whole chapter for itself. White's plan here reminds us of a Ruy Lopez, the gold standard of ♖e1-♘d2-f1 maneuvers. One of the advantages of playing the knight to f1 is that from there it will work more harmoniously together with its colleague on f3. Knights standing next to each other cover more squares than knights standing in each other's way. Arguably the biggest part of White's plan is that the blockading piece on d4 will be a bishop rather than a knight. This is very uncomfortable for Black, because the dark squared bishops are the key minor piece for both sides here. White will often end up with an advantage if he can exchange them. The only thing which Black would be willing to allow a trade of bishops for would be in return for strong control over the e-file.

Black needs to come up with a different plan to combat this ♘d2-f1 maneuver. When the knight goes to f1 instead of b3, the nature of the position changes. Black is now much more capable of successfully launching a queenside pawn storm. Another difference to note is that we are not forced to put the c5-knight on e4. Thus we keep it on c5 for now, to later be able to block the bishop coming to d4 with ... ♗e6. If you keep these two things in mind when playing against this plan, in general you should be able to reach an equal position. But enough talking, let's jump into things, shall we?

10...0-0 11. ♘f1

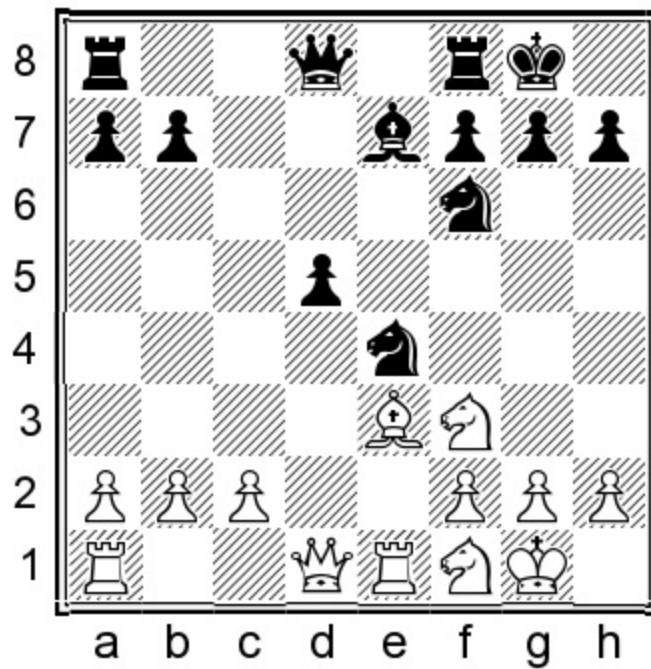
11. ♘b3 transposes to the previous chapter. Note that ♖e1 is not the main line there, because the plan is to put a knight on f5 as soon as possible. Here that plan can be easily parried with ... ♖e8 and ... ♗f8, making it a harmless way of playing.



Position after: 11. ♖f1

11...a5

11...♞ce4?! A mistake. The knight should stay flexible to block ♕d4. 12.♙e3

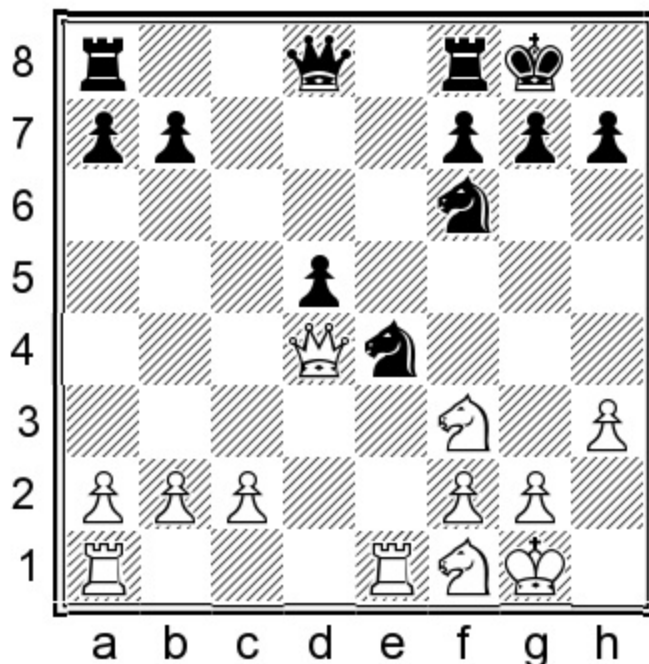


Position after: 12. ♙e3

A) 12...♞e8 transposes to 11...♞e8.

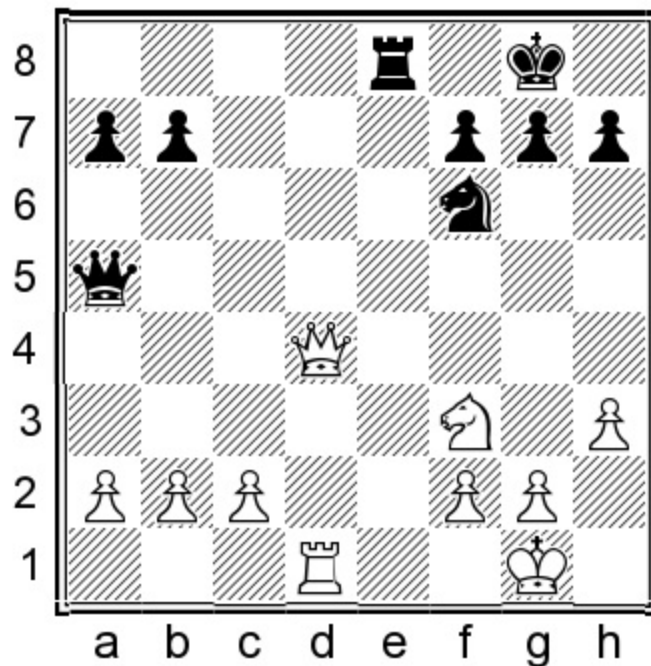
B) 12...♞g4?! was played by Viktor Korchnoi so we have to spend some time on it. 13.♙d4 ♞f6?

Viktor the Terrible gives White everything he wanted. It's funny, despite the fact that it's a terrible position, White has never managed to convert it in practice. 14.h3! [14.♖e2? ♖e8± ½-½ (48) Kotsur, P (2500) – Korchnoi, V (2610) Luzern 1997.] 14...♙xd4 15.♚xd4 ♘gf6 [15...♘gxf2 16.♖e2+– The two knights are infinitely stronger than the rook. White will be able to set up a deadly attack very soon.]



Position after: 15...♘gf6

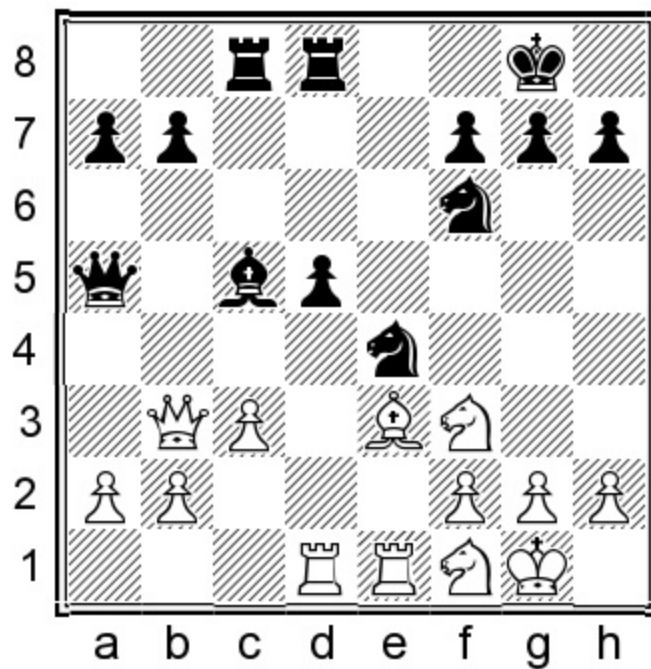
16.♘e3! The only move to give White an 85% winning chance! Oddly enough, this move has only been found by the lowest rated players playing this line. The point is that White is actually threatening to take on d5 right now. [16.c4? ♖e8 17.cxd5 ♚xd5 ½-½ Pavasovic, D (2508) – Mohr, G (2468) Austria 2001.] 16...♖e8 17.♖ad1 [17.♖ed1? is very unnatural, as the e-file is extremely important. I cannot overstate that. 17...♚c7± ½-½ (29) Biti, O (2323) – Gomez Gomez, S (2095) Aviles 2000.] 17...♚a5 18.♘xd5 ♖ad8 19.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 20.♖xe8+ ♖xe8+–



Position after: 20... Rxe8+-

White is a pawn up and has another pawn's worth of 'compensation' with his beautifully centralized queen.

C) 12... Rxc8!? 13.c3 Qc5 [13... Re8!?] 14.Wb3!? W a5 15.Rad1 Rfd8



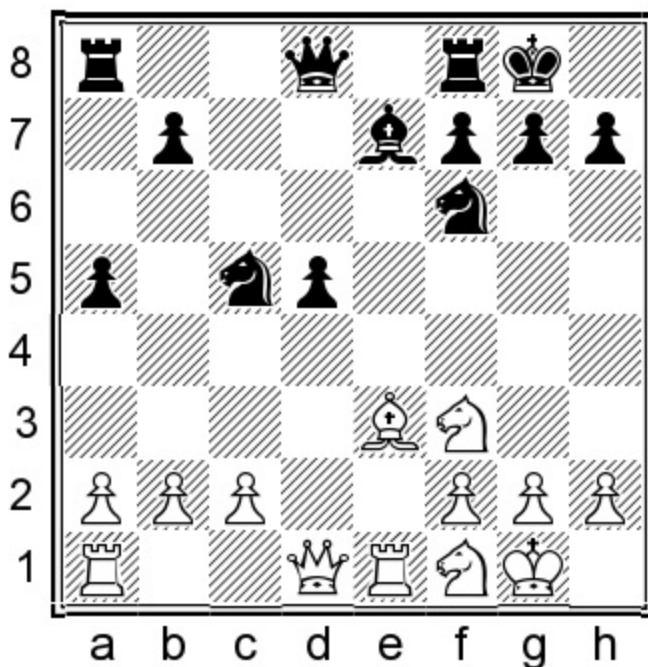
Position after: 15... Rfd8

16.Qd4! Vachier-Lagrave made the mistake of putting the f3-knight on d4, leaving the f1-knight out of a job. [16.Qd4?! ½-½ (51) Vachier-Lagrave, M (2731) – Barsov, A (2521) Mulhouse 2011.]

16...h6 17.♘e3± White has reached a state of complete harmony and zen. In case you ever reach this position with White, please consider drinking tea with the characteristic British pinky finger. It would display your posh class and lush positional understanding. And don't forget to press the clock in painstakingly slow fashion.

12.♙e3

12.♙f4!?! This extra option is not available after 11...♖e8 because it runs into (12.♙f4!?) 12...♔a5. 12...♖e8 13.♘e3 a4 14.♖b1! Now White finds a harmonious position for the bishop on e5 or d4, something we really don't want to allow.



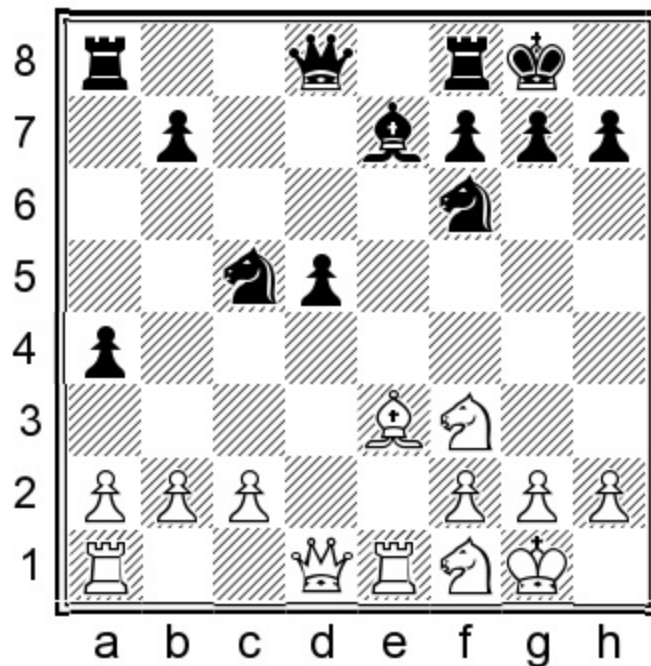
Position after: 12.♙e3

12...b5!?

This has only been played twice, once in correspondence chess and once by Vassily Ivanchuk. It's probably wise to take notes. After moving the pieces around a lot, I have found that the pawn structure with a black pawn on b4, exchanged for either a3 or c3, is difficult to break down. One more tricky thing here is that by putting the pawn unprotected on b5, we are inviting the knight to d4. White will often be tempted to do this, not realizing they are sabotaging their ideal setup with ♙e3-d4-♘e3 (I caught my inner voice making an evil laugh, you could also do the laugh during your game, although I advise making friends with the arbiter first).

A) 12...♖e8 transposes to our main line.

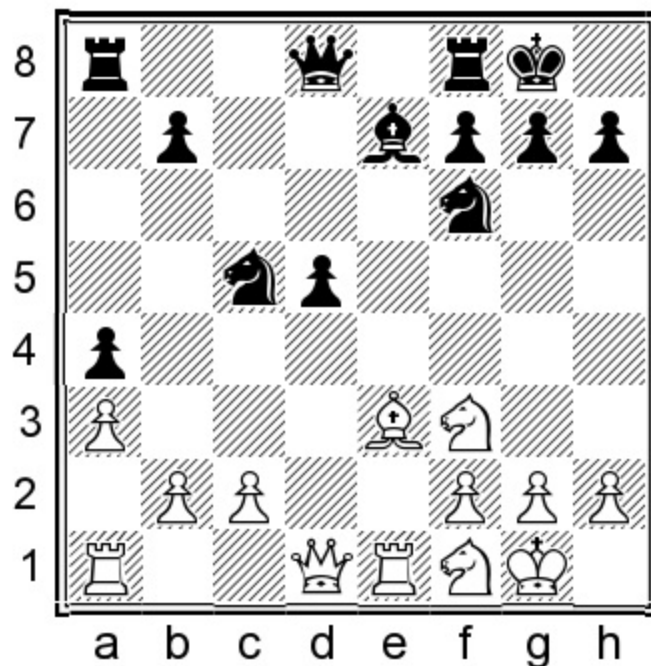
B) 12...a4!?! I believe that this move is a little less flexible than any line with ...♖e8 because it cuts out the option of the ...b4 break. Apart from that it is very solid and scores well in correspondence games.



Position after: 12...a4!?

B1) 13.♔d4?! ♖e6 14.♗e3 [14.♕e5 ♕c5!]=] 14...♘xd4! I am not sure why Black has never taken like this before. Somehow Black remains reluctant to exchange minor pieces, even though this is a profitable exchange. In my experience Black does well here, as our bishop gets a free role creating lots of threats which, in the long run, become more and more problematic. [14...♖e8 15.♗f5 ♕f8= 1-0 (75) Socko, M (2486) – Kononenko, T (2384) Germany 2011.]

B2) 13.a3

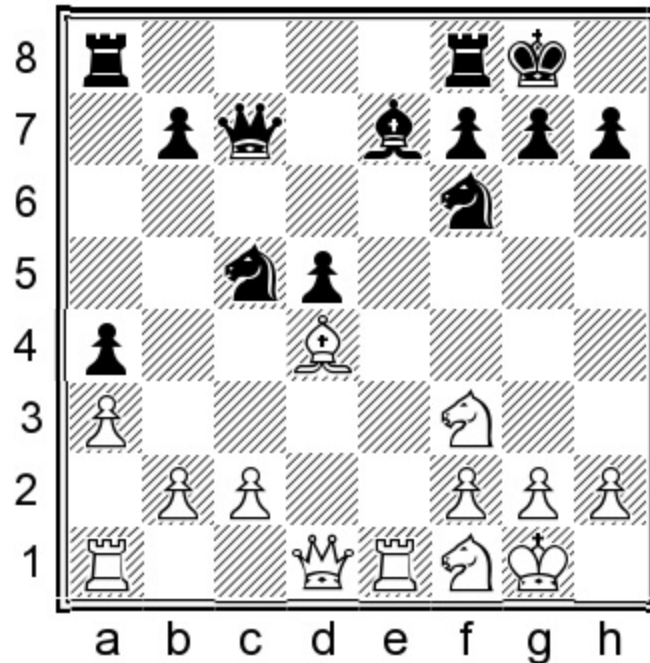


Position after: 13.a3

B2.1) 13...♖ce4 14.♙d4± ♜e8 15.♗e3 b6 16.♚d3 ♘c5 17.♞ad1 ♚d6 18.♙xc5 ♜xc5 19.♚d4 ♞a5 20.♚xc5 ♞xc5 21.♗d4 [21.♞d4±] 21...♙f8± ½-½ (29) Lobzhanidze, D (2435) – Schlawin, M (2342) Germany 2016.

B2.2) 13...♞e8N is a novelty because Black prefers delaying this move in order to avoid the main line, not to transpose to it. 14.c3 would just bring us back into the main line.

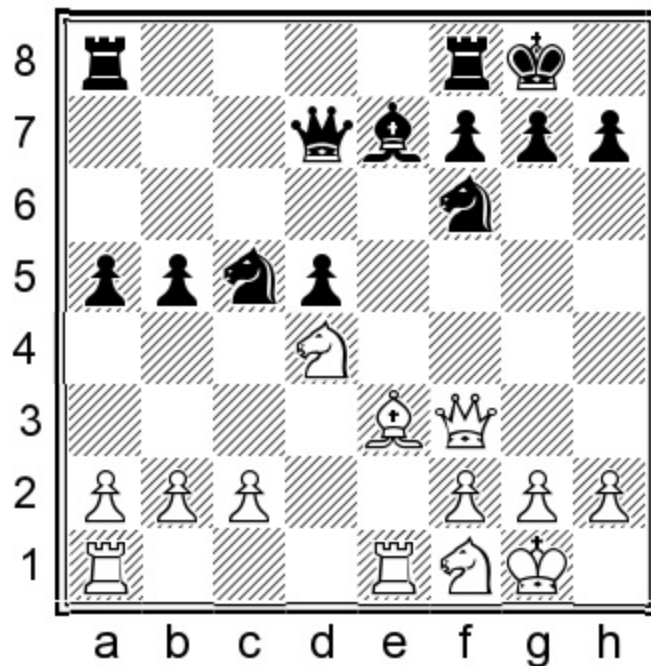
B2.3) 13...♚c7!? The only independent try, aiming to put the queen on c6. Black postpones ...♞e8 because he will soon play ...♗e6 closing the e-file for quite some time. I approve of this line, even though it is not going to be easy to win. 14.♙d4



Position after: 14. ♙d4

14...♗e6! [14...♞fd8?! 15.♗e3 ♗fe4 16.♚e2 ♘f6 17.♞ad1 g6 18.c3± This is everything White was dreaming of. ½-½ (29) Kengis, E (2575) – Piskov, Y (2540) Bonn 1995.] 15.♙e5 ♚c6 16.♗e3 ♞fe8 17.c3 ♞ad8 18.♗d4 ♗xd4 19.♙xd4 [19.cxd4 ♗e4=] 19...♗e4= Black has a good lead in development, which compensates for the powerful bishop on d4. Still, in this line Black had hardly any alternatives along the way.

13.♗d4 ♚d7 14.♚f3



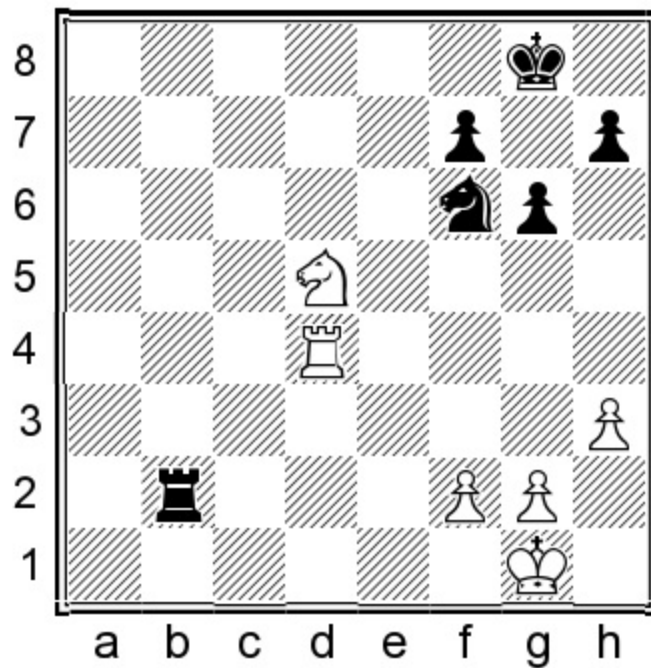
Position after: 14. ♖f3

14...g6

Before I started to write, I was convinced that the pawn nearly always belongs on g6. However the computer changed my mind, because in general I have not seen many positions where ...g6 is the right way to play. All the various different chess engines prefer ...h6 as the luft (not in this line but in general). In this case it is about preventing ♘f5 and preserving our bishop. The only other way to do that was 14...♖fe8N. Please play through the original Ivanchuk game to get an idea of the middlegame positions and the human ideas.

14...♖fe8!N 15.♘f5 ♕f8 16.♘h6+ Play starts to get concrete, but there is no getting through. 16...♔h8 17.♕d4 ♘ce4 18.♘g3 ♖e6 19.♖ad1 ♚c7= Black's position is very solid with counterplay along the e-file and the half-open c-file.

15.♖ad1 ♖fe8 16.♘g3 ♖ac8 17.a3 b4 18.axb4 axb4 19.♕g5 ♘ce4 20.♕xf6 ♘xf6 21.h3 ♕d8 22.♖xe8+ ♚xe8 23.♘f1 ♚e5 24.♚b3 ♕b6 25.♚xb4 ♕xd4 26.♚xd4 ♚xd4 27.♖xd4 ♖xc2 28.♘e3 ♖xb2 29.♘xd5

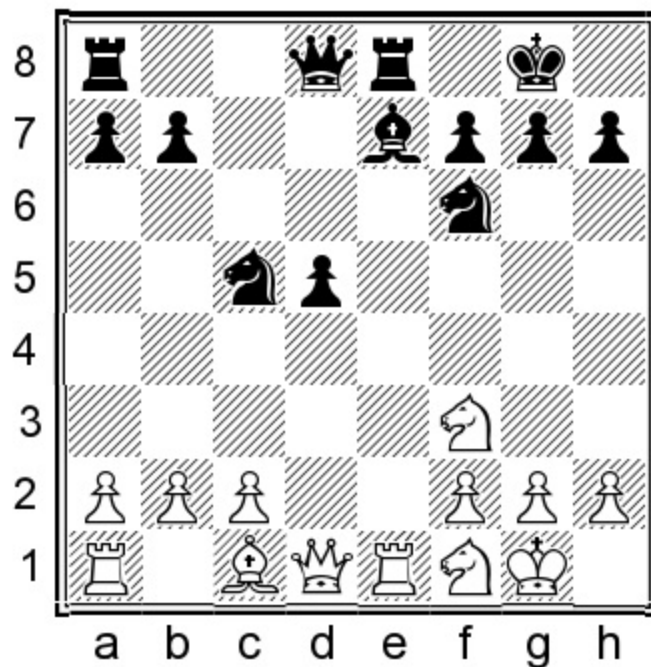


Position after: 29. ♖xd5

Draw agreed. ½-½ (29) Delgado Ramirez, N (2567) – Ivanchuk, V (2739) Havana 2005.

b) 11...♖e8

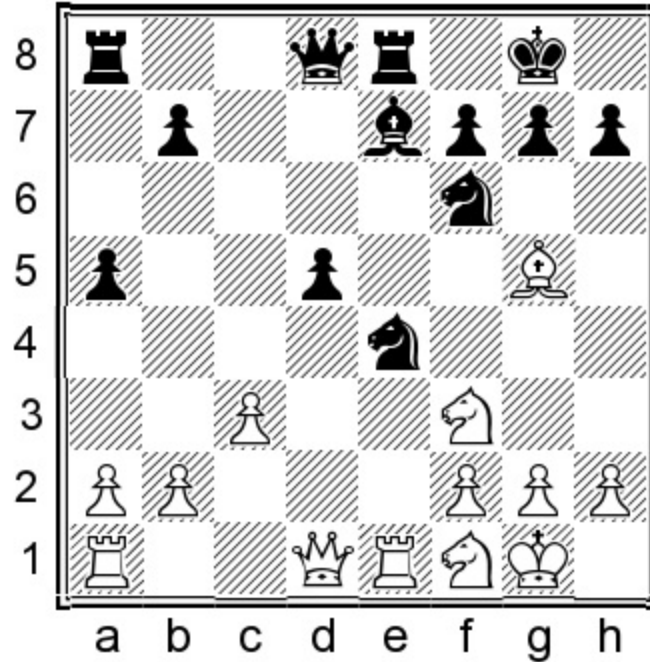
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♖d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♘f6 6.♙b5+ ♚d7 7.♙xd7+ ♜bxd7 8.0-0 ♙e7 9.dxc5 ♜xc5 10.♞e1 0-0 11.♗f1 ♖e8



Position after: 11...♖e8

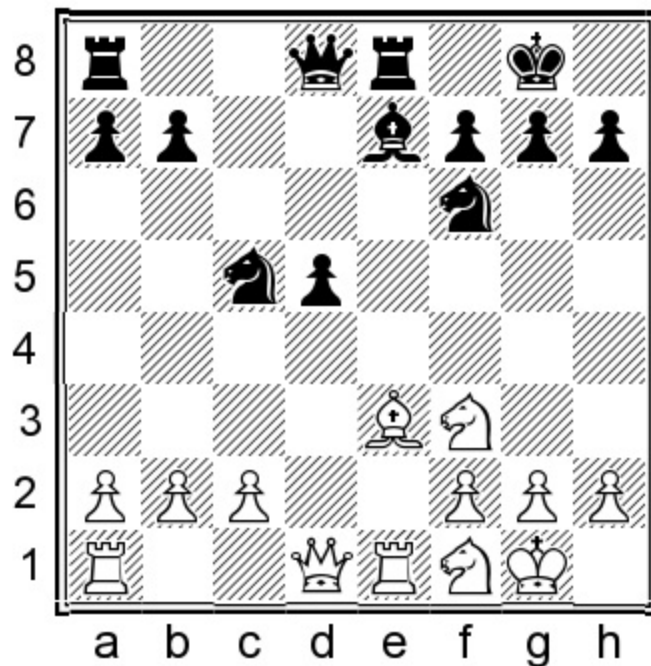
12.♙e3

12.c3!?! This waiting move fits in perfectly with White's strategy and can be considered a serious alternative to the main line. 12...a5 13.♙g5!?N [13.♙e3 transposes; 13.♙f4!?N 13...a4 14.a3 ♖b3 15.♜b1 ♚b6 gives a different version of the main line. The pawn structure is essentially the same.] 13...♞ce4



Position after: 13...♞ce4

When we are winning a tempo, we can use that to blow up the queenside. 14.♙e3 b5 15.a3 b4 16.cxb4 axb4 17.a4 ♞g4! 18.♙d4 [18.♜e2 ♞xe3 19.♞xe3=] 18...♞exf2 19.♙xf2 ♞xf2 20.♚xf2 ♙c5+ 21.♚g3 ♚d6+ 22.♚h3 ♚h6+=

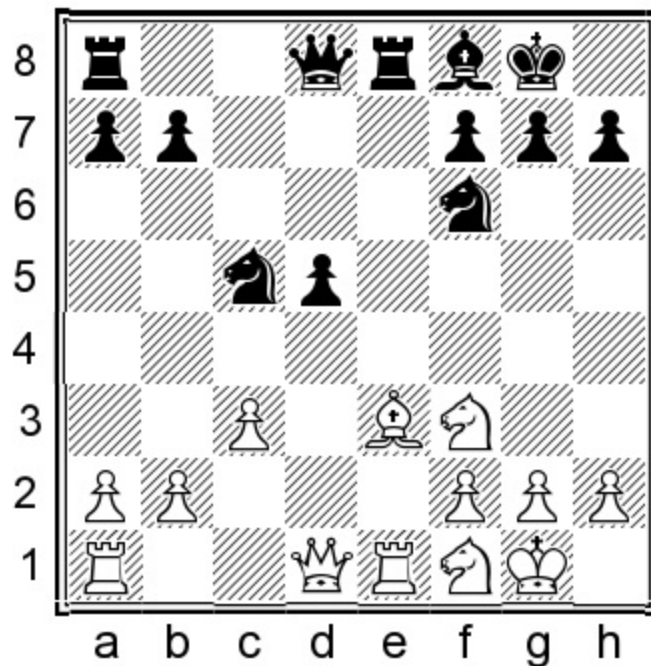


Position after: 12. ♖e3

In this position Black has a huge choice. There is the most solid plan with 12...a5 and Black has actually been winning the most games there. But there are countless interesting alternatives, mainly because the position is not very sharp and the stakes are not that high. It is more important to play for a consistent plan. Hence I will present a few alternative plans to the main line here.

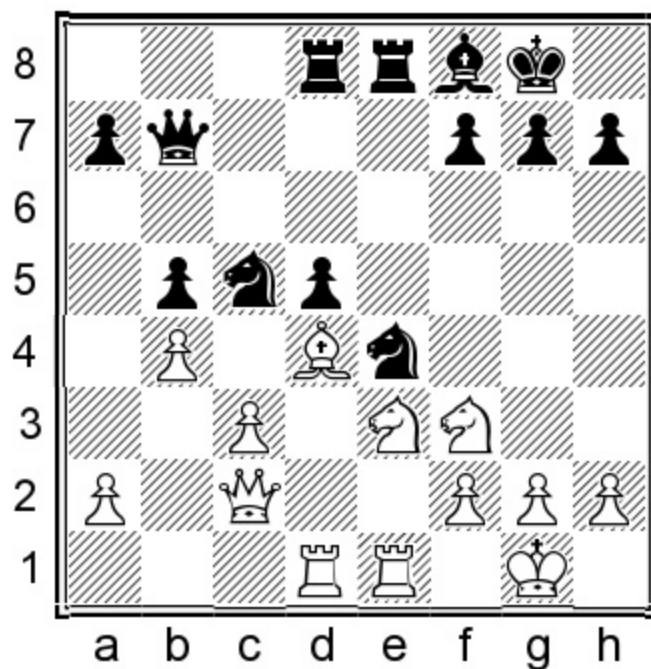
12...a5

A) 12...♖f8!? is extremely rare yet very logical, purely playing for the e-file. This is the most important strategic element in these French IQP positions. White is striving to connect the rooks as soon as possible in order to enable the ♖d4 plan. 13.c3! Intending 14.♙c2.



Position after: 13.c3!

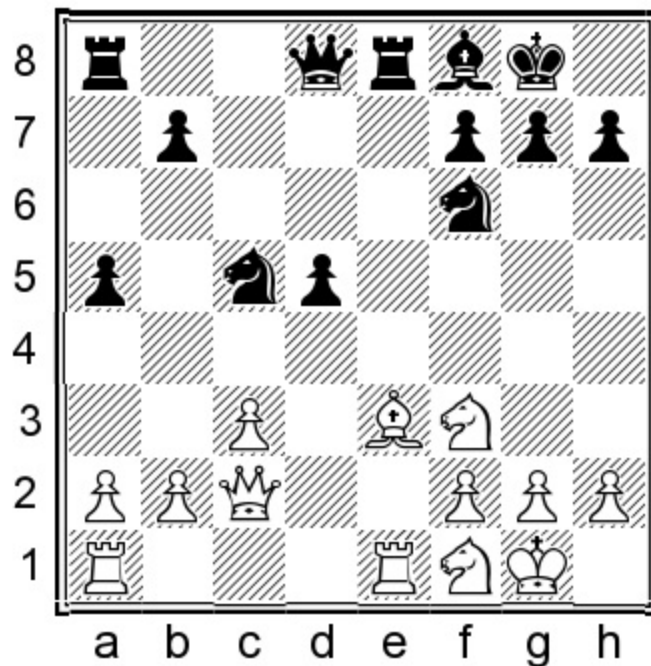
A1) 13...♔d7 14.♚c2 b5 15.♙d4 ♞fe4 16.♞ad1 ♚b7 17.♘e3 ♞ad8 18.b4



Position after: 18.b4

18...♘e6 [18...♘a4! 19.♞d3 a6 20.a3 ♚c6= The counterplay against c3 is enough for an equal game.] 19.♘d5 ♘xd4? [19...♘xc3! 20.♘f6+ gxf6 21.♙xc3 ♚c6± Black is still close to equality.] 20.♞xd4± 0-1 (61) Hamdouchi, H (2541) – Vaganian, R (2623) New Delhi 2000.

A2) 13...a5!? 14.♚c2

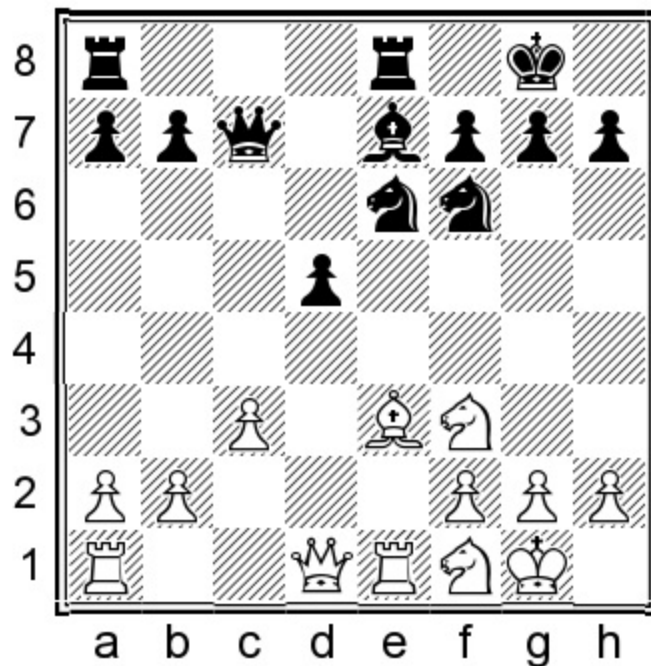


Position after: 14. ♖c2

A2.1) 14...a4 15. ♗d4 ♜xe1 16. ♝xe1± Having achieved e-file domination and a perfectly placed bishop on d4, White is better. 16...a3!? 17. ♘g5! [17.bxa3 ♘e6 18. ♗xf6 ♚xf6 19. ♘e3 d4 20.cxd4 ½-½ (20) Gerzhoy, L (2471) – Sambuev, B (2478) Montreal 2010.] 17...♘fe4 18. ♘xe4 ♘xe4 19.b4±

A2.2) 14...♘e6! I like this move right now. White was ready to exchange the rooks and now we close the e-file again. And of course, it also stops ♗d4 ideas. 15.a3 ♚d7 16.h3 b5= Black's play is very natural and easy here.

B) 12...♘e6!? Another great and original line played by three fantastic players, all of whom have a surname beginning with S: Short, Socko and Savchenko, three big experts in this line. The charm of 12...♘e6! is that it retains more complexity than the main line, which means slightly more winning chances. 13.c3 ♚c7 [13...a5 is a perfectly fine option as well, with play similar to the variation with 12...♗f8 above.]



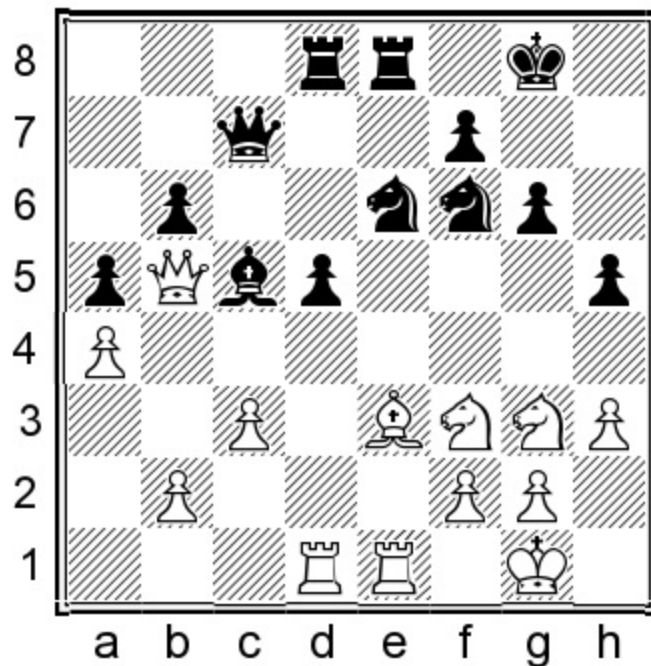
Position after: 13... ♕c7

B1) 14. ♖d3N 14... ♜ad8 15. ♜ad1 ♙f8 16. ♘d4 a6 17. h3 ♘e4 18. ♘d2 ♘6c5 19. ♚c2 b5=

B2) 14. ♘d4 The following game was a nearly perfect textbook example of how to play this position with counterplay down the e-file. This is one of the games that proves that the French IQP is not as bad as the standard IQP. The difference is that there is counterplay on the e-file instead of the c-file, and this reduces the importance of exchanging minor pieces. 14... ♙c5 15. ♚d3 ♚b6 16. ♘xe6 ♜xe6 17. ♙xc5 ♚xc5 18. ♘e3 ♜ae8 19. h3 g6 20. ♜ed1 ♜e4 21. ♜d2 ♔g7 22. ♜ad1 h5 23. ♜f1 ½-½ Polakovic, P (2470) – Degerhammar, R (2500) ICCF email 2015.

B3) 14. ♚b3

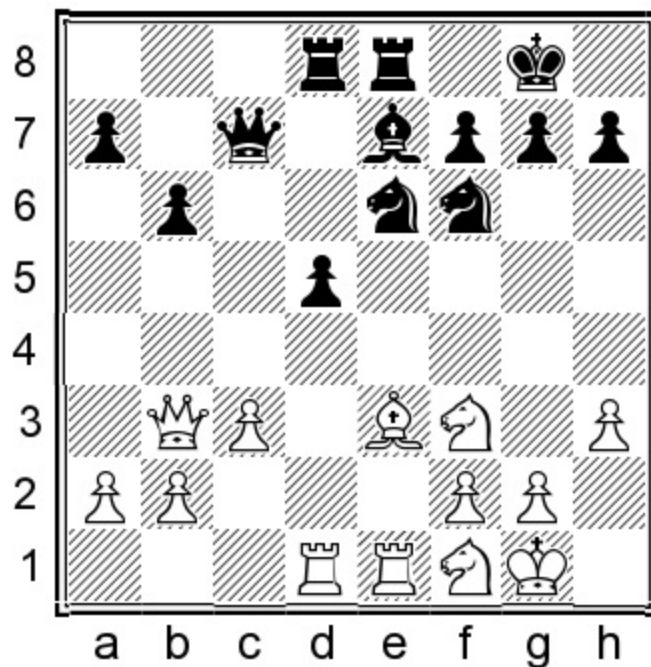
B3.1) 14... a5!N It turns out this move is essential. 15. a4 [15. a3 ♙f8] 15... b6! 16. ♚b5 ♙c5 17. ♜ad1 h5 18. h3 ♜ad8 19. ♘g3 g6=



Position after: 19...g6=

With the knight on e6, Black has more control of the dark squares and so ...g6 is a reasonable move, given that it has already been prepared by ...h5! as otherwise White could land ♔h6.

B3.2) 14...b6 15.♖ad1 ♜ad8 16.h3

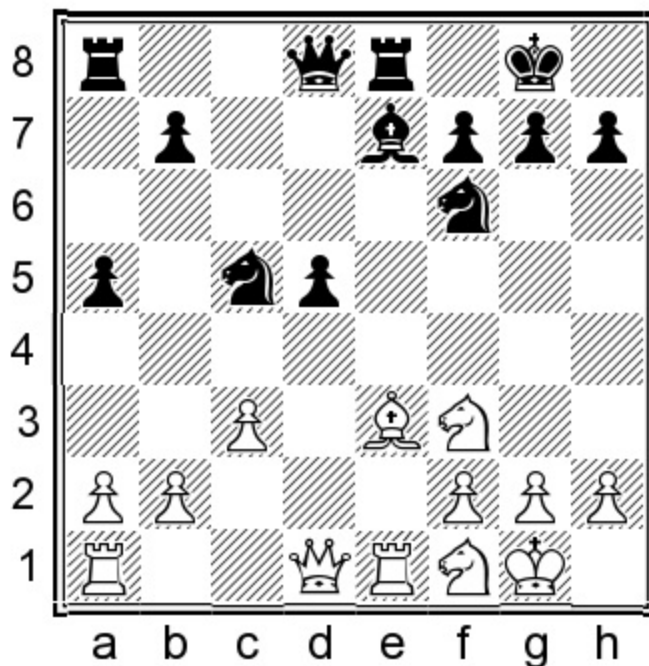


Position after: 16.h3

B3.2a) 16...g6!? 17.♘1h2 [17.♔h6! ♚c4 18.♘e3 ♚xb3 19.axb3 a5±] 17...h5 18.♚c2 ♔c5= 1/2-1/2
 (44) Kapnisis, S (2464) – Pfreundt, J (2388) Anogia 2018.

B3.2b) 16...♔c5 17.♚b5 ♖e7 18.♚a4 ½-½ (18) Zubarev, A (2597) – Socko, B (2631) Kavala 2011.

13.c3

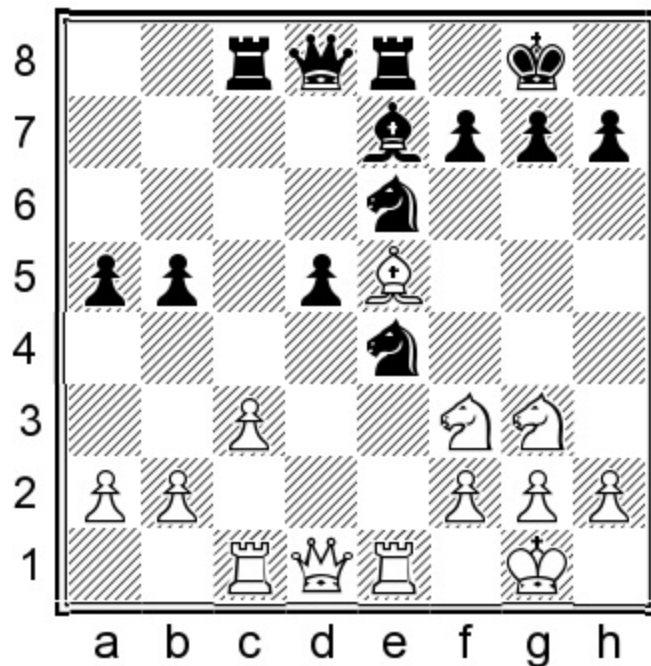


Position after: 13.c3

13...a4

13...b5!? is a specialty of the Russian GM Ulybin.

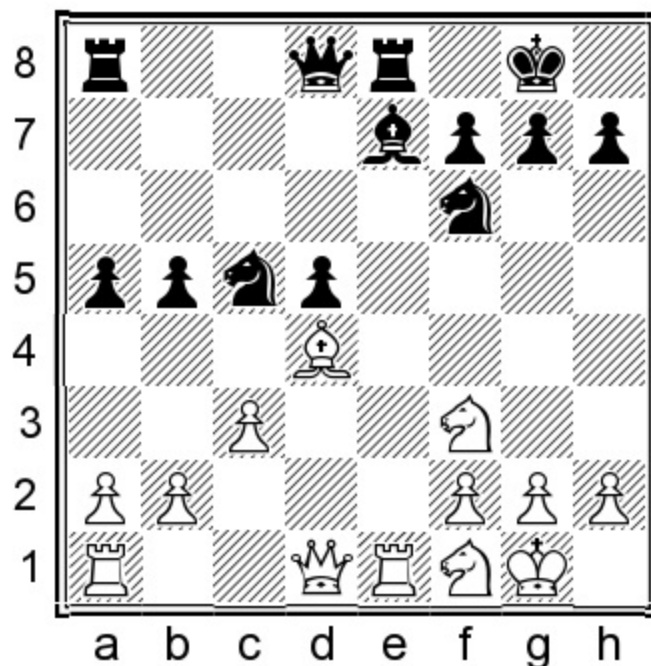
A) 14.♖c1 ♖c8= Both Gurevich and Ulybin went for this but I believe the rook on c8 is slightly misplaced. It should not be going anywhere but d8 or e8. [14...♔f8 15.a3 ♗fe4= Black is doing fine here.] 15.♔d4 ♗e6 16.♔e5 ♗e4 17.♗g3



Position after: 17. ♖g3

17... ♘g3?! This was a different matter when the rooks were still on a1 and a8. [17... ♘6g5! 18. ♕d4 b4 19. h4 ♘xf3+ 20. ♖xf3 ♕xh4 21. ♘e4 dxe4 22. ♖xe4 ♖xe4 23. ♖xe4 ♕f6 24. ♕xf6 ♖xf6=] 18. hxg3 ♕c5 19. ♖c2± ½-½ (70) Ponomarev, R (2585) – Gurevich, M (2610) Belfort 1998.

B) 14. ♕d4



Position after: 14. ♕d4

B1) 14... ♘e6 15. ♕e5N [15. ♖b3?! b4 16. cxb4 ♕xb4= 0-1 (40) Caspi, I (2404) – Uflybin, M (2533)]

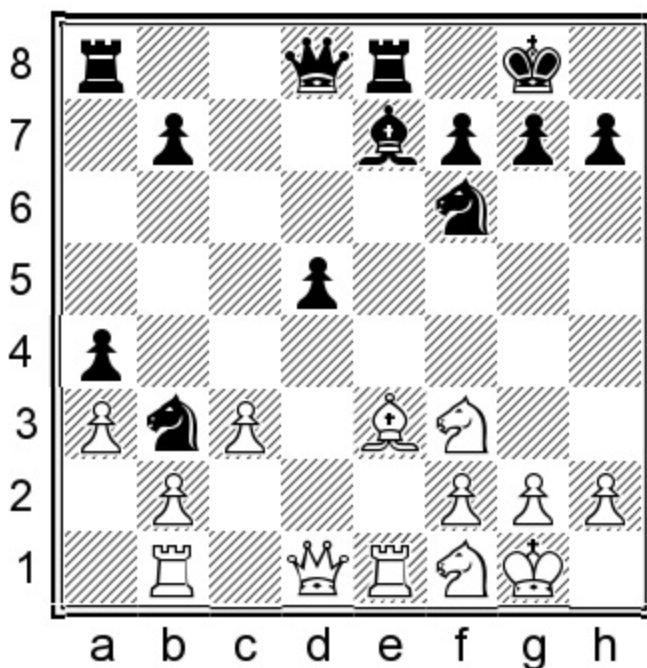
Hoogeveen 2009.] 15...♖e4 [15...♖g4!? 16.h3 ♖xe5 17.♞xe5 ♖c7 18.♚d2 g6= Black has hardly any problems once the rooks are traded on the e-file.] 16.♖g3 ♖xg3 17.hxg3 b4=

B2) 14...b4 15.♖e3 ♖ce4 16.c4 [16.cxb4 axb4 17.♖e5 ♖d6 18.♖d3 would have been a better try, although it probably isn't much. 18...h6 19.♖f5 ♖f8=] 16...dxc4= 1-0 (68) Svidler, P (2690) – Ulybin, M (2575) Maikop 1998.

14.a3 ♖b3

14...♖f8N is again a very normal move. 15.♚c2 ♚b6 16.♞ad1 ♞ad8= Even though Black is very solid in these positions, the absence of a clear plan makes it a little more difficult to play.

15.♞b1



Position after: 15.♞b1

15...♚d7

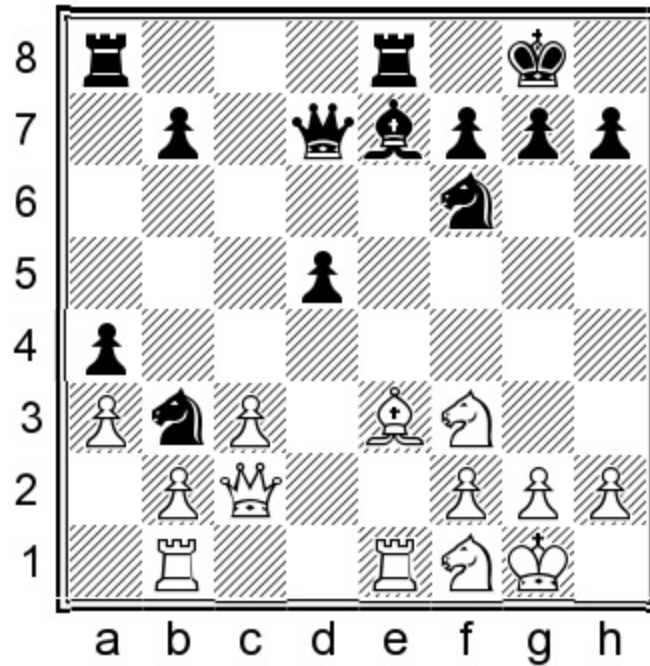
At this point we have almost arrived at a highly static and balanced middlegame position where there are even more ways of playing than before.

15...♚a5!? This line was given by Shaw but he kept his analysis brief. 16.♖d4 ♖xd4?! [16...♖c5!= of course.] 17.♖xd4 ♖e4 18.♖e3 ♖f8 19.♚h5 ♞ad8 20.♖f5 ♚a6 [20...♖c5!]=] 21.♞bd1 ♚g6 22.♚xg6 hxg6 23.♖e3± The position is very difficult for Black. 1-0 (34) Rublevsky, S (2703) – Lipka, J (2418) Ohrid 2009.

16.♚d3

This is the most recent try.

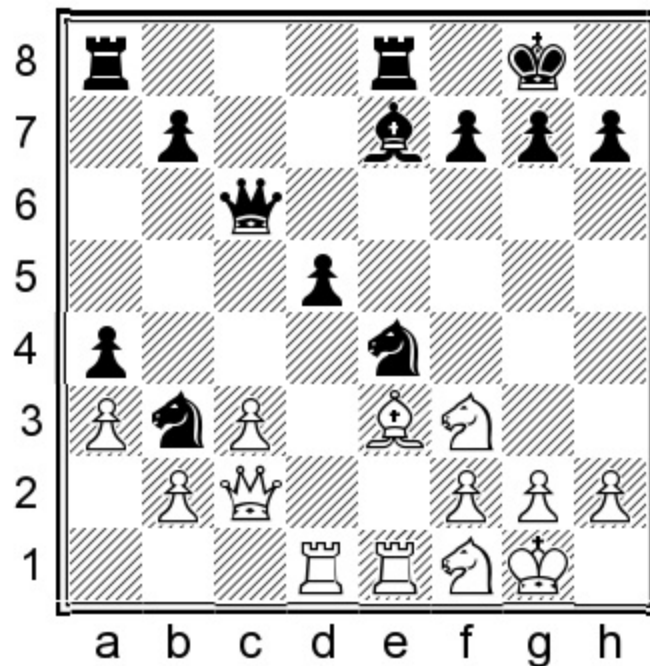
16. ♖c2



Position after: 16. ♖c2

A) 16... ♗f8! 17. ♘1d2 ♘c5 18. ♝bd1 ♚b5 19. ♘d4 ♚a6 20. ♘2f3 h6= Again we are going for this long maneuvering battle. We will have to see more practical tests.

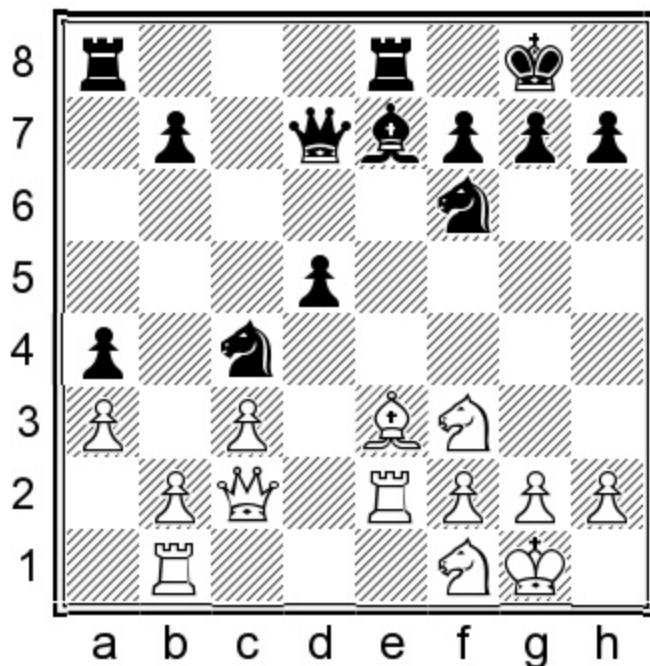
B) 16... ♘e4 17. ♝bd1 ♚c6



Position after: 17... ♚c6

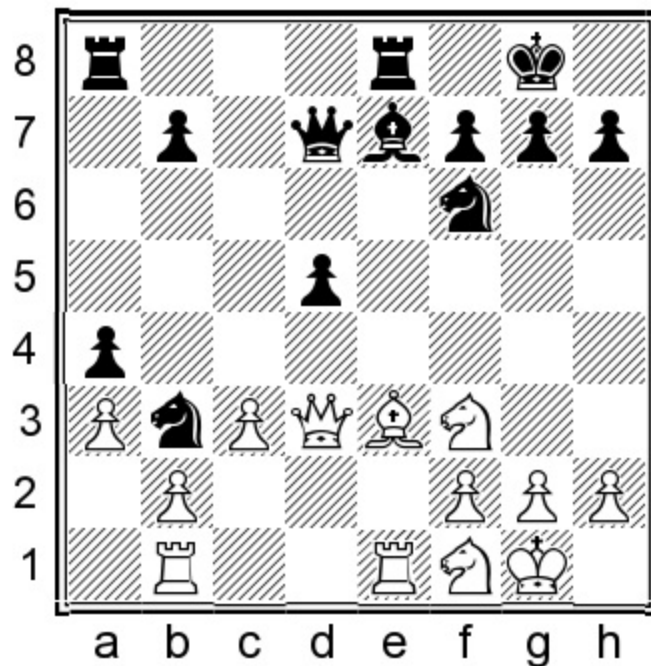
18.♖e5 [18.♗d4?! ♗xd4! 19.♙xd4 ♙f8 20.♗e3 ♗d6 Black is heading for c4, and b2 might slowly start to become a problem.] 18...♚e6 19.♗d3 ♚c6 20.♗f4 ♗f6 Even though White made us dance around a bit, there is nothing to worry about. 21.♗g3 g6=

C) 16...♗a5 Most players do not seem to realize that the knight is useful on b3. It is preventing ♗d4, so it should only move when it is forced to do so. 17.♞e2 [17.♞bd1!N 17...♚c6 18.♙d4 ♗b3 19.♗e3 ♗xd4 20.♗xd4 ♚a6= Probably nothing special, but Black is deprived of any counterplay.] 17...♗c4



Position after: 17...♗c4

18.♞be1 [18.♙d4?! ♙xa3 19.♙xf6 gxf6 20.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 21.b4 axb3 22.♚xb3 b6 23.♞d1 ♚e6= There is still a glimmer of hope for that well-deserved 0-1.] 18...♗xe3 19.♗xe3 ♙c5= The good news for Black is that there are too many alternatives to mention. The position after 15...♚d7 is very level. ½-½ (47) Ponomariov, R (2616) – Dizdar, G (2549) Bled 1999.



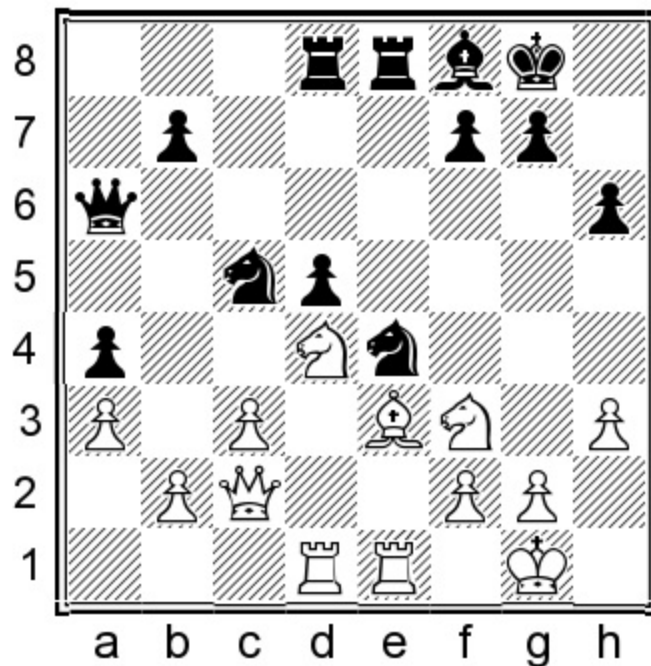
Position after: 16. ♖d3

16... ♗f8!N

Again fighting for the e-file!

16... ♗c5?! It might be a bit harsh to call this dubious but there was no reason to exchange these bishops for the sake of one measly tempo. 17. ♖bd1 [17. ♗xc5 ♘xc5 18. ♖c2 ♗e4 19. ♖bd1 ♖b5 20. ♘d4 ♖b6± Black is again solid but lacking counterplay.] 17...h6 18.h3?! [18. ♗xc5±] 18... ♖c6 19. ♗xc5 ♘xc5 20. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 21. ♖c2± 1-0 (54) Vaibhav, S (2561) – Narciso Dublan, M (2483) Barcelona 2018.

17. ♖bd1 h6 18. ♘1d2 ♘c5 19. ♖c2 ♖ad8 20.h3 ♖c6 21. ♘d4 ♖a6 22. ♘2f3 ♘fe4=



Position after: 22... Nfe4=

This is a complicated middlegame where you can outplay lower rated opponents.

Conclusion

We have come to the end of the 5... Nf6 system, a very solid weapon which provides the degree of complexity needed to outplay your opponents. Another good thing is that it is very difficult to prepare these lines deeply because there are too many decent moves for both sides. Therefore, we often see how important it is to understand which pieces you should aim to exchange and when you should do it. That's where our extra knowledge can make the difference.

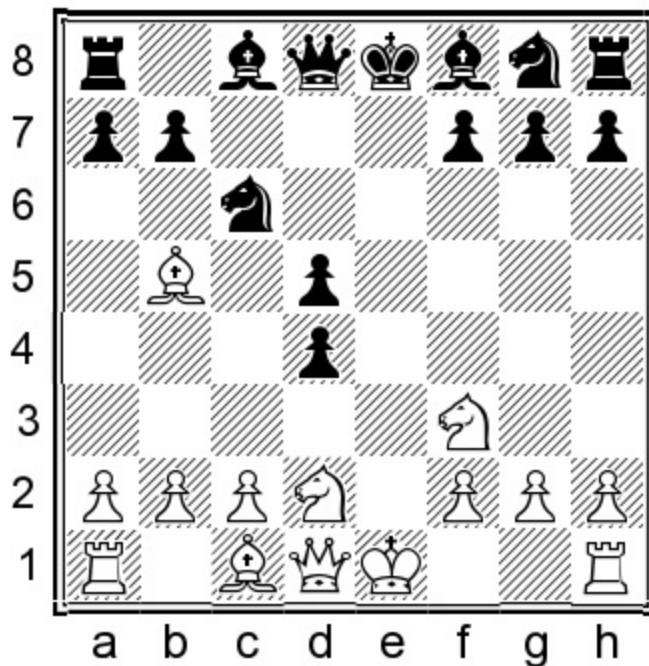
10. Re1 presents Black with a different set of problems. White slowly develops and brings the bishop to d4. Our best strategies are always based on a queenside pawn storm, because there is no knight on b3. The other key recipe for success is not playing ... Nce4 unless it wins a tempo. In general, we want to hinder the plan of Qd4 and Ne3. If we are successful with that, then we will have an easy time.

One last general note: If you like a static pawn structure, I would recommend pushing the pawn to a4, while if you prefer things a little more dynamic, I recommend you go for the plan of pushing the b-pawn like Ulybin and Ivanchuk. Both strategies are valid and lead to equal positions where your understanding of the plans is more important than memorizing concrete variations.

Chapter 8

5...♞c6 – Introduction and 6...cxd4

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞gf3 ♞c6 6.♟b5 cxd4



Chapter Guide

Chapter 8 – 5...♞c6 (Introduction and 6...cxd4)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞gf3 ♞c6 6.♟b5 cxd4 7.♞e2+ ♞e7 8.♞xd4 ♞xe2+ 9.♞xe2 ♟d7

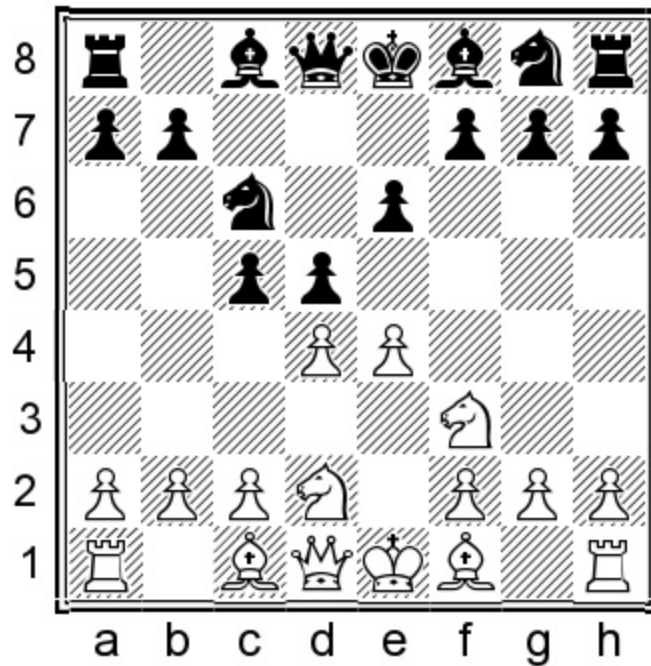
a) 10.♞2f3

b) 10.♞2b3

a) 10.♞2f3

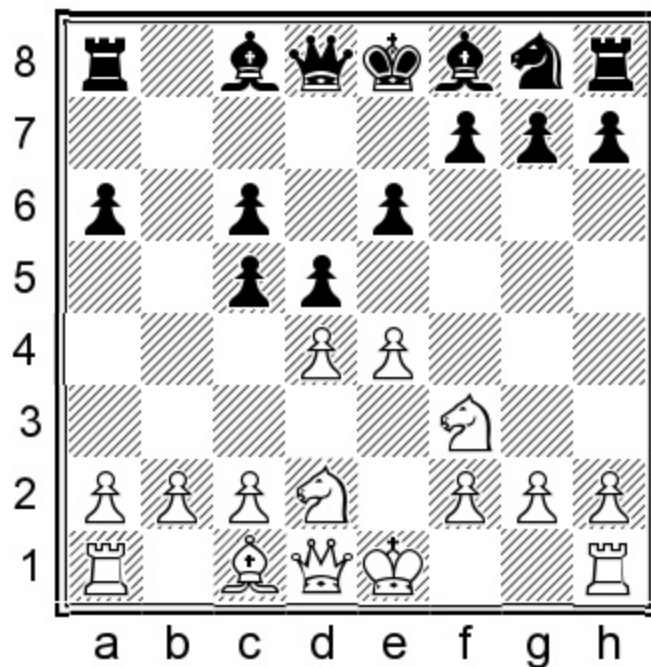
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5

4.♞gf3 ♞c6



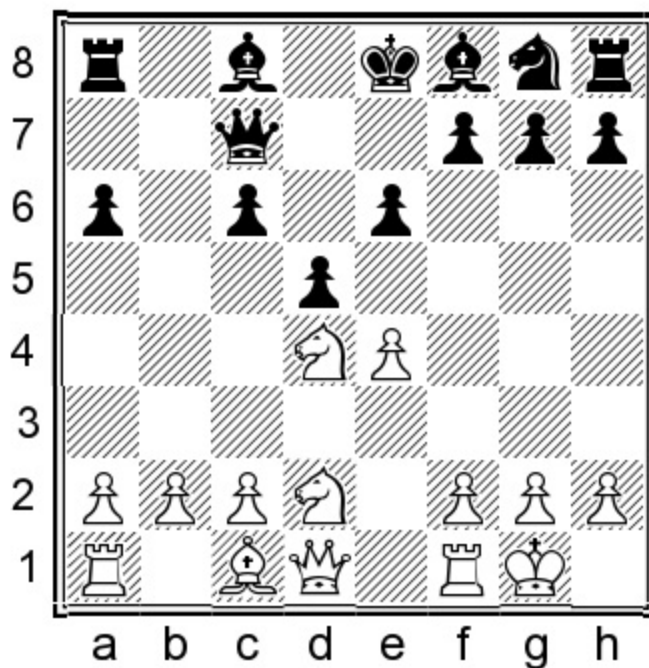
Position after: 4...Nc6

I would say the biggest advantage of this move is that Black has less to learn. Why? Well because the only White try for an advantage is to play the isolated pawn positions! So compared to 5...Nf6 there is less theory to learn. On the other hand, it is always good to have several tricks up your sleeve against those sneaky 3.Nd2 players. 5.Bb5 This is the path to a unique position. [5.exd5 exd5 transposes.] 5...a6! That bishop looks way too tasty not to take it. 6.Bxc6+ bxc6



Position after: 6...bxc6

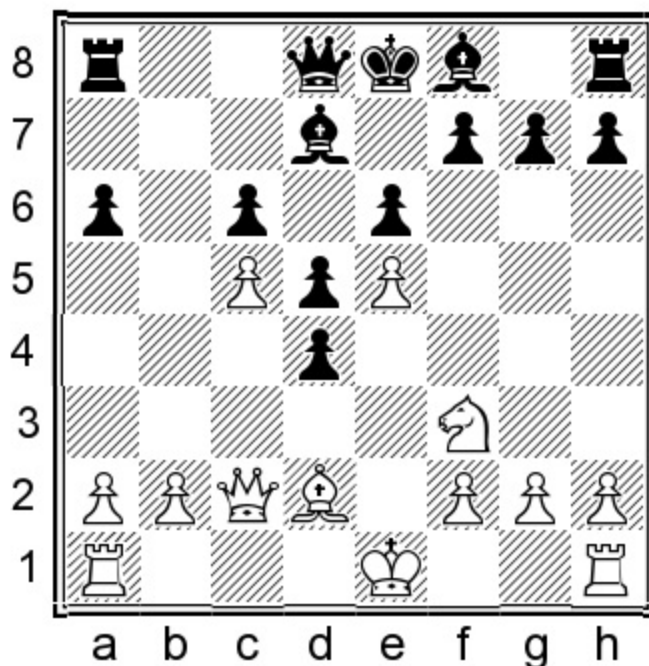
A) 7.0-0 cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♚c7!N [8...♙b7?! 9.b4! Now White has consolidated his knight's position on d4.]



Position after: 8...♚c7!N

A difficult move to find, preventing e5 and preparing to play ...♘f6. 9.exd5 cxd5 10.c4 ♘f6 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘e4 ♙e7 13.♚g4 g6 14.♚d1 h5= White has had to play a lot of 'only' moves to avoid being worse.

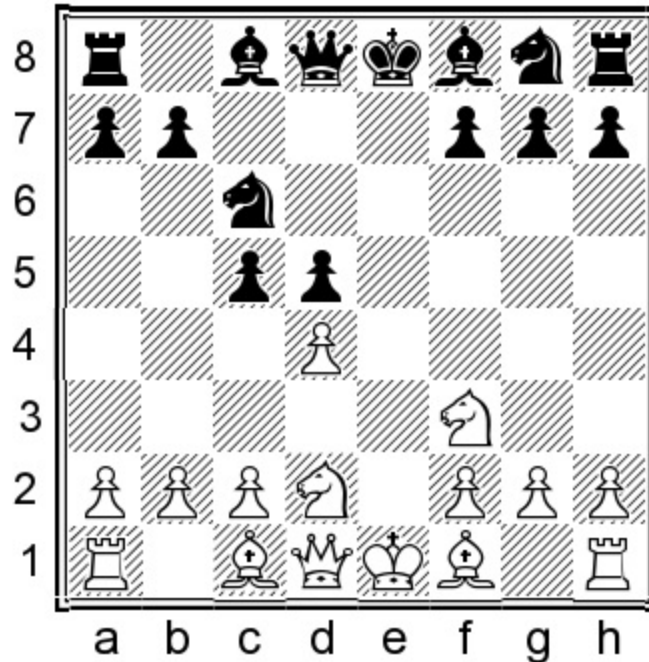
B) 7.c4!N This computer move cracks me up a bit. 7...cxd4 [7...♘f6 8.♚a4! ♙d7 9.e5 ♘e4 10.♚c2 ♘xd2 11.♙xd2 cxd4 12.c5! This is the point, when White is actually getting an edge.]



Position after: 12.c5!

8.0-0 ♖e7!? 9.♞e1 f6!? 10.e5 ♘g6 11.exf6 gxf6 12.♗xd4 ♔f7= Black has an impressive center and a great pair of bishops. I would advise any gambling addict to put all your money on Black here, because you are getting 1% better odds than in a game of roulette.

4...exd5 5.♘gf3 ♗c6



Position after: 5...♗c6

We have arrived at the starting point for the remainder of our isolated pawn endeavor.

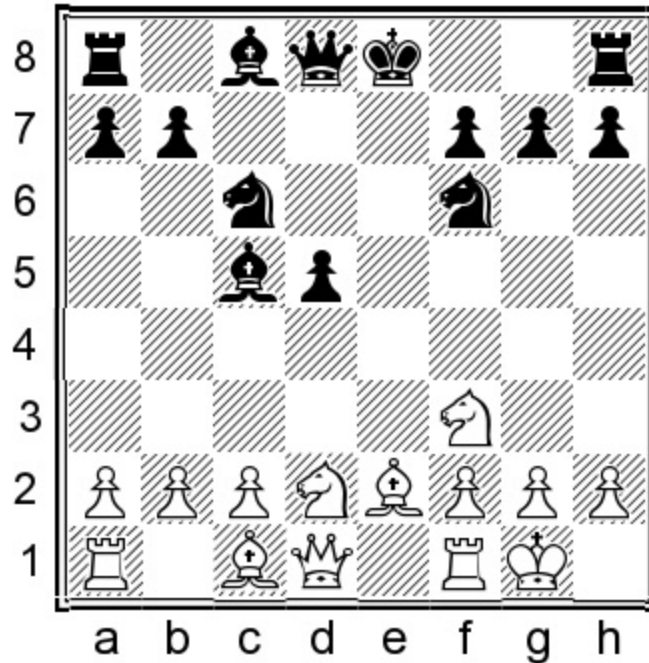
6.♞b5

This is the only serious try for an advantage. Now Black has several options. Recently Korchnoi's 6...♞e7+ has become the most fashionable move. 6...♞d6 is the classical main line of the system. For example, Shaw spends most of his chapter on 4...exd5 analyzing it. Finally, there is another move order with 6...cxd4 which was recommended by Marin in his online repertoire on the French. I will start with the two latter options, because they are more similar in nature than 6...♞e7+.

A) 6.dxc5?! In the last chapter we spent a tempo on a6 to make White take on c5. Now he does it voluntarily. 6...♞xc5 7.♗b3 ♞b6 8.♞d3 ♗f6 9.♞e2+ ♞e6 10.♗g5 ♞d6 11.♗xe6 fxe6!N 12.♞e3 ♞xe3 13.♞xe3 0-0= with chances for both sides.

B) 6.♞e2?! This move might even be worse than 6.dxc5?!. The only difference is that strong players have actually opted for this line. White is ahead in development, which means he should not block the e-file like this. It is almost inevitable that the e2-bishop will have to move again. For now Black is allowed ideal development with knights on c6 and f6. No wonder this move has never been

played in correspondence chess. 6...♘f6 7.0-0 ♕d6 8.dxc5 ♕xc5

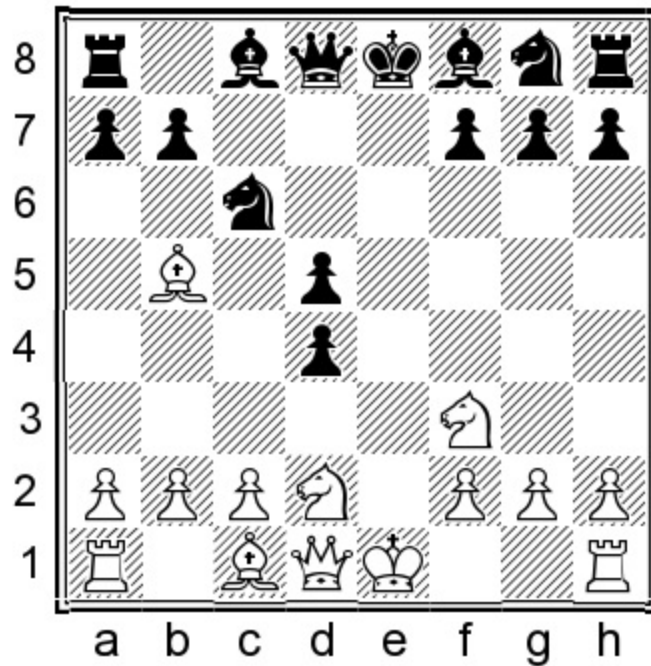


Position after: 8...♕xc5

B1) 9.a3!? This is probably the best way to solve the problem of the dark squared bishop. 9...a5 10.♘b3 ♕a7 [10...♕b6=] 11.c3 0-0 12.♘bd4 ♕g4= 0-1 (31) Ochoa, F (1287) – Stolz, S (2235) LSS email 2013.

B2) 9.♘b3 ♕b6 10.♕g5 0-0 You can compare this to the 5...a6!? line. Here Black did not even need to play a6 to prevent ♕b5! 11.c3 ♖e8= With the ideas from the 5...a6!? line, you should be well able to come up with something good for Black here.

6...cx4



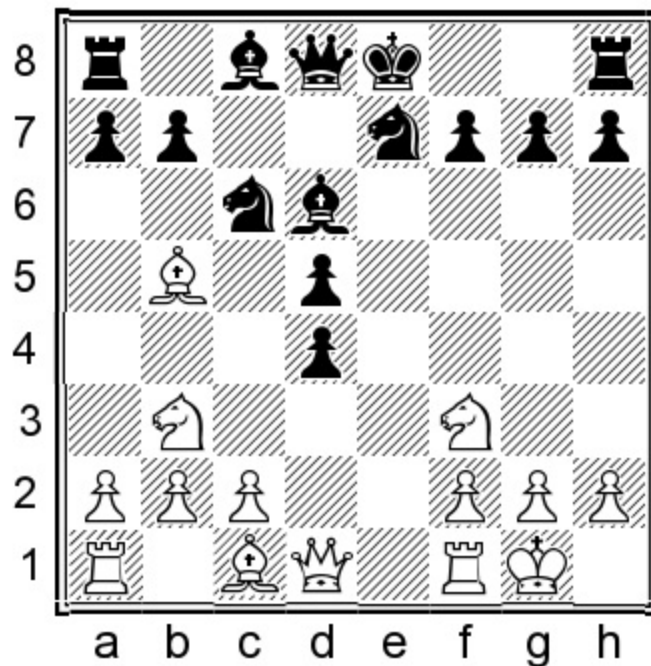
Position after: 6...cxd4

Let's see how Marin's repertoire is holding up! The main idea of this move is to have a 'useless' extra pawn on d4 compared to the main lines with 6...♔d6. This means White is unable to play the most critical lines there.

7.♙e2+

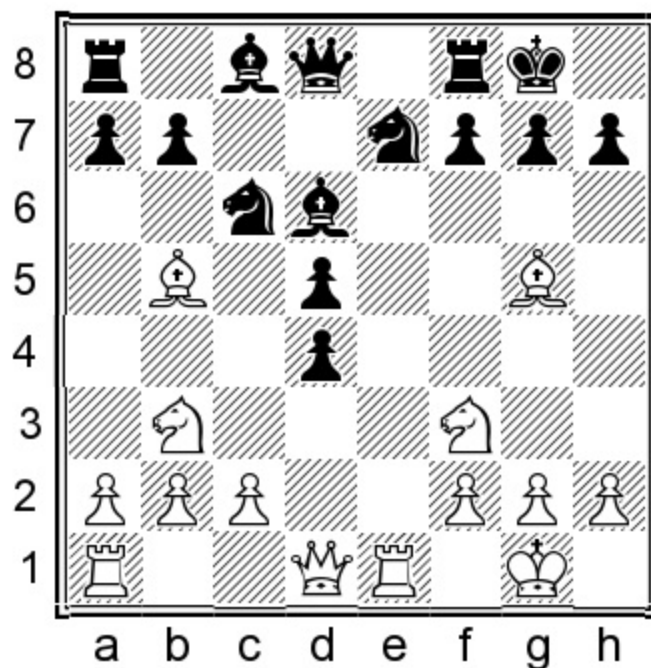
"The only move to fight for an advantage" according to Caruana. Well then, who are we to even consider thinking for ourselves? Let's not commit that terrible mistake.

A) 7.0-0 This move transposes to a version of the 6...♔d6 system in any scenario where the d4 pawn gets taken. I will just cover the unique positions in case the pawn is not taken. 7...♔d6 8.♘b3 ♘ge7



Position after: 8... Nge7

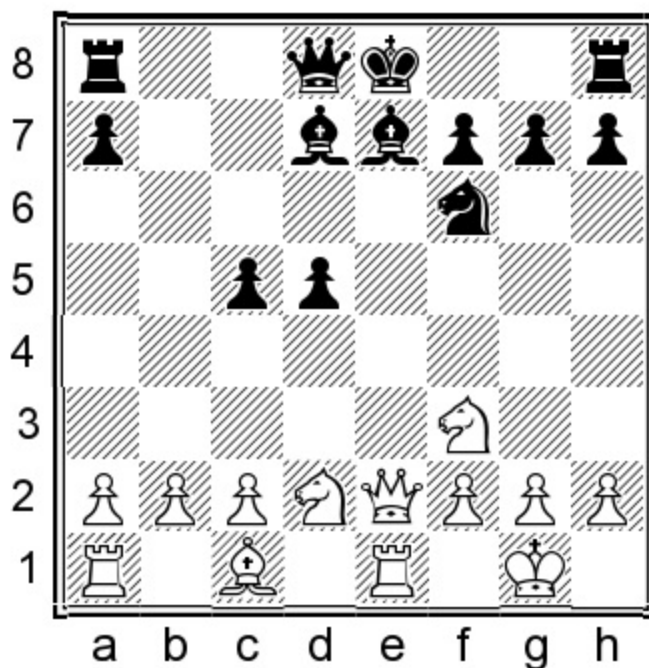
It is very difficult to come up with a plan which does not involve recapturing the d4-pawn. Although that pawn has no hope of surviving the near future, it is doing a good job of preventing c3 for the moment. So in order to complete ideal development, White must capture it eventually. The computer recommends taking the pawn at every single opportunity by the way, which means a transposition to the next chapter is extremely likely. 9. Re1 0-0 10. Bg5



Position after: 10. Bg5

This is the main line where Black has an extra pawn on d4, which is the ‘raison d’être’ of the 6...cxd4 line. 10...♙g4 11.h3 ♙xf3 12.♚xf3 f6 13.♙d2 ♘e5 14.♚d1 a6 15.♙e2 ♘7c6 16.♙f4 ♙b4 17.♚f1 ♚b6 18.c3 dxc3 19.♚xd5+ ♖h8 20.♙e3 ♚d8 21.♚xd8 ♚fxd8 22.bxc3 This is a sample line to show what happens when White tries something rebellious. It might still be equal but of course it is easy to slightly prefer Black.

B) 7.♘xd4 This move is not very critical. 7...♙d7 8.♚e2+ ♙e7 [8...♚e7 transposes to the main line.] 9.♙xc6 bxc6 10.0-0 ♘f6 11.♚e1 c5 12.♘4f3

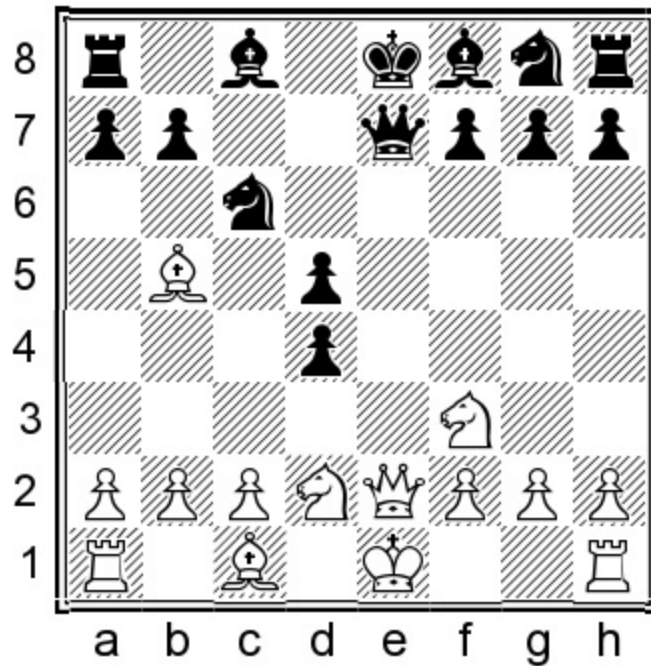


Position after: 12.♘4f3

12...h6 Preparing ...♙e6 followed by castling. [12...♚b8!? intending ...♚b6-e6 is also worth consideration.] 13.b4! cxb4 14.♙b2 ♙e6 15.♘d4 0-0 16.♘xe6 fxe6 17.♚xe6+ ♚f7= Black has nothing to fear, as both sides have an equal number of weaknesses.

7...♚e7

7...♙e7? If you feel playing main lines is boring and you need something fresh and unknown, look somewhere else! This is ‘fresh’ for a reason. 8.0-0 a6 9.♙xc6+ bxc6 10.♚e1 ♚a7 [10...♘f6 11.♘e5±] 11.b4 ♘f6 12.♙b2 0-0 13.♙xd4 Now the trouble starts and Black needs to either sacrifice an exchange or accept a worse position. 13...♚c7 14.♙b6 ♙xb4 15.♚ab1±

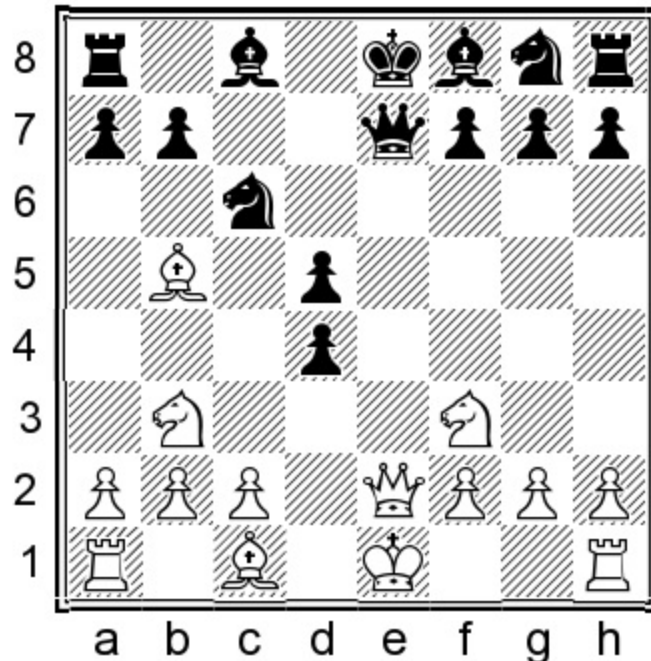


Position after: 7... ♔e7

8. ♖xd4!

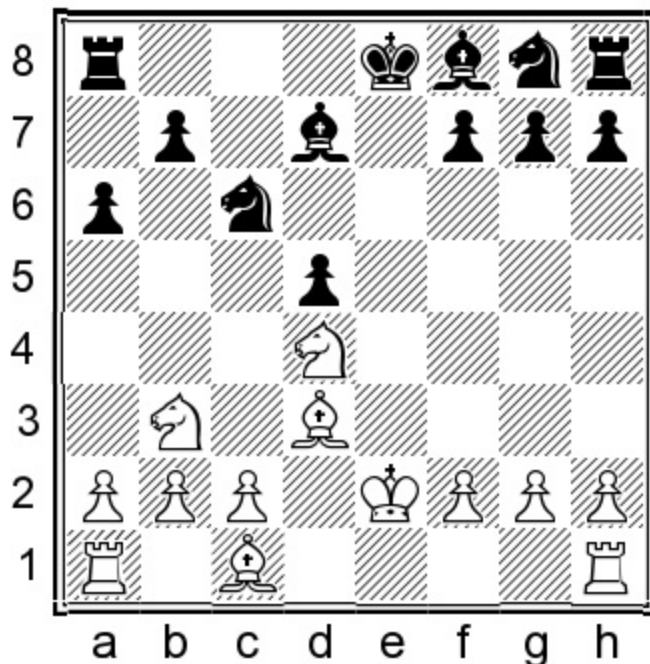
How can I award exclamation marks to both this move and its alternative? Well, I believe they are equal in strength and they have different plans.

8. ♖b3!? This move order is quite tricky because if Black seeks to transpose to the main line, he will land himself in some trouble. Moreover, this will be very difficult to play for Black in all lines.



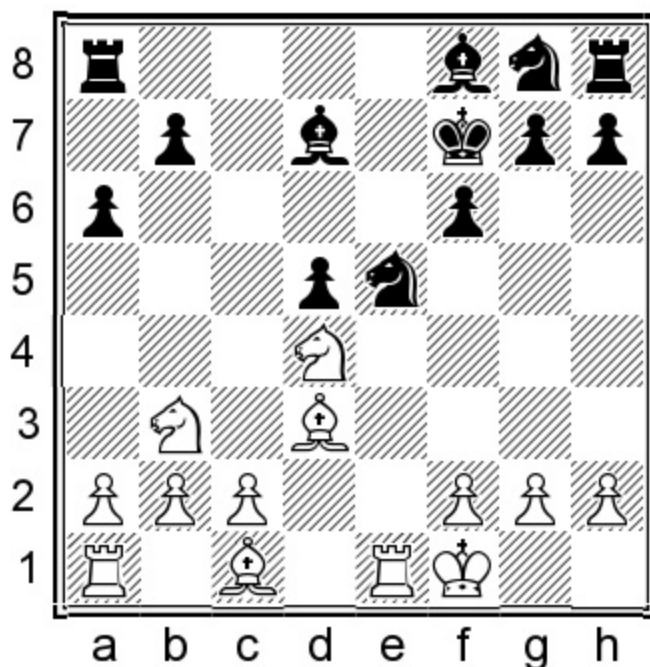
Position after: 8. ♖b3!?

A) 8...♙d7?! 9.♘fxd4 a6 [9...♚xe2+?! 10.♙xe2!± This is not possible in the main line. The bishop on e2 is less exposed and White can still castle queenside. I looked at some sample lines but life is generally hard for Black here.] 10.♙d3 ♚xe2+ 11.♙xe2 [11.♙xe2±]



Position after: 11.♙xe2

11...♗e5 [11...♗b4 12.♙f4!N 12...♗xd3 13.cxd3± The bishop on d7 is permanently bad. White will probably win the game in 30 or 40 moves for that very reason.] 12.♞e1 f6 [12...0-0-0 was seen in ½-½ (35) Munguntuul, B (2261) – Grabuzova, T (2357) Sochi 2007, and now 13.♙f1± would have given a clear advantage to White.] 13.♙f1 ♙f7

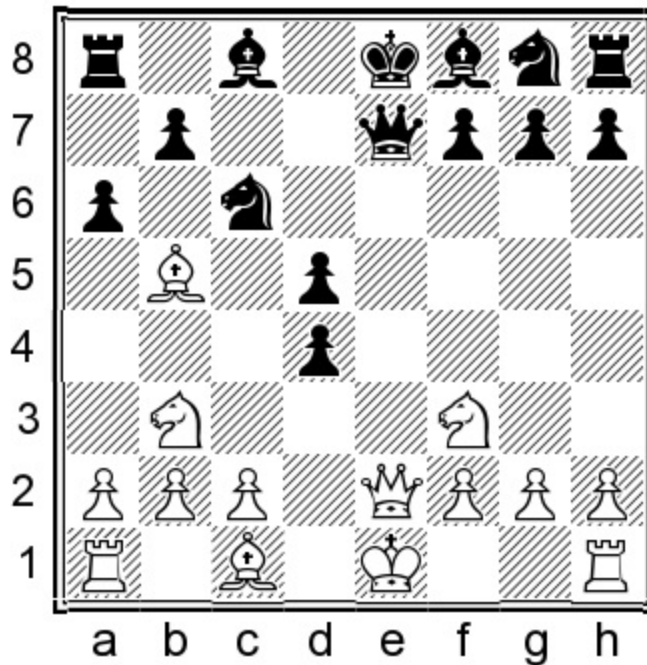


Position after: 13... ♖f7

14. ♖f4 [14. ♖e2!? White has an edge here as well.] 14... ♗xd3 15. cxd3 ♘e7 16. ♖d6 ♗f5 17. ♖xf8 ♜hx8 18. ♗xf5 ♖xf5 19. ♖e2 ♖e7 20. ♗d4 ♖d7 21. ♖d2+ ♖d6± Good old Stockfish does not believe Leela when she says it's an advantage. Well who is right? In practice, I would say that Leela giving a 65% chance for White is closest to the truth.

B) 8... ♜xe2+?! 9. ♖xe2 ♖b4+ 10. ♖d2 ♖xd2+ 11. ♗xd2 ♖g4 12. ♗fxd4± The players agreed a draw in ½-½ (12) Nikolenko, O (2520) – Dolmatov, S (2573) St Petersburg 2004, but would you?

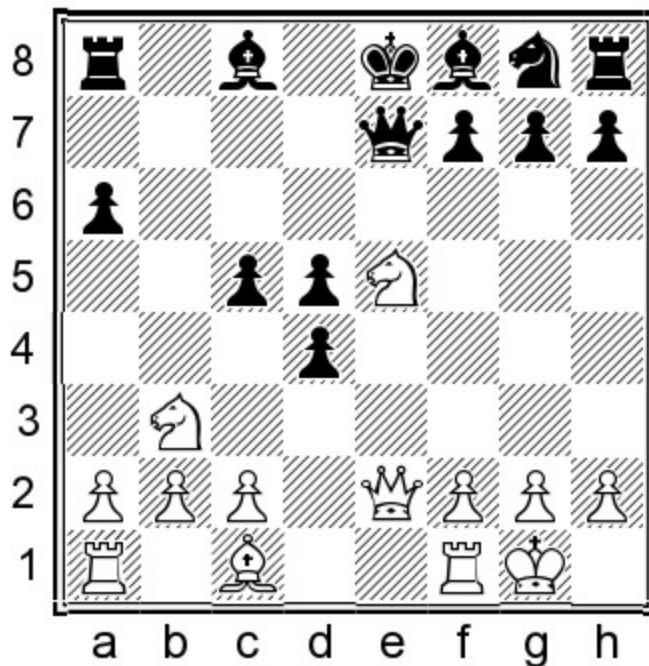
C) 8... a6! It's important to be accurate here. But despite making the best move, White may still actually get an edge.



Position after: 8... a6!

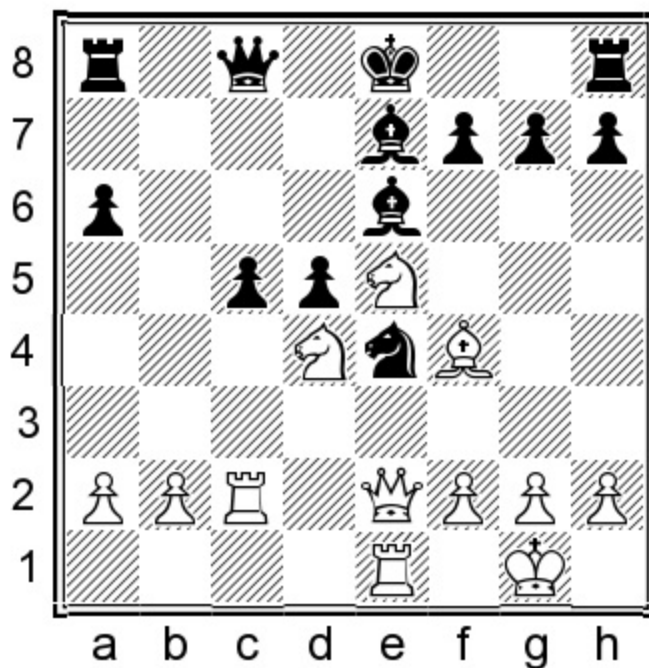
C1) 9. ♖d3!? This could very well be the best option, although Black has difficulty in both lines. 9... ♗b4 10. ♗fxd4! [10. ♖f4!? ♜xe2+ 11. ♖xe2 ♗xd3 12. cxd3 ♘e7 13. ♜he1 ♗g6 14. ♖f1+ ♖e7 15. ♖d2 ♖d7= The two bishops counterbalance the outpost.] 10... ♗xd3+ 11. cxd3 ♜xe2+ 12. ♖xe2 ♖d6 13. ♖f3! ♗e7 14. ♖f4 ♖xf4 15. ♖xf4± White can try to press forever with his beautiful outpost.

C2) 9. ♖xc6+ bxc6 10. ♗e5! c5 11. 0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

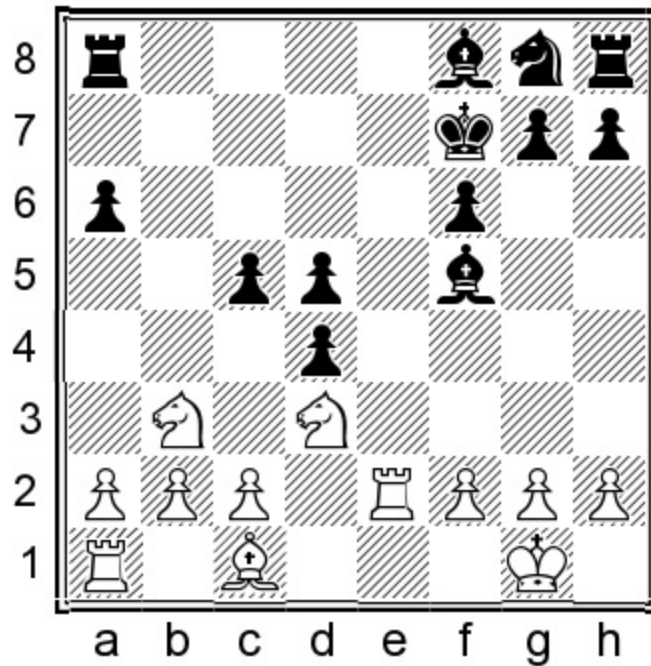
C2.1) 11...♙e6 12.♞e1 ♚c7 13.♙f4 ♚c8 14.♞ac1! ♙e7 15.c4 dxc3 16.♞xc3 ♜f6 17.♞d4 ♜e4 18.♞c2



Position after: 18.♞c2

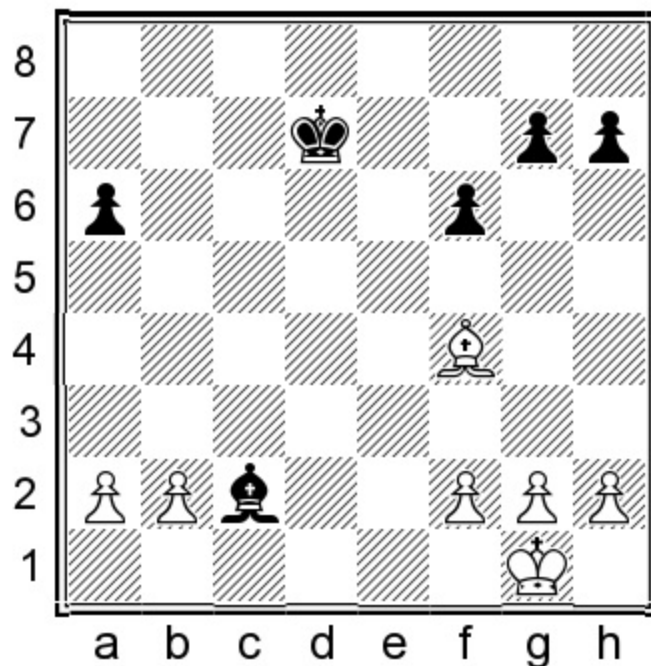
18...♙h4 [18...0-0 19.f3 ♚b7 20.♞dc6 ♜d6 21.♞xe7+ ♚xe7 22.♞xc5±] 19.♞xe6 ♚xe6 20.♞g4 ♚xg4 21.♞xg4 0-0 22.g3 ♙d8 23.f3 ♜g5 24.♙xg5 ♙xg5 25.♞xc5±

C2.2) 11...♙f5 12.♞e1 f6 13.♞d3 ♚xe2 14.♞xe2+ ♚f7



Position after: 14... ♔f7

15. ♖dxc5 [15. ♖bxc5 ♜e7= with a level game.] 15... ♙xc5 16. ♜xc5 ♜e7 17. ♜b7! ♜c8 18. ♙f4 ♞a7 19. ♜c5 ♜e7 20. ♜b3 ♜c6 21. ♞d1 ♞e8 22. ♜xd4 ♜xd4 23. ♞xe8 ♙xe8 24. ♞xd4 ♙xc2 25. ♞xd5 ♞d7 26. ♞xd7 ♙xd7=



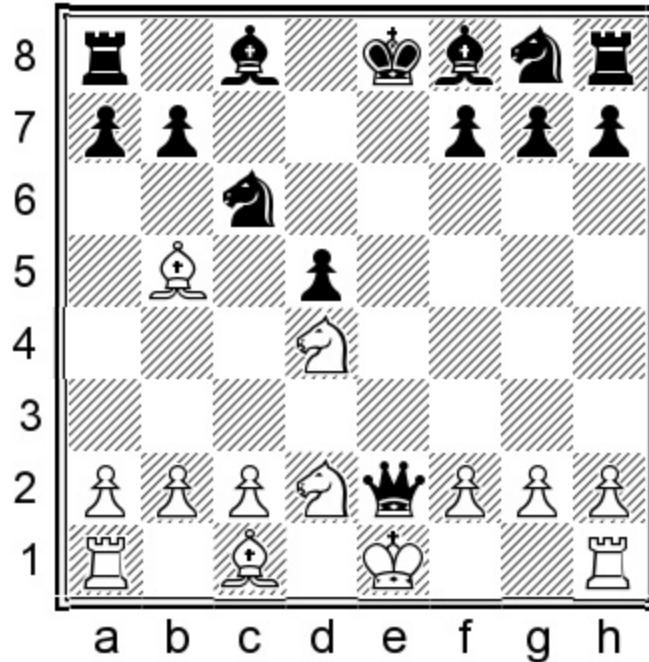
Position after: 26... ♙xd7=

It took a lot of work for Black to secure the draw, but we got there in the end. Still, I cannot guarantee that there are no improvements for White between moves 20 and 26. Let's conclude

that this line needs more practical tests. 8.♘b3 might be an even more serious try than the main line.

8...♙xe2+

8...♙d7 9.♘2b3 transposes to the notes to 8.♘b3.



Position after: 8...♙xe2+

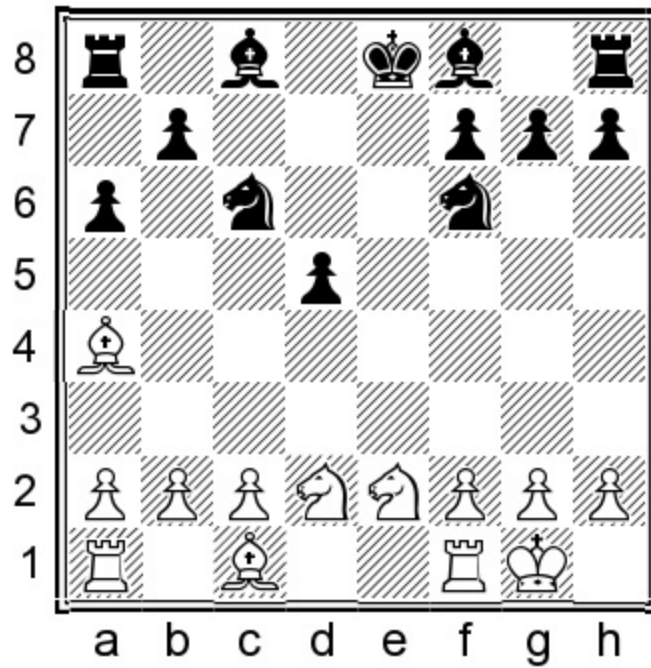
9.♙xe2

This is the best way to proceed. White can play follow up by bringing his rook to e1 and dropping the king back to f1. The moves ♙e2-♖e1-♙f1 are just as fast as playing 0-0-♖e1-♙f1. With that logic it becomes clear that the king recapture is actually a developing move.

9.♘xe2!?

A) 9...♘f6 This move was the choice of Korchnoi against Hübner and sadly it is the recommendation of Marin as well. 10.♘b3!N 10...a6 11.♙d3 ♘e5 This gives us similar positions to the 8.♘b3 line. White simply has a tiny static advantage because of their firm grip over d4. 12.0-0 ♘xd3 13.cxd3 ♙e7 14.♙e3 ♙f5 15.♖fd1±

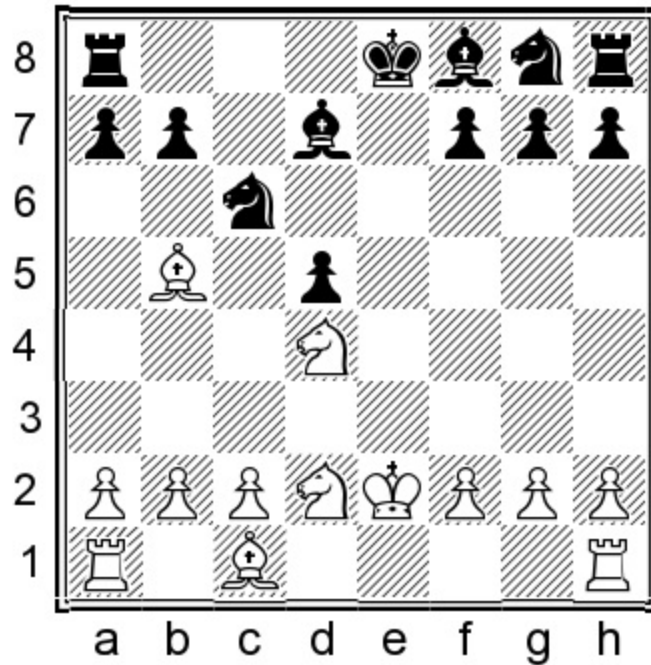
B) 9...a6! 10.♙a4 Generally the bishop has limited mobility from here, which means the position is getting closer to equality. [10.♙d3 ♘b4 11.♘b3 ♘xd3+ 12.cxd3 ♙f5!⇒ Now this move is more useful than ...♘f6.] 10...♘f6 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

11...♔d6 [11...♔c5!? 12.♖b3 ♘b6 13.♖bd4 ♔d7 14.♙e3 ♗g4=] 12.♗d4 ♔d7 13.♞e1+ ♕d8= Black was solid in ½–½ (61) Korneev, O (2608) – Del Rio de Angelis, S (2534) Navalmoral 2011.

9...♔d7



Position after: 9...♔d7

10.♗2f3

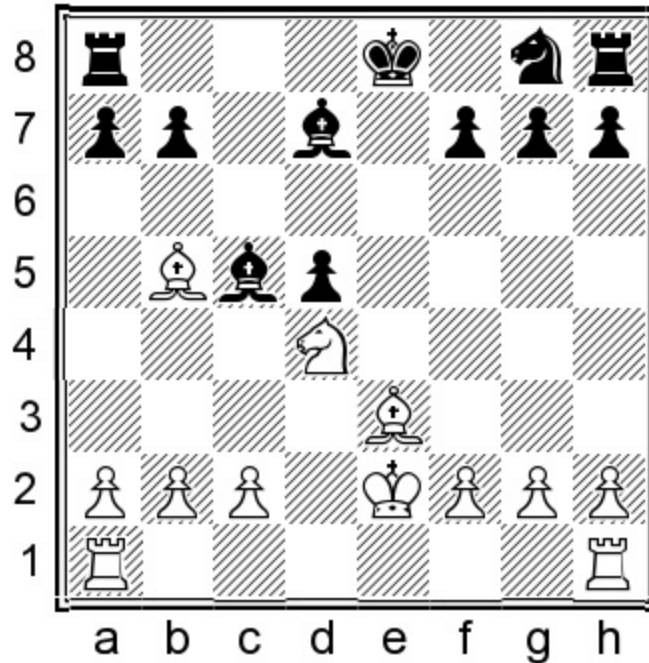
This move has been played the most but I believe it is not the best. Black has tried many moves in response, but it is easy to go wrong here.

A) 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♙d3 ♘d6 12.♞e1 ♚e7 13.♜f3 f6 14.c4 ♔f7 15.♕f1 ♞hb8 Black had a good version of the endgame in ½–½ (31) Duda, J (2707) – Rakhmanov, A (2663) Linares 2017.

B) 10.♜2b3! – see the next subchapter.

10...♙d6

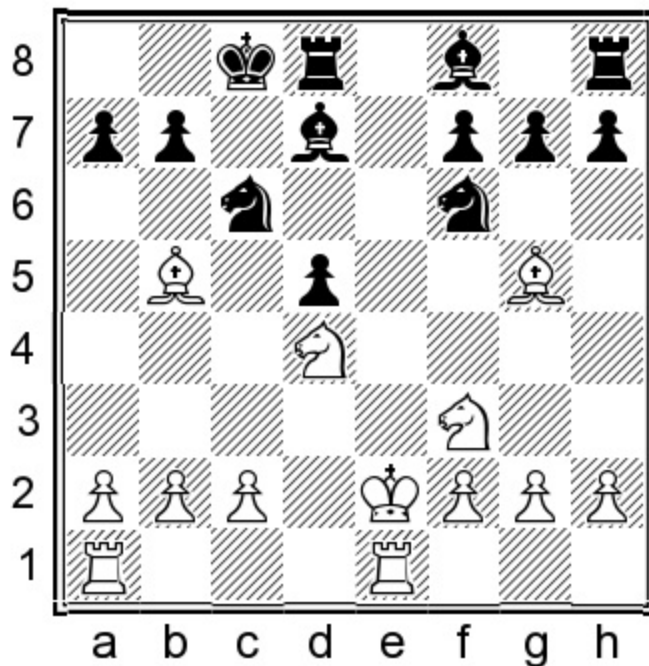
A) 10...♙c5!/? Immediately going for the fortress strategy might be the best option. This is one of the reasons why White should prefer 10.♜2b3!. 11.♙e3 ♜xd4+ 12.♜xd4



Position after: 12.♜xd4

12...♙xd4 [12...♙xb5+ 13.♜xb5 ♙xe3 14.♕xe3 ♔d7 15.♞hd1 ♜f6 16.f3 ♞he8+ 17.♕f2 a6 18.♜d4= ½–½ (41) Smirin, I (2676) – Korchnoi, V (2626) Biel 2002.] 13.♙xd7+ ♔xd7 14.♙xd4 f6 15.♞hd1 ♜e7 16.c4?! ♕e6 17.cxd5+ ♜xd5= This endgame would be advantageous if White's bishop was a light squared one, but things here are not dangerous with his dark squared one. Black held the draw in ½–½ (29) Ravi, T (2345) – Dolmatov, S (2610) Kolkata 1996.

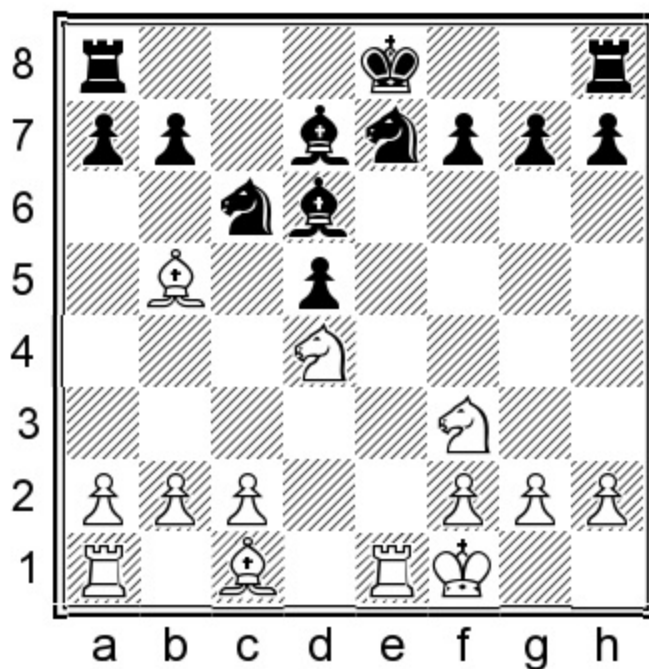
B) 10...♜f6 This recommendation of Marin's would not be mine. He is curious why it is hardly ever played, well let's answer that question here. 11.♞e1 0-0-0 12.♙g5!N



Position after: 12. ♕g5!N

Marin gives this as a sideline, but of course it is more critical than his 12. ♕f4. 12... ♕c5 13. ♖b3! Avoiding the exchanges on d4, it is better to control the d4 square than to stand on it! 13... ♕b6 14. ♔f1 ♜he8 15. ♝xe8 ♝xe8 16. ♕xf6 gxf6 17. ♞d1± Too bad Marin did not find this, but to be fair, there is more than one way to get a good position against 10... ♖f6. I am unable to make it my main line.

11. ♞e1 ♘ge7 12. ♔f1

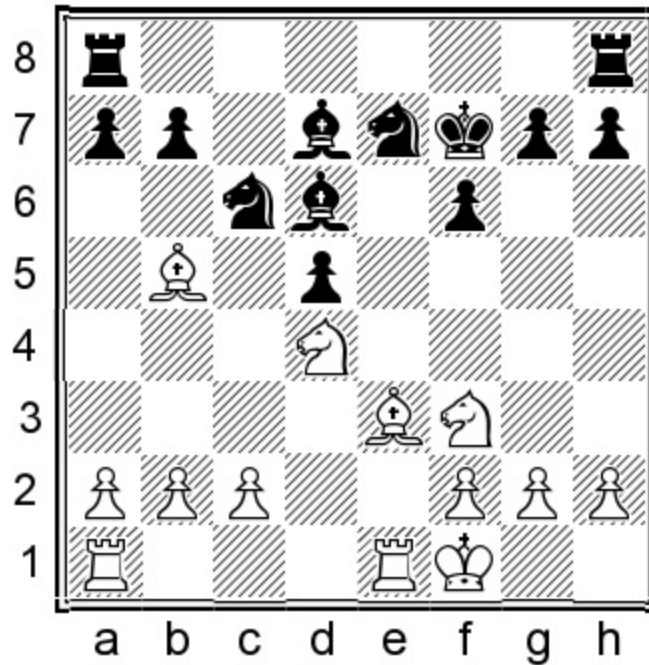


Position after: 12. ♔f1

12...a6

12...f6!?

A) 13. ♙e3 ♔f7!

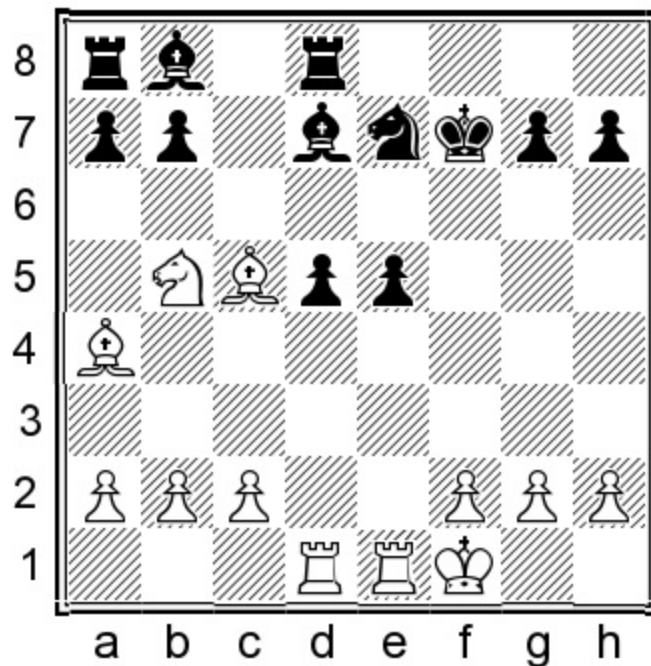


Position after: 13... ♔f7!

A key move, the king belongs here. 14. ♖ad1 ♜hd8 15. c3 a6 16. ♙d3 ♞e5= Despite the fact that the computer is quite optimistic for White at the moment, I can only see a lively but equal position. The black king has gone to the right square and despite his passive position, Black remained solid in ½–½ (52) Kasparov, S (2493) – Vysochin, S (2533) Wroclaw 2012.

B) 13. ♙a4! This is a very tricky move.

B1) 13... ♔f7 14. ♞b5 ♙b8 15. ♙e3 ♜d8 16. ♙c5 ♞e5 17. ♞xe5+! The black center will come under heavy fire. 17... fxe5 18. ♖ad1



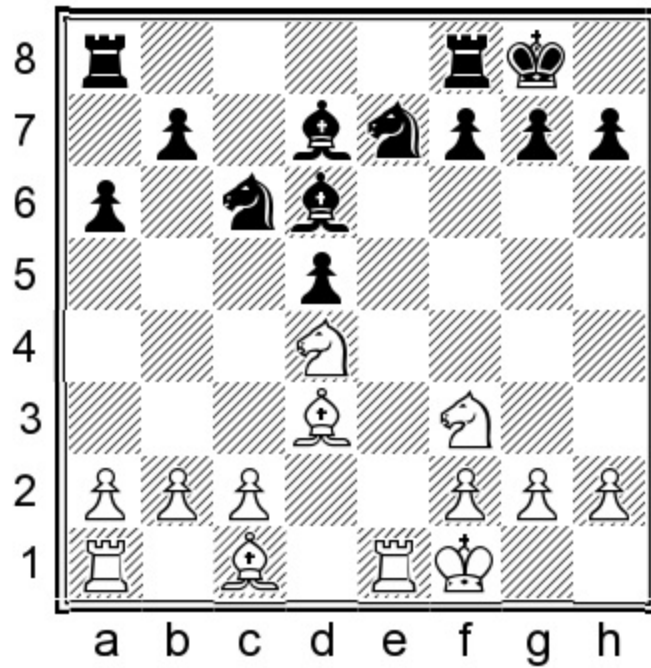
Position after: 18. ♖ad1

18... ♜g8! [18... ♙c6 19. ♞c3! ♙xa4 20. ♙xe7! ♚xe7 21. ♞xa4± The black pawns will be constantly harassed. In the long run the chances of making a mistake here with Black are astronomical.]

19. c4! ♜c8 20. ♞xd5 ♙e6 21. ♞d6+ ♙xd6 22. ♙xd6 ♞xc4 23. ♞a5 b6 24. b3! [24. ♞axe5!?±] 24... bxa5 25. bxc4 ♙xc4+ 26. ♜g1 ♙xa2 27. ♞xe5± White will collect all the pawns on the queenside with his pair of bishops and then he might even press with 3 vs 2.

B2) 13... ♞xd4 This is probably a better option, playing for a fortress. 14. ♙xd7+ ♜xd7 15. ♞xd4± Now Black would like to exchange his bishop for the knight and set up a fortress with ...b6. Still, White retains good chances to play for a win.

13. ♙d3 0-0

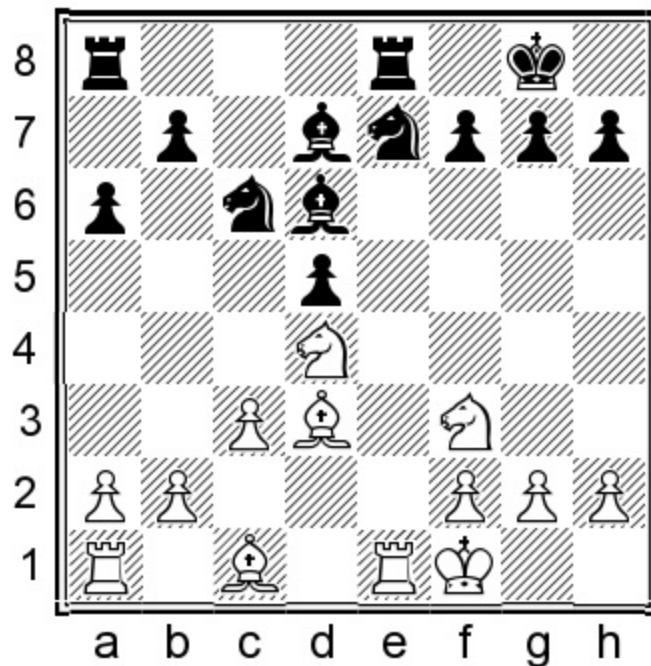


Position after: 13...0-0

14.c3

14.♙e3!?N 14...♘b4 15.♙e2 ♘f5! 16.♘xf5 ♙xf5 17.♘d4! ♙g6 18.c3 ♘d3 19.♙xd3 ♙xd3+= Black has a typical fortress position, though White can still try.

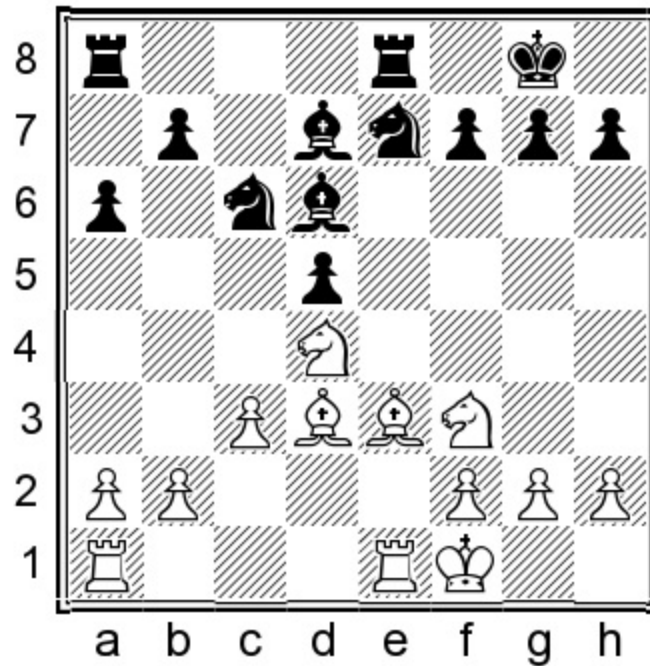
14...♞fe8



Position after: 14...♞fe8

15. ♖e3

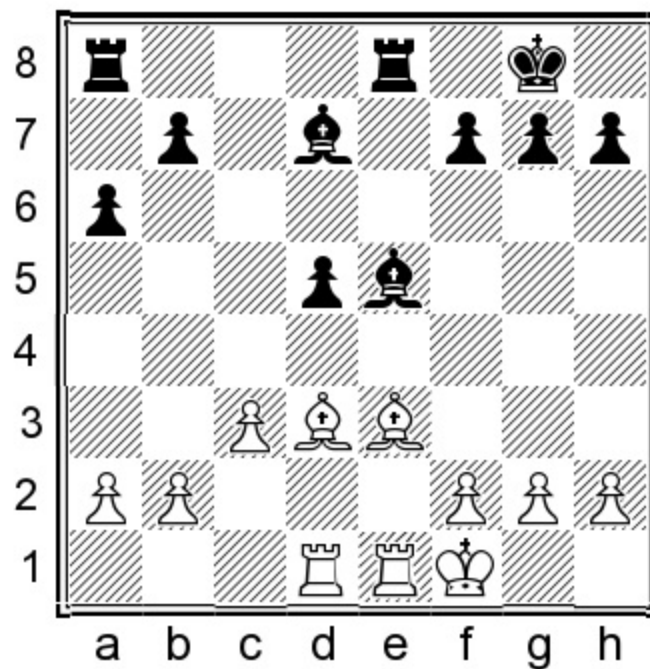
15.h3!? f6! [15... ♖xd4 16. ♗xd4 ♖c6 17. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 18. ♗xc6 ♕xc6 19. ♖e3± 1-0 (54) Akopian, V (2660) – Lputian, S (2585) Yerevan 1997.] 16. ♖d1 ♗e5 17. ♖e2 ♕a4 18. ♗b3 ♗c4=



Position after: 15. ♖e3

15...f6!?N

15... ♖xd4 16. ♗xd4 ♖c6 17. ♗f3 ♗e5 18. ♗xe5 ♕xe5 19. ♖ad1±



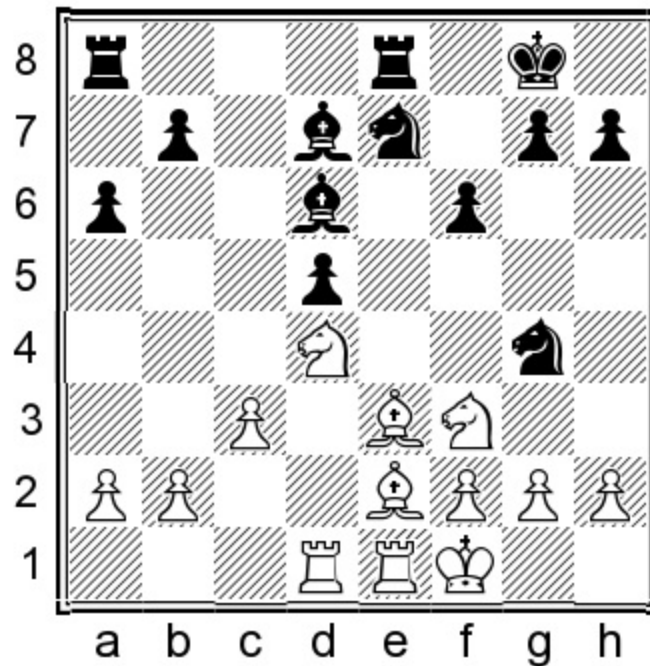
Position after: 19. ♖ad1±

Howell gradually outplayed Short, but somehow the game managed to end in a draw ½–½ (63)
Howell, D (2644) – Short, N (2679) London 2016. Still Short's opening play was not ideal in this game.

16. ♖ad1 ♜e5 17. ♙e2

17. ♜xe5 fxe5 18. ♜b3 a5 19. ♙c5 ♜c8 20. ♙e2 ♙c6 21. ♙g4 b6=

17... ♜g4



Position after: 17... ♜g4

Threatening to capture twice on h2 as g3 at the end would allow ... ♙h3#.

18. ♜c2

18. ♙d3 ♜e5 19. ♙e2=

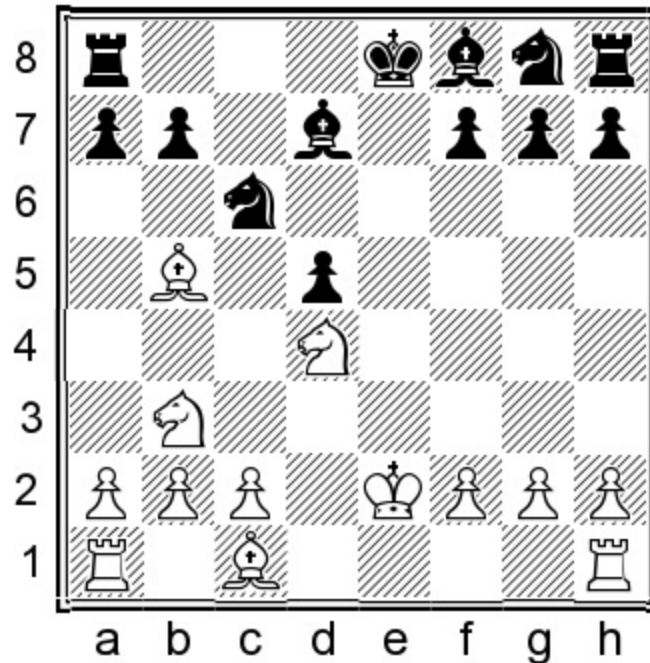
18... ♜xh2+ 19. ♜xh2 ♙xh2 20. ♜b4 ♖ad8 21. ♜xd5 ♜xd5 22. ♖xd5 ♙e6! 23. ♖xd8 ♖xd8=

Despite the fact that White can push his queenside pawns, Black's control over the d-file compensates for this. White still has a very small edge.

b) 10. ♜2b3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. ♜d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5. ♜gf3 ♜c6 6. ♙b5 cxd4 7. ♖e2+ ♖e7 8. ♜xd4! ♖xe2+ chessstairing.com

9.♙xe2 ♖d7 10.♘2b3!



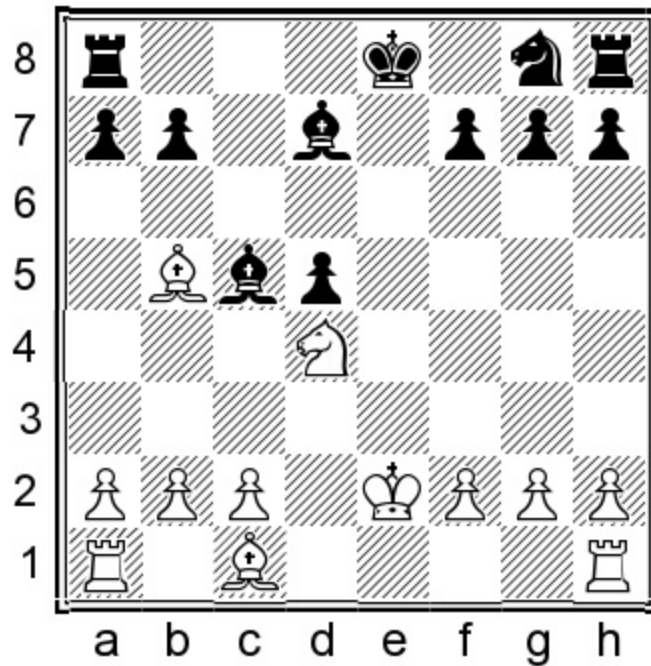
Position after: 10.♘2b3!

The idea of this move is to control the c5-square. The downside is that h2 is often left unprotected and Black can capture there in several lines if the bishop retreats to e2. Still, it is difficult for Black to find the right moves here.

10...♖d6

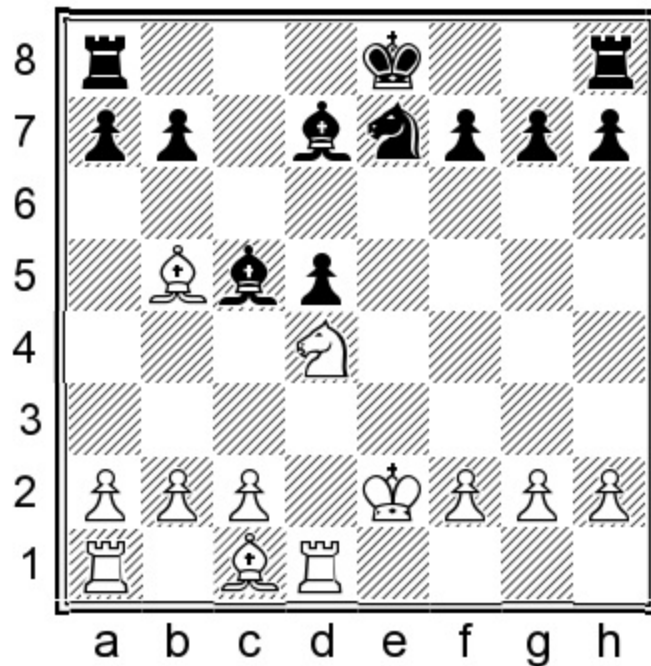
A) 10...a6 is too slow. 11.♖d3 ♖d6 [11...0-0-0 12.♘xc6±] 12.♘f5 ♖e5 13.f4 ♖xf5 14.♖xf5 g6 15.fxe5 gxf5 16.♖g5± White will probably manage to sweep all the weak pawns off the board in the end.

B) 10...♘xd4+!? is a way to play for a fortress, but it should not be enough for equality. Korchnoi's plan in these positions is actually to exchange all the pieces and draw. We will see more about this plan later. 11.♘xd4 ♖c5 [11...♖xb5+ 12.♘xb5 ♖c8 13.c3 a6 14.♘d4 ♖c5 15.♖d1± gives White a clear plus.]



Position after: 11...♙c5

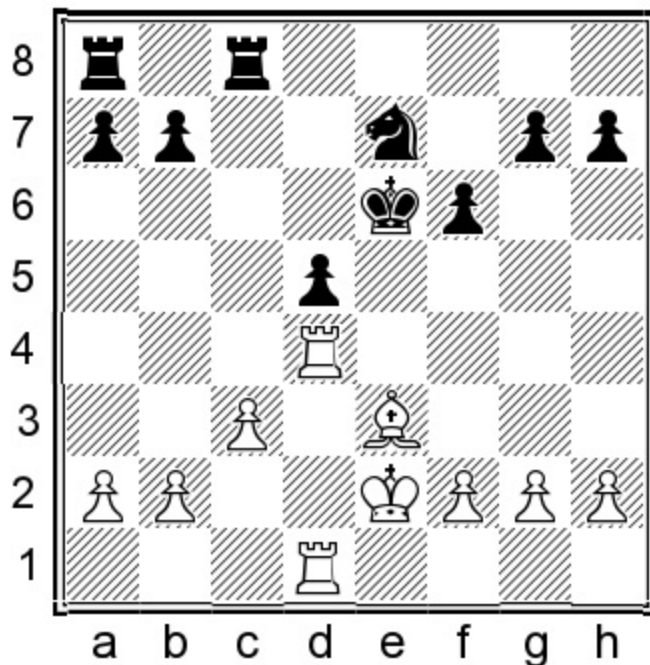
12.♖d1! [12.♙e3?! ♙xd4 13.♙xd7+ ♔xd7 14.♙xd4 f6= Now we have transposed to the Ravi – Dolmatov ending which is a fortress. Again we are seeing that the best strategy for White is to vacate the d4-square as soon as possible.] 12...♞e7



Position after: 12...♞e7

13.a4!N This is a useful inclusion because it will help weaken Black's dark squares in the end, which will be a good thing after White has taken on d4. The fortress with ...b6, ...f6 and ♞c6 will

not be possible to construct. [13.♙e3 ♘xd4 14.♙xd7+ ♔xd7 15.♞xd4 ♜hc8! 16.c3 ♙e6 17.♞ad1 f6=



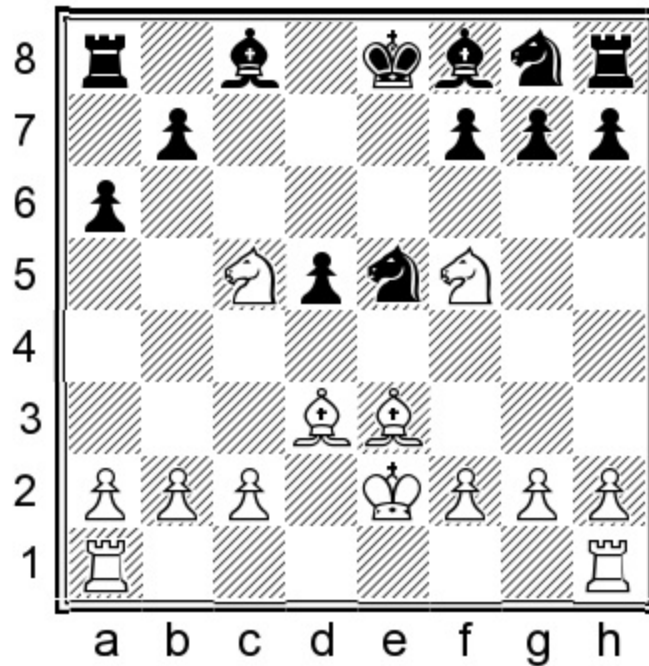
Position after: 17...f6=

This is the fortress position I am talking about. It is important to maintain the pawn on a7. $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ (35) Fedorchuk, S (2603) – Eingorn, V (2588) Metz 2007.] 13...a6 Black is not able to do without this move. 14.♙xd7+ ♔xd7 15.♙e3 ♜hc8 16.c3 ♙e6 17.♞ad1 ♞f6= With the pawn on a6, Black is probably unable to hold this position.

11.♞e1!

Marin does not give this move because it has not been played by any strong players. This is very strange, I mean, these positions are all about the e-file. 90% of this book is about the e-file!

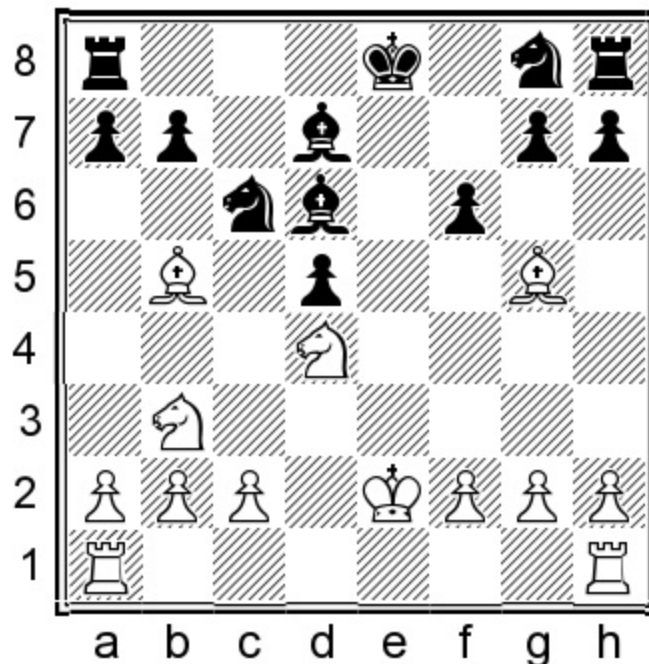
A) 11.♙e3 is Marin's main line, quite understandably because it scores rather well for White. Fortunately we have a big improvement for Black. 11...a6!N 12.♙d3 ♘e5 Immediately taking the initiative. 13.♘f5 ♙f8! 14.♘c5 ♙c8!



Position after: 14...♙c8!

Isn't this beautiful, the two bishops support each other by attacking their opponents. 15.♘h4 ♙g4+!
 16.f3 ♙c8!= I might be awarding way too many exclamation marks, but this is just too cool. Black will exchange on d3 later and the knight on h4 is offside. Obviously this is only a sample line, but I believe Black is solid in all lines after 11...a6.

B) 11.♙g5?! This is provoking a move that Black actually wants to make anyway. 11...f6



Position after: 11...f6

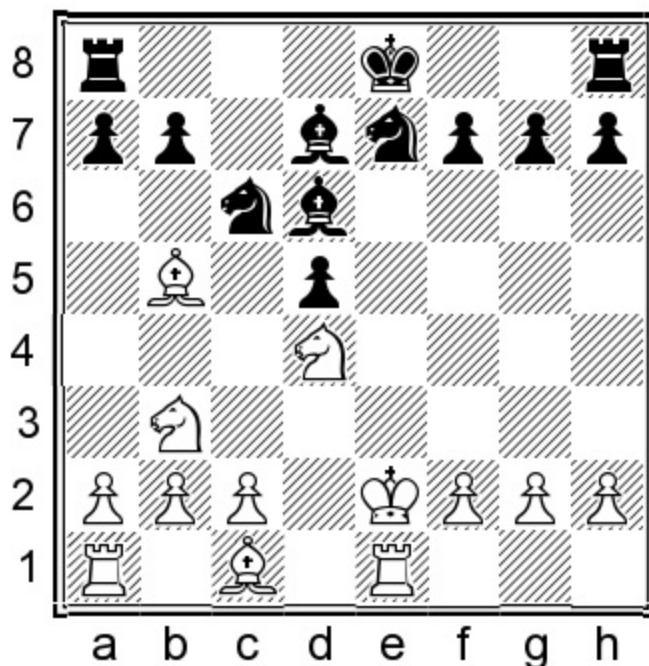
B1) 12.♔h4 ♕e5!N [12...♖ge7= ½-½ (71) Naiditsch, Y (2408) – Peptan, C (2394) Baku 2016.]
 13.♞ad1 ♗ge7 14.♕g3 h5!= Black can slowly start thinking about winning the game.

B2) 12.♕e3

B2.1) 12...♖ge7 13.♕d3? 0-1 (85) McShane, L (2438) – Gdanski, J (2535) Germany 2000.
 [13.♞hd1=] 13...♗e5!N and Black is a little better.

B2.2) 12...a6N 13.♕d3 ♗e5 14.♕f5 ♖c4= is at least equal.

11...♗ge7

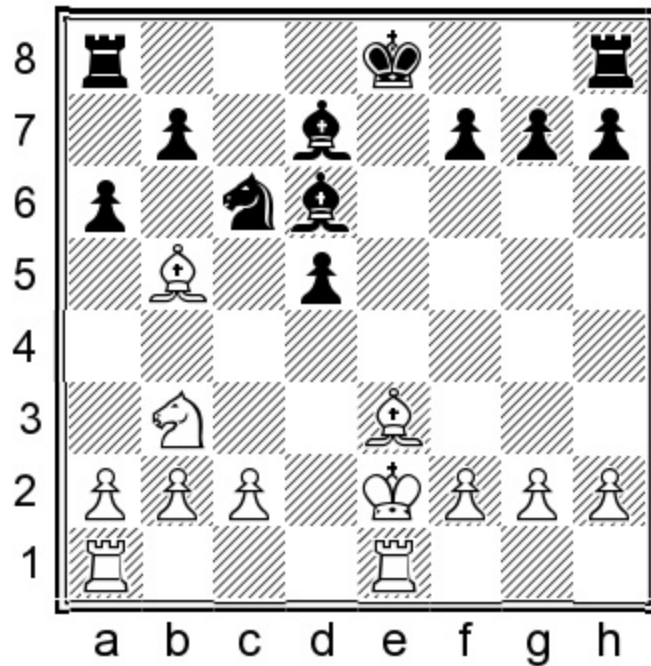


Position after: 11...♗ge7

12.♔f1

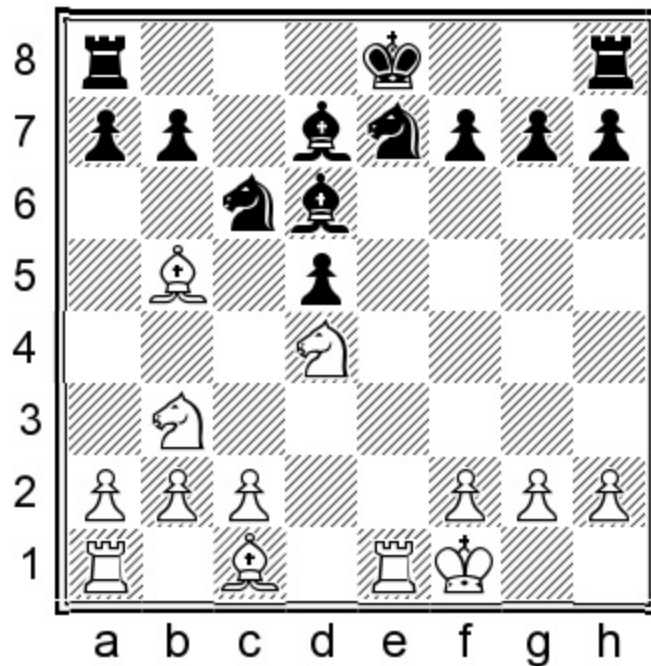
First things first, it is a successful strategy to wait until Black solves his e-file problems before playing ♕e3.

12.♕e3!? a6 As a rule of thumb, ♕e3 is usually met by this move. That's because ...a6 is a slow move, and ♕e3 blocks the e-file, which affords Black the time to play it. 13.♖xc6 [13.♕d3?! ♗e5= Without the possibility of ♗f5, Black has equalized.] 13...♖xc6!



Position after: 13... Nxc6!

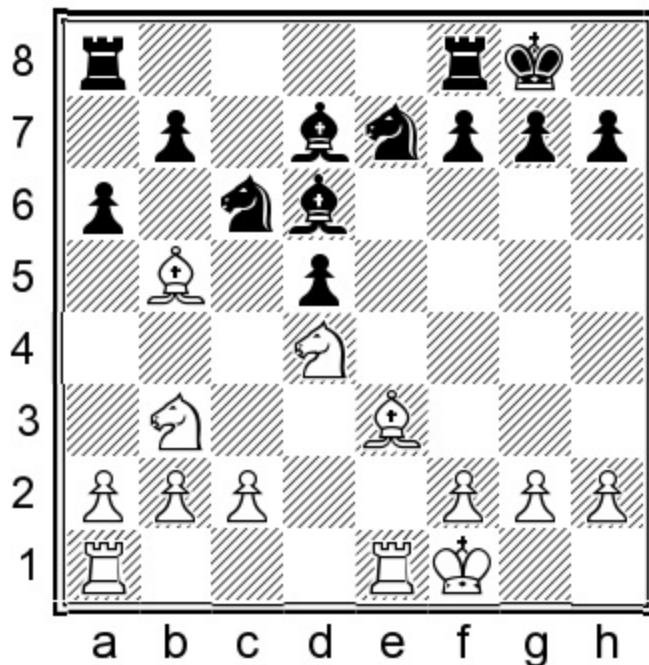
14. Qc5 [14. Qxc6 bxc6 15. Qc5 Qe7= White does not have a lot here either.] 14... axb5 15. Qxd6 f6 16. Qd2+ Qf7 17. Nd4 Qxd4 18. Re7+ Qg6 19. Rxd7 Rhd8 20. Rxd8 Rxd8= Again this endgame of knight versus dark squared bishop turns out to be a fortress. The knight on c6 protects all the vital breakthrough squares.



Position after: 12... Qf1

12...f6!N

A) 12...0-0 The only move that has been tried here. 13.♔e3 a6

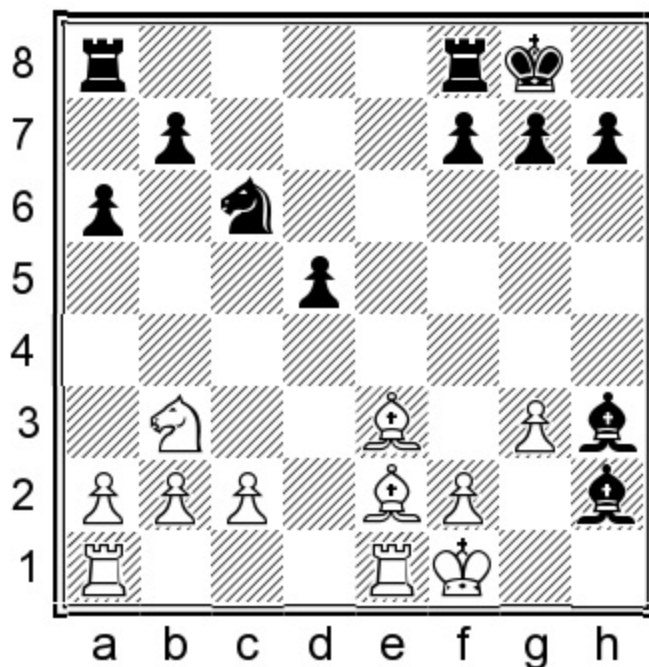


Position after: 13...a6

A1) 14.♔d3 ♖e5 15.h3!? [15.♔f4 f6= Black is solid here.] 15...♜xd3 16.cxd3 ♜f5 17.♔d2= The players soon agreed to a draw. I have to say, I have rarely seen a 1900 rating encounter with so few errors! ½-½ (20) Urhegyi, F (1921) – Vlcek, P (1954) Slovakia 2015.

A2) 14.♜xc6!N

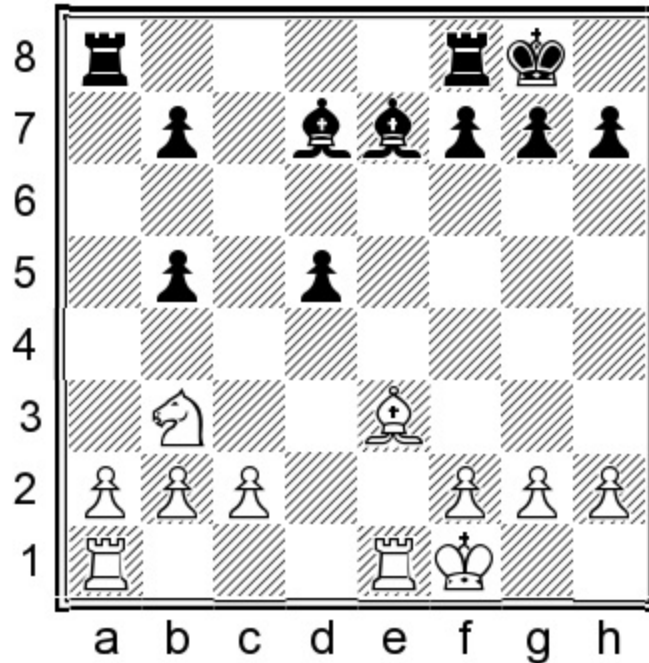
A2.1) 14...♜xc6 15.♔e2! ♔xh2 16.♖ad1 [16.g3?? ♔h3#



Position after: 16...♔h3#

I once fell for this trick against my younger brother in a simul. It still hurts, because it's the only time he has ever beaten me.] 16...♔e6 17.♕f3 ♕e5 18.c3 d4 [18...♖fd8? 19.♕b6! Black cannot hold the pawn.] 19.cxd4 ♕c4+ 20.♔g1 ♕xb3 21.axb3± White has a slight advantage with the two bishops in an open position.

A2.2) 14...axb5!? 15.♗xe7+ ♕xe7



Position after: 15...♕xe7

16.a3! [16.♕c5?! White should not be in a hurry strategically. 16...♕xc5 17.♗xc5 ♕f5 18.c3 ♖fc8 19.♖e5 ♖xc5 20.♖xf5 g6=] 16...♖fe8 [16...b4 17.♕d2 ♕f6 18.♕xb4 ♖fe8 19.c3± Black has some compensation but not enough.] 17.♕c5 ♕f6 18.♖xe8+ ♖xe8 19.♕d4± There is a decent chance of an opposite-colored bishop ending, but apart from that White has very decent winning chances.

B) 12...a6N 13.♕e2! ♕xh2 14.♕f3 ♕d6 15.♕xd5 0-0 16.♕e4± White has annoying pressure and a possible outside passed pawn scenario.

13.h4!

Anyone who has ever analyzed with Leela would have guessed that this move came from her, but no. It was good old Stockfish who came up with this bright idea, enabling White to retreat with ♕e2 after ...a6.

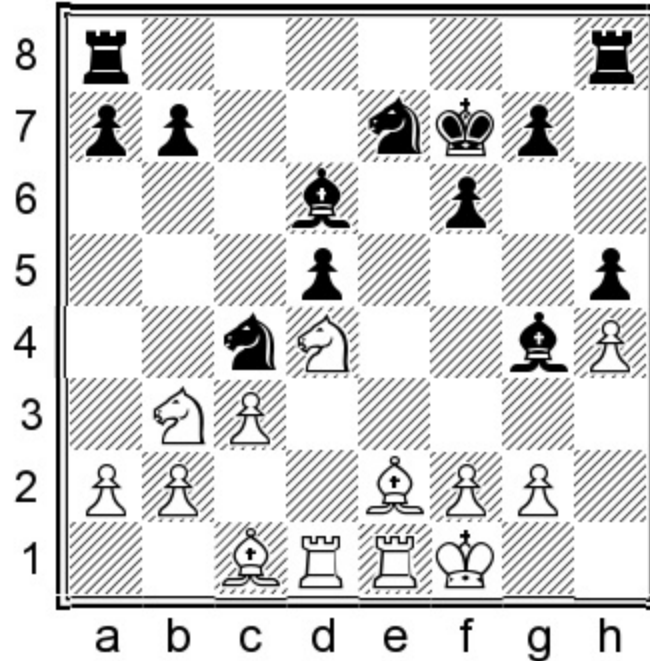
13...♔f7 14.♕e2!

Black has solved his e-file problems so now White doesn't mind blocking it.

14...h5

14...a6!?

15.♙e3 ♘g4 16.c3 ♞e5 17.♞ad1 ♞c4 18.♙c1±



Position after: 18. ♙c1±

White has anticipated Black's ideas very well and has achieved harmonious piece placement. After this prophylactic phase, White is now ready for action.

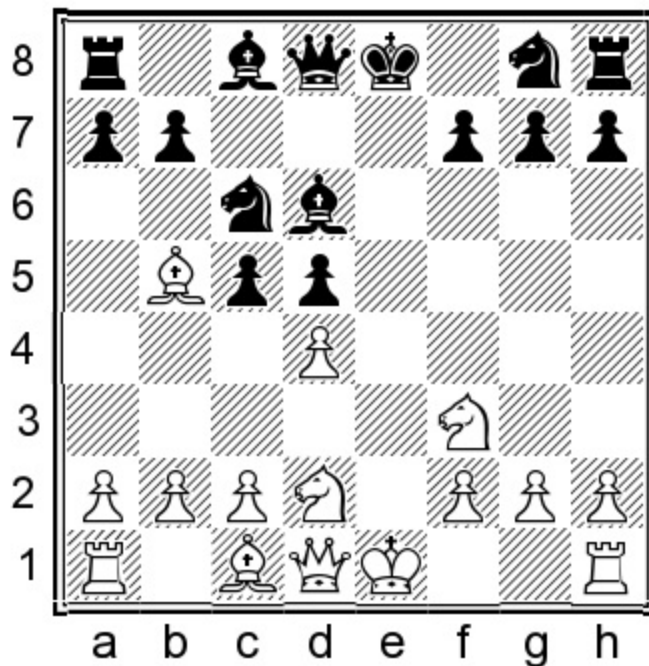
Conclusion

We started our journey into 5...♞c6 by exploring the tricky 6...cxd4 in this chapter. It shows that White should know a lot of things in order to get a better position against 4...exd5. Unfortunately I have not been able to find full equality in this line. White has two decent tries with 8.♞b3! and 8.♞xd4 combined with 10.♞2b3!. On the other hand, many White players are probably unaware of the subtleties and novelties pointed out here, which means I will probably give 6...cxd4 a try someday. But to be clear, as a permanent repertoire choice it has failed the test.

Chapter 9

6...♞d6 – The central station and how to get there

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞gf3 ♞c6 6.♞b5 ♞d6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 9 – 6...♞d6 (The central station and how to get there)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞gf3 ♞c6 6.♞b5 ♞d6 7.dxc5 ♞xc5 8.0-0 ♞ge7

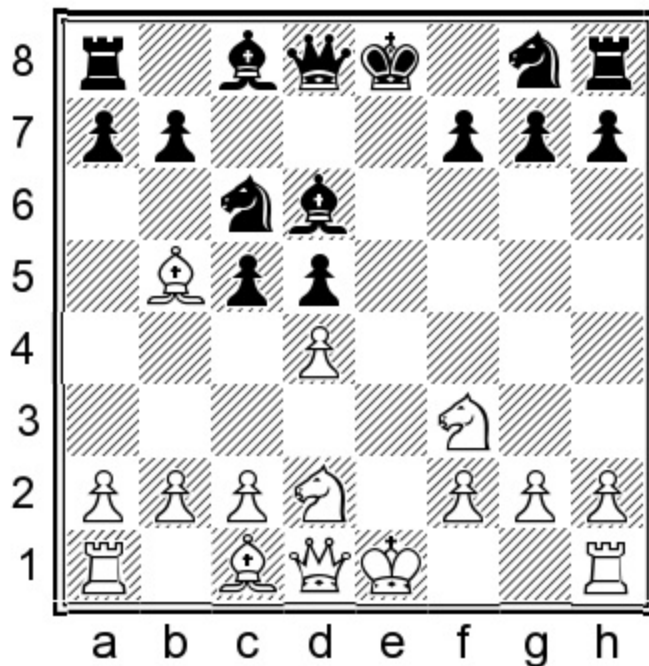
a) 9.c4

b) 9.♞b3 ♞d6 10.--

c) 9.♞b3 ♞d6 10.♞fd4, 10.♞bd4

a) 9.c4

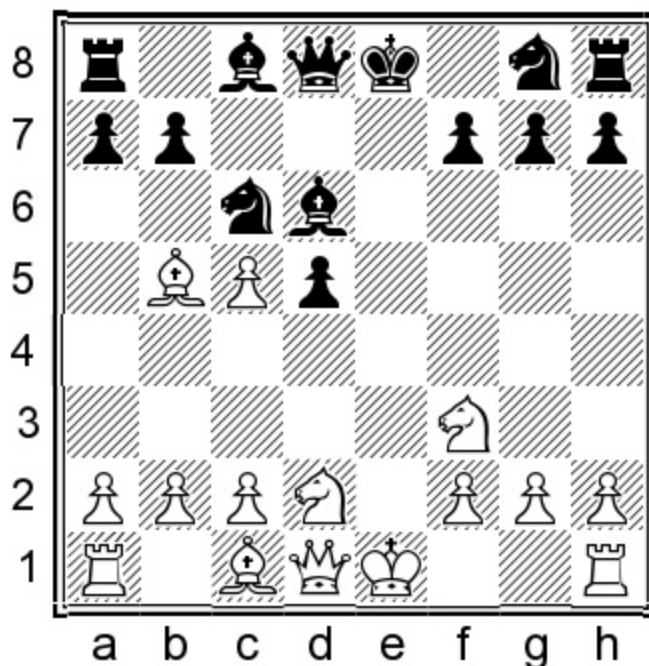
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♞d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♞gf3 ♞c6 6.♞b5 ♞d6



Position after: 6...♗d6

We have reached the classical main line of the system. Even though it might not be the real main line anymore, it is still a respected choice. Let's start our investigations by covering the minor options. If you liked the chapter on 6...cxd4, then you will need to know the main line with 6...cxd4 7.0-0 which will be covered here.

7.dxc5

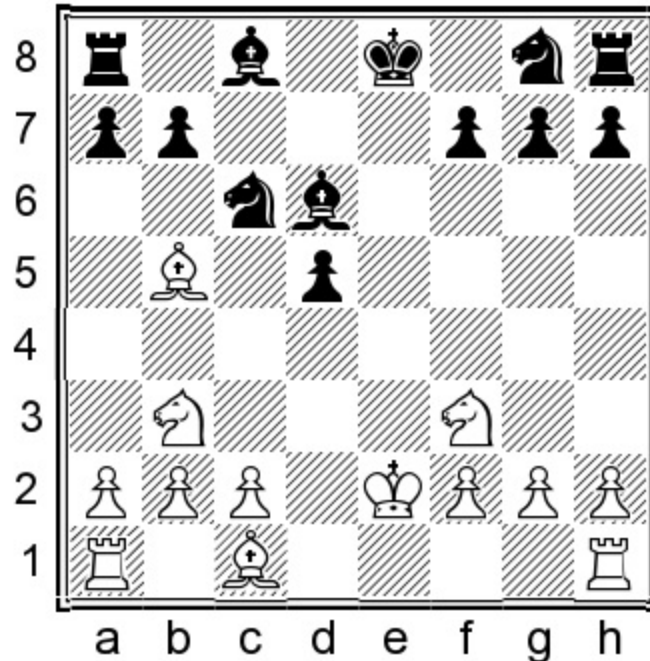


Position after: 7.dxc5

7...♙xc5

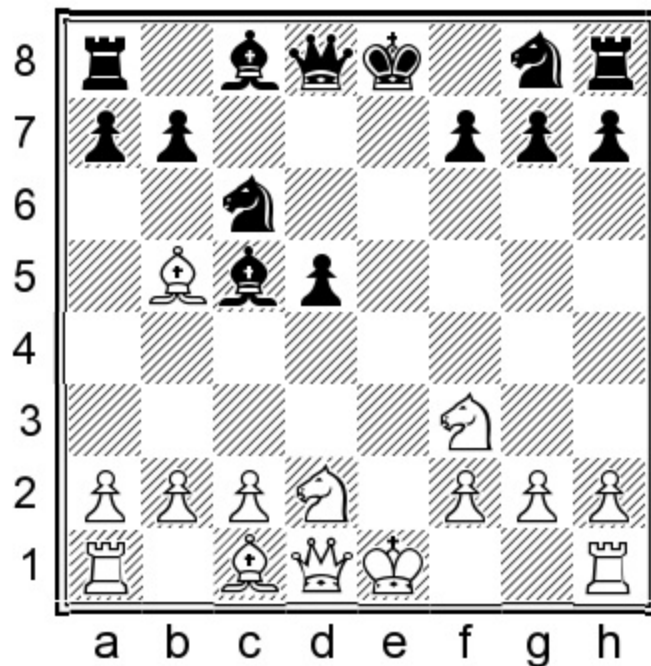
White is happy to make this exchange now that it costs Black an extra tempo.

7...♛e7+!? allows Black to get another version of the endgames seen in the previous chapter. In practice Black is drawing a lot of games here. 8.♛e2 ♛xe2+ 9.♔xe2 ♙xc5 10.♞b3 ♙d6



Position after: 10...♙d6

This position scores surprisingly well for Black (50%). Even though White should have an edge, it is hard to find. One of the biggest challenges for White is the sheer number of options to choose from. There are many ways to go wrong. 11.♞e1!? The aim again is to put pressure on the e-file as soon as possible. There are other tries too, but I have decided to skim over them as otherwise they could take up half a chapter. Therefore if you wish to adopt this as a pet line, I'd advise you to do some further investigation yourself. 11...♞ge7 12.♔f1 f6 Both sides have a slightly improved version of their piece placement from the previous chapter. White is not blocking the d4 square but instead controlling it, and Black has saved time by omitting the move ...♙d7. I believe this line is also advantageous for White. 13.♙e3 ♔f7 14.♞ad1± White has a slight plus but it is easy to let it slip into an equal position.



Position after: 7... Qxc5

8.0-0

8. Nf3 Qd6 9. Qd4 This is a line that Psakhis briefly mentions. [9.0-0 is a transposition to the main lines.] 9... Nf6 10.0-0 0-0 11. Qxc6 bxc6 12. Qf4! This is the idea behind 9. Qd4, seizing control of the dark squares with the knights. 12... Qxf4 13. Qxf4 Qb6 14. Qd4 Re8= Black is marginally ahead in development which makes up for the slightly weakened dark squares.

8... Nge7

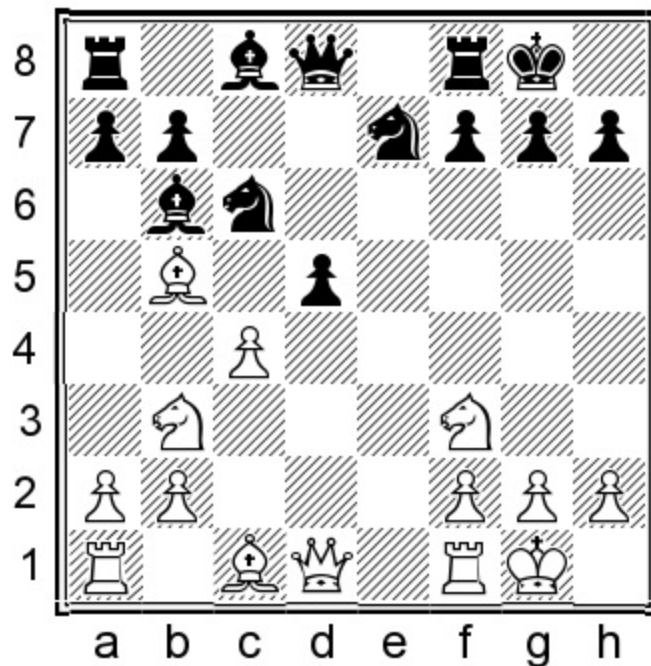
8... Nf6?! 9. Re1+ [9. Qe2+!?!] 9... Qe6 10. Nf3 Qb6 11. Nbd4 0-0 12. Qxc6 bxc6 13. Nxc6±

9.c4!?

This line was considered ‘interesting’ by Lev Psakhis in his monumental works on the French. I consider it to be ‘very interesting’. The c4 pawn cannot be taken and White plans Nf3 and c5. Black is having trouble dealing with this in correspondence games, so let’s pay serious attention. Please note that all these 9th move alternatives would be impossible with an extra black pawn on d4, as we had in the previous chapter.

9.c3?! Playing like this will give Black more favorable versions of both the ... Qb6 and ... Qd6 lines. I would still recommend putting the bishop on d6, after which we will see a transposition into the 10.c3 line.

9...0-0 10. Nf3 Qb6



Position after: 10...♙b6

11.c5!

11.♙xc6!? was Psakhis' recommendation. 11...dxc4! [11...bxc6 12.c5 ♙c7 13.♘bd4 White is still pushing for an edge here.] 12.♙e4 ♚xd1 13.♖xd1 cxb3 14.axb3 ♜c6!= Black is slightly behind in development, but that is not such a big deal considering the structural weaknesses of White's queenside.

11...♙c7 12.♖e1!

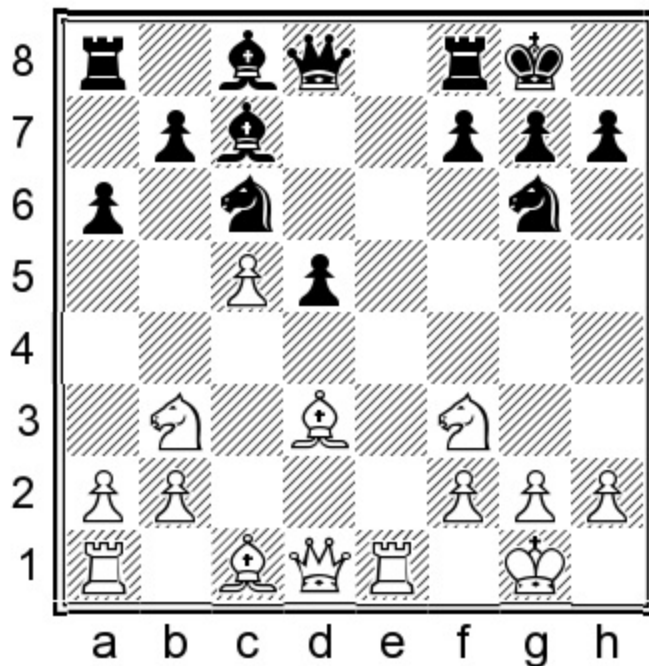
The most critical try. Other moves do not pose problems.

12...a6! 13.♙d3

13.♙xc6 ♜xc6!=

13...♜g6

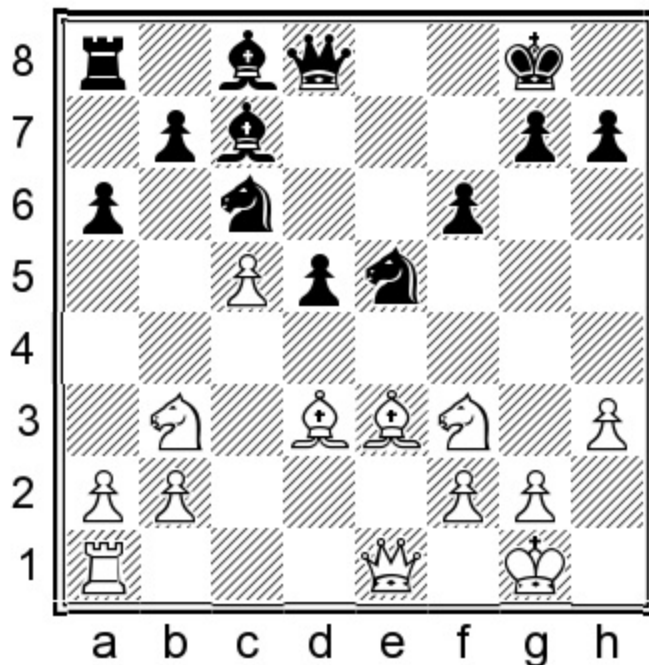
13...h6!?N



Position after: 13... Nf6

14. Qg5

14.h3 Rxe8! Again the e-file is of paramount importance. [14... Nf4 15. Qc2 Qe6 16. Nbd4± 1-0 (63) Zieba, Z (2265) – Van Daatselaar, J (2232) ICCF email 2013.] 15. Qg5 [15. Rxe8+ Qxe8 16. Nbd4 Nge5!±] 15... Rxe1+ 16. Qxe1 f6 17. Qe3 Nge5± Black got his counterplay in and has a pleasant equal position.

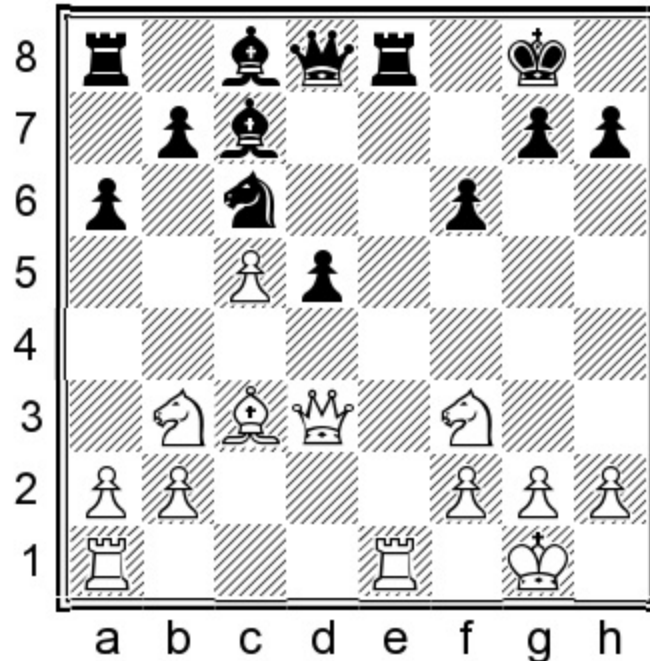


Position after: 17... Nge5±

14...f6 15.♔d2

15.♙e3 ♖ge5=

15...♗ge5 16.♙c3 ♗xd3 17.♚xd3 ♜e8!⇒

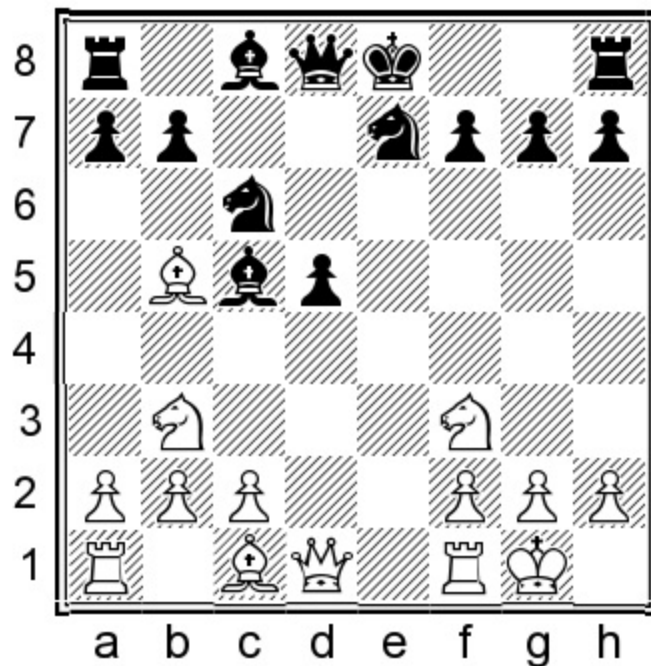


Position after: 17...♜e8!⇒

Note again that it is possible to sacrifice the IQP when you possess the bishop pair. I must say that this line is rather difficult to play unless you are extremely well prepared in it as Black, which is one of the reasons I have instead chosen 6...♚e7+ as the main choice.

b) 9.♗b3 ♙d6 10.--

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♗d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♗c6 6.♙b5 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9.♗b3



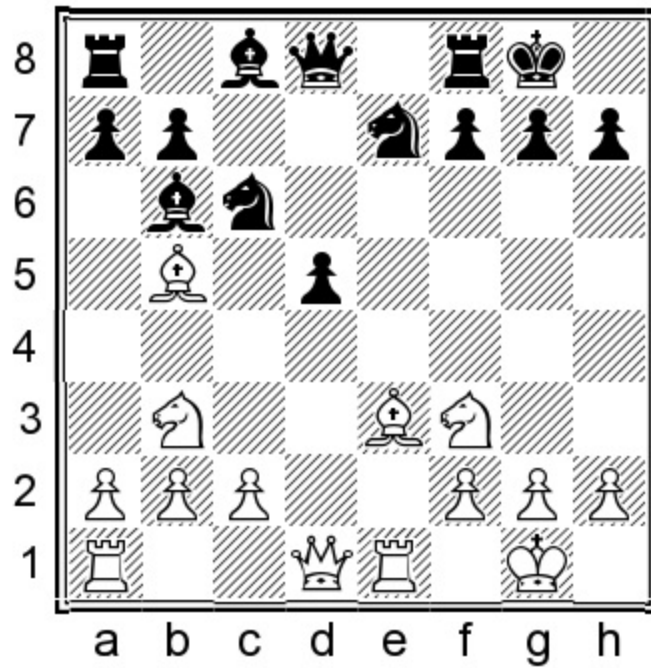
Position after: 9. ♖b3

Black is presented with an interesting choice about where to retreat his bishop. On b6, the bishop would be more exposed to a future ♕e3, which is why 9...♗d6 exists as the main line. Still 9...♗b6 has the right to exist, and White probably only gets a small plus there. Besides 9. ♖b3, there are some interesting sidelines to be dealt with.

9...♗d6

This position used to be considered the ‘tabiya’ of the 4... exd5 system, especially before 5... ♗f6 came into fashion. I would like to refer to this rich position as the ‘central station’. White has a lot of possible options and it would only be confusing to discuss all of them at this point. In this chapter we will pay most of our attention to the options which could arise from 6...cxd4 as well as from 6...♗d6. Those are 10. ♖bd4 and 10. ♗fd4. But first, let’s get the avalanche of minor alternatives out of the way.

9...♗b6 10. ♖e1 0-0 11. ♕e3!

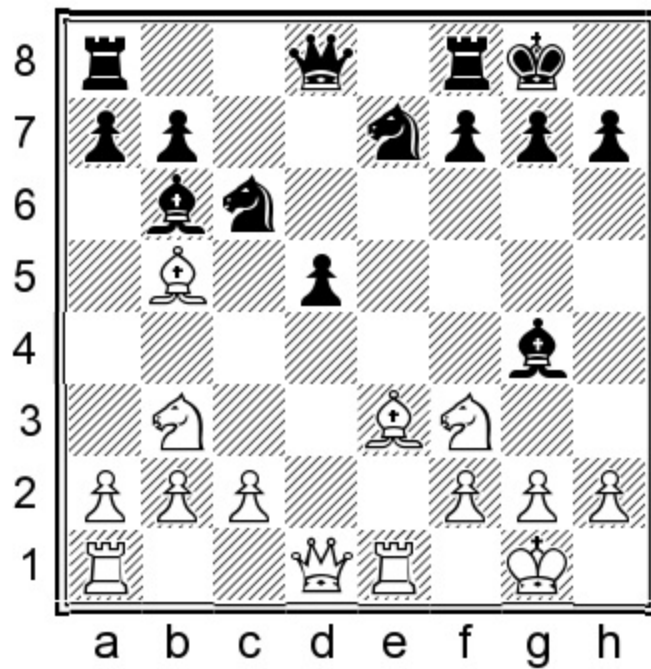


Position after: 11. ♖e3!

Black has a few options here but none of them seem satisfactory. Everything leads to a comfortable edge for White.

A) 11... ♗c7!? 12. ♗c5 ♜e8 13. ♗xc6 bxc6 14. ♞e2 ♗e6 15. ♞a6±

B) 11... ♗g4

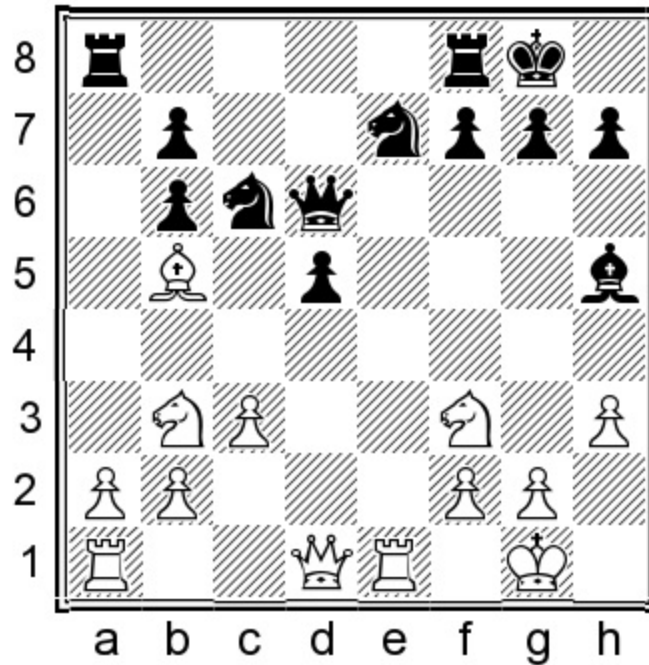


Position after: 11... ♗g4

B1) 12.♙xb6?! ♚xb6 13.♙xc6 ♘xc6 14.♚xd5 ♘b4 15.♚e4 ♙xf3 16.gxf3 h6! [16...a5!?±] 17.c3 ♘c6 18.♞ad1 ♞fe8!= Having knights on the board will favor the queen versus the two rooks, so White should not take on e8 in a practical game. Overall, the game remains equal as long as the heavy artillery does not get traded off. 1-0 (43) Safarli, E (2680) – Pavlovic, M (2495) Zürich 2017.

B2) 12.h3!

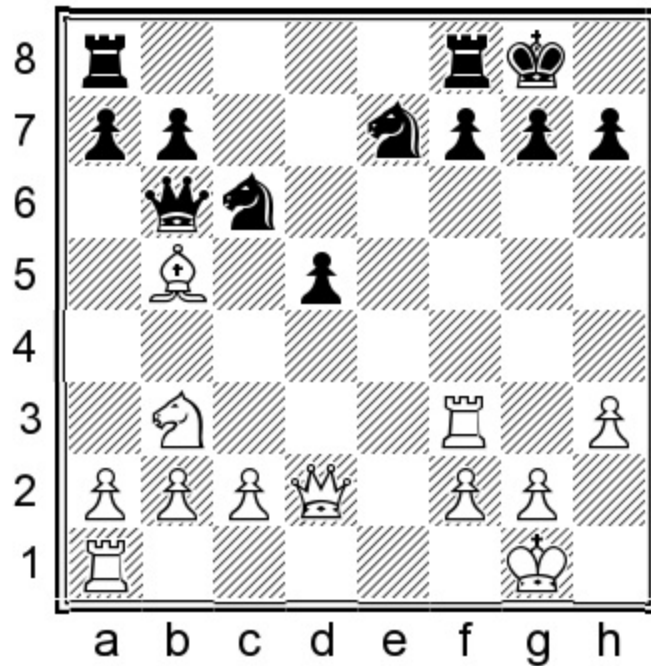
B2.1) 12...♙h5?! 13.♙xb6 axb6 14.c3 ♚d6



Position after: 14...♚d6

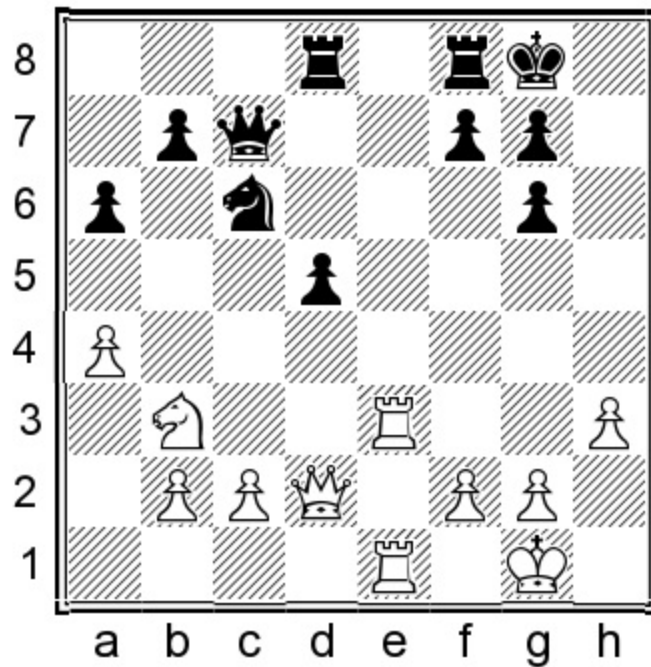
15.♚d3! [15.♙e2?! reaches a position which has been played quite often, with White having an immense score. The fact that Korchnoi drew against Anand does not mean a lot. Korchnoi did not at all mind having a worse position in the isolani. 15...♞ad8 16.♘fd4± ½-½ (52) Anand, V (2720) – Korchnoi, V (2615) London 1994.] 15...♘g6 [15...♙xf3 16.♚xf3±] 16.♘fd4± Bonanate, V – Celestini, M corr. 1993.

B2.2) 12...♙xe3 13.♞xe3 ♙h5 14.♚d2 ♙xf3 15.♞xf3 ♚b6!



Position after: 15... ♕b6!

♙xc6 does not win a pawn at the moment! 16.a4 ♖ad8 17.♗e1 a6 18.♙d3 [18.♙f1!± It is important to keep pressure on the d5-pawn, which could be amplified by a kingside fianchetto.] 18...♘g6 19.♗fe3 ♕c7 20.♙xg6?! Though most of the advantage had already disappeared, White should have gone for ♙f1!. 20...hxg6=

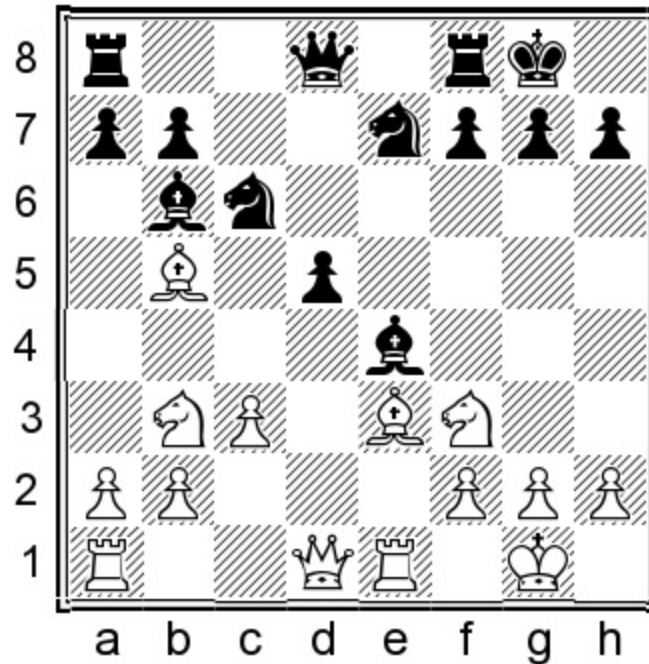


Position after: 20...hxg6=

This game clearly highlights how difficult it is to win these positions even when Black is a bit

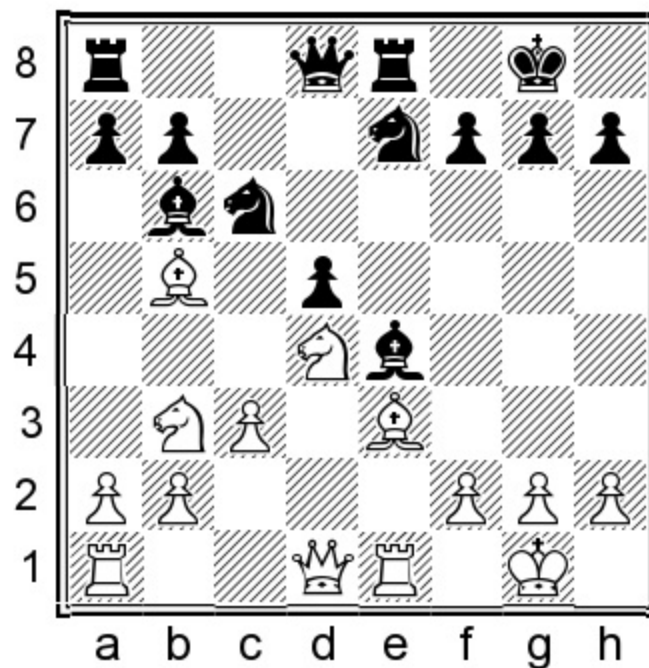
worse. ½-½ (50) McShane, L (2568) – Korchnoi, V (2642) Reykjavik 2003.

C) 11...♔f5! Top practice, correspondence games, Leela and good old Stockfish are all in agreement with this move. 12.c3 [12.♙d3?! d4!=] 12...♙e4



Position after: 12...♙e4

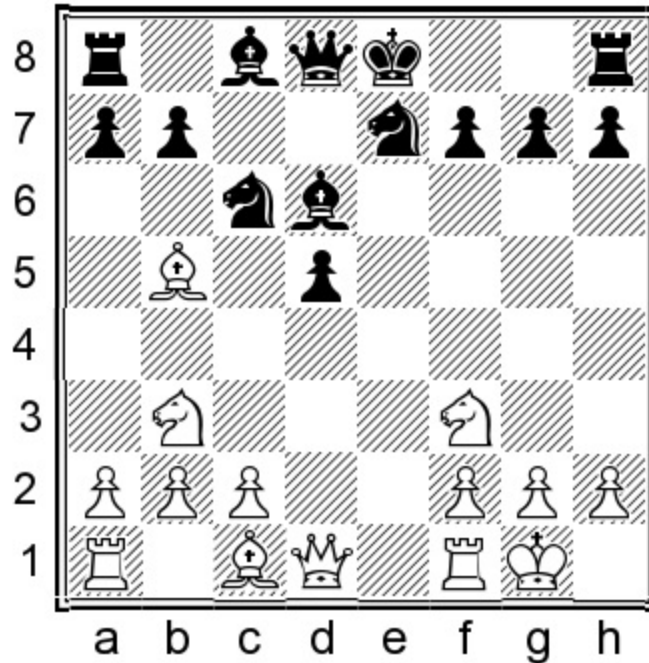
C1) 13.♘fd4 Most strong players try this plan in order to play f3 but the good news is, it's inaccurate! This is wonderful because it has also been recommended by John Shaw in his playing 1.e4 series. 13...♖e8!



Position after: 13...♖e8!

Shaw does not even mention this move. Throughout this book you will have noticed that the e-file is the most important strategic asset in the position. 14.f3 ♔g6 15.♕d2 h6= [15...♘f5± ½-½ (29) Lindholm, E (2197) – Wicklund Hansen, G (1901) ICCF email 2012.]

C2) 13.♙c5!? ♙xc5! 14.♘xc5 ♗b6 15.♙xc6 ♗xc5 16.♙a4 ♘c6 17.♘d2 ♖ae8± Even though this is the best try for White, Black seems to be very solid. ½-½ (51) Johansen, O (2278) – Wicklund Hansen, G (1901) ICCF email 2012.

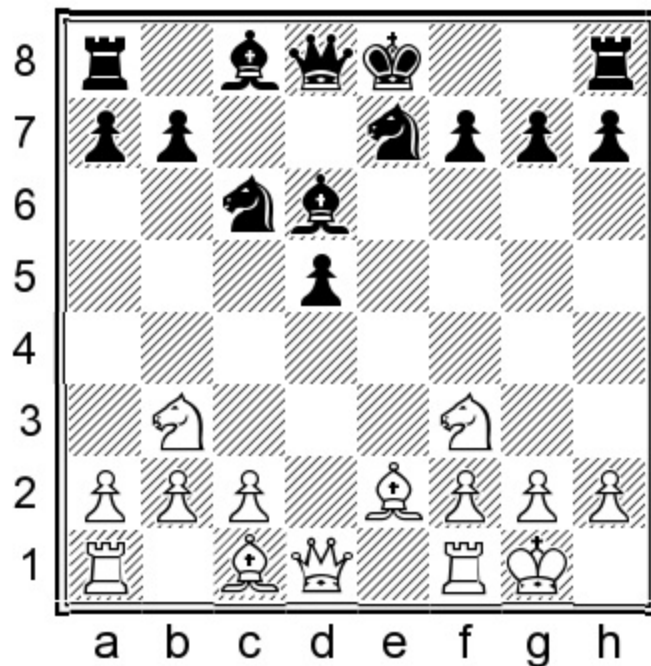


Position after: 9...♙d6

10.♙d2!?

A rare and unique line. The obvious plan is to put the bishop on c3. Fortunately it is a little bit slow, moving the same piece twice.

A) 10.♙d3 transposes into virtually every other line after 10...0-0. White is allowing one extra option, though I would not recommend it. 10...♘b4?! [10...0-0 is my recommendation, transposing to the main options.] 11.♙e2 ♘bc6



Position after: 11... Nbc6

Right now the bishop on e2 is not such a big problem because Black's knight is already committed to e7 instead of the more favorable f6-square. Moreover, after ...0-0 the bishop was not doing very much on b5 anymore anyway, which leads me to conclude that this is a better version of the main line for White. 12. $\text{R}e1\pm$

B) 10. Qe3 is definitely interesting, especially if Black chooses to deviate into relatively uncharted territory with 10... Qg4 . However, after 10...0-0 there is no decent way for White to avoid transposing into more usual lines.

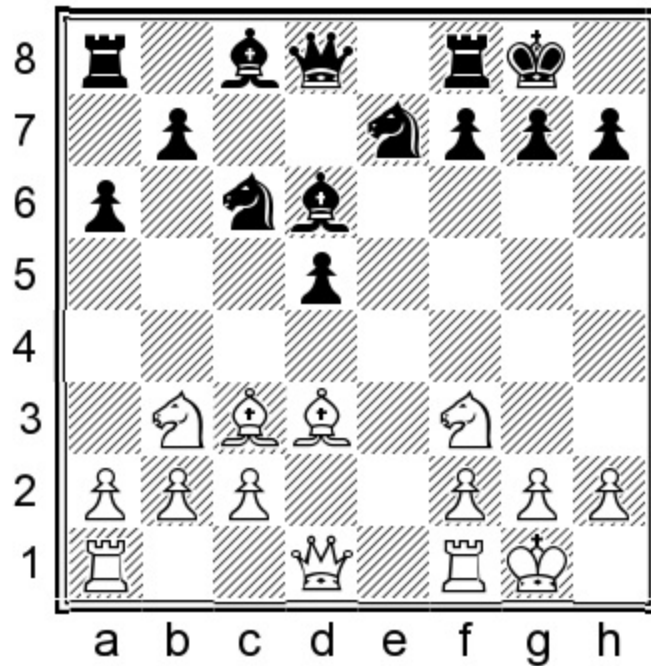
C) 10. Qxc6+ bxc6 11. Qd4 has been covered already.

10...0-0 11. Qc3 a6 !

As a rule of thumb, we can play a6 whenever White's control of the c5-square has been loosened. Compare this with the main line of this chapter.

11... $\text{Qg4}!$? should work as well.

12. Qd3

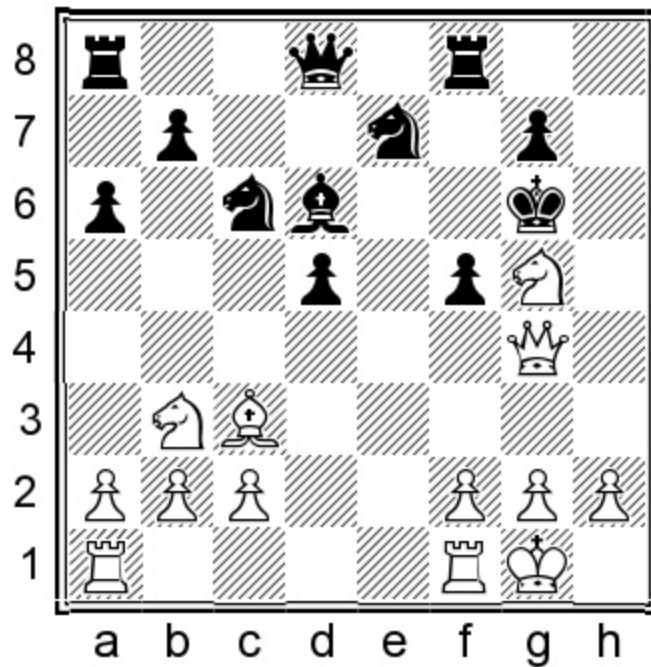


Position after: 12. ♖d3

12...h6!?N

To enable ...♗g4, it is important to first eliminate the possibility of any bishop sacrifice on h7.

12...♗g4!N An exclamation mark for audacity. 13. ♖xh7+ ♔xh7 14. ♘g5+ ♖g6 15. ♙xg4 f5!

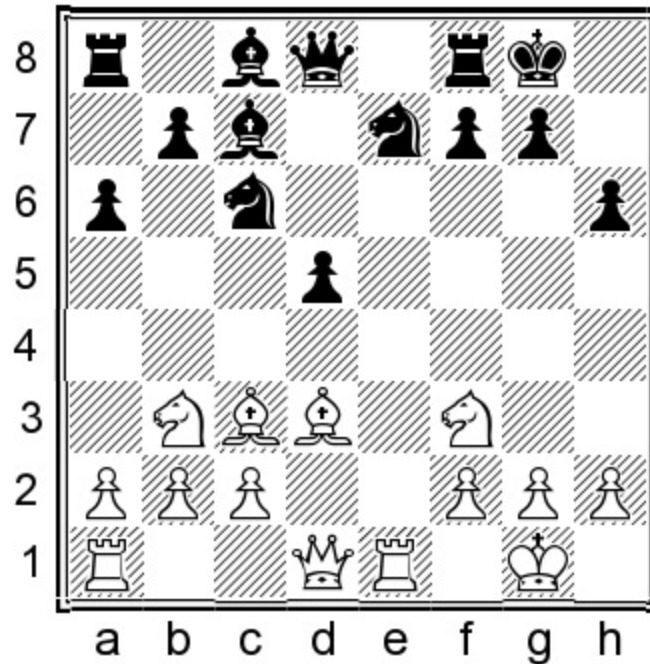


Position after: 15...f5!

A counter-trick, winning the g5-knight. SPECTACULAR! Sorry for the caps, blame my left pinky

finger. 16. ♖e2 ♗xg5 17. ♖e6 ♘g6 18. ♗xg7 ♖e7 19. ♖xe7+ ♘gxe7 20. ♗xf8 ♖xf8 21. ♖ad1= Although my computer says equal, I would prefer to play with the harmonious white pieces.

13. ♖e1 ♗c7

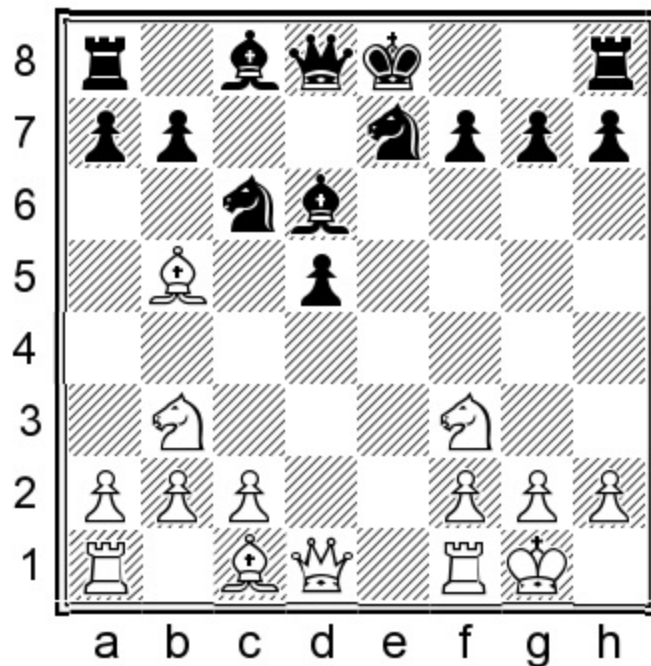


Position after: 13... ♗c7

Preparing ... ♖d6 and ... ♗d7 with an equal game. The bishop on c3 is not as good as it looks.

c) 9. ♗b3 ♗d6 10. ♗fd4, 10. ♗bd4

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. ♗d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5. ♗gf3 ♗c6 6. ♗b5 ♗d6 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9. ♗b3 ♗d6

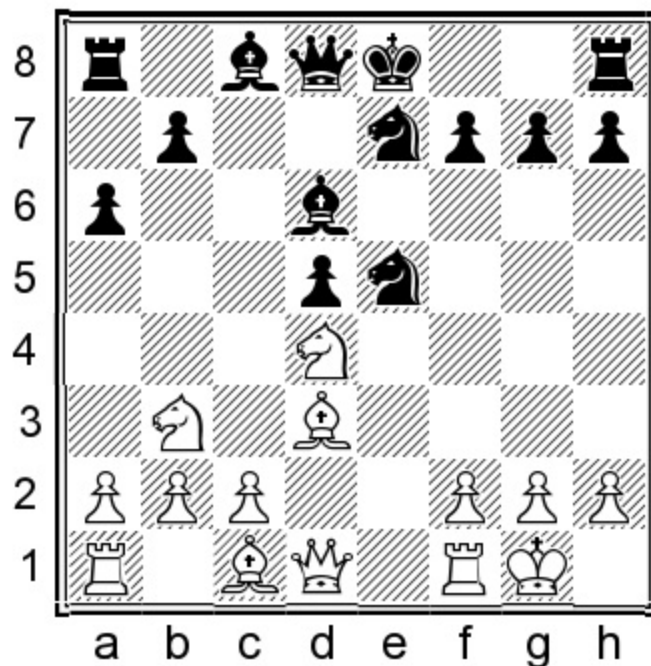


Position after: 9...♔d6

10.♘bd4

All the 6...cxd4 fans should pay attention now! This is part of the repertoire together with 10.♘fd4. The good thing about these knight moves is that they are completely harmless, which means you can try to trick anyone who has never faced 6...cxd4 before into these lines. In the other subchapters we will deal with the main lines 10.h3!?, 10.♕g5 and 10.♖e1.

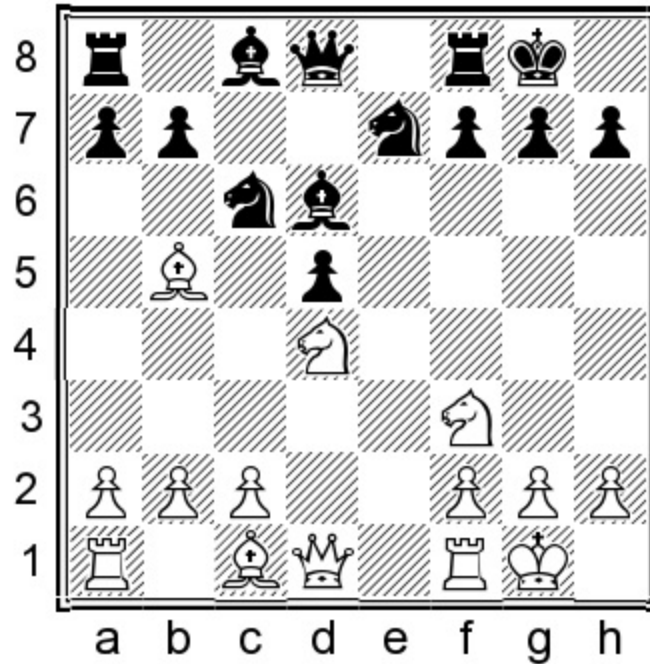
10.♘bd4 This is very unnatural, moving the knight away from the kingside. 10...a6! 11.♕d3 ♘e5



Position after: 11...♘e5

Funnily enough, we have transposed to a line from the King's Indian Attack against the Caro-Kann. 12.♙g5 0-0 13.♖e1 ♜e8= Black easily maintains the balance.

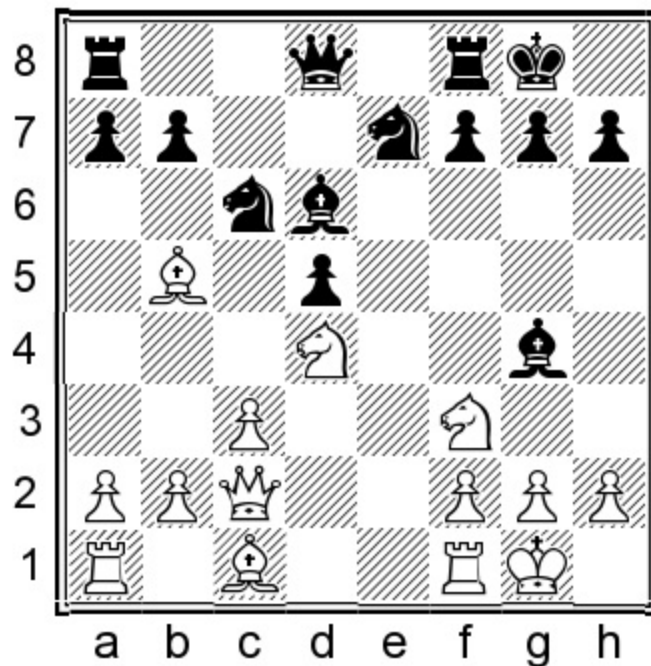
10...0-0



Position after: 10...0-0

11.♙e3

A) 11.c3 This move has been played most often, but the whole 6...♙d6 line is so old that there are bound to be improvements everywhere. The idea is to go for ♖a4 which is actually not very strong because it allows Black to develop ideally. 11...♙g4 12.♙c2 [12.♙a4 ♙d7= For instance, this is equal. 13.♙e3 a6 14.♙e2 ♘f5! 15.♘xf5 ♙xf5 16.♞fe1 ♞fe8 17.g3 h6 ½-½ (41) Kappes, D (2337) – Baranowski, T (2400) ICCF email 2014.]

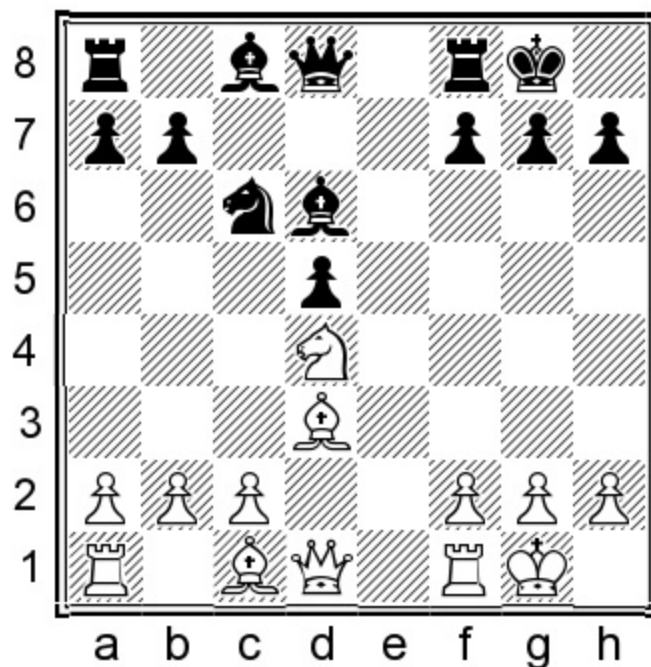


Position after: 12. ♖c2

A1) 12... ♗h5 13. ♗d3 h6 14. ♗e3 ♖d7 15. ♜fe1 ♜fe8 16. ♗d2N [16. ♘b5? ♗xf3 0-1 (26) Gudok, V (2354) – Eldridge, M (2389) ICCF 2013.] 16... a6 17. ♗f4 ♗c5 18. h3 ♗xd4!? 19. ♘xd4 ♘xd4 20. cxd4 ♗g6=

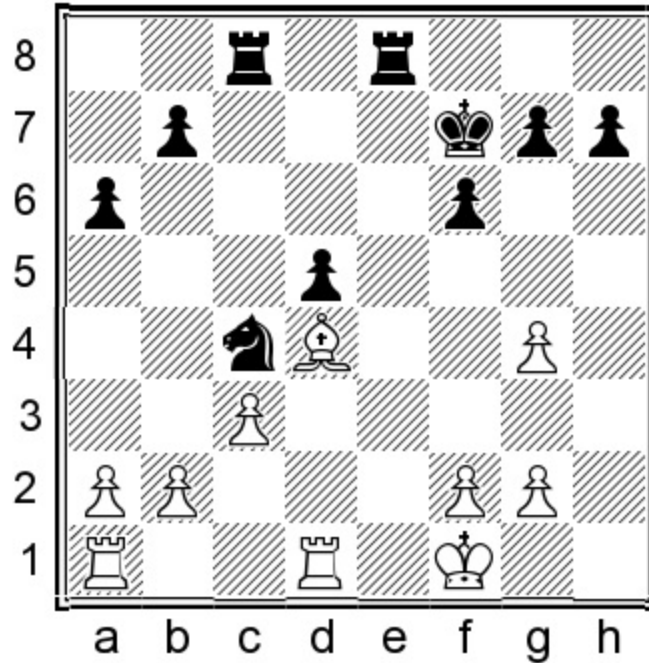
A2) 12... h6! 13. h3 ♗h5 14. ♜e1 a6!? might have packed a little bit more punch than the game continuation above. [14... ♜e8= is similar to the variation with 12... ♗h5 above. 0-1 (28) Peterson, W (2220) – Vaganian, R (2625) Philadelphia 1994.] 15. ♗d3 ♜c8

B) 11. ♗d3!? ♘xd4! 12. ♘xd4 ♘c6



Position after: 12... ♖c6

B1) 13. ♗e3 ♘e5! = We will see this exchanging operation time and time again, and it is always the equalizer in the position. The knight heads for c4 or g4 and wreaks havoc. For example: 14. h3 ♙h4?! [14... ♖e8!] 15. ♗f5?! a6 16. c3 ♘c4 17. ♗xc8 ♖axc8 18. ♘f5 ♙e4 19. ♘xd6 ♘xd6 20. ♖e1 ♖fe8 21. ♗d4 ♙f5 22. ♙g4 ♙xg4 23. hxg4 f6 24. ♙f1 ♙f7 25. ♖ed1 ♘c4

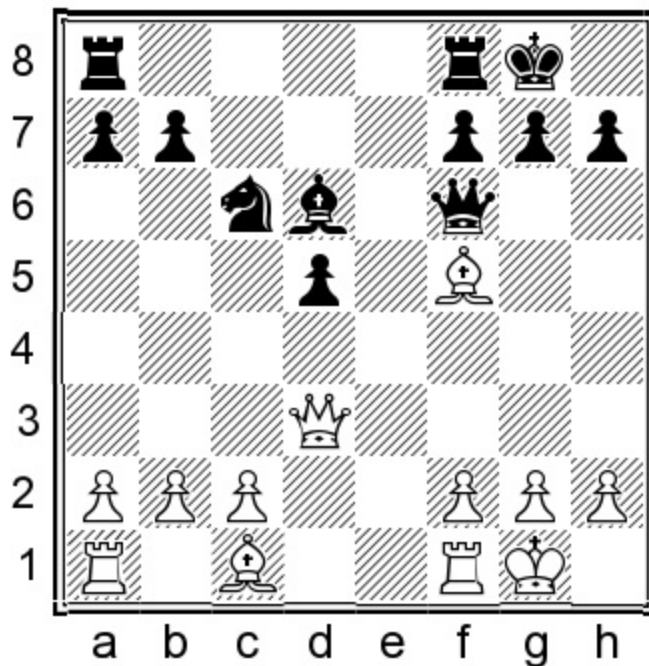


Position after: 25... ♘c4

White might have been slightly better but the knight creates counterplay against b2. ½-½ (44) Fier, A (2558) – Khegay, D (2499) Almaty 2018.

B2) 13. ♘f5!?

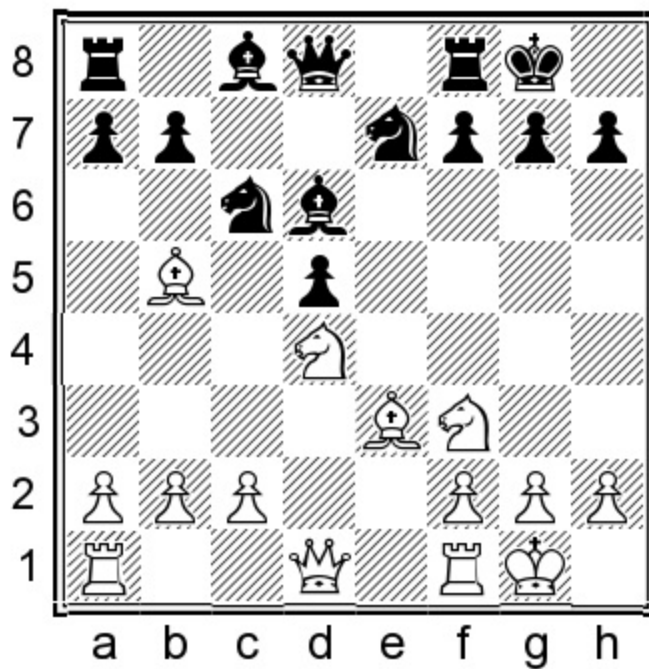
B2.1) 13... ♗xf5 14. ♗xf5 ♙f6 15. ♙d3



Position after: 15. ♔d3

15...g6= 1-0 (45) Vajda, L (2597) – Cosma, E (2324) Medias 2016. [15...h6!= This is often the correct way to go when you have a choice between ...g6 or ...h6.]

B2.2) 13...♙e5!? 14.c3 ♜e8 15.♞d4 ♞xd4 16.cxd4 ♚f6= The easiest path to a position which may even be marginally better for Black.

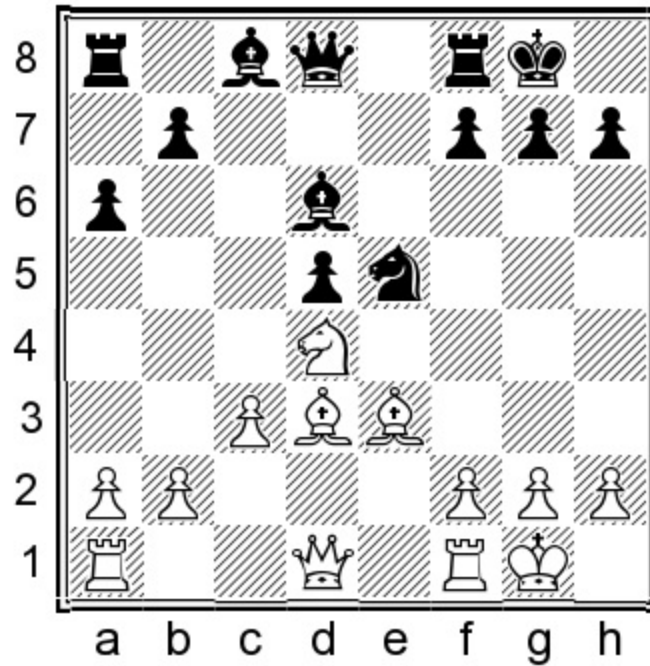


Position after: 11. ♙e3

11...♙g4

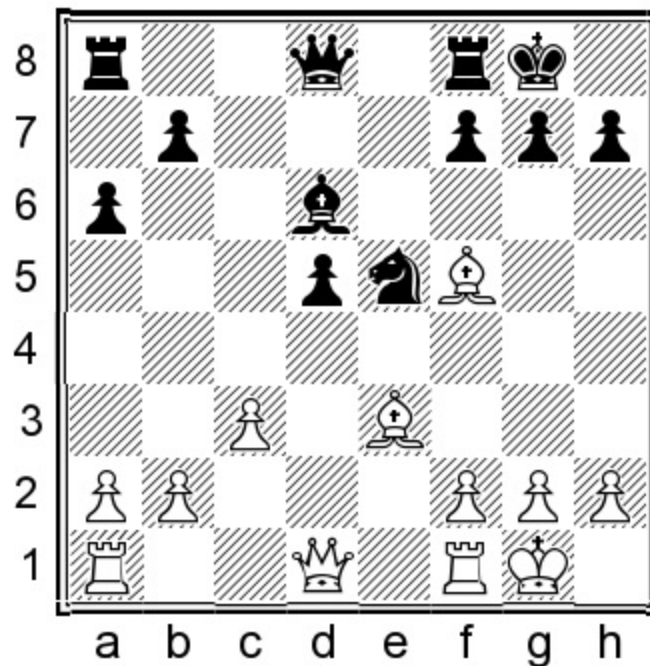
This might be the best way to play for a win with Black.

11...a6!? Our typical exchanging operation is possible again. 12..♙d3 ♖xd4 [12...♘g6!? can be played with ...♗ce5 equalizing in mind.] 13.♗xd4 ♗c6 14.c3 ♗e5=



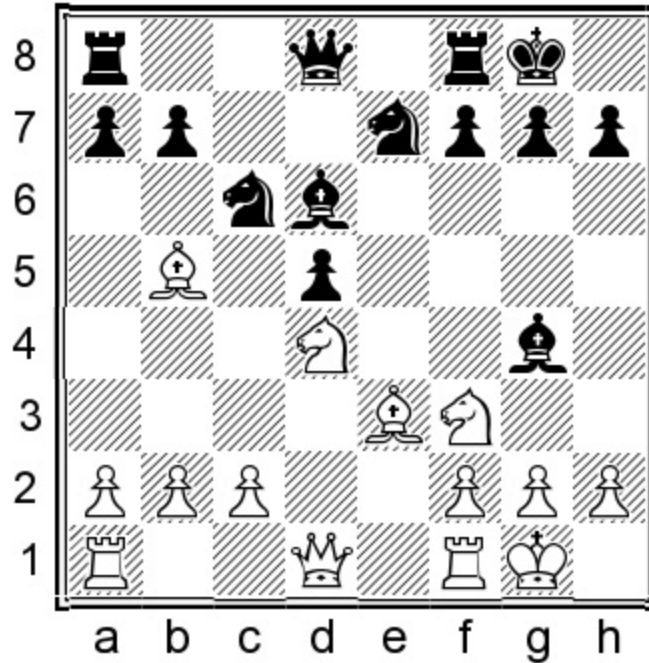
Position after: 14... ♗e5=

Black has executed the standard plan. 15.♗f5 [15.♖e1 ♗xd3 16.♙xd3 ♖e8= The two bishops adequately compensate for the isolani.] 15...♙xf5 [15...♗xd3!N Take the bishops! 16.♙xd3 ♙e6 17.♗xd6 ♙xd6= Bear in mind this game might last a long time.] 16.♙xf5



Position after: 16. ♖xf5

16...g6?! [16...♗c4!]=] 17. ♗h3 ♗c4 18. ♗h6 ♜e8 19.g3! [19.b3?! ♗e5= ½-½ (22) Acedanski, J (2381) – Van Daatselaar, J (2198) ICCF email 2010.] 19...♗xb2 20. ♖b3 ♗c4 21. ♖xb7± White is softening up the center which of course combines well with his pair of bishops. For this reason, Black should prefer 16...♗c4.



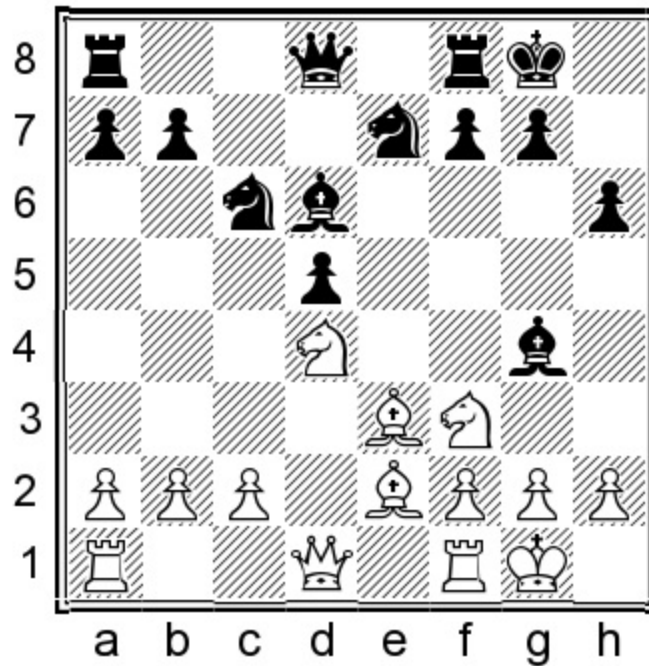
Position after: 11... ♗g4

12. ♖d2

Solving problems with development! Of course this is the most logical move, stepping out of the pin, developing a piece and preparing a future ♗f4.

A) 12. ♗e2

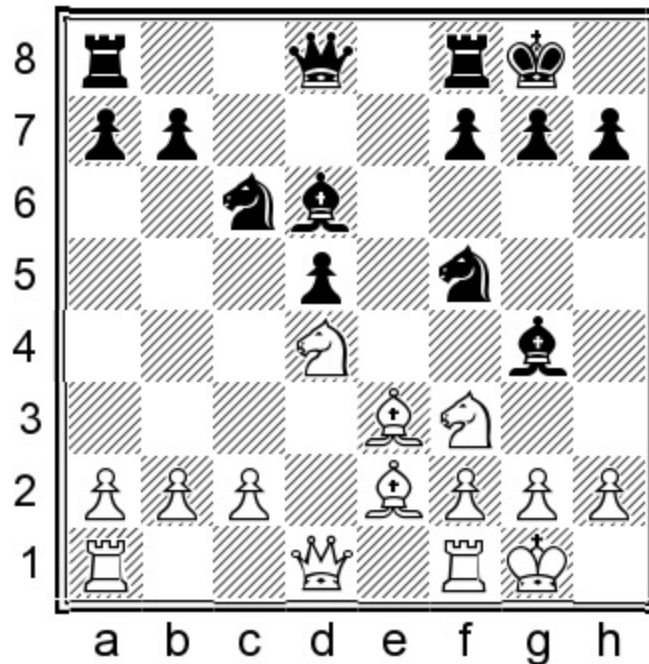
A1) 12...h6!N



Position after: 12...h6!N

This move might be a little too deep, but it has a similar idea to 12...♘f5!N. 13.h3 ♕f5! Naturally it is no problem if White takes on f5. We will get a lot of control over the key d4-square in that case. 14.♞e1 ♕e4 15.c3 ♞e8= Black has full equality.

A2) 12...♘f5!N

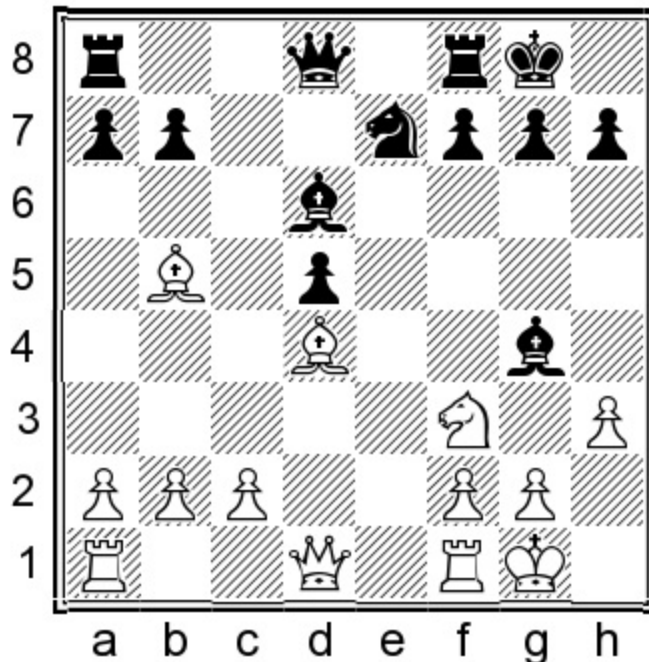


Position after: 12...♘f5!N

Both of these novelties have the intention of keeping the rook on f8 for a little while. Again we can

see that if White puts his bishop on e2, we should be in no rush to get on the e-file. Instead we should try to exchange one pair of knights and then park the bishop on e4. 13. ♖xf5 ♗xf5= If White attacks the bishop it should go to e4, otherwise we carry on developing. Black will get an equal fighting game.

B) 12.h3 ♘xd4! 13. ♗xd4



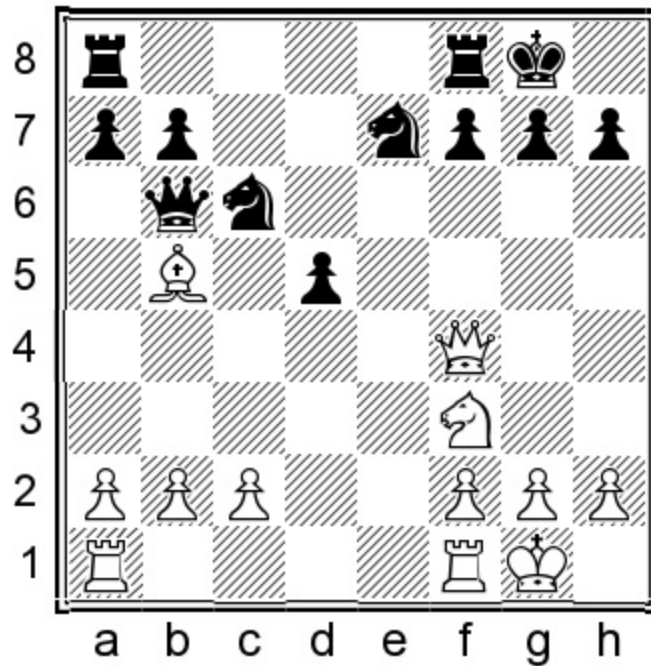
Position after: 13. ♗xd4

As we have seen before, the bishop is not the best piece for the d4-square in this line. 13... ♗h5 14. ♖e1 ♘c6 15. ♗xc6 bxc6 and Black could dream of playing for more than half a point in 1/2-1/2 (24) Sokolov, A (2495) – Lputian, S (2540) Lvov 1984.

12...a6

A) 12... ♖c7 transposes after 13.h3 ♗h5 14.c3 a6 15. ♗d3.

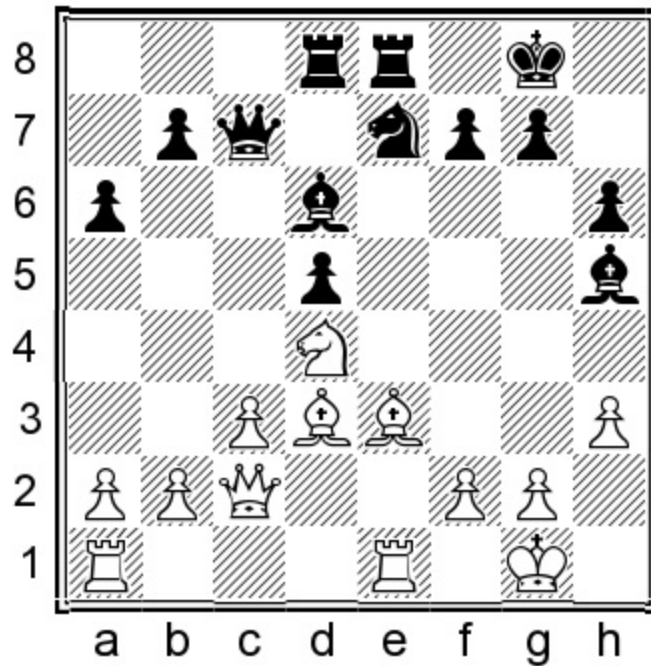
B) 12... ♗c7!?N It is easy to see why this move is new. Black is actually provoking ♗f4. 13. ♗f4 ♗xf4 14. ♖xf4 ♗xf3 15. ♘xf3 ♖b6 The counter Black was playing for.



Position after: 15... ♕b6

16.a4 a6 17.♔d3 ♖g6 18.♔xg6 hxg6 White has to be precise to play for an advantage. 19.♕h4 f6 20.♕g3 ♕xb2 21.♕xg6 ♖f7 22.h4 ♗d4 23.♗xd4 ♕xd4= Anything can happen here.

13.♔d3 ♕c7 14.h3 ♔h5 15.c3 ♖ad8 16.♖fe1 ♖fe8 17.♗c2 h6 18.♗xc6 ♕xc6 19.♗d4 ♕c7



Position after: 19... ♕c7

These kinds of positions are solid. Leela likes White initially, but the evaluation drops down quite

low in the end. For example, an IM managed to draw with Black against a 2600 GM. ½-½ (30)
Oleksienko, M (2604) – Mousavi, S (2447) Konya 2018.

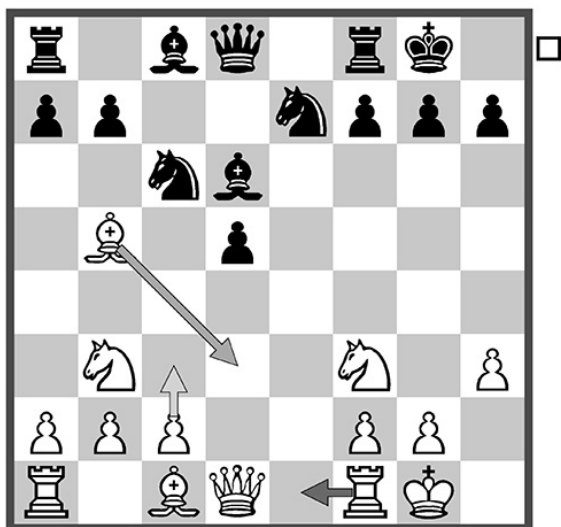
Conclusion

We have seen a lot of lines here, but we have made a good start. The first highlight of this chapter was 9.c4!?, which I had expected to be able to neutralize much more easily. Black certainly needs to take care here. Be sure to check the recommendations there in order to reach an equal game. Next we saw that most lines after 9...♙b6 give White a steady plus. You should only consider playing this line in conjunction with the ...♙f5-e4 plan, and only when a draw is a satisfactory result. 9...♙d6 brings us to the biggest tabiya of the whole 4...exd5 system. I have dismissed a lot of older games because there are numerous improvements for both sides. The equalizing maneuver ...a6, ...♞xd4, ...♞c6-e5-c4, should be a basic tool in the lines with 10.♞bd4, the most dangerous line we have covered here. Often there is more than one way to reach an equal position which makes most lines in this chapter rather harmless for Black.

Chapter 10

10.h3! – The right track

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9.♗b3 ♙d6
10.h3 0-0



Chapter Guide

Chapter 10 – 10.h3! (The right track)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9.♗b3 ♙d6
10.h3 0-0

a) 11.--

b) 11.♙d3

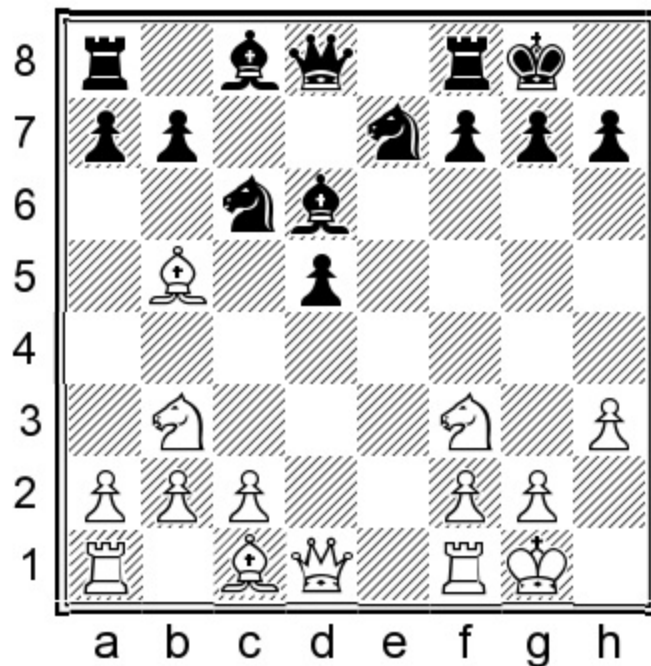
c) 11.c3

d) 11.♖e1 h6 12.c3 ♖e8

e) 11.♖e1 h6 12.c3 ♗f5

a) 11.--

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9.♗b3 ♙d6
10.h3! 0-0



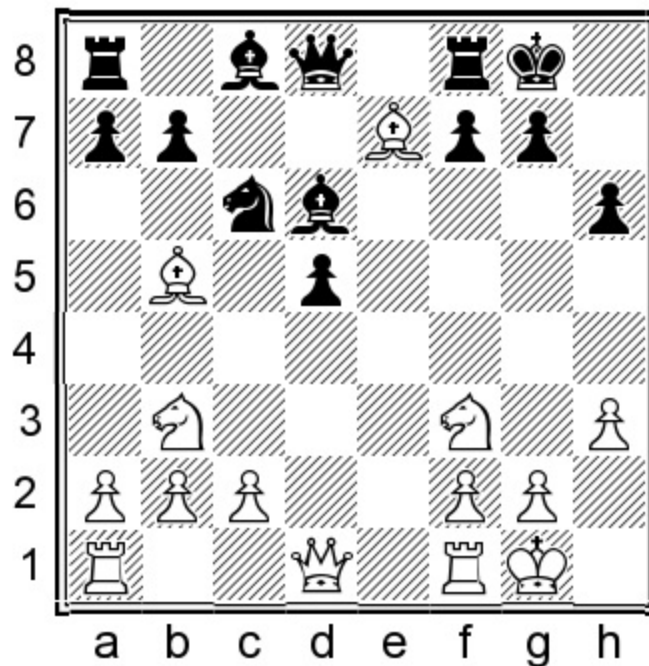
Position after: 10...0-0

It is funny that Black does not have any real alternatives to this move. This answers the question of why 10.h3! is the best move order. The only other move which could come into consideration is 10...♙f5, however this often just transposes to plan 1 which we will talk about later. Right now, White has five options. 11.♖e1 is the best. 11.c3, preparing a safe landing for the bishop on d3, transposes to 10.c3 above. 11.♙e3! is an interesting positional trick where you need to know how to react. Then there is the ‘risky’ approach of just playing 11.♙d3 immediately without hesitation, which is dangerous if we are unprepared. This move should again be ‘punished’ by a rare move. But first, we will briefly look at the non-critical lines 11.♘bd4 and 11.♙g5.

11.♙e3!?

This rare and tricky line has a different drawback than you might think. What’s especially appealing for players studying these lines from the White perspective is that Black has not found the right continuation in any game yet.

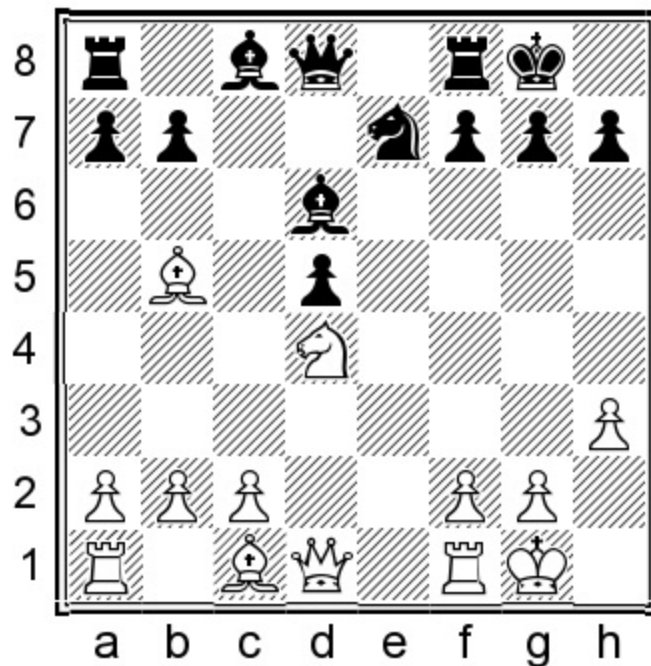
A) 11.♙g5?! h6 It does not make sense to retreat to g3 anymore, so Black hits the bishop and collects the bishop pair. 12.♙xe7=



Position after: 12. ♕xe7=

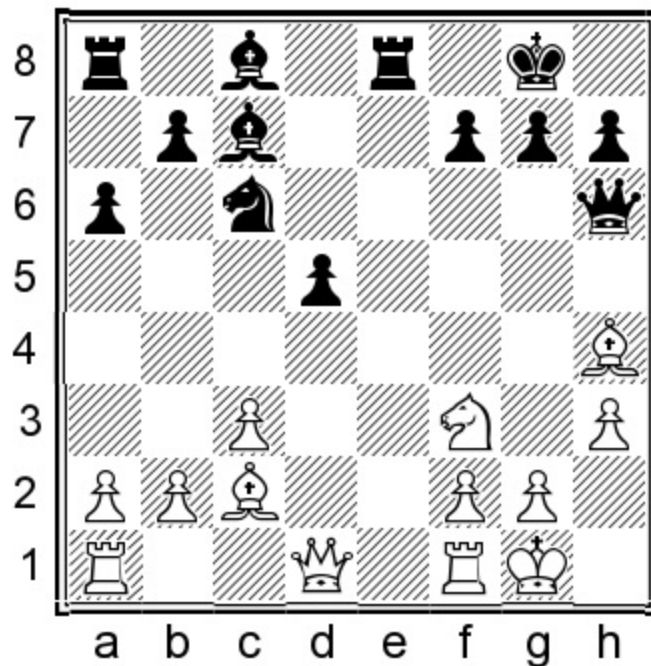
Recapturing with either minor piece gives Black an equal game. The bishop pair is a great asset in these isolani positions because Black can think about sacrificing d5 for an initiative. Losing d5 often increases the value of the bishops so much that White might only win '0.25 of a pawn' by capturing it.

B) 11. ♖bd4 ♗xd4! We are unable to pin the knight on f3 anyway, therefore it is a good idea to relieve some tension. I would like to add that Black's minor pieces are placed slightly passively in these positions, which means they are not controlling as many squares as usual in IQP positions. So strangely enough, the position often becomes a bit easier to play when only two or three sets of minor pieces remain. 12. ♗xd4



Position after: 12. ♖xd4

B1) 12...a6 The plan from the previous chapter with ...a6 does not work very well here because the knight can drop back to f3. 13. ♕d3 ♗c6 14. ♖f3! ♜e8 15. c3 ♘c7 16. ♘g5 ♙d6 17. ♘h4 ♚h6 18. ♘c2±

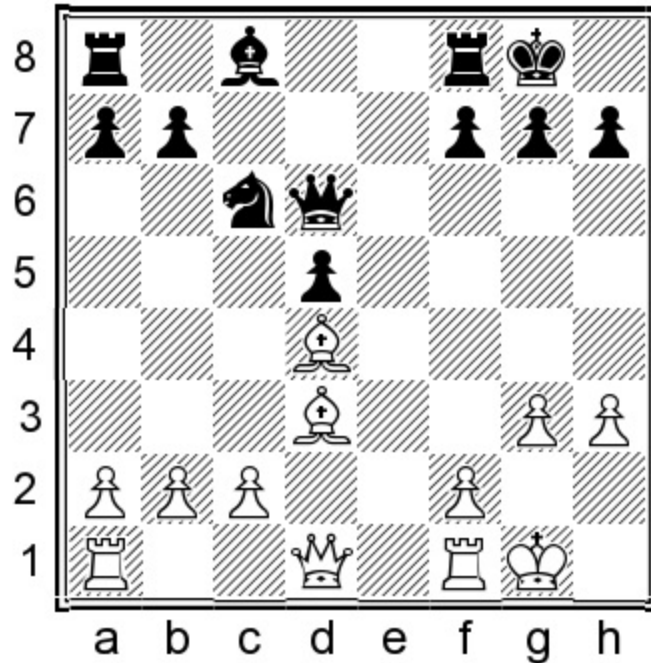


Position after: 18. ♘c2±

1-0 (59) Caruana, F (2709) – Short, N (2680) Reggio Emilia 2010.

B2) 12...♘c7!

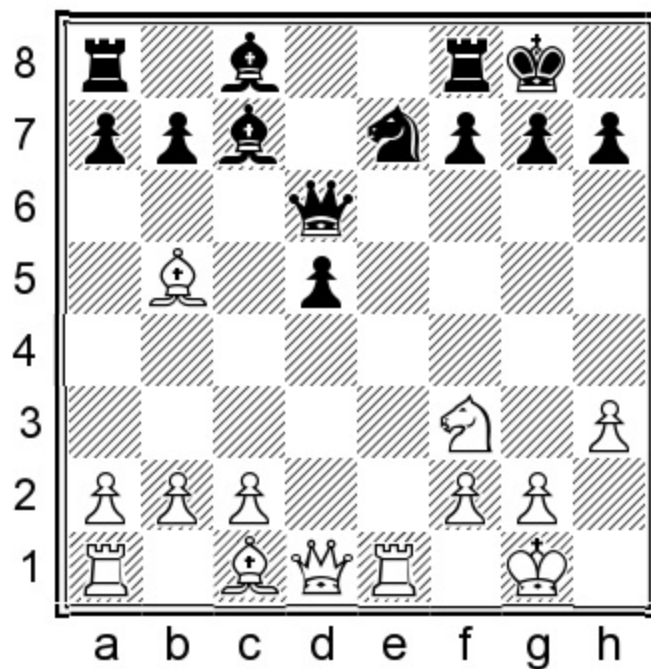
B2.1) 13.♙d3 ♖d6 14.g3 ♘b6 15.♙e3 ♙xd4!? [15...♘c6!?] 16.♙xd4 ♘c6=



Position after: 16...♘c6=

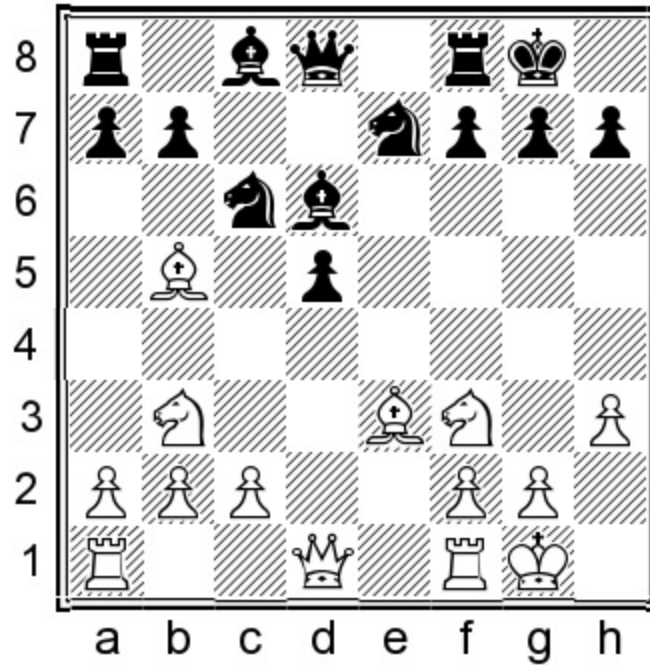
17.c3?! [17.♙e3 ♘b4=] 17...♘xd4 18.cxd4 g6! [18...♖f6?! ½-½ (29) Sjugirov, S (2629) – Zvjaginsev, V (2659) Taganrog 2011.] 19.h4 ♖b6↑

B2.2) 13.♙e1! ♖d6 14.♘f3



Position after: 14.♘f3

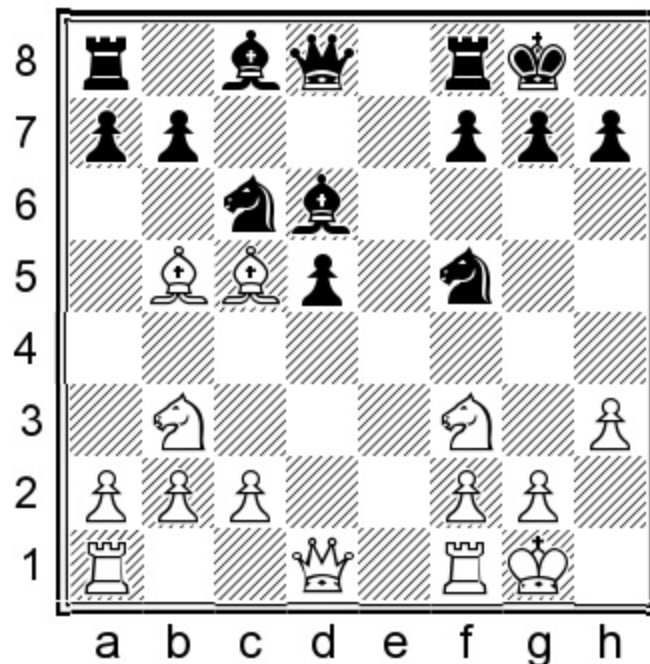
This move was seen in two high-level games but Black did not play optimally on either occasion. 14...a6!N 15.♔d3 ♔d7 [15...♖g6 16.♔e3 ♔d7=] 16.♔g5 ♜fe8= This position is one of the most ideal you can get as Black. All of the pieces are developed harmoniously.



Position after: 11.♔e3!?

11...a6!

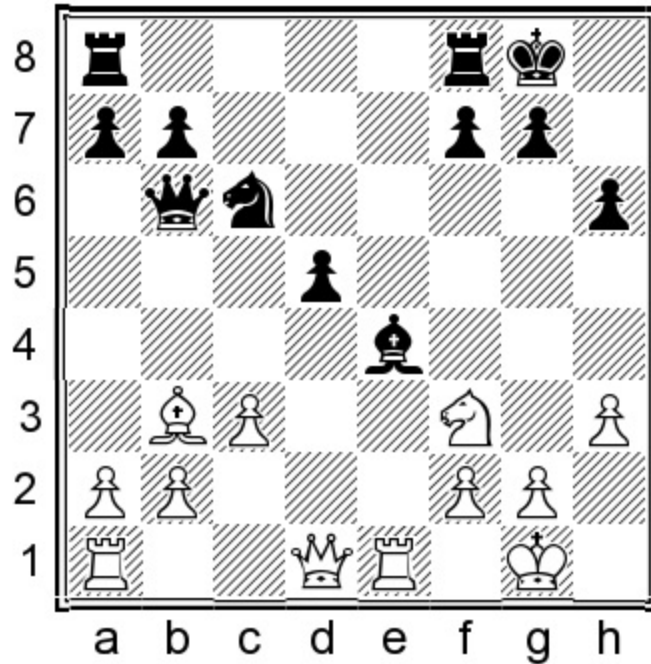
A) 11...♖f5?! Falling for the trap. 12.♔c5! This was the idea!



Position after: 12.♔c5!

12...♙xc5 13.♘xc5 ♖b6 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.♘a4 ♗a5 16.b3± White has a small advantage.

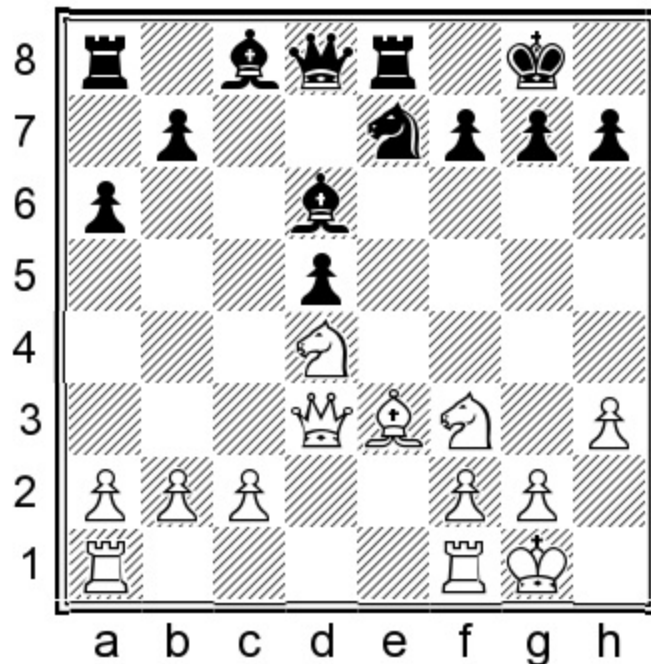
B) 11...♙f5!? Remember that when the e4-square is weakened we can park our bishop there! 12.♞e1 ♙e4! 13.♙c5 ♙xc5 14.♘xc5 ♖b6! 15.♙xc6 [15.♘xe4 ♖xb5 16.♘g3 ♖xb2=] 15...♗xc5 16.♙a4 ♘c6 17.c3 ♖b6 18.♙b3 h6=



Position after: 18...h6=

Black is very close to full equality.

12.♙d3 ♘b4! 13.♘bd4 ♘xd3 14.♗xd3 ♞e8=

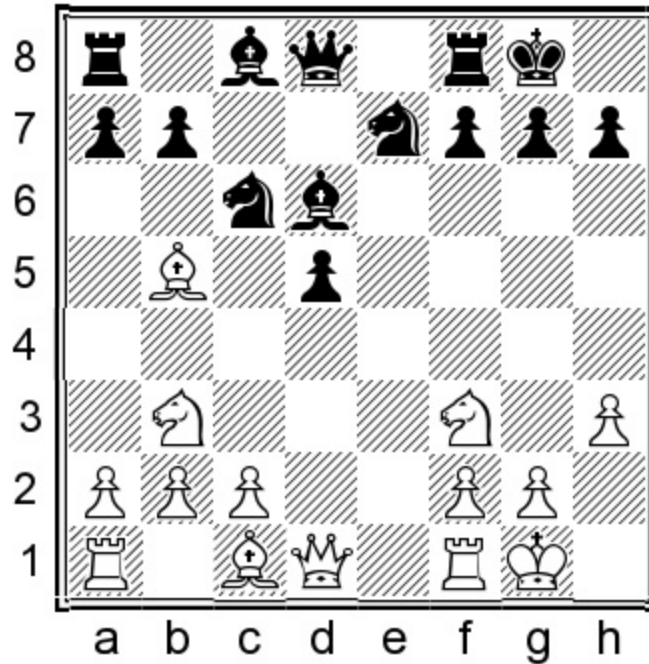


Position after: 14...♖e8=

Black has a long-term plan of utilizing his bishop pair.

b) 11.♗d3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♘c6 6.♗b5 ♗d6 7.dxc5 ♗xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9.♘b3 ♗d6 10.h3 0-0



Position after: 10...0-0

11.♗d3

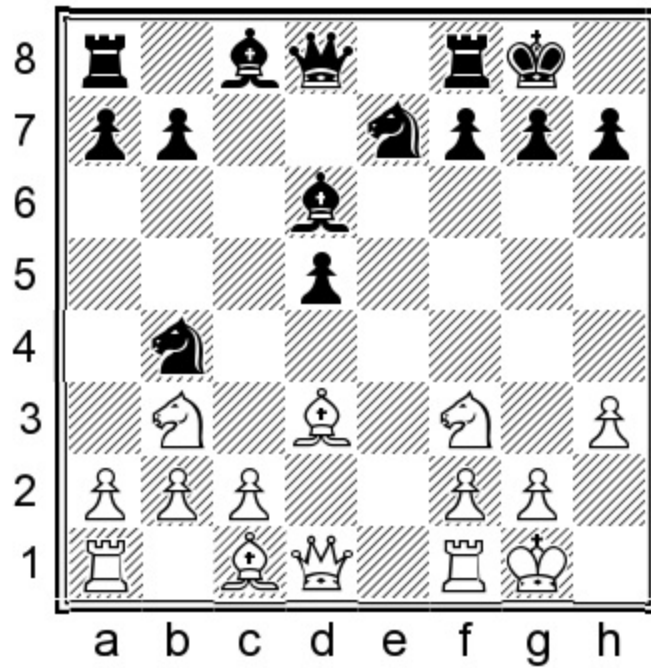
This is a serious option, though I have managed to find a neat way of equalizing besides the main line continuation.

11.c3 – see the next subchapter.

11...♗b4!?

This move has only been played twice but it is clearly Leela's preference. Therefore we should take it seriously. Black remains passive in most lines, but in return he will have two bishops to rely on. This is a good way to get off the beaten track.

11...h6 This is the most commonly played move, leading us back to the main path where I have not found anything spectacular for White. 12.c3 We will see this position under the 11.c3 move order.

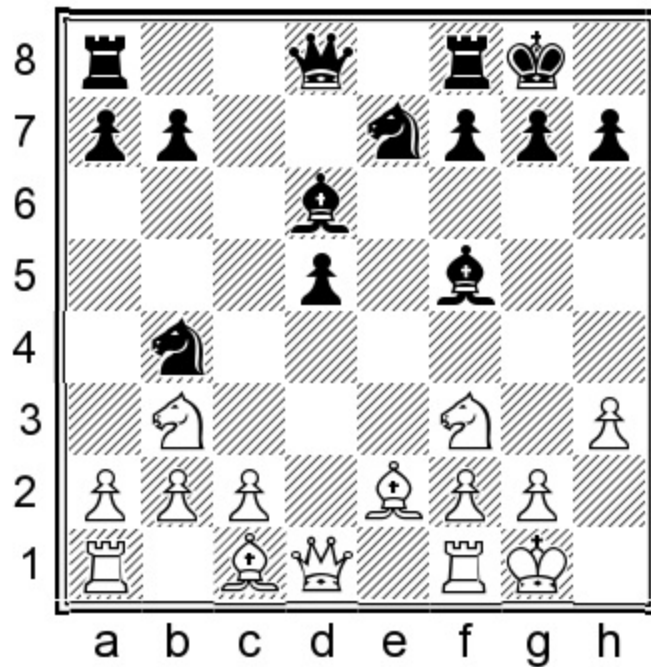


Position after: 11... Nxb4!?

12. Nbd4!

White might very well retain an edge here.

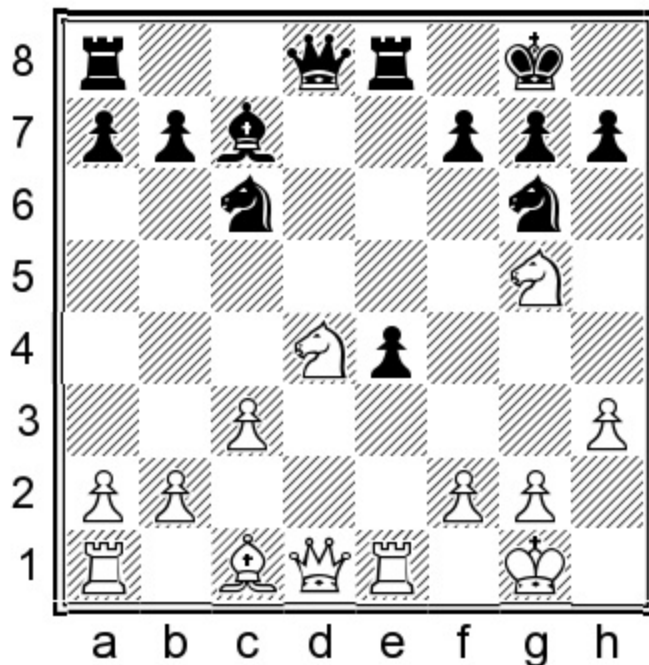
A) 12. Qe2 Qf5



Position after: 12... Qf5

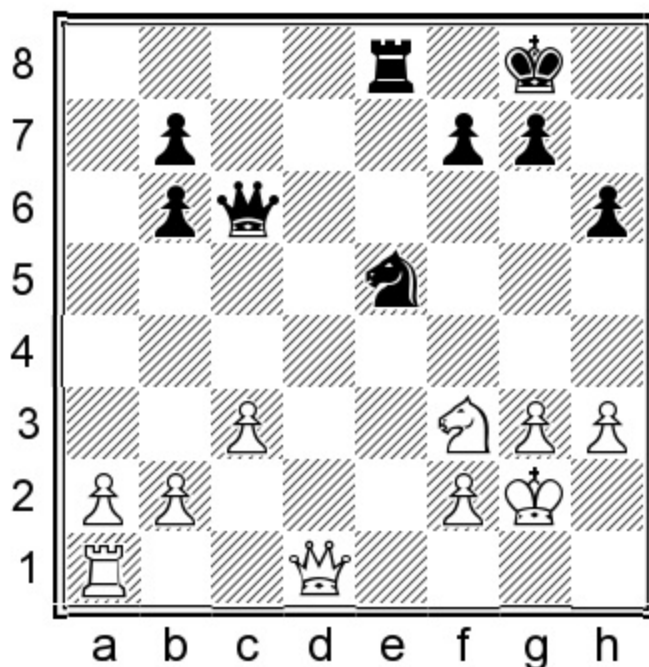
A1) 13. Nbd4 Qe4! N This involves a very deep pawn sacrifice. [13... Qg6?! Unfortunately Black m

missed the pawn sac but this should still keep a solid position. 14.c3 ♖bc6 15.♙d3 ♗xd4 16.♘xd4 ♗c6 17.♙xg6 hxg6± 1-0 (82) Suarez Real, A (2447) – McGowan, D (2151) England 2018.] 14.c3 ♗bc6 15.♞e1 ♞e8 16.♙d3 ♗g6 17.♙xe4 dxe4 18.♗g5 ♙c7!



Position after: 18... ♙c7!

19.♞xe4 [19.♗xe4? ♞d5 20.♞f3 ♞e5 21.g3 f5 22.♙f4 ♗xf4 23.♗g5 ♗xd4 24.cxd4 ♞d5 25.gxf4 ♞xf3 26.♗xf3 ♙xf4± Wild stuff indeed!] 19...♞d6 20.g3 h6 21.♞xe8+ ♞xe8 22.♗gf3 ♙b6 23.♗g2 ♞d5 24.♙e3 ♗ge5 25.♗xc6 ♞xc6 26.♙xb6 axb6±



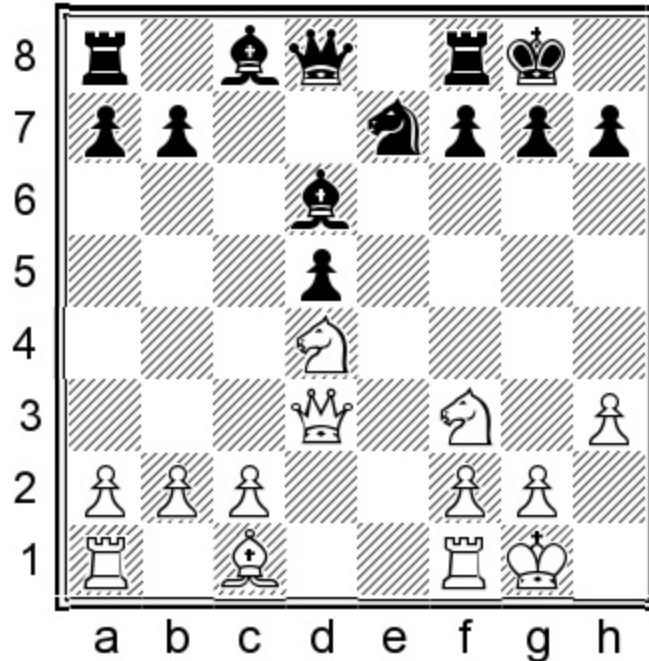
Position after: 26...axb6

A lot of moves in this line were forced, with the result being a position of dynamic equilibrium.

A2) 13. ♖fd4 ♙e4 14. c3 ♘bc6 15. ♙f3 ♙c7 16. ♖e1 ♚d6 17. g3 ♚g6=

B) 12. ♙g5N 12... ♘xd3 13. ♚xd3 f6 14. ♙e3 ♙f5 15. ♚d2 ♙e4 16. ♖fd4 ♖e8 17. ♖fe1 ♙e5!?= [17... ♘c6 18. ♘xc6 bxc6=]

12... ♘xd3 13. ♚xd3



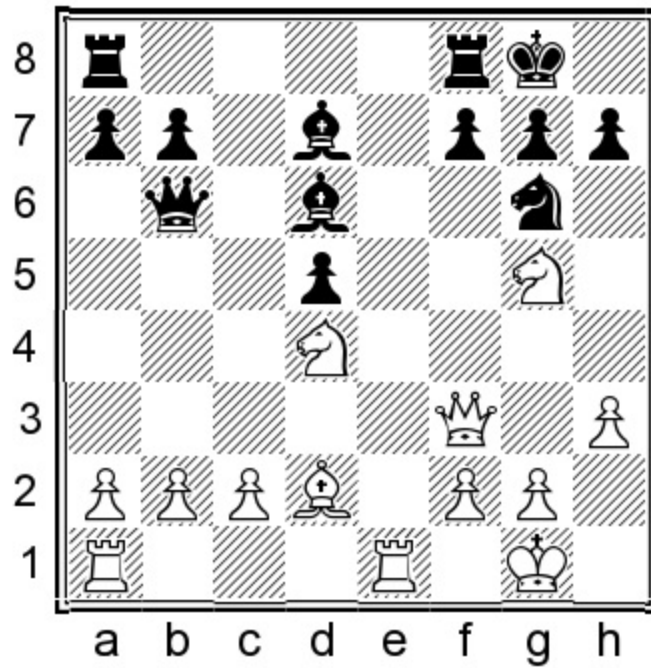
Position after: 13. ♚xd3

This was seen in 1-0 (39) Lazhevskaya, Z (2087) – Tappyrov, V (2339) St Petersburg 2002, but now Black could've improved with

13... ♙d7!N

A) 13... ♖g6?! was the game continuation.

B) 13... ♖e8!? does not seem to be hugely different from 13... ♙d7, but in the forced line which follows, we can see the drawback of moving the rook first. 14. ♖e1 ♙d7 15. ♙d2! ♚b6!? [15... ♖c8 16. ♖e5 ♘c6 17. ♖xd7 ♚xd7 18. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 19. ♖f3±] 16. ♖g5 ♖g6 17. ♚f3 ♖f8



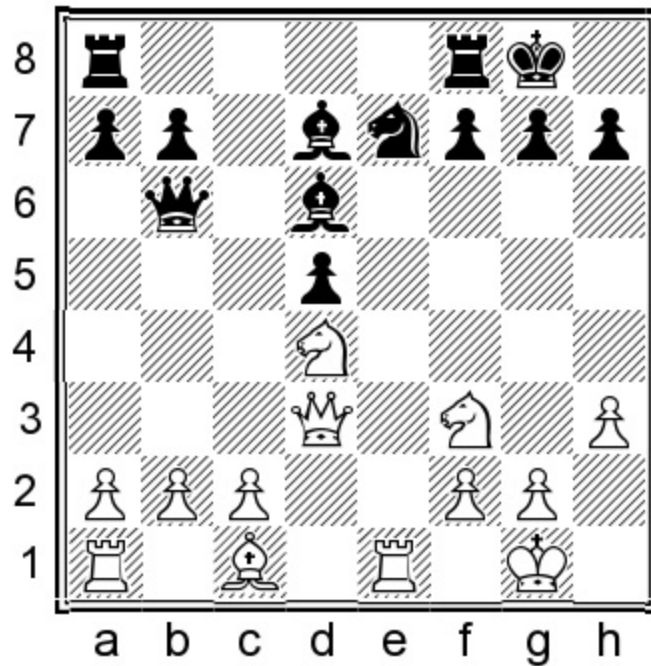
Position after: 17... Rf8

The drawback. 18. ♖xd5 ♙c5 19. ♙e3 [19. ♙c3!? ♙c6=] 19... ♙xh3 20. c3 ♜ad8 21. ♜f3 ♙c8 22. b4 ♙xd4 23. ♙xd4± Unfortunately this did not quite work, even though it is a spectacular line. Luckily we have an alternative.

14. ♜e1

14. ♜b3 ♜c7=

14... ♜b6!

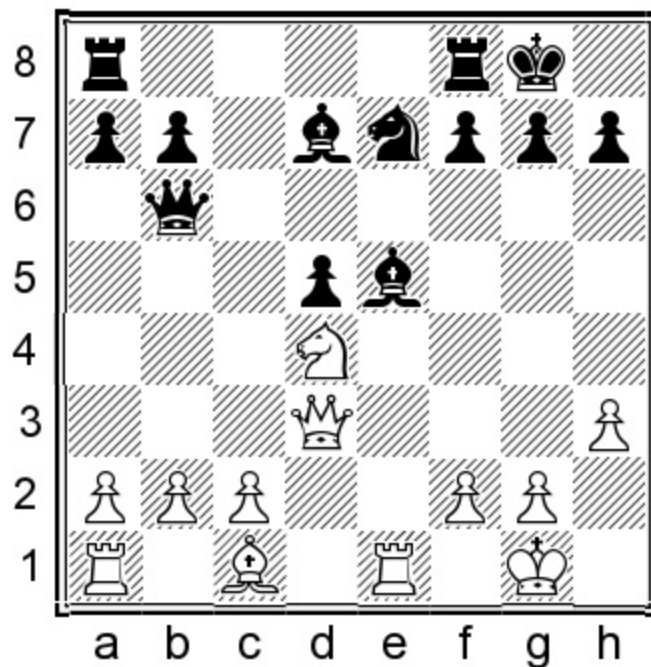


Position after: 14... ♔b6!

15. ♘e3

A) 15.a4 ♖fe8 [15...a6!? 16.a5 ♔c7 Threatening ...♔c4!. 17.♔b3 ♖fe8=] 16.a5 ♔a6! 17.♔xa6 bxa6⇒ Knights hate a-pawns, therefore it is better to get two instead of one. Black has definite counterplay.

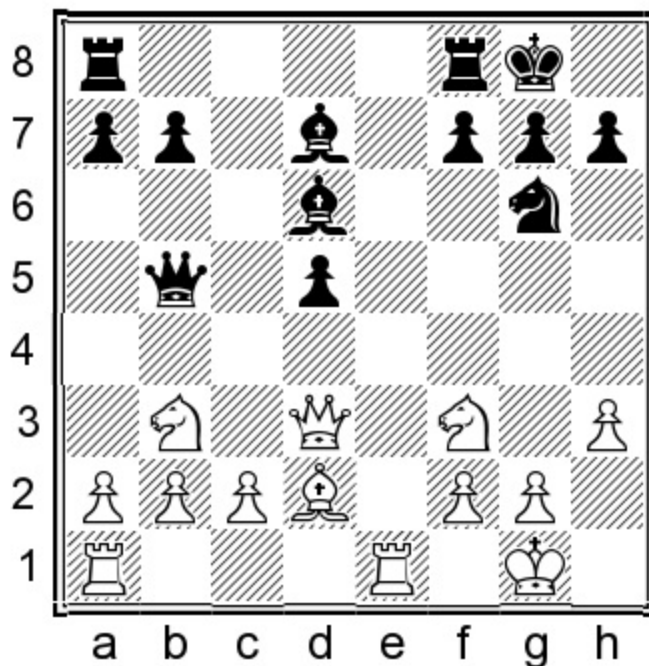
B) 15. ♘e5 ♘xe5!



Position after: 15... ♘xe5!

The opposite-colored bishops combined with the open e-file is a wonderful recipe for securing a draw. 16.♖xe5 ♜fe8 17.♖b3 ♚f6 18.♖e1 ♞c6

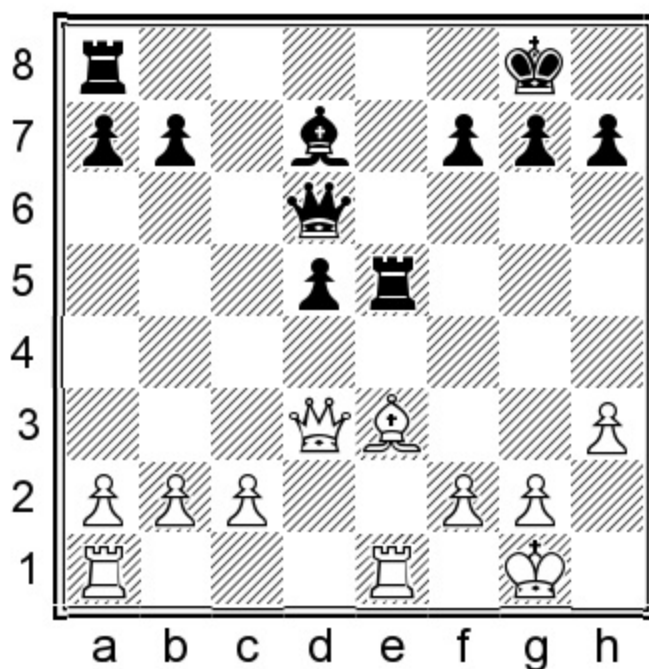
C) 15.♙d2!? ♞g6 16.♞b3 ♚b5



Position after: 16... ♚b5

Exchanging queens favors the bishop pair. 17.♚xb5 ♙xb5 18.♙e3 ♙a4 19.♖ad1 ♜fd8 20.♖d4 ♙e8=

15...♜fe8 16.♞g5 ♞g6 17.♞f5 ♚c6 18.♞xd6 ♚xd6 19.♞f3 ♞e5 20.♞xe5 ♜xe5=

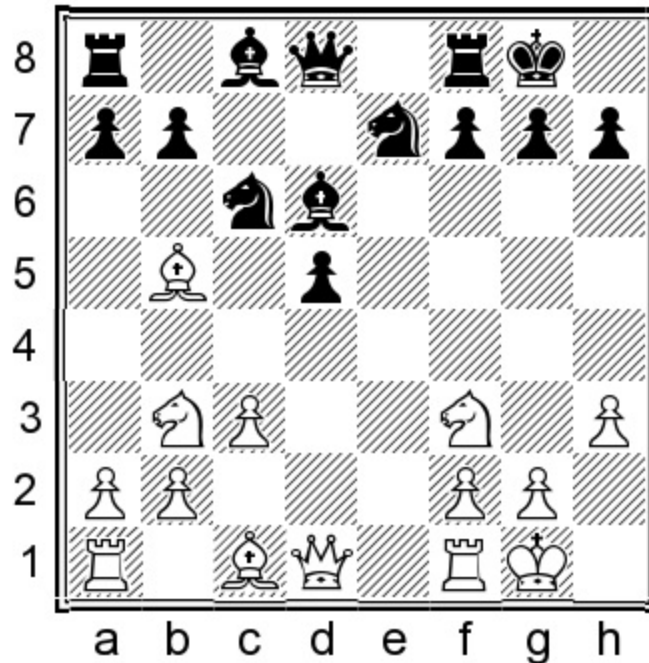


Position after: 20...♖xe5=

The same drawing recipe (two servings) from the well-known cookbook 'The Healthy Drawer' which we have already seen. Take one pinch of open e-file and mix that with some freshly chopped opposite-colored bishops. Exchange rooks for a great crispy taste. Take two plates and both of you enjoy your draw! Smells great doesn't it?

c) 11.c3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9.♗b3 ♙d6 10.h3 0-0 11.c3



Position after: 11.c3

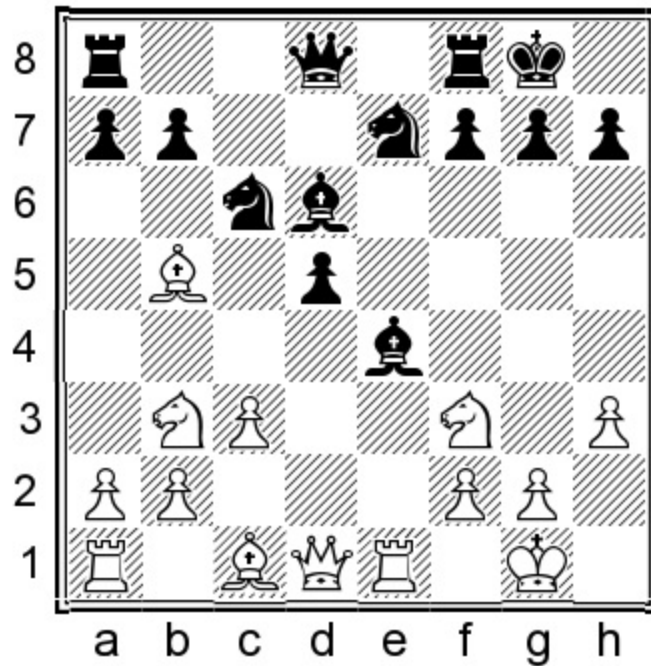
This is the most popular option here.

11...h6

The most common reply.

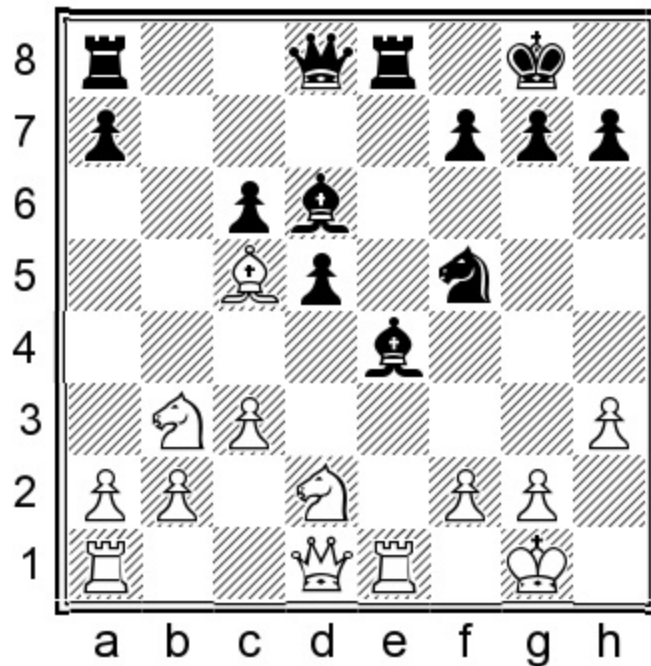
11...♙f5 It makes a tiny bit more sense to opt for this solid line now because c3 is a slow move.

A) 12.♖e1 In the main line of the ♖e1/h3 system, Black often plays his knight to f5 instead of his bishop. Black might get move-ordered here if it weren't for 12...♙e4!?N.



Position after: 12...♙e4!?N

13.♙e3 [13.♘g5 ♙g6 14.♘f3 h6= Now Black can move his knight to f5 again, and the bishop has moved to a slightly more favorable square.] 13...♘f5 14.♙c5 ♖e8 Black allows the dark squared bishop to be traded in order to get the knight to d6 and later c4. 15.♙xc6 bxc6 16.♘fd2

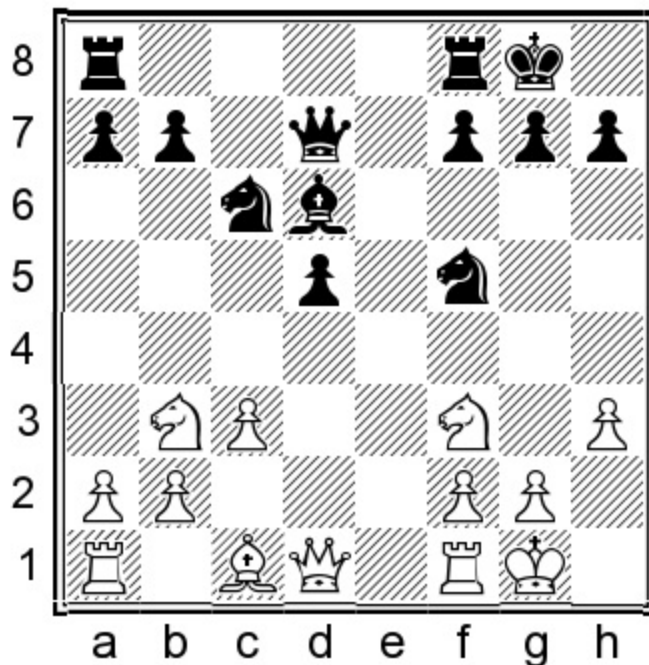


Position after: 16.♘fd2

This seems to be White's best try but Black's activity will compensate for his slightly weakened pawn structure. 16...g6!? Creating a luft, but mostly waiting to see how White will resolve the

tension. 17. ♖xd6 [17. ♘xe4 dxe4=] 17... ♘xd6 18. ♘c5 ♔g5= It is certainly possible to do without the move ...h6 and instead go into unique waters. Considering that Black is the one applying pressure here, there seems to be no reason to complain.

B) 12. ♖d3! White should not allow our bishop to go to e4. 12... ♔d7 13. ♖xf5 [13. ♖e1 transposes to the solid line.] 13... ♘xf5



Position after: 13... ♘xf5

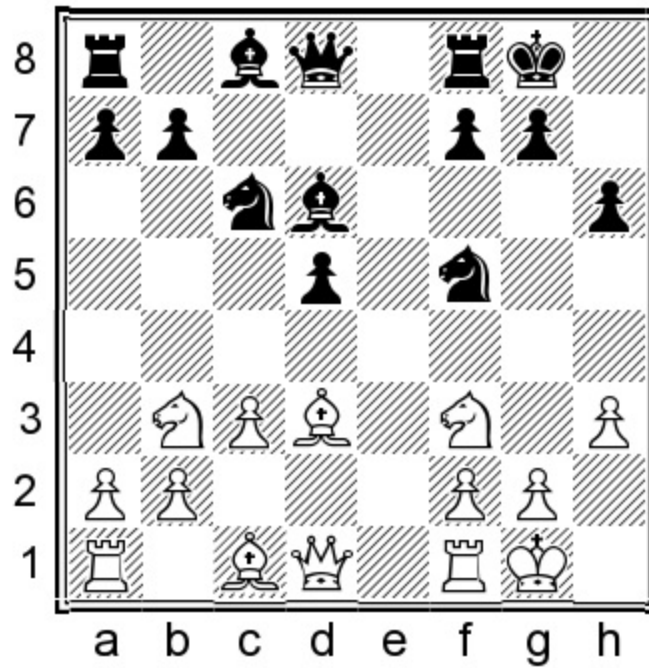
Black has saved time by avoiding the move ...h6, even though that is actually a very useful move. 14. ♔h1! Eliminating all discovered attacks and increasing the pressure on d5. 14... ♘fe7 15. ♖e3 ♖fe8 16. ♖e1 ♖ad8 17. ♔d3 ♖b8 18. ♖ad1 ♘g6 19. ♘c5! ♔c8 20. ♔b5 b6 21. ♘d3 White has an edge here.

12. ♖d3

♖e1 would have transposed to the main line. It is quite clear that against Black's main options there is no good way to avoid playing the rook to e1.

12... ♘f5!

Let's hope that White will play for the plan without ♖e1.



Position after: 12... Nf5!

13. $\text{Kc2!}?$

13. Re1 is the main line.

13... Re8!

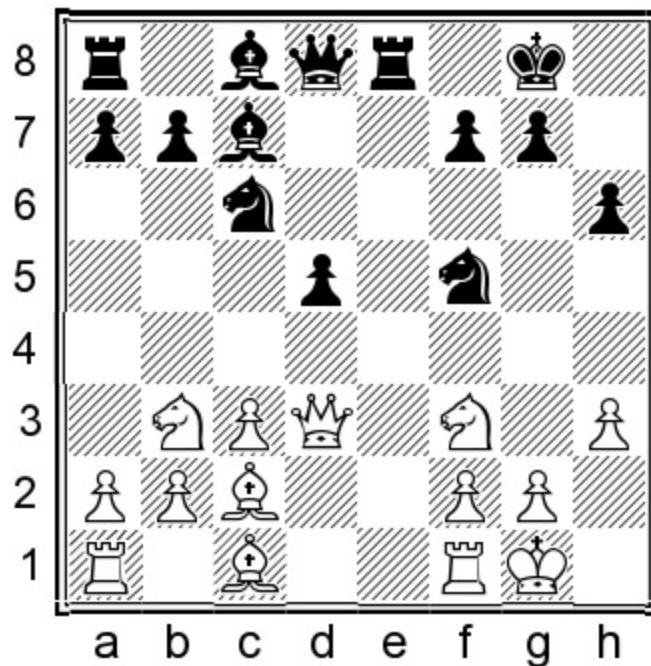
There is no way back for White now that Black has obtained the e-file.

14. $\text{Qd3!}?$

White's plan is to delay playing Re1 . It should be noted here that the plan with ... Kc7 seems to be off the table.

Or is it?

14... Kc7!!N



Position after: 14...♙c7!!N

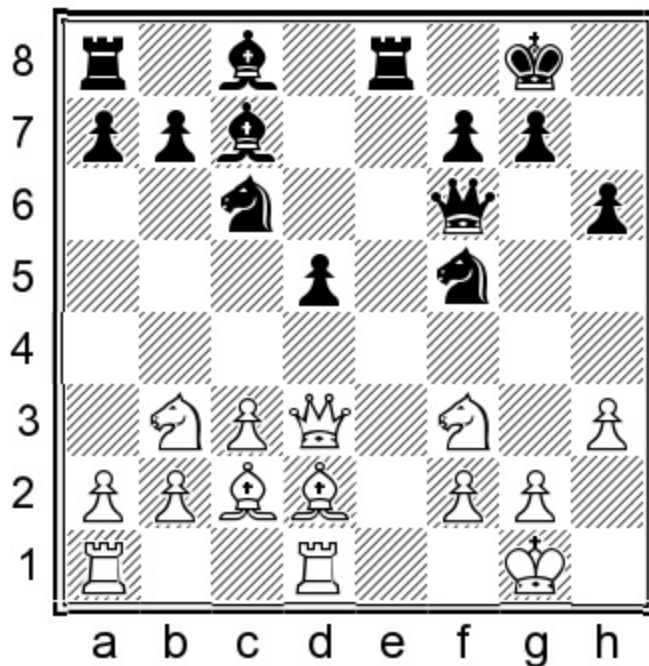
The double exclamation is for audacity, Black is inviting g4. Let's pray for our opponents to play it.

14...g6 This older move is playable but after seeing fireworks in the main line, I cannot possibly recommend it.

15.g4

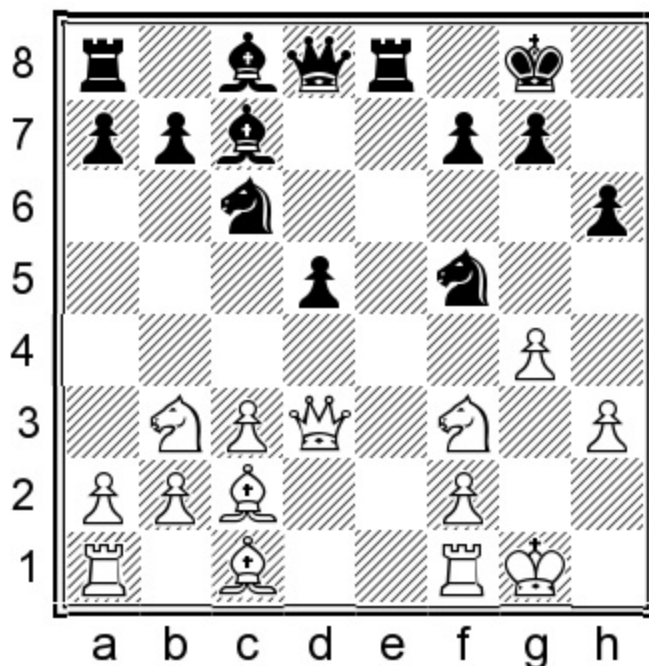
They did it! It would be very difficult for me to hide my emotions at this point, haha. (So unprofessional, saying 'haha' in a chess book. Definitely no five-star reviews, that's for sure). Okay, back to business! Black surprisingly has two options in this position. Let's investigate both.

15.♖d1!? ♚f6 16.♙d2



Position after: 16. ♔d2

16... ♔d6! [16... ♖b6 17.a4 a6 18.a5 ♕a7 19. ♖bd4 ♗cxd4 20. ♗xd4 ♕xd4 21.cxd4 g6 22. ♖e1 ♕d7 23. ♕c3± Black is solid but White can try.] 17. ♖e1 ♕d7 18. ♖bd4 ♗cxd4 19.cxd4 g6=



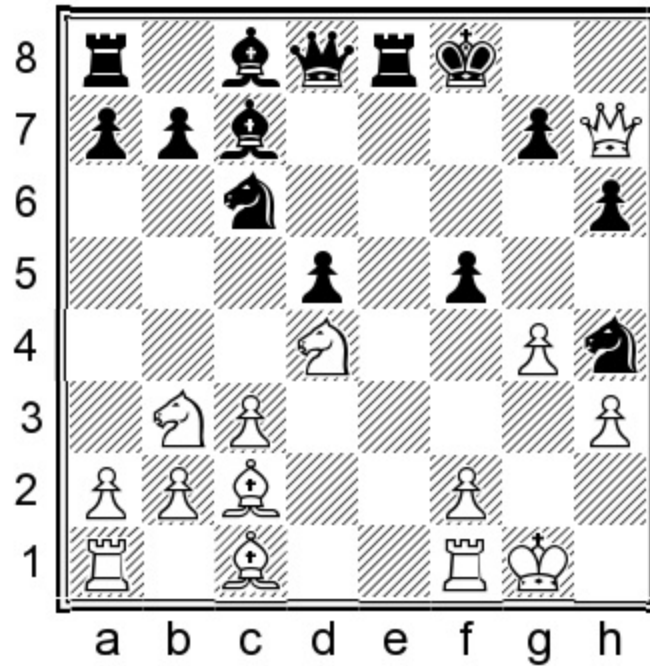
Position after: 15.g4

15... ♔d6!!

This is as double-edged as it gets. If Black manages to memorize this forcing rook sacrifice, it will

present an excellent chance to win.

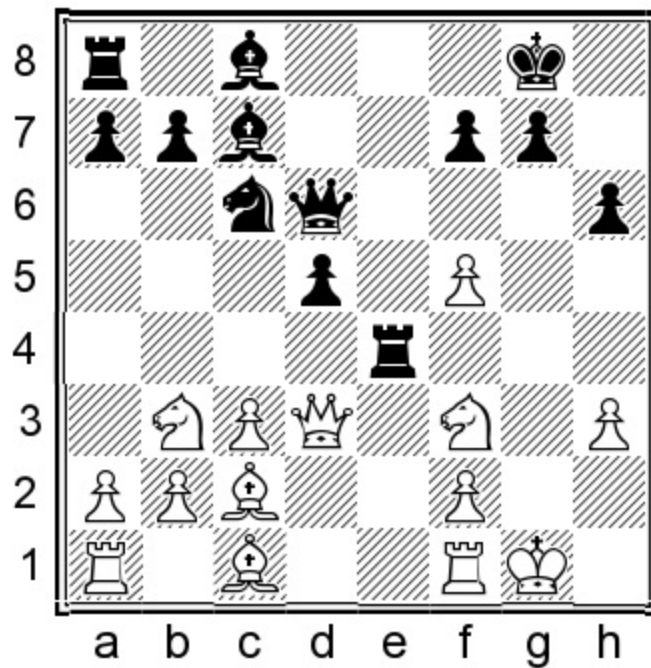
15...♖h4!? 16.♙h7+ ♔f8 17.♗fd4 f5!



Position after: 17...f5!

This is forcing a draw. 18.♗xh6 [18.♗xf5 ♙d6 19.f4 ♗xd4 20.♗xd4 ♗xf5 21.♗xf5 ♗b6+ 22.♗h1 ♗xf5! 23.♙xf5+ ♔g8 24.♙d3 d4 25.♗d2 ♖ad8 26.♖ae1 ♙c6+ 27.♙f3 ♖xe1 28.♗xe1 ♙b5 29.cxd4 ♙xb2] It is easier to play Black with the better king safety, though the position is objectively equal.]
18...gxf6 19.♙xh6+=

16.gxf5 ♖e4



Position after: 16... Re4

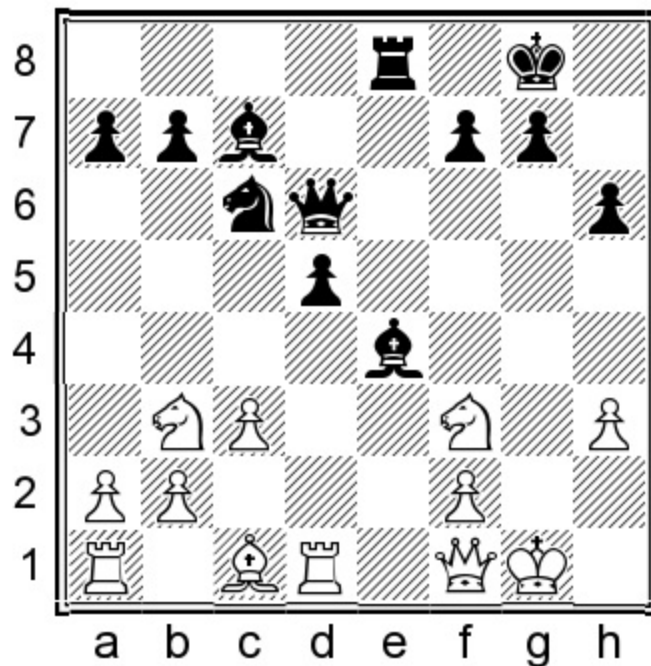
17. Re1

17. ♖d1 ♗xf5 18. ♗xe4 ♗xe4 19. ♘bd2 ♚g6+ 20. ♔h1 ♚f5= is another way for White to escape with a draw.

17... ♗xf5 18. ♚f1 □

18. ♚xd5 ♚g6+ 19. ♔h1 ♗d8-+

18... ♗ae8! 19. ♗xe4 ♗xe4



Position after: 19...♙xe4

Black is now a full rook down!

20.♘bd2 □ 20...♙f5 21.♙h1

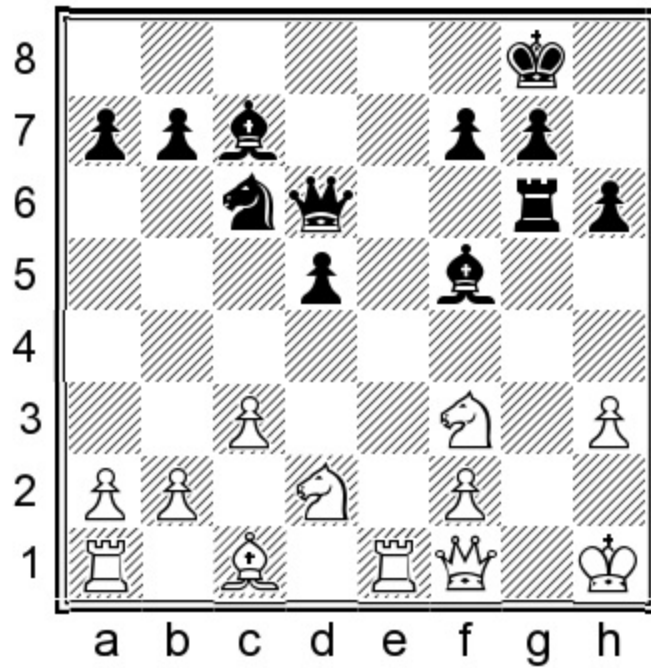
After long analysis of the inferior 21.♙h1, I came to the conclusion that 21.♙g2! is the last chance for White to maintain equality. Still, I have kept 21.♙h1 as my main line in order to enjoy chess bliss in its purest form.

21.♙g2! ♚d7 22.♖e1 ♖e6 23.♗xe6 ♚xe6 24.♘h2 ♙xh3 25.♙f3 ♚e1+ 26.♘df1 ♙xh2+ 27.♙xh2 ♙xf1=

21...♗e6 22.♗e1

22.a4 transposes after 22...♗g6 23.♗e1.

22...♗g6



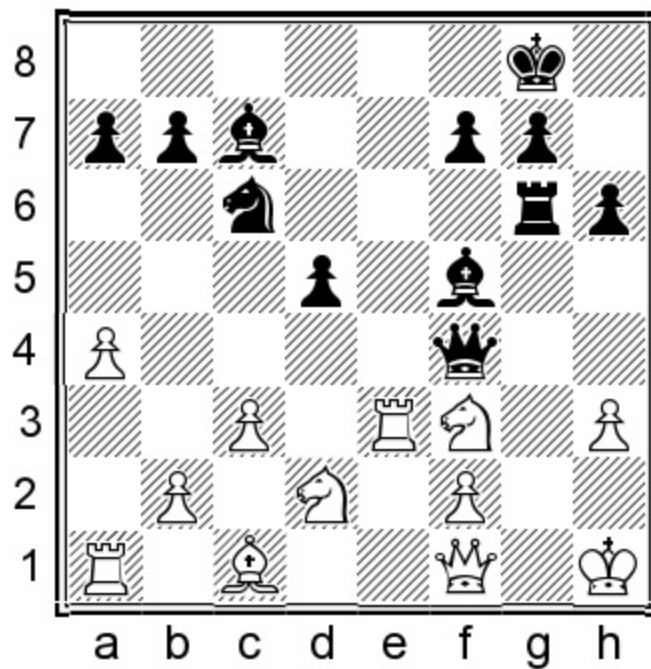
Position after: 22...Rg6

23.a4

Black will probably win a few games as a result of White being unable to find this difficult move.

23.Rxe3 d4! 24.Re1 Qd7! 25.fh4 [25.fg1 h5-+; 25.Qe2 h4!!-+] 25...hx3 26.Re8+ Qxe8
 27.Qxh3 Qe1+ 28.f1 Re6-+

23...Qf4! 24.Re3



Position after: 24. ♖e3□

Again, all other moves lose.

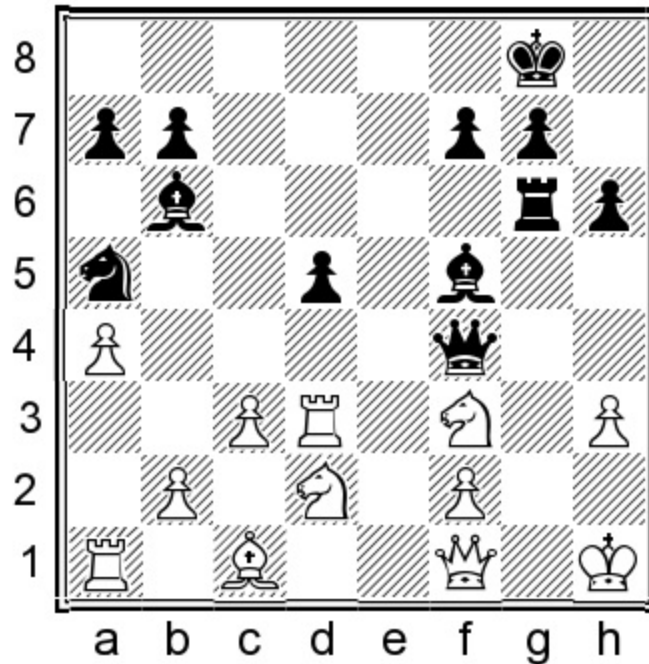
24... ♗a5!?

24... ♗e5 25. ♗xe5 ♘xe5 26. ♖xe5 ♚xe5 27. ♖a3 ♙xh3 28. ♚xh3 ♚g5 29. ♚h2 ♖e6 30. ♚h3 ♖g6=

25. ♖d3□

25. ♖a3 ♗c4 26. ♗xc4 ♘e4!-+

25... ♘b6

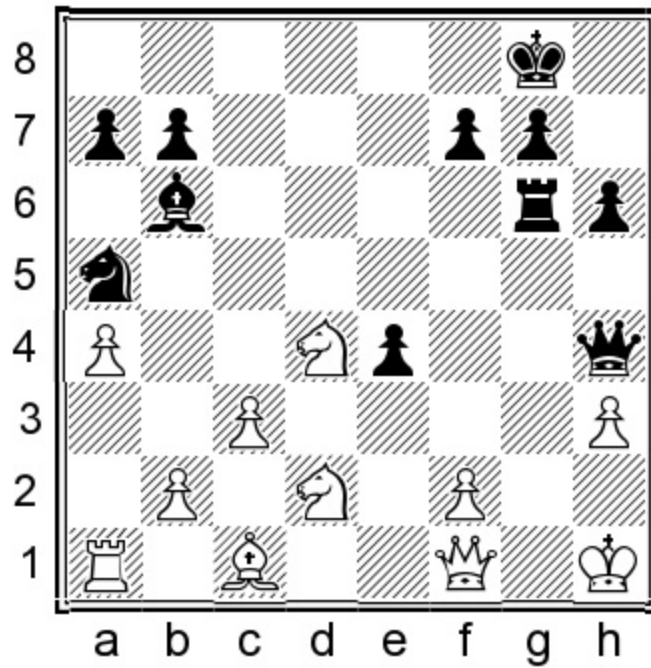


Position after: 25... ♘b6

26. ♖d4?!

26. ♗d4! ♘xd3 27. ♚xd3 ♚xf2 28. ♚f1 ♘xd4 29. cxd4 ♚xd4 30. ♖a3 ♖ Black has three pawns for the piece, but White has managed not to die.

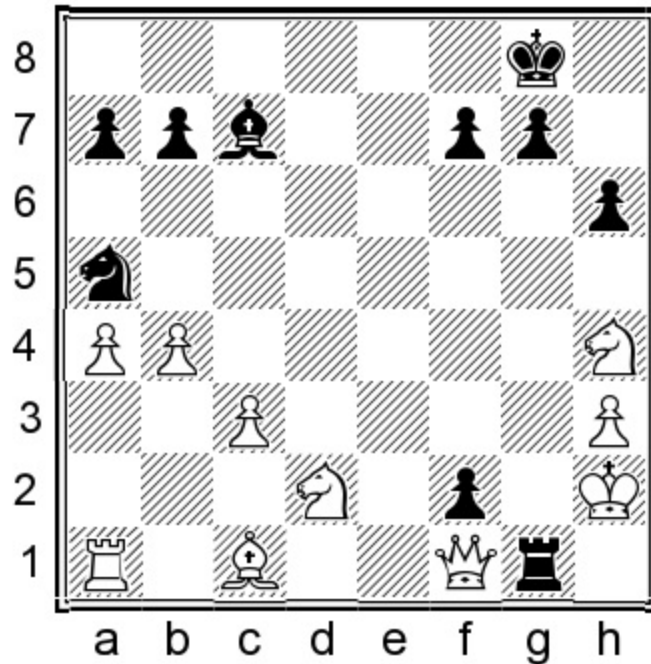
26... ♘e4 27. ♖xe4 dxe4 28. ♗d4 ♚h4



Position after: 28... ♔h4

29. ♗f5

29.b4 Let's see what resources are available to Black here. 29...e3!! 30. ♗f5?! [30. ♗2f3!? ♖e4 31.fxe3 ♗xd4 32.exd4 ♗b3 33. ♖a2 ♗xc1 34. ♖f2 ♗d3--+] 30...exf2!! 31. ♗xh4 ♖g1+ 32. ♗h2 ♗c7#



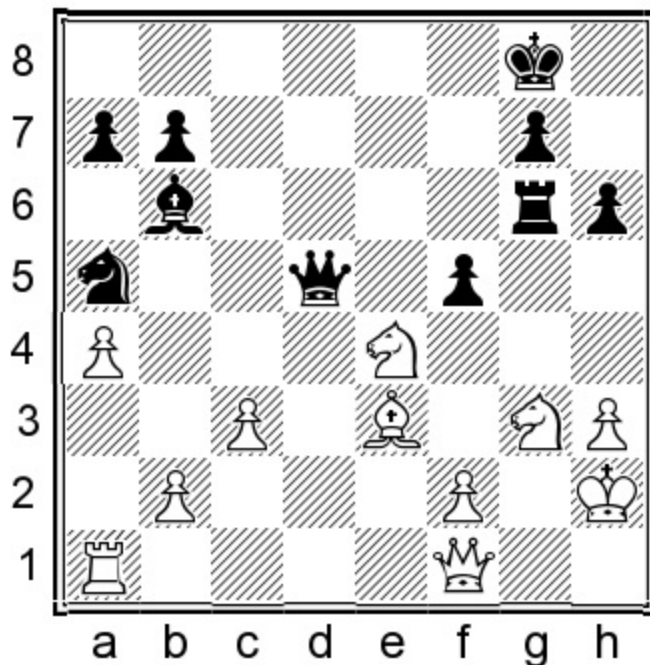
Position after: 32... ♗c7#

A very pretty mate!

29...♙g5 30.♘g3

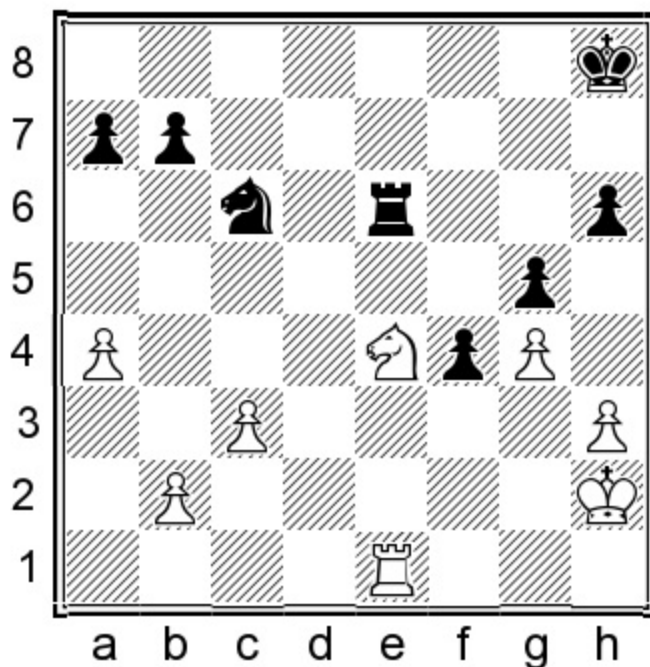
30.♘d4 ♚h5! 31.b4 e3!!-+

30...e3 31.♘de4 ♚d5 32.♙h2 f5 33.♙xe3



Position after: 33. ♙xe3

33...♙c7! 34.♘c5 ♚f3 35.♚g2 ♙xg3+ 36.fxg3 ♚xe3 37.♚d5+ ♙h8! 38.♙g1 f4 39.g4 ♘c6 40.♚e4 ♚xe4 41.♘xe4 ♙e6 42.♙e1 g5

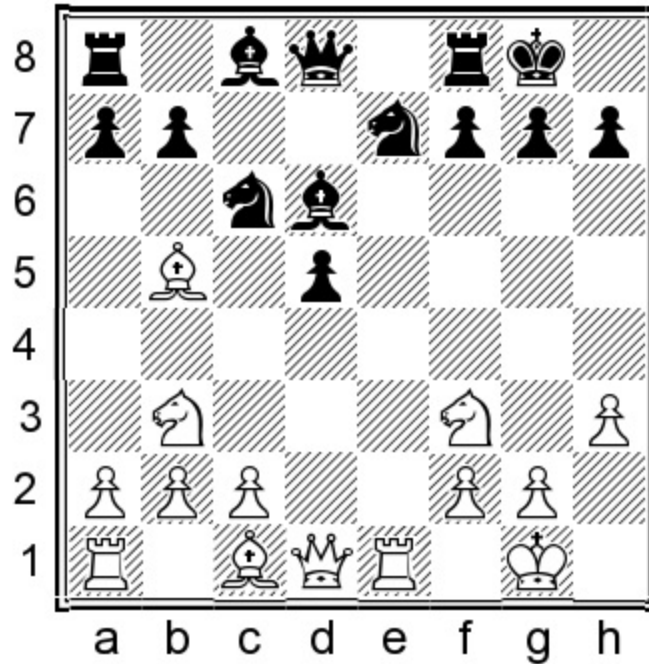


Position after: 42...g5

With his beautifully protected passed pawn, Black has all the chances to win this game.

d) 11.♖e1 h6 12.c3 ♖e8

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3 ♗c6 6.♙b5 ♙d6 7.dxc5 ♙xc5 8.0-0 ♗ge7 9.♗b3 ♙d6 10.h3 0-0 11.♖e1



Position after: 11.♖e1

11...h6

Now White will play c3 and ♙d3 in some order, meaning they are predictable for the next two moves. Therefore we should think about the possible setups we can adopt over the next three moves. Let's talk about the plans available to Black. There are three main ways to play this position.

1) The 'solid line' with ...♙f5. This line is quite easy to play, but it has proven rather difficult to win with. White generally has an edge in all lines.

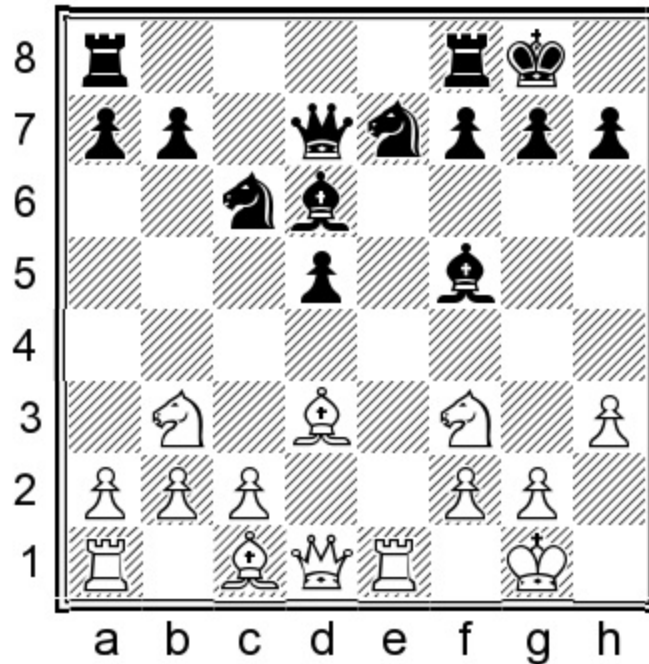
2) The ...♖e8/...♙c7 plan, which also includes ...h6. This plan can easily lead to inferior positions unless we know the one exact path to equality. If Black has memorized those lines, or if he prepares the lines thoroughly before a game, there should be at least a half-point reward.

3) The main plan with ...♗f5. I did not manage to find anything tangible against the main line, even though White has many different tries. On the other hand, this means there is a lot to memorize.

In summary: Go for the first plan if you do not wish to study too much theory. Actually, in that case I would recommend you play 6...♙e7+ which is probably the strongest line you can play without

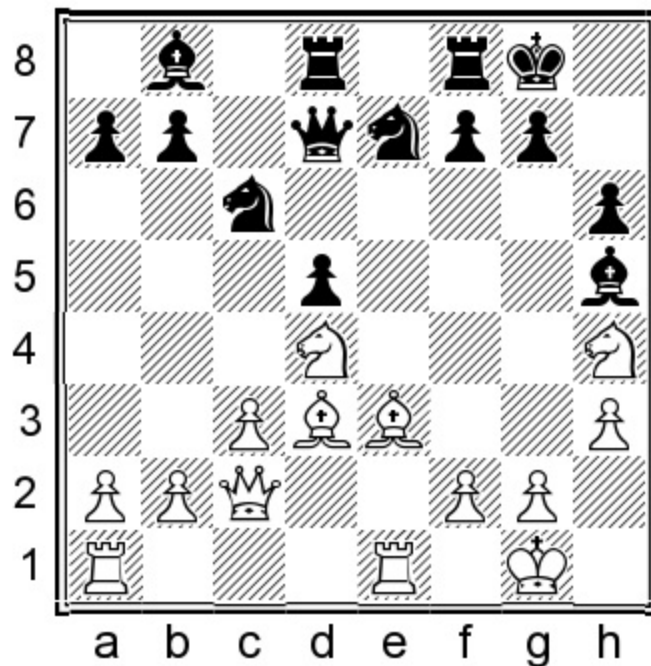
learning much theory. Go for the second plan if you would like to play for something very fresh and complex. The third plan is the known way. The unfortunate part about the well-trodden path is that there are a lot of possible tries against it. On the flipside, this means that White has hardly anything new to try. My personal preference is for the second plan if a draw is okay and for the third plan if you need to play for a win.

A) 11...♙f5!? This is the 'solid line', a decent way to avoid main line theory, although you will probably end up slightly worse. 12.♙d3! ♚d7



Position after: 12...♙d7

A1) 13.♘bd4 ♙g6 14.♙e3 ♖ad8 15.c3 h6 16.♚c2 ♙h5?! A real fighter is sometimes willing to make dubious moves in order to keep the game complicated. [16...♙xd3= White keeps a nominal edge in all lines here.] 17.♘h4 ♙b8

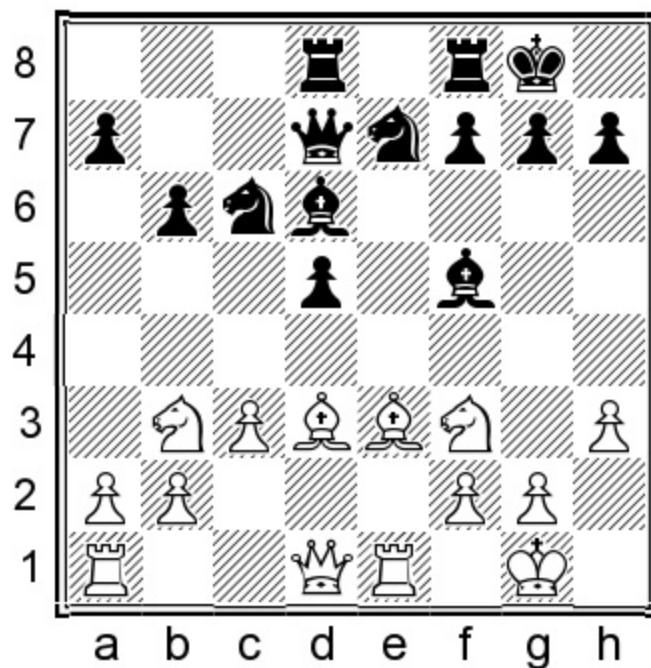


Position after: 17...♙b8

18.g4?! ♖d6 19.f4 ♘xd4?! 20.♙xd4 ♙g6 21.♗f2?! [21.♙xg6!±] 21...♙xd3 22.♙c5 ♗xf4 23.♗xf4 ♙xf4 24.♙xe7 ♙e4= 0-1 (41) Sanal, V (2460) – Romanov, E (2625) Jerusalem 2015.

A2) 13.c3 transposes to 11.c3.

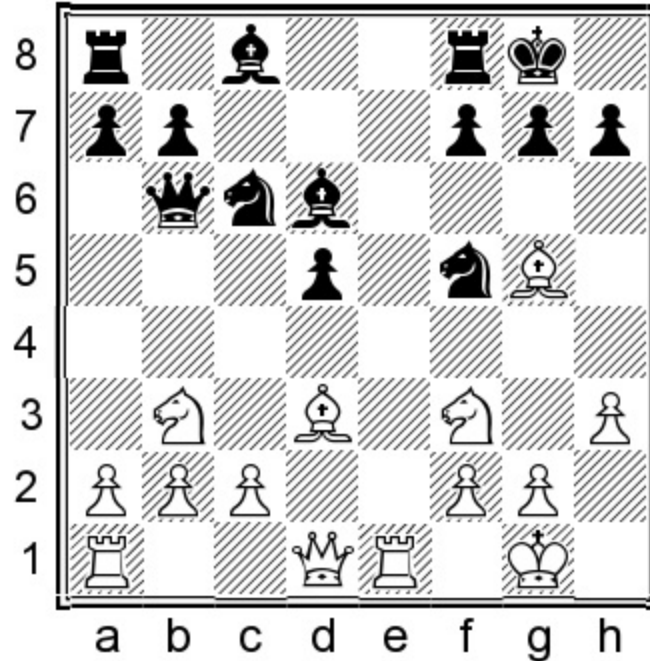
A3) 13.♙e3 b6? This move weakens c6, which in turn weakens control of the d4-square. Therefore, even when Black can prevent two minor pieces from going to c5, this weakness is still not worth it. [13...h6!?] 14.c3 ♖ad8



Position after: 14...♖ad8

15.♚c2?! [15.♙b5!±] 15...♙g6 16.♙xg6 ♘xg6 17.♖ad1± 1-0 (57) Vachier-Lagrave, M (2703) – Fridman, D (2645) Warsaw 2010.

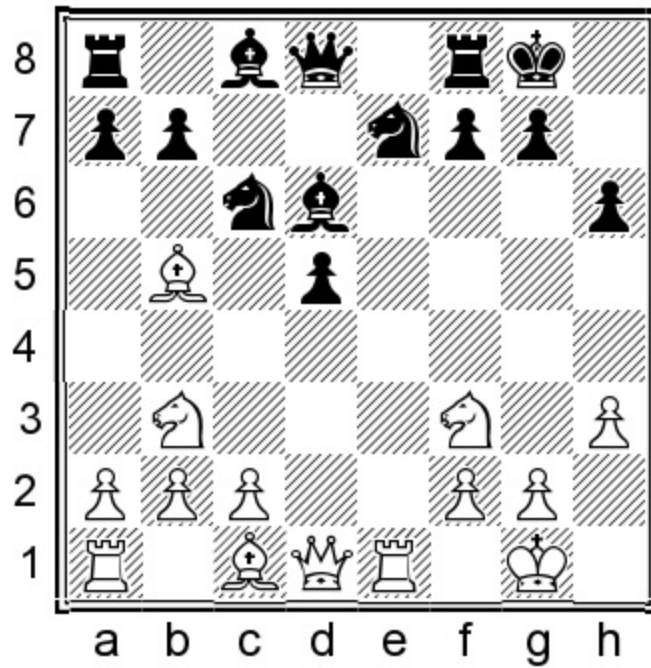
B) 11...♘f5!? This move should be prepared with ...h6. Let's see why. 12.♙g5 ♚b6 13.♙d3



Position after: 13. ♙d3

B1) 13...♘b4 14.g4! [14.♙f1 h6 15.♙c1 ♙g3!? 16.♖e2 gives an edge to White.] 14...♘xd3 15.♚xd3 h6 16.♙d2 ♘e7 17.♙a5 ♚c6 18.♘bd4±

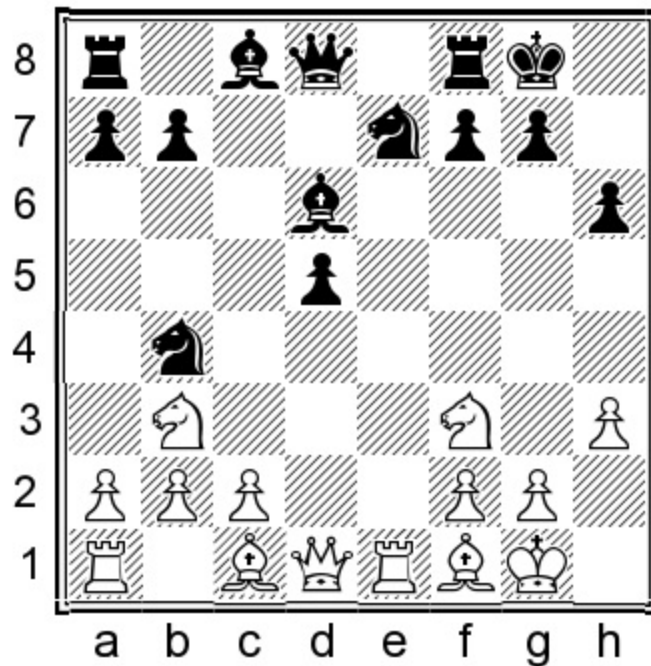
B2) 13...h6 14.♙xf5 ♙xf5 15.♚xd5 ♙xc2 16.♚xd6 hxg5 17.♘xg5 ♖ad8 18.♚g3± ♙g6 Black has some compensation, but not full. This is just one sample line to show how White gets the better game.



Position after: 11...h6

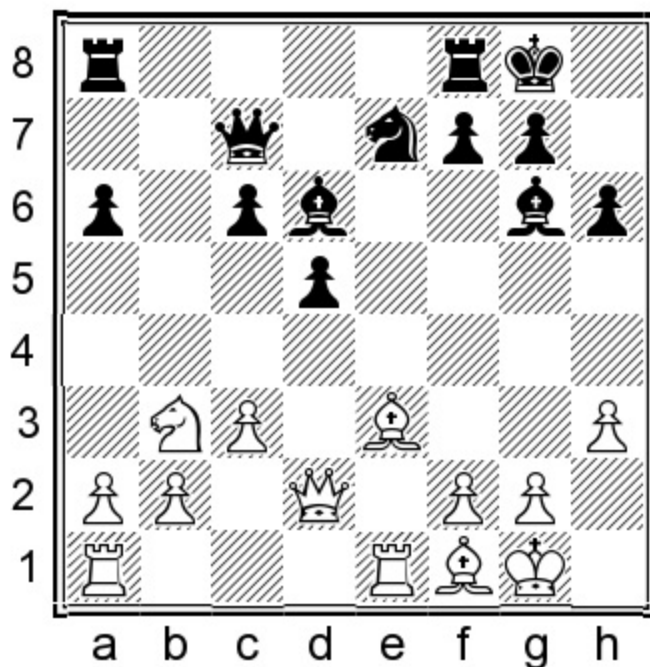
12.c3

12.♙d3 would again allow the knight jump as an additional option. 12...♘b4!? Again this move comes into consideration, although I feel like White does get an edge this time. [12...♘f5 13.c3 is the main line.] 13.♙f1



Position after: 13.♙f1

This was not possible when White hadn't played ♖e1 yet. The availability of this ♕f1 retreat makes the line an improved version of when ♕d3 was played on move 11. Bishops often like to be tucked away for a while and wait to reappear in the action later. Often the best way to play with a bishop is to use your other pieces to soften up the squares of your bishop's color. For example, if White now manages to soften up Black's light squares, then the f1-bishop will be able to reappear very effectively later on. But for the moment, it takes up a modest defensive role on f1. 13...♕f5 14.♗fd4 ♕g6 15.c3 ♗bc6 16.♕e3 a6 17.♖d2 ♔c7 18.♗xc6 bxc6 This position was seen in ½-½ (39) Smagin, S (2550) – Schmidt, W (2465) Belgrade 1988.



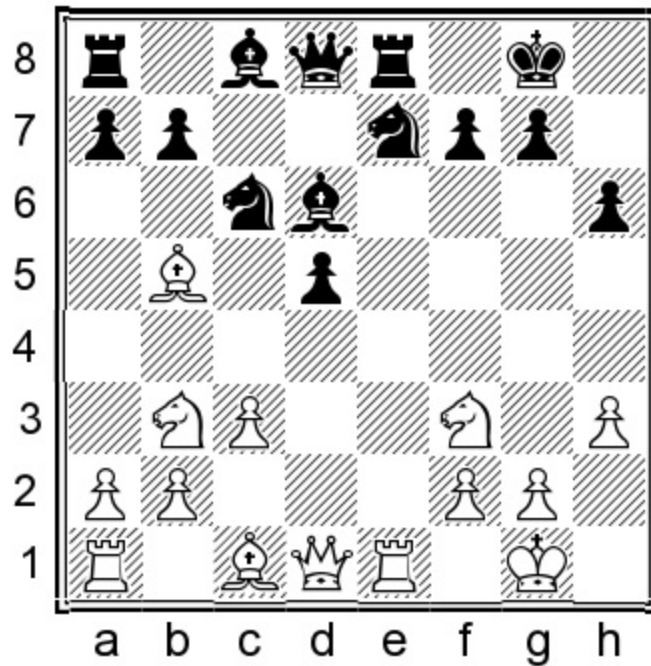
Position after: 18...bxc6

Now 19.♕c5± would have given White an edge. Notice how wonderfully active the bishop on f1 is, pointing at the queenside while his counterpart on g6 is staring into thin air.

12...♖e8!?

This logical move has only been played a handful of times. The plan is to play for the all-important e-file.

12...♗f5 – see the next subchapter.

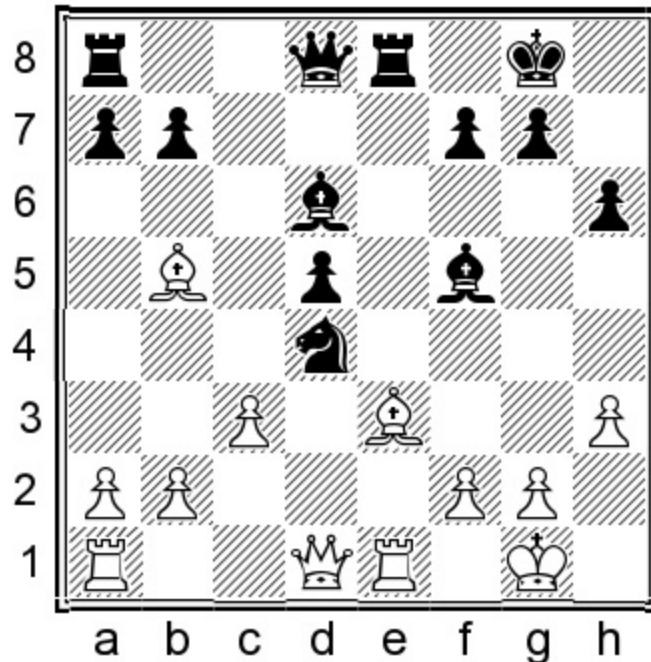


Position after: 12...♖e8!?

13.♙d3

Playing similarly to the main line is best, though the only three games to reach this position all continued with 13.♘bd4. Therefore we might consider 12...♖e8!? to be a ‘positionally tricky’ move.

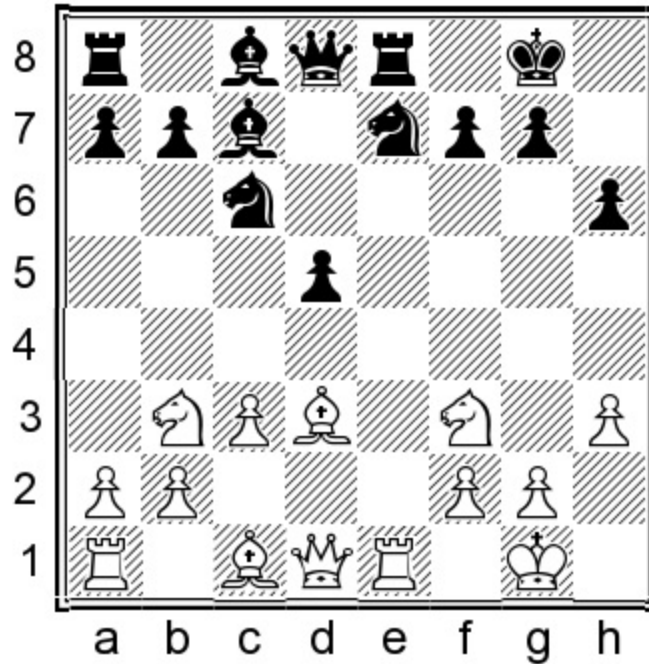
13.♘bd4 ♕d7! 14.♙e3 was seen in 1-0 (39) Pirozzi, H (2360) – Milher, A (2440) Argentina 1998, where Black could have made an unexpected improvement with 14...♘f5!N. Other moves are not good. 15.♘xf5 ♕xf5 16.♘d4 ♘xd4!



Position after: 16... ♖xd4!

17. ♗xd4 [17. ♗xe8 ♜c2 18. ♗b5 ♜xe1 19. ♚xe1 ♗c7=] 17... ♜xe1+ 18. ♚xe1 a6 19. ♗f1 ♚d7= Black takes the e-file and equalizes.

13... ♗c7

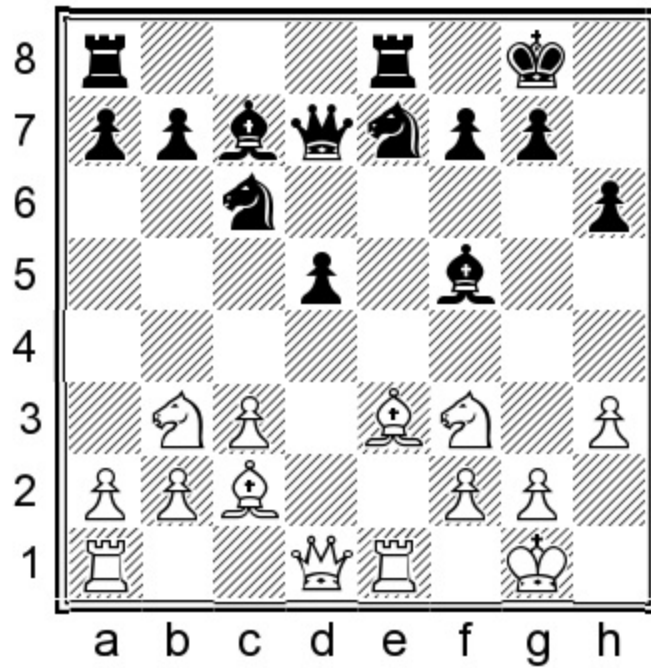


Position after: 13... ♗c7

White can play for two plans here. Either 14. ♗c2 or the more critical 14. ♚c2.

14. ♚c2

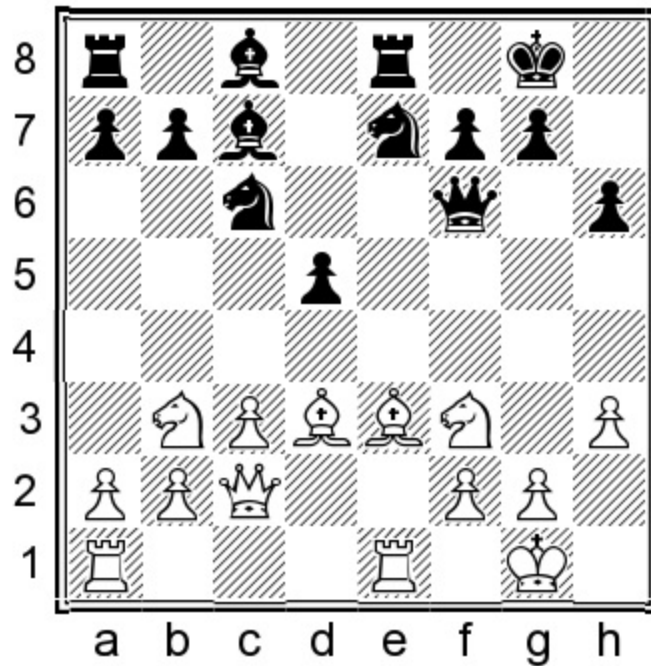
14. ♗c2 ♗f5 Now we can play the 'solid line' with an extra tempo. [14... ♚d6!? 15. ♗e3 ♗d7 16. ♗c5 ♚f4 17. ♚d2±] 15. ♗e3! Discouraging ... ♚d6. 15... ♚d7! [15... ♚d6 16. ♗c5 ♗xc2 17. ♚xc2 ♚d7 would see Black lose back the tempo and hand White back the usual edge he gets in these solid lines.]



Position after: 15... ♕d7!

16. ♖c5 [16. ♖bd4 ♙e4! This works when the e-file is blocked. 17. ♙xe4 dxe4 18. ♖b5 ♖c8 19. ♖d2 ♖f5=] 16... ♖d6! 17. ♖xb7 ♖g6 18. ♙xf5 ♖xf5 19. ♖c5 ♖xe3 20. ♖xe3 ♖xe3 21. fx3 ♖d8

14... ♖d6 15. ♙e3 ♖f6!



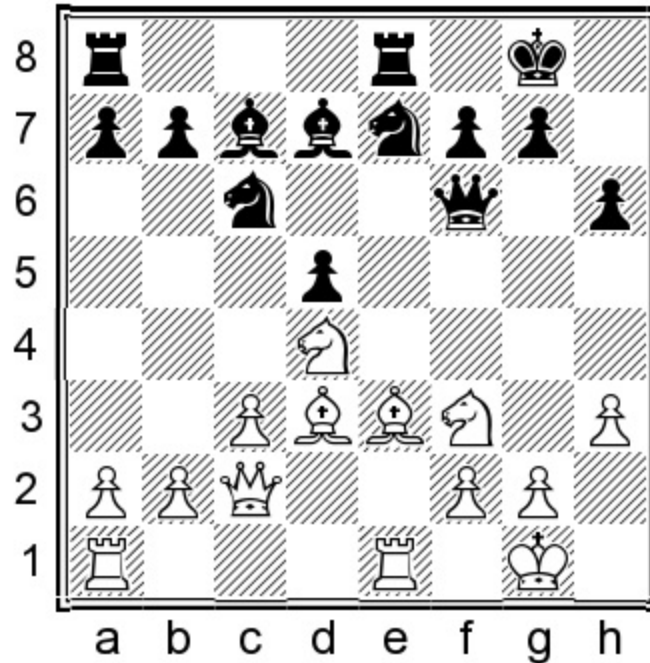
Position after: 15... ♖f6!

Now we have entered a complicated correspondence game which I will analyze in detail. chesshouring.com

16. ♖bd4

16. ♕d4!? ♜xd4 17. ♜bxd4 ♕d7=

16... ♕d7



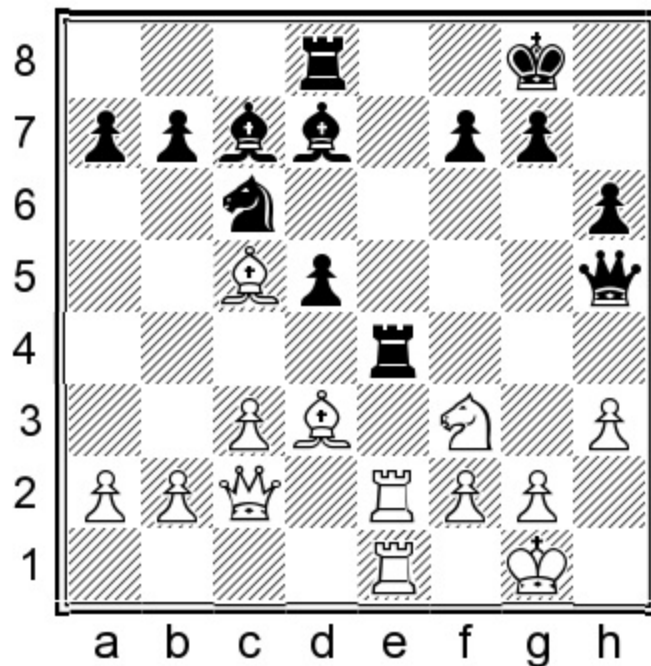
Position after: 16... ♕d7

16... ♜e5 17. ♜xe5 ♝xe5 18. g3 ♞f6 19. ♕b5 ♕xh3 20. ♕xe8 ♞xe8 21. ♞e2± Black does not have enough compensation, but it is still an interesting line!

17. ♞e2!N

A slight improvement over the game we are following. Nevertheless, Black can still manage a draw.

17. ♞ad1 ♞ad8 [17... ♜e5 18. ♜xe5 ♝xe5 19. g3 ♞f6 20. ♕f1 ♜f5 21. ♜xf5 ♕xf5 22. ♞b3 with slight pressure for White.] 18. ♞e2 ♜e5 19. ♜xe5 ♝xe5 20. ♜f3 ♞h5 21. ♕c5 ♜c6 22. ♞de1 ♞e4!! This resource is possible due to the exposed bishop on c5.



Position after: 22...Rxe4!!

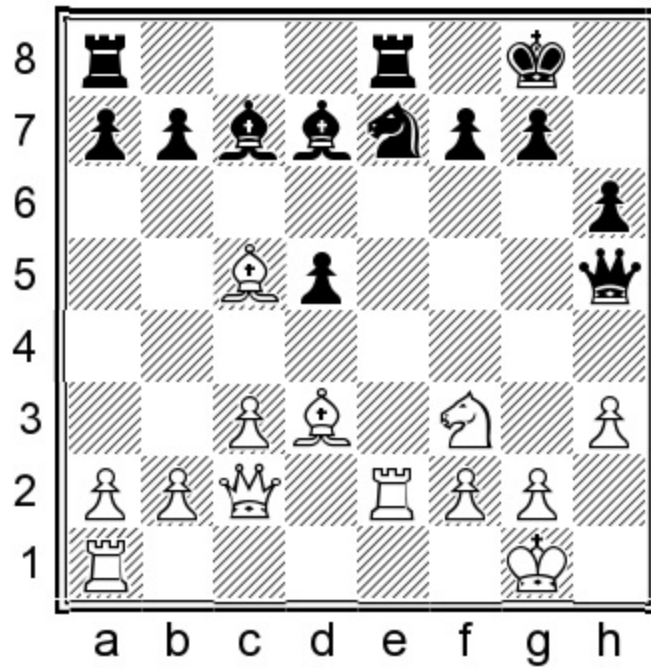
A) 23.b4 Rxe2 24.Qxe2 b6 25.Qe3 Re8 [25...Nd5 26.Nd4 Qxe2 27.Qxe2 Nc4= reaches an equal endgame.] 26.Qb5 Qxh3 27.Qxc6 Qxg2=

B) 23.Qxe4?? dxe4 24.Rxe4 Qxc5-+

C) 23.Nd4!? Qxh3! 24.Qxe4 Qf5 25.f3 Qh2+ 26.Qf1 Nxd4 27.Qxf5! Qh1+ 28.Qf2 Qh4+=

D) 23.Qd4 A typical computer move. 23...Rxe2 24.Qxe2 Nxd4 25.Nxd4 Qxe2= 1/2-1/2 (40) Corujedo Hernandez, R (2197) – Llorach Gracia, T (2174) ICCF email 2015. [25...Qg5=]

17...Nd5 18.Nxe5 Qxe5 19.Nf3 Qh5 20.Qc5



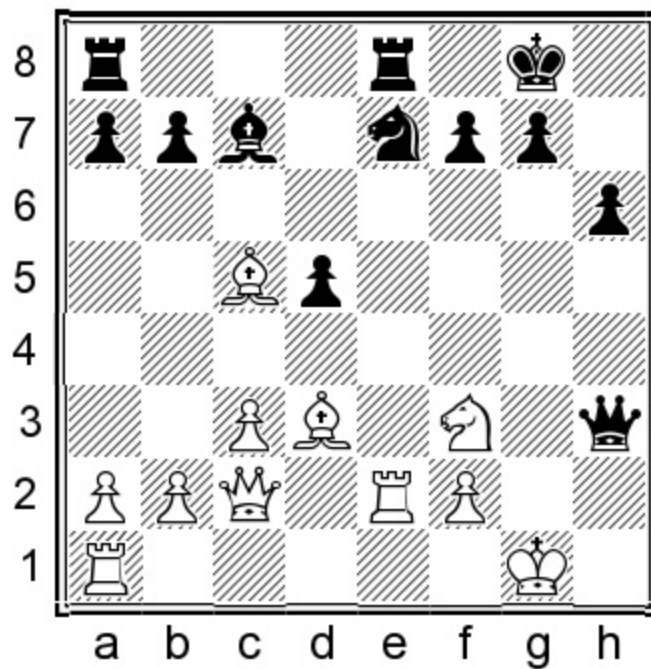
Position after: 20. ♔c5

20... ♕xh3!?

20... ♞c6 21. ♖ae1 ♜e4!? 22. b4 ♜xe2 23. ♚xe2 ♜c8 24. ♔c2±

21. gxh3 ♚xf3

21... ♚xh3?!



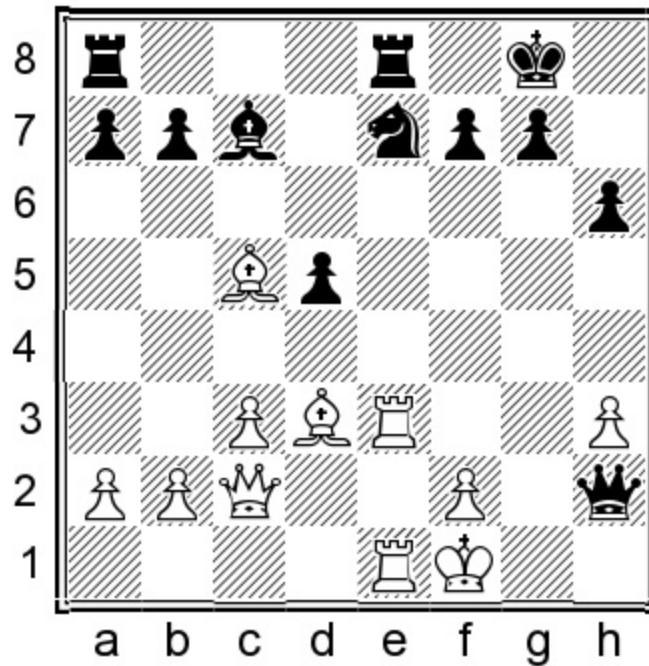
Position after: 21... ♚xh3?!

This leads to serious trouble, but it does not seem very easy to play. 22.♖e5 [22.♞e3 ♕f4 23.♞ae1 ♜g4+ 24.♔h1 ♞h5+=] 22...♕xe5 23.♞xe5 ♘g6 24.♕f5 ♞h5 25.♞e3 ♘h4 26.♕h3 ♞xe3 27.♕xe3 g5! 28.♕g2 ♞g4 29.f3 ♘xf3+ 30.♔f2 d4 31.cxd4 ♘xd4 32.♞d3 ♞d8 33.♞d1± Despite all the aggression, the bishops are long-term assets.

22.♞e3

22.♞ae1? ♞xh3 23.♞e3 ♞h2+ 24.♔f1 ♞h1+ 25.♔e2 ♞h5+ 26.♔f1 ♕f4 27.♞xe7 ♞h1+ 28.♔e2 ♞xe7+ 29.♕xe7 ♞h5+ 30.♔f1 ♞e8-+

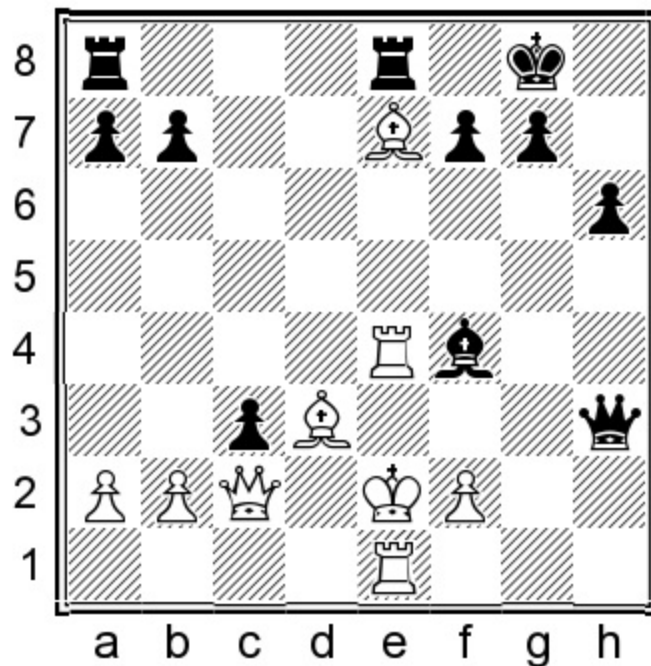
22...♞f4 23.♞ae1 ♞h2+ 24.♔f1



Position after: 24.♔f1

24...d4!

24...♕f4 is another possibility but White gets more options there. 25.♕xe7 d4 26.♞e4 ♞xh3+ 27.♔e2 dxc3



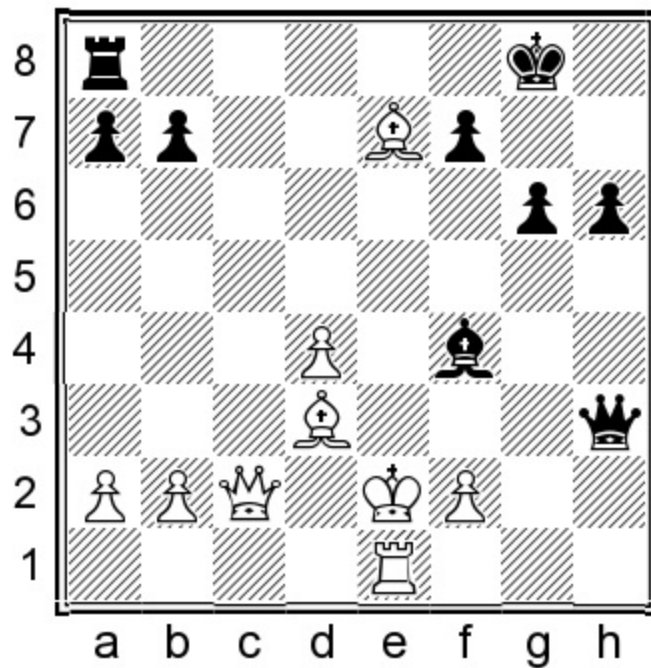
Position after: 27...dxc3

28.♔d1!? [28.♖xc3 ♜ac8 29.♗d4 ♞h5+ 30.f3 ♞h2+ 31.♗f2 f5 32.♗xh2 ♞xh2 33.♞e6 ♞c7 34.♔f2
 ♔f7 35.♞d6 ♞xe6 36.♞xc7 ♞xe1 37.♞xh2 ♞a1 38.♞e5= Leela claims an edge for Black, who knows!]
 28...♞d2 29.♞g1 ♞h5+ 30.♞e2 ♞d5 31.♞d3 ♞h5+=

25.cxd4 ♞f4 26.♞xe7

26.♞xe7 ♞ac8 27.♗a4 ♞xe7 28.♞xe7 ♞xh3+ 29.♔e2 ♞h5+=

26...♞xh3+ 27.♔e2 ♞xe7+ 28.♞xe7 g6=



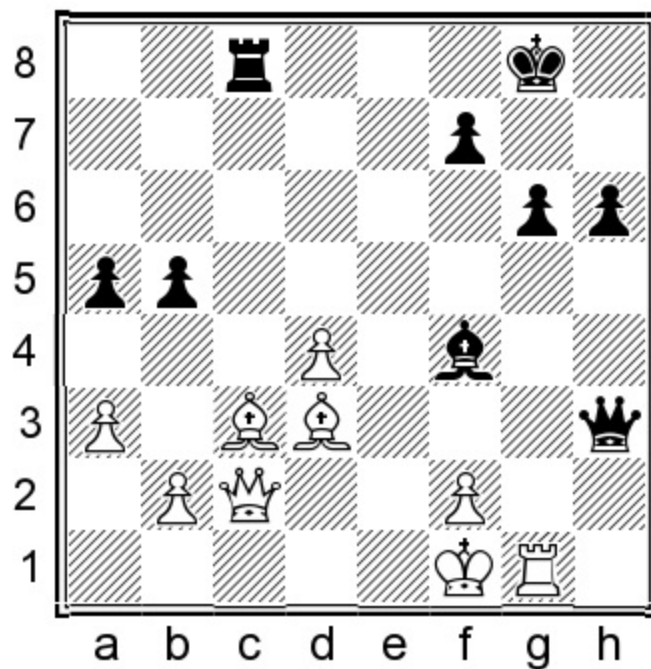
Position after: 28...g6=

The game will probably end in a draw, so this seems like a sensible line to prepare against a higher rated player.

29.♙b4

29.♙c4 ♚h5+ 30.f3 ♜c8 31.♙c5 b6

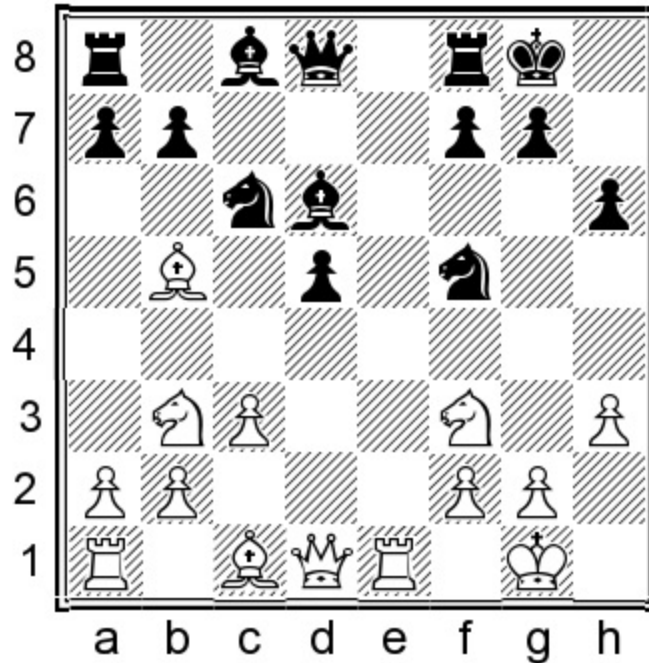
29...♜c8 30.♙c3 b5 31.a3 a5 32.♞g1 ♚h5+ 33.♚f1 ♚h3+=



Position after: 33... ♖h3+=

e) 11. ♖e1 h6 12. c3 ♘f5

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘d2 c5 4. exd5 exd5 5. ♘gf3 ♘c6 6. ♗b5 ♗d6 7. dxc5 ♗xc5 8. 0-0 ♘ge7 9. ♘b3 ♗d6 10. h3 0-0 11. ♖e1 h6 12. c3 ♘f5



Position after: 12... ♘f5

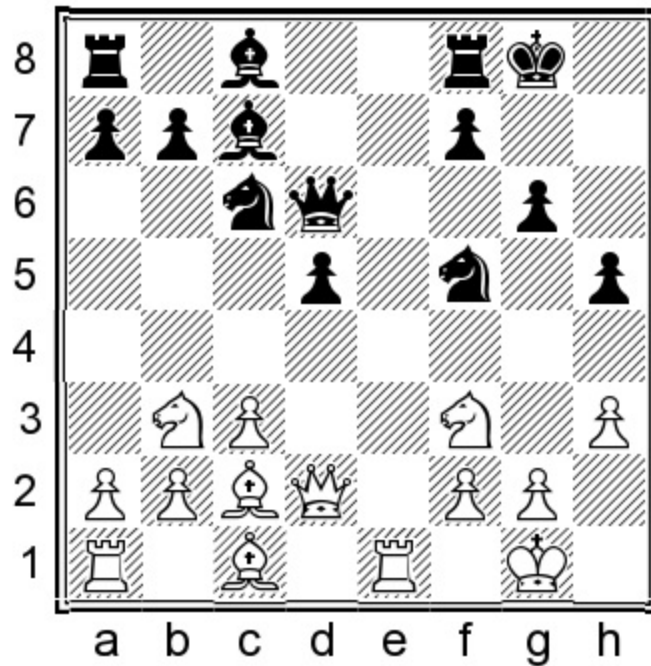
This is opting for the third plan mentioned above, which is generally the strongest. I will also mention the second plan as an alternative.

13. ♗d3

This position has been played a lot. If all roads lead to Rome, then we should consider this position to be the 'Rome' of the variation. From here, we will take a look at three popular options. 13... ♖f6 is the main line, while 13... ♗c7 and 13... ♖e8 are also worth a look.

13... ♖f6

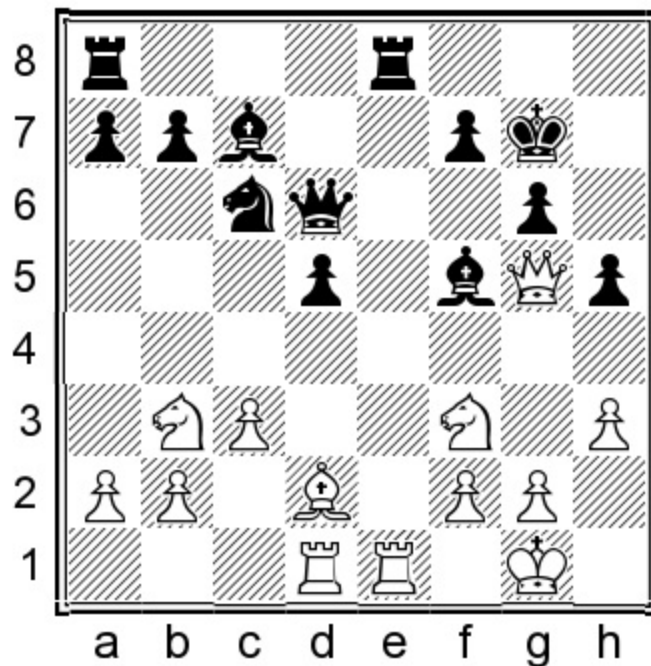
13... ♗c7!? Somehow this move does not offer as many winning chances as 13... ♖f6. It seems a bit too slow to pose problems. 14. ♗c2 ♖d6 15. ♖d3 g6 16. ♖d2 [16. g4 leads to a well-known draw: 16... ♗b6 17. ♖g2 ♗xf2 18. ♖xf2 ♖g3+=] 16... h5



Position after: 16...h5

A) 17. ♖xf5 ♜xf5 18. ♚h6 This line scores well for White and gives Black a difficult choice.
 18...f6!N 19. ♜e3 ♜f7 20. ♜c5 ♚d7 21. ♘fd4 [21. ♘bd4 ♘e5=] 21...♜xh3 22. gxh3 ♚xh3 23. ♚e3
 ♜h2+=

B) 17. ♚g5 ♜d7 18. ♜d2 ♜fe8 19. ♜ad1 ♚g7? 20. ♜xf5 [20.c4!] 20...♜xf5



Position after: 20...♜xf5

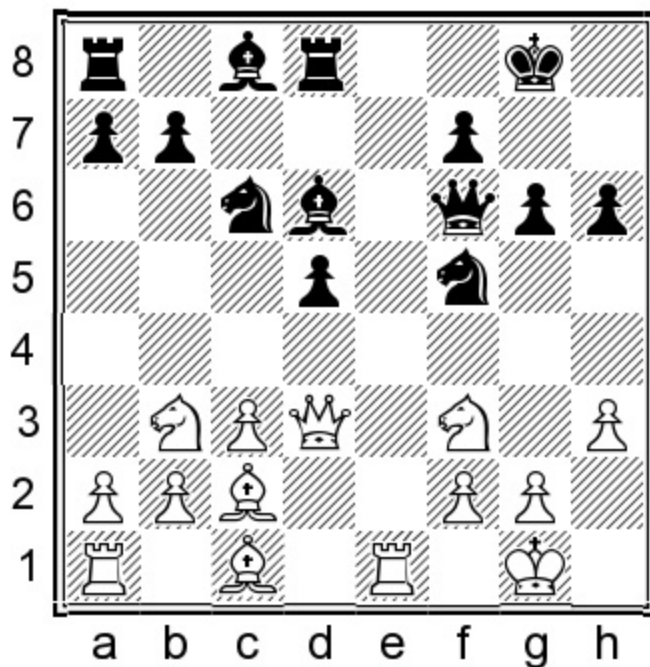
21.g3? [21. ♚h6+ ♚g8 22. ♜e3±; 21. ♘c5!± ♚xc5?? 22. ♚h6+ ♚g8 23. ♘g5+-] 21...♜e4?? [21...♚f8!

☞] 22. ♖h6+ ♔g8 23. ♘g5+- 1-0 (27) Kasimdzhanov, R (2693) – Schmidt, W (2360) Poznan 2014.

14. ♙c2 ♚d8 15. ♖d3

15. ♖e2!? might be an improvement for White, though it looks slightly illogical.

15...g6



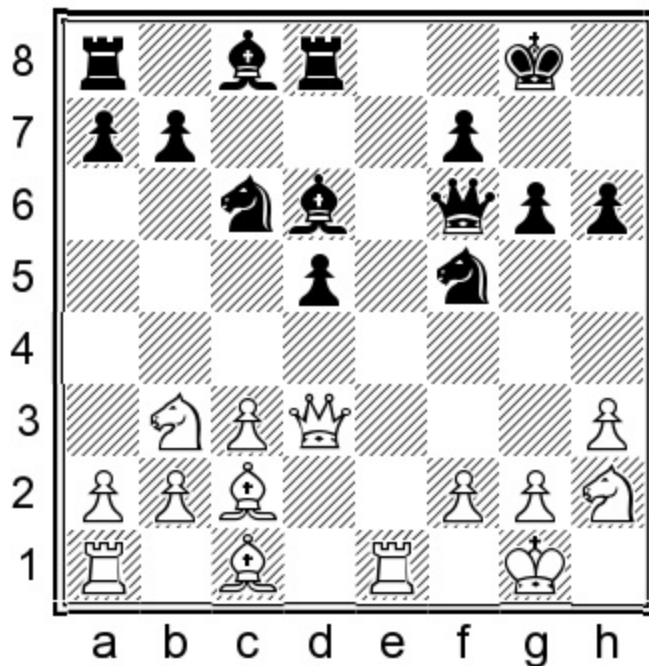
Position after: 15...g6

This is another tabiya. White has chosen many options and all of them score around 60%. Let's take a look at the four most important branches.

16. ♙d2

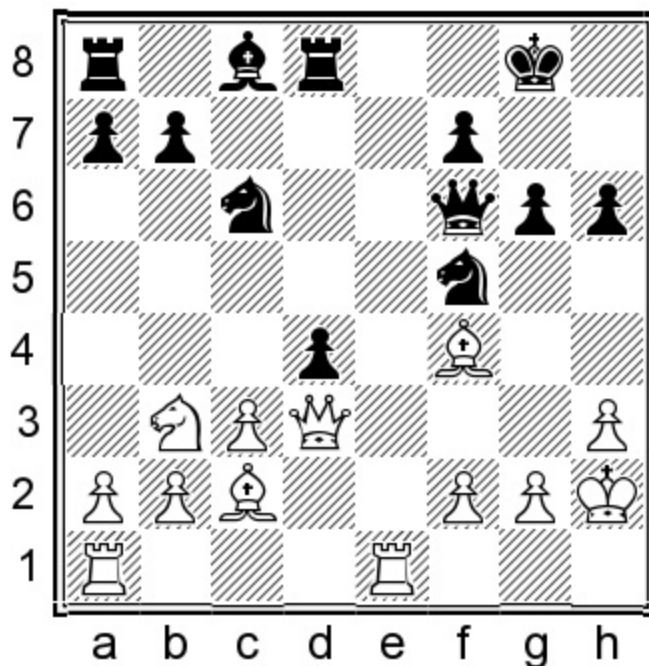
After this move, we enter a forced line where Black can hold a draw.

A) 16. ♘h2!? “I can resist everything except temptation.” ~ Oscar Wilde. Well, Mr. Wilde is in good company because a lot of strong grandmasters could not resist the temptation to take on h2.



Position after: 16. ♖h2!?

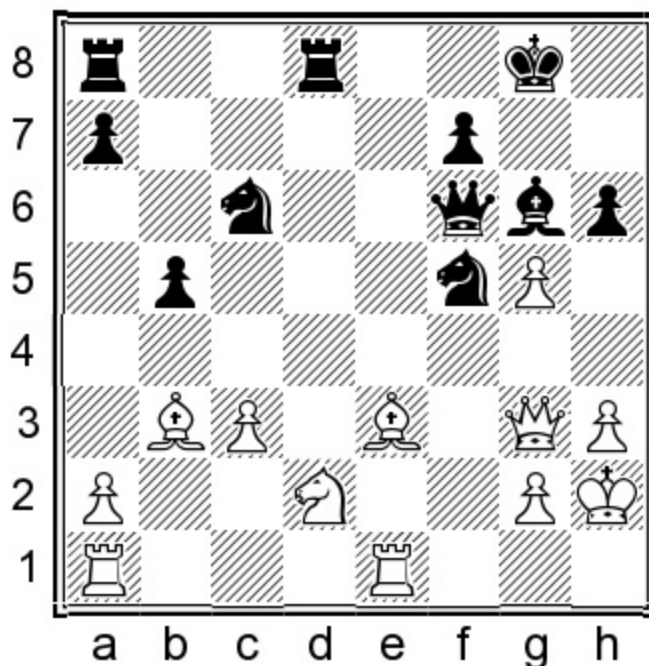
A1) 16... ♙xh2+ 17. ♚xh2 d4 [17... ♙e6!?!N] 18. ♙f4 [18. ♙d2!?!N 18... ♙e6 19. ♗c5 ♙d5 20. ♗e4 ♙xe4 21. ♚xe4 d3 Black still needs to prove full equality in this strange position. All bishop moves are worth examination here.]



Position after: 18. ♙f4

18...b6!? [18... ♗fe7 19. ♙c7 ♙f5 20. ♚f3 ♖dc8 21. ♙g3 dxc3 22. bxc3 ♗g7 23. ♙d1 h5! 24. ♗d4 ♖e8 25. ♙a4 h4! 26. ♙f4 ♗xd4 27. cxd4 ♗c6 28. ♙xc6 ♚xc6 29. d5 ♚f6 30. ♙d2± This is a critical line;

White can still try and press here. Although it is not much, he does have the better bishop.] 19.♖d2 ♘d6 20.♗g3 dxc3 21.bxc3 g5 22.♙e3 ♙f5 23.♙a4 b5 24.♙b3 ♙g6 25.f4 ♘f5 26.fxg5

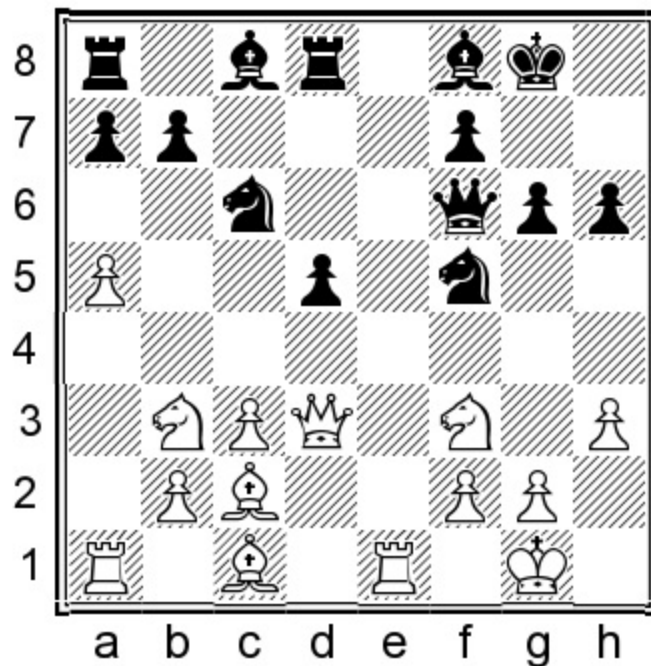


Position after: 26.fxg5

26...♗e7?? [26...♗xc3! 27.♖ac1 ♗xb3 28.♘xb3 ♘xg3 29.♖xc6 ♘f5=] 27.♗f2 hxg5 28.♙f4 1-0 Timofeev, A (2658) – Lysyj, I (2590) Sochi 2007.

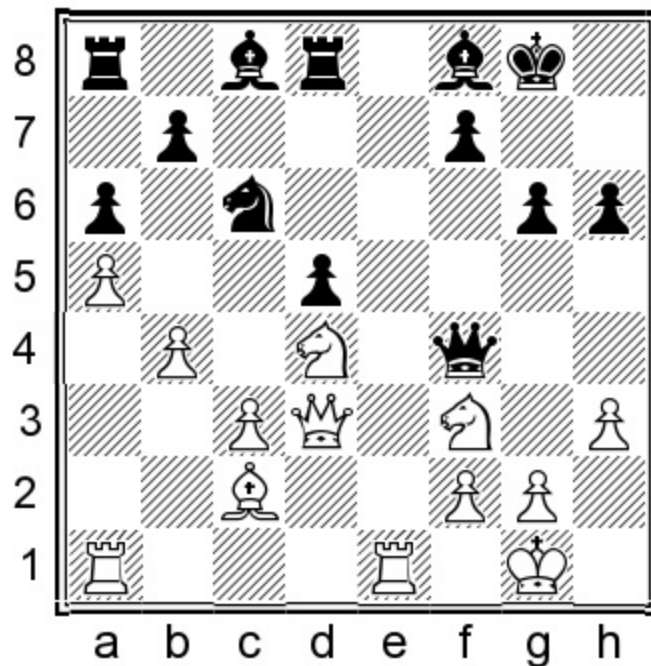
A2) 16...a5! is the easiest way to equalize. 17.♘g4 ♗g7 18.a4 ♙e6 19.♗f3 h5 20.♙xf5 hxg4 21.♙xg4 ♘e5 22.♗e3 ♙xg4 23.hxg4 ♖e8= ½-½ (77) De Carlos Arregui, I (2376) – Palmo, P (2404) ICCF email 2009.

B) 16.a4!? This somewhat rare move scores best in both over the board games and correspondence games, and it is also Leela’s top choice. But despite having all these things going for it, it is still not the main line! 16...♙f8 17.a5!



Position after: 17.a5!

17...a6 [17...d4 18.♘bxd4 ♘fxd4 19.♘xd4 ♘xd4 20.cxd4 ♞xd4 21.♞c3± 1-0 (46) Hibbard, C – Van der Houwen, P ICCF email 2001.] 18.♙f4N [18.♞e2!?N] 18...♘fd4 19.♘bxd4 ♞xf4 20.b4!?

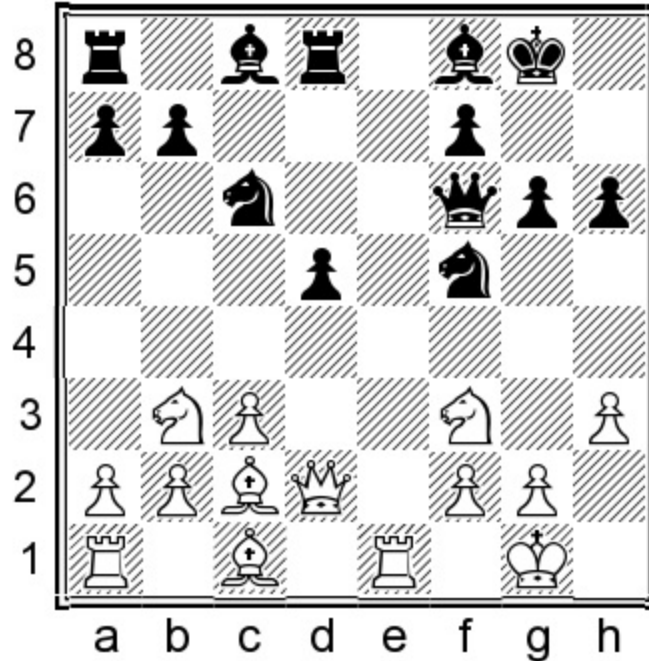


Position after: 20.b4!/?

This move aims for a nasty positional bind. 20...♘xd4 21.♘xd4 ♙f5! No bind today. 22.♘xf5 ♞xf5 23.♞xf5 gxf5 24.♙xf5 d4! =

C) 16.♞d2 The second most common move in the position. White is moving his queen around in the

hope of creating some weaknesses. 16...♔f8 Basically forced.



Position after: 16...♔f8

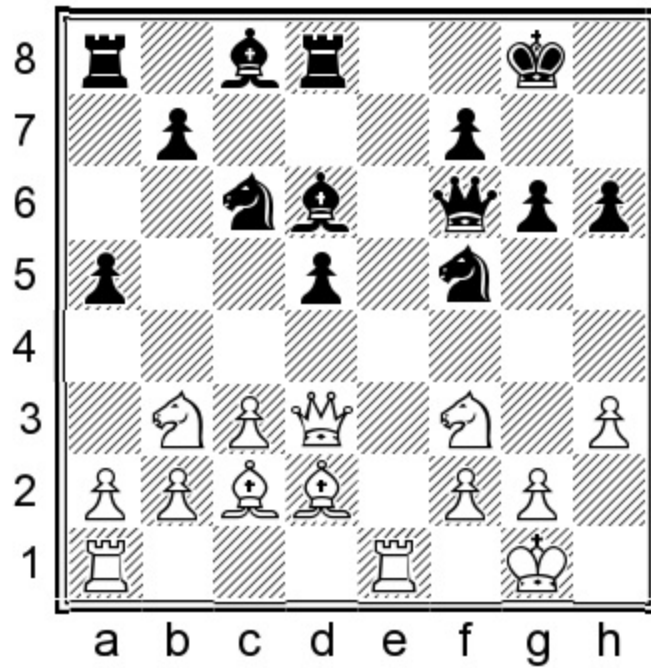
C1) 17.♘h2?! a5! This is something which should be remembered – ♘h2 should be met by play on the other side of the board! 18.♘g4 ♖g7 19.♗d1N 19...a4 20.♘d4 ♘cxd4 21.cxd4 ♗xd4 22.♙xf5 ♗xd1 23.♞xd1 gxf5 24.♘f6+ ♔g7 25.♘h5+ ♔g6 26.♘f4+ ♔h7 27.♙e3 ♙e6

C2) 17.♗f4 ♙d6 [17...a5!?] 18.♗a4 ♔h7! 19.♗b5 a6 20.♗d3 b5 21.♙d2 a5↑

C3) 17.♙xf5 ♙xf5 18.♘fd4 ♙d7=

C4) 17.♗e2!? ♘d6 18.♗d1 ♘c4 19.♘bd4 ♙d7= This position was seen in three correspondence games, the first being ½-½ (32) Pivinsky, E (2457) – Liebert, E (2478) ICCF email 2008.

16...a5!

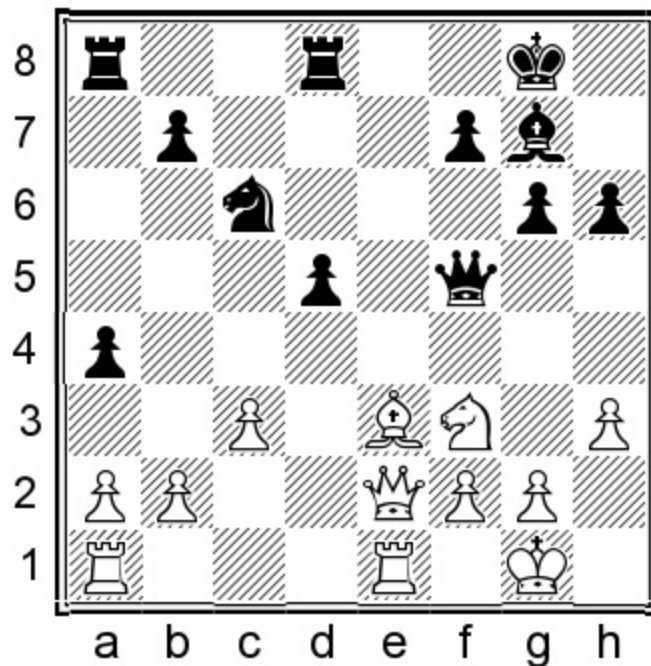


Position after: 16...a5!

Black really needs to know what he is doing here to avoid losing.

17.a4

17.♔e2!? a4 18.♙xf5 ♙xf5 19.♘bd4 ♙f8 20.♘xf5 ♔xf5 21.♙e3 ♙g7



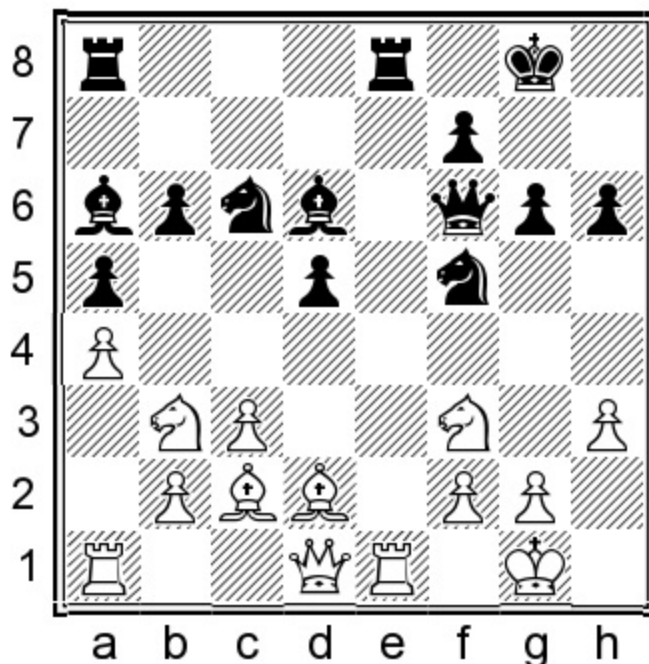
Position after: 21...♙g7

A) 22.♖ac1!? d4N [22...♖e8 23.♖ed1 ♖e7 24.♔d2 ♘e5 25.♘d4 ♔e4= Later in the game Black

became a little too creative for his own good. 1-0 (64) Kuhl, E (2201) – Van Daatselaar, J (2145) ICCF email 2015.] 23. ♖xd4 ♜xd4 24. cxd4 ♙xd4 25. ♙xh6 ♜ac8=

B) 22. ♚d2N 22...d4 23. ♖xd4 ♜xd4 24. ♙xd4 ♜ac8 25. ♞e2 ♙xd4 26. cxd4 ♔g7 27. ♞d1 ♞d5 28. ♚d3 ♚d7= Black is playing for two results, but the draw is very likely.

17...b6 18. ♚e2 ♙a6 19. ♚d1 ♞e8



Position after: 19... ♞e8

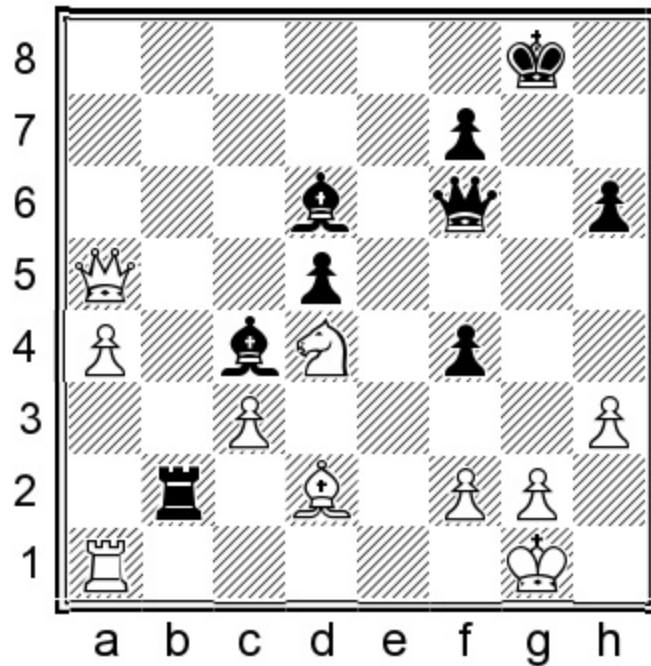
20. ♞xe8+

20. ♙xf5 is the main move but the above move order gives Black no extra options.

20... ♞xe8 21. ♙xf5 gxf5 22. ♖fd4 ♜xd4 23. ♖xd4 f4!

The only move to avoid a worse position.

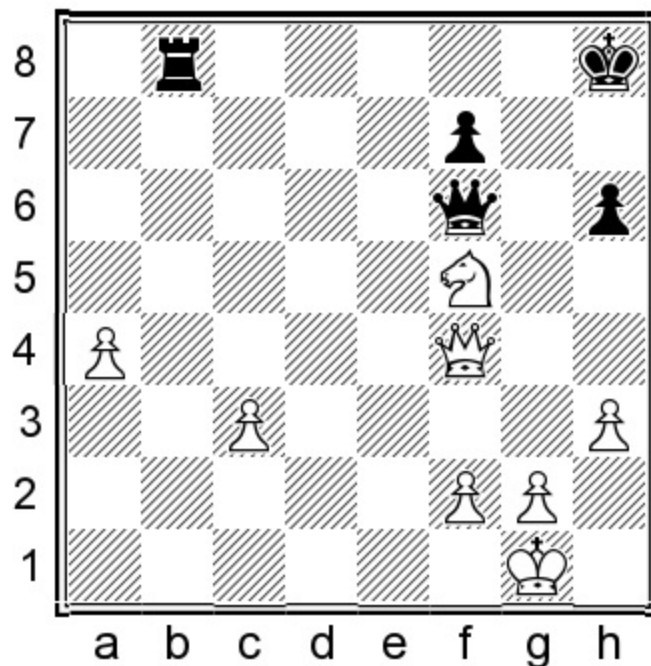
24. ♚b3 ♙c4 25. ♚xb6 ♞b8 26. ♚xa5 ♞xb2



Position after: 26... ♖xb2

Now we can finally stop and assess this resulting position. In general White is doing well with his extra pawn. Although Black has compensation, he still needs to work for the draw. Of course in correspondence chess this is a rather simple task. I will include a full correspondence game as an example.

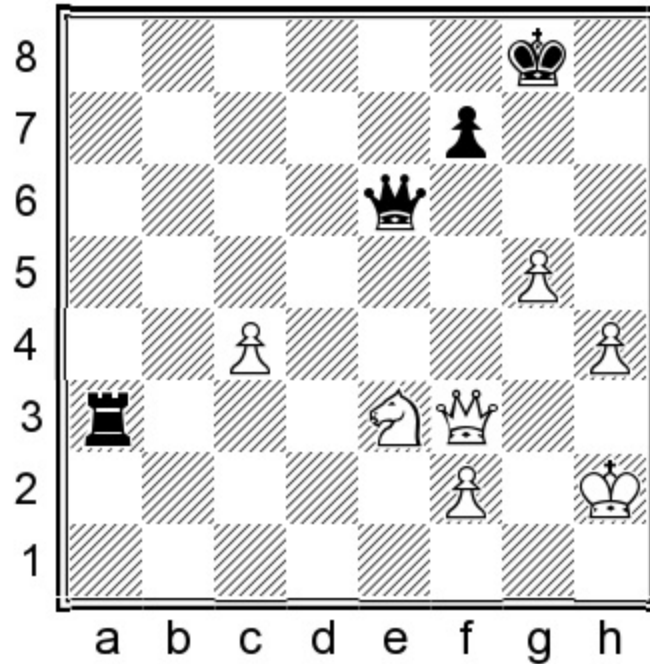
27. ♘f3 ♜h7 28. ♝e1 ♜b8 29. ♚a7 ♚g6 30. ♚d7 ♙d3 31. ♘h4 ♚f6 32. ♚c6 ♙e4 33. ♝xe4 dxe4 34. ♚xe4+ ♜h8 35. ♘f5 ♙c7 36. ♙xf4 ♙xf4 37. ♚xf4



Position after: 37. ♖xf4

Up to this point Black has made a lot of ‘only’ moves.

37... ♜b3 38. c4 ♔h7 39. ♔h2 ♜b4 40. g4 ♜xa4 41. h4 h5 42. g5 ♚e6 43. ♘e3 ♜a5 44. ♚f3 ♜a3
45. ♚xh5+ ♔g8 46. ♚f3



Position after: 46. ♚f3

½-½ Roques, P (2370) – Oger, C (2345) ICCF email 2014.

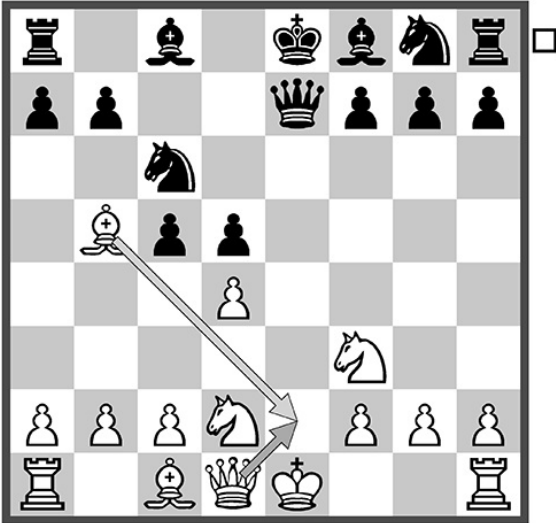
Conclusion

We have investigated a lot of different options for White. We can conclude that good preparation allows Black to reach equal positions, but only with a deep level of accuracy. White generally retains a tiny edge in the middlegame, but a thorough studying of the lines in this chapter will ensure you a good game. My recommendation is to choose one of the three outlined plans and focus on mastering it. All of the plans have their merits, but the second one is my personal favorite. My view is that if you’re going to have to learn a lot anyway, then you might as well have some fun while you’re at it!

Chapter 11

6...♔e7+ – Just checking

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♔e7+



Chapter Guide

Chapter 11 – 6...♔e7+ (Just checking)

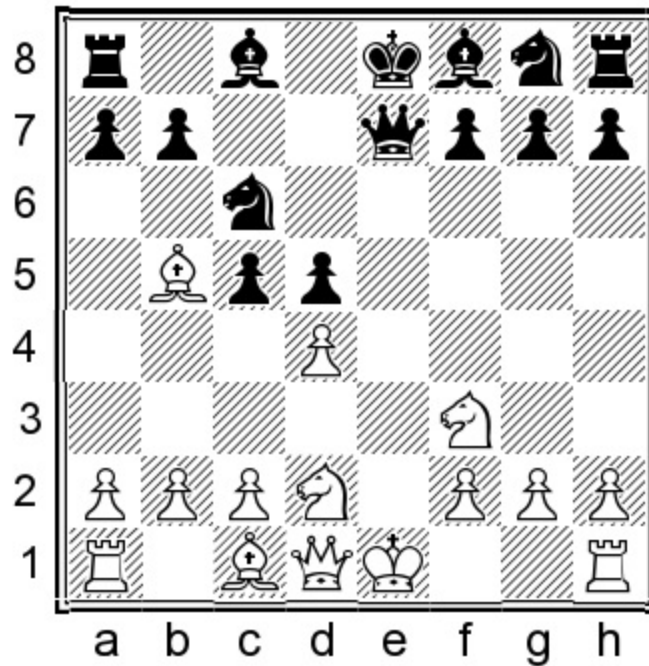
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♔e7+

a) 7.♔e2

b) 7.♙e2

a) 7.♔e2

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♔e7+



Position after: 6... ♔e7+

This move forces a decision and takes the game into less explored territory. Over the last couple of years, many strong players have been following in Korchnoi's footsteps and giving this check a go.

7. ♖e2

This is clearly inferior to 7. ♕e2. Still it is a very natural move and has been played a lot in high-level encounters.

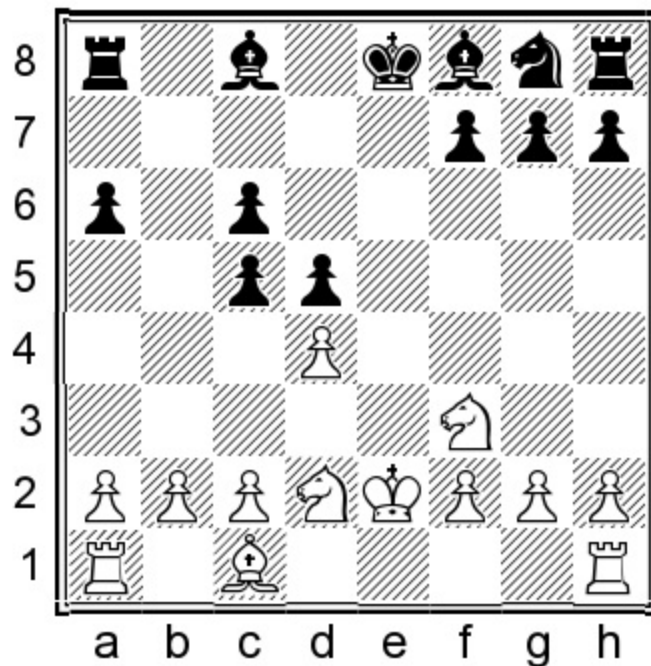
7... ♗xe2+ 8. ♔xe2

8. ♕xe2?! ♕f5=

8...a6!

This move, grabbing the bishop pair, is the main reason why 7. ♕e2 should be preferred.

9. ♕xc6+ bxc6



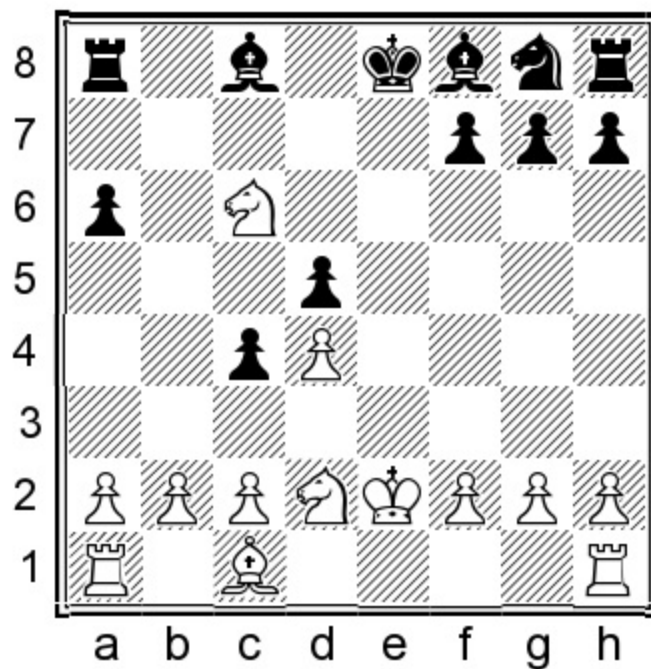
Position after: 9...bxc6

At this point White has two main options, 10.♖e1 and 10.dxc5, as well as the interesting 10.♘e5.

10.♖e1

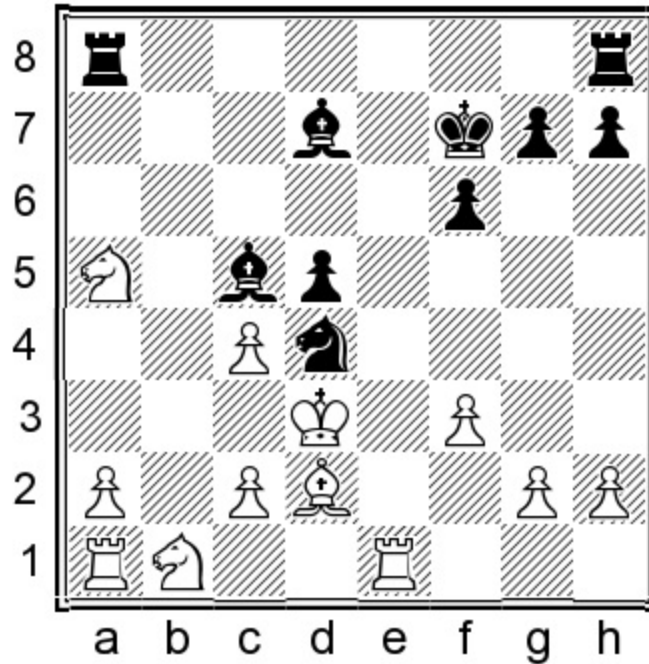
The only move to pose Black some problems.

A) 10.♘e5!?! This move cannot be described as anything more than interesting, and only leads to equal positions that are slightly harder to play for White. 10...c4! 11.♘xc6



Position after: 11. ♖xc6

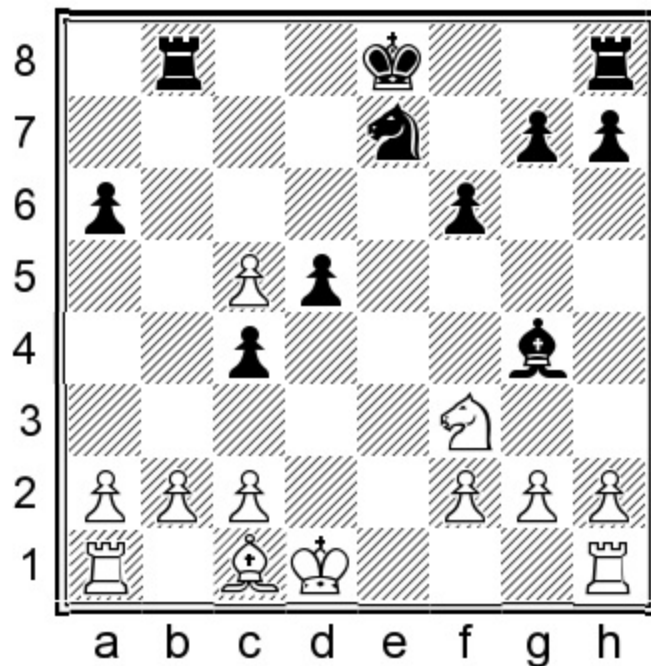
A1) 11...a5!? This is one viable way of playing. 12. ♗b1 f6 [12...♖a6!?] 13. ♕d2 ♗h6! 14. b3 ♕g4+ 15. f3 ♕d7 16. ♗xa5 ♗f5 17. bxc4 ♗xd4+ 18. ♖d3 ♕c5 19. ♖e1+ ♖f7=



Position after: 19... ♖f7=

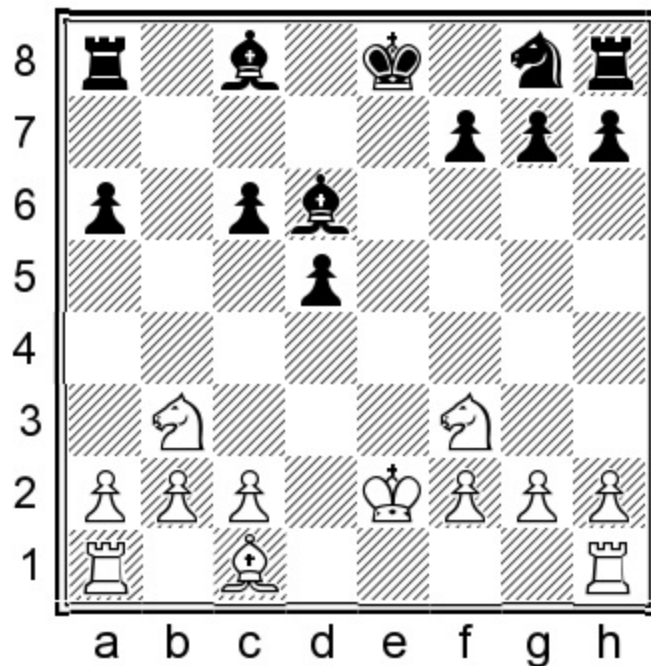
Black has compensation. Of course, this is only a sample line. 20. cxd5 ♕f5+ 21. ♖e4 ♗xc2! 22. ♖xc2 ♕d4 23. ♕c3 ♕xc3 24. ♗xc3 ♕xe4+ 25. fxe4 ♖xa5=

A2) 11... ♕f5 12. ♖d1 f6 13. ♗a5 ♕b4 [13...♖b8!?] 14. ♗b7 ♖b8 15. ♗c5 ♕xc5 16. dxc5 ♗e7 17. ♗f3 ♕g4= Black probably wins the pawn back and reaches a drawish endgame.



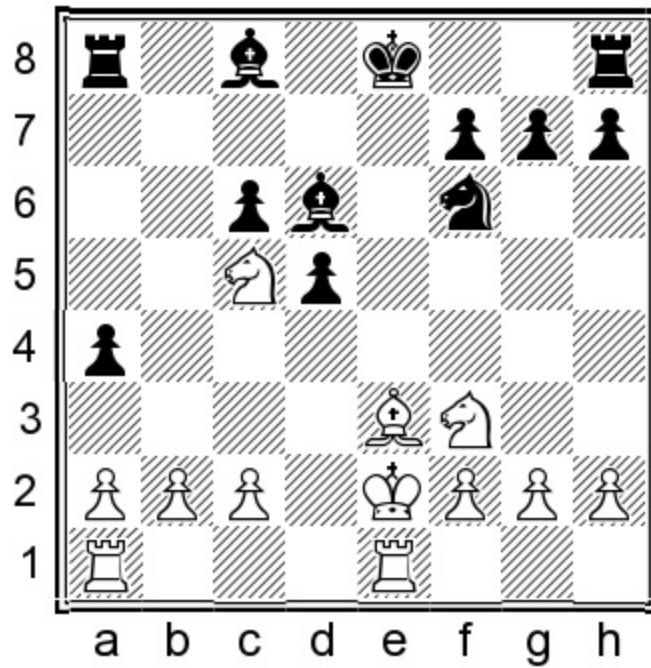
Position after: 17...Bg4

B) 10.dxc5 This move order provides Black with more options. 10...xc5 11.b3 d6 [11...b6?!
Now more than ever, Black should not allow e3 hitting the b6-bishop. 12.e3]



Position after: 11...d6

12.e3 As we have highlighted in the previous chapters, this move blocks the all-important e-file. Therefore I would advise players on the white side to play e1 f6 and we have transposed to the main line of this chapter.] 12...a5 13.e1 a4N 14.c5 f6! chesstouring.com

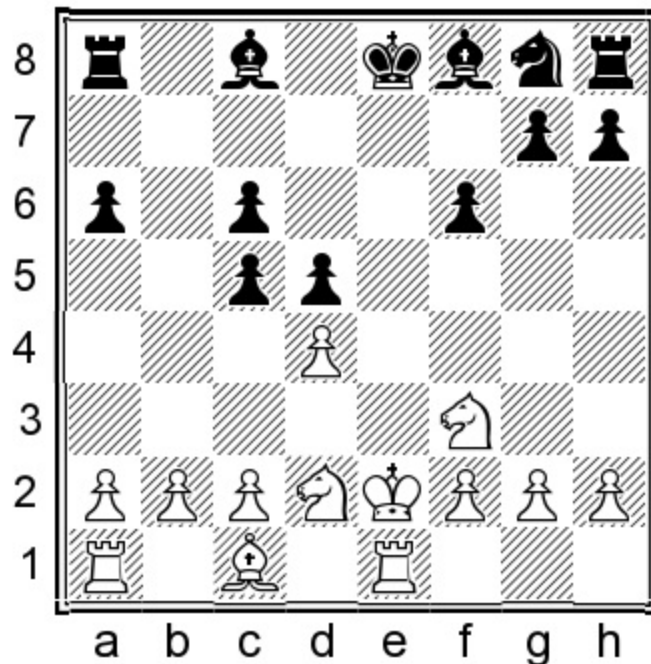


Position after: 14... Nf6!

This way of playing, without having to commit to the slow move ...f6, is a neat additional option.
 15. ♖f1 0-0 16. b3 a3 17. ♙d4 ♘d7 18. ♗xd7 ♙xd7 19. ♙e5 ♙c5 20. ♙d4=

10...f6!

Another important move to remember.



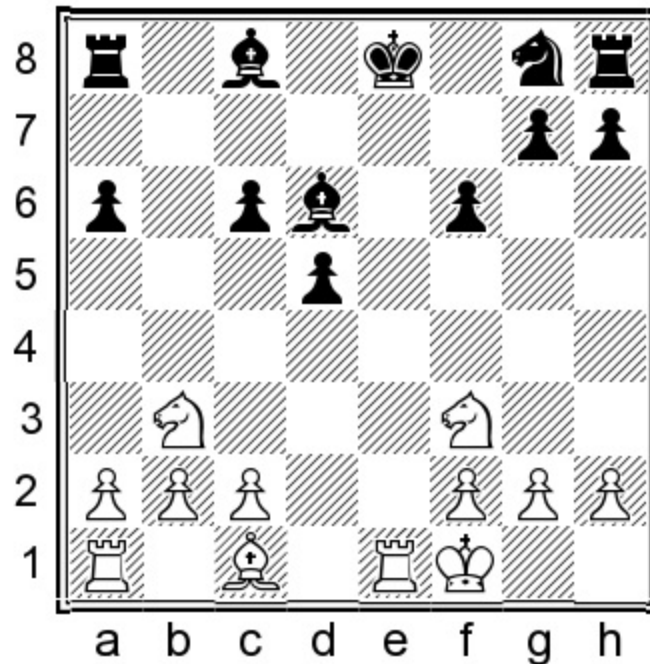
Position after: 10...f6!

Black's strategy is based around flexibility, and in general f7 is the best square for the king in isolated lines where the queens have been exchanged.

11.dxc5 ♖xc5 12.♗b3 ♖d6 13.♙e3

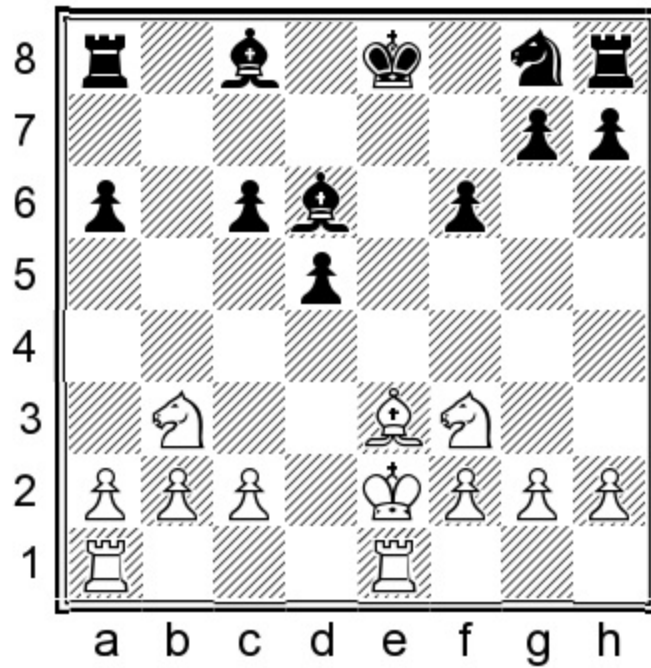
Black has two options here. Historically 13...a5 has been played most often, even though the move is objectively incorrect. Therefore I have chosen 13...♗e7 as my main move.

13.♙f1+



Position after: 13.♙f1+

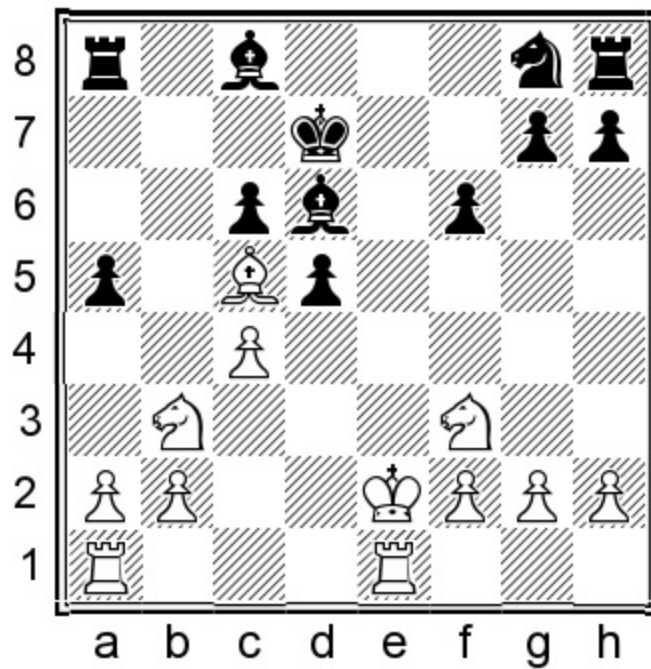
The threat is stronger than the execution. It was better to keep the king on e2 where it protects the f3-knight in case Black's bishop lands on g4. 13...♙f7 14.♙e3 ♖g4 15.♗fd2 [15.♙c5 ♖xc5 16.♗xc5 ♙xf3 17.gxf3 ♗e7= 0-1 (53) Matus, F (1700) – Kreutzmann, D (1975) Prague 2016.] 15...♞b8!= Black is slowly taking over.



Position after: 13. ♖e3

13... ♘e7

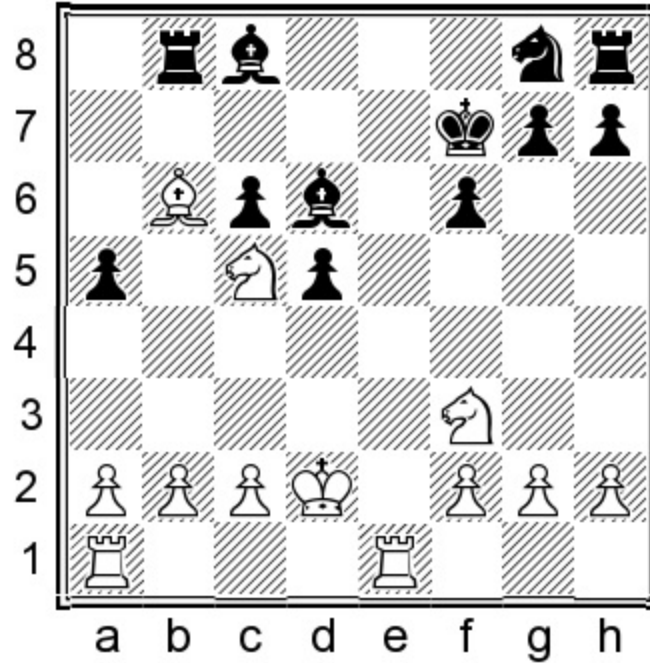
13... a5 14. ♖c5 ♔d7 15. ♖b6?! [15. c4!±



Position after: 15. c4!±

This is the only way for White to gain an advantage. 15... ♖a6 16. ♔d2 ♖xc4 17. ♖xd6 ♔xd6 18. ♗bd4 ♗e7 19. ♖e6+ ♔d7 20. ♖ae1 ♖ae8 21. b3± White clearly has the better pieces.] 15... ♖b8! 16. ♗c5+ ♔e8

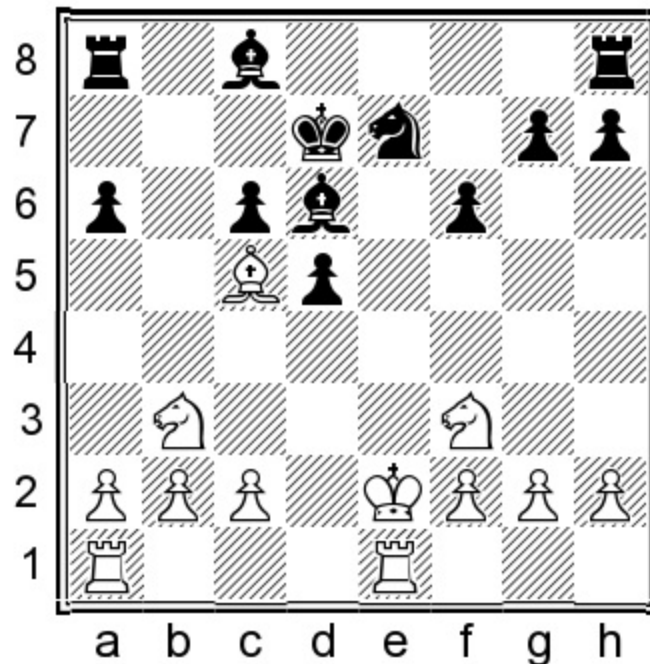
17.♔d2+ ♕f7



Position after: 17...♕f7

18.♖a4 [18.♙a7 ♜a8 19.♙b6 ♘e7=] 18...♘e7 0-1 (58) Ponomariov, R (2699) – Harikrishna, P (2737) Biel 2017.

14.♙c5 ♕d7



Position after: 14...♕d7

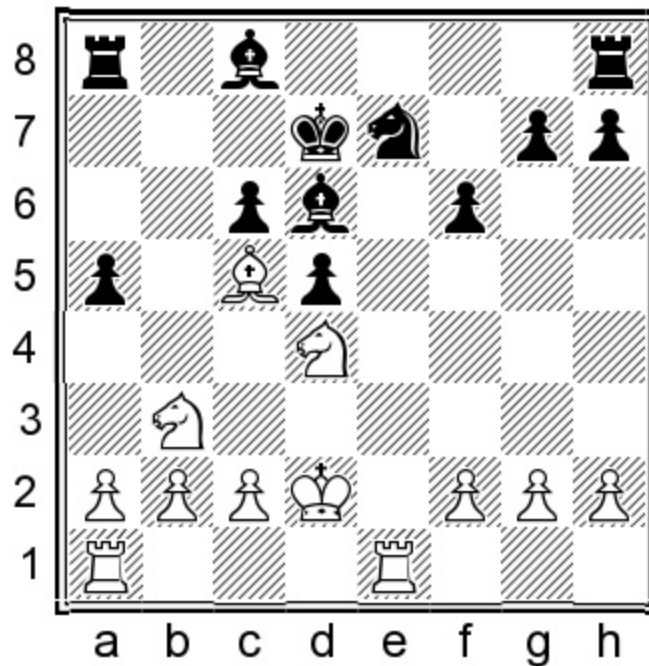
15. ♖fd4

15. ♖xd6 Humans are often incapable of maintaining the tension for too long. 15... ♔xd6 16. c4 ♗g4 17. h3 ½-½ (17) Breder, D (2458) – Motwani, P (2536) Belgium 2003.

15... a5

15... ♖c7 16. ♖d2 ♗f5 17. ♗xf5 ♗xf5 18. ♗xd6+ ♔xd6 19. ♗d4 ♗d7 20. b4± Again White has something tangible to play with here.

16. ♖d2

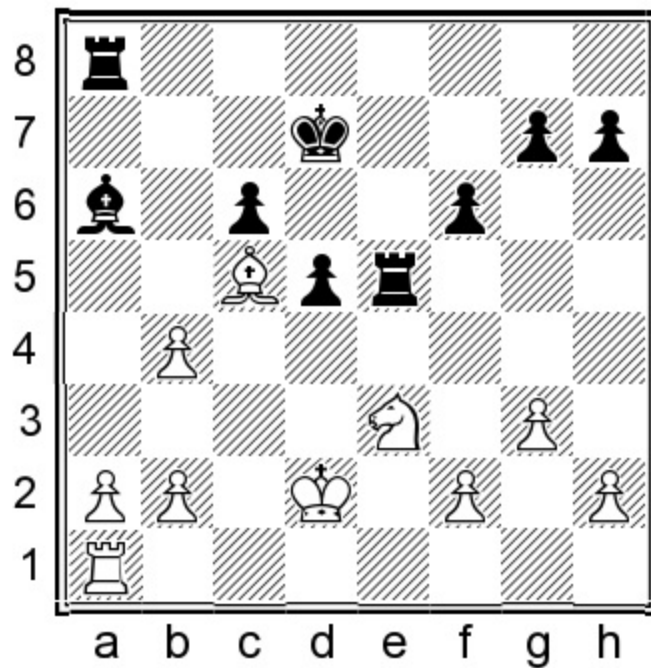


Position after: 16. ♖d2

16... a4

16... ♗xc5!? 17. ♗xc5+ ♔d6 18. ♗a4 ♗f5 19. ♗b3 h5=

17. ♖e6 ♗f5 18. ♗xf5 ♗f4+ 19. ♖e3 axb3 20. cxb3 ♖e8 21. b4 ♖e5 22. g3 ♗xe3+ 23. ♗xe3 ♗a6=

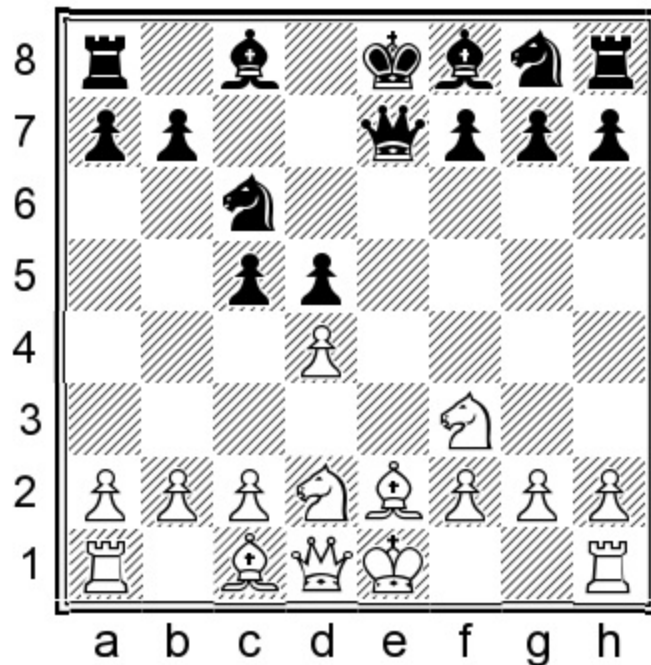


Position after: 23...♙a6=

Both sides have strong control over one color complex (light or dark squares) which makes the position quite difficult to win for either side.

b) 7.♙e2

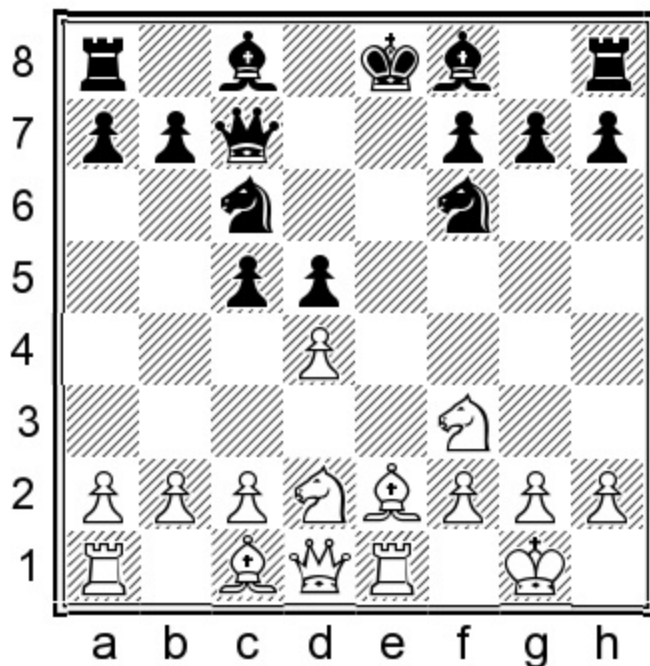
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 ♘c6 6.♙b5 ♚e7+ 7.♙e2



Position after: 7.♙e2

The idea of this move is to avoid exchanging queens, which is a great idea because the queen on e7 is hindering Black's development while ♔e2 is just a useful extra developing move.

7...♙c7 8.0-0 ♘f6 9.♖e1

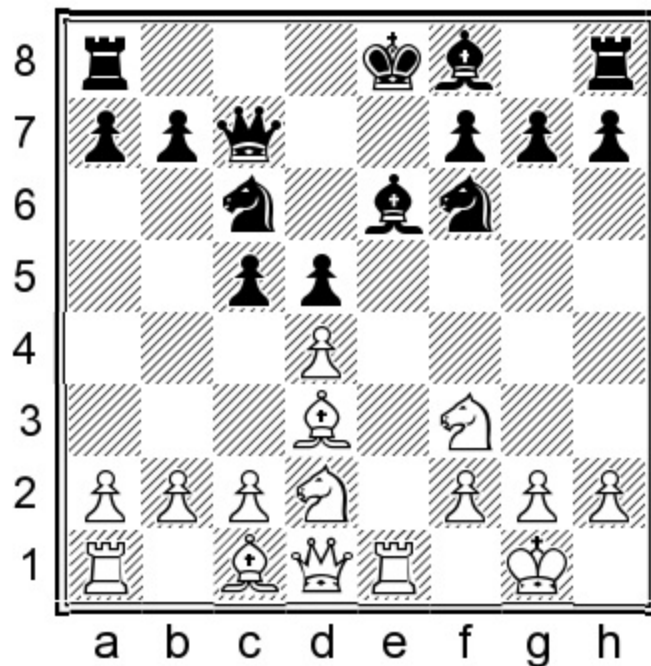


Position after: 9.♖e1

9...cxd4!

I would say this is the only way to really play this line.

9...♙e6 10.♙d3!



Position after: 10. ♕d3!

10...0-0-0 The computer likes this move but it is very difficult to play for Black here. [10...♕e7 11.dxc5 ♕xc5 12.♘b3 ♕b6 13.♕g5 ♘g4 14.♕h4± ½-½ (43) Schulze, L (2326) – Rempeli, A (2076) Heusenstamm 2019.] 11.dxc5 [11.c3!±] 11...♕xc5 12.♘b3 ♕b6 13.♕e3 ♕xe3 14.♖xe3 d4 15.♞e1 ♕g4? [15...a6=] 16.h3± 1-0 (31) Anurag, M (2484) – Miedema, D (2370) Dieren 2018.

10. ♘b3

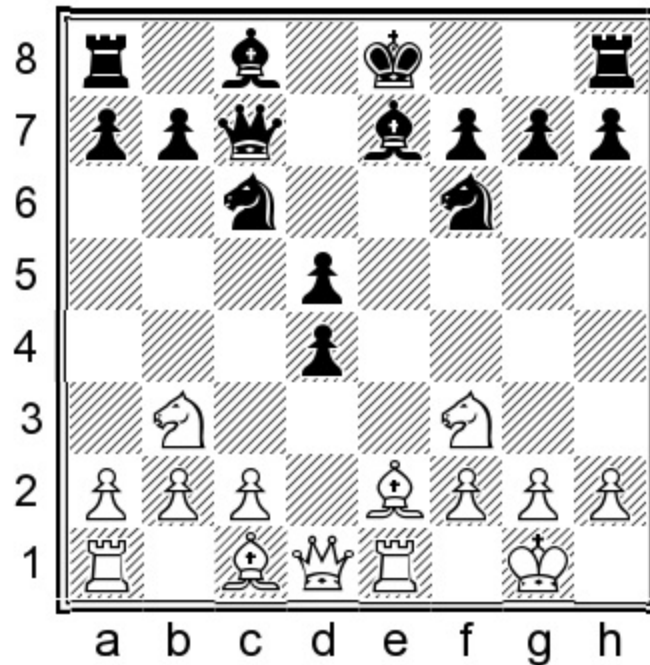
10.♕b5+!? ♕e7 11.♞e2 a6 12.♕xc6+ bxc6 13.b4

A) 13...♞a7!? 14.♕b2 0-0 15.♕xd4 ♕xb4 16.c3 ♕d6 17.♕xa7 ♞xa7

10...♙b4

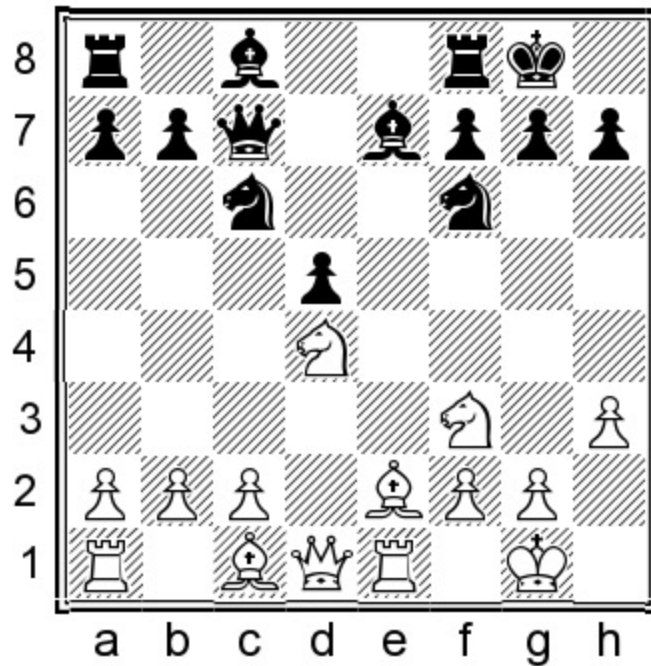
With this move, Black opts for a slightly worse but very solid position – a well-known strategy in this complex.

10...♙e7!? is the fighting option, keeping more material on the board which gives better chances of outplaying the opponent. There don't seem to be enough tests yet to determine the real objective value of this move.



Position after: 10...♙b4

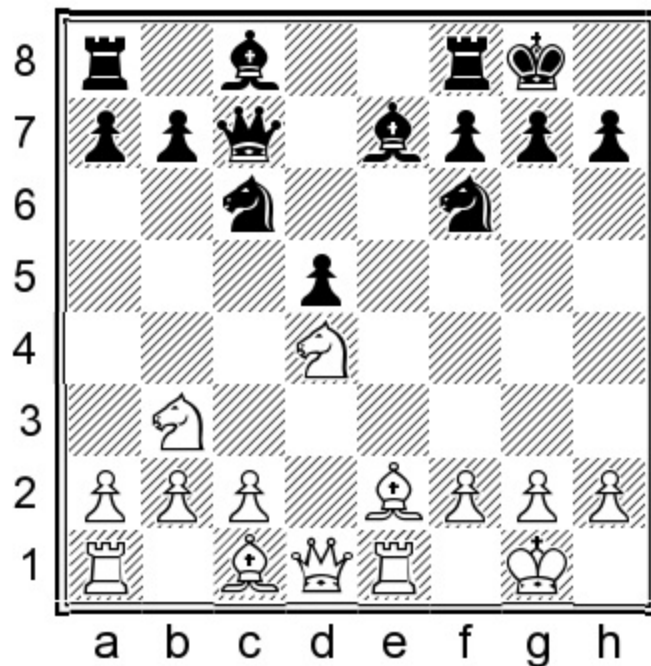
A) 11.♘bxd4 The most popular move is not very convincing. 11...0-0 12.h3



Position after: 12.h3

12...♔d7!N [12...a6 13.c3?! (13.♙g5=) 13...♞e8 14.♙d3 h6 15.♘f5?! ♙xf5 16.♙xf5 ♙c5= 1-0 (47) Cornette, D (2439) – Mkrтчian, L (2376) Riadh 2017.] 13.c3 [13.♙g5 h6 14.♙h4 ♞fe8=] 13...♞fe8 14.♙e3 a6 15.♙d3 h6= Both sides have a solid position here.

B) 11.♘fxd4 0-0



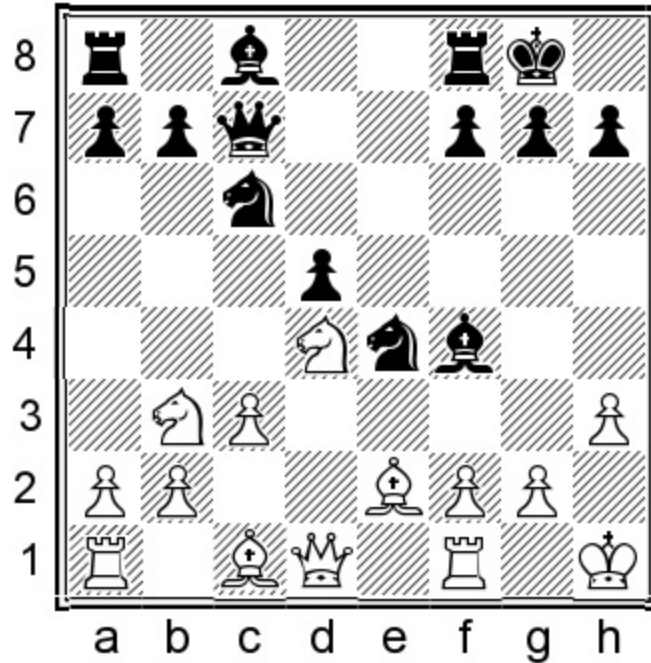
Position after: 11...0-0

B1) 12.♙e3 ♞e8?! Probably the only time I will criticize this move. [12...a6! 13.h3 ♘e5=] 13.♘b5

♖b8 14.g3 ♘d6 15.♗xd6 ♜xd6 16.♙f4± 1-0 (28) Socko, B (2611) – Moor, O (2348) Graz 2015.

B2) 12.♗b5N 12...♜b8 13.♙g5 a6 14.♗5d4 ♗g4 15.♙xg4 ♙xg5=

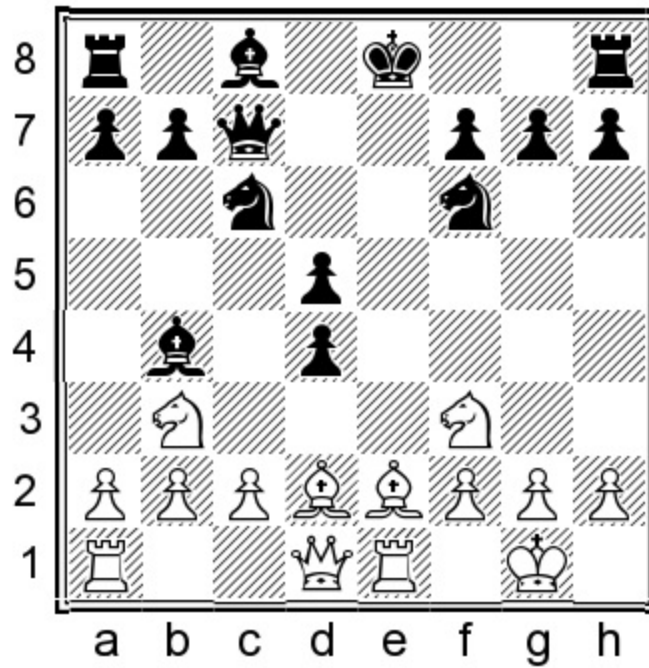
B3) 12.c3 ♘d6!N [12...a6?! This move is now too slow. Confusing stuff indeed! 13.♙g5 ♗e5 14.♗f3 ♗c4 15.♜c2 b5 16.♞ad1 ♙b7 17.♗bd4± 0-1 (41) Salih, A (2284) – Das, S (2444) Doha 2014.] 13.h3 ♙h2+ 14.♗h1 ♗e4 15.♞f1 ♙f4=



Position after: 15...♙f4=

The aggression seems to have solved Black's problems.

11.♙d2



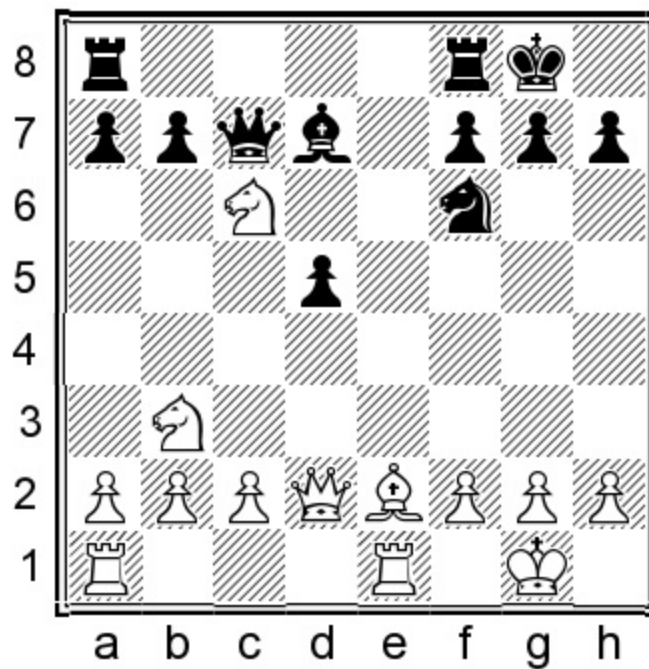
Position after: 11. ♔d2

11... ♔xd2

A) 11... 0-0!? N 12. ♔xb4 ♖xb4 13. ♗fxd4 a5 14. a4 ♔d7= is just another way to play.

B) 11... ♔e7 If Black wishes to play like this, I would recommend not provoking ♔d2 first.

12. ♙xd2 0-0 13. ♗fxd4 ♔d7 14. ♗xc6



Position after: 14. ♗xc6

14...bxc6

14...♙xc6 15.♚a5!N 15...♚xa5 16.♘xa5 ♖fe8 17.f3!± White has created a scenario where he can press forever.

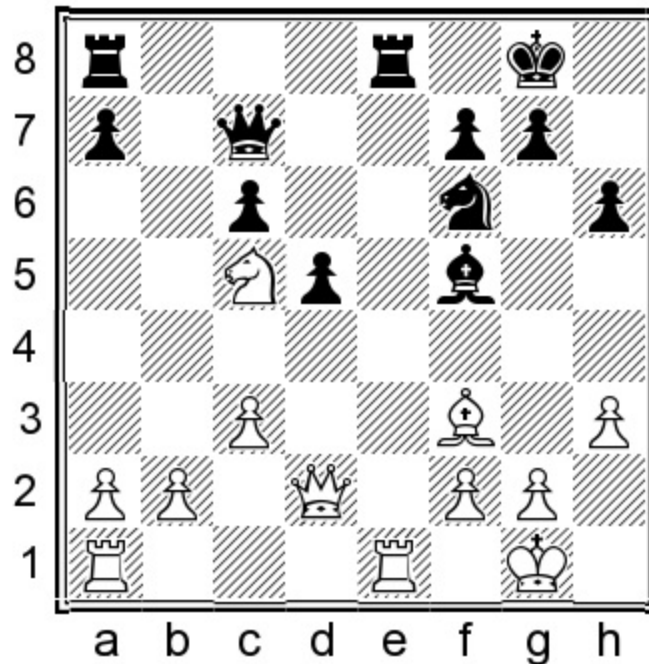
15.♘c5 ♙f5 16.♙f3

16.h3 ♘e4 17.♘xe4 ♙xe4 18.b4 Leela claims a minor edge but it is probably all drawable. 18...♖fd8 19.c3 c5=

16...♖fe8

16...a5!? 17.c3 a4 18.b4 axb3 19.axb3 ♖xa1=

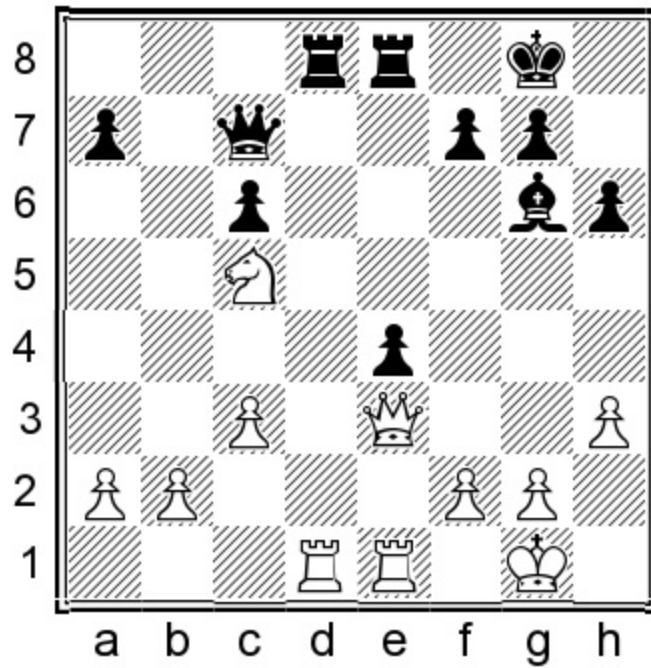
17.h3 h6 18.c3



Position after: 18.c3

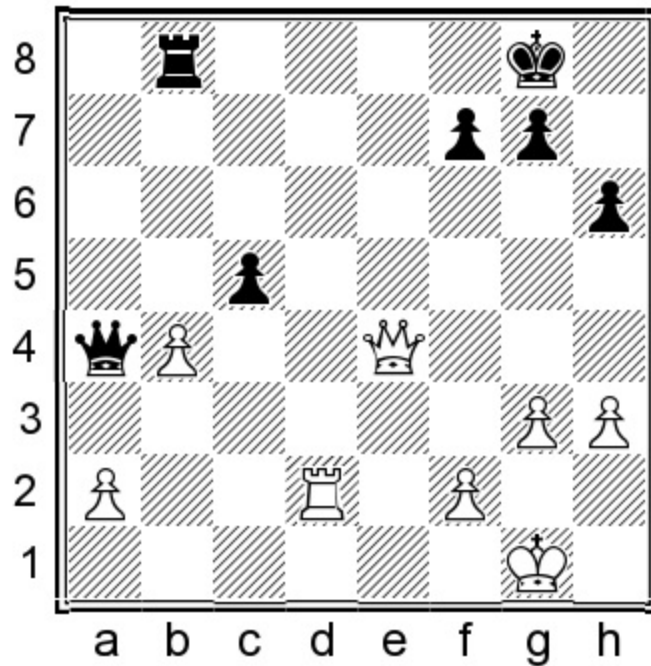
18...♙e4

18...♘e4 19.♙xe4 dxe4 20.♖ad1 ♖ad8 21.♚e3 ♙g6=



Position after: 21...♔g6=

19.♔xe4 ♖xe4 20.♖xe4 dxe4 21.♞ad1 ♚a5 22.b4 ♚a4 23.♞d4 a5 24.♞d2 axb4 25.cxb4 ♞ab8
 26.♞xe4 ♞xe4 27.♞xe4 c5 28.g3



Position after: 28.g3

½-½ Rublevsky, S (2702) – Zvjaginsev, V (2660) Berlin 2015.

Conclusion

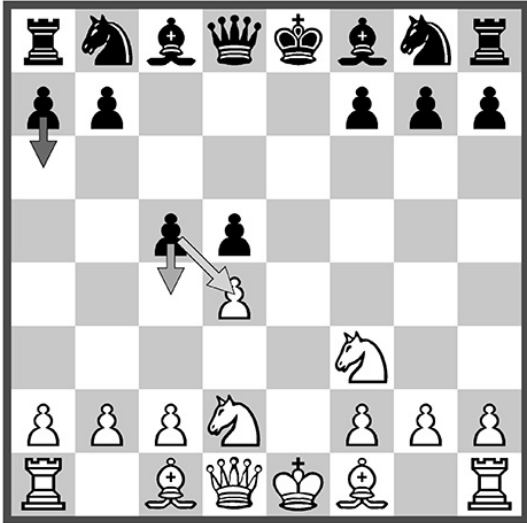
chesstouring.com

In the end I would say that 6...♖e7+ gives Black the best chances in the 5...♘c6 system. Especially because it is relatively unexplored compared to the other lines in this book. My personal favorite is 10...♙e7, but the other lines do give decent play as well.

Chapter 12

5...a6!? – And the rest

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 12 – 5...a6!? (And the rest)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♗gf3

a) 5...c4

b) 5...cxd4

c) 5...a6 6.♗e2 c4 7.0-0 ♗d6 8.b3 cxb3

d) 5...a6 6.♗e2 c4 7.0-0 ♗d6 8.b3 b5

e) 5...a6 6.♗e2 ♗f6 7.0-0 cxd4, 7...c4

f) 5...a6 6.♗e2 ♗f6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♗b3 ♗b6

g) 5...a6 6.♗e2 ♗f6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♗b3 ♗a7

h) 5...a6 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.♗d3

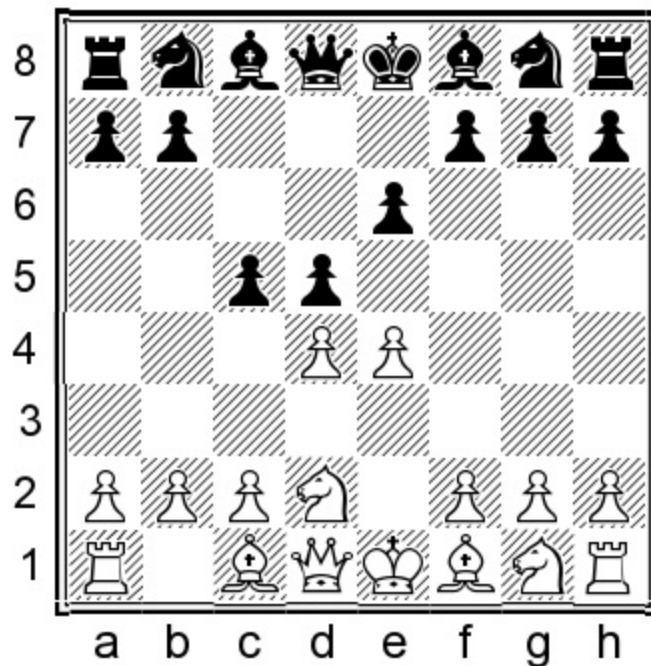
i) 5...a6 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.♗b3 ♗e7

j) 5...a6 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.♗b3 ♗b6 8.♗d3 ♗e7+ 9.♗e2 ♗c6 10.♗g5

k) 5...a6 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.♗b3 ♗b6 8.♗d3 ♗e7+ 9.♗e2 ♗c6 10.h3

a) 5...c4

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5



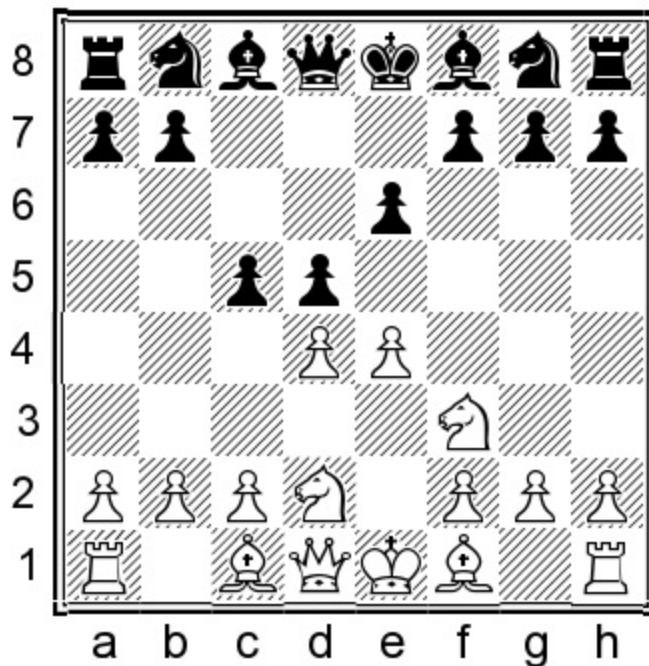
Position after: 3...c5

4.exd5

Before you start eating this dessert, please realize this chapter is, in fact, a real dessert. It might taste sweet and there are a lot of flavors to choose from, but do you really need something sugary? It is easy for White to avoid these line entirely, so it is really in their hands whether you get a chance to try these ideas at all.

I would recommend studying the main lines thoroughly first before diversifying here. That's why I have made this the final chapter of the book. These lines are very interesting but very preventable. If these warnings haven't discouraged you yet, great! You will definitely learn a lot about the IQP positions from a new perspective here.

4.♘gf3

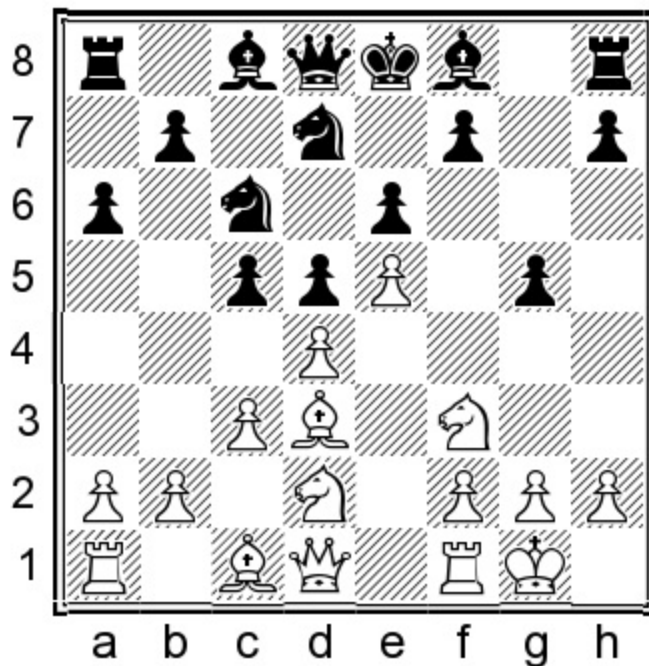


Position after: 4. ♖g3

This move spoils all the sidelines featured here. So this chapter should be seen only as a way to supplement an existing repertoire against 3. ♘d2, rather than as a source to build a new one from.

A) 4...c4?? It is usually vital for Black to maintain the pawn tension in the center, as otherwise it is very easy to be left stuck without any counterplay. In many variations White actually spends one or two moves provoking this concession. I would only ever consider this move if the light squared bishops were off the board. Closing the center right now would be a positionally losing decision.

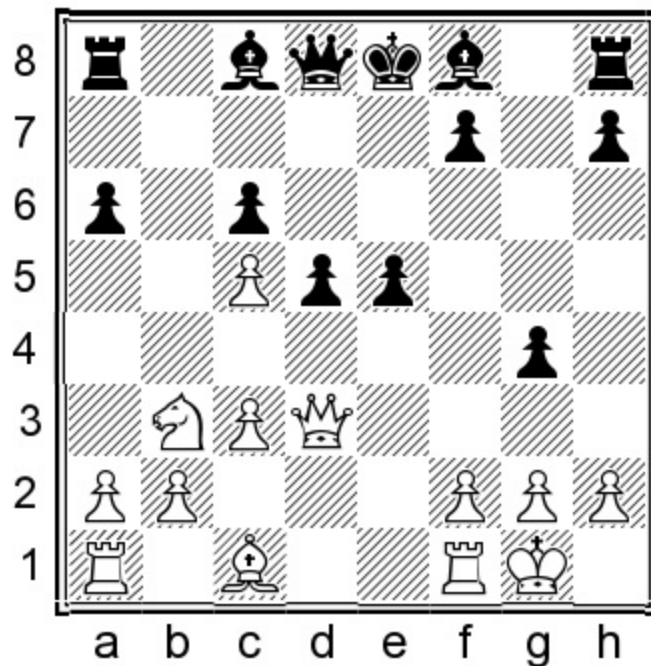
B) 4...a6 Naturally White has other options here besides 5.exd5. With 5.c3, White waits for ...♘f6 before closing the center. This will give rise to a 'universal variation' where Black has played a6. I have tried to make this work, and I used to score some beautiful victories with it until it became widely known how to play against it. [5.♙d3 basically leads to the same thing.] 5...♘c6 6.♙d3 ♘f6 7.e5 ♘d7 8.0-0 g5?!



Position after: 8...g5?!

This is what I used to play. You can still use it, depending on your opponent's level. The trick is that the only strong response for White is to run into a pawn fork, meaning it is a rather difficult move to find. However, once White knows about 9.♘b3, Black will be permanently worse and already positionally losing. Use of this line is based on the hope that your opponent doesn't know about this trick. This essentially makes it a 'condom variation', you use it once and then you throw it away. (Credit for this joke must go to Nigel Short).

B1) 9.dxc5? If your opponent falls for this, please execute 9...g4 very slowly. It has a better effect psychologically when you make threatening moves slowly. This position could be interpreted as an improved version of the lines with ...♙e7 because our pawn on a6 is preventing the usual ♙b5 pin. 9...g4 10.♘d4 ♘dxe5 11.♘2b3 ♘xd3 12.♙xd3 e5 13.♘xc6 [13.♞e1?! is played the most. 13...♙g7] 13...bxc6±

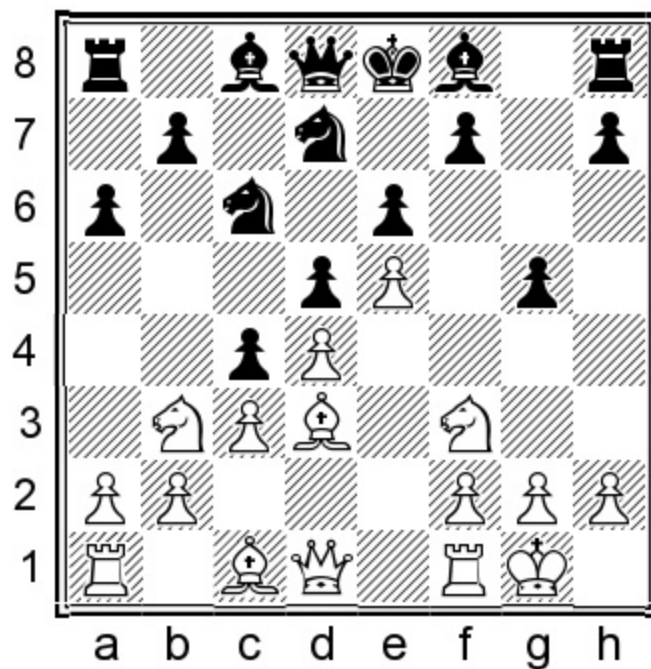


Position after: 13...bxc6±

Even though the position is highly complicated, both 14.♔g3 and 14.f4 seem to promise White a slight advantage. In the end, even an improved version does not seem to promise anything special.

B2) 9.♘b3!

B2.1) 9...c4?

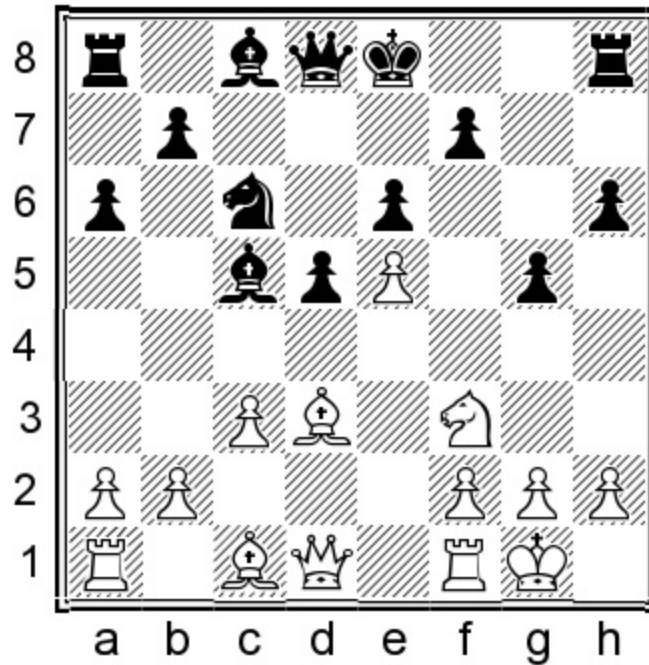


Position after: 9...c4?

Let's see what happens if you insist on playing with fire. 10.♘xg5 cxd3 11.♘xe6 ♔b6 12.♘f4

♞e7 13.♞h5 ♞g6 14.♞xd5 ♞c6 15.c4 ♞xc4 16.♞f3 ♞e7 17.♞f6+ ♞xf6 18.exf6+- Of course most humans will not find all the moves for White, but let's not even talk about how difficult the moves for Black are.

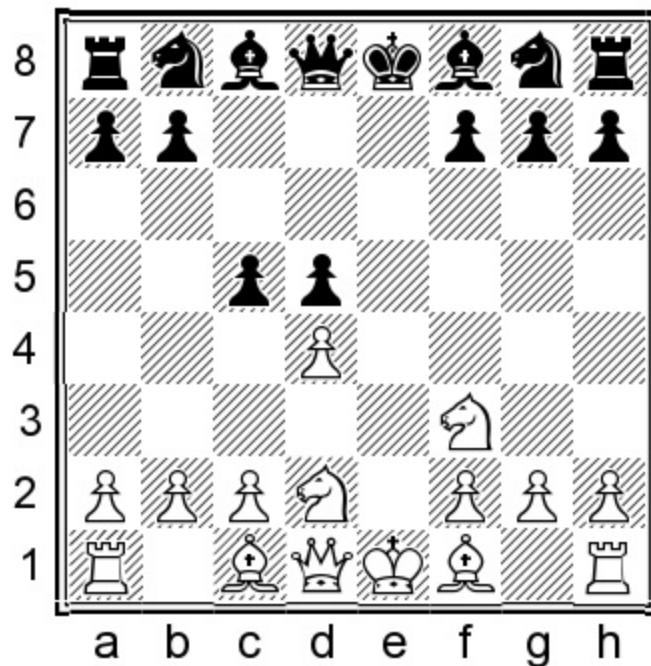
B2.2) 9...h6 10.♞xc5 ♞xc5 11.dxc5 ♞xc5±



Position after: 11...♞xc5±

I wish I could give any other evaluation, but Black's position is very suspect in the long run because of permanent king safety problems. This is the reason why 5...a6!? (or 3...a6) is not suitable as part of a permanent repertoire.

4...exd5 5.♞gf3



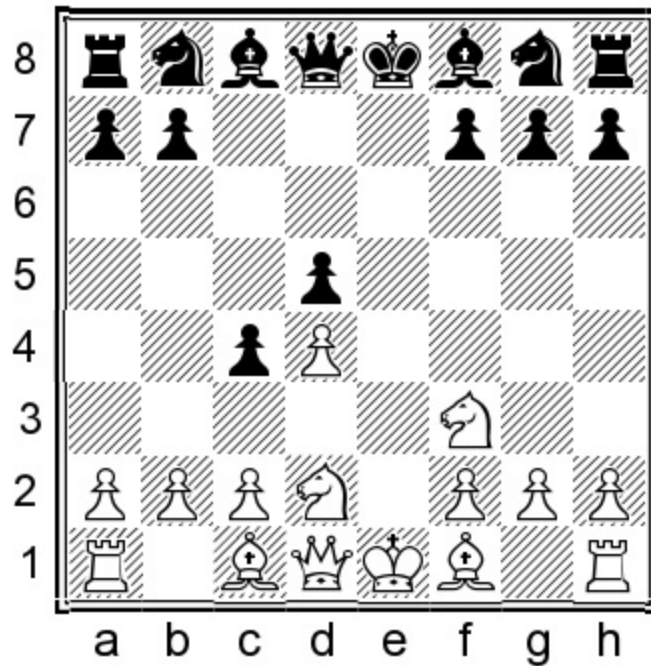
Position after: 5. Nf3

Recently I was sitting next to Predrag Nikolic, one of the ultimate champions of the French defense, in a competition game. Of course I could not maintain focus on my own game when this position arose on the board beside me! For a few moments, my universe stood still. I started to wonder which move Nikolic would prefer here. After around thirty seconds, he played 5...a6!? and my jaw dropped, though luckily no one noticed. I was hoping for 5... Nf6 of course, or maybe 5... Nc6 followed by the fashionable 6... W e7+ . But no, he went for 5...a6!?, the unique move which we are going to deal with in this chapter.

The fact that it cannot offer a complete repertoire against 3. Nd2 might be the only disadvantage of this choice. Firstly, it offers decent surprise value because both knight moves are played more often. Secondly, it prevents the active placement of the light squared bishop on b5, which will be forced to block the e-file instead and give us more time to castle. Finally, it also scores better in correspondence games than the main move 5... Nc6 , which is a tell-tale sign of its objective value. White's score of 55% is just the same as from the starting position.

5. Bb5+ This check from Chapter two would also ruin all the bonus options given here.

5...c4

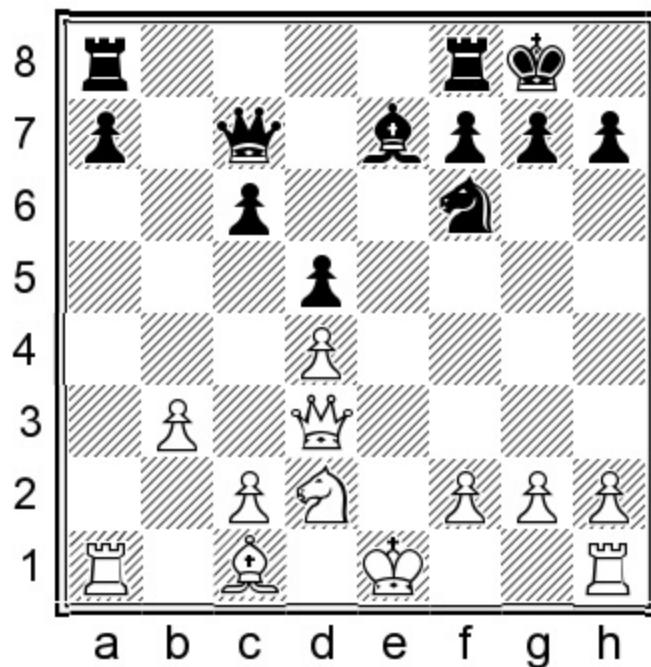


Position after: 5...c4

Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy? Well the question is, will you actually get caught in a landslide, with no escape from reality? Viktor the Terrible has played this line on several occasions, along with many other French defense celebrities like Nikolic, Gurevich, Socko and Rozentalis.

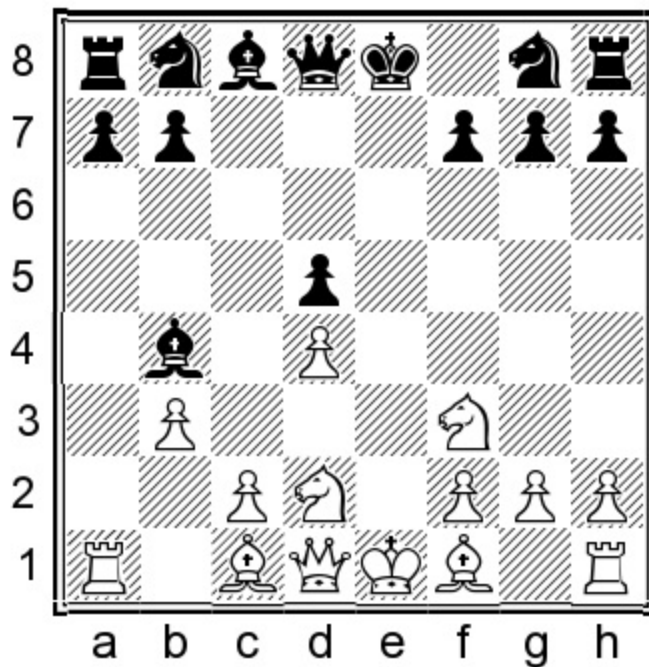
6.b3 cxb3 7.axb3

7.♙b5+!? ♜d7 8.♚e2+ ♜e7 9.♙xd7+ ♚xd7! 10.axb3 ♞f6 11.♞e5 ♚c7 12.♚b5+ ♞c6 [12...♞bd7!?=] 13.♞xc6 bxc6 14.♚d3 0-0= ½-½ (42) Zelbel, P (2379) – Rozentalis, E (2592) Austria 2012.



Position after: 14...0-0=

7...♖b4

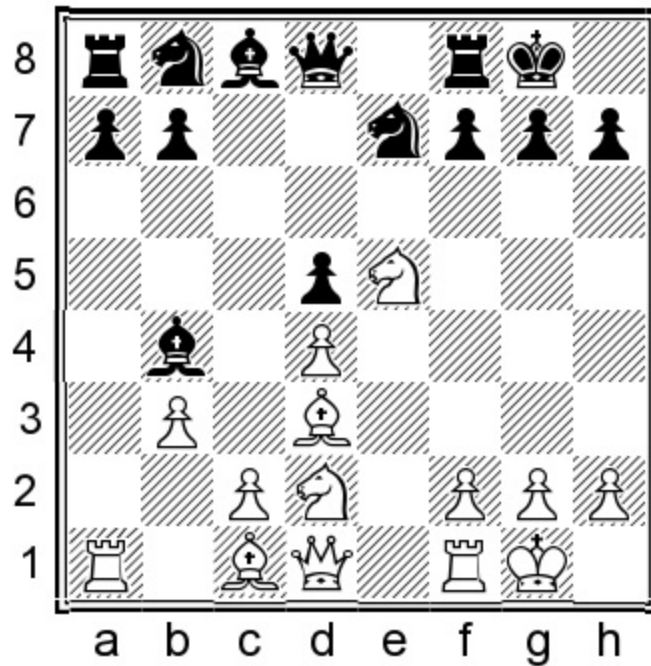


Position after: 7...♖b4

Korchnoi has played this line numerous times!

8.♖b5+

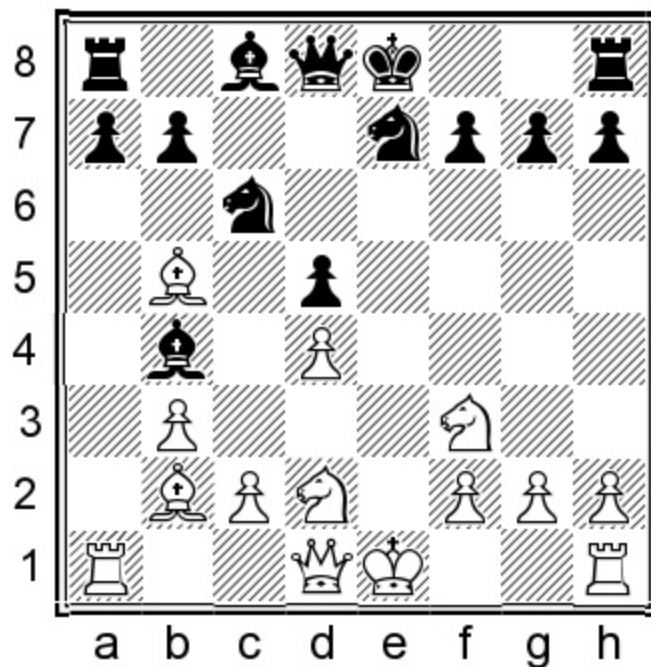
A) 8.♖e5 ♖e7 9.♖d3 0-0 [9...♖bc6?! 10.0-0 ♖c3 11.♖a4 ♖xd4 12.♖xc6 ♖xc6 13.♖a3± Nikolic had a hard time against a young player named Carlsen. 1-0 (22) Carlsen, M (2553) – Nikolic, P (2676) Wijk aan Zee 2005.] 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

10...♞c7!N This is a deep move, defending against all kinds of piece sacrifices. [10...♘f5 11.♙b2 f6 12.♗ef3 ♘c6 13.c3 ♙d6± Black managed to win despite the outcome of the opening. 0-1 (25) Nevednichy, V (2531) – Gurevich, M (2627) Heraklion 2007.] 11.♙b2 This seems to be the most natural move. 11...f6 12.♗ef3 ♙f5 13.♞e2 ♙xd3 14.♞xd3 ♘bc6 15.♞fe1= This is a level playing position.

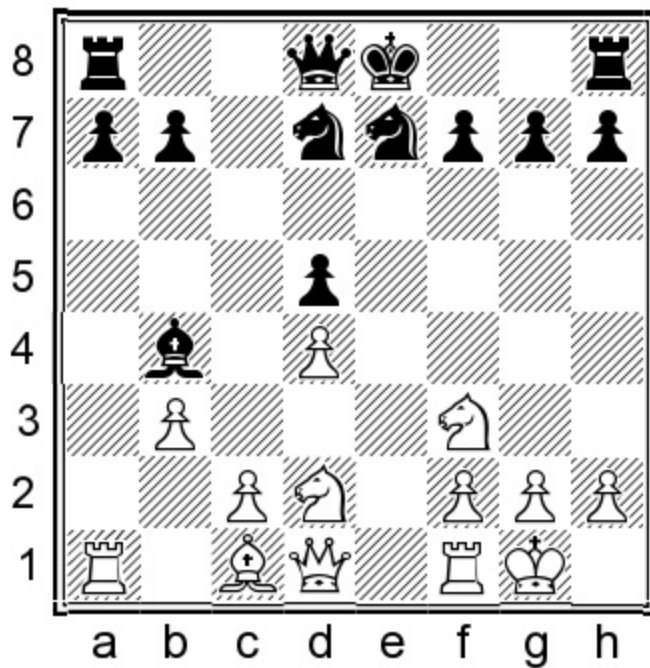
B) 8.♙b2 This rare move is probably best. 8...♗c6 9.♙b5 ♗ge7



Position after: 9...♗ge7

This was ½-½ (87) Ioffe, E (2061) – Gunchenko, V (2160) Voronezh 2015. But now 10.0-0N 10...0-0 11.c3 ♔d6 12.♞e1 ♞e8 13.♟f1 a6± might have been the best way to play for White, although it is not a real landslide we are dealing with here. The pawn structure remains solid.

8...♔d7 9.♔xd7+ ♟xd7 10.0-0 ♟e7



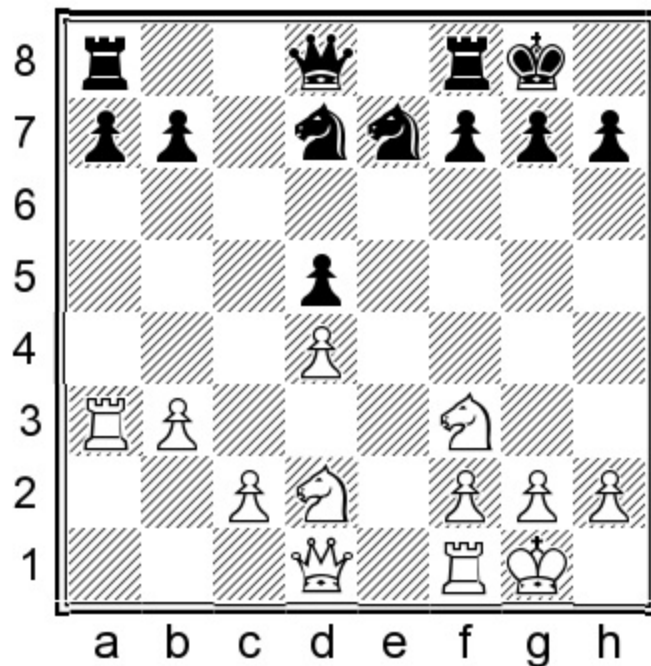
Position after: 10...♟e7

11.♔a3

A) 11.♟b1 0-0 12.c3 ♔d6 13.♞d3 ♟g6 [13...h6! 14.c4 ♟c6=] 14.♔g5 f6?! 15.♔e3± 1-0 (35) Timkin, N (2200) – Ekaworawong, P (1896) Chessfriend.com 2004. [15.♔d2!?±]

B) 11.♞e2!? 0-0 12.♞b5 ♔c3 13.♞a2 ♟c6!N [13...♞c7 was not active enough. 14.♔a3 ♟f6 15.♟b1 ♟e4 16.♔xe7 ♞xe7 17.♞xd5± Black was left dealing with some problems in 1-0 (39) Browne, W (2585) – Langeweg, K (2450) Wijk aan Zee 1976.] 14.♞xb7 ♞c8 15.♞xc8 ♞fxc8= Black's activity provides enough compensation.

11...♔xa3 12.♞xa3 0-0



Position after: 12...0-0

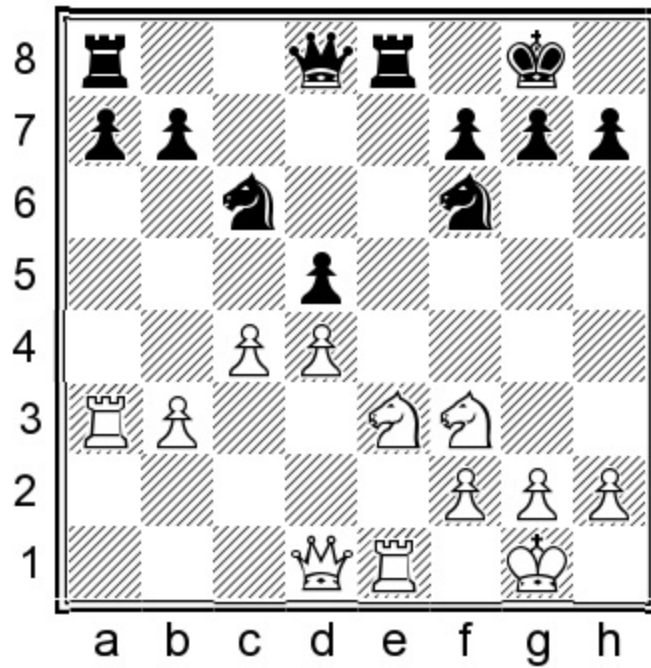
13.c4

13.♖e1!? ♗c6 14.♗f1 ♗f6 15.♗e5 ♕d6 16.♞a1 ♞fe8 17.♗xc6 ♞xe1 18.♚xe1 ♚xc6 19.♗e3 a6 After a clean game, there was not much fuel left and the players agreed to a draw. Brunner, L (2525) – Nikolic, P (2600) Munich 1990.

13...♗c6!?

13...a6 14.♚b1 ♗c6 15.cxd5?! The Dutch grandmaster got tempted by the bait. [15.♞d1= It's not easy for White to find the right moves.] 15...♗b4⚡ Black enjoyed his better pawn structure in 0-1 (37) Van der Wiel, J (2540) – Korchnoi, V (2595) Amsterdam 1988.

14.♞e1 ♗f6 15.♗f1 ♞e8 16.♗e3

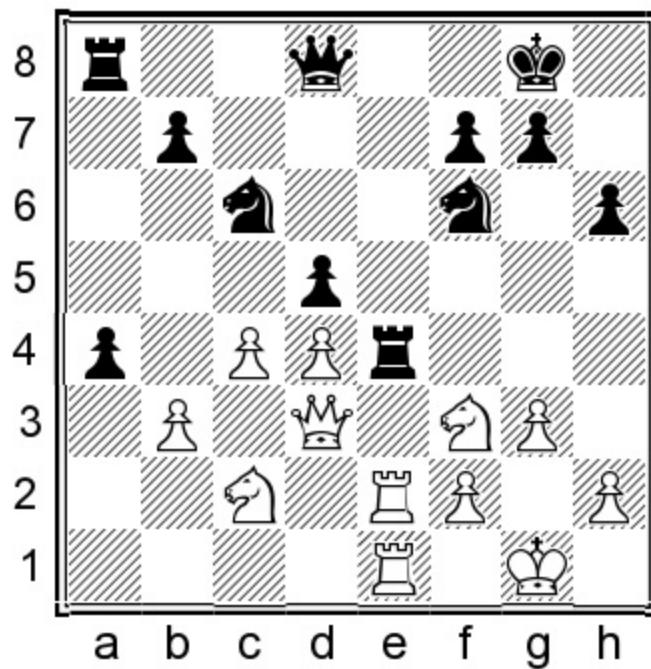


Position after: 16. ♘e3

16... ♖e4

16... ♔d6=

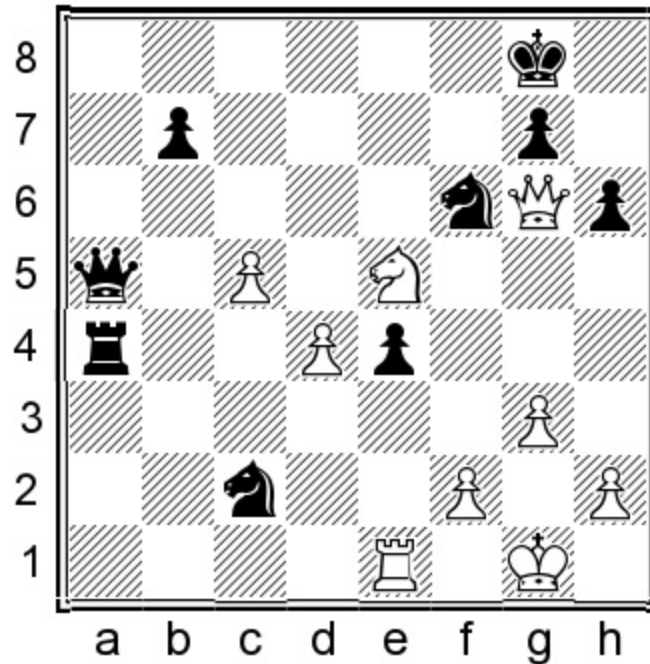
17. ♖a2 h6 18. ♖ae2 ♜f4 19. ♘c2 a5 20. ♔d3 ♖e4 21. g3 a4!



Position after: 21...a4!

The active way to attack White's pawn structure.

22.bxa4 ♖xa4 23.c5 ♗a5 24.♞b3 ♘b4 25.♝xe4 dxe4 26.♘e5 ♘xc2 27.♞xf7+ ♔h7 28.♞g6+ ♔g8



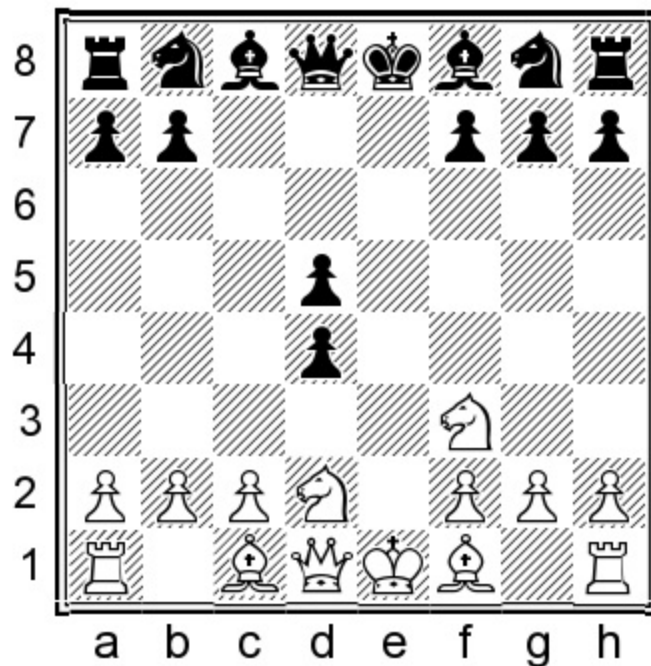
Position after: 28...♔g8

½-½ Short, N (2665) – Korchnoi, V (2595) Hastings 1988.

In the end, this variation did indeed prove to be the real life. There were no fictional landslides, the only downside being that things can end up slightly drawish. But on the other hand, the pawn structure remains unique and solid. No wonder so many strong grand-masters have fancied playing this way!

b) 5...cxd4

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 cxd4!?



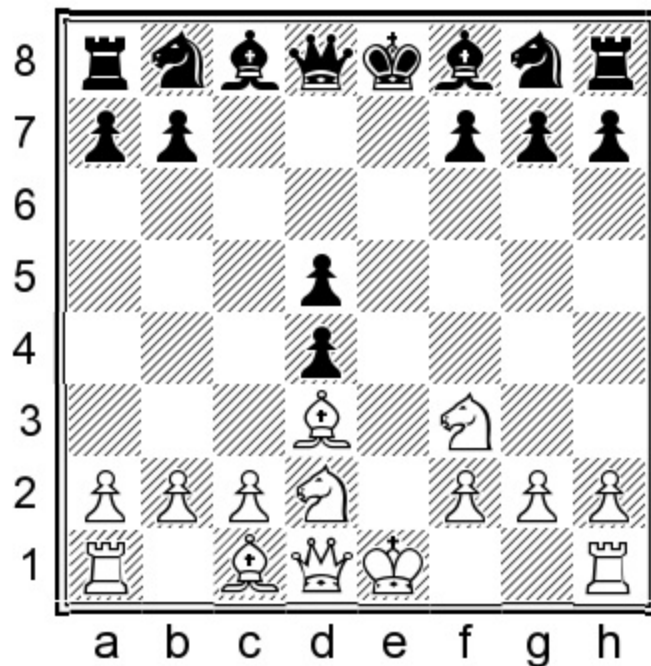
Position after: 5...cxd4!?

This move's lack of popularity may not be fully deserved. As we have seen already in this book, 5...♘c6 6.♙b5 cxd4 might now be considered a slightly improved version of the old main line with 6...♙d6. Knowing that White's main move here transposes to material we have already covered, you might be asking, what's the catch? Well, the only thing we have lost by clarifying the center this early is that we now cannot meet 6.♙d3 with 6...c4. Probably no big deal, but why allow an extra option?

6.♙b5+

This move gives Black many ways to transpose into one of our various different systems.

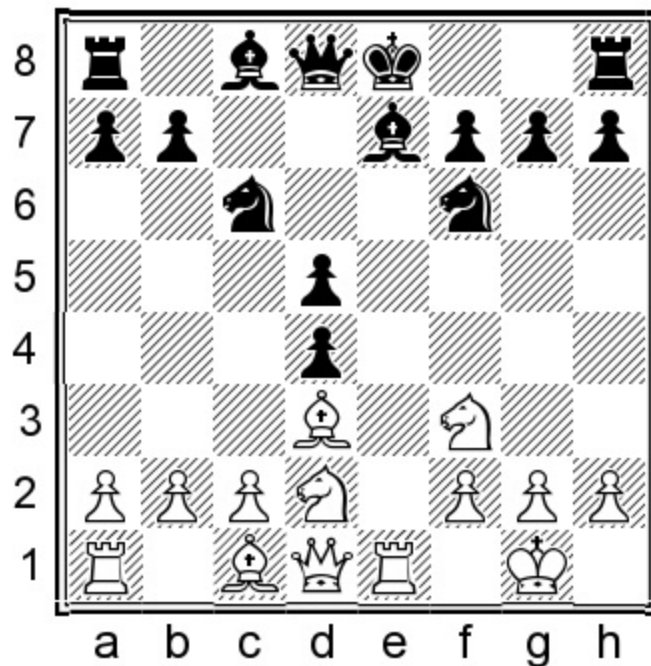
6.♙d3



Position after: 6...d3

A) 6...♙e7+!? 7.♜e2 ♚xe2+ 8.♙xe2 ♘c6 9.♘b3 ♙b4+ [9...♘f6!? 10.♘fxd4 ♙d6 11.♙g5 ♘e4 12.♙e3 0-0 13.0-0-0±] 10.♙d2 ♙xd2+ 11.♜xd2 ♙g4 12.♘fxd4± ½-½ Nikolenko, O (2520) – Dolmatov, S (2573) St Petersburg 2004. The move order has been adjusted a bit.

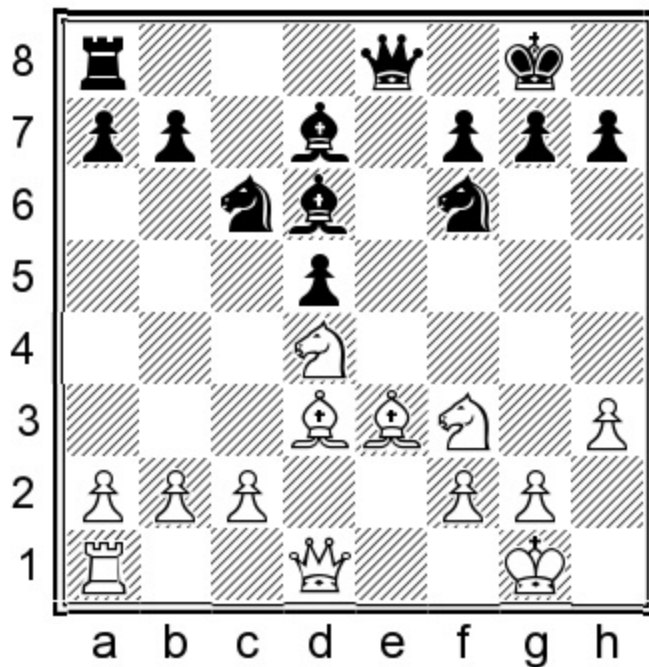
B) 6...♘c6 7.0-0 ♘f6 8.♞e1+ ♙e7



Position after: 8...e7

9.h3!? [9.♘b3 ♙g4 10.h3 ♙h5 11.g4 ♙g6 12.♘bxd4 0-0= was at least equal in 0-1 (22) Teloudis, A

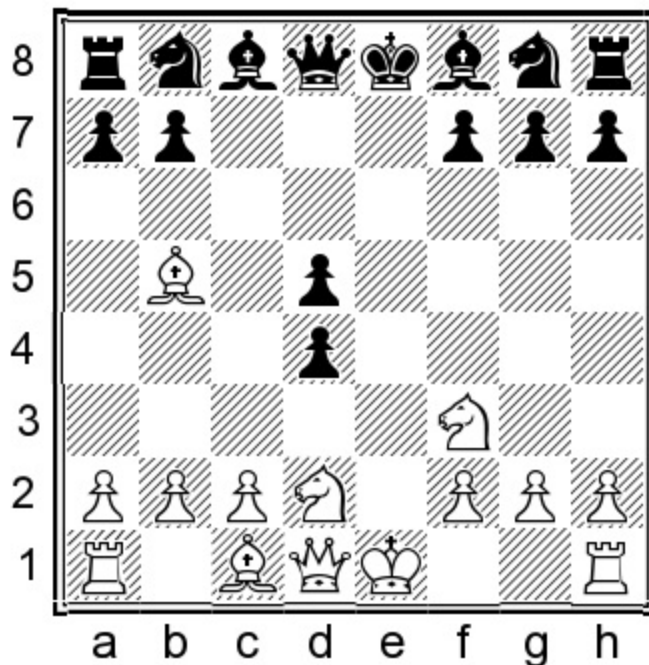
(2273) – Graf, A (2590) Kavala 2010.] 9...0-0 10.♖b3 ♜e8!N [10...♗e4 11.♗bxd4 f5!?± 0-1 (18)
 Tornay Gomez, J (2121) – Michalik, P (2550) Heusenstamm 2016.] 11.♗bxd4 ♔d6 12.♞xe8+ ♚xe8
 13.♕e3 ♕d7=



Position after: 13...♕d7=

I would invite you to conduct your own further research into this position.

Back to 6.♕b5+.

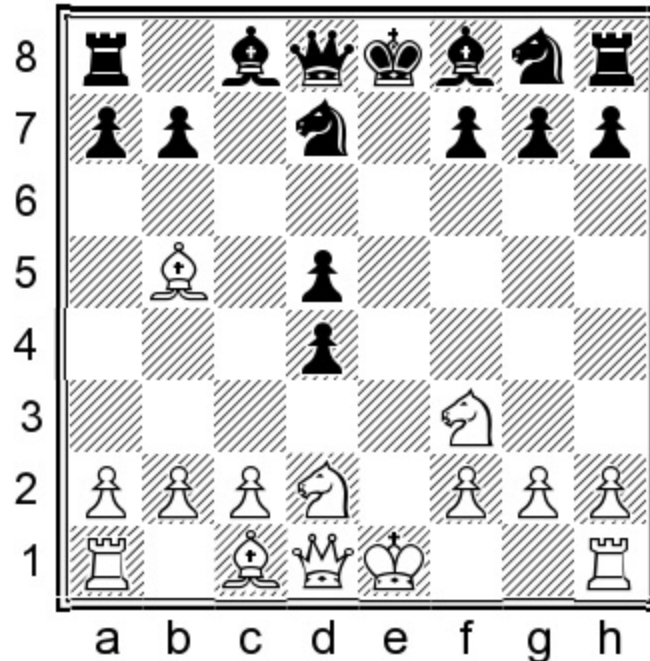


Position after: 6.♕b5+

6...♔d7?!

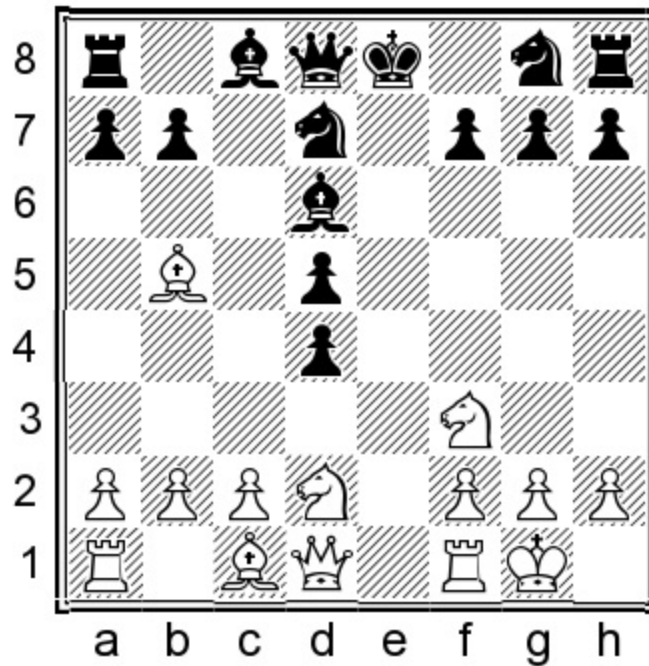
A) 6...♘c6 is a direct transposition to Chapters 10 and 11 and is the only move I can wholeheartedly recommend.

B) 6...♘d7?!N



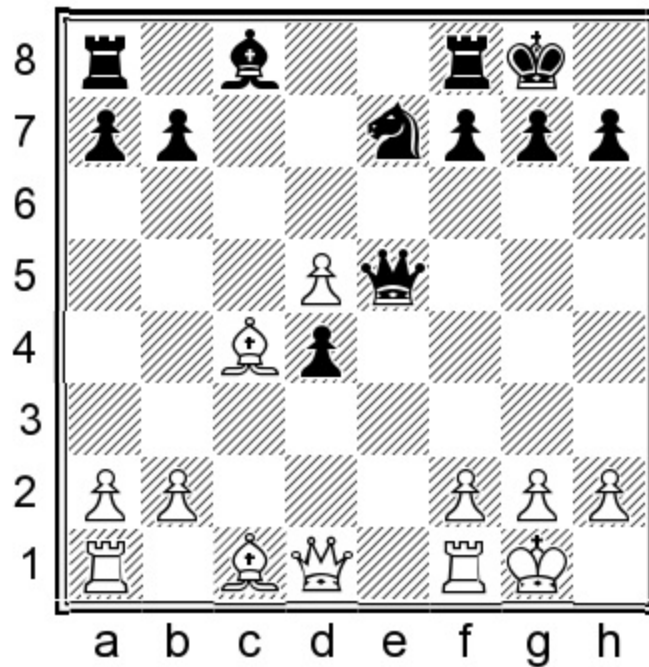
Position after: 6...♘d7?!N

This is an attempt to boldly go where no man has gone before. Of course, there is a reason why this has never been tried. It is just not as good as the other options. 7.0-0 [7.♙e2+ ♚e7 8.0-0 ♙xe2 9.♔xe2 ♔d6 10.♘xd4 ♘e7 11.♖e1 a6 12.♘2b3 0-0 13.♔g5± White is much better developed; 7.♘xd4!? a6 8.♙e2+ ♚e7 9.♔d3 ♙xe2+ 10.♔xe2± The funny thing is that the computer wants to spend two tempi getting a knight back to c6!] 7...♔d6□



Position after: 7...♙d6

8.c4!! A difficult but brilliant move to find. [8.♘b3 ♘e7 9.♙xd4 0-0 10.♙f4 ♘f6 11.♙xd6 ♘f5 12.♙f4 ♙xd6 13.♙xd6 ♘xd6± Even here, in the most favorable version for Black, White has an advantage because he has exchanged off our best minor piece.] 8...♘e7 [8...dxc3 9.♘c4!+-] 9.cxd5 0-0 10.♘e4 ♘e5 11.♘xd6 ♙xd6 12.♘xe5 ♙xe5 13.♙c4



Position after: 13.♙c4

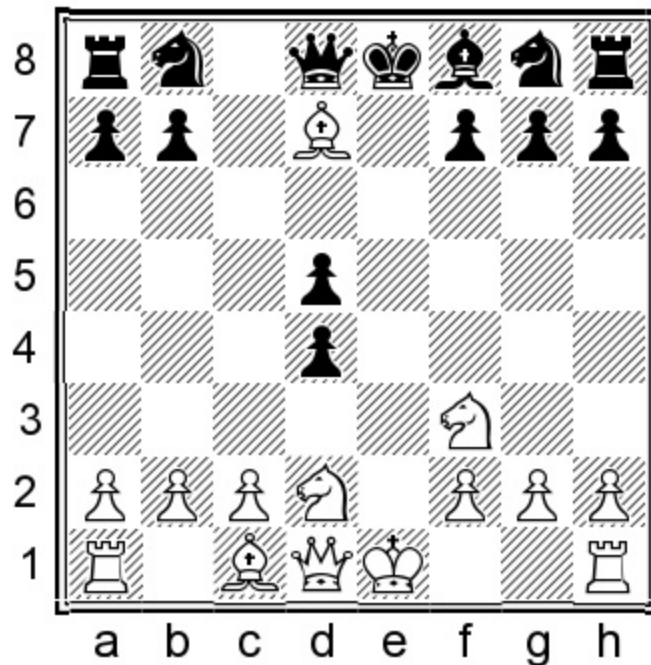
13...♘xd5 [13...b5!? 14.♞e1 ♙f6 15.♙d3 ♙f5 16.♙xf5 ♘xf5 17.♙f4±] 14.♞e1 ♙d6 15.♙xd4 ♙e6±

White is the one who can play for a win with the bishop pair in an open position.

7. ♖e2+!

The correct way to punish Black's lack of development.

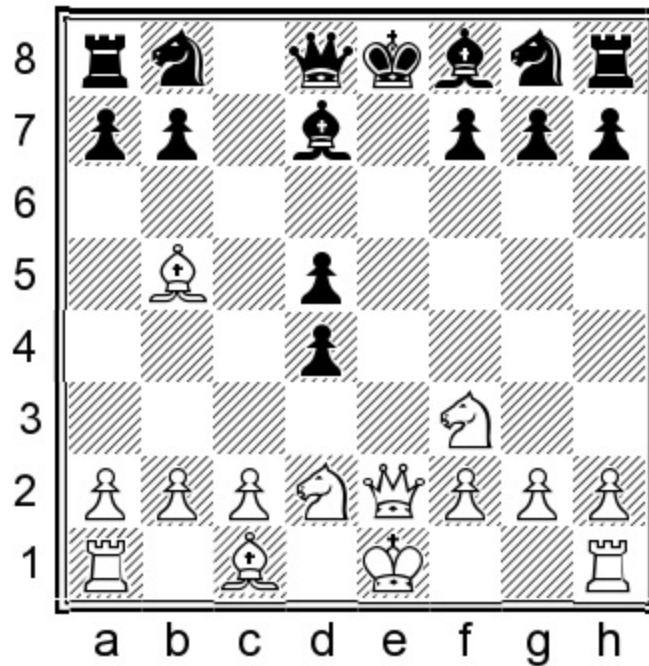
7. ♗xd7+



Position after: 7. ♗xd7+

A) 7... ♗xd7?! I cannot recommend this way of playing. In the main lines of 5... ♗f6 with 7... ♗bd7, Black is not playing ...cxd4 at all. 8. ♖e2+ [8.0-0 ♗d6 9. ♖e1+ ♗e7 10. ♗b3 0-0 11. ♖xd4 h6 12. ♗f4 ♗c6 13. ♖d2 ♗f6 14. ♖ad1 ♗xf4 15. ♖xf4 ♖b6 ½-½ Dobrowolski, P (2415) – Dudzinski, P (2355) Jastrzebia Gora 2019; 8. ♗xd4 ♗d6 9. ♗f5 ♖f6 10. ♗xd6+ ♖xd6 11.0-0 ♗e7 12. ♖e1±] 8... ♖e7 9. ♗xd4 ♖xe2+ 10. ♗xe2± Black really needs a knight to control d4.

B) 7... ♖xd7! This is similar to Chapter 5, and some transpositions are possible. However, we might make use of the fact we haven't played ...♗f6 yet and try something else. 8.0-0 ♗c6 9. ♖e1+ ♗e7 10. ♗b3 ♗f6 gives a transposition to Chapter 5 as mentioned.

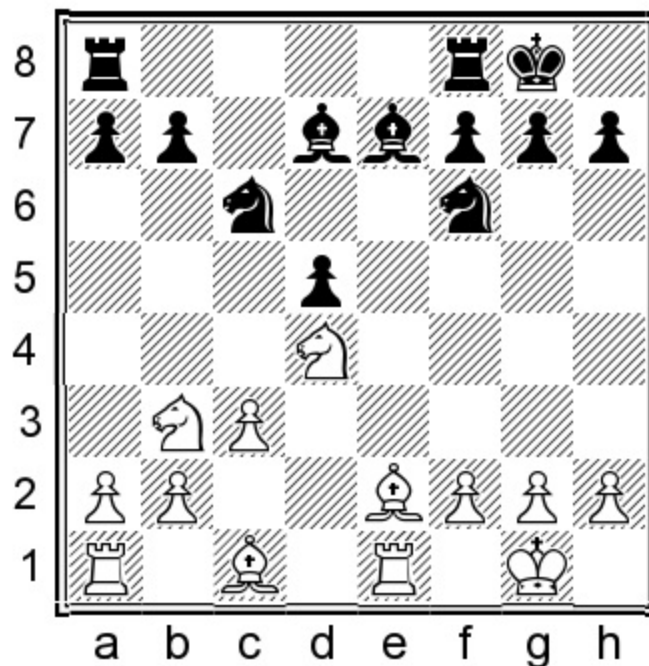


Position after: 7. ♖e2+!

7... ♗e7

7... ♗e7 is a little bit worse. 8. 0-0 ♗xb5!N [8... ♗f6?! 9. ♖e1 ♗xb5 10. ♗xb5+ ♗d7 11. ♗xd7+ ♗bx7 12. ♗xd4± 1-0 (32) Baklan, V (2620) – Haimovich, T (2419) Biel 2011.] 9. ♗xb5+ ♗d7 10. ♗xd7+ ♗xd7± Again Black will struggle to develop.

8. 0-0 ♗xe2 9. ♗xe2 ♗f6 10. ♖e1 ♗e7 11. ♗b3 ♗c6 12. ♗fxd4 0-0 13. c3±



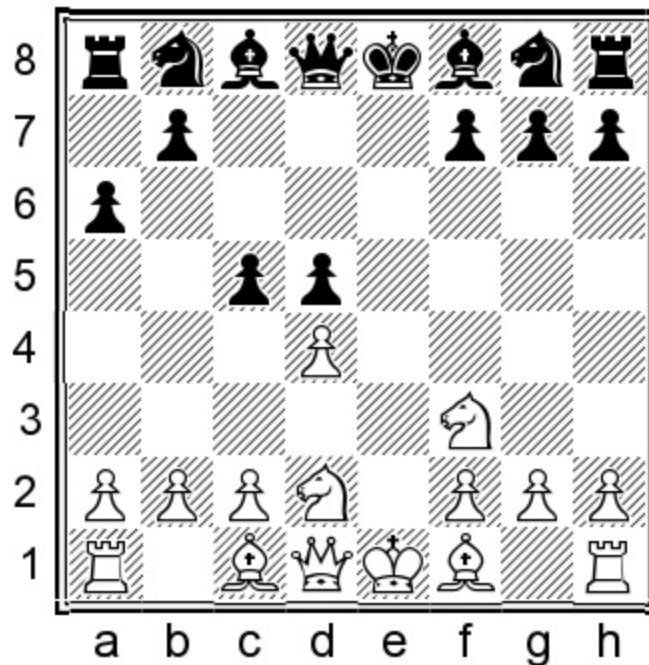
Position after: 13.c3±

White has the better minor pieces. Note that it does not really matter that there are four sets of minor pieces present. It's all about where and how they stand. In French isolani structures, e-file control affects the evaluation more than trading off minor pieces.

This brings us to the end of our unique 5...cxd4 endeavor. Of course in practice it will likely just lead to a transposition after 6.♙b5+ and 6...♘c6. But who knows, White might know a bit of theory and try to punish this move order, or lose their minds in the transpositional forests. At least choosing this line will win some time on the clock!

c) 5...a6 6.♙e2 c4 7.0-0 ♗d6 8.b3 cxb3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 a6!?



Position after: 5...a6!?

Apart from Nikolic, Vassily Ivanchuk and other French 'celebrities' have employed this line regularly.

6.♙e2

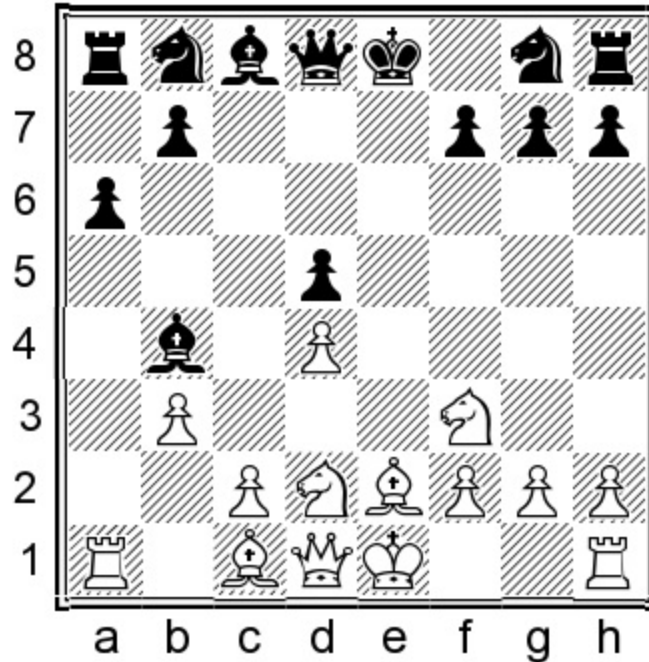
Even though this move has been seen a lot, it is not the most critical. White obstructs the e-file, which affords Black vital time to develop his pieces to favorable squares. It's hard to understand why John Shaw recommended playing this way instead of the more critical 6.dxc5!

6...c4

This move has been played the most and it is Nikolic's favored way of playing. It is most usual to play it here on move 6, but he often also delays it until move 7.

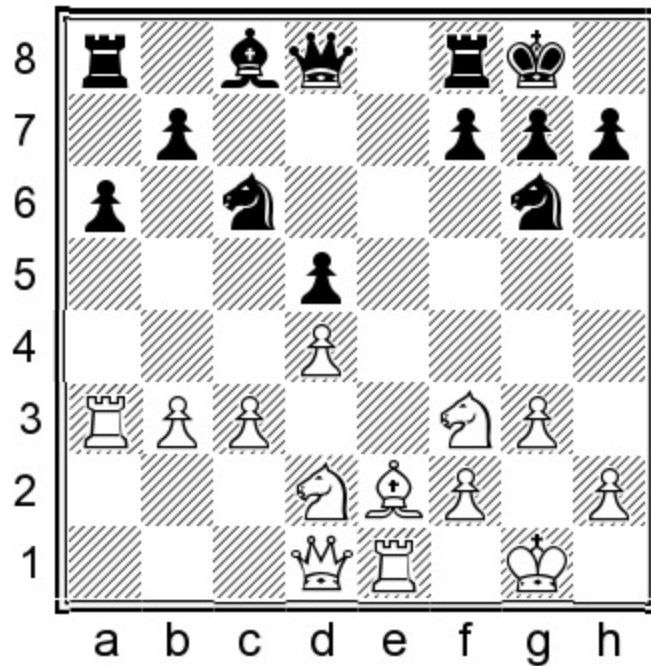
7.0-0

7.b3 generally transposes but gives Black slightly more options. 7...cxb3 [7...b5 8.0-0 ♖d6 transposes.] 8.axb3 ♗b4!



Position after: 8... ♗b4!

One of many extra options, but in my view the most annoying one. 9.0-0 ♘e7 10.♗a3 [10.♞e1!? 0-0 11.♗b2 ♗e6 12.c3 ♗d6 13.♘f1 ♘d7=] 10...♗xa3 11.♞xa3 ♘bc6 12.c3 0-0 13.♞e1 ♘g6 14.g3

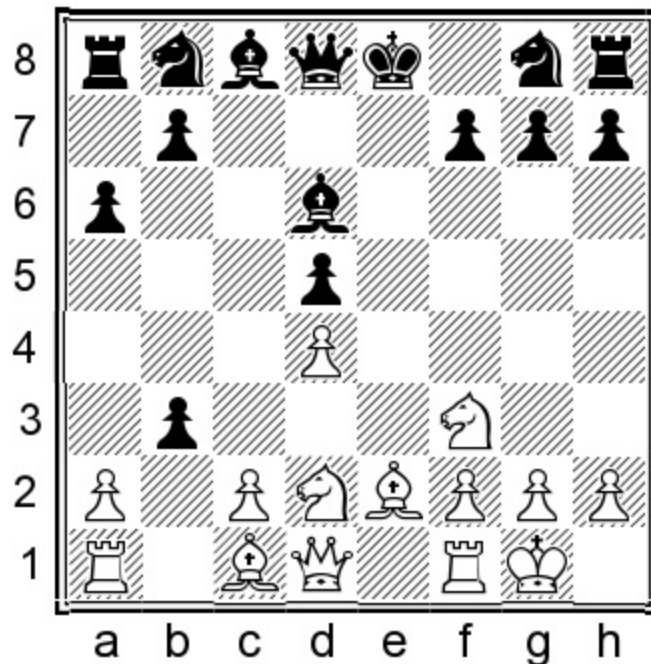


Position after: 14.g3

14...♔d6 [14...♙h3! We shouldn't encourage the rook on a3 to move to a better position. 15.♙f1 ♔d7 16.♙xh3 ♔xh3=] 15.♖a2 ♙e6 16.♘f1± 0-1 (40) Foldi, I (2320) – Atalik, S (2420) Budapest 1991.

7...♙d6! 8.b3 cxb3

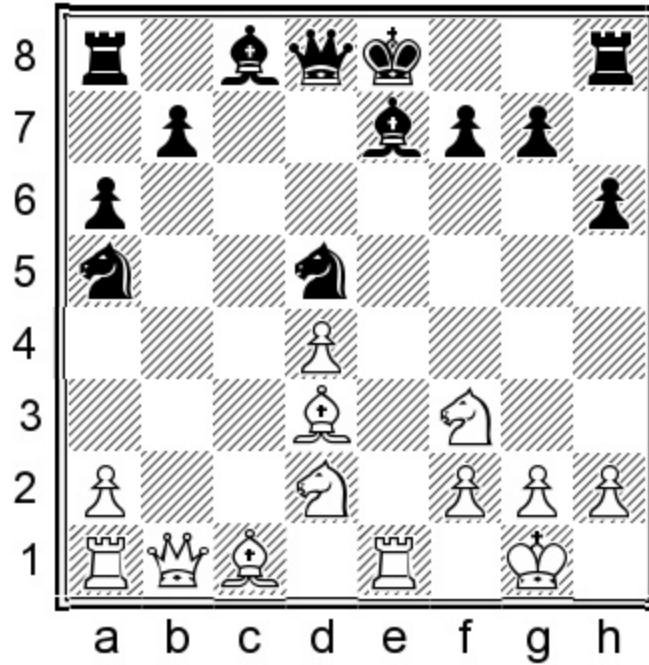
8...b5!? – see the next subchapter.



Position after: 8...cxb3

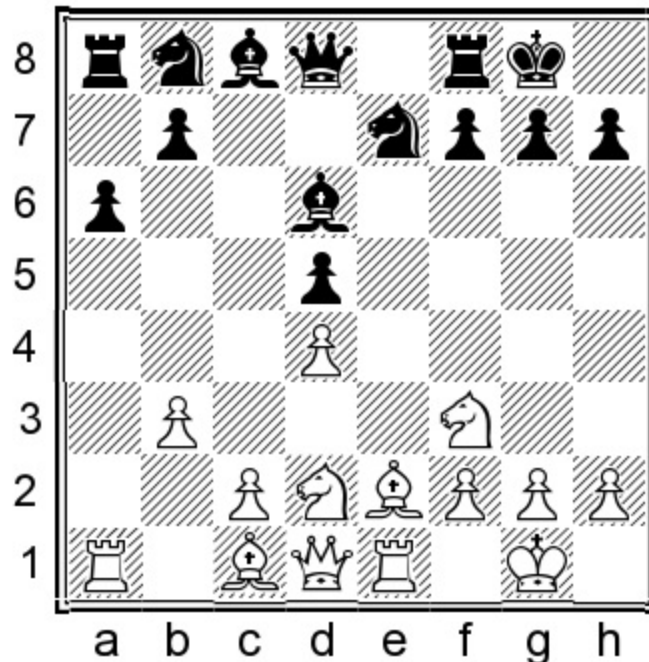
9.axb3

9.c4!? Nobody expects the Spanish inquisition! 9...♖e7 10.♙xb3 ♜bc6 11.cxd5 ♜a5 12.♙b1 ♜xd5?
 [12...0-0 13.♜e4 ♜xd5 14.♜xd6 ♜c3 15.♙b4 ♜xe2+ 16.♔h1 ♜xc1 17.♞axc1 ♜e6= ½-½ (29) Kunz,
 H (2081) – Burgarth, U (2242) email 2011.] 13.♜d3 h6 14.♞e1+ ♜e7± 0-1 (37) Solak, D (2579) –
 Kotic, D (2538) Novi Sad 2009.



Position after: 14...♜e7±

9...♖e7 10.♞e1 0-0



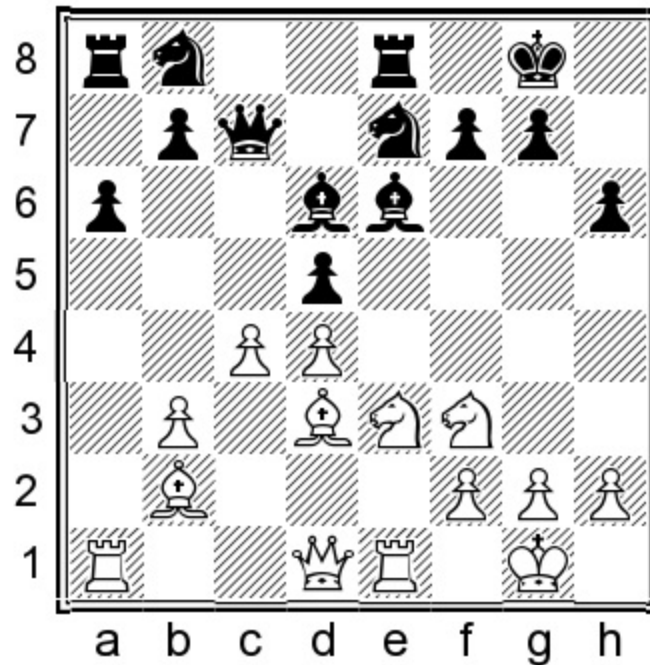
Position after: 10...0-0

The advantage of keeping the b8-knight flexible is that it can still choose to go the d7-f6 route in some cases.

11.♘f1 h6 12.♘e3 ♕e6 13.♕d3 ♖e8 14.♕b2 ♚c7

14...♞d7= provides a complicated middlegame.

15.c4±

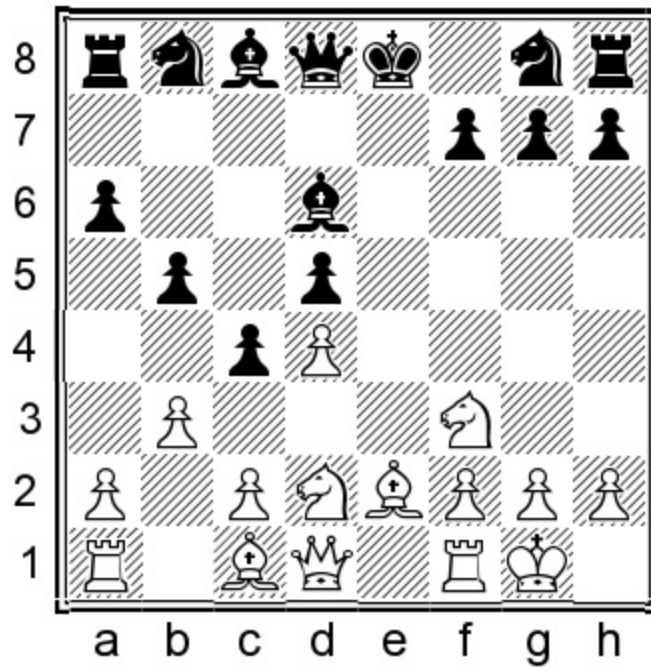


Position after: 15.c4±

½-½ (25) Jovanovic, B (2079) – Mondino, V (2149) LSS email 2013.

d) 5...a6 6.♕e2 c4 7.0-0 ♕d6 8.b3 b5

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 a6!? 6.♕e2 c4 7.0-0 ♕d6! 8.b3 b5!?



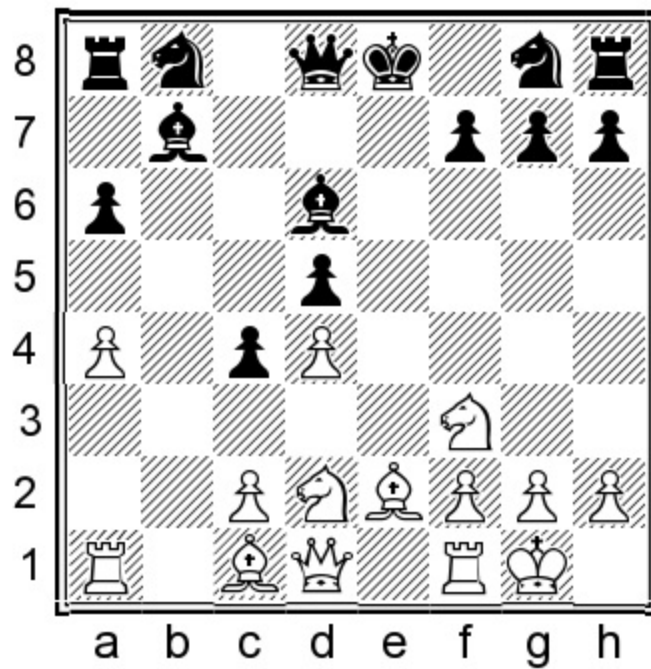
Position after: 8...b5!?

Beware, with perfect play this leads to a losing position for Black. Then again, this remains a popular sideline, probably because it is too challenging for White to deal with it perfectly in practice.

9.a4 c3

Accepting the piece sacrifice is the best way to challenge White.

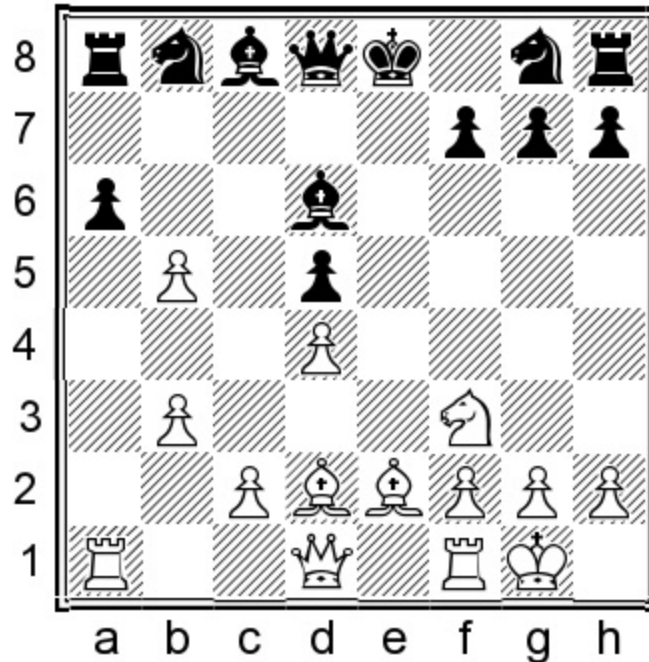
9...♙b7 10.bxc4 bxc4



Position after: 10...bxc4

11.♙xc4! [11.♖b1±] 11...dxc4 12.♘xc4 ♕e7 13.♞e1± ♚c7?! [13...♙d5 14.♘e3 ♘c6 15.♘xd5 ♚xd5 16.c4 ♚xc4 17.d5 0-0-0 18.♙e3 ♙b4 19.♞c1 ♚xd5 20.♚xd5 ♞xd5 21.♞xc6+ ♔d7 22.♞ec1+–] 14.♖b1!+– 1-0 (20) Geller, E (2515) – Dreev, A (2605) New York 1990.

10.axb5 cxd2 11.♙xd2



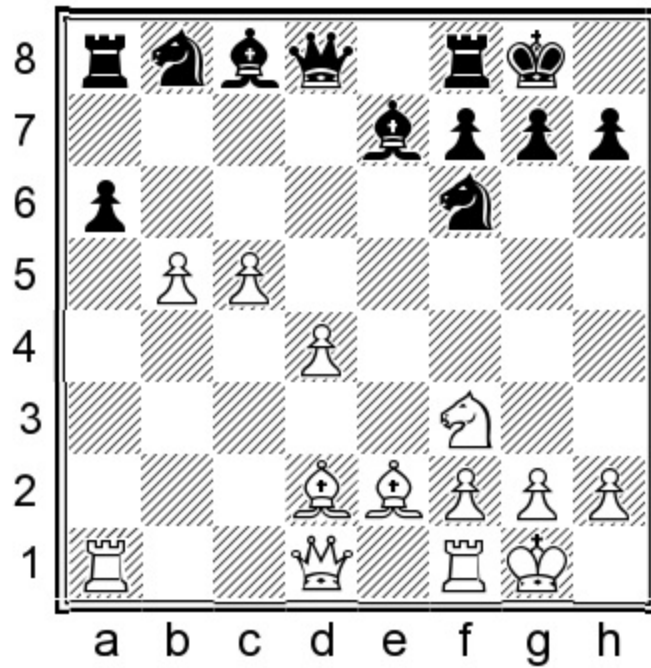
Position after: 11.♙xd2

11...♘f6

11...♙b7?! 12.bxa6 ♘xa6 13.c4! [13.♙xa6? This little trick does not work. 13...♞xa6 14.♚e2+ ♚e7 15.♚b5+ ♚d7 16.♚e2+ ♚e7 17.♚b5+ ½-½ (17) Akbaev, K (2475) – Kiselev, V (2505) Dombai 2014.] 13...♘e7 14.c5 ♙b8 15.b4±

12.c4 dxc4 13.bxc4 0-0 14.c5 ♕e7

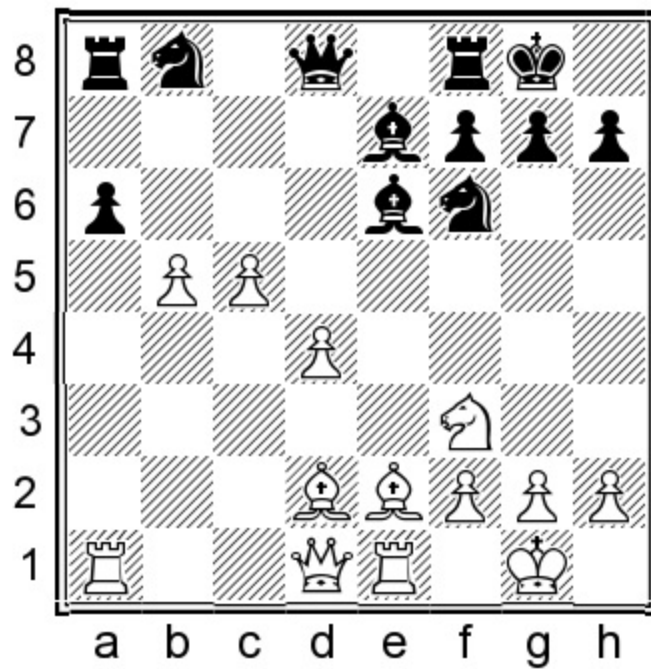
A wonderful secret! Computers love the White position, yet the results are terrible in practice. Nikolic is convincing me to try this out at least once or twice myself. Is he convincing you as well? No? Yes? No? Okay. Let's see some more moves.



Position after: 14...♙e7

15.♙c2!

A) 15.♖e1 ♘e6

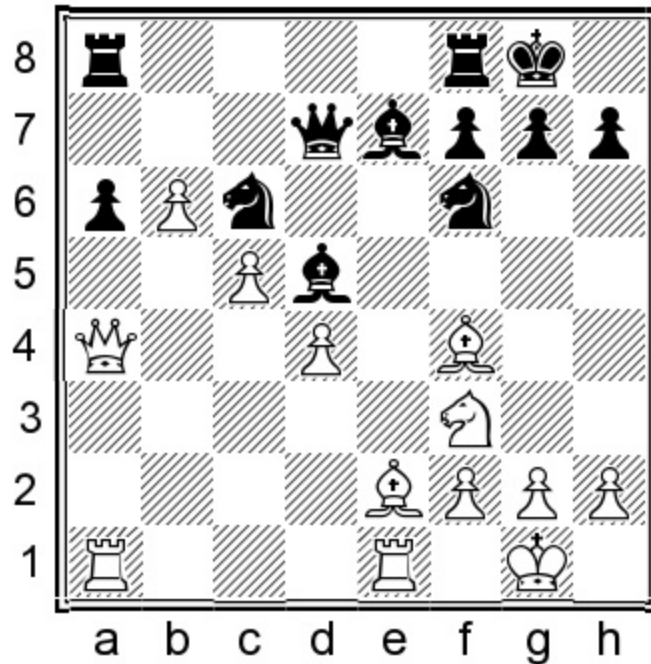


Position after: 15...♘e6

A1) 16.♙c3 ♙d5 17.bxa6 ♘c6= 0-1 (40) Milher, A (2440) – Colombo Berra, F (2325) Argentina 1998. [17...♘e4!♣]

A2) 16. ♖b1 ♘d5 17. ♘a5? ♚c8 18. bxa6? ♘d8 19. ♘xd8 ♚xd8 ♠ Maybe the top Bulgarian grandmaster just had a bad day. 0-1 (21) Georgiev, K (2475) – Nikolic, P (2625) Elenite 1993.

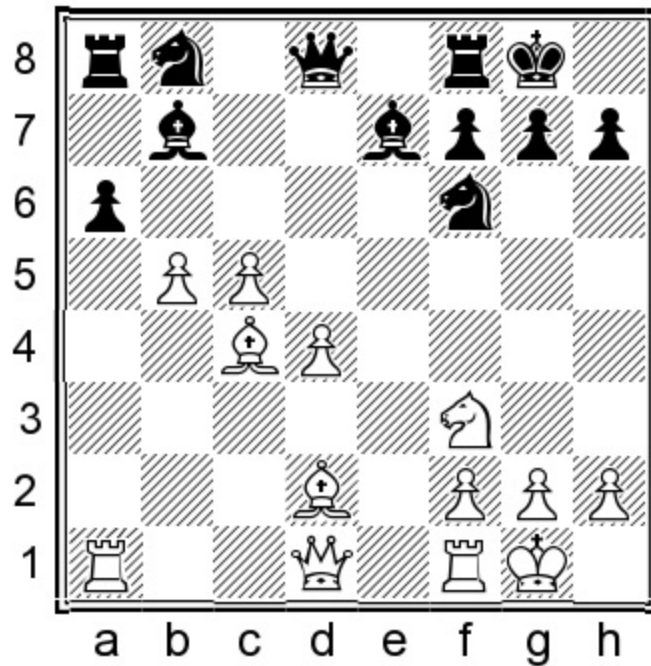
A3) 16. b6N 16... ♞c6 17. ♚a4 ♘d5 18. ♘f4 ♚d7∞



Position after: 18... ♚d7∞

The computer is very optimistic for White initially, but then its evaluation drops rapidly. This is one of those wild lines where you can play for a win with Black! Note that Black aims for an attack on the white king here. There he can use his extra piece, while White’s extra queenside pawns cannot be used for defense.

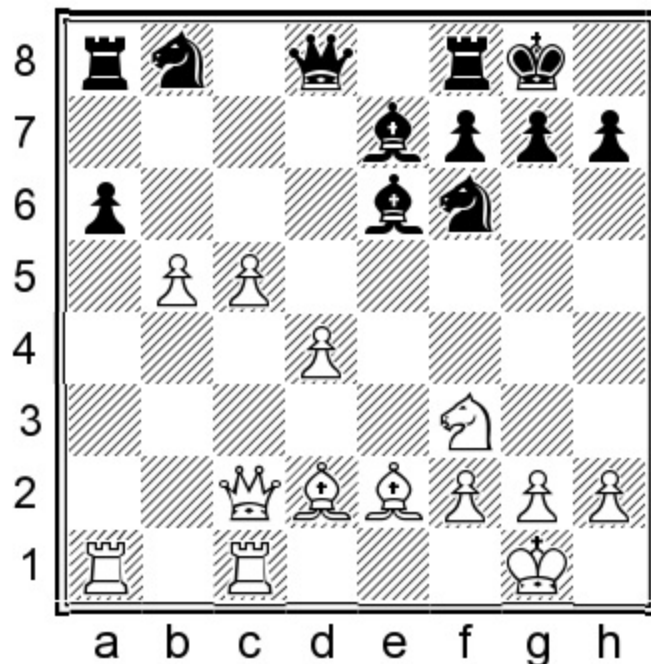
B) 15. ♘c4 ♘b7



Position after: 15...♙b7

16.♙a5 [16.b6!?N 16...♘c6 17.♙f4 ♘d5= Nimzowitsch, the god of blockades, would have loved this.] 16...♚c8 17.c6 axb5 18.cxb7 ♚xb7 19.♙d3?! [19.♚b3=] 19...♘c6= 0-1 (37) Del Carril, J (1959) – Martinez Uceda, V (1400) UECC email 2000. [19...b4!♣]

15...♙e6 16.♚fc1!

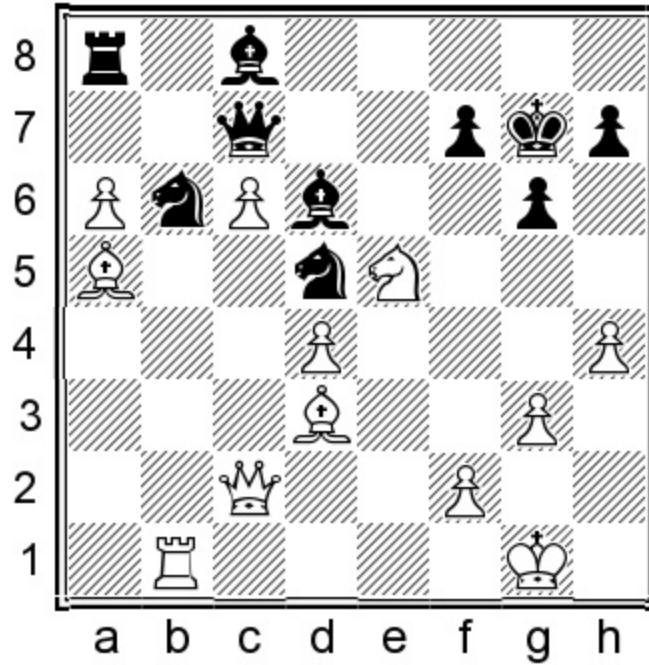


Position after: 16.♚fc1!

Even though White is clearly better, the position remains quite difficult. Nikolic does not play this way anymore, which tells us all we need to know.

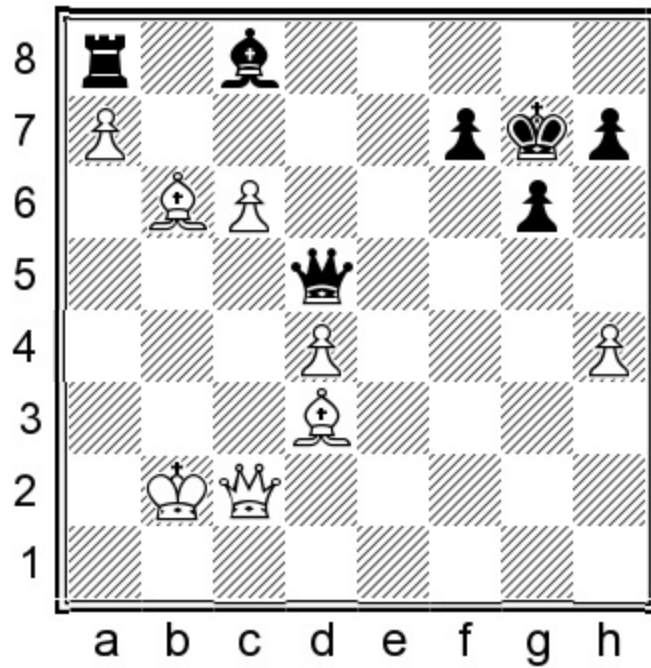
16...♖bd7 17.b6

17.♞xa6! ♞xa6 18.bxa6 ♚c7 19.c6 ♜b6 20.♙a5 ♜fd5 21.♞e5 ♞a8 22.♙d3 g6 23.♞b1 ♙d6 24.g3 ♖g7 25.h4 ♙c8



Position after: 25...♙c8

26.♞b5! ♙xe5 27.♞xd5 ♙xg3 28.♙xb6 ♙xf2+ 29.♖xf2 ♚h2+ 30.♖e3 ♚g3+ 31.♖d2 ♚g2+ 32.♖c1 ♚h1+ 33.♖b2 ♚xd5 34.a7+–

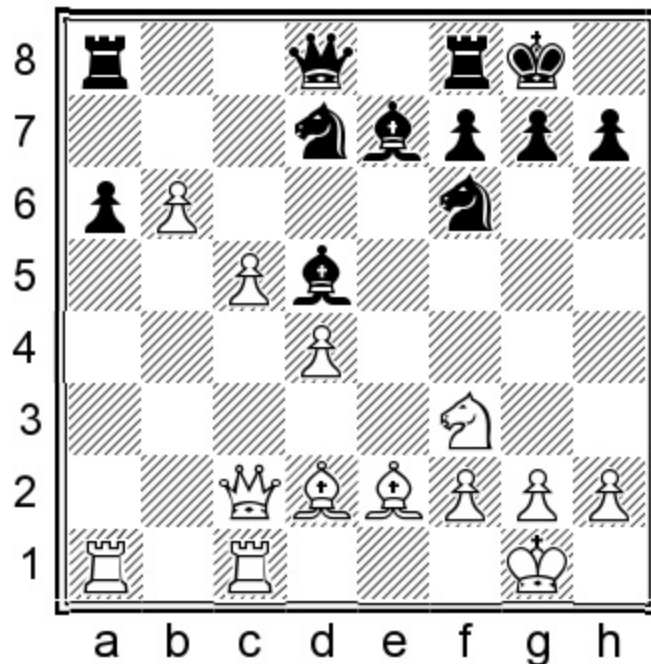


Position after: 34.a7+-

Sorry, I got a little bit carried away by my analysis! Let's hope you have enjoyed the madness.

This is just a sample line to show how White could use his space advantage. The only good news for Black is that White could rather easily lose the advantage somewhere along the road.

17...♙d5

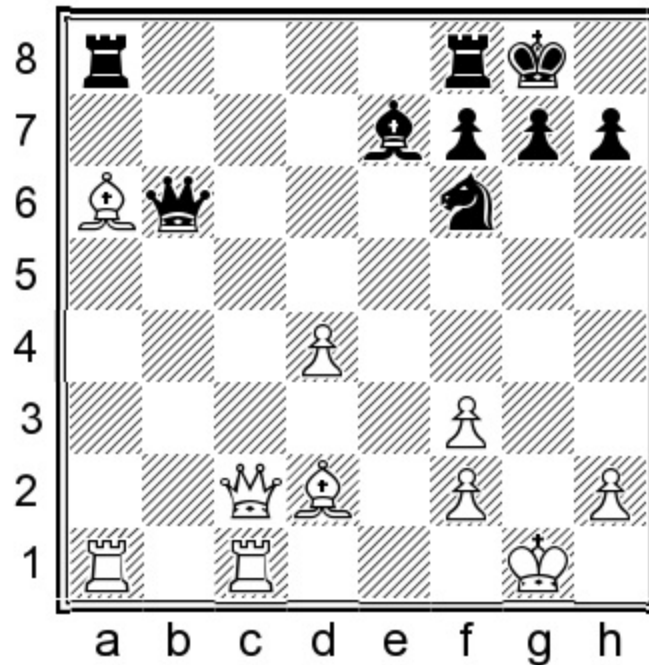


Position after: 17...♙d5

18. ♖xa6?!

18. ♖a5! Threatening something cheap. 18... ♗b8 19. ♖ab1 ♕c6 20. d5! ♕xd5 21. b7 ♕xb7 22. c6 ♖a7 23. ♘d4!± Black is completely stuck, although normal humans would surely never consider this position. The more difficult it is for White to find the correct moves, the happier I become.

18... ♘xb6 19. cxb6 ♕xf3 20. gxf3 ♗xb6=

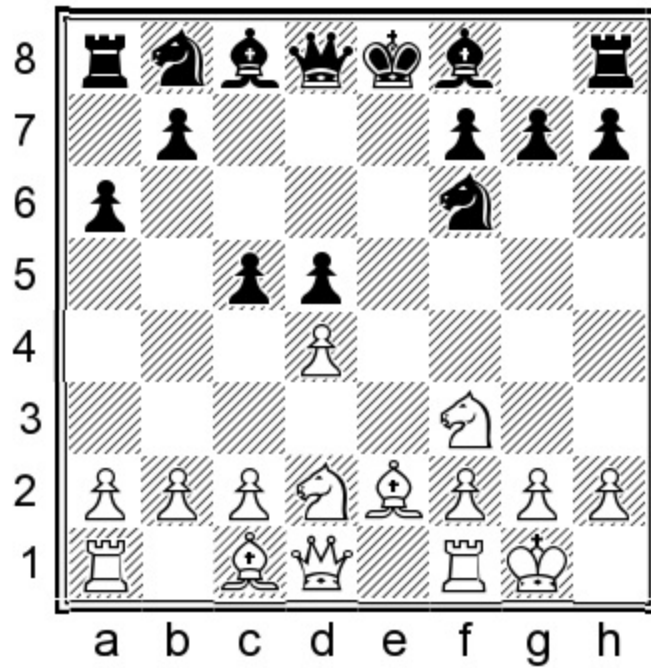


Position after: 20... ♗xb6=

½-½ (25) Solak, D (2632) – Nikolic, P (2602) Palic 2014.

e) 5...a6 6. ♕e2 ♘f6 7. 0-0 cxd4, 7...c4

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘d2 c5 4. exd5 exd5 5. ♘gf3 a6!? 6. ♕e2 ♘f6 7. 0-0

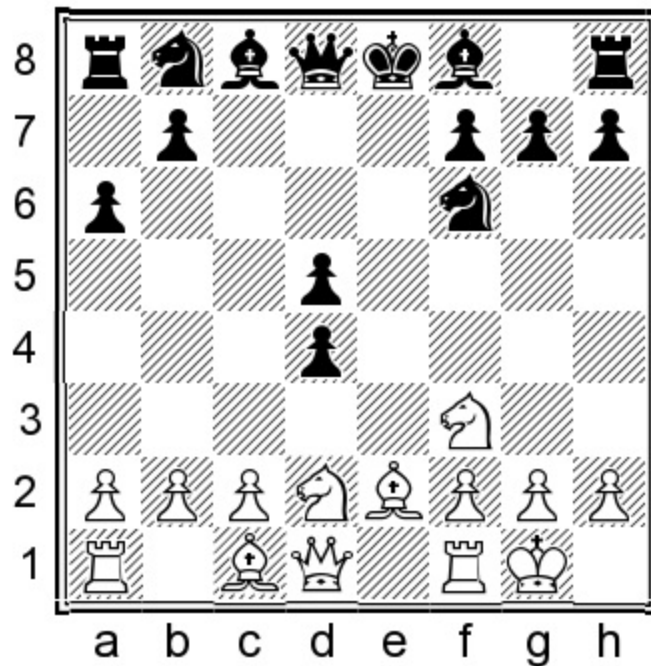


Position after: 7.0-0

7...c4

Nikolic's latest try! It seems that he switched to this attempt after 2014.

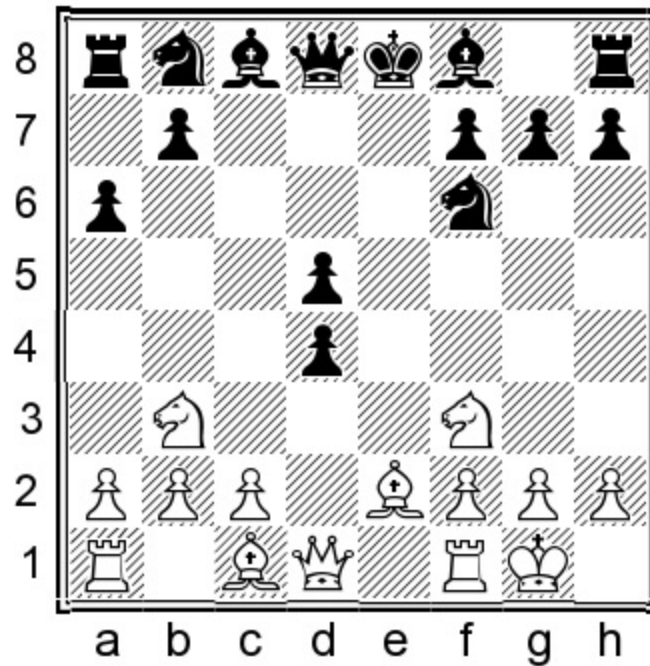
7...cxd4



Position after: 7...cxd4

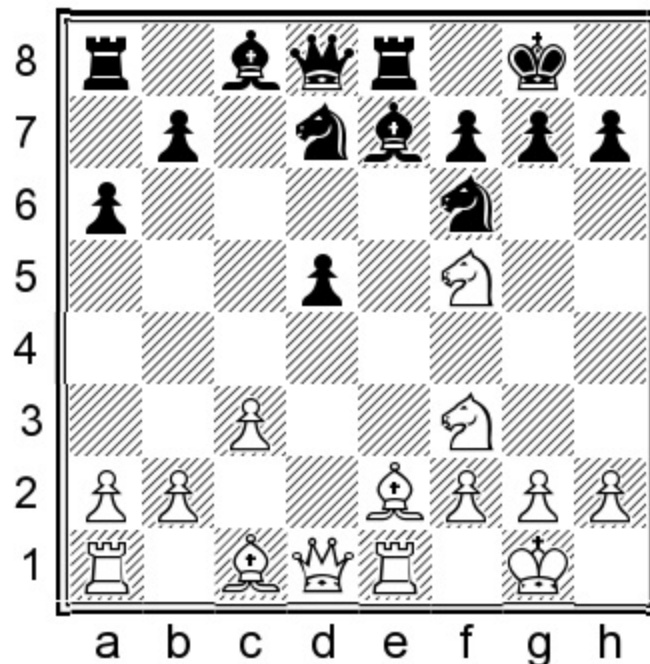
The real question about 7...cxd4 is whether the bishop really belongs on b6. Most strong players

would prefer to have it there. However, in most of these lines the bishop finds a nice square on f8, so I would not condemn this way of playing, per se. 8.♘b3



Position after: 8.♘b3

A) 8...♙e7 This move is underrated. 9.♘bxd4 [9.♘fxd4 0-0 10.♙f4 ♘c6 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.c4 ♘e4= Black had hardly any problems in ½–½ (33) Marjanovic, S (2505) – Andersson, U (2575) Sarajevo 1985.] 9...0-0 10.c3 ♞e8 11.♞e1 ♘bd7 12.♘f5

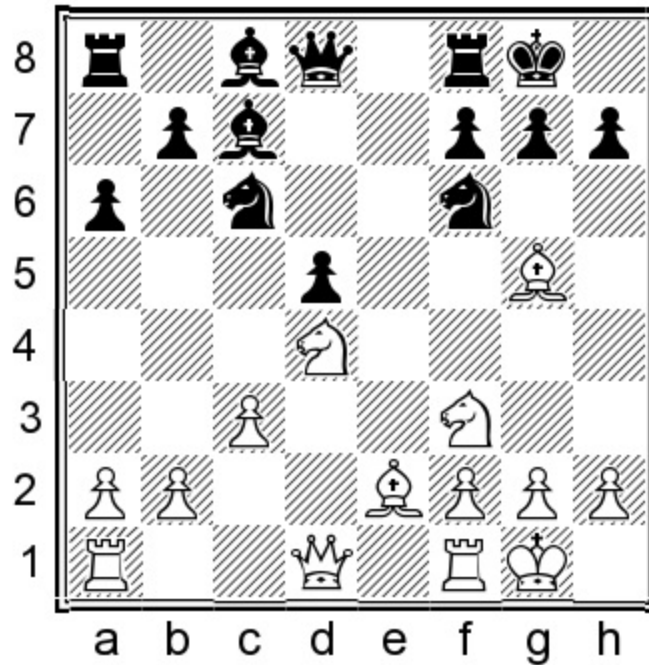


Position after: 12.♘f5

12...♔c5?! [12...♔f8! 13.♔f4 ♖c5 14.♗e3 b5!?] 13.♔e3! ♚c7 14.g3 [14.♔f1! The e-file! 14...♗f8 15.♔xc5 ♜xe1 16.♗xe1! ♚xc5 17.♚d4 ♚xd4 18.♗xd4±] 14...h6 15.♔f1± ½-½ (26) Pirhala, L (2367) – Canibal, J (2324) ICCF email 2010.

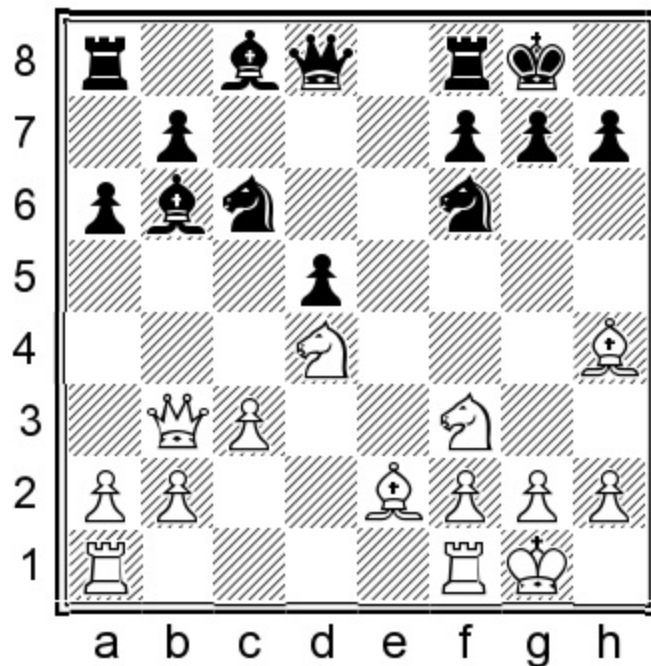
B) 8...♔d6 9.♔g5 ♗c6 10.♗bxd4 0-0 11.c3

B1) 11...♔c7!?



Position after: 11...♔c7!?

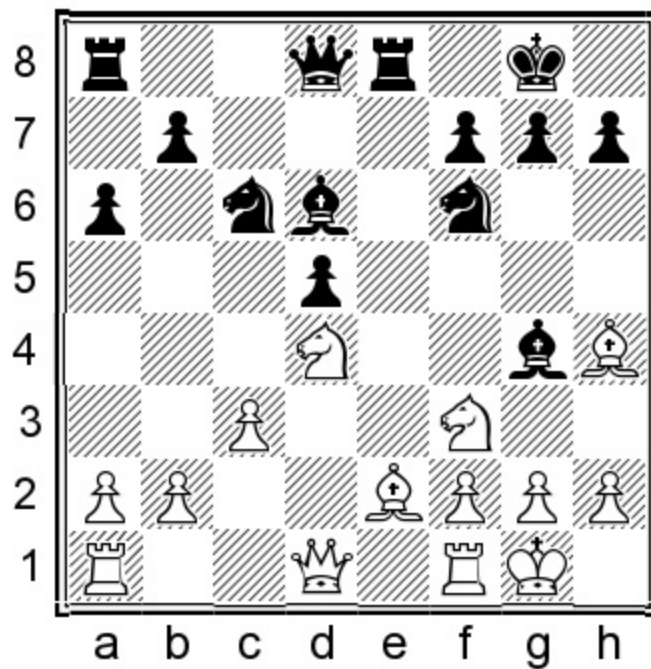
A mysterious move, but it has its logic. Black often gets great play after sacrificing the d5-pawn. 12.♔h4 [12.♗c2!? h6 13.♔xf6 ♚xf6 14.♗e3 d4 15.♗xd4 ♜d8; 12.♚b3 h6 13.♔xf6 ♚xf6 14.♚xd5 ♜d8] 12...♔b6?! [12...♚d6! 13.♔g3 ♚d8 14.♚b3 ♔xg3 15.hxg3 ♜e8 16.♜fe1± The position is simply difficult for Black. Therefore I do not recommend 11...♔c7.] 13.♚b3±



Position after: 13. ♖b3±

The bishop is just misplaced on b6 and should go back to where it came from. 1-0 (28) Timoscenko, G (2520) – Legky, N (2505) Metz 1995.

B2) 11... ♖e8 Simple moves are often best. 12. ♗h4 ♗g4

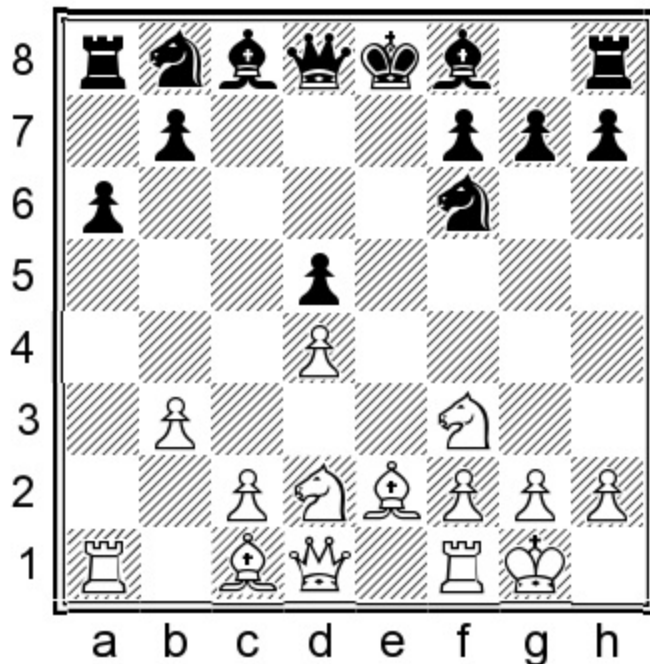


Position after: 12... ♗g4

Black has managed to develop all of his minor pieces ideally. The only problem is the pin on our knight, but that will be broken after playing ... ♗c5 and ... ♖d6. 13. ♖e1 ♗c5 14. ♗xc6 ♖xc6 15. ♗d4

♙xe2 16.♞xe2 ♚d6= 0-1 (46) Shibaev, F (2301) – Skorchenko, D (2420) Krasnodar 2002.

8.b3 cxb3 9.axb3

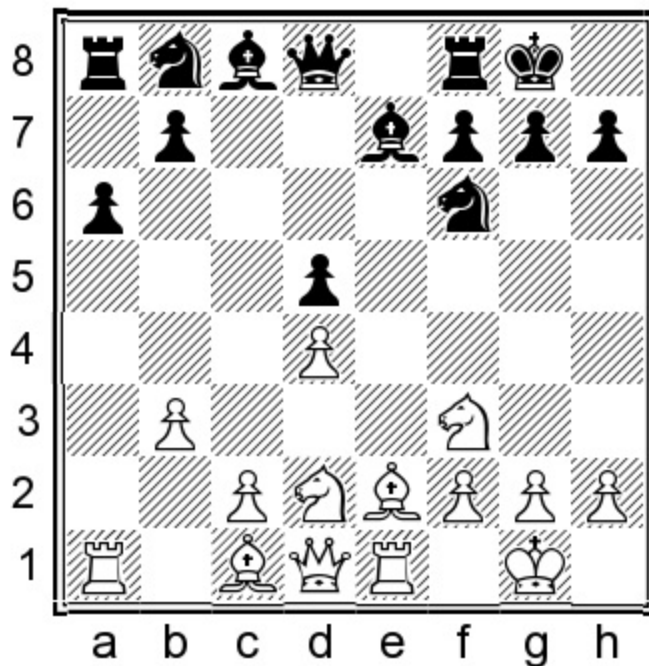


Position after: 9.axb3

9...♙e7

9...♙b4? is a logical experiment, but one which should fail. 10.♙a3? Double blindness! [10.♙b5+!N 10...♙d7 11.♞e1+ ♔f8 12.♙xd7 ♞bxd7 13.♙b2±] 10...♙xa3 11.♞xa3 ½-½ (55) Tuna, A (2034) – Nikolic, P (2617) Sarajevo 2016. 11...0-0!=

10.♞e1 0-0!

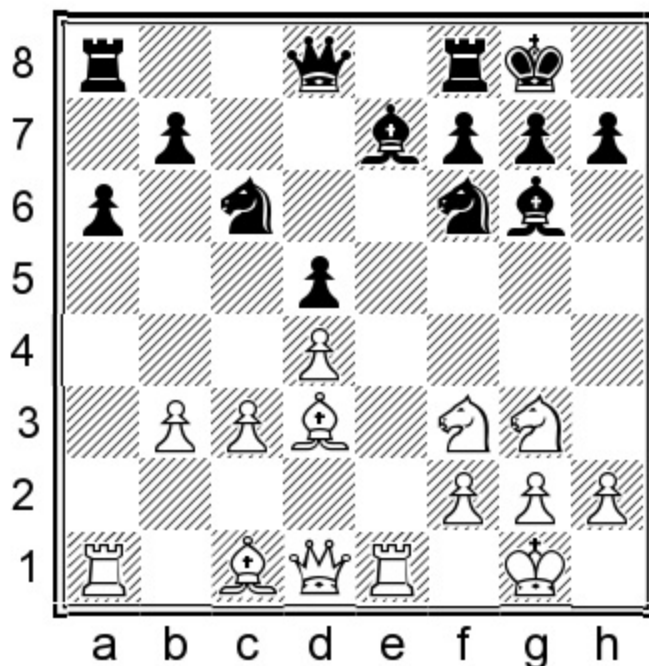


Position after: 10...0-0!

It is difficult to find any advantage for White here. His pawn structure is optically good, but that is about it.

11. ♘e5

11. ♕d3 ♖c6 12. c3 ♗g4 13. ♘f1 ♗h5 [13... ♖e8! Never retreat voluntarily, only when there is a threat (Of course this is a rule that is meant to be broken, like “knights before bishops”). 14. h3 ♗h5 15. ♕g5 ♗g6=] 14. ♘g3 ♗g6

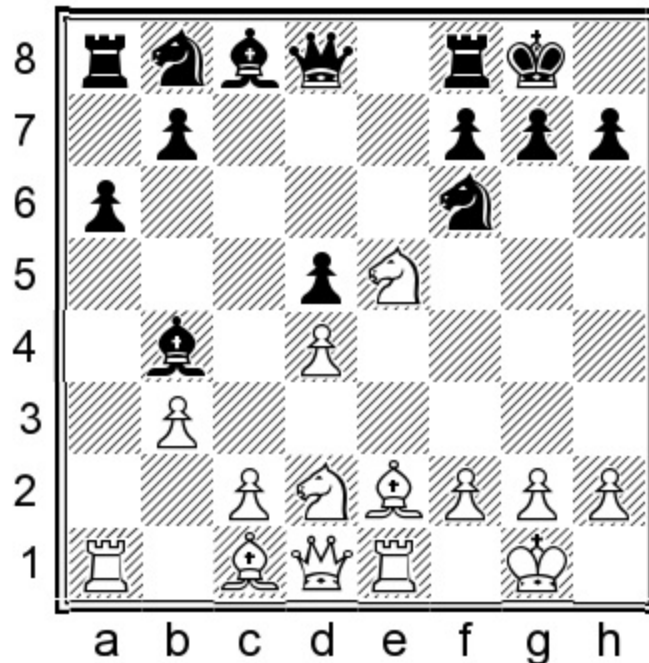


Position after: 14...♔g6

15.♘f5 [15.♖a2!? ♜e8 16.♖ae2 ♙f8 17.♙g5 ♜xe2 18.♚xe2 ♚d6= Even powerful moves are not enough to create much for White.] 15...♜e8 16.♘e5 [16.♘3h4!? ♙f8 17.♖xe8 ♚xe8 18.♘xg6 hxg6 19.♘e3 ♚d7 20.♙b2 ♘d8! 21.g3 ♘e6= Black is solid and the queenside pawns are ready for action.] 16...♘xe5 17.♘xe7+ ♚xe7 18.dxe5 ♘e4 1-0 (45) Donchev, D (2495) – Vodep, O (2265) Oberwart 1992.

11...♙b4!

11...♚c7 12.♙d3 ♙b4 13.♖e3?! ♘c6 14.♘df3 ♘e7 15.♘h4?! ♘e4= This is the game I was sitting next to. Unfortunately it didn't last too long as White blundered early on. 0-1 (24) Schuh, D (2395) – Nikolic, P (2576) Germany 2019.

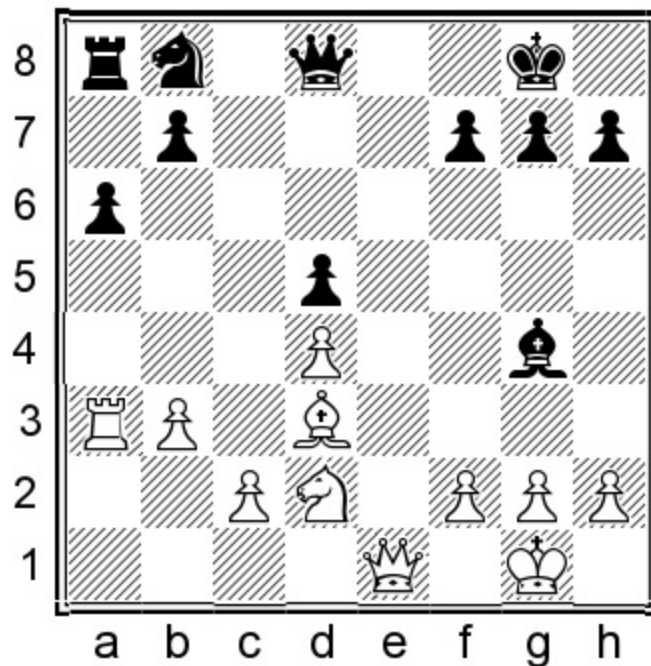


Position after: 11...♙b4!

12.♙a3

12.♙b2 ♘e4 13.♘xe4 ♙xe1 14.♚xe1 dxe4 15.♙c4 ♘d7 16.♚xe4 ♘xe5 17.♚xe5 ♜e8 18.♚f4 ♚d7=

12...♙xa3 13.♖xa3 ♜e8 14.♙d3 ♘g4 15.♘xg4 ♖xe1+ 16.♚xe1 ♙xg4=

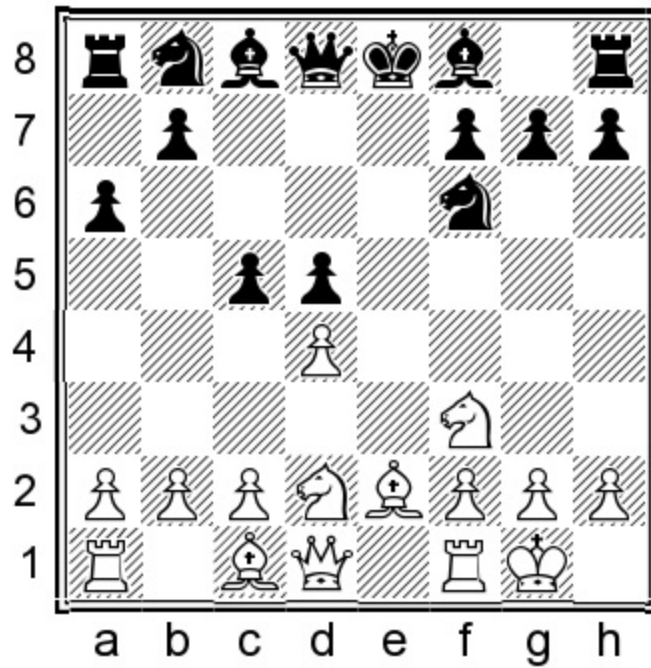


Position after: 16... ♕xg4=

Black is again very solid. The usual island rule of pawn structures does not seem to apply here. Neither does the majority in the center. Which brings us to our conclusion: The structures arising after ...c4-...cxb3 are very playable positions that a lot of players do not know how to handle as White. They might think they have the better position as everything looks good optically. These thoughts might just cause White to overplay his hand in the end.

f) 5...a6 6.♗e2 ♖f6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.♖b3 ♗b6

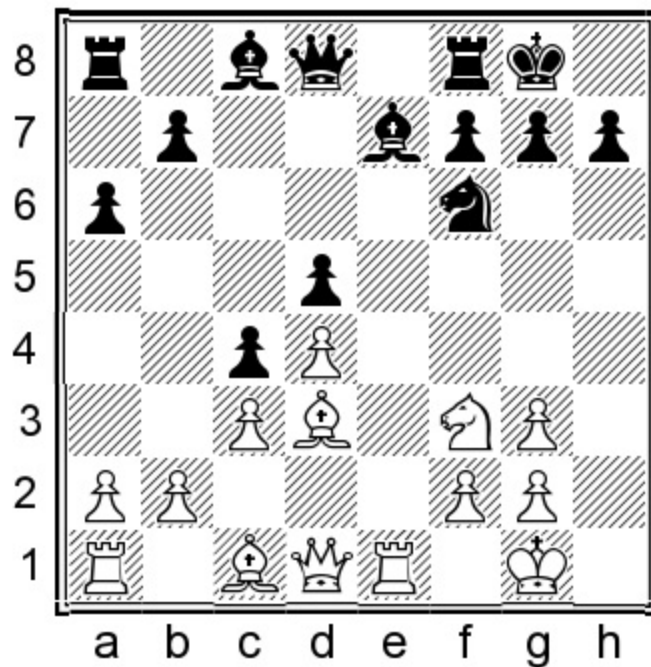
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♖d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♖gf3 a6!? 6.♗e2 ♖f6 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

7...♙e7

7...♘bd7!? This move is better than it looks and is still very fresh. 8.♖e1N 8...♙e7 9.♘f1 0-0 10.c3 ♘e4 11.♙d3 ♘df6 12.♘g3 ♘xg3 13.hxg3 c4=



Position after: 13...c4=

This line deserves more practical tests!

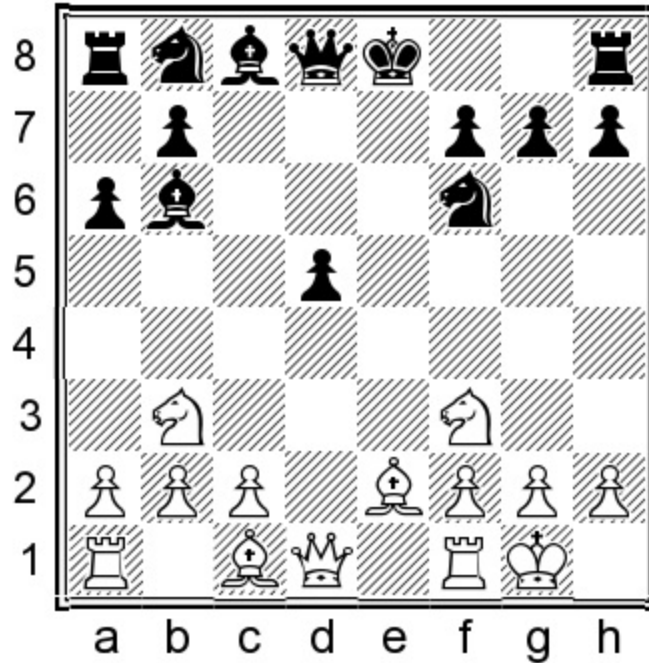
8.dxc5 ♖xc5 9.♗b3

Black has a choice here.

I do not know how much it will matter, but there are some subtle differences between placing the bishop on b6 or a7.

9...♖b6

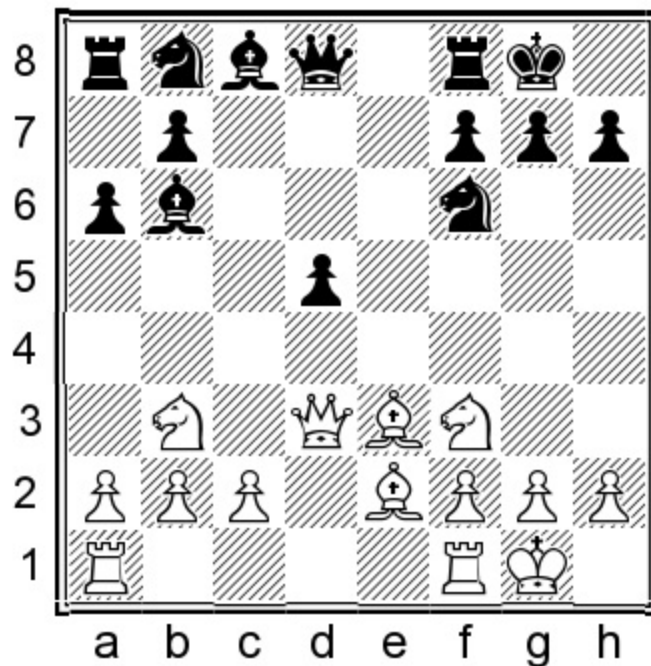
9...♖a7!? – see the next subchapter.



Position after: 9...♖b6

10.♖g5

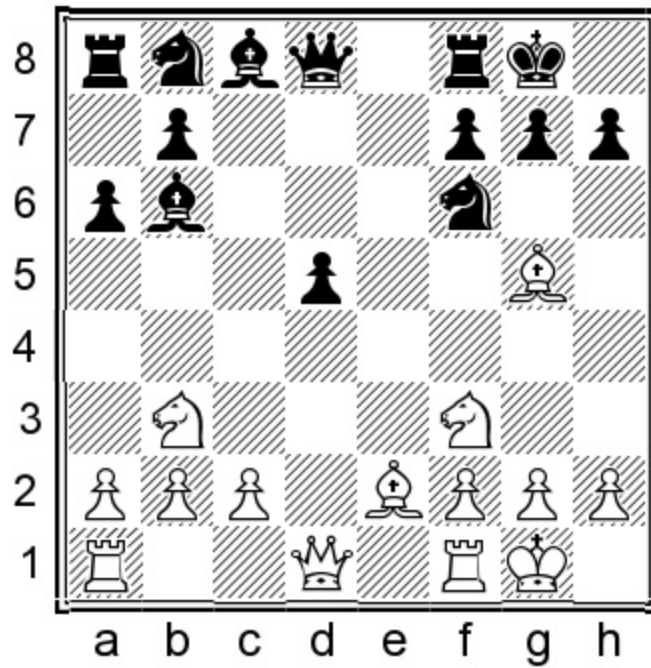
10.♗d3 is Shaw's recommendation but unfortunately for players following his recommendations, I cannot make it the main line. 10...0-0 11.♖e3



Position after: 11. ♔e3

This plan always makes sense for White. 11...♔c7!? A way to play for a win. The computer prefers the 11...♘c6 line, I guess it is just a matter of taste. Note that neither option is possible after 9...♔a7. [11...♘c6 12.♔xb6 ♚xb6 13.♞fe1 ♞e8 14.♔f1 ♔g4=; 11...♔xe3 This move will transpose to 9...♔a7. As we will see, it should also lead to equality. Good news for us, it is the only move that Shaw considers.] 12.c3 ♞e8! [12...♔g4!? 0-1 (43) Goessler, M (2190) – Vitouch, A (2317) Vienna 2018. 13.♘c5!N is annoying.] 13.♞fe1 ♘c6 14.♞ad1 ♚d6= with chances for both sides. I cannot understand why Shaw has recommended this way of playing. In general, his coverage of the isolated pawn positions is less thorough than his coverage of other lines, e.g. 4...♚xd5 and 3...♘f6. Of course it must be difficult to deal with so many different responses to 3.♘d2.

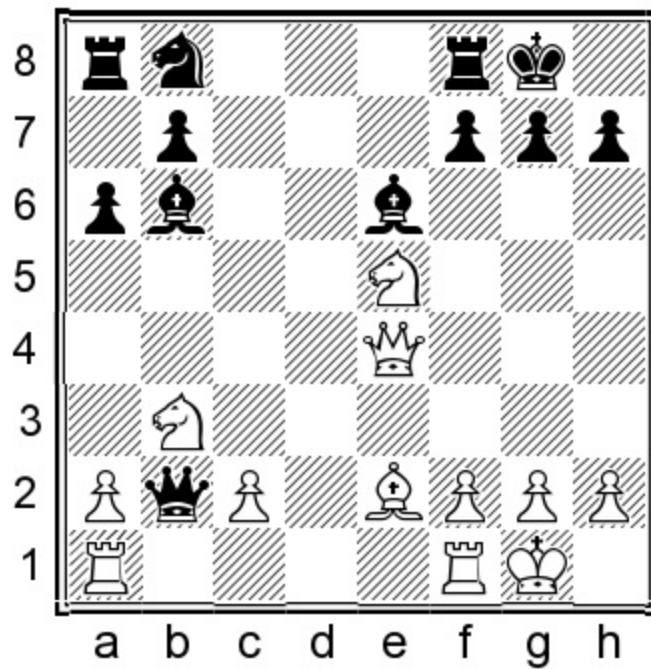
10...0-0



Position after: 10...0-0

11.c3

11.♙xf6!? ♚xf6 12.♜xd5 ♜xb2 13.♘e5 ♙e6 14.♜e4



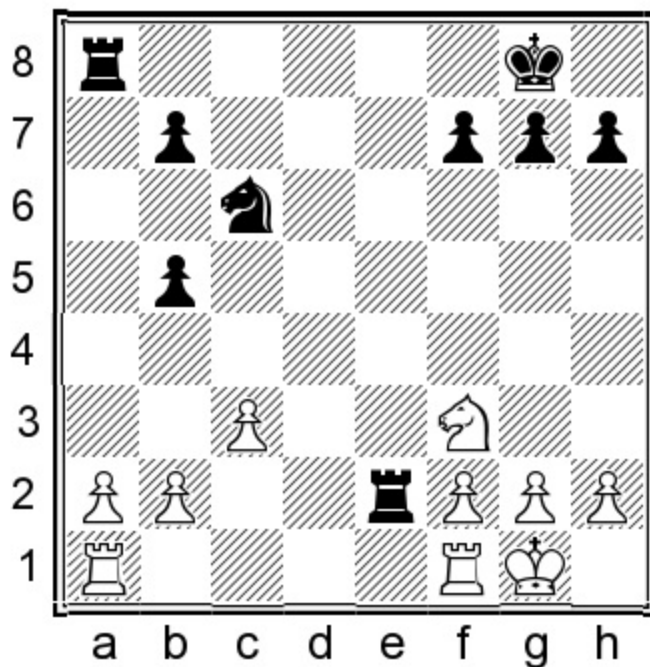
Position after: 14.♜e4

This position was reached in ½-½ (87) Rasik, V (2437) – Kanovsky, D (2419) Czechia 2015.

14...♘c6!N 15.♘xc6 bxc6 16.♙d3 g6 17.♜xc6 ♖ab8 18.♙xa6 ♙xf2+!=

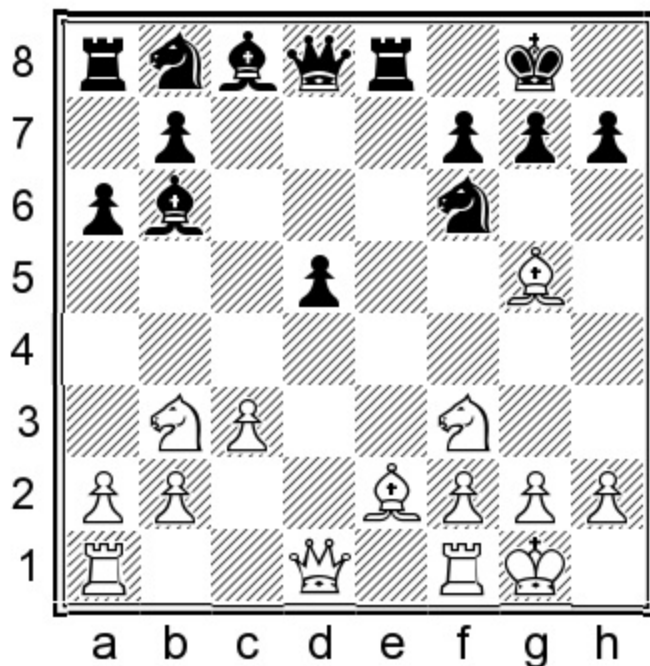
11...♖e8!

11...♘c6!? I would only ever play this move against either a very weak or a very strong opponent. A very weak opponent might play 12.♖e1 and miss the trick, while a very strong opponent might realize White can get a tiny advantage. 12.♙xf6 ♗xf6 13.♚xd5 ♙f5 14.♘bd4 ♖fe8 15.♘xf5 ♖xe2 16.♗b3 ♗xf5 17.♗xb6 ♗b5 18.♗xb5 axb5=



Position after: 18...axb5=

The two players were following the correspondence game Kostal, J – Volek, S 2015 in ½-½ (23) Plenca, J (2487) – Velten, P (2458) Le Castella 2018.



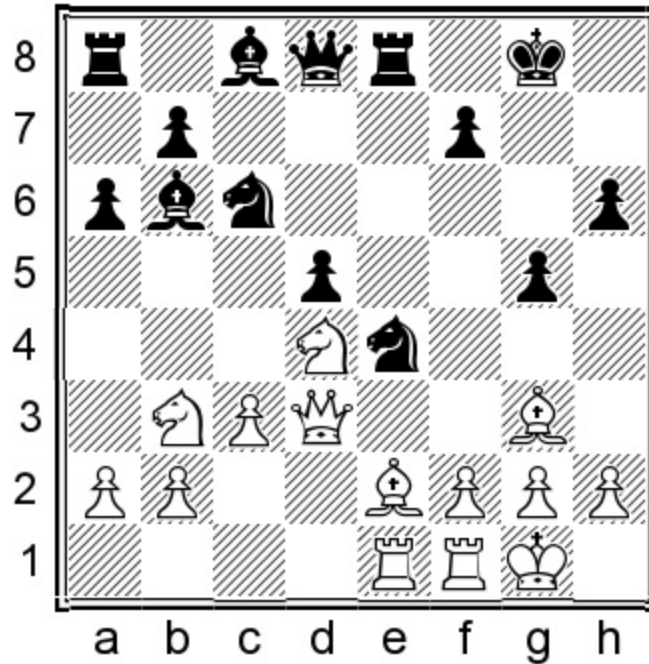
Position after: 11...♖e8!

Psychologically, this might be a better move. Why? Because White needs to play the unnatural pawn sacrifice 12.♗e1 to avoid becoming slightly worse. We will see the same idea in the 8...♙a7 line and there are actually a lot of transpositions because once the bishop takes on f2, it doesn't matter which square it was coming from.

12.♘fd4

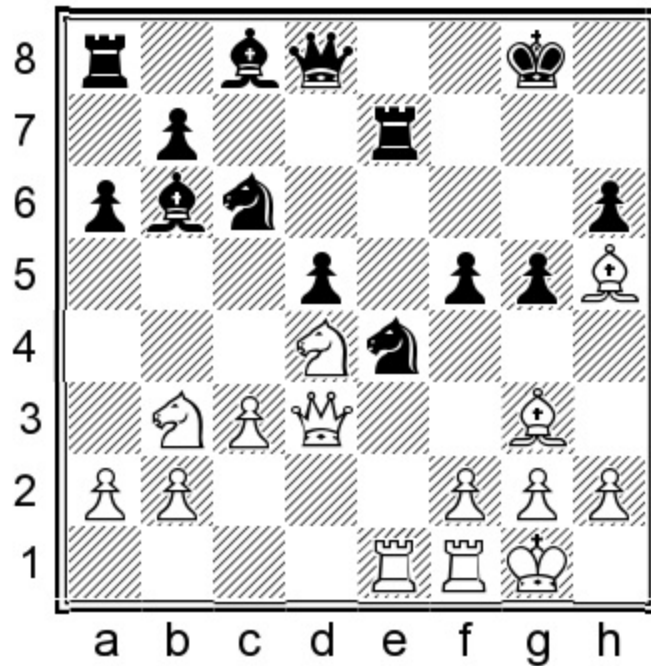
The most common move here, but it is an inaccuracy. One more reason to add 5...a6!? to your repertoire. This view of mine is contrary to classical opinions on the blockade. Nimzowitsch considers the blockade as something to be desired. But modern times have shown us it is more important to focus on controlling the d4-square here, while simultaneously applying more pressure on d5. The blockade is actually a relief for Black as it gives the d5-pawn more stability. This big mistake is something we have discussed in detail already.

A) 12.♙d3 ♘c6 13.♗ae1 h6 14.♙h4 [14.♙xf6 ♗xf6 15.♙xd5 ♙e6 16.♙d2 ♗ad8] The compensation is worth more than a pawn! 14...g5! 15.♙g3 ♘e4 16.♘fd4



Position after: 16.♘fd4

16...f5!N Objectively best, but difficult to play. [16...♙d7N maintains a better position for Black; 16...♗f6 has been played with varying results. 17.♙f3 ♘xd4 18.♘xd4 ♙xd4 19.cxd4 ♙d7= 0-1 (58) Pacher, M (2431) – Maslik, M (2365) Slovakia 2015.] 17.♙h5 ♗e7

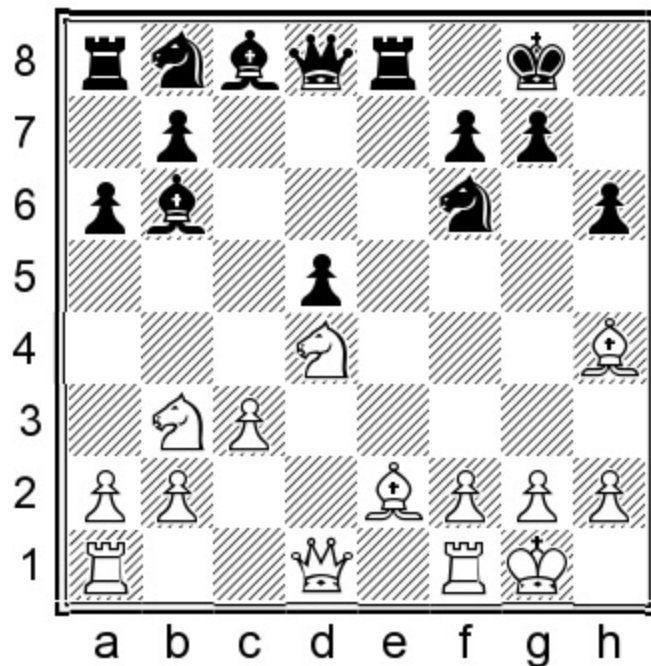


Position after: 17...♖e7

18.h3 [18.f4 ♖g7±; 18.f3?! The most natural move. 18...♘f6 19.♙g6 ♖xe1 20.♖xe1 ♘e7-+] 18...f4
19.♙h2 a5±

B) 12.♖e1! ♙xf2+ transposes to a variation we will soon see in the 8...♙a7 line. White ends up with a small advantage in the endgame there.

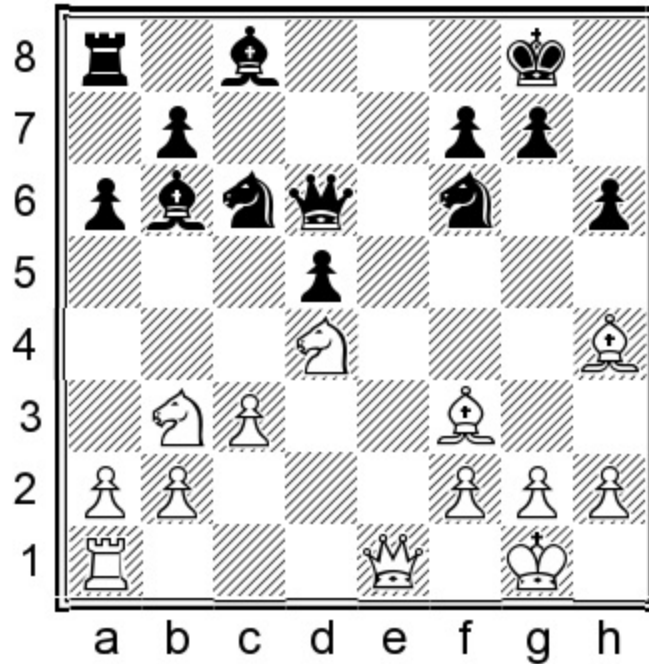
12...h6 13.♙h4



Position after: 13. ♖h4

13...g5!?

13...♘c6 14.♞e1 ♚d6 15.♙f3 ♞xe1+ 16.♛xe1

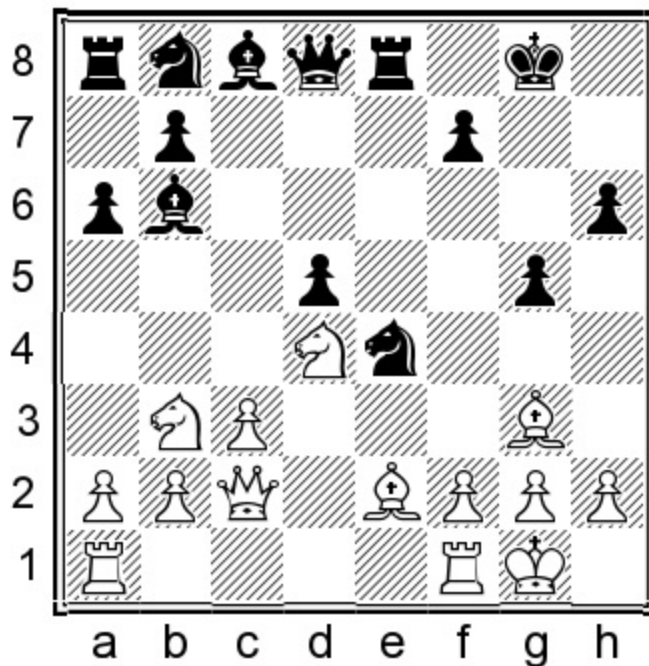


Position after: 16. ♛xe1

A) 16...♘e5?! 17.♙xf6 ♘xf3+ 18.♘xf3 ♚xf6 19.♛e8+± Dreev managed to win the game in the end but I do not advise you to follow his example. If you would like to play for a win, try the lines involving an ambitious ...g5. 0-1 (65) Akopian, V (2600) – Dreev, A (2590) Tilburg 1992.

B) 16...♙g4!? 17.♙xf6 ♙xf3 18.♘xf3 ♚xf6=

14.♙g3 ♘e4 15.♛c2N



Position after: 15. ♖c2

A novelty, though it immediately transposes to two other games.

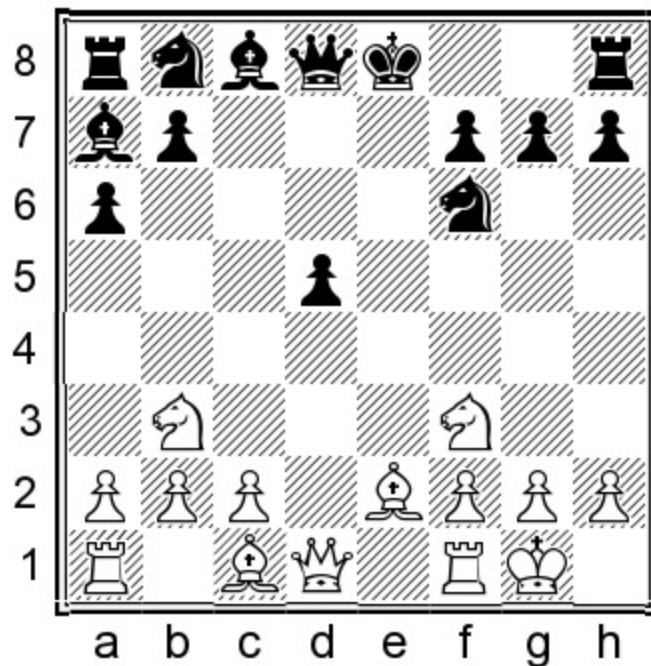
15... ♘c6 16. ♖ad1 ♕f6 17. ♗f3 ♘d7!↑

With ...h5 to come, Black has the initiative. After moving the pieces around for some time in our investigation of these lines, we can conclude that 6. ♗e2 is just not as critical as the alternative. Black can often even lash out with ...g5 and play for an advantage.

17... ♗f5?! 18. ♘xf5 ♕xf5= 0-1 (33) Malinovsky, K (2231) – Tibensky, R (2425) Olomouc 2004.

g) 5... a6 6. ♗e2 ♘f6 7. 0-0 ♗e7 8. dxc5 ♗xc5 9. ♘b3 ♗a7

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘d2 c5 4. exd5 exd5 5. ♘gf3 a6!? 6. ♗e2 ♘f6 7. 0-0 ♗e7 8. dxc5 ♗xc5 9. ♘b3 ♗a7!?



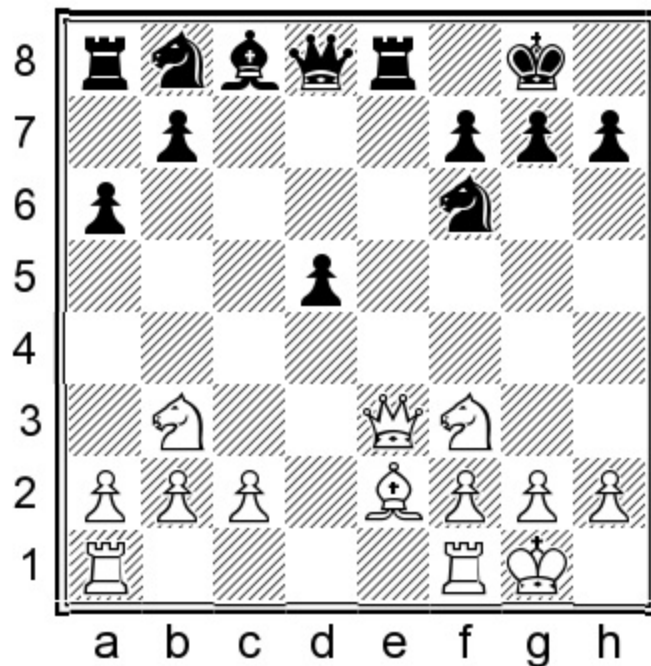
Position after: 9...♙a7!?

This move scores 15% worse than 9...♙b6 but I do not really see why.

10.♙g5

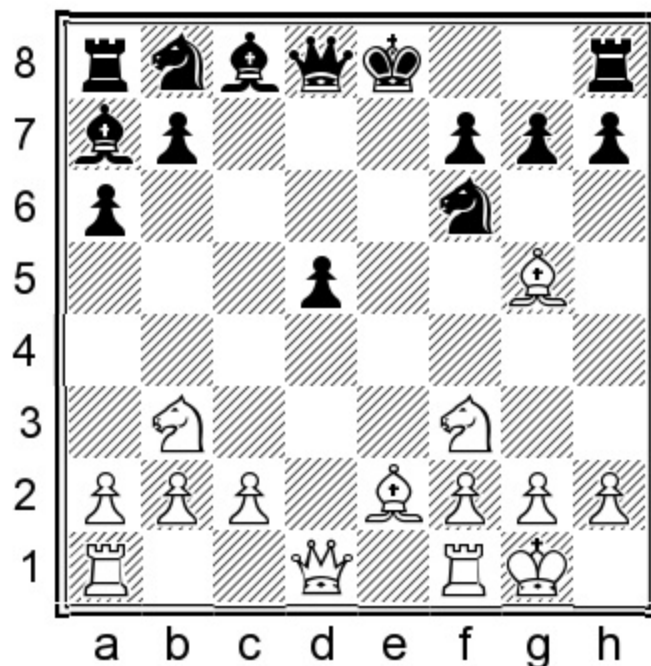
A) 10.♘fd4 0-0 11.♙e3N [11.♙g5?! h6 12.♙h4 g5! 13.♙g3 ♘e4 14.c3 f5!N Go big or go home. 15.♙xb8 ♖xb8=] 11...♞e8 12.♞e1 ♚d6! 13.♙f3 ♘c6 14.♘xc6 ♙xe3 15.♘cd4 ♙h6 16.♞xe8+ ♘xe8 17.c3 g6= Black's superbishop has defeated his nemesis. The position is equal but let's hope our champion on h6 can make his presence felt.

B) 10.♚d3 0-0 11.♙e3 ♙xe3 12.♚xe3 ♞e8



Position after: 12...♖e8

13.♔d2! [13.♔d3 ♘c6 14.c3 ♕f5 is the reason why 13.♔d2 should be preferred. 0-1 (25) Burlacu, B (2316) – Schwabeneder, F (2327) Austria 2013.] 13...♘c6! Shaw misses this move, even though I believe White still retains some annoying pressure thanks to the bishop exchange. 14.c3 ♔b6= Unfortunately Black was outplayed from this equal position. 1-0 (34) Solak, D (2613) – Dizdar, G (2499) Ljubljana 2012. The conclusion is that this line should be our only objection to playing 9...♕a7.

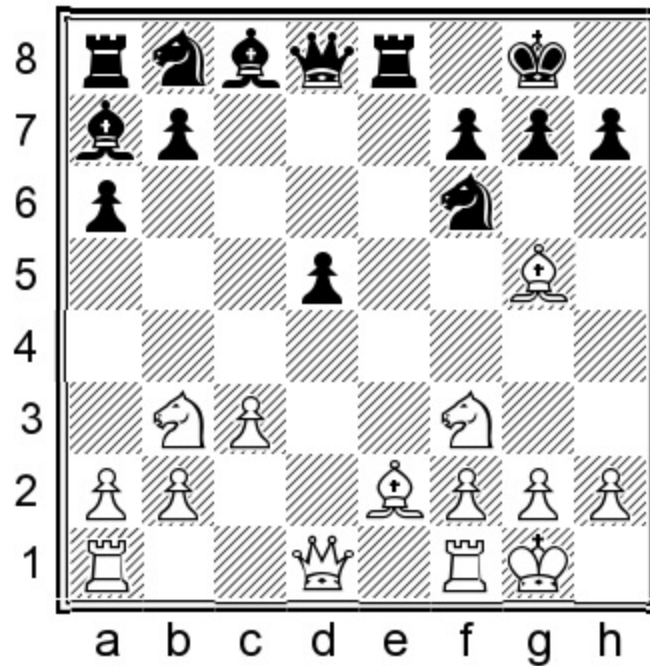


Position after: 10...♕g5

10...0-0

10...h6!? If there was an annotation symbol for ‘very interesting’, I would have used that here. Sadly there is no such thing. 11.♙xf6 ♖xf6 12.♚xd5 0-0 13.c3 ♘c6 14.♗fd4 ♘xd4 15.♗xd4 ♜d8 16.♚e4 ♙xd4 17.cxd4 ♙e6= Despite the compensation, a draw is still the most likely result. I would definitely consider this option if I needed a draw. [Of course not 17...♚xd4?? 18.♜fd1!! ♚xe4 19.♜xd8+ ♔h7 20.♙d3+-.]

11.c3 ♜e8



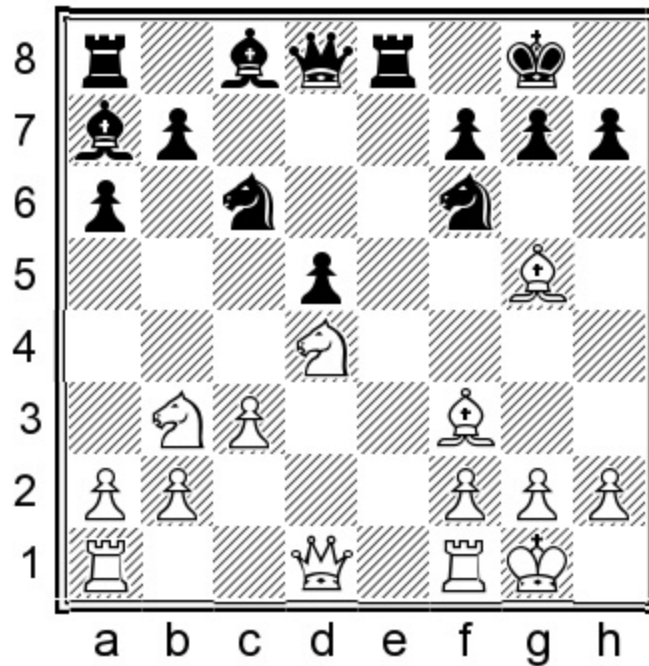
Position after: 11...♜e8

12.♜e1!

Fighting for the e-file is tactically justified. I mean fighting is great but knowing that justice is also on your side is just so incredibly satisfying.

12.♗fd4

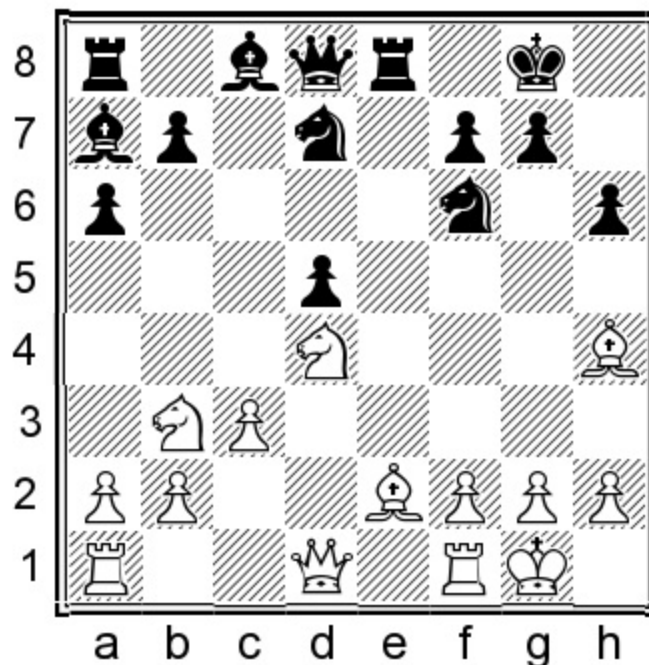
A) 12...♘c6 13.♙f3



Position after: 13. ♕f3

13... ♖e5!? [13... ♗e6 14. ♘xe6!N This exchange seems to work out well for White in most of the positions I've come across. 14... ♗xe6 15. ♖e1 ♗d6 16. ♕xf6 ♗xf6± Our worse king safety might become a cause for concern in 15 to 20 moves.] 14. ♕xf6 [14. ♖e1!? h6 15. ♕xf6 ♗xf6 16. ♕xd5 a5 17. a4 ♖d8 18. ♕e4 ♕e6 19. ♗e2 ♕c4] 14... ♗xf6 15. ♕xd5 ♗d6 16. ♕f3 ♖e7 The bishop pair in an open position often compensates for the lost pawn. This is one advantage of ... ♗a7, our award-winning bishop is safely tucked away.

B) 12...h6 13. ♕h4 ♖bd7!

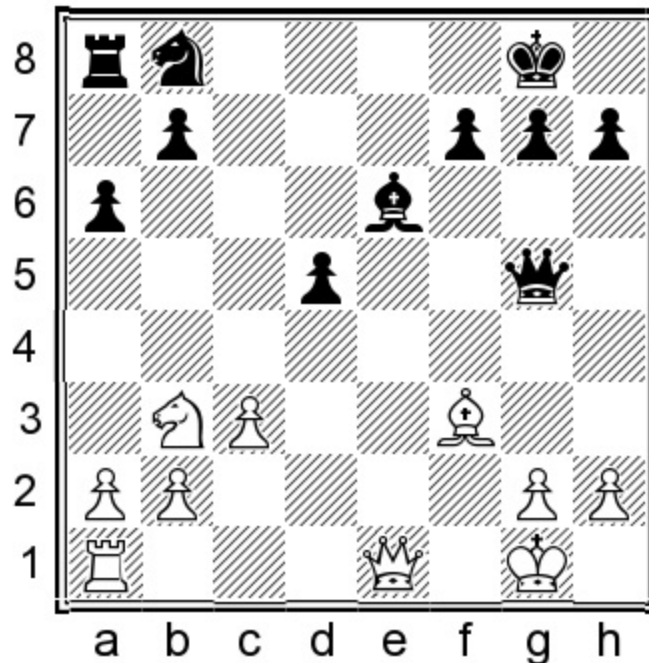


Position after: 13... ♖bd7!

There are also other moves to try for an advantage. 14. ♖e1 ♗e5 15. ♕f3 g5 16. ♕g3 ♗xf3+ 17. ♔xf3 ♗e4 18. ♖ad1 ♔b6 19. ♗d2! ♔g6 12. ♗fd4 was supposed to be the main line of the system. This highlights once more why 6. ♕e2 is clearly an inferior move. White is the one trying to maintain the balance here.

12... ♗bd7

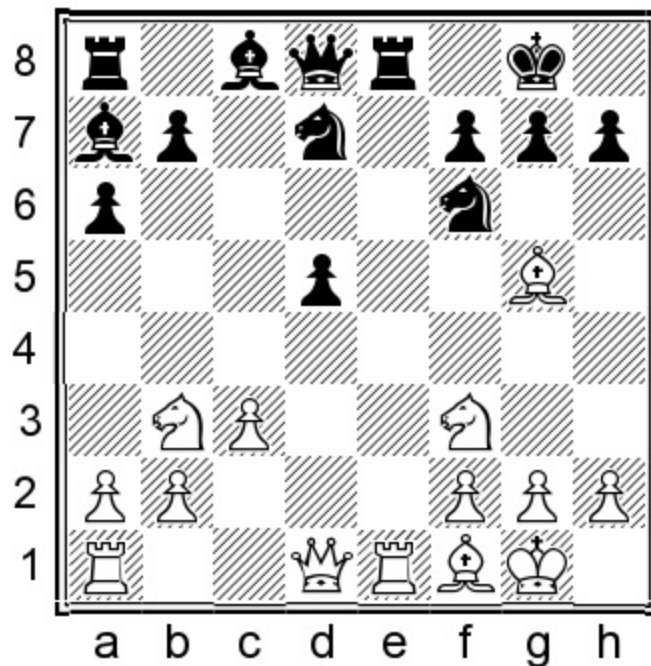
12... ♕xf2+ This is the reason why hardly anyone plays 12. ♖e1. 13. ♗xf2 ♗e4+ 14. ♗g1 ♗xg5 15. ♗xg5 ♔xg5 16. ♕f3 ♖xe1+ 17. ♔xe1 ♕e6



Position after: 17... ♕e6

18. ♗c5 [18. ♗d4 ♕d7 19. h4 ♔f6 20. ♕xd5 ♗c6 21. ♔f2 ♔xf2+ 22. ♗xf2 ♖d8 23. ♖d1 ♗e5= 0-1 (51) Havelka, J (2338) – Perske, T (2431) Rymanow Zdroj 2017.] 18... ♔e7 19. ♗xe6 fxe6 20. ♕g4 e5 21. ♖d1 ♔d6 22. ♔d2 d4 23. cxd4 ♗c6 24. dxe5 ♔xe5 25. ♔d5+ ♔xd5 26. ♖xd5± Having the rook and bishop vs rook and knight gives White a tiny long-term advantage.

13. ♕f1

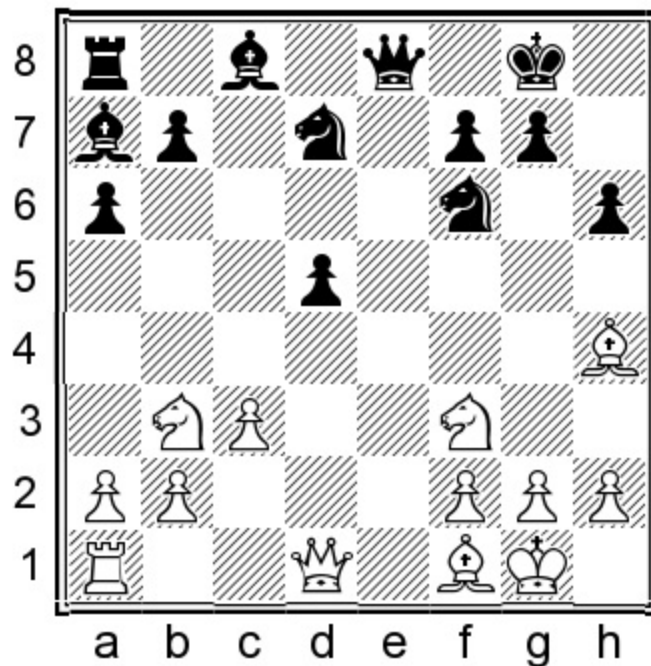


Position after: 13. ♕f1

13...h6!

13...♖xe1N 14.♔xe1 h6 15.♕e3 ♕xe3 16.♔xe3± White has achieved both of his strategic goals – the exchange of dark squared bishops and e-file domination.

14.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 15.♕h4



Position after: 15. ♕h4

15...g5

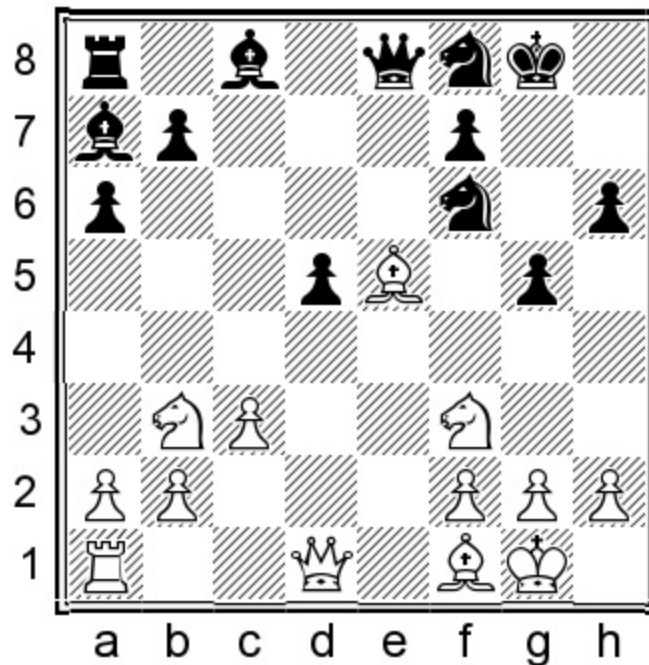
15...♖e6!? 16.♘fd4 ♚d6= gives us a nice level playing position.

16.♙g3 ♘f8

16...♗d8!? 17.♞c1 ♘c5 18.♙e5 ♙g4 19.♘xc5 ♙xc5 20.♞c2±

17.♙e5?!

17.♗d2±

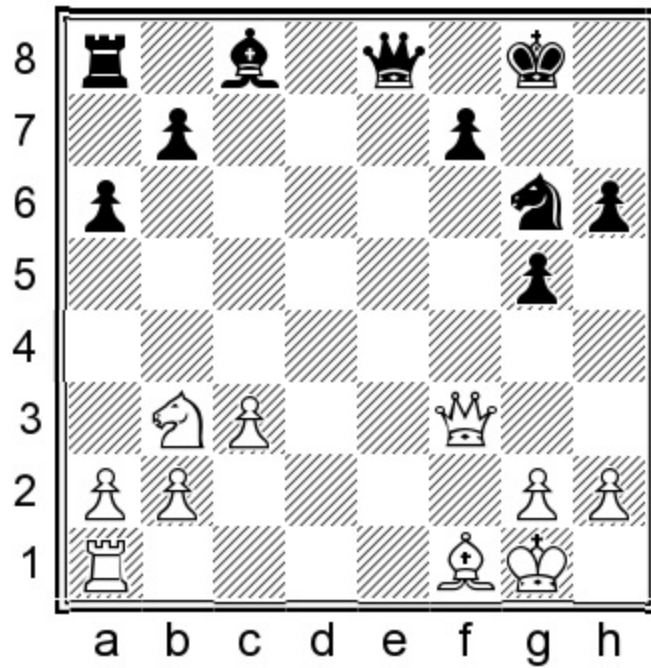


Position after: 17. ♙e5?!

17...♙xf2+

17...♘8d7? ½-½ (48) Petrik, T (2362) – Tibensky, R (2467) Slovakia 2002. Here White should have played 18.♙d4±.

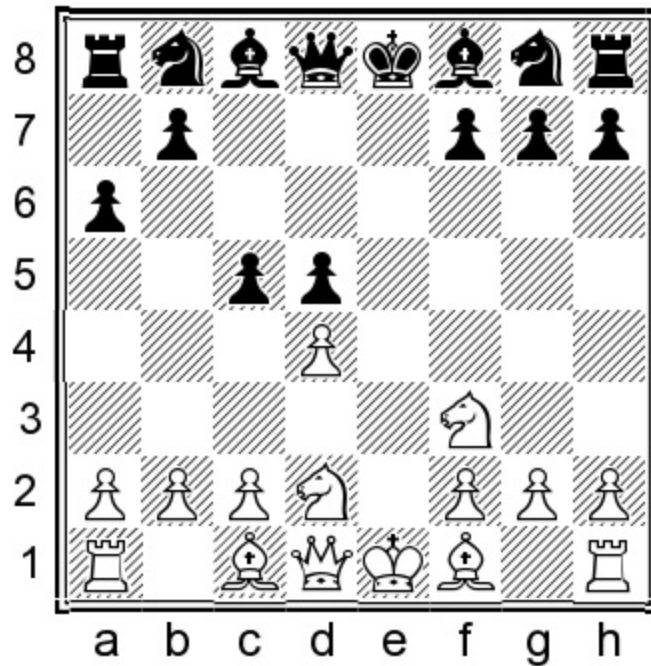
18.♙xf2 ♘g4+ 19.♙g1 ♘xe5 20.♗xd5 ♘xf3+ 21.♗xf3 ♘g6=



Position after: 21... Nf6=

h) 5...a6 6.dxc5 Qxc5 7.Qd3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.Ngf3 a6!?

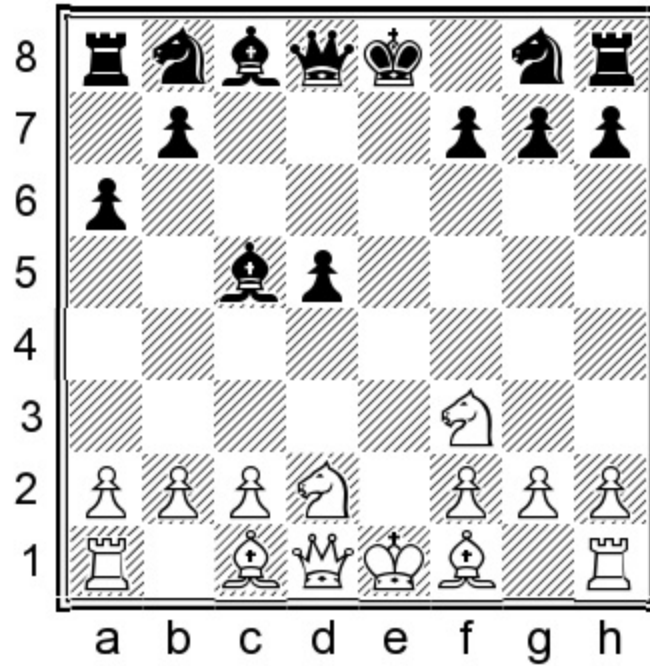


Position after: 5...a6!?

6.dxc5!

This move is chosen in almost half the games that reach this position. The reason for allowing the black bishop to capture on c5 without a loss of tempo is because White would like to develop his own bishop to d3 without getting harassed by the nasty ...c4 push.

6...♗xc5



Position after: 6...♗xc5

Just look how happy the bishop is on c5, having not been forced to waste a tempo before getting there. The other black pieces must be applauding its efficiency.

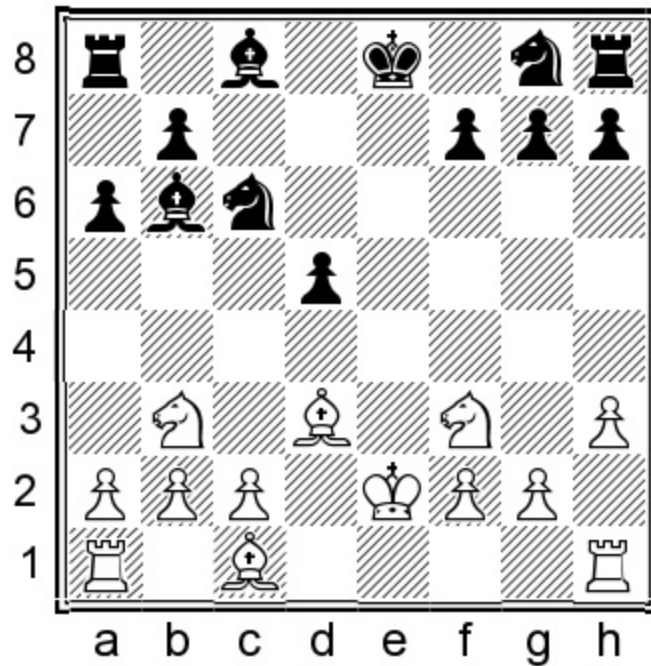
Unfortunately, that's not the whole story. The white bishop will also be very happy to be able to go to d3, which in turn pleases the rook on h1 and the queen on d1, as now either of them can try to play a check at the right moment.

7.♗d3

7.♞b3 – see the next subchapters.

7...♞f6

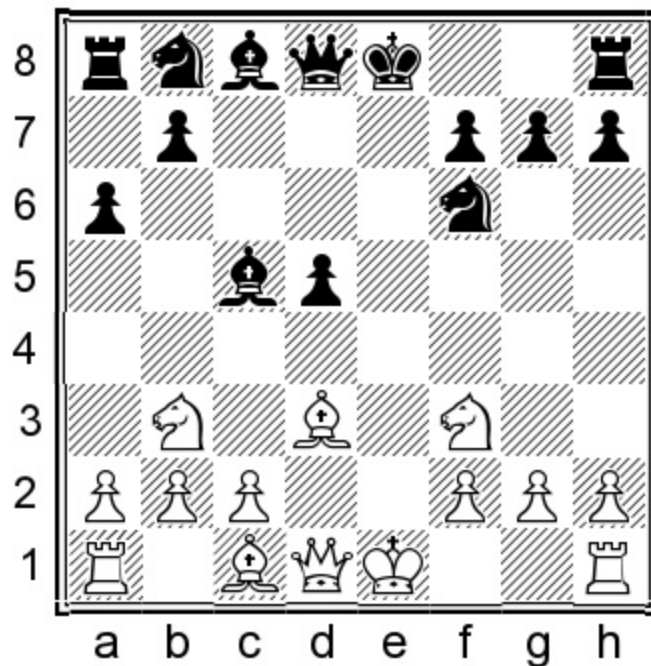
7...♕e7+ 8.♕e2 ♞c6 9.♞b3 ♗b6 10.h3! ♕xe2+ 11.♔xe2



Position after: 11. ♖xe2

11... ♘f6 [11... ♘ge7 12. ♖e1 f6 13. ♙e3 ♙xe3 14. ♕xe3 ♙f5± Black will have a very hard time playing for a win here.] 12. ♖e1 0-0 13. ♙g5± We can conclude that the early queen exchange is not very favorable for us in this slow system.

8. ♘b3



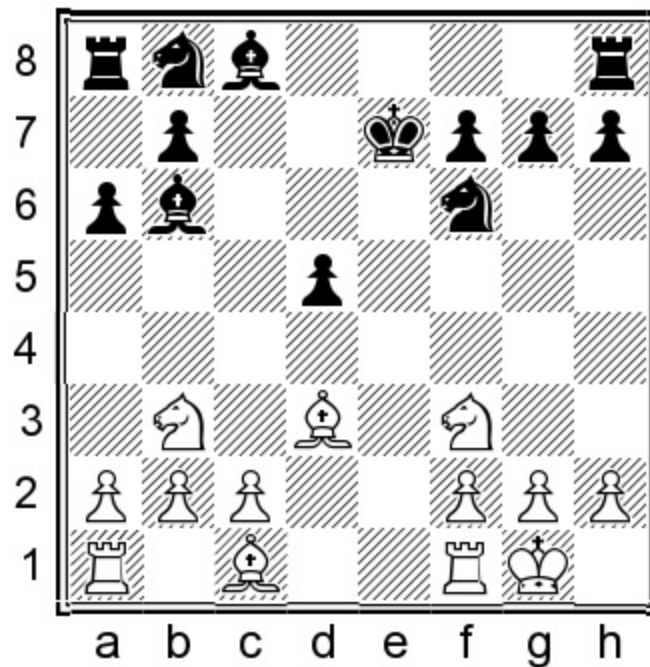
Position after: 8. ♘b3

8...♔d6!?

A) 8...♔e7 would transpose to the notes to 6.♘b3 ♔e7. I would advise you to take a serious look at this move in order to understand why 8...♔d6!? might be an improvement.

B) 8...♔b6 is played the most in human games. It seems more appealing, but it is questionable whether it really works against the most critical responses. On the other hand, 5...a6!? will probably have taken your opponents a bit out of book already. 9.♖e2+! [9.0-0?! 0-0= allows Black to reach a great setup without the usual harassment on the e-file.]

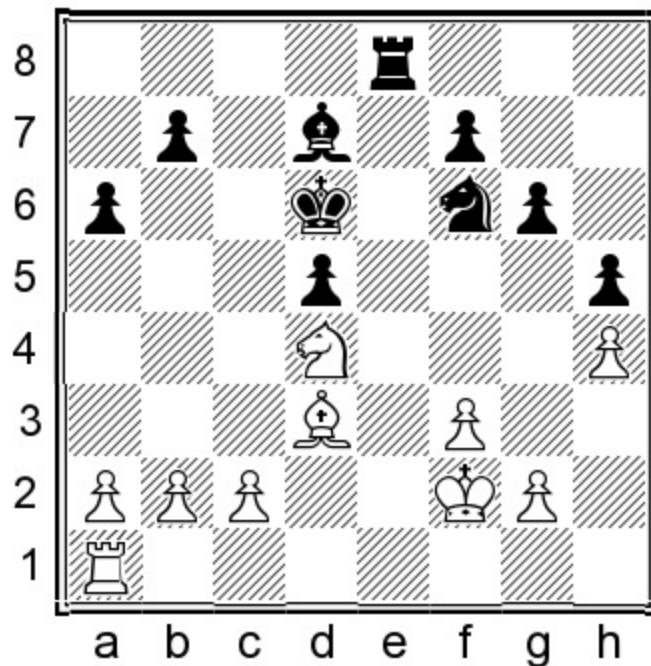
B1) 9...♗e7 10.♗xe7+ ♔xe7 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

B1.1) 11...♞e8 12.♞e1+! N 12...♗f8 13.♞xe8+ ♔xe8 14.♔g5 ♘c6 15.♞e1+± This line is not easy at all for Black. There should be an objective edge possible for White after 8...♔b6. On the other hand, the high frequency of draws does emphasize how resilient the French isolani structure is.

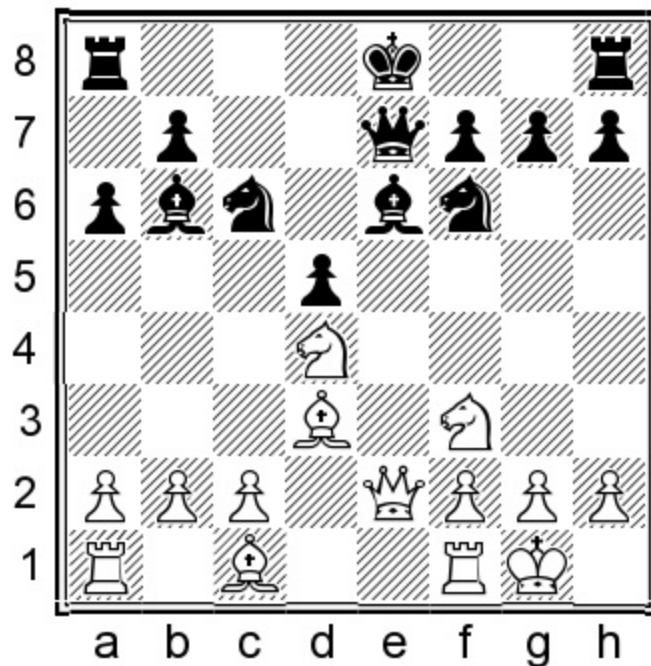
B1.2) 11...♘c6 12.♞e1+ ♔e6 13.♔e3 [13.c3 ♞he8 14.♔f4 ♞ad8 15.♘fd4 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♔xd4 17.cxd4± Again White has a plus but it is not easy at all. ½-½ (48) Torosyan, N (2365) – Shahinyan, D (2452) Yerevan 2019.] 13...♔xe3 14.♞xe3 ♔d6 15.♘fd4 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 ♞he8 17.f3 ♔d7 18.♞xe8 ♞xe8 19.♔f2 h5 20.h4 g6±



Position after: 20...g6±

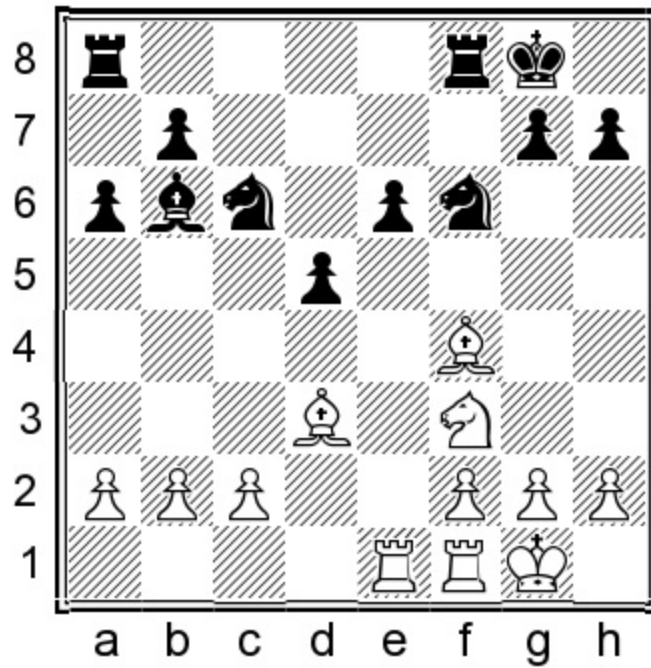
Of course White is slightly better, but getting the full point is never easy, even for MVL. ½-½ (43) Vachier-Lagrave, M (2722) – Dobrov, V (2537) Nancy 2013.

B2) 9...♙e6!? 10.♘bd4 ♚e7 11.0-0 ♜c6! [11...0-0?! 12.♙f5! ♜c6?! 13.♘xe6 ♞ae8 14.♞e1 fxe6 15.♚xe6+ ♚xe6 16.♙xe6+- ½-½ (56) Boulard, E (2260) – Gallagher, J (2405) France 1989.]



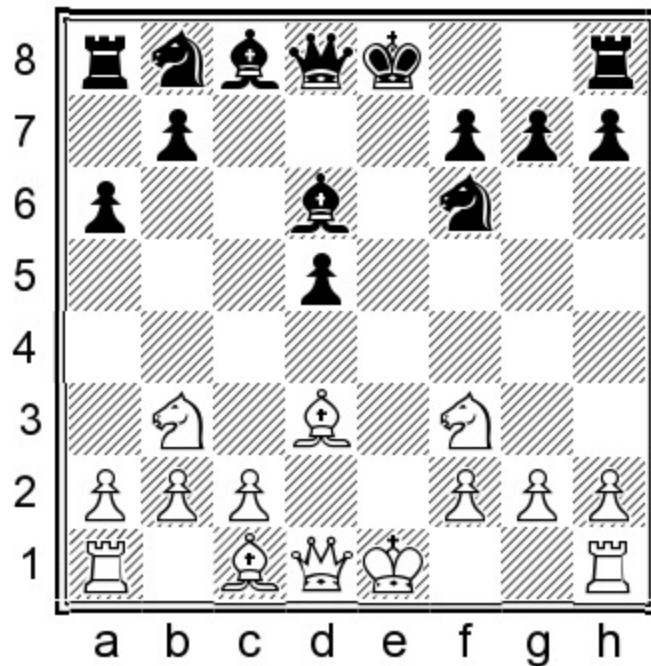
Position after: 11...♜c6!

B2.1) 12.♘xe6!? ♚xe6 [12...fxe6?! 13.♙f4 0-0 14.c4!±] 13.♚xe6+ fxe6 14.♙f4 0-0 15.♞ae1±



Position after: 15. ♖ae1±

B2.2) 12. ♕e3!N 12... ♕c7 [12... ♘xd4 13. ♕xd4 ♕xd4 14. ♘xd4± This might be the relatively best option for Black in this line, even though it is not going to be a lot of fun.] 13. ♘xe6 ♖xe6 [13... fxe6 14. c4!±] 14. ♘d4 ♘xd4 15. ♕xd4 0-0 16. ♖fe1±

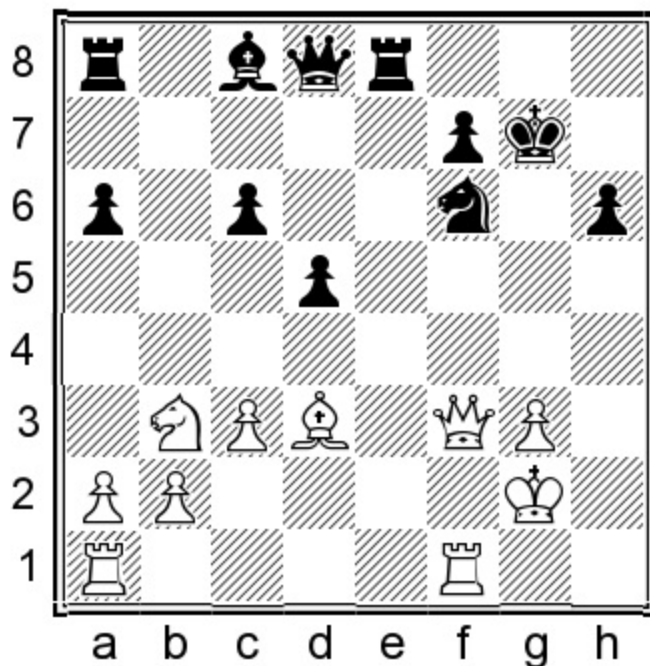


Position after: 8... ♕d6!?

9. ♖e2+

If White does not give this check, Black can rejoice and say it was right to take the risk. Then again, the check is quite a natural reaction.

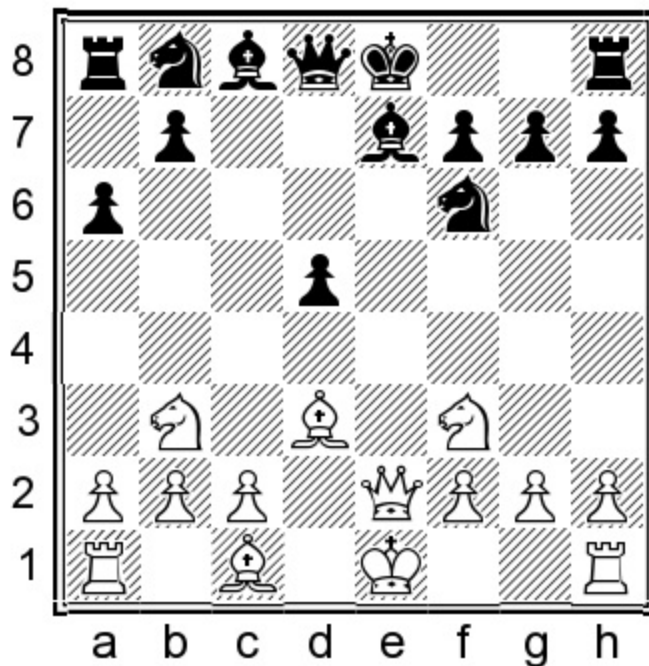
9.0-0?! 0-0 10.h3 ♘c6 11.c3 ♖e8 12.♙g5 h6 13.♙h4 g5! 14.♙g3 ♙xg3 15.fxg3 g4 16.♘fd4 gxh3 17.♘xc6 bxc6 18.♚f3 hxg2 19.♙xg2 ♙g7=



Position after: 19... ♙g7=

Things were objectively equal at this point, but it is never easy to play a pawn down. 0-1 (54) Van Beers, E (2406) – Hovhannisyann, M (2294) Westerlo 2004.

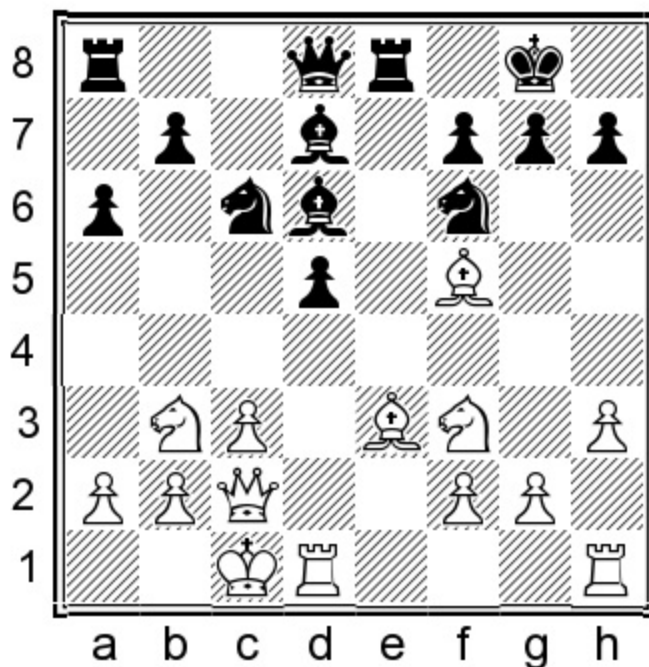
9...♙e7



Position after: 9...♙e7

10.0-0

A) 10.♙e3 Not the most critical. 10...0-0 11.h3 ♘c6 12.c3 ♖e8 13.♙c2 ♙d6 14.0-0-0 ♙d7 15.♙f5?!
Exchanging minor pieces is not the way!

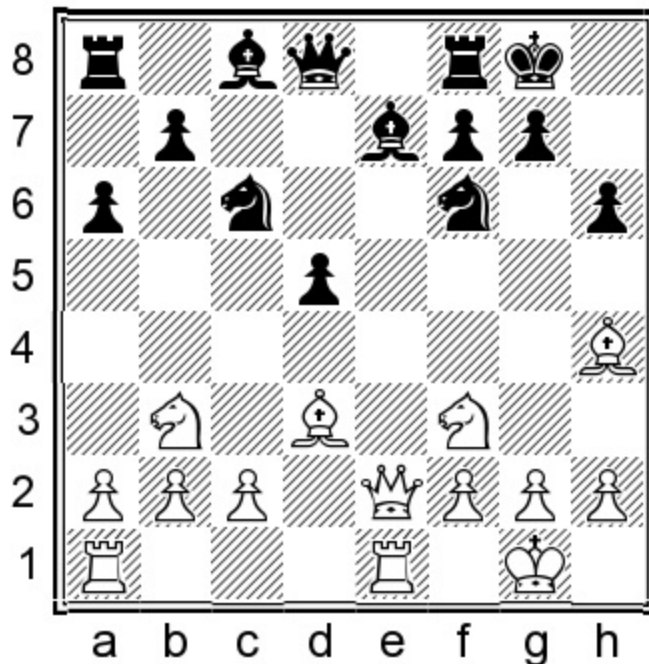


Position after: 15.♙f5?!

Be sure to take a look at this game in the general isolani section because the mistakes White made

are very instructive. 15...♖c8 16.♙xd7 ♗xd7= 0-1 (51) Boruchovsky, A (2472) – Rombaldoni, A (2530) Warsaw 2013.

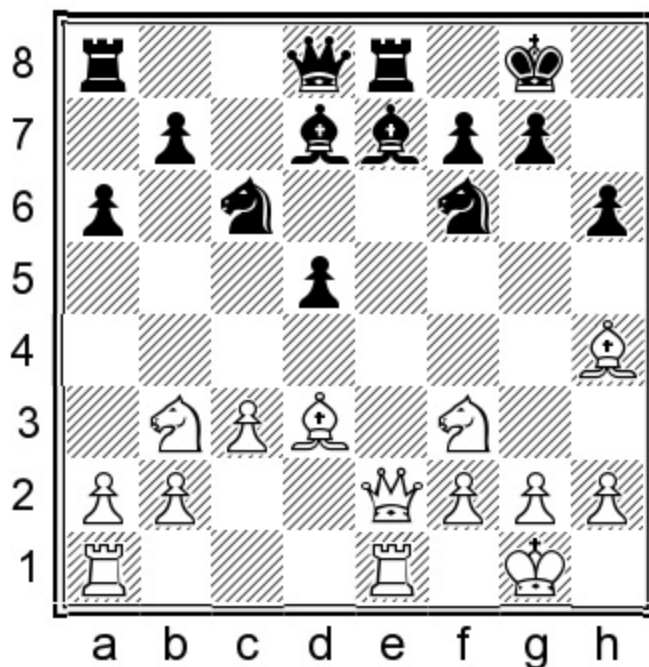
B) 10.♙g5 0-0 11.0-0 ♘c6 12.♖fe1 h6 13.♙h4



Position after: 13. ♙h4

13...♙d7 [13...g5!? 14.♙g3 ♙g4 15.♗f1! ♙xf3 16.gxf3±] 14.c3 ♖e8= This is a transposition to our main line.

10...0-0 11.♙g5 ♘c6 12.♖fe1 h6 13.♙h4 ♙d7 14.c3 ♖e8=

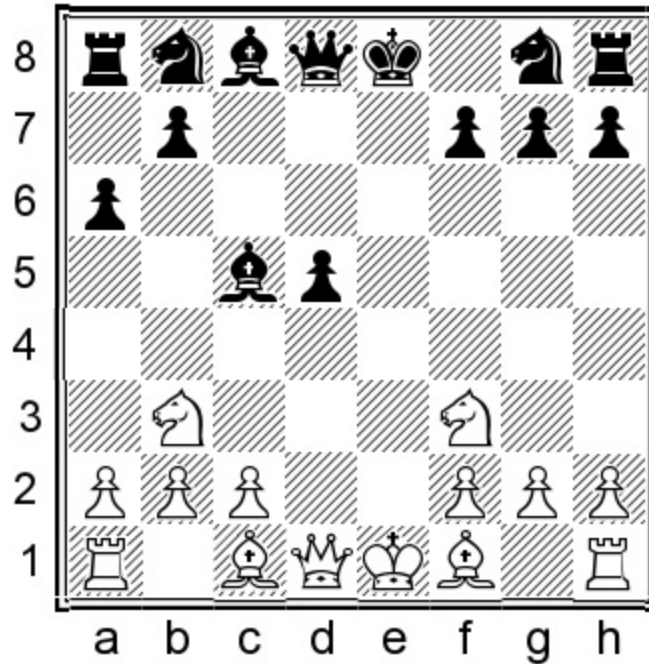


Position after: 14...♖e8=

Black is solid and anything can happen with so many pieces left on the board.

i) 5...a6 6.dxc5 ♗xc5 7.♘b3 ♗e7

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 a6!? 6.dxc5! ♗xc5 7.♘b3



Position after: 7.♘b3

It is probably best to ask the bishop where it is going as soon as possible.

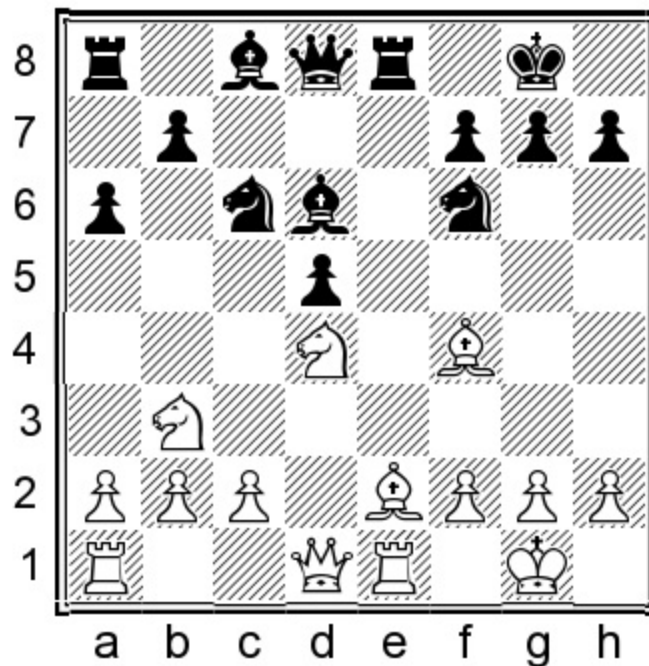
7...♗e7!?

7...♗b6 – see the next subchapters.

8.♗d3

8.♗e2 is not very logical because the game is all about the e-file. It has hardly been seen recently.

8...♘f6 9.♗f4 0-0 10.♘fd4 ♘c6 11.0-0 ♖e8 12.♖e1 ♗d6!?



Position after: 12...♙d6!?

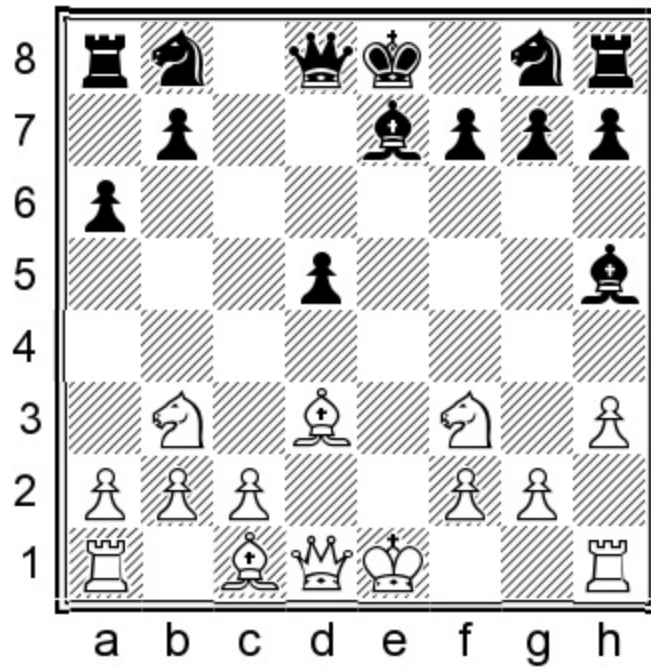
Vadim Zvjaginsev never seems to be afraid of exchanging this bishop. Other options work well too.

13.♙xd6 ♚xd6 14.♚d2 ♘e4 15.♙d3 ♙d7= ½-½ (43) Palac, M (2561) – Zvjaginsev, V (2653)
Yerevan 2014.

8...♘f6

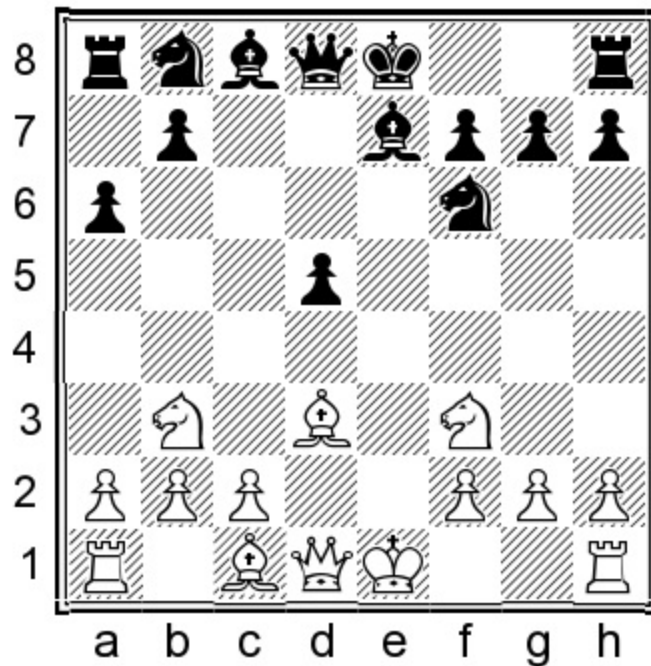
White has an interesting choice to make. Should he allow ...♙g4 on the next move or not? Well, my research suggests that the most testing move order for White is to not allow it. Therefore I will make this move order our main line of study, because we need to know what to do if White prevents 9...♙g4!.

8...♙g4?! 9.h3 ♙h5



Position after: 9... ♔h5

10. ♖e3 [10. ♘bd4 ♜f6 11. ♜f5 0-0 12. 0-0 ♔c5= Black lost, but not as a result of the opening. 1-0 (41) Rozentalis, E – Dolmatov, S (2525) Sverdlovsk 1984.] 10... ♜f6 11. g4 ♔g6 12. ♜h4 ♜c6 13. ♜xg6 hxg6 14. ♚e2!± White is preparing to castle queenside with annoying pressure.



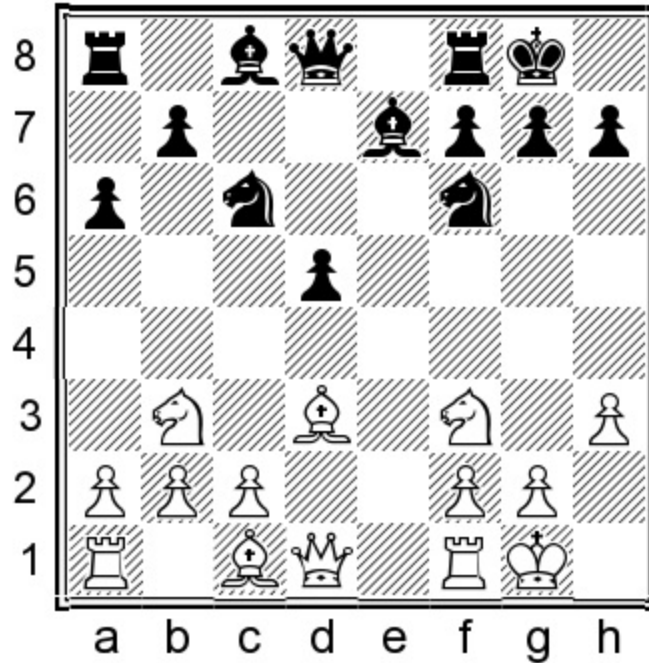
Position after: 8... ♞f6

9. h3!

The position might still be equal, but it is a bit more difficult to find a good square for the c8-bishop now.

9.0-0 ♖g4! 10.c3 [10.h3 ♕h5 11.♘bd4 0-0 12.♞e1 ♕c5 13.♜f5 ♞b6 14.♙e3 ♜c6 15.♙xc5 ♞xc5= ½-½ (48) Lobron, E (2440) – Dolmatov, S (2590) Manila 1982.] 10...0-0 11.h3 ♕h5 12.♞e1 ♞e8 13.♙f4 ♜c6 14.g4 ♙g6 15.♜fd4?! [15.♙xg6 hxg6 16.♚g2 ♜e4=] 15...♜e4 16.f3? [16.♙xe4 ♙xe4 17.f3 ♙g6=] 16...♙d6! 17.♙xd6 ♞xd6 0-1 (32) Dudek, R (2305) – Backwinkel, P (2400) Germany 1996.

9...0-0 10.0-0 ♜c6



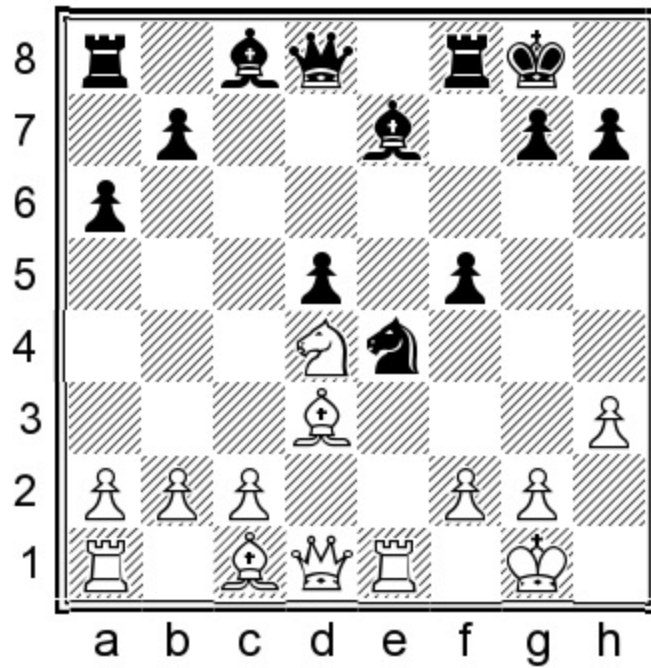
Position after: 10...♜c6

11.c3

11.♞e1 ♜e4! 12.♘bd4 [12.♙xe4 dxex4 13.♞xd8 ♞xd8 14.♞xe4 ♙f5 15.♞e2 ♞d1+ ½-½ (38)

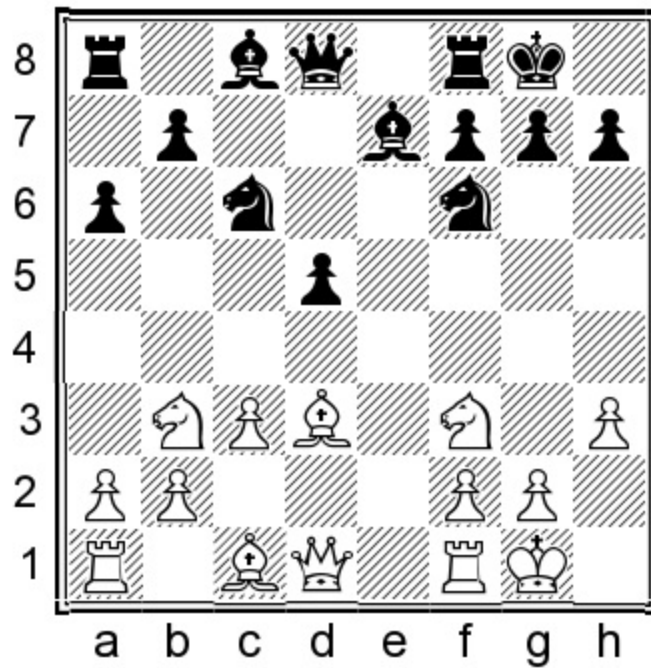
Mammadzada, G (2438) – Injac, T (2310) Antalya 2019.] 12...♜xd4! [12...♙f6?! 13.♙e3± ½-½ (36)

Nguyen, V (2324) – Kotic, D (2493) Budapest 2017.] 13.♜xd4 f5



Position after: 13...f5

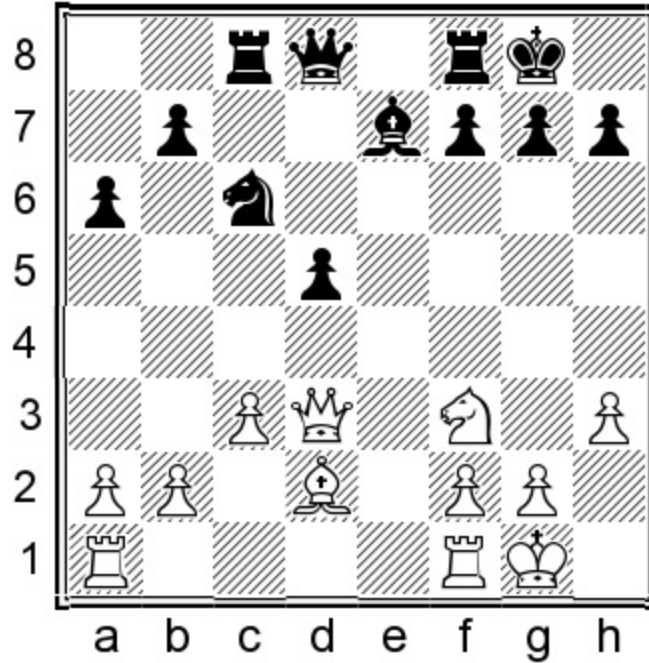
14.c3 [14.f3?! ♔d6! 15.fxe4 fxe4 Trying to keep the piece with ♕f1 doesn't work because of ...♔h4. 16.♖f1=] 14...♔d6! White might have an edge but it will be very difficult to find the right moves. Black is exerting a lot of pressure on the kingside.



Position after: 11.c3

11...♖e8

11...♖e4 12.♔c2 ♕f5 13.♗bd2!N 13...♖c8 14.♔b1 ♗xd2 15.♕xd2 ♕xd3 16.♔xd3±



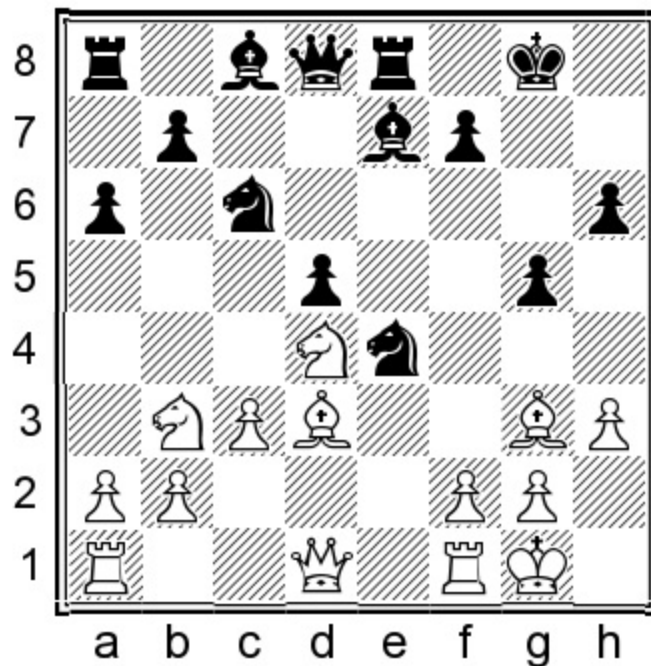
Position after: 16.♔xd3±

Black is slightly passive which is a more important factor than having exchanged some minor pieces.

12.♕g5 h6 13.♕h4 g5!?

13...♗e4 14.♕xe7 ♖xe7 15.♖e1 ♔b6 16.♖e2 ♕d7 17.♗bd4= Black's e-file progress is going well, which should compensate for the missing dark squared bishop.

14.♕g3 ♗e4 15.♗fd4



Position after: 15. ♘fd4

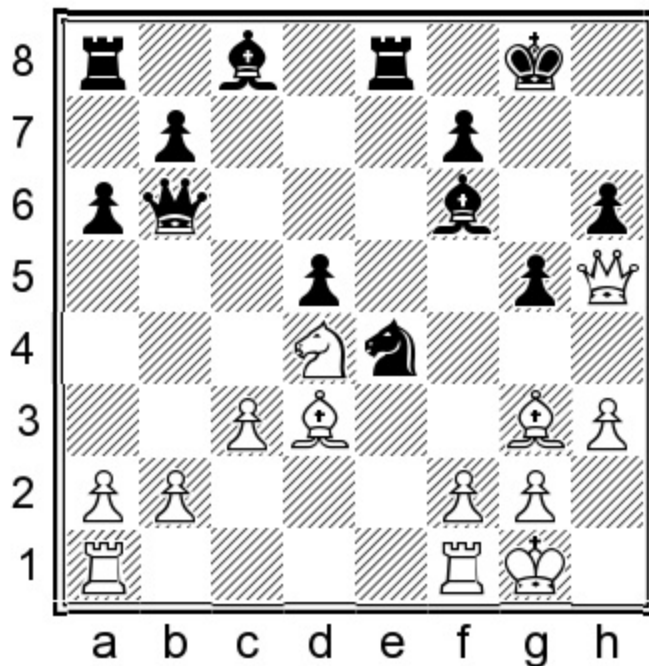
15... ♙b6

15... ♙d6? 16. ♙xd6 ♙xd6 17. ♖e1 ± ½-½ (24) Uzhva, A (2264) – Manelis, V (2327) Voronezh 2006.

16. ♙h5

16. ♘xc6 bxc6! 17. ♙xe4 dxe4= The bishop pair compensates for the structural deficiencies.

16... ♘xd4 17. ♘xd4 ♙f6=

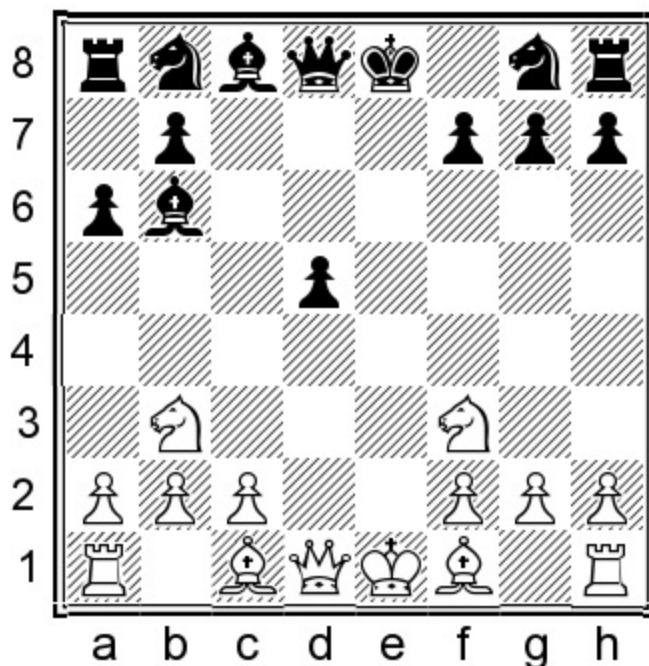


Position after: 17...♙f6=

White will have to make some tough decisions under pressure, while Black's king is not as safe as it could be.

j) 5...a6 6.dxc5 ♖xc5 7.♘b3 ♙b6 8.♙d3 ♚e7+ 9.♚e2 ♜c6 10.♙g5

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 a6!? 6.dxc5! ♖xc5 7.♘b3 ♙b6

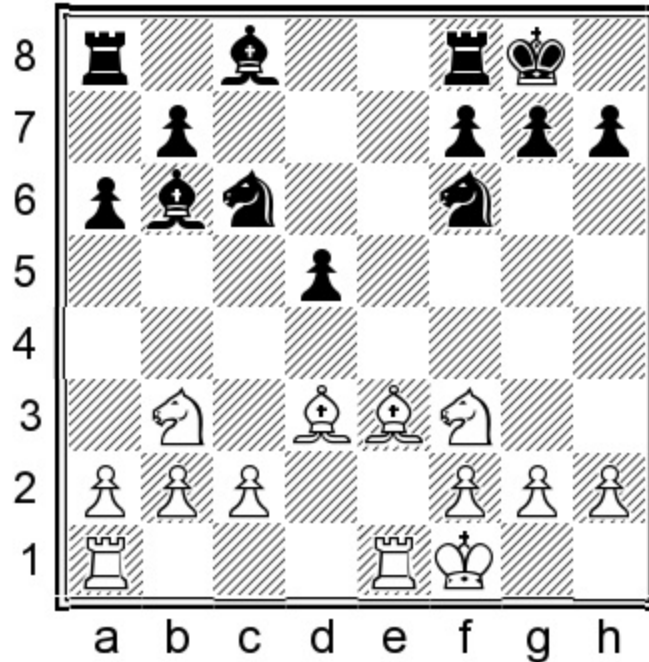


Position after: 7...♙b6

Position after: 9. ♖e2

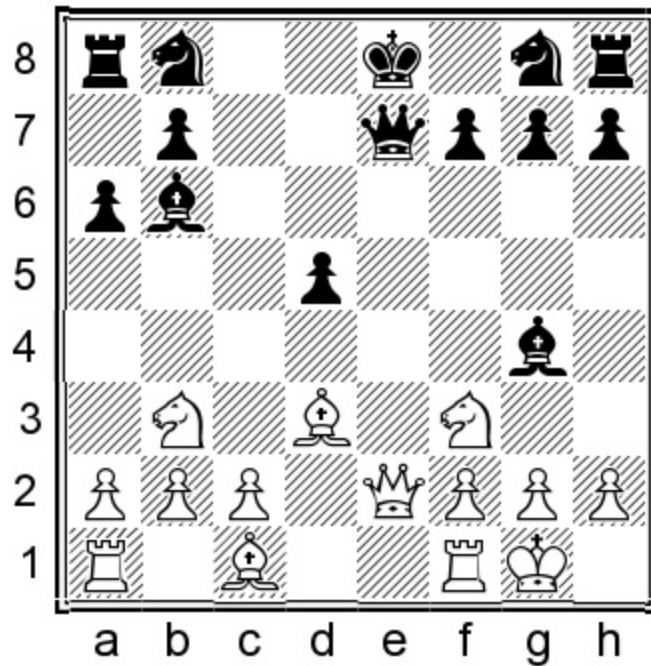
9... ♘c6

A) 9... ♖xe2+?! I cannot recommend this move because we should not help White with his development like this. 10. ♗xe2 ♘f6 11. ♞e1 0-0 12. ♗f1 ♘c6 13. ♙e3± White had a solid plus in 1-0 (39) Mista, A (2587) – Repka, C (2487) Krakow 2017.



Position after: 13. ♙e3±

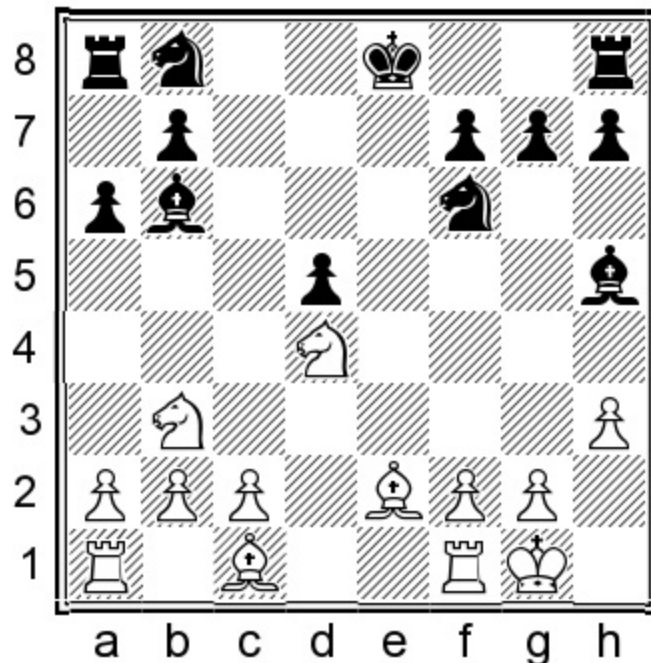
B) 9... ♙g4!? This is a very reasonable sideline, even though we are again violating the old dogma of knights before bishops. Though overall, Lasker was probably right about that statement in this case. 10.0-0



Position after: 10.0-0

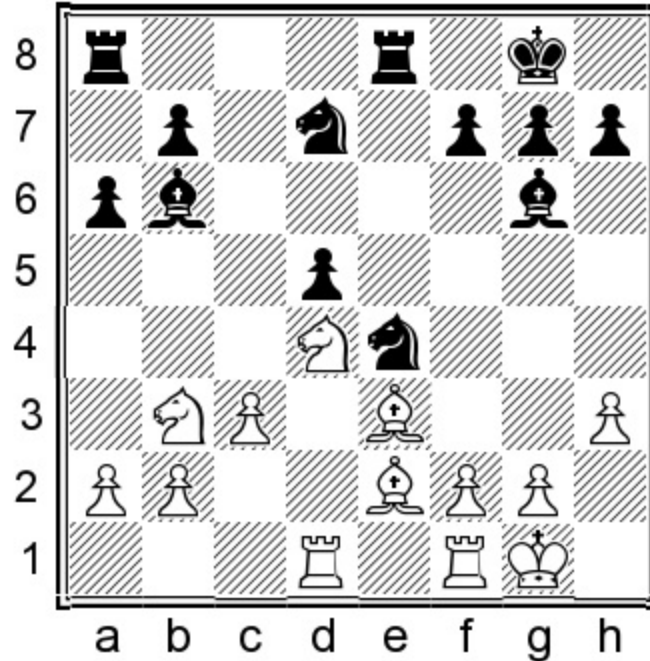
B1) 10...♞c6 11.h3 [11...♙e3 This standard exchange is not the most critical here. 11...♙xe3 12.♚xe3 ♚xe3 13.fxex3 ♙xf3 14.gxf3 0-0-0 15.♜f2 ♞f6= Black is controlling a lot of light squares with his pawns, which immobilizes the d3-bishop.] 11...♚xe2 12.♙xe2 ♙h5 13.♞e1 0-0-0 14.♙g5 f6 15.♙f4 ♞ge7 16.♞ad1 ♞he8 17.♙h2± A difficult position which is close to equal.

B2) 10...♚xe2 11.♙xe2 ♞f6 12.h3 ♙h5 13.♞fd4



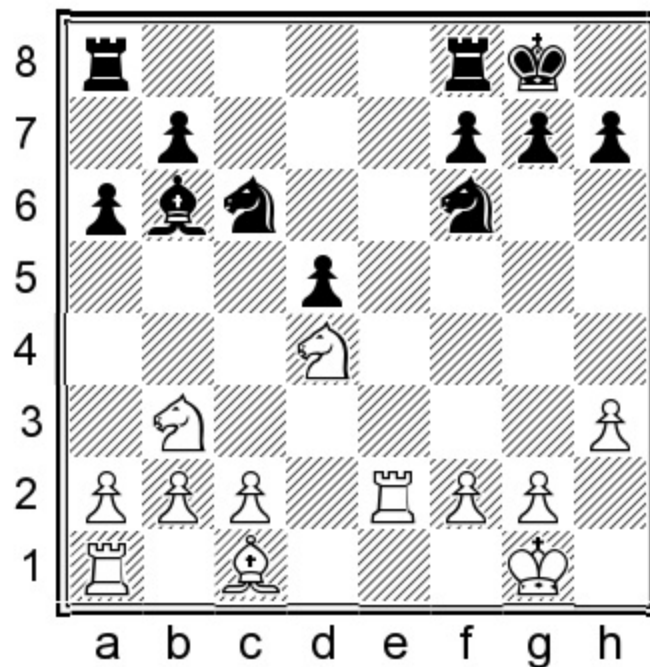
Position after: 13.♞fd4

B2.1) 13...♙g6 14.♙g5?! [14.♙e3! ♜bd7 15.a4 0-0 16.a5 ♙c7 17.♞c1!± White has found pretty squares for his minor pieces.] 14...♞e4 [14...♞bd7! Solving problems with development! Black should let White retreat the bishop to the superior e3-square of his own accord. Though the game was equal anyway. 15.c3 0-0 16.a4 ♞fe8 17.a5 ♙a7=] 15.♙e3 ♞d7 16.♞ad1 0-0 17.c3 ♞fe8= ½-½ (32) Burri, Q (2422) – Gibicar, D (2286) Germany 2018.



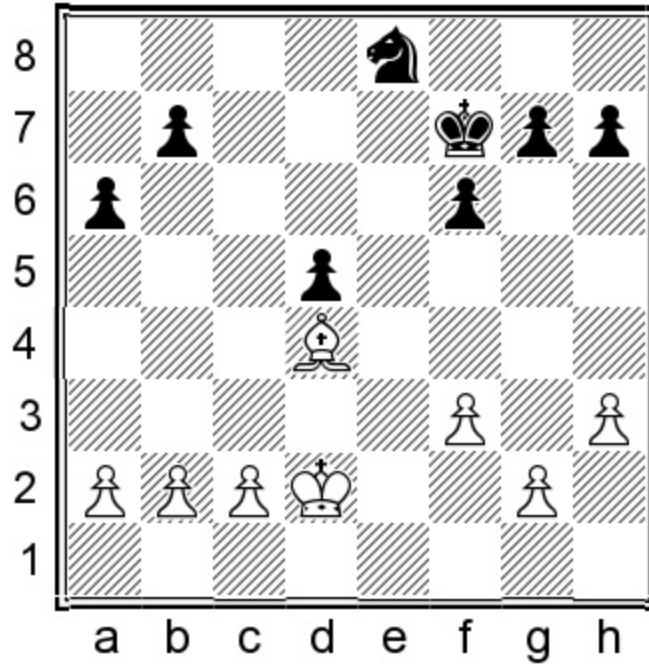
Position after: 17...♞fe8=

B2.2) 13...♙xe2 This simplifying move leads to a slightly worse endgame. 14.♞e1 0-0 [14...♞c6 15.♞xe2+ ♞d7 16.♙e3 ♞he8 17.♞f5!N and White is slightly better.] 15.♞xe2 ♞c6



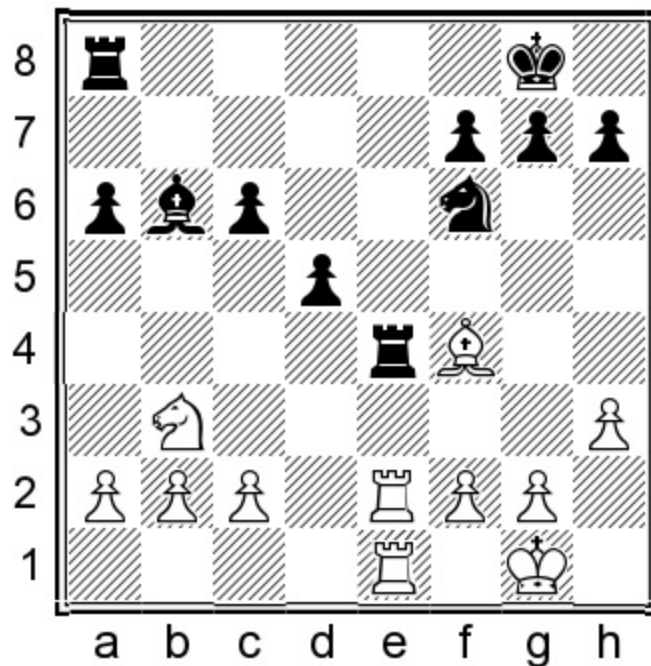
Position after: 15... ♖c6

16. ♗xc6!? [16. ♕e3!? White often seems to forget about this strong move. 16... ♖fe8 17. ♖ae1 ♗xd4 18. ♗xd4 ♕xd4 19. ♕xd4 ♖xe2 20. ♖xe2 ♖e8 21. ♔f1 ♗e4 22. ♔e1 f6 23. f3 ♗d6 24. ♖xe8+ ♗xe8 25. ♔d2 ♔f7±



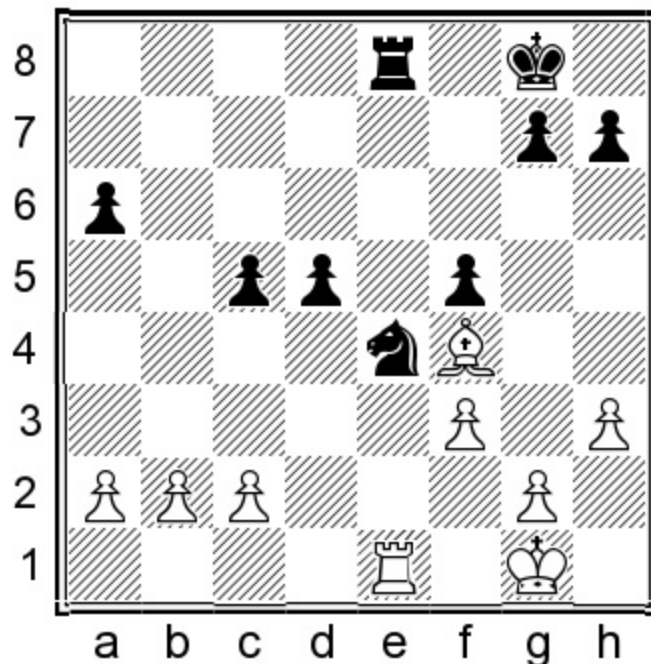
Position after: 25... ♔f7±

This is definitely not an endgame we would like to play. But in the other sections I have shown you how to draw these inferior endgames.] 16... ♖xc6 White has significantly improved the pawn structure for us. 17. ♕f4! [17. ♕e3 ♖fb8 18. ♕xb6 ♖xb6 19. ♖c1 ♖e8!N It's all about the e-file. 20. ♔f1 ♖xe2 21. ♔xe2 ♔f8=] 17... ♖fe8 18. ♖ae1 ♖e4!



Position after: 18...Rxe4!

19.Rxe4 [19.g5 Rae8 20.f1 Rxe2 21.Rxe2 Rxe2 22.fxe2 d7=] 19...dxe4 20.e3 Rb8
 21.d4 exd4 22.exd4 c5 23.e5 Re8 24.f4 f5 25.f3±



Position after: 25.f3±

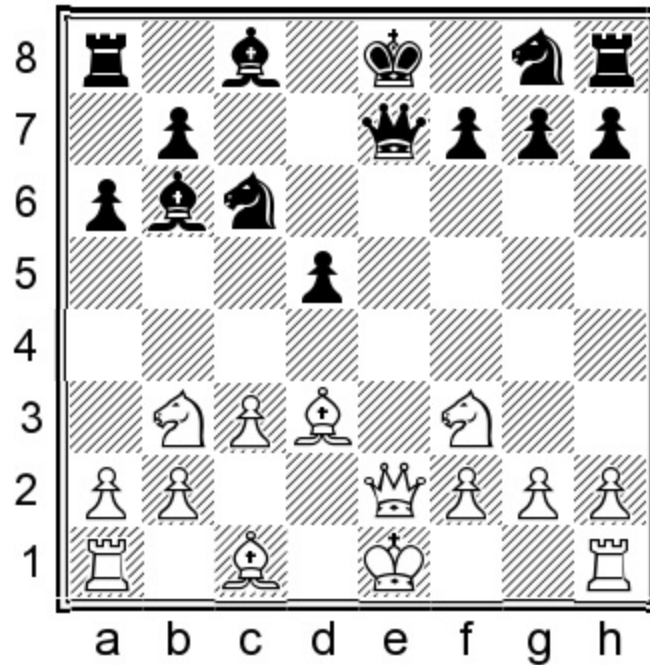
Again reaching a slightly better endgame which should be drawn if we can display fabulous technique. For example: 25...d6 26.Rxe8+ dxe8 27.f2 f7 28.b4 cxb4 29.f3 f6 30.d4 d6 31.f5 d5 32.fxb4 d4 33.c3 d2 34.d2 d6 35.a5 f5= Black has enough

counterplay.

10.♙g5

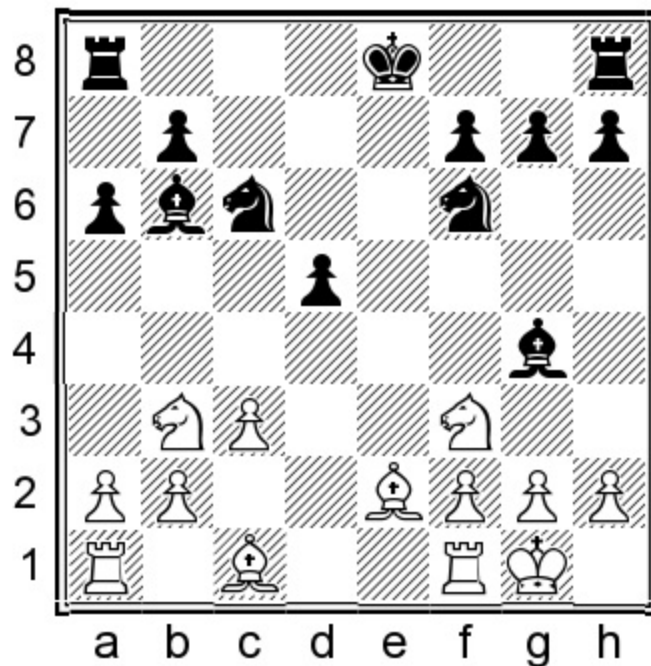
For 10.h3!N, see the next subchapter.

10.c3



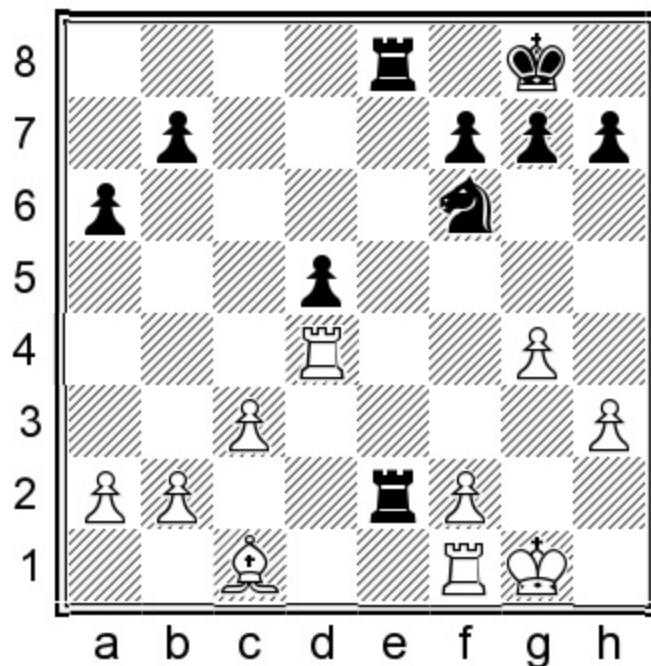
Position after: 10.c3

When playing as White, it is hard to know when this move is good and when it is not. A harmless c3 inclusion like this is actually one of the main things I hope for as Black. It is shocking how many times this move has been played. 10...♙g4 Of course it is always a good idea to play this move if White lets us. 11.0-0 ♖xe2 12.♙xe2 ♘f6



Position after: 12... Nf6

A) 13. Qf4 0-0 14. h3 Qh5 15. g4 Qg6 16. Rad1 Rfe8 17. Qd3 Qxd3 18. Rxd3 Re2 19. Qc1 [19. Rd2 Rae8 20. Nc1 Rxd2 21. Qxd2 Ne4= 1/2-1/2 (25) Raptis, N (2353) – Kiriakov, P (2629) Reno 2006.] 19... Rae8 20. Nbd4 Nxd4 21. Nxd4 Qxd4 22. Rxd4

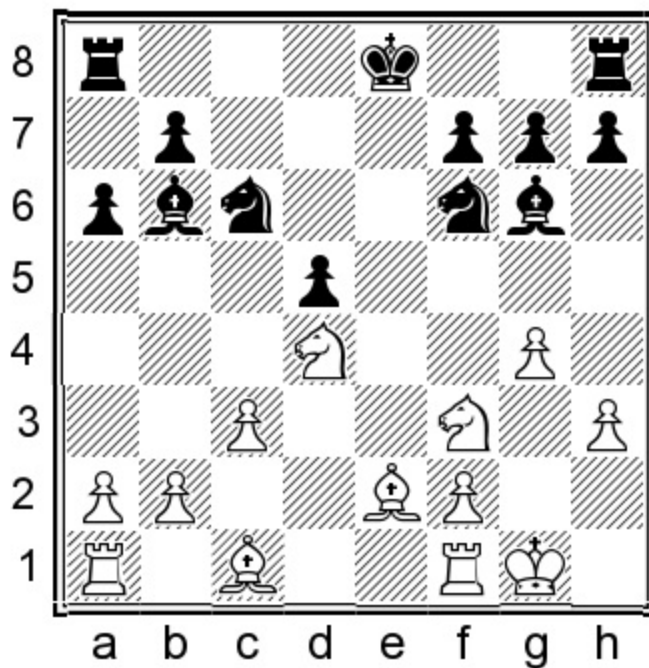


Position after: 22. Rxd4

22... R8e4?! Weakening the domination of the e-file. [22... h6! 23. Qg2 Rc2 24. Qf3 Rde2 25. a4 Ne4! 26. Rxd5 Rxf2+ 27. Rxf2 Nxf2 28. Qd2 Nd1=] 23. Rd3 h6 24. a3? = Note that this game started with

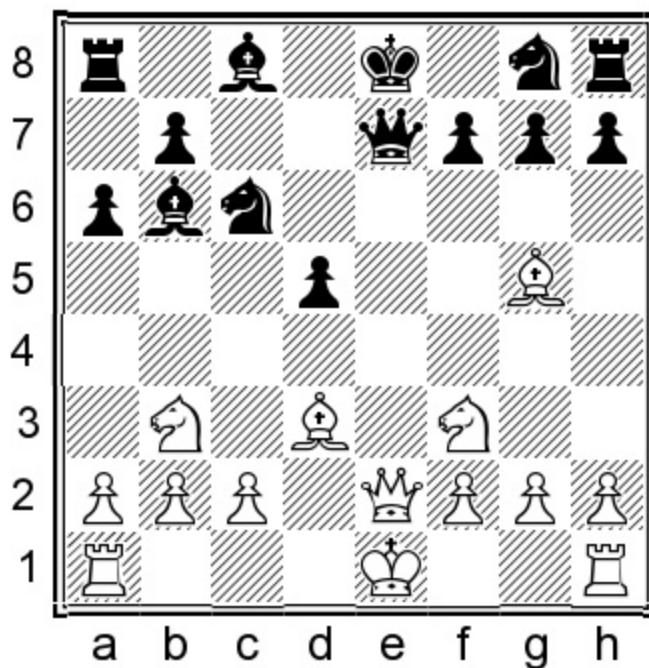
the 13.h3 move order. 0-1 (63) Pavlov, M (2505) – Kiriakov, P (2535) Sochi 2015. [24.f3±]

B) 13.h3 ♘h5 14.g4 ♙g6 15.♗bd4



Position after: 15.♗bd4

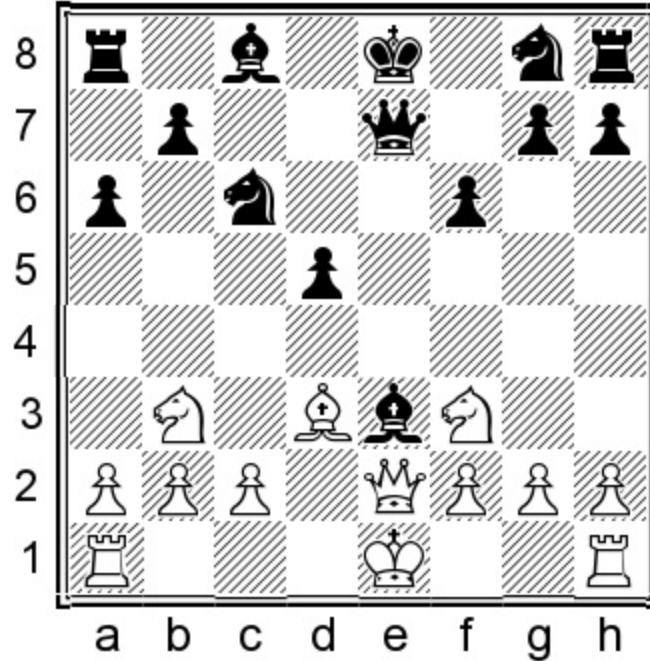
15...h5!N [15...♗xd4 16.♗xd4 h5 17.♙f4= This would not have been an option in the other case. ½-½ (38) Bindrich, F (2507) – Nikolic, P (2597) Germany 2010.] 16.g5 ♗xd4 17.♗xd4 ♗e4 18.♙e3= Black can now choose to exchange on d4 whenever he wants and aim to eventually get a good knight vs bad bishop scenario.



Position after: 10. ♔g5

10... ♖xe2+

10...f6 is a more complicated alternative. 11. ♕e3 ♕xe3



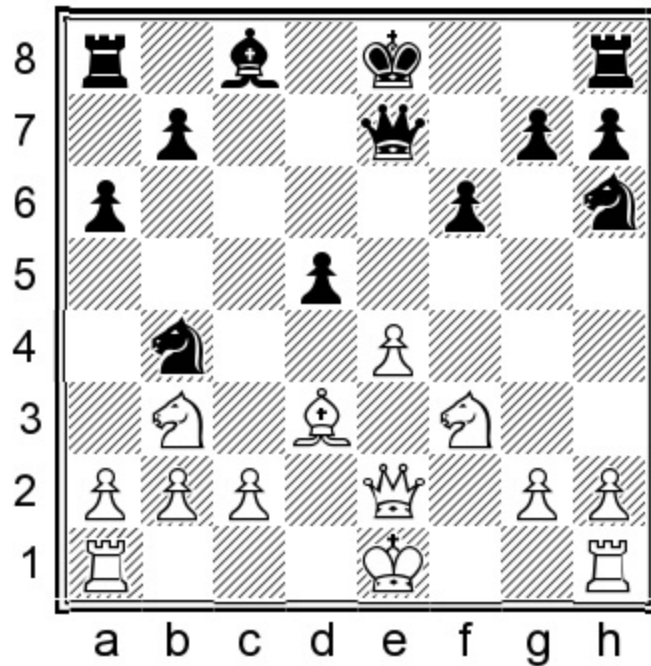
Position after: 11... ♕xe3

A) 12. ♖xe3 ♖xe3+ 13. fxe3

A1) 13... ♗ge7 14. ♗bd4 ♕g4 15. ♖d2 ♖d7 16. ♗hf1 ♗ae8 17. ♗xc6 ♗xc6 18. ♗d4 ♗xd4? 19. exd4±
Black must have been quite confident in his abilities to draw this. And he was right! ½-½ (46)
Barkhagen, J (2449) – Brynell, S (2484) Oerebro 2000.

A2) 13...f5!?N 14. ♗bd4 g6 15. ♗xc6 bxc6 16. ♗e5 c5= This option will annoy White a bit more in my opinion.

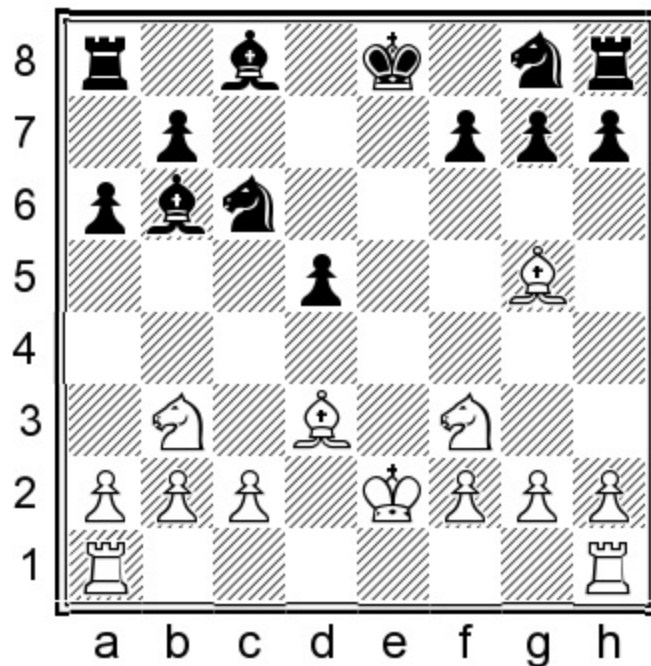
B) 12. fxe3 ♗h6 [12...f5! 13. ♗bd4 g6±] 13. e4 ♗b4



Position after: 13... Nxb4

14.0-0-0? [14.exd5 Nxd3+ 15.cxd3 Qxe2+ 16.Kxe2 0-0=] 14... Nxd3+ 15.Qxd3 dxe4 16.Qd5 f5 [16... Nf7! F] 17.Nfd4 Qf7 18.Qe5+ ½-½ Nijboer, F (2445) – Dokhoian, Y (2575) Wijk aan Zee 1989.

11. Kxe2

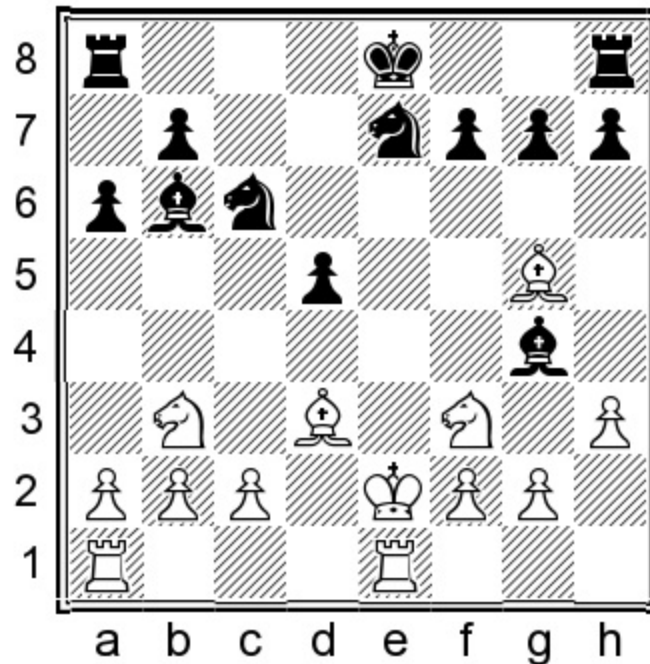


Position after: 11. Kxe2

11...♙g4!

11...h6 12.♙e3 ♜xe3 13.♚xe3 ♞f6 14.♞fd4± I believe White still had something to play for in ½-½ Yudasin, L (2635) – Dreev, A (2590) Moscow 1992.

12.♞he1 ♞ge7 13.h3



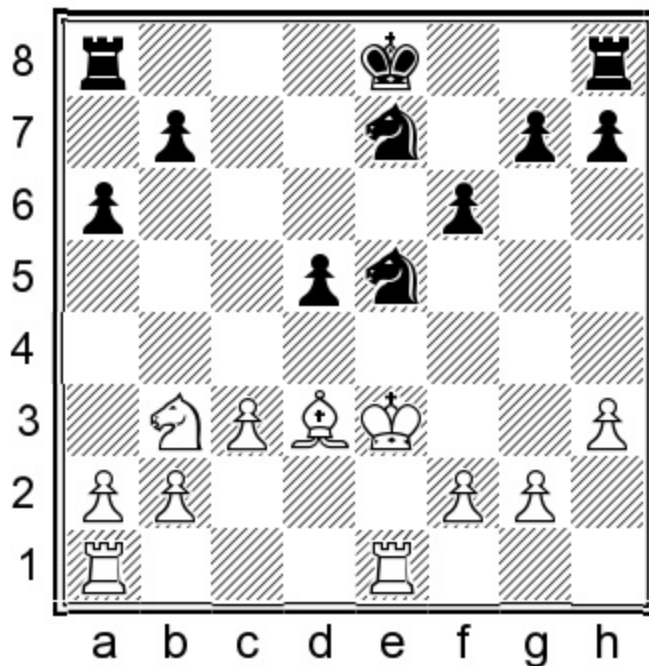
Position after: 13.h3

Black faces a difficult choice.

13.c3 This move from Leela is too tame. 13...h6 14.♙e3 ♜xf3+ 15.♚xf3 ♞e5+ 16.♚e2 ♙xe3 17.♚xe3 0-0-0= The white king is somewhat unsafe and the endgame is probably equal.

13...♙xf3+!

13...♙h5 14.♙xe7?! Dubious might be a little too harsh, but I really dislike giving up the bishop for a knight here. Now the remaining dark squared bishop on b6 can become a game saver. [14.c3 f6 15.♙e3 ♜xf3+ 16.♚xf3 ♞e5+ 17.♚e2 ♙xe3 18.♚xe3±



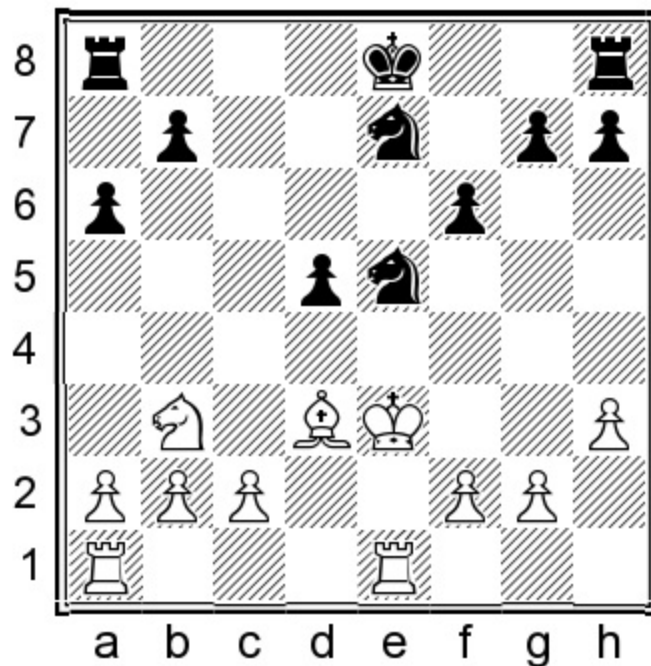
Position after: 18. ♔xe3±

Compared to the main line, White has gotten the very useful move c3 in for free.] 14... ♔xe7 15. ♔f1+ ♔d6 16. ♖h4 ♗g6 17. ♖ad1 ♔c7? [17... ♖he8± Of course.] 18. ♗xg6 hxg6 19. ♖f3± ½-½ (38) Ghaem Maghami, E (2570) – Grachev, B (2693) Basel 2012.

14. ♔xf3

Again, luring the king into the open is what Black's play is based on. Compare this to the line with 13... ♗h5.

14... f6 15. ♗e3 ♖e5+ 16. ♔e2 ♗xe3 17. ♔xe3



Position after: 17. ♔xe3

A crucial moment! Black now makes an instructive mistake. The king should go to f7 as we do not want it getting in the way of our queenside counterplay.

17...0-0-0?!

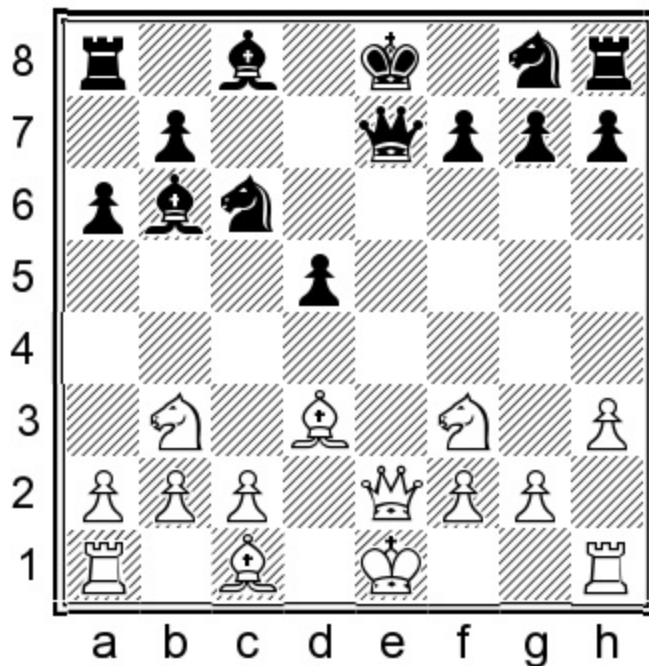
17... ♔f7 18. ♖ad1 ♜he8 19. ♔d2 ♘xd3 20. ♔xd3 ♘g6 21. ♖xe8 ♜xe8 22. g3 h5= Again we can see that even with limited material, having control over the e-file is still compensating for the isolated pawn.

18. ♘d4 ♘c4+ 19. ♔f3±

White went on to win in 1-0 (89) Hellers, F (2490) – Kosten, A (2510) Budapest 1988.

k) 5...a6 6.dxc5 ♙xc5 7.♘b3 ♙b6 8.♙d3 ♚e7+ 9.♚e2 ♘c6 10.h3

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.exd5 exd5 5.♘gf3 a6!? 6.dxc5! ♙xc5 7.♘b3 ♙b6 8.♙d3 ♚e7+ 9.♚e2 ♘c6 10.h3!N

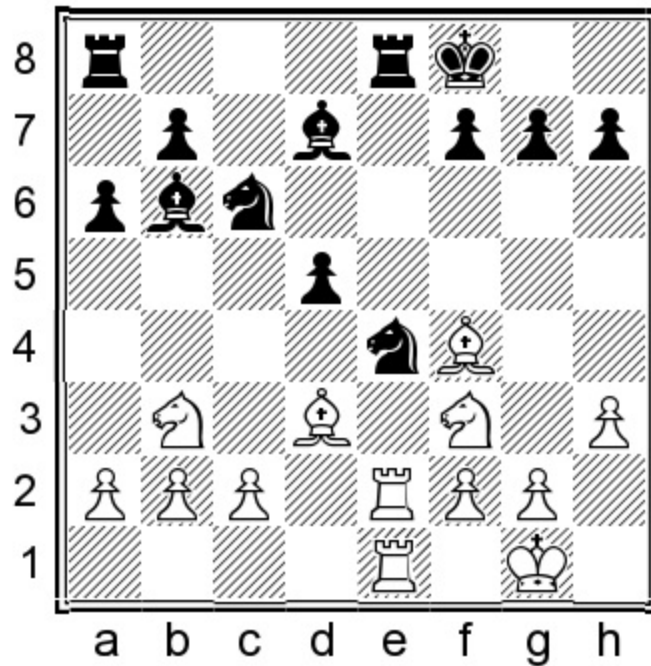


Position after: 10.h3!N

It is very surprising to see that this natural move is actually a novelty! Call me crazy, but to my eyes this looks like very natural prophylaxis. Black only has the inferior squares d7 and e6 left to choose from for his bishop now, which hampers his coordination significantly. I have not found any way to full equality for Black. My main line is what the computers prefer but I would recommend you do some research yourself and see if you can find something else you find more satisfactory.

10...♙d7

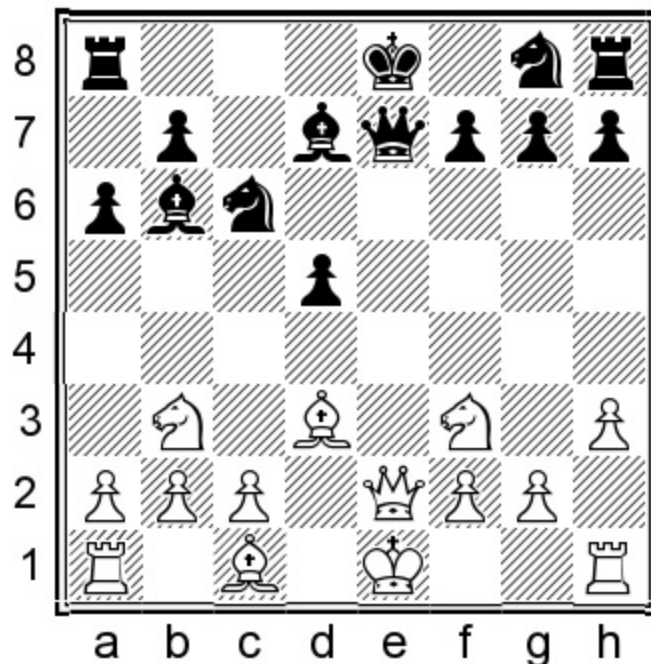
A) 10...♘f6!? 11.♚xe7+ ♜xe7 12.0-0 ♞e8 13.♞e1+ ♜f8 14.♙f4! ♘e4 15.♞e2 ♙d7 16.♞ae1±



Position after: 16. ♖ae1±

White has put all his pieces on good squares and can now start to build the pressure. Note that all four sets of minor pieces remain and White is better. This again confirms the hypothesis that in the French isolani structure, the e-file is more important than the number of remaining minor pieces.

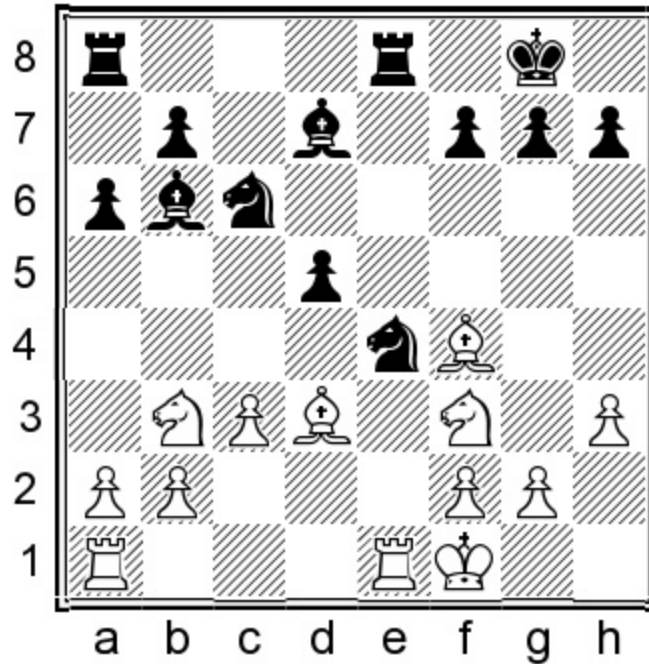
B) 10... ♖b4!? 11. ♕e3 ♕xe3 12. ♖xe3 ♖xe3+ 13. fx3 ♘f6 14. ♘fd4± Again we see White enjoying his typical long-lasting pressure. 10.h3N seems to just fit in nicely with the spirit of the position.



Position after: 10... ♕d7

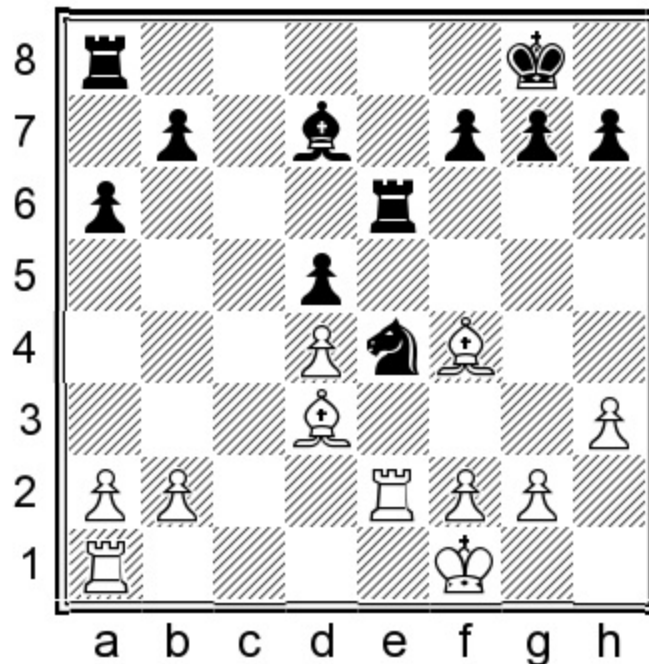
11. ♖g5

11.c3 ♜xe2+ 12.♔xe2 ♘f6 13.♞e1 0-0 14.♕f1 ♞fe8 15.♙f4 ♘e4



Position after: 15... ♘e4

Note that this is a position from the 10... ♘f6 variation with an extra tempo. 16.♞e2 ♞e6 17.♘bd4 [17.♞ae1 ♞ae8 18.♘bd4 ♘xd4 19.♘xd4 ♙xd4! 20.cxd4 g5! 21.♙e5 f6 22.♙c7 ♘d2+ 23.♔g1 ♞xe2 24.♞xe2 ♞xe2 25.♙xe2 ♙f5= If Black manages to exchange the light squared bishops, there will be real winning chances!] 17... ♘xd4 18.♘xd4 ♙xd4! 19.cxd4

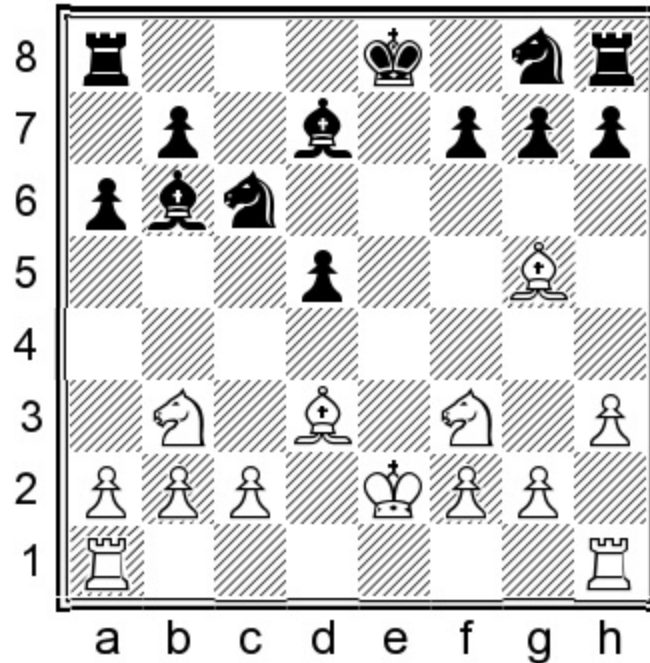


Position after: 19.cxd4

A) 19...♙b5?! At first this looks like we are trading towards an ideal good knight vs bad bishop scenario, but no. White can manage to unblock the crucial d4-square for his bishop. 20.♙xb5 axb5 21.f3 ♘f6 22.♖c2 ♜c6 23.♖c5 ♝xc5 24.dxc5±

B) 19...♜f6 20.♙h2 h5= White probably still has a minimal edge but it's not much to worry about.

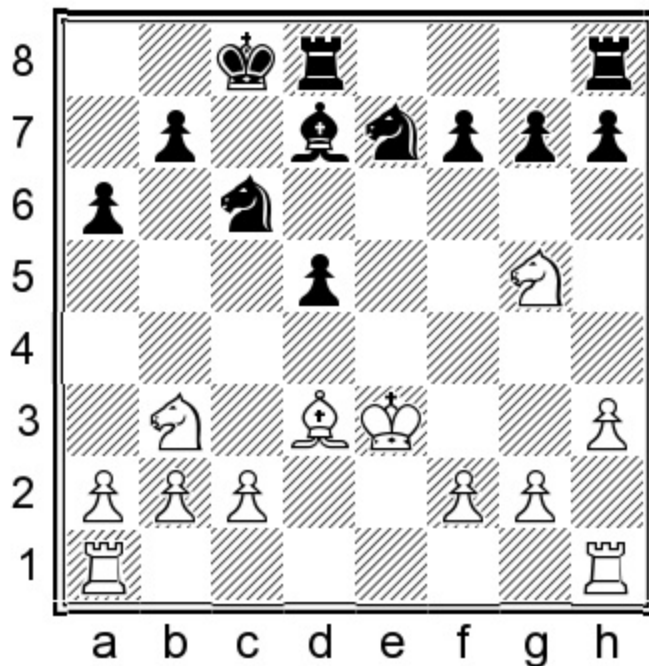
11...♜xe2+ 12.♙xe2



Position after: 12.♙xe2

12...h6

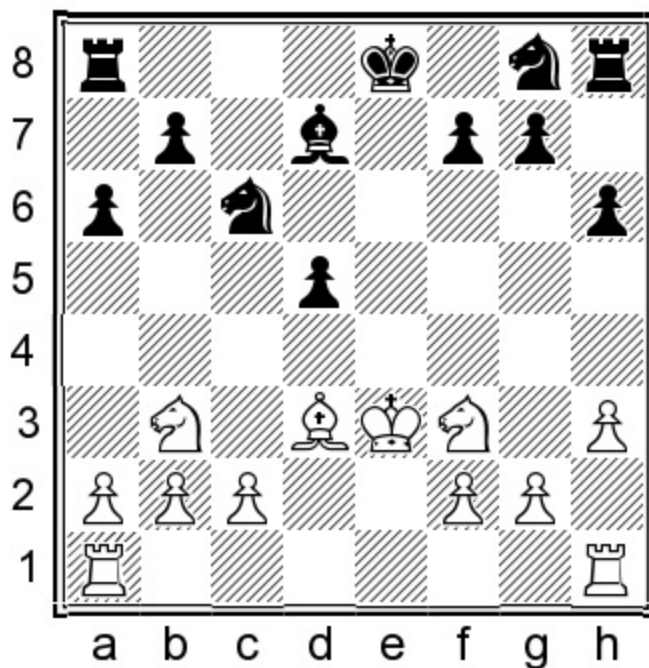
12...♞ge7!?N Black closes the e-file which will inhibit any counterplay against the white king. For example: 13.♙e3 ♙xe3 14.♙xe3 0-0-0 15.♞g5!



Position after: 15. ♖g5!

This is only strong because the e-file is blocked. 15... ♗f5+ 16. ♕xf5 ♕xf5 17. ♗xf7 ♖he8+ 18. ♔d2 ♜d7 19. ♗g5 ♞de7 20. ♞he1 ♞xe1 21. ♞xe1 ♞xe1 22. ♔xe1 ♕xc2 23. ♗c5± White is able to create an outside passed pawn eventually and his knights are well placed.

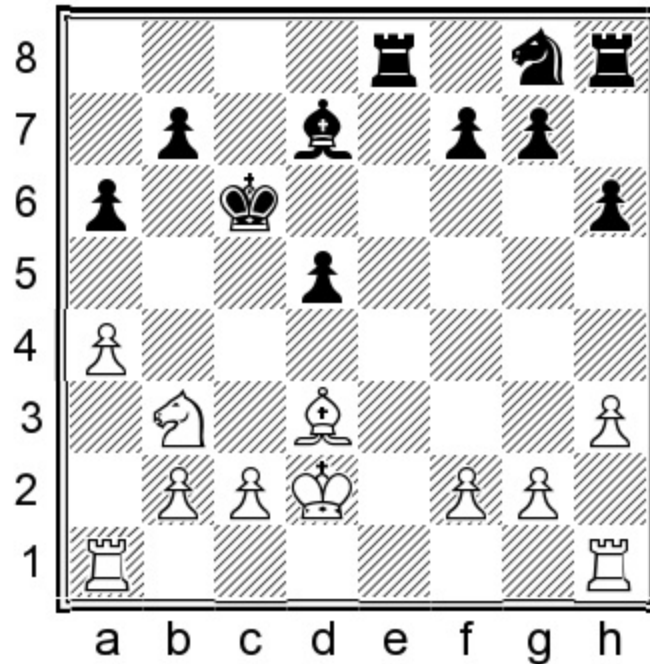
13. ♕e3 ♕xe3 14. ♔xe3



Position after: 14. ♔xe3

I usually don't approve of this exchange but this time it leaves the white king a bit exposed, which means we will win at least a tempo.

14...0-0-0 15.♘fd4 ♖e8+ 16.♔d2 ♕c7 17.♘xc6 ♕xc6 18.a4±



Position after: 18.a4±

Black is solid and close to equality but trying to win is a different matter.

Conclusion

That wraps things up for this chapter covering the good, the bad and the ugly of IQP structures. First we looked at the try with 5...cxd4, which should transpose to Chapter 5. Then we checked what happens if we ask the question of 5...c4. My conclusion is that the resulting positions are still rather poorly understood in general. At first glance the pawn structure is worse for Black, but there seems to be no concrete way to prove it. It can definitely be recommended as a pet line and a potential goldmine for surprise value. Finally, 5...a6!? has been a good ride. It can serve as a useful surprise option alongside your main weapon. Most players on the white side will be completely unaware of the subtle nuances required to gain an advantage. 6.dxc5! combined with the strong 10.h3!N is the only way I have found to get something tangible for White. This means that 5...a6 is not as strong as 5...♘f6 objectively. However, it is always advisable to have a wide repertoire against 3.♘d2. Next time this position arises, I will seriously consider trying out these lines. That is for sure.

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The Modernized French Defense

Volume 2

Against the Tarrasch

David Miedema



Dutch International Master David Miedema is a chess coach with one GM norm. He has finished sixth in the Dutch championships, and shared first place in one of the biggest open tournaments in Germany in 2010. Miedema has played the French Defense for most of his chess career.

The Tarrasch variation of the French Defense is reached after 1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nd2. This is one of the most positional treatments of the French Defense. David opted for the most solid approach but with lots of dynamic options. It should not come as a surprise that in these positional fights Black can still play for a win.

The groundwork of the French Defense was done by Nimzowitsch, Botvinnik and Kortchnoi in the old days. Nowadays players like Carlsen, So, Mamedyarov and Nepomniatchi still use their ideas in this opening with success.

People often ask, 'does true love exist'? Well, Miedema and the French Defense might be one of those rare examples. Fortunately this love has translated to countless novelties and combatable lines. This is his second volume on the French Defense, the final volume being expected later this year.



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