

Yes, we went there!

The Modernized Modern Defense



Daniel Fernandez



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by

Daniel Fernandez

Thinkers Publishing 2020



www.thinkerspublishing.com

First edition 2020 by Thinkers Publishing

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All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com

Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Romain Edouard

Assistant Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Typesetting: Mark Haast

Software: Hub van de Laar

Cover Design: Iwan Kerkhof

Graphic Artist: Philippe Tonnard

Production: BESTinGraphics

ISBN: 9789492510884

D/2020/13730/1

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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The Perfect Pirc-Modern, Viktor Moskalenko, New in Chess 2013

The Modern Tiger, Tiger Hillarp Persson, Quality Chess 2014

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Play 1.e4: A Complete White Repertoire, Jon Ludvig Hammer, Chess24 2019

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The Week in Chess, Mark Crowther, 1994-2020

ChessPublishing 1.e4 section, Various authors, 2009-2020

Introduction to the Modernized Modern

Playing the Modern Defense with any regularity is a sign that you truly love chess. From the very first move, you are indicating to your opponent (and to the jury deciding on the brilliancy prizes!) that you would like to play an unbalanced position. Then the thrill of the fight courses through your veins and you simply must trust yourself to handle developments better than the other player. For a very long time this truly was the absolute frontier, the Wild West of opening theory: if it went well you looked like a genius, if it goes badly you got mated in 20 moves, and most likely neither of you ever really made the analysis which you so badly needed to remember at the board.

A certain air of reckless abandon, of pure devil-may-care mischief, was needed to play it successfully, and to some extent still is. Something of this passion was conveyed into printed form by Swedish GM Tiger Hillarp Persson when he wrote his *Tiger's Modern*. Even within the Modern, the crème de-la-crème of the opening, when I learned it from his book almost a decade ago was the famous Hippo setup, the epitome of the adventurer's spirit.

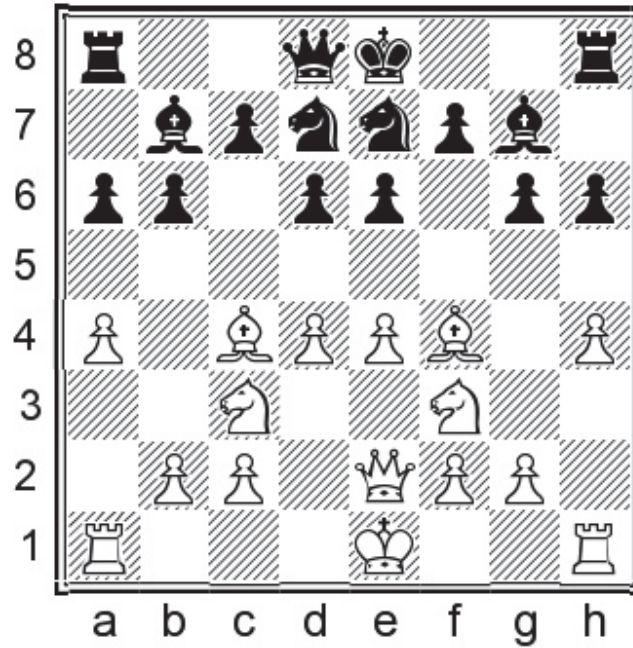
While White goes about stationing his pieces aggressively, controls the centre, etc., Black nonchalantly places nearly all his pawns on the third rank and shuffles his pieces behind them! For some reason this appealed to the 15-year-old me: the idea that I could take the game to my opponent in a way that I chose, rather than by preparing endlessly for some subtlety on move 27 of the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf.

Throughout the year 2010 I played the Modern almost exclusively; it filled the gap between my 1...e5 phase and my 1...c6 phase. (The latter remained my main reply to 1.e4 until I began learning the Najdorf in 2018, but I do still enjoy regularly mixing it up with the Modern; there are more than 20 references to my own games in the text.) What might surprise you is that 2010 was the year in which my chess career started progressing by leaps and bounds! I became an IM relying very heavily on it; an example from one of my norm tournaments can be seen in Part I (Lahiri-Fernandez.) I embraced the complexity, the audacity and the novelty whole-heartedly, and it embraced me back.

The following game was perhaps one of my most free-spirited ever. As a competitive player it can be hard to get fully into a creative mindset, but you can always try. This is, of course, much easier to do if you're not dependent on the result to the extent that dinner will be porridge if you lose, salad if you draw and steak if you win.

Bezgodov, Alexei (2485)
Fernandez, Daniel (2371)
Khanty-Mansiysk 2010

1.♘f3 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.e4 d6 4.♘c3 a6 5.h3 ♘d7 6.♙c4 e6 7.a4 b6 8.♙g5 ♘e7 9.h4 h6 10.♙f4 ♙b7
11.♚e2



Position after: 11. ♖e2

11... ♚b8!?

Commencing a manoeuvre I had read about in my (at that stage very new) copy of “Tiger’s Modern”.

12. ♜d1 ♚a7!? 13. 0-0 ♜d8 14. ♞fe1 ♚a8 15. ♞h2 0-0

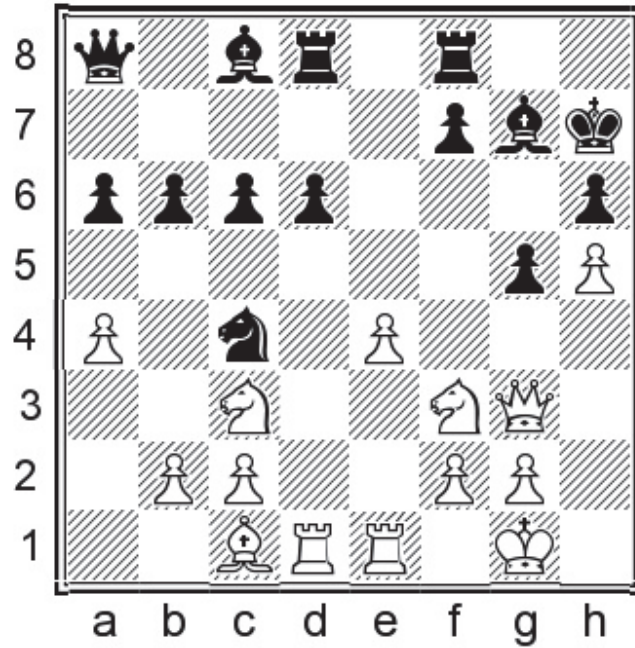
A purist might have played the even more contrived 15... ♔f8 !

16. ♚e3 ♔h7 17. ♚h3 e5!

Opening the game at the right time.

Black’s pieces turn out to be quite well placed!

18. ♙e3 exd4 19. ♙xd4 ♞e5 20. ♙b3 ♞7c6 21. ♙e3 ♞a5 22. ♙d5 ♞ac4 23. ♙c1 c6 24. ♙xc4 ♞xc4 25. h5
 ♙c8 26. ♚g3 g5 27. ♞f3



Position after: 27. ♖f3

27... ♔xc3!?

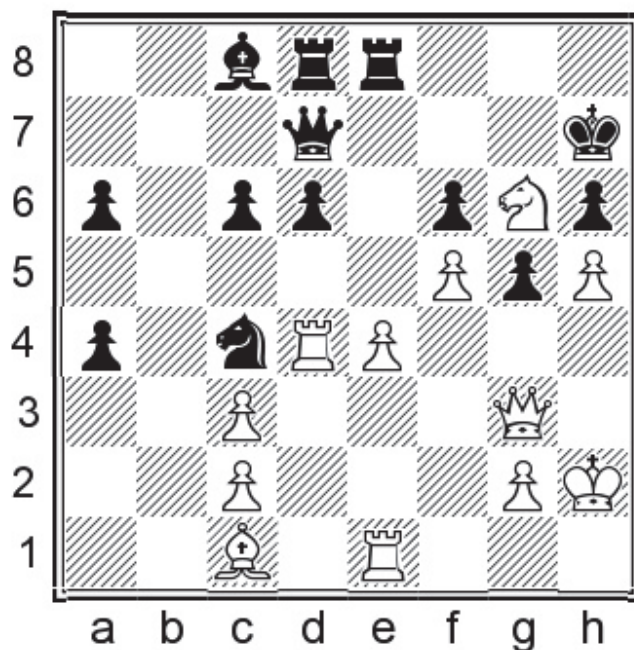
Positionally speaking this is a reasonable idea, but there was no compulsion to give up the bishop.

27... b5! ♞

28. bxc3 f6 29. ♗h4 ♜fe8 30. f4 b5 31. ♗g6 ♚a7+ 32. ♕h2 ♛d7 33. f5?

In mutual time pressure and with the position becoming quite complicated, both sides start making quite big mistakes. Unluckily for our story, the last mistake was made by me.

33... bxa4 34. ♜d4



Position after: 34. ♖d4

34...c5?!

Showing, as Ivan Sokolov would say, “too much talent”.

34... ♖f7! ♣ would have kept matters under control and Black can always play ...c5 next.

35. ♖xc4 ♖b5 36. e5 ♖xc4 37. e6 ♘b7 38. e7 ♖c8 39. ♖e6

White has very good value for the exchange and in what followed I just fell apart.

**39... ♖d5? 40. ♖xf6+- ♖d1 41. ♘xg5 ♖xh5+ 42. ♘h4 ♘d5 43. ♘f4 ♖g8 44. ♘xh5 ♖xg3 45. ♘xg3 a3
46. ♖f8 a2 47. ♖xc8 ♘f7 48. ♘xd6 ♘xh5 49. ♘e5**

1-0

Life can be ironic sometimes. From a starting point of being fairly contemptuous of opening theory a decade ago, you now find me in the process of selling this, my second opening book; the third one might well feature, of all things, the Poisoned Pawn Najdorf! But this may not be so much due to a change of character as to a change in how chess is played.

Times are changing (as even the Wild West at some point became industrialized) and theory has developed on everything. It has therefore become possible, *inter alia*, to try and write a rigorous opening manual on the Modern. What I mean is not that equality has been found and this should be your exclusive opening choice for all time to come (I would be lying to you if I said that) but rather that there is now a roadmap as to how you should study this opening. About time, given the number of 1.e4 repertoires that have been written and which contain anti-Modern recommendations (usually

in the ‘Other’ or ‘Miscellaneous’ section towards the back!) that nobody has taken the time to combat rigorously.

Furthermore, there has been a sea change in the ethos of Modern players (and also Pirc players): we no longer wish to get something totally new, or redefine the concept of development in Hippo style, but usually these days we want to get a Sicilian structure! That is to say, a position where Black gets to play ...cxd4 (or have White play dxc5) and thereby obtains a central majority that will stand him in good stead for the long term. That has now become the intellectual gold standard, a trend that has progressed in tandem with the inclusion of this opening in more players’ repertoires and its slow shift in towards the mainstream from the fringes of what is acceptable.

As artisans (for we must never forget our roots) on this moving fringe, it is important to have your bearings. Nowadays (and however much you feel like playing it freehand) if you want to include the Modern in your repertoire you should do some study. You should know, for instance, where White can get a safe plus (in my opinion, just chapter III.2), where White can get a less-safe plus (chapter IV.4), and where there are routes to equality, dynamic or otherwise (essentially the rest of the book!)

For the rare player from the White side who has picked this book up looking for inspiration, this text must have seemed like a really hate-filled polemic right up until that last paragraph. Yes, indeed, I am making some recommendations for White here too. For as objectivity plays a larger and larger part in the evolution of this opening and others, it falls to authors and commentators to try and uncover the truth of the position as honestly as they know how, rather than shamelessly trying to promote one side or the other.

As such, not only am I suggesting some lines and novelties for White, but I’m also severely dialing back some of my other personal biases (such as picking the ‘fun’ line over safe equality, or giving away the bishop-pair with the manoeuvres ...g4xf3) in order to try and provide as many sustainably playable options as possible. Also, where I consider there to be relatively little choice (Part IV, chapters 3 and 4) I am being honest about that and not trying to create analysis from thin air.

Unfortunately, the nature of the material is such that I cannot possibly cover every move-order; some talented analyst might well prove an advantage for White after 3.c3 or 3.g4. What to do? Well, I reiterate the message from my first book: my goal is not to be 100% comprehensive, because these days that’s largely impossible. There is a reasonable amount of consensus that the third moves (after 1.e4 g6 2.d4 g7) which deserve the most attention are 3.f3, 3.c3 and 3.c4; my aim after all three of those moves is to be 99% correct 99% of the time, and never too badly mistaken.

I hope this book proves to be informative as well as ground-breaking; that it reinforces your knowledge while infusing it with passion and some new discoveries; and above all that you have as much fun reading it as I did writing it.

It remains for me to thank those who have been instrumental in the creation of this book as you hold it today: Thinkers Publishing for being (extremely) lenient with deadlines; numerous colleagues and friends for sharing their ideas and input freely (but especially fellow GMs Negi Parimarjan and Justin Tan); and of course my parents, for putting up with so much of my chess mania during the second half of my childhood and beyond.

Daniel Fernandez
Sydney, June 2020

Part I

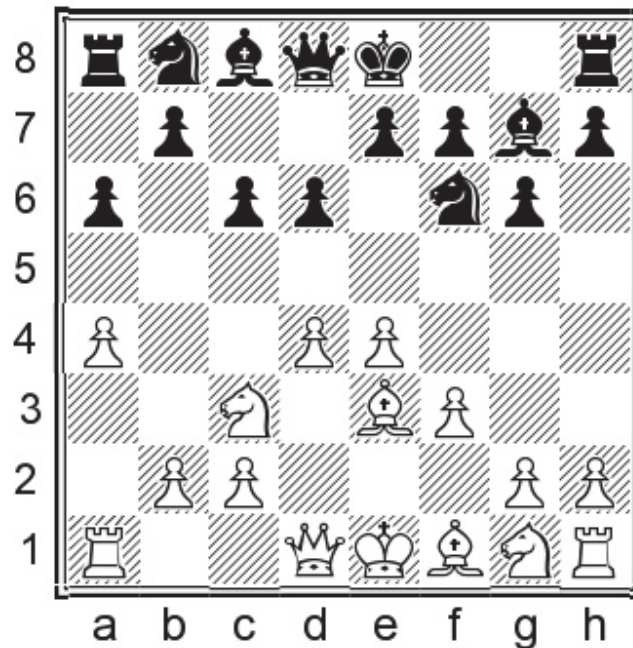
Illustrative games

Radjabov, Teimour (2745)

Nakamura, Hikaru (2775)

Stavanger 2013

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.a4 ♘f6 6.f3 c6!?



Position after: 6...c6!?

This is a little-known alternative which I will be analysing in Part III, although my main recommendation is 5...b6.

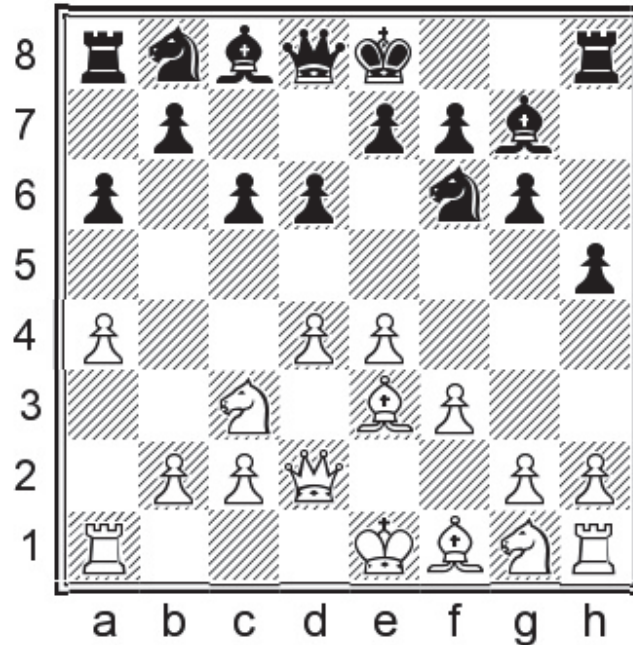
7.♙d2

7.a5 is the other critical move, and then my main line runs 7...♘bd7! 8.h4 e5 9.♙d2 0-0 10.g4 d5 with complications and rough dynamic equality.

7...h5!?

Not a bad move for blitz, but in a position which is (almost indisputably) slightly worse for Black, I have had to recommend the move which almost gets mated, in order to make White work harder for the small edge.

7...0-0 This move fits neatly into our repertoire and is also discussed in the theoretical section.



Position after: 7...h5!?

8.♔d3?!

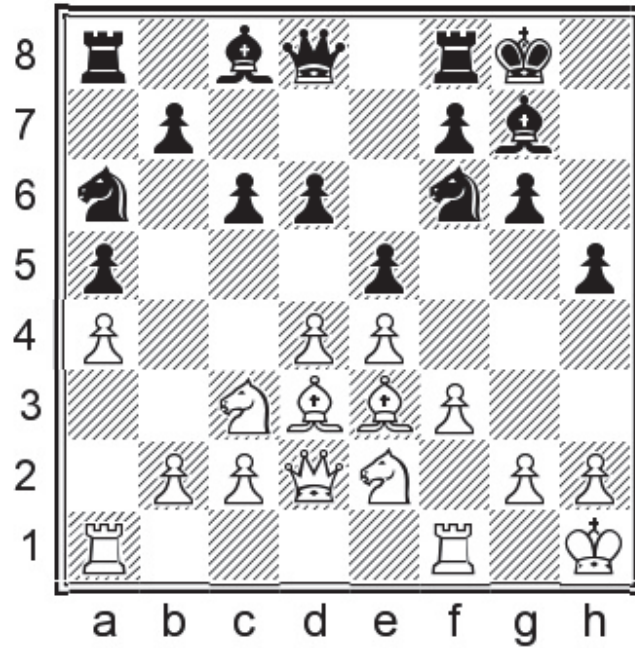
8.a5± is probably a good way to highlight the positional deficiencies of Black's setup. Now ...♘bd7 will probably end up looking a bit pathetic against the idea of ♕c4, ♖h3-g5.

8...a5

It is a good time for this typical thrust. We have a very curious position here where White has made a lot of improving moves, but it isn't completely clear yet where he can attack. My (possibly unpopular) opinion is that black has already equalised.

9.♘ge2 ♖a6 10.0-0 0-0 11.♔h1 e5

Possibly more in the cat-and-mouse spirit of this position was 11...♘b4= holding off on ...e5 for one more move and ensuring that ♕c4 can be met by ...d5.



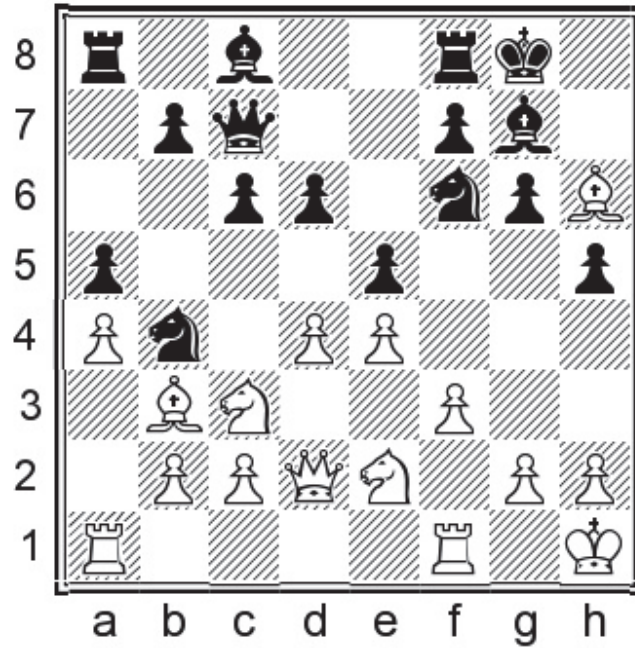
Position after: 11...e5

12.♙c4

This makes Black think twice about his move-order, but perhaps not as much as one of the alternatives.

One of the problems with playing a quick ...e5 is that White can now play 12.♙xa6 ♖xa6 13.♞ad1 ♔c7 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♙c5± when his co-ordination is much better.

12...♞b4 13.♙b3 ♔c7 14.♙h6



Position after: 14. ♖h6

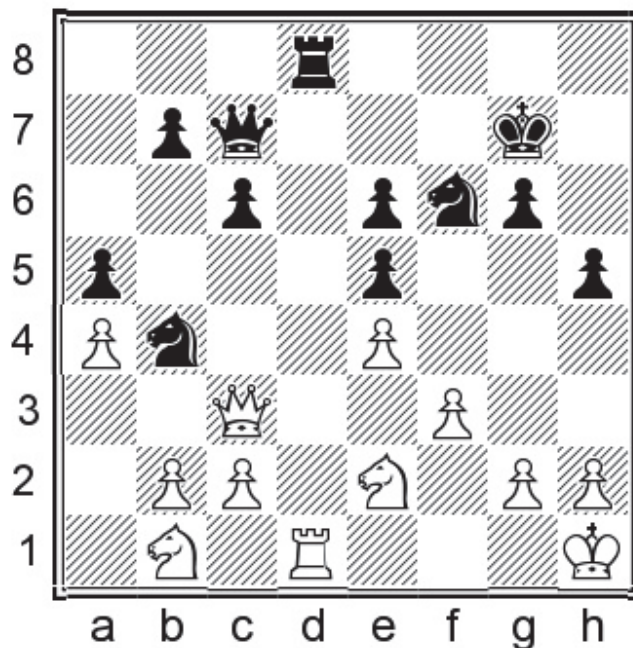
14...♔h7

14...♙e6 15.♙xe6 fxe6 16.dxe5 dxe5± reaches the same structure as in the game, which (like ...♙e6 options in the Serbian system, see chapter III.5) engines overestimate for White.

15.♙xg7 ♔xg7 16.♖ad1

16.f4 ♙g4 17.f5 ♖ad8 18.h3 ♙xe2 19.dxe5 dxe5 20.♙xe2 ♖d4=

16...♙e6 17.♙xe6 fxe6 18.dxe5 dxe5 19.♘b1 ♖ad8 20.♙c3 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♖d8



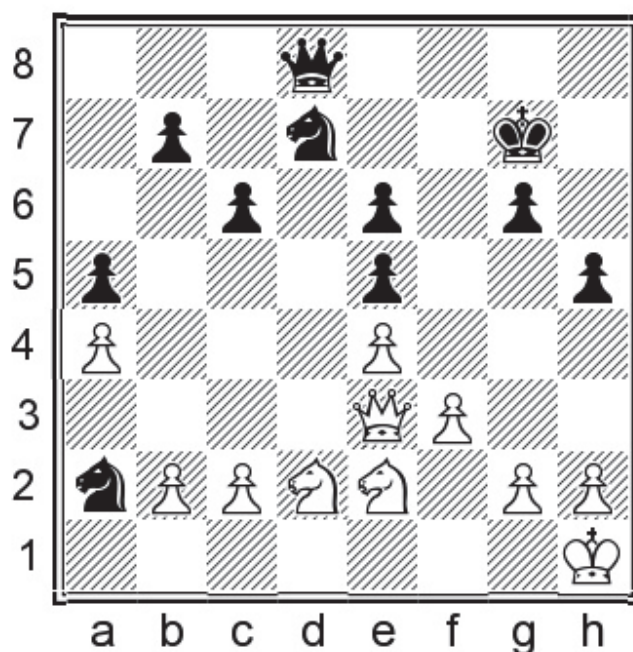
Position after: 21...Rd8

22. Rxd8?!

As we saw in the note to White's 16th, Black's queen actually operates very well in this kind of position. White should have kept the rooks on to make that fact less apparent.

22. Rg1±

22...Qxd8 23. Nd2 Na2 24. Qe3 Nb4 25. Qc3 Na2 26. Qe3 Nd7!?



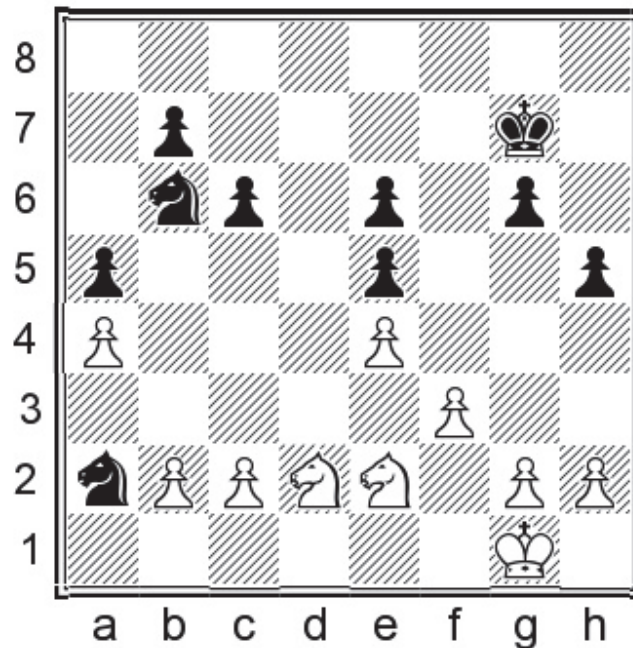
Position after: 26...♞d7!?

Black gets ambitious. As this was a rapid game, he probably felt quite comfortable doing this, especially since White's plan for how to play for a win is not obvious.

27.♔g1

I would be surprised if Nakamura did not intend a line like 27.♞c4 b5 28.axb5 cxb5 29.♞d6 ♚b8!↑

27...♚b6 28.♚xb6 ♞xb6



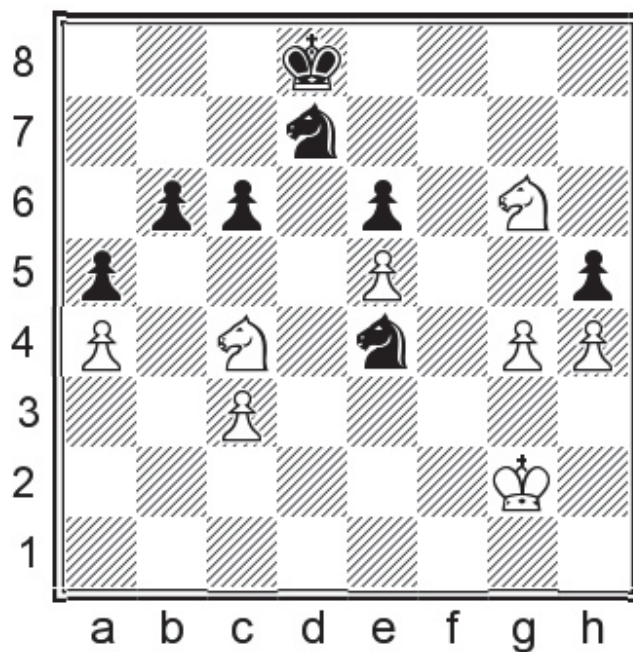
Position after: 28...♞xb6

Now this is an endgame that has potential applications to more than one chapter of the later parts of this book. Both sides have to collaborate for this to become a three-results game; here, they do.

29.b3 ♞b4 30.c3 ♞d3 31.♔f1 ♞d7 32.♞c4 b6 33.g3 ♔f6 34.h4 ♔e7 35.♔g2 ♔d8 36.f4 ♞3c5

36...♔c7!?! looks a lot more obvious to me: with a knight on e5 and king on d6 Black can hardly lose, and he can wait for a more opportune time for a committal move like ...b5 or ...♞3c5.

37.fxe5 ♞xb3 38.♞f4 ♞bc5 39.♞xg6 ♞xe4 40.g4



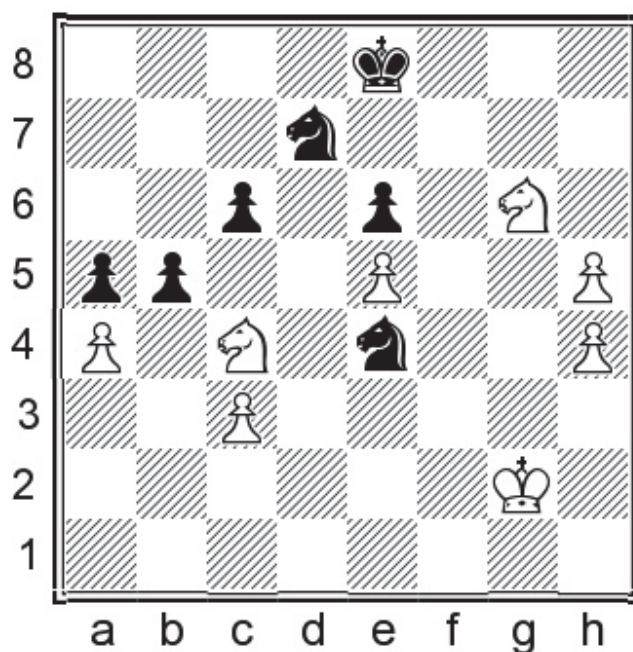
Position after: 40.g4

The positions become critical.

40...b5?

40...hxg4 41.h5 ♔e8= would have been level and White could overpress just as easily as Black.

41.gxh5 ♔e8



Position after: 41... ♖e8

42.h6?

After this the game remains within the drawing margin until the players get down to bare kings.

The winning move was the highly aesthetic 42. ♕f3!! which, once you see it, doesn't really require any more explanation.

42... ♗f8 43. ♗d6+ ♗xd6 44. ♗xf8 ♗f7 45. ♗xe6 bxa4 46. h7 a3 47. ♗d4 a2 48. ♗c2 ♗e7 49. ♕f2 ♗e6
50. ♕e2 ♗xe5 51. ♕d2 ♗e4 52. ♕c1 ♗d3 53. ♕b2 c5 54. h5 a4 55. ♗a3 a1=♚+ 56. ♕xa1 ♗xc3
57. ♗b5+ ♗d3 58. ♕b2 c4 59. ♕a3 c3 60. ♗xc3 ♗xc3 61. ♕xa4 ♗c4 62. ♕a3 ♗d5 63. ♕b4 ♗e5
64. ♕c5 ♗f6 65. ♕d5 ♗g7 66. ♕e6 ♗g5+ 67. ♕f5 ♗xh7 68. ♕xg5 ♗g7 69. h6+ ♗h7 70. ♕f4 ♗xh6

½-½

Lahiri, Atanu (2368)

Fernandez, Daniel Howard (2299)

Parramatta 2010

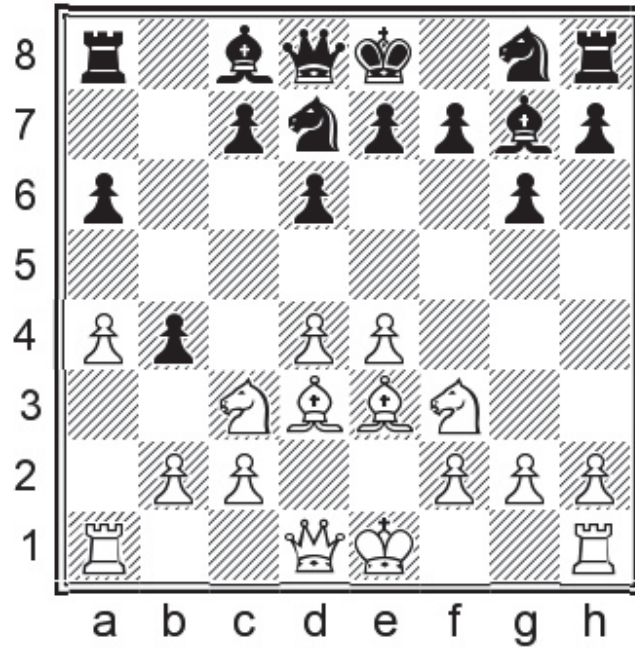
1. d4 g6 2. e4 ♗g7 3. ♗c3 d6 4. ♗e3 a6 5. ♗f3 b5

Later in this book I will investigate both the text and the alternative 5... ♗f6.

6. ♗d3 ♗d7

My recommendation is to begin with 6... ♗b7, but there is really not much to choose between the moves. See IV.1 for details.

7. a4 b4



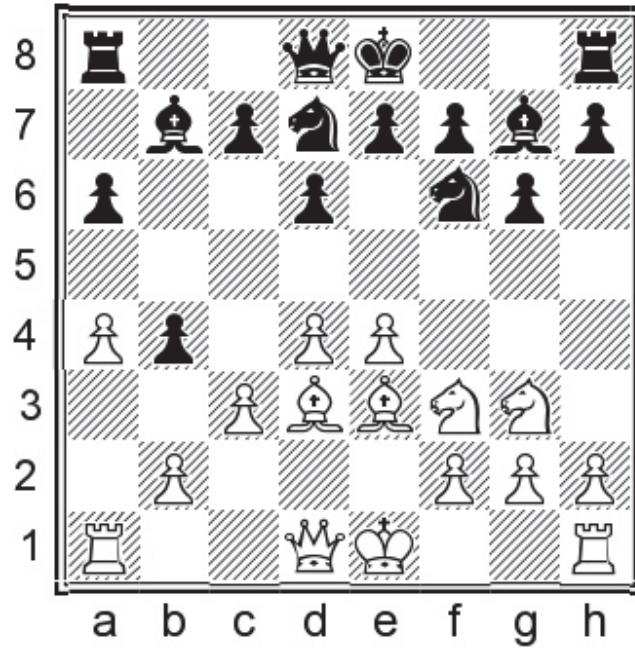
Position after: 7...b4

8.♘e2

This is an example of a ‘common sense’ system that is not especially testing (especially compared with the equivalent version where the f-pawn is already at f4) and it makes sense to just develop an instinct for how to cope with them, rather than analyse each one individually.

Here after 8.♘d5 it actually makes sense for Black to proceed as in Pijpers – Van Foreest: 8...a5 9.♘f4 ♘b7 followed by ...♘gf6 or ...e5.

8...♘gf6 9.c3 ♘b7 10.♘g3



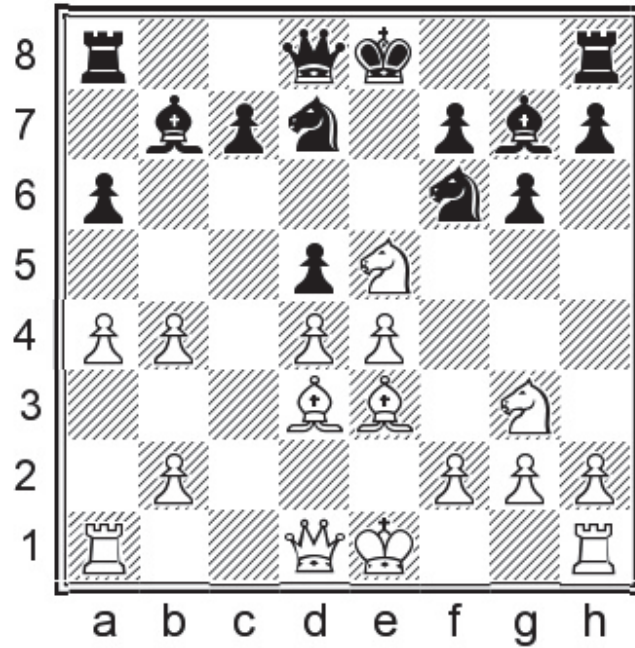
Position after: 10. ♖g3

10...e5?!

Now I think it's more consistent to try and build up the tension in the pawn-structure with something like 10...h5 11.h4 c5! with the idea of ...0-0, ...♙a5, ...♞b8 etc. if White does nothing. The main way in which White can relieve the pressure is to accept a pawn sacrifice: 12.0-0 0-0 13.cxb4 ♖g4

11.d5

After 11.cxb4! my idea was to play 11...d5, but then 12.♗xe5± is strong for White (among other things.)



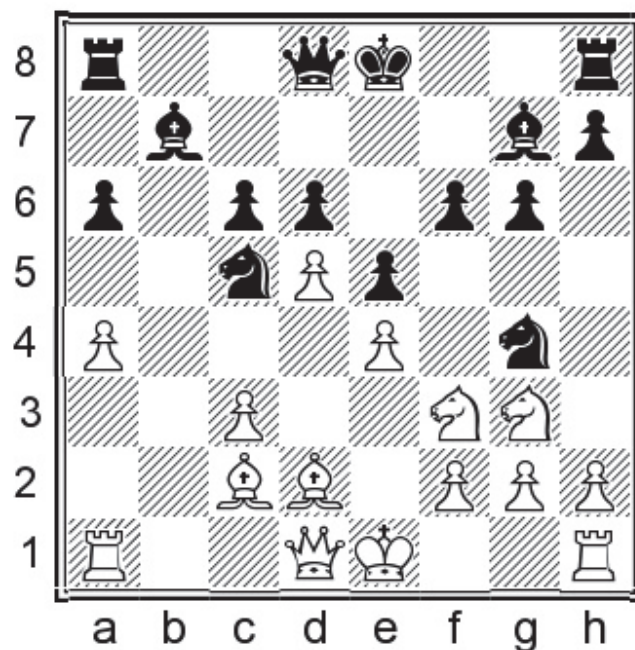
Position after: 12. Nxe5

The c-pawn is backward and Black needs too much time to regain the pawn.

11...bxc3 12.bxc3 Ng4

Here Black could still be nominally worse, but there are some reasonable targets he can aim for as well as obvious improving moves, of which some will be shown in what follows.

13. Qg5 f6 14. Qd2 Nc5 15. Qc2 c6

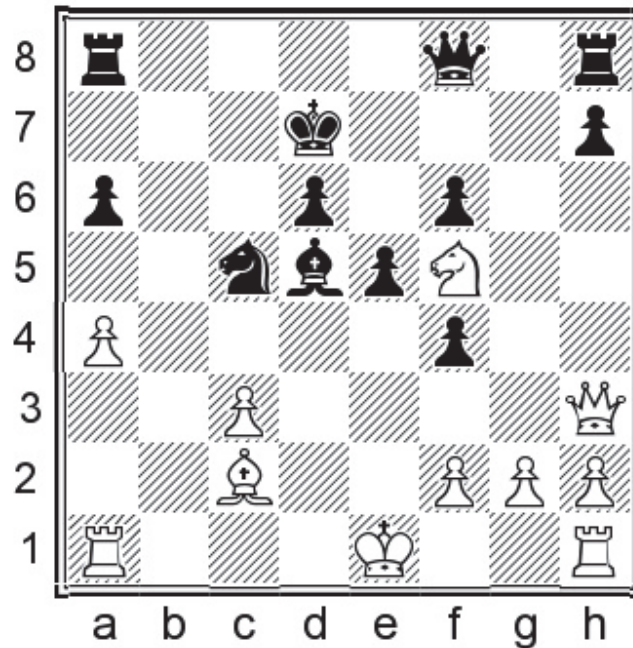


Position after: 15...c6

16.c4

White had to find a cute motif relating to the g4-knight in order to keep a significant advantage.

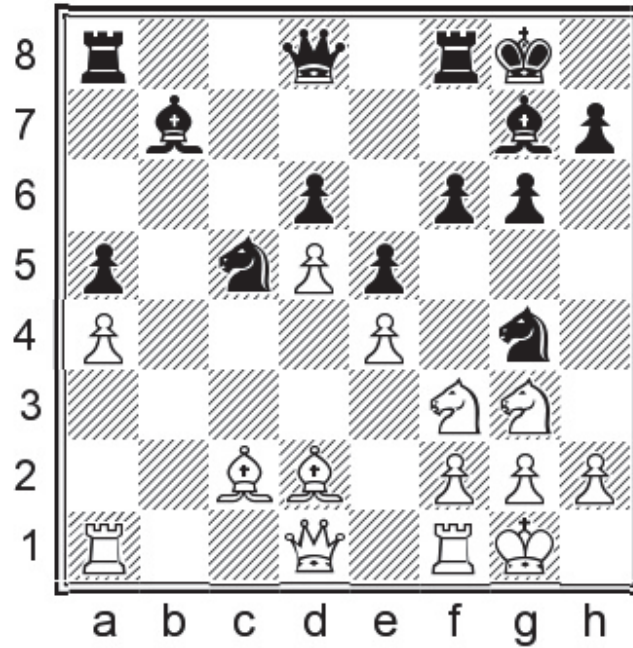
16.♘h4!? ♘h6 [16...♚d7 17.♘hf5! gxf5 18.♘xf5 h5 19.h3± Black is in trouble here.] 17.♘hf5 gxf5
18.♙xh6 ♙xh6 19.♚h5+ ♔d7 20.♚xh6 f4! 21.♘f5 ♚f8 22.♚h3 cxd5 23.exd5 ♙xd5±



Position after: 23...♙xd5±

The engines insist that White has substantially more compensation than he needs, but I am not so convinced. The knight on c5 is incredibly robust and White needs to put great effort in even to make Black trade off his bishop.

16...0-0 17.0-0 cxd5 18.cxd5 a5



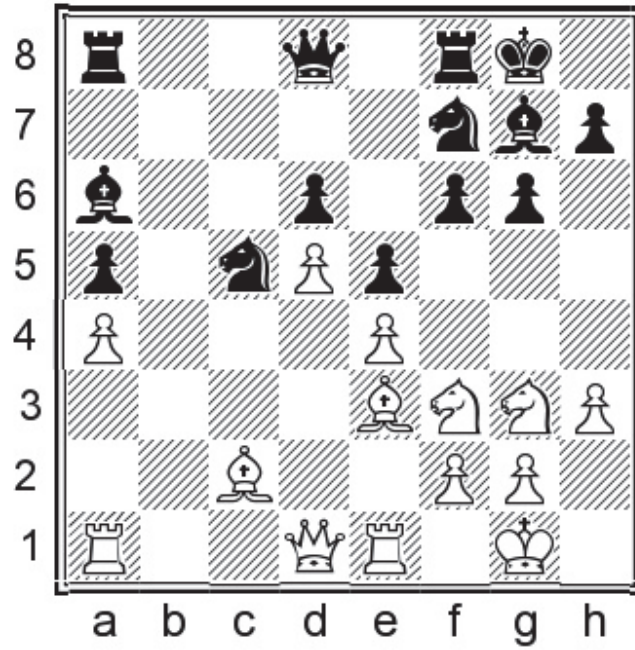
Position after: 18...a5

19.h3

After this point I don't really think White can be better any longer. The fact that he spent time chasing Black's knight to a place it wanted to be anyway undermines my confidence in his position, and (as we will see) gives Black some much-needed time to organise the ...♔h6 exchange. The next phase of the game (at least the next 10 moves) revolves around whether Black will be able to make use of his dark-squared bishop in this way.

It is possible that White's position is at least more enjoyable to play following a more efficient move such as 19.♘e1, because then after 19...♘h6 White can simply exchange knights without delay on d3.

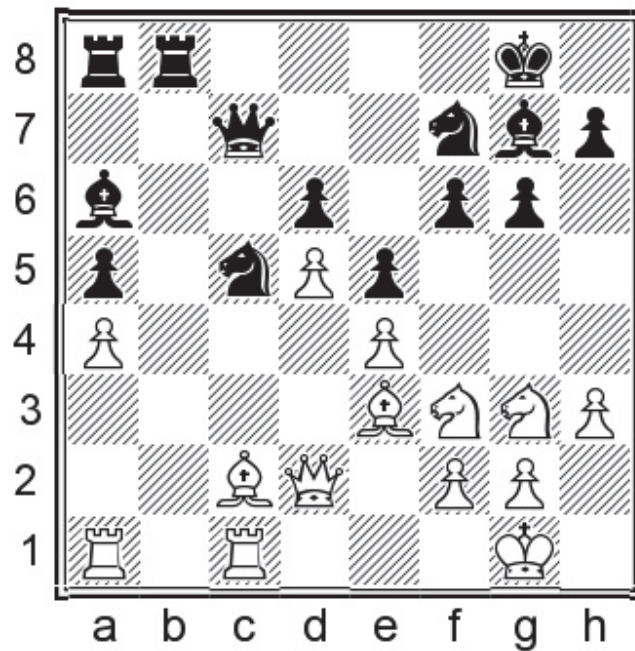
19...♘h6 20.♔e3 ♔a6 21.♖e1 ♘f7



Position after: 21... Nf7

As mentioned, I am intending ... Qh6 . This game obviously started out as a 'Four Pieces System' but the comments apply equally (or even more) to lines such as those in III.3.

22. Qd2 Qc7 23. Rec1 Rfb8



Position after: 23... Rfb8

24. $\text{Ne1}?!$

To some extent my previous move called White's bluff. Did he really want to play 24.♙d3? The critical point to notice is that the move exchanges dark-squared bishops as well as light-squared ones, leaving Black with perhaps some nominal advantage due to temporary possession of the b-file.

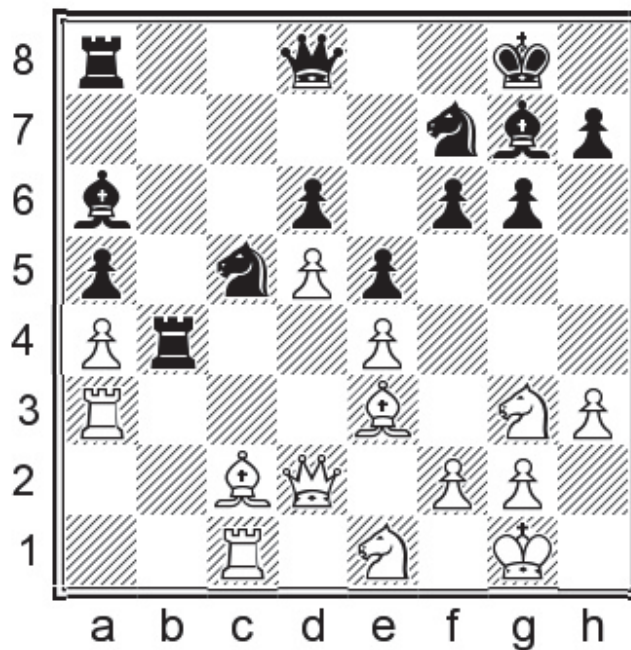
24...♙xd3 25.♚xd3 ♙h6 26.♙xh6 ♘xh6=

24...♚d8 25.♞a3

White continues to drift into a significantly worse position.

The problem is that the immediate 25.♘d3 ♙xd3 26.♙xd3 can be met by 26...♘b3. Actually, the text move doesn't solve this issue, and neither does the next one, but it indicates the direction in which White's thoughts were moving.

25...♞b4



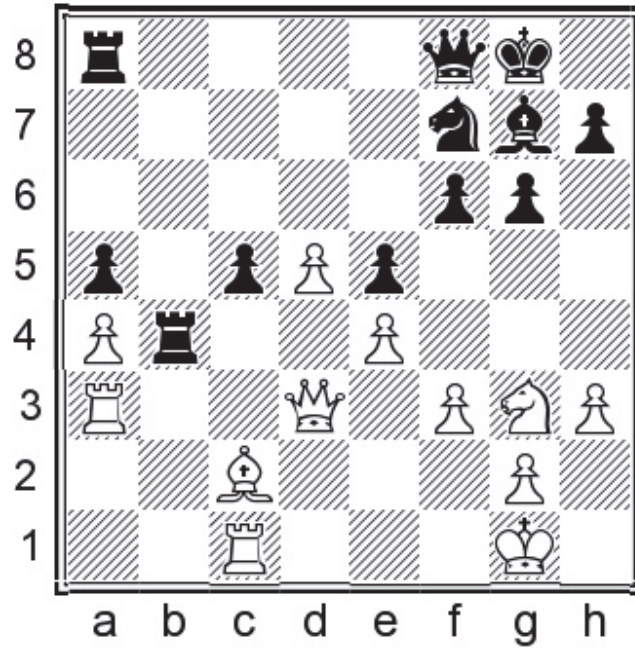
Position after: 25...♞b4

Pretending to be interested in the e4-pawn, but in fact covering the a5-pawn so that I can play ...♚f8 and ...♙h6!

26.f3 ♚f8 27.♘d3 ♙xd3 28.♙xc5

28.♙xd3 ♘b3⚡ was actually arguably a lesser evil at this point, so great is the carnage on the dark-squares.

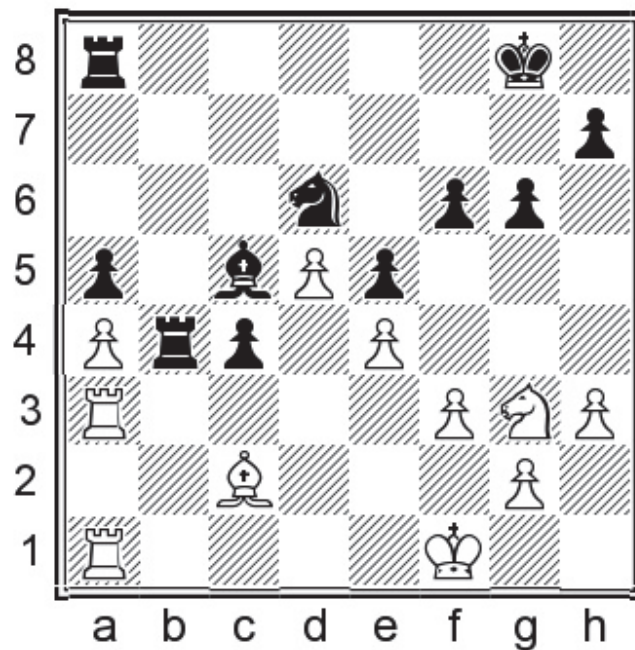
28...dxc5 29.♚xd3



Position after: 29. ♖xd3

Now one or another version of the mobilisation shown in the next diagram is guaranteed to happen.

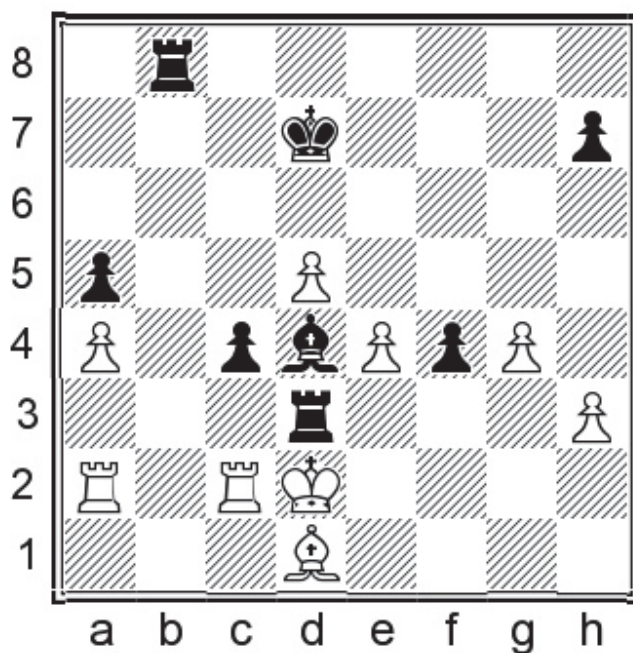
29...c4 30. ♖f1 ♗h6 31. ♖ca1 ♖c5+ 32. ♖f2 ♗f8 33. ♖xc5 ♗xc5+ 34. ♔f1 ♞d6



Position after: 34... ♞d6

From a positional perspective the game is basically over (b-file, better bishop, better knight, passed c-pawn.)

35.♔e2 ♖ab8 36.♞3a2 ♔f7 37.♔d2 ♙d4 38.♞c1 ♔e7 39.♗e2 ♔d7 40.♗c3 ♞b3 41.♙d1 f5 42.exf5
 gxf5 43.g4 f4 44.♞cc2 e4 45.♗xe4 ♗xe4+ 46.fxe4 ♞d3+



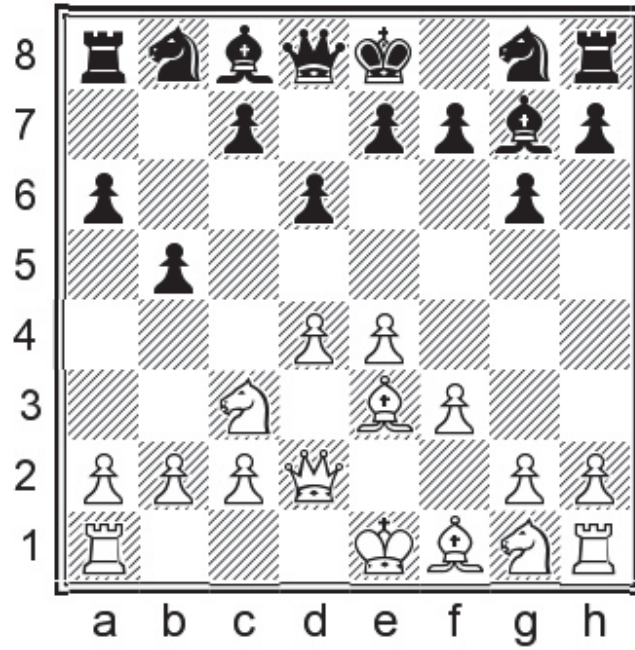
Position after: 46...♞d3+

0-1

Shimanov, Aleksandr (2587)
Shtembuliak, Evgeny (2628)
 Moscow 2020

These notes are substantially redone and expanded from my earlier annotations for ChessPublishing (03. 2020.)

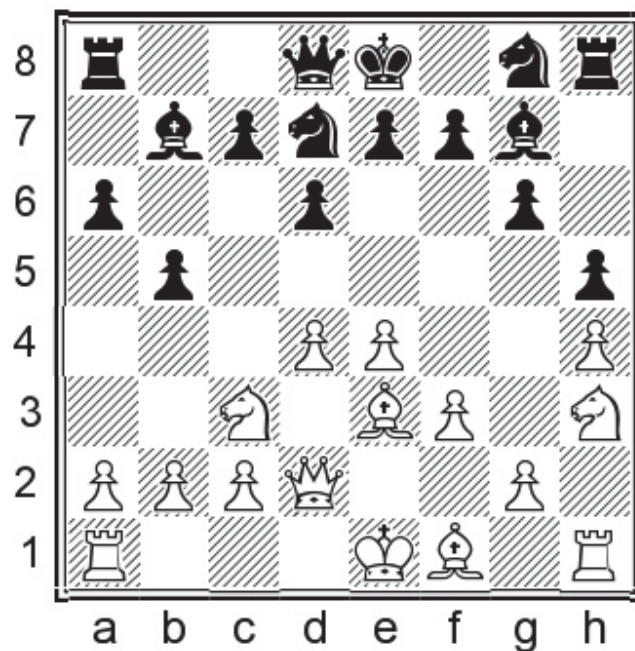
1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♙g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♞d2 b5 6.f3



Position after: 6.f3

In Part IV we will see exactly why this move-order is the most precise one.

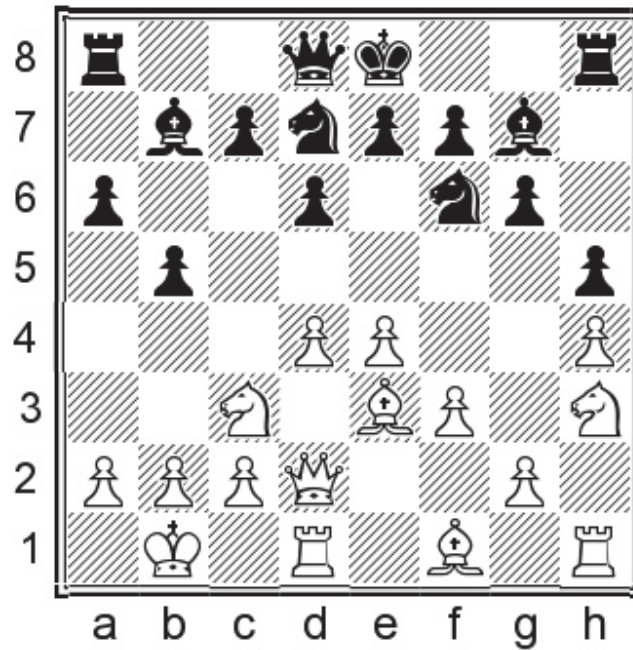
6...♞d7 7.h4 h5 8.♞h3 ♘b7



Position after: 8...♘b7

9.♞g5

A slightly more flexible move-order is the following. 9.0-0-0 ♖gf6 10.♔b1



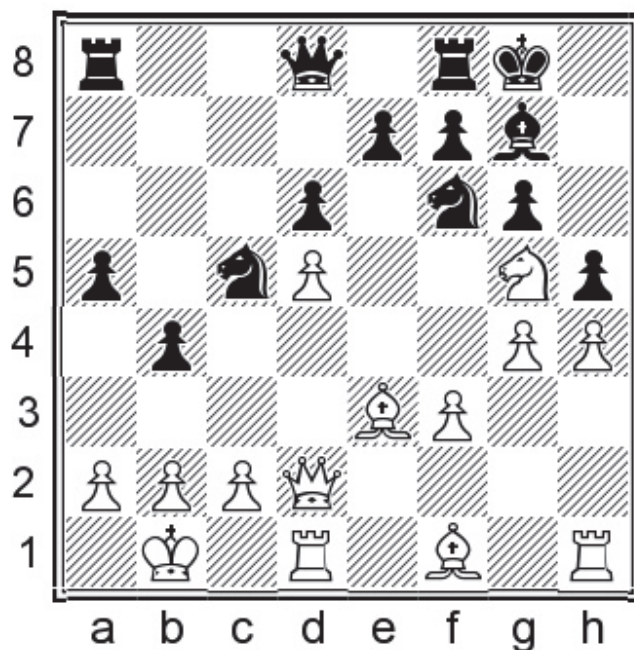
Position after: 10.♔b1

Here White may also play 10.♘g5 (see 9.♘g5) or something like 10.♘f2, also leading to hazardous positions.

A) 10...e6 11.♘g5! transposes back to move 11 of this game.

B) 10...c5?! 11.dxc5 dxc5 12.♘g5! ♔c7 [12...0-0 13.g4±] 13.g4 hxg4 14.fxg4 ♘xg4 15.♙h3±

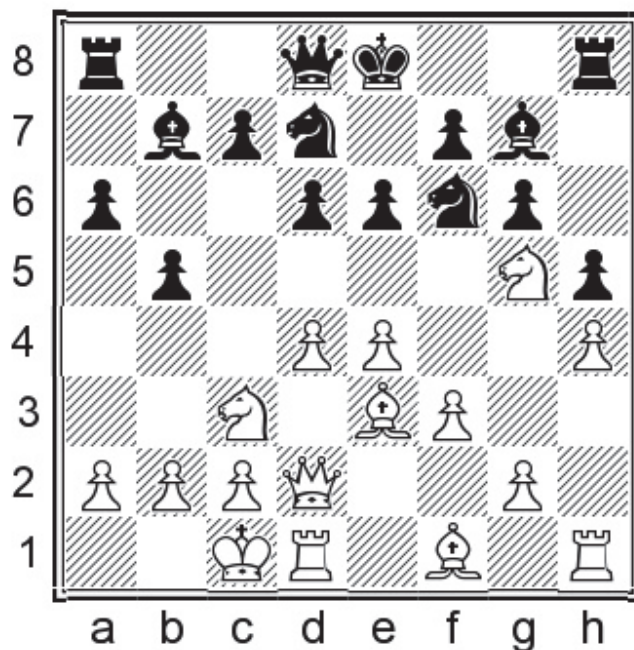
C) 10...0-0 11.♘g5 c5 12.dxc5 ♘xc5 13.g4 b4! 14.♘d5 [14.♘e2 hxg4 15.h5 gxf3] 14...♙xd5 15.exd5 a5±



Position after: 15...a5±

White is slightly better, because he can centralise his pieces better than his opponent (♙c4, ♙d4) and from mid-board they can influence both the kingside and queenside.

9...e6 10.0-0-0 ♖gf6



Position after: 10...♖gf6

After people started realising that they couldn't play simply ...♖gf6 followed by ...0-0, the trend

became ...♘gf6 with ...e6, the idea being to later play ...♙e7. Despite the lack of immediate mating ideas, after precise play White has an advantage. A similar sort of thing can be said about 10...♙c8 11.g3, which is not that relevant right now.

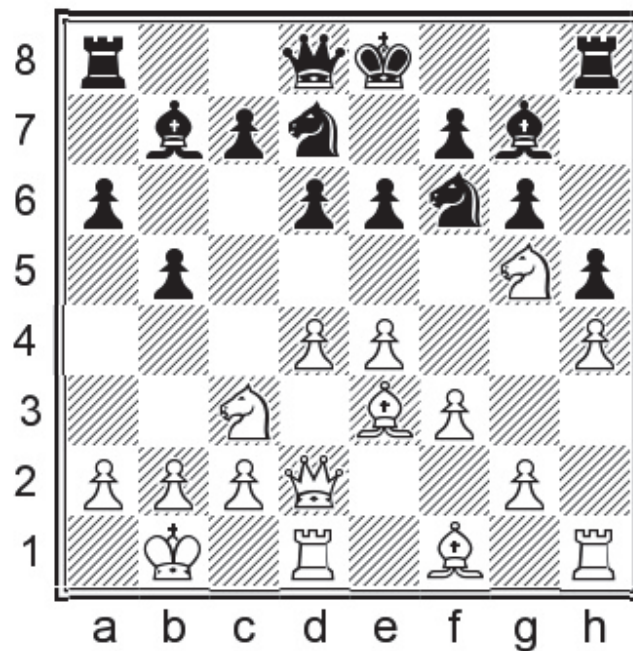
11.♔b1!

Shimanov correctly considers this move to be the best use of a tempo. It isn't yet completely clear where Black will place either his king or queen.

A) 11.♙e2 0-0 12.♔b1 b4 13.♘a4 a5= Now the a4-knight is offside and may be targeted by a future ... ♙c6, so it isn't even really holding back Black's pawn-storm.

B) After 11.♞g1 I think Black may castle since there is no longer a rook lined up on the h-file. (The difference compared to lines with 11.♔b1 ♙e7 12.♞g1 is that here Black can often play ...♙a5.) 11...0-0!? 12.g4 b4 13.♘e2 hxg4 14.fxg4 [14.♘f4 e5!⇒] 14...c5 15.h5 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♙xe4∞ I haven't been able to find anything especially convincing for White here.

C) Perhaps another direction for White is 11.a3!? with a similar idea to the game move, i.e. meeting 11...♙e7 with 12.♞g1!?

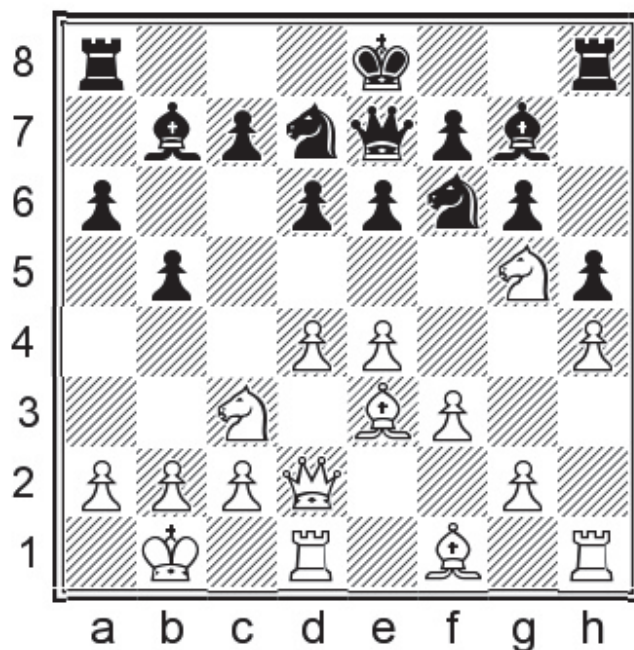


Position after: 11.♔b1!

11...♙e7

On a practical level it is possible to consider playing this position with Black, as long as you have good memory and nerves, but I've still decided to leave it in the annotations section rather than as a recommendation.

11...0-0 12.g4± The attack crashes through.

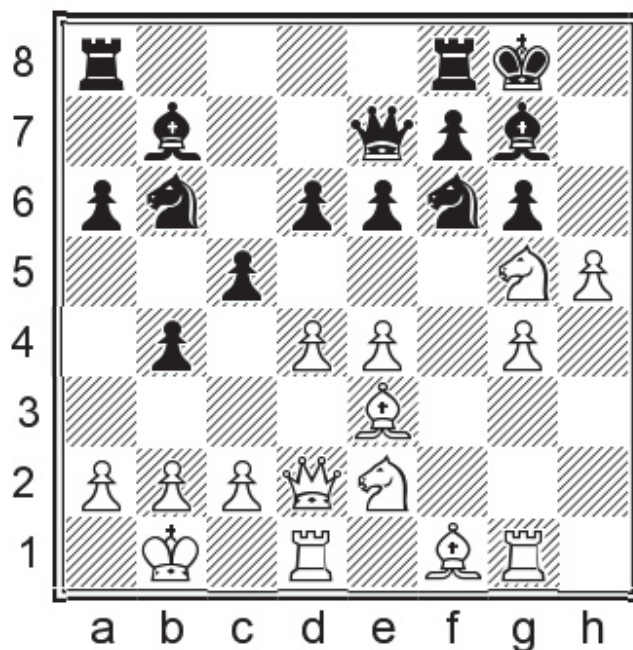


Position after: 11...♔e7

12.a3!?

This might be a little too much prophylaxis, though White's position remains comfortable.

A) On principle White should try and build the attack up with 12.♖g1!? now that Black lacks ...♔a5 ideas, and Black should respond to the rook vacating the h-file by trying short castling, with an incredible mess where he is still a bit worse after best play. 12...0-0!? [12...♖d8 13.♔f2± was an attempt from an email game, Manaenkov, V – Siefring, C ICCF email 2014. It seems like this is a safe route to an edge for White and not really worth going into.] 13.g4 hxg4 14.fxg4 b4 15.♘e2! [15.♘a4?! ♘xe4 16.♔xb4 ♖ab8 17.♔e1!↔ Probably Black benefits slightly from the inclusion of ♔b1 and ...♔e7 and so his position is playable.] 15...c5 16.h5! ♘b6!

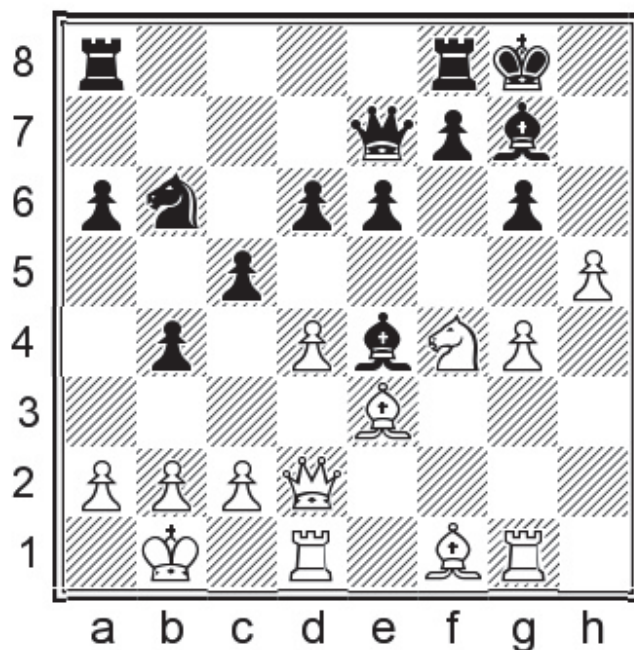


Position after: 16...♖b6!

Black just about avoids losing by force. However after the next move he will be forced into a line that is decidedly worse for him.

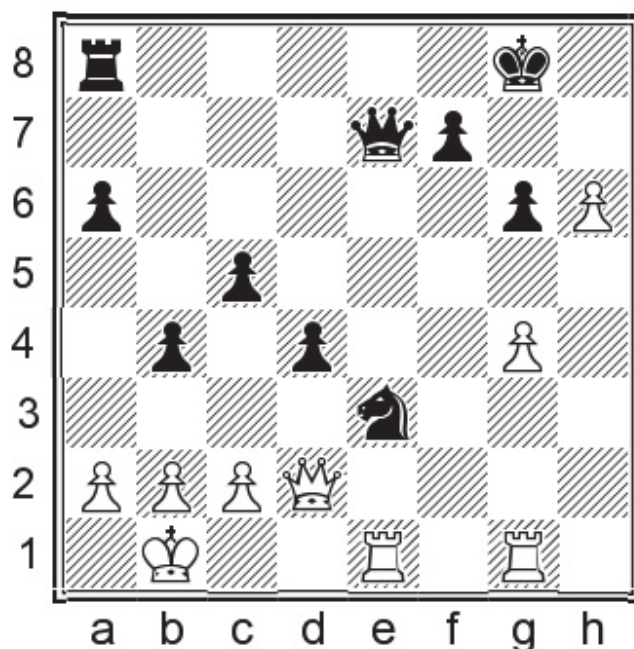
A1) After 17.hxg6?! ♗c4 18.♚c1 ♘xe3 19.♚xe3 ♙h6 20.g7♠ 20...♙xg7 the bishop defends against the immediate mating ideas, and the closed g-file gives Black enough time to run to the queenside. For instance, 21.♖h1 ♜fc8 22.♚h3 cxd4 23.♗g3 [23.♗f4 ♜c5↔] 23...♜f8! 24.♙d3 ♜e8! 25.♗f3 ♜d8!± and White has at most a slight advantage, but due to White's structural issues Black can also play for a win!

A2) 17.♗f4! ♗xe4 18.♗xe4 ♙xe4



Position after: 18...♙xe4

19.h6! [19.hxg6 fxg6 20.dxc5 ♘d5!! 21.♘xd5 exd5 22.cxd6 ♚xd6± Black has a worse structure but this is far from terminal.] 19...♙xd4 20.♙xd4 e5□ 21.♞e1! [21.♙f2 exf4 22.♚xf4 g5! 23.♚h2 d5∞] 21...exd4 22.♙d3 d5 23.♘xd5 ♘xd5 24.♙xe4 ♘e3 25.♙xa8 ♞xa8±

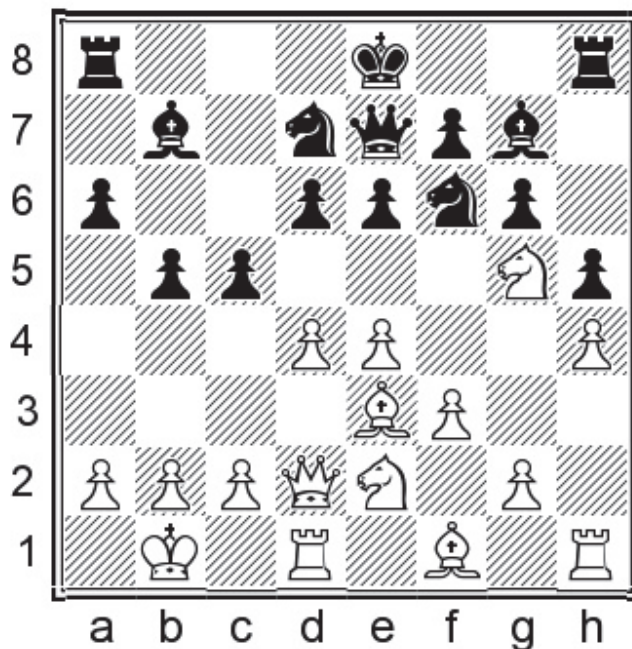


Position after: 25...♞xa8±

The position is not completely clear and Black has definite practical chances (especially at short time controls) but there are enough open lines that the rooks should eventually be able to prove

their worth.

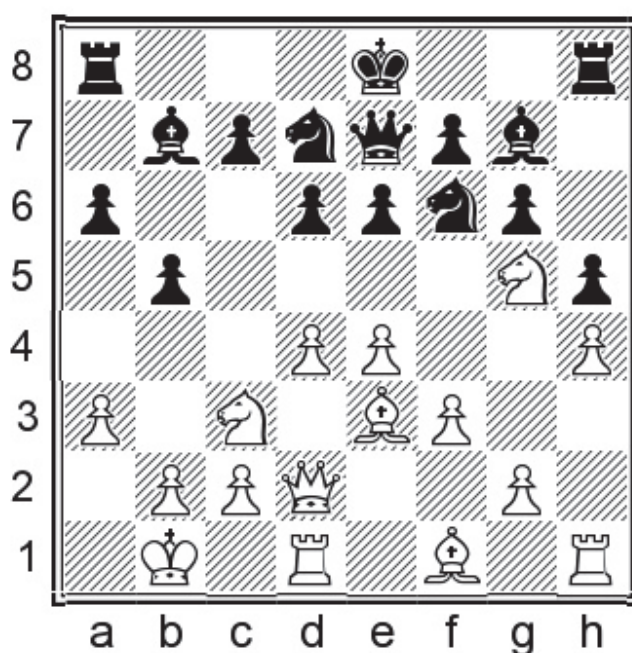
B) 12.♘e2 This is the main line, but it's not great; if people keep playing it then maybe Black can consider going for these positions after all! 12...c5!



Position after: 12...c5!

B1) 13.dxc5 dxc5 [13...d5!?] 14.♙f4 e5 15.♙e3 0-0∞ is basically okay for Black.

B2) 13.c3 e5 14.♘c1 exd4 15.cxd4 0-0♞ Now see Mammadzada, G – Maghsoodloo, P Voronezh 2018, where Black managed to completely turn the tables.

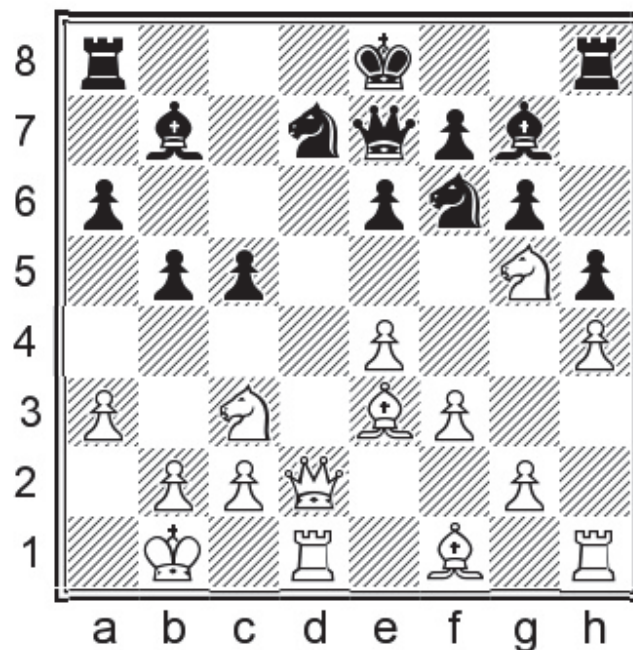


Position after: 12.a3!?

12...♖d8!

Here this is reasonable prophylaxis by Black. It is clear that castling is still not good, but not clear whether Black should play ...c6 or ...c5. This move is a happy medium.

- A) 12...♞b6!?± with the idea of a future long castling is not entirely stupid, but this is not a position where we should be looking for an equalising improvement anyway.
- B) 12...0-0 13.g4± works well for White here.
- C) 12...c5?! 13.dxc5 dxc5



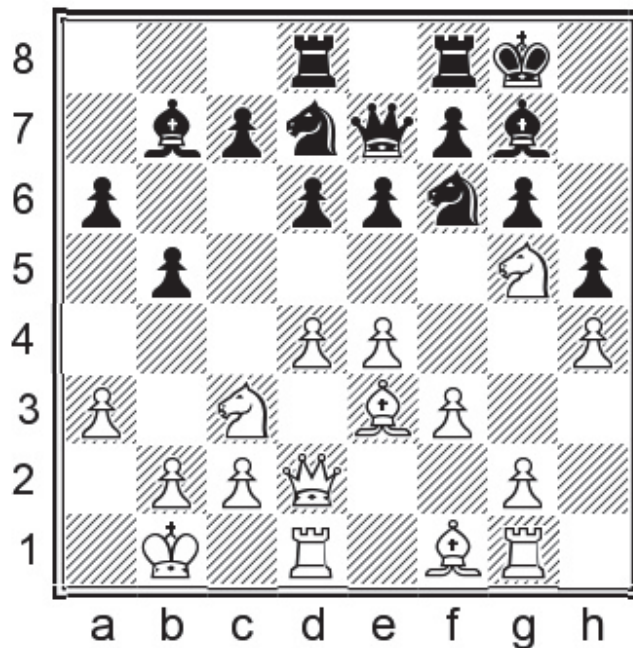
Position after: 13...dxc5

14.♙f4! [14.♚d6 ♚xd6 15.♞xd6 ♙f8 16.♞d2 c4 17.♙e2 ♙c5 18.♙xc5 ♞xc5 19.a4 ♙c6= Vidit, S – Maghsoodloo, P Biel 2019] 14...e5 15.♙e3± Here the issue is that Black lacks a decent choice that isn't ...0-0, and concretely 16.g4! works well as a response to castling.

13.♞g1

- A) On ChessPublishing I also gave 13.d5!? exd5 14.exd5 0-0 15.♙d3± which seems like a decent way of trying to make the non-committal 12...♖d8 look passive. However Black is very solid and can just play something like ...♞de8, trying to solve his problems by trading major pieces.
- B) It is not critical for either side's opening repertoire (since I believe 12.♞g1 was best anyway) but an alternative way of building up the attack was 13.♙e2 0-0 14.g4 c5 which may still be a bit better for White.

13...0-0



Position after: 13...0-0

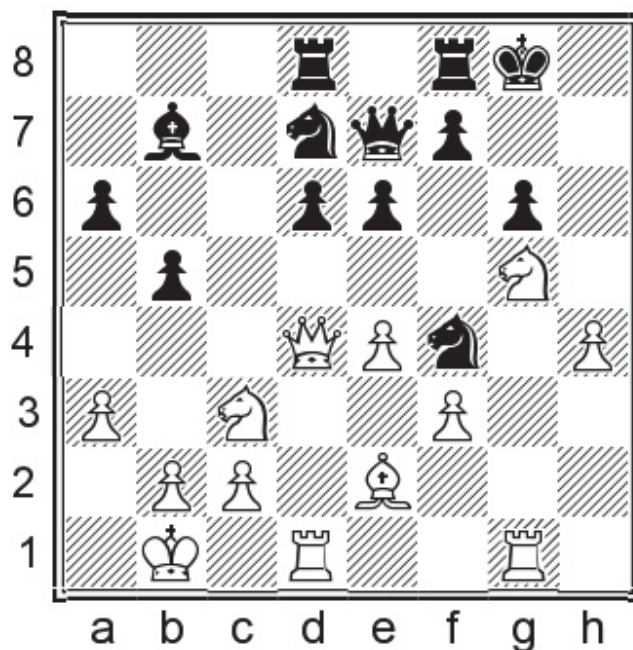
In keeping with the usual rule that there is no good time to castle short in this line, but the least worst time to do it is straight after White plays ♖g1.

14.g4 c5 15.gxh5?!

Now Black obtains equality.

In my opinion a useful way to utilise the benefit of ♖g1 as compared to ♔e2 was a queen lift:
15.♚h2!? hxg4 16.fxg4 b4 17.axb4 cxb4 18.♘a2± followed by h5.

15...♘xh5 16.♔e2 cxd4 17.♔xd4 ♔xd4 18.♚xd4 ♘f4



Position after: 18... Nf4

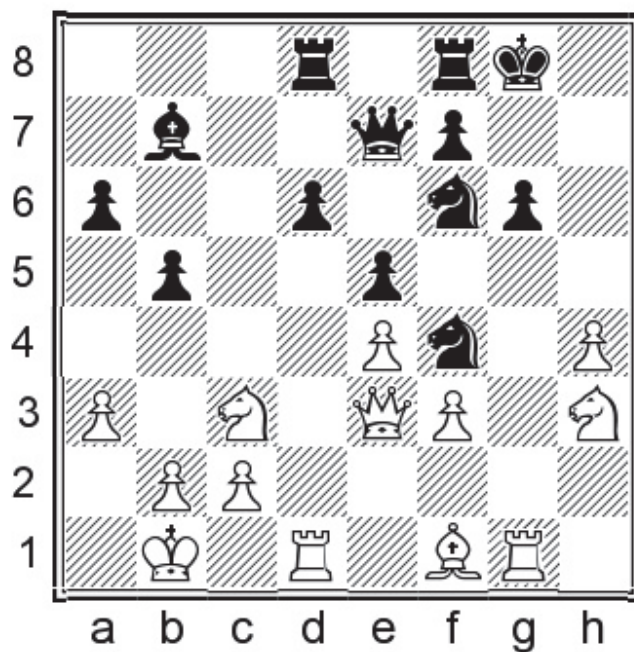
So after tremendous struggles Black has obtained a reasonable, Sicilian-type position.

19. Qe3

White makes a reasonable practical choice to keep the queens on. It's instructive to see how chances can be retained in these Sicilian-type positions even if Black has officially equalised.

19. h5!? Nxh5 20. Qxd6 Bxd6 21. Rxd6 Ne5= Despite White's activity, Black's good structure means he holds the balance.

19...e5 20. Qf1 Nf6 21. Nh3

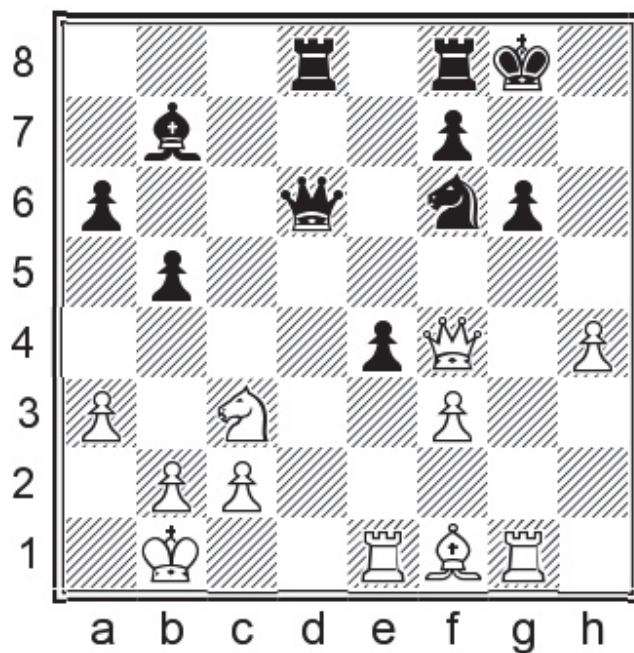


Position after: 21. ♘h3

21... ♗xh3

Practically this is probably an error.

I think Black should play 21...d5 aiming for trades. 22. ♗xf4 exf4 23. ♕xf4 dxe4 24. ♖e1 ♕d6!



Position after: 24... ♕d6!

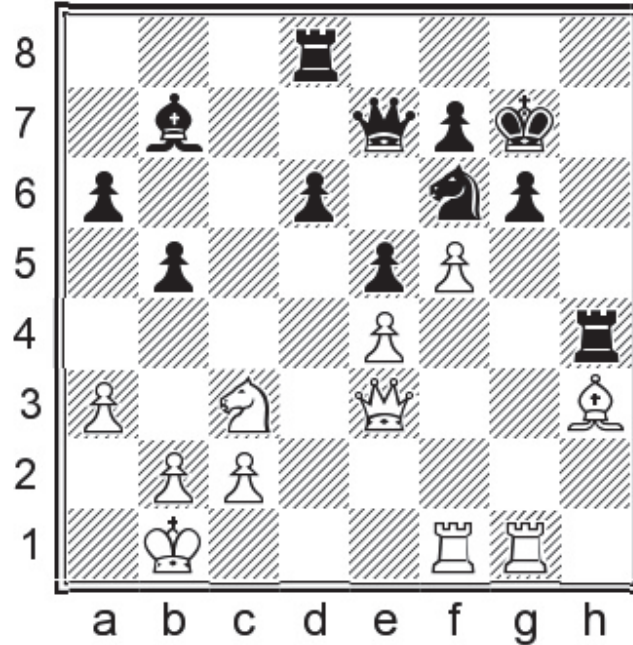
Black temporarily gives White a pawn, but it's not possible to keep the pawn. 25. ♕h6 [25. ♕xd6 ♖xd6

26. ♖xe4 ♙xe4 27. fxe4 ♜e8= and the e4-pawn will drop.] 25...exf3 26. ♙d3 f2! 27. ♞xg6+ fxg6 28. ♚xg6+ ♔h8 29. ♚h6+= White is only attacking with two pieces and has to take a draw.

22. ♙xh3 ♔g7 23. ♞df1 ♜h8!?

Worth considering was 23...a5 24. ♖xb5 d5!?

24.f4 ♞xh4 25.f5



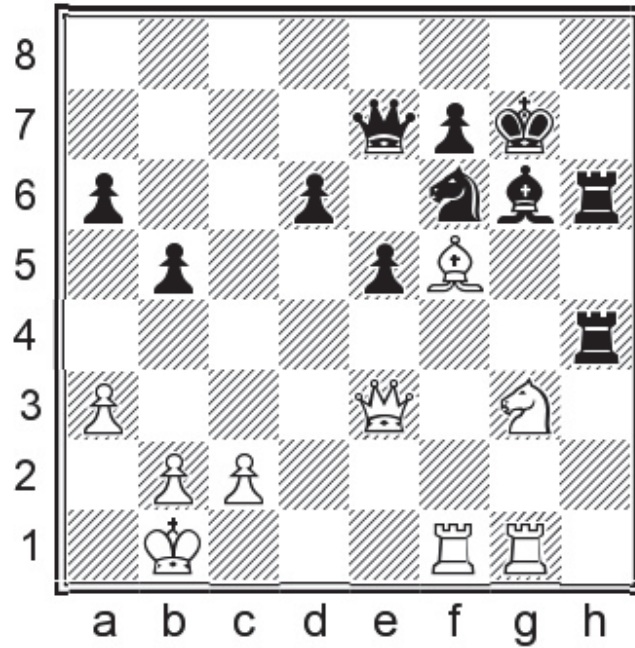
Position after: 25.f5

25...♙xe4?!

After this White develops an attack which will ultimately be Black's doom.

25...♞dh8! 26. ♙g2 ♜8h6= is safe and White is getting nowhere.

26.fxg6 ♙xg6 27. ♙f5 ♞dh8 28. ♖e2 ♜8h6 29. ♖g3



Position after: 29. ♖g3

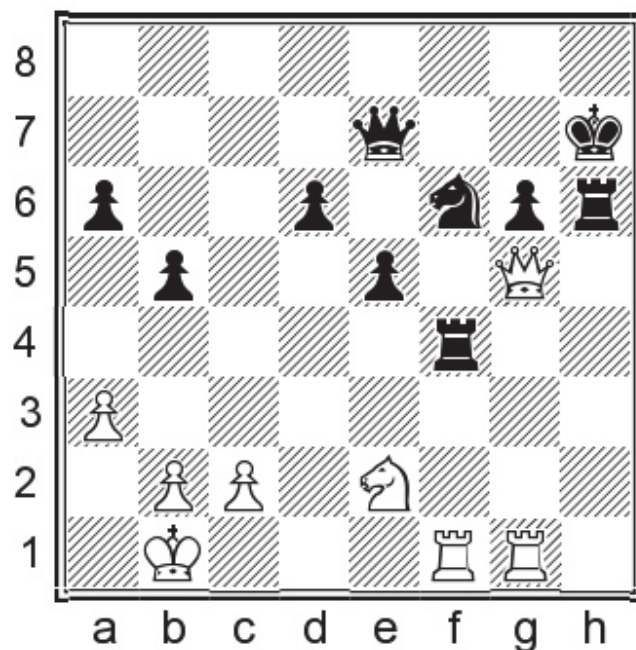
29...♔h7?

This is nearly a decisive mistake, and I'll give the rest without comment and leave you to play through White's masterful attack. 29...♔h8! is the lesser evil.

30. ♕xg6+ fxg6 31. ♖g5! ♜f4

The point, of course, is that after 31...♞d5?? Black loses a piece and the game. 32. ♖xe7+ ♞xe7 33. ♜f7+ ♔g8 34. ♜xe7 ♜g4 35. ♔a2 ♜h3 36. ♞e2+-

32. ♞e2



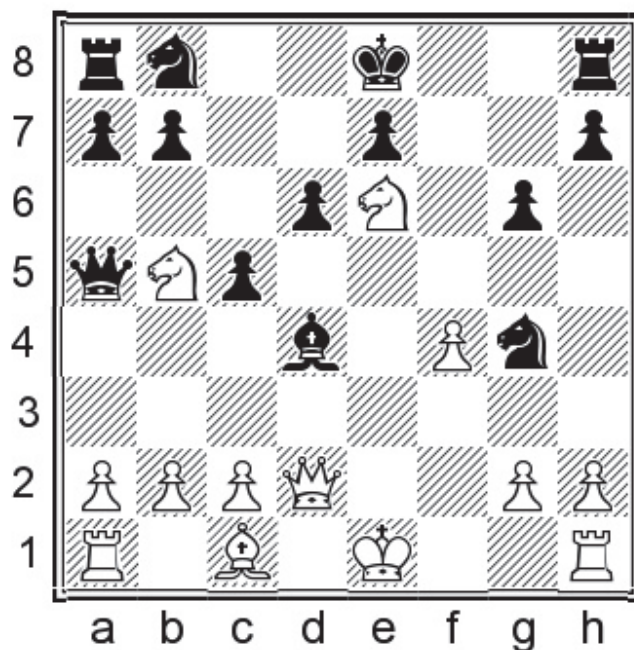
Position after: 32. ♖e2

32... ♖f5 33. ♖xf5 gxf5 34. ♚xf5+ ♔h8 35. ♚c8+ ♔h7 36. ♚f5+ ♔h8 37. ♚c8+ ♔h7 38. ♚xa6+- ♖g6
 39. ♖h1+ ♖h6 40. ♖d1 d5 41. ♚xb5 ♔g6 42. ♖c3 d4 43. ♖g1+ ♔f7 44. ♚c4+ ♔e8 45. ♖d5 ♖xd5
 46. ♚c8+ ♔f7 47. ♚g8+ ♔f6 48. ♚g5+

1-0

Karjakin, Sergey
 Grischuk, Alexander
 Moscow 2011

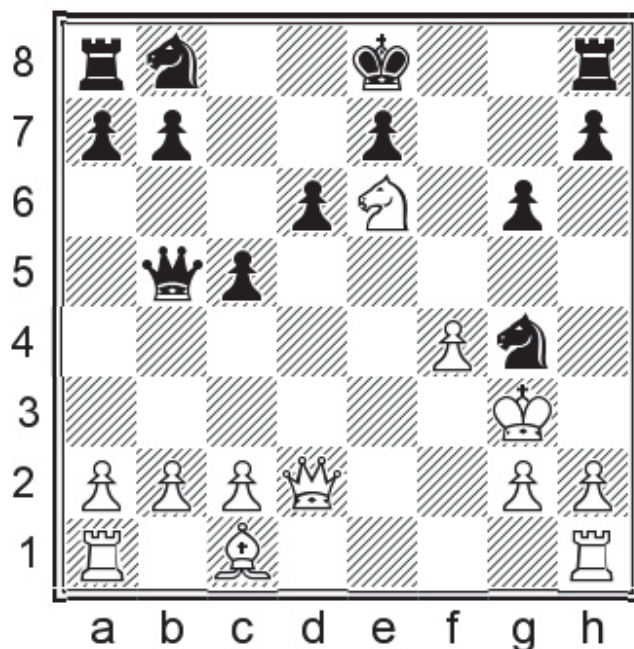
1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♖f6 3.♖c3 g6 4.f4 ♗g7 5.♖f3 c5 6.♗b5+ ♗d7 7.e5 ♖g4 8.e6 fxe6 9.♖g5 ♗xd4
 10.♖xe6 ♗xb5 11.♖xb5 ♚a5+ 12.♚d2



Position after: 12. ♔d2

12... ♚xd2+

The move 12... ♗f2+ also exists, but I don't trust Black's position here. (My recommendation in Part II is to swap queens.) 13. ♖d1 ♜e3+ 14. ♖e2 ♚xb5+ 15. ♖xf2 ♞g4+ 16. ♖g3



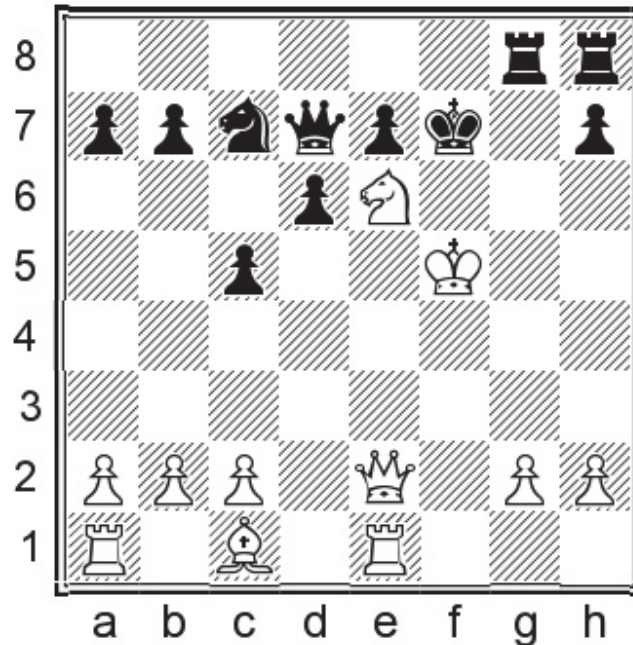
Position after: 16. ♖g3

16... ♞a6! It turns out that Black doesn't need to formally defend the knight on g4. [16... ♚d7?! 17. ♝e1

♞a6 18.b4!? and it is well known that Black is in trouble.]

A) 17.♔xg4? ♚d7 18.♞e1 ♞c7

A1) 19.♞e2 ♔f7 20.f5? gxf5+ 21.♔xf5 ♞ag8



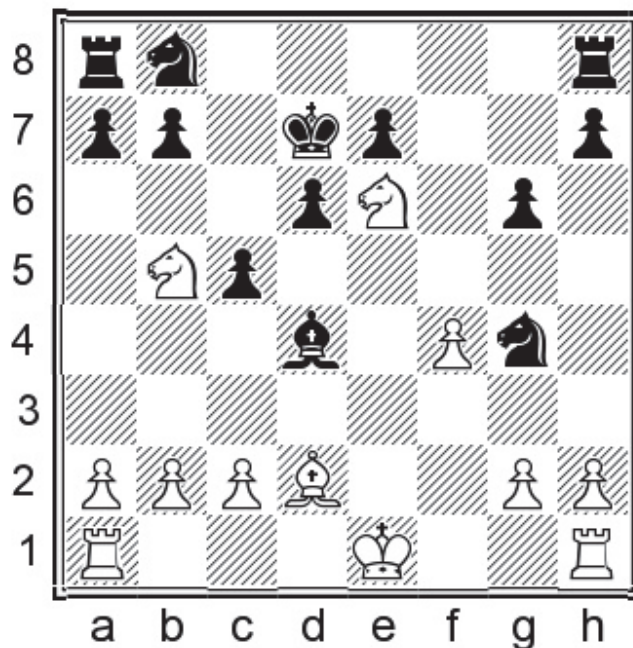
Position after: 21...♞ag8

This was given as good by Stohl and indeed after 22.♞f1 ♔e8 23.♔f4 ♚xe6 24.♞xe6 ♞xe6+ 25.♔e4 ♞xg2–+ the Black player scored a memorable scalp over an English IM in McPhillips, J – Davis, L Aberystwyth 2014.

A2) Thus, the knight on e6 was immune anyway. 19.♞c3 ♞f8 20.♞b3 d5 21.♞xb7 ♞xe6

B) 17.♞e1 ♞h6 18.b3 [18.h3!? can also be considered, and White's bishop should be the better piece in general.] 18...♞f5+ 19.♔f2 h5 20.♞b2 ♞g8 21.♞ad1± Modern engines prefer White's position, vindicating Grischuk's choice to vary.

13.♞xd2 ♔d7



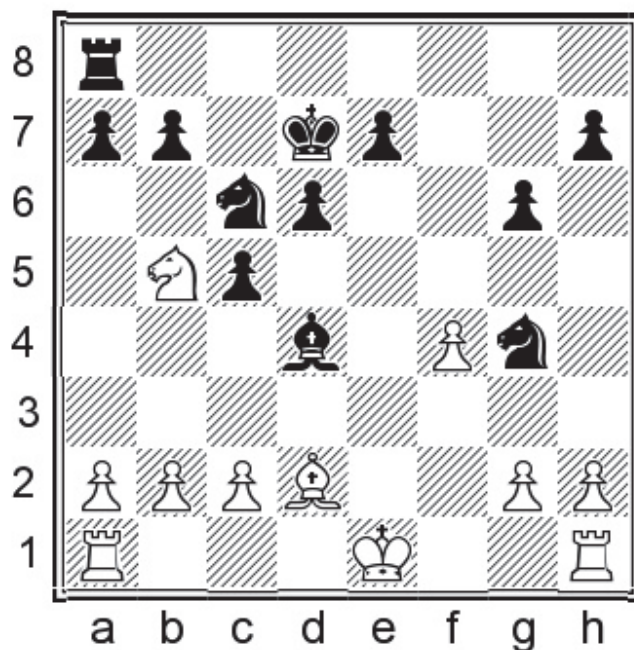
Position after: 13...♔d7

14. ♖bxd4

With the queens off White cannot rely on the bishop being superior to the knight anymore, and Black also has various other advantages such as central pawns and a well-placed king. The present game illustrates how Black can use the imbalances in his favour.

A) 14. ♘ec7!?

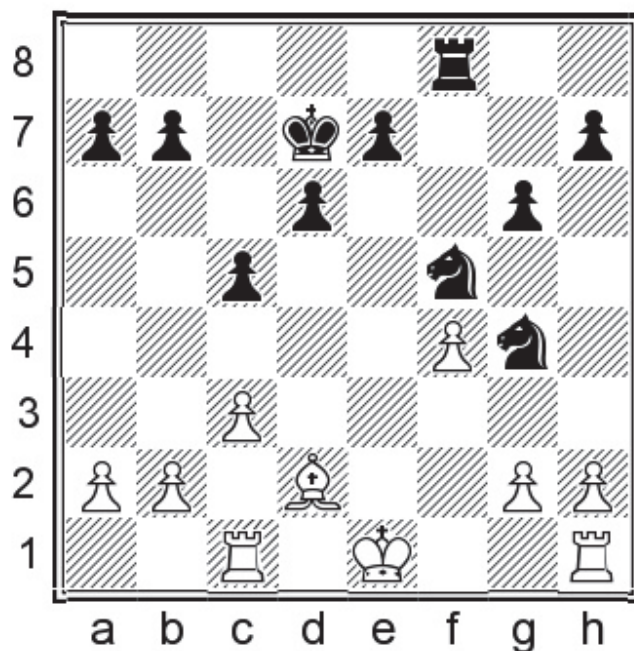
A1) A previous annotator gave 14... ♘c6 15. ♘xa8 ♖xa8 as an alternative, and it is definitely worth considering alongside my line from II.4.3, but White does appear to be better.



Position after: 15... Rxa8

A1.1) 16.h3!? So that if the knight retreats White will be able to castle. 16... Bf2 [16... Bh6?!
17.0-0-0±] 17.Rf1 Bxe4 18.Bxd4 cxd4∞

A1.2) 16.Bxd4 Bxd4 [16...cxd4 17.0-0 e6 18.c3± now makes less sense.] 17.Rc1 Rf8 18.c3 Bf5



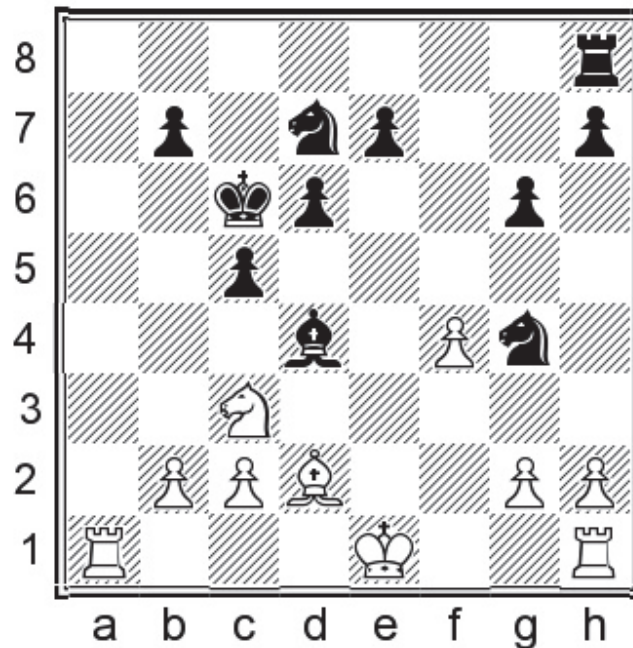
Position after: 18... Bf5

19.Qe2!?N [19.h3 Bf6 20.g4 Bg3 21.Rg1 Bfe4 22.Rc2 h5∞ Vestergard, S – Pfiffner, P ICCF
email 2009] 19...e6⇒ Black's central pawns are not that mobile, so maybe White can get a

tangible edge with a couple more precise moves.

A1.3) 16.c3 ♔g7 17.0-0 e6 18.♖ae1 a6 19.♘a3 d5± In general White should be a bit better here since Black has not managed to pose concrete problems, but it's still hard to play against the central majority in a position with so few open lines.

A2) 14...a6! 15.♗xa8 axb5 16.a4 bxa4 17.♗b6+ ♔c6 18.♗xa4 ♘d7 19.♗c3

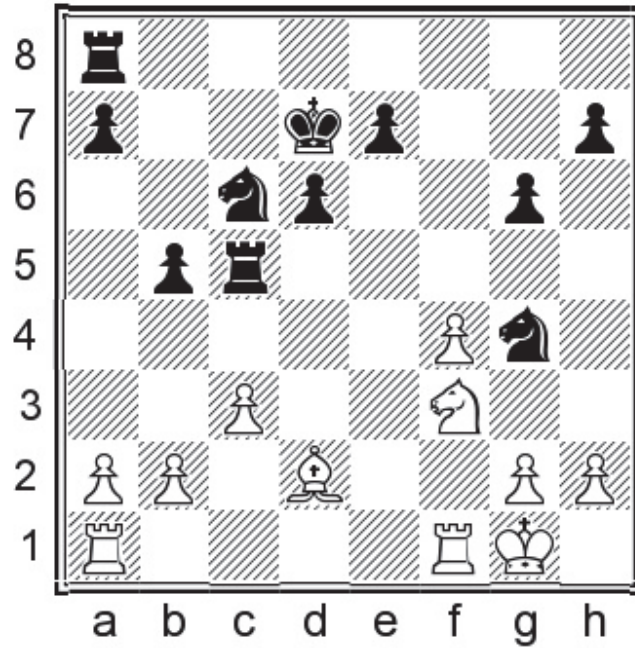


Position after: 19.♗c3

19...♗b6 [19...e5! is the move I give in Part II.] 20.♗d1 ♗c4 21.c3 ♔g7 22.♔c1 White consolidated his edge but was ultimately unable to convert it in Radjabov, T – Ivanchuk, V Monte Carlo blindfold 2007.

B) 14.♗bc7? ♗a6 15.♗xa6 [15.♗xa8 ♔xe6+] 15...bxa6 16.♗xd4 cxd4

14...cxd4 15.♗xd4 ♖c8 16.0-0 ♖c5! 17.c3 ♗c6 18.♗f3 b5



Position after: 18...b5

Black is playing quite powerfully. For the moment White keeps pace, but in my opinion the bishop is quite hard to handle in such positions.

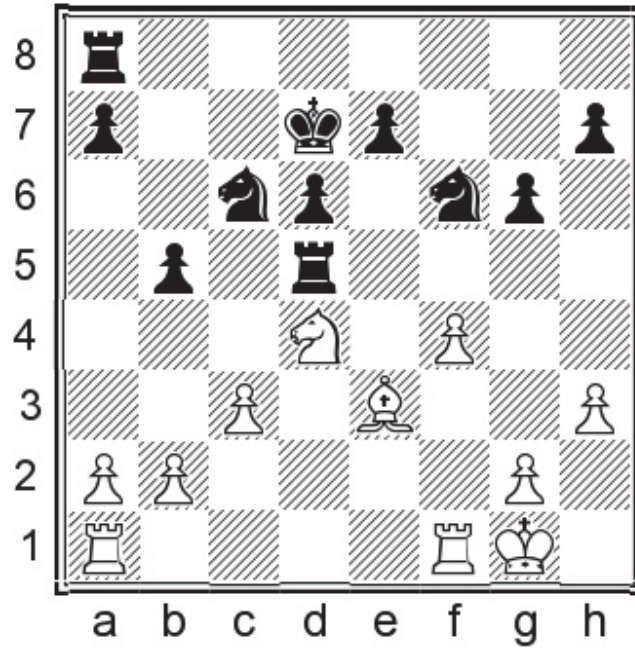
19.h3

Perhaps the start of a 'drift' or perhaps White doesn't know what to play for.

19.a4!? has been suggested as a way to open lines. 19...bxa4 20.♖xa4 ♜b8 21.b4 ♜c4 and now most likely White should open more lines by offering a knight trade: 22.♘d4=

19...♘f6 20.♙e3 ♜d5 21.♘d4

At this point 21.a4 can be met by 21...b4!♞ so White has lost his chance to open the position.



Position after: 21. ♖d4

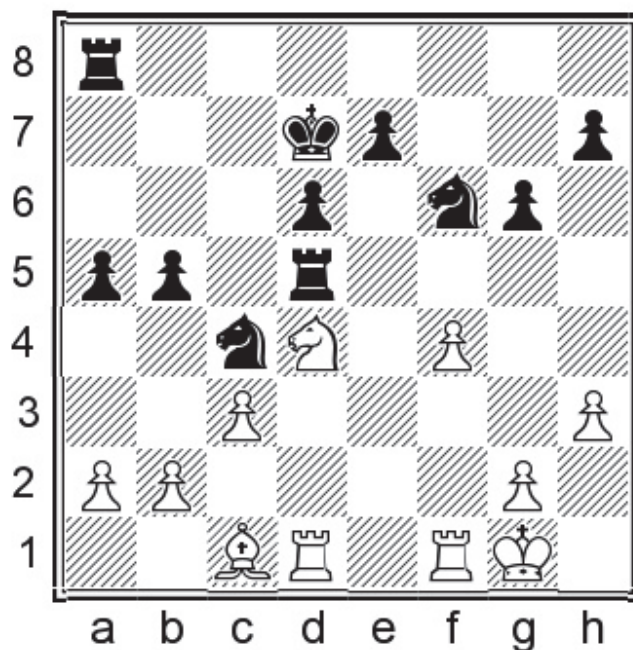
21... ♗a5!?

21...a5 is potentially a bit more accurate, locking down White's queenside majority. Black does get round to this two moves later though.

22. ♖ad1

22.a4!? should still be met by 22...b4 23.cxb4 ♘c4 24. ♕f2 ♗xb2 but it's clear that White has one or two active ideas if he continues with 25.b5!?

22... ♗c4 23. ♕c1 a5

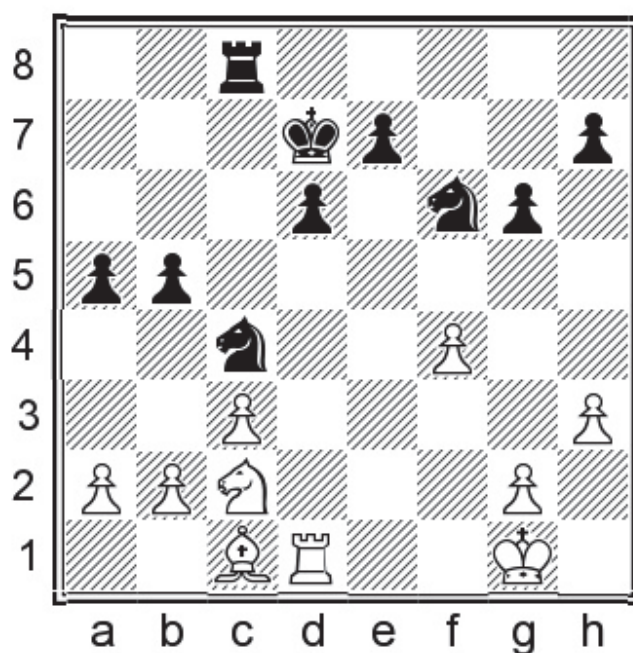


Position after: 23...a5

24. ♖c2?!

I don't exactly understand why White didn't appreciate the importance of finding a better square for the bishop. The continuation 24. b3 ♜b6 25. ♕b2 a4 ♞ seems like the most logical one for both sides.

24... ♜xd1 25. ♜xd1 ♜c8



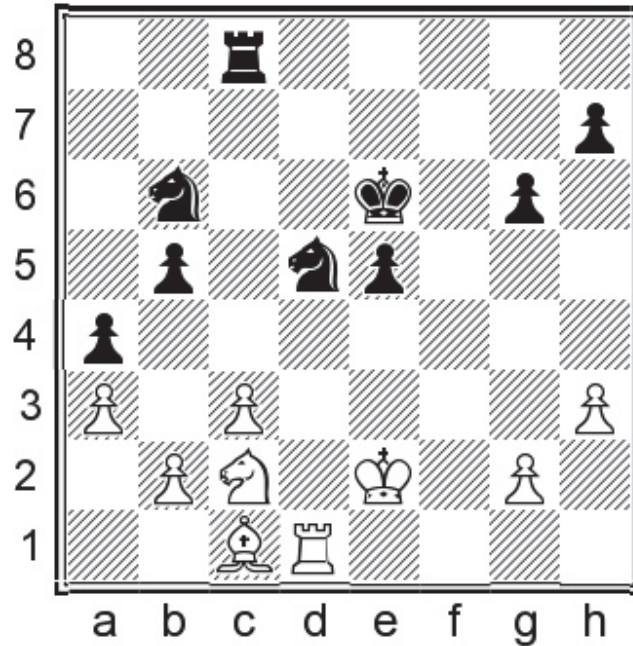
Position after: 25...♜c8

From this point onwards Black's advantage continues to grow with simple, logical moves.

26.♔f1

26.♘d4 b4⚡ This does give White a better majority, but from years of experience I can tell you that the passed d-pawn is more important than the passed a-pawn with so many pieces left on the board.

26...♗b6 27.a3 a4! 28.♞d4 ♘fd5 29.♔e2 e5 30.fxe5 dxe5 31.♞d1 ♔e6



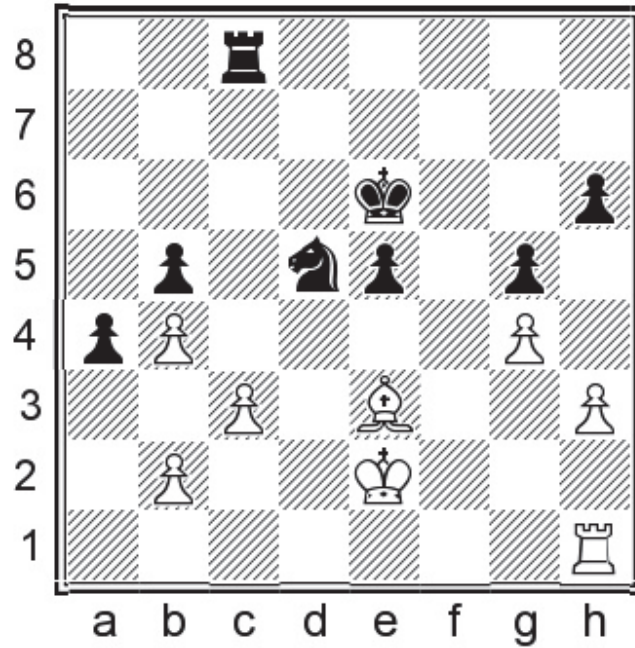
Position after: 31...♔e6

32.♞f1?!

The way the knights are traded in the game, Black gets more to work with.

A possible improvement was 32.♘e1⚡ as suggested by Grischuk.

32...♗c4 33.♞f3 h6 34.♗b4 ♗xb4 35.axb4 g5⚡ 36.g4 ♞g8! 37.♞f1 ♗b6 38.♔e3 ♗d5 39.♞h1 ♞c8



Position after: 39...Rc8

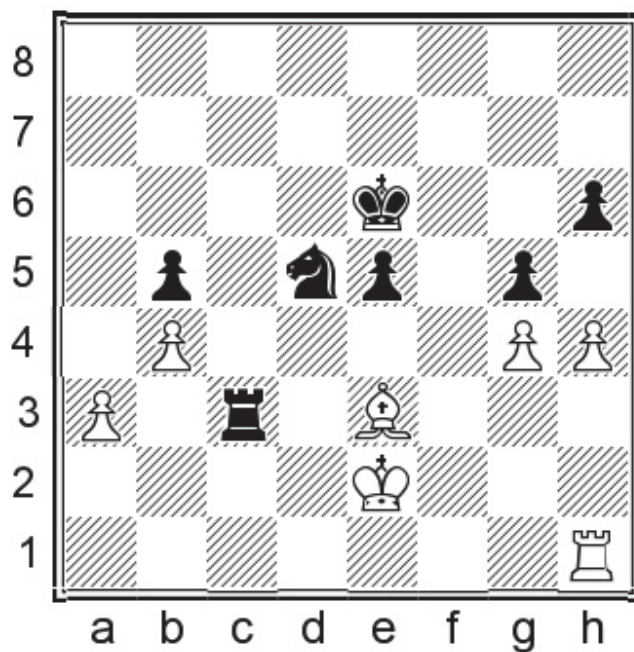
40.h4?

After this it appears that White played the endgame as best he could, but it was just not possible to save.

A) Most likely 40.♙c5 ♜d8 is also mathematically winning.

B) 40.♜a1 ♘f4+ 41.♙d2 ♙d5 Black has very good winning chances, but it's not over yet.

40...a3! 41.bxa3 ♜xc3



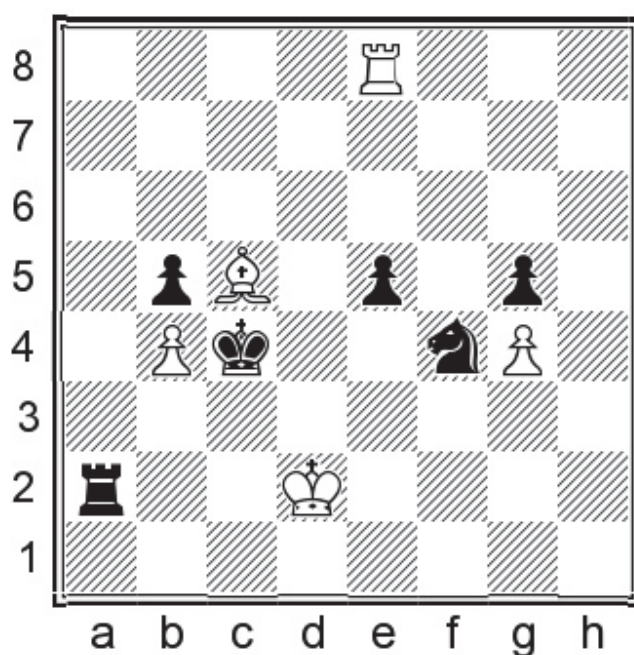
Position after: 41...Rxc3

42. Qc5

A) 42. Qd2 Nf4+! -+ This is clean; now White doesn't get to create a passed g-pawn.

B) 42. hxg5 Rxe3+ 43. Qd2 hxg5 and the tricks don't work.

42... Nf4+ 43. Qd2 Rxa3 44. hxg5 hxg5 45. Rh8 Qd5 46. Rd8+ Qc4 47. Re8 Qd5 48. Rb8 Qc4 49. Re8 Ra2+!

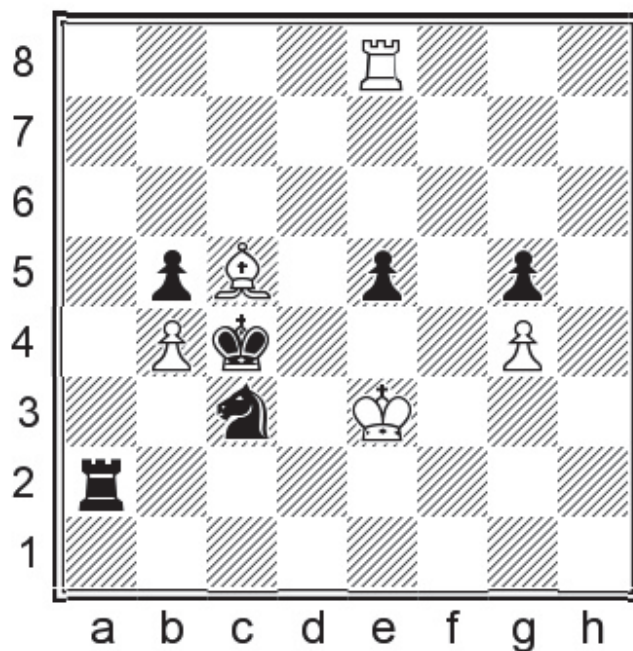


Position after: 49...♖a2!

50.♔e3

50.♔e1 ♖d3+ 51.♔f1 ♖xc5 52.bxc5 ♔d5!! There is no reason to let White trade pawns unnecessarily. Now Black forces, at a minimum, the technically winning 'e+g' ending.

50...♖d5+ 51.♔f3 ♖a3+ 52.♔e2 ♖c3+ 53.♔e3 ♖a2!

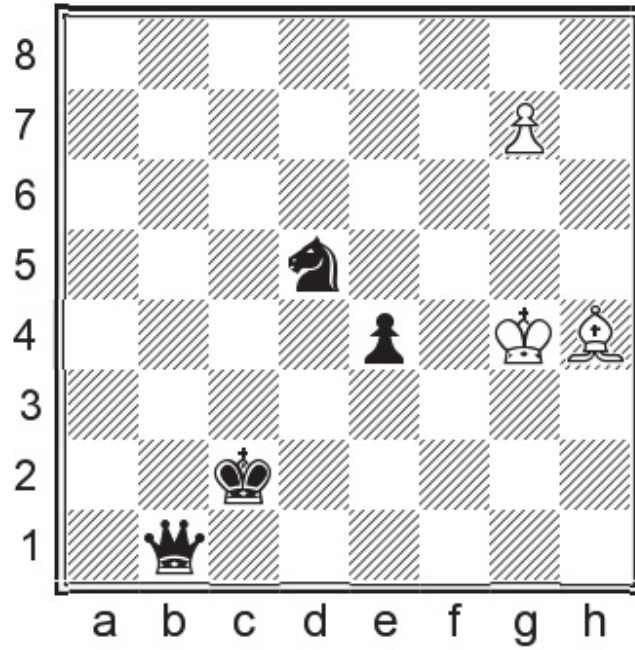


Position after: 53...♖a2!

54.♖c8

54.♖e7 ♖d5+ 55.♔e4 ♖xe7 56.♖xe7 ♖f2! With two extra pawns.

54...♖e2+ 55.♔f3 e4+ 56.♔g3 ♖c2! 57.♔h3 ♖d5 58.♖e7+ ♔b3 59.♖xc2 ♔xc2 60.♖xg5 ♖xb4 61.♖h4 ♖d5 62.g5 b4 63.♔g4 b3 64.g6 b2 65.g7 b1=♚



Position after: 65...b1=♔

After White makes his new queen Black can win it.

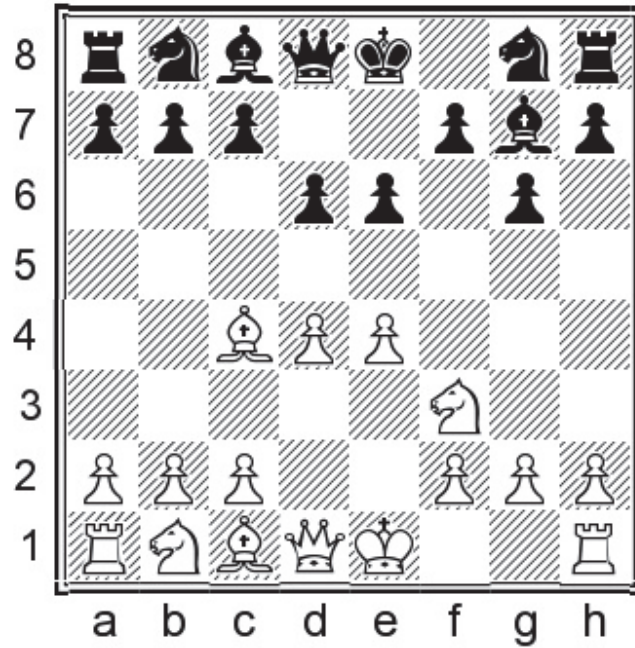
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Hebden, Mark (2426)

Fernandez, Daniel (2461)

4NCL Congress 2018

1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♔g7 3.♘f3 d6 4.♔c4 e6



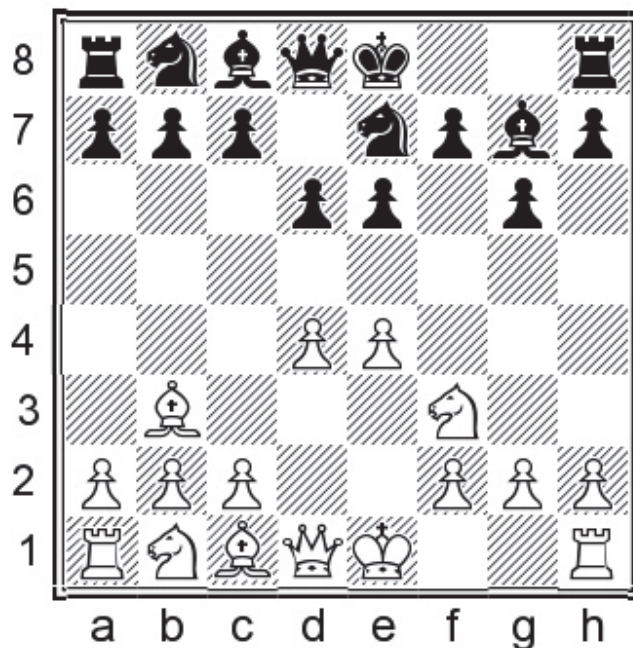
Position after: 4...e6

I don't advocate this move in chapter III.1 because it doesn't guarantee equality, and I believe it's possible to equalise as well as have a more interesting game after 4...♘f6. The present game was instrumental in creating this impression of mine.

5.c3

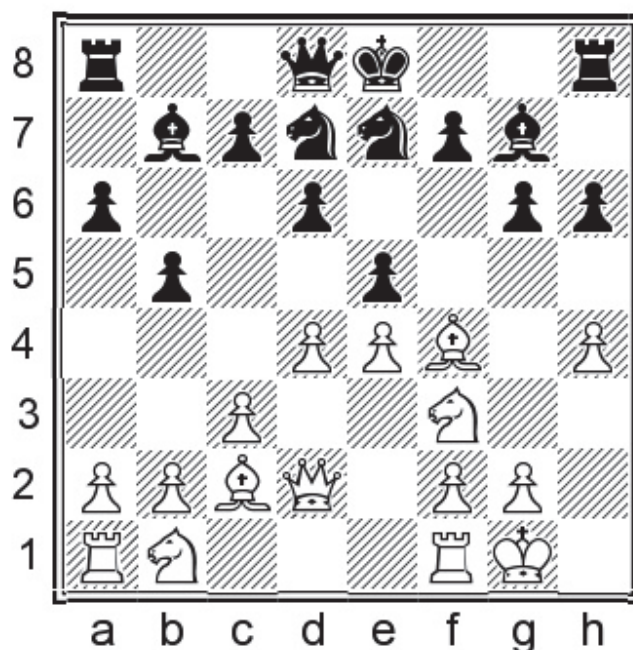
A) 5.0-0 d5! 6.♙d3 dxe4 7.♙xe4 ♘d7 This extra option gives Black equality, and so White should avoid it.

B) I think the most precise order for White starts with 5.♙b3!? ♘e7



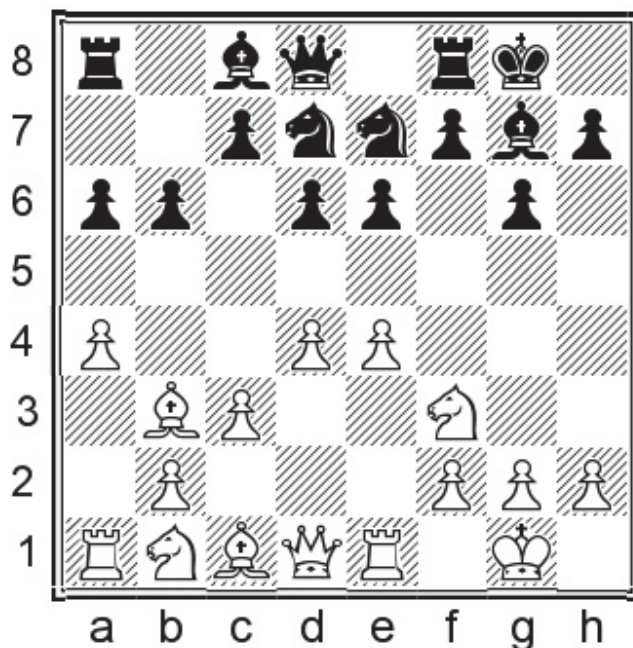
Position after: 5...♞e7

B1) One subtlety of move-order which is worth pointing out is that if White starts with 6.h4, Black should immediately reply ...h6. In some positions ...h5 is also OK, but those tend to be the ones where White has already committed his dark-square bishop to a square other than g5. Then, White can stop his opponent short-castling, but in exchange must worry about ideas like ...e5. For instance: 6...h6 7.♞f4 a6 8.♞d2 b5 9.c3 ♞b7 10.♞c2 ♞d7 11.0-0 e5!=



Position after: 11...e5!=

B2) 6.0-0 When White castles kingside, Black can do likewise. 6...0-0 Now in some sense the next decision White needs to take is with the c-pawn. In case he leaves it at home, play more or less transposes to the Hippo chapter, which leaves the text and the note move. 7.c3! ♖d7 8.♖e1 Now the next three half-moves should follow in some order: Black needs to unravel the queenside and White should try and get a4 in so that he can later play a5 and also to avoid the position-types from the first note. 8...a6 9.a4 b6

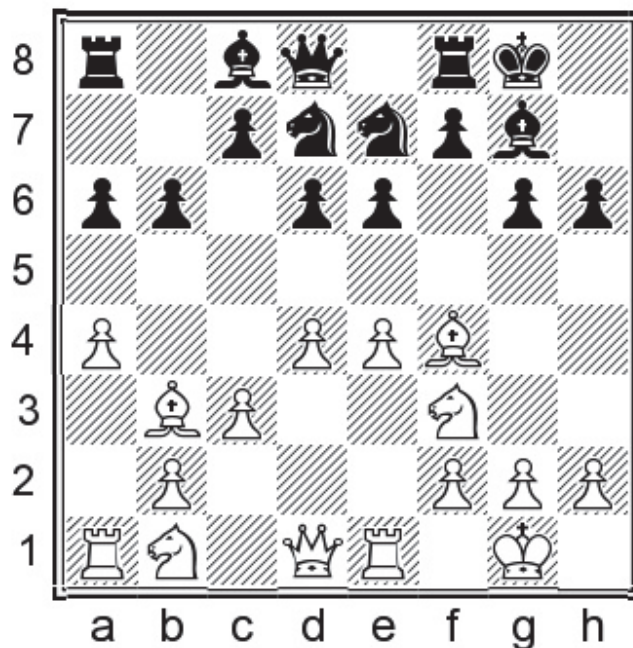


Position after: 9...b6

B2.1) If White places the bishop on the edge of the board Black can play to trade it off: 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4 g5 12.♗g3 ♖g6 13.♗c2 ♗b7 ♞ and while White continues being unable to play e5, Black can get in ...♜f6-h5. Obviously, this line would have certain similarities to the one with 10.♗f4.

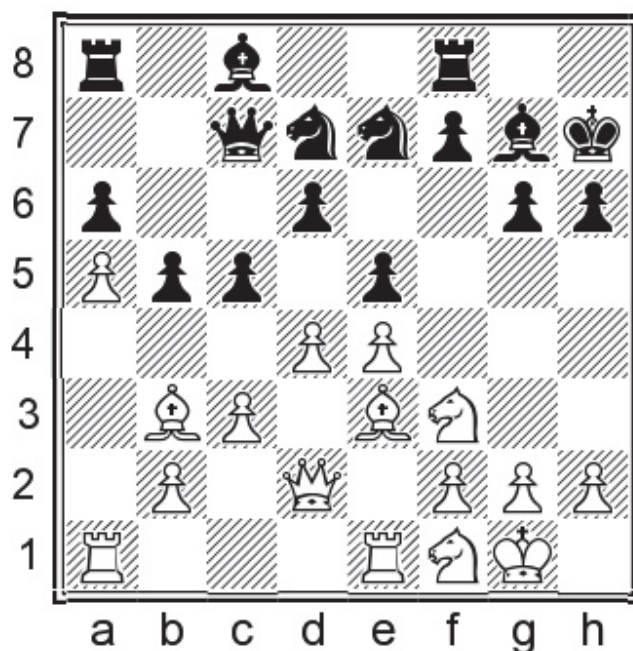
B2.2) 10.♗e3 ♗b7 11.♞bd2 c5= just sees the bishop get in the way of everything else.

B2.3) Where does White want the dark-squared bishop? It seems that everything else has been decided. 10.♗f4! h6



Position after: 10...h6

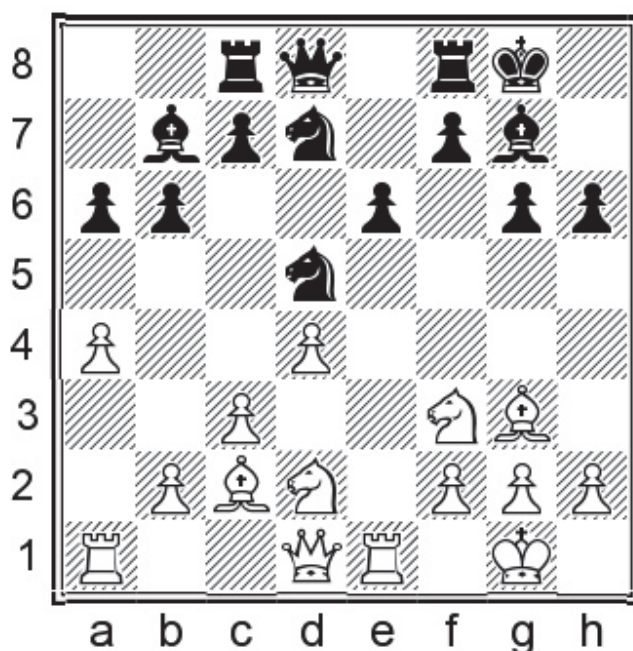
B2.3a) 11.a5 b5 is generally not a great insertion for White unless he has a long-term means of holding back ...c5. Hold that thought. 12.♖bd2 [12.e5 ♜f5! 13.g4 ♜e7 14.exd6 cxd6 15.♙xd6 ♜f6; 12.♙g3?! The aesthetic appeal of preventing both ...e5 and ...d5 with tempo by playing the bishops to symmetrical squares is considerable. However Black can still go ...e5: 12...e5 13.d5 ♜c5 14.♙c2 f5; 12...e5 13.♙e3 c5 14.♜f1 ♚c7 15.♚d2 ♔h7=



Position after: 15...♔h7=

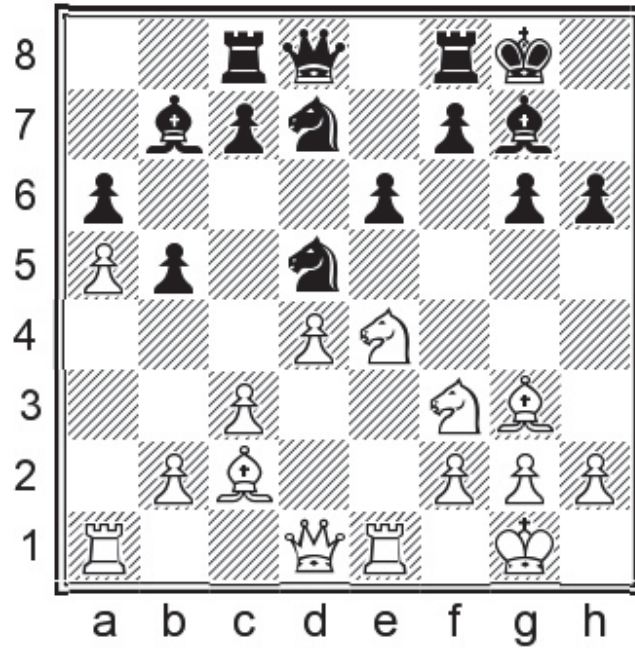
This is almost a Ruy Lopez!

B2.3b) 11. ♖g3 ♗b7 [Oddly, 11...e5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13. ♘bd2± isn't so great as in the last note, because White's queen's knight has access to the c4-square, from which it attacks the vulnerable e5-pawn.] 12. ♘bd2 d5! [12...a5!? This move is always useful, but I don't think there's any real need to analyse the position in any detail unless it is established that the position after 12. ♘bd2 is important.] 13. exd5 ♘xd5 14. ♖c2 ♜c8



Position after: 14... ♜c8

Now it is time for White to decide what to do with the d2-knight. 15.a5! [15. ♘c4 ♘e7! This retreat is worth bearing in mind. The dynamics are now such that White doesn't really have a move with the queen to connect rooks, since ♙d2 runs into ... ♗xf3 crippling the kingside structure. The other logical move is 16. ♙e2 but then there follows 16...a5! 17. ♗e4 ♗a6= when White faces a somewhat unpleasant pin.] 15...b5 16. ♘e4±



Position after: 16. ♖e4±

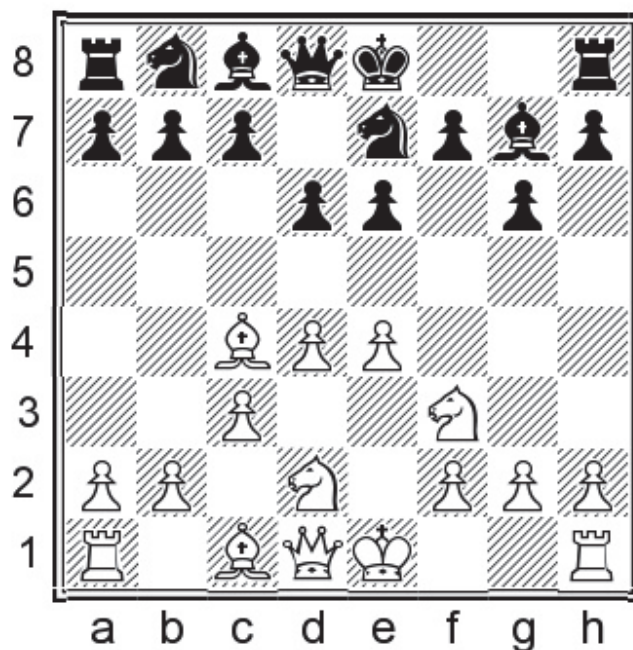
This move counts as ‘a long-term way of holding back ...c5’. That break is now basically impossible for Black to get in without sacrifices.

5... ♗e7

A) 5... ♗f6! could be more accurate, with the idea that after 6. ♗bd2 d5 7. ♕d3 dxe4 8. ♗xe4 ♗bd7 9. 0-0 ♗xe4 10. ♕xe4 c5⇌ Black has alleviated the cramp and exchanged an extra set of minor pieces.

B) 5... d5 could also equalise here (as after 5.0-0) so 5. ♕b3 is a unique path.

6. ♗bd2

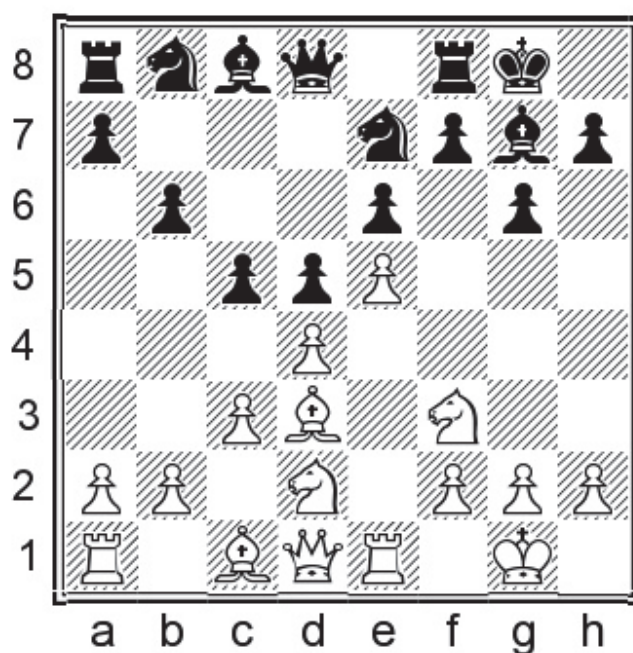


Position after: 6. Nbd2

6...d5

6... Nbd7 7. Qe2 0-0 8. 0-0 b6 would be a normal 'Hippo' type setup, where White is better both visually and objectively but lacks plans, and so at a sub – 2400 level it makes great sense to play this way for Black.

7. Qd3 b6 8. 0-0 0-0 9. Re1 c5 10. e5

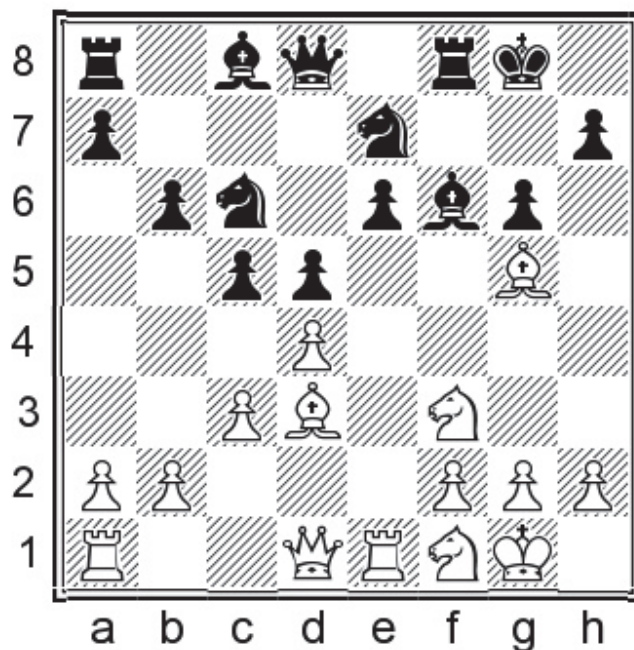


Position after: 10.e5

10...♙a6?!

This may look very natural, but in fact there was a significant choice available.

10...♘bc6 11.♘f1 ♜f6 is also quite logical, but after the principled 12.exf6 ♙xf6 13.♙g5



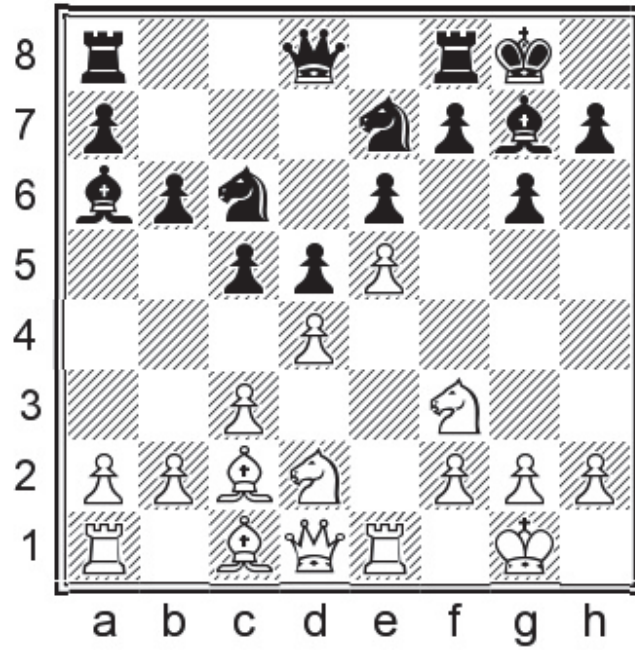
Position after: 13.♙g5

I realised White probably had something. Nevertheless, this is an instructive 'French-style' position to study.

11.♙c2

11.♘f1 ♙xd3 12.♙xd3 ♜h6!⇒

11...♘bc6?!



Position after: 11... Nbc6?!

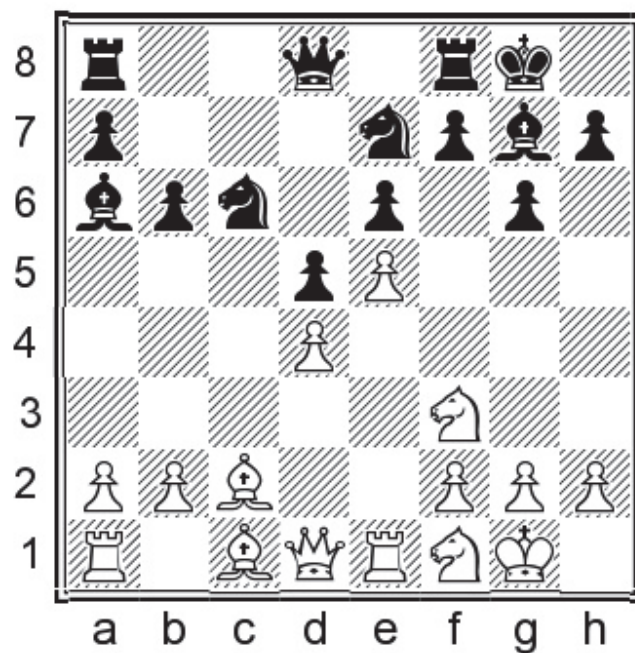
Now White is better.

12. Qf1?!

Messing things up – now the position is equal again.

12. $\text{Nb3!}\pm$ forces me to make a rather unpleasant call regarding my c5-pawn.

12... cxd4 13. cxd4



Position after: 13.cxd4

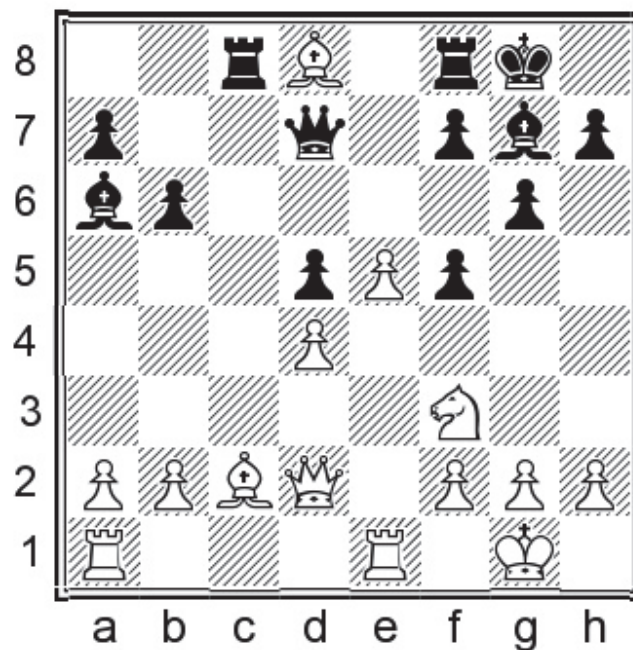
13...♖c8

13...f6! 14.exf6 ♜xf6= and now Black has the typical 'French' idea of ...♜xf3, enabling him to meet all of White's immediate attempts.

14.♘e3 ♘f5?!

14...f5! Closing the position this way was preferable. 15.exf6 ♜xf6 and after 16.♘g4? Black has the familiar 16...♜xf3.

15.♘xf5 exf5 16.♙g5 ♚d7 17.♚d2 ♘d8 18.♙xd8



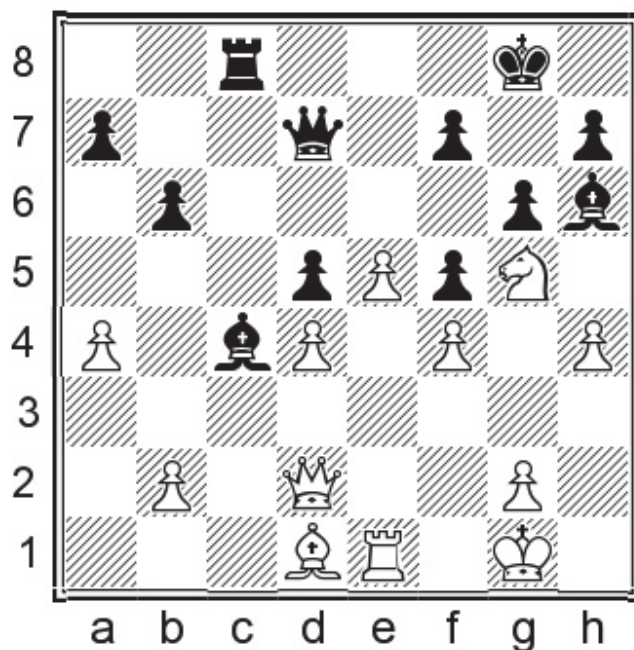
Position after: 18.♙xd8

The engine doesn't like this move, but with it White ensures a static advantage. From here Mark outplays me.

18...♜fxd8 19.♜ac1 ♙b5 20.h4 ♜c7 21.a4

21.♙d3±

21...♙a6 22.♘g5 ♙h6 23.f4 ♜e8 24.♙b3 ♜xc1 25.♜xc1 ♜c8 26.♜e1 ♙c4 27.♙d1



Position after: 27. ♖d1

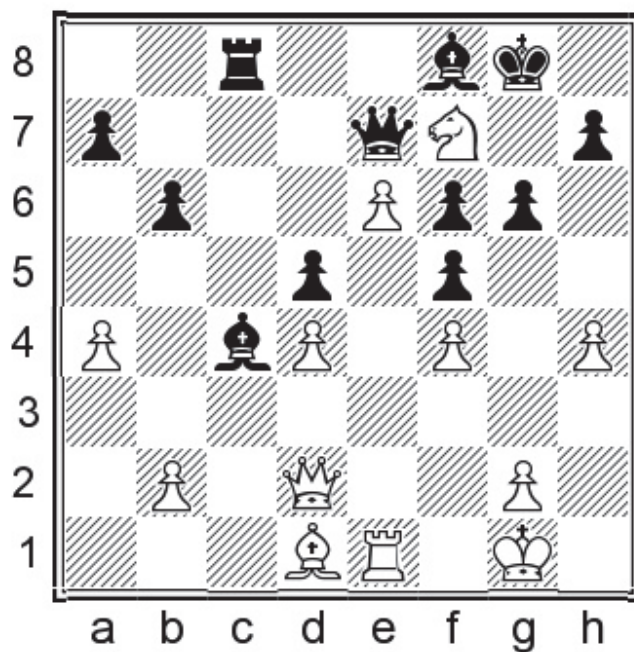
27... ♚e7?

Intending ... ♜f8 and ... ♛b4, but this is the wrong way to go about things.

27... ♜f8! 28. e6 fxe6 29. ♖xe6 ♜e8 30. ♖xe8 ♛xe8 31. ♘f3 ♛e4! is not actually better for White, contrary to appearance.

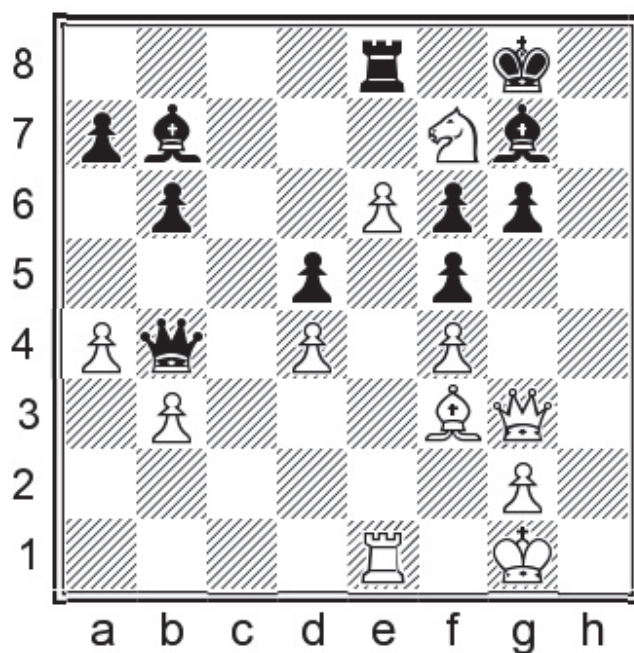
28. b3!?

28. e6!? f6 29. ♘f7 ♜f8 is equally rich in both attacking and defensive possibilities.



Position after: 29...♔f8

28...♔a6 29.♔f3 ♔b7 30.e6 f6 31.♘f7 ♔f8 32.h5 ♔b4 33.♙f2 ♖e8 34.hxg6 hxg6 35.♙g3 ♔g7



Position after: 35...♔g7

36.♝c1?!

Not the best choice, but enough for a good advantage given the way I played.

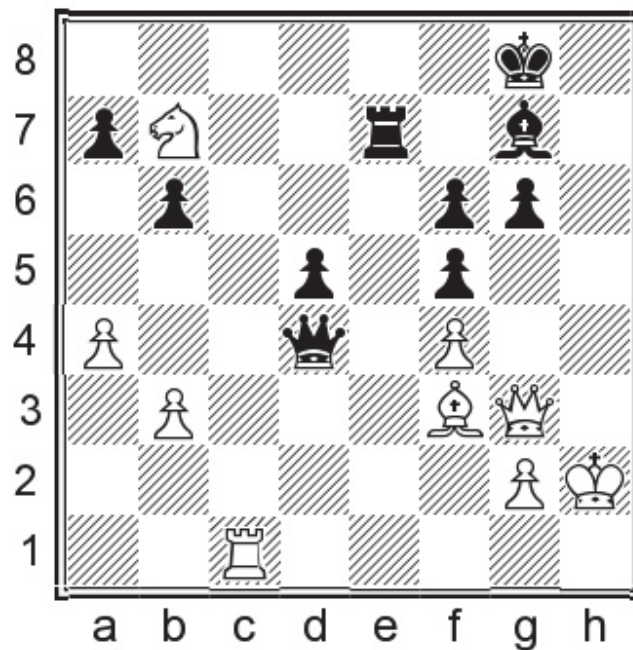
36...♖xe6

36...♜xd4+ 37.♔h2 ♜e7 38.♙h5!!+ – The idea that a knight on f5 was worth 3 pieces featured constantly in my calculations.

37.♘d8 ♜xd4+ 38.♔h2 ♜e7!

With a specific idea in mind, which turned out to be correct – but then he didn't stop it, and I didn't play it.

39.♘xb7



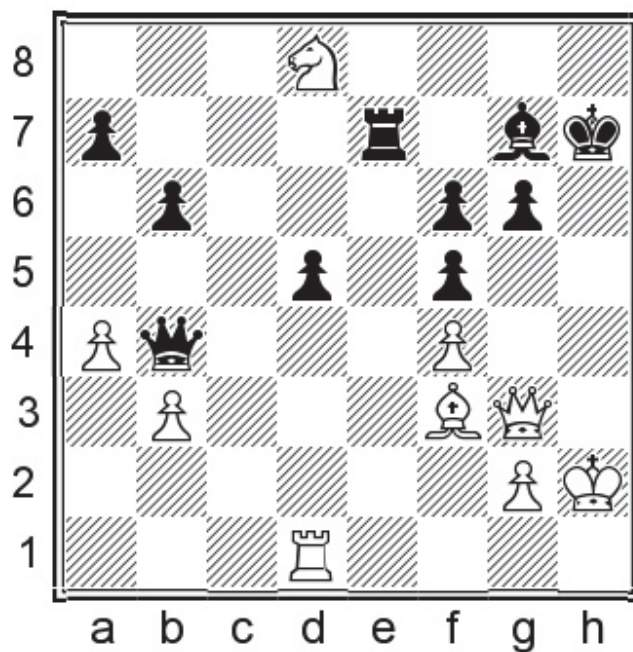
Position after: 39.♘xb7

39...♔h7?

Changing idea at the last moment is rarely a good idea.

My idea had been the insane 39...♙f8!= with the idea of ...♖h7. Then for some reason I hallucinated that 40.♙h5 was winning on the spot, and changed my mind with seconds to go.

40.♖d1 ♜b4 41.♘d8!



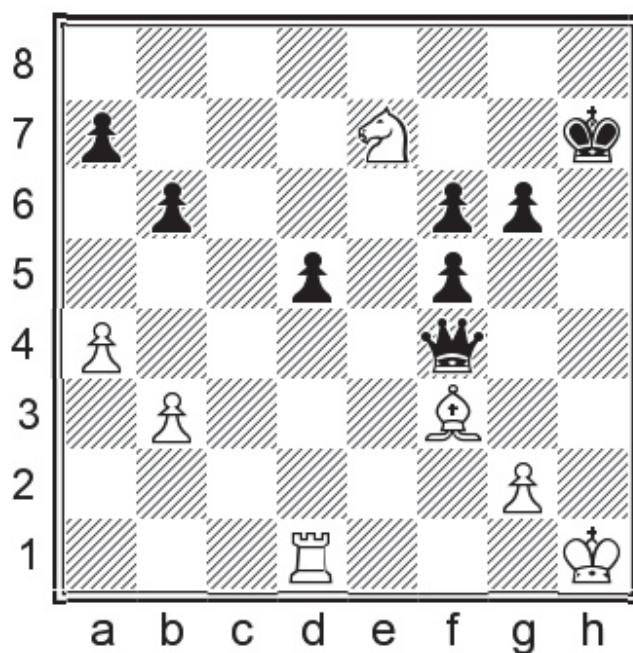
Position after: 41. ♖d8!

The only move to assure a decisive advantage.

41... ♙h6 42. ♘c6 ♚d6 43. ♘xe7??

43. ♙xd5! is just a solid piece advantage, because of the trick 43... ♙xf4 44. ♙g8+!!+-

43... ♙xf4 44. ♚xf4 ♚xf4+ 45. ♔h1



Position after: 45. ♔h1

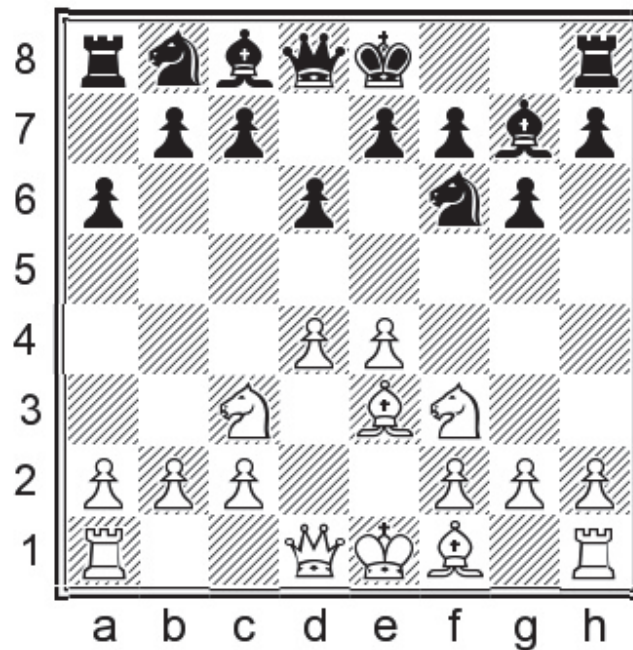
45... ♚h6+

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Part II Pirc Transpositions

Chapter 1 System with 4.♘e3

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♗f3 d6 4.♘e3 ♗f6 5.♖c3 a6



Chapter Guide

Chapter 1 – System with 4.♘e3

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♗f3 d6 4.♘e3 ♗f6 5.♖c3 a6 (6.♞d2)

1.1) Move-order nuance: 3.♗f3 d6 4.♘e3 ♗f6 5.♖c3 c6?!

1.2) The premature push 6.♞d2 b5?!

1.3) 6.♞d2 0-0 7.♘d3 intro and other 7th moves

1.4) 6.♞d2 0-0 7.♘d3 ♗c6 main line

1.5) 6.♞d2 0-0 7.♘h6 c5 8.♘xg7 ♖xg7 9.h4 h5

1.6) 6.♞d2 0-0 7.♘h6 c5 8.♘xg7 ♖xg7 9.h4 ♘g4

1.7) 6.♞d2 0-0 7.♘h6 c5 8.♘xg7 ♖xg7 9.0-0-0

Introduction to Chapter 1

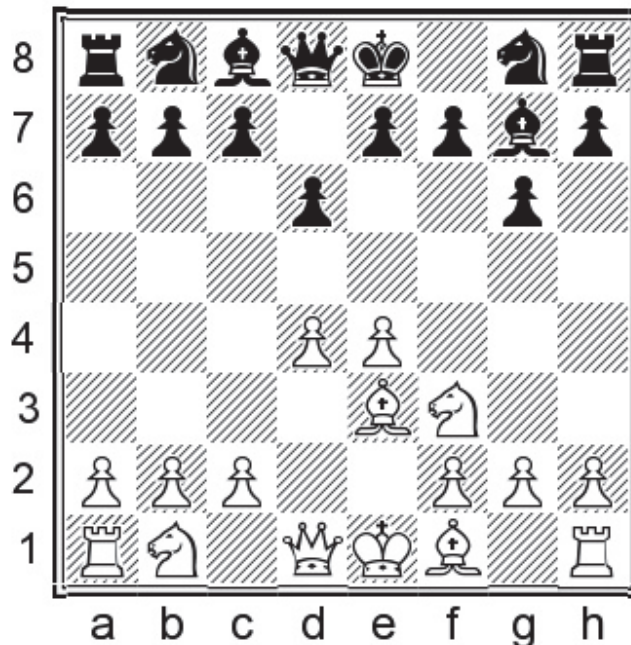
Let's start off gently and with two lines that highlight that I'm giving recommendations to White as well as Black in this book. In 1.1) the point is that White gains an advantage if Black mindlessly copies the approach from subsequent chapters where White has played 4.♘e2. There are two critical differences which he can use: one is the ability to play a speedier ♗h6 and the second is the ability to play ♗d3 in one move (a more active post for the bishop.) Therefore, the order starting with 3.♘f3 is the one that cuts out Black's extra options, one of which is pushing ...b5 on move 5. Then in 1.2) I examine what happens if Black tries to execute this push straight after ...a6 anyway, on move 6.

The following 2 subchapters deal with a line which has not really been tested much; the extent of existing knowledge is some ChessPublishing annotations by myself and Serbian GM Milos Pavlovic.

The meat of the chapter is the last 3 subchapters, in which White forces through 7.♗h6 as fast as possible. I don't feel as threatened by this version as I do by the ones where White's knight is still at g1 and he has played some other useful move in the meantime (e.g. long castling) but it is still important to have an answer ready. I advocate the relative sideline 7...c5, and now it seems to me that White's best try is to exchange bishops and then launch the h-pawn. More analysis time has been devoted to 9.0-0-0, but there are reasons why White should try to insert the matching h-pawn moves, as you can tell from a comparative reading of the three lines.

1.1) Move-order nuance: 3.♘f3 d6 4.♗e3 ♘f6 5.♘c3 c6?!

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘f3 d6 4.♗e3!?



Position after: 4.♗e3!?

This is the most accurate move-order, based on the thematic point that Black is usually only willing to

play ...a6 after White has gone for ♖c3.

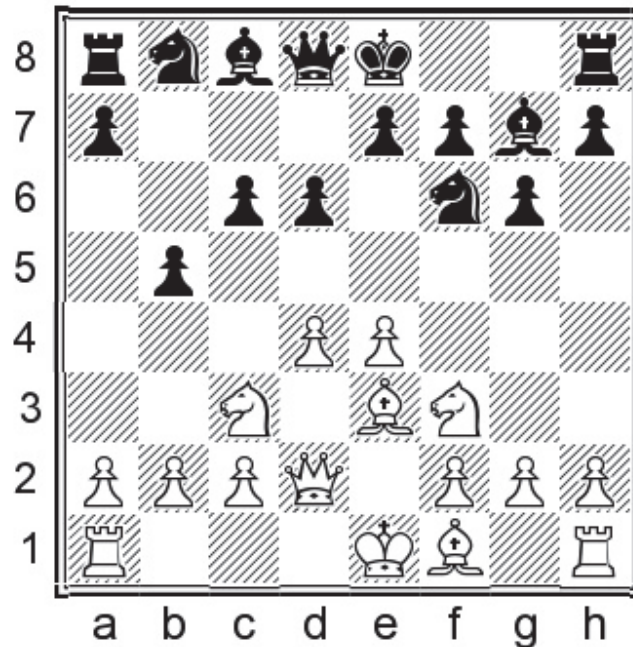
4...♗f6 5.♗c3 c6?!

If Black isn't bothered that he's been 'move-ordered' out of being able to play 5...b5, it is possible to go 5...0-0 6.♜d2 a6 7.♘h6 c5 and transpose into the rest of the chapter.

6.♜d2

6.a4 a5 7.h3 ♗a6 is another positional line where Black's ideas are reasonably well-known, e.g. 8.♙e2 0-0 9.0-0 ♗b4 10.♞e1 ♜c7 11.♙f4 ♗h5 12.♙h2 e5 ♞ Vachier Lagrave, M – Nakamura, H Stavanger 2015.

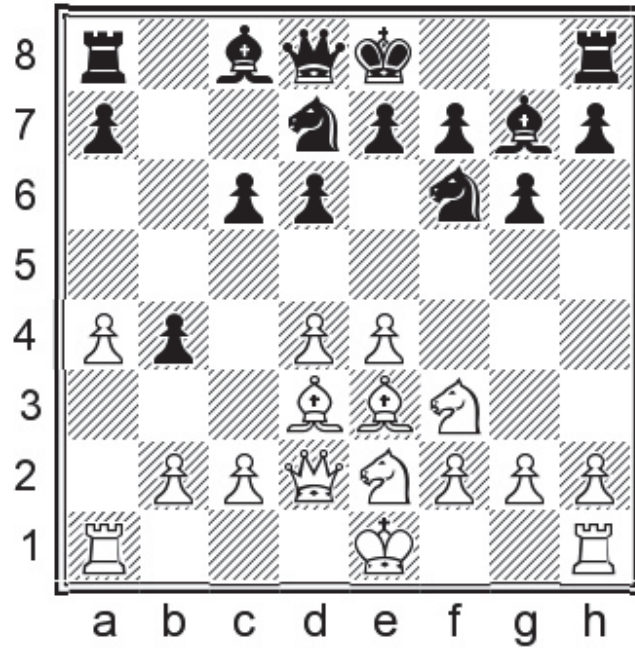
6...b5



Position after: 6...b5

7.♙h6!?

White still asks the most pressing questions with this direct approach, but his task is also far from easy. The slower 7.♙d3 ♗bd7 8.a4 b4 9.♗e2 has also been tried.

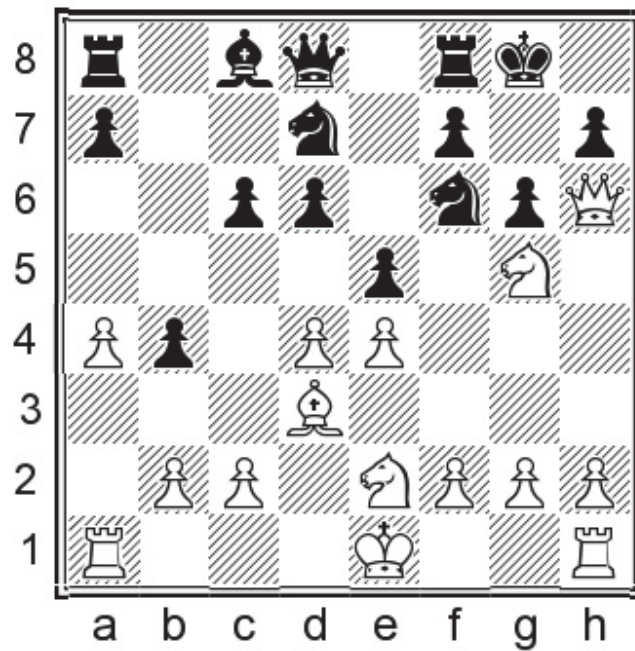


Position after: 9. dxe2

A) 9...0-0!?

A1) 10. ♖xb4 c5 11. ♖a3 ♗b7 12. d5 [12. ♘c3 ♘g4] 12...c4 13. ♗xc4 ♘xe4 14. 0-0 Black probably has enough for this pawn.

A2) 10. ♗h6! ♗xh6?! [10...a5 11. ♗xg7 ♖xg7 12. h4 transposes to 9...a5] 11. ♖xh6 e5 12. ♘g5!

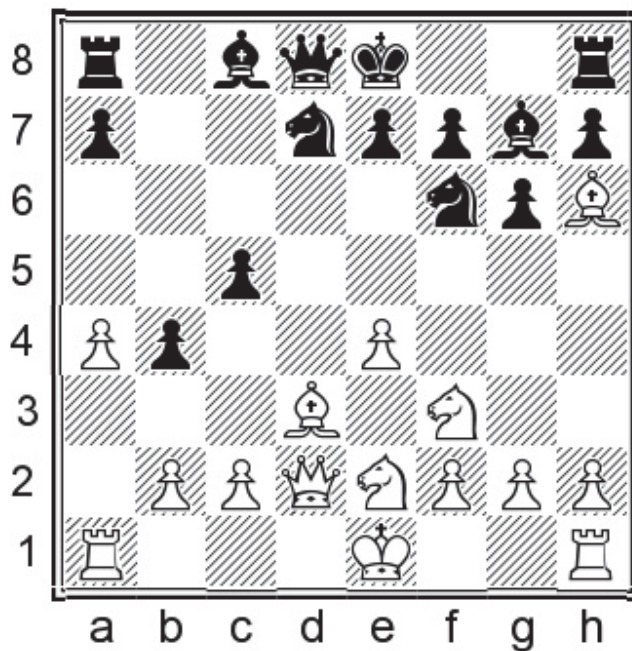


Position after: 12. ♘g5!

This is the key move which makes sure 7.♔d3 suffices for a plus. Black can't wriggle free on the kingside, e. g. 12...♖e8 13.0-0 ♖e7 14.f4 ♚f8!? 15.♗h4 h6 16.♘f3→.

B) 9...♙a5?! 10.♔h6 0-0 11.0-0 [11.h4!] 11...e5 12.♘g3± and despite not having much attack White was still better in Ivanov, O – Savchenko, B Moscow 2019.

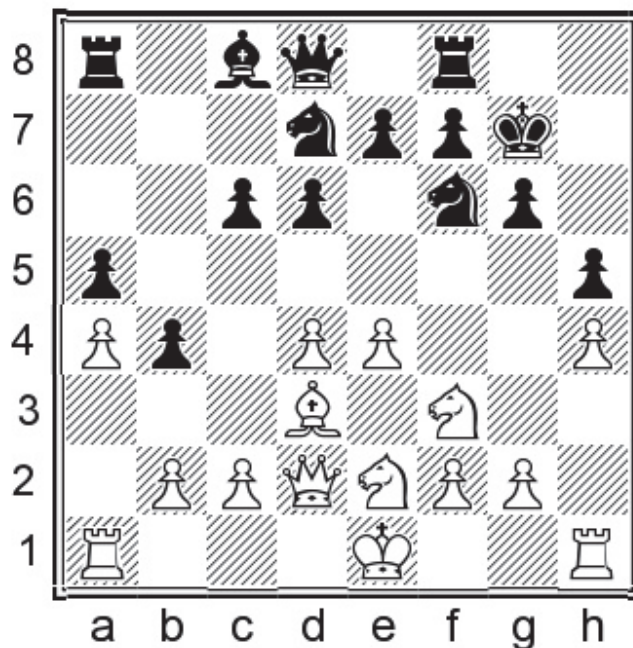
C) 9...c5 10.dxc5 dxc5 11.♔h6→



Position after: 11.♔h6→

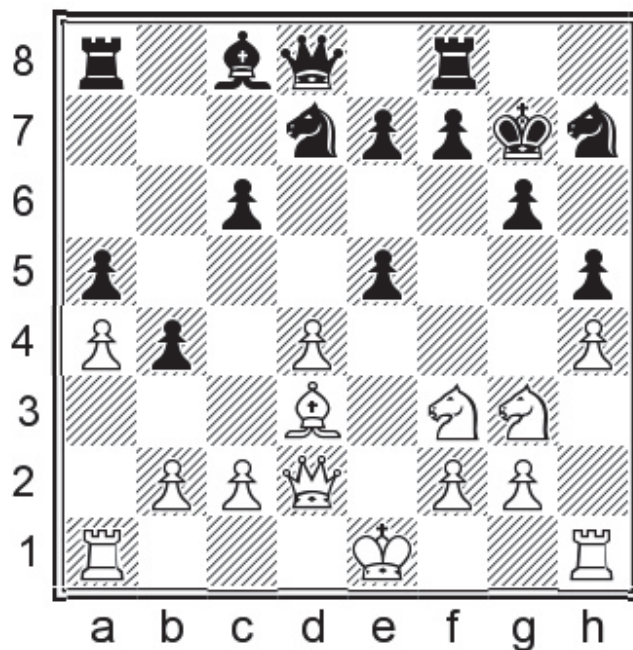
doesn't inspire confidence right now.

D) 9...a5 10.♔h6 0-0 11.♔xg7! ♚xg7 12.h4 h5



Position after: 12...h5

Now to get an advantage, White has to force through e5, in my view. 13. ♖g3 [13.e5 dxe5 14.dxe5 ♜g4] 13... ♜h7 14.e5 [14.c3 e5 15.0-0 ♝b8 is a position with debatable evaluation – White still has space and slightly better knights, but Black is solid and has, from a purist point of view, a better bishop.] 14...dxe5



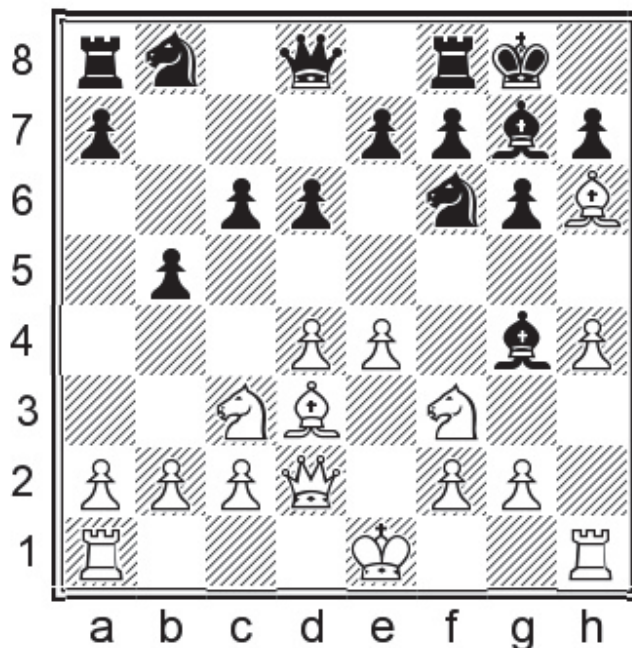
Position after: 14...dxe5

D1) 15. ♜xe5 ♜xe5 16.dxe5 ♞d4

D2) 15.♘g5 ♜hf6! and none of the sacrificial ideas quite work, e.g. 16.0-0-0 [16.♙xg6 ♖xg6 17.♘f3 ♜b6] 16...exd4 17.♙xg6 ♖xg6 18.♚xd4 ♜b6 19.♚d3+ ♖g7 20.♞he1 ♜xf2!.

D3) 15.dxe5 ♜c5 16.♚e3 ♜xd3+ 17.cxd3 ♙g4± The knight on h7 is still out of the game, but Black can play this position.

7...0-0 8.♙d3 ♙g4 9.h4!

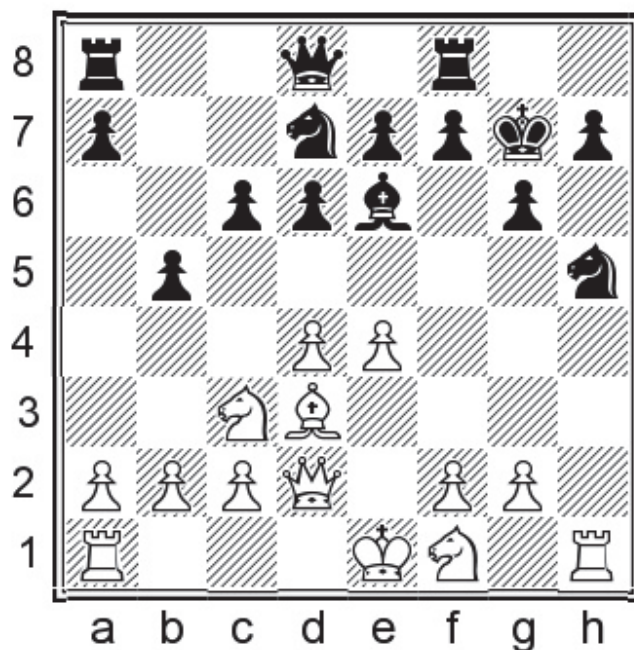


Position after: 9.h4!

9...♙xf3!

9...♜bd7?! 10.h5 is deeply unconvincing for Black, e.g.

A) 10...♜xh5 11.♙xg7 ♖xg7 12.♜h2! ♙e6 13.♜f1!±

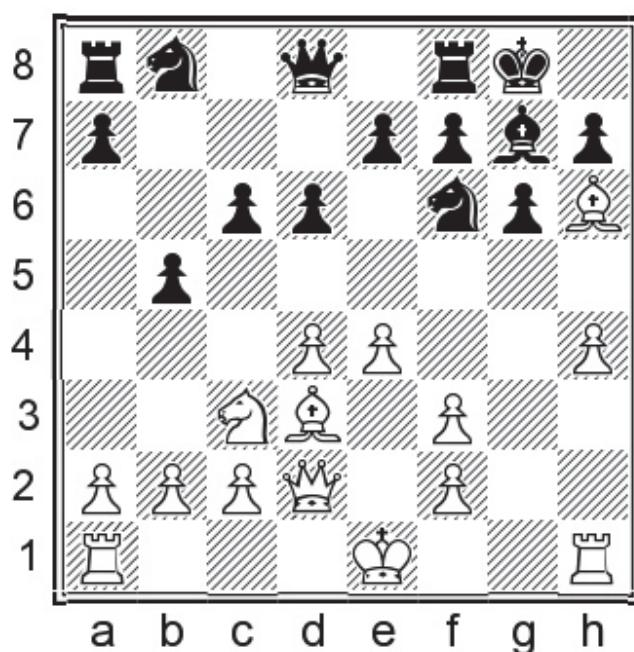


Position after: 13. ♖f1!±

A strong manoeuvre pointed out by Justin Tan on ChessPublishing. There is not very much Black can do against f3, g4, ♖g3 and doubling or tripling on the h-file.

B) 10...e5 11. ♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.hxg6 fxc6 and now Giri, A – Mamedyarov, S chess.com 2018 could have continued simply 13. ♖h6+ ♔g8 14. ♖g5 ♖e7 15.f3! exd4 16. ♖e2+– when the bishop on g4 is trapped.

10.gxf3

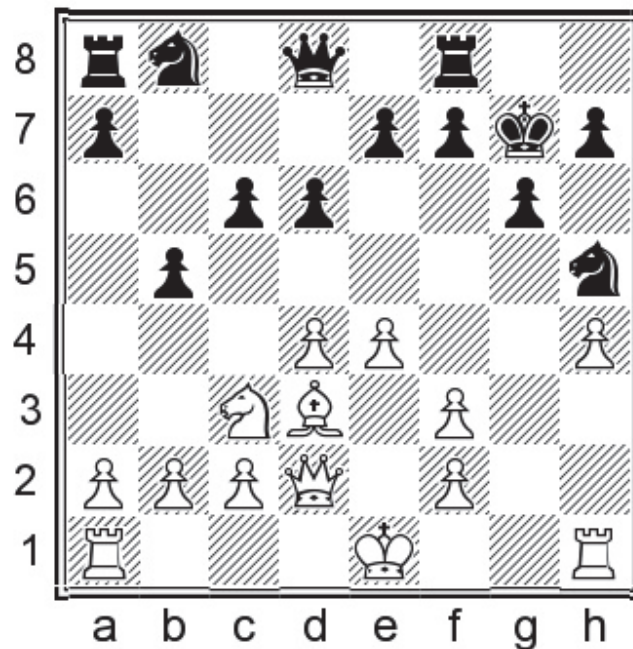


Position after: 10.gxf3

10...e5

This might be playable, but it is extremely risky. Nevertheless, Black is in the kind of position where looking back is worse than plunging forwards.

10...♞h5 is another possibility, which it is worth bearing in mind. 11.♙xg7 [11.♞e2 ♚b6 12.c3 ♞d7 13.♙xg7 ♜xg7 14.♞g3 This attack is too slow to really be worrying. 14...♞xg3 15.fxg3 h5=] 11...♜xg7



Position after: 11...♜xg7

A) 12.♞e2 e5 13.♞g3 ♞f4 14.h5 Here the engines even think Black has time for the sedate 14...a6!? followed by ...♚f6 and ...c5.

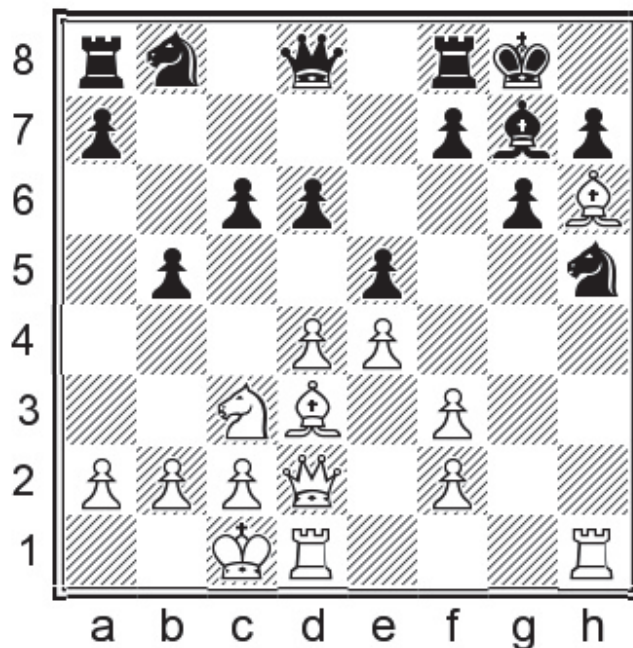
B) 12.0-0-0 ♚b6 and White's best could even be the rather pedestrian 13.♙f1 with the idea of ♙h3-g4. I think Black is okay here too; there is ...♞d7-f6 if need be.

C) 12.f4!? This move is the problem: White achieves a better position without any particular redeeming features. 12...b4 [12...♞d7 13.♙e2!±] 13.♞e2 c5 14.dxc5 dxc5 15.0-0-0 ♞c6 16.♚e3±

11.h5!

11.0-0-0 is a worse order, not least because Black can play 11...♞h5 with possibly a better version of 10...♞h5.

11...♞xh5 12.0-0-0

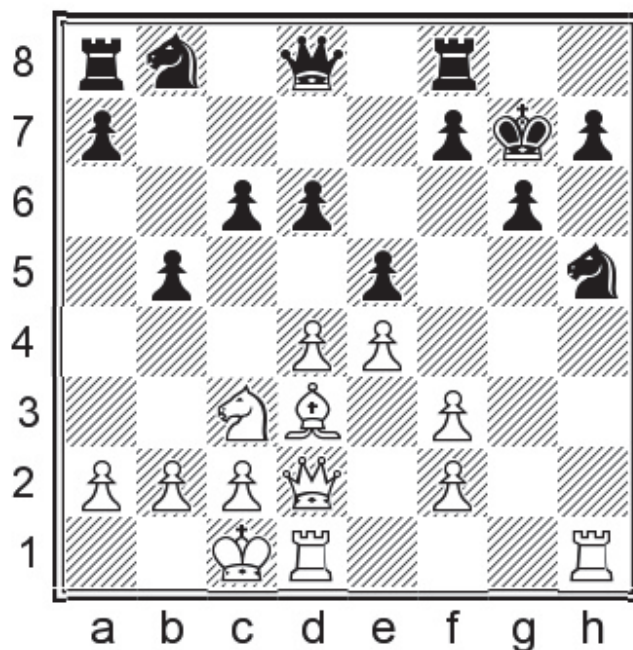


Position after: 12.0-0-0

12...♔h8

The positions after the generally sensible 12...♘f4? are generally considered to be terminal by strong engines. 13.♙xf4 [13.♙xb5!? cxb5 14.dxe5±] 13...exf4 14.♚xf4 ♜f6 15.♚h2 h5 16.f4±

13.♙xg7+ ♔xg7



Position after: 13...♔xg7

14.♖e2!

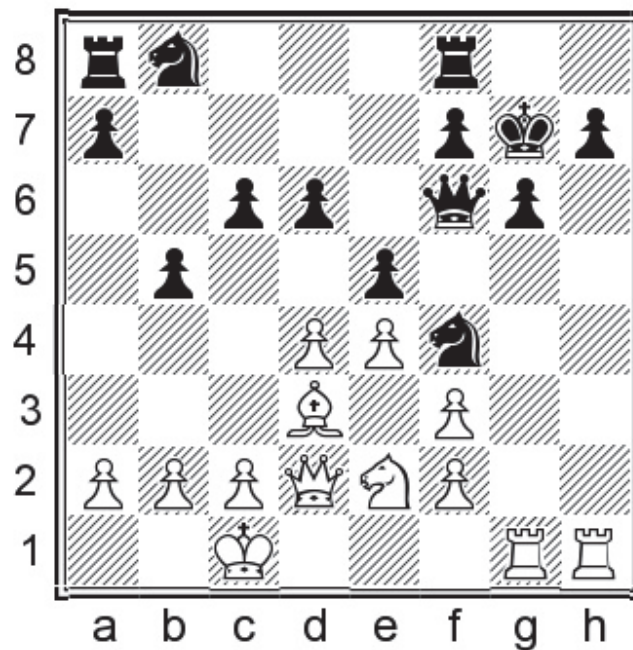
Another Guramishvili move.

14.d5 ♖f4 15.dxc6 ♖xc6=

14...♙f6 15.♖dg1

15.♖xh5!? gxf5 16.♖g3 ♖h8 17.♖xh5 ♙g6 18.♖h1 a6 19.f4 ♖d7= It seems like Black can survive this by just staying calm.

15...♖f4!



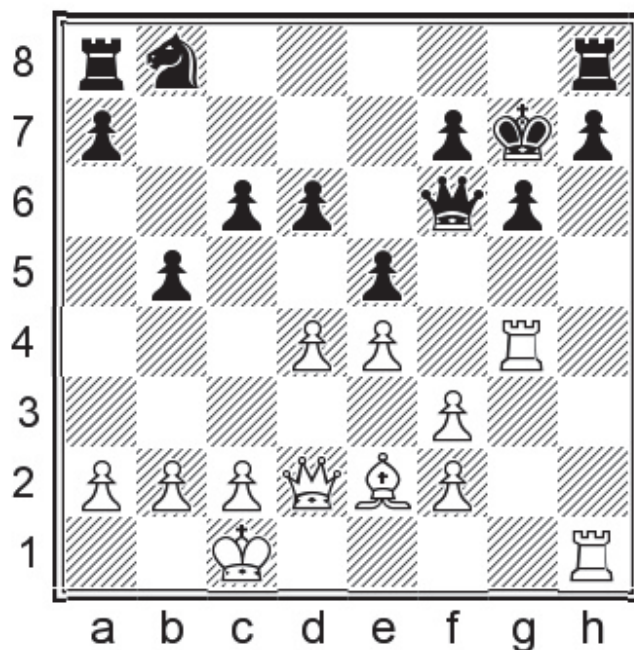
Position after: 15...♖f4!

Everything else loses by force.

16.♖g4! ♖xe2+

16...h5? 17.♖xf4 hxf4 18.♖d5!! is the point.

17.♙xe2 ♖h8



Position after: 17...♖h8

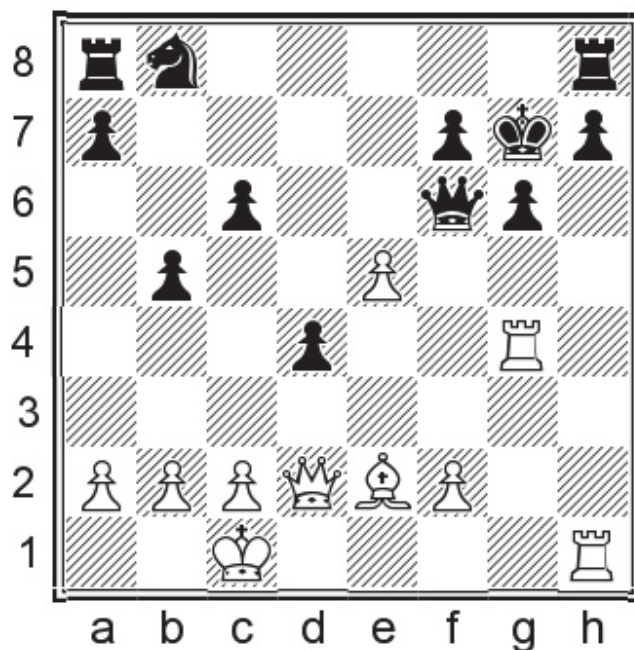
Now White has various ideas to try and land a blow before Black plays ...h5 and drive his pieces back.

18.dxe5!

The only path to an advantage.

A) 18.♙h6+?! ♔g8 19.f4 exd4 20.e5 [20.f5 ♘d7 and the reinforcements arrive on time. Notice the defensive resource 21.♖f4 g5!♞] 20...dxe5 21.fxe5 ♙xf2 22.♞e4 ♘d7 23.e6 f5! 24.♖f1 ♙g2= and White is well advised to force a repetition.

B) 18.f4 is a refinement of 18.♙h6+, but not yet the best version available. 18...exd4! White should be trying to cut out this option if possible. 19.e5! dxe5 20.fxe5



Position after: 20.fxe5

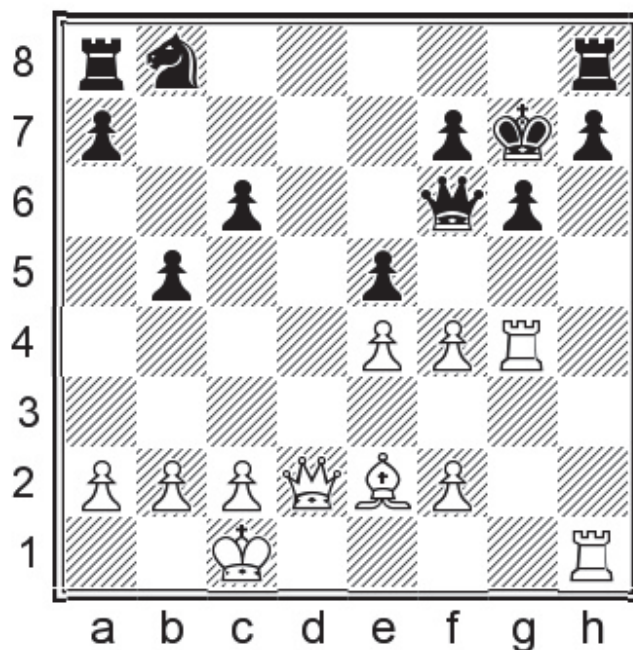
20...♙xe5 [20...♙xf2 21.♖xd4 h5 22.♖f1+- with disaster on the f-file.] 21.♖xd4! [21.♙h6+ ♔g8 22.♖d1 ♙xe2 23.♖gx4 ♘d7 24.♖xd7 ♖e8=] 21...♘a6 22.♙f3 ♙f6 23.♙h6+ ♔g8 24.♖hd1 ♖e8= This is the best version of the f4-sacrifice White can get, and still it seems as if Black can unravel soon.

18...dxe5

18...♙xe5 19.♙h6+ ♔g8 20.f4± is less ambitious, but perhaps objectively better: in an endgame the passed h-pawn and White's doubled f-pawns will give Black good play.

19.f4!

19.♙h6+ ♔g8 20.f4 again doesn't work as well: 20...exf4 21.♖xf4 ♙e7= followed by ...♘d7.



Position after: 19.f4!

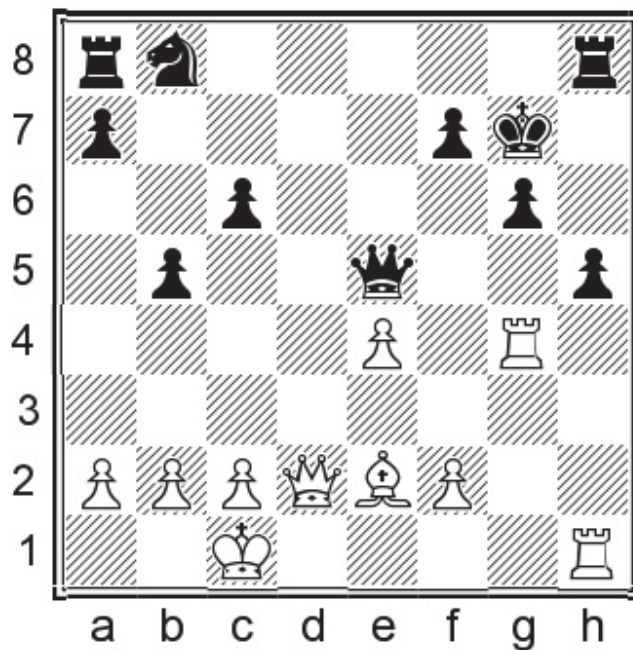
19...h5

The most forcing for Black.

A) 19...exf4 20.♞xf4 ♕e5 21.♞g4! A cloud-engine move. The point is not to threaten anything on the kingside yet, but rather to wait until Black's knight commits to a6 (rather than d7) before pushing the f-pawn. [21.♞f5 ♕e6 22.♞f3 ♘d7 23.♞d3 ♘e5=] 21...h5 [21...♔g8!?!; 21...♘a6? 22.♕h6+ ♔g8 23.f4±] 22.♞gg1! Transposing to the main line.

B) 19...♕d8!?! doesn't really work out because of the 'queen lift': 20.♕c3 ♕d4 21.♕h3 h5 22.f5 ♘d7 23.♞gg1!± [23.♞g3 ♕xe4 24.fxg6 f5∞]

20.fxe5 ♕xe5



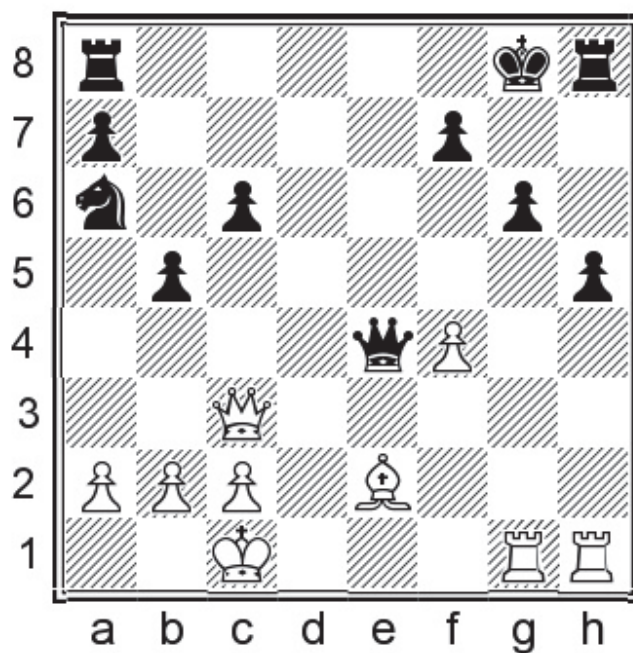
Position after: 20... ♔xe5

21. ♖gg1!

A tricky move to find considering the number of hanging pawns.

21. ♖g5 may be selling out too cheaply. 21... ♗e7 22. ♕xh5 ♘d7∞

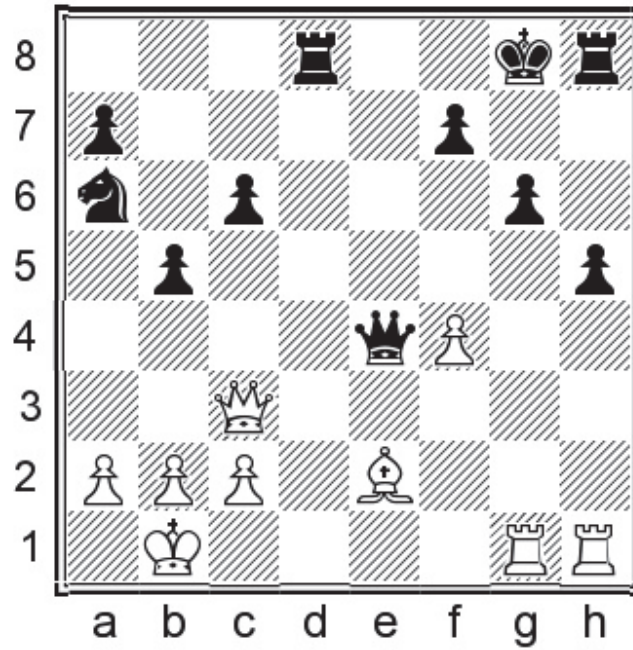
21... ♘a6!? 22. f4! ♗xe4 23. ♗c3+ ♔g8



Position after: 23... ♔g8

24. ♔xh5!

The engine also gives the rather odd 24. ♔b1 but Black should be okay after 24... ♖d8! =

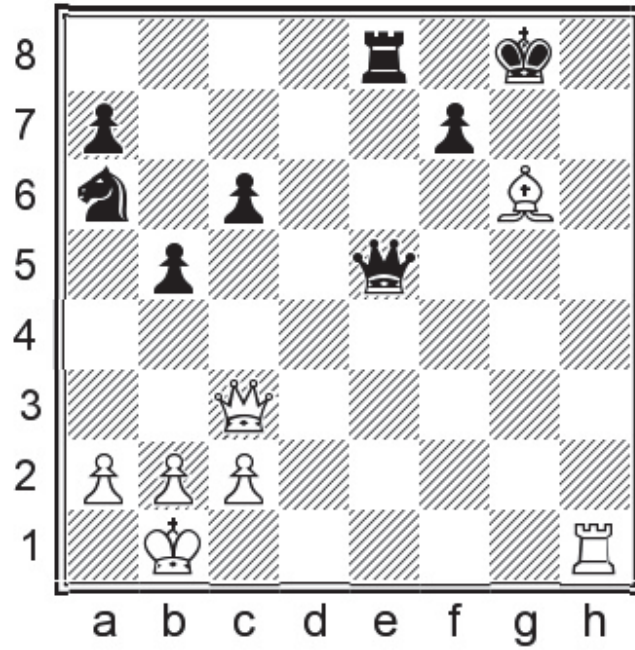


Position after: 24... ♖d8! =

24... ♙xf4+ 25. ♔b1 ♖e8! 26. ♔xg6!

26. ♙xc6 ♙e4 =

26... ♖xh1 27. ♖xh1 ♙e5



Position after: 27...♔e5

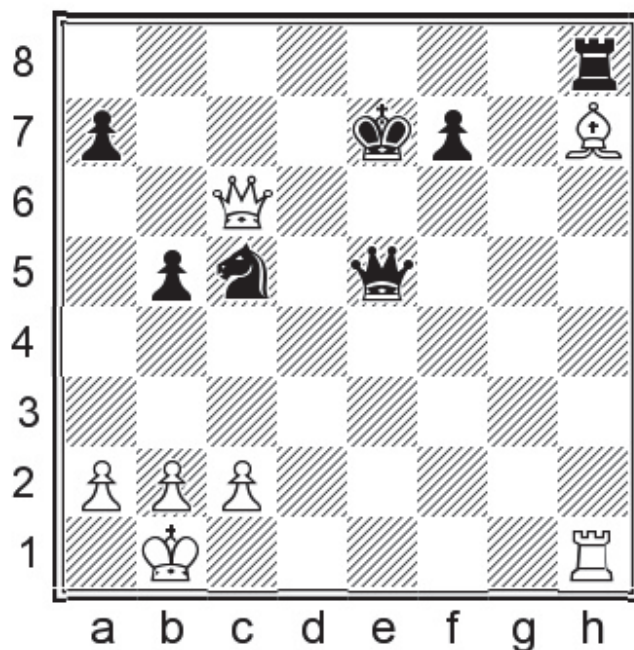
28.♙h7+

28.♙xf7+ ♔xf7 29.♖f1+ ♔g8= and White lacks a mate because his own king is weak too.

28...♔f8 29.♚d2 ♘c5 30.♚h6+

For want of any really convincing alternatives, White should equalise the material balance.

30...♔e7 31.♚xc6 ♖h8±

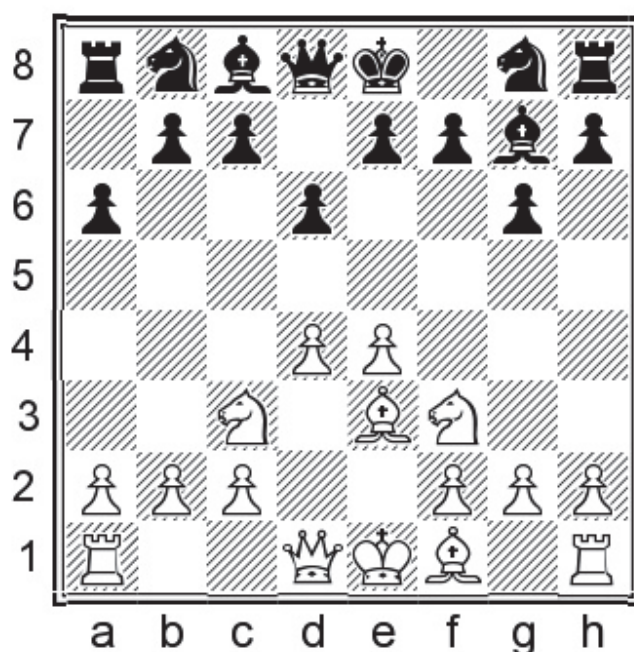


Position after: 31...♖h8±

In this odd position, both sides have poor co-ordination. White's queen is offside and he has to reckon with ideas like ...♘a4, ...♘e6 and ...f5. But he does have the bishop and some pressure against the opponent's king.

1.2) The premature push 6.♙d2 b5?!

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♘f3



Position after: 5. ♖f3

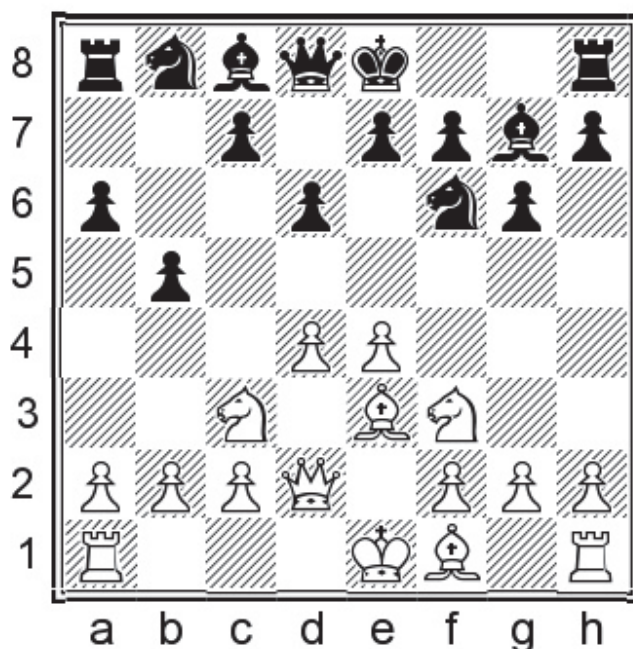
As mentioned in IV.1, this isn't White's best order to reach this position.

5... ♗f6

We have reached a Pirc position where White usually chooses between 6. ♕d2 and 6. ♘d3. Note that the accurate 5...b5! is analysed later on.

The other 'pure Modern' move 5... ♗d7 is inadvisable. 6. ♘d3!? e6 [After 6...c5 7. ♘c4!± is a really strong idea. We will see the same position, with the bishop coming from e2, later on.] 7. ♕d2 h6 8. 0-0-0! White can castle queenside and then launch a sacrificial attack on the kingside. 8... ♗e7 9. h4±

6. ♕d2 b5?!



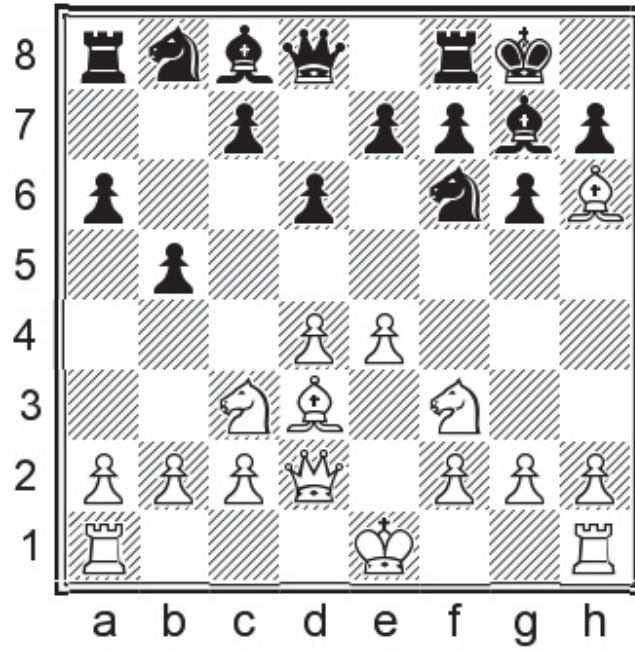
Position after: 6...b5?!

Now it is too late to play this, in my opinion. But the line is instructive.

7. ♘h6

Pavlovic was positive about this move in his 2015 annotations for ChessPublishing. I don't think it probably gives White an advantage as such, but the positions are quite miserable for Black – and I also don't see equality after one improvement in particular.

7...0-0 8. ♘d3



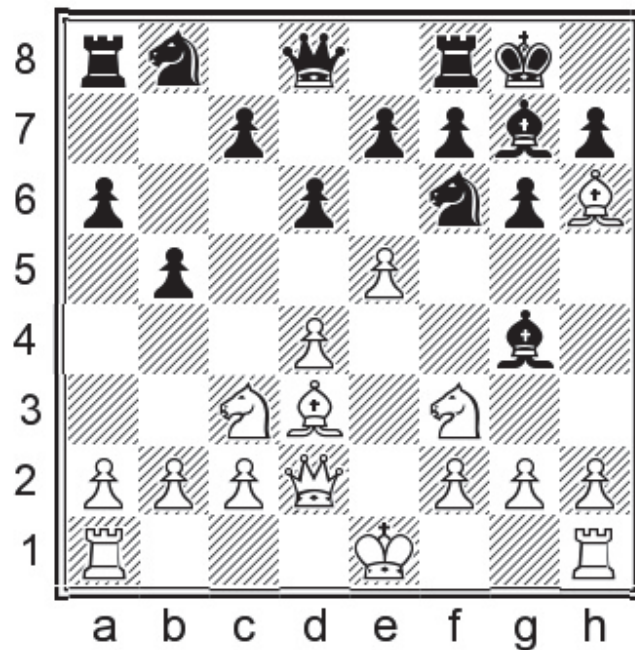
Position after: 8. Qd3

8... Qc6!

A) 8...c5 9.dxc5 dxc5 10.Qxg7 Qxg7 11.e5±

B) 8...Qb7 9.Qxg7! Qxg7 10.e5 Black is in huge trouble and the details can be worked out quite easily.

C) 8...Qg4 9.e5!



Position after: 9.e5!

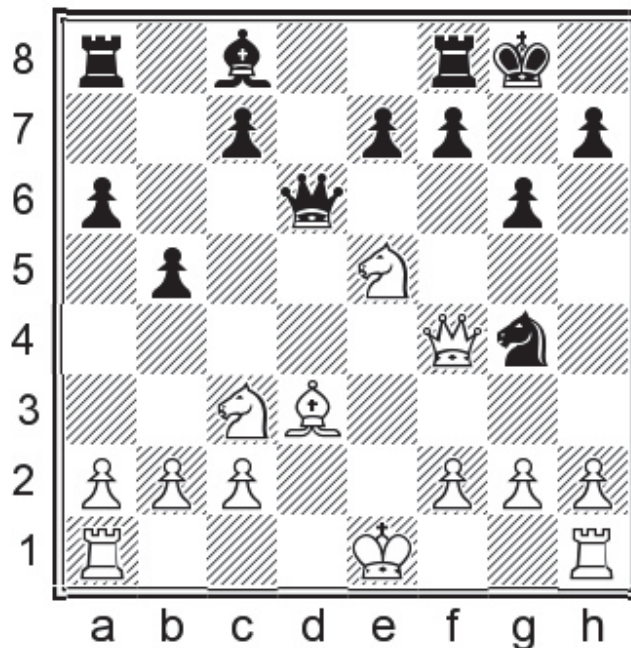
C1) 9...♞fd7? Black doesn't have time for this, as Guramishvili points out on chess24. The problem is 10.♙xg7 ♖xg7 11.h4!N 11...♙xf3 [11...h5 12.♞g5± and the g4-bishop gets into difficulties] 12.gxf3 dxe5 13.h5! when the attack crashes through.

C2) 9...dxe5 10.dxe5 ♞fd7 [10...♞h5 11.♙xg7 ♞xg7 12.♙e4 ♙xf3 13.♙xf3 ♖xd2+ 14.♖xd2 ♜a7 15.♜ad1 ♞d7 16.♞he1 ♞b6 17.♙c6± Hammer, J – Giri, A Stavanger 2015] 11.♙xg7 ♖xg7 12.♞f4 ♙xf3 13.♞xf3 c6 14.♞g3± Black's position is not desperate yet, but White's play is just so hard to mess up that Black can't play this way with optimism.

9.♙xg7

The moves 9.d5 and 9.♞d5 force a bit of accuracy but Black stands well there.

One of the key resources found in this line was 9.e5 dxe5 10.dxe5 ♙xh6 11.♞xh6 ♞g4 12.♞f4 ♞cxe5! 13.♞xe5 ♞d6! after which Black is doing fine.

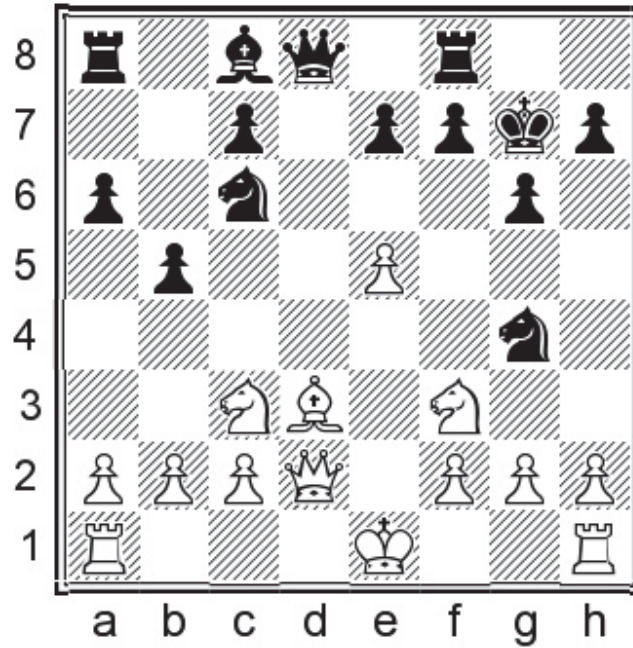


Position after: 13...♞d6!

9...♖xg7 10.e5

10.d5 ♞e5 11.♞xe5 dxe5 now works out fine for Black.

10...dxe5 11.dxe5 ♞g4



Position after: 11... Nf4

12.0-0-0

The move which changed the evaluation of this line for most people.

12...b4

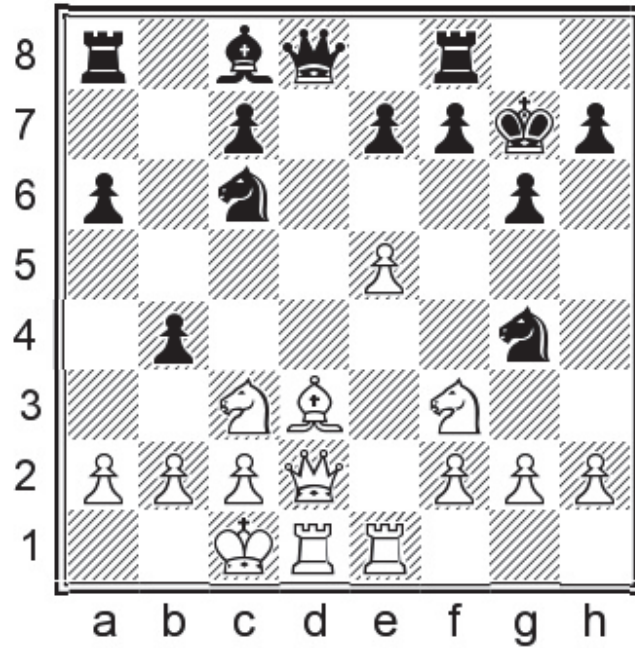
12... Nxe5 13. Nxe5 Nxe5 14. Qe1 Nxd3+ 15. Rxd3 Qe8 16. Nd5± works out well for White.

13. Rf1!

I thought this was a novelty when I analysed this line in early 2018, but clearly I was missing something.

A) 13. Ne4 Qd5±

B) 13. h3 bxc3 14. Qxc3 Nxf2 15. Qe4



Position after: 13. Re1!

13...Rb8

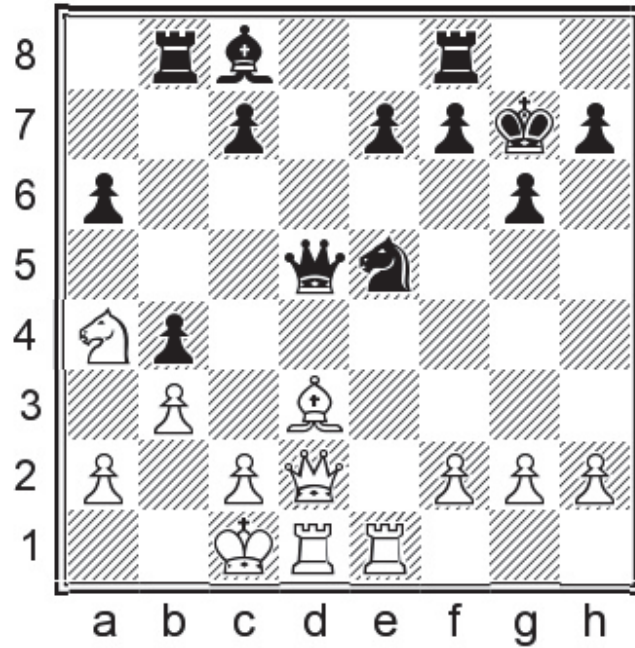
A) 13...xf5?! 14.h3! bxc3 [14...h6 15.e2±] 15.Wxc3 hxf2 16.fxf5 hxd1 17.Rxd1 Wb8 18.fxe4! A really great move to know about. Black is forced to simplify to a grim ending.

B) 13...bxc3? 14.Wxc3 Wd5 15.fxe4 Wxa2 16.fxc6 Rb8 17.h3! hxf2 18.e6+ f6 19.Rd4+- White was already winning in Kosteniuk, A – Bodnaruk, A Kazan 2014.

14.ha4

14.ha4 Wd5 15.b1 hgxe5 16.hxe5 Wxe5= and White is scraping the barrel for compensation.

14...Wd5 15.b3 hcx5 16.hxe5 hxe5



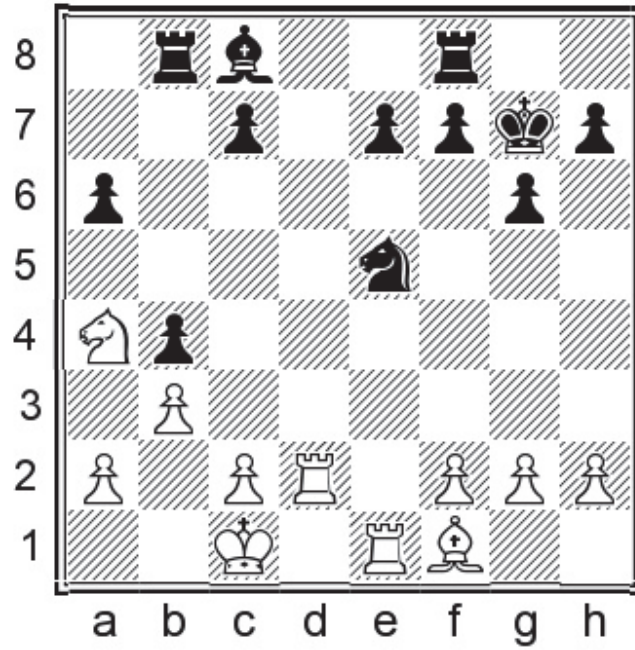
Position after: 16... Nxe5

17. Qf1!

This is clearly the best move, although as to whether it is sufficient to put 6...b5 out of commission as an equalising try I am not going to make any claims.

Pavlovic gives 17. Qxa6!? but this has the potential to become very complicated: 17... Wxg2 18. Bxe5 Wxh2! [18... Qxa6 19. Wf4± is definitely less inspiring, with Nc5 or Bxe7 coming next.] 19. Wd4 Qxa6 20. Be6+ Kg8 21. Bxa6 Bbd8∞

17... Wxd2+ 18. Bxd2



Position after: 18. ♖xd2

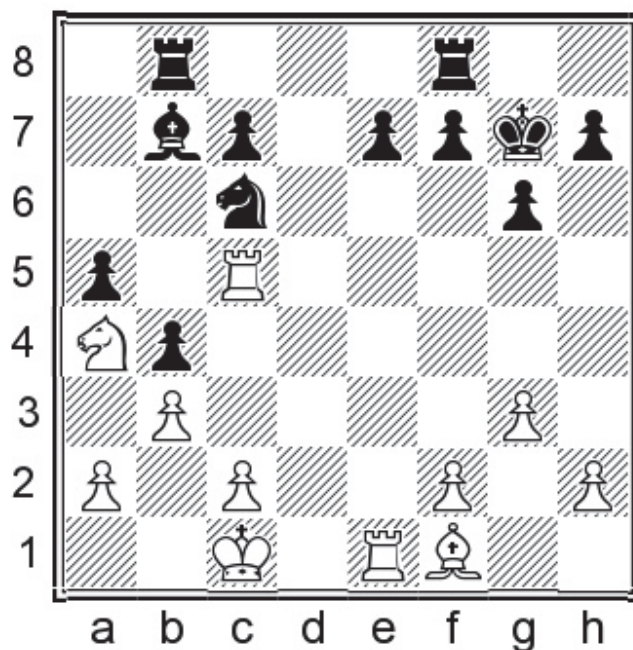
18... ♘c6

18... ♔f6 19. ♖d5 ♘d7 20. ♙xa6 ♘b6 21. ♘xb6 ♖xb6 22. ♙xc8 ♖xc8 23. ♖c5±

19. ♖d5 a5

19... e6 20. ♖c5 ♙b7 21. ♙xa6±

20. ♖c5 ♙b7 21. g3!?!±



Position after: 21.g3!?±

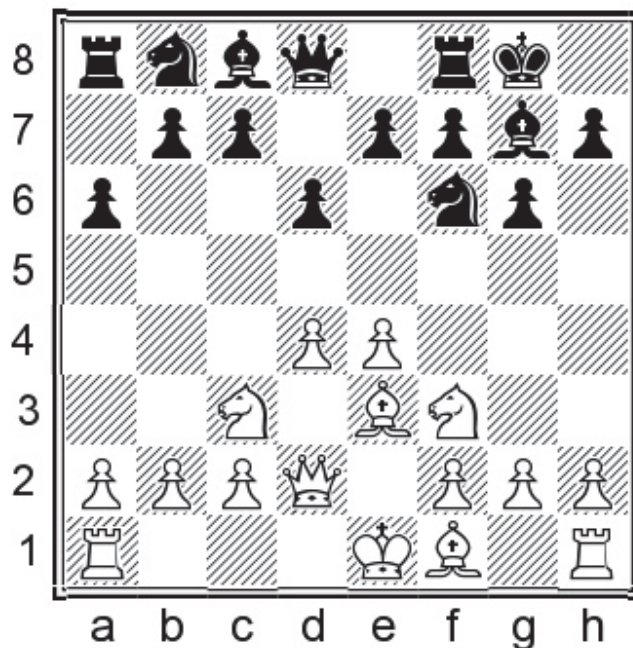
White retains a small pull in a simplified position.

1.3) 6.♙d2 0-0 7.♘d3 intro and other 7th moves

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♖f3 ♗f6 6.♙d2

This move is pretty much indispensable after ♙e3, whatever other plan White intends to play. White gains nothing by playing 6.♙d3 first, for instance.

6...0-0



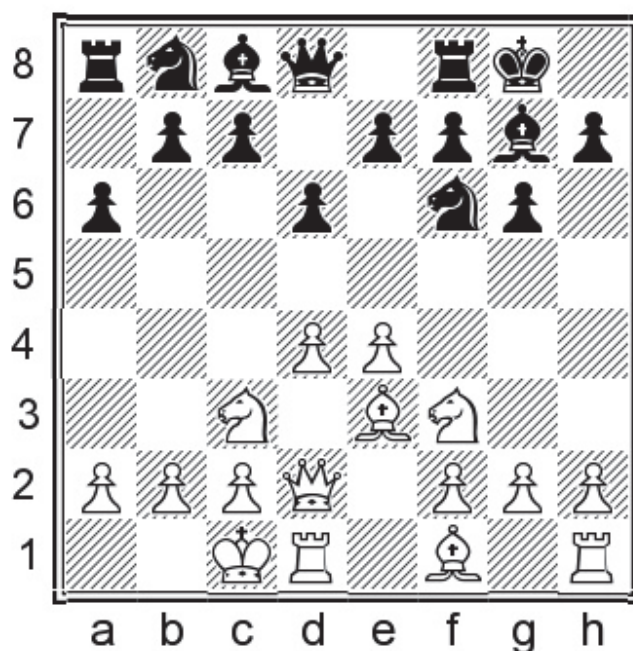
Position after: 6...0-0

Now we shall deal with White's major options other than ♔h6.

7.♔d3

A) 7.a4 It is often not that great for White to play this push in the Pirc (as opposed to Modern) while Black has the option of ...♘c6-b4. In this case he can also consider ...♞g4 ideas. 7...♘c6 8.h3 e5= Fedorchuk, S – Onischuk, V Riga 2019

B) 7.0-0-0 This is a very serious attempt to play move-order tricks.

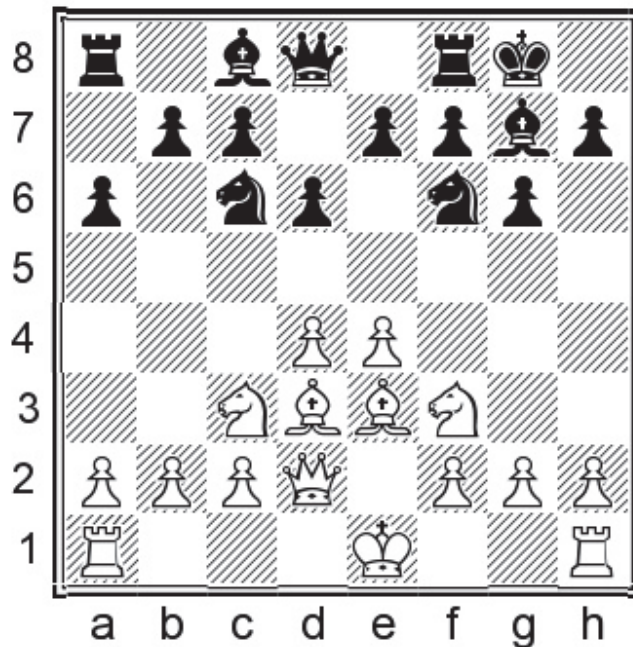


Position after: 7.0-0-0

B1) Following 7...b5 White can play ♖d3 under much more favourable circumstances. 8.♗d3! [8.♗h6 b4 9.♘d5 ♘xe4 is basically just a pawn, and 8.h4 is not much better.] 8...♗b7 [8...b4 9.♘d5 ♘xd5 10.exd5→; 8...♘c6 9.e5 ♘g4 10.♗e4 ♗b7 11.♗f4 dxe5 12.dxe5±] 9.h4! b4 10.♘e2 ♗xe4 11.h5 ♗xd3 12.♙xd3± This is a very unpleasant position for Black, who has to defend accurately and hope to not simply be executed without warning.

B2) 7...♘c6! 8.♗h6 White has eliminated the options based on ...c5, so it might seem that this is especially well-timed. However, after 8...♗g4 9.♙e3 e6⇒ White will not be crashing through soon, and in the meantime Black is ready to play ...b5.

7...♘c6!

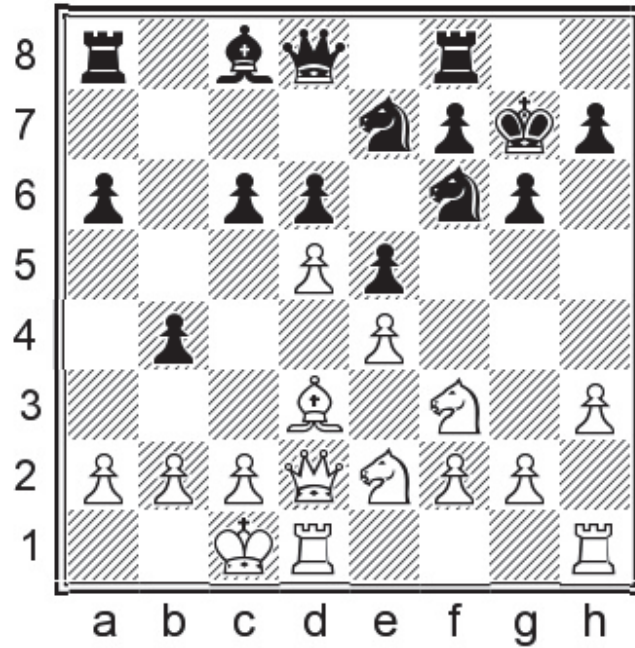


Position after: 7...♘c6!

8.d5

A) 8.h3 is unthreatening, because Black can switch – for once – into KID mode: 8...e5 9.d5 ♘e7

A1) 10.0-0-0 b5 11.♗h6 b4 12.♗xg7 ♖xg7 13.♘e2 c6!

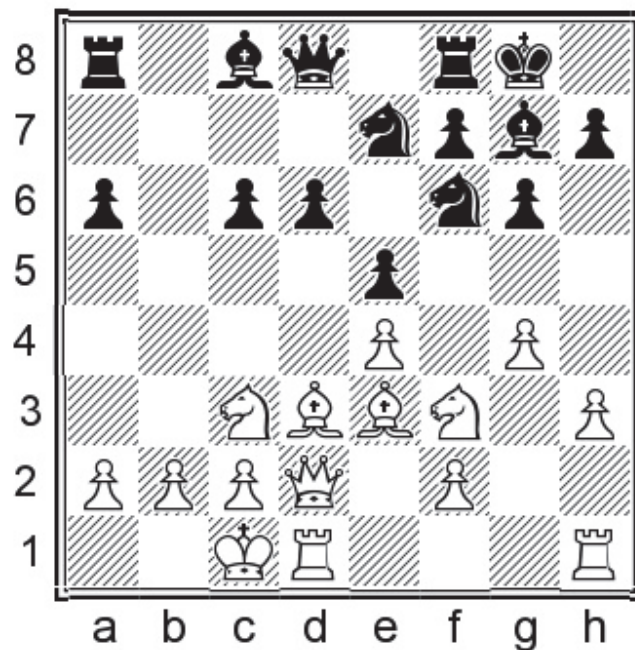


Position after: 13...c6!

A very good call by the experienced Israeli grandmaster. 14.dxc6 ♖xc6 Bok, B – Smirin, I Wijk aan Zee 2017

A2) 10.♗h6 can be met in various ways, including the hypersolid 10...♗xh6 11.♙xh6 ♖h8 intending ...♞fg8, ...h6 and ...f5.

A3) 10.g4 c6 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.0-0-0



Position after: 12.0-0-0

12...♔c7↑ [12...d5?!± Movsesian, S – Carlsen, M Riyadh 2017]

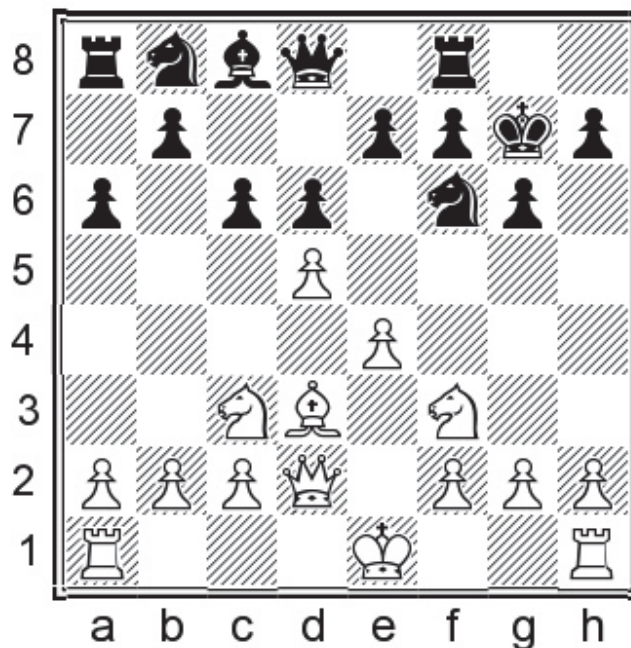
B) 8.e5? doesn't work for various reasons, including 8...dxe5 9.dxe5 ♖g4♞.

C) Following 8.♗h6 Black should avoid the transposition to subchapter 2 with ...b5, and seek out an independent route with 8...e5!? 9.d5 ♜b4!≠.

8...♜b8

Black wants to free his game with ...c6.

9.♗h6 c6 10.♗xg7 ♔xg7



Position after: 10...♔xg7

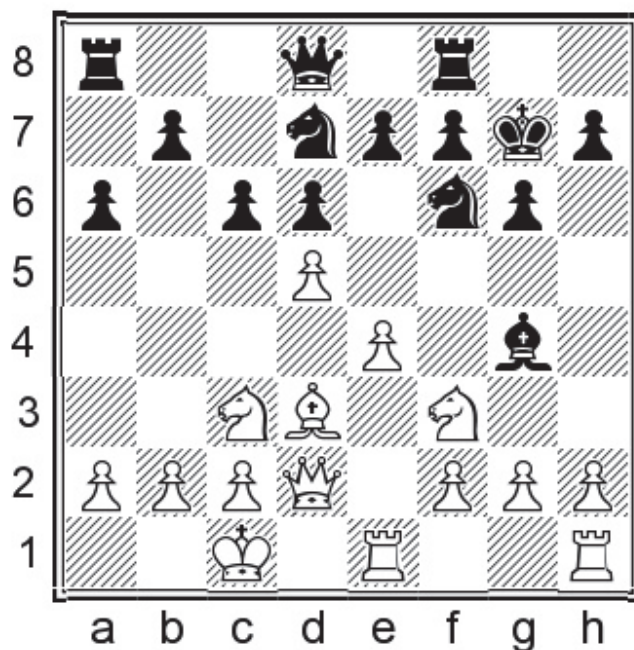
11.0-0-0

This move isn't critical. If we compare it to the version with h4, ...h5 included (next subchapter) White poses more problems with the latter.

11.0-0 is too peaceful: 11...♗g4 [11...b5!? was played in Schroll, G – Videki, S Austria 2018.]

12.♞d4 c5 13.♞de2 ♗xe2 14.♞xe2 b5♞ and Black gets adequate counterplay on the queenside.

11...♗g4 12.♞de1 ♞bd7=

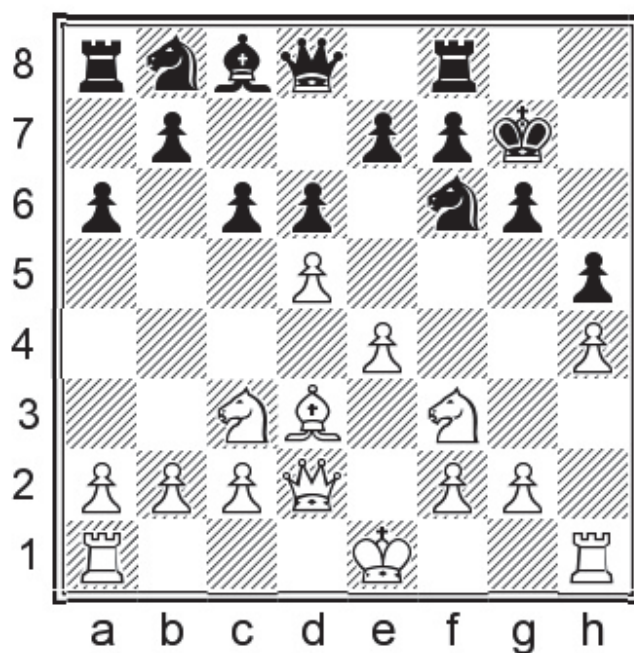


Position after: 12... Nbd7=

This is much better for Black than the equivalent with h4, ...h5 included.

1.4) 6. ♖d2 0-0 7. ♙d3 ♘c6 main line

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♖f3 ♖f6 6.♙d3 0-0 7.♖d2 ♘c6! 8.d5 ♖b8 9.♙h6 c6
10.♙xg7 ♗xg7 11.h4! h5



Position after: 11...h5

In this case I would much rather parry with ...h5 than ...h6. Remembering details like this is the bane of the Pirc/Modern player.

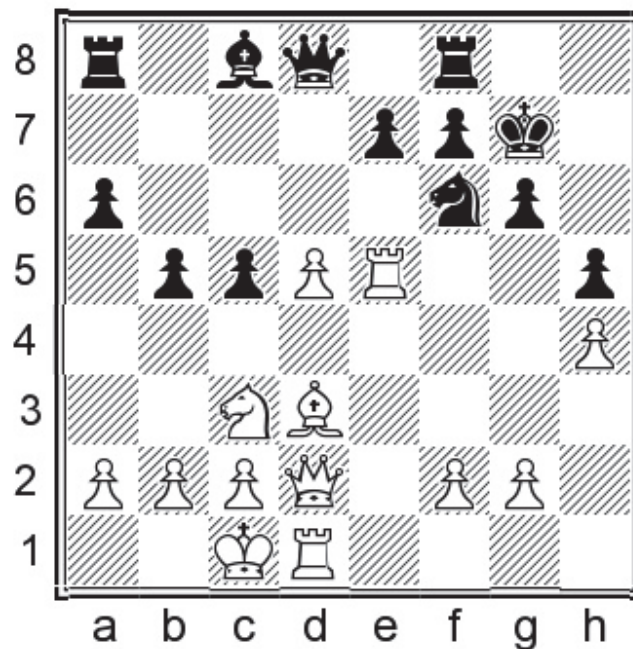
12.0-0-0 ♖bd7

Pavlovic's move, which does let White play through the centre, but objectively everything is totally fine.

12...♙g4!? looks more logical, but following 13.♞de1± there is a slight traffic jam in Black's camp.

13.dxc6

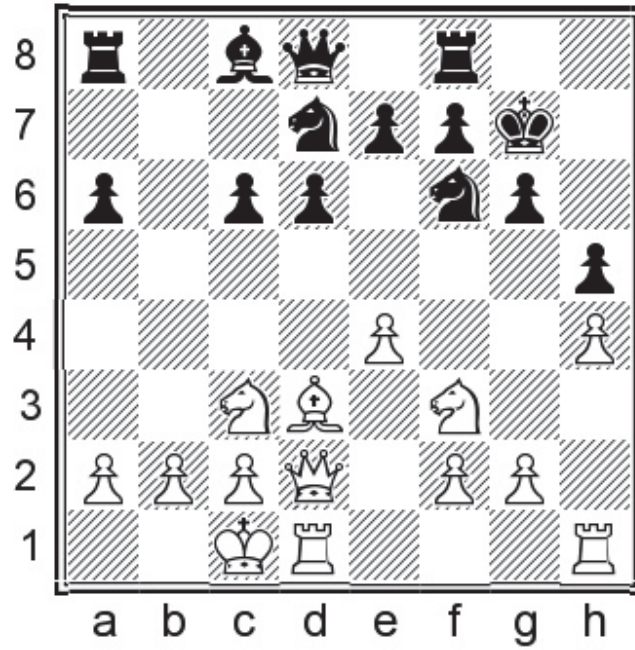
A) 13.♞he1 c5! 14.e5 dxe5 15.♗xe5 ♖xe5 16.♞xe5 b5∞ This type of position, which we can also get from the Benko or Benoni, is a bit unpleasant to play for either side!



Position after: 16...b5∞

B) 13.e5 gives Black more options compared to the main line, e.g. 13...♗xd5 14.♗xd5 cxd5 15.g4! [15.e6 ♗c5 16.exf7 ♙g4=] 15...♗xe5 16.♗xe5 dxe5 17.gxh5 ♙g4!∞ when anything at all can happen.

13...bxc6



Position after: 13...bxc6

14.e5?!

14.♔c4 ♕c7= is a better choice for White, but less critical.

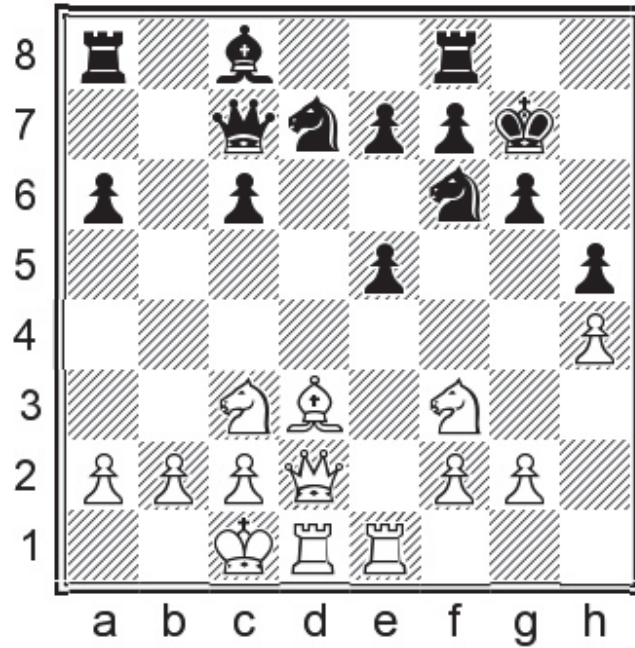
14...dxe5

14...♞xe5 15.♞xe5 dxe5 16.♕g5±

15.♖he1

15.♖de1 ♕a5 16.♕g5 ♞g4 17.♕xe7 ♕c5≠

15...♕c7!



Position after: 15...♔c7!

This move relies on a very tricky nuance which would not be present with a pair of knights traded.

16.♔g5

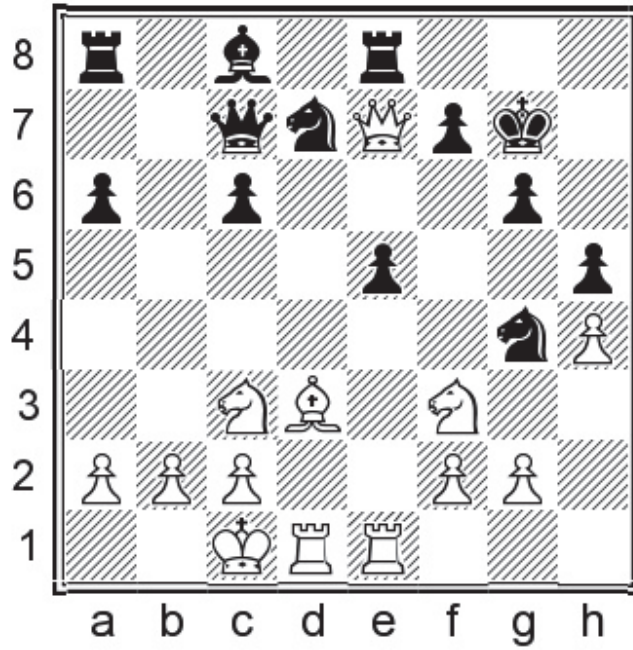
White has to chase after the pawn, because his other attacking chances are fading fast.

16.♗f5?! is too fanciful: 16...gxf5 17.♔g5+ ♔h7 18.♔xf5+ ♔h8 and Black should be able to consolidate.

16...♗g4! 17.♔xe7

17.♗f5?! ♗b6 18.♗xc8 f6!

17...♗e8!!



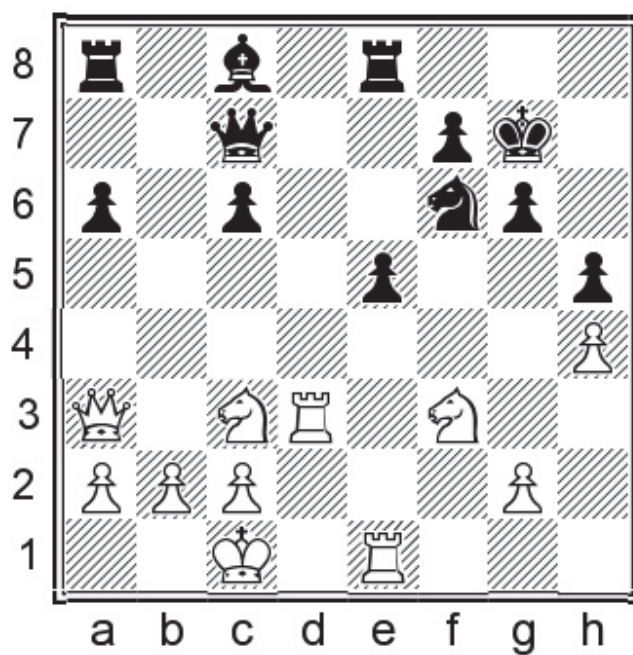
Position after: 17...Re8!!

A good idea to know about.

18. ♔a3

18. ♕xe8 ♖df6

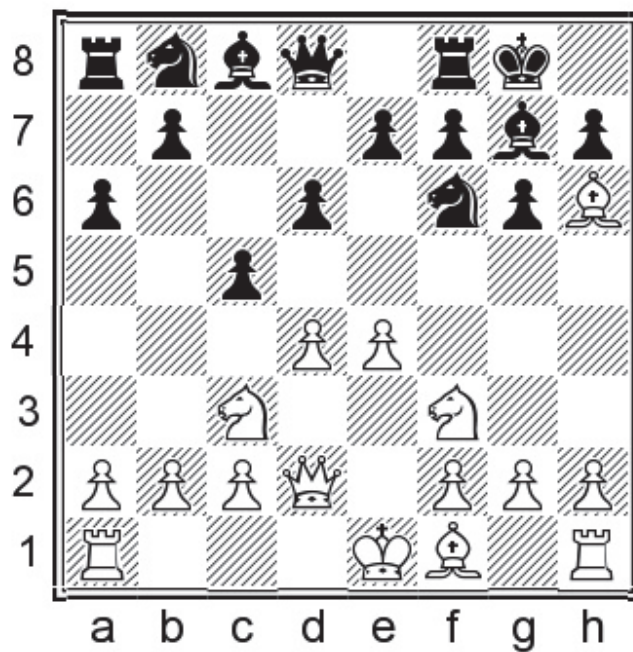
18... ♗xf2 19. ♖d2 ♗xd3+ 20. ♖xd3 ♗f6



Position after: 20... ♖f6

1.5) 6. ♖d2 0-0 7. ♗h6 c5 8. ♗xg7 ♕xg7 9. h4 h5

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3. ♖c3 d6 4. ♗e3 a6 5. ♗f3 ♗f6 6. ♖d2 0-0 7. ♗h6 c5!?

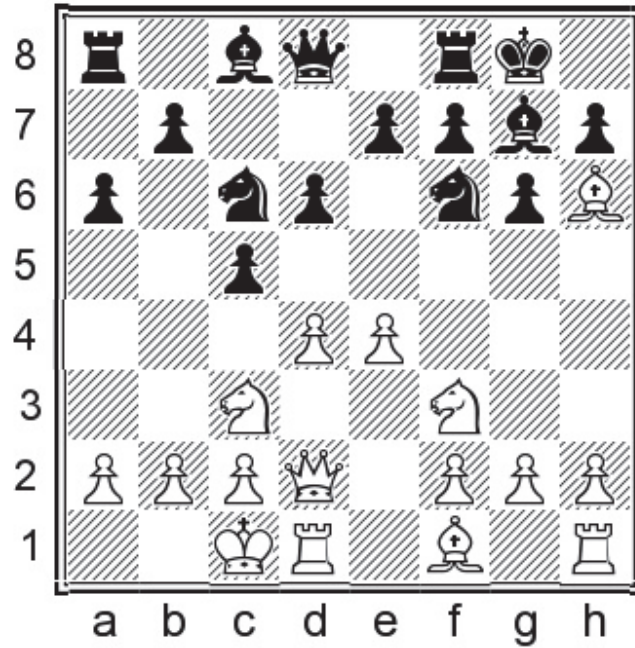


Position after: 7...c5!?

Nothing else is really worth contemplating, if we want a repertoire suggestion against which White can't just play on autopilot (and bearing in mind the previous subchapters.)

8. ♗xg7

A) It's obviously possible to begin with 8.0-0-0 ♖c6 but I don't see how White continues now.

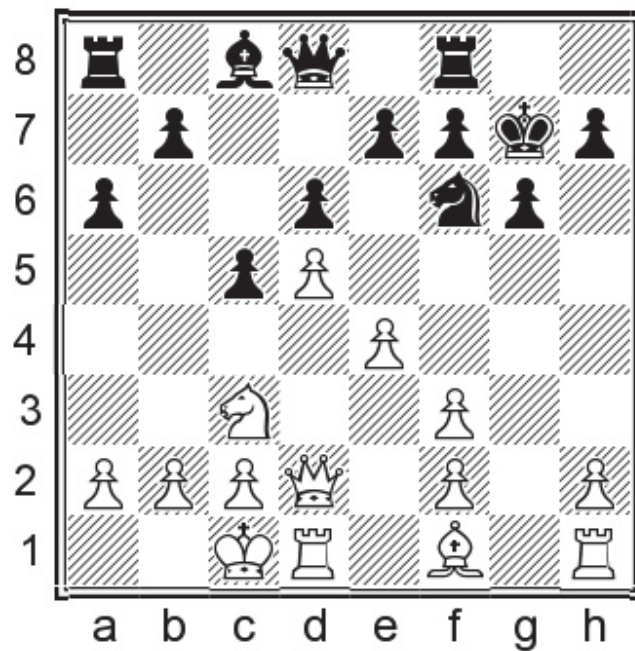


Position after: 8... Nc6

The main move with independent significance must be 9.d5.

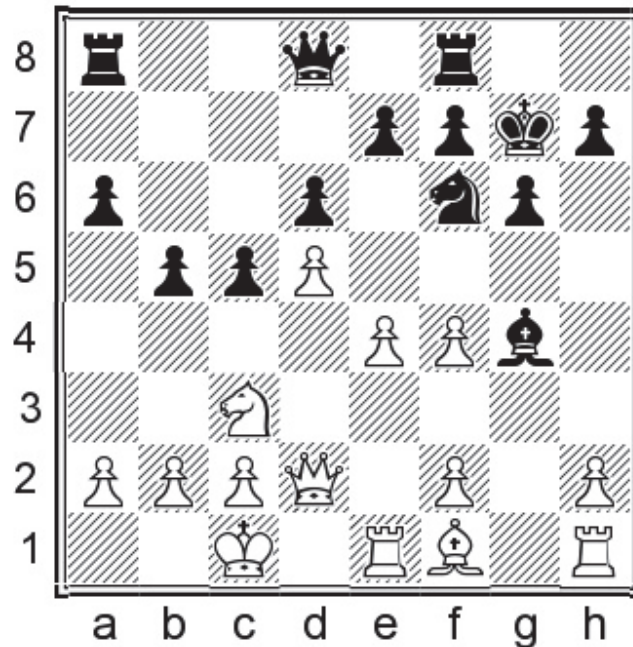
A1) After 9.dxc5 dxc5 10. ♖g5 ♗a5 White really should trade bishops and transpose to subchapter 7: 11.h4? [Inserting 11. ♕b1 ♘e6 helps Black.] 11... ♙xh6 12. ♗xh6 ♞g4

A2) 9.d5 ♞d4!? An important, though small, tactical point. [After 9... ♞a5 10.h4!? we have been somewhat tricked out of our intended lines.] 10. ♙xg7 [10. ♞xd4?? cxd4 and Black is winning at least a pawn.] 10... ♞xf3 11.gxf3 ♕xg7



Position after: 11...♔xg7

12.f4 ♕g4! [12...b5 13.e5 ♖g8 14.♗e4±] 13.♞e1 [13.♕e2 ♕xe2 14.♚xe2 ♚d7 15.e5 ♗h5 16.♚e3 ♚f5 17.♗e2⇌ Black's better structure is balanced by White's tactical possibilities. I think Black should continue with the prophylactic ...♗h8.] 13...b5!

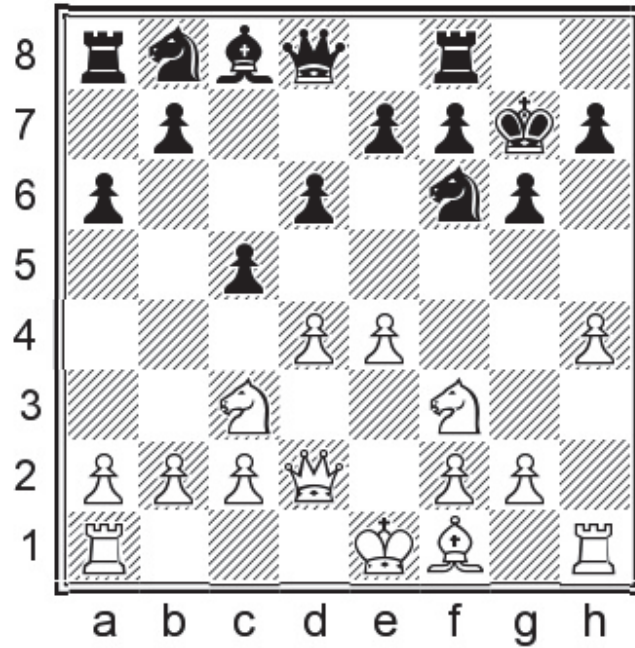


Position after: 13...b5!

14.♞g1 [14.e5? dxe5 15.fxe5 ♗xd5±] 14...b4 15.e5 bxc3 16.exf6+ exf6 17.♚xc3 ♕f5⇌ Here both sides have damaged structures but it's a bit more obvious to me how Black can continue.

B) After 8.h4 Black can play 8...♕g4 and White doesn't seem to have anything better than transposing to subchapter 6.

8...♕xg7 9.h4!?



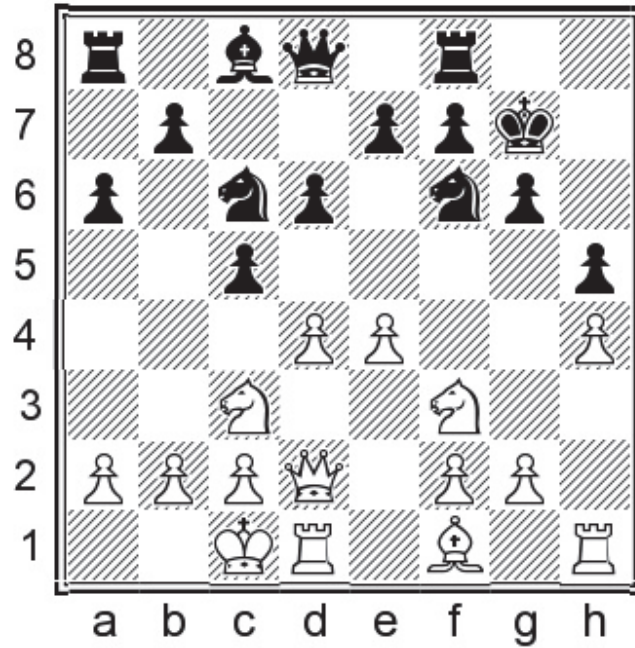
Position after: 9.h4!?

An order with some interesting subtleties to it. We will look at long castling next (subchapter 7) and that move has the bulk of the memory work associated with 5...♞f6. First I'll investigate the automatic human response 9...h5, but I think White has something here. 9...♔g4 is the next subchapter.

9...h5 10.0-0-0

10.dxc5 dxc5 11.♔g5 ♔b6! =

10...♞c6



Position after: 10... Nc6

11.dxc5!

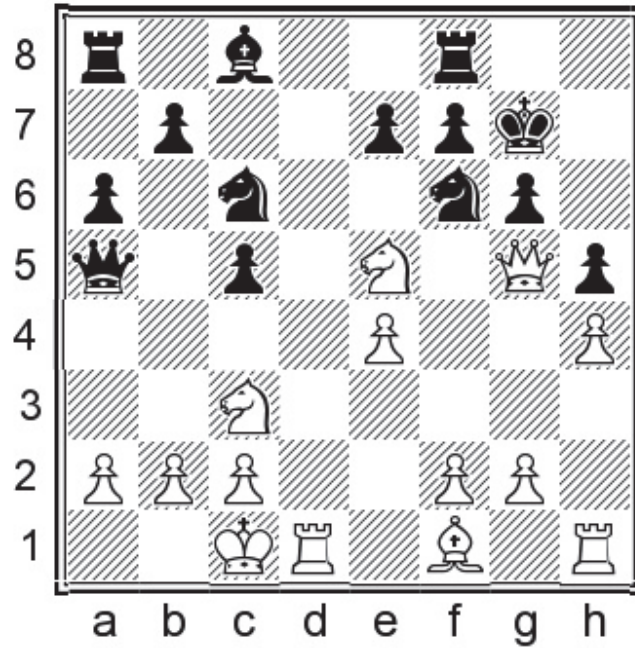
11.d5?! N7a7 12.Ng5 b5 Now in Gabrielian, A – Kobo, O St Petersburg 2018 White had one more chance to reverse the momentum of the game and try and claim an initiative: 13.R1e1= with the idea of Nd1-e3.

11...dxc5 12.Qg5 Qa5

Now White can exploit Black's lack of an ...h6 push (as compared to the main line) by trying to play for Nc4:

13.Ne5!?

13.Nd2 Nd4! is an acceptable answer for Black.



Position after: 13. Nxe5!?

13... Qe6

Black is almost ready to get organised with ... Rad8, so White has to act now.

A) 13... Nd4? now fails to 14. Nxf7 Rxf7 15. Rxd4+-

B) 13... Qc7 14. Nxc6 Qxc6 15. f3± is no fun for Black.

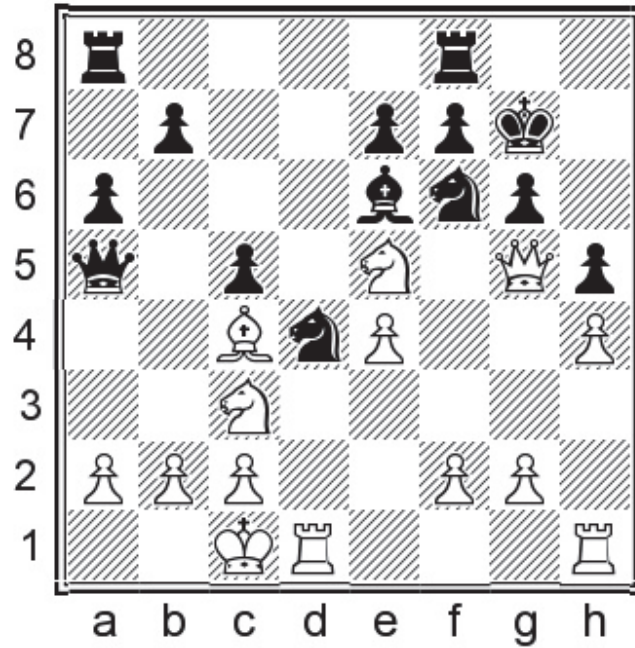
14. Qc4!

14. Nxc6 bxc6± gives Black more than enough for the doubled pawns.

14... Nd4!

Nothing else works.

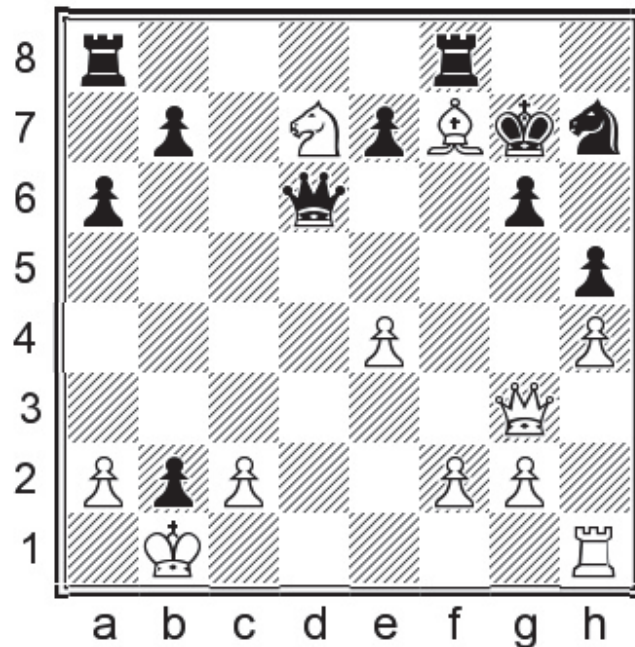
14... Nxe5 15. Qxe6 Nc6 [15... Qc7 16. Nd5 Nxd5 17. Rxd5 fxe6 18. Rxe5 Rxf2 19. Rxe6 Rf6 20. Qe5!±]
16. Qd5±



Position after: 14...♞d4!

15.f3!

A) 15.♞xd4!? doesn't quite cut it: 15...cxd4 16.♟xe6 ♞h7 17.♞g3 dxc3 18.♟xf7 cxb2+ [18...♞b6 19.♞xc3 ♞f6 20.♟b3±] 19.♞b1 ♞b6 20.♞d7 ♞d6!



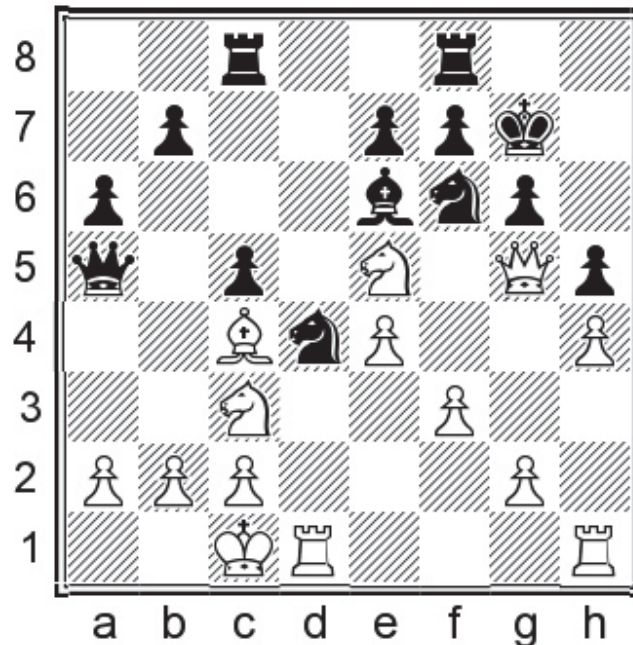
Position after: 20...♞d6!

The endgames seem fine for Black, e.g. 21.♞xf8 ♞xg3 22.fxg3 ♞xf8 23.♟d5 b6 24.♞e1 e5 25.♞xb2

♠f2 26.♞e3 ♜xg2 27.♞b3 g5 and White could also lose if they aren't careful.

B) 15.♘xg6? fxg6 16.♞xd4 ♚c7

15...♞ac8!?



Position after: 15...♞ac8!?

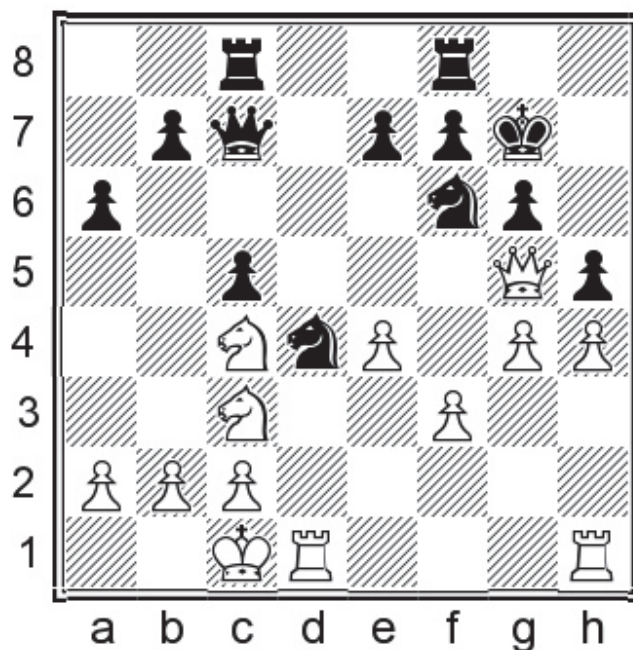
A move which is useful on multiple fronts: x-ray attack on c2, defence of the c7-square. Its disadvantage is that Black lacks any further way to improve his position at all.

A) 15...b5?! sees Black's attack run out of steam: 16.♞xd4 bxc4 17.♞d2 ♞ab8?! [17...♚b6 18.♘e2±] 18.♘c6 ♚b6 19.♘xb8 ♞xb8 20.b3!±

B) 15...♞ad8 16.♘xg6 fxg6 17.♞xd4 ♞xd4 18.♙xe6±

16.♙b1!

Weaker is 16.g4 ♙xc4 17.♘xc4 ♚c7:



Position after: 17...♙c7

Black is ready with the standard answer of ...♘e6, as well as a number of cute counter-attacking moves in specific lines: 18.gxh5 [18.e5 b5!! Otherwise Black is in massive trouble. 19.♘d2 b4=] 18...♘xh5 19.♘d5 ♘xf3!=

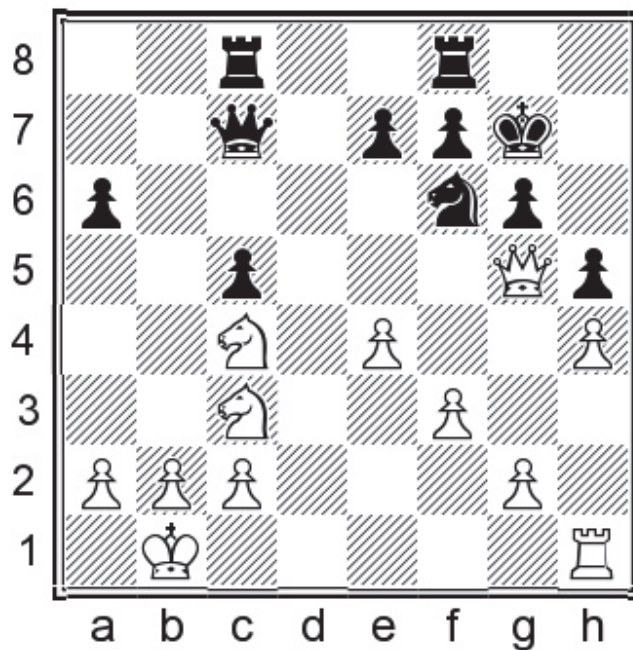
16...b5

This is more or less the only move Black can play, for reasons that have already been exhausted. Now White can play in different ways – for instance, ♙xe6 looks good. So does this line:

17.♞xd4 bxc4 18.♞xc4!?

18.♘xc4 ♙c7 19.♞d5 ♘xd5 20.exd5 f6 21.♙e3 ♙f7∞

18...♙xc4 19.♘xc4 ♙c7=

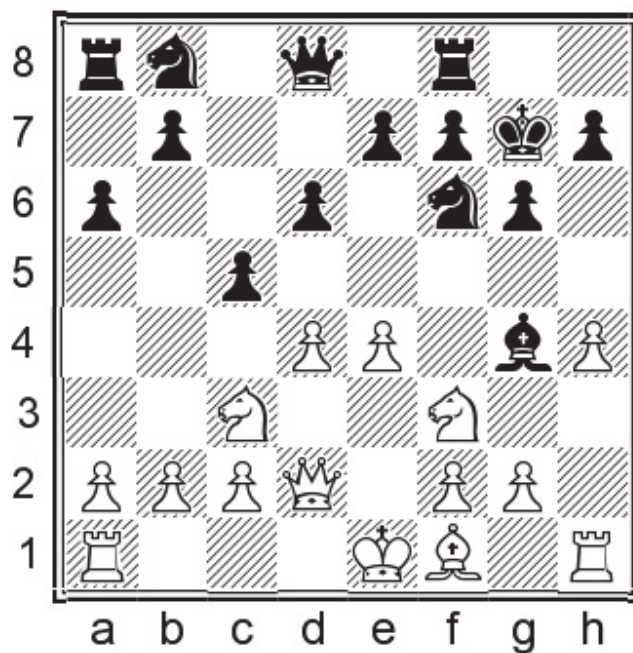


Position after: 19... ♔c7

when White has more than enough compensation.

1.6) 6. ♖d2 0-0 7. ♗h6 c5 8. ♗xg7 ♕xg7 9. h4 ♗g4

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♗e3 a6 5.♖f3 ♖f6 6.♖d2 0-0 7.♗h6 c5!? 8.♗xg7 ♕xg7 9.h4!? ♗g4!



Position after: 9... ♗g4!

10. ♖h2

10.h5 should always be considered, but here I think Black can simply take. 10... ♕xh5! [10... ♖xh5 11. ♖h2 cxd4 12. ♖xg4 dxc3 13. ♖xc3+ e5 14. ♖d2±] 11. ♕e2 ♖c6↗

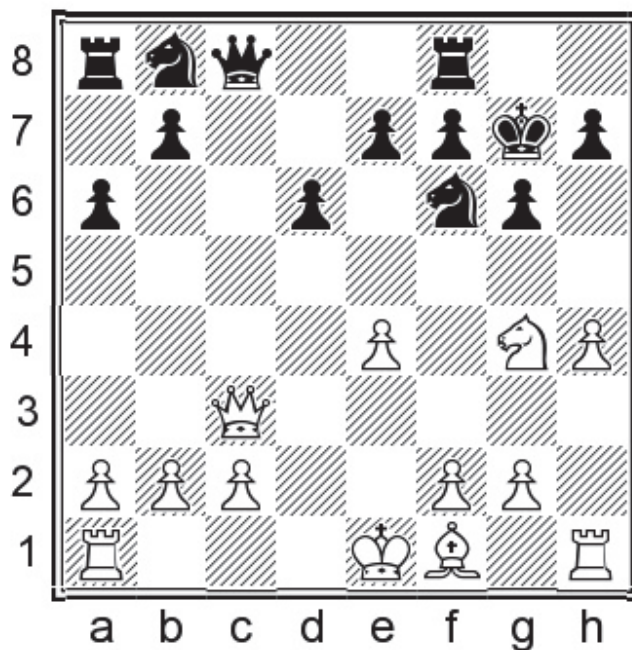
10...cxd4

A) 10... ♖c6 11.d5 ♖d4 12. ♖xg4 ♖xg4 13.h5→

B) 10... ♕c8 is too cynical for me, and the previous set of notes also imply that maybe White can insert 11.h5!?

11. ♖d5

11. ♖xg4 dxc3 12. ♖xc3 ♖c8!↗

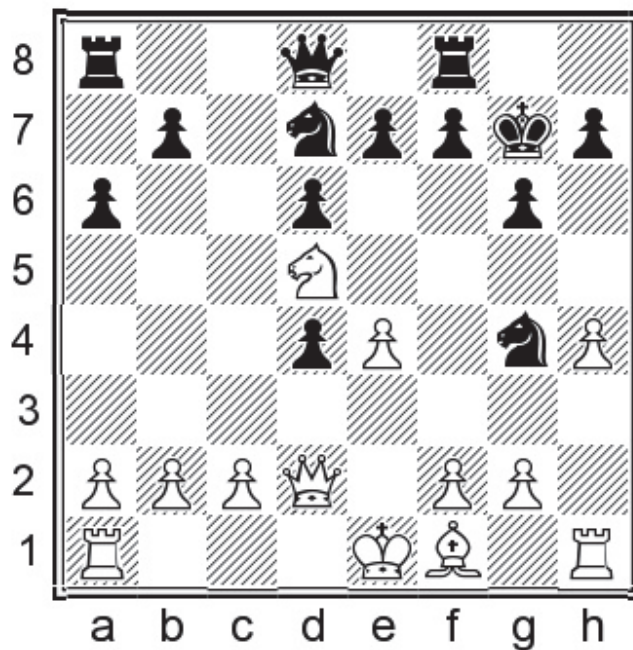


Position after: 12... ♖c8!↗

11... ♖bd7! 12. ♖xg4

12. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 13. ♖xg4 ♖xg4 14. ♕e2 ♖f6 15. ♖xd4 h5 is absolutely nothing, and I'd even prefer to take Black here.

12... ♖xg4



Position after: 12... Nc4

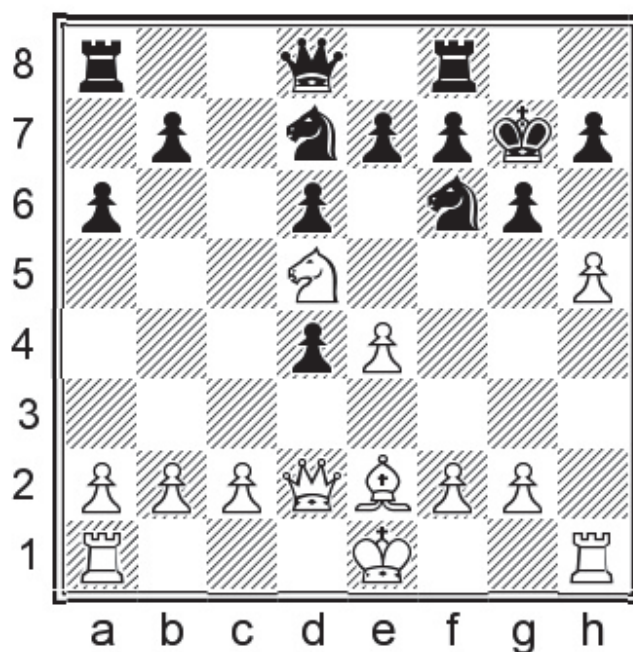
13. Qe2?!

Critical but not especially good.

A) 13. h5 e6 [13... e5!? 14. hxg6 hxg6 15. f3 Nc3 16. Nxe3 dxe3 17. Qxe3 Qa5+=] 14. Qxd4+ Ndf6=

B) 13. f3 Ngf6 14. Qxd4 e5! Thematic. 15. Qd2 Nxd5 16. Qxd5 Nf6

13... Nc4 14. h5

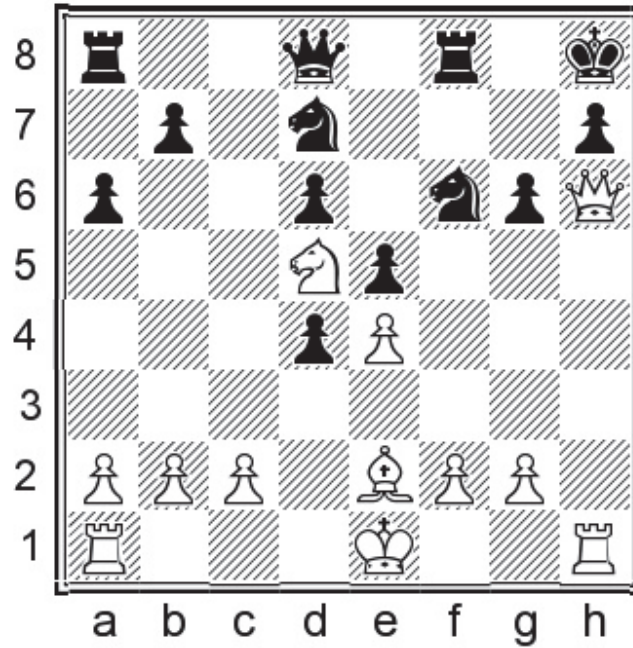


Position after: 14.h5

14...e5!

14...♞xe4 15.♞xd4+ ♞df6 16.0-0-0∞ and only White can be better.

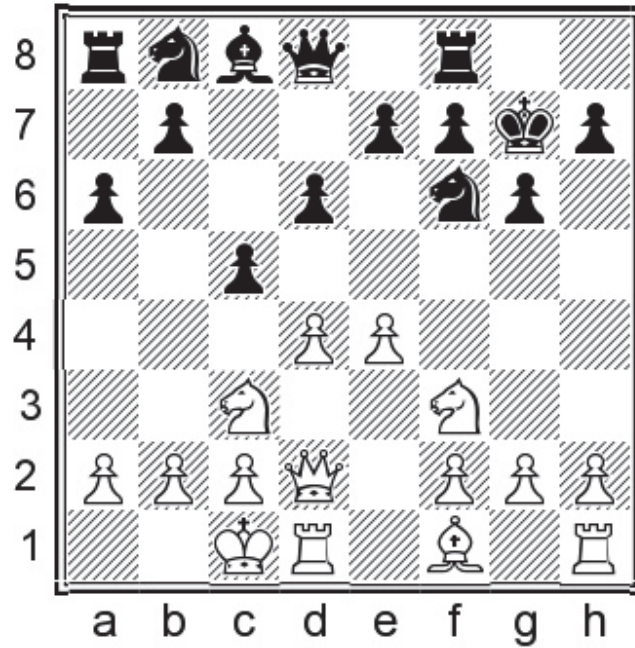
15.hxg6 fxg6 16.♞h6+ ♔h8



Position after: 16...♔h8

1.7) 6.♞d2 0-0 7.♞h6 c5 8.♞xg7 ♔xg7 9.0-0-0

1.e4 g6 2.d4 d6 3.♞c3 ♞g7 4.♞e3 a6 5.♞f3 ♞f6 6.♞d2 0-0 7.♞h6 c5!? 8.♞xg7 ♔xg7 9.0-0-0

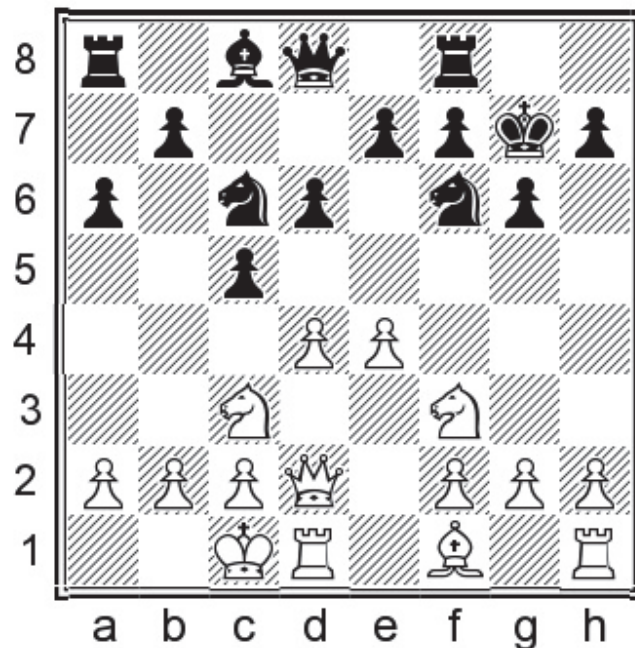


Position after: 9.0-0-0

I can't find an advantage for White in this line either, and while Black does have to do memory work, he will be rewarded with winning chances based on his queenside counterplay.

9...♞c6

Black should avoid the likes of 9...cxd4 10.♞xd4± when White has achieved more of his Dragon goals than Black.



Position after: 9...♘c6

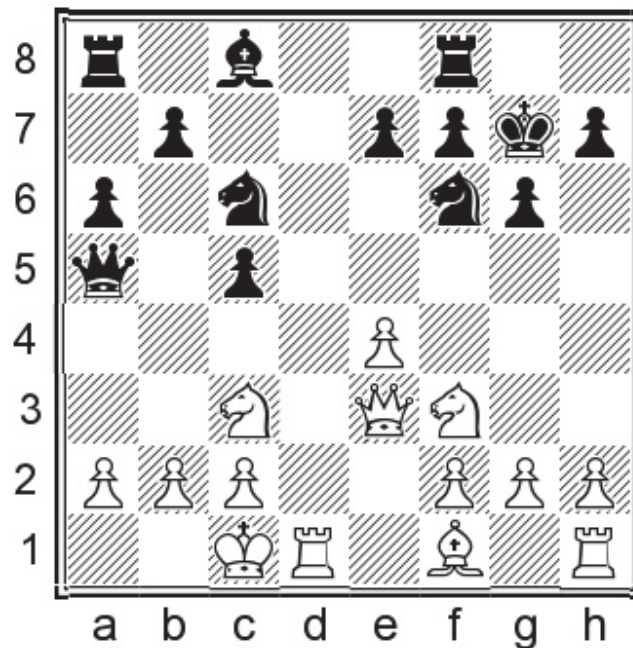
10.dxc5

After 10.d5 Black does not have ...♘d4 as in the case of 9.d5, but the fact that he can block on the h-file does mean he's able to attack a bit more slowly on the queenside. 10...♘a7! [10...♘e5!? can also be considered.] Now the critical line seems to be 11.h4 ♕g4 12.♖e1 ♘b5! 13.e5 dxe5 14.♘xe5 ♘xc3 15.♙xc3 ♘xd5 16.♙d2 ♘f6! = with a likely equal endgame. The centre is so empty that neither side can really commit to a flank attack.

10...dxc5 11.♙e3

11.♙g5 ♙a5 doesn't work so well here as in the last line: after most logical developing moves like 12.♕c4 Black has 12...h6 13.♙g3 b5 14.♕d5 and now there is the solid ...♕b7, or the sacrificial ...b4.

11...♙a5

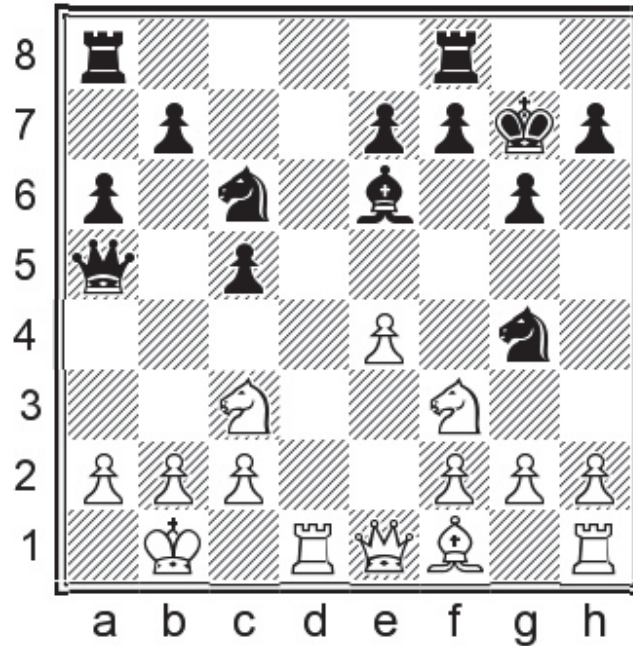


Position after: 11...♙a5

12.♖b1!

When you can't think what to do in the Sicilian, you should play ♖b1, and the rule applies here too! In his analysis for ChessPublishing, GM Justin Tan delves into the following line, which is basically fine for Black: 12.h3 ♕e6 13.e5 ♘e8 14.h4 h5 15.a3 ♘c7 16.♕d3 ♘b5!∞ Black offered the c5-pawn in Jacot, L – Neagu, L ICCF email 2012, and proceeded to draw a baffling game full of computer lines, but all three results are possible here.

12...♘g4 13.♚e1 ♙e6



Position after: 13...♙e6

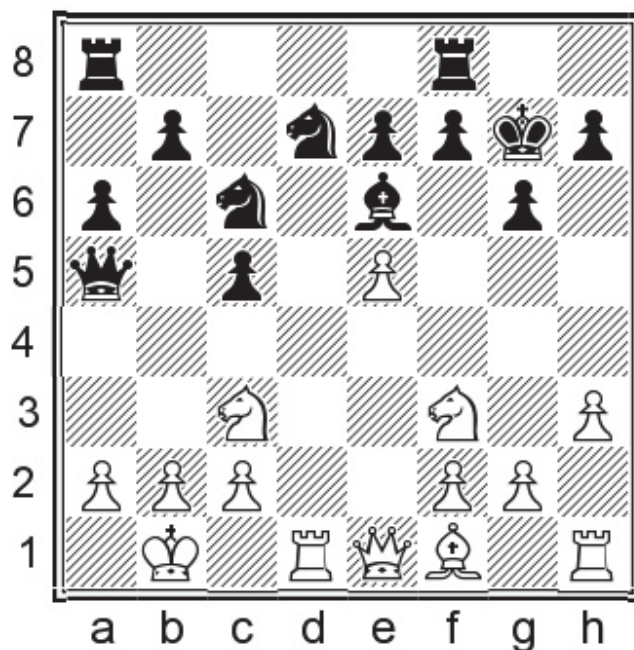
14.h3

14.♘g5 is a human move, but the doubled e-pawns won't be weak at all. 14...♞ad8! 15.♘xe6+ [15.♙e2 ♙c8=] 15...fxe6 16.♞xd8 ♚xd8 17.♙e2 ♘ge5⇌

14...♘f6 15.e5

15.♚e3 ♞ad8 16.♙e2 is the most circumspect, hoping for a small endgame edge. But most likely Black is just fine after a move like ...h6.

15...♘d7



Position after: 15... Nd7

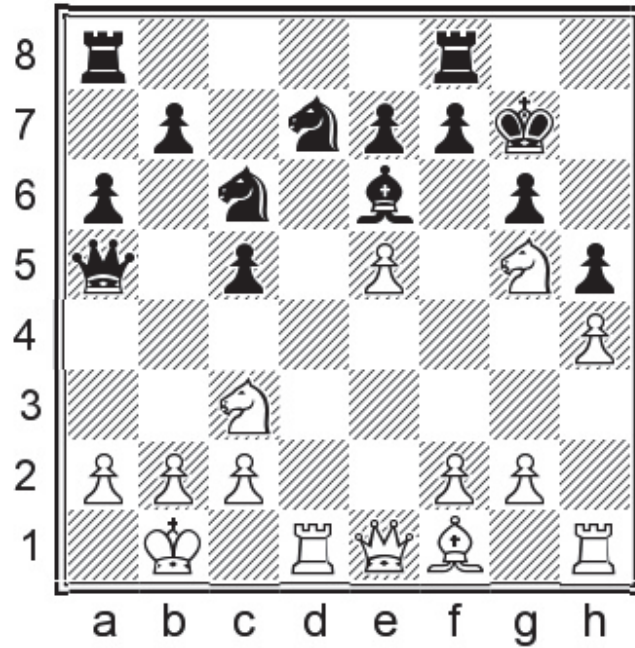
16.h4!?

Not for the first time in this line, White wants to include h4, ...h5 on his terms.

Justin only gives 16. Ng5 Bxd8 17. f4 Nb6! when Black's knights drum up enough tricks for any structural defects, e.g. 18. Nxe6+ fxe6 19. Bxd8 Bxd8 20. h4 Nd5! Black has no time for ...h5 in this position, hence why White should try and get those two moves included first. 21. h5 Nxc3+ [21... Qb4!?] 22. bxc3 Nd4=

16...h6!

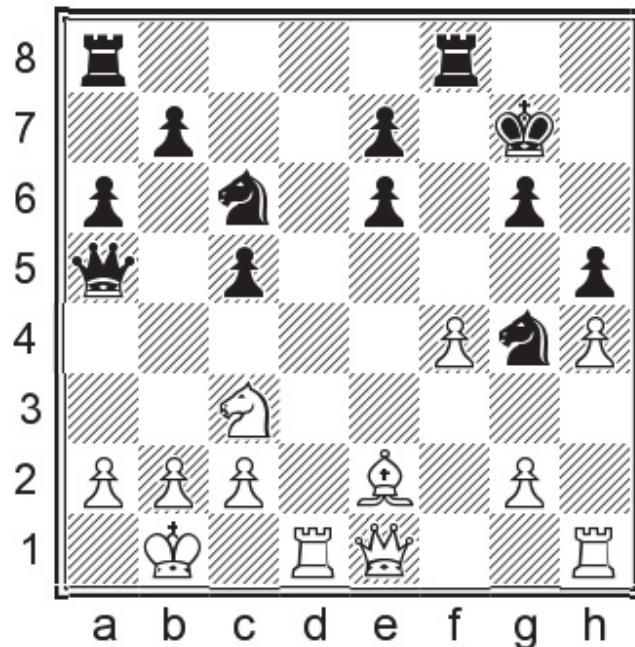
16...h5?! 17. Ng5!



Position after: 17. Bg5!

A) 17... Rad8 is a much worse version of the last note, e.g. 18. f4 Bb6 [18... Qf5 19. e6!±] 19. Bxe6+ fxe6 20. Rxd8 Rxd8 21. Qg3 Ba4 22. Qe2 Bxc3+ 23. bxc3± and White takes over the initiative

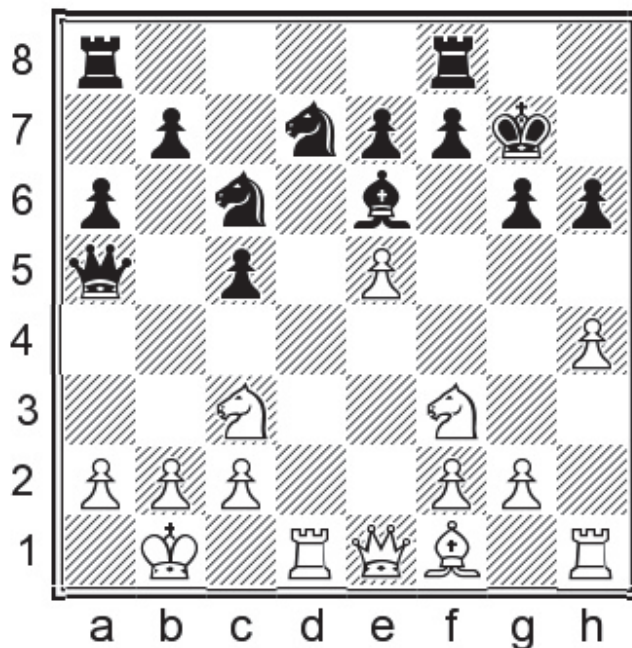
B) 17... Bdx5 18. f4 Bg4 19. Bxe6+ fxe6 20. Qe2!



Position after: 20. Qe2!

20... Bf6 [20... Be3 21. Qxh5 Bxd1 22. Qxd1± with amazing positional and tactical compensation for the exchange.] 21. g4!? [21. Qf3 Bd4 22. Qe5 Rad8 looks promising, but there isn't a follow-up.]

21...hxg4 White just has to find a correct continuation of the attack, since the attackers clearly outnumber the defenders. To me, it seems like 22.♔g3 ♕c7 23.♖dg1± should do the job.



Position after: 16...h6!

17.♔e3

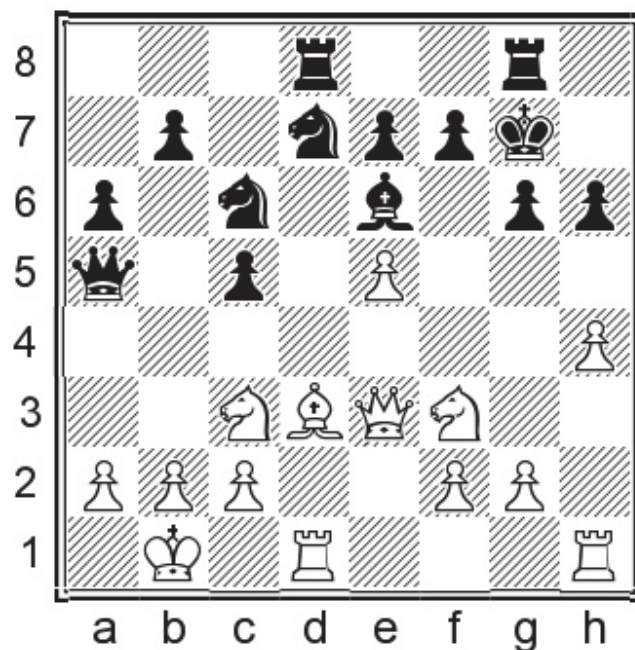
This position is still something of a minefield. White can go wrong (e.g. by losing the e5-pawn) as easily as Black.

17.h5 g5 18.♔e3 ♖g8! Black has to prepare an escape route. 19.♗c4 ♗xc4 20.♖xd7=

17...♖g8! 18.♗d3!?

Believe it or not, this is prophylaxis. White's point is the double attack 18...b5 19.h5 g5 20.♔e4!+-

18...♖ad8! =



Position after: 18...♖ad8! =

Having got this far, Black is granted his wish of an equal game.

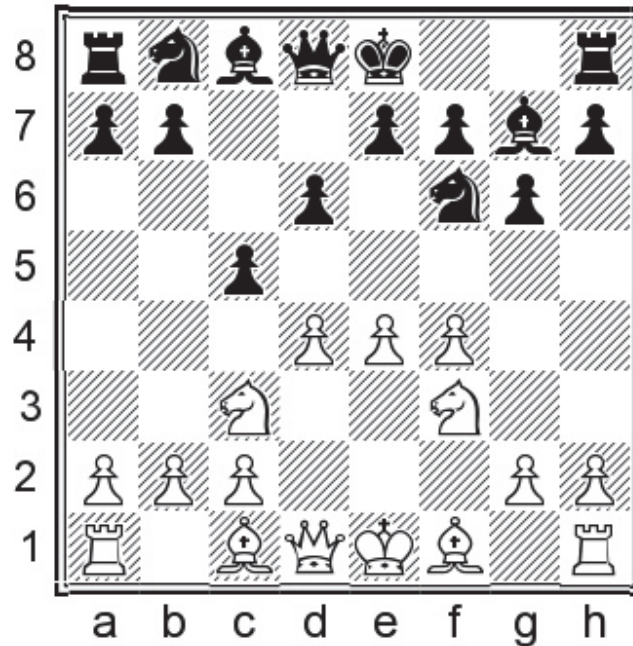
Conclusion to Chapter 1

This is not an easy chapter. In common with all the chapters of Part IV, Black will suffer if he has not done memory work, but I still think there are some general comments we can make, as well as moves to highlight. In general, White's chances in this system lie not in closed positions but in lines with an opened d-file; he should combine kingside pressure with tactical motifs involving e5, ♖e5 or ♘d5 as in 1.5). Saying that, there is some delicacy in how Black should handle the push d5, especially when it comes with tempo.

Chapter 2

Austrian Pirc without 6.♘b5+

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 c5



Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – Austrian Pirc without 6.♘b5+

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 c5

2.1) Intro and 6.d5

2.2) Endgame line: 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d3

2.3) Short-castling line: 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d3

2.4) 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d4 0-0 8.cxd6

2.5) 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d4 0-0 8.♗d2

Introduction to Chapter 2

This is the first of three chapters on the Austrian Pirc, which is an opening so complicated that the analysis here will make 4...a6 in Part IV look almost like a surprise weapon. The reason for this weighting is that I think there will be people who want to play 4...♘f6 and not 4...a6, but very few who want the reverse. I do think it's important to analyse both, and also to vary your approach so that opponents don't exactly know what to expect. In fact, you can even go one better and play both 5...c5

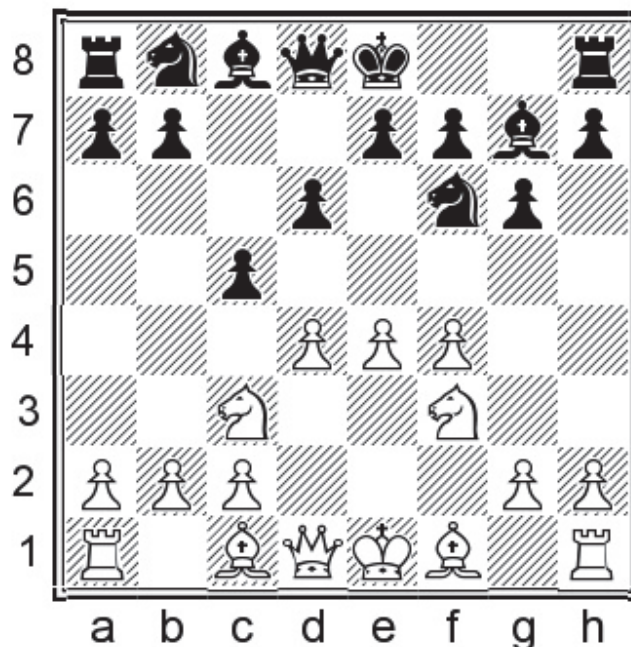
and 5...0-0 within the Austrian Pirc, but I shall draw the line at doing that. The choice of ...c5 is slightly more taxing memory-wise, but I think White also has to know a fair bit to enter these lines.

This chapter will focus specifically on less threatening lines White can try, whereas the other two will be devoted entirely to the disruptive 6.♘b5+. First, 2.1) deals with the various Benoni- and Sicilian-type possibilities, none of which are too threatening. Somewhat more interesting is 2.2) where White makes it his priority to exchange queens. Two basic endgames are then possible: one where White plays with a far-advanced king's pawn and one where Black has a broken structure but the bishop-pair compensates. Wrapping up the single-subchapter lines is the interesting 7.♙d3 (2.3) which leads to play vaguely reminiscent of the Grand Prix Attack against the Sicilian.

Finally there is the 7.♖d4 line, in which Black must sacrifice a pawn and play with an IQP, but the queenside attack compensates for all that. I would particularly draw your attention to the key move 10...b5 in 2.4) and the idea 12...♖fd8 in 2.5) which seems to simplify Black's task a fair bit. This last also ties in with a recurring theme in the 6.dxc5 line: when is it okay to play ...dxc5 and when must you try and take another pawn? Compare III.1.3 where Black simply cannot ever play ...dxc5 and must take the e-pawn instead.

2.1) Intro and 6.d5

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♙g7 5.♘f3 c5

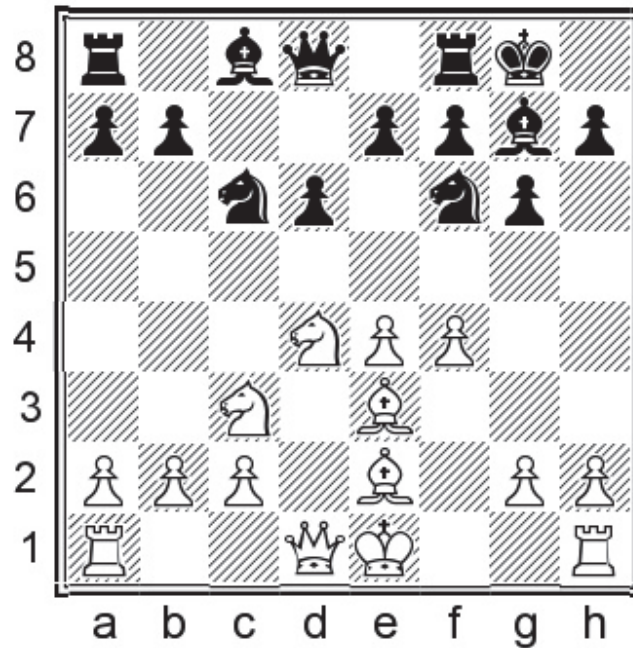


Position after: 5...c5

There is nothing really wrong with 5...0-0, and you can play for a win there too, but this move is stylistically more my scene. But isn't it a forced draw if White wants, you ask? Well, kind of.

6.d5

6.♙e2 cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘c6 8.♙e3 [8.♘b3 0-0 9.0-0 b5! 10.♙xb5?! ♚b6+ 11.♙h1 ♘xe4!≠ Castaneda – D. Gurevich, Chicago 1994.] 8...0-0

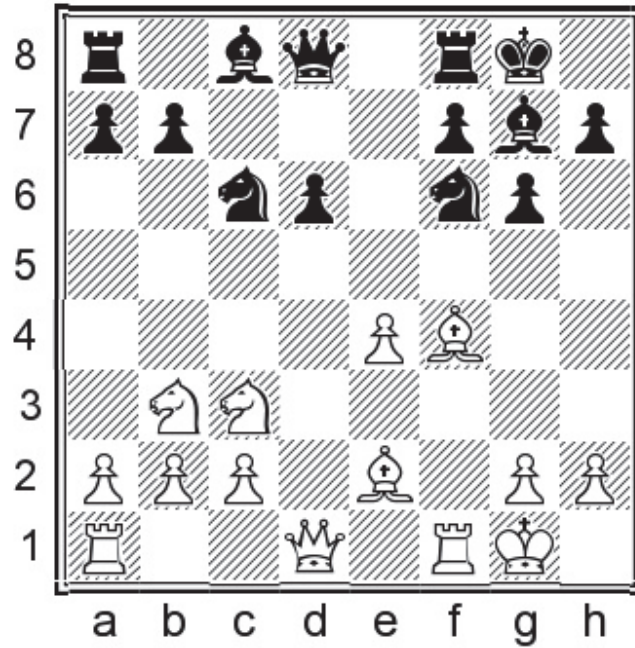


Position after: 8...0-0

Black intends to take on d4 and then play ...e5. This is a good Sicilian for Black: he has not spent a tempo on ...a6 yet and indeed it may be unnecessary in some lines, as in 8.♘b3 above.

A) 9.0-0 ♚b6! works tactically for Black since White's best try is 10.♚d3 ♘g4 11.♘d5!? [11.♙xg4 ♙xd4 12.♙xd4 ♚xd4+ 13.♚xd4 ♘xd4 14.♙d1=] 11...♙xd4! 12.♘xb6 ♙xe3+ 13.♙h1 ♙xb6⇌ With this material imbalance the stronger player will win.

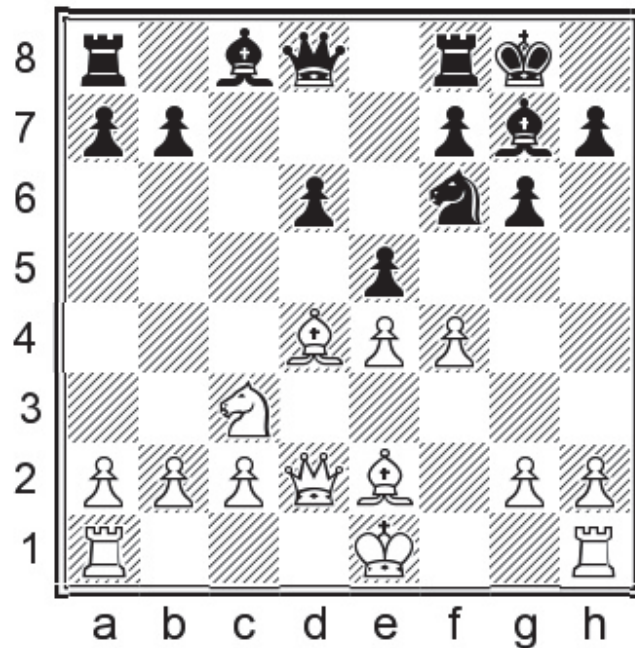
B) 9.♘b3 Avoiding ...♘xd4 followed by ...e5, but Black can play the pawn push anyway since there is no danger of White being able to go past. (Compare the position where White already has g4 and Black has ...a6.) 9...e5! 10.0-0 Ambitious, but maybe not rightly so. [10.fxe5 ♘xe5 11.0-0 ♙e6= is simple enough.] 10...exf4 11.♙xf4



Position after: 11. ♖xf4

11...♖e8! No need to spend a tempo on ...♘e5 in this case. Black simply liquidates the centre. This resource is initially due to GM Mihail Marin. 12. ♗xd6 ♖b6+!? [12...♗xd6 13. ♕xd6 ♘xe4= is quite equal.] 13. ♔h1 ♘xe4 14. ♘xe4 ♖xe4 15. ♕f3 ♖e6 16. ♗d2 ♖e8 17. c3 ♘e5!↑ Black has some pressure.

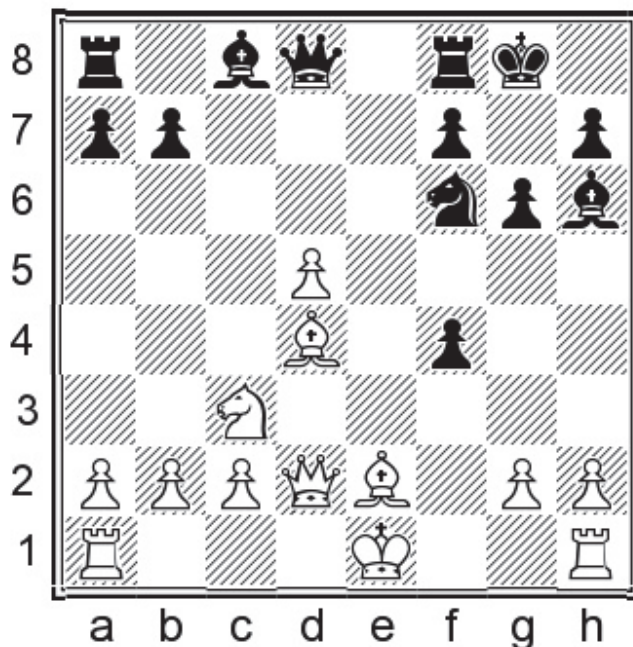
C) 9. ♗d2 ♘xd4 10. ♕xd4 e5



Position after: 10...e5

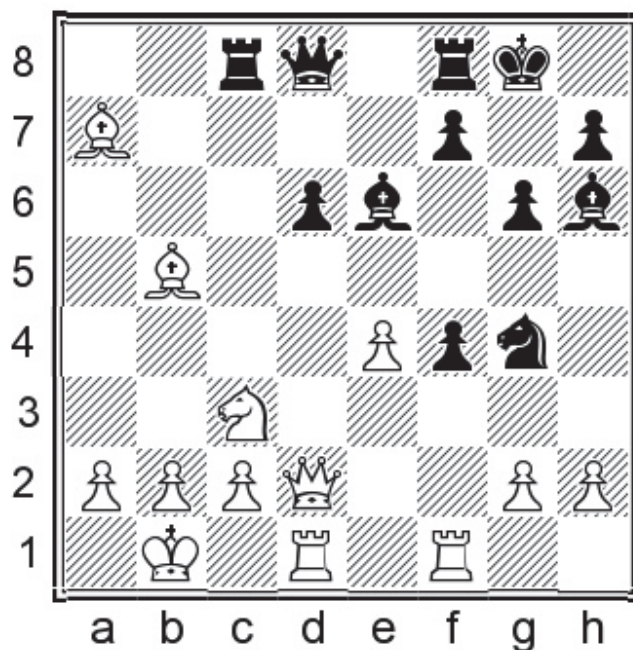
11. ♕e3 [11.fxe5 dxe5 12. ♕e3 ♕e6= White couldn't win a pawn due to the ...♘xe4 motif. So he had

to go back to e3, but now the position is dead level, as in Fritsche – Dutra Neto, email 2009.]
 11...exf4 12.♔d4 A logical improvement of White's play pointed out by Marin. [12.♙xf4?! ♖e8
 This is similar to the 9.♘b3 line from above, except that White has not castled yet. This factor tips
 the evaluation in Black's favour.] 12...♙h6! [The following idea is not bad per se, but White can
 sacrifice back the pawn in an interesting way. 12...d5!? 13.exd5 ♙h6



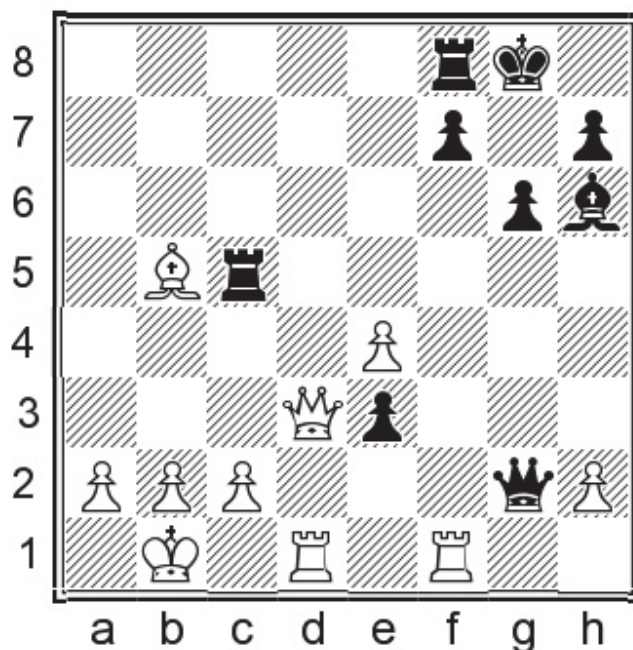
Position after: 13...♙h6

14.0-0-0!? ♘xd5? 15.♙f3 ♙e6 16.♚e1!± Suddenly Black is in major trouble.] 13.0-0-0 White's
 main idea must be to castle queenside and get ♖hf1xf4 in. 13...♙e6 14.♔b1 ♖c8 15.♖hf1 [15.g3 d5!±
 works out well for Black.] 15...b5!? One of several options, with the idea being to distract the e2-
 bishop and launch an attack on the kingside. Black can play less speculative moves if he is fine with
 equality. 16.♙xb5 [16.♖xf4?! White equalises the material stakes after this, but his rook will be
 caught offside on h4. 16...b4 17.♙xf6 bxc3 18.♙xd8 cxd2 19.♖h4 ♙e3 20.♙f6 ♖c6↑] 16...♘g4
 17.♙xa7



Position after: 17. ♖xa7

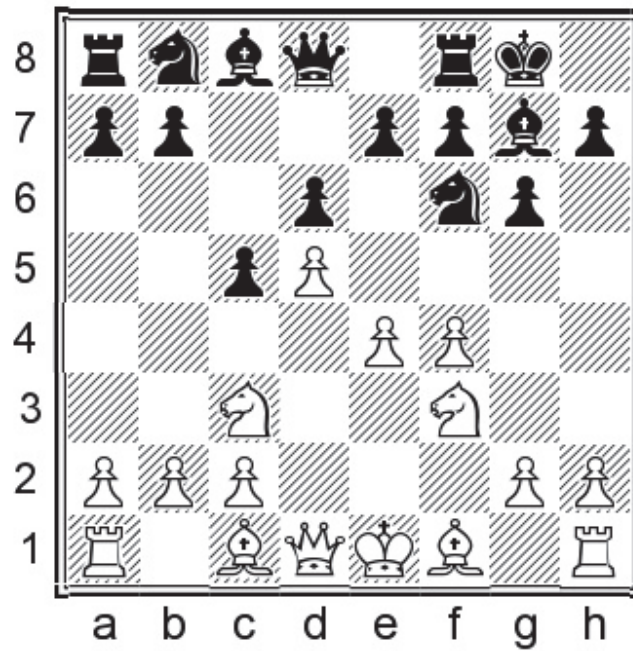
17... ♘e3 [The engine approves of the forcing 17... f3!? 18. ♕xd6 ♖xd6 19. ♗xd6 fxg2 20. ♖g1 ♖a8 21. ♘b6 ♘f4 22. ♖xe6! fxe6 23. ♖xg2 ♘xh2 24. a4∞ but this seems harder to play for Black.] 18. ♘e3 fxe3 19. ♕xd6 ♖g5 20. ♘d5! [20. a4 ♖xc3 21. bxc3 ♘g7∞ is preferable for Black in a practical game.] 20... ♘xd5 21. ♕xd5 ♖xg2 22. ♕d3 ♖c5⇌ The threat of ... ♖xb5 and ... e2 is oddly hard to meet.



Position after: 22... ♖c5⇌

6...0-0

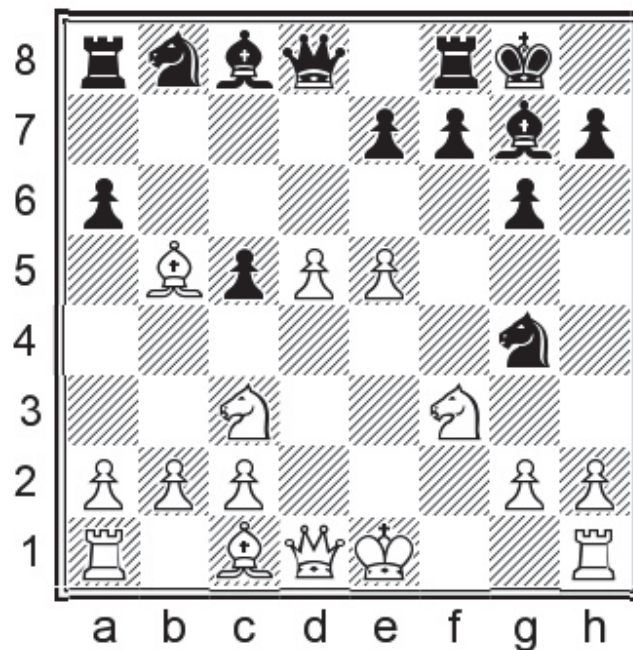
Without a black piece on d7 (unlike the next chapter) there is no danger of the e5 break being dangerous. So Black can continue normally.



Position after: 6...0-0

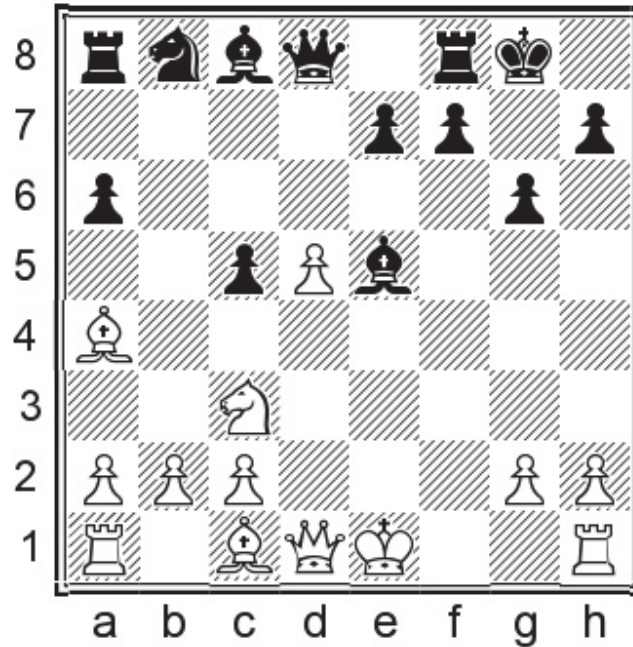
7.♔d3

7.♔e2 b5! The standard Benoni trick. 8.e5 dxe5 9.fxe5 ♖g4 10.♔xb5 a6!



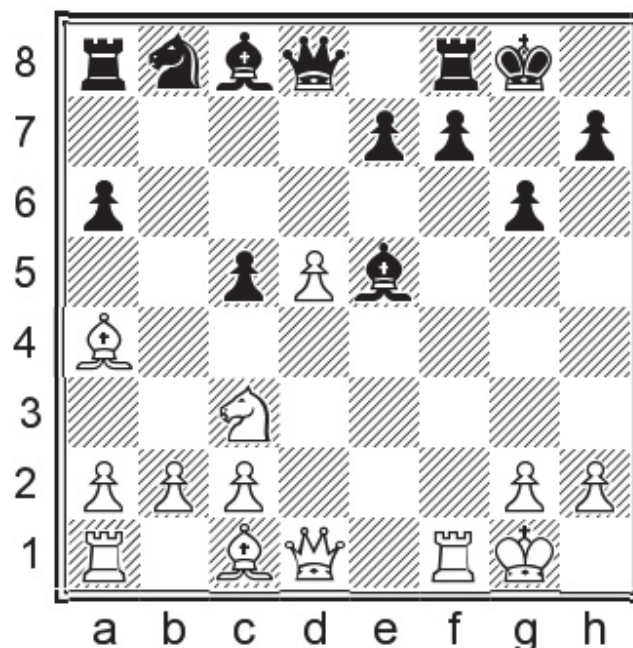
Position after: 10...a6!

A strong intermediate move: the idea is that White must either leave his bishop undefended in one line, or stop controlling the d7-square. 11.♙a4 [11.♙c4 ♜d7! is actually better than taking the pawn immediately. 12.e6 ♞de5 13.♙e2 fxe6 14.0-0 ♙b7↑; 11.♙e2 ♞xe5= will equalise simply now that White can't gain tempo with ♚e2 or ♚e1.] 11...♞xe5 12.♞xe5 ♙xe5



Position after: 12...♙xe5

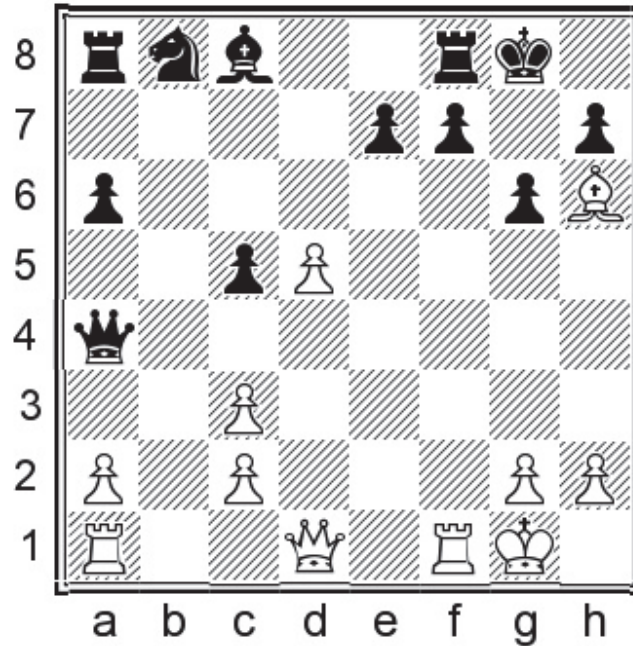
13.0-0 [13.♚e2?! ♙xc3+ 14.bxc3 ♚a5! This is the point. White must play 15.♚c4 to defend against both threats, and now after 15...♞d7↑ White probably has to give up either the bishop-pair or the exchange.]



Position after: 13.0-0

A) 13...♘d7 can't be bad but Black may have to sacrifice an exchange, e.g. 14.♚e2! [14.♙h6 ♖b8] 14...♚c7 15.♗h1 ♘f6 16.♙h6 ♙xh2 17.♙xf8 ♗xf8 18.♘e4 ♙e5=

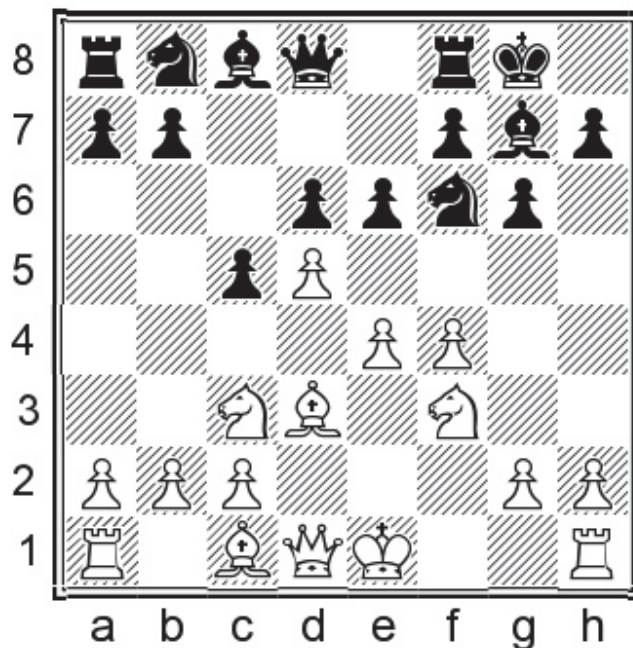
B) 13...♚a5!? On this occasion, I would prefer to be material up and force my opponent to demonstrate compensation. 14.♙h6 [14.d6!? exd6 15.♙h6 ♙e6 16.♙xf8 ♗xf8= White has again won an exchange, but here his bishop is also trapped on a4.] 14...♙xc3 15.bxc3 ♚xa4



Position after: 15...♚xa4

16.♙xf8 [White can also force a draw in more bloodthirsty fashion: 16.♚e2 ♖e8 17.♚e5 f6 18.♖xf6 exf6 19.♚xf6 ♖a7 20.♖f1 ♙f5 21.♖xf5 gxf5 22.♚g5+=] 16...♗xf8 17.d6 [Otherwise Black's consolidation goes like this: 17.♚d2 ♚e8 18.♚e3 ♚d8 19.♚xc5 ♘d7] 17...♘c6 18.dxe7+ ♗xe7 19.♚f3 ♙f5 20.♚e3+ ♗f8 21.♚h6+ ♗g8 22.♖xf5=

7...e6



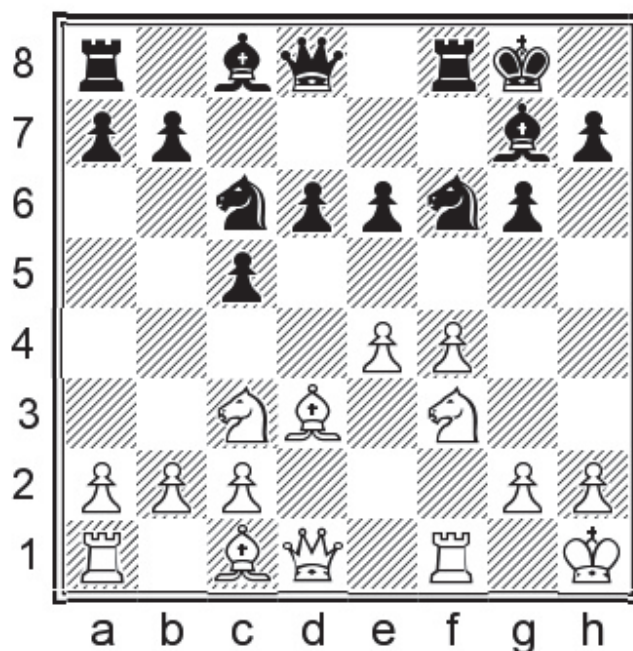
Position after: 7...e6

8.dxe6!?

Not a usual Benoni option but here it is White's best try.

After, say, 8.0-0 exd5 9.exd5 ♖a6 the pawn at f4 looks a bit out of place and ...♗c7 or ...♗b4 is about to come with tempo.

8...fxe6 9.0-0 ♗c6 10.♔h1!



Position after: 10. ♔h1!

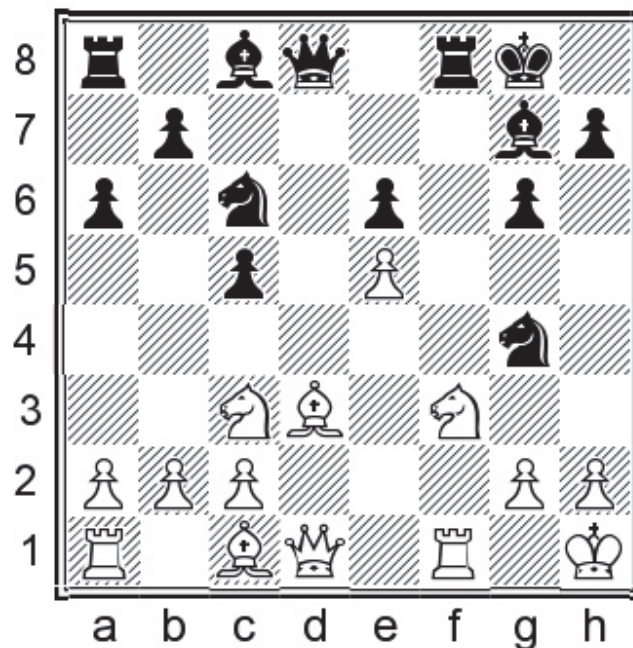
Preparing e5. White should definitely play for e5 and not f5.

10. ♖g5 ♗d7 11. f5 ♕e7 12. fxe6 ♗xe6 13. ♖b5 ♜ad8=

10...♗d7!

The most useful move.

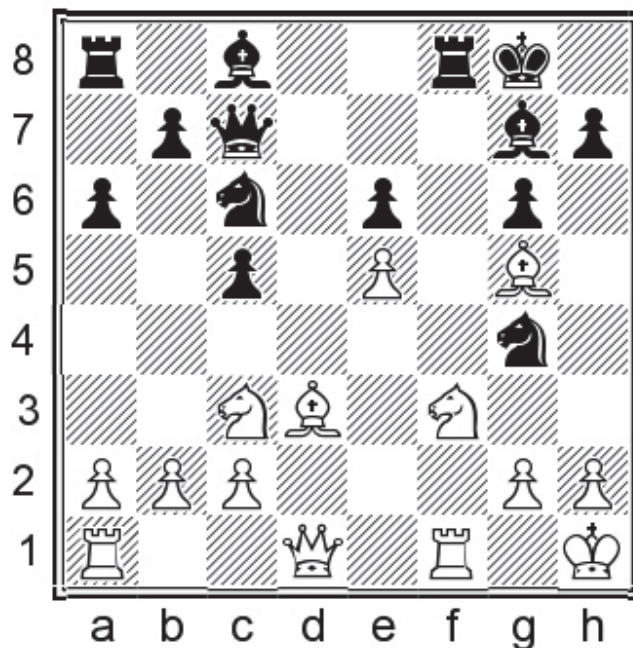
10...a6?! This was recommended by Marin, but I don't like it. 11. e5 [White should avoid 11. a4?! d5 12. e5 ♖g4 13. h3 ♖h6↑ when Black has gained the possibility of ... ♖b4 in addition to specific tactics based on ...c4.] 11...dxe5 12. fxe5 ♖g4



Position after: 12... ♖g4

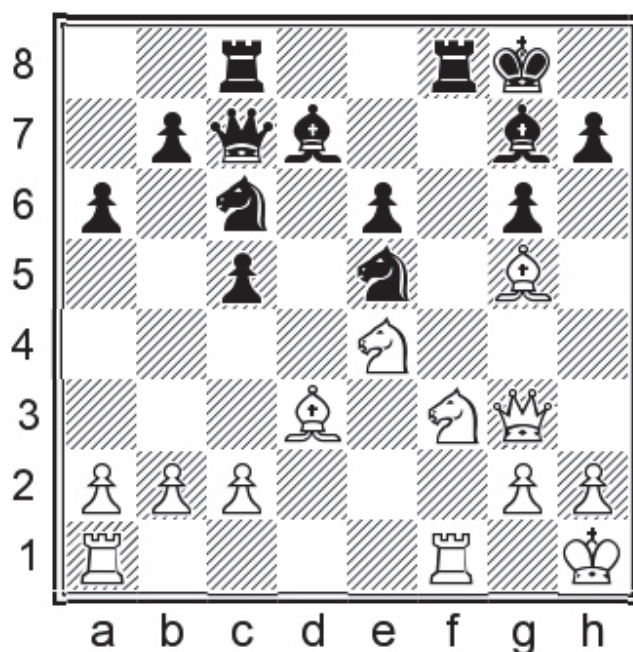
A) 13. ♖e4!? ♗d7 [13... ♕c7?! White isn't obliged to play ♗g5 here, and can profitably continue with something else: 14. ♕e1! ♖gxe5 15. ♕g3 ♖d4 16. ♖xd4 ♜xf1+ 17. ♗xf1 cxd4 18. ♗g5→] 14. ♖xc5 ♖cxe5 15. ♖xe5 ♜xf1+ 16. ♕xf1 ♖xe5 17. ♗e2 ♜c8 18. ♖xd7 ♕xd7 19. c3↔ White has the bishop-pair and better structure, but the knight on e5 compensates for this.

B) 13. ♗g5 This is the right move to play to get an advantage. 13... ♕c7



Position after: 13... ♔c7

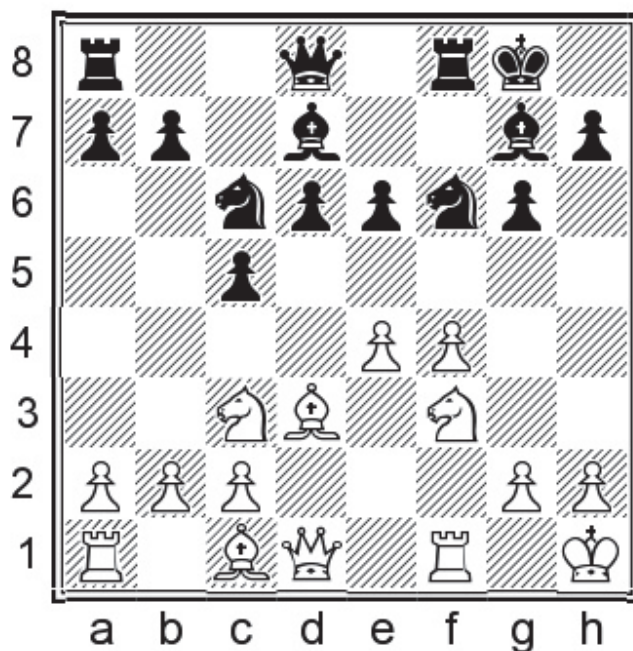
B1) 14. ♞e4 The knight occupies the square that the bishop wanted. Just why is not obvious, because it seems like White could go to f6 or take on c5. But let us check. 14... ♙d7!? 15. ♚e1 [15. ♞xc5? ♞cxe5-+; 15. ♞f6+?! ♙xf6 16. exf6 ♞d4! White is in trouble. With his own king's position being weakened, there will be limited attacking chances available for the pawn. 17. ♚d2 ♞xf3 18. gxf3 ♞xf6] 15... ♞gxe5 16. ♚g3 ♞ac8



Position after: 16... ♞ac8

17.♔f4 Now Black is in time to take off both enemy bishops. 17...♖xf4! 18.♗xf4 ♘xd3 19.♗xc7 ♖xc7 20.cxd3 ♘b4↑

B2) 14.♗e1! c4 [14...♘gxe5 15.♗g3 ♔d7 16.♔f4 ♖ac8 17.♔e4± If we compare this with the last diagram, Black is a lot more tied up and the exchange sacrifice would now only eliminate one White bishop rather than both.] 15.♔e2 ♘gxe5 16.♗g3→ White has significant pressure for the pawn.



Position after: 10...♔d7!

11.♔c4

Attacking the d6-pawn, preventing ...d5, and preparing to play e5 under more favourable circumstances.

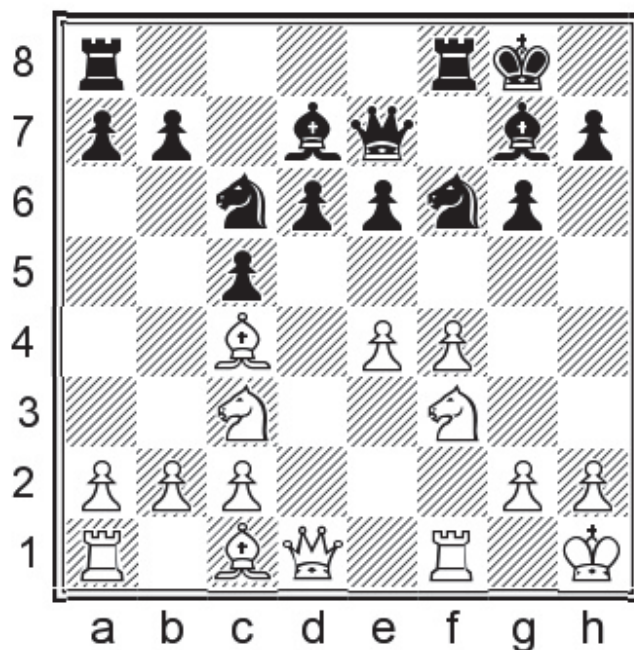
After the immediate 11.e5 dxe5 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.fxe5 Black hasn't lost any time with his queen, and still has the d5-square available for his knight. 13...♘d5 14.♖xf8+ ♗xf8=

11...♗e7

The safe approach. White can gain some positional trumps but Black has enough activity.

A) The pawn sacrifice 11...♘d4 12.♘xd4 cxd4 13.♗xd4 d5± is not stupid, but White should get an edge with either move of the e-pawn.

B) 11...♘a5 12.♔e2 ♔c6 13.♘g5 looks dicier.



Position after: 11...Ke7

12.a3

A) 12.e5?! dxe5 13.fxe5 g4 14.g5 Ke8∞

B) 12.f5 Na5 13.gxe6+ gxe6 14.fxe6 Bxe6 15.g5 looks possible too, but Black is in time to take on e4 and equalise.

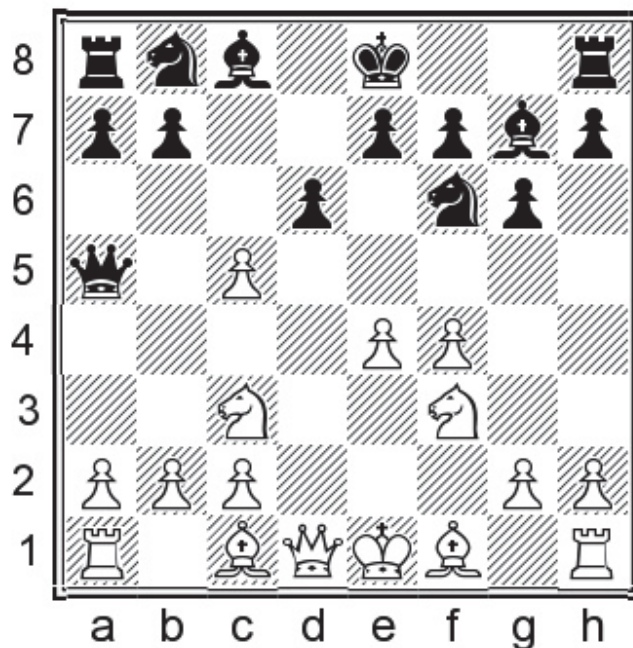
12...Bd8!?

Other, less committal moves are possible (for instance, ...a6.)

13.e5 Ne8 14.gd3↗

2.2) Endgame line: 6.dxc5 Ba5 7.Kd3

1.e4 d6 2.d4 Nf6 3.Nc3 g6 4.f4 g7 5.Nf3 c5 6.dxc5 Ba5



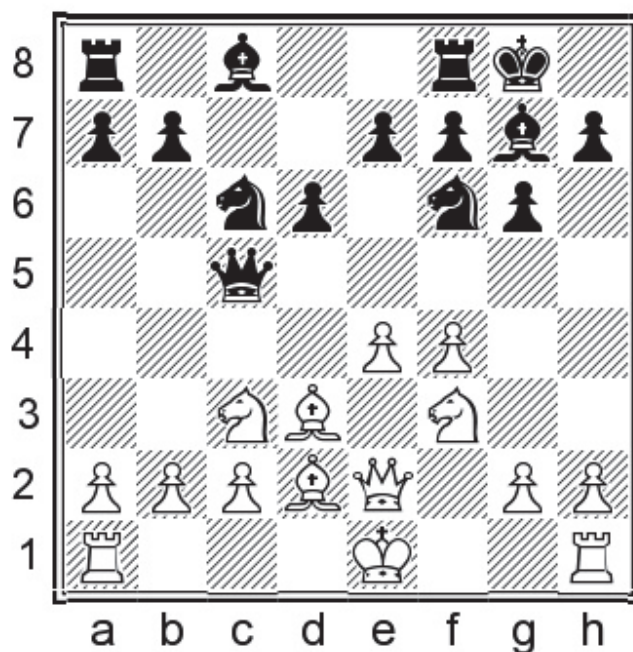
Position after: 6... ♔a5

7. ♔d3

This move seems very safe, but the resulting endgames can become very sharp indeed.

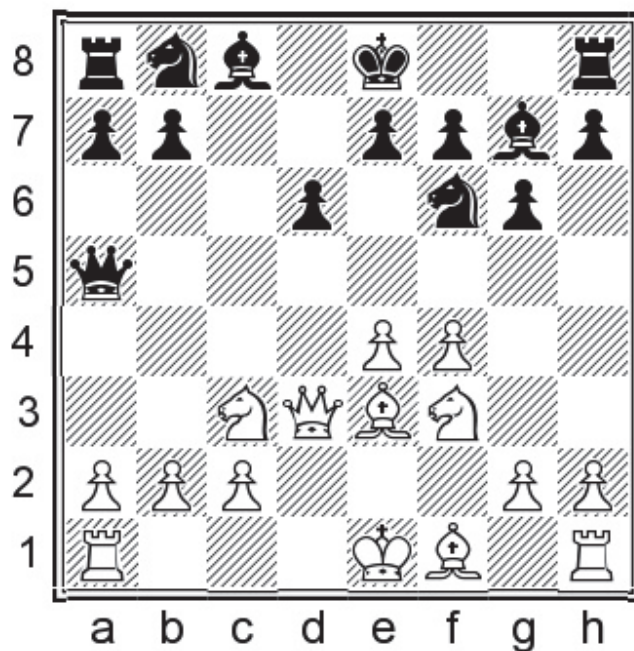
A) 7. cxd6? ♖xe4=

B) 7. ♘d2 ♙xc5 8. ♘d3 0-0 9. ♙e2 ♖c6= Black has good development and is not even material down. A much better version of this idea is 7. ♘d3.



Position after: 9...♘c6=

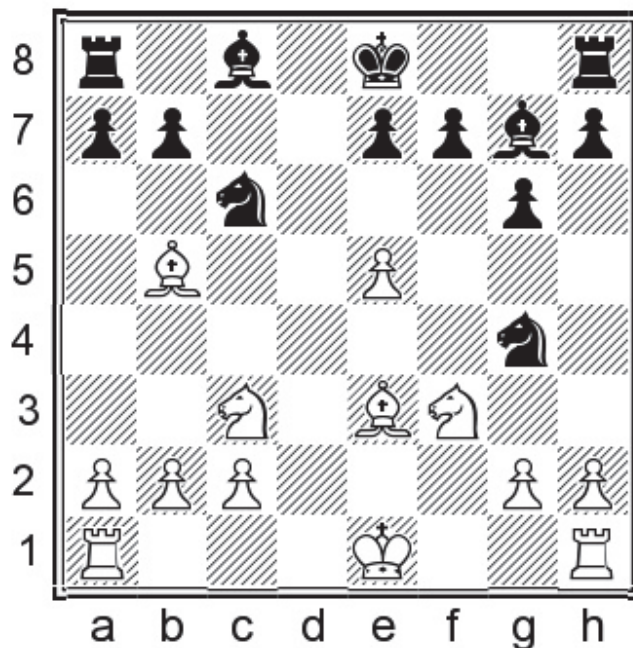
7...♙xc5 8.♙e3 ♙a5



Position after: 8...♙a5

9.♙b5+

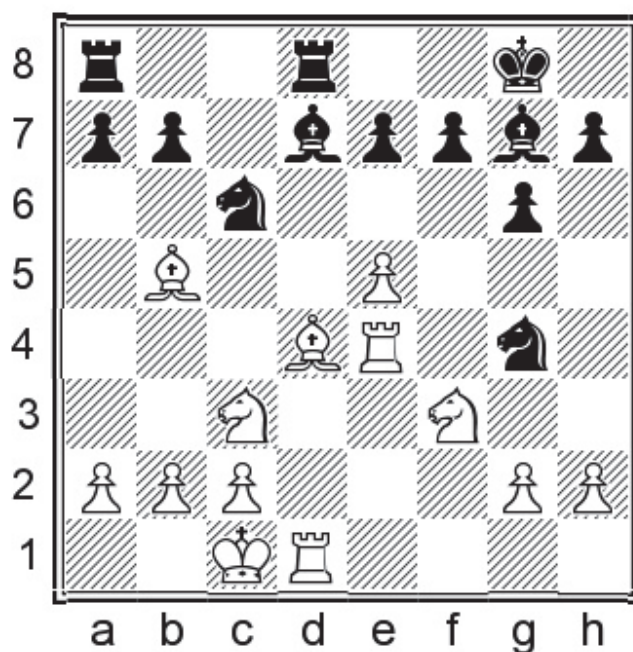
A) White can also opt for: 9.e5 dxe5 10.♙b5+ ♙xb5 11.♙xb5+ ♘c6! [11...♙d7 12.♘xe5 0-0 13.♘xd7 ♘bxd7 14.0-0-0± Kaidanov, G – Boehmer, C Chicago 1993] 12.fxe5 [12.♘xe5 ♘g4!]=] 12...♘g4



Position after: 12...Bg4

A1) 13. Qxc6+ This is too early and Black will be able to benefit from the bishop pair much more easily than White can benefit from the slightly weakened queenside. 13...bxc6 14. Qf4 [14. Qd4 c5! 15. Qxc5 Bxe5] 14...Rb8 15. b3 Rb4 16. g3 f6 White is in very serious trouble here.

A2) 13. Qd4 Qd7 14. 0-0-0 [14. e6 Bxd4 15. Qxd7+ Qf8 16. Bxd4 Qxd4=] 14...0-0 15. Rhe1!? [15. Qc5 Rfd8= and the e5-pawn will soon be found to be weak.] 15...Rfd8 16. Re4

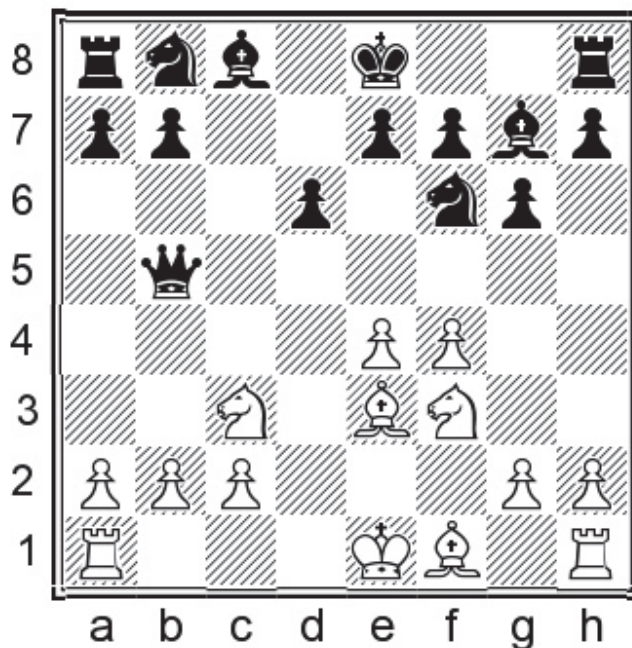


Position after: 16. Re4

16...♘h6⇒ [I would prefer not to give White the time to arrange his kingside pawns: 16...h5 17.h3 ♘h6 18.♙f2 a6 19.♙d3 ♙f5 20.♖ee1 ♙xd3 21.cxd3 e6 22.d4± looks better for White.]

B) It is possible, but strange, to avoid the exchange of queens. 9.♙d2!? Possibly this was intended as a draw offer, but I'm not completely sure. The remainder of the game was also strange. 9...♘bd7 10.0-0-0 0-0 11.♙c4?! a6!♞ [11...♘b6?! Bartel, M – Van Wely, L Guingamp 2010]

9...♙xb5

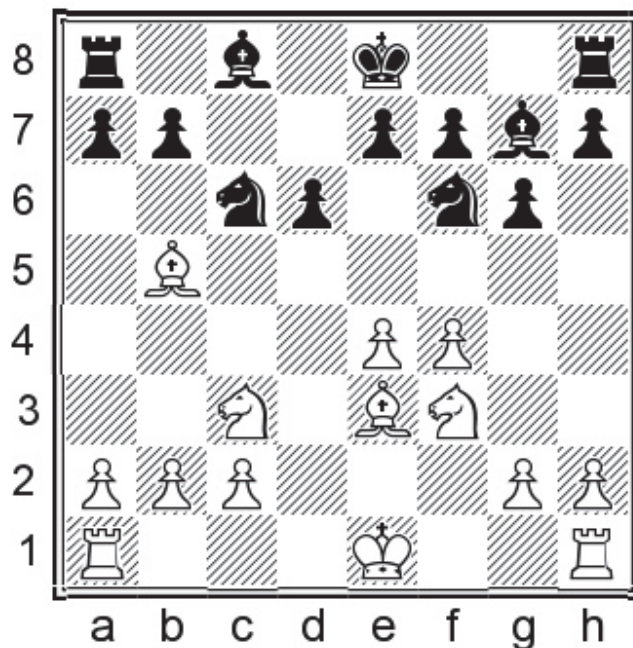


Position after: 9...♙xb5

10.♙xb5+

10.♙xb5 ♘a6 11.♙d3 0-0! 12.♙xa7 [12.♘xa7 ♙d7♞ leaves White very vulnerable to tactics such as ...♘g4, ...♘xe4, or ...♘c5.] 12...♙d7 13.a4 In Vargas Arteaga – Escobar Medina, Cartagena 2016, Black's best was: 13...♙c6! when after 14.♘d2 it is possible to simply regain the pawn with ...♘h5, but Black can also afford the time to play 14...♘b4♞ and fight for more.

10...♘c6

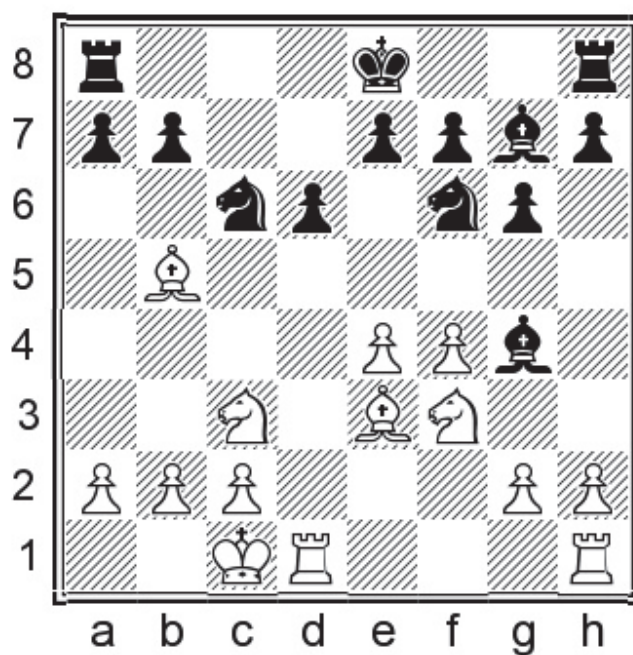


Position after: 10... Nc6

11. Qd5!?

The correct move with which to play for a win. An endgame will result where White has a '3v1' majority on the queenside and Black has '5v3' elsewhere, and the bishop pair.

A) 11.0-0-0 This gives Black access to more intuitive play. 11... Qg4

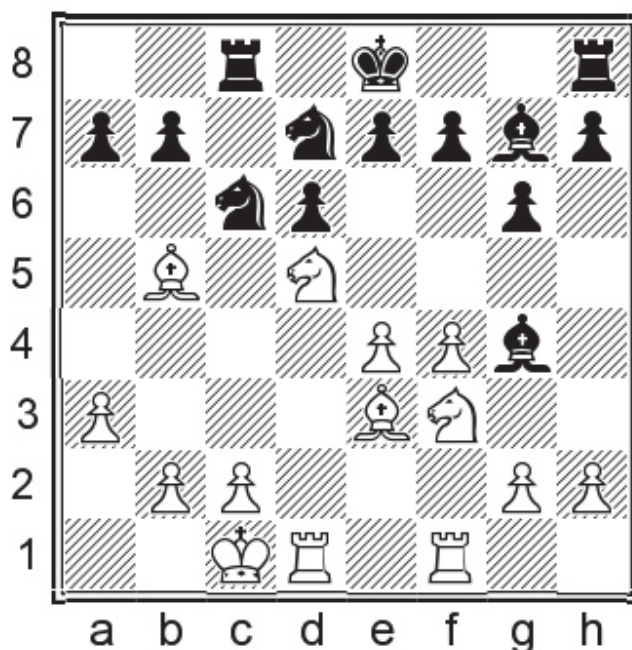


Position after: 11... Qg4

A1) 12.♖d5?! is neither fish nor flesh and Black can play against the doubled f-pawns later.
 12...♗xd5 13.exd5 ♕xf3 14.gxf3 a6 15.♕e2 ♖b8 16.h4 ♗d7 17.h5 0-0-0 18.c3 ♕h6= As seen in
 Van Leeuwen – Hasselmeyer, email 2011.

A2) Concrete tactics favour Black after 12.♖he1 ♗h5!? 13.♗d5 ♕xf3 14.gxf3 0-0-0 with very good
 play against the f-pawns. Note that White cannot take on e7 as the knight gets trapped there.

A3) 12.♖hf1!?N Logical and best. 12...♗d7!? [I annotated a game where Black played the rather
 slack 12...0-0?! 13.h3 ♕xf3 14.♖xf3±: Holm, K – Getz, N Larvik NOR 2019 was a convincing
 endgame win for White.; 12...a6!? is possible as well but arguably more weakening.] 13.♗d5 ♖c8
 14.a3!?



Position after: 14.a3!?

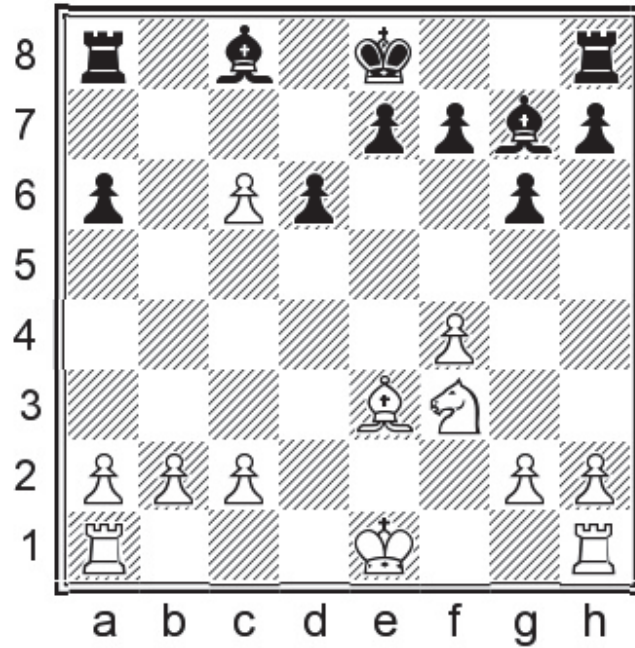
The threat was ... e6, so White prepares ♗b4. 14...a6 15.♕e2 b5 16.h3 ♕xf3 17.♕xf3 ♗a5= Black
 has good Sicilian-type counterplay.

B) 11.e5 transposes to 9.e5.

11...♗xd5 12.exd5 a6 13.♕xc6+

13.♕a4?! b5 14.dxc6 bxa4= White is in some serious trouble now, Stejskal – Melich, Czech Republic
 1997.

13...bxc6 14.dxc6



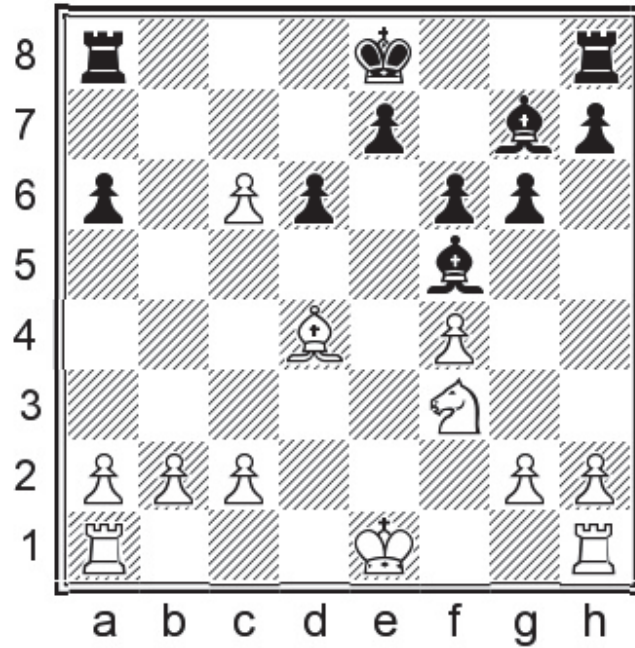
Position after: 14.dxc6

14...♙f5!?

A necessary improvement. Remember, grandmasters barely ever take pawns; they keep attacking more pawns until they all drop at once! The idea is ...♖c8.

14...♙xb2?! 15.♖b1 ♘c3+ 16.♙f2 ♘e6 Now White's control of the b-file, coupled with the ability to exchange off Black's dark-squared bishop at will, give chances for a serious advantage. 17.♙d4! ♙xd4+ 18.♗xd4↑

15.♙d4 f6!⇒

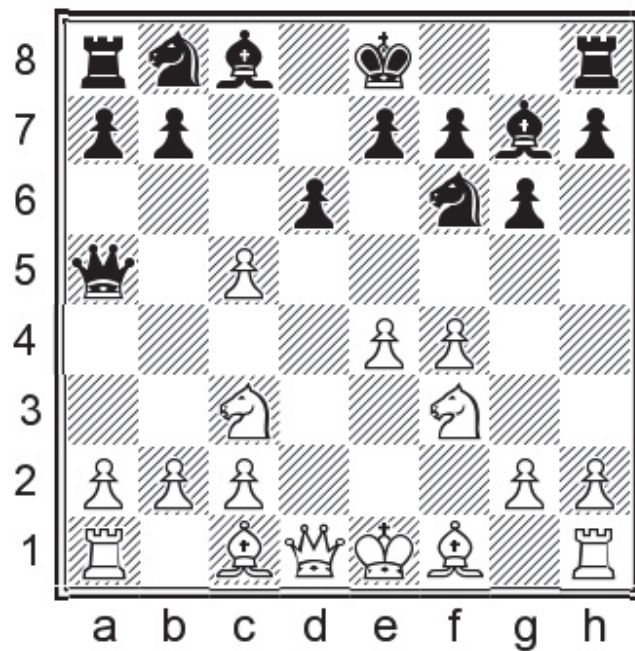


Position after: 15...f6!⇒

Black will follow up by taking the necessary measures to round up the c6-pawn. Then, some kind of pawn race will likely happen after a further piece exchange or two.

2.3) Short-castling line: 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♙d3

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♙g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.dxc5 ♖a5

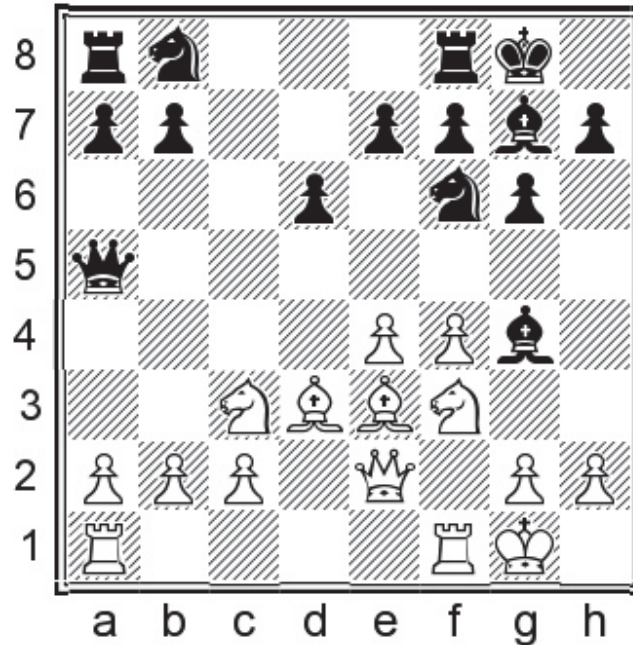


Position after: 6...♖a5

7.♔d3 ♖xc5 8.♕e2 ♜c6!?

I prefer this over immediate kingside castling because it forces White to find useful ideas other than a pawn storm.

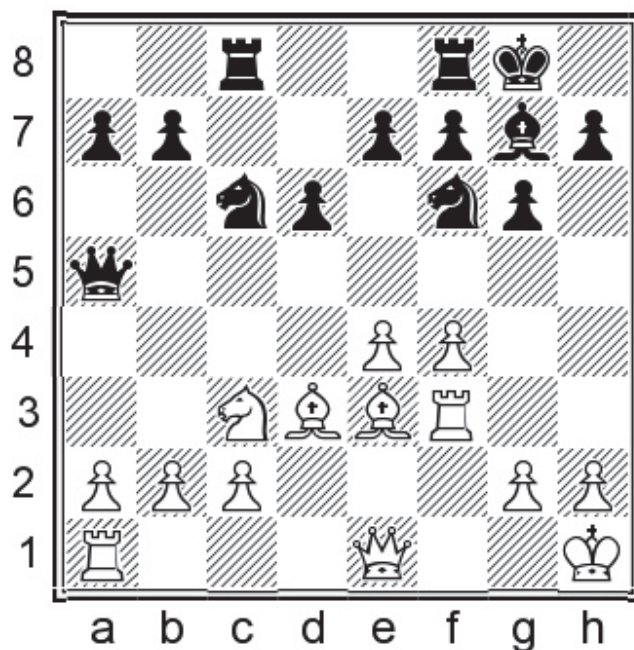
My problem with 8...0-0 lies in the following line: 9.♔e3 ♖a5 10.0-0 ♔g4



Position after: 10...♔g4

A) 11.♕f2 has the same idea as ♕e1, i.e. encouraging ...♔xf3 without playing h3, but in Thipsay – Plaskett, Dhaka 1997 Black showed the defect: it is better to recapture on f3 with the rook rather than the queen. 11...♔xf3 12.♕xf3 ♜c6 13.♔h1 ♖ac8 [13...♜d7!?] 14.a3 ♕h5⇒

B) 11.♕e1! Bizarrely, this computerish-looking idea is actually an old one from Danish international master Erling Mortensen, which is borne out by modern engine analysis... 11...♔xf3 Otherwise the bishop would be misplaced after ♜d2. 12.♖xf3 ♜c6 13.♔h1 White clears the g1-square and evacuates the king from the slightly vulnerable diagonal in order to proceed with ♖h3 without fearing ...♜g4. 13...♖ac8

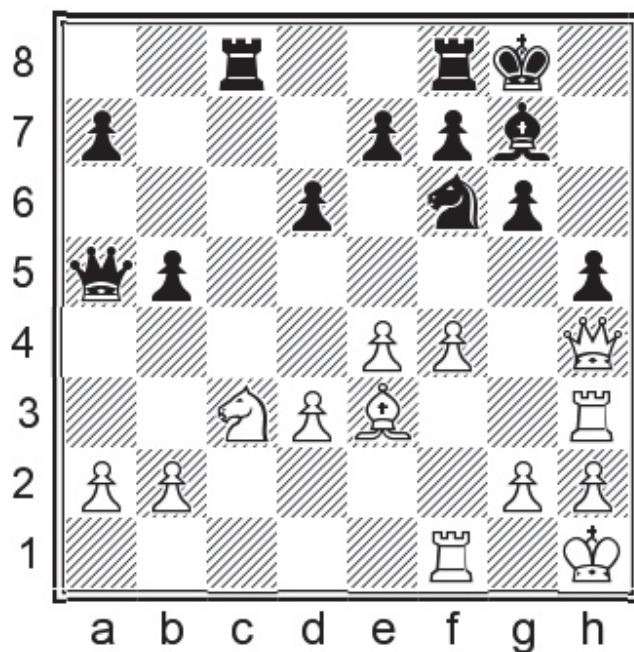


Position after: 13...♖ac8

A useful waiting move, which is best responded to in kind.

B1) Preventing ...♘b4 is not a good use of time at this point. 14.a3 Black can already open the centre: 14...d5! 15.e5 d4! =

B2) 14.♖h3 is Marin's main line, but the rook is doing some useful work on f3 and it is a bit too early to move it. 14...♘b4 15.♚h4 h5 16.♖f1 ♘xd3 17.cxd3 b5! ⇝



Position after: 17...b5!⇝

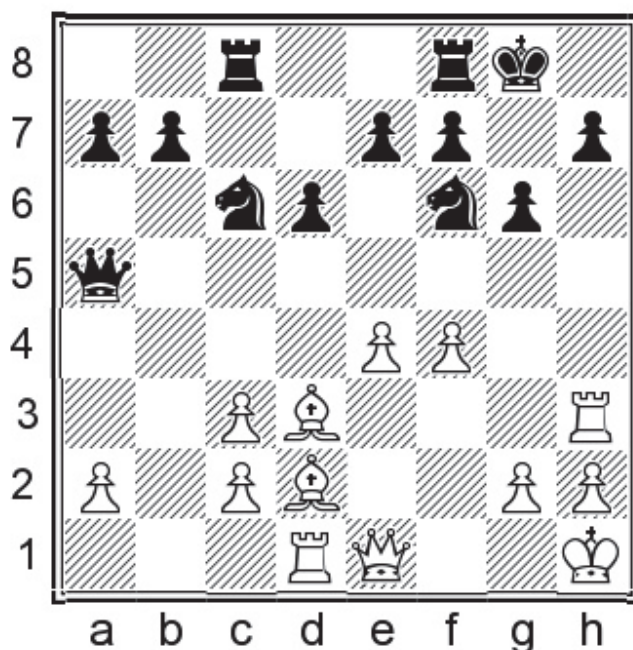
A needed improvement over Ahn – Verduyn, Belgium 2005.

B3) 14.♖d1!

B3.1) The standard counterplay with 14...♗b4 15.f5 ♗xd3 16.cxd3 b5 looks slow and unconvincing: 17.a3 b4 18.axb4 ♖xb4 19.♙c1 ♗d7 20.♖h4→

B3.2) 14...e6 15.a3 d5 16.e5 ♗d7 17.♙f2± Nothing is clear yet, but White should seem better prepared for a battle encompassing all areas of the board.

B3.3) 14...♗d7! Giving a three-results game at the cost of some disadvantage. 15.♖h3 ♙xc3 Black needs to weaken the White queenside, quickly. [15...♗c5 16.f5→] 16.bxc3 ♗f6 17.♙d2± In this tense fight between dynamic and static advantages White seems to have better chances.



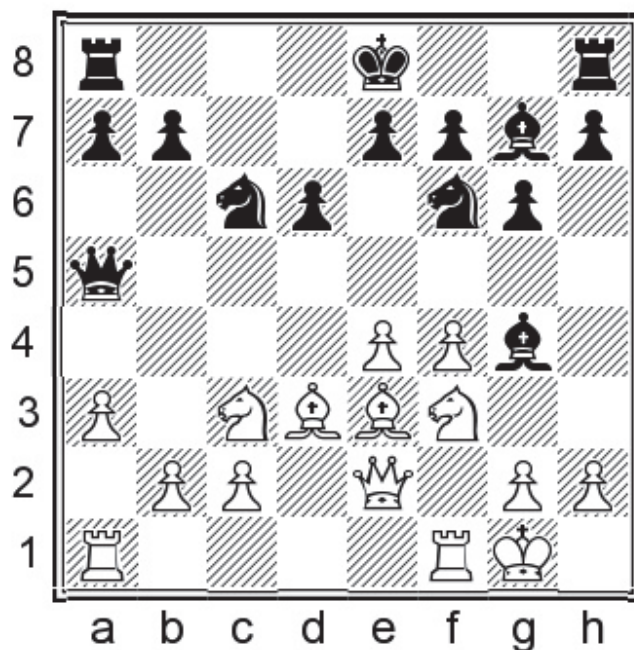
Position after: 17.♙d2±

9.a3!?

Trying to push b4 is at least novel.

9.♙e3 ♖a5 10.0-0 ♙g4 11.♖e1 ♙xf3 12.♖xf3 ♖c8± In this version of the Mortensen line, Black can continue to make one or two more useful moves before castling kingside, which accelerate his counterplay just enough after White does go ♖h3. Another possibility is ...♗d7 and ...♙xc3 cuing up a Sniper-esque game. [12...♗d7!? 13.a3 ♙xc3 14.bxc3 ♗c5±]

9...♙g4 10.♙e3 ♖a5 11.0-0



Position after: 11.0-0

11...0-0!?

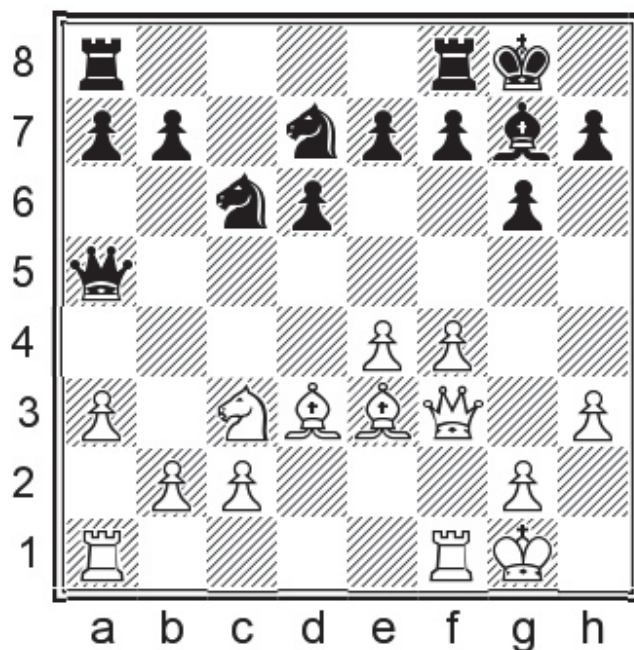
Moving back into normal territory.

In my previous analysis I gave the immediate 11...♘d7 which equalises in case of White's main idea 12.b4 ♖d8 13.♗e1 ♙xf3 14.♖xf3 ♜c8= (as in Nayhebaver, M – Jurcik, M Ruzomberok 2019) but may fall victim to the ingenious and flexible 12.♘d1.

12.h3

Now 12.♗e1 ♙xf3 13.♖xf3 ♜ac8 leaves White without time to deal with the idea of ...♘g4, as otherwise ...d5 would open the centre and transpose to a good version of 8...0-0.

12...♙xf3 13.♗xf3 ♘d7

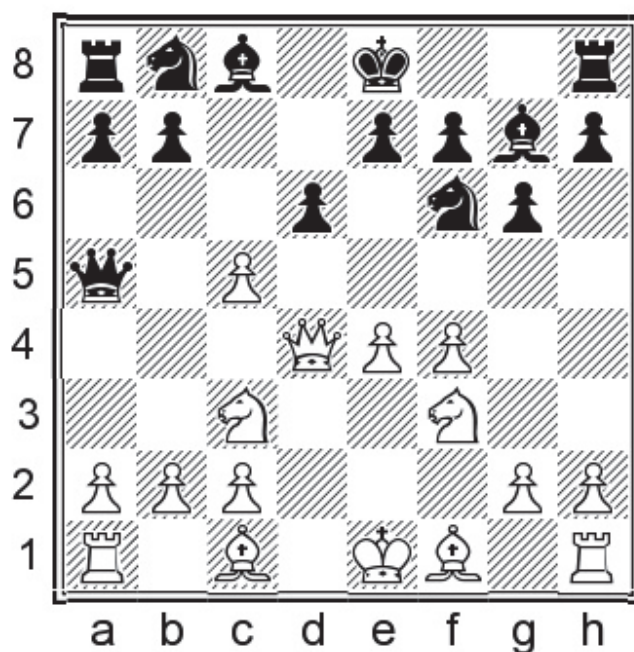


Position after: 13... Nxd7

We have transposed back into a theoretical position where Black is doing absolutely fine. An example game is Leon Hoyos, M – Gurevich, M Beijing 2008.

2.4) 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d4 0-0 8.cxd6

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♙g7 5.♗f3 c5 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d4

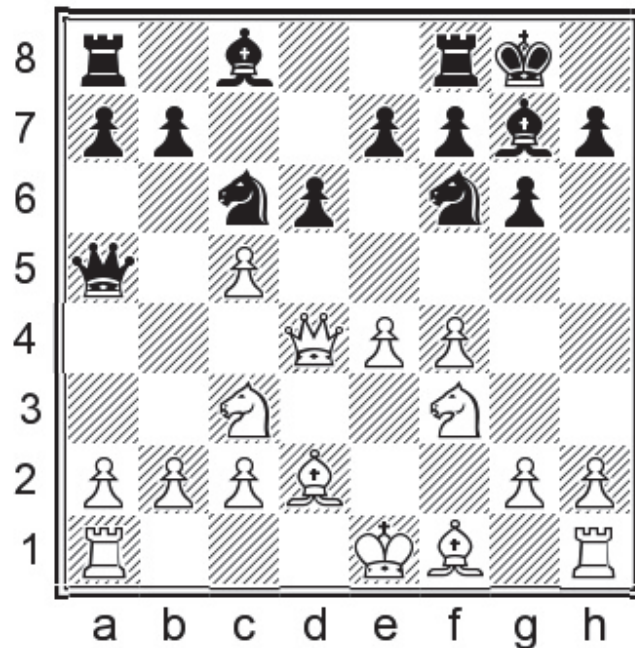


Position after: 7. ♗d4

This is a very challenging line.

7...0-0 8.cxd6

8.♔d2!? I will examine the correct way to play against this in the next subchapter, but first let's see some positions which can arise and fit in with the theme of an early cxd6. 8...♘c6 [8...♘fd7!? 9.♘d5 ♚d8 10.cxd6 exd6 11.♚e3 ♘b6±]

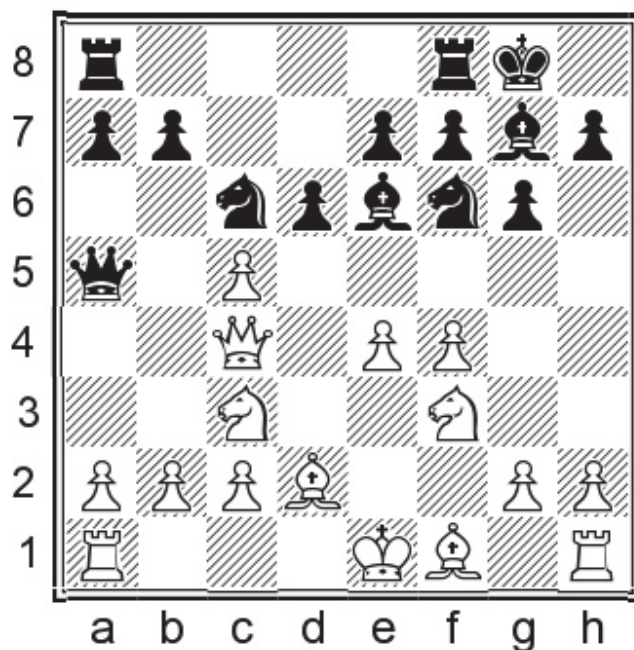


Position after: 8...♘c6

A) 9.♚g1 b5!? This is an idea to bear in mind; it is not dissimilar to some ideas in the ‘Sniper’ line. 10.cxb6 [10.e5 dxe5 11.fxe5 ♘g4 12.♘xb5 ♚a4=] 10...axb6 11.a3 ♔a6=

B) 9.♚f2 (or, equivalently, ♚e3) is an attempted refinement: 9...♘g4 10.♚g1 [10.♚h4 ♚xc5=] 10...♚xc5 11.♚xc5 dxc5 12.h3 ♔xc3! 13.♔xc3 ♘e3= White doesn't get to keep the bishop pair. The opposite-coloured bishop with symmetrical pawns will be somewhat dynamic but also balanced in the end.

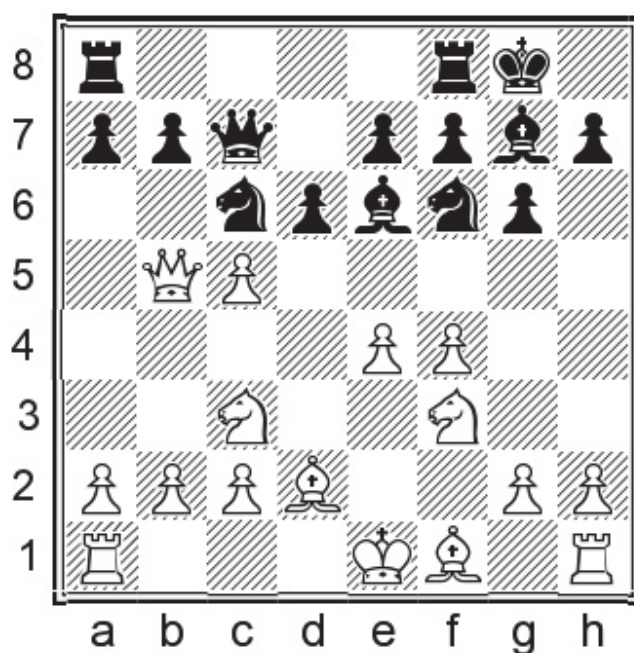
C) 9.♚c4! The handiest move, keeping one eye on the possibility of a queen trade. 9...♔e6 There is no need to worry about the possibility of a discovered attack on Black's queen just yet.



Position after: 9... Ke6

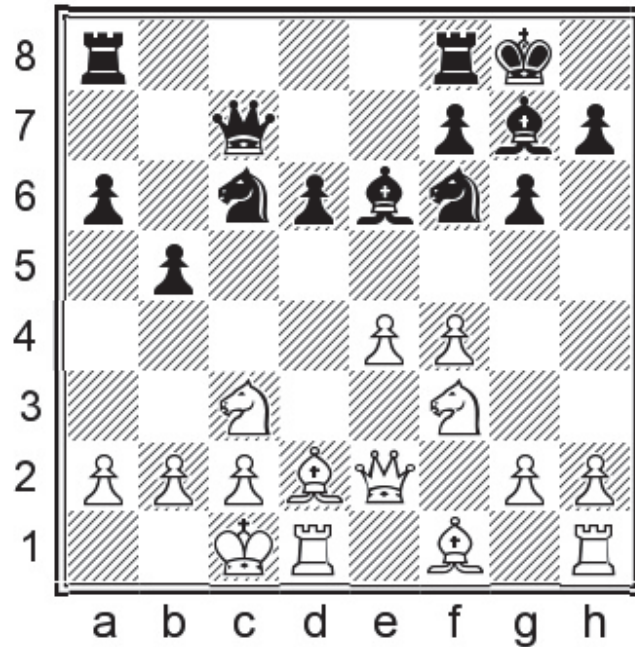
C1) 10. Nd5 Qxc5!? [10... Qd8 probably works out well for Black as well, due to White's tangled pieces.] 11. Qxc5 dxc5 12. Nc7 Nxe4 13. Nxa8 Bxa8 14. c3 Qd5 It is really not obvious how White should complete development. The engine suggests Bg1 to defend the g2-pawn. In any case, Black will have the bishop-pair and a pawn for the exchange.

C2) 10. Qb5 Qc7!



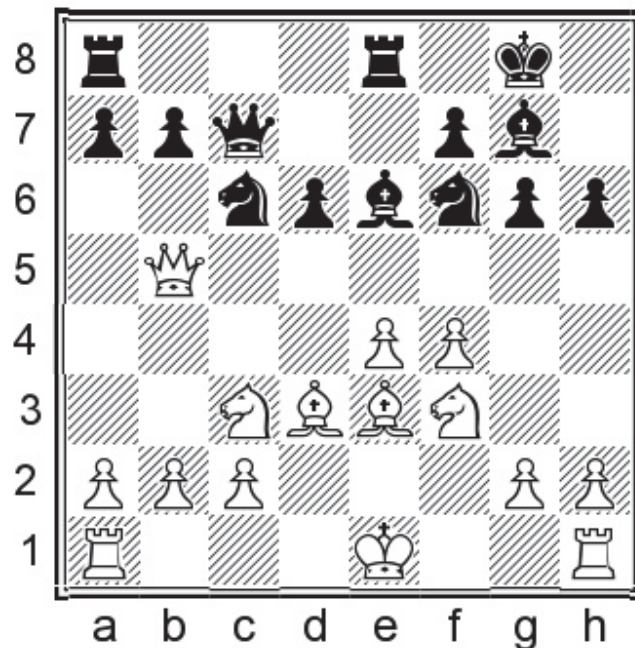
Position after: 10... Qc7!

C2.1) 11.cxd6?! is rather compliant. 11...exd6 12.♔d3 [Nothing else is very good at all: 12.♘d5?! ♔xd5 13.exd5 ♖fe8+; 12.♔c4?? a6 traps the queen on b5, a feature for which White should be constantly on alert; 12.0-0-0? a6 13.♙e2 b5+]



Position after: 13...b5+

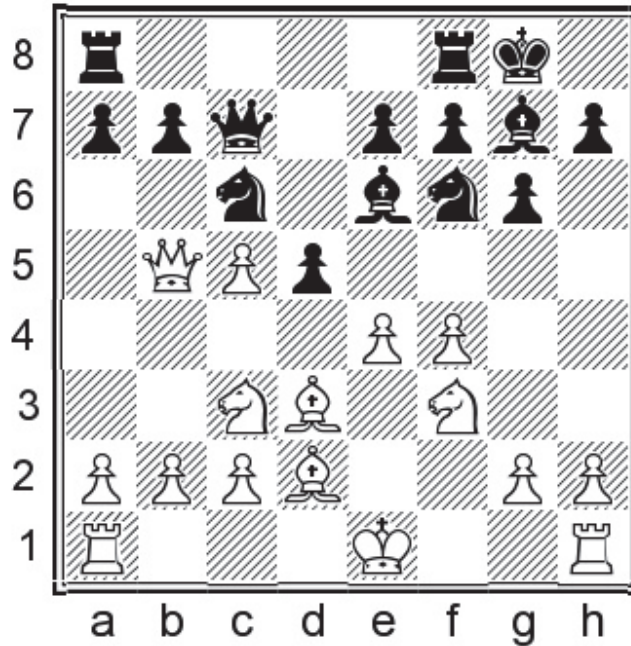
White doesn't have any really convincing answer to the plan of ...♖fe8, ...♖ac8, ...b4.] 12...h6!? Closing the net around the queen on b5. The best way for her majesty to be saved is now: 13.♔e3 ♖fe8



Position after: 13... ♖fe8

14.0-0-0 [14.0-0 ♗g4 15.♙f2 ♗xf2 16.♖xf2 ♗d4↑ Black is the one playing for an edge here.]
 14...a6 15.♚b6 ♚c8 16.♙g1 ♗d7 17.♚f2 ♗c5→ While this attack isn't as strong as some of the other versions, it is nevertheless more pleasant to have Black here.

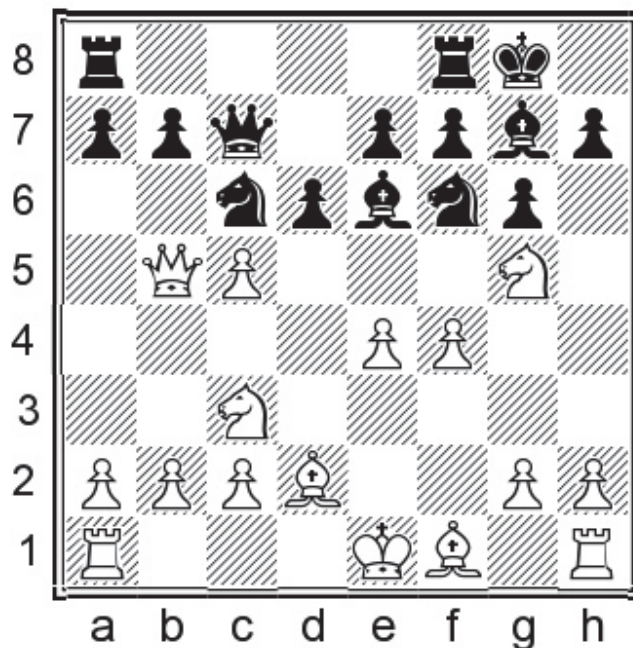
C2.2) 11.♙d3 Note that ♙e2 would be very similar: d3 does not qualify as a retreat square for the queen because of ...♗b4. 11...d5! White should bail out now.



Position after: 11...d5!

12.0-0N [12.♗g5?! ♙d7! Setting up some nasty ideas based on ...♗e5. White has to take care not to end up worse now.; 12.e5?! ♗d7≠ White faced huge issues keeping the centre intact in Gunnarsson, J – Gretarsson, H Reykjavik 2018.] 12...dxe4 13.♗xe4 ♖fd8 14.♖ae1 The only way to avoid ...♗xe4 followed by ...♗d4, but now Black has 14...a6 15.♚b6 ♚xb6 16.cxb6 ♗d7= regaining the pawn by pedestrian methods.

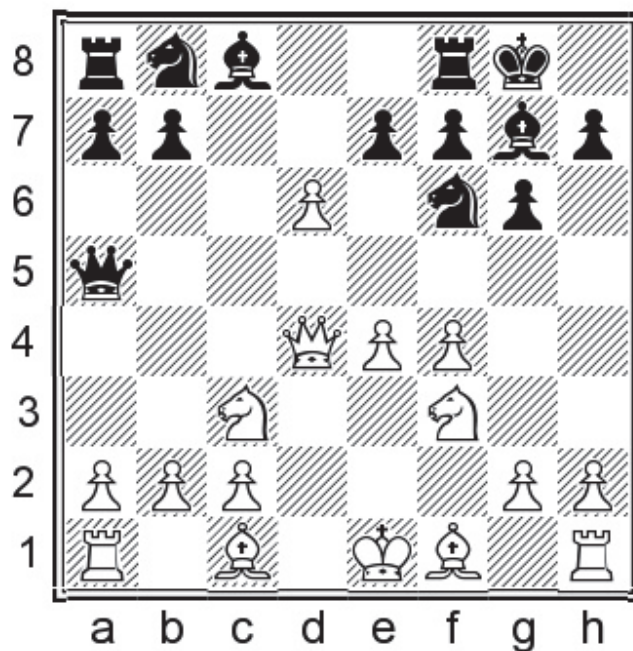
C2.3) 11.♗g5!/? The best move 11.0-0-0 is the subject of the next subchapter.



Position after: 11. Bg5!?

11... Bd7! [11... Bd4?! 12.cxd6 Bxd6 13.e5!± is a kind of positional trap.] 12.cxd6 exd6 13. Bxe6 fxe6 14.0-0-0 Bc5⇌ The e6-bishop is not critical to Black's queenside play, so this version is OK for him.

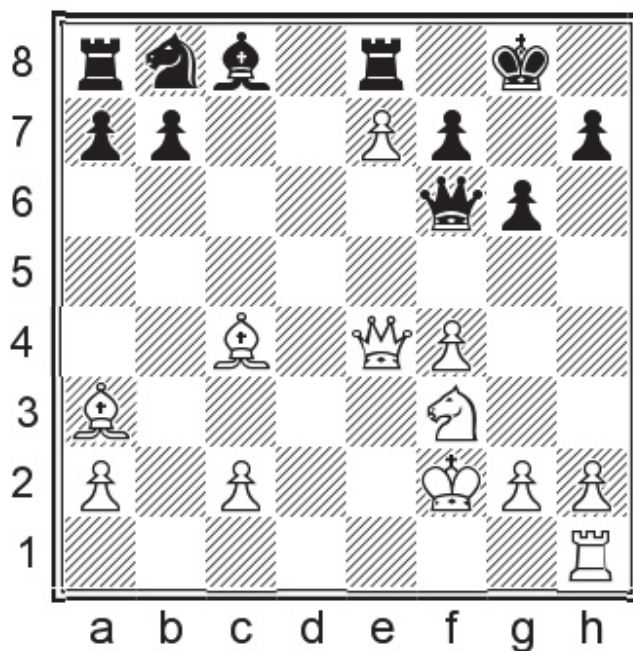
Back to the main line.



Position after: 8.cxd6

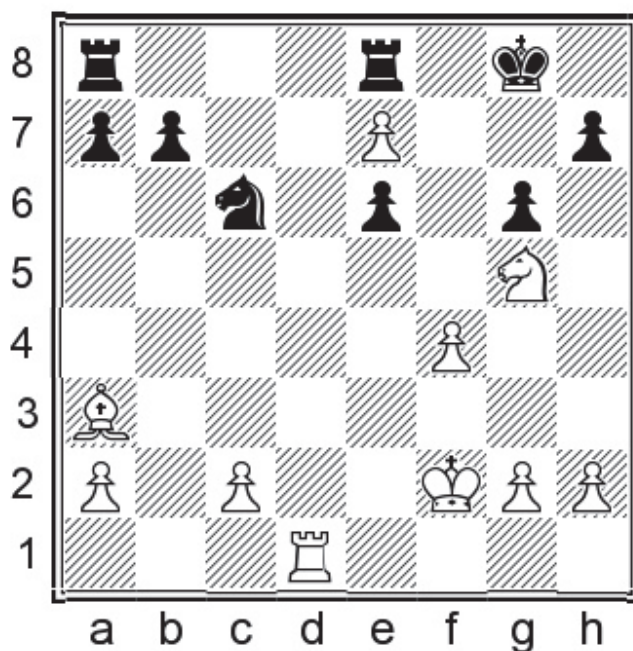
8...exd6!

A) The main alternative is the following forcing line: 8...♖xe4 9.♘xe4 ♙xc3+ 10.bxc3 ♚xc3+ 11.♔f2 ♚xa1 12.dxe7 ♜e8 13.♙c4 ♚f6 14.♙a3



Position after: 14. ♙a3

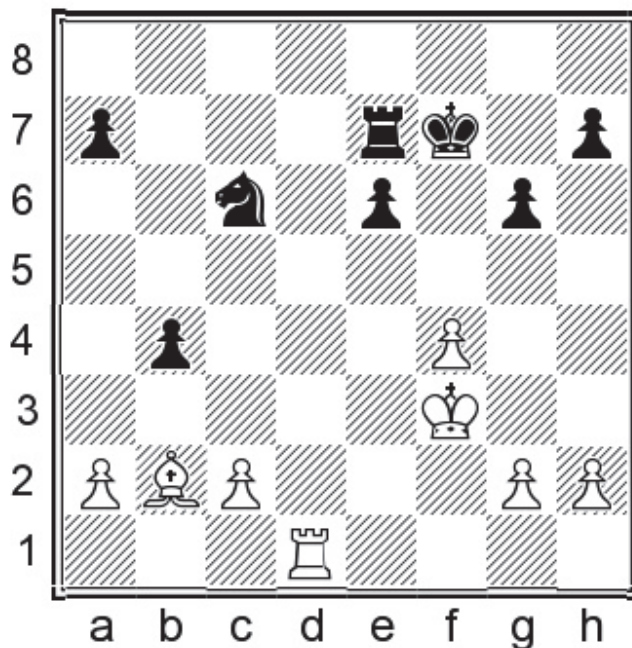
A position arises which Justin Tan (on ChessPublishing) gives as better for White and Mihail Marin gives as equal. I would point out that +/- just means “draw after good defence”: White presses and Black really should hold. 14...♙e6! 15.♙xe6 ♚xe6 16.♘xe6 ♜xe6 17.♘g5 ♘c6 18.♜d1



Position after: 18. ♜d1

A1) 18...♖ac8 is too slow and despite Marin's enthusiasm, there is no way for Black to force a draw. 19.♗d7 ♜b8 20.♗xb7 ♗xc2+ 21.♔g1 ♗xa2 22.♙c5± I think White will be able to improve slowly here and the position will become deeply unpleasant for Black to play.

A2) 18...b5! This is the only way to go. 19.♞e4 [19.♙c5 ♗ac8 20.♞e4 ♞xe7+] 19...b4 20.♞f6+ ♜f7 21.♞xe8 ♗xe8 22.♙b2 ♗xe7 23.♔f3



Position after: 23.♔f3

Here it is fortunate that there is 23...e5! liquidating the main weakness. True, White wins a pawn with 24.♗d6 ♗e6 25.♗d7+ ♔e8 26.♗xh7 exf4 27.♔xf4 but he also risks losing if he is overly optimistic: 27...♞e7±.

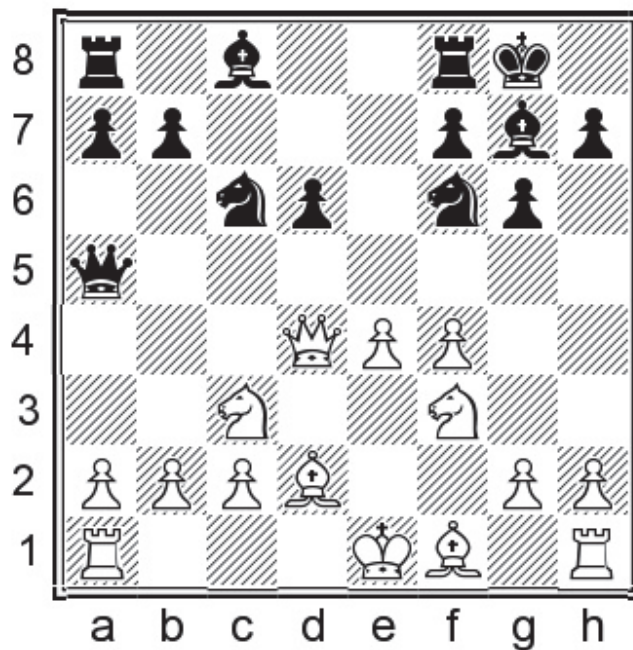
B) 8...♞c6 9.♗d2 exd6 10.♙d3 ♗e8 11.0-0± Black has some play, but it's all a bit slow and unconvincing.

9.♙d2

A) 9.♗d2 ♞a6!± Black can attack the e4-pawn with four pieces and force the dissolution of the White centre.

B) A normal move like 9.♙c4 can be met by ...♞xe4, or in this specific case 9...d5!± also seems good.

9...♞c6



Position after: 9... Nc6

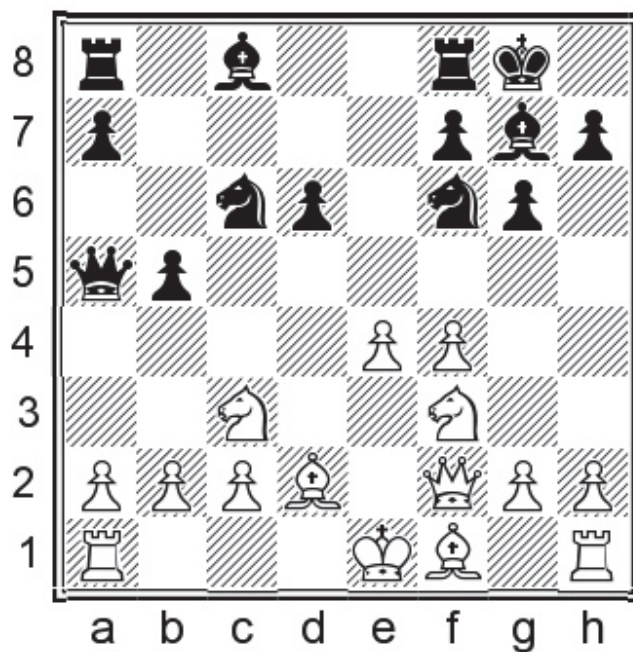
10. ♖f2

A) 10. ♖e3 ♜e8 11. ♘c4 ♙e6

B) 10. ♖c4 ♙e6 11. ♗b5 ♚c7 leads to a good version of the 8. ♘d2 lines for Black.

10...b5!

A very useful move for Black to know.

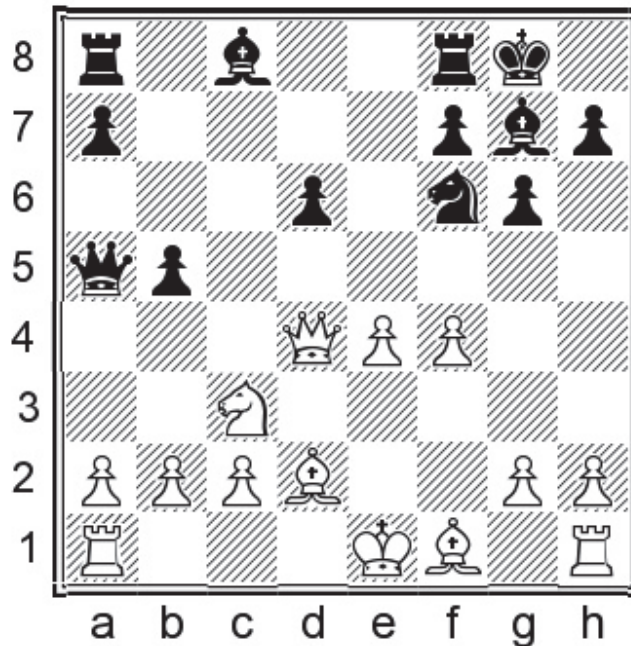


Position after: 10...b5!

11. ♖d5

A) 11. ♖xb5?! quickly gets White into hot water after the not-especially-intuitive 11... ♖b4! 12. ♔e2 ♜b8 with the threat of ... ♗a6.

B) 11. ♖d4?! ♖xd4 12. ♔xd4

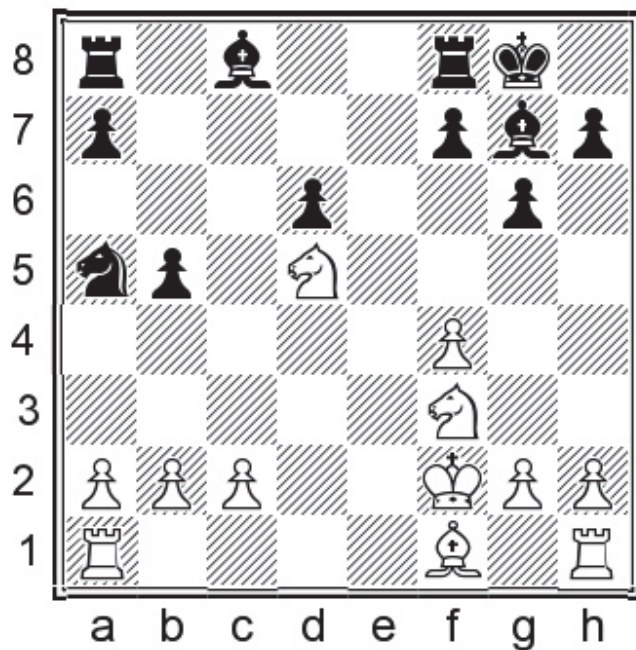


Position after: 12. ♔xd4

B1) 12... ♗b7! 13. ♗d3 [13. ♖xb5 ♔d8 14. ♗c3 ♗xe4 15. 0-0 d5 Black's pressure more than compensates for the pawn.] 13...b4 14. ♖e2 Black has a few interesting continuations, but the simplest seems to be 14... ♔c7! [14... ♜fe8 15. ♗xb4 ♔h5 16. ♗c3 ♗xe4 17. 0-0 ♗xd3 18. ♖g3 ♔d5 19. ♔xd5 ♖xd5 20. ♗xg7 ♗xg7 21. ♜xd3 ♖xf4 22. ♜xd6 ♖xg2= The game is equal though by no means drawn yet.] 15. ♔xb4 [15. ♗xb4?! ♖d5!-+] 15... ♜fe8 16. ♔a5 ♔xa5 17. ♗xa5 ♗xe4 The reduced material is not a guarantee of White's safety.

B2) 12... ♔d8 is also possible. In the event that White chooses to enter one of the endgames with extra material, such as 13. ♗xb5 ♗b7 14. e5 dxe5 15. ♔xd8 ♜fxd8 16. fxe5 ♖g4 17. ♗f4 ♜ac8, Black always has enough activity to keep the balance. Here, that takes the form of a forced draw in case of castling. 18. 0-0 ♗xe5 19. ♗xe5 ♜d2=

11... ♖xe4! 12. ♗xa5 ♖xf2 13. ♗xf2 ♖xa5=

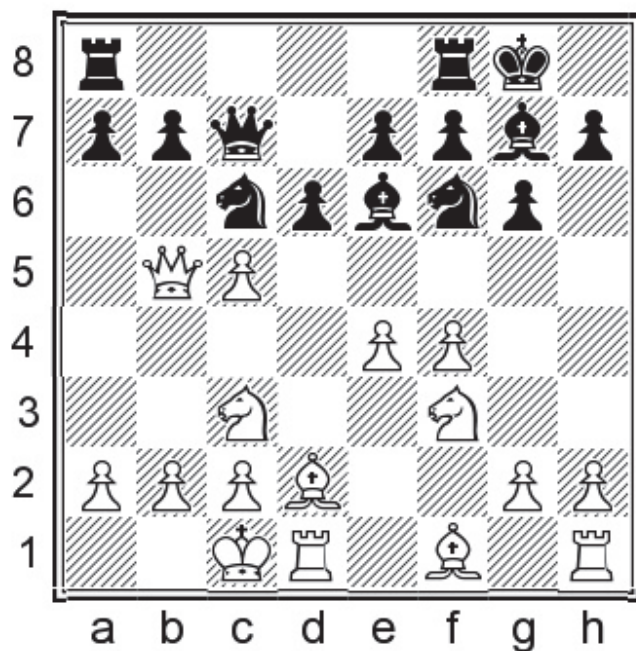


Position after: 13... Nxa5=

This is close to being dead level.

2.5) 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d4 0-0 8.♙d2

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♙g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.dxc5 ♖a5 7.♗d4 0-0 8.♙d2!? ♘c6 9.♗c4! ♙e6 10.♗b5 ♗c7! 11.0-0-0



Position after: 11.0-0-0

This was my main line in my analysis for ChessPublishing.

11...♖ac8!

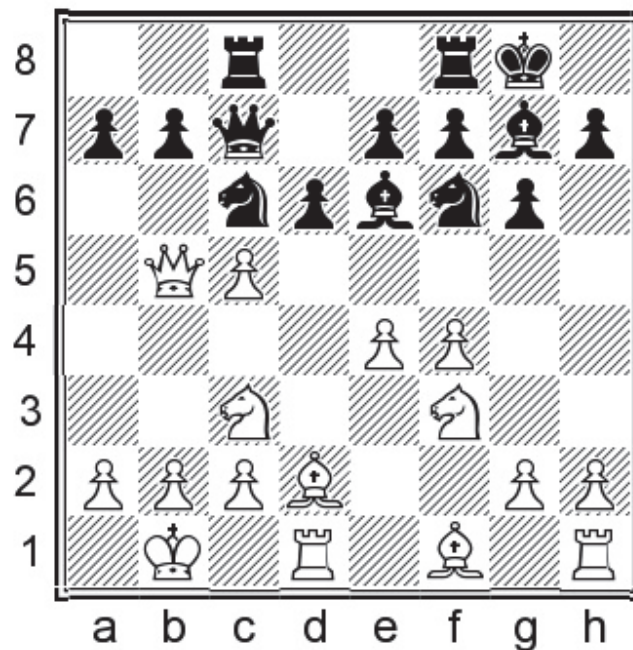
A) 11...d5?! 12.e5 d4 13.♗e2 is worth looking at, but maybe not so great if White plays a logical exchange sacrifice. 13...♗e4 14.♗exd4 ♗xd4 15.♗xd4 ♕xa2 16.b3! [16.♕e3 ♗xc5] 16...♗f2?! 17.♕c4!±

B) 11...dxc5 12.♖xc5 b6 13.♖a3 a5 14.♗g5± Black can obviously play like this, and he did in Pichot, A – Stremavicius, T Batumi 2018, but the position demands a bit more from him.

12.♗b1!

A) After 12.cxd6 exd6→ White is not sufficiently developed and the usual ...a6, ...b5 stuff will come shortly.

B) 12.h3 This seems like an improvement. 12...♗d7!± [12...a6 13.♖b6 ♖b8 Villanueva, M – Nagle, S chess. com 2018]

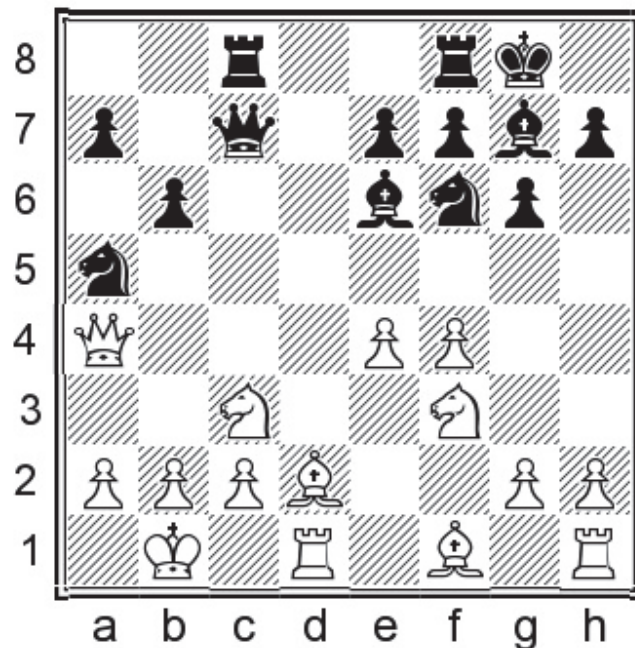


Position after: 12.♗b1!

12...♖fd8

12...dxc5!/? This is given by Marin, but I have a visceral dislike of taking ...dxc5 at all in the Modern. Saying that, there is a real possibility that Black may prefer this line due to the drawish tendency of the alternative. 13.♖xc5 b6 14.♖a3! As always. 14...♗a5 Clearing the c-file and thus threatening ...♗xe4. 15.♖a4!/? Having considered the position a fair bit, I think this artificial move gives White good chances. The idea is to lock down the light squares with ♗d4 or ♕a6, while not allowing Black

...♞c4 with tempo. [15.♞g5?! ♞c4 16.♙xc4 ♙xc4→ fails to address Black's main idea.]

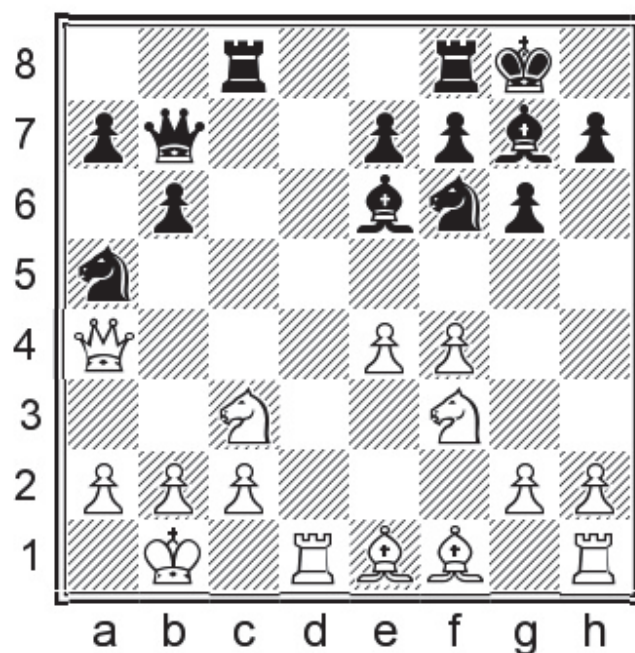


Position after: 15. ♙a4!?

A) 15...♞g4 16.♙a6 ♞cd8 17.♞b5 ♙b8 Now after White gives up the weak central pawn he will have an enlarged theatre of operations. 18.f5! gxf5 19.exf5 ♙xf5 20.♙g5 ♞f2 21.♞xd8 ♞xd8 22.♞e1±

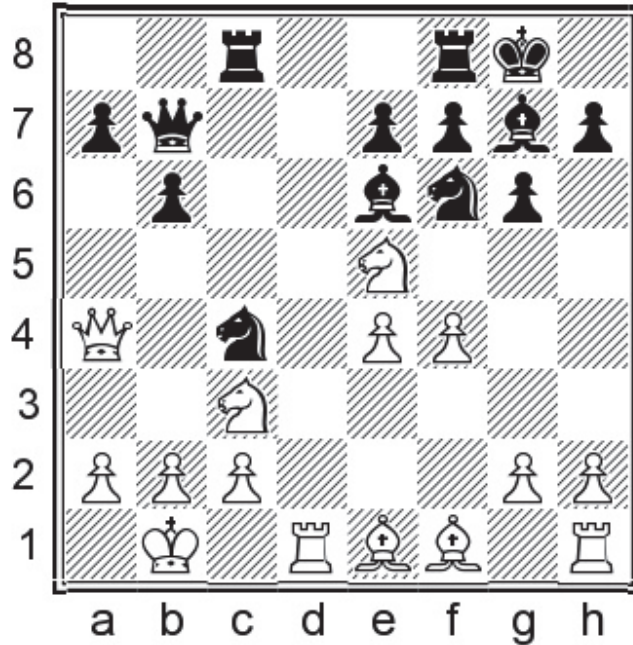
B) 15...♞c4 16.e5 ♞g4 17.♙xc4 ♙xc4 18.♞c1! Avoiding ... b5 for the time being and preparing ♞d1, so White can continue with h3 and ♞e3 to consolidate. 18...a6 19.♞d1±

C) 15...♙b7!?! 16.♙e1!



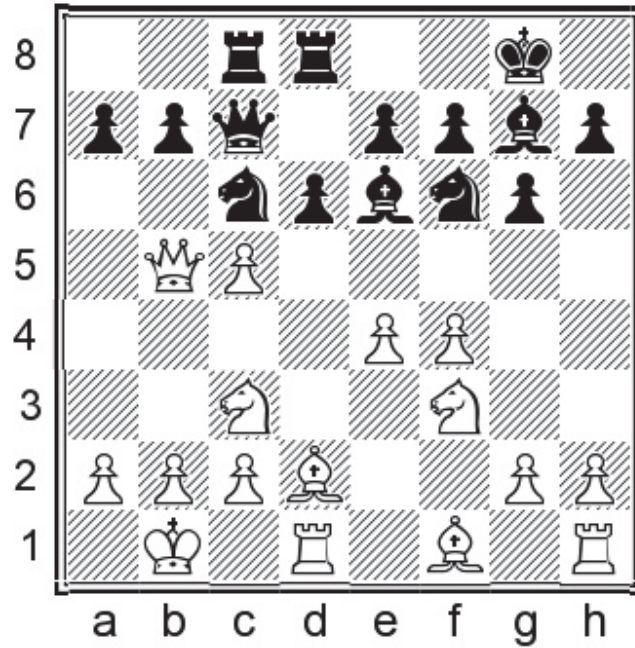
Position after: 16. ♔e1!

Another apparently bizarre piece of prophylaxis. 16... ♖c4 [16... ♖d7 17.e5 ♖c5 18. ♙d4±; 16... ♜fd8 17. ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 18.e5 ♖e4 19.b3±] 17. ♖e5



Position after: 17. ♖e5

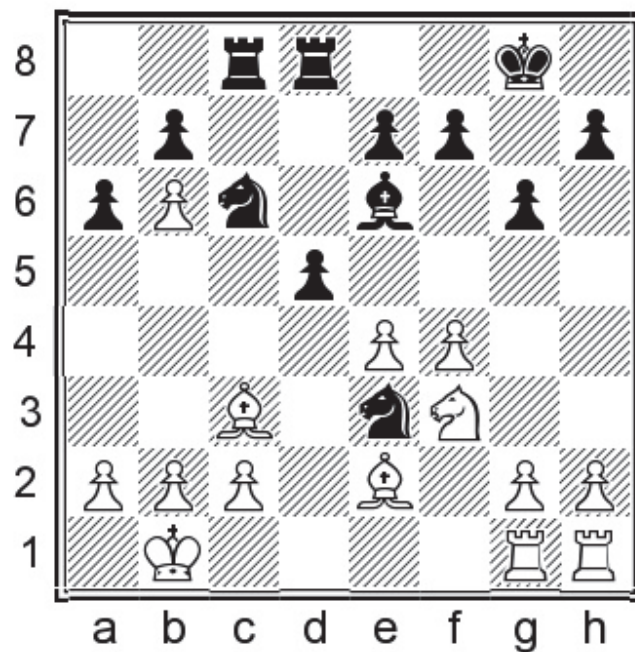
Now Black has to sacrifice something major. 17... ♖xb2!? [17... b5?! 18. ♙xb5 ♙xb5 19. ♖xb5 ♖xe5 20.fxe5 ♖xe4 21.b3 ♔xe5 22. ♖xa7± looks uninspiring: battling three connected passed pawns rarely ends well.; 17... ♖d6 18. ♔a6 ♙c7 19. ♔xc8 ♜xc8± is not stupid at all, but also fails to equalise.] 18. ♔xb2 b5 19. ♙xb5 ♙c7± The position is obviously really dangerous for White, but if he can memorise certain moves starting with 20. ♙a4 then he has good chances to convert the extra material.



Position after: 12...Rfd8

13. Qd3

13. Qe2!? a6 14. Wb6 Wxb6 15. cxb6 Ng4 Black threatens forks on e3 and f2. White can navigate through without losing material, e.g. 16. Rdf1 Qxc3 17. Qxc3 Ne3 18. Rfg1 d5→, but there will be adequate play for Black.

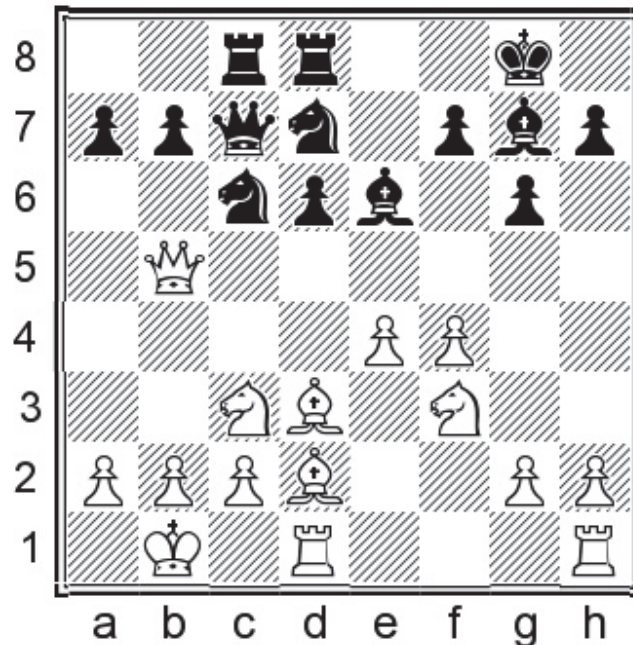


Position after: 18...d5→

Alternatively, Black could play 13...dxc5 and claim a better version of 12...dxc5.

13...a6!

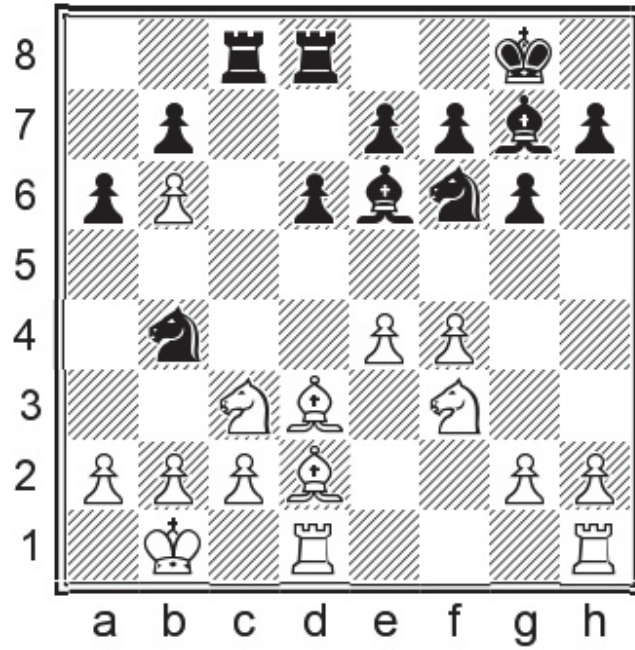
I recommended 13...♘d7 before but there is an issue: 14.cxd6 [14.♘d5!? ♚b8!⇒] 14...exd6



Position after: 14...exd6

15.♘d5! This is the maximalist continuation. [15.f5 Now Black gets his attack for a cheaper price. 15...a6 16.♘d5 ♙xd5 17.♚xd5 ♘c5⇐] 15...♙xd5 16.exd5 ♘e7 17.c4! a6 18.♚a5 b6 19.♚a3± It turns out that because of the constant motif of ♙a5 skewering Black's major pieces, there is no way to arrange ... b5 quickly.

14.♚b6 ♚xb6 15.cxb6 ♘b4



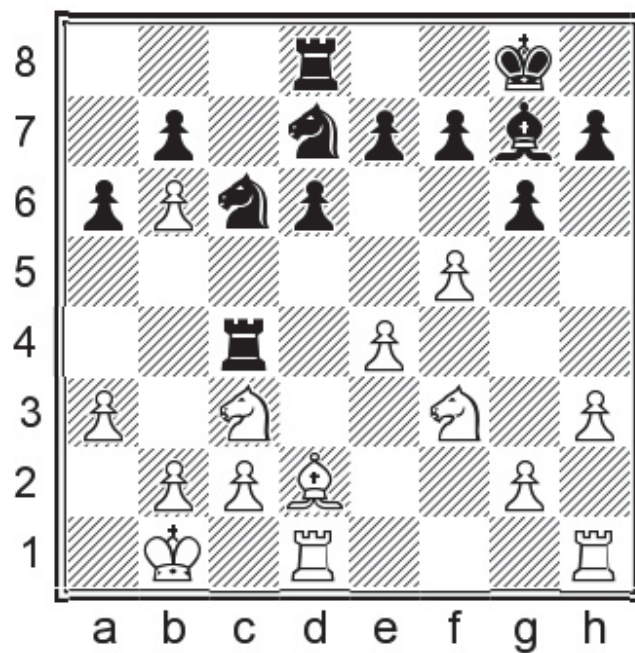
Position after: 15... Nxb4

Black regains the pawn in all lines:

16.h3

16. Rhf1 Nd7 17.f5 Qc4=

16... Nd7 17.f5 Qc4 18.Qxc4 Rxc4 19.a3 Nc6=



Position after: 19...♘c6=

Conclusion to Chapter 2

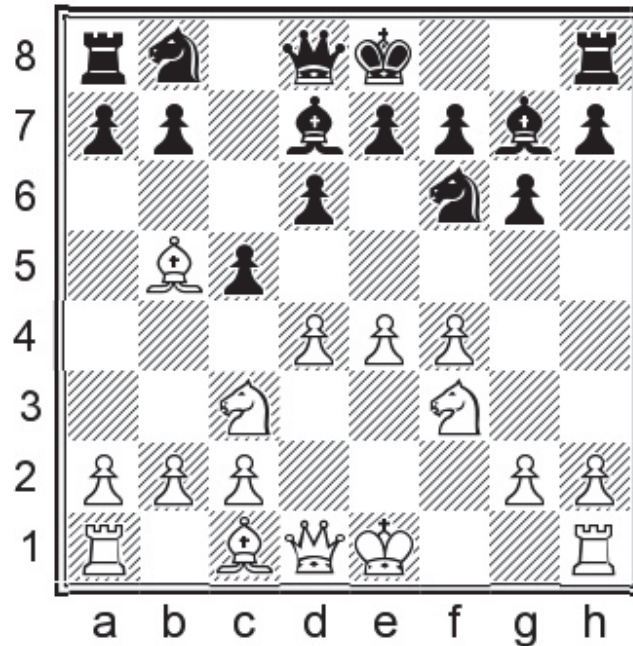
This is the chapter you read as a gentle introduction to the world of the 5...c5 Pirc. Are you happy? If so, read on. If not, then you will find analysis of 4.f4 a6 in Part IV and just be grateful there are (at least) two playable alternatives!

Within this chapter it's quite important to grasp the idea that sometimes Black can have very good compensation even if, in addition to dxc5, he allows White to take a further pawn with cxd6. The compensation along the c-file, e-file and long diagonal is a key feature of this line. It's also interesting to take a look at the 7.♙d4 line (2.4, 2.5) yourself, as every analyst here seems to come up with a different opinion; I have just published my own!

Chapter 3

Austrian Pirc with ♖xd7

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 c5 6.♗b5+ ♗d7



Chapter Guide

Chapter 3 – Austrian Pirc with ♖xd7

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 c5 6.♗b5+ ♗d7

3.1) 7.e5 ♘g4 8.♗xd7+ ♖xd7 9.h3 cxd4 10.♖xd4 ♘c6 11.♖e4

3.2) 7.e5 ♘g4 8.♗xd7+ ♖xd7 9.h3 cxd4 10.♖xd4 ♘c6 11.♖a4

3.3) 7.e5 ♘g4 8.♗xd7+ ♖xd7 9.d5

3.4) 7.♗xd7+ (...♘bxd7)

3.5) 7.♗xd7+ ♘bxd7 8.d5 0-0 9.♖e2 and 9.a4

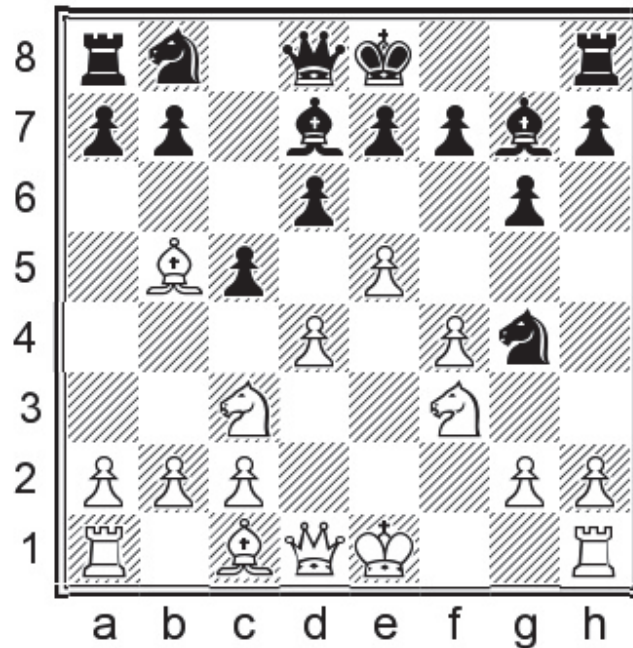
Introduction to Chapter 3

Slightly more critical than avoiding the check on b5 completely, White can choose to play the check and then exchange bishops rather than attacking the d7-bishop with 8.e6. (Do note that it's not possible to play 6.e5 without inserting the check, as Black simply replies ...♘fd7 and White's centre collapses.) This chapter contains one very critical subchapter (3.3) where the game has been worked out almost to a draw, but you do have to remember to play 10...e4! to get the line started. In the

remainder of the chapter there is no need for quite such precision from either side, but obviously in all these lines where White sets up a pawn centre and then aims to create an attack while Black is breaking down the centre, there are sharp details to be remembered. There are definitely echoes of the previous chapter in lines 3.1) and 3.2) despite the presence of queens.

3.1) 7.e5 ♖g4 8.♙xd7+ ♚xd7 9.h3 cxd4 10.♚xd4 ♜c6 11.♚e4

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♟f6 3.♟c3 g6 4.f4 ♙g7 5.♟f3 c5 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.e5 ♖g4

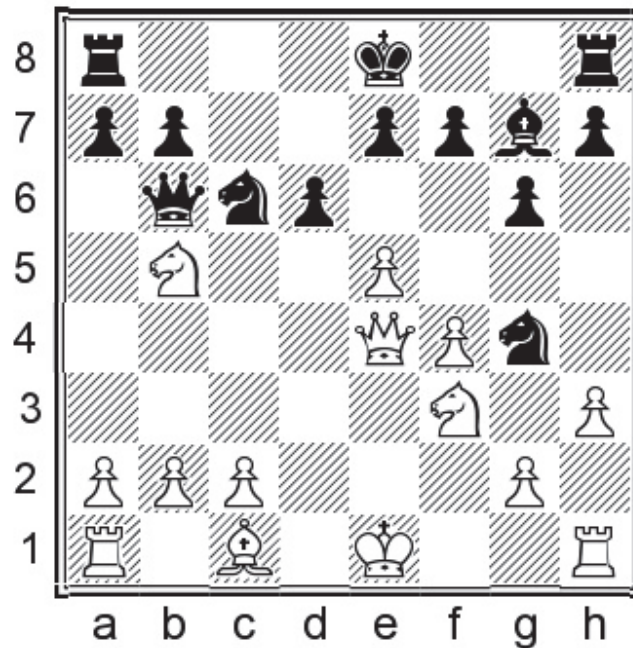


Position after: 7... ♖g4

Reaching a critical juncture. Here, 8.e6 is the main move and will occupy us for the next chapter.

8.♙xd7+!

A) 8.h3 This used to be a main line until Black discovered the right way to gain a tempo on move 11. 8...cxd4 9.♚xd4 ♙xb5 10.♟xb5 ♜c6 11.♚e4 ♚b6!

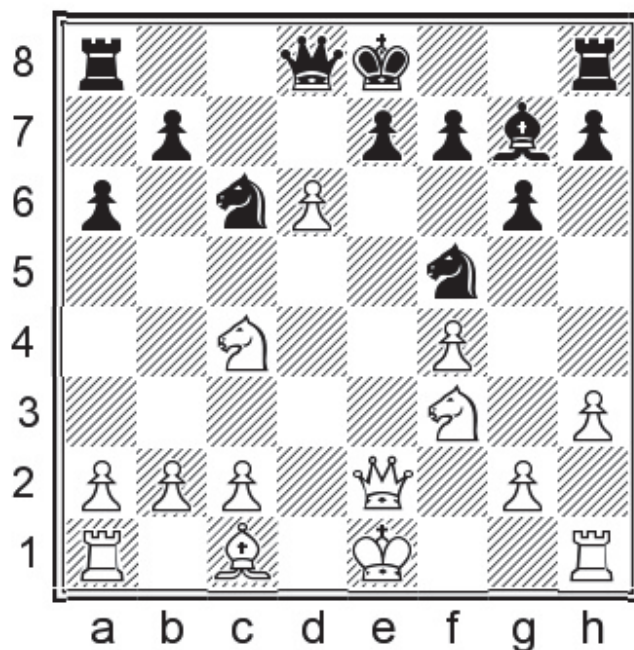


Position after: 11... ♔b6!

This move is not check, but it does threaten a very significant check on f2... 12. ♕e2 [12. hxg4?! ♕xb5 Now White can't castle and can easily get into trouble, e.g. 13. exd6 0-0 14. dxe7? ♖fe8♠ with a huge attack.] 12... a6! Another intermezzo!

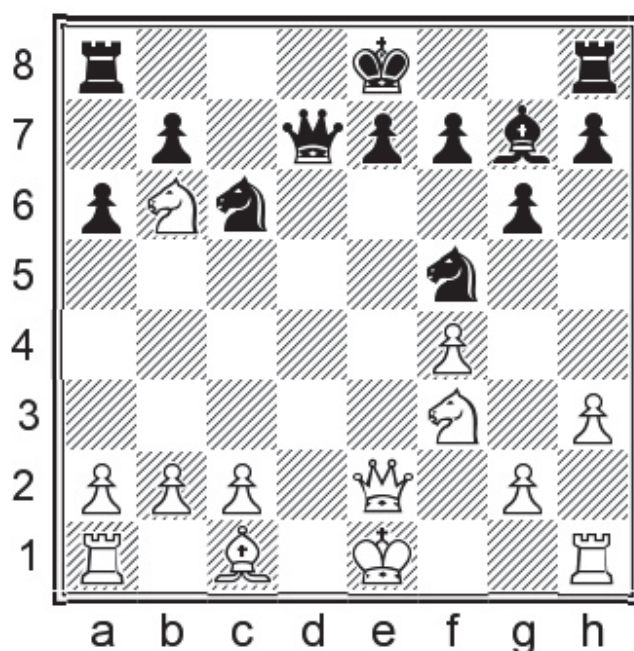
A1) After 13. exd6 as played in Franzoi – Arias Rodriguez, corr. 1996, Black can play in various ways, including: 13... axb5N 14. d7+ ♔xd7 15. hxg4 b4 White is not close enough to castling himself for Black's king to genuinely feel the draught.

A2) 13. ♖a3 ♘h6 14. ♘c4 ♕d8 So far, this is almost forced after 8.h3. 15. exd6 [15. 0-0 b5 16. ♘e3 dxe5 17. fxe5 0-0= Black couldn't really take on e5 on the previous move, but now he is ready to do so. White's position is harder to play.] 15... ♘f5



Position after: 15... Nf5

16.d7+! White has to take care to stay level. [16.dxe7?! Now Marin gives 16... Nxe7 17.Qf2 Qd5 18.Ne3 Nxe3N 19.Qxe3 0-0-0→, but another very annoying possibility is the unusual 16... Qc7! threatening both ... Ng3 and ... Ncd4. Black is better.] 16... Qxd7 17.Nb6

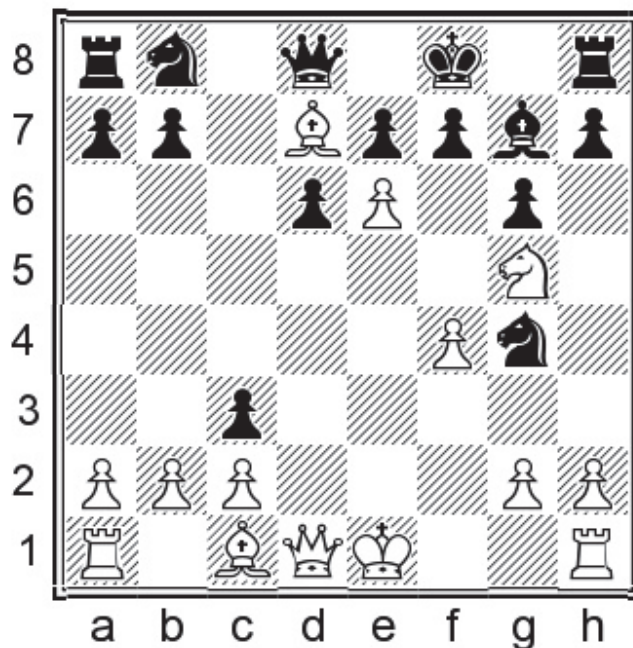


Position after: 17. Nb6

17... Ncd4! 18.Nxd4 Nxd4 19.Nxd7 Nxe2 20.Nb6 Ng3 21.Nxa8 Nxh1= Black had completely equalised, and I think in a practical game he could now start to play for a win. Romualdi – Soh,

email 2013.

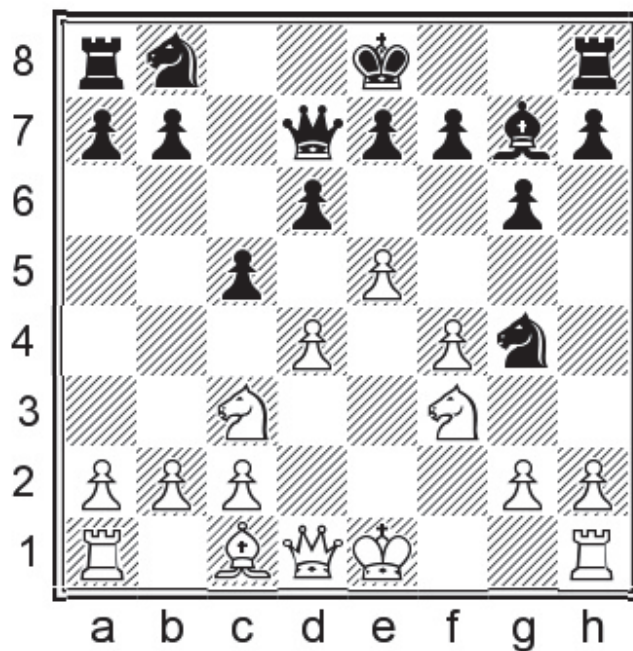
B) 8. ♖g5?! cxd4! 9. e6 dxc3 10. ♕xd7+ ♔f8!



Position after: 10... ♔f8!

Now Black plays ...f5 next to consolidate, unless White goes for 11. ♖xf7? ♖b6 12. ♖xg4 cxb2-+.

8... ♕xd7



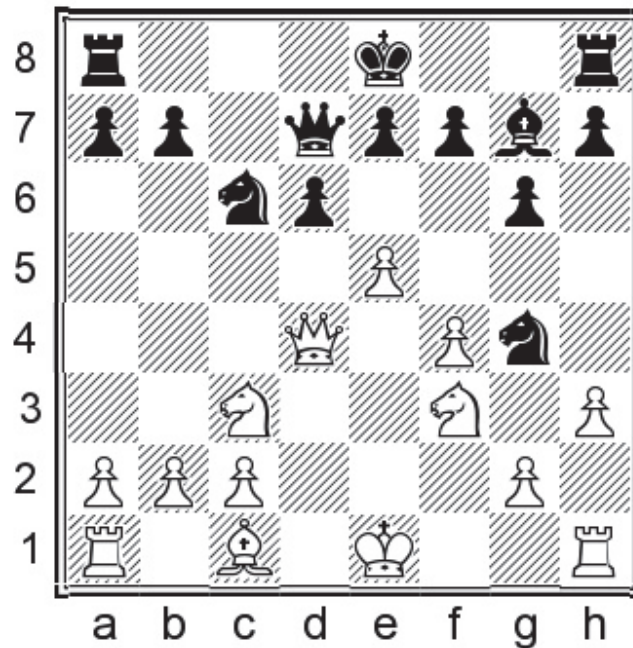
Position after: 8... ♕xd7

9.h3

After 9.dxc5 dxe5 10.♔xd7+ ♘xd7 11.h3 e4! we get an early foretaste of subchapter 3! Black is fine here.

9...cxd4 10.♔xd4 ♘c6

10...♘h6 11.♔f2!± and McDonald rightly concluded on ChessPublishing that Black can't easily solve the problem of his h6-knight.

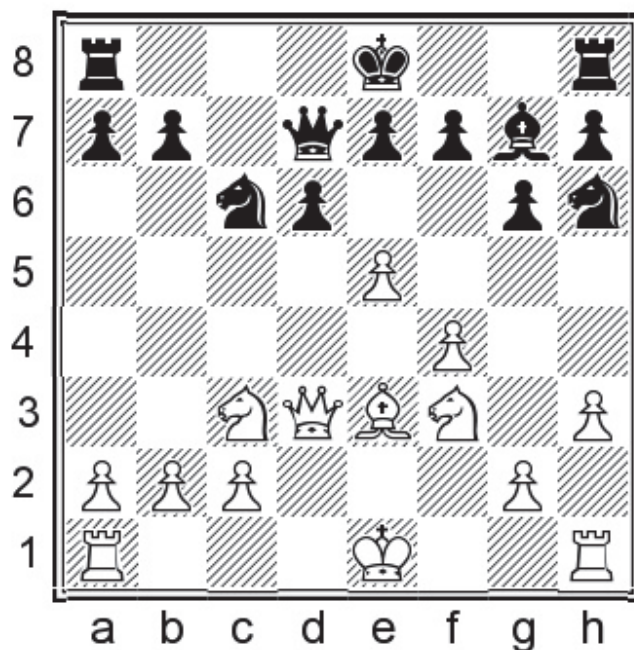


Position after: 10...♘c6

11.♔e4

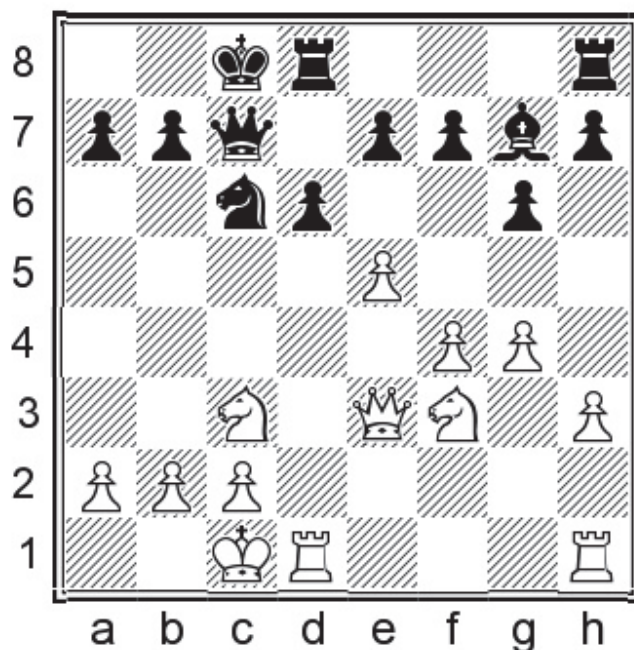
This looks active, but the queen is not well defended here. The move I consider best, 11.♔a4, is considered next.

11.♔d3 ♘h6 12.♙e3 [It is worth noting that after 12.exd6 Black can play 12...♘f5 and obtain compensation with or without the trade of queens.]



Position after: 12. ♔e3

A) In practice the main line has been: 12... ♘f5 13.0-0-0! This is possible now, since there is no fork with ... ♗g3 available. 13...0-0-0 [13... ♗b4!? 14. ♙e4 ♘xe3 15. ♙xe3 ♙e6 16. ♖b1 dxe5 17.a3 ♘c6 18. ♘d5 ♙c8 19. ♗he1 0-0 20.fxe5 Black was later able to bounce back and win in Sutovsky, E – Tan, Z Caleta 2014.] 14.g4 ♘xe3 15. ♙xe3 ♙c7



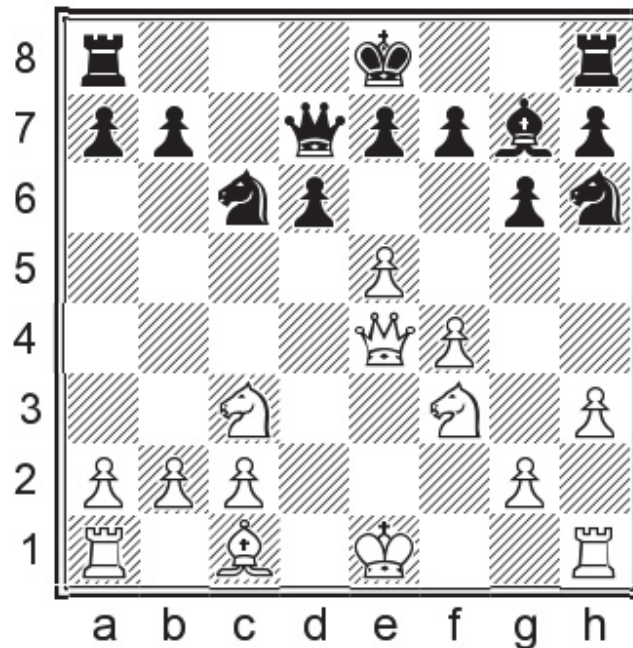
Position after: 15... ♙c7

16.e6!?N 16... ♔xc3 17. ♙xc3 f6 18. ♖b1 White retains a space advantage, although objectively Black

may be OK.

B) 12...0-0!? I believe this to be a novelty. 13.0-0-0 [After 13.g4 ♖e6 14.♗g5 ♖c8 15.exd6 ♗b4 16.♗d2 ♜d8= Black has a strong initiative.] 13...♗e6 14.♕b1 ♜ad8= White can no longer keep his space advantage, as 15.♗e4?! runs into the familiar 15...♗f5=.

11...♗h6



Position after: 11...♗h6

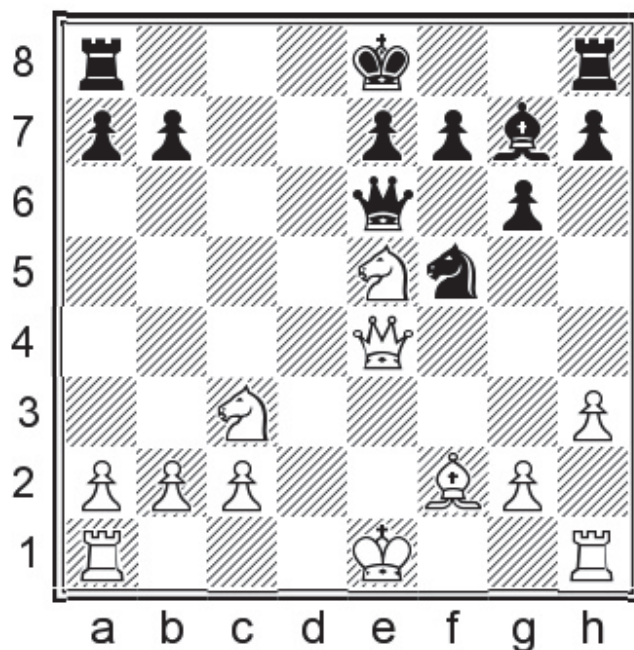
12.♗e3

12.g4 was also noted by McDonald to be an overextension: 12...0-0-0!? 13.♗e3 dxe5 14.fxe5 f5! White must liberate the enemy knight, exchange it, or open the e-file. Black was OK in Berkley – Benatar, email 2001.

12...♗f5 13.♗f2 dxe5 14.fxe5 ♗xe5!

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to give independent recommendations. This move is simply good.

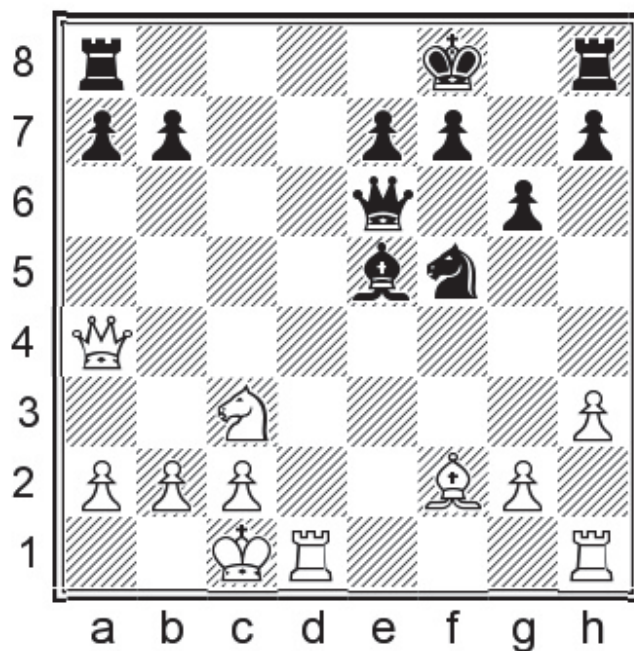
15.♗xe5 ♖e6



Position after: 15...Qe6

16.0-0-0

A) 16.Qa4+ deprives the king of the right to castle, but after 16...Kf8 the king will sooner or later go to g7: 17.0-0-0 Qxe5



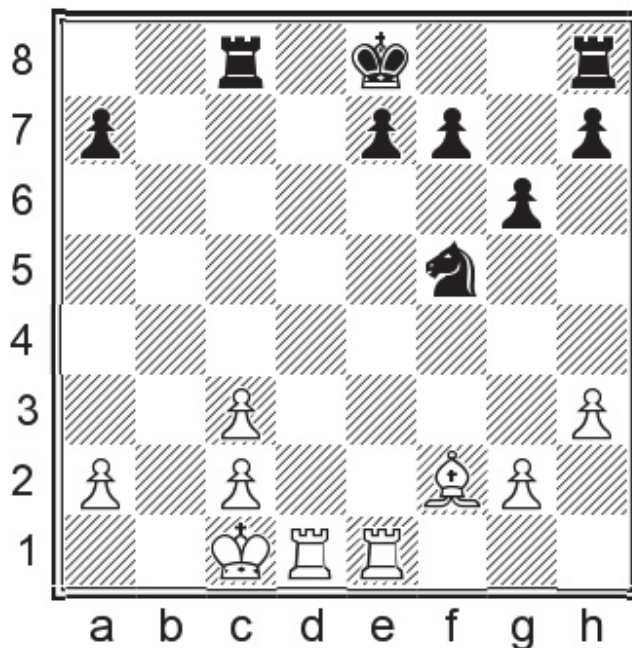
Position after: 17...Qxe5

18.g4N [18.Khe1 f6 19.g4 Qd6 20.Qd4 Qf7 21.Qd5 Kc8 22.Qxa7 Qxd5 23.Qxe5 Qc6 24.Qc3 e5

25.h4 ♔g7 was fine for Black in Shpakovsky – Kogler, email 2011] 18...♘d6 19.♙d4 b5!? It is best to return the pawn for the sake of completing development before White's central pressure becomes too strong. If 20.♚b4 [20.♘xb5 ♘xb5 21.♚xb5 ♙xd4 22.♖xd4 h5 is nothing, since Black's king is safer than White's.] 20...♞c8 Followed by ...♞c4 and Black has obvious counterplay.

B) 16.0-0?! ♙xe5 doesn't give White enough compensation.

16...♙xe5 17.♞he1 ♙xc3 18.♚xb7 ♞c8 19.♚xc8+ ♞xc8 20.bxc3



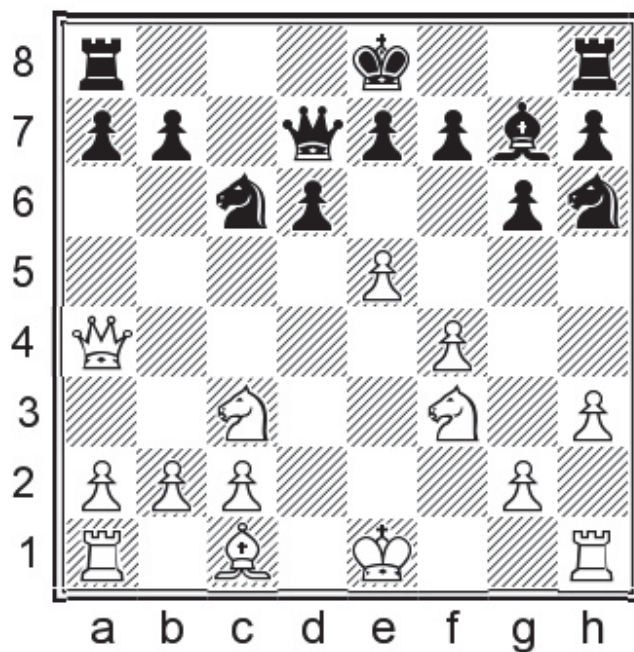
Position after: 20.bxc3

20...f6!?=

20...♞c7 21.g4 ♘g7 22.♙g3 ♞b7?! led to problems in Shirov – Zaragatski, Germany 2015.

3.2) 7.e5 ♘g4 8.♙xd7+ ♚xd7 9.h3 cxd4 10.♚xd4 ♘c6 11.♚a4

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.f4 ♙g7 5.♘f3 c5 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.e5 ♘g4 8.♙xd7+! ♚xd7 9.h3 cxd4 10.♚xd4 ♘c6 11.♚a4! ♘h6

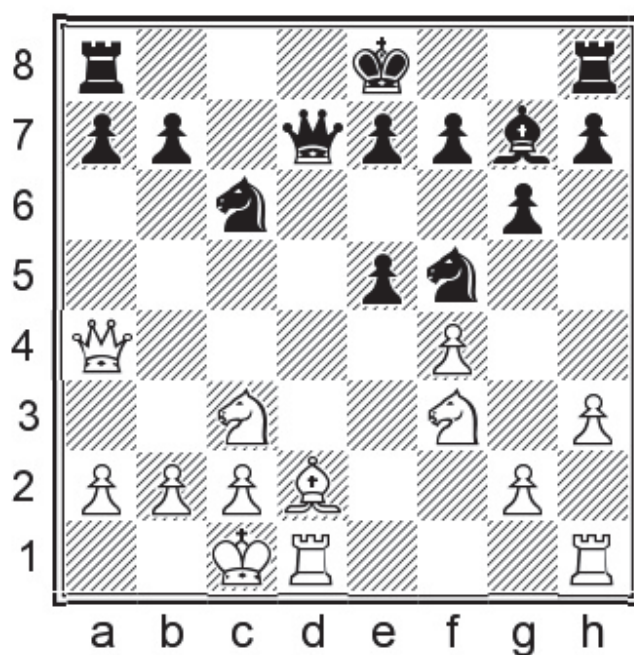


Position after: 11... Nf6

12. Qd2 Nf5 13. 0-0-0!

13. g4 Ncd4! =

13... dxe5



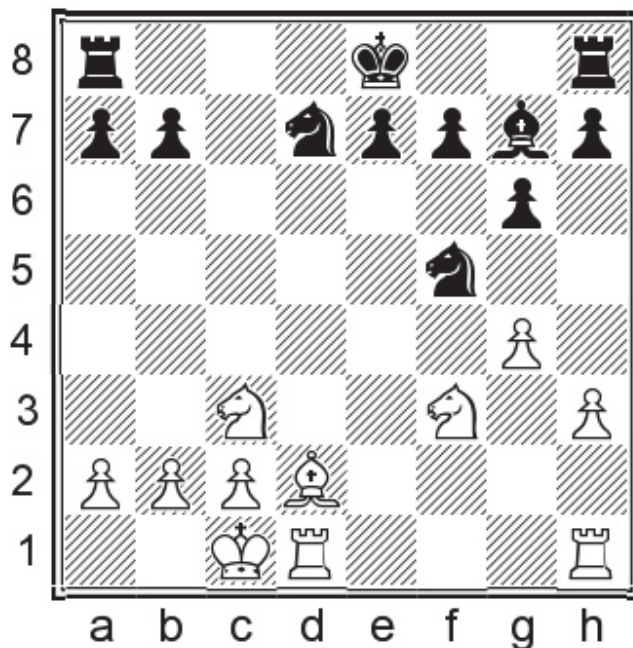
Position after: 13... dxe5

14.♖he1!

In my opinion, a very testing line against the 5...c5 Pirc. White doesn't have an advantage but there are a number of positions which need tests.

14.fxe5 Here White can obtain the 'better majority' in various rook endgames, but nothing more.

14...♗xe5 15.♕xd7+ ♗xd7 16.g4



Position after: 16.g4

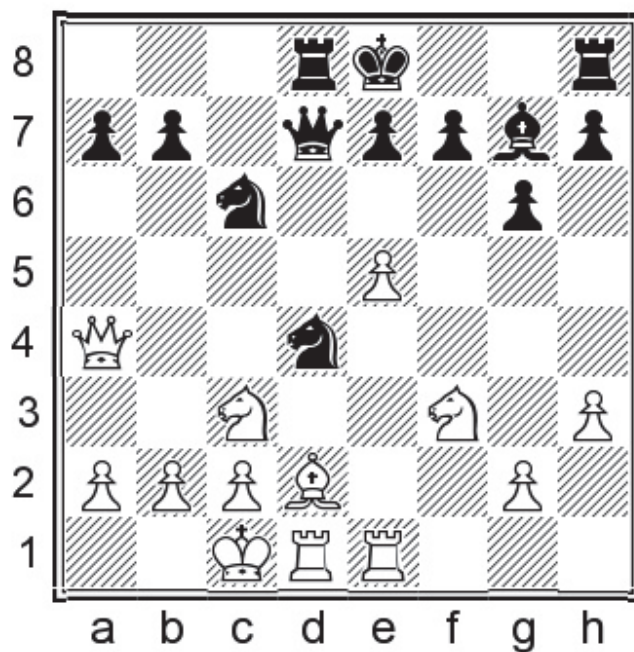
16...♗d4! [16...♗h6 17.♗b5+-; 16...♗d6 17.♗d5± and Black's position is rather dubious.] 17.♗xd4 ♕xd4 18.♗d5 ♖c8! [18...♕e5?! 19.♖he1 f6 20.♕b4 ♖c8 21.g5±] 19.♕g5 ♕f6! [19...f6 20.♖xd4 fxg5 21.♖hd1 ♗f6 22.♗xf6+ exf6 23.♖e1+ ♔f8 24.♖d6±] 20.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 21.♕xf6 exf6 22.♖he1+ ♔f8 23.♖d7 h5 24.♖xb7 hxg4 25.hxg4 ♖h2∞

14...♖d8

14...e4 15.♕xe4 0-0-0 16.♖c4 ♗d6 17.♖b3 ♔b8 18.♕e3± Black is somewhat cramped and has work to do to neutralise White's pressure.

15.fxe5 ♗fd4

Black's construction with the knight and queen aligned on an open file does not inspire confidence, so it is just as well he has some counter-ideas against White's queen on a4.



Position after: 15... Nfd4

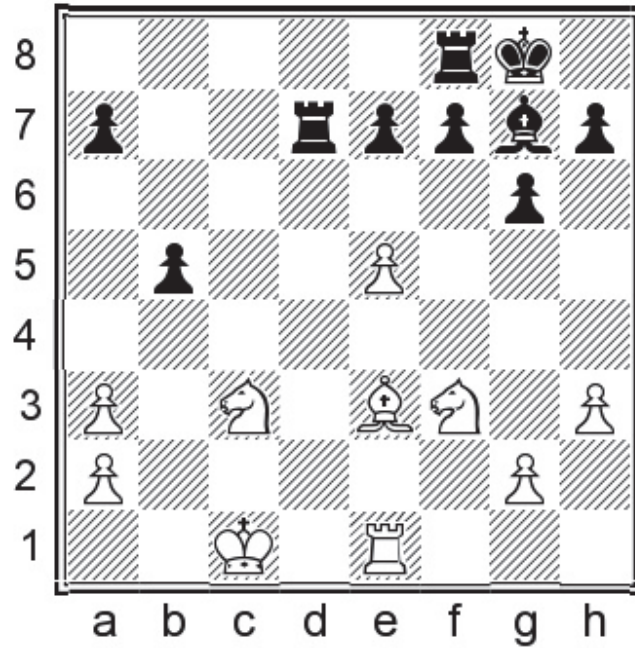
16. Qe3

16. Nxd4 Qxd4 17. Qb5 0-0 18. Qxb7 Nxe5

16...b5 17. Qa6 Nb4 18. Qa3

18. Qa5 Nbc6 19. Qa3 b4 20. Qa4 bxc3 21. Nxd4 cxb2+=

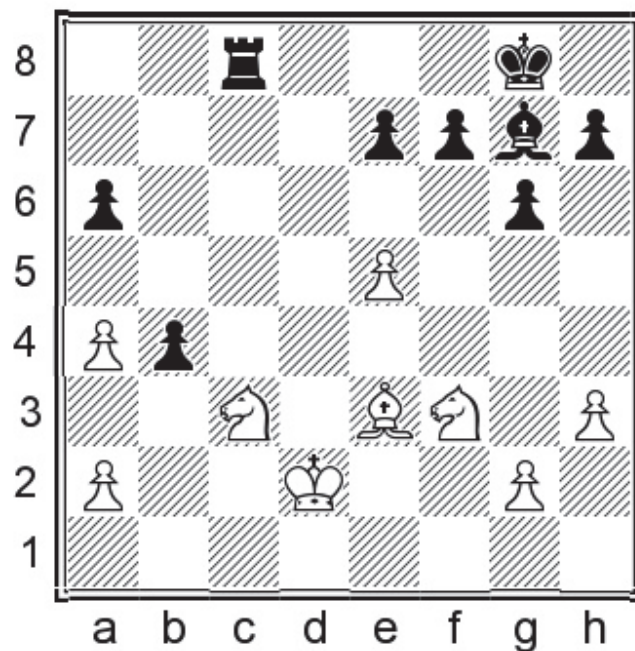
18...Nbxc2 19. Qxd4 Nxa3 20. Qxd7 Qxd7 21. bxa3 0-0



Position after: 21...0-0

Now for instance:

22.♞d1 ♜xd1+ 23.♔xd1 a6 24.a4 ♞c8 25.♕d2 b4⇌



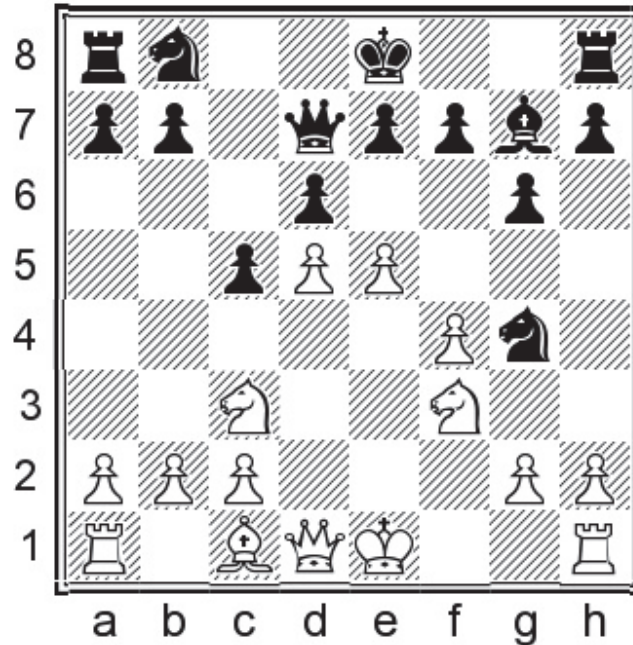
Position after: 25...b4⇌

White hasn't been able to exchange his doubled a-pawns. It is still difficult for Black to envisage winning right now, but after a pawn exchange (...f6) and perhaps a trade of bishop for knight, his

winning chances should not be worse than White's.

3.3) 7.e5 ♖g4 8.♙xd7+ ♚xd7 9.d5

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♗f6 3.♗c3 g6 4.f4 ♙g7 5.♗f3 c5 6.♙b5+ ♙d7 7.e5 ♖g4 8.♙xd7+! ♚xd7 9.d5!?

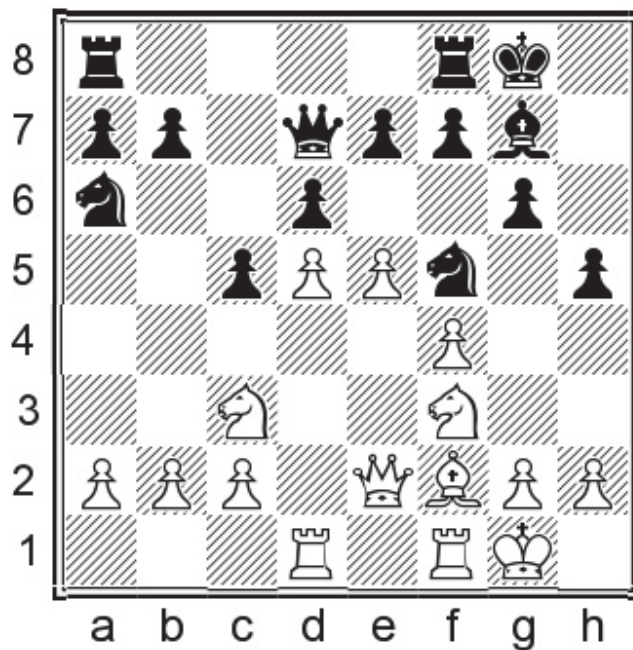


Position after: 9.d5!?

A critical move, leading to positions where Black must play in unnatural ways. However, it's weaker than 9.h3.

9...dxe5

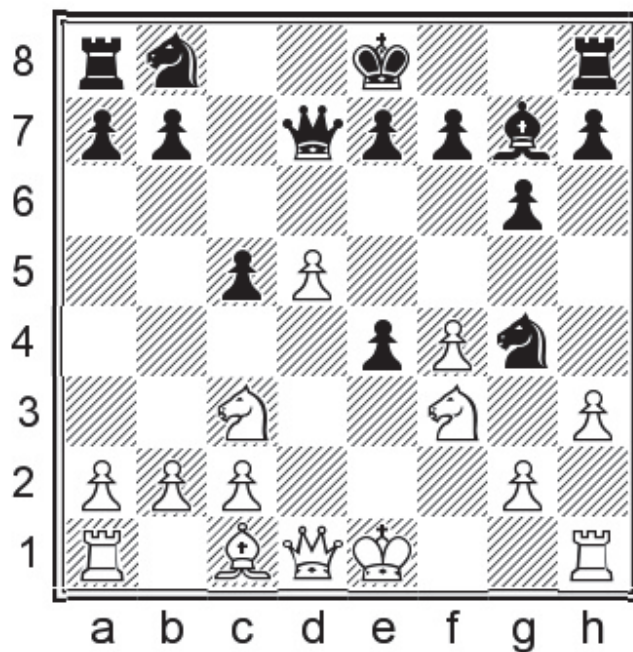
In one game I tried to avoid the work of the main line and play 'creatively' with 9...♗a6?!, however this attempt is not good. 10.♚e2 [Also strong is 10.h3 ♖h6 11.g4±.] 10...♖h6 11.♙e3 ♗f5 12.♙f2 h5 13.0-0 0-0 14.♖ad1±



Position after: 14. ♖ad1±

White had consolidated his advantage and went on to win in Cheng, B – Fernandez, D Begonia Open 2019.

10.h3 e4



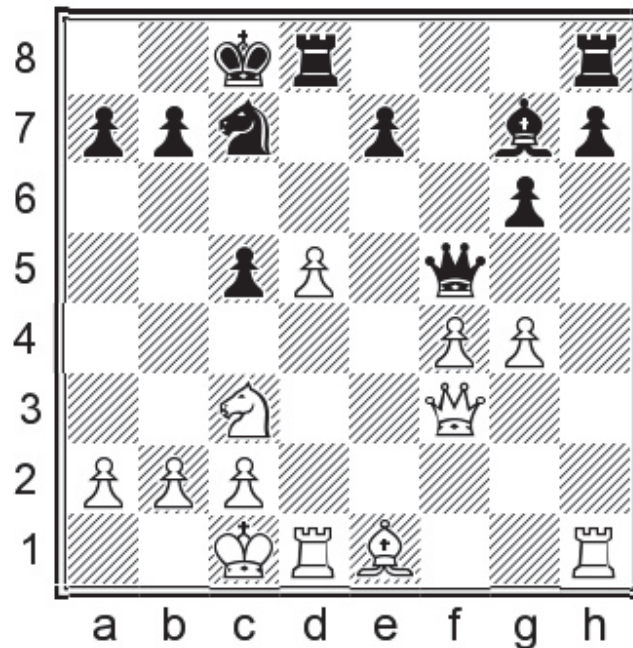
Position after: 10...e4

11.hxg4

In this line the ‘best play’ telescopes very rapidly, so there are very few realistic choices for either side until almost the point where it is a forced draw.

11. ♖xe4 ♜f6 12. ♖xf6+ ♙xf6 13. 0-0 0-0 Black is fine already. 14. ♜e5 [The immediate 14.c4 allows Black to exchange pieces. 14...e6 15. ♜e5 ♚d6 16. ♚b3 ♜d7=; 14. ♙e3 ♙xb2= will lead to simplifications and a draw.] 14... ♚d6 15.c4 ♜d7 Also 15...e6 is reasonable. 16. ♜g4 ♙d4+ 17. ♙e3 f5!= A good decision taken by a few different Black players in practical games, for instance Eraschenkov, D – Tsheshkovsky, V, Belorechensk 2007.

11...exf3 12. ♚xf3 ♜a6 13. ♙d2 0-0-0 14.0-0-0 ♜c7 15. ♙e1 f5 16.gxf5 ♚xf5 17.g4



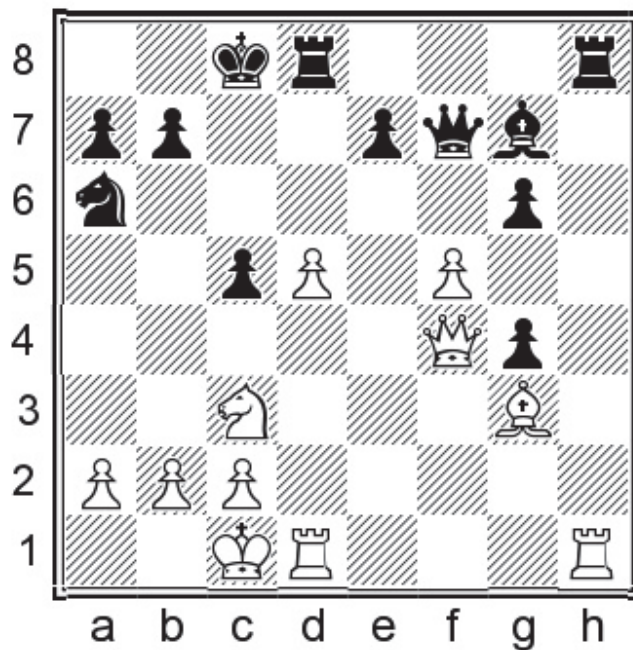
Position after: 17.g4

Preventing Black from locking in a blockade with ...h5.

17... ♚f7 18. ♙g3

18.f5 h5 19. ♙g3 transposes.

18...h5! 19.f5! hxg4 20. ♚f4 ♜a6

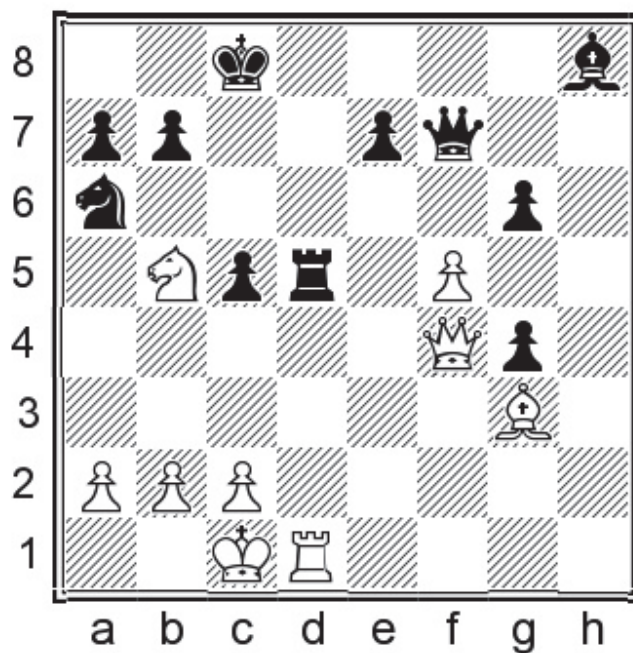


Position after: 20...♞a6

21.fxg6!?

This is White's most critical attempt.

The logical attacking move 21.♞b5 also comes to mind, but Black's defences have already been worked out and shown to be watertight. 21...♞xd5 22.♞xh8+ ♞xh8



Position after: 22...♞xh8