Positional Repertoire

The Modernized Reti

Adrien Demuth



Extended New Edition

Thinkers Publishing

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The Modernized Reti, a Complete Repertoire for White

By

Adrien Demuth

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Key to Symbols Used

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
=	equality
∞	unclear position
⩲	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 an initiative
⇄	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⩿	better is
≤	worse is
N	novelty
+	check
#	mate
⩲	with compensation for the sacrificed material

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Preface

Contrary to what critical pessimists might say, the Reti opening is an ambitious weapon for White. By avoiding the main theoretical debates, White tries to reach an unbalanced position from an early stage of the game, with many different plans available. This is exactly what I found attractive when I started to play the Reti.

Because, of course, I didn't always play the Reti. At first, I was a pure 1.d4 player, but on numerous occasions, during my preparation, I felt as if I was stuck and caught in a dead end, for instance when I had to investigate very complicated lines such as you encounter in the Slav Defense, and in many others as well. I thought that I was far from getting any advantage in these openings, and even if I could manage, the positions reached were very classical, and my opponents most likely understood them well. That's why I started to play 1.♘f3 from time to time, but at first without knowing much theory. It really came as a breath of fresh air to my games, and I enjoyed it. In 2013, I decided to go one step further and build a complete repertoire for my games with 1.♘f3. I did that with my friend, IM Romain Picard. We were in the same spirit (even if he is a 1.e4 player, we found much common ground with our Reti). Of course, when you leave the center to your opponent, you must be very careful not to end up worse after the opening, but I was satisfied with most of the work we did together.

About one year ago, Romain Edouard offered me the opportunity to write this book. It was a real challenge for me. There was no real book available with a complete repertoire for the Reti. Even more challenging, some recently published books included the Reti in refutable 'side lines' for White, but I have always been confident that I could manage to overturn these opinions and write an interesting book with many new lines and underestimated possibilities.

My first principle was, even if White is playing a rather 'slow' opening and doesn't take full control over the center, that he shouldn't leave Black's hands free by allowing him to play both ...d5 and ...c5 or ...d5 and ...e5 (you won't meet many lines where ...e5 is played by Black). If Black can manage that, I believe he will hardly be worse. That's why I decided to concentrate on the different move orders where White plays 1.♘f3 and 2.c4 against most black moves, putting immediate pressure on d5. It's also why I consider the most critical debate in this book to be the 'Advance Variation', where Black plays 2...d4, because he will try to take some space, following up with 3...c5, heading for a reversed Benoni.

In most of these cases, I have been looking for lines clearly in keeping with the Reti spirit, but I sometimes transposed into some 1.d4 lines when I felt that it was needed or clearly the best choice. So the first point is that I have chosen lines where White plays a kingside fianchetto in most cases (especially when Black starts with 1...d5), and this first fianchetto is often followed by another, if possible. My goal was to reach a middlegame full of subtle resources where White has various ways to react in the center, and his main weapon would be his pair of powerful bishops.

It also seemed important to mention that your opponent might not feel that confident in these kinds of middlegames that he might not be so used to meeting. He might also feel that 'everything is playable against such an opening', but that would be a rather naive and dangerous way of reasoning.

Recently, most of the top grandmasters have included the Reti in their repertoire. It is not necessarily

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their main weapon, but we can't say that players such as Kramnik, Aronian, Grischuk, and even Carlsen (to name a few), play it 'only rarely', and that is an excellent sign.

Our present book aims at providing you with a complete Reti repertoire for White. The only variations I haven't covered in detail are those few which transpose quickly into other main lines that are not related to the Reti, such as the Maroczy or the King's Indian (although I have offered an alternative). Of course, I have explained these different transpositions and suggested different types of set-up for you to choose from. When I felt it was needed, I analyzed thoroughly, explaining all the main plans in detail.

My aim was to write a book which would be helpful to players of all strengths, from club player to strong grandmaster, who want to start playing the Reti or improve their understanding of it. It has been a difficult though enjoyable task, but I think I have achieved my goal!

I hope you will enjoy reading it, and it would be great if you can score some nice wins and have excellent results with our 'Modernized Reti'!

Adrien Demuth
Barcelona, November 2017

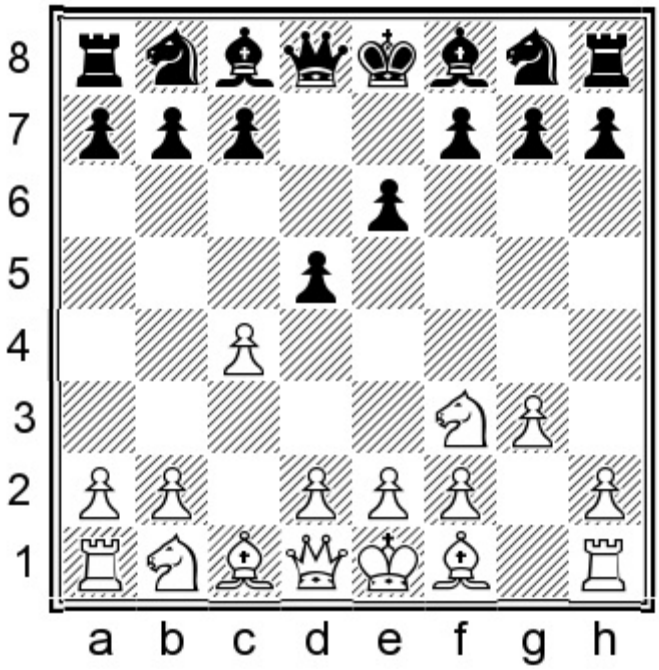
Many thanks to my good friend Pablo Ollier for his help with this second edition.

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Part I
Neo-Catalan 1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

Chapter 1
Early Deviations

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3



Chapter guide

Chapter 1 – Early Deviations

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

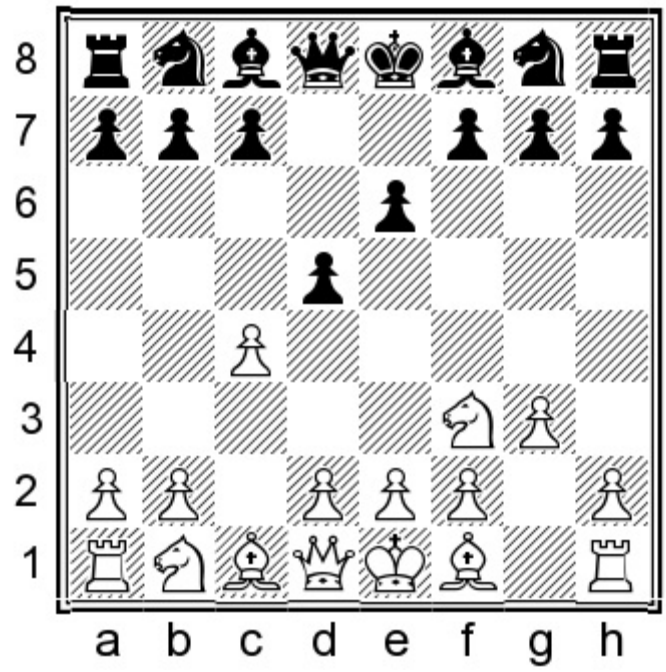
a) 3...--

b) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 ♘bd7

a) 3...--

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

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Position after: 3.g3

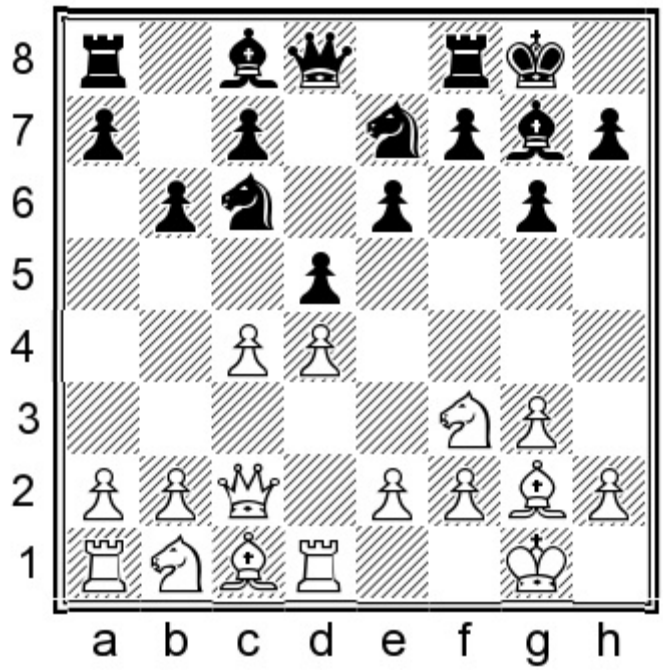
We are only at the beginning of the theory of the Neo-Catalan, which is the equivalent of the Queen's Gambit Declined set-up for Black, but we aim for a 'Modernized Reti' system for White. Before entering into various variations that we can consider as being the main lines, we will take a look at different set-ups starting from the third or fourth move. Many possibilities have no real independent value, as they will most probably transpose into the main lines, but we can try to be exhaustive about the other ideas. It seems fair to say that most of the lines that are presented in this chapter are rather dubious and we can be quite happy to meet them.

3...♘f6

This is obviously the main move. Let's see other possibilities and possible transpositions to other chapters:

A) 3...g6 This doesn't seem logical. It's even against the principles we all know (don't put all your pawns on the samecolored squares, otherwise it will leave many holes in the position), but at least it prevents us from playing b3 so easily and reaching a Reti set-up with a double fianchetto. 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 ♘e7 6.d4 0-0 7.♕c2!? This seems to be the best way to defend the center properly. 7...♘bc6 8.♖d1 b6

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Position after: 8...b6

And here I prefer to follow another path than in the game Yuffa, D (2534) – Motylev, A (2663) Sochi 2016 by playing 9.b3 ♗b7 10.♗b2. I am not sure what Black's intentions could be. 10...♘f5 11.e3! ♖e8 12.a3 ♕e7 13.♘bd2 and White's play is much easier: 13...♖ad8 14.b4±.

B) 3...dxc4 – see chapter 2.

C) 3...d4!? – see chapter 3.

D) 3...c5 – see chapter 4.

E) 3...c6 – see chapter 6.

F) 3...♘d7 This unusual move can threaten to take on c4 in some lines. Even if we have a few good options, the easiest solution seems to be simply tlo protect the pawn. 4.b3!? ♘gf6 (4...a5!? 5.♘c3! It's important to stop the advance of the a-pawn. 5...♘gf6 6.♗g2 ♗e7 7.♗b2±) 5.♗g2 – see 4...♘bd7.

4.♗g2 ♘c6

At first glance, this move may seem weird, but it actually prepares the advance of the d-pawn. Again, many transpositions are possible:

A) 4...dxc4 – chapter 2.

B) 4...d4 – chapter 3.

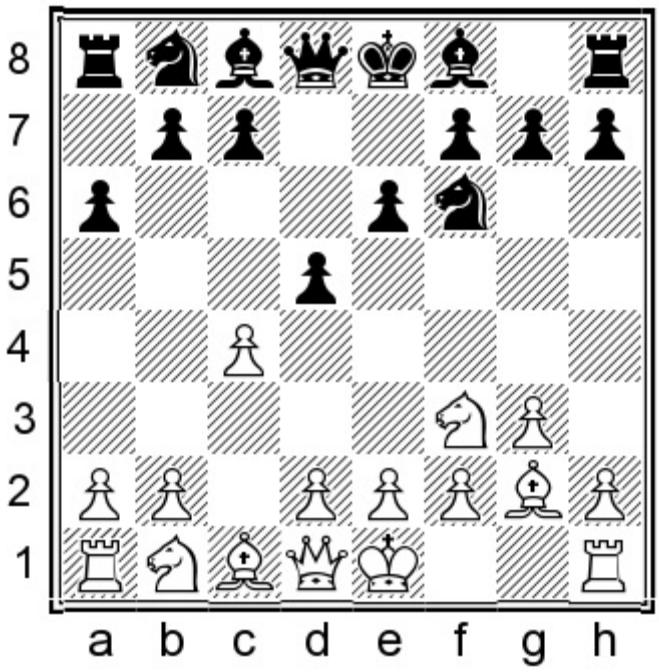
C) 4...c5 – chapter 4.

D) 4...♗e7 – chapter 5.

E) 4...♗d6 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 ♘bd7 transposes into the next subchapter.

F) 4...a6

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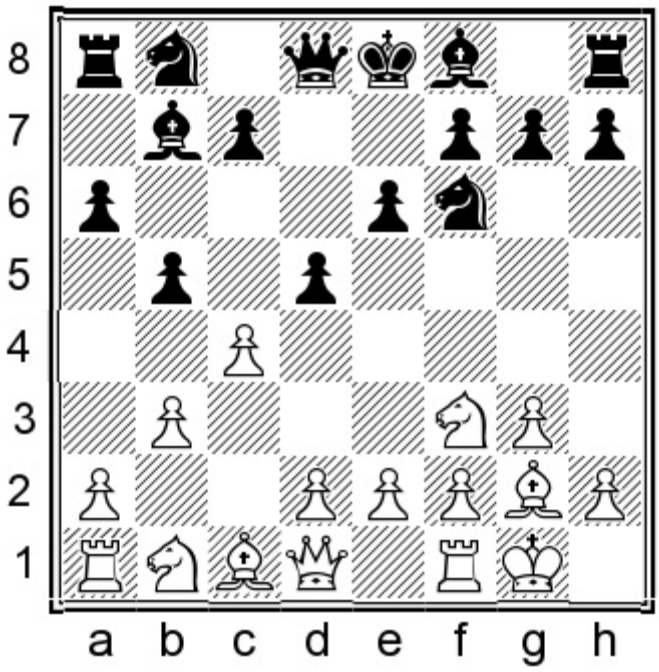
Position after: 4...a6

This reminds us of Romanishin's line, treated in chapter 16. Black is more or less saying, "I am now threatening to take on c4, and you need to do something about it. And I'm fine if you take on d5, as it's not logical to release the tention so early".

F1) 5.d4 This is of course one of the main possibilities. We can decide to transpose into a real Catalan, where Black doesn't really have a choice because he has already played ...a6. He needs to enter a tricky variation 5...dxc4 6.0-0 Here you need to know both 6...b5 and 6...♘c6, but they are not the topic of this book, and you can find all the material about this Catalan in, for example, Avrukh's excellent books.

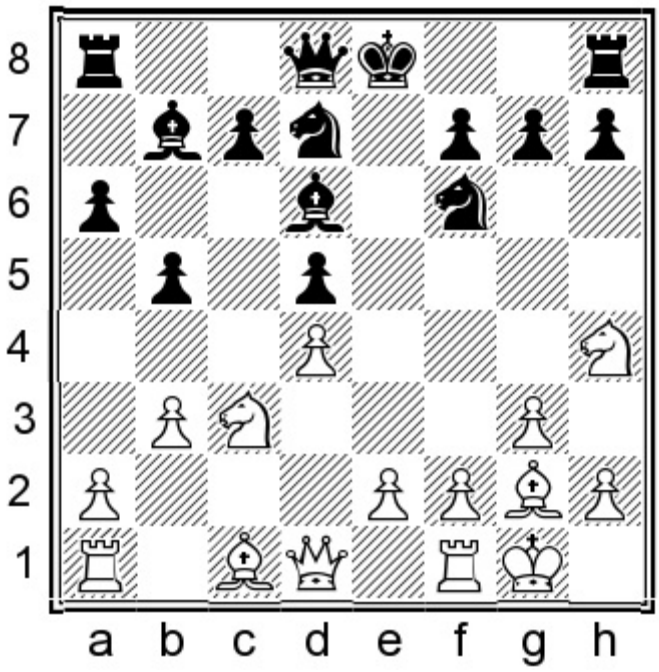
F2) 5.b3!? This is the move closest to the spirit of the Reti! Play might continue logically with 5...b5 6.0-0 ♗b7

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Position after: 6...♗b7

And here I prefer to clarify things in the center, and take advantage of the early development of the bishop on b7. 7.cxd5!? exd5 8.d4 ♗d6 9.♘c3 ♘bd7 10.♘h4!?⩲.



Position after: 10.♘h4!?⩲

I don’t see the point of Black’s queenside development (e.g. he can’t really play ...c5 any more as it would create a rather weak isolated pawn on d5) and White’s chances look preferable.

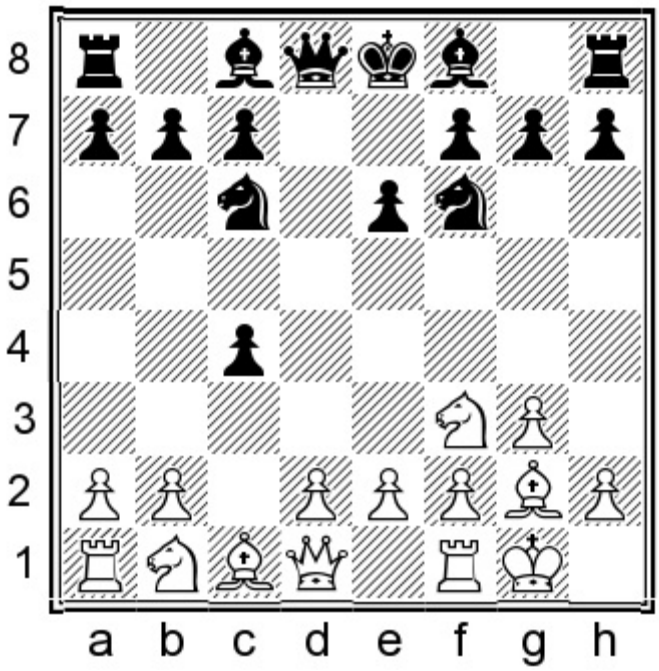
5.0-0

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A) 5.d4!? dxc4 transposes again into a Catalan.

B) 5.b3?! is not so great; after 5...d4 I will explain in chapter 3 that b2-b3 sometimes doesn't really fit in well against a Benoni set-up. This is the case here, where this pawn should try to reach the fourth rank.

5...dxc4



Position after: 5...dxc4

A) 5...d4 This is simply a transposition into chapter 3 when Black plays with 5...♘c6.

B) 5...♗e7 has no real value because after 6.d4 Black needs to explain what the knight is doing on c6. Black needs to explain that... 6...dxc4 7.♕a4 0-0 8.♕xc4± And we have reached an easy Catalan set-up, where Black clearly lacks counterplay.

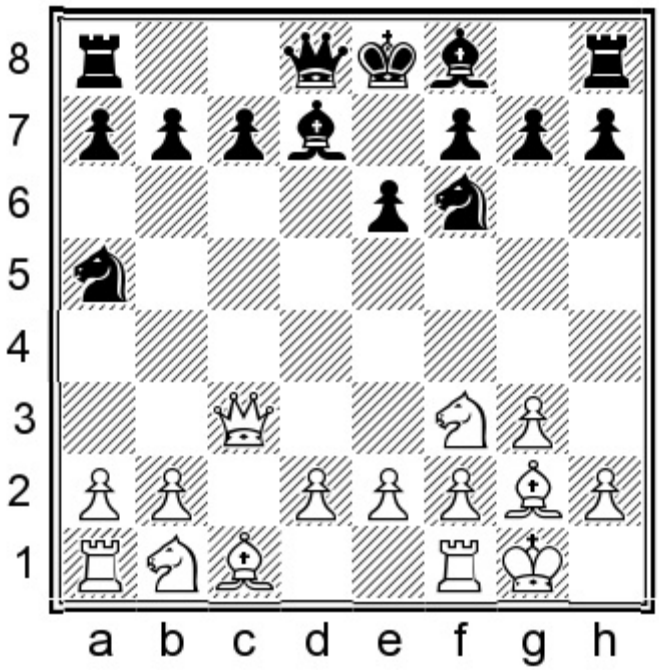
6.♕a4

White's real threat is 7.♘e5. What happens if Black tries to keep his extra pawn?

6...♕d5

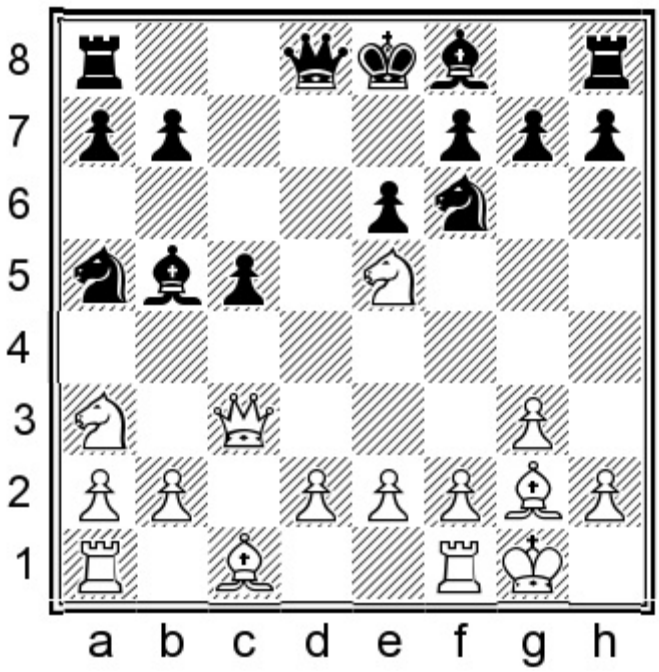
6...♗d7 7.♕xc4 ♘a5 8.♕c3!

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Position after: 8.♕c3!

This is my recommendation, even if c3 is an unusual spot for the queen. The fact that it's also the computer's move might have something to do with it. The queen keeps an eye on the a5-knight, as well as on the g7 pawn. (≤ 8.♕c2 c5 9.♘e5 ♗d6 10.♘xd7 ♕xd7 Even if we have gained the bishop pair, this position looks rather equal and a bit dry.) 8...c5 9.♘e5 ♗b5N (9...♗d6? 10.♘xd7+– This is the difference with 8.♕c2: Black has no good way to take back; 9...♖c8 10.♘xd7 ♘xd7 11.d4⩲) 10.♘a3!

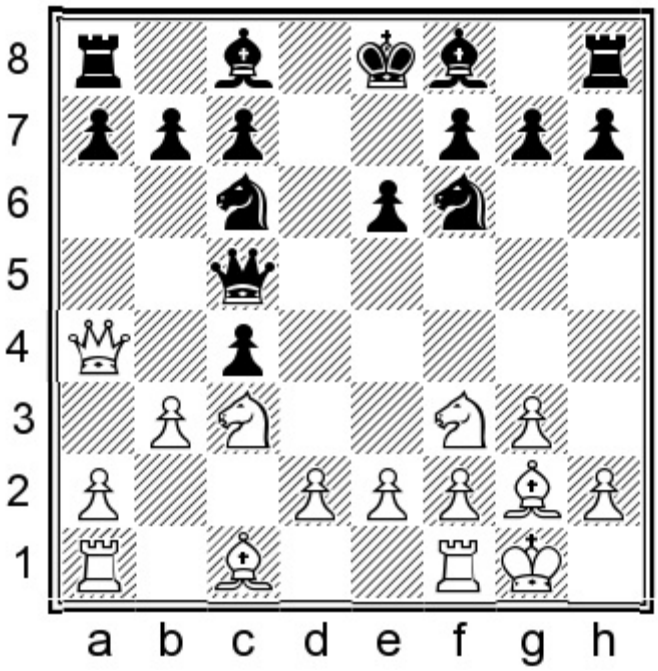


Position after: 10.♘a3!

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A strong sacrifice. 10...♗xe2 11.♖e1 ♗a6 (11...♗h5 12.♘ac4! ♘xc4 13.♕xc4 ♗d6 14.♗xb7 0-0 15.♗xa8 ♕xa8 16.b3±) 12.d4! Files needed to be opened. 12...cxd4 13.♕c2± This position is pretty sharp, but Black is really suffering on the light squares, and he won't have time to castle because of ♕a4!

7.♘c3 ♕c5 8.b3!



Position after: 8.b3!

This enables us to develop our pieces super swiftly!

8...cxb3

And here I recommend leaving the interesting game Lushenkov, M (2387) – Ivanov, A (2425) Sochi 2007 (1-0) by playing the strong...

9.♘b5!N 9...♘d5

Black can't solve the problems that easily by playing 9...♗d6?! as White would answer 10.♗a3 (the hidden threat behind 9.♘b5) 10...♕b6 11.♘xd6+ cxd6 12.♗xd6±.

10.e4 ♘b6

10...a6? 11.exd5 ♕xb5 12.♕xb5 axb5 13.dxc6+–

11.♕xb3

Black still needs to defend the c7-pawn.

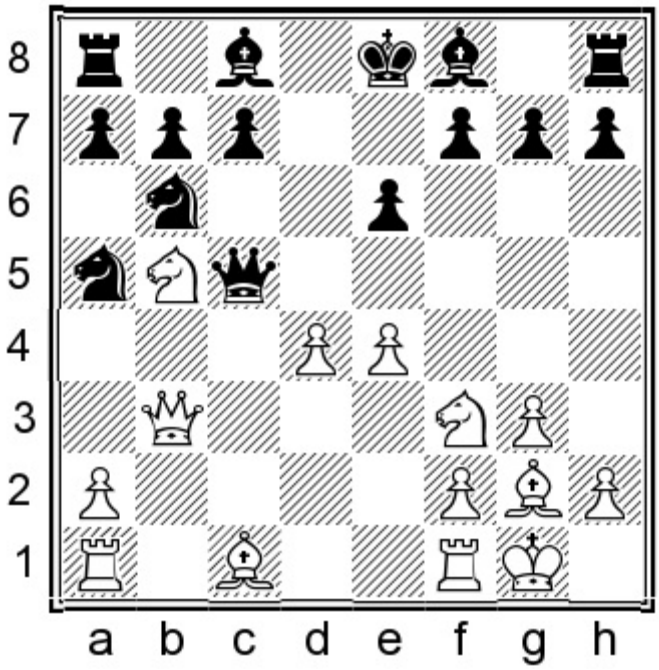
11.♘xc7+? ♔d8∓

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11...♘a5

11...♗d6? 12.♗a3!+–

12.d4!



Position after: 12.d4!

This is the point!

12...♕c6

12...♘xb3? is of course bad: 13.dxc5 ♘xa1 14.♘xc7+ ♔d7 15.cxb6+– with too many threats to deal with for Black.

13.d5! ♕c5

13...♘xb3 14.dxc6 ♘xa1 15.♘xc7+ ♔d8 16.♗f4!±

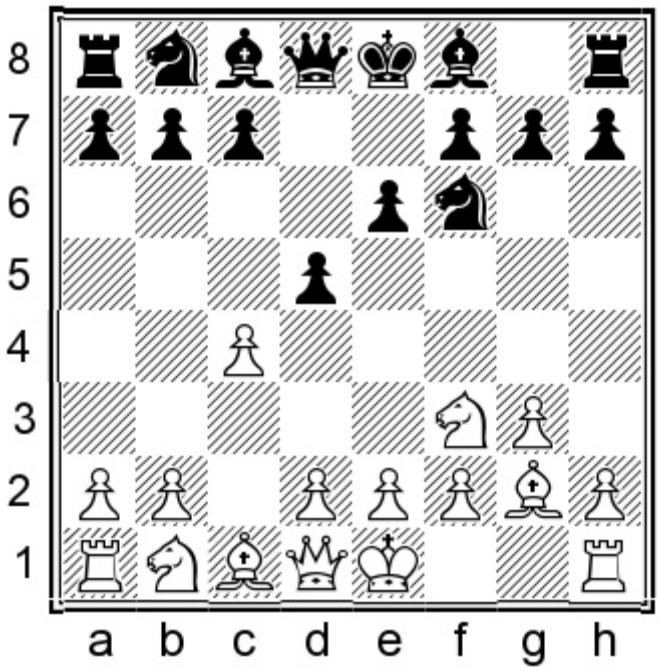
14.♕d3±

Black's huge lack of development will prove to be much more important than his extra pawn.

b) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 ♘bd7

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2

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Position after: 4.♗g2

4...♘bd7

It might feel weird to you, but I actually think that this move is a commitment. Black decides too early where his knight should go, as it might be better placed on c6 in some lines. Also, as ...d4 is no longer a threat, White can simply proceed with...

5.b3 ♗d6

At least the bishop finds a slightly more active square.

A) 5...♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♗b2 is covered in the fifth chapter.

B) 5...b6 Even when Black tries to be creative, it has no real independent value, as it will eventually transpose into one of the other lines: 6.0-0 ♗b7 7.♗b2 ♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.e3 and we finally transpose into the 6...b6 line of chapter 5.

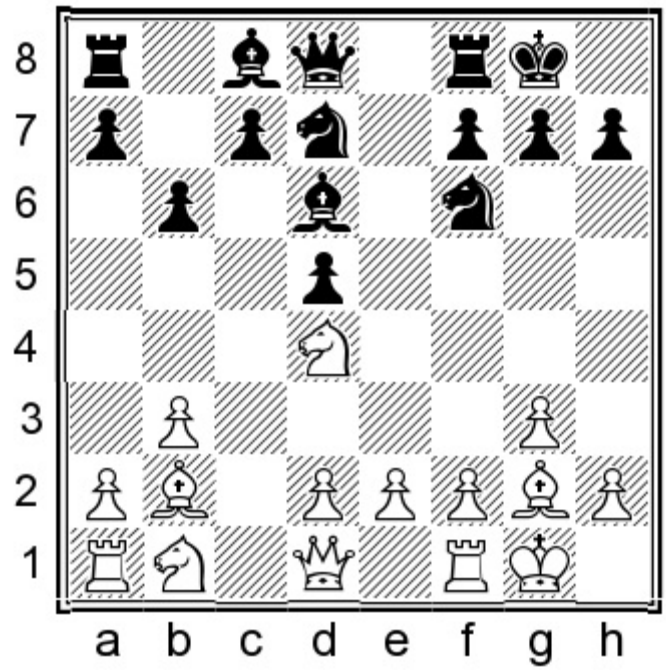
6.0-0 0-0 7.♗b2 b6

A) 7...c6 We can't really say that this is an important theoretical position, but it can be reached through several different move orders, and you can find the theory in chapter 9, the Semi-Slav.

B) 7...♖e8 8.♘c3 c6 Black is unable to dispense with this move, which transposes into chapter 9, the Semi-Slav.

8.cxd5 exd5 9.♘d4!

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Position after: 9.♘d4!

This strong manoeuvre allows White to fight for an advantage.

9...♗b7

9...♘c5?! 10.b4 ♘cd7 (10...♘ce4 11.d3 ♘g5 12.♘c6!±) 11.♕b3±

10.♘f5! ♖e8?!

10...♗c5 11.d4 ♗e7 12.♘c3±

11.♘xd6 cxd6 12.d3±

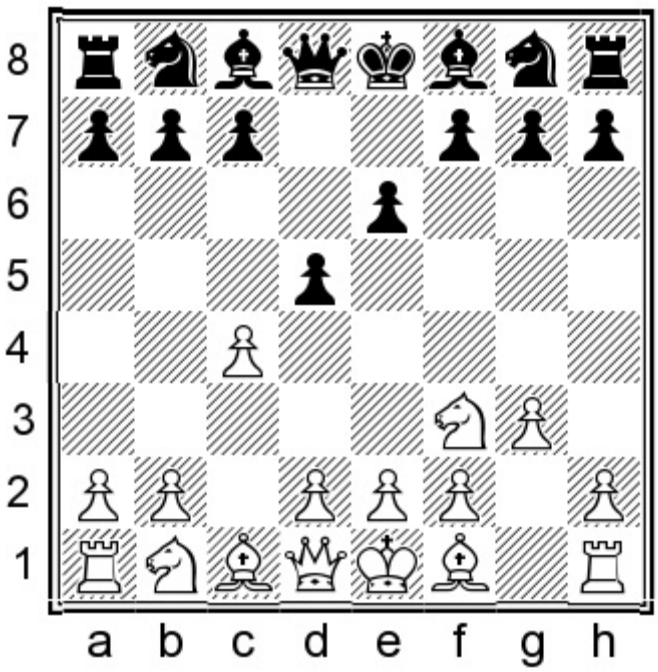
White may already be technically winning as in 1-0 (41) Martinovic, S (2445) – Paunovic, D (2320) Vrnjacka Banja 1983.

This was really a short chapter, but don't get used to it, it was only our warm-up!

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Chapter 2
Systems with ...dxc4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3



Position after: 3.g3

Chapter guide

Chapter 2 – Systems with ...dxc4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

a) 3...dxc4 4.--, 4.♕a4+ --

b) 3...dxc4 4.♕a4+ ♘bd7 5.--, 5.♗g2 c5

c) 3...dxc4 4.♕a4+ ♘bd7 5.♗g2 a6

d) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ --

e) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ c6 with 9...a6

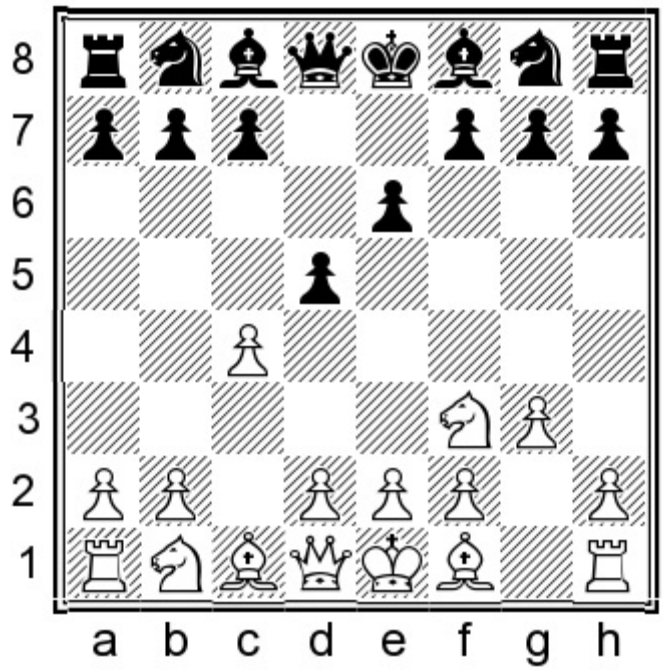
f) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ c6 with 9...♖c8

g) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 dxc4?!

a) 3...dxc4 4.--, 4.♕a4+ --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

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Position after: 3.g3

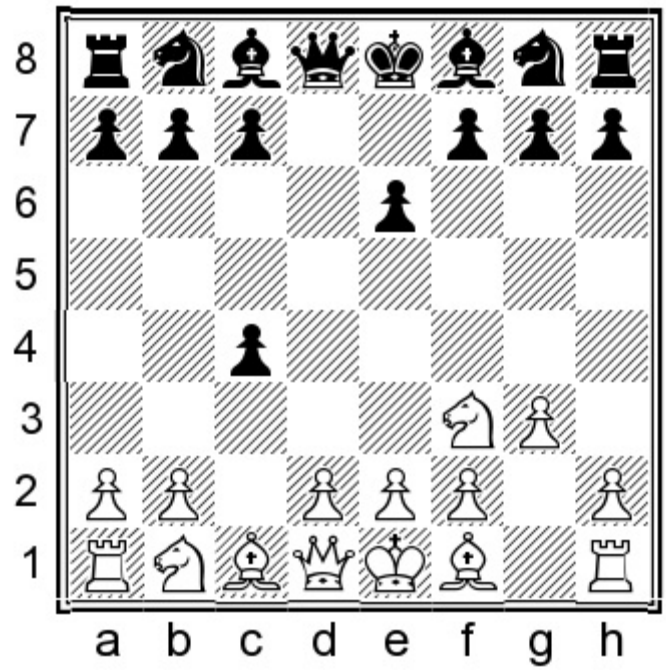
In the first chapter we didn't discuss the most obvious question, the one everyone must have asked himself: it's one thing to sacrifice a pawn, BUT what happens if Black simply decides to take it? How to deal with that? Do we try to recover it at once, or do we stick to quick development and keeping our initiative?

Actually, both approaches are possible, and it merely depends on your personal temperament. Positional players will prefer to restore the material balance as soon as possible, whereas more active and bolder players will prefer the more dangerous paths. My preferred choice? Hmmm, it was a tough one, but I went for the positional path (even if I have only tried the bold option myself).

In this chapter, generally speaking, White is going to expose his queen near the center. In exchange, he obtains the better pawn structure, because he has more pawns on the central files, and his g2-bishop is more active. Black must try to take advantage of the exposed queen by quickly developing his queenside when he could possibly take over the initiative.

3...dxc4!?

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Position after: 3...dxc4!?

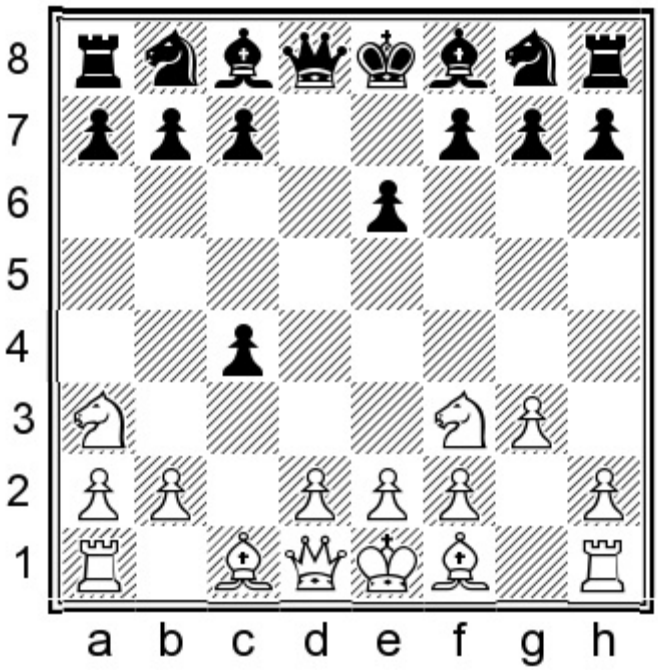
First of all, we need to know what happens if Black takes as early as on the third move. Why aren't we actually considering 2...dxc4 first? Simply because it's absolutely not the same kind of position than in this present chapter. But don't worry, this is covered in chapter 10, the more 'Queen's Gambit Accepted' types of position. The main difference is that after 2...dxc4, White will most probably take back with his bishop from f1, whereas here, White is already committed to g3, so the bishop will hardly leave his beloved fianchetto position. To take on the third move is a rather concrete and interesting option for Black. White needs to have an adequate response. I will call it 'The Sveshnikov Variation', as Evgeny and Vladimir Sveshnikov have played it almost twenty times according to the databases, which is impressive for a rare sideline. I do apologise in advance in case this variation already has another name.

4.♕a4+

As in the main line 4...dxc4, my advice is to take the pawn back straight away. Does White have additional ideas? We will try to find out.

A) 4.♘a3?!

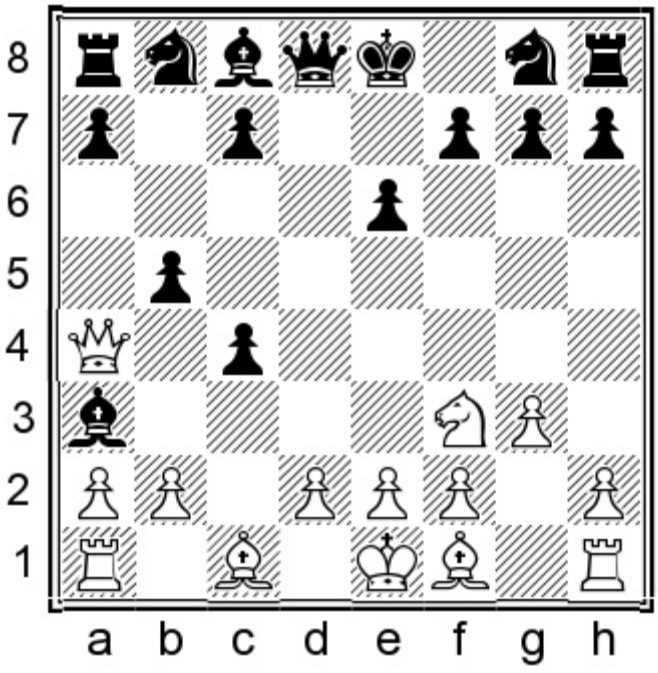
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Position after: 4.♘a3?!

In this position (in contrast to the main line), this move is not really feasible. Even if I played it once (it transposed to the normal position after 3...♘f6 4.♗g2, quite a weird move order), Black has strong options to meet this move.

4...♗xa3! The strongest, I believe, is to give up the bishop pair in order to damage White's pawn structure. 5.♕a4+ A logical move if White is not happy about having doubled a-pawns, but Black is resourceful. (The issue with 5.bxa3 is that Black can keep a healthy extra pawn: 5...b5! 6.♗g2 ♗b7! Black has already covered the long diagonal, and White's compensation is dubious. 7.♗b2 ♘f6 8.0-0 0-0 9.a4 a6∓) 5...b5!

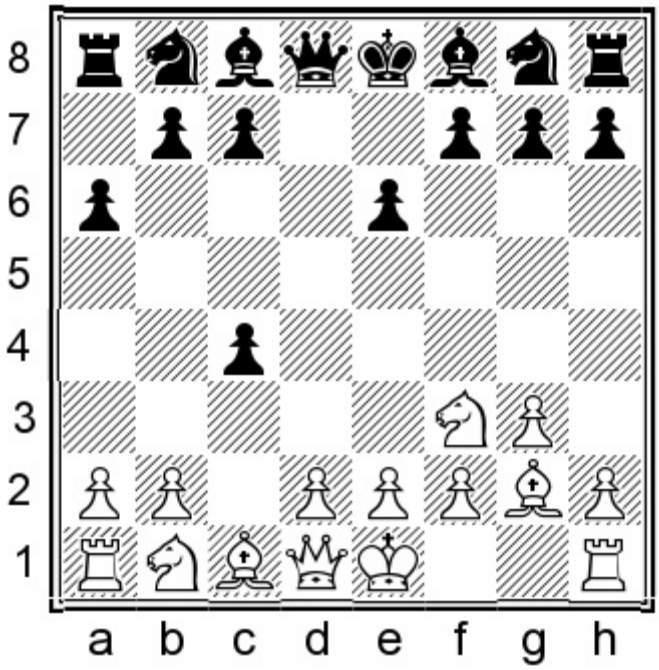


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Position after: 5...b5!

Easy to miss! Black takes over the initiative. 6.♕xa3 (6.♕xb5+?? c6–+) 6...♗b7 7.♗g2 ♘d7 8.b3 cxb3 9.♕xb3 ♖b8!∓ White's play lacks bite, and I prefer Black here.

B) 4.♗g2 may be an option, but among Black's possibilities, one of them really annoyed me, 4...a6!

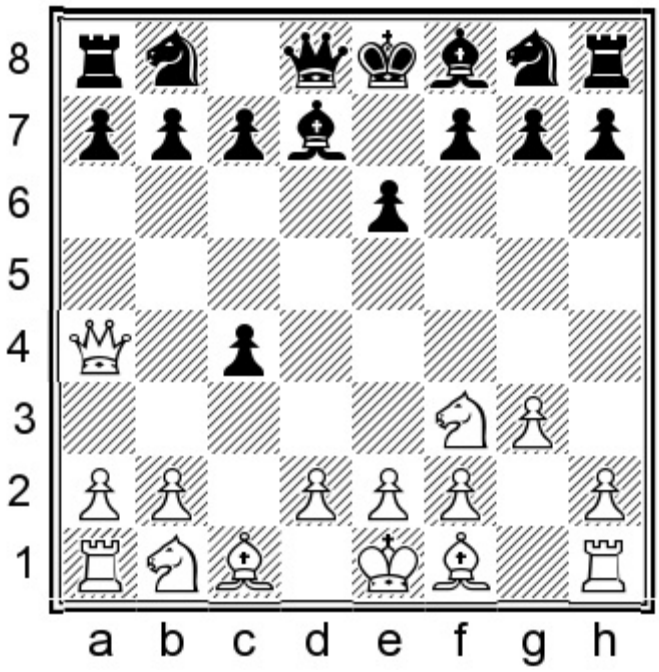


Position after: 4...a6!

And none of the following tries seems attractive to me: 5.♘c3 (5.0-0 ♘f6 6.♘a3 b5 7.♘e5 ♖a7 8.d3 cxd3 9.♗e3 c5∓ I prefer Black's extra pawn rather than White's pseudo-initiative with 10.b4; 5.♘e5 against this move, Black can always respond with 5...♕d4! 6.f4 ♘d7 7.e3 ♕c5 8.d4 cxd3 9.♘xd3 ♕a7∓; 5.a4?! ♘c6 6.♘a3 ♘a5 7.♕c2 ♕d5∞) 5...♘f6 6.♘e5 ♕d4!↑

4...♗d7!?

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Position after: 4...♗d7!?

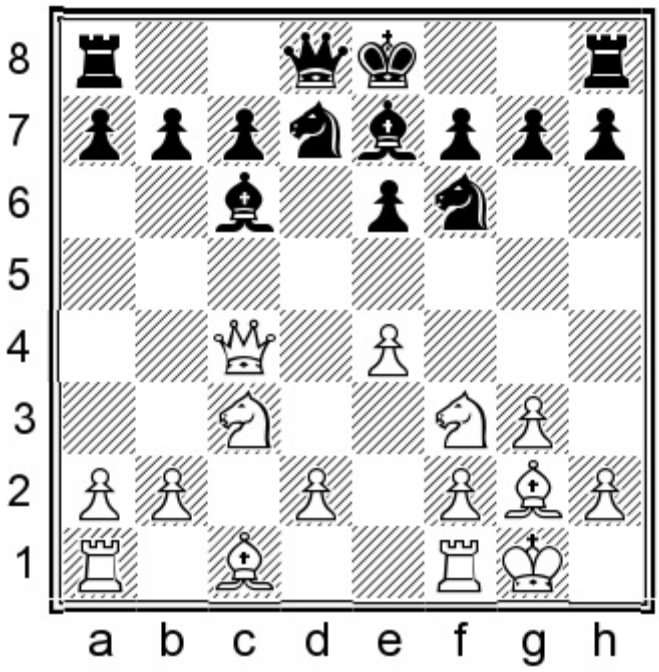
This is actually a smart try. Black tries to get a better version of the main line. How?

4...c6 is possible as well, but it has no independent value. 5.♕xc4 b5 6.♕c2 ♗b7 7.♗g2 ♘d7 8.0-0 Finally, Black doesn't really have other options than transposing into the main line with 5...c6 by playing 8...♘gf6.

5.♕xc4 c5

The classical manoeuvre 5...♗c6 which reminds us of some Catalan lines for instance, is not particularly strong here. The following correspondence game shows the main difference: as White has not yet played d4, it will be easier to play with e4, and fight against the c6-bishop. 6.♗g2 ♘f6 7.0-0 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 ♗e7 9.e4!

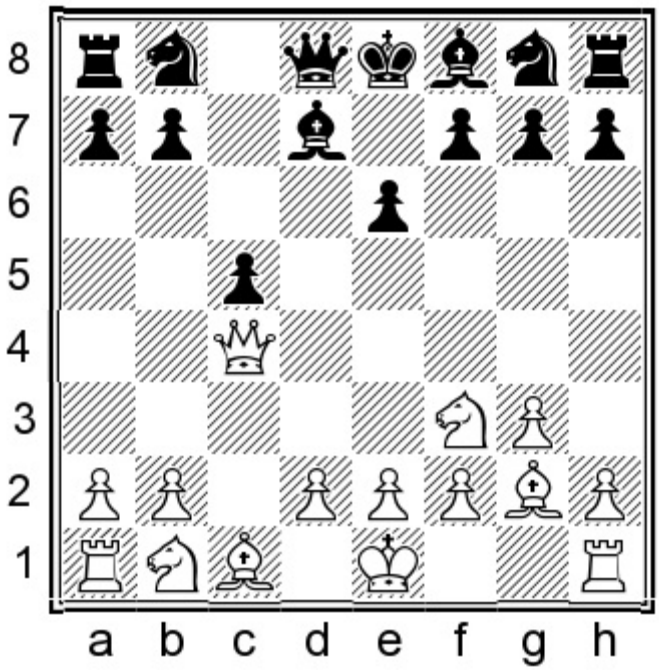
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Position after: 9.e4!

9...0-0 10.♖d1 a6 11.♕e2 b5 12.♘d4 (12.d4!? was straightforward and strong enough to obtain a simple advantage: 12...b4?! 13.d5!±) 12...♗b7 13.e5! ♗xg2 14.♔xg2 ♘d5 15.♘xd5 exd5 16.♘c6 ♕e8 17.d4± 1-0 (66) Karacsony, E (2340) – Puoli, H (2350) corr Argentina – Romania 2008.

6.♗g2



Position after: 6.♗g2

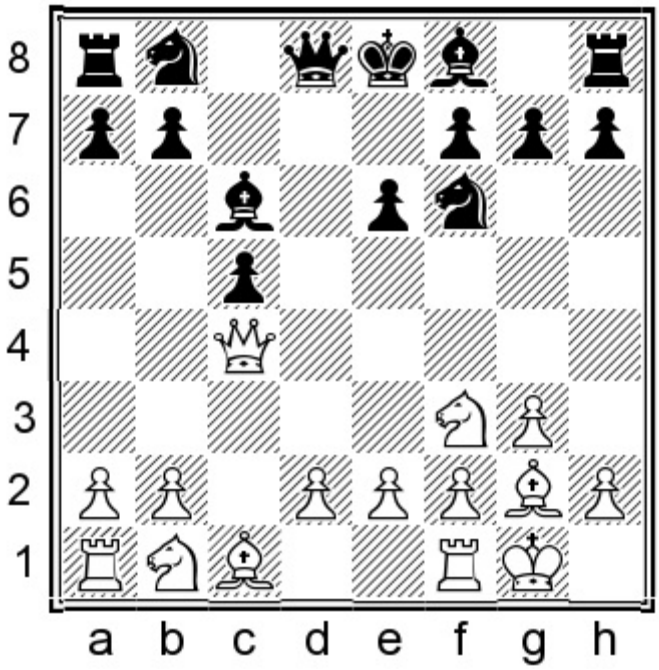
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6.♘e5 doesn't work as well as in the variation with 4...dxc4 and 5...♗d7 of this current chapter. 6...♘c6 7.♘xd7 ♕xd7 8.♗g2 ♘f6=. What happened? We are a full tempo down compared to the classical line. Why? Black didn't spend a tempo playing ...♕c8. Thus, I think Black is fine.

6...♘c6

The Sveshnikov approach. Here I would like to advise you to use a novelty for White (even if it transposes into a few new games).

6...♗c6 This looks to me like the most natural continuation, otherwise the bishop on d7 doesn't make much sense. However, White gets a pleasant position: 7.0-0 ♘f6

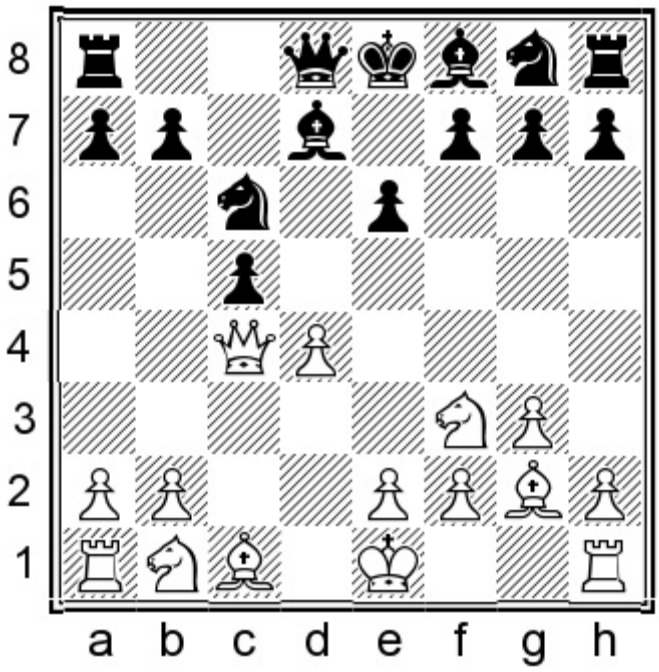


Position after: 7...♘f6

8.b3! I believe that White can keep an edge with this move. At least he has a simple plan. 8...♗e7 9.♗b2 0-0 10.d3 ♘bd7 And here, I want to improve on the game Movsesian, S (2705) – Grachev, B (2672) Sibenik 2012. 11.♕c2!?N 11...b5 12.e4 a6 13.♖c1 ♕b6 14.♕e2! The queen can prove to be better here, that's why I prefer to delay ♘bd2. 14...♖fd8 15.♘bd2 ♗b7 16.a4↑

7.d4!?

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Position after: 7.d4!?

White tries to be smart. OK, but what happens if Black reacts as usual?

The line 7.0-0 ♘f6 8.d4 b5 9.♕d3 transposes into a Catalan variation. Sure, you can check, but I don't like it!

7...b5

This seems to be the logical follow-up.

7...cxd4 8.♘xd4 ♘xd4?! (8...♖c8 9.0-0 ♘f6 10.♘c3 ♗e7 11.♖d1±) 9.♕xd4 ♗c6 10.♗xc6+ bxc6 11.♗e3±

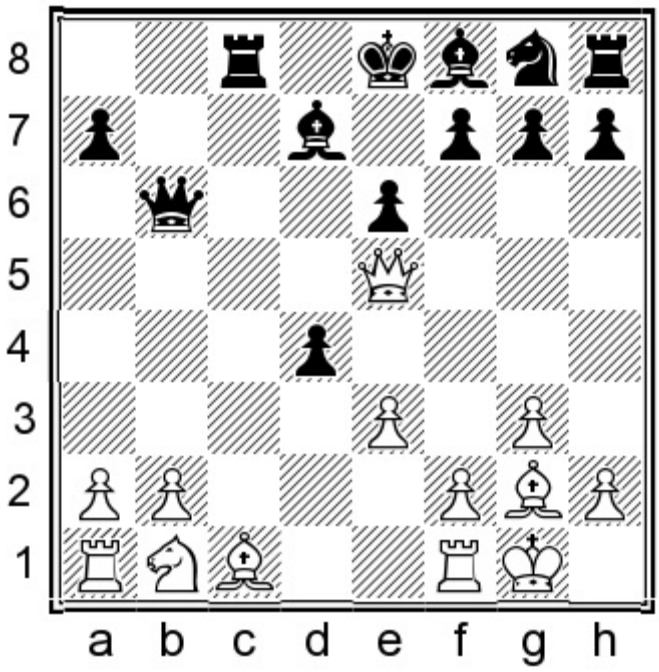
8.♕xb5!N

We are trying to make a difference.

8...♘xd4

8...cxd4 may look as the safe option, but things are not so simple: 9.♘e5! ♘xe5 10.♕xe5 ♖c8 11.0-0 ♕b6 12.e3!

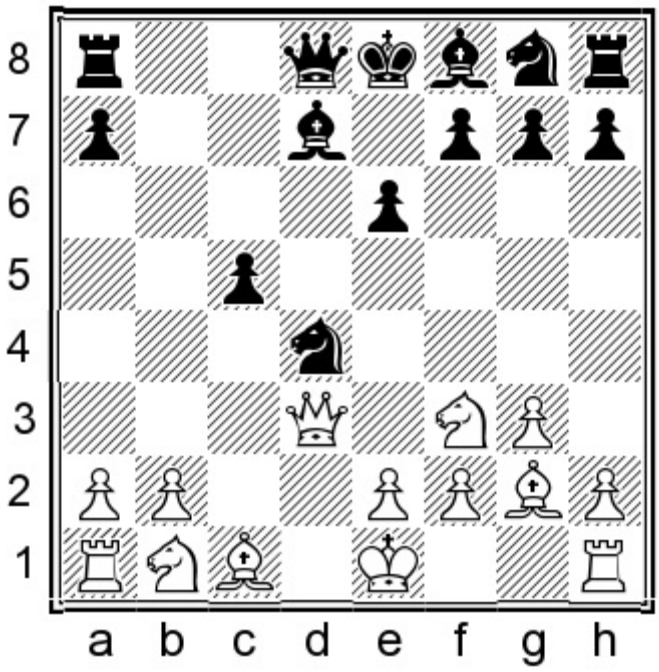
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Position after: 12.e3!

Black has a difficult choice: give up a pawn or concede his activity? 12...♘f6! (12...dxe3?! 13.♗xe3 ♕a6 14.♘d2± Black is too far from castling to be fine) 13.♕xd4 ♗c5 14.♕h4 0-0 15.♘c3± Black has some compensation, but he is definitely the one playing for a draw here, and he will need to be very accurate.

9.♕d3

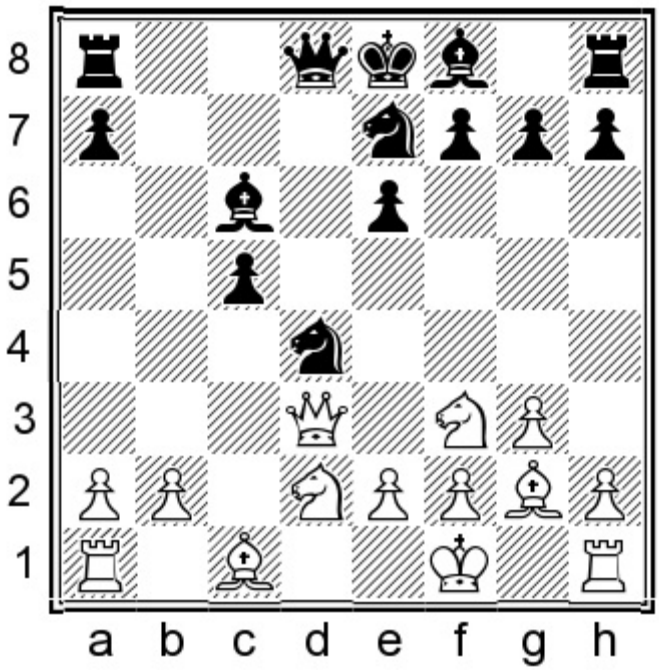


Position after: 9.♕d3

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9...♗b5

9...♗c6 10.♘bd2 ♘e7 (10...♘xf3+?! 11.♗xf3!±) 11.♔f1!! OK, two exclamation marks may seem too much.



Position after: 11.♔f1!!

It's not like White is crushing his opponent, but this mind-blowing move makes life difficult for him! (11.0-0 ♘xf3+ Check, sir! 12.♘xf3 ♕xd3 13.exd3 ♖d8= was too simple for Black) 11...♖c8 This semi-waiting move seems to be the most accurate answer. (11...♘xf3?! 12.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 13.♗xf3 ♘d5 14.b3 ♗e7 15.♗b2± and White keeps the advantage of a better structure. He will try to grab the c-pawn and win the endgame.)

A) 12.e3 ♗b5 13.♘c4 ♘dc6!↑ (13...♘xf3 14.♘d6+ ♕xd6 15.♕xb5+ ♕c6 16.♕xc6+ ♘xc6 17.♗xf3±)

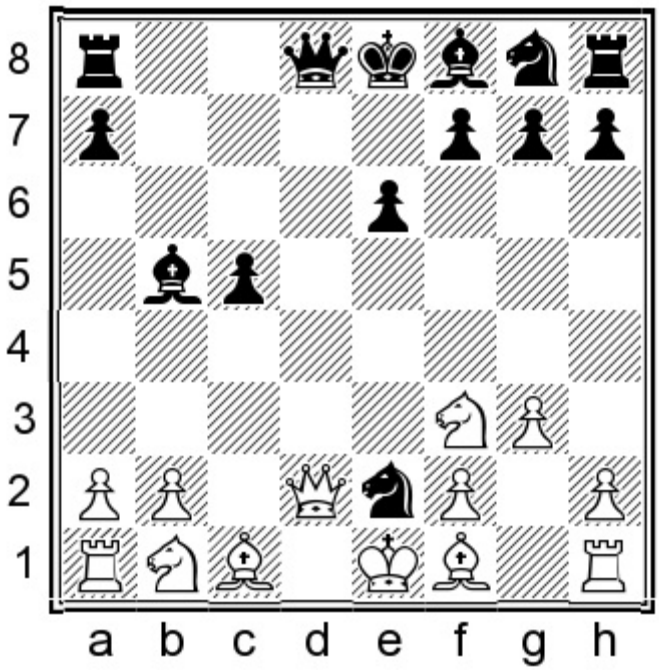
B) 12.♘xd4! ♕xd4 13.♕xd4 cxd4 14.♘b3 e5 15.f4 Even if the position is close to equal, White has ideas to play on and create problems.

10.♕d2 ♘xe2

10...♖c8 11.♘c3 ♗c6 12.0-0 ♘f6 13.♖d1 ♘xf3+ 14.♗xf3 ♗xf3 15.exf3± Black will suffer because of his isolated c-pawn.

11.♗f1!

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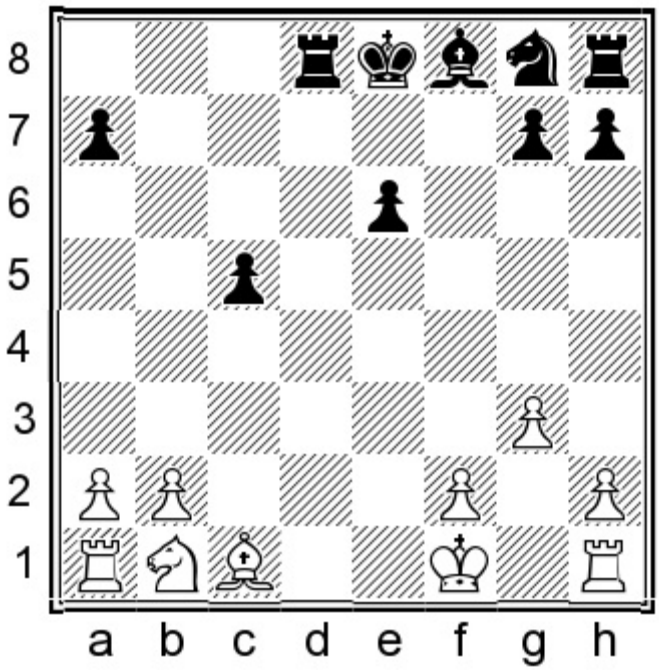
Position after: 11.♗f1!

Suddenly we understand why we did not insert 0-0 and ...♘f6 in our line.

11...♘d4

11...♕xd2+ 12.♘bxd2 ♘d4 13.♘xd4 ♗xf1 14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.♔xf1±

12.♘xd4 ♗xf1 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 15.♔xf1!±



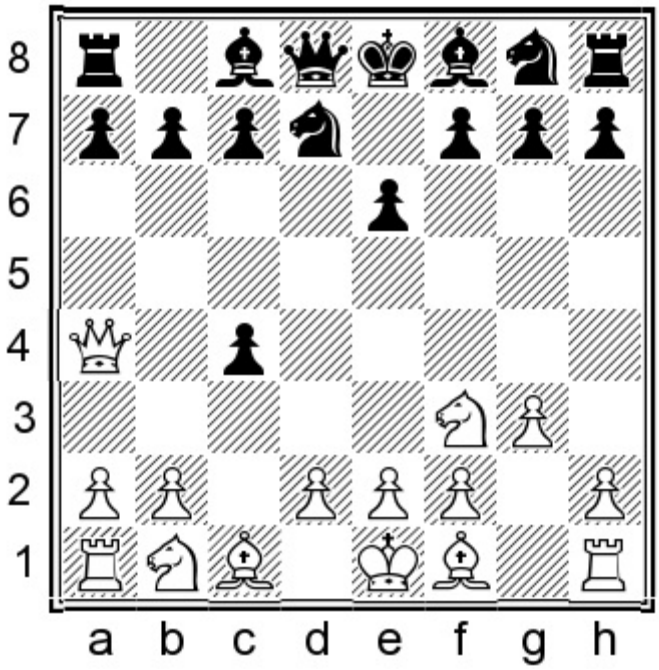
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Position after: 15.♔xf1!±

With clearly the better structure and more pleasant endgame for White. The first step for White will be to put some pressure on the c5-pawn.

b) 3...dxc4 4.♕a4+ ♘bd7 5.--, 5.♗g2 c5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 dxc4!? 4.♕a4+ ♘d7



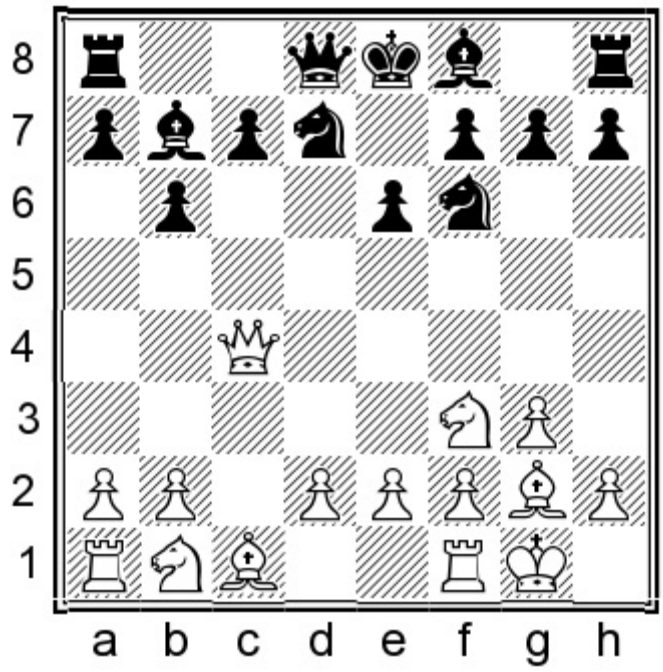
Position after: 4...♘d7

5.♗g2!

For some reason, I prefer to delay the capture on c4, as Black has no way to prevent it.

As a matter of interest, let's see how Black should react after 5.♕xc4. 5...b6!? is pretty interesting here, whereas it is obviously impossible in our mainline. (5...c5 6.♗g2 b6!? transposes into 6...b6 of our main line; 5...♘gf6 6.♗g2 transposes into the main line as well.) 6.♗g2 ♗b7 7.0-0 ♘gf6

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Position after: 7...♘gf6

Black has easily brought his bishop into play, and the game seems roughly balanced: ½-½ (45) Ibarra Chami, L (2477) – Gonzalez Garcia, J (2497) Merida 2012.

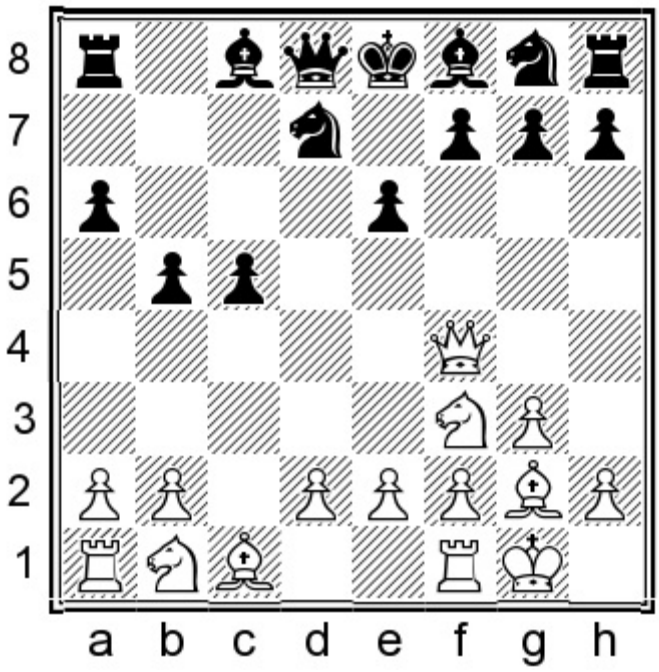
5...c5

5...♘gf6 6.♕xc4 transposes into the main line.

6.♕xc4!

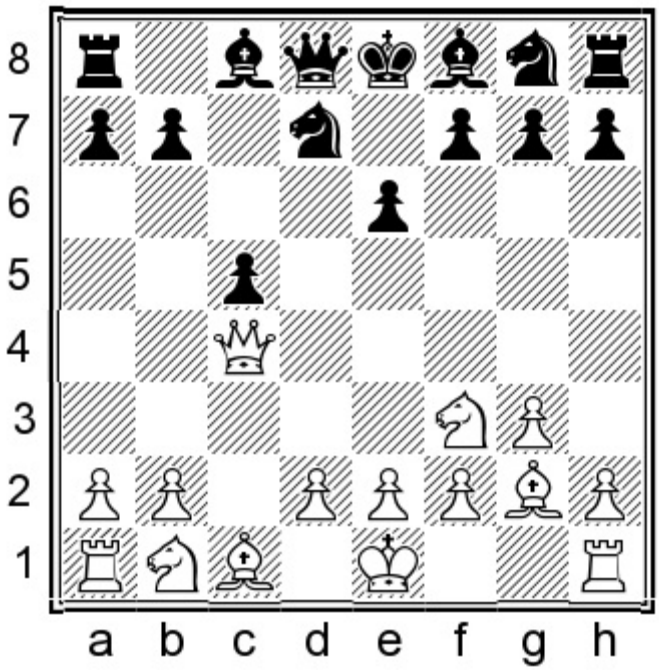
6.0-0 a6 7.♕xc4 b5 8.♕f4!?N

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Position after: 8.♕f4!?N

This is an interesting try, threatening both ♘e5 or ♘g5, with a mating threat and attacking the a8-rook. But unfortunately the simple 8...♖b8! solves the problems: 9.d4 ♘gf6 10.♖d1 ♗b7 11.dxc5 ♗xc5=.



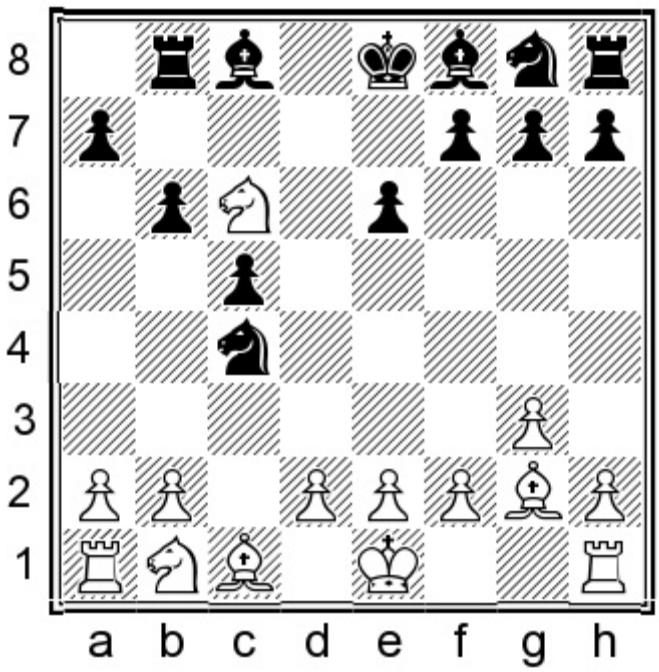
Position after: 6.♕xc4!

6...a6

6...b6?! Black steps into the lion's den, but it's actually not so easy to punish him: 7.♘d4!? ♘e5! The point, preventing Black from being lost at once. 8.♘c6! (8.♘xe6!? is not so bad either, but Black will

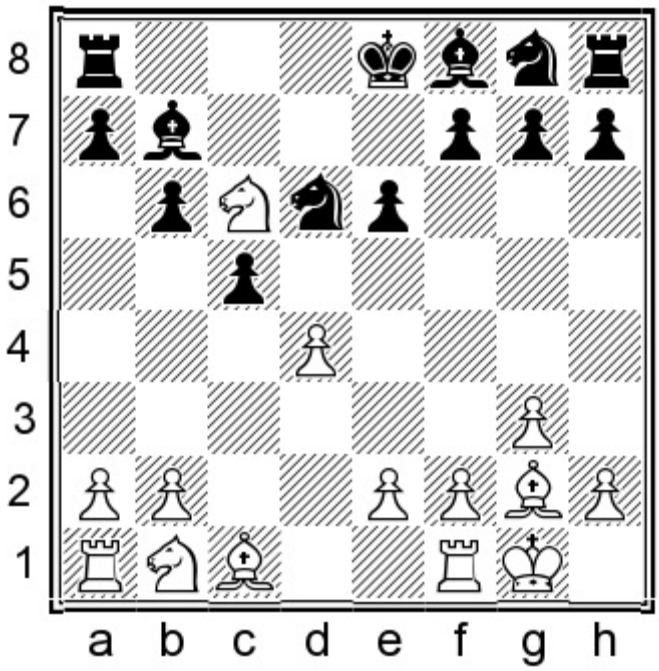
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get some compensation after 8...♗xe6 9.♕e4 ♖c8 10.♕xe5 ♘f6 11.d3 ♗d6 12.♕c3 0-0⩱) 8...♘xc4 9.♘xd8 ♖b8 10.♘c6



Position after: 10.♘c6

10...♗b7 (10...♖b7?! 11.♘c3 ♘e7 12.d3 ♘d6 13.♗f4 ♘df5 14.♘b5!±) 11.0-0 ♖a8 The only move to keep the balance, even if it's unappealing. 12.d3N Strangely enough, this is a new move. White takes the upper-hand after 12...♘d6 13.d4! We open the center with a nice initiative.



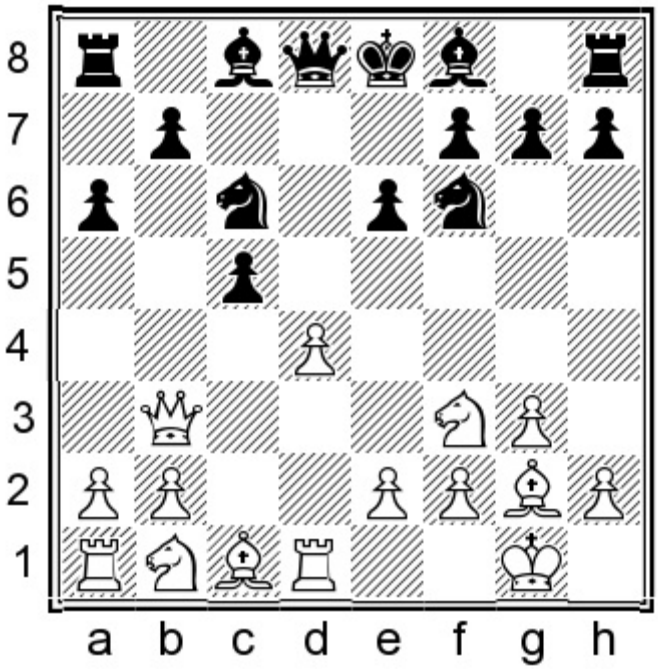
Position after: 13.d4!

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For example 13...cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♘f6 16.♘c3 ♗e7 17.♗f4! 0-0 18.♘c6 ♘f5 19.♘b5± and White has good chances to win a pawn or achieve a positional plus.

7.♕b3 ♖b8

7...♘e7?! I don't like this move as this plan looks really slow. White is able to open the center anyway: 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.♖d1 ♘f6 10.d4!

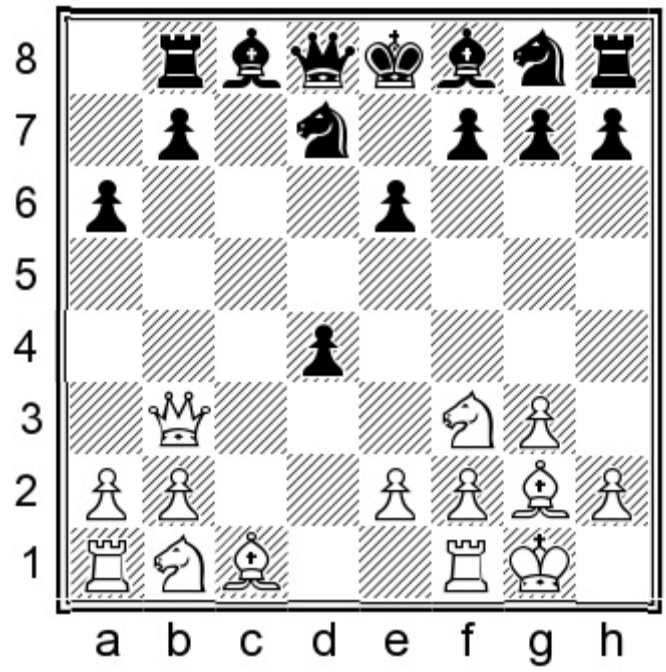


Position after: 10.d4!

This move works, and there is nothing Black could do to prevent it. 10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♕a4+ b5 13.♕xd4 ♕xd4 14.♖xd4 ♖a7 And now we can improve on the game Seifert, D (2125) – Genser, H (2332) St Veit 2006, ½-½ (22), by playing 15.a4!±.

8.d4 cxd4 9.0-0!

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Position after: 9.0-0!

I love this strong idea of Wang Yue. He prefers to put his rook on d1 before retaking the d4-pawn. If Black tries to protect his pawn, his lack of developpment will prove dangerous for him.

9...♘c5

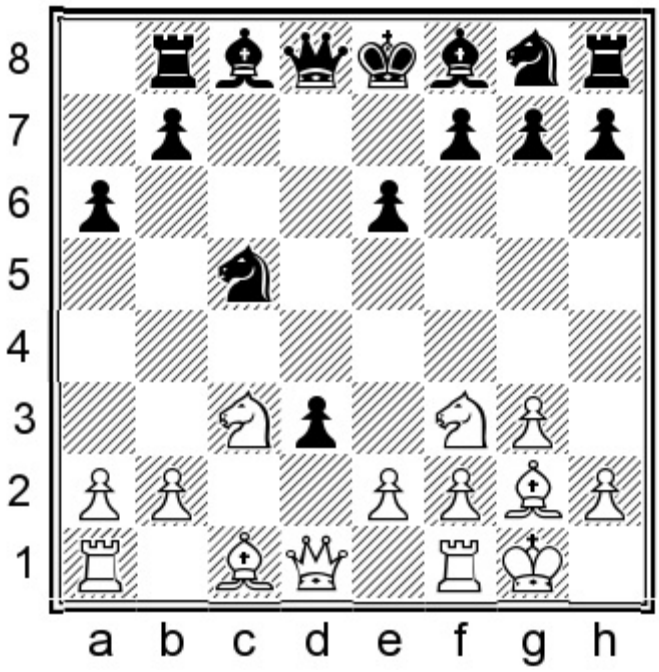
9...e5 10.e3! ♘c5 11.♕d1 The center finally collapses. 11...♗g4 12.exd4 exd4 13.♗f4 ♖c8 14.♕xd4!± with a huge lead in development.

10.♕d1 d3

White won in Wang, Y (2718) – Barsov, A (2460) Abu Dhabi 2016, but I would now make a different choice than the Chinese grandmaster by playing...

11.♘c3!N

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Position after: 11.♘c3!N

11...dxe2?!

11...♘f6 12.exd3! ♘xd3 13.♗g5 ♗e7 14.♕e2 ♘c5 15.♖fd1 ♕a5 16.♗f4 ♖a8 17.♘e5+– With ♘c4 coming, when Black's queen is in great danger.

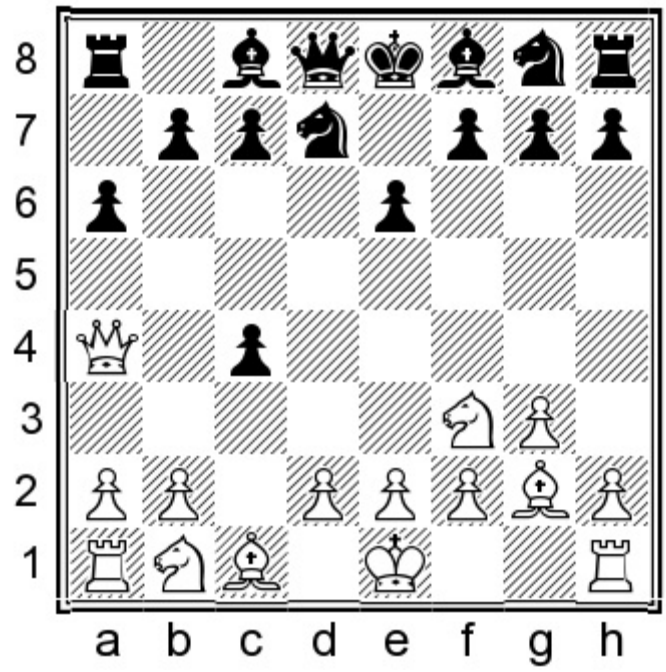
12.♕xe2 ♕d3 13.♕e1!→

The black queen is far too exposed and we will play ♗f4 and ♖d1 with tempo each time. If 13...♘f6? then 14.♗f4+–.

c) 3...dxc4 4.♕a4+ ♘bd7 5.♗g2 a6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 dxc4!? 4.♕a4+ ♘d7 5.♗g2 a6!

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Position after: 5...a6!

In my opinion this is one of the main reasons why Black should play ...dxc4 as early as possible. In our main line with ...♘gf6 and ♕xc4 included, White can anticipate ...b5 by moving the queen back to c2. Here it's obviously not possible, and White has to allow ...b5.

6.♕xc4 b5!

This is one of the advantages of this move order when Black delays ...♘f6. He is ready to play ...b5 with a direct attack on the queen, followed with ...♗b7.

In the main line, we have time to retreat the queen once ...a6 has been played, so ...b5 is met with nasty ideas on the long diagonal. Here we don't.

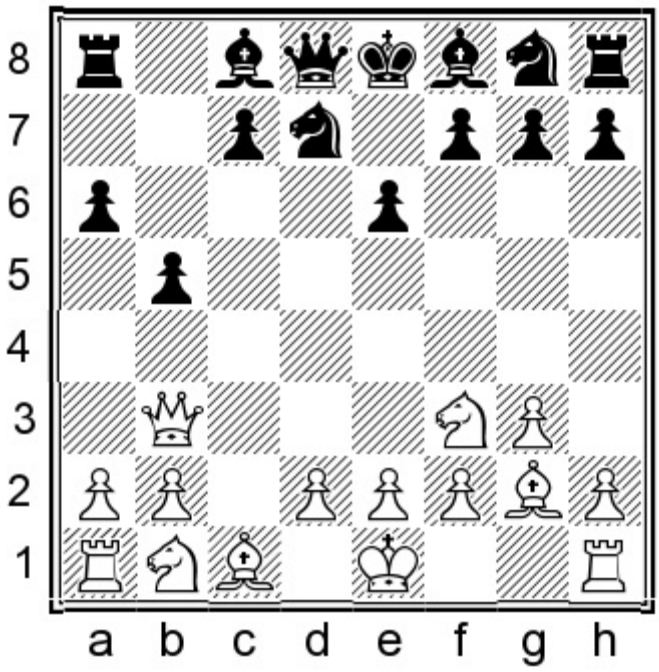
We are left with a choice for our queen's retreat, and none of the possible moves has made a great impression on current theory. This is considered as a more or less equal line, and I won't tell you that I have an advantage in each variation.

Indeed, I am not a magician, but I can provide you with some interesting ideas and tell you why Black has some chances to misplay if we follow the correct plans.

6...♘gf6 is again a transposition into the main variation.

7.♕b3!?

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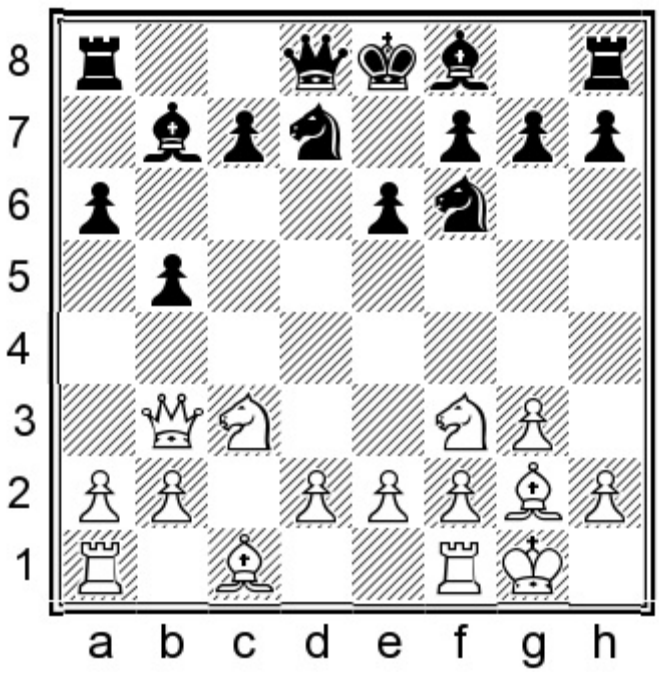


Position after: 7.♕b3!?

This move has the best overall score (in fact it's the only one with more than 50% here).

7.♕c2 is the main move. Each side develops his pieces, but I think the follow-up is quite easy to play for Black.

7...♗b7 8.0-0 ♘gf6 9.♘c3!?



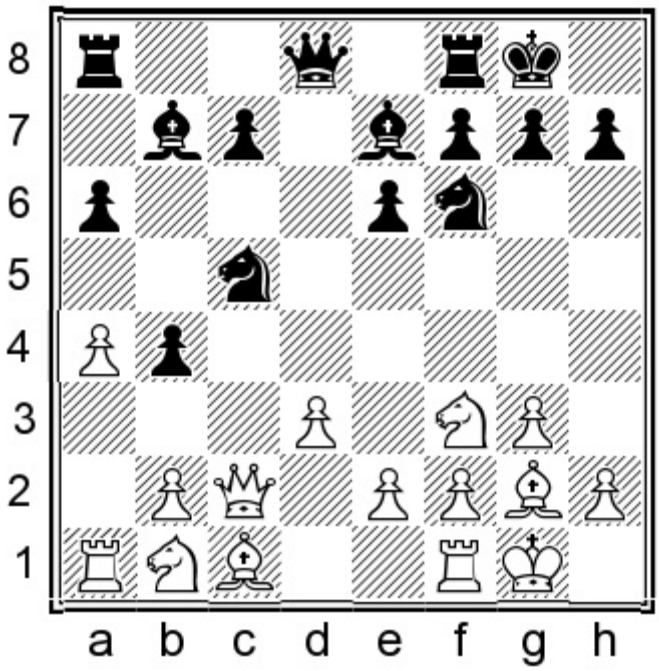
Position after: 9.♘c3!?

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9.d3 also makes a lot of sense, but I prefer to put immediate pressure on b5, in order, if possible, to play a2-a4 already on the next move.

9...c5

9...♗e7 10.d3 0-0 (10...c5 transposes into 9... c5) 11.a4 b4 12.♘b1 ♘c5 13.♕c2

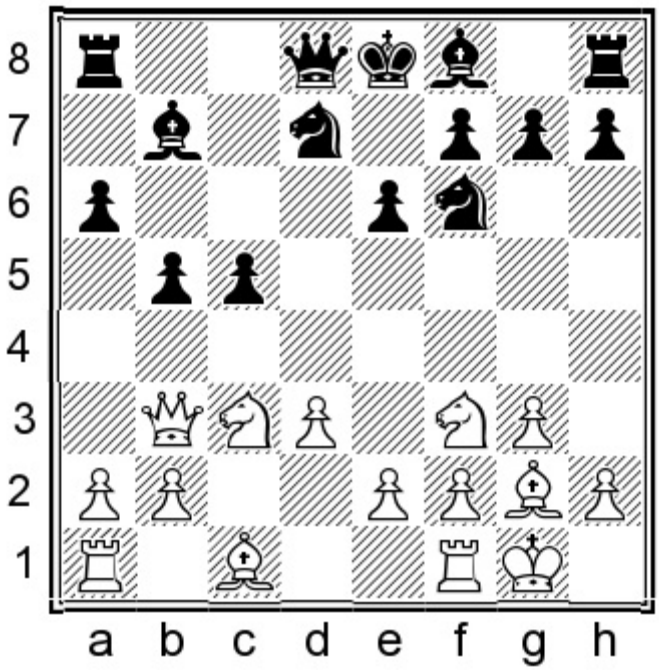


Position after: 13.♕c2

Again we have provoked ...b4 in order to obtain full control over the c4-square for our knight. Even Kramnik did not really know how to handle the position, and was outplayed by his Russian team-mate, Svidler. 13...e5 14.♗e3 e4 Looking for complications before White has time to play ♘bd2. 15.♗xc5 ♗xc5, and now I would avoid the great complications of the game Svidler, P (2755) – Kramnik, V (2800) Moscow 2011, even if it went well for White, by playing the quiet 16.♘g5!?N 16...♗d4 17.♘xe4 ♗xe4 18.♗xe4 ♘xe4 19.dxe4 ♕f6 20.♖a2 ♕e6 21.b3± and we keep a healthy extra pawn.

10.d3

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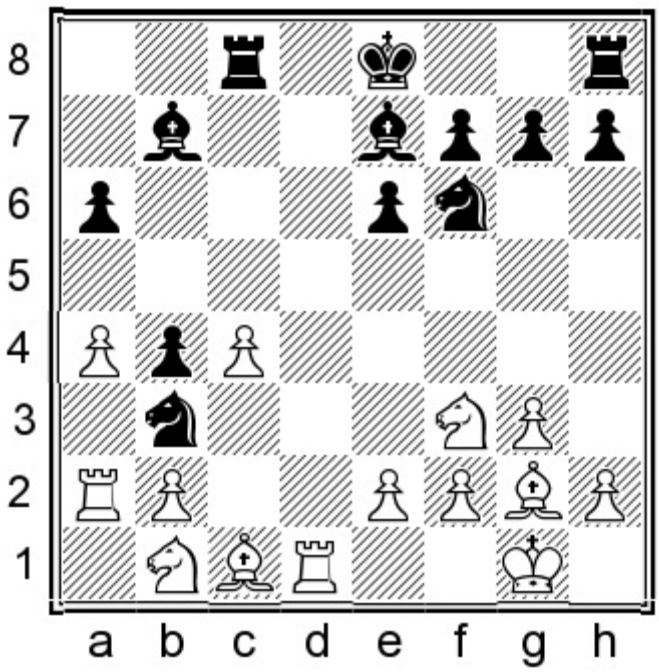


Position after: 10.d3

This time we have to prevent ...c4.

10...♗e7 11.a4 b4

11...c4!? has been tried a couple of times, and is actually quite interesting. Black is objectively fine, but he has to be very accurate. Play may continue: 12.dxc4 ♘c5 13.♕d1! (13.♕c2? b4 14.♘b1 ♗e4∓) 13...b4 14.♘b1 ♕xd1 15.♖xd1 ♘b3 16.♖a2 ♖c8



Position after: 16...♖c8

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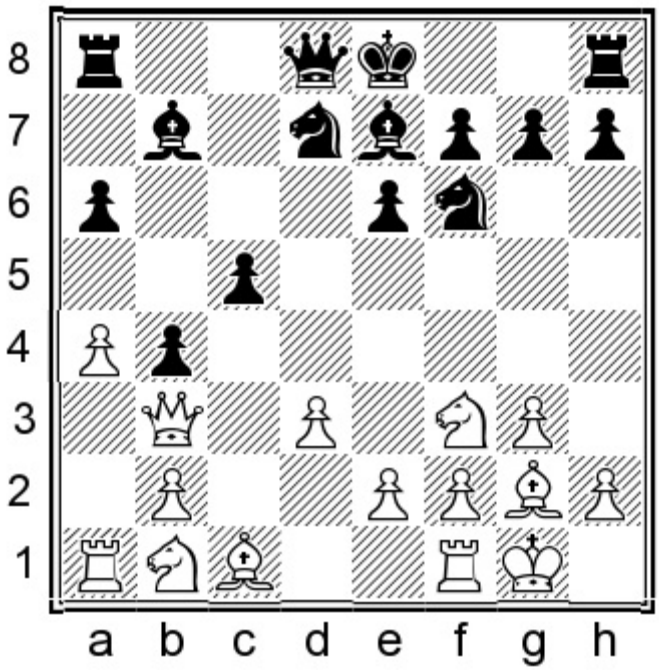
We are a pawn up, but under some pressure right now. 17.♗e3!

A) 17...♖xc4?! 18.♘bd2 ♘xd2 19.♘xd2 ♖c7 20.♗xb7 ♖xb7 21.♖c1±

B) 17...♗xf3 18.♗xf3 ♖xc4 19.♘d2 ♘xd2 20.♗xd2 ♖c2 21.♖aa1 0-0 22.b3⇄ The position is more or less balanced, but we have managed to keep the bishop pair, whereas Black has the more active rooks. The next moves will be very important in order to know if White can get a real advantage.

C) 17...0-0 18.♘fd2! ♘a5! A really hard move to find. (18...♗xg2? 19.♘xb3! ♗b7 20.♘1d2 ♖fd8 21.♖aa1±) 19.b3 ♗xg2 20.♔xg2 ♖c6⩲ This move prevents ♗b6 and enables Black to maintain the balance, something really hard to understand!

12.♘b1!



Position after: 12.♘b1!

We have obtained what we wanted: at the price of a few tempi, a knight is going to reach the c4-square soon.

12...0-0 13.♘bd2N

This logical move is no longer a novelty since it was used by Romain Edouard at the 4NCL.

13...a5

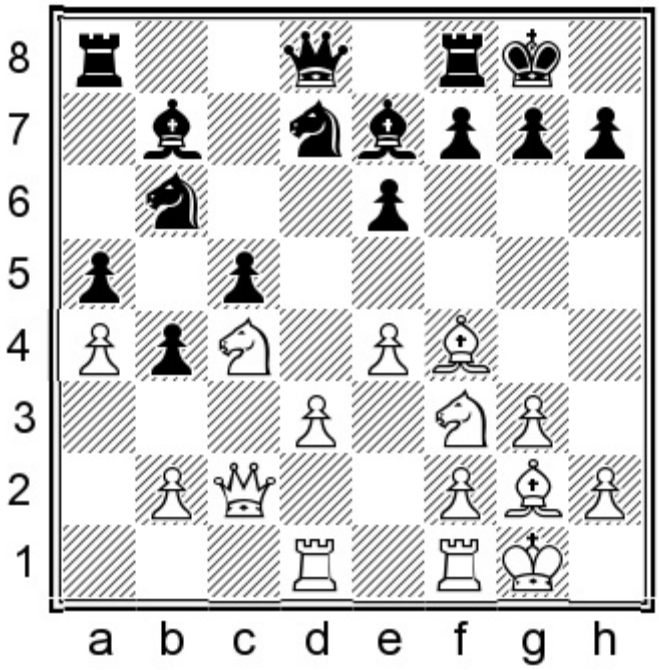
Romain had to face the move 13...♘e8 in his game, 1-0 (63) Edouard, R (2619) – Longson, A (2317) England 2018, but I would now recommend (instead of trading knights on c4) slowly developing the queenside: 14.♕c2!?N 14...♘d6 15.b3 ♖c8 16.♗b2 ♗f6 17.♗xf6 ♕xf6 18.e4↑.

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14.♕c2

It’s quite hard for Black to find an effective plan. The game might continue...

14...♘d5 15.♘c4 ♕c7 16.e4! ♘5b6 17.♗f4 ♕d8 18.♖ad1↑

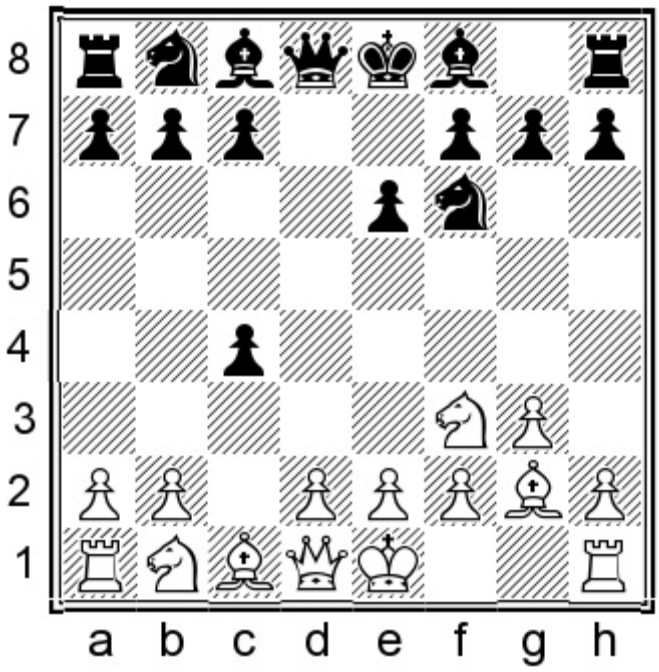


Position after: 18.♖ad1↑

d) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4

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Position after: 4...dxc4

This is the most usual moment for Black to take on c4. Theory has developed extensively and you may expect many complicated lines.

5.♕a4+

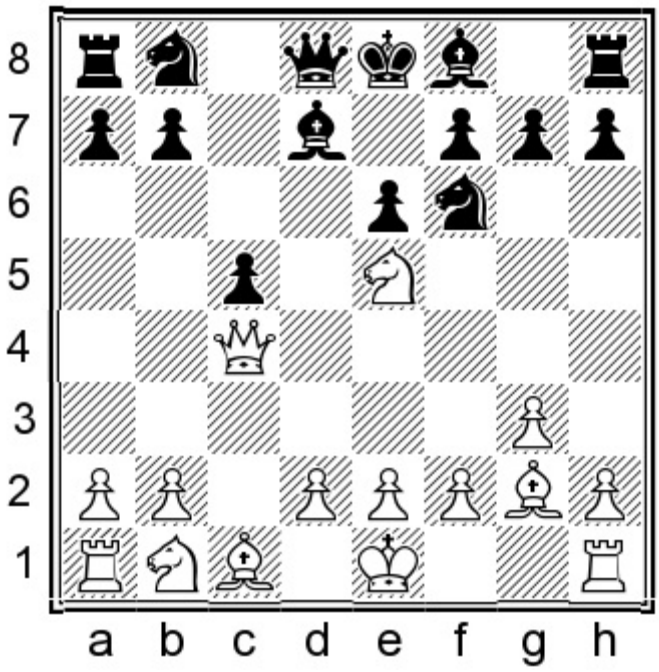
I favoured this line, as it's the simpler and more positional one, but not necessarily the best. Black will get the opportunity to achieve a balanced position and the plans are easy to understand for both sides.

5.♘a3 is actually the only line I have played, and it's critical. We are giving up our pawn structure in order to get the bishop pair, and soon we will have a shining bishop on b2. But our compensation might be insufficient if White doesn't play perfectly, whereas sometimes Black's play feels easier. I saw no reason to investigate this complicated line too much, as I am not even sure that I can provide you with some promising positions!

5...♘bd7

5...♗d7 6.♕xc4 c5 (6...♗c6 is already discussed in the line starting with 3...dxc4 4.♕a4+ ♗d7) 7.♘e5 Grabbing the bishop pair is the easiest way to get a slight edge. (7.b3 is possible as well, and would transpose into chapter 2a, when Black started 3...dxc4)

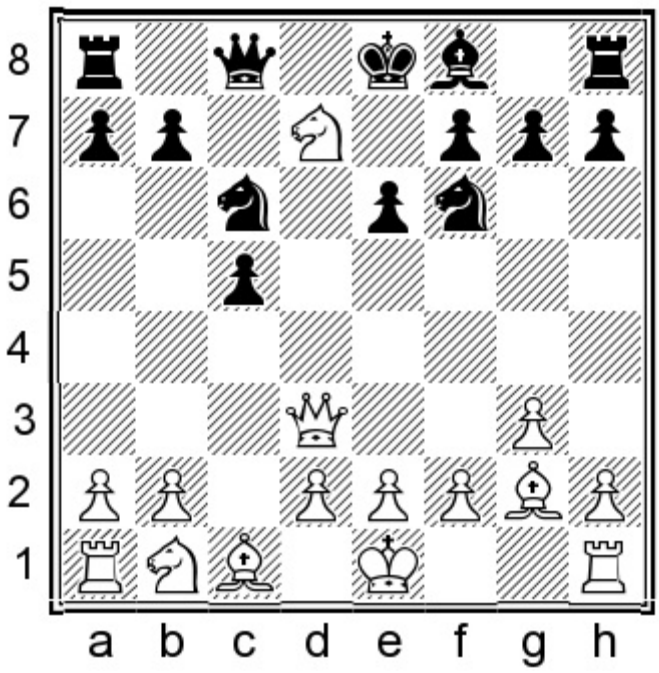
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Position after: 7.♘e5

A) 7...♕c7?! 8.d4!? ♗d6 9.♘a3!N White is intending ♘b5. (≤ 9.♘c3 is less effective because of 9...cxd4 10.♕xc7 ♗xc7= and we don't have time to take on b7 because our two knights are under attack.) 9...a6 The only way to parry the obvious threat... (9...♗xe5 10.dxe5±; 9...cxd4 10.♕xc7 ♗xc7 11.♗xb7 ♗xe5 12.♗xa8±) ...but we still have some nice pressure after 10.0-0 b5 11.♕c2± Δ 11...♘c6? 12.♘xd7 ♘xd7 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♗f4 ♕b6 15.♗xc6 ♕xc6 16.b4+–.

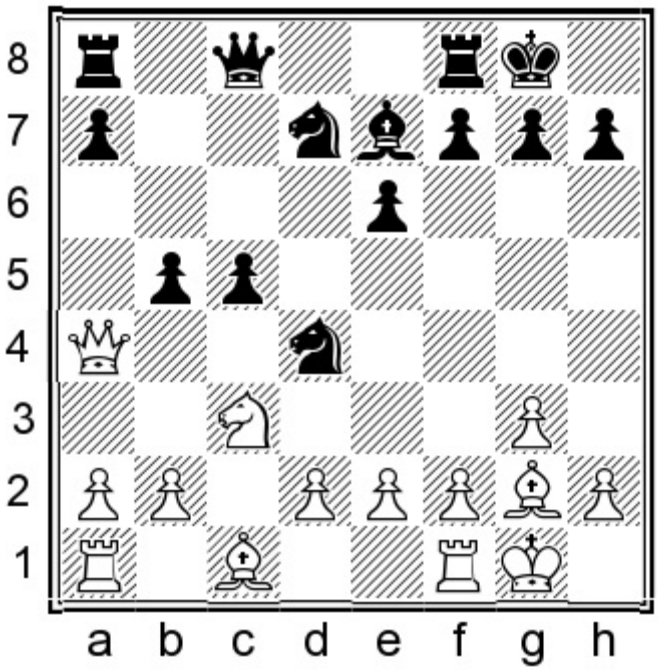
B) 7...♕c8! Black has to spend a move in order to prepare ...♘c6. 8.♕d3 Among the multiple possible moves we have at our disposal, this seems like an interesting try. 8...♘c6 9.♘xd7



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Position after: 9.♘xd7

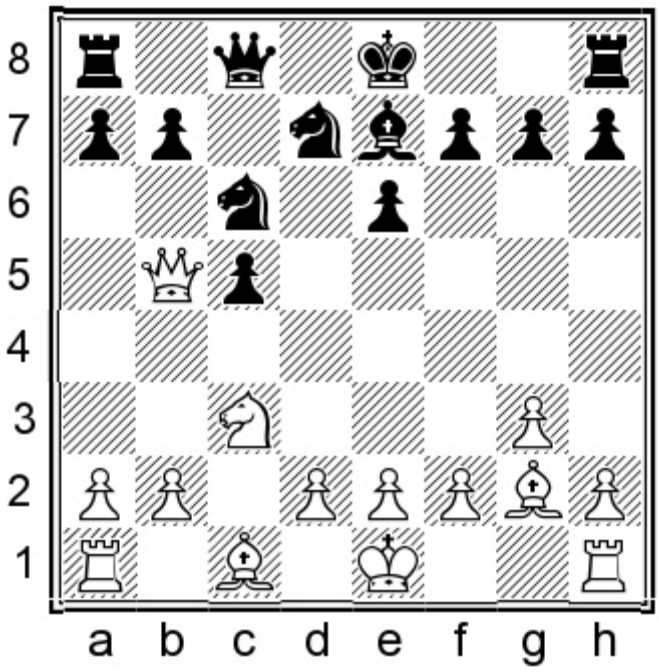
9...♘xd7 (9...♕xd7?! 10.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 11.♘c3 ♗d6 12.d3± These endgames are always in White's favour thanks to the bishop pair.) 10.♘c3! (≤ 10.♕b5 I recently discovered that this move order has a major issue: 10...♘d4! 11.♕a4 ♗e7 12.♘c3 0-0 13.0-0 b5!



Position after: 13...b5!

This strong blow enables Black to seize the initiative, even if it costs him an exchange. 14.♕d1 b4 Accepting the exchange sacrifice would be very dangerous for White, as ...♕e4 would follow. 15.♘b1 c4 16.e3 ♘f5 17.d4 cxd3 18.♕xd3 ♖b8∓ And White suffered, but achieved a draw in Banusz, T (2617) – Fedorovsky, M (2478) Hockenheim 2017.) 10...♗e7 11.♕b5

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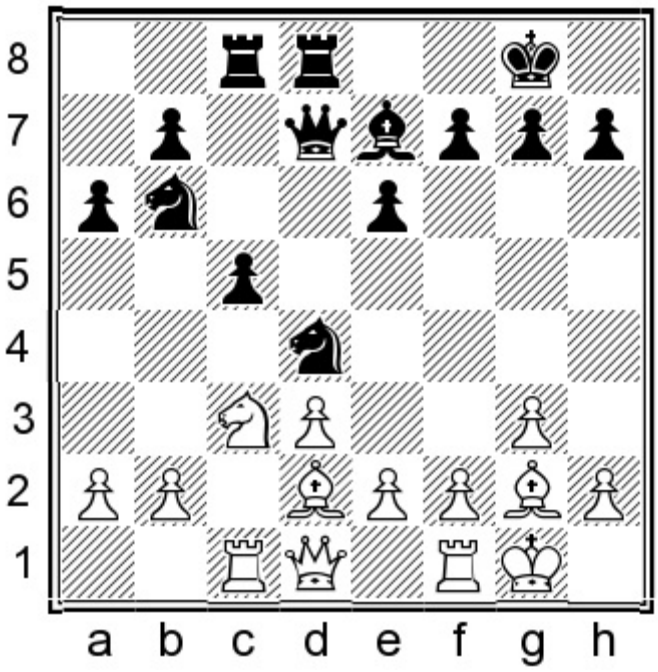
Position after: 11.♕b5

B1) 11...0-0 12.0-0 (12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♕d3 ♘b6 14.b3 c4! Black gets enough counterplay and soon regains the pawn: 15.bxc4 ♕a6 16.0-0 ♗f6 17.♖b1 ♖fd8 18.♕f3 ♘xc4 19.♘e4 ♗e7 20.♕c3= 0-1 (66) Edouard, R (2612) – Akobian, V (2640) Saint Louis 2018) 12...♘b6 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♕a5 c4 15.b3! ↑ White can try to keep the better pawn structure.

B2) 11...♘d4?! 12.♕xb7! Now this works because the b1-square is free! 12...♕xb7 13.♗xb7 ♖b8 14.♗e4 f5 15.♗b1±

B3) 11...a6 12.♕a4 ♘d4 So Black manages to put a strong knight on d4, but he had to spend a tempo playing ...a6 to do so. 13.0-0 0-0 14.d3 ♘b6 15.♕d1 ♖d8 16.♗d2 ♕d7 17.♖c1 ♖ac8

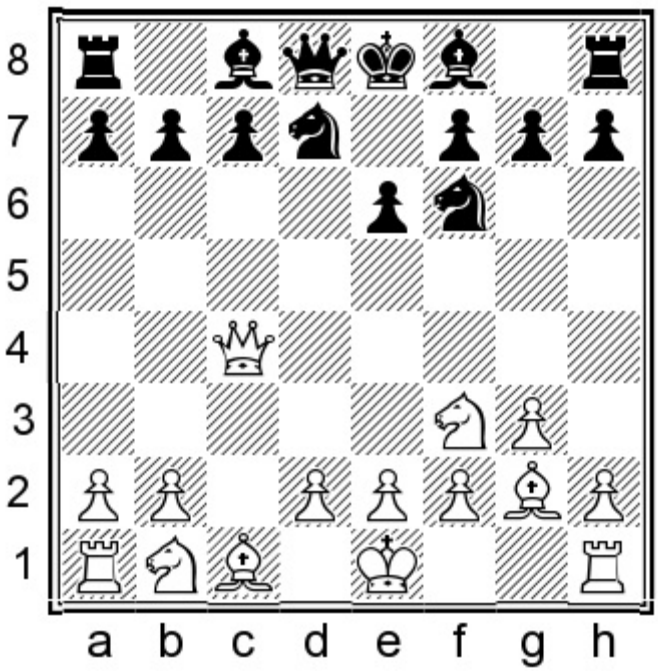
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Position after: 17...♖ac8

This kind of position is really interesting. White has the bishop pair, but the fight against the strong knight on d4 is hard. Aronian's plan is very instructive. 18.b3! First, he stops any ...c4-idea. 18...h6 19.♔h1 Then he slowly prepares f2-f4. 19...♘d5 20.♘xd5 exd5 21.e3 Now he chases the annoying knight before starting expansion on the kingside. 21...♘c6 22.♕h5 ♕d6 23.f4!± 1-0 (33) Aronian, L (2797) – Sethuraman, S (2646) Gibtaltar 2018.

6.♕xc4



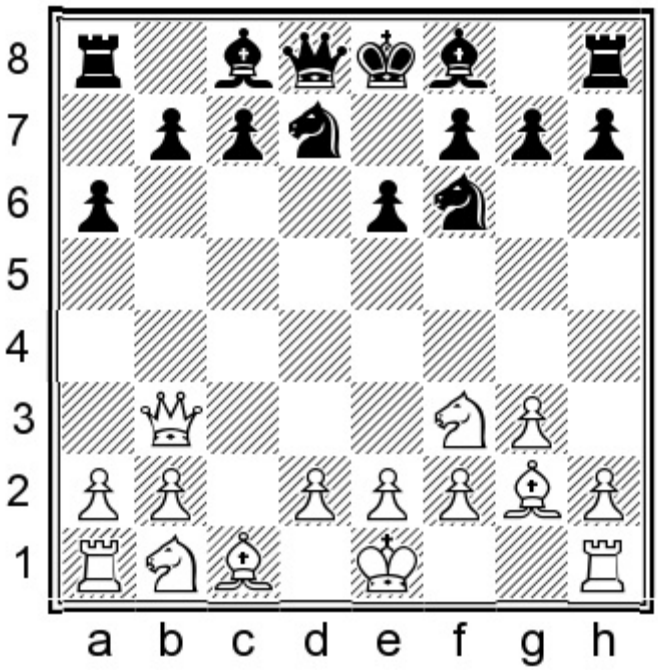
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Position after: 6.♕xc4

Black's play is now divided into two ways of playing the position which may sometimes transpose into each other. Let's have a look at both of these options, ...c7-c5 or ...a7-a6.

6...c5

6...a6 This aims at playing ...b5 as soon as possible. 7.♕b3



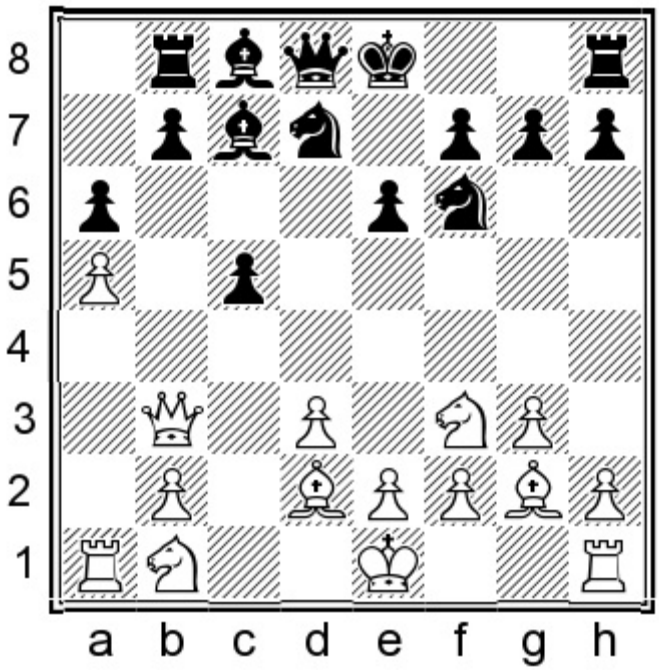
Position after: 7.♕b3

A good repertoire is also a repertoire that is easy to learn. That's why I prefer the same queen retreat on both possible moves for Black. Instead, ♕c2 is actually the main move, but our move is not inferior, and with slightly different ideas.

A) 7...b5?! loses material after 8.♘e5!±.

B) 7...c5 It is usually an inaccuracy to start with this move, as we are able to stop Black's queenside expansion with 8.a4! ♗d6 (8...♖b8 9.a5! is the automatic follow-up after ...♖b8) 9.d3 Very precise, to continue with 9...♖b8 10.a5! ♗c7 11.♗d2! and our pawn is safely protected. Now if Black wants to push ...b5 at some point, it will be at the cost of his pawn structure.

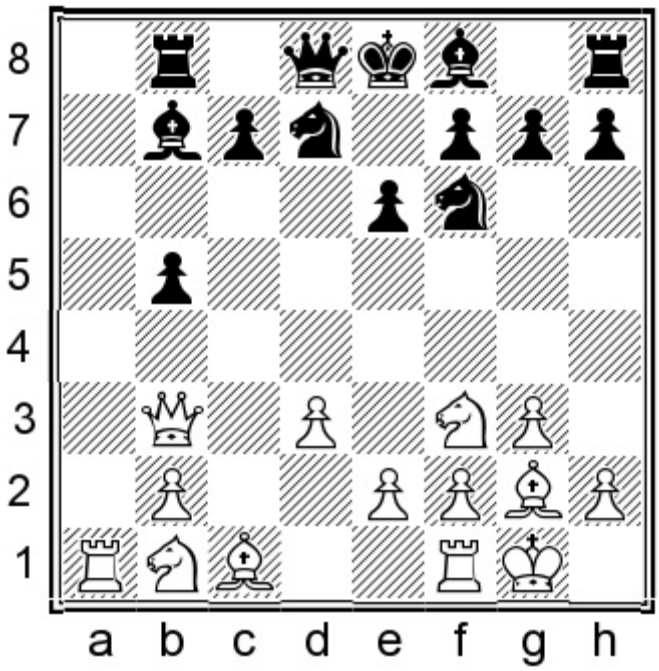
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Position after: 11.♗d2!

11...0-0 12.0-0 ♘d5 13.♖c1 b5 Without any useful move available, Black finally cracks. 14.axb6 ♘7xb6 [1-0 (49) Romanov, E (2594) – Yevseev, D (2520) St Petersburg 2010] 15.♕a3!?N 15...♗d6 16.♗a5±

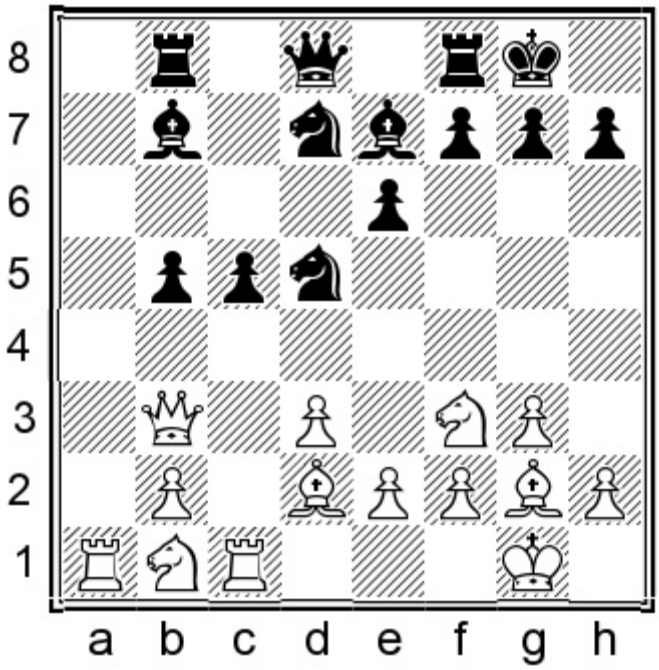
C) 7...♖b8 8.0-0 b5 9.a4 ♗b7 10.axb5 axb5 11.d3



Position after: 11.d3

11...♗e7 (11...♗d6 12.♘c3!?N 12...0-0 13.♕c2! Attacking 'b5' for good. 13...b4 14.♘b1 Once again

we have to lose a couple of tempi in order to take control over the c4-square, but we are quite happy to do so... 14...c5 15.♘bd2 ♘b6 16.b3 ♕c7 17.♗b2±) 12.♗f4 ♘d5 13.♗d2 We have allowed the knight to come to d5; however, this hampers the bishop on b7 and sometimes allows the possibility of playing e2-e4 with an attack. From d2 the bishop is heading to a5, as in the following game: 13...0-0 14.♖c1 c5

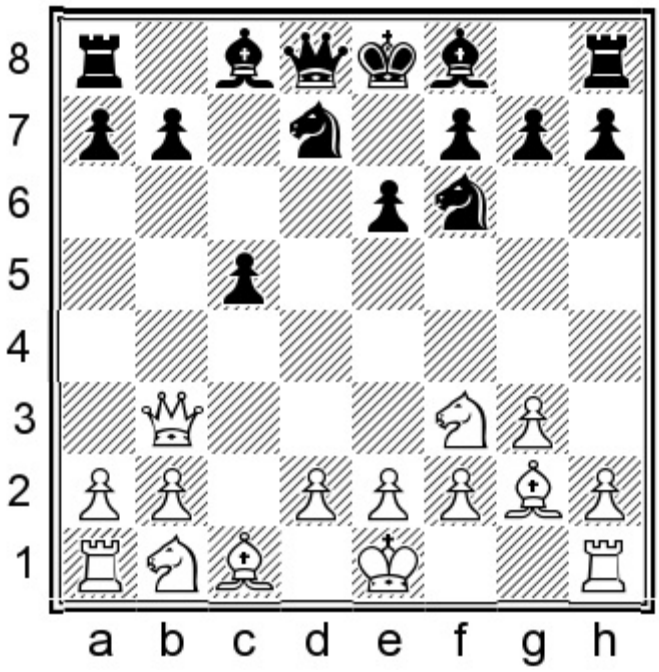


Position after: 14...c5

15.♗a5! ♕e8 16.♘bd2 ♘5f6 Here it is, the knight has to move by itself. I think we even became more optimistic than Levon in his game, Aronian, L (2812) – Anand, V (2773) Zurich 2014, that he finally won, by playing 17.e4!± Black keeps a really solid position, but with very limited resources.

7.♕b3!?

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Position after: 7.♕b3!?

7...♖b8

A) 7...♗d6 8.0-0 0-0 9.♘c3 a6 10.a4 ♖b8 11.a5 We know this idea from the same structure after 6...a6. We still want to prevent an easy ...b5 at all costs. 11...b5 It's probably best to play this move. (11...♗c7 12.♕a2 b5 13.axb6 ♘xb6 14.d3⩲) 12.axb6 ♖xb6 13.♕c2 ♗b7 14.d3 ♕a8 15.♘a4 ♖b5 16.e4 ♘g4 17.♘d2 ♘ge5 18.♘c4 ♗e7 19.♗d2⩲ 1-0 (51) Naiditsch, A (2707) – Greenfeld, A (2573) Rogaska Slatina.

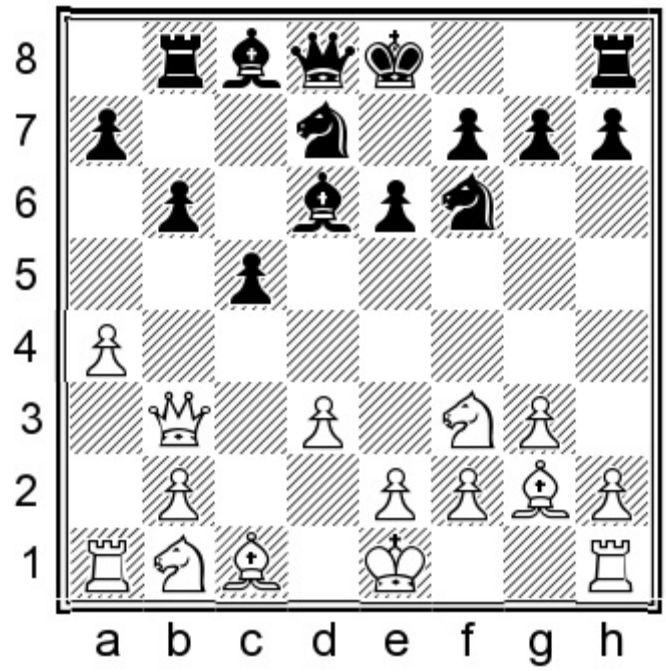
B) 7...a6 8.a4 transposes to a sideline of 6...a6.

8.d3

Intending ♗f4.

8...♗d6 9.a4 b6!

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Position after: 9...b6!

This is why Black did well to wait before playing ...a6.

When Black starts with ...a6 he has some problems on the long diagonal, because of the remaining rook on a8.

I think that the game is pretty close to equality, and practice shows that Black does not experience too many problems in those kinds of positions. However I would continue with...

10.♘a3 a6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♘c4 ♗c7 13.♗d2 ♗b7

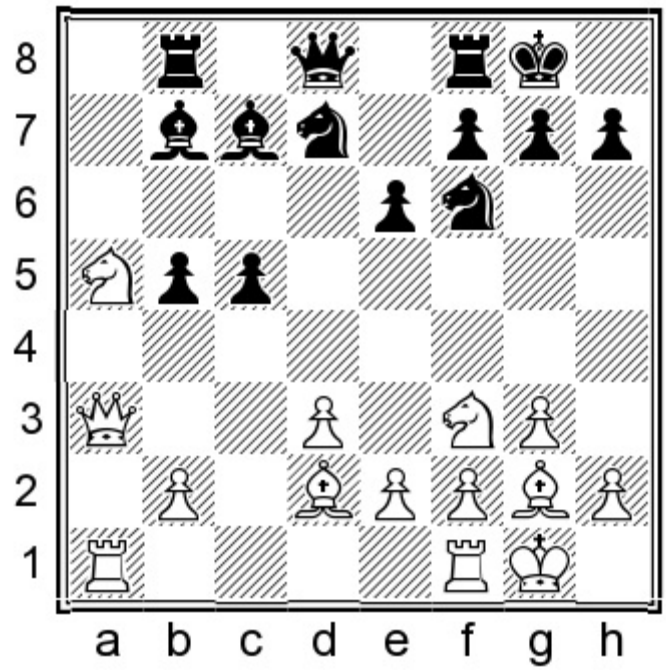
The previous moves were pretty logical.

14.♕a3!?

14.e4?! b5 15.axb5 axb5 16.♘a5 ♗a8 17.♖fe1 c4!∓ was good for Black even if he finally lost in Ju, W (2526) – Zhai, M (2303) Wuxi 2014.

14...b5 15.axb5 axb5 16.♘a5

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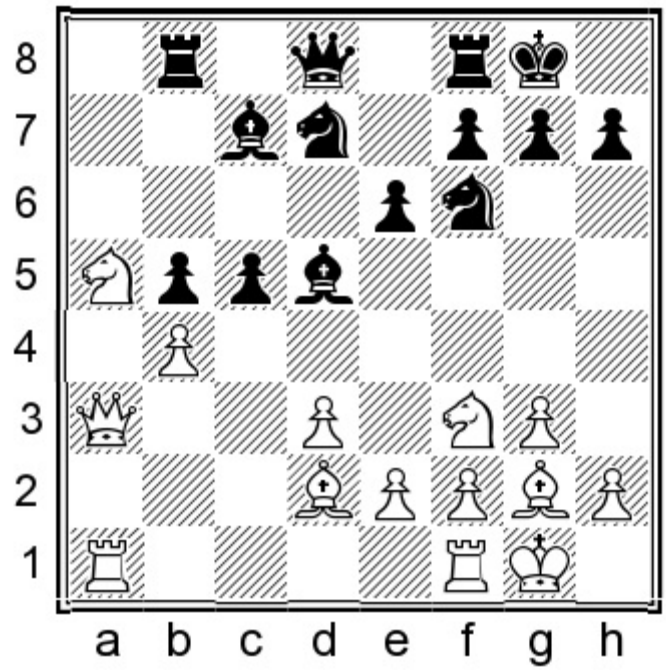


Position after: 16.♘a5

16...♗d5

16...b4 17.♕a4 ♗xa5! 18.♕xa5 ♕e7 (18...♕xa5 19.♖xa5± would be easier for White thank's to the a-file) 19.♖fc1 ♖fc8 20.♕a4⇄ White has the bishop pair, but for now it's hard for him to get an advantage. But the game is still full of resources; I still prefer White.

17.b4!



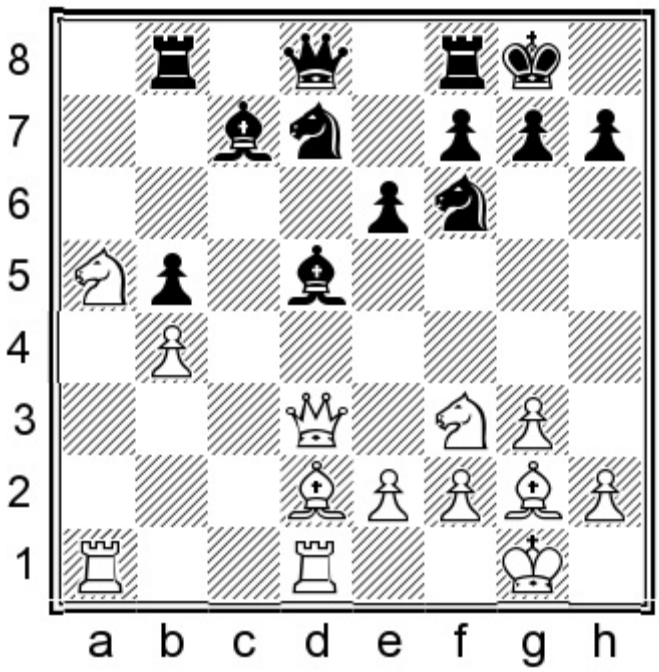
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Position after: 17.b4!

17...c4

White failed to achieve enough winning chances in Rausis, I (2520) – Drasko, M (2540) France 2008; I now would prefer...

18.♖fd1!?N 18...cxd3 19.♕xd3↑



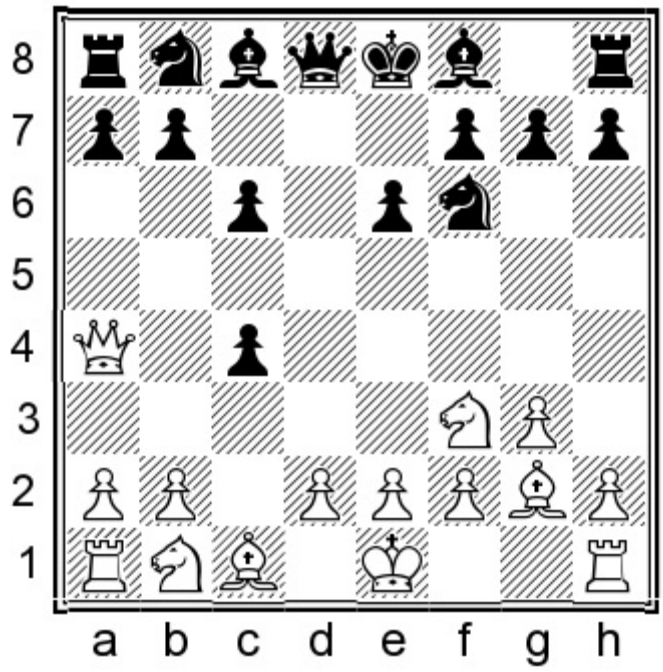
Position after: 19.♕xd3↑

...with some initiative for White, who wants to put a knight, at some point, on c6. By grabbing the bishop pair, White would keep a long-term advantage.

e) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ c6 with 9...a6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ c6

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Position after: 5...c6

Black plays in the spirit of the Semi-Slav, with a queenside expansion that works thanks to our exposed queen, but the major difference is that we have not yet placed a pawn on d4, and this gives us more possibilities.

6.♕xc4 b5 7.♕c2 ♗b7

Despite what we may think, we have reached a really tricky position. Black's play is quite simple; his next moves are (whatever the order), ...a6, ...♘bd7, ...♗e7, ...♖c8, ...c5 and ...0-0. His position is healthy and active at the same time. Actually, it scores pretty well for Black, and it was a challenge for me to find a valuable line for White, but I think what I've found is quite good and easy to understand. Let's have a look!

8.a4!?

The aim of this move is to provoke an early ...b4, which would be really satisfying for us, as it leaves the c4-square free. It also prevents Black from playing ...c5 for now.

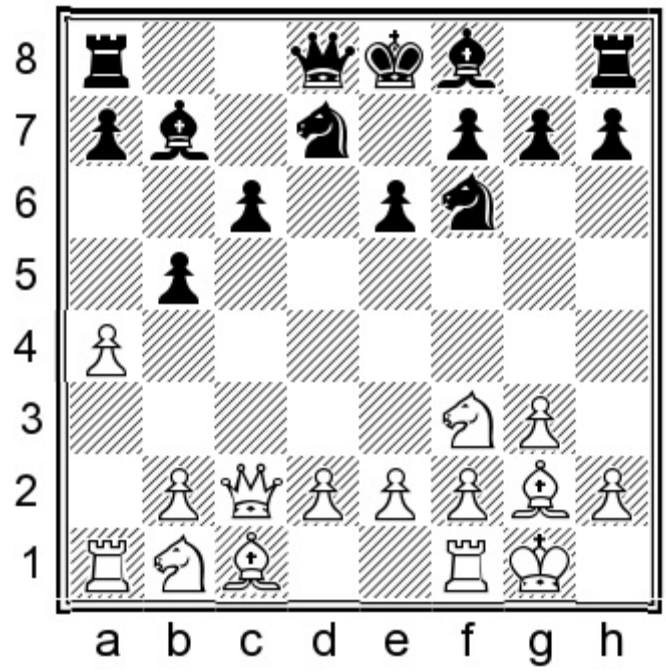
Even if it wouldn't necessarily be bad news, the move order starting with 8.0-0 leaves Black the extra possibility of playing with 8...c5.

8...♘bd7

8...a6 9.0-0 ♘bd7 transposes into 9...a6.

9.0-0

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Position after: 9.0-0

Now Black has two main moves: 9...a6 or 9...♖c8 (next subchapter).

9...a6 10.♘c3 ♗e7 11.d3!?

I'll now will show you another possibility for White, as I am not fond of playing d2-d4.

11.d4 failed to convince me because of 11...c5 or on the next move, after castling, when Black surely has nice play.

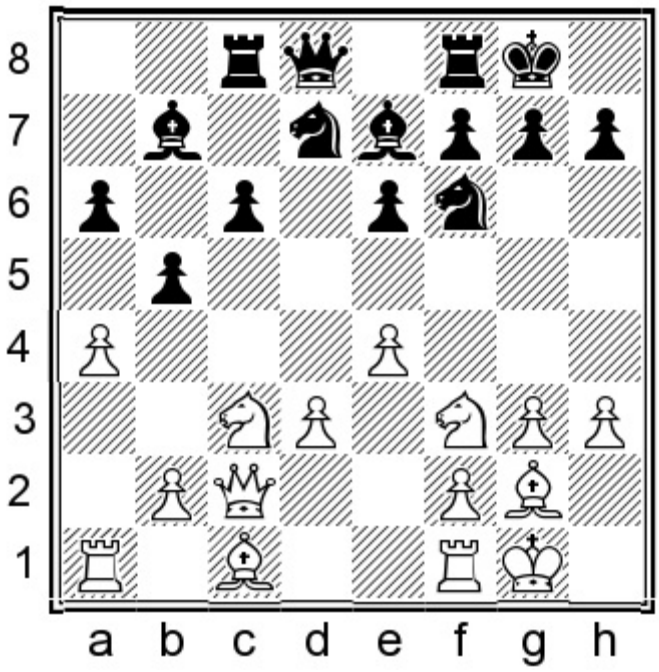
11...0-0 12.e4 ♖c8

This is the most active plan. The idea is to be able to play ...a5, as it virtually protects the b5-pawn.

12...b4 13.♘b1! c5 14.♘bd2 a5 15.b3N 15...♘b6 16.♗b2±

13.h3

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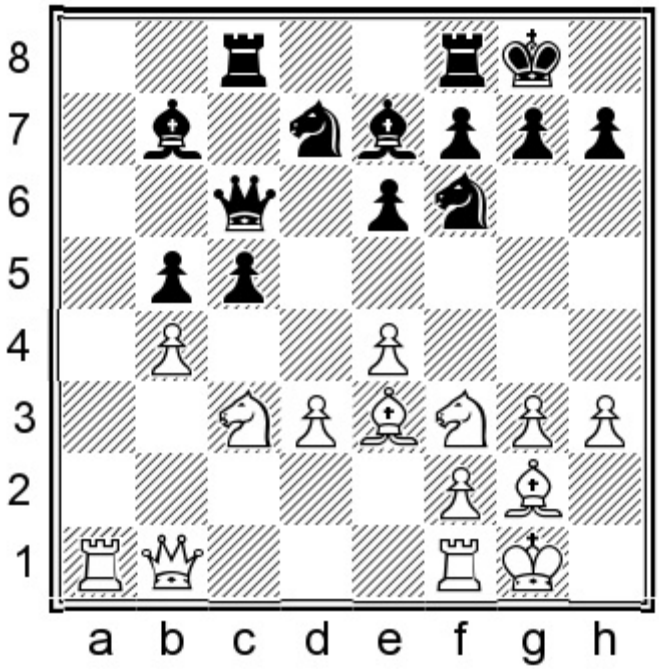


Position after: 13.h3

Obligatory, in order to play ♗e3 without being annoyed by ...♘g4.

13...a5

13...♕b6 This natural move is easily met with 14.♗e3 c5 15.axb5 axb5 16.b4! ♕c6 (16...♕d8N might be better, but after 17.♘xb5 cxb4 18.♕d2± White keeps the upper hand) 17.♕b1!



Position after: 17.♕b1!

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17...cxb4 18.♘d4 ♕b6 19.♘f5 ♕d8 20.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 21.♘xb5± and White took his time, but managed to convert his position in Delchev, A (2643) – Nisipeanu, L (2674) Bad Wiessee 2013.

14.♗e3 ♗a6!?

Black is seeking counterplay.

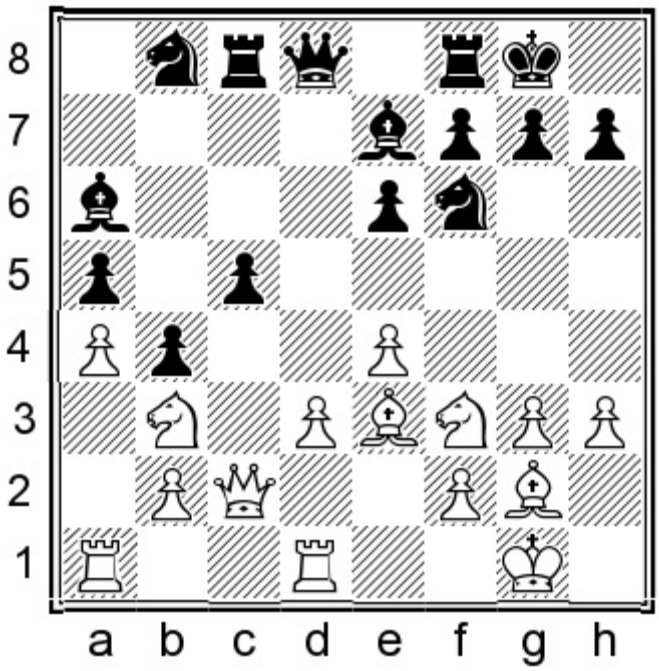
15.♖fd1 b4 16.♘b1 c5

16...♘b6 17.♗f1! c5 18.♘bd2 ♘fd7 19.♘b3±

17.♘bd2 ♘b8

All this appeared in the game won by Black, Kaidanov, G (2569) – Bruzon Batista, L (2679) Praia da Pipa 2014, but we really need to play the strong...

18.♘b3!N



Position after: 18.♘b3!N

Putting both pawns under attack and preventing ...♘c6. Black will have to worry about his c5-pawn in particular.

18...♕c7 19.♖ac1 ♘fd7 20.♗f1!?±

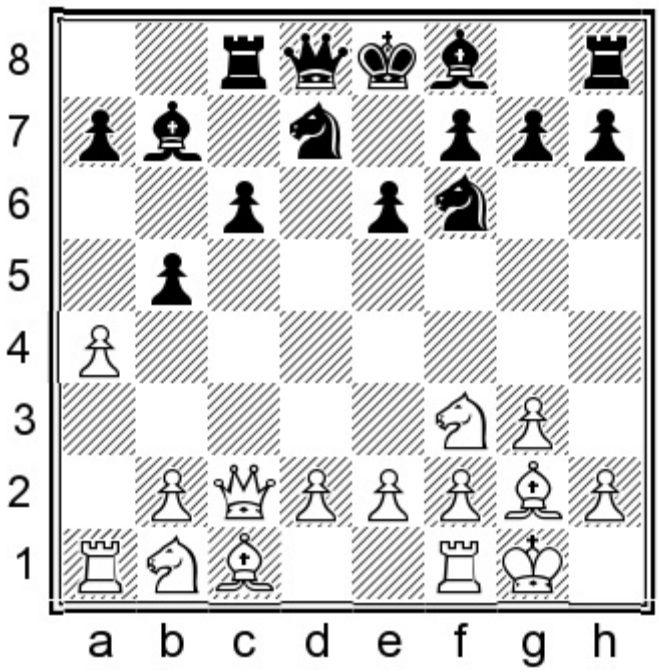
White keeps an eye on both the a5 and c5-pawns. He also has the c4-square at his disposal, and can open the position with d3-d4 whenever he wants.

This pressure ensures that he can keep the upper hand.

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f) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ c6 with 9...♖c8

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.♕a4+ c6 6.♕xc4 b5 7.♕c2 ♗b7 8.a4!? ♘bd7 9.0-0 ♖c8!?



Position after: 9...♖c8!?

When Black plays this move quickly, he shows that he wants to push ...c5 as soon as he can.

10.♘c3 a6

In case of 10...b4 we are happy even if we must lose a couple of tempi as we get exactly what we want: 11.♘d1 (11.♘b1!?) 11...♗e7 12.b3 0-0 13.♗b2 c5 14.♘e3↑.

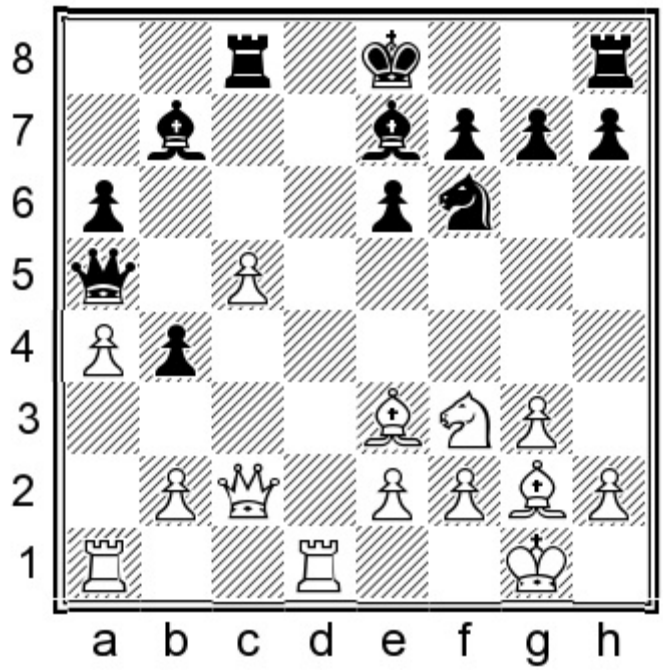
11.♖d1!

11.d4?! would be premature because of 11...b4 12.♘e4 c5↑.

11...♕b6

11...♗e7 12.d4! b4 (12...0-0 13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♘d5 15.axb5 axb5 16.♘e4 c5 17.♘c3!±) 13.♘e4 c5 As Black is ready to open files, he shouldn't wait. 14.♘xf6+! ♘xf6 (14...♗xf6 15.dxc5 ♖xc5 16.♕b3± Black needs to solve his problems of hanging pawns, pins, and the hazardous placing of his rook.) 15.dxc5 ♕a5 16.♗e3!

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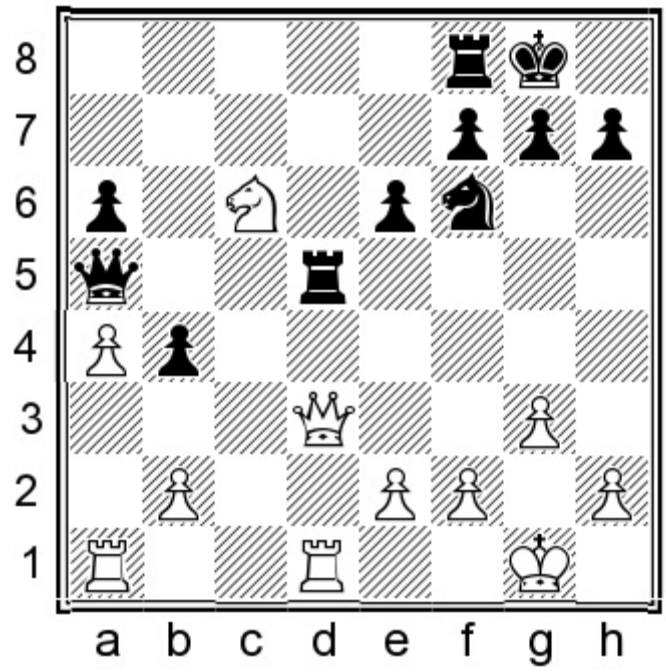


Position after: 16.♗e3!

A) Black can't wait to capture the c5-pawn: 16...0-0?! 17.♘d2! ♗xg2 18.♔xg2 ♘g4 was seen in the game Berczes, D (2550) – Venkatesh, M (2480), 1-0 (48), Dresden 2011, and we can improve White's play with 19.♘b3!N 19...♘xe3+ 20.fxe3 ♕c7 21.♖ac1. We have damaged our structure, but we now have an extra pawn that Black needs to take back by means of 21...♕c6+ 22.♔f2 ♕xa4 23.♕c4!±. Now Black's pieces are going to be dominated by the strong c-pawn which will not stand still! His queenside also feels fragile, with ♖a1 coming.

B) 16...♗xc5 17.♗xc5 ♖xc5 18.♕d3 0-0 19.♘d4! This pretty strong move allows White to keep a decent edge in each of the following lines: 19...♗d5 (19...♗xg2? 20.♘b3 ♕b6 21.♘xc5+–) 20.♗xd5 ♖xd5 21.♘c6!

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Position after: 21.♘c6!

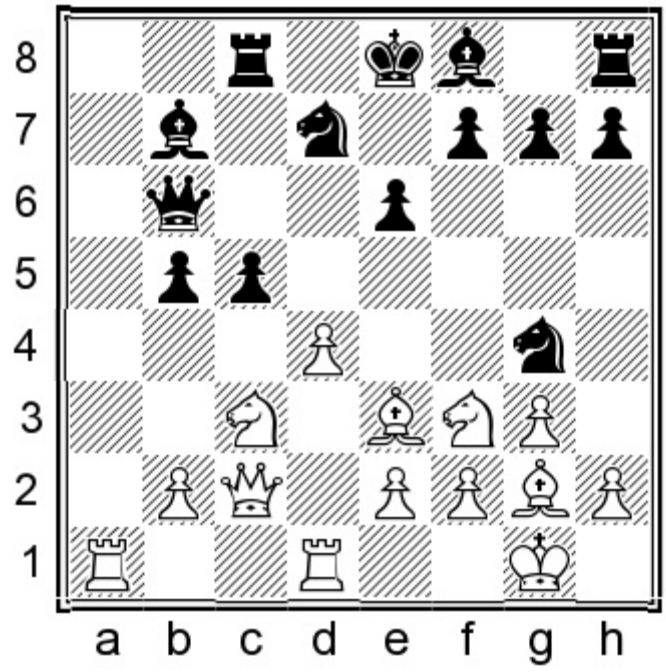
21...♕c5 (21...♖xd3 22.♘xa5 ♖xd1+ 23.♖xd1±) 22.♕xa6±

12.d4 c5!

This is the logical follow-up.

12...♗e7?! 13.♘e5! ♘xe5 14.dxe5 ♘d5 15.♘e4 0-0 16.♗g5±

13.axb5 axb5 14.♗e3! ♘g4



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Position after: 14...♘g4

Even if White played really well and scored a good win in Artemiev, V (2671) – Bukavshin, I (2648) Sochi 2015, we could try two different ideas here, both crushing if Black fails to understand the position.

15.dxc5!N

This is my favourite, as it seems completely stupid at first!

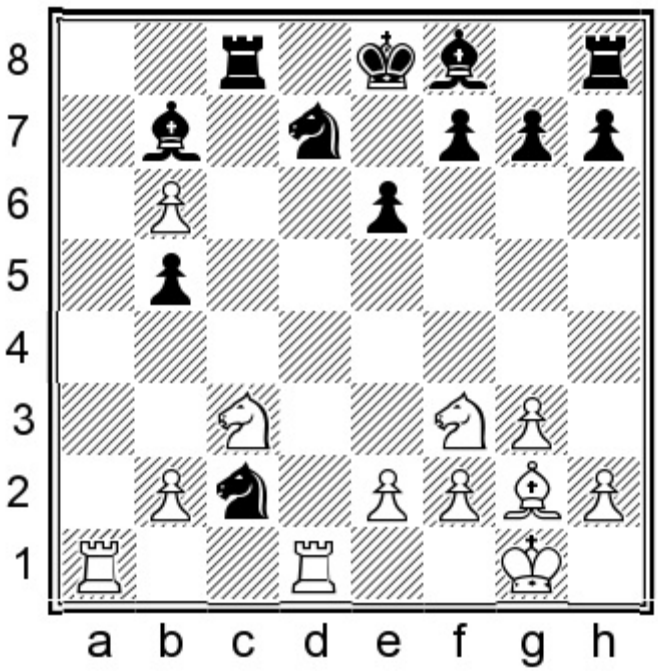
15.♘e5!?N 15...♘xe3 (15...♘dxe5 16.♗xb7 ♘xe3 17.fxe3 ♕xb7 18.dxe5 ♗e7 19.♕e4 ♕b6 20.♖a8 0-0 21.♖xc8 ♖xc8 22.♖d7±) 16.♘xd7 ♘xc2 17.♘xb6 ♖b8 18.♗xb7 ♘xa1 19.♗c6+ ♔e7 20.♘d7 ♖d8 21.dxc5 ♘c2 22.♗xb5±

15...♘xe3?

A mistake, but tempting, right?

15...♗xc5 is the only move to survive 16.♕d3 0-0! 17.♗xc5 ♕xc5 18.♕d4!± Black is still under pressure with his hanging knights and b5-pawn.

16.cxb6 ♘xc2



Position after: 16...♘xc2

Did we really just blunder a piece?

17.♖a7!

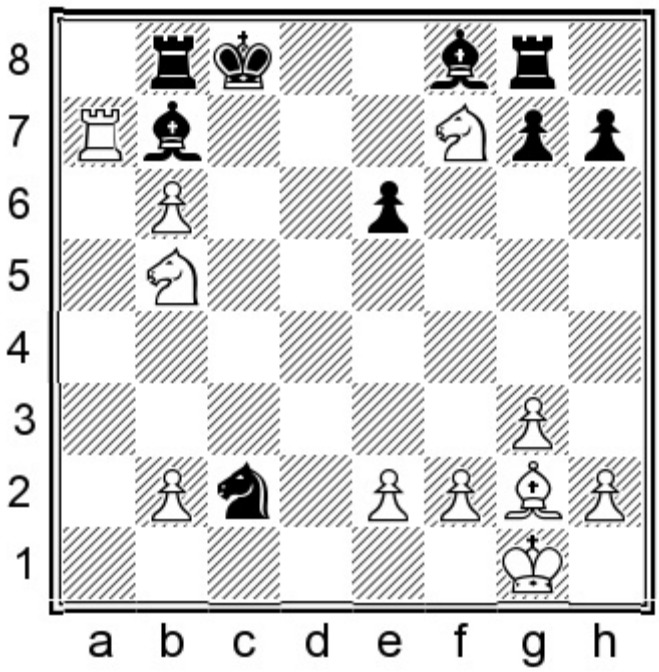
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Certainly not!

17...♖b8

17...♗xf3 18.♖axd7! ♗xg2 19.♔xg2 ♗e7 20.b7 ♖b8 21.♘xb5 ♘b4 22.♘c7+! ♔f8 23.♖a1+–

18.♖xd7 ♔xd7 19.♘e5+ ♔c8 20.♘xf7 ♖g8 21.♘xb5+–



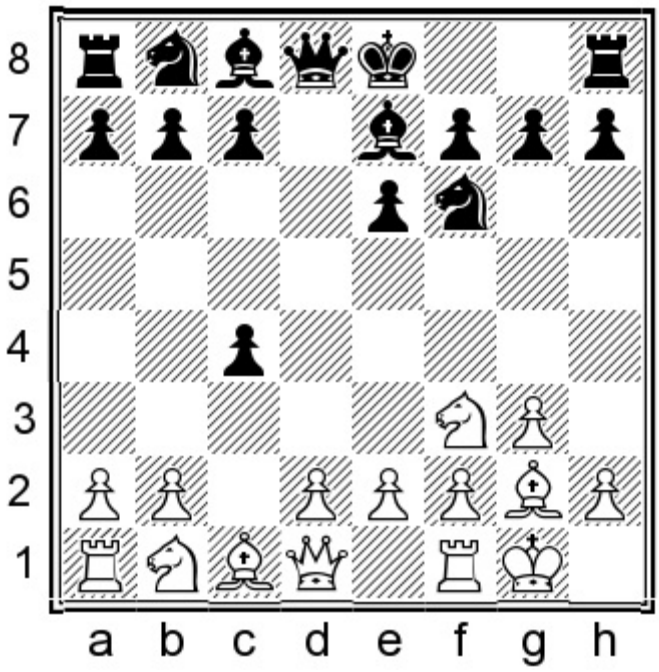
Position after: 21.♘xb5+–

Black is helpless against ♘bd6+.

g) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 dxc4?!

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 dxc4?!

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Position after: 5...dxc4?!

This is clearly the worst moment to take on c4. Whereas we have only played useful moves, Black just moved his bishop to a square which is not necessarily the best one, and we can take advantage of that immediately by playing...

6.♘a3!

On the previous move, after 4...dxc4, I rejected this move because of the complications after 5...♗xa3, but now we are a full tempo up and it makes some difference.

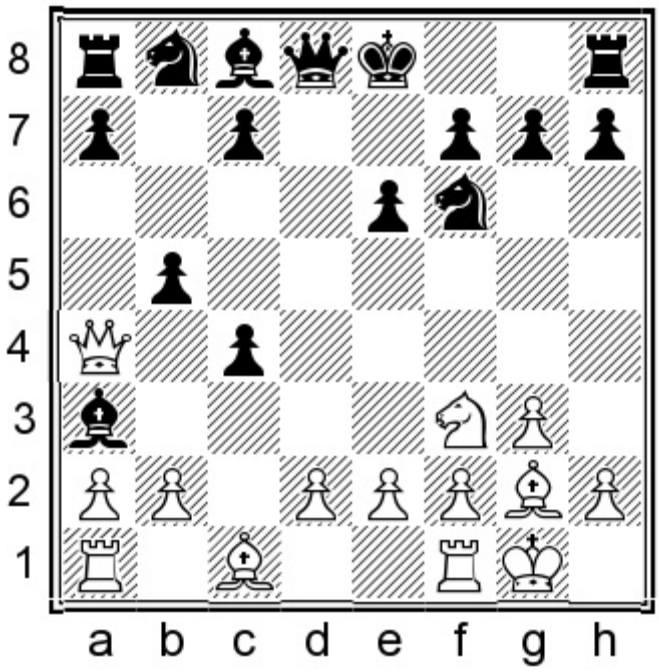
6...0-0

A) 6...♗xa3 7.♕a4+!? Keeping our good pawn structure. (7.bxa3± is also more than fine, but I prefer to offer a variation that is easy to understand. It's up to you if you prefer to work a bit extra for this one.)

A1) 7...♗d7 8.♕xa3 ♗c6 (8...♘c6 9.♕c5 ♕e7 10.♕xc4 0-0 11.d4±) 9.♕c3 0-0 10.♕xc4 ♘bd7 11.♕c3± White prevents ...♗xf3 followed by ...♘e5 and stands better.

A2) 7...b5!N

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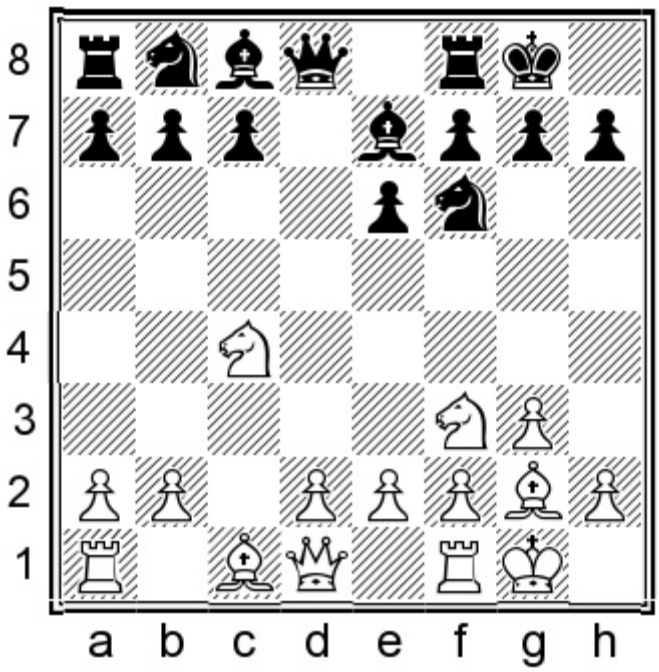


Position after: 7...b5!N

A smart way to play this move, and probably an improvement for Black. 8.♕xa3 ♗b7 9.b3! cxb3 10.axb3 ♘bd7 11.♗b2 a5 (11...♕e7? 12.♕a5±) 12.♖fc1⩲ Black's queenside has many holes and we obtained good chances to take our pawn back soon.

B) 6...c5 doesn't change much, and play must transpose after 7.♘xc4 ♘c6 8.b3 0-0.

7.♘xc4



Position after: 7.♘xc4

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7...c5

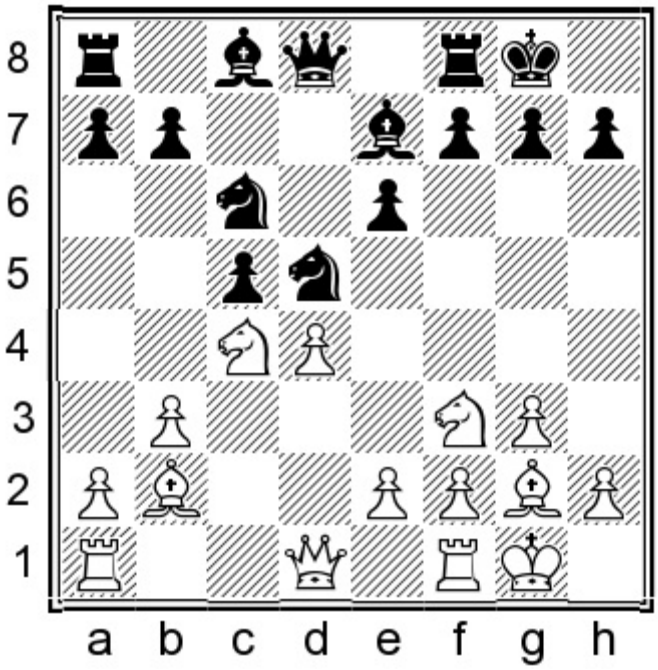
7...b5 8.♘fe5 (8.♘ce5 was tried recently, and even if White is still better, the move is objectively inferior 8...♗b7 9.d4 a6 10.♗d2 c5 11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♖c1± 1-0 (30) Gonda, L (2499) – Marosi, L (2293) Hungary 2018) 8...♘d5 9.♘e3 ♗b7 10.♘xd5 ♗xd5 (10...exd5?! 11.d4± What exactly is the pawn on b5 doing here?) 11.e4 ♗b7 12.d4 c5 13.d5!±

8.b3 ♘c6 9.♗b2

Marin states about this position very correctly: "White has very active development and the possibility of neutralising Black's space advantage with d2-d4 at the most convenient moment." Now we have to look at a few alternatives.

9...♗d7

A) 9...♘d5 10.d4

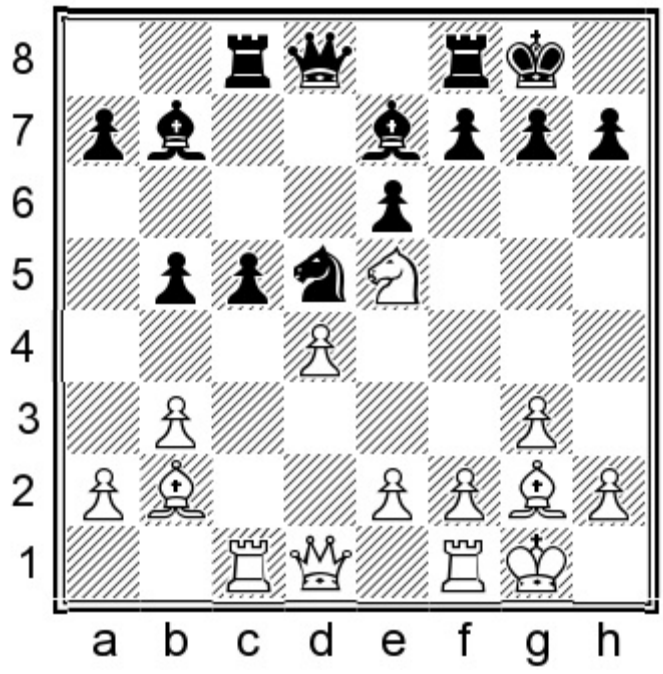


Position after: 10.d4

A1) 10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♗f6 13.♕d2! ♗xb2 14.♕xb2 In this almost symmetrical position, Black is 'almost' close to equality, but is actually in huge trouble already as his pieces remain inactive. 14...b5 15.♖fd1! bxc4 16.bxc4 ♕b6 17.♕a3 ♖b8 (17...♘c7 18.♖ab1 ♕a6 19.♕e7+–) 18.cxd5 exd5 19.♗xd5±

A2) 10...b5 11.♘ce5 ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♗b7 13.♖c1!? I prefer this less common move, instead of trading on c5, to keep some pressure. 13...♖c8

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Position after: 13...♖c8

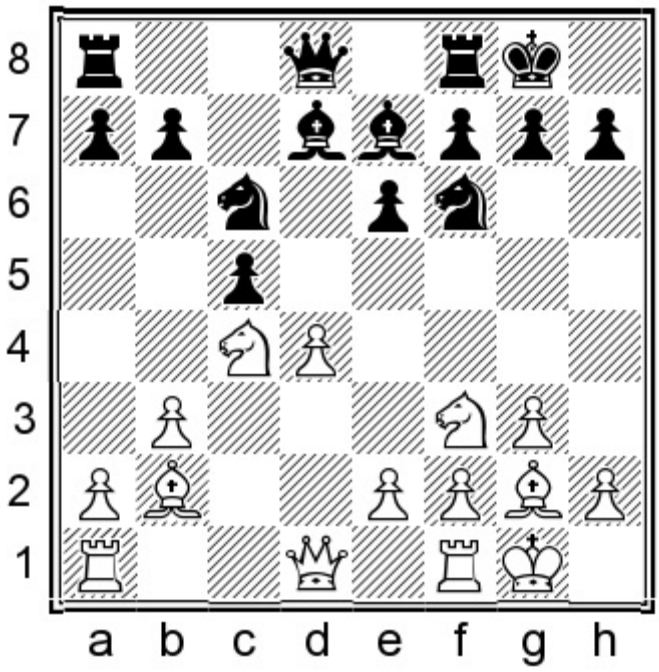
14.♕d2! cxd4 15.♕xd4 f6 (15...♕b6! 16.♕xb6 axb6 17.♘d7 ♖xc1 18.♖xc1 ♖c8 19.♔f1!±) 16.♕xa7 ♖xc1 17.♖xc1 ♕a8 18.♕xa8 ♖xa8 19.♘c6 ♗xc6 20.♖xc6 ♔f7 21.♗xd5 exd5 22.a3 ♗xa3 23.♖c7+ ♗e7 24.♗d4± White has played a close to perfect game and managed to win in Sadorra, J (2473) – Yang, D (2417) Richardson 2010.

B) 9...♕c7 It doesn't seem a great idea to put the queen on this file. 10.♖c1 ♖d8 11.♘fe5 ♘xe5 12.♗xe5 ♕d7 13.♗b2±

10.d4

White clearly has the more active pieces and has obtained a nice advantage already.

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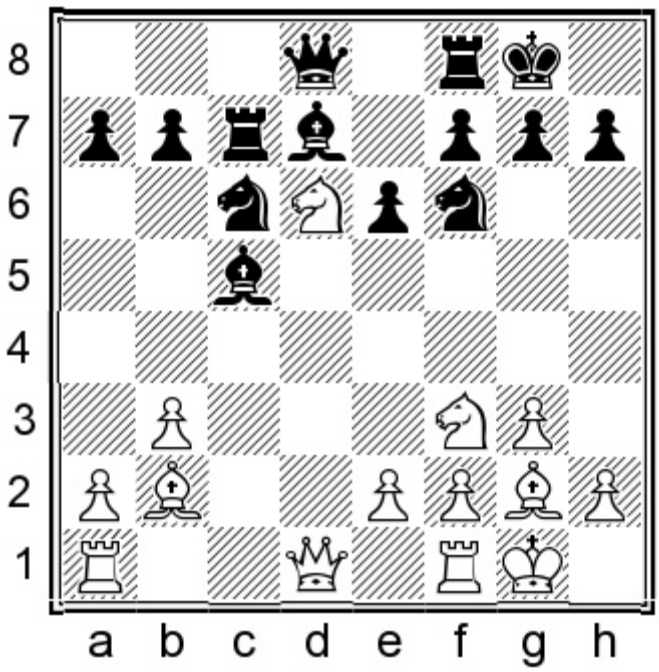
Position after: 10.d4

10...♖c8?!

In a recent top-level game, Black com-pletely messed up his opening.

10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♗c6 13.♗xc6 bxc6 14.♖ac1± This being a kind of endgame, without any hope to improve his position. The c6-pawn is a long term weakness, and our pieces are already well placed to attack it.

11.dxc5 ♗xc5 12.♘d6 ♖c7



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Position after: 12...♖c7

Black insists on keeping the bishop pair, so had to play this ugly move.

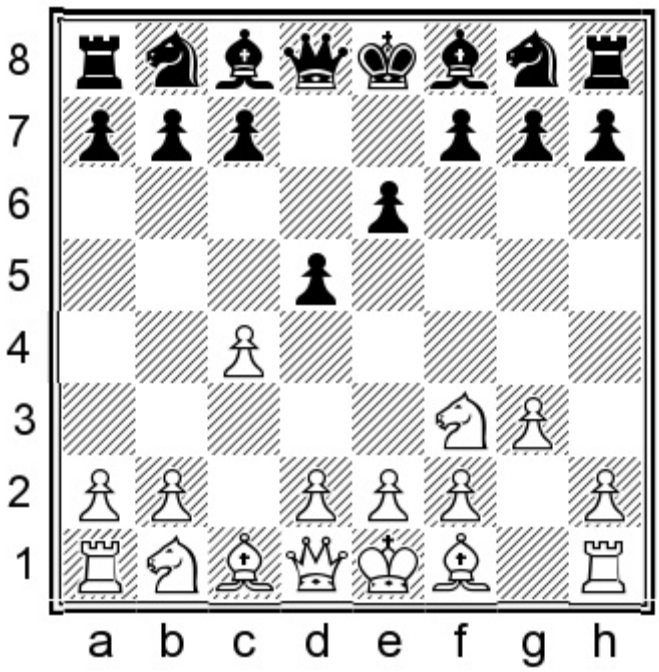
13.♖c1 b6 14.♘g5! ♕e7 15.♘ge4 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♖d8 17.♘xc5 bxc5 18.♕e1±

White has an overwhelming advantage that he converted with ease in Grischuk, A (2795) – Inarkiev, E (2688) Moscow 2014.

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Chapter 3
Black plays with ...d4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3



Chapter guide

Chapter 3 – Black plays with ...d4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

a) 3...d4, 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 d4 5.--, 5.0-0 ♘c6

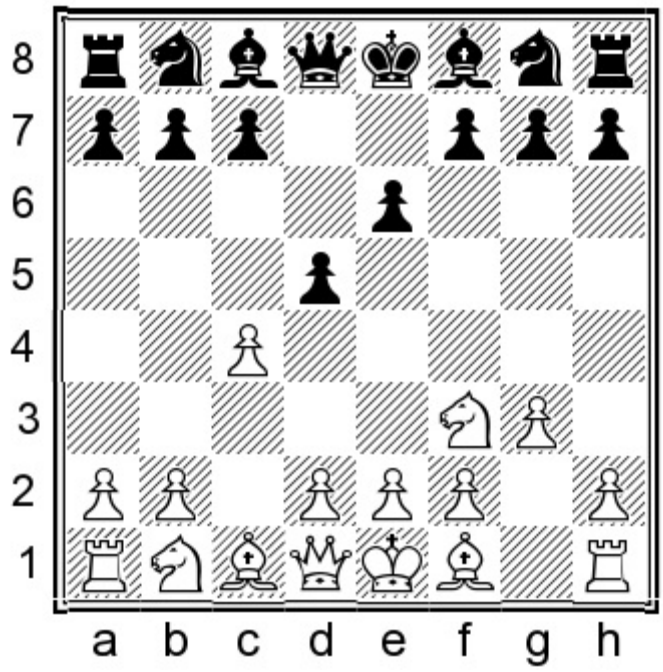
b) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 d4 5.0-0 c5 6.e3 ♘c6 7.exd4 ♘xd4, 7...cxd4 8.d3 --

c) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 d4 5.0-0 c5 6.e3 ♘c6 7.exd4 cxd4 8.d3 ♗d6

a) 3...d4, 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 d4 5.--, 5.0-0 ♘c6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3

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Position after: 3.g3

In this chapter, we focus on Black's possibility of advancing ...d5-d4 early in the opening. If we have to give it a name, this might be the 'Reversed Benoni'. True, it is similar, but what are the main differences? Of course we are playing the Benoni as White, so we have an extra tempo, and Black has only played ...e6, whereas White usually doesn't hesitate to push e4, and has sometimes to spend another tempo in order to play ...e6-e5. So if you like the Benoni Defense, this surely won't be a problem for you

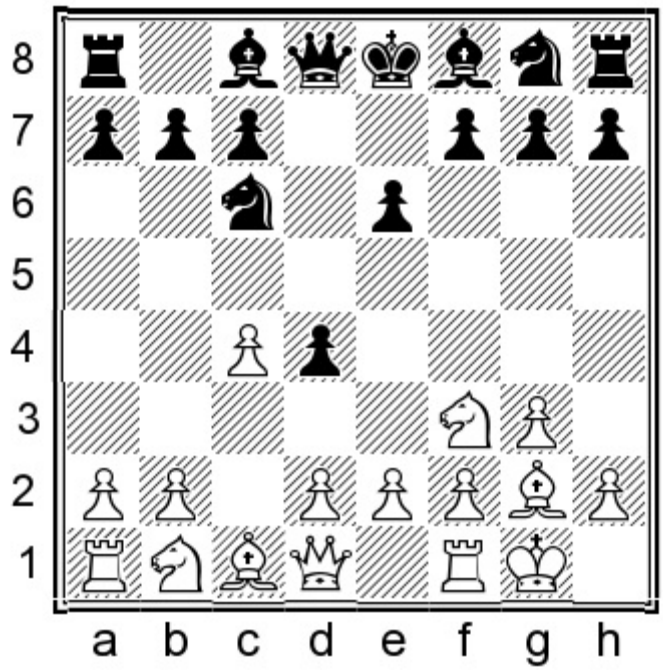
But it has to be said that things are not so bad for Black. From an objective point of view, he is actually trying to get an edge by having more space in the center and easy development besides. How should White proceed? As we will see, it seems more promising to play with a classical plan borrowed from the Benoni than some Benko ideas...

3...♘f6

3...d4 A quite unusual move order, but it can sometimes help Black to keep the possibility of playing ...♘e7. 4.♗g2

A) 4...♘c6!? 5.0-0

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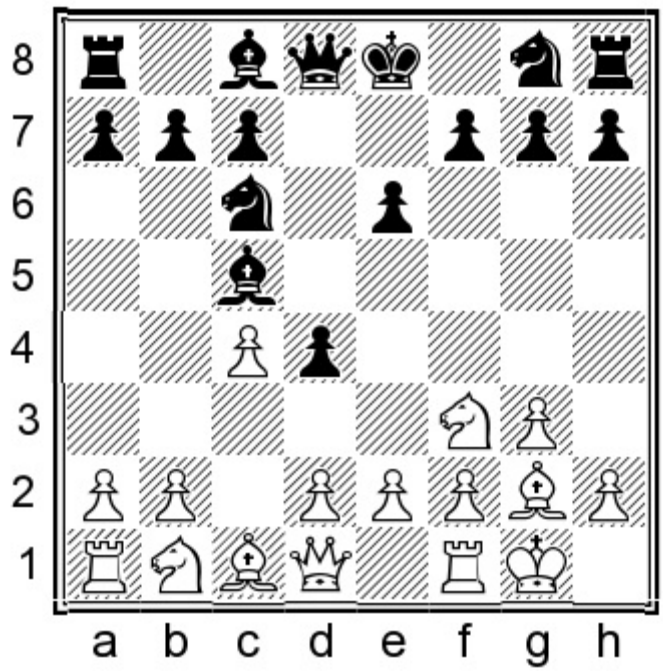


Position after: 5.0-0

A1) 5...♘f6 – see 5...♘c6.

A2) 5...e5 6.e3 ♗g4 This move is overoptimistic and Black will regret it once we can open the center. (6...♘f6 – see 5...♘c6) 7.d3! First we need to prevent ...e4. 7...♘f6 8.exd4 ♘xd4 9.♘bd2 ♗d6 10.h3 ♘xf3+ (10...♗h5?! 11.g4 ♘xf3+ 12.♕xf3 ♗g6 13.♕xb7±) 11.♘xf3 ♗xf3 12.♕xf3 c6 13.b4!↑ With some initiative on the queenside and in the center.

A3) 5...♗c5



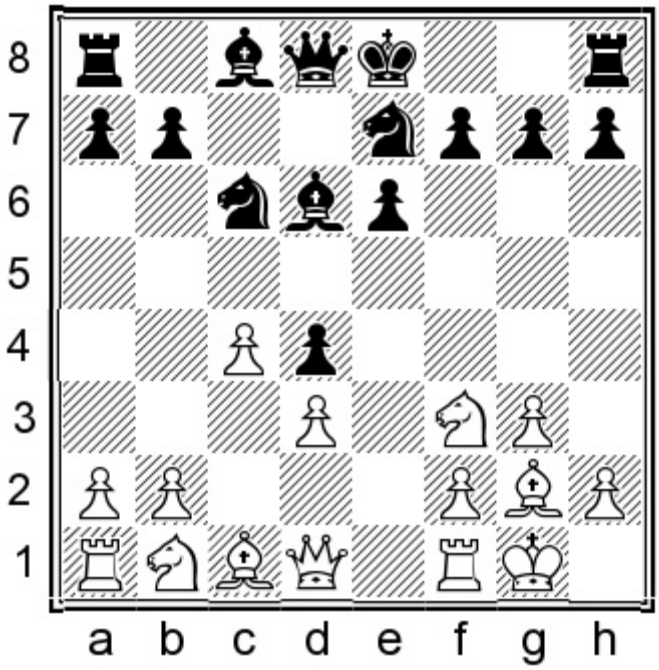
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Position after: 5...♗c5

A3.1) 6.e3 ♘ge7! All this might be the best idea for Black if he wants to advance his pawn to d4. (6...♘f6 7.b4! – see again 5...♘c6) 7.b4?! doesn't work as well as in the main line because of (7.d3 0-0 8.♘a3 e5 9.♘c2 ♗f5 10.exd4 ♘xd4) 7...♘xb4 8.exd4 ♗xd4 9.♘xd4 ♕xd4 10.♕a4+ ♘bc6!∓ and you can see that the knight on e7 is essential.

A3.2) 6.d3! (I had to change my mind concerning the move order as 6.e3 couldn't satisfy me.) 6...♘f6 Black finally plays ...♘f6 but we cannot transpose to 5...♘c6 any more as we generally avoid playing d3 there. However the position is still fine. (6...♘ge7?! 7.♘bd2 Suddenly the c5-bishop feels a bit exposed. 7...a5 8.♘b3 ♗b6 9.e3! dxe3 10.♗xe3↑) 7.♘bd2 0-0 8.♘b3 ♗e7 9.e3 e5 10.exd4 exd4 11.♖e1!↑

B) 4...c5 5.0-0 ♘c6 6.e3 ♗d6 7.exd4 cxd4 8.d3 ♘ge7

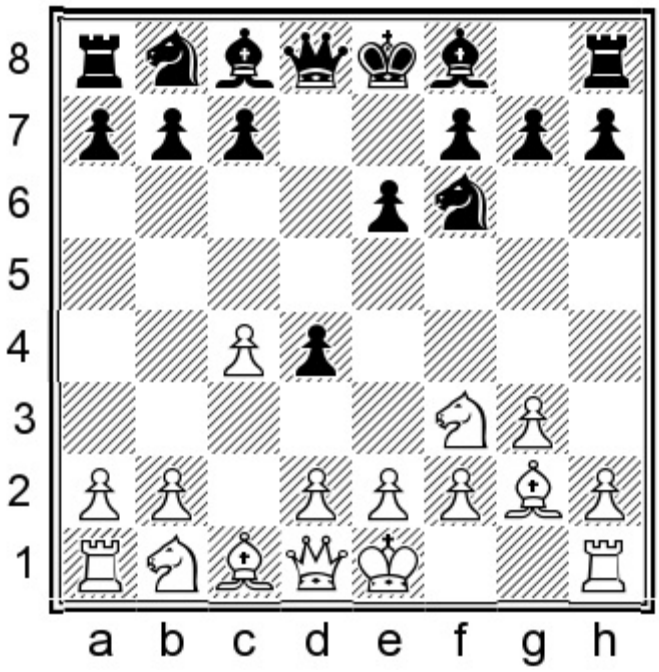


Position after: 8...♘ge7

In this case, I don't think Black's knight is doing a great job on e7. (8...♘f6 – see the main line) 9.♘bd2! 0-0 10.♖e1 h6 11.a3 a5 12.♘e4 ♗c7 13.♖b1! It's hard for Black to stop b4. 13...f5 (13...a4?! 14.♘c5! ♗d6 15.♘xa4 ♕a5 16.b3±) 14.♘c5 ♕d6? This mistake occurred in Karavade, E (2398) – Kiselev, A (2204) Golden Sands 2013, but White was unable to spot the tactic... (14...e5 15.b4!↑) 15.♘xe6!N 15...♗xe6 16.♗f4 ♕d7 17.♗xc7+– winning an important pawn.

4.♗g2 d4

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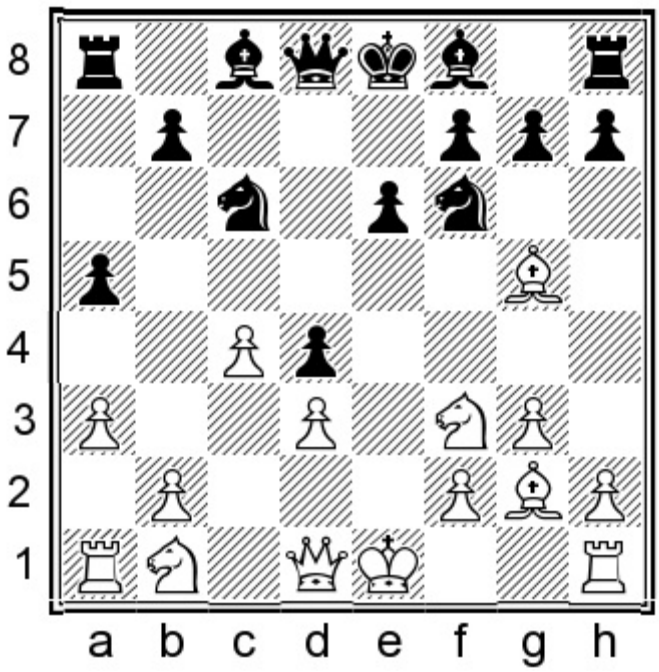
Position after: 4...d4

5.0-0

As other ideas were not suiting me, it seems logical to go for the main theoretical line.

A) 5.a3 was an interesting try by Aronian in 2015, and has been followed by a couple of grandmasters since. The Armenian managed to score a nice win, but his followers were not as lucky, as Black came up with a strong improvement (line A2).

A1) Facing this novelty, Ponomariov preferred the logical idea 5...a5 but there are some advantages in having included a3/...a5. 6.e3 c5 7.exd4 cxd4 8.d3 ♘c6 9.♗g5!



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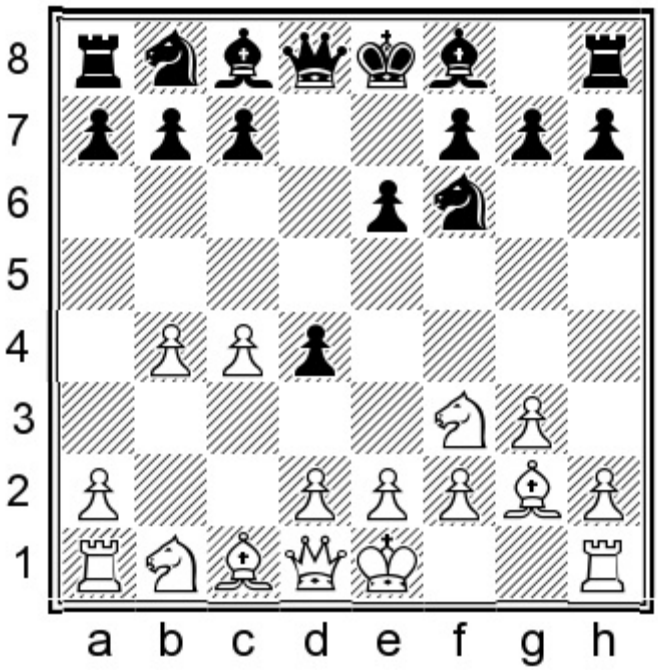
Position after: 9.♗g5!

This is the point. Compared to our main line, a3/...a5 has been included, preventing Black from giving checks or other annoying ideas.

So White can delay castling, enabling Black to obtain easy development. 9...♗e7 (9...♗d6 10.♘bd2± gives Black some trouble) 10.♘bd2 h6 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 This position is not awful for Black, but White can apply some pressure! 12.0-0 0-0 13.c5 ♗e7 14.♖c1!↑ 1-0 (49) Aronian, L (2770) – Ponomariov, R (2713) Tsaghkadzor 2015.

A2) 5...c5! 6.b4 White plays in the spirit of the Benko Gambit, but Black can simply prefer to decline the offer with 6...a5! and I couldn't find any real chances for an advantage here, as shown in the following game: 7.bxc5 ♘c6 8.d3 ♗xc5 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.0-0 a4 12.♘bd2 ♕e7 13.♕c1 f5!?↑ 0-1 (64) Romanov, E (2586) – Fridman, D (2639) Liepaja 2015.

B) It's very sad for White that the aggressive 5.b4? is over-optimistic.

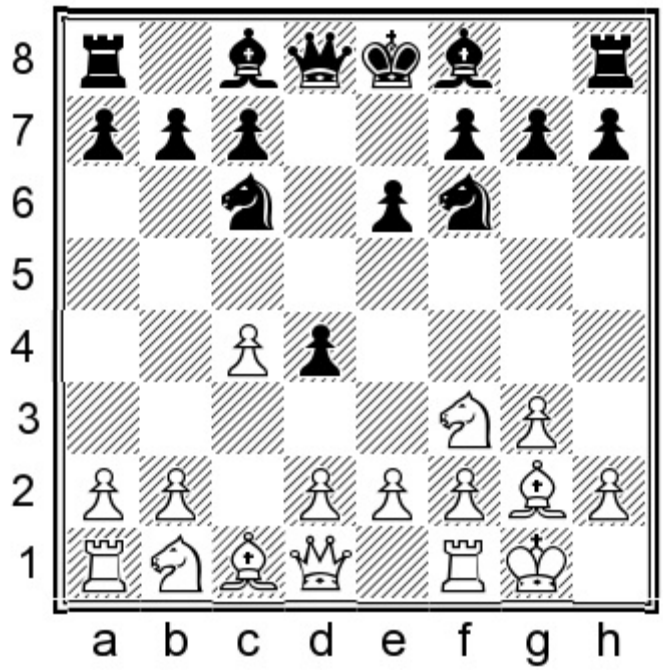


Position after: 5.b4?

5...♗xb4! It's true that it would have been nice. White can be satisfied after any other moves, but this is simply strong. 6.♕a4+ ♘c6 7.♘e5 Is Black in trouble? Losing something? No! 7...♖b8!∓ So close, but this simple defensive move enables Black to hold the initiative with better development.

5...♘c6

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Position after: 5...♘c6

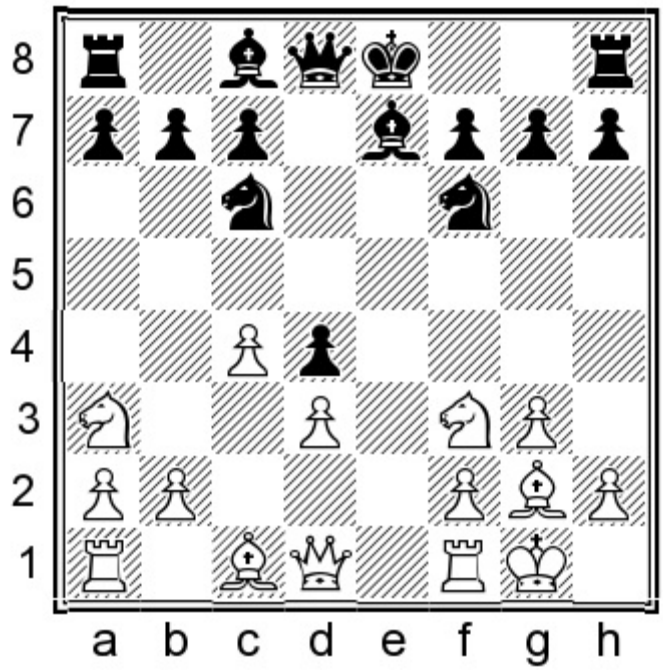
This is a principled move, simply protecting the important d4 and e5 squares in the center, but I think that White can easily take the upper hand.

5...c5 will be examined later.

6.e3 ♗c5

The tempo lost with the e-pawn after 6...e5 will become rather important. We can compare it with the line 1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.g3 (in this book we will consider 3.b4 in chapter 11) 3...♘c6 4.♗g2 e5 5. 0-0 ♘f6 6.e3, and we reach the same position with Black to move! 7.exd4 exd4 (7...e4 8.♘g5 ♘xd4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♗xe4± a pawn is a pawn) 8.d3 ♗e7 9.♘a3!?

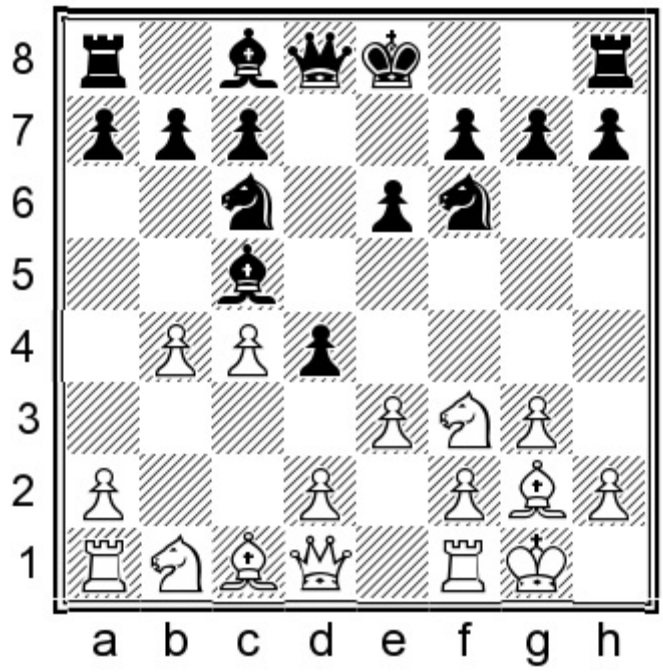
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Position after: 9.♘a3!?

9...0-0 10.♘c2 a5 11.♖e1± White will have many plans available (attacking d4, trading knights on e5, pushing on the queenside by means of a3 and ♖b1), whereas Black will always need to keep an eye on his weak d4-pawn.

7.b4!?



Position after: 7.b4!?

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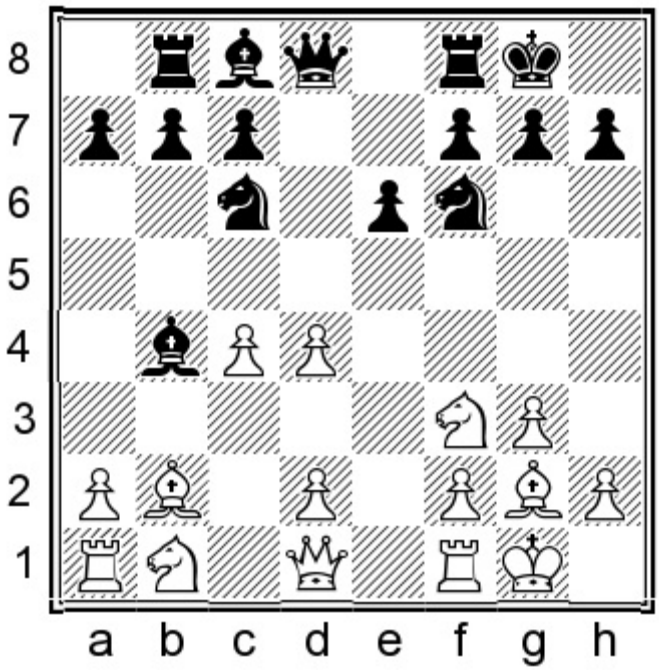
This wins a pawn in the center!

7...♗xb4

7...♘xb4?!N 8.exd4 ♗e7 (8...♗xd4?? 9.♘xd4 ♕xd4 10.♕a4+ And Black will lose some material whatever he plays. For instance 10...♔d8 11.♕xb4 ♕xa1 12.♗a3! ♖e8 13.♘c3+–) 9.♗b2± is even worse for Black.

8.exd4 0-0 9.♗b2 ♖b8

Up to this point, things were going fine for White in the game Caruana, F (2805) – Hammer, J (2677) Stavanger 2015.



Position after: 9...♖b8

Black's threat is to push ...b5 in order to weaken our center. Now White lacked precision in the game, so we're going to improve!

10.♕e2!?N

10.♘a3 ♗xa3 11.♗xa3 ♖e8 12.♗b2 b5∞ was played in the game.

10...♖e8!

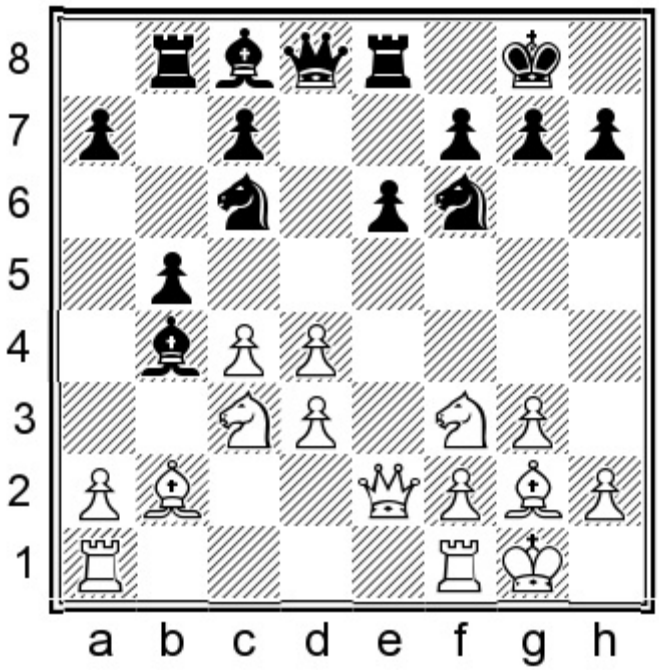
A useful waiting move.

11.d3

11.♖d1!?

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11...b5 12.♘c3±

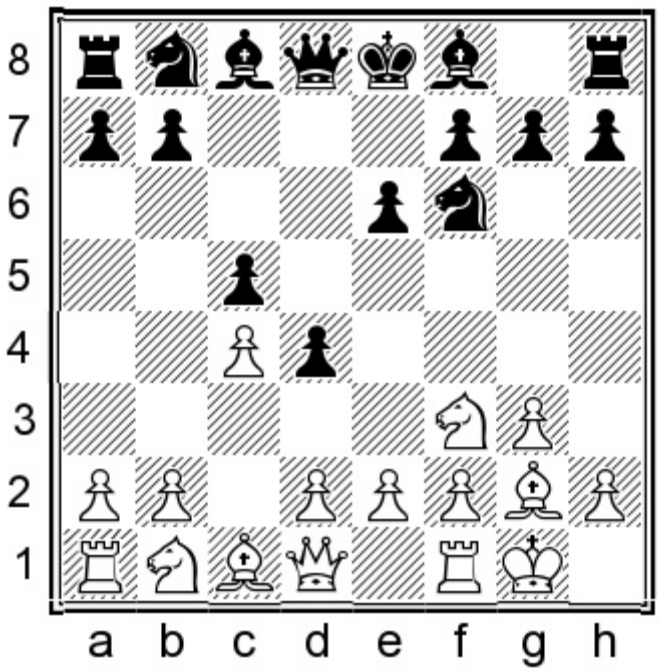


Position after: 12.♘c3±

With a complicated but very active position.

b) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 d4 5.0-0 c5 6.e3 ♘c6 7.exd4 ♘xd4, 7...cxd4 8.d3 --

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 e6 3.♗g2 d5 4.c4 d4 5.0-0 c5



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Position after: 5...c5

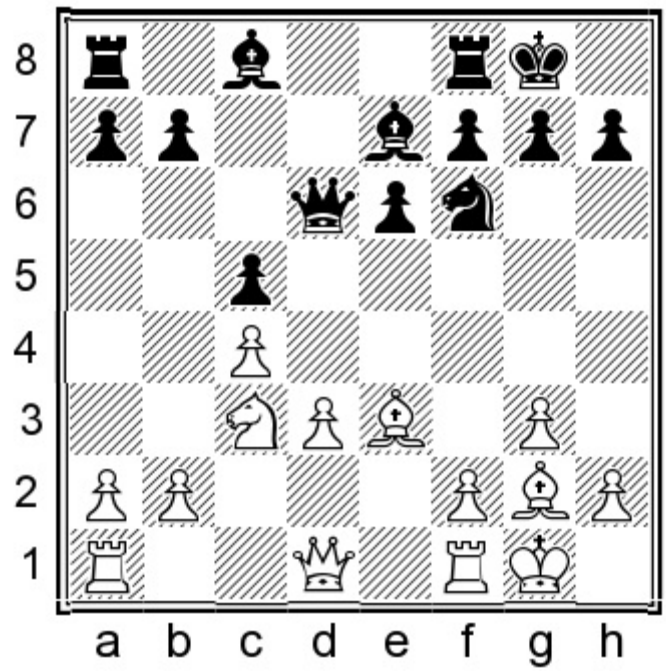
This is surely the most logical move and the most similar to the Benoni.

6.e3

You can have a look at 6.b4, but I don't really believe that it can be so strong.

6...♘c6 7.exd4 cxd4

7...♘xd4?! Trading knights opens the long diagonal for our g2-bishop, and surely helps White. 8.♘xd4 ♕xd4 It's true that positionally, Black has managed to create a big hole in White's center. It seems more logical to put a piece there instead of a pawn, in order to keep some pressure on our d-pawn, but dynamically, this simply doesn't work, as Shirov experienced. (8...cxd4 9.d3 ♗d6 10.b4!± This additional idea is now strong, and this kind of position is every Benoni player's dream.) 9.d3 ♗e7 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♗e3 ♕d6



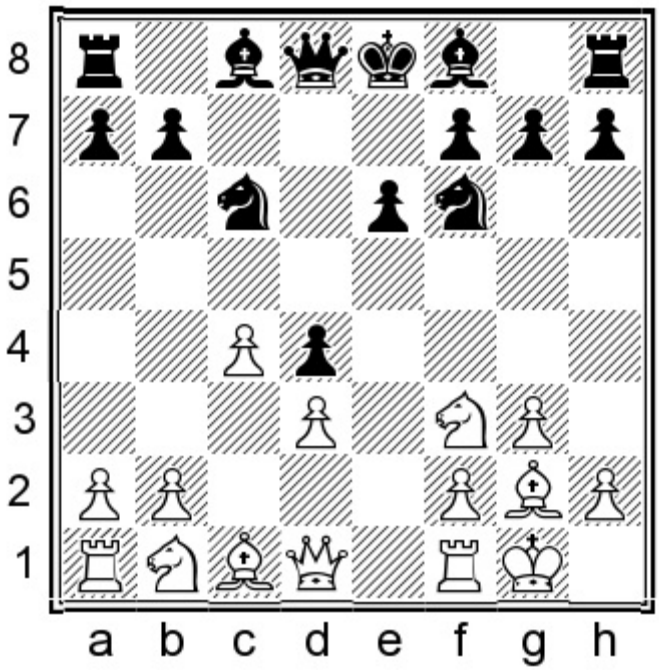
Position after: 11...♕d6

A) 12.♕e2 e5 13.h3 ♗e6 14.♖fe1± Shirov could have reached a close to equal position, but fell into a nice trap: 14...♖fd8?! 15.♗xb7 ♖ab8 16.♗g2 ♕xd3? 17.♘d5! ♕xe2 18.♘xe7+ ♔f8 19.♖xe2+– and White eventually managed to win in Aronian, L (2792) – Shirov, A (2684) Zurich 2016.

B) 12.d4!? If you don't like the game, you should know that you can already fill the hole on d4. And it might be even better than what happened in the game 12...cxd4 13.♕xd4! ♕xd4 (13...♕c7 14.♘b5! ♕a5 15.♘xa7± Gluttony must be the way... sometimes, that is!) 14.♗xd4 ♖d8 15.♖ad1± Black needs to address a serious question: how will he develop his queenside, as both a7 and b7 are hanging?

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8.d3



Position after: 8.d3

We finally reach the standard Benoni, with a tempo up for White, and the e6-pawn (instead of the usual e5) for Black, as discussed in the introduction.

Now the different plans for White are:

- advance on the queenside by means of a3/b4, or sometimes ♘a3-c2 (or the other knight with ♘e1-c2), in order to help the pawns to advance;
- take control over the e4-square, by trading the f6-knight with the g5-bishop, followed by ♘bd2 and ♖e1;
- sometimes, play f4 in order to prevent ...e5.

On the other hand, Black will try to:

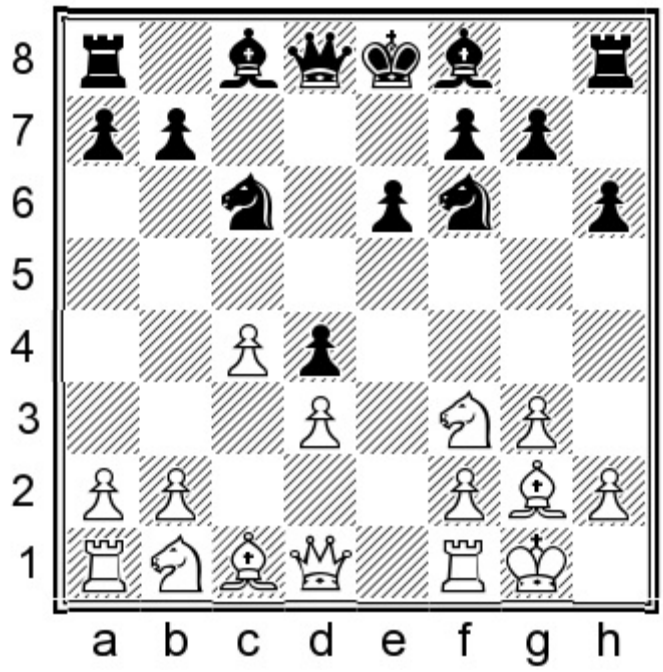
- get a strong center with ...e5, then put his f6-knight on c5, and either play ...f5, or put pressure on d3 with the help of ...♗f5;
- anticipate b2-b4, and try to play ...♖b8 followed by ...b5 in order to open the queenside. Whoever is able to reach his goals has good chances of getting an advantage.

8...♗e7

With this move, Black doesn't understand that he needs to take a grip on the e5-square, and find a more active square for his bishop. For 8...♗d6, see the next subchapter.

8...h6 Indeed, what happens if Black prevents ♗g5 (as in the classical line of the Benoni, when White plays with h3/e4/♗d3/♘f3)?

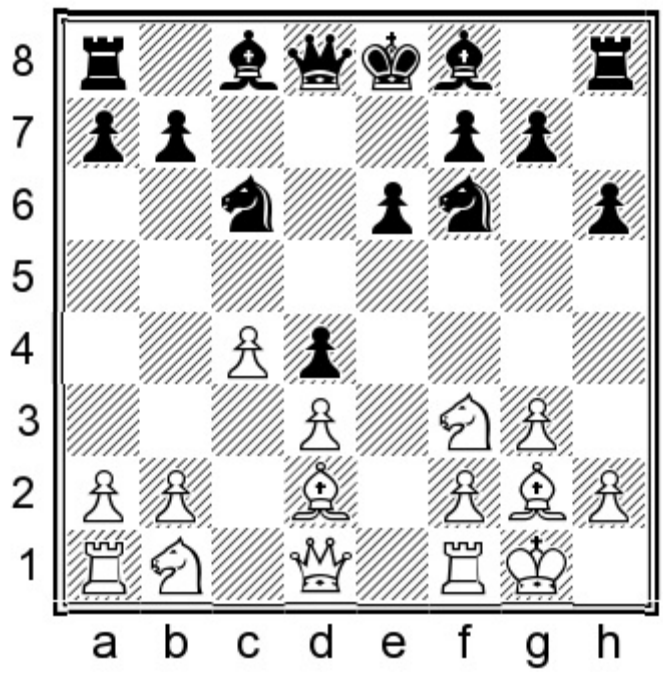
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Position after: 8...h6

A) 9.♗f4 is obviously more common, and interesting as well. For instance, the main game here continued 9...♗d6 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6 11.a3 (11.♘a3!? 0-0 12.♖c1 preparing the classical 'c5' expansion is interesting as well) 11...a5 12.♘bd2 0-0 13.♕c2 a4 14.c5 ♕c7 15.♖fe1↑ 1-0 (69) Fressinet, L (2709) – Parligras, M (2572) Yerevan 2014.

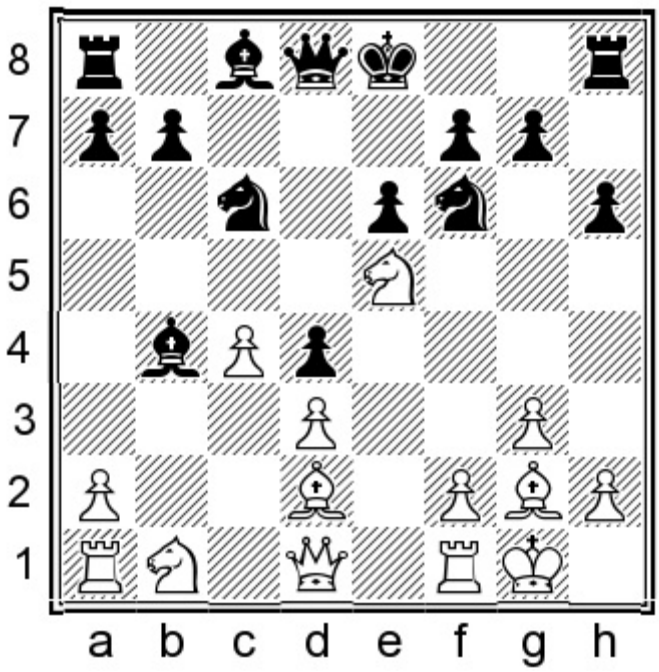
B) 9.♗d2!?N This smart novelty is not typical of the Benoni, but it contains some venom and it seems an interesting practical try.



Position after: 9.♗d2!?N

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B1) The main idea becomes obvious after 9...♗d6?! 10.b4! ♗xb4 (10...0-0 11.c5 ♗e7 12.♕a4 a6 13.♘a3±; 10...♘xb4?? 11.♗xb4 ♗xb4 12.♕a4++–) 11.♘e5!



Position after: 11.♘e5!

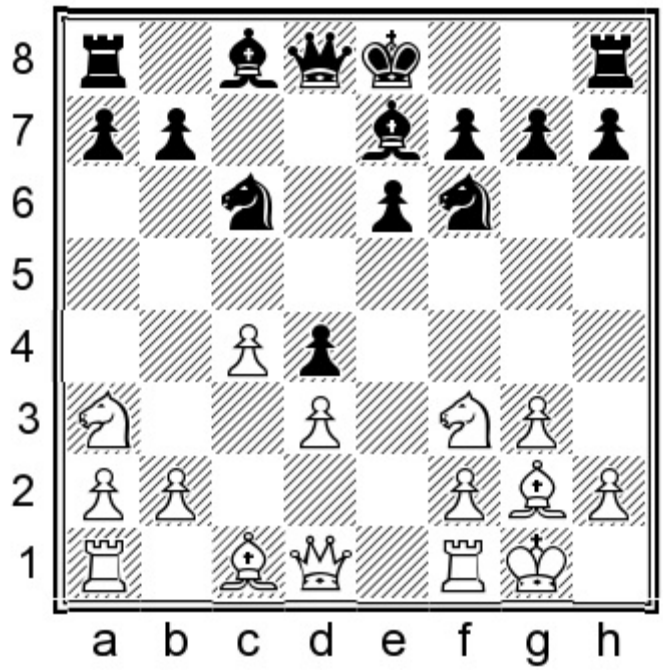
A surprising blow! 11...♘xe5 (11...♗xd2 12.♘xc6 ♕c7! 13.♘xd2 bxc6 14.♕a4 ♗d7 15.♕a3⩲ Black is in trouble) 12.♗xb4 ♘c6 13.♗xc6+ bxc6 14.♘d2± Black is far from castling, and we have huge compensation.

B2) 9...a6 10.b4 ♗xb4 11.♘e5 ♗xd2 12.♘xc6 ♕c7 13.♘xd2 bxc6 14.♕a4 ♗b7 15.♘b3 0-0 16.♘c5⩲

B3) 9...a5 You need to remind me of something... Why does Black prefer to wait for a3 before preventing b4 with ...a5? 10.♘a3 Oh yes, now I remember, because of the b5-square! 10...♗d6 11.♘b5 ♗b8 12.♘e1 0-0 13.f4! e5 14.fxe5 ♗xe5 15.♘f3 ♗b8 16.♕c2↑

9.♘a3!?

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Position after: 9.♘a3!?

9.♖e1 is also pretty interesting and might amount to the same.

9...0-0 10.♖e1

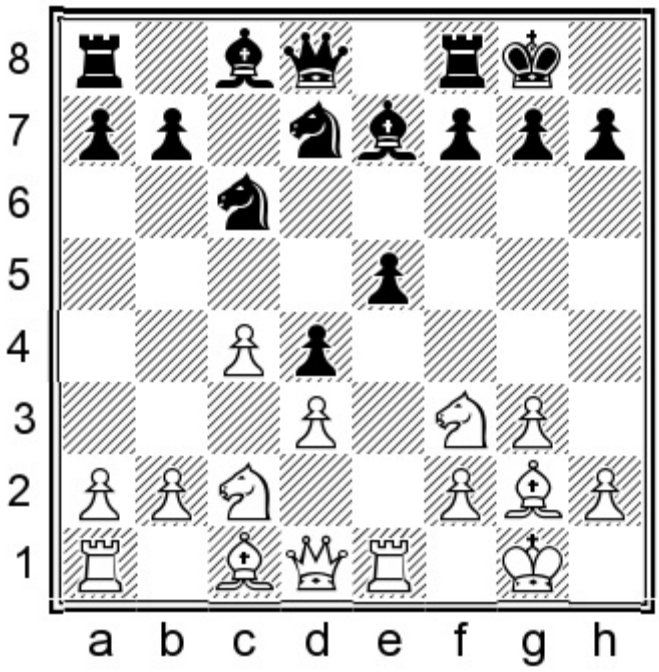
Preventing ...e5 seems important.

10...♖e8

A) 10...♗xa3?! This is so ugly strategically, but who knows, sometimes it can be strong. No, just kidding. Here it only opens the b-file (where a rook can have a great influence, and can even aim at the b5-outpost) and throws away the bishop pair (actually the more active bishop). 11.bxa3 ♖e8 12.♗f4 ♗d7 13.♖b1 b6 14.♕d2±

B) 10...♘d7 11.♘c2 e5

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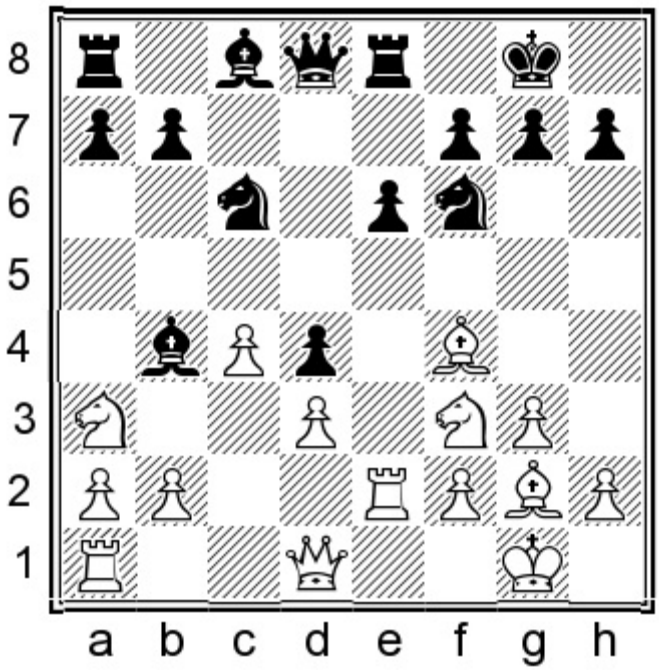


Position after: 11...e5

This is the situation when you understood that you need a pawn on e5, but it's too late... (I think a lesser evil was 11...a5 12.♘fxd4 ♘xd4 13.♘xd4 ♘c5 14.♗e3 e5 15.♘b5 ♘xd3 16.♖f1± White has the more active minor pieces and a pleasant position.) 12.b4! a6 occured in Michalik, P (2570) – Cyborowski, L (2530) Schwäbisch Hall 2015 where White won convincingly. (12...♘xb4 13.♘xe5! ♘xe5 14.♖xe5 ♘xc2 15.♕xc2± Black is soon going to experience major troubles on the long diagonal, and will most probably lose either the b7 or d4 pawn.) 13.b5!?N An improvement over the above-mentioned game! 13...axb5 14.cxb5 ♘b4 15.♗a3! ♘xc2 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♕xc2±

11.♗f4 ♗b4 12.♖e2

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Position after: 12.♖e2

The rook is slightly awkward here, but White has managed to prevent ...e5.

12...♘h5

12...♘d7 13.♘c2 ♗c5 14.a3 e5 15.♗d2± Black will have to stop the plan of expansion starting with b2-b4.

13.♗g5! ♗e7

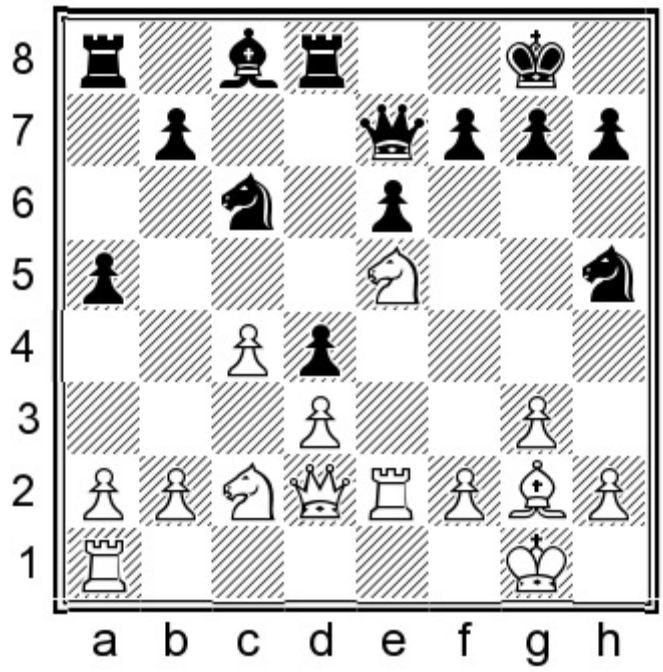
13...f6 14.♗d2 ♗xd2 15.♘xd2 e5 16.c5!±

14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.♕d2 ♖d8 16.♘c2 a5

This is necessary in order to avoid b4 but has the usual drawback: it weakens the b5-square and allows the strong manoeuvre...

17.♘e5!

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Position after: 17.♘e5!

The knight is untouchable!

17...♘b4

17...♘xe5? 18.♖xe5 ♘f6 19.♖xa5+–

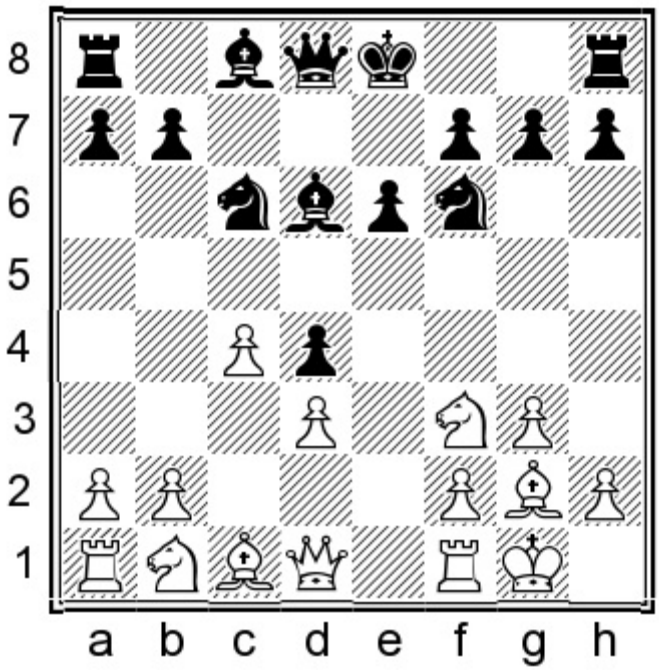
18.♘xb4 axb4 19.c5! ♕xc5 20.♕g5 ♘f6 21.♘xf7!±

1-0 Wang Hao (2737) – Xu Shijiazhuang (2331) China 2013.

c) 3...♘f6 4.♗g2 d4 5.0-0 c5 6.e3 ♘c6 7.exd4 cxd4 8.d3 ♗d6

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 e6 3.♗g2 d5 4.c4 d4 5.0-0 c5 6.e3 ♘c6 7.exd4 cxd4 8.d3 ♗d6

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Position after: 8...♗d6

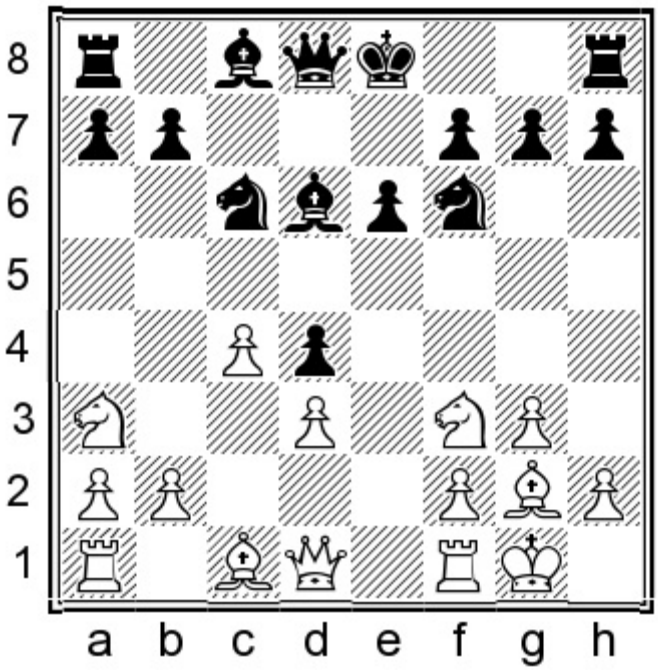
Nowadays this has become the main move, and I'm pretty sure it's the best try for Black.

9.♗g5!

It is not without reason that in one of the main lines, White plays h2-h3 against the Benoni, in order to avoid the equivalent ...♗g4 pin. Indeed, it is sometimes good to give up the bishop pair! Here it is motivated by the possibility of putting a knight on the central e4-square.

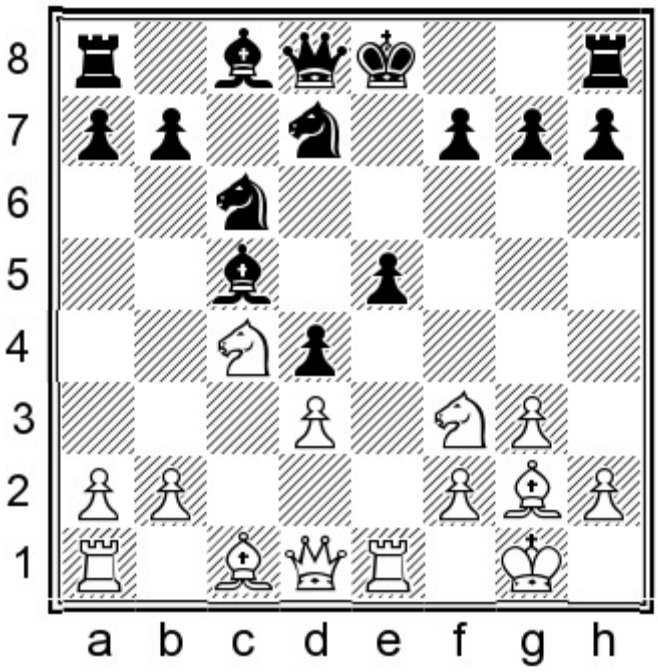
9.♘a3 has been tried recently in high-level games, and offers some good ideas too, but Black should be able to achieve equality.

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Position after: 9.♘a3

A) 9...e5 seems over-ambitious for Black, and Giri scored a nice win with 10.c5! ♗xc5 11.♘c4 ♘d7 (11...♗g4 12.♕b3 ♕e7 13.♖e1±) 12.♖e1



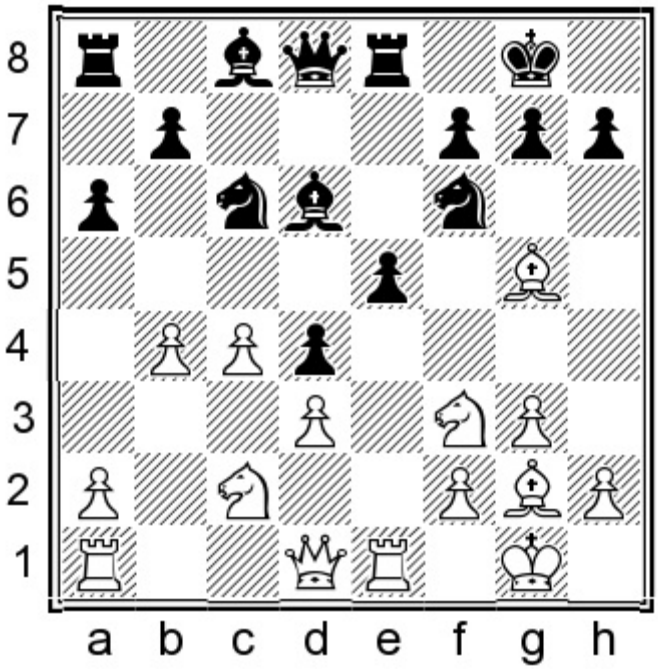
Position after: 12.♖e1

12...0-0 (12...f6?! 13.♘h4! is quite annoying: if Black responds carelessly with 13...0-0 14.♗d5+! ♔h8? 15.♘g6+! hxg6 16.♕g4+– decides the game quickly) 13.♘fxe5 ♘cxe5 14.♘xe5 ♘xe5 15.♖xe5 ♕b6 16.a4! a5 17.♕c2 ♗b4 18.♖b5 ♕e6 19.♗f4± With strong pressure that the Dutch prodigy

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converted into a win in Giri, A (2784) – So, W (2762) Wijk aan Zee 2015.

B) 9...0-0 10.♘c2 e5 11.b4 This is the point, but Black can keep a level game with 11...a6 12.♖e1 ♖e8. Now White can improve on the game Bulski, K (2547) – Banusz, T (2580) Germany 2013 with the new move 13.♗g5N (which had already been tried in a correspondence game).



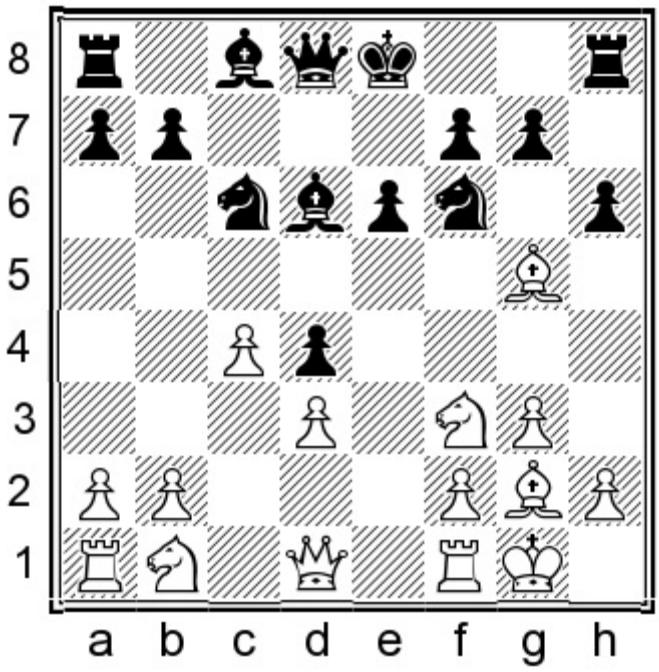
Position after: 13.♗g5N

But still 13...♗f5! enables Black to reach an interesting position. (13...h6? was a terrible blunder (unusual in a correspondence game, but it can still happen) 14.♗xf6 ♕xf6 15.c5 ♗c7 16.♘fxd4± 1-0 (48) Reinhart, K (2475) – Pierzak, R (2490) POL – USA 2015; 13...♗g4 14.c5 ♗c7 15.a4±) 14.c5 ♗f8! 15.♘h4 ♗d7= And I couldn't find any interesting ideas here to keep playing for an opening advantage. However the position remains full of resources, and can be played by both sides for a win.

9...h6

It's hardly any better to wait before playing this move.

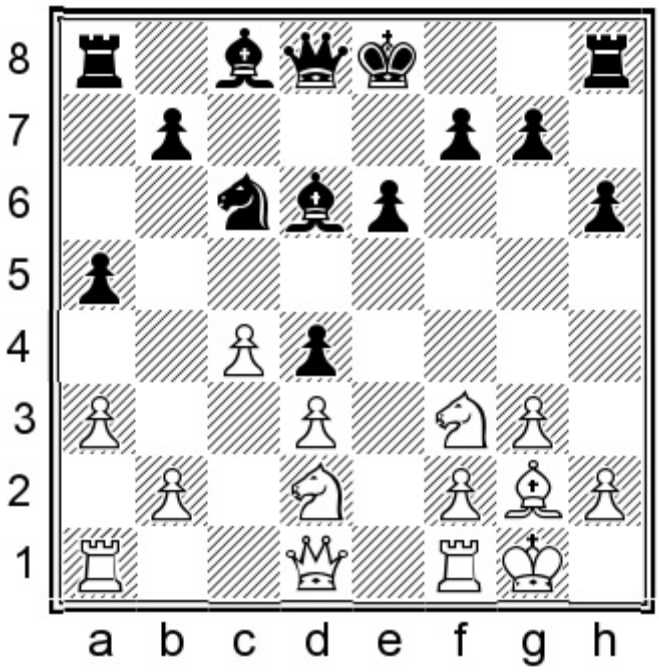
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Position after: 9...h6

10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.♘bd2 ♕e7

A) 11...♕d8 It's difficult to say where the queen is best placed. Both have pluses and minuses. 12.a3 a5



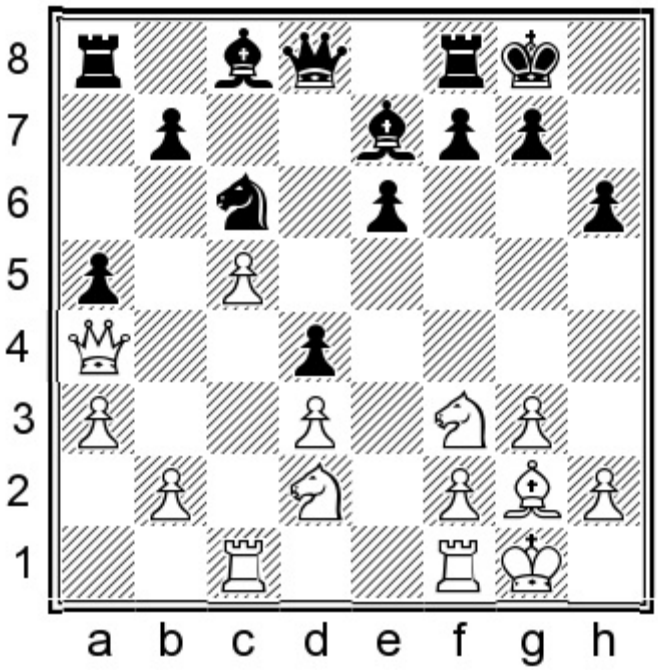
Position after: 12...a5

A1) The only time I encountered this opening, I had no real knowledge, except some ideas and plans against the regular Benoni. I decided to choose a plan I knew from the Pawn-Storm System (with f4)

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where the knight reaches c7 (here c2), to help White in pushing b4. It also frees the way for the bishop and sometimes allows some extravagance with f4. 13.♘e1 0-0 14.♘c2 e5 15.♖b1 a4 16.b4 axb3 17.♖xb3= And even if I eventually won this game, and think it's quite interesting, the position is objectively balanced: Demuth, A (2550) – Delabaca, R (2344) Drancy 2016.

A2) 13.♖c1! I like this idea of MVL (OK true, he's not the first player who employed this move, but it's thanks to him that I got interested in it). White uses his plan B, trying to push c5 and get some nice squares for his knights. 13...0-0 14.c5 ♗e7 By some magic trick, we have again the game Aronian – Ponomariov seen in the line 5.a3 of our present chapter. Really? All that for this? Actually you should remember we considered that this was not the best for Black. And another small difference: here it's even White to play! 15.♕a4!?N

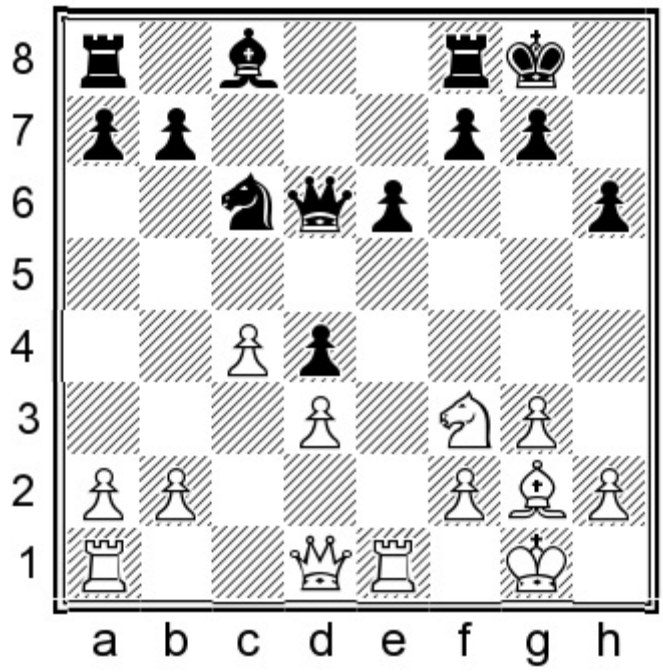


Position after: 15.♕a4!?N

A new idea, and perhaps the best move. It's actually really hard to find an active move for Black. (Maxime preferred 15.♖e1 ♗d7 16.♘e4 ♕c7 17.♘fd2↑ with an active position that he won convincingly Vachier Lagrave, M (2811) – Antic, D (2455) Novi Sad 2016) 15...♖b8 (15...♗d7?! 16.♘xd4 ♘xd4 17.♕xd4 ♗c6 18.♕c4±; 15...e5? doesn't parry the obvious threat 16.b4!±) 16.♘c4! ♗xc5 17.♘xa5 ♘xa5 18.♖xc5 ♗d7! (18...♘c6 19.♖fc1±) 19.♕d1 ♘c6 20.b4±

B) 11...0-0 With this careless move, Black gives back the bishop pair. Moreover it leaves Black with his less active pieces, which is most important here! 12.♘e4 ♕e7 13.♘xd6 ♕xd6 14.♖e1!

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Position after: 14.♖e1!

This sets a trap that we have already met on numerous occasions in this chapter. 14...e5?! 15.b4! ♗g4 16.c5 ♕f6 17.b5± Black was in huge trouble and soon collapsed in Mkrtchian, L (2449) – Tscharotschkin, M (2144) Gibraltar 2015.

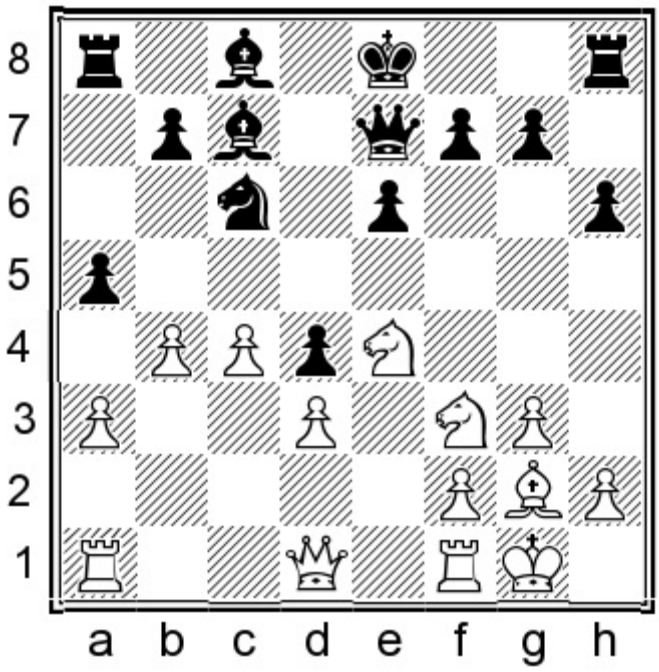
12.a3

12.♘b3 deserves some attention as well.

12...a5 13.♘e4 ♗c7 14.b4!

This usual strong blow has scored really well for White.

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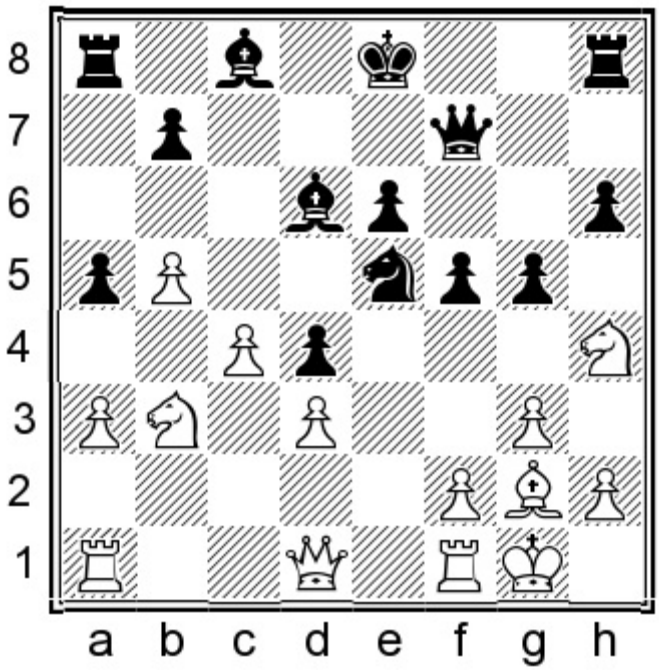
Position after: 14.b4!

Svidler preferred 14.♕a4 but after 14...♗d7 15.♕b5 a4 16.b4 Georgiadis could have improved his play in the game Svidler, P (2739) – Georgiadis, N (2490) Gibraltar 2015 by playing 16...axb3 17.♕xb7 ♖a7 18.♕xb3 0-0⩲ with strong compensation. Instead, he preferred to keep the material balance, and even if the game was really interesting, he was finally outplayed by the Russian top-GM.

14...axb4

14...f5 15.♘h4! A huge upset for Black. The only game with this position highlighted Black's difficulties. 15...♕f7 (15...fxe4 16.♘g6 ♕f6 17.♘xh8 g6 18.♘xg6! ♕xg6 19.♗xe4 ♕f7 20.♕a4+–; 15...0-0 must be the best continuation, but White keeps the upper hand 16.♘g6 ♕f7 17.♘xf8 fxe4 18.♘xe6 ♗xe6 19.♗xe4±) 16.b5! White enters a more or less forced line and after 16...♘e5 17.♘c5 ♗d6 18.♘b3 g5

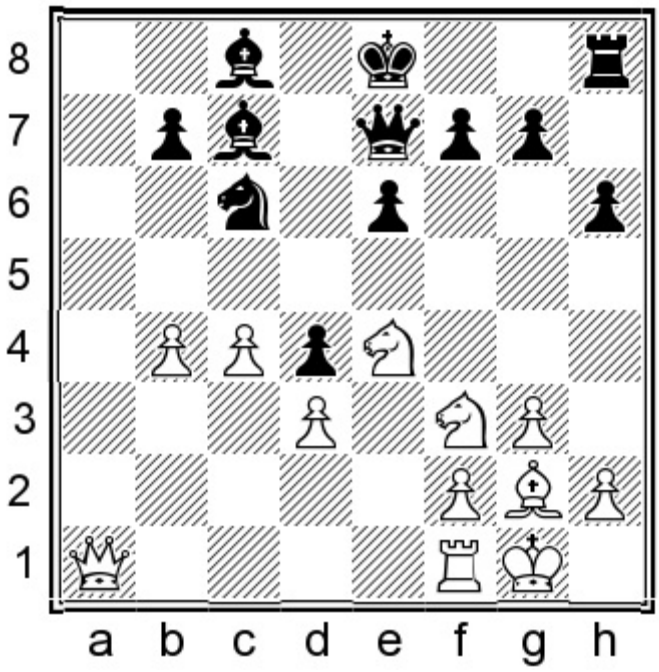
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Position after: 18...g5

19.♘f3 (19.c5!?) 19...♘xf3+ 20.♗xf3 g4 21.♗g2 a4 22.♘xd4 ♗e5 23.♘c6! ♗xa1 24.♕xa1 0-0 25.♘e5 ♕f6 26.d4+– had wonderful (and decisive) compensation for the exchange in Grunberg, M (2380) – Csatari, M (2125) Harkany 1997.

15.axb4 ♖xa1 16.♕xa1



Position after: 16.♕xa1

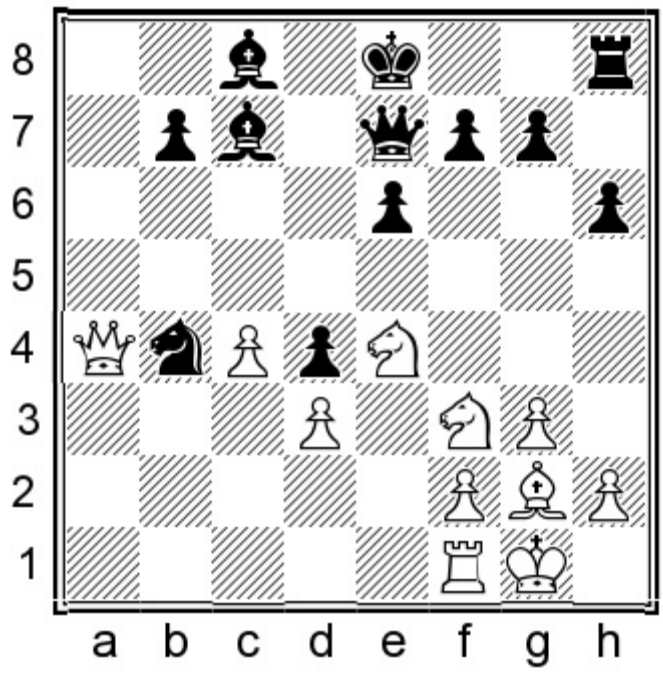
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The smoke is soon going to clear with the better position for White.

16...f5

A) 16...♕xb4 17.♖b1 ♕e7 18.♘xd4 ♘xd4 19.♕xd4± occurred in the game Gual Pascual, A (2416) – Raghunandan, K (2403) Barbera del Valles 2016, which White managed to win with fine technique.

B) 16...♘xb4?!N 17.♕a4+!



Position after: 17.♕a4+!

White needs to find (or remember, I hope, for you) this move to keep an edge. 17...♗d7 (17...♘c6 18.♘xd4 ♗d7 19.♘b5 ♗b8 20.♕a8 0-0 21.♕xb7±) 18.♕a8+ ♕d8 (18...♗d8 19.c5! 0-0 20.♕xb7 ♘c6 21.♘d6±) 19.♕xb7 ♘c6 20.♘c5 0-0 21.♖a1±

17.♘c5 ♘xb4!

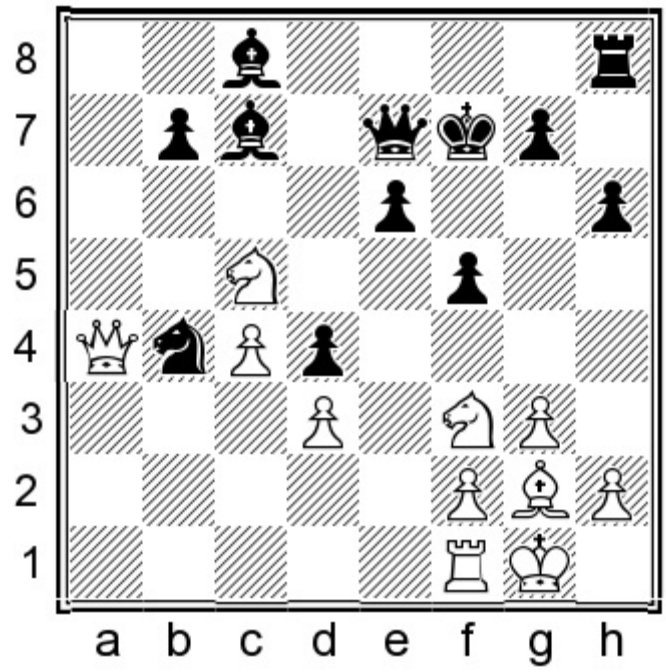
17...0-0 18.♖b1! ♘xb4 19.♖xb4 ♕xc5 20.♖b5 ♕d6 21.♕xd4±

18.♕a4+ ♔f7!

This is the best continuation for Black, as found by the strong young German grandmaster, Bluebaum.

Here you can choose to play the same way as his opponent, which leaves Black in a difficult practical position.

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Position after: 18...♔f7!

19.♕xb4 ♗d6

This is of course the point.

20.♕e1

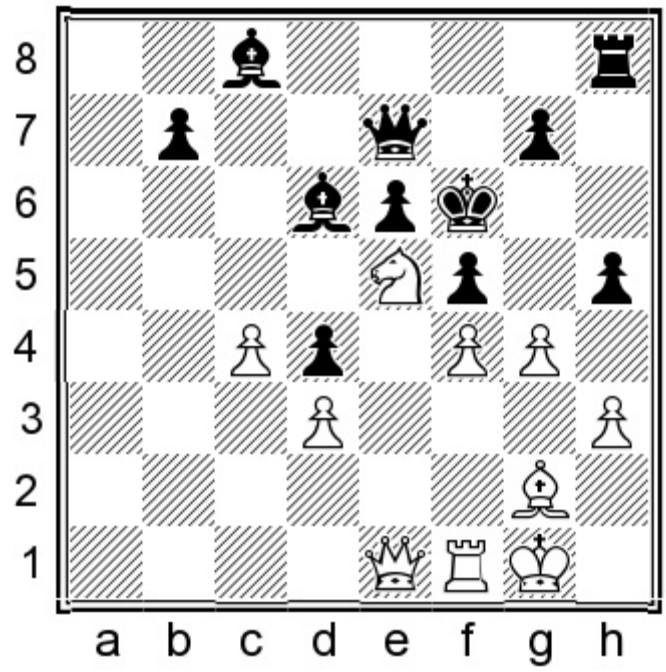
20.♘e5+ only leads to equality: 20...♗xe5 21.♕b5 ♗d6 22.♘xb7 ♗xb7 23.♗xb7 ♖b8 24.♖b1=

20...♗xc5 21.♘e5+ ♔f6 22.f4! h5

22...♗d6 23.h4 ♗xe5?! 24.♕xe5+ ♔f7 25.♖b1↑

23.h3 ♗d6 24.g4

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Position after: 24.g4

Even if the game was far from perfect, I will leave you with the moves of this fine win by White.

24.♘f3!± might be a nice improvement, taking the pawn back.

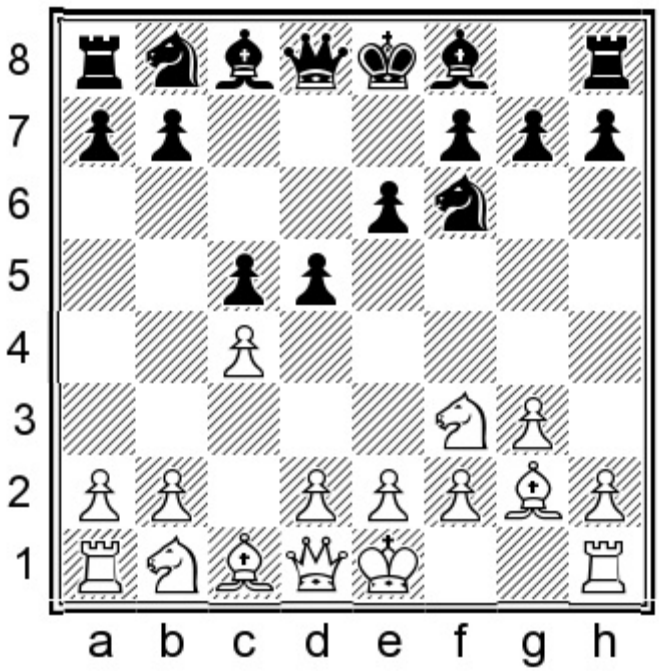
24...hxg4 25.hxg4 g6 26.c5 ♗c7 27.♕b4 ♗xe5 28.fxe5+ ♔g7 29.gxf5 ♕h4 30.f6+ ♔f7 31.♖f2 ♕h2+ 32.♔f1 ♕h5 33.♖e2 ♕f5+ 34.♔e1 ♕xd3 35.c6 ♕g3+ 36.♔d1 ♔g8 37.cxb7 ♗xb7 38.♕xb7 ♕d3+ 39.♖d2

1-0 Mesaros, F (2390) – Bluebaum, M (2589) Karpacz 2015.

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Chapter 4
Tarrasch Defense & Systems including ...c5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c5



Chapter guide

Chapter 4 – Tarrasch Defense & Systems including ...c5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c5 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.d4 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.dxc5

a) 5...♘xd5 alternative

b) Earlier alternatives & 9...d4?!

c) 9...♗xc5 10.a3 --

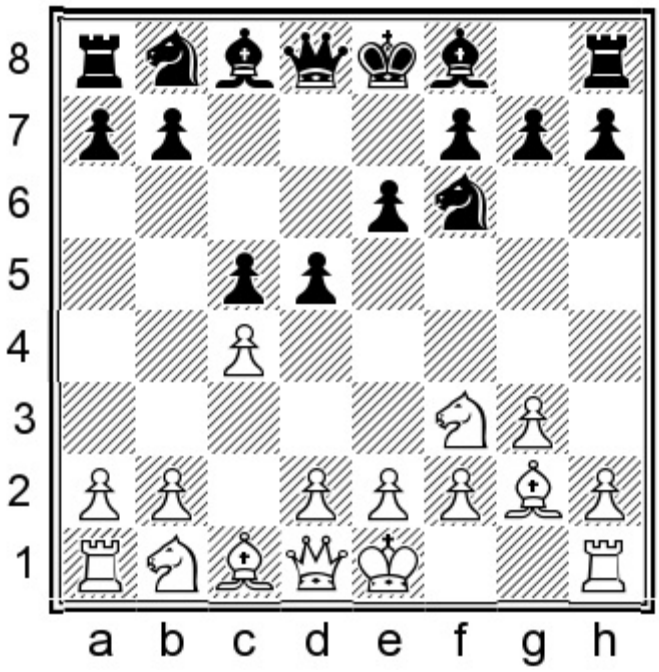
d) 9...♗xc5 10.a3 ♖e8

e) 9...♗xc5 10.a3 ♘e4

a) 5...♘xd5 alternative

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c5

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Position after: 4...c5

Before writing this book, I was not sure whether I should include a complete chapter on the Tarrasch Defense, since it is an important opening that has nothing to do with the Reti. But practice has shown me that it is quite common to meet it even if you vary with 1.d4, 1.c4 or 1.♘f3.

During his preparation, your opponent might come to think, “OK, he plays too many different lines, let’s find something where his move order has no impact”. Not that many openings achieve this goal, but the Tarrasch is one of them (like, in most cases, the Dutch Defense and the King’s Indian).

Also some players naively think, “If my opponent isn’t taking the center, then I must take it”, and later transpose into the Tarrasch Defense without knowing much about it.

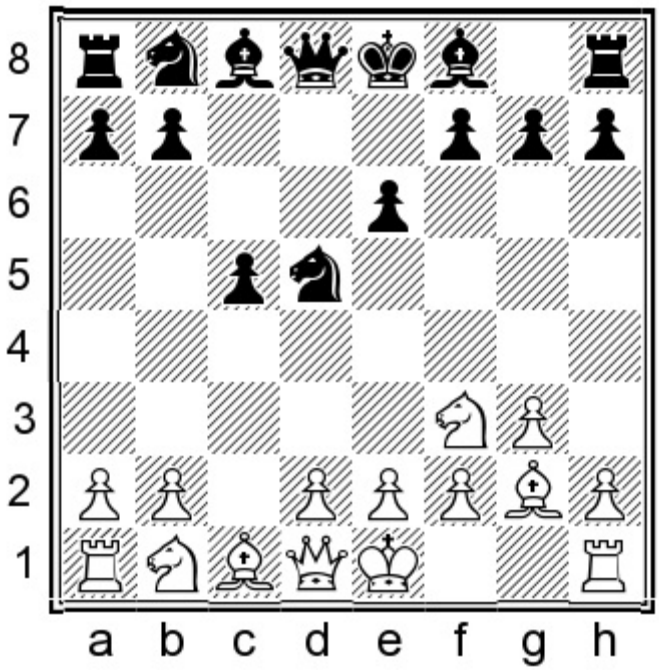
That’s why I decided to dedicate a full chapter to the Tarrasch, covering the sidelines for Black and presenting an interesting variation for White in the main line. The main aim in these lines is to reach a position where Black has an Isolated Queen’s Pawn (IQP, also called isolani) which we are able to take advantage of.

5.cxd5

As soon as Black plays ...c5, there is no reason to refrain from this move. First of all, what happens if Black avoids a (probable) isolani in the center?

5...♘xd5

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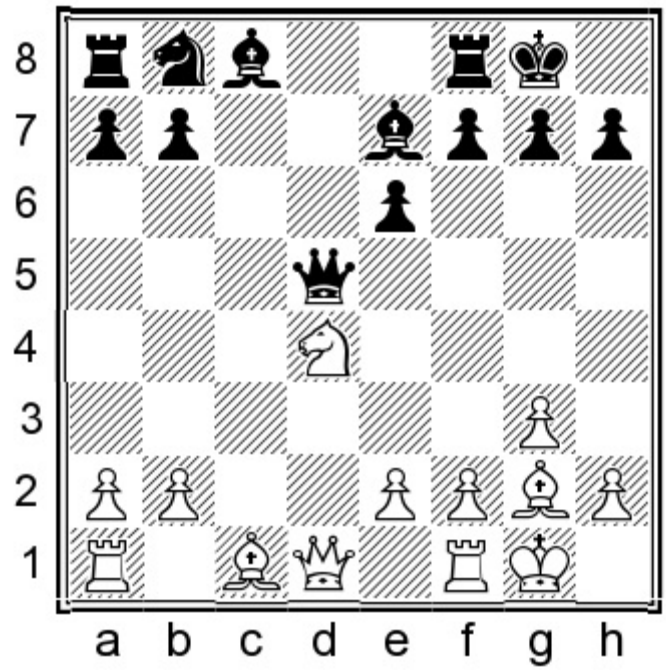
Position after: 5...♘xd5

This looks a lot like some lines of the Symmetrical English Opening, except that Black decided to play ...e6, which has the drawback of locking in the bishop on c8. In the move order 1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.g3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♗g2, you can't imagine 5...e6 being the main move. However, that is the position we have on the board. How can we deal with it?

6.0-0 ♘c6

The alternative 6...♗e7 doesn't make much difference, as it is likely to transpose: 7.♘c3 0-0 (7...♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♘c6 9.d4 transposes into the main continuation, with the inferior 8...♘xc3) 8.d4! cxd4?! (8...♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♘c6 again transposes) 9.♘xd5 ♕xd5 (9...exd5 10.♘xd4 ♘c6 11.♗e3± leads to a good version of the IQP for White) 10.♘xd4

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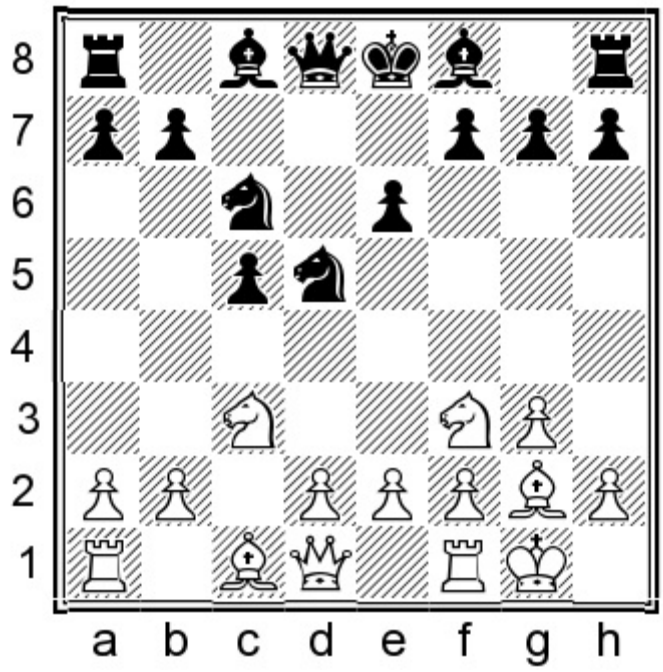


Position after: 10.♘xd4

The pawn structure is pretty symmetrical, but White has some pluses in his position: a clear lead in development (as the b8-knight and the c8-bishop will have some trouble finding a nice spot), a very strong g2-bishop, and the queen will easily find a safe place to let the rooks come into play. This is definitely like a Catalan opening that has gone really well for White. 10...♕d7 is the most-played queen retreat. Others are possible, but similar, and we won't be exhaustive about this line. 11.♗e3 ♖d8?! 12.♕b3! ♘a6 13.♖fd1 ♕e8 It's quite easy to compare both positions. 14.♘b5 ♗d7 15.♘d6 ♗xd6 16.♖xd6 ♗c6 was reached in Lengyel, L (2415) – Sapi, L (2420) Budapest 1977, and White can now improve his play with 17.♖xc6!N 17...bxc6 18.♕b7+– winning the poor a6-knight.

7.♘c3

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Position after: 7.♘c3

7.d4 is pretty good too, with slightly different ideas. I preferred the text move because it fits best with every move order.

7...♗e7

A) 7...♘f6 is acceptable for Black. Despite having lost two tempi with the knight, it prevents d4. I recommend a simple plan as in the following game: 8.d3 ♗e7 9.♗f4 0-0 10.♖c1 ♗d7 11.d4! b6?! 12.dxc5 ♗xc5 13.♘a4 ♗e7 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 15.♗xa8 ♕xa8 16.♗xe5± 1-0 (67) Macieja, B (2639) – Adamski, J (2287) Warsaw 2010.

B) 7...♘c7 8.d3 ♗e7 9.♗e3 0-0 10.♖c1 e5 11.♘d2±

8.d4!

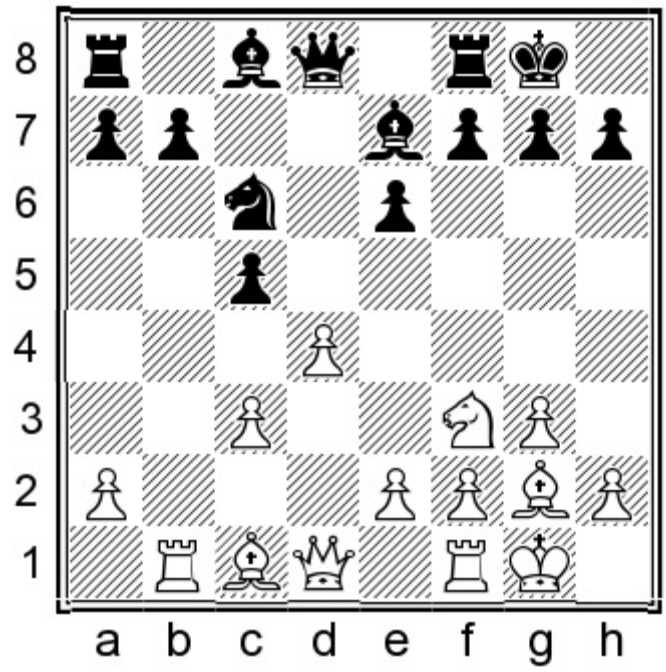
The IQP arising after 8.♘xd5 exd5 9.d4 0-0 10.dxc5 ♗xc5 is not so problematic for Black (the trade of knights actually helps him, as there is now less pressure on d5, and the missing f6-knight can't be pinned as it is missing)! 11.♗g5 ♕d7 12.♘e1 h6 13.♗f4 ♖d8 14.♘d3 ♗b6 15.♗d2 ♕e7= 1-0 (38) Boger, R (2475) – Sowden, E (2360) Bernard Partridge Memorial Final (corr.) 2000.

8...0-0

Keeping the tension is Black's best chance.

A) 8...♘xc3 9.bxc3 0-0 10.♖b1

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Position after: 10.♖b1

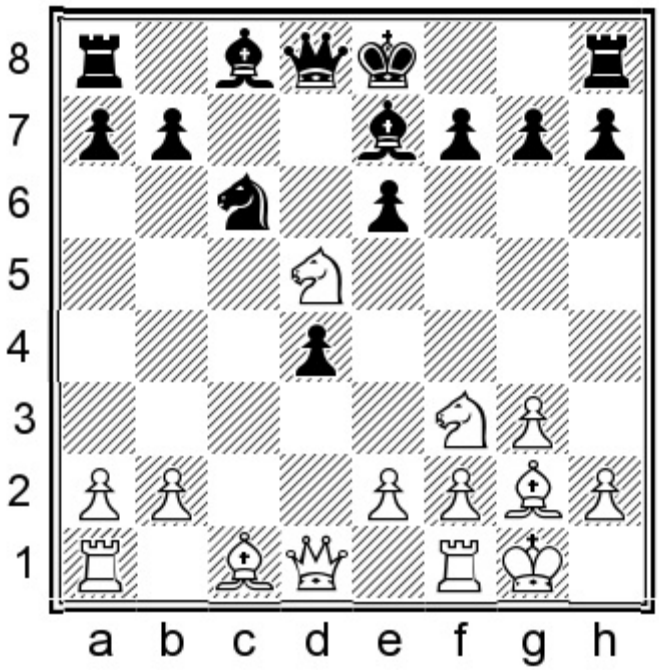
A1) 10...♕c7 11.♗f4 ♗d6 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.♕a4!± It's important to keep an eye on the c6-knight in order to avoid any ...b6-idea.

A2) 10...cxd4 11.cxd4 These kinds of positions, which look rather simple, are really tough to play for Black. It's no coincidence that Black couldn't find a way to handle the pressure in the following game: 11...♕a5 12.♕c2 ♖d8 13.♖d1 ♗d7 14.♖xb7± 1-0 (30) Van Wely, L (2689) – Bellahcene, B (2355) Haguenau 2013.

A3) 10...♕a5 11.♕c2 h6 12.♖d1 ♖d8 13.e4 cxd4 14.cxd4 ♕h5 15.h3 a5 16.♗f4 ♗d6 17.♗xd6 ♖xd6 18.g4 ♕g6 19.♕c5 ♖d8 20.d5+– 1-0 (38) Avrukh, B (2653) – Kinopoulos, A Kalamata 2005.

B) 8...cxd4?! is clearly inaccurate here: 9.♘xd5

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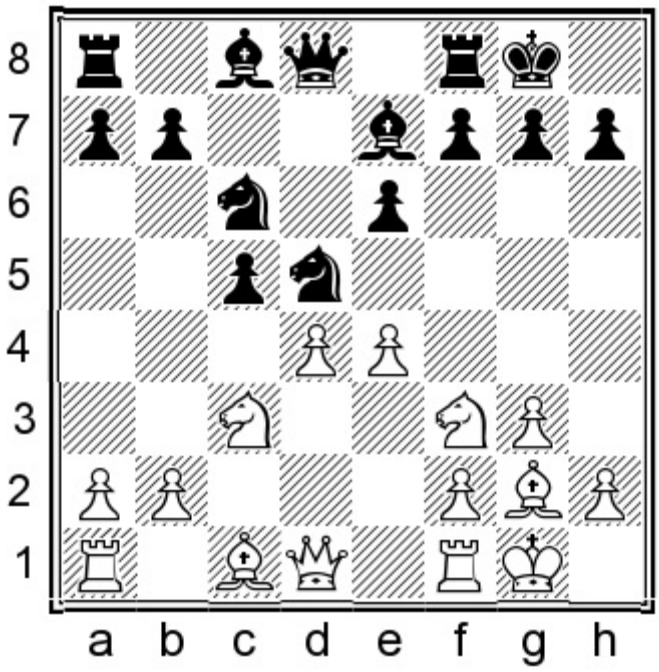


Position after: 9.♘xd5

B1) 9...exd5 10.♘xd4 0-0 11.♗e3± As said (in the 6...♗e7 line), this is good for White. I said two variations earlier that the trade of knights favours Black. Here, it's not the same, because the dark-squared bishop is less active on e7 than c5, and the knight on d4 is already a good blockader.

B2) 9...♕xd5?! 10.♘xd4! ♕c4 (of course not 10...♕xd4?? 11.♗xc6++–) 11.b3 ♕a6 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♕c2± With pretty easy play for White.

9.e4!



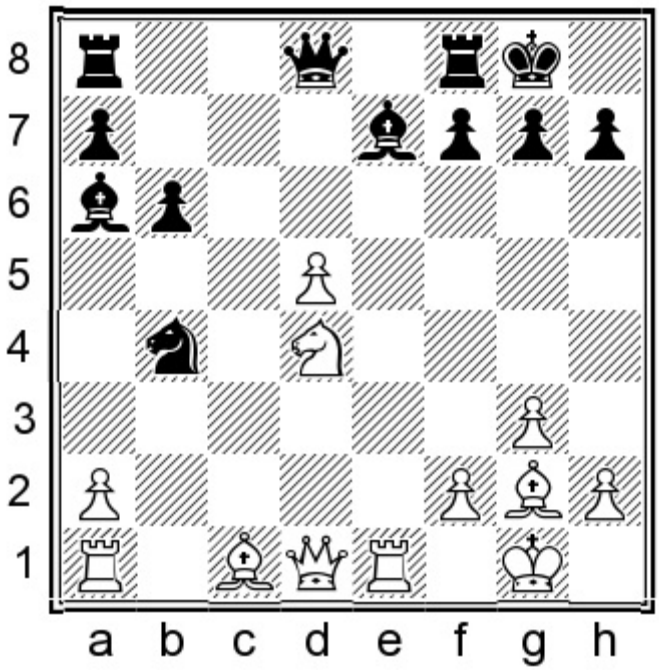
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Position after: 9.e4!

9...♘db4

This move recently enjoyed the favour of the living legend Vishy Anand, with two fine draws as Black. We can bet it will become more popular soon.

A) 9...♘xc3 10.bxc3 cxd4 11.cxd4 b6 (11...♗f6 12.♗b2 b6 13.♖b1! ♗b7 14.d5! exd5 15.exd5 ♘a5 16.♘e5 ♗xe5 17.♗xe5 ♖c8 18.♖c1± 1-0 (31) Christiansen, L (2515) – Portisch, L (2650) Linares 1981) 12.d5!? exd5 13.exd5 ♘b4 14.♘d4 ♗a6 15.♖e1



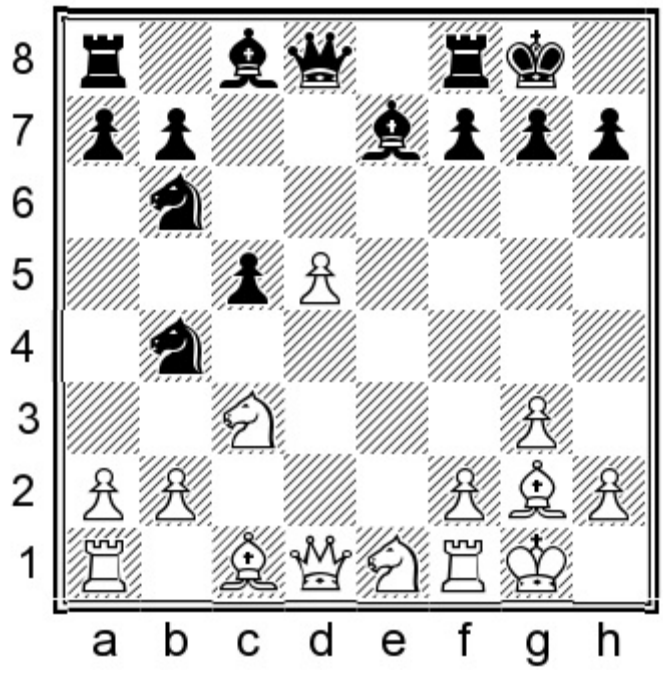
Position after: 15.♖e1

A1) 15...♗c5!?N 16.♘c6 ♕f6 17.♗e3 ♗xe3 18.fxe3 (18.♖xe3? ♘c2∓) 18...♘d3 19.♖f1↑

A2) 15...♗f6 16.♗a3 ♗xd4 17.♕xd4 ♘c2 18.♕a4 ♘xa3 19.♕xa3± 1-0 (31) Iturrizaga Bonelli, E (2653) – Hansen, E (2584) Dubai 2014.

B) 9...♘b6 10.d5 exd5 11.exd5 ♘b4 12.♘e1!

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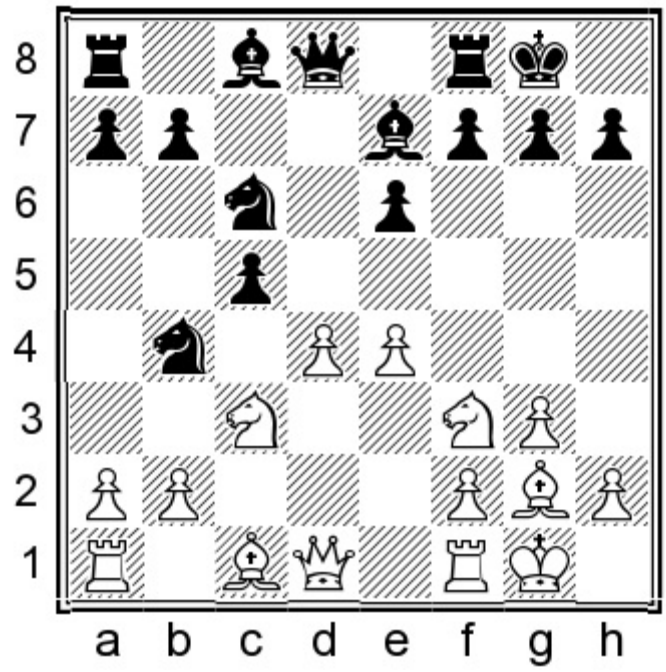
Position after: 12.♘e1!

Only this strong move allows White to play for an opening advantage.

B1) 12...♘c4 seems quite artificial to me, but the idea is rather simple, to put a blockading knight in front of the passed and isolated d-pawn. 13.a3 ♘a6 14.♘c2! ♘c7 15.♕e2 ♘d6 16.♗f4 ♖e8 17.♘e3± 1-0 (52) Papp, G (2584) – Priyadharshan, K (2484) Philadelphia 2016.

B2) 12...♗f6 13.a3!? has only rarely occurred, but I trust this move. 13...♗xc3 The move that worries White, but he has a way to get great compensation. (13...♘a6N 14.♘c2 ♘c7 15.d6 ♘e6 16.♘e4±) 14.axb4 ♗xb4 15.♘c2! The following line is only an example: 15...a5 16.♘xb4 cxb4 17.♕d4 ♘d7 18.♗f4 b6 19.♗d6 ♖e8 20.♗xb4± and White got an ideal position that he converted into a win in Ghaem Maghami, E (2603) – Adhiban, B (2486) Kolkata 2009.

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Position after: 9...♘db4

10.dxc5

The move preferred by both Aronian and Giri, but neither of them could manage to beat Anand.

10.d5!? exd5 11.exd5 ♘d4 12.♘xd4 (12.a3 ♘xd5 13.♘xd4 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 cxd4 15.cxd4 ♗d6=) 12...cxd4 13.a3 dxc3 14.axb4 ♗xb4 15.♕d4 ♗d6 16.bxc3 b6± With a holdable position for Black.

10...♗xc5 11.a3!?

This would be my preference if I had to play this position.

It's far from being a novelty, Tal and Vaganian already played this position as White back in 1979!

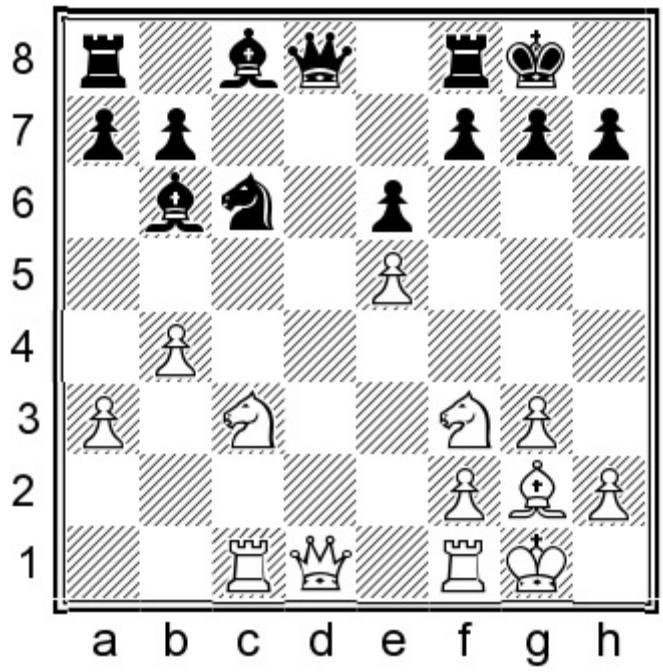
11.e5 ♗b6 happened in both of Anand's games.

11...♘d3

11...♕xd1 12.♖xd1 ♘c2 13.♖b1 e5 14.b4 ♗b6 15.♘d5 ♗g4 16.h3±

12.b4 ♘xc1 13.♖xc1 ♗b6 14.e5±

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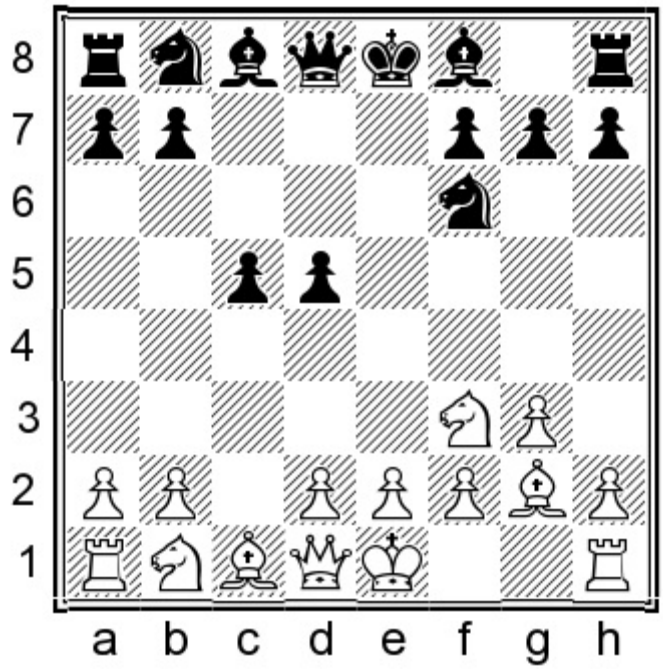


Position after: 14.e5±

We have given up the bishop pair, but managed to put the pawn on e5, preventing the c8-bishop from developing to a nice square, and creating a great outpost on d6 for our knight.

b) Earlier alternatives & 9...d4?!

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c5 5.cxd5 exd5

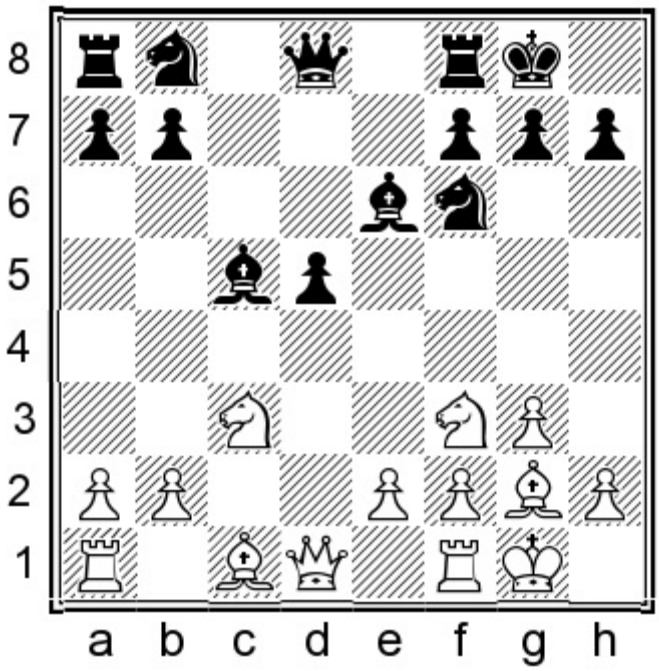


Position after: 5...exd5

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6.d4 ♘c6

Is it worth a try playing without ...♘c6? Yes, but it's hard to give this as real advice and it doesn't change the situation much for us. 6...♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.♘c3 ♗e6 9.dxc5 ♗xc5



Position after: 9...♗xc5

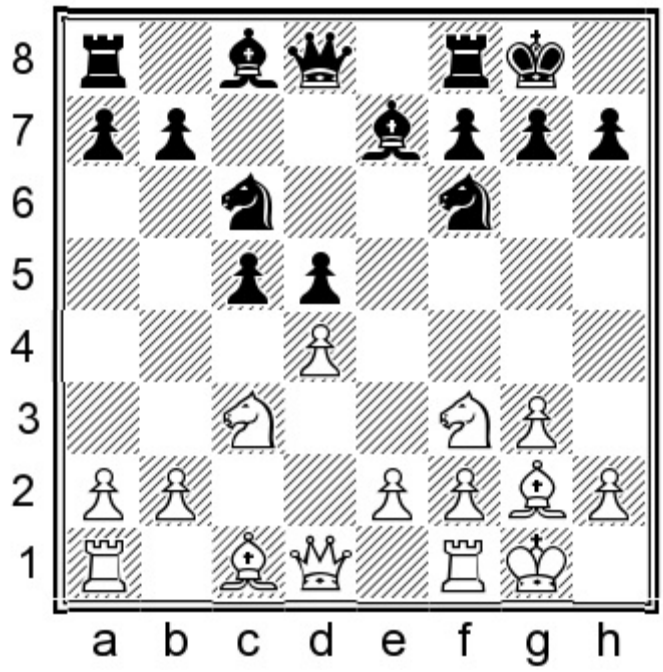
10.a3!N We can actually play the same plan, and Black more or less has to play 10...♘c6 which transposes to the 10...♗e6 variation of our main line.

7.0-0 ♗e7

The move everyone is playing, and definitely the one making the most sense.

8.♘c3 0-0

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Position after: 8...0-0

So the question is: what to do in this main line?

A few years ago, Jacob Aagard and Nikolaos Ntirlis did a great job and wrote a very good book on the Tarrasch Defense. Almost every line starting from this position was covered in their work. I will try to suggest some improvements.

I actually played the Tarrasch on numerous occasions, thanks to their excellent work, but most annoying for me was to play an IQP in the first place. Firstly, because it's generally hard to achieve more than a draw as Black; secondly, because it's possible to endure a long agony without much play until a cruel defeat brings an end to the suffering...

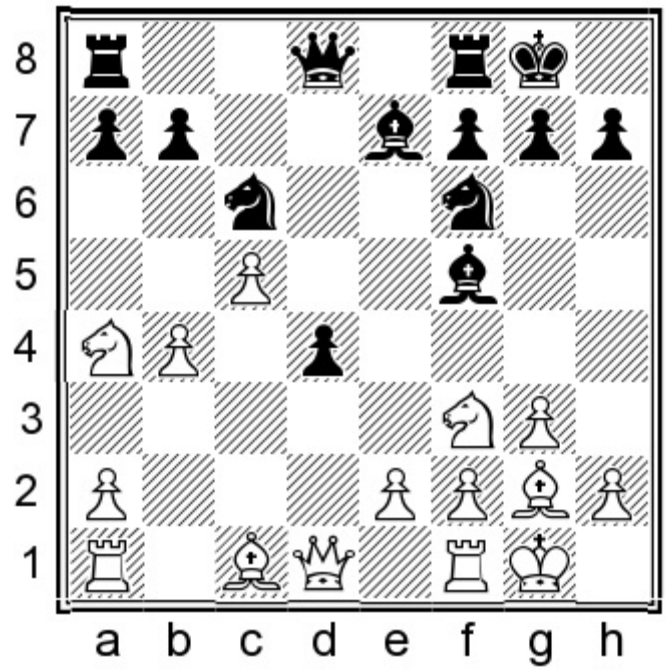
9.dxc5 d4?!

This move needs to be taken seriously, even if the antidote had already been revealed some time ago.

9...♗xc5 became the main line later on.

10.♘a4 ♗f5 11.b4!?

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Position after: 11.b4!?

Among many possible moves, I would like to propose this one, quite forcing, interesting, and less played than the other ones.

11...d3!

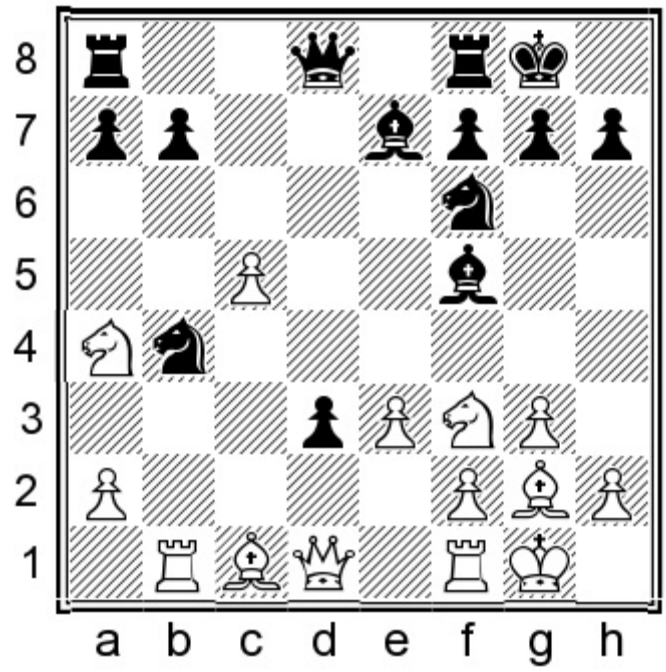
Trying to disrupt White's harmony.

11...♘xb4?! 12.♘xd4 ♗e4 13.f3 ♗c6 14.♘xc6 ♘xc6 15.♗e3± is just a safe pawn up for White.

12.e3! ♘xb4 13.♖b1!?N

No-one has ever tried this simple move, but it is actually quite good.

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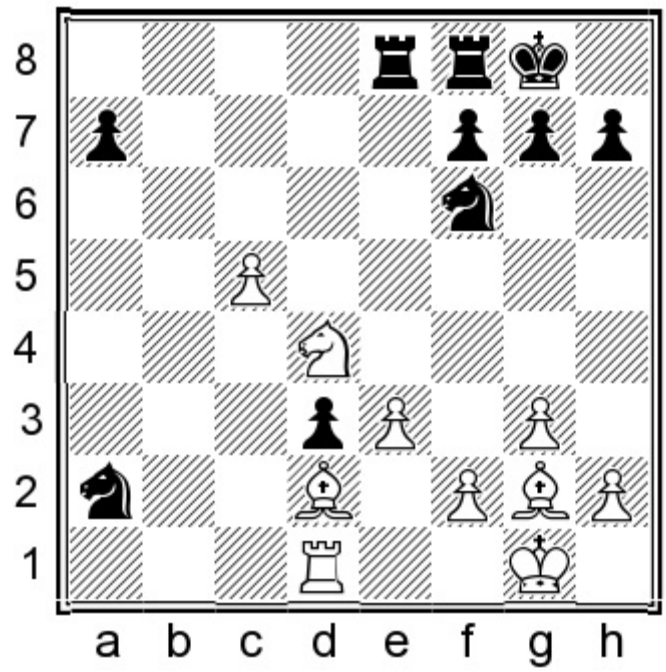


Position after: 13.♖b1!?N

13...♘xa2

13...♘c2 14.♖xb7 ♗e4 15.♖b3! ♖c8 16.♗b2±

14.♘d4 ♗d7 15.♗d2 ♕e8 16.♖xb7 ♗xa4 17.♖xe7 ♗xd1 18.♖xe8 ♖axe8 19.♖xd1±



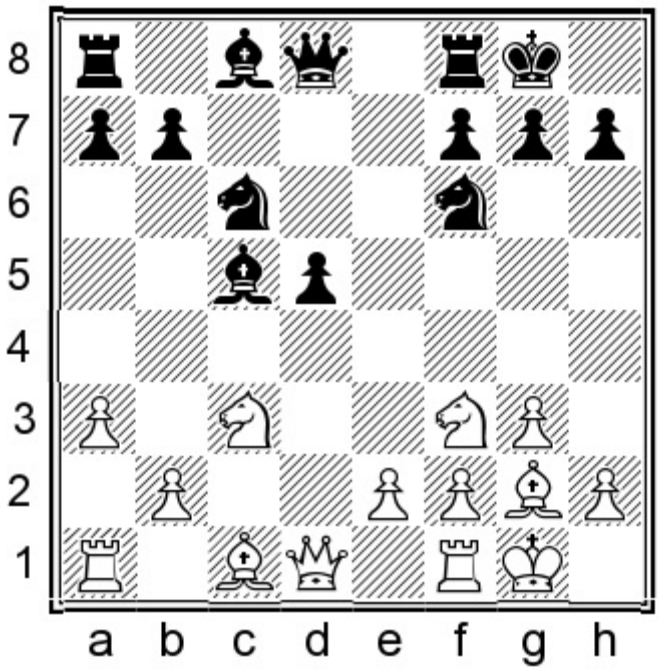
Position after: 19.♖xd1±

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With an overwhelming advantage for White.

c) 9...♗xc5 10.a3 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d4 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.a3!



Position after: 10.a3!

This timid-looking move is actually not lacking in venom. The idea is simple: to play a double fianchetto position (with the formation a3/b4 instead of b3, which sometimes allows b5, chasing the knight) in order to get an active position, thanks to the two strong bishops.

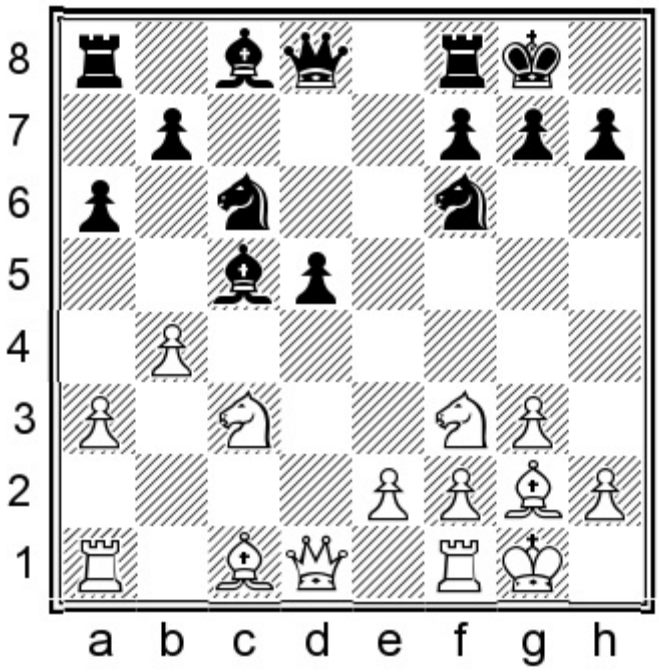
The answer given by Aagard and Ntirlis did not satisfy me fully for Black, and it's exactly the type of position from the Reti opening (some slow play against an IQP is often the main goal in the Modern Reti) we like. Now Black has many moves.

10...♗e6

A solid-looking move.

A) 10...a6 gives a safe spot to the bishop (on b6 it can easily be attacked with ♘a4), and prevents b4-b5, chasing the knight, but Black had to spend a tempo! 11.b4

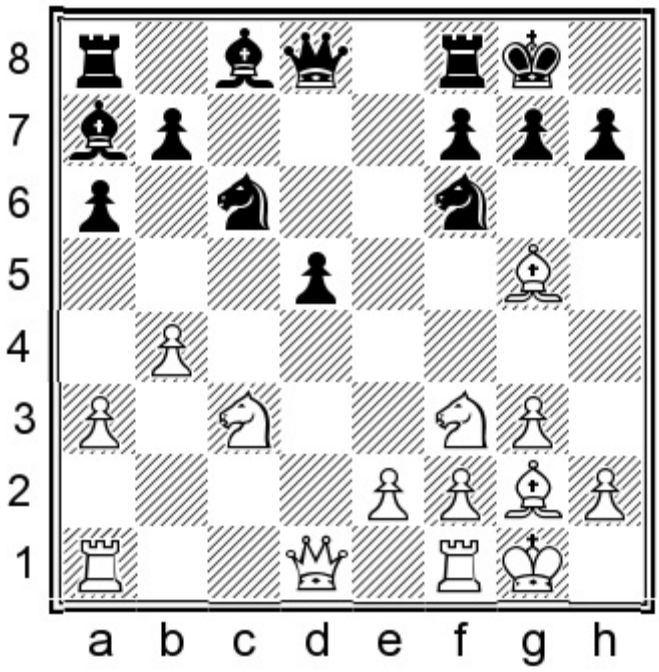
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Position after: 11.b4

A1) 11...♗e7 has to be played, but after 12.♗b2 ♗e6 13.♖c1 ♖c8 14.e3! White will play the classical manoeuvres ♘e2-♘fd4-♘f4 and get amazing knights thanks to his control over the dark squares. 14...♘e4 15.♘e2! ♗f6 16.♘fd4± And long suffering is a fact for Black.

A2) 11...♗a7?! Objectively bad, but it was basically the idea of ...a6 12.♗g5!



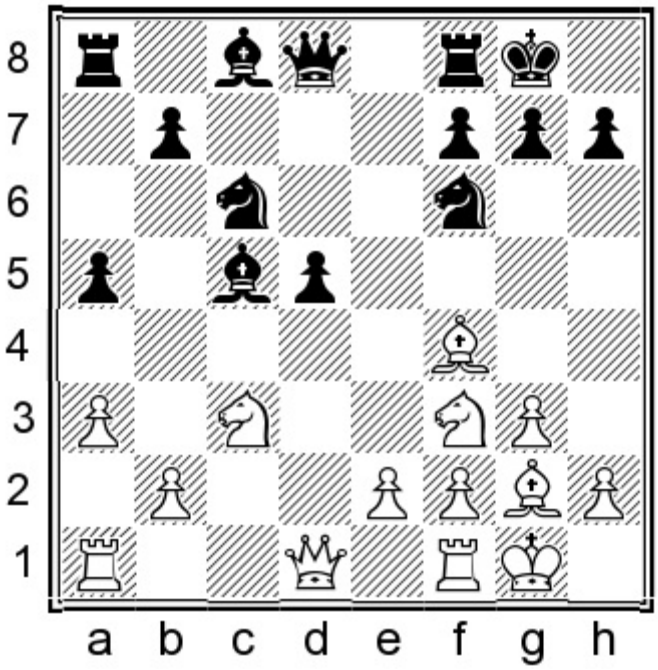
Position after: 12.♗g5!

This was the main move on move 10. Since then, White has played a3/b4, and Black ...a6/...♗a7.

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That means that Black is not able to go back to e7 with his bishop any more to unpin the knight. Thus Black is in trouble! 12...♗e6 (12...d4 13.♘e4 ♗f5 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♘h4 ♗g6 16.♖c1± Sometimes having the bishop pair can't help you. This is the case here for Black.) 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6 (13...gxf6 14.♕d2 ♔g7 15.♖fd1 d4 16.♘e4 ♖e8 17.♕f4 Black was not able to avoid a quick defeat in Gonda, L (2540) – Lauber, A (2441) Germany 2015) 14.♘xd5± Of course, it's just a pawn, and Black has no way to get enough compensation.

B) 10...a5?! We just included a3 and ...a5. But who stands to gain more? Most probably White (Black weakened the b5-square, always critical when faced with an IQP type of position) 11.♗f4!?

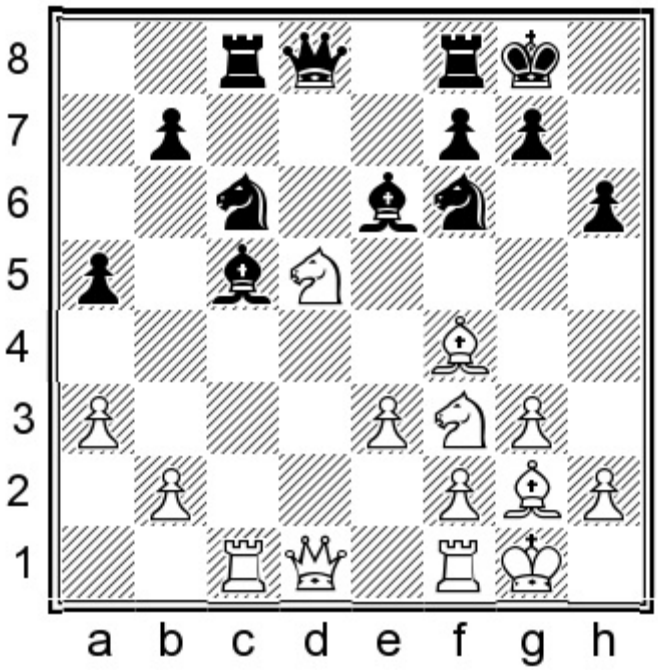


Position after: 11.♗f4!?

(11.♗g5!? is interesting as well, but does not necessarily transpose into a better version of the usual main line – 10.♗g5 – 11...d4 12.♘e4 ♗e7 and some games have shown that it's not such a big deal for White).

B1) 11...♗e6 12.♖c1 ♖c8 13.e3 setting an obvious trap, but in the only game I found here, Black was caught! (13.♘xd5?! does not work well now 13...♗xf2+ 14.♖xf2 ♘xd5=) 13...h6 was seen in Levin, E (2512) – Vunder, A (2248) St Petersburg 2012 (13...♗a7 was a lesser evil 14.♘b5 ♗b8 15.♗xb8 Trading the dark-squared bishop is usually in favour of White in a IQP. White has definitely achieved something here: 15...♖xb8 16.♘fd4!±) and now I don't understand why White refrained from 14.♘xd5!N

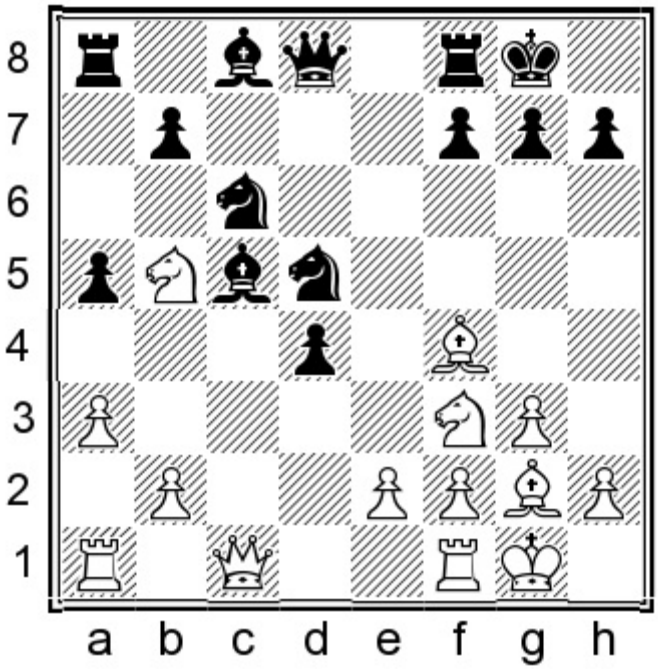
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Position after: 14.♘xd5!N

14...♘xd5 15.♖xc5 g5 Maybe he missed something here? 16.♗e5! ♘xe5 (16...g4 17.♘h4 ♘xe5 18.♖xc8 ♕xc8 19.♗xd5 ♖d8 20.♗xe6 fxe6 21.♕a4±) 17.♖xc8 ♘xf3+ 18.♗xf3 ♕xc8 19.♗xd5±

B2) 11...d4 12.♘b5 Perfect timing, exactly where White was wanting to go. 12...♘d5! 13.♕c1!



Position after: 13.♕c1!

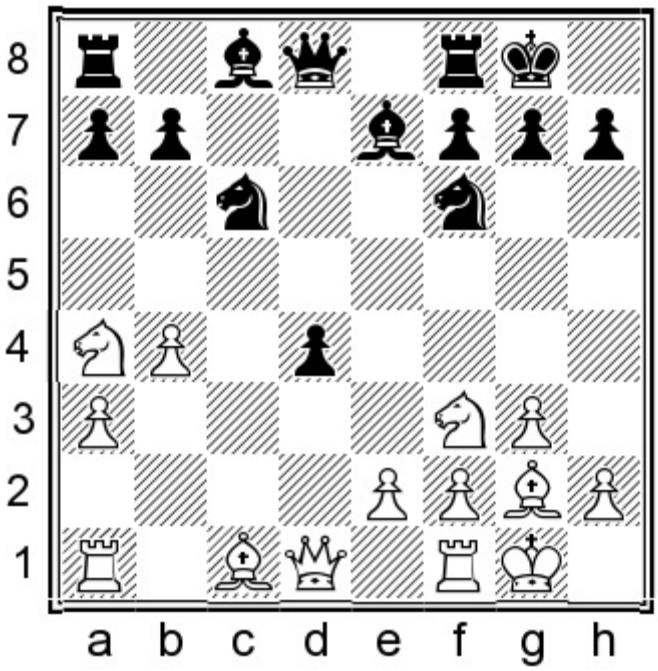
B2.1) 13...♘xf4 14.♕xf4 White decides to part with his bishop pair. To compensate, the queen is doing a great job on f4. 14...♖e8 (14...♕b6?! 15.♘c7 ♖b8 16.♖ac1!± Having the bishop on c5 as a

target is really annoying for Black) 15.♖ac1 ♗b6 16.♖fe1!±

B2.2) 13...♕b6 14.♘c7! ♘xc7 15.♗xc7 ♕b5 (15...♕xc7 16.♕xc5 leaves the d4-pawn poorly protected: 16...♖d8 17.♖fd1 ♕d6 18.♕xd6 ♖xd6 19.♖ac1± intending ♘d2 with a difficult endgame coming for Black) 16.a4 ♕b4 17.♘e1 ♗a7 18.♘d3 ♕e7 19.♗xc6 ♕xc7 20.♗f3±

C) 10...h6?! must definitely be wrong somehow. It prevents ♗g5 (which pins the f6-knight), and ♘g5 (threatening the future e6-bishop), but White's idea is just to proceed with 11.b4 ♗b6 12.♗b2 ♗e6 13.♘a4 ♘e4 14.♕d3!?± with an indisputable advantage.

D) When I used this system at the World Blitz Championships in Berlin (2015), my Greek opponent tried this move. It actually makes White's life even easier! 10...d4?! 11.♘a4 ♗e7 12.b4!



Position after: 12.b4!

Black needs to find a way to protect d4, and it's not easy. 12...♗g4 (12...♕d6 13.♗b2 ♖d8 14.♖c1±) 13.♗b2

D1) 13...♕d7 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.♗xd4 ♖ad8 16.♗b2 ♕e6 (16...♕xd1 17.♖fxd1 ♗xe2 18.♖e1 ♖d2 19.♗xb7±) 17.♕c1± It's not clear whether Black is able to take the pawn back or not. Most probably not!

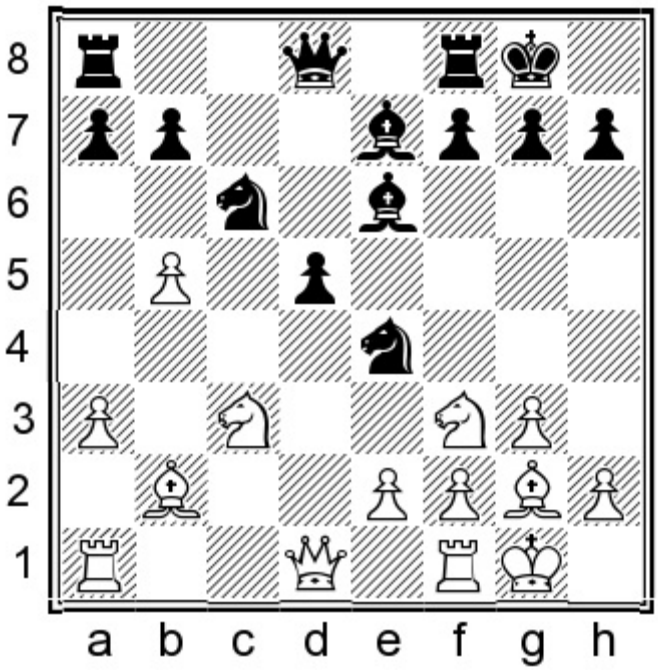
D2) 13...d3 14.♕xd3 ♕xd3 15.exd3 The d3-pawn is not really weak, and it's definitely a healthy pawn up for White. 15...♖fd8 16.♖fe1 ♗f8 17.d4 ♘d5 18.♘e5+– And my opponent only got his salvation thanks to an incredible mistake in the endgame: ½-½ Demuth, A (2545) – Halkias, S (2534) Blitz, Berlin 2015.

11.b4! ♗e7 12.♗b2 ♖c8

It is time to find a decent square for the queen, in order to create space for the rooks. What is the best

square?

A) 12...♘e4 13.b5!



Position after: 13.b5!

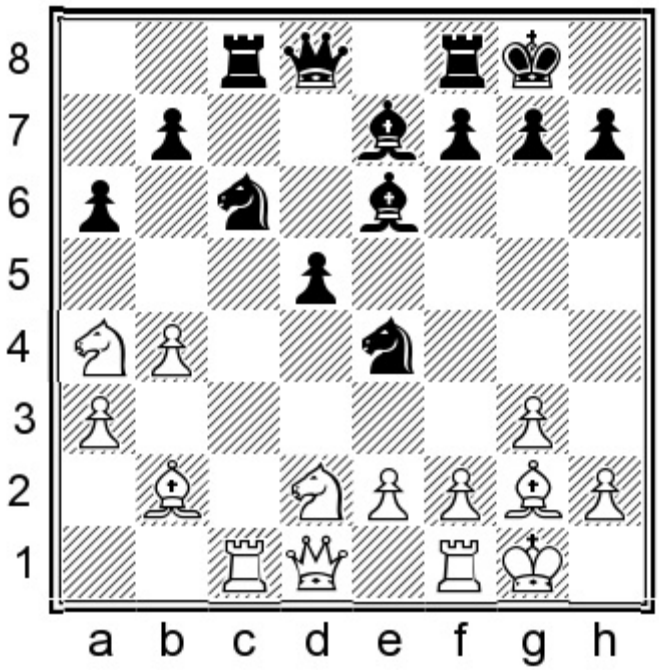
This is a complicated position, where Black has a choice of taking on c3 or not.

A1) The choice of Tarrasch himself was 13...♘a5, but Rubinstein played a really nice game and won against the creator of this opening: 14.♘xe4! dxe4 15.♘d4! ♕d5 16.♕c2 the e4-pawn is about to fall and if Black wants to keep it with 16...f5? then 17.♕c3! ♘c4 18.♘xf5!+– and White was already winning in Rubinstein, A – Tarrasch, S Teplitz-Schönau 1922.

A2) 13...♘xc3N 14.♗xc3 ♘a5 Black will get the c4-square for the knight, something we usually want to avoid when we play a3/b4, but which does not have great significance here. 15.♘d4! ♖c8 16.♕d3!± White will follow with ♖fd1 and try to play e4 and ♘xe6 in order to leave Black with a really poor structure.

B) A correspondence game showed us 12...a6 13.♖c1 ♘e4 14.♘a4 ♖c8 15.♘d2! A key move.

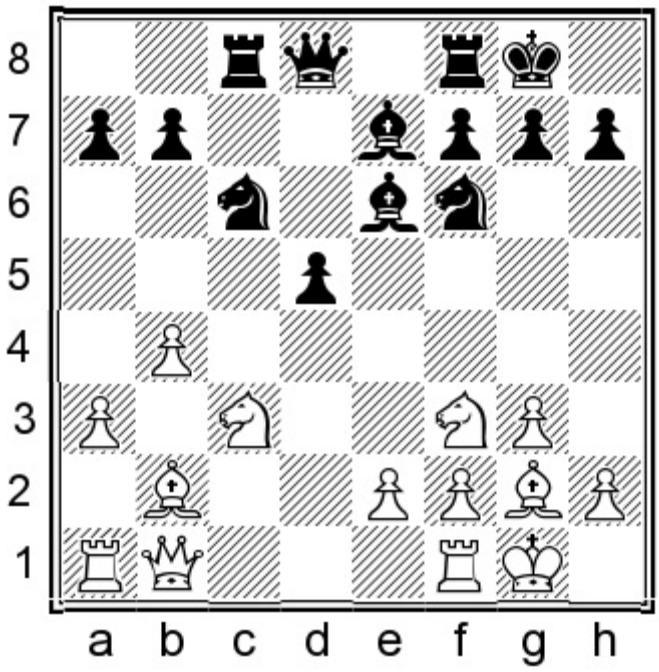
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Position after: 15.♘d2!

It is important to trade or chase this annoying knight which is the pride of Black's position. 15...♘d6 16.♘c5 The first point: we gain the c5-square. 16...♗f6 17.♕b3 ♖e8 18.♘xe6 fxe6 19.e4!± A typical way to proceed. Whatever happens, Black ends up with a horrible structure: Fister, B (2370) – Brindza, I (2320) corr. 2011, 1-0 (42).

13.♕b1!!N



Position after: 13.♕b1!!N

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I don’t often give two exclamation marks to a move. Here, it might be slightly exaggerated. Firstly, because White doesn’t necessarily need to find this move to have the better game. Secondly, it’s not a novelty, but it has only been played a couple of times in unimportant (no offence to the players) games.

Why are the other squares weaker? On c2 and b3 it’s obvious that the queen can easily become a target. On a4, the queen’s influence is almost non-existent. On d2 or d3, it prevents the future ♖d1 to pin the d-pawn (and try to win it). Instead, on b1, it keeps an eye on e4, preventing the knight from arriving there. It can reach a2 in case of ...♗f5. And of course, it does not interfere with ♖d1 (which will certainly be our next move).

The natural move 13.♖c1 also provides White with an edge, but it leaves Black with some options in the center, as happened in this recent encounter: 13...♕d7 14.♕a4?! d4 15.♘b1 d3? (15...a6! 16.♖fd1 ♖fd8=) 16.exd3 ♕xd3 17.♖fd1 ♕b3 18.♕xb3 ♗xb3 19.♖e1± 1-0 (48) Goganov, A (2563) – Balashov, Y (2434) Taganrog 2018.

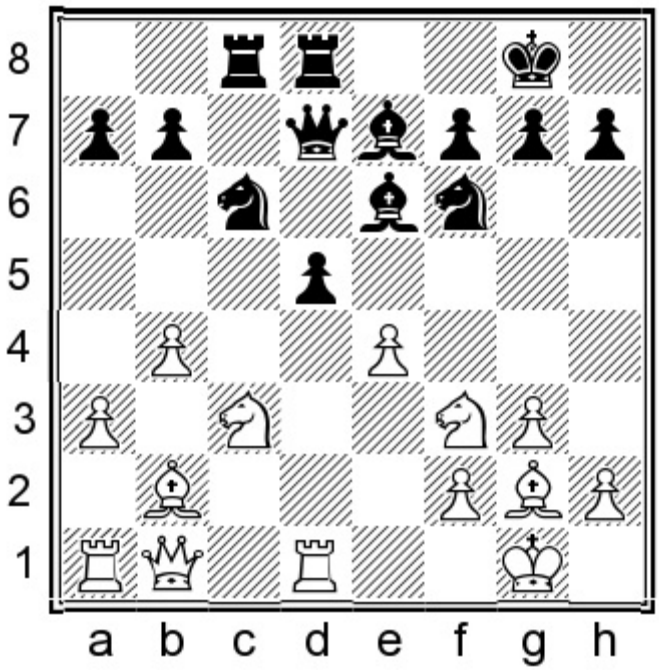
13...♕d7

13...h6 Black may be afraid of ♘g5. 14.♖d1 ♕c7 15.♘h4 ♖fd8 16.♘f5!± This underlines why b1 was the right square for the queen.

14.♖d1 ♖fd8

14...♗f5 15.♕a2 ♗e6 16.♘g5! We now need a clear shot at the e6-bishop.

15.e4!



Position after: 15.e4!

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15...d4

15...♕e8 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.exd5 ♗xd5 18.♘g5 ♗xg5 19.♖xd5 ♖xd5 20.♗xd5± Black can only hope for a draw, but the road will be long and hazardous

16.b5 ♘a5!

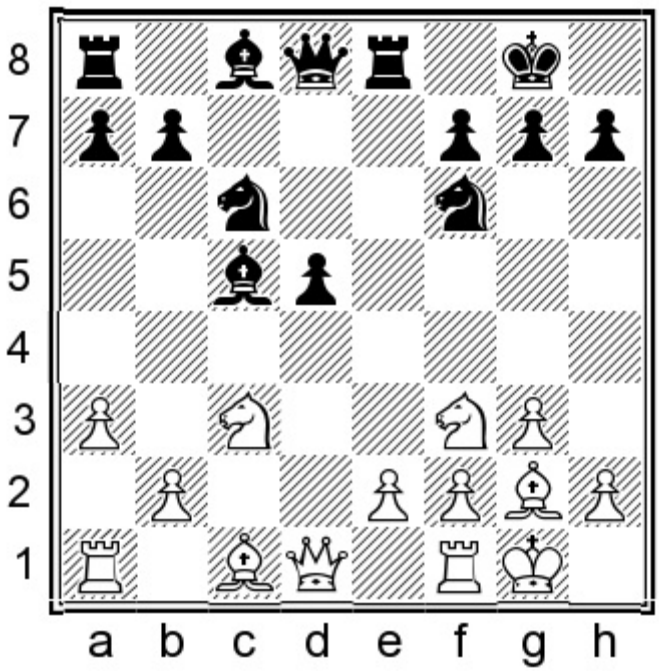
16...♕e8?! 17.♘d5! ♗xd5 18.exd5 ♘a5 19.♘xd4±

17.♘xd4 ♗g4 18.♘f3 ♕e8 19.♖xd8 ♖xd8 20.♕c2 ♘c4 21.♘d5±

Black has compensation, but White remains better.

d) 9...♗xc5 10.a3 ♖e8

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d4 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.a3 ♖e8



Position after: 10...♖e8

This is usually an acceptable waiting move, always useful in the Tarrasch. Playing it now allows the bishop to go back to f8, from where it can't be attacked, and does not interfere with other pieces.

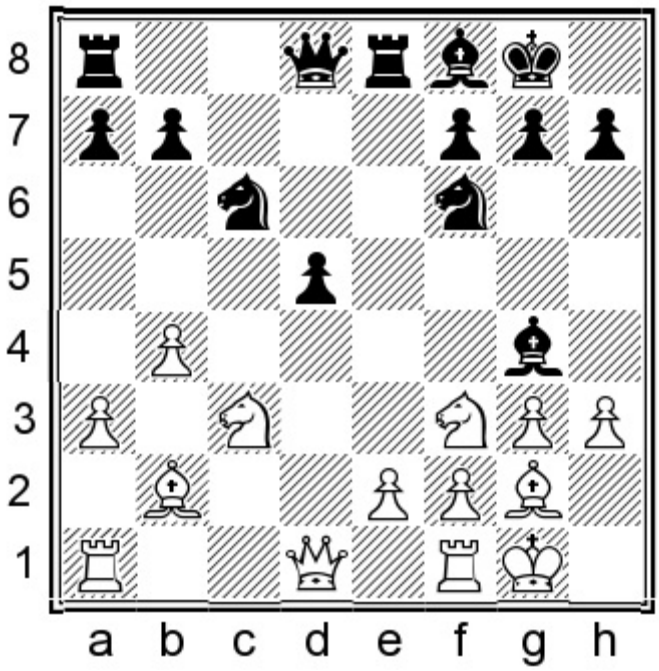
However, I think that it is a bit too slow here, and that's why I did not present it as the main line (despite having been played much more often than the other moves). I believe that Black should look in another direction.

10...♘e4 is our main line, and will be analyzed in the next subchapter.

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11.b4 ♗b6

Even if it seems logical 11...♗f8 has been less tried in pratice. It is true that it looks less active here. 12.♗b2 ♗g4 13.h3!

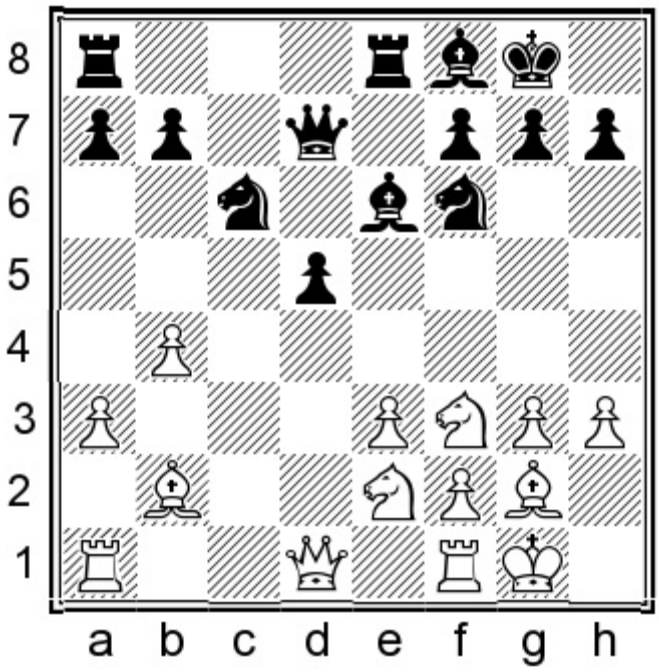


Position after: 13.h3!

This is a good zwischenzug: Black now has to decide if the bishop remains on g4 from where it attacks the knight (and prevents it from moving because of the hanging e2-pawn), or goes to e6, from where it will safely defend d5. It also avoids ...♕d7 and ...♗h3, which Black might be tempted to try to trade the strong g2-bishop.

13...♗e6 (13...♗h5 14.♕b3! keeping the d5-pawn will be a tough mission 14...♕d7 15.♖ad1 ♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♕xh3 17.♘xd5 ♘xd5 18.♗xd5 ♖e7 19.♖d2±) 14.e3 I am not always fond of playing this move against an IQP. It weakens the e4-square (because f2-f3 more or less won't be playable anymore, because of the e3-pawn), and every light square in general. But as we have already played h3, ...♗g4 is not possible any more, so preventing ...d4 (and allowing ♘e2-f4) looks like a fine option. 14...♕d7 15.♘e2!N

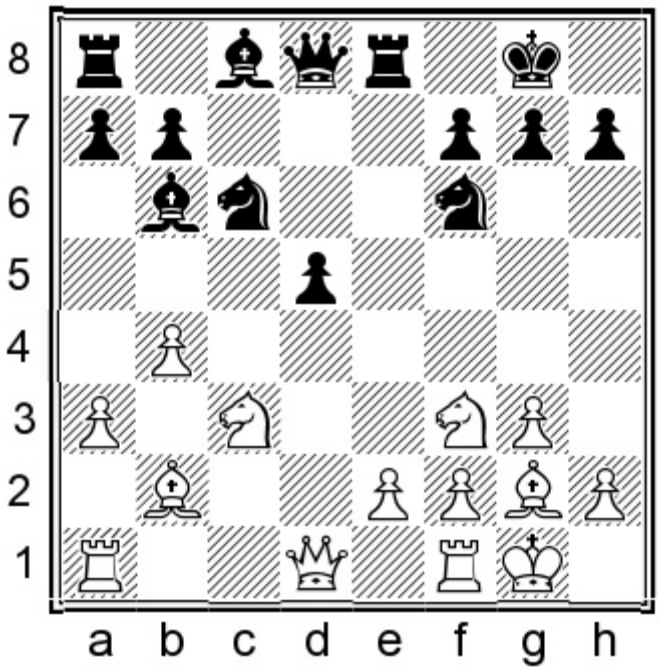
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Position after: 15.♘e2!N

No need to spend a tempo with ♔h2! 15...♘e4 (15...♗xh3? 16.♗xf6 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 gxf6 18.♖h1± Black's kingside is a disaster, and the knights are going to be monsters!) 16.♘f4! ♖ad8 17.♘d4± White has reached the perfect set-up for the minor pieces. He will most probably win the d5-pawn once the rooks come into play.

12.♗b2



Position after: 12.♗b2

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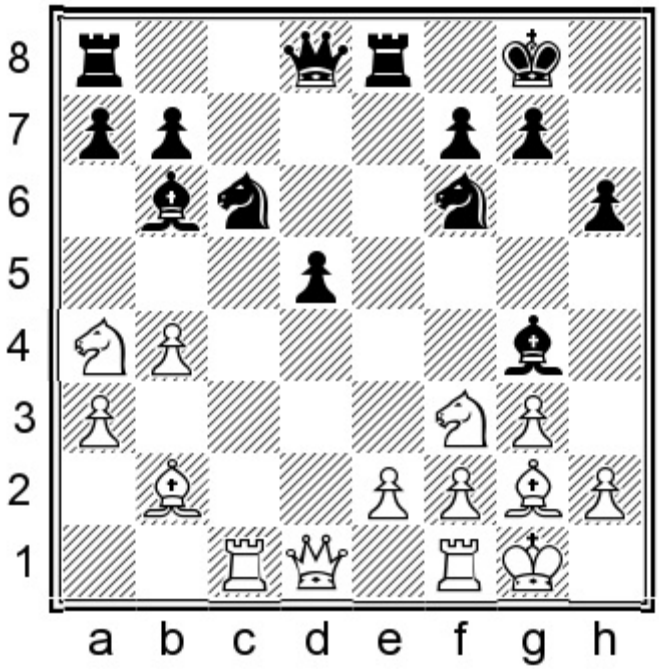
12...♗g4

12...♗f5 13.♘a4 ♗e4 14.♖c1 ♕e7 15.♘xb6!N 15...axb6 16.♖e1 ♖ad8 17.♕d2± White has played really simple chess and achieved a great position.

13.♖c1

13.♘a4!? is more than fine for White (and actually played much more often), but I prefer Bacrot's move. Only because he's French, yes ☺.

13...h6 14.♘a4



Position after: 14.♘a4

When the bishop is on b6, it's always nice to chase it. It will either stay en prise, or will go back to c7, leaving the c5-square available for the knight.

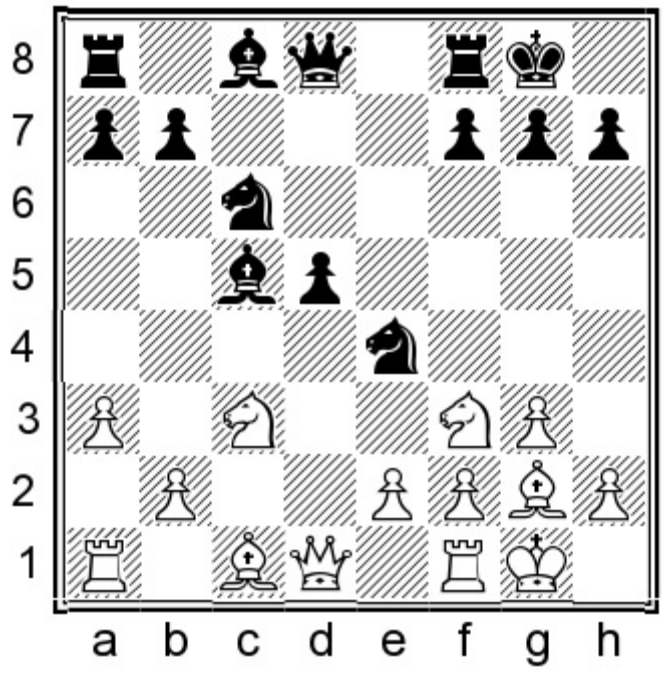
14...♕e7 15.♘xb6 axb6 16.♖e1 ♖ad8 17.♕d3 ♗xf3 18.♕xf3 ♘e5 19.♕f4±

White's advantage was undisputable in Bacrot, E (2692) – Berelowitsch, A (2521) Mulheim 2016, and he won convincingly.

e) 9...♗xc5 10.a3 ♘e4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 c5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.d4 ♘c6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.dxc5 ♗xc5 10.a3! ♘e4!?

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Position after: 10...♘e4!?

Aagaard and Ntirlis explained in their book (2011) that this was the best chance for Black, and I agree. It sacrifices the d5-pawn, but White does not necessarily need to grab it. Let's investigate the different options.

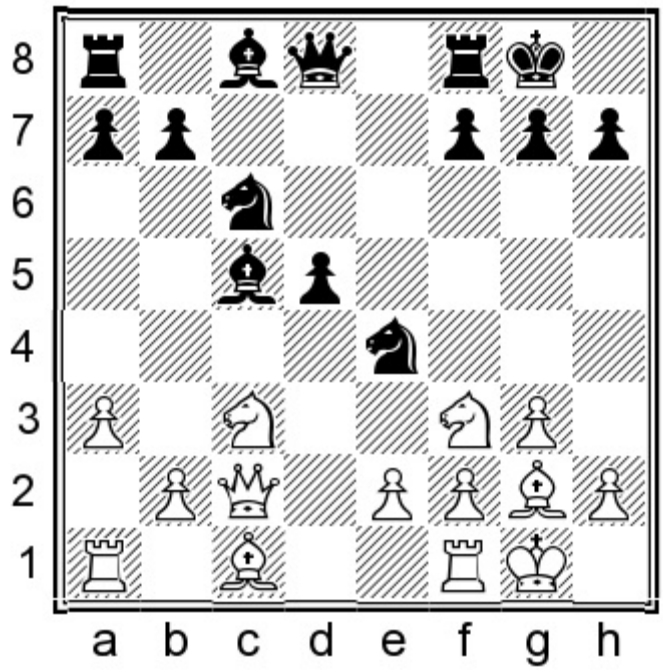
11.♘xd5!

I have the feeling that this move is still the most annoying for Black, at least from a practical point of view. White has various ways to play, and Black will have to respond precisely in order to make a draw.

A) As Aagaard points out, 11.♕xd5 doesn't give White real chances: 11...♘xc3 12.♕xc5 ♘xe2+ 13.♔h1 ♘xc1 14.♖axc1 ♕f6 15.b4!? ♗g4= and Black should be able to hold the balance.

B) 11.♕c2!? is a move that was not considered in their book. It has gained some popularity in recent times, especially from 2012 to 2014. Despite a great score for White, it's not played as often any more. Having played this position with both colours, I believe that Black has a few ways to be safe.

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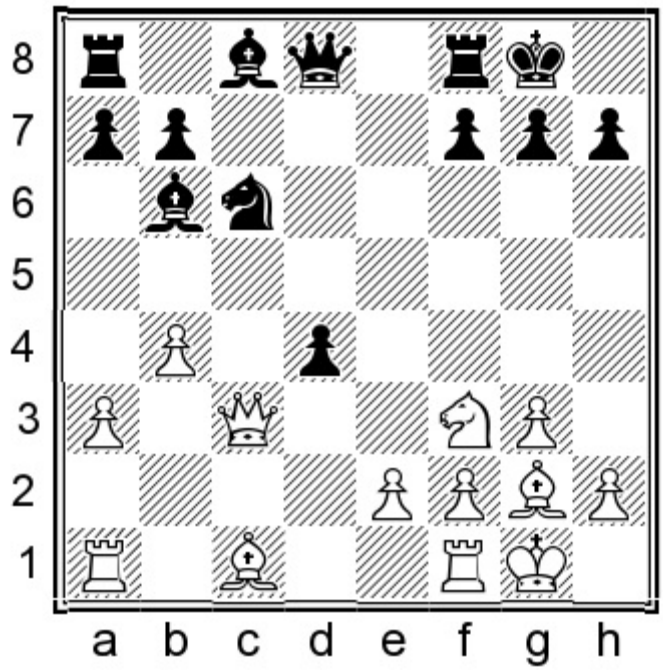


Position after: 11.♕c2!?

11...♘xc3 12.♕xc3

B1) 12...♗e7 seems somehow inferior, as White can settle a strong knight in front of the IQP. I recently played a game in a rapid that continued: 13.♗e3!? ♗f6 14.♘d4 ♘e5 15.♖ad1 (15.b3!± was actually much simpler, with a good edge) 15...♘c4 16.♗c1 ♗g4 17.b3?! ♘b6? (17...♘d6! complicates the game) 18.♖fe1 ♖c8 19.♕d2 ♖e8 20.♗b2± with a difficult position for Black in Demuth – Barbero, Sendic Catalan team rapid 2017.

B2) 12...♗b6 13.b4 d4!? The most direct and concrete way to play.



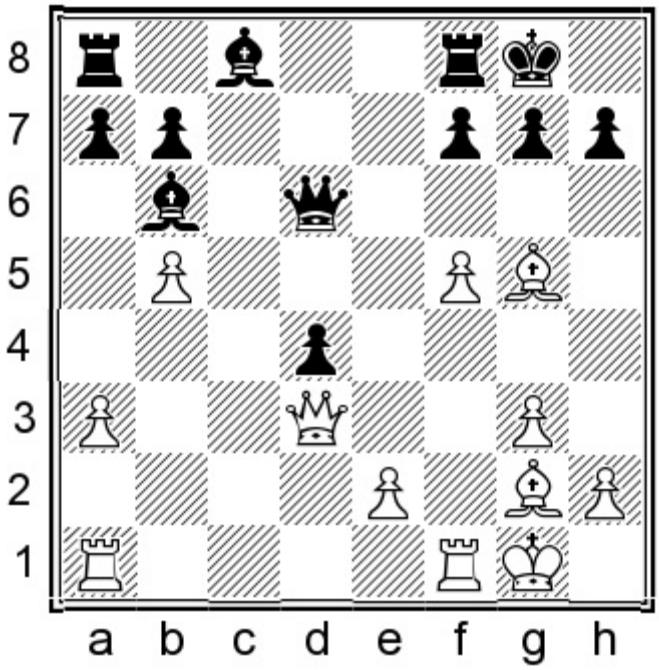
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Position after: 13...d4

Already blocking the a1-h8 diagonal. (13...♗f5!? is interesting as well as are a few other moves)

B2.1) 14.♕d2?! ♗e6!N is a strong and logical novelty from the correspondence game Kahl, F (2470) – Privara, I (2515) ICCF email 2013. The basic idea is to annoy White with ...♗b3 whenever a rook tries to reach d1, and ...♗c4 might sometimes be an option. 15.♗b2 ♖e8 16.♖fe1 a6 17.♖ac1 (17.♖ad1 ♗b3!=) 17...♕d7↑ and I like Black here.

B2.2) 14.♕d3!? is definitely the best try. Black should try to chase this queen. 14...♕f6!?N 15.♗g5! An important move, far from being artificial, because it avoids ...♗f5. (15.♗b2 ♖d8 16.♖fd1 ♗f5 17.♕b3 ♖d7!⇄ The d4-pawn is well defended, and really annoying for White.) 15...♕e6! (15...♕f5 is somehow inferior, because Black can't really take on d3: it would leave a weak d4-pawn and a b6-bishop which does not do much. 16.b5! ♘a5 17.♗e7! ♖e8 18.♗b4 ♕xd3 19.exd3 ♗f5 20.♗xa5 ♗xa5 21.♘xd4 ♗xd3 22.♗xb7± White keeps an edge here.) Here I couldn't find a better move than 16.b5 ♘e5 17.♘xe5 ♕xe5 18.f4 ♕d6 19.f5

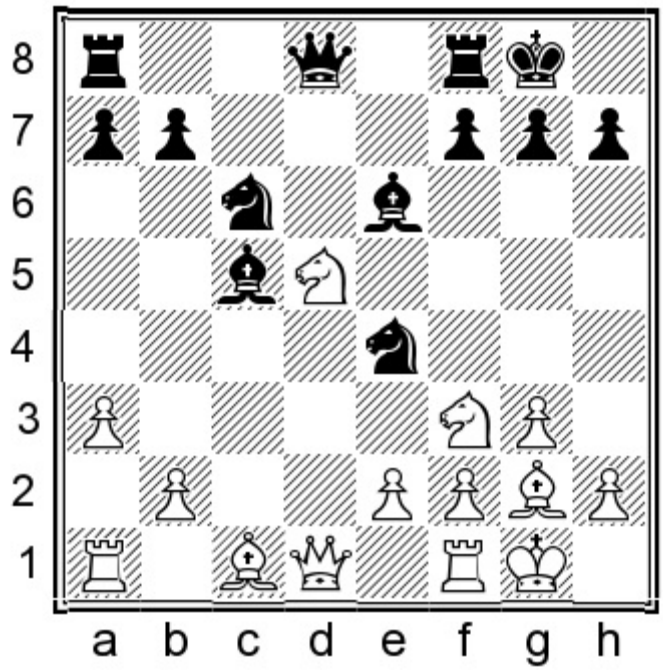


Position after: 19.f5

19...a6! With some cold-blooded defence, Blacks gets decent counterplay on the a-file (also, f6 is not so threatening, as it's hard for White to start an attack on the king). 20.♖ab1 ♗d7 21.bxa6 ♖xa6∞

11...♗e6

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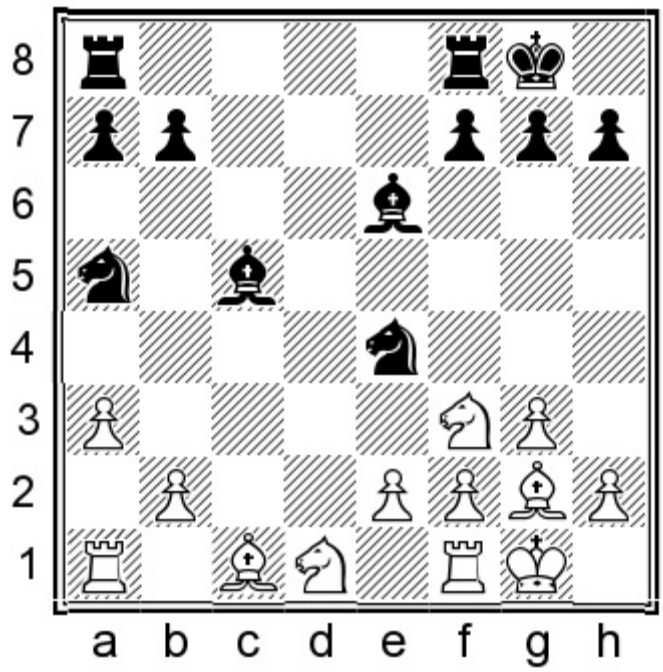
Position after: 11...♗e6

12.♘c3

12.♘e3?! f5!⩱

12...♘xc3

12...♕xd1!? has occurred only once, but it's not clear that it's inferior to the text move: 13.♘xd1 ♘a5!N



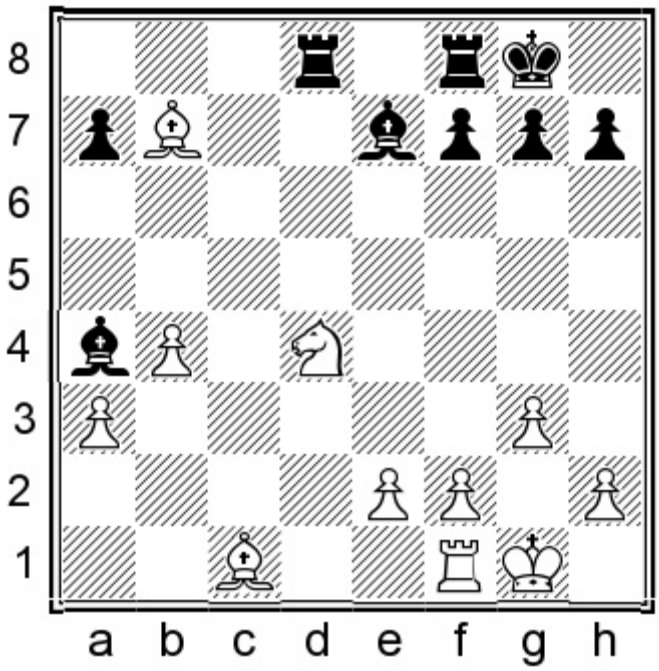
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Position after: 13...♘a5!N

(13...♗c4?! 14.♖e1 ♖fe8 15.♗e3 ♗xe3 16.♘xe3± 1-0 (29) Berry, N (2355) – Cafolla, P (2067) Douglas 2015) 14.b4 ♘b3 15.♖b1

A) 15...♘xc1?! 16.♖xc1 ♗b6 (16...♗e7? 17.♘d4+–) 17.♘e5 ♘d2 18.♖e1 ♘b3 19.♖b1 ♖ab8 20.♘d7! ♗xd7 21.♖xb3±

B) 15...♗e7! 16.♖xb3!? The beginning of a long forced line. 16...♗xb3 17.♘d4 ♗xd1 18.♗xe4 ♗a4 19.♗xb7 ♖ad8

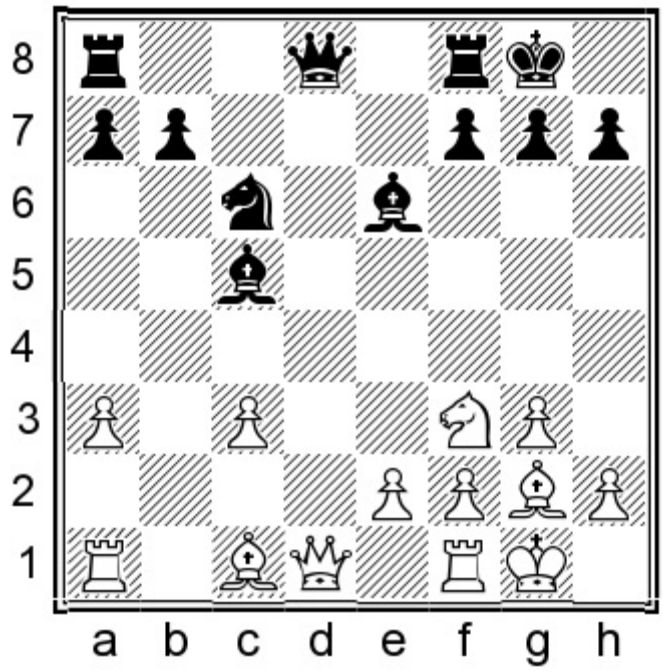


Position after: 19...♖ad8

20.♘c6 (20.♗c6 ♖xd4 21.♗xa4 a5 22.♗e3 ♖e4 23.♗c2 ♖xe3 24.fxe3 axb4 25.a4± is also no walk in the park for Black.) 20...♖d7 21.♘xe7+ ♖xe7 22.♗f3 ♖c8 23.♗g5 ♖ec7 24.♗e3± This kind of position is really unpleasant to defend, and needless to say Black already had to find many critical moves to survive.

13.bxc3

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Position after: 13.bxc3

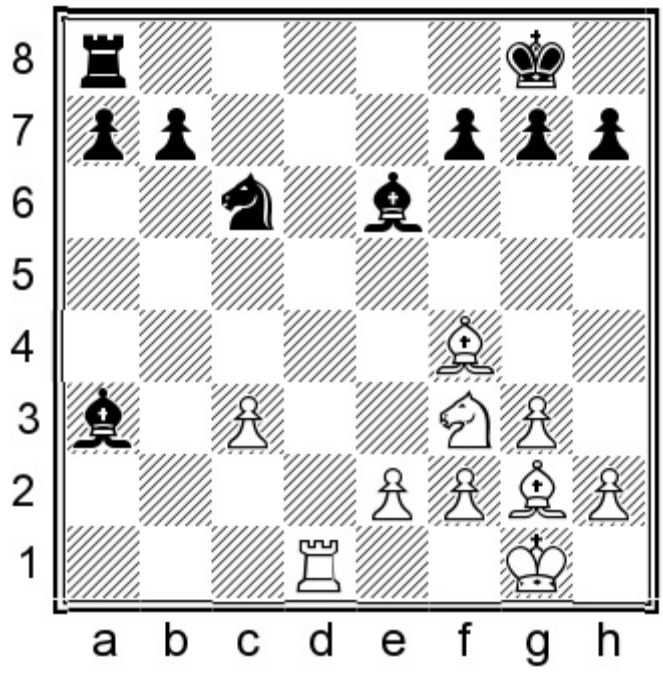
13...♕xd1

13...♖e8 Black has got good results with this move, but they are not so representative as we have only three games available. 14.♕xd8!?N Probably the simplest. It may seem like an improvement for Black as we have lost a few tempi compared to the main line, but the rook on e8 is not really useful (as after e3 its activity is questionable), and our rook is not so bad on f1, as it won't be attacked by any future ...♗b3 or the opposite rook on d8. 14...♖axd8 15.e3! ♘a5 16.♘d4 ♗c4 17.♖d1 and I think that White keeps a slight edge, even if Black has compensation for the pawn. For instance: 17...♗b3 18.♖d2 ♗a4 19.♖b1 ♘c4 20.♖a2 b6 21.♗f1 b5 22.♗xc4 bxc4 23.♖ab2± Bishops are strong, but so is our d4-knight.

14.♖xd1 ♖ad8!

≤ 14...♖fd8 is slightly imprecise: 15.♗f4! ♖xd1+ 16.♖xd1 ♗xa3. We have returned our extra pawn, but in exchange regained some activity.

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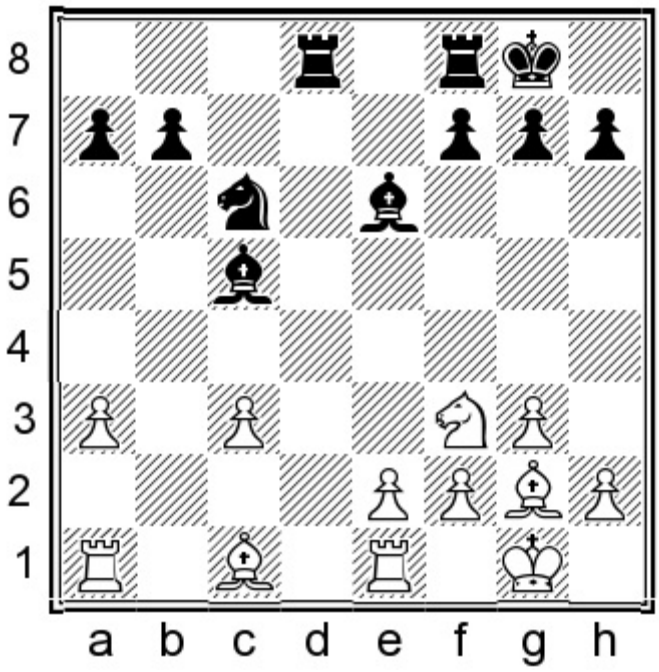
Position after: 16...♗xa3

17.♘d4! ♖d8 (17...♘xd4?! 18.♖xd4!± The b7-pawn is lost.) 18.♗xc6 bxc6 19.♖a1 ♗c5 20.♘xc6 ♖c8 21.♘d4± Is this endgame enough to play for a win? The Dutch prodigy proved so in Giri, A (2730) – Kopylov, M (2473) Germany 2012, even if it took him 81 moves to convert.

15.♖e1!?

I like this quiet move. We keep the rooks on the board, and intend either a4-♗a3 to trade our useless bishop, or e3-♘d4 to get a really strong knight in the center. Black has compensation, but we keep the better chances.

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Position after: 15.♖e1!?

A) 15.♗f4 ♖xd1+ 16.♖xd1 ♗xa3 17.♘d4 ♘xd4 18.cxd4 b5! is a major difference to the line 14...♖fd8.

B) 15.♗b2 was the main line in the book by Aagard and Ntirlis, where they explained that Black achieves enough compensation after 15...♘a5 16.♘d4 ♗b3! 17.♘xb3 ♘xb3 18.♖xd8 ♖xd8 19.♖b1 b5⩱ and White's queenside is paralyzed.

15...♘a5

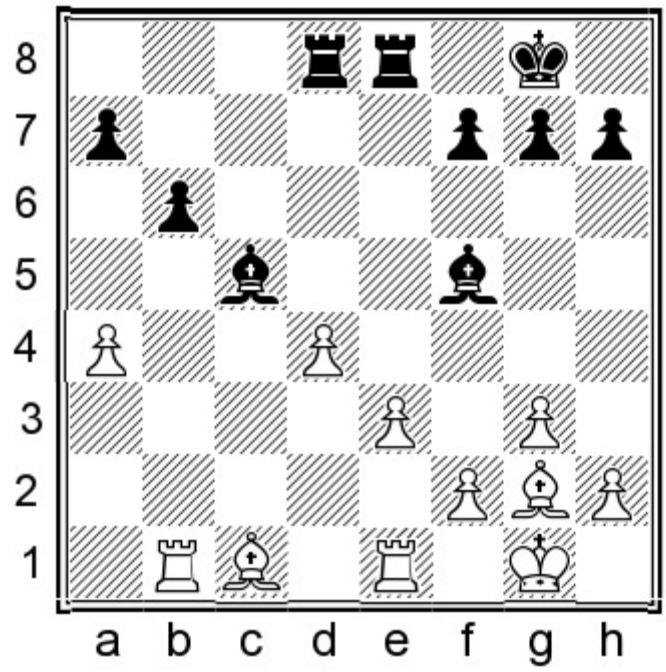
≤ 15...♖fe8 is too slow because of 16.a4! ♘a5 17.♗a3 ♗xa3 18.♖xa3 b6 19.♘d4 ♖c8 20.e3 g6 21.♗f1±.

16.a4! ♘b3

16...♖fe8 17.♗a3± This trades our worse bishop and secures the d4-square for our knight.

17.♖b1 b6 18.e3 ♖fe8 19.♘d4! ♘xd4 20.cxd4 ♗f5!

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Position after: 20...♗f5!

If we move the rook, Black intends to take on d4.

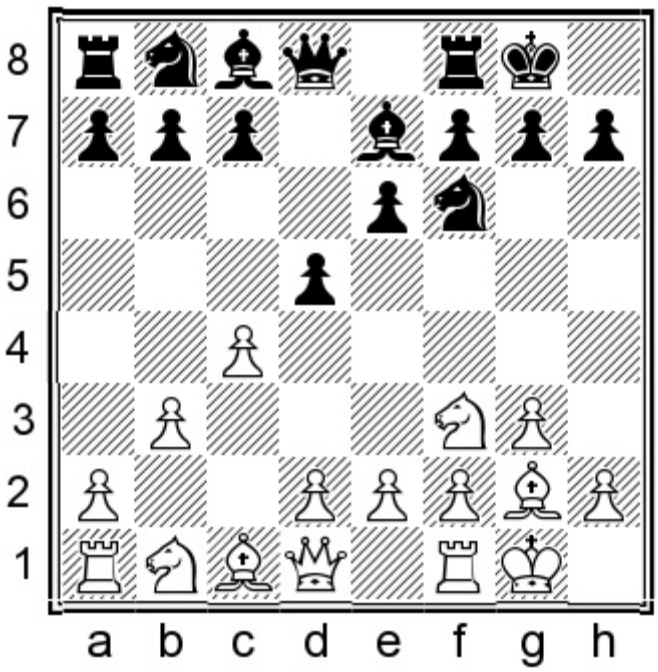
21.e4! ♗xd4 22.♗g5! f6 23.♗xf6 ♗xf6 24.exf5 ♖xe1+ 25.♖xe1±

We have kept an extra pawn, and even if opposite-colored bishops appeared on the board, our 4 v 2 majority on the kingside may be difficult to stop in an actual game.

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Chapter 5
Main line of the Neo-Catalan with 6.b3

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3



Chapter guide

Chapter 5 – Main line of the Neo-Catalan with 6.b3

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3

a) 6...a5

b) 6...d4

c) 6...b6

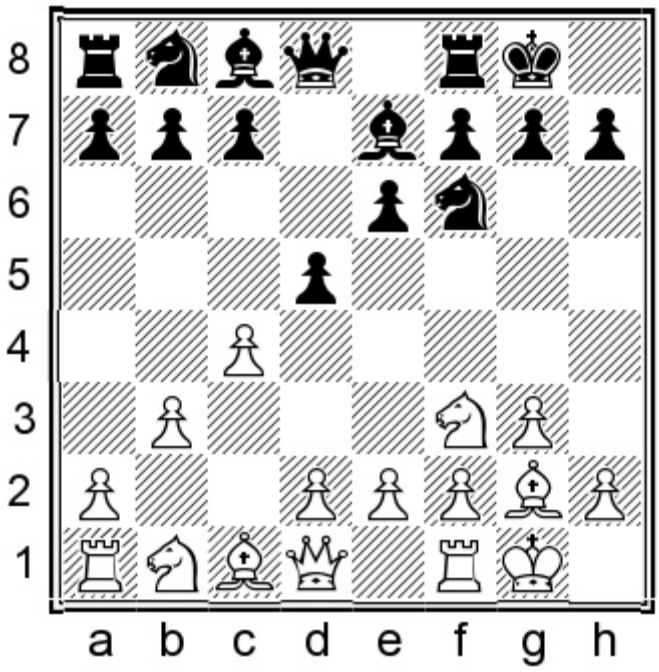
d) 6...c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 --, 8...b6 9.♘c3 --

e) 6...c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗b7

a) 6...a5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3

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Position after: 6.b3

After dealing with various black systems in the previous chapters, it's now time to face the main line. You should note that if you are a fan of the Catalan, you could still transpose with 6.d4 (with this move order you did not allow the lines with 4...dxc4, which are tricky and full of theory). I have played it myself a couple of times. But we are here to discuss the Reti opening, what we will call the Neo-Catalan, and 6.b3 seems like the best option in this spirit. We can mention that 6.♕c2 is played quite often, but it seems less flexible, and it's not clear whether the queen is well placed there.

This is also an important moment for Black. We will try to cover the most plausible systems, but you need to remember that Black can mix up some move orders, and you need to be care-ful about the possible transpositions. For some Black players, facing 6.b3 might come as a big disappointment, and a logical reaction, trying to 'punish' White for this double fianchetto, is to rush in playing...

6...a5

6...c6 would transpose into chapter 9 on the Semi-Slav with 5...♗e7.

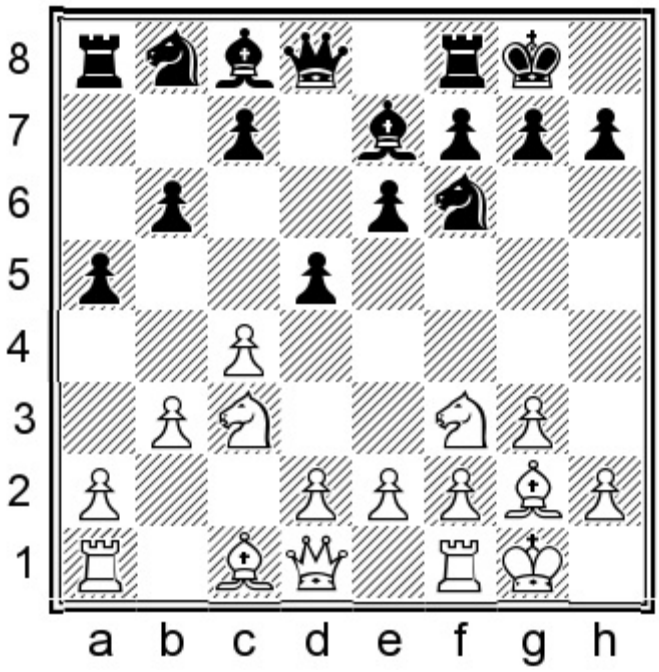
7.♘c3

A smart move, preventing a further push of the a-pawn.

7...d4

A) 7...b6

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Position after: 7...b6

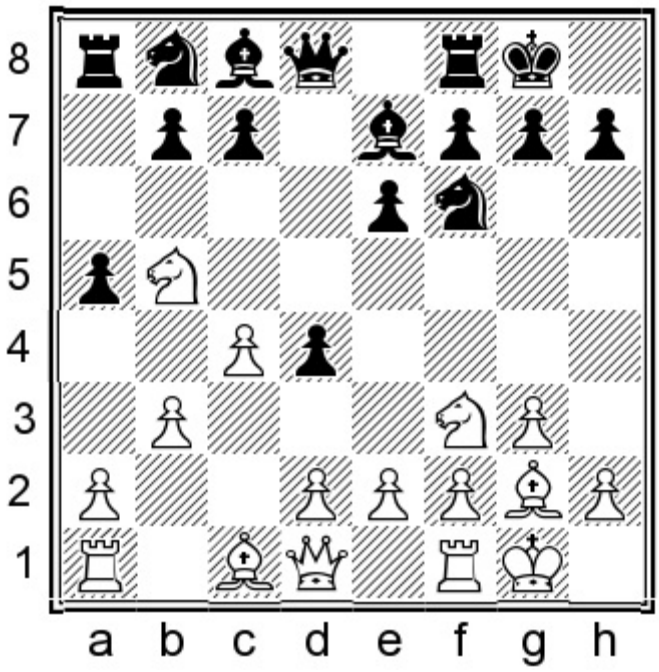
A1) 8.cxd5 is another way to play the position, but I don't see why we should take such an early decision. 8...exd5 9.d4 ♗b7 10.♗b2 ♘bd7 11.♖c1 ♖e8 12.♘e5 ♗d6 13.f4!± White keeps the better position, and eventually won in Pantsulaia, L (2607) – Bersamina, P (2404) Subic Bay 2016.

A2) 8.♗b2 ♗b7 9.e3 ♘bd7 (9...♘a6 10.d4!± is simply better for White, as pointed out by Delchev) 10.♖c1± Black still needs to show why he played 6...a5.

B) 7...a4? 8.♘xa4 dxc4 (8...♖xa4? 9.bxa4 dxc4 10.♕c2+– is over-optimistic for Black) 9.bxc4± with a healthy extra pawn.

8.♘b5!

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Position after: 8.♘b5!

This move underlines the drawbacks of 6...a5.

Black has to defend his d-pawn, and he can no longer chase the intruder.

8...c5

8...♘c6 9.♗b2 e5 10.e3 ♗c5 11.exd4 exd4 12.♖e1± Black will always have to worry about his weak d4-pawn.

9.♘e5!?N

This interesting new move might even be an improvement over the classical and logical 9.e3. White prevents ...♘c6 and already blocks any ...e5 idea.

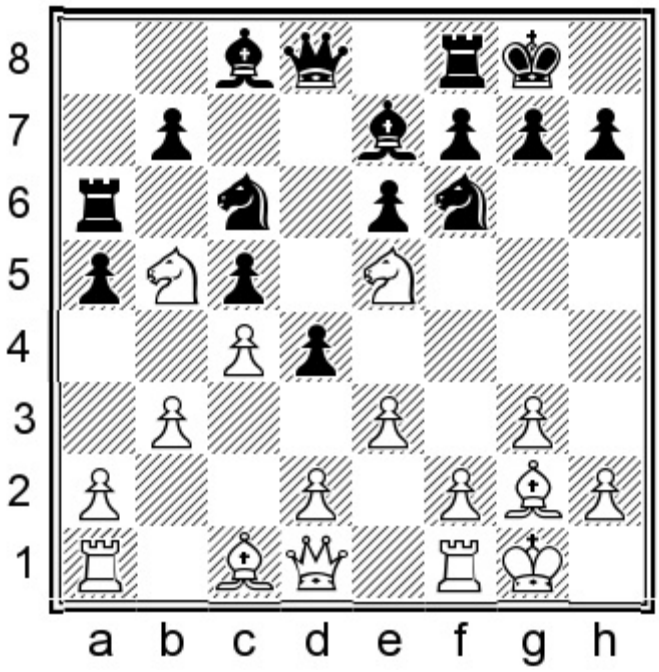
9.e3 ♘c6 10.exd4 cxd4 11.♖e1!± The knight is perfect on b5, and White has the better game.

9...♖a6!?

9...♘fd7 10.♘d3 e5 11.f4!↑ We have reached quite an unusual pawn structure, but have managed to arrange our knights perfectly, while Black still has to catch up with his development.

10.e3 ♘c6!

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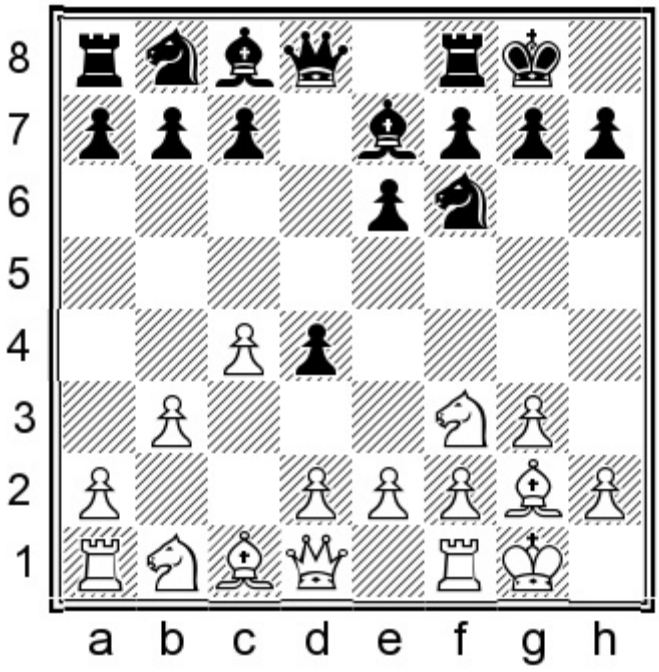
Position after: 10...♘c6!

11.exd4 cxd4 12.♖e1 ♘xe5 13.♖xe5 ♘d7 14.♖e1 e5 15.d3↑

We are ready to follow with f2-f4 on the next move, in order to put some pressure on Black‘s center.

b) 6...d4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 d4



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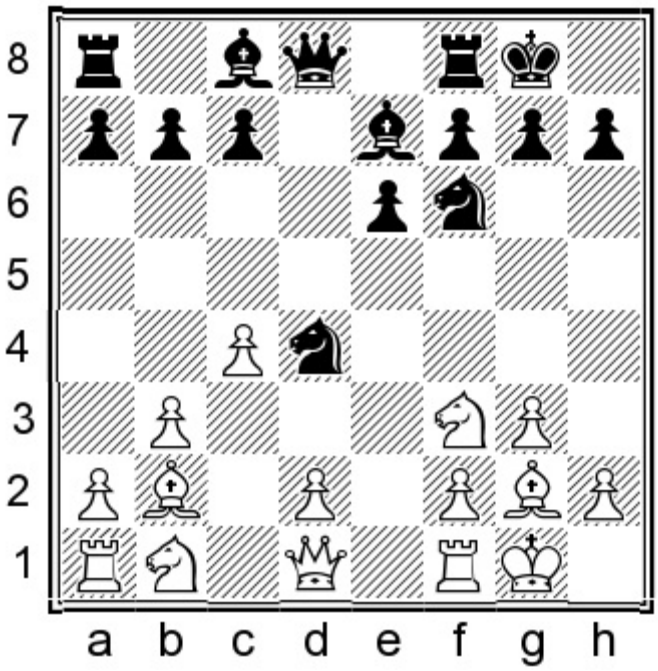
Position after: 6...d4

We ignored that move order in the first chapter, as it's not in the same spirit. It's not really a reversed Benoni, as White has already played b3, but we can still try to make use of the extra move.

7.e3 c5

The principled move. Black obviously wants to keep a central pawn on d4, in order to keep the a1-h8 diagonal closed.

7...♘c6 8.exd4 ♘xd4 9.♗b2



Position after: 9.♗b2

Black seems to have the upper hand on the d4-square, but things are not that simple for him.

A) 9...♗c5 10.♘e5! (10.♘a3!? is interesting too but I prefer the text move.) 10...c6 11.♘c3 ♕d6 12.♖e1 Black's development is far from obvious, and a recent game continued 12...♗a3 13.♗xa3 ♕xa3 14.♘e2! ♖d8 15.♘xd4 ♖xd4 16.♕c2 c5 17.♕c3 ♖b8 18.♖ad1 ♖d8 19.d4!± White converted his advantage quite easily in the game Lubbe, N (2490) – Skytte, R (2412) Kolding 2016.

B) 9...c5 10.d3!N 10...♖e8 11.♖e1 ♕b6 12.♘bd2± What kind of development is this for Black?

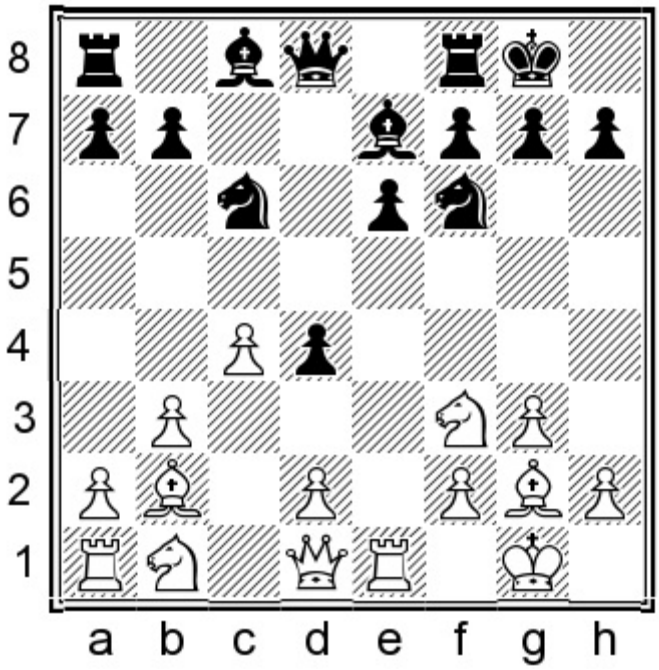
C) 9...♘xf3+ 10.♕xf3 ♖b8 11.♕e2!? b6 White can push d4 more or less whenever he wants, which gives him the better game, with more space and strong central pawns. An old game of Botvinnik (where he took his time), continued 12.♘c3 ♗b7 13.♖ad1 ♗xg2 14.♔xg2 c6 15.♘e4 ♖b7 16.♘g5 ♘d7 17.♘f3 ♗f6 18.d4± Botvinnik – Stahlberg Amsterdam 1954.

8.♗b2 ♘c6 9.exd4 cxd4

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9...♘xd4 is analyzed briefly via 7...♘c6.

10.♖e1!



Position after: 10.♖e1!

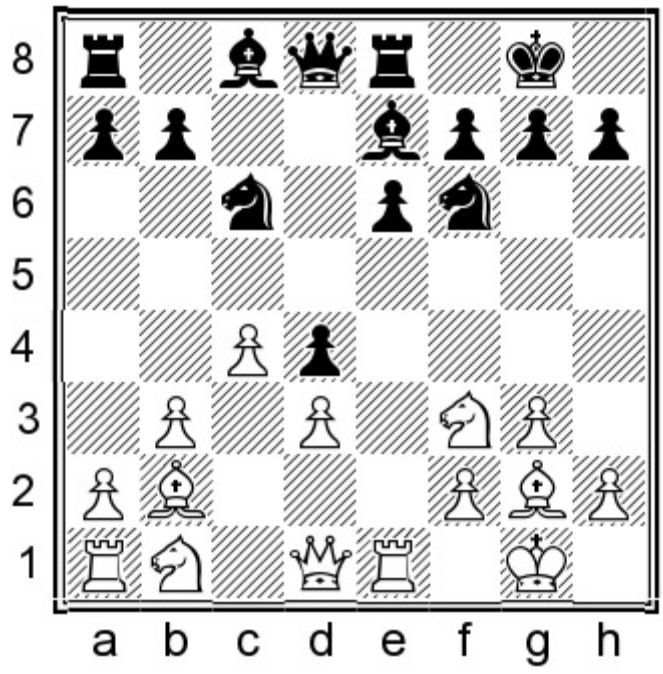
This natural move prevents Black from pushing ...e5. This is actually the start of the strategical fight in the position. Black will try to play either ...♖e8 or ...f6, to continue with ...e5, and White must try to prevent that and obtain some play on the queenside (playing b4 under good conditions would be an accomplishment).

We again stand at an important crossroads of different moves.

10...♘e8

A) 10...♖e8 makes a lot of sense to me: 11.d3

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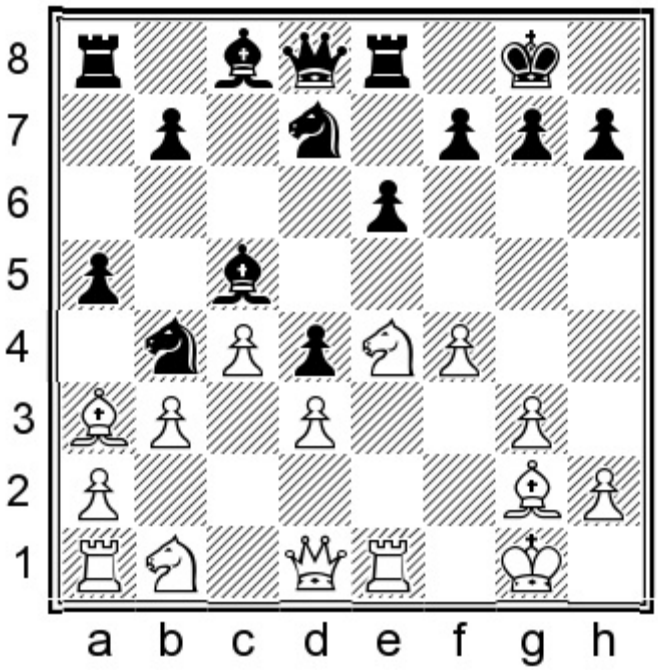


Position after: 11.d3

A1) After 11...♗f8 I prefer 12.♘e5! ♘xe5 13.♖xe5 ♘d7 14.♖e2! As often, this is the best square, as it frees the e1-square for the second rook or the queen. 14...e5 15.♕e1! Black must protect the d4-pawn... or the e8-rook. This not being easy, the best is to opt for a third option: 15...♗e7! (in a recent blitz game, my opponent clearly failed to solve his opening issues: 15...♖e7?! 16.b4 a5 17.a3 ♕c7?! 18.♗xd4! exd4 19.♖xe7 ♗xe7 20.♕xe7 axb4?? Black regains his pawn, but... gets mated quickly 21.♗d5 h6 22.♕xf7+ ♔h7 23.♗e4+ 1-0 Demuth, A (2538) – Sonis, F (2420) Cap d'Agde 2017) but after 16.b4!↑ White gets the initiative on the queenside.

A2) 11...♗c5 12.♗a3!? ♘d7 I believe this is the best for Black; it's no surprise that Wesley So played it a few months ago. (12...♗xa3?! 13.♘xa3 e5 14.c5! ♕e7 15.♘b5!±; 12...♕e7?! 13.♗xc5 ♕xc5 14.a3!± and Black can't prevent b4, because 14...a5?! 15.b4!± is still met with b4, thanks to the hanging a8-rook.) 13.♘fd2!? ♘b4 14.♘e4 a5 15.f4

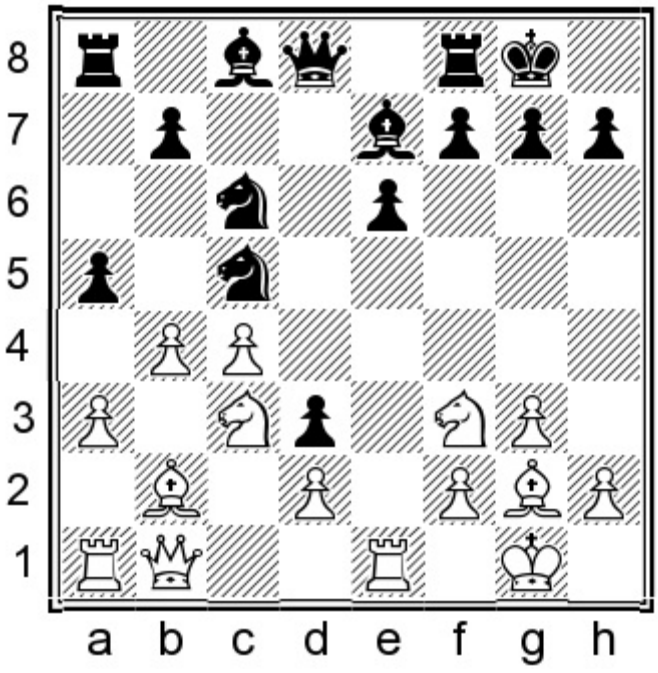
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Position after: 15.f4

The game continued with 15...♗e7 16.♗b2 ♘c6 17.a3 b6 18.♘d6 ♗xd6 19.♗xc6 ♖a7 20.♗xd4 e5 ½-½ (54) Robson, R (2668) – So, W (2822) Saint Louis 2017, and now 21.♗f2!± would have enabled White to keep his edge.

B) Strangely enough, I met the same move twice back in 2014, whereas it's actually a rare guest in recent games. Despite two winning positions, I had to settle for two draws... 10...d3 11.♘c3 ♘d7 It seems logical to relocate the knight to c5 in order to protect d3. (We don't really see how 11...♘b4 will help Black 12.♖c1!±) 12.a3 a5 13.♕b1! improving on an old game of Andersson, I found this idea (the first time) over the board. 13...♘c5 14.b4!

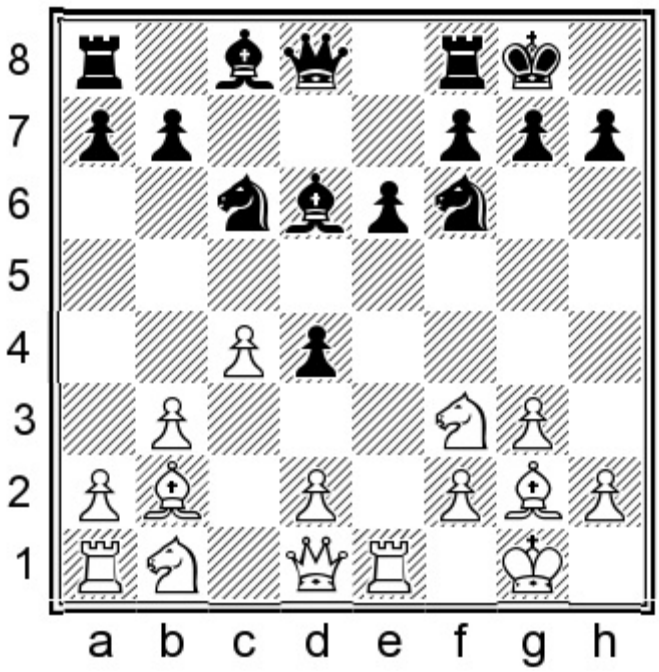


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Position after: 14.b4!

White gains the advantage thanks to the poor coordination of Black's pieces: 14...♘b3 15.♖a2 ♘cd4 (15...axb4 The second time, I also won a pawn straight away after 16.axb4 ♖xa2 17.♘xa2 ♘bd4 18.♘xd4 ♘xd4 19.♕xd3± ½-½ (78) Demuth, A (2488) – Aubry, Y (2255) Rennes 2014.) 16.♘xd4 ♘xd4 17.♕xd3 ♘b3 and now my game Demuth, A (2476) – Zilka, S (2549) Ruzomberok 2014, ½-½ (45), can even be improved upon with 18.♕c2!N 18...♘d4 (18...♕xd2 19.♕b1! ♕h6 20.♖d1±) 19.♕e4±.

C) 10...♗d6

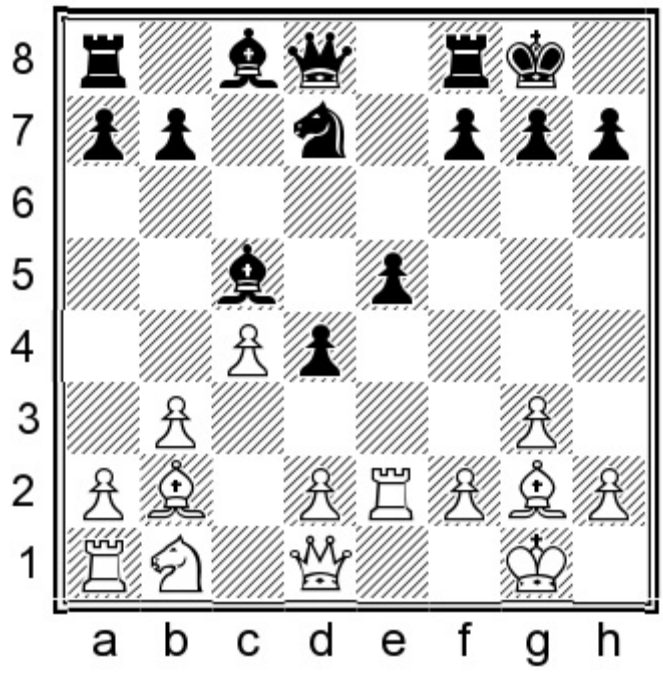


Position after: 10...♗d6

Not fearing the loss of the pawn, Black is trying to play ...e6-e5 directly, but we can actually take up the challenge: 11.♘xd4! ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 ♗xg3 13.hxg3 ♕xd4 14.♘c3 ♖d8 15.♕e2 ♖b8 (Of course not 15...♕xd2?? because of 16.♖ad1!+–) 16.♖ad1 b6 17.♘b5 ♕d7 18.d4± Our impressive center enables us to play for two results (1-0 or ½-½!).

D) After 10...♗c5, 11.♘e5!? is one of the various ways of playing: 11...♘xe5 12.♖xe5 ♘d7 13.♖e2 e5

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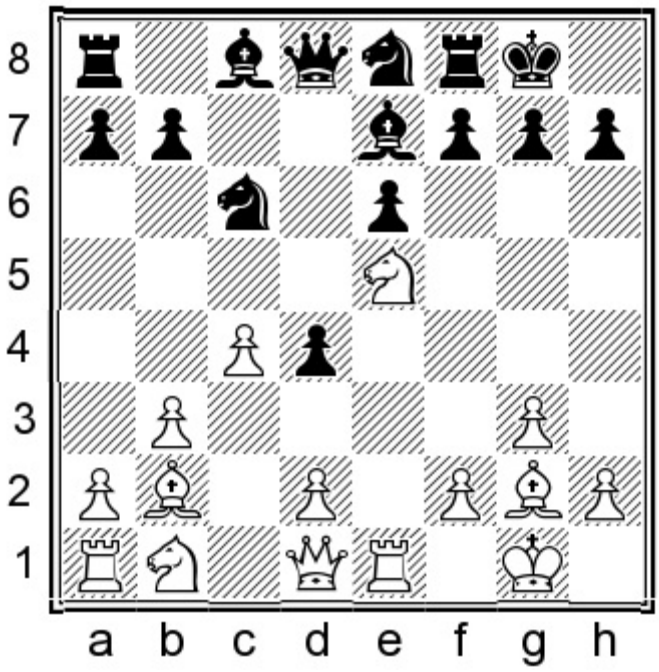


Position after: 13...e5

Black manages to get an apparently strong pawn on e5, but White can deal with it pretty well. 14.d3. The following game is not perfect, but it shows how Black can quickly face important problems. 14...♖b8 15.♘d2 (15.♘a3!N is quite similar, but a slightly better way to play 15...b6 16.♕d2 a5 17.♖f1 ♗b7 18.♗xb7 ♖xb7 19.f4±) 15...b6 16.♕f1!? A rare but interesting manoeuvre. 16...♗b7 17.♗xb7 ♖xb7 18.f4! exf4 19.♕xf4 ♗b4 20.♘f3 ♘c5 21.♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 22.♗xd4± And Black even blundered now. He was far from lost, but still slightly inferior 22...♘xd3?? 23.♖e3! 1-0 (23) Mikhalevski, V (2545) – Bruzon Batista, L (2643) Calgary 2016.

11.♘e5!

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Position after: 11.♘e5!

11...♘xe5 12.♖xe5 f6 13.♖e1

This time 13.♖e2 would sometimes be met by ...♗g4, so it doesn't seem so great.

13...e5

If Black takes his time with 13...♘c7 we can leave him regretting it after 14.f4 a5 15.d3 ♖b8 16.♘d2 b5 17.♖b1 ♗b7 18.♗xb7 ♖xb7 19.♕f3± And White won a fine game in Reinderman, D (2591) – Sonntag, H (2364) Germany 2016, 1-0 (37).

14.♗a3!

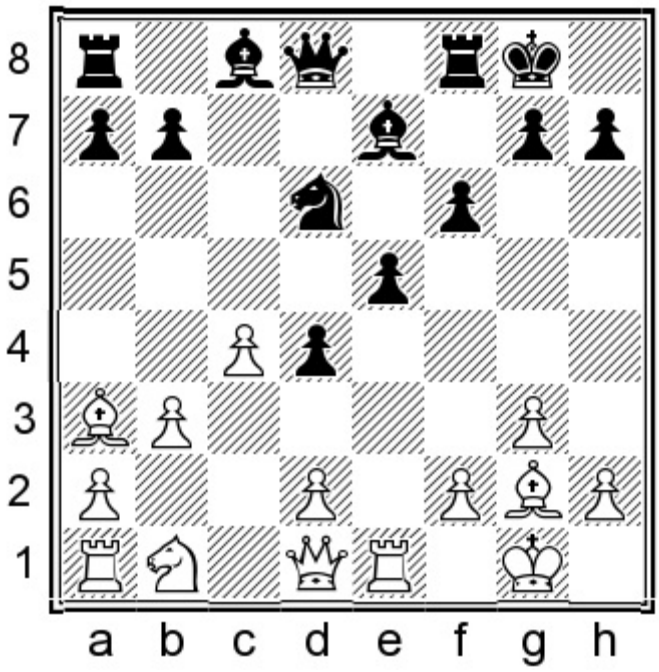
It's important to understand that our bishop is not doing much, whereas his bishop can protect the center, so it is essential to trade them.

14...♗xa3

A) 14...♘c7 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.f4! ♕d6 17.fxe5 fxe5 18.d3 ♗f5 19.♕e2 ♖ae8 20.♘d2 b6 21.♘e4± White is obviously better thanks to his excellent control over the e4-square.

B) 14...♘d6 was tried in a top-level rapid game by Nakamura, and deserves a mention here. Black wants to keep his bishop on the board, and sometimes relocates the knight back to f7 in order to protect the e5-pawn better.

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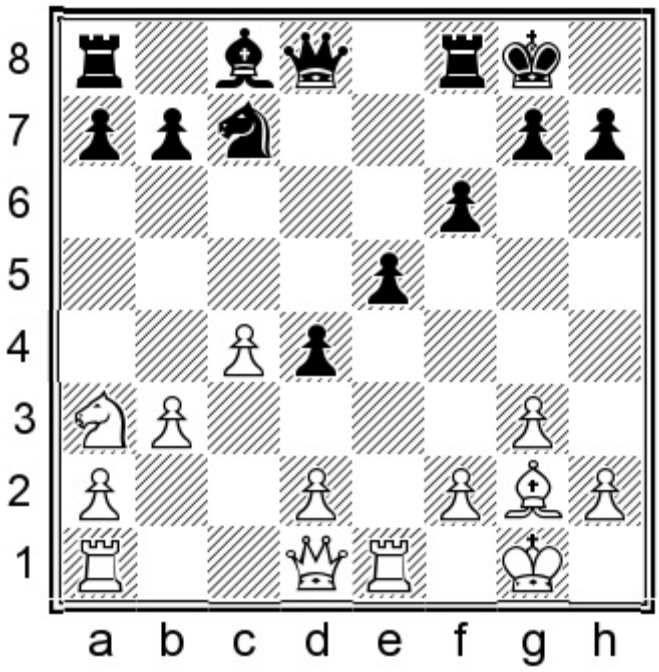
Position after: 14...♘d6

B1) 15.f4!N The most direct approach is probably best. 15...♘f7! (15...exf4? 16.♕f3! ♔h8 17.♕xf4± We get a lot of play, and keep some threats, starting with ♖xe7.) 16.♕e2 ♗xa3 17.♘xa3 ♕e7 18.♘c2 ♗f5 19.d3± We can take on e5 whenever we want, and the e4-square is ours.

B2) 15.d3 ♘f7 (15...♖b8 16.♘d2 ♗f5 17.♕c2 ♕d7 18.f4 occurred in a rapid game of my own, and I soon won after 18...♗h3? 19.fxe5 fxe5 20.♘f3! ♗xg2 21.♘xe5 ♕c7 22.♕xg2+– and my opponent resigned already: 1-0 Demuth, A – Fernandez, D Sabadell rapid 2017.) 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♘d2 ♕c7 18.b4 ♗d7 was still the game Giri, A (2782) – Nakamura, H (2787) Paris 2016, and now 19.a4± seems more adequate in order to get a massive pawn advance on the queenside.

15.♘xa3 ♘c7

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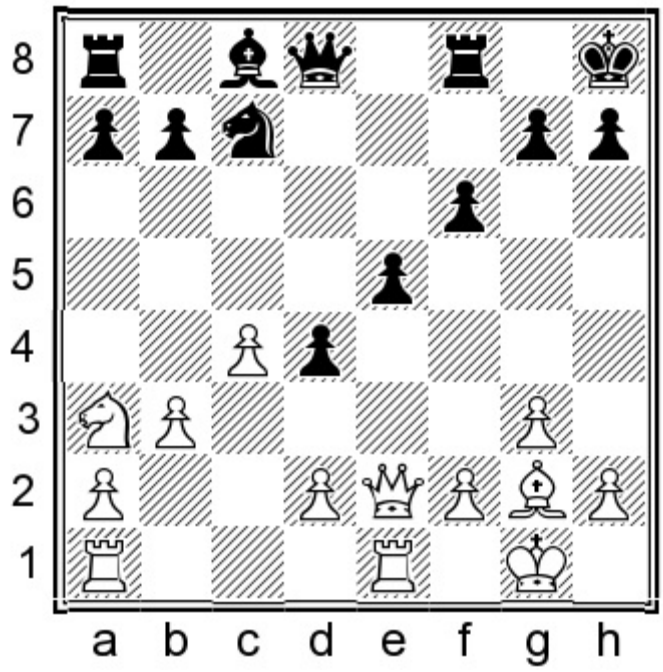
Position after: 15...♘c7

16.♕e2!?

This move has been tried in a corres-pondence game. 16.♖c1 is also interesting 16...♖b8 17.c5! b5 (17...♗e6 18.♕e2! ♗d5 19.♘c4 ♗xg2 20.♔xg2 ♕d5+ 21.♕f3! ♕xf3+ 22.♔xf3± and White keeps some pressure in this endgame.) 18.cxb6 axb6 19.f4! After opening the queenside, White tries to open every file. 19...exf4 20.♕f3→ And White has good prospects both on the queenside and in the center. Black's pieces lack harmony, and it could soon end in disaster.

16...♔h8?!

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Position after: 16...♔h8?!

Maybe a bit too slow, 16...♖b8 should have been preferred, even if it doesn't change the essence of the position.

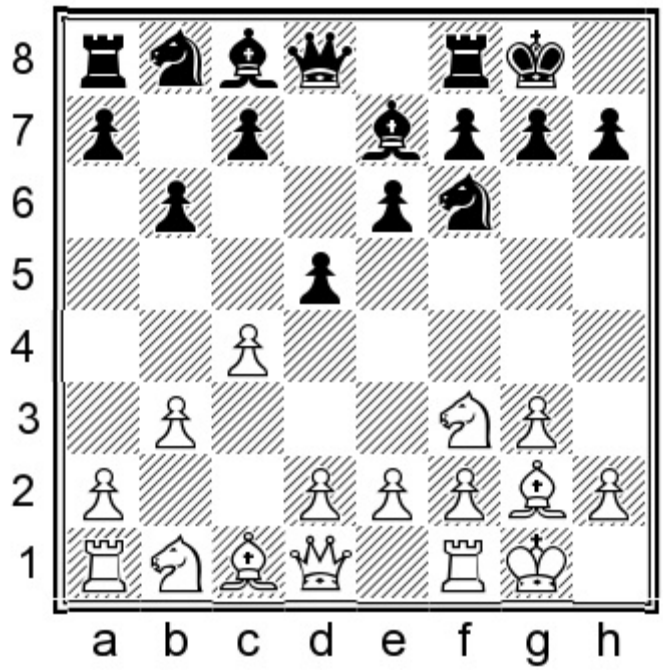
17.c5 ♘e6 18.♖ac1 ♕a5 19.♘b5 ♕xa2 20.♘d6 ♕xb3 21.f4!±

And White's activity completely destroyed Black's position, despite being two pawns down: Ludgate, A (2490) – Kudela, S (2345) corr. 2007, 1-0 (61).

c) 6...b6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 b6

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Position after: 6...b6

One of the best systems for Black, solid and reliable!

7.♗b2 ♗b7 8.e3 ♘bd7

A) Black has no reason to rush with 8...dxc4: 9.bxc4 c5 10.♘c3 ♘bd7 11.♕e2 and we are going to transpose into our main lines.

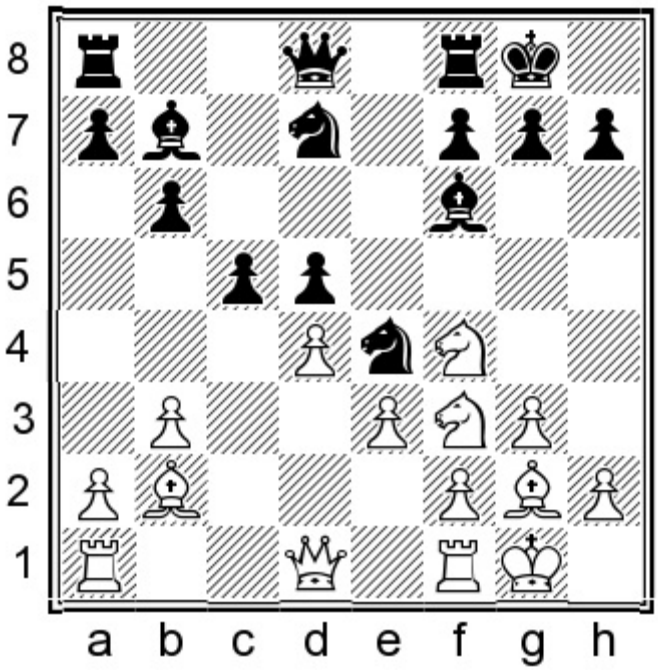
B) We can mention that 8...c5 does not have any independent value, as after 9.♘c3 Black has a choice between 9...♘bd7 and 9...dxc4, which are examined here, and 9...♘c6 transposing into 6...c5.

9.♘c3! c5

A) Another try is 9...♘e4

A1) 10.♘e2 was seen is a recent high-level game. Even if White won convincingly, I don't think it's the strongest option: 10...♗f6 11.d4 c5?! (The right way to play for Black is 11...dxc4 12.bxc4 c5!=) 12.cxd5 exd5 13.♘f4!

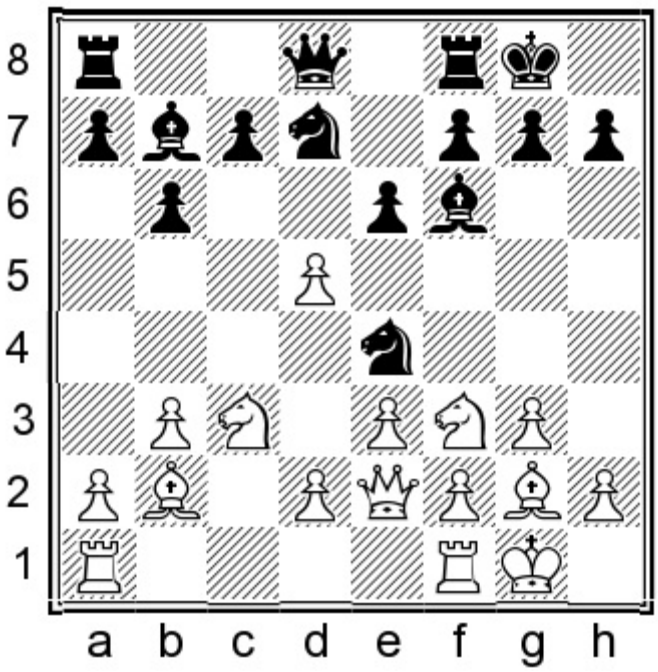
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Position after: 13.♘f4!

13...c4 14.♘d2 cxb3 15.♘xd5! ♗xd5 16.♗xe4 ♗xe4 17.♘xe4 bxa2 18.♖xa2± 1-0 (34) Wei Yi (2734) – Bacrot, E (2718) Liaocheng 2018.

A2) 10.♕e2! ♗f6 Black is trying to trade some minor pieces in order to reach clear equality. 11.cxd5



Position after: 11.cxd5

A2.1) 11...exd5 is met with 12.d4 in order to keep the bishops on the board. 12...♕e7 13.♖fd1 c5 14.♖ac1 ♖fd8 15.dxc5 ♘dxc5 16.♘d4± White reaches a nice IQP, and definitely has the better

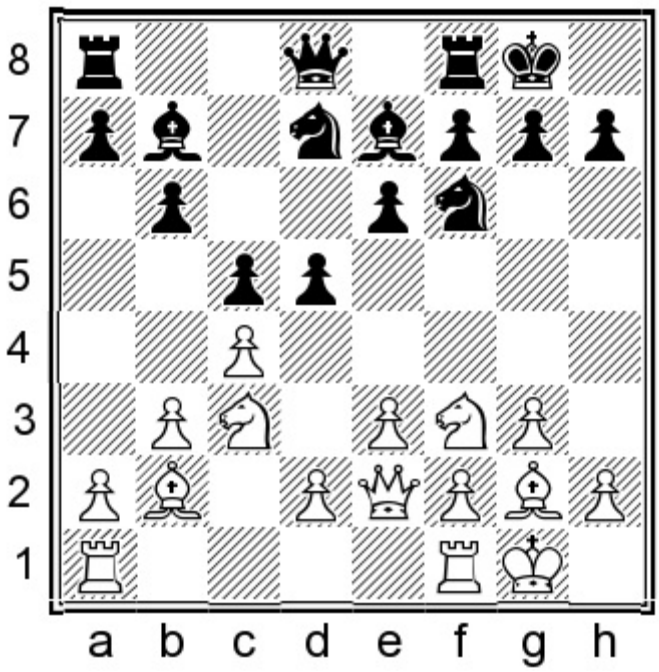
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chances; he eventually managed to win in Tikkanen, H (2566) – Brynell, S (2489) Tylosand 2012.

A2.2) 11...♘xc3 12.dxc3!N I prefer this novelty, in order to retain as many pieces as possible. 12...exd5 (12...♗xd5 13.e4 ♗b7 14.e5 ♗e7 15.♘d4±) 13.♖fd1 ♕e7 14.♘d4! The threat is c4, so Black has to protect his b7-bishop. 14...♘c5 15.♗a3! An annoying pin. 15...♖fd8 16.♖ac1 ♕e8 17.♘b5! ♕d7 18.c4±

B) Sometimes Black tries 9...♘c5 in order to try to reach the nice spot d3. Of course White can't allow that. 10.d4 ♘ce4 11.♘xe4 ♘xe4 12.♘e5± White is slightly better.

10.♕e2



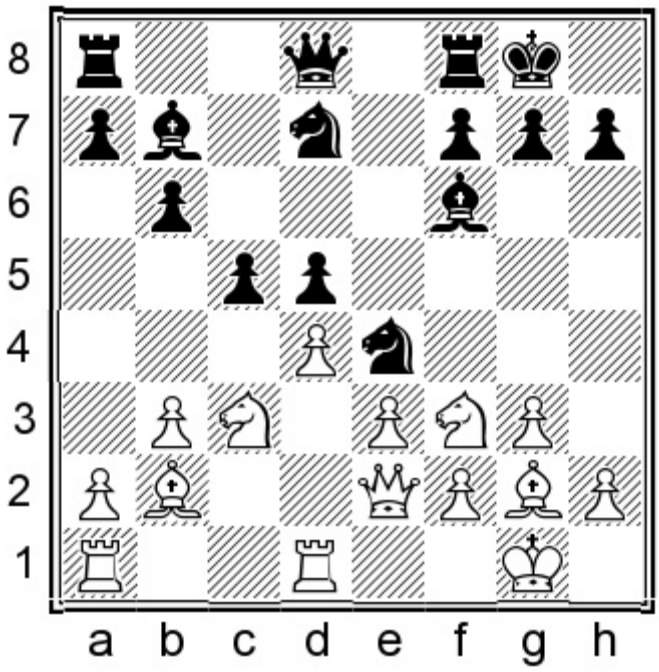
Position after: 10.♕e2

10...♖c8

This position has been reached almost 200 times. I myself experienced it once. I would like to suggest an interesting improvement that came to my mind during this game (but only after I played the classical move), but first, let's have a look at Black's other possibilities:

A) I had an interesting game against Pogonina after 10...♘e4 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♖fd1 ♗f6 13.d4!

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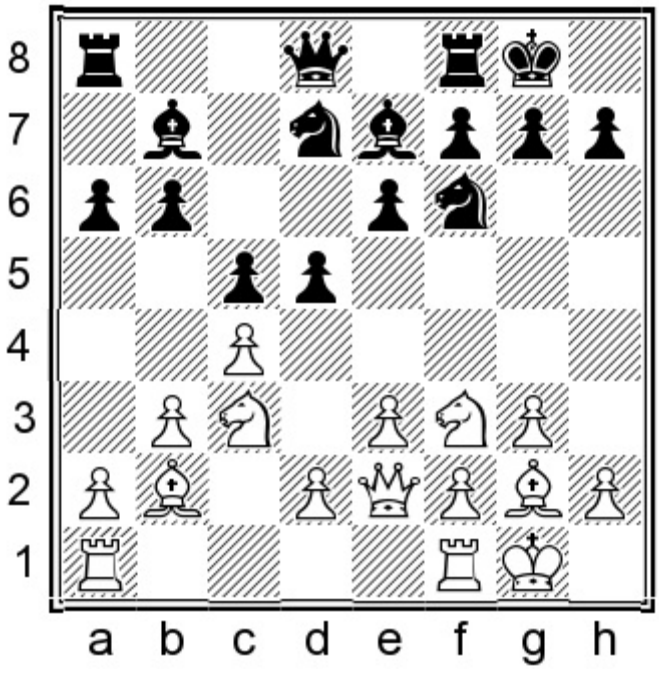


Position after: 13.d4!

I more or less knew the position up to this point, and it's quite easy to put some pressure on Black: 13...♘xc3 14.♗xc3 ♕e7 15.♖ac1 ♖ac8 16.♕b2 ♖fe8 17.♘e1! d5 is in danger, so Black has to accept an IQP. 17...cxd4 18.♗xd4 ♗xd4 19.♕xd4 ♘f6 20.♘d3± And again (at that time, it was quite usual for me to miss wins in my games resulting from the Reti) I had to settle for a draw after a long game (½-½, 80) Demuth, A (2535) – Pogonina, N (2454) Gibraltar 2016.

B) 10...♕c7 11.♘h4!? with similar ideas to our main lines.

C) 10...a6



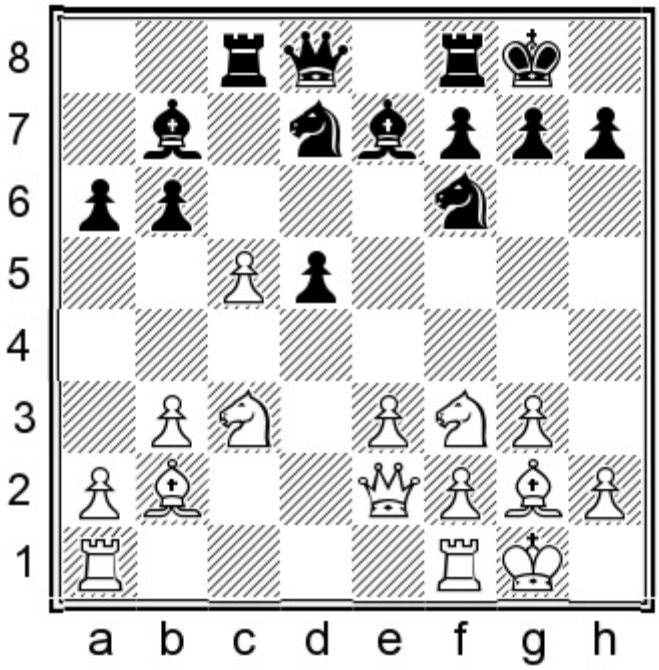
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Position after: 10...a6

I would like to tell you a short story about this line. During summer 2017, I was the second of my friend, the French talent and grandmaster Maxime Lagarde, for the French Championships.

He had a tough game to prepare against the super-solid (and our team mate) Tigran Gharamian, who plays many openings and is always really well-prepared. We finally decided that the Reti was quite a clever opening choice, and we especially prepared this line with 6...b6. But Tigran managed to surprise both of us with this semi-waiting move 10...a6. It worked quite well in the game, as White couldn't get the attack he wanted, and had to settle for a draw.

I think we can improve Maxime's play by starting with 11.cxd5. Indeed, as ...a6 was not really useful, we can react in the center with ease. (11.♘h4 was interesting in the game, but a bit too early as the queen is still on d8: 11...g6 12.f4 ♘e4 13.d3 ♘xc3 14.♗xc3 ♗f6⇄ ½-½ (22) Lagarde, M (2607) – Gharamian, T (2616) Agen 2017.) 11...exd5 (11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.d4 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2± In addition to having wasted a tempo with 10...a6, the pawn now becomes a target that prevents the a8-rook from moving. White is better thanks to his more active pieces.) 12.d4 ♖c8 13.dxc5

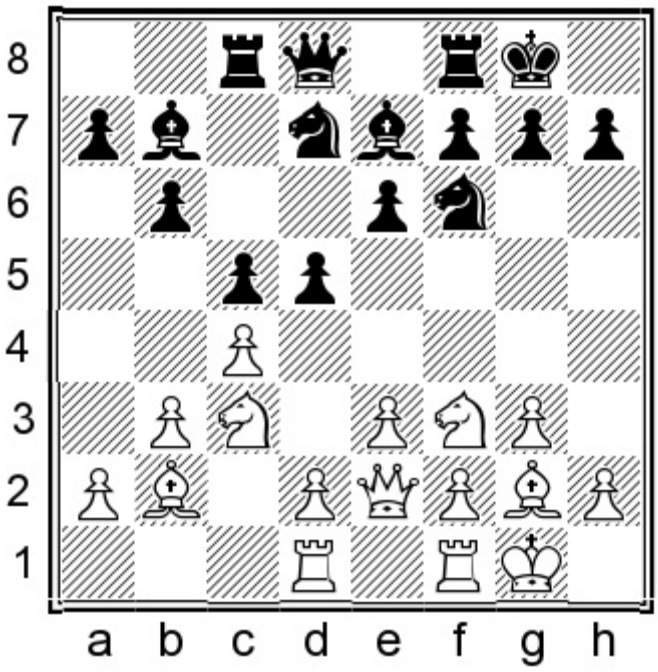


Position after: 13.dxc5

We have to take as soon as we can in order to prevent c4-ideas, 13...bxc5 14.♖fd1! ♕c7 15.♘h4! ♘b6 16.♘f5 ♖fe8 17.♖ac1± White not only has good prospects against the hanging pawns in the center, but also sometimes on the kingside with the help of the knight on f5 and bishop on b2.

11.♖ad1!N

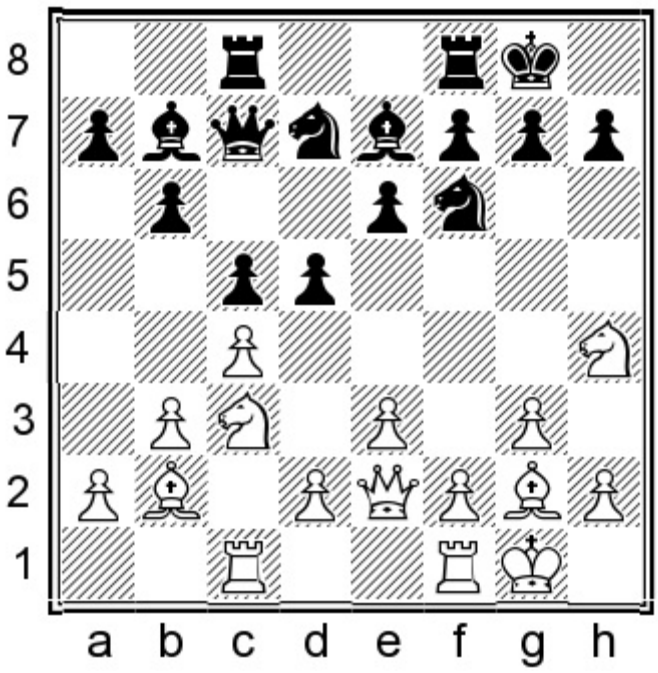
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Position after: 11.♖ad1!N

This has been played a couple of times, but escaped the attention it deserves, which is why I kept the novelty mark. White has nothing to do on the c-file, thus it's better to start both offensive and defensive ideas on the d-file.

A more natural move is 11.♖ac1 ♕c7 12.♘h4!? with similar ideas to our main line:



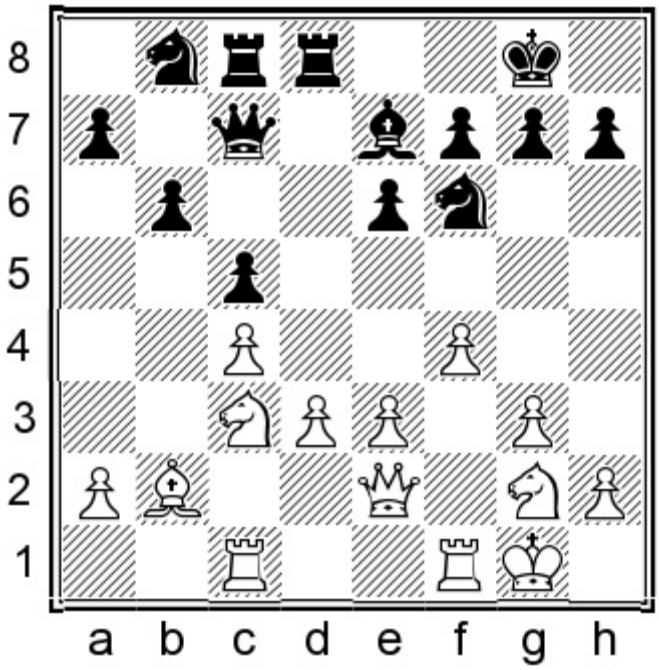
Position after: 12.♘h4!?

A) 12...♖fd8?! 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 (13...exd5?! is simply quite bad: 14.d4! ♕b8 15.dxc5! with a great

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position.) 14.♘f5! This is the point of White's strategy. 14...♘7f6 (14...♗f6 15.♗xd5 ♗xd5 16.♘b5 ♕b7 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♘fd6±; 14...♗f8?? 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♘h6++–; 14...exf5 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♗xd5±) 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♗e5 ♕b7 17.♗xd5 (17.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 18.e4 ♗b7∞) 17...♖xd5 18.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 19.d4±

B) 12...dxc4 13.bxc4 ♗xg2 14.♘xg2 ♖fd8 15.f4 ♘b8 16.d3 During my game, I started to wonder around here, "Why did I put this rook on c1, it's complete nonsense. I need a rook on f1 to attack, and one on d1 to defend the d-pawn...".

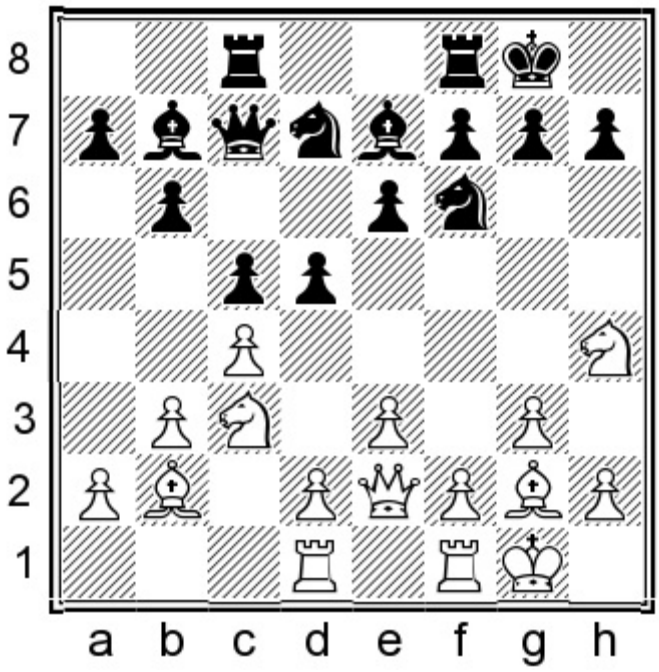


Position after: 16.d3

16...♘c6 17.g4 ♕d7 18.♖cd1 And finally I had to spend a tempo playing this defensive move. 18...♘e8 19.♘e4 ♘d6 20.♘g3 f6 21.♘h5 ♖f8 22.g5± And somehow (once in a while, this can happen), I scored a fine win in the game Demuth, A (2544) – Zhai, M (2382) Cannes 2016, 1-0 (34).

11...♕c7 12.♘h4!

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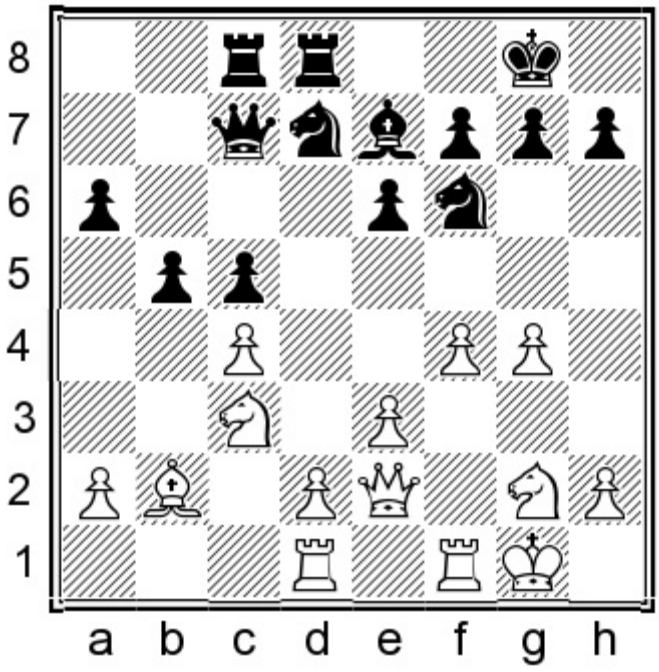


Position after: 12.♘h4!

The ideas are similar to my game against Zhai Mho.

12...dxc4

After 12...♖fd8 we can even prefer 13.f4! which 'forces' Black to take a decision in the center if he doesn't want to wait for White to attack. 13...dxc4 14.bxc4 ♗xg2 15.♘xg2 a6 16.g4 b5!?

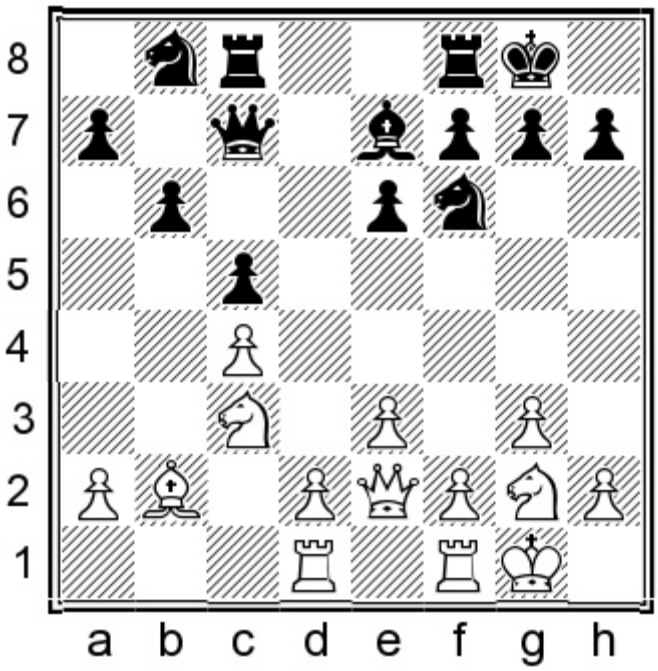


Position after: 16...b5!?

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It is always quite logical for Black to sacrifice a pawn in this area. This is the quickest way to get counterplay. 17.g5 ♘e8 18.cxb5 axb5 19.♘xb5! Anyway, we should take it. 19...♕b7 20.♗c3 ♖a8 21.h4!→ As we don't really care about our a-pawn, it's time to get on with the attack.

13.bxc4 ♗xg2 14.♘xg2 ♘b8

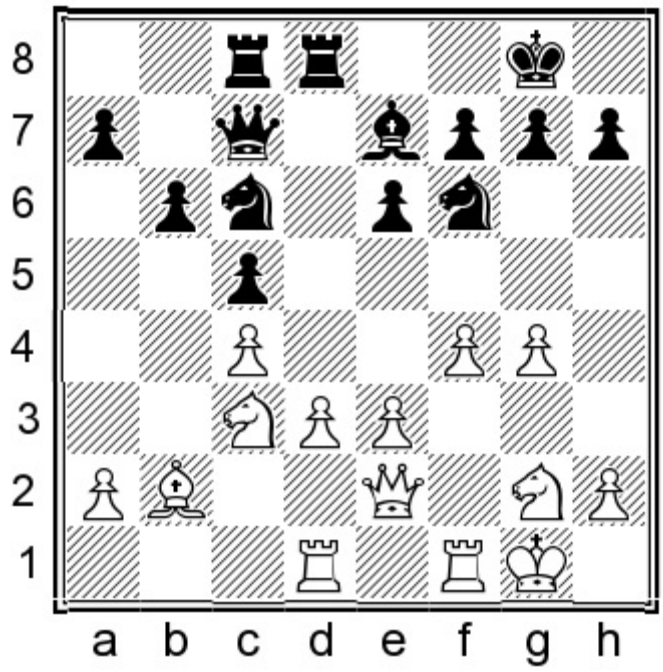


Position after: 14...♘b8

This move shows why we play this kind of plan (with ♘h4, f4, g4), only when the knight arrives on d7 (where it was doing nothing), and not on c6. With two tempi up, Black could manage to get some active counterplay, but here he is going to be a bit too late.

15.f4 ♘c6 16.g4 ♖fd8 17.d3→

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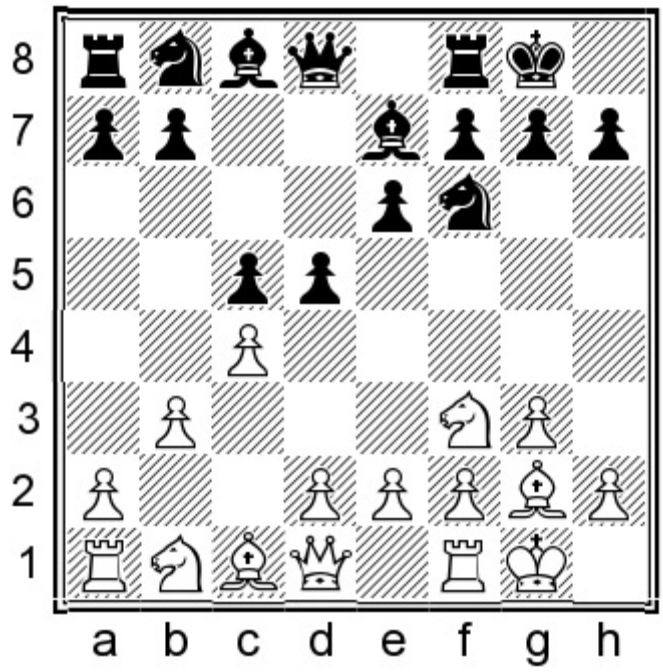
Position after: 17.d3→

After some natural moves, we have reached a plausible position. White can sometimes opt for g5, but f5 is interesting as well (as it would weaken the d5-square for a knight). That's why I call this kind of position a 'positional attack', because the goal is not only to mate the king. Black needs to take the positional threats really seriously as well. This is definitely the kind of positions that needs to be played.

d) 6...c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 --, 8...b6 9.♘c3 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 c5

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Position after: 6...c5

This is the most played move. You will already certainly have noticed that ...c5 is played in many other variations, which is quite logical as White decided to delay d4. Thus Black can still transpose into the other lines. Here, we are going to go deeper into the systems where Black tries to control the center.

7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3

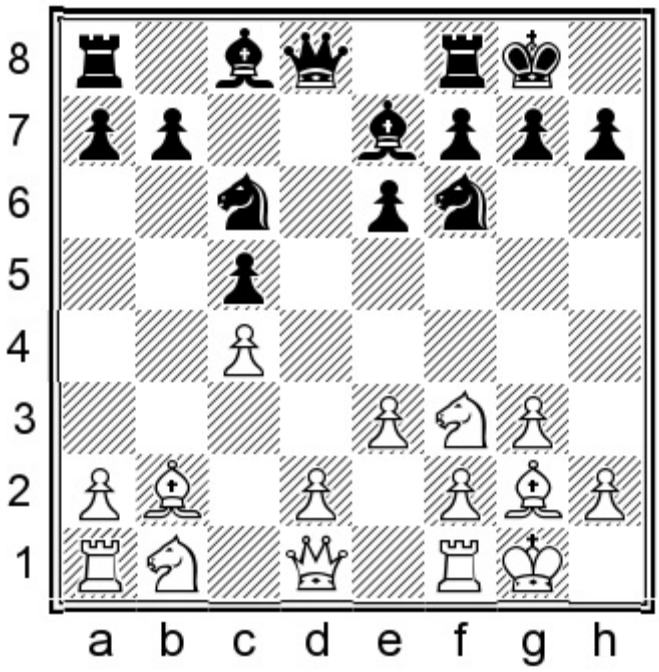
As usual, it's good to start with this move in order to prepare ♘c3.

8...b6

Black opts for a fianchetto, as in the line 6...b6, but the knight is now on c6. This makes the plan with ♘h4, f4, g4, starting a positional attack, less effective because the center is also less well defended.

A) 8...dxc4 9.bxc4

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Position after: 9.bxc4

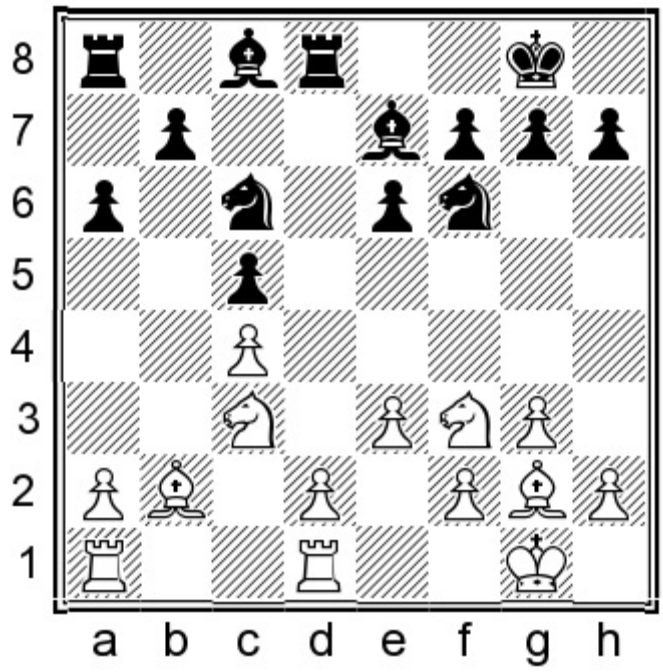
A1) 9...♕b6!?

A1.1) 10.♕b3 ♘a5! I met this line in a friendly blitz game with the Egyptian grandmaster Ahmed Adly. As my position soon collapsed, I had to take a serious look at it. 11.♕xb6 axb6 12.♘a3 (12.d3?! ♖d8 13.♖d1? ♘xc4–+) 12...♖d8 13.♖fd1 ♘e4 14.d3 ♘d6=

A1.2) 10.♕c2! much less played, but we don't have to fear ...♘b4: 10...♖d8 (the threat is now ...♘b4 to go to d3) 11.d4! cxd4 12.exd4 ♕c7 13.♘c3± and White gets an active position.

A2) 9...♕d3 As White has made a hole on d3, it's quite logical to try to exploit it. 10.♕b3! ♖d8 11.♖d1 Black will soon be pushed away. For instance: 11...a6 12.♕xd3 ♖xd3 13.♘c3 ♖d8 (13...♖b8 14.♘a4! b5 15.cxb5 axb5 16.♘e1±)

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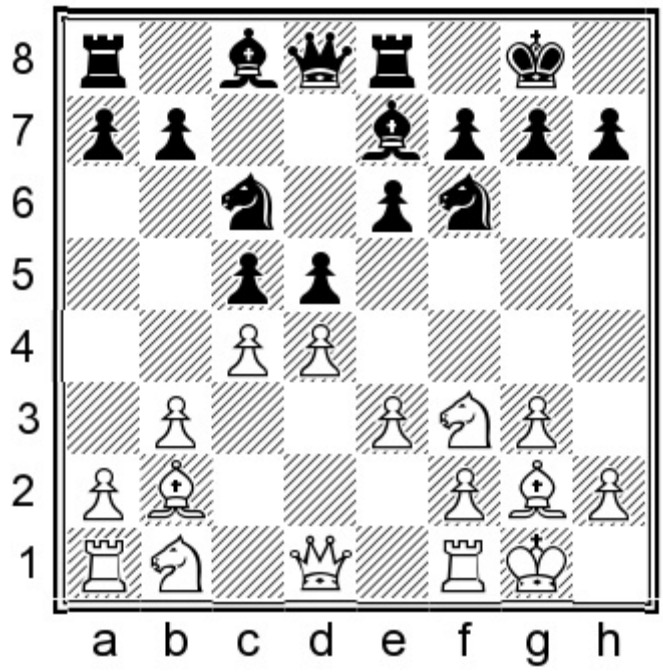


Position after: 13...♖d8

So far we have followed the game won by White Neverov, V (2572) – Efimenko, Z (2643) Rivne 2005, but we can improve White's play with... 14.♘a4!N 14...♖b8 15.♘e5!±.

B) 8...d4 transposes into 6...d4.

C) 8...♖e8 might be an interesting waiting move, waiting for ♘c3 in order to push ...d4. 9.d4!



Position after: 9.d4!

A good move in order to show that the move ...♖e8 was useless. (9.♕e2?! d4 10.exd4 cxd4 11.d3

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a5⇄) 9...dxc4 (9...cxd4 10.♘xd4! ♗d7 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘d2± Which do you prefer, White's bishops or Black's bishops?) 10.bxc4 cxd4 11.exd4 ♖b8 12.♕e2N 12...b6 13.♘bd2 ♗b7 14.♖ac1 ♕d7 15.♖fd1± White gets a mobile pair of pawns in the center, and Black is not fully ready to handle them.

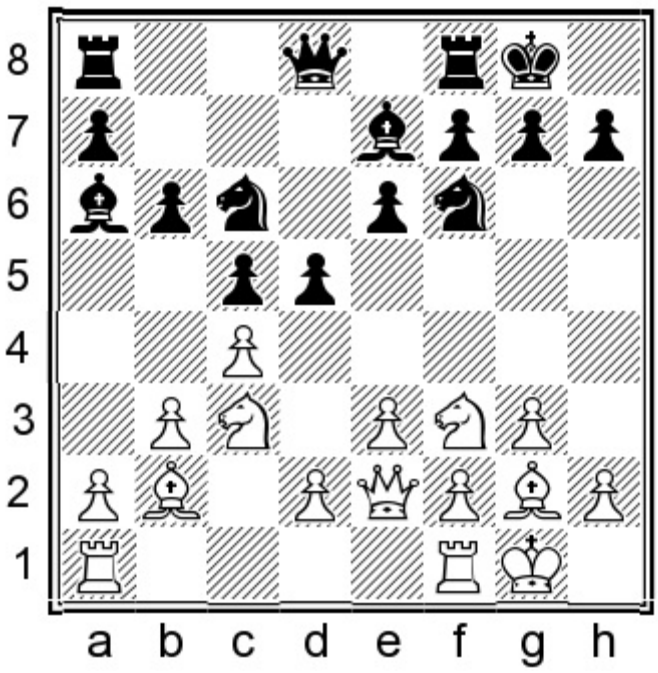
9.♘c3

9.cxd5?! Releasing the tension already is not a good idea, Black can capture with the knight, reaching an easy game: 9...♘xd5 10.d4 (10.♘c3 ♘db4!∓) 10...♗a6 11.♖e1 ♘db4!∓.

If Black doesn't want to enter the main line, this is the last chance!

9...dxc4

9...♗a6 10.♕e2



Position after: 10.♕e2

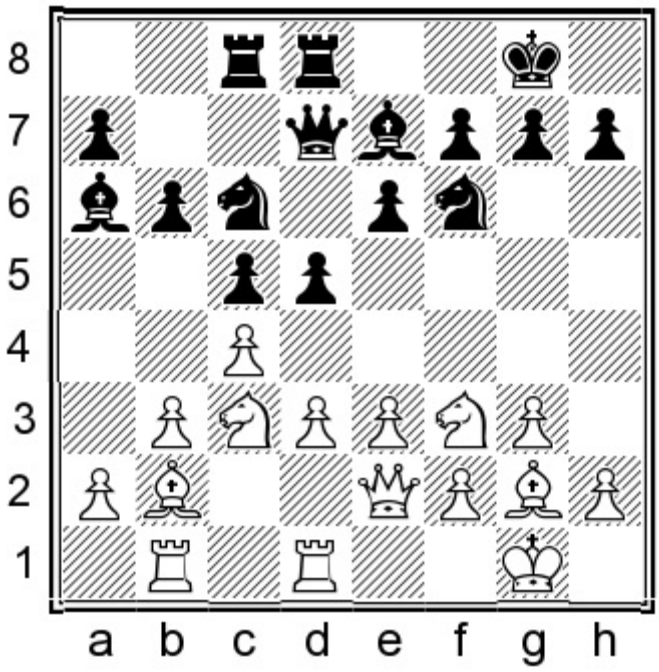
A) 10...♕d7?! is slightly inaccurate: 11.d4! cxd4 12.exd4

A1) 12...♖ac8 13.♘e5! (After the less precise 13.♘b5 the following game soon became complicated 13...dxc4 14.bxc4 ♘a5 15.♘e5 ♕e8 16.a4 ♘d7∞ ½-½ (54) Pantsulaia, L (2613) – Haznedaroglu, K (2494) Gjakova 2016) 13...♕c7 14.♘b5!±

A2) 12...♖fd8 13.♘e5 ♕e8 14.♘b5! Energetic play is needed here. 14...♗xb5 (14...♖ac8 15.♘xc6 ♖xc6 16.♘xa7 ♖xc4! A quite unusual sacrifice. 17.bxc4 ♗xc4 18.♕c2 ♕d7 19.♖fb1 ♕xa7 20.a4±) 15.cxb5 ♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♘d7 17.a3 White tries to take the c5-square away from Black's light pieces. 17...♖ac8 18.b4±

B) 10...♖c8 11.d3 ♕d7 12.♖fd1 ♖fd8 13.♖ab1!?

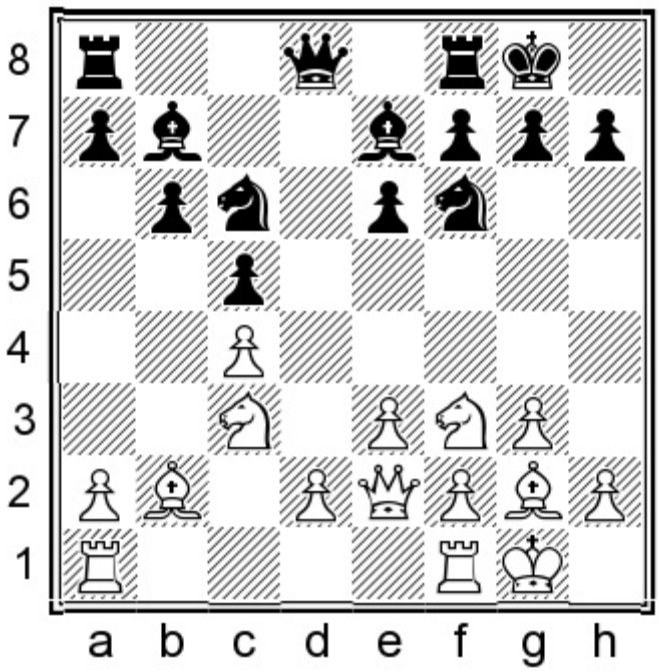
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Position after: 13.♖ab1!?

After a few natural moves, I offer an interesting continuation. The idea is not obvious. 13...♕e8 The logical move. 14.♘b5! ♖d7 (14...♗xb5?! 15.cxb5 ♘a5 16.a4! ♘xb3?? 17.♗xf6+– Here is the point of ♖ab1.) 15.♖d2 ♖cd8 16.♖bd1 ♗b7 17.♘e1 dxc4 18.bxc4 ♖b8 19.g4 ♕c8 20.g5 ♘e8 21.f4± With some decent play in this game White eventually managed to win in Dolezal, C (2417) – Molina, J (2163) Pinamar 2012.

10.bxc4 ♗b7 11.♕e2



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Position after: 11.♕e2

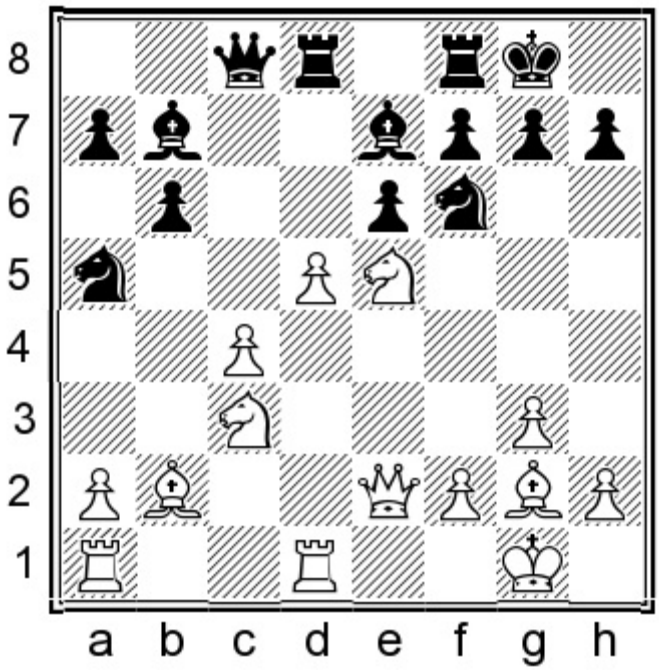
Black has a big choice of continuations. What is the best way for him to bring his rook into play?

11...a6!

Not so obvious, is it? It's actually important to prevent ♘b5 in some lines. It can also be good to prepare ...b5!

A) 11...♘b4?! is obviously quite bad as the knight will never reach the dream d3-square: 12.d4! cxd4 13.exd4 ♖c8 14.♖fd1±.

B) 11...♕d7 12.♖fd1! ♖fd8! (12...♖ad8 is the wrong rook: 13.d4! cxd4 14.exd4 ♘a5 15.♘e5 ♕c8 16.d5!

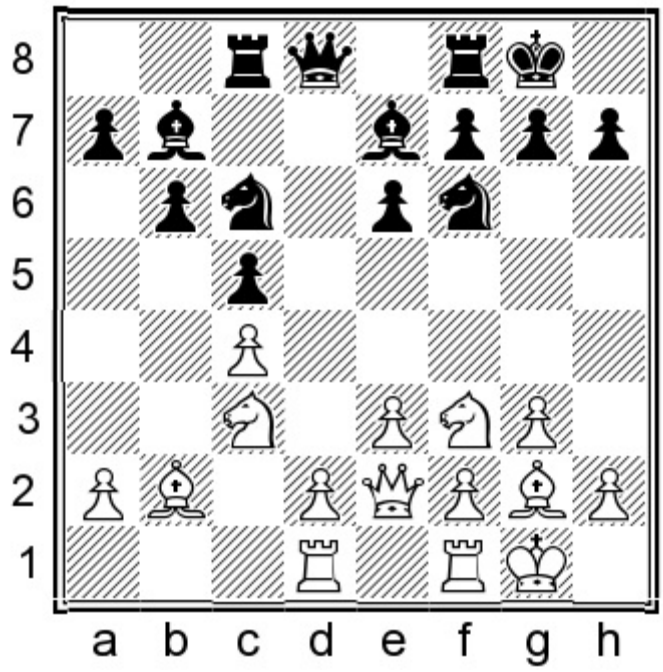


Position after: 16.d5!

This strong breakthrough brings White a serious advantage. 16...exd5 17.♘xd5 ♘xd5 18.cxd5±) 13.d4 cxd4 14.exd4 ♗f8! (14...♘a5? 15.d5!± is again pretty strong for White.) 15.♘e5 (15.a4!? is interesting as well.) 15...♕c8 16.♘xc6 ♗xc6 17.d5 exd5 18.♘xd5!±

C) 11...♖c8 12.♖ad1!?

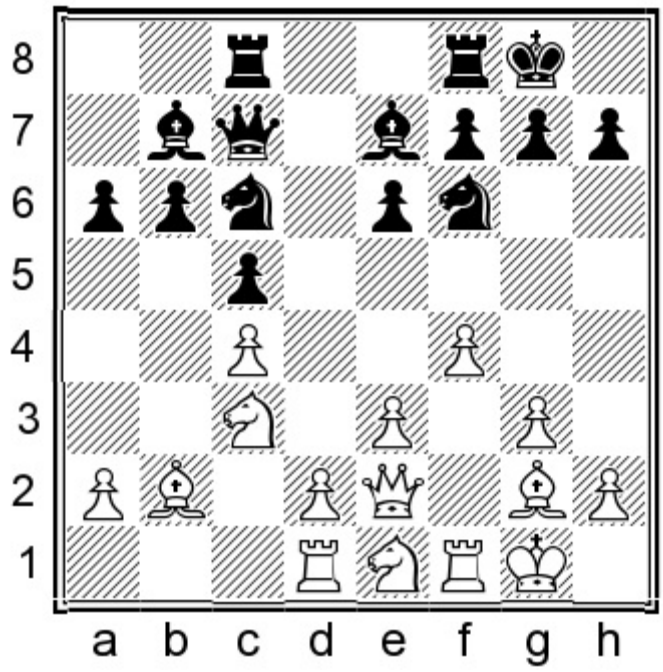
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Position after: 12.♖ad1!?

White can opt for several plans, depending on where Black puts his queen. 12...♕c7 (12...♕d7?! Here the pawn on c4 is less vulnerable, and the queen seems a bit misplaced on d7. 13.d4 cxd4 14.exd4 ♗b4 15.d5 ♘a5 16.♘e5±)

C1) 13.♘e1 a6 14.f4!



Position after: 14.f4!

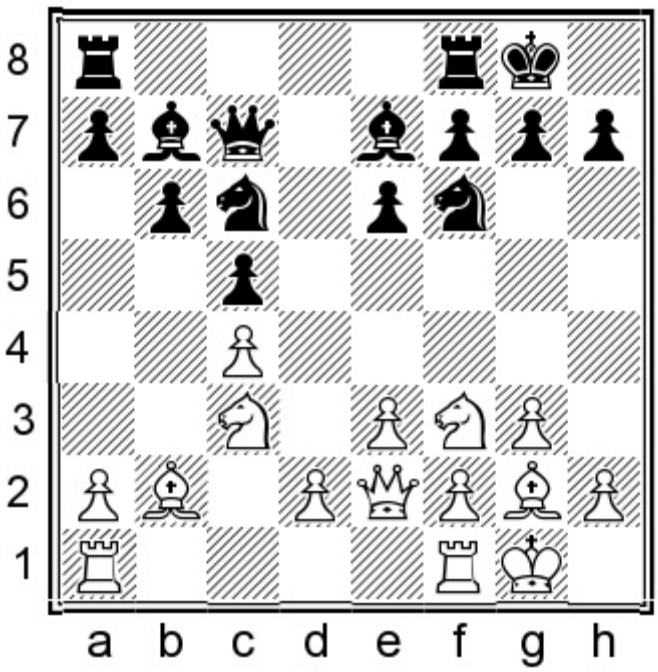
I stated before that this plan is not perfect with the knight on c6. True, but sometimes, if Black plays

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too slowly, it can still work (and Black also needs to spend some time with the knight in order to trade the light-squared bishops). 14...♘a7 15.f5!N 15...♗xg2 16.♘xg2 ♘c6 17.♘f4!± White threatens the e6-pawn, in order to invade the important d5-square.

C2) In the same spirit, Cordova tried 13.♘h4 ♘e8 14.f4 ♗xh4 Probably this looks quite dynamic for White, still I prefer to put the knight on e1! 15.gxh4 ♘e7 16.h5 ♗xg2 17.♕xg2 ♕c6 18.e4 f5 19.d3⇄ 1-0 (96) Cordova, E (2609) – Lopez Martinez, J (2548) Catalonia 2014.

D) What happens if Black doesn't play ...a6? I found the response myself in a recent game: 11...♕c7

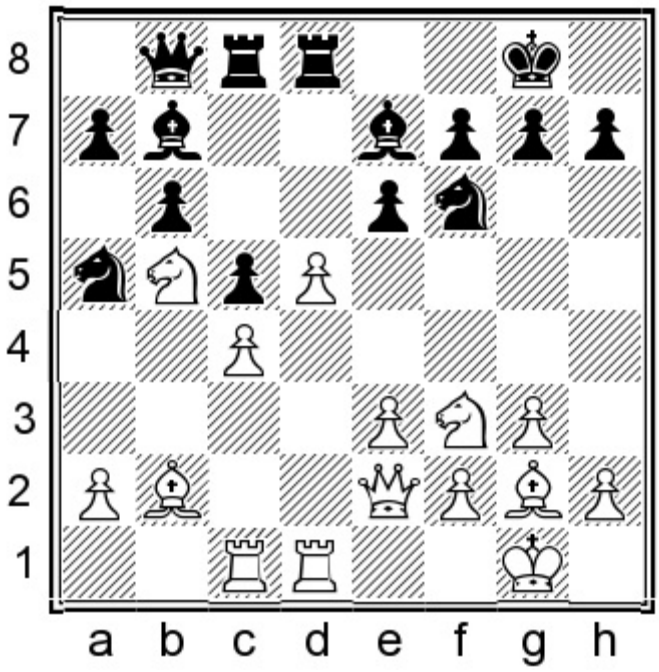


Position after: 11...♕c7

D1) Here 12.♖ad1 is a bit careless if Black is precise: 12...♖fd8 13.♘e1 a6 14.f4 b5! (14...♘b4!? 15.d3 ♗xg2 16.♘xg2 b5!↑) 15.cxb5 axb5 We notice that it's not really possible if Black delays ...♖ac8.

D2) 12.♖fd1 ♖ac8 13.♖ac1 ♖fd8 After some careless play by Black, we have the right to open the center. 14.d4! ♘a5 This is the logical response. Black keeps the center closed for now, and tries to get some counterplay on the c4-pawn. 15.♘b5 ♕b8 16.d5!

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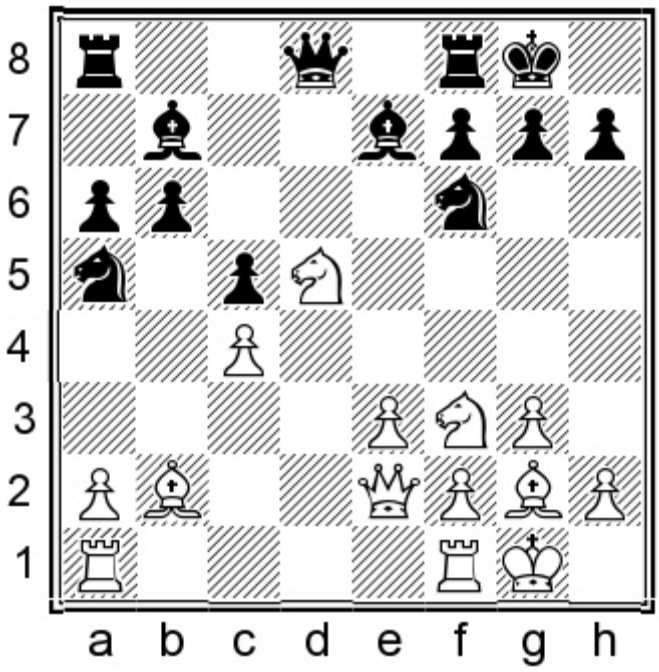
Position after: 16.d5!

A really strong breakthrough, which needs to be well calculated. 16...exd5 17.♗e5 ♕a8 18.♘c7 ♖xc7 19.♗xc7 White has won an exchange. The question now is: can Black get enough compensation with his queenside pawns? 19...♖c8 20.cxd5! A nice intermediate move. 20...♖xc7 (20...♗xd5?! 21.♗e5 ♕b7 22.♘h4 ♗xg2 23.♘xg2± and I converted quite easily in Demuth, A (2529) – Donchenko, An (2284) Grenke Open 2017) 21.d6 ♖d7 22.dxe7 ♖xe7 23.♘h4 ♗xg2 24.♘xg2 ♘c6 25.♕f3± Black can organize some reasonable play, but White keeps the advantage.

12.♖fd1!?

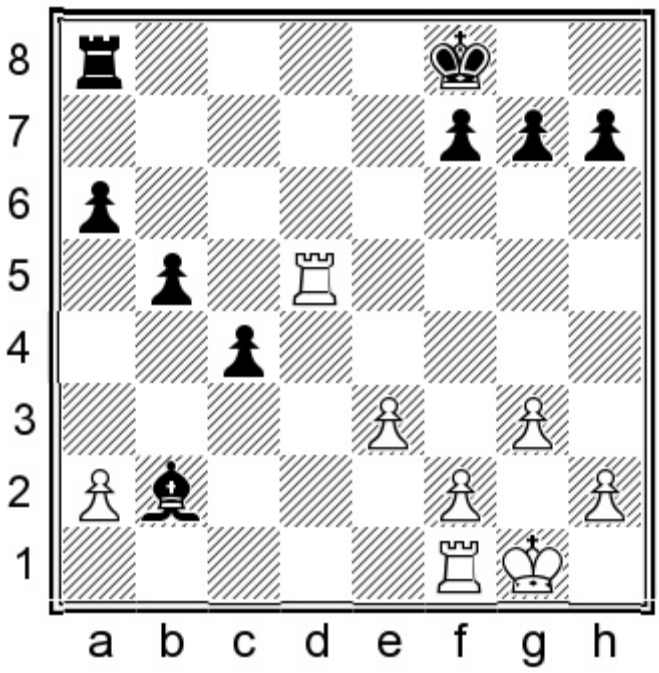
I found a nice idea after 12.d4 ♘a5 13.d5!? (temporarily sacrificing a pawn) 13...exd5 14.♘xd5!N

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Position after: 14.♘xd5!N

14...♘xd5 15.♖ad1! ♘xc4! This is best. If we can just take back on d4, then White is better. 16.♕xc4 Now Black has to find a way to save his knight, and it's quite tough. 16...b5□ 17.♕g4 ♗f6□ Again the only move to keep the balance. (17...g6 18.♘e5! ♗f6 19.♖xd5! ♗xd5 20.♖d1 ♕c7 21.♘xg6!± hxg6? 22.♗xf6+–) 18.♘e5! ♕d6! 19.♕d7 ♕xd7! (19...♗xe5 20.♕xb7 ♗xb2 21.♖xd5 ♕b8 22.♕xb8 ♖axb8 23.♖xc5±) 20.♘xd7 ♗xb2 21.♘xf8 ♔xf8 22.♗xd5 ♗xd5 23.♖xd5 c4!

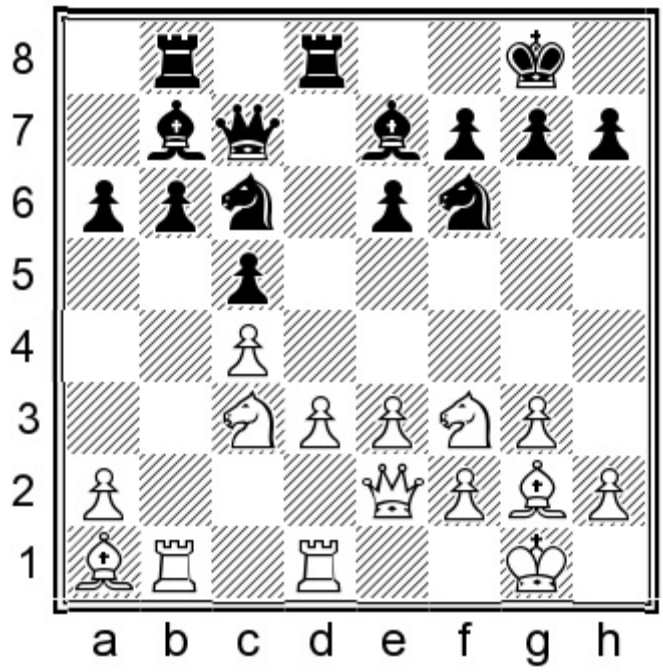


Position after: 23...c4!

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And unfortunately all these forced moves only lead to a draw. Of course it can be tried in a game; you can imagine how hard it is to find these moves for Black. The game might continue: 24.♖fd1 (24.♖c5 ♖d8 25.a4 ♖b8 26.♖d1 c3 27.axb5 axb5 28.♖d7 ♔e8 29.♖cc7 c2 30.♖e7+ ♔d8 31.♖ed7+ ♔e8 32.♖e7+=) 24...♖c8 25.♔f1 c3 26.♖d8+ ♖xd8 27.♖xd8+ ♔e7 28.♖c8 ♔d7 29.♖c5 ♔d6 30.♖c8 ♔d7=

12...♕c7 13.♖ab1! ♖ab8 14.♗a1 ♖fd8 15.d3



Position after: 15.d3

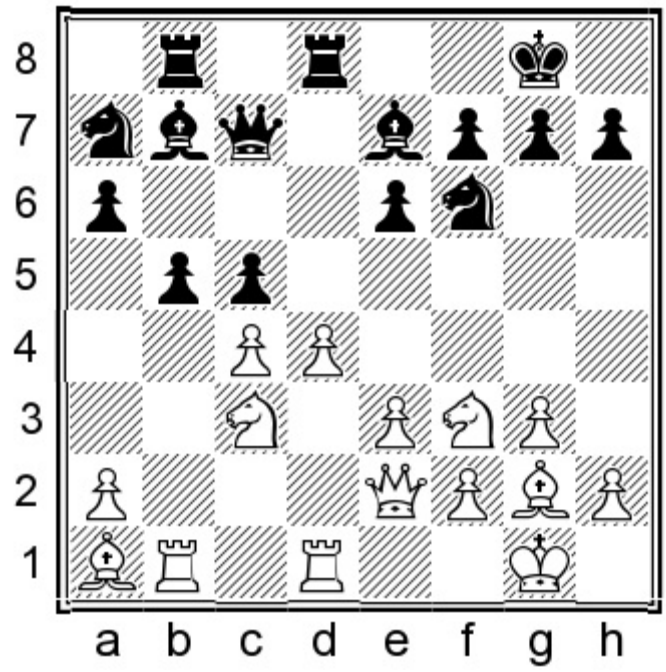
White tries a solid set-up, preventing many strong Black ideas. If the queenside is locked, then we will be able to think about action on the kingside.

15...♗a8

15...♘a7 An interesting try, intending to play ...b5 at some point.

A) 16.d4 was tried in, for instance, in the game Korchnoi, V (2635) – Georgiev, K (2545) Lugano 1986. White tries to take advantage of the knight that just landed on the edge of the board, but it can actually be met with 16...b5!N

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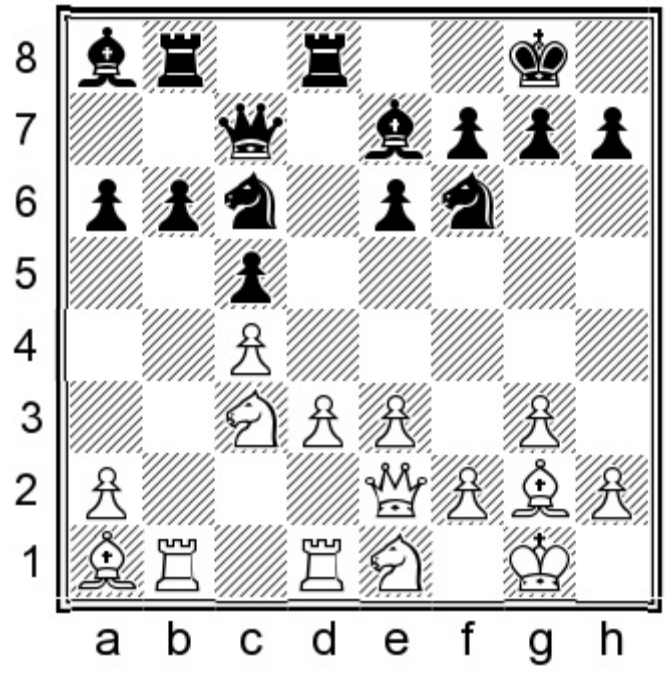


Position after: 16...b5!N

and I don’t see how White can get anything in the center: 17.cxb5 axb5 18.dxc5 ♕xc5=.

B) 16.♕c2!? My advice! This often enables our knight on c3 to find a better square on e2, and then f4. 16...♗c6 17.♘e2 ♘d7 18.♘f4 We have managed to find a great spot for our knight. 18...♕b7 19.♕e2 b5! 20.d4 ♗e4 21.d5!? And White found this interesting exchange sacrifice that brought her victory: Kovalevskaya, E (2417) – Zhao, X (2556) Jermuk 2012.

16.♘e1



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Position after: 16.♘e1

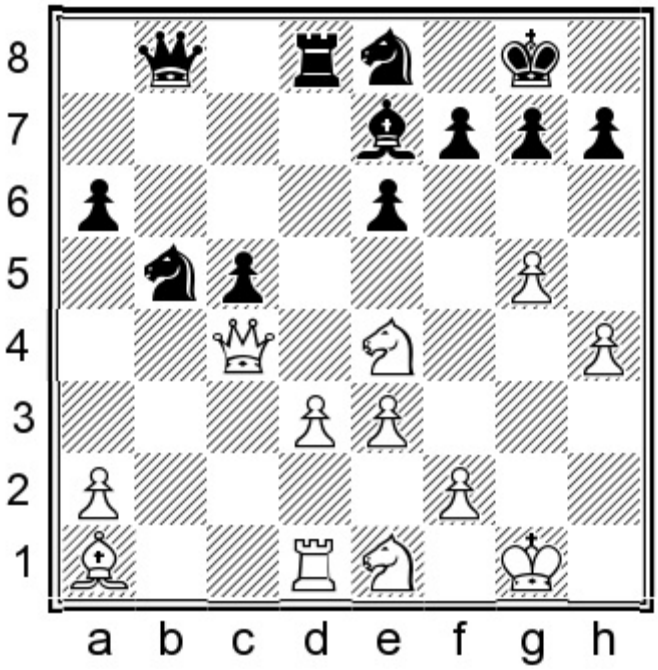
16...♘a7

16...♘e8 17.f4! was played in Zaichik – Tiviakov, Moscow 1994: 17...♘d6 18.a4!? ♘b4 19.♗xa8 ♖xa8 and here I prefer 20.♘f3↑ with interesting dynamic play.

17.♗xa8 ♖xa8 18.g4!↑

White takes over the initiative.

18...♖ab8 19.g5 ♘e8 20.h4 b5 21.♕g4 bxc4 22.♖xb8 ♕xb8 23.♕xc4 ♘b5 24.♘e4±



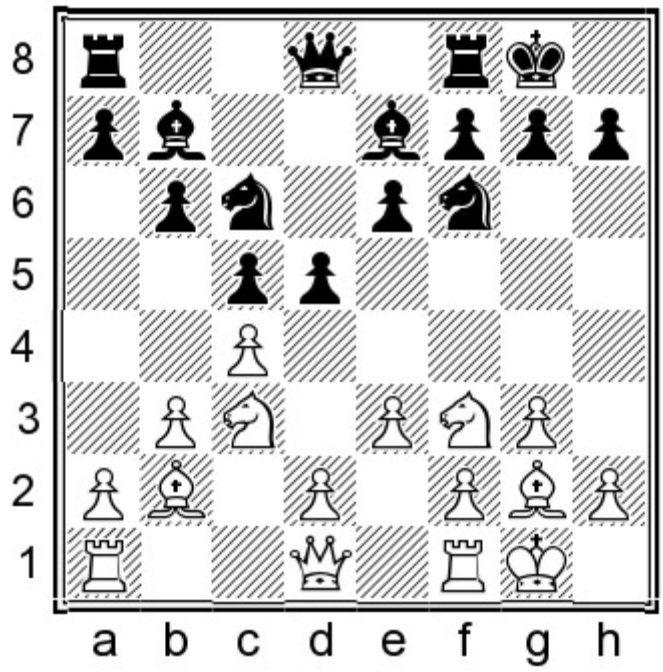
Position after: 24.♘e4±

White couldn't win in Bukavshin, I (2648) – Lysyj, I (2677) Sochi 2015, but he has kept the better position, thanks to the pawn structure.

e) 6...c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗b7

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 e6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗e7 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3 c5 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.e3 b6 9.♘c3 ♗b7

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Position after: 9...♗b7

10.cxd5!

Usually, in this kind of structure, it's useful to know that White will get a good position if Black takes back with a pawn (especially with the knight on c6, from where it does not protect c5, and obstructs his own bishop on b7).

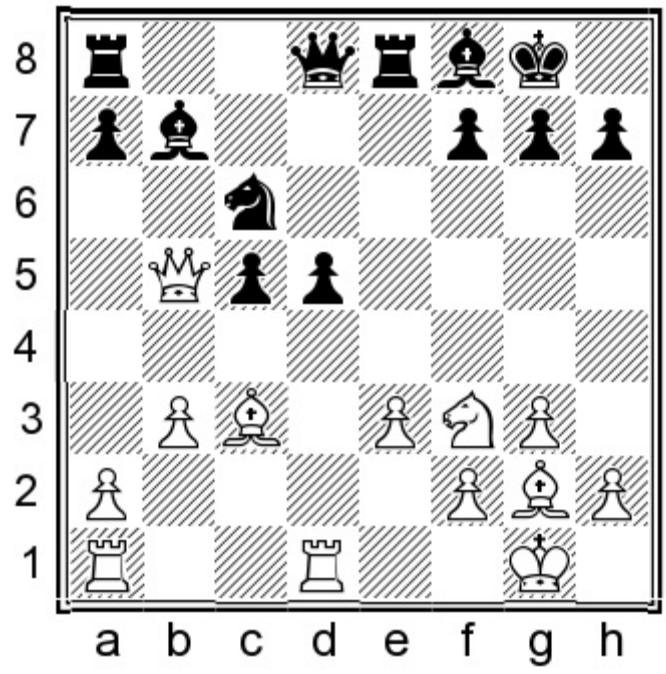
10...♘xd5

Now let's see why it's pretty dubious to take with the pawn: 10...exd5?! 11.d4

A) In case of 11...♗a6?! we can even play the intermediate move 12.♘e5! ♘xe5? (12...♖c8 13.♖e1±) 13.dxe5 ♗xf1 14.exf6 ♗xg2 15.fxe7 ♕xe7 16.♔xg2±

B) After 11...♘e4 the following game of Kramnik popularized White's system: 12.dxc5 ♘xc3 13.♗xc3 bxc5 14.♕e2 ♖e8 15.♖fd1 ♗f8 16.♕b5!

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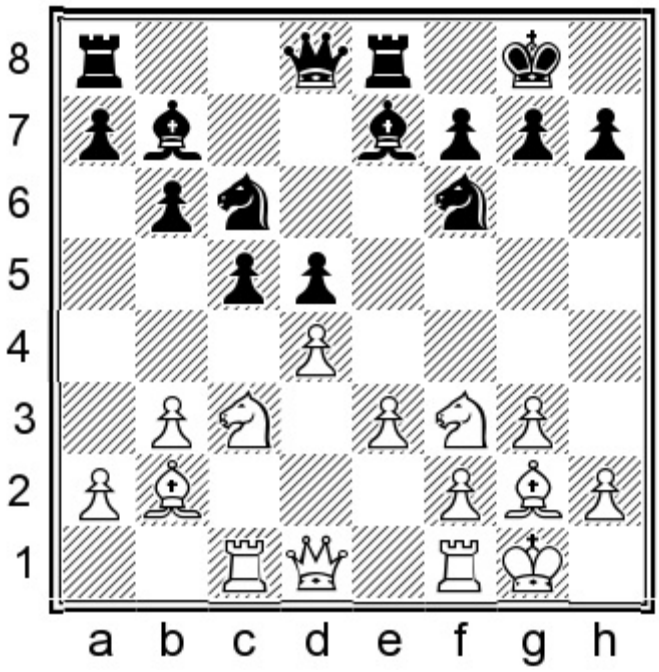
Position after: 16.♕b5!

16...♕b6 17.♕xb6 axb6 18.♖xd5 ♘d4! 19.♘xd4 ♗xd5 20.♗xd5 cxd4 21.♗xd4 ♖a5 22.e4± You can imagine what kind of nightmare it is to defend this endgame against the Russian former World Champion. It's no coincidence that Jones could not save the game in Kramnik, V (2795) – Jones, G (2644) London 2012.

C) 11...♖c8 12.♖c1 ♗a6 13.♖e1 cxd4 14.♘xd4 ♘b4 In Akopian, V (2688) – Iakymov, V (2463) Rijeka 2010. Black goes 'all-in'; if his counterplay collapses, he will get an awful IQP. 15.♗h3!N would have been best: 15...♖c7 16.♗f5! (in order to simply protect the weak square, before chasing the annoying knight) 16...♗c5 17.a3 ♘c6? 18.♘xc6 ♖xc6 19.b4+–.

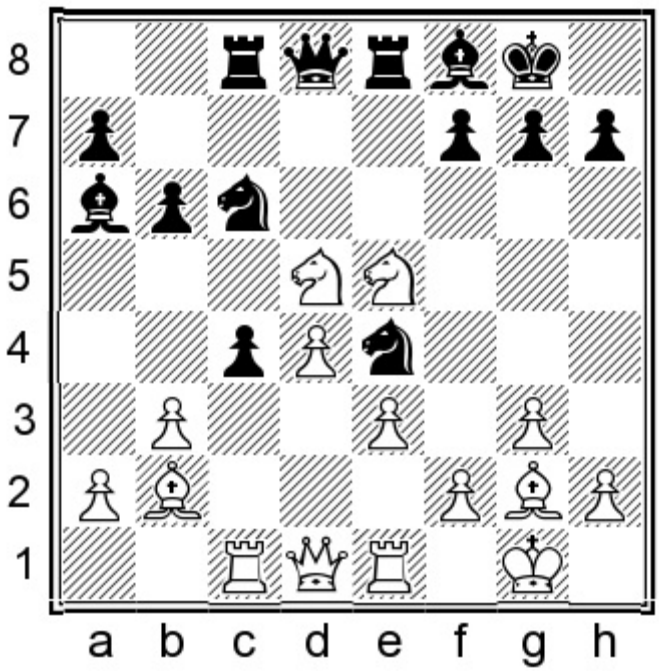
D) 11...♖e8 12.♖c1

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Position after: 12.♖c1

12...♗f8 13.♘e2! This has been played only once (but by Vitiugov), and it's simply the best. 13...♘e4 14.♘f4! This is the right square for the knight, both attacking d5 and freeing the way for the bishop on b2. 14...♗a6 15.♖e1 c4 This is still the game Vitiugov, N (2720) – Frolyanov, D (2610) Olginka 2011, and even if White won, we can improve his play with 16.♘e5!N 16...♖c8 17.♘xd5!

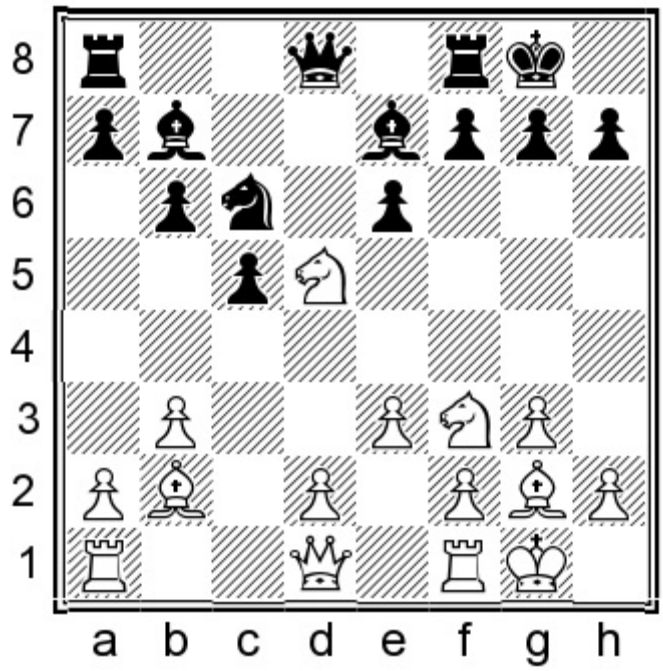


Position after: 17.♘xd5!

17...♕xd5 18.bxc4 ♕a5 19.♗xe4± with at least a pawn up for White.

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11.♘xd5!



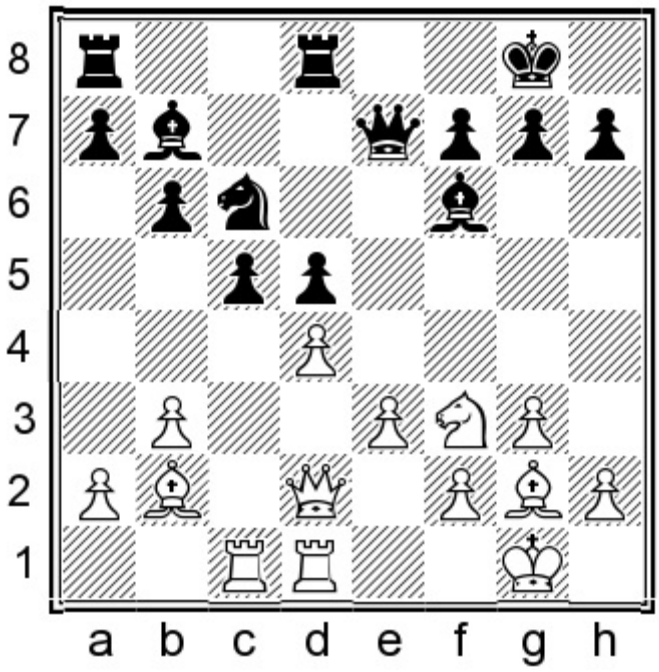
Position after: 11.♘xd5!

11...♕xd5

In order to avoid having a pawn on d5, Black has to put the queen in the center. How do we make use of that?

11...exd5?! Again this move doesn't ask much from White in order to take the initiative. Of course Black has multiple ways to play; we can simply say that White has the easier game, and only needs to exert some pressure in the center: 12.d4! ♗f6 13.♕d2 ♕e7 14.♖fd1 ♖fd8 15.♖ac1

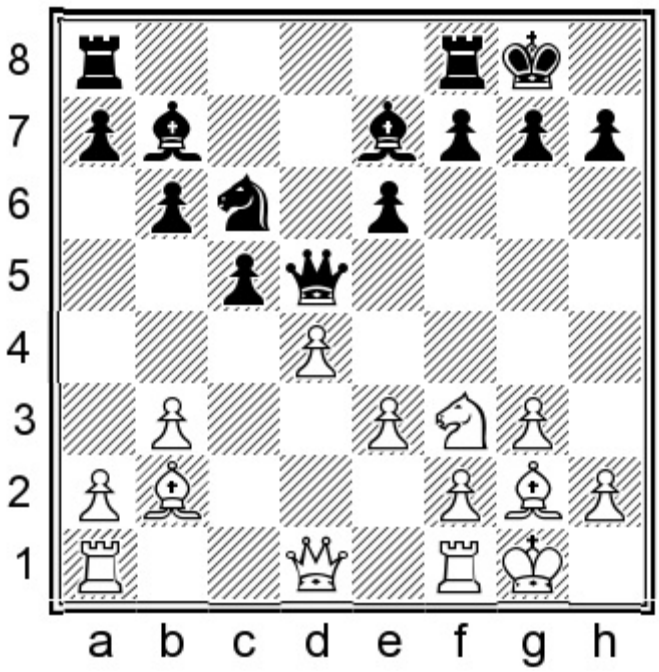
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Position after: 15.♖ac1

The only time I faced this line, I scored a fine win. The position is already tough for Black, and he even helped me to realize my edge with 15...cxd4?! which has to be seen as a concession: 16.♘xd4 ♘xd4 17.♗xd4 ♗xd4 18.♕xd4 h6 Here I only remembered the advice of Fischer against an isolated d-pawn, which is more or less “put everything you can on it, and then grab it”. 19.♖c2 ♖ac8 But my opponent decided to give it up right away. 20.♖xc8 ♖xc8 21.♗xd5 ♗xd5 22.♕xd5± 1-0 (53) Demuth, A (2516) – Kundt, K (2293) Pfalz Open 2015.

12.d4!



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Position after: 12.d4!

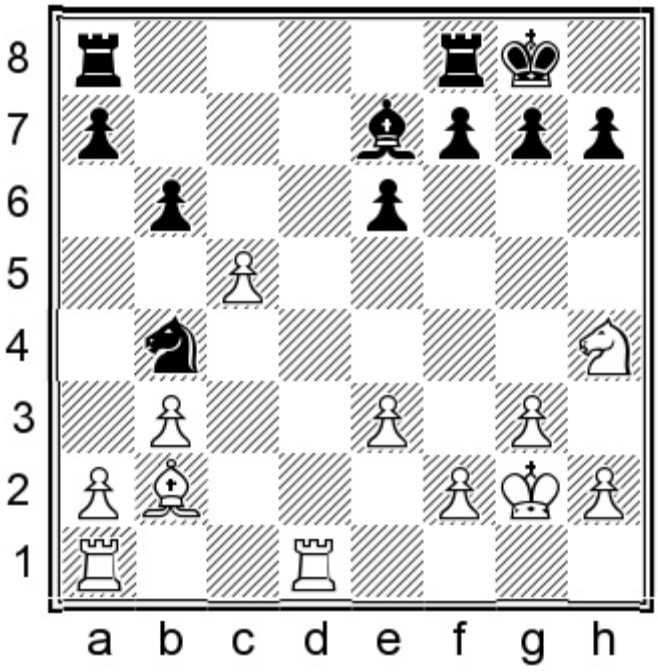
This simple move undermines Black's center and threatens 13.♘e5. Black needs to figure out what to do with his queen. He has experimented with many moves here.

12...♖ad8

A) 12...♖fd8?! has been known to be dubious for a long time: 13.♘e5 ♕d6 14.♕f3! As f7 is also under attack, Black has no other choice but to give up the bishop pair: 14...♘xe5 15.♕xb7 ♘d3 16.♗a3± Pigusov – Dzuban, Riga 1988.

B) 12...♕d8 This can't be good enough for equality. 13.dxc5 ♗xc5 14.♘e5 ♘xe5 (14...♕c7 is well met with 15.♘d7! ♖fd8? 16.♕g4 e5 17.♖fd1± and White is almost winning.) 15.♗xb7±

C) After 12...♘b4 we have major trades: 13.♘h4 ♕d7 14.dxc5 ♕xd1 15.♖fxd1 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2



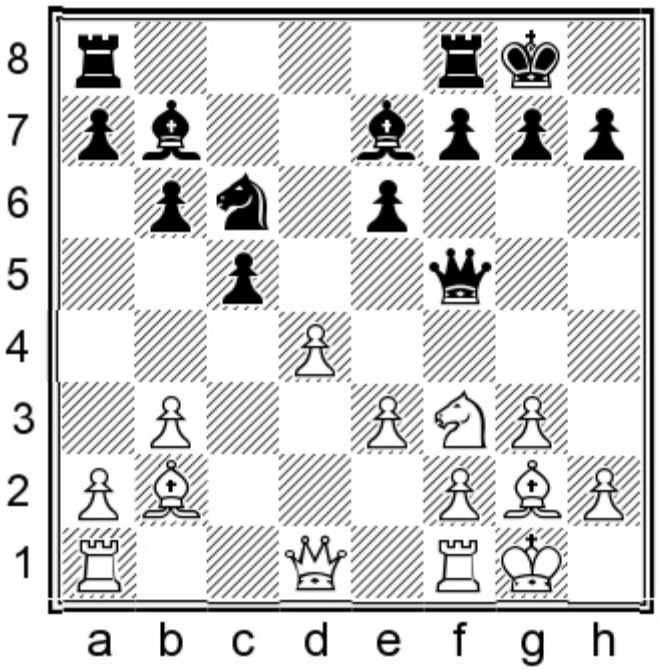
Position after: 16.♔xg2

Are we going to accept a sad draw? Of course not, as now both recaptures have their drawbacks! 16...♗xc5 (16...bxc5 17.♘f3 ♖fd8 18.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 19.♗c3 ♘c6 20.♔f1± White keeps the better endgame thanks to his better structure, and Black is still far from achieving a draw.) 17.a3 ♘c6 (Obviously 17...♘c2 is too risky: 18.♖ac1 ♘xa3 19.♖xc5 bxc5 20.♗xa3±.) 18.b4 ♗e7 19.♖ac1± Black is deprived of activity and will soon be suffering.

D) 12...♘a5 13.♖c1 ♖ac8 14.♗a3!±

E) 12...♕f5 Now we have two ways to try to disrupt Black's coordination:

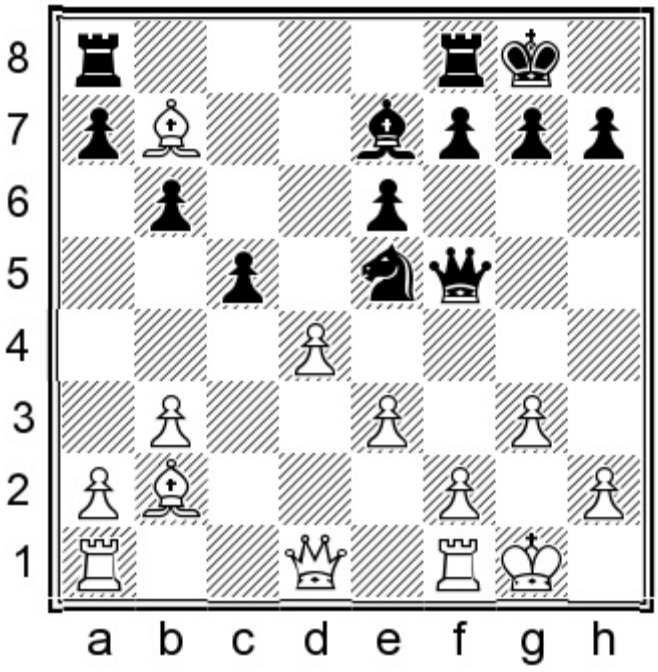
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Position after: 12...♕f5

E1) 13.dxc5!? ♖ad8! (13...♗xc5? 14.♘h4 ♕g5 15.b4! ♗xb4 16.♕d7 ♘a5?! 17.♗xb7 ♖ad8 18.♕a4+–) 14.♕e2 ♗xc5 15.a3 a5 16.♘h4 ♕g5 17.♖ac1±

E2) 13.♘e5 ♘xe5 14.♗xb7

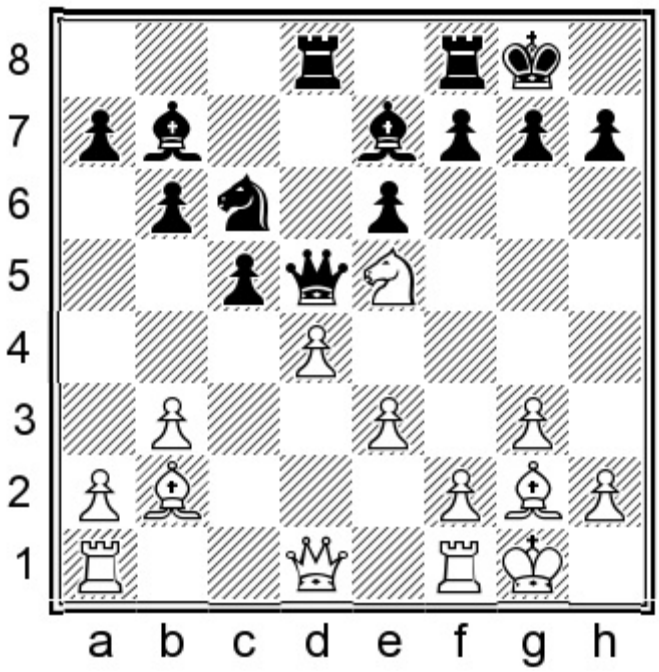


Position after: 14.♗xb7

14...♖ab8 (14...♖ad8 15.♕e2 ♕d3 1-0 (99) So, W (2788) – Dominguez Perez, L (2739) Saint Louis 2017 16.♕h5!N 16...♕c2 17.♗a3 ♘d3 18.♕d1!±) 15.♗g2 cxd4 16.♗xd4 ♖fd8 17.♕e2 ♗f6 Black

compensates for the absence of the bishop pair with some activity, but in the long term, White remains better 18.♖fd1 ♖bc8 19.♖ac1 ♖xc1 20.♖xc1 h6 21.♖c7± 1-0 (53) Loeschnauer, R (2455) – Kirchshofer, E (2095) 29th Austrian CC Championship 2007.

13.♘e5



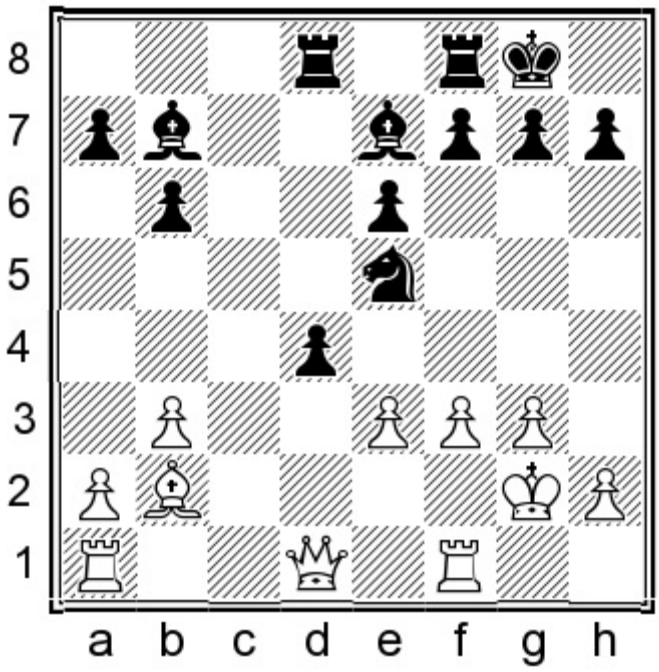
Position after: 13.♘e5

13...♕d6

Black wants to keep the material balance, but he will soon find himself in a difficult position.

As our main move fails to achieve equality, it's legitimate to have a good look at 13...♕xg2+!?. This could come as a shock to many players, but it might be the best practical choice. Even if White scores five points out of the six games in this position (of course he has almost no losing chances), we have to say that the great Vladimir Kramnik failed to convert his advantage against an Egyptian 2400 player. 14.♔xg2 ♘xe5+ 15.f3 cxd4

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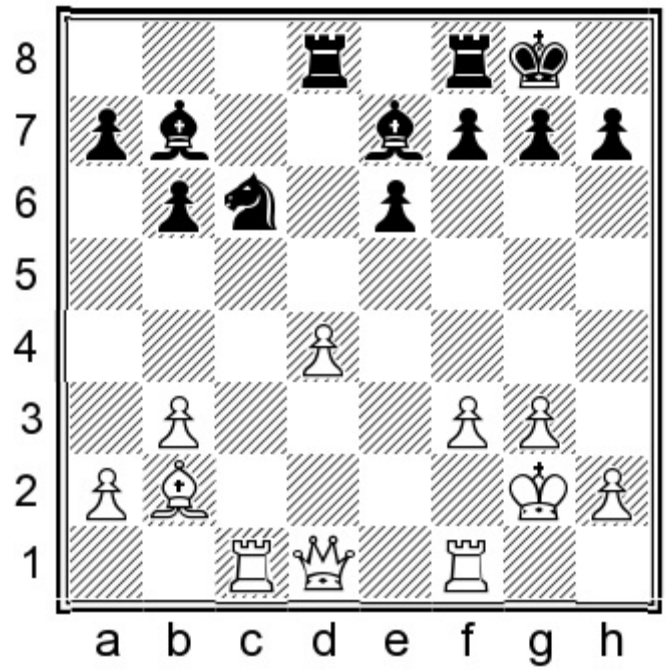
Position after: 15...cxd4

Marin summarizes the situation really well: “The good thing when playing this variation with Black is that the computer’s evaluation has little to do with the reality. Black only gets two minor pieces for the queen, but has good chances to build a reliable fortress. Moreover, during an over the board game White’s weaknesses may look a bit more worrying than they objectively should”.

A) If White prefers 16.♗xd4 Black has a choice of two ways to try to achieve a draw: 16...♘xf3!? (16...♘c6 17.♕e2 ♘xd4 18.exd4 ♗f6 19.♖ac1 ♖d7 20.♖fd1 ♗xd4±) 17.♖xf3 e5 18.♖c1 exd4 19.exd4 ♗xf3+ (19...♗c5 20.dxc5 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 bxc5 22.♖d7 ♗xf3+ 23.♔xf3± leads to a difficult endgame for Black, even if he is temporarily a pawn up) 20.♔xf3! ♖d7± White will of course push very hard, but I feel Black can sometimes get close to a fortress.

B) 16.exd4 ♘c6 17.♖c1

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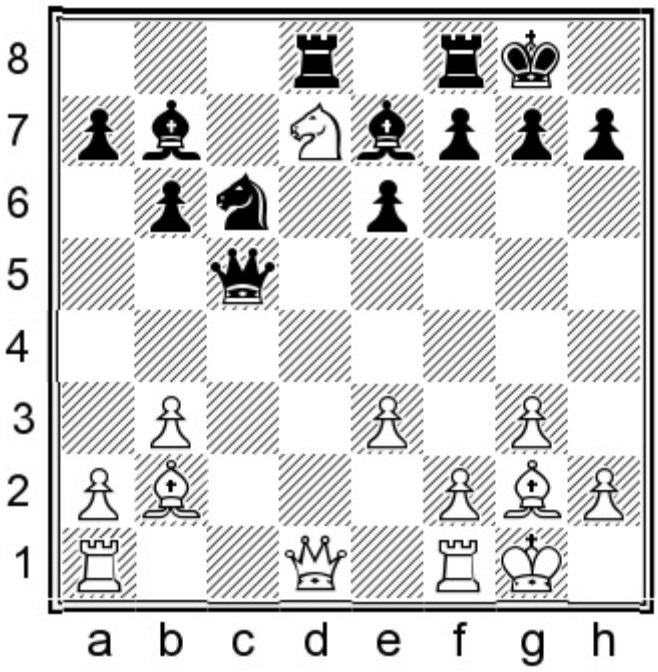
Position after: 17.♖c1

B1) 17...♖d7 was played in the above mentioned game Kramnik, V (2793) – Ezat, M (2454) Antalya 2013. 18.♖c4!?N The move I'd like to suggest. The rook most probably won't be able to stay here for too long, but it will provoke some weaknesses in Black's camp. 18...b5 (18...♖fd8 19.♕c1 ♘b4 20.♖c7! When we are able to trade a pair of rooks, it helps us a lot! 20...♘xa2 21.♕f4 ♗d6 22.♖xd7 ♖xd7 23.♕d2 ♘b4 24.♗a3+–) 19.♖c2! ♘b4 20.♖e2 ♖fd8 21.♕b1 ♘d5 22.♖c1±

B2) 17...♖d5 has been tested as well, as the rook can find an active square on f5: 18.♖c4 b5 19.♖c2 ♗d6 20.♕e2 ♘e7 21.♖fc1 ♖f5 and even if White eventually won in the top level game Morozevich, A (2719) – Bologan, V (2655) Poikovsky 2014, maybe he should prefer the computer-like move 22.d5!?N 22...♗xd5 23.♔g1. The point of giving up these two pawns is that White will get some play, now that all of his pieces are playing. If Black doesn't take on f3, then f4 is coming. 23...♗xf3 (23...♖xf3 24.♕xb5+–) 24.♕d3 And suddenly (and strangely enough) Black's camp lacks harmony. 24...♗d5 (24...♗b8?? 25.♗a3+–; 24...♘d5 25.♖c8! h5 26.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 27.♖c8+ ♔e7 28.♕xb5+–) 25.♕xb5 ♗e4 26.♕a6! ♖d5 27.♖f2+–

14.dxc5 ♕xc5 15.♘d7!

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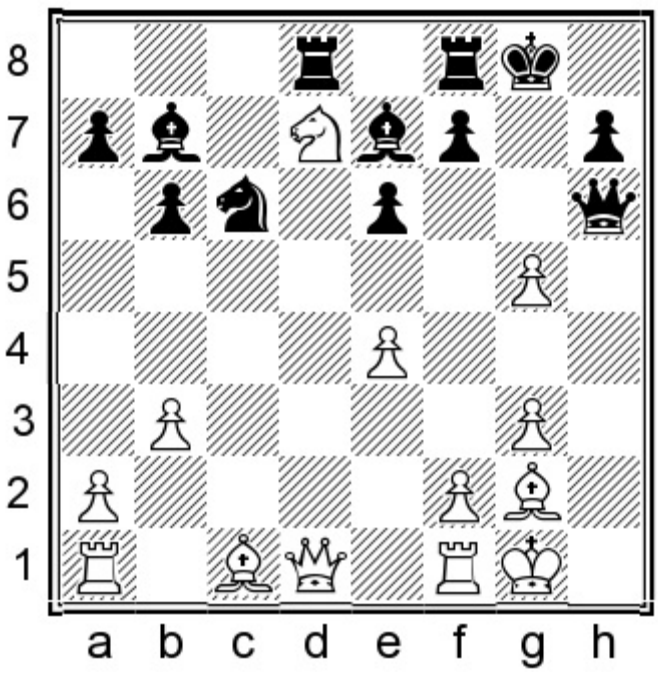
Position after: 15.♘d7!

Now Black needs to move the queen and prevent ♕g4, otherwise he will lose on the spot.

15...♕f5!

15...♕g5?! 16.h4! (16.♖c1!?±) 16...♕h6 17.♖c1 e5 18.♕g4 ♖fe8 19.♖fd1+– White had complete domination in Flores, D (2568) – Hoffman, A (2488) Buenos Aires 2017, 1-0 (28).

16.e4 ♕g5 17.h4 ♕h6 18.♗c1 g5 19.hxg5



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Position after: 19.hxg5

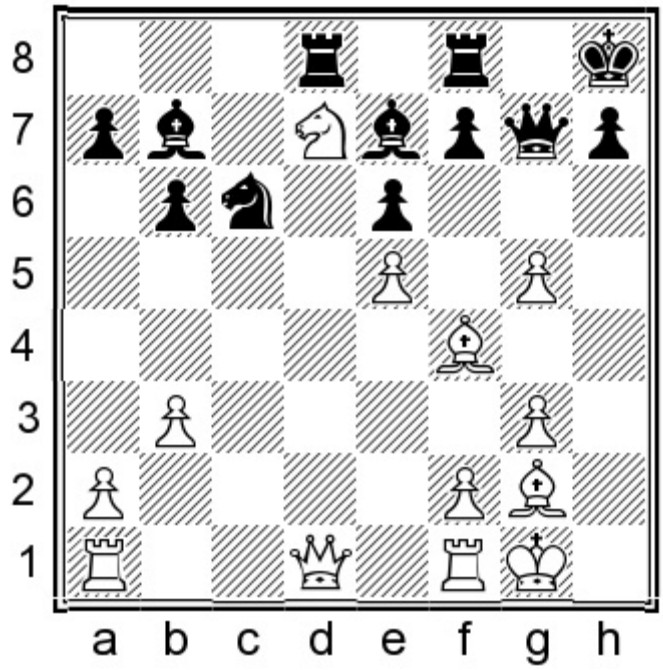
19...♕g7!

19...♗xg5 20.f4 ♕g7! (20...♘b8?? 21.fxg5 ♕g7 22.♘f6++–; 20...♗e7?! 21.♕g4+ ♕g6 22.♕xg6+ hxg6 23.♘xf8 ♗c5+ 24.♔h2 ♔xf8 25.♗b2+– left Black without much hope in Malakhov, V (2712) – Savchenko, B (2550) Konya 2012.) 21.fxg5 ♕xa1 22.♘f6+ ♕xf6 (22...♔g7 23.♕h5+–) 23.gxf6 ♖xd1 24.♖xd1 ♖d8 Black keeps approximate material equality, but the resulting endgame is going to be a slow, painful affair. 25.♖xd8+ ♘xd8 26.♗a3±

20.e5! ♔h8

20...♘xe5 21.♗b2! ♗xg5 (21...♖xd7 22.♕xd7 ♘xd7 23.♗xg7 ♔xg7 24.♗xb7+–) 22.♗xe5 f6 23.♘xf8 ♖xd1 24.♖fxd1 ♕xf8 25.♗xb7±

21.♗f4



Position after: 21.♗f4

Black has been totally dominated on the kingside and is still pinned along the light-squared diagonal...

21...♗xg5 22.♗xg5 ♕xg5 23.♘xf8 ♖xd1 24.♖axd1±

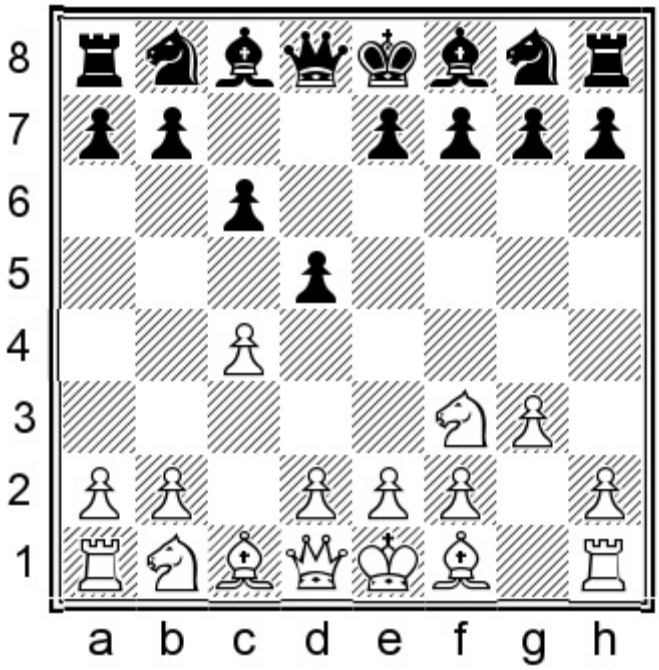
This has all been played, and White went on to win in Miroshnichenko, E (2618) – Nakhbayeva, G (2378) Al Ain 2014.

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Part II
Slav Structures 1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3

Chapter 6
Early Deviations (Black delays or avoids 3...♘f6)

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3



Chapter guide

Chapter 6 – Early Deviations (Black delays or avoids 3...♘f6)

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3

a) 3...♗f5 & 3...g6

b) 3...dxc4

c) 3...e6 (with and without ...f5)

d) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 --, 4...e6 5.♕b3

e) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 exd5 6.0-0 --, 6...♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 --

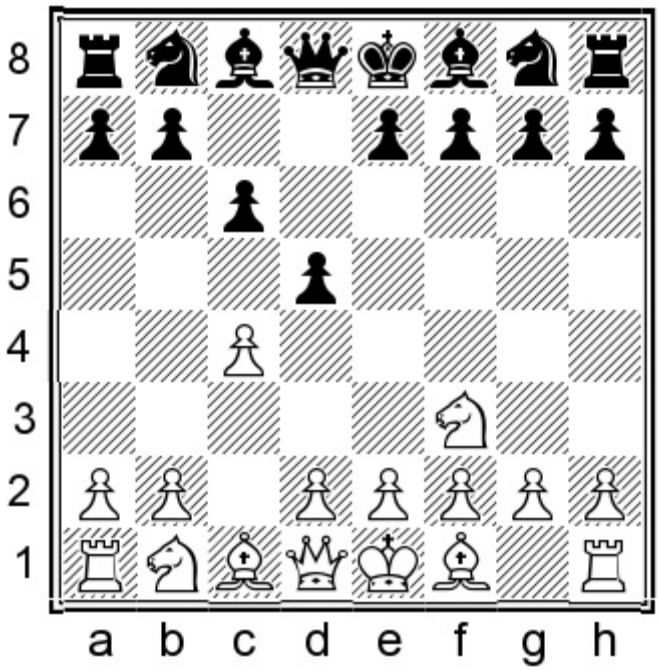
f) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 exd5 6.0-0 ♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 ♗e7

g) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 ♗xf3 6.♗xf3 cxd5

a) 3...♗f5 & 3...g6

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1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6



Position after: 2...c6

By playing 2...c6 your opponent shows his Slav Defense spirit. If he is not a Slav player, playing 3.d4 of course makes a lot of sense. Even if he is, you can still choose to enter the complex Slav, although theory shows that it's really tough to get an advantage because of its solid nature.

That's why playing a Modern Reti against the Slav makes a lot of sense to me. It may only lead to equality in some lines, but at least it's less theoretical, and is a fresher approach. As usual, in order to stay in the spirit of our repertoire, 3.g3 seems like the right way to start.

3.g3

This chapter is a prequel to the next one (which starts after the inclusion of ...♘f6 and ♗g2). We will have a look at many moves and explore Black's choice of different variations to those in the next chapter. Beware of transpositions! I have chosen a different method of classifying the variations than in the first part.

Whereas for the Neo-Catalan, I decided to devote one chapter to each idea (for instance, a chapter on every move and possibilities of Black playing ...dxc4), here I am going to spend a full chapter analyzing every third move other than 3...♘f6, even if I have to look at these same moves in the next chapter with ...♘f6 and ♗g2 included! I hope that you, being test subjects, will help me to decide which presentation is best.

3...g6!?

This asks a good question: "If you can't play b3 that easily, what are you going to do?". True,

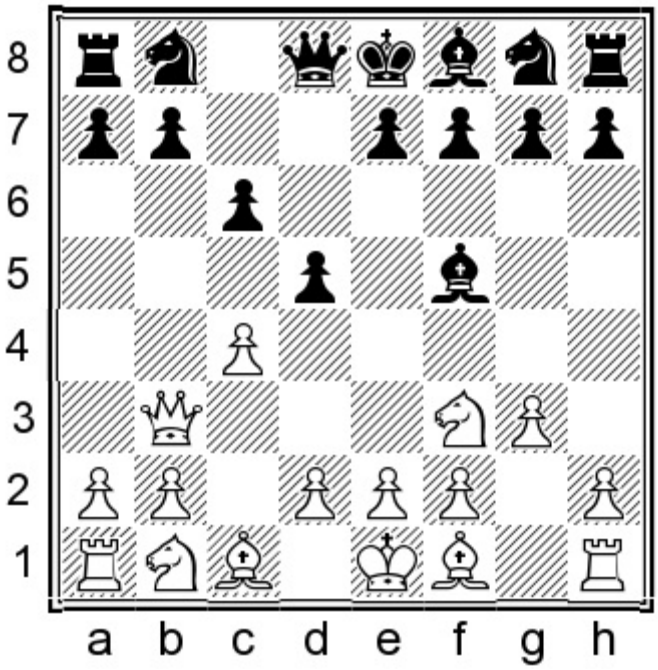
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compared with the next chapter where Black plays 4...g6 (where b3 will be possible because the knight is already on f6), White needs to find another set-up.

3...♗f5?! Strangely enough, this move order has rarely been used. Whereas it can be useful to delay ...♘f6 in order to start with ...e6, and eventually take back on d5 with the e-pawn, I consider it a drawback that Black has already decided where the bishop goes.

A) The move order 4.cxd5 cxd5 5.♕b3 is less appealing to me because of 5...♘c6! and, as we will see in the next chapter with ♗g2 and ...♘f6 included, this gambit is pretty interesting for Black: 6.♕xb7 ♖c8! The threat is now ...♘a5, winning because of the hanging bishop on c1. (6...♗d7!? allows the surprising 7.♗h3!? which forces 7...e6 8.♕b3⩱ Black will get some compensation, but at least he couldn't push ...e5.) 7.♘c3 e5 8.♕b5 ♗d6! 9.♘xd5 ♘f6⩲ The lead in development clearly allows Black to dream of a great initiative.

B) 4.♕b3! Keeping the option of taking on d5 later, depending on how Black defends the b7-pawn.

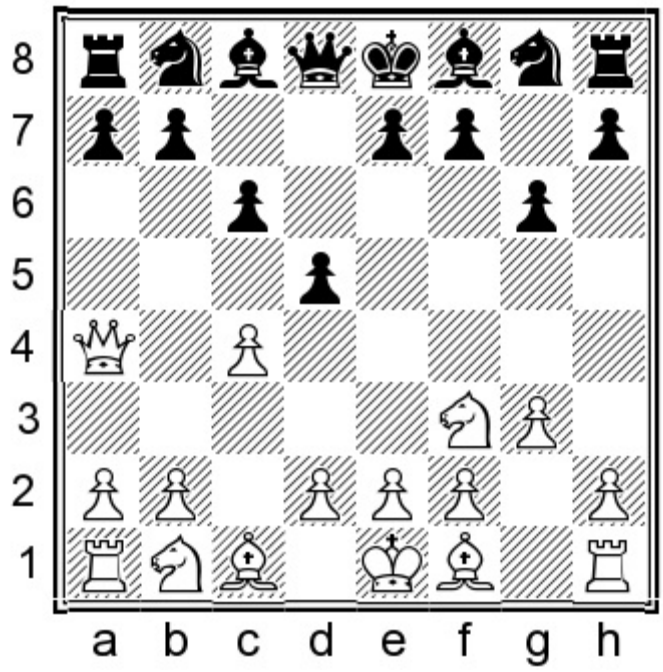


Position after: 4.♕b3!

4...♕b6 (4...♕c8 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♘c3 e6 7.d3 ♘f6 8.♗g2 once again transposes into the next chapter.) 5.♕xb6 axb6 6.cxd5 cxd5 Usually Black avoids this structure by taking back on d5 with the f6-knight. As it's not possible here, we can assume that 4...♕b6 was simply dubious, and the following endgame, which will be analyzed in the next chapter in the ...♗f5 line, is unpleasant for Black: 7.♘c3 e6 8.d3 ♘c6 9.♗g2.

4.♕a4!?

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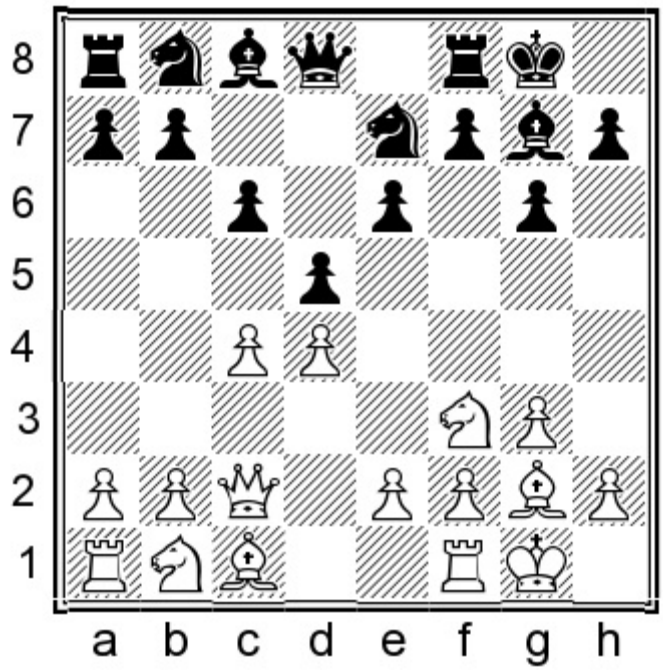
Position after: 4.♕a4!?

This is an interesting way to head for a complex position. If White wants to try a different line, he can continue 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.d4 (5.0-0 e5∞) 5...♘f6 6.0-0 0-0 which leads to a Grünfeld Defense, where White has played g3, and Black has defended with the solid ...c6/...d5 set-up. It's playable of course, but not in the same spirit, and White has some difficulties in proving an advantage.

4...d4!?

A) 4...e6 5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.0-0 ♘e7 (6...♘f6 7.d4 ♘bd7 8.♕c2 0-0 9.♖d1 b6 10.♘c3 ♗b7 11.a4 c5 12.a5! ↑) 7.d4 0-0 8.♕c2 This looks like a weird Catalan. At some point, White should be able to to open the center favourably, especially since Black has no knight on f6.

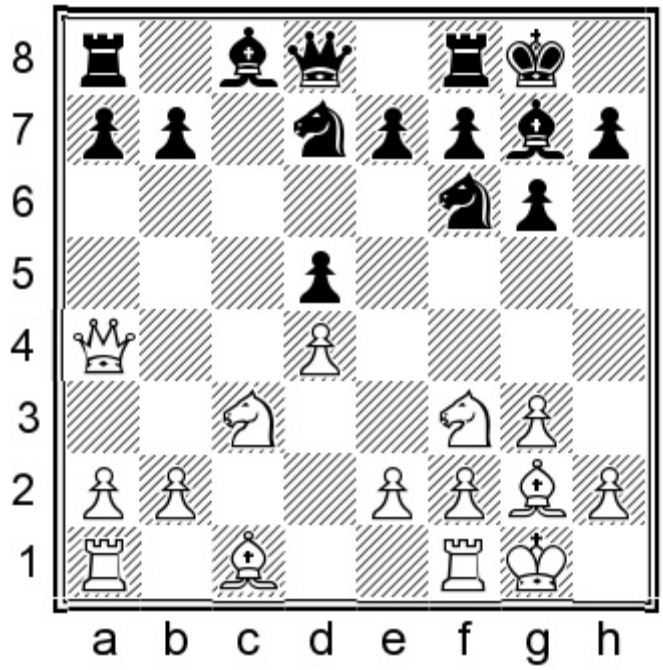
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Position after: 8.♕c2

8...b6 9.♖d1 ♗a6 10.b3 White quietly secures his queenside before acting in the center. 10...♘d7 11.♗b2 ♖c8 12.♘c3 (12.e3!?N 12...c5?! 13.dxc5 ♗xb2 14.♕xb2 ♘xc5 15.♘c3±) 12...♕c7 13.e4 dxc4 14.♘e2!? Even in a blitz game, Grischuk plays inventive chess, and it worked well: 14...cxb3 15.axb3 ♕b7 16.h4 ♘f6 17.♘f4↑ 1-0 (72) Grischuk, A (2792) – Fressinet, L (2717) Dubai 2014.

B) 4...♘d7?! 5.cxd5 cxd5 (5...♘b6? is a classical idea, but not possible here: 6.♕d4! ♘f6 7.dxc6+–) 6.♘c3 ♘gf6 7.♗g2 ♗g7 8.0-0 0-0 9.d4!

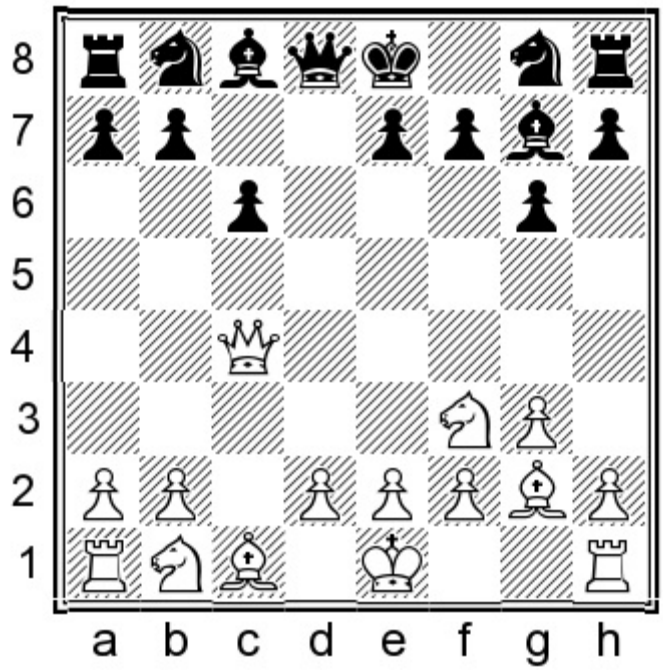


Position after: 9.d4!

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After some natural moves, we can pause here. The position is symmetrical, except for the knights. The c3-knight is much more active than its counterpart on d7, so Black must try to activate this knight: 9...♘b6! 10.♕b3 ♗f5 11.♗f4 ♖c8 12.♖ac1 Black's play is not easy. We can also compare the queens; the one on d8 clearly lacks good squares, as d7 would be of a temporary nature. 12...♘e4 13.♘b5! a6 14.♘a3!?± We can see that the knight is clearly misplaced on the b-file.

C) 4...dxc4 is of course absolutely playable: 5.♕xc4 ♗g7 6.♗g2. Black has several options now.

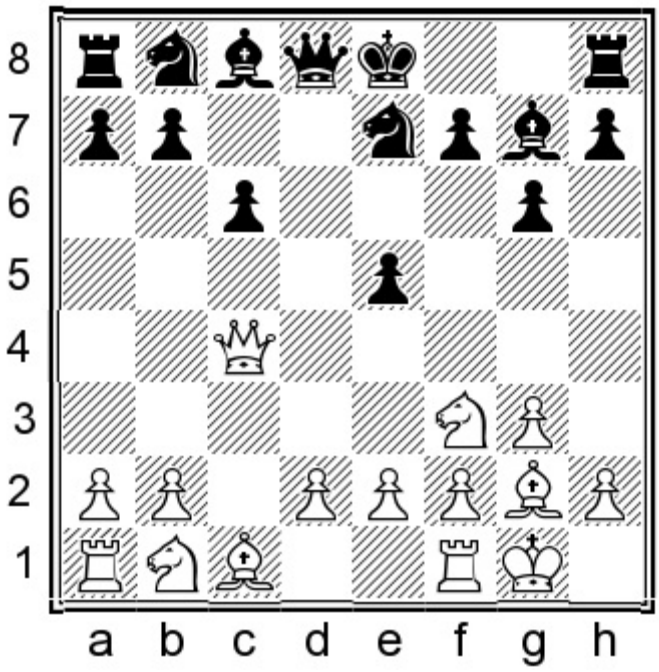


Position after: 6.♗g2

C1) 6...♘h6!? is quite sound. The knight will find a more active square on f5. 7.0-0 ♘f5 8.d3 0-0 9.♕c2 a5 10.♘c3 ♘a6 11.♖d1 ♕b6 12.e3 Objectively the position is more or less balanced, but I like White in this kind of position. It looks a lot like a good reversed Sicilian Defense. In the game Bocharov, D (2597) – Korchmar, V (2437) Kazan 2016, Black misplayed with 12...h6?, allowing the strong 13.e4! ♘d4 14.♘xd4 ♕xd4 15.♗e3 ♕d6 16.d4± and suddenly White's center is really impressive.

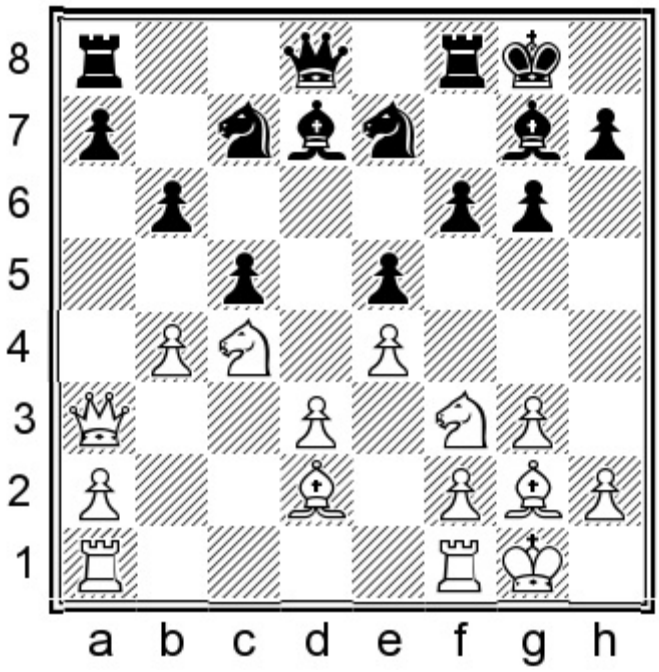
C2) 6...e5 This prevents d4. Now the idea to reach a Sicilian pawn structure is pretty clear. 7.0-0 ♘e7

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Position after: 7...♘e7

These kinds of positions are really difficult to analyze. There is no clear plan, and various set-ups for both sides are possible. A recent game between two strong young players continued: 8.♘c3 0-0 9.d3 ♘d7 10.♘e4 ♘b6 11.♕c5 ♘bd5 12.♘d6 b6 13.♕a3 ♗d7 14.♘c4 f6 15.♗d2 c5 16.e4 ♘c7 17.b4!

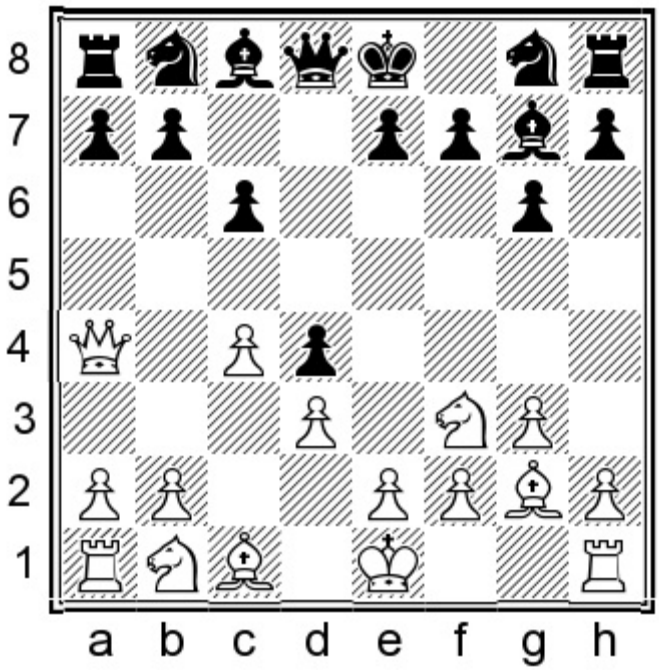


Position after: 17.b4!

White is finally taking the lead and he went on to win in Artemiev, V (2663) – Bajarani, U (2509) Baku 2016.

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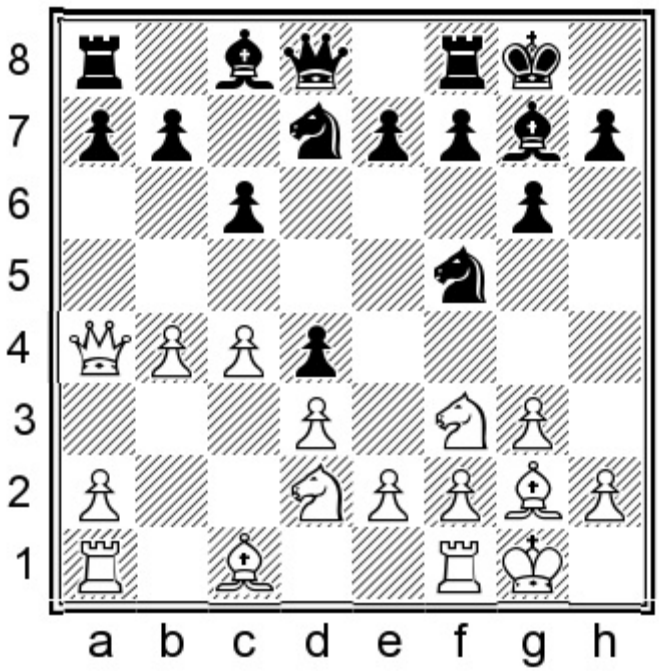
5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.d3



Position after: 6.d3

6...e5

6...♘h6 makes some sense as well. As we have already seen, the knight heads to f5, from where it has good control over the center. 7.b4! White starts a nice expansion on the queenside. 7...0-0 8.0-0 ♘f5 9.♘bd2 ♘d7



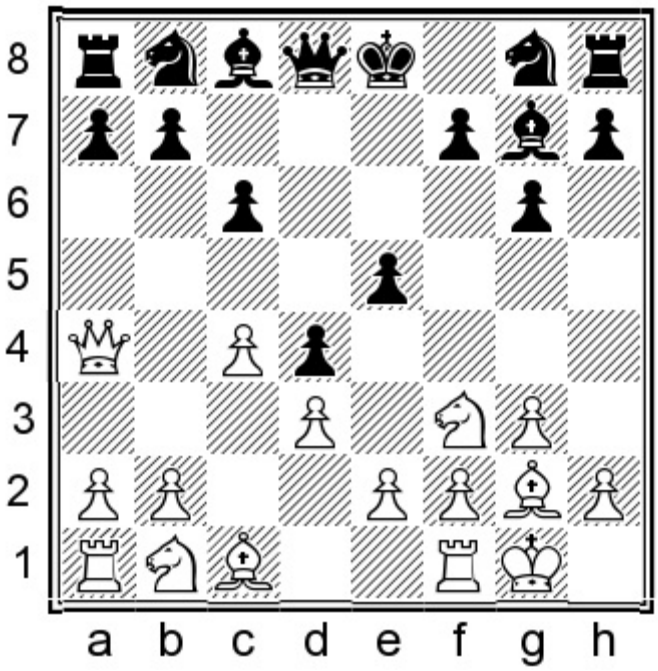
Position after: 9...♘d7

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A) The specialist in the 4.♕a4 line, Markowski, decided to play 10.♗a3 ♖e8 11.♘e4 ♘d6 12.♘xd6 exd6 13.♖fe1 but failed to achieve an advantage here as the bishop is pointless on a3: 13...a5 14.♖ab1 ♘b6 15.♕c2 axb4 16.♗xb4 ♘a4!∓ and even if White finally won, I prefer Black here in Markowski, T (2592) – Lautier, J (2658) Ohrid 2001.

B) 10.♖b1 ♖e8 11.♘e4 ♘d6 12.♘xd6 exd6 13.♕c2 ♕c7 happened in Kramnik, V (2812) – Topalov, V (2761) Leuven 2016, and here Kramnik could have improved his play, for instance with 14.♗b2!?N 14...c5 15.e3 dxe3 16.fxe3±.

7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

7...♘e7 8.♘bd2 0-0 9.b4 ♘d7

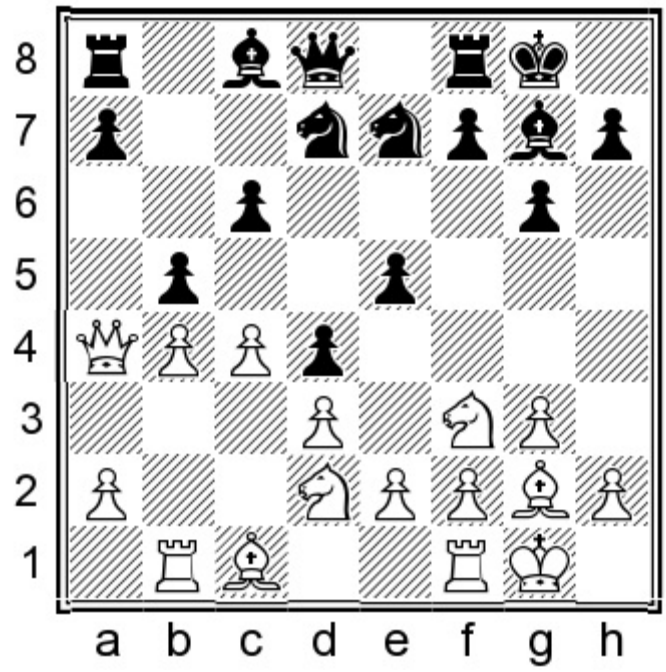
The game is objectively balanced, but nevertheless White has reached a nice reversed Benoni-type position, and I am confident in his chances here. For instance

10.♖b1

10.♗b2 a5 11.a3 b6 12.♕c2 ♗b7 13.♖fe1 ♕c7 14.e3 dxe3 15.fxe3± White has the better game and won in Khairullin, I (2630) – Svane, R (2509) Moscow 2015.

10...b5

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Position after: 10...b5

I think that this move is over-ambitious.

10...b6 11.♘e4!N 11...♘f6 12.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 13.♗h6 ♖e8 14.♘d2±

11.♕a5?!

11.cxb5! is the right move order, transposing into the game we are following after 11...♘b6 12.♕a5.

11...♘b6?!

11...a6!=

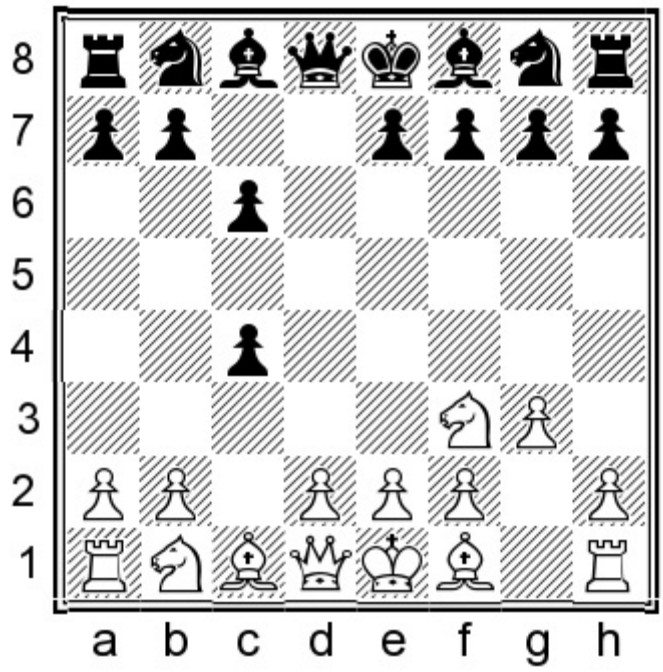
12.cxb5 cxb5 13.♕xb5 ♘ed5 14.♗b2 ♘c3 15.♗xc3 dxc3 16.♘e4 f5 17.♘c5±

White clearly has the better chances, even if he failed to convert his advantage in Artemiev, V (2691) – Shirov, A (2631) Moscow 2017.

b) 3...dxc4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 dxc4

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Position after: 3...dxc4

This makes a lot of sense as ...c6 has already been played. The bishop is not yet on g2 in order to control the long diagonal, which can discourage Black from playing ...b5.

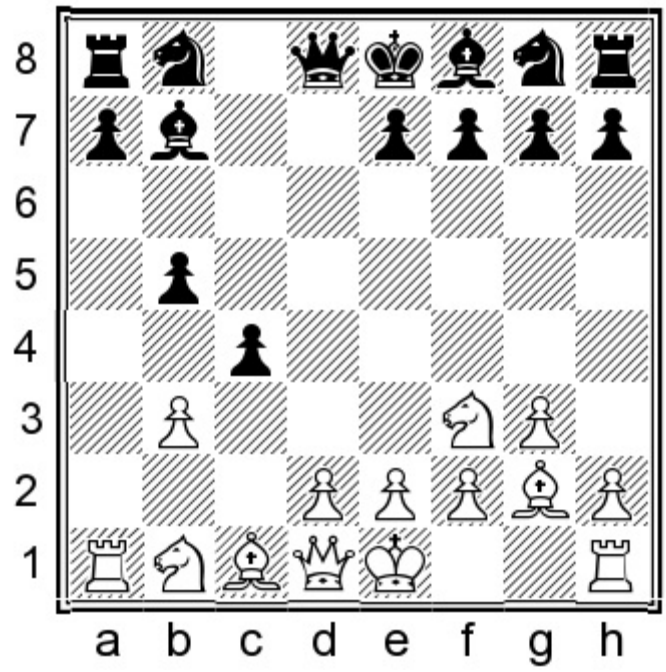
4.♗g2 ♘d7

This has two aims: firstly, the knight is heading to the b6-square in order to protect the c4-pawn, and secondly, it can help in playing ...e5.

A) 4...♘f6 is deeply analyzed in the next chapter with 4...dxc4.

B) 4...b5 This is the most natural continuation considering the previous moves, but is not necessarily the best. 5.a4 ♗b7 6.axb5!N It was really strange to discover that no-one has ever played this move. 6...cxb5 7.b3!

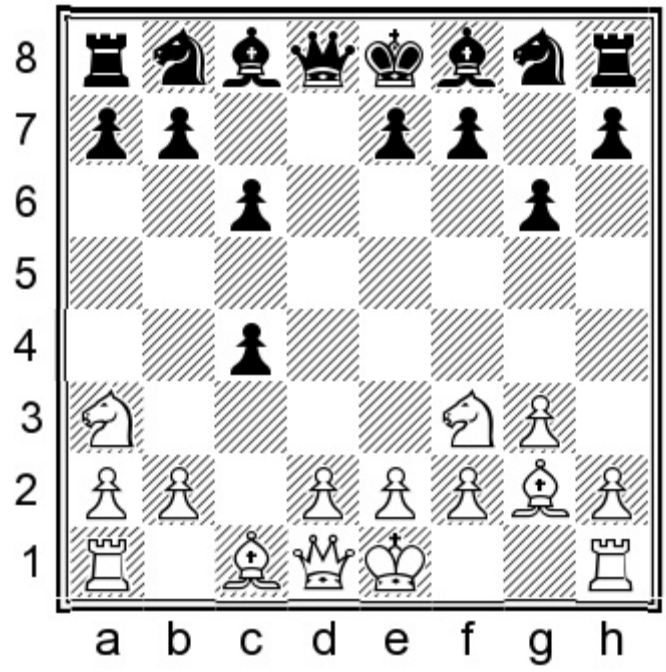
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Position after: 7.b3!

7...e6 As the logical continuation fails, Black has to settle for this kind of move! (7...cxb3?! 8.♕xb3 a6?? and now 9.♘e5!+– might be what several players have missed, with disastrous consequences for Black.) 8.bxc4 b4! The only way to get a double-edged position. (8...bxc4 9.♘a3 ♘f6 10.♘xc4±) 9.♗b2 a5 This reminds us of the Noteboom line of the Slav Defense, which is complicated as well. 10.0-0 ♘f6 11.d4 ♗e7 12.♘bd2 0-0 13.♖e1± With a complicated middlegame to come, but preferable for White.

C) 4...g6 5.♘a3!?



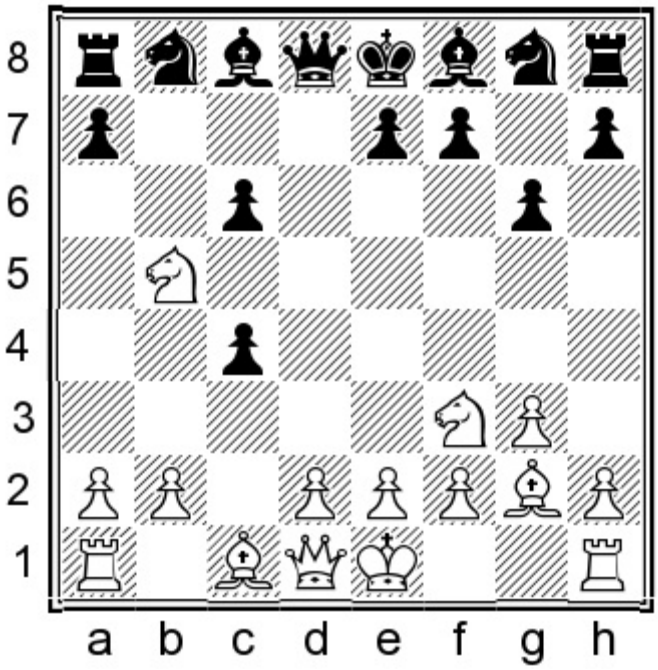
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Position after: 5.♘a3!?

C1) After the dubious 5...♕d5?! 6.♕c2 ♗e6 a good game by Delchev continued 7.♕c3 ♘f6 8.0-0 ♗g7 9.♘d4! ♘e4 10.♘xe6! ♘xc3 11.♘xg7+ ♔f8 12.dxc3 ♕e5 13.♗h6 ♔g8 14.♖fd1+– and White is already completely winning, despite having lost the queen (for a few things, I agree): 1-0 (24) Delchev, A (2619) – Kostic, V (2447) Valjevo 2011.

C2) 5...♗g7 6.♘xc4 ♘f6 7.0-0 0-0 8.d3± This leaves Black with a passive position where it's impossible to create a pawn break. Thus White is definitely better.

C3) 5...b5!?N 6.♘xb5

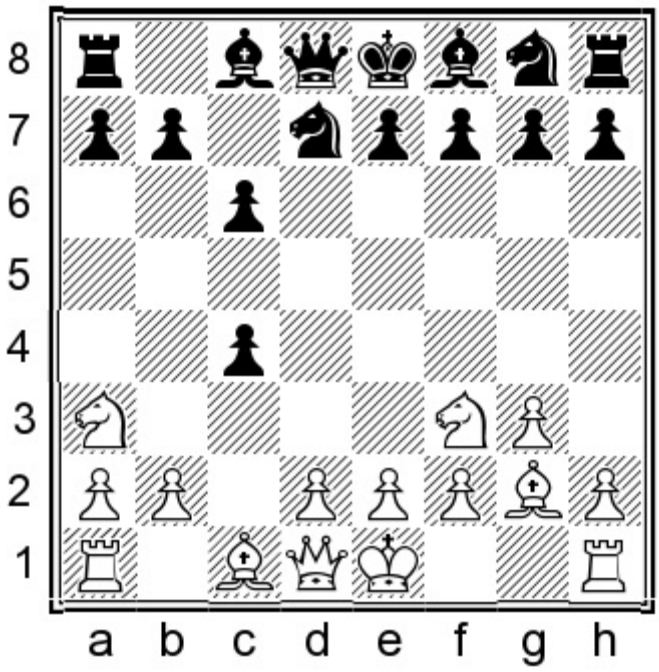


Position after: 6.♘xb5

We don't necessarily have to enter this variation, but as it seems good for White, I see no reason to refrain from the complications. 6...cxb5 7.♘g1! Sad but true, this is the only safe square available for the knight. 7...♗d7 One of the few ways to get the light-squared bishop, White's most important piece. 8.♗xa8 ♘c6 9.♗xc6 ♗xc6 10.f3 ♗g7 11.d3! I'm aware that some people may dislike this position for White, but it seems easier for us, as we need to develop our remaining pieces and try to trade most of them! Of course nothing is simple, but I prefer White. For instance, after 11...cxd3 12.♕xd3 ♕xd3 trades queens, which is normally not Black's aim, but damages White's structure: 13.exd3 h5 14.h4 ♔d7 15.♔f2 ♘f6 16.♖b1± and I still prefer White.

5.♘a3

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Position after: 5.♘a3

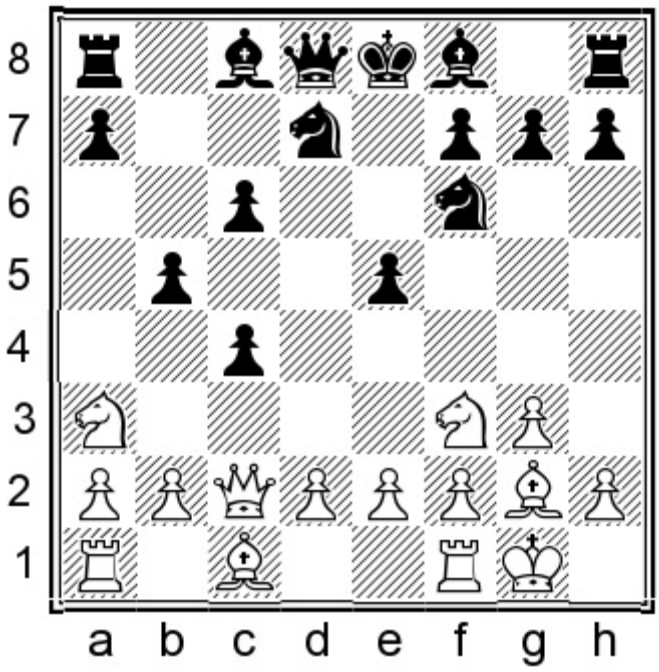
5...♘b6

5...e5 This move has been played twice by Jobava, so it deserves attention.

A) I don't like the continuation of the game Nepomniachtchi, I (2732) – Jobava, B (2707) Leuven 2017, ½-½ (41): 6.♘xc4 e4 7.♘d4 because of the surprising 7...♘e5!N 8.♘xe5 ♕xd4. Is the knight trapped? Not completely, but the solution is not really appealing: 9.f4 f6 10.e3 ♕d5 11.♘g4 ♗xg4! 12.♕xg4 f5∓.

B) 6.♕c2 b5 (6...♗xa3 7.bxa3 ♘gf6 8.♕xc4± The bishop pair compensates for the damaged pawn structure.) 7.0-0 ♘gf6

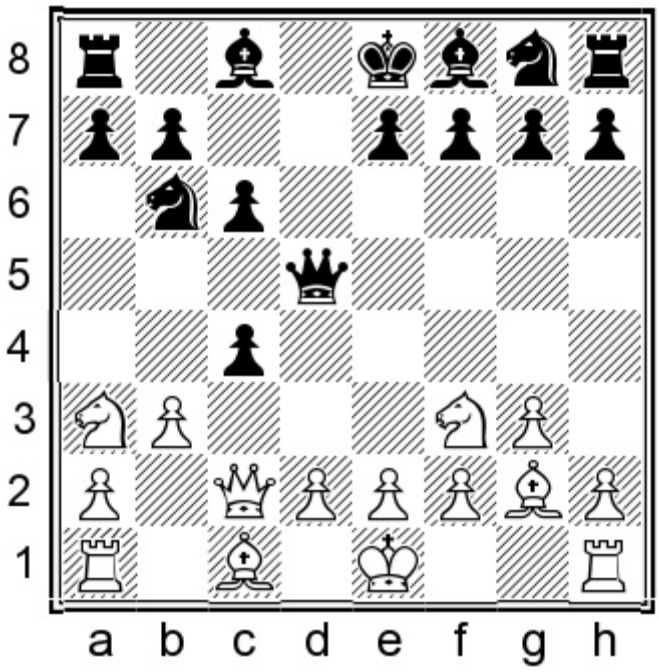
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Position after: 7...♘gf6

8.d4!N Black will face some serious trouble after the opening of the position. (8.b3 creates a wild position and after 8...♗c5 9.bxc4 b4 10.♘b1 e4 11.♘g5 ♗d4↑ I prefer Black in Jones, G (2654) – Jobava, B (2713) Minsk 2017, 0-1 (25)) 8...cxd3 9.exd3 ♗xa3 10.bxa3 0-0 11.♗b2⩲ With some strong compensation.

6.♕c2 ♕d5 7.b3!



Position after: 7.b3!

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A classical pawn gambit (that we will meet in many occasions). Black spent some tempi (...♘d6-b6 and ...♕d5), with non-developing moves. It is logical to open the position as soon as possible.

7...cxb3

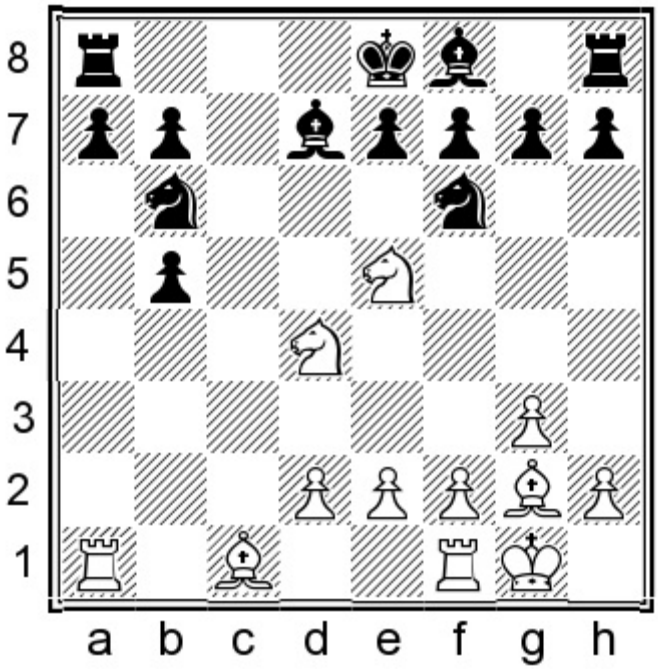
7...♗f5 8.♕c3 cxb3 9.d3± The threat of e2-e4 questions the usefulness of 7...♗f5.

8.axb3 ♗e6 9.b4!N

My preference over the move 9.♖b1, played in the game Nikcevic, N (2395) – Bartha, S (2330) Paris 1993, 1-0 (28).

9.♘c4!? is interesting as well in order to open the b-file: 9...♘xc4 10.bxc4 ♕xc4 11.♕b1!⩱.

9...♘f6 10.0-0 ♕b3 11.b5 ♕xc2 12.♘xc2 cxb5 13.♘cd4 ♗d7 14.♘e5⩲



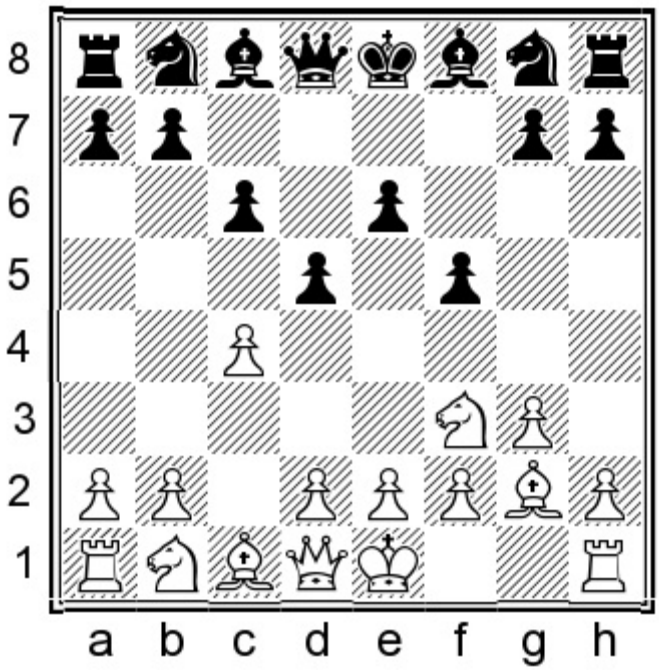
Position after: 14.♘e5⩲

White enjoys great compensation.

c) 3...e6 (with and without ...f5)

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 e6 4.♗g2 f5

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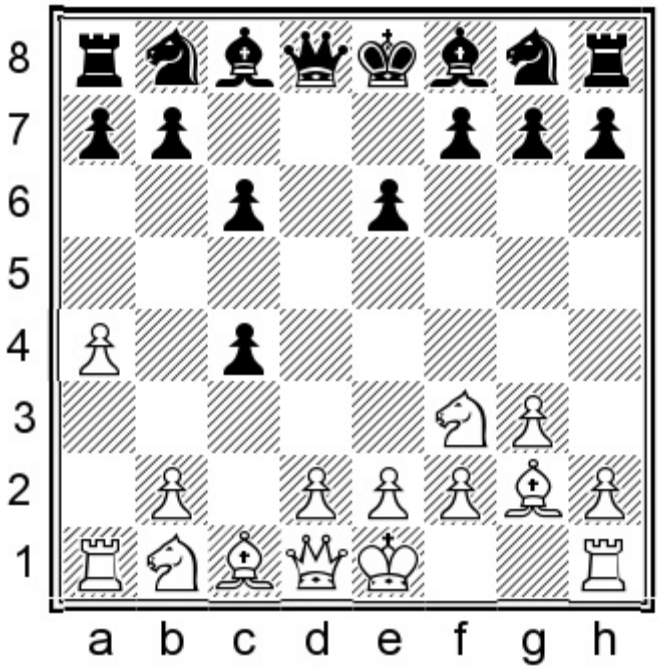


Position after: 4...f5

The Stonewall has always been considered a reliable defense for Black. However, we are quite happy to meet it with our move order, because not having put our pawn on d4 yet will help us to open the center by means of d3 and e4.

A) 4...♘f6 will be the subject of chapter 9, the Semi-Slav formation.

B) 4...dxc4 5.a4



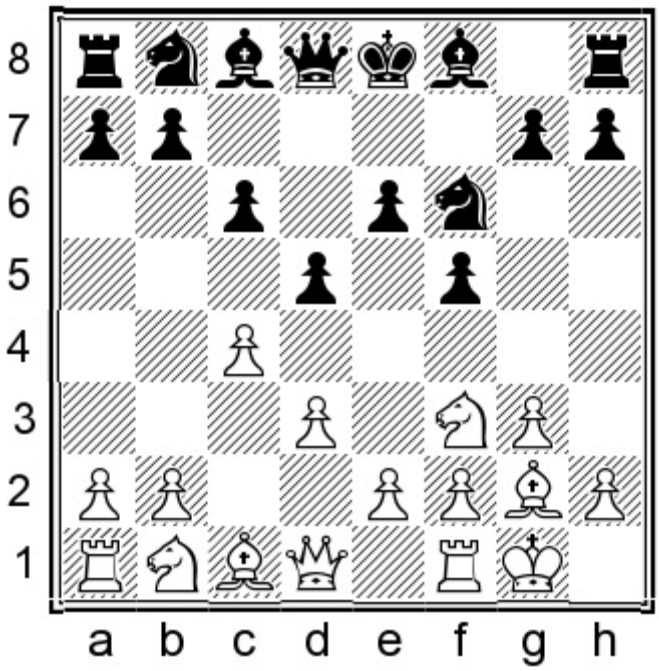
Position after: 5.a4

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B1) 5...♘f6 After this move, White has often transposed to chapter 9 (with 5...dxc4) by playing 6.0-0. However this move order also gives him the option of playing 6.♘a3!? right away.

B2) 5...♘a6 is one of the uncommon ideas here; it makes some sense and has actually attracted a few grandmasters: 6.♘a3!? (6.♕c2 ♘b4 7.♕xc4 ♘f6 Black has got what he wanted (a strong and entrenched knight on b4), and the queen might prove misplaced here, for instance if Black continues with ...a5/...b6/ ...♗a6) 6...♕d5 7.0-0 ♘f6 8.♕c2 transposing to our chapter 9 again (the main line of the 5...dxc4 variation).

5.0-0 ♘f6 6.d3



Position after: 6.d3

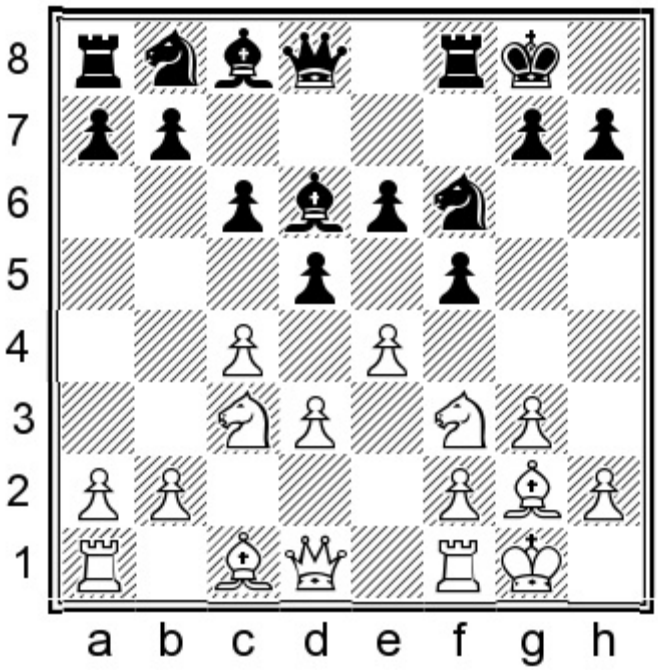
6.b3!? leads to interesting play as well, with a slower e4 to come.

6...♗e7

This move has been the trend in recent games, and I believe that it is significantly better than the other moves.

A) 6...♗d6!? This is the most played move. It helps in playing ...e5, but the bishop can become a target after White manages to push e4, when it can be attacked either by the queen on d1, or by a nasty fork with e4-e5. That's why I feel it's inferior to ...♗e7. 7.♘c3 0-0 (If Black goes for the fast 7...e5? he is going to be punished by means of 8.cxd5 cxd5 9.♗g5! d4 10.♘b5 ♘c6 11.♕b3±.) 8.e4! Here Black has tried many moves, but it would be too laborious to explore them all. We just need to understand the main ideas.

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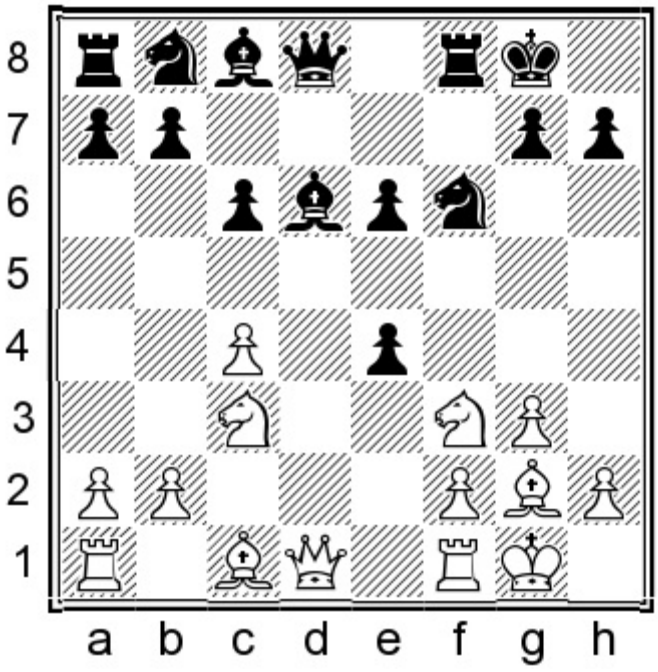


Position after: 8.e4!

A1) 8...♗b4 9.exd5 cxd5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♕b3 ♘c6 12.♗e3!± White prepares ♘d4 which will exert pressure on Black's weak central pawns.

A2) 8...♗c7?! 9.cxd5 exd5 10.♗g5!N 10...dxe4 11.♕b3+ ♔h8 12.dxe4± You just need to glance at the position to understand that Black has gone too far in playing non-developing moves.

A3) If Black plays 8...dxe4 he will sooner or later face something like 9.dxe4 fxe4

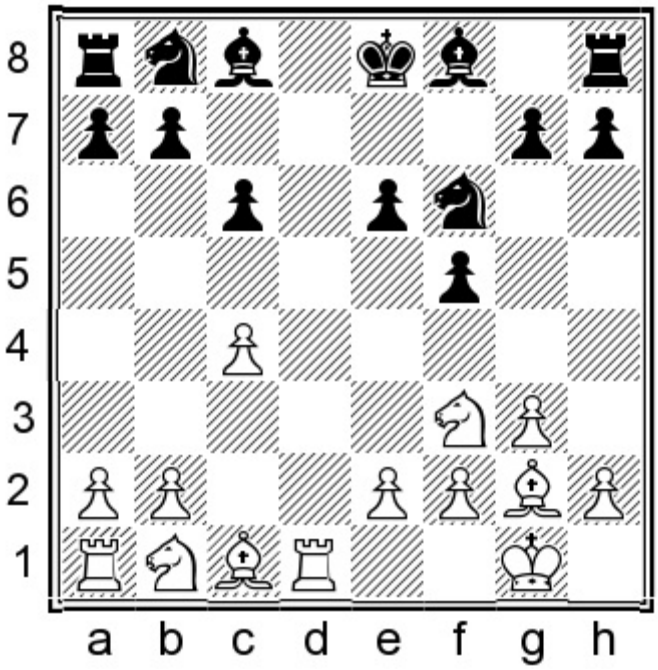


Position after: 9...fxe4

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10.♘g5! and White regains the pawn with advantage. For instance 10...e5 11.c5! ♗e7 12.♕b3+ ♘d5 13.♗xe4! Sometimes precise calculation is needed. The Chinese grandmaster decided on a great sacrifice and eventually won easily after 13...♗xg5 14.♗xg5 ♕xg5 15.♘xd5 cxd5 16.♗xd5+ ♔h8 17.♗xb7 ♗xb7 18.♕xb7+– leaving Black in a lost position in Bu, X (2691) – Sang, T (2287) Las Vegas 2014, 1-0 (33).

B) 6...dxc4?! A move that most Stonewall players won't ever think of playing because it is usually awful. Here it's playable, but dubious, as the resulting endgames are difficult for Black. 7.dxc4 ♕xd1 8.♖xd1



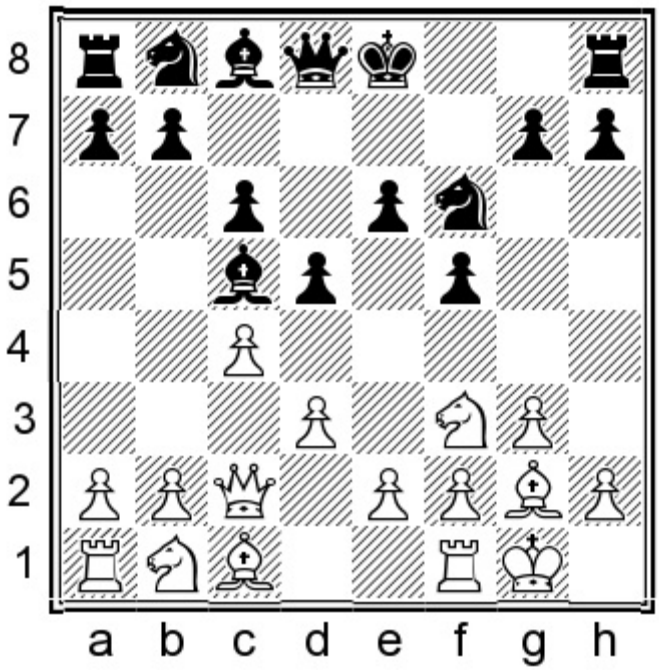
Position after: 8.♖xd1

B1) After 8...♗c5 it seems logical to prevent ...e5 for a while with 9.♗f4 which is an improvement over grandmaster games. 9...♘e4?! 10.e3 ♘d7 11.♘bd2 ♘df6 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♗c7! 0-0 14.♘e5± Black is already struggling to survive as he is unable to develop his light-squared bishop.

B2) 8...♘bd7 9.♘d4!? (9.♗f4!? is still interesting, but Ragger's idea seems good.) 9...♔f7 10.♘c3 g6 11.e4! (11.♘f3!?) 11...♗b4 12.exf5 exf5 13.♗f4 White's lead in development allows him to keep the edge in this ending, where Black eventually collapsed in the following game: 13...♘b6 14.♘f3 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 ♘e4 16.♘e5+± 1-0 (34) Ragger, M (2689) – Bern, I (2314) Norway 2016.

C) 6...♗c5 This is an unusual spot for the bishop in this opening (obviously, as the pawn is usually on d4). It may seem like an active square, but Black could be confronted with the immediate 7.♕c2!, preparing e4 and creating a direct threat against the bishop on c5 that he needs to parry:

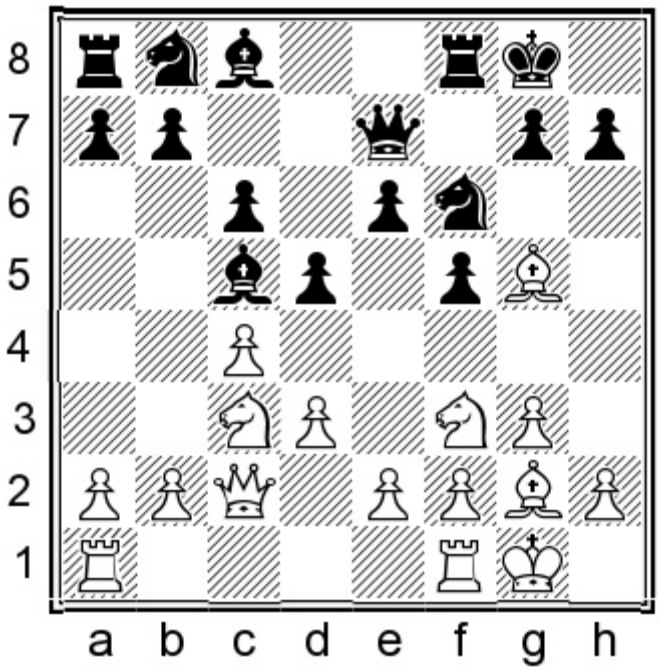
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Position after: 7.♕c2!

C1) 7...♘bd7?! 8.cxd5! cxd5 (8...exd5?! 9.d4! was the sneaky surprise behind the last move 9...♗d6 10.♕xf5±) 9.♘c3! 0-0 10.e4!N Black's center is going to explode. A logical continuation may be 10...fxe4 11.dxe4 ♘xe4 12.♘xe4 dxe4 13.♘g5!± Black has a really weak structure and worse development, which gives us an overwhelming advantage.

C2) 7...♕e7 8.♗g5 0-0 9.♘c3!?N

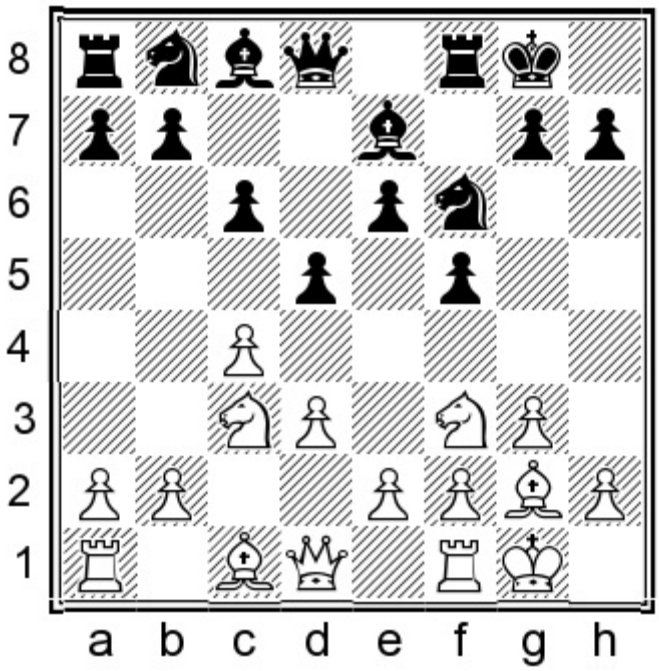


Position after: 9.♘c3!?N

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I don’t see any reason why everyone has preferred to put the knight on d2, as ...d5-d4 at once is not fully playable: 9...♘bd7 (9...dxc4?! 10.d4! ♗b6 11.♕a4±; 9...d4 10.♘a4 e5 11.♘xc5 ♕xc5 12.e3!±) 10.cxd5! cxd5 (10...exd5 again fails to 11.d4 ♗d6 12.♕xf5±) 11.e4!±

7.♘c3 0-0



Position after: 7...0-0

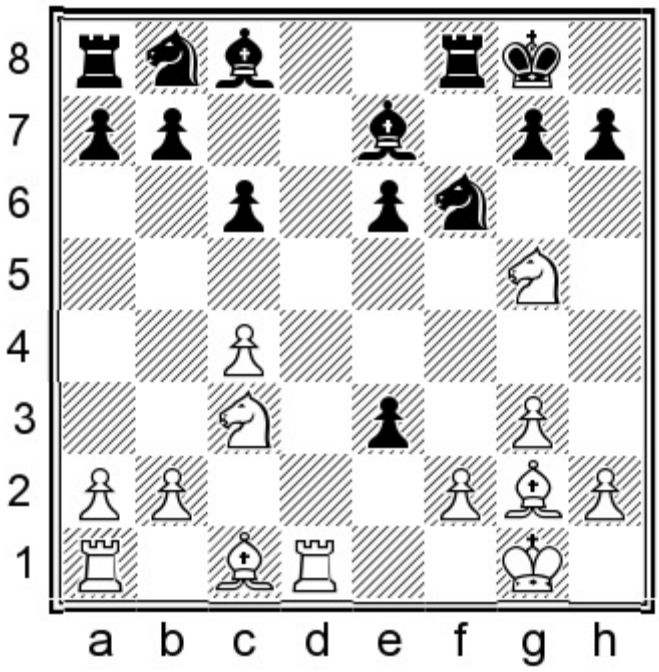
At this stage I would like to offer a rare possibility for White compared to 8.e4 (which makes a lot of sense and scores wonderfully, but something doesn’t appeal to me).

8.b3!?

The slow way.

8.e4 Almost everything works perfectly here, but Black has never managed to use the full potential of his position: 8...dxe4 9.dxe4 fxe4 10.♘g5 and the thematic way to regain the pawn does not impress me because of 10...♕xd1 11.♖xd1 e3!

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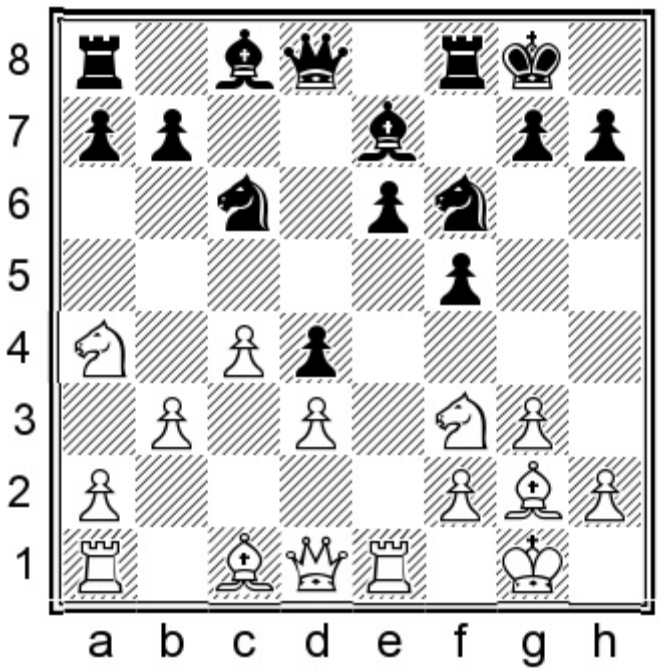


Position after: 11...e3!

12.♗xe3 ♘g4! with threats on f2 and g5 that overload the e3-bishop, which is also under attack: 13.♘ge4 ♘xe3 14.fxe3 ♘d7= and there is no reason why Black should fear this position.

8...♘bd7

A) 8...d4 9.♘a4 c5 10.e3! ♘c6 11.exd4 cxd4 12.♖e1!



Position after: 12.♖e1!

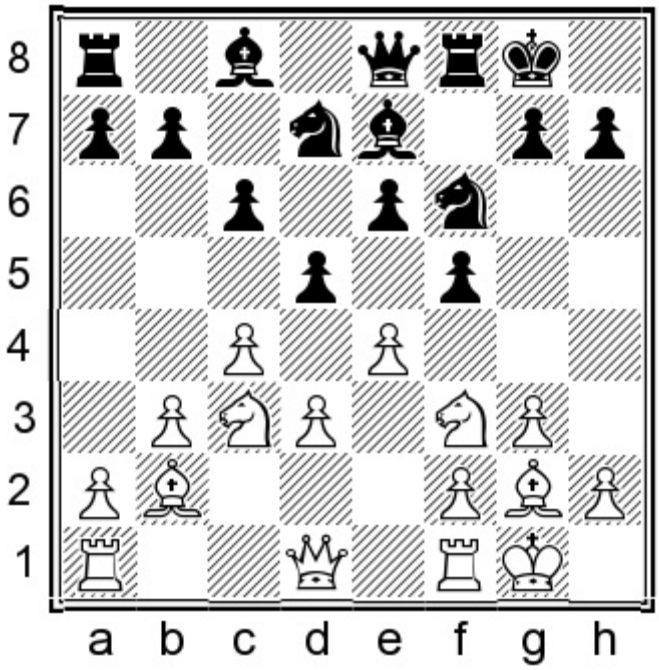
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This reminds me of the fifth chapter on the Queen's Gambit, where Black pushed 6...d4, transposing to some kind of reversed Benoni, except that the black f-pawn is already on f5, which considerably weakens the e5-square. 12...♗b4 13.♗d2 ♗xd2 14.♕xd2 ♖e8 15.b4!±

B) 8...♗d7 9.♗b2 ♗e8 10.e4!± has been played a few times, but I don't need to explain why it will be a worse version for Black than before.

9.♗b2 ♕e8 10.e4!N

We don't need to wait any longer to push in the center.



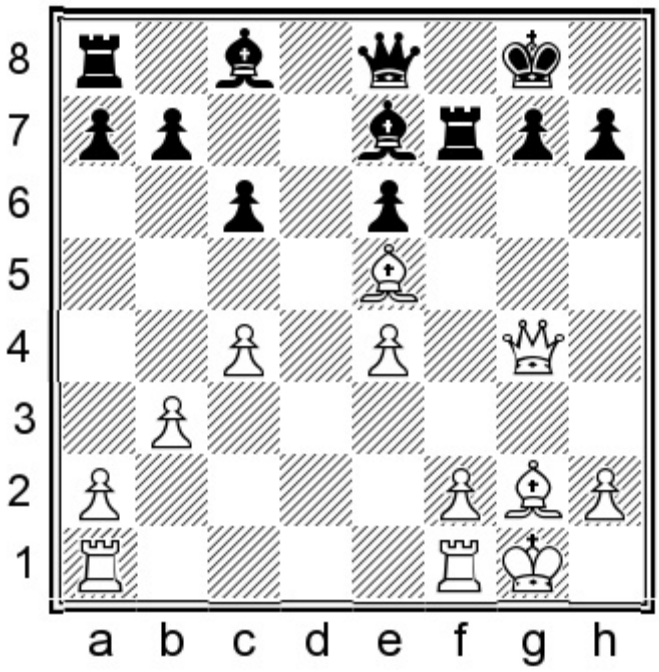
Position after: 10.e4!N

10...dxe4 11.dxe4 f4!

This is a classic sacrifice, made possible by ♗c1-b2, but we can be pleased to accept it.

12.gxf4 ♘h5 13.♘e2 ♘xf4 14.♘xf4 ♖xf4 15.♘e5 ♘xe5 16.♗xe5 ♖f7 17.♕g4±

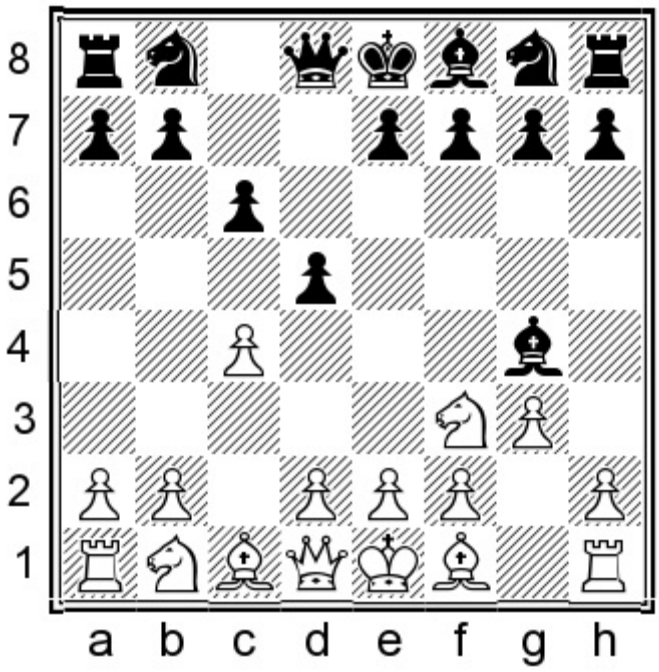
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Position after: 17.♕g4±

d) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 --, 4...e6 5.♕b3

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♗g4



Position after: 3...♗g4

In my opinion this is the most interesting move we will be looking at. There are some good reasons for Black to start with this move. First, he wants to hurry in playing ...e6, in order to be able to take back

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with this pawn. Once the f8-bishop is developed, the g8-knight can also reach e7, from where it can be more flexible. And finally, it deprives White of a few possibilities (such as ♘e5 ideas; we will explain this point later).

4.♗g2

4.♘e5 loses most of its point since after 4...♗e6! 5.cxd5?! (5.♗g2 ♘d7!= doesn't allow any transposition) 5...♗xd5 6.♘f3 ♗xf3! is something that is not possible after the inclusion of ...♘f6 and ♗g2. This is discussed briefly in the next chapter.

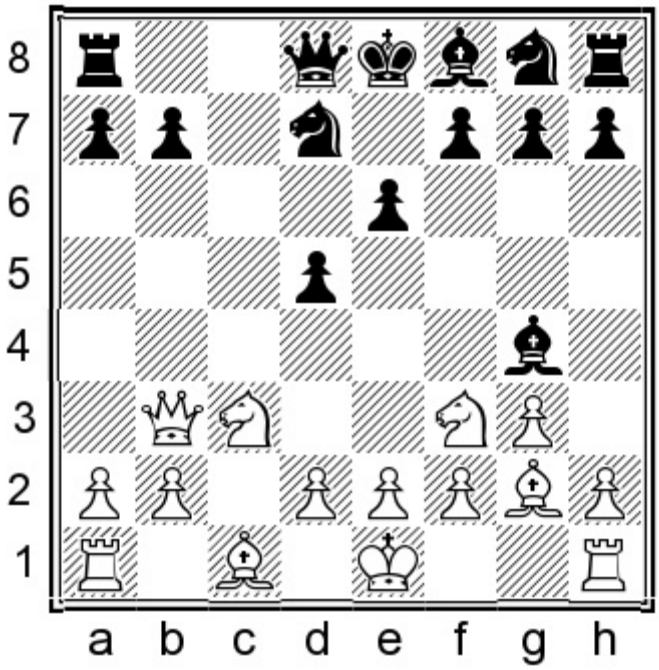
4...e6

We have reached a pretty important crossroads. This is the beginning of a reliable system for Black (and one of the very best) if he wants to play for a slightly passive but equal position.

I am going to show you two completely different systems. One is well known, and has occurred in some high-level games, and the alternative aims at slowly outplaying your opponent.

I must admit that they should be objecttively equal with adequate play by both sides, but we should still know some plans in the position and possibilities to outplay our opponent.

A) 4...♘d7 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♘c3 (6.♕b3?! ♘c5!=) 6...e6 (6...♘gf6 is less precise as it allows an extra possibility: 7.♕b3! ♘c5? 8.♕b5+ ♘fd7 9.d4!± was already known to be bad for Black back in the game Andersson – Tal, Stockholm 1976.) 7.♕b3



Position after: 7.♕b3

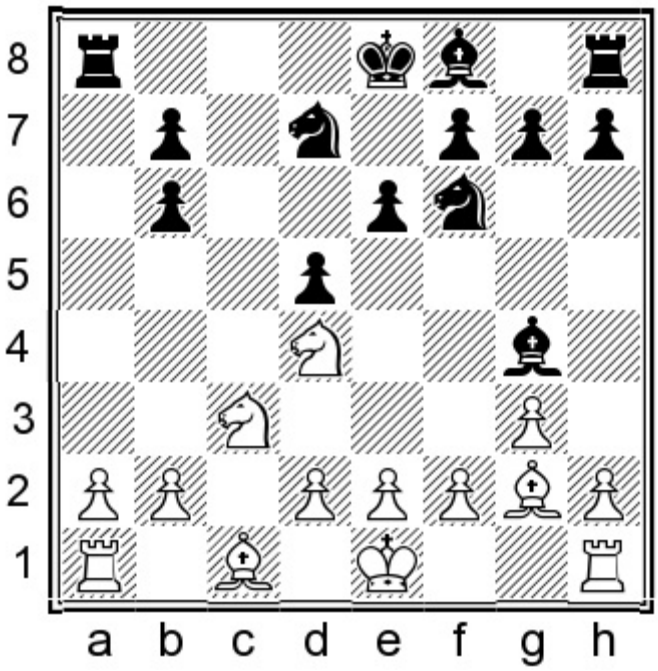
A1) 7...♕b6 8.♕xb6

A1.1) 8...♘xb6 9.♘e5 ♗h5 10.♘b5 ♔d8 11.d4± We are not winning, as the king on d8 is not

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necessarily a big deal, but we still have the better position, thanks to the weird position of the b6-knight. The e4 push can come as a threat, but White generally intends to continue with g4 and h4 in order to grab the bishop pair in favourable circumstances (as ...fxg6 will be needed once Black has advanced his h-pawn to save the bishop).

A1.2) 8...axb6 9.♘d4 ♘gf6

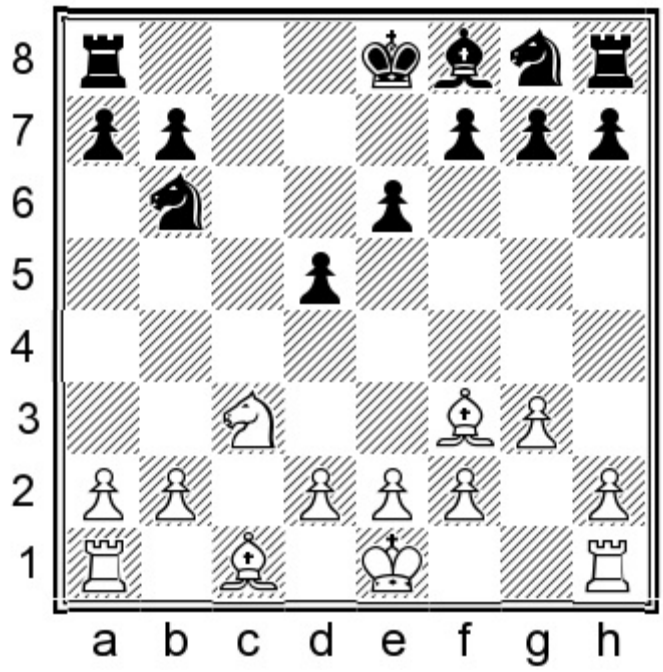


Position after: 9...♘gf6

Black has tried to defend this endgame ten times, but has only managed to escape once (in a completely lost position, by the way). (9...♘c5 10.♘db5 ♔d7 11.d4±) 10.♘db5 ♖c8 11.d4 This is a simpler way to play the position, but it's by no means worse than other possibilities. As you can see, the following game was easy for White: 11...♗e7 12.♗f4 0-0 13.f3 ♗h5 14.0-0 ♘e8 15.e4 dxe4 16.fxe4 e5 17.♘d5 ♗c5 18.dxc5 ♖xc5 19.♗d2 ♖xb5 20.♘e7+ ♔h8 21.b4+– The rook is trapped, and the game lasted only three more moves. 21...♘d6 22.a4 ♖e8 23.♘f5 ♘c4 24.♗c3 1-0 Almasi, Z (2717) – Robson, R (2562) Paks 2010.

A2) 7...♗xf3 That might be the best in order to prevent nasty ♘d4 or ♘e5 ideas. 8.♗xf3 ♕b6 9.♕xb6 ♘xb6

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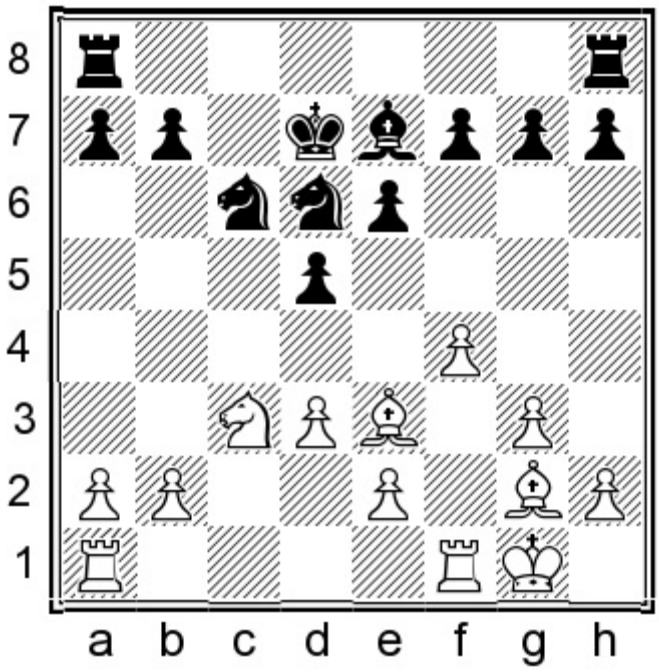


Position after: 9...♘xb6

White enters an endgame with a symmetrical pawn structure, with the edge of the bishop pair. This is not necessarily significant as the position remains closed, and White needs to come up with an idea of how to play it. Theoretical dogma tells you that when you have the bishop pair, you need to open the position. True, but it's not at all easy here, as the only way is to push e4, when Black will either be able to advance to d4 to keep the position closed, or take on e4, in order to create a weakness in White's camp (our isolated d-pawn).

The decision will depend on the exact position. In terms of good ideas, I like the way Petrosian (the strong grandmaster, not the former World Champion) treated it: 10.♘b5!? First, he forces the king to move, which can sometimes be useful. 10...♔d7 11.0-0 ♘e7 12.d3 ♘c6 13.♗e3 (simply developing the pieces) 13...♘c8 14.♘c3 ♘d6 15.♗g2 (preparing to push pawns) 15...♗e7 16.f4

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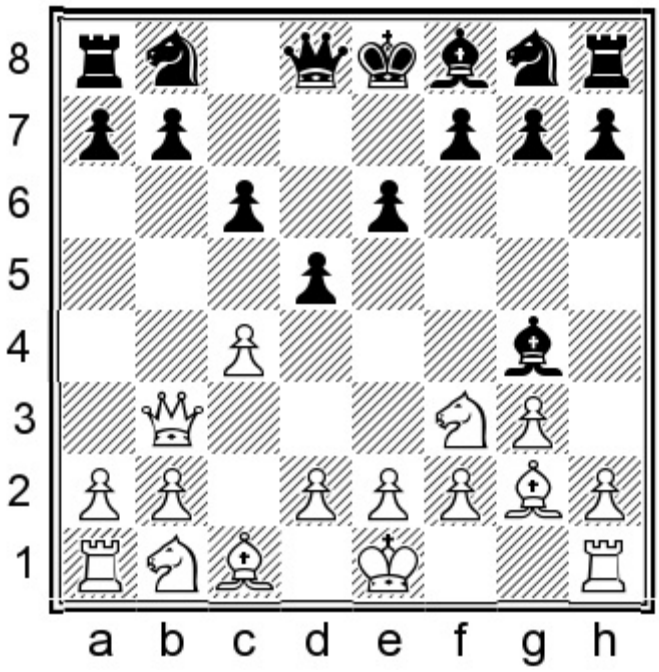
Position after: 16.f4

And now White launches some action in the center, by preventing any kind of ...e5. He may threaten f5, which helps in building an impressive center should White manage to play e4. 16...♘f5 17.♗f2 d4 This is required in order to prevent e4, but the d4-pawn is now a weakness. 18.♘b5! ♗c5 19.♖fc1 ♗b6 20.♖c4 ♖ac8 21.♖ac1 ♘e3 22.♗xe3 dxe3 23.♗xc6+ ♖xc6 24.♖xc6 bxc6 25.♘a3± And after massive exchanges, Black remained with a bad bishop and many weaknesses in Petrosian, T (2629) – Raznikov, D (2500) Warsaw 2014, 1-0 (51).

B) 4...♘f6 transposes into the next chapter with 4...♗g4.

5.♕b3

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Position after: 5.♕b3

This is what I call the ‘non-theoretical line’. This surprising move simply wants to lure the queen to b6, where it does nothing and can sometimes become a target.

5...♕b6

This is of course the natural answer, even if it plays into White’s hands.

6.♕c2 ♘d7 7.b3!

I like this idea.

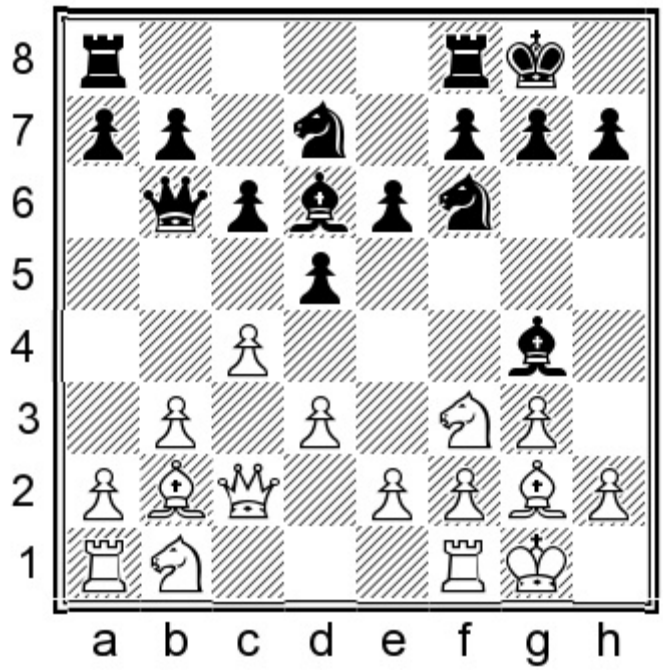
7.d3 can transpose, but it gives the additional possibility 7...dxc4 8.♕xc4 (8.dxc4 would lead to quite a dry middlegame) 8...♗xf3 9.♗xf3 ♘e5 10.♕f4 ♘xf3+ 11.♕xf3=.

7...♘gf6

7...h5 Engines suggest this move, but I don’t believe it can be too dangerous: 8.♗b2 ♘gf6 9.0-0 h4 10.♘xh4! ♗xe2 11.♖e1 ♗g4 12.h3 ♗h5 13.♘c3± with good play for White.

8.0-0 ♗d6 9.♗b2 0-0 10.d3

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Position after: 10.d3

This middlegame is nearly balanced, but Black needs to react before White can push in the center. That is why the next move is completely logical.

10...e5

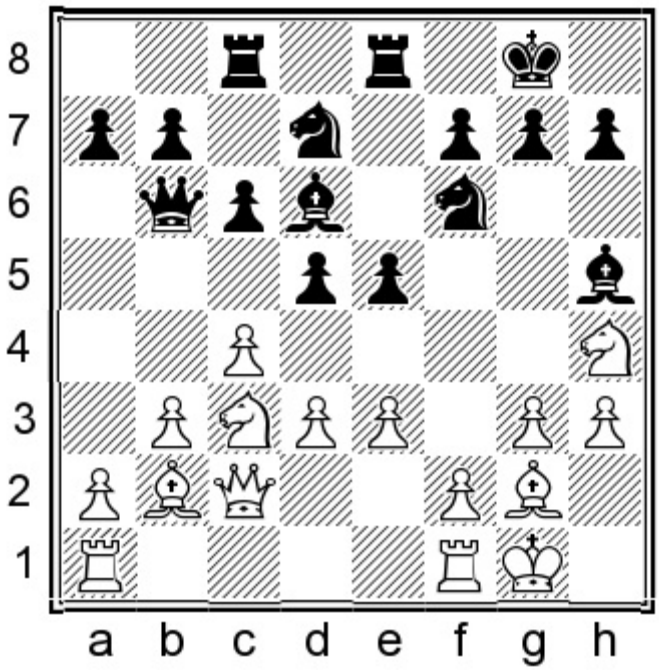
10...a5 11.♘bd2 a4 12.♖fc1⇄

11.e3!

It's important to prevent ...e4 from happening.

11...♖fe8 12.♘c3 ♖ac8 13.h3 ♗h5 14.♘h4!

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Position after: 14.♘h4!

14...♕d8

The queen finally retreats, which justifies our 5.♕b3 inclusion.

15.♖ae1 ♘f8

This was played in the game Movsesian, S (2677) – Debashis, D (2494) Gibraltar 2014, won by the first player.

16.♕d2!

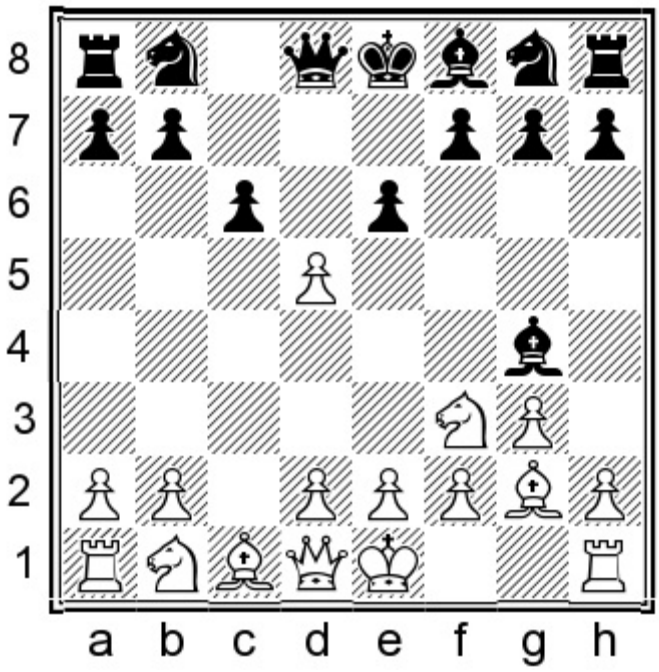
This simple move attacks the d5-pawn, and improves White's game.

16...dxc4 17.dxc4 e4 18.♘f5!↑

e) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 exd5 6.0-0 --, 6...♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5

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Position after: 5.cxd5

In order to enter this theoretical line, some would prefer to castle first, but I would rather start with this move, forcing Black to choose how to take back.

5...exd5

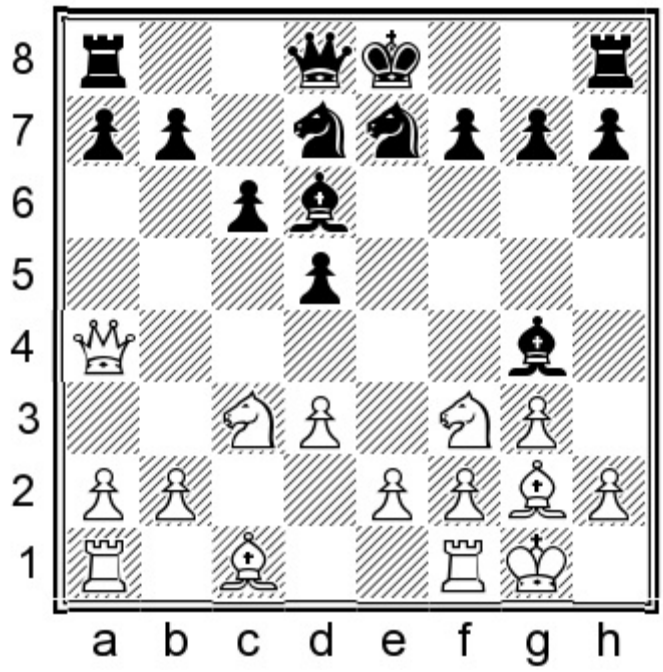
This is generally the pawn structure we are aiming at. Although it is not necessarily bad for Black, it creates an imbalance that we do not get after ...♗xf3 followed by ...cxd5 (subchapter 'g'). Our plan is to expand in the center by means of d3 and e4, but this has to be well prepared, and we shouldn't give Black time to centralize all of his pieces nicely, otherwise he will be in time to deal with it.

5...cxd5?? Black can't take back this way! 6.♕a4++–

6.0-0 ♘f6

If Black wants to delay ...♘f6, a logical continuation might be 6...♘d7 7.d3 ♗d6 8.♘c3 and now after 8...♘e7 9.♕a4!?

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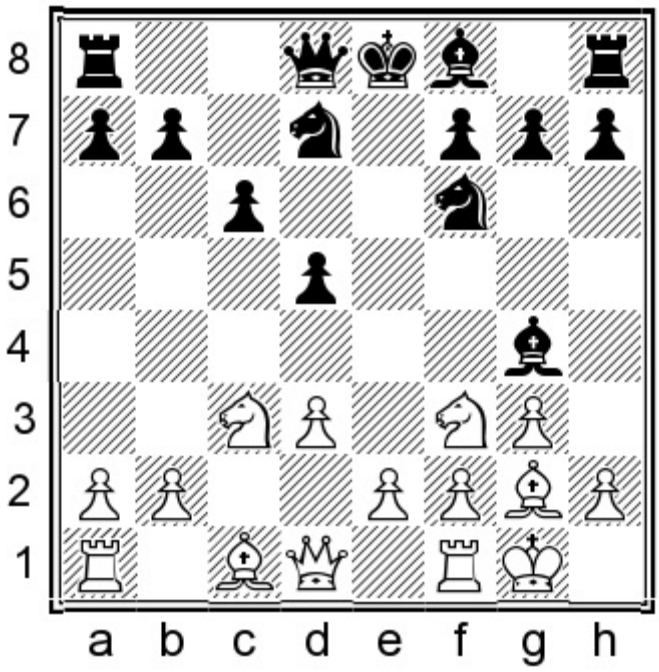
Position after: 9.♕a4!?

This move makes a lot of sense. It not only attacks g4, it also helps in playing e4. That's why the continuation of the game is interesting: 9...♗h5 10.e4! 0-0 (10...dxe4 would be a difficult solution, as it makes White's center mobile: 11.dxe4 0-0 12.h3! ♕c7 13.♕c2± and we can start some action on the kingside) 11.♗e3 ♘c5 12.♕c2 ♘e6 13.exd5 cxd5 14.d4!

The game has proceeded logically, and White now fixes the weakness on d5 and gets the possibility of planting a knight on e5. 14...♕b6 15.♘g5 (15.♘h4!N was actually even stronger: 15...♖ac8 16.♘f5±) 15...♗g6 16.♕d2 ♘c7 17.♘h3 ♖fd8 18.♘f4 ♗xf4 19.♗xf4± 1-0 (49) Zherebukh, Y (2605) – Shabalov, A (2556) Saint Louis 2017.

7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3

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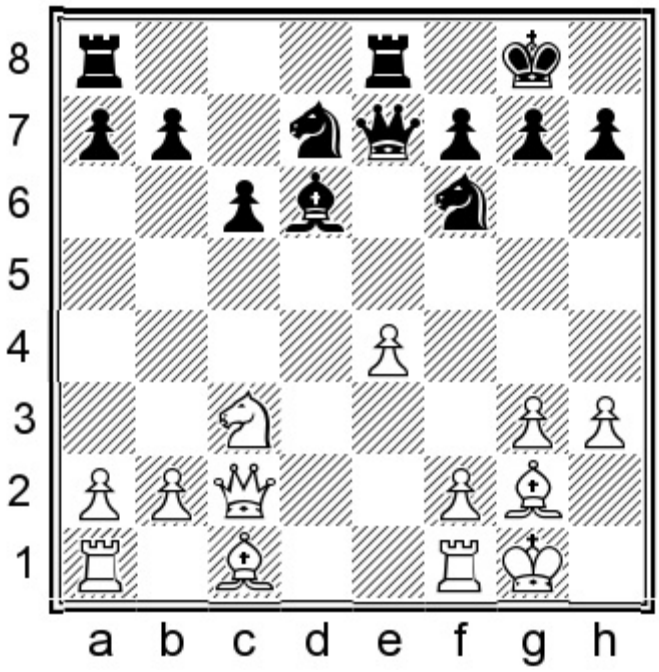
Position after: 8.♘c3

Black has three possibilities to develop his bishop.

8...♗c5

8...♗d6. The main idea of this move is to be able to play ...♘e5 at some point, also it doesn't interfere with a rook coming to e8. 9.♕c2!? I had played h3 in rapids, but I actually prefer this move. It unpins the f3-knight, protects e4, and leaves room for a rook to come to d1. 9...0-0 10.e4 ♖e8 (≤ 10...dxe4 11.dxe4 ♖e8 12.♘d4!? is an extra possibility, not allowing the trade of our knight.) 11.h3 ♗xf3 12.♗xf3 dxe4 13.dxe4 ♕e7 14.♗g2

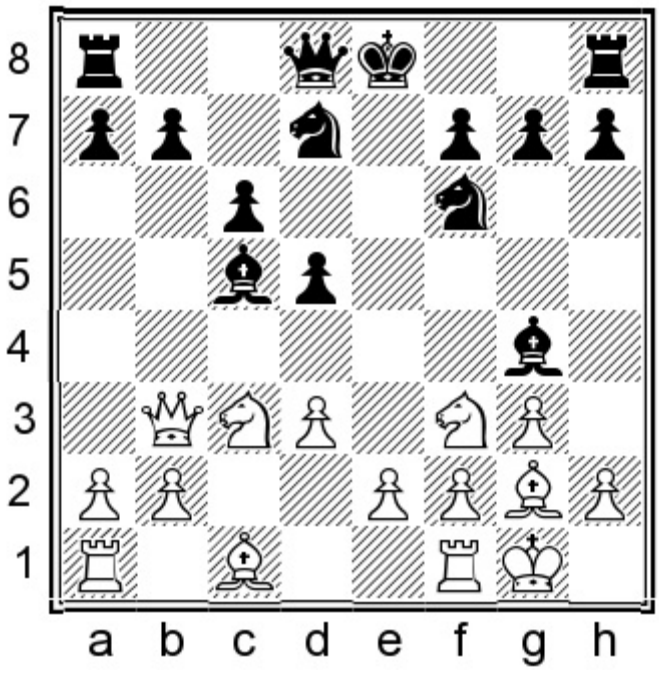
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Position after: 14.♗g2

14...♗c5 This is a fine manoeuvre; the bishop finds a good spot on d4. 15.♔h2 ♗d4 This more or less attacks our central pawn. Here I think we can improve on the game Rapport, R (2720) – Gretarsson, H (2572) Reykjavik 2016, 1-0 (42) with 16.♗d2! ♖ad8 17.f4!? (17.♖ae1! is pretty strong as well in order to prepare our invasion) 17...♗xc3 18.♗xc3 ♘xe4 19.♖fe1 f5 20.♗xe4 fxe4 21.♕b3+ ♔h8 22.♕xb7±.

9.♕b3!?



Position after: 9.♕b3!?

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This simple move asks some good questions, and it's not so easy to answer them all for Black.

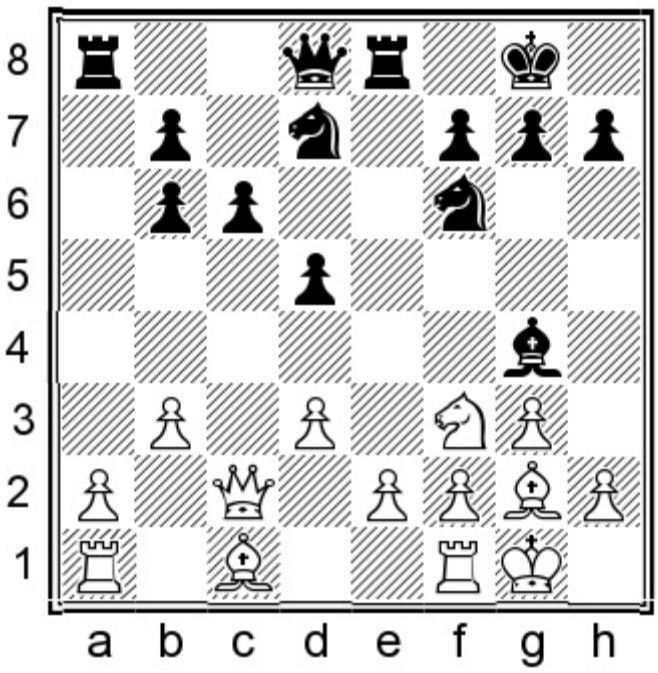
9...♗b6

This has been the most common reply, but White will simply grab the bishop pair. The alternatives are:

A) 9...♕b6?! 10.♕c2! The ♘a4 fork forces Black to go back. 10...♕d8 11.e4!± We don't have to analyze this position to know that it's good for us, as we are virtually a tempo up.

B) 9...♘b6 10.e4 0-0 11.h3 ♗h5 and here we can improve on the game Schandorff, L (2519) – Svane, R (2543) Denmark 2016, by playing 12.♗f4!N 12...♖e8 13.♖ac1 dxe4 14.dxe4 ♗f8 15.♖fd1 ♕e7 16.g4 ♗g6 17.♘e5±.

10.♘a4 0-0 11.♘xb6 axb6 12.♕c2 ♖e8 13.b3!



Position after: 13.b3!

There is no need to hurry. As Black is missing his dark-squared bishop, we fianchetto ours.

13...♗xf3

Black decides to trade his bishop in order to gain some space (this is Mikhalevski's recommendation in *Beating Minor Openings*).

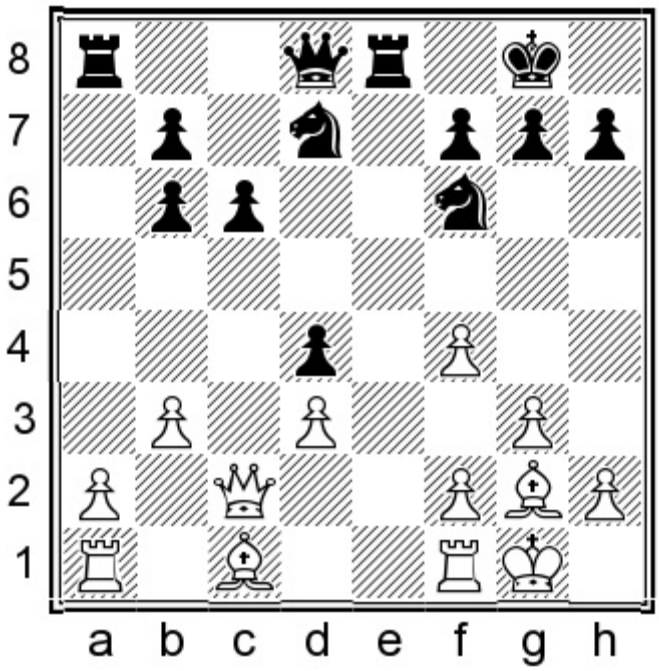
13...b5 14.a3 ♗xf3 15.♗xf3 ♘e5 16.♗g2 ♕d6 17.♗b2 h5 18.a4 bxa4 19.♖xa4 ♖xa4 20.bxa4± The bishops will soon rule the board, and White easily converted his advantage in Svidler, P (2743) – Tomashevsky, E (2714) Sochi 2014.

14.exf3!?N

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The move I like!

14...d4 15.f4!



Position after: 15.f4!

We use our f-pawn to deprive Black of the e5-square.

15...♘c5 16.♕c4

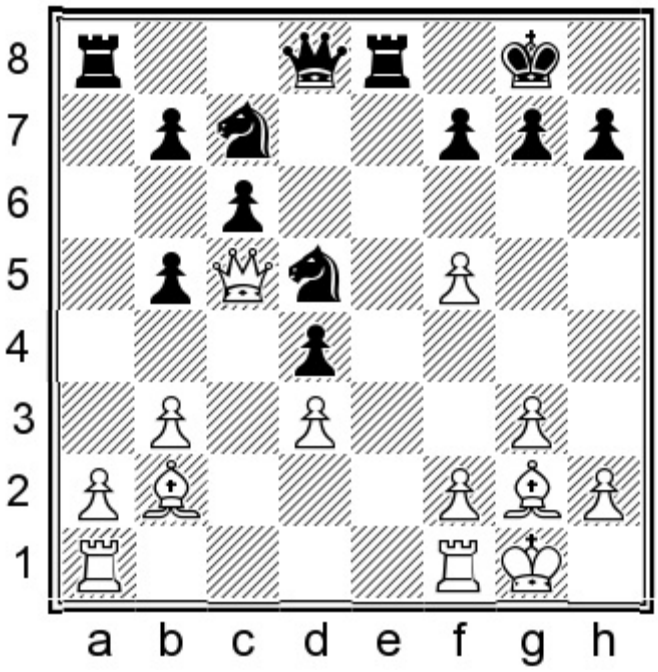
16.♗b2 ♘d5! 17.♗xd4 ♘xf4 18.♗xc5 ♘e2+ 19.♔h1 bxc5=

16...♘e6

16...♕d6 17.♗b2 ♖ad8 18.♖fe1↑ and Black always faces some problems with the d4-pawn.

17.♗b2 b5 18.♕c2 ♘d5 19.f5 ♘ec7 20.♕c5±

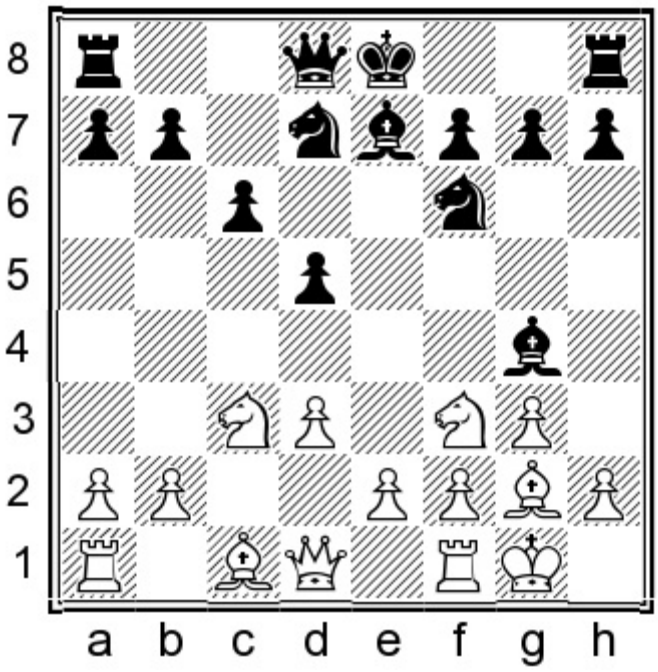
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Position after: 20.♕c5±

f) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 exd5 6.0-0 ♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 ♗e7

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 exd5 6.0-0 ♘f6 7.d3 ♘bd7 8.♘c3 ♗e7



Position after: 8...♗e7

At first sight, this seems passive, but it's always a logical square, as the bishop is not exposed. It's no surprise that it is the main move here.

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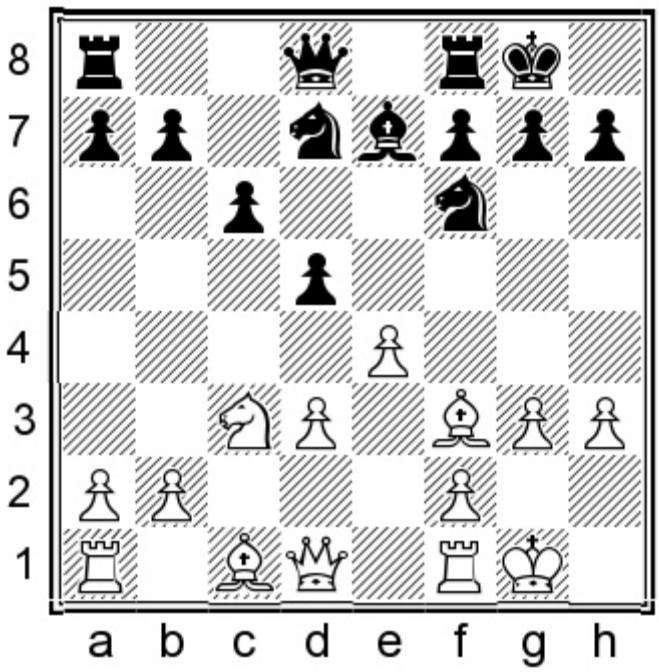
9.h3!

9.e4?! allows Black to trade enough pieces for equality: 9...♘e5!=.

9...♗h5

9...♗xf3 10.♗xf3

A) 10...0-0 allows White to start kingside and central expansion: 11.e4!



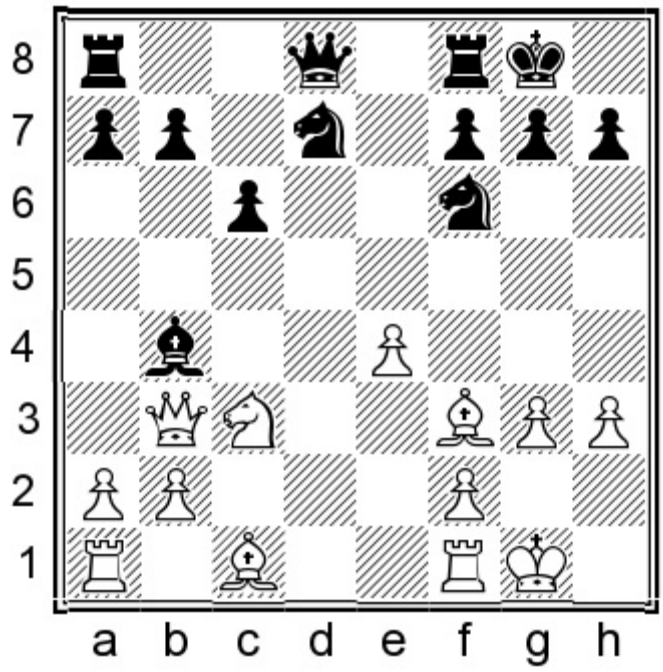
Position after: 11.e4!

A1) 11...d4 12.♘e2± would be hard for Black, as there is no opposition against the coming f4.

A2) 11...♘e5 12.♗e2! We temporarily leave our fianchetto spot to protect the d3-square. As f4 is coming, the knight won't stay here too long. 12...d4 13.♘b1±

A3) 11...dxe4 12.dxe4 ♗b4 This is one of the possibilities; we logically react with 13.♕b3!

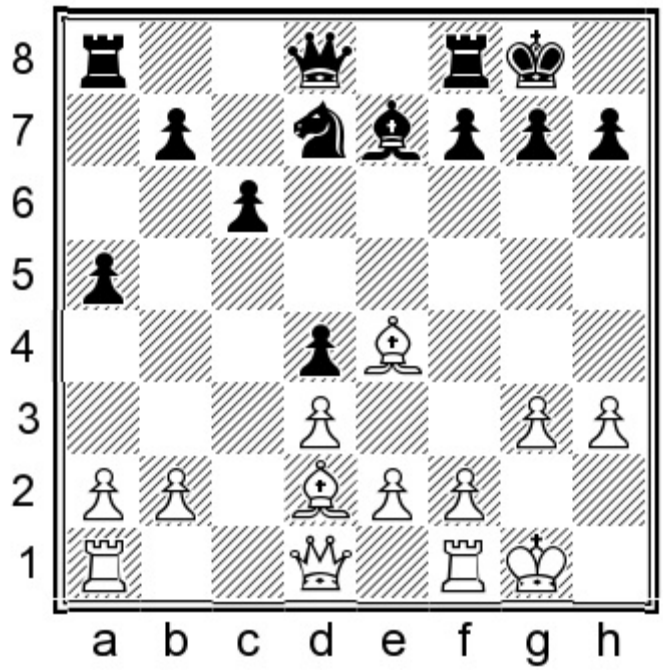
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Position after: 13.♕b3!

13...♕e7 (13...a5 14.♗e3 ♘c5 15.♗xc5 ♗xc5 16.e5! ♘d7 17.♖ad1 ♕c7 18.♘e4 ♗a7 19.e6!±; 13...♘e5 14.♕xb4 ♘xf3+ 15.♔g2 ♘e5 16.♖d1 ♕c7 17.f4± Who will stop White's central expansion?) 14.♗g2 a5 15.♕c2 ♖ad8 16.f4!↑

B) 10...d4 11.♘e4 ♘xe4 12.♗xe4 a5 13.♗d2 0-0



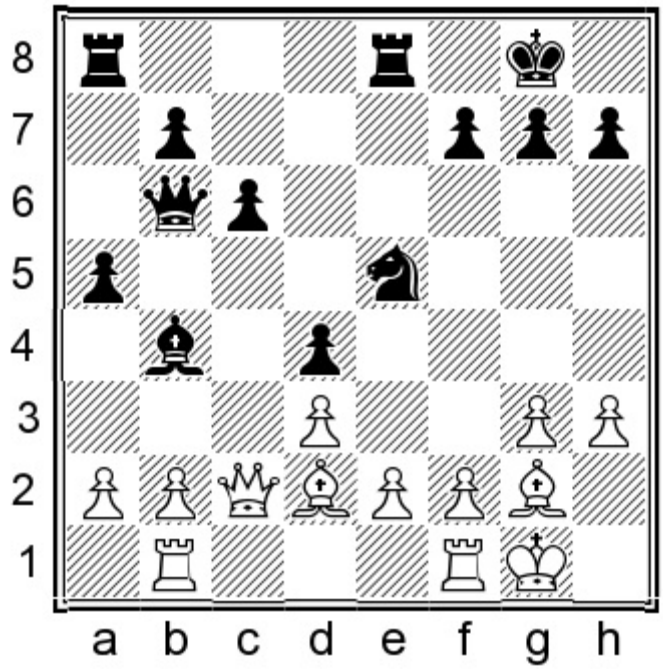
Position after: 13...0-0

B1) It was even possible to start the plan with 14.♖b1 ♖e8 15.♗f3 ♗b4 16.a3 ♗xd2 17.♕xd2 Black

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can’t prevent b4 any more and will remain slightly worse: 17...♘e5 18.♗g2 a4 19.b4 axb3 20.♖xb3± 1-0 (27) Ragger, M (2628) – Gonda, L (2550) Germany 2011.

B2) 14.♕c2 ♕b6 15.♗f3 ♖fe8N 16.♖ab1 ♘e5 17.♗g2 ♗b4

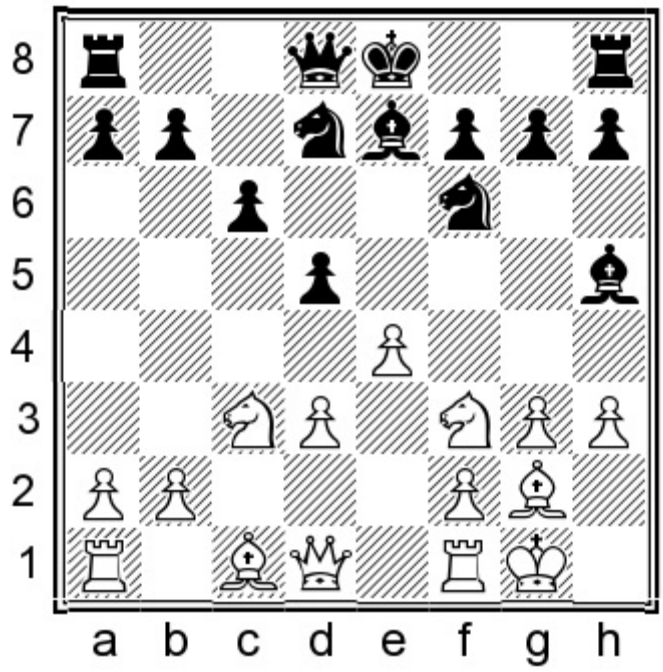


Position after: 17...♗b4

When you are playing against the bishop pair, it’s better to try to exchange the remaining bishop, to get a knight versus bishop middlegame. This is what Black is doing here. 18.♗c1! ♘d7 19.a3 ♗f8 20.♖e1⇄ The idea is still to push b4 and to weaken the queenside by means of a minority attack with b5.

10.e4

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Position after: 10.e4

10...dxe4

A) 10...♘e5 doesn't work any more as 11.g4! is possible. This is exactly why we included the move 9.h3. 11...♘xf3+ 12.♕xf3 ♗g6 13.exd5!±.

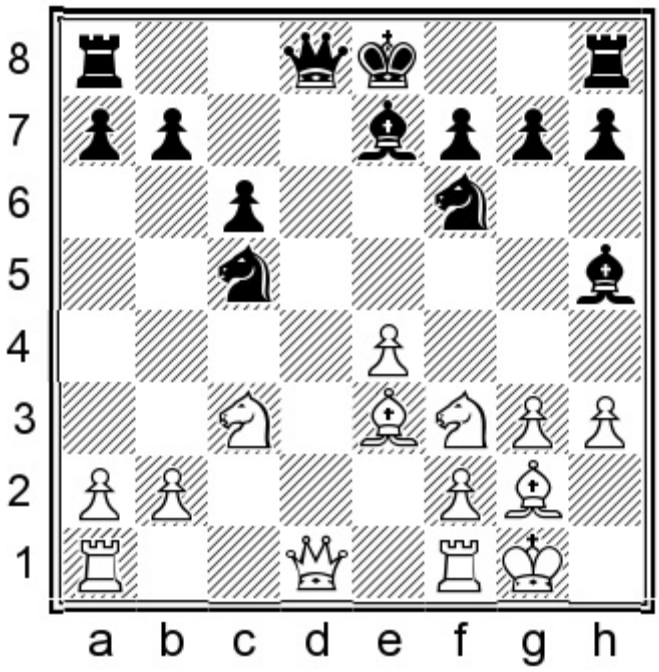
B) 10...0-0 11.exd5! White easily creates a symmetrical pawn structure where he gets an initiative: 11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♗e3 ♗c5 14.d4 ♗d6 0-1 (56) Meier, G (2650) – Karjakin, S (2760) Riyadh 2017, and now 15.♕b3!N 15...♘b6 16.♘e5±.

11.dxe4 ♘c5

11...0-0 12.♕c2! ♖e8 13.♖d1 ♗f8 14.♗f4 This underlines the fact that the ♕d8 faces difficulties in finding a safe haven. 14...♕a5 15.a3 ♖ad8 16.b4 ♕b6 17.g4 ♗g6 And even if White eventually won in Velikov, P (2430) – Daurelle, H (2223) Evry 2005, I would prefer to play 18.♘h4N 18...♘e5 19.♖xd8 ♕xd8 20.♖d1±.

12.♗e3!

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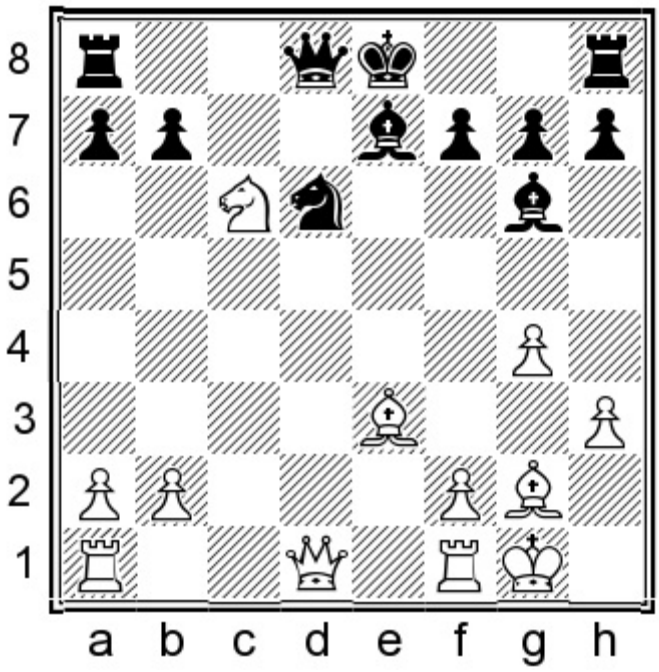
Position after: 12.♗e3!

Despite the e4-pawn being under attack, I would like to suggest this simple developing move.

12.♕e2 ♕d3!=

12...0-0

12...♘fxe4?! is pretty dubious: 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.g4 ♗g6 15.♘e5! ♘d6 16.♘xc6!? This move is not forced at all, but this continuation seems pretty annoying for Black:



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Position after: 16.♘xc6!?

16...bxc6 17.♗xc6+ ♔f8 18.♗xa8 ♕xa8 19.♗c5 ♘e4 20.♗xe7+ ♔xe7 21.♕b3± with a huge attack coming.

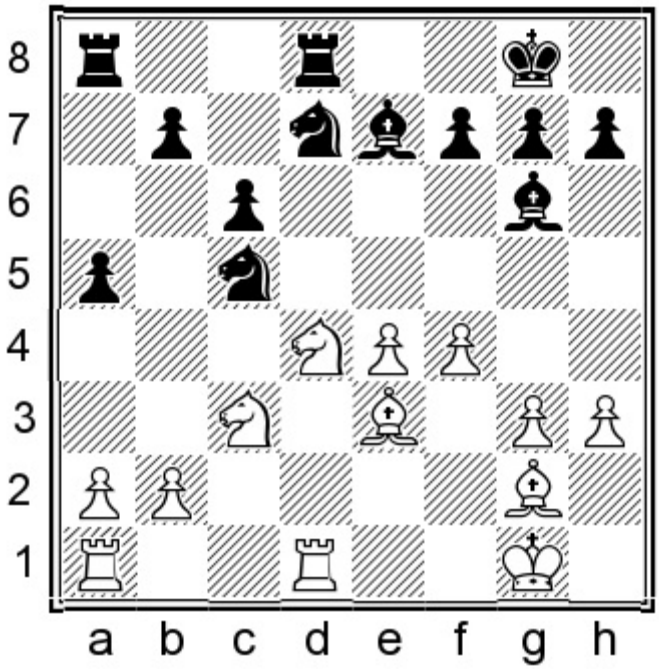
13.♕c2! ♕d3

Otherwise White puts a rook on d1 next and Black's concept is nonsense.

14.♘e1!

The best way to enter the endgame.

14...♕xc2 15.♘xc2 ♗g6 16.f3 ♖fd8 17.♖fd1 a5 18.♘d4 ♘fd7 19.f4!±



Position after: 19.f4!±

White can start the desired expansion, and managed to win in Meier, G (2669) – Prusikin, M (2541) Austria 2011.

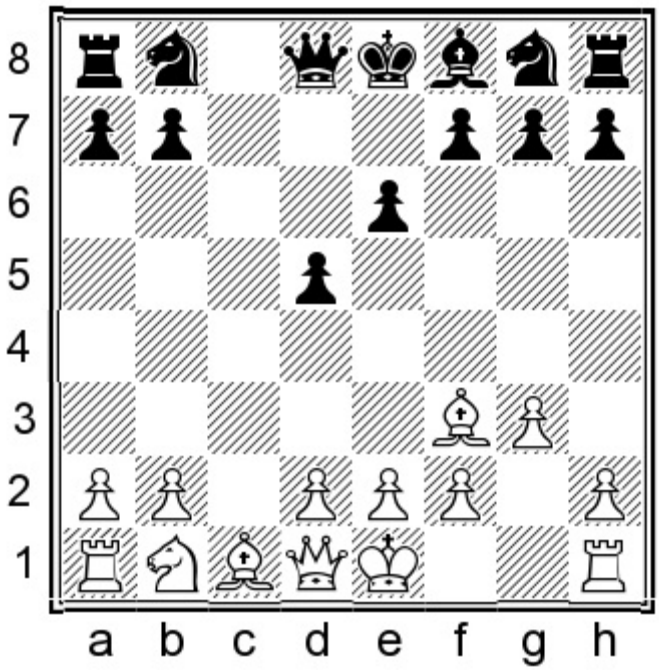
g) 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 ♗xf3 6.♗xf3 cxd5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2 e6 5.cxd5 ♗xf3!

I believe this is the most annoying system in this position.

6.♗xf3 cxd5

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Position after: 6...cxd5

Once again, we have gained the bishop pair, but Black's position is super-solid. I consider it one of the most reliable systems for Black if he wants to fight for equality.

Of course he can't really dream of more, but who could turn down an easy draw with Black? We must be ready for a long fight to make Black suffer as much as possible (and prevent players from entering such a dry opening).

7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.0-0 ♘f6

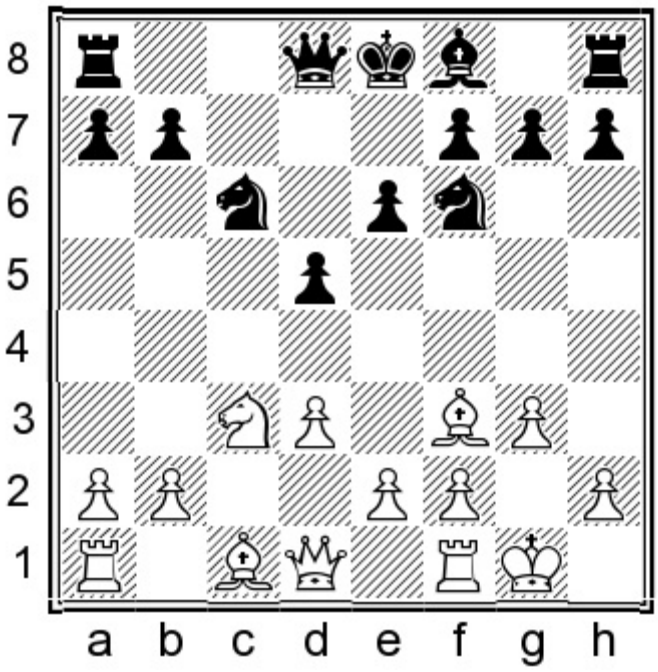
Here we have a choice between two different set-ups.

9.d4

This has been chosen by most of the top players, including Carlsen (albeit without success, as he lost to Caruana).

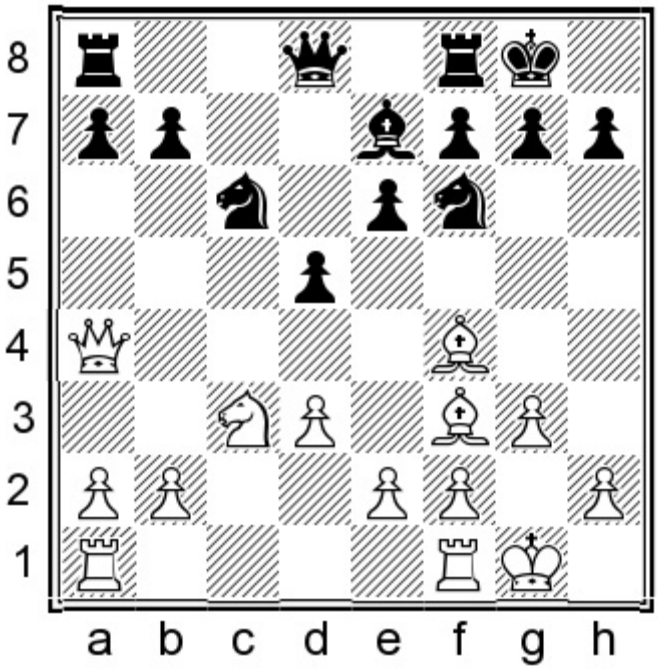
Before, my preference was 9.d3, to get a more flexible pawn structure, but my results (two sad draws with White, and a painful loss against the strong GM Anton Korobov as Black – I must confess I used this system as well), made me realize that I did not fully understand the position.

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Position after: 9.d3

White can sometimes try to push e4, but he will need to worry about the weak point it creates on d4. 9...♗e7 10.♕a4!? The main aim of this move is to allow the f1-rook to come to c1. 10...0-0 11.♗f4



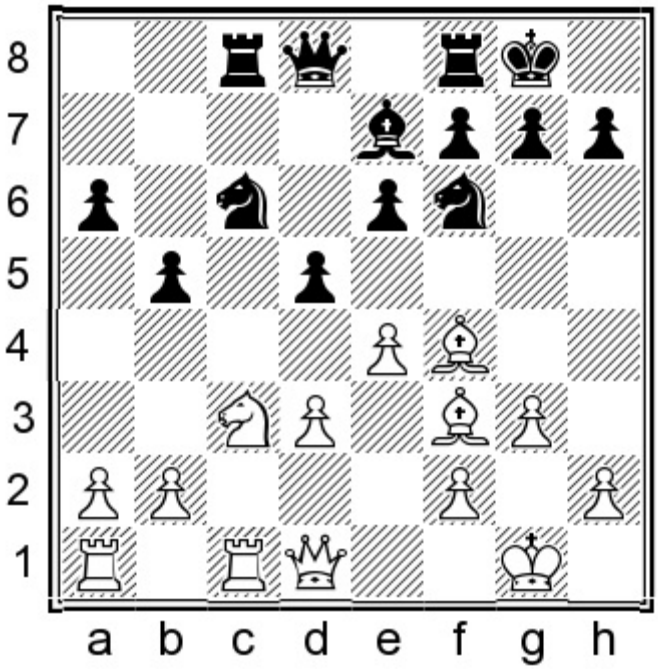
Position after: 11.♗f4

A) 11...♘d7!? This manoeuvre makes a lot of sense since the queen is exposed on a4, and it allows Black to dream about the ...e5 push (even if it's usually too weakening for its colleague on d5). 12.♖fc1 a6 13.♕d1 ♖c8 14.♗g2 b5 15.h4!?N This kind of move is pleasant, to prevent ...g5-ideas. We have not discussed this yet, but it can be strong for Black to start with ...g5 and then ...f5 if he can. It

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also starts expansion on the kingside, before playing e4, trying to open files.

B) When Caruana was a youngster, he suffered a defeat against his former national team colleague Daniele Vocaturo, and it gave some popularity to this line. 11...a6 12.♖fc1 b5 13.♕d1 ♖c8 14.e4

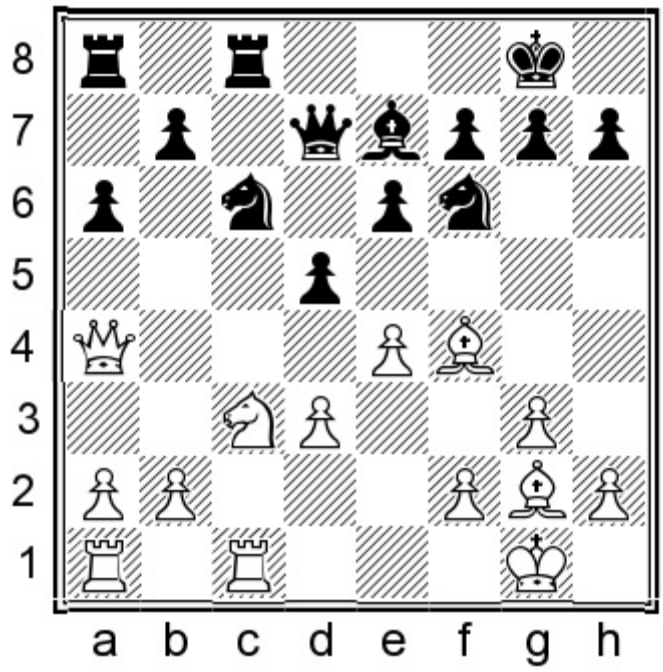


Position after: 14.e4

Vocaturo opens the center, which was maybe a bit premature, but Black had to show why. 14...d4 (14...dxe4 15.dxe4 ♕b6 16.♗e3 ♕b7⇄) 15.♘b1 ♘d7 16.♗d2 ♘c5 17.♗e2 ♘a4?! 18.b3 ♘b6 19.a4 Now White starts his expansion and grabs the important c4-square. 19...b4 20.♗e1 ♕d7 21.a5 ♘a8 22.♘d2 ♘a7 23.♘c4 ♘b5 24.f4± And White went on to win in this complicated middlegame: Vocaturo, D (2500) – Caruana, F (2652) Reggio Emilia 2009, 1-0 (45).

C) 11...♕d7 12.♖fc1 ♖fc8 If Black does the same with his rook, we can try 13.♗g2 a6 14.e4!?N

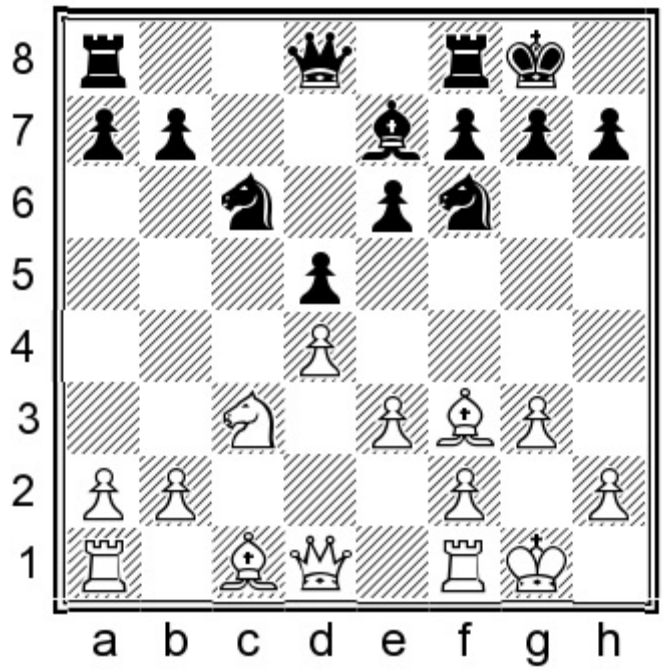
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Position after: 14.e4!?N

which actually works pretty well here. For instance 14...dxe4?! (14...d4 15.♘e2 e5 16.♗d2 b5 17.♕d1 White is temporarily on the defensive, but he will start a classic King's Indian expansion with f4) 15.dxe4 ♗c5 16.♖d1 ♕e7 17.e5 ♘g4 18.♘e4!± giving White a good outpost on d6 for his knight.

9...♗e7 10.e3 0-0



Position after: 10...0-0

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11.♗d2

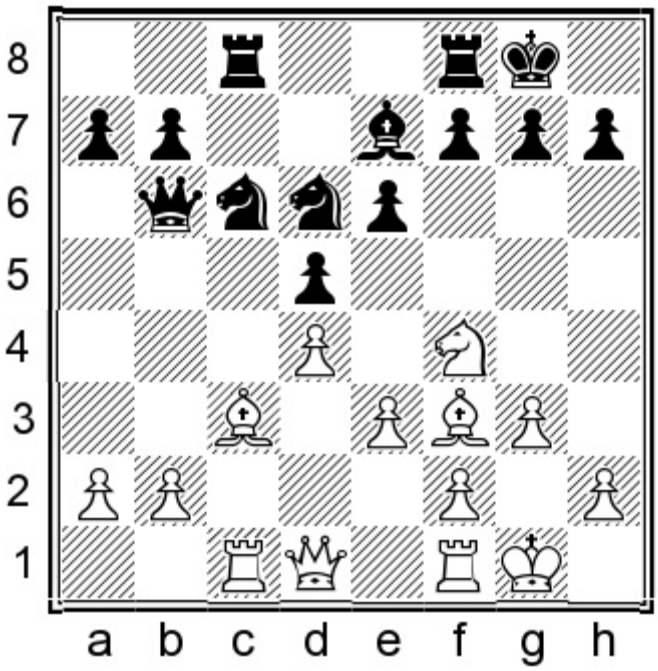
11.b3 was chosen by Carlsen, but it's probably dubious, as it clearly weakens the queenside, especially the a3-square: 11...♕a5 12.♗b2 ♗a3 13.♕c1 ♗xb2 14.♕xb2 ♖fc8= 0-1 (62) Carlsen, M (2864) – Caruana, F (2774) Moscow 2013.

11...♖c8 12.♖c1

And among the many plans at his disposal, Black can play...

12...♘d7

12...♘e8 makes a lot of sense too: 13.♘e2 ♘d6 14.♘f4 ♕b6 15.♗c3

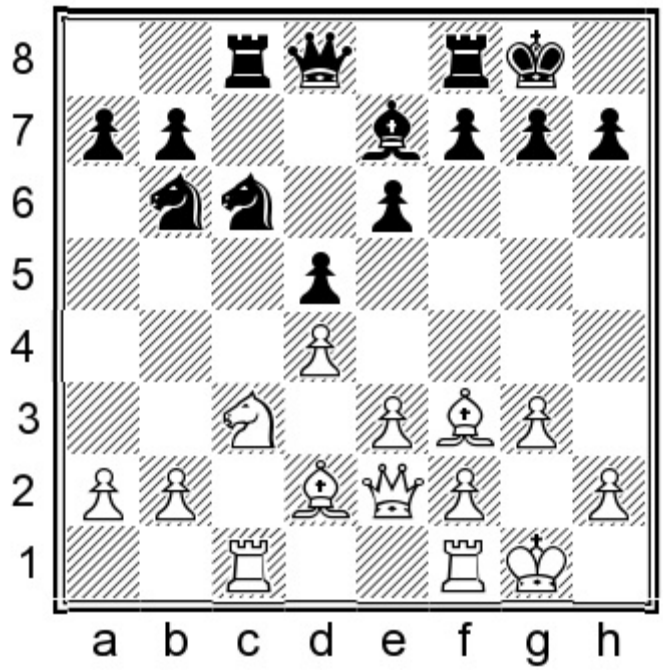


Position after: 15.♗c3

This position reminds us of the 23rd game of the Botvinnik – Bronstein match, that Botvinnik managed to win in order to keep his crown. 15...♖fd8 16.a3 ♘b5 17.♗d2 ♗g5 18.♘d3± 1-0 (53) Howell, D (2682) – Saric, I (2664) Gibraltar 2018.

13.♕e2 ♘b6⇄

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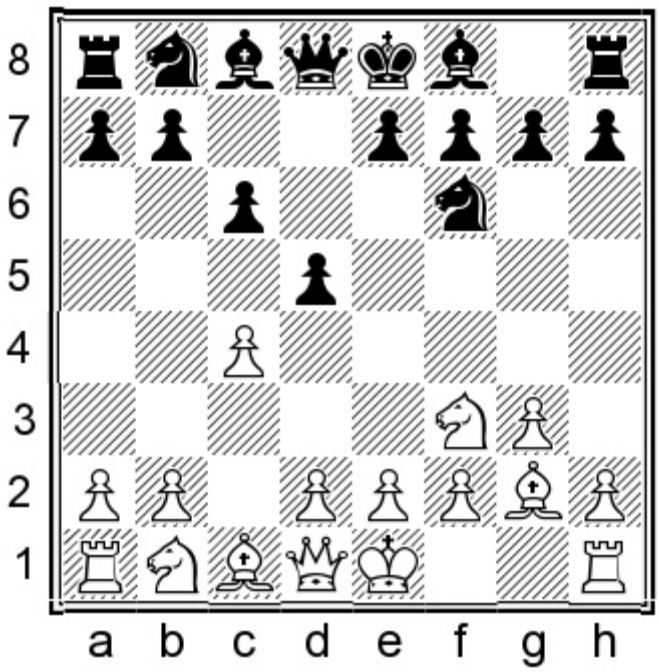
Position after: 13...♘b6⇄

...and White can obtain different kinds of play. Sometimes he will try to expand on the kingside, putting a pawn on h5 if he can, where it can help a future attack. After that he will be able to push e4 (as we already know, when we have an isolani on d4, it's recommended to prepare a kingside attack), or he can prefer to push both pawns on the queenside, to repel the black knights. However, in general, this weakens the c4-square, which can be invaded, so we have to be pretty cautious. I won't analyze too deeply; it would be a complete waste of time because of the multiple set-ups that Black can choose. Knowing and understanding the different plans seems more useful to me.

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Chapter 7
Various 4th moves

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2



Chapter guide

Chapter 7 – Various 4th moves

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2

a) 4...♘bd7

b) 4...g6

c) 4...♗f5 5.--, 5.♕b3 --

d) 4...♗f5 5.♕b3 ♕b6 6.d3 --

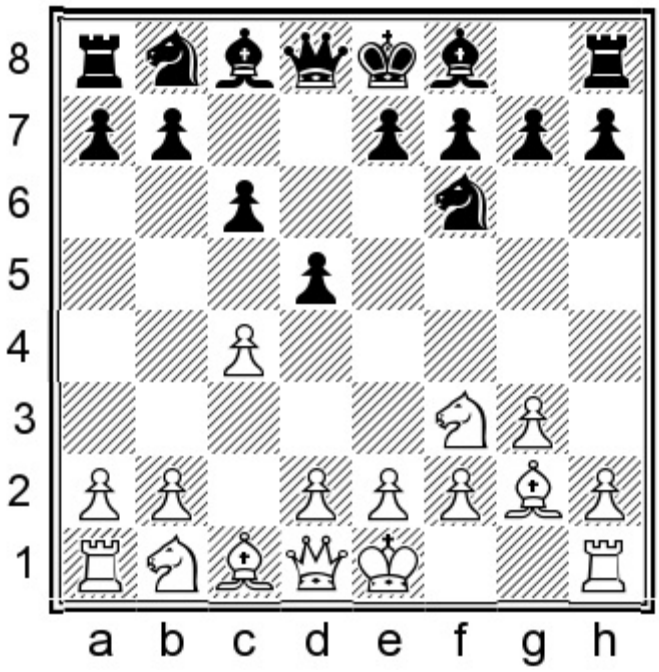
e) 4...♗f5 5.♕b3 ♕b6 6.d3 e6

f) 4...♗g4

a) 4...♘bd7

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2

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Position after: 4.♗g2

In general, most of your games against a Slav Defense player will start here, especially since the position can also arise via the move order 1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 c6 3.g3 d5 4.♗g2.

The Slav is one of the most resilient systems against 1.d4, so we can assume it will be the same against the Reti, otherwise it would be too easy.

In this important chapter, therefore, we will go deeply into some of the systems you will encounter most frequently, especially the reversed London with 4...♗f5, 4...♗g4, which we have already covered in detail in the previous chapter, and 4...dxc4, which simply asks, “Why are you giving me a pawn?”.

We will also look at two less important systems: 4...♘bd7 (in order to push ...e5), and 4...g6, which more or less transposes into Grünfeld systems.

I’ll be honest with you: don’t expect me to give you a clear plus in every line, I didn’t refute the Slav, and I apologize for that! J However, some clever ideas are hidden in the following pages!

4...♘bd7

I don’t like this move for Black; I find it too compromising, as the knight prevents the c8-bishop from developing easily, and if the c-pawns are traded it can no longer go to the natural c6-square. But the threat can sometimes be to push the pawn to ...e5, and we must take care of that.

5.cxd5

Taking advantage of the drawbacks we just mentioned, and trading when the knight can’t reach c6 so easily. You can also choose to castle first, but it gives more possibilities to Black.

5.d4 e6 transposes to some kind of Semi-Slav with g3, which is interesting too, but I don’t want to

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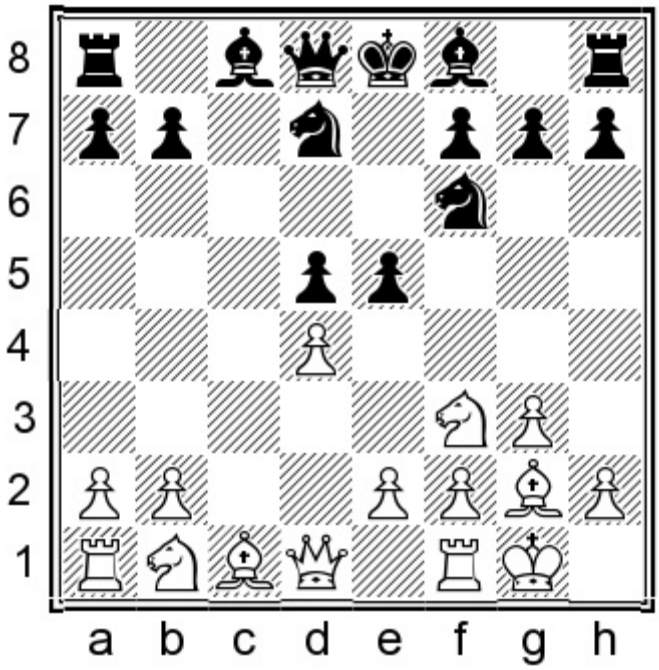
analyze these kinds of variations, as they have not-hing to do with the Reti.

5...cxd5 6.0-0 e5

This is the principled move, to justify starting with 4...♘bd7.

6...e6 7.d3 ♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.e4! (again, a classical pattern, which aims at opening the long diagonal) 9...dxe4 10.dxe4 e5 (otherwise White will play e5 himself) 11.♕e2 b6 12.♖d1 ♕c7 13.♘h4!±

7.d4!



Position after: 7.d4!

It was possible to leave the center to Black, and try for instance to play some kind of Pirc a tempo up, but this reaction is actually quite sound.

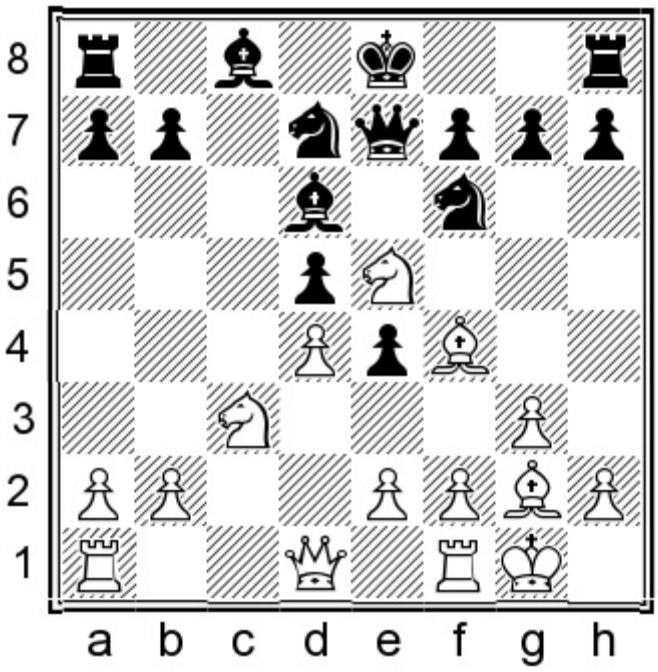
7...e4 8.♘e5! ♗d6 9.♗f4

The previous moves were pretty forced. Now the threat is ♘xf7, winning at least a pawn, so Black must react!

9...♕e7 10.♘c3!

This is not a sacrifice, as ‘d5’ will be hanging, and it’s more efficient than simply trading knights.

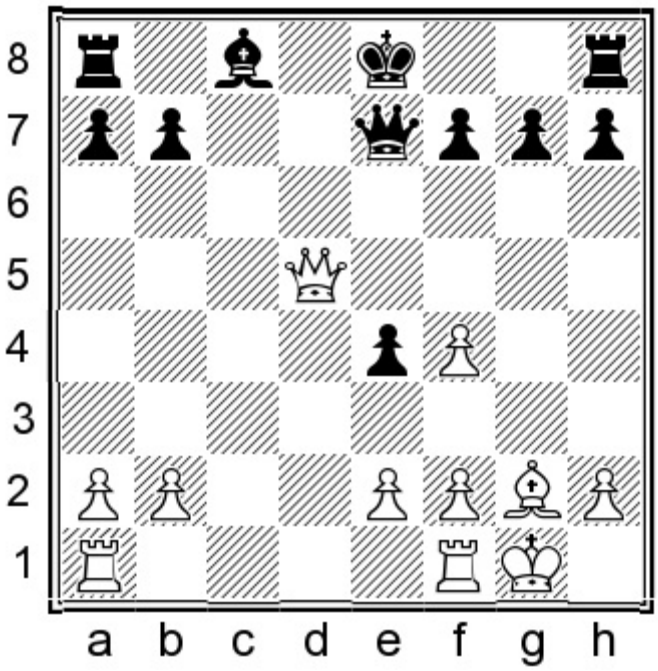
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Position after: 10.♘c3!

10...0-0

10...♘xe5 11.dxe5 ♗xe5 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♕xd5 ♗xf4 14.gxf4 This has occurred only once, and Black misplayed the position in the game in question.



Position after: 14.gxf4

14...f5!N This doesn't help Black to castle, but it limits the range of the g2-bishop. (14...e3?! 15.♕b5+! ± This nasty intermediate move was a source of problems in Tomerlin, S (2282) – Pavlovic, V (1923)

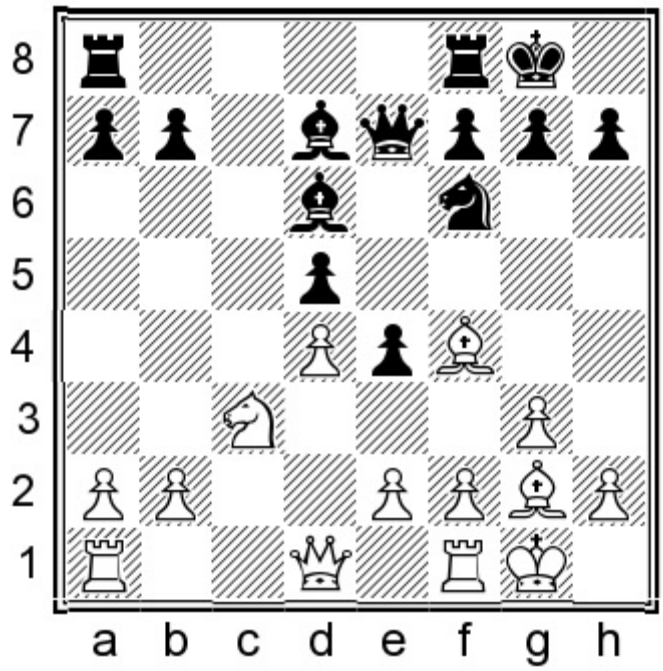
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Osijek 2004.) 15.♖ac1 ♗e6 16.♕e5 0-0 17.f3! e3 There is nothing better than to give up the pawn. 18.♕xe3± White has a long-term advantage thanks to the extra pawn, but if Black defends precisely, he can hope for a draw, because of the ugly bishop on g2.

11.♘xd7

As we don't have any useful moves, it's time to swap and find a new target.

11...♗xd7



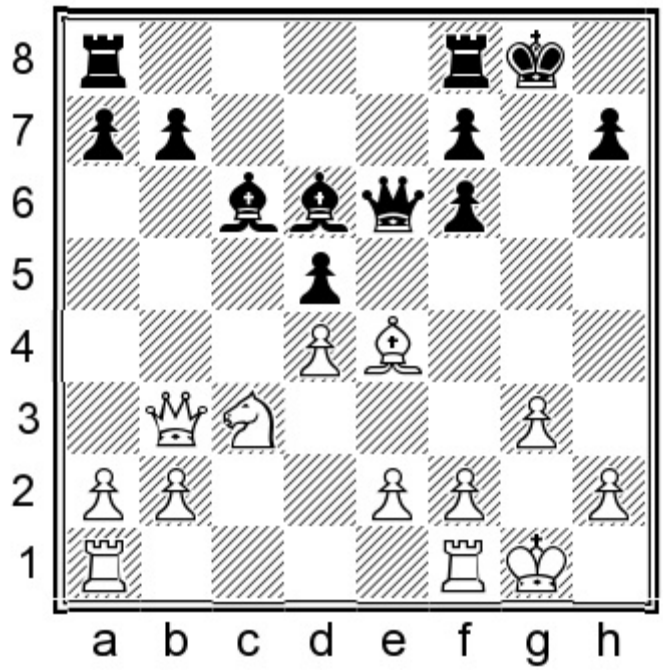
Position after: 11...♗xd7

11...♕xd7 Black wants to avoid being pinned and be able to protect the f6-knight with ...♗e7, but we can play 12.♗e5! ♗e7 13.f3!. We have a huge lead in development and far better pieces, so we open the center. Chess is sometimes simple! 13...exf3 14.♗xf3±

12.♗g5! ♗c6

12...♕e6 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♕b3 ♗c6 15.♗xe4! With this move, White opens the position, underlining the weaknesses in Black's camp.

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Position after: 15.♗xe4!

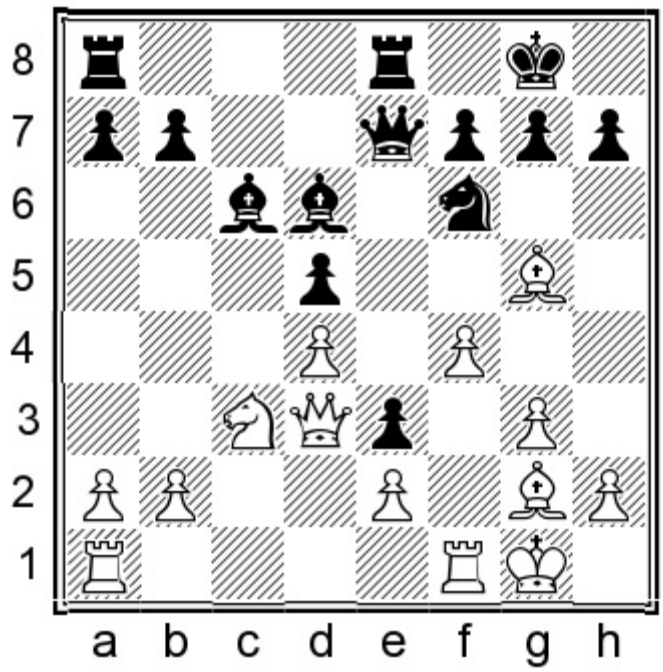
15...dxe4 16.d5 ♗xd5 17.♘xd5 ♔g7 18.♖fd1±

13.f3 e3

Sadly, this is forced, as the other moves were not really appealing.

13...exf3?! 14.♖xf3 ♖fe8 15.♗xf6 gxf6 16.♕d2+–

14.♕d3 ♖fe8 15.f4!±



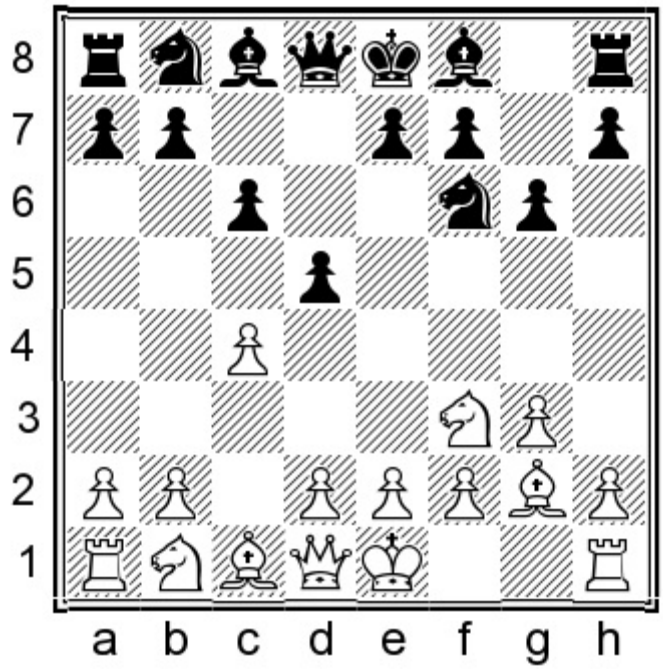
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Position after: 15.f4!±

The d5-pawn comes under attack and it will be pretty hard to keep defending it. However, Black fought like a lion and eventually made a draw in Kokarev, D (2616) – Ponkratov, P (2589) Izhevsk 2012.

b) 4...g6

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 g6



Position after: 4...g6

This mixture of Slav and Grünfeld is usually called the Schlechter Defense. It can be both solid and active, as various pawn breaks are possible. Compared to the 1.d4 lines, we are more flexible, and will decide later the correct square for our d-pawn.

5.b3!

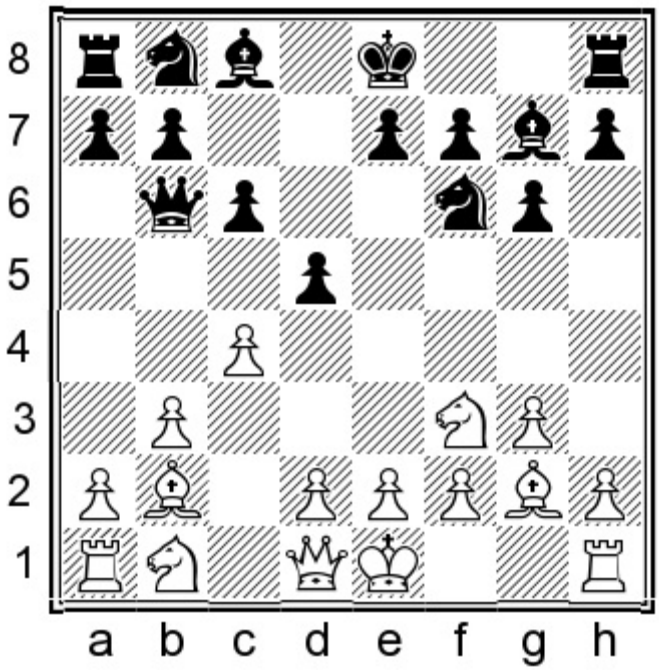
We have to play this move at once, before Black has time to put his bishop on g7.

5.d4 If you are not worried about deep theoretical lines (granted, this book is quite theoretical, but about less theoretical lines, if I may say so), I suggest you work on this line. Who knows if White has a real edge here?

5...♗g7 6.♗b2 0-0

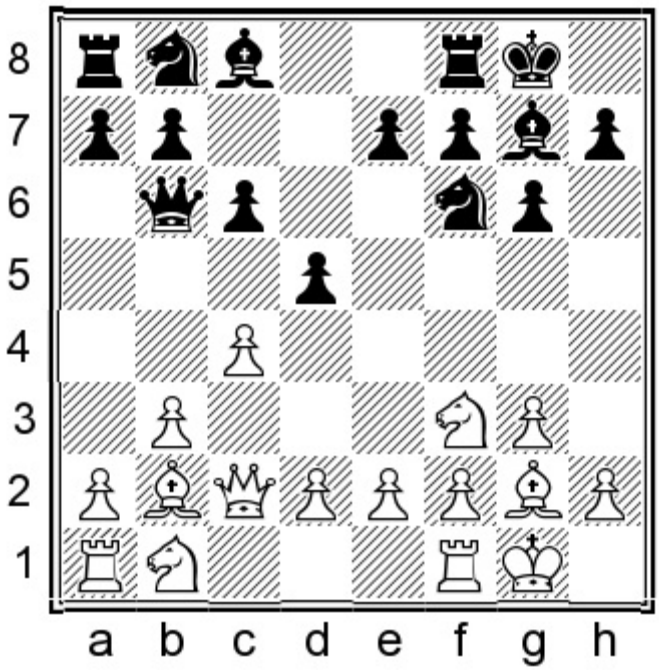
I don’t see much reason for the move 6...♕b6,

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Position after: 6...♕b6

but I guess Black is simply trying to disorganize White's pieces – which is not so easy to manage. 7.♕c2. In many cases, White prefers to put the queen on c1, preventing any tricks on the b1-h7 diagonal, but as these threats are not really scary, I don't see any problem with the c2-square. 7...0-0 (7...♗f5?! 8.d3 ♘bd7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘d4! e6 11.♘d2± We will simply take the bishop pair and try to push e4 at some point; 7...♘a6 8.0-0 0-0 9.d3 ♘b4 10.♕d2 ♖d8 11.a3 ♘a6 12.♕c2± What exactly is the knight doing on a6?) 8.0-0

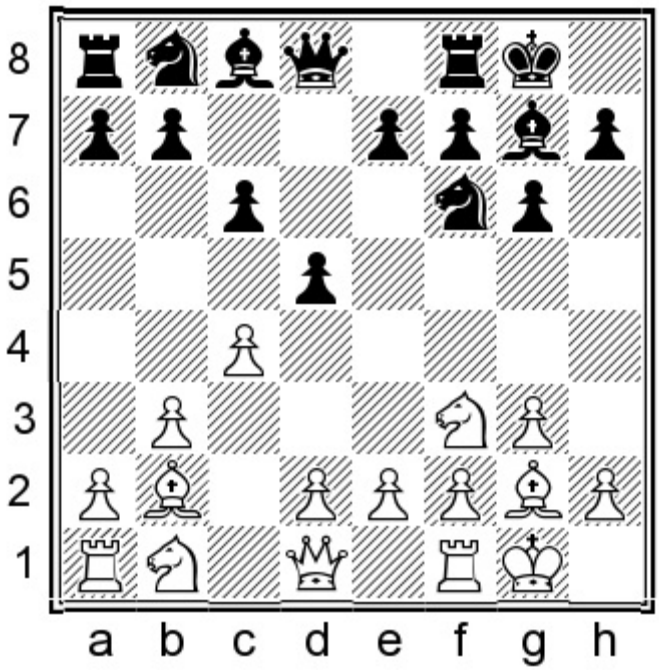


Position after: 8.0-0

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8...♗g4 9.d3 ♗xf3 Black clearly wants to trade the knight, and doesn't wait for White to play ♘bd2. 10.♗xf3 e6 11.e3 ♘bd7 12.d4± The position has changed a bit (...♗f5 is no longer possible), so we can allow ourselves to push d4. Later on we will open the center with e4. Pantsulaia, L (2567) – Kozul, Z (2617) Reykjavik 2015, 1-0 (41).

7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

This is the real starting point of the variation. Black has various plans at his disposal: he can play in the center with ...e5, or for a flank attack with the ...a5-a4 push, or even just develop his pieces in various ways.

Things seem a bit simpler for White, as he will wait until Black shows his hand before deciding between d3 or d4. Then he will slowly make progress, sometimes trying to push b4-b5, or more commonly e2-e4.

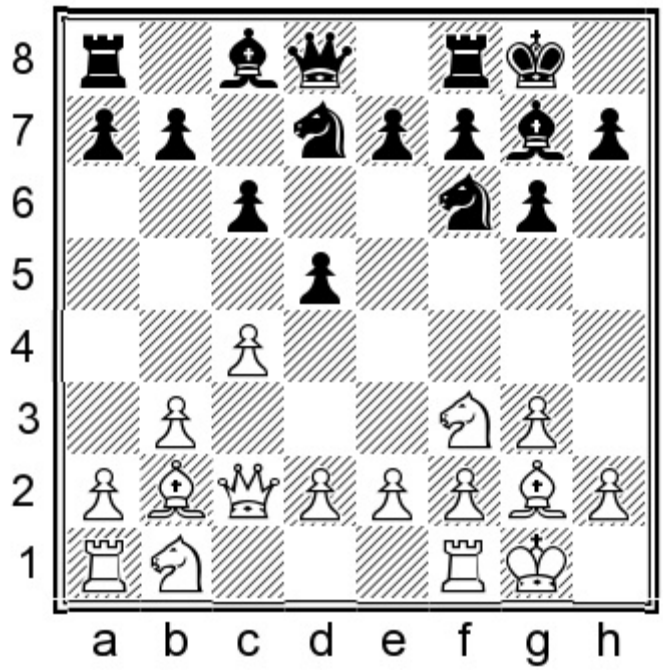
7...a5!?

Some players don't like to face systems with two fianchettoes. If they want an original set-up, they might like to play moves like ...a5 in order to annoy the bishop on b2.

A) 7...♕b6 – see 6... ♕b6.

B) 7...♘bd7 8.♕c2

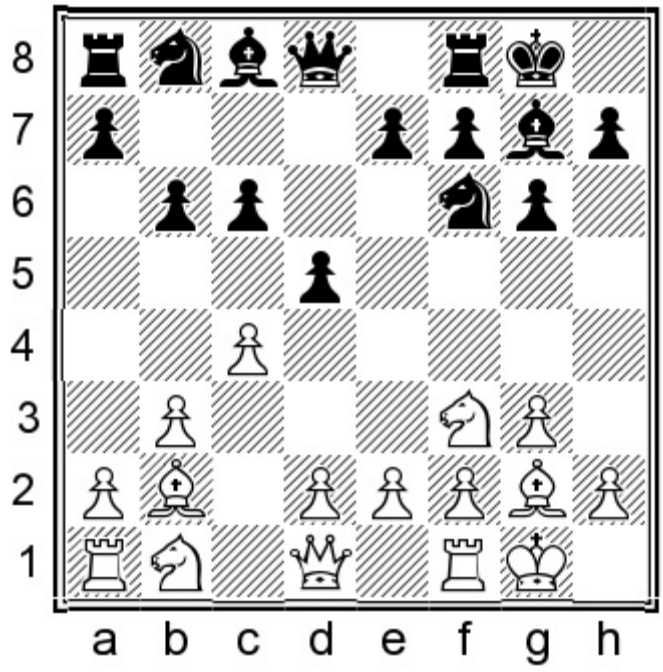
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Position after: 8.♕c2

I like this waiting move. Of course it is possible to play d2-d4 straight away, transposing into theoretical lines of the Grünfeld Defense. The idea of our move is to improve on these lines. Black should continue logically with 8...♖e8 9.d4 ♘e4 (9...♘b6 10.♘h4 It's important to prevent ...♗f5. 10...a5 11.♘d2 a4 12.e4!⩲) 10.e3 ♘df6 11.♘e5 ♗f5 12.g4! ♘xg4 (12...♗e6 13.f3 ♘d6 14.c5 ♘b5 15.♘d2⩲) 13.♘xg4 ♘g3 14.e4! ♘xe4 15.♘e3±.

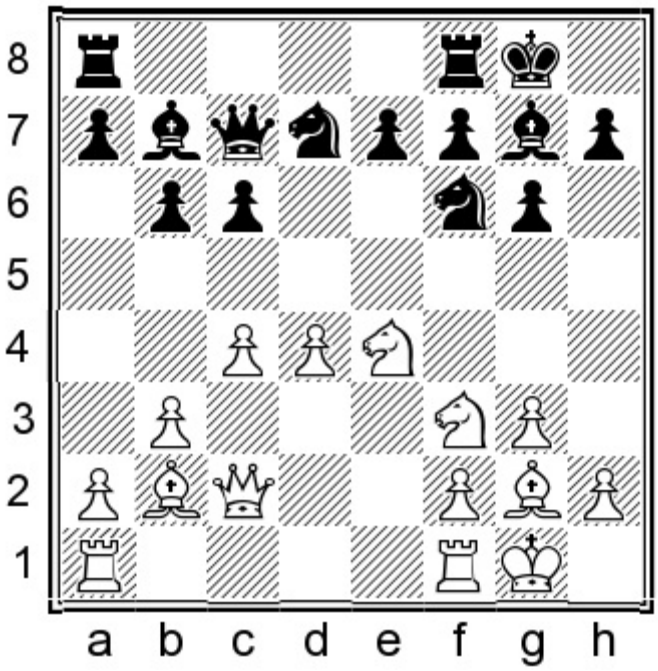
C) 7...b6 Black also decides to play with two fianchettoes, but as he is a tempo down and unable to expand in the center, he won't be able to play for full equality at present.



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Position after: 7...b6

8.d4 ♗b7 9.♘c3 ♘bd7 10.♕c2 ♕c7 11.e4 We follow the straightforward plan, but some strong players have tried a slower plan with e2-e3, rooks to the c- and d-files, and some knight manoeuvres. This is of course possible as well, but I prefer clear paths: just open the position. 11...dxe4 12.♘xe4

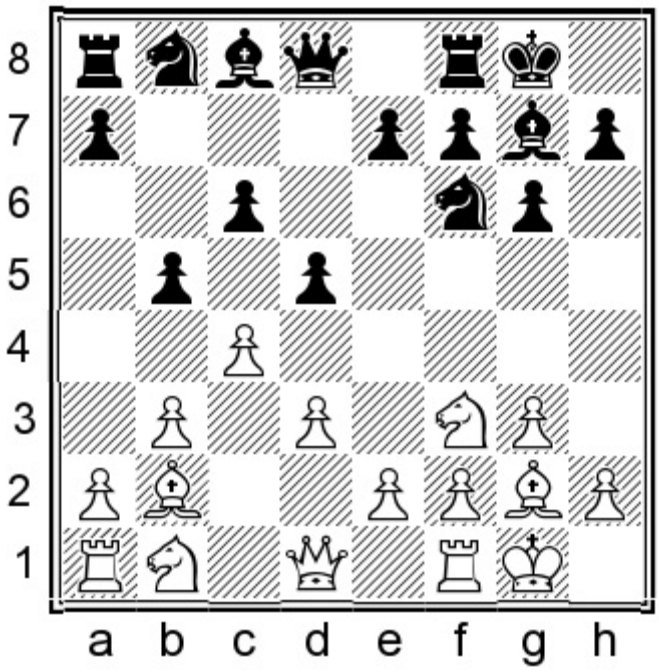


Position after: 12.♘xe4

12...♖ab8?! This was played once, but is too passive, and White has time to exert some more pressure. (12...♘xe4 13.♕xe4 c5 14.♕e2 cxd4 15.♘xd4 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2± Even if Black is solid, White keeps the better position and will try to make progress on the queenside with his pawn majority.) 13.♖ad1 ♖fe8 14.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 15.♖fe1± 1-0 (29) Idani, P (2543) – Naghdiyev, N (2366) Baku 2016.

D) 7...b5 This strange-looking move is one of the computer's preferences (it says about 0.20, so it's not crucial). The idea is merely to open the b-file and disturb our bishop. 8.d3

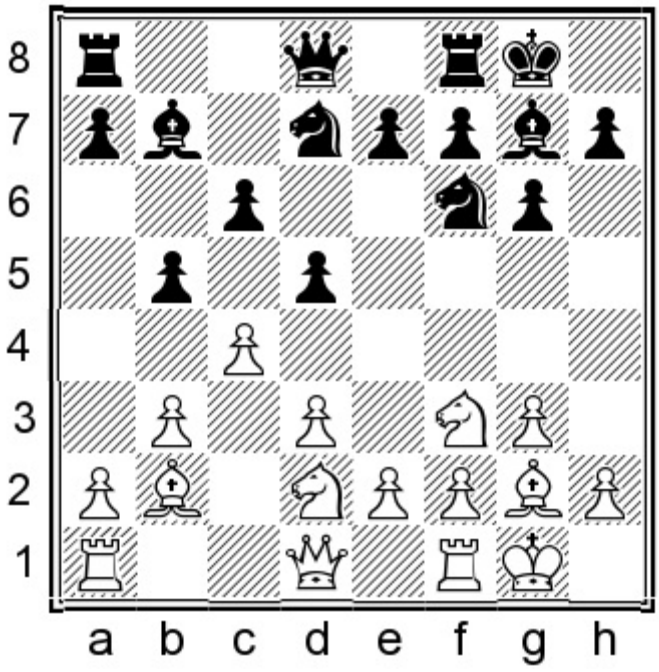
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Position after: 8.d3

D1) Even if the c4-pawn becomes weakened in the event of pawn exchanges after 8...bxc4 9.bxc4 dxc4 10.dxc4, the key element is that our g2-bishop can now breathe and express itself. 10...♘bd7 (10...♗b7 11.♕b3 ♕b6 12.♘bd2 c5 is pretty symmetrical, but we will make use of our extra tempi. 13.♕c2! ♘bd7 14.e4!±) 11.♘d4 ♗b7 12.♗xc6±

D2) 8...♗b7 9.♘bd2 This allows White to finally recapture on c4 with the knight, which is a clear improvement! 9...♘bd7

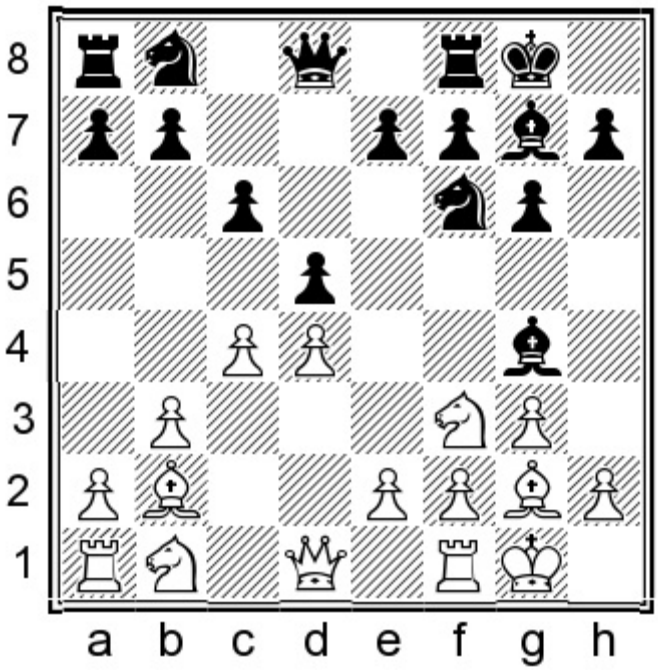


Position after: 9...♘bd7

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was seen in the creative game Fioramonti, H (2325) – Shirov, A (2677) Novi Sad 2016, 0-1 (41). Here instead of the timid move chosen by Fioramenti, 10.♕c2!N continues in similar vein: 10...♖e8 11.♘e5! An important move, preventing ...e5. 11...♘xe5 12.♗xe5 ♕d7 13.a4!? b4 14.a5!± Cutting off the a-pawn, the potential defender of the b4-pawn. White is definitely better here.

E) 7...♗g4 8.d4

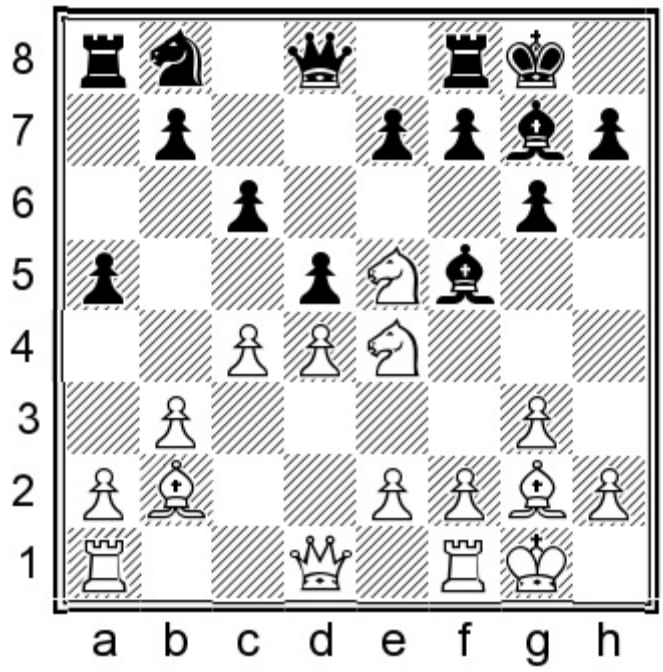


Position after: 8.d4

(8.d3 is clearly the main move, but going one step further makes a lot of sense, as the f5-square would be a better spot for the bishop when the pawn is on d4.)

E1) 8...a5 This is a rare move that I had to face the only time I encountered this variation. It may seem a reasonable choice, but I doubt if it can be any good as Black's last two moves don't really go together. I decided to proceed with a straightforward line: 9.♘e5 ♗f5 10.♘c3 ♘e4 (the natural move; unfortunately it is impossible for Black to play 10...♘bd7?! 11.cxd5! cxd5 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♗xd5 ♘xe5 14.dxe5±) 11.♘xe4

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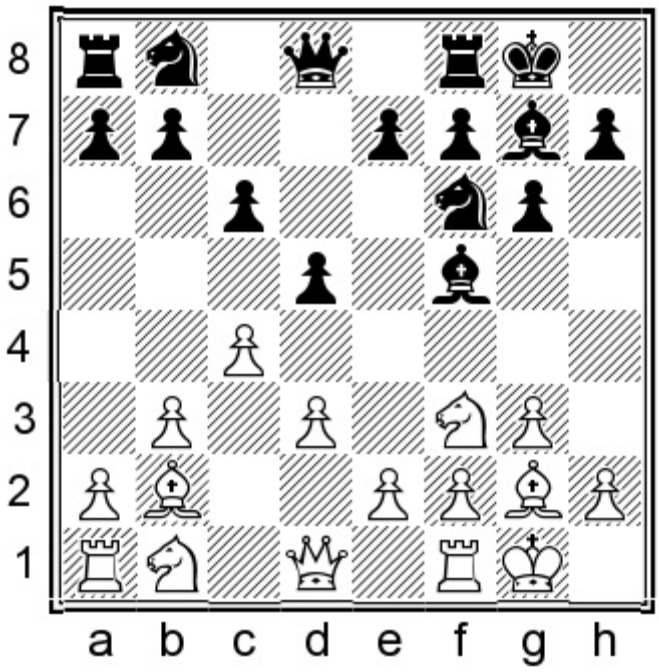
Position after: 11.♘xe4

11...dxe4 (11...♗xe4 12.f3 ♗f5 13.e4 ♗e6 14.exd5 cxd5 15.f4±) 12.g4 ♗e6 13.♗xe4 f6 14.d5! cxd5 15.cxd5 ♗c8 16.♘c4 ♗xg4 17.♗g2± And even if I couldn't win a pawn, I did manage to get an overwhelming advantage that I converted in Demuth, A (2537) – Charochkina, D (2395) Sitges 2015.

E2) 8...♘bd7 9.♘bd2 (9.cxd5!? is interesting as well in order to define the pawn structure in the center: 9...cxd5 10.♘e5 ♗f5 11.♘c3±.) 9...a5 10.♖e1 a4 (In case of 10...♗f5 11.♘h4! we can take the bishop pair, and will try to open the center.) 11.e4! dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♖xe4 ♗f5 14.♖e3!±

F) 7...♗f5 is one of the lines that makes us glad we haven't played d2-d4 yet as we can take measures against the light-squared bishop: 8.d3

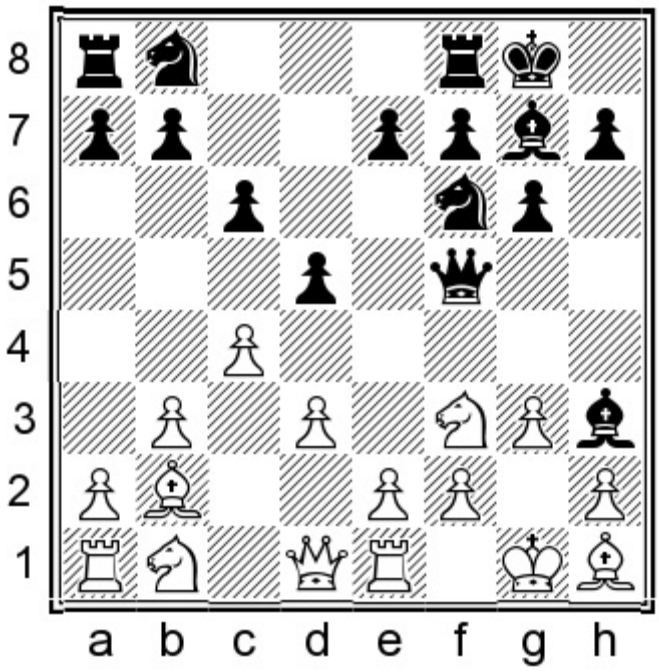
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Position after: 8.d3

F1) 8...♘bd7 Black tries to improve on the 7...♘bd7 line as he has developed the bishop first, but we can take the bishop pair. 9.♘d4! e5?! 10.♘xf5 gxf5 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.d4!? A positional approach, fixing Black's pawn structure. 12...e4 13.e3± Black is already struggling, and eventually lost in Moskalenko, A (2490) – Lugovskoy, M (2436) Sochi 2016.

F2) 8...♕c8 9.♖e1 Of course we don't want to trade our g2-bishop! 9...♗h3 (9...♖d8 10.♘bd2 dxc4 11.♘xc4 ♘a6 12.♕c1!N 12...♘c7 13.e4 ♗h3 14.d4±) 10.♗h1 ♕f5! I consider this best for Black, to organize pressure on our kingside. The idea is to put the queen on h5 and the knight on g4, perhaps with some mating ideas.

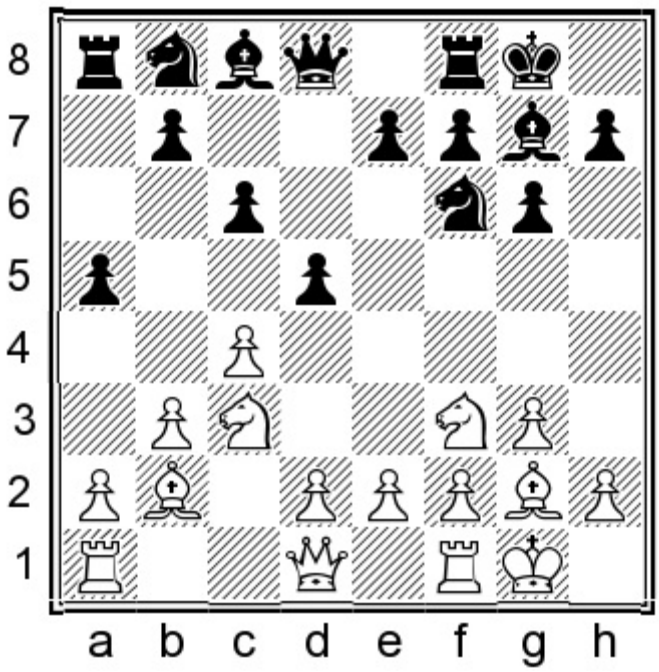


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Position after: 10...♕f5!

11.♘a3!?N This move serves two purposes: (1) developing our queen-side, and (2) not obstructing either the b2-bishop or the d2-square for the queen, which we can now trade on g5. Of course we will soon mobilize the knight via the c2-square. 11...♕h5 12.♕d2 The threat, if we can call it a threat, is ♕g5, but it's not the only trick. 12...♘bd7 (12...h6?! 13.♕b4!± simply wins a pawn, as we are unlikely to get mated any time soon) 13.♕g5 h6 14.♕xh5 ♘xh5 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.cxd5 cxd5 17.e4! dxe4 18.♖xe4 e6 19.♖c4 ♖ac8 20.♘b5± Black's pieces are too uncoordinated.

8.♘c3!



Position after: 8.♘c3!

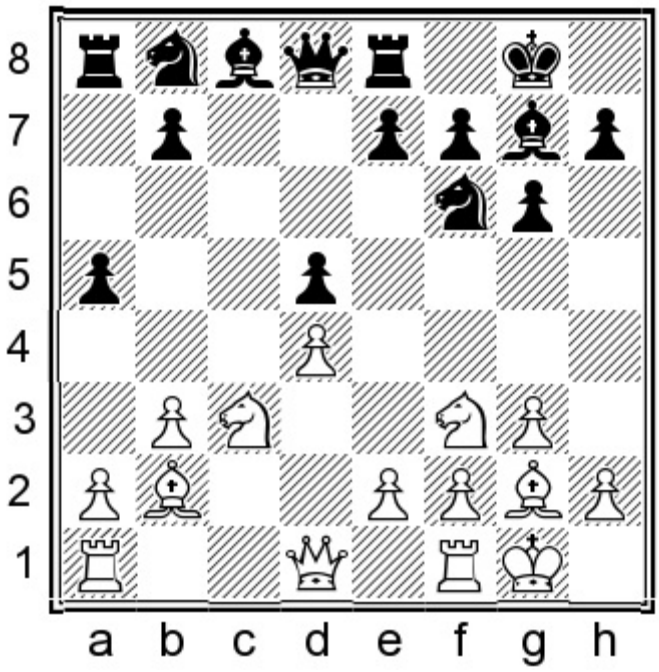
Best, waiting to decide between d3 or d4, and preventing ...a5-a4.

8...♘e4

This is always logical as Black will be happy to trade a few minor pieces. That's why we must choose which ones we want to trade.

A) 8...♖e8 9.cxd5! cxd5 (9...♘xd5 10.d4!± We control the center and it won't be simple for Black to create counterplay.) 10.d4N

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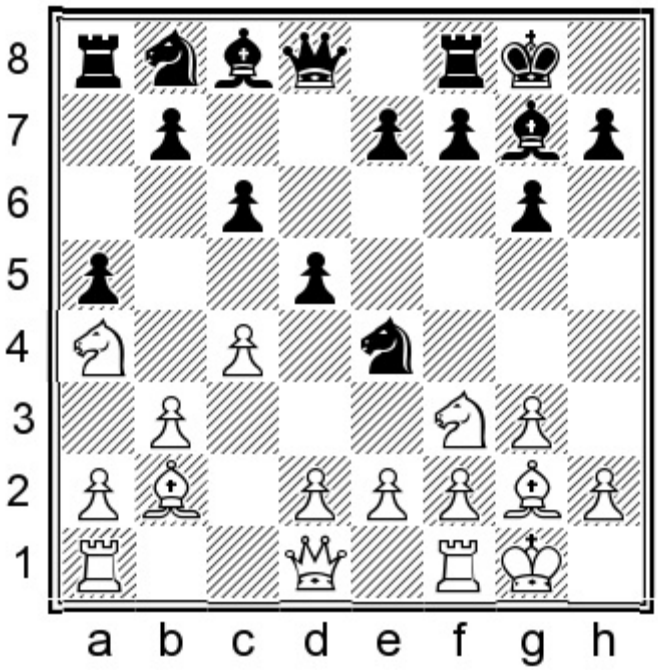
Position after: 10.d4N

10...♘e4?! When you are behind in development, you can't just do what you want. (10...♘c6 11.♘e5 ♗f5 12.♖c1± Our idea is to follow up by trading on c6, and bringing the knight to a4. This will create threats against the weak c6-pawn, and the c5-square is an ideal outpost for our knight.) 11.♘xe4! dxe4 12.♘e5 ♗f5 13.g4! ♗e6 (13...♗xe5 simply loses a pawn: 14.gxf5 ♗g7 15.fxg6 hxg6 16.♗xe4±) 14.♗xe4 ♗xe5 15.dxe5 ♗xg4 16.♗xb7±

B) 8...d4?! doesn't turn out well, so Black should prefer another move here. 9.♘a4! The knight is amazingly safe here. Both ...e5 and ...c5 are impossible, so Black must find another way to defend 'd4'. 9...♘e8 (9...b5?? 10.cxb5 cxb5 11.♘xd4!+– and Black's position collapses) 10.e3 e5 11.exd4 exd4 12.♖e1± This is a great Benoni-type position, where Black has lost many tempi.

9.♘a4!?

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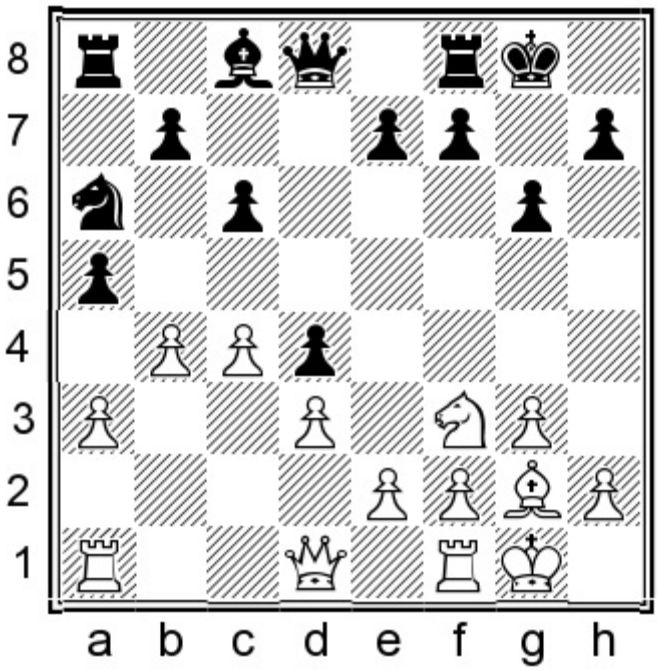
Position after: 9.♘a4!?

Keeping the knights on the board and trading the bishops to weaken Black's kingside.

9...♗xb2 10.♘xb2 d4 11.♘d3

This is a pretty good square for the knight, preventing ...e5 and helping to push b3-b4 at some stage.

11...♘a6 12.a3 ♘ec5 13.♘xc5 ♘xc5 14.b4! ♘a6 15.d3±



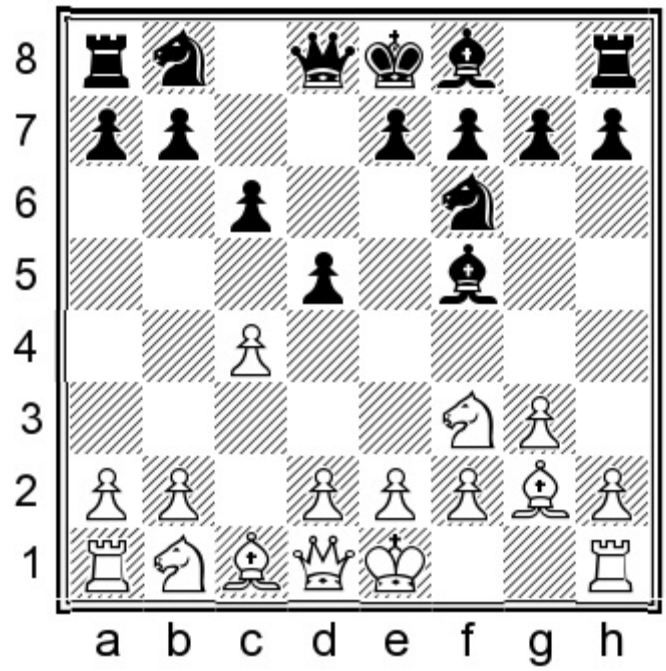
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Position after: 15.d3±

The b4-pawn is not hanging and White enjoys a space advantage: Dizdarevic, E (2509) – Kuzmanovic, S (2146) Zenica 2016, 1-0 (51).

c) 4...♗f5 5.--, 5.♕b3 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗f5



Position after: 4...♗f5

This is a natural move, and amongst the most frequently played. It's highly likely that you will face this system in your games from time to time. Your opponent might not be aware that it's a London system with reversed colors, so with an extra tempo for us. That's not of great importance, as it's a slow opening. Still, we have to take advantage of that extra tempo!

5.♕b3!?

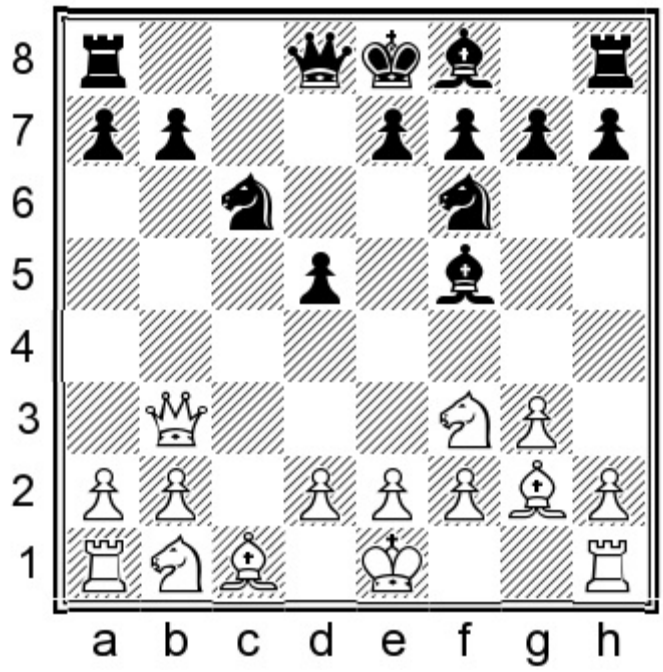
This is not the usual move order, and at first sight it doesn't look that great, but you can't judge a book by its cover, and you'll soon change your mind. Before we have a look at the side lines, I'd like to discuss the main move (according to theory) and explain why I don't like it. There are pluses and minuses compared to our line, and I believe the minuses predominate.

≤ 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♕b3

A) 6...♕b6?! Even if this is the main line (I would have chosen 5.cxd5 if this was the best for Black!), it will soon be clear that it's not the best, even if it's tenable for Black. 7.♕xb6 axb6 8.♘c3± This gives us a good endgame!

B) 6...♘c6!

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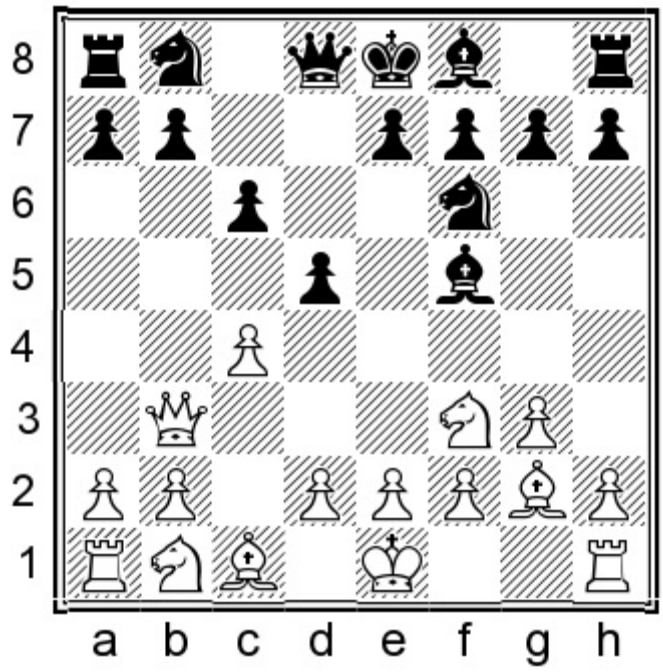


Position after: 6...♘c6!

This gambit has been played in many games recently. I have felt it was a really strong move from the first time I saw it. Then there were only a dozen games; now we have almost a hundred.

It is the reason why I prefer to start with 5.♕b3 – ...♘c6 is not possible! If White does nothing, Black will simply play ...e5, so he needs to justify 6.♕b3 by taking on b7: 7.♕xb7 ♗d7!

Now the queen is in danger, so we must retreat. 8.♕b3 e5 9.d3 ♖b8 10.♕d1 ♗b4+ 11.♘fd2 (11.♘bd2?! e4!∓) 11...h5!→ and I won't continue with the line, as Black's compensation is indisputable. We don't have to enter this variation.



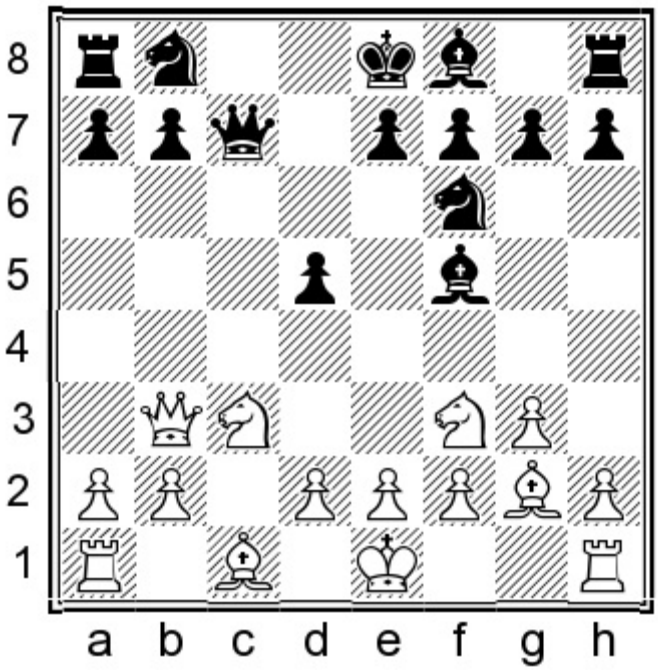
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Position after: 5.♕b3!?

5...♕c8?!

Here the queen is not a target for our pieces, and it is less exposed than on c7, but it's also more passive.

5...♕c7?! As we will find out, this move is probably worse than ...♕c8. Our bishop will soon arrive, as usual, on f4, gaining another important tempo. 6.cxd5 cxd5 (6...♘xd5?! 7.d3±) 7.♘c3

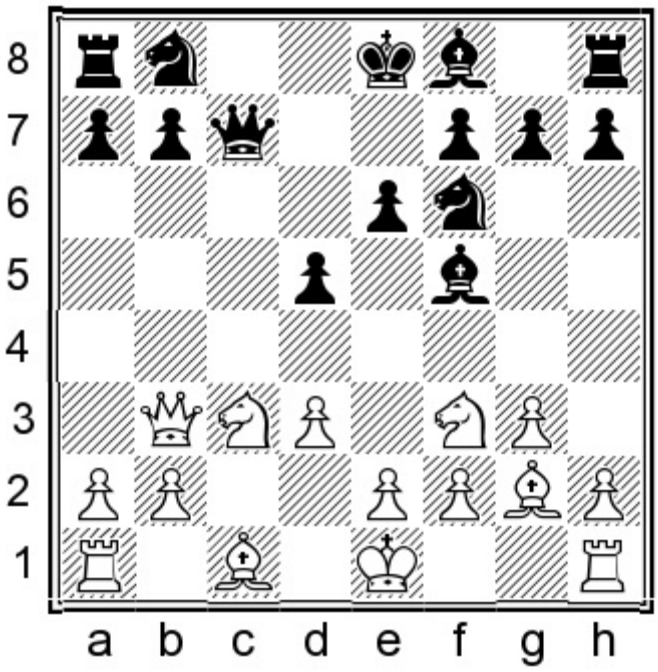


Position after: 7.♘c3

A) 7...♘c6?! This is the preference of some engines, but it's already an all-in gambit which clearly fails: 8.♘xd5 ♘xd5 9.♕xd5 e6 (9...♘b4?? 10.♕b5++–) 10.♕b3 ♗e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.d3± with a healthy extra pawn.

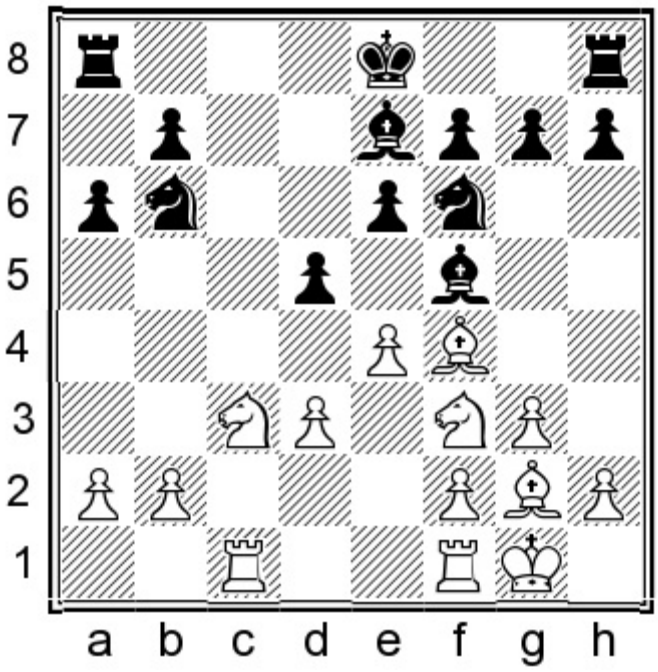
B) 7...e6 8.d3

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Position after: 8.d3

B1) 8...♘bd7 This is not a logical square, as c6 was now available. The idea is simply to recapture with the knight when the queen goes to b6. 9.♗f4! ♕b6 10.♕xb6 ♘xb6 Black avoids an endgame with doubled b-pawns, but this one is not appealing either. 11.0-0 a6 12.♖ac1 ♗e7 13.e4!N



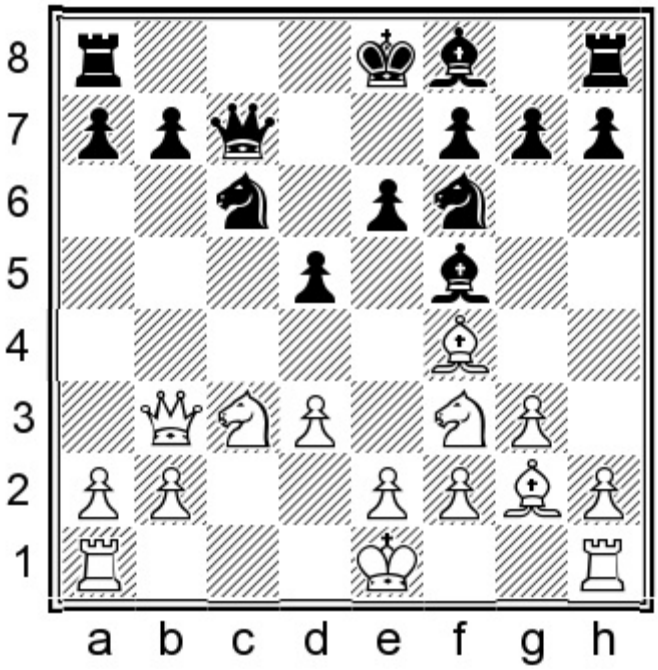
Position after: 13.e4!N

There always comes the right moment to open the center, even if it involves sacrificing a pawn, and this is exactly that right moment, as all our pieces are ready, and Black still needs another move to escape from the danger zone with his king. 13...dxe4 14.dxe4 ♗xe4 (14...♗g6 15.♘e5±; 14...♘xe4?!

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15.♘d4 ♘xc3 16.♖xc3±) 15.♘xe4 ♘xe4 16.♘d4! ♘c5 Black is a pawn up, has everything protected and is threatening ...♘d3 – but it is all an illusion: 17.♖fd1! We first prevent ...♘d3. 17...♘d5 (17...0-0 18.b4! ♘ca4 19.♗xb7 ♖a7 20.♗f3±) 18.♗xd5 exd5 19.♖e1± Black has to give up material.

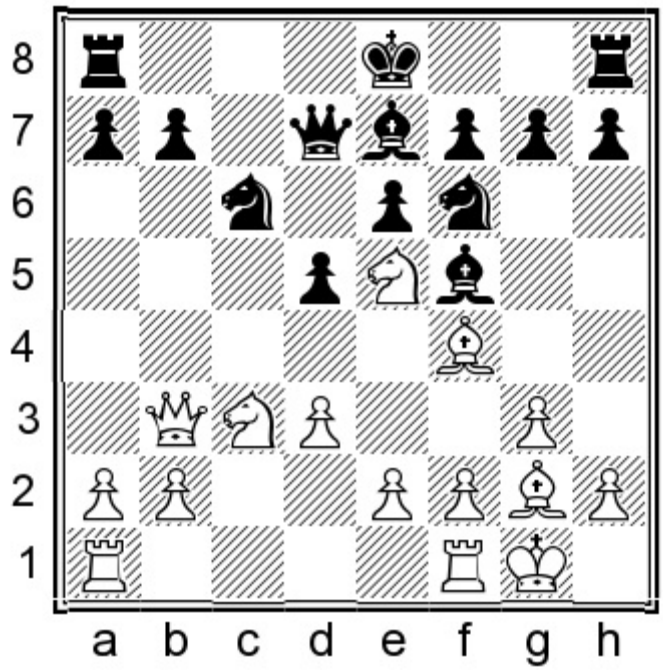
B2) 8...♘c6 9.♗f4



Position after: 9.♗f4

9...♕d7 (9...e5? 10.♘xe5! ♘xe5 11.d4! We will regain the knight with interest, for instance 11...♗d6 12.♘b5 ♕a5+ 13.♗d2 ♕d8 14.♘xd6+ ♕xd6 15.♗b4 ♕c7 16.dxe5 ♕xe5 17.0-0+– and Black's king is too far from safety.) 10.0-0 We have transposed into a 5...♕c8 line where Black finally decided to put the queen back on d7 without really having achieved anything. 10...♗e7 11.♘e5

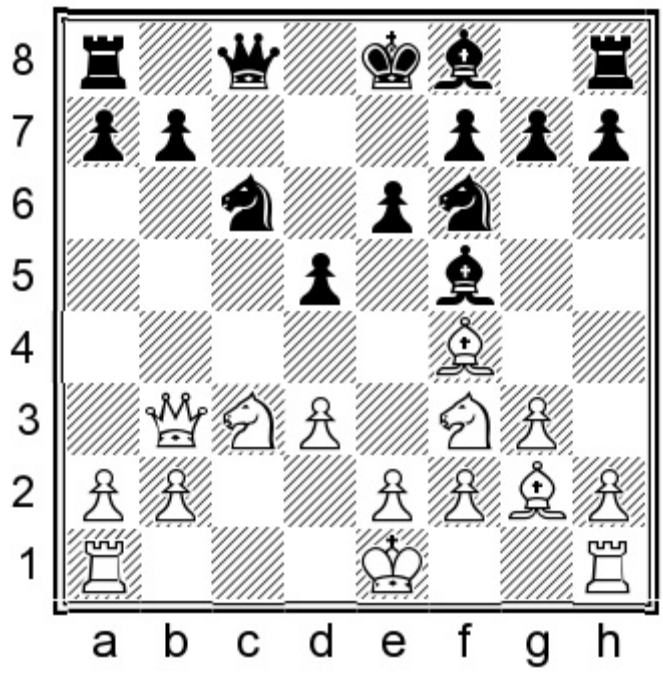
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Position after: 11.♘e5

(11.e4!? is certainly better for us, but why would we want to complicate the game?) 11...♘xe5 12.♗xe5 0-0 13.e4!±

6.cxd5 cxd5 7.♘c3 e6 8.d3 ♘c6 9.♗f4



Position after: 9.♗f4

9...h6

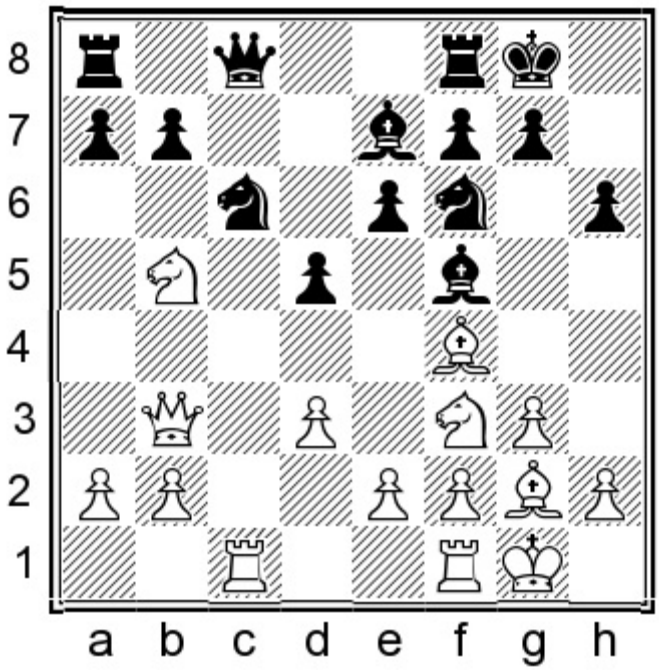
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A) After 9...♘h5 10.♗e3 ♗e7 11.♖c1 0-0 12.0-0 Black has nothing better than to come back. 12...♘f6 13.♘b5 ♕d7 14.♘bd4 ♘xd4 15.♗xd4± The knight comes to e5, and we keep our great initiative.

B) 9...♗e7 10.♘h4 ♗g4 11.h3 ♗h5 12.g4 ♗g6 13.♗g3 0-0 14.0-0±

10.♖c1 ♗e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♘b5!

The idea is not really to go to c7 or d6, even if it sometimes works. We would prefer to go to d4 in order to create a weakness on c6.



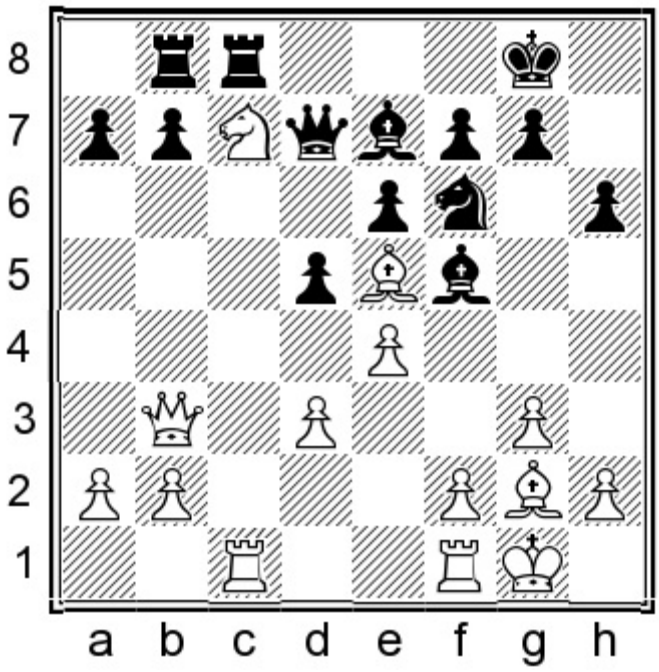
Position after: 12.♘b5!

12...♕d7 13.♘e5!N

This new move opens the c-file by force.

13...♘xe5 14.♗xe5 ♖fc8 15.♘c7 ♖ab8 16.e4!±

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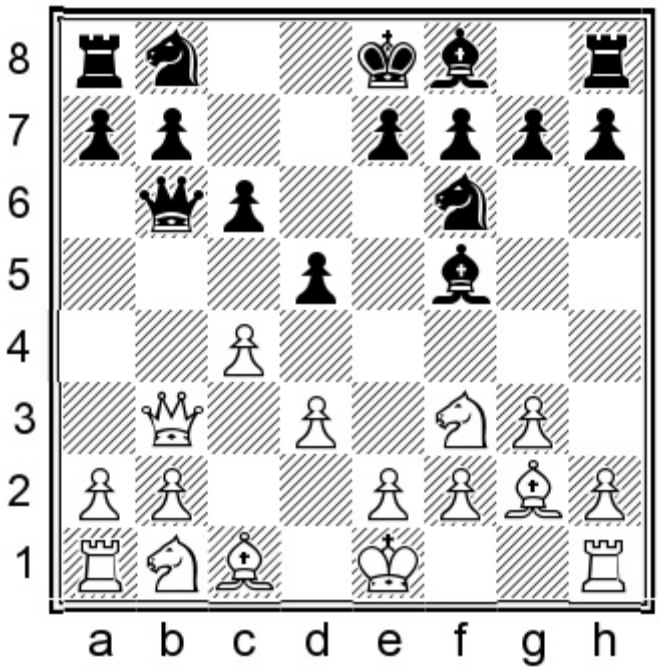


Position after: 16.e4!±

It’s easy to understand that even if we sac a pawn, this can’t be good for Black.

d) 4...♗f5 5.♕b3 ♕b6 6.d3 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗f5 5.♕b3!? ♕b6! 6.d3!



Position after: 6.d3!

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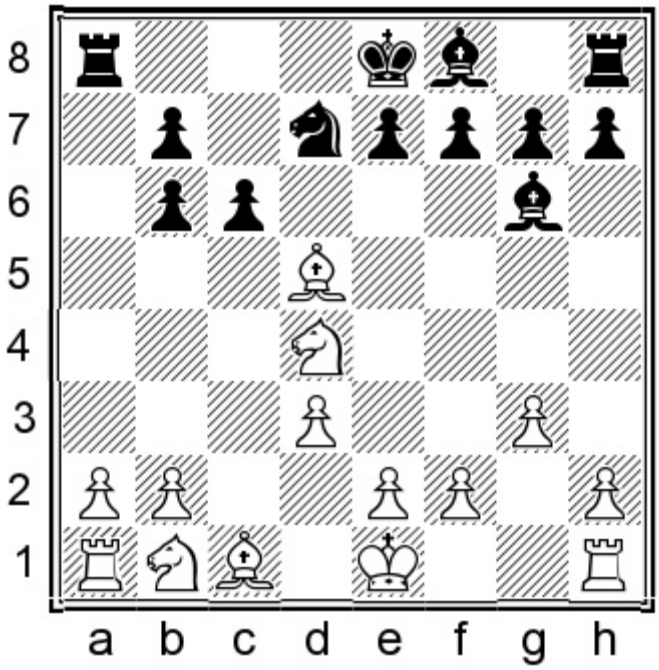
6...♕xb3

Black could have waited for ♗e3 before playing this move.

6...♘bd7 7.♕xb6 A nuance and additional possibility that makes a lot of sense. (7.♗e3 ♕xb3 8.axb3 a6 9.♘h4 ♗g6 10.♘c3 e6 11.h3 transposes into our main line.)

A) 7...♘xb6?! 8.cxd5 cxd5 (8...♘bxd5 9.e4! ♘b4 10.exf5 ♘c2+ 11.♔d1 ♘xa1 12.♗e3±) 9.♘c3± The b6-knight is completely misplaced, as it has no effect on the center and will become a target for the bishop on e3.

B) 7...axb6 8.♘d4 ♗g6 9.cxd5 ♘xd5 10.♗xd5!



Position after: 10.♗xd5!

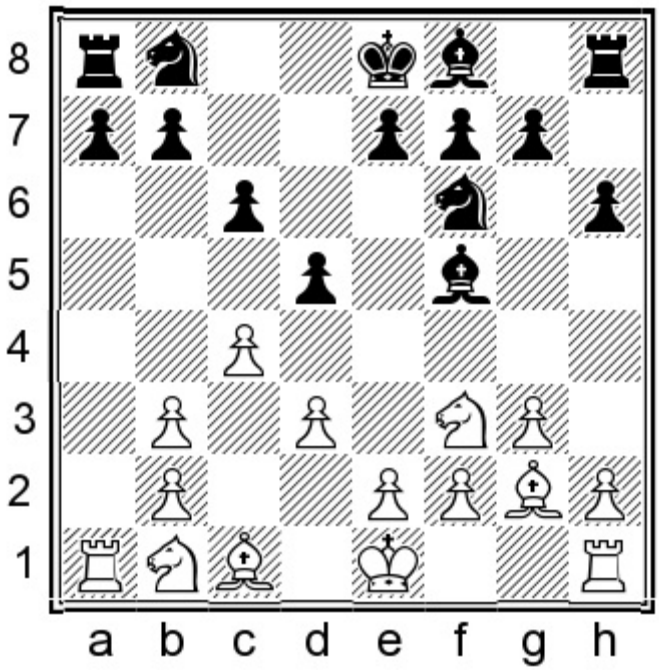
We have to give up the bishop, but have achieved what we wanted: Black has two weak, isolated pawns. 10...cxd5 11.♘c3 e6 12.♘db5 ♖c8 13.0-0 ♗e7 14.♗e3±

7.axb3 ♘a6

The knight tries to reach the b4-square, our weak spot, but we won't give him time for that!

7...h6?!N

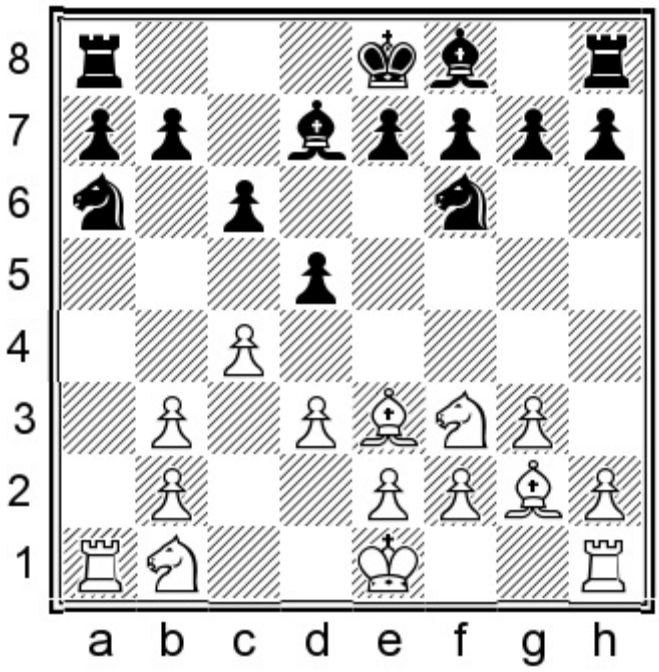
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Position after: 7...h6?!N

In our main line, Black can never keep his light-squared bishop alive, so what do we play if he wants to save it? 8.cxd5! cxd5 9.♗e3 a6 (9...♘c6?! 10.♘d4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4± Both a7 and d5 – because of the possibility of ♗xf6 – are under attack, and Black has to lose a pawn). 10.♘c3 ♘c6 11.♘d4 ♘xd4?! 12.♗xd4 e6 13.e4!±

8.♗e3 ♗d7



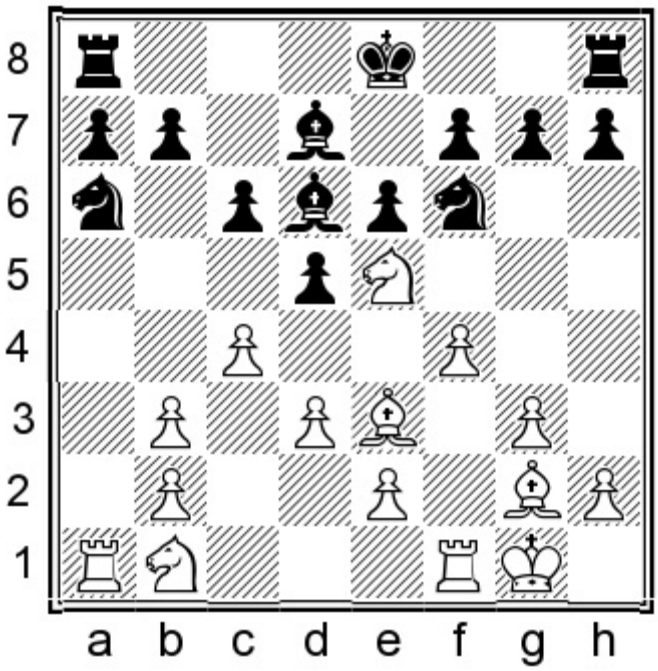
Position after: 8...♗d7

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In the hands of Karpov, this mysterious bishop retreat reminds us of the legendary game Janowski – Capablanca, New York 1916 (a game you definitely need to know if you don't already), where the Cuban former World Champion found the exact same move with similar ideas: not to leave the bishop in a useless position and try to help push on the queenside. However in this particular position, ...♗d7 seems less impressive.

8...♘b4?! 9.♖xa7 ♖xa7 10.♗xa7± A pawn is a pawn, and it's not an insignificant one, as the a-pawn was supposed to come to a5 to protect the knight.

9.♘e5 e6 10.0-0 ♗d6 11.f4!



Position after: 11.f4!

A classical move in order to gain some space. It's usually the start of a pawn storm on the kingside.

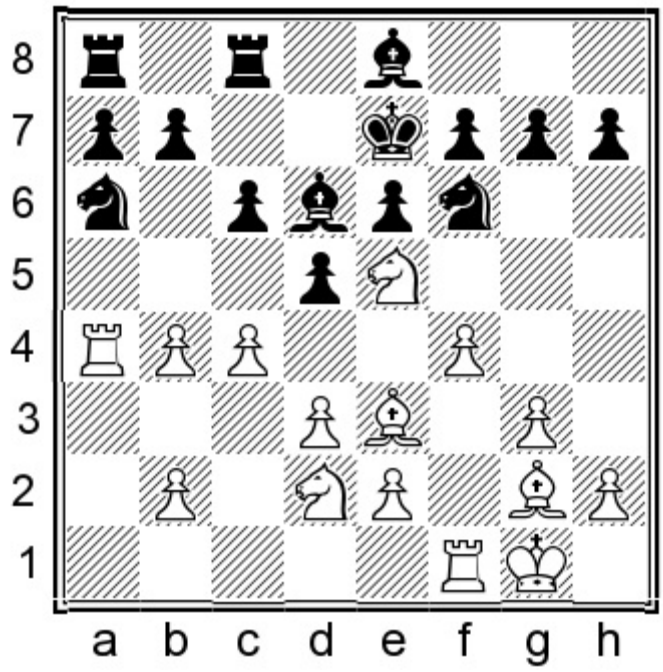
11.d4!? makes sense as well.

11...♔e7 12.♘d2 ♖hc8

We can now vary from the fighting game Timman, J (2565) – Karpov, A (2628) Murmansk 2016, which was eventually drawn, by playing a move that helps with the queenside advance...

13.♖a4!?N 13...♗e8?! 14.b4!±

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Position after: 14.b4!±

White is much better as the pawn is not hanging:

14...♘xb4??

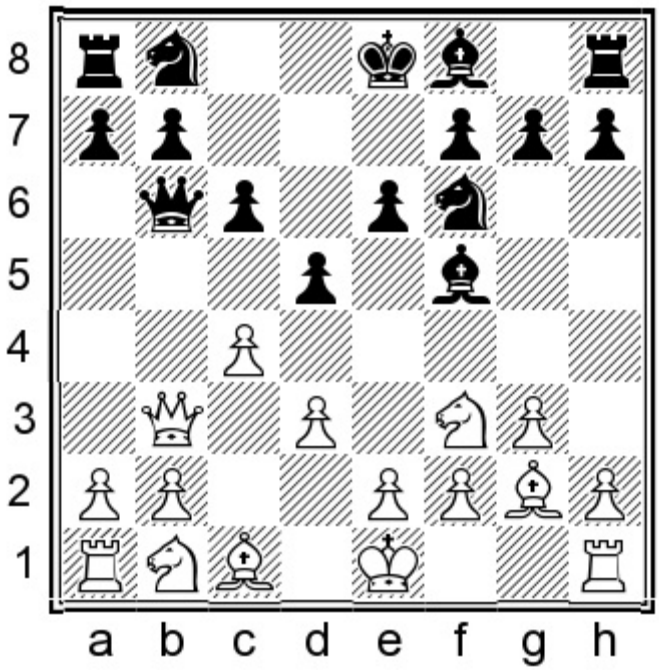
14...♗xb4?? 15.♖xb4 ♘xb4 16.♗c5++–

15.c5+–

e) 4...♗f5 5.♕b3 ♕b6 6.d3 e6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗f5 5.♕b3!? ♕b6! 6.d3! e6

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Position after: 6...e6

Finally we come to the most logical move, which gives the additional possibility of taking back on d5 with the e-pawn.

7.♗e3!?

Forcing our opponent to decide whether to trade queens now, but Black can also take the view that we have misplayed the position, which is what happened the only time I reached it.

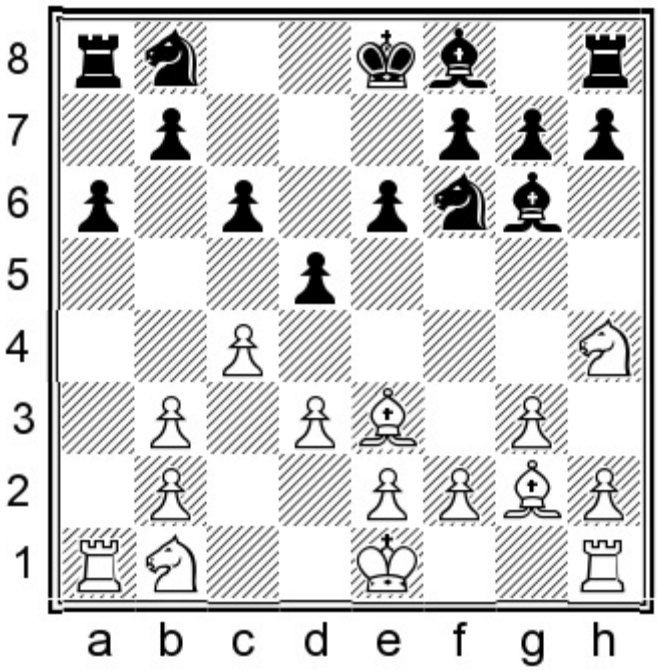
7.♘h4!? is another way to play for an edge, but it seems less concrete.

7...dxc4

A surprising intermediate move that, at first, seems to solve Black's problems. If we simply take back with the pawn, then Black exchanges queens in dream conditions, because once the d3-pawn disappears, the bishop on f5 gets a new lease of life. But we have another surprise in store for our opponent.

A) 7...♕xb3 Not the most challenging – but it might be the most reasonable choice. 8.axb3 a6 9.♘h4! This bishop cannot stay alive. 9...♗g6

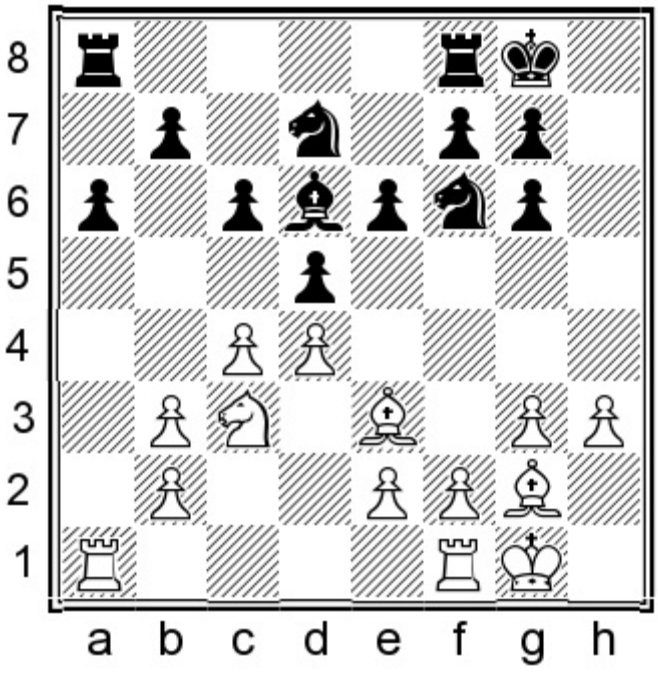
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Position after: 9...♗g6

A1) The creative Russian player Alexander Morozevich came up with a really original plan (although I still prefer my move): 10.f4 ♘bd7 11.h3 ♗b4+ 12.♔d1 He brings his king to c2, where it protects the queenside, and will then try to advance his pawns on the kingside. 12...0-0 13.♘d2 ♖fd8 14.♔c2 b5 15.♖hd1 a5 16.♘xg6 hxg6 17.♘f3± White has good squares for his pieces and the better position, even if he finally lost in Morozevich, A (2711) – Bologan, V (2607) Poikovsky 2015.

A2) 10.♘c3!?N Strangely enough, none of the players tried this logical move in the few games that reached this position. 10...♘bd7 11.h3! This is a preventive move, avoiding any ...♘g4 ideas and stopping the bishop from escaping via h5. 11...♗d6 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.0-0 0-0 14.d4!±

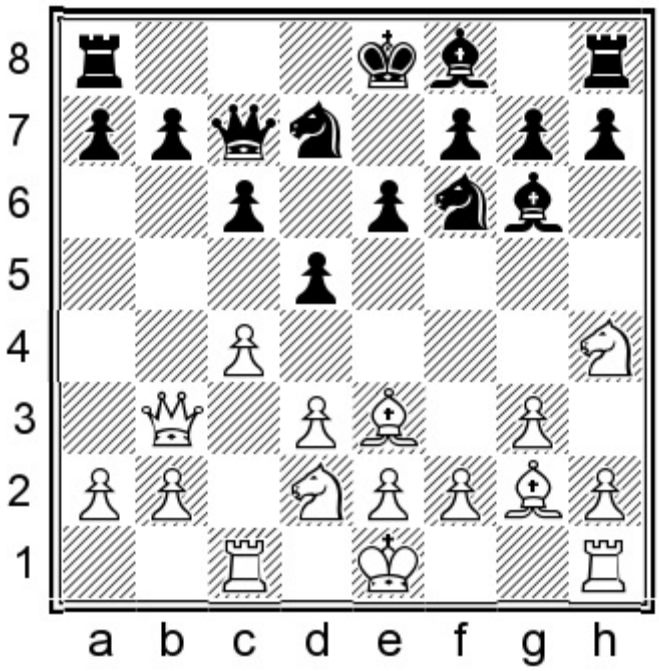


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Position after: 14.d4!±

With the bishop no longer on on f5, we can finally open this diagonal and prevent ...♘c5. In this endgame, we will try to relocate our dark-squared bishop to clear the way for our e-pawn to reach the fourth rank. As usual, with the pair of bishops, opening the position is to our advantage.

B) Against a slow retreat like 7...♕c7 we can simply grab the bishop pair before doing anything else: 8.♘h4! ♗g6 9.♘d2! ♘bd7 10.♖c1.

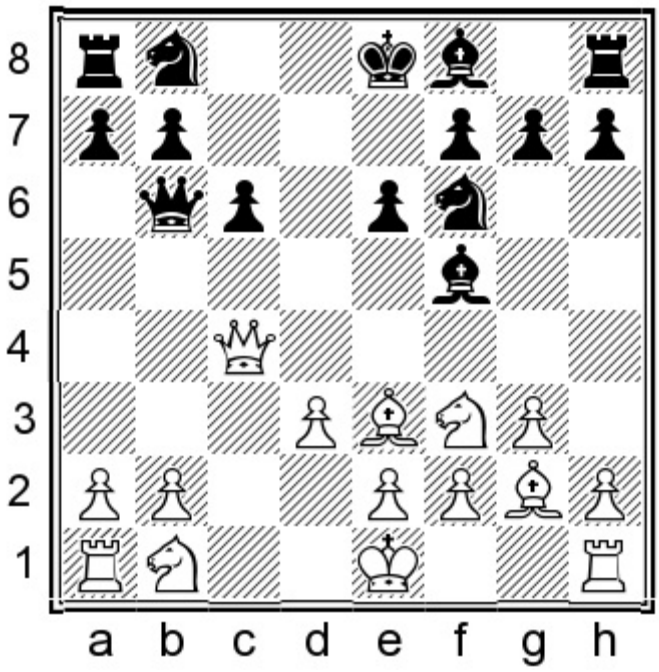


Position after: 10.♖c1

The threat is now to take everything on d5 because of the pinning issue. 10...♗d6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♘xg6 hxg6 13.♘f3± This is a solid position for Black, but pretty passive.

8.♕xc4!N

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Position after: 8.♕xc4!N

I have called this move a novelty, al-though it actually isn't, because I've already played it myself! I was proud and pleased to be able to test this move in practice, and it brought me success.

8...♕xb2

This is the most principled move, as White's play is not obvious yet, but Black can also reject the gift: 8...♕c7 9.♗f4 ♕a5+ 10.♗d2 ♕c7 11.0-0 ♘bd7 12.e4 ♗g4 13.♕c2 e5 14.b4±. White wants to continue pushing his b-pawn, and Black cannot stop this minority attack in any reasonable way.

9.♗d4! ♕b4+

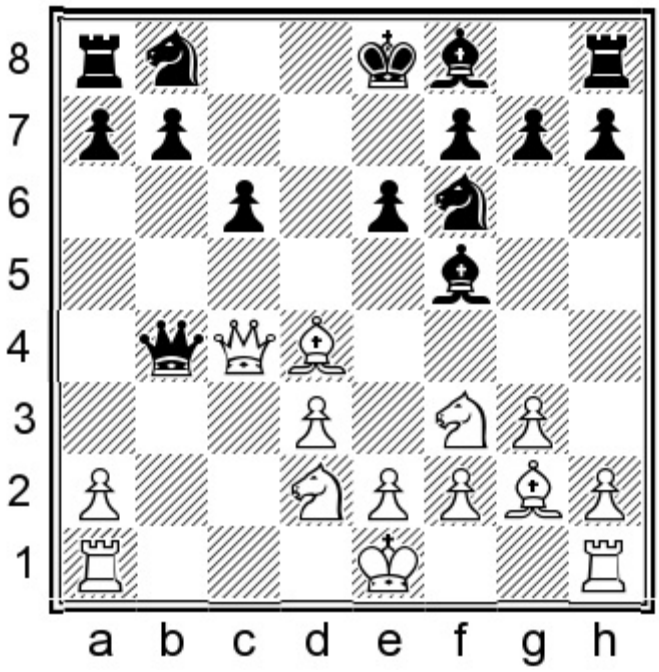
A) 9...b5? 10.♕xe6+! One of the many ways to get the pawn back and reach a better endgame. 10...♗xe6 11.♗xb2±

B) 9...♕b5? 10.♕xb5 cxb5 11.♘e5!±

C) 9...♗b4+? 10.♘fd2! ♗xd2+ 11.♘xd2 ♕a3 12.♖b1 ♕e7 13.0-0± Black has some problems, initially having to deal with the nasty ♗c5, and it's already probably too much.

10.♘bd2!

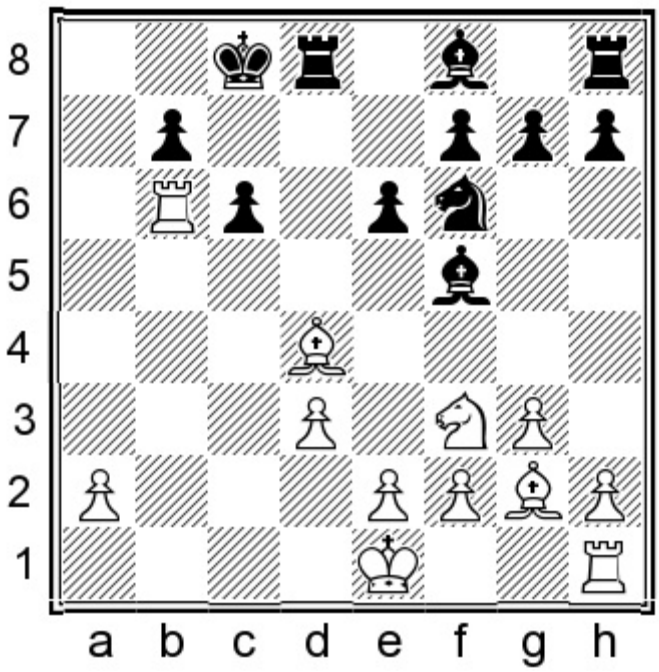
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Position after: 10.♘bd2!

10...♕xc4

10...♘bd7?! This move is probably inferior, as it gives Black fewer possibilities after White's obvious next move, but it was the move chosen by my opponent. 11.♖b1 ♕xc4 12.♘xc4 There is no good way to protect the b7-pawn. Reshef decided to return his extra pawn by trading a piece and opening the a-file with 12...♘b6 13.♘xb6 axb6 14.♖xb6 0-0-0.

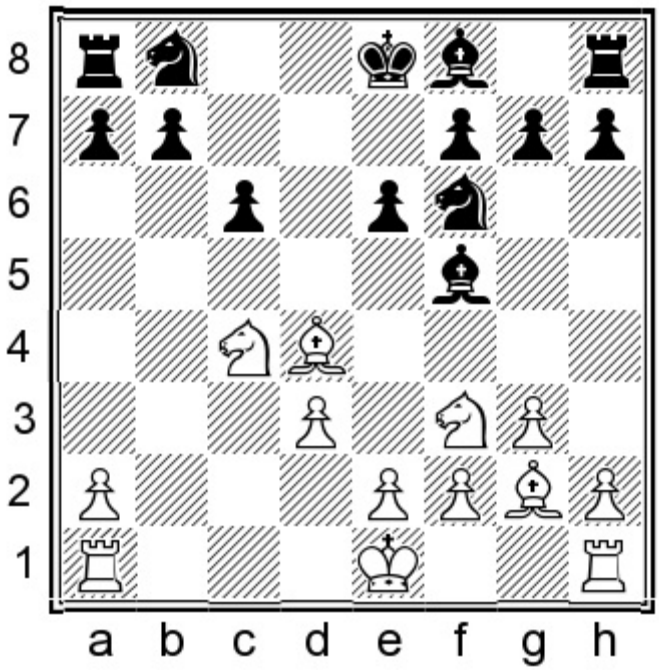


Position after: 14...0-0-0

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The threat is ...♖xd4 followed by ...♗c5, so we have to go back. 15.♖b3! ♗g4 All this was played in my game Demuth, A (2541) – Reshef, O (2425) Llucmajor 2016, 1-0 (50), and now it's easy to improve on my play with 16.e3±, keeping the bishop in the center, before castling and bringing the other rook to the b-file.

11.♘xc4



Position after: 11.♘xc4

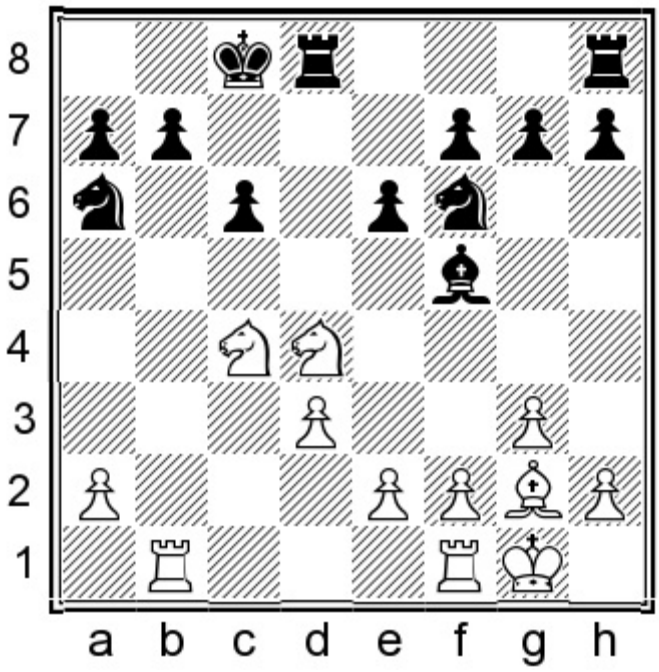
11...♗b4+

The most human move, I believe.

A) 11...♘bd7 – see 10...♘bd7.

B) 11...♘a6 was also tried in a recent game, but Black failed to solve his problems: 12.0-0! ♗c5 13.♖ab1 ♗xd4 14.♘xd4 0-0-0

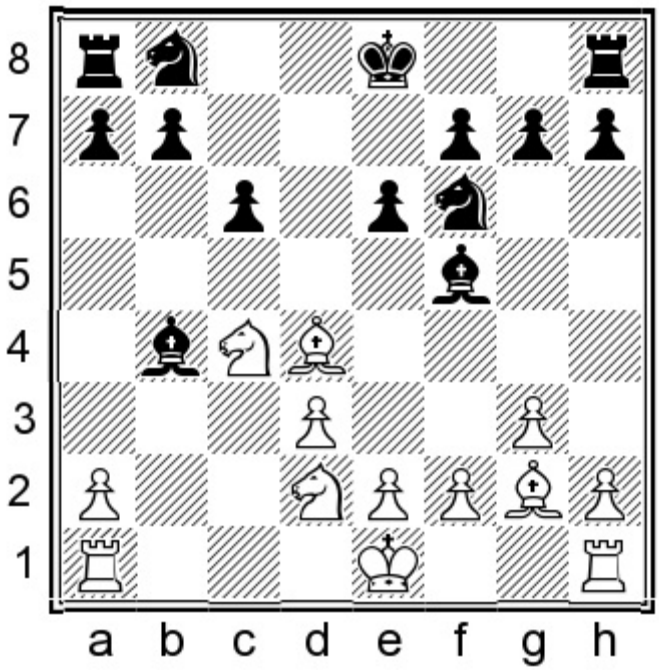
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Position after: 14...0-0-0

In Hillarp Persson, T (2537) – Alekseenko, K (2590) Stockholm 2018 White started to lose the thread here, but he could have kept a huge edge with 15.♗xc6! bxc6 16.♘xc6 ♖d7 17.♘6e5 ♖hd8 (17...♖c7 18.♘d6+ ♔d8 19.♘dxf7++–) 18.♘xd7 ♖xd7 19.♖fc1 ♖c7 20.♘d6+ ♔d7 21.♘xf7±. White is probably already winning here.

12.♘fd2!



Position after: 12.♘fd2!

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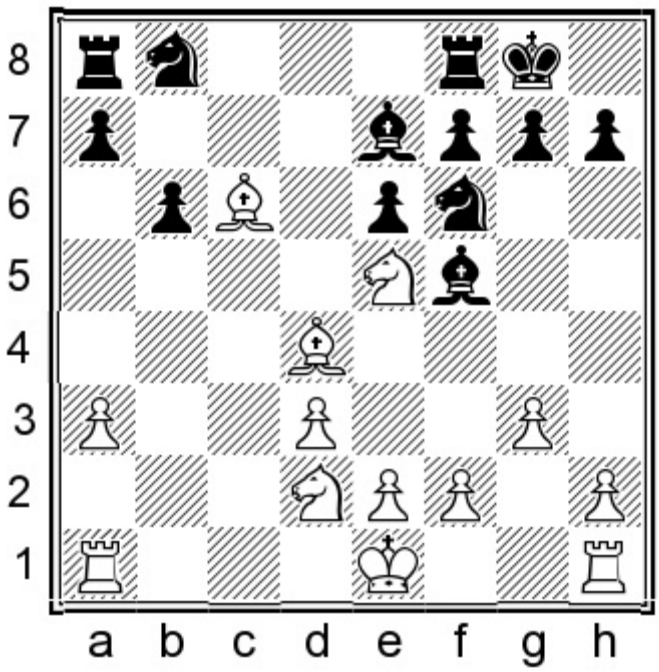
The most ambitious reply. 12.♔d1, not wanting to pin our knight, makes a lot of sense too, but the king can sometimes be a bit awkwardly placed in the center.

12...b6!?

This is played by engines, not so surprisingly, as it solves the issue of the b-pawn before a rook arrives on this file. However it weakens the c6-pawn.

12...♘a6 13.a3! ♗e7 14.♖b1 0-0-0 15.♘b3!±

13.a3 ♗e7 14.♘e5 0-0 15.♗xc6!



Position after: 15.♗xc6!

The correct way to take, as the knight will be more effective on c6 than the bishop.

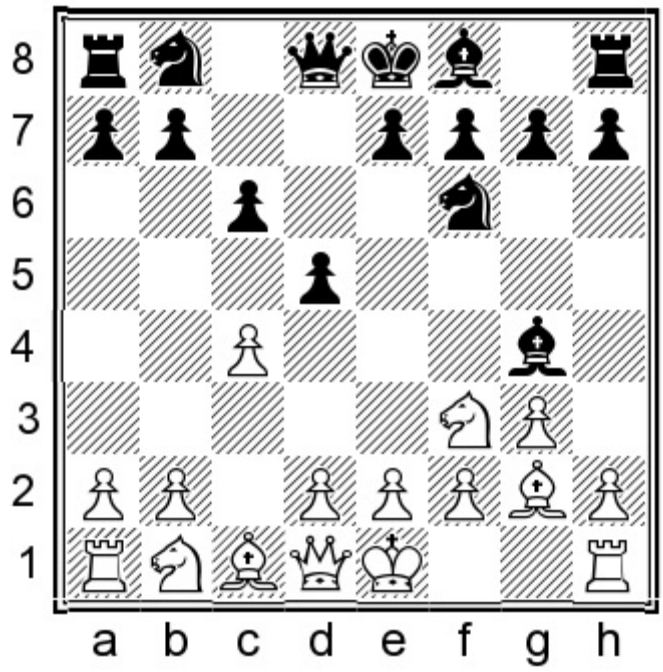
15...♘xc6 16.♘xc6 ♗d6 17.♘c4±

Black has plenty to worry about as he attempts to hold this endgame.

f) 4...♗g4

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♗g4

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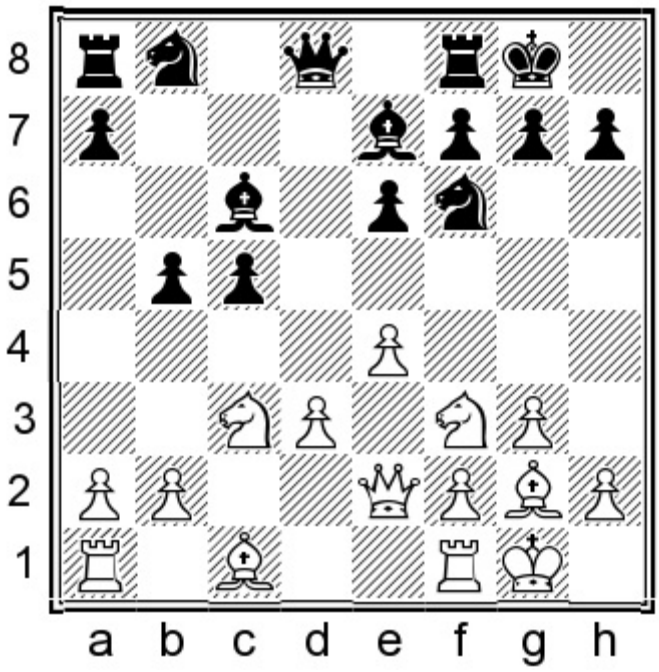
Position after: 4...♗g4

Like 4...♗f5, this is a system Black uses frequently, as it is as solid as a rock. We talked about the ideas in this line in the previous chapter after 3...♗g4. Here I will just add a few differences and transpositions.

5.0-0

A) 5.♘e5 is a critical line I originally wanted to analyze in this book, but I'm afraid it should be about equal. I'll just give one of the main lines, which I consider to be fine for Black: 5...♗e6! By far the best move. 6.cxd5 ♗xd5 7.♘f3 A few unusual moves have led to a normal position. 7...c5! 8.♘c3 ♗c6 9.0-0 e6 10.d3! ♗e7 11.e4 0-0 12.♕e2 If Black does nothing, d3-d4 will soon be a huge threat, but here comes the strong move: 12...b5!

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Position after: 12...b5!

The most testing move. 13.a4! b4 14.♘b1 We have gained the c4-square at the cost of a few tempi. 14...♗b7! 15.♘bd2 ♘c6 16.♘c4 ♘d7= and in this interesting position I could not find any good way to fight for an edge, as Black is both solid and active. It's up to you if you want to enter this kind of line, if the position doesn't feel like a problem to you, but I wanted to offer a simpler way to play, especially since 3...♗g4 doesn't allow the possibility of entering these variations.

B) 5.♕b3 is less impressive here, as Black can continue with 5...♕b6 6.♕c2 ♘bd7= and it's clearly an improvement that ...e5 is possible in one move.

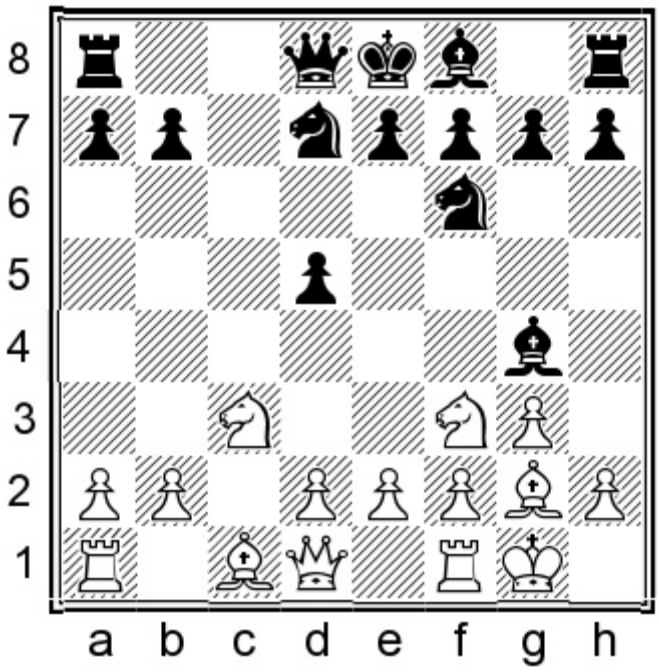
5...♘bd7

A) 5...e6 is the main and most logical move to get more active play in the center, but after 6.♕b3!? (an idea that we have already met several times now) 6...♕b6 7.♕c2 ♘bd7 8.b3! we transpose to the previous chapter on 3...♗g4.

B) 5...dxc4 is closely related to the 4...dxc4 lines, so a transposition is likely.

6.cxd5 cxd5 7.♘c3

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Position after: 7.♘c3

7...e6

7...e5?! is too early and Black will suffer because his bishop is on g4: 8.d4! e4 9.♘e5 ♗e6 10.♕b3±.

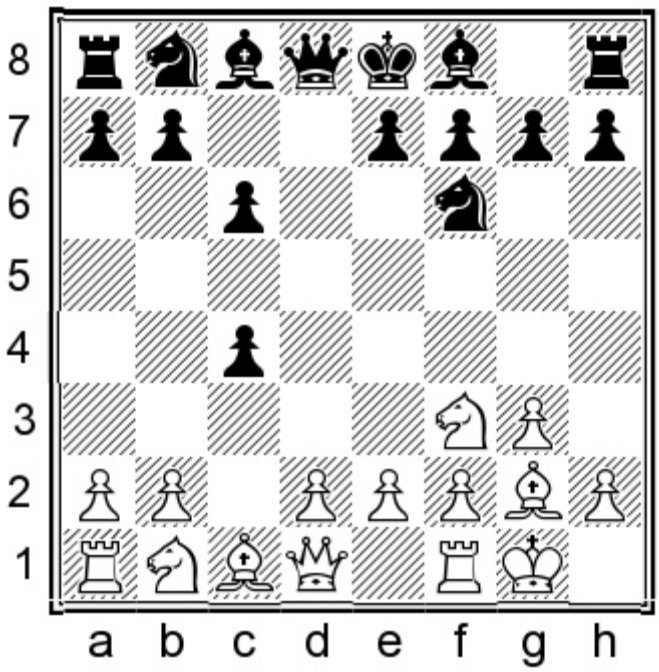
8.♕b3±

And we have the same themes as in the 3...♗g4 4.♗g2 ♘d7 line of the previous chapter.

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Chapter 8
Variations with 4...dxc4

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4!? 5.0-0



Chapter guide

Chapter 8 – Variations with 4...dxc4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4 5.0-0

a) 5...--

b) 5... ♗e6

c) 5...♗f5

d) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 --

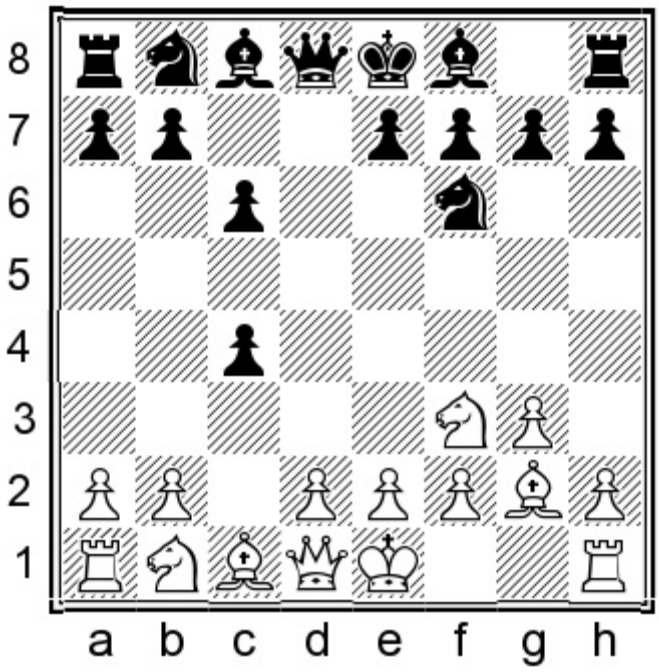
e) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 ♗e6 8.♘g5 & 8.♘e5 --

f) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 ♗e6 8.♘e5 ♕d4

a) 5...--

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4!?

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Position after: 4...dxc4!?

I think this simple move is the critical test for the Reti against the Slav Defense. There's no apparent reason why it shouldn't be good, and it has has been played only a bit less than 4...♗f5.

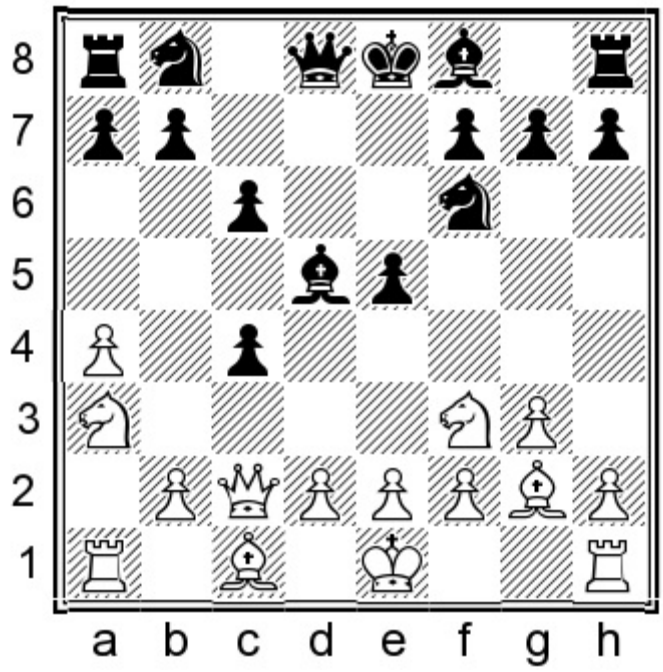
In contrast to other moves, if you are not well prepared, you can soon end up with a clearly inferior position. We are a pawn down, which we will try to regain, keeping chances for a small plus. With our extra pawn in the center we do keep that advantage in most cases.

5.0-0

This is already an important position – decision-making time! Black can choose between doing nothing to protect his extra pawn and simply develop his pieces, protecting it with pieces or using the b-pawn for consolidation.

5.a4?! I tried to make this move work, but I found a line that simply refutes it: 5...♗e6! 6.♘a3 ♗d5! 7.♕c2 (7.0-0?! would be too slow as 7...♘a6∓ prevents ♕c2-ideas) 7...e5!

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Position after: 7...e5!

This strong move doesn't allow us to fight for an edge: 8.♘xc4 e4 and for instance the game 1-0 (70) Vallejo Pons, F (2711) – Short, N (2646) Madrid 2016 continued with 9.♘h4 but the strong improvement 9...♗e6!N already puts White in bad shape: 10.♘e3 ♕d7 11.♗xe4 ♘xe4 12.♕xe4 ♘a6∓ Black will get huge compensation and I don't want to defend this position.

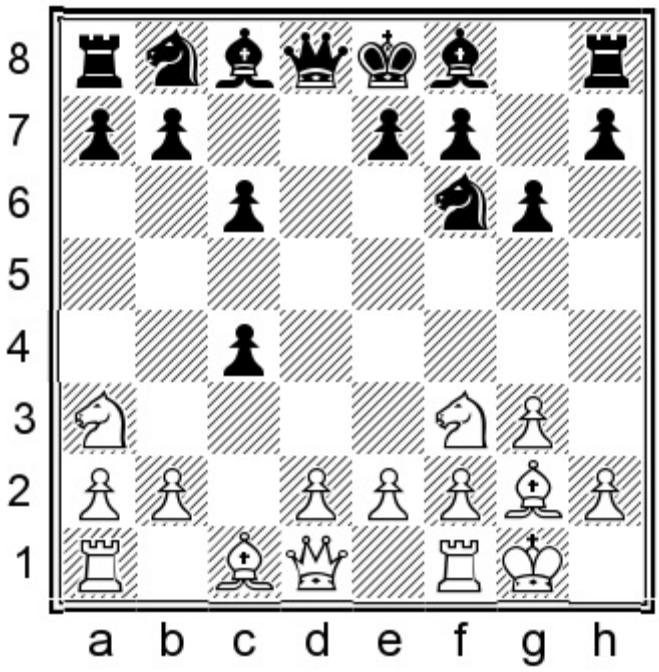
5...b5

This seems like a logical continuation, but things are not so simple for Black.

A) 5...e6!? is analyzed in the next chapter about the Semi-Slav.

B) 5...g6 6.♘a3

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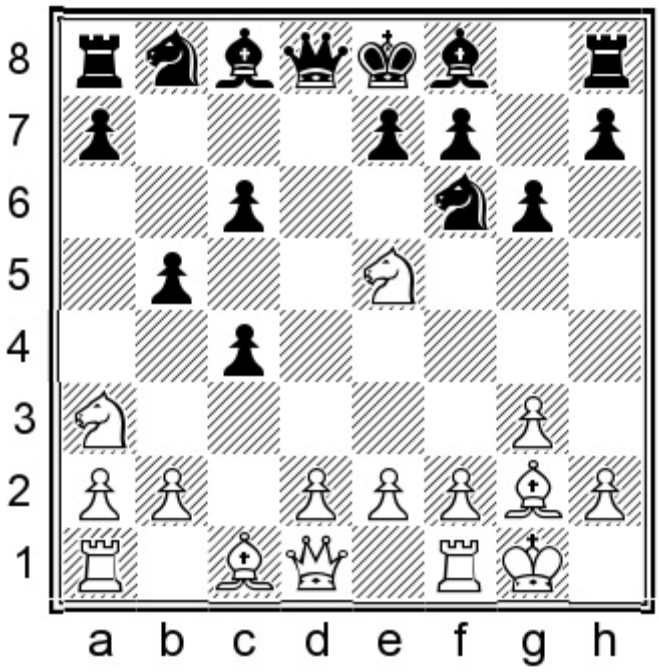
Position after: 6.♘a3

B1) 6...♗e6? would now be too slow because of 7.♘g5! ♗d5 8.e4 h6 9.exd5 hxg5 10.dxc6 ♘xc6 11.♘xc4 ♗g7 12.d4!±.

B2) 6...♗g7 7.♘xc4 0-0 There is no doubt that we have the upper hand. We simply need to choose the way we want to proceed. 8.d3 (8.d4!?±) 8...♘bd7 (8...♗e6 9.♕c2 ♘bd7 10.♗d2±) 9.♗d2 ♘d5 10.♕c2± Dzindzichashvili.

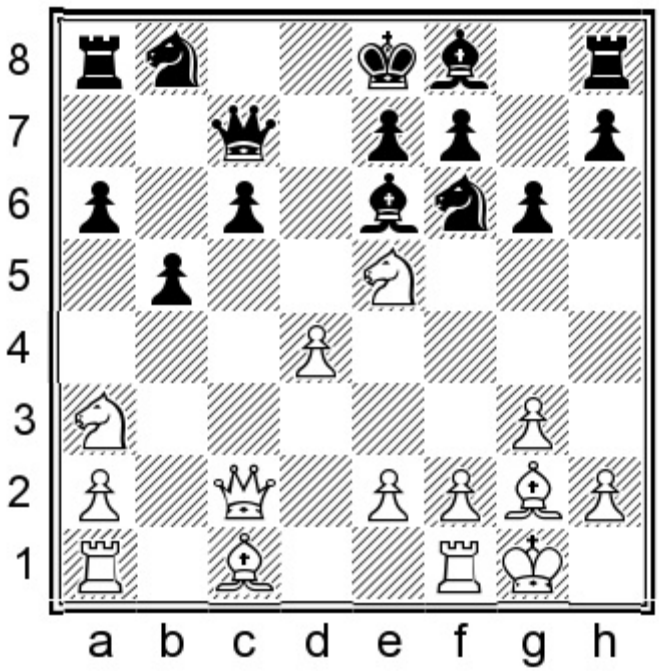
B3) 6...b5 Black has waited for ♘a3 before pushing ...b5. This seems reasonable thinking as a2-a4 is no longer possible, but in this case, we can take advantage of the weakened long diagonal by playing 7.♘e5!

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Position after: 7.♘e5!

7...♕c7?! (7...♗b7? 8.♘xb5±; 7...♕b6?! 8.d3 cxd3 9.♗e3 ♕c7 10.♗f4! ♕b6 11.♖c1!+– and the pressure is already mounting beyond salvation.) 8.d4! a6 (8...cxd3 9.♗f4!+– transposes into the 7...♕b6 line that we know to be bad.) 9.b3! Once again, we open the position. 9...cxb3 10.♕xb3! ♗e6 11.♕c2



Position after: 11.♕c2

11...♘d5!N This is probably the most resistant, but I still don't like Black here. (11...♗g7 12.♗f4

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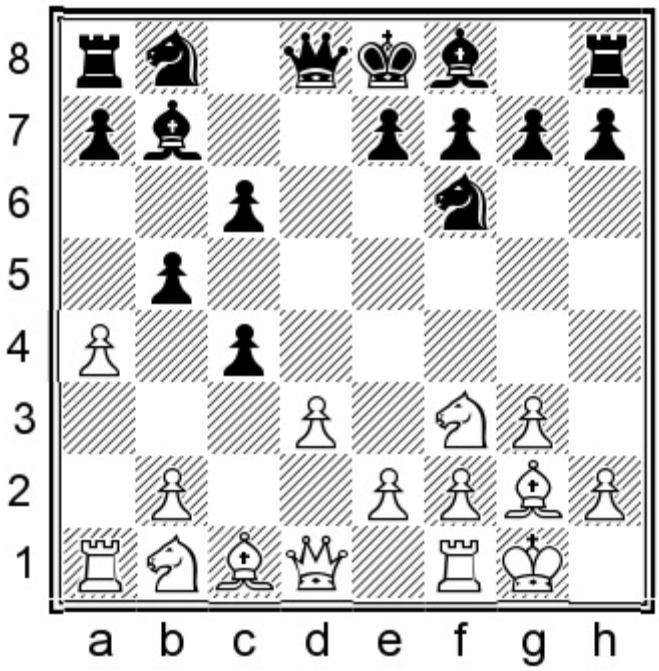
♘h5 13.♘xg6 ♘xf4 14.♘xf4 ♗xd4 15.♖ad1 ♗f6 16.♘xe6 fxe6 17.♕b3+– 1-0 (58) Pigusov, E (2520) – Graf, A (2415) Pavlodar 1987) 12.e4 ♘b4?! 13.♕b1 a5 14.♗f4!± Black's position is about to crack under the pressure.

6.a4

We directly attack the queenside.

6...♗b7 7.d3!

I like this recent idea! Most games have continued with 7.b3 which is interes-ting too... but less than our move!



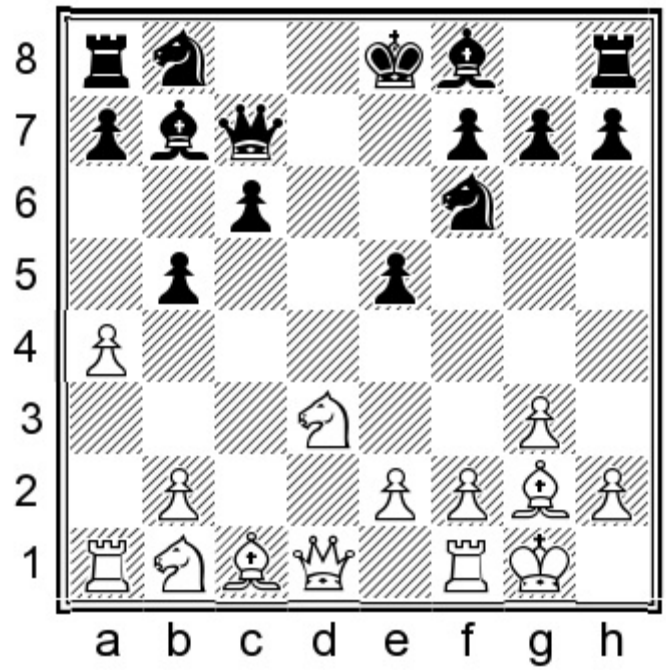
Position after: 7.d3!

7...cxd3 8.♘e5 ♕c7

8...b4!? 9.a5! If we want to grab the b4-pawn, we have to prevent ...a5. We also threaten a6 with some problems on c6! 9...♕c8! (9...dxe2? 10.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 11.♖e1 ♔e8 12.a6+–) 10.♘xd3 e6 11.♕a4 ♗e7 12.♗d2 0-0 13.♖c1± Next we take on b4 and keep the better pawn structure and our advantage.

9.♘xd3 e5

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Position after: 9...e5

This position occurred in the game Stella, A (2447) – Banusz, T (2588) Fano 2013.
Now I believe it's really important to improve White's play with...

10.♕c2!N 10...b4

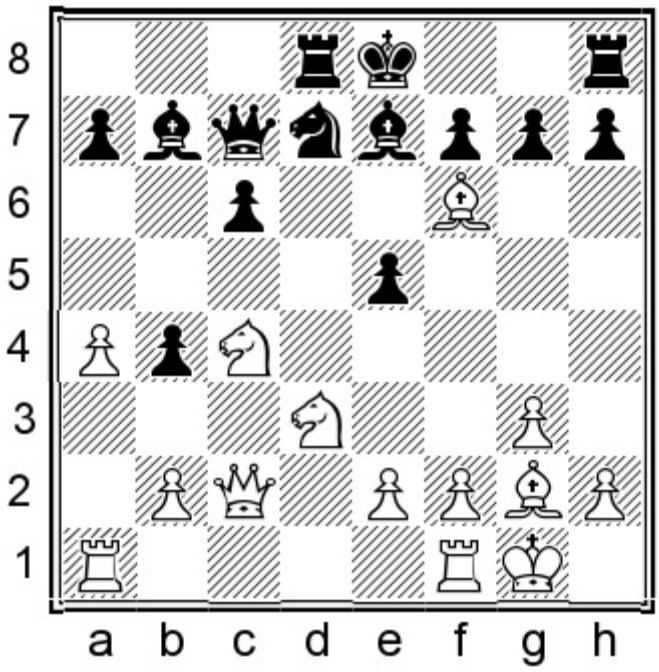
This is more or less forced if Black wants to keep his queenside closed.

11.♘d2 ♘bd7 12.♘c4 ♖d8

12...a5?! 13.♘dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♘xe5!±

13.♗g5 ♗e7 14.♗xf6!

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Position after: 14.♗xf6!

There is no good way for Black to take the bishop.

14...gxf6

A) 14...♗xf6 15.♘xb4±

B) 14...♘xf6 15.♘cxe5±

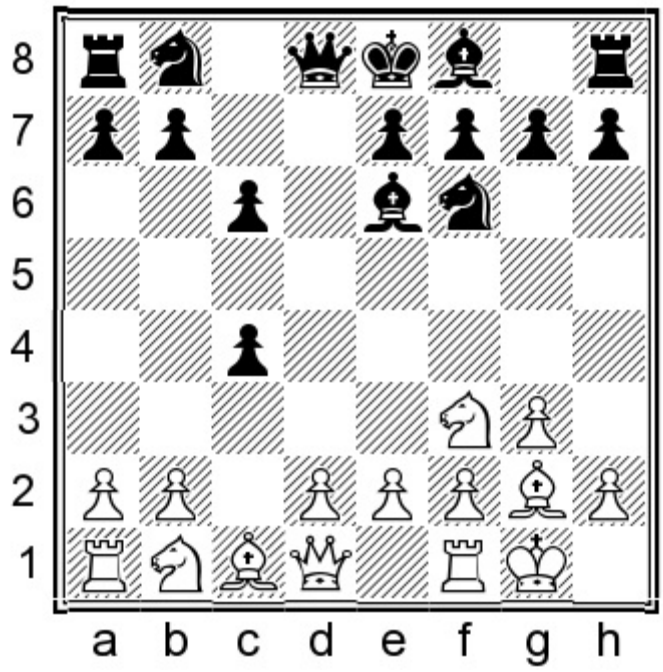
15.♘e3→

The knight goes to f5 with great demolition power in mind.

b) 5... ♗e6

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4!? 5.0-0 ♗e6

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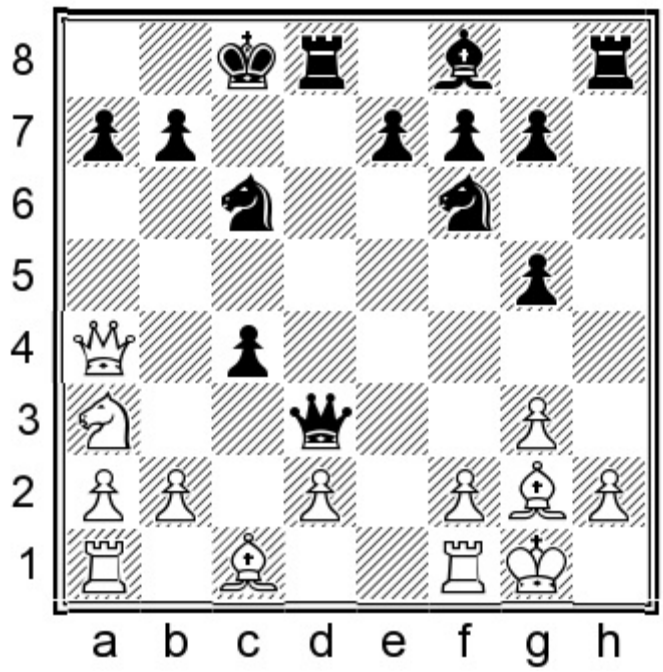


Position after: 5...♗e6

The other way to defend the c4-pawn right away.

6.♘a3!

First I worked on the move 6.♘g5!?. I even played it once, and it is not necessarily bad, but I am not fond of it due to the following line: 6...♗d5 7.e4 h6! 8.exd5 hxg5 9.dxc6 ♘xc6 10.♘a3 ♕d3! 11.♕a4 0-0-0=.



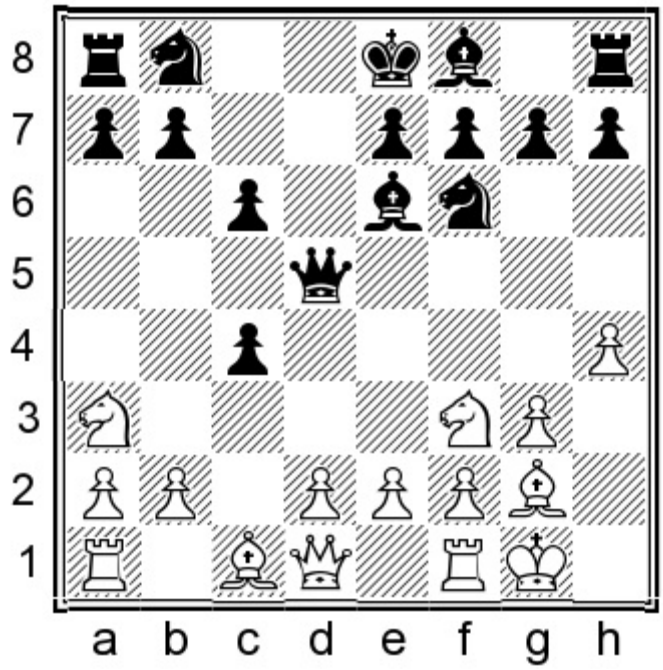
Position after: 11...0-0-0=

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This position is really complicated, and will most likely end in a draw by perpetual (as in the only time I played it).

6...♗d5

A) 6...♕d5 This seems surprising at first sight, as it puts the queen on the radar of the g2-bishop, but you will soon understand that it's a pretty common move as there is no real satisfactory discovered attack on the queen, but... 7.h4!



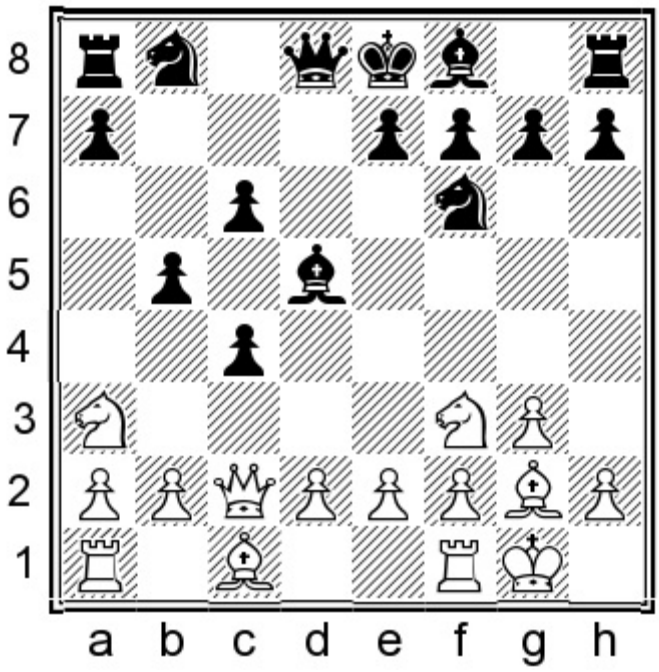
Position after: 7.h4!

I like this move, played only once. We want to play ♘g5 by force, and Black has to worry about it. 7...♕a5 (7...♕c5 seems more reasonable than the game, but it is difficult to play as well: 8.♘g5 ♗g4?! 9.d4! cxd3 10.♕b3! dxe2 11.♖e1+– and with both f7 and b7 en prise, we are already winning.) 8.♘g5 ♗g4 And here we can easily improve on the game Berkovich, M (2366) – Thormann, W (2251) Kaunas 2012, 0-1 (31), with 9.♘xc4! ♕c7 10.d4±.

B) 6...♘bd7?!N 7.♘g5! this would be a much better version than the line we talked about after 6.♘g5 because 7...♗d5? 8.e4 h6 9.exd5 hxg5 10.dxc6± simply destroys Black.

7.♕c2! b5

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Position after: 7...b5

On other moves, we would simply take our pawn back and start advancing by means of d3/e4, chasing the bishop away.

8.b3!

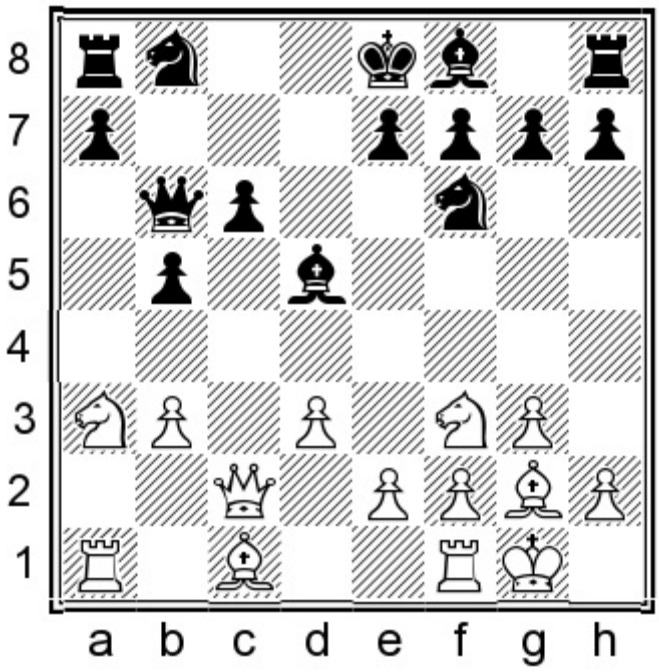
This is a highly thematical move. We waited for Black to weaken his queenside, and sacrifice a pawn to get rid of this annoying c4-pawn. Play should continue with...

8...cxb3 9.axb3 ♕b6?!

9...g6 should be better, even if we get good prospects in the center: 10.♗b2 ♗g7 11.♖fe1 0-0 12.e4 ♗e6 13.♘d4↑.

10.d3

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Position after: 10.d3

10...c5?!

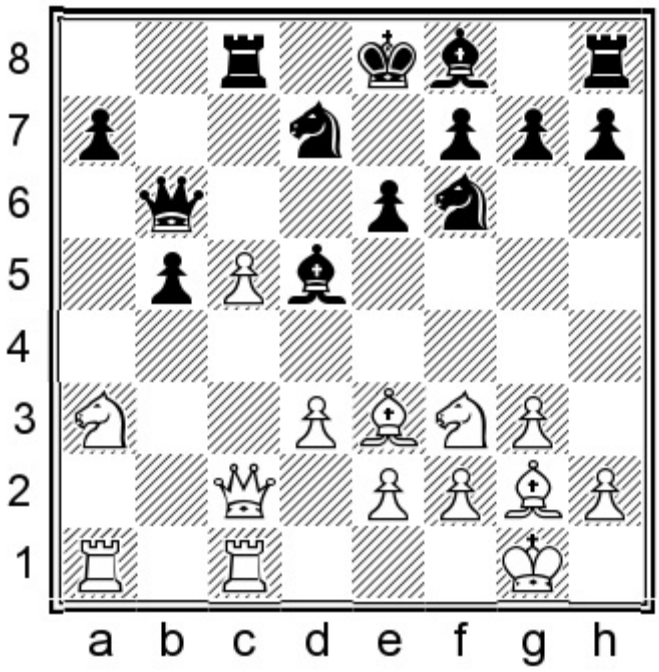
This is too ambitious, but ♗e3 was coming anyway.

11.b4!

This nice move is possible thanks to the vulnerability of the c8-square. Now we put all our forces on the c5-pawn.

11...e6 12.♗e3 ♘bd7 13.♖fc1 ♖c8 14.bxc5

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Position after: 14.bxc5

The pawn seemed protected, but it was actually impossible to take it back.

14...♕b7

14...♗xc5?? 15.d4+–

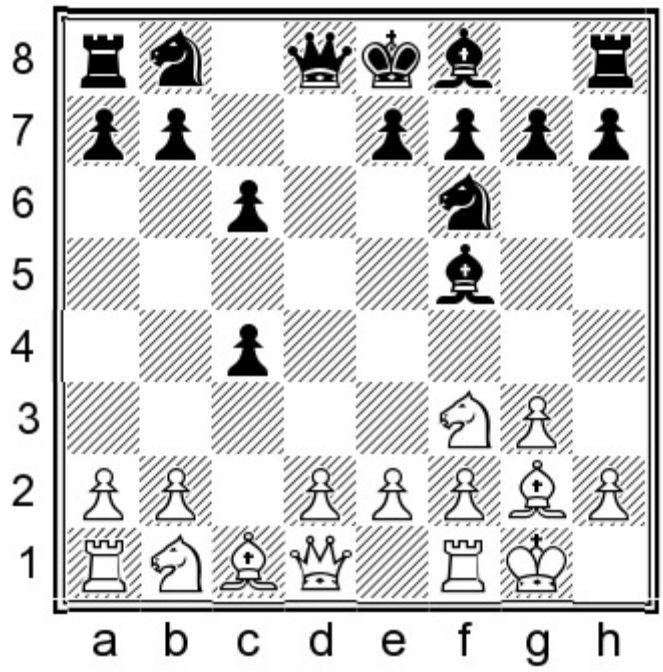
15.d4 ♗e7 16.♕b2+–

Hard to believe, but White did not manage to transform his huge advantage into a win and had to settle for a draw in Pantsulaia, L (2591) – Mikadze, M (2240) Poti 2014.

c) 5...♗f5

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4!? 5.0-0 ♗f5

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Position after: 5...♗f5

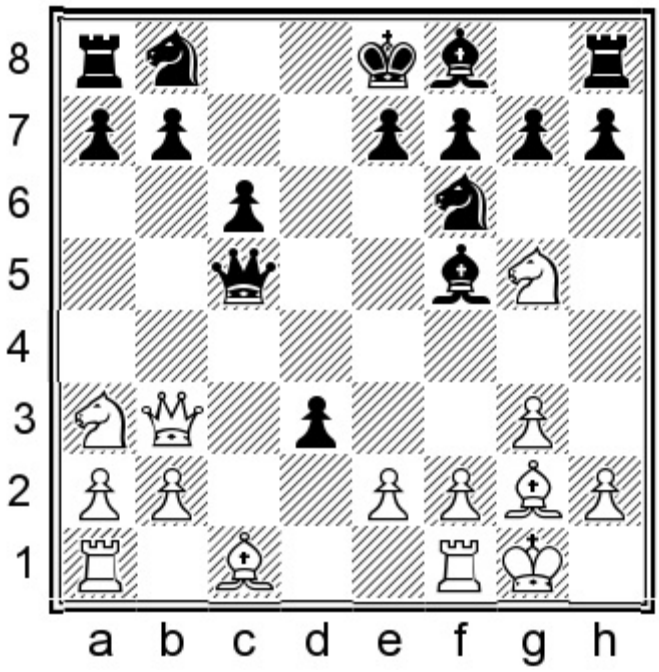
One of the ideas of this move is to prevent ♕c2, but the bishop can sometimes be exposed here, as we will see!

6.♘a3 b5

This might seem dubious as the bishop can't reach b7 any more in order to protect the long diagonal, but ...♗e4 can sometimes solve that issue.

A) 6...♕d5?! 7.♘g5! ♕c5 (7...♕d4 8.d3 cxd3 9.♕b3 dxe2 10.♖e1 ♘bd7 11.♕xf7+ ♔d8 12.♘e6+ ♗xe6 13.♕xe6±) 8.d4! cxd3 9.♕b3!

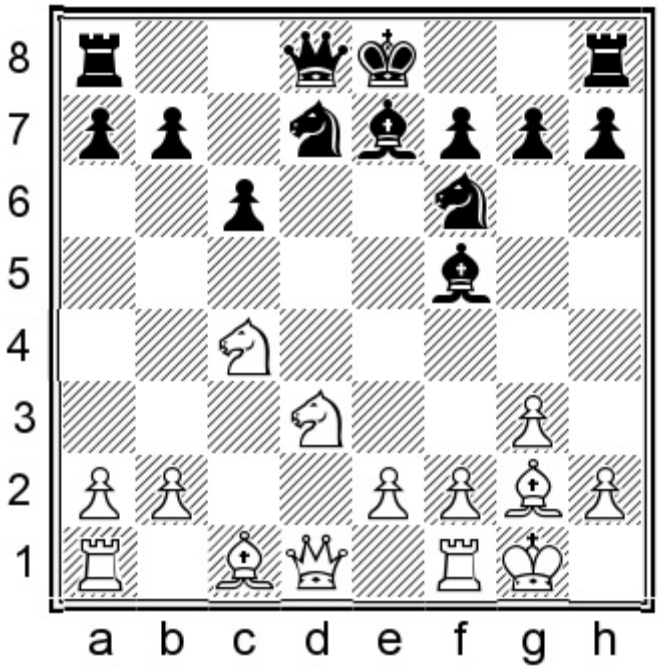
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Position after: 9.♕b3!

9...dxe2 10.♖e1+– We have already met this pattern and know we are completely winning.

B) 6...e5 7.♘xc4 (7.♘xe5?? ♗xa3 8.bxa3 ♕d4–+ was the obvious trick hidden in Black's sixth move) 7...e4 8.♘fe5 ♘bd7 9.d4! exd3 10.♘xd3 ♗e7



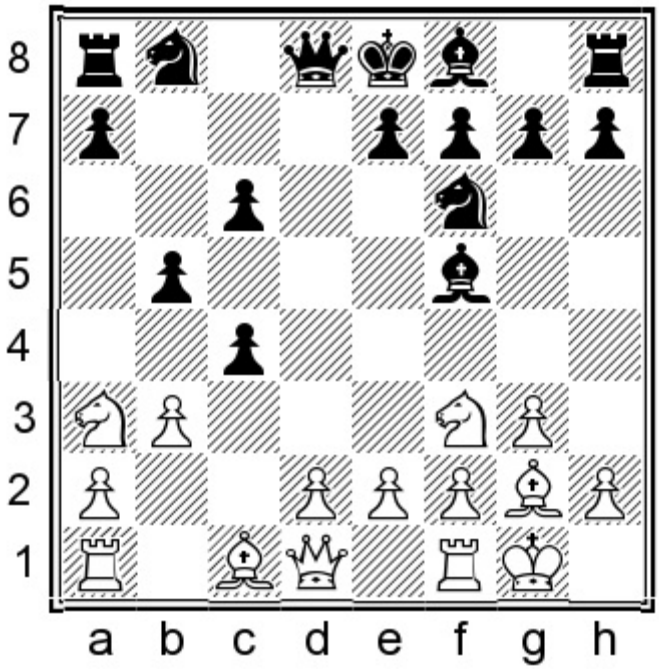
Position after: 10...♗e7

This was played in Movsesian, S (2695) – Tregubov, P (2610) Russia 2013, 1-0 (44). We can easily take advantage of the adventurous f5-bishop by playing 11.♘e3!N 11...♗g6 12.♘f4 ♘b6 13.♘xg6

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hxg6 14.♕c2±. You should know by now that the bishop pair in an open position smells good for us.

7.b3!

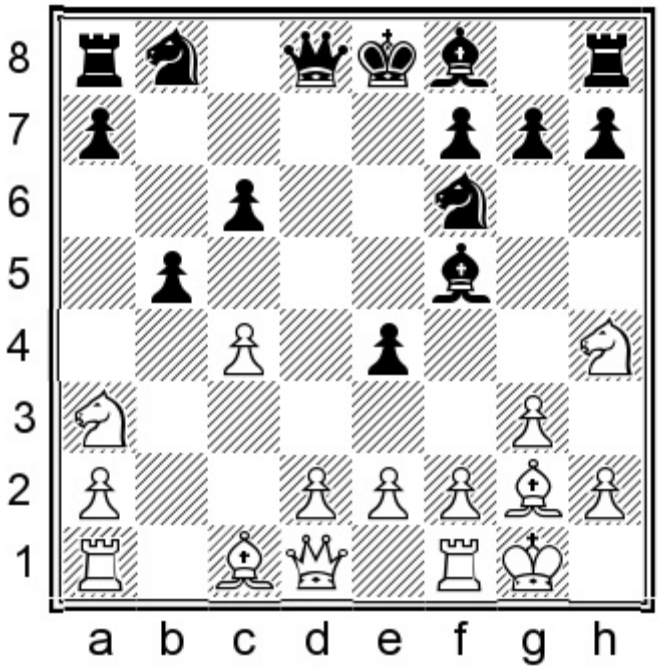


Position after: 7.b3!

7...cxb3

We have a choice between two kinds of positional compensation.

7...e5?! 8.bxc4 e4 (8...b4? 9.♘c2!±) 9.♘h4!N



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Position after: 9.♘h4!N

9...♗e6 The move ...g5 is a threat we have to worry about. 10.d3! We have to open the center now, even if our knight on h4 is in danger. 10...g5 (No better is 10...♗xa3 11.♗xa3 g5 12.dxe4 gxh4 13.cxb5 hxg3 14.hxg3 ♕xd1 15.♖fxd1+– Even in the endgame, Black can't move most of his pieces and should be lost.) 11.♗xg5! ♗xa3 12.cxb5! Only two pawns for the piece, but our many threats and the weaknesses in Black's camp compensate more than enough. For instance: 12...♗e7 (12...♖g8 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6 14.♕a4 ♗c5 15.♖ac1 ♕d4 16.♕xd4 ♗xd4 17.♗xe4±; 12...♗b2 13.dxe4 ♕xd1 14.♖axd1 h6 15.♗f4±) 13.dxe4 ♕xd1 14.♖fxd1 ♖g8 15.♘f3 ♘xe4 16.♗xe7 ♔xe7 17.♖ac1!± Even this kind of endgame does not save Black here.

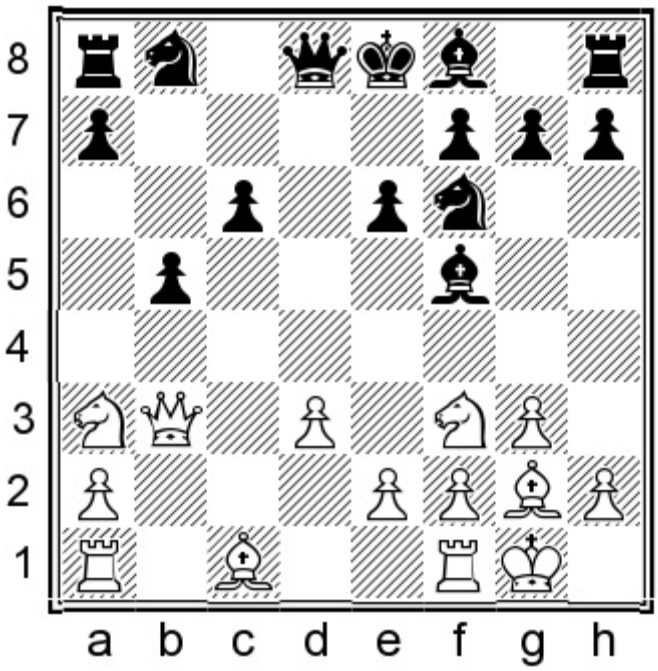
8.♕xb3!?

8.axb3!?⩱

8...e6

8...a6 9.♘e5 e6 10.♘xc6 ♕c7 11.♘xb8 ♖xb8 12.♗b2±

9.d3



Position after: 9.d3

9...♗c5N

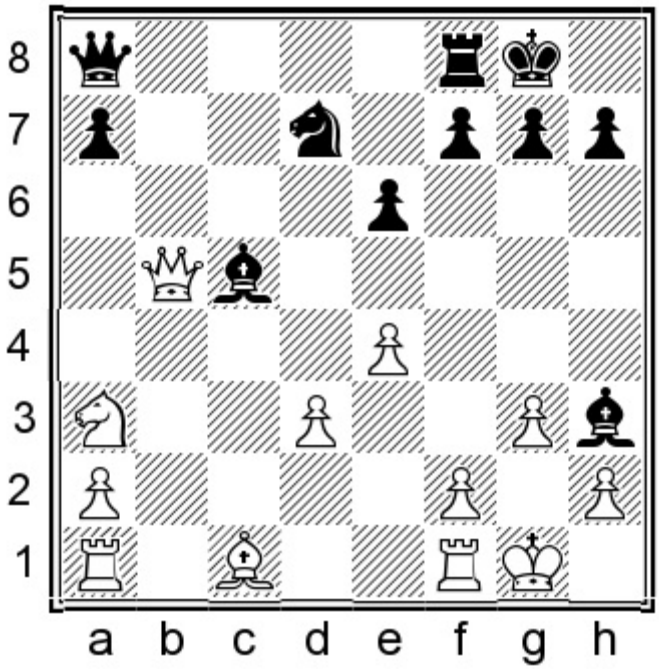
9...♗g6?! 10.♘e5 ♘d5 11.♗b2 a6 12.♘c2 ♖a7 13.a4!± 1-0 (40) Skoberne, J (2547) – Gheng, J (2319) Böblingen 2015.

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10.♘e5 ♘fd7!

10...0-0?! 11.♘xb5±

11.♘xc6 ♘xc6 12.♗xc6 0-0 13.♗xa8 ♕xa8 14.e4 ♗h3 15.♕xb5±



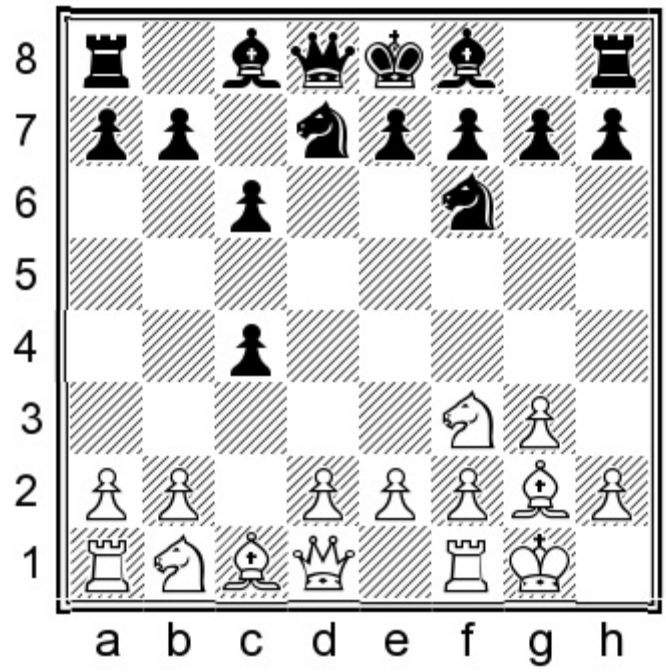
Position after: 15.♕xb5±

Black keeps some compensation, but he needs great precision if he wants to survive in this game.

d) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4!? 5.0-0 ♘bd7

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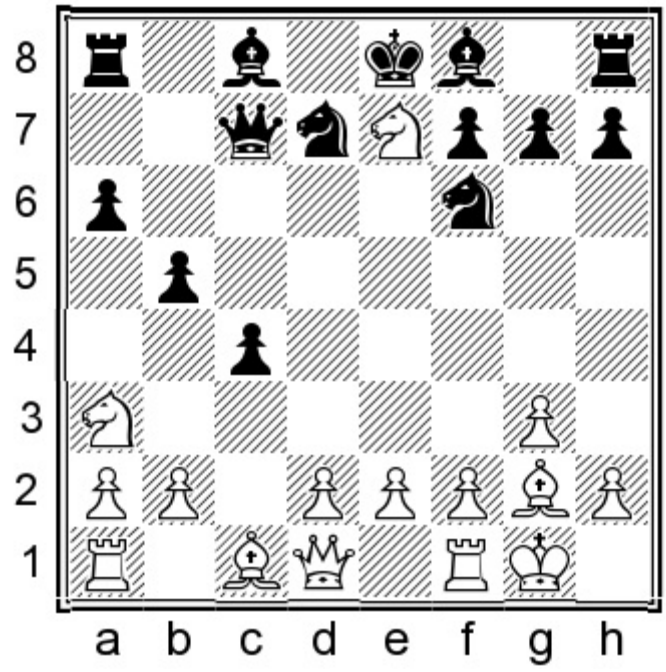
Position after: 5...♘bd7

6.♘a3

6.♕c2 doesn't change much, as it should merely transpose.

6...♘b6

6...b5!? has only been tried three times, but can we refute this move? 7.♘d4!? a6! 8.♘xc6 ♕c7 9.♘xe7!

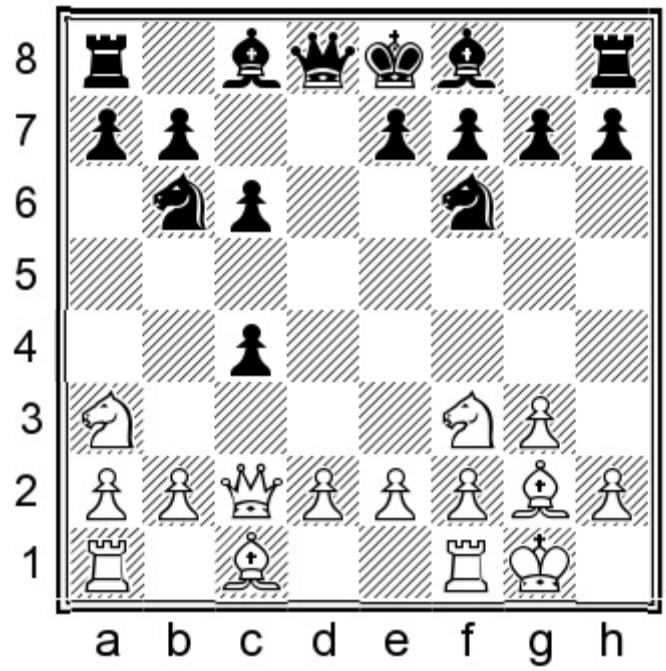


Position after: 9.♘xe7!

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9...♗b7 10.♗xb7 ♕xb7 11.♘f5 g6 (11...♘e5 seemed inferior in Georgiev, K (2626) – Varga, Z (2459) Palic 2014 and we can even pose more problems for Black with 12.b3!N 12...cxb3 13.d4!±) 12.♘e3 ♗g7 13.b3! ♘g4 14.♘xg4 ♗xa1 15.bxc4 ♗g7 16.♕c2⩲ Even if the game is still complicated, two pawns for the exchange in addition to a massive center is more than enough.

7.♕c2



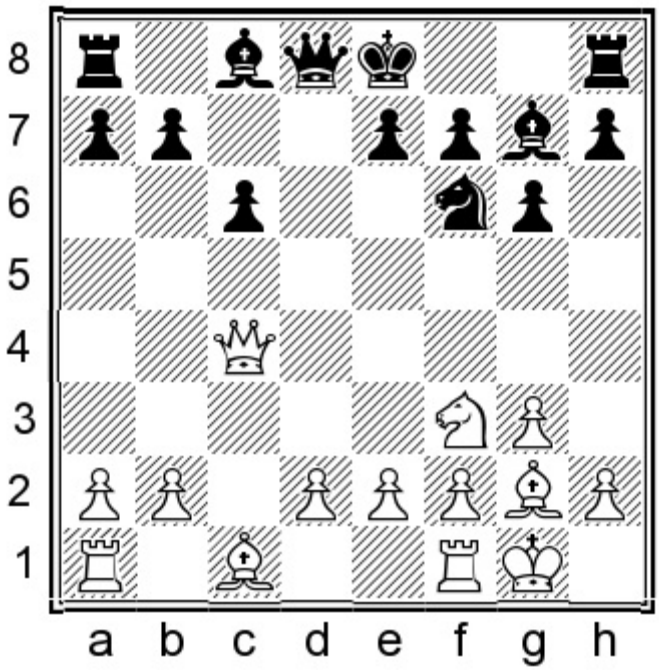
Position after: 7.♕c2

7...♕d5

This has been played almost as often as 7...♗e6, but it is no longer fashionable due to White's next move.

7...g6!? This is not the most ambitious decision, as Black simply offers his pawn. He will only fight for equality, but it's still quite a sound system. 8.♘xc4 (8...♗g7 9.b3 ♗f5 10.d3 ♕c8 11.♗b2 ♗h3 12.e4 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 0-0 14.d4± And even if White lost, he was clearly better in Margvelashvili, G (2530) – Dreev, A (2653) chess.com 2018.) 8...♘xc4 9.♕xc4 ♗g7

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Position after: 9...♗g7

(9...♗e6 has no real independent value as after 10.♕c2 ♗g7 11.e4 we transpose to 9...♗g7.)

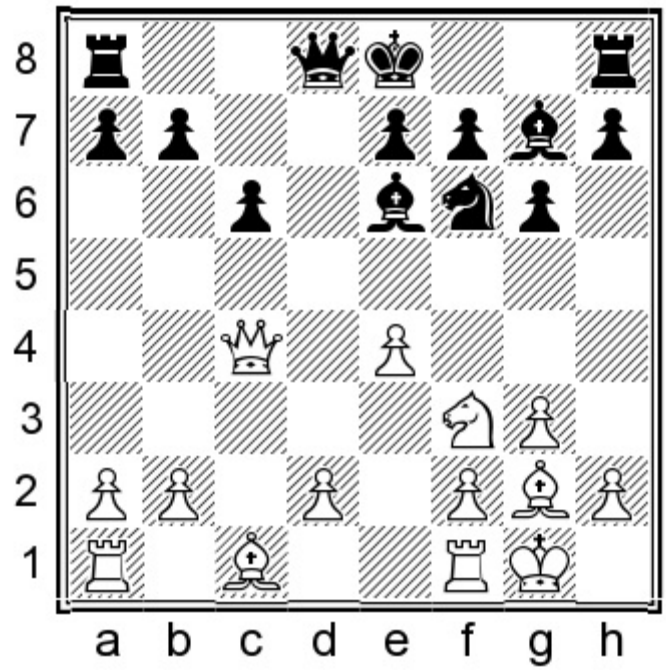
A) When I faced this position in a classical game, without knowing much about it, I chose the main move, but I now feel that it's not so dangerous for Black. The game continued 10.d3 0-0 11.♗e3 (Aronian recently managed to keep some activity by playing 11.♗d2, but the position remains objectively about equal: 11...♘d5 12.♕c1 a5 13.♗h6 ♗g4 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♘e5 ♗e6 16.d4 ♘f6 17.♖d1↑ ½-½ (40) Aronian, L (2794) – Vitiugov, N (2735) Baden Baden 2018) 11...♘d5 12.♗d4 ♘b6 13.♕b4 ♗xd4 14.♕xd4 ♕xd4 15.♘xd4 a5 and here we signed a quick draw Demuth, A (2529) – Banusz, T (2613) Karlsruhe 2017.

B) 10.e4!? The main debate in this position is whether White will be able to set up a strong center with both pawns on the fourth rank. There are a few technical problems, but we have to give this a decent try.

B1) 10...0-0 11.♖e1 ♘d7 12.e5!? (12.d4 e5 13.♗e3± was possible as well) 12...♘b6 13.♕h4 f6 14.d4⇄ We have interesting prospects on the queenside, even if our opponent might be able to keep the balance. Black did not manage to find the right moves in Zhigalko, A (2610) – Bulmaga, I (2383) Kavala 2016, 1-0 (39).

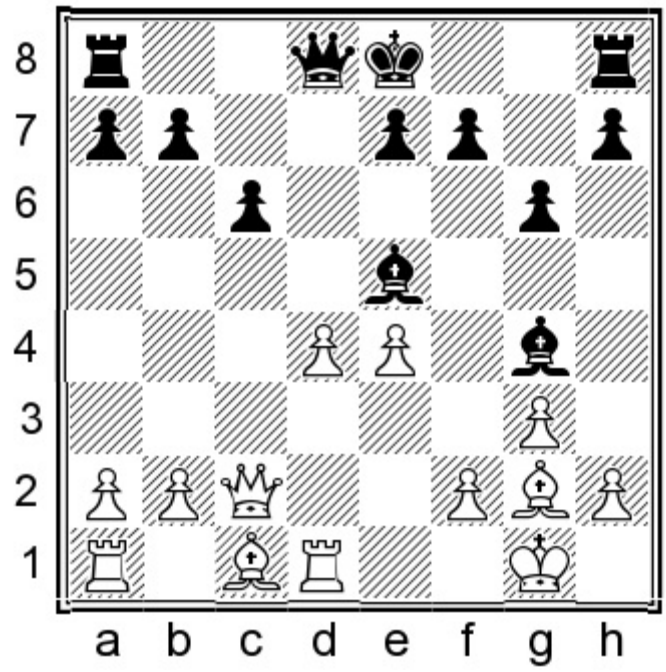
B2) 10...♗e6

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Position after: 10...♗e6

This was the choice of GM Banusz, who I believe is the specialist in this line. When we were analysing our game (with 10.d3), it became clear that he had worked quite a lot on the position, and even played it with both colors. So let's follow what he played a few months after our encounter: 11.♕c2 ♘g4?! I don't like this move even if it's really hard to refute properly. (11...♗g4!N is actually more annoying for us. I believe that 12.♖d1 e5! 13.d3 is playable, but it's Black's best chance. 13...0-0 14.♗e3 ♖e8 15.h3 ♗xf3 16.♗xf3 ♘d7 17.h4↑) 12.♖d1! ♘e5 13.♘xe5 ♗xe5 14.d4! ♗g4



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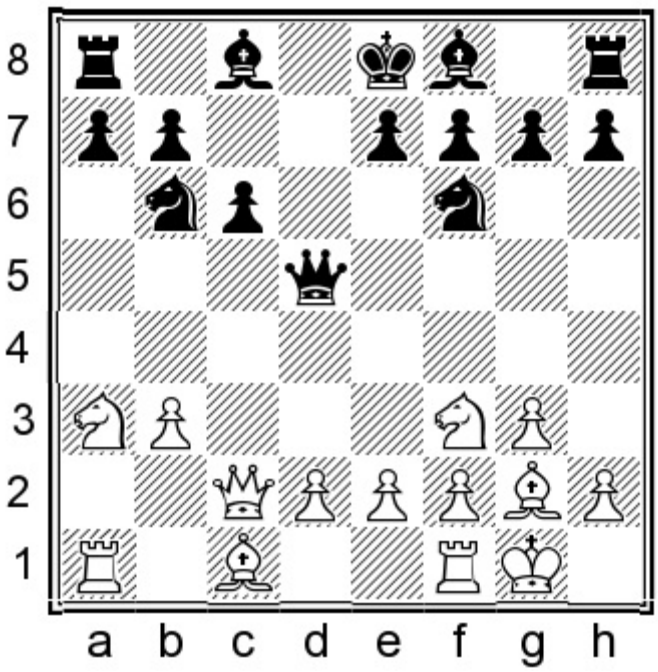
Position after: 14...♗g4

This was seen in the drawn game Iturrizaga, E (2662) – Banusz, T (2611) Linares 2017, and now I propose the incredibly strong improvement 15.♗h6!N which our silicon friends found in less than a second. We just give up an exchange, but the remaining bishop is going to be a source of worries for Black. 15...♗xd1 16.♖xd1 ♗xd4□ (16...♗c7 17.d5!+–) 17.♕a4! e5 18.♗g7! ♖g8 19.♗xe5 ♗xe5 20.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 21.♕xa7± It is not clear if we are winning, but White is definitely better because of the uncoordinated pieces in Black's camp.

8.b3! cxb3

8...♗f5 9.♕b2 cxb3 10.axb3 e6 11.d3 We had to take the b2-square away from our own bishop, but the other bishop on f5 is misplaced, and Black must move it in order to parry the e4-fork. 11...♕d8 12.♘c4 ♗e7 13.♗e3 0-0 14.♖xa7! ♖xa7 15.♗xb6 ♕a8 16.♗xa7 ♕xa7 17.♖a1 ♕b8 18.b4±

9.axb3



Position after: 9.axb3

Black is now a clear pawn up, but has played some strange moves, such as putting the knight on b6 and exposing the queen on d5. In addition to the open files, this provides us with clear compensation.

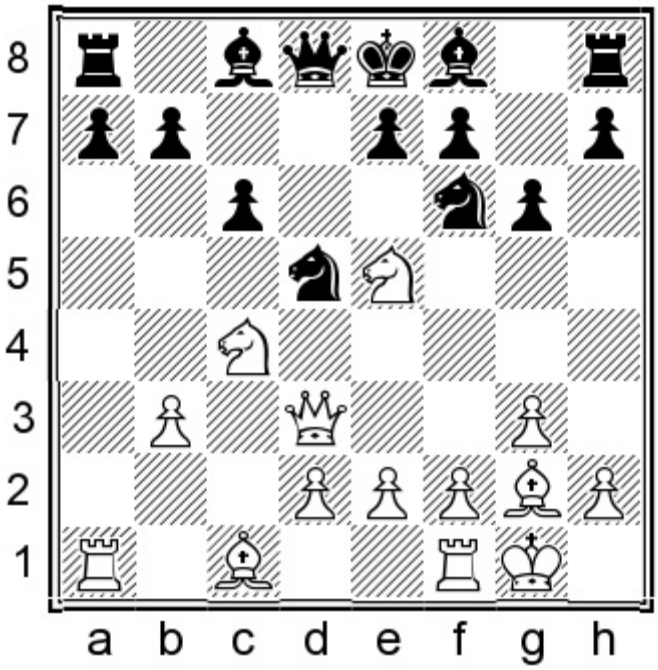
9...♗e6

9...g6 10.♘c4! Regrouping our pawns in the center and opening lines is worth the trade of a knight.

A) 10...♕d8 11.♘fe5! ♘bd5 This position has appeared twice over the board. (11...♗g7? 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♘xb6! ♕xb6 14.♗xc6+ ♘d7 15.♗xa8 ♗xa1 16.♕xc8+ ♕d8 17.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 18.♗a3+–)

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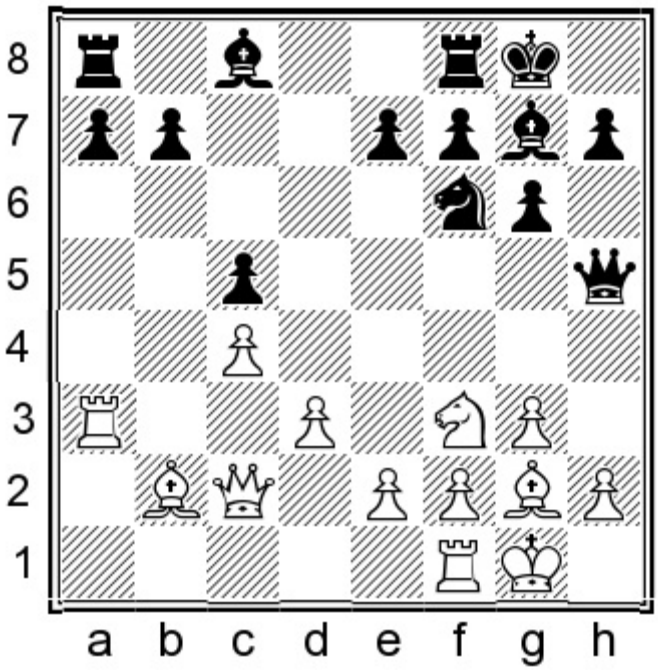
12.♕d3!?N



Position after: 12.♕d3!?N

A nice improvement. White wants to continue with 13.e4 against almost any move. For instance 12...♗e6 13.e4! ♘c7 14.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 15.d4 Black is in an awkward position. 15...♔e8 16.♘a5 ♗c8 17.♗b2±

B) 10...♘xc4 11.bxc4 ♕h5 (11...♕d8 12.♗b2 ♗g7 13.♗d4 a6 14.♖fb1 0-0 15.d3⩲ was obviously fine for White in Arun Prasad, S (2514) – Vorobiov, E (2584) Moscow 2013) 12.d3 ♗g7 13.♗a3 c5 14.♗b2 0-0 15.♖a3

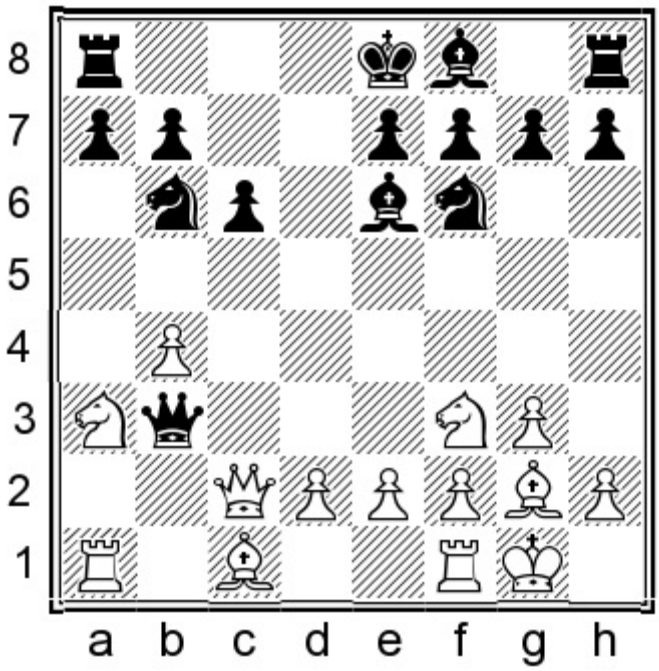


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Position after: 15.♖a3

The position looks a bit like a Benko, except that we have no annoying pawn on d4 in front of our pieces. We simply need to reinforce the pressure on the open files. 15...♗d7 16.♖fa1 a6 17.♘e5 ♖ab8 18.♖b3!N An improvement on the game Adams, M (2725) – Kanep, M (2512) Gibraltar 2013 which also ended well for White. 18...b5 19.♖xa6 bxc4 20.♖xb8 ♖xb8 21.♕xc4!±

10.b4! ♕b3



Position after: 10...♕b3

When Black played ...♗e6, this was his idea.

11.♕xb3 ♗xb3 12.b5!

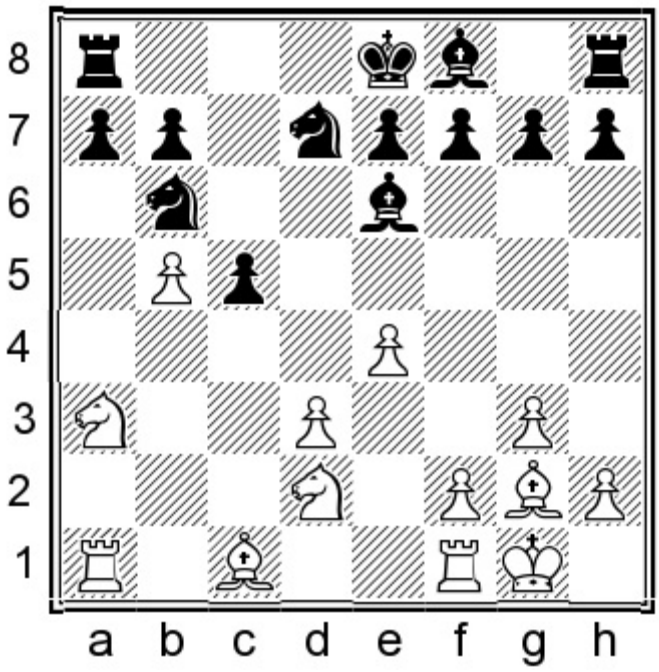
We want to open the long diagonal and Black can't really keep it closed.

12...c5

The attempt to install a blockade on the diagonal gives us some useful tempi: 12...♗d5 13.d3! c5 14.e4 ♗e6 15.♗e3 ♘fd7 16.d4!±.

13.d3 ♘fd7 14.♘d2 ♗d5 15.e4 ♗e6

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Position after: 15...♗e6

16.f4!

Black has to save the exhausted bishop.

16...f6

16...g6!N must be an improvement but we keep the upper hand with 17.♗b2! ♖g8 18.♘ac4!±.

17.e5!

And if Black wants to close the diagonal again, see what happens...

17...♗d5 18.e6!

A nasty surprise.

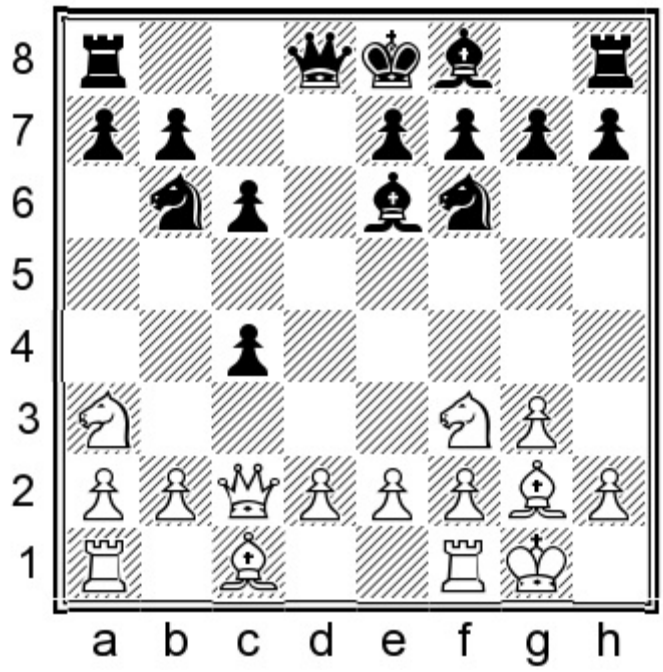
18...♗xe6 19.♗xb7±

Timman, J (2571) – Ernst, S (2606) Wijk aan Zee 2012.

e) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 ♗e6 8.♘g5 & 8.♘e5 –

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4!? 5.0-0 ♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 ♗e6!

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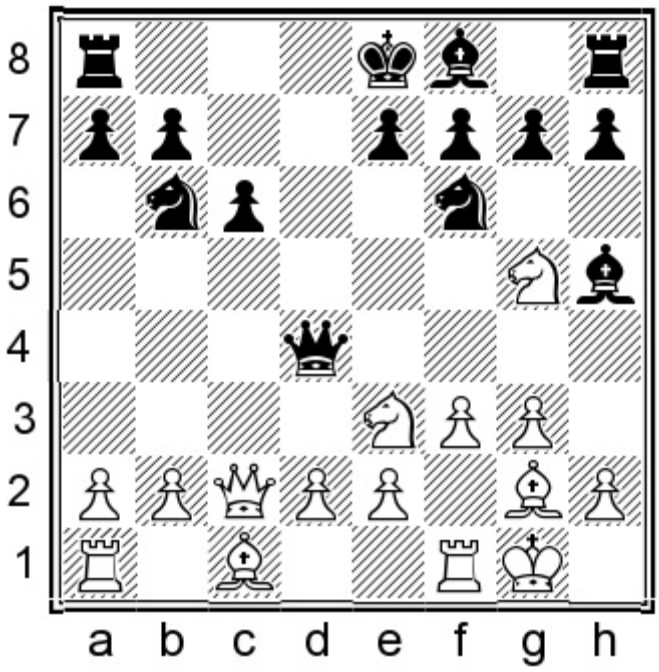
Position after: 7...♗e6!

This is the line that gave me the most problems; in my opinion it can sometimes result in a pretty unclear position.

8.♘e5!

8.♘g5?! was my first intention and the main move, but there is a major problem after this move. 8...♗g4! (8...♕d7 9.b3! cxb3 10.axb3 ♗g4 11.d4!∞; 8...♗d5 9.e4±) 9.f3 This was Marin's advice, but I don't think there's enough play here. (9.♘xc4 ♗xe2 10.♘e5 ♗h5! White fails at tricking Black on his weak f7-pawn 11.♖e1 h6 12.♘e4 e6∞) 9...♗h5 10.♘xc4 ♕d4+! 11.♘e3 White has scored well recently, but not thanks to his opening. In almost every game, things were going quite sadly for him at some point.

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Position after: 11.♘e3

11...h6! 12.♘h3 ♗g6 13.♕c3 e5. Our pieces are far too ugly in this line. 14.♕xd4 exd4 15.♘g4 ♘xg4 16.fxg4 ♗c5∓

8...h5!?

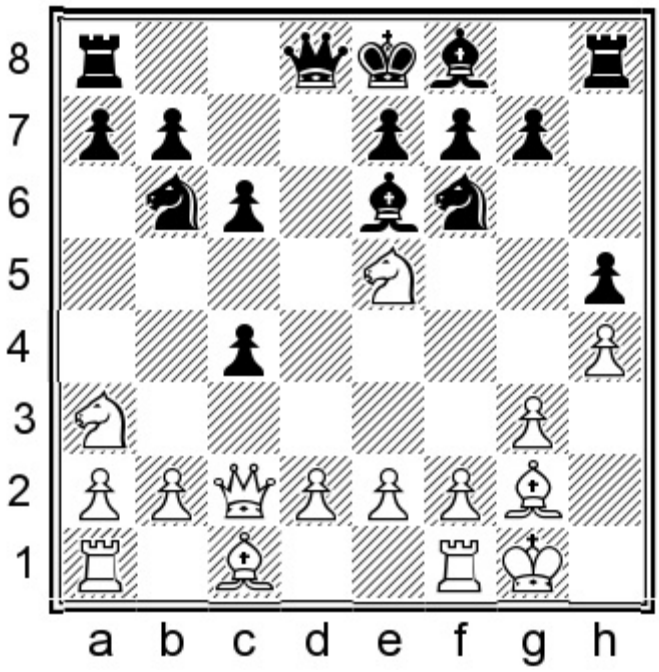
This interesting attempt was tried twice by Wesley So against none other than Aronian and Adams. He only scored half a point but got two fine positions.

It's a classical pattern to attack our fianchetto once our f3-knight has left his post.

8...g6?! This is a bit too much, as we can easily get the better game. 9.♘axc4 ♘xc4 10.♘xc4 ♗g7 11.b3! ♗d5 12.♗b2 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 ♕d5+ 14.e4 ♕h5 15.f3 0-0 16.d4. We have a strong center, and it's no big deal that we traded our fianchettoed bishop as our king is well protected. Black won shortly after in Kravtsiv, M (2641) – Skawinski, A (2367) Zalakaros 2016.

9.h4!

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Position after: 9.h4!

I needed some help from correspondence games to understand how important it is to prevent Black from playing ...h4 himself, even if we need to play a slightly weakening move. This is probably better than 9.b3 as played by Adams, and 9.♘axc4 by Aronian.

9...♕d4

This is similar to our main line, but with h4/...h5 included. Whom does it help more?

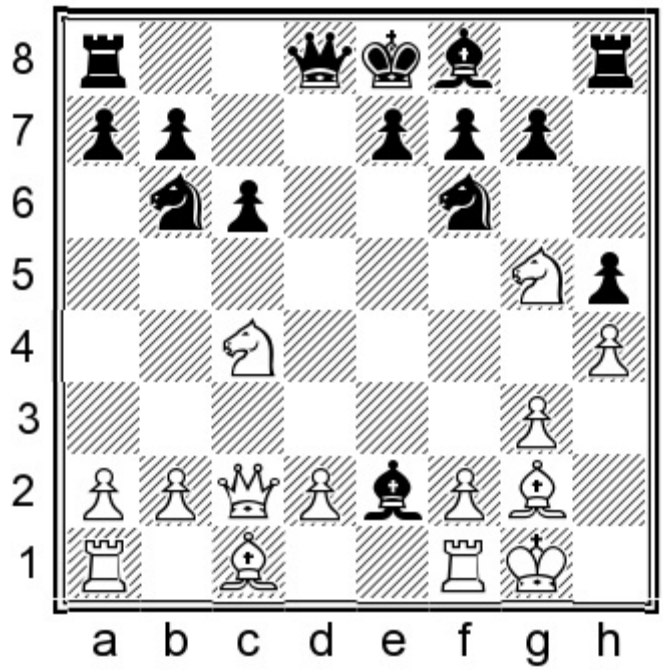
10.♘f3!

The answer is White, but not for the reason you may think! We don't take on c6 any more as in the main line, but we manage a clever retreat.

10...♕e4

A) 10...♕d8? makes no sense as it's not a repetition and after 11.♘g5! ♗g4?! 12.♘xc4 ♗xe2

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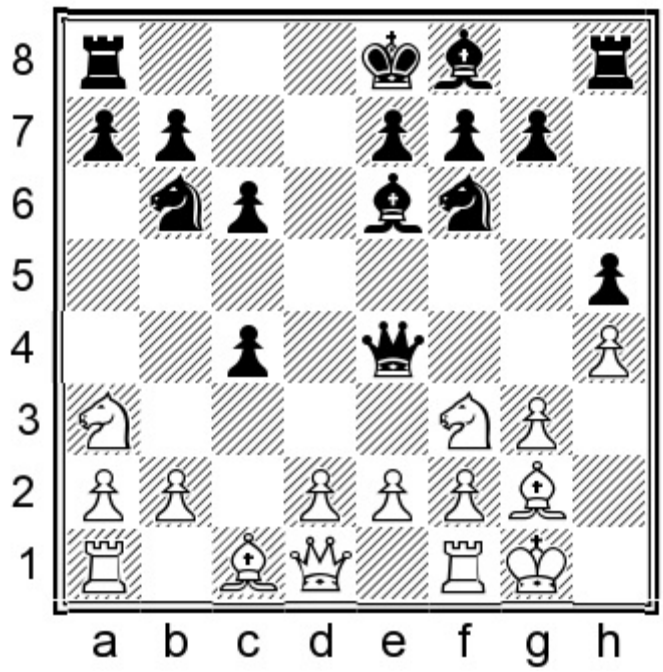


Position after: 12...♗xe2

13.♘e5!+– Now ...♗h5 is not possible in order to protect f7, which is a major difference compared to the line 8.♘g5. White wins.

B) 10...♕d5 11.♘g5 ♕e5 12.d4 cxd3 13.exd3 ♗d7 14.♗f4⩲

11.♕d1!N



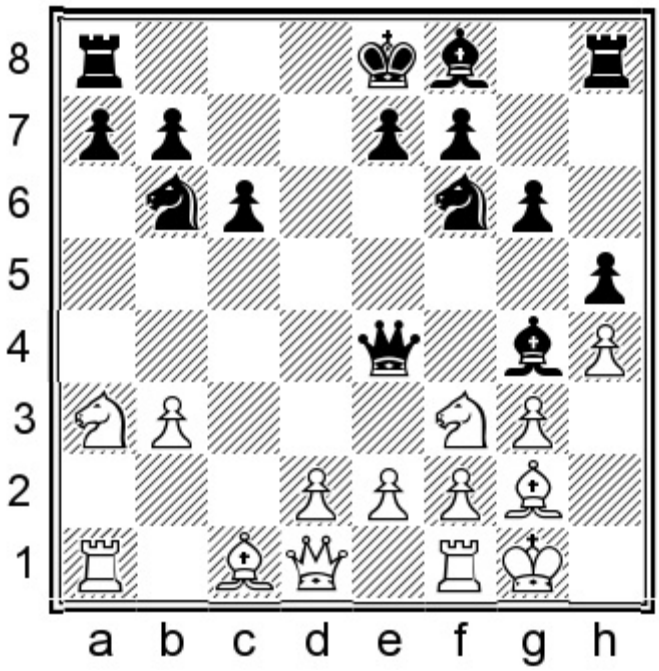
Position after: 11.♕d1!N

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A novelty, at least in classical games, as it has appeared on few occasions in correspondence chess.

11.d3?! is the only practical try but it's not really convincing: 11...cxd3 12.exd3 ♕g4 13.b3 ♗d5 14.♕e2 e6 15.♘c4 ♗c5∓ 0-1 (41) Almasi, Z (2694) – Oparin, G (2540) Linares 2014.

11...♗g4 12.b3! cxb3 13.axb3 g6!



Position after: 13...g6!

14.♘c4!

14.♗b2 was chosen in another correspondence game and resulted in some fire on the board: 14...♗g7 15.♘e5 ♕f5 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♗xc6+ ♔f8 18.♗xa8 ♘xa8 19.♘c4⇄ ½-½ (34) Philipps, R (2440) – Tauber, H (2525) WS/GMN/047 ICCF 2015.

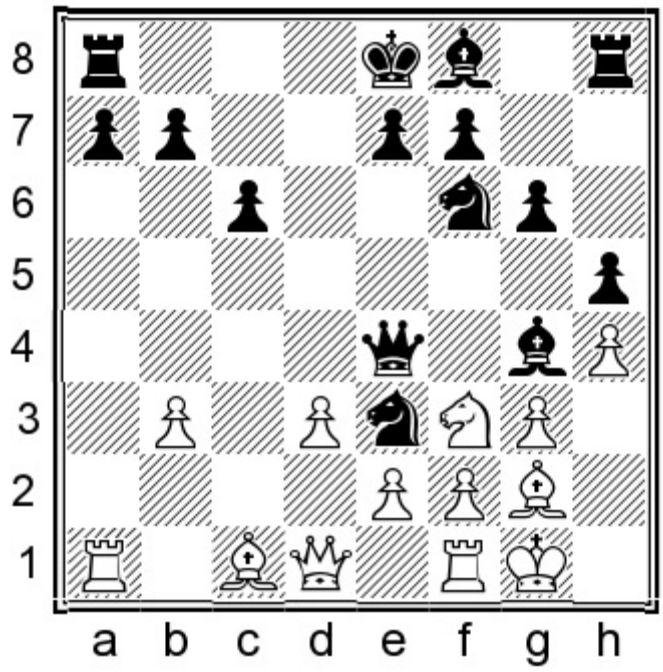
14...♘xc4 15.d3!?N

This is 'my' novelty (if we take the correspondence games into account). The position is probably level, but from a practical point of view this seems less easy to play for Black than the other lines.

Black gets decent compensation for the two pawns after 15.bxc4 ♕xc4 16.d3 ♕b5 17.♘d4 ♕b6 18.♗e3 ♕c7 19.♕c1 ♗d7 20.♘b5 ♕b8 21.♘xa7 ♗g7 22.♗f4 e5 23.♘xc6 ♖xa1 but it was soon a draw in Pligin, S (2495) – Evtushenko, S (2540) CL/2017/Champ 2015, and there is no real way to improve White's play.

15...♘e3!

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Position after: 15...♘e3!

Not to allow the reinforcement of the structure by White.

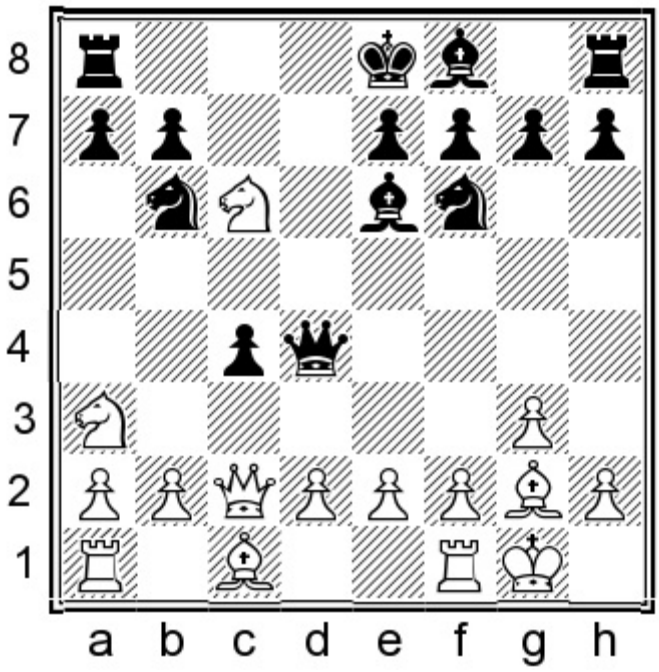
16.♗xe3 ♕e6 17.♘g5 ♕d7 18.♗xa7 ♗g7 19.d4 0-0 20.♕d3=

The position is objectively equal, but with lots of play left on the board!

f) 5...♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 ♗e6 8.♘e5 ♕d4

1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.♗g2 dxc4!? 5.0-0 ♘bd7 6.♘a3 ♘b6 7.♕c2 ♗e6! 8.♘e5! ♕d4!? 9.♘xc6!

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Position after: 9.♘xc6!

This has been played a few times, and most likely analyzed in depth by the best players. We can't give a definite assessment before we check this deeply!

9...bxc6 10.♗xc6+

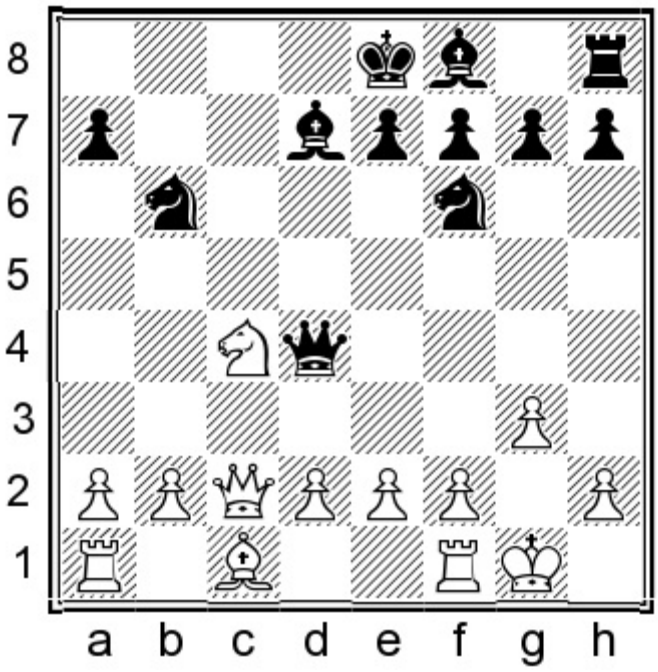
In his analysis, Marin wrote: "White will get a rook and a pawn for a knight and bishop, a complex material balance, which could favour either side, depending on the concrete circumstances. For White it will be essential to speed up his development with either b2-b3 or d2-d3, otherwise Black would have a comfortable position.". This sounds like a good explanation of the position. Now, Black has a choice of three moves, but none of them has scored positively for him.

10...♔d8!

This has been played most times. Black decides to leave the pawn in the center, but on the other hand, the other pieces are at their maximum capacity.

A) 10...♗d7?! This already gives back a second pawn, so we don't have to worry about material any more. 11.♗xa8 ♘xa8 12.♘xc4 (12.♕xc4 is fine as well; it's a matter of taste.) 12...♘b6

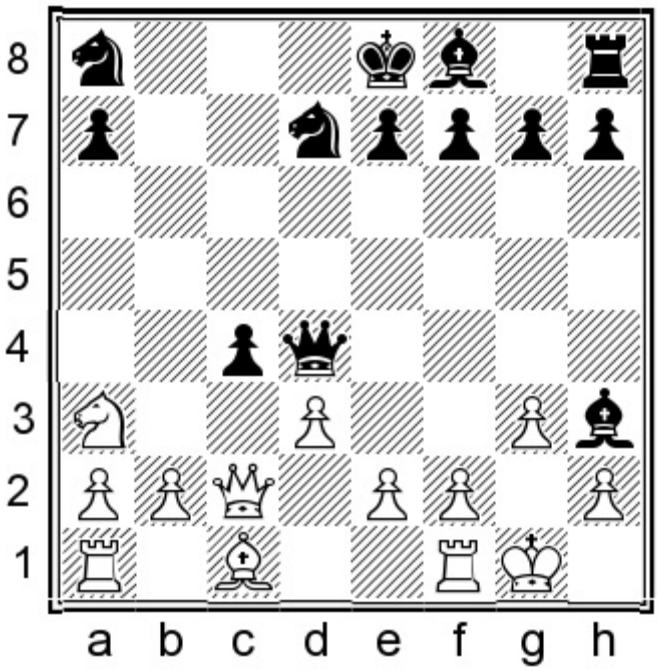
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Position after: 12...♘b6

White won in Brunello, S (2537) – Korneev, O (2573) Otranto 2011, but I even prefer to improve the game with 13.d3!N 13...♗h3 14.♘xb6 axb6 15.♕c6+ ♕d7 16.♕a8+ ♕d8 17.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 18.♖d1±

B) 10...♘fd7 11.♗xa8 ♘xa8 12.d3! Development is of course the key factor here. 12...♗h3 (12...cxd3?? would be a nice misclick: 13.♕c8#.)



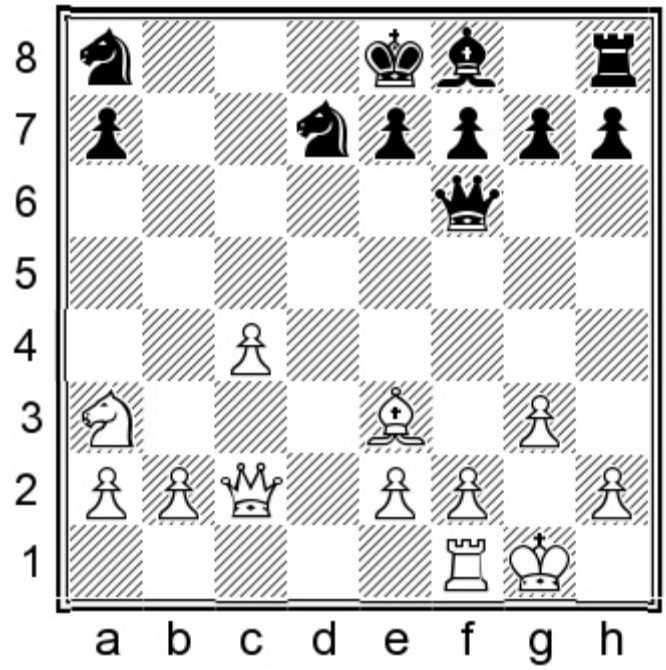
Position after: 12...♗h3

B1) 13.♖d1 is playable too, but Black gets good play after 13...♕d5! 14.f3 (14.e4N 14...♕h5

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15.♘xc4 e5!∓ with a long term attack thanks to the weak light-squares) 14...♕d4+! 15.e3 ♕f6 16.♕xc4 ♘ab6! 17.♕f4 ♕xf4 18.exf4 ♘d5∓ and I prefer Black in this awkward endgame.

B2) 13.dxc4!N 13...♗xf1 14.♗e3! ♕f6 15.♖xf1

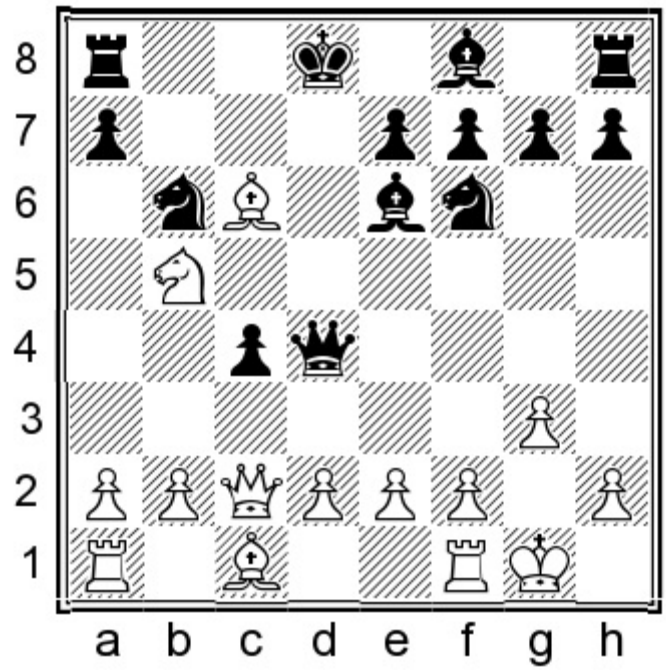


Position after: 15.♖xf1

White has two pawns for a piece. It's usually not enough, but in this case the lead in development and the weak a-pawn are more than enough for White. 15...e5! (15...a6? loses by force after 16.♕e4! ♘c7 17.♖d1 ♕e6 18.♕b7+–) 16.♘b5 We don't want to allow ...♗xa3. 16...♗e7 (16...a6? 17.♕e4!+–) 17.♘xa7 0-0 18.♖d1± The position is still complicated, but it seems easier to have three passed pawns here!

11.♘b5!

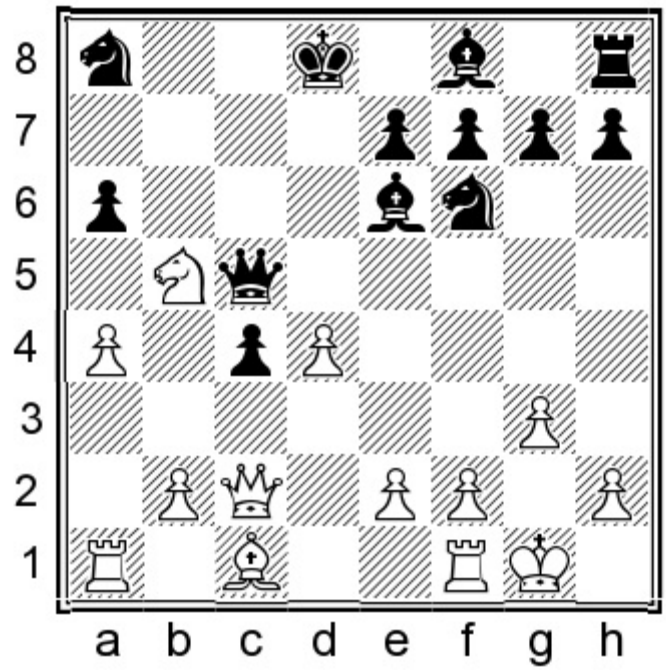
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Position after: 11.♘b5!

11...♕c5 12.♗xa8 ♕xb5!

12...♘xa8 13.a4 a6 14.d4!



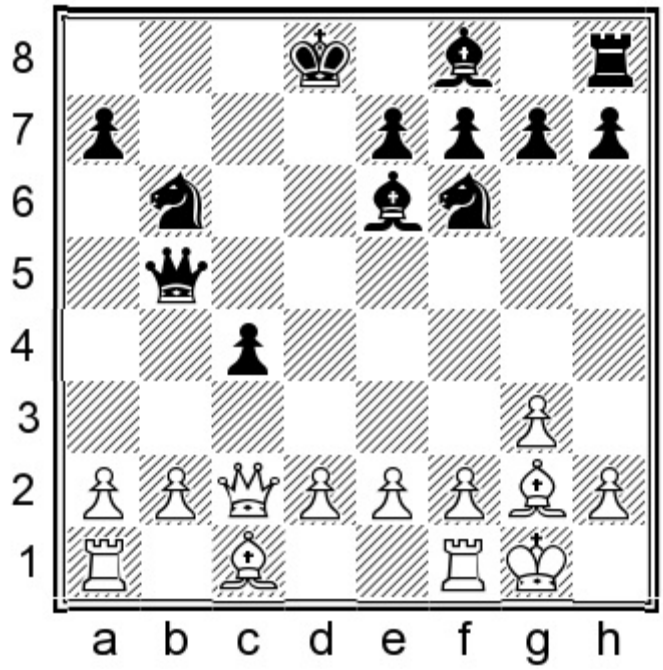
Position after: 14.d4!

This is the point behind 11.♘b5, it allows quick development! 14...♕c6N (14...♕f5?! 15.♕xf5 ♗xf5 16.♘a3 ♗e6 17.f3 ♘d7 18.♖d1± In this difficult position, Black strangely blundered with 18...♗d5 19.e4 ♗e6 20.d5 ♗h3 21.♘xc4+– 1-0 (26) Prusikin, M (2535) – Haas, C (2211) Zurich 2016.) 15.♘a3!

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♘b6 16.f3!± White's center is starting to advance, and there is nothing that can stop it.

13.♗g2



Position after: 13.♗g2

13...♗d7

This was the novelty played in Aronian, L (2830) – Andreikin, D (2709) Khanty-Mansiysk 2014. Here I prefer to disturb Black's pieces right away once again.

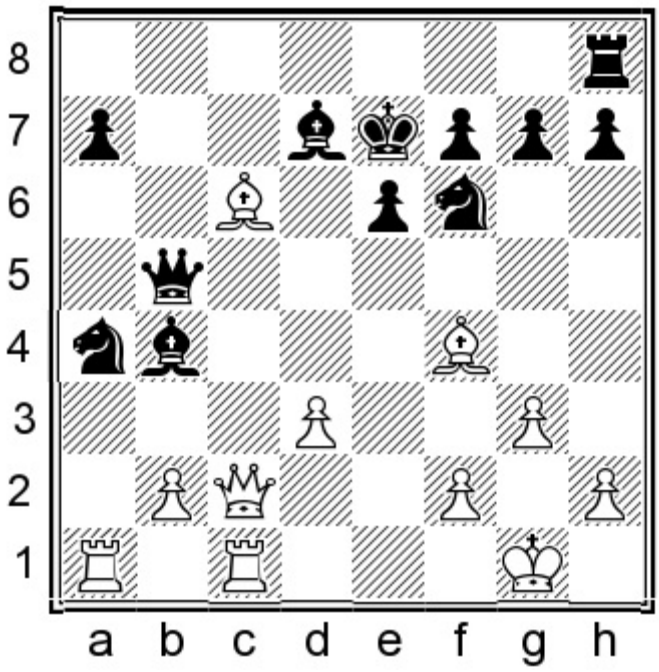
A) 13...h5 does not seem like a dangerous attack and 14.a4! disturbs Black's pieces straight away 14...♕b3 15.♕xb3 cxb3 16.e4 ♗d7 17.a5 ♘c4 18.d3 ♘e5 19.d4± 1-0 (41) Medvegy, Z (2552) – Csonka, B (2354) Zalakaros 2013.

B) 13...♗f5 was tried recently, but I don't see why it could be disturbing. 14.e4! ♗d7 Black won in the actual game, but I would now improve over White's play in Haria, R (2374) – Volkov, S (2645) Stockholm 2018, with 15.a4!N 15...♕a5 16.b4! cxb3 17.♕xb3 e6 18.d4± and White has a huge initiative.

14.a4!N 14...♕b3!

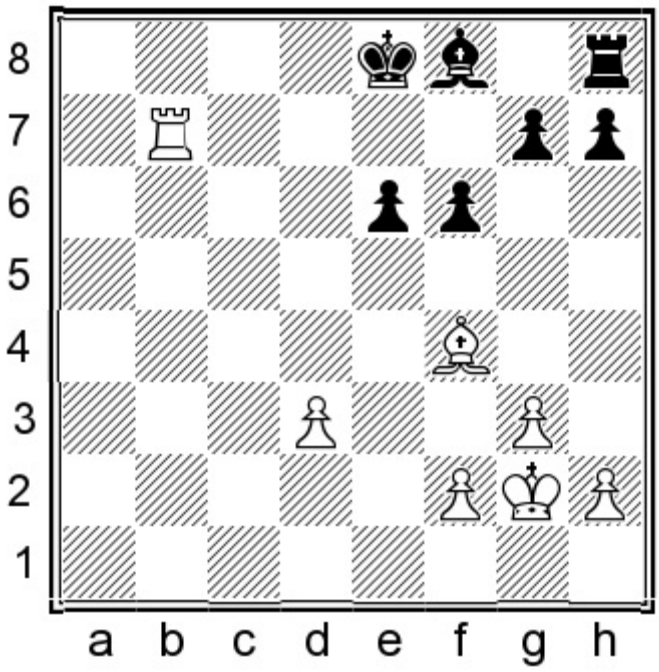
14...♘xa4 15.d3 cxd3 16.exd3 e6 17.♗f4 ♗b4 18.♖fc1 ♔e7 19.♗c6!

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Position after: 19.♗c6!

An endgame is arriving, with a nice initiative. 19...♕xc6 20.♕xc6 ♗xc6 21.♖xc6 ♘xb2 22.♖xa7+ ♘d7 23.♖xd7+ ♔xd7 24.♖c7+ ♔d8 25.♖b7 ♗f8! 26.♖xb2 f6 27.♖b8+ ♔e7 28.♖b7+ ♔e8 29.♔g2±



Position after: 29.♔g2±

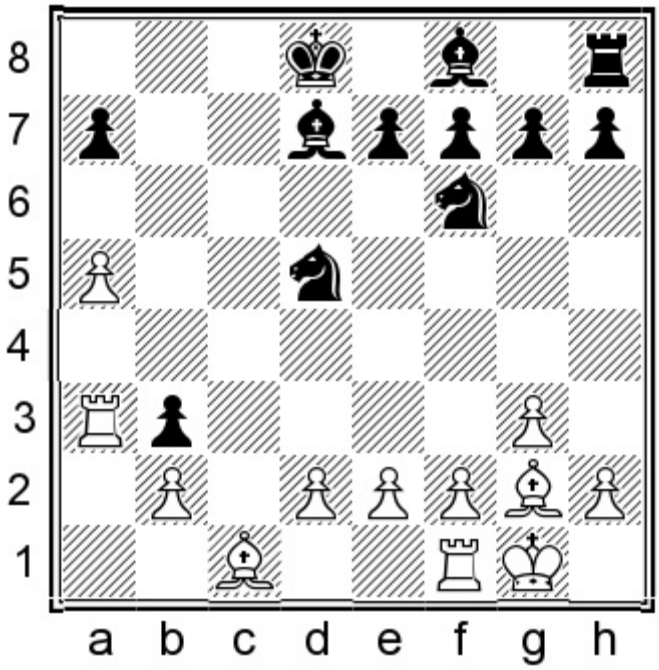
You may say, “Such a long line for so little result?”. I can understand.

Sometimes in these kinds of forced tactical lines, there is nothing better than a draw if your opponent does not commit any mistake. Here you can still try to make him crack, because it is not clear how he

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reorganizes his pieces.

15.♕xb3 cxb3 16.a5 ♘bd5 17.♖a3



Position after: 17.♖a3

We take the important b3-pawn, but the line does not stop here.

17...e6 18.♖xb3 ♗b4 19.e4!

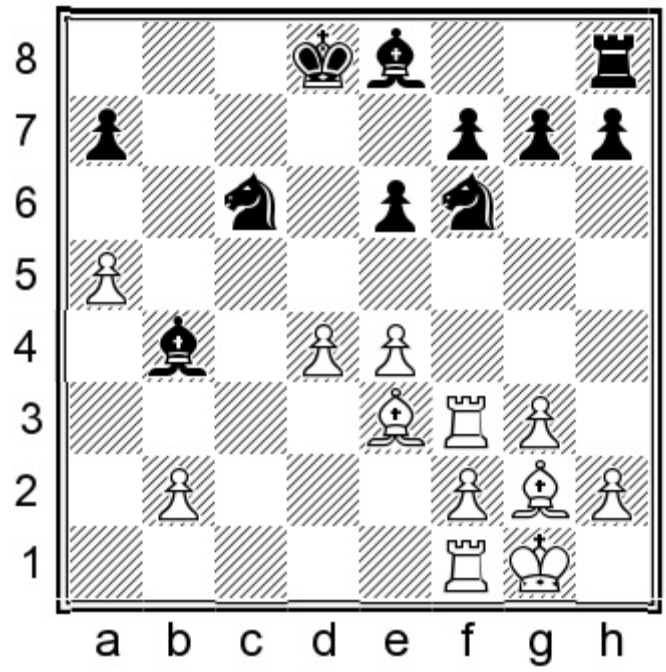
19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.e4 ♗a4 21.♖f3 ♘e7 22.♖xf7 ♖g8=

19...♗a4! 20.♖f3 ♘e7 21.d3

21.e5 ♘fd5 22.♖xf7 ♖g8 23.♗xd5 exd5 24.♖f4 ♘c6 25.♖f7=

21...♗e8 22.♗e3 ♘c6 23.d4!

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Position after: 23.d4!

And I would prefer to play White, even if it's still really complicated. For example, in the event of...

23...♘xe4

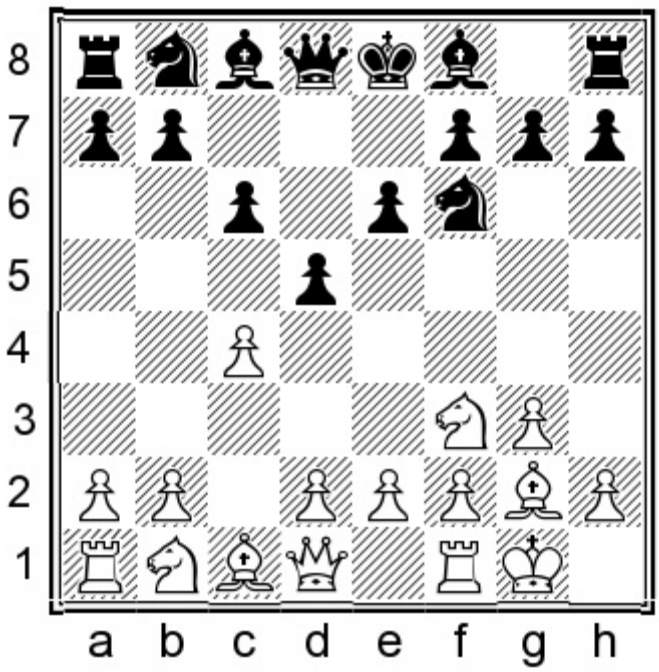
White opens some files and gets some play against the black king:

24.d5 exd5 25.♖d1↑

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Chapter 9
Semi-Slav 4...e6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 e6 5.0-0



Chapter guide

Chapter 9 – Semi-Slav 4...e6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 e6 5.0-0

a) 5...--

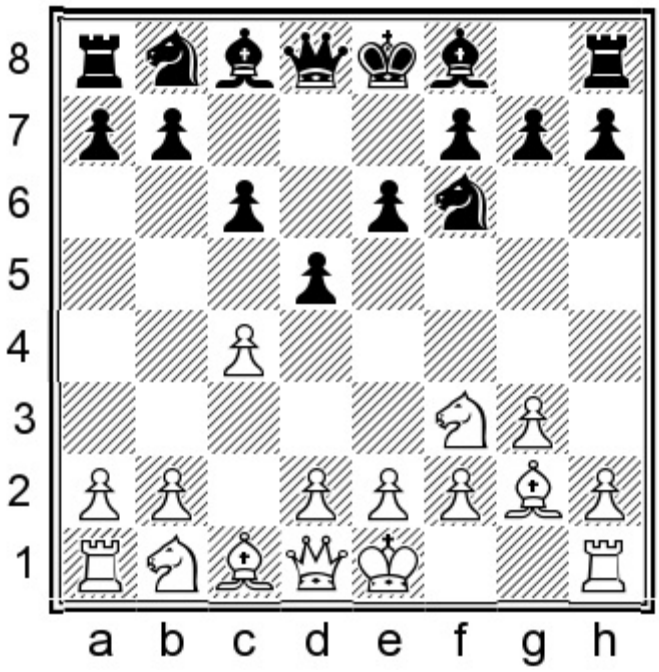
b) 5...♗d6

c) 5...♗e7

a) 5...--

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 e6

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Position after: 4...e6

Among the many theoretical debates a 1.d4 player has to face, the Semi-Slav Defense is one of the most complicated. Against the Reti, this is less the case. We are playing quite slowly, and Black doesn't seize the opportunity to take more space in the center, as he has played both ...c6 and ...e6. Nevertheless, it is without doubt one of the most solid systems.

5.0-0 dxc4!?

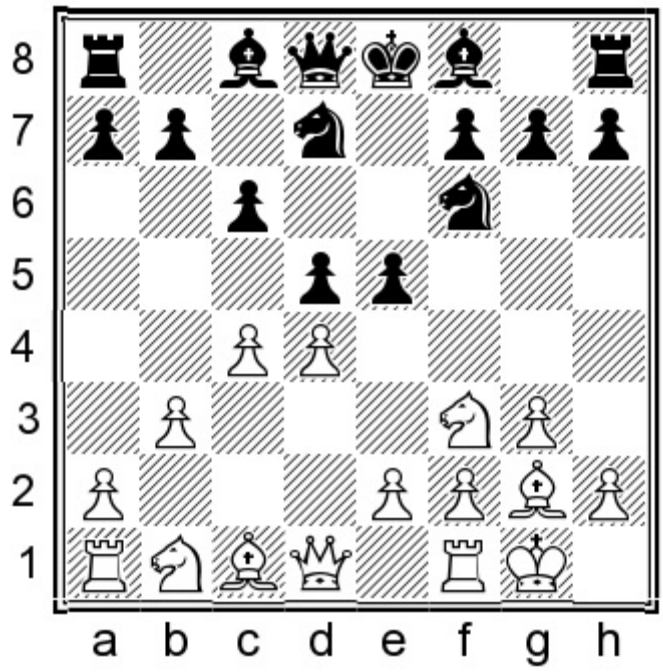
This is not the main move in this exact position, but it can transpose into 4...dxc4 5.0-0, which is covered in chapter 7 if Black plays 5...e6. I consider it here, as I feel it's more about a Semi-Slav variation than a real Slav.

5...♘bd7 This move is not particularly useful, as Black will play ...♗d6 or ...♗e7 on the next move. Let's see what happens if he tries to play differently after 6.b3:

A) 6...a5 We have already met this move on several occasions, and have learned by now that the best is to prevent ...a4 if we can. 7.♘c3 And we easily manage to, as ...d4 is not playable for Black here. 7...♗b4 8.♗b2 0-0 9.a3! ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 a4 11.cxd5! ♘xd5?! 12.♗b2 axb3 13.♕xb3±.

B) 6...e5!? We are a tempo up compared to the line with 4...♘bd7 of chapter 7, but this extra tempo is the move b3, so we have to play differently. 7.d4!

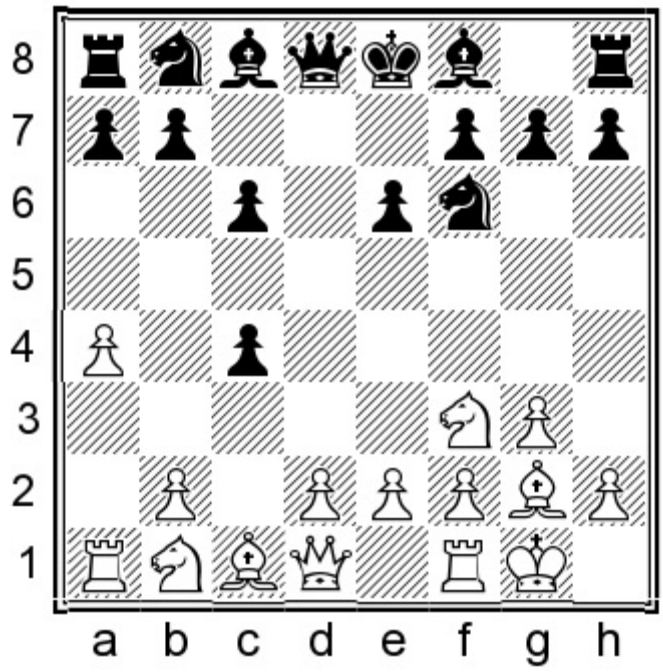
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Position after: 7.d4!

7...e4 8.♘h4!? I like this idea. We keep the tension in the center until Black can find a way to develop his bishop on f8 without fearing ♘f5. It leaves only a few choices. 8...♗b4 (8...g6 9.♘c3 ♗g7 10.♗a3! It's not so bad to have this extra b3, is it?) 9.a3 ♗a5 10.b4 ♗c7 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.f3!± White opens the position, and will be able to bring his knight into battle via the f5-square.

6.a4!



Position after: 6.a4!

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It is necessary to start with this move if we want to get our pawn back. It is a bit weakening, especially the b4-square, but it prevents ...b5. Also, after ♘a3/...♗xa3, it allows the recapture with the rook, which is an important difference. Black can't really allow White to retake easily on c4, otherwise he will have problems with his development as he has already played ...e6.

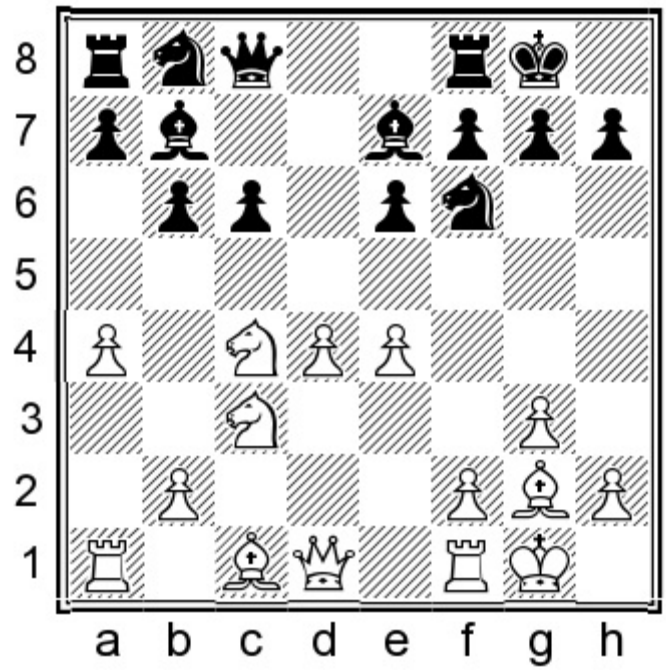
If I haven't mentioned it yet, it must be said that these variations have already been treated in another book. Of course, it's Volume 2 of the trilogy Mihail Marin wrote on the English Opening. Theory hasn't changed much until now, and although I haven't compared our two works, I can imagine that there are most probably some similar lines in this book. It's hard to argue against a great theoretical analyst like the Romanian chess trainer Marin!

6.♘a3?! now fails because of 6...b5! 7.♘e5 ♗xa3 8.♘xc6 ♕b6 9.♘xb8 ♗b7 10.bxa3 ♖xb8∓ with clearly the better game for Black.

6...♘a6!

Black immediately takes advantage of the weakness we just created.

A) 6...b6?! is too slow to be strong. 7.♘e5! ♗b7 8.♘xc4 ♗e7 9.♘c3 0-0 10.d4 ♕c8. This occurred in the quite old game Vanderwaeren, S (2252) – Goloshchapov, A (2574) Leuven 2003, where Black struggled to survive, and we can even improve now with 11.e4!N



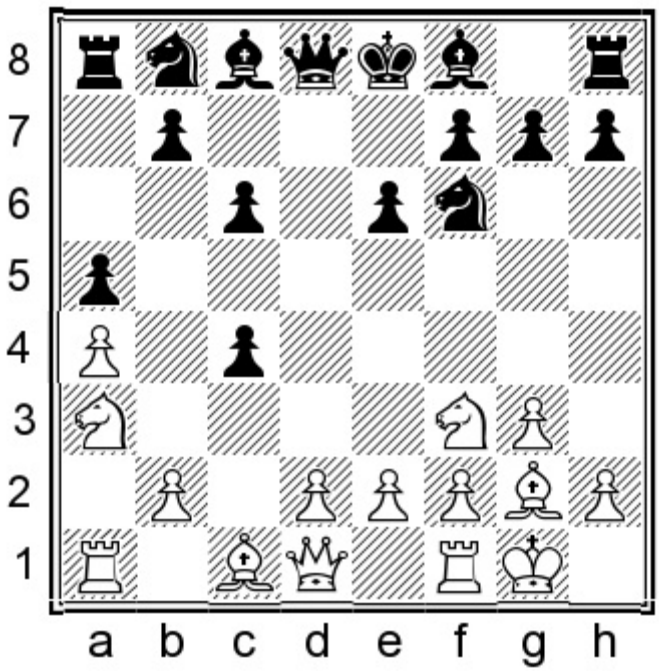
Position after: 11.e4!N

A1) 11...c5?! 12.d5 ♖d8 (12...exd5 13.exd5 ♖d8 14.♖e1±) 13.d6!?± e5?! 14.f4!+– There is no way to stop White's massive advance in the center.

A2) 11...♖d8 12.♗g5! (e5 now comes as the threat) 12...♕c7 13.e5 ♘e8 14.♗xe7 ♕xe7 15.♘e4± Trading the dark-squared bishops was very important in terms of being able to use the d6-square.

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B) 6...a5!? Black has a pawn majority on the queenside, and already improves his pawns there. It also secures the weakness on the b4-square. 7.♘a3



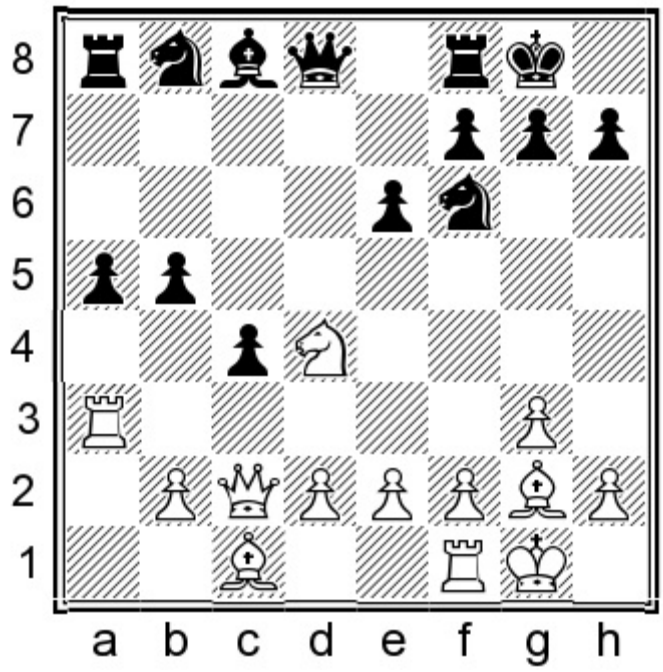
Position after: 7.♘a3

B1) 7...♘a6 8.♘xc4 ♗e7 9.d4 0-0 This all appeared in Tomashevsky, E – Sjugirov, S Budva 2009. It's possible to play in a different manner than 'the Professor' with 10.♗d2!?N 10...♘b4 11.♕b3 ♘e4 12.♗xb4. We are giving up the bishop pair, but have also taken care of the annoying knight. 12...♗xb4 13.e3± White will slowly increase the tension and try to advance in the center. Black doesn't have any counterplay at his disposal.

B2) 7...♗xa3!?

B2.1) 8.♖xa3 does not satisfy me here. The issue is that after 8...0-0 9.♕c2 b5! is surprisingly strong. (9...♕d5?! 10.b3! cxb3 11.♖xb3 ♘a6 12.♗a3 ♖e8 13.d4⩲ with serious compensation.) After 10.axb5 cxb5 11.♘d4 Black takes over the initiative with the strong intermediate move...

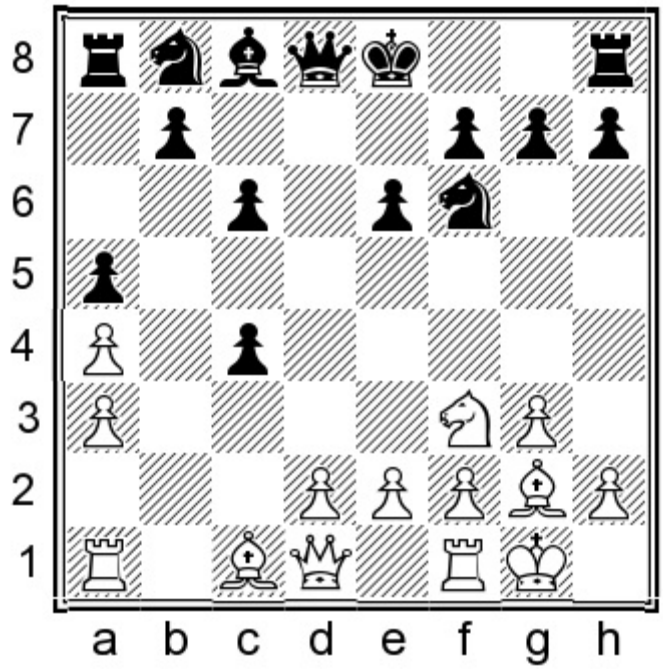
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Position after: 11.♘d4

11...b4! 12.♖a1 ♖a7 13.♕xc4 ♗a6∓

B2.2) 8.bxa3!



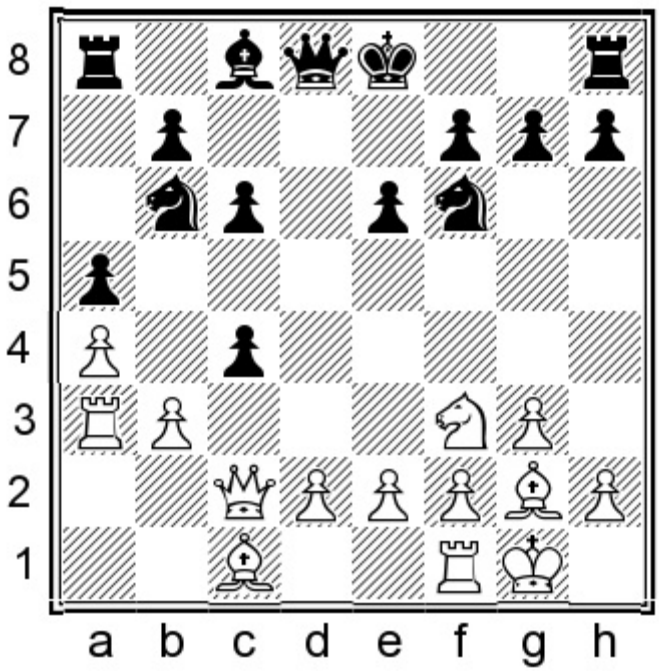
Position after: 8.bxa3!

8...0-0 9.♕c2 ♘bd7N (9...b5?! was refuted by White in the following game: 10.♖b1! ♗a6 11.axb5 cxb5 12.♘d4 ♕xd4 13.♗xa8 ♘d5 14.♗b2 ♕a7 15.♗xd5 exd5 16.♕f5± Tomashevsky, E – Korneev, O Dresden 2007) 10.♕xc4 ♕e7 11.♗b2 e5 12.d3! ♖e8 13.♖ac1± Black is already missing his dark-

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squared bishop.

C) 6...♘bd7 7.♘a3! ♗xa3 8.♖xa3 a5 (8...e5 9.♕c2 ♕e7 10.♕xc4 e4 was given by Watson, but Black has some problems here too: 11.♘g5! ♘b6 12.♕c2 ♗f5 13.a5 ♘bd5 14.♖a4 ♘b4 15.♕c4 c5 16.f3!±) 9.♕c2 ♘b6 10.b3!



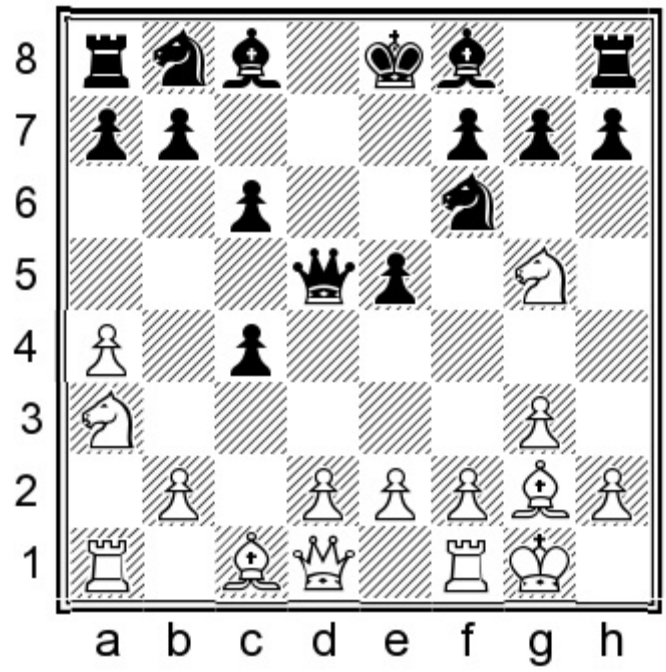
Position after: 10.b3!

Black managed to defend his pawn quite safely, but with awkward moves. Thus we can give up a pawn and open the position. 10...cxb3 11.♖xb3 ♘bd5 (11...0-0 12.♗a3 ♖e8 13.♖fb1 ♘bd7 14.d4! e5 15.e4!±; 11...♘xa4?? 12.♖d3+–) 12.♗a3! ♘b4 A sad necessity to be able to castle. 13.♗xb4 axb4 14.♖xb4 0-0 15.♖fb1 ♕e7 16.d4!± and I don't see what Black will do with his poorly placed pieces.

D) 6...♗e7?! obviously lacks sense as after 7.♘a3!± Black should normally take on a3.

E) 6...♕d5!? This surprising move has appeared in a dozen games, especially in one by the top GM Hikaru Nakamura. 7.♘a3! (After 7.♘c3?! ♕a5!= is stronger than Nakamura's ...♕h5. Even if Black has lost some time, his c4-pawn is now difficult to attack.) 7...e5! This is the logical continuation, but after 8.♘g5! White's activity is going to increase:

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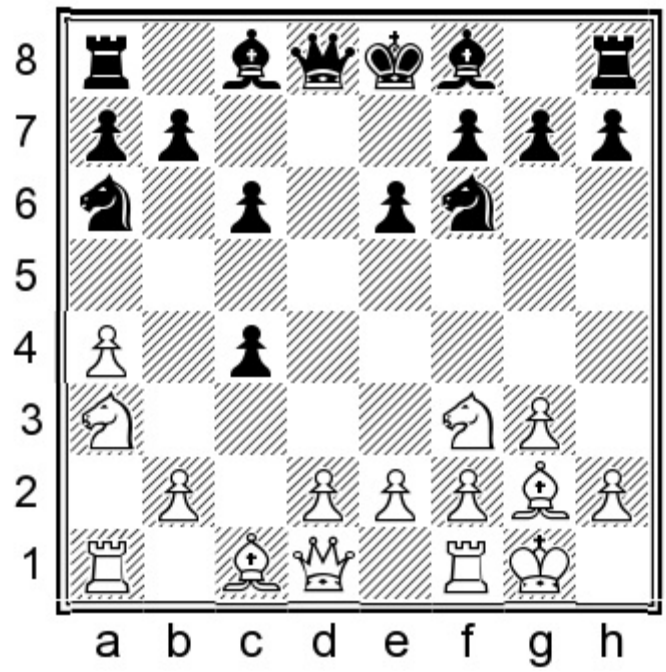


Position after: 8.♘g5!

E1) 8...♕d4 9.d3! cxd3? (9...♗xa3 10.♖xa3 0-0 11.♘f3 ♕c5 12.♖c3 ♕e7 13.♖xc4±) 10.♕b3! ♕d7 11.♗h3!+–

E2) 8...♕c5 9.d3! cxd3 10.♕xd3 h6 11.♖d1 ♕e7 12.♘e4⩲ We have a great lead in development, and thus fine compensation!

7.♘a3

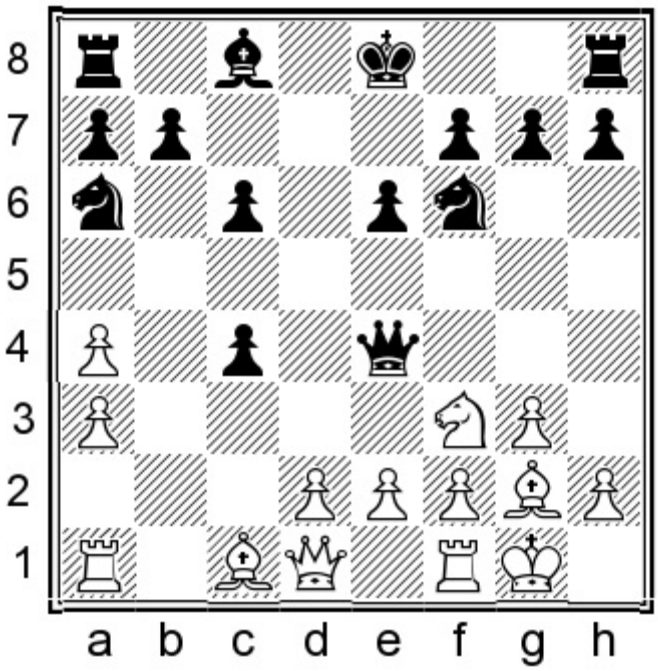


Position after: 7.♘a3

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7...♗xa3

7...♕d5?! 8.♕c2 ♗xa3 (8...♘b4 9.♕xc4 ♕xc4 10.♘xc4 ♗e7 11.d4± As the bishop on c8 seems poorly, this kind of endgame is always undoubtedly good for White.) 9.bxa3! This prevents the knight from coming to b4, and accelerates our development. 9...0-0 (9...♕e4 10.♕d1! We don't trade here!



Position after: 10.♕d1!

10...0-0 11.♗b2±) 10.♗b2 ♕c5 11.♕c3! ♖d8 12.♖fc1 b6 13.♖ab1 ♗b7 14.♘e5± Black still has problems in activating his pieces.

8.bxa3!?

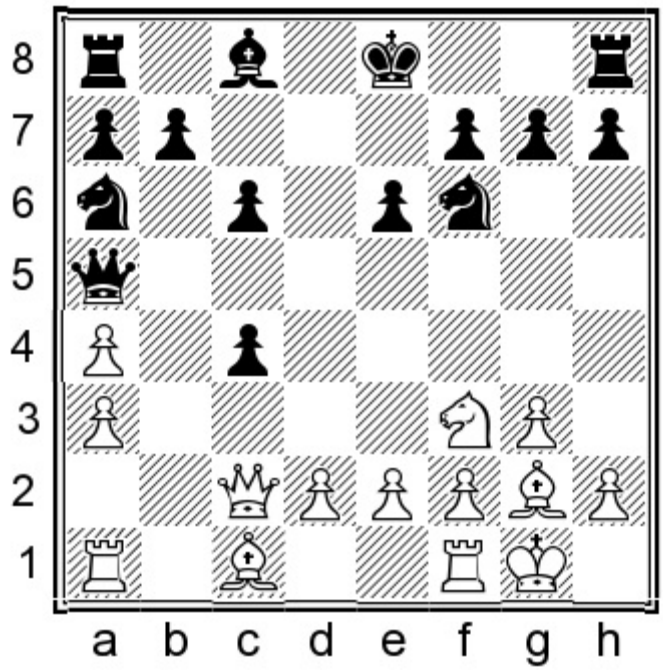
8.♖xa3 is also correct, but White's play seems less straightforward in that case.

8...♘c5

The move that has been played in all three games with this position.

A) 8...♕a5N 9.♕c2

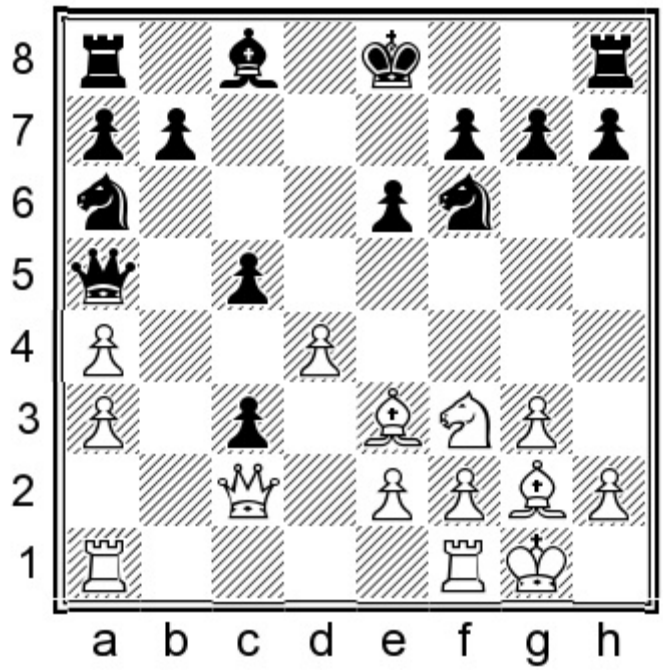
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Position after: 9.♕c2

A1) 9...♘c5?! is too naive: 10.♕xc4! ♘xa4 11.d3 ♘b6 12.♕c2 0-0 13.a4!±. It has taken some time for Black to capture one of the doubled a-pawns. Our counterplay on the b- and c-files will be really powerful, in addition to our two strong bishops. White can look forward to a great game.

A2) 9...c3! Black surrenders his c-pawn but tries to damage White's pawn structure. 10.d4! (10.dxc3 e5!=) 10...c5 Trying to free the c5-square for his knight. 11.♗e3!



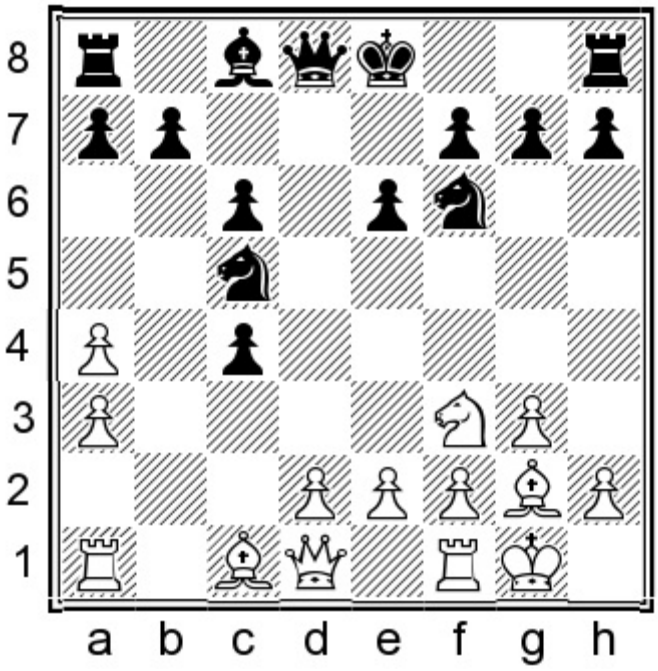
Position after: 11.♗e3!

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A2.1) 11...♘d5 12.♖ac1 ♘xe3?! This is surprisingly bad. (12...♗d7 13.♘e5 ♗xa4 14.♘c4 ♗xc2 15.♘xa5 ♗a4 16.dxc5 c2 17.♘xb7 ♔e7 18.♗d4 ♖hc8 19.e4!↑) 13.fxe3 0-0 14.♕xc3 ♕xa4 15.dxc5± Our structure is damaged, but Black's pieces clearly lack activity and we will soon obtain a strong initiative.

A2.2) 11...♗d7 12.♘e5! ♗xa4 13.♘c4 ♗xc2 14.♘xa5 ♘d5 15.♖fc1! (An improvement over the line 11...♘d5 12.♖ac1 ♗d7, where we got the same position with the a-rook on c1.) 15...♗a4 16.dxc5 c2 17.♗d4!⩲ The position is still rather complicated, but engines prefer White. If he can get rid of the annoying c2-pawn, he will be able to make good use of his two bishops.

B) A correspondence game continued as follows: 8...♕b6 9.♕c2 ♕b3 10.♕xb3 cxb3 11.a5!? e5 12.♘xe5 ♗e6 13.♖b1 0-0-0 14.d3± where White finally managed to win the b3-pawn and the game Konstantinov – Mokeev CP 2015.



Position after: 8...♘c5

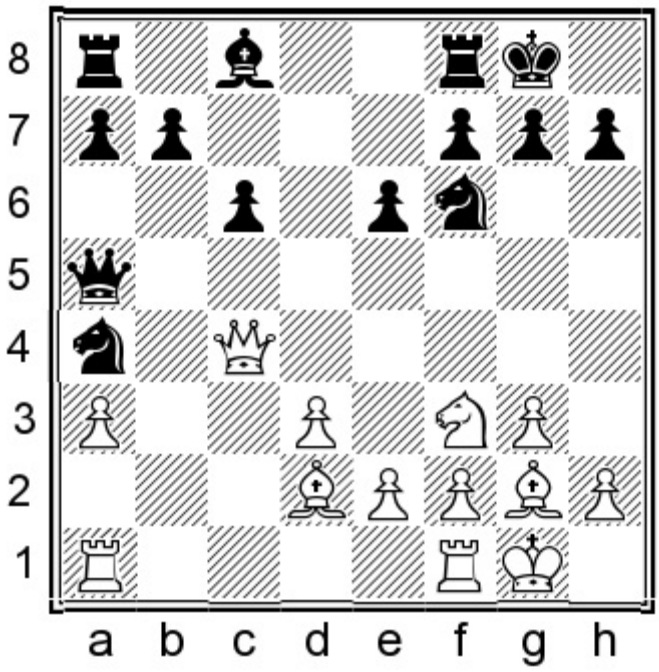
9.♕c2!N

9.♖b1 0-0 (9...♕a5 10.♖b4 c3 11.dxc3 0-0 1-0 (28) Hillarp Persson, T (2596) – Dreev, A (2660) Helsingor 2009 12.♖h4!?N gives some interesting play, as the rook surprisingly finds a safe place in order to launch the attack.) 10.♕c2 has appeared twice, but if Black plays 10...♕a5!N this is a slightly better version for him than our main line.

9...0-0

9...♕a5?! 10.♕xc4 ♘xa4 11.d3 0-0 12.♗d2!

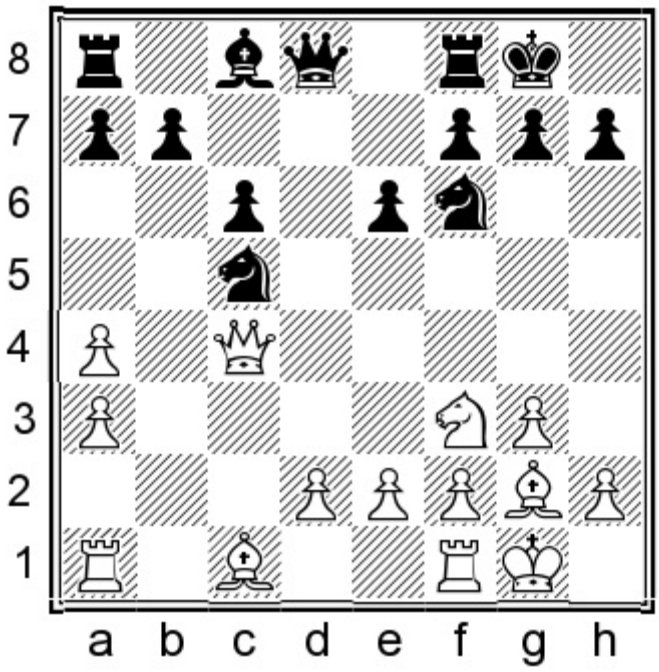
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Position after: 12.♗d2!

The black queen must go to an exposed square. 12...♕b5 13.♕h4 ♘b6 14.a4! ♕h5 15.♕xh5 ♘xh5 16.a5 ♘d5 17.♘e5!± With more than enough compensation, thanks to the huge pressure on the queenside.

10.♕xc4



Position after: 10.♕xc4

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10...b6

10...♕d5 11.♕c2 e5 12.♗b2 e4 13.♘d4 ♖e8 14.f3!± opens everything in White's favor!

11.d3 ♗a6 12.♕c2 ♘b7

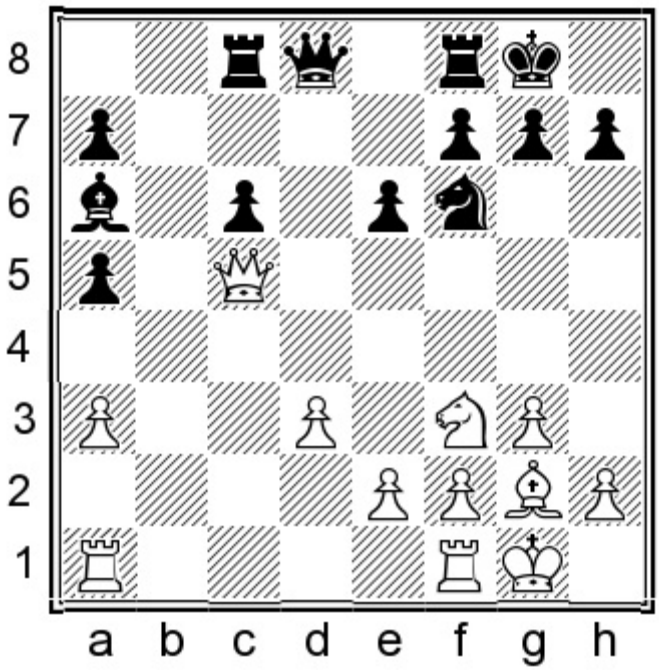
12...♖c8?! 13.a5!± trades one of our weak a-pawns.

13.♗d2

13.♕xc6?? ♖c8–+

13...♖c8 14.a5! ♘xa5 15.♗xa5 bxa5 16.♕c5±

White has given up a pawn, but he is now the one with the better structure, and will most likely regain his pawn soon.

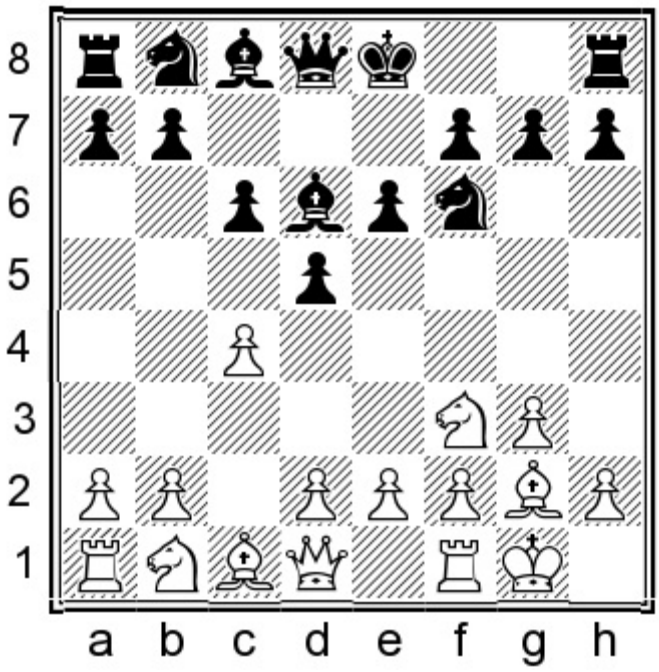


Position after: 16.♕c5±

b) 5...♗d6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 e6 5.0-0 ♗d6

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Position after: 5...♗d6

This is the most common place for the bishop in the Semi-Slav lines.

As Black doesn't need to unpin the knight on f6, the bishop is not doing much on e7, and some players prefer to have it on d6, in order to help play ...e5 at some point.

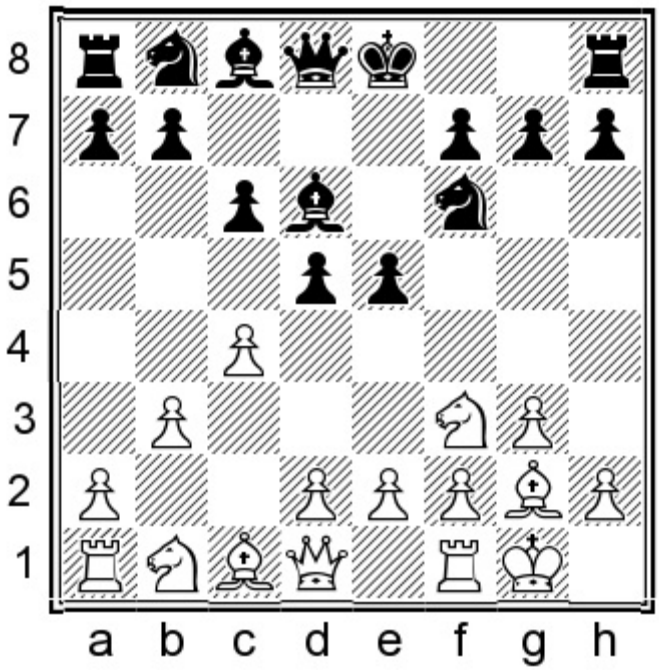
6.b3

Once again, this move fits perfectly with our Reti set-up!

6...0-0

6...e5 is a move we have to consider:

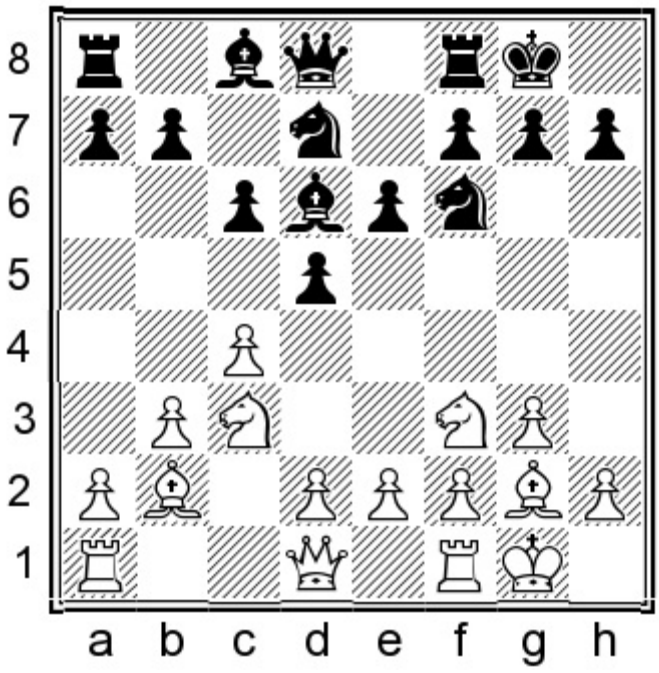
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Position after: 6...e5

7.♗b2 Inviting Black to keep advancing his pawns. 7...♕e7 (7...e4?! 8.♘e1!N 8...0-0 9.cxd5 cxd5 10.d3! ♖e8 11.dxe4 dxe4 12.♘d2 ♗f5 13.♘c2± Our knights are finding nice squares on e3 and c4.) 8.d4 e4 9.♘e5 ♘bd7 10.f4! We must keep our strong knight at any price. 10...exf3 (10...0-0 11.e3±) 11.exf3 0-0 12.f4 ♘e4 13.♘c3 ♘df6 14.f5!?↑ With promising pressure on the kingside.

7.♗b2 ♘bd7 8.♘c3!



Position after: 8.♘c3!

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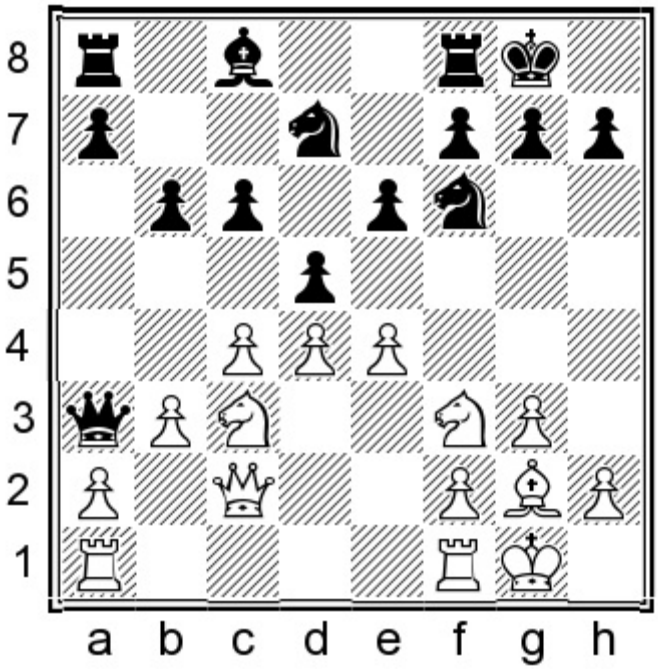
8.d4!? At this point, you can still return to a ‘d4’ set-up if you wish. The aim is to quickly play ♘bd2, ♕c2 and e4, in order to open the center.

8...e5

Of course, Black has many other moves, but this looks the most principled to me.

A) 8...♖e8 9.♕c2! e5 10.cxd5 cxd5 11.♘b5! ♗b8 12.♖fc1±

B) 8...♕e7 9.♕c2 ♗a3 Black tries to simplify the position. 10.♗xa3 ♕xa3 11.d4 b6 12.e4

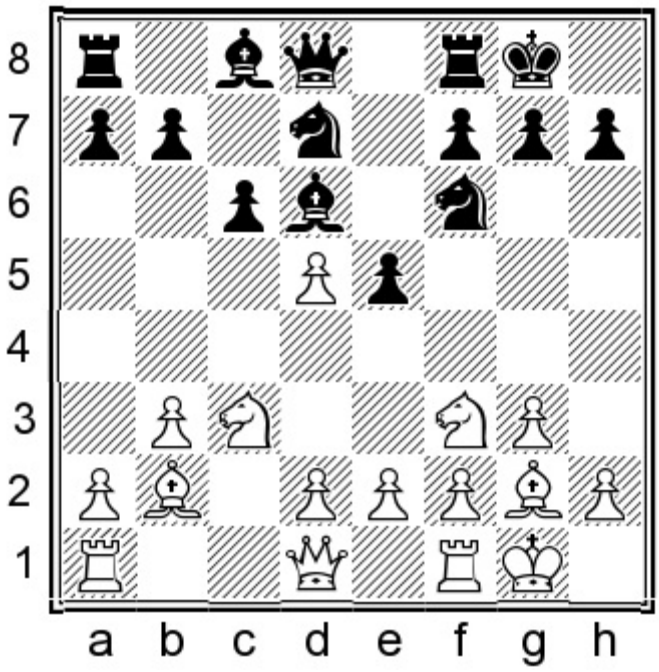


Position after: 12.e4

Of course, we want to open the long diagonal. 12...dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4 ♗b7 15.♖fd1. In the following instructive game, White used a really simple plan which worked very well: 15...♖fd8 16.♖d2 a5 17.♕f4 ♖ac8 18.♖ad1 a4 19.♘e5!±. You definitely need to have a look at the game Filip, M (2510) – Liljedahl, L (2260) Skopje 1972 (1-0).

9.cxd5

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Position after: 9.cxd5

9...cxd5

9...♘xd5 a strange decision, as Black doesn't keep his strong center. I believe White can keep the upper hand here. 10.♘e4! This resembles a Sicilian structure with reversed colors; White wants to keep as many pieces as possible. 10...♗c7 11.d3 f5 (11...♕e7 12.♘ed2 ♖d8 13.a3 ♘c5 14.♕c2↑) 12.♘ed2 ♕e7 13.♕c1± Δ 13...♖e8?! 14.e4!±

10.♕c2!

The queen finds a good square here, both eyeing the c-file and the f5-square. The c-file doesn't seem that important, but it gives White some options.

Black might already feel comfortable, but that's not the case and he must be very precise now.

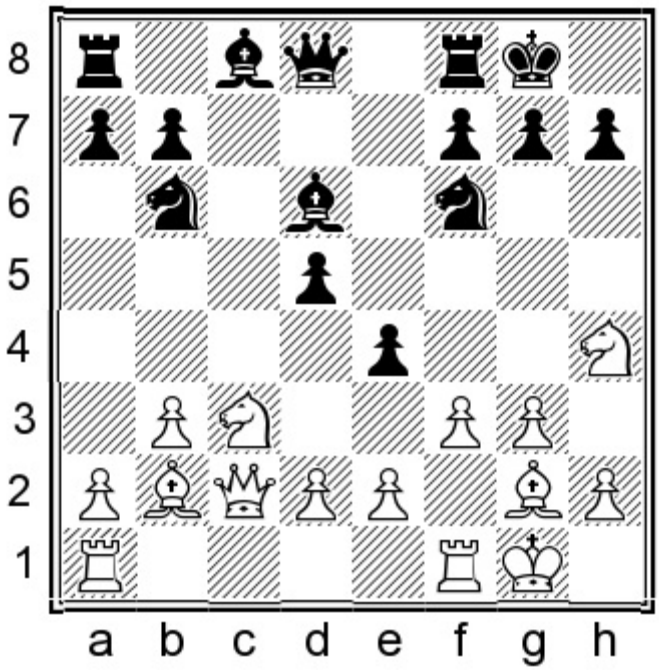
10...a6!?

A) 10...e4?! 11.♘h4

A1) 11...♘e5 12.♘b5 ♗b8 13.♖ac1± Δ 13...g5?! 14.♘c7!+– (14.f4!?±)

A2) 11...♘b6 12.f3!

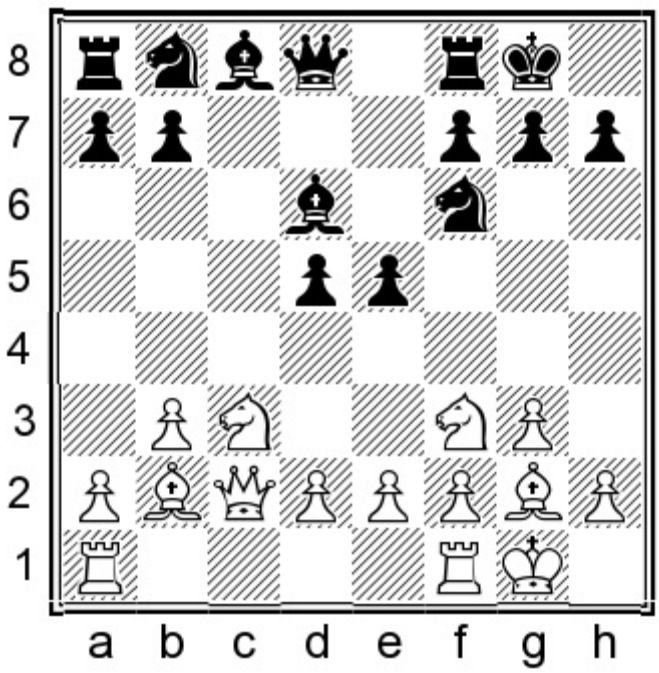
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Position after: 12.f3!

12...g5?! 13.fxe4 gxh4 14.♖xf6!! ♕xf6 15.♘xd5 ♕g6 (15...♘xd5 16.♗xf6 ♘xf6 17.d4± This completely unbalanced position looks great for White thanks to his strong center.) 16.♘f6+ ♔h8 17.♖f1± White will regain some material and keep the better position.

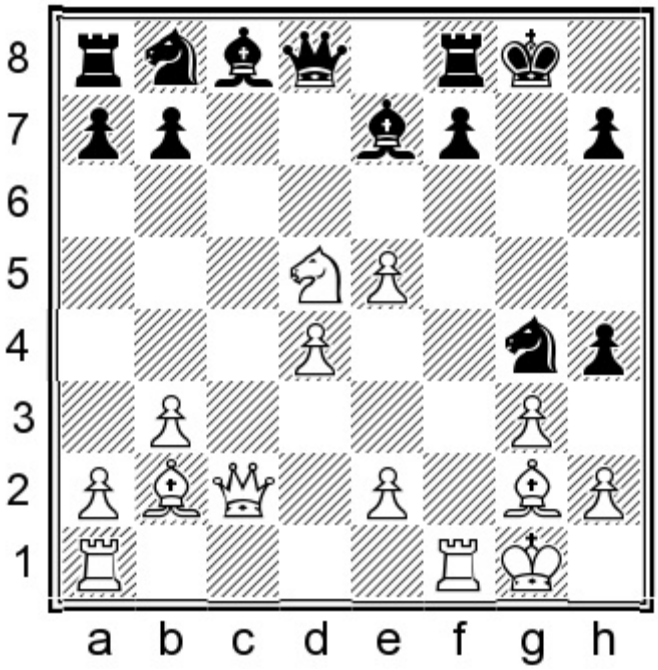
B) 10...♘b8!?N Hard to believe, but playable. The knight finds a much better square on c6, where it closes the c-file, lets the c8-bishop breathe, and protects the center. White needs to use these two tempi in an active way.



Position after: 10...♘b8!?N

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11.♘h4! ♗e7 (11...♗e6 12.d4 e4 13.f3 exf3 14.♘xf3 ♘g4 15.♕d2 ♘c6 16.♘g5±; 11...d4 12.♘b5± This is simply good for White.) 12.d4 e4 13.f3↑ The opening of the center favors White, and once again Black can't really try to grab the lonely h4-knight. 13...g5?! 14.fxe4 gxh4 15.e5 ♘g4 (15...♘e4 16.♘xd5! ♕xd5 17.♗xe4 ♕e6 18.d5+–) 16.♘xd5±

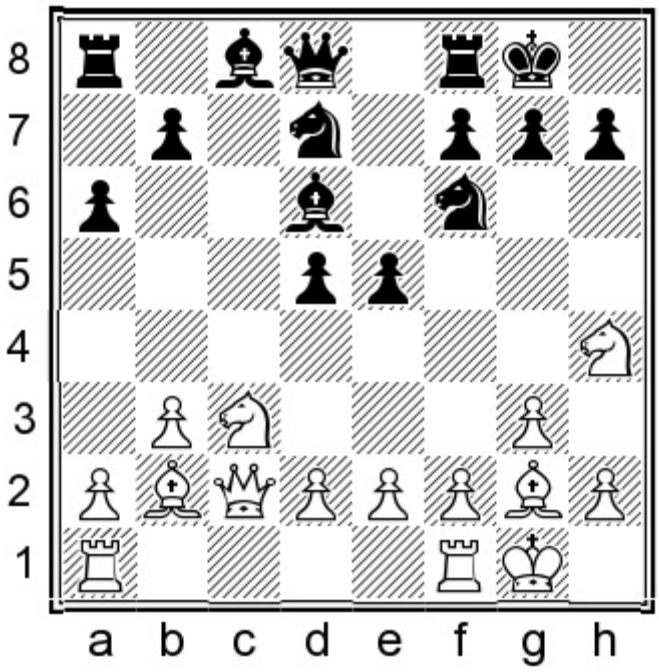


Position after: 16.♘xd5±

White has more than enough compensation. His center is mobile and strong, and the bishop on b2 will soon become an aggressor versus the black kingside.

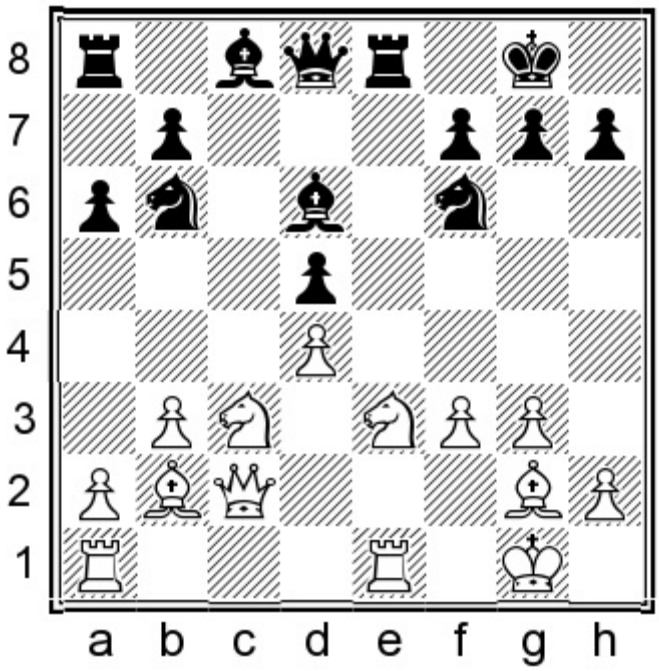
11.♘h4!

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Position after: 11.♘h4!

11...♘b6 12.♘f5 ♗b8 13.d4!N 13...e4 14.♘e3 ♗d6 15.f3! exf3 16.exf3 ♖e8 17.♖fe1±



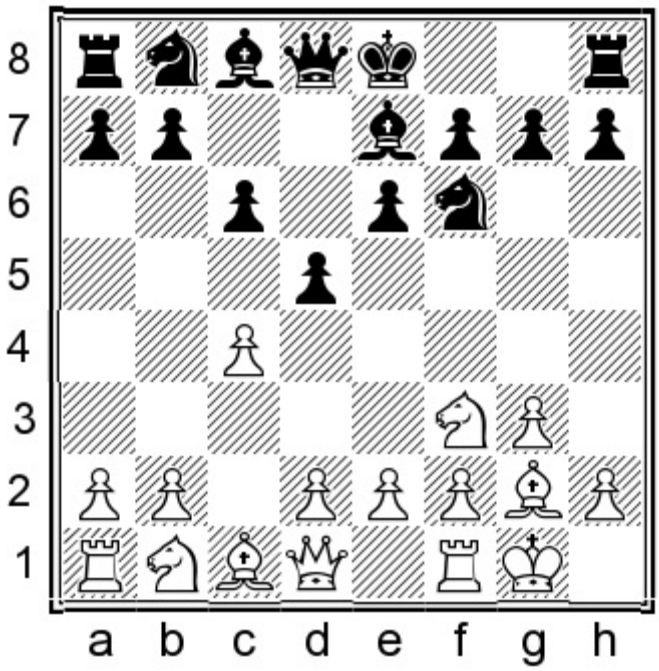
Position after: 17.♖fe1±

And White has the more active pieces.

c) 5...♗e7

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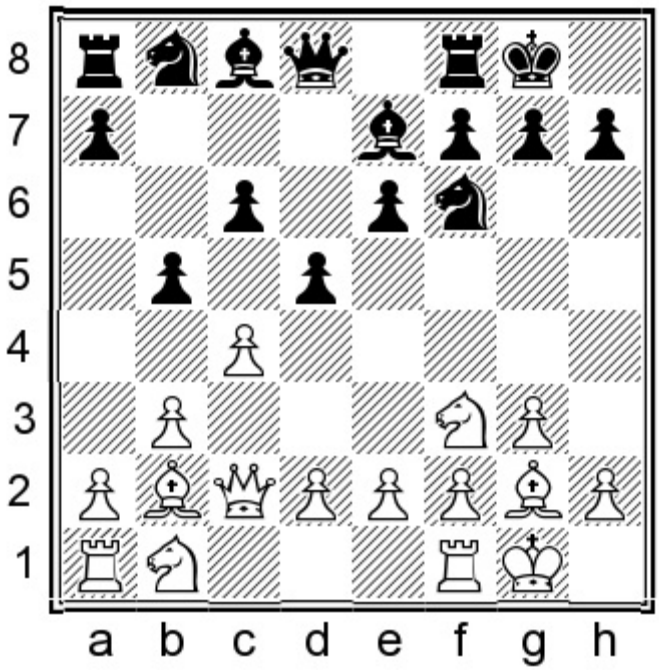
1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 c6 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 e6 5.0-0 ♗e7



Position after: 5...♗e7

6.b3 0-0 7.♗b2 ♘bd7

7...b5 An interesting try that has been played a few times recently. 8.♕c2



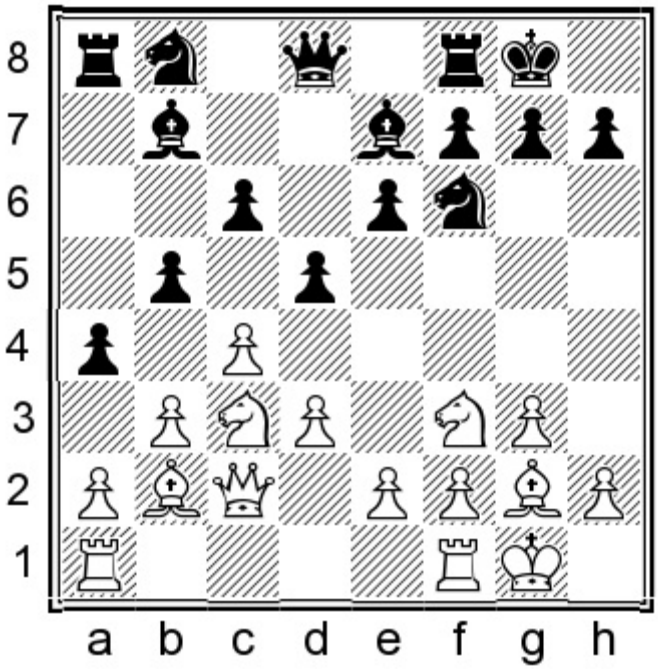
Position after: 8.♕c2

A) 8...a5 This is a really concrete approach. This time, ...a4 is coming, and we won't be able to

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respond with b4, as c4 must still be protected. 9.c5! Closing the center is not usual in our Reti lines, but it's the best option. Of course, we will try to advance e2-e4 in the near future. 9...♘bd7 10.d4 ♘e4! This is the best way to prevent e4-ideas. 11.♘bd2 f5 The game transposes into different set-ups. For instance, the following game was actually reached through a Catalan move order. White wisely reorganized his pieces with 12.♘e1! ♗f6! 13.♘xe4 fxe4 14.f3 exf3 15.♘xf3 a4 16.b4 ♖f7?! 17.e4!±. As predicted, we now open the center. White got an overwhelming advantage that he converted in Kohlweyer, B (2420) – Spraggett, K (2565) Metz 1993.

B) 8...♗b7 9.d3 a5 10.♘c3 a4



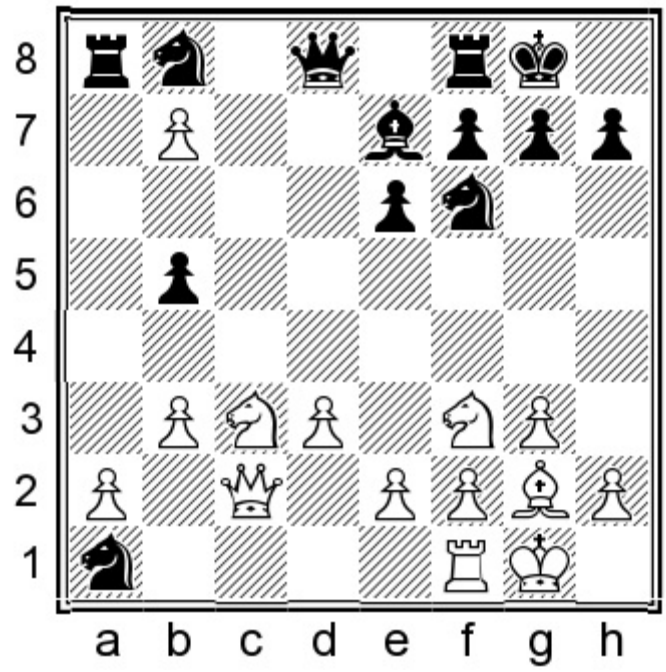
Position after: 10...a4

B1) 11.cxd5 has been played once, but there is a problem:

B1.1) 11...exd5 12.bxa4 b4 13.♘d1 ♕a5?! (13...c5 14.♘e3 ♖e8 15.a3! ♘c6 16.d4!↑) 14.♘e3 ♕xa4 15.♕c1 ♗c8 16.♘d4 occurred in Flores, D (2567) – Kovalyov, A (2643) Medellin 2017, and White is much better.

B1.2) 11...a3! 12.dxc6?! Unfortunately, this doesn't work. The nice refutation is 12...axb2 13.cxb7 bxa1=♘!

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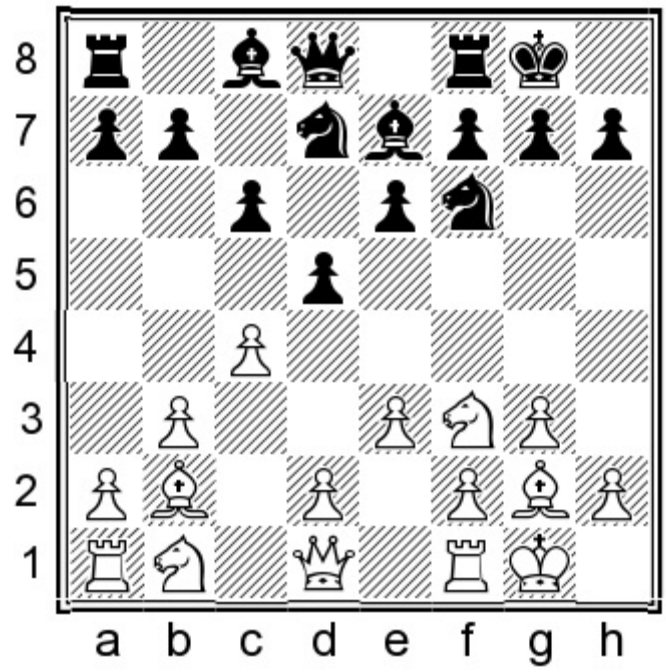


Position after: 13...bxa1=♘!

14.bxa8=♕ ♘xc2 15.♘xb5∓

B2) 11.cxb5!N 11...a3 12.♗c1 cxb5 13.♘xb5 ♘c6 14.♘fd4±

8.e3



Position after: 8.e3

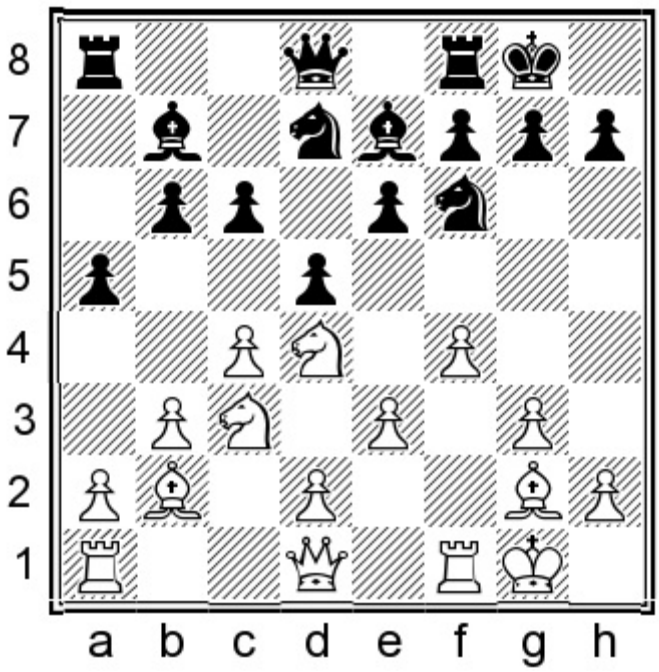
8...b6

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8...a5 9.♘c3 b6

A) 10.♕c2 is a bit timid and too classical: 10...♗a6 11.d3 ♖c8 12.♖fd1 ♕c7 13.♖ac1 ♕b8 14.e4 b5 15.exd5 cxd5 16.♘d4?! bxc4 17.dxc4 and now my opponent missed his chance by playing 17...♗b7? (17...dxc4! 18.♘c6 ♖xc6 19.♗xc6 ♘e5∓) 18.cxd5 ♗xd5? 19.♘xd5! ♖xc2 20.♘xe7+ ♔h8 21.♘xc2+– 1-0 (25) Demuth, A (2529) – Nasshan, D (2345) Karlsruhe 2017.

B) 10.♘d4!? My favorite idea. 10...♗b7 11.f4!N



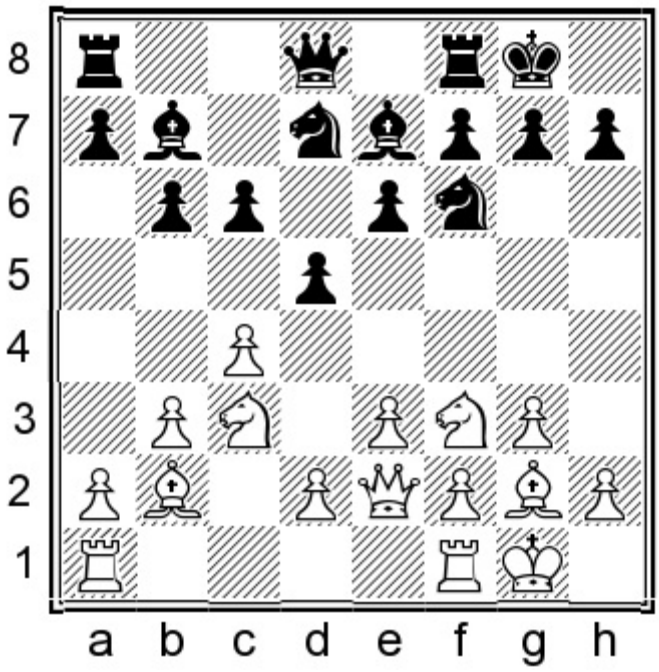
Position after: 11.f4!N

Quite strange, but the knight is actually stable on d4 (...c7-c5 is ugly because of the b5-square and ...e7-e5 only helps White right now). 11...♘c5 12.d3! ♕d7 13.g4!?↑ I like White's prospects on the kingside, and the fact that Black is quite unable to react in the center right now.

9.♘c3 ♗b7 10.♕e2

Black is playing exactly the same system as in the 6...b6 lines of chapter 5, the Neo-Catalan, except that his c-pawn is on c6 instead of c5. Of course it looks less logical, and ...c5 is always a logical continuation here, accepting being a tempo down.

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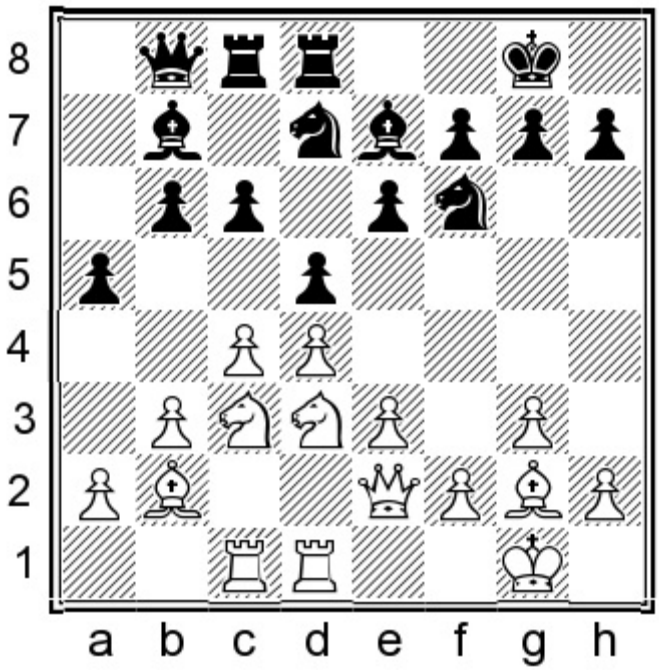


Position after: 10.♕e2

10...♖c8 11.d4 ♕c7 12.♖fd1 ♖fd8 13.♖ac1 ♕b8 14.♘e1!?N

A possible improvement, relocating the knight to better squares (sometimes d3 and then f4, depending on what happens in the center).

14...a5 15.♘d3↑



Position after: 15.♘d3↑

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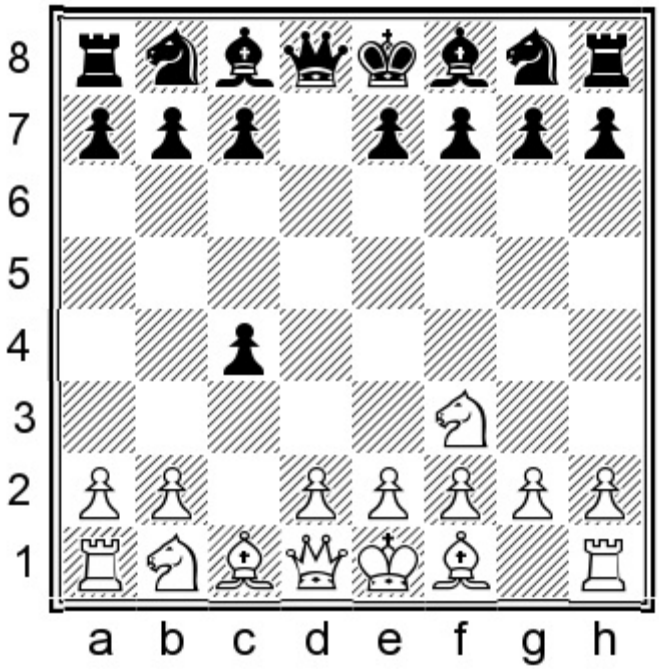
White is ready to meet ...c5 with cxd5, leaving Black with a weak d-pawn. He is well organized in the center, and intends to continue with e4 at the correct moment!

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Part III
1...d5 – Other Systems 1.♘f3 d5 2.c4

Chapter 10
QGA-like 2...dxc4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4



Chapter guide

Chapter 10 – QGA-like 2...dxc4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4

a) 3.--, 3.e3 --

b) 3.e3 ♘c6

c) 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2 --

d) 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2 a6 7.♖d1 ♘c6

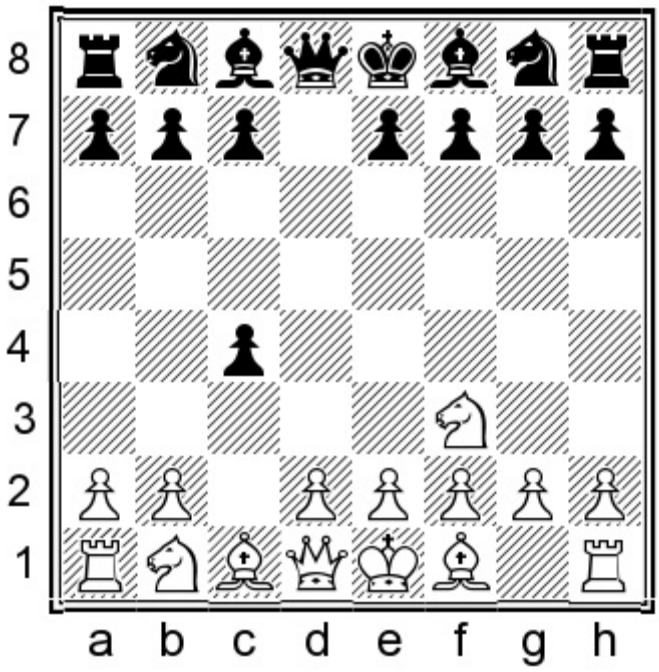
e) 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2 a6 7.♖d1 b5

f) 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.0-0 a6

a) 3.--, 3.e3 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4

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Position after: 2...dxc4

For a player who prefers the Queen's Gambit Accepted against 1.d4, our move order is quite tricky. He can't really play 2...c6 or 2...e6, as 3.d4 will force him to enter lines that he is not used to playing. That's why he will probably turn to one of the two moves 2...dxc4, which I cover here, or 2...d4, which will be covered in the next chapter. Of course other players might also want to enter these variations, especially the 2...d4 line.

3.e3!

This move doesn't lack ambition. It's similar to the main lines of the Queen's Gambit Accepted, but doesn't necessarily transpose (if we were to play d4).

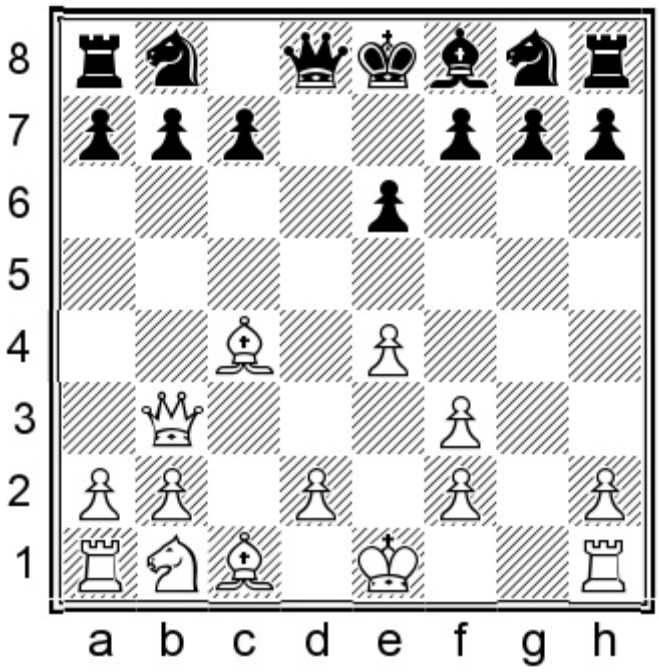
We will choose whether to play d3 or d4, depending on which set-up Black uses. It also prevents a few variations for Black. First, let's check why other options are not perfect for White:

A) 3.♘a3 a6! 4.♘xc4 b5!↑ Unfortunately, e5 is not safe, and we have to find an ugly square for our knight.

B) It's not easy to play in the spirit of the Neo-Catalan because Black can respond 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2 ♘c6!=, intending to play ...e5 in one move, and he has a comfortable game.

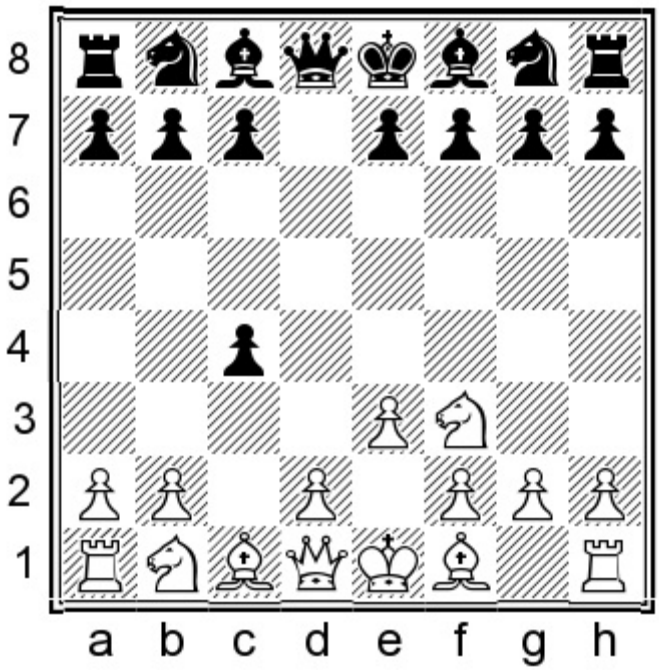
C) 3.e4 is possible, but there is one major problem: 3...♗g4! 4.♗xc4 e6. This prevents any tricks with ♗xf7+, and White has some problems with the d4-square. The principled move is 5.♕b3 but Black can sacrifice his b7-pawn: 5...♗xf3! 6.gxf3

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Position after: 6.gxf3

6...♘c6!? (6...♗c5!?N is probably even stronger, but needs analysis) 7.♕xb7 ♘d4 8.♗b5+ ♔e7 9.b3 f6 10.♗c4 ♔f7↑ with good play for Black in Cornette, M (2579) – Stevic, H (2607) Drancy 2016, 0-1 (62).



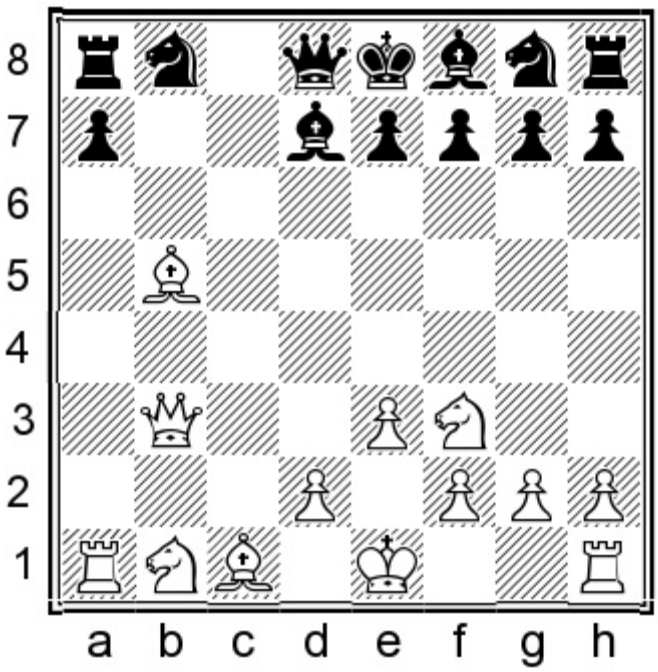
Position after: 3.e3!

3...♗e6!?

This always deserves attention, as it's sometimes not so simple to get the pawn back.

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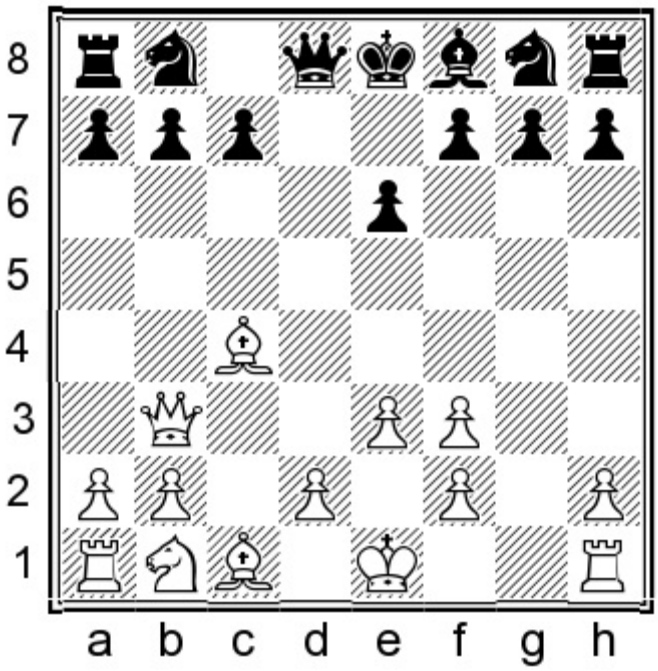
A) 3...b5?! 4.a4! c6 (4...b4± looks like the lesser evil, but it proves that 3...b5 isn't great.) 5.axb5 cxb5 6.b3↑ cxb3 7.♗xb5+ ♗d7 8.♕xb3±



Position after: 8.♕xb3±

This position is typically good for White. He has good chances to win the a-pawn in the middlegame, and his extra pawn in the center is very important.

B) 3...♗g4 4.♗xc4 e6 Black tries the Romanishin Variation of the Queen's Gambit Accepted. (3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗g4), but there is a concrete problem with this move order: 5.♕b3! ♗xf3 Black hasn't any other choice, otherwise ♘e5 is coming. 6.gxf3



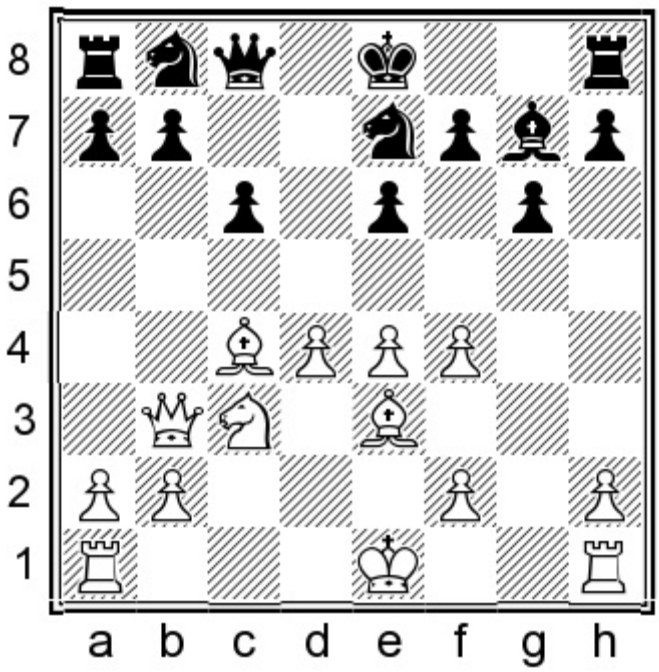
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Position after: 6.gxf3

B1) 6...♘d7?! simply doesn't offer Black enough compensation: 7.♕xb7 ♖b8 8.♕xa7 ♖b4 9.♗e2 ♘e7 10.♘c3 ♘c6 11.♕a6 ♖b6 12.♕d3 ♕g5 13.f4 ♕g2 14.♕e4+– appeared in Fridman, D (2635) – Efroimski, M (2316) Douglas 2014, which was easily won by White thanks to his two extra pawns.

B2) 6...b6 is quite ugly, e.g. 7.d4 ♘f6 8.♘c3 transposing to a dubious line of the Romanishin Variation: 8...♗e7 9.d5!? exd5 10.♘xd5 0-0 11.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 12.♗d2±.

B3) 6...♕c8 White has the bishop pair, a mobile and strong center, and a lead in development. He has many ways to continue, for instance Sjugirov decided to start with 7.f4!? (7.♘c3, as a friend of mine played recently, is playable as well: 7...♘d7 8.f4 ♘e7 9.♕c2 ♘f5 10.b3 c6 11.♗b2±. White has a nice position and won convingly in Libiszewski, F (2530) – Alekseenko, K (2594) chess.com 2018) 7...c6 8.d4 ♘e7 (8...♘f6 9.♘c3 ♗e7 10.e4!? is pretty similar) 9.e4! g6 10.♘c3 ♗g7 11.♗e3

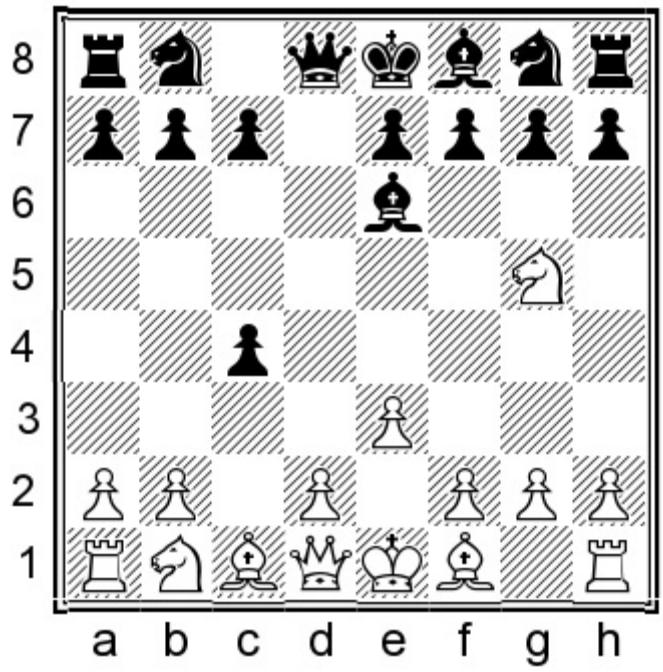


Position after: 11.♗e3

White is ready to castle on opposite wings and launch an attack with f4-f5 or h4-h5. 11...b5 12.♗d3 ♘d7±. Seeing the previous moves, White should have changed his mind (even if he eventually won after 13.f5?! in Sjugirov, S (2678) – Asgarizadeh, A (2424) Moscow 2015), and played 13.a4!N 13...a6 14.axb5 cxb5 15.♕a3→.

4.♘g5!

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Position after: 4.♘g5!

The critical move!

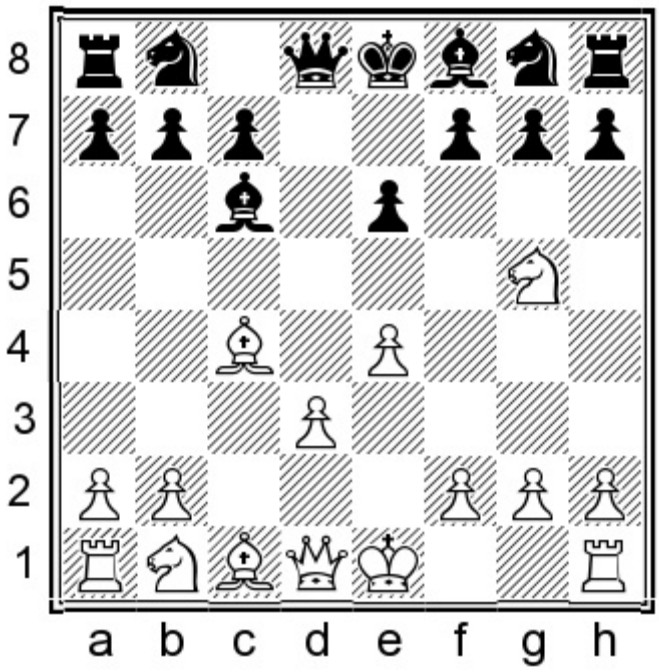
4.♘a3 c5 5.♘xc4 ♘c6 6.b3 ♘f6 7.♗b2 g6⇄ was seen in Larsen, B (2565) – Ljubojevic, L (2620) Brussels 1987. This is playable of course, but it seems that White lacks enough activity to cause Black any trouble.

4...♗d5 5.e4! e6!

This is not the main move, but I think it's the most interesting one.

A) 5...♗c6 6.♗xc4 e6 7.d3!

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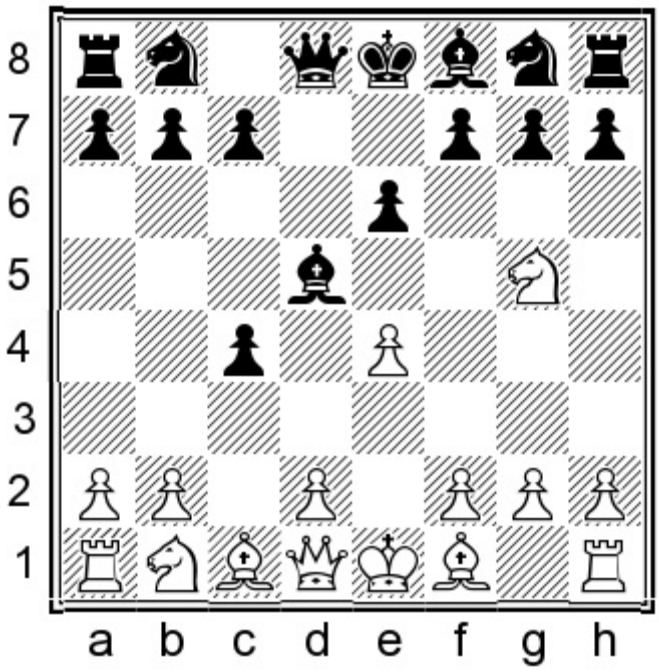


Position after: 7.d3!

Of course we have a hole on d4, but Black's bishop on c6 is completely misplaced, preventing both ...c5 and ...♘c6. We will push d4 later in order to dominate the center. 7...♘f6 (7...♗e7 8.♕g4!? ♘f6 9.♕h3!→ Grandelius, N – Sokolov, I, Stockholm 2010 9...h6?? 10.♘xf7! ♔xf7 11.♕xe6+ ♔e8 12.♕f7+ ♔d7 13.♗e6+ ♔d6 14.♗f4+ ♔c5 15.♗e3++– The black king won't survive very long.) 8.♘c3 h6 9.♘f3 ♗e7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♕e2± White is finally ready to advance to d4 on the next move: Van der Sterren, P (2520) – Flear, G (2495) Wijk aan Zee 1987, 1-0 (31).

B) 5...h6 isn't great, even if we get a strange structure: 6.exd5 hxg5 7.♗xc4± (the g5-pawn is weak as well, and we should be able to force Black to play ...c6 at some point) 7...♘f6?! 8.♕b3! ♕c8 9.d4 g4 10.♗f4±

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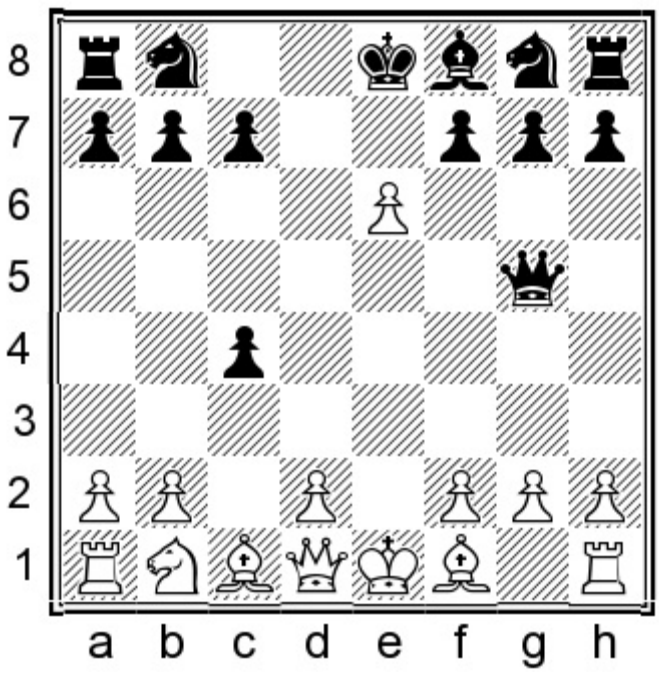
Position after: 5...e6!

6.d4!N

A smart way to improve the position and protect the g5-knight!

A) 6.♘xf7?! ♔xf7 7.exd5 exd5∓

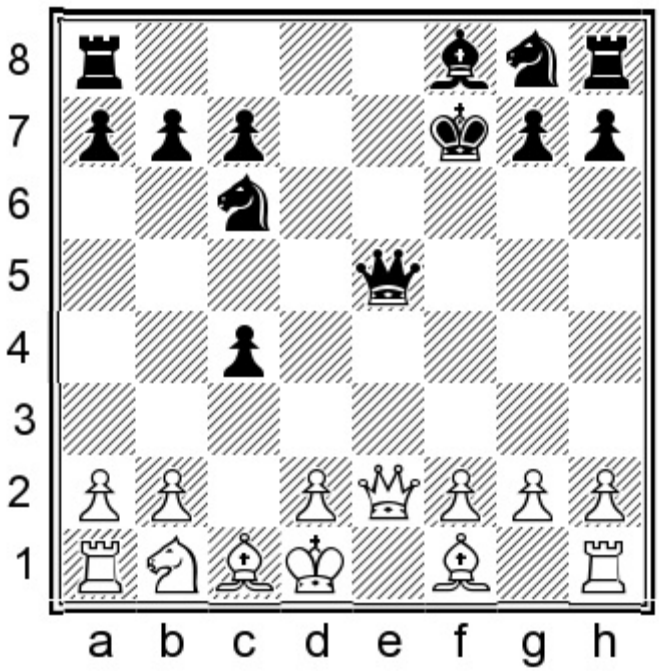
B) Delchev's recommendation 6.exd5 ♕xg5 7.dxe6 has been played a few times, but I think there are different paths to equality:



Position after: 7.dxe6

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B1) 7...♕e5+!? 8.♕e2 ♘c6! (8...♗d6? 9.♕xe5 ♗xe5 10.exf7+ ♔xf7 11.♗xc4+±; 8...♕xe2+ 9.♗xe2 fxe6 10.♗xc4 ♘f6 11.♘c3 ♔f7 12.0-0 ♗d6 13.f4±) 9.exf7+ ♔xf7 10.♔d1!



Position after: 10.♔d1!

Even if it might seem crazy, this move is clearly the best, but Black can still keep the balance by means of 10...g6! (10...♖e8 11.♕f3+ ♔e7 12.♗xc4 ♔d8 13.♘c3 ♘f6 14.d3↑; 10...♕xe2+ 11.♗xe2 ♘e5 12.b3!∞) 11.♕xc4+ (11.♕f3+ ♔g7 12.♗xc4 ♘f6 13.♘c3 ♗d6↑) 11...♔g7 12.f4! ♕d6⇄.

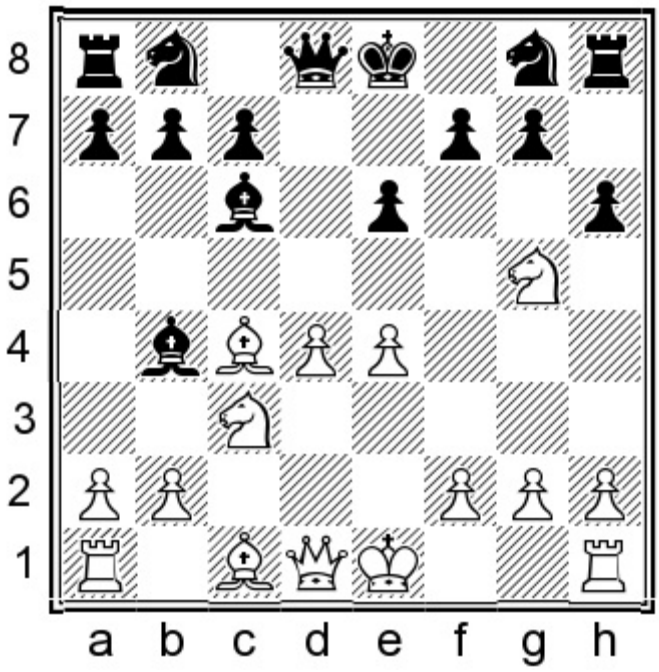
B2) 7...fxe6! is probably simplest. 8.d4! ♕g6 9.♗e2! White needs to spend this tempo if he wants to castle and not allow ...♕xg2. 9...♘f6 10.0-0 ♘c6 11.♗xc4 0-0-0 Black has a good lead in development, and d4 can't be saved any more. 12.♗e3 (12.♗xe6+ ♔b8 13.d5 ♗c5! 14.♘c3 ♘d4∓) 12...♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♕e4⇄ with a complicated game where Black is not inferior.

6...♗b4+

6...♗c6 7.♘c3! (7.♗xc4 ♗e7 8.h4 h6 9.♘xe6 fxe6 10.♕h5+ ♔f8 11.♗xe6 ♕e8!∞) 7...♗e7?! (7...b5?! 8.d5 exd5 9.exd5 ♗d7 10.a4 b4?! 11.♕f3! is even worse for Black than 7...♗e7 11...♘f6 12.♘ce4! c3 13.bxc3 bxc3 14.d6!±; 7...♗b4 transposes into 6...♗b4) 8.♘f3 b5 9.d5 exd5 10.exd5 ♗d7 11.a4 b4 12.♘b5 a6 13.♘bd4 ♘f6 14.♗xc4 0-0 15.♗f4±

7.♘c3 ♗c6 8.♗xc4 h6

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Position after: 8...h6

9.♘f3!

A necessary pawn sacrifice that gives White nice activity.

9.♘xe6!? fxe6 10.0-0 ♕e7 11.d5! ♗d7 12.e5⩲ is pretty interesting according to our engines, but there is no need to enter these complicated lines.

9...♗xe4

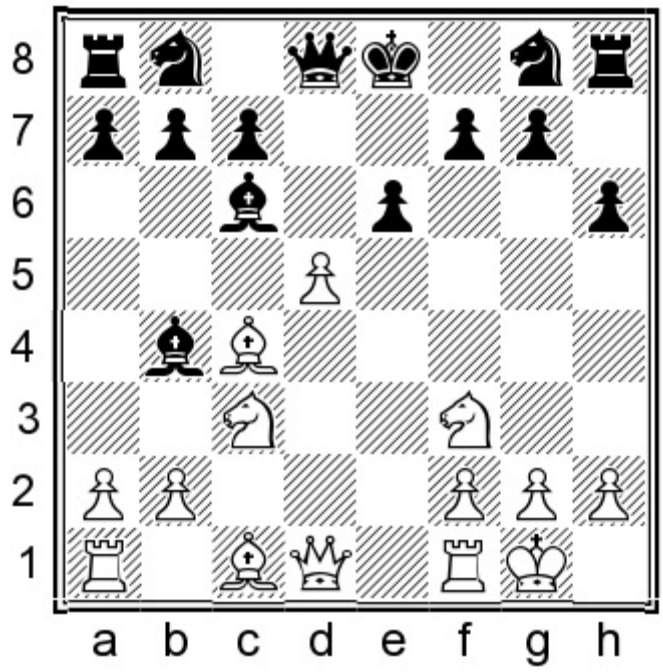
9...♘f6 10.e5! ♘d5 11.♗d2 ♘b6 12.♗e2±

10.0-0 ♗xc3!

Black doesn't have time to retreat the bishop.

A) 10...♗c6?! 11.d5!

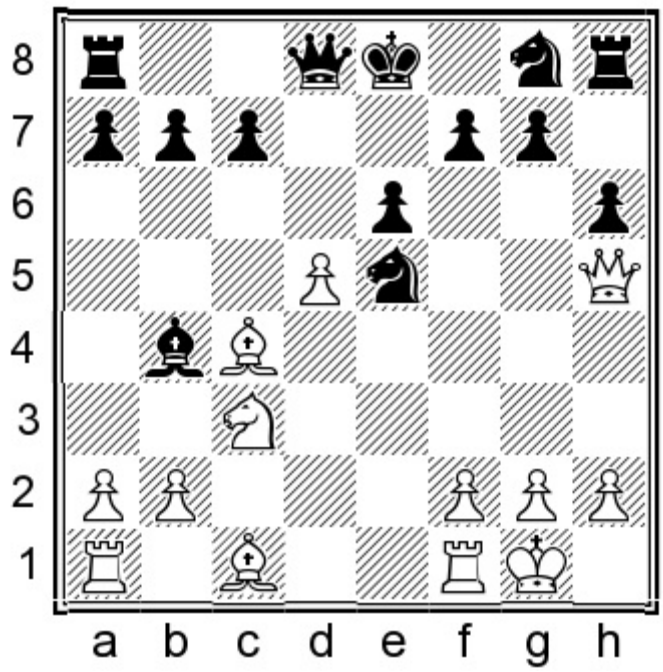
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Position after: 11.d5!

11...♗xc3 (11...exd5? 12.♘xd5+– is devastating) 12.dxc6 and Black has only one way to continue playing: 12...b5! (12...♕xd1?? 13.cxb7!+–) 13.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 14.♗xb5 ♗f6 15.♗f4±

B) 10...♗xf3 11.♕xf3 ♘c6 12.d5! ♘e5 13.♕h5!



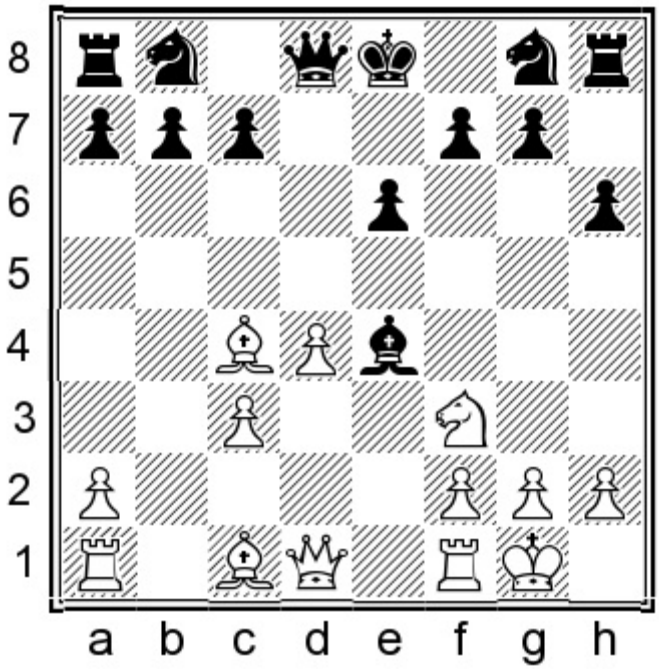
Position after: 13.♕h5!

13...♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♘xc4 15.dxe6 ♕e7 (15...♘d6 16.exf7+ ♘xf7? 17.♗a3!+– White follows with ♖fe1 and wins on the spot.) 16.♕b5+±

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C) 10...♘f6?? 11.♕a4+ ♘c6 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♗b5+– Black has to give up a piece.

11.bxc3



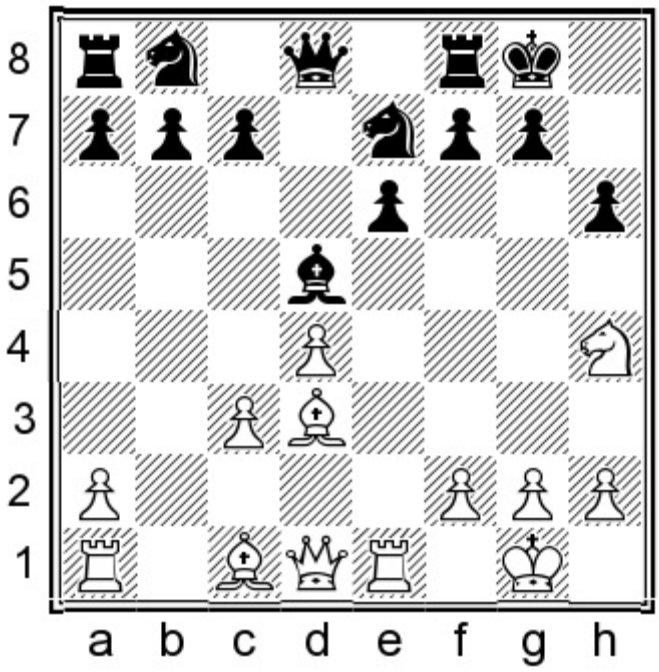
Position after: 11.bxc3

11...♘e7

11...♘f6 12.♗a3! This is Black's problem. He has won a pawn, but given White this possibility, preventing him from castling. 12...♘bd7 13.♖e1 c5! 14.dxc5 0-0 15.c6! ♗xc6 16.♗xf8 ♕xf8 17.♘d4± Even if Black has compensation, we obviously have the upper hand.

12.♖e1 ♗d5 13.♗d3 0-0 14.♘h4!→

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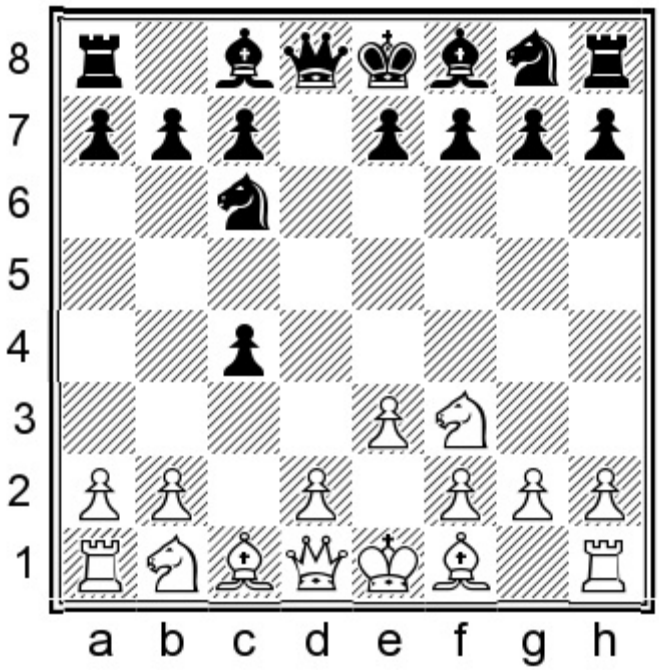


Position after: 14.♘h4!→

White follows with ♕g4 and gets a dangerous attack thanks to the two strong bishops.

b) 3.e3 ♘c6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘c6?!



Position after: 3...♘c6?!

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I think this move should objectively be dubious, but if you want to refute it, your play must be quite accurate.

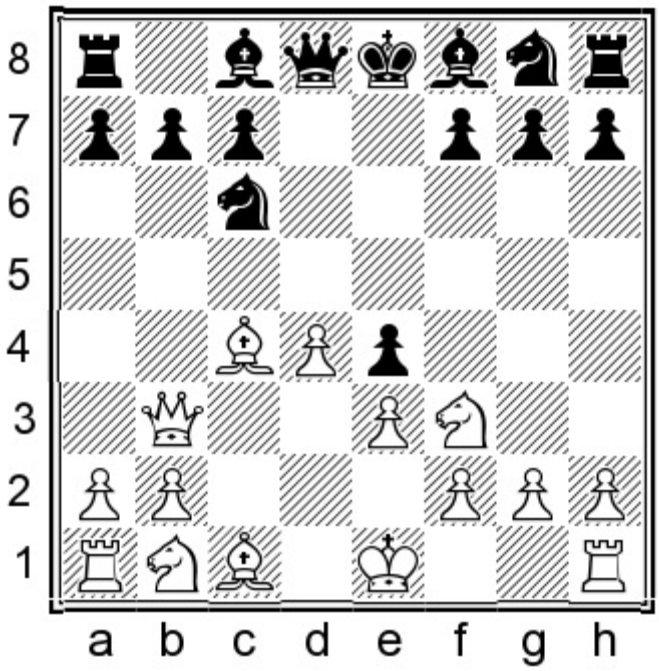
4.♗xc4 e5 5.d4!

In many lines, it transposes into a bad version for Black of the Queen's Gambit Accepted with 3.e3 e5, because the knight went to c6 too early.

Playing as if it was a Sicilian is possible, although I prefer the text move: 5.♕c2!? ♗d6 6.a3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 0-0 8.b4⇄.

5...exd4

5...e4?! Against this move, it's strange that almost none of the games has continued with 6.♕b3! (6.♘fd2 ♕g5 7.g3 ♘f6 8.♘c3 ♕g6⇄)



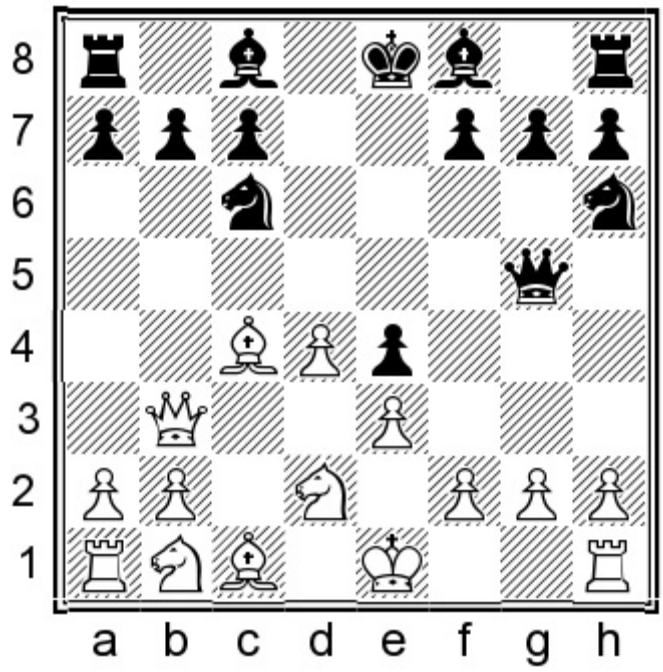
Position after: 6.♕b3!

A) 6...exf3? 7.♗xf7+ ♔e7 8.♗xg8 fxg2 9.♖g1± ♖xg8 10.♕xg8 ♗h3 Black manages to find some tricks, but is helpless if we find a few cold-blooded moves: 11.♘c3! ♕d6 12.♕xh7 ♕xh2 13.♘e2+–.

B) 6...♕f6 7.♘e5! is possible now: 7...♘xe5 8.dxe5 ♕f5 9.g4! ♕f3 (9...♕g6 10.♘c3±) 10.♖g1±.

C) 6...♘h6! 7.♘fd2 ♕g5

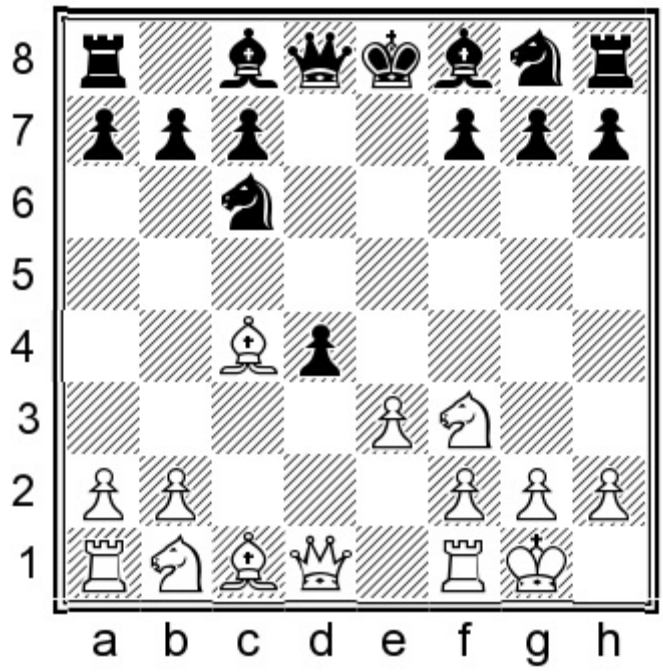
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Position after: 7...♕g5

(7...f5 8.♘c3 ♗d7 9.♗e2 ♗d6 10.♘c4±) The inclusion of ♕b3 and ...♘h6 clearly favors White. Even if playing ♗f1 is possible, I would rather continue with 8.g3! ♘a5 9.♕b5+ ♕xb5 10.♗xb5+ c6 11.♗e2 f5 12.b3 ♗d7 13.♗b2±. White clearly has the better minor pieces and keeps the better endgame.

6.0-0!



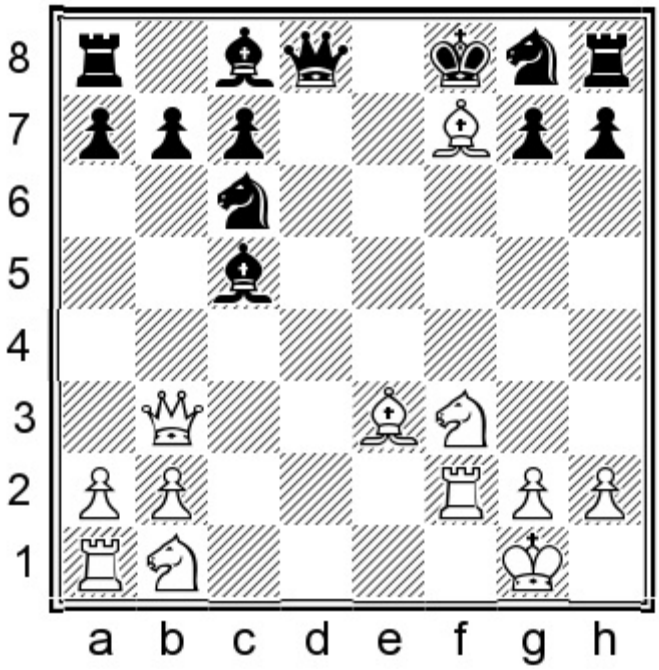
Position after: 6.0-0!

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Castling avoids unpleasant checks, and it's hard for Black to take advantage of this move order.

6...♘f6

If Black wants to take a pawn with 6...dxe3, we can play 7.♕b3! exf2+ (7...♕d7 8.♕xe3+ ♗e7 9.♕b3! ♕f5 10.♘c3±) 8.♖xf2 ♗c5 (8...♗e6 9.♕xb7! ♘a5 10.♗b5+ c6 11.♗xc6+ ♘xc6 12.♕xc6+ ♗d7 13.♕e4+ ♗e7 14.♗g5±) 9.♗xf7+ ♔f8 10.♗e3!



Position after: 10.♗e3!

10...♗xe3 11.♕xe3 ♕e7!? (11...♘f6 12.♗b3 ♘g4 13.♕c5+ ♕e7 14.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 15.♖e2+ ♔d8 16.♘c3↑; 11...♔xf7?? is obviously met by 12.♘e5+ ♔e8 13.♘xc6+ ♘e7 14.♘xd8+–) 12.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 (12...♘gxe7 13.♗b3! g6 14.♘g5+ ♔g7 15.♖f7+ ♔h6 16.h4+– White is still a pawn down, but is completely dominating the position.) 13.♘g5 ♘f6 14.♘c3 ♗g4 15.♘d5+ ♘xd5 16.♗xd5±

7.exd4!?

This is possible now, and provides us with a strong isolated pawn which will soon advance to disrupt Black's harmony.

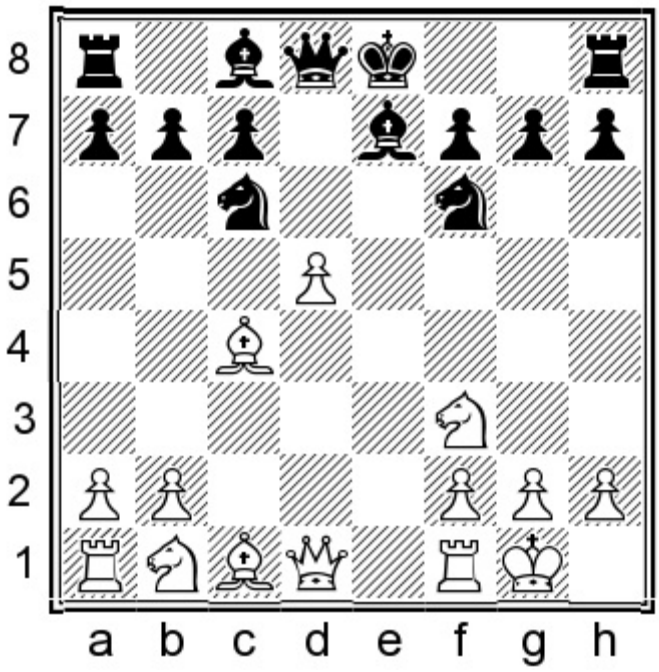
7.♕b3!? might be even stronger than the classical way. Black has no reasonable way to protect f7, so he should go for 7...♘a5 8.♗xf7+ ♔e7 9.♕a3+ ♔xf7 10.♕xa5 dxe3 11.♗xe3 ♗d6 12.♘c3± when White keeps the initiative.

7...♗e7

7...♗d6?! 8.♖e1+±

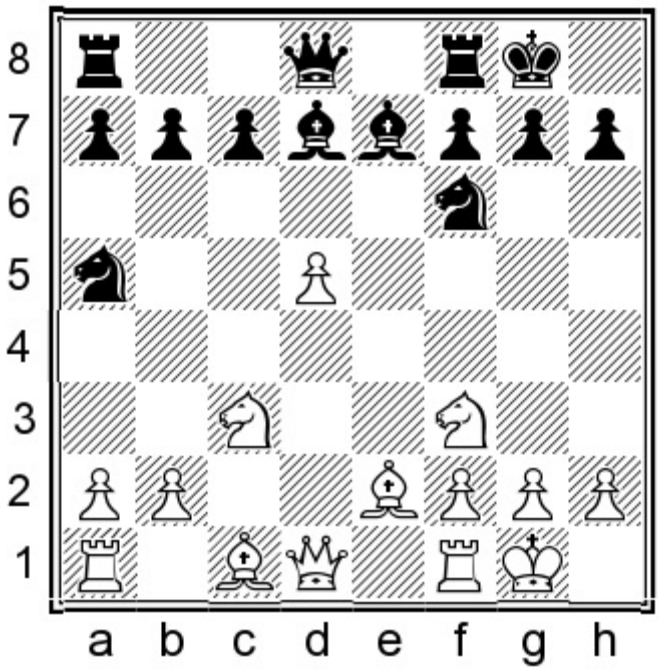
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8.d5!



Position after: 8.d5!

8...♘a5 9.♗b5+ ♗d7 10.♗e2! 0-0 11.♘c3±

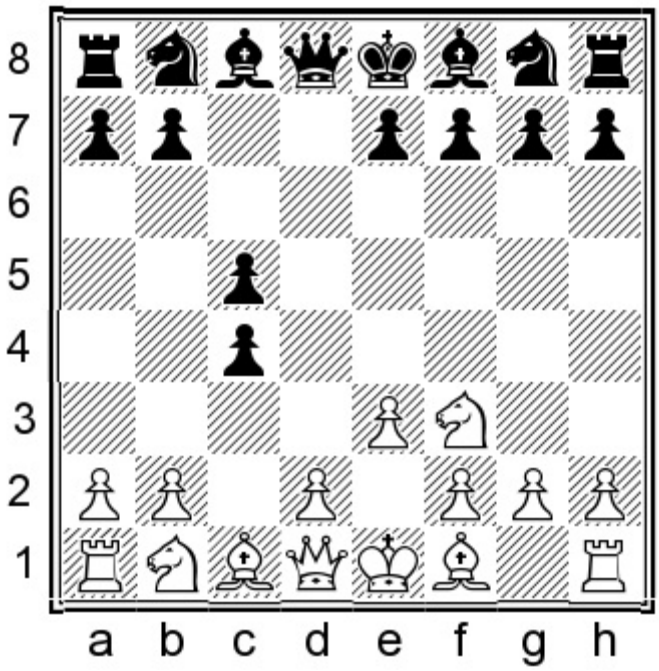


Position after: 11.♘c3±

White has a space advantage even if Black is solid. He will put his rooks on the open files and most probably try to play ♕c2 and ♘d4-f5.

c) 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2 -- chesstouring.com

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 c5



Position after: 3...c5

This is inferior to the main line, but the reason why is not obvious at all! It's essential to have a deep look at this line, as it's probably the most popular move, either now or at the fifth move.

4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6

Black simply plays the moves he is used to playing when he plays the Queen's Gambit Accepted. We can transpose into this opening right now by playing 6.d4, but we want more than that!

6.♕e2!

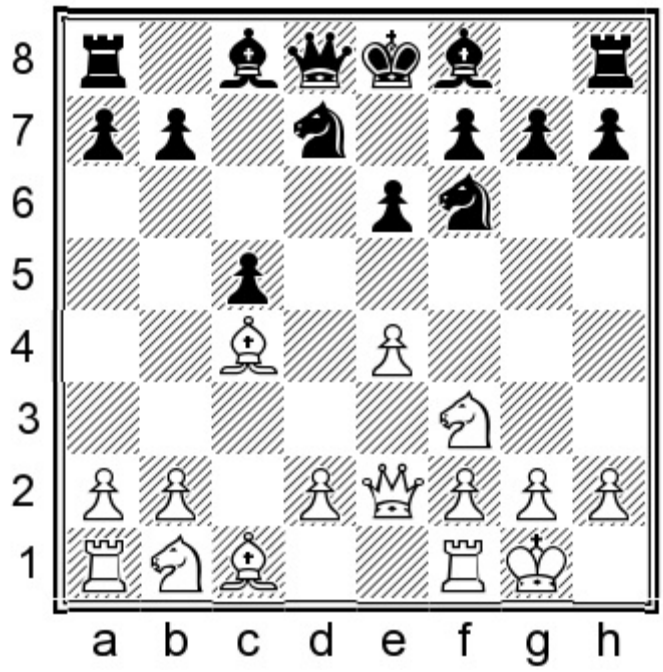
6.b3 is also possible, more or less transposing into the main line.

6...♘c6

6...♘bd7?!N seems a bit strange now, even if it's possible. For instance we can play:

A) 7.e4!

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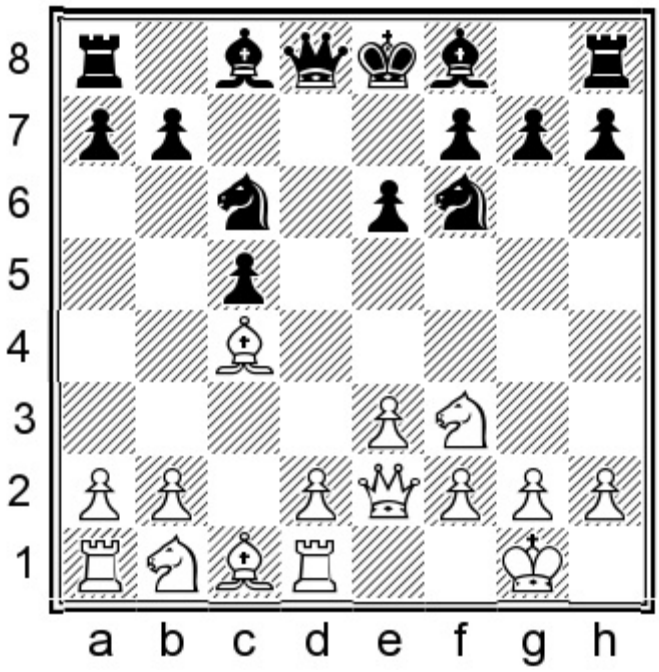
Position after: 7.e4!

intending to play e5 on the next move, and Black can't prevent it. This move is strong in this case as Black's f6-knight is deprived of the d7-square. 7...♕c7 (7...a6 8.a4 ♕c7 9.e5 ♘d5 10.♗xd5 exd5 11.♘c3!±; 7...e5?? 8.♘g5+–) 8.e5 ♘d5 9.♗xd5 exd5 10.♘c3 ♘b6 11.d4!±

B) Also very thematical is 7.d4 a6 8.a4! cxd4 (8...♕c7 9.e4! cxd4 10.e5 ♘d5 11.♗xd5 exd5 12.♘xd4±) 9.exd4 ♗e7 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♖d1 ♘b6 12.♗b3 ♘bd5 13.♘e5 ♗d7 14.♖d3!→ This classical manoeuvre works well here, in order to start the attack.

7.♖d1!

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Position after: 7.♖d1!

7...♗e7

7...a6 transposes into 6...a6 7.♖d1 ♘c6.

8.♘c3 0-0 9.d4! cxd4

9...♕c7?! 10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.a3! In this quite symmetrical middlegame, White has a good lead in development, and his queen is slightly better placed. 11...a6 (11...a5 12.b3 ♖d8 13.♗b2 ♖xd1+ 14.♖xd1 ♕e7 15.♘b5 b6 16.♘e1!±) 12.b4 ♗d6 13.♗b2 ♖d8 (13...b5? 14.♗xb5!±) 14.♖ac1±

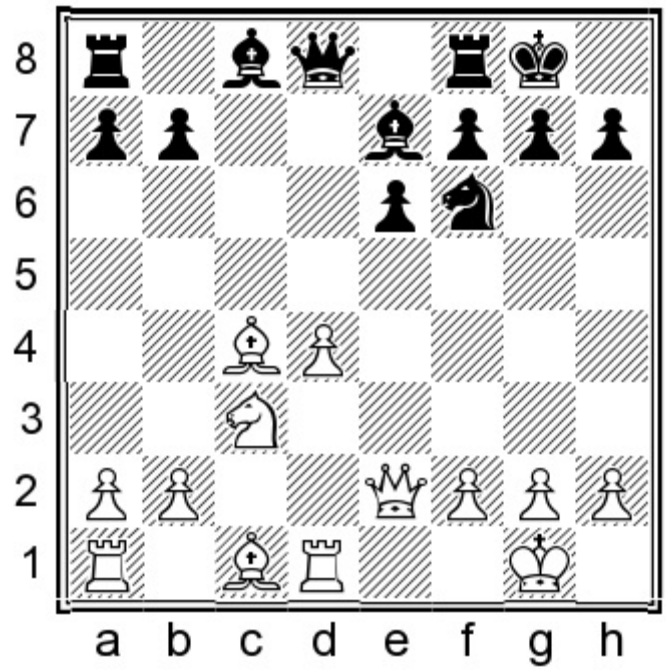
10.♘xd4!

It's quite unusual, but here I like to trade knights before accepting an isolani. It allows us to transfer the queen more easily to the kingside.

10...♘xd4 11.exd4!

Black has tried many moves, but the most logical (and most played) is...

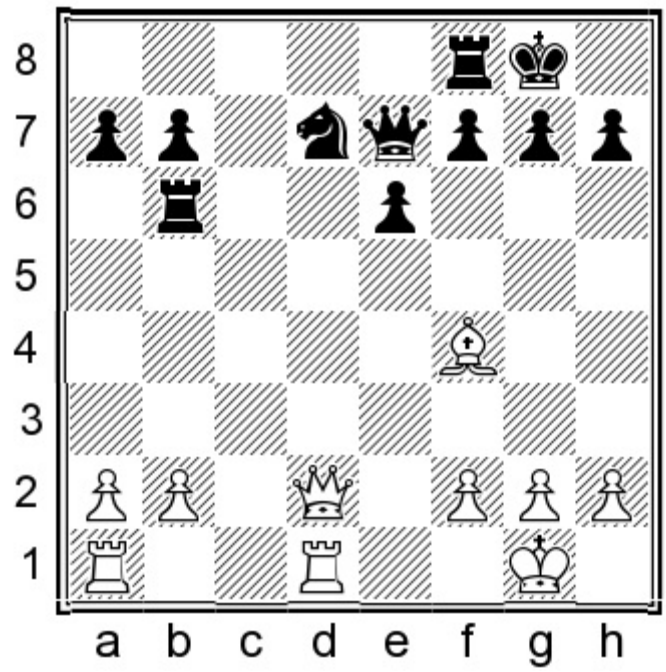
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Position after: 11.exd4!

11...♘d5!?

A) 11...♕e8?! 12.♘b5 (starting with 12.♗f4 might be even stronger) 12...♕d8 13.♗f4! ♗d7 14.♘c7 ♖c8 15.d5! ♖xc7?! (15...exd5 was probably better, but the position is hard to understand for Black. 16.♘xd5 ♖e8 17.♕d3 ♗a4 18.b3 ♗c6 19.♘xe7+±) 16.d6± ♖c6 17.dxe7 ♕xe7 18.♗b5 ♖b6 19.♗xd7 ♘xd7 20.♕d2!

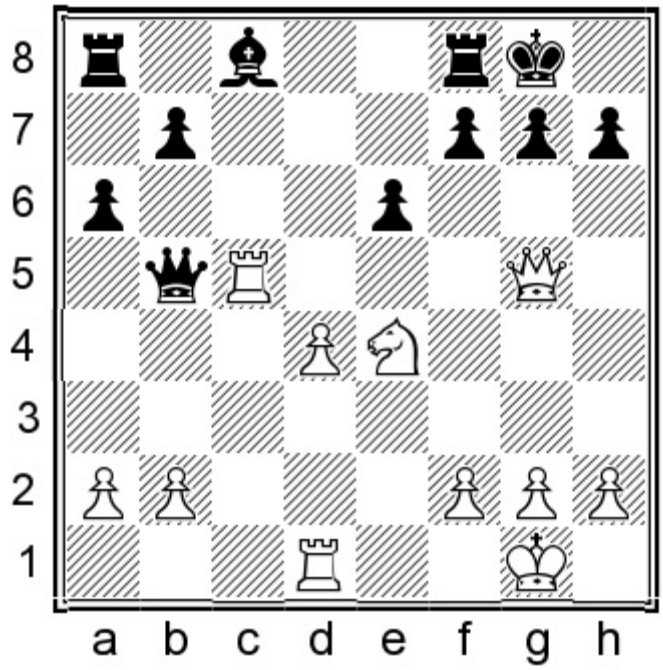


Position after: 20.♕d2!

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Black is a pawn up, but has concrete problems on the d-file. 20...e5?! 21.♗e3 ♘c5 22.b4 ♘e4 23.♕c2 ♖xb4 24.a3+– And Black finally loses material: Topalov, V (2707) – Kharlov, A (2627) New Delhi/Tehran 2000, 1-0 (41).

B) 11...♕c7 Putting the queen on an open file is probably not that great. 12.♗g5! a6 13.♖ac1± ♘g4?! Trying to solve the problems tactically, but it fails: 14.♕xg4 ♗xg5 15.♕xg5 ♕xc4 16.♘e4 ♕b5 appeared in Libiszewski, F (2505) – Brethes, F (2254) Pau 2012, which White managed to win, but he could have been faster if he had played 17.♖c5!N

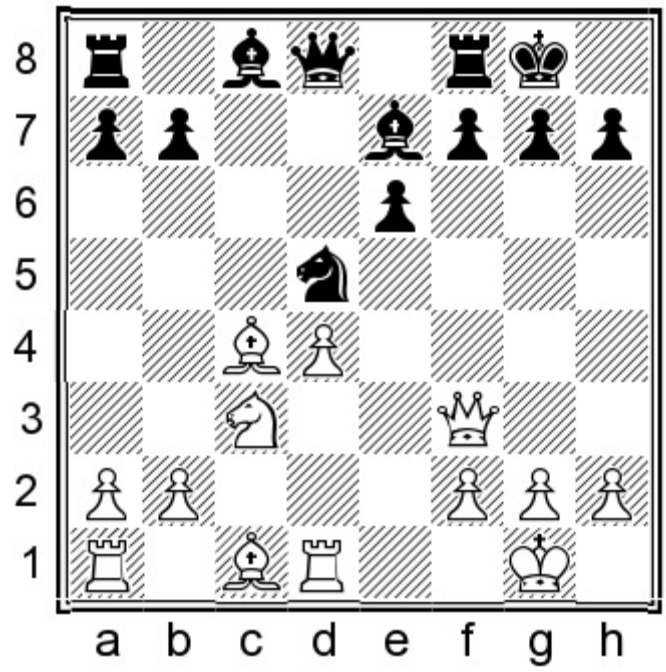


Position after: 17.♖c5!N

17...♕e2 18.♘f6+ ♔h8 19.♖dc1!→ with a crushing attack!

12.♕f3!

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Position after: 12.♕f3!

White follows his plan which has scored well in practice.

12...♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♕c7 14.♗b3 ♗d6

14...♖b8 is a bit slow, and we have the time to play 15.♖d3!N which was already analysed by Delchev, and seems strong: 15...♗d6 (15...b6?! 16.♕h5→) 16.♕h5 h6 17.c4 b6 18.♖h3→.

15.c4!

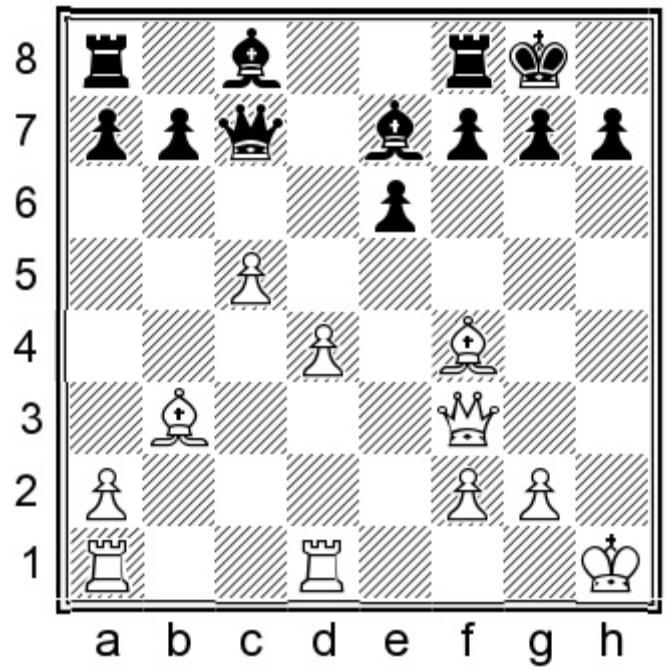
White is not afraid of losing the h2- pawn as he gains some tempi.

15...♗xh2+

15...♗d7 16.c5! ♗e7 17.♗f4 ♕c8 18.♗e5±

16.♔h1 ♗d6 17.c5 ♗e7 18.♗f4!

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Position after: 18.♗f4!

18...♕c6

Black collapsed quickly after 18...♕d8 19.♖ab1 ♗g5 20.♗d6 ♗e7 21.♗e5 ♗f6 22.♗h2± and even if he stands clearly inferior, it's quite strange that he blundered with 22...♗xd4?? 23.♕e4 1-0 Glavina, P (2434) – Ivanov, J (2461) Ferrol 2000.

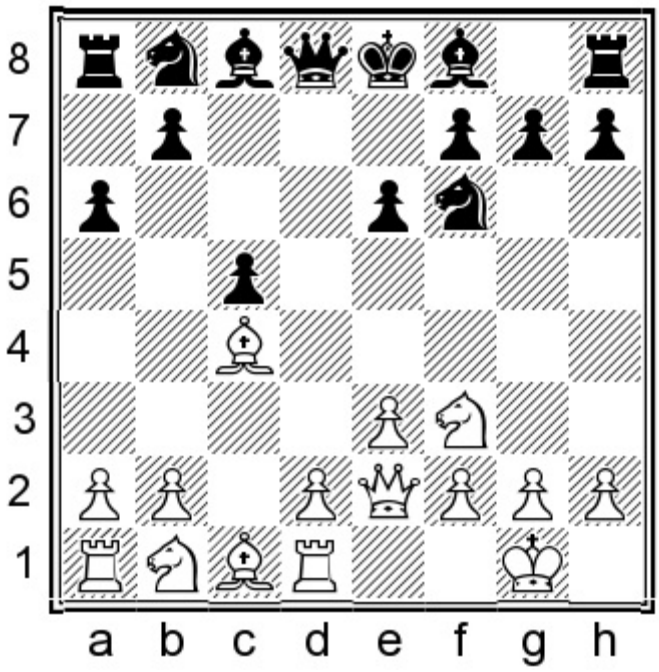
19.♕xc6 bxc6 20.♗a4 ♗d7 21.♖ab1 ♖fd8 22.♖b7 ♔f8 23.♖xd7!±

1-0 (36) Gelfand, B (2675) – Adianto, U (2610) Cap d'Agde 1998.

d) 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2 a6 7.♖d1 ♘c6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2! a6 7.♖d1!

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Position after: 7.♖d1!

Once again, we don't want to transpose into the main lines for now. Instead, we prepare d4.

7...♘c6

7...b5 will be covered in our next subchapter.

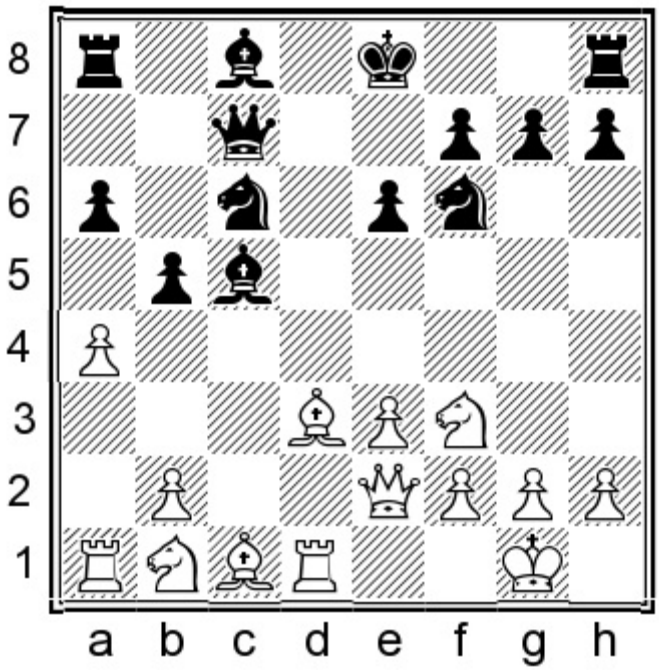
8.d4!

Now Black has a choice between three moves.

8...cxd4

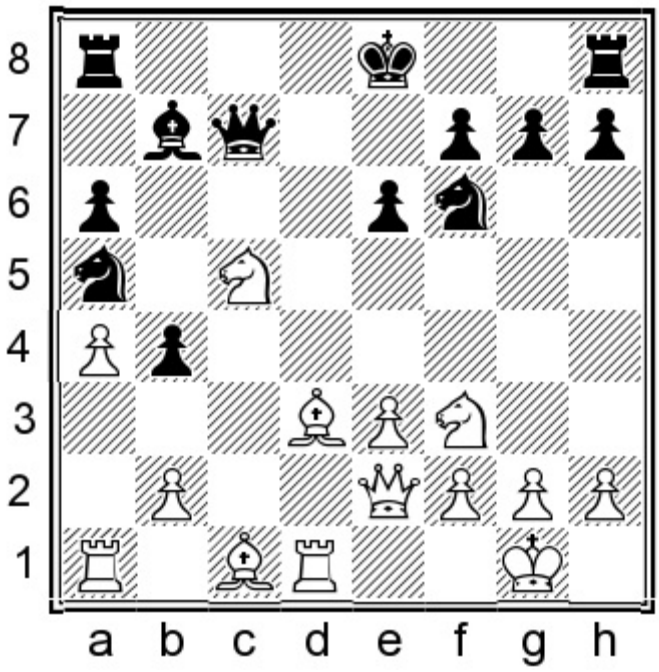
A) 8...b5?! is easy to meet, as everything is more or less forced: 9.dxc5! ♕c7 10.♗d3 ♗xc5 11.a4!

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Position after: 11.a4!

This is one of the typical ideas of our opening. We wait for ...b5 before provoking a weakness on the queenside, when it is clear that Black must advance with ...b4. 11...b4 (11...bxa4 12.♖xa4 ♘b4 13.♗b5+! ♘d7?! 14.♗d2 ♖b8 15.♗xb4 ♖xb5 16.♕c2!± Black has some problems and couldn't escape in Krasenkow, M (2633) – Shirov, A (2723) Wijk aan Zee 2003.) 12.♘bd2 ♗b7 13.♘b3 ♘a5 (13...♗d6 is probably better, but it's not enough for equality: 14.e4! 0-0 15.♗g5 ♘g4 16.h3 ♘ge5 17.♘xe5 ♘xe5 18.♖ac1↑) 14.♘xc5!

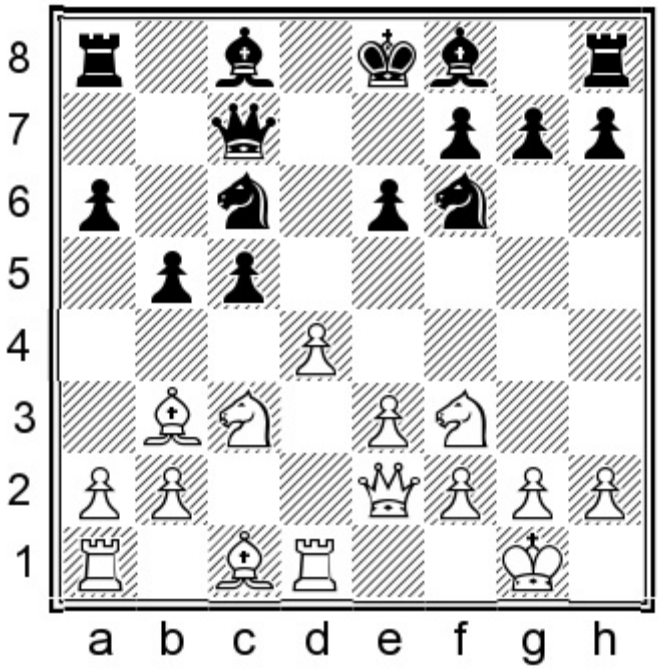


Position after: 14.♘xc5!

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14...♕xc5 15.e4 ♘b3 16.♖b1 0-0 17.♗e3± We have the bishop pair, and have managed to advance the e-pawn, gaining some play in the center. White eventually won in Ivanchuk, V (2699) – Ponomariov, R (2734) Wijk aan Zee 2003.

B) 8...♕c7?! seems to be dubious, as the main line reveals some problems: 9.♘c3 b5 (9...♗e7 10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.b3 White is better thanks to a few extra tempi in this symmetrical position: 11...0-0 12.♗b2 ♕e7 13.♗d3 ♗a3 14.♗xa3 ♕xa3 15.♘e4 ♘d5 16.♖ac1± 1-0 (32) Andreikin, D (2708) – Timofeev, A (2549) Sochi 2017) 10.♗b3

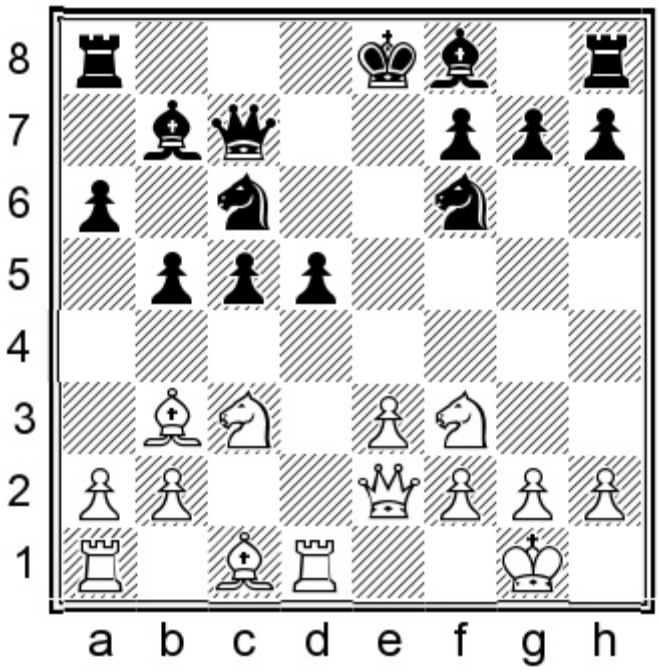


Position after: 10.♗b3

B1) 10...♘a5 This might seem strong, in order to prevent the d4-d5 advance, but by simply playing 11.e4!N (11.♗c2?! ♗b7=) 11...♘xb3 12.axb3 ♗e7? 13.d5! exd5 14.e5!+– we already have a decisive advantage.

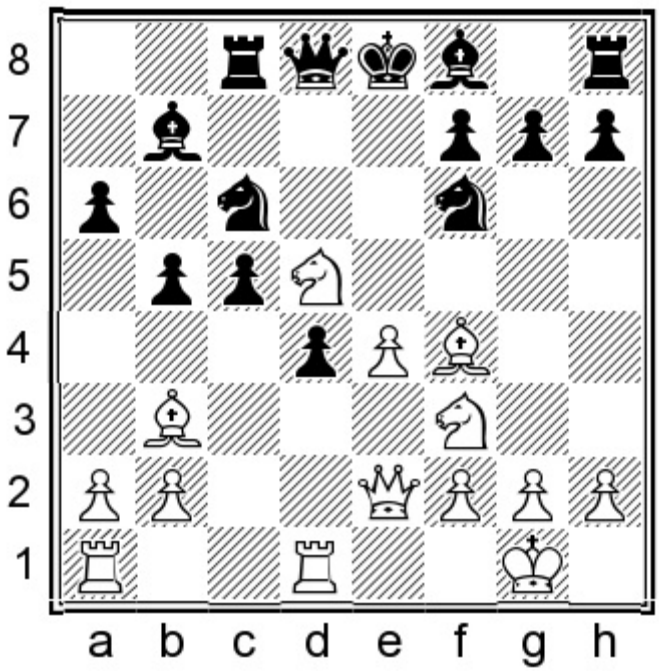
B2) 10...♗b7 11.d5 exd5

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Position after: 11...exd5

12.e4! A beautiful move! (The simpler 12.♘xd5!? has worked well in practice too. It's good to know if you are not particularly prepared for a game, but is less fun.) 12...d4 (Black is obviously crushed if he plays 12...dxe4? 13.♘xe4 ♘xe4 14.♕xe4+ ♗e7 15.♗f4! ♕c8 16.♗d5+–; 12...0-0-0?! 13.♘xd5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5±) 13.♘d5 ♕d8□ (13...♘xd5? 14.exd5+ ♘e7 15.a4! c4 16.♖xd4 cxb3 17.d6+–) 14.♗f4 ♖c8□



Position after: 14...♖c8□

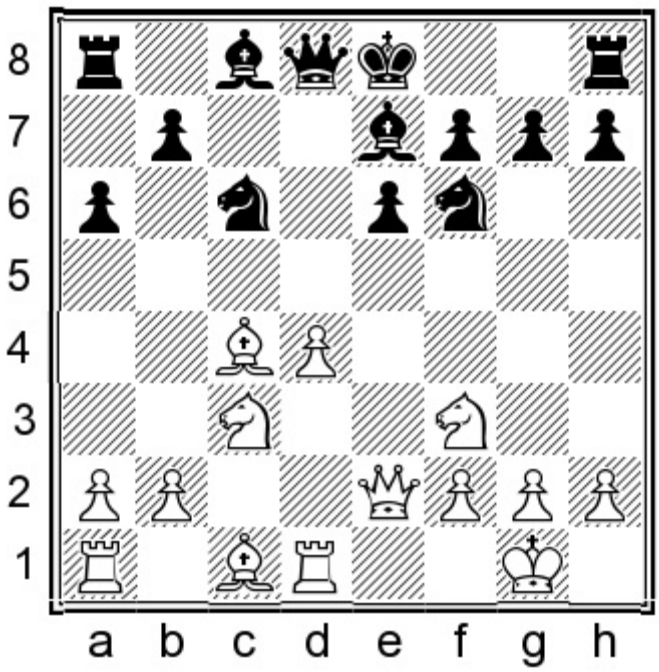
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Again the only move, but White has at least two good options.

B2.1) 15.♖ac1!?N 15...♗e7 16.♘xf6+ gxf6 (16...♗xf6 17.♖xc5±) 17.♗d5 ♕d7 (17...0-0? 18.♘h4+–) 18.a4 bxa4 19.♕c4 0-0 20.♗h6±

B2.2) 15.a4!? ♘a5 (15...c4 16.axb5 axb5 17.♘xd4! ♘xd4 18.♖xd4+– and White should win soon, as he has overwhelming play.) 16.axb5! ♘xb3 17.bxa6 ♗c6 18.♘e5 ♘xa1 19.♘xc6 ♖xc6 20.♖xa1+– Even a rook down, White is completely winning, mainly thanks to his passed a-pawn.

9.exd4 ♗e7 10.♘c3



Position after: 10.♘c3

This is a classical perfect isolated pawn: White didn't spend a tempo by moving the bishop before taking on c4 (compared to some Panov lines for instance), and didn't have to play a4 (compared to a Slav variation). He usually continues with ♗g5, or ♘e5 and ♖d3.

10...0-0

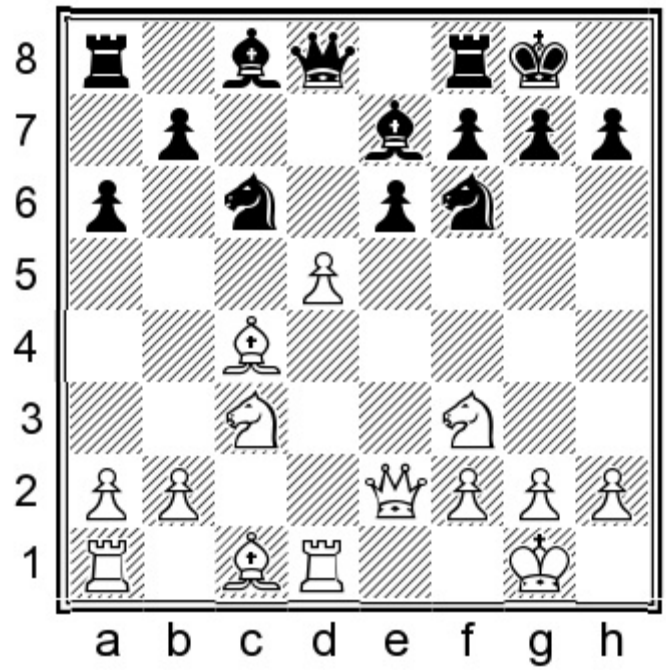
White has a choice between opening the center and keeping the pieces.

A) 10...♘b4?! allows us to start our attack with 11.♘e5 0-0 12.a3 ♘bd5 13.♖d3. Our d-pawn is blocked (one of Black's aims), but we have gained many tempi for the attack. 13...b5?! 14.♗xd5! ♘xd5 15.♖g3 ♗b7 16.♗h6 ♗f6 17.♘e4+– with an already a decisive edge, as we win material.

B) 10...b5? is well known to be a mistake: 11.d5! bxc4 12.dxc6 ♕c7 13.♕xc4 e5 14.♘d5 ♘xd5 15.♕xd5+–.

11.d5

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Position after: 11.d5

11.♗g5!?±

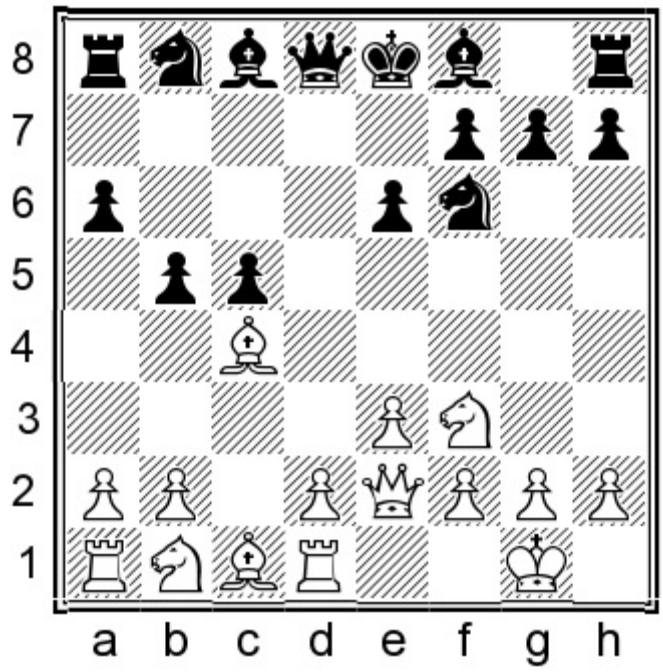
11...exd5 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♗xd5 ♕c7 14.♕e4!±

Black is unable to develop his c8-bishop, thus we have a great advantage.

e) 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2 a6 7.♖d1 b5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 c5 4.♗xc4 ♘f6 5.0-0 e6 6.♕e2! a6 7.♖d1! b5

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Position after: 7...b5

8.♗b3 ♗b7

8...♘c6 9.a4 ♖b8 10.axb5 axb5 11.♘c3 c4 12.♗c2 ♘b4 13.d3!± Rasmussen – Pina Vega, Havana 2011.

9.a4!

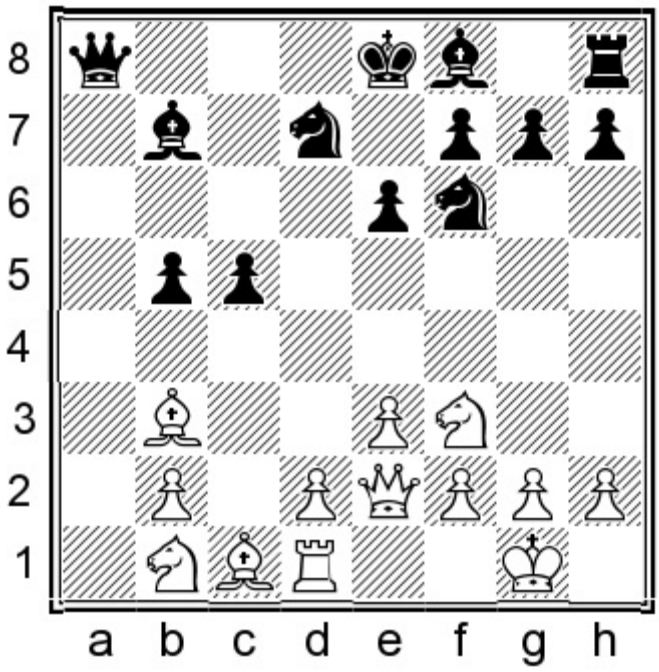
Here we are: Black has executed his logical plan and we start to provoke a weakness on the queenside.

9...b4

A) 9...c4?! 10.♗c2 ♘bd7 (10...♕b6 11.axb5 axb5 12.♖xa8 ♗xa8 13.d3! cxd3 14.♗xd3 b4 15.♘bd2±) 11.d3 cxd3 12.♗xd3 b4 13.e4!±

B) 9...♘bd7 In a sense Black is right, as we are unable to take the pawn here. 10.axb5 axb5 11.♖xa8 ♕xa8

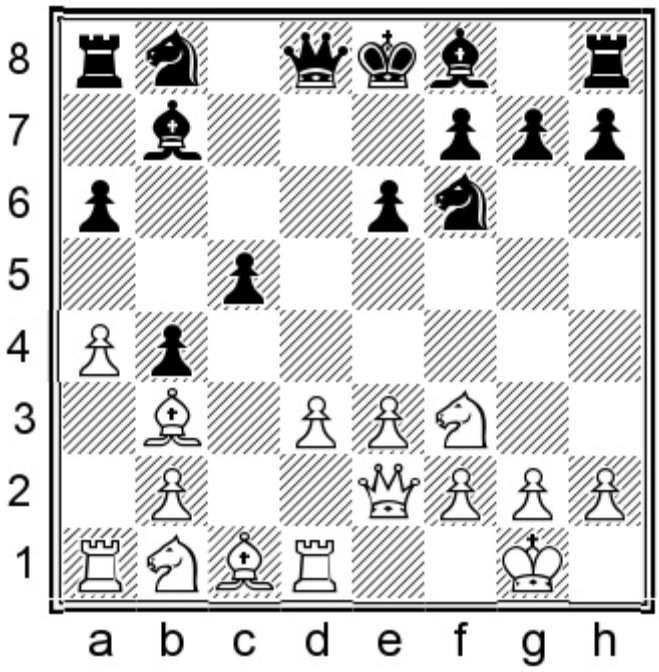
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Position after: 11...♕xa8

Targeting the knight on f3, but we have the strong 12.♘a3! b4 13.♘c4 ♗e7 14.d3!±. Now we don't intend to advance with d4, but prefer to block the battery on the long diagonal. Nevertheless, White had to settle for a draw in Bellahcene, B (2438) – Guliyev, N (2573) Wasselonne 2015.

10.d3!



Position after: 10.d3!

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Once again our plan no longer includes d2-d4. We prefer to block the action of the bishop on b7 by playing e3-e4 soon.

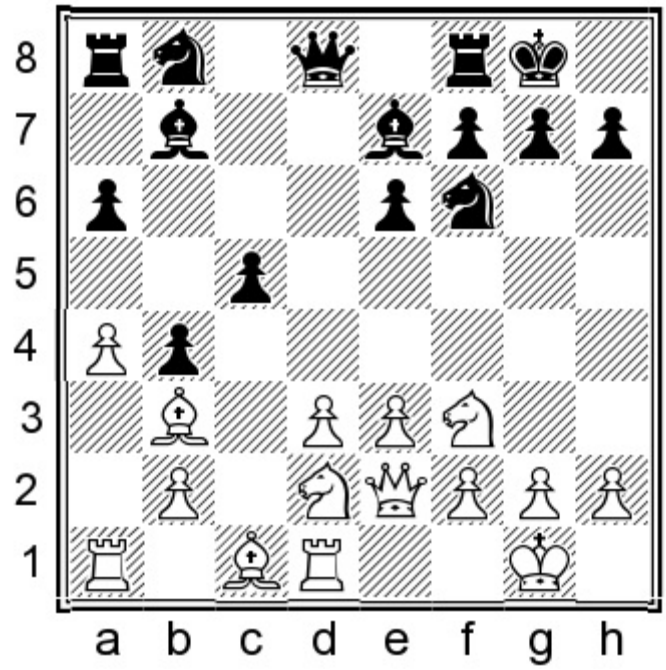
The c4-square is ours, whereas Black has no clear plan available.

10...♗e7

This has been Black's choice in most games.

10...♘c6 11.♘bd2 ♘a5 (11...♕c7 12.♘c4 will normally transpose into our main line.) 12.♗c2 ♗e7 13.e4 ♕c7 14.♘b3 ♘xb3 15.♗xb3 h6 16.♘d2± (16.h3 0-0 17.♗e3±)

11.♘bd2 0-0



Position after: 11...0-0

12.♘c4!

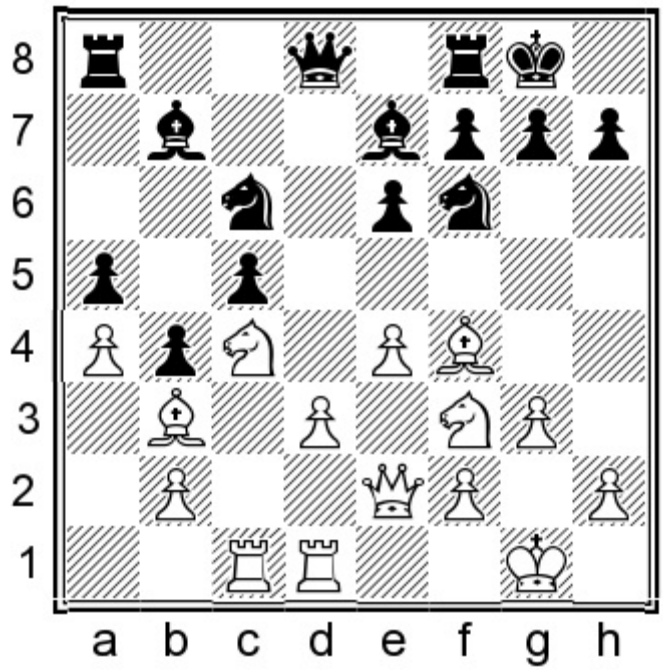
12.a5 ♗c6 13.d4?! was quite dubious for White, as it's normally not the basic plan, and Black managed to win the high-level game Kramnik, V (2791) – Karjakin, S (2760) Moscow 2010.

12...a5

12...♘bd7?! The knight is quite misplaced here. 13.e4! ♕c7 14.g3 ♘b8 15.♗f4 ♕d8 16.d4!± Black has been doing nothing on the previous moves, and logically lost in Plischki, S (2436) – Zieher, H (2300) Saarbrücken 2013.

13.e4 ♕c7 14.g3 ♘c6! 15.♗f4 ♕d8 16.♖ac1±

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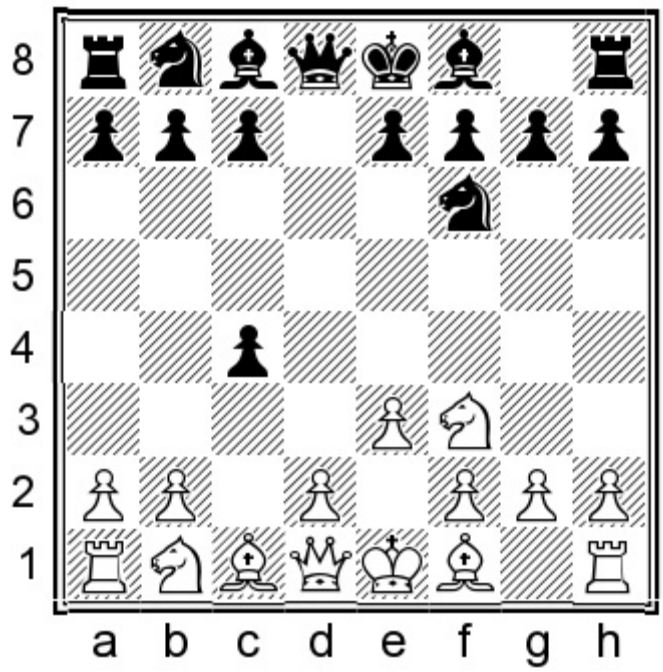


Position after: 16.♖ac1±

White is going to build pressure against the c5-pawn by means of ♗e3 and one of the knights going to b3 at some point. He may also try to push d3-d4 and enjoy a nice space advantage.

f) 3.e3 ♘f6 4.♗xc4 e6 5.0-0 a6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 ♘f6



Position after: 3...♘f6

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Even if the reasons aren't obvious, this is the best move order.

4.♗xc4 e6

4...♗g4?? is a classical blunder: 5.♗xf7+! ♔xf7 6.♘e5++–.

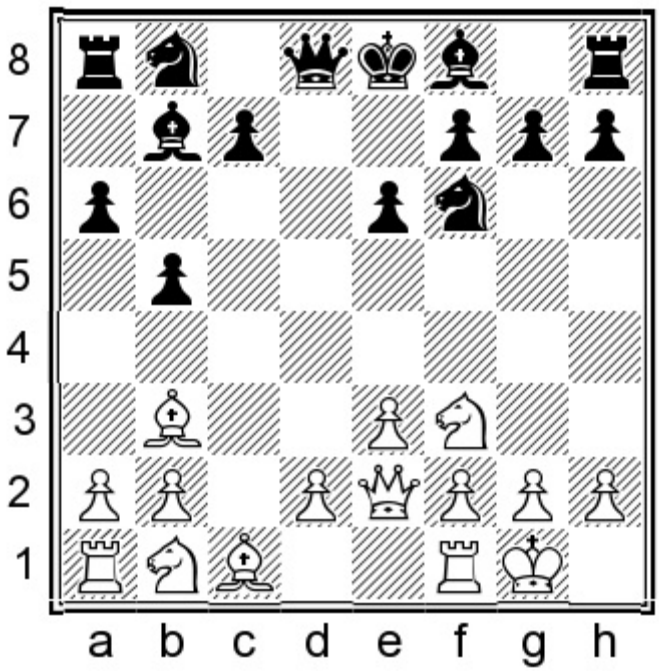
5.0-0 a6!

Even if 5...c5 is clearly the main move (it transposes into 3...c5), I believe that this move is stronger, as there is no real reason to place a pawn on c5.

6.b3!?

This should be seen as a viable alternative to the more usual plans, as 6.♕e2 doesn't satisfy me:

A) 6.♕e2 b5 7.♗b3 ♗b7



Position after: 7...♗b7

A1) 8.♖d1 is the only move that has been tried, but it doesn't help much, as after 8...♘bd7! we still don't know which plan we should choose. 9.d4 (9.d3 c5! 10.a4 doesn't provoke anything any more) 9...c5! 10.a4 ♗e7 and Black seems fine.

A2) 8.a4N If we want to be logical, we can play this line, applying the same ideas as in the 3...c5 main line. However there is a major difference: Black doesn't need to do anything to defend his b5-pawn. 8...♘bd7! I believe that Black is fine here. 9.♖d1 (9.d4 c5! 10.axb5 axb5 11.♖xa8 ♕xa8 12.♘a3 b4 13.♘c4 ♗e7∓ Black has full control over the long diagonal, and is more than fine now; 9.axb5 axb5 10.♖xa8 ♕xa8 11.♘a3 ♗xa3!? 12.bxa3 c5 13.♗b2 0-0⇄) 9...♗e7 10.d3 0-0 11.e4 c5= White has followed his plan of playing d3/e4, but didn't manage to create a weakness on c4, so

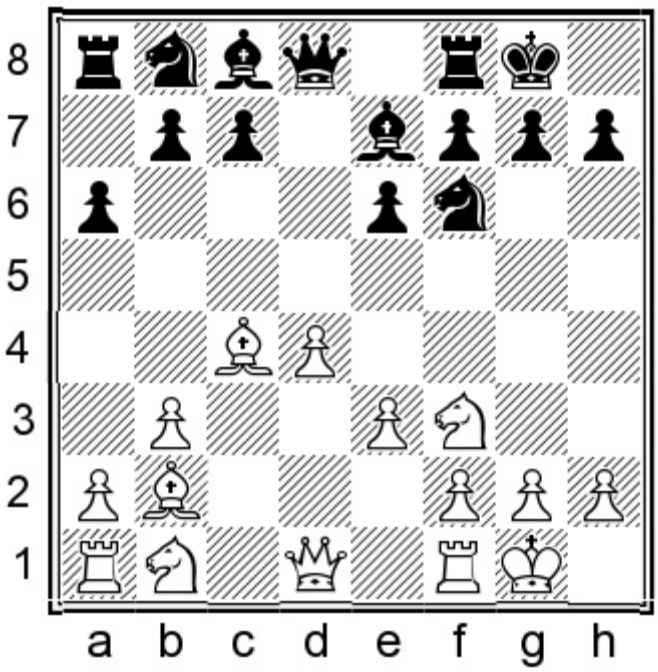
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Black's queenside pawns are still mobile and strong.

B) 6.d4 c5 is a way to transpose into the classical Queen's Gambit Accepted.

6...c5

Black can even wait before deciding what he wants to do about his queenside. 6...♗e7 7.♗b2 0-0 8.d4



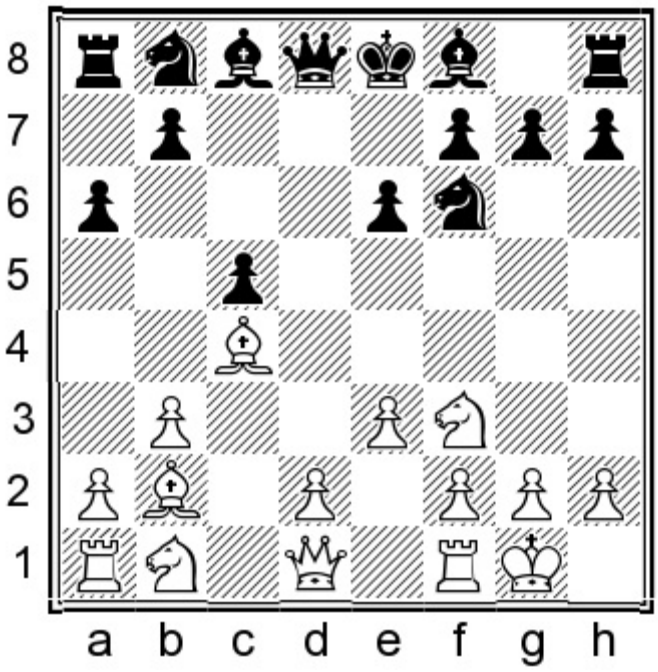
Position after: 8.d4

A) 8...c5 would now be met with 9.dxc5 ♗xc5 with a symmetrical, but preferable middlegame: (9...♕xd1 10.♖xd1 ♗xc5 11.♘e5! b5 12.♗e2 ♗b7 13.a4!± 10.♘bd2!?N 10...b5 11.♗e2 ♗b7 12.a4! ♕b6 Black looks fine, but we retreat our bishop with 13.♗d3! and intend to place unpleasant pressure on the b5-pawn: 13...♖d8 14.♕e2 b4 15.♘c4 ♕c7 16.♗e5 ♕e7 17.♘a5±.

B) 8...b5 9.♗e2 ♗b7 10.a4 b4 11.♘bd2 ♘bd7 12.♘c4 c5 13.♖c1 ♗d5 14.♘fe5± White is slightly better, and has even managed to increase his advantage. I still don't really understand how he managed to lose in Gelfand, B (2741) – Karjakin, S (2760) Moscow 2010.

7.♗b2

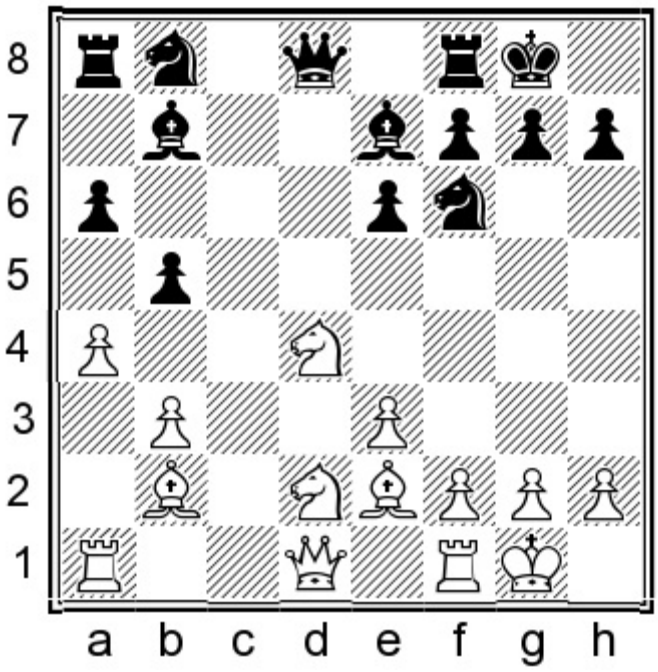
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Position after: 7.♗b2

7...♘c6

7...♗e7 8.d4 cxd4 (8...0-0 9.dxc5 See 6...♗e7) 9.♘xd4 0-0 10.♘d2 b5 11.♗e2 ♗b7 12.a4!?



Position after: 12.a4!?

A) 12...b4?! 13.♗f3 ♘d5 14.♖c1 ♘d7 (this will be necessary at some point) 15.♘c6 ♗xc6 16.♖xc6±

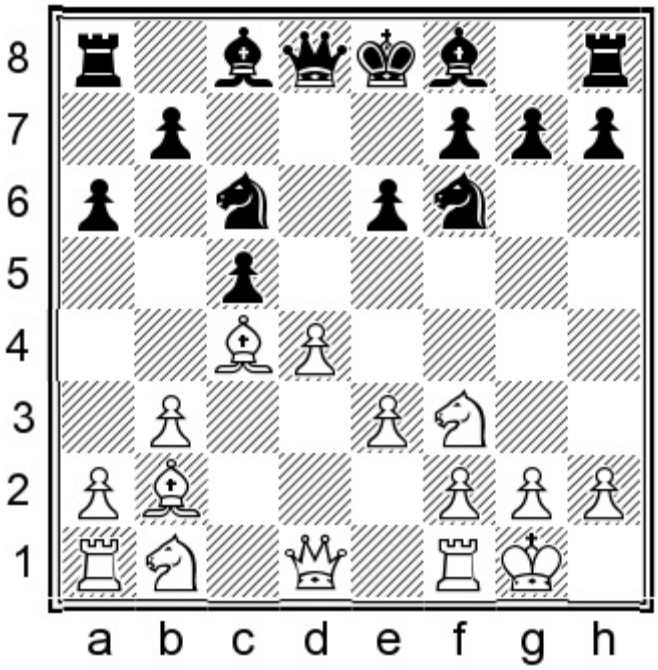
B) 12...♘c6!?N This new move might be the best, simply developing the last minor piece and

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virtually protecting b5. 13.♘xc6 ♗xc6 14.♘f3!↑ White has a small initiative, but the game is still more or less balanced.

C) 12...bxa4 13.♖xa4! Our objective is to put pressure on the a6-pawn. 13...♘bd7 14.♕a1 ♘c5 15.♖a5↑

8.d4



Position after: 8.d4

This transposes into the classical line of the Queen's Gambit Accepted with 7.b3, which is an interesting side line.

8.♗e2!? ♗e7 9.d4 is similar to the main line (9.d3 0-0 10.♘bd2 b5!⇄).

8...cxd4

8...♗e7 9.dxc5!

A) 9...♗xc5?! 10.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 11.♘c3 ♔e7 12.♘a4 ♗d6 (12...♗a7 13.♗a3+! ♔e8 14.♖ac1±) 13.♘b6±

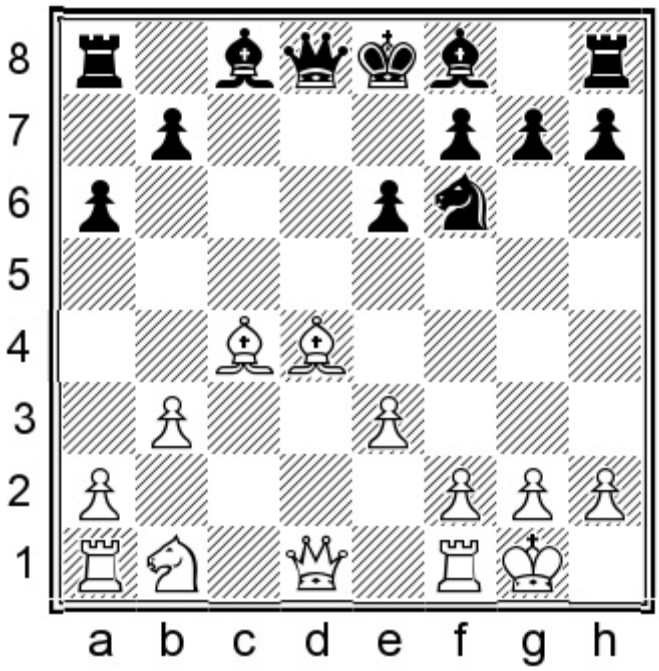
B) 9...♕xd1 10.♖xd1 ♗xc5 11.♘bd2 0-0 12.♖ac1 ♗e7 13.♗e2± White is clearly better thanks to his lead in development and Black's weakness on b6, which is easy to exploit.

9.♘xd4 ♘xd4

9...♗d7 is logical too, intending to develop the bishop swiftly: 10.♘d2 ♗e7 11.♘4f3!? is a possible way to handle the position. Black still lacks activity. 11...b5 12.♗d3 ♘b4 13.♗e2 ♗c6 14.a3 ♘bd5 15.♘e5 ♗b7 16.a4!± 1-0 (32) Iturrizaga, E (2664) – Sprenger, J (2514) Leiria 2017.

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10.♗xd4

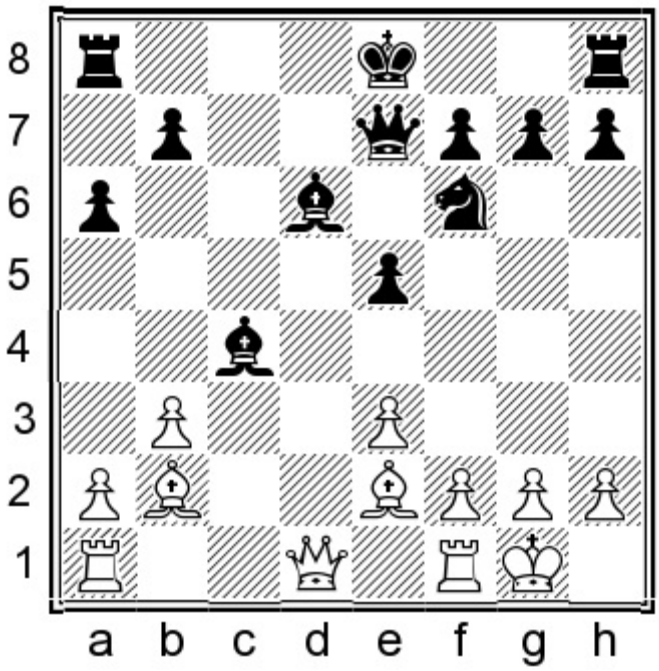


Position after: 10.♗xd4

This may seem like an arid middlegame. It's true that it is quite symmetrical, but it's always easier to play for White, as the bishops are occupying the center.

10...♗d7

10...♗d6 11.♘d2 e5 12.♗b2 ♕e7 (12...0-0 13.♗d3 ♗g4 14.♕b1!±) 13.♗e2 ♗e6 (13...♗a3?! is not really possible yet because of 14.♗xa3! ♕xa3 15.♘c4 ♕e7 16.♘d6+ ♔f8 17.♘c4±) 14.♘c4 ♗xc4

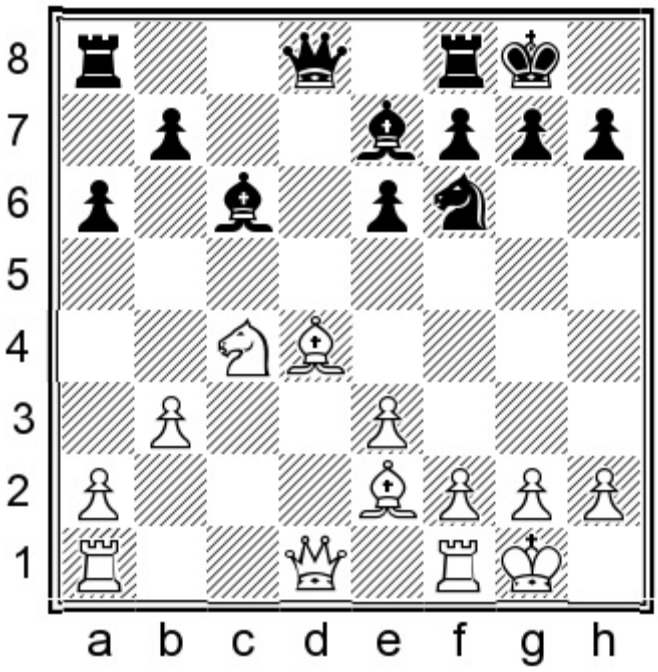


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Position after: 14...♗xc4

15.bxc4! 0-0 (15...♗a3?? 16.♕a4++–) 16.♕b3 ♘e4 17.♖fd1 ♘c5 18.♕c2± We have had to accept an isolated c-pawn, but have managed to keep the bishop pair in this open position. We will try to place our bishop on the central d5-square, from where it will dominate the position.

11.♘d2 ♗e7 12.♗e2 ♗c6 13.♘c4 0-0



Position after: 13...0-0

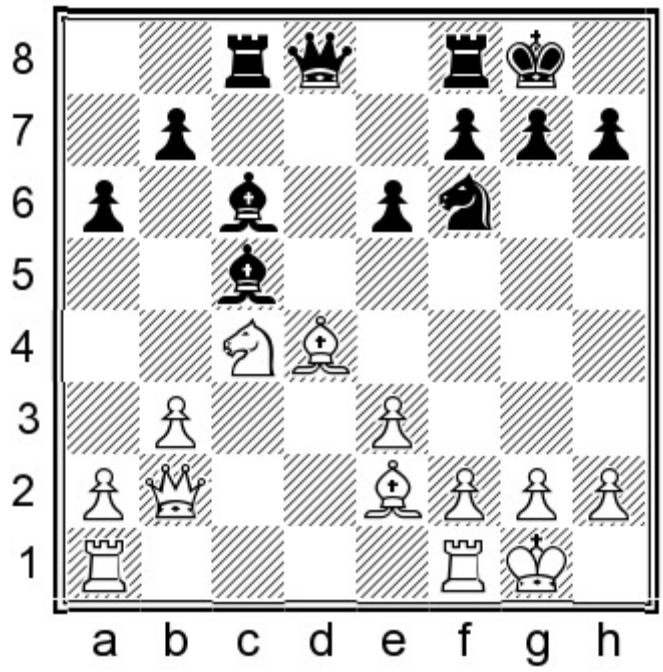
14.♕c2

The most natural move.

14.♖c1 is of course also playable, and I have added a complete game (the only one in the book!) which shows how a former World Champion can misplay this kind of position: 14...♘d5 15.♕d2 ♗b4 16.♕b2 ♕g5 17.♗f3 ♘e7 18.♘e5 ♗d5 19.♖fd1 (19.e4!±) 19...♖fc8 20.♖xc8+ ♖xc8 21.e4 ♗c6 22.♗e3 ♕f6 23.♕d4 ♗a5?! 24.♕d6 ♘g6 and he decided to resign already 1-0 Koneru, H (2545) – Karpov, A (2668) Cap d'Agde 2006.

14...♖c8 15.♕b2 ♗c5!

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Position after: 15...♗c5!

16.♖fd1

16.♗xc5!? ♕d5 17.e4 ♕xc5 18.e5 ♘d7 19.♖ac1!↑

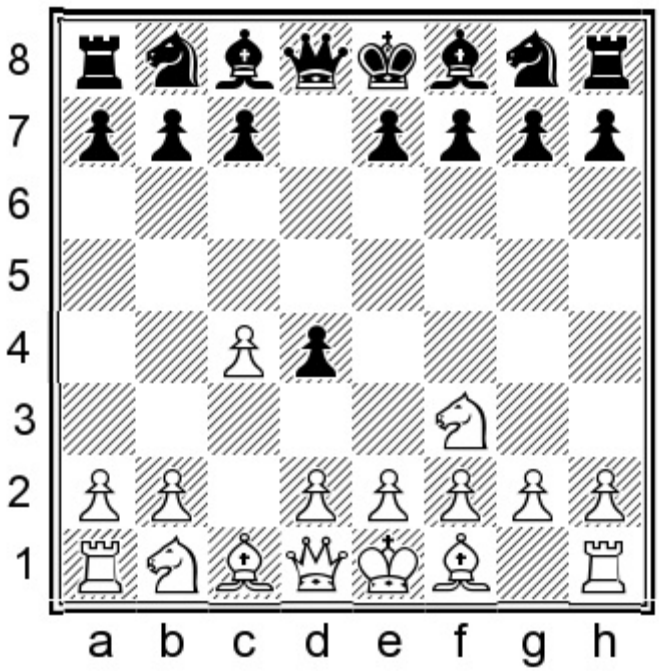
16...♗xd4 17.♖xd4 ♕e7 18.♖ad1!↑

It's not that much, but White has kept the initiative and eventually won in the game Dreev, A (2644) – Abreu Delgado, A (2450) Merida 2015.

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Chapter 11
Advance Variation 2...d4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4



Chapter guide

Chapter 11 – Advance Variation 2...d4

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4

a) 3.--, 3.b4 a5

b) 3.--, 3.b4 c5

c) 3.b4 ♗g4 4.♕b3 --

d) 3.b4 ♗g4 4.♕b3 ♘c6 & 4...♘f6

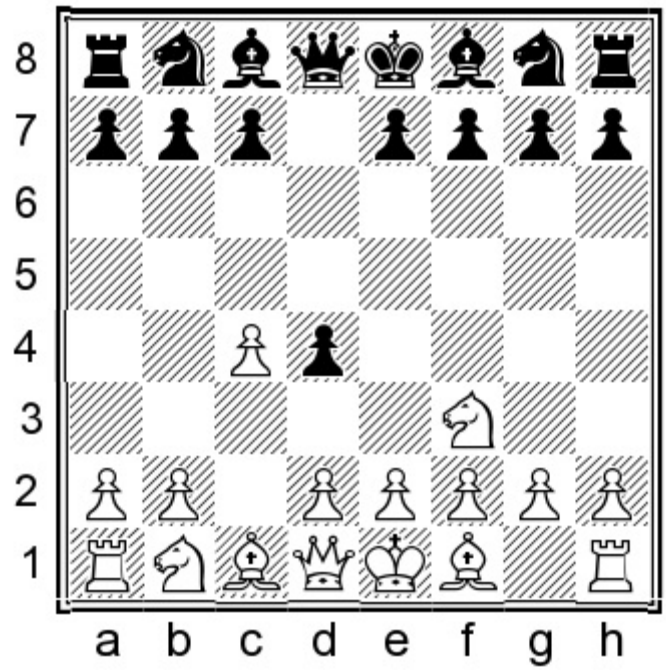
e) 3.b4 g6

f) 3.b4 g5

a) 3.--, 3.b4 a5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4

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Position after: 2...d4

We may have reached the critical chapter of our book – we will find out if our move order with 1.♘f3 and 2.c4 is viable or not. However, this is not so obvious. White seems to play something like a reversed Benko or Benoni and, being White, is simply a tempo up. It doesn't seem to be a problem, but being a tempo up doesn't always ensure you an advantage. And the fact that, lately, analysts recommend this line for Black is not something we should dismiss lightly. Before heading to our main theory, let's see the other possibilities we have instead of 3.b4, although I do not believe that they are sufficient to play for an edge.

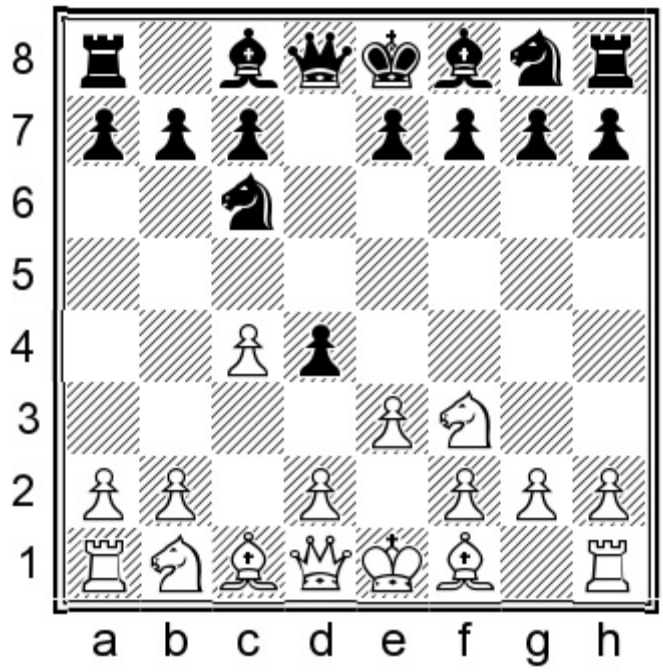
3.b4

We are playing in the spirit of the Benko, but it can actually lead to various types of play. We start to expand on the queenside as soon as the tension in the center is released (with 2...d4) in order to prevent ...c7-c5, which would give Black a fine space advantage. The next move is usually e3, in order to start attacking d4. This is actually a reversed line of 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 b5, where 4.♗g5 is the most common move. Here Black has the same position without ...♘f6, but he can make use of that, for example by playing 3...f6, which is actually the main move, in order to take control over the center. First, let's have a close look at the different sidelines:

A) 3.c5?! This strange move has attractted some followers. The idea is simply to prevent ...c7-c5, but it can't be good. 3...♘c6 (3...e5!?) 4.♕a4 ♗d7! 5.♘xd4 e5 6.♘xc6 ♗xc6 7.♕c2 ♕d4↑

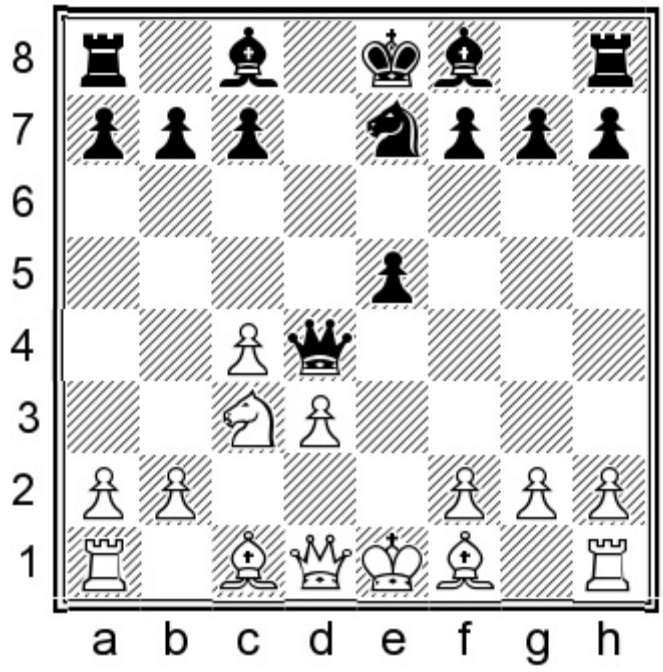
B) 3.e3 White either wants to enter a Benoni (3...c5) a tempo up, or a Blumenfeld (3...c5 4.b4, which actually transposes to our analysis), but Black has the possibility of playing 3...♘c6!.

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Position after: 3...♘c6!

This line exists with reversed colors after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 c5 3.d5 e6 4.♘c3, so Black gets the same position, with the knight still at home on g8. This is actually not bad news, as it will head for a better spot. 4.exd4 (4.b4?! dxe3 5.fxe3 ♘xb4 6.d4 is well met by 6...e5!∓) 4...♘xd4 5.♘xd4 ♕xd4 6.♘c3 e5 7.d3 ♘e7!



Position after: 7...♘e7!

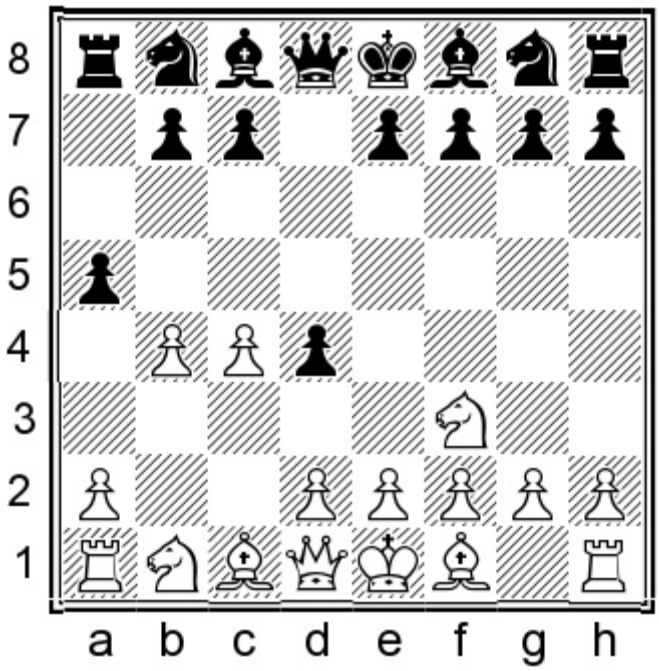
This is a major difference. The knight goes to f5, where it prevents ♗e3 and stops any d4-ideas. 8.♗e2

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(8.♗e3 ♕d6 9.d4 ♘f5∓) 8...♘f5!? 9.0-0 c6!↑

C) 3.g3 White can try to delay e3, but it doesn't really help and Black can take a firm grip on the center after 3...♘c6! 4.♗g2 e5 5.d3 (5.0-0 can be met with 5...e4! 6.♘e1 h5! 7.♗xe4 ♗h3!?→ with a very dangerous attack for the pawn.) 5...♗b4+!? An annoying check that blocks most of the play on the queenside and forces us to put a piece on d2 that we don't necessarily want or need there. 6.♗d2 a5 This is analyzed by Delchev, and is quite safe for Black.

3...a5!?



Position after: 3...a5!?

You will soon get acquainted with this idea. Black wants to provoke b4-b5 in order to use the c5-square, for example for his b8-knight.

4.♕a4+!

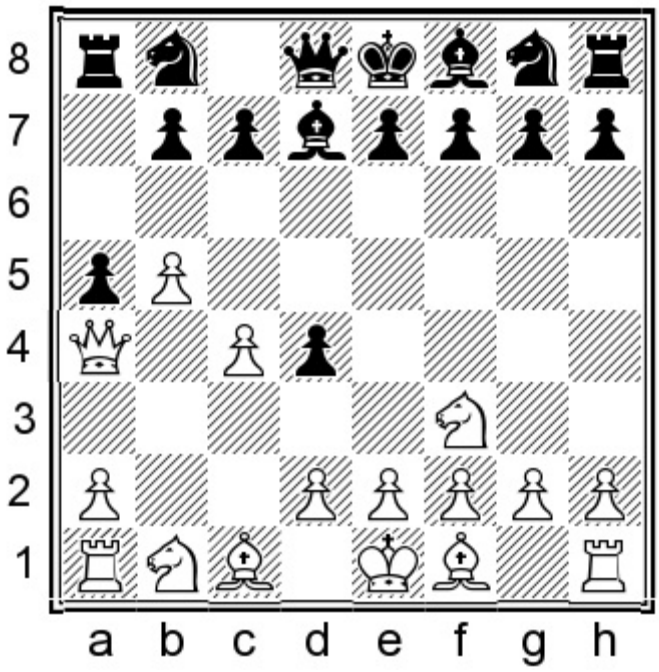
This pins the a-pawn and intends to continue with ♗b2 on the next move, grabbing the d4-pawn.

4...♗d7!

Other moves are too slow, for example 4...c6?! 5.♗b2!±.

5.b5

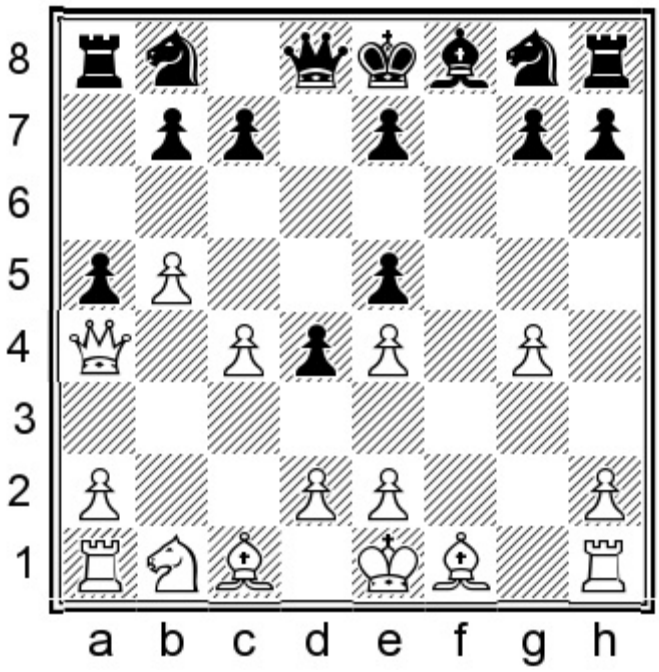
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Position after: 5.b5

5...c5!

5...♗g4!? A recent game soon became crazy after 6.♘e5 ♗f5 7.g4! ♗e4 8.f3 f6! 9.fxe4 fxe5



Position after: 9...fxe5

10.c5!! Brilliant. The idea is to free the c4-square for the queen. 10...e6 11.♕c4 ♘d7 12.c6 bxc6 (12...♕h4+!?N 13.♔d1 bxc6 14.♕xe6+ ♗e7 15.♕xc6 ♖b8 16.d3 ♘gf6 17.♘d2 ♘xg4 18.♘f3 ♕f6 19.♔c2!±) 13.♕xe6+ ♕e7 14.♕xc6 ♕h4+ 15.♔d1 ♖b8 16.d3 ♗b4 17.♘d2! ♘e7 18.♕c4± This is

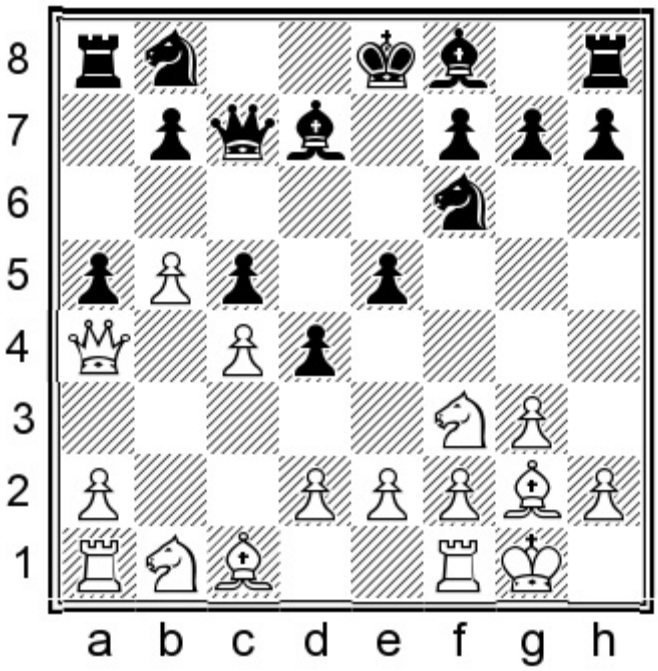
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messy, but White keeps the upper hand thanks to his radiant queen on c4, and finally won in Howell, D (2671) – Brunello, S (2573) Gjakova 2016.

6.g3

6.e3 ♕c7!= prepares ...e5, and indirectly defends the d4-pawn because of the nasty ...♕e5+ at the end.

6...♕c7 7.♗g2 e5 8.0-0 ♘f6



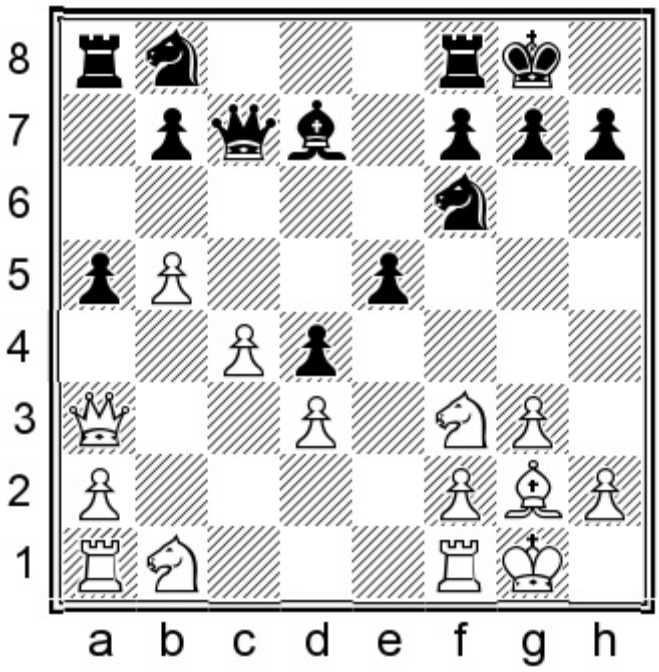
Position after: 8...♘f6

9.e3!N 9...♗d6 10.exd4 cxd4 11.♗a3!

It's incredibly important to trade these bishops. Doing so weakens the e5-pawn and the dark squares on the queenside.

11...0-0 12.♗xd6 ♕xd6 13.♕a3! ♕c7 14.d3±

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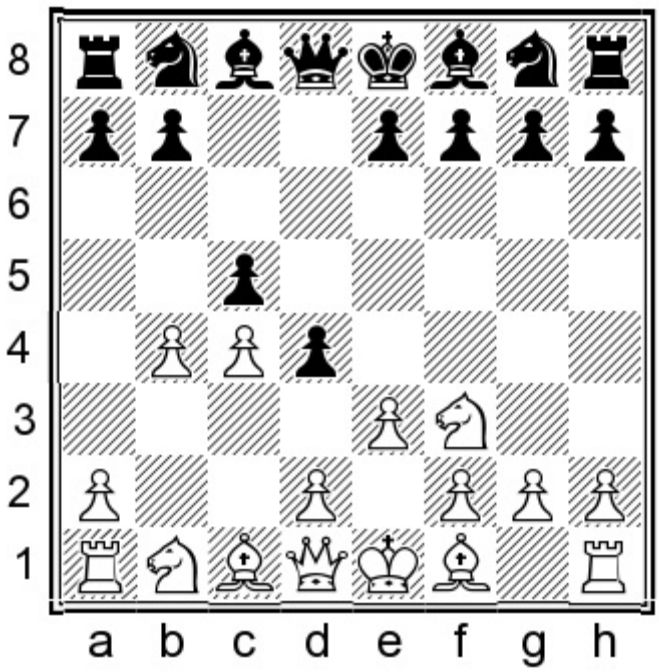
Position after: 14.d3±

b) 3.--, 3.b4 c5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 c5

Black accepts being a tempo down. It's a tough choice to make, and I don't think it would be mine. I have always considered the best answer to be...

4.e3!?



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Position after: 4.e3!?

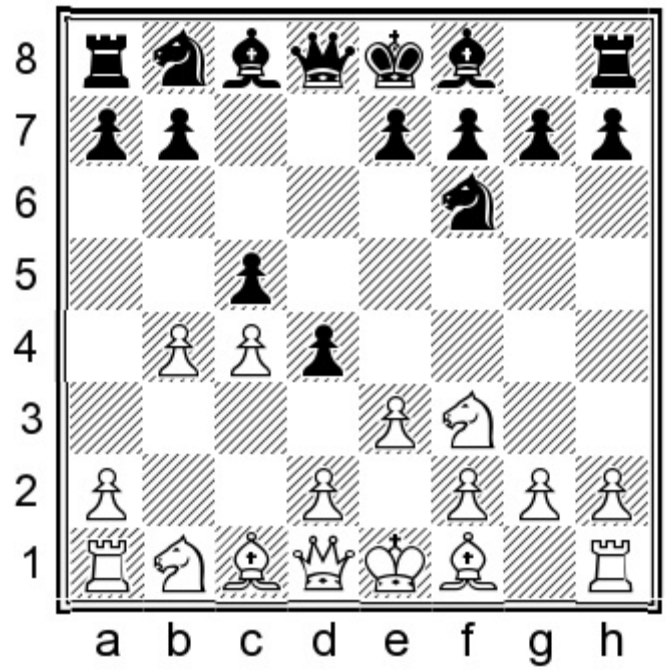
Intending to play a Blumenfeld Gambit a tempo up after 4...dxe3 5.fxe3 cxb4 6.d4, with lots of play and compensation. Even if Black can try to fight back, I think he actually has a stronger continuation at his disposal. 4.g3!? Bauer, C (2623) – Lampert, J (2461) Skopje 2015, 1-0 (59), is also really interesting, in order to play a Benko a tempo up. Of course, the choice depends on your style!

4...dxe3

The main line.

A) 4...f6 transposes into the main line with 4...c5.

B) 4...♘f6!?



Position after: 4...♘f6!?

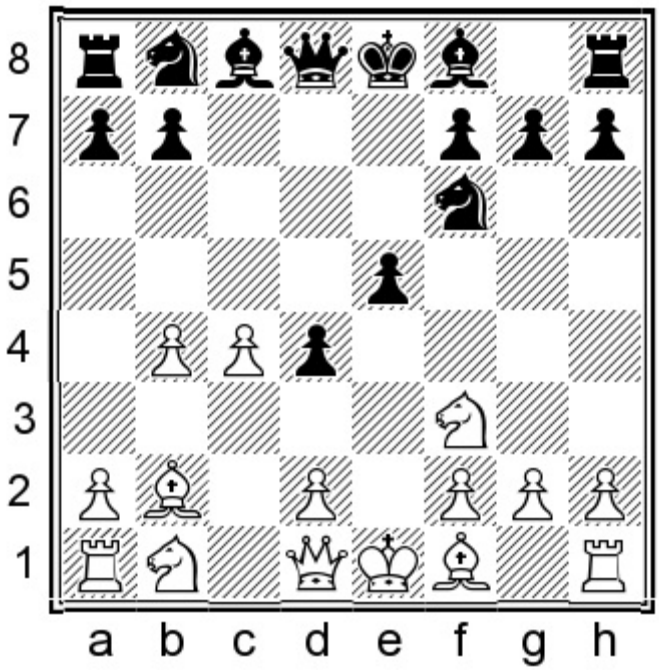
This is only the ninth most played move in this position! But it was actually quite hard to find an answer that fully satisfied me.

B1) 5.bxc5 ♘c6! 6.exd4 ♘xd4 7.♘c3 e5!↑

B2) 5.b5 ♘bd7 6.exd4 cxd4 7.♘xd4 ♘c5 8.♗b2 (8.♘b3 ♘d3+ 9.♗xd3 ♕xd3 10.♕e2 ♗f5 11.♗b2 ♖c8 12.♘a3) 8...e5 9.♘b3 ♗f5!⩱

B3) 5.exd4 cxd4 6.♗b2 (6.a3 a5 7.b5 ♗g4 8.d3 e5 9.♗e2 ♘bd7 10.0-0∓; 6.d3?! was severely countered in the recent game Mareco, S (2635) – Vidit, S (2689) Doha 2016: 6...e5! 7.a3 a5 8.♘xe5 axb4 9.♕e2 ♗e7∓ 0-1 (35)) 6...e5! Once again, this strike is really strong for Black.

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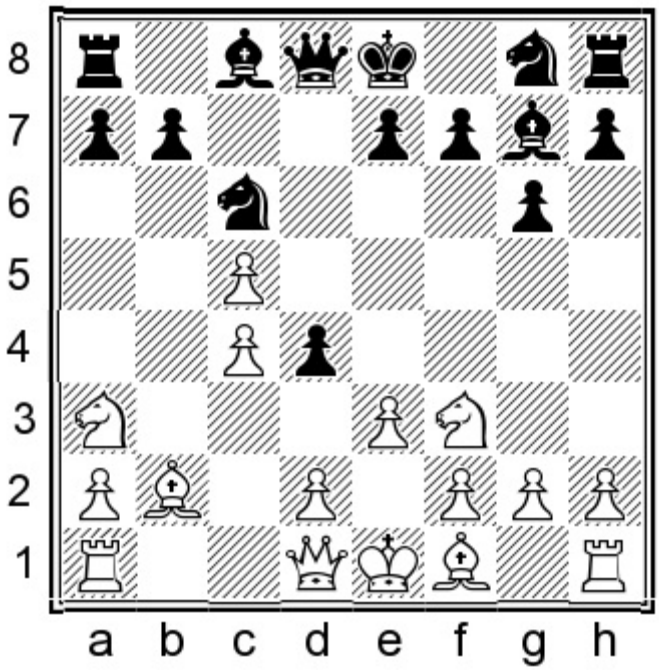
Position after: 6...e5!

7.♘xe5 ♗xb4 8.♕a4+ Black loses a piece? No! 8...♘fd7! 9.♗xd4 (9.♘xd7? ♕e7+!∓) 9...0-0! 10.♕xb4 ♘xe5 11.♗xe5 ♘c6! 12.♕c3 ♘xe5 13.♗e2 ♘c6 14.0-0 ♘d4= White is a pawn up, but he has huge trouble getting rid of the annoying d4-knight. Black is not worse at all.

B4) 5.♗b2 dxe3 6.fxe3 cxb4 We have a slightly different version of the Blumenfeld we wanted, as the bishop doesn't necessarily belong on b2, but it's not bad at all, and I think is White's best chance. 7.d4 g6 8.♗d3 ♗g7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘bd2↑

C) 4...g6?! I met this move in a rapid game, but I don't think it can be good, as Black prevents his own bishop from taking back on c5. 5.bxc5 ♘c6 6.♗b2 ♗g7 Now I prefer to improve on the game Demuth, A (2470) – Tregubov, P (2625) Le Port Marly 2014 (1-0, 49), with 7.♘a3!±

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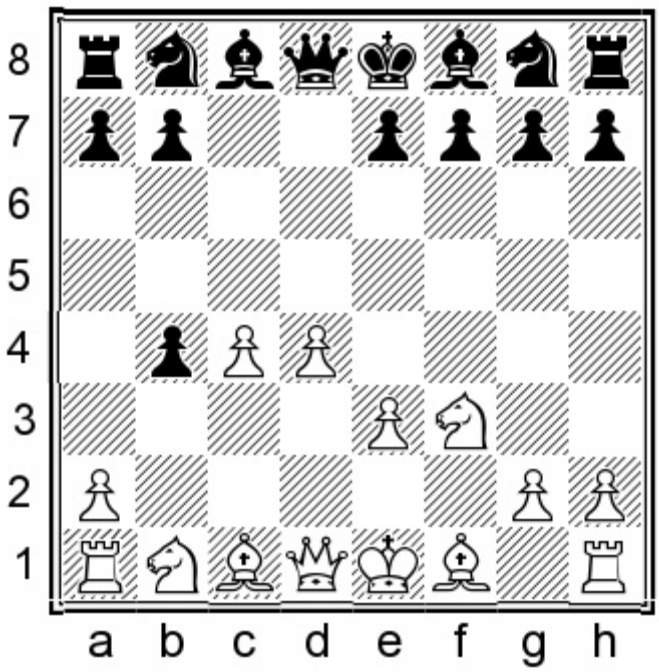


Position after: 7.♘a3!±

with the idea that 7...e5? is bad in view of 8.♘b5±.

D) 4...♗g4?! 5.exd4 cxd4 6.h3 ♗xf3 (6...♗h5 7.♕a4+ ♘c6 8.g4 ♗g6 9.♗g2 ♘f6 10.♘e5±) 7.♕xf3 ♕c7 8.♘a3 e5 9.c5 ♘c6 10.♖b1±

5.fxe3 cxb4 6.d4



Position after: 6.d4

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The Blumenfeld is a tricky gambit to meet, especially if one doesn't really know how to respond. Being a tempo down definitely doesn't help Black.

6...♘f6

6...e6 will transpose into 7...e6 once Black plays ...♘g8-f6.

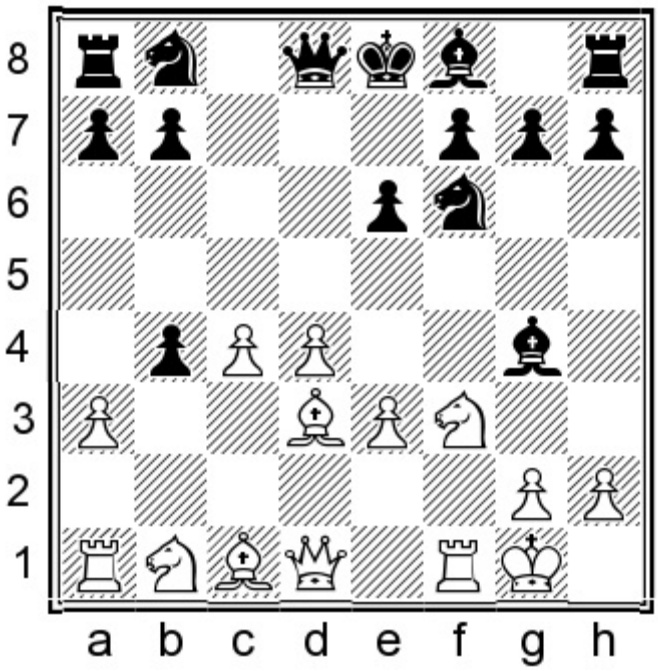
7.♗d3

7.a3!?N is slightly different, but also interesting: 7...bxa3 8.♗e2 e6 (8...g6 is a bit too slow, as we can take control of the center with 9.♘c3 ♗g7 10.e4!±) 9.0-0 ♗e7 10.♗xa3 0-0 11.♘c3↑

7...g6

A) 7...e6 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.♗b2 ♗e7 10.♘bd2 0-0 11.♕e2! b6 12.e4! ♗b7 13.e5 ♘e8 14.♖ad1↑

B) 7...♗g4 8.0-0 e6 9.a3!?N



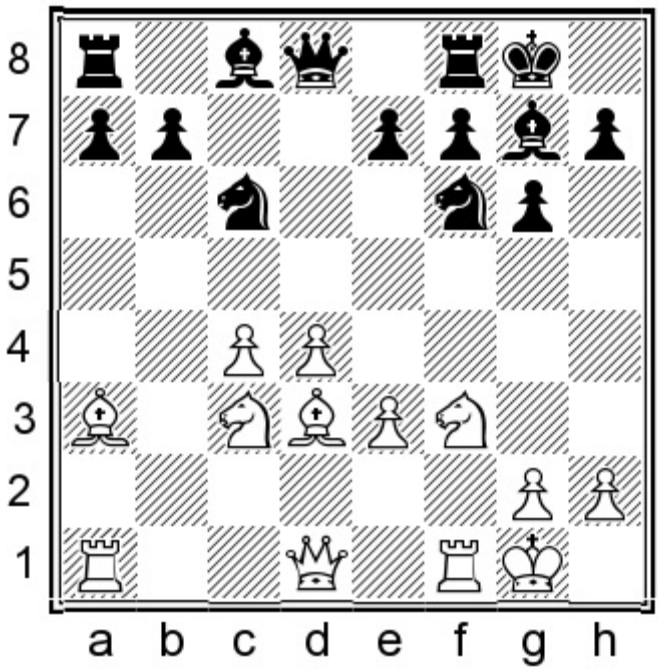
Position after: 9.a3!?N

White has other choices, but this seems quite promising, with the idea 9...♘c6 10.♕a4!, putting some pressure on the queenside as well. 10...♗e7 (10...♗xf3 11.♖xf3 bxa3 12.♘xa3 ♗e7 13.♗b2 0-0 14.♖af1↑) 11.axb4 ♗xf3 12.♖xf3 ♗xb4 13.♗b2↑.

8.a3 bxa3 9.♘c3 ♗g7 10.0-0 0-0 11.♗xa3 ♘c6

Even if it was an online rapid game, White got a good scalp in Mareco, S (2664) – Nakamura, H (2793) chess.com 2017. I would even improve on his play with...

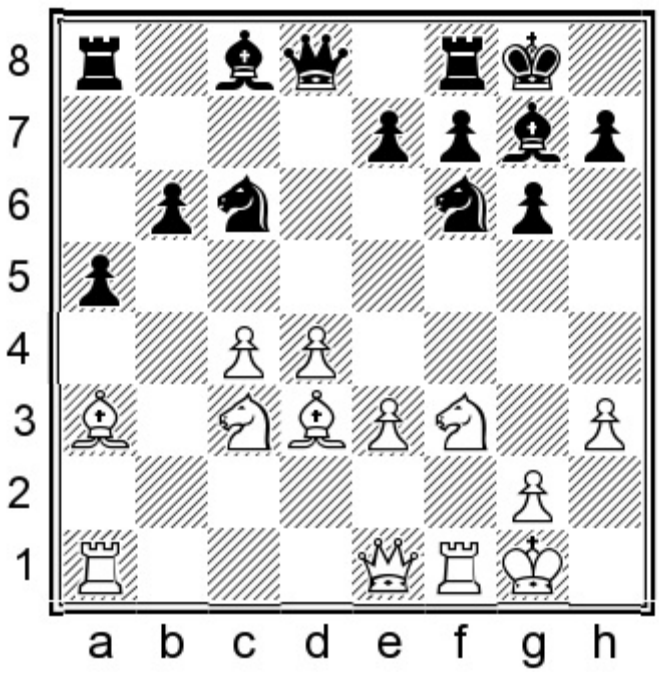
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Position after: 11...♘c6

12.♕e1!?N

A few days after finishing this book, I got this position against the strong Chinese grandmaster Yu Yangyi. I remembered the main ideas of my analysis, but unfortunately in the wrong move order, and I repeated the next move of Mareco's game: 12.h3 This move isn't bad, as it prevents any nasty ...♗g4, or even ...♘g4, ideas, but I feel now that it's a bit too slow. He continued logically with another fianchetto: 12...b6 13.♕e1 Intending either ♕f2 or ♕h4. (13.♕e2 was Mareco's move.) 13...a5!

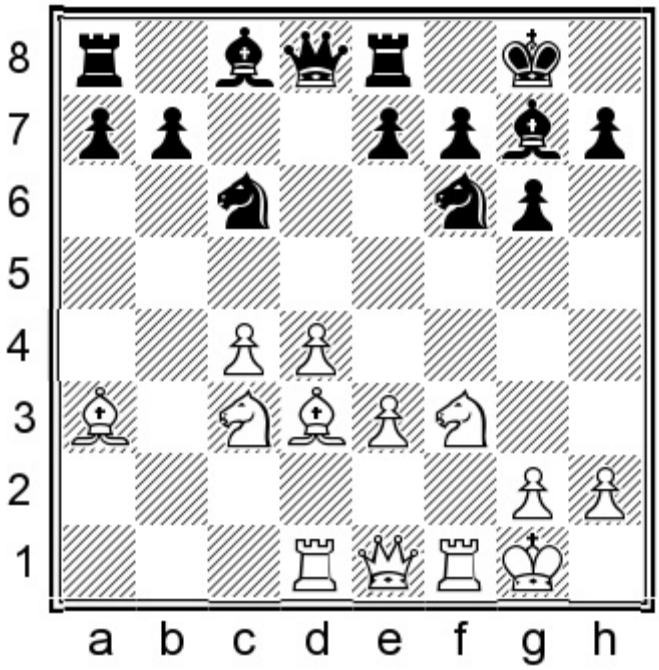


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Position after: 13...a5!

This enables the knight to reach the b4-square, but the bishop can also to come to a6, without fearing the rook on a1. I decided to enter the complications, but my opponent simply played better. 14.d5 ♗a6! 15.dxc6 ♕xd3 16.♘e5 ♕d8 17.♖d1?! (17.♖xf6! ♗xf6 18.♘d7↑ was probably the best chance but I didn't spot it.) 17...♕c7 18.♘d7 ♕xc6 19.♖xf6 exf6 20.♗xf8 ♖xf8!∓ and Black was better in Demuth, A (2538) – Yu, Y (2743) Turkey 2017.

12...♖e8 13.♖d1!



Position after: 13.♖d1!

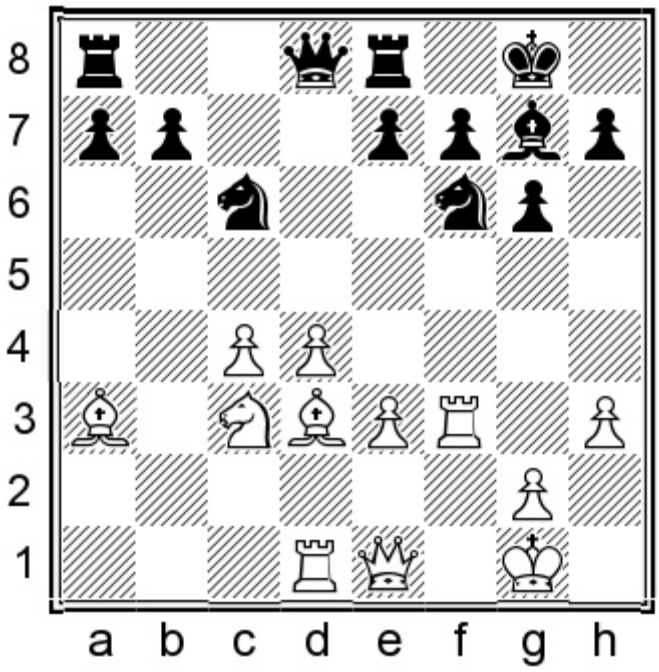
This move prevents most of the ...e5-ideas, but also prevents ...♘xd4, which can sometimes be a problem for White.

13...♗g4

13...a5 14.♗c2! ♘b4 15.♗b3 ♗d7 16.♘e5↑

14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♖xf3⩲

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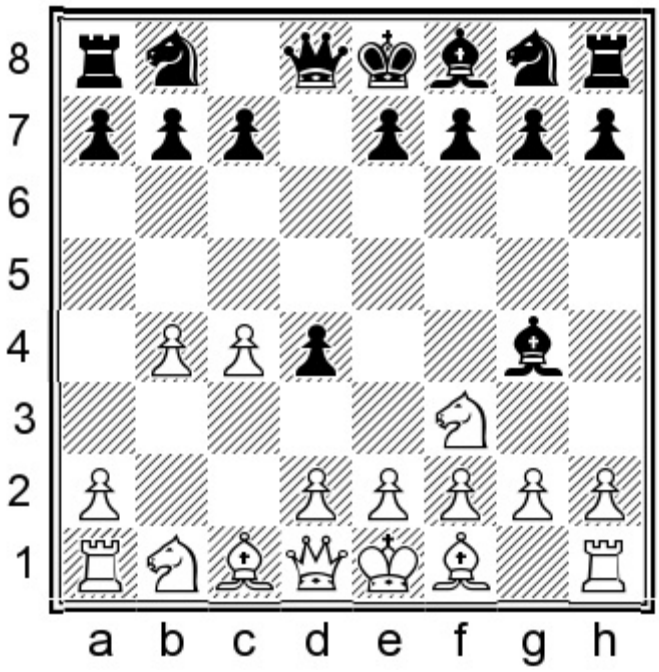
Position after: 15.♖xf3♾

I am not sure whether we can state that White has an edge here, but it seems easier to play for him, and he definitely has enough compensation.

He has good prospects in the center if he manages to advance his pawns in the most accurate way.

c) 3.b4 ♗g4 4.♕b3 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 ♗g4!?



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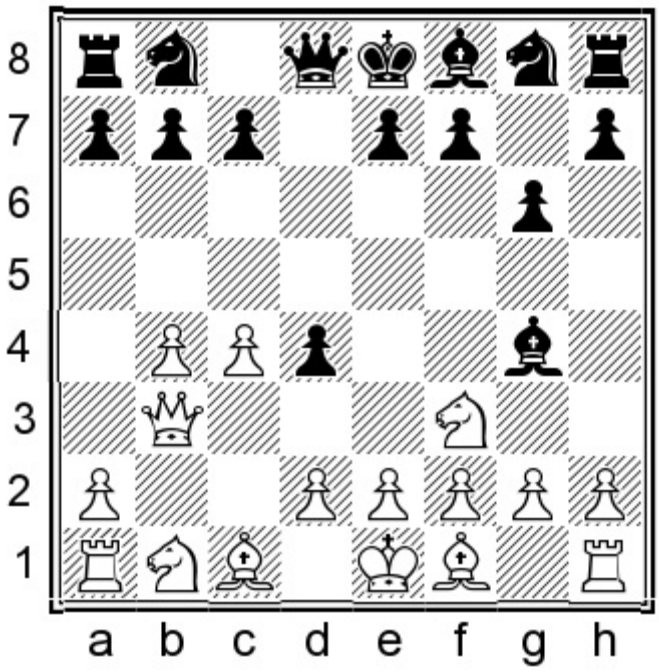
Position after: 3...♗g4!?

This is a really serious alternative. Black attacks our knight, in order to be able to push ...e7-e5. Shortly before writing this book, New in Chess asked me to write a survey about this exact opening. (This was published in Yearbook 123 if you want to read it in full.) Here I will only highlight the main ideas and recent improvements that have occurred in the most recent games.

4.♕b3!

It's a strange feeling, but not unpleasant, to quote myself: "What are the basic ideas? First, White wants to have the option to take back on f3 with the queen if needed. The queen also protects the b4 pawn, but we might sometimes be forced to play c4-c5, so that the bishop on f8 doesn't attack it. This will allow us to play ♗f1-c4 which is even stronger if Black decided to play ...f7-f6 to follow-up with ...e7-e5. The a2-g8 diagonal might become really weak. White's aim is to put pressure either on the center, by means of e2-e3 and ♗c1-b2, or play along the diagonal h1-a8 after a fianchetto and b4-b5 at some point in order to attack the c6-square. On the other hand, Black may try to weaken White's queenside with ...a7-a5, in order to obtain the c5-square, or place a strong center with ...e7-e5".

4...g6?!

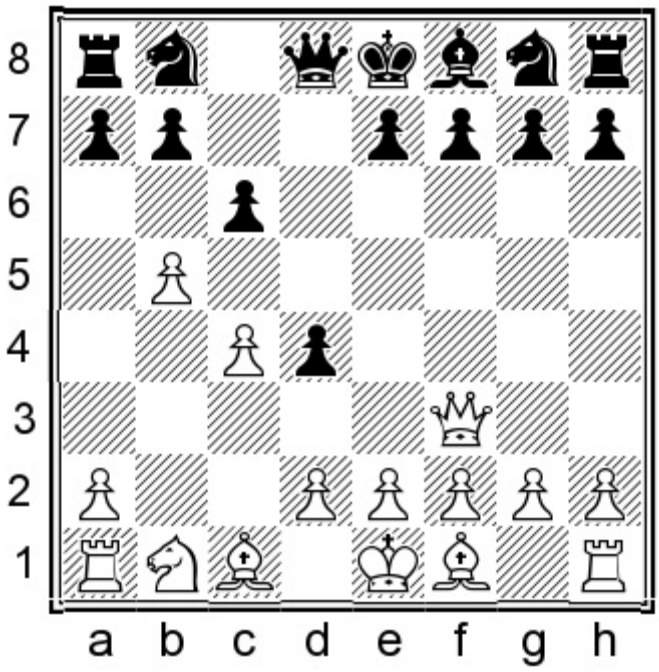


Position after: 4...g6?!

This is already quite a serious mistake, but none of the White players was able to spot the refutation.

A) 4...♗xf3 5.♕xf3 c6 6.b5!N This is actually an improvement over many of the games played, and what I analyzed in the Yearbook earlier this year. I now think that it is crucial to put some pressure on the c6-pawn straightaway, preventing ...♘b8-d7.

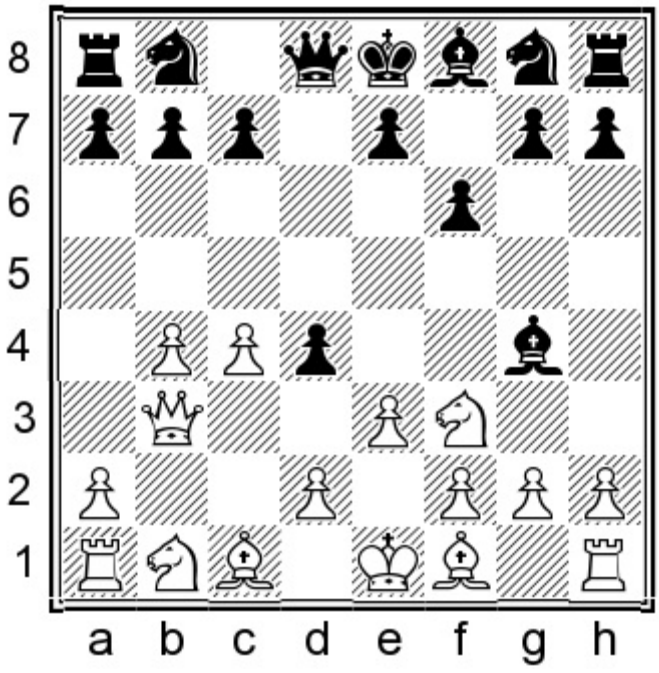
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Position after: 6.b5!N

6...♘f6 (6...e5 7.g3 ♗b4 8.♗g2 ♘e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘a3!↑) 7.g3! e5 8.♗g2 ♗e7 9.d3 0-0 10.0-0± How is Black going to develop his queenside?

B) 4...f6 It seems less sound to play this move now than on the third move, because the queen is already on b3, and can take advantage of the weakened light-squared diagonal. 5.e3!



Position after: 5.e3!

This is the right reaction. We attack the center and clear the way for the bishop on f1.

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B1) 5...dxe3?! I really don't like this move. It is absolutely antipositional, as it seems important to keep this pawn, which limited White's pieces. Now everything will get steadily worse. 6.fxe3!N Completely in the spirit of the Blumenfeld Gambit, but without having to sac a pawn. 6...e5 7.♗b2 ♘d7?! 8.c5 c6 9.♗c4 ♘h6 10.0-0 ♗e7 11.d4±.

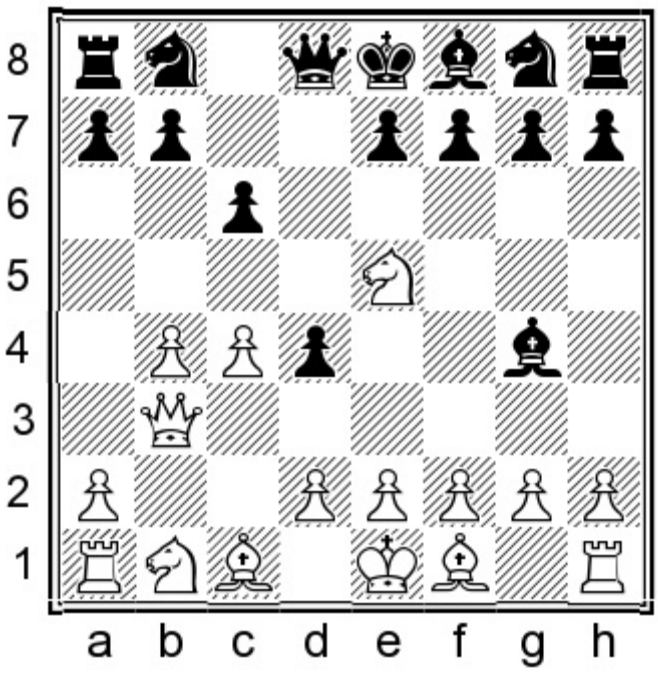
B2) 5...♗xf3 This move makes sense, as the queen can't take back any more. 6.gxf3 e5 7.f4! With the bishop pair, White needs to open the position, even if it costs him a pawn. 7...♘c6 (7...exf4?! 8.♗g2! c6 9.0-0 and it's already hard to find a useful move for Black; he will be unable to keep the position stable and closed.) 8.c5! exf4 9.♗g2 ♕d7 10.0-0 0-0-0 11.b5!→

B3) 5...e5 6.♗e2± makes Black feel a bit stupid as he has to parry the obvious threat ♘f3xd4, which is not so easy.

C) In the recent European Club Cup, I had to face the move 4...c6 that I had covered in the Yearbook. I had proposed an interesting novelty, but despite the article being quite recent... my brain hadn't stored it and I couldn't figure it out over the board!

C1) 5.e3 was my choice during the game, and a novelty at the time as well: 5...♗xf3 6.gxf3 g6 7.♗b2 ♗g7 8.♘a3 ♘h6 9.♘c2 e5= The game became really complicated and ended in a draw after some drama, but White doesn't have anything special here: Demuth, A (2538) – Rodshtein, M (2699) Antalya 2017, ½-½ (44).

C2) 5.♘e5!



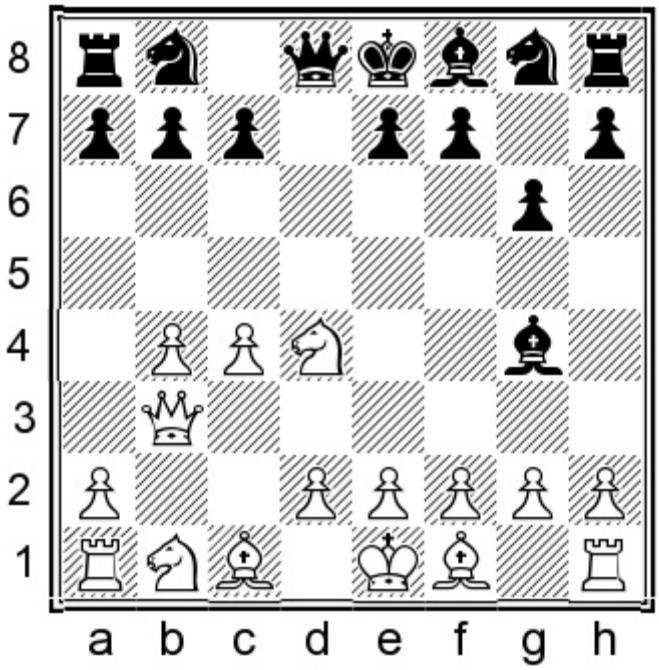
Position after: 5.♘e5!

The move I had prepared, and probably the best, underlining that Black is playing a bit slowly with 4...c6. It is no longer a novelty, as Eljanov played it a few days before this book went to print. However, he did not continue in the best way. 5...♗f5 6.e3!N (6.♗b2?! f6 7.♘f3 e5 8.e3 c5! 9.bxc5 ♘c6! 10.exd4 exd4 11.♗d3 ♕e7+ 12.♔d1 ♗xd3 13.♕xd3 0-0-0 was great for Black in Eljanov, P

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(2720) – Edouard, R (2607) Hersonissos 2017, 1-0 (52)) 6...f6 7.♘f3 e5 8.c5! The a2-g8 diagonal becomes weak. 8...♘h6 9.♗b2 dxe3 10.dxe3±

5.♘xd4!N



Position after: 5.♘xd4!N

Not so hard to see!

5...♗g7

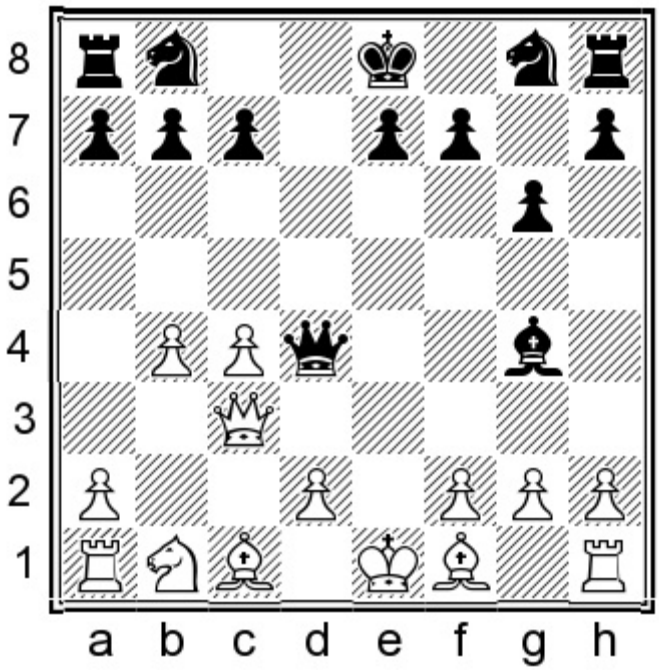
5...♕xd4? is simply a mistake: 6.♗b2 ♕d6 7.♗xh8. Even if the bishop is going to be blocked in for a while, or lost after great efforts by Black, White will clearly stay in the driver's seat. For instance: 7...f6 8.e3 (the threat is c5) 8...♘h6 9.c5 ♕d8 10.d4 ♘f7 11.♗xf6 exf6 12.♗c4± with an almost winning position thanks to the impressive center.

6.e3! ♗xd4

Otherwise we are just a pawn up.

7.exd4 ♕xd4 8.♕c3!

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Position after: 8.♕c3!

This may be the hardest move to find.

8.♗b2 is tempting, but only leads to a perpetual: 8...♕e4+ 9.♕e3 ♕c2! 10.♘c3!? (10.♕b3 ♕e4+=) 10...♕xb2 11.♖b1 ♕a3= White has compensation, but only enough for a draw.

8...♘c6!

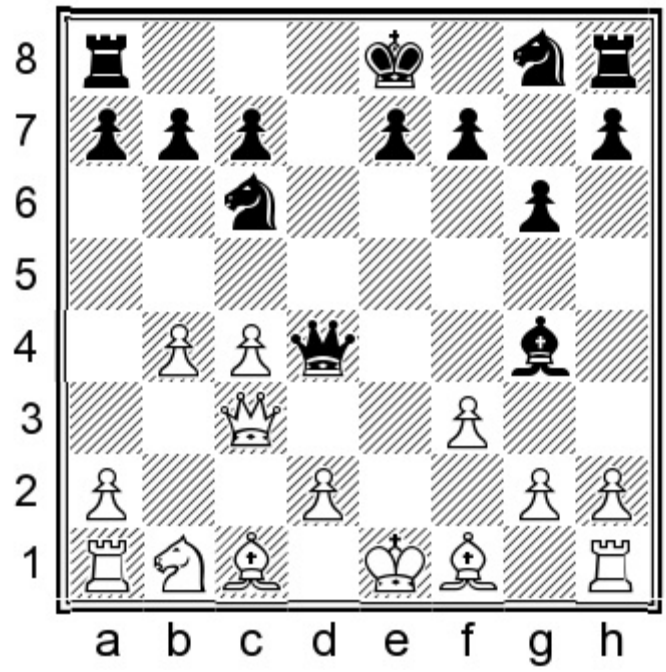
Best.

A) 8...♕xc3 9.♘xc3 ♘c6 10.♗b2! 0-0-0 (10...♘xb4?! 11.f3 ♗f5 12.g4 ♗d7 13.♘d5 ♘xd5 14.♗xh8 ♘b4 15.♖b1 c5 16.♔f2±) 11.f3 ♗f5 12.♘d5 e5 13.0-0-0±

B) 8...♕e4+?! 9.♕e3 ♕xe3+ (9...♕c2? 10.♘c3!+– This is the difference with 8.♗b2: the bishop is not hanging.) 10.fxe3± This is a much better endgame for White.

9.f3

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Position after: 9.f3

9...♕xc3

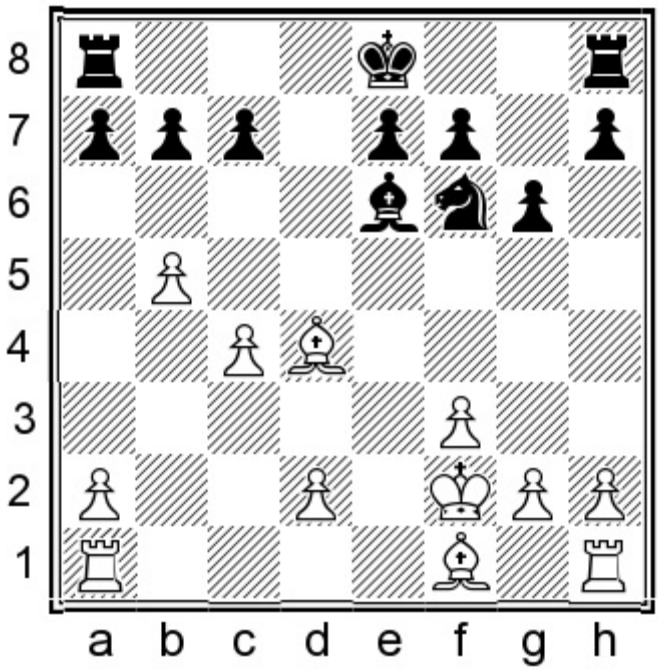
9...♗f5 10.♗b2±

10.♘xc3 ♗e6 11.♗b2 ♘f6 12.b5 ♘d4 13.♘d5! ♗xd5

13...♘c2+ 14.♔d1 ♗xd5 15.♔xc2 ♗e6 16.a4↑

14.♗xd4 ♗e6 15.♔f2±

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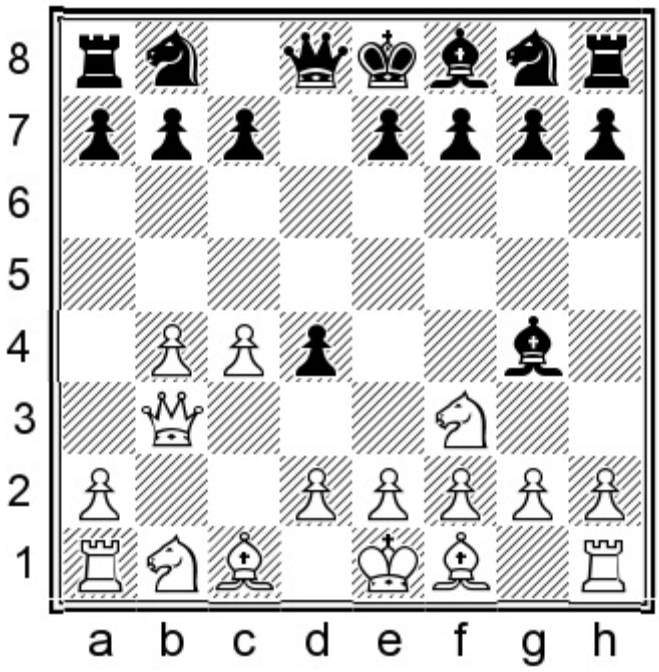


Position after: 15.♔f2±

The kind of endgame in which White can quietly push for a win. The bishop pair is really important.

d) 3.b4 ♗g4 4.♕b3 ♘c6 & 4...♘f6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 ♗g4 4.♕b3

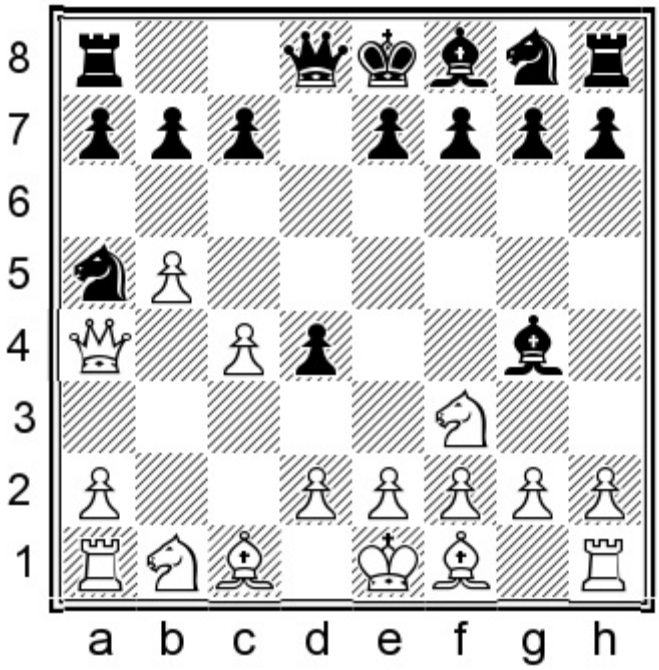


Position after: 4.♕b3

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4...♘f6

4...♘c6 This looks like a strange move, but it shouldn't be underestimated. 5.b5! ♘a5 6.♕a4



Position after: 6.♕a4

A) 6...c5 7.♘e5 ♗f5 (The idea 7...♗c8 8.b6+ ♘c6 9.♘xc6 ♕d7? is nicely refuted: 10.♕xa7!+–) 8.g4! (8.b6+?! ♘c6 9.♘xc6 axb6! 10.♘xd8+ ♖xa4 11.♘xb7 e5!∓ The knight on b7 is trapped, and Black will soon get his piece back with benefits.) 8...♗e4 9.f3 f6 10.fxe4 fxe5 11.d3± The light-squared bishop will find a nice spot on h3 and will have no opposition!

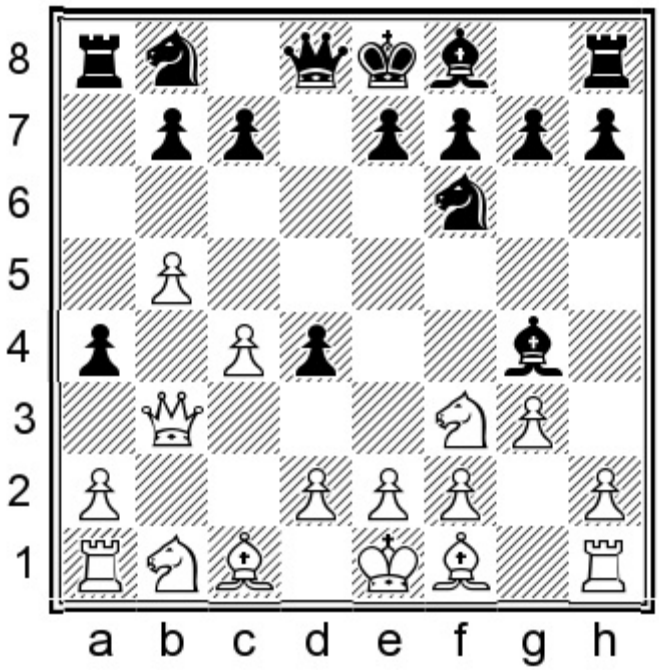
B) 6...♗xf3 7.gxf3! I think the easiest way to develop a nice initiative. 7...c5 (7...c6 8.d3 e6 9.♘d2 ♘f6 10.♘b3! ♘xb3 11.axb3 ♕b6 12.f4!±) 8.f4 e6 9.♗g2 ♗d6 10.d3 White's threat is ♗d2, and Black was already in danger in Kanep, M – Sveshnikov, E Talinn 2015.

5.g3 a5

As we have already found out, this move is often useful in order to gain control over the c5-square.

6.b5 a4!

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Position after: 6...a4!

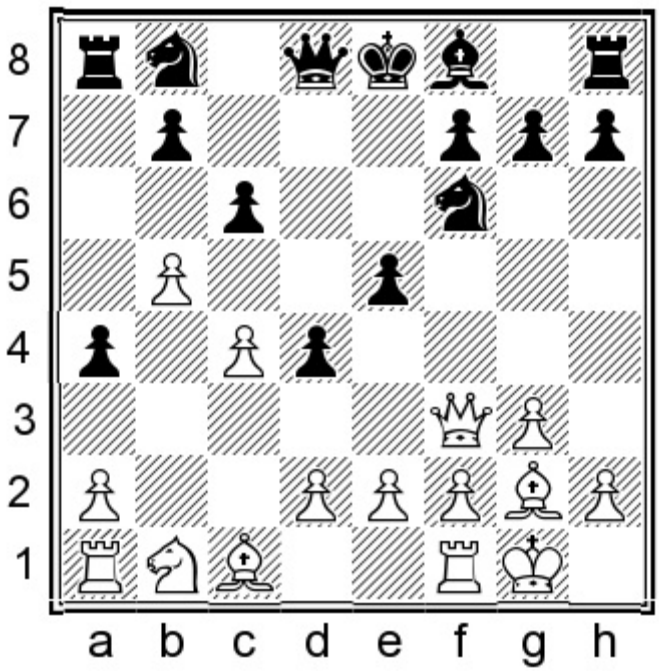
It seems like a good idea to nudge the white queen to an odd square.

6...e6 7.♗g2 ♗c5 8.♘e5! a4 9.♕d1 ♖a7 10.♘xg4 ♘xg4 11.0-0±

7.♕d3 c5!

Motylev's choice, and probably best.

7...♗xf3?! This feels illogical to me as it allows White to relocate the queen straight away. 8.♕xf3 c6 9.♗g2 e5 10.0-0



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Position after: 10.0-0

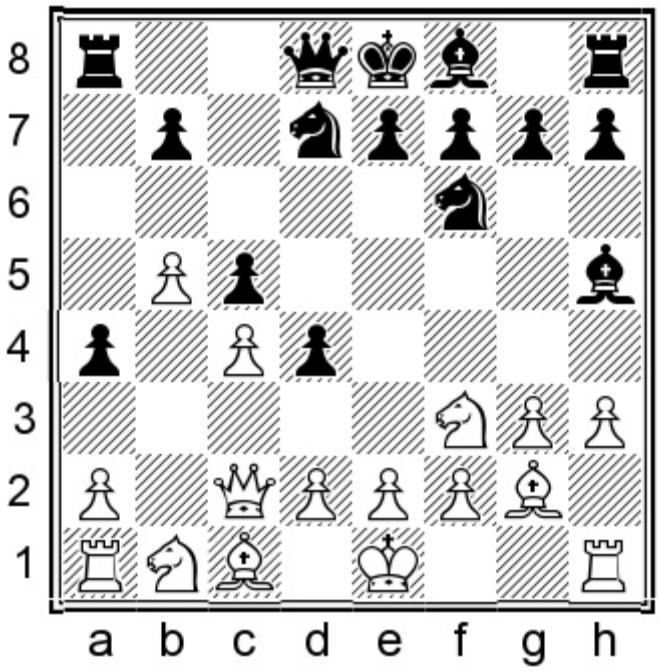
A) 10...e4? doesn't help: 11.♕f5! ♗e7 (11...g6 12.♕e5+ ♗e7 13.♗a3! ♘bd7 14.♕xd4±) 12.d3 0-0 (12...exd3 13.♕xd3 0-0 14.♗b2 ♗c5 15.♖d1±) 13.dxe4 ♘bd7 14.♖d1±

B) 10...♗e7 11.d3 0-0 12.♘d2± Here is Black's problem: he won't be able to move the knight and finish his development for a long time.

8.♗g2 ♘bd7 9.h3 ♗h5

White's development is quite ugly, but I would like to solve this problem, and improve on the game Bologan, V (2640) – Motylev, A (2663) Sochi 2016, with...

10.♕c2!N



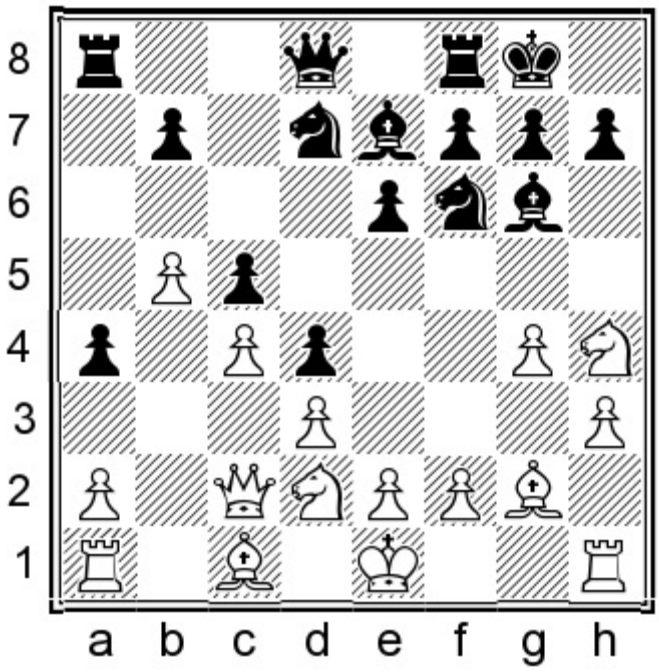
Position after: 10.♕c2!N

10...e6!

10...e5 is now well met by 11.♘h4! ♖a7 12.b6! ♘xb6 (12...♖a6 13.d3 ♗e7 14.g4 ♗g6 15.♗xb7 ♖xb6 16.♘xg6 hxg6 17.♗g2±) 13.♘a3!±.

11.d3 ♗e7 12.♘bd2 0-0 13.g4 ♗g6 14.♘h4↑

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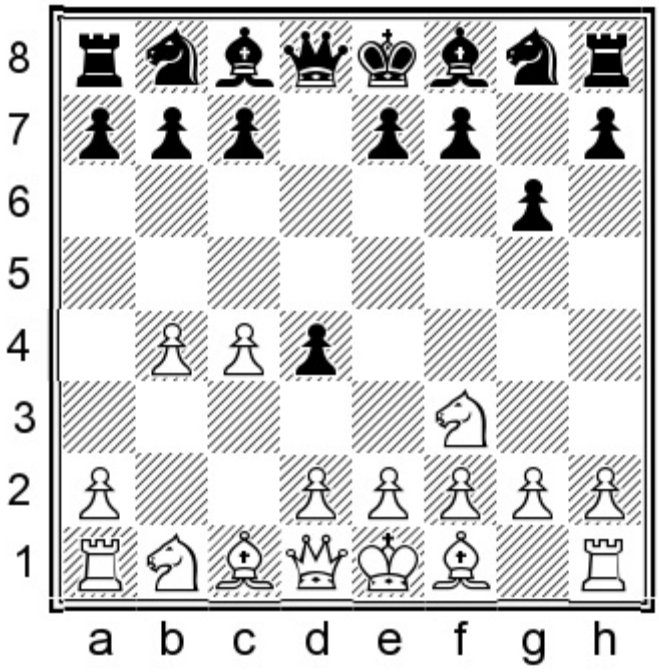


Position after: 14.♘h4↑

White will soon get the bishop pair, already has a great bishop on g2 and will try to expand on the kingside. Another problem for Black: he always has to keep an eye on the a4-pawn (endgames will be hard to save, if not lost).

e) 3.b4 g6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 g6



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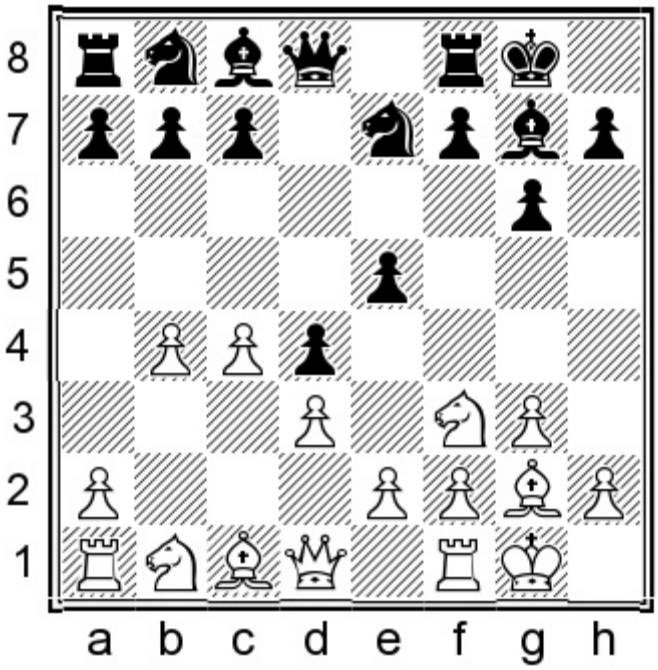
Position after: 3...g6

Black figures that this is going to be an important diagonal, and he is partly right. It is hard to know where this bishop is going to be most efficient, as it can also be useful in order to attack the b4-pawn.

4.g3!

When I met this move for the first time, in blitz against a strong GM, I naively played 4.e3?!, but an unpleasant surprise was uncorked after the strong 4...e5! 5.♘xe5 ♗g7! with some problems on the long diagonal. I managed to win (blitz is blitz...), but Black is not worse at all! Demuth, A (2545) – Romanov, E (2573) Berlin 2015.

4...♗g7 5.d3 e5 6.♗g2 ♘e7 7.0-0 0-0



Position after: 7...0-0

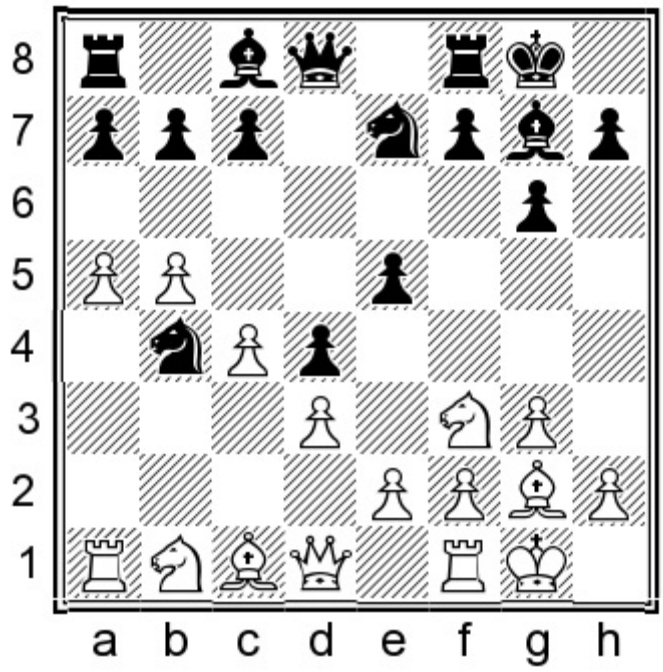
Black can do whatever he wants in the center. It's time to improve on the queenside now.

8.a4! a5

This is by far the main move, in order to block the queenside, but practice has shown that it doesn't really help Black.

8...♘bc6 9.b5 ♘b4 This was Black's idea, to settle the knight on b4, but it's not exactly what we can call a safe square. 10.a5!

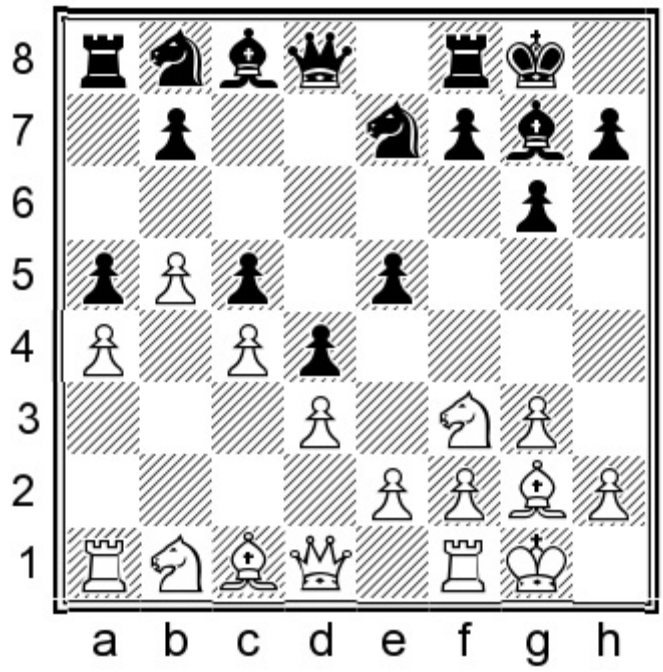
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Position after: 10.a5!

Preventing ...a7-a5 to keep the knight on b4. 10...c5! (10...a6?! 11.♗a3 c5 12.bxc6 ♘bxc6 13.♘bd2 ♗f5 14.♕a4 ♖e8 15.♖fb1± gives a lot of play for White. Black has lost precious tempi in order to open the queenside for White 1-0 (30) Howell, D (2678) – Can, E (2555) Dubai 2016.) 11.a6! (11.bxc6? ♘exc6! ∓) 11...bxa6 12.♘xe5 ♖b8 13.♘c6! ♘exc6 14.bxc6±

9.b5 c5



Position after: 9...c5

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10.♖a2!

We are going to open the center. This move allows to transfer the rook to the ‘e’ or ‘f’ file if needed, and it’s no longer a target for the bishop on g7.

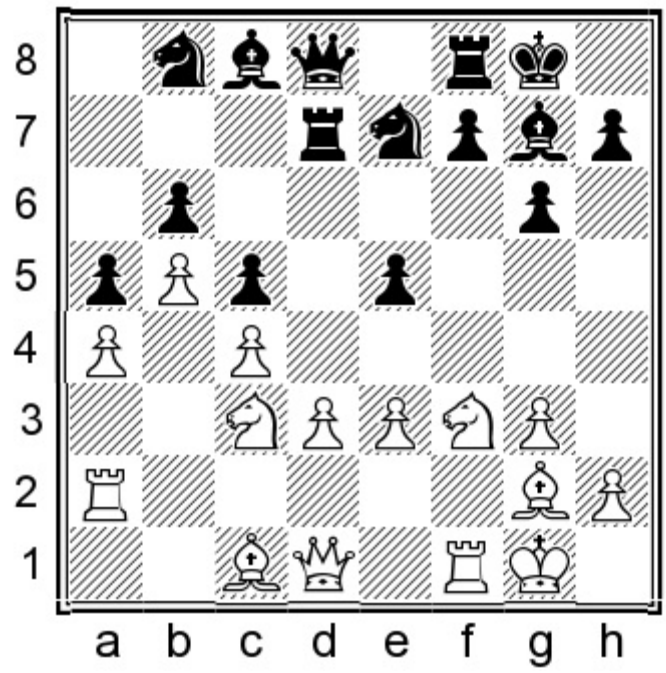
10...♖a7

In the same spirit, Black brings his own rook into play.

11.e3 dxe3

11...b6?! 12.exd4 exd4 13.♖e1 ♘d7 14.♖ae2 ♘f5 15.g4! ♘h6 16.h3!± No real harmony can be seen amongst Black’s pieces.

12.fxe3 b6 13.♘c3 ♖d7



Position after: 13...♖d7

While all five games that reached this position continued with 14.♘e1, with great results for White, I prefer the move...

14.♖d2!?N 14...♘f5 15.♕e2 ♖e8 16.♘d5±

For example if...

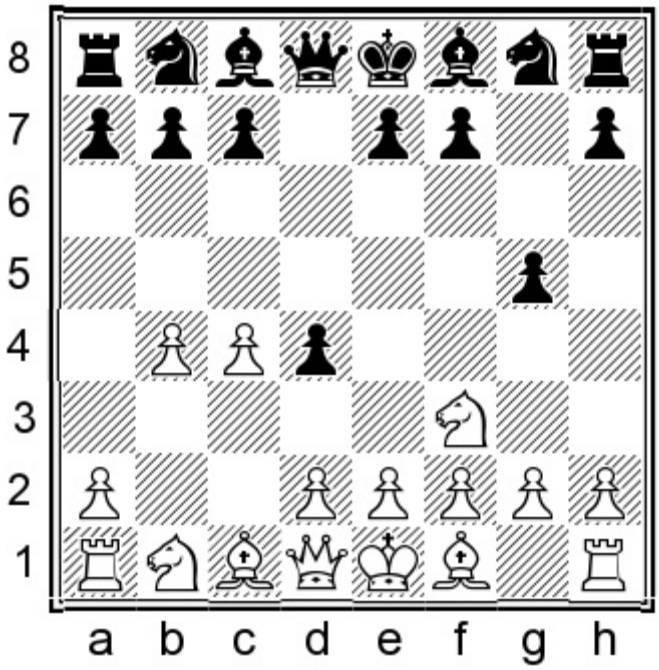
16...♗b7?! 17.e4! ♘d4 18.♕d1!±

The second rook is coming to the f-file with great effect and excellent attacking chances for White.

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f) 3.b4 g5

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 g5!?



Position after: 3...g5!?

This is a super-interesting and inventive idea. It doesn't surprise me that it was first played by the chess genius David Navara in 2011. Since then it has gained some popularity, and should really be considered a serious weapon for Black. He sacrifices a pawn in order to develop super-quickly and keep control over the center.

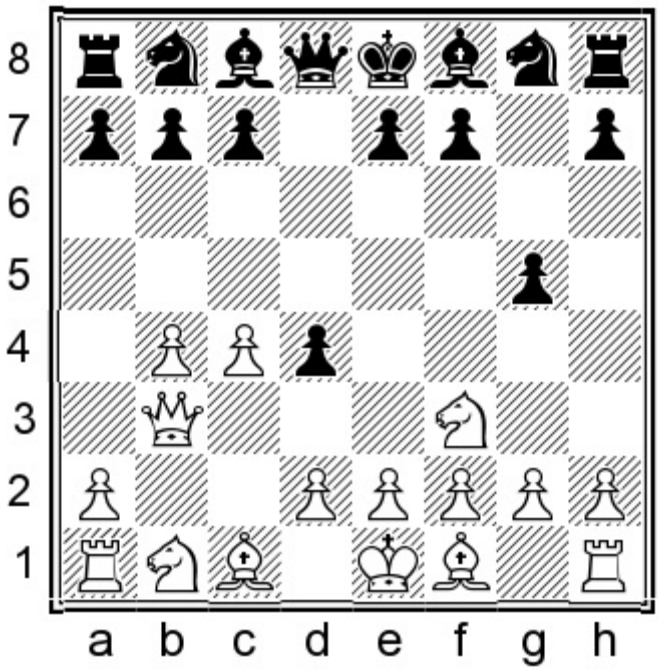
Actually, a strange thing happened to me last summer. I was having lunch with my friends IMs Loiseau and Barbot, and GM Lagarde, and we were talking about the Reti, which I was going to play in my afternoon game. One of them mentioned this line with 3...g5, and I told him that I still had to work on it for my book, but that White should still keep an edge somehow. And that same afternoon, this is what I got on the board. It took me twenty minutes to decide on my next move...

4.♗b2

This was my final choice, and I think it's among the best moves.

4.♕b3 I really like this practical move.

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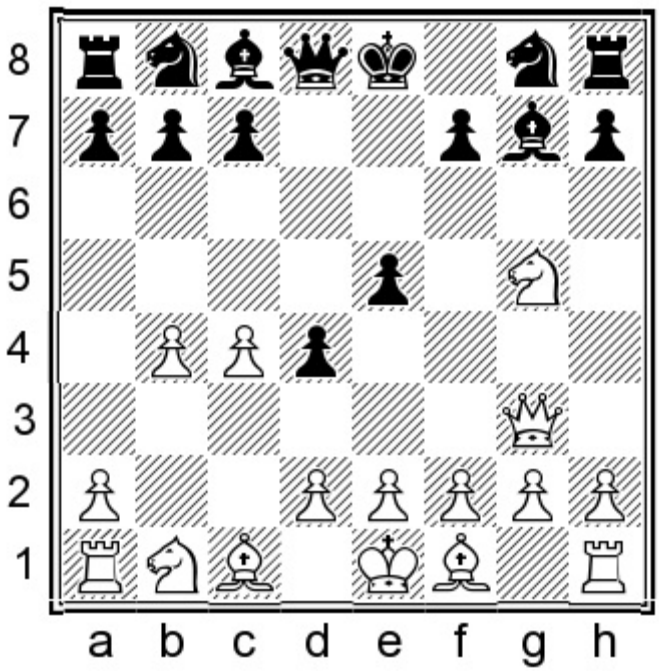


Position after: 4.♕b3

A) 4...g4?! falls into the trap 5.♘xd4! A pattern we have already met in the 3...♗g4 line: 5...♕xd4 6.♗b2 ♕d8 7.♗xh8 f6 8.h3!+–.

B) 4...f6 5.e3 e5 6.h3! A complicated position arrives on the board. If we are able to open the center, Black will soon regret his early pawn advances.

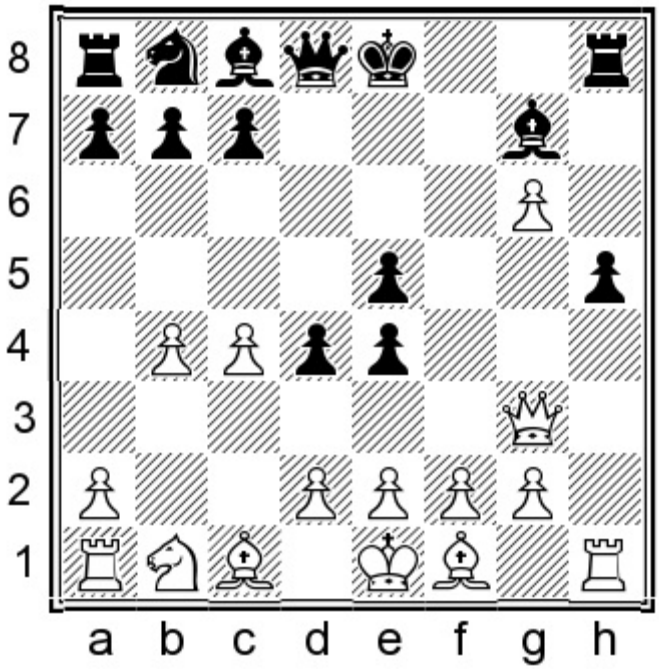
C) 4...♗g7! 5.♘xg5 e5! 6.♕g3!?N



Position after: 6.♕g3!?N

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This can be an annoying surprise for Black. 6...♘e7! 7.♘e4! (7.♘e6?! ♗xe6 8.♕xg7 ♖g8 9.♕xe5 ♘bc6 10.♕f6 ♘xb4 11.♘a3 ♕d7∞) 7...♘g6 (7...0-0?! 8.♘f6+ ♔h8 9.♕h4 h6 10.♘h5!±; 7...♖g8 8.♕h4 f5 9.♘f6+ ♗xf6 10.♕xf6±) 8.h4 A very tricky position where Black needs to find the following continuation if he wants to get a decent position: 8...f5! 9.h5 fxe4 10.hxg6 h5!

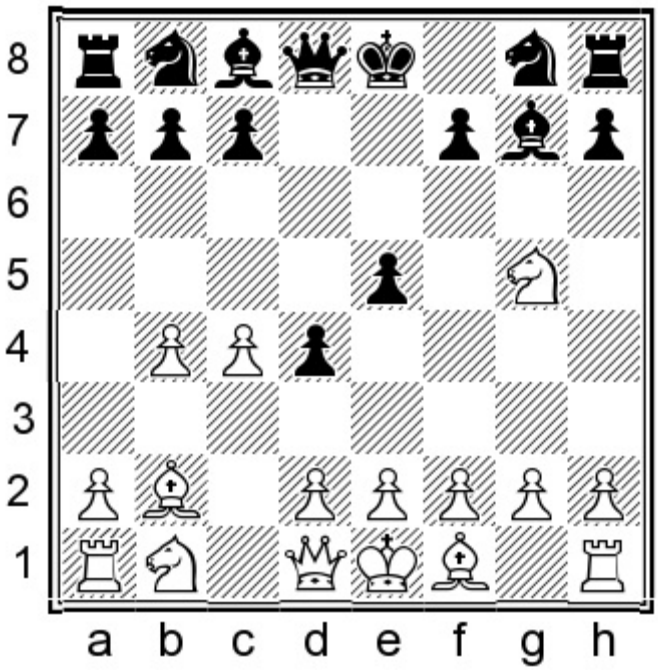


Position after: 10...h5!

White is a pawn up, but it's easy to understand that a pawn doesn't matter so much in this kind of position. 11.d3 e3! (11...♘c6 12.a3 e3 13.fxe3 transposes) 12.fxe3 ♘c6! Definitely a hard move to find for Black. 13.a3 ♗g4! (13...dxe3? 14.♘c3 ♘d4 15.♖a2 ♗g4 16.♕xe3±) 14.e4! It's now two extra pawns, but the game is objectively quite complicated and the position is difficult to evaluate. For instance, play might continue 14...♕d7 15.♗g5 ♘e7 16.♘d2 ♘xg6 17.♘f3⇄.

4...♗g7 5.♘xg5 e5

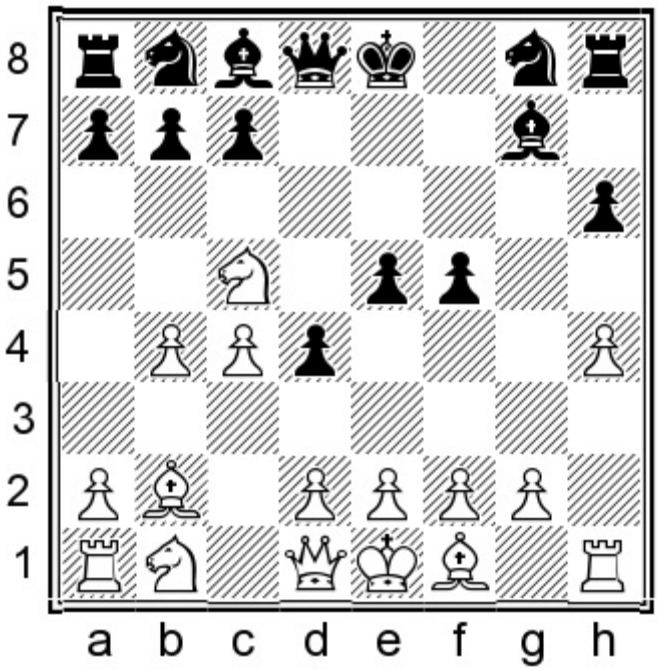
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Position after: 5...e5

6.♘e4

6.h4!?N This is an interesting try, to weaken the g6-square (yes, you will see that when the knight arrives on f4, it can be useful!). 6...h6 7.♘e4 f5 8.♘c5



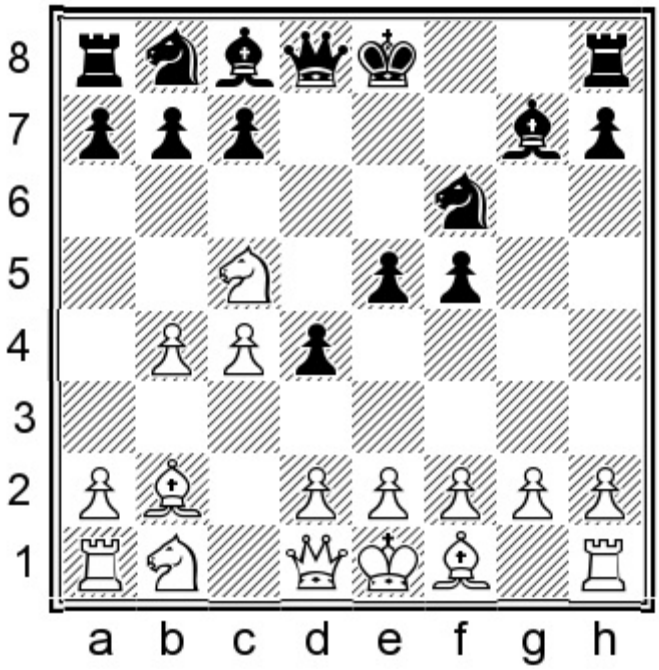
Position after: 8.♘c5

A) 8...b6 9.♕a4+!? ♔f7 (9...c6?! 10.♘d3 e4?! 11.♘f4± I told you that h2-h4 could be useful, didn't I?) 10.♘d3 ♘e7 11.♘a3 c5 12.bxc5 e4 13.♘f4±

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B) 8...♕e7 9.e3 a5 10.exd4 exd4+ 11.♗e2 axb4 12.♘d3 ♘c6 13.a3⇄

6...f5 7.♘c5! ♘f6



Position after: 7...♘f6

7...b6 8.♕a4+!? ♔f7 This might be best, but it's quite hard to play such a move. (8...c6 appeared in Iturrizaga, E (2653) – Sulskis, S (2544) Tromso 2014, and now I suggest the following novelty: 9.♘d3!N 9...♘e7 10.e3 0-0 11.exd4 exd4 12.♘a3±.) 9.♘d3 ♘e7 10.♘a3!?N This is an unusual way to continue our development, but it seems quite logical. We are ready to castle long and open files by means of e3, c5 and even f4 in order to disrupt Black's center. For instance, play might continue 10...♖e8 (10...a5 11.f4! ♘d7 12.fxe5 ♘xe5 13.♘xe5+ ♗xe5 14.0-0-0↑) 11.f4 e4 12.♘e5+ ♗xe5 13.fxe5 ♘g6 14.c5 ♘xe5 15.cxb6 cxb6 16.b5!±.

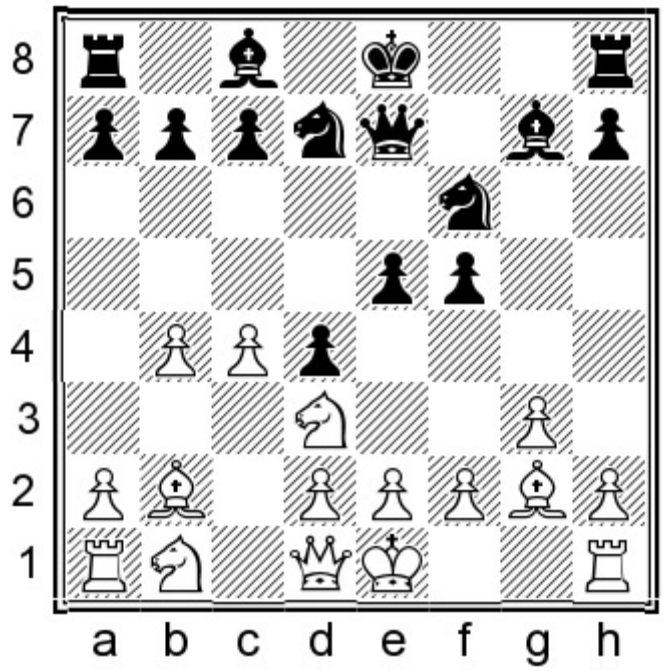
8.g3!N

Simple and strong. This move prevents any ...b7-b6 ideas.

8.e3 0-0 9.exd4 exd4 10.♗e2 a5 11.0-0 axb4 12.a3 b6 13.♘b3 d3 14.♗f3 ♘e4∞ was my game Demuth, A (2540) – Midoux, S (2321) Agen 2017. I eventually won, despite neither of us understanding that White is still fine here, so I consider that it was some kind of luck.

8...♕e7 9.♗g2 ♘bd7 10.♘d3!

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Position after: 10.♘d3!

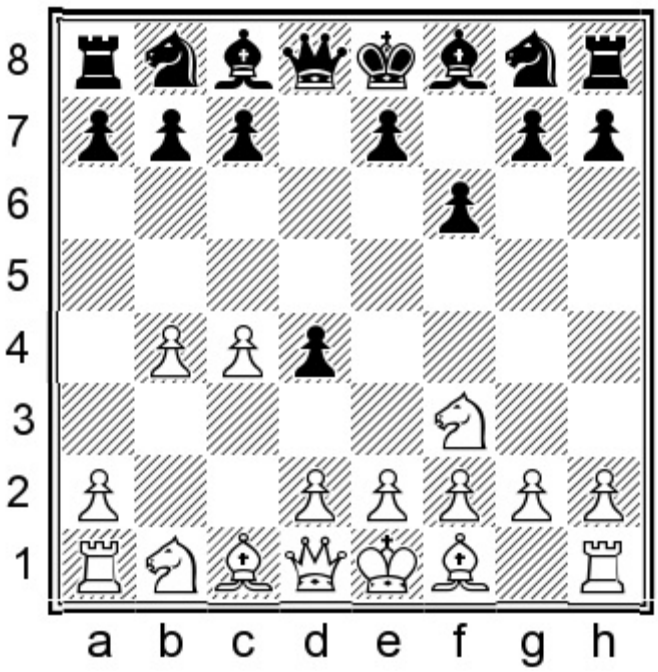
Black's center doesn't actually prove to be so impressive, and we retain the possibility of opening files after e2-e3.

10...0-0 11.0-0 c6 12.b5 c5 13.e3 e4 14.♘f4± Δ 14...d3?! 15.f3±

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Chapter 12
Advance Variation 2...d4 (3.b4 f6)

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6



Chapter guide

Chapter 12 – Advance Variation 2...d4 (3.b4 f6)

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6 4.e3 e5 5.c5 a5 6.♕a4+

a) 4th move alternatives for Black

b) 5th move alternatives for Black

c) 6.-- alternatives, 6...♘c6

d) 6...♕d7 7.♗b5 c6 8.♗c4 --

e) 6...♕d7 7.♗b5 c6 8.♗c4 dxe3

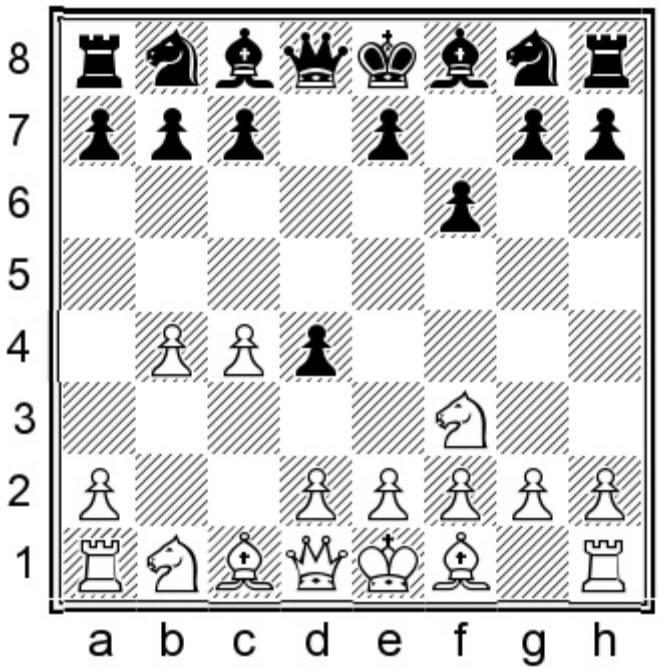
f) 6...♗d7 7.b5 ♗xc5 8.♗c4 --, 8...♘e7 9.exd4 exd4 10.♗a3 ♗xa3

g) 6...♗d7 7.b5 ♗xc5 8.♗c4 ♘e7 9.exd4 exd4 10.♗a3 ♘a6

a) 4th move alternatives for Black

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6!

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Position after: 3...f6!

The main and most important reply, and probably the strongest. In this set-up, Black, a tempo down, takes advantage of not having played ...♘f6 yet, and aims to gain space in the center by playing ...e5.

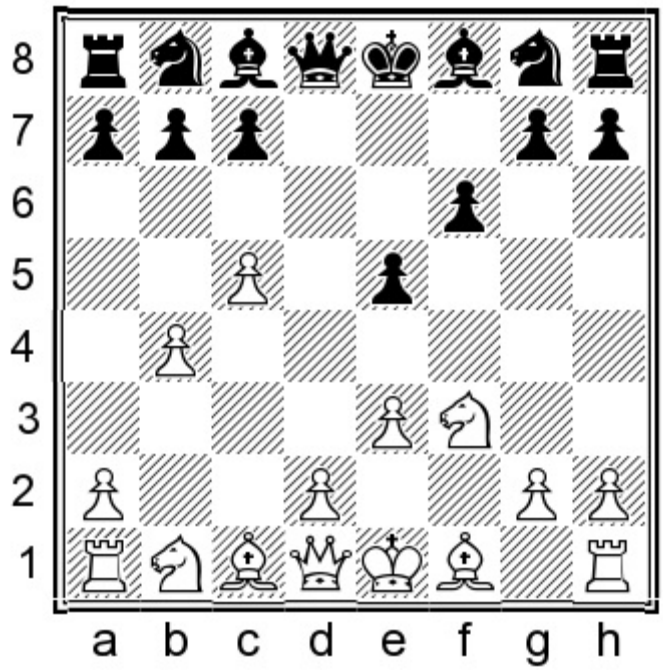
4.e3

4.♘a3!? is an interesting way to play and scores really well in recent games. I considered analyzing it as well for this book, but still prefer the text move. Nevertheless, it's another path, leading to interesting positions, and if the main lines don't satisfy you, you may find it an interesting alternative.

4...c5

4...dxe3?! 5.fxe3 e5 6.c5

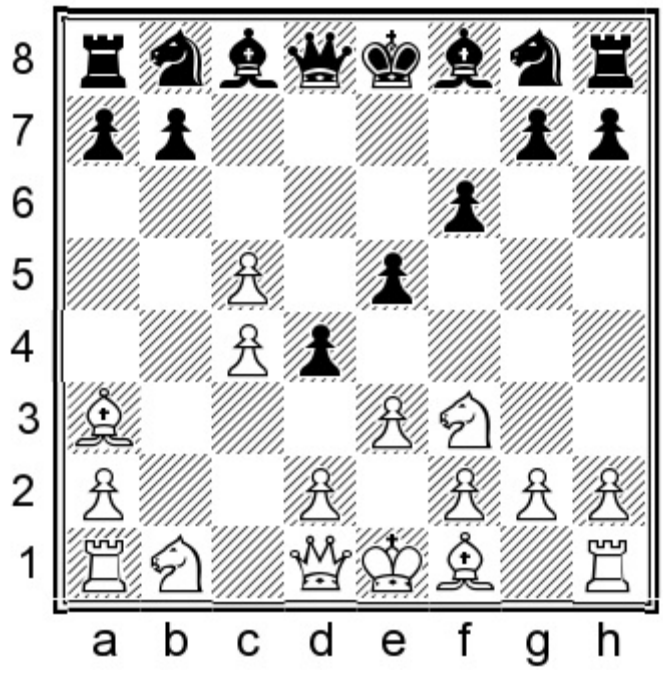
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Position after: 6.c5

6...♗e6 (6...♗g4 7.♗b2 ♘c6 8.b5 ♘b4 was seen in the game Shoker – Yu Yangyi, World Team Championships 2015, and I would now play 9.♕a4!N 9...♗xc5 10.a3 ♘d3+ 11.♗xd3 ♗xf3 12.♕c4 ♗xg2 13.♖g1 ♕d5 14.♘c3 ♕xc4 15.♗xc4 ♗h3 16.♖xg7±; 6...a5!?N 7.♗c4 axb4 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.d4 ♘h6 10.♘bd2↑) 7.d4! e4 8.♘fd2 f5 9.♘c3N 9...♘f6 10.♗c4 ♗xc4 11.♘xc4±

5.bxc5! e5 6.♗a3!?N



Position after: 6.♗a3!?N

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Not common; we simply try to defend our extra c5-pawn.

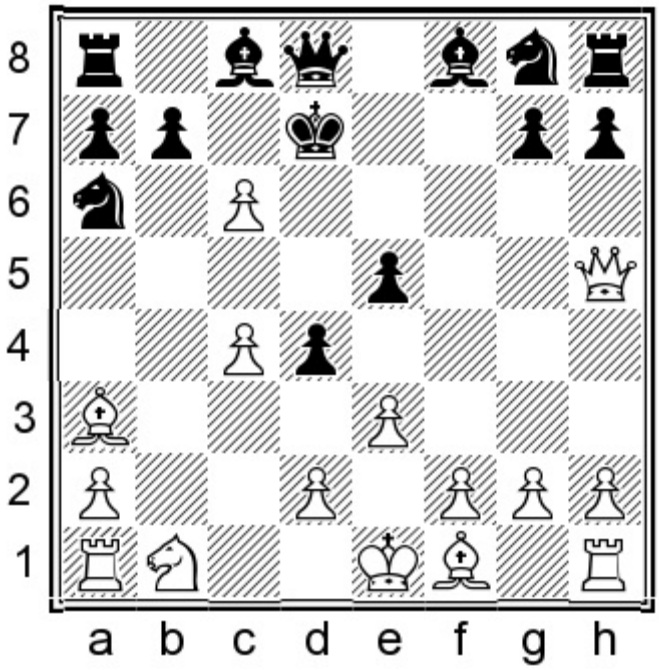
6.exd4 is a decent alternative, with the following plan: 6...exd4 7.d3! ♘c6 8.♗e2 ♗xc5 9.0-0 ♘ge7 10.♘bd2 0-0 11.♘b3!±.

6...♘c6

A) 6...♘d7? 7.exd4+–

B) 6...♘h6?! 7.exd4 exd4 8.♗d3! ♘a6 9.0-0 ♗xc5 10.♖e1+ ♔f8 11.♗e4±

C) 6...♘a6 seems like the logical follow-up, simply attacking the pawn, but 7.♘xe5! is misery for Black: 7...fxe5 8.♕h5+ ♔d7 9.c6+!

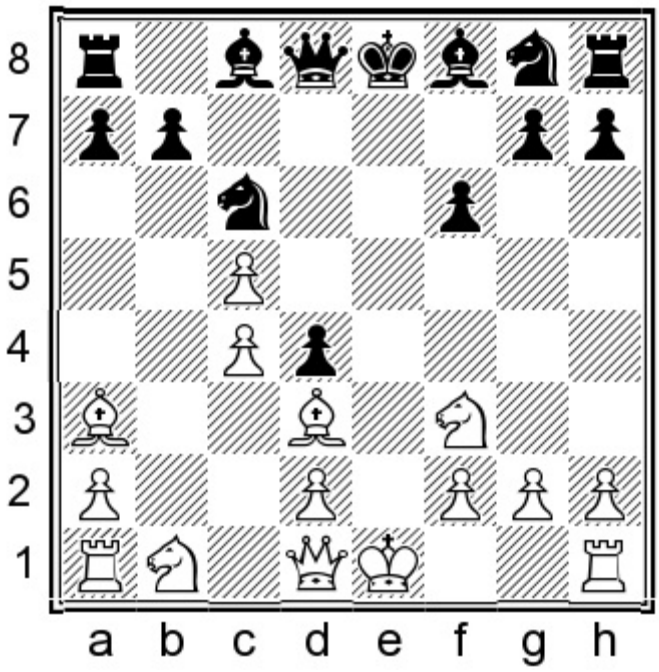


Position after: 9.c6+!

9...bxc6 (9...♔e6 10.♕f3!! attacking the f8-bishop, and after 10...♗xa3 11.cxb7! ♗xb7 12.♕xb7 ♗c5 13.♕xa6+ ♕b6 14.♕xb6+ axb6 15.♗e2± White keeps two extra pawns, and should be able to win the endgame, even if Black has chances.) 10.♕f5+ ♔c7 11.♕xf8±.

7.exd4 exd4 8.♗d3!?

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Position after: 8.♗d3!?

White plays actively on the light squares and frees the e-file for the rook.

8...♕e7+ 9.♕e2±

It's still not clear how Black is going to regain the c5-pawn. White will put the bishop on e4, then develop the knight to d2, and should be able to exert some pressure on the b-file.

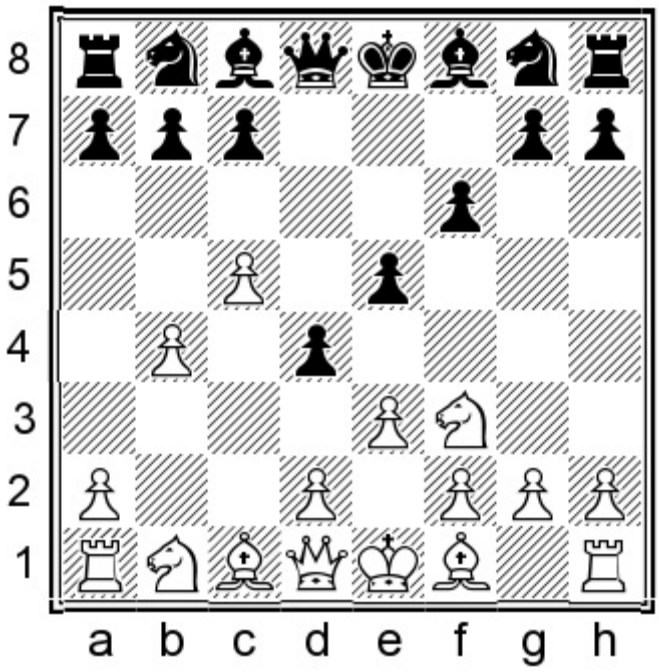
b) 5th move alternatives for Black

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6! 4.e3 e5

We have already seen that other moves would come as a pleasant surprise for us. This is definitely the most logical continuation.

5.c5!

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Position after: 5.c5!

We are at the beginning of a weird but also very exciting line! We protect our b4-pawn and leave the c4-square free for our bishop, where it will be a monster on the weakened a2-g8 diagonal.

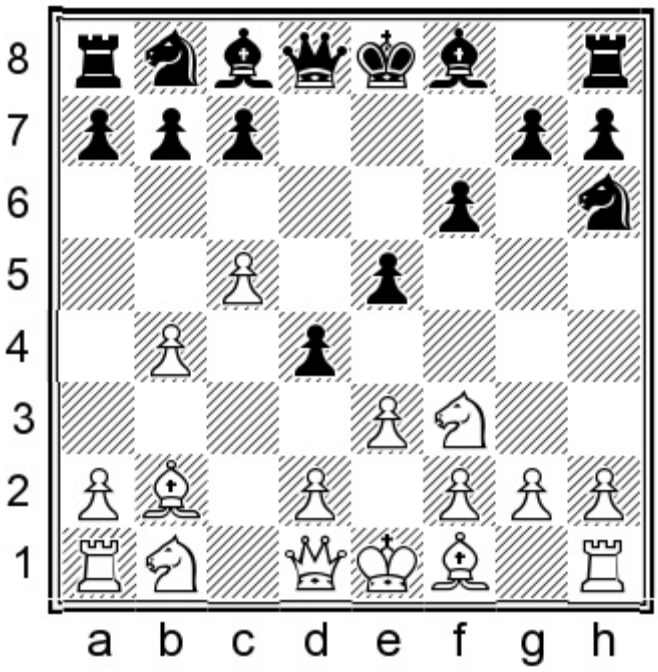
5.♘xe5? doesn't work at all here: 5...fxe5 6.♕h5+ ♔e7 7.♕xe5+ ♔f7 8.c5 ♗e6∓.

5...d3?!

This seems a bit too compromising. White could suffocate on the two first ranks if he doesn't play actively, but he has possibilities to escape:

A) 5...♘h6?! has been tried a couple of times. The idea is to develop the kingside to be able to castle short soon, and eventually put the knight on f7 in order to protect the weak a2-g8 diagonal. 6.♗b2!?N

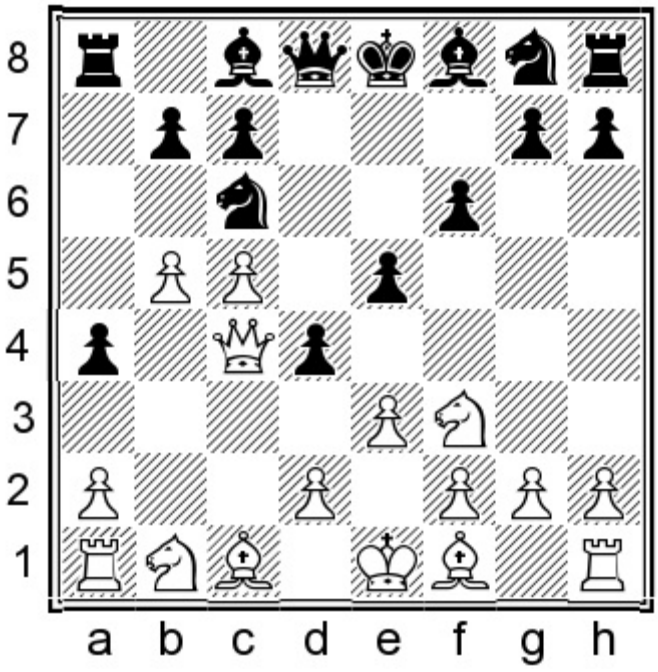
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Position after: 6.♗b2!?N

This seems simple and strong. Black must make a decision regarding his d4-pawn. 6...d3 (6...dxe3 7.fxe3 a5 8.a3! is now possible thanks to ♗b2 8...axb4 9.axb4 ♖xa1 10.♗xa1 ♗e6 11.♕c2! ♘c6 12.♗b5±. d2-d4 will come at the right moment, with a perfect initiative in the center.) 7.♕b3 e4 8.♘d4 f5?! 9.f3!± And Black can only regret placing the knight on h6, as it would be perfect on f6.

B) 5...♘c6 6.♕b3 (6.b5!? ♘b4 7.a3!N 7...♘d5 8.♕c2± is another path to a good position) 6...a5 7.b5 a4 I would now improve on the game Lokander, M (2309) – Louis, T (2249) Paris 2014, 1-0 (51), with 8.♕c4!?N

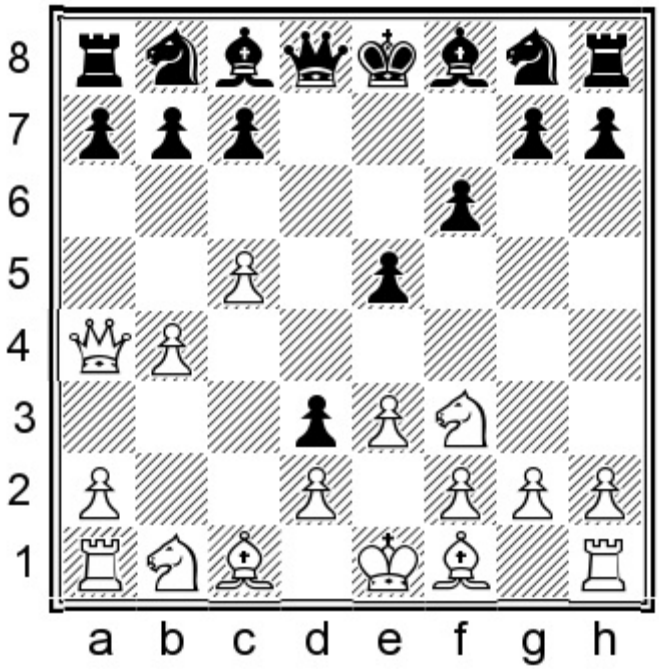


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Position after: 8.♕c4!?N

which forces the knight to go to the edge of the board: 8...♘a5 9.♕c2±.

6.♕a4+!



Position after: 6.♕a4+!

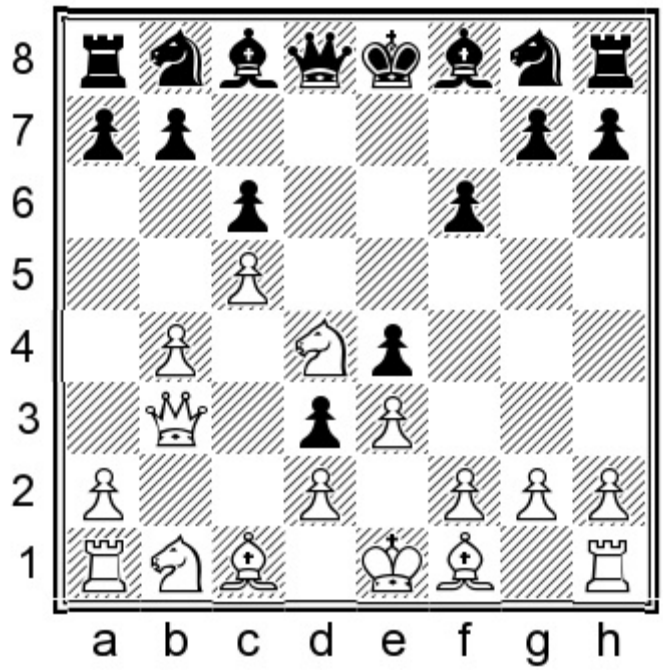
I like this move, tried only by Adhiban.

6...c6

6...♗d7 7.♕b3 e4 8.♘d4 ♘c6 9.♘xc6 ♗xc6 10.♘c3 b4-b5 comes as a threat 10...a6 11.g3 f5 12.♗b2 ♕d7 13.a4!±

7.♕b3 e4 8.♘d4

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Position after: 8.♘d4

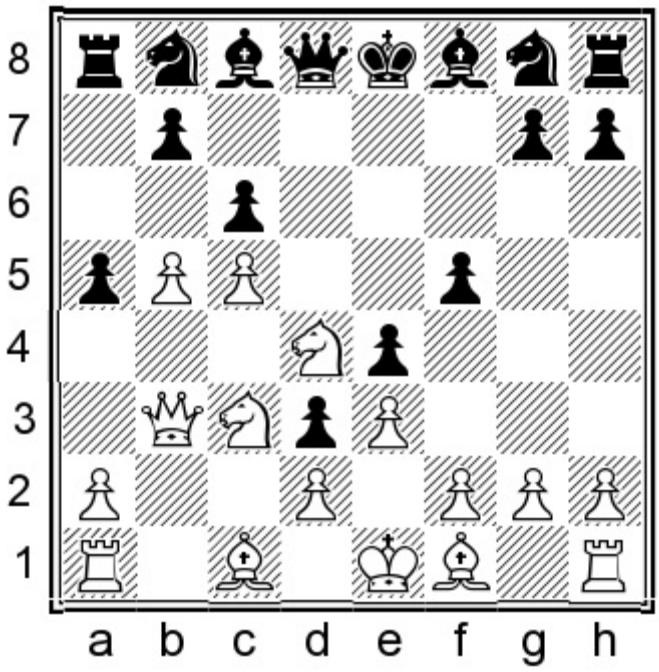
Black now has a choice as there is no direct attack on his e4-pawn.

8...a5

8...f5 9.♘c3 ♘f6 10.♗a3! ♕e7 (10...a5 would now be met with 11.b5! a4 12.♕c4 The pressure on e4 is going to increase and Black still doesn't seem to have a way to develop his pieces and castle. 12...♘g4 13.f4!±) and White won in Adhiban, B (2671) – Raetsky, A (2384) Abu Dhabi 2016, but I now prefer to deviate with 11.f3!±, and it's already hard to find a move for Black.

9.♘c3 f5 10.b5!

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Position after: 10.b5!

This sacrifices a pawn, but we do have an idea!

10...♗xc5

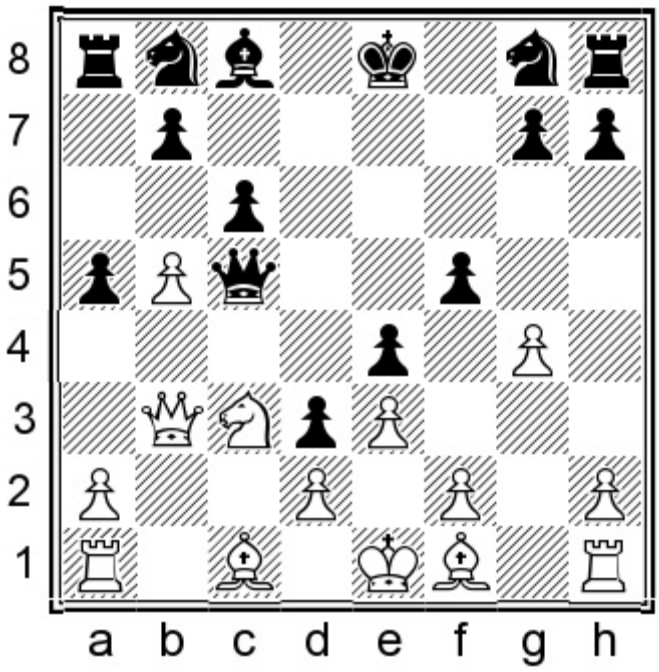
10...♘f6 11.♗a3 a4 12.♕c4 transposes into 8...f5 and then 10...a5.

11.♘e6! ♕e7

11...♗xe6?! 12.♕xe6+ ♘e7 13.g4!± Black's center is collapsing.

12.♘xc5 ♕xc5 13.g4!

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Position after: 13.g4!

Once again we have to attack the base of the chain if we want to destroy the center.

13...♘f6! 14.♘a4!

The knight tries to reach b6.

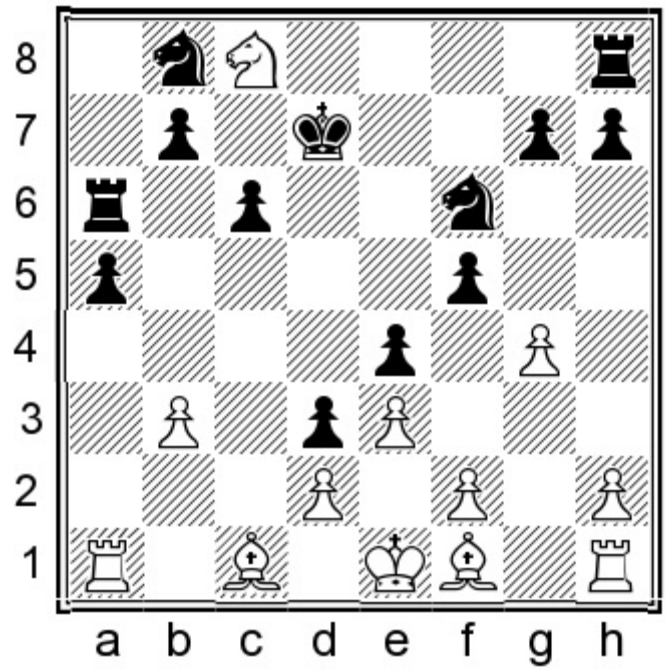
14...♕xb5

A) 14...♕e7?! 15.♗a3 ♕e5 16.♗b2 ♕c7 17.gxf5! ♗xf5 18.♖g1± We can easily sense that something has gone wrong with Black's position.

B) 14...♕e5 15.♗b2 – see 14...♕e7.

15.♘b6! ♕xb3 16.axb3 ♖a6 17.♘xc8 ♔d7

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Position after: 17...♔d7

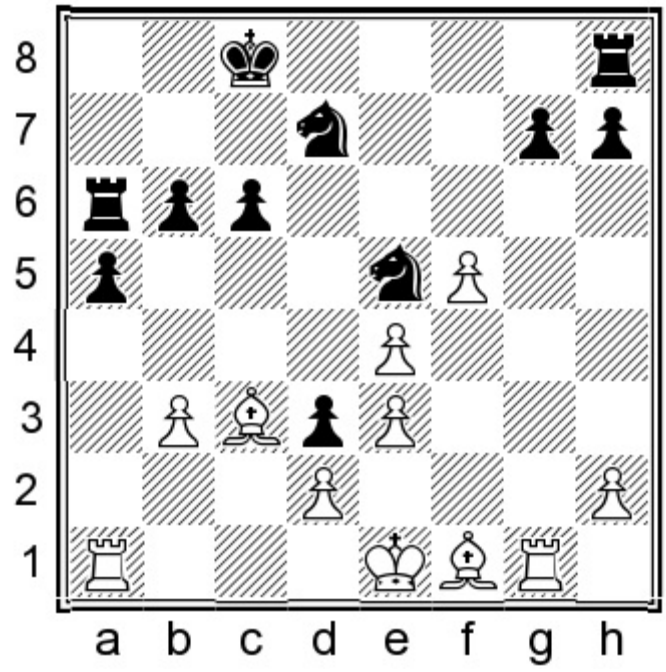
Our knight is trapped, but it gives us some time to counterattack on the kingside.

18.gxf5! ♔xc8!

18...♖xc8? is bad in view of the simple 19.♖g1 ♖g8?! 20.f3 exf3 21.♗xd3 ♖b6 22.♗c4+–

19.f3! exf3

19...♘bd7 20.fxe4 ♘e5 21.♗b2 ♘fd7 22.♗c3 b6 23.♖g1!

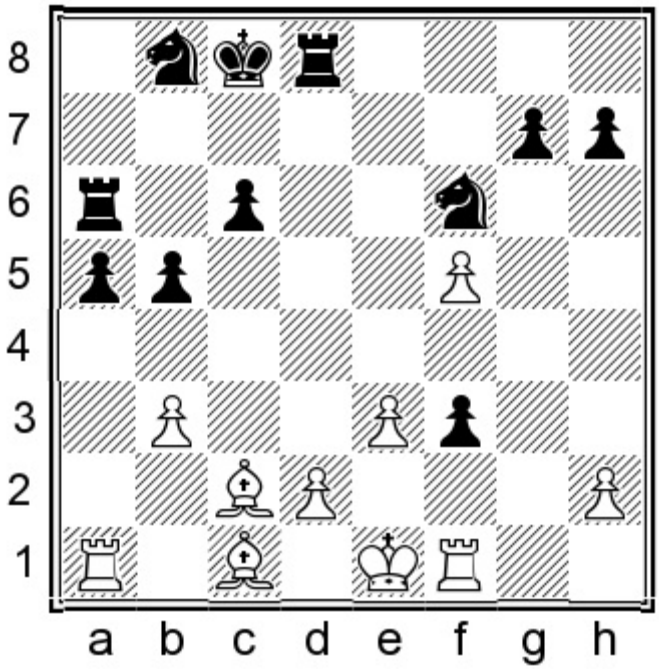


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Position after: 23.♖g1!

23...♘f3+?! (23...g6 24.0-0-0 ♖f8 25.h4!±) 24.♔f2 ♘xg1 25.♗xd3!±

20.♗xd3 b5 21.♗c2 ♖d8 22.♖f1±



Position after: 22.♖f1±

The bishop pair and center give White the upper hand in this double-edged endgame.

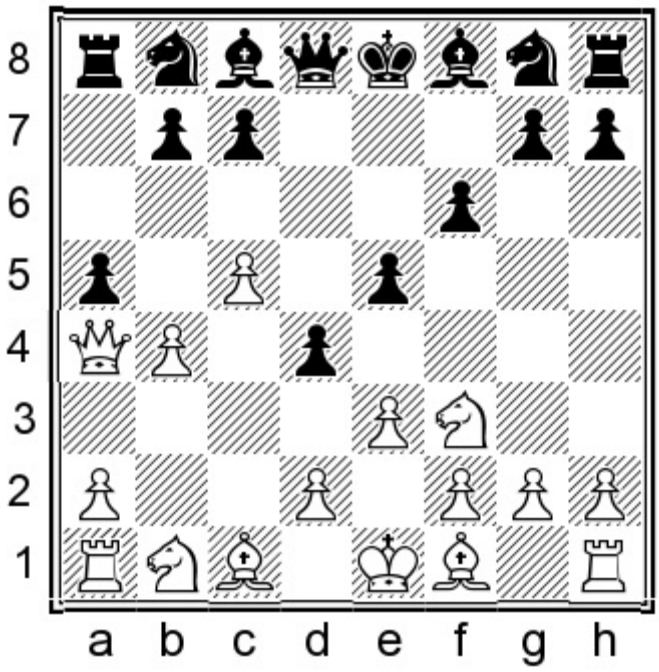
c) 6.-- alternatives, 6...♘c6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6! 4.e3 e5 5.c5! a5

This is clearly the most natural move, in order to destroy our queenside.

6.♕a4+!

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Position after: 6.♕a4+!

This recent idea is the only decent try. I was actually the third player to try it in 2014 (a draw against Duda), and I had the chance to repeat it against Wesley So, who won an impressive game.

A) 6.♘xe5?! doesn't even lead to a perpetual after 6...fxe5 7.♕h5+ ♔d7 8.♕f5+ ♔e7 9.♕xe5+ ♗e6 10.♗c4 ♕d7∓.

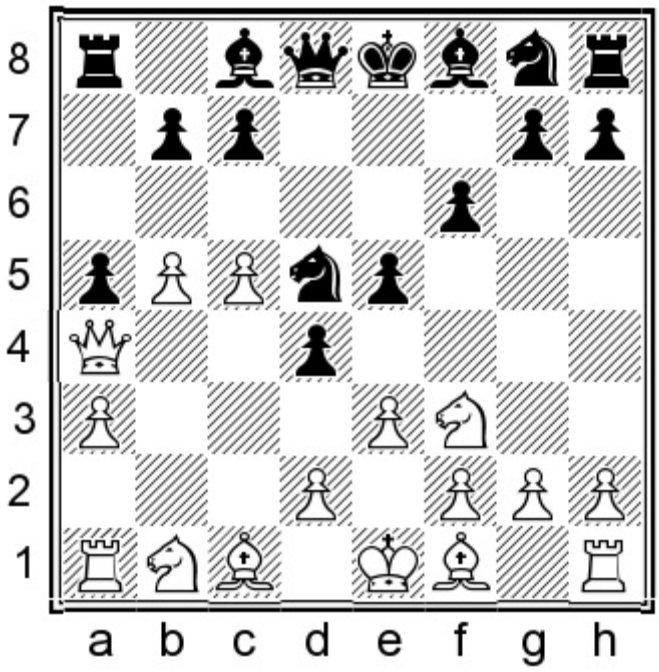
B) 6.♗b5+ was considered the main line, but Black found some solutions.

6...♘c6!?

This interesting move was first played in my game against So. Play is more or less forced after...

7.b5 ♘b4 8.a3 ♘d5

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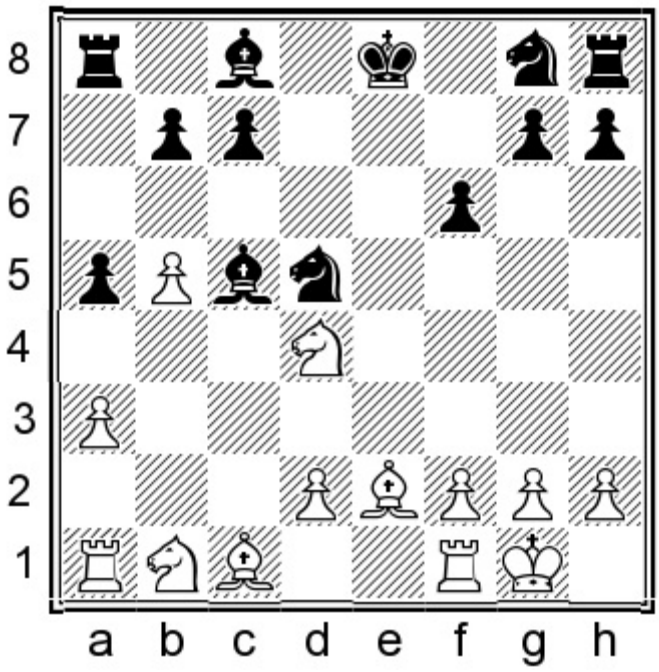


Position after: 8...♘d5

9.♕c2!

I believe that this move should be stronger, and more difficult to face as Black.

9.exd4!? is the most natural continuation, but maybe not the best: 9...exd4 10.♕xd4 ♕e7+ 11.♗e2 ♕xc5 12.0-0 ♕xd4 13.♘xd4 ♗c5



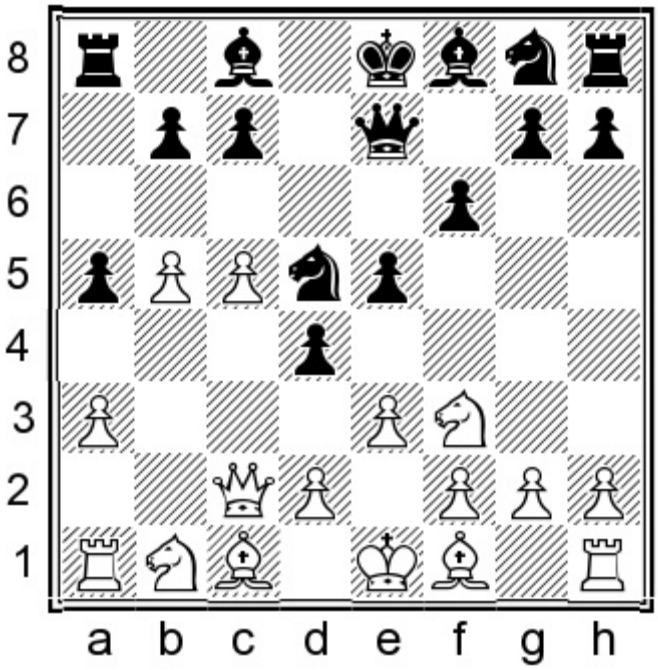
Position after: 13...♗c5

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Three months after my game the Argentinian GM Mareco improved my play with 14.♘b3! (14.♗b2?! ♘ge7 15.♗c4?! ♗d7 16.♖e1 ♘b6 17.♗b3 0-0-0∓ Black has the more comfortable game and converted nicely in Demuth, A (2515) – So, W (2778) Montpellier 2015) 14...♗d6 15.♘c3!N (15.♗f3 ♘ge7 16.♖e1 ♘f4 17.d4 ♘d3 18.♖d1 ♘xc1 19.♖xc1 ♗e6 20.♘c5 ♗xc5 21.♖xc5 0-0-0 22.b6 c6 23.♘c3± 1-0 (55) Mareco, S (2599) – Ni, H (2704) Baku 2015) 15...♘xc3 (15...♘ge7 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♗f3 c6 18.♗b2↑) 16.dxc3 ♘e7 17.♖d1↑ With good play on the queenside and a slightly preferable endgame.

9...♘h6

9...♕e7!? has been tried once. Black attacks our exposed c5-pawn, but I think that development is more important here than a single pawn:

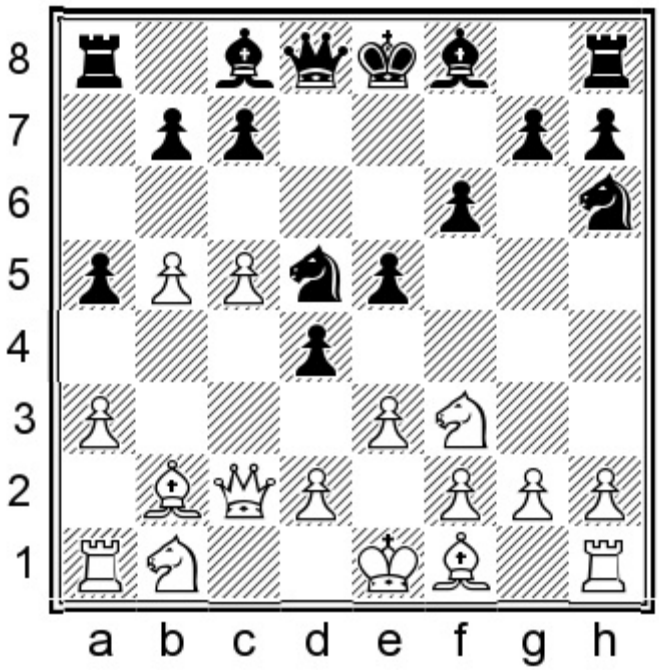


Position after: 9...♕e7!?

10.♗c4!N (10.c6 dxe3 11.dxe3 ♕c5 12.♕xc5 ♗xc5 13.cxb7 ♗xb7 14.♗b2 ♘ge7 15.♗e2= ½-½ (54) Di Benedetto, D (2183) – Aakanksha, H (2183) Khanty-Mansiysk 2016) 10...♕xc5 11.exd4 exd4 12.0-0 ♘b6 13.♖e1+ ♗e7 14.♗d3 ♕xc2 15.♗xc2± We will regain the d4-pawn, and get the more active position.

10.♗b2

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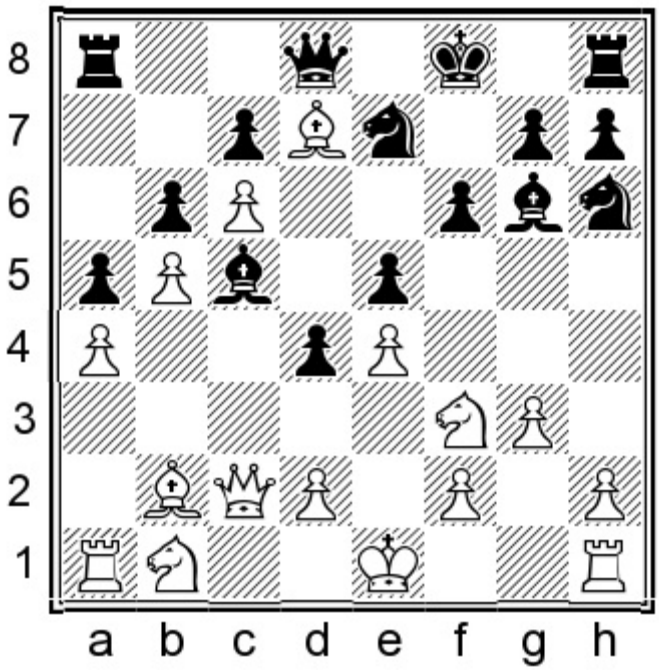


Position after: 10.♗b2

10...♗f5

10...♕e7 is again too slow: 11.♗c4 c6 12.exd4! exd4+ 13.♔d1→ The white king is safe on d1 and ♖e1 is coming, while the d4-pawn will fall.

11.e4 ♗g6 12.c6 b6 13.g3! ♗c5 14.♗h3 ♘e7 15.♗d7+ ♔f8 16.a4



Position after: 16.a4

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This unusual position was reached in a correspondence game.

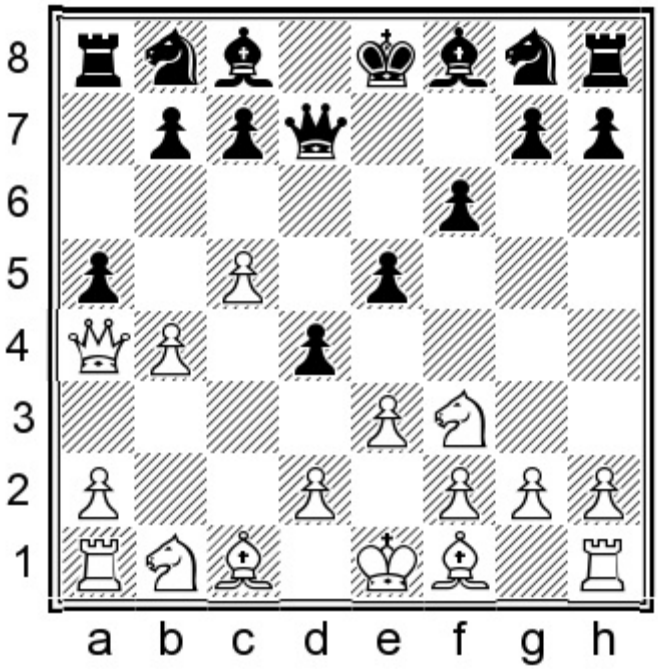
Even though it's really complicated, White seems to be better thanks to his space advantage and potentially dangerous pawns on the queenside.

16...♗e8 17.♗xe8 ♕xe8 18.d3 ♕h5 19.♕e2 ♕h3 20.♘bd2 g6 21.0-0-0±

And White eventually won in Oreopoulas – Helbich, ICCF Elmars Zemgalis Memorial 2015.

d) 6...♕d7 7.♗b5 c6 8.♗c4 --

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6! 4.e3 e5 5.c5! a5 6.♕a4+! ♕d7!?



Position after: 6...♕d7!?

This is a really serious alternative. It has only been played a couple of times in classical games (with two crushing defeats for Black, which is maybe why it's not the main line), but it is generally the preference of correspondence players. No doubt many improvements are possible here, and it needs more practical games.

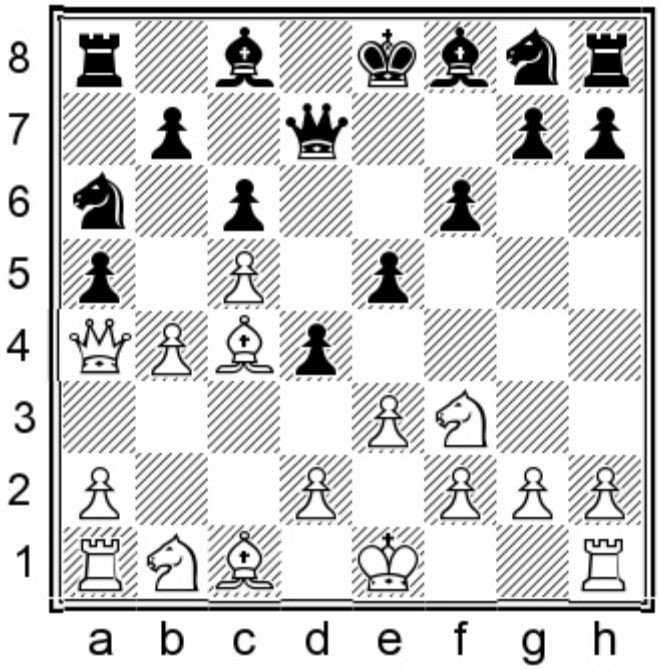
7.♗b5 c6 8.♗c4

At this important crossroads, Black soon collapsed in the two games played. We have three moves to consider: 8...♘a6, which should be dubious, 8...♘e7, and 8...dxe3!?N, which we will cover in the next subchapter.

8...♘e7!?

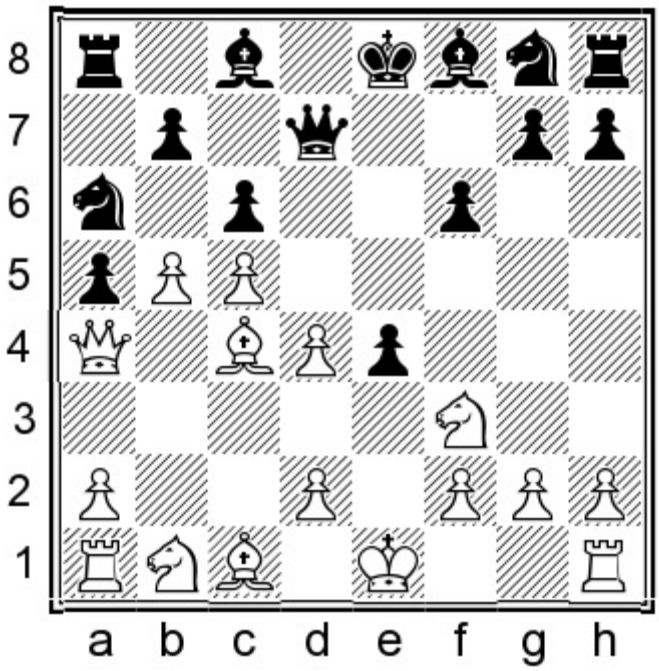
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8...♘a6?!



Position after: 8...♘a6?!

I believe this is the worst option; it had already been deeply analyzed after Hillarp Persson's game. 9.exd4! e4! (9...♘xb4? 10.0-0 exd4 11.♖e1+ ♗e7 12.♗a3 Black has too many problems. 12...♘d5 13.♘xd4+–; 9...exd4 10.0-0 axb4 11.♖e1+ ♔d8 12.a3 ♘c7 13.♕xb4→ It's hard to believe that Black can survive in the long term.) 10.b5



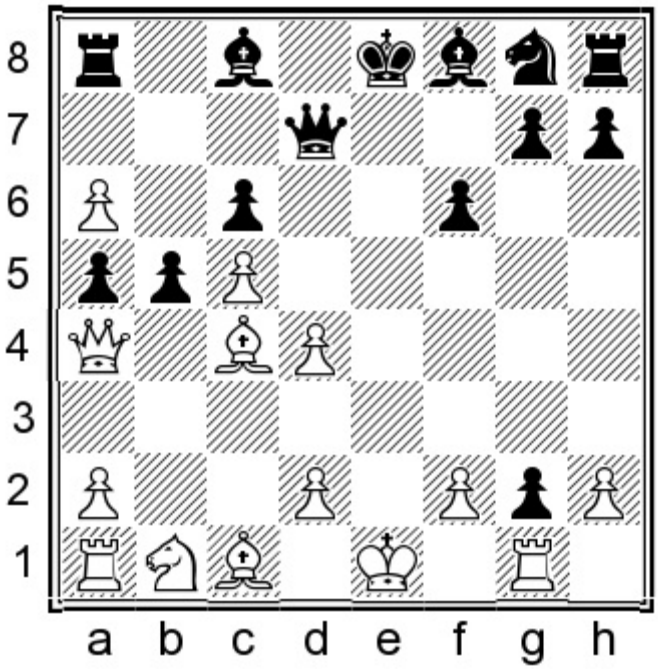
Position after: 10.b5

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A) 10...exf3!N must be the best continuation, but Black still needs to find an important move on move 12: 11.bxa6 fxg2 12.♖g1

A1) 12...♕h3? 13.axb7 ♗xb7 (13...♕xh2 14.♕xc6+ ♔e7 15.♖xg2+–) 14.♘c3 ♕xh2 15.♘e2+– The pawn on g2 isn't that dangerous, and White will continue with ♖a1-b1 and d4-d5, with an overwhelming advantage.

A2) 12...b5!!

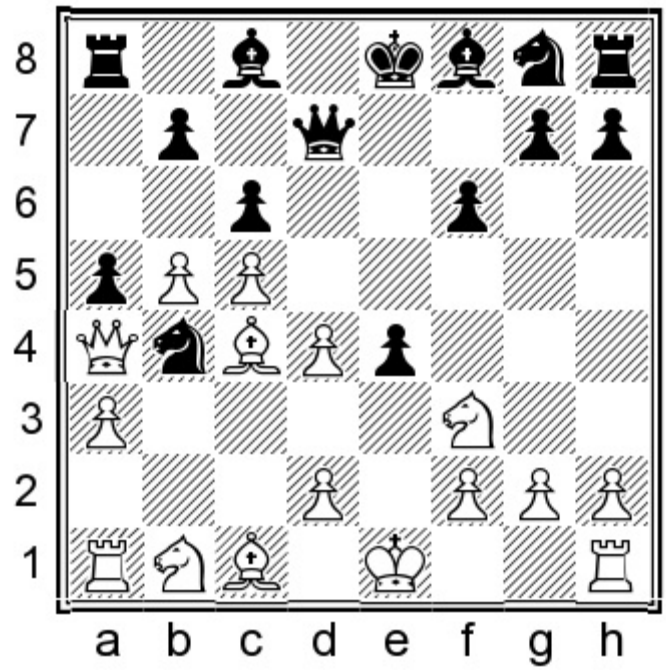


Position after: 12...b5!!

The only saving resource. 13.cxb6 ♗xa6 14.♖xg2± White keeps the upper hand, but anything could happen in this kind of crazy position.

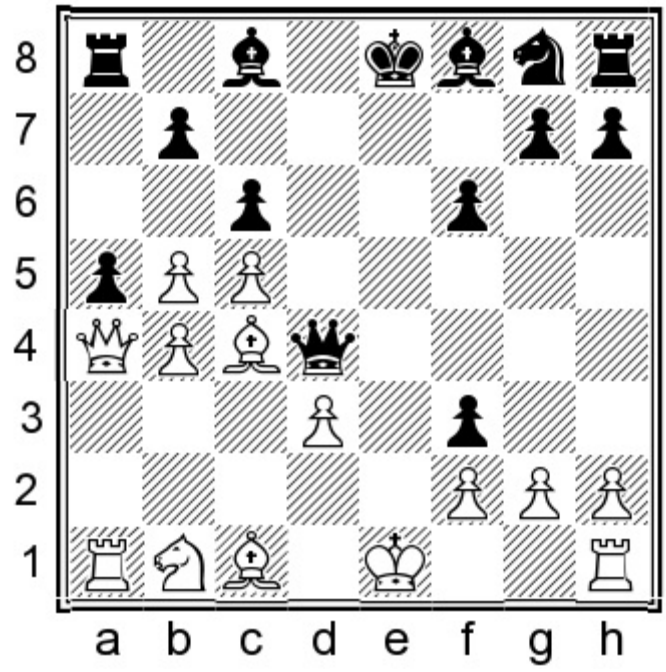
B) 10...♘b4?! 11.a3!?

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Position after: 11.a3!?

At first, the engines are not fond of this move, but they finally understand that it should win by force for White. (11.bxc6!? bxc6 12.a3 exf3 13.axb4 fxg2 14.♖g1± is also very good for White, and can be regarded as a simpler alternative) 11...exf3 12.axb4 ♕xd4 (12...fxg2 13.♖g1 ♘e7 14.bxa5! ♘f5 15.♗b2 ♘h4 16.♔d1!±) 13.d3!!

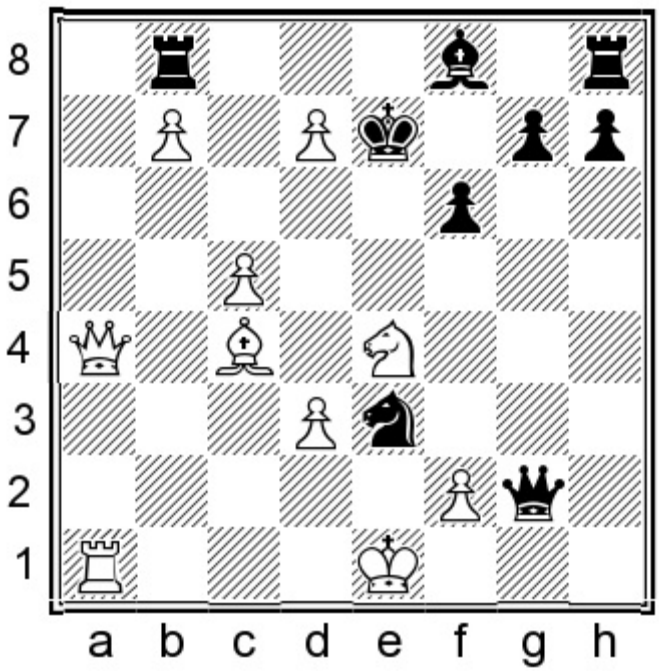


Position after: 13.d3!!

B1) 13...fxg2N doesn't really help Black after 14.♖g1 ♘e7 15.♗e3 ♕g4 16.♘c3↑ (Hillarp Persson) 16...♗d7 17.bxa5 Our queenside majority is hard to stop. 17...♕h3 (17...♘g6 18.a6+–) 18.a6! ♕xh2

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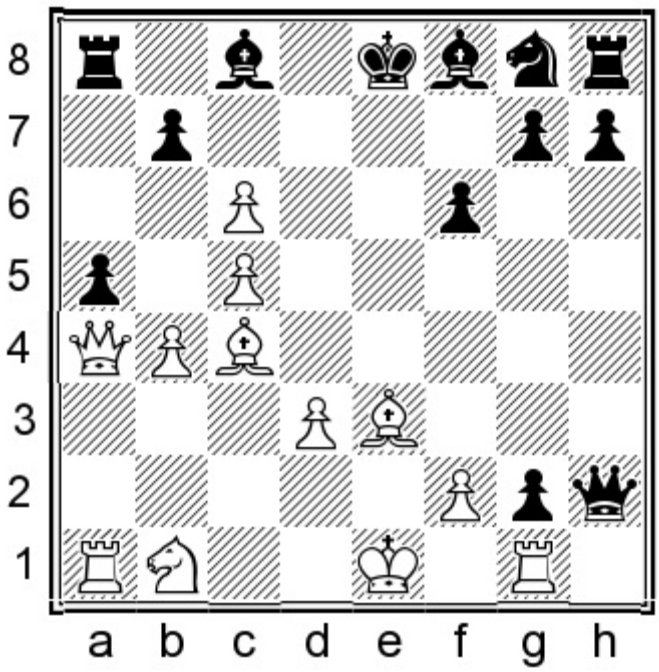
19.♖xg2! ♕xg2 20.axb7 ♖b8 21.♘e4 We could stop here, as Black is clearly being crushed, but the end of the line is nice: 21...♘f5 22.bxc6 ♘xe3 23.cxd7+ ♔e7



Position after: 23...♔e7

24.d8=♕+! ♖xd8 25.b8=♕!! A double promotion sacrifice in order to deliver mate. 25...♖xb8 (25...♕f1+ 26.♔d2 ♘xc4+ 27.♕xc4+–) 26.♕a7++–

B2) 13...♕e5+ 14.♗e3 fxg2 15.♖g1 ♕xh2 White looks in trouble but he simply continues his devastating plan. 16.bxc6!!

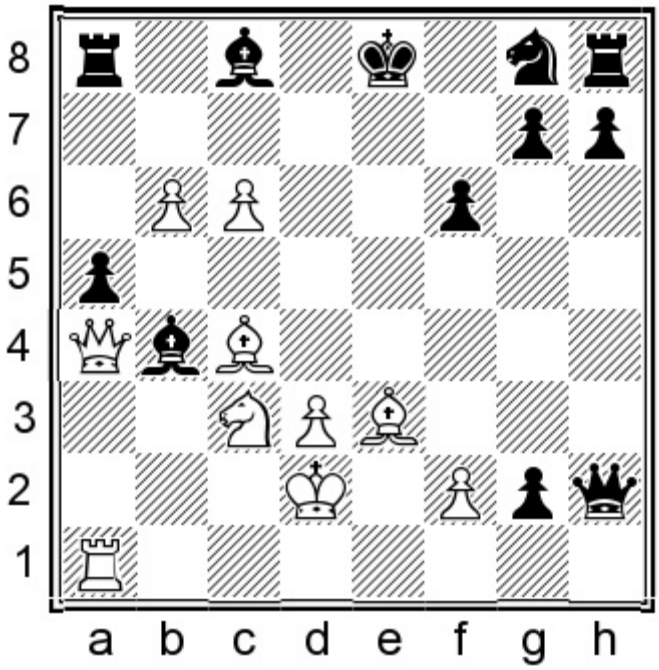


Position after: 16.bxc6!!

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16...♕xg1+ (16...b5 17.cxb6 ♗xb4+ 18.♘c3 ♗xc3+ 19.♔e2+– Black is defenseless against b6-b7 and c6-c7 with check; 16...♔d8 17.♘c3 ♕xg1+ 18.♔d2 ♕h2 19.♘d5 bxc6 20.♕xc6 ♖a7 21.♕b6+ ♔e8 22.♕xa7+–) 17.♔d2

B2.1) 17...b5 18.cxb6 ♗xb4+ 19.♘c3! ♕h2



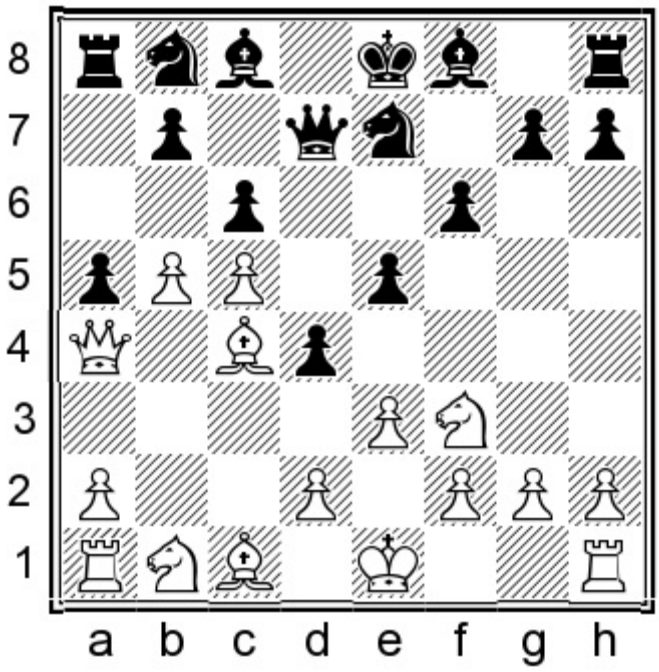
Position after: 19...♕h2

And the amazing game Hillarp Persson, T (2547) – Hector, J (2503) Denmark 2014, 1-0 (33) could have finished much sooner if White had played 20.c7+!N 20...♔f8 21.♕c6 ♗xc3+ 22.♔xc3+–.

B2.2) 17...♔d8 18.♘c3 ♕h2 (If 18...♕xa1 we continue the attack with 19.c7+! ♔xc7 20.♘d5+ ♔d8 21.♕xa1+–.) 19.♘d5! ♘e7 (19...g1=♕? 20.♖xg1 ♕xg1 21.c7#) 20.c7+ ♕xc7 21.♘xc7 ♔xc7 22.♕e8+–. So many beautiful lines!

9.b5!

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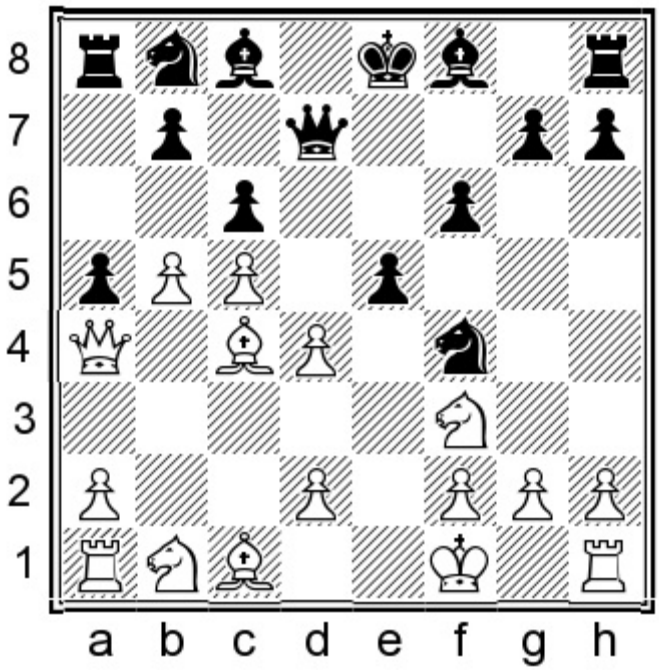
Position after: 9.b5!

This is an excellent improvement over the game Christiansen, J (2411) – Gretarsson, H (2550) Helsingor 2016, 1-0 (38). It has only been played once, in a correspondence game.

9...♘d5 10.exd4 ♘f4!

The best way to continue for Black, as White has some trouble to properly defend his kingside.

11.♔f1!



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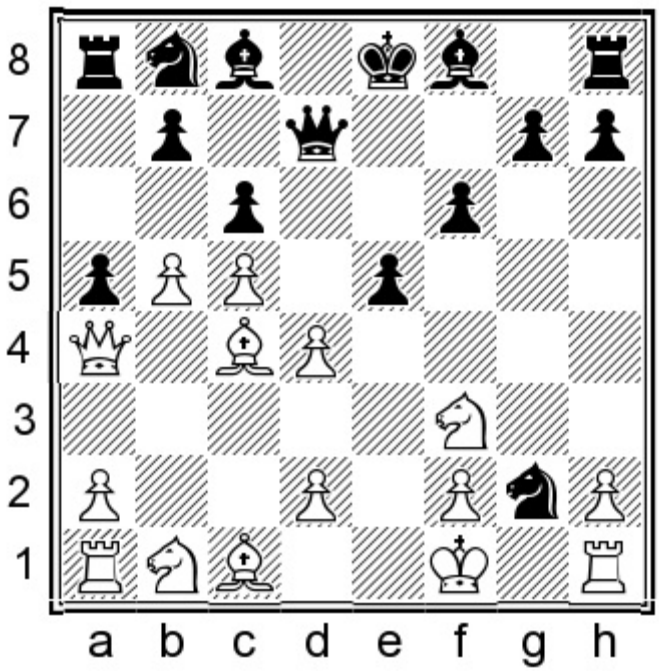
Position after: 11.♔f1!

11.0-0? ♘xg2!∓ is obviously pretty dangerous with ...♕g4 coming.

11...♕f5!

This is more or less the only move.

11...♘xg2?!



Position after: 11...♘xg2?!

This is wrong now because of the quiet 12.h3!! e4 (12...♘h4? 13.♘xh4 ♕xd4 14.♘f3 ♕xa1 Black has won material, but his queen is going to be trapped. 15.♕c2! cxb5 16.♗xb5+ ♗d7 17.♗xd7+ ♘xd7 18.♔g2! ♗xc5 19.♘c3 0-0 20.♗b2+–; 12...♘f4 13.dxe5 ♗e7 14.d4 ♘d5 15.bxc6 bxc6 16.♔g2±) 13.♘e1 ♘xe1 14.♔xe1 ♗e7 15.♘c3± White's center is really strong, and d4 is untouchable because of ♗f7+.

12.♕b3

The human move, and my preference.

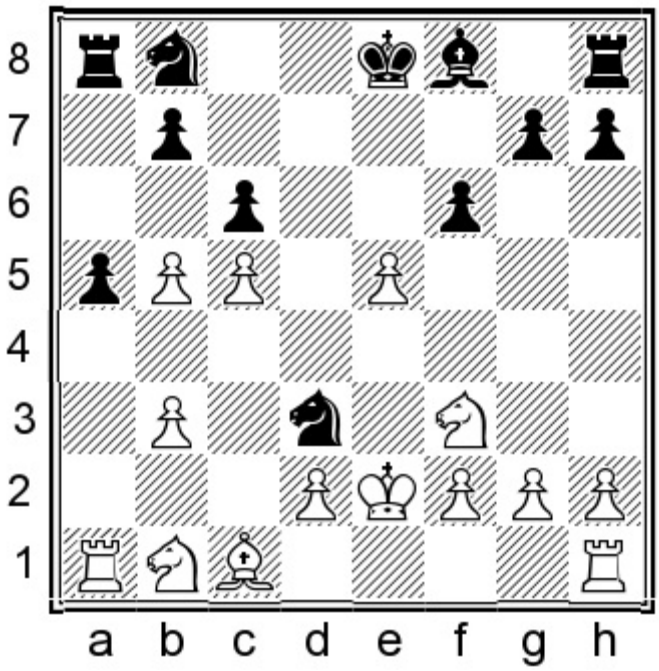
12.h3 is rather complicated to justify now. A game continued 12...exd4 13.d3 ♘xd3 14.♘bd2 ♘xc5 15.♕d1 ♕h5 16.♘b3!↑ when White had some good compensation, but had to settle for a draw in Oreopoulas – Esposito CCF 2017.

12...♗e6

12...exd4 13.♘xd4 ♕g4 14.♖g1 ♗xc5 15.♘f3±

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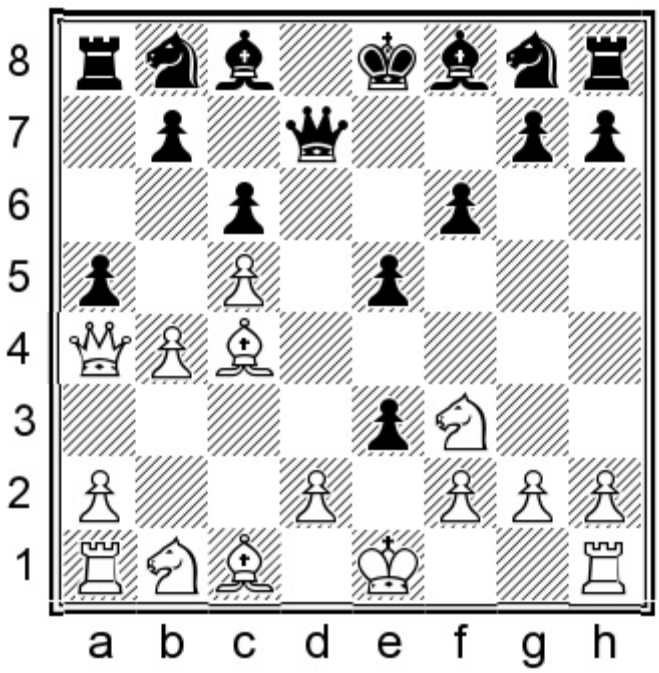
13.♗xe6 ♕xe6 14.dxe5 ♕xb3 15.axb3 ♘d3! 16.♔e2±



Position after: 16.♔e2±

e) 6...♕d7 7.♗b5 c6 8.♗c4 dxe3

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6! 4.e3 e5 5.c5! a5 6.♕a4+! ♕d7!? 7.♗b5 c6 8.♗c4 dxe3!N



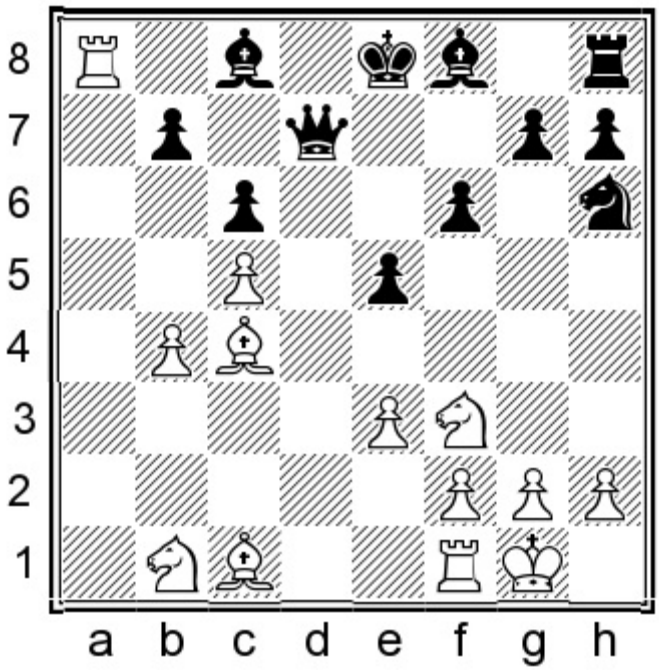
Position after: 8...dxe3!N

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9.fxe3!

Correspondence games have witnessed this position already several times (with only draws and wins for White), and a kind of special theory has developed here.

9.dxe3!? might be interesting, but there is (at least) one small problem after 9...♘a6! 10.a3 axb4! 11.0-0 ♘h6 12.axb4 ♘c7! 13.♕xa8 ♘xa8 14.♖xa8.



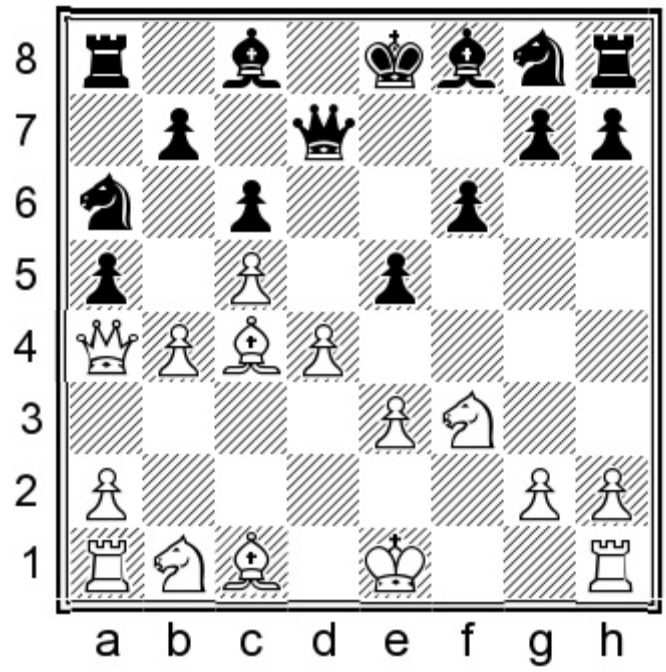
Position after: 14.♖xa8

Black seems to be crushed, but he has the resource 14...b5!!= allowing the transfer of the queen to b7 to get rid of the annoying rook. The game is objectively about equal.

9...♕g4!

9...♘a6?! fails after 10.d4!

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Position after: 10.d4!

10...♘xb4 (10...axb4 11.0-0 e4 12.♘fd2 f5 13.♗xg8 ♖xg8 14.♘c4 ♘c7 15.♕xb4±) 11.♘c3! ♘e7 12.♕b3 ♘ed5 13.a3 ♘xc3 14.axb4 ♘d5 15.bxa5±

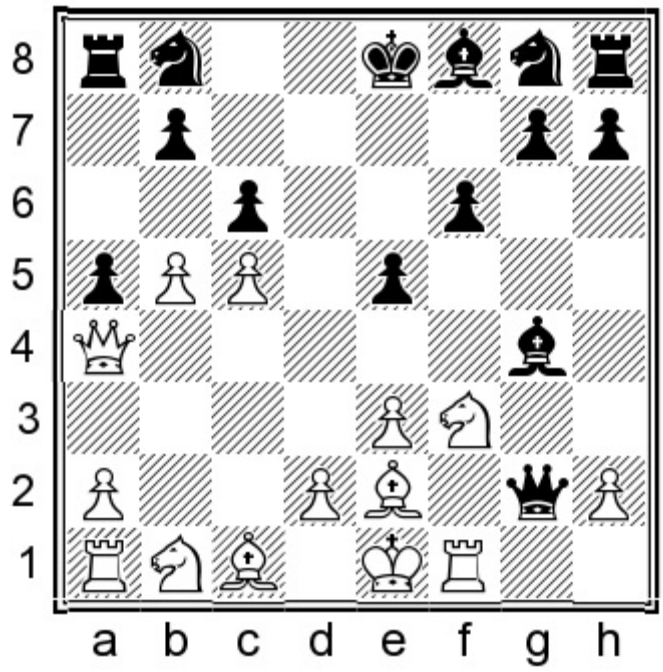
10.b5!

10.d4?! ♕xg2!∓

10...e4

10...♕xg2?! seems too artificial, and White got a great position after 11.♖f1 ♗g4 12.♗e2!

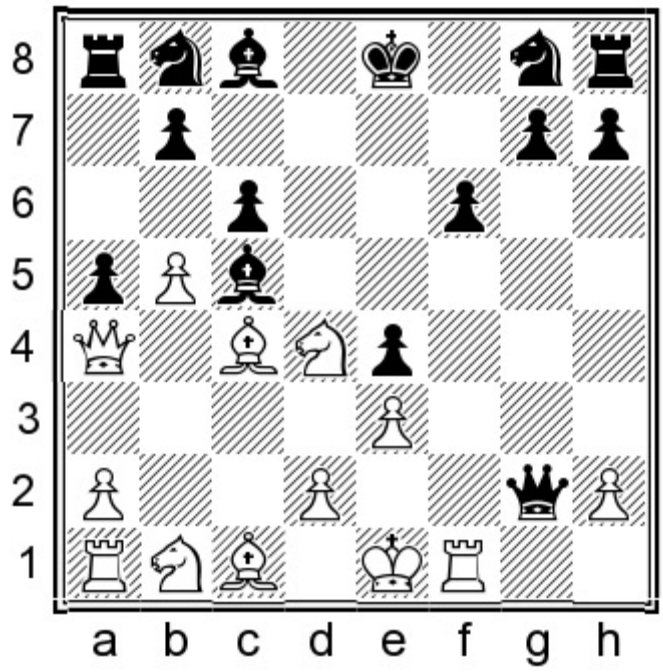
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Position after: 12.♗e2!

12...♗d7 (12...f5?! 13.♘c3! ♗e7 14.♗b2 ♘f6 15.0-0-0±) 13.♘c3 ♘e7 (13...♗xc5 14.♖g1 ♕h3 15.♖xg7±) 14.d4! exd4 15.exd4 ♕h3 16.♗d2 g6 17.d5± Black is about to collapse, and eventually lost in Havumaki, A (2415) – Ruokokoski, H (2225) FIN/C67 2016.

11.♘d4 ♕xg2 12.♖f1 ♗xc5



Position after: 12...♗xc5

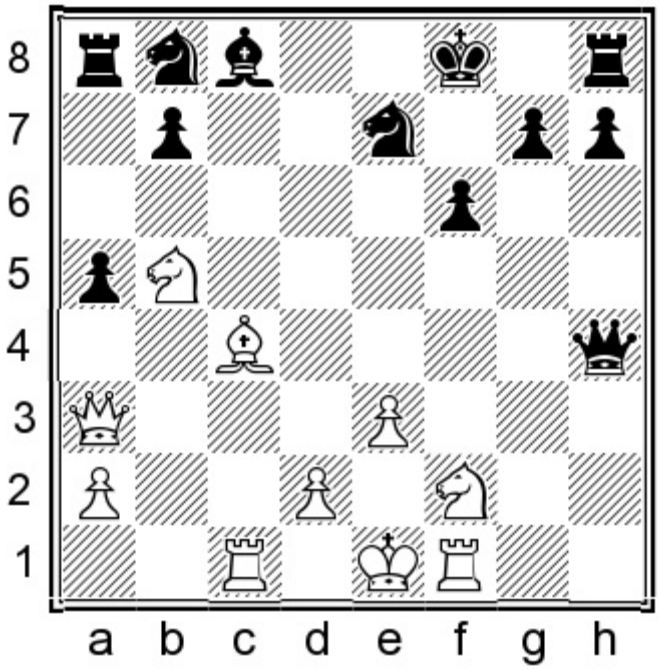
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Black is temporarily two pawns up, but his king will never find a safe spot. It’s no accident that both of the following correspondence games were won by White.

13.♗a3! ♗xa3

13...♗xd4 14.exd4 ♗g4 15.bxc6 bxc6 16.♖f2 ♕g1+ 17.♗f1 The threat is ♖f2-g2. 17...♗h3 18.♘c3! e3 19.♖f3 ♔d8 20.0-0-0 and Black resigned already in Claridge, J (2230) – Sage, F (2340) FRA – WLS 2015, 1-0.

14.♕xa3 ♕xh2 15.♘c3 ♘e7 16.♘xe4 ♕h4+ 17.♘f2 cxb5 18.♘xb5 ♔f8 19.♖c1♾



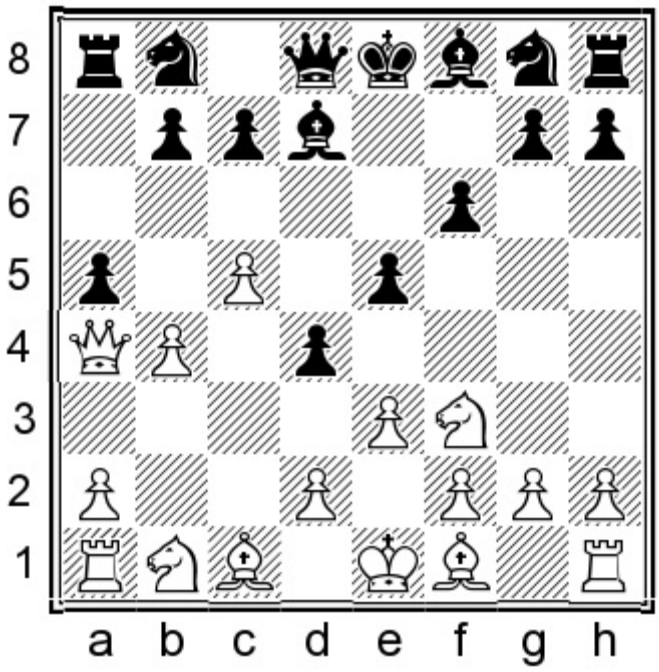
Position after: 19.♖c1♾

With tremendous compensation for White in the game Ilyushchenko, Y (2300) – Simmelink, J (2340) corr CP – LSS ICCF 2013.

f) 6...♗d7 7.b5 ♗xc5 8.♗c4 --, 8...♘e7 9.exd4 exd4 10.♗a3 ♗xa3

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6! 4.e3 e5 5.c5! a5 6.♕a4+! ♗d7

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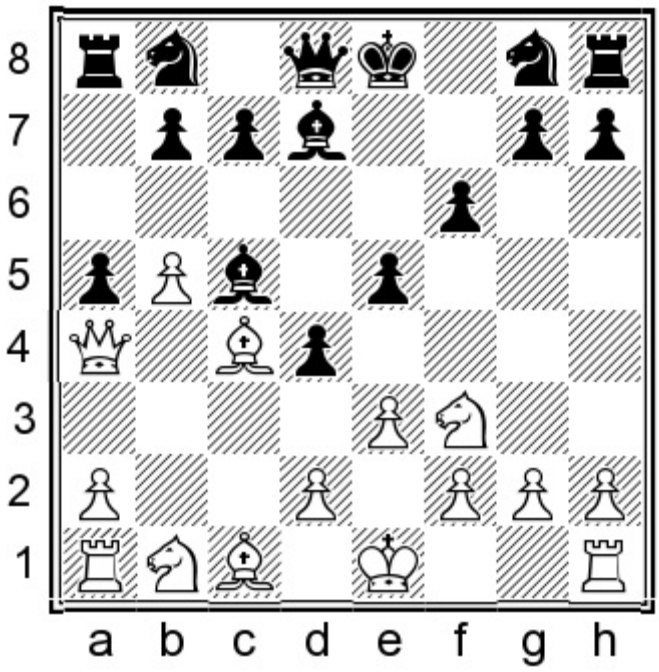
Position after: 6...♗d7

This has been the most problematic move in practice.

7.b5

This is the natural continuation after 6.♕a4+; we are ready to give up a pawn in exchange for quick and active development.

7...♗xc5 8.♗c4



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Position after: 8.♗c4

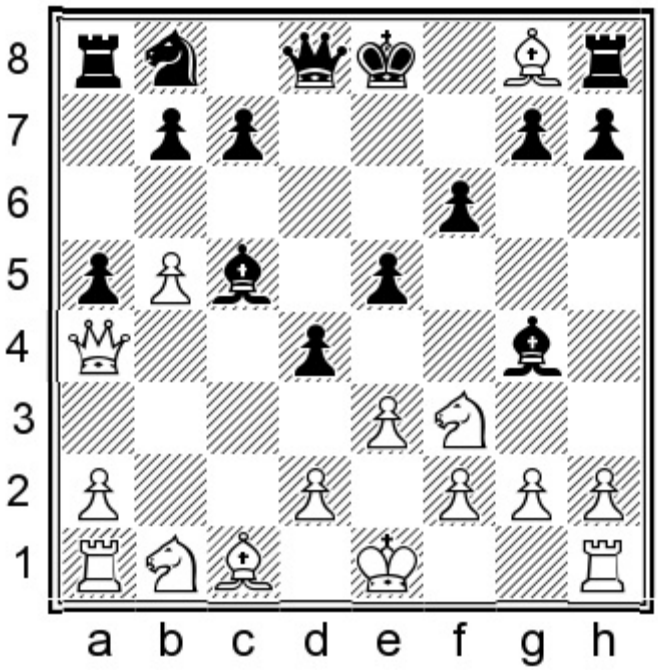
8...♘e7

Even if correspondence players all agree that this is the best move, over-the-board players don't seem to feel the same, and a few mistakes have appeared instead of this move.

A) 8...♕e7?! 9.0-0 dxe3 10.fxe3!N (10.dxe3 ♗e6 White couldn't achieve enough counterplay in Mareco, S (2635) – Anand, V (2779) Doha 2016) 10...e4 11.♘d4! ♗xd4?! 12.exd4± The annoying ♗a3 is coming, and we have a crushing initiative.

B) 8...c6? 9.♗xg8 ♖xg8 10.♕c4±

C) 8...♗g4? is like 8...c6, and Anand himself couldn't spot (or simply forgot and played too fast) that White has the trick 9.♗xg8! followed by ♕c4, winning a piece.



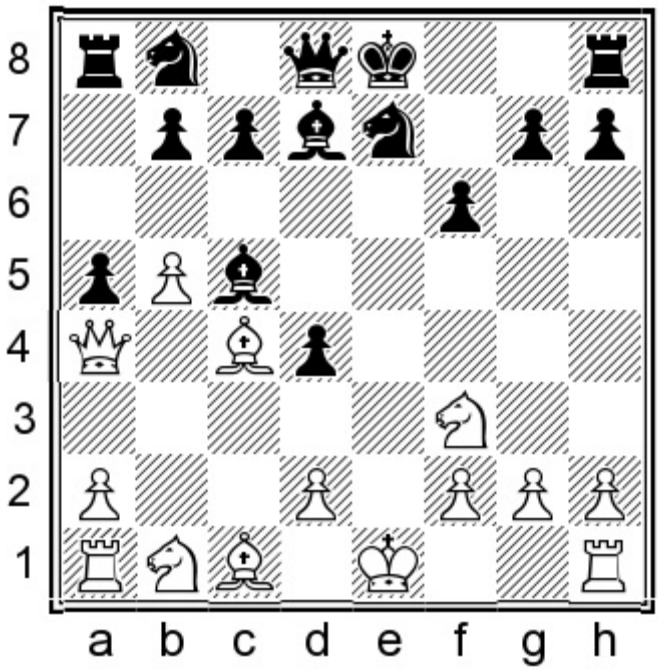
Position after: 9.♗xg8!

The game continued 9...♘d7 10.♕b3 ♕e7 11.♗c4 a4 12.♕c2 0-0-0±. White failed to convert his advantage in Caruana, F (2804) – Anand, V (2770) Leuven 2016, but obviously only because it was a rapid game.

D) 8...♘h6? is far too slow to be convincing: 9.exd4 exd4 10.0-0 ♘f5 11.♖e1+ (11.♕c2!?N is even stronger, to annoy the c5-bishop: 11...♘d6 12.♗d5 ♗b6 13.♖e1+ ♔f8 14.♗a3+–) 11...♔f8 12.♗a3 ♘a6 13.♘xd4 ♘b4 14.♘b3± 1-0 (30) Rasmussen, A (2517) – Farago, I (2428) Amantea 2014.

9.exd4 exd4

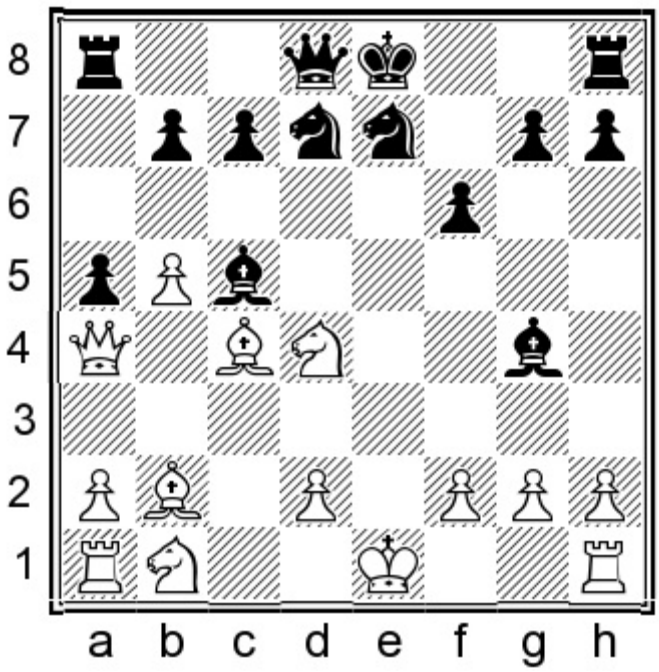
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Position after: 9...exd4

10.♗a3!

10.♗b2?! is clearly inferior, and Black has the better game after 10...♗g4 11.♘xd4 as played in the game Ramirez, A (2587) – Edouard, R (2639) Arlington 2015, which Black easily won. But as my good friend Romain mentions in his analysis (I have actually written this book thanks to him – sometimes I have to admit he is right), he could have improved his play with 11...♘d7!N

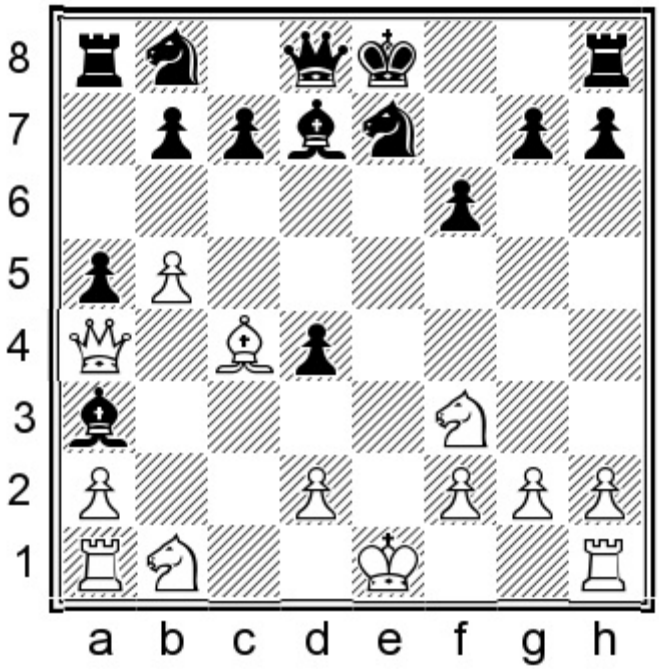


Position after: 11...♘d7!N

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because 12.♘e6 doesn't work: 12...♗xe6 13.♗xe6 ♗xf2+! 14.♔xf2 ♘c5 15.♕g4 ♘d3+ 16.♔g1 ♘xb2 17.♕xg7 ♕d4+ 18.♔f1 ♖f8∓.

10...♗xa3!?



Position after: 10...♗xa3!?

Now we need to improve over previous games with...

11.♕xa3!N

This is counterintuitive, as it doesn't develop the knight, but it's actually more important to protect the f3-knight, keep an eye on the knight on e7, and move the queen now in view of ...♘b8-d7-b6.

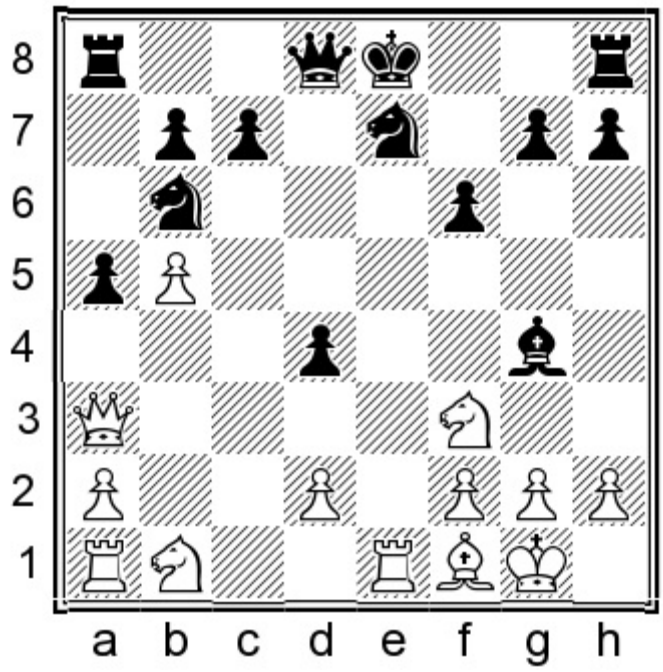
≤ 11.♘xa3 ♗g4 12.♘xd4 ♘d7 13.♘ac2 ♘b6 14.♕b3 ♕d6! 15.0-0 a4 16.♕c3 0-0-0∓ Black has the initiative, even if he finally couldn't win in Caruana, F (2823) – Topalov, V (2760) Saint Louis 2016.

11...♗g4 12.0-0 ♘d7 13.♖e1

We follow active and straightforward development.

13...♘b6 14.♗f1!

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Position after: 14.♗f1!

We don’t need our bishop to prevent Black from castling, as the black king must defend the knight, so it’s better to bring the bishop back home to f1, from where it defends b5 and can sometimes be a good companion for its king.

14...♔f7 15.♖e4!?

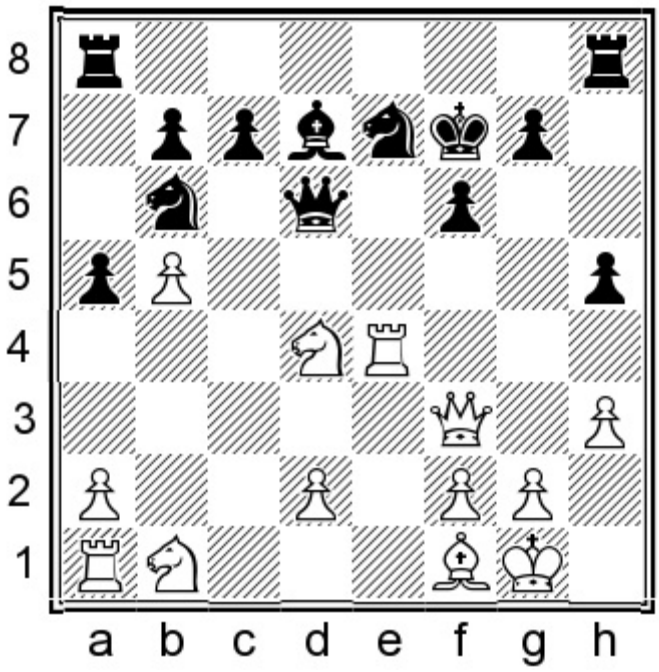
I prefer this move to the one played in the correspondence game Zawadski, A (2180) – Frijling, J (2215) WS/M/578 ICCF 2016: 15.♘xd4 ♖e8 16.♕b3+ ♔f8 17.♖e4 ♗f5 18.♘c3 ♕d7 19.♘xf5 ♘xf5 20.♖ae1 ♘d6 21.♖4e3± ½-½ (55).

15...h5

15...♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♖e8 17.♘a3! ♔g8 18.♖ae1 ♕d7 19.♘c4±

16.♘xd4 ♕d6 17.h3 ♗d7 18.♕f3!↑

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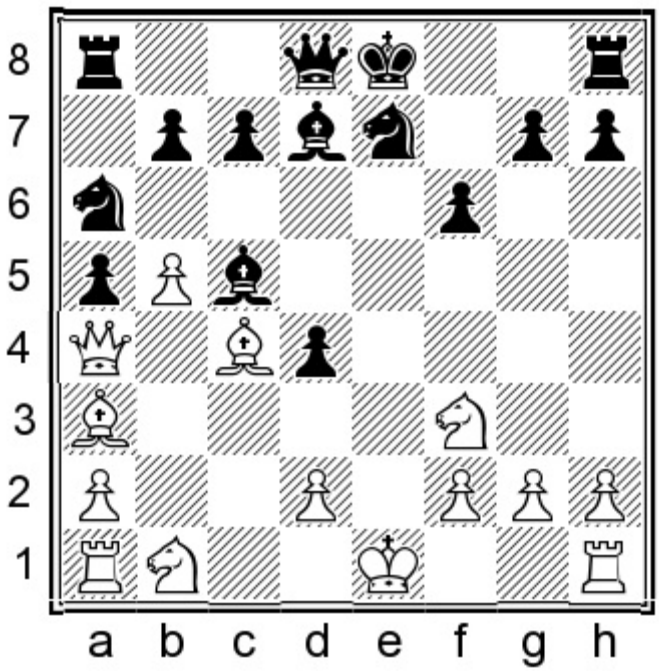


Position after: 18.♕f3!↑

White has activity in the center and Black still has concerns about his king. He can't castle 'by hand' because he also has to worry about his hanging h-pawn.

g) 6...♗d7 7.b5 ♗xc5 8.♗c4 ♘e7 9.exd4 exd4 10.♗a3 ♘a6

1.♘f3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 f6! 4.e3 e5 5.c5! a5 6.♕a4+! ♗d7 7.b5 ♗xc5 8.♗c4 ♘e7 9.exd4 exd4 10.♗a3! ♘a6!?



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Position after: 10...♘a6!?

An ingenious way to bring the knight into play and protect the bishop.

11.0-0 ♘b4

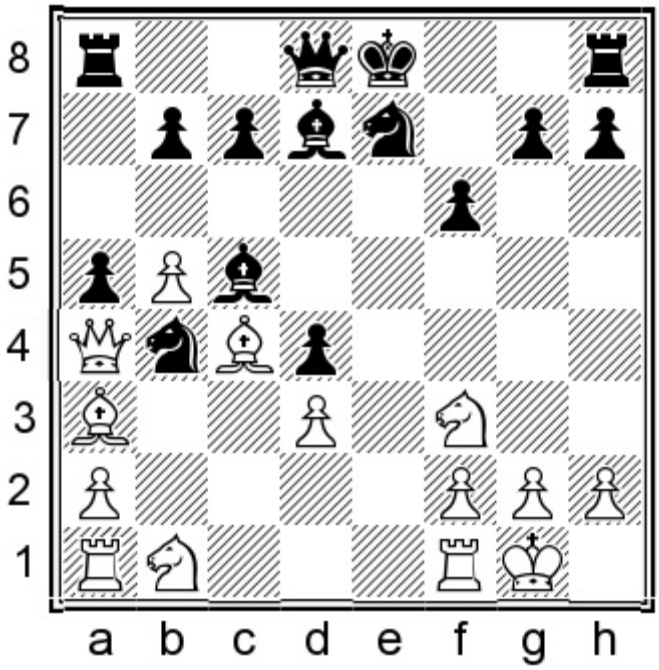
In the latest theoretical books, this position is the recommendation of both Delchev (with Semkov), and Mikhalevski.

There is no doubt that this is a really important position. While 12.d3 is analyzed quite deeply by the authors, and I agree with them that the game is more or less balanced (I even prefer Black in most of the lines as his position seems simpler to play), I turned once again to correspondence games, and they all agree on 12.♖e1.

12.♖e1!N

It's quite strange that no one has tested this move in a real game, as it seems natural.

12.d3 can be well met with two different moves:



Position after: 12.d3

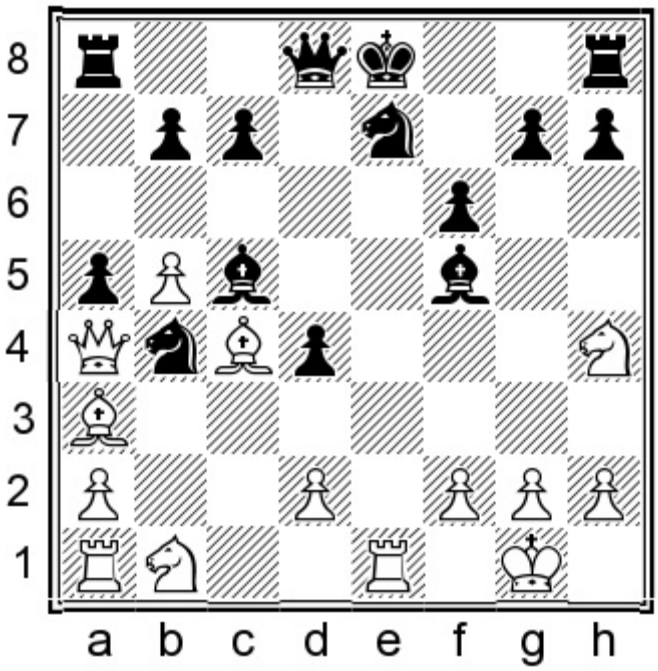
12...♗f5! (12...c6!? 13.♘bd2 ♕b6 14.bxc6 ♗xc6!N 15.♕d1 0-0-0∞) 13.♖e1 (I tried the slightly dubious 13.♖c1 against the Polish prodigy Duda, and after a crazy game was quite lucky to draw.) 13...♗xd3 14.♗xd3 ♘xd3 15.♗xc5 ♘xc5 16.♕c4 ♕d6! 17.♘bd2 0-0-0 18.♖ac1 b6 19.♘e4 ♘xe4 20.♖xe4 ♖d7 21.♖xd4= We regain our pawn, but have no attack left; it is simply equal.

12...♗g4

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The most logical continuation, as White does not have any natural move to protect his knight.

A) 12...♗f5?! is well met with 13.♘h4!



Position after: 13.♘h4!

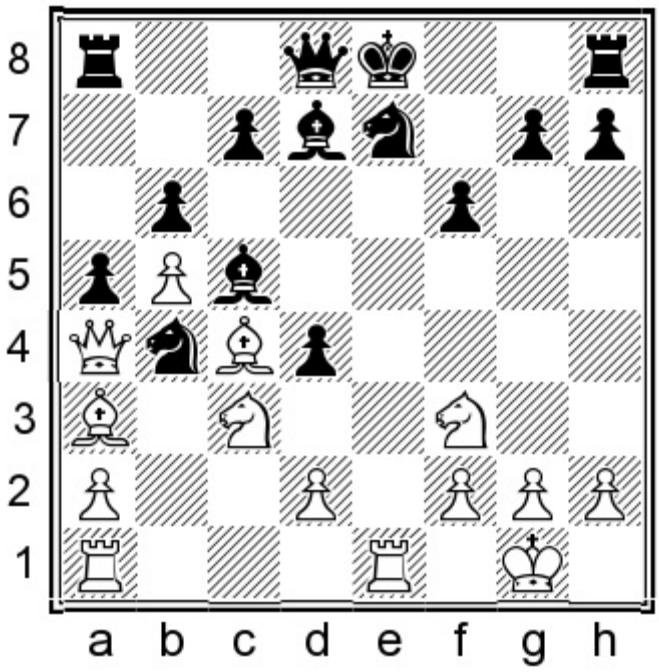
A1) 13...♔f8 14.♕d1 ♕d7 15.♘xf5 ♕xf5 16.♗e6 ♕g5 17.d3± The bishop on e6 is a real monster.

A2) 13...♗c2? is refuted 14.♗xb4!! ♗xa4 15.♗xc5, leaving Black in an awful position. He needs to prevent ♘f5 with 15...g6 16.♘f3!, but the king can't hide anywhere and we can take on e7 whenever we want. 16...c6 17.♘a3! ♔d7 18.♖xe7+ ♕xe7 19.♗xe7 ♔xe7 20.♘xd4+–.

A3) 13...♗g6 14.♕b3 ♕d6 15.♕h3!→ preventing the king from castling, and now threatening 16.♘xg6.

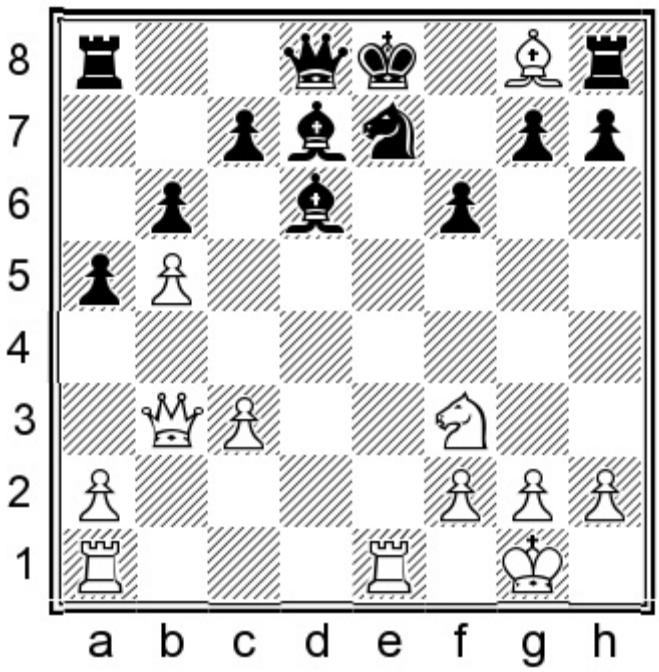
B) 12...b6 can be quite logical, but now I like 13.♘c3!

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Position after: 13.♘c3!

The knight is heading to e4, which more or less forces 13...dxc3 14.dxc3 ♘c2 (14...♔f8 15.♖ad1 ♘c2 16.♕xc2 ♗xa3 17.♖xd7! ♕xd7 18.♘d4 ♔e8 19.♕e2!→ It seems a bit early to stop the analysis, but as this position is unlikely to occur, I will just say that White has wonderful compensation for the rook.) 15.♕xc2 ♗xa3 16.♕b3! ♗d6 (16...♗c5 is similar: 17.♗g8 ♗g4 18.♕f7+ ♔d7 19.♖xe7+! ♕xe7 20.♕d5+ ♕d6 21.♕xa8 ♗xf3 22.♕xf3±) 17.♗g8!!



Position after: 17.♗g8!!

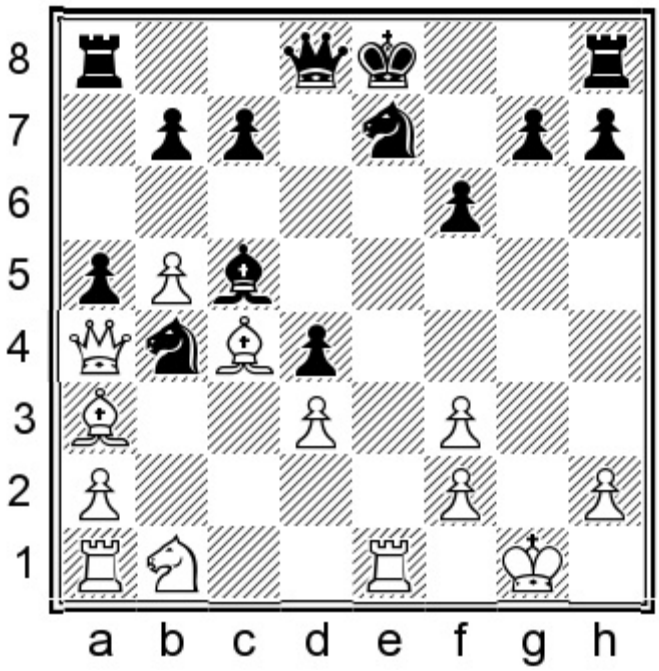
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17...♗g4 18.♘d4!± This position requires some calculation, but Black is objectively already lost.

13.d3

13.♕b3? Since the first edition of the book, the following game Perez Ponsa, F (2553) – Ramirez, A (2568) chess.com 2018, 0-1 (23), was played on the internet. However, White's idea is pretty bad, and we can even improve Black's play with 13...♕d6! 14.h3 ♗xf3 15.♕xf3 0-0-0∓.

13...♗xf3 14.gxf3



Position after: 14.gxf3

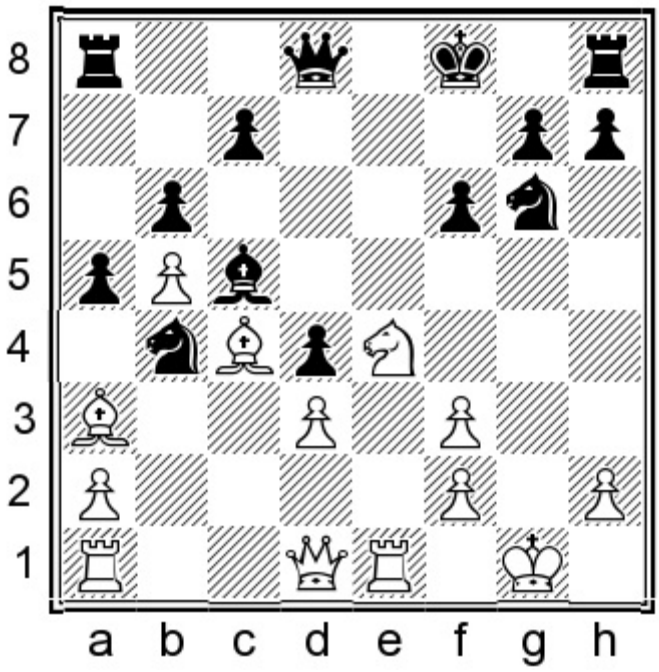
White is a pawn down, and his kingside is damaged, but he has the bishop pair, and as Black has had to give up his light-squared bishop, our bishop on c4 is really dominating.

14...♔f8

Of course, Black has other moves but it's not easy to castle long, so this seems like the easiest way to bring the e7-knight back to life.

14...b6 doesn't really help Black, and gives him fewer options: 15.♘d2 ♔f8 16.♘e4 ♘g6 17.♕d1!

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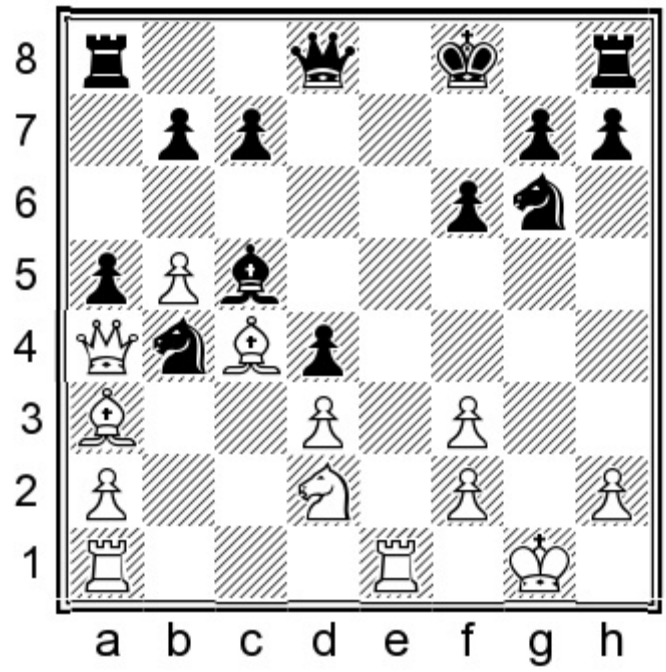
Position after: 17.♕d1!

We transfer our queen to the kingside, even if the way seems blocked right now. 17...♕d7 (17...♗e7 is no longer logical as Black has played 14...b6. We can open the way for our queen with 18.f4! ♕d7 19.♕h5+–. Black has been completely outplayed; 17...♘f4 18.♗c1 ♘bd5 19.♗xd5 ♘xd5 20.♘xc5 bxc5 21.♗a3 ♔f7 22.♗xc5↑) 18.f4 h5 (18...♘xf4?? 19.♕f3 ♘g6 20.♘xf6+–) 19.♘xc5 bxc5 20.♗xb4 axb4 21.♗e6! ♕xb5 22.♕f3± Despite his efforts, Black is unable to bring the h8-rook into play. White is about to play a2-a4, to either open the queenside or create a strong passed pawn. He easily won in the correspondence game: Oreopoulos, K (2490) – Szczepanski, Z (2520) WS/ GMN/047 ICCF 2015.

15.♘d2 ♘ed5

15...♘g6

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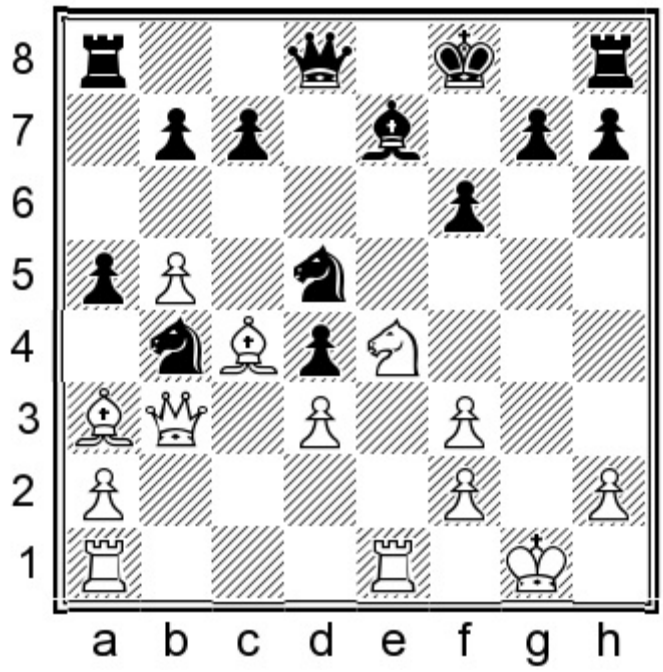
Position after: 15...♘g6

A) 16.♘e4 ♗e7 (16...b6 – see 14... b6) 17.♘g3 ♘e5 18.♖xe5! A necessary exchange sacrifice. 18...fxe5 19.♖e1 g6 20.♖xe5 White has good compensation, but two correspondence games soon ended in a draw. No doubt though that it is still interesting for a practical game. 20...♔g7 21.♗b2 (21.♗c1 ♗f6 22.♗f4 ♖f8 23.a3 ♗h4 24.♗d2 ♗f6 ½-½ Martín Sánchez, C (2450) – Jensen, E (2450) WS/GMN/050 ICCF 2016) 21...c5 22.bxc6 ♘xc6 ½-½ Torsteinsson (2455) – Biedermann, T (2420) ISL/OPC/2016 (corr.) 2016.

B) 16.♘b3!? This might be stronger than coming to the center. 16...b6 (16...♗e7? 17.♖e4+–) 17.♘xc5 bxc5 18.♕d1! ♘e5 19.♗xb4 axb4 20.♗b3 g5 21.f4 gxf4 22.♕h5 ♔g7 23.♔h1→

16.♘e4 ♗e7 17.♕b3

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Position after: 17.♕b3

17...c6

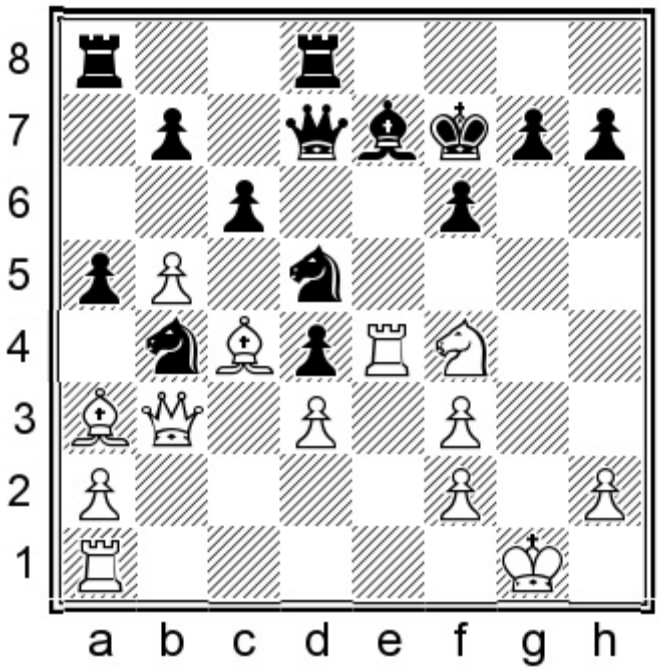
17...♘f4 18.♘g3! ♗d6 19.♖e4→

18.♘g3 ♕d7 19.♖e4 ♔f7 20.♘e2

20.♖ae1 is of course logical as well.

20...♖hd8 21.♘f4→

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Position after: 21.♘f4→

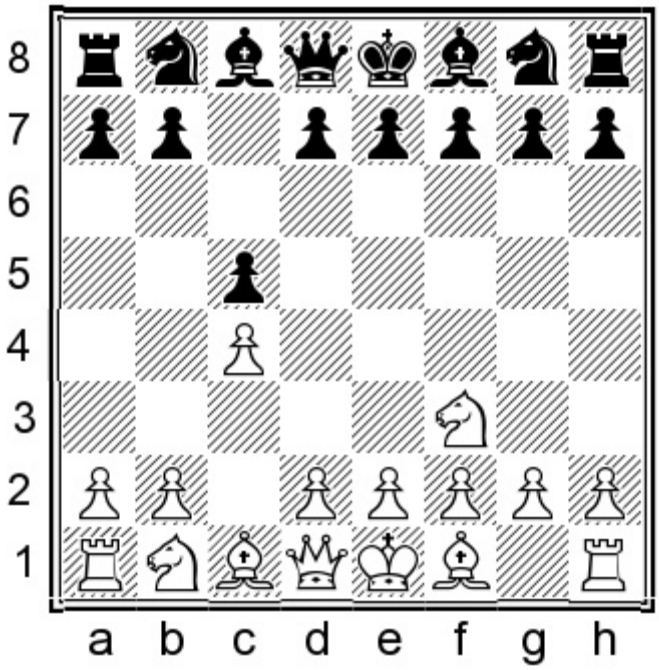
Black has finally been able to use his h8-rook, but White's initiative is hard to neutralize, and he eventually won in Oreopoulos, K (2445) – Ruefenacht, M (2455) Champions League 2012, 1-0 (34).

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Part IV
Symmetrical English 1.♘f3 c5 2.c4

Chapter 13
Lines without ...♘f6 & Botvinnik

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4



Chapter guide

Chapter 13 – Lines without ...♘f6 & Botvinnik

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.b3 e5 4.♗b2

a) 2.--, 2.c4 --

b) 4...e4

c) 4...d6 5.♘c3 --

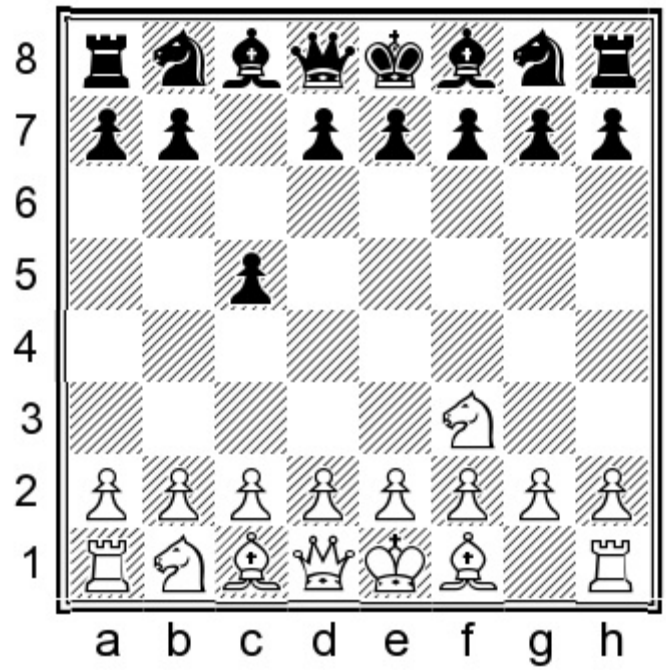
d) 4...d6 5.♘c3 g6 6.g3 ♗g7 7.d3 ♘ge7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 --

e) 4...d6 5.♘c3 g6 6.g3 ♗g7 7.d3 ♘ge7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 h6

a) 2.--, 2.c4 --

1.♘f3 c5

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Position after: 1...c5

This is nothing less than the third most played move at this early stage (after 1...♘f6 and 1...d5). It's perhaps even the most important, as after 1...♘f6, players usually transpose to ...c5-systems (after 2.c4 c5). We will start our investigation of these systems with ...c5 on move one, as it is the most flexible more order for Black. It's important to mention that only Sicilian players can logically play 1...c5 as it would transpose after 2.e4, but as I am not really willing to refute the Sicilian, I prefer to analyze only 2.c4.

2.c4

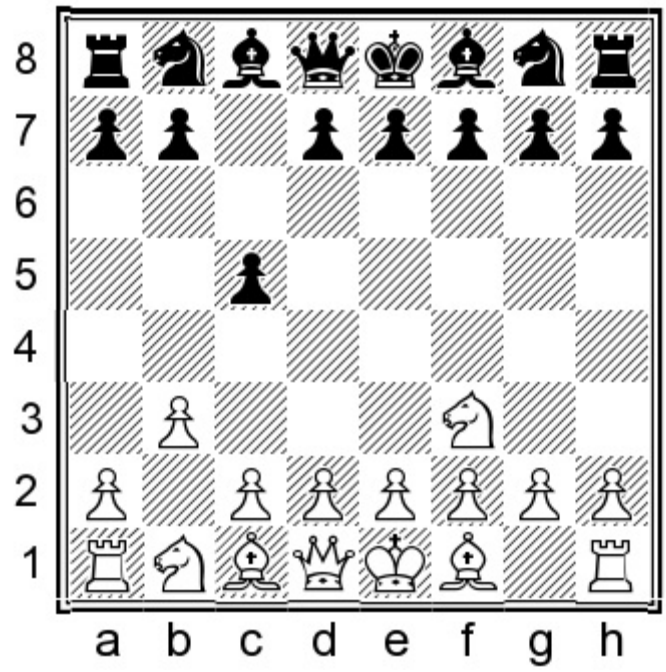
This transposes to the Symmetrical English, which has been covered in many books, but not with the system I have chosen for you! It was already a tough choice for me on the second move, as I have played 2.b3 in most of my games.

Both move orders have drawbacks and advantages, and I had to balance the pros and cons. I finally preferred the text move. In this chapter, we will have a closer look at some minor systems that Black may want to play.

These systems have one thing in common: the knight on g8 doesn't go to its natural square on f6. We will study the possibilities after an early ...♘f6 in the next chapter.

2.b3!?

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Position after: 2.b3!?

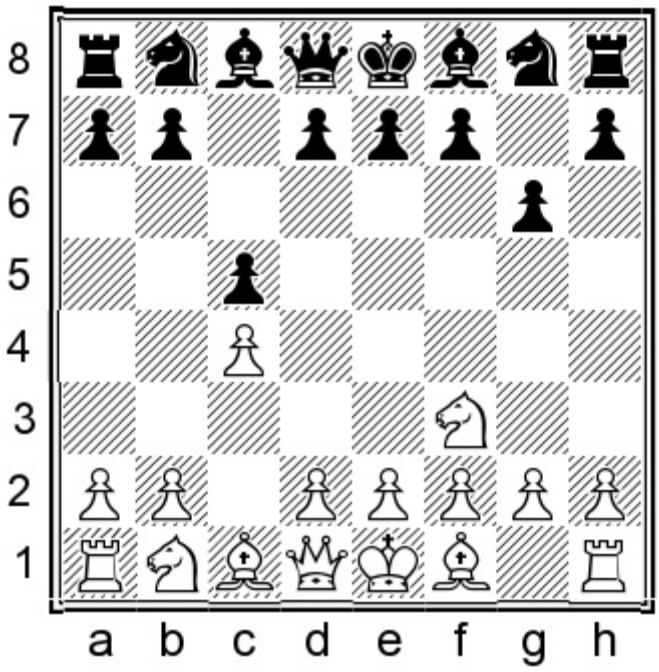
The main advantage of starting with this move is that it prevents Black from playing an early ...g7-g6, which is annoying if we want to play b2-b3 later. It can transpose to our text move on many occasions, but the main problem in my view (even if no one has played it against me, maybe because Black completely changes his set-up) is 2...d5!, when we can't play c2-c4 as ...d5-d4 would be quite annoying now that b3 has been played (and doesn't make much sense in these pawn structures). So it's impossible to try to transpose into the chapter on the Neo-Catalan, while after 3.♗b2, among Black's good options, he can continue with 3...f6!?, which is quite annoying as he simply tries to occupy the center.

But if for any reason you would like to play this move order, my advice is to have a look at the rare move 4.♘c3!? which is almost a novelty, but was seen in Nakamura – Caruana, Saint Louis rapid 2017 (and also Edouard, R – Demuth, A Llucmajor blitz 2016, but you won't find this one in the databases). The position is already quite strange, but White is ready to meet 4...e5?! with the central reaction 5.e4! ↑.

2...b6!?

A) 2...g6 prevents us from playing our Reti-like system with b2-b3 so easily. None of the options really has anything to do with a Modern Reti, so I prefer not to cover it in depth. I have made some suggestions on how to meet it below. Sorry to disappoint you, but I'll leave the choice (and all the work!) to you!

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Position after: 2...g6

A1) 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.♘c3 is a tabiya of the Symmetrical English, where Black now has various choices leading to several systems, but we generally can't transpose into the lines I am covering here.

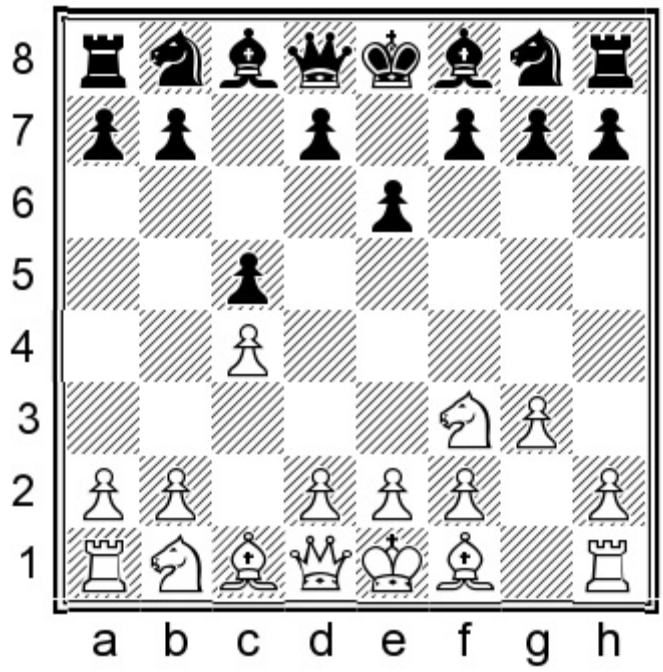
A2) 3.e3 aims to advance with d2-d4, but avoiding the Maroczy. Black can respond quietly with 3...♗g7 4.d4 ♘f6 and White still needs to justify his early e2-e3.

A3) 3.d4 leading to a Maroczy system is usually the reason why people don't play 2...g6: 3...cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗g7 5.e4 ♘c6 6.♗e3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 d6 and this is only the beginning of the theory. Maybe you already have some knowledge of the Maroczy if you are used to facing it in the Sicilian, or in some lines of the King's Indian. It has already been covered in books, and there are many ways to play for both sides.

B) 2...e6 This is quite a compromising move. Firstly, because Black can't play any system where the pawn advances to e5 any more, without being a tempo down.

Secondly, because ...g7-g6 is not really an option any more, as it would be too weakening. And last, because it can only transpose into other systems. 3.g3!

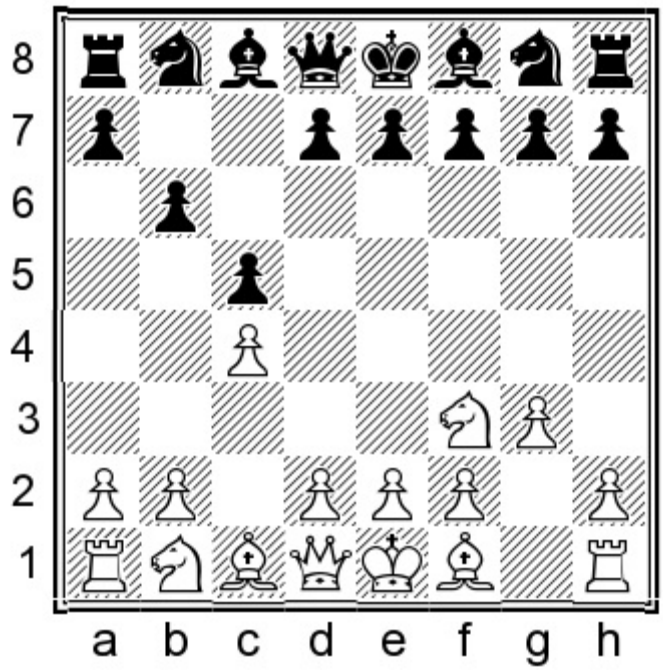
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Position after: 3.g3!

There is no reason to hurry in playing b2-b3 now. 3...d5 (3...b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 ♘f6 transposes into chapter 15 on the Hedgehog; 3...♘c6 4.♗g2 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.b3 0-0 7.♗b2 d5 finally transposes into chapter 5 on the Neo-Catalan) 4.cxd5 exd5 5.d4 is chapter 4 on the Tarrasch.

3.g3



Position after: 3.g3

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We have to hurry in playing this move, otherwise Black would have the possibility of taking on f3 once we play g3, with some positional compensation in the d4-square. If you want to play a kingside fianchetto, it's now or never.

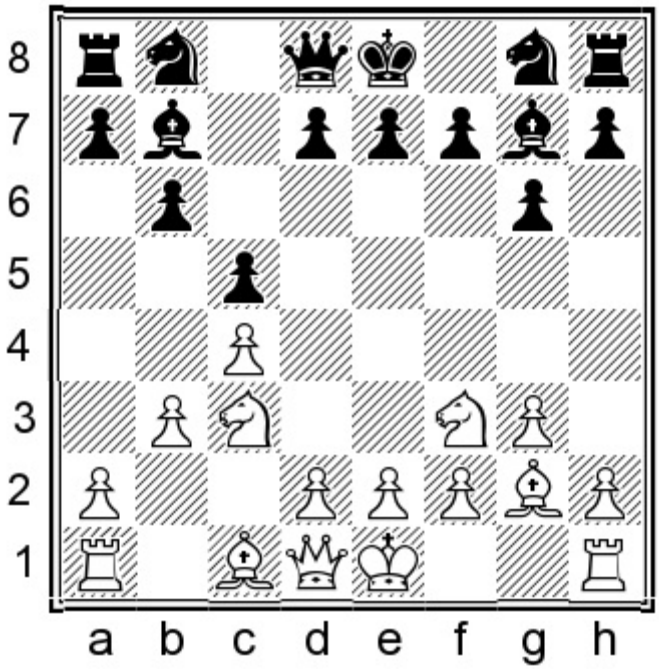
3...♗b7 4.♗g2 g6!?

After 2...g6 Black is first to place a bishop on the long dark-squared diagonal. When I faced this last year, I decided to play...

5.♘c3

5.0-0 is a bit too slow for my taste because of 5...♗g7 6.♘c3 ♘f6 7.b3 and Black can take advantage of the pin on the long diagonal with 7...d5!↑, when he is the first to strike in the center. (7...♘e4!?= is also fine, if allowing too many trades).

5...♗g7 6.b3



Position after: 6.b3

6...♘h6!?

This is more or less the only independent idea.

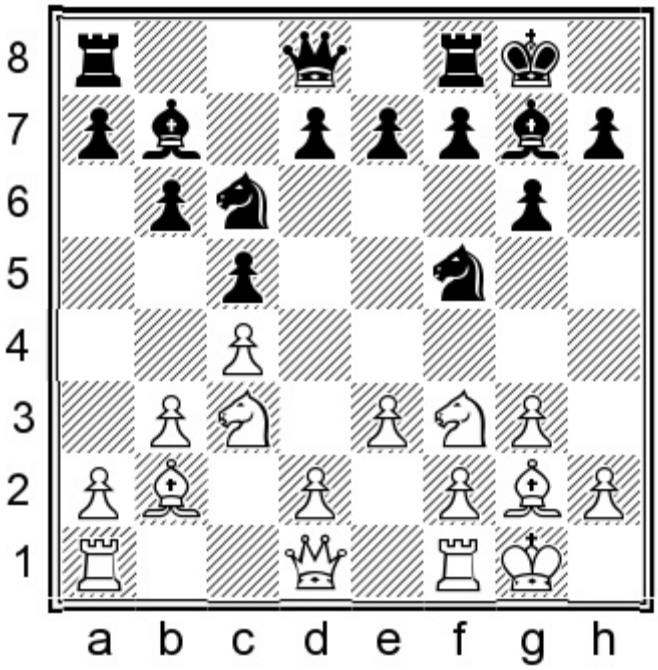
6...♘f6 7.♗b2 transposes into the symmetrical double fianchetto system that we will analyze later in this chapter.

7.♗b2 ♘f5

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This thematic manoeuvre fights against the possibility of d2-d4, and the knight is quite difficult to remove.

8.0-0 0-0 9.e3 ♘c6



Position after: 9...♘c6

This position was reached in my game Demuth, A (2545) – Edouard, R (2647) Agen 2016, which I won after surviving some trouble in the middlegame.

I consider it a reliable system for Black. I won't spend too much time on it, as you will most probably never face this variation (as the move order is really unusual, especially 2...b6), and will simply recommend the following plan...

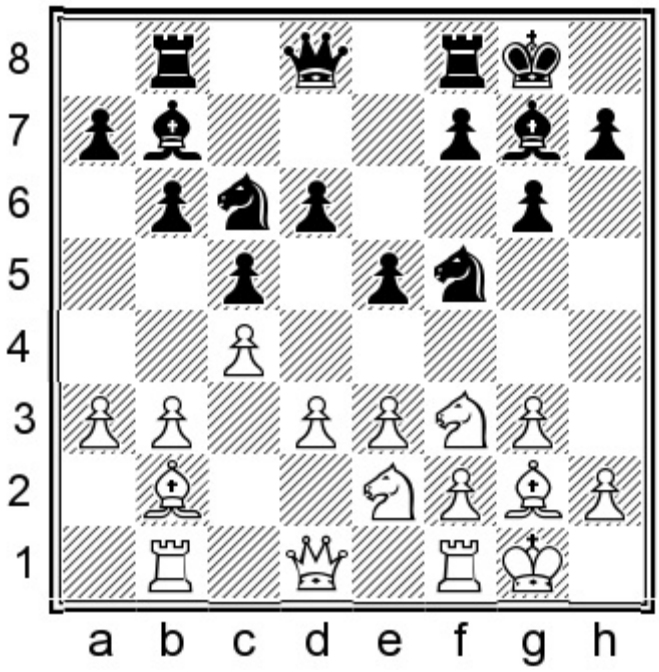
10.♖b1!?N 10...♖b8! 11.♘e2 e5

This might be best.

11...♗xb2 12.♖xb2↑ seems quite promising as the logical continuation d2-d4 will follow.

12.d3 d6 13.a3↑

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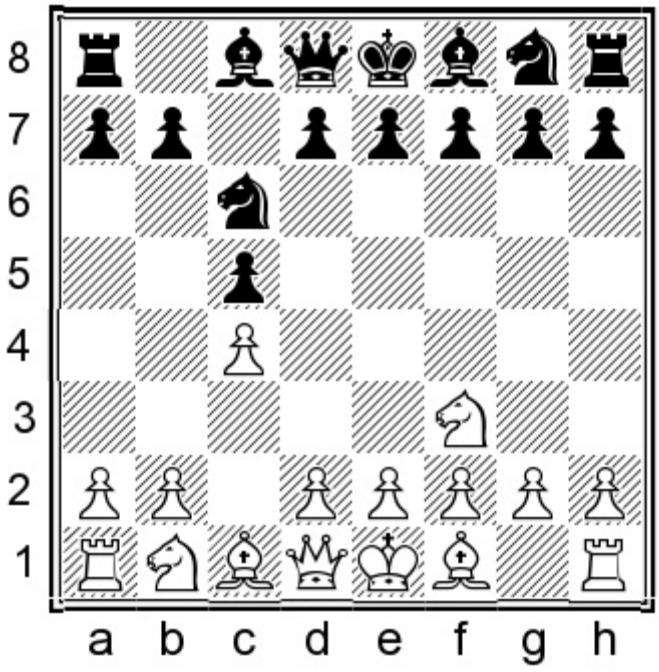


Position after: 13.a3↑

This is similar to the main line of the Botvinnik system. White should bring a knight to/towards the d5-square, and then try to advance b3-b4. In addition the knight on f5 is somewhat misplaced: it prevents ...f7-f5 and will be necessary on e7 to fight against a potential white knight on d5.

b) 4...e4

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘c6



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Position after: 2...♘c6

We will now focus on this critical move. Black intends to play 3...e5, which is why White often reacts with 3.d4. It's true that it should be the most ambitious move, but I prefer to avoid a clash in the center for now, and develop with the double fianchetto system.

3.b3!? e5!?

We will concentrate only on this move for now, as others have already been covered or will transpose into the next chapters.

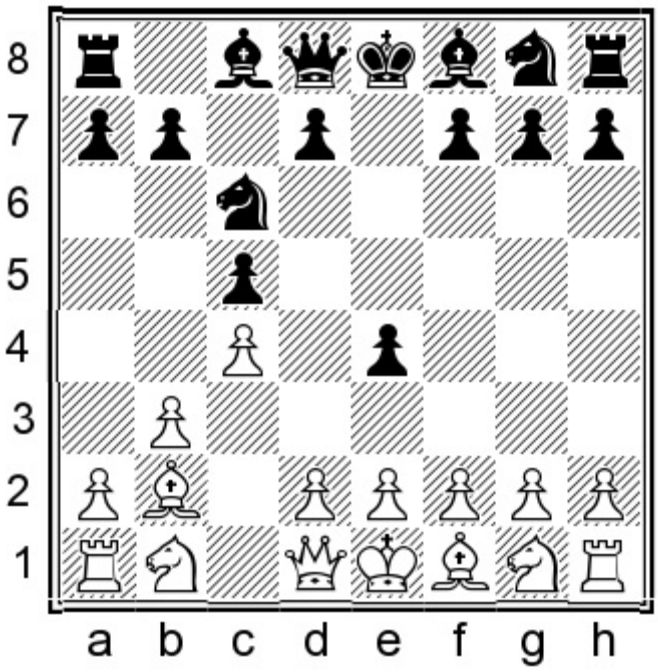
4.♗b2!

Strange, but very interesting! White chooses not to prevent the annoying-looking ...e4.

4...e4

4...d6 is the main move – see the next subchapters.

5.♘g1



Position after: 5.♘g1

5...♘f6

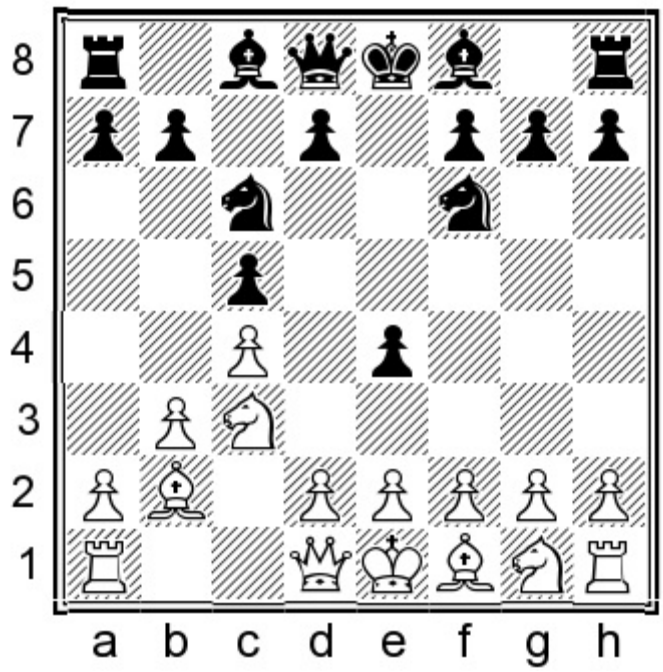
5...f5?!N Black takes as much space as possible, but it is not really effective as it also creates some weak spots. 6.d3! ♘f6 7.e3 ♗e7 8.♘c3 0-0 9.♘h3! In order to prevent a knight from coming to d5, Black has to hurry with 9...d5. but after 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.dxe4 ♘xc3 12.♗c4+ ♔h8 13.♕xd8 ♖xd8

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14.♗xc3 fxe4 15.♘f4± White stands much better.

6.♘c3

Black has to worry about his e4-pawn. Like Black in Alekhine's Defense, White encourages his opponent's pawns to advance, in order to destroy his center more easily later. It's actually quite strange that of the three games that reached this position, two were played by the Russian super-GM Peter Svidler in blitz games.



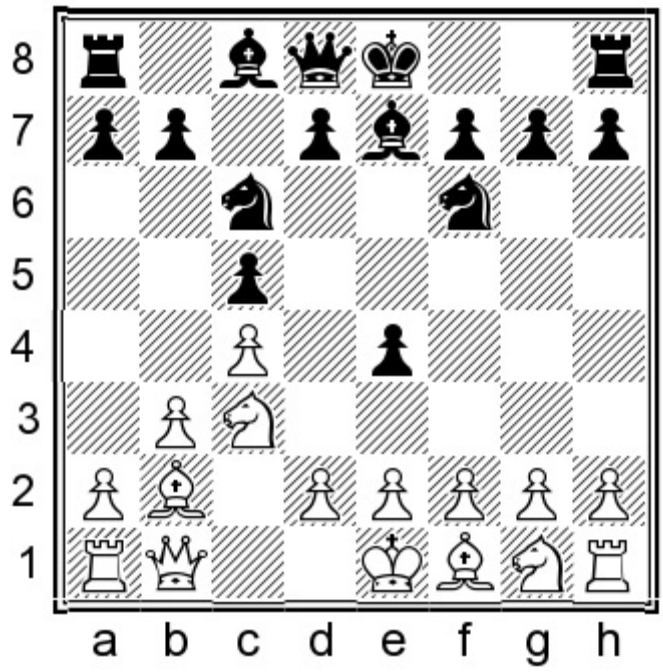
Position after: 6.♘c3

6...♗d6!?

This move was played by Radjabov in the first encounter against Svidler. His idea is to put the bishop on e5 in order to pin our knight.

A) 6...♗e7?! 7.♕b1!N

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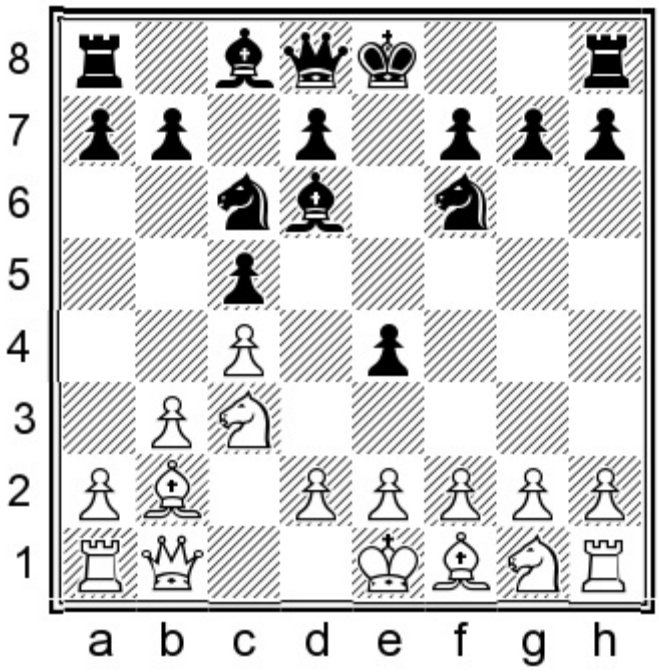
Position after: 7.♕b1!N

I don’t see any reason why we should refrain from trying to take the pawn. (7.g3 0-0 8.♗g2 ♖e8 9.♘h3 d5 10.cxd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xe4 ♗f5 12.♘c3 ♗f6⩱ MVL had great compensation for the pawn and eventually won in Svidler, P (2759) – Vachier-Lagrave, M (2798) Biel 2016) 7...0-0 (7...d5 8.cxd5 ♘b4 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♕xe4 0-0 11.a3! ♘xd5 12.♘f3±) 8.e3! We have to be cautious and prepare the capture of the e4-pawn. (8.♘xe4?! ♘xe4 9.♕xe4 ♗f6 10.♕b1 d5! 11.cxd5 ♗xb2 12.♕xb2 ♕xd5⩱ and Black’s initiative is not easy to handle.) 8...♖e8 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♕xe4± Δ 10...♗f6? 11.♗xf6+–

B) 6...d5N 7.cxd5 ♘b4 8.e3! ♘bxd5 9.♘ge2! ♘xc3?! 10.♘xc3 ♗e7 11.♕c2 ♗f5 12.♗b5+!±

7.♕b1!?N

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Position after: 7.♕b1!?N

7.e3 as played by Svidler is interesting too. 7...0-0 But I would now advise 8.f4!N, actively preventing ...♗e5.

7...0-0!

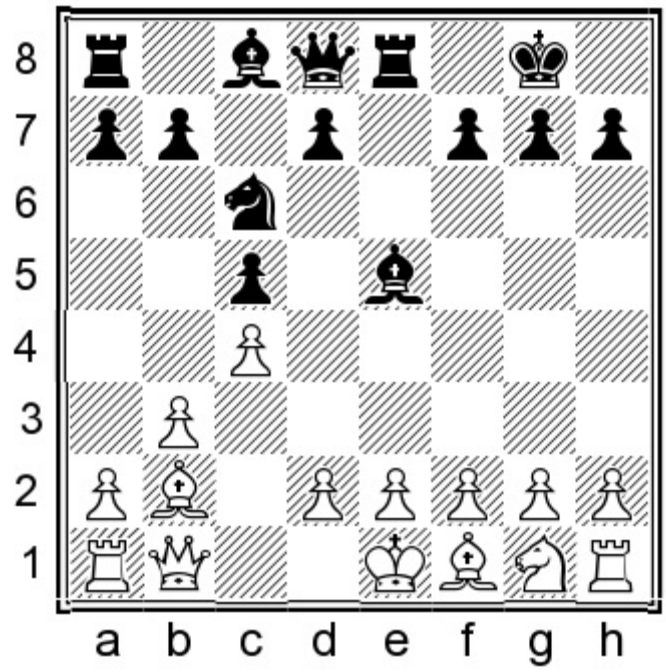
It seems best for Black to sacrifice the pawn in order to create some counterplay. We have to be accurate.

A) 7...♗e5? 8.♘xe4 ♗xb2 9.♘d6+ ♔e7 10.♘xc8+ ♖xc8 11.♕xb2±

B) 7...♕e7 8.e3 0-0 9.♘ge2 ♖e8 10.♘g3± Black's development isn't great and he needs to worry about his e4-pawn for a while.

8.♘xe4! ♘xe4 9.♕xe4 ♖e8 10.♕b1 ♗e5

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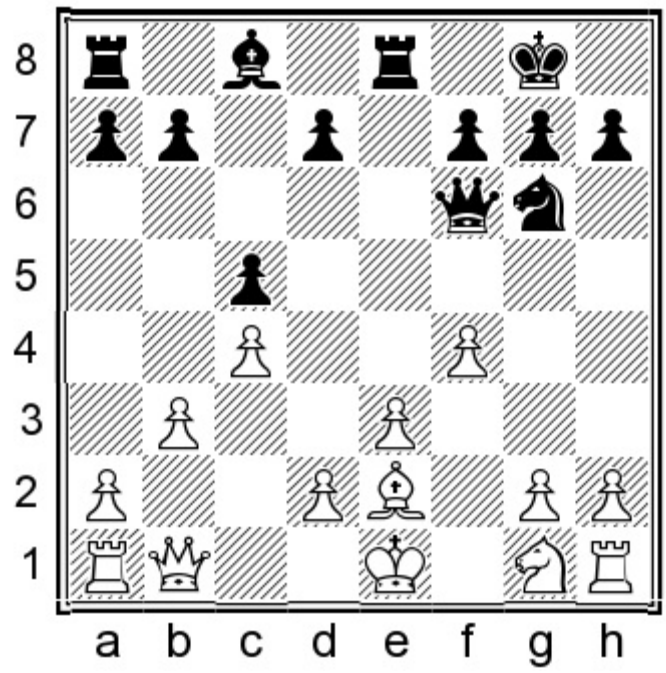
Position after: 10...♗e5

Black wants to continue with ...d7-d5 and open lines since we still need some time to castle.

11.e3!

This important move provides some options. For instance play might continue...

11...♕f6 12.♗xe5 ♘xe5 13.f4! ♘g6 14.♗e2!⩲



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Position after: 14.♗e2!⩲

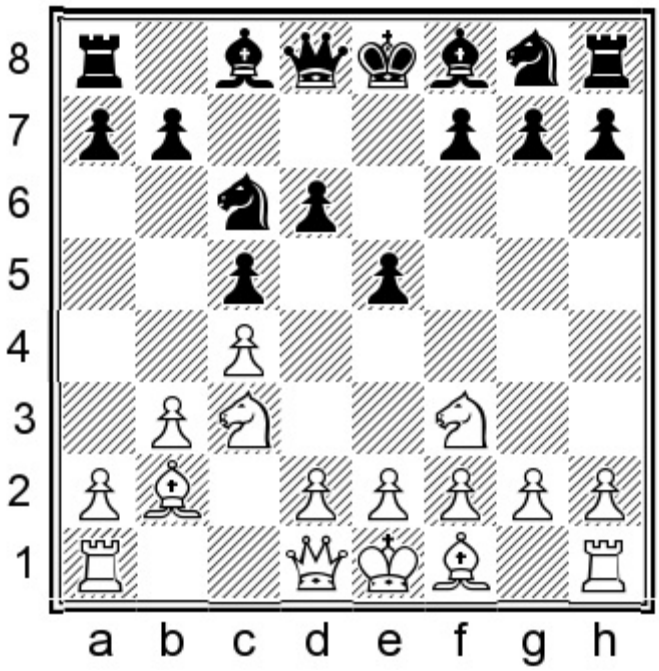
As Black is lacking clear counterplay here, I think we are simply better.

c) 4...d6 5.♘c3 --

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.b3 e5 4.♗b2 d6

Black's central pawn structure indicates the start of the Botvinnik System, which often appears in the English opening, and can be played by either side. This is a solid choice, the only drawback being that it clearly weakens the light squares, especially d5.

5.♘c3



Position after: 5.♘c3

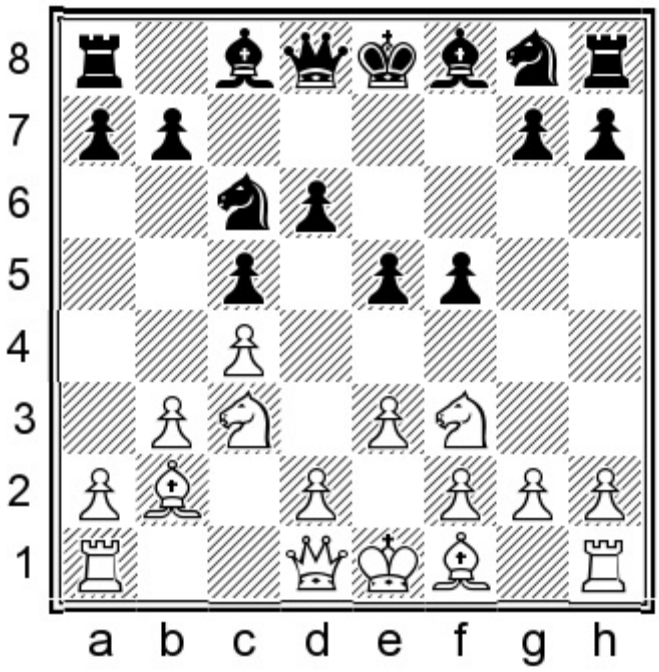
As we said, d5 is a really important square in this opening, thus it's logical to develop our knight here. It also prevents ...e5-e4, which we have no reason to allow any more.

5...♘f6

This is played from time to time, but it's not great.

A) 5...f5?! This would be too early, as we can still strike in the center with 6.e3!, intending d2-d4, which is hard for Black to meet.

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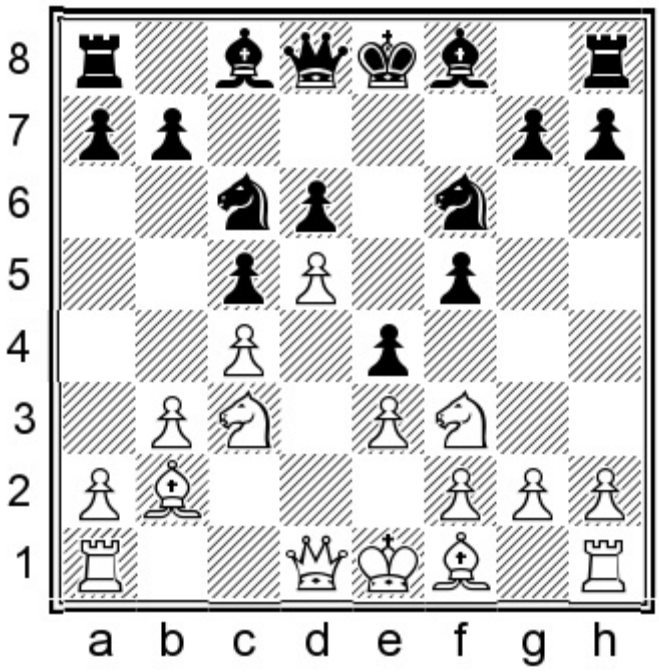
Position after: 6.e3!

(6.d3 ♘f6 7.g3 ♗e7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0±) 6...♘f6 (6...e4?! is similar to the line we saw earlier with: 4...e4 7.♘g1 ♘f6 8.d3 ♗e7 9.♘h3!±; 6...g6?! 7.d4! exd4 8.exd4 cxd4 9.♘xd4±) 7.d4!

A1) 7...cxd4?! is even worse: 8.exd4 e4 9.d5! exf3 10.dxc6 ♕e7+ 11.♔d2! Once again, we are following a blitz game by Peter Svidler. We can be concerned about our king being so exposed, but it will soon be safe, whereas Black has to do something about the e-file. 11...bxc6 12.♕xf3 ♘e4+ 13.♔c2! ♗e6 14.♘xe4 fxe4 15.♕xe4+– 1-0 (25) Svidler, P (2753) – Caruana, F (2791) Stavanger 2014.

A2) 7...e4 8.d5!

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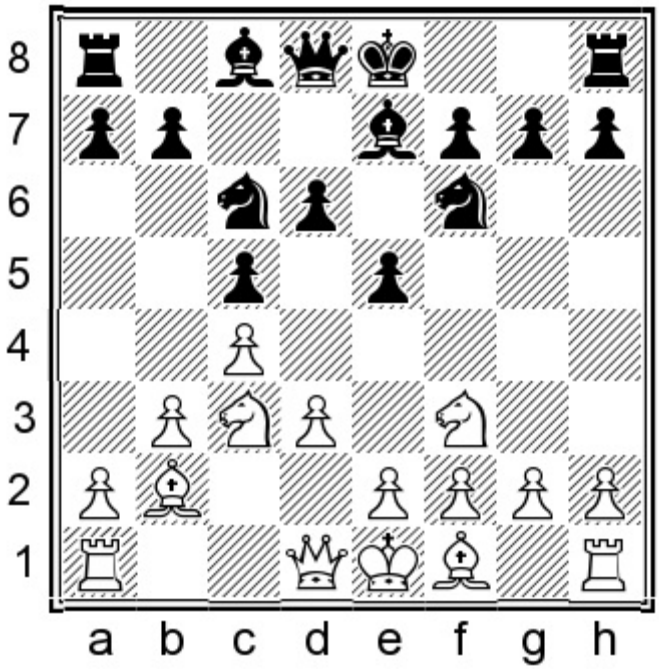


Position after: 8.d5!

This is obviously the idea. 8...♘b4 (8...exf3?! 9.dxc6 bxc6 10.♕xf3±) 9.♘g5± h6?! 10.♘e6 ♗xe6 11.dxe6± The pawn on e6 is poisoned, as it will be untouchable after ♘c3-d5.

B) Our main move, 5...g6, will be covered in the following subchapters.

6.d3 ♗e7



Position after: 6...♗e7

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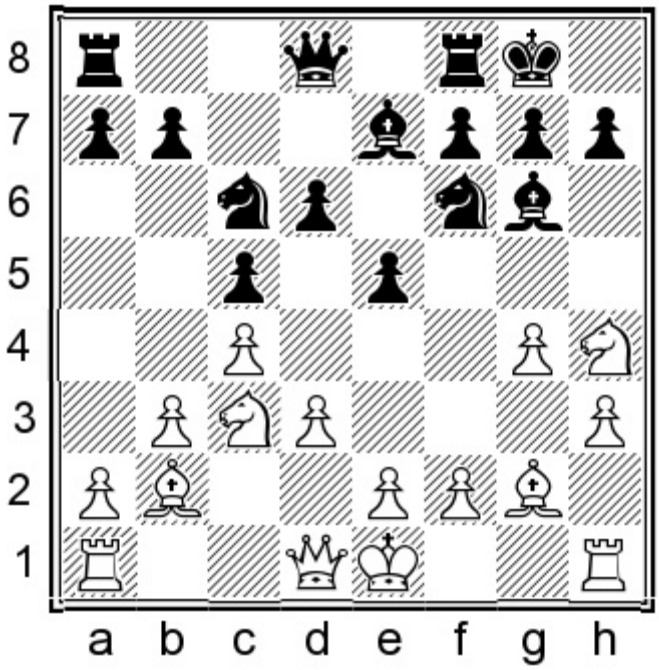
Another way to develop the kingside, but clearly inferior. Black can't play ...f7-f5 any more, and his bishop does nothing on e7. Of course, the position is still playable, but I don't know why Black should enter this passive system. It's no accident there are only a few games played this way.

6...g6?! 7.g3 ♗g7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 This is like our main line except that the knight is not on e7. The difference doesn't help Black at all, so we won't take it any further.

7.g3 0-0 8.♗g2 ♗g4?!

8...a6 9.0-0 ♖b8 10.♘d2 ♗d7 11.e3!? b5 12.♘de4± Black hasn't achieved much on the queenside, and we are ready to continue with ♕e2 and f4 soon.

9.h3 ♗h5 10.g4 ♗g6 11.♘h4±



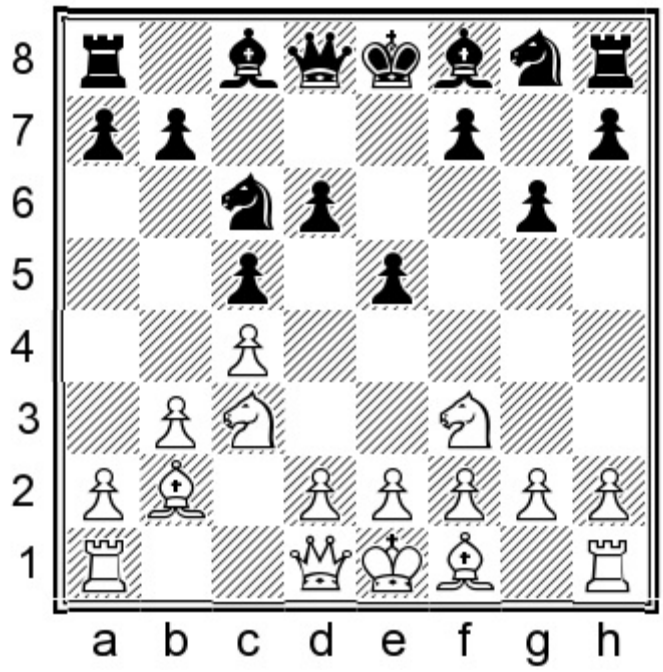
Position after: 11.♘h4±

By collecting the g6-bishop, White will get some advantage thanks to the light squares.

d) 4...d6 5.♘c3 g6 6.g3 ♗g7 7.d3 ♘ge7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 --

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.b3 e5 4.♗b2 d6 5.♘c3 g6

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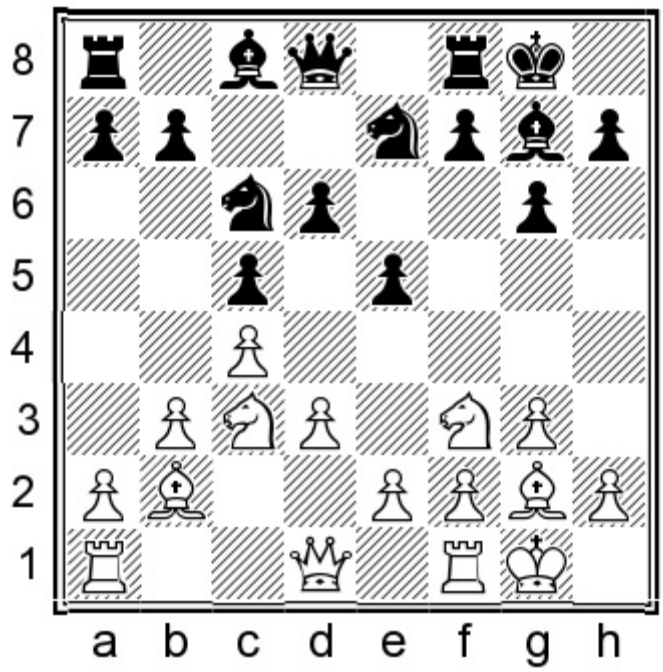


Position after: 5...g6

6.g3 ♗g7 7.d3

We can start with 7.♗g2, but it seems even simpler to prevent any ...e5-e4 ideas.

7...♘ge7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0



Position after: 9.0-0

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We have reached one of the tabiyas of our system against the Symmetrical English, where Black has

decided to head for a pure Botvinnik formation.

Black generally has two major plans:

1) Expand on the queenside by means of ...a7-a6, ...♖a8-b8 and ...b7-b5. Of course, opening the b-file would be great for Black, but it's not so easy, as we prefer to take back on c4 with the d-pawn in order to open our own lines.

2) Build an initiative on the kingside with the battery ...♗e6/...♕d7 (al-though he'll have to start with ...h7-h6 to prevent any annoying ♘g5-ideas), then try to trade our g2-bishop by playing ...♗e6-h3, and most probably start an expansion with ...f7-f5.

On the other hand, we have attractive plans of our own:

1) We can also start an expansion on the queenside, with a2-a3 and b3-b4, even if we sometimes have to sacrifice a pawn. This will open files and we always get good compensation.

2) Using the weakness of the light-squared diagonal, put our knights on d5 and e4, and then advance in the center with e2-e3 and f2-f4.

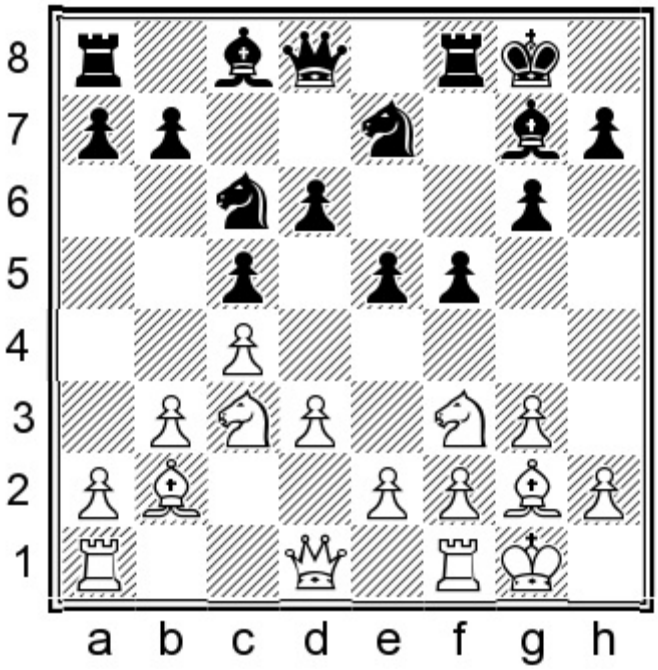
Objectively, in these kinds of positions, chances are balanced, and I can't say that White has the advantage, but if we understand the position well we can outplay our opponents, as often happened in my games. Let's start our analysis. We have four moves to consider!

9...a6

Black starts plan one, expansion on the queenside

A) 9...♖b8 gives Black fewer options than 9...a6 (as ...b7-b5 can't be played right now). We will concentrate only on the other move order.

B) 9...f5

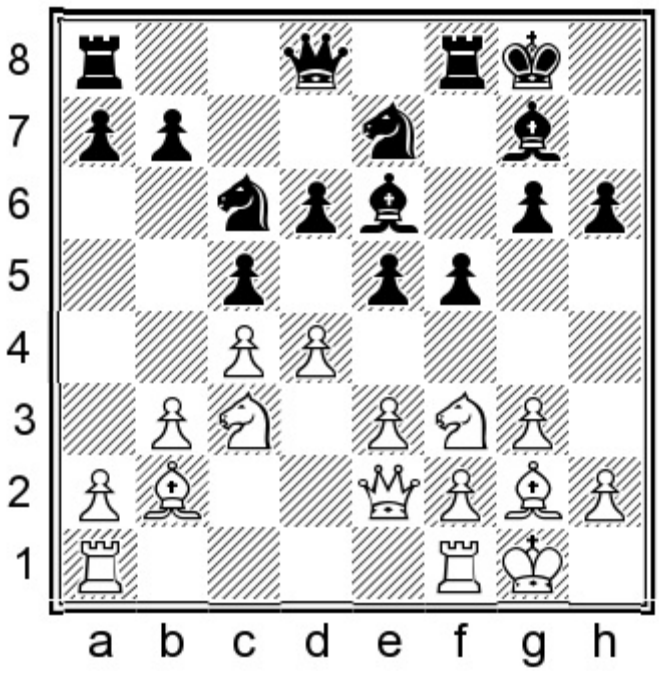


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Position after: 9...f5

This is less usual, as Black is now unable to trade the light-squared bishops with ...♗h3. Still, the idea is not bad, simply developing the pieces with the idea to keep advancing with ...f5-f4 at some point. 10.e3 h6 11.♕e2!?

B1) Our last move had the nasty idea to meet 11...♗e6?! with the strong... 12.d4!

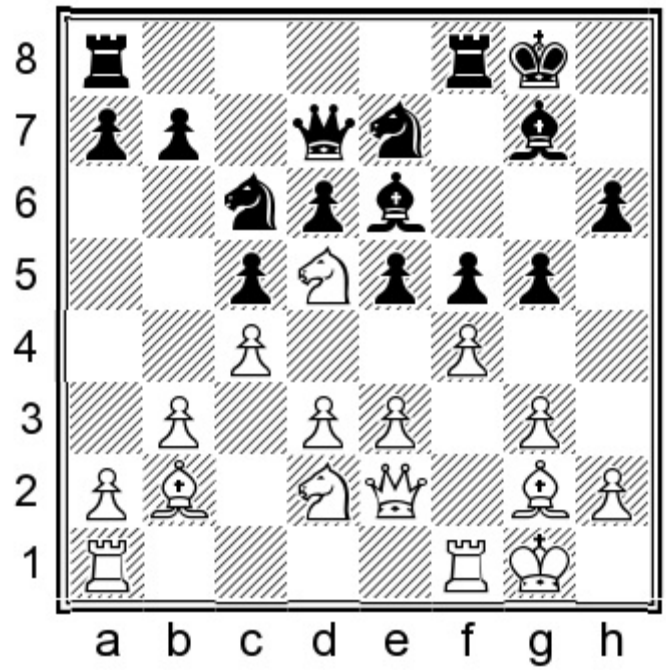


Position after: 12.d4!

The exposed bishop on e6 is a source of problems for Black. 12...♗f7?! 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♖fd1 ♕a5 15.♘d5± with a great position for White in Frouth, N (2225) – Cebalo, M (2425) Zagreb 2014.

B2) 11...g5!? 12.♘d2 ♗e6 13.♘d5 ♕d7 (13...g4!? 14.♘b1!? The d5-square is so important that we are ready to spend a couple of tempi to use it properly. 14...♕d7 15.♘bc3 h5 16.f3!↑ Timing is important, and we are ready to open the position.) 14.f4!

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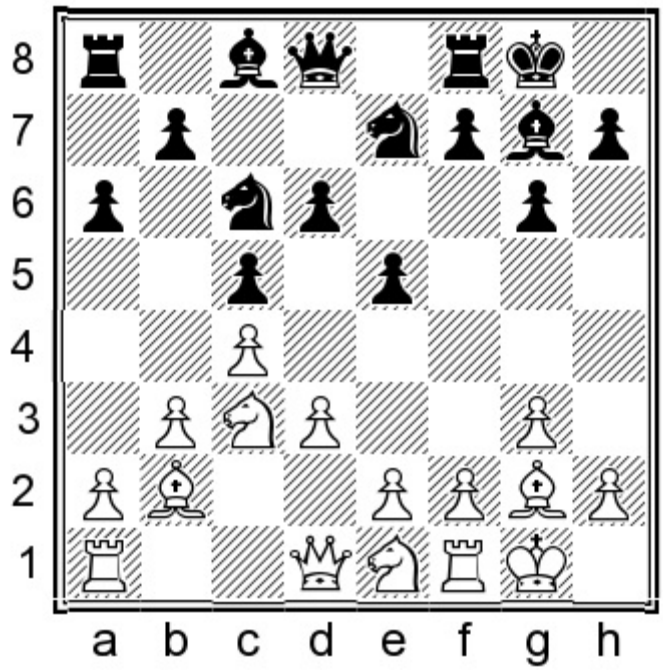
Position after: 14.f4!

This is always a nice move. It prevents any further advance of the f-pawn, so blocks the bishop e6. 14...g4! (14...exf4 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.gxf4 g4 17.a3! ♘g6 18.b4↑) 15.a3 As the kingside is blocked for now, we turn our attention towards the queenside. 15...♖f7 (15...exf4?! 16.♗xg7 f3?! This idea doesn't work. 17.♗xf8! fxe2? 18.♘f6+ ♔f7 19.♘xd7 exf1=♕+ 20.♖xf1 ♗xd7 21.♗xh6±) 16.♖ab1 h5 17.b4!↑ Once again I prefer White who has the initiative on the queenside.

C) 9...h6 is our main move, and will be covered in the next subchapter.

10.♘e1

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Position after: 10.♘e1

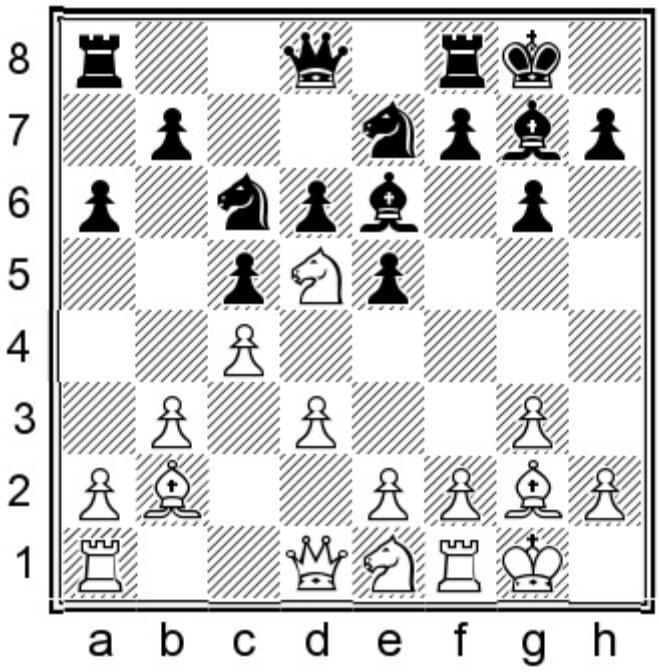
10...♗e6

As already explained, when our knight has moved from f3, the bishop can come to e6 without fearing ♘f3-g5.

10...♖b8 is slightly less precise, as after 11.♘c2 b5 12.♘e3 ♗e6 White can either transpose to our main line with 13.♘cd5, or can try to improve by using the other knight. Both make a lot of sense and Black shouldn't leave us this choice.

11.♘d5!

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Position after: 11.♘d5!

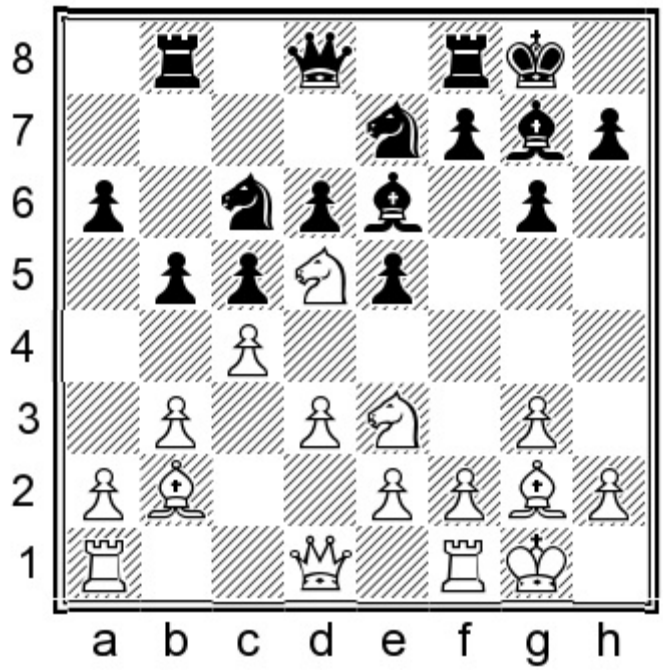
If we wait, Black will react in the center: 11.♘c2 d5! 12.cxd5 ♘xd5↑. Black is happy about the opening of the center: the weakness of the d5-square belongs to the past now.

11...♖b8 12.♘c2

12.♕d2!? is also interesting for White. In the game Velikov, P (2431) – Parmentier, X (2348) Clichy 2002, play continued 12...b5 13.f4! f5 14.♘xe7+ ♘xe7 15.♖c1 ♕d7 16.♘f3↑, and the knight found a quicker way to come back into play. We retain promising pressure in the center and don't fear anything on the queenside.

12...b5 13.♘ce3

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Position after: 13.♘ce3

We are ready to continue with f2-f4, and Black still needs to find a plan, as his action on the queenside was neither a huge nor clear success.

13...♔h8

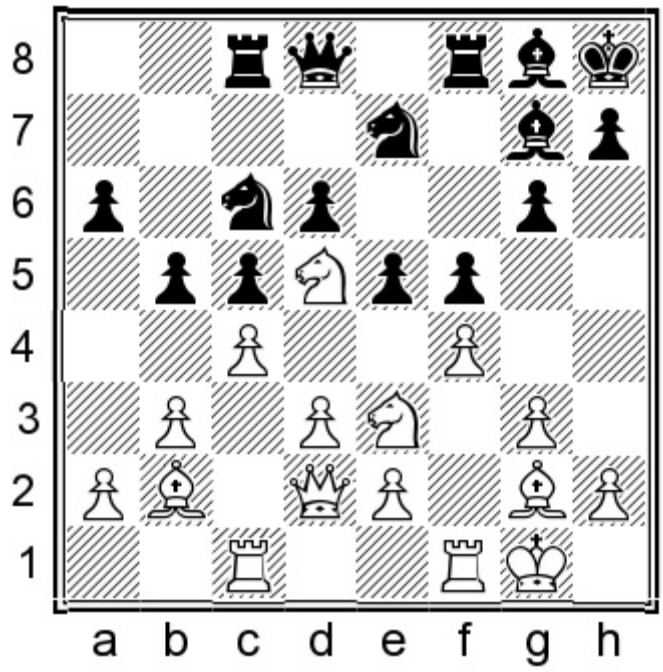
13...♕d7 14.f4 bxc4 15.dxc4 ♘d4 16.fxe5 dxe5 17.♕d2 f5 18.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 19.♘d5 ♕d7 20.e3±

14.f4 f5 15.♕d2 ♗g8 16.♖ac1

Black finds himself without a real plan, and played really slowly in the following game...

16...♖c8

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Position after: 16...♖c8

17.♘xe7

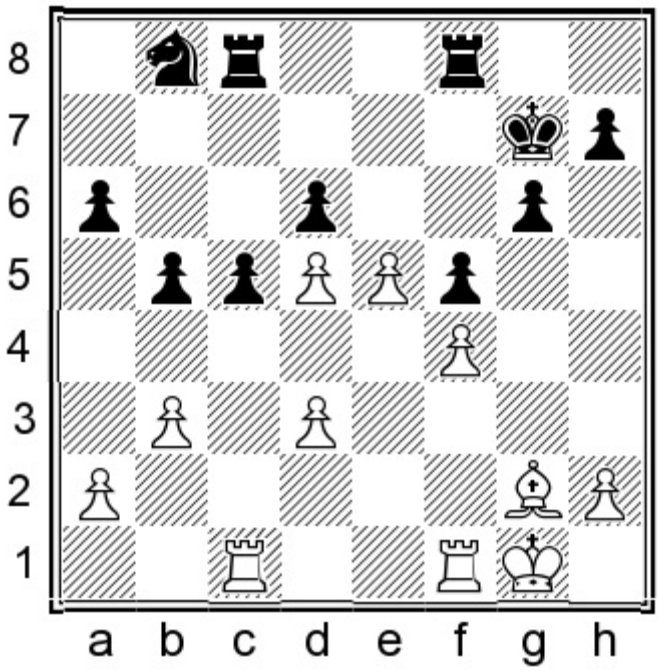
17.fxe5!? is another path to a better position: 17...♘xe5 (17...dxe5 18.cxb5±) 18.a4! bxa4 (18...b4 19.d4±) 19.bxa4 ♖b8 20.♖b1±.

17...♕xe7 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.cxd5 ♘b8 20.e4!?

20.fxe5N 20...♗xe5 21.d4!?↑

20...exf4 21.gxf4 ♗xb2 22.♕xb2+ ♕g7 23.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 24.e5↑

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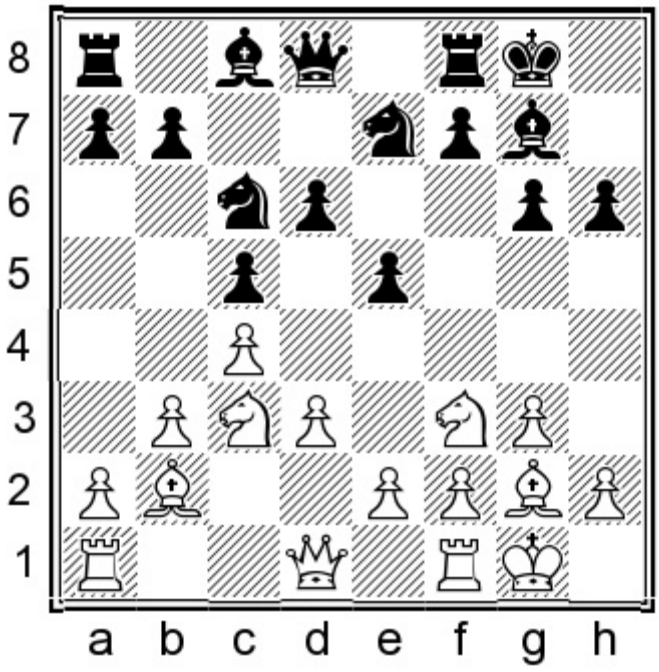


Position after: 24.e5↑

Even if he failed to convert his edge, White still had the upper hand in Soppe, G – Adla, D Cordoba 1994.

e) 4...d6 5.♘c3 g6 6.g3 ♗g7 7.d3 ♘ge7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 h6

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.b3 e5 4.♗b2 d6 5.♘c3 g6 6.g3 ♗g7 7.d3 ♘ge7 8.♗g2 0-0 9.0-0 h6



Position after: 9...h6

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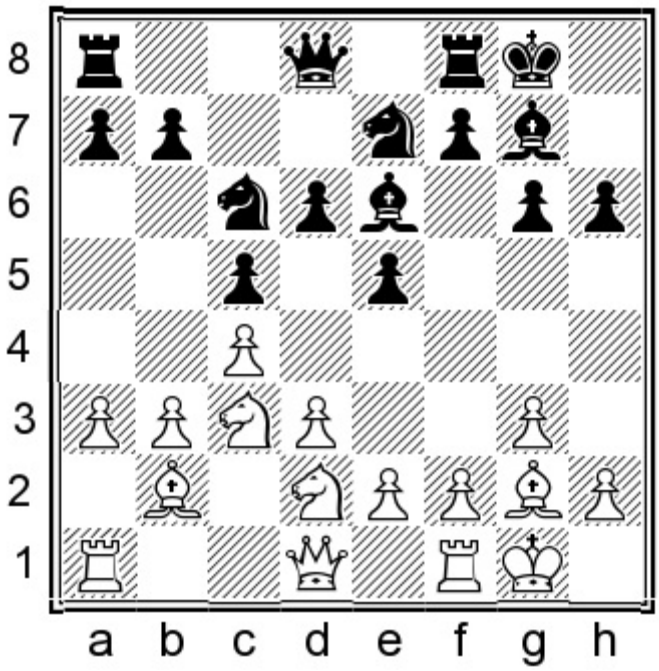
In my opinion this definitely has to be considered the main move. Black keeps his options open and wants to continue with 10...♗e6 no matter what.

10.♘d2

10.♘e1 is also possible, but I prefer to have the opportunity of bringing the knight to e4.

10...♗e6 11.a3!

We have reached the last crossroads of our present chapter. Black has various ways to continue, and I have already met two of these possibilities in my own games.



Position after: 11.a3!

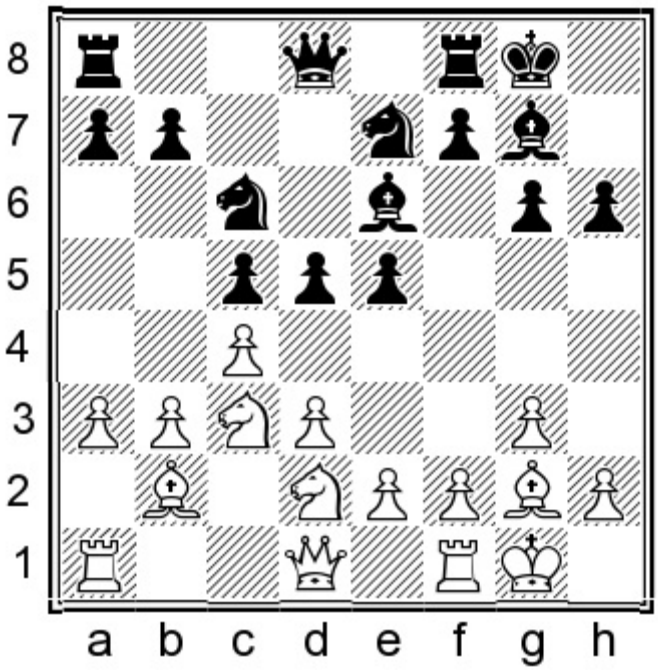
11.♘d5 You need to be cautious with this move, as Black can sometimes play 11...♗xd5 12.cxd5 ♘b4∞ and we can't defend d5 without losing the d3-pawn. Things are not so clear, but there is no reason to allow these kinds of tricks.

11...♕d7

This is the logical continuation.

A) 11...d5?!

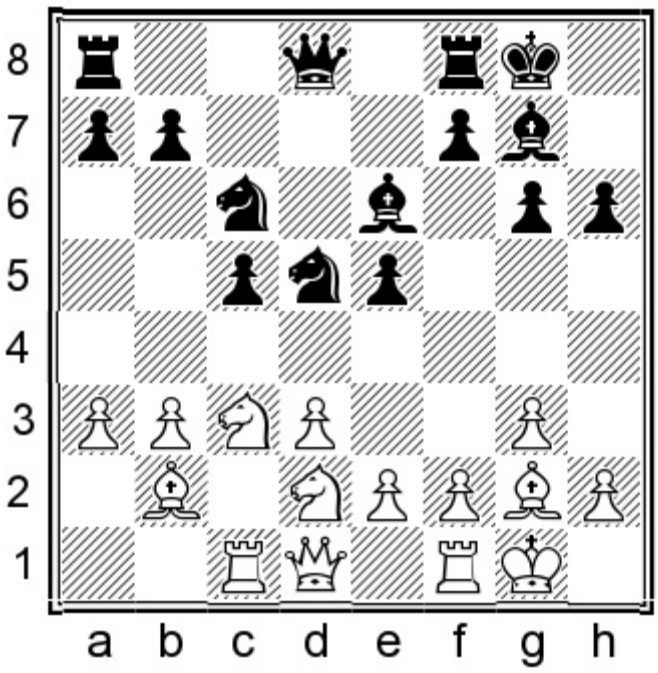
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Position after: 11...d5?!

In 2012, this move occurred in two blitz games between Radjabov and Grischuk. Surprisingly, neither of the two moves tried by Radjabov is the best!

A1) 12.cxd5!N This very logical move is actually a novelty, but I don't understand why. 12...♘xd5 13.♖c1!



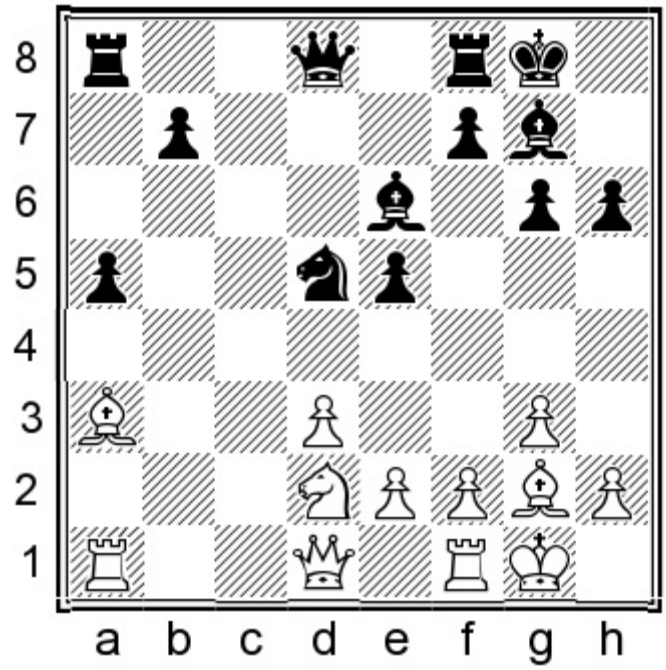
Position after: 13.♖c1!

Here is the problem. Black must defend his c5-pawn, and will have some problems on the c-file.

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13...♘de7 (13...b6 is not good enough as the c6-knight is the source of many problems. 14.b4!±) 14.♘a4! b6 15.b4! Black must lose a pawn. The best way seems to be 15...♖b8 16.bxc5 b5 17.♘c3 f5± where he gets some compensation, but not enough.

A2) 12.b4!? I also like this counter-strike, even if it's probably inferior to our move 12.cxd5. 12...cxb4! (12...dxc4 13.♘xc4 ♗xc4 14.dxc4 cxb4 15.axb4 ♘xb4 16.♕a4↑ ♘bc6?! 17.♗a3±; 12...d4?! 13.♘a4 cxb4 14.axb4! ♘xb4 15.♘c5±) 13.axb4 ♘xb4! The only problem I could find, but it's quite a significant one. (13...dxc4 appeared once, but White has a strong intermediate move at his disposal: 14.b5 ♘d4 15.dxc4 ♕c7 16.e3 and White already had an overwhelming advantage in Markowski, T (2475) – Huster, M (2255) Biel 1994; 13...d4 14.♘a4! transposes to 12...d4?!) 14.♗a3 a5 15.cxd5! ♘exd5 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5

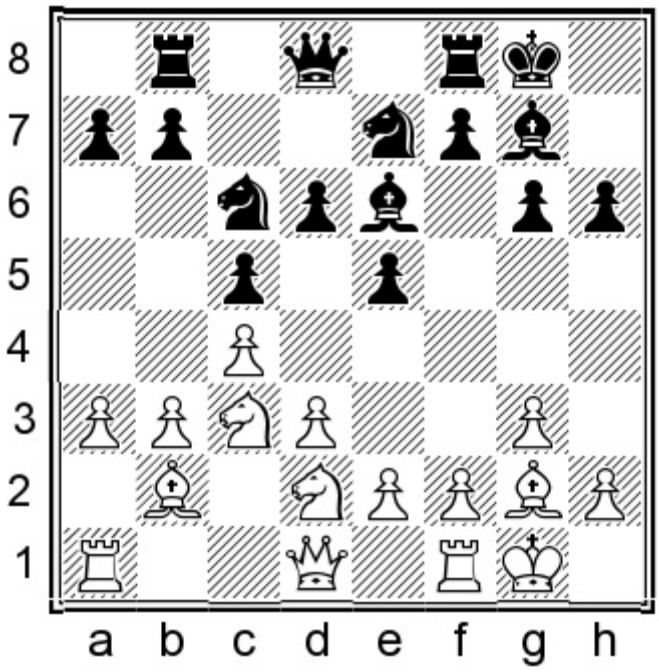


Position after: 16...♘xd5

Black sacrifices the exchange and gains some activity. 17.♗xf8 ♘c3! (17...♔xf8 18.♕a4±) 18.♕e1 ♗xf8∓ Black is going to put the bishop on b4, with good compensation, and it's no accident that he won in Keene, R – Timman, J Reykjavik 1972.

B) 11...♖b8

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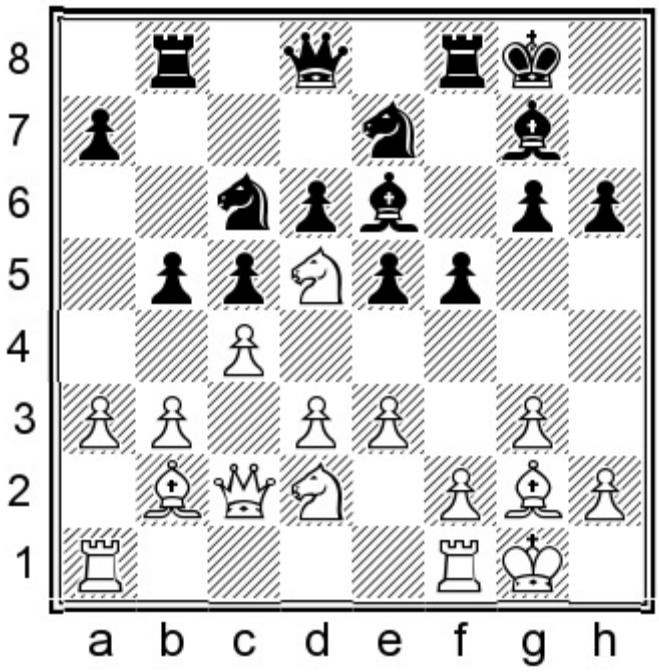


Position after: 11...♖b8

If Black changes his mind in order to start some action on the queenside, you have a choice: you can either first advance with b4, or you can quietly improve your center. I don't know which one I would pick right now.

B1) 12.b4!?N This is no longer a sacrifice, as the a7-pawn would be en prise. Black must keep the tension in the center and also react on the queenside with 12...a6! 13.♘d5 b5 14.♗c3!⇄ Many things could happen, but White is making good use of the d5-square here.

B2) 12.♘d5 b5!? 13.e3 f5 14.♕c2



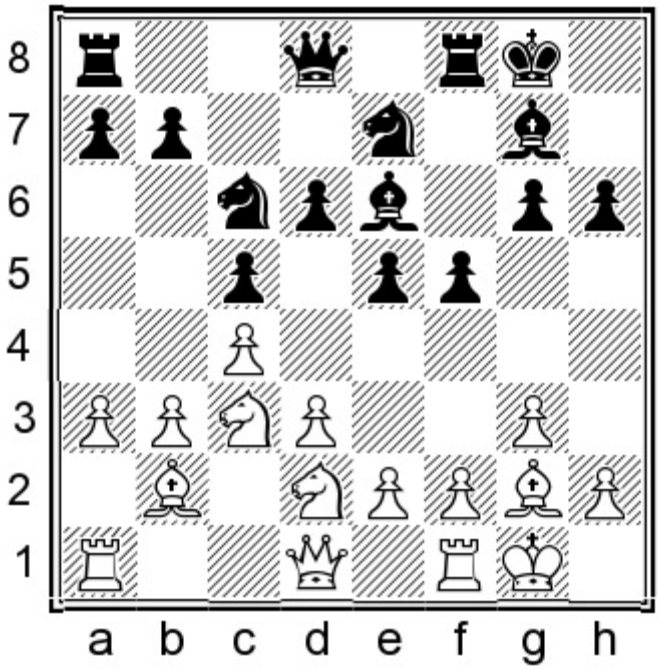
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Position after: 14.♕c2

14...♕d7 (14...a6?! 15.b4!↑ uses the fact that the c6-knight is quite exposed) 15.f4!? ♖f7 16.♖f2!?⇄ The fight is tense in every sector of the board!

C) 11...a6N 12.♘d5 ♖b8 13.b4 transposes to 11...♖b8.

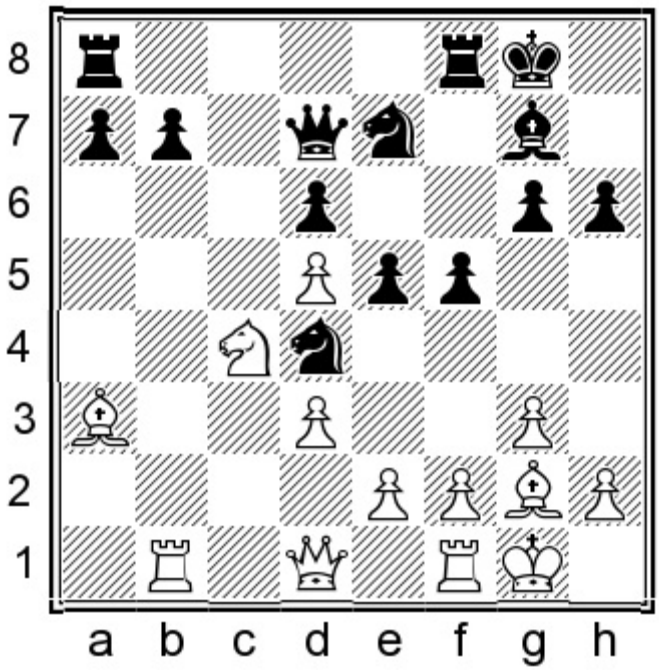
D) 11...f5 This is always possible, but it's probably not the best moment for it. It's actually quite similar to 9...f5 (subchapter D), except that a3 and ...h6 have been included.



Position after: 11...f5

I think overall this helps White as it gives him possibilities of playing b3-b4 at any moment, so you can follow the same plan as after 9...f5 and play with e2-e3, ♕d1-e2, and f2-f4 at some stage. In a blitz game, I chose a different path to obtain the initiative. Objectively it might be inferior, but it shows some of the problems that Black might face: 12.b4!? cxb4 13.axb4 ♘xb4 14.♗a3 (14.♗xb7 probably didn't suit me because of 14...♖b8 15.♗g2 ♘xd3! 16.exd3 ♖xb2 17.♖xa7↑ even if White objectively keeps some initiative.) 14...♘bc6 15.♘d5 ♗xd5? (Black should have kept the tension with 15...♖c8, even if we can mount pressure on the queenside: 16.♕a4 ♖f7 17.♖fb1⩲) 16.cxd5 ♘d4 17.♖b1 ♕d7 18.♘c4!

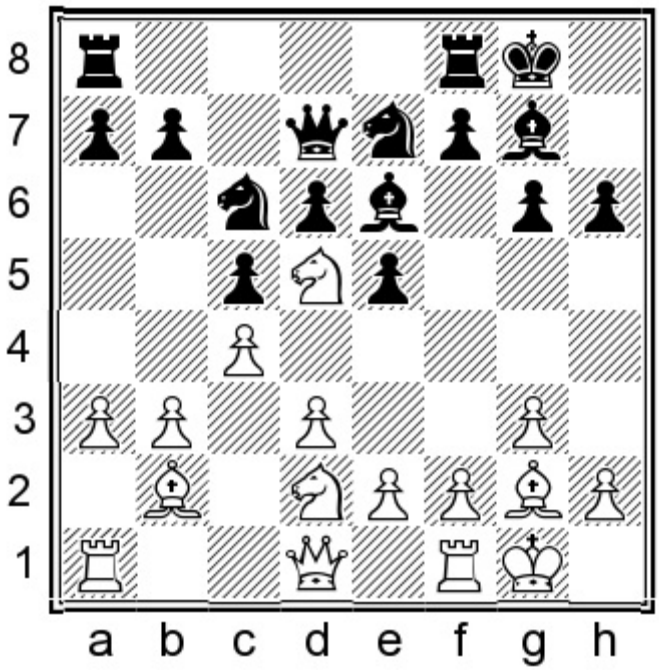
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Position after: 18.♘c4!

The d6-pawn is too weak. My opponent failed to defend it properly and played 18...♘b5? 19.♕a4! a6 20.♘xd6 ♖fd8 21.♘xb5 axb5 22.♕b3+–. I was close to converting this winning position in the blitz game Demuth, A (2545) – Volokitin, A (2639) Berlin 2015, 0-1, until a nasty knight fork came along to ruin my day!

12.♘d5

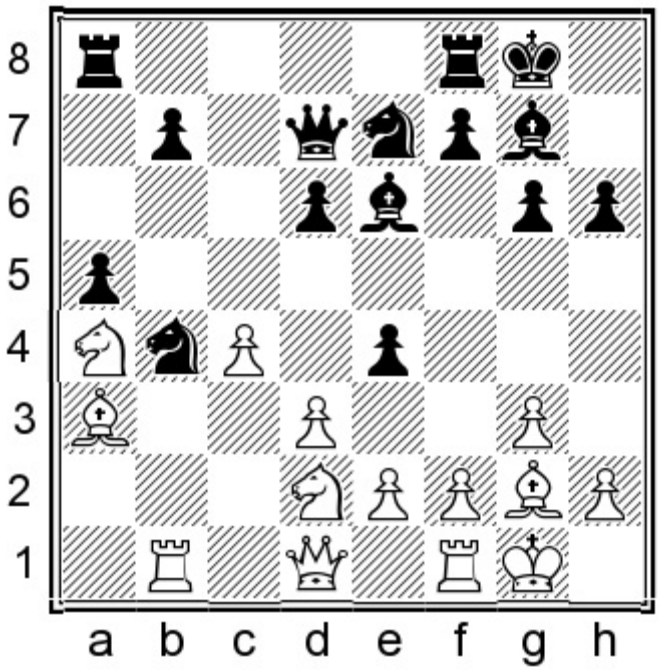


Position after: 12.♘d5

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Contrary to 11.♘d5, this doesn't lose a pawn, so the knight is virtually untouchable for now. You will notice that if Black had already played ...a6, it would be less easy to play a plan including ...♕d7 because of the weakness of the b6-square.

12.b4!? This novelty was used in March 2018 by no one else than Kramnik. It seems really interesting and ambitious, playing in a Benko spirit, but it's probably only about equal. 12...cxb4 13.axb4 ♘xb4 14.♗a3 a5! (14...♘bc6?! 15.♘de4 ♘c8 16.♘b5 ♖d8 17.♘bxd6±) 15.♖b1 e4 16.♘a4!



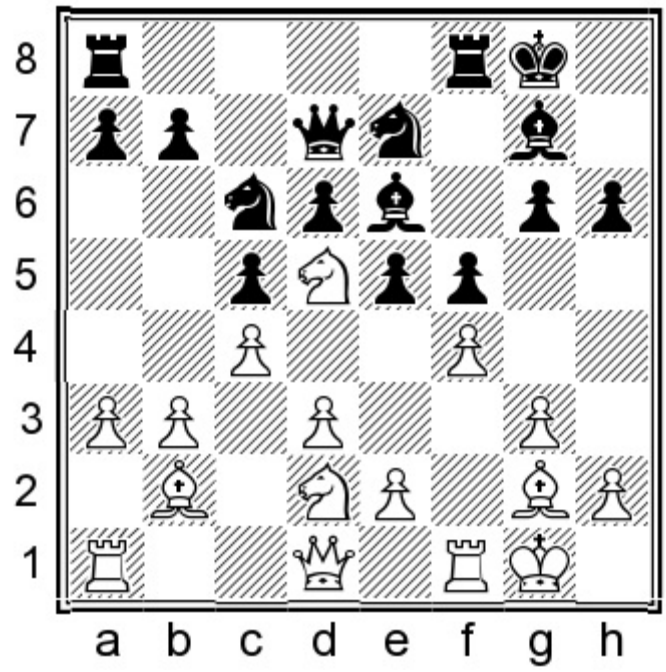
Position after: 16.♘a4!

16...♖a6 (16...exd3!? is one of the moves which can keep the balance 17.♘b6 ♕c7 18.♘xa8 ♖xa8 19.exd3 ♘ec6⩲) 17.♘xe4 b5! 18.cxb5 ♕xb5 19.♗b2↑ ½-½ (56) Kramnik, V (2800) – Gelfand, B (2695) Moscow 2018.

12...♗h3

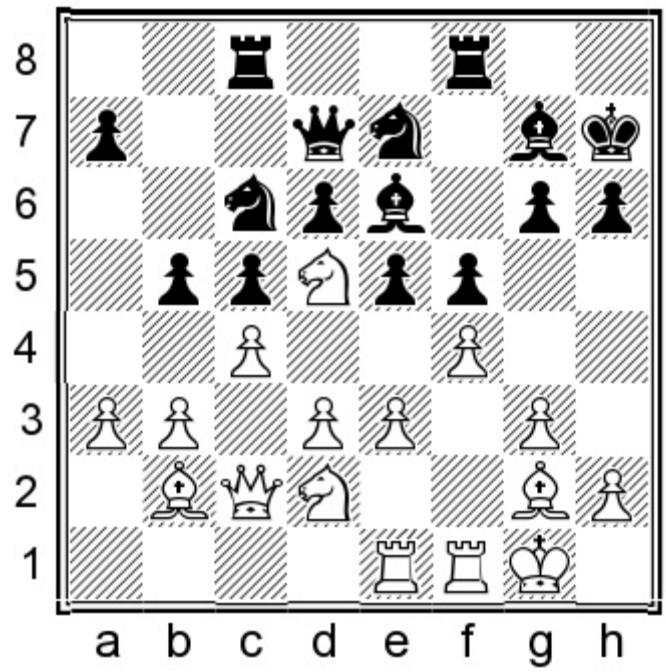
A) 12...f5 You won't find this game in the databases, but I faced this move a few months ago against a friend of mine. 13.f4!?

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Position after: 13.f4!?

It's also possible to start more slowly with 13.e3, but I wanted to stop any attempts at ...f5-f4 right now. 13...♖ae8 14.e3 ♔h7 15.♕c2 (15.b4!? seems promising since the rook has left the a8-square – as we already said, there is no longer a sacrifice as the a7-pawn is now a target – but things are going to be quite complicated after 15...b5?! which is why I was still wanting to improve my position. Actually, I could have played 16.♘b3! which is quite annoying for Black as he is unable to protect the c5-pawn. He has to play 16...cxb4 17.axb4 ♗xd5 18.cxd5 ♘xb4 19.e4!± when White gets a serious advantage thanks to the exposed b4-knight.) 15...♖c8 My opponent changed his mind, and started to prevent the b2-b4 idea. 16.♖ae1 b5

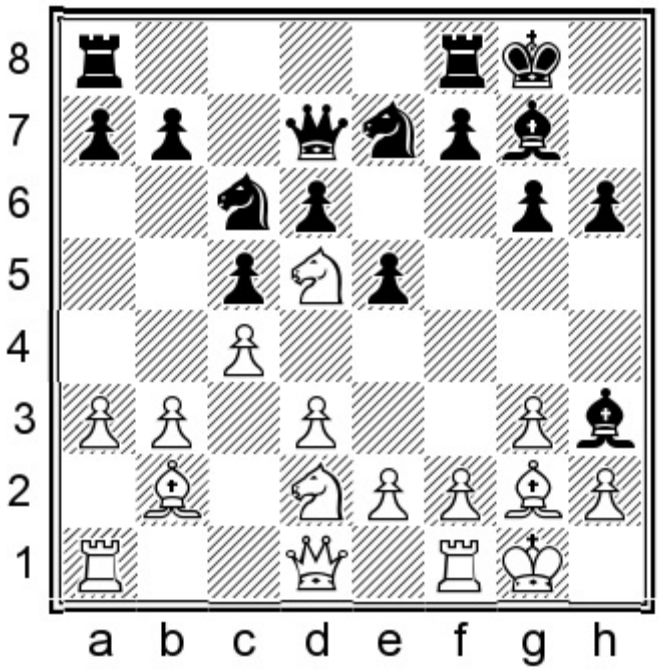


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Position after: 16...b5

We'll now leave my game Demuth, A (2547) – Bedouin, X (2329) Mansle 2017 which I finally won after a tough fight. Now I prefer the strong 17.♘xe7 ♘xe7 18.cxb5 ♕xb5 19.♘c4!± that allows White to keep some pressure in the center, as both d6 and e5 are under attack, and it seems possible to handle Black's counterplay on the b-file.

B) 12...♗g4?! appeared once, but it really seems too slow: 13.b4!?N 13...cxb4 14.axb4 ♘xd5 15.cxd5 ♘xb4 16.♘c4↑ with some counterplay on the open files on the queenside.



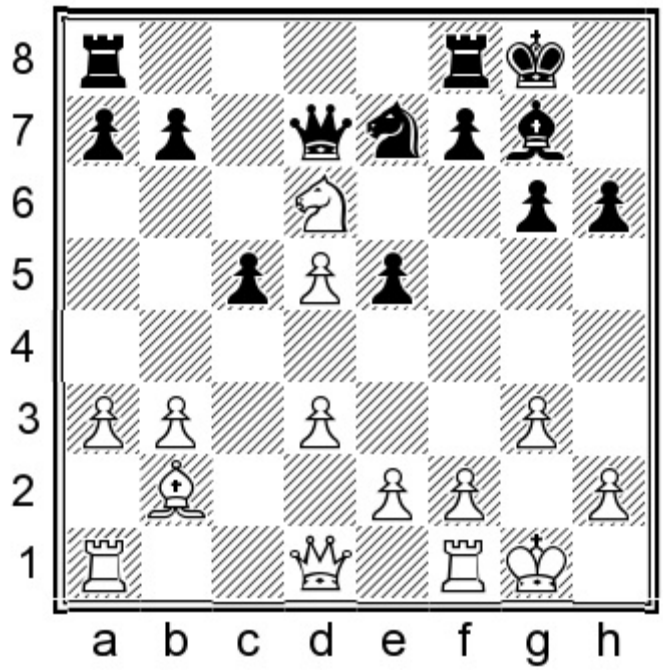
Position after: 12...♗h3

13.♗xh3!N

White has no qualms about attracting the queen into his camp. His activity on the queenside is going to be more important.

13.♘e4!? I have always thought that this was the only way to try to play for an advantage here, but computers actually prefer our text move! White is threatening the deadly ♘f6+, but he can also take on h3 and grab the pawn on d6. Thus the only move is 13...♘xd5! 14.♗xh3! (14.cxd5?! is a bad move order as Black can play 14...♗xg2! 15.dxc6?! ♕h3! 16.cxb7 ♖ad8! 17.♖e1?! f5–+ when he already has a winning position) 14...♕xh3 15.cxd5 ♘e7! (15...♘d4 16.e3 ♘f5 Black has protected d6, but has some coordination problems. For instance, we are better after 17.b4 b6 18.♕e2±) 16.♘xd6 ♕d7! This strong queen retreat saves Black as we can't keep the extra pawn.

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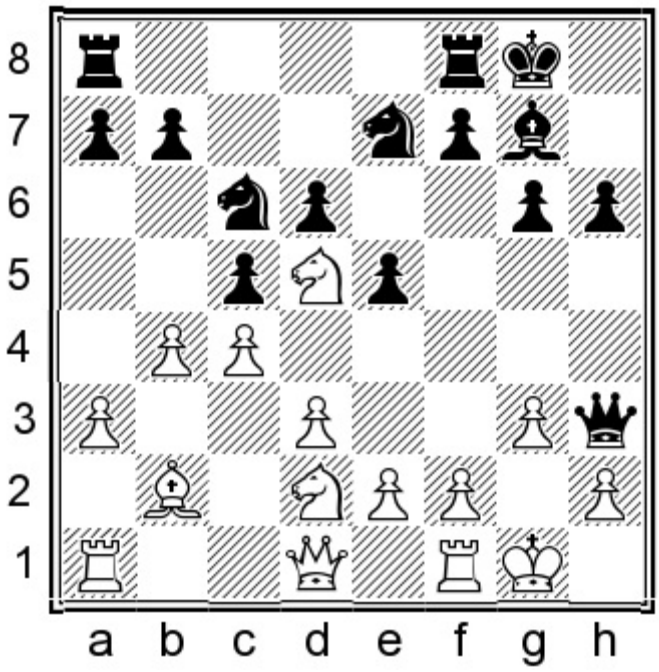
Position after: 16...♕d7!

A) 17.♘e4 has been played in two games that reached this position, but Black is fine after 17...♕xd5 18.♖c1N (18.♕c2 is even worse: 18...♖ac8!N and White no longer has any b4-ideas) 18...♖ac8! 19.b4 cxb4 20.axb4 f5⇄.

B) 17.♘c4! ♕xd5 18.b4 cxb4 19.axb4↑ Even if the game is balanced, it seems more promising for White. For instance, he has the possibility of playing ♖a1-a5 to chase Black's queen and attack the e5-pawn. Still, it is certainly less promising than the main line.

13...♕xh3 14.b4!

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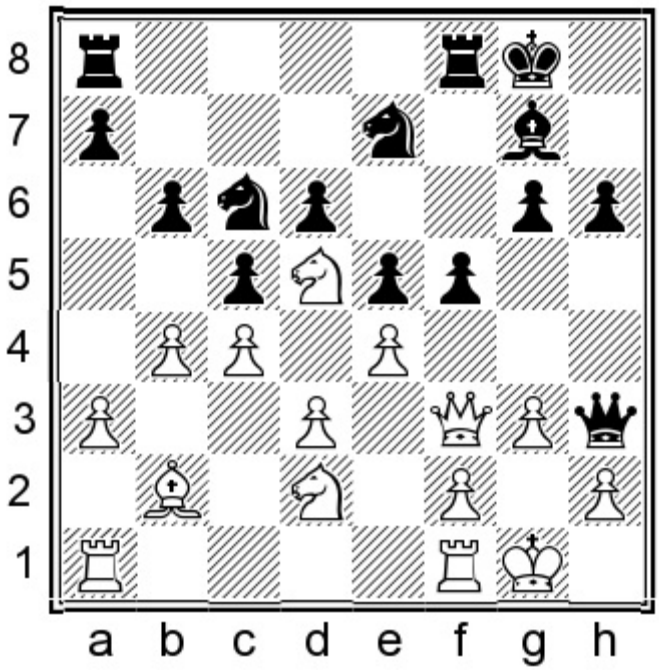
Position after: 14.b4!

14...♕d7!

This prevents b4-b5 as the knight on e7 is now protected.

A) White's idea is clear here, when Black is not careful: 14...♖fd8?! 15.b5! ♘xd5 16.cxd5 ♘e7 17.e4 We have gained the c4-square for our knight and Black has no real counterplay.

B) 14...b6 15.e4! Now the positional idea is that we are always happy if our opponent takes on d5, as we will get either the c4 or the e4-square for our knight. (15.♘e4?! f5! 16.♘xd6 ♖ad8↑) 15...f5 16.♕f3!



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Position after: 16.♕f3!

16...f4 17.♕g2 (17.b5 ♘xd5 18.exd5 ♘a5 19.♖ae1±) 17...♕d7 18.b5!±

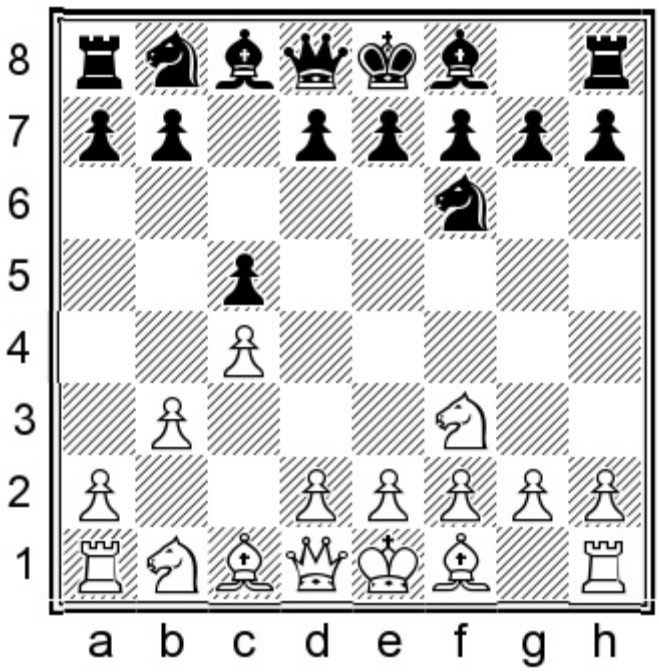
15.♕a4!? ♖ad8 16.e3↑

The time that Black spent in trading the light-squared bishops can be seen as an achievement, but in compensation we have taken over the initiative on the queenside and still have some ideas in the center, starting with f2-f4.

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Chapter 14
Every System with 2...♘f6

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3



Chapter guide

Chapter 14 – Every System with 2...♘f6

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3

a) 3...--, 3...b6

b) 3...d5

c) 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 --

d) 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 d5

e) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 --, 5...b6

f) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 --

g) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 --

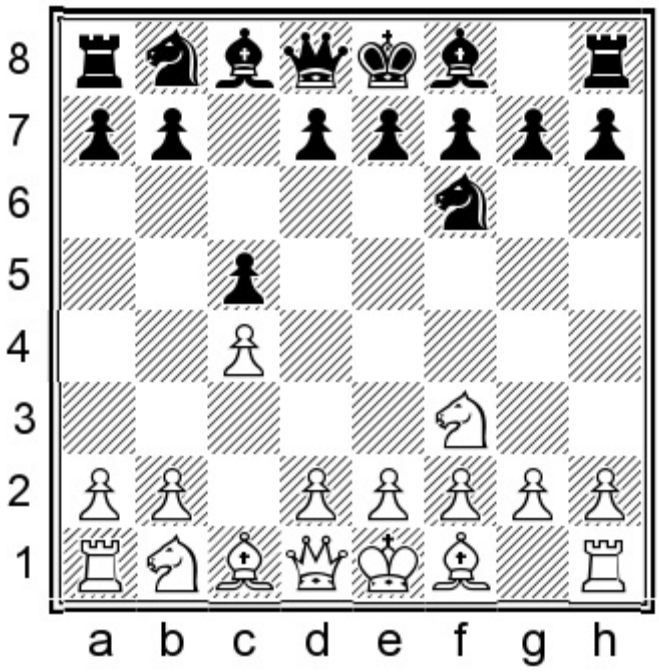
h) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.♘xd4 -- 9...♗d7 10.♘c3 --

i) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♗d7 10.♘c3 ♕a5

a) 3...--, 3...b6

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6

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Position after: 2...♘f6

Here comes the time to study every system that arises after this logical move. Of course, it gives Black plenty of options, and the only one we are not going to analyze here is the Hedgehog (as in my opinion it doesn't belong to the Symmetrical English).

3.b3!?

I don't really want to enter the classical lines, so once again I am willing to start playing in Reti-style, with a double fianchetto in most cases. Among the set-ups we are going to see, the two most important are the reversed double fianchetto, where Black wants to keep the symmetry, and the kingside fianchetto. We will also try to explore every possibility for Black to advance his d-pawn to the fifth rank, defended by an e6-pawn or not.

For obvious reasons, many transpositions appear, both within this chapter and to other chapters. Let's now have a look at some third moves for Black.

3...b6

3...e6

A) 4.♘c3 d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.e3 might be another way to play, but I'm not so confident with this one, as it seems a bit early to put the knight on c3.

B) 4.♗b2 is not really an option, as after 4...b6 we must face the Hedgehog, and we usually put the bishop directly on a3...

C) 4.g3! d5 5.cxd5 exd5 6.♗g2 ♘c6 7.♗b2 – see 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 e6.

4.g3 ♗b7 5.♗g2 e6

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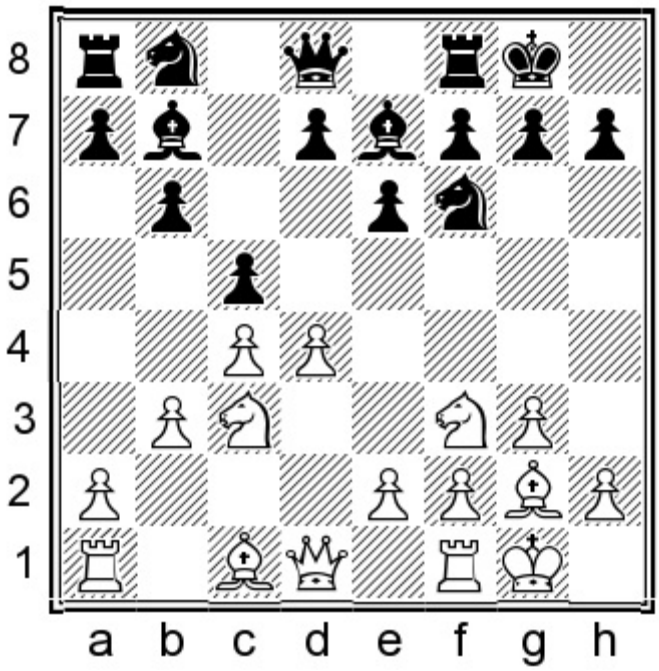
Black is playing as if he wants to play a Hedgehog, but we have already played b3. It's not really a big deal if we don't hurry in putting the bishop on b2. It is a bit strange, as we played b3 on the third move, but the bishop should go to a3 later. In most cases, this will indeed transpose into the Hedgehog, but we are going to discuss some slight differences you might encounter when you start with 3.b3.

5...g6 6.♗b2 ♗g7 is the reversed double fianchetto system, which we cover later in this chapter.

6.0-0 ♗e7 7.♘c3 0-0

7...d5 8.e3 As soon as Black castles, this will transpose to chapter 5 on the Neo-Catalan with 6... b6.

8.d4



Position after: 8.d4

In most cases, this will transpose to the classical Hedgehog line covered in the next chapter. Here we will investigate the few differences connected to this move order (where we played b3 quite early).

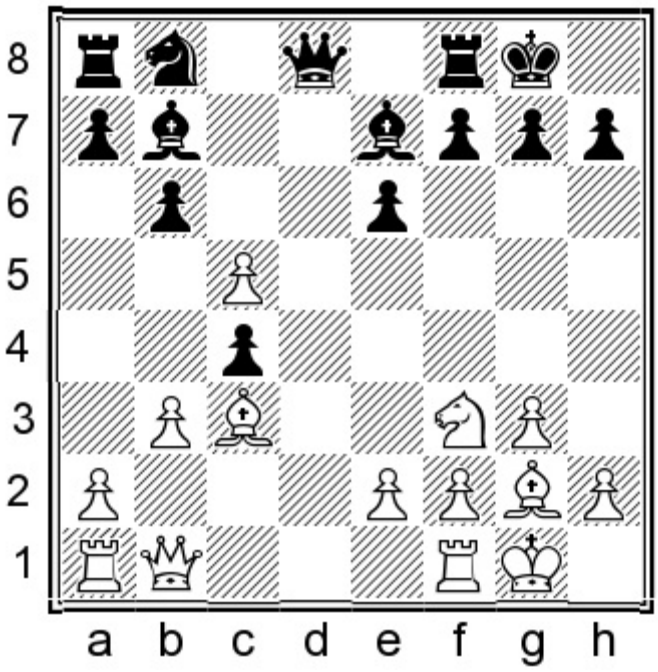
8...d5!?

A) 8...♘e4 is an attempt to simplify the position by trading a minor piece, but it accelerates White's development. 9.♗b2!

A1) 9...♘xc3 was played by Karjakin himself, and although he eventually won, he was not at all convincing. 10.♗xc3

A1.1) 10...d5!?N is probably much better than Karjakin's choice: 11.dxc5 dxc4! 12.♕b1!

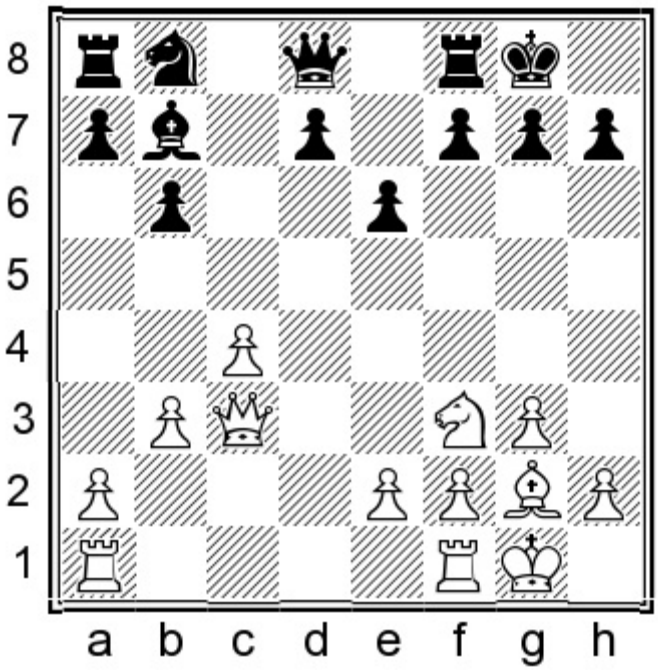
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Position after: 12.♕b1!

A sneaky move! 12...♕c8! (12...cxb3? 13.♘g5! ♗xg5 14.♗xb7+–) 13.bxc4 ♘d7 (13...♗xc5 14.♘g5 g6 15.♘e4→) 14.cxb6 axb6 15.♖d1± White has managed to grab a pawn, but in this kind of structure Black usually keeps good drawing chances.

A1.2) 10...cxd4?! 11.♕xd4 ♗f6 12.♕d3 ♗xc3 13.♕xc3

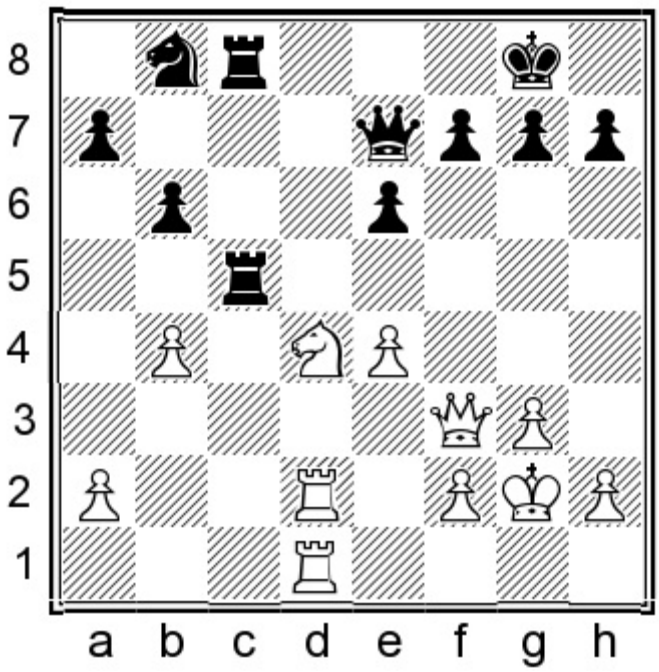


Position after: 13.♕xc3

Karjakin's plan of trying to trade a few minor pieces has worked, but the resulting position is

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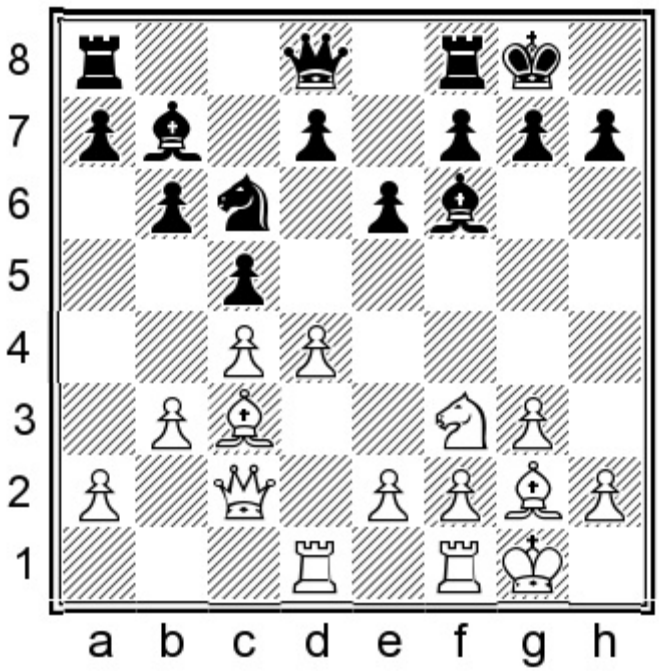
passive, and White easily kept the advantage. The game continued 13...♕e7 14.♖fd1 ♖d8 15.♖d2 ♘a6 16.♘d4 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♖ac8 18.♕f3 d5 19.♖ad1 ♘b8 20.cxd5 ♖xd5 21.e4 ♖dc5 22.b4



Position after: 22.b4

Both players had played well in Navara, D (2707) – Karjakin, S (2723) Khanty-Mansiysk 2009, until 22...♖c1?!, when White could have won by playing 23.♖xc1!N 23...♖xc1 24.♘c2!. Black has too many problems on the eighth rank and with his exposed rook. 24...h5 25.♕a3 ♖b1 26.b5!+–.

A2) 9...♗f6 10.♕c2! ♘xc3 11.♗xc3 ♘c6 12.♖ad1!

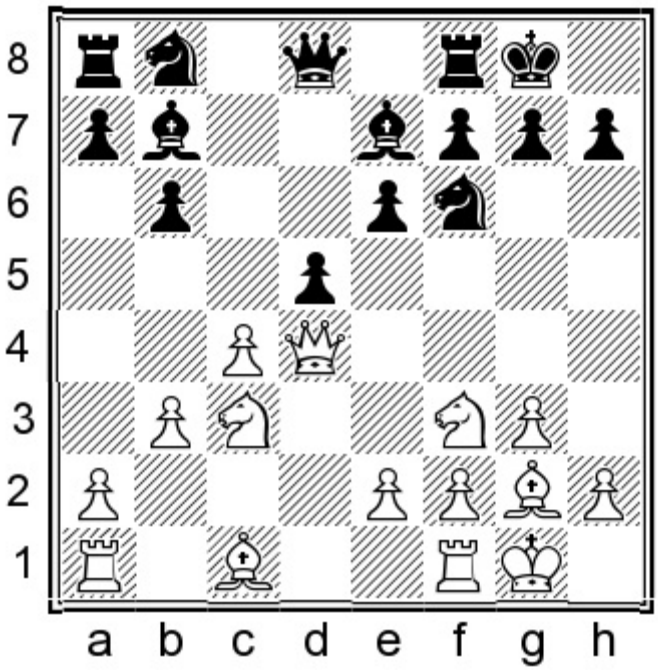


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Position after: 12.♖ad1!

We are of course happy if major trades happen with 12...cxd4?! (12...♖c8!? 13.dxc5 ♗xc3 14.♕xc3 bxc5 15.♘e5 ♘d4! 16.♖d2 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 d6 18.♘f3 e5 19.e3 ♘xf3 20.♔xf3±) 13.♘xd4 ♗xd4 14.♗xd4 ♘xd4 15.♖xd4 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 because Black will soon lose his d-pawn: 16...♕c7 17.♕d3 d5 18.cxd5 exd5 19.♖xd5+– 1-0 (35) Iljin, A (2481) – Evstratov, O (2249) Dagomys 2004.

B) 8...cxd4 9.♕xd4 d5



Position after: 9...d5

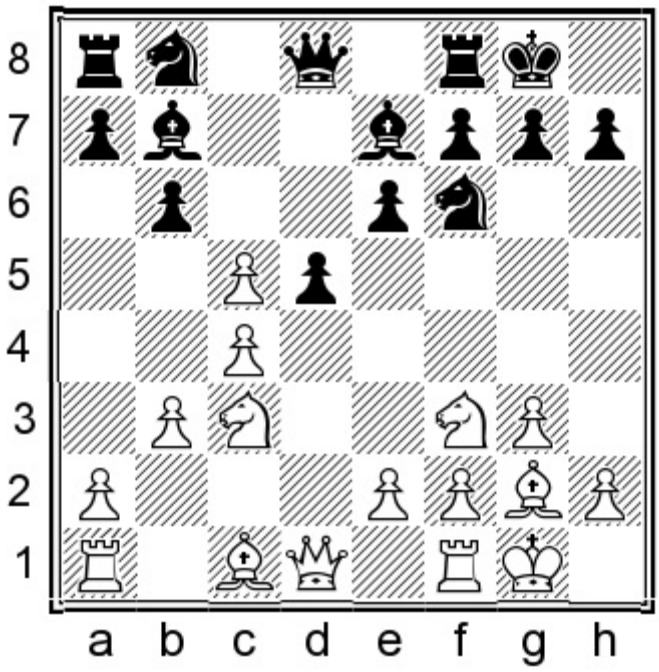
This is another difference to the Hedgehog. The 'danger' is to get a completely equal and quite symmetrical middlegame, but White can generally keep an edge quite easily (for instance by provoking an isolated d-pawn). We must start with 10.♘e5!

B1) 10...♘c6 11.♘xc6 ♗xc6 12.♗b2! Black can't solve his problems with the d-pawn, and the best is to concede an isolani. (12.cxd5?! ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 ♗xd5 14.♗xd5 ♗f6!=) 12...♖c8 13.cxd5 ♗c5 14.♕d3 ♘xd5 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♗xd5 exd5 17.♖fd1±

B2) 10...♘bd7 11.♗b2 ♗c5 (11...♘xe5 12.♕xe5 ♗d6 13.♕e3 ♗c5 14.♕f4 ♕e7 15.cxd5 ♘xd5 16.♘xd5 ♗xd5 17.♗xd5 exd5 18.e3± and now "Put everything on the d5-pawn!") 12.♕f4 ♘h5 13.♕f3! ♘hf6 It's really strange that the game Szuhanek, R (2504) – Derakhshani, D (2386) Novi Sad 2016 ended in a draw right now, for White can easily keep playing, for instance with 14.♘xd7!? ♕xd7 15.♖fd1 ♖fd8 16.cxd5 exd5 17.♖ac1±.

9.dxc5

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Position after: 9.dxc5

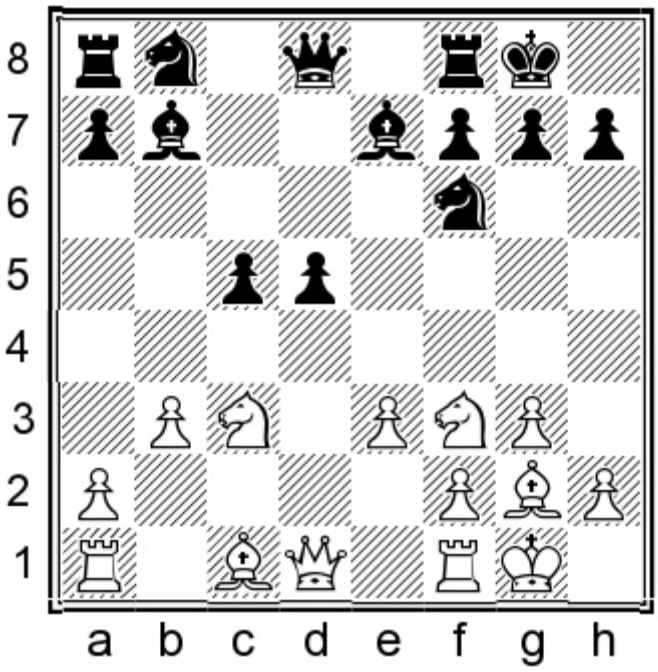
9...♗xc5

Generally, the safest choice for Black is always to take back with a piece, to keep a symmetrical pawn structure, but other options are worth a look:

A) 9...dxc4!?N 10.cxb6 axb6 (10...cxb3?! 11.bxa7 ♖xa7 12.♕xb3±) 11.♕xd8 ♖xd8 12.bxc4± We have already met this pawn structure. Once again, it offers Black decent drawing chances, but only White can play for a win, thanks to his extra pawn.

B) 9...bxc5 10.cxd5 exd5 11.e3! It's essential to prevent ...d5-d4, which would give Black some activity.

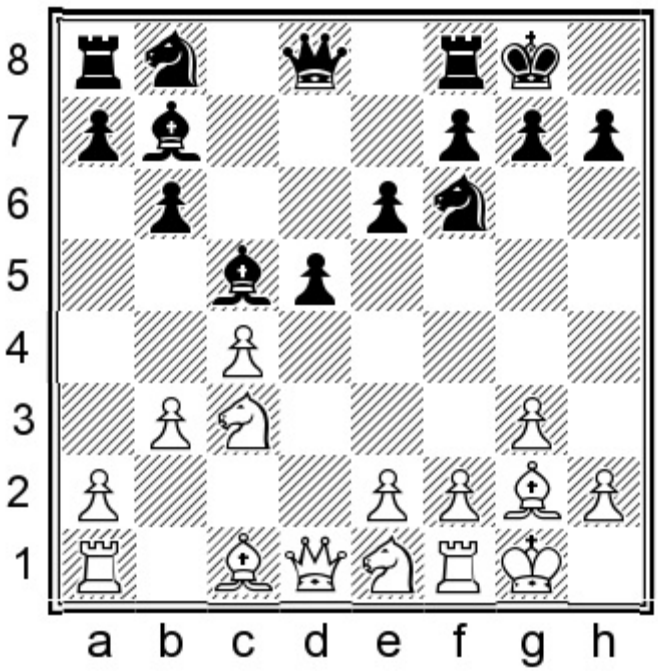
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Position after: 11.e3!

11...♘bd7 12.♗b2 ♖e8! (12...♖c8?! is already met with 13.♘h4! ♘b6 14.♘f5±) 13.♕c2!? ♖c8 14.♖fd1 ♕c7 15.♖ac1 ♕b8 16.♕f5↑ White tries his best to disrupt Black's hanging pawns.

10.♘e1!N



Position after: 10.♘e1!N

I like this move. (I was actually inspired by the classical game Ding, L – So, W Tbilisi 2017, played

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three days before I started to write.) White wants to take on d5 and create an isolated pawn, but in the meantime he brings the knight to d3, and sometimes even f4, to reinforce the attack on the d-pawn.

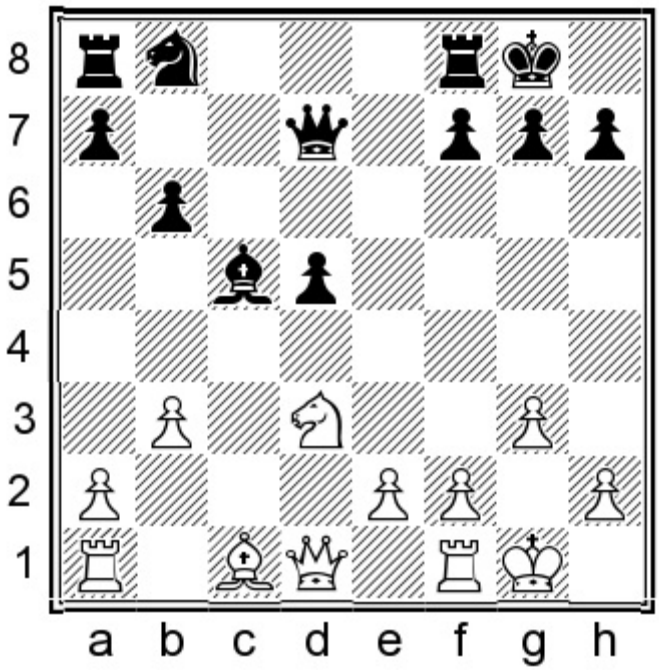
10...♕d7

10...♕e7?! 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 (11...exd5 12.♗g5!± We can still change our mind and deviate from the double fianchetto system that we seem to be playing.) 12.♘xd5 exd5 (12...♗xd5 13.♗xd5 ♖d8 14.♗g5! ♕xg5 15.♗xa8 ♖xd1 16.♖xd1± Only White can win here. A long and tough defense awaits Black.) 13.♗b2 ♖d8 14.♘d3±

11.cxd5

11.♗g5!? ♘e4 12.♗xe4! dxe4 13.♕xd7 ♘xd7 14.♘c2±

11...♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.♗xd5 exd5 14.♘d3±



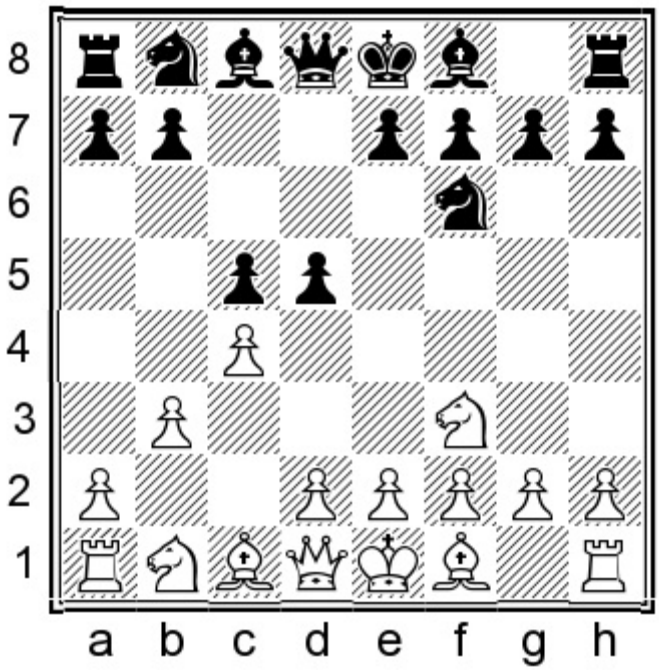
Position after: 14.♘d3±

White has a long-term edge.

b) 3...d5

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? d5

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Position after: 3...d5

This move generally transposes to the lines we analyze after 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 d5. The only difference appears after...

4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♗b2 f6!?

5...♘c6 is the main move, but it transposes into 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 d5.

6.e3!

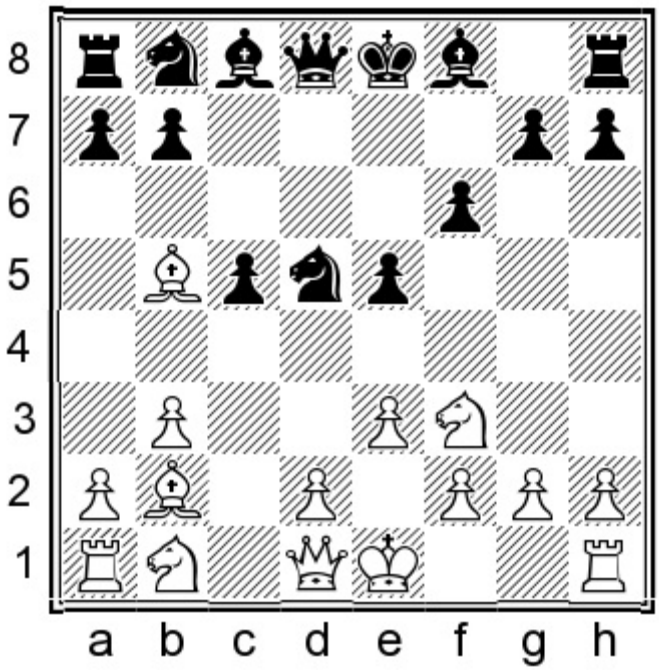
6.d4?! is clearly too soon because our king is unsafe: 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4 e5!∓ and we must protect ourselves against 8...♗b4+.

6...e5

6...♘c6 7.♘c3 e5 again transposes to 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 d5 5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.♘c3 e5 7.e3 f6?!.

7.♗b5+!

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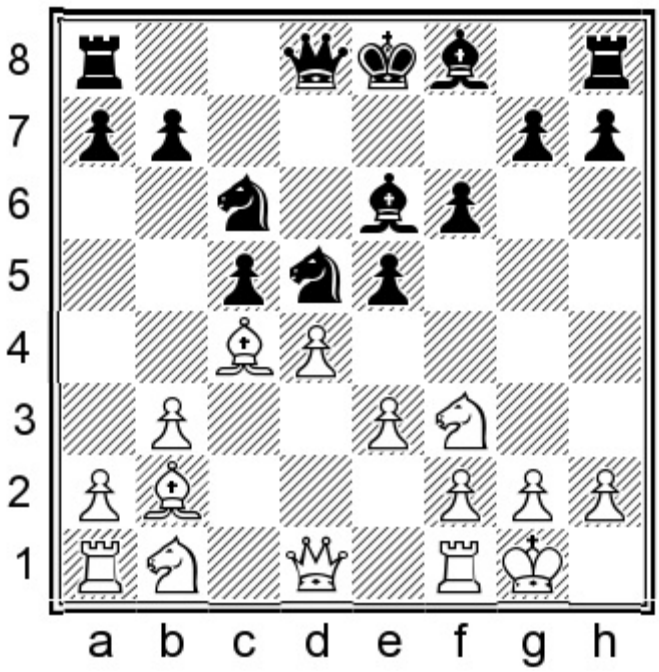
Position after: 7.♗b5+!

I like the idea of trying to disrupt Black's coordination.

7...♘c6!N

Sadly, taking on c6 would be a great concession to our light squares, especially since both ...♗c8-a6 and ...♘d5-b4 are playable.

7...♗d7?! seems structurally logical, but White takes over the initiative after 8.♗c4 ♗e6 (8...♗c6?! 9.0-0 ♗e7 10.d4!± is even worse for Black) 9.0-0 ♘c6 10.d4!



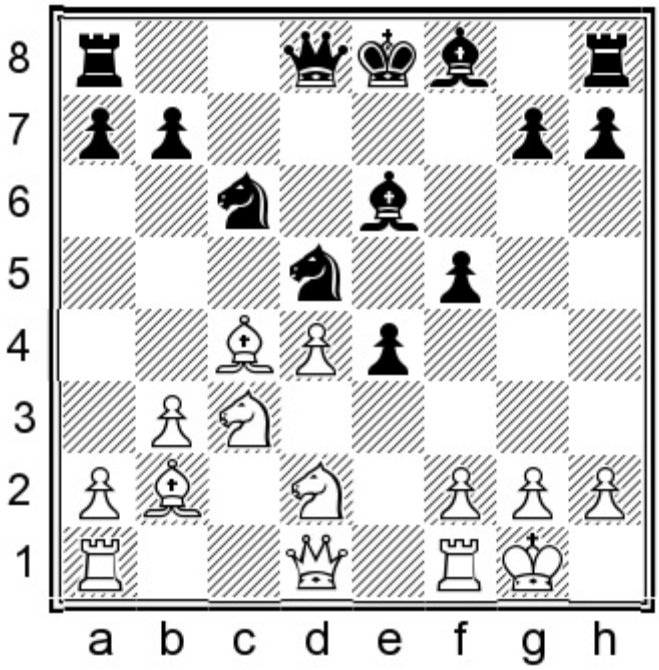
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Position after: 10.d4!

Black doesn't have any satisfactory way to react to this clash in the center.

A) 10...e4 11.♘fd2 cxd4 12.♘xe4 (12.exd4 leads to 10...cxd4, but we have something even better and I think we should go for it.) 12...dxe3 13.fxe3 ♕d7 (13...♘xe3 14.♕h5+ g6 15.♕f3+–) 14.♕h5+ ♗f7 15.♕f3! 0-0-0 (15...♗e7? 16.♖d1+–) 16.♖d1 ♕e8 17.♘bc3→

B) 10...cxd4 11.exd4 e4 12.♘fd2 f5 13.♘c3!

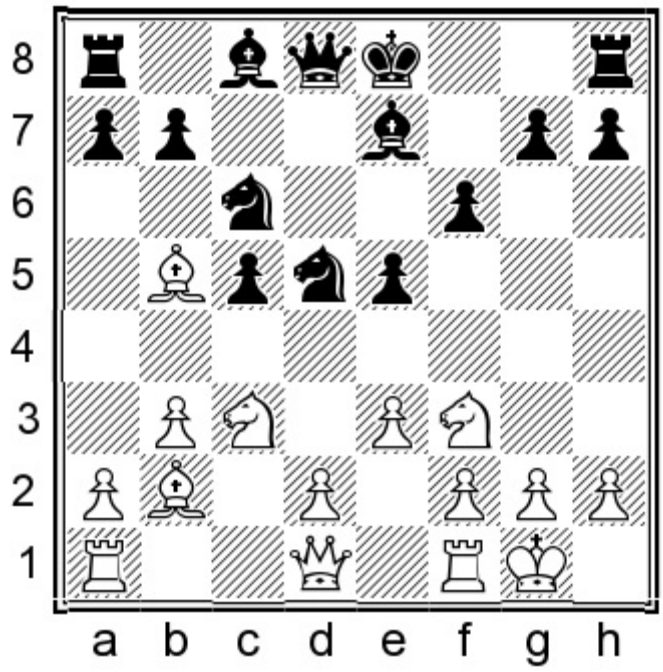


Position after: 13.♘c3!

13...♕d7 (13...♗e7? falls into our trap: 14.♘dxe4! fxe4 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♕h5+ g6 17.♕xd5+–) 14.♗xd5 (14.♘dxe4? doesn't work any more: 14...fxe4 15.♘xd5 ♗xd5 16.♕h5+ ♗f7–+) 14...♗xd5 15.♘xd5 ♕xd5 16.♘c4!→ It's usually quite bad to reach this structure for White, but here he has some activity thanks to his lead in development.

8.0-0 ♗e7 9.♘c3

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Position after: 9.♘c3

Black is unable to castle right now, so he must find something else.

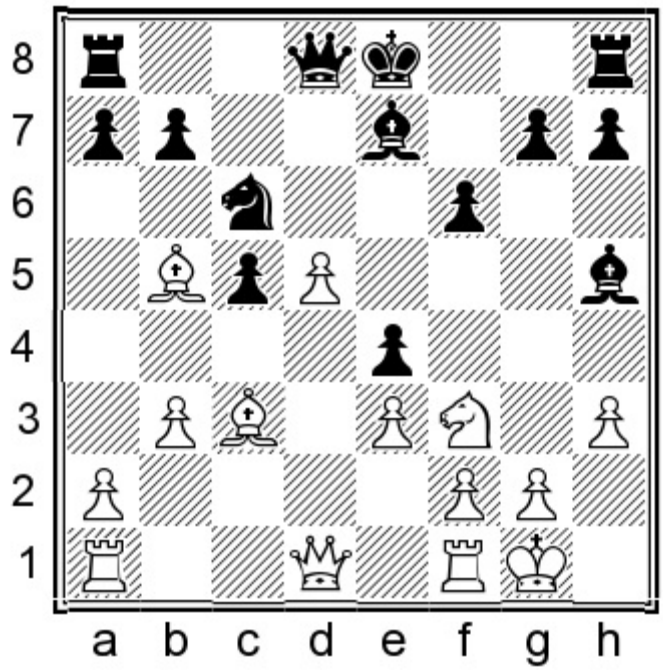
9...♘xc3

9...♗g4 10.h3 ♗h5 11.d4 ♘xc3 12.♗xc3 transposes into 10...♗g4.

10.♗xc3 0-0

Things can get really tense in the center after 10...♗g4 11.h3 ♗h5 12.d4 e4 (12...exd4 13.exd4 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♗xf3! 15.gxf3 0-0 16.♗e3!± The bishop pair is more important than the structure on the kingside here.) 13.d5!

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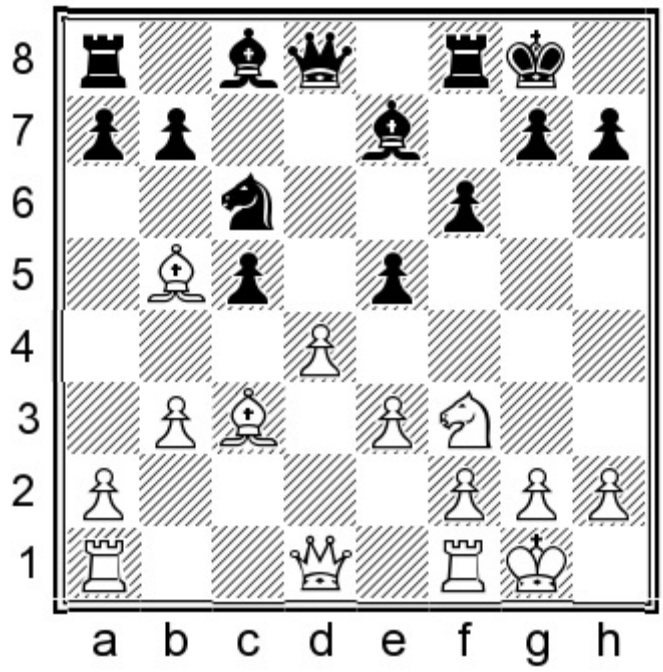
Position after: 13.d5!

13...a6! (13...exf3? 14.dxc6 fxg2 15.♕xh5+ g6 16.c7++–) 14.dxc6 axb5 15.cxb7 ♖b8 16.♕xd8+ ♗xd8 17.♘d2. Black has the bishop pair but can't make great use of it right now.

That's why he is quite happy to offer the e4-pawn as a gift. 17...♖xb7! (17...♗g6 18.b4! cxb4 19.♗xb4 ♖xb7 20.♖fd1⩲) 18.♘xe4 ♗e7⩱ The idea would be not to trade the queenside pawns, and play any 4 v 3 endgame on the kingside for ages. Of course, Black should be able to hold a draw if he defends correctly.

11.d4!

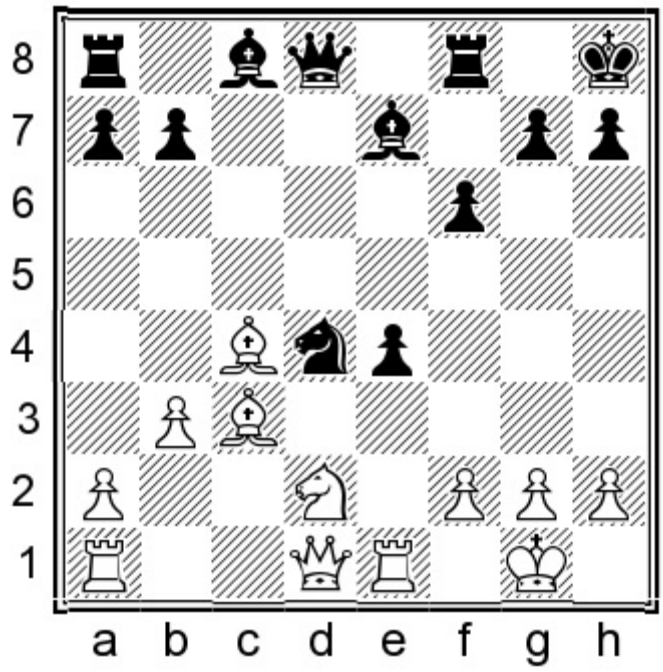
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Position after: 11.d4!

11...e4 12.♘d2 cxd4 13.exd4 f5

13...♘xd4 14.♗c4+ ♔h8 15.♖e1!

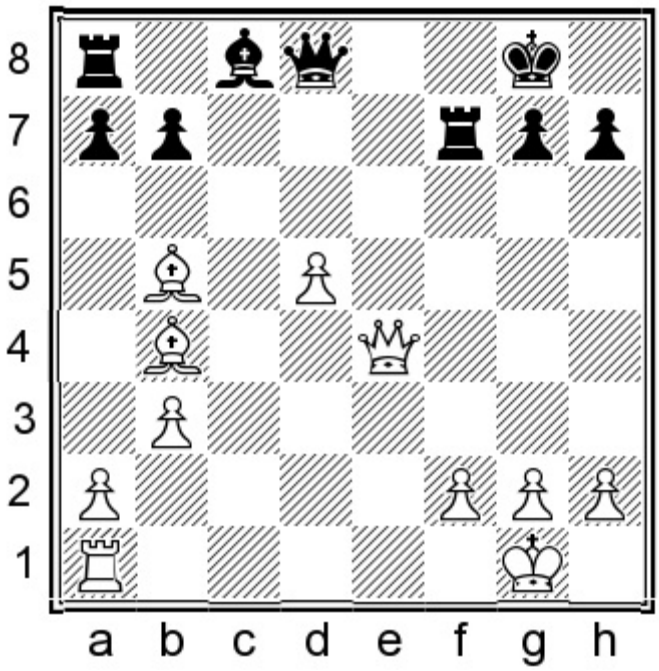


Position after: 15.♖e1!

Once we regain the e4-pawn, Black will clearly regret the weakening move ...f7-f6, mainly because of which he has a slightly inferior position. (15.♘xe4 b5 16.♕xd4 ♕xd4 17.♗xd4 bxc4 18.bxc4 ♗a6⩲) 15...b5 (15...♗f5 16.♘xe4 ♘c6 17.♘g3±) 16.♗f1±

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14.d5! ♘b4 15.♘xe4! fxe4 16.♕d4 ♖f7 17.♗xb4 ♗f6 18.♕xe4 ♗xa1 19.♖xa1↑

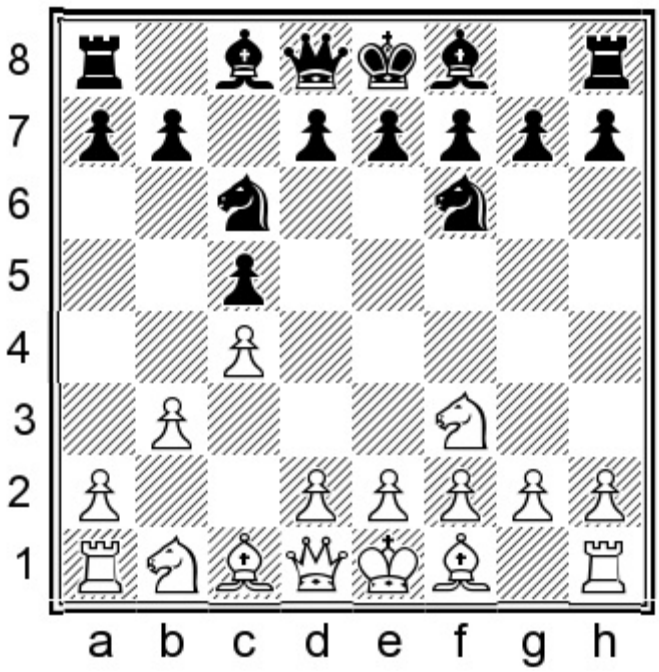


Position after: 19.♖xa1↑

It might not be so easy to convert this into a win, but I would definitely pick White here.

c) 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 --

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? ♘c6



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Position after: 3...♘c6

This move is actually quite compromising. Black can no longer enter a Hedgehog or the reversed double fianchetto (as in both cases the knight has to go to d7), but it retains the possibility of reacting in the center with ...d5.

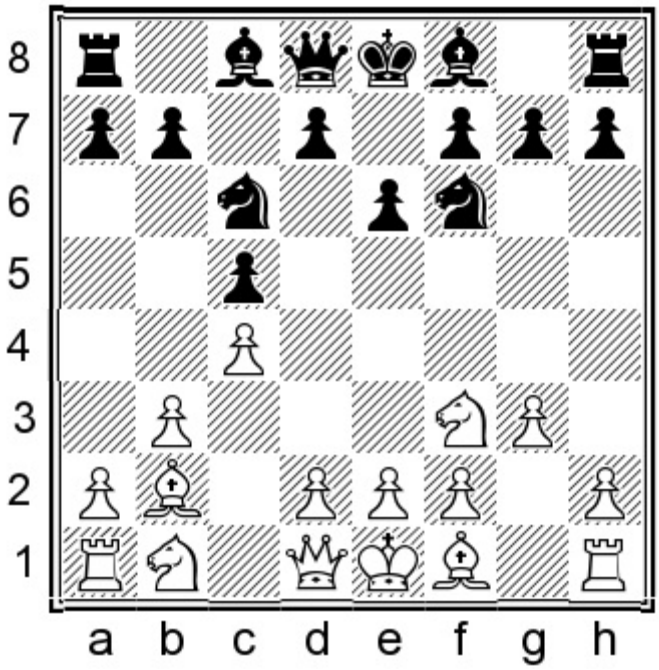
4.♗b2 e6!?

Black is aiming at pushing ...d7-d5, with the idea of taking back with the e-pawn. He can decide later when to do so, and we must consider this on every move.

A) 4...d6?! 5.g3 e5 We have already discussed this possibility in the previous chapter. The assessment is that in this kind of Botvinnik system, Black should prefer to have the knight on e7.

B) 4...g6 is a strange move order, but it will normally transpose into our main line. It simply gives White the possibility of playing 5.♗xf6, but that doesn't seem so dangerous here: 5.g3 ♗g7 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 – see the main line.

5.g3



Position after: 5.g3

5...d5

5...♗e7 6.♗g2 d5 (6...0-0 7.0-0 d5 8.e3 transposes into the chapter on the Neo-Catalan with 6...c5)

A) White doesn't have time for 7.0-0 as Black can respond with 7...d4! 8.e3 e5!∓ which makes a major difference to the Neo-Catalan, as Black is able to take back with the e-pawn and doesn't have to worry about the development of his c8-bishop.

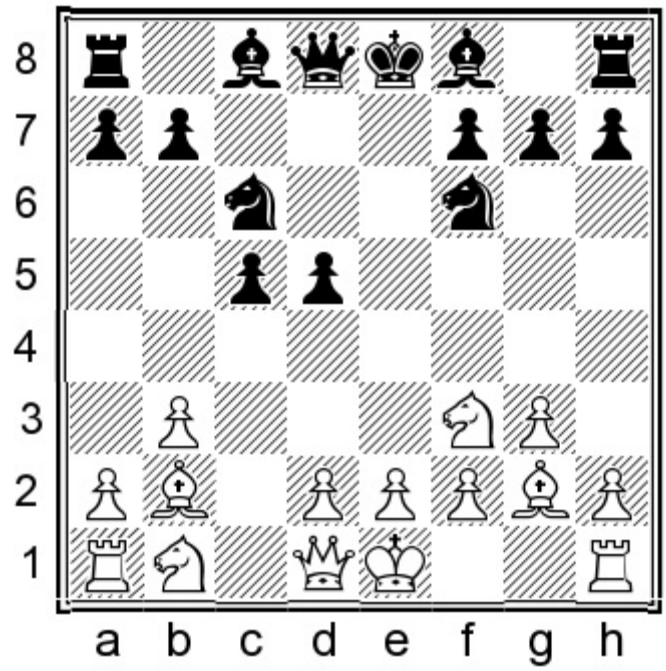
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B) 7.cxd5! exd5 8.d4! transposes to the main line: Novikov, S (2514) – Kim, A (2434) Moscow 2005, 1-0 (33).

6.cxd5 exd5

6...♘xd5?! doesn't make much sense now, as playing ...e6-e5 at any time would lose a full tempo compared to 4...d5. Black is unable to develop his f8-bishop properly because the g7-pawn is hanging.

7.♗g2!



Position after: 7.♗g2!

This is an important position for finding out if our move order is valid. In fact, it can arise by many transpositions, and we don't really have an adequate way of avoiding it.

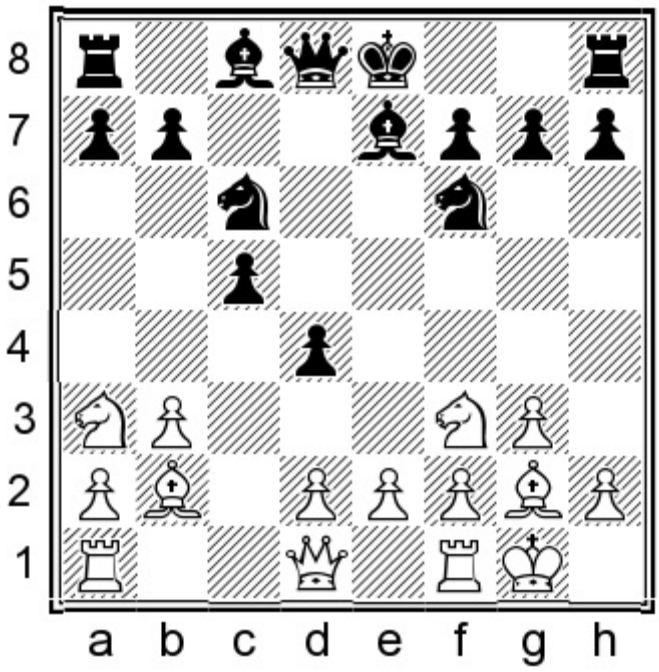
Now Black must choose: he can either allow d2-d4, and most probably accept an isolated d-pawn, or prevent it by playing ...d5-d4 himself. This latter possibility is probably the more critical one.

7.d4?! is too early, and we soon face 'king issues' after 7...cxd4! 8.♘xd4 ♗b4+!, when the only way to survive is to play the ugly 9.♗c3□ 9...♕e7∓.

7...♗e7

7...d4!? This move frees the way for our bishop on g2. However, it also blocks our bishop on b2, and prevents d2-d4. We need to make this d4-pawn our new target. 8.0-0 ♗e7 9.♘a3!

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Position after: 9.♘a3!

Before playing e3, we must bring our knight into play. (9.e3 is slightly inferior, as Black has the pleasant option of pinning our ♘f3 after 9...0-0 10.♘a3 ♗g4! and I couldn't find a way to get an advantage here.) 9...0-0 10.♘c4 Black must make a decision with his c8-bishop as he can't pin our f3-knight!

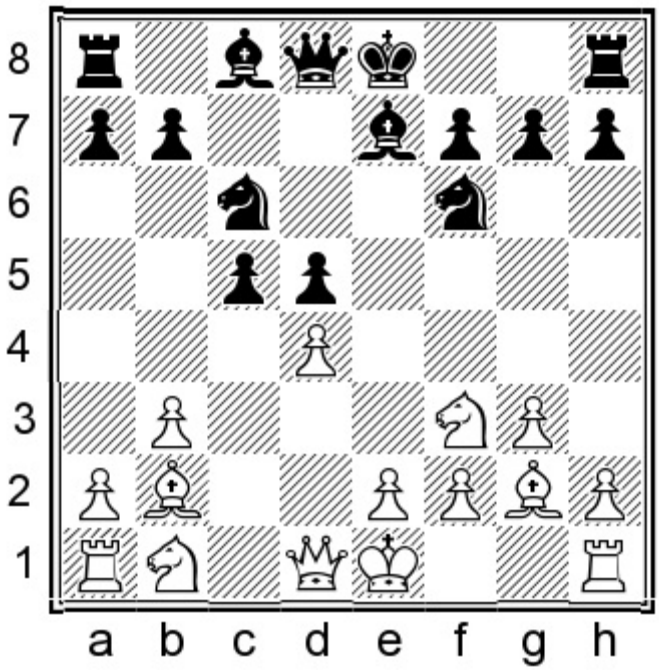
A) 10...♗g4?! 11.♘fe5! ♘xe5 12.♘xe5 ♕b6 13.♘xg4 ♘xg4 14.e3 ♘e5 15.exd4 cxd4 16.♖e1 ♗f6 (Of course not 16...♘d3?? 17.♖xe7 ♘xb2 18.♕c2+–.) 17.d3±

B) 10...♖e8 11.e3 ♗e6 12.♖e1!? ♖c8 13.♘fe5 (13.♖c1? ♘b4!↑ and the knight can either jump to d3 or grab the a2-pawn) 13...♘xe5 14.♘xe5 ♕b6 15.♖c1↑

C) 10...♗e6 11.e3 (11.♘g5 appeared in an old game between two of the best players of the mid-20th century, but after many trades, White loses the possibility of pressurising the d4-pawn: 11...♗d5 12.e4 dxe3 13.dxe3 ♗xg2 14.♔xg2= and the game was balanced in Keres, P – Kotov, A Moscow 1949) 11...♗d5N 12.exd4 cxd4 13.♖e1↑ As usual, Black is the one who must be careful as his d4-pawn is now clearly a weakness.

8.d4!

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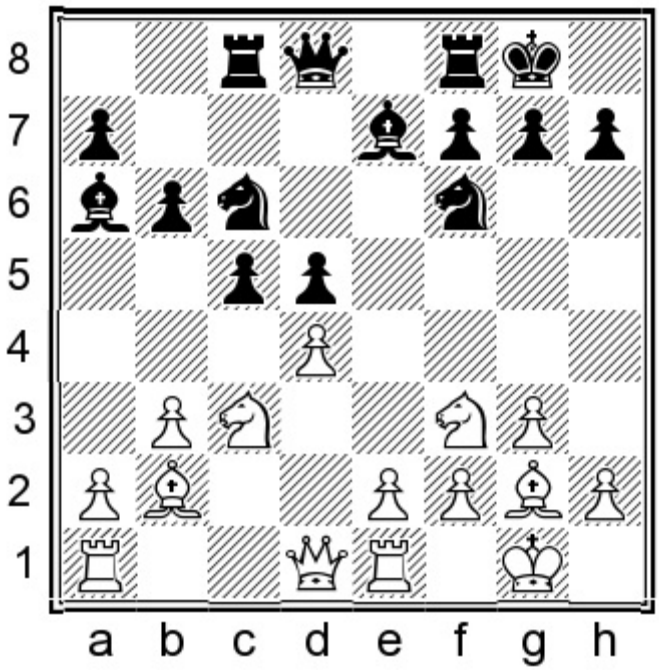


Position after: 8.d4!

8...0-0

A) 8...cxd4?! is obviously no longer a problem: 9.♘xd4 ♗b4+ 10.♘c3± and Black doesn't have time to continue his attack as we are ready to castle.

B) 8...b6!? An unusal move at this stage of the game, but it's the only way to avoid playing with an isolani. 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘c3 ♗a6 has been played in several games. This is probably the best way to activate the bishop. Only a few players could find the best way to continue for White. 11.♖e1 ♖c8



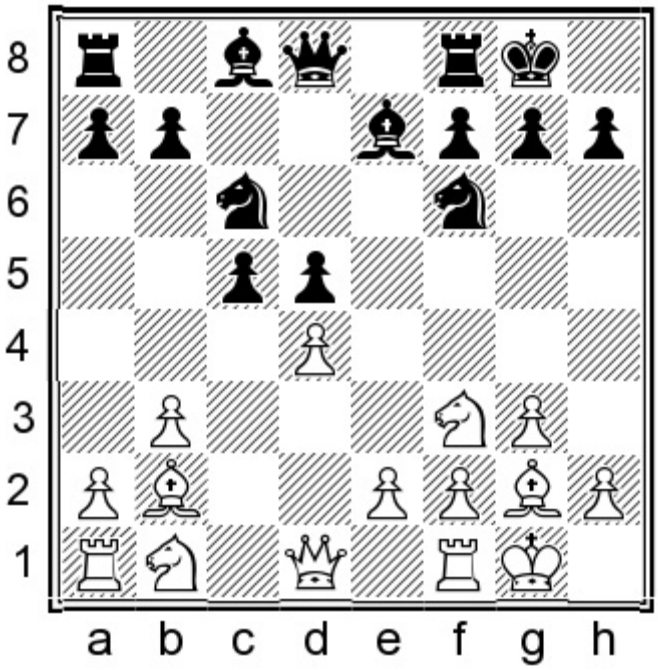
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Position after: 11...♖c8

B1) 12.e3!? ♕d6?! I think this is already a serious imprecision by Black, and White took advantage by playing 13.dxc5 bxc5 14.♘h4! ♕d7 15.♗xd5± and Black was unable to get enough compensation to save himself in Movsziszian, K (2525) – Siegel, G (2490) Germany 1994.

B2) 12.♘e5!?N I like the idea of putting some pressure on the slightly exposed d5-pawn. 12...♘xd4 13.e3 ♘c6 14.♘xc6 ♖xc6 15.♘xd5 ♘xd5 (15...♖d6 16.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 17.♕c2 ♖fd8 18.♖ad1± This will require good technique if to win, but at least we have almost no losing chances.) 16.♗xd5 ♖d6 17.e4↑ gives us a dangerous initiative in the center.

9.0-0



Position after: 9.0-0

Black has actually transposed into a variation of the Tarrasch Defense not considered to be dangerous for him, but he still has to feel comfortable with it (which I doubt, since although our opponent is a 1...c5 player, he has no reason to be a Tarrasch Defense specialist). A lot of games have reached this position, but I won't go into details, as it's not really the subject of the chapter. What you need to know is that the main move is...

9...♘e4 10.♘c3!

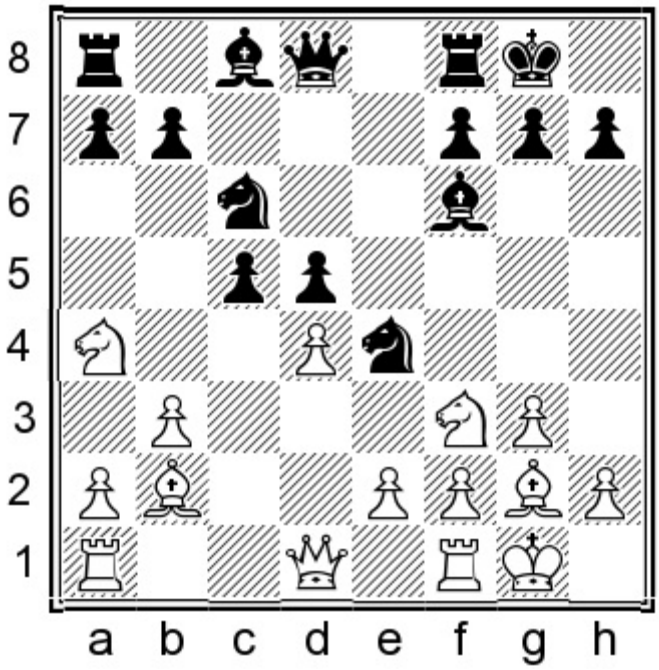
The move I like.

10...♗f6 11.♘a4!

This has given White great practical results, with good reason, I think. We are going to trade a few

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minor pieces and most probably create an isolated d-pawn in our opponent's camp.



Position after: 11.♘a4!

11...b6

Black prefers two weak hanging pawns instead of the isolated pawn.

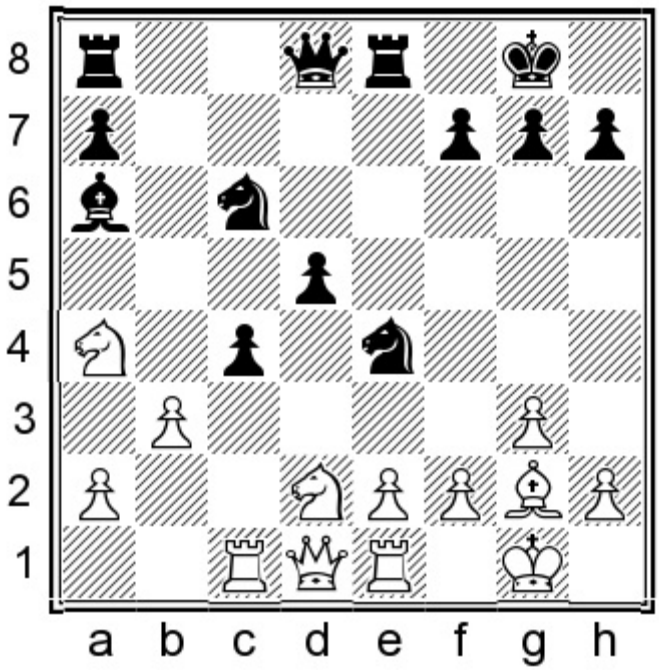
11...♖e8 12.♖c1 cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♘e5 14.♘b5 ♘c6 and now I would improve on White's play, even if he won in Zhou, J (2607) – Xiu, D (2534) Xinghua 2013, by playing 15.♗xe4!N 15...dxe4 16.♕xd8 ♗xd8 17.♘d6 ♖e6 18.♖fd1±.

12.dxc5 ♗xb2 13.♘xb2 bxc5 14.♘a4

Black is struggling to defend his c5-pawn.

14...♗a6 15.♖c1 ♖e8 16.♖e1 c4! 17.♘d2

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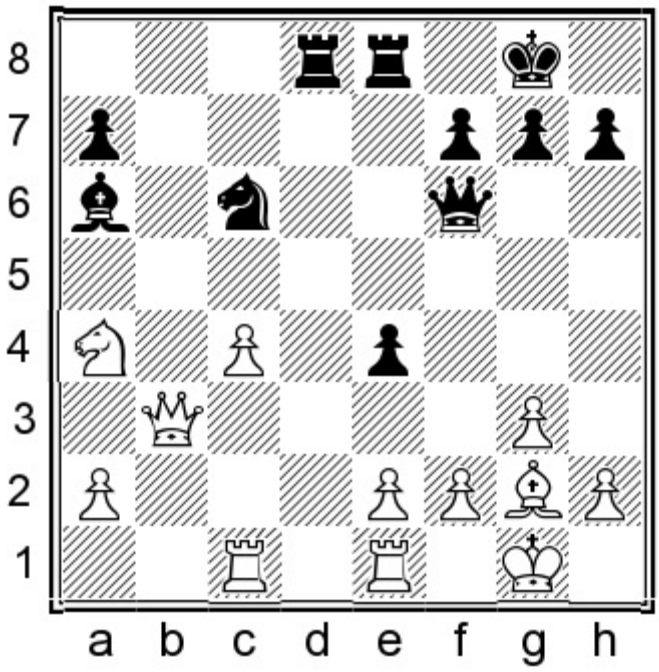
Position after: 17.♘d2

This position is actually a tabiya of the Tarrasch, as it has appeared more than a hundred times. Black has only one way to play, namely...

17...♕f6!

17...cxb3?! 18.♖xc6 ♗b5 19.♘xe4 ♗xc6 (19...dxe4?? 20.♖d6+–) 20.♘ec3 bxa2 21.♘xa2±

18.♘xe4 dxe4 19.bxc4 ♖ad8! 20.♕b3



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Position after: 20.♕b3

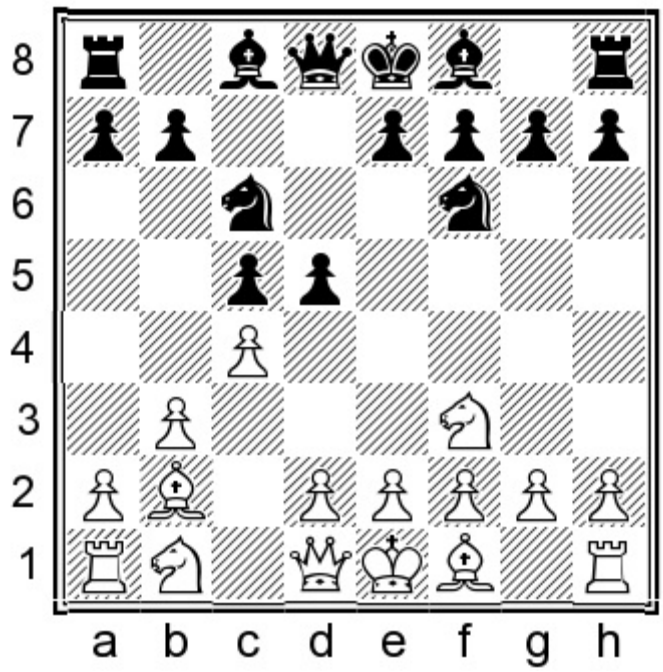
After so many moves, Black still needs to find...

20...e3 21.f4!? ♘d4!N 22.♕a3⇄

The position is objectively quite complicated, but Black is the one who is a pawn down, and has to be accurate to keep the balance.

d) 3...♘c6 4.♗b2 d5

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? ♘c6 4.♗b2 d5



Position after: 4...d5

5.cxd5 ♘xd5 6.♘c3!

A) 6.e3?! ♘db4 7.d3 ♗f5!∓

B) 6.g3?! is definitely too slow, and allows Black to get a huge center that gives us the worse position after 6...f6! 7.♗g2 e5 8.0-0 ♗e6∓, with a kind of reversed Maroczy where White has played the rather strange b2-b3.

6...e5!?

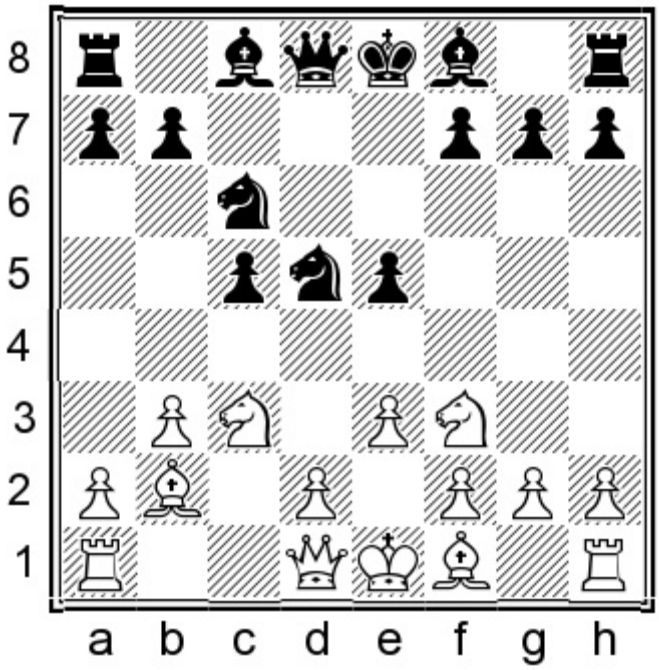
Definitely the most ambitious move for Black. We have to hurry in creating our counterplay.

6...♗g4 7.e3 e6 (7...♘db4 isn't a problem any more, as we can protect the d3-square with 8.♕b1! e6 9.a3 ♘d5 10.♕c2±) 8.♘xd5!? ♕xd5 (8...exd5?! 9.♗e2± How does Black plan to castle with the hanging

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g7-pawn?) 9.♗c4 ♕d6 10.0-0 ♗e7 11.h3! ♗f5 (11...♗h5 12.♗xg7 ♖g8 13.♗c3±) 12.d4±

7.e3



Position after: 7.e3

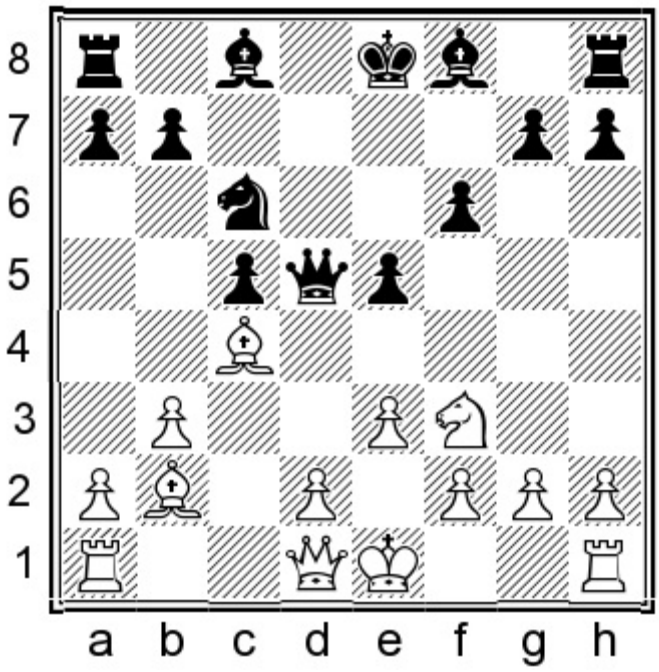
7...♘c7

In my opinion this is the most logical move. It prevents ♗b5; also in the other lines Black is often in trouble because White has the possibility of taking on d5. However I'm not sure it's really the best, due to White's next move.

A) 7...♘db4?! 8.♕b1! Once again, this is the reason why we played ♘c3 before e3. 8...♗e6 9.a3 ♘d5 10.♗c4!↑

B) 7...f6N secures the e5-pawn, but gives us a few tempi after 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5 9.♗c4

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Position after: 9.♗c4

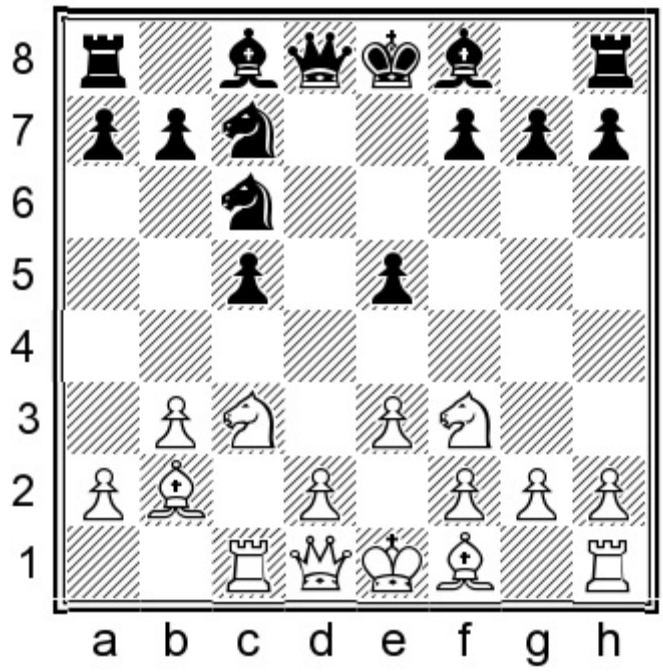
B1) 9...♕d6 10.d4! cxd4 11.exd4 ♗g4 (11...exd4?! 12.♘xd4±) 12.0-0→

B2) 9...♕e4 This is the best, but it's quite a weird move! 10.♖c1 ♕g4! 11.0-0 e4 12.♘e1 ♕xd1 13.♖xd1↑ White will continue with d2-d3, and even if it's not such a big deal, it can still be annoying to play with Black.

C) 7...♗e6N 8.♘xd5 ♕xd5 9.♘g5!↑ The bishop can't move because of the deadly ♗f1-c4, so we first take the bishop pair, then see what we can do with our light-squared bishop.

8.♖c1!

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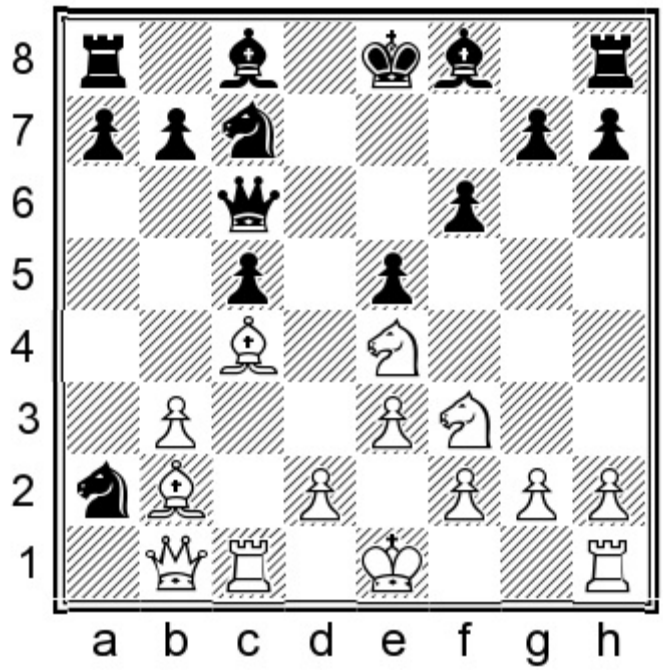
Position after: 8.♖c1!

Directly targeting the c5-pawn.

8...b6

This logical move will be met with a surprising and incredibly strong answer.

8...f6 9.♘e4! ♕d5 (9...b6?! is obviously bad in view of 10.d4±) 10.♕c2 ♘b4 11.♕b1 ♘xa2 Our queen can’t do everything, but our other pieces are doing great. 12.♗c4 ♕c6

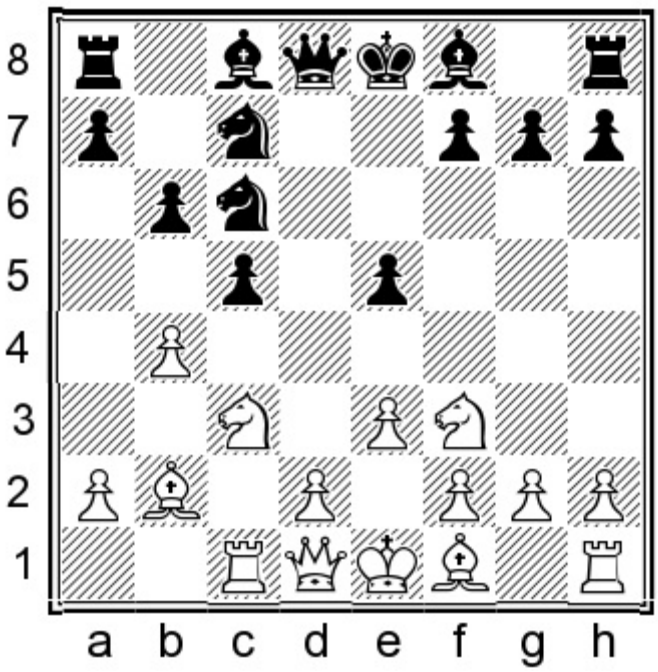


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Position after: 12...♕c6

13.♕xa2! (13.♘xf6+ gxf6 14.♕xa2±) 13...♕xe4 14.0-0± White continues with d2-d4 on the next move, and Black is about to collapse.

9.b4!!



Position after: 9.b4!!

It's quite rare that I use the '!! excellent move' symbol, but I believe it is deserved here, as this is quite surprising.

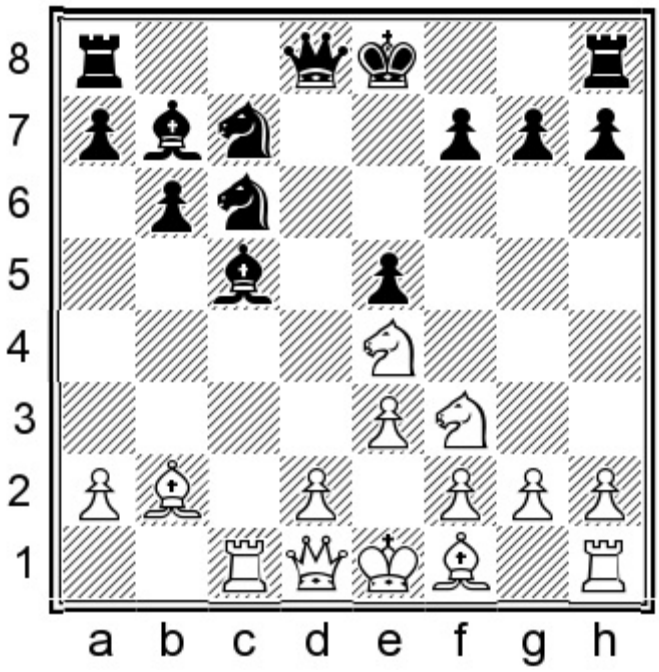
9...♗b7

9...cxb4? 10.♘b5!+– There are too many problems on this file...

10.bxc5 ♗xc5 11.♘e4!±

White is much better since Black can't retreat his bishop:

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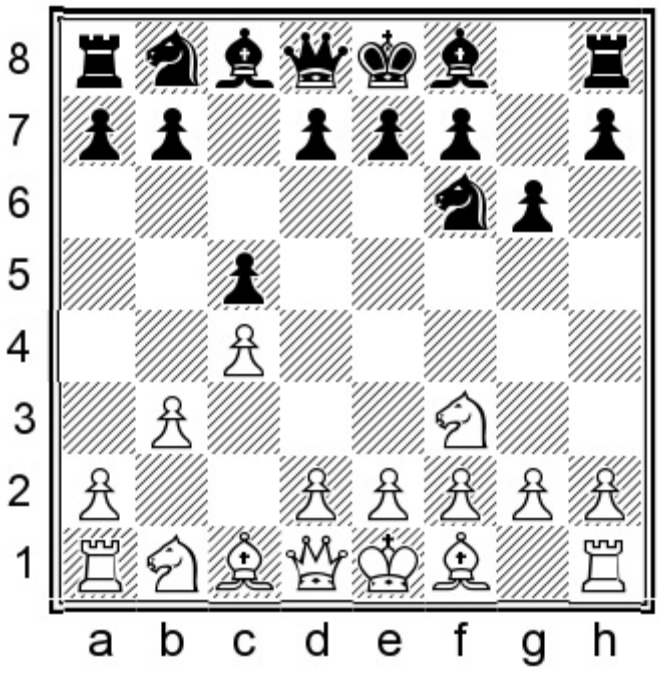


Position after: 11.♘e4!±

11...♗e7?! 12.♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.♗xe5 ♗xe4 14.♕a4++–

e) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 --, 5...b6

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? g6



Position after: 3...g6

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Now let's have a look at some set-ups where Black decides to play with a kingside fianchetto.

4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3

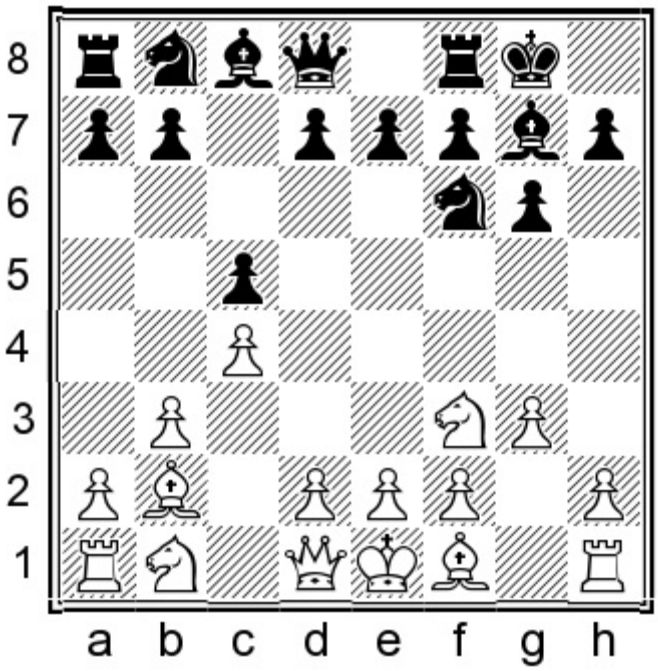
Black needs to decide which system he wants to employ.

5...b6!?

This system can arise from various move orders. It's also a test of our own system because, even if we don't really run much risk of being worse, we must show that Black can't hope for easy equality by using a mirror set-up – this would be too simple. In general, White will be the first to push d4 (...d5 for Black), and this makes a major difference – if we can take advantage of Black's trying to keep the symmetry!

A) 5...d6 6.♗g2 e5 7.0-0 0-0 8.♘c3 ♘c6 9.d3 We already discussed this set-up in the previous chapter, where we said that it's a Botvinnik system with the knight misplaced on f6 (it should have gone to e7). So it's not a problem for us.

B) 5...0-0



Position after: 5...0-0

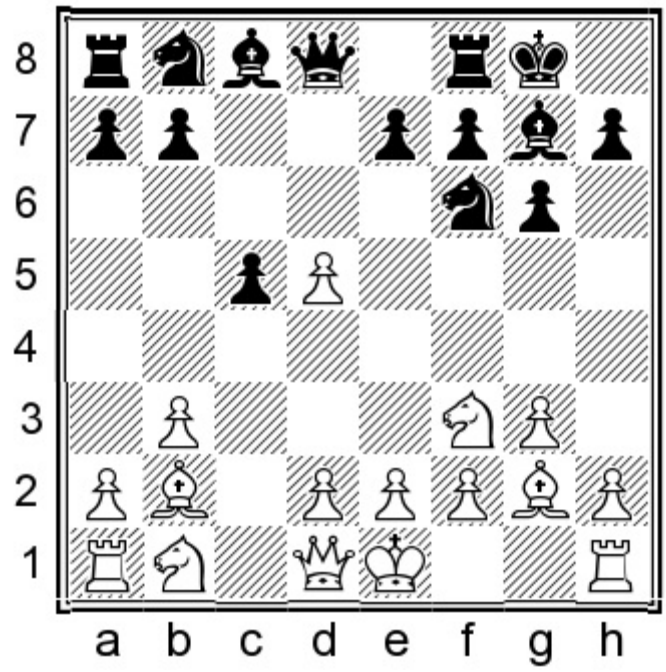
Normally this won't change anything compared to the more usual move order. 6.♗g2

B1) 6...d6 7.0-0 e5 – see 5...d6 (7...♘c6 – see the main line).

B2) 6...b6 It seems dangerous for Black to delay playing this move, but we most probably have nothing better than to transpose into 5...b6.

B3) 6...d5 7.cxd5

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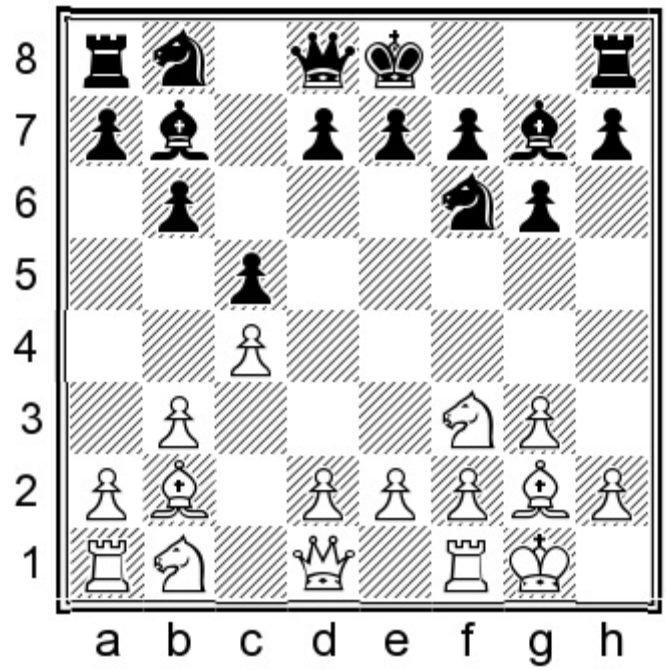


Position after: 7.cxd5

B3.1) 7...♕xd5 8.♘c3 ♕f5 (8...♕h5?! 9.h3!± is why we started with 8.♘c3 instead of castling; 8...♕d6 9.0-0 ♘c6 10.♖c1 b6 11.d4!± White retains an excellent game thanks to his lead in development.) 9.♘a4!N Black has problems with his c-pawn! 9...♘c6?! 10.♘h4! ♕h5 11.♖c1±

B3.2) 7...♘xd5 8.♗xg7 ♔xg7 9.0-0 and Black has nothing better than 9...♘c6 which transposes to the main line with 7...d5.

6.♗g2 ♗b7 7.0-0



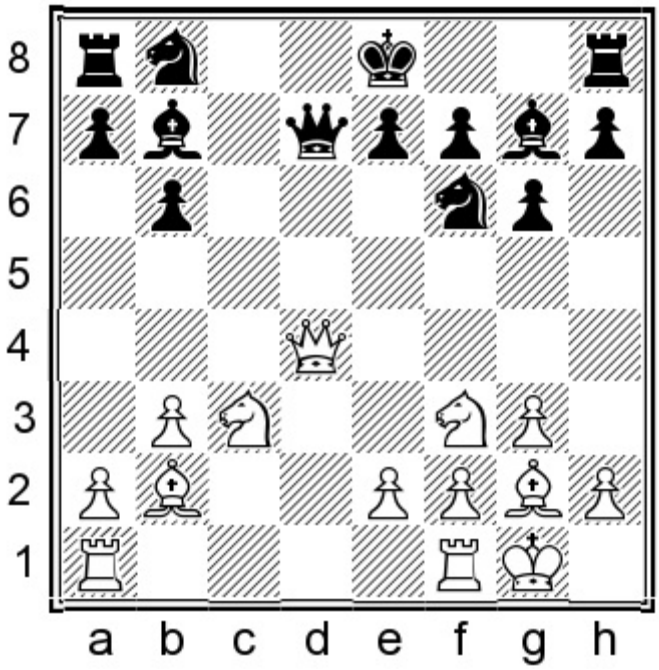
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Position after: 7.0-0

7...0-0

A) If Black tries to be the first to advance in the center, he can experience some problems: 7...d5?! 8.cxd5

A1) 8...♕xd5 has been tried a couple of times, but seems easy for White: 9.♘c3 ♕d7 (9...♕h5?! doesn't help Black because his queen is in danger here. 10.h3! The threat of 11.g4 forces the queen to go back. 10...♕f5 11.d4! cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♕d7 13.♘f5! gxf5 14.♕xd7+ ♘bxd7 15.♗xb7 ♖b8 16.♗g2±) 10.d4 cxd4 11.♕xd4

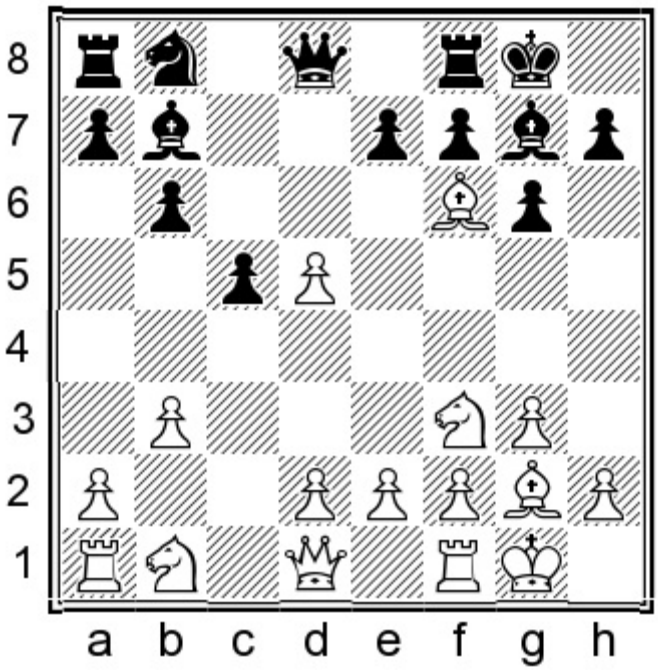


Position after: 11.♕xd4

11...0-0 (11...♕xd4 12.♘xd4 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2± We are clearly ahead in development, and Black even has problems in developing his b8-knight as he needs to protect the c6-square.) 12.♕h4!? ♘a6 13.♘e5 ♕c8 14.e4↑ 1-0 (32) Foygel, I (2462) – Karatekin, T (2309) Boston 2001.

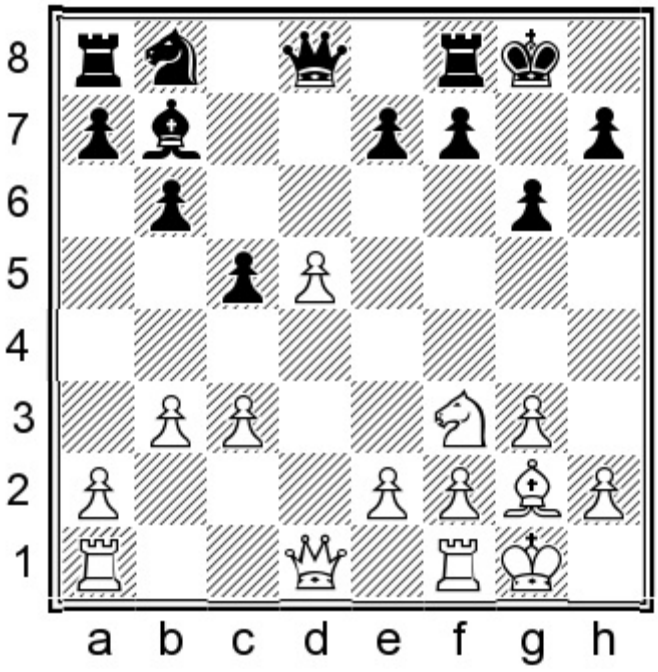
A2) 8...0-0 9.♗xf6!

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Position after: 9.♗xf6!

This is quite a surprising move. We surrender the bishop pair, but Black must give it back if he wants to regain his pawn. 9...♗xf6 (9...exf6N has never been tried yet, maybe because after 10.♘c3 f5 11.d4! ♘a6 12.♕d2± it's still not clear how Black can regain his pawn.) 10.♘c3 ♗xc3 (10...♗xd5?? obviously doesn't work: 11.♘xd5 ♗xa1 12.♕xa1 ♕xd5 13.♘e5+–) 11.dxc3



Position after: 11.dxc3

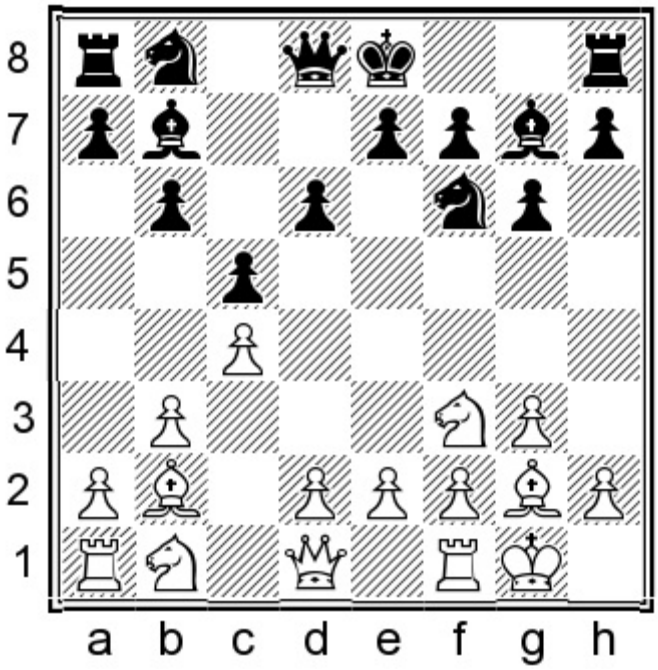
A2.1) 11...♗xd5?! 12.♕d2! It's impressive to see that Black is already in huge trouble. The first

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threat is ♖ad1, simply winning the bishop. 12...♘c6 (12...♗c6 13.♕h6! f6 14.h4! ♕e8 15.♖fd1 a5 16.♖d2 ♖a7 17.♖ad1± White has a great position and won in Barle, J (2425) – Cekro, E (2435) Brezovica 1988.) 13.♖fd1!N This is the correct rook, as after 13...♗xf3 14.♕f4 ♘d4 we have the possibility of playing 15.cxd4! ♗xg2 (15...♗xe2? 16.♖d2+–) 16.dxc5 ♕c8 17.♔xg2 ♕xc5 18.♖ac1±.

A2.2) 11...♕xd5! 12.♕xd5 ♗xd5 13.♖fd1 Even in such a simple position Black has problems in equalizing. 13...♗e4 14.♘e5 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 f6 16.♘d7 ♖c8 17.♘xb8 ♖cxb8 18.♖d7 ♔f7 19.♖ad1± If Black defends well, he should be able to draw, but things are not that easy: Speelman, J (2578) – Contin, D (2394) Catalan Bay 2004.

B) 7...d6



Position after: 7...d6

This move is a bit committal as it deprives Black of the possibility of playing ...d5, but in general it transposes into our main line: 8.d4! cxd4 9.♕xd4 ♘bd7 (9...♘c6 10.♕d2 0-0 11.♘c3 ♕d7 12.♖ad1± followed by e4, and it's not easy to find a useful task for the c6-knight.) 10.♘c3 0-0 finally transposing into our main line.

8.d4!

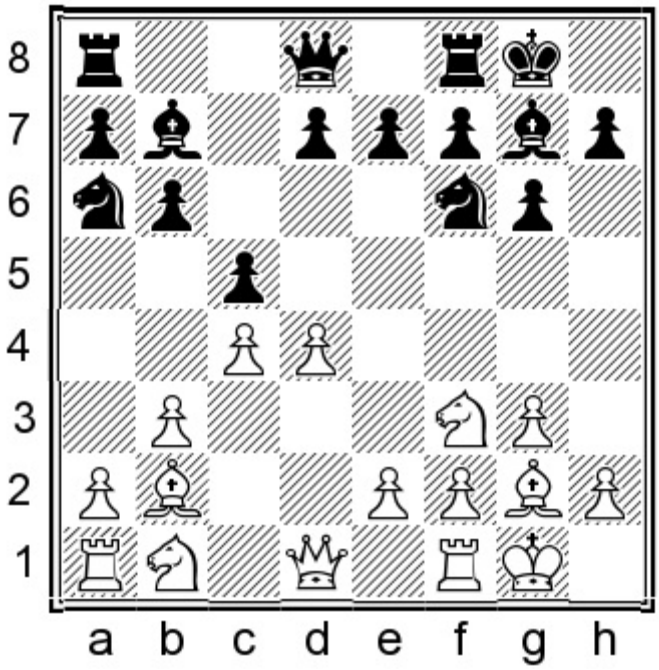
A) 8.♘c3 is supposed to be the main line, but it really looks like a comfortable draw for Black in the event of 8...d5! 9.♘xd5 ♘xd5 10.♗xg7 ♔xg7 11.cxd5 ♕xd5 12.d4 ♘a6!= and I don't see any way to fight for a real edge.

B) Playing quite slowly in the center is always possible as well, but in general Black is able to get a nice middlegame: 8.e3 d6 9.♘c3 ♘bd7 10.♕e2 ♘e4= was more or less equal in Dzindzichashvili, R (2560) – Rohde, M (2585) Philadelphia 1992.

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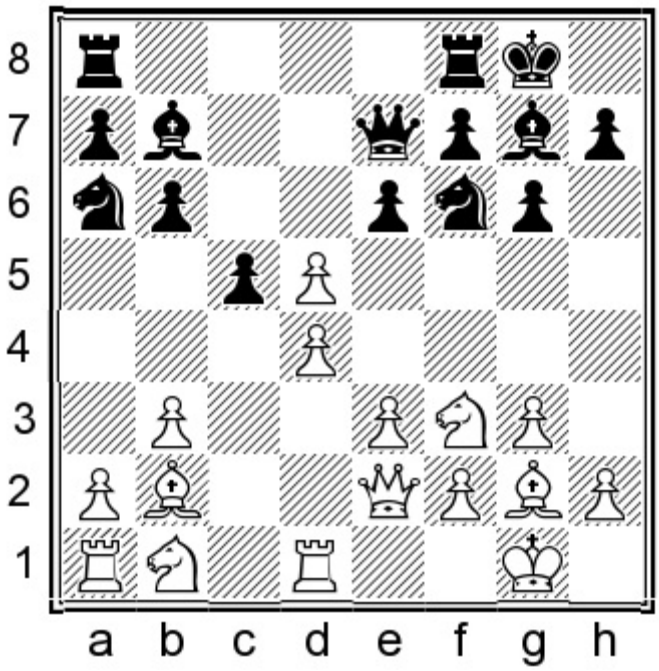
8...cxd4

8...♘a6!? was seen in some games.



Position after: 8...♘a6!?

In this variation, the knight often goes to a6, where it cannot be pinned, and doesn't get in the way of other pieces. 9.e3 e6 (9...d5 10.♕e2 e6 is a way to transpose, as Black doesn't have anything better to do in the center) 10.♕e2 ♕e7 (10...d5 11.♖d1! ♕e7 transposes too) 11.♖d1 d5 12.cxd5! This breaks the symmetry.

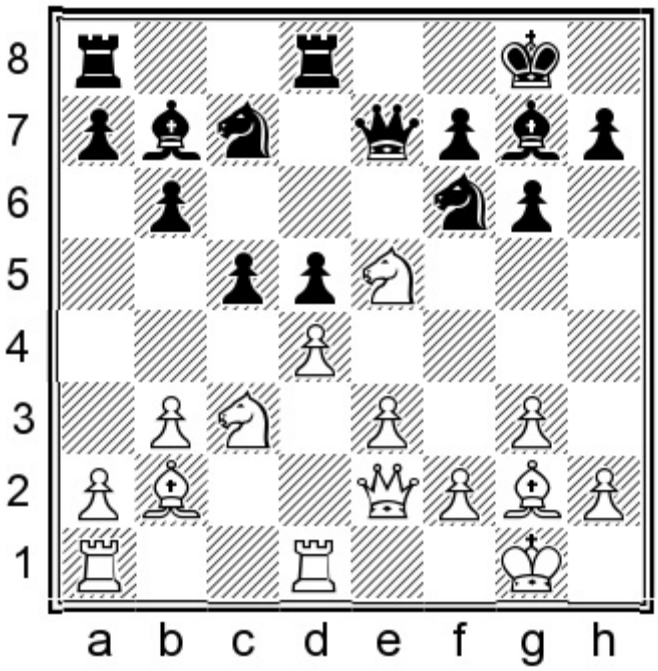


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Position after: 12.cxd5!

A) 12...♘xd5?! 13.e4 ♘f6 14.♘c3 This is still very symmetrical, but White is the one who takes over the initiative. He soon had a great position in this game: 14...cxd4 15.♘xd4 ♖fd8 16.♘db5 ♘c5 17.b4 ♘a6 18.a3 ♘e8 19.♖xd8 ♕xd8 20.♖d1 ♕e7 21.e5± 1-0 (41) Froewis, G (2452) – Gaehwiler, G (2359) Bad Ragaz 2016.

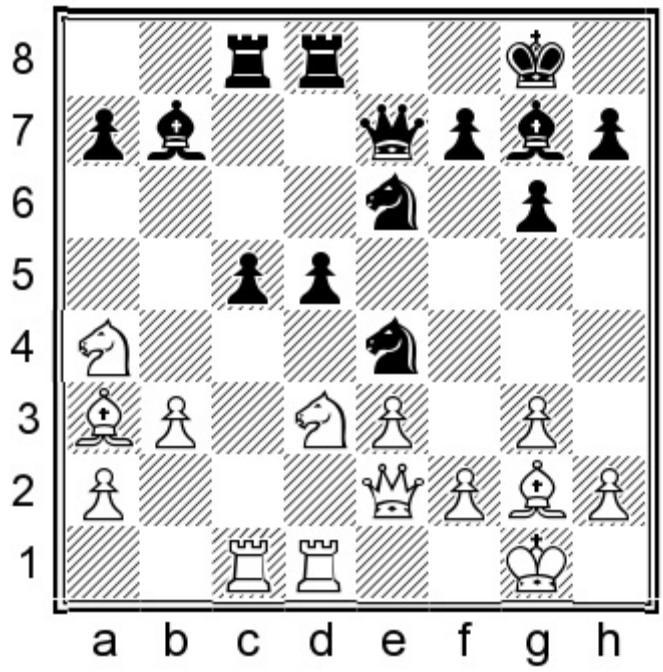
B) 12...exd5 13.♘c3 ♖fd8 14.♘e5! ♘c7



Position after: 14...♘c7

15.dxc5!?N This move is tactically justified, and actually quite strong. (15.f4!? ♘e4 16.♘xe4 dxe4 17.dxc5 ♕xc5 18.♖ac1 ♕e7 19.♗a3 ♕xa3 20.♖xc7→ White has kept the initiative and won quickly in Iturrizaga Bonelli, E (2649) – Dragnev, V (2344) Gibraltar 2015.) 15...bxc5 (15...♕xe5? 16.♘xd5 and Black can't protect ev-erything. The best is probably 16...♘fxd5 17.♗xe5 ♗xe5 18.♖ac1± and the material balance is clearly in White's favor.) 16.♘a4! ♘e6 17.♖ac1 ♖ac8 18.♗a3 ♘e4 19.♘d3↑

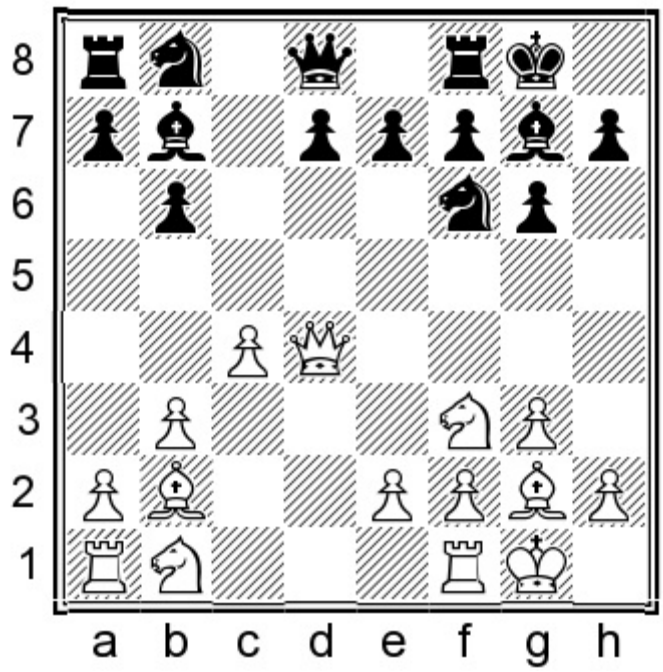
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Position after: 19.♘d3↑

We concentrate all our forces on the c5-pawn, which should enable us to capture it soon.

9.♕xd4



Position after: 9.♕xd4

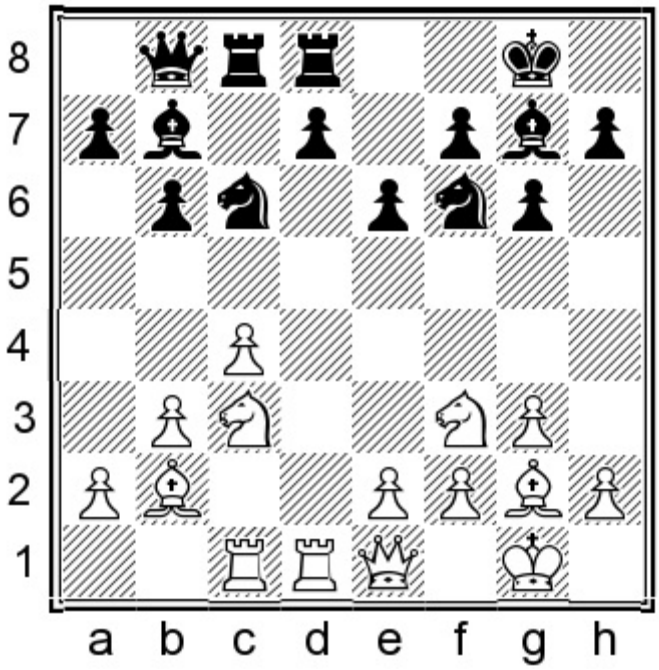
9...d6

A) 9...d5 This move doesn't have many adherents, but Wesley So played it in 2017 in a blitz game

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against Grischuk. It might appeal to some players, but I don't think it's too dangerous (in terms of conceding a draw, I mean...). 10.♖d1 (More sensible than Grischuk's 10. ♘a3.) 10...♘c6N 11.♕c3!? e6 12.♕e1! We put the queen on a safe square, and are going to start attacking the d5-pawn. 12...♖c8 13.♘c3±

B) 9...♘c6 In general, the knight is misplaced on this square if Black can't react with ...d5, which is normally the case here. 10.♕c3 I like this clever manoeuvre by Aronian, as in the previous line. 10...♖c8 (10...♕c7 11.♖d1 ♖ad8 This set-up with the rook on d8 instead of c8 was recently also tried by MVL, but I don't think it makes any major difference. 12.♘a3!? a6, 0-1 (46) Hou Yifan (2654) – Vachier-Lagrave, M (2789) Karlsruhe 2018, and now 13.e4!N would give White some advantage: 13...d6 14.♕e1 ♖fe8 15.♖ac1 e6 16.♘d4±.) 11.♖d1 ♕c7 12.♕e1 ♕b8 13.♘c3 ♖fd8 14.♖ac1 e6

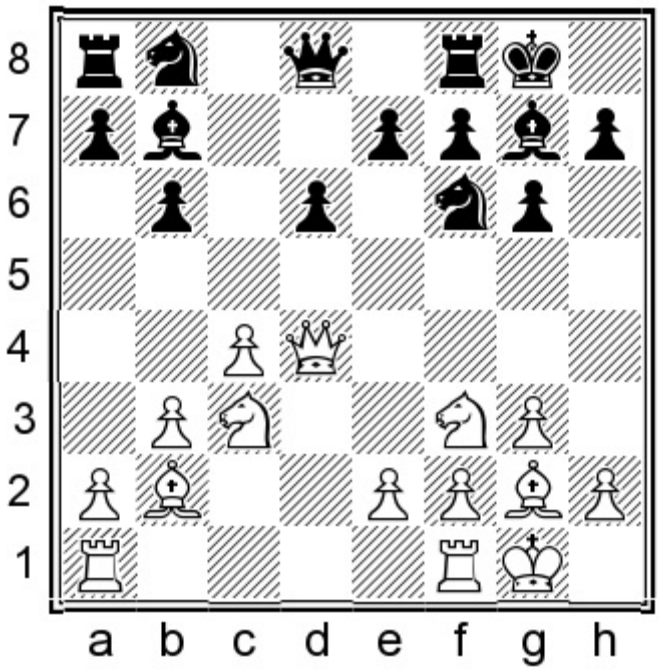


Position after: 14...e6

Black is unable to react in the center, and it's even easy to improve on White's play in Aronian, L (2793) – Vachier- Lagrave, M (2796) Leuven 2017 by playing 15.e4!N 15...d6 16.♕e2 a6 17.♖c2±.

10.♘c3

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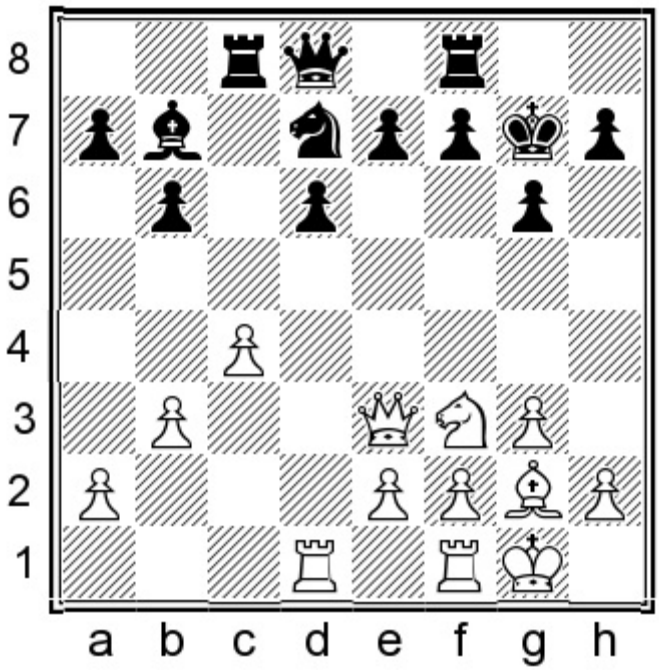


Position after: 10.♘c3

10...♘bd7

We have arrived at a position we are likely to meet often. White has many moves at his disposal, but my preference is to retreat the queen.

White is generally happy to see 10...♘e4 as it's easy for him to control the center: 11.♕e3 ♘xc3 12.♗xc3 ♘d7 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♖ad1 ♖c8



Position after: 14...♖c8

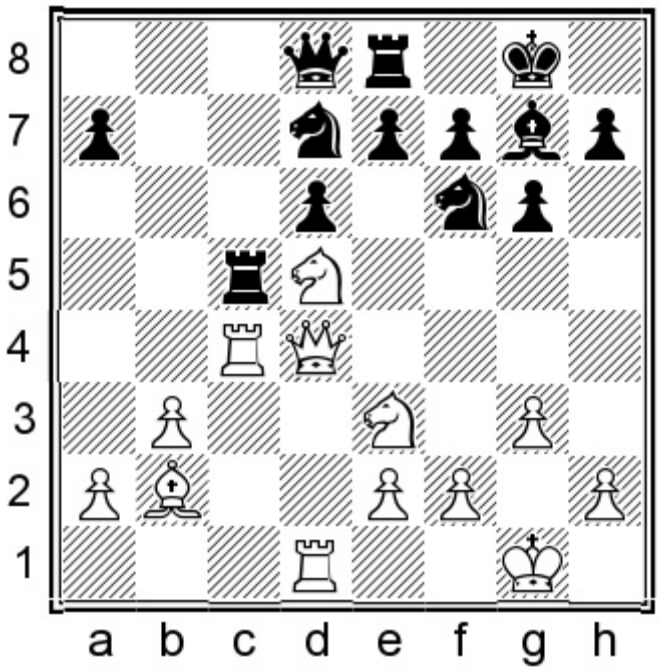
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and now White can start an attack on the kingside after exchanging the minor pieces. For instance, we can leave the game Aronian, L (2803) – Dominguez Perez, L (2754) Beijing 2013 with 15.♘e1!? ♗xg2 16.♘xg2 ♘f6 17.♘f4 ♕c7 18.♘d5 ♘xd5 19.♖xd5→ We can launch an attack with the h-pawn and easily transfer the rook. This is the kind of middlegame where Black has to be very careful.

11.♕d2

A) 11.♘e1 is a recent try by Meier that I quite like, but I prefer the version with ♕d2 first. 11...♗xg2 (11...♘e4 12.♕e3 ♘dc5 13.♖d1 ♗xc3 14.♗xc3 ♘xc3 15.♕xc3 ♕d7 16.♘c2 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2±) 12.♘xg2 ♕c8 13.♘d5 ♖e8 14.♖ac1 ♕b7 15.♘ge3 ♖ac8 16.♖fd1 a6 17.♕d2 ♖c5 18.♗d4 ♖c6 19.a4± 1-0 (34) Meier, G (2648) – Baldauf, M (2431) Dudenhofen 2017.

B) 11.♖ac1 ♖c8 12.♖fd1 ♖c5 13.♘e1 The Chinese grandmaster follows the same plans as in our main line. This is also very instructive, even if I prefer our main continuation. 13...♗xg2 14.♘xg2 ♖e8 15.♘d5 b5 16.♘ge3 bxc4 17.♖xc4 White is happy to trade a few pieces, so that there are fewer defenders around the black king.



Position after: 17.♖xc4

17...♕b8 18.♖xc5 ♘xc5 19.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 20.♕d2 ♗xb2 21.♕xb2 a5 22.♘d5 ♕b7 23.♕c3 ♖a8 24.h4!→ 1-0 (48) Bu Xiangzhi (2725) – Dubov, D (2696) Liaocheng 2018.

11...♖c8

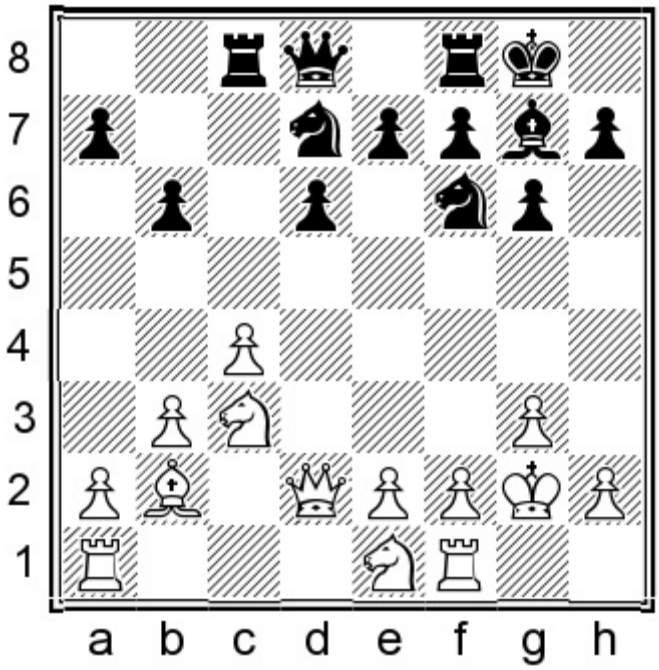
I now like the new move:

12.♘e1N

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12.♘d4 ♗xg2 13.♔xg2 ♘c5 14.f3 d5!= is the reason why we put the knight on e1!

12...♗xg2 13.♔xg2!



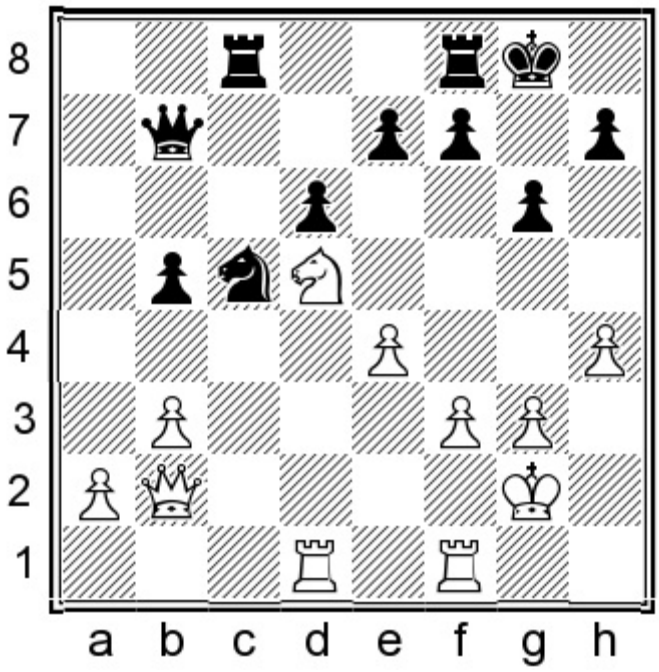
Position after: 13.♔xg2!

It's true that we expose our king with this move, but it won't be for long as we plan to continue with f3 and e4.

The knight will head for d3 to be traded, freeing the way for the rook to come to h1 once we decide to start our attack.

13...♘c5 14.f3 ♕c7 15.e4 ♕b7 16.♘d3 ♘fd7 17.♖ad1 ♘xd3 18.♕xd3 ♘c5 19.♕d2 a6 20.♘d5 ♗xb2 21.♕xb2 b5 22.cxb5 axb5 23.h4→

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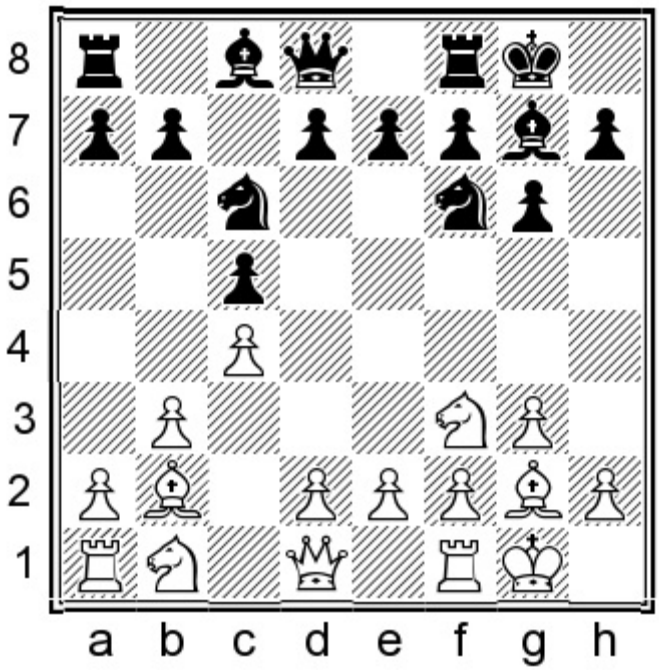


Position after: 23.h4→

And we finally launch the attack.

f) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 --

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0



Position after: 7.0-0

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7...d5?!

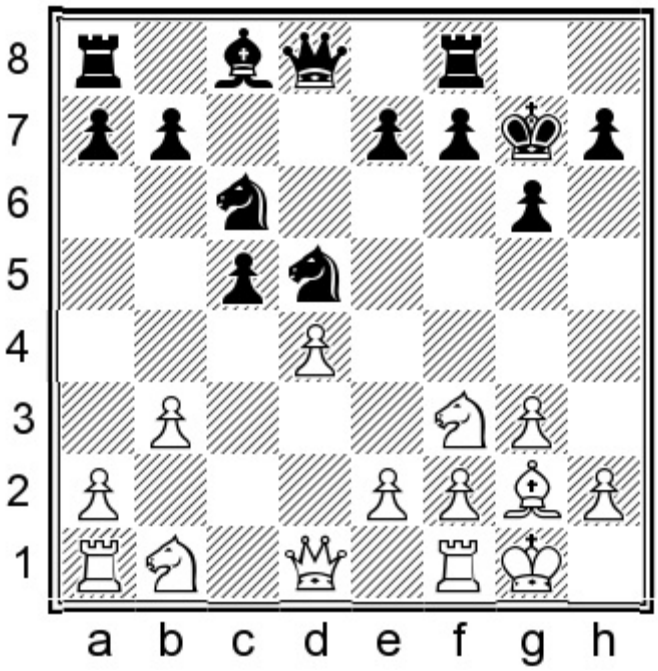
This is the second main move, but I believe that it's simply wrong.

7...b6?! This basically leads to a bad version of the reversed double fianchetto, as the knight has nothing to do on c6. 8.d4! cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♗b7 10.♘c3± Here, I would only mention a trick that worked in one game where my opponent wanted to trade the minor pieces: 10...♕c8?! 11.♖c1 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♘e4 This seems to solve most of the problems, but we have the surprising 13.♘d5! The mating threat forces 13...♗xd4 14.♘xe7+ ♔g7 15.♗xd4+ f6 16.♘xc8 ♖axc8 17.♖fd1+– 1-0 (56) Demuth, A (2600) – Dubessay, B (2360) Chalons-en-Champagne rapid 2015.

8.cxd5 ♘xd5

8...♕xd5? 9.♘e5 ♕d6 10.♘xc6 bxc6 11.♘c3± is obviously pretty bad for Black.

9.♗xg7 ♔xg7 10.d4!



Position after: 10.d4!

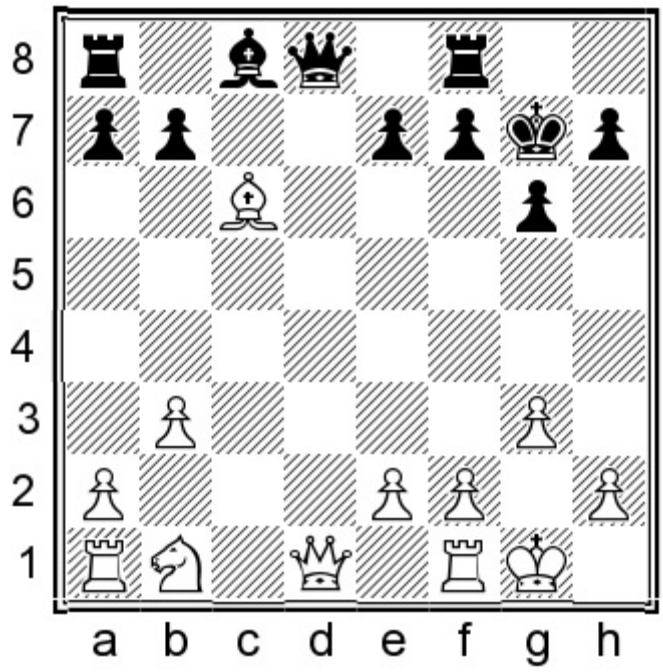
It seems like White is trading too many pieces, but Black is actually in trouble.

10...cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4

A) 11...e5 doesn't help: 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.♘d2 ♕c7 14.♖c1 ♖d8 15.♕c2± We have obtained the perfect pawn structure where the c-pawn has no chance of being traded and will be a long-term weakness.

B) 11...♘db4 12.♘xc6 ♘xc6 13.♗xc6! Probably the strongest and simplest path to an advantage.

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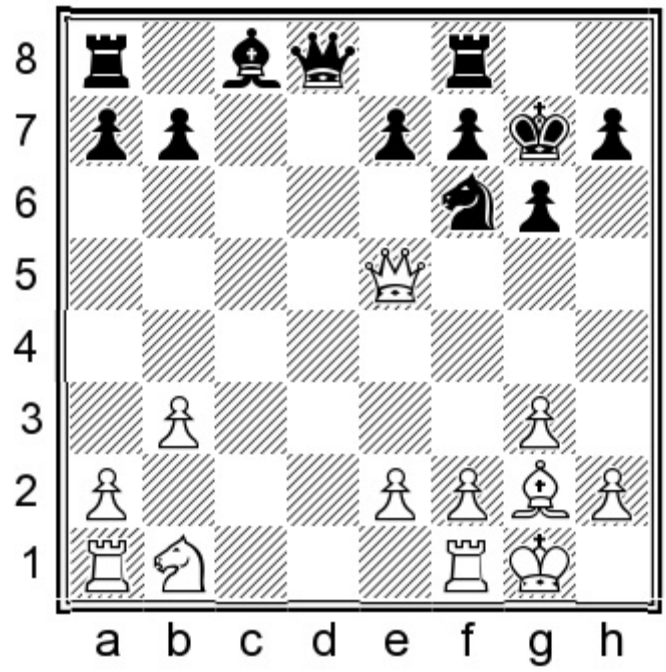
Position after: 13.♗xc6!

This is one of the rare cases where we are happy to trade our fianchettoed bishop for a knight as we want to enter a good knight versus bad bishop endgame with the better pawn structure. 13...bxc6 14.♘c3± The c6-pawn is weak, and we have a perfect square on c5 for our knight. Black obviously has no way of launching an attack against our king, even if he still has his light-squared bishop, and if he wants to free his c-pawn now, he will most probably lose it. For instance 14...c5?! 15.♖c1 (15.♕c2 is fine as well 15...♗f5 16.e4 ♗g4 17.f3 ♗e6 18.♖fd1±) 15...♗e6 16.♘e4 c4 17.bxc4 ♖c8 and despite his win in the game Granda Zuniga, J (2665) – Salgado Lopez, I (2624) Camarinas 2013, White should now prefer 18.♕d3±, keeping everything under control.

12.♕xd4+ ♘f6 13.♕e5!

The queen is perfectly placed here. This is a pretty important move to remember. It pins the knight, keeps an eye on the e7-pawn and on the b8-square so that Black can't put his rook there in order to protect b7. Black has scored terribly in this line.

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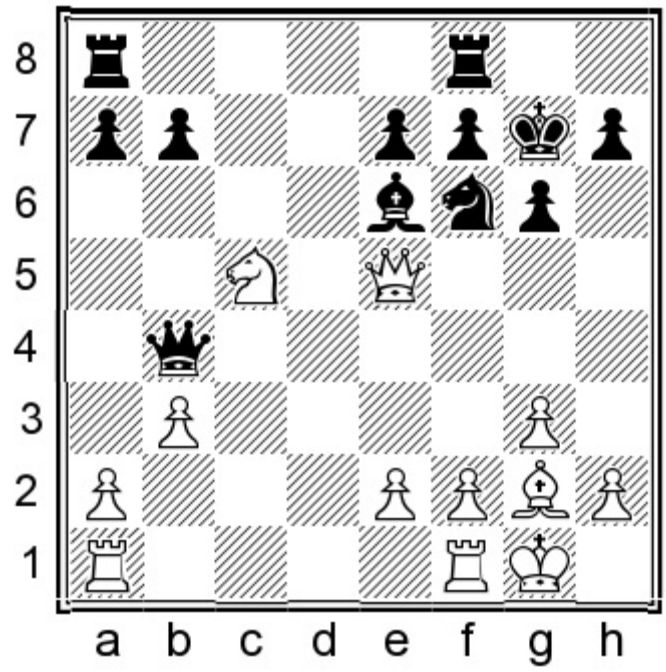


Position after: 13.♕e5!

13...♕d6

Maybe the least of the evils, but Black is going to suffer in the endgame.

A) 13...♕b6 14.♘c3 ♗e6 Black seems to have solved his development problems, but he certainly missed 15.♘a4! ♕b4 16.♘c5



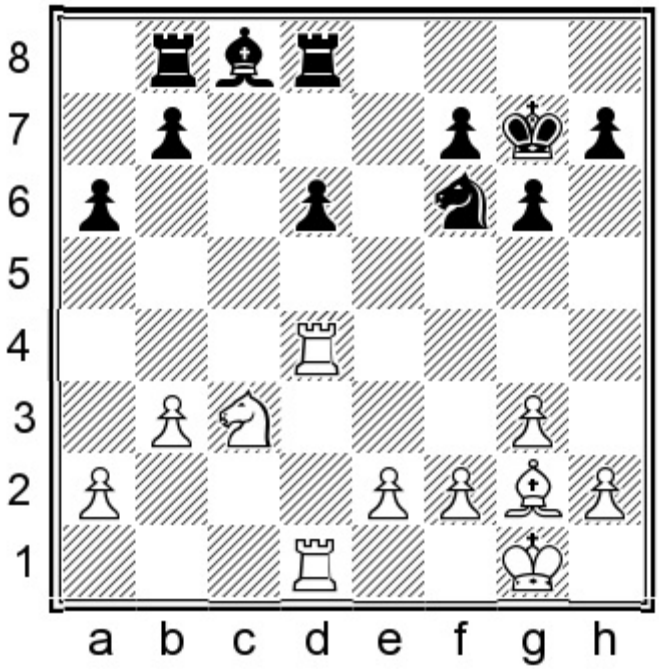
Position after: 16.♘c5

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which wins at least a pawn: 16...♗d5 17.♕xe7 ♔g8 18.♕xf6 ♗xg2 19.♘e6!+– and even two in Meier, G (2656) – Reich, T (2406) Germany 2015.

B) 13...♔g8 14.♘c3 ♘g4 (14...♘d7 15.♕g5 ♘f6 16.♖fd1 ♕b6 17.♘a4 ♕a6 18.♗f3±) 15.♕c5± Once again, Black doesn't have any useful move.

14.♕xd6 exd6 15.♘c3 ♖d8 16.♖fd1 a6 17.♖d4 ♖b8 18.♖ad1±



Position after: 18.♖ad1±

Black has complicated his task but it was already tough for him:

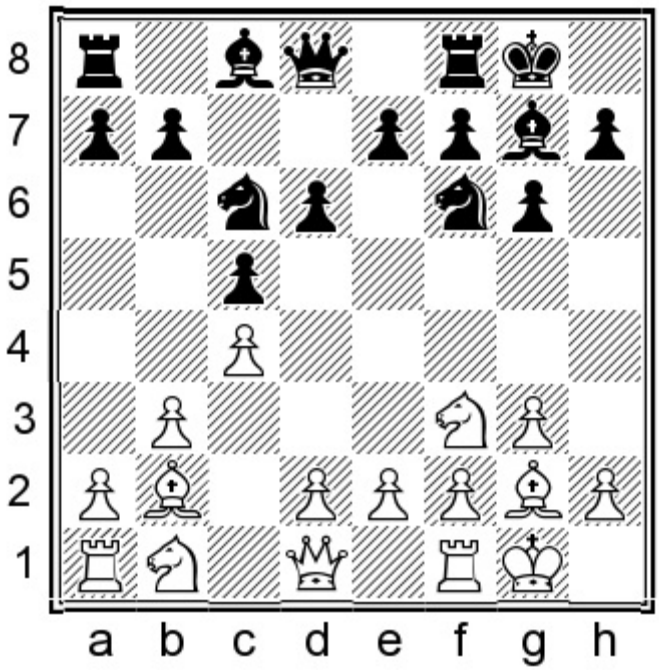
18...♗f5 19.e4 ♗g4?! 20.e5! ♗xd1 21.exf6+ ♔xf6 22.♖xd1+–

With a technically won game for White, Karjakin, S (2756) – Ponomariov, R (2731) Beijing 2013.

g) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 --

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6

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Position after: 7...d6

Again, it's important to mention that this position can arise through various move orders. For instance, I also reached this position after a King's Indian move order (where I decided not to transpose into the main line with d4).

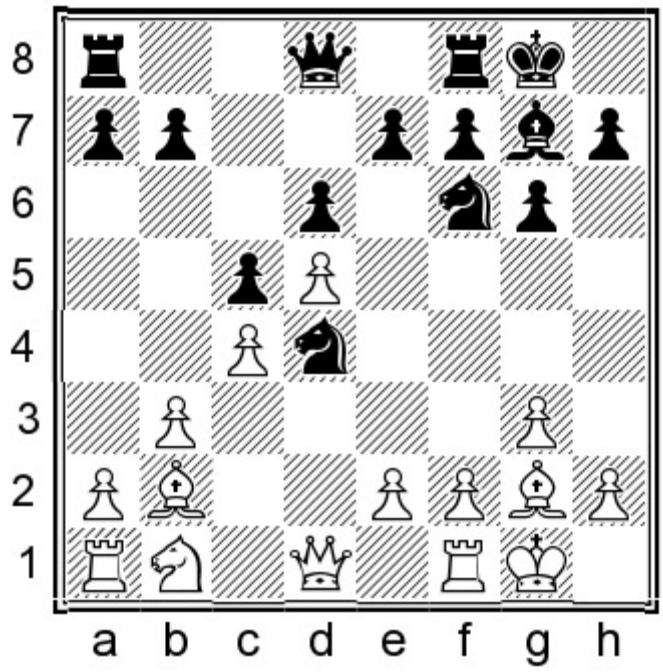
8.d4!

The time has come to open the center. Most of the time Black simply takes, but he also has other interesting possibilities.

8...♘e4!?

A) 8...♗g4?! The moves that allow d4-d5 aren't great for Black. 9.d5 ♗xf3 10.♗xf3! (10.exf3?! would be great if 10...♘d4! wasn't possible: 11.f4 ♘d7 12.♘c3 ♖b8 13.♖e1 a6∞) 10...♘d4 11.♗g2

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Position after: 11.♗g2

11...♘d7 (11...♘f5 12.♘c3 White has the bishop pair, and a free hand in the center. Black is only fighting for survival in this game 12...♕a5 13.e3 a6 14.♕d3±) 12.♘c3 ♕a5 13.♖c1 a6 14.♗h3! ♘f6 15.g4! Black has not been careful enough, and his knight is now trapped in the center. 15...b5 16.e3 b4 17.exd4 bxc3 18.♗xc3 ♕b6 19.♖e1+– 1-0 (29) Ivanov, M (2403) – Afanasiev, N (2131) Kaluga 2012.

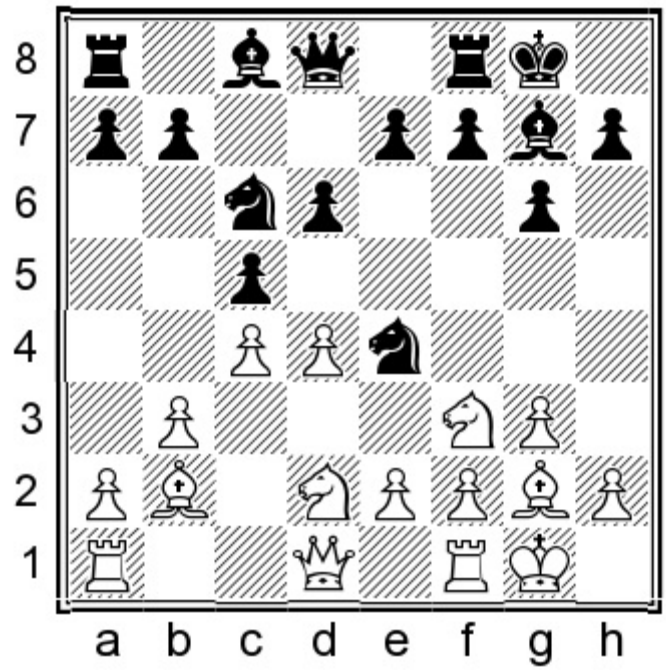
B) 8...♗f5?! 9.d5 ♘b8 10.♘c3 ♘e4 (10...a6 11.♘d2!? ♕c8 12.e4 ♗h3 13.f4!±) 11.♕c1±

9.h3!?

This has been played by Kramnik himself. It seems a bit slow, but it's quite clever, as it prevents ...♗g4 and makes ...♗f5 weaker (as g4 would follow). It's clearly more forcing than the other moves and Black has to change his plan as ♕c2 now comes as a threat.

A) 9.♘bd2!? Before writing this book, this was my main move and I even played it, but it doesn't satisfy me any more because of one of Black's possibilities (see A3):

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Position after: 9.♘bd2!?

A1) 9...♘xd2?! 10.♕xd2 cxd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♗xd4 ♗xd4 13.♕xd4±

A2) 9...f5?! 10.♘xe4 fxe4 11.♘g5 ♘xd4 12.♗xe4 e6 13.e3 ♘f3+ (13...♕xg5 14.exd4 ♕f6 15.♕d2 cxd4 16.f4!± followed by ♖ad1) 14.♘xf3 ♗xb2 15.♖b1 ♗g7 16.h4!→

A3) 9...♗f5! 10.♘h4 This is the only way to try something against the threat to the d4-pawn. 10...♘xd2! 11.♕xd2 ♘xd4! (≤ 11...♗d7 12.e3 cxd4 13.exd4 e5 14.d5± 1-0 (45) Demuth, A (2542) – Burnier, D (2305) Flims 2016) 12.♘xf5 ♘xf5 13.♗xg7 ♘xg7 14.♗xb7 ♖b8 15.♗f3= I don't think White is better here. We can try to launch an attack, but it's unlikely to work well, whereas Black can start a breakthrough on the queenside by means of ...a5-a4, and exert some pressure on b3.

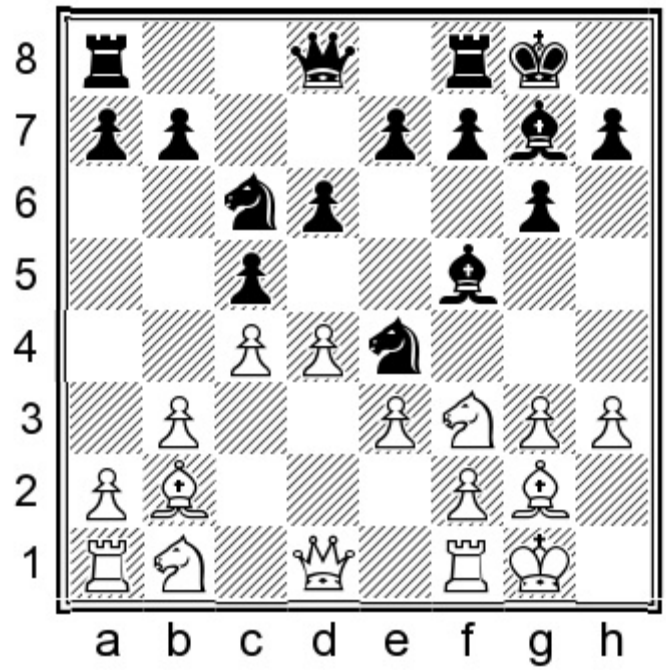
B) 9.e3 is met by 9...♗g4 10.♕c1 ♗xf3 11.♗xf3 ♘g5 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.dxc5 dxc5 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7± White is obviously better, but objectively it's not so easy to win, and Black can hold by means of his activity.

9...♗f5

9...♕a5?! 10.♕c2! ♗f5 11.g4! ♘b4 12.♕c1 ♗d7 13.d5±

10.e3

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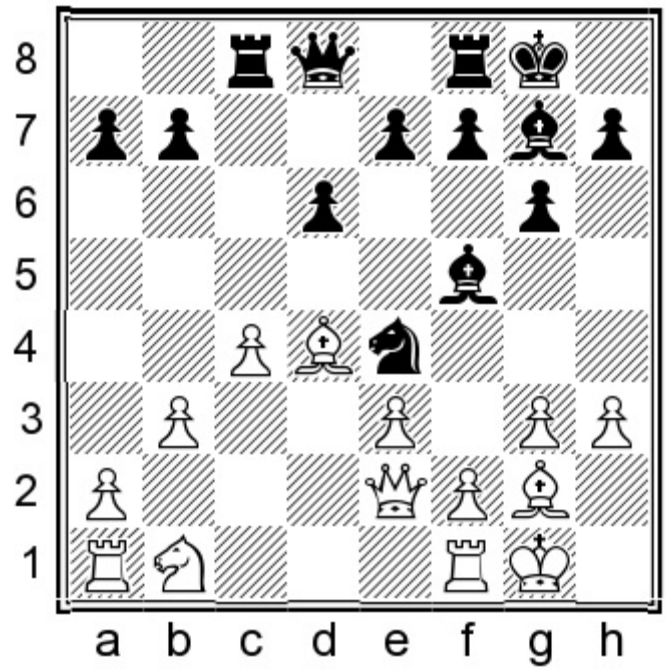


Position after: 10.e3

10...♖c8

10...♘f6?! This shows that Black has played the opening incorrectly. 11.♘c3 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♗d7 13.♕e2± White is many tempi ahead compared to the main line, and he won convincingly in Kramnik, V (2783) – Caruana, F (2811) Zurich 2015.

11.♕e2 cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘xd4 13.♗xd4±

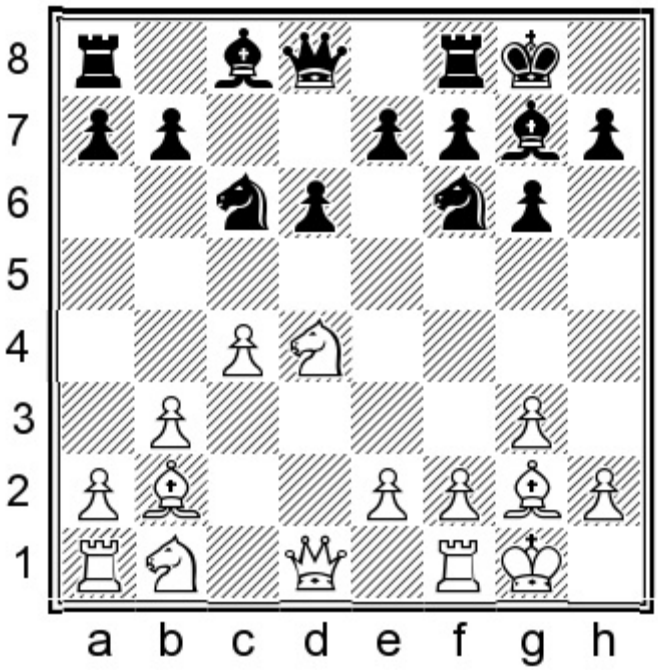


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Position after: 13.♗xd4±

h) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.♘xd4 --, 9...♗d7 10.♘c3 --

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.♘xd4

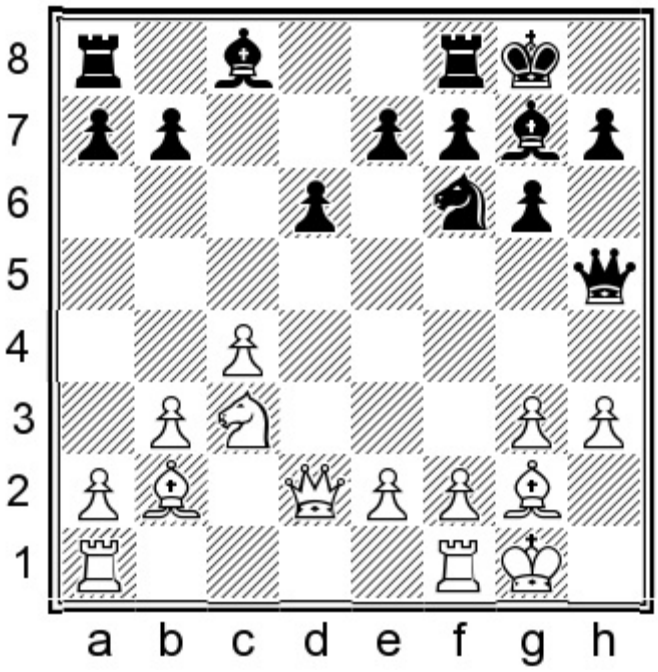


Position after: 9.♘xd4

9...♗d7

9...♘xd4 Black shouldn't hurry in taking because after 10.♕xd4 he has trouble developing his queenside: 10...♕a5 (10...♘e8 11.♕d2 ♗xb2 12.♕xb2 ♖b8 13.♘c3 b6 14.e4 ♗b7 15.♖ad1± with a huge space advantage for White) 11.♘c3 ♘g4!? Black sometimes decides to start this primitive attack. 12.♕d2 ♕h5 13.h3 ♘f6

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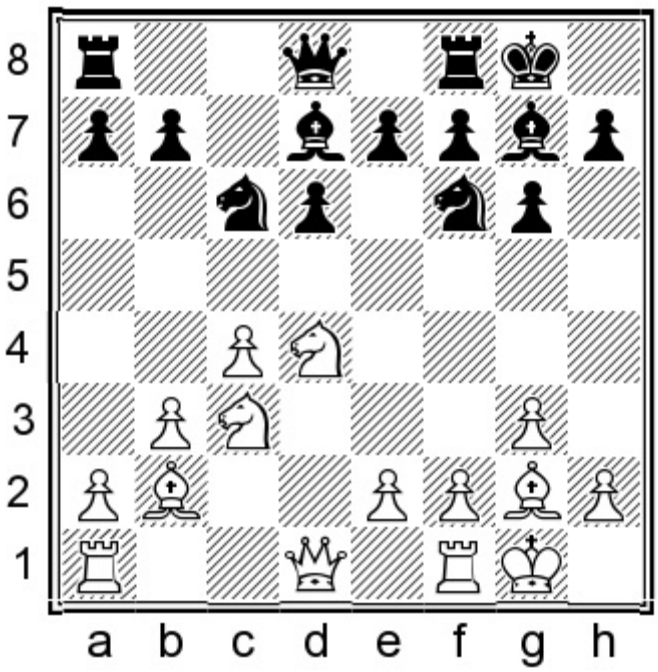


Position after: 13...♘f6

A) 14.g4?! might be too weakening: 14...♕h4∞ and ...h5 is a threat. (14...♗xg4?! 15.hxg4 ♘xg4 16.♖fd1±)

B) 14.h4! h6 15.♗f3 ♗g4 16.♗xb7 ♖ab8 17.♗g2 g5 18.hxg5 hxg5 19.f3 ♗e6 20.♔f2± and Black's attack was finally turning against him in Sharif, M (2463) – Edouard, R (2221) Cannes 2005.

10.♘c3



Position after: 10.♘c3

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We have reached one of the main crossroads. Black can take now on d4, or wait for a better occasion. His long-term plan is usually to play ...b5 to start a kind of minority attack on the queenside. It's going to be very important to keep this in mind and prevent that. We have a spatial advantage, but Black remains really solid. The aim is to make him suffer, by improving our position littly by little.

10.e3 is not so strong here, because of 10...♘xd4 11.exd4 d5⇄

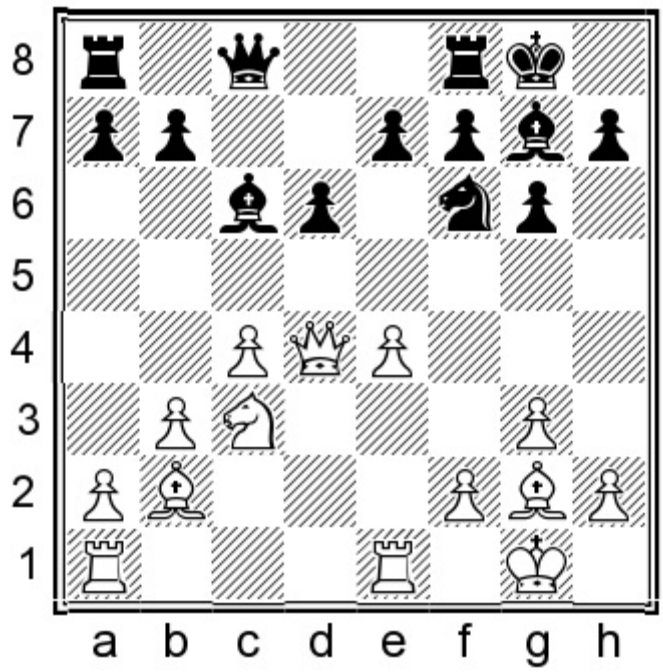
10...♘xd4

This has been played almost as often as 11...♕a5, but I think it's less ambitious, and we don't have much difficulty achieving the better position.

A) 10...a6 11.e3 I don't see any real way for Black to avoid the main line.

B) 10...♖c8 11.♕d2?! (11.e3 ♕a5 transposes into the next subchapter) justifies Black's ...♘xd4, so I don't think it's the best. If I had known the right plan before, I wouldn't have played as in the following game: 11...a6 12.♖ac1 ♘xd4 13.♕xd4 ♗c6 14.♘d5 ♗xd5 15.♗xd5⇄ 0-1 (39) Demuth, A (2545) – Adhiban, B (2674) Berlin 2015.

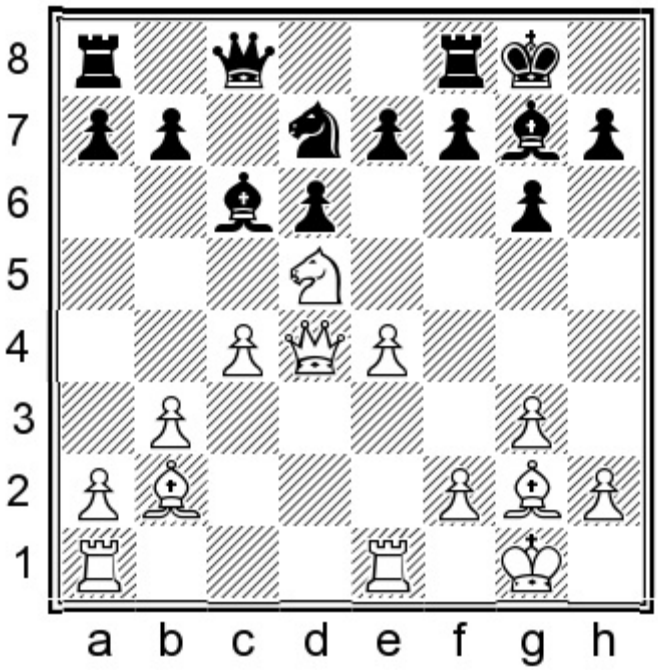
C) 10...♕c8 Black once tried to trade the light-squared bishops in one of my games, but it's easy to avoid: 11.♖e1 ♘xd4 12.♕xd4 ♗c6 13.e4!



Position after: 13.e4!

This is a trick I've already mentioned, and even if my opponent didn't choose the most logical way, he still stumbled : 13...♘d7? (13...♘xe4? 14.♘d5 works the same way 14...♗xd4 15.♘xe7+ ♔g7 16.♗xd4+ ♘f6 17.♘xc8 ♖axc8 18.g4! g5 19.h4 h6 20.f4 ♔g6 21.h5+ ♔g7 22.fxg5 hxg5 23.♖f1+–) 14.♘d5!

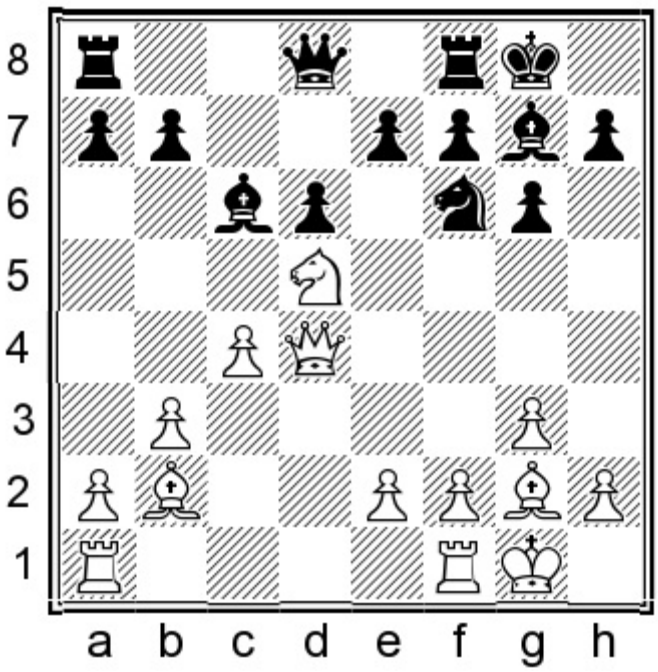
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Position after: 14.♘d5!

14...♗xd4 15.♘xe7+ ♔g7 16.♗xd4+ f6 17.♘xc8 ♖fxc8 18.♖ad1+– 1-0 (23) Demuth, A (2600) – Sauviat, T (2320) Chalons-en-Champagne rapid 2015.

11.♕xd4 ♗c6 12.♘d5



Position after: 12.♘d5

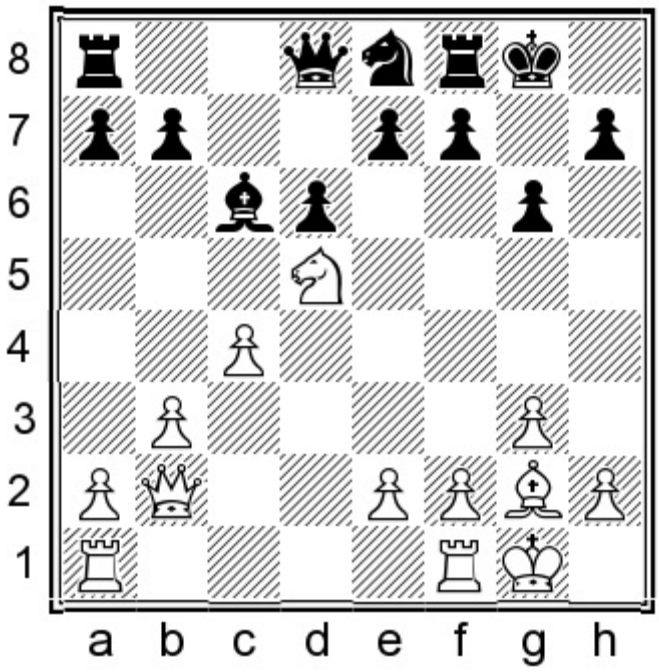
We are quite happy to keep our fianchettoed bishop, as long as we don't have to take on d5 with the

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pawn.

12...♗xd5!?

12...♘e8 13.♕d2 ♗xb2 14.♕xb2

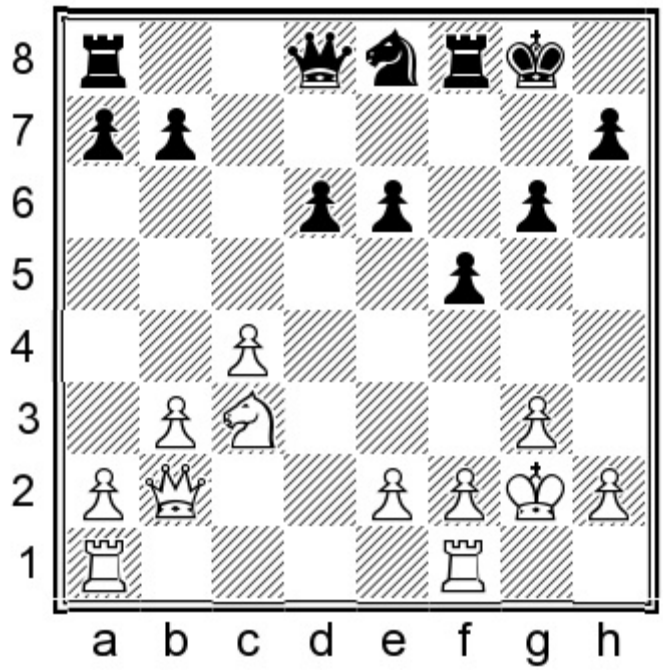


Position after: 14.♕xb2

A) In case of 14...♘c7 I would suggest 15.♘c3!N 15...♗xg2 16.♔xg2±. We have already discussed this kind of structure. We have good control over the center, which allows us to think about a kingside attack starting with h4. Black will have to organize counterplay by means of ...b5 at some point, but I prefer White.

B) 14...e6 This gives us a chance to target the d6-pawn! 15.♘c3 (15.♘f4!? ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♕e7 17.e4 ♘f6 18.f3 a6 19.♖fd1 b5 20.♕a3 bxc4 21.e5! ♘d5 22.♘xd5 exd5 23.♕xd6 ♕xd6 24.exd6 cxb3 25.axb3± 1-0 (27) Tarasov, A (2342) – Dvalishvili, P (2421) Moscow 2016) 15...♗xg2 16.♔xg2 f5

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Position after: 16...f5

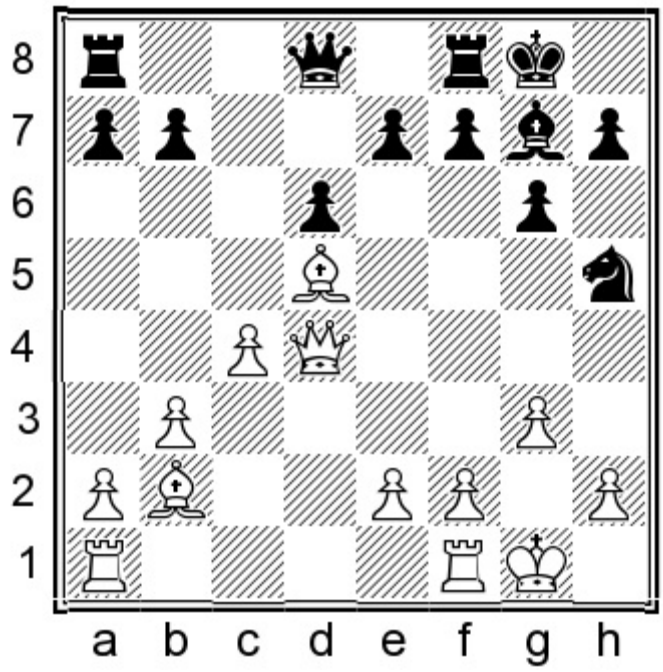
This can look frightening, but it's simply too artificial, and our king is safe. 17.♖ad1 ♕f6 18.♖d3 a6 19.♕d2 ♖c8 20.a4! Preventing ...b5 for good. 20...♖f7 21.f4!? ♖fc7 22.e4 ♕f7 23.♖e1± with an overwhelming advantage for White in Landa, K (2626) – Fejzullahu, A (2367) Skopje 2015.

13.♗xd5!

13.cxd5!? was played in a top-level game, but I find it quite surprising as it renders the g2-bishop less effective, and I don't really like to play with such a piece! 13...♕a5 14.♗c3 ♕a6 15.♕d2 ♖fc8 16.♖fc1 ♕b5 17.♖ab1 a5 18.e4 ♘d7= and the American won in So, W (2779) – Grischuk, A (2771) Saint Louis 2015, but I don't feel too confident about reaching an advantage.

13...♘h5

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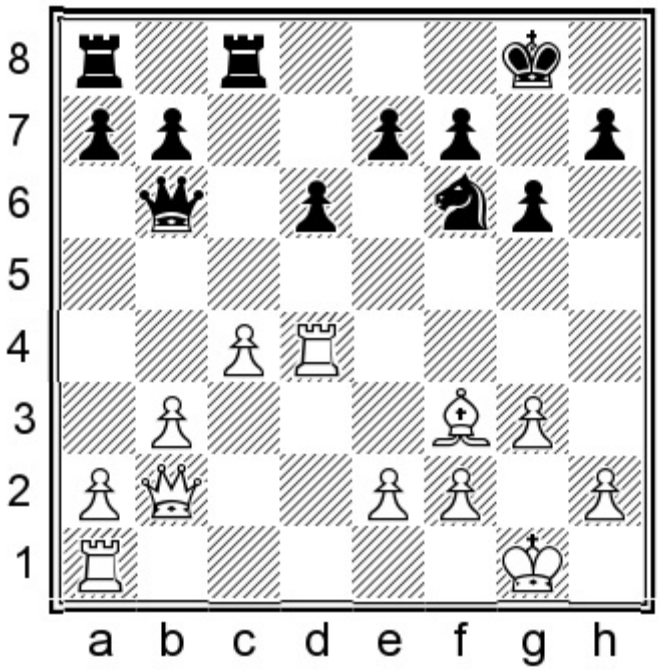
Position after: 13...♘h5

“When you are playing against the bishop pair, trade your own bishop to transpose into a bishop versus knight position” is advice I have always kept in mind. That’s why I think it’s the right choice for Black. In the same spirit: 13...♘e8 14.♕d2 ♗xb2 15.♕xb2 ♕b6 and the players decided to agree a draw now in Bachmann, A (2649) – Vitiugov, N (2728) Biel 2016, but White can safely keep playing. It’s similar to 13...♘h5.

14.♕d2 ♗xb2 15.♕xb2 ♕b6 16.♗f3 ♘f6 17.♖fd1 ♖fc8 18.♖d4!

This protects c4, prepares to double the rooks, and creates the possibility of going to h4 to put some pressure on the kingside.

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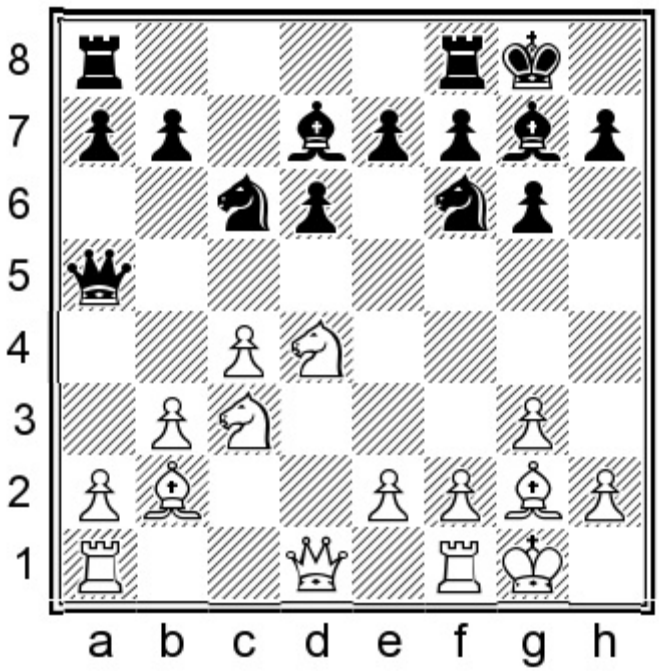
Position after: 18.♖d4!

18...♖c5 19.♖ad1 ♘d7 20.♕d2 a5 21.♖h4!?↑

1-0 (37) Bernadskiy, V (2527) – Borovikov, V (2556) Paleochora 2016

i) 3...g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4 cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♗d7 10.♘c3 ♕a5

1.♘f3 c5 2.c4 ♘f6 3.b3!? g6 4.♗b2 ♗g7 5.g3 ♘c6 6.♗g2 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.d4! cxd4 9.♘xd4 ♗d7 10.♘c3 ♕a5!?



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Position after: 10...♕a5!?

This move contains several ideas:

1) it helps with playing ...b5;

2) it frees the way for the f8-rook to come to c8 (as the two most important files for Black are the b- and c-files);

3) it allows a possible ...♕h5 to disrupt White's harmony on the kingside;

4) it keeps an eye on the c3-knight which can become under attack both on the c-file and the long diagonal.

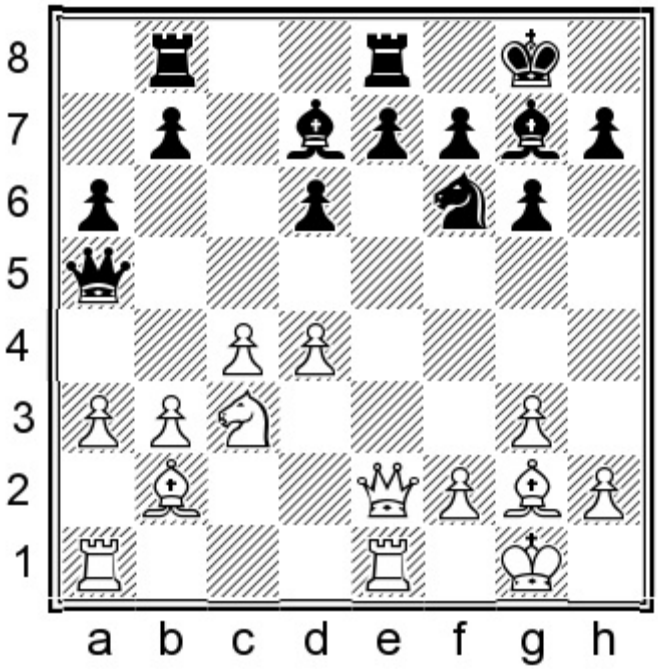
All of which explains our next move...

11.e3!

Preventing ...♕h5, because we would be happy to trade queens, and allowing us to put our queen on e2, from where it helps prevent ...b5 and eyes the e7-pawn in the event of Black taking on d4. It's hard to be exhaustive in these kinds of positions, as there are many basically equivalent possibilities.

11...♖fc8

A) 11...a6 12.♕e2 ♖ab8 13.♖fe1 ♘xd4 14.exd4 ♖fe8 15.a3!?



Position after: 15.a3!?

If it's possible to chase the queen, we should try to do it! 15...♕b6 16.b4 ♕c7 17.♖ac1 ♖bc8 18.♘d1! e5?! (18...♗c6?! 19.d5 ♗d7 20.c5±) 19.dxe5 ♘g4 20.♘c3 ♕xc4 21.♗xb7±

B) 11...♗g4?! I faced this move once, but it's not a problem at all, as Black doesn't have time to

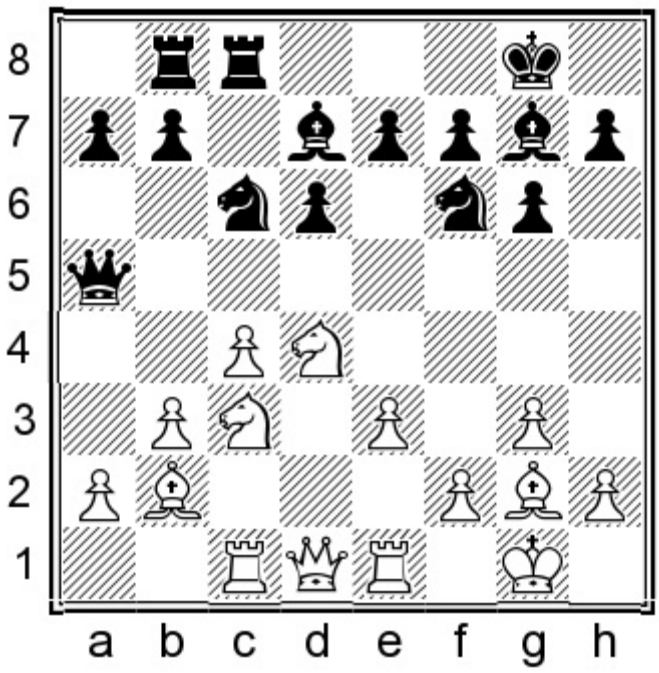
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follow up with ...♕h5 (because of the problem on c6). 12.♕d2 ♖ac8 13.h3 ♗e6 Objectively my opponent should put his bishop back on d7, but I don't think he wanted to admit that 11...♗g4 was a bad idea. 14.♖fd1 ♔h8 15.♖ac1 a6 16.♘ce2!? ♕xd2 17.♖xd2 ♘xd4 18.♗xd4 ♖c7 19.♗b6!± with a great endgame that I converted after almost wasting it: Demuth, A (2521) – Puccini, J (2322) Brisbane 2017.

C) 11...♖ac8 The wrong rook! Now Black is unlikely to manage ...b5 under favorable conditions. 12.♖c1 a6 13.a3 b5 (13...♘xd4 14.exd4 b5?! 15.b4! ♕c7 16.c5↑ justifies our last two moves) 14.cxb5 (Better than 14.♘xc6 as played in Mikhalevski, V (2504) – Raptis, N (2262) chess.com 2017, 1-0 (35).) 14...♘xd4 15.♕xd4 axb5 16.♘d5! ♕d8 17.♖xc8 ♗xc8 18.♘b4±

12.♕e2

12.♖e1 I once started with this move because I didn't want to lose a tempo in case of ...♗g4. It's probably equivalent. 12...♖ab8 13.♖c1

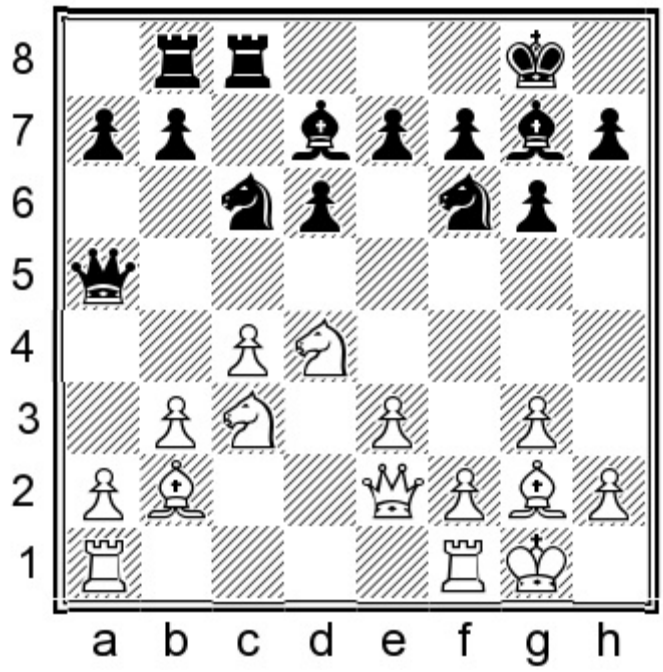


Position after: 13.♖c1

My opponent was already out of useful moves here, and played pretty badly with 13...♕d8?! 14.♕e2 a6 15.h3 ♗f8 16.♘c2 ♗g7 17.♖ed1 ♖c7 18.e4! ♖cc8 19.♘e3± 1-0 (28) Demuth, A (2545) – Weller, M (2181) Germany 2017.

12...♖ab8

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Position after: 12...♖ab8

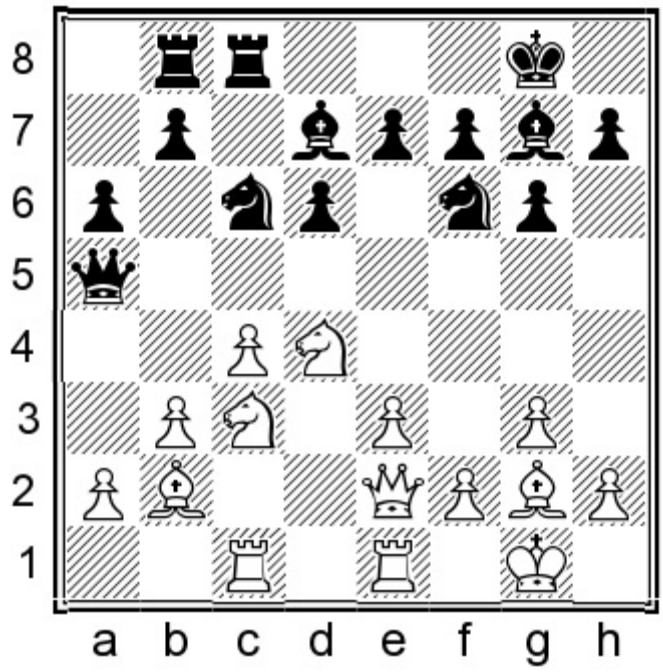
12...♗g4 is not particularly good as the bishop is not great on g4, and we can meet the idea of ...♕h5 with 13.♕d2 ♕h5?! 14.♘de2! ♕a5 Drygalov, S (2400) – Fedorov, A (2565) Samara 2016. I now prefer 15.h3! ♗d7 16.♖fd1±.

13.♖ac1

Even though he was getting on in years, Smyslov came up with another interesting plan: 13.♖fd1 a6 14.♘xc6 ♗xc6 15.e4!? b5 16.♘d5 ♗xd5 17.cxd5 ♘d7 18.♗xg7 ♔xg7 19.♗h3 ♖b7 and got a solid advantage in Smyslov, V (2550) – Relange, E (2460) Cannes 1996, with 20.♖ac1! ♖xc1 21.♖xc1 ♘c5 22.♕b2+ f6 23.b4 ♘d3 24.bxa5 ♘xb2 25.♖c6±.

13...a6 14.♖fe1!±

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Position after: 14.♖fe1!±

Black is unable to push ...b5 now, so he still needs to find a plan. He soon collapsed in the following game:

14...♗g4 15.♕f1 ♗d7 16.h3 ♕c5? 17.♘d5! ♖e8 18.♖ed1 ♕a5 19.♘xf6+ exf6 20.♗c3±

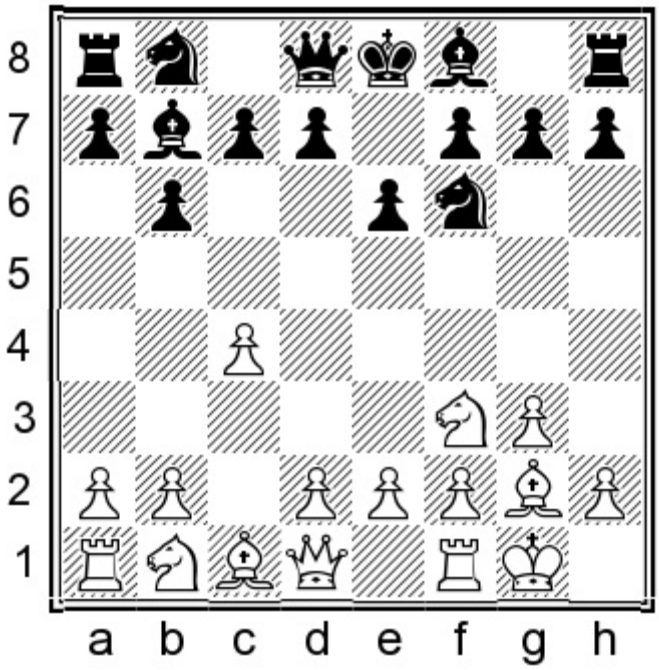
1-0 Smyslov, V (2620) – Stull, N (2255) Skopje 1972.

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Part V
Other Systems 1.♘f3

Chapter 15
The Hedgehog

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0



Chapter guide

Chapter 15 – The Hedgehog

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4

a) 5.-- & 6.-- alternatives

b) 8...♘c6

c) 8...0-0 9.♖d1 ♕c8

d) 8...0-0 9.♖d1 d6

e) 8...d6 9.♖d1 --, 9...a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4 ♕b8, 11...♕c7

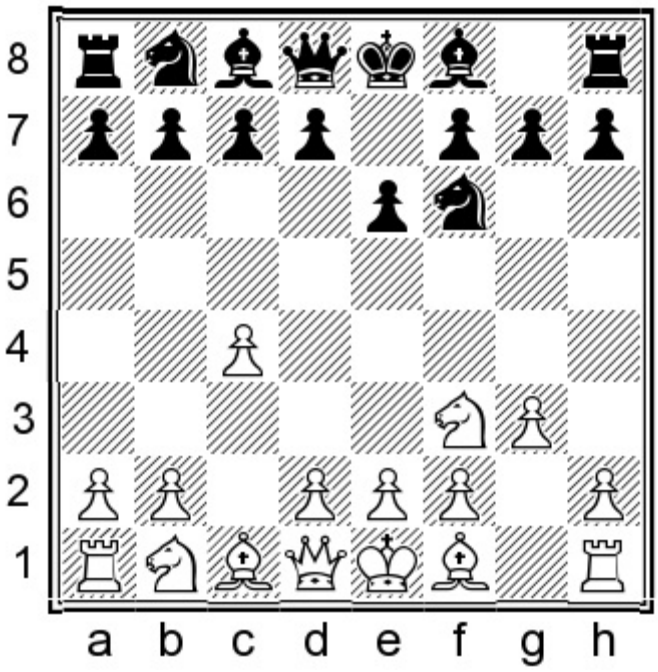
f) 8...d6 9.♖d1 a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4 0-0

g) 8...d6 9.♖d1 a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4 ♕c8

a) 5.-- & 6.-- alternatives

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1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3

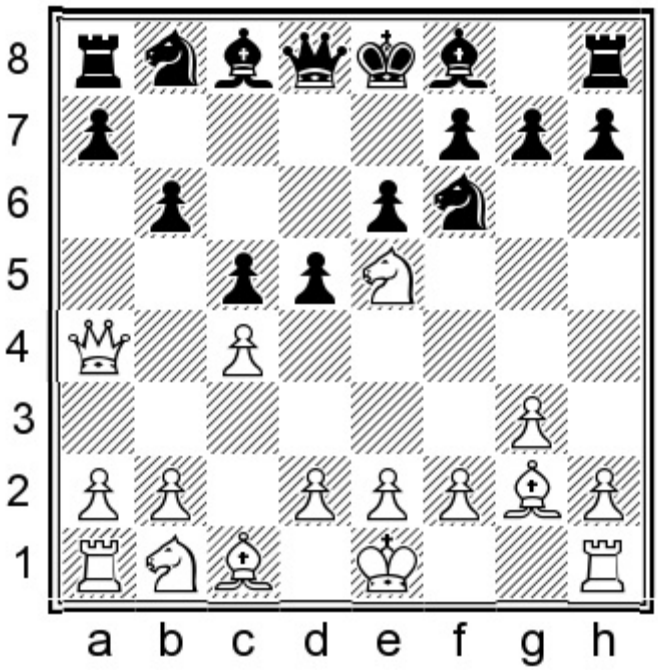


Position after: 3.g3

In this chapter and the next we are going to focus on two systems generally played by Nimzo-Indian players. As they are unable to play a real Nimzo against our move order, and may dislike 3...d5 (for instance because White can transpose into a Catalan), they have to turn to one of the following two systems.

3...b6

Before entering the main theory of the Hedgehog, it is worth mentioning that Black can't start with 3...c5 4.♗g2 b6? 5.♘e5 d5 6.♕a4+!

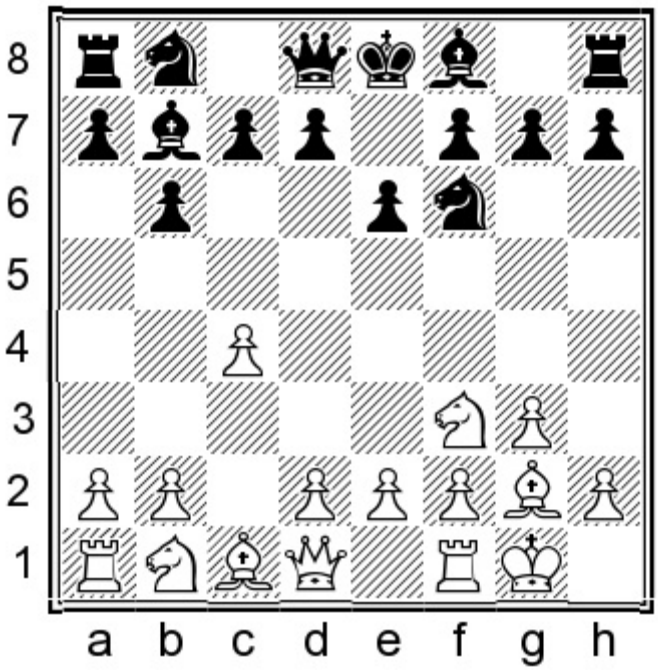


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Position after: 6.♕a4+!

6...♘bd7 (6...♗d7?! 7.♘xd7 ♕xd7 8.♕xd7+ ♘bxd7 9.♘c3± White gets the bishop pair already, and now grabs a pawn. He should win quite easily.) 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3 ♗b7 9.d3 ♗d6 10.♘c4! ♗c7 11.♘e3±

4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0

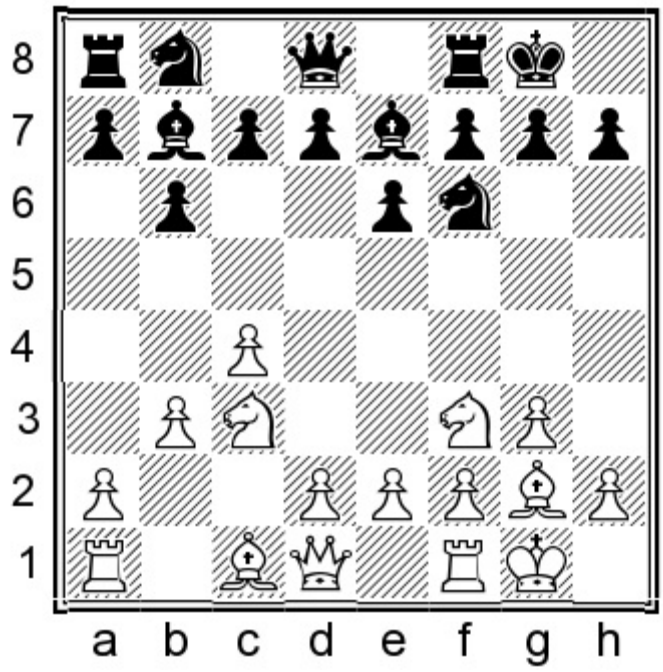


Position after: 5.0-0

5...c5

5...♗e7 might seem a smart move order, but we have an answer for everything. 6.♘c3 0-0 (6...c5 just transposes into the 6...♗e7 line of the Hedgehog.) 7.b3! (7.d4 would be a classical line of the Queen's Indian. You can of course transpose into this, but that's not our objective.)

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Position after: 7.b3!

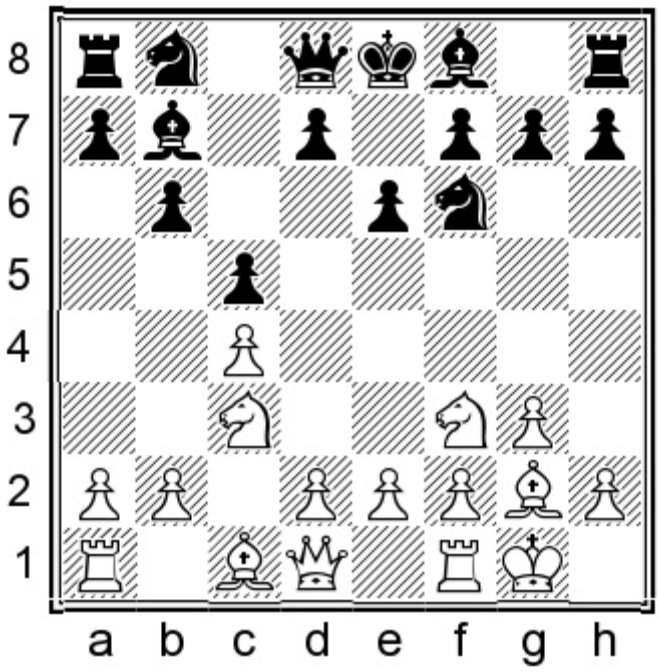
A) 7...c5 We already discussed this position in the previous chapter, in the line with 3...b6. It generally transposes into the Hedgehog, but we explained other possibilities for Black (mainly based on ...d5).

B) 7...d6 8.♗b2 ♘bd7 9.d4±

C) 7...d5 8.e3! This is going to transpose into chapter 5 on the Neo-Catalan (8.♗b2 d4 is possible as well, but is a new line).

6.♘c3

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Position after: 6.♘c3

We are at the beginning of the Hedgehog Defense. This has always been a very reliable system for Black, and I don't pretend that I am going to refute it.

In my first years of chess, I never liked to play against the Hedgehog, or these kinds of set-ups. This is probably the case for other players too. Black follows a simple plan, with a lot of obvious moves, whereas White must find useful ideas, and might even feel quite frustrated if he doesn't find anything concrete.

So I tried to find a way to get a straightforward plan, no matter what Black plays. I think I am offering an easy-to-play and positionally tricky repertoire against the Hedgehog. The result for me is that I am now happy to face this defense, and have enjoyed some good results as well.

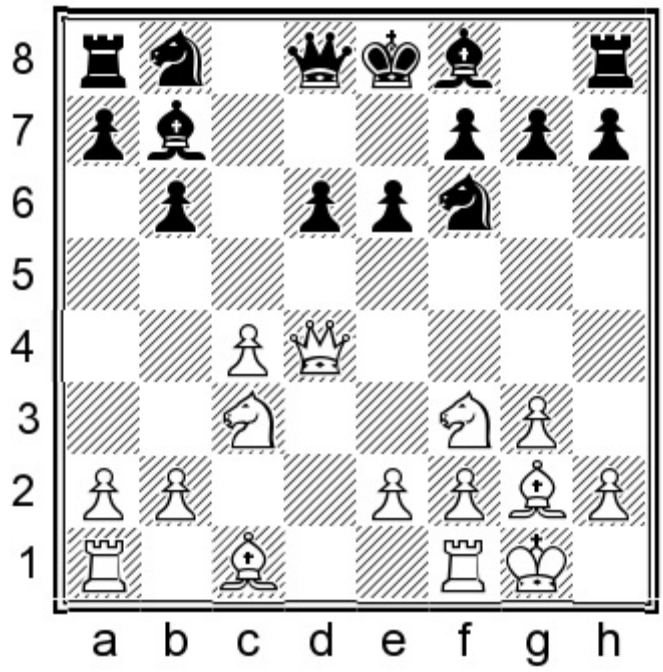
I also need to explain why this opening is covered here, and not in Part 4, the Symmetrical English. It's mainly because experience has shown me that the Hedgehog is generally played by Nimzo-Indian players, as they can often get a classical structure as in the Nimzo and the move order is perfect for them, so I preferred to include it here. Black can now start with different move orders but it doesn't change much for us as we are using the double fianchetto systems in any case.

We'll have a look at the differences offered by the other move orders, but in most cases, they will simply transpose into the main line.

6...a6

A) 6...d6 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4

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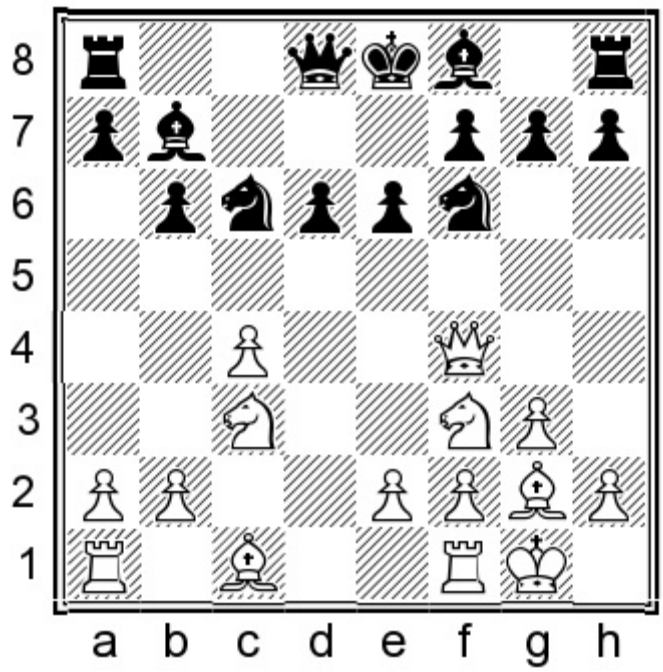
Position after: 8.♕xd4

A1) 8...♗e7 – see the main line.

A2) 8...♘bd7? Not everything is permitted! 9.♘b5! d5 10.♗f4! ♖c8 (10...♗c5 amounts to the same after 11.♘d6+ ♗xd6 12.♗xd6 ♖c8 13.cxd5 ♗xd5 14.♖fc1±) 11.cxd5! ♗xd5 12.♖ac1 ♗c5 13.♘d6+ ♗xd6 14.♗xd6±

A3) 8...a6 – see 6...a6.

A4) 8...♘c6 This move isn't great, no matter the move order (6...a6, 6...d6 or 6...♗e7). However, in each of the three versions, we must face it differently. 9.♕f4!

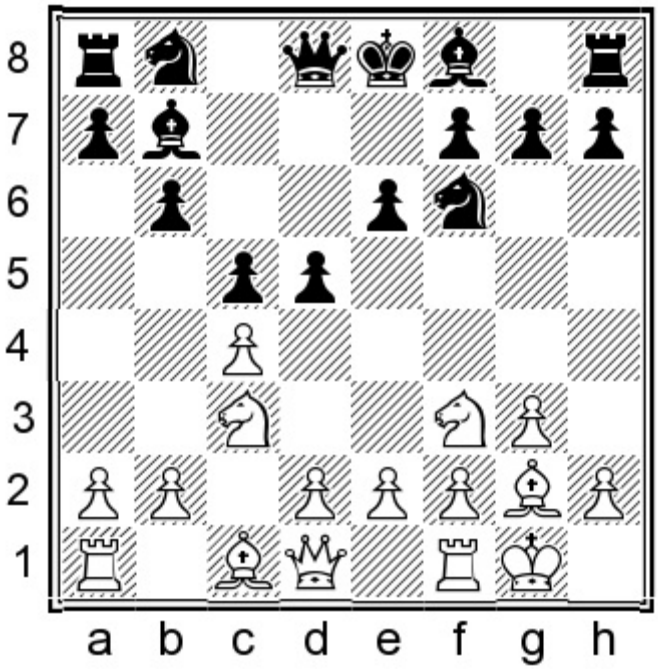


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Position after: 9.♕f4!

Taking advantage of the fact that the d-pawn is already on the sixth rank. 9...♗e7 (9...♘e7?! is too slow here: 10.e4! ♘g6 11.♕e3 ♗e7 12.♖d1 0-0 13.b3± and d6 is in danger.) 10.♖d1 We transpose to 8...♘c6 in the main line (subchapter 'b').

B) 6...d5?!



Position after: 6...d5?!

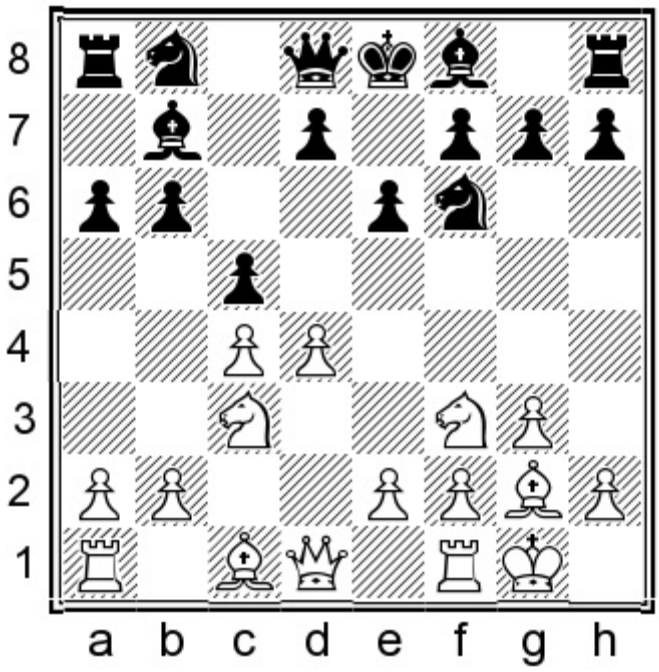
This is a rare guest in practice. We won't transpose into a Neo-Catalan. 7.cxd5

B1) 7...exd5 8.d4 ♘bd7! (8...♗e7?! 9.dxc5! bxc5 10.♕b3 ♕b6 11.♘e5± Black is going to lose the d5-pawn in the next few moves.) 9.♗f4 ♗e7 10.♘h4 g6 11.dxc5 ♘xc5 12.♗h6± Black's kingside is already weak, he is unable to castle, and he has an isolated d-pawn. Even if we had to put our knight on h4, Black is clearly not doing great.

B2) 7...♘xd5 keeps a healthy pawn structure, but we can make use of our lead in development to open the center: 8.d4 ♘d7 (8...♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♗e7 10.♖e1 0-0 11.e4±) 9.♘xd5 ♗xd5 10.♖e1! ♗e7 11.e4 ♗b7 12.d5±

7.d4

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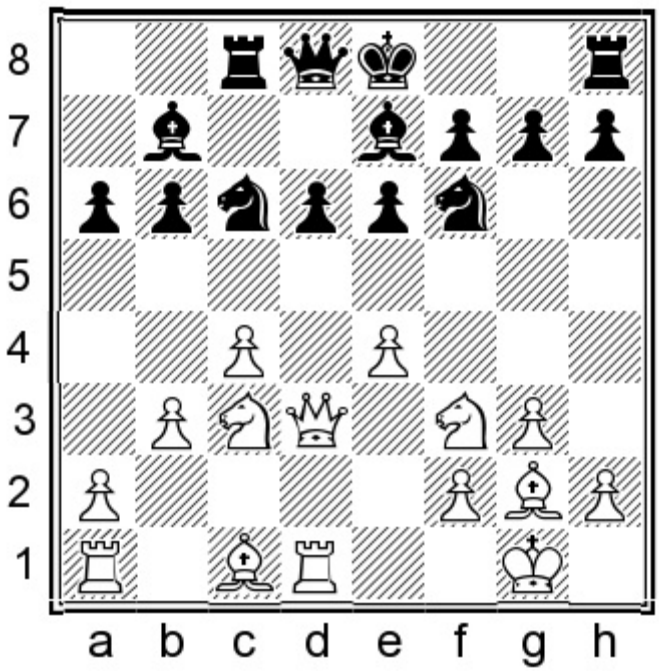


Position after: 7.d4

Those who want can start with 7.b3, but starting with this move generally gives us more options.

7...cxd4 8.♕xd4 d6

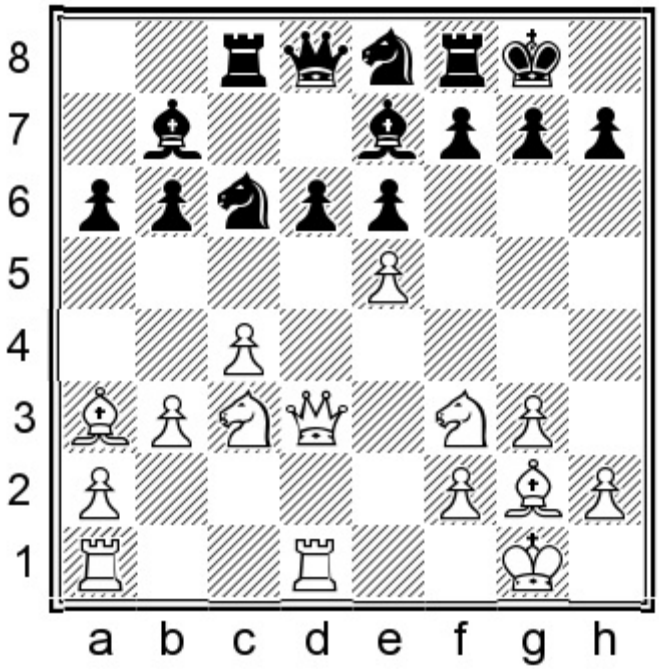
A) 8...♘c6?! 9.♕d3! (And not 9.♕f4 as we played in the same position with ...d6 included, instead of ...a6. 9...♘e7!? 10.♖d1 ♘g6 11.♕d2 ♖c8⇄.) 9...♖c8 (9...♗e7 10.♗f4 0-0 11.♖fd1±) 10.e4 d6 11.b3 ♗e7 12.♖d1



Position after: 12.♖d1

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As usual, we attack Black's weak pawn on d6. In the main line, when the knight is on d7, Black can always meet ♗a3 with ...♘c5, but it's not possible here. This makes a major difference. Another difference is that when Black plays ...♕c7, he normally has to face ♖ac1, threatening thematic patterns like ♘b5 or ♘d5. 12...0-0 13.♗a3 ♘e8 This is the only way to defend the pawn. 14.e5!±

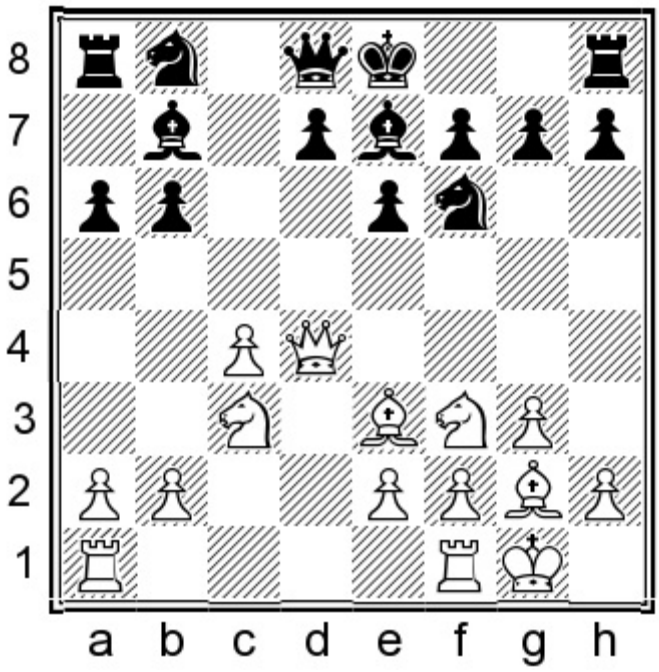


Position after: 14.e5!±

In this precise line, it's not so hard to crack Black's nut. 14...dxe5?! 15.♕xd8 ♖xd8 16.♗xe7 ♖xd1+ 17.♖xd1 ♘xe7 18.♘xe5 ♗xg2 19.♔xg2+– Our control over the d-file gives us a decisive advantage already.

B) 8...♗e7? 9.♗e3!

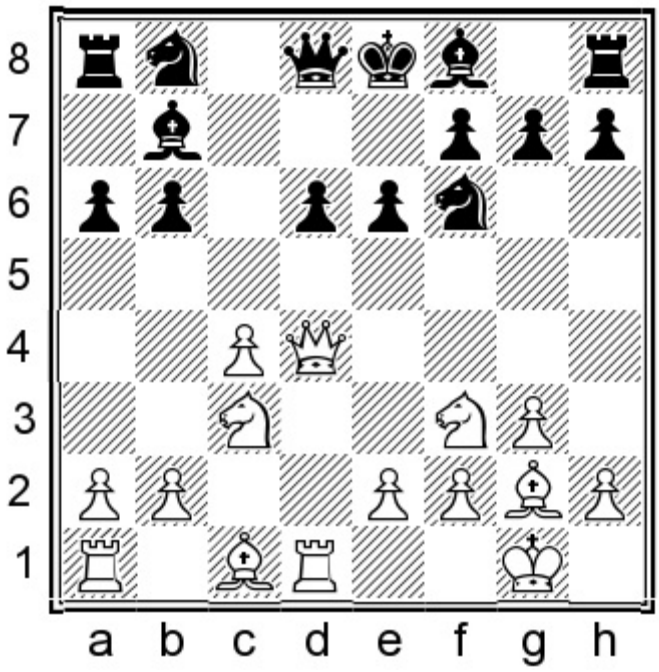
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Position after: 9.♗e3!

9...♗c5 This is the only way to avoid losing a pawn, but Black cannot be happy about trading the dark-squared bishops, because it weakens the d6- square, one of the key points in his position. 10.♕d2 ♗xe3 11.♕xe3 0-0 12.♖fd1 ♘c6 13.♘a4! b5 14.♘c5±

9.♖d1



Position after: 9.♖d1

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9...♘bd7

Black varies from the main line by delaying ...♗e7.

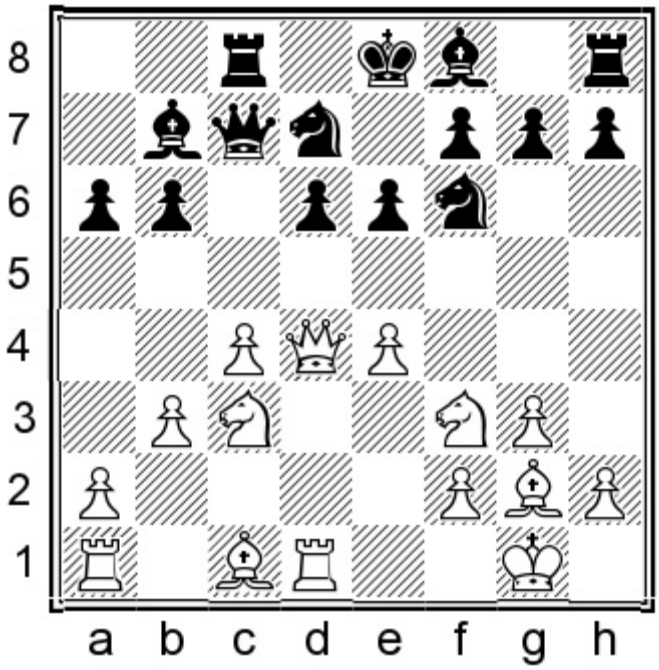
9...♗e7 10.b3! ♘bd7 (10...0-0? 11.♗a3 ♘e8 12.♘e4 ♘c6 13.♕e3±) 11.e4 transposes into the main line.

10.e4 ♕c7!?

A) 10...♗e7 11.b3 transposes again.

B) 10...♘c5?N 11.e5! dxe5 12.♕xd8+ ♖xd8 13.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 14.♘xe5 ♔e8 15.♗f4± is almost the worst version of this endgame that Black can get.

11.b3 ♖c8



Position after: 11...♖c8

12.♗a3!?

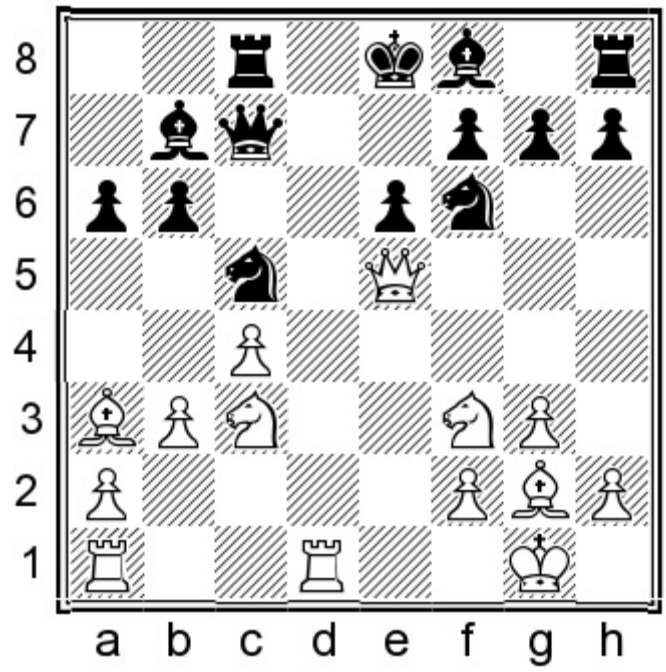
12.♗b2 ♗e7 13.♕e3 0-0 14.♖d2± You can always prefer a slow positional plan, arguing that Black is simply worse, and there is no need to hurry. But I prefer this straightforward plan.

12...♘c5

This is always the way to protect the d6-pawn, but Black doesn't control the e5-square any more, so White can directly go...

13.e5! dxe5 14.♕xe5

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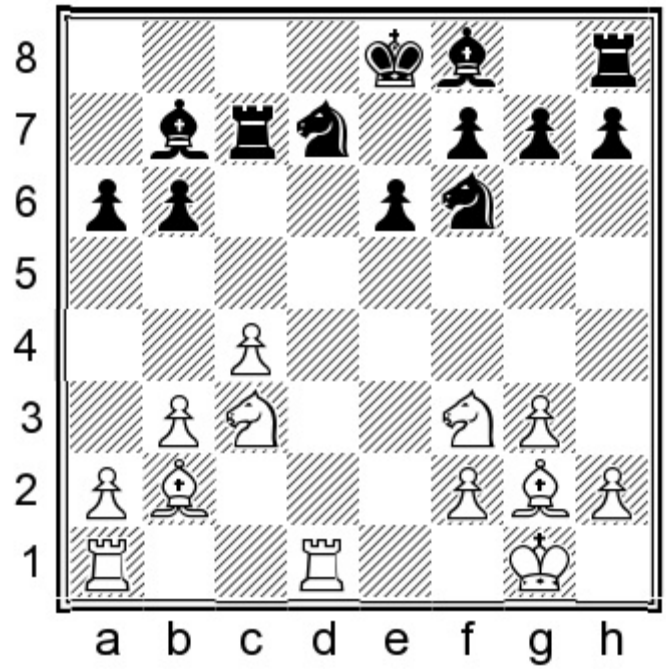
Position after: 14.♕xe5

14...♘cd7!

A) 14...♕xe5 15.♘xe5 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♗e7 – see subchapter ‘e’.

B) 14...♗e7 also transposes to subchapter ‘e’.

15.♕xc7 ♖xc7 16.♗b2!



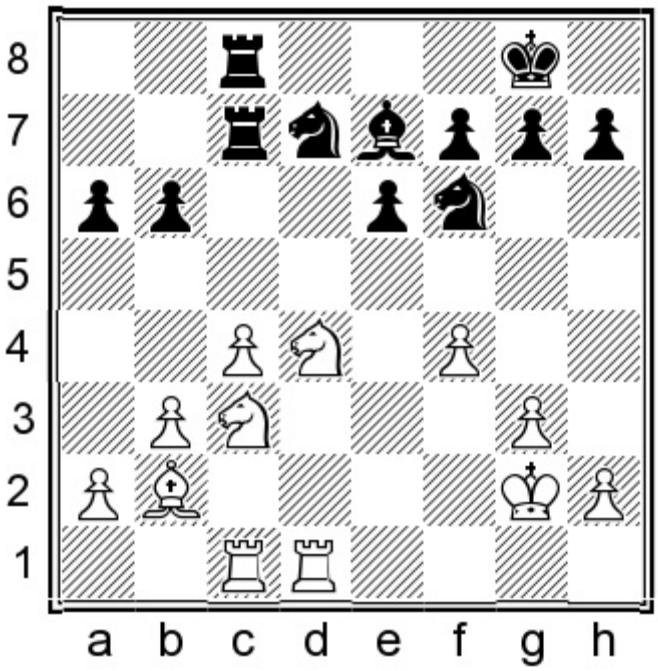
Position after: 16.♗b2!

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16...♗e7 17.♘d4

17.♘g5!? ♘c5 18.♖d2 h6 19.♘f3 0-0 20.♖ad1 ♖d7?! This move fails tactically as White will keep a good endgame. 21.♖xd7 ♘cxd7 22.♘e5 ♗xg2 23.♘xd7 ♗f3 24.♘xf8 ♗xd1 25.♘g6 fxg6 26.♘xd1± and White won in Espig, L (2460) – Ortel, E (2295) Harkany 1989.

17...♗xg2 18.♔xg2 0-0 19.♖ac1 ♖fc8 20.f4!↑



Position after: 20.f4!↑

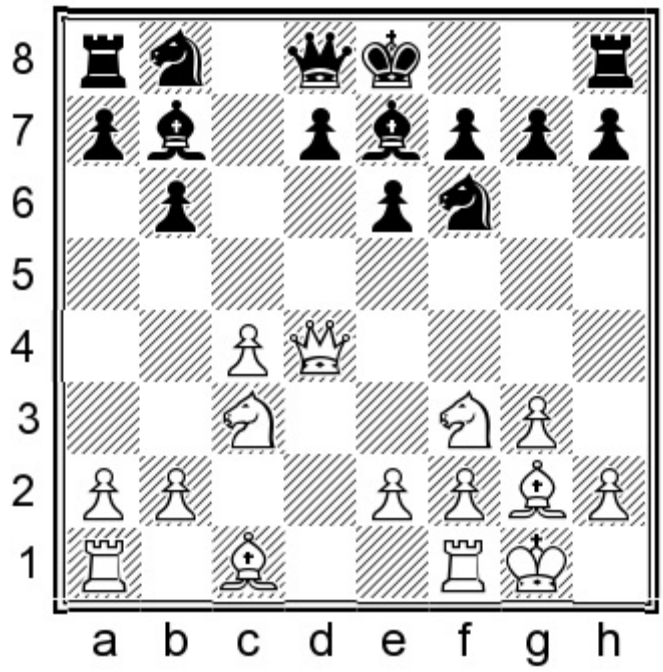
We keep the better endgame thanks to our space advantage and the permanently weak c6-square for Black.

White can follow up with ♖d2, ♖cd1, as ...b5 will hardly work.

b) 8...♘c6

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4

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Position after: 8.♕xd4

Of course, we don't want to trade any pieces. This invites Black to play ...♘c6, but in general that's not great for him. We now consider three moves, the main one (8...0-0) being the subject of the next two subchapters.

8...♘c6?!

Maybe I'm being too pessimistic for Black, but I have never liked this move, which I feel spoils Black's harmony. It's also more difficult for Black to defend d6, as normally the knight should go to c5 when our bishop arrives on a3.

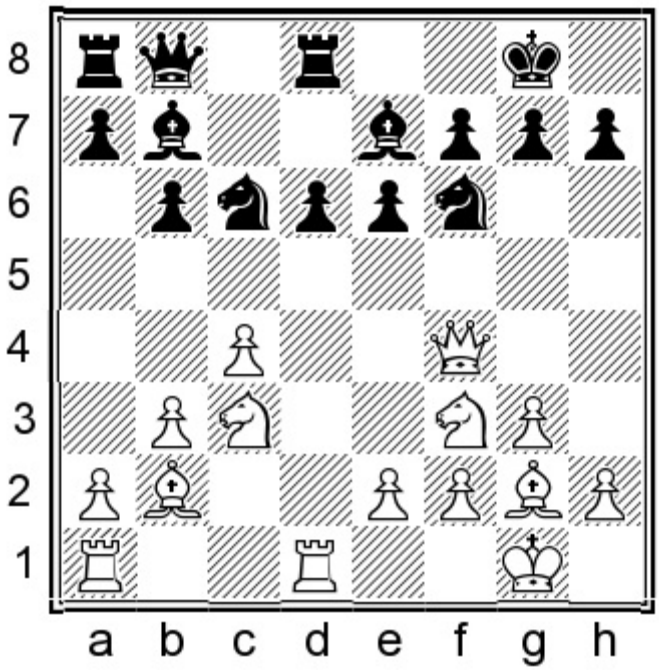
8...a6?! 9.♗e3!± was already shown to be bad for Black in 6...a6.

9.♕f4 0-0 10.♖d1 ♕b8

This is a way of defending the d-pawn: Black frees the d8-square for his rook and tries to trade one of the attackers of d6.

10...d6 11.b3 ♕b8 12.♗b2 (In the event of 12.♗a3 Black is happy to play to equalize with 12...d5 and I am not sure we get much here.) 12...♖d8

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Position after: 12...♖d8

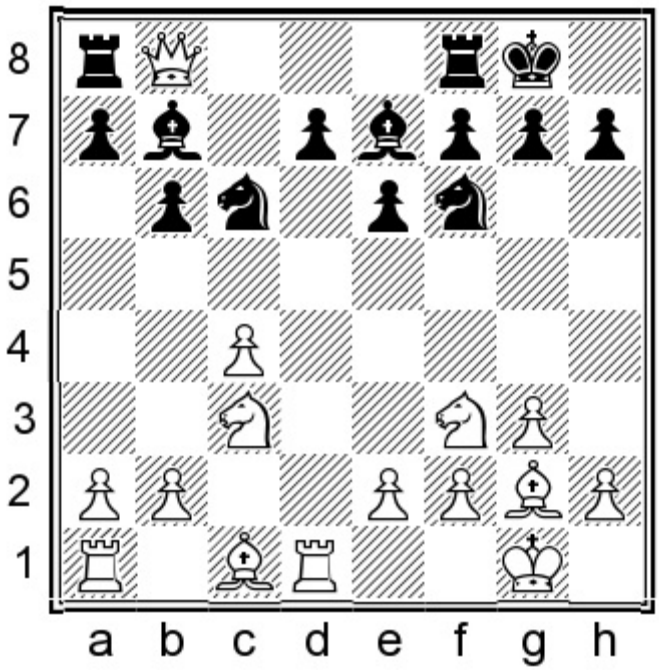
13.♖d2 I played this move without knowing any theory last year, and still feel it's the easiest way to increase the pressure. (13.e4 a6 14.♕e3 ♕c7 15.♖ac1 ♘e5 16.♘d4 ♖ac8 17.♕e2 ♗f8 18.f4 ♘ed7± Even if he has lost a few tempi, Black has reached a standard Hedgehog position: Meier, G (2648) – Perunovic, M (2429) Batumi 2018.)

A) 13...h6 14.♖ad1 ♘e8 appeared in one of my (numerous) short draws: Demuth, A (2546) – Papin, V (2466) Melbourne 2016, but I could have continued with 15.g4!, starting the attack and giving my queen a retreat square. 15...♗f6 16.g5! hxg5 17.♘xg5± with a huge initiative.

B) 13...a6 14.♘e4!N A well-timed move. (14.♖ad1?! is met with 14...b5 15.cxb5 axb5↑ Unfortunately our a2-pawn is hanging.) 14...♘xe4 15.♕xe4 and now for instance 15...♘e5 16.♕d4, taking advantage of all the weaknesses in Black's camp. 16...♗f6 (16...♕c7 17.♘xe5 dxe5 18.♕xe5 ♕xe5 19.♖xd8+ just wins a pawn.) 17.♕xb6 ♗xf3 18.♕xb8 ♖dxb8 19.♗xf3 ♘xc4! 20.bxc4 ♖xb2 21.♖xd6± Black must fight hard for a draw.

11.♕xb8!?

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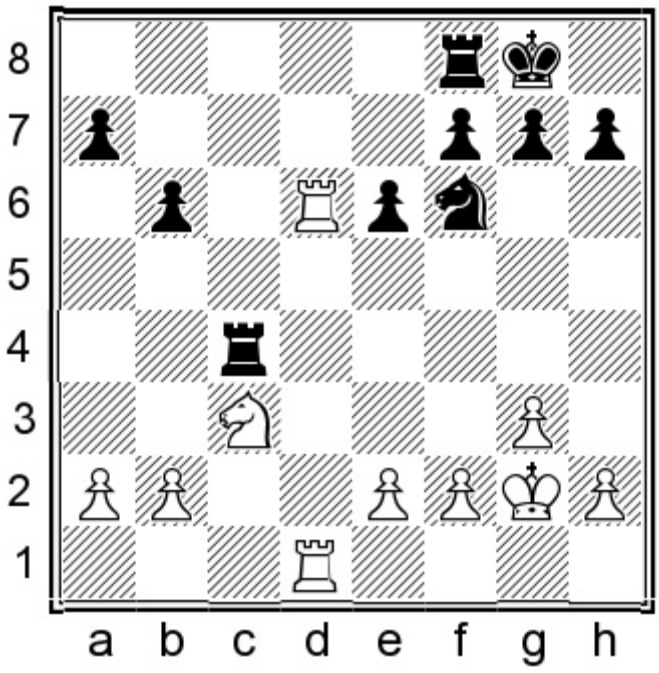
Position after: 11.♕xb8!?

You can play differently. White has other good options (for example, Carlsen played 11.e4), but the endgame is excellent. It all depends on your style. I like endgames!

11...♖axb8 12.♗f4 ♖bc8 13.b3

I like this quiet move, simply protecting our c-pawn and avoiding any nasty surprises.

13.♘e5 has brought White some success after 13...d6 14.♘xc6 ♗xc6 15.♗xd6 ♗xd6 16.♖xd6 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♖xc4 18.♖ad1.

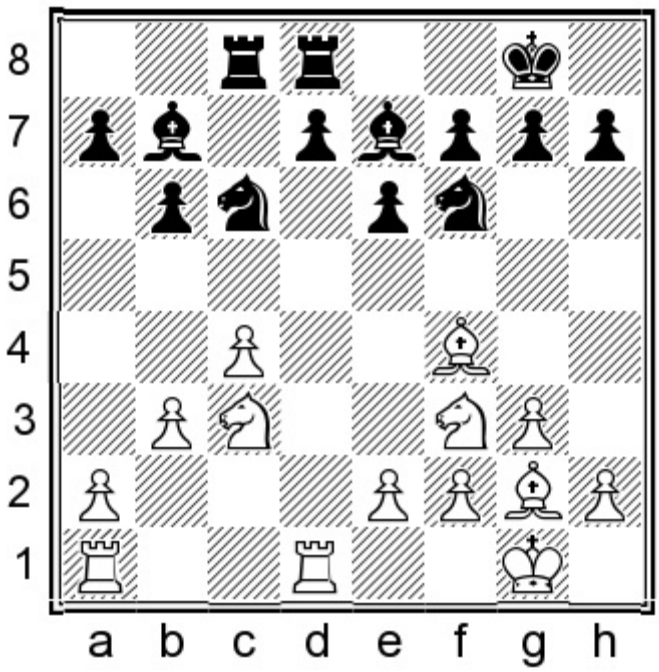


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Position after: 18.♖ad1

This is actually a tabiya as twenty-six games have reached this endgame. Even if White has scored 60%, Black is objectively fine: 18...g5!=.

13...♖fd8



Position after: 13...♖fd8

After a few logical moves, I think I would now improve on my own games with...

14.♘d4!?

The move I played, 14.♗d6, is interesting too, and brought me two fine wins, but our text move is actually very clever.

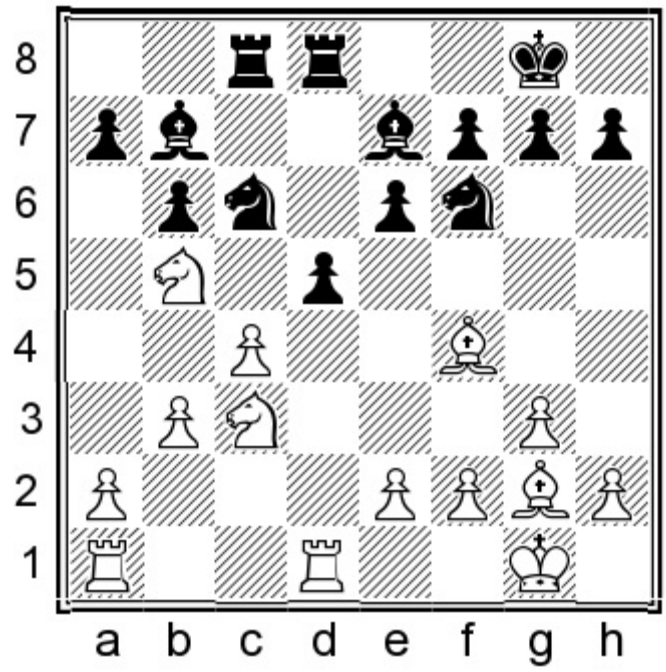
We want to bring the knight to b5 and then d6, but we couldn't play 14.♘b5 because of the obvious counter-strike 14...d5⇄.

14...a6

This seems like the most logical move, but we can simply come back with the knight, glad that it managed to provoke Black into playing ...a6, which weakens b6.

14...d5 15.♘db5! gives Black some concerns:

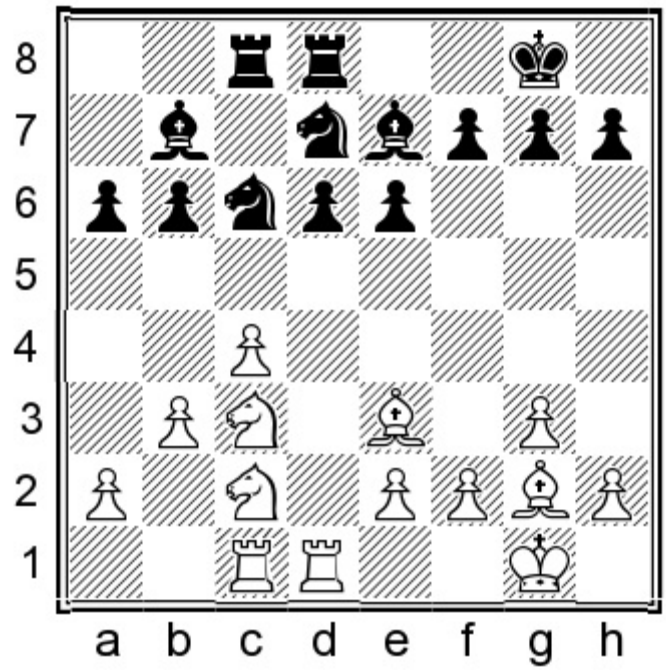
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Position after: 15.♘db5!

(15.♘xc6?! ♗xc6 16.cxd5 ♘xd5 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♖xd5 19.♖xd5 exd5 20.♖c1 ½-½ Stanec, N (2490) – Teske, H (2510) Austria 1996) 15...dxc4? 16.♘xa7! ♘xa7 17.♗xb7 ♖xd1+ 18.♖xd1 ♖d8?! 19.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 20.♗b8+–

15.♘c2! d6 16.♗e3 ♘d7 17.♖ac1±



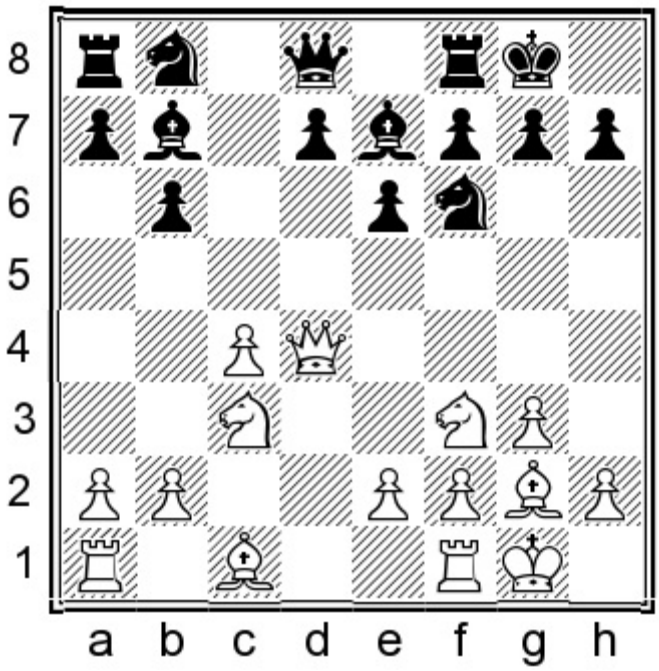
Position after: 17.♖ac1±

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We keep the better endgame, and I am already waiting to try this one!

c) 8...0-0 9.♖d1 ♕c8

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4 0-0!?



Position after: 8...0-0!?

This is another possibility for Black which has gained some popularity in recent years. He must understand, however, that he shouldn't play ...a6 any more, otherwise he is going to transpose into subchapter 'f' (11...0-0), which is bad for him. So the idea is basically to try to avoid the loss of the ...a6 tempo in order to take other measures against future problems with the d6-pawn (e.g. by placing a rook on d8, and sometimes advancing the d-pawn to the fifth rank in one move).

9.♖d1! ♕c8!?

Modern chess allows many things, sometimes even the strangest moves. It's hard to believe, but this is interesting, and I am not surprised that Laurent Fressinet (one of Carlsen's seconds), has played it a couple of times. The queen runs away from the d-file, allowing ...♖d8 and sometimes even ...d5 in one move. It also keeps all options open, not only for the b8-knight, but also for the e7-bishop which might want to come to c5. As I don't really like existing theory here, I had to look for a new idea.

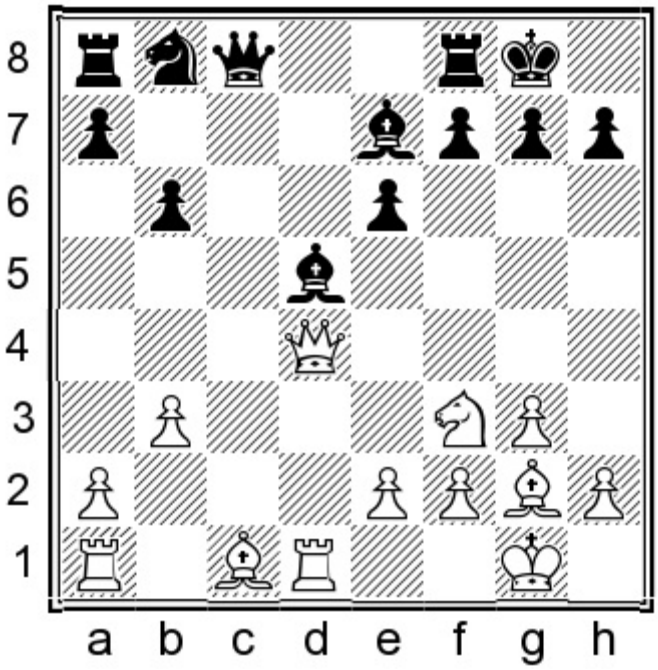
9...a6?! 10.♗e3±

10.♘b5!?N

This is a concrete move, as we want to put a knight on d6. Black doesn't have time to spend on ...♖d8.

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A) 10.b3 allows a simple equalizer: 10...d5! 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5

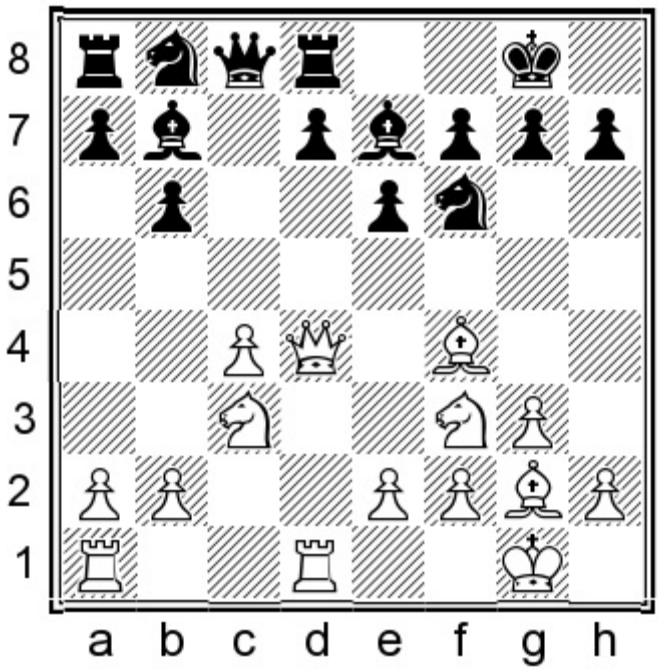


Position after: 12...♗xd5

13.♗g5 (13.♕f4 ♘d7! 14.♗b2 ♗f6 15.♖ac1 ♕a6⇄; 13.♗b2 ♗f6 14.♕d2 ♘d7 15.♖ac1 ♕b7= and as soon as Black trades every minor piece, I can't see how White is able to take advantage of his rooks already placed on the open files.) 13...♘c6 14.♕g4 ♗xg5 15.♘xg5 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 h6 17.♘f3 ♘e7= In these kinds of positions, engines always give White a slight edge because of his better rooks and knight. For example, White can manoeuvre his knight to target squares such as c6 or d6, while Black finds it difficult to do so in the white camp. Having said that, I would feel guilty if my advice was to enter this endgame, but it's up to you if you want to give it a try.

B) 10.♗f4 is the main move but Black can play 10...♖d8!

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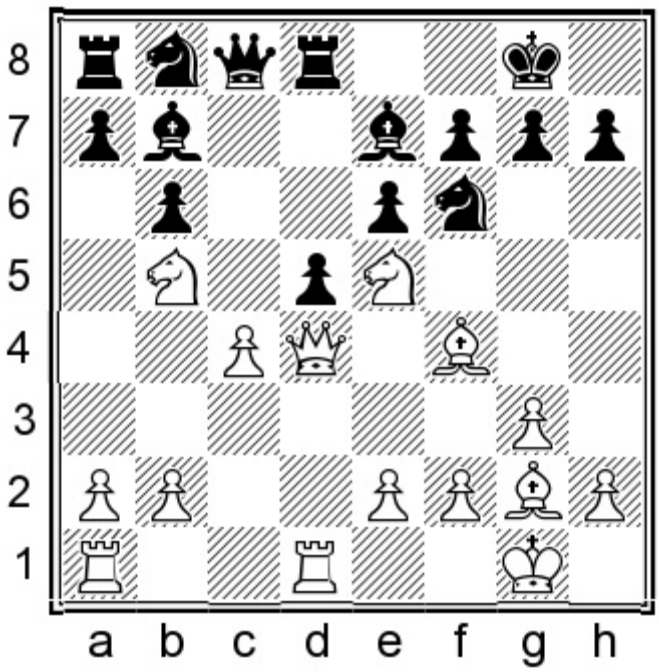


Position after: 10...♖d8!

B1) 11.♖ac1 d6 12.♕d2 ♘a6 13.♘b5 ♘e4 14.♕e1 ♘ac5 15.b4 ♘a4= 1-0 (35) Kovalenko, I (2668) – Fressinet, L (2687) Almaty 2016.

B2) 11.e4 is also interesting, but it only reaches a standard Hedgehog scheme after 11...d6 threatening ...e5. 12.♕d3 ♘a6! 13.♕e2 ♘c5 14.♘d4 a6⇄

B3) 11.♘b5 d5 12.♘e5 (12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♖ac1 ♘c6 14.♕e4 a6⇄) White managed to win in So, W (2770) – Fressinet, L (2687) Paris 2016, but I am not sure it would have been so simple after...



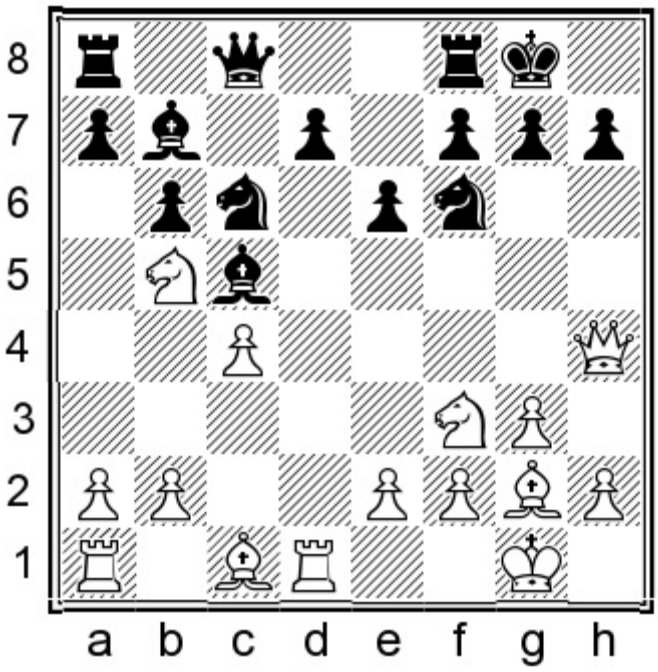
Position after: 12.♘e5

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12...♘c6!N 13.♘xc6 ♗xc6= with an objectively equal position.

10...d5

A) 10...♗c5!? 11.♕h4 ♘c6



Position after: 11...♘c6

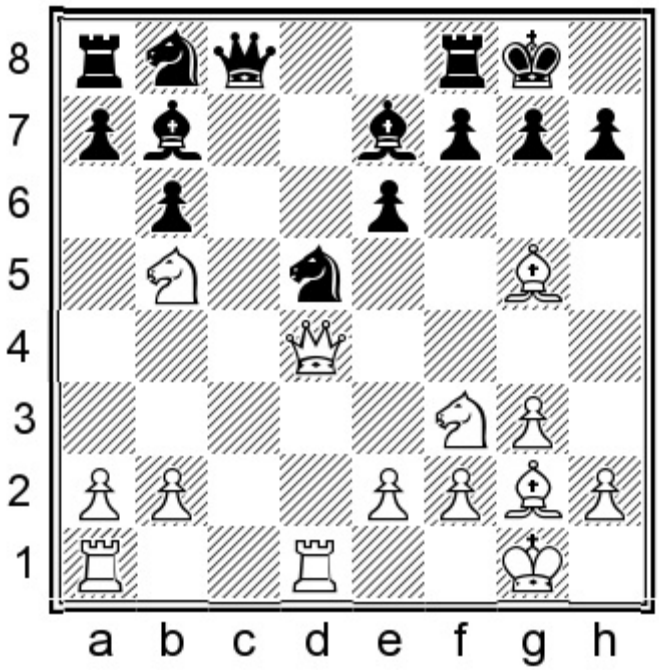
A1) 12.♗f4 is interesting too, but Black is fine after 12...♘e7! 13.♘d6 ♗xd6 14.♗xd6 ♘f5 15.♕f4 ♘xd6 16.♕xd6 ♕xc4! 17.♘e5 ♕a6 18.♗xb7 ♕xb7 19.♘xd7 ♕xd7 20.♕xd7 ♘xd7 21.♖xd7= We have a micro-advantage, but Black should draw quite easily after a few precise moves.

A2) 12.♗g5! ♘e8 13.♖ac1 f6 14.♗d2 a6 15.♘c3± We are glad to see the appearance of ...f7-f6 on the board.

B) 10...♘c6 11.♕h4 ♖d8 12.♗g5! (12.♘d6?! ♗xd6 13.♖xd6 ♘e7⇄) 12...d6 13.♕f4! e5 14.♕c1!± Black did something he should never do in the Hedgehog: push ...e6-e5. We had to spend a few tempi, but it was worth it.

11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♗g5!

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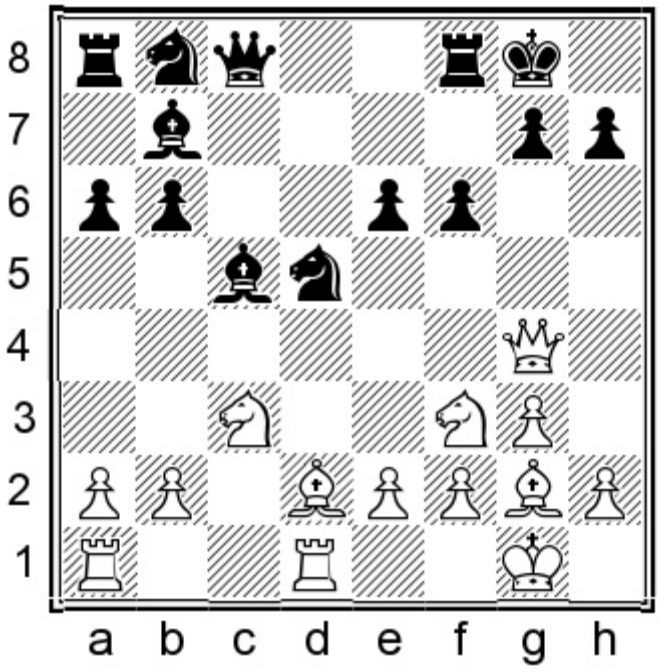


Position after: 12.♗g5!

We have found another way to make the d6 square available for our knight.

12...♘c6

12...f6 13.♗d2 a6 14.♘c3 ♗c5 15.♕g4± Our pieces have been repelled, but Black has a new weakness on e6, and is still behind in development, so there is no doubting our advantage.



Position after: 15.♕g4±

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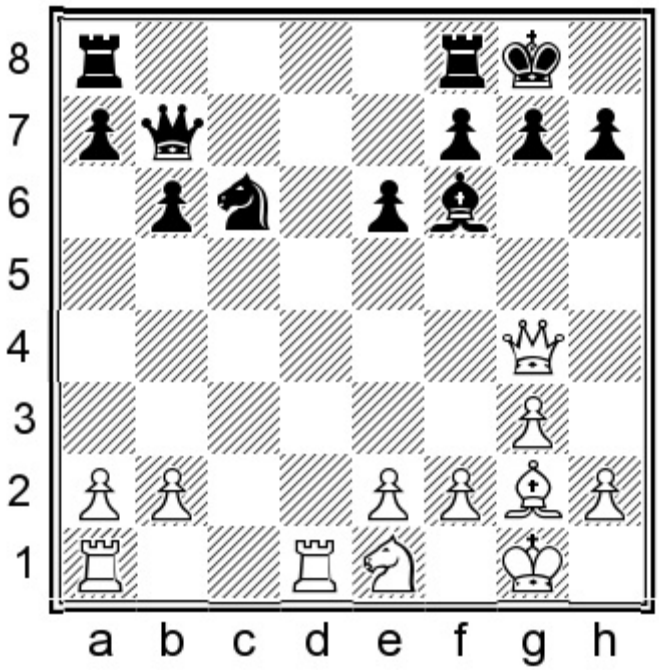
13.♕g4!?±

Now ♗h6 becomes a threat, and White remains better. If Black wants to keep the bishop by means of...

13...♘f6? 14.♗xf6 ♗xf6 15.♘d6 ♕c7 16.♘xb7 ♕xb7

Then...

17.♘e1!+–



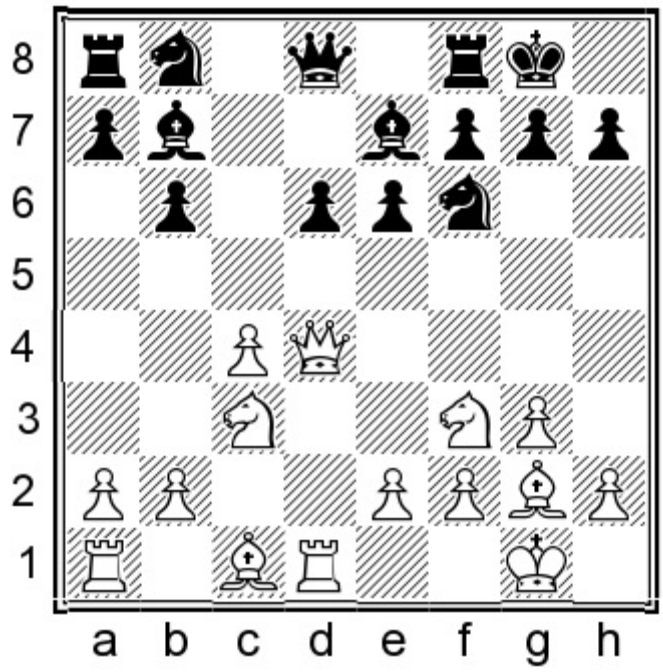
Position after: 17.♘e1!+–

...with the idea ♖ac1, and Black is defenseless against it.

d) 8...0-0 9.♖d1 d6

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4 0-0!? 9.♖d1! d6

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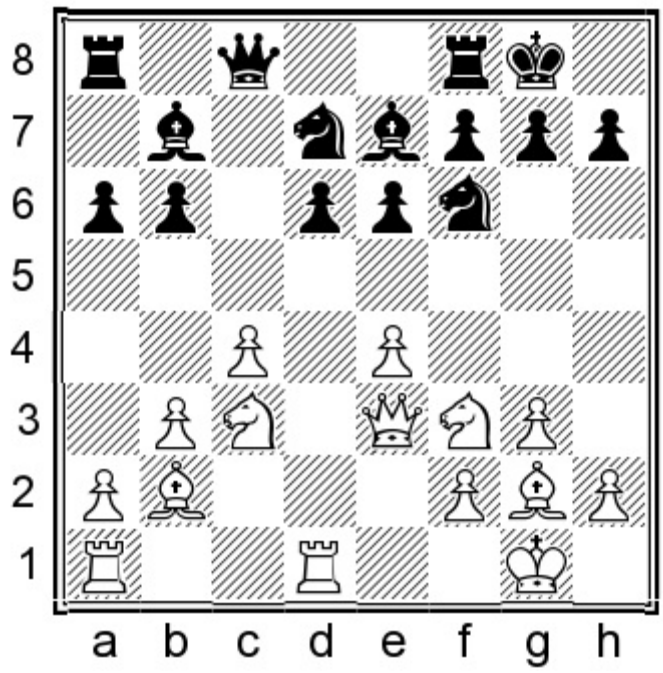


Position after: 9...d6

10.♗g5!?

The threat is simply to take on f6, then on d6.

10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4 ♕c8! 12.♗b2 (12.♗a3 is not that strong any more: 12...♘c5 13.e5 dxe5 14.♘xe5 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♕b7+ 16.f3 ♖fd8⇄) 12...a6 13.♕e3



Position after: 13.♕e3

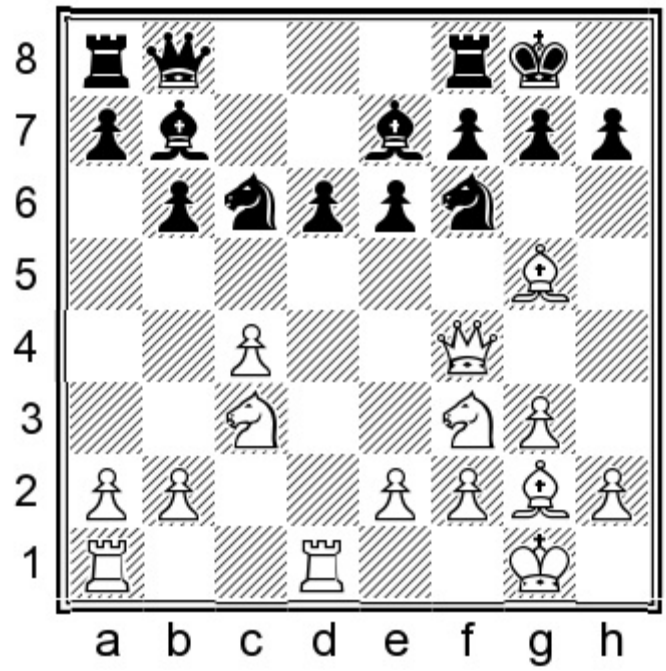
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Stohl says about this kind of position: “White’s plan is to avoid exchanges, keep the tension and prevent any liberating breaks by concentrating his forces in the center, followed by gradually expanding and building up a kingside initiative. However, successfully implementing this demanding strategy in practice is much harder than just describing. The reason is that Black’s position is very flexible.” I think it’s a clear statement about players’ feelings on the Hedgehog. You can enter these lines, but I won’t go any deeper here.

10...♘bd7

10...♘c6 Kramnik played this move twice during the 2016 Tal Memorial. The second time he had to face 11.♕f4 ♕b8. (11...♘e8 is somewhat illogical, because generally Black shouldn’t trade this bishop, the best protector of the d6-pawn. Postny, E (2647) – Cmilyte, V (2470) Helsingor 2009, continued 12.♗xe7 ♕xe7 13.♖d2 a6 14.♖ad1± ♘a5?! 15.b4 ♘c6 16.a3 ♖d8 17.♕e3 ♕c7 18.♘a4 b5 19.cxb5 axb5 20.♘c3± 1-0 (51).).

Now we have a choice of three approximately equivalent moves, but I feel I would play the least forcing one.

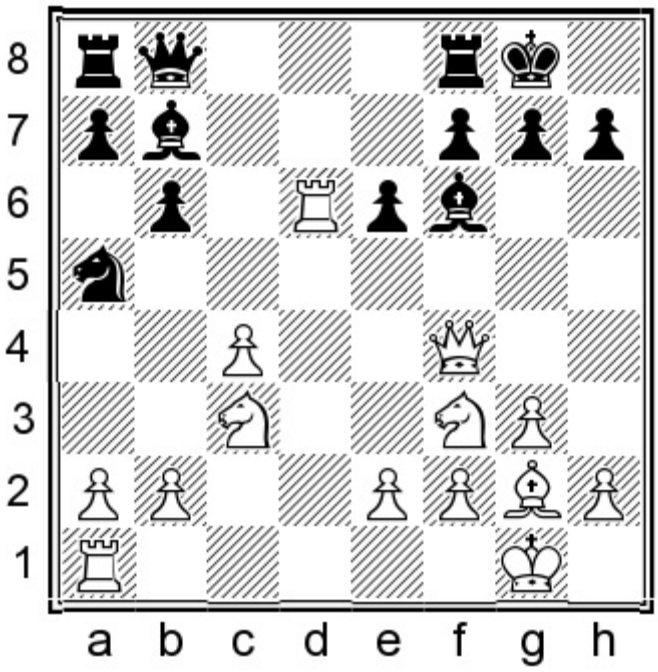


Position after: 11...♕b8

A) 12.♘b5 was a kind of theoretical debate which Black seems to have won, because after the forcing line 12...♘e5 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♘xd6 ♘xf3+ 15.♗xf3 ♗xf3 16.♕xf3 ♗xb2 17.♖ab1 ♗e5 18.c5! ♕c7! 19.♕e4 ♕xc5 20.♖bc1 ♗xd6 21.♖xc5 ♗xc5± although White is obviously the only one playing for a win, he didn’t manage to do so in any of the six games which reached this position.

B) 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♖xd6 was tried by Nepomniachtchi, but Kramnik had done his homework and improved on a game of Nakamura: 13...♘a5!

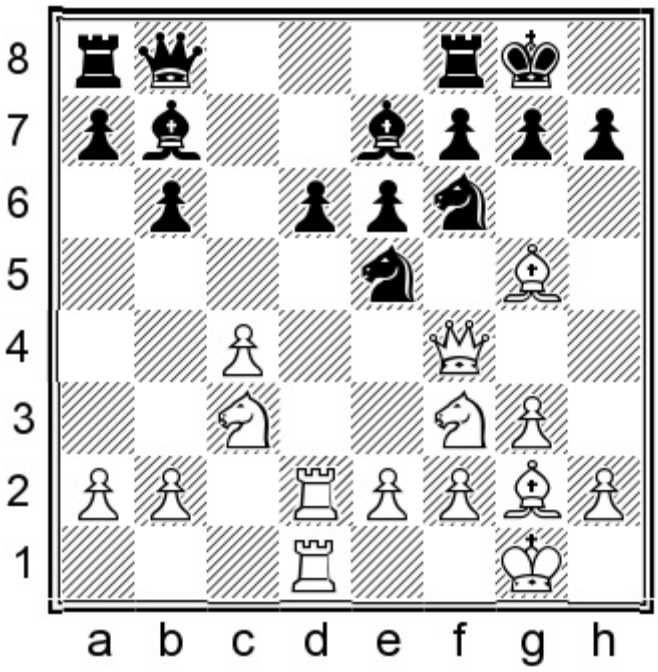
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Position after: 13...♘a5!

(13...♘d4?! 14.♘xd4 ♗xg2 15.♘c2 ♗b7 16.♖ad1± with a healthy extra pawn for White in Nakamura, H (2816) – Gurevich, D (2472) Las Vegas 2015) 14.♖ad1 ♕c7! 15.♖d7 ♕xf4 16.gxf4 ♗c6 17.♘g5 ♗xd7 18.♗xa8 ♗xc3 19.♖xd7 ♗xb2 and even if White managed to win, I think he has a difficult task here: Nepomniachtchi, I (2740) – Kramnik, V (2808) Moscow 2016.

C) 12.♖d2! ♘e5 13.♖ad1

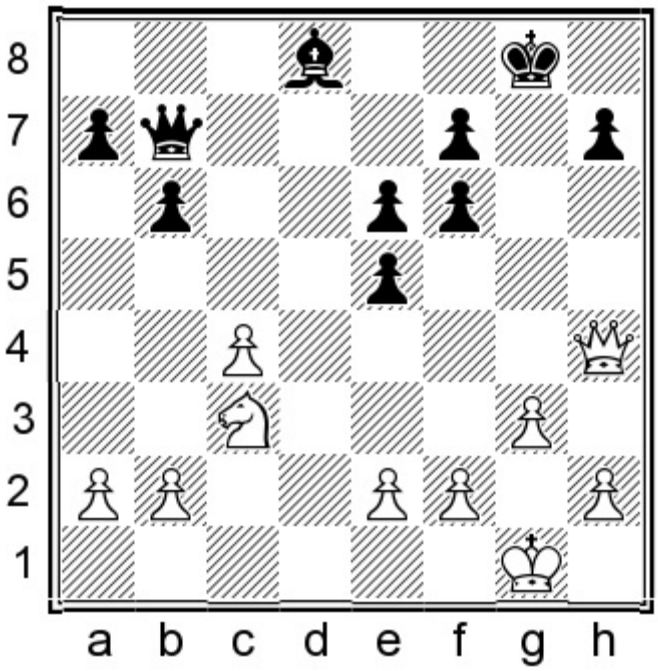


Position after: 13.♖ad1

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Black has faced some difficulties in finding an effective plan, and lost the three games that got this far. For example 13...♖c8!? This is recommended by Lysyj and Ovetchkin in their book on the Hedgehog and is probably objectively best, but I don't think it totally equalizes the game. (13...♘g6 14.♕e3 ♖d8!?N Improving on a game Benidze, D (2476) – Solodovnichenko, Y (2586) Cubuk 2017, 1-0 (35): 15.♗xf6 ♗xf6 16.♘d4± and White keeps an edge thanks to his pressure on d6.)

C1) 14.♘xe5 dxe5 15.♕h4 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♕b7+ 17.♔g1 (17.f3 e4 18.b3 exf3+ 19.exf3 h6 20.♗xf6 ♗xf6 21.♕e4 ♕xe4 22.♘xe4= This endgame looks promising, but as Lysyj and Ovetchkin explain in their book, Black should be able to maintain the balance with accurate play.) 17...♖d8 18.♗xf6 gxf6 19.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 20.♖xd8+ ♗xd8



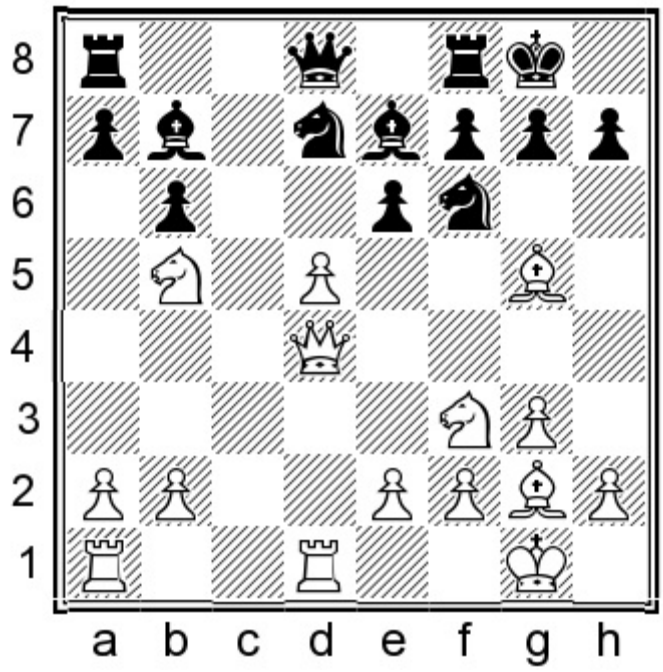
Position after: 20...♗xd8

All this is analyzed by Lysyj and Ovetchkin in their book. They assess this kind of position as roughly equal, but I don't see why we couldn't play on for a while. Firstly, we have the queen and knight, which is generally stronger than queen and bishop, and secondly, we have a potential passed pawn on the queenside, whereas Black is clearly unable to get one in the center. The objective is to find a way to effectively block these pawns, and then choose between advancing the c-pawn, and bringing the knight to the kingside to get some play against the black monarch. 21.♕g4+ ♔f8 (21...♔h8 22.e4 ♗e7 23.♕f3 ♔g7 24.♕d3↑) 22.♕h3 ♔g7 23.g4!↑

C2) 14.b3!? is possible too if White wants to keep more pieces on the board: 14...♘g6 15.♕e3 d5! 16.cxd5 ♗c5 (16...♘xd5?! 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xe7 ♘xe7 19.♕d4 ♕c7 20.e4±) 17.♕d3 ♘xd5 18.♘xd5 ♗xd5 19.e4 ♗b7 20.♕e2↑

11.♘b5! d5 12.cxd5

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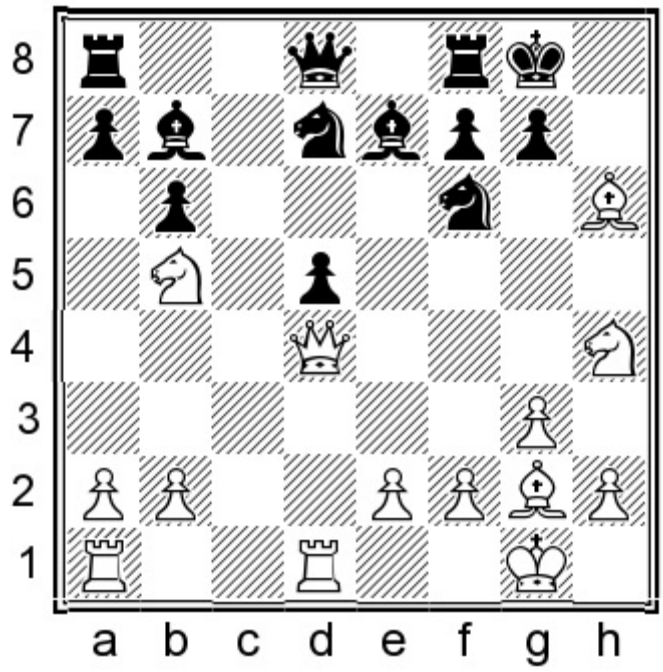


Position after: 12.cxd5

12...♗xd5!

Black is willing to settle for a draw with a symmetrical (boring) game. But we can keep the upper hand.

A) 12...exd5?! reaching an isolani is just what we want! 13.♘h4! h6?! has been played in a few games, even by Mickey Adams! But we have a winning tactic: (13...g6 14.b4! a6 15.♘c3±) 14.♗xh6!!N



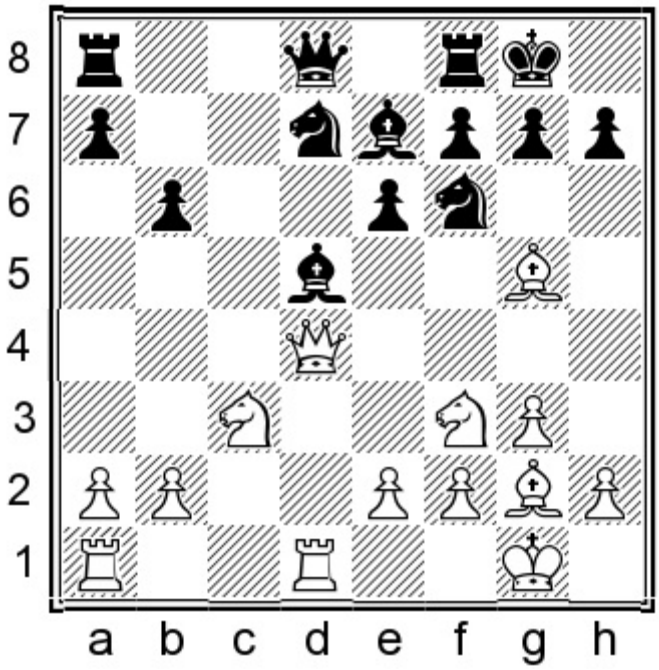
Position after: 14.♗xh6!!N

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14...gxh6 15.♘f5 ♖e8 (15...♘c5 16.♕h4 ♖e8 17.♘xh6+ ♔f8 18.♘f5 transposes) 16.♘xh6+ ♔f8 17.♘f5 Black doesn't have any defensive move. 17...♘c5 18.♕h4 ♘g8 19.♕h7 ♗f6 20.♘bd6 ♕d7 21.♘xb7 ♘xb7 22.♗xd5+– Black shouldn't survive for long.

B) 12...♘xd5? 13.♗xe7 ♕xe7 14.e4 a6 15.♘c7! ♘xc7 16.♕xd7±

13.♘c3



Position after: 13.♘c3

13...♗c6

A) 13...♗b7 14.♕a4!↑ Black has some problems with his knight on d7.

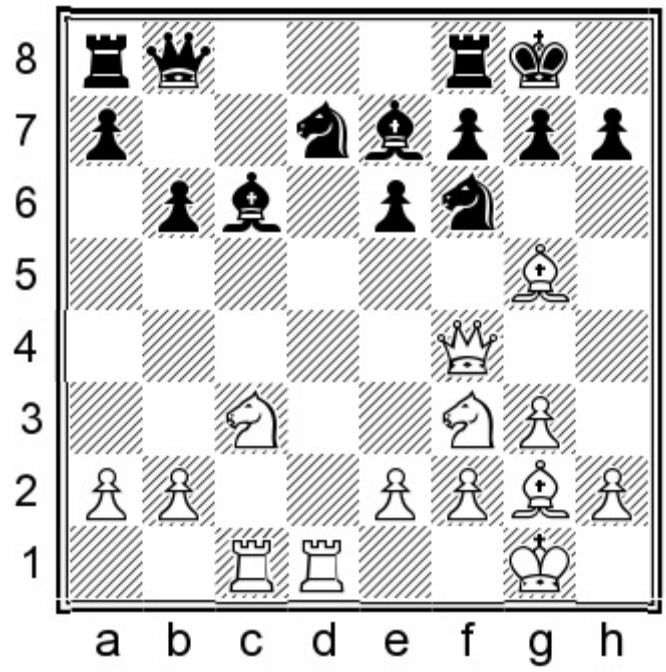
B) 13...h6?! This is way too easy for White: 14.♘xd5 exd5 15.♗f4 ♖c8 was played in Bauer, C (2625) – Gunina, V (2502) chess.com 2018, 1-0 (65), and now for example 16.♕a4! is an easy plus for White.

14.♖ac1 ♕b8

14...♖c8 15.b4!± I like this move, just taking away the c5-square from Black's minor pieces.

15.♕f4!?N

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Position after: 15.♕f4!?N

We have some other moves, but keep the advantage in the endgame, thanks to our better coordination. And Black should watch out for a little trick:

15...♕b7? 16.♖xd7 ♗xd7

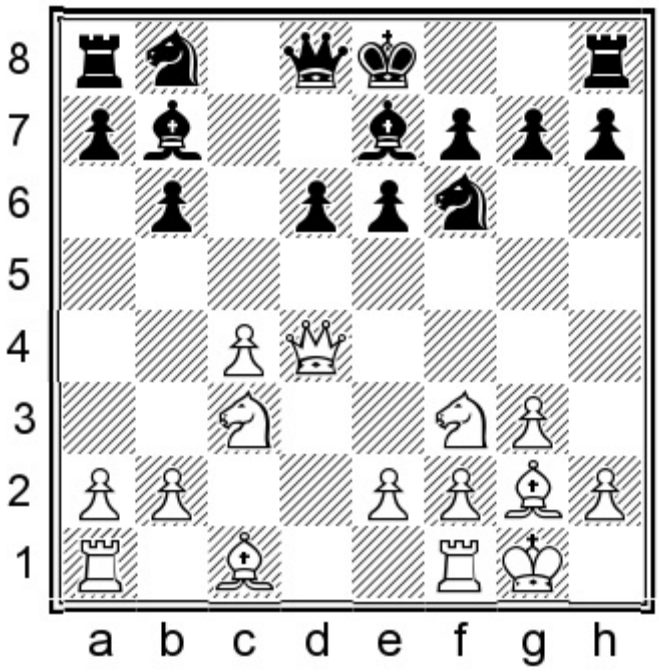
16...♕xd7 17.♘e5 ♗d6 18.♘xd7 ♗xf4 19.♘xf6+ gxf6 20.♗xf4 ♗xg2 21.♔xg2+–

17.♘e5 ♕c7 18.♗xa8 ♖xa8 19.♘e4+–

e) 8...d6 9.♖d1 --, 9...a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4 ♕b8, 11...♕c7

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4 d6

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Position after: 8...d6

This has always been the main move, and still is nowadays.

9.♖d1!?

9.♗g5 is the other classical main line. If you want to know more about this line, I recommend having a look at the game Carlsen, M (2835) – Gashimov, V (2761) Wijk aan Zee 2012, analysed by Magnus himself!

9...a6

This is why this opening is called the Hedgehog. Black puts all his pawns on the sixth rank looking like multiple spines.

A) 9...0-0 – see 8... 0-0.

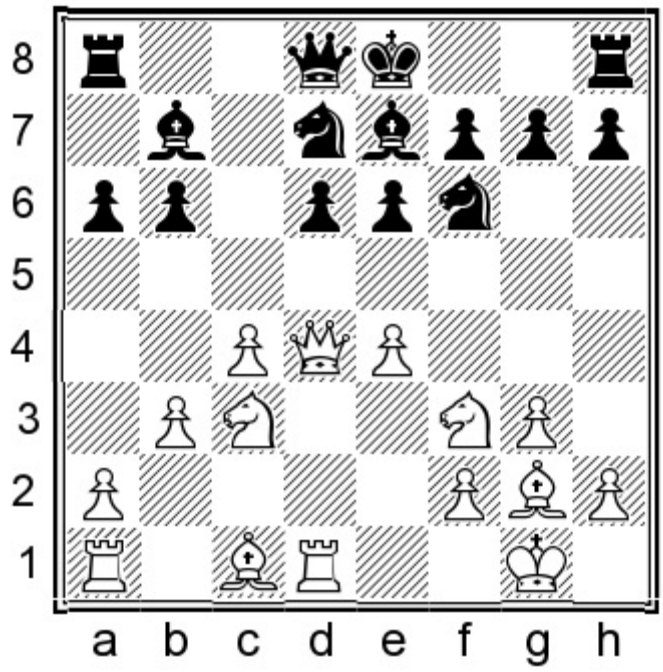
B) 9...♘bd7?! is a bad move order because we have an extra possibility: 10.♘b5!? d5 11.♗f4! 0-0 12.♗c7 ♕c8 13.♗d6! ♕d8 14.♖ac1↑.

10.b3 ♘bd7

10...0-0?! 11.♗a3! Black is unable to play with ...♘bd7 any more, and must play passively.

11.e4!

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Position after: 11.e4!

We have reached an important position where Black has often failed to understand what is happening. He has four main moves at his disposal, two of them fine, the other two rather dubious, and Black chooses the wrong solution in 50% of the games.

White is planning to decoy the knight to c5 by playing 12.♗a3, and then open the position with 13.e5. These are White's next two moves, no matter which of the four moves Black chooses.

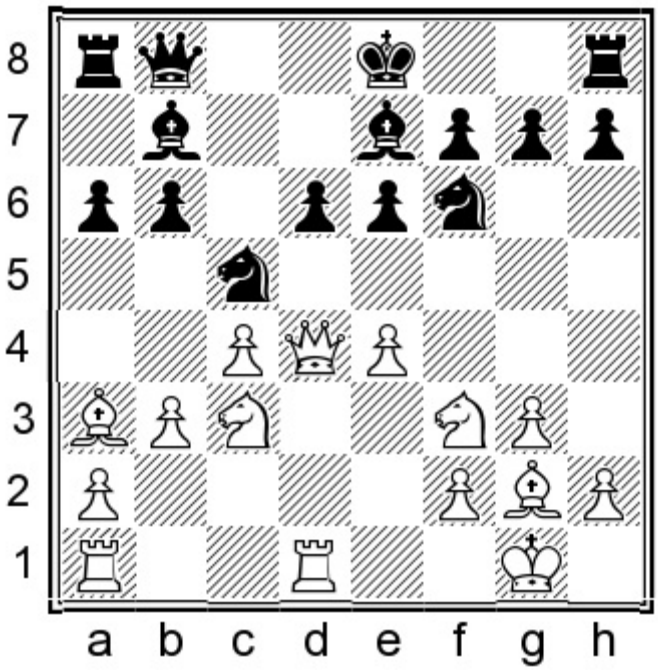
In this subchapter we will study the first two options, 11...♕c7?! and 11...♕b8!?, the next subchapter will be about 11...0-0?!, and then finally we will analyze 11...♕c8, which I consider to be the main line.

11...♕c7?!

This move is dubious, despite being the most frequently played here!

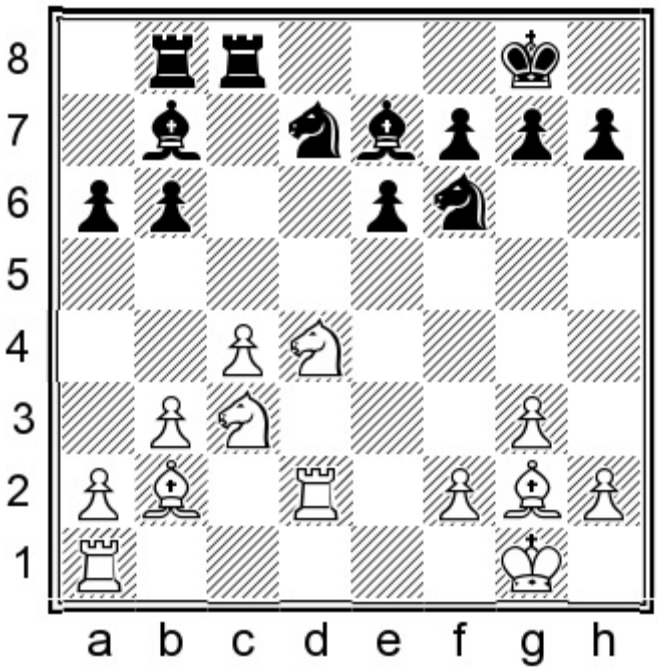
11...♕b8!? is a reliable move. But I won't go too far into the analysis, not only because it's played less often, but also because the arising endgame is very similar to the main line we examined in the 6...a6 variation. 12.♗a3 ♘c5

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Position after: 12...♘c5

13.e5 dxe5 14.♕xe5 ♘cd7! 15.♕xb8+ ♖xb8 16.♗b2! 0-0 17.♘d4 ♖fc8 (17...♗xg2 18.♔xg2 ♖fc8 is similar, but more or less helps us) was played for instance in the game Kopylov, A (2438) – Ftacnik, L (2568) Khanty-Mansiysk 2010, but I would now rather play 18.♖d2!?N Intending to double rooks.

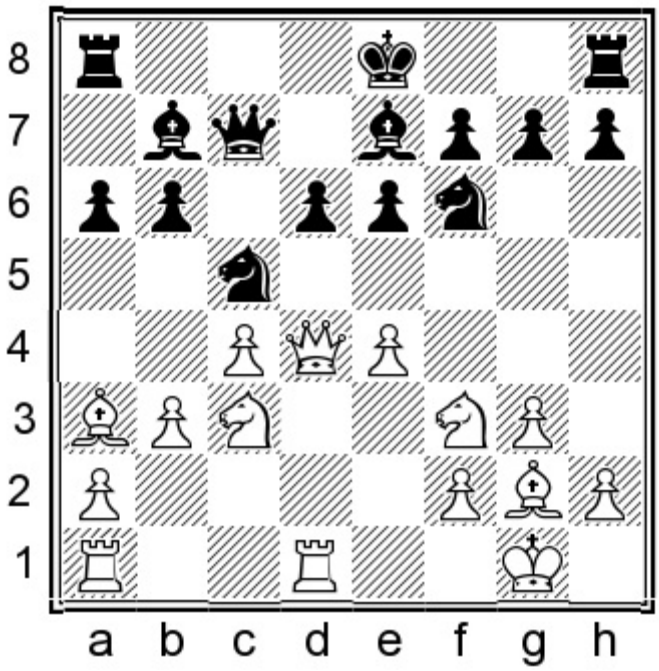


Position after: 18.♖d2!?N

18...♘c5 19.♖ad1 ♔f8 20.f4!↑ As I said, it's similar to the main line with 6...a6. This move stabilizes the position, as it prevents any ...e5-ideas. Black's position is not so simple, and we can keep playing, intending to advance our queenside majority at some point.

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12.♗a3 ♘c5



Position after: 12...♘c5

13.e5! dxe5 14.♕xe5!

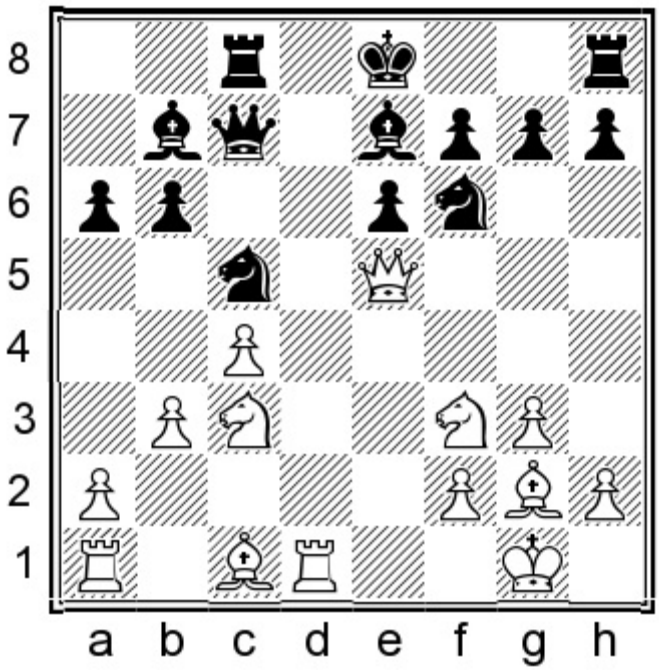
Again Black has a choice, but none of them gives him an easy game.

14...♕c8

If Black understands that endgames are not great for him, he might want to play this move.

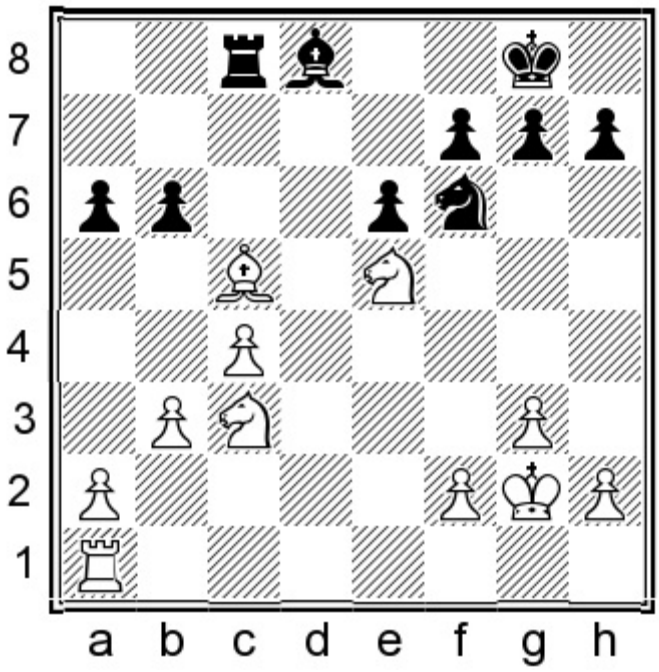
A) 14...♖c8 15.♗c1!

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Position after: 15.♗c1!

I believe in this strong retreat. The bishop is going to be useful on f4. 15...♕xe5 16.♘xe5 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 0-0 18.♗e3!± ♖fd8?! 19.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 20.♗xc5!N



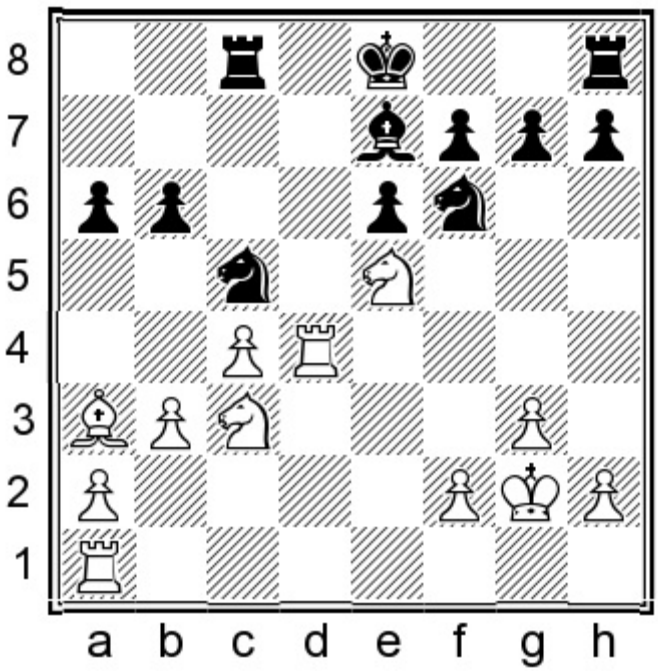
Position after: 20.♗xc5!N

A1) 20...♖xc5?! 21.♖d1 ♗e7 22.♘d7! ♖c6 (22...♘xd7 23.♖xd7 ♗f6 24.♘a4+–) 23.♘b8!±

A2) 20...bxc5 Awful for the structure, but taking with the rook is even worse. 21.♖d1± Black has long-term weaknesses on the queenside, and we keep the initiative.

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B) 14...♕xe5?! is probably the worst for Black, making White's life even easier: 15.♘xe5 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♖c8 (16...0-0?? 17.♘c6 ♗d8 18.♘a4+–) 17.♖d4!?



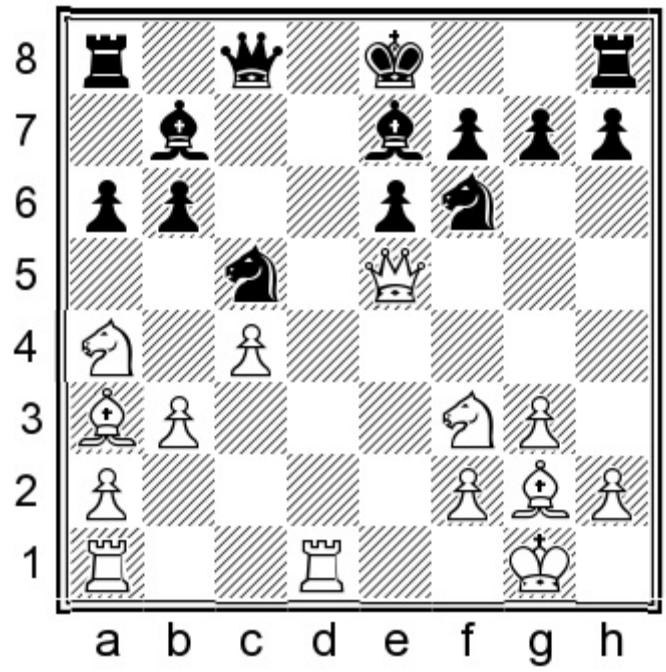
Position after: 17.♖d4!?

B1) 17...0-0 18.♖ad1± Again a nice tactical trick awaits Black: 18...♖fd8? 19.♘c6! ♖e8 (19...♖xd4? 20.♘xe7+ ♔f8 21.♘xc8+–) 20.♘xe7+ ♖xe7 21.♖d6+–.

B2) 17...♘cd7 Black manages to trade a few more pieces, but obviously remains worse: 18.♘xd7 ♘xd7 19.♖ad1! ♖c7 (19...♗xa3?! 20.♖xd7 0-0 21.♖a7 a5 22.♖b7 ♖b8 23.♖dd7!+– Black is too dominated to hold this one.) 20.♗b2 ♘c5 21.b4 ♘d7 (21...♘b7 22.b5 a5 23.♘a4 ♗c5 24.♘xc5 bxc5 25.♖4d3+–) 22.b5! ♗f6 23.♖4d2 a5 24.f4 ♘c5 25.♖d6 ♖b7 26.♗a3 ♘d7 27.♖c6 1-0 Edouard, R (2619) – Sarakauskas, G (2416) England 2018.

15.♘a4!

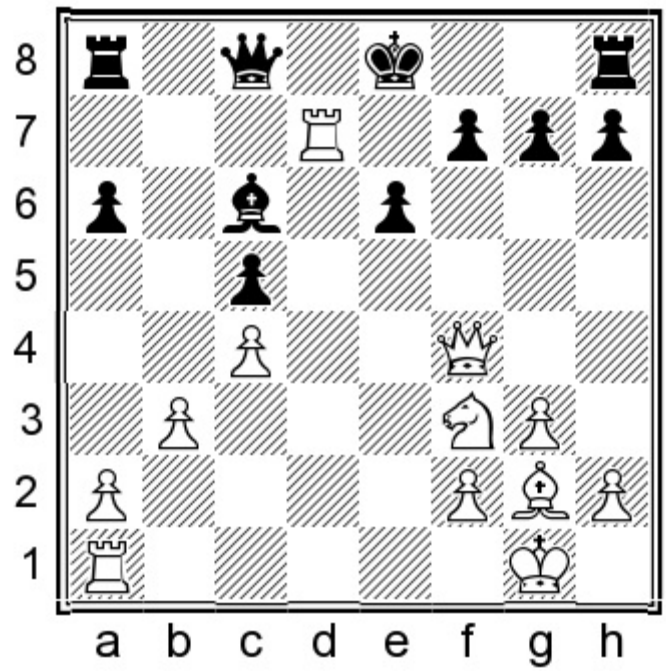
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Position after: 15.♘a4!

15...♘cd7!

15...♘fd7 (15...♘xa4? 16.♗xe7!±) 15...♘fd7 16.♕xg7! Much stronger than my move. I didn't want to complicate the game, but it is just crushing. (After 16.♕f4 my opponent quickly collapsed: 16...♗c6? 17.♗xc5 ♗xc5 18.♘xc5 bxc5 19.♖xd7!



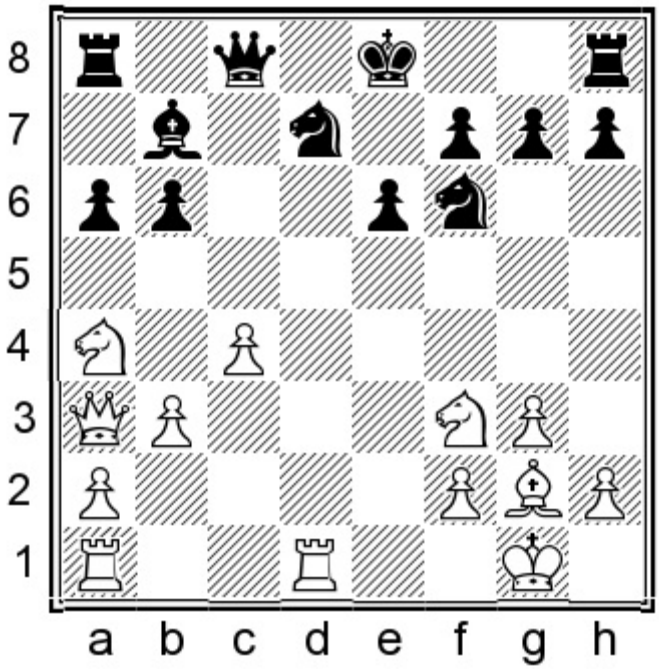
Position after: 19.♖xd7!

19...♗xd7 20.♘e5 f6 21.♘xd7 ♔xd7 22.♖d1+ ♔e8 23.♗xa8 ♕xa8 24.♕c7 1-0 Demuth, A (2550) –

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Haubro, M (2345) Ballerup 2016.) 16...♗f6 17.♕h6 ♗xa1 18.♖xa1 ♕c7 19.♘xc5 bxc5 20.♗b2 ♖g8 21.♕xh7± 1-0 (29) Stean, M (2505) – Ligterink, G (2455) Marbella 1982.

16.♕b2 ♗xa3 17.♕xa3



Position after: 17.♕xa3

17...♕c7

The text move is probably the best continuation, but White is still ahead in the game with, for instance...

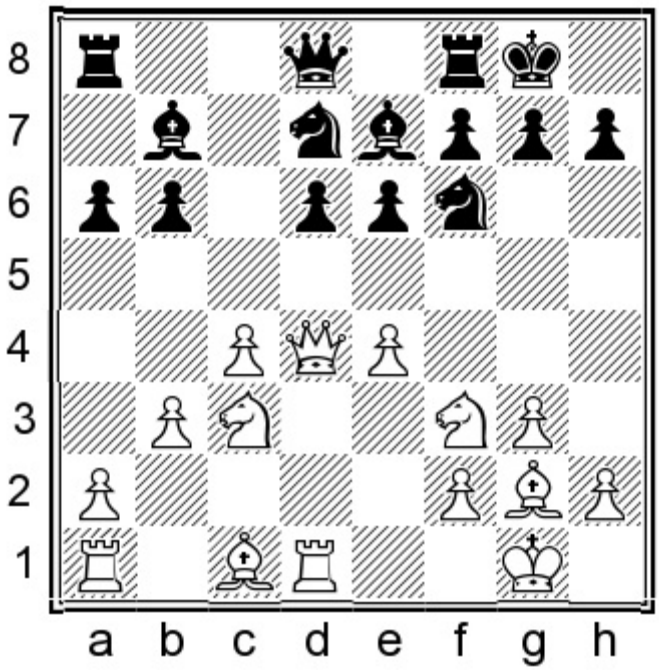
17...b5 18.♘b2 ♕c5 19.♕xc5 ♘xc5 20.b4 ♘cd7 21.c5±

18.♖d2!?N 18...♘c5 19.♘xc5 bxc5 20.♕b2±

f) 8...d6 9.♖d1 a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4 0-0

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4 d6 9.♖d1!? a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4! 0-0?!

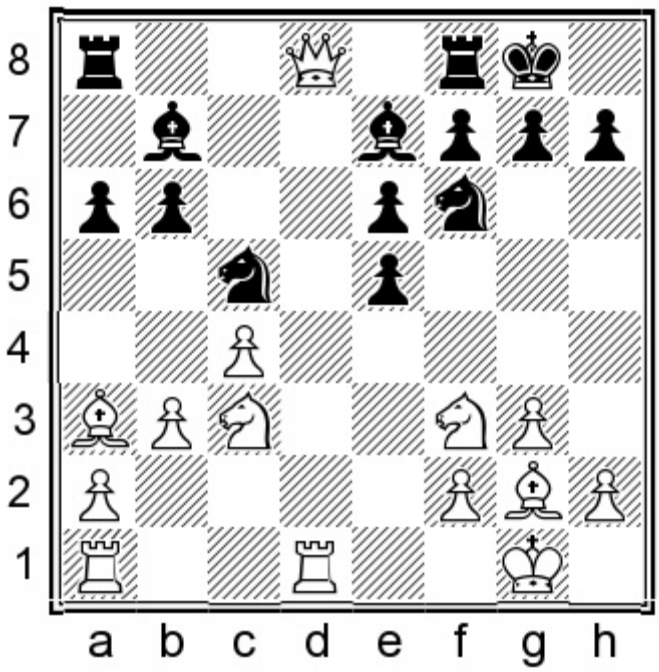
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Position after: 11...0-0?!

This might look like the logical move, but it’s probably the worst of the four options.

12.♗a3 ♘c5 13.e5! dxe5 14.♕xd8!



Position after: 14.♕xd8!

Not giving the black queen a chance to run away.

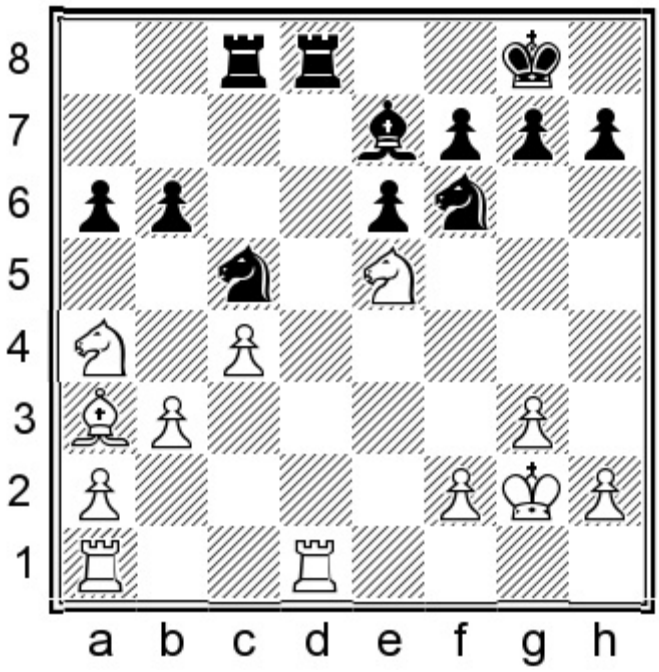
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14...♖fxd8

Taking with the other rook doesn't make sense, as it will be needed to protect the c6-square.

15.♘xe5 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 ♗f8

A) 16...♖ac8?! 17.♘a4!



Position after: 17.♘a4!

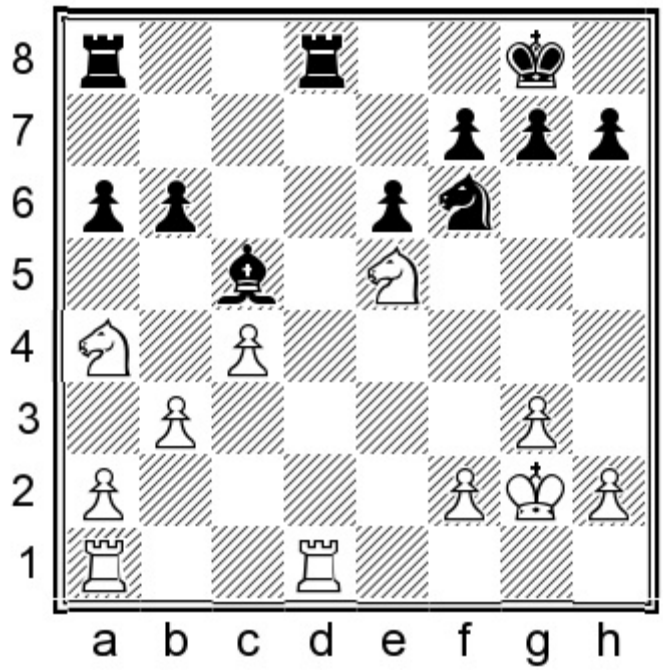
17...♗d6□N The only move that doesn't lose right now. (17...♘xa4? 18.♗xe7 ♖xd1 19.♖xd1 ♘c3 20.♖d6! ♘xa2 21.♖xb6 a5 22.♘c6 ♘d7 23.♖a6+– Black loses the a-pawn, and soon the game.) 18.♗xc5 bxc5 19.♘d3± with lots of suffering to come for Black.

B) 16...♖dc8 17.♘a4 ♖ab8 18.♗xc5! ♗xc5 19.♘xc5 ♖xc5 20.f4± with a stable advantage for White.

17.♗xc5 ♗xc5 18.♘a4!

We want this bishop!

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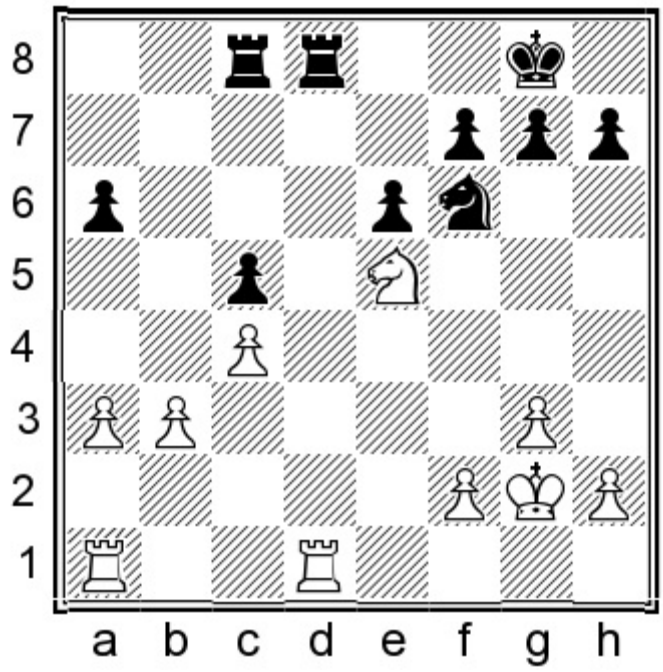


Position after: 18.♘a4!

18...♖ac8

18...♔f8?! is the most frequently played move here but 19.b4! is a painful surprise: 19...♗xb4 20.♘xb6 ♖xd1 21.♖xd1 ♖e8□ (21...♖a7?? 22.♖d8+ ♘e8 23.♘bd7+ ♔e7 24.♘c6++– An aesthetic finish!) 22.c5±

19.♘xc5 bxc5 20.a3!±



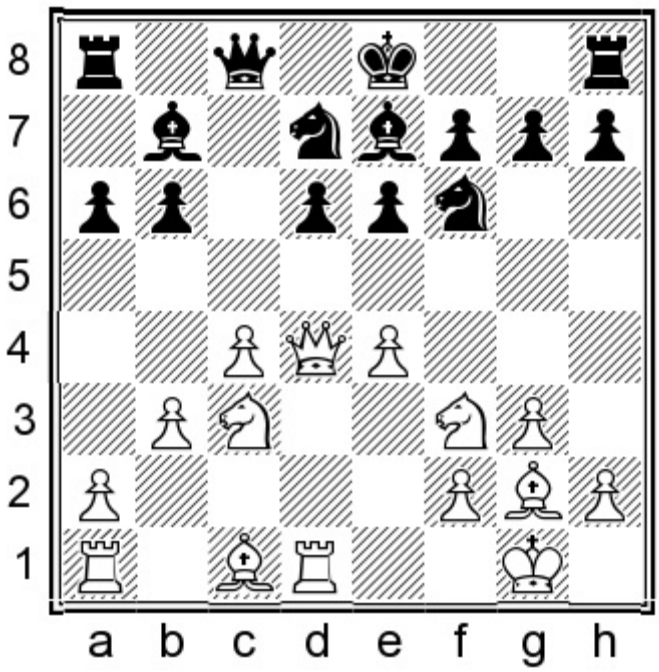
Position after: 20.a3!±

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White is aiming to start pawn expansion on the queenside, and managed to win in Obolenskikh, D (2513) – Khantuev, A (2342) Angarsk 2015.

g) 8...d6 9.♖d1 a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4 ♕c8

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 b6 4.♗g2 ♗b7 5.0-0 c5 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.d4 cxd4 8.♕xd4 d6 9.♖d1!? a6 10.b3 ♘bd7 11.e4! ♕c8!



Position after: 11...♕c8!

12.♗a3!?

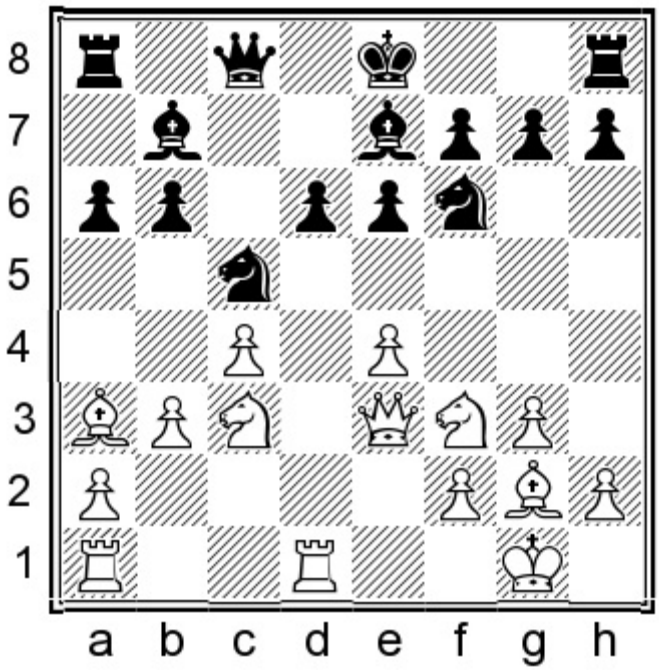
12.♗b2 is the most frequently played move, but I prefer a forced line!

12...♘c5 13.e5!?

This move was long considered to be a mistake, but theory is continually evolving.

13.♕e3!? offers a few tricks and was my choice the only time I encountered this position. I already knew that our main line was possible, but I changed my mind a few minutes before the round, fearing that my opponent was a specialist in the opening. As I said, White has a few tricks in this line, but Black should be able to deal with them. I will provide you with a few variations, just to give you some inspiration in case the main line doesn't suit you.

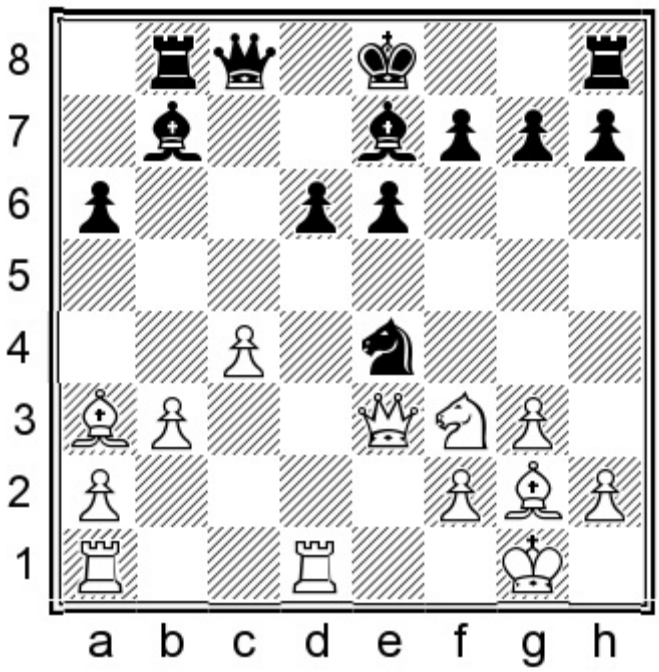
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Position after: 13.♕e3!?

A) 13...♕c7 14.♘d4 (14.e5!? doesn't work any more because of 14...♘g4∞) 14...0-0 15.h3 (I would also definitely advise 15.♖ac1!? ♖ac8 16.f4 ♕b8 17.b4 ♘cd7 18.♕e2↑.) 15...♖ac8 16.♖ac1 ♕b8 17.g4 I think this is the kind of attack you must launch. Black can respond in the center at some stage, but it's really interesting to play. 17...♕a8 18.♖e1 g6 19.♗b2 ♖fe8 20.♖cd1 ♗f8 21.g5 ♘h5 22.♗f3 ♘g7 23.h4 d5!? 24.cxd5 exd5 25.e5⇄ 1-0 (56) Adly, A (2599) – Mchedlishvili, M (2601) Doha 2016.

B) 13...♘fxe4?! 14.♘xe4 ♘xe4 15.♕xb6 ♖b8 (15...0-0 16.♘d2 ♖b8 17.♘xe4 ♗xe4 18.♕a7 ♗xg2 19.♕xe7 ♖e8 20.♕a7 ♗f3 21.♖xd6±) 16.♕e3

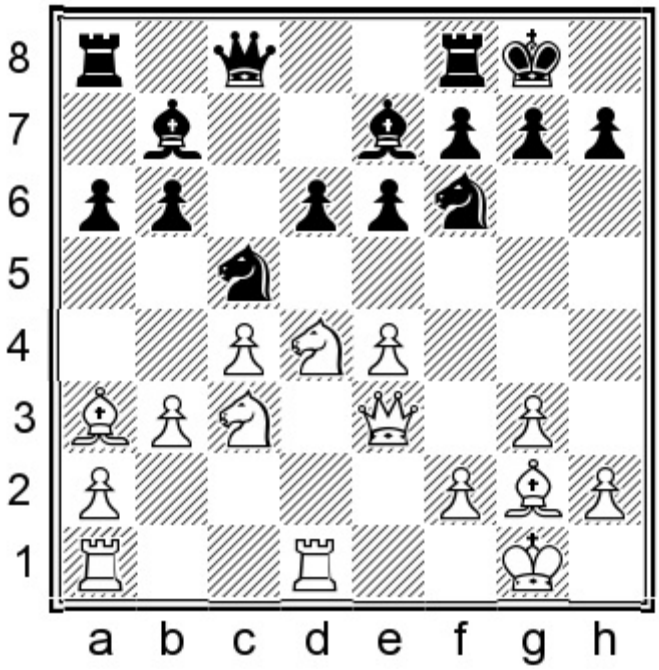


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Position after: 16.♕e3

16...♕c7 (16...0-0? 17.♘e5! ♘c5 18.♗xc5 dxc5 19.♘d7+–) 17.♘d4 ♘c5 18.b4 ♘d7 19.b5 ♗xg2 20.♘f5!→

C) 13...0-0! 14.♘d4

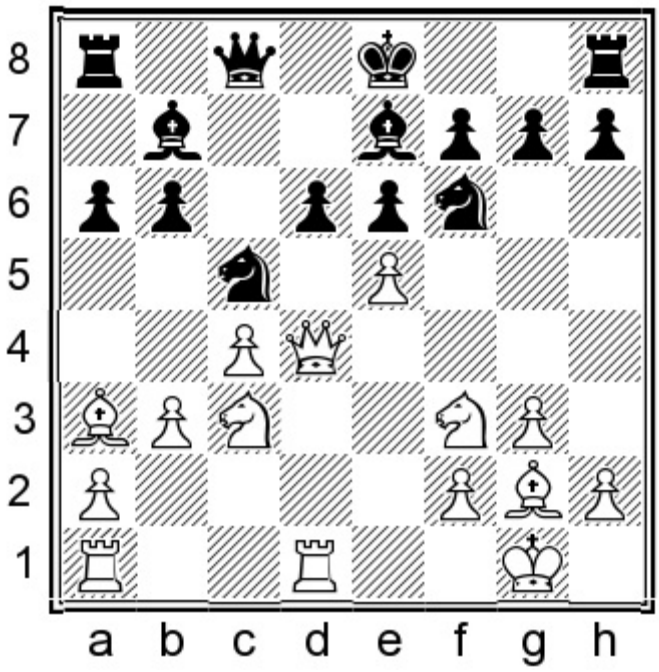


Position after: 14.♘d4

C1) 14...♖d8?! 15.♖ac1 ♗f8 (15...♕c7? 16.b4 ♘cd7 17.♘d5! exd5 18.cxd5 ♕b8 19.♘c6±) 16.♗b2 ♕c7 17.b4 ♘cd7 18.♘d5! exd5? 19.cxd5 ♕b8 20.♘c6 ♕c8 21.♗h3+–

C2) 14...♖e8! 15.♖ac1 ♕c7 16.h3 (16.♗b2 ♖ac8 17.h3 I decided to agree a draw here, mainly because I was having a pretty bad tournament and didn't want to play this kind of Hedgehog against a specialist: Demuth, A (2546) – Kasparov, S (2464) Melbourne 2016) 16...♖ac8 17.g4!?↑ White starts an attack on the kingside, intending to disrupt Black's harmony.

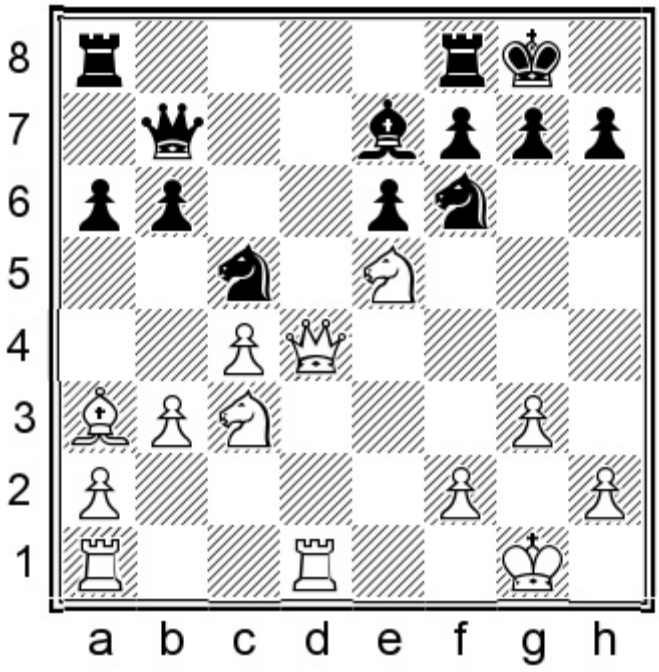
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Position after: 13.e5!?

13...♗xf3!

13...dxe5 is easier to meet, but we still need to be precise: 14.♘xe5 ♗xg2 15.♔xg2 ♕b7+ (15...0-0 16.♘a4 more or less forces 16...♕b7+ 17.♔g1 which transposes) 16.♔g1! (16.f3 has been played too, but it's more weakening for our king, especially the second rank, which makes a major difference) 16...0-0

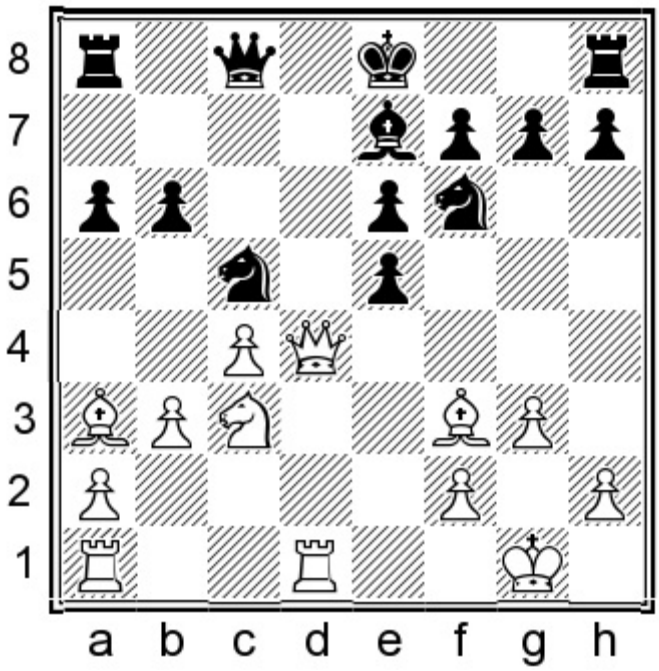


Position after: 16...0-0

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17.♘a4!?N This is a new move, even if I feel it's thematic. (17.♕e3 has brought White good results, but it should be objectively fine for Black) 17...♘xa4 (17...♕c7 is always possible, but it leaves Black with a bad structure after 18.♗xc5 bxc5 19.♕e3±) 18.♗xe7 ♕xe7 19.bxa4 White accepts a dubious structure, but has some activity. His powerful knight completely dominates its counterpart and helps him target the b6-pawn which will soon fall. The mission is then to advance the passed c-pawn. 19...♕b4! As the b6-pawn is lost, Black counterattacks. 20.♖db1! (20.a3 ♕xa4 21.♕xb6↑ is playable as well) 20...♕xa4 21.♖xb6! ♖ab8 22.♖xb8 ♖xb8 23.♖d1 h6 24.♖d2± We have a stable position where it's not so easy for Black to organize counterplay.

14.♗xf3 dxe5



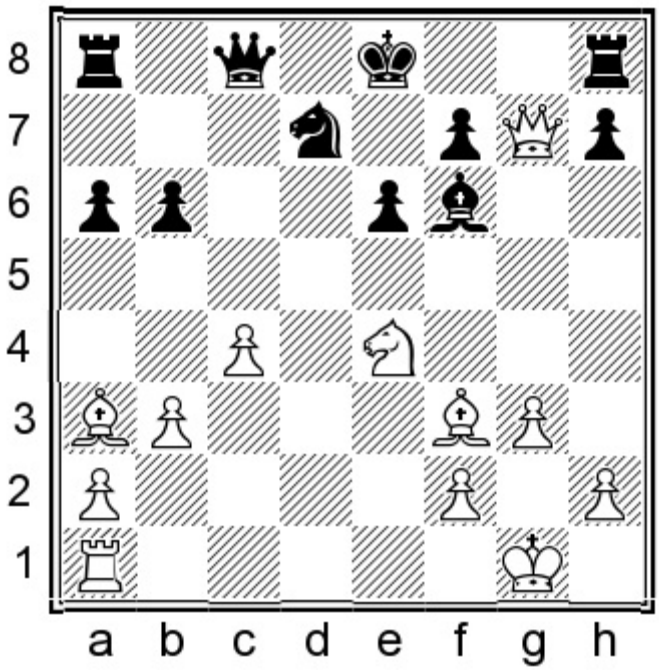
Position after: 14...dxe5

15.♕e3!?

I like this move which came to my attention in a game that was played right next to me in the Australian Open by Grandmaster Ahmed Adly.

15.♕xe5 This was losing, but White has a way to force a draw, a possibility you should be aware of if you're playing against a much stronger opponent. 15...♘cd7! 16.♖xd7! ♘xd7 17.♕xg7 ♗f6 All this was forced, and now 18.♘e4!?

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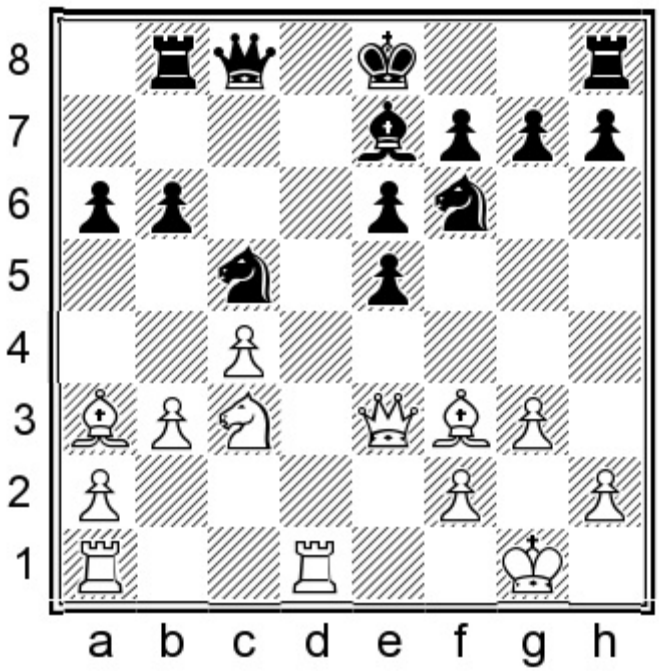


Position after: 18.♘e4!?

saves the day for White: 18...♗xg7 19.♘d6+ ♔d8 20.♘xf7+ ♔e8 (20...♔c7?? 21.♗d6# Oops!) 21.♘d6+= ending the game with a pleasant repetition which has already occurred in five games.

15...♖a7!

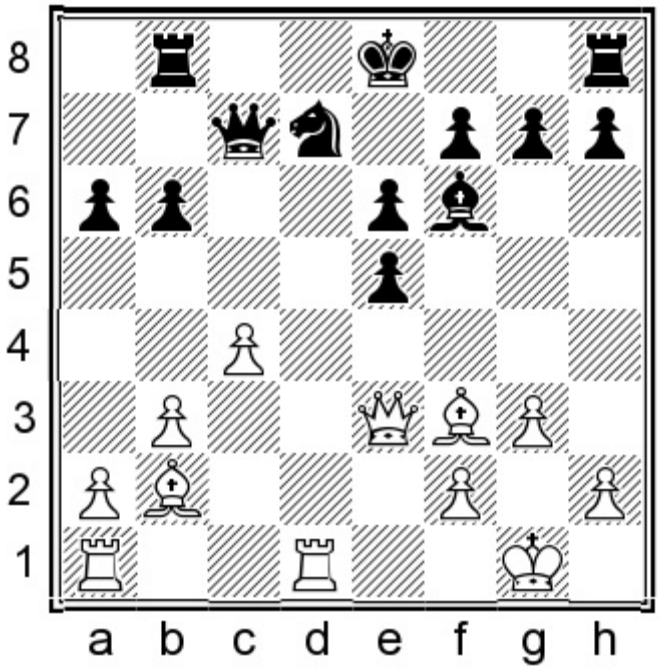
15...♖b8



Position after: 15...♖b8

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This is the other continuation, but the rook makes less sense here, as it cannot come into play that easily. 16.♗b2 ♘cd7! (16...♕c7? 17.♘d5! exd5 18.♗xe5 ♕a7 19.♗xf6 gxf6 20.cxd5 0-0 21.b4!± ♘a4? 22.d6 ♗d8 23.♗e4+–; 16...e4 17.♘xe4 ♘cxe4 18.♗xe4 ♘xe4 19.♕xe4 0-0 20.♗e5 ♖b7 21.♖d3↑) 17.♘e4! ♕c7 18.♘xf6+ ♗xf6



Position after: 18...♗xf6

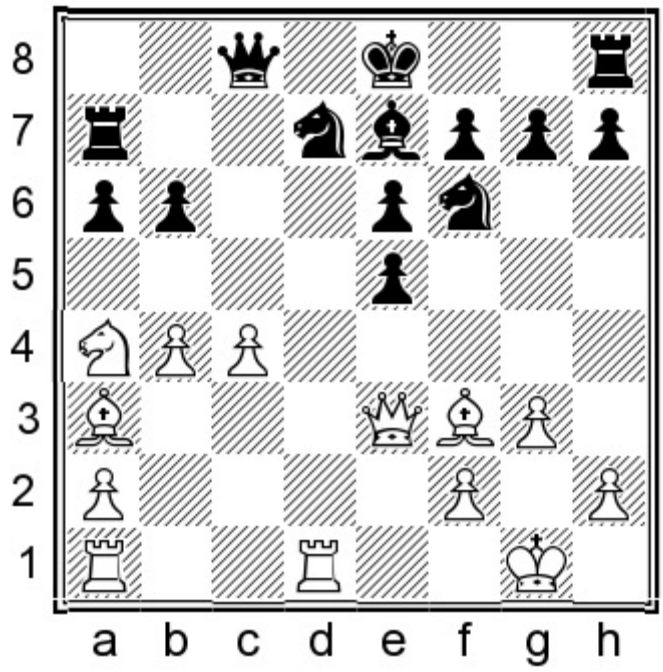
19.♖d2!? (Very interesting too is 19.♗a3 ♗e7 20.♗xe7 ♔xe7 21.♕g5+ ♔f8⇄ 1-0 (41) Anic, D (2415) – Sallen, L Lyon 1993.) 19...0-0 20.♖ad1 ♘c5 21.♖d6± White is about to regain his pawn on e5, retaining some initiative.

16.b4!

16.♗b2 ♖d7!=

16...♘cd7 17.♘a4

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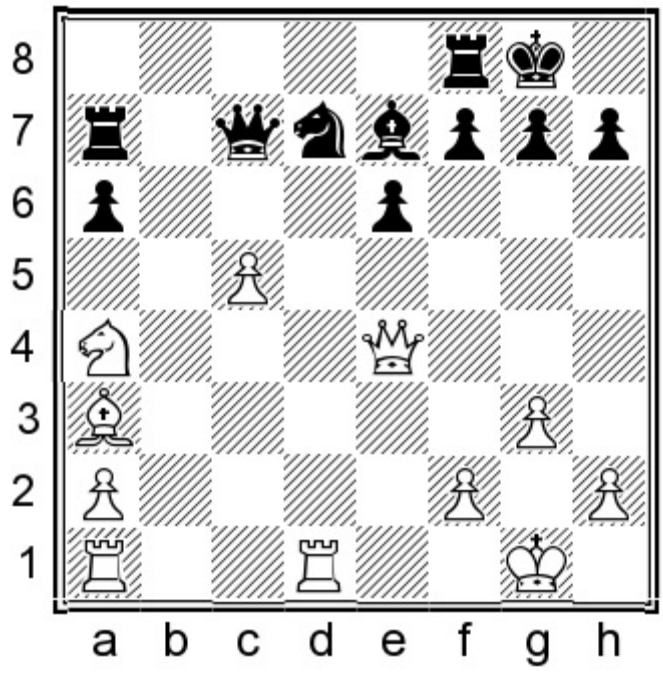


Position after: 17.♘a4

17...e4!N

This move, a novelty at the time of the first edition of the book, seems necessary for Black because the bishop on f3 was way too strong, but it's still not so easy to achieve equality.

17...♕c7 seems inferior since White can advance his c-pawn and protect it easily: 18.c5 bxc5 19.bxc5 e4 (19...0-0? would be met with 20.c6! ♗xa3 21.cxd7 ♗e7 22.♖ac1 ♕b8 23.♖c8!+– The rook on a7 is hanging, and this detail decides the game.) 20.♗xe4 ♘xe4 21.♕xe4 0-0



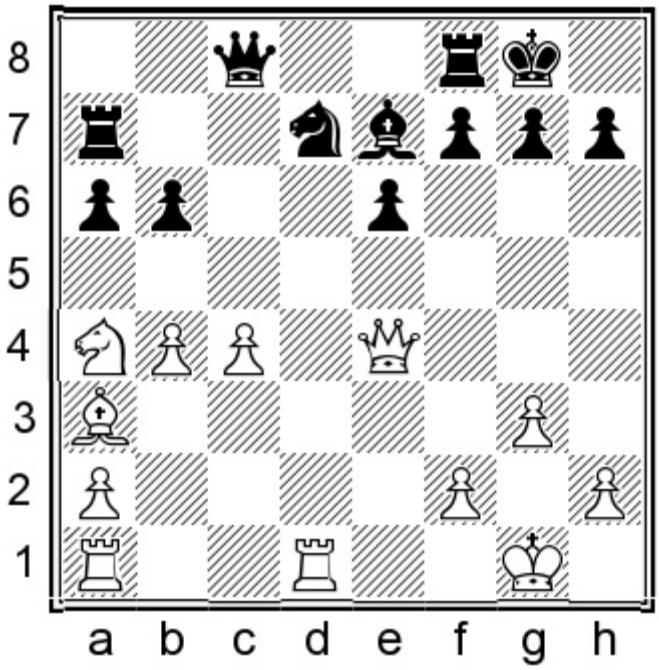
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Position after: 21...0-0

This position occurred in Adly, A (2597) – Kasparov, S (2470) Brisbane 2017. I think that White could play the simple 22.♖ac1! ♘f6 23.♕f3 ♕a5 24.♘b6± with a comfortable edge.

18.♗xe4 ♘xe4 19.♕xe4 0-0!

Black has finally managed to castle, but White has a pawn majority on the queenside, and can try to create a passed c-pawn.

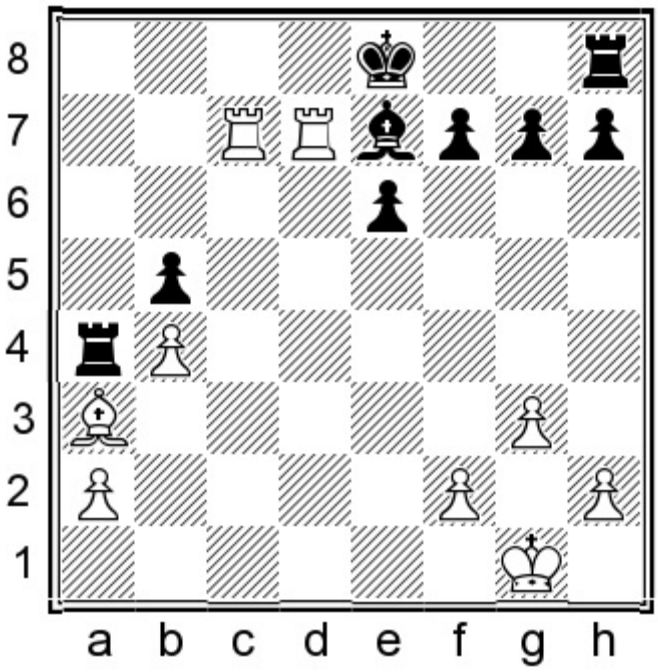


Position after: 19...0-0!

19...b5?! This move is attractive for Black, and it was my opponent's choice after a long thought. 20.cxb5 axb5

A) 21.♖ac1!?N This move could be my choice if I face this position again. 21...♕a8! (21...♕b8?! 22.♗b2 0-0 23.♘c5 ♘xc5 24.♕g4! g6 25.bxc5±) 22.♕xa8+ ♖xa8 23.♖c7 ♖xa4 24.♖dxd7

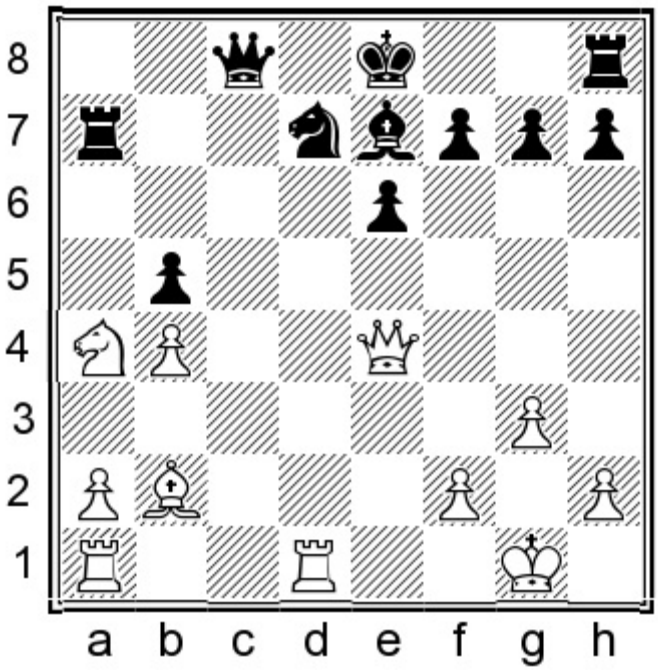
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Position after: 24.♖dxd7

This position seems very dangerous for Black, even if he can probably hold with precise play 24...♗f6 (24...♗d8 25.♖a7 ♖xa3 26.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 27.♖xa3 ♔e7□ 28.♖a7+ ♔f6 29.♖a5 ♖b8 30.♔g2↑) 25.♗c1 ♖xb4 (25...0-0? 26.a3±) 26.♗e3 0-0 27.♗c5 ♖b1+ 28.♔g2 ♖a8 29.♖b7↑

B) 21.♗b2!? I still think that this move, which I suggested in the first edition, is very interesting, but maybe objectively equal if Black plays correctly.



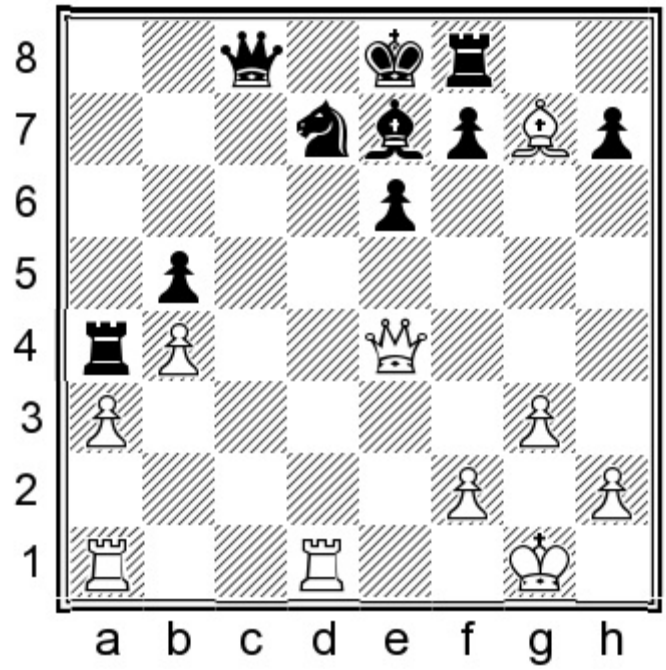
Position after: 21.♗b2!?

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B1) 21...bxa4 22.♗xg7 ♖g8 23.♕xh7 ♖xg7 24.♕xg7 ♗xb4 25.♖ac1 ♖c7 26.♖xc7 ♕xc7 27.♕d4 ♗c5 28.♕xa4± These kinds of endgames are difficult for Black. White has two separate passed pawns, and is the only one playing for a win.

B2) It's a bit late to castle: 21...0-0?? 22.♕d4!+–.

B3) 21...♖xa4 22.♗xg7 ♖f8 23.a3!



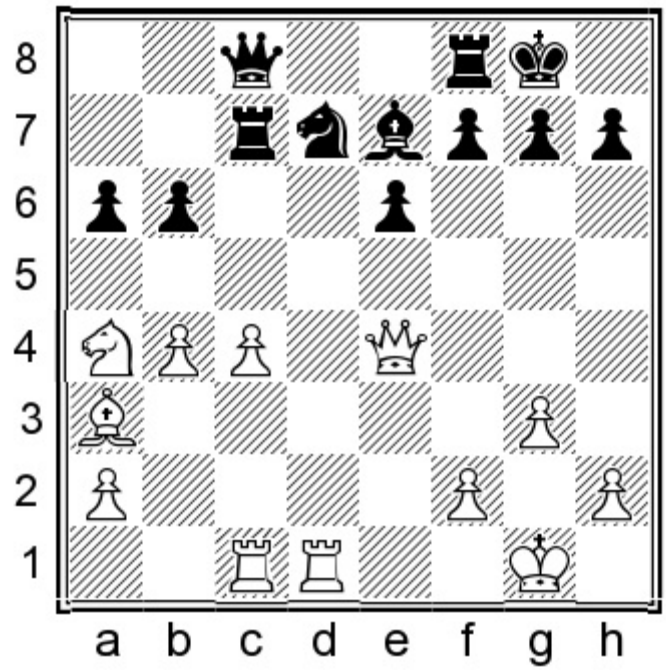
Position after: 23.a3!

This is strong! White simply protects his queenside pawns before restoring the material balance. 23...♕a8 24.♕xh7± Black's king isn't safe, and we have managed to create a passed h-pawn. Thus, we keep the upper hand. 24...♖xa3?? 25.♕d3+– A quite beautiful trap.

B4) 21...♕b7! This is the move I had to face recently, and it's probably about equal. 22.♕xb7 (22.♘c3!? ♕xe4 23.♘xe4 0-0 24.a3 is probably equal but still playable for White.) 22...♖xb7 23.♖ac1 (23.♘c5 ♘xc5 24.bxc5 f6 25.♗d4 ♔f7 26.♖dc1=) 23...bxa4 24.♖c8+ ♗d8 25.♗xg7 ♖g8 26.♗f6 ♘xf6 27.♖dxd8+ ♔e7 28.♖xg8 ♘xg8 29.♖xg8 ♖xb4 30.♖a8 ½-½ Demuth, A (2543) – Papin, V (2453) Adelaide 2017.

20.♖ac1 ♖c7

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Position after: 20...♖c7

21.♕e3!

21.c5 doesn't work if Black is precise: 21...bxc5 22.bxc5 ♘xc5! 23.♕f4 Black looks in trouble on the c-file, but he is not in danger: 23...h6 24.♖c4 ♖d8! 25.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 26.♗xc5 ♗xc5 27.♖xc5 ♖xc5 28.♘xc5 ♕d1+ 29.♔g2 ♕d5+ 30.♕e4 ♕xc5 31.♕a8+ ♔h7 32.♕xa6 ♕d5+= and the passed a-pawn is not enough here to cause Black trouble.

21...♕b7

21...b5?! 22.cxb5 axb5 23.♘c3±

22.♖xd7! ♖xd7 23.♘xb6

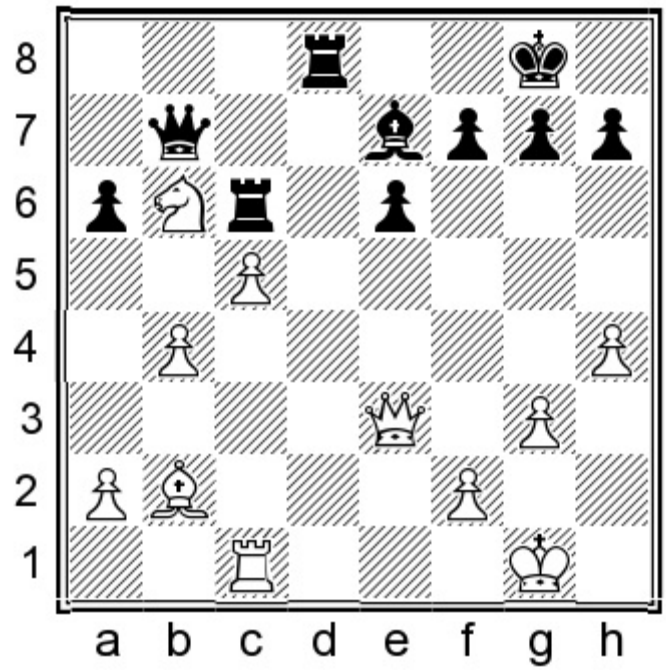
I like this position. Engines are not afraid and assess the position as being fully equal, but White's prospects on the queenside seem quite promising. I don't think it would bother me to play this position in practice.

23...♖d6 24.c5 ♖c6 25.h4

25.♗b2?! White doesn't protect b4 any more, and this gives Black the possibility to force him to take a perpetual after 25...♗d8! 26.a3 ♗xb6 27.♗xg7! ♔xg7 28.♕g5+ ♔h8 29.♕f6+ ♔g8 30.♕g5+=.

25...♖d8 26.♗b2↑

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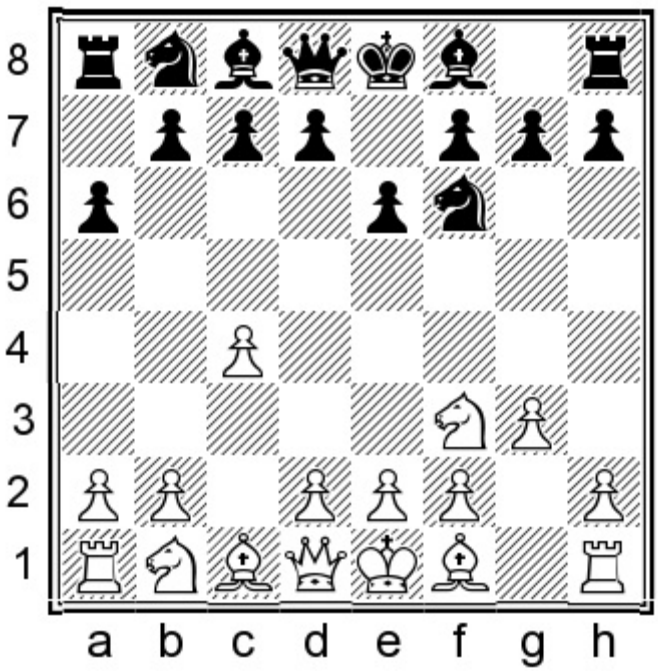


Position after: 26.♗b2↑

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Chapter 16
The Romanishin Defense

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 a6



Chapter guide

Chapter 16 – The Romanishin Defense

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 a6

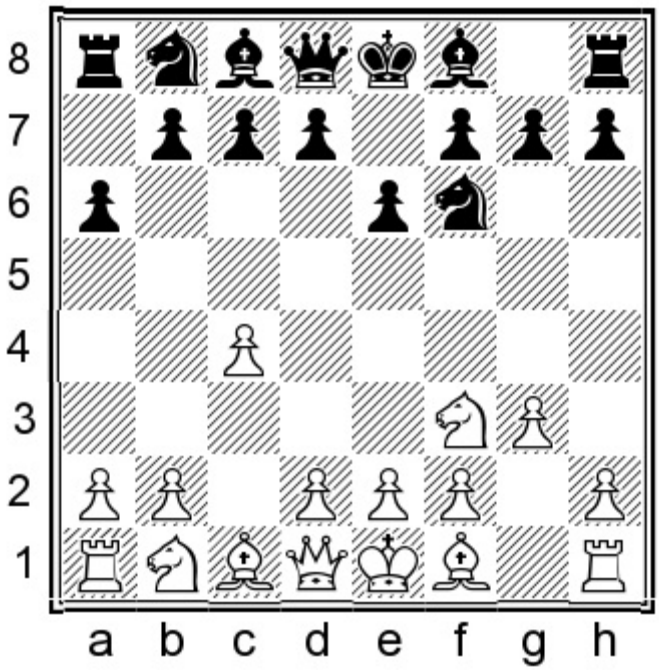
a) 4.--, 4.♗g2 --, 4...b5 5.b3 c5

b) 4.♗g2 b5 5.b3 ♗b7

a) 4.--, 4.♗g2 --, 4...b5 5.b3 c5

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 a6!?

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Position after: 3...a6!?

Here we look at the second option available to Nimzo-Indian players, the Romanishin Defense, which I think is quite an underestimated line. Black is aiming to disrupt our center by attacking the c4-pawn. Unfortunately, there is no effective way to prevent ...b5.

4.♗g2

We can start with 4.b3, but in general, it makes little difference.

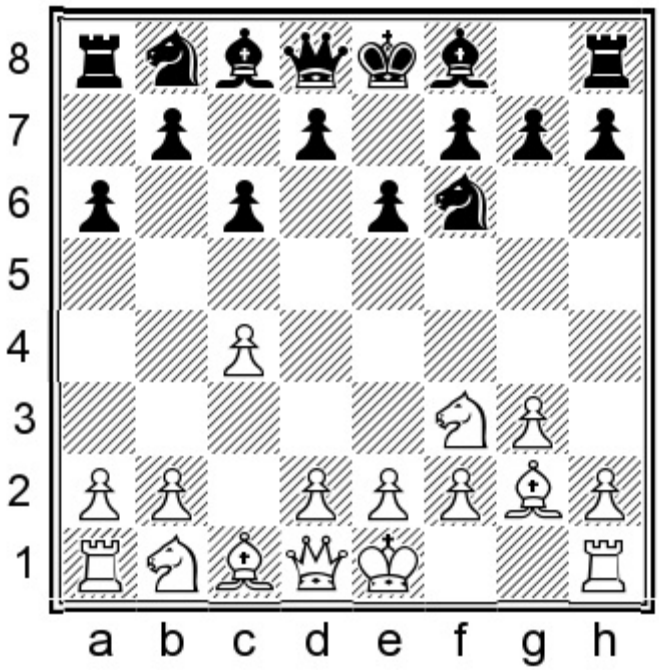
If 4.♘c3?! d5! is quite strong. We can't really allow ...dxc4 as 3...a6 would prove useful. 5.cxd5 (5.b3? d4∓) 5...exd5 6.♗g2 ♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.d4 c6= The pawn on a6 isn't useful but this is the kind of position where we could regret having taken on d5. Black has easy development, and in contrast to the Catalan (where we usually want to push e4 at some point), we don't have any plan here as it would create a weak d-pawn.

4...b5

Black doesn't fear any discovery on the long diagonal as he would happily play ...d5.

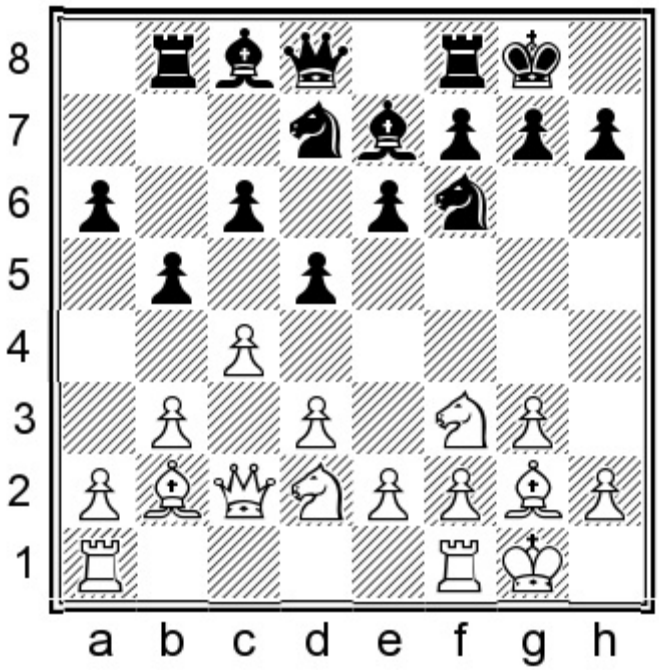
A) 4...c6

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Position after: 4...c6

I'll just mention that Mamedyarov tried this move twice at the same blitz event, but after two defeats, he never tried it again, and no-one has followed in his footsteps. 5.0-0 b5 6.d3 d5 7.♕c2 ♗e7 8.b3 ♘bd7 9.♗b2 0-0 10.♘bd2 ♖b8



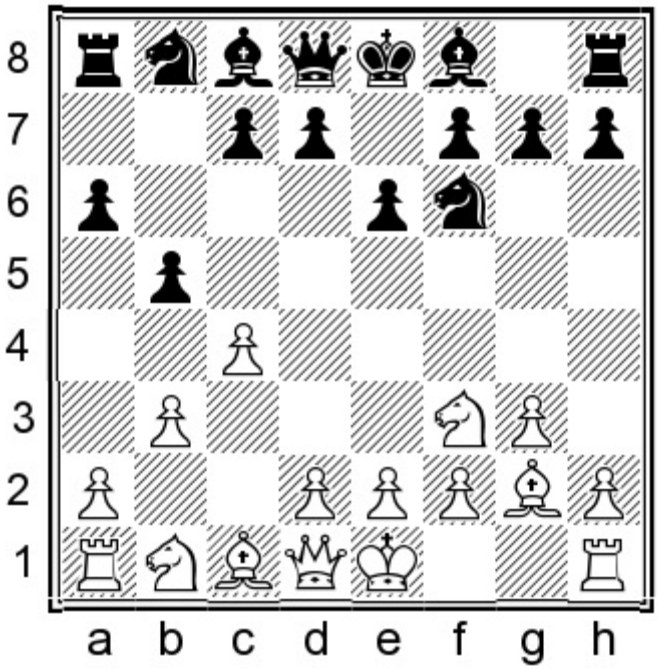
Position after: 10...♖b8

I would now deviate from Carlsen, M (2775) – Mamedyarov, S (2742) Moscow 2008 with 11.e4!N 11...♗b7 12.♖fe1± and Black's pawn structure makes little sense.

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B) 4...d5 If you are reading this book from the beginning to the end, you might remember that we checked this move long ago... in the first chapter about the sidelines of the Neo-Catalan!

5.b3!



Position after: 5.b3!

Simply protecting our pawn. Black now has a choice between two more or less equivalent moves.

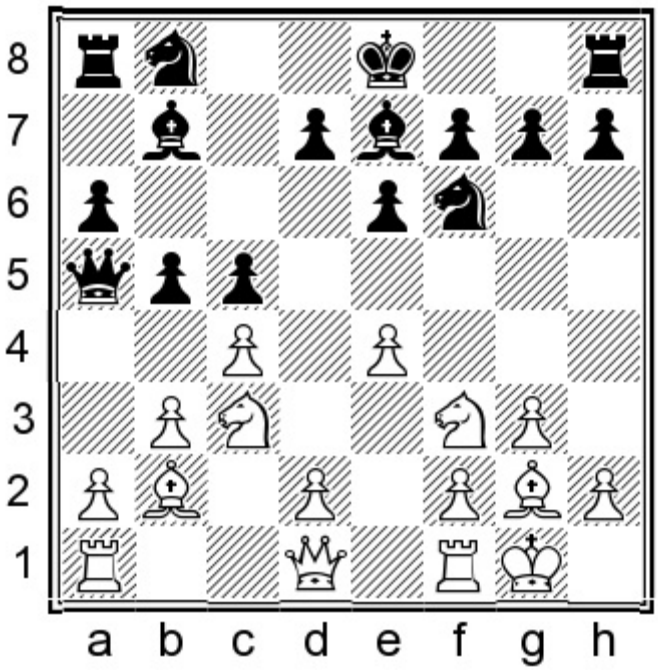
5...c5!?

This anticipates the attack of the b-pawn.

6.0-0 ♗b7 7.♘c3! ♕b6

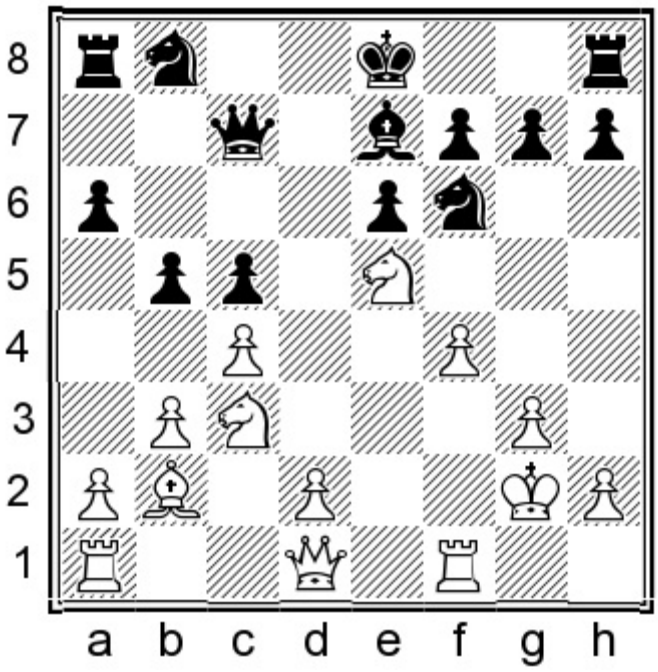
A) 7...♕a5?! The queen seems less natural here, and it does nothing special on the a-file. 8.♗b2 ♗e7 9.e4!

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Position after: 9.e4!

A1) 9...d6 10.e5 dxe5 11.♘xe5 ♗xg2 12.♔xg2 ♕c7 (12...0-0N 13.cxb5! axb5 14.a4 b4 15.♘b5± We have great minor pieces and a protected passed a-pawn already. The only problem in our position is our isolated and potentially weak d-pawn.) 13.f4!N



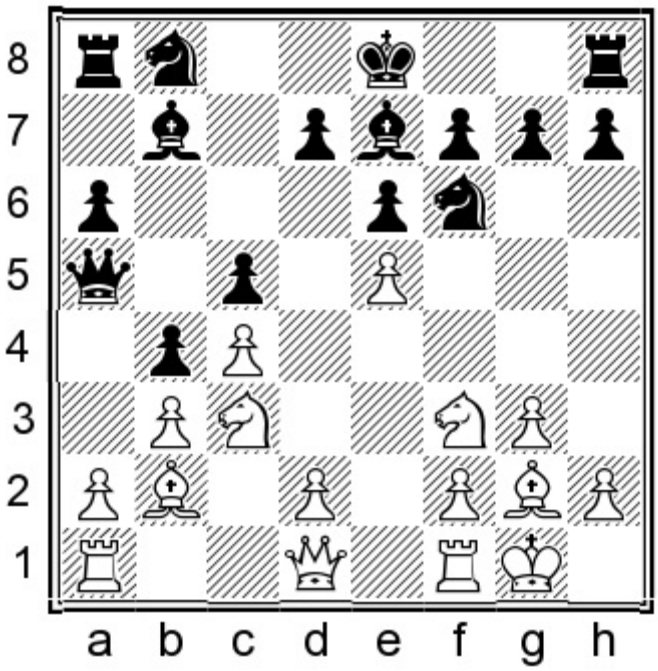
Position after: 13.f4!N

13...♕b7+ (13...♘bd7?! 14.♕f3 ♖b8 15.♘c6 ♖b6 16.♘xe7 ♔xe7 17.d3±) 14.♕f3! ♕xf3+ 15.♖xf3 bxc4 16.bxc4 ♘fd7 17.♘xd7 ♘xd7 18.♘a4±

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A2) 9...♘xe4? 10.♘xe4! ♗xe4 11.♖e1 ♗b7 12.♗xg7 ♖g8 13.♗b2±

A3) 9...b4 10.e5! An important move.



Position after: 10.e5!

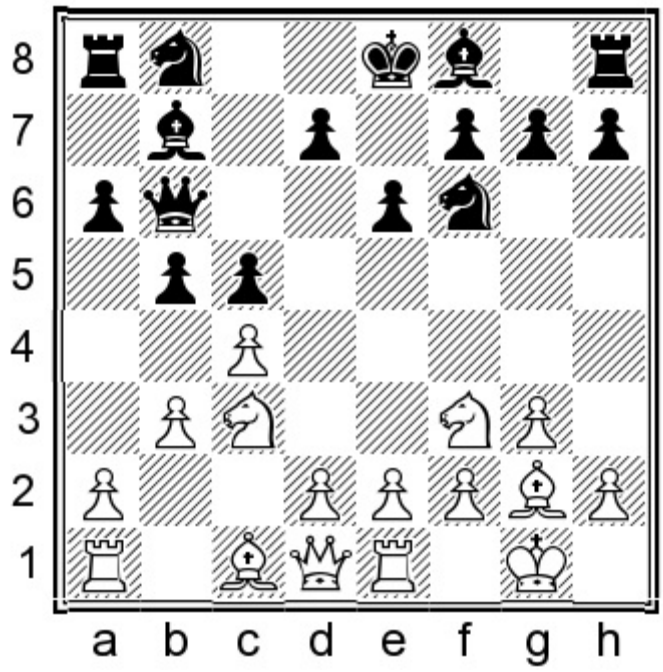
10...bxc3 11.♗xc3 ♕d8 12.exf6 ♗xf6 The strong Chinese grandmaster understands the position perfectly, and forces Black to enter a difficult endgame after 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6 14.d4! cxd4 15.♘xd4 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2 0-0 17.♕f3! ♕xf3+ 18.♔xf3± and he managed to win in Ni, H (2689) – Cheng, B (2436) Sydney 2015.

B) 7...b4 8.♘a4 d6 is similar to the ...b4-ideas in the line with 5...♗b7.

8.♖e1!

This is clearly not the main move, but I think it's pretty strong, and is definitely my choice.

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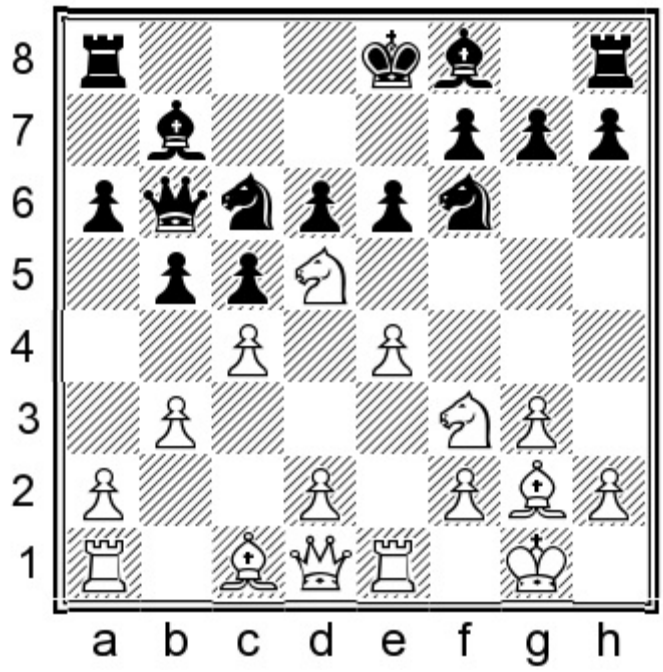


Position after: 8.♖e1!

8...d6

A) 8...♘e4?! 9.♘xe4 ♗xe4 10.d3 ♗b7 11.♗b2± is difficult for Black because he can't develop his bishop without losing his g7-pawn.

B) 8...♘c6?! 9.e4! d6 (9...♘d4?! fails because of 10.e5! ♘g4 11.♘xd4 cxd4 12.♕xg4 dxc3 13.dxc3±) 10.♘d5!!

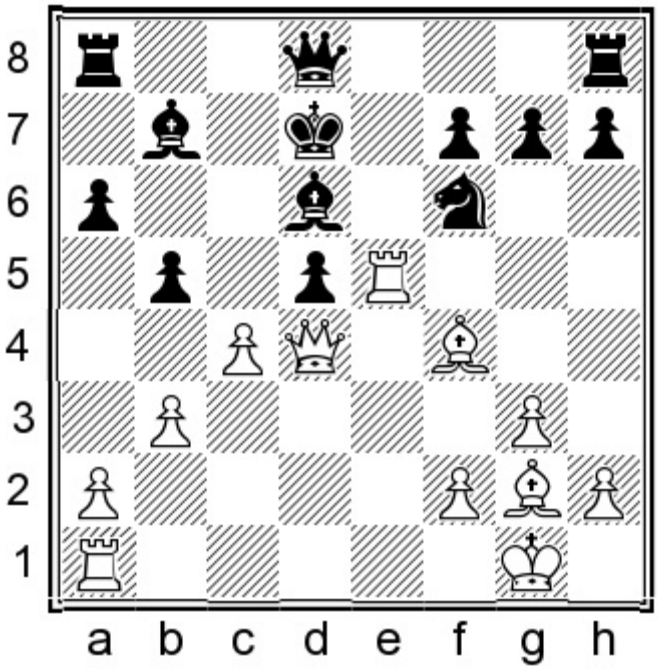


Position after: 10.♘d5!!

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This is an amazing piece sacrifice. Unfortunately, it's not a novelty, but Black has already suffered a couple of losses here.

B1) 10...♕d8 11.d4! cxd4 12.♘xd4 ♘xd4 13.♕xd4± exd5? now loses to 14.e5! with a completely crushing attack: 14...dxe5 15.♖xe5+ ♔d7 16.♗f4 ♗d6



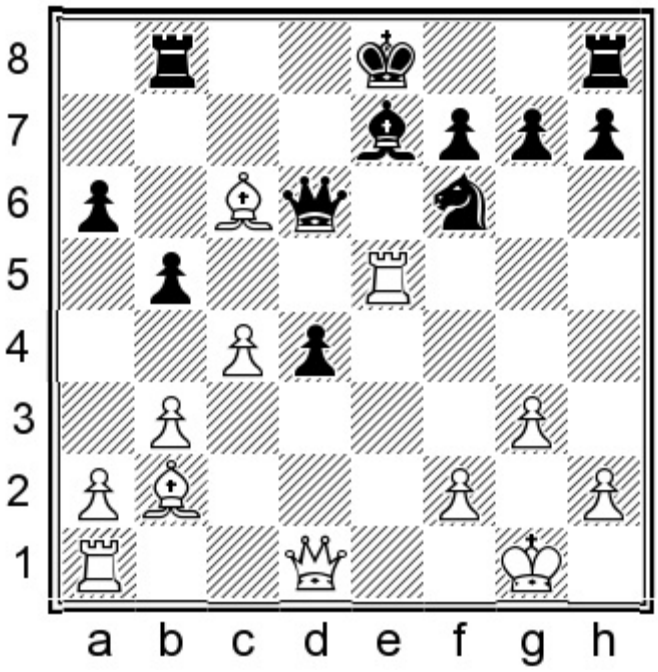
Position after: 16...♗d6

All this was seen in the game Santos Ruiz, M (2331) – Illingworth, M (2450) Budapest 2014 where White collapsed completely, whereas he could have kept a winning position with 17.♖ae1!N 17...♔c7 18.♖e7+ ♔b8 19.c5! ♗xf4 20.♕xf4+ ♔a7 21.c6+–.

B2) 10...exd5 11.exd5+

B2.1) 11...♘e5 12.d4! cxd4 13.♗b2! ♗e7 14.♘xe5 dxe5 15.♖xe5 ♕d6 (15...♕c7 16.d6! ♕xd6 17.♗xb7 ♖b8 18.♗c6+!!

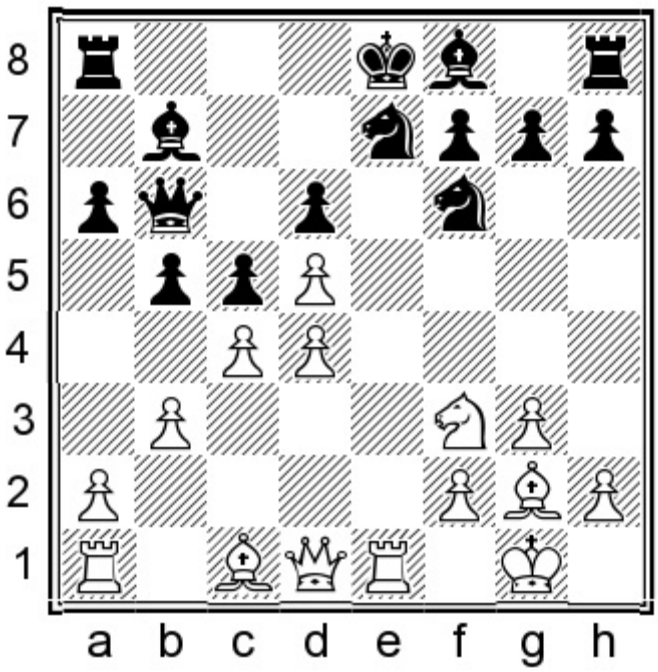
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Position after: 18.♗c6+!!

18...♕xc6 19.♕xd4→ with excellent compensation for the piece) 16.♗xd4 0-0 17.c5! ♕d8 18.♗e3± White's position is crushing.

B2.2) 11...♘e7 12.d4!±



Position after: 12.d4!±

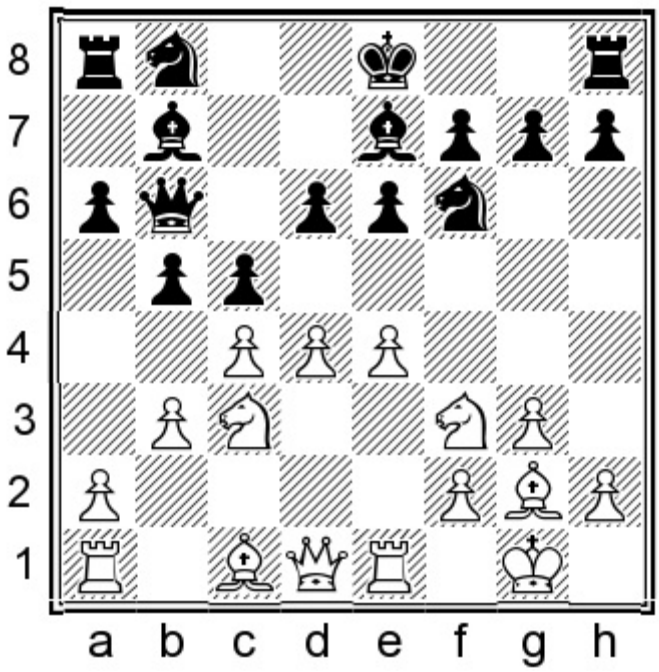
It's hard to believe, but Black is actually defenseless. The only game to reach this position continued 12...0-0-0? 13.♘g5! winning back some material: 13...♘exd5 14.♘xf7 ♘c3 15.♗xb7+

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(15.dxc5! is even stronger: 15...♕c7 16.♗xb7+ ♕xb7 17.♘xd8 ♔xd8 18.♕d4+–) 15...♕xb7 16.♘xd8 ♔xd8 17.♕d3 b4 18.dxc5 d5 19.♗e3+– 1-0 (24) Sadorra, J (2577) – Iotov, V (2568) Dallas 2013.

C) 8...♗e7 is maybe best, but it's a pretty dismal move: 9.e4 0-0 10.e5 ♘e8 11.d4!N 11...cxd4 12.♕xd4 ♕xd4 13.♘xd4 ♗xg2 14.♔xg2±.

9.e4 ♗e7 10.d4



Position after: 10.d4

10...cxd4

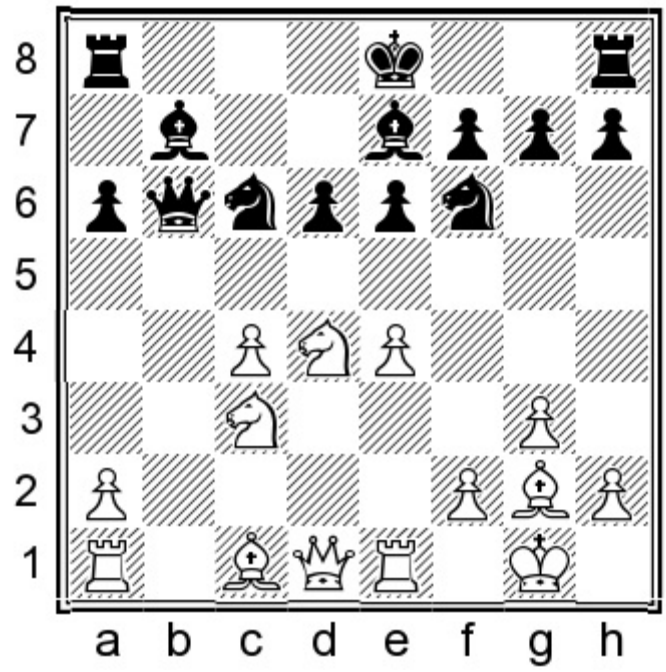
In the event of 10...♘c6 11.d5!N looks like a strong continuation: 11...♘d4 (11...♘d8? 12.e5 dxe5 13.♘xe5 0-0 14.♗g5+–) 12.♗e3 ♘xf3+ 13.♗xf3 0-0 14.b4!± with an overwhelming advantage.

11.♘xd4 bxc4?!

11...♘c6 Black should prefer to keep the position as closed as possible, but he's in trouble anyway: 12.♗e3 ♘xd4 13.♗xd4 ♕c6 (13...♕a5 14.e5! dxe5 15.♗xb7 exd4 16.♗xa8 dxc3 17.♗c6+ ♔f8 18.cxb5 axb5 19.a3±) 14.cxb5 axb5 15.♖c1±.

12.bxc4 ♘c6

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Position after: 12...♘c6

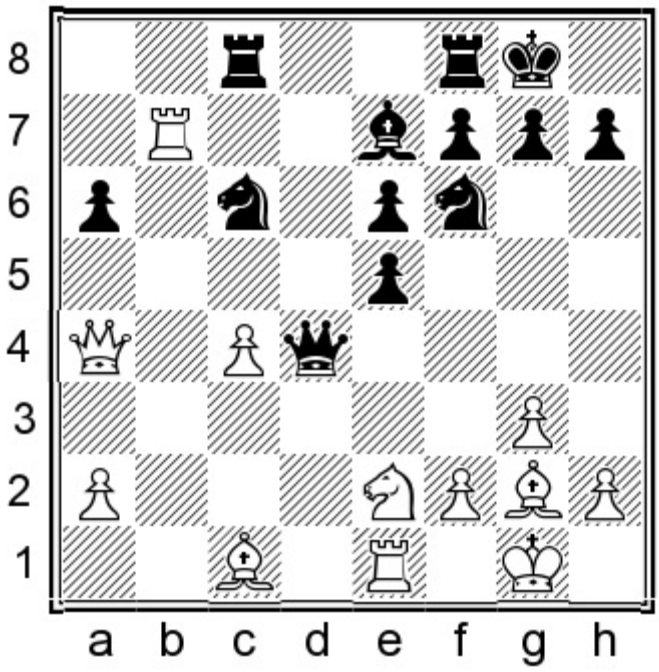
White won easily in Filippov, V – Atalik, S Bled 2001, but it seems fair to mention that he has the stronger...

13.e5!N 13...dxe5 14.♖b1 ♕xd4 15.♖xb7 ♖c8 16.♕a4 0-0

16...♕xc3? 17.♗xc6+ ♔f8 18.♖d1+– White is winning. ♗b2, bagging the queen, and ♖xe7 are two threats hard to parry.

17.♘e2!+–

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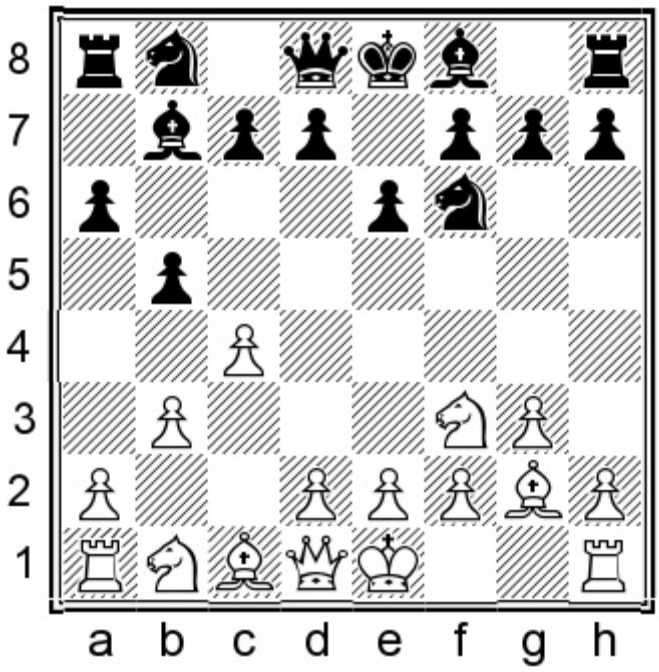


Position after: 17.♘e2!+−

And White wins either the c6-knight or e7-bishop.

b) 4.♗g2 b5 5.b3 ♗b7

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3 a6!? 4.♗g2 b5 5.b3! ♗b7



Position after: 5...♗b7

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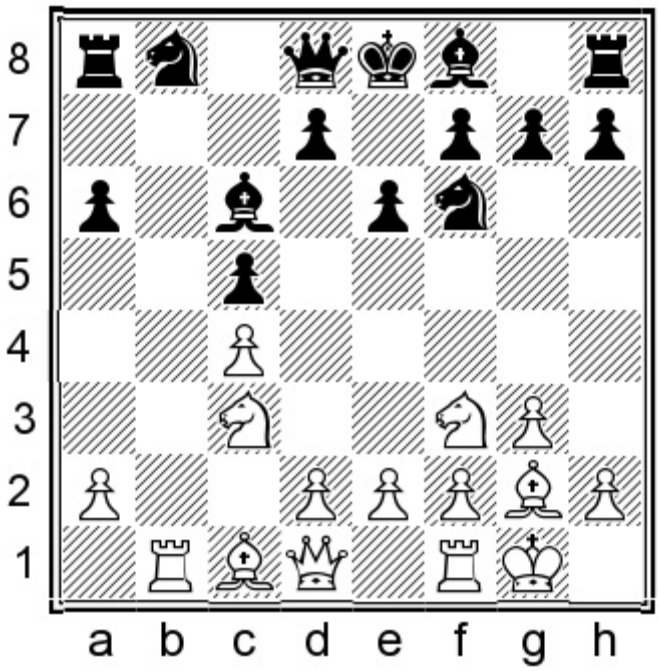
6.♘c3!

Forcing our opponent to make a decision about his b-pawn. He has many choices at his disposal.

6...b4

This releases the pressure, but it's probably the least of the evils.

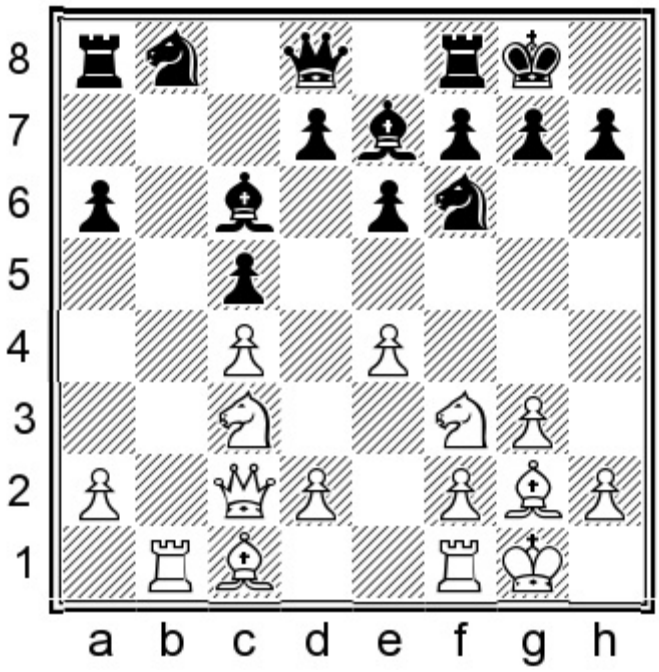
A) 6...bxc4?! I haven't a clue why this has been played so many times as it makes little sense. Opening the file is clearly pretty bad news for the bishop: 7.bxc4 c5 8.♖b1! ♗c6 9.0-0



Position after: 9.0-0

9...♗e7 (9...d6N isn't better because d6 will soon become a target 10.d4! cxd4 11.♕xd4 ♘bd7 12.♗a3 ♕c7 13.♖fd1± ♘c5? 14.♗xc5 dxc5 15.♕e5 ♕xe5 16.♘xe5 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♗e7 18.♘c6+– Black is completely lost.) 10.♕c2! (10.d4!? cxd4 11.♕xd4 0-0 12.♖d1 ♕a5 13.♗d2 ♕c5 14.♗e3 ♕xd4 15.♘xd4 ♗xg2 16.♔xg2± 1-0 (33) Laznicka, V (2676) – Akobian, V (2635) Baku 2015) 10...0-0 11.e4

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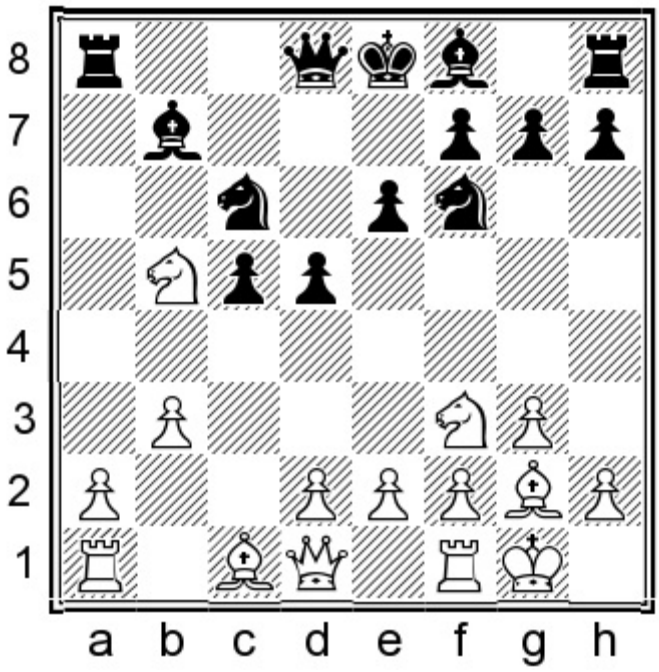


Position after: 11.e4

Black has huge trouble developing his pieces. 11...♖a7 (11...♕c7 12.d4 cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♖c8 14.♖d1± 1-0 (32) Ribli, Z – Fedorchuk, S Germany 2006) 12.d4 cxd4 13.♘xd4 ♗a8 14.♖d1 Black has solved his problem with the b8-knight (the c6-square is free), but he remains passive. White won in Korchnoi, V – Tisdall, J Copenhagen 1996.

B) 6...♗b4 protects b5, but gives up the bishop pair: 7.cxb5! ♗xc3 8.dxc3 axb5 9.♕d3!±.

C) 6...c5?! I don't feel Black has enough counterplay after this sacrifice. 7.cxb5 axb5 8.♘xb5 d5 (8...♕b6 9.a4 ♘c6 10.0-0 ♗e7 11.d4!±) 9.0-0 ♘c6

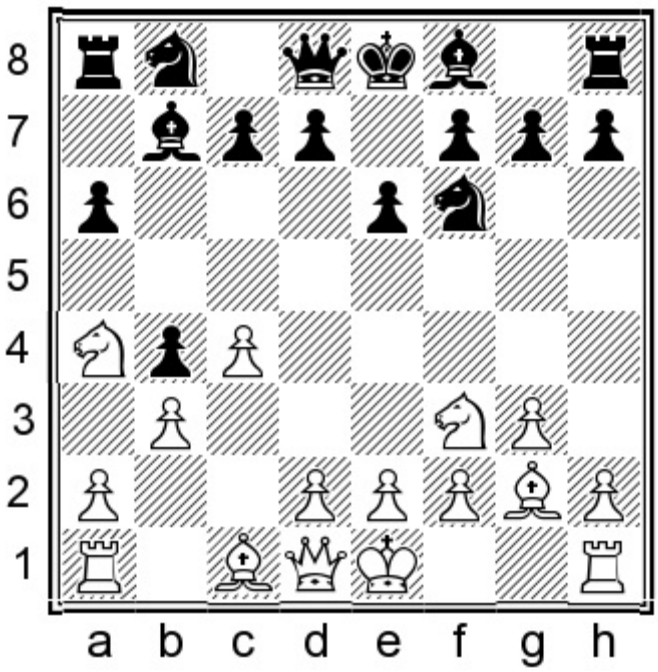


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Position after: 9...♘c6

10.♗b2N (Better than 10.d3 as played in Goldin, A (2585) – Lugovoi, A (2490) Elista 1995, because we keep the idea of playing d2-d4 at any moment.) 10...♗e7 11.a4 0-0 12.d4!±

7.♘a4



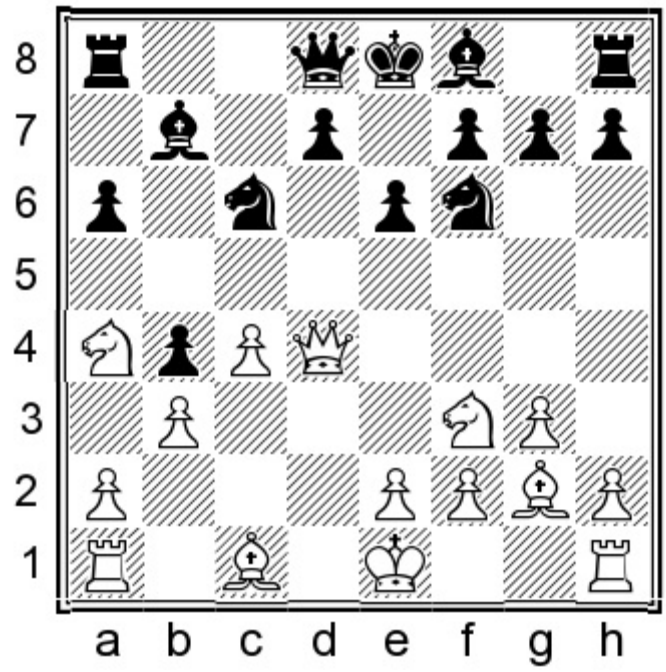
Position after: 7.♘a4

7...d6

A) 7...♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.d4 d6 10.♗b2 is similar to the main line.

B) 7...c5 is bit committal, and Black should wait to play it. 8.d4 cxd4 (8...d6? 9.dxc5 dxc5 10.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 11.0-0±) 9.♕xd4 ♘c6

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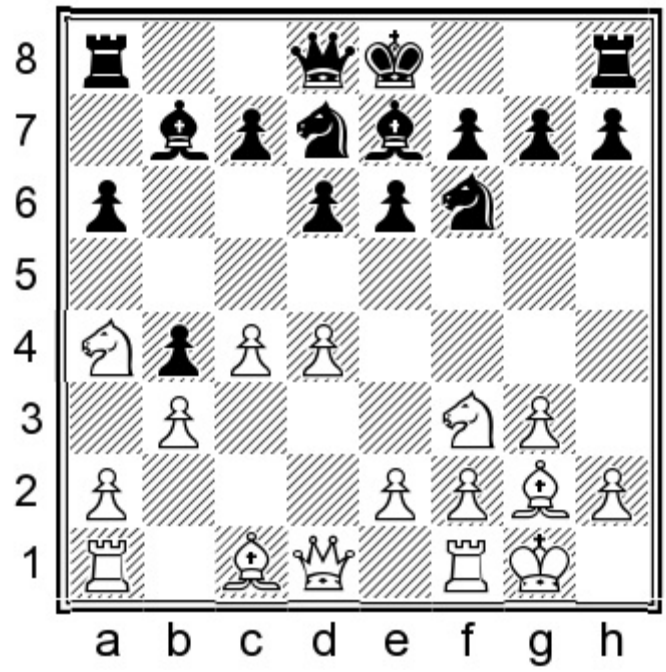
Position after: 9...♘c6

10.♕b6!? This kind of endgame is actually quite bad for Black. (10.♕f4! d6 11.♗b2 ♗e7 12.♖d1± is probably even stronger than the endgame) 10...♕xb6 11.♘xb6 ♖d8 12.0-0 ♘e4 13.♗b2 f6 14.♖ad1 ♘c5 (14...♗c5 15.♘a4 ♗a7 16.♘e1! ♘c5 17.♘xc5 ♗xc5 18.♘d3 ♗e7 19.♗c1!± Black's queenside pawns are weak) 15.♘e1 ♘a5 16.♘d3 ♗xg2 17.♔xg2 ♘xd3 18.exd3 ♖b8 19.♗d4 ♘c6 20.♗e3± 1-0 (43) Mareco, S (2655) – Flores, D (2568) Buenos Aires 2017.

8.d4 ♘bd7 9.0-0 ♗e7

If 9...c5 White gets an advantage with 10.dxc5 dxc5 11.♕d3! ♗e7 12.♖d1 0-0 13.♗f4±. Black needs to find a way to get some activity, but it's not so simple.

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Position after: 9...♗e7

10.♗b2 0-0

After some natural moves, I like the thematic pseudo-sacrifice...

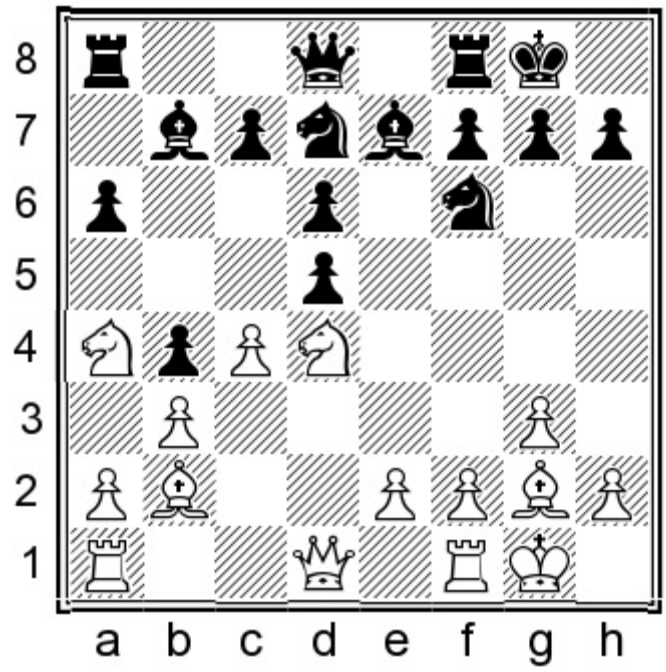
11.d5!? exd5

11...e5?! 12.♘h4! is strong because Black can't prevent ♘f5. 12...g6 13.c5! Black is crushed: 13...♘xc5? (13...dxc5? 14.d6+–; 13...♗c8 is the only move that doesn't lose on the spot: 14.c6 ♘b8 15.f4!→) 14.♘xc5 dxc5 15.d6! ♗xg2 16.dxe7 ♕xe7 17.♘xg2+–.

12.♘h4!?

12.♘d4!?N

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Position after: 12.♘d4!?N

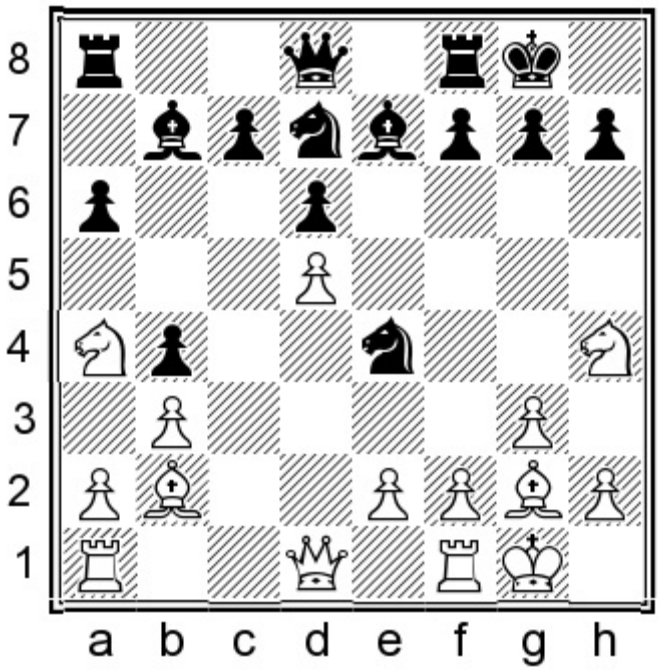
White can also play a real sacrifice, as Black is able to keep his extra pawn. The knight is heading for c6, and we are going to have compensation.

A) 12...c5!? is always possible and might be better than keeping the pawn, because at least the knight can't find a good spot on c6: 13.♘f5 was another idea 13...♖e8 14.cxd5 ♗f8 15.♘e3 and I think the best practical choice is to sacrifice the exchange with 15...♖xe3 16.fxe3 ♕e7∞.

B) 12...♖b8 13.cxd5 ♘xd5 14.♖c1! ♗f6 15.♘c6 ♗xc6 16.♖xc6 ♗xb2 (16...♘e7 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.♖xa6±) 17.♗xd5 ♗f6 18.♕c2∓ I definitely prefer White here.

12...♘e4 13.cxd5

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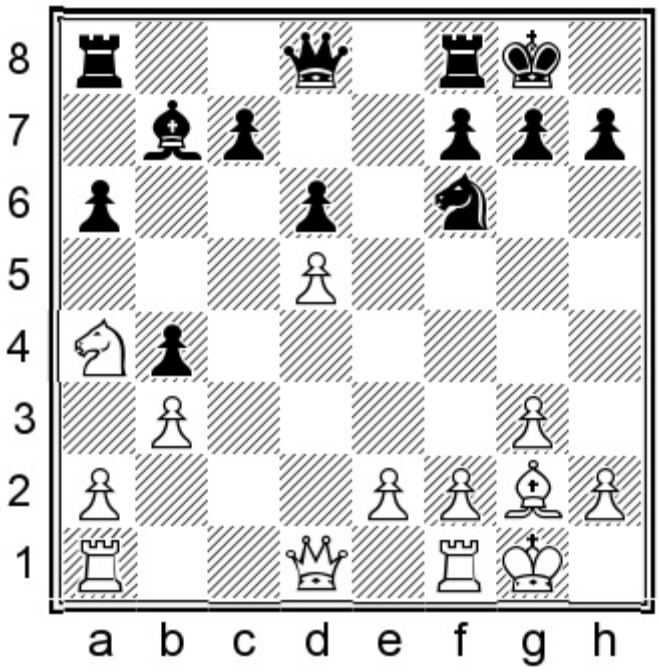
Position after: 13.cxd5

13...♗xh4!N

13...♘ec5 14.♕d4 ♗f6 15.♕xb4 a5 was clearly worse for Black in view of 16.♕d2!N (16.♗xf6 axb4 17.♗xd8 ♖fxd8 18.♘xc5 ♘xc5⩲ 1-0 (65) Bogosavljevic, B (2551) – Rajkovic, D (2453) Cetinje 2010) 16...♘xa4 17.bxa4 ♗xh4 18.gxh4 ♕xh4 19.♖ac1±

14.♗xe4 ♗f6 15.♗xf6 ♘xf6 16.♗g2↑

We have the upper hand but Black is still solid.



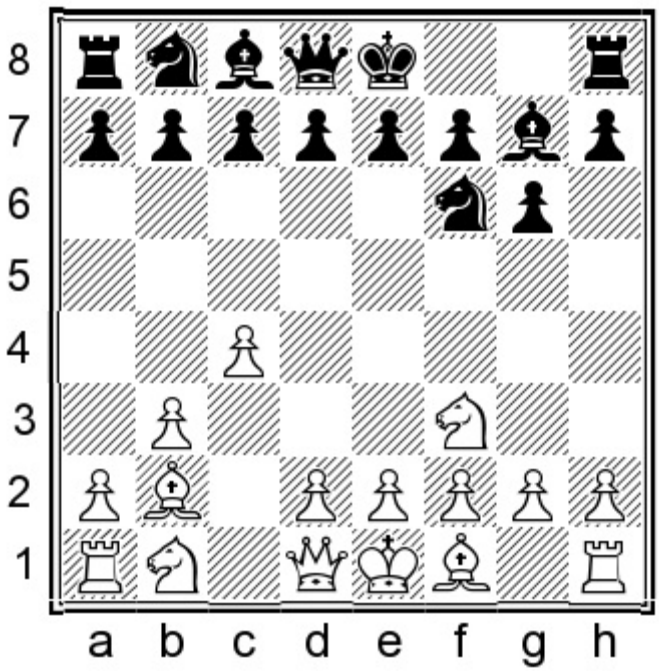
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Position after: 16.♗g2↑

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Chapter 17
The Anti-King's Indian Defense

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.b3 ♗g7 4.♗b2



Chapter guide

Chapter 17 – The Anti-King's Indian Defense

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.b3 ♗g7 4.♗b2

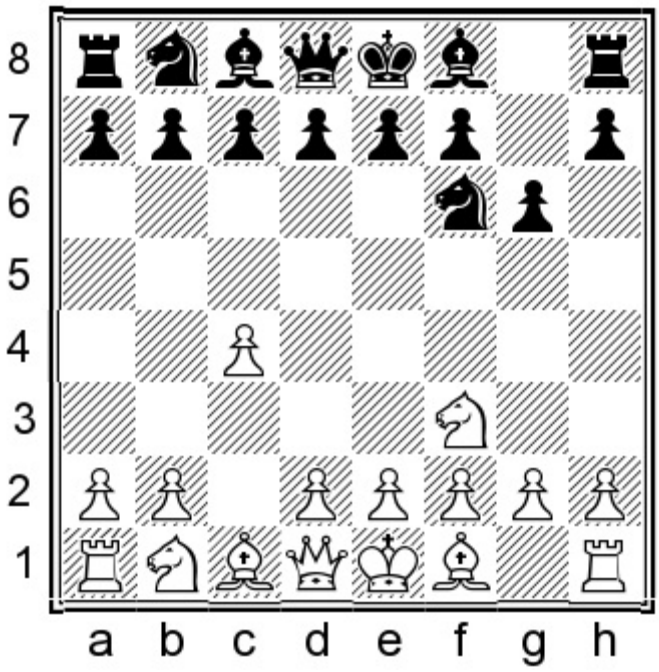
a) 4...--, 4...0-0 5.g3 --, 5...d6 6.d4 --

b) 4...0-0 5.g3 d6 6.d4 ♘bd7 7.♗g2 --, 7...e5

a) 4...--, 4...0-0 5.g3 --, 5...d6 6.d4 --

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6

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Position after: 2...g6

The King's Indian and Grünfeld Defenses have always been highly popular, both among top players and amateurs. White can easily occupy the center, and Black readily agrees to this. In the following two chapters we are going to examine two possibilities for White. First, a pure Reti system, starting with 3.b3. Of course we will keep in mind that if Black plays ...c5 at some point we transpose into the Symmetrical English.

We will focus mainly on the possibilities of Black playing in King's Indian spirit (with ...e5), whereas we will be playing with two fianchettoes. On the other hand, Grünfeld players may try ...c6/ ...d5, which transposes into chapter 6, the Slav Defense with 4...g6.

Then we will consider the main lines, where we more or less transpose into 1.d4 systems, but against the Grünfeld we will examine a system specific to our move order.

The King's Indian is another subject, as starting with 1.♘f3, 2.c4 and 3.♘c3 doesn't change much. It's up to you to pick the system which suits you best.

3.b3!?

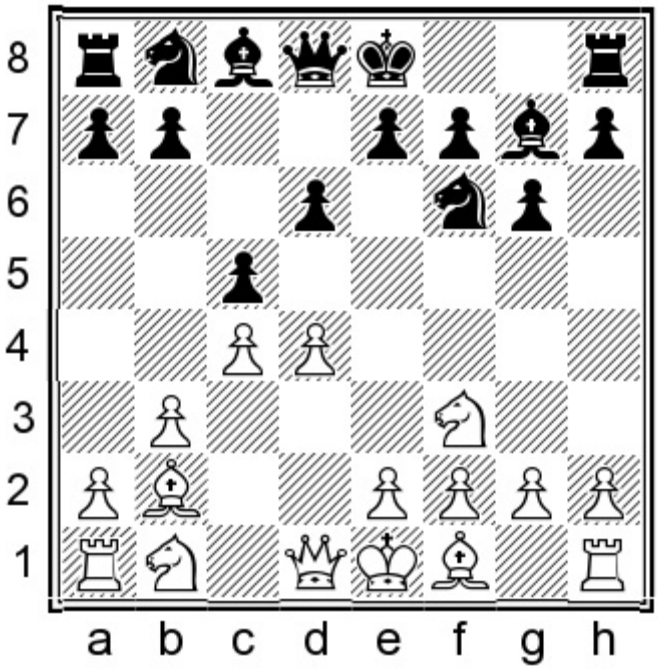
This approach is in the spirit of the other lines presented in this book. It can transpose to lines that were covered in the previous chapters (for instance if Black plays with ...c5, it will transpose to the Symmetrical English, chapter 14).

3...♗g7 4.♗b2 0-0

A) 4...d6!? If Black starts with this move, it's important to remember that we must prevent ...e5 for now. That's why, before developing our kingside, we should start with 5.d4! c5. It's un-usual for Black to start with this move, as he hasn't castled yet. We must remember that we can't play our usual

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g2-g3 obtaining the double fianchetto. (5...0-0 6.g3 – see the main line)

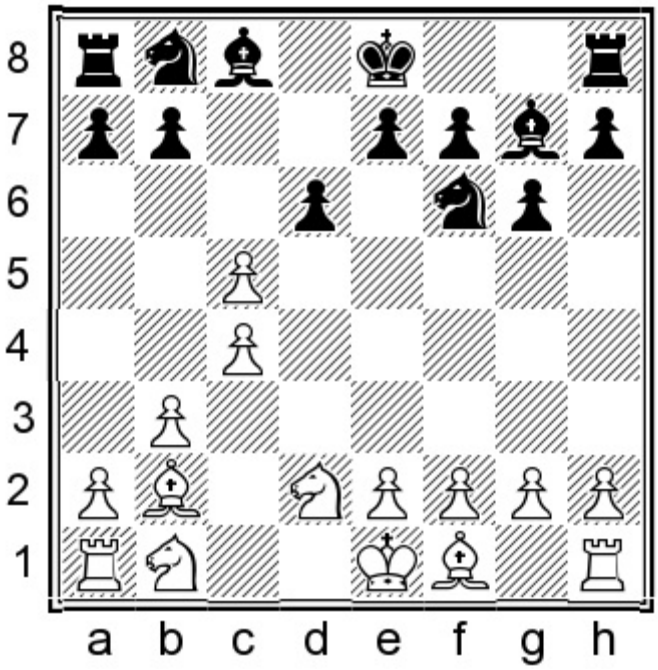


Position after: 5...c5

A1) 6.g3?! is a position known to be bad for White because of 6...♘e4! 7.♗g2 ♕a5+! 8.♘bd2 (8.♘fd2 ♘xd2 9.♕xd2 ♕xd2+ 10.♘xd2 ♗xd4! 11.♗xd4 cxd4∓ White's opening has been a disaster and he is fighting for a draw.) 8...♘c3! 9.♗xc3 (9.♕c2?! cxd4∓) 9...♕xc3 10.0-0 ♘c6∓

A2) 6.♘c3 is not ideal for us either: 6...cxd4 7.♘xd4 0-0 8.g3?! d5!N 9.♗g2 e5 10.♘c2 d4 11.♘d5∞.

A3) 6.dxc5 Entering the following endgame is a good practical choice. 6...♕a5+ 7.♕d2! ♕xd2+ 8.♘fxd2!N



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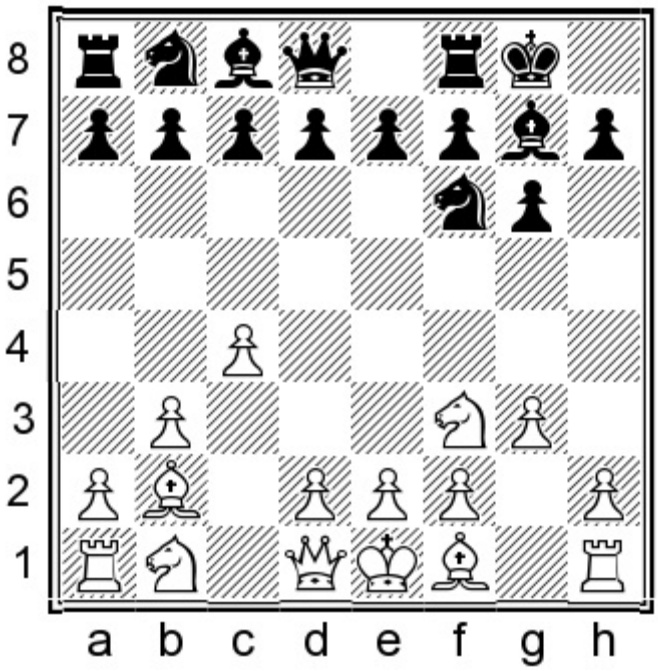
Position after: 8.♘fxd2!N

(You will understand the big difference with 8.♘bxd2 in a moment.) 8...dxc5 9.♘e4 ♘bd7 (9...♘xe4?! 10.♗xg7 ♖g8 11.♗b2 ♘c6 12.f3! This is why we prefer to have a knight on b1 and not f3, the difference with 8.♘bxd2. 12...♘d6 13.♘c3±) 10.g3! 0-0 11.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 12.♗g2 Things are not that simple for Black. Play might continue 12...♖b8 13.♗e5!? ♘d7 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.♘c3 ♘f6 16.0-0-0 ♗e6 17.♔b2± with the preferable endgame for White.

B) 4...c5 5.g3 transposes into chapter 14 on the Symmetrical English.

C) 4...c6 might be the choice of Grünfeld players. After 5.g3 d5 6.♗g2 it actually transposes into chapter 7 on the 4...g6 line of the Slav. It also made sense to cover this line here, but I preferred to include it in the Slav section.

5.g3



Position after: 5.g3

5...d6

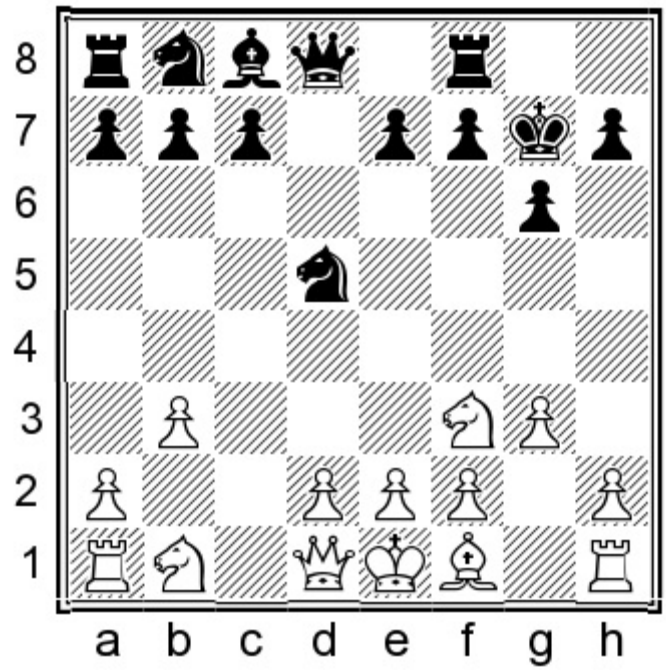
The typical move of the King's Indian's player.

A) 5...c6!? Again, this might be the Grünfeld player's choice. 6.♗g2 d5 transposing to chapter 7 with 4...g6.

B) 5...b6 6.♗g2 ♗b7 7.0-0 c5 is chapter 12 on the reverse double fianchetto of the Symmetrical English.

C) 5...d5!? is a minor side line which I wasn't planning to analyze, but it's Mikhalevski's recommendation in his last book. 6.cxd5 ♘xd5 7.♗xg7 ♔xg7

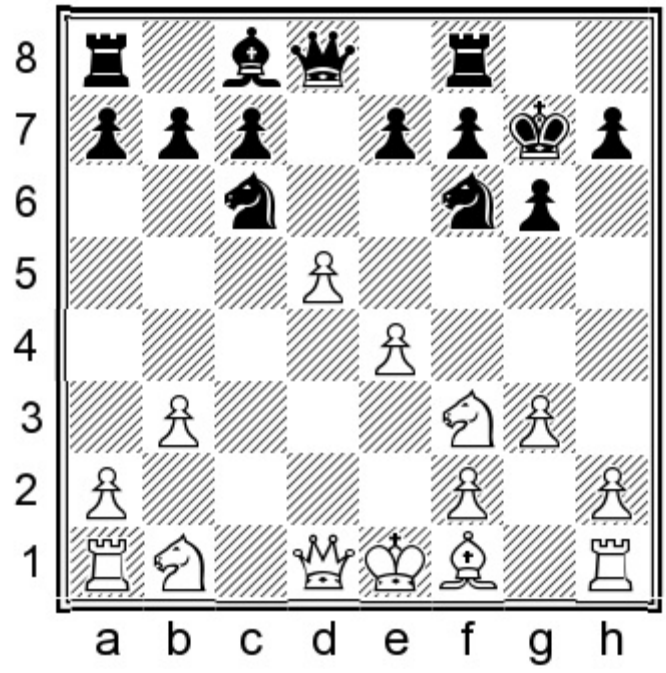
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Position after: 7...♔xg7

C1) 8.♗g2 (as well as 8.♕c1) is well analyzed in the book, where Mikhalevski reaches equality of sorts after some accurate moves. For example, he analyzes 8...♘c6 9.d4 ♗g4 10.0-0 ♕d6! 11.e4 ♘db4 12.d5 ♘e5! 13.♘bd2 c6 14.♘c4 ♘xc4 15.bxc4 e5 16.♕b3 ♗xf3! 17.♗xf3 b6 where he stops and says, "Black will exchange on d5 and bring his knight to c5 via a6". Well, we can try 18.♕a3↑ which may be a bit annoying for Black. He can hardly play with ...a5 because of b6, which will remain weak, but he can probably get a position close to equal.

C2) 8.d4!? This is not analyzed in his book, but it contains some venom. 8...♘c6 9.e4 ♘f6 (9...♘db4?! 10.a3! f5! 11.axb4 fxe4 12.♘e5 ♘xd4 13.♗g2 ♕d6 14.♘c4 ♕xb4+ 15.♘bd2±) 10.d5



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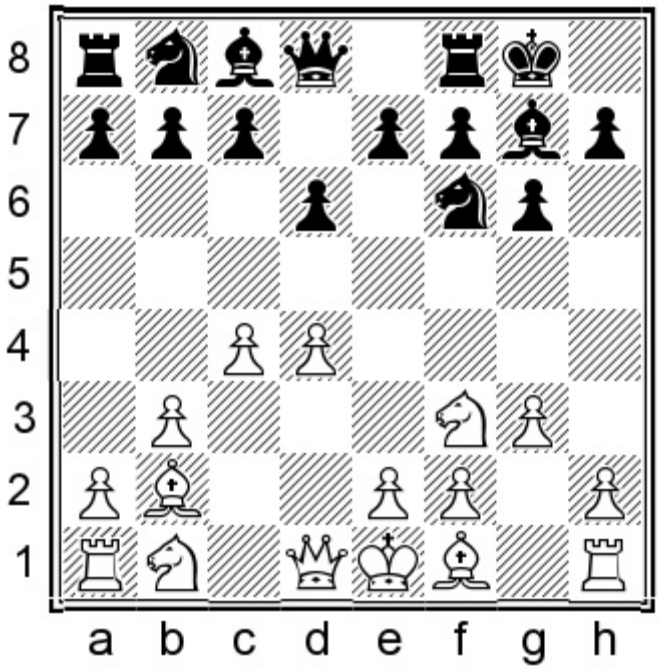
Position after: 10.d5

C2.1) 10...♘xe4!? Interesting in practice, but objectively a bit dubious. 11.♕d3! ♗g4 12.♘h4! Only this strong move enables White to grab a piece. Black gets some compensation, but it won't be enough: 12...♘xf2 13.♔xf2 ♘e5 14.♕d4 f6 15.♘c3 c6 16.h3 ♗e6 17.♗e2!±.

C2.2) 10...♗g4 11.♗e2! ♗xf3 (11...♘b8 12.h3 ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 e6 14.0-0 exd5 15.exd5±) 12.♗xf3 ♘e5 13.♗g2 e6 14.0-0 exd5 15.exd5 ♕d6 16.♘c3 a6 17.♖c1↑ White keeps the easier position.

6.d4!

Once again we prevent Black's intended ...e5. The downside of our system (yes, there has to be a limit to things!) is that Black is still able to play this move, but he must know what he is doing.



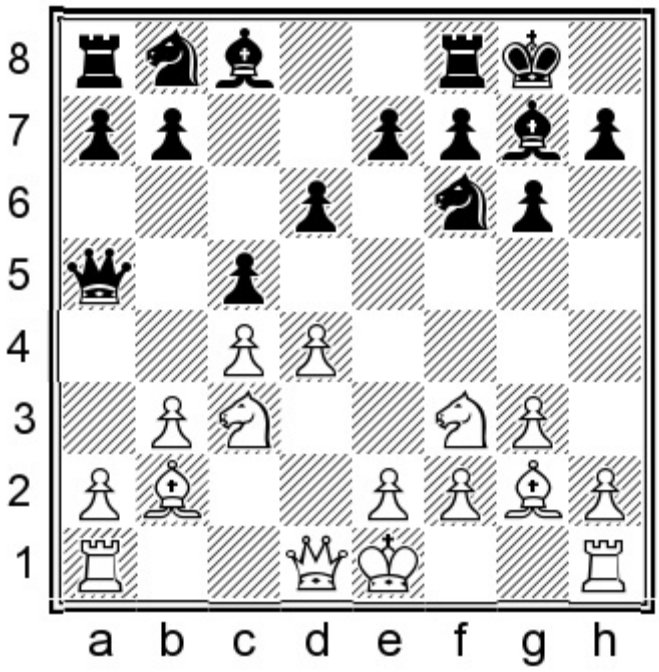
Position after: 6.d4!

6...e5!?

This is far from being the main move, and I have never met it myself over the board.

6...c5 7.♗g2 In case of classical moves like 7...♘c6 or 7...cxd4, we will easily transpose into the main line of chapter 14 about the Symmetrical English. The only line that might seem dangerous is 7...♕a5+ (7...d5 8.dxc5 ♕a5+ 9.♘bd2 dxc4 10.0-0! c3 11.♘c4 ♕xc5 12.♗xc3 ♘c6 13.♖c1↑) 8.♘c3!

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Position after: 8.♘c3!

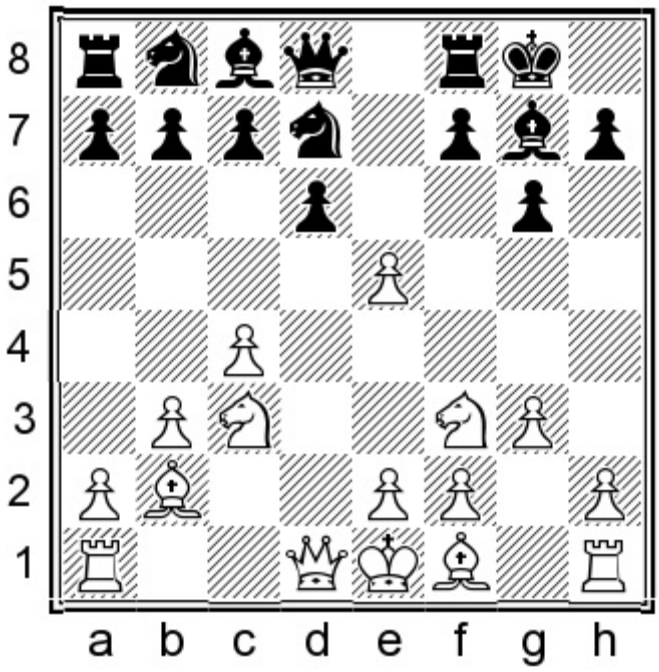
A) 8...♘e4 9.♖c1! Black's activity runs out of steam because we are ready to castle on the next move. We will attack the e4-knight, and if he trades we will gain a tempo on his queen (only a kamikaze would take on a2). 9...♘c6 (9...♗f5 10.0-0 ♘xc3?! 11.♗xc3 ♕xa2 12.♘e1! ♕a6 13.♖a1 ♕b6 14.♗a5 ♕a6 15.♗c7+–) 10.0-0 ♘xc3 11.♗xc3 ♕a3 12.e3±

B) 8...♘c6 9.0-0 cxd4 10.♘xd4 ♗d7 This transposes directly into the main line of chapter 12. (10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♘d5 12.♕xd5 ♗xc3 13.♗xc3 ♕xc3 14.♖fc1 ♕f6 15.c5!± It won't be easy for Black to get any activity as his b7-pawn is hard to protect.)

7.dxe5 dxe5

A) 7...♘fd7!? This is another decent move for Black, but I think White can still fight for an edge. 8.♘c3!

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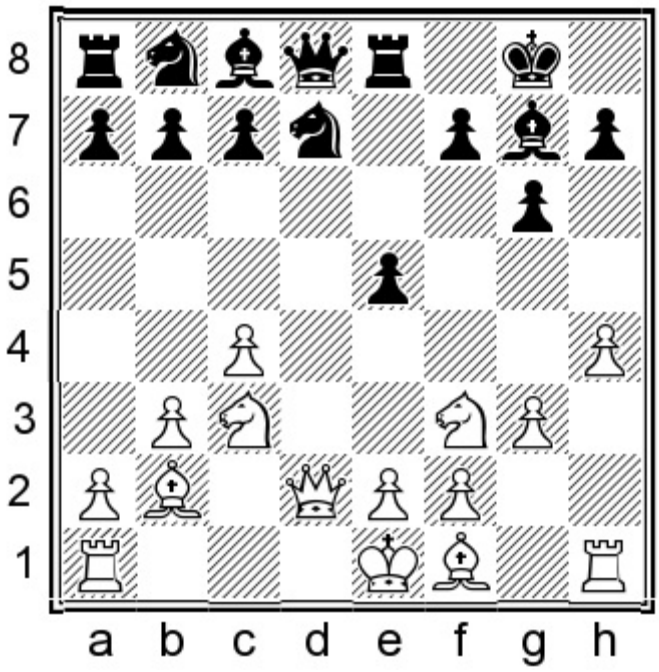
Position after: 8.♘c3!

8...dxe5! (8...♘xe5?! 9.♗g2! ♘xf3+ 10.♗xf3 ♘d7 11.0-0 ♘e5 12.♗g2± Even if this has occurred in a hundred games, I'm going to stop the analysis here. It is really easy to play for White. We will continue with ♕d2 and then ♘d5. Trading the dark-squared bishops will be great for the attack along the diagonal, and ...c6 is hardly playable for Black because of the weakening of the d6-pawn.) 9.♕d2! It's very important to prevent ...e5-e4 (which we did by protecting our b2-bishop), and it can also allow White to castle long quickly.

A1) 9...♘c6?! 10.♖d1! ♖e8 11.h4! e4 12.♘g5↑

A2) 9...♖e8 Most players have chosen this move. 10.h4!

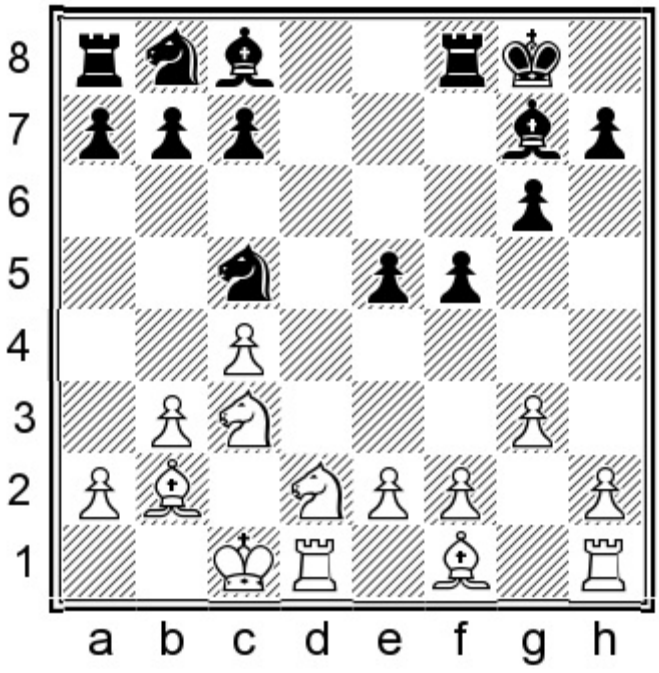
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Position after: 10.h4!

I like this approach. When Black's threat is e4, we secure the g5-square for the knight. 10...e4 11.♘g5 ♘c5 (11...♘f6 12.♕xd8 ♖xd8 This occurred in Kurajica, B (2518) – Kozul, Z (2620) Sarajevo 2015, and I think it's now better to improve on White's play with 13.♗g2!N 13...♖e8 14.0-0-0 ♗f5 15.f3 exf3 16.exf3⩲) 12.0-0-0 (12.♕e3!? ♘bd7 13.0-0-0 ♕e7 14.♘d5 ♗xb2+ 15.♔xb2 ♕e5+ 16.♕c3 c6! 17.♕xe5 ♖xe5 18.♘e3⩲) 12...♕xd2+ 13.♖xd2⩲ h6? (13...f5?! 14.♘d5 ♘ba6 15.h5!⩱) 14.♘gxe4! ♘xe4 15.♘xe4+–

A3) 9...♘c5!N A difficult move from a human point of view, but probably best. 10.0-0-0 ♕xd2+ 11.♘xd2 f5!



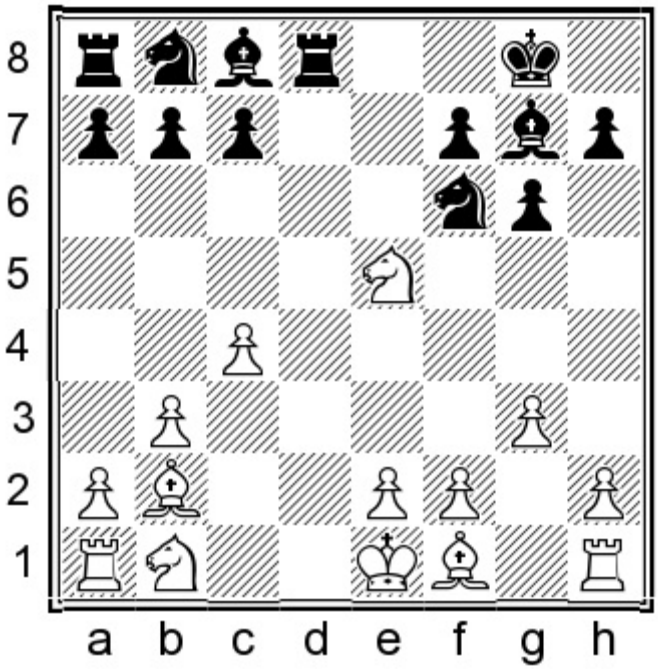
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Position after: 11...f5!

12.h4!?↑ White keeps some initiative in this endgame, and it's easy for Black to go wrong. 12...♘c6?! 13.♗g2 e4 14.♘d5 ♖f7 15.f3±

B) 7...♘g4?! This move is clearly less flexible than 7...♘fd7 since Black will have to take back with the knight: 8.♘c3 ♘xe5, transposing into 8...♘xe5 of the 7...♘fd7 line.

8.♕xd8 ♖xd8 9.♘xe5



Position after: 9.♘xe5

It's now important for Black to know (or find) the next move, otherwise he may not be able to prove he has enough compensation.

9...♘a6!

The knight is heading to the b4-square.

A) 9...♘fd7? 10.♘d3! ♗xb2 11.♘xb2±

B) This position actually occurred in one of my recent blitz games, and my opponent now took the wrong path: 9...♘e4?! 10.♘d3 ♗xb2 11.♘xb2 ♘c6?! (⌓11...♘a6 12.♗g2 ♘ec5 13.♘c3 ♘b4 14.0-0 ♖d2 15.♘ba4±) 12.♗g2 ♘c5 13.♗xc6! bxc6 14.♘c3 ♗f5 15.♖d1!+– and Black was already objectively lost in Demuth, A (2538) – Yuffa, D (2527) Cap d'Agde 2017.

10.♘d3

White was clearly dominated after the quite logical developing move 10.♘c3 ♘b4! 11.♖c1 ♗f5 12.♗g2

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♘d7 13.g4 ♗xe5 14.gxf5 ♘xa2 15.♘xa2 ♗xb2∓ 0-1 (46) Kurajica, B (2528) – Kozul, Z (2617) Mali Losinj 2017.

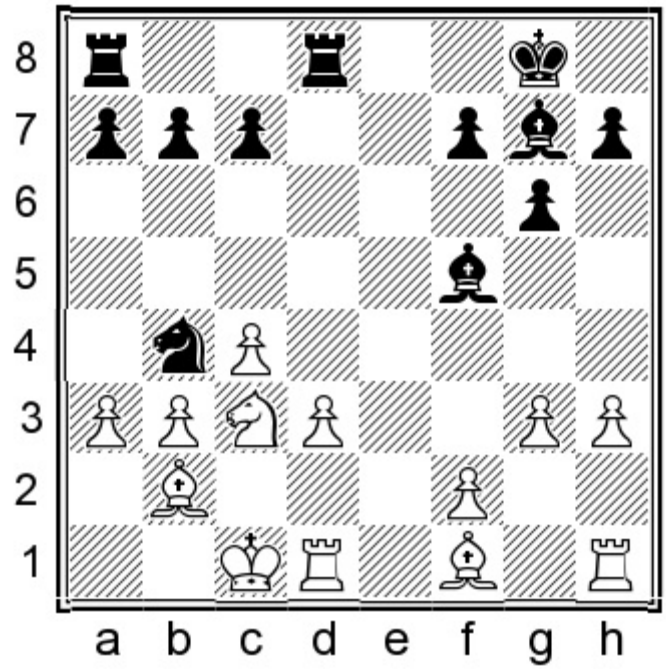
10...♗f5

Both games in which this position occurred continued with this active move.

Even if we're aiming at an advantage, it's still relevant to point out that the two games ended in a draw, despite Black having a much higher rating.

11.♘c3! ♗xd3

11...♘g4!? 12.h3 ♘e5 13.0-0-0 ♘xd3+ 14.exd3 ♘b4 15.a3

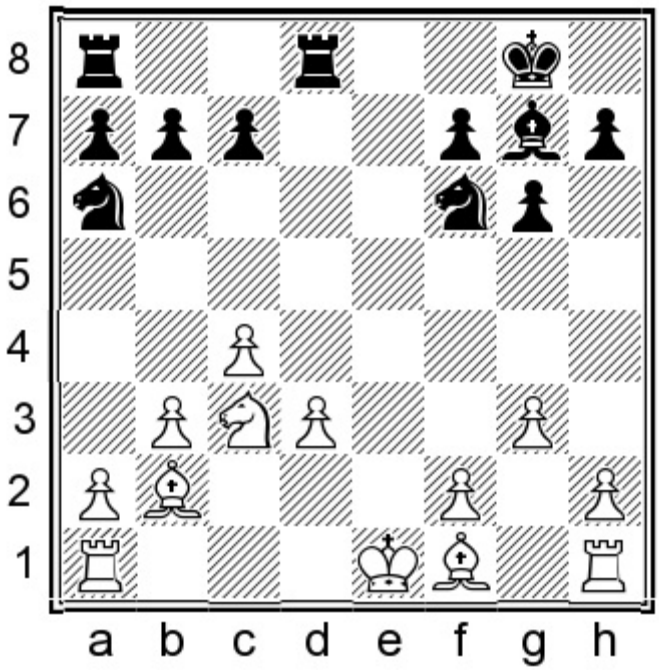


Position after: 15.a3

15...♗xc3 (Black has played accurately. Sometimes White has to accept that a draw is the logical result after sensible play by both sides. This is what might have happened if Black had played 15...♘xd3+! 16.♗xd3 ♗xd3 17.♖d2 ♗f5 18.♘d5 ♗xb2+ 19.♔xb2 ♔f8 20.♖hd1 c6=.) 16.♗xc3 ♘xd3+ 17.♗xd3 ♖xd3 18.♖xd3 ♗xd3 19.♖d1± White kept a small edge in Barbosa, O (2550) – Ding, L (2679) Ho Chi Minh City 2012.

12.exd3

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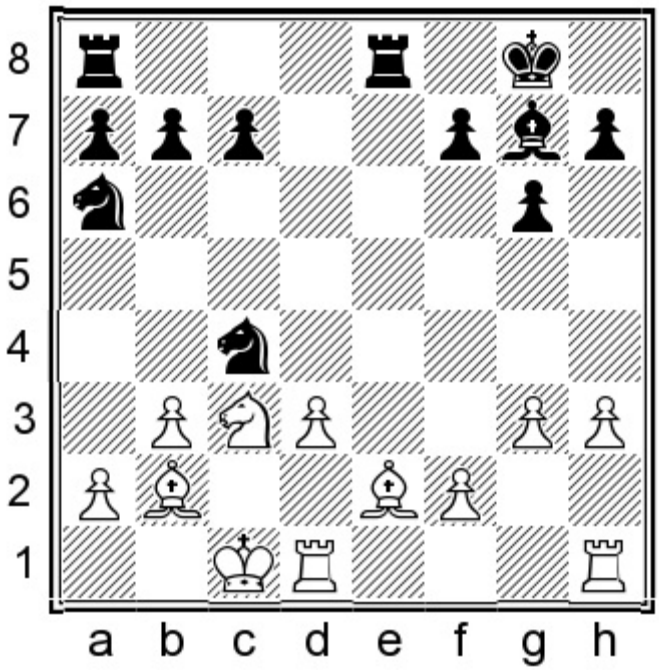


Position after: 12.exd3

12...♘b4!N

This should give Black enough compensation to draw.

12...♘g4?! 13.h3!N (13.♗e2 ♘b4! 14.♖d1 ♘e5 15.d4 ♘c2+ 16.♔f1 ♘xd4 17.♘d5= In the end, the game was logically drawn: Genov, P (2463) – Sutovsky, E (2700) Arvier 2012.) 13...♖e8+ 14.♗e2 ♘e5 15.0-0-0 ♘xc4!



Position after: 15...♘xc4!

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This is the last chance for Black to take his pawn back. 16.dxc4 ♗xc3 17.♗xc3 ♖xe2 18.♖d2± We can still try for something in this endgame, with a bishop v knight and the weaknesses on the dark squares.

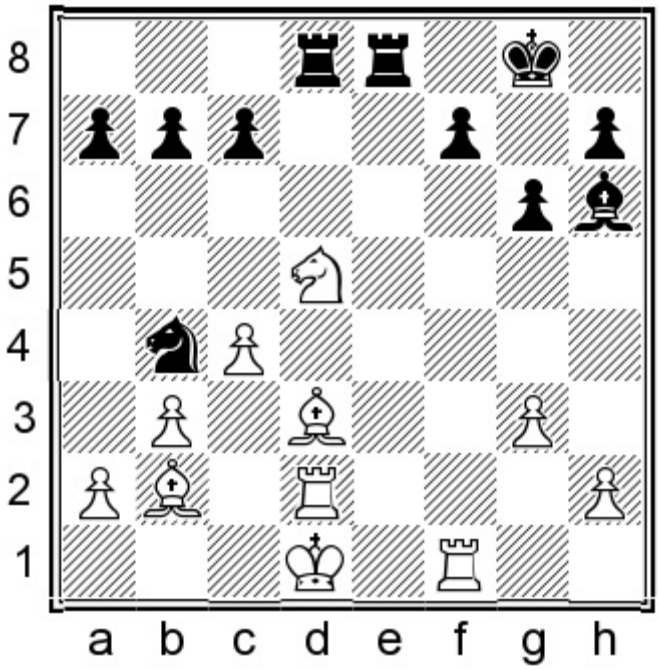
13.0-0-0 ♘g4! 14.♖d2 ♖e8! 15.♗e2

15.♘e4 ♘xa2+ 16.♔b1 ♘b4=

15...♘xf2 16.♖f1 ♘fxd3+! 17.♗xd3 ♗h6

We have some problems, but have created just enough counterplay to reach a drawn position.

18.♔d1 ♖ad8 19.♘d5!



Position after: 19.♘d5!

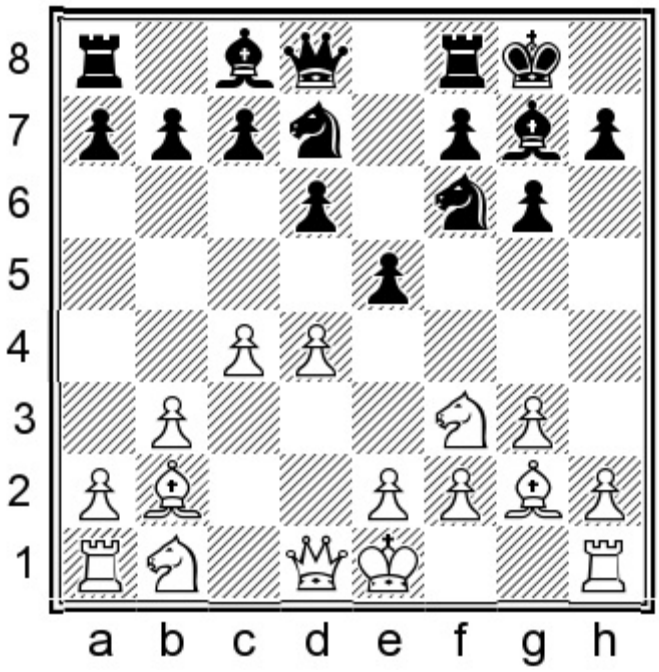
19...♗xd2 20.♘f6+ ♔f8 21.♘xh7+ ♔g8 22.♘f6+ ♔f8=

As explained earlier, with perfect play from both sides it seems that a draw is a fair result...

b) 4...0-0 5.g3 d6 6.d4 ♘bd7 7.♗g2 --, 7...e5

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.b3!? ♗g7 4.♗b2 0-0 5.g3 d6 6.d4! ♘bd7 7.♗g2 e5!?

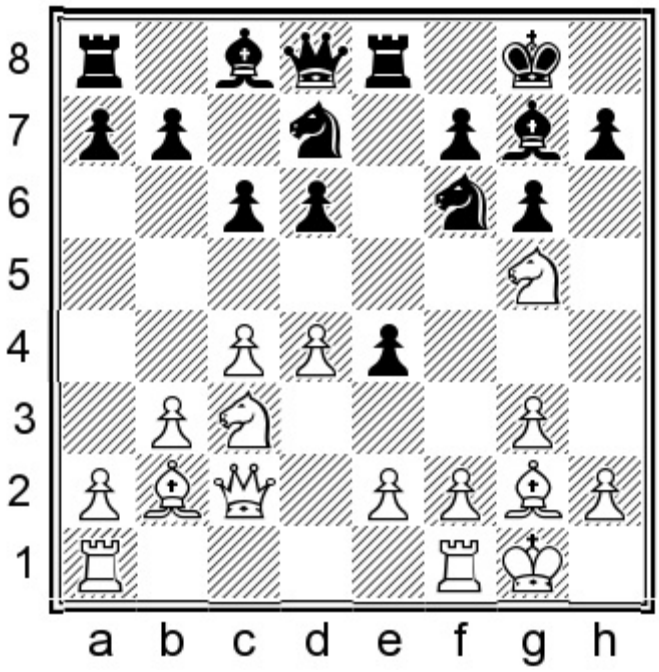
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Position after: 7...e5!?

If Black doesn’t have to prepare this move, he shouldn’t hesitate.

7...c6 is possible too, but it helps White: 8.0-0 ♖e8 (8...♕c7 is less precise. After 9.♘c3 e5 10.e3 ♖e8 11.♖c1↑ Black doesn’t have the option of advancing to e4, because he cannot defend the pawn later with ...d5 due to the problems on the c-file.) 9.♘c3 e5 10.♕c2 e4 11.♘g5! Entering the complications is the way to fight ...e5-e4.



Position after: 11.♘g5!

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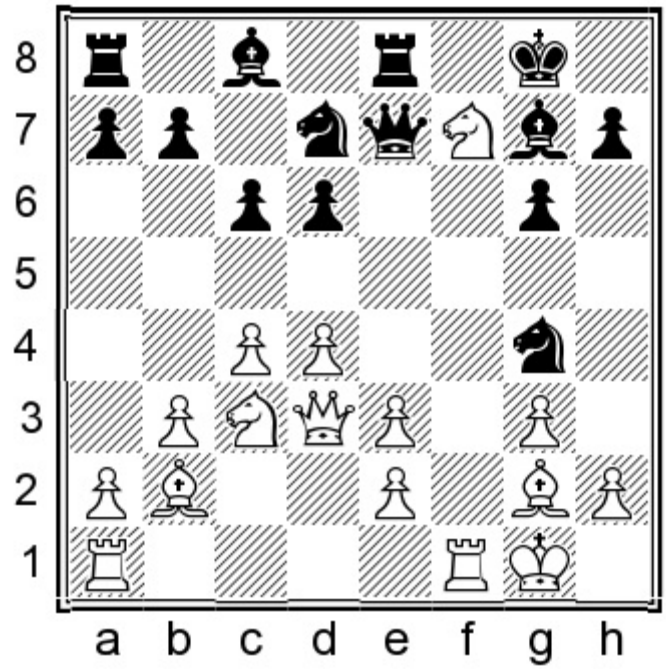
A) In the event of 11...d5?! our previous moves are fully justified by 12.cxd5 cxd5 13.♘b5! ♖b8 (13...h6? 14.♘c7 hxg5 15.♘xa8± Our knight easily finds an emergency exit.) 14.♘d6 ♖f8 15.f3!↑ This move is perfectly timed in order to open the center.

B) 11...e3! 12.fxe3 One of the best practical decisions; we are better developed, so open the f-file, even if it allows some counterplay.

B1) 12...♗h6?! 13.♘ge4! ♗xe3+ 14.♔h1 ♗xd4 15.♘xd6±

B2) 12...♖xe3 13.♕d2 ♕e7 (13...♖e8 14.e4±) 14.♖f4!?↑

B3) 12...♕e7!N Black must bear in mind that we also have an active position, thanks to the open f-file, and the possibility of forming an impressive center. Thus, he has to be really careful. 13.♕d3 ♘g4! 14.♘xf7! Going for it!



Position after: 14.♘xf7!

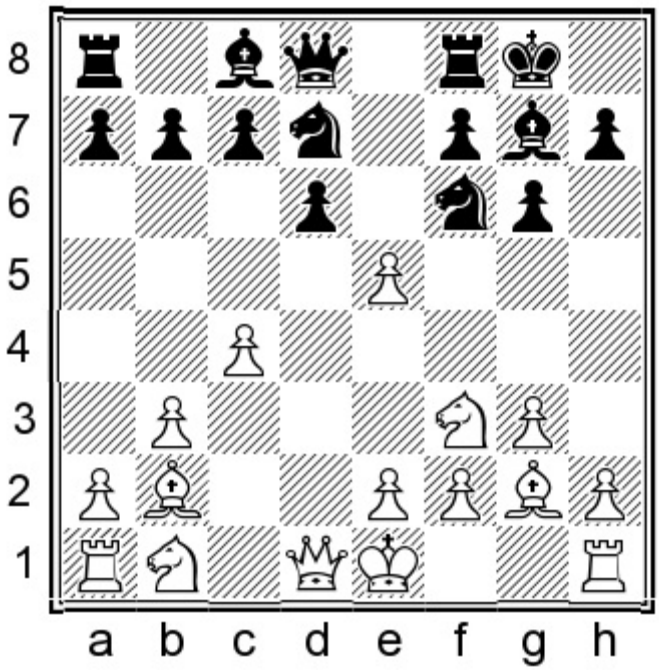
14...♘df6 (14...♘xe3?! 15.♘e4 ♘xf1 16.♘fxd6 ♖f8 17.♖xf1 ♖xf1+ 18.♗xf1± White's impressive center makes all the difference.) 15.♘xd6 ♕xd6 16.e4⇄ The position is still really complicated, but I like White's prospects in the center with his three pawns for the piece.

8.♘c3!?

We have other tries, but this is my preference.

8.dxe5?! is the principal move, but its main point is that it gives Black the chance to make a bad decision.

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Position after: 8.dxe5?!

A) ≤ 8...♘g4?! is the thematic reply, but it's exactly what we wanted. 9.0-0 ♘gxe5 10.♘c3 ♘xf3+ 11.♗xf3 ♘e5 12.♗g2± White has good prospects in this position. He will continue with ♕d2, ♖ad1 and then ♘d5. Black can't chase the knight with ...c6, because the d6-pawn would become too weak, and White aims to trade the dark-squared bishops to take advantage of the weaknesses around the black king. You can, for instance, look at the classic game Polugaevsky, L – Janosevic, D Skopje 1968, 1-0 (51).

B) 8...dxe5! is correct:

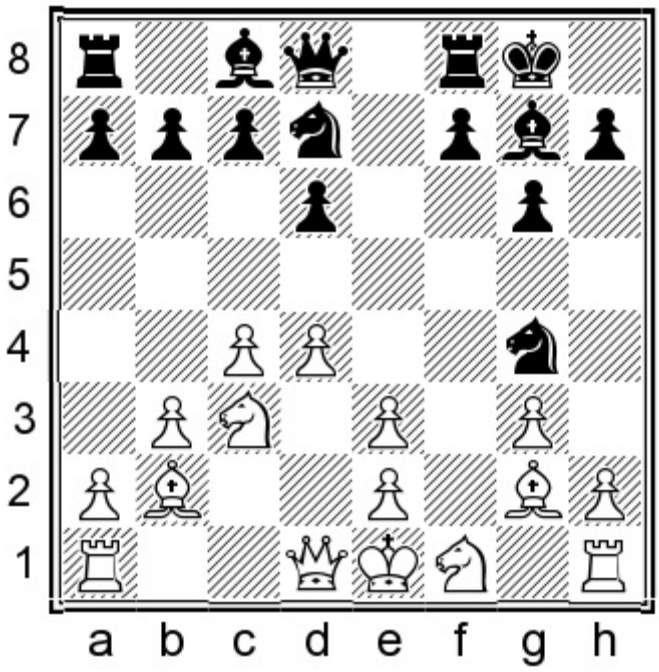
B1) 9.♘xe5?! is strongly met by 9...♘g4! 10.♘d3 (10.♘xg4 ♗xb2 11.♘d2 f5!∓) 10...♗xb2 11.♘xb2 ♕f6–+.

B2) 9.0-0 e4! I dislike this line. Black seems to have the more attractive position, even if we can try to play against the e4-pawn. 10.♘e1 ♕e7 (10...♖e8 11.♘c2 c6 12.♕d2 ♕e7⇄) 11.♘c3 c6 12.♘c2 ♘c5↑

8...♖e8

8...e4?! is too early at present: 9.♘d2 e3 10.fxe3 ♘g4 11.♘f1!±.

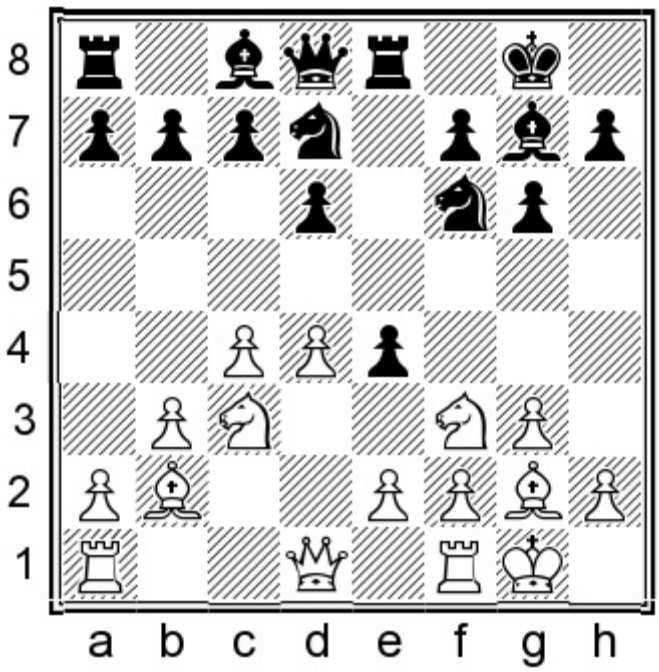
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Position after: 11.♘f1!±

We prevent ...♘xe3 and are going to play e4 or chase the knight with h3, depending on Black's move. Besides, a pawn is a pawn.

9.0-0 e4



Position after: 9...e4

If this move is not satisfactory, Black must look for another try, and, as you will see, one might be

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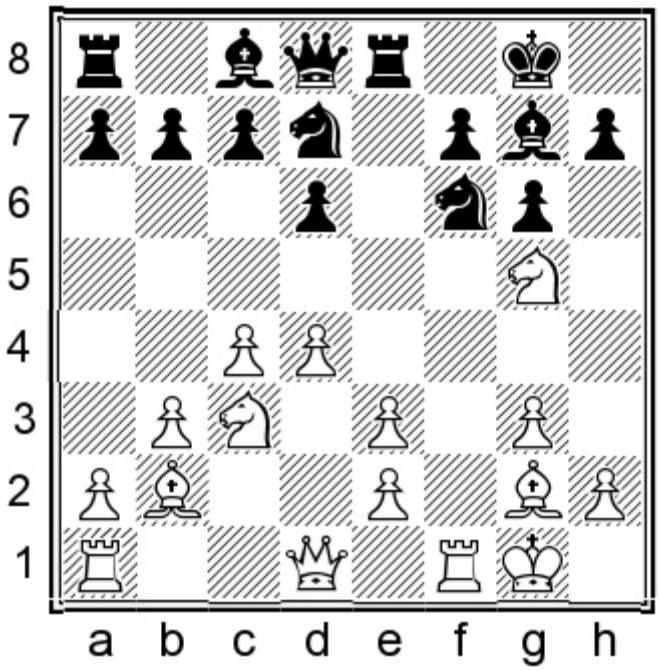
needed.

9...c6 has been the most played move, but it simply transposes to 7...c6.

10.♘g5 e3

Black does not have any satisfactory way to defend the pawn, so he has to go for this move.

11.fxe3!



Position after: 11.fxe3!

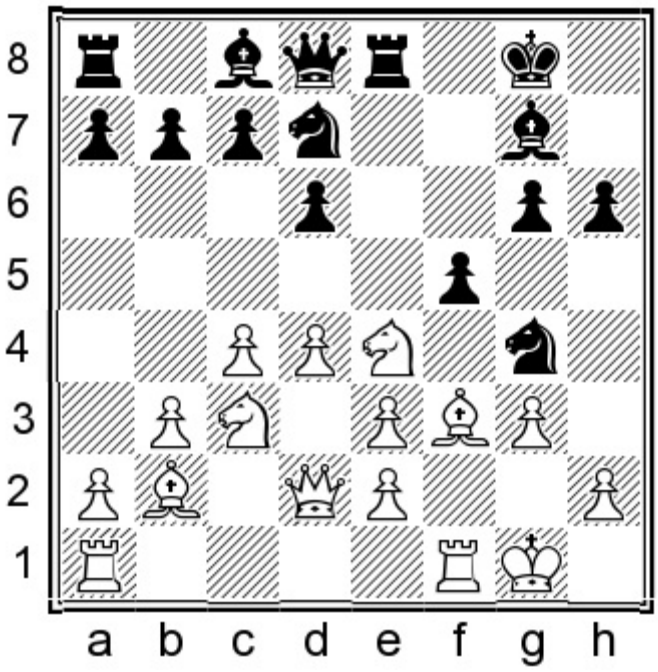
This is similar to the line we examined after 7...c6. It seems simplest to open the f-file.

11...♗h6

This can be considered the main move, forcing White to make a decision. I think we have an excellent solution and a novelty in store!

11...h6 12.♘ge4 ♘g4 appeared in Mastrovasilis, A (2537) – Ladopoulos, D (2138) Thessaloniki 2017, 1-0 (26): (12...♘xe4! is probably best, in order to attack the e3-pawn 13.♘xe4 ♕e7 14.♗c1! f5 15.♘c3 ♘f6 16.♖f4⩲ White keeps his extra pawn, but he must advance to the fourth rank if he wants to claim a real advantage.) 13.♕d2! f5 14.♗f3!

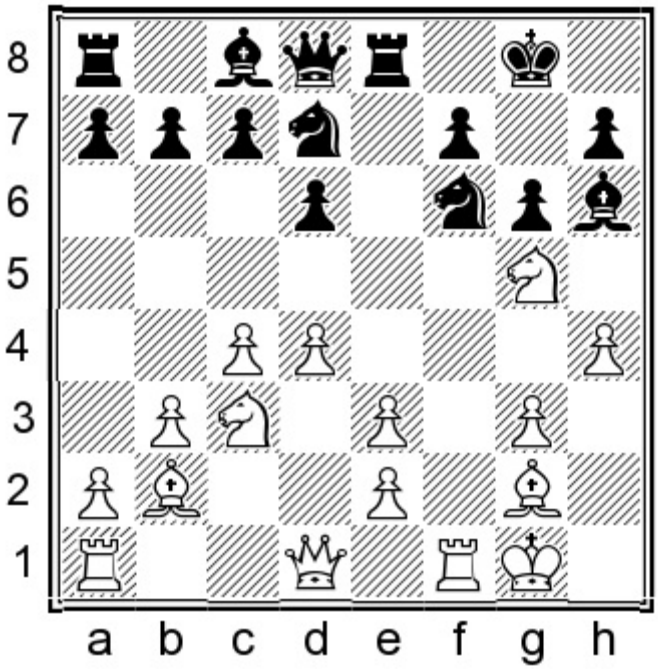
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Position after: 14.♗f3!

14...h5 15.♗xg4 hxg4 16.♘f2 ♗h6 17.♘d5± The position is rather strange, but Black still has to prove enough compensation.

12.h4!N



Position after: 12.h4!N

This is surprisingly good, even if it looks too weakening at first sight.

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12...♗xg5

12...♖xe3 13.♕e1! ♗g7 14.♕f2 ♖e8 15.♖ae1±

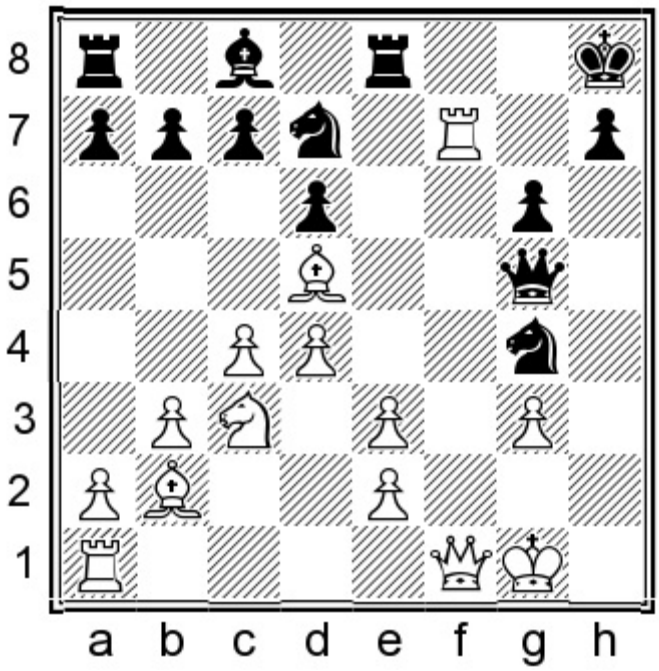
13.hxg5 ♘g4

This looks rather dubious for us, as we have a couple of pawns hanging. That's why we must play actively.

14.♗d5 ♖f8

Black pauses before collecting our pawn.

14...♔h8 15.♖xf7 ♕xg5 (15...♘xe3? 16.♕d2 ♕xg5 17.♖f3! ♘f6 18.♘e4 ♘xe4 19.♕xe3 ♕xe3+ 20.♖xe3 ♘f6 21.♖xe8+ ♘xe8 22.♖f1+–) 16.♕f1!! This is an effective way to protect our king and start counterplay on the f-file. Our rook is very important on the seventh rank, both attacking, and preparing for the endgame.



Position after: 16.♕f1!!

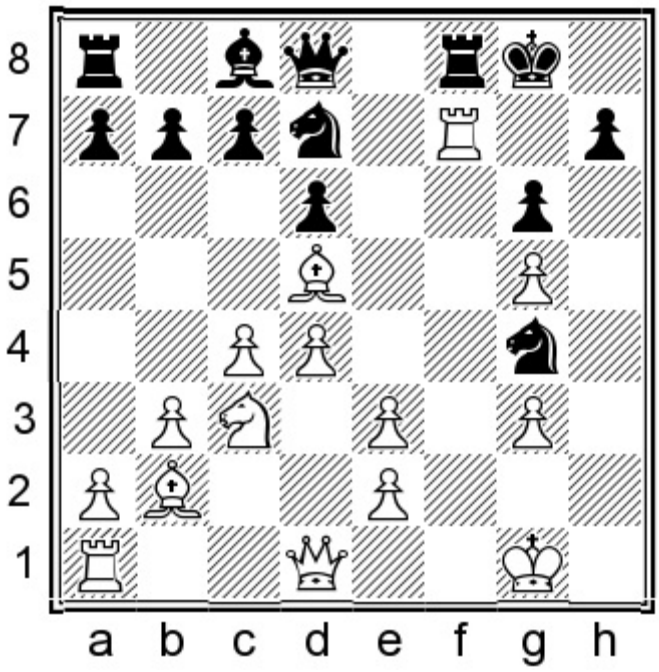
Furthermore, the vis-à-vis between the b2-bishop and the black king might prove dangerous for Black at some point.

A) 16...♕xe3+ 17.♔g2 c6? fails to 18.♖xh7+ ♔xh7 19.♕f7+ ♔h8 (19...♔h6 20.♖h1+ ♔g5 21.♗c1+–) 20.♖h1+ ♘h6 21.♕xg6+–

B) 16...♘df6 17.♕f4! ♕xf4 18.exf4 ♘xd5 19.cxd5±

15.♖xf7!!

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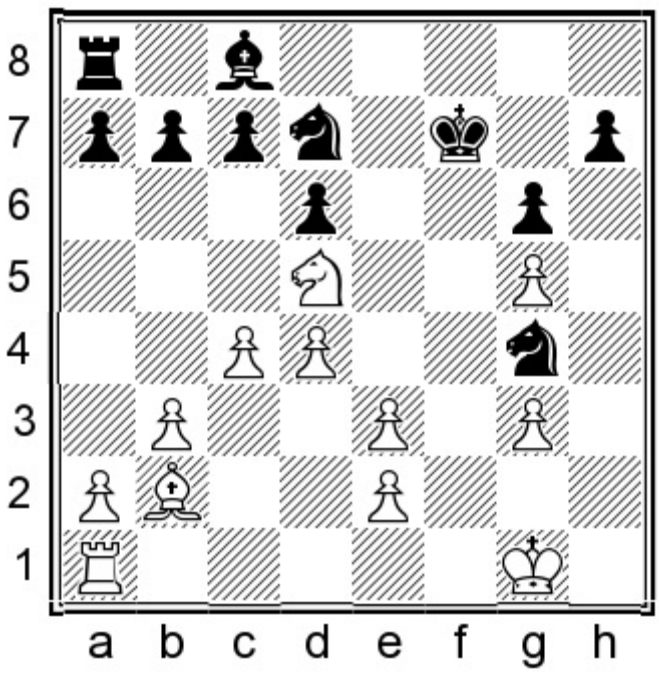
Position after: 15.♖xf7!!

A nasty surprise for Black!

15...♖xf7 16.♕f1 ♕e7 17.♕xf7+ ♕xf7 18.♗xf7+!

18.♖f1?! would be even stronger if Black didn't have the strong resource 18...♘de5! 19.dxe5 ♗e6 20.♖xf7 ♔xf7 21.exd6 ♗xd5 22.♘xd5 cxd6∓ where he even seems to be better.

18...♔xf7 19.♘d5!



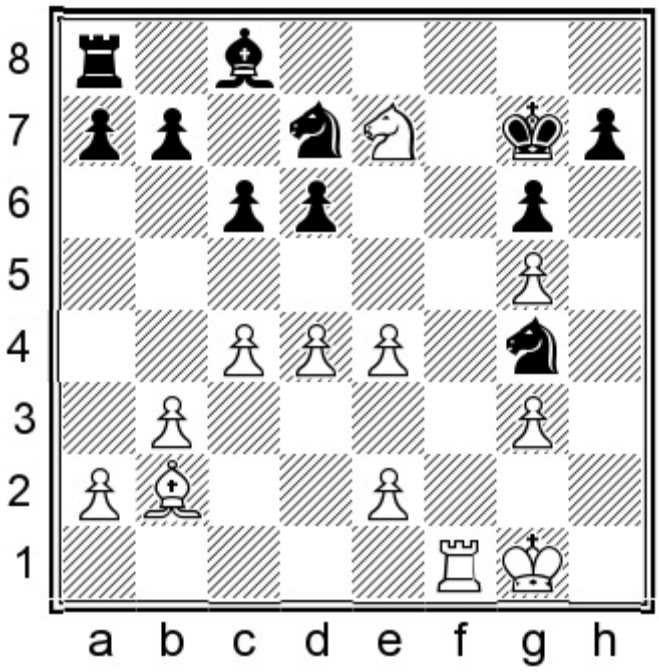
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Position after: 19.♘d5!

With this precise line, we achieve great compensation.

19...c6 20.♖f1+ ♔g7

20...♔g8?! 21.♘e7+ ♔g7 22.e4! Black is completely dominated.

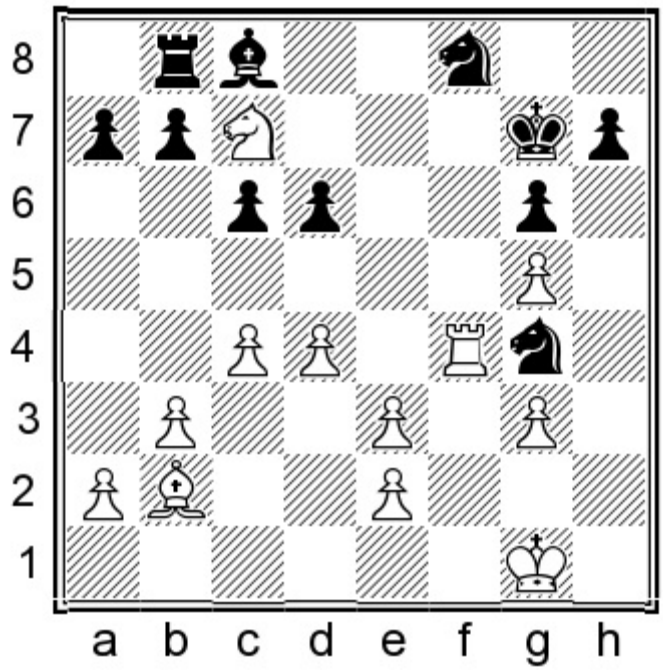


Position after: 22.e4!

White is going to use the bishop b2 with great effect, as the black king can't escape anywhere. 22...♘f8 (22...a5 23.♖f4 h5 24.gxh6+ ♘xh6 25.c5! dxc5 26.d5+ ♔h7 27.♖h4 cxd5 28.exd5+– Black can't protect himself against 29.♗c1.) 23.♖f4 ♗d7 24.d5+ ♘e5 25.c5!+–

21.♘c7 ♖b8 22.♖f4 ♘f8

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Position after: 22...♘f8

23.♖e4!

23.♘e8+ is also possible: 23...♔g8 24.♘xd6 ♘xe3 25.♖f3 ♘f5 26.♘e8± Once again, we only have two pawns for the piece, but will soon get the steamroller in the center moving.

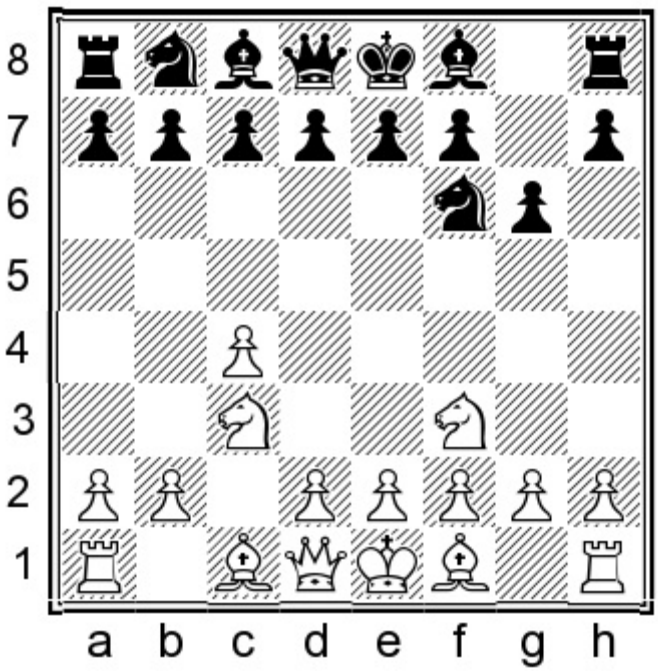
23...♔f7 24.♘e8 ♗f5 25.♘xd6+ ♔g8 26.♖e7±

Black needs to be very accurate if he wants to survive here.

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Chapter 18
The Anti-Grünfeld Defense

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3



Chapter guide

Chapter 18 – The Anti-Grünfeld Defense

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3

a) 3...--, 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6 6.d4 ♗e6

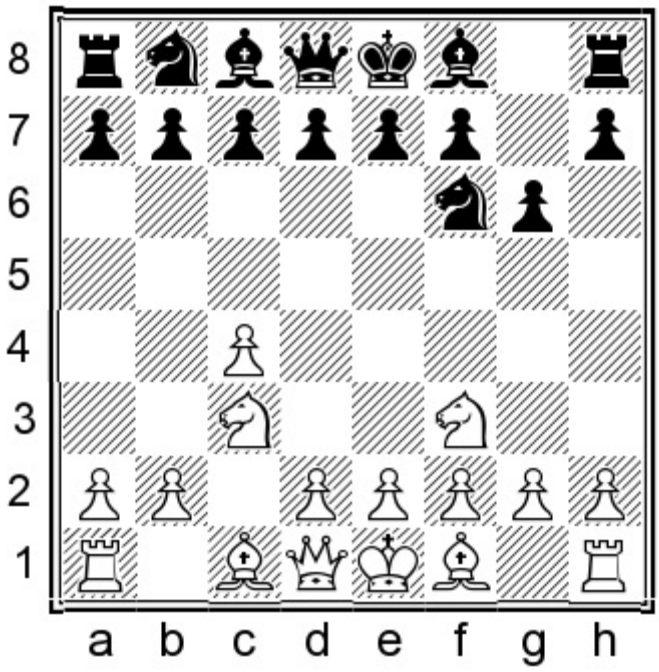
b) 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6 6.d4 ♗g7 7.♗f4 --, 7...♗e6 8.♕a3 --

c) 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6 6.d4 ♗g7 7.♗f4 ♗e6 8.♕a3 c5

a) 3...--, 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6 6.d4 ♗e6

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3

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Position after: 3.♘c3

As I explained in the previous chapter, we are focusing on a more classical idea here (compared to 3.b3 of chapter 17) where White intends to play 4.e4, preventing the Grünfeld Defense.

If our opponent plays a King's Indian, see 3...♗g7, but if he wants to play a Grünfeld, he will have to enter our line, which is normally only possible with this move order.

3...d5

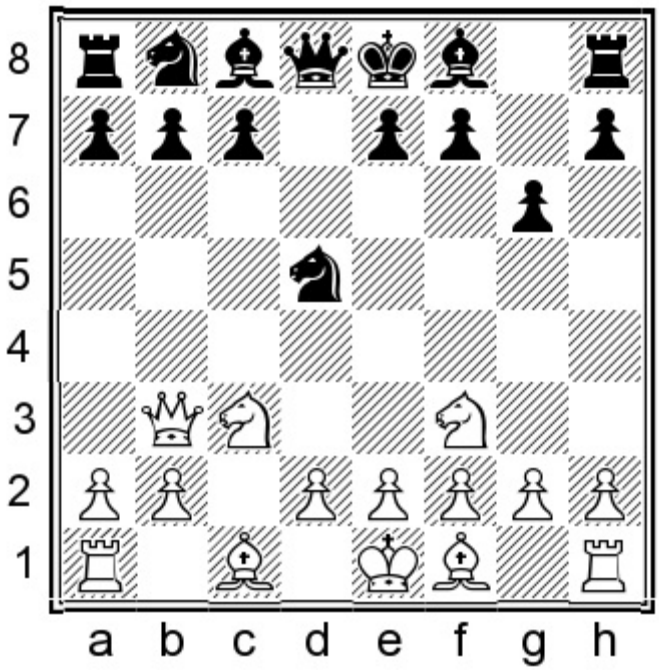
Black can't delay ...d5, but we can use our clever move order to enter a slightly advantageous line of the Grünfeld.

A) 3...c5 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 ♗g7 6.e4 transposes into the Maroczy system, as in the Symmetrical English with 2...g6.

B) 3...♗g7 This move order is no problem for King's Indian players who will normally play this move, but Grünfeld players can't put off playing ...d5 as we would play 4.e4, preventing them from doing so. 4...d6 (4...c5 once again goes straight to the Maroczy system: 5.d4 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♘c6 7.♗e3) 5.d4 0-0 You can now choose your own system against the King's Indian.

4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3

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Position after: 5.♕b3

White has other options that don't transpose into the main lines. 5.♕a4+ is probably the most important of them, and 5.h4 has gained some popularity recently.

5...♘b6!

5...♘xc3? is obviously not possible here: 6.♕xc3! ♖g8 7.e4 ♗g7 8.d4±.

6.d4

So we have reached a Grünfeld set-up. What was the point of our move order exactly?

The answer is that after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3, Black has the excellent option of 5...♘xc3, reaching classical positions where the queen is not particularly well placed on b3.

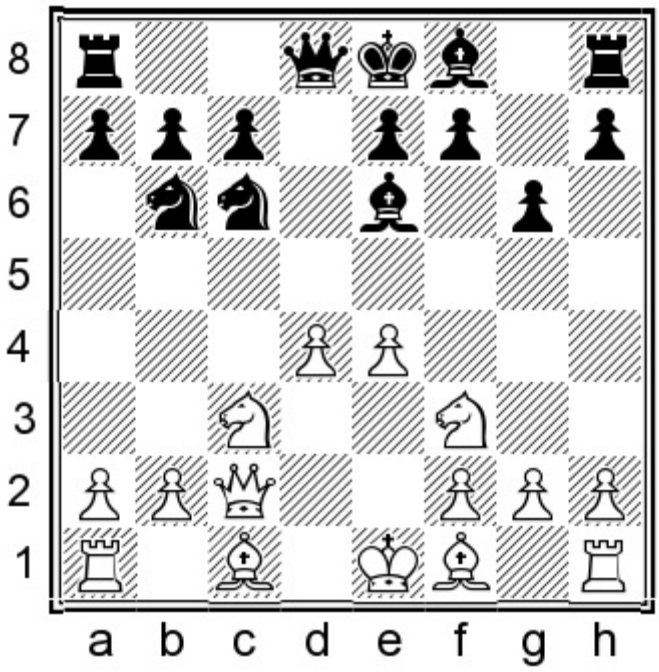
6...♗e6?!

If Black tries to take advantage of the position of our queen, he should hurry because after 6...♗g7 7.e4, ...♗e6 doesn't make any sense because of the possibility of d4-d5. Nevertheless, this move is premature and rather dubious.

7.♕c2! ♗g7

A) 7...♘c6 8.e4!

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Position after: 8.e4!

Once again, Black never really threatens to take on d4, and now needs to solve his immediate problems.

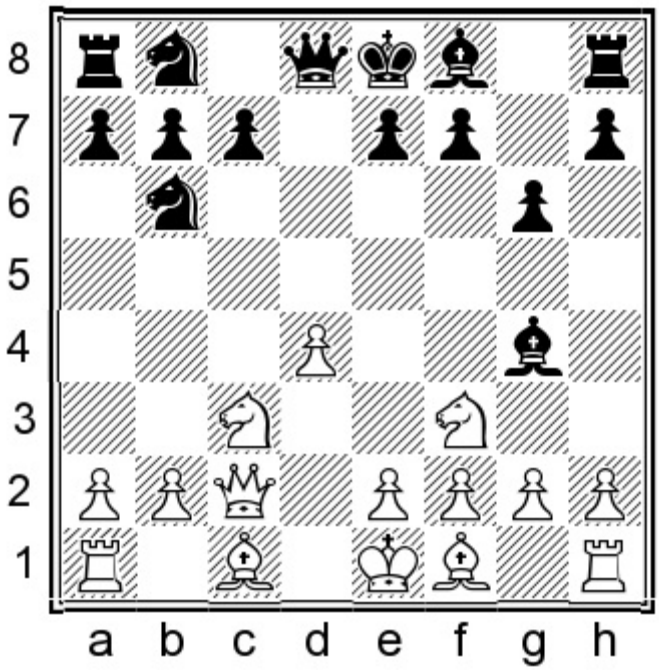
A1) 8...♘xd4?? 9.♘xd4 ♕xd4 10.♘b5+–

A2) 8...♗g4? 9.d5! puts Black in huge trouble: 9...♘b8 (9...♗xf3? 10.dxc6 ♗g4 11.cxb7 ♖b8 12.♗a6+–) 10.♘e5 ♗d7 11.♗f4±.

A3) 8...♘b4 9.♕d1!± c6 (9...♗g4 10.d5 ♗xf3 11.gxf3 ♗g7 12.♕b3 a5 13.♗e3± 1-0 (31) Greenfeld, A (2571) – Groszpeter, A (2495) Panormo 2001) 10.a3 ♘a6 11.♘g5 ♗c8 Black's opening has obviously gone badly and he must retreat. 12.♕b3 e6 13.♗e3 ♗g7 14.♖d1± 1-0 (34) Fridman, D (2670) – Giemsa, S (2267) Bad Wiessee 2012.

B) 7...♗g4 might be the lesser evil, but White easily keeps an advantage, for example by taking the two bishops:

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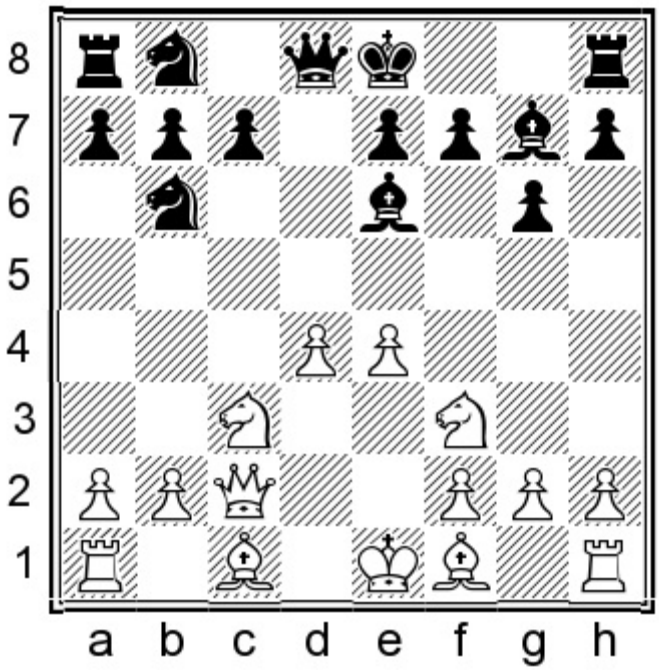


Position after: 7...♗g4

8.♕e4!? ♗xf3 9.♕xf3↑ ♕xd4?! 10.♕xb7 ♗g7 11.g3!?±

8.e4!

We are not afraid of losing the d-pawn.



Position after: 8.e4!

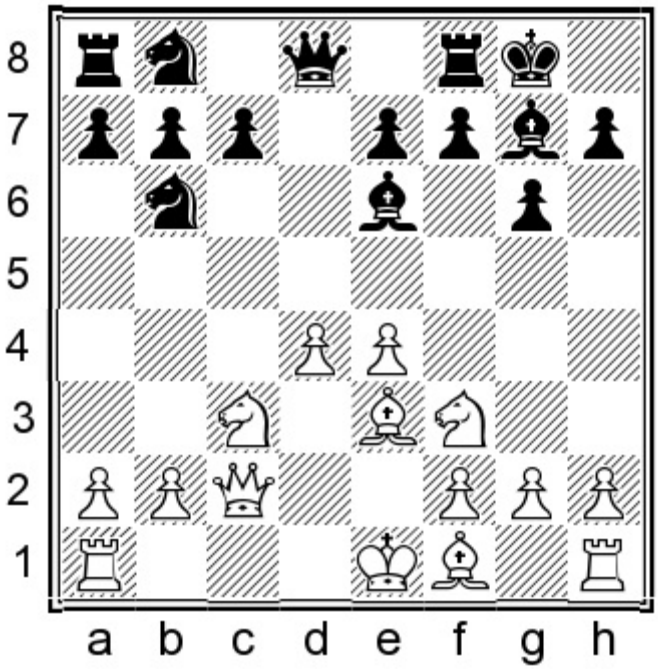
8...0-0

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A) 8...♗g4 9.♘e5! ♗xe5 This avoids losing time, but it's not great. Don't forget that this is supposed to be Black's better bishop, and its disappearance will weaken his kingside. (9...♗e6 10.♗e3 0-0 11.♖d1± Black has already lost many tempi!) 10.dxe5 ♘c6 (10...0-0 11.f3 ♗e6 12.♗h6! ♖e8 13.♕f2! ±) 11.♗b5! ♗d7 12.♗xc6 (12.e6!? is also interesting, destroying Black's pawn structure) 12...♗xc6 13.♗e3! ♕d7 (13...0-0 will most probably transpose: 14.♖d1 ♕c8 15.0-0 ♖d8 16.♗d4±) 14.♖d1 ♕e6 15.0-0 0-0 16.f4 ♖ad8 17.♗d4± This position is obviously difficult for Black, and he did not defend well enough to escape in Gelfand, B (2723) – Shirov, A (2740) Dagomys 2008.

B) 8...♗xd4?? 9.♘xd4 ♕xd4 10.♘b5 ♕b4+ 11.♗d2+– wins on the spot.

9.♗e3



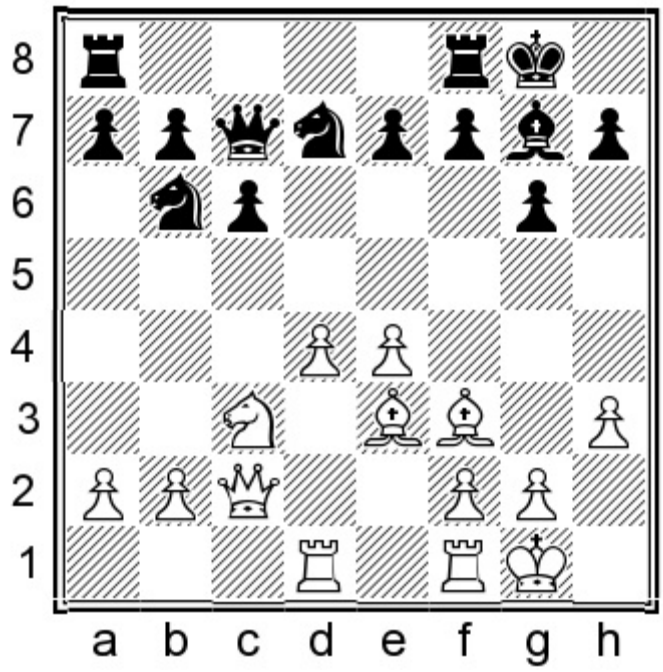
Position after: 9.♗e3

9...c6

9...♘c4 (9...♗c4 10.♖d1!?N 10...♗xf1 11.♔xf1 e6 12.g3±) 9...♘c4 10.♗f4 We have let the knight come to c4, but will soon repel it. 10...c6 (10...♗xd4?? 11.♘b5+–) 11.♖d1 ♕b6 12.b3 ♘a3 13.♕c1 ♘b5 14.♘xb5 cxb5 15.♗e2±

10.♖d1 ♘8d7 11.♗e2 ♗g4 12.0-0 ♕c7 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♗xf3±

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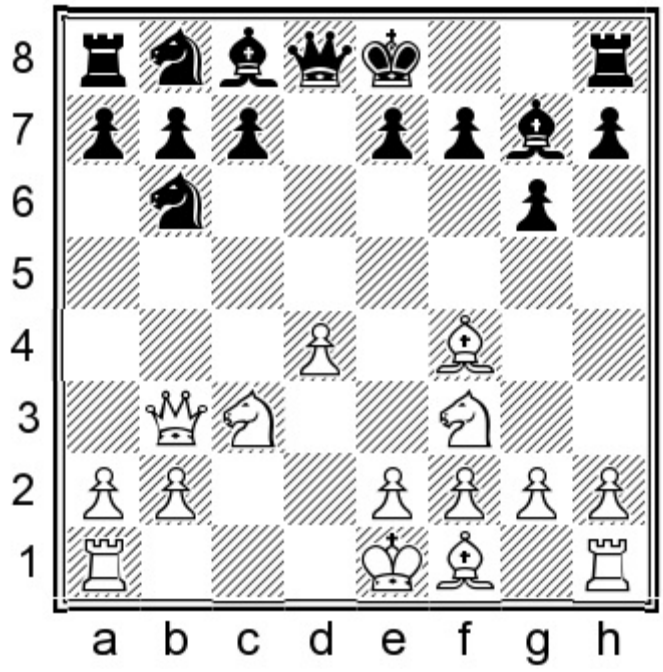


Position after: 14.♗xf3±

Black has reached a typical passive position, and it was no surprise that White won quite easily in Mamedyarov – Areshchenko, European Club Cup, Eilat 2012.

b) 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6 6.d4 ♗g7 7.♗f4 --, 7...♗e6 8.♕a3 --

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6! 6.d4 ♗g7 7.♗f4!?



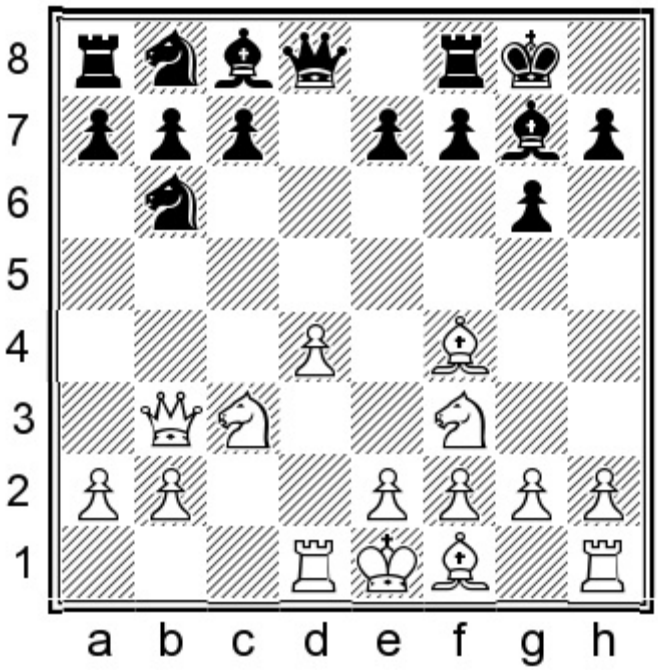
Position after: 7.♗f4!?

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This is the positional approach. I also like 7.e4, the other critical line, and have played some games with it, but I feel it's a bit too dangerous and complicated for the book. Still, some wonderful games have been played with this move, have a look for example at Cheparinov, I (2678) – Sutovsky, E (2660) Poikovsky 2013.

7...♗e6!

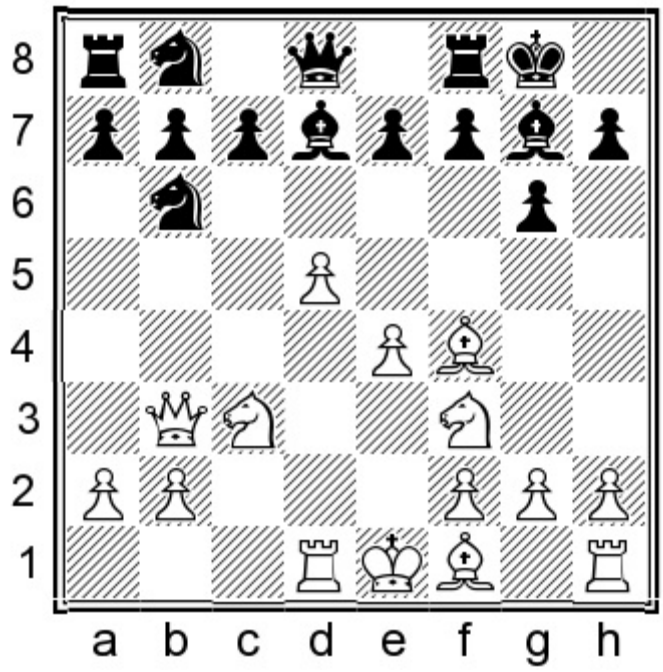
7...0-0 is a bit too slow, as White will now be able to meet ...♗e6 with d5, saving some tempi. 8.♖d1! This move restricts Black's possibilities. For instance, it's harder for him to make the thematic move ...c5 work.



Position after: 8.♖d1!

A) 8...♗e6 9.d5! ♗d7 (9...♗xc3+!? 10.bxc3 ♗xd5? 11.c4 ♗xc4 12.♖xd8 ♗xb3 13.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 14.axb3+–) 10.e4!N

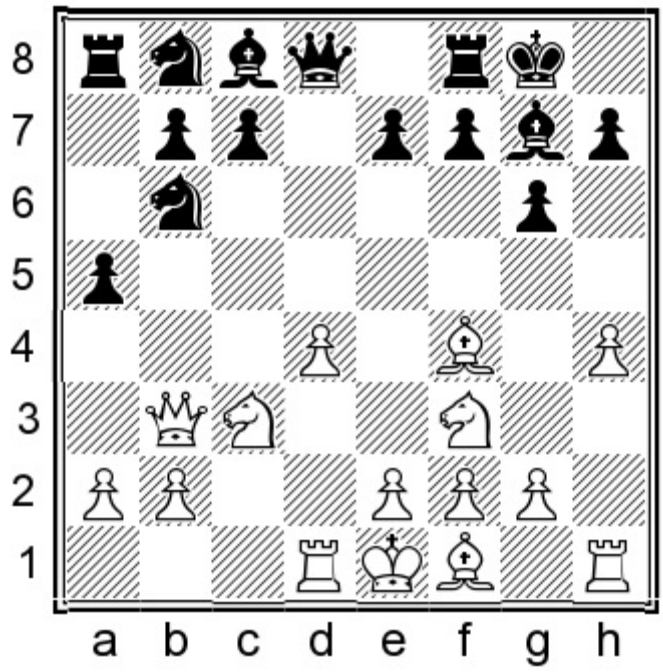
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Position after: 10.e4!N

The simplest. (10.♘e5 c6 11.dxc6 ♘xc6 12.♘xc6 bxc6 13.e4 ♕c8 14.♗e2 ♗e6 15.♕c2± occurred in the drawn game Xiong, J (2641) – Lin, Y (2276) China 2016) 10...c6 11.♗e2 cxd5 12.exd5 ♘a6 13.0-0± White has a very active position, full of possibilities.

B) 8...a5 9.h4!?N



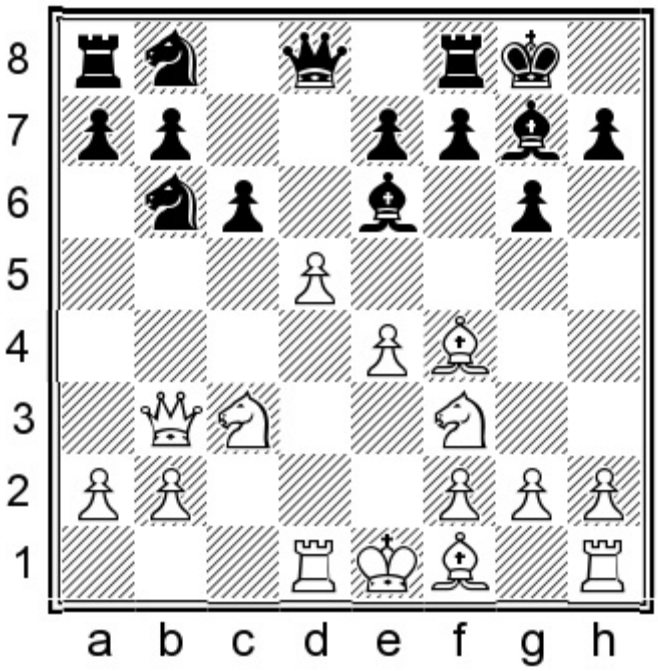
Position after: 9.h4!?N

This move makes a lot of sense as most of Black's pieces are on the queenside and we have already

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stabilized the center. (9.e3 a4 10.♕c2 ♘c6 11.♗e2± is obviously good for White; it's hard for Black to find counterplay) 9...♗g4?! (9...h5 10.e4 ♗g4 11.♗e2→) 10.♘e5! ♗xe5 11.dxe5 ♕c8 12.h5! ♗e6 (12...♗xh5 13.f3!+–) 13.♕c2 ♖d8 14.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 15.hxg6 hxg6 16.e3→ Black will hardly survive the coming storm.

C) 8...c6 9.e4 ♗e6 10.d5!?



Position after: 10.d5!?

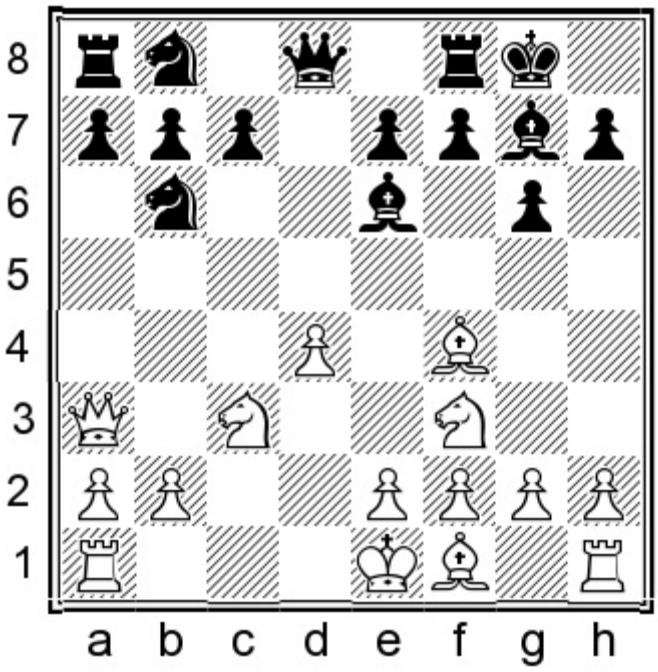
10...cxd5 11.exd5 ♗g4 12.♗e2 ♘8d7 13.h3 ♗xf3 14.♗xf3 ♖c8 15.0-0 ♘c5 16.♕b4± White has the bishop pair and an isolated but strong d-pawn, so remains better: Ribli, Z (2554) – Tazbir, M (2555) Germany 2013, 1-0 (29).

8.♕a3

Black has a choice. Grandmasters generally head for great complications, but two other moves which make some sense have been played more often.

8...0-0

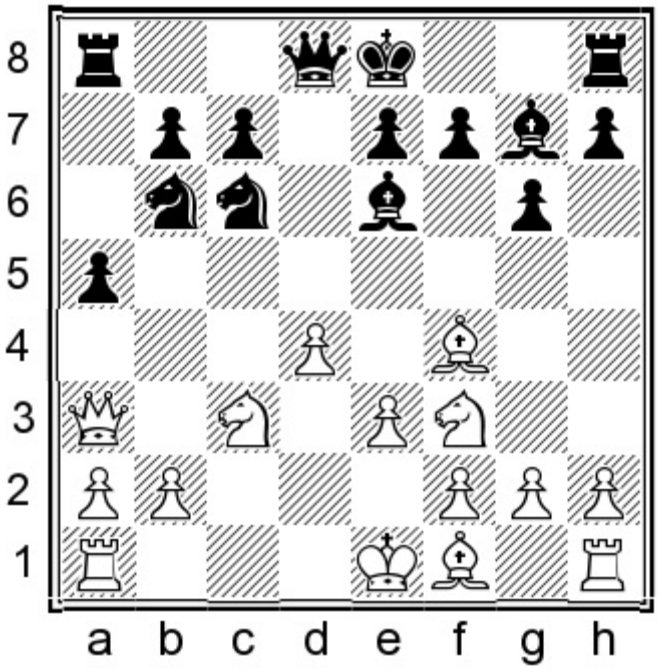
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Position after: 8...0-0

Here I am not sure which line is the best, so I will leave the choice to you.

8...♘c6 9.e3 a5 is the logical follow-up, to bring the knight to b4.



Position after: 9...a5

A) 10.♗b5 is very logical as well, but Black has a straightforward way to complicate the position. 10...0-0 11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.0-0 ♘c4! 13.♕c5 ♘xb2 14.♕xc6 ♘d3 15.♗g3 ♘b4 16.♕c5 ♘a6 17.♕b5 c5! 18.♖fd1⇄ White managed to win the top-level game Jakovenko, D (2713) – Navara, D (2715) Achaia

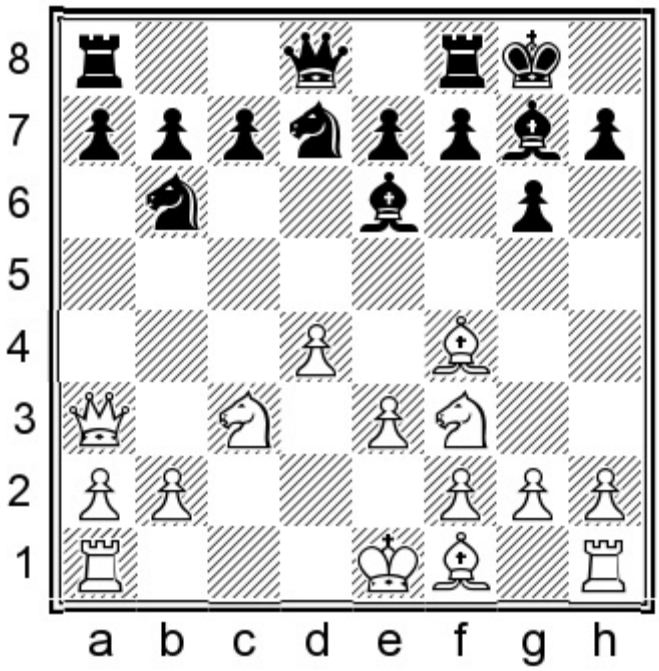
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2013, but I feel that Black should be fine if he keeps playing well, with 18...♕d7 for instance.

B) 10.♕c5!?N 10...0-0 11.♗e2 ♘d5 (11...a4!? Brings the rook into play. 12.♗g3!? Keeps the bishop away from any possible threats. 12...♖a5 13.♘b5 ♗d5 14.♕c3 ♗xf3 15.gxf3 ♘d5 16.♕d2±) 12.♘xd5 ♕xd5 13.♕c3± Black lacks pawn breaks, and generally remains inferior in these kinds of positions.

9.e4

9.e3!? ♘8d7

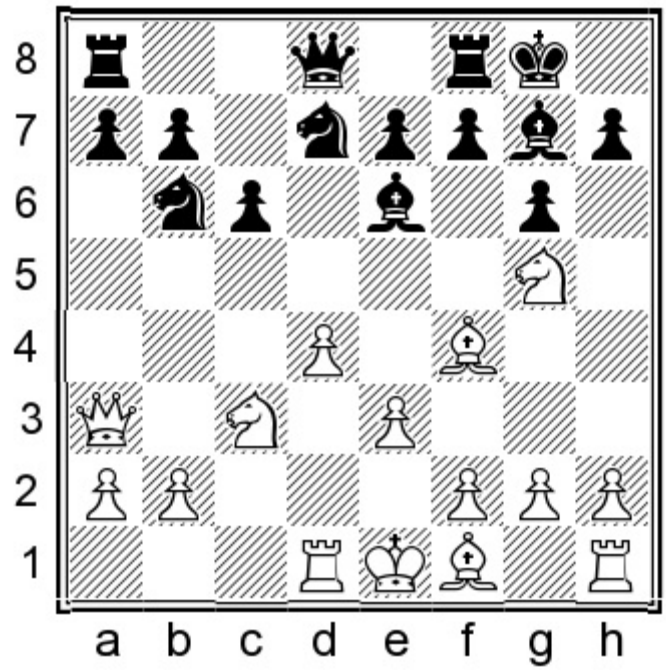


Position after: 9...♘8d7

A) 10.♗e2 You must be careful. This move is well met with 10...c5! 11.dxc5 (11.0-0 ♘c4 12.♕a4 ♘db6 13.♕c2 ♗f5⇄) 11...♘c4 12.♕b4 a5 13.♕b5 ♖c8!⇄ and Black has gained some activity.

B) 10.♖d1 Threatening d5 and preventing ...c5 ideas. 10...c6 11.♘g5!

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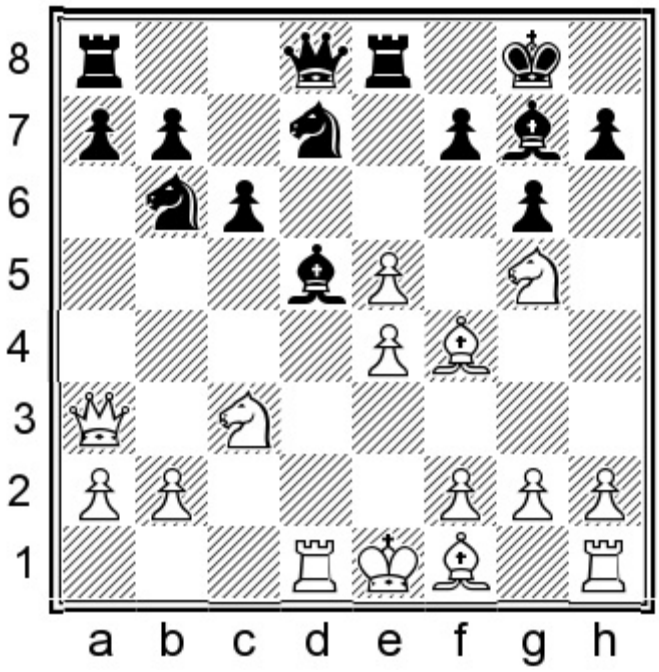
Position after: 11.♘g5!

(11.♗e2?! ♘c4 12.♗xc4 ♗xc4=)

B1) 11...♗c4 12.♗xc4 ♘xc4 13.♕b3 b5 (13...e5 was tried in Wang, H (2715) – Li, C (2613) China 2010, but it's not enough for equality: 14.dxe5 ♘cxe5 15.0-0 ♕b6 16.♕c2! ♘c5 17.♘ce4 ♘xe4 18.♘xe4± Black has some problems on the dark squares, 1-0 in 62 moves.) 14.0-0 e5?! (14...♕a5 15.♘ge4 e5 16.dxe5 ♘dxe5 17.♗g5↑) 15.dxe5 ♕e7 16.e6 fxe6 17.♘ge4! ♖f5 18.♕c2 ♗e5 19.♘e2 ♗xf4 20.♘xf4± Black's pawn structure is really weak, and his pieces are not active enough to compensate for these weaknesses: Sargissian, G (2676) – Le Roux, J (2538) Aix-les-Bains 2011, 1-0 (36).

B2) 11...♗d5 12.e4 e5 13.dxe5 ♖e8!

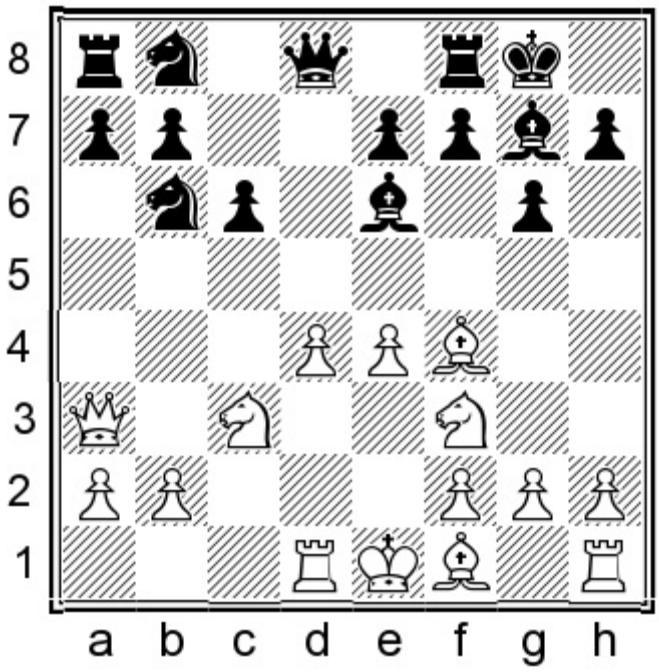
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Position after: 13...♖e8!

14.♘f3 (14.exd5? ♗xe5 15.♗e3 ♕xg5! 16.♗xg5?? ♗xc3#) 14...♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♖xe5 17.♗d3 ♕e7 18.♕xe7 ♖xe7 19.f3 f5 20.♔f2 fxe4 21.♗xe4 ♗xe4 22.♘xe4 White has a slight initiative, but it might not be enough to win without some help from Black. The game Jakovenko, D (2709) – Grischuk, A (2742) Sharjah 2017 ended in a draw.

9...c6 10.♖d1



Position after: 10.♖d1

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10...♘8d7

10...♘c4 11.♗xc4 ♗xc4 12.h4!?N 12...h5 13.♘e5 ♗a6?! 14.g4!± The attack comes fast.

11.h4 h6

This position occurred in the game Bacrot, E (2692) – Ivanchuk, V (2710) Ashdod 2015, 0-1 (44). We can play an interesting new move here.

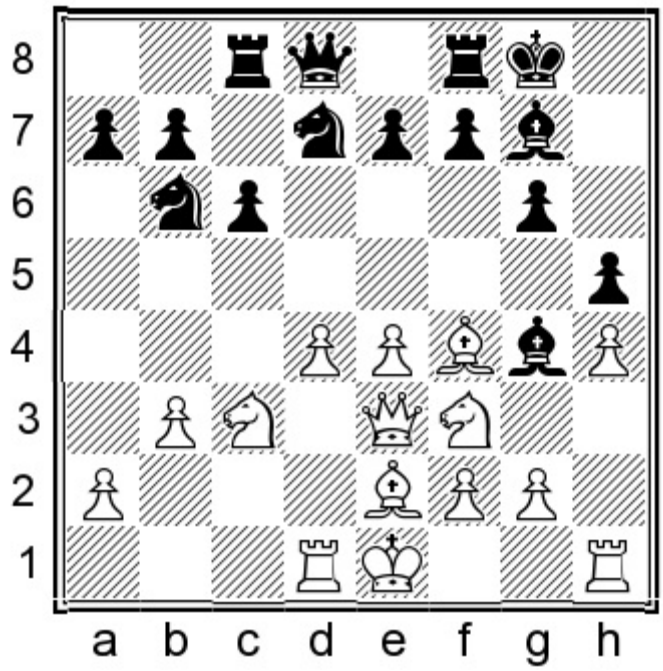
12.b3!

Preventing ...♘c4 and intending the following sequence:

12...♗g4 13.♕c1!

Reactivating the queen.

13...h5 14.♗e2 ♖c8 15.♕e3!↑



Position after: 15.♕e3!↑

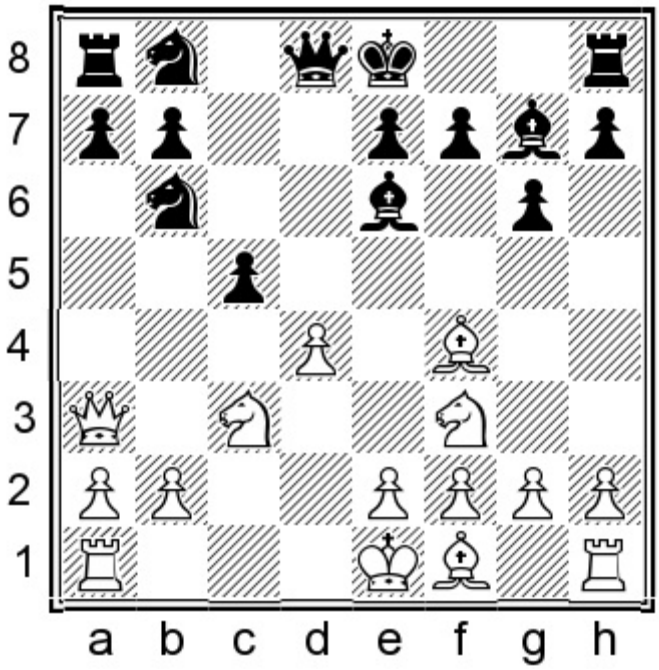
White has a stable center and his advantage is indisputable.

c) 3...d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6 6.d4 ♗g7 7.♗f4 ♗e6 8.♕a3 c5

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♕b3 ♘b6! 6.d4 ♗g7 7.♗f4!? ♗e6! 8.♕a3 c5!?

This move is the choice of grandmasters. So far only titled players have used it, and in very few games.

Although it is unlikely that club players will play such a strange-looking move, it is important to know it, as it contains a lot of venom.



Position after: 8...c5!?

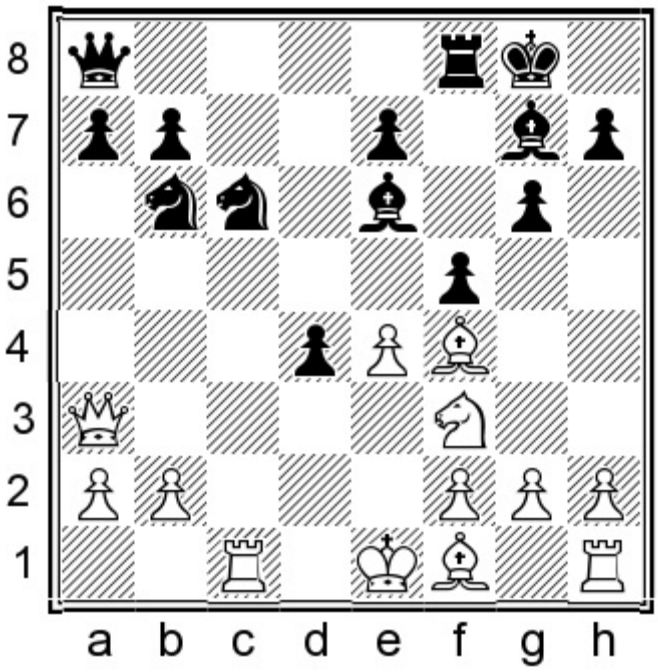
9.♕xc5!

The most principled move, I believe. We spend a few tempi to win the pawn, even if it opens the c-file for Black. Our opponent has to prove compensation. We are not risking much here, and in the worst case we will have to settle for a draw, as our position is solid anyway.

A) 9.dxc5?! is dubious due to 9...♘c4! 10.♕b4 0-0 11.♕xb7 ♕a5→.

B) 9.e4 was played by Grünfeld specialist David Navara; play soon became wild: 9...cxd4! 10.♘b5 0-0 11.♘c7 ♘c6 12.♘xa8 ♕xa8 13.♖c1 f5!

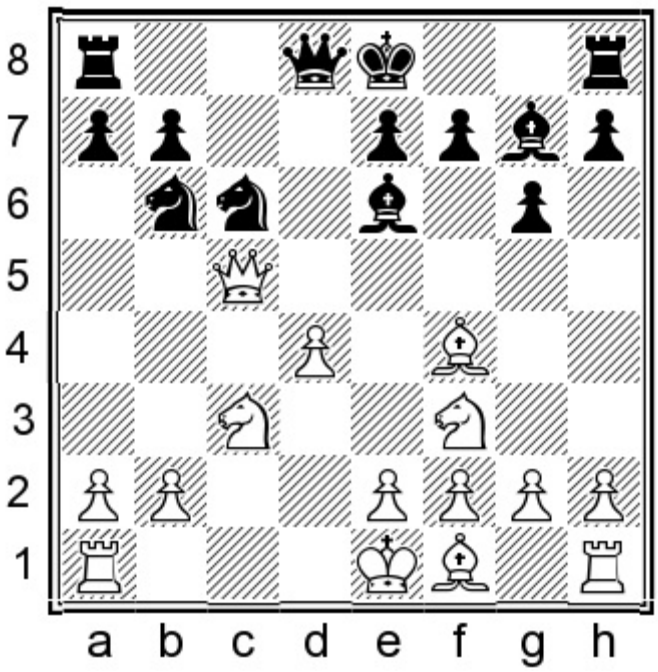
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Position after: 13...f5!

14.e5 ♘d5 15.♗d2 ♘xe5 16.♘xd4 ♗f7∞ White's preparation stopped on the 27th move, but it's definitely too complicated: Navara, D (2729) – Wei, Y (2675) Wijk aan Zee 2015, ½-½ (66).

9...♘c6



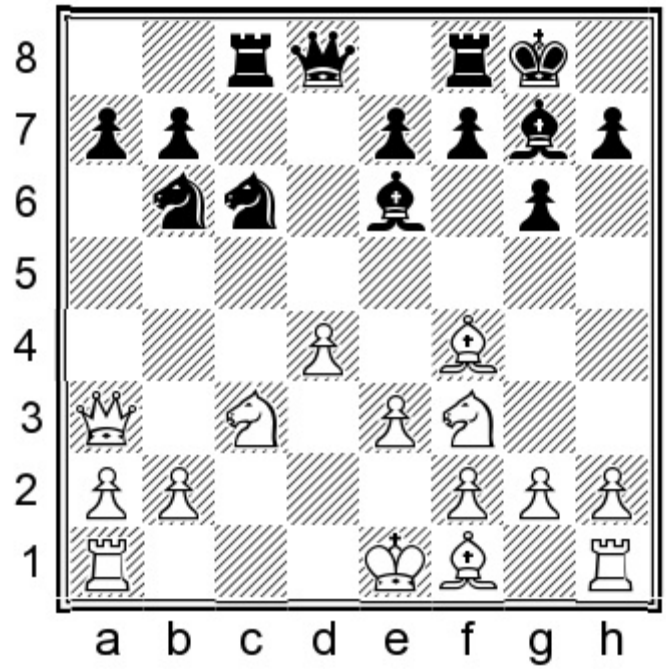
Position after: 9...♘c6

10.e4!

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This move was a novelty when I first worked on this line in 2014, but not any more. I am not sure which of Black's moves now should be the main line, so I decided to follow the engine's preference.

10.e3 Let's explain the complications after this more natural move: 10...♖c8 11.♕a3 0-0

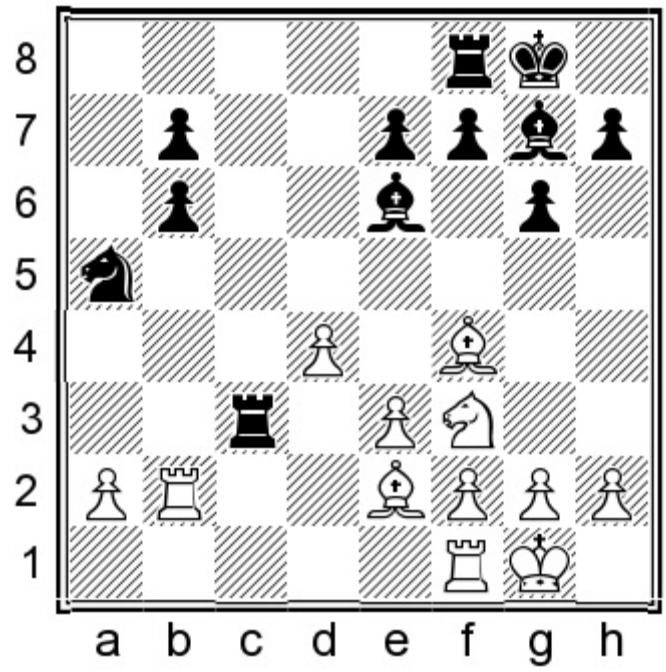


Position after: 11...0-0

A) 12.♖d1 fails because of the powerful 12...a5! (12...♘c4?! 13.♗xc4 ♗xc4 14.d5 ♕a5 15.♕xa5 ♘xa5 16.♗e5±) 13.♖d2 (13.♘e5 ♘b4!N 14.♕xa5 ♘c2+ 15.♔d2 ♘xd4 16.♔c1 ♖a8 17.♕b4 ♘d5 18.♕xd4 ♘xc3 19.bxc3 ♕a5→) 13...♘c4 14.♗xc4 ♗xc4 15.♘e2! ♘b4 16.0-0 ♕b6!⩱ All these moves are hard to find for Black, so it may be possible to try this line in a real game.

B) 12.♗e2 This is the main move here. 12...♘c4 13.♕a4 ♘xb2 14.♕b5 ♕b6! (14...♘c4?! 15.0-0 ♕a5 16.♖fc1 ♘a3 17.♕xb7 ♘b4 18.♘e1!± 1-0 (30) Le, Q (2703) – Navara, D (2706) Belfort 2012) 15.♕xb6 axb6 16.♖b1 ♘a5! 17.♖xb2 ♖xc3 18.0-0

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Position after: 18.0-0

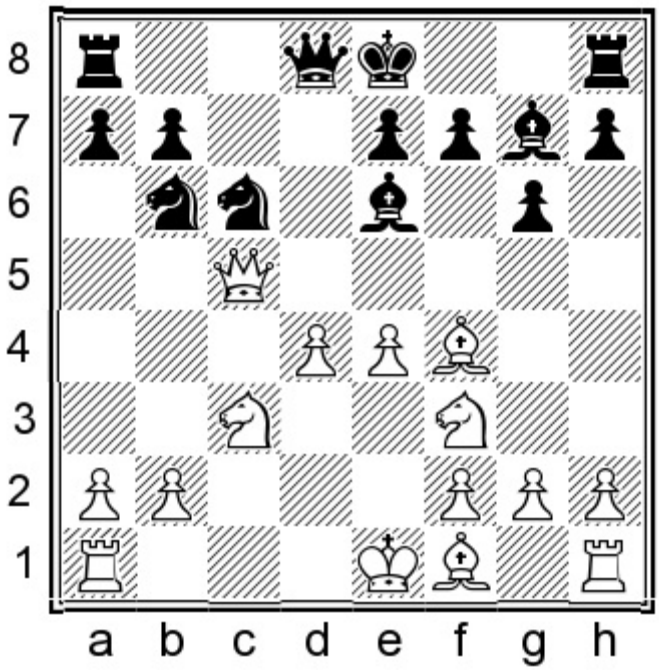
Three games have reached this position, with good results for White (two wins and a draw). Black should have enough compensation for his poor structure, but he still has to play very accurately.

B1) 18...♗c4 19.♖fb1 ♖a8 and in the game Kovalyov, A (2616) – Troff, K (2532) Greensboro 2015, it now seems more simple to start with 20.♔f1 ♗d5 21.♘d2±.

B2) 18...♖fc8 19.♖xb6 ♖a3 20.♘e5± ♖xa2?! 21.♖xe6! fxe6 22.♗g4 ♖cc2 23.♗xe6+ ♔f8 24.♗xa2 ♖xa2 25.h4± 1-0 (43) Zhou, W (2616) – Robson, R (2628) Ningbo 2013.

B3) 18...♘c4!?N might be the best way to play: 19.♖b4 ♖c8! 20.h3 ♗d5 21.♘e5 ♘xe5 22.dxe5 ♖8c5!=.

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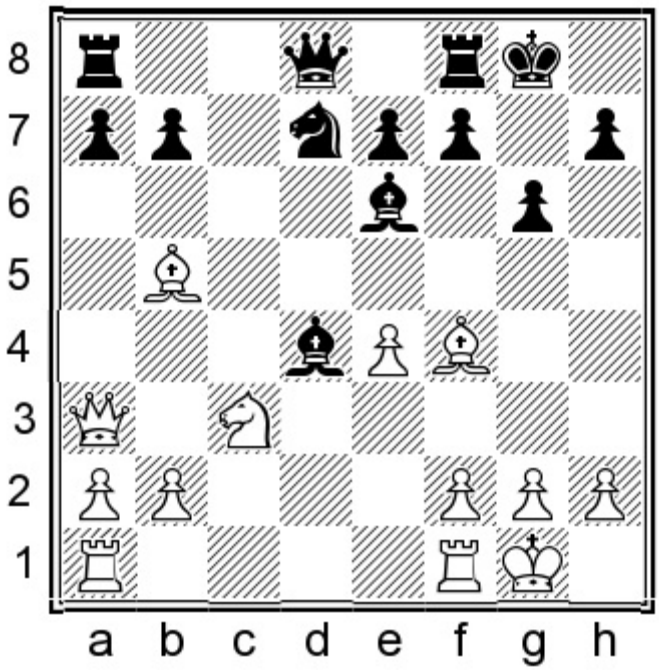


Position after: 10.e4!

10...♖c8

This has been tried by MVL. My advice is to take the logical step of removing the queen from the dangerous c-file.

A) 10...♘d7 This is a solid alternative. Black cedes the initiative to his opponent, but regains the pawn immediately. 11.♕a3 ♘xd4 12.♘xd4 ♗xd4 13.♗b5! 0-0 14.0-0

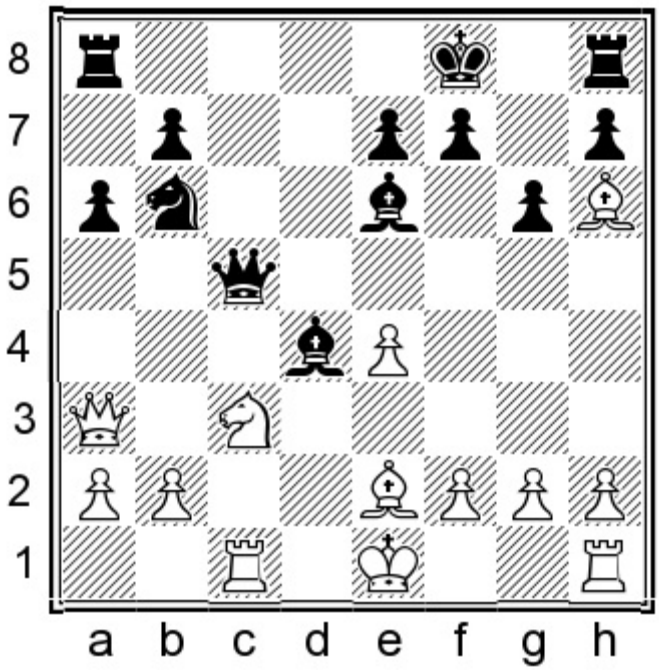


Position after: 14.0-0

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14...♕b6?! (14...♘f6!? is really a computer move: 15.♗h6 ♕b6 16.♗xf8 ♖xf8 17.♗e2 ♗c5 18.♕a4 ♗xf2+ 19.♖xf2 ♕xb2 20.♖d1 ♕xc3 21.♗f3±; 14...♗c5 15.b4! ♗d6 16.♗xd6 exd6 17.♖fd1±) 15.♗xd7 ♗xd7 16.♘d5! ♕xb2 17.♕xb2 ♗xb2 18.♖ab1 ♗a3 19.♖xb7 ♖fd8 20.h4! White has managed to keep the initiative, and won easily in Xiong, J (2641) – Troff, K (2543) Saint Louis 2016.

B) 10...♘xd4?! I don't like this move, which regains the pawn, but loses time with the king. 11.♘xd4 ♗xd4 12.♗b5+ ♔f8 13.♕a3 a6 14.♗e2 ♕c8 (14...♘d7?! 15.0-0 ♕b6 16.♗h6+ ♗g7 17.♗e3 ♕d6 This occurred recently, and among White's good options, he chose 18.♕xd6!? exd6 19.♖fd1± 1-0 (57) Banusz, T (2616) – Sutovsky, E (2689) Austria 2017) 15.♖c1 ♕c5□ 16.♗h6+!N



Position after: 16.♗h6+!N

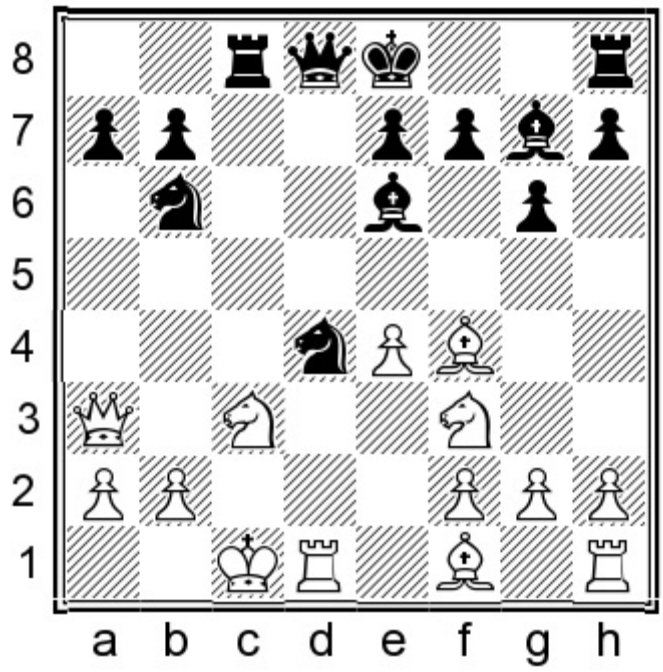
This is an improvement over the game Vazquez Igarza, R (2592) – Wei, Y (2675) Gibraltar 2015. 16...♔g8 17.♕xc5 ♗xc5 18.0-0± with an unpleasant endgame for Black.

11.♕a3! ♘xd4

11...♘c4 12.♗xc4 ♗xc4 13.♕a4 ♗a6 14.0-0-0±

12.0-0-0!?N

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Position after: 12.0-0-0!?N

Time to castle, even if we put the king on the dangerous c-file. It's more important to generate play against the d4-knight.

12.♘xd4 ♕xd4 (12...♗xd4 13.♗b5+ ♘d7 14.♖d1 ♕b6 15.♕a4!±) 13.♗b5+ ♗d7 14.♗e3 ♕d6 15.♗xd7+ ♕xd7 16.♕xa7 ♖xc3 17.♕xb6 ♖c2=

12...0-0!

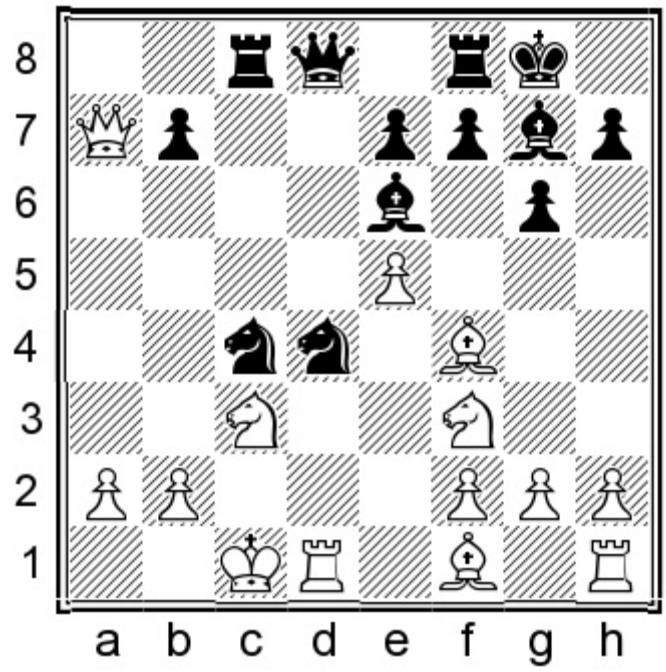
All this is Mikhalevski's recommendation for Black.

13.e5

13.♗e3 is interesting, but Black is resourceful: 13...♘c4□ 14.♗xc4 ♖xc4 15.♗xd4 ♗xd4 16.♘xd4 ♖xd4 17.♕xa7 b6! 18.f3 Black still has to prove his compensation, but it seems that he should be OK: 18...♗c4!=.

13...♘c4! 14.♕xa7

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Position after: 14.♕xa7

14...♕c7!

14...♘b5?! This clearly leads to an edge for White. 15.♖xd8 ♘xa7 16.♖xc8 ♖xc8 17.♘d4! Giving the pawn back is necessary to stop Black's initiative, but I think it's quite easy to understand if you face it over the board. 17...♘xe5 18.♘xe6 fxe6 19.♔b1± And White managed to convert in Wang Hao (2711) – Mikhalevski, V (2538) Gibraltar 2018.

15.♖xd4

A) 15.♗xc4 doesn't work due to 15...♘xf3 16.♗xe6 fxe6 and the bishop on f4 is hanging.

B) It would be nice if we could play 15.♕xd4, but after 15...♖fd8 16.♕e4 ♖xd1+ 17.♔xd1 ♘xb2+ White's position is collapsing.

15...♖a8 16.♖xc4 ♗xc4 17.♕e3 ♗xa2

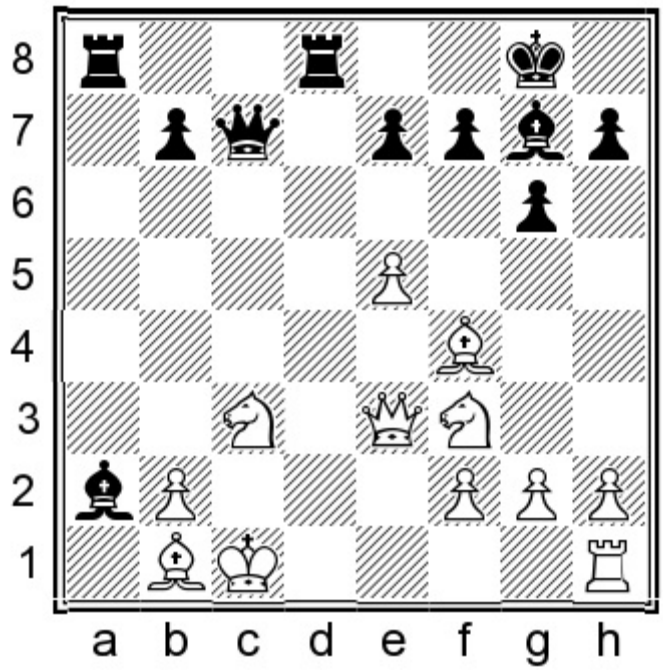
White has two knights for a rook, but as Mikhalevski states, this is a kind of 'dynamic equality'. However, I think that White can keep the upper hand with accurate play.

18.♗d3 ♖fd8

18...♗c4 19.♖d1! ♖a1+ 20.♔c2 ♖xd1 21.♘xd1!±

19.♗b1!

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Position after: 19.♗b1!

It took me a while to find this move!

19...♗xb1

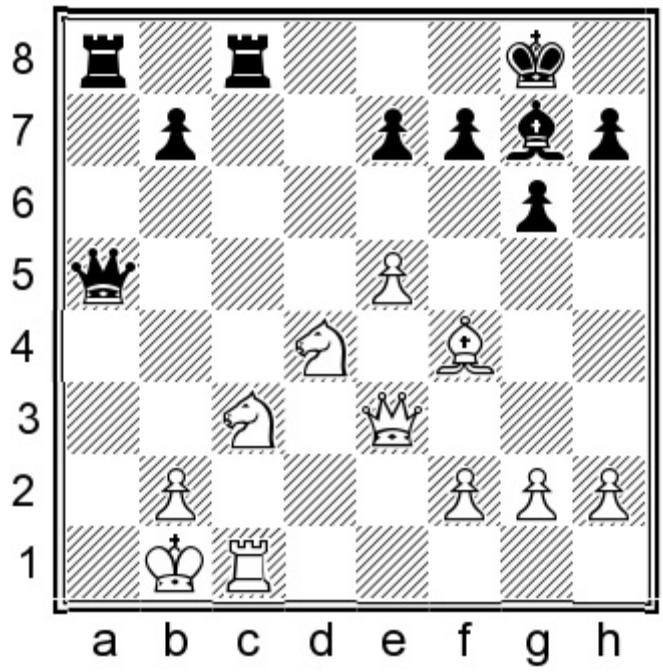
Other moves are no better:

A) 19...b5 20.♗xa2 ♖xa2 21.♔b1! ♖a6 22.♖c1 ♖da8 23.♕d4 Black needs to bring his bishop into play in order to advance with ...b4. 23...e6 24.♗e3 ♗f8 25.b4!± This strong (and surprising) resource allows us to get the better position.

B) 19...♗e6 20.♘d4 ♗c4 21.♖d1 b5 22.e6!±

20.♔xb1 ♕a5 21.♖c1! ♖dc8 22.♘d4±

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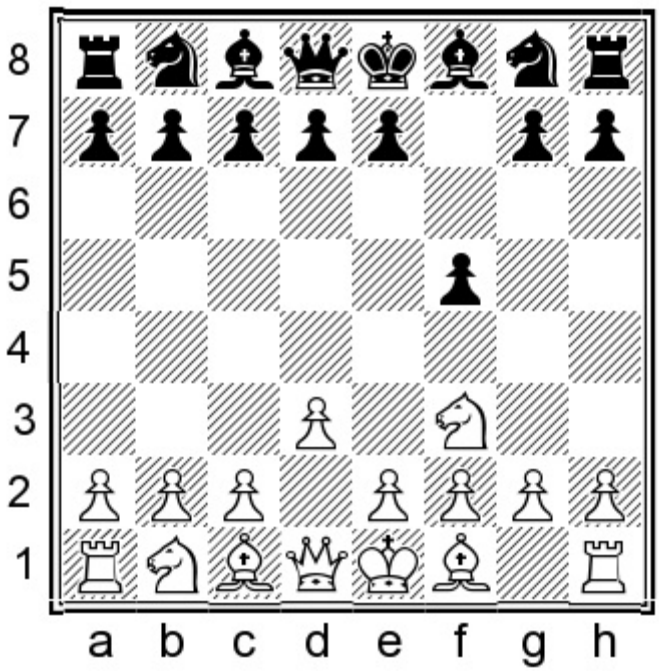
Position after: 22.♘d4±

Even if it's still complicated, I prefer White who has two knights for a rook, and his task of exchanging pieces seems easier.

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Chapter 19
The Dutch Defense

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3



Chapter guide

Chapter 19 – The Dutch Defense

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3

a) 2...d5, 2...♘f6

b) 2...d6 3.e4 g6, 3...e5 4.♘c3 c5

c) 2...d6 3.e4 e5 4.♘c3 ♘f6

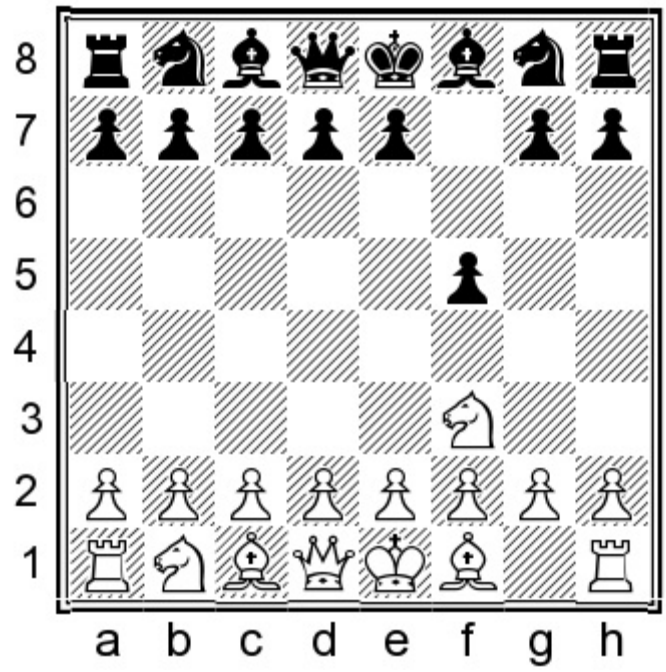
d) 2...d6 3.e4 e5 4.♘c3 ♘c6

e) 2...♘c6!

a) 2...d5, 2...♘f6

1.♘f3 f5

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Position after: 1...f5

The Dutch Defense merits a full chapter to itself. It is a serious weapon for Black, and I even play it myself quite often. I will concentrate on the move 2.d3, which is interesting and is in keeping with the spirit of this book as it fully justifies our move order with 1.♘f3.

I will also indicate the best move order to enter the main lines against the Dutch. This shouldn't be much of a problem; the Dutch is not difficult to face when White is playing for an opening advantage as there are several ways to achieve one.

What is difficult in the main lines of the Dutch is to convert this advantage. Your job is to work on your own repertoire against it if this is your choice.

2.d3!?

The is the start of the Lisitsyn Variation. For the whole story, 2.e4 is the Lisitsyn Gambit. We are playing in the same spirit as we want to follow up with 3.e4, but without necessarily playing a gambit.

If you are willing to enter the main lines of the Dutch, many move orders are possible, but I prefer the following one, which avoids having to work on a new line against the Stonewall Defense: 2.c4 ♘f6 3.g3 g6 (3...e6 has already been discussed via 1...e6) 4.♗g2 ♗g7 5.0-0 0-0. It's now clear that Black is aiming for the Leningrad Dutch. White has many options, but playing with d4 at some point seems like the right decision since we can't let Black advance with ...e5 so easily.

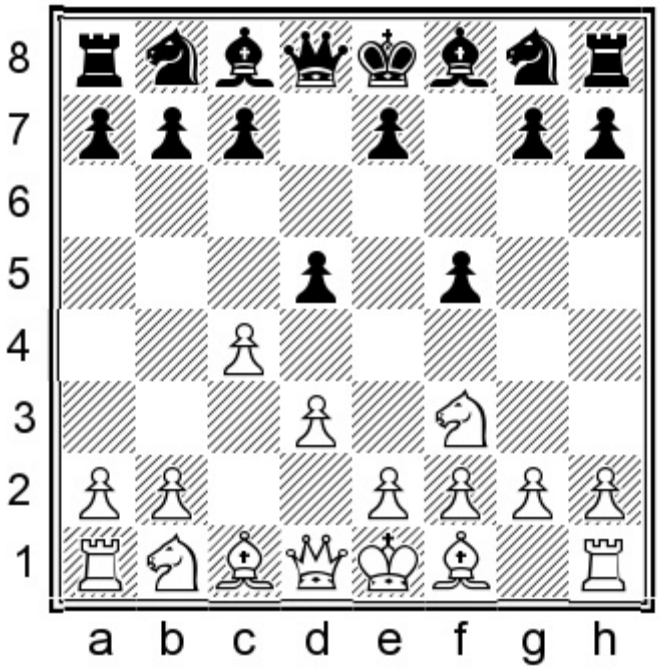
2...♘f6?!

By far the most common move, but not particularly good. Black wants to prevent e4, but it's not very effective.

2...d5 also aims at preventing e2-e4, but will most likely transpose to the Stonewall Defense (which

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was probably not Black's intention): 3.c4!



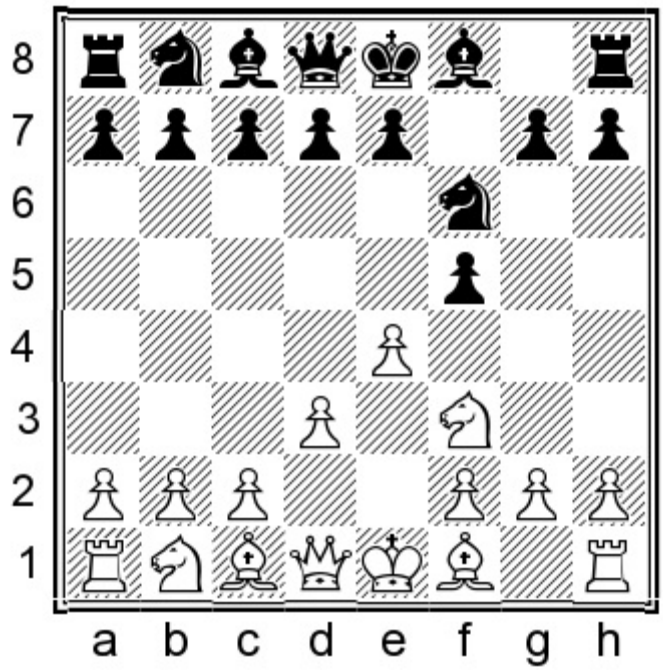
Position after: 3.c4!

A) 3...dxc4?! 4.d4! ♘f6 5.e3 We are playing a Queen's Gambit Accepted, where Black has an extra tempo, but this extra tempo is ...f5, probably the ugliest move in the position. White has no problem in securing an advantage: 5...♗e6 6.♘bd2!± b5? 7.a4 c6 8.axb5 cxb5 9.b3±.

B) 3...e6 4.g3 ♘f6 5.♗g2 c6 (5...dxc4?! 6.♕a4+ ♗d7 7.♕xc4± Now it's a Neo-Catalan with an early ...dxc4, where Black has advanced ...f5, and once again it's not great at all!) 6.0-0 This transposes into Chapter 6, where we covered the Stonewall.

3.e4!

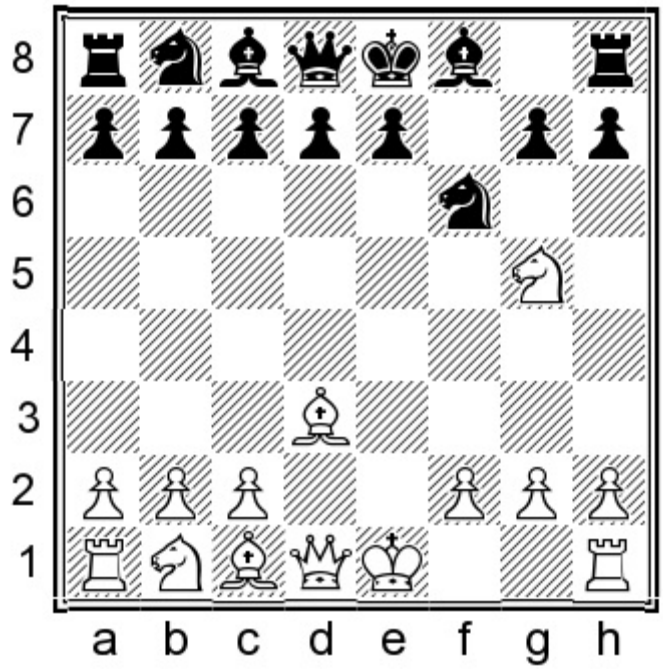
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Position after: 3.e4!

3...d6

3...fxe4?! is not great: 4.dxe4 ♘xe4 (4...d6 5.e5! ♘fd7 6.♘c3 dxe5? 7.♘g5!+–) 5.♗d3! ♘f6 (5...d5 6.♗xe4! dxe4 7.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 8.♘g5 ♔e8 9.♘c3± We have given up the bishop pair, but kept the better structure and lead in development, especially since Black has lost the right to castle.) 6.♘g5!



Position after: 6.♘g5!

Reminiscent of From's Gambit (1.f4 e5 2.fxe5 d6), but clearly a better version. White's threat is simply

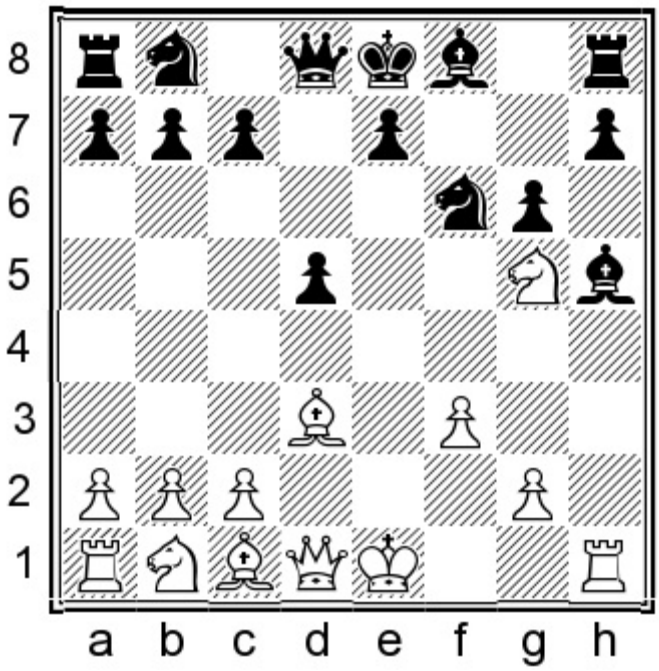
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to take on h7, as the following lines illustrate:

A) 6...d6? 7.♗xh7! is crushing: 7...♘xh7 8.♕h5+ ♔d7 9.♘f7! ♕e8 (9...♘f6 10.♕g6 ♕e8 11.♘xh8+–) 10.♕g4+ ♔c6 11.♕c4+ ♔d7 12.♘xh8±

B) 6...e6? 7.♗xh7! Black is busted. 7...♘xh7?! 8.♕h5+ ♔e7 9.♘xh7+–

C) 6...g6 This seems like the only viable move, but White gets a strong attack. 7.h4! d5 (7...c6 8.h5 ♕a5+ 9.♘c3 ♕e5+ 10.♔f1!+–) 8.h5! Black has no good way of stopping White's initiative. 8...♗g4 9.f3 ♗xh5

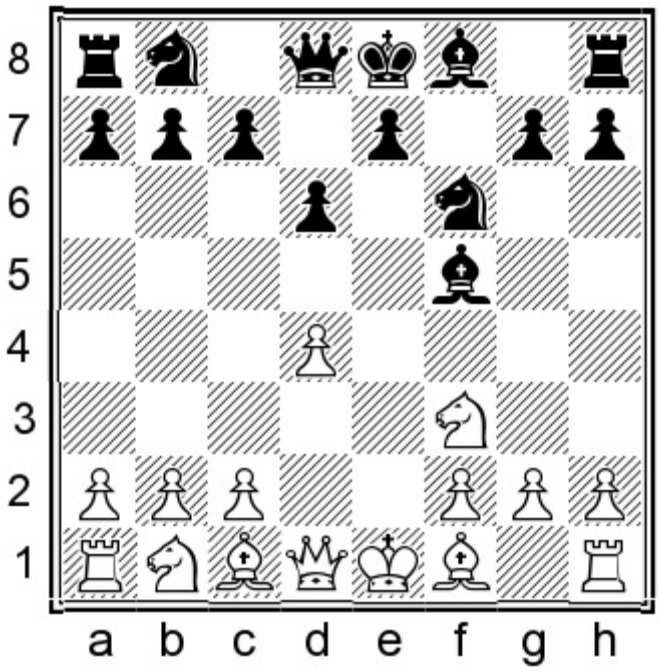


Position after: 9...♗xh5

10.g4 (10.♘c3!N is actually even stronger according to computer reasoning, but from a human point of view, the text move is of course more logical) 10...♕d6 11.gxh5 ♘xh5 12.♘c3+– occurred in Kazakovskiy, V (2323) – Kantans, T (2496) Stockholm 2016, which White won easily despite his lower rating.

4.exf5 ♗xf5 5.d4

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Position after: 5.d4

We have entered the Janos Balogh Gambit (1.e4 d6 2.d4 f5 3.exf5 ♗xf5 4.♘f3 ♘f6) a tempo up for Black, but still not particularly effective, even if it's probably Black's best in the 2...♘f6 line.

5...♕d7

Among the many possibilities at Black's disposal, this has been played recently a few times, and it's probably the most resilient. At least it protects the weak light squares, and anticipates ♗d3.

A) 5...c6?! 6.♗d3 ♗g4 7.0-0! ♘bd7 8.♖e1± is already quite bad for Black.

B) 5...e6 6.♗d3 ♗e7 7.0-0 ♕d7 8.♖e1 ♗g4 9.h3 ♗xf3 10.♕xf3 ♘c6 11.c3± 1-0 (48) Mamedyarov, S (2479) – Dovliatov, S (2360) Baku 2001.

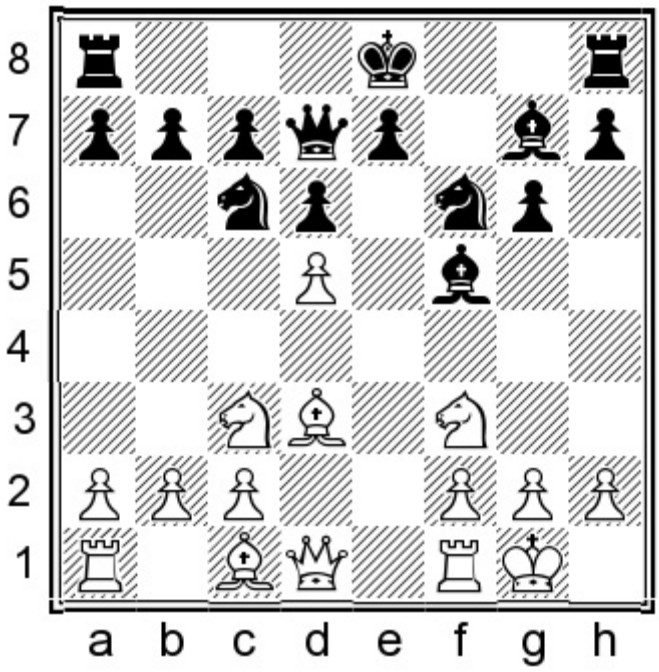
6.♘c3

Following in Magnus's footsteps is quite safe!

6...♘c6

6...g6?! 7.♗d3 ♗g7 8.0-0 ♘c6 9.d5!

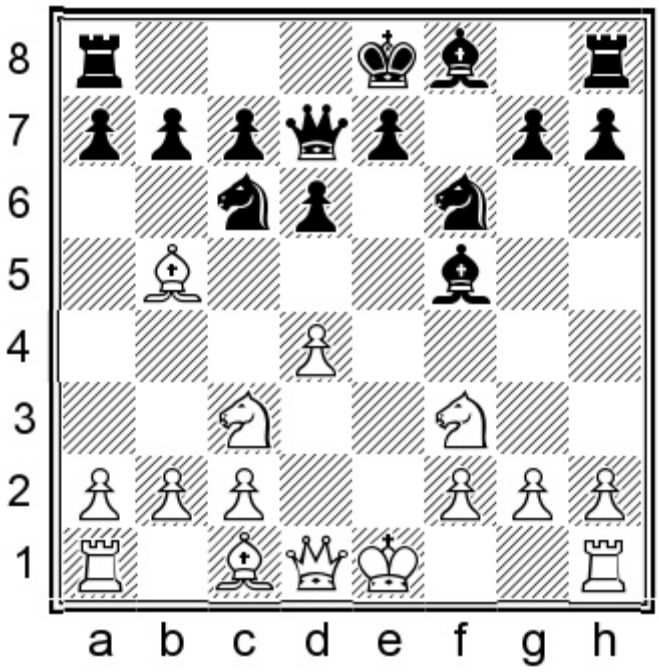
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Position after: 9.d5!

9...♘b4 10.♗xf5 gxf5 11.a3 ♘a6 12.♘d4± Black has played poorly and is already in massive trouble because of the giant hole on e6. Of course, White won easily in Carlsen, M (2881) – Rodriguez Vila, A (2437) Caxias do Sul 2014.

7.♗b5!N



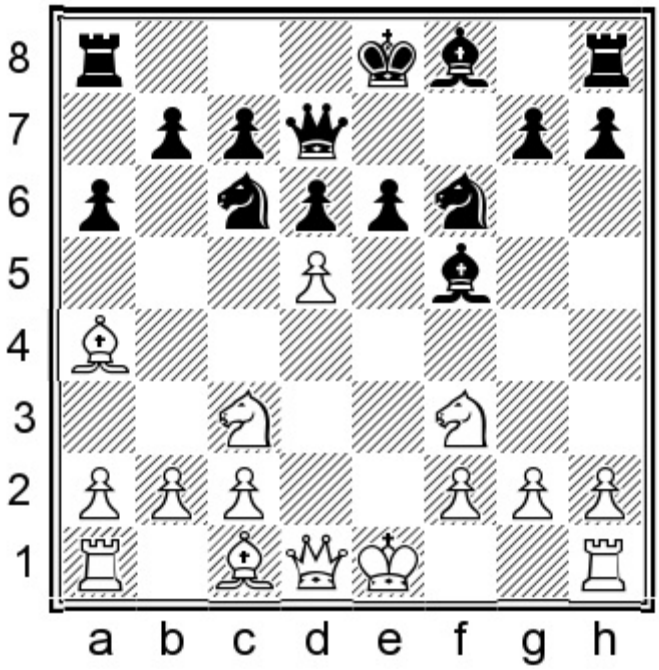
Position after: 7.♗b5!N

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7...a6

7...e6 8.d5 exd5 9.0-0! is similar to the main line.

8.♗a4 e6 9.d5!



Position after: 9.d5!

This temporary sacrifice frees the d4-square for our knight and opens the e-file. Black has to find a safe spot for his king, but it's not so simple.

9...exd5 10.0-0! ♗e7

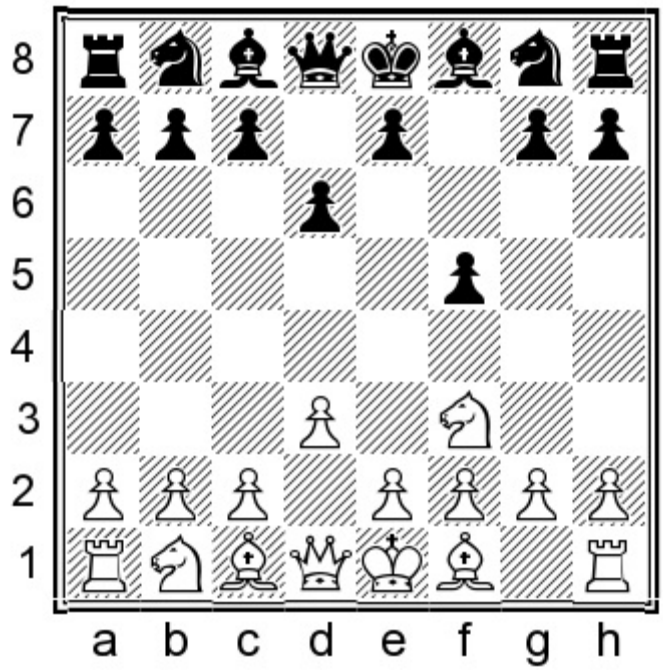
10...0-0-0? 11.♘d4! b5 12.♘cxb5!+–

11.♘xd5 ♘xd5 12.♕xd5 ♗e6 13.♕e4±

b) 2...d6 3.e4 g6, 3...e5 4.♘c3 c5

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3 d6!?

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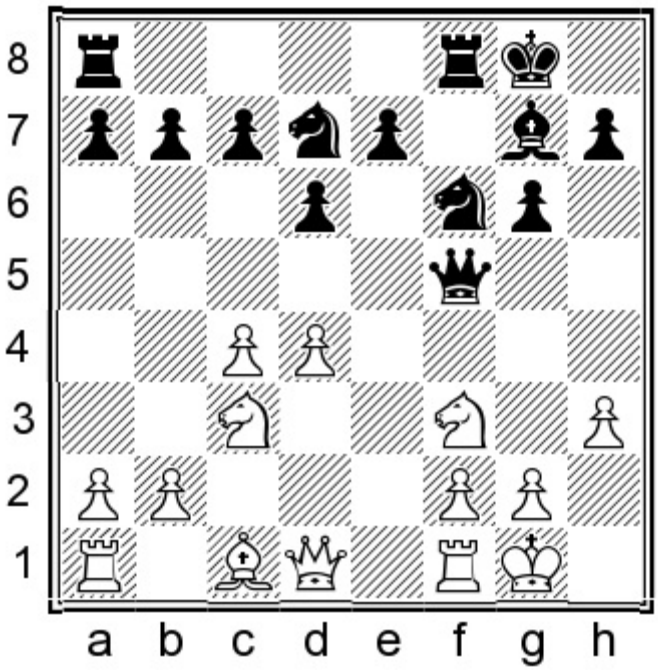
Position after: 2...d6!?

This was Malaniuk's recommendation in his last book on the Dutch Defense. As in the main line, Black's aim is to advance ...e7-e5. Even if it's played more often than 2...♘c6, I don't think it's the strongest move.

3.e4! e5

3...g6?! lacks logic: 4.exf5 ♗xf5 5.d4! Preventing ...e5 and allowing the trade of the light-squared bishops, underlining Black's weakness on e6. 5...♗g7 6.♗d3 ♕d7 7.0-0 ♘f6 8.c4 0-0 9.♗xf5 ♕xf5 10.♘c3 ♘bd7 11.h3!N

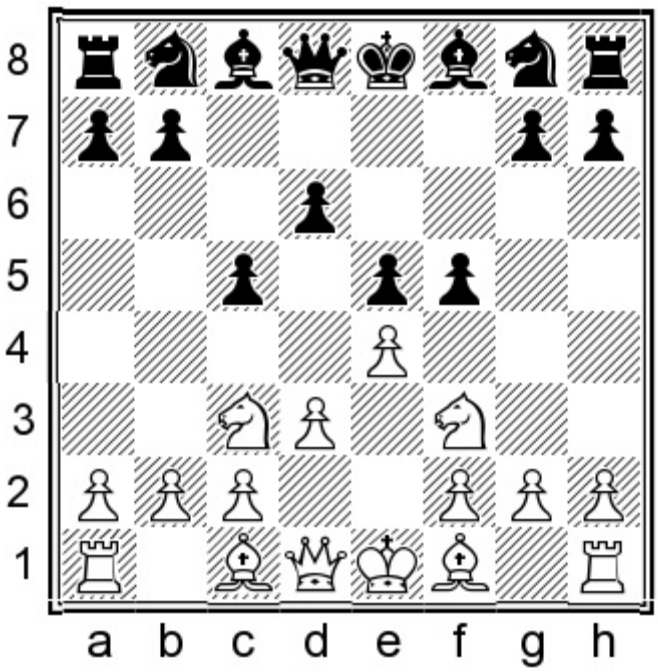
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Position after: 11.h3!N

This is an improvement on the game Tate, A (2332) – Ringoir, T (2448) Istanbul 2012. 11...e5 12.♗e3±. White has a good, stable position.

4.♘c3! c5



Position after: 4...c5

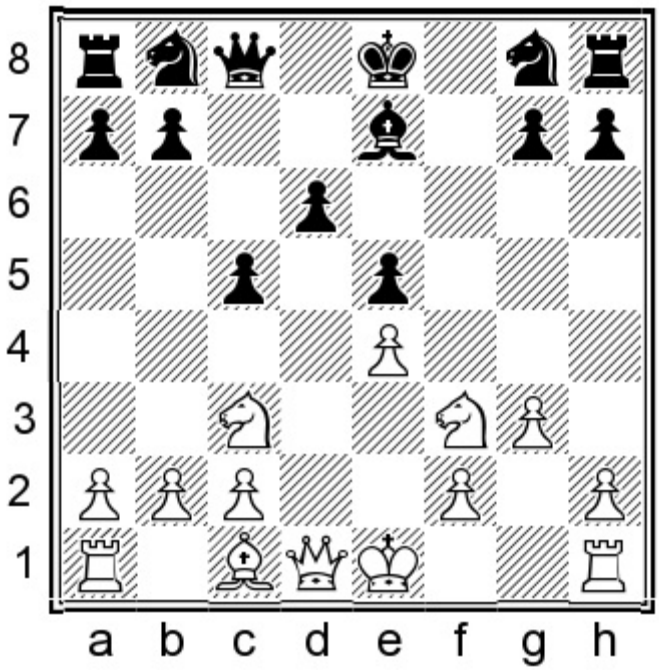
This prevents us from undertaking any action in the center, but weakens the d5-square.

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Our goal now is to force Black to take on e4, opening the d-file.

5.g3! ♘c6

If Black prevents us from playing ♘h4, we have an extra card up our sleeve: 5...♗e7 6.♗h3! fxe4□ (6...g6? 7.exf5 gxf5 8.♘h4!+–) 7.♗xc8 ♕xc8 8.dxe4



Position after: 8.dxe4

Now, to establish full control over d5, we need to trade our bishop for the knight when it appears on f6.

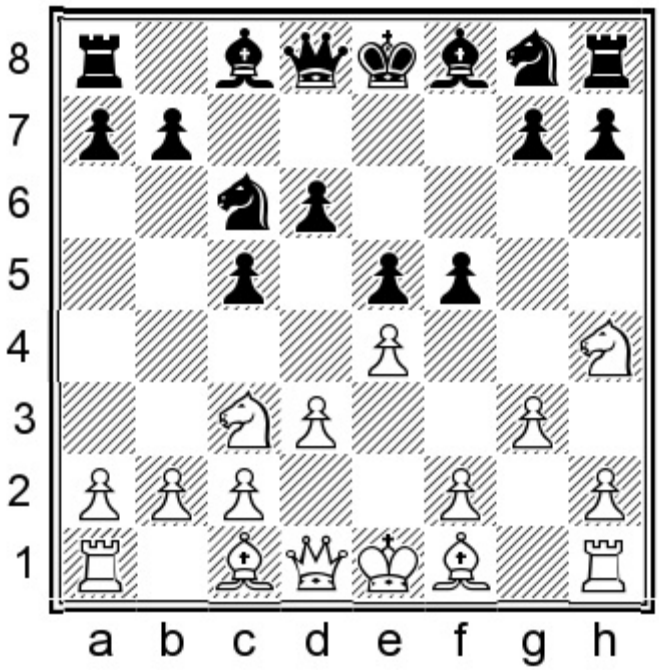
A) From this point of view 8...♘f6?! simply helps us: 9.♗g5! 0-0 10.♘h4 The f5-square is weak as well. 10...g6 11.♘d5 ♕d8 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♘g2± The other knight goes straight to e3, with a strong grip on the position, even if Black managed to escape in Fressinet, L (2693) – Vaisser, A (2548) Haguenau 2013.

B) 8...♘c6 9.0-0N White is waiting for Black to play ...♘f6, which will happen sooner or later. 9...♕d7 10.♕d3 ♘f6 (10...0-0-0 11.♘d5! ♘f6 12.c3 ♖hf8 13.♗g5±) 11.♗g5! 0-0-0 12.♗xf6 ♗xf6 13.♘d5± Our next moves are probably c3 and b4, in order to start the attack, whereas Black's play is not obvious.

6.♘h4!

6.♗h3 is possible too, but if we can keep the light-squared bishop for now, so much the better.

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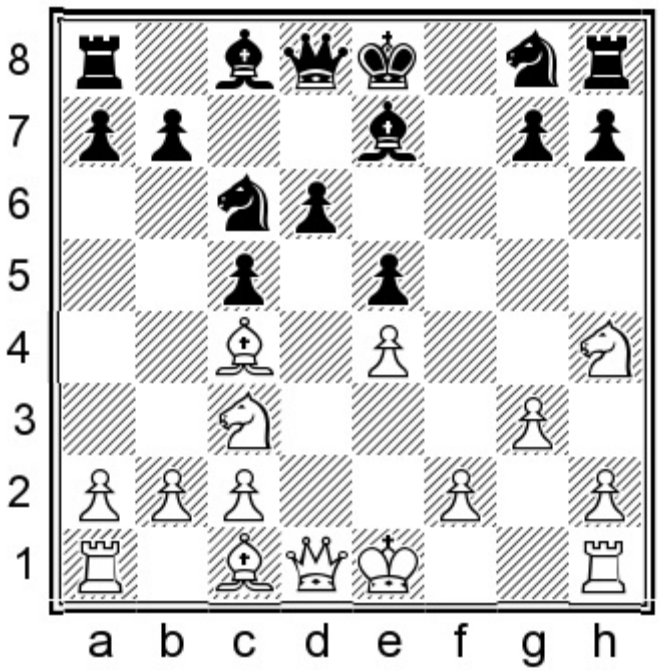


Position after: 6.♘h4!

6...fxe4

6...♘d4? has been played twice to protect the pawn, but is rather dubious. 7.♘d5! fxe4 8.dxe4 ♗e6 occurred in the game Le Roux, J (2571) – Rendle, T (2384) England 2013 which White soon won, but even stronger is 9.c3! ♘c6 (9...♗xd5? 10.exd5+– Oops, the knight is trapped.) 10.♗c4± with an overwhelming advantage.

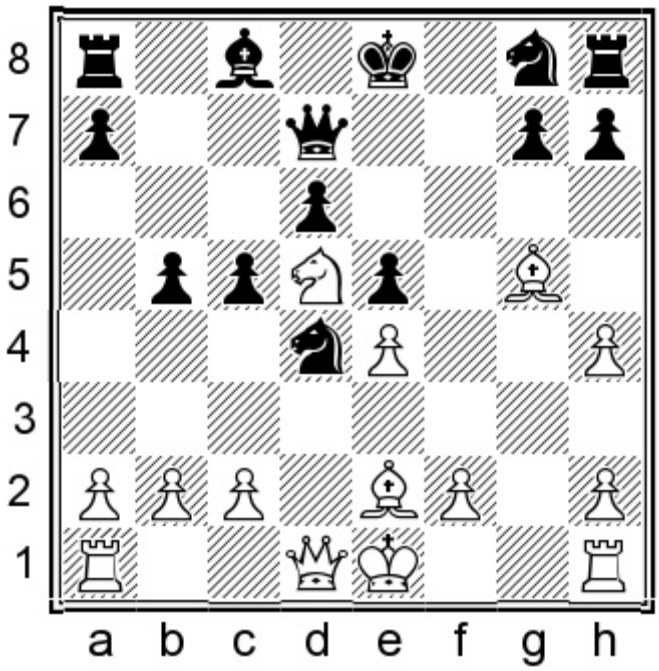
7.dxe4 ♗e7 8.♗c4!



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Position after: 8.♗c4!

8...♗xh4 9.gxh4 ♘d4 10.♗g5 ♕d7 11.♘d5 b5 12.♗e2±



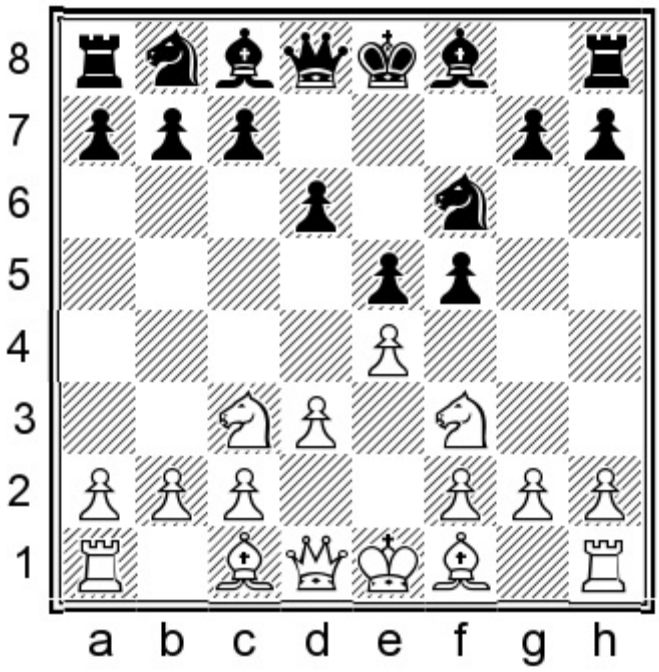
Position after: 12.♗e2±

With c2-c3 coming and our great knight on d5, there is no doubt that we are better.

c) 2...d6 3.e4 e5 4.♘c3 ♘f6

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3 d6 3.e4 e5 4.♘c3 ♘f6?!

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Position after: 4...♘f6?!

Strangely enough, this is clearly the most frequently played move, but I believe that it's quite bad.

5.exf5 ♗xf5 6.d4! e4

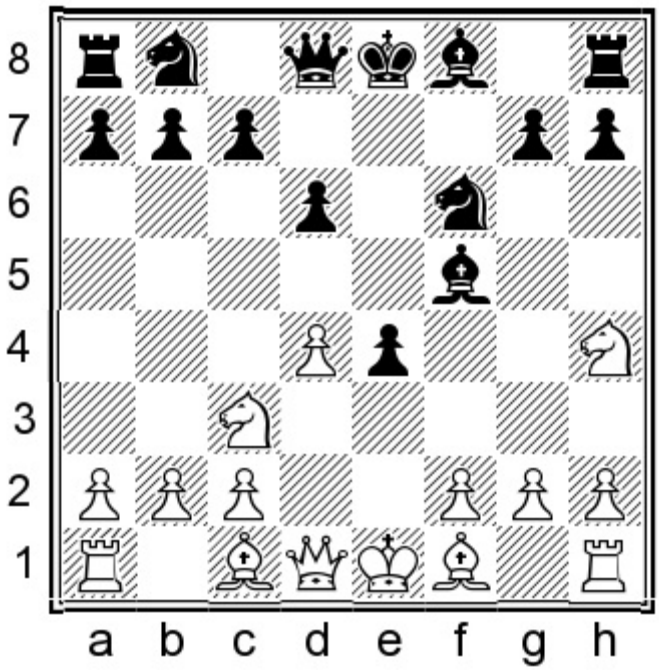
This is the principled move to keep the position closed, but we gain an important tempo. I think this line is rather dubious for Black.

A) 6...♘bd7 7.♗c4 ♕e7 8.0-0 h6 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♗e3±

B) 6...♘c6 transposes to 4...♘c6.

7.♘h4

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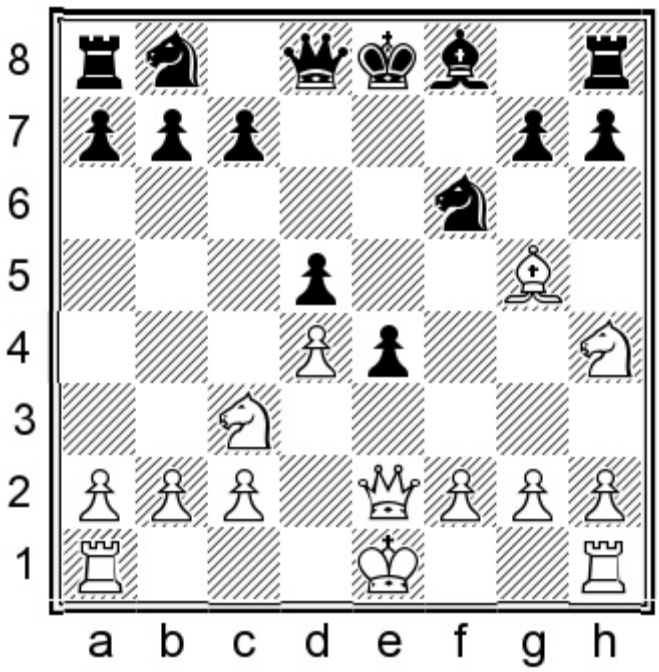
Position after: 7.♘h4

7...♗g4

A) 7...♗e6 8.d5! ♗f7 9.♗c4 ♘bd7 10.♘f5±

B) 7...♗d7 8.♗c4!?N After this logical novelty, I don't see any good plan for Black except 8...♗g4 (8...c6 9.d5! c5?! 10.♕e2!±) 9.♗e2 which transposes to 7...♗g4.

8.♗e2! ♗xe2 9.♕xe2 d5 10.♗g5!



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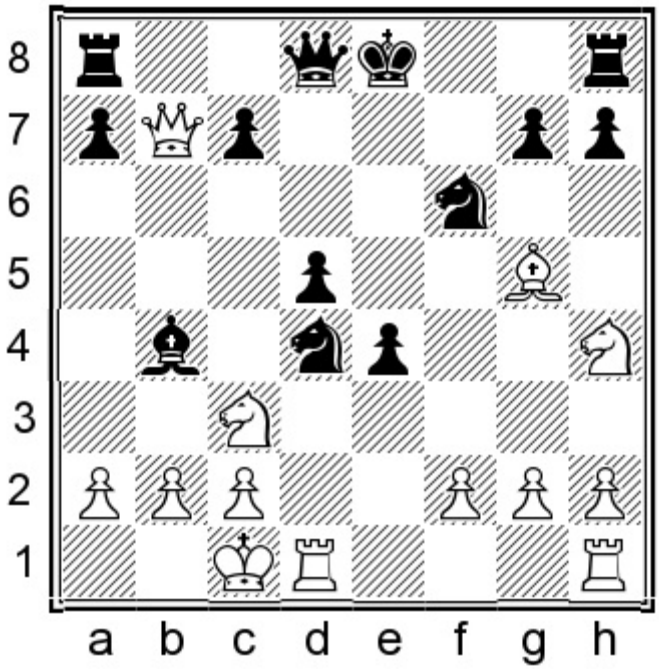
Position after: 10.♗g5!

Black has some problems with the d5-pawn. It seems that the only playable move is to pin our knight, but we keep a great position.

10...♗b4

10...c6 11.f3! ♗e7 12.fxe4 dxe4 13.♘f5 0-0 14.0-0+– White will win a pawn at least, with a crushing initiative.

11.♕b5+! ♘c6 12.♕xb7 ♘xd4 13.0-0-0!



Position after: 13.0-0-0!

13...♖b8

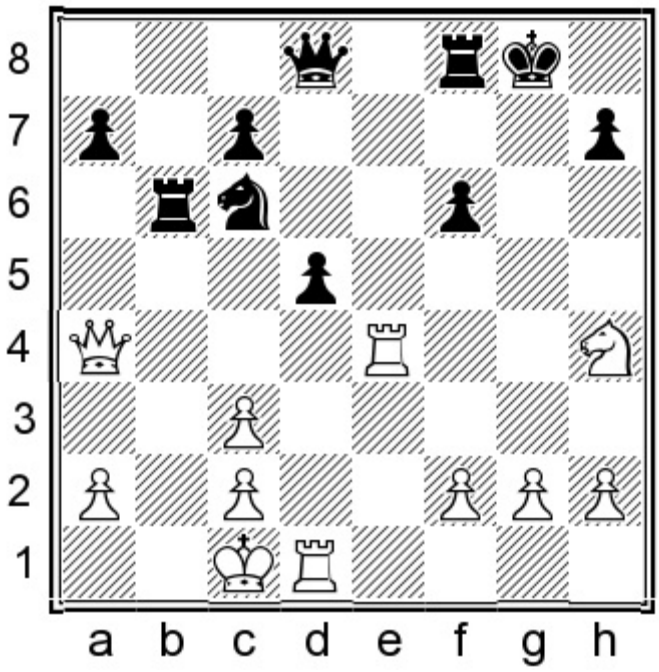
13...♗xc3 14.bxc3 ♖b8 15.♗xf6 gxf6 transposes.

14.♗xf6 ♗xc3 15.bxc3 gxf6

15...♖xb7 16.♗xd8 ♘b5 17.♗g5 ♘xc3 18.♖de1± Black has compensation, but not enough.

16.♕a6! ♖b6 17.♕a4+ ♘c6 18.♖he1! 0-0 19.♖xe4!±

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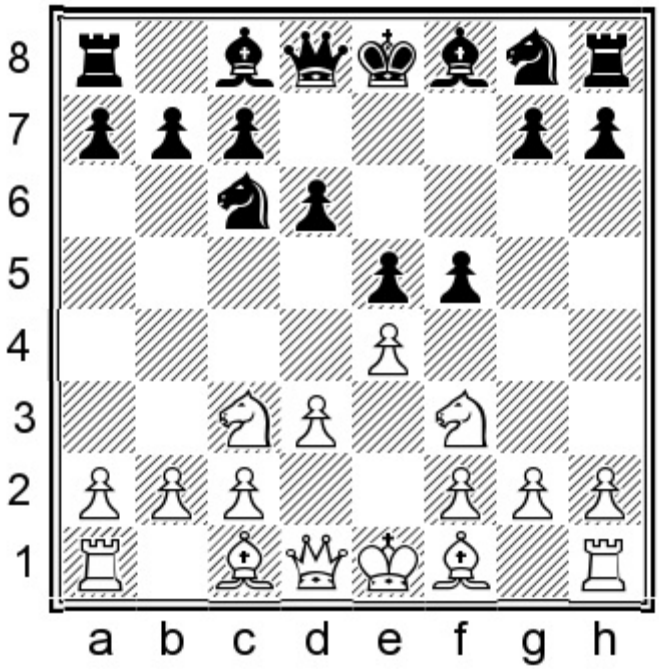


Position after: 19.♖xe4!±

White was almost winning in Cabrera Trujillo, J (2353) – Saumweber, W (2108) Santa Cruz de Tenerife 2011.

d) 2...d6 3.e4 e5 4.♘c3 ♘c6

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3 d6 3.e4 e5 4.♘c3! ♘c6



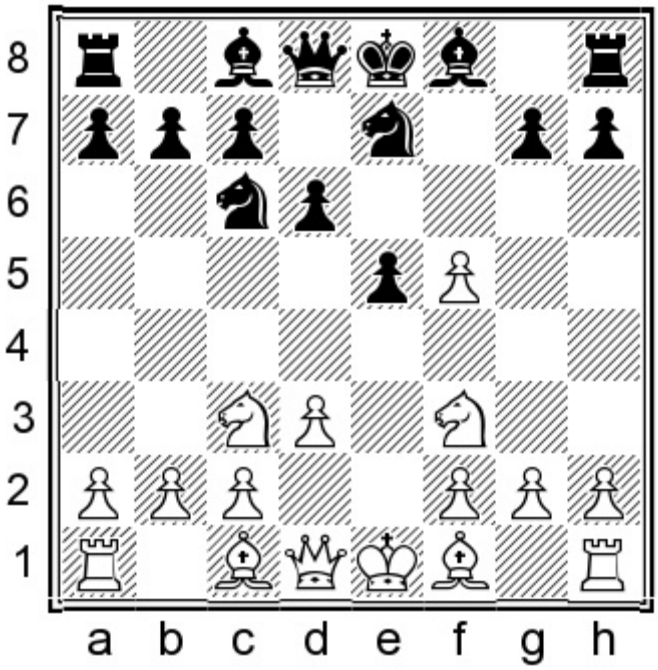
Position after: 4...♘c6

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This is probably better than 4...♘f6 even if it has been played less often. Anyway, we play the same idea:

5.exf5

5...♘ge7!? I didn't know about this interesting try until GM Axel Delorme told me about it (unfortunately too late for the first edition of the book).

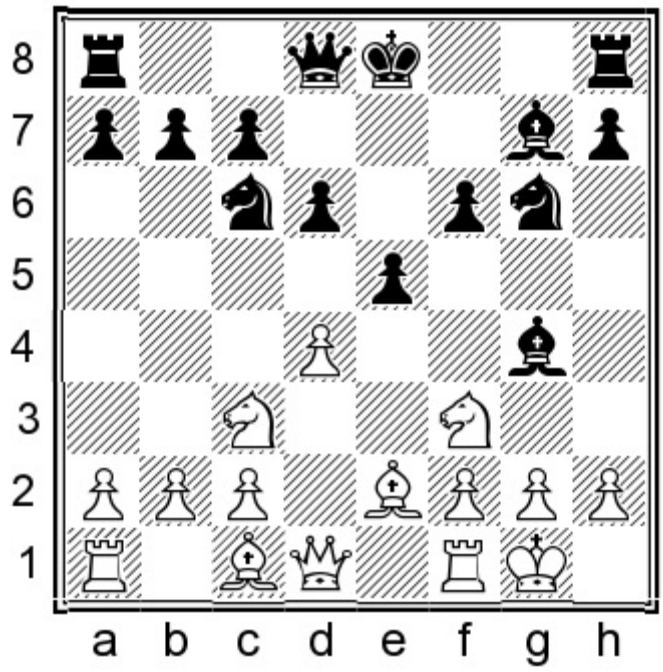


Position after: 5...♘ge7!?

A) 6.f6 This was my initial idea, but I don't feel that White gets any advantage if Black is precise. 6...gxf6 7.d4

A1) 7...♗g4 8.♗e2 ♘g6 (8...♗xf3 9.♗xf3 ♘xd4 10.♗xb7 ♖b8 11.♗d5!± I don't really see how Black is going to find a safe haven for his king.) 9.0-0 ♗g7? (9...♕d7 10.♘e4 ♗g7 11.dxe5 fxe5 12.h3 ♗f5 13.♘g3± ♗e6?! 14.♘g5±) This was played in the game Ganguly, S (2657) – Kindermann, S (2502) Solingen 2017, and surprisingly, White now missed...

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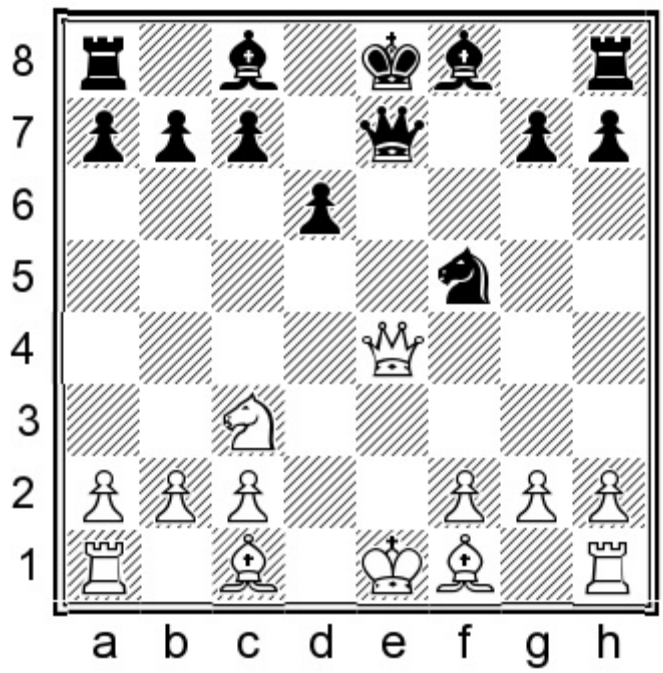


Position after: 9...♗g7?

10.♘xe5! ♗xe2 11.♘xc6 ♗xd1 12.♘xd8 ♖xd8 13.♖xd1±

A2) 7...d5!N 8.dxe5 fxe5 9.♘g5 ♗f5= And Black even takes over the initiative.

B) 6.d4 exd4 7.♘xd4 ♘xd4 8.♕xd4 ♘xf5 It's not so simple to keep the initiative in this position, and I think the best is to enter an endgame. (8...♗xf5? 9.♗g5±) 9.♕e4+ ♕e7



Position after: 9...♕e7

(9...♗e7? 10.g4! ♘h4 11.♘d5± 12.♗g5 is a big threat) 10.♗d3 ♕xe4+ 11.♘xe4± I think White keeps

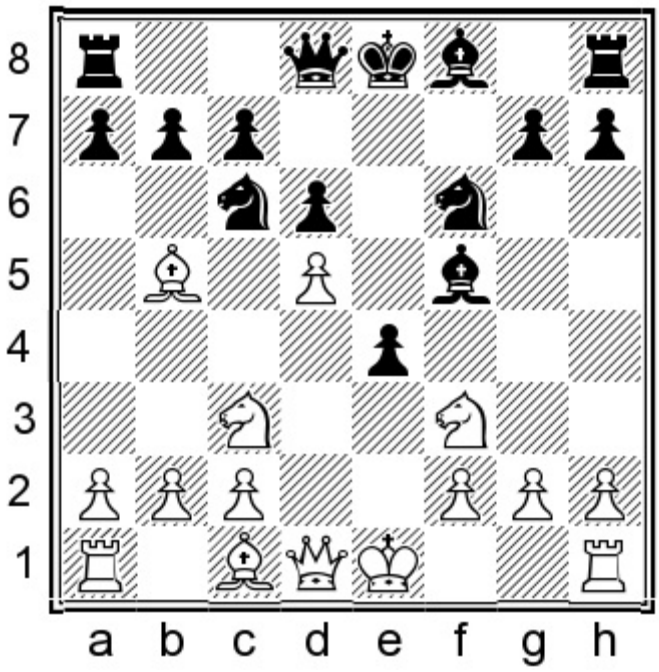
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the upper hand, even if he finally had to agree a draw in Pelletier, Y (2563) – Borisek, J (2571) Zillertal 2015.

5...♗xf5 6.d4! ♘xd4

A) 6...♘b4?! is too artificial: 7.♗b5+ c6 8.♗a4±

B) 6...♘f6 7.♗b5! puts Black in trouble. Trying to keep the position closed fails: 7...e4? 8.d5!

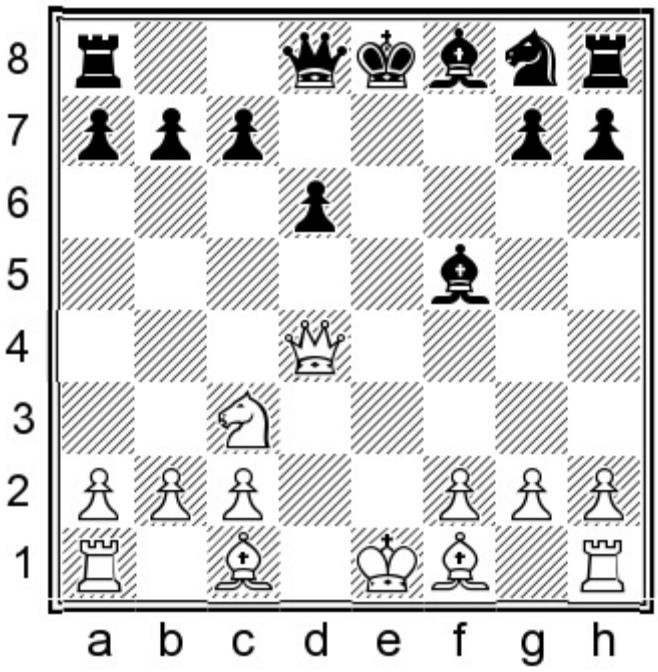


Position after: 8.d5!

8...exf3?! (8...a6 9.♗xc6+!? bxc6 10.♘d4 ♗d7 11.dxc6+–) 9.dxc6! bxc6 10.♗xc6+ ♗d7 11.♗xa8 ♕xa8 12.♕xf3+–

7.♘xd4 exd4 8.♕xd4

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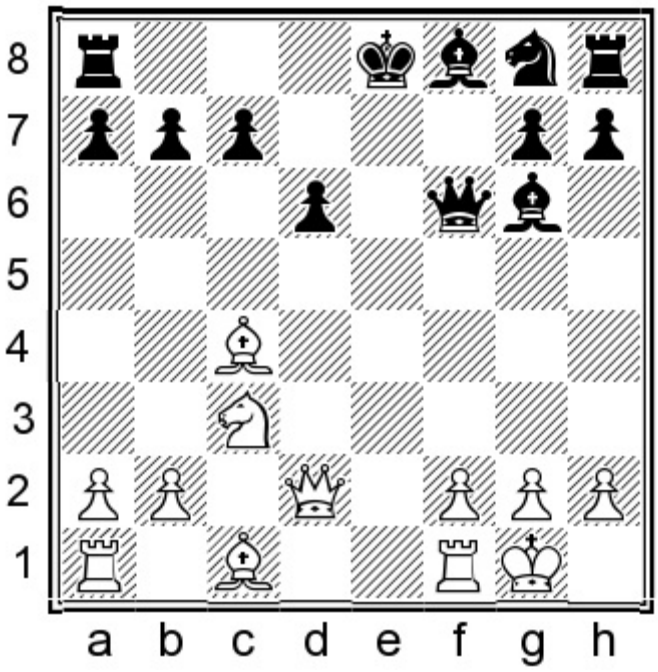
Position after: 8.♕xd4

Black is again left with a difficult choice.

8...c6

This is a logical move which anticipates problems on the light-squared diagonal and tries to castle kingside.

A) 8...♗xc2?!N leaves White in control: 9.♗c4 ♕f6 chases White's queen, but doesn't necessarily help. (9...c6 10.0-0 ♘f6 11.♖e1+ ♗e7 12.♗g5±) 10.♕d2 ♗g6 11.0-0



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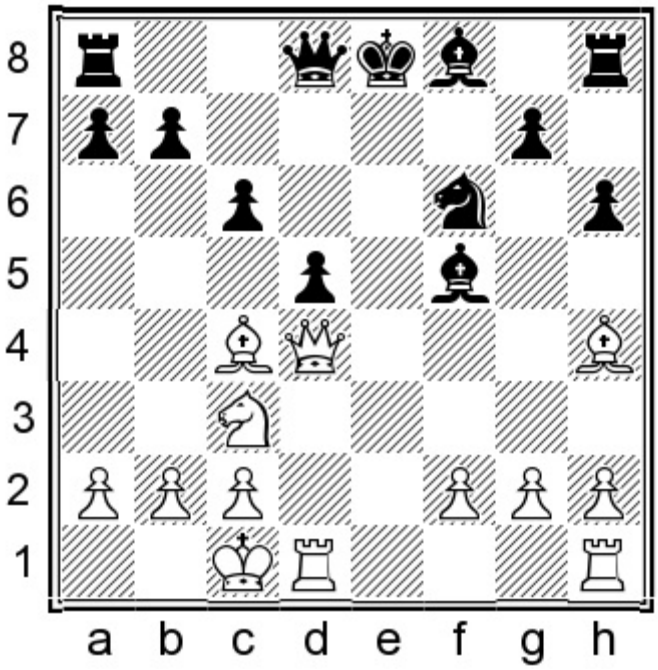
Position after: 11.0-0

11...c6 (11...0-0-0? 12.♘d5 ♕h4 13.♗b3 ♘f6 14.♕a5 ♘xd5 15.♗xd5+– Black is helpless on the queenside, and should soon resign.) 12.♖e1+ ♗e7 13.♕d1!± The queen is heading to b3, with many threats.

B) 8...♘f6

B1) 9.♗g5 was my try the only time I got this position, and it's a strong move. 9...♗e7 10.♗c4! h6 11.♗h4 d5 happened in my game Demuth, A (2541) – Dionisi, T (2371) Saint-Quentin 2015, and now it's even simpler to play 12.♗xd5! ♘xd5?! 13.♘xd5 ♗xh4 14.♕e5++–.

B2) 9.♗c4 c6 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗h4 d5 12.0-0-0!



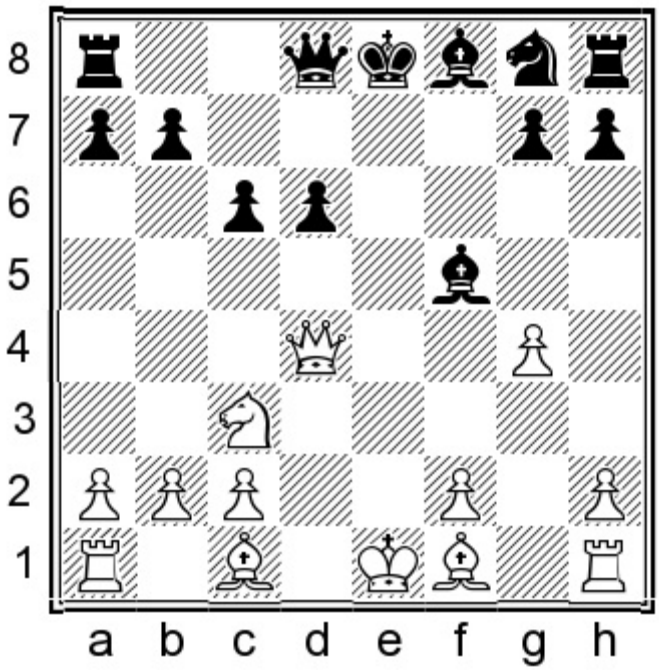
Position after: 12.0-0-0!

12...♗e7 13.♖he1 0-0 14.♕e5± With a great advantage that MVL converted with ease in Vachier-Lagrave, M (2758) – Vaisser, A (2531) Saint-Quentin 2014.

9.g4!N

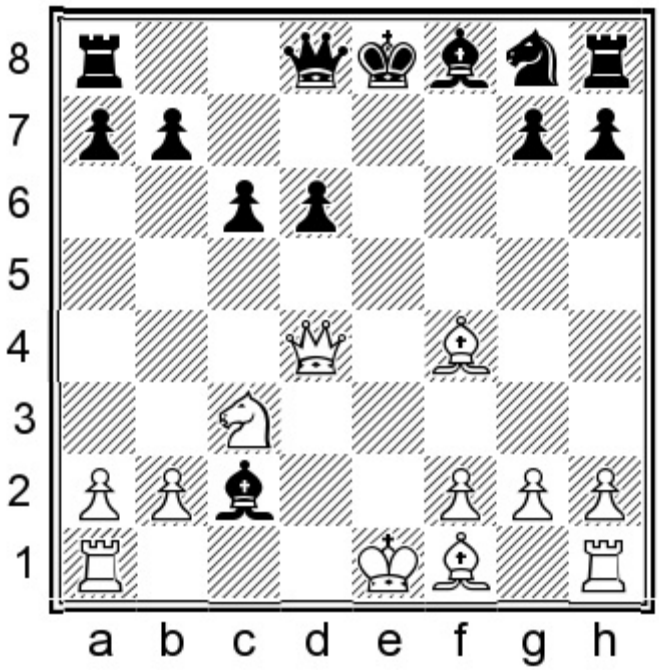
An improvement on previous games, and needed, as the other lines didn't fully satisfy me.

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Position after: 9.g4!N

9.♗f4!? Even if this has scored well, I don't think it gives an advantage, but Black must improve on previous games. 9...♗xc2!



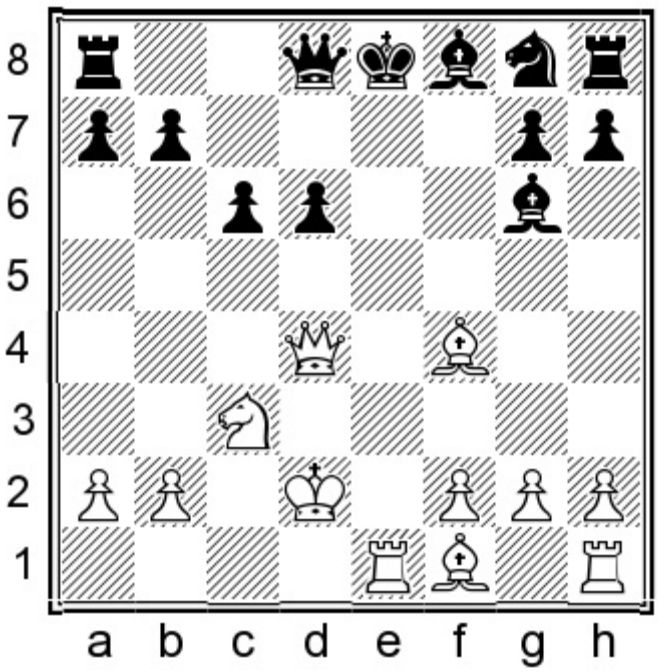
Position after: 9...♗xc2!

First, he needs to be greedy and prevent 0-0-0. (9...♘f6 10.0-0-0±)

A) 10.♖c1!?N 10...♗g6 11.♘b5 ♘f6 12.♗xd6 ♗xd6! (12...♘d5?! 13.♕e5+ ♗e7 14.♘c7+ ♘xc7 15.♗xc7 ♕d5 16.♕xd5 cxd5 17.♗b5+ ♔f7 18.♗d7±) 13.♘xd6+ ♔f8⇄

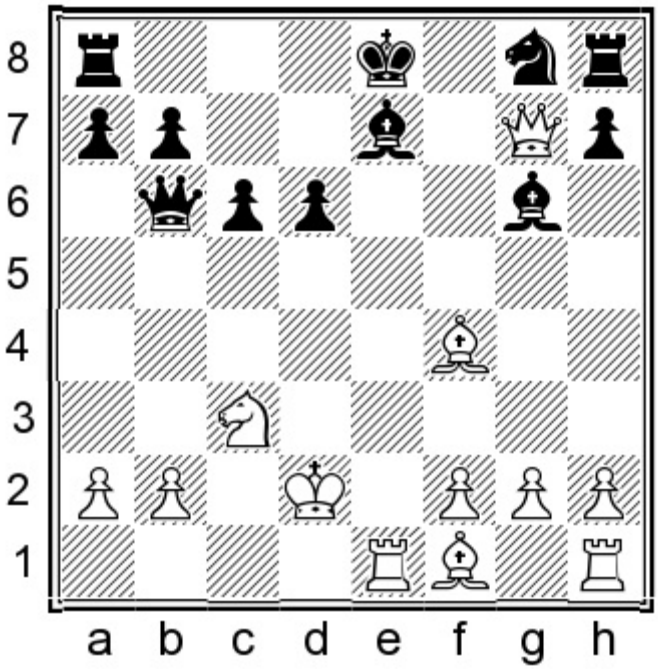
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B) 10.♔d2!? A nice move, allowing fast development. 10...♗g6! (10...♗f5?! 11.♖e1+ ♔d7 12.g4! ♗g6 13.♔c1 ♕b6 14.♕d2 ♕c5?! 15.g5!+–) 11.♖e1+



Position after: 11.♖e1+

11...♗e7!N The perfect developing move that Black was in need of. Of course, the critical move is to take material on g7. (11...♘e7?!N 12.♔c1 ♕b6 13.♕xd6 ♖d8 14.♕e5±; 11...♔d7 12.g3!? ♕b6 13.♗h3+ ♔c7 14.♗xd6+ ♗xd6 15.♕xg7+ ♔b8 16.♔c1!± The position is still complicated, but was better for White in Fressinet, L (2718) – Malaniuk, V (2527) Bastia 2010, 1-0 (21)) 12.♕xg7?! (12.♗xd6? ♕d7! Simply intending ...0-0-0 next move, taking advantage of the exposed white king. 13.♗e5 ♕xd4+ 14.♗xd4 0-0-0–+) 12...♕b6!

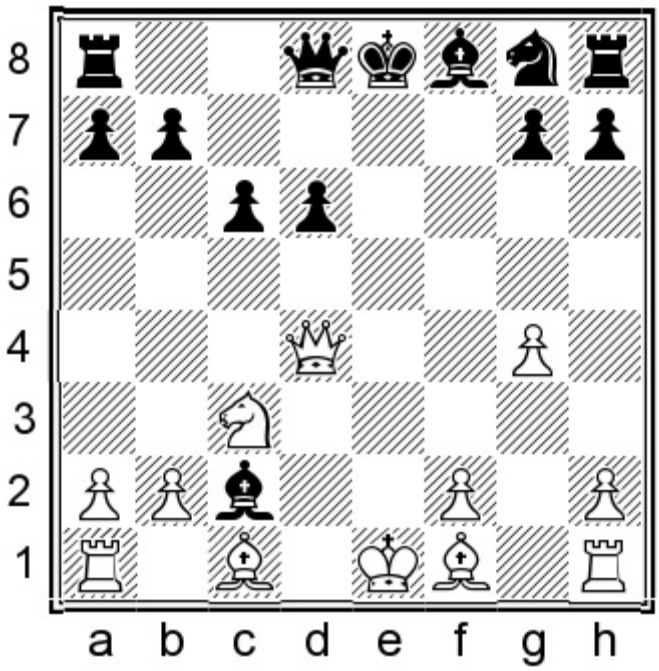


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Position after: 12...♕b6!

Black gets strong counterplay against the white king, attacking both the b2- and f2-pawns. 13.♖xe7+ (13.♔c1 ♕xf2 14.♗d2 0-0-0∓ 15.♕xh8? ♗f6–+) 13...♘xe7 14.♕xh8+ ♔f7 15.♕xa8 ♕xb2+→ I won't go any further. Despite being at least a rook down, Black has more than enough compensation and a continuing strong attack.

9...♗xc2



Position after: 9...♗xc2

This seems like the principled move, otherwise White develops his kingside quicker, disturbing Black's pieces.

9...♗e6 10.♗e3 ♘f6?! 11.g5 ♘d5 12.0-0-0±

10.♗g2! ♕f6

The only move, trying to chase our queen.

10...♘f6 11.0-0 ♗e7 12.g5! ♘h5 13.♗f3±

11.♕c4

We see why our bishop is useful on g2 as the threat is now ♗xc6.

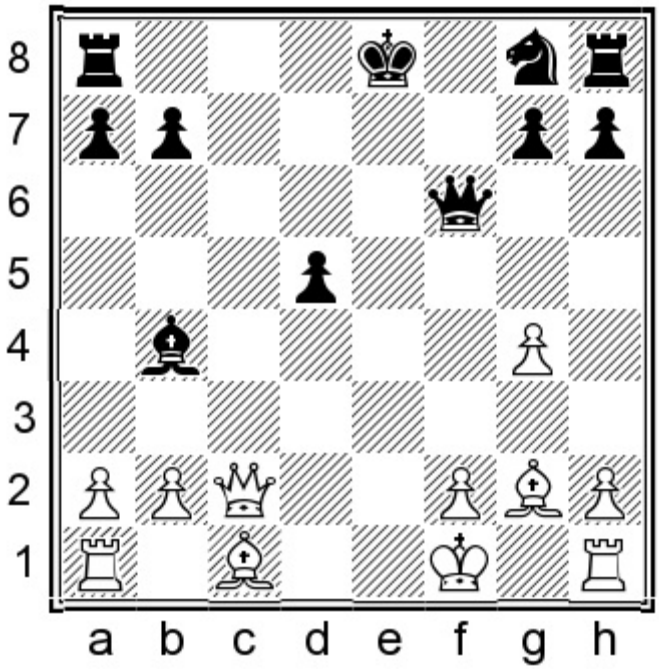
11...d5

A) 11...♘e7 12.0-0 d5 13.♕e2 ♗g6 14.f4 0-0-0 15.f5 ♗f7 16.♗f4±

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B) 11...0-0-0 12.♗xc6! is crushing for White: 12...bxc6?! 13.♕xc6+ ♔b8 14.♗e3+–

12.♘xd5 cxd5 13.♕xc2 ♗b4+ 14.♔f1!±.



Position after: 14.♔f1!±

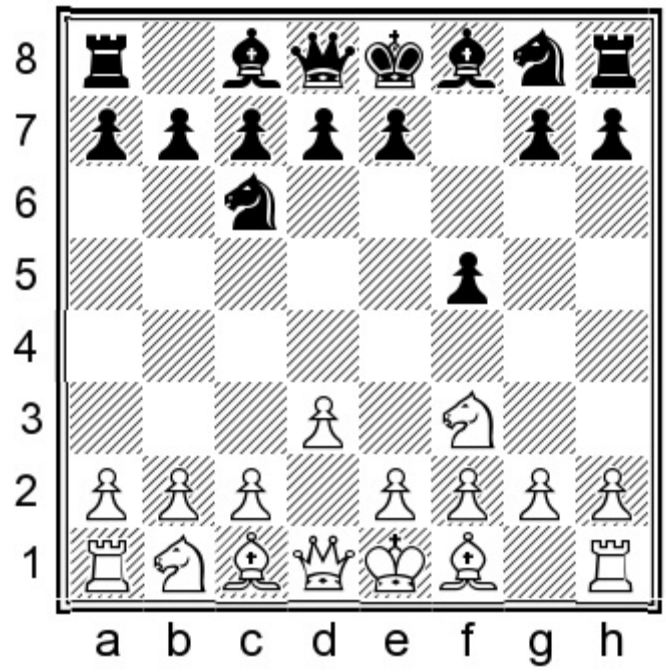
White has many threats, such as ♕a4+ and ♗xd5 to mention the most obvious ones, the bishop pair, and a fine structure. Even if his king still needs to find a safe haven, he is much better.

e) 2...♘c6!

1.♘f3 f5 2.d3!? ♘c6!

Black wants to play ...e5 on the next move, the only problem being that this move is quite committal. White has various options. I hesitated a long time over which variation is best, but finally decided on 3.d4!?.

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Position after: 2...♘c6!

3.d4!?

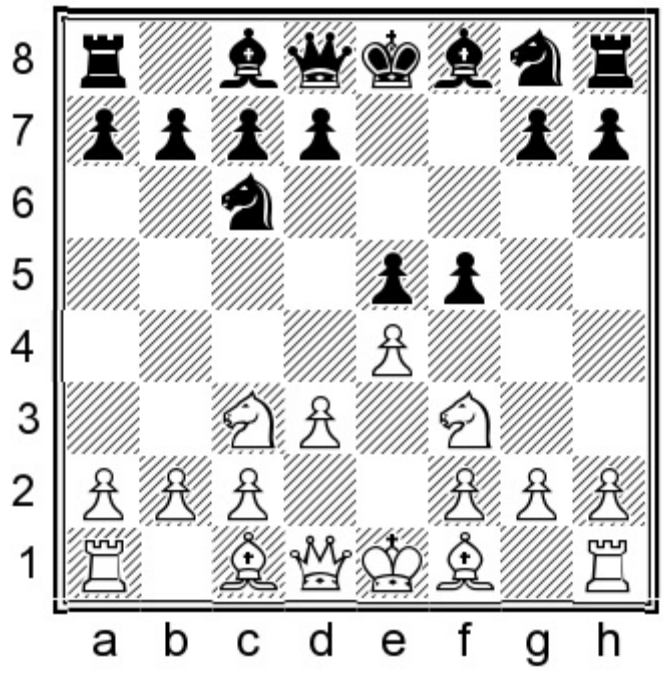
What a stunning turnaround – White moves his d-pawn for the second time in only three moves! He changes his mind and decides to enter the classical lines of the Dutch Defense, considering the extra tempo ...♘c6 a drawback. The immediate threat is d4-d5, which Black normally prevents.

What happens if we follow the same plan as in the previous subchapters (...d6 instead of ...♘c6)? 3.e4!? e5!

A) 4.d4!? Against 2...♘c6, my second choice is this line, actually transposing into a Vienna Game with reversed colors: 1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.f4 d5. You may ask why we would want to enter this system as if we had the Black pieces? Firstly, it is unlikely that our opponent plays the Vienna Game as White (because almost no-one plays the Vienna Game any more...), secondly, because in the Vienna Game, it's not so easy for White to achieve equality if we play correctly. You can have a look at any 1.e4 e5 book if you want to know the theory of this line.

B) 4.♘c3

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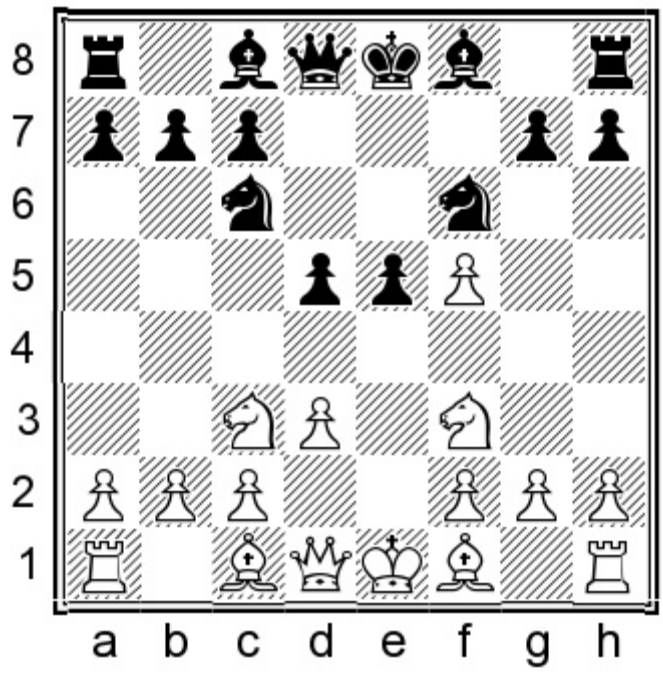


Position after: 4.♘c3

Compared to 2...d6, Black now has two valid options.

B1) 4...♗b4!? was discovered recently, and is simply good for Black as he gets easy play: 5.♗d2 (5.d4 fxe4 6.♘xe5 ♘f6 7.♗e2 ♕e7 8.♘xc6 dxc6 9.0-0 0-0↑) 5...♘f6 6.♘d5?! (6.♗e2 d6 7.exf5 ♗xf5↑) 6...♗xd2+ 7.♕xd2 0-0 8.0-0-0 d6∓ White lacks activity; I definitely prefer Black here: Vegh, E (2293) – Hoang, T (2509) Zalakaros 2014, 0-1 (24).

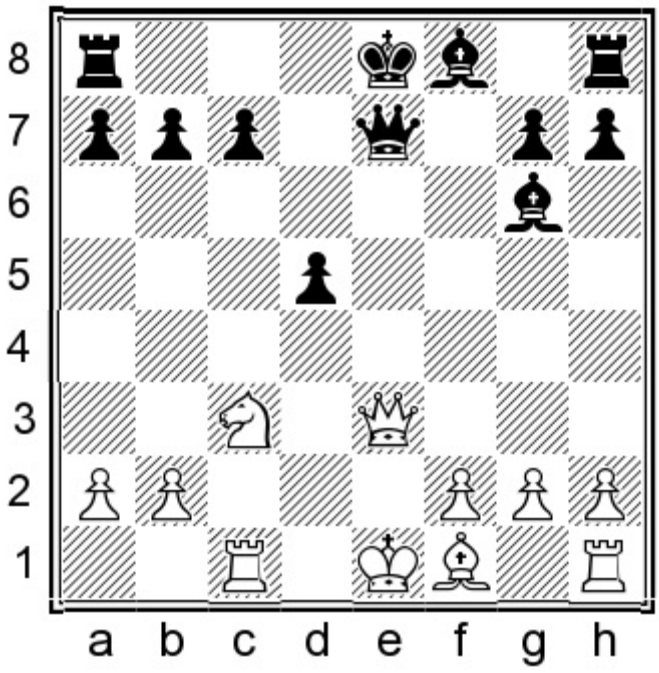
B2) 4...♘f6!? 5.exf5 d5!



Position after: 5...d5!

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This is a major difference. The pawn reaches the fifth rank and we don't have any ideas to counter it. 6.d4 exd4! 7.♘xd4 ♘xd4 8.♕xd4 ♗xf5 9.♗g5 This was considered to be good for White for a long time because of the game Taimanov, M (2495) – Zaichik, G (2500) Leningrad 1989, but it's an illusion. 9...♗xc2! 10.♖c1 (10.♔d2 ♗g6 11.♖e1+ ♔f7∓) 10...♗g6 11.♗xf6 ♕xf6 12.♕e3+ ♕e7!N

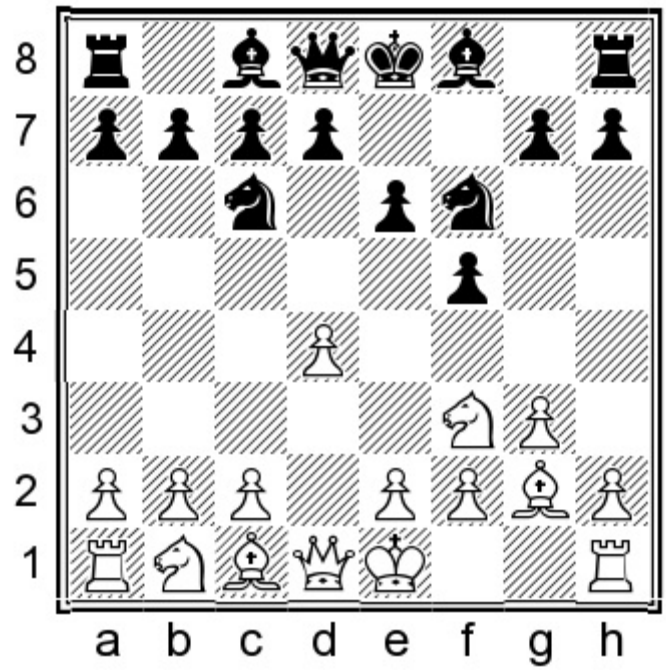


Position after: 12...♕e7!N

The strong move that Zaichik failed to find, but this line was spotted by Moskalenko is his book *The Diamond Dutch*. 13.♕xe7+ ♔xe7! 14.♘xd5+ ♔d7!∓ Nothing really works for White, and he will have to defend against the bishop pair in an open position.

3...e6 4.g3 ♘f6 5.♗g2

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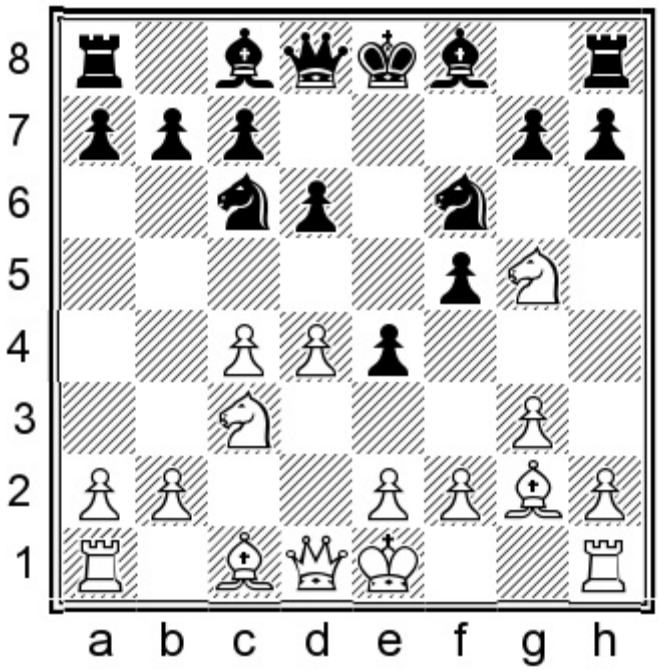
Position after: 5.♗g2

5...♗e7

A) 5...d5!? transposes to a weird Stonewall where Black has the extra move ...♘c6 which prevents him from playing ...c6, but it's quite acceptable for him: 6.c4!?N The right move order, I believe. (6.0-0 is generally met by the surprising 6...♖b8!? which prevents c4 because of 7...dxc4 and 8...b5, and it's not so simple to find a good plan for White) 6...♗e7 (6...♖b8 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♘c3⩲; 6...dxc4 7.♕a4 ♖b8 8.♕xc4 ♗d7 9.0-0 ♗d6 10.♗f4!?N) 7.0-0 0-0 8.b3!?↑ I still believe that White is preferable.

B) In the summer of 2017, I had to face the move 5...d6, aiming to continue with ...e5, which we can't stop. 6.c4 e5 7.♘c3! (I don't like the way I played in the game with 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8 9.♘g5?! ♘d4∓ Demuth, A (2558) – Ekstroem, R (2376) Graechen 2017) 7...e4 8.♘g5

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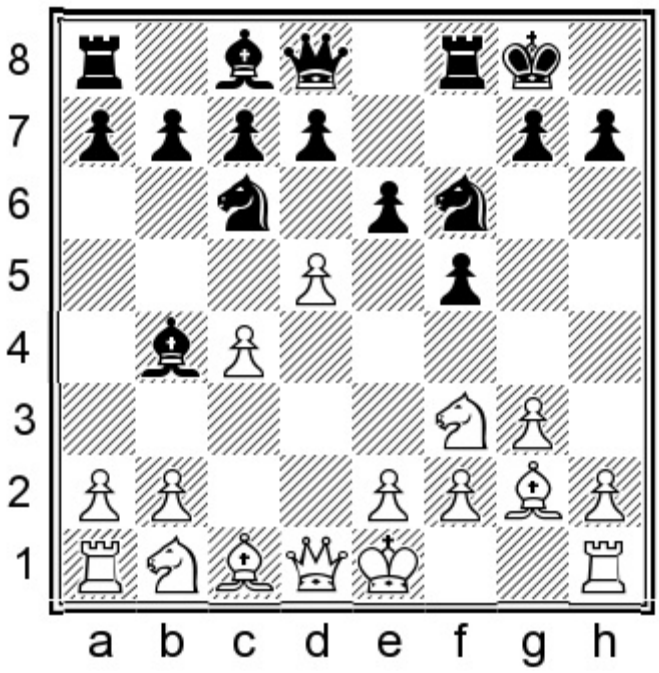


Position after: 8.♘g5

White generally keeps the advantage in this kind of structure. For instance, it's quite logical for Black to continue with 8...h6 9.♘h3 g5 10.0-0 ♗g7 11.f3! exf3 12.exf3 0-0 13.f4 g4 14.♘f2±.

6.c4 0-0 7.0-0

I actually met this position once... with Black! I like to play the Dutch sometimes, and chose this line because I felt it was the best chance for Black. My opponent didn't want to enter the classical lines, being down the ♘c6-tempo, so he tried 7.d5, but I don't think it can bring White an edge: 7...♗b4+

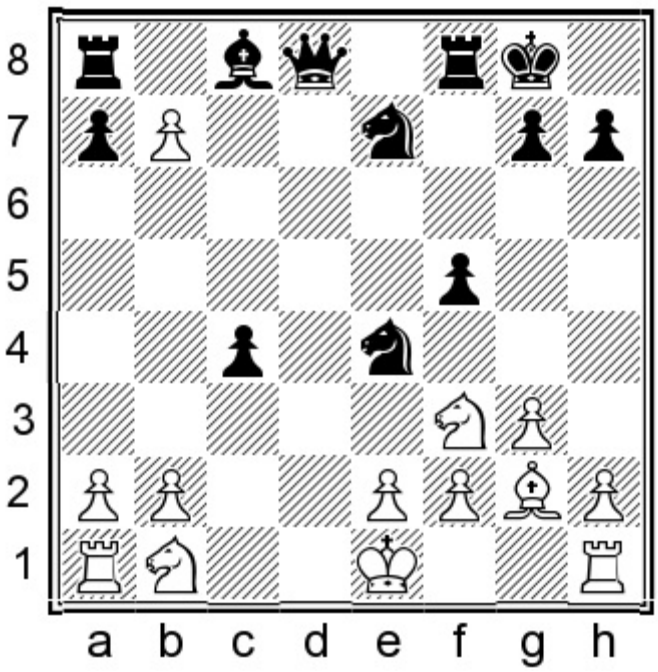


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Position after: 7...♗b4+

(7...♘a5!? 8.♕d3 b6⇄) 8.♗d2 ♗xd2+ 9.♕xd2 ♘e4 10.♕c1 exd5 11.cxd5 ♘e7 12.♕c4 After a few logical moves, I played a pawn sacrifice to alleviate the possible pressure on the c-file: 12...c6! 13.dxc6+ d5

A) 14.cxb7 dxc4!



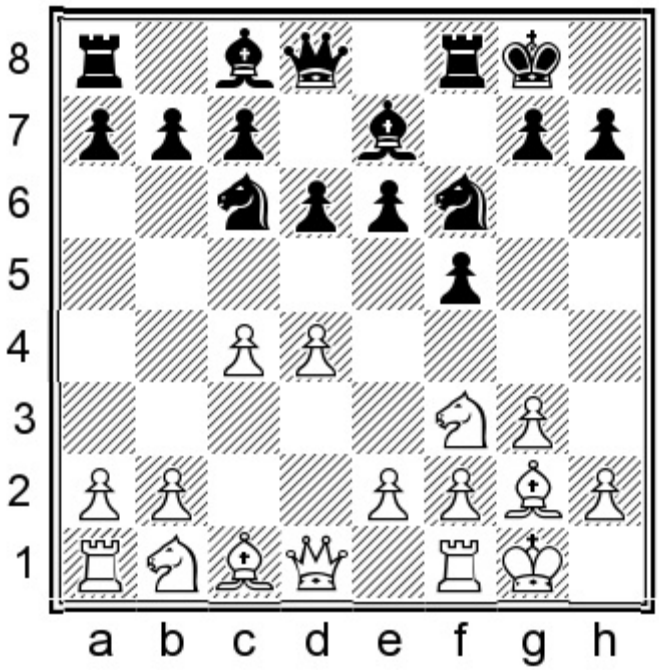
Position after: 14...dxc4!

(I was not sure about this move, and should probably have played 14...♗xb7 15.♕b4 ♖b8⩲) 15.bxa8=♕ ♕b6 16.0-0 ♗a6 17.♕xf8+ ♔xf8⩱ With lots of play for Black, which might give him the better chances.

B) 14.c7 My opponent rejected the offer: 14...dxc4 15.cxd8=♗ ♖xd8 16.♘bd2= and the game quite quickly ended in a draw: Petrov, N (2573) – Demuth, A (2547) Bad Ragaz 2018.

7...d6

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Position after: 7...d6

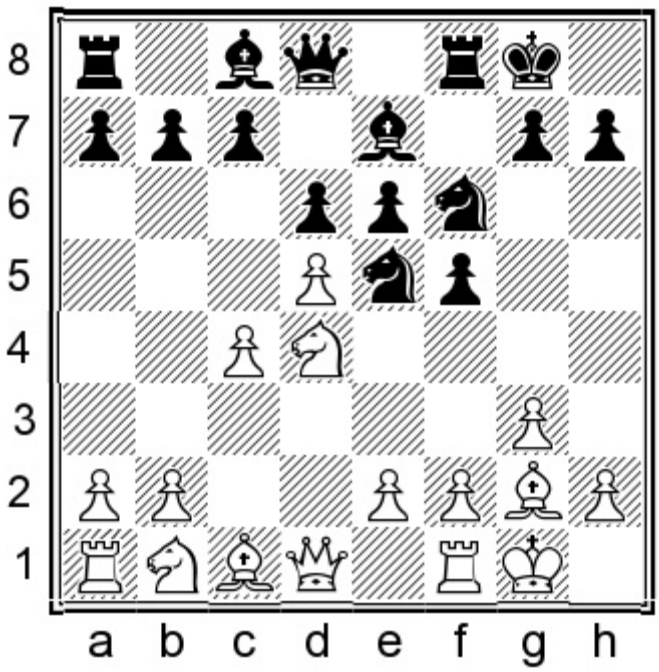
Black has transposed into the Classical Variation with the extra move ...♘c6.

This is quite interesting, as the line with ...♘c6 exists in the Classical Dutch, but it is probably not enough for Black to claim equality. It took me a long time to choose a line against 2...♘c6.

8.d5! ♘e5 9.♕b3!

I like this positional approach, simply defending c4 and keeping an eye on the b7-pawn.

9.♘d4



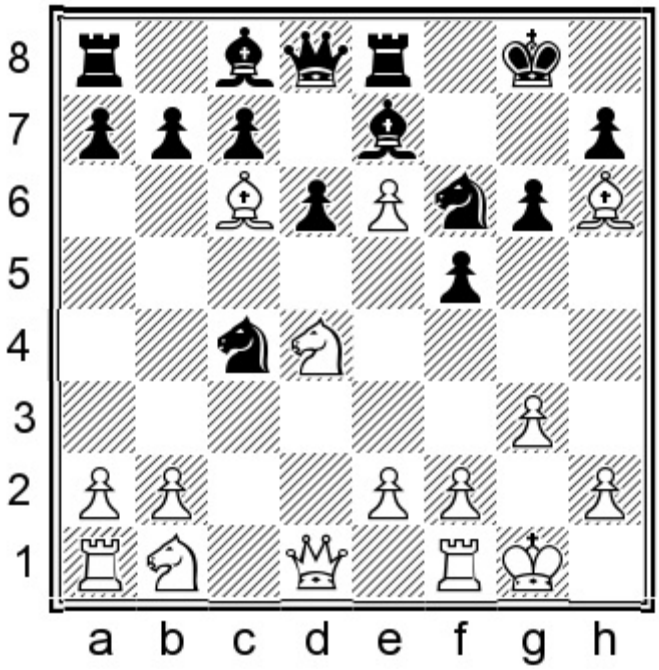
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Position after: 9.♘d4

This is a thematic pattern, but in the Classical line, White has already played ♘c3. Of course, it's an important difference. 9...♘xc4! 10.dxe6

A) 10...d5! 11.♘xf5 ♗xe6 12.♘xe7+ ♕xe7⇄ This is the simpler way for Black, with a roughly balanced position.

B) 10...g6!? 11.♗h6 ♖e8 12.♗c6!

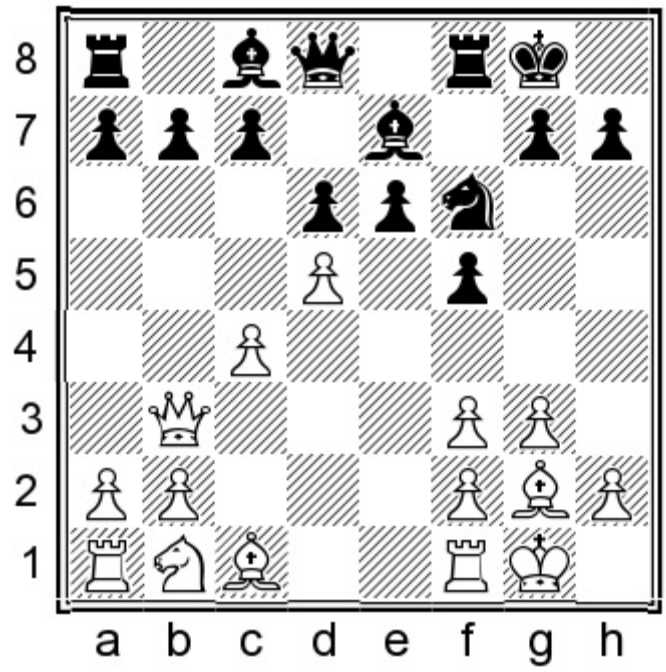


Position after: 12.♗c6!

is a nice line for White, even if it's still complicated: 12...♖f8!N 13.♗xf8 ♗xf8 14.♗g2 d5!∞ Black will soon get some compensation.

9...♘xf3+ 10.exf3

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Position after: 10.exf3

10...e5N

10...♘d7 was tested in the only game that reached this position, but I think that White can play 11.dxe6!N 11...♘c5 12.♕c2 ♗xe6 13.♗e3 c6 14.f4± and I like our prospects on the queenside.

11.f4!

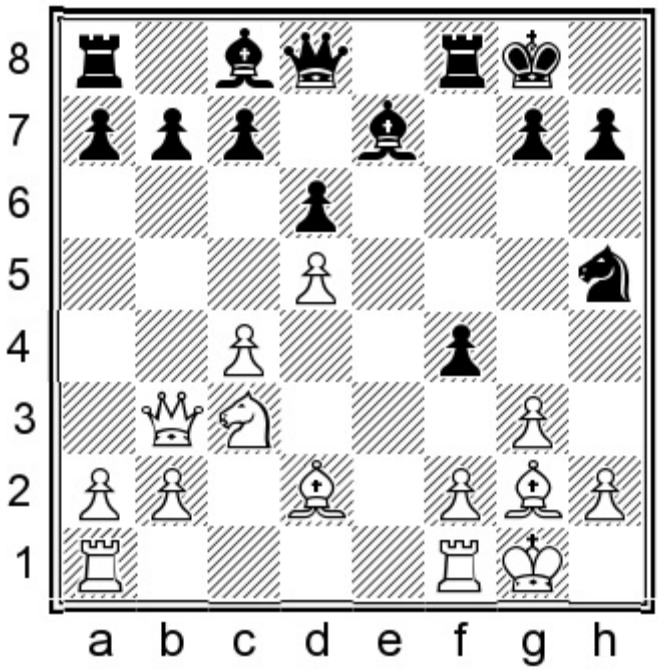
It's essential to prevent Black from playing ...f5-f4, and this is the only way to do so. We are trying to suffocate Black, starting with his c8-bishop, which does not have great prospects.

11...exf4

11...e4 12.f3! (12.♘c3 gives Black the possibility to play 12...c5!? 13.♗d2 ♖b8 14.f3 exf3 15.♗xf3 ♖e8 16.♖ae1 ♗d7⇄) 12...exf3 13.♗xf3 ♖e8 14.♘c3 ♗f8 15.♗d2± White has more space and keeps the upper hand.

12.♗xf4 ♘h5 13.♗d2 f4 14.♘c3

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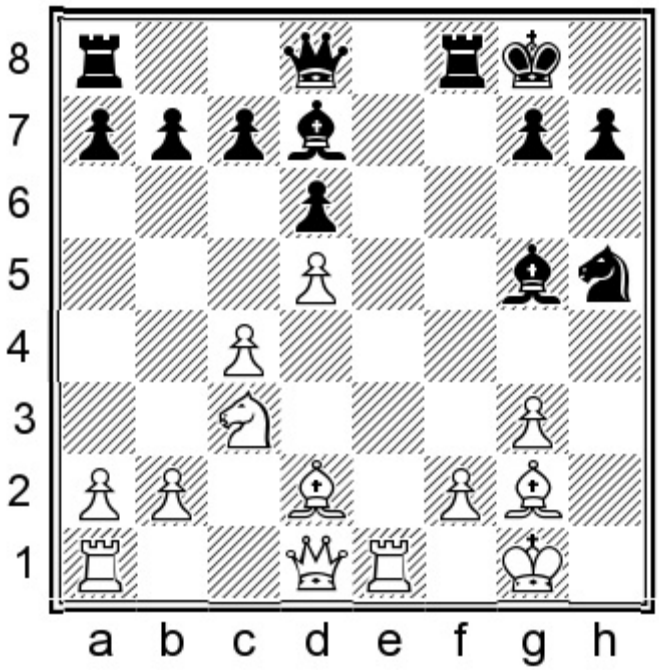
Position after: 14.♘c3

Black has gained some space and activity for his pieces, but is still worse, mainly because of his awkward knight on h5.

14...♗g5!? 15.♕d1! fxg3

15...♘f6?! 16.♘e2!±

16.hxg3 ♗d7 17.♖e1±



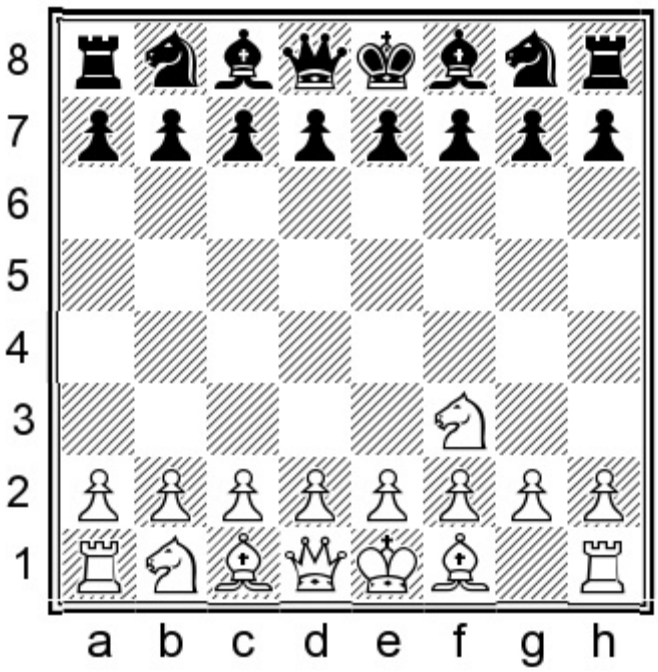
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Position after: 17.♖e1±

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Chapter 20
Various First Moves

1.♘f3



Chapter guide

Chapter 20 – Various First Moves

1.♘f3

a) 1...--

b) 1...b5

c) 1...b6

d) 1...♘c6 2.d4 d5 3.g3 --, 3...♗f5 4.♗g2 ♘f6

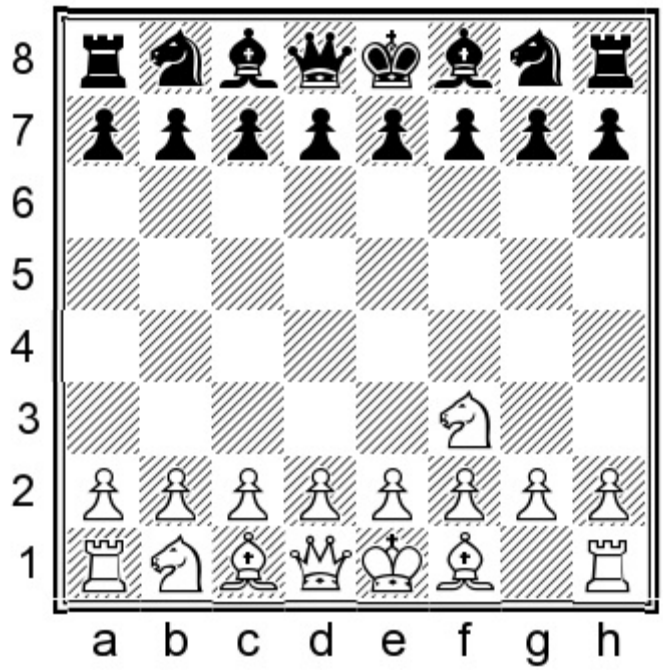
e) 1...♘c6 2.d4 d5 3.g3 ♗f5 4.♗g2 ♘b4

f) 1...♘c6 2.d4 d5 3.g3 ♗g4

a) 1...--

1.♘f3

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Position after: 1.♘f3

Here we are, at the final chapter. It has gone so quickly. I hope it was faster for you to read than for me to write!

We have covered every major system that you are likely to meet, but we're not finished yet. We need to have a look at various systems starting with first moves other than ...♘f6, ...d5 and ...c5. And there are quite a lot!

In general, these systems all have something in common: in most cases, my advice is to transpose into either a 1.d4 or a 1.e4 system. The reason is quite simple: if we decide to learn and play the Reti, it's partly (or even chiefly!) because we are tired of the main lines after 1.d4 or 1.e4, where it's hard to get an advantage anyway, as Black is generally well prepared.

With the Reti, we have other, more off-beat, ways of fighting the Slav or the Queen's Gambit Declined, for example, but fighting against lines such as the Modern, the Owen, or even the Chigorin has never been a big issue for White, so we don't necessarily need to play in the spirit of the Reti. However, it's sometimes important to use a clever move order, or a good system that can be different from the main lines.

Sometimes in this chapter I might stop the analysis at an early stage, claming that it's fine and still theoretical, but has nothing to do with our Reti. In that case it's your job to find the exact line you want to play, depending on your style and feelings. That is why all these various systems are contained in only one chapter.

1...d6

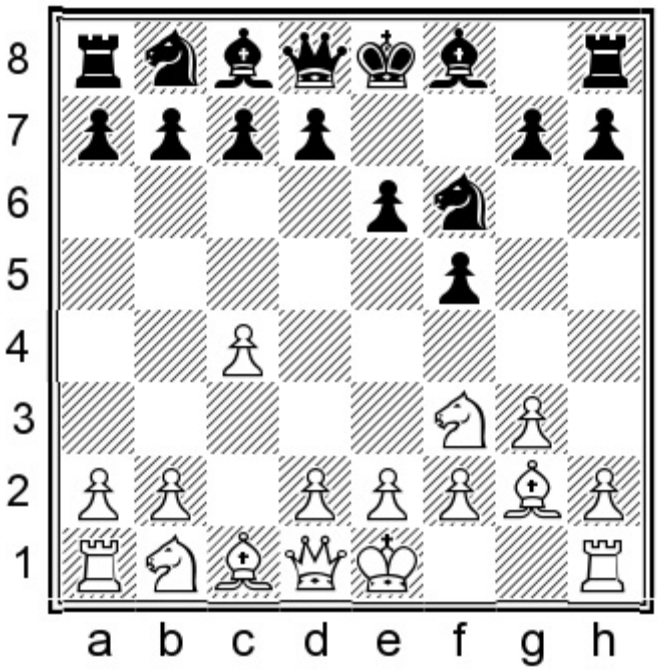
This move clearly intends to continue with ...e5 on the next move. You should already know that we usually prevent this.

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Of course, you can play 2.g3, in Reti spirit, and treat it as more or less a Pirc Defense with an extra tempo, where Black has played the harmless ...d6, or play 2.c4, transposing to some favorable (we hope!) reversed Sicilian a tempo up. What I offer here is a way to keep it logical. I will explain, without going too deeply into details – it's not a three- volume repertoire! – some systems where you can transpose into what you already know, and also, most importantly, the tricks to avoid.

A quick look at some other pawn moves:

A) 1...e6 This flexible move can lead to many systems we don't have any problem transposing into, including the Hedgehog and the Neo-Catalan, but more annoyingly, it can transpose into the Classical or Stonewall variations of the Dutch Defense, which forces us to know how to deal with that eventuality. Of course the line we examine in this chapter with 1.♘f3 f5 2.d3 is of no help against this move order. My advice is to start with 2.c4 f5 (2...b6 3.g3 ♗b7 4.♗g2 should transpose into the Hedgehog; 2...♘f6 has already been examined) 3.g3 ♘f6 4.♗g2

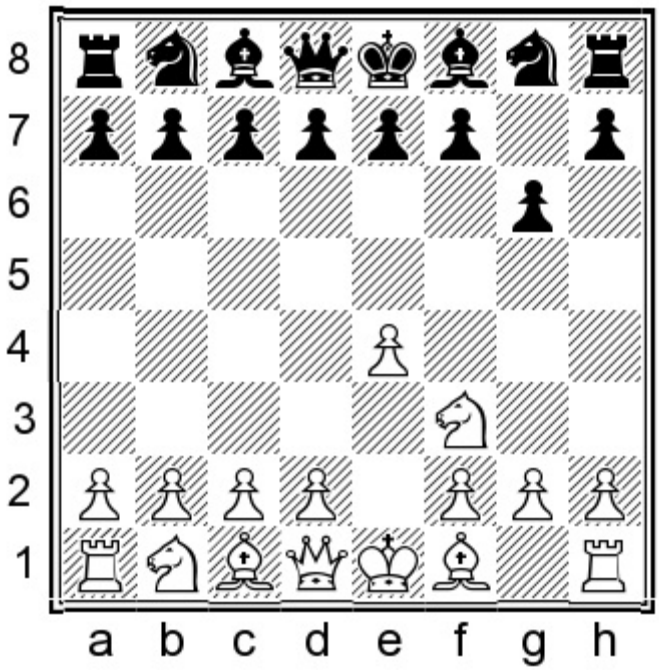


Position after: 4.♗g2

Black can still play either a Stonewall or Classical Dutch, but in the end he will have to choose. 4...♗e7 (4...d5 is examined in chapter 6, the Slav side lines) 5.0-0 0-0 6.b3!? This is the most flexible. 6...d6 As usual, we should prevent ...e5. (6...d5 7.♗b2 c6 8.d3 ♘bd7 9.♘c3 is not a problem for you, as it transposes into the line we gave against the Stonewall in chapter 6) 7.d4 I suggest you have a look at this line, which is pretty good against the Classical Dutch, but is not the subject here.

B) 1...g6 It's not the first time in this book that Black prevents us from playing with two fianchettoes. Again, we can stick to some kind of Reti, but you would need to adapt your repertoire compared to the one I offer here. I would prefer to play 2.e4

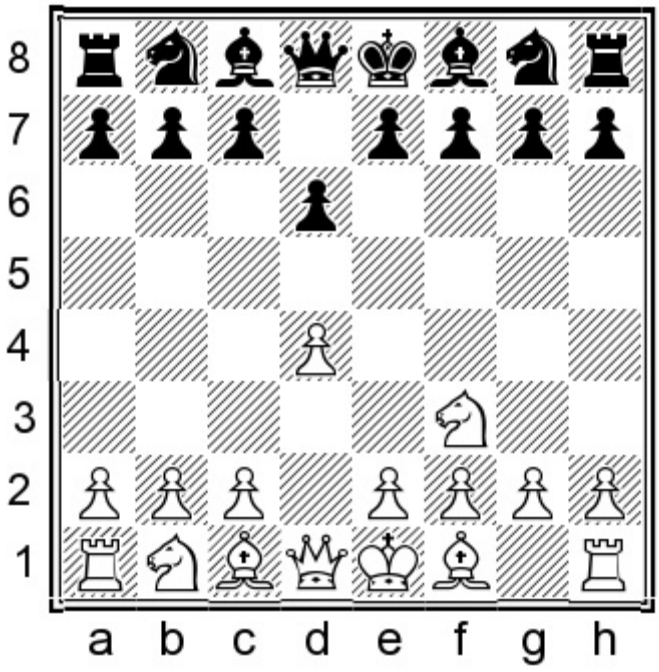
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Position after: 2.e4

which gives Black a choice of Pirc, Modern or Sicilian! But don't worry; since Black has already played ...g6, we can enter the Maroczy variation. 2...♗g7 (2...c5 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♗g7 5.c4 ♘c6 6.♗e3 ♘f6 7.♘c3 is the Maroczy variation) 3.d4 d6 Now I will leave the choice of which set-up to choose against the Pirc/Modern complex to you. There are many possibilities, and it mainly depends on your style of play.

2.d4



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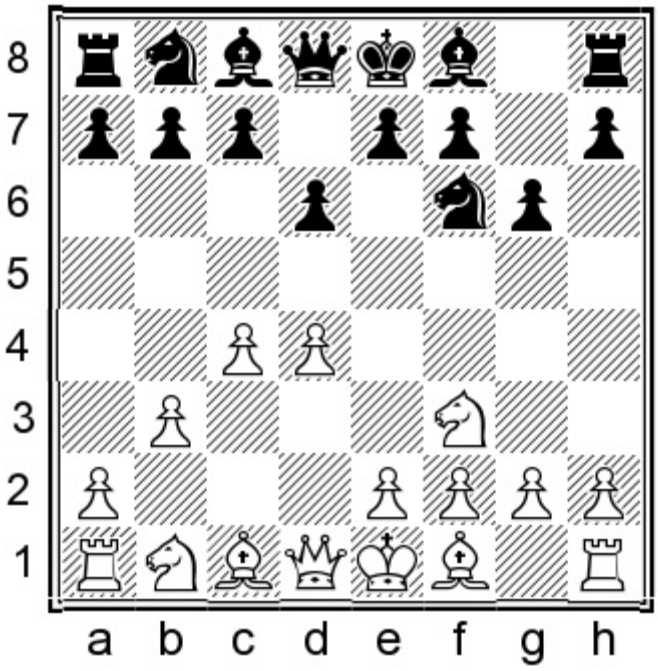
Position after: 2.d4

2...f5?!

This is playable, but it's not a safe way to transpose into the Leningrad Dutch, because with this move order, White has a nasty surprise for Black.

A) 2...g6 At first sight it looks like Black is willing to play a King's Indian, but he can also still transpose into the Leningrad. 3.e4!? (3.b3 ♗g7 4.♗b2 f5 Black can be happy to enter the Leningrad here.) 3...♗g7 4.c4 transposing into a King's Indian. (4.♘c3 transposes into 1...g6, where I leave the choice of system to you.)

B) 2...♘f6 3.c4 Now that Black has already played ...d6, the only main system he can still play is the King's Indian, but if you want a complete repertoire, you will have to work on ...♘bd7 and other side lines by yourself. (3.g3 is slightly less precise because Black can play 3...g6 4.b3 c5! 5.♗b2!? cxd4 6.♘xd4 d5 7.♗g2 e5 8.♘f3 e4 9.♘d4 ♗g7⇄) 3...g6 4.b3!?



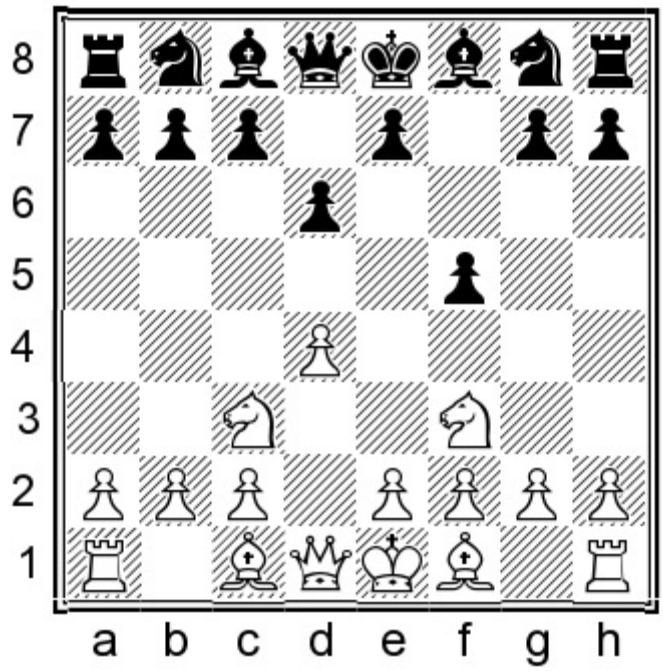
Position after: 4.b3!?

4...♗g7 (4...c5 5.♗b2 cxd4 6.♘xd4 ♗g7 7.♘c3 ♘c6 8.g3 0-0 9.♗g2 ♗d7 10.0-0 transposes into the Symmetrical English with 2...♘f6, chapter 17) 5.♗b2 0-0 6.g3 transposes into chapter 14 with 3.b3.

C) 2...♗g4 This move, the Wade Defense, has some adherents, but White usually picks up the bishop pair or gets a strong center and again I leave the choice of continuation to you.

3.♘c3!

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Position after: 3.♘c3!

White intends 4.e4, and will do everything he can to reach that goal.

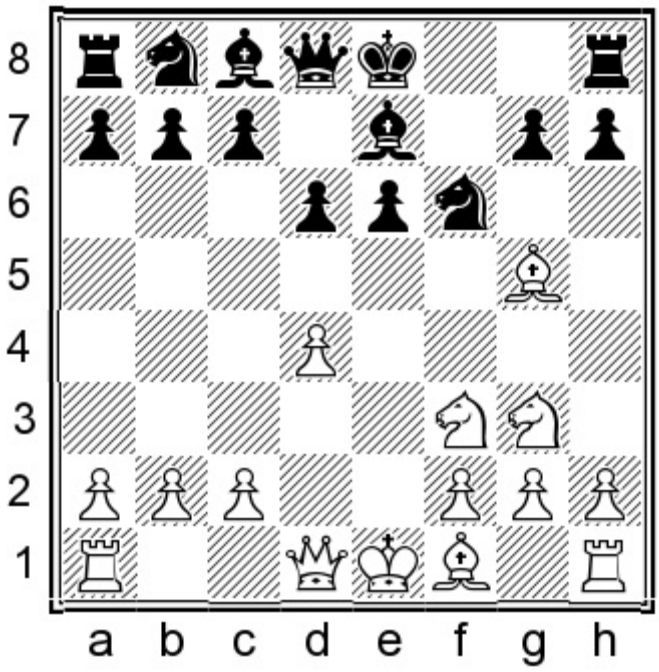
3...♘f6

3...d5?! can't be good, as the line 1.d4 f5 2.♘c3 d5 already exists and is fine for White, and here he is even a full tempo up.

4.♗g5 ♘bd7

4...e6?! 5.e4 fxe4 6.♘xe4 ♗e7 7.♘g3!

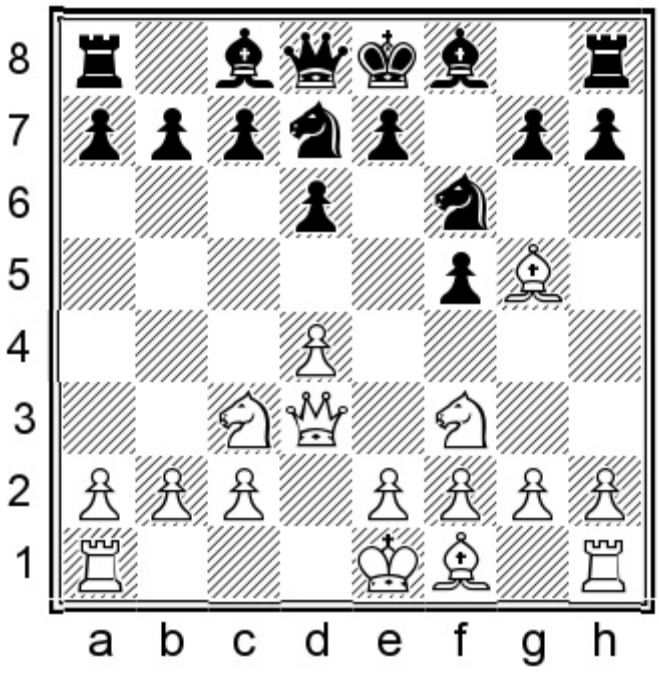
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Position after: 7.♘g3!

I prefer this less usual move which keeps more pieces on the board. (After 7.♗xf6 ♗xf6 8.♗d3 White usually gets good prospects on the kingside. His next moves are probably h4, ♕e2 and 0-0-0.) 7...0-0 8.♗d3± Black has problems finishing his development, e.g. the c8-bishop can't go to b7 because it has to defend e6, and White clearly has the better chances.

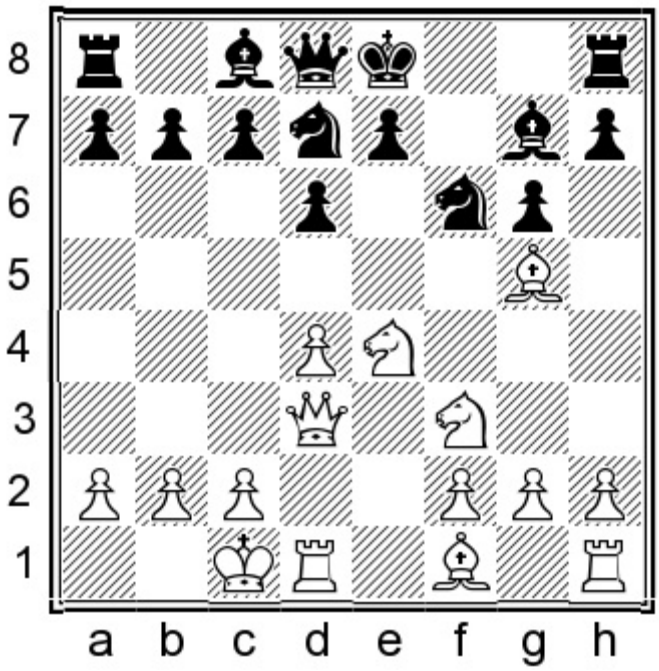
5.♕d3!



Position after: 5.♕d3!

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5...g6 6.e4 fxe4 7.♘xe4 ♗g7 8.0-0-0±



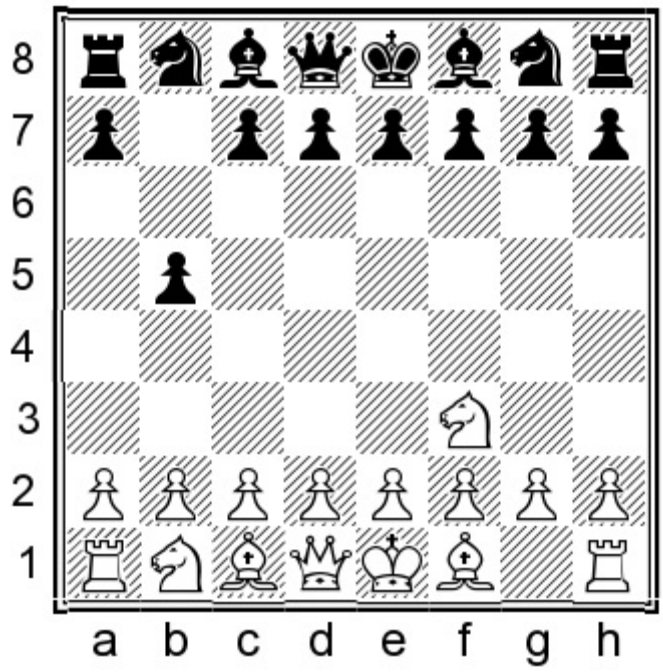
Position after: 8.0-0-0±

White has scored pretty well in this line. I will stop the analysis here, as Black has many possibilities, but I should just point out that Black won't be happy that he allowed e4 (normally in the Leningrad, it's not that simple), and our attack on the kingside is quite obvious.

b) 1...b5

1.♘f3 b5?!

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Position after: 1...b5?!

This is quite a thematic move when White plays ♘f3, but in general Black should wait for White to play g3 before playing this move. For instance after 1...♘f6 2.g3, b5 is a reliable system for Black, but here we can play in the center.

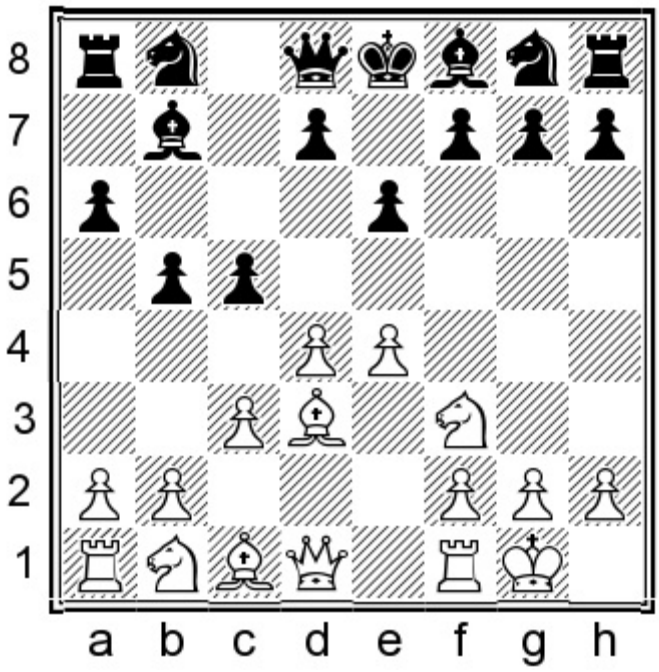
2.e4!

This transposes into a classical system against ...b5. We will only have a brief look, as it's not hard to draw conclusions. Black has a choice between defending his pawn or counterattacking our central pawn.

2...♗b7

≤ 2...a6 3.d4 ♗b7 4.♗d3 e6 (4...♘f6 5.e5 ♘d5 6.0-0 e6 transposes) 5.0-0 c5 6.c3

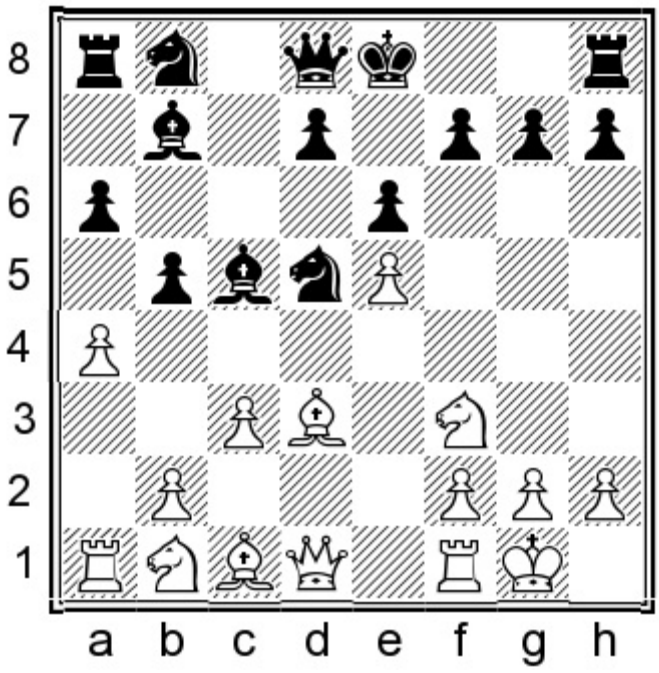
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Position after: 6.c3

A) 6...d6 7.a4! Thematically provoking Black to advance on the queenside. This is Black's problem after advancing with ...b5 so early in the game. 7...c4 (7...♕b6?! 8.axb5 axb5 9.♖xa8 ♗xa8 10.dxc5 dxc5 11.♕b3+–) 8.♗c2 ♘d7 9.d5!± White won convincingly in the game Nisipeanu, L (2661) – Carlstedt, J (2383) Germany 2013.

B) 6...♘f6 Black challenges our center, but we are happy to advance here. 7.e5! ♘d5 8.dxc5 ♗xc5 9.a4!

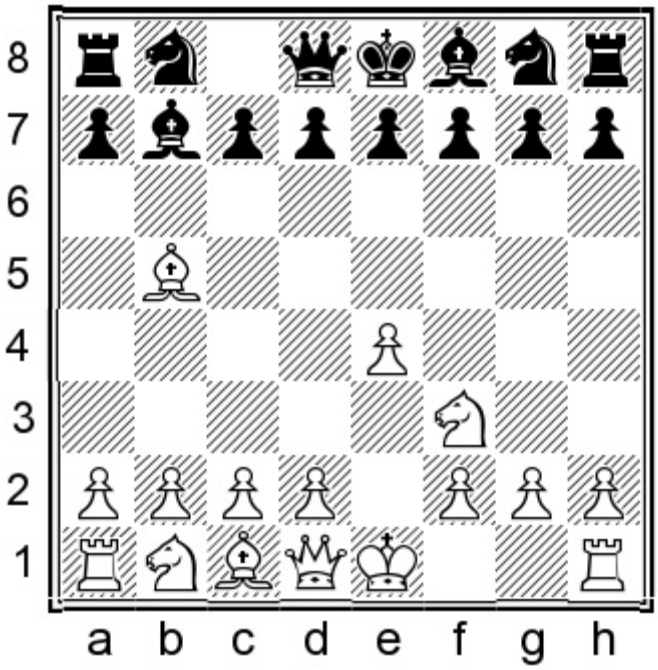


Position after: 9.a4!

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Once again, we want to provoke some weaknesses on the queenside. 9...♕b6N (9...♘c6?! 10.axb5 axb5 11.♖xa8 ♕xa8 12.♗xb5±) 10.♘bd2! ♘c6 11.♘b3 ♗e7 12.axb5 axb5 13.♖xa8+ ♗xa8 14.♕e2±

3.♗xb5!?



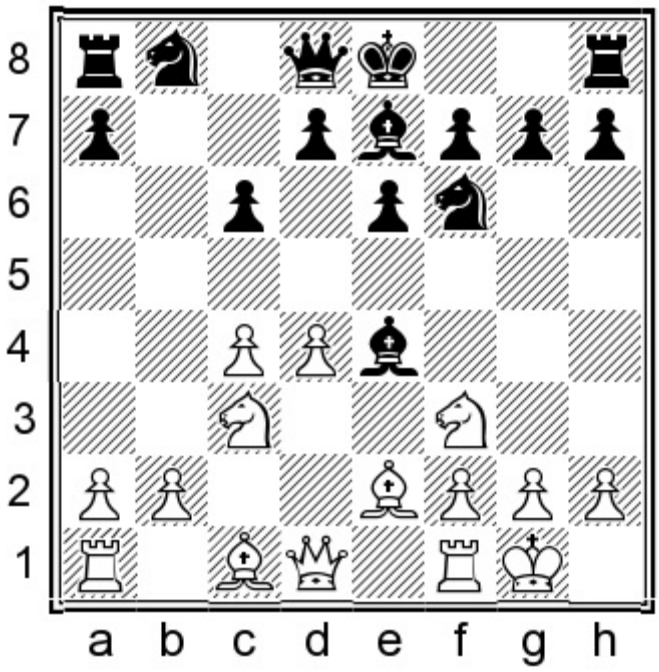
Position after: 3.♗xb5!?

This is a well-known way to play against this system. We agree to the trade of pawns, which is apparently not great because the e-pawn is generally more important than the b-pawn, but in return we gain time for development and get interesting play in the center.

3...♗xe4 4.0-0 ♘f6

4...c6?! 5.♗e2! ♘f6 6.d4 e6 7.c4 ♗e7 8.♘c3!N

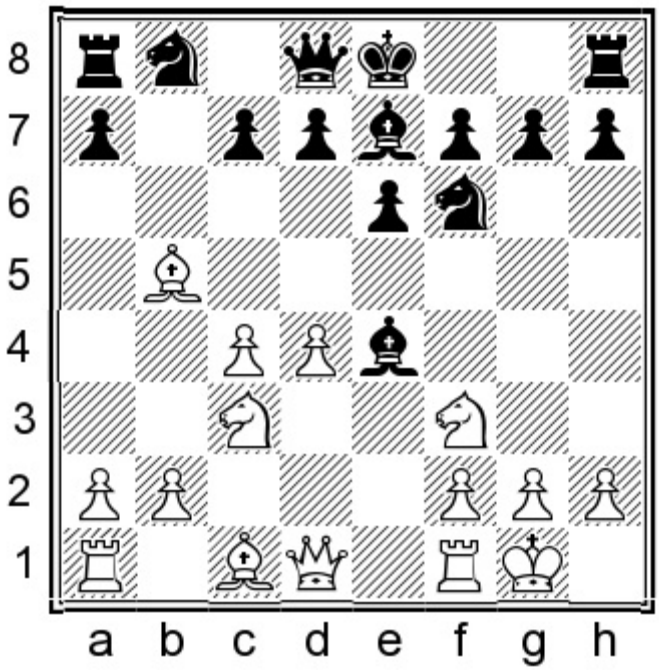
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Position after: 8.♘c3!N

8...♗xf3 9.♗xf3 d5 10.c5!? ♘fd7 11.b4 0-0 12.a4 e5 White now found the strong and quite obvious sacrifice 13.♘xd5! cxd5 14.♗xd5+− with an overwhelming advantage: Konopka, M (2453) – Obsivac, J (2309) Pardubice 2000.

5.d4 e6 6.c4! ♗e7 7.♘c3



Position after: 7.♘c3

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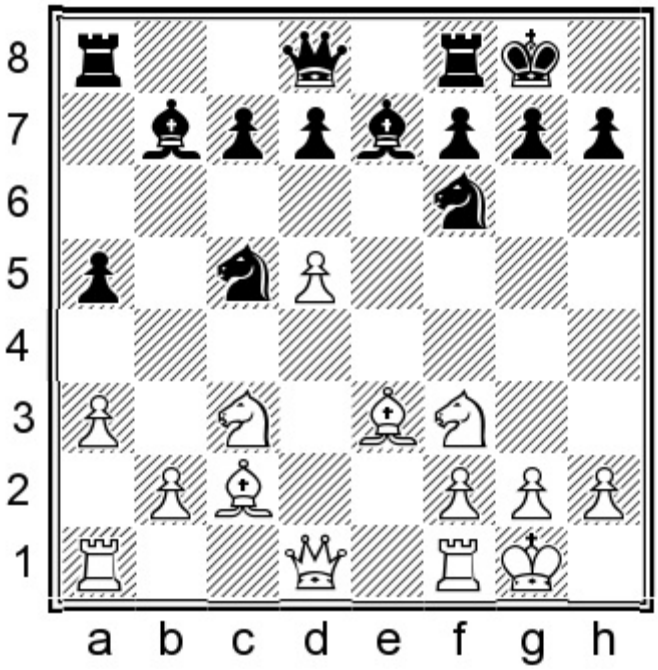
7...♗b7

7...0-0?! Conceding the bishop pair isn't a great idea, and saving a tempo is not a good argument to justify this move. 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♕e2 f5 10.c5!?± The bishop will come back to d3 in order to chase the knight.

8.d5!? 0-0 9.♗a4

After blocking Black's play on the light-squares, it makes sense to bring our own bishop back into play.

9...♘a6 10.a3 ♘c5 11.♗c2 a5 12.♗e3 exd5 13.cxd5±



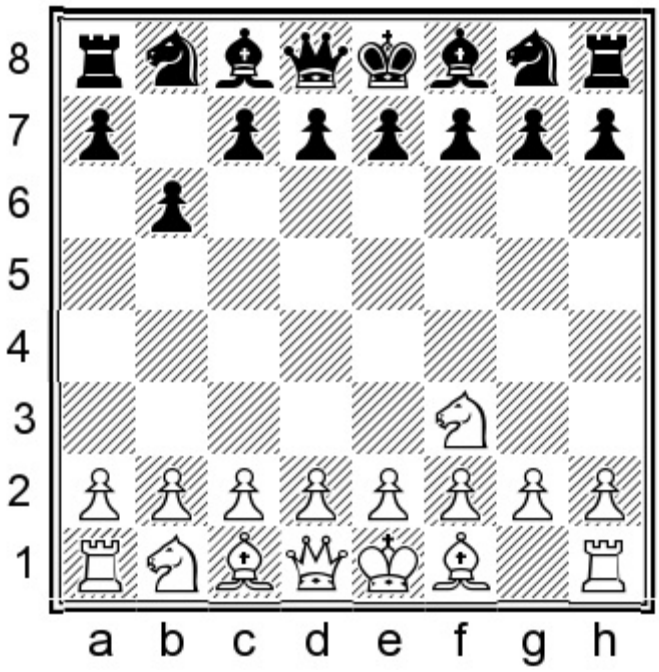
Position after: 13.cxd5±

White keeps the upper hand in this semi-open position, and eventually won in Wojtkiewicz – Bronstein, Reykjavik 1994.

c) 1...b6

1.♘f3 b6

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Position after: 1...b6!?

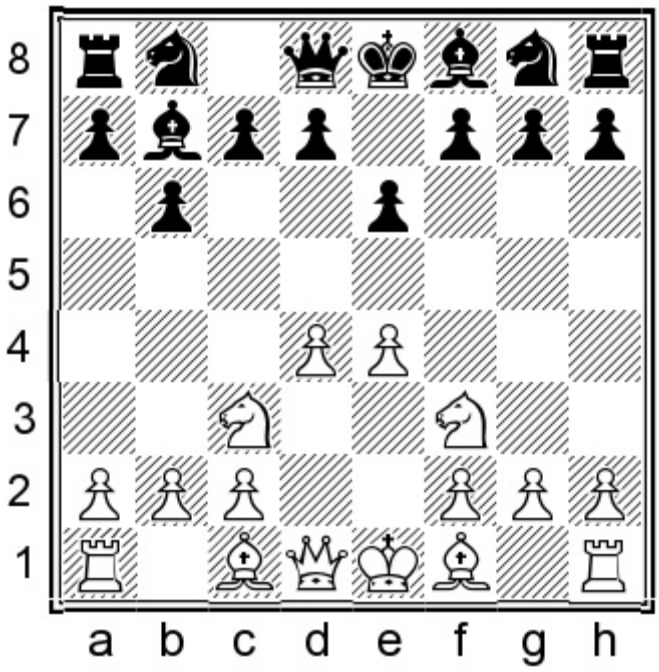
It's quite amusing that I've been writing this section on the very day that Carlsen decided to play this move, with success, against Pavel Eljanov. The move is obviously playable, and actually quite annoying if we want to play a Reti (for instance, after 2.g3 ♗b7 3.♗g2 g6!? we can't play a double fianchetto system). That's why I prefer to enter the classical lines of Owen's Defense.

2.e4 ♗b7

2...c5 is playable, but is far from being a Sicilian main line. We won't go into the theory, as it depends mainly on your style. Anyway, I feel it's pretty unlikely to happen, as it would be weird for a player who had just played 1...b6 to enter a strange side line of the Sicilian Defense.

3.♘c3 e6 4.d4

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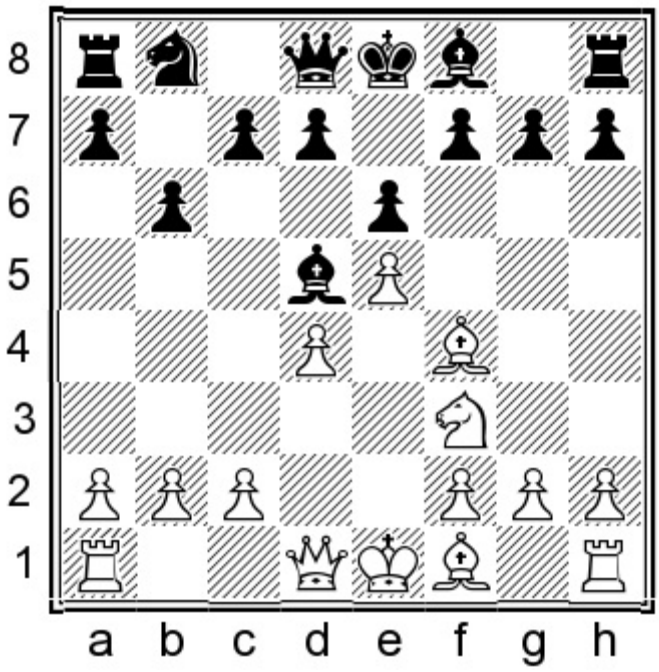


Position after: 4.d4

We have transposed into a normal Owen's Defence. I don't think it's the best one for White as we started with 1.♘f3 (for instance, after 1.e4 b6 2.d4 ♗b7, playing 3.♗d3 and 4.♘ge2 is pretty strong), but it should still be enough for an opening advantage.

4...♗b4

4...♘f6 is less frequently played, and makes less sense, as we can advance in the center: 5.e5 ♘d5 (5...♘e4 6.♘xe4 ♗xe4 7.♗d3 ♗xd3 8.♕xd3±) 6.♘xd5 ♗xd5 7.♗f4!?N

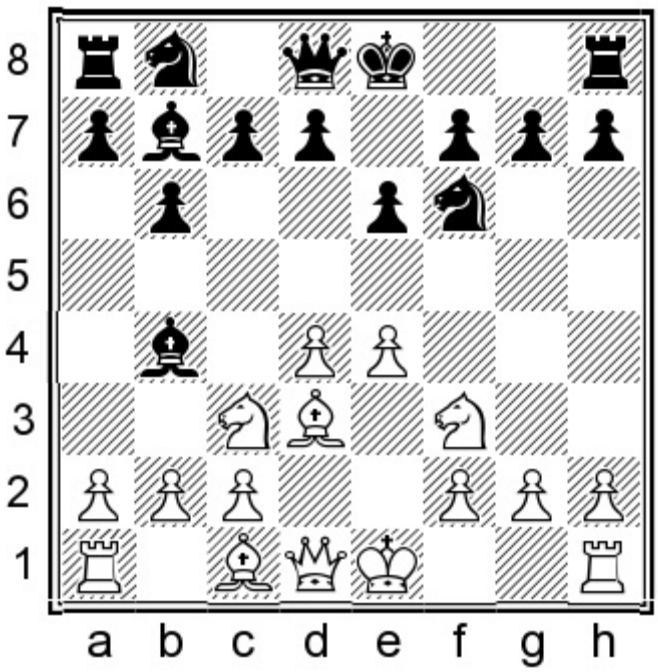


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Position after: 7.♗f4!?N

7...♗e7 (7...c5 8.c4! ♗xf3 9.♕xf3 ♘c6 10.d5!± fully justifies our new move 7.♗f4) 8.♗d3 ♗b7 9.0-0 c5 10.dxc5 bxc5 11.♖e1± Our space advantage is clear, and we have good prospects on the kingside.

5.♗d3 ♘f6



Position after: 5...♘f6

6.♘d2!?

I like this interesting move, rather than 6.♕e2, keeping the option of playing the interesting push e4-e5 at some point. It feels a strange move and clearly has the status of a side line.

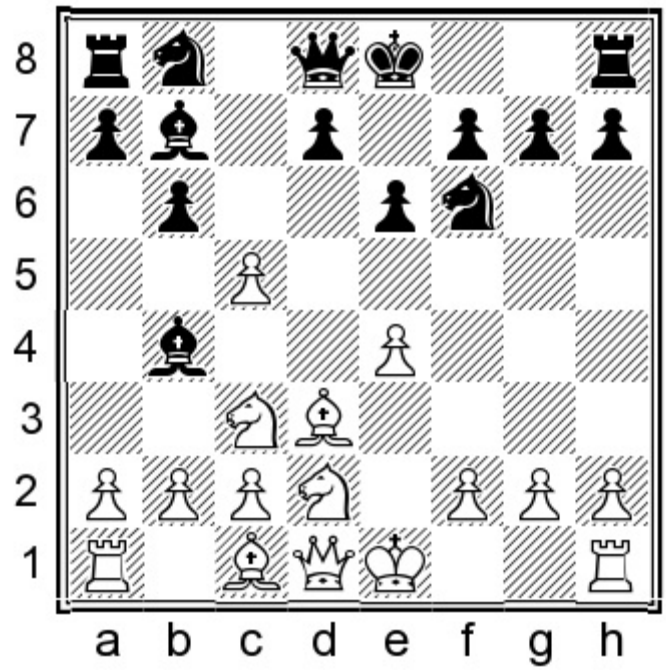
6.♕e2 is the main line, and the move Eljanov chose, but it fails to convince me because of Magnus's move 6...d5! 7.exd5 (7.e5?! ♘e4=) 7...♘xd5! (7...♕xd5!? was preferred by Carlsen, who won convincingly, but I don't believe it's the best: 8.0-0 ♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♘bd7 10.c4 ♕h5⇄ Eljanov, P – Carlsen, M Isle of Man 2017, 0-1 (29)) 8.♗d2 ♘xc3 9.bxc3 ♗e7 10.0-0 ♘d7 11.a4 a5⇄. This is close to equality, as White lacks activity.

6...d5

This has been the most played move by far.

A) 6...c5?! This move creates a weakness on d6, and we should be able to take advantage of it. 7.dxc5!

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Position after: 7.dxc5!

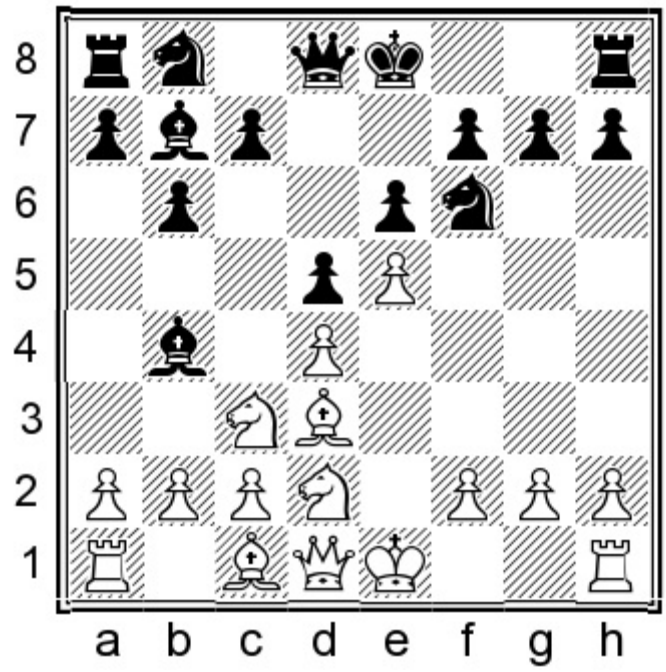
7...♗xc5 (7...bxc5?! 8.e5 ♘d5 9.♘xd5 ♗xd5 10.c3 ♗a5 11.♕g4!±; 7...♗xc3?! 8.bxc3 bxc5 9.e5! ♘d5 10.♘c4 0-0 11.♘d6±) 8.e5 ♘d5 9.♘ce4 0-0 10.0-0 ♘c6 11.c4 ♘f4 12.♘xc5 bxc5 13.♗e4±

B) 6...♘c6?! 7.♘e2! Strange play with our knights, but it's quite effective. 7...0-0 8.c3 ♗e7 9.e5 ♘d5 10.♘f3 f6 11.♕c2!↑

C) 6...d6 This was tried recently, but I am not sure it's advisable for Black. 7.0-0 ♗xc3 8.bxc3 ♘bd7 9.f4! e5 10.♗a3 c5 11.♘c4± 1-0 (46) Lomasov, S (2551) – Yuksel, A (2237) Batumi 2018.

7.e5

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Position after: 7.e5

7...♘e4

7...♘fd7?! 8.♕g4 puts Black in trouble: he can't really castle because of 8...0-0 (8...g6 9.♘f3±) 9.♘f3 Intending ♗h6. 9...♖e8 (9...♔h8? 10.♕h3 h6 11.♗xh6+–) 10.♗h6 ♗f8 11.♗e3± White's threat is now to take on h7, followed with ♘g5, a classical mating pattern.

8.♕g4!

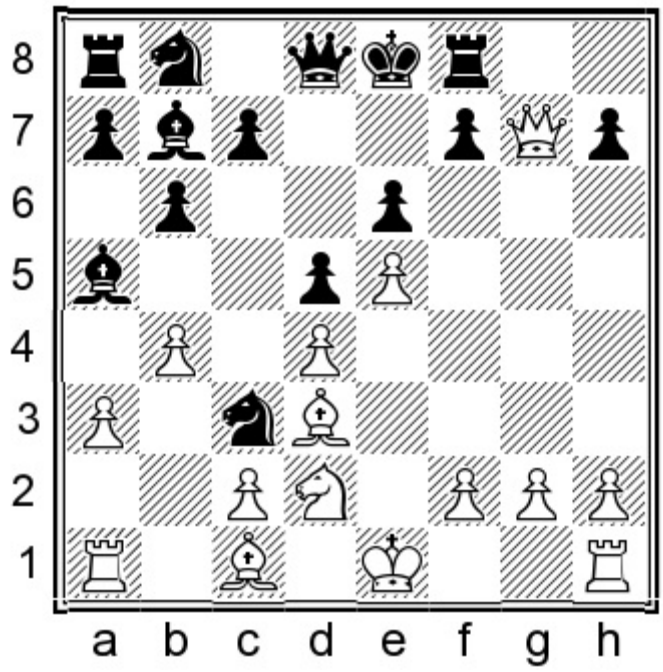
This was one of the ideas when we played 6.♘d2: the queen comes to the kingside.

8...♔f8

Filipovic, a specialist in this position with Black, has defended it three times, in fact the only three only games in the database.

8...♘xc3? 9.♕xg7 ♖f8 10.a3! puts Black in trouble: 10...♗a5 11.b4!

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Position after: 11.b4!

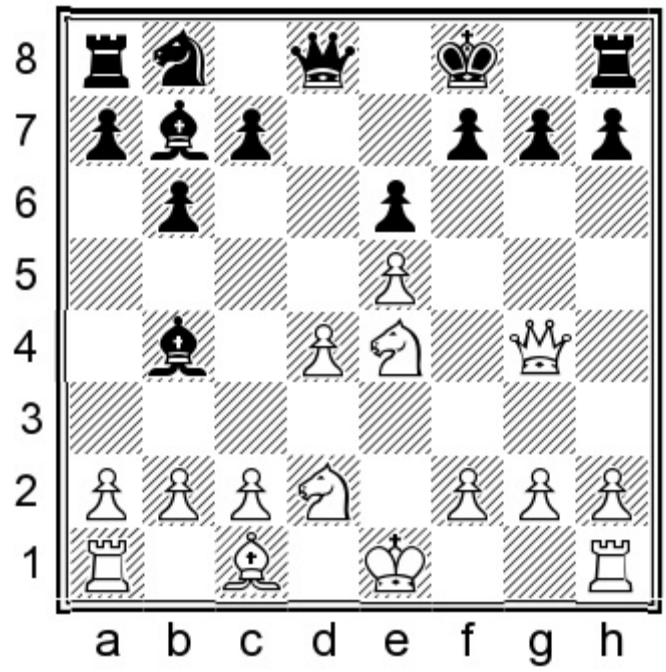
Of course we prefer to take the bishop, not the knight. 11...♘c6 12.bxa5 ♘xd4 13.a4!± This enables White to play ♗a3, and prevents the knight from finding a shelter on a4. (If 13.♗b2?! ♘f5! 14.♗xf5 ♘a4!± and Black miraculously escapes.)

9.♗xe4!

9.♘cxe4 dxe4 10.♗c4 ♗e7! (10...♗xd2+ 11.♗xd2 ♕xd4? would be bad because we can play 12.0-0-0 ♕xc4 13.♗h6!+–, with a decisive attack as Black can't parry every threat) 11.c3 c5⇄

9...dxe4 10.♘cxe4

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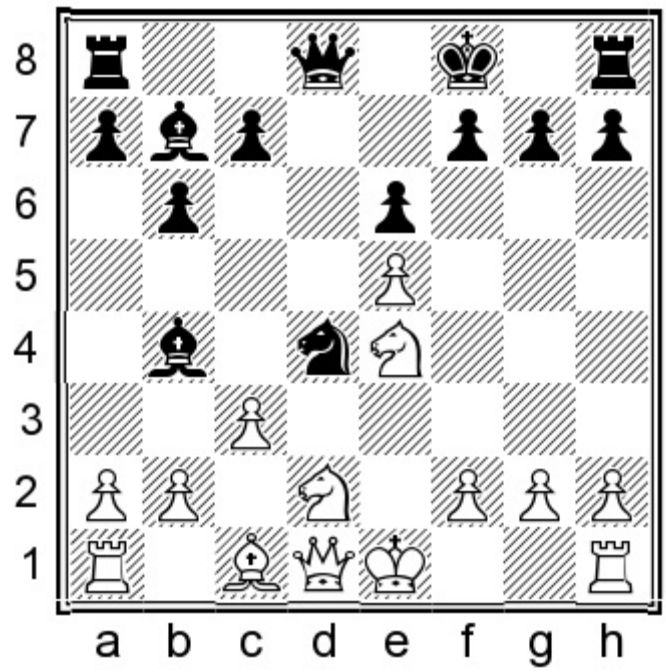


Position after: 10.♘cxe4

10...h5

A) 10...♕xd4?! 11.c3 ♕d3 12.cxb4 ♘c6 13.♕e2±

B) 10...♘c6!? is really a computer move... 11.c3 ♘xd4! 12.♕d1!



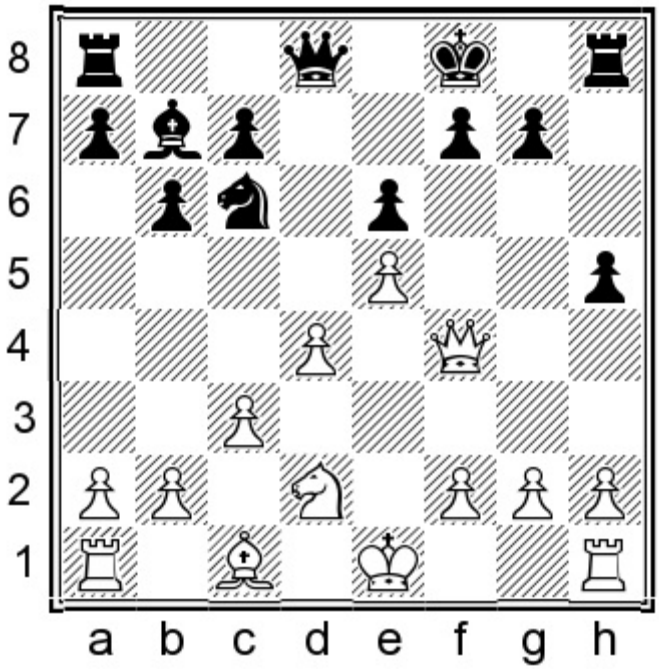
Position after: 12.♕d1!

A strong retreat. For instance: 12...♕h4 13.0-0! ♗xe4 14.♘xe4 ♕xe4 15.cxd4±. White will soon put

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pressure on the c7-pawn.

11.♕f4! ♗xd2+ 12.♘xd2 ♘c6 13.c3±



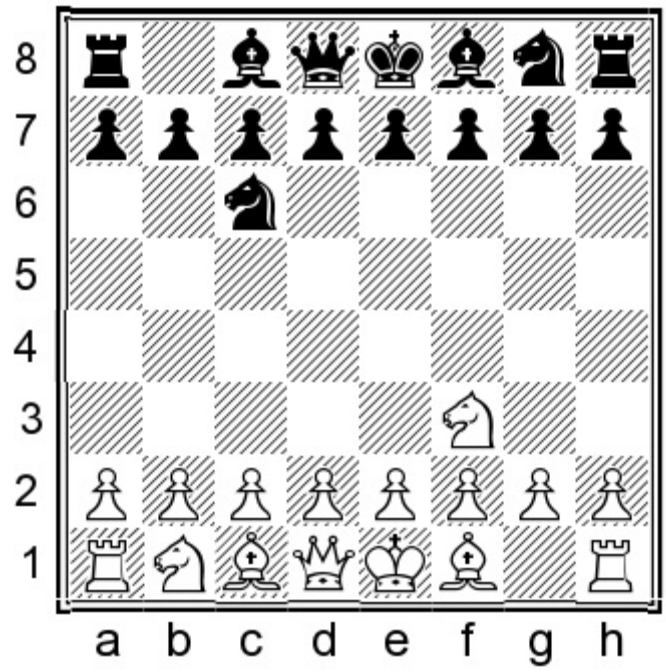
Position after: 13.c3±

Black cannot be happy with his position here, even if he managed to draw in Buss, R (2318) – Filipovic, B (2425) Switzerland 2004.

d) 1...♘c6 2.d4 d5 3.g3 --, 3...♗f5 4.♗g2 ♘f6

1.♘f3 ♘c6!?

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Position after: 1...♘c6!?

This move tries to take advantage of our move order by intending to advance ...e5 on the next move. Obviously we can't let that happen (unless we want to transpose into an English, a reversed Pirc a tempo up or a 1.e4 e5 opening), as we play the Modernized Reti to get away from big theory in other openings.

2.d4

Of course this doesn't transpose into regular 1.d4 systems, as Black has already committed his knight to c6. He has a number of moves here, such as 2...♘f6 or 2...e6, but we will concentrate on the main one.

2...d5

This transposes into Chigorin's Defense. We can't play Avrukh's recommendation (1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♘c6 3.♘c3), but we have other ways to treat the position. The one that corresponds most with our repertoire is...

3.g3

...but keep in mind that 3.e3 is another interesting way to make use of our move order, and of course 3.c4 transposes into the main lines. In general, in our line, Black develops his queenside quickly, in order to castle long and launch an attack on the kingside. In general, we can either react in the center with c4, or start an attack with c3 and b4-b5.

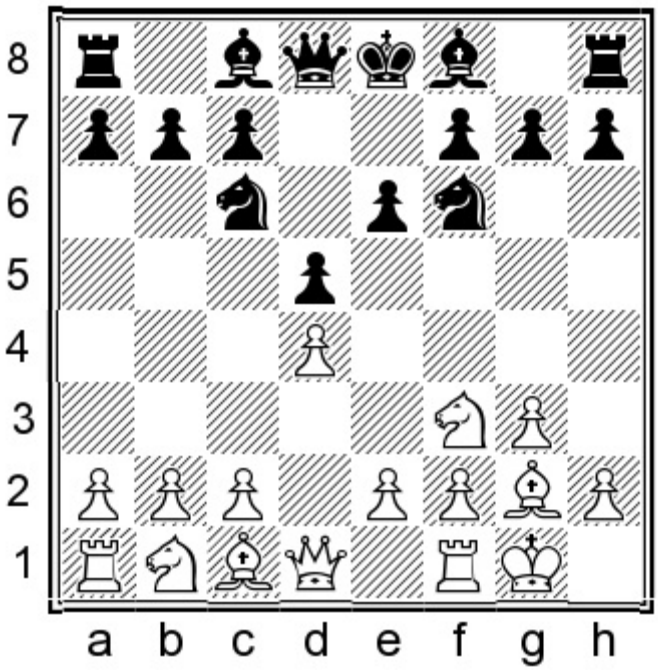
3...♗f5

This has been played less than 3...♗g4, but has recently gained in popularity. White must always bear in

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mind that ...♘b4 might feature in Black's plans, but he should also understand that it doesn't always work well!

3...♘f6 gives Black fewer options, as he usually likes to play ...f6 at some point, and then choose between ...e5 and ...g5. 4.♗g2 e6 For any light-squared bishop move, see the two main lines, 3...♗f5 and 3...♗g4. 5.0-0



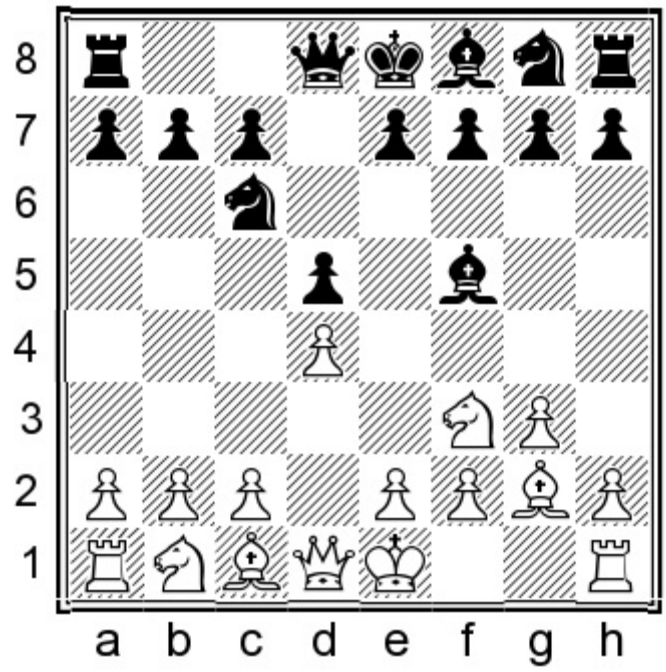
Position after: 5.0-0

A) 5...♗e7 6.b3 0-0 7.c4 b6 8.♗b2 ♗b7 9.♘bd2± We won't go too deeply into these lines. Compared to some lines of the Neo-Catalan, we have played d4, but on the other hand, Black has committed his knight to c6 and can't advance his c-pawn any more, which deprives him of activity. Our plan is to play e2-e4 at some stage.

B) 5...♗d6 6.c4 0-0 (6...dxc4 7.♘bd2! b5?! 8.♘e5! ♘xd4 9.♘dxc4! bxc4 10.♕xd4±) 7.♘c3 dxc4 8.♕a4!↑ With a comfortable game in the center.

4.♗g2

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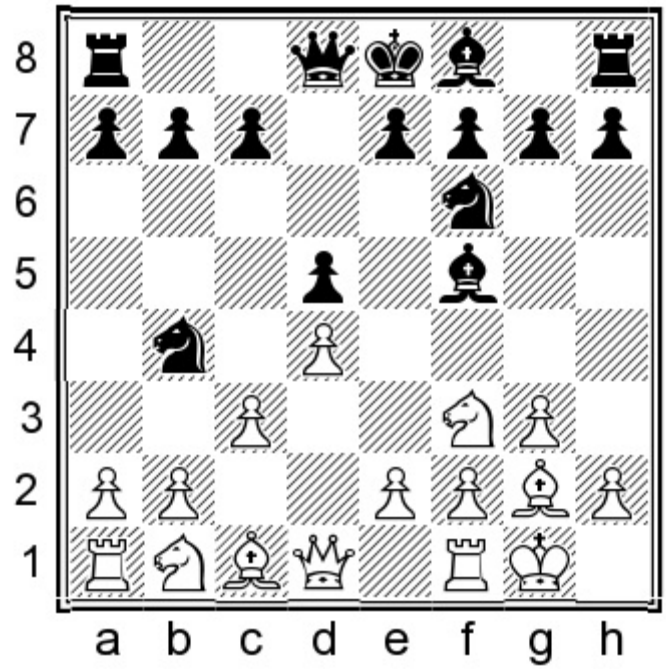
Position after: 4.♗g2

4...♘f6

The other main move, 4...♘b4, will be covered in the next subchapter, while 4...e6 5.0-0 ♘b4 (5...♘f6 – see 4...♘f6) 6.♘a3 transposes into it.

5.0-0 e6

5...♘b4?! no longer makes much sense because of 6.c3! which is, strangely enough, almost a novelty:



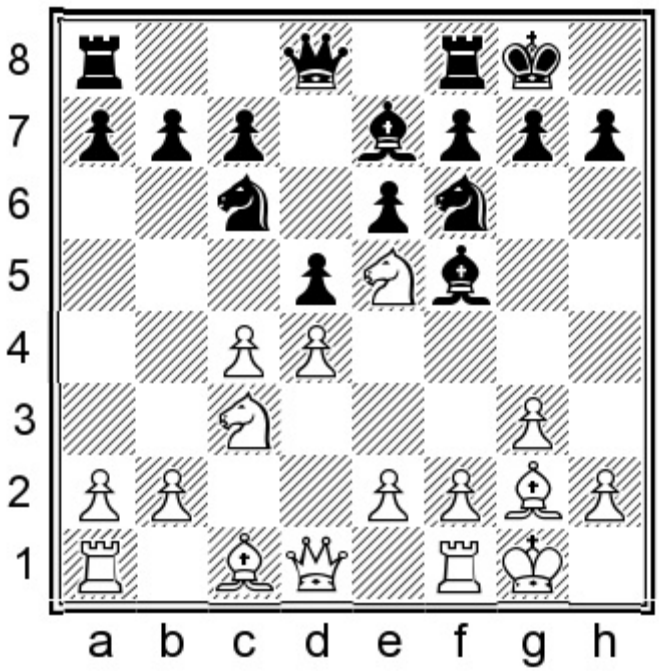
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Position after: 6.c3!

6...♗c2N (6...♘c2?! 7.♘h4! ♘xa1 8.♘xf5 e6 9.♘h4± Of course, the a1-knight won't survive long, and White already has a great advantage.) 7.♕e1! (7.♕d2 ♗xb1!∞) 7...♘c6 8.c4!± It's not exactly clear what Black is doing.

6.c4! dxc4

A) 6...♗e7 7.♘c3 0-0 8.♘e5!

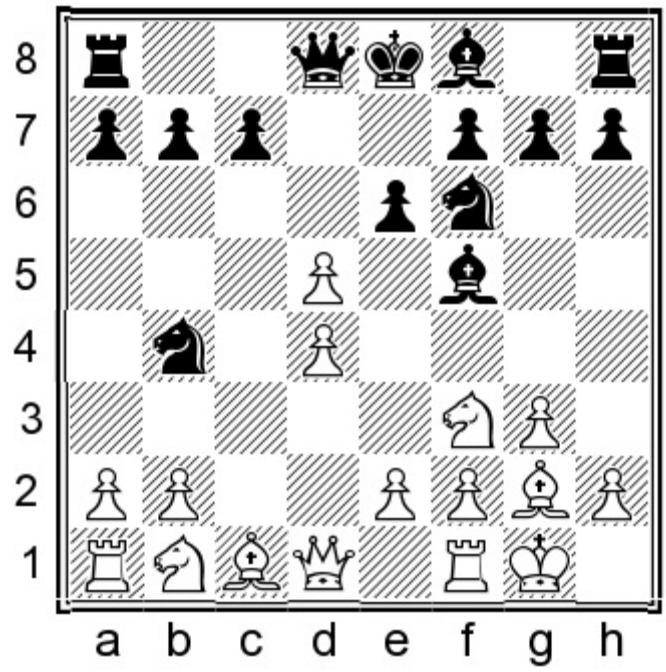


Position after: 8.♘e5!

Black is in trouble. For example: 8...♘xe5 (8...♘e4 9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♕a4!? ♕d7 11.f3 ♘xc3 12.bxc3 ♖fd8 13.e4 ♗g6 14.♗e3± 1-0 (39) Kengis, E (2575) – Serper, G (2490) Gausdal 1991) 9.dxe5 ♘e4 (9...♘g4 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♘xd5 ♘xe5 12.♕b3!±) 10.cxd5 ♘xc3 11.bxc3 exd5 12.♕xd5 ♕xd5 13.♗xd5 c6 14.♗g2±

B) 6...♘b4?! 7.cxd5!N

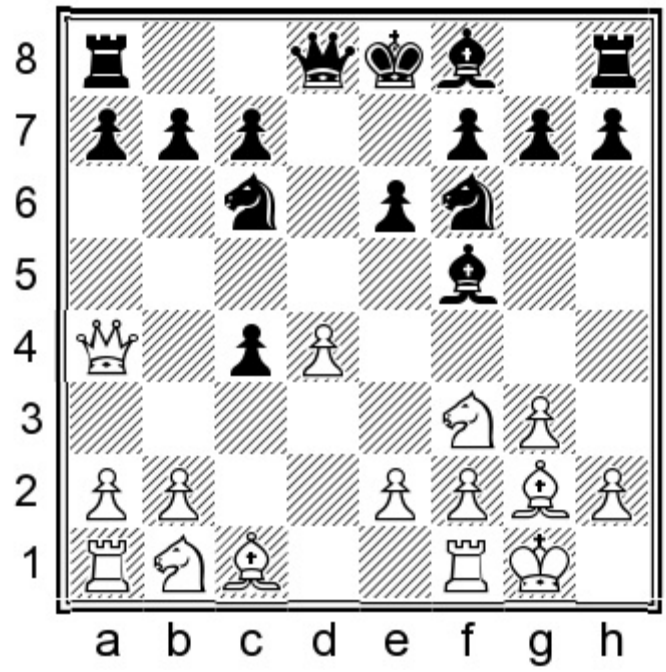
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Position after: 7.cxd5!N

This simply refutes Black's idea. 7...♘c2 (7...exd5 8.a3!± ♘c2? 9.♘h4!+– Again, this is great for White.) 8.♘e5! ♘xa1 (8...exd5 9.e4! ♗xe4 10.♗xe4 ♘xa1 11.♗g2± The knight is trapped on a1.) 9.♕a4+ ♘d7 10.dxe6 ♗xe6 11.♗xb7+– White will soon win back his material.

7.♕a4!



Position after: 7.♕a4!

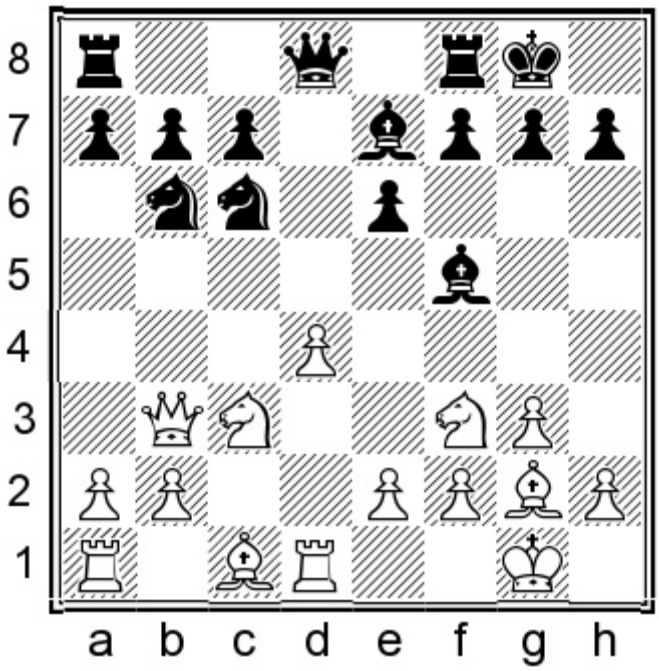
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Not only can White take back on c4, his obvious threat is ♘e5.

7...♘d7

7...♗d6 8.♘e5! ♗xe5 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.dxe5 ♘d7 11.♘c3 0-0 (11...♘xe5?! 12.♖d1 ♕c8 13.♗f4 ♘d7 14.♕xc6±) 12.♖d1± Black's structure is a mess and White will probably soon be a pawn up.

8.♕xc4 ♘b6 9.♕b3 ♗e7 10.♘c3 0-0 11.♖d1±

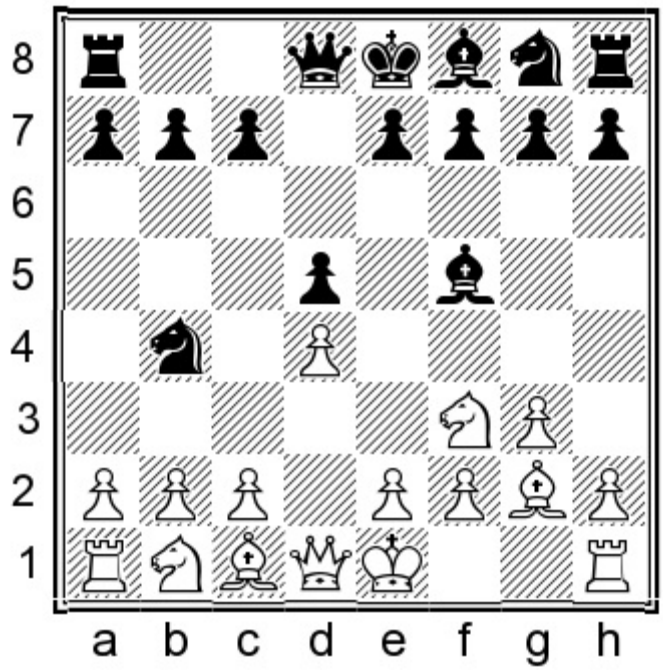


Position after: 11.♖d1±

e) 1...♘c6 2.d4 d5 3.g3 ♗f5 4.♗g2 ♘b4

1.♘f3 ♘c6!? 2.d4 d5 3.g3 ♗f5 4.♗g2 ♘b4

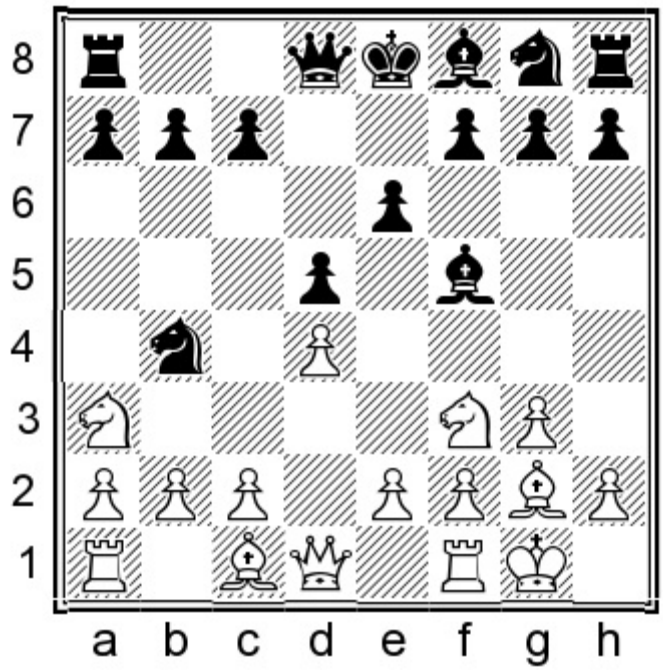
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Position after: 4...♘b4

This move has become quite popular recently. Black knows that c3 is coming, chasing the knight, but our knight on a3 will also have to relocate to find better prospects. The point is that we have to play c3 (whereas we would have preferred to play c4 at once), and Black's knight sometimes goes back to a6, then to c7.

5.♘a3 e6 6.0-0



Position after: 6.0-0

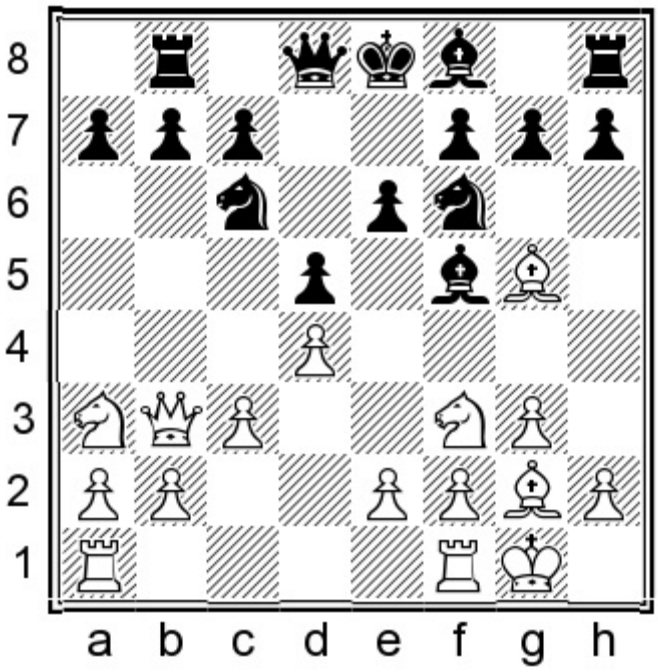
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Black has various choices, but he should keep in mind that we can try to get the bishop pair by means of ♘h4.

6...♗e7

I think this is the best move. It prevents ♘h4 and develops the bishop.

A) 6...♘f6 7.c3 ♘c6 8.♕b3 ♖b8 9.♗g5!

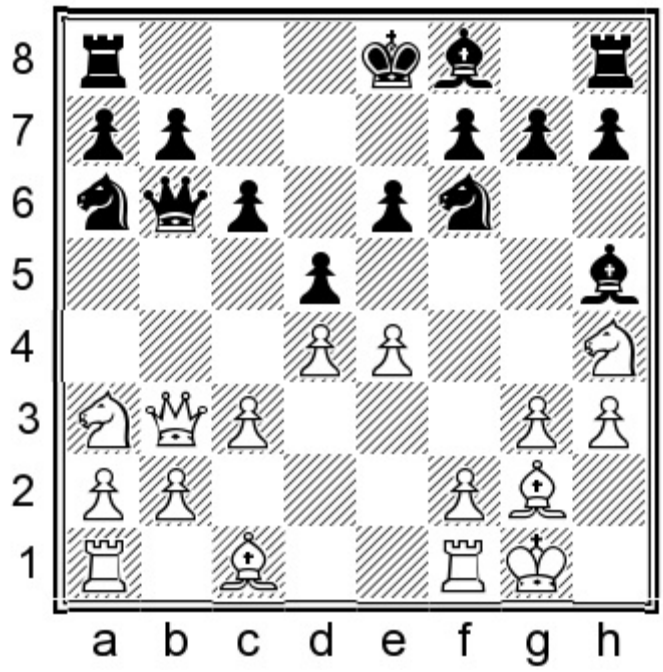


Position after: 9.♗g5!

The idea is to trade our bishop at some stage, then play ♘d2 in order to advance e4. It's clear that we need to open the center in order to bring the g2-bishop into play. 9...♗e7 (9...h6?! 10.♗xf6 ♕xf6 11.♘d2!±) 10.♘d2! ♘e4 (10...0-0 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.e4 dxe4 13.♘xe4 ♗e7 14.♘c4±) 11.♗xe7 ♘xe7 12.♘xe4 ♗xe4! 13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♘b1 0-0 15.♘d2 ♕d5 16.e3±

B) 6...c6?! Black clearly aims at bringing the knight back to a6, and then c7, but it's too slow. 7.c3 ♘a6 8.♕b3 ♕b6 9.♘h4 ♗g4 10.e4! ♘f6 11.h3 ♗h5

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Position after: 11...♗h5

appeared in the game Sharafiev, A (2433) – Artemiev, V (2692) St Peters-burg 2017, and although Black won, he would have been clearly worse if White had played 12.exd5!N when Black has no good way to take back on d5:

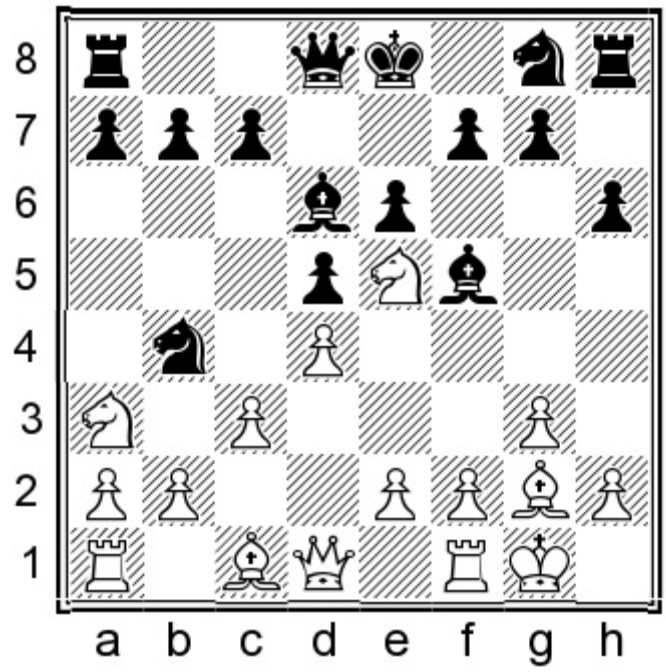
B1) 12...exd5? is obviously bad because of 13.♖e1++–.

B2) After 12...cxd5 White has many good continuations, e.g. he can simply play 13.g4 ♗g6 14.♘xg6 hxg6 15.♗f4± and the knight on a6 seems clearly misplaced as c7 is not available any more.

B3) 12...♘xd5 13.♘c4 ♕xb3 14.axb3±

C) 6...h6 This makes a square available for the bishop, but like 6...c6 it's a bit slow, and we will soon be ready to act in the center. 7.♘e5! Depriving Black of the possibility of bringing the knight back to c6. 7...♗d6 (7...c6 8.c3 ♘a6 9.f3! ♘f6 10.e4! Black can't take on e4, otherwise the f7-pawn will eventually fall. 10...♗h7 11.♕e2±) 8.c3

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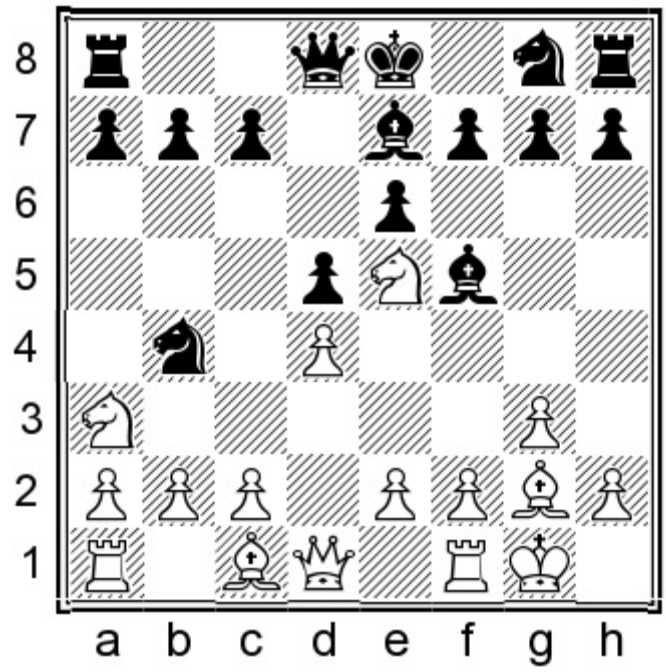
Position after: 8.c3

C1) 8...♘a6?! 9.♕a4+! ♔f8 (9...c6? 10.♘xc6! ♕d7 11.♘b5!+– and Black doesn't have any good move at his disposal) 10.♕b3 ♖b8 11.♘b5±

C2) 8...♗xe5 This is needed, but we have already gained the bishop pair, whereas 6... h6 tried to keep it. 9.dxe5 ♘c6 10.♕b3! An important move to misplace the black queen. (MVL started with the wrong move order: 10.c4 ♘ge7 11.cxd5 exd5 12.♘b5 0-0 13.♘d4 ♘xd4 14.♕xd4 ♕d7= 0-1 (54) Vachier-Lagrave, M (2789) – Bosiocic, M (2624) Riyadh 2017.) 10...♕c8 11.c4!↑

7.♘e5!?

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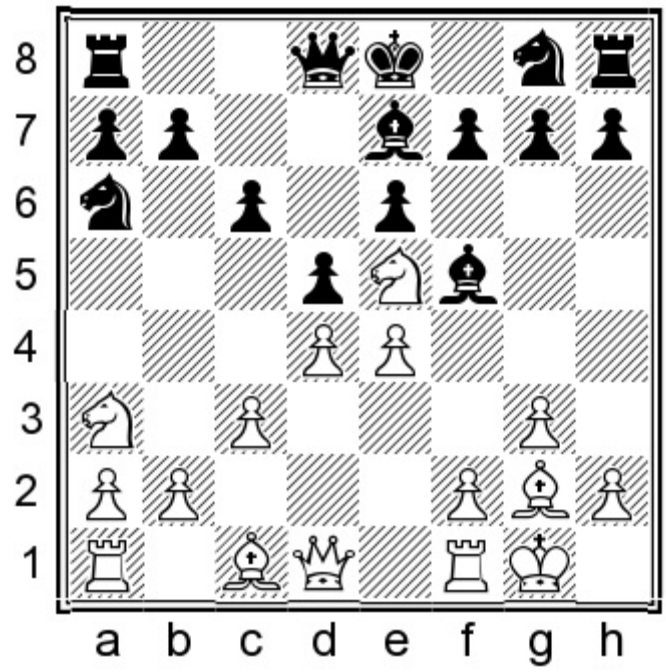


Position after: 7.♘e5!?

This is the same idea as against 6...h6, preventing ...♘c6 and clearing the way for f3/e4.

7...♘f6

In the event of 7...c6 8.c3 ♘a6 we have the following strong move at our disposal: 9.e4!



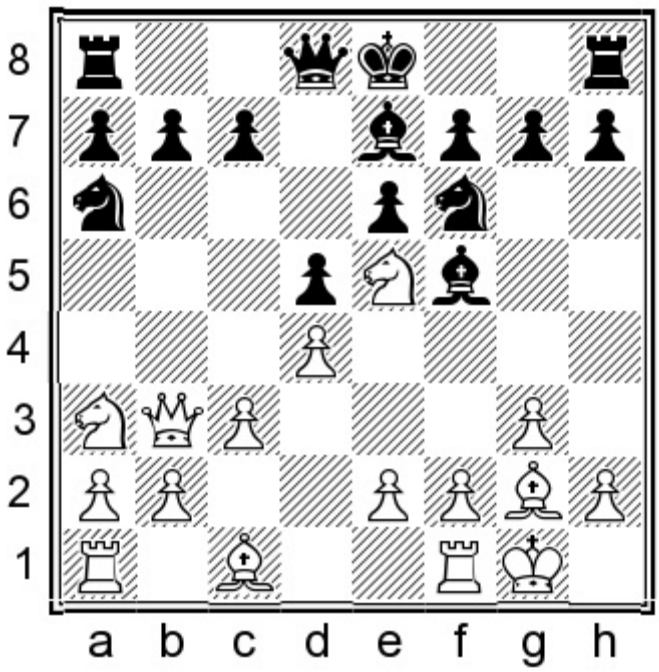
Position after: 9.e4!

and Black is unable to equalize because he can't develop his kingside. 9...dxe4 (9...♗xe4! is probably

better, but after 10.♗xe4 dxe4 11.♕g4 ♗f6 12.♕xe4± we have the more active development and more space in the center, so are definitely slightly better) 10.♕h5! ♗g6 (If 10...g6, then 11.♕e2 threatening g4, simply winning a piece. 11...h5 12.♘xc6! bxc6 13.♕xa6±) 11.♘xg6 fxg6 12.♕h3± White won convincingly in Ravi, L (2419) – Xie, G (2340) Hyderabad 2005.

8.c3 ♘a6 9.♕b3

9.♕a4+ c6 10.♘xc6?? doesn't work because of 10...♕d7–+.



Position after: 9.♕b3

9...♕c8

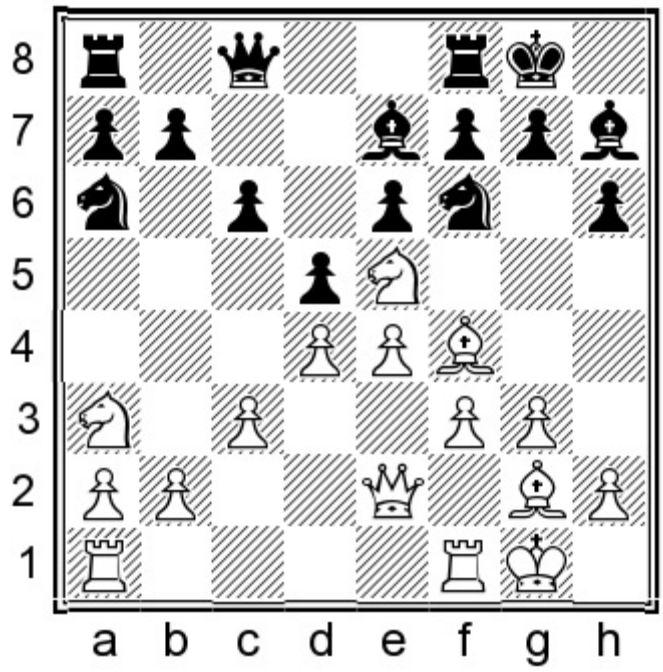
9...♖b8N 10.f3 0-0 11.g4 ♗g6 12.h4! h6 13.♘xg6 fxg6 14.♕c2±

10.f3! h6 11.e4 ♗h7

Again, Black can't exchange everything on e4, as f7 is hanging at the end. Now I suggest bringing the queen to the center.

12.♕b5+!?N 12...c6 13.♕e2 0-0 14.♗f4±

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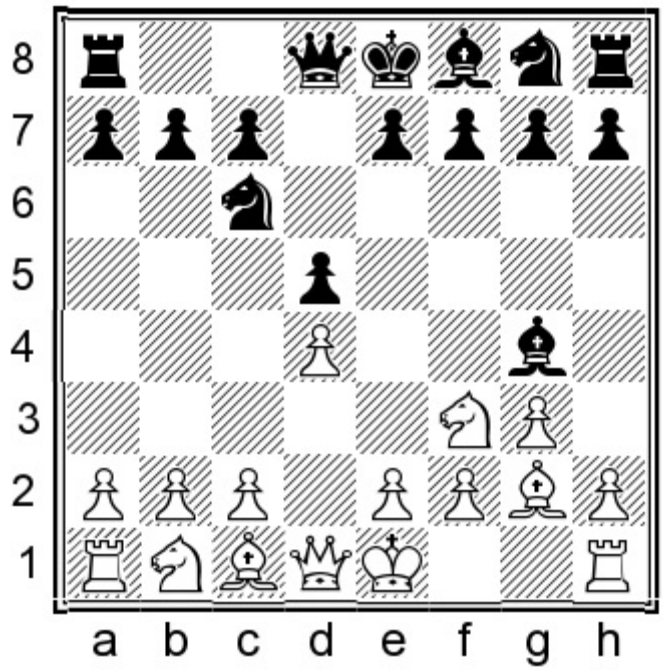


Position after: 14.♗f4±

We keep the slightly better position thanks to our strong center, even if Black is still solid.

f) 1...♘c6 2.d4 d5 3.g3 ♗g4

1.♘f3 ♘c6!? 2.d4 d5 3.g3 ♗g4 4.♗g2



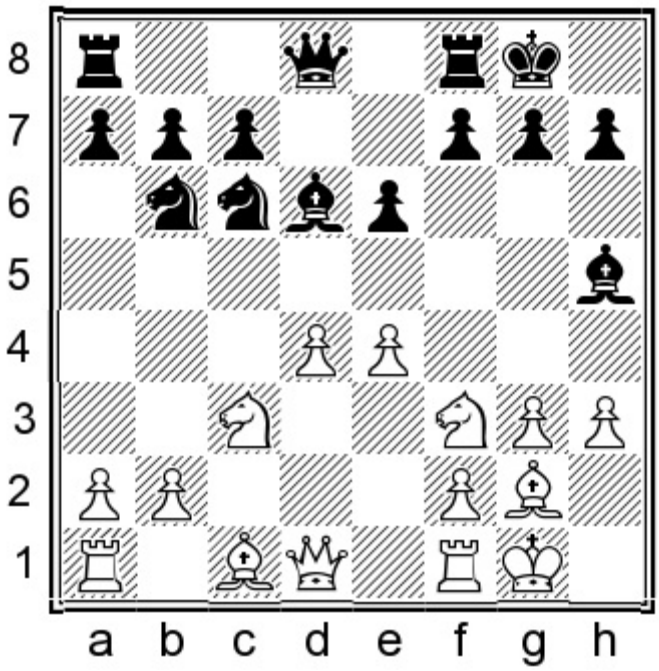
Position after: 4.♗g2

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4...♕d7

This is one of the critical lines. Black intends to castle long and start action in the center or on the kingside.

4...e6 5.0-0 ♗d6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘c3 0-0 8.cxd5! ♘xd5 (8...exd5 would be too passive for Black; we would continue with 9.♗g5 ♗e7 10.♘e5!±) 9.h3 ♗h5 10.e4 ♘b6 This position is well-known to be dangerous, and Black scores well.

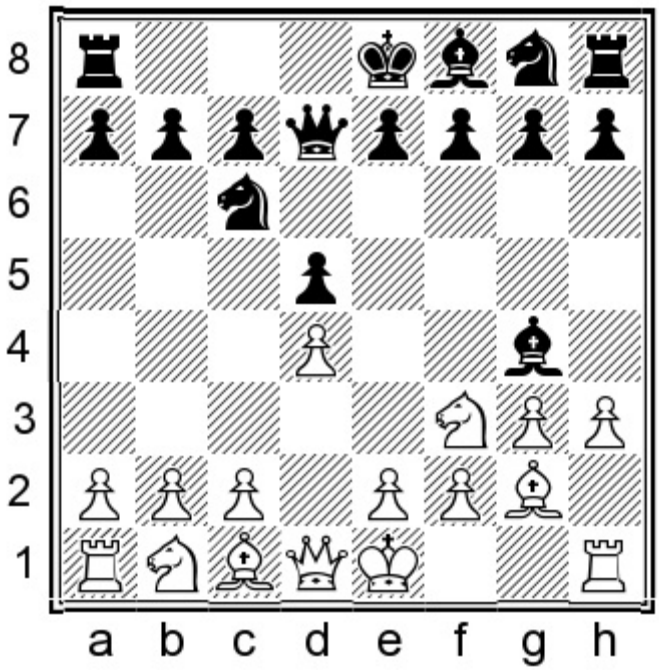


Position after: 10...♘b6

I now prefer to start with the new move 11.♖e1!?N, slowly preparing action in the center (11.g4 ♗g6 12.♕e2 f5 13.gxf5 ♗h5 14.♖d1 ♕e8∞ is pretty unclear), for instance 11...e5 12.d5 ♘d4 13.g4! ♘xf3+ 14.♕xf3 ♗g6 15.♗f1!↑ Black's bishop is buried on g6. It's time to advance on the queenside in order to create some initiative there. Only White can be better here.

5.h3!?

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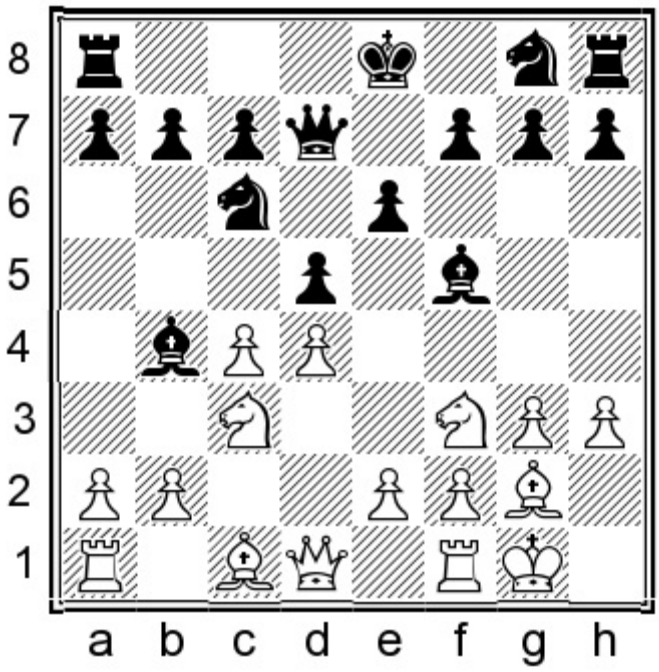


Position after: 5.h3!?

A good zwischenzug. Black needs to choose the correct diagonal now for his bishop, or decide if he wants to trade it.

5...♗xf3!?

A) 5...♗f5 Black keeps an eye on the h3 pawn and prevents us from castling, but we can react in the center: 6.c4! e6 (6...♘b4? 7.♘e5 ♕d6 8.0-0 ♘c2 9.e4+–) 7.♘c3 ♗b4 (7...0-0-0 8.♕a4 ♗b4 9.0-0 ♗xc3 10.bxc3 ♗e4 11.♘d2 ♗xg2 12.♔xg2±) 8.0-0

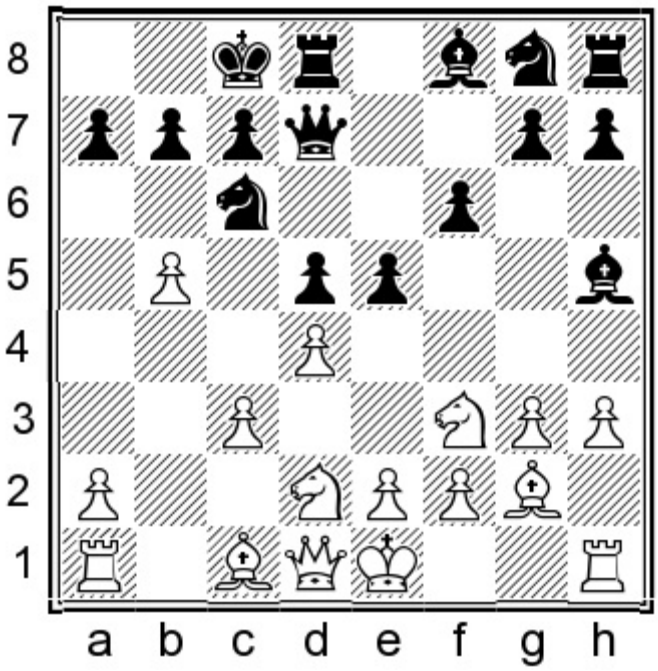


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Position after: 8.0-0

8...♗xc3 (8...♘f6 9.♘e5! ♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♗xc3 11.bxc3 ♘e4 12.♕b3±) 9.bxc3 ♗e4 This has been played a few times, and the best seems to get rid of the bishop with 10.♘d2! ♗xg2 11.♔xg2 ♘ge7 12.♖b1↑.

B) 5...♗h5?! doesn't help Black's attack since neither ...♗h3 nor the advance ...h5-h4 is possible any more. 6.c3!? Getting the attack under way. A logical continuation is 6...f6 7.b4 0-0-0 8.♘bd2 e5 9.b5!



Position after: 9.b5!

9...♘b8 (9...♘a5 10.♕a4 b6 11.dxe5 a6 12.♕h4!±) 10.dxe5 ♕xb5 11.0-0! fxe5 12.c4 dxc4 13.♕c2 ♗g6 14.♕xc4 ♕xc4 15.♘xc4± White is temporarily a pawn down, but should soon be able to regain it: Heberla, B (2536) – Raetsky, A (2431) Bugibba 2012, 1-0 (24).

6.exf3!

I like this move, as it deprives Black of any ideas involving ...e5. We have arrived at a complicated position; the following games should give you some ideas.

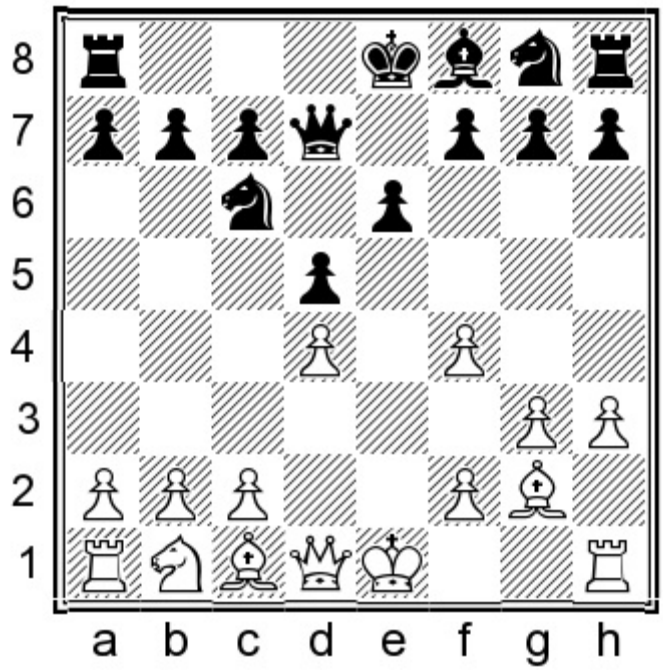
6.♗xf3 keeps a good structure, but cedes the initiative to Black: 6...0-0-0 7.♗g2 e5 8.dxe5 ♘xe5⇄.

6...e6

6...♘f6 This doesn't really change the position and White gets similar play to the main lines. 7.0-0 e6 8.c3 ♗d6 9.♕e2 0-0 10.f4 ♘e7 11.♘d2↑ 1-0 (40) Gordievsky, D (2630) – Bellahcene, B (2488) Karlsruhe 2018.

7.f4

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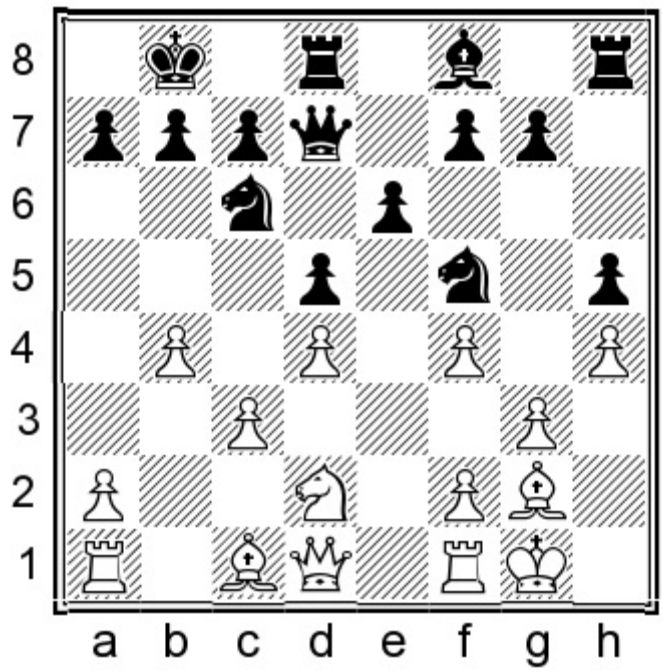


Position after: 7.f4

7...0-0-0

7...♘ge7 8.c3 ♘f5 9.♘d2 h5 10.h4 ♗e7 11.♘f3 g6 12.0-0 White has a stable advantage, and it is no surprise that he soon got a great position in the following game: 12...a5 13.a4 0-0 14.♖e1 ♗f6 15.♗f1 ♘ce7 16.♘e5 ♗xe5 17.fxe5 b6 18.♗g5 c5 19.♗b5 ♕c7 20.♗f6± 1-0 (47) Baumegger, S (2447) – Jurkovic, H (2405) Austria 2009.

8.0-0 ♔b8 9.c3 h5 10.h4 ♘ge7 11.♘d2 ♘f5 12.b4!



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Position after: 12.b4!

White's play is clearly easier.

12...a6 13.a4 a5 14.b5 ♘ce7 15.♘b3!→

1-0 (27) Tukmakov, V (2581) – Raetsky, A (2460) Geneva 1999.

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