Universal Chess Training



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by

Wojciech Moranda

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
⟳	lead in development
⊝	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
⩱	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+–	White has a decisive advantage
–+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
⇄	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
⩲	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Introduction

I. What is the purpose of this book?

I have always considered chess to be a difficult game to learn, especially for those of us who are mostly self-taught. The literally endless number of motifs, patterns or variations may seem overwhelming for many players. And then there is the need to apply this knowledge in practice. When confronted with such a vast amount of data, people very quickly tend to start looking for more general points of reference, or maybe even shortcuts intended to put them on the fast-track to mastery.

Before reaching the GM title at the age of 21 I used to be very principled, digesting book after book. I purchased whatever title appeared on the market – this was my method. With little or no access to professional coaching services, I believed that hard work (understood as memorizing idea after idea and maneuver after maneuver) would eventually pay off. There was little or no order within this 'learning process', nor was there any understanding of how to apply this knowledge in a tournament game. To give you an example, I knew every single pawn-structure that was ever discussed in textbooks, but I still felt lost like a babe in the woods whenever my games diverged from these studied structures.

Only when I started training others in my early twenties, as probably the youngest coach in the history of the Polish National Youth Chess Academy, did I discover that this 'learning process' was not the way. I witnessed some players working as I did in the past – training extremely hard, but only seeing the fruits of their labors after a long period of time. Indeed, so long that they were discouraged from further work. This experience as a young coach taught me one very important lesson: the training regime of every single player needs to be not only organized around whatever might be taking place on the board (plans and ideas in various stages of the game), but should also cover more concrete topics pertaining to thought processes and decision making.

Over time, this prompted me to develop my own training system. It enabled me to guide my students on their path to chess improvement in a systematic manner. Nowadays, and as a coach at my own chess school, I prepare the curricula of my pupils in accordance with the rule of 'three tiers':

Exemplary training curriculum

Tier 1: Core Training *Basic elements that need to be understood by every single player, irrespective of their playing strength and current knowledge*

Tier 2: Personalized Program *Targeted exercises, customized to the needs of the specific player and designed to eliminate their particular flaws*

Tier 3: Universal Chess Training *Thought processes and decision making in practice, whether this infers the application of knowledge or not*

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Creating a distinct methodology for Tiers 1 and 2 was child's play, but how about Tier 3? To devise something truly instructive in this area I investigated a few thousand games of my students. My purpose was to seek to establish what type of mental mistakes they made most frequently. The results of my research surprised me. I discovered that whether the given player was rated 1600 or 2500 they were all most likely to experience difficulties when making use of the following five skills:

1. *Anticipation & Prophylaxis*
2. *Attack & Defense*
3. *Coordination*
4. *Statics & Dynamics*
5. *Weakness*

Statistically speaking, the above five skills were involved in more than 80% of the strategic problems my students were facing in their games. I quickly realized that mastering these five skills would mean that only 20%, or every fifth problem, would potentially come as a surprise to them. Taking an important exam and knowing upfront 80% of the material discussed therein sounds like quite a competitive edge to me!

As you can tell by now these skills are not something particularly concrete, but rather a general set of skills. Moreover, they are necessary if you are to learn the skill of handling your pieces properly. It will enable you to apply all the knowledge you have *in practice*. However, calling them 'soft skills' is not sufficient. I, therefore, prefer to speak of them as 'Universal Chess Training', because knowing them will most certainly help you play a good move whether the position seems familiar or not.

And this is exactly what this book is all about. Below you will find a short introduction to the essentials of these five aspects. It presents basic knowledge that will not only enhance your results but also facilitate your ability to negotiate the rest of this book. The information given below represents merely a quantum of knowledge conveyed herein: every single game is meant to bring you deeper and deeper into the discussed subject matter.

II. Universal Chess Training

1. Anticipation & Prophylaxis

Anticipation is the ability to predict the future, to foresee the consequences of one's actions. Prophylaxis, on the other hand, represents the habit of constantly asking yourself 'What does my opponent want to do?' and/or 'How is the opponent going to respond to these intended actions of mine?'. Those are questions that may (and should!) be asked all the time and paying attention to the answers will very rarely let you down.

Those skills are so valuable because good play is all about being able to tell the future. If you can do that you are already halfway prepared for what is about to come. In case you are wondering, the difference between anticipation and prophylaxis is as follows: prophylaxis infers the possibility of preventing the opponent's intentions. Anticipation rather emphasizes the importance of understanding the direction in which the game is going.

Prophylaxis tends to have a negative psychological effect on the opponent, it is very difficult to play

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if your opponent predicts your actions in advance and prevents whatever you might be up to. At the same time, we must not forget that this is not a purely defensive weapon at all. More often than not, anticipation is going to assure us that it is the right time to attack, or even compel us to do so, otherwise we may face some hardships ourselves.

2. Attack & Defense

Attacking and defending are like reflections in a mirror. The same set of rules applies to both situations, with the only difference being perspective. In other words, when attacking, we are advised to include as many pieces as we can. If we are defending, however, we are doing the exact thing albeit with a slightly alternative goal: namely to exchange pieces to reduce the opponent's attacking potential.

Both approaches stem from the very same principle, known widely in chess literature as the 'Attack-Defense-Ratio'. In plain terms, the Attack-Defense-Ratio represents the difference between the number of pieces taking part in the attack and the number of pieces defending. If the difference is 2 or more the chances for success are relatively high. If it is lower than 2 do not even try! The reason for this is as follows: whenever you start an attack you need to take into consideration that the number of your pieces present on the board might decrease at quite a rapid pace, whether through possible exchanges or sacrifices. The surplus of 2 or more pieces means that, at the end of the day when the opponent's king is left alone and defenseless, you will still have enough forces at your disposal to mate him.

Obviously, this is a very crude rule and a multitude of reservations need to be mentioned. First, the issue is not solely about the *quantity* of the pieces taking part in the attack, but also about their *quality.* For example, you usually would not want to start an onslaught against a black king castled kingside without a knight drifting somewhere around the f5-square. Also, the coordination of your forces cannot be underestimated either. The last thing you want to see is a large number of your pieces failing to storm the barricades of the opponent's inferior position simply because his defensive arrangement happens to be better organized.

3. Coordination

Coordination means the number of possibilities your pieces happen to enjoy in a given position. This can pertain to a single piece or many pieces altogether. The most famous derivative of this rule is the principle of the weakest piece. According to this principle it takes only one piece of yours to be 'bad' to spoil your entire position. For this reason, the principle of the weakest piece should be considered as a practical guideline. Whenever you have time during a game, you may want to consider how to improve your weakest piece. Examples of 'bad' pieces include the light-squared bishop in the French Defense and knights on the edge of the board. But make sure that you do not follow this rule blindly. After all, some hypermodern openings like the King's Indian Defense may surprise you in this respect more than once.

In this book we divide the means required to improve the coordination of pieces into two groups: static and dynamic. Static means bringing one of your pieces to greener pastures. For example, re-routing White's dark-squared bishop in the Winawer to the splendid a3-square. Such endeavors clearly improve the situation on the board, but usually affect only the coordination of the piece

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involved. Dynamic means, on the other hand, imply a drastic change to the character of the position, leading to a global modification of the capabilities of all of your pieces. This can happen in the form of a pawn-lever (e.g. the ...e6-e5 push in the French Defense), or after the material balance becomes disturbed (e.g. after a positional exchange sacrifice on c3 in the Sicilian Defense).

Because chess involves two players, it is not only the coordination of your own pieces that need to be taken care of. You may also need to dedicate some time to spoiling the efforts of your opponent. If you can kill two birds with one stone, that would be even better!

4. Statics & Dynamics

To speak of things 'static' in chess means everything that is stable and subject to changes only under a considerable amount of force, e.g. the pawn-structure or the material balance in an otherwise calm position. Enjoying a static edge usually implies that if nothing changes this type of advantage is going to allow us to bring the full point home without any undue adventures. By comparison 'dynamics' take place in a game of chess when the balance is disturbed, e.g. when one of the players sacrifices material for something intangible be it an attack or initiative. The nature of a dynamic edge tends to be ephemeral – it can be raging at a given moment only to completely disappear two moves later if mishandled.

The above distinction is not only of theoretical importance as we must be able to grasp what kind of position we have in front of us. It means that we will know when we need to change the nature of the position. Suppose we are being dominated by our opponent and we need to break his progress. When doing so, however, there are two guidelines that need to be followed:

a. If our opponent has a strategically superior position (e.g. due to a smaller amount of pawn-weaknesses in his camp), you would usually be advised to 'wiggle', that is to destabilize the position by seeking tactical/dynamic opportunities.

b. However, when finding yourself under dynamic pressure (e.g. when under attack or when the opponent has the initiative), the best way of countering this will be to drain the activity out of the opponent's position. If successful, whatever remains of the position afterwards should favor us, especially if it was positionally advantageous for us from the start.

5. Weakness

In general, a 'weakness' represents an element of the position which is not defended well enough. Moreover, this weakness should be defended due to its importance for the assessment of the position as a whole. There can be as many types of weaknesses as there are elements in chess: pawns, pieces, files, ranks, diagonals, even a whole color complex of squares can be a weakness. What is even more interesting, there are elements in chess that are considered weak or strong relative to the stage of the game (an IQP in the middlegame/endgame) or the nature of the pawn structure (bishop pair in open/closed positions).

There is one more thing that needs to be mentioned in the context of weaknesses. Namely, if you are ever struggling to find a plan during the game, focus your attention on the weaknesses in the position. It is not a coincidence that more experienced players repeatedly say that 'If you see a weakness, you already have a plan!'. The weaknesses of your opponent may represent some kind of inducement for

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you to start active action. However, in the absence of such weaknesses, there is nothing wrong in fixing whatever holes you see in your position before embarking on actions directed strictly at your foe.

III. How to work with this book?

I am a huge fan of the science of life optimization, in 'maxing out' whatever I can achieve in every aspect of life to which I turn my attention. Because of that, the book that you have in your hands is constructed in a very specific manner. Here are a few principles that I followed while writing it in order to make sure that you profit from it the most:

1. Original content: One specific difficulty related to studying chess as a whole is the lack of high quality material on the market. There are, in fact, some very good publishing houses out there but if you are serious about chess you will soon notice the limited number of books that have actually enriched you as a player. What is even worse, after a while you will notice that examples tend endlessly to repeat themselves. For some strange reason, many authors seem to love repeating games from the past, despite them having been commented on in other sources numerous times before. Another typical 'sin' of chess authors is to give their workbook a concrete title (e.g., 'Prophylaxis'), when perhaps only 25% of their material is strictly relevant to their topic. They offer valuable training material, but the remaining 75% function merely as padding. Additionally, even today many examples cited in books are not checked with engines, which means that they are objectively incorrect or feature two or three alternative solutions. Given all of this, you might sometimes feel demotivated before even starting.

Why anyone would produce books like that beats me. But I do know that working with such books is not going to profit you as much as analyzing original, well-annotated content. Hence, I decided that this book is going to be different. The 90 games selected for this book have been cherry-picked out of thousands, without resorting to other books or commentaries available online. Most of them come from the years 2018-2019; only a handful are slightly older. Simply put what you are getting here is value for what you paid.

2. Three levels of difficulty: This book is aimed to benefit a very wide chess audience starting from 1600 upwards. The first part, titled 'What every Russian schoolboy solves' is aimed at players rated 1600-1900. It also includes the highest number of motifs considered 'typical' in modern chess literature. The second part ('Enter at your own risk: Puzzles may bite') is designed for 1900-2200 players. They are, therefore, more complex in nature. The third and last section is titled 'Grandmasters wept solving these'... and there is a reason for this. The only thing I can say about them without spoiling the fun is that they require the highest level of abstract thinking to be solved.

Although I did my best to sort these games in an order based on their complexity, this division remains very subjective. Some of the exercises from the first part are not necessarily much easier than the ones designed for more experienced players. At the same time aspiring amateurs stand a chance at solving the entirety of the puzzles in every chapter. That said, some of the finer points here and there will likely remain harder to grasp. Knowledge is surely going to help you out sometimes, but because the majority of examples are, in a certain sense, innovative, what will matter most is how good a "chess thinker" you are.

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3. Mixed exercises with no hints: To further advance your learning curve I decided that the puzzles should not be sorted according to themes. They are only sorted according to difficulty. In my view offering a hint about the topic of a given exercise will bias the person solving them, and in so doing neutralize the learning effect. As a result, you will not know beforehand what the given exercise is all about and which of the skills mentioned above will be useful in solving it. It follows that training with this book will resemble a practical game as much as possible. The solutions, however, will not only indicate the underlying idea behind each puzzle, but will also elaborate in detail upon both the suggested continuation and, very often, on additional problems of practical value that could also be meaningful in the given case.

4. Focus on what remained behind the scenes: The average playing strength of the chess populace may, indeed, be rising globally. But it has still been an arduous task to find suitable training material. The book that you are holding represents the result of approximately 400 hours of hard work with a quarter of these hours dedicated exclusively to the selection of games. It became apparent at the beginning of the process that full games, as played even by strong grandmasters, are marred by bad mistakes, and therefore seldom represent solid training material. Although some model games played at the board are still going to be included, the vast majority of the examples in this book start only the moment one of the players missed a great resource. There will be a particular focus on explaining what went wrong and how this mistake could have been avoided or the play improved upon. As most of the games constitute high-profile encounters, every puzzle you solve is simultaneously going to mean that you did better than a strong grandmaster!

IV. Acknowledgements

This book would not have been published had it not been for the invaluable help of a few people that I would like to mention.

First of all, I would like to thank my parents for their love and unending support. Without them I would never have been able to pursue my chess passion.

A special thanks also goes to my dear wife who was kind enough to take over most of the duties relating to the care of our infant daughter when I was writing – you are a real hero!

Furthermore, I cannot help but mention students of my chess school, most notably Phillip Eltakchi, Kyron Griffith, Daniel Maxwell and Sebastian Mueer. I cordially thank them for all the invaluable advice and comments which inspired me to go the extra mile more than once.

Lastly, I would like to thank you for purchasing this book to spend some quality time herein – may you find it both instructive and entertaining.

Any comments or criticism you might have is very much welcome and can be sent to my e-mail address: wojciech.moranda@gmail.com.

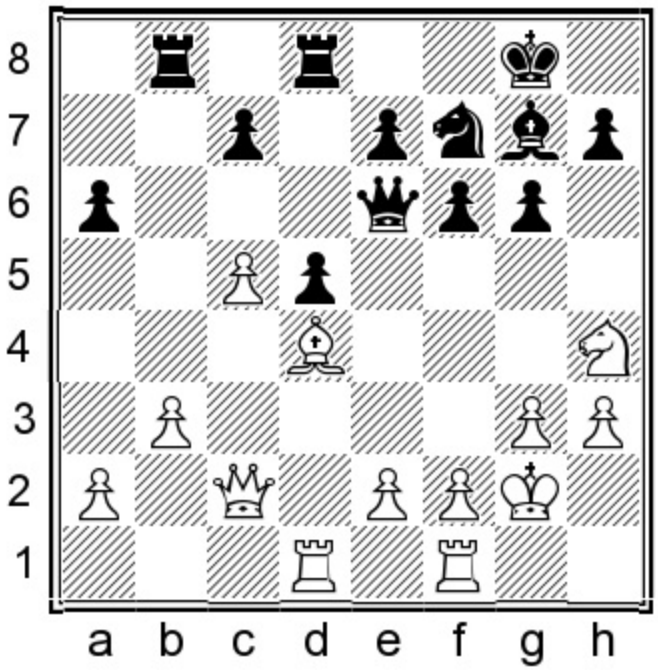
GM Wojciech Moranda
Wroclaw, September 2020

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Show in Text Mode

Chapter One
What every Russian schoolboy solves

1
Winterberg – Lubbe
Magdeburg 2019



□ *22.?*

Show/Hide Solution

1
Winterberg, Lukas (2376)
Lubbe, Nikolas (2431)
Magdeburg 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
What does my opponent want to do?

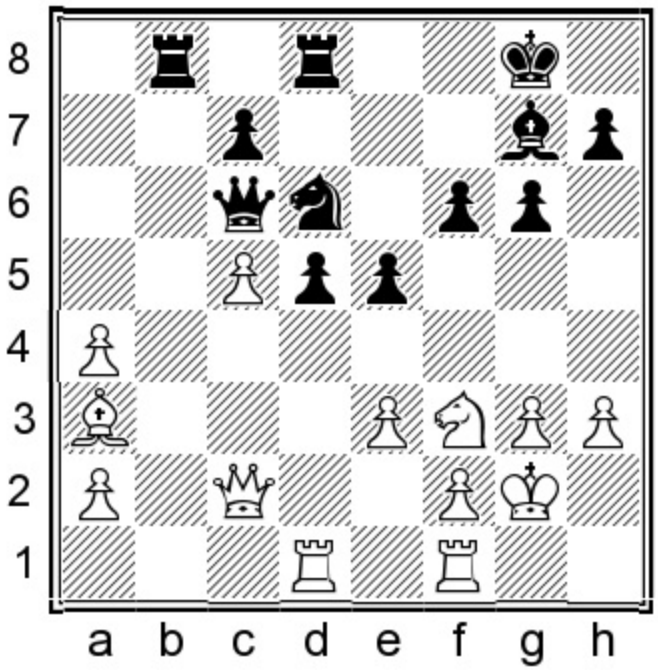
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A brief review of the position reveals that a major backlash is coming in White's direction. Black just needs to remove the queen from e6 and make way for the e7-pawn to go all the way to e5. As a result, White will not only be forced to concede space, but also have to spend time re-routing his minor pieces from their overly exposed outposts on d4 and h4. But this would by no means be the end of the story for White. With Black expanding his pieces would improve in quality, and it would only be a matter of time before they would shift their attention towards possible weaknesses present in White's camp. Such a weakness is represented by the c5-pawn, which would be rather difficult to defend should the white bishop be compelled to step aside. At the same time, if White becomes too absorbed with maintaining control over the queenside, Black could very effectively switch to an attack against the white king due to his space advantage by means of ...♘f7-g5. That is a grim prospect for sure but maybe there is an antidote to this looming chaos?

22.f4!

A superb prophylactic measure! White not only prevents any of Black's tricks related to the ...♘f7-g5 maneuver, but also significantly hampers Black's potential ...e7-e5 push. Furthermore, should Black be passive in his actions, White could even flirt with the idea of launching his own attack with f4-f5. Black is, therefore, advised to handle this position with care.

A) In the game, White proceeded with 22.♘f3?!, which is simply too tame. After 22...♕c6 23.♗b2 e5 24.e3 Black could claim that he has already made great progress, but he would not stop at that as the queenside has yet to be conquered! There would come 24...a5 25.♗a3 a4 with strong pressure against the white b3-pawn. If it stays on that square it will fall the moment Black arranges a rook battery along the b-file. If he loses his temper, however, and takes with 26.bxa4 Black is going to be more than pleased to take control over c4 by means of the tactical 26...♘d6!∓



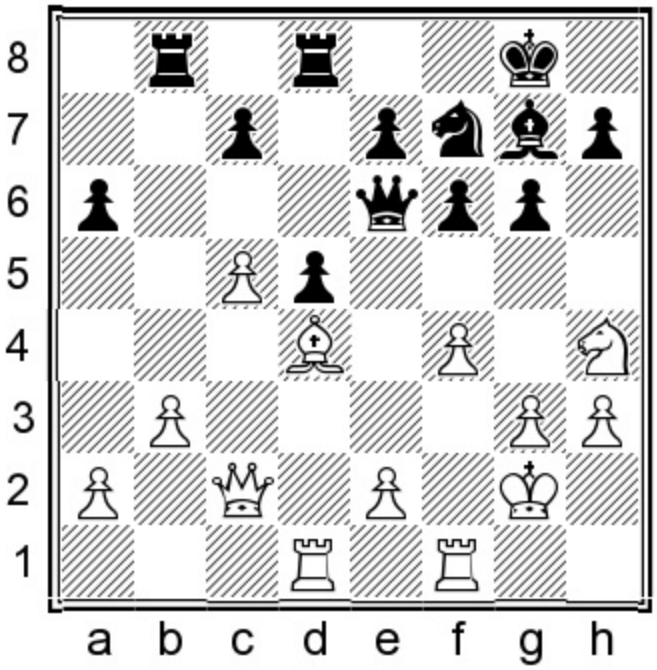
Position after: 26...♘d6!∓

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The resultant position already looks out of control for White. His queenside pawns are falling, one after the other.

B) 22.♗b2?!, on the other hand, allows Black to strike on the other side of the board: 22...♘g5! and now, after 23.g4, Black could try to trade chances of a kingside attack for hopes of gobbling up the c5-pawn with 23...♕e4+ 24.♕xe4 ♘xe4 25.♖c1 ♖b5!∓. Quite unexpectedly, the said pawn would be in serious trouble again. An interim solution for White would be to move this pawn one square farther. But without any more support out there, capturing it would most probably represent delayed gratification for Black.

22.f4!



Position after: 22.f4!

22...♕e4+

Black's best chance to retain at least a shadow of counterplay is probably to exchange queens on e4 in a way that would help him contest the d-file.

A) 22...♘h6 leads to a comparable position after 23.f5 gxf5 24.♘xf5 ♘xf5 25.♖xf5 ♕e4+ 26.♕xe4 dxe4 27.♖ff1⇄ whereas, in this scenario, the black central pawns are less menacing. If I were Black, I would hurry to make sure that the e4-pawn does not get entangled and captured any time soon, should the white king approach it from the kingside.

B) 22...f5?! rules out any f4-f5 pushes from White's side but is strategically faulty. This not only undermines a possible ...e7-e5 thrust, but White is even in a position to prevent that e5 push from coming at all with something like 23.♘f3 ♗xd4 24.♖xd4 c6 25.♖a4 ♕c8 26.♕c3± when White would have control of the situation on both wings, and must, therefore, be judged to be at least a tad better in

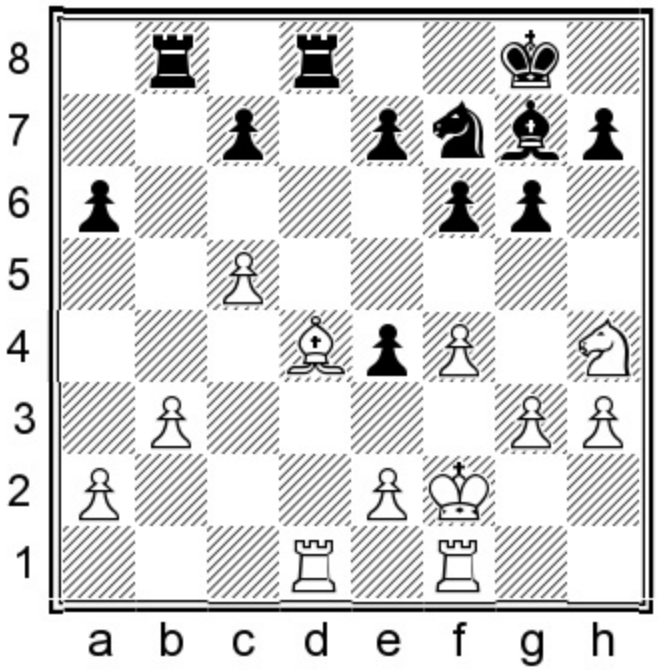
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general.

23.♕xe4 dxe4

Now if White simply brings the king closer to the queenside and reactivates his hitherto dormant knight, his position should be easily defensible, e.g.

24.♔f2



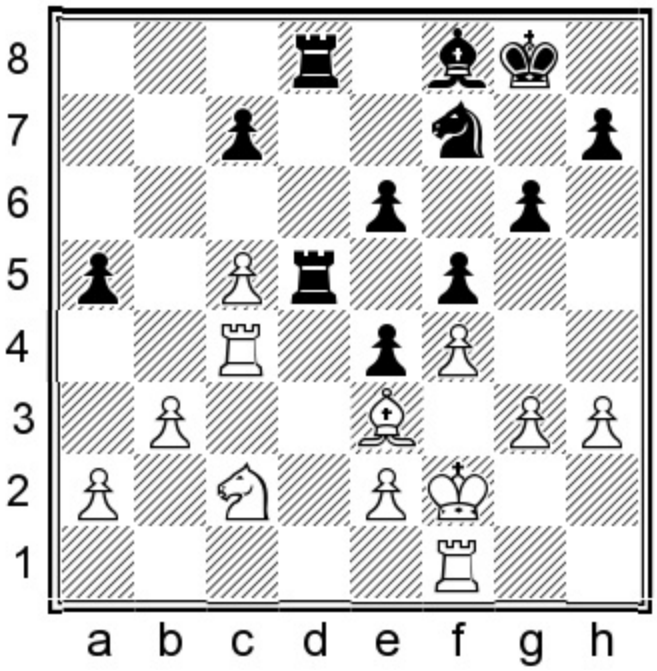
Position after: 24.♔f2

24...♖d5

24...f5 25.♗xg7 ♔xg7 26.♘g2= and the idle white knight is brought to new, greener pastures on the queenside via e3.

25.♗e3 ♖bd8 26.♖c1 f5 27.♘g2 a5 28.♘e1 ♗f8 29.♖c4 e6 30.♘c2=

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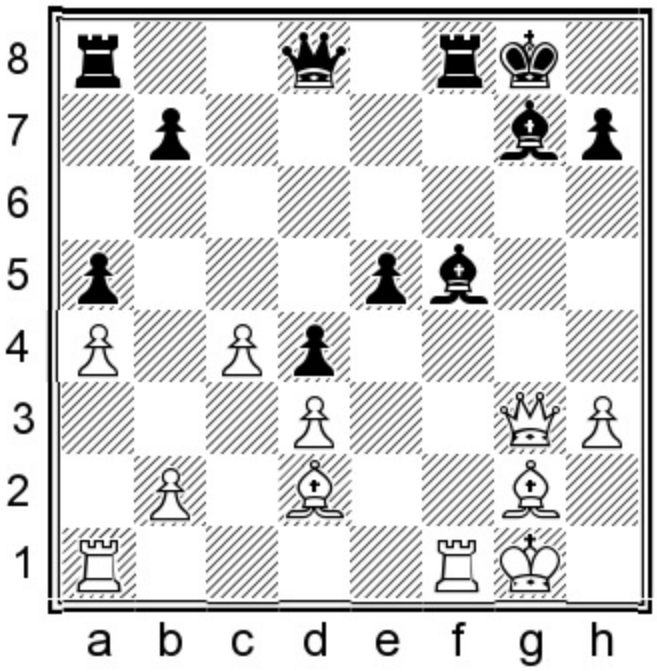
Position after: 30.♘c2=

With everything defended and Black still far from activating his f7-knight, White would be able to claim equality here.

What is quite important is that Black cannot freely infiltrate along the d-file, as this could cost him the a5-pawn later on.

2
Shahinyan – Minasian
Yerevan 2019

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■ *23...?*

Show/Hide Solution

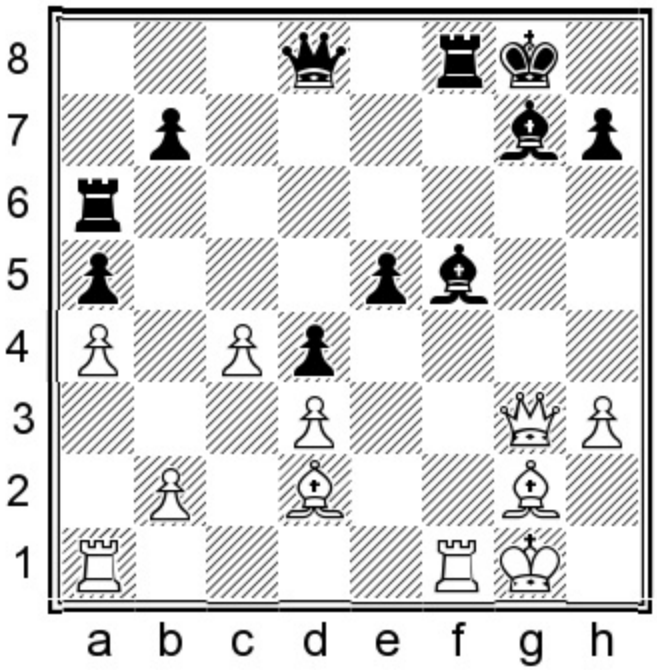
2
Shahinyan, David (2429)
Minasian, Artashes (2472)
Yerevan 2019

Attack & Defense
Include all your forces into the attack

Material is equal here, but both sides have at least one thing to complain about. In White's case it is probably the backward d3-pawn that bothers him as it is already under attack. Black, on the other hand, is probably not too euphoric about his own b7-pawn as it could be captured any day now. At the same time, if we ask ourselves what type of position we have in front of us we will quickly reach the conclusion that it is very dynamic in nature. The main reason for this is that both kings are actually quite vulnerable along the g-file. Hence, and notwithstanding some small material casualties along the way, the player who can first launch an attack against the opponent's king should be the one emerging victorious at the end of the day. If you know this, you already know everything that you need...

23...♖a6!

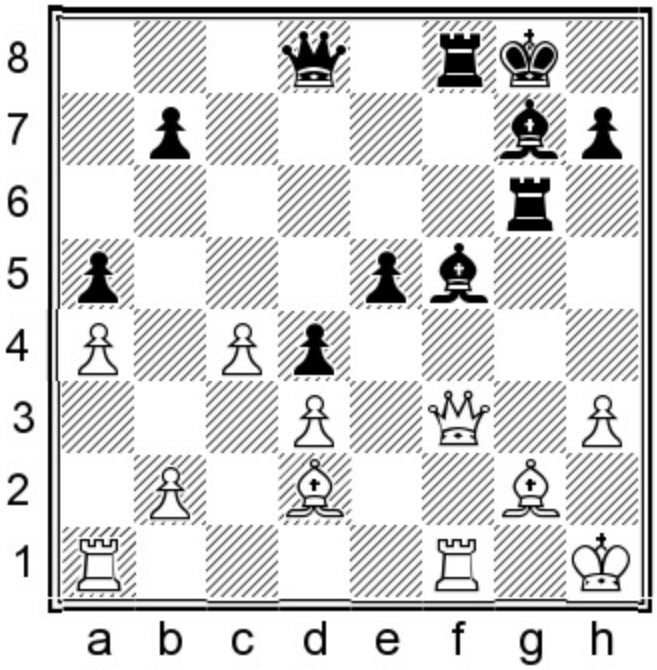
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Position after: 23...♖a6!

Well played! Black does not need to care about the pawn on b7 because it cannot be taken for the time being. However, even if the pawn falls in a move or two, the attack coming against the white king on the kingside is going to compensate for that with interest. Small material investments are inherent to attacks and this game is no exception to the rule.

24.♔h1 ♖g6 25.♕f3



Position after: 25.♕f3

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25...♔h8!

Black is carrying out his attack in a text-book manner – before bringing the rest of his forces towards the kingside, he makes sure that his own monarch is perfectly safe. In particular, he ensures that there are no nasty surprises awaiting him should White give a check on d5. Black would also prefer to make sure that the arrival of the white queen to d5 is not going to result in any exchanges as these represent a natural defensive method, reducing the attacking potential of the opponent. Although attacking chess is based hugely on agility, this little investment of time will certainly not hinder Black from continuing his attack in a smooth manner very soon. As they say – if you want to change the world, make sure to start off by making your own bed.

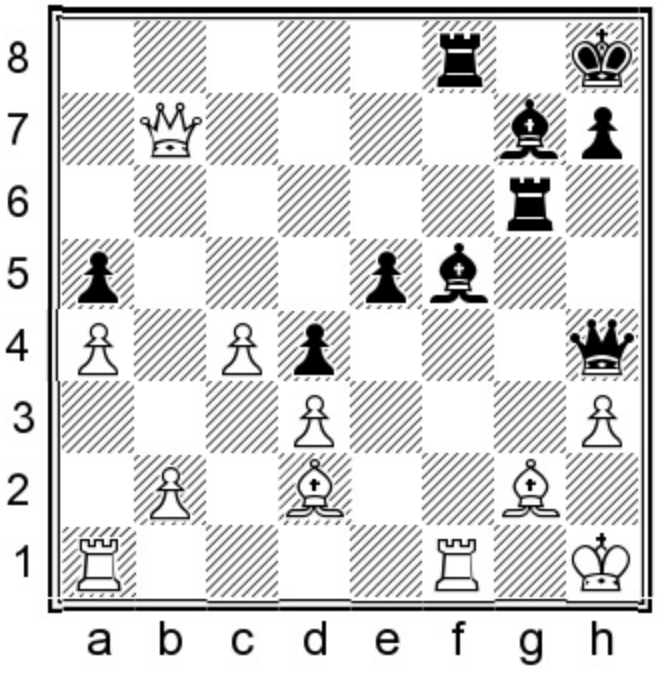
25...♕h4?! would have been too hasty in view of 26.♕d5+ ♗e6 27.♖xf8+ ♗xf8 and now after the mind-boggling 28.♖f1!= quite unexpectedly, Black would not be allowed to take on d5 due to the resulting perpetual check. Furthermore, if the black bishop cannot move from e6 anymore, White's king immediately becomes much more secure.

Here White faltered and quickly went down for the count; still, even the logical looking

26.♕xb7

leaves White on the edge of defeat after

26...♕h4



Position after: 26...♕h4

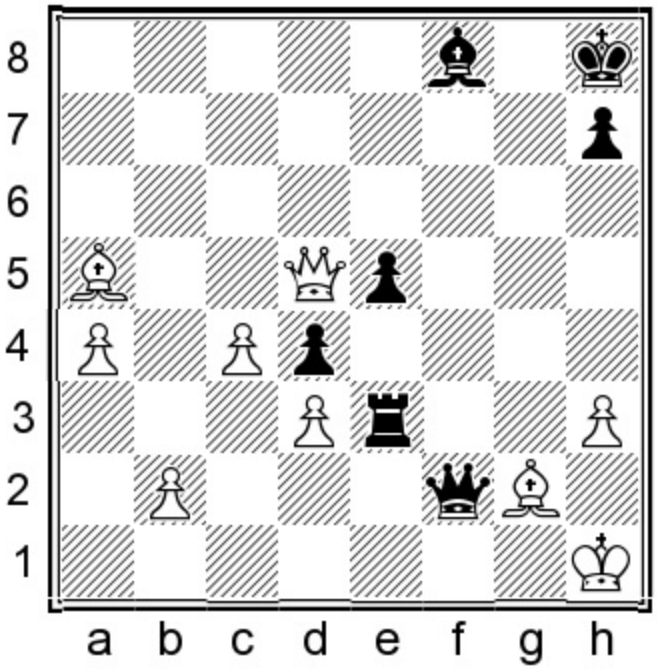
27.♖xf5

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27.♗e1?! ♕h5 28.♖f3 ♖g8–+ changes nothing.

It is pleasing to witness how all of Black's pieces are taking part in the attack while White is getting the short end of the stick due to his misplaced pieces. It is not only that the Attack/Defense Ratio speaks in his favor very strongly (>2), but also the pace with which he managed to include all of his pieces into the attack. It makes a dazzling impression.

27...♖xf5 28.♖f1 ♖xf1+ 29.♗xf1 ♕f2 30.♗g2 ♗f8 31.♗xa5 ♖g3! 32.♕d5 ♖e3!∓

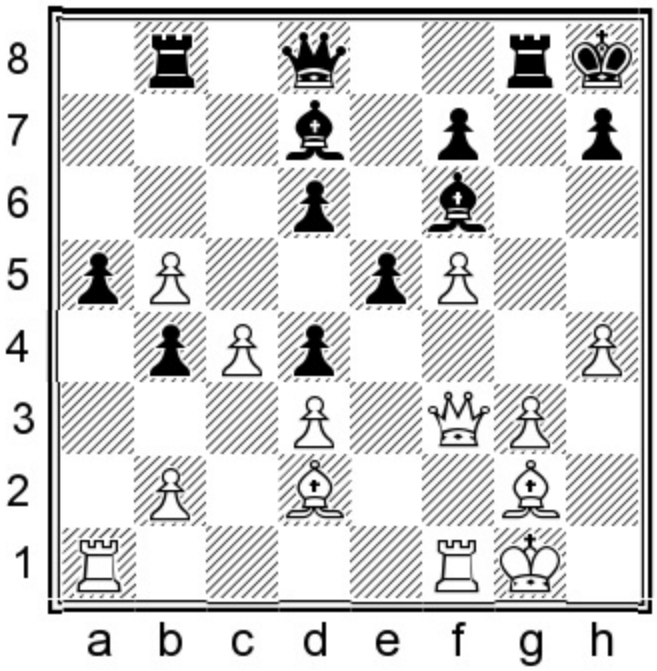


Position after: 32...♖e3!∓

Due to the multitude of threats along the first and second rank, White would need to rely on some miracle if he were to stay in the game.

3
Demchenko – Jones
St Petersburg 2018

chesstouring.com



■ *23...?*

Show/Hide Solution

3
Demchenko, Anton (2679)
Jones, Gawain (2682)
St Petersburg 2018

Coordination
Principle of the weakest piece – inclusion into the attack

With equal material on board, the second thing that draws one's attention in this position is the highly original pawn structure. White has two pawn islands compared to Black's three, which should, in general, favor White. At the same time the viability of the pawn structure cannot be assessed in isolation from the pieces surrounding it as pieces are like muscles entwining the spine (the pawns). A bad pawn structure (let's call it a 'hunchback') will severely obstruct even the strongest pieces, whereas even the healthiest of spines completely deprived of muscles (piece support) is inevitably going to fall. Translating this into plain chess language we can say that with a slightly worse pawn structure Black must try hard to maintain equality unless the activity of his pieces can compensate for his structural inferiority. For the moment, however, only the black g8-rook may brag about its placement, occupying a semi-open file and exerting pressure against a backward white pawn. Black's other pieces not only seem to be uncoordinated, but their general usability leaves a lot to be desired. What is even worse, White may wish to execute a g3-g4-g5 push in the coming future. This might

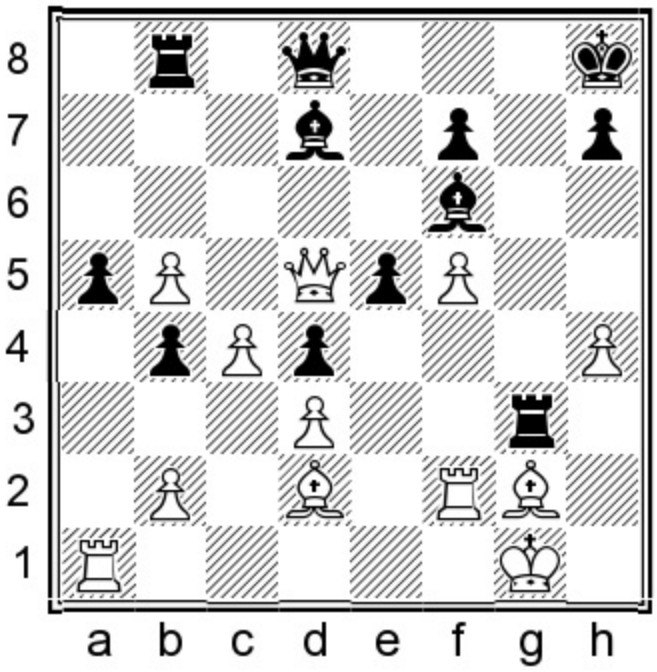
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take some time and preparation (♗d2-e1 & ♕d1-h5), but if it comes, Black's fate would be more or less sealed. What is your best chance here?

23...♗c8!

A splendid bishop transfer! The principle of the weakest piece is applicable here as the sad bishop was simply terrible on d7. It does nothing but look at the white b5-pawn. Now it is being re-routed via c8 to b7, it will not only neutralize the white light-squared counterpart, but also weaken the position of the white king.

The only real alternative for Black would have been 23...d5!? pursuing another central breakthrough with ...e5-e4 and massive complications thereafter, but after the accurate 24.♕xd5 ♖xg3 25.♖f2!!±

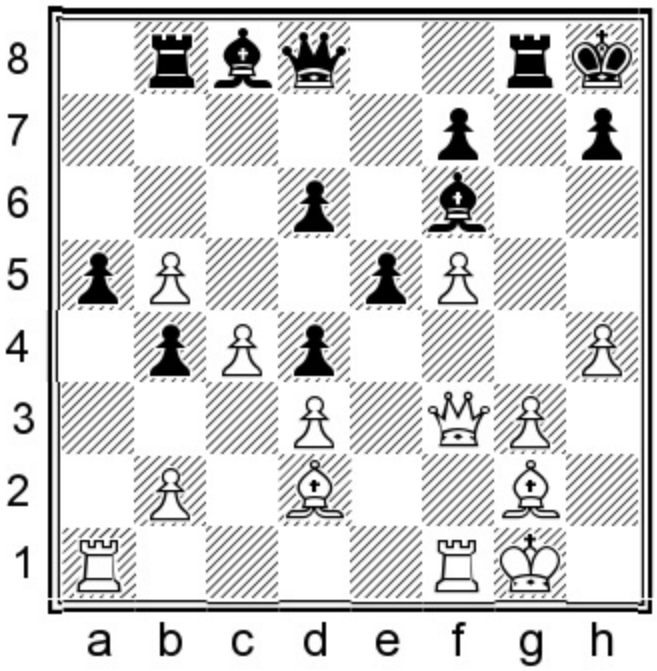


Position after: 25.♖f2!!±

White would have remained in the driver's seat, especially as the greedy 25...♖xd3? loses to 26.♗g5! ♖g3 27.♕d6!+– with Black conceding at least an exchange.

23...♗c8!

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Position after: 23...♗c8!

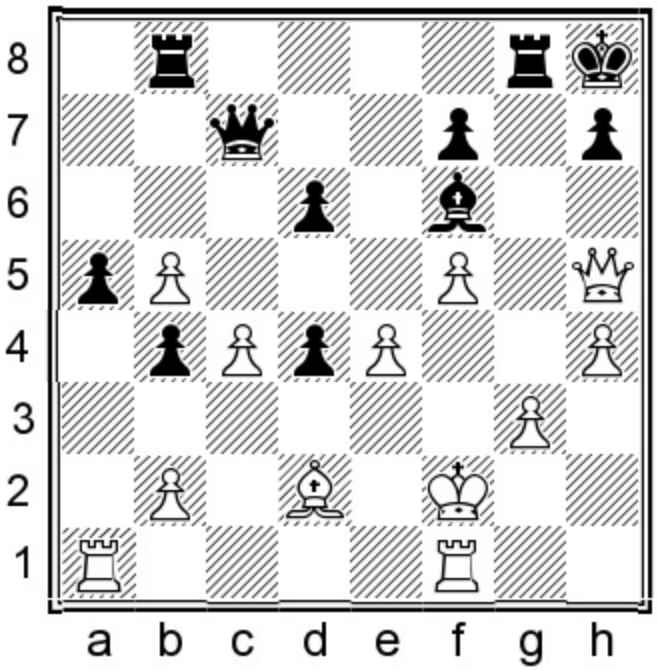
24.♕f2

White's safest try is to remove the queen in advance from any possible attacks.

A) 24.♔h2? Stumbles, quite unexpectedly, into 24...♗xh4!→ when the bishop is taboo because of the powerful black g8-rook hitting the white g2-bishop as a result of the g-file opening up. It is fascinating to observe the so-called 'synergy effect' of the principle of the weakest piece. With the imminent threat of ...♗c8-b7 Black's other pieces have improved. Remember, the f6-bishop was shut in behind a barrier of pawns and it was difficult to find any occupation whatsoever for the black c8-bishop.

B) On the other hand, 24.♔f2 is best met by 24...♗b7 25.♕h5 e4! when after [But not 25...♗xg2 26.♔xg2 ♗xh4? which loses on the spot to 27.♖h1 ♖xg3+ 28.♔f1+–] 26.♗xe4 ♗xe4 27.dxe4 ♕c7!∓

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Position after: 27...♕c7!∞

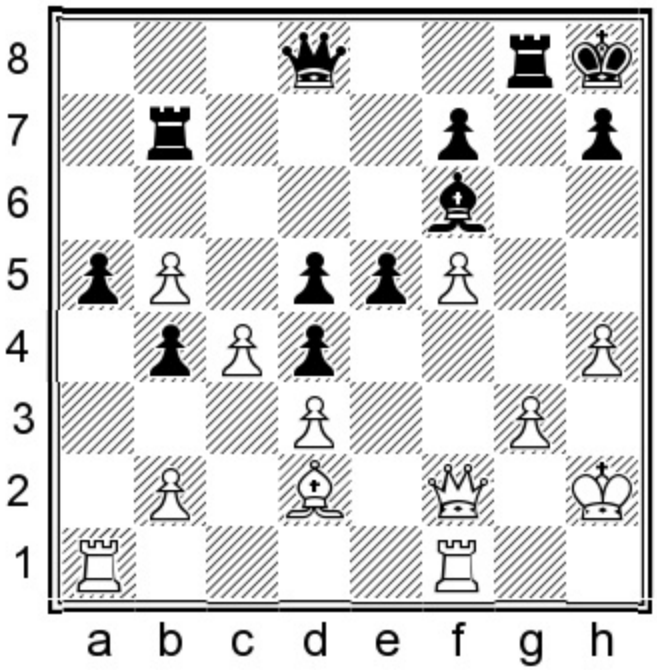
Black is not only threatening to recapture material on c4, but also thinking about carrying out the dynamic ...d6-d5! Push, with an attack against both g3 and c4. In my opinion, it would be best for White to now settle for a draw by repetition with 28.b3 ♗e5= 29.♕h6 ♗g7 30.♕h5 ♗e5=

24...♗b7 25.♗xb7 ♖xb7 26.♔h2

and now Black equalized with the very strong

26...d5!

chesstouring.com



Position after: 26...d5!

which not only eliminates the problem of the backward d6-pawn, but also aims to create a pair of passed pawns in the center, after a possible ...e5-e4 push. White should now handle his position with caution and, as a first step, immobilize Black's central pawn mass. But after

27.♖fe1

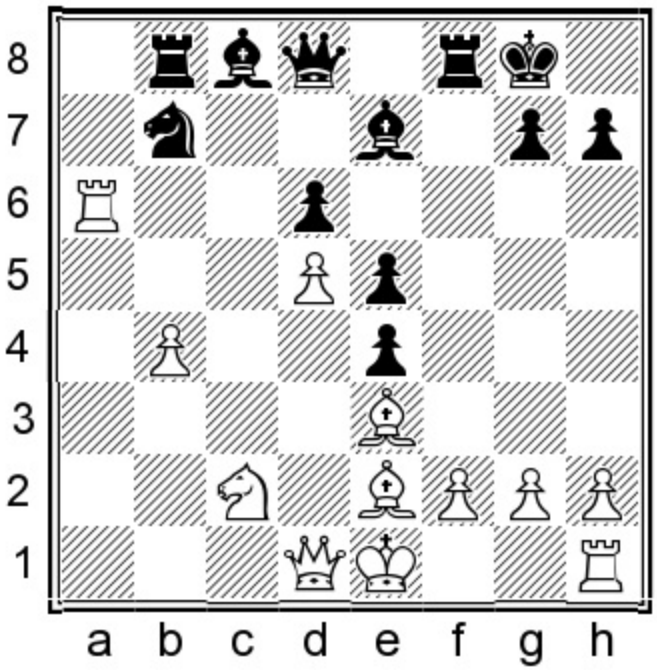
sadly, here Anton faltered with 27.cxd5?! and quickly ended up in a lost position after 27...♖xb5 28.♔h3 ♕xd5 29.♕f3 ♕xf3 30.♖xf3 ♖c8–+. Voluntarily demolishing one's own pawn chain, especially one that prevented the opponent from infiltrating your camp, could not simply go unpunished.

27...♖c7 28.♖ac1 ♖c5 29.b3 ♕d6⇄

The game is very much on, with all three results still possible.

4
Lagarde – Colin
Brest 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *19...?*

Show/Hide Solution

4
Lagarde, Maxime (2600)
Colin, Vincent (2383)
Brest 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Sacrifice for initiative along the squares of a color-complex

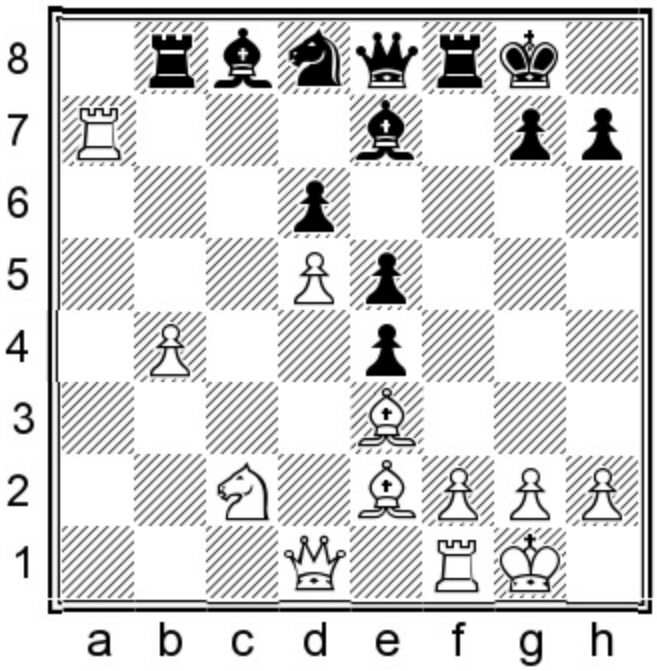
Black is not enjoying himself in this position, one that arose out of the Sicilian Kalashnikov. White has already made significant progress on the queenside – only castling short separates him from being able to throw everything he has got to that flank. In the meantime, Black may have managed to open up the f-file, but the list of his pros ends here. The knight on b7 is dominated by the white b4-pawn, and the e7-bishop is typically 'bad' in this structure. Having said all of this, we are in a position to understand that Black needs to be highly creative here if he wants to obtain some chances.

19...♘c5!

An absolute must as the knight on b7 was not only Black's worst piece, it also negatively affected the prospects of the b8 rook.

A) In the game, Colin went for 19...♕e8? 20.0-0 ♘d8 21.♖a7±

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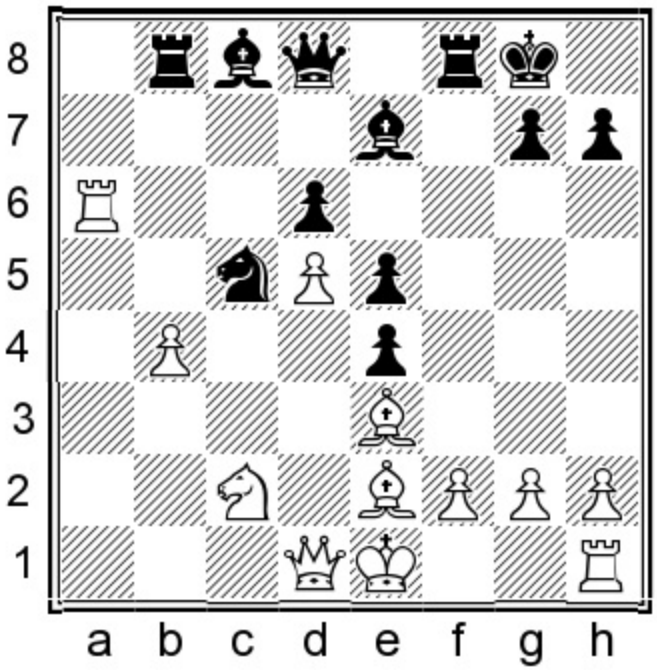
Position after: 21.♖a7±

which is close to losing for more than one reason. First of all, White's b-pawn will advance ultra-quickly and will find itself on b6 in no time. Also, White's c2-knight will soon be redirected via a3 to c4, from where it will exert annoying pressure against the backward d6-pawn. In the meantime, Black is going to find it impossible to create reasonable counterplay on the kingside as the knight still needs a few moves to start threatening anything. Besides, Black cannot even bring his queen into play via g6 as the e7-bishop would be hanging.

B) On the contrary, 19...♗g5 is not a bad move by itself (Black tries to trade off his 'bad' bishop), but much too slow in comparison with White's incoming activity on the queenside, e.g. 20.0-0 ♗xe3 21.♘xe3 ♕g5 and now 22.♕c1!? ♗d7 23.♕c7+– would have left Black's queenside pieces defenseless because of the white queen's infiltration.

19...♘c5!

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Position after: 19...♘c5!

20.♖a7

20.bxc5? is naturally not advised as, after 20...♗xa6 21.♗xa6 ♕a5+ 22.♗d2 ♕xa6–+ White would lose material and, together with that, the game.

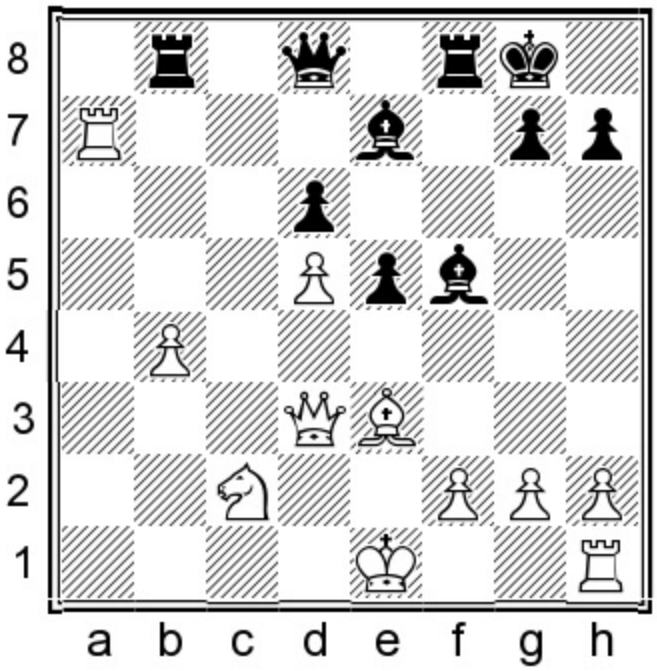
20...♘d3+!

The only logical follow-up. If you have seen this far but refrained from jumping with the knight straight into the abyss you cannot count this one as solved.

20...♘d7?! would have sent Black back to the Stone Ages in terms of dynamic counterplay as now after 21.♕d2 ♘f6 22.b5 ♗d7 23.♘a3± White will be making serious progress on the queenside, while Black's activity on the opposite flank does not manage to get started.

21.♗xd3 exd3 22.♕xd3 ♗f5≅

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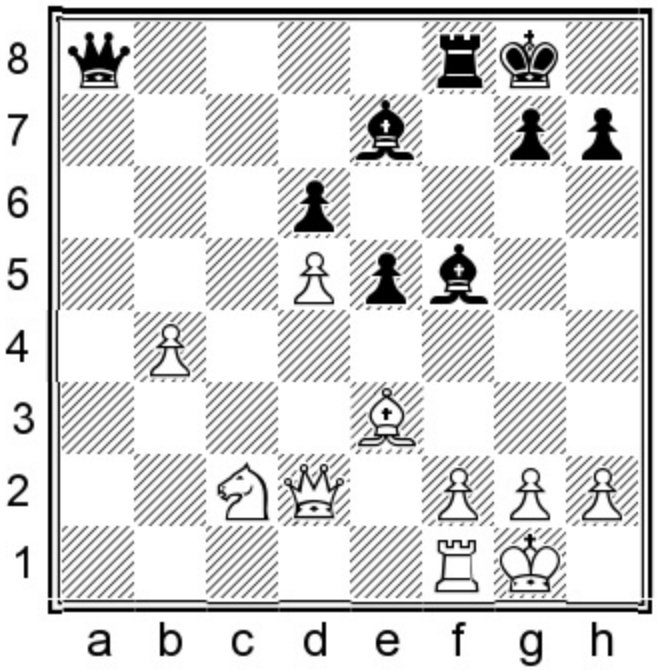
Position after: 22...♗f5⩱

Only now does the point behind Black's suicidal knight venture reveal itself. For the price of a pawn, Black manages to open up his light-squared bishop with a tempo. What is more, due to the absence of a white counterpart, this piece enjoys superiority across squares of the whole color complex. As a result, this not only makes it tough for White to push the b-pawn, but it also makes it difficult to capture the bishop. The following sample lines confirm that it is White who has to be careful in the ensuing position:

23.♕b3

23.♕d2?! allows Black to take the positional initiative with 23...♖a8 24.♖xa8 ♕xa8 25.0-0

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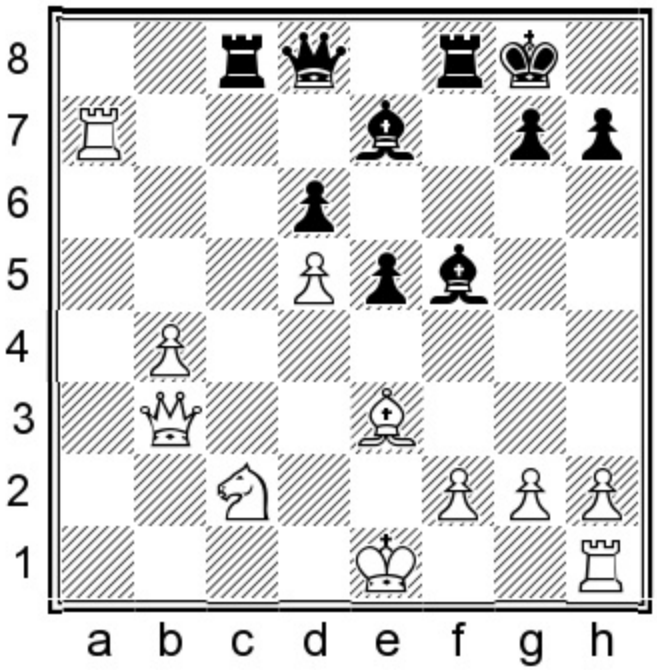
Position after: 25.0-0

A) But not 25...♗xc2?! which would have been a bad mistake from the dynamic perspective as after 26.♕xc2 ♕xd5 27.♖c1± material equality may have been restored but White's pawn looks much stronger than the black central duo as they still need to be activated. This is a typical misjudgment we sometimes make when sacrificing material by trying to recapture the material at the first opportunity. In reality sacrificing material implies that we are playing for something intangible that cannot be expressed in terms of material. There is nothing wrong with regaining it but only 'along the way', so to speak, as our 'investment', the positional or dynamic advantages for which we offered material, matures. If you have problems understanding this concept imagine you are placing a deposit with a bank for a decent annual percent. How much interest do you think you will get if you come back to the teller the very next day and demand your money back?

B) 25...♕a4! 26.♘e1 ♖c8↑ Black is still a pawn down but apart from that has no reasons to worry. White's pieces are passively placed and enjoy no influence over the position. The b4-pawn is not going anywhere soon, whereas its colleague represents an easy target for our light-squared bishop. It is not that White's position is much worse, rather, that he will likely find it unpleasant to play this position because he has to switch to defense despite having more material.

23...♖c8

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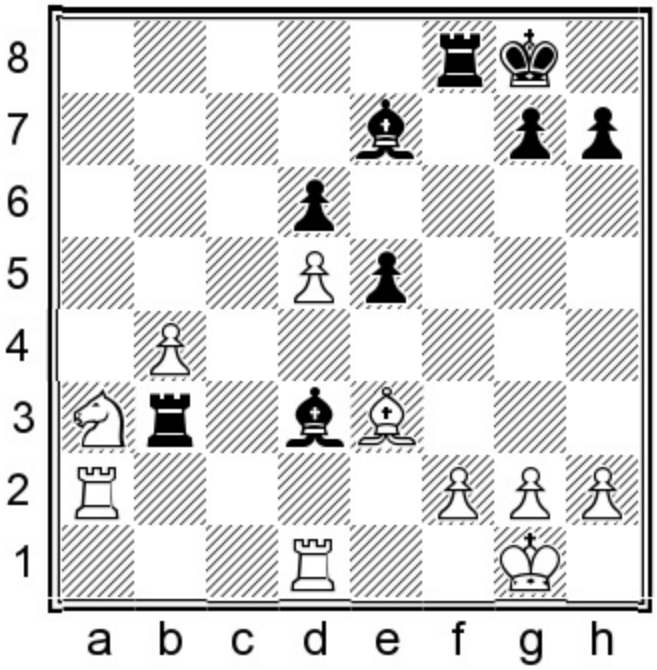


Position after: 23...♖c8

24.♖a2

24.♘a3?! is already a little bit too risky for White as after 24...♕e8 25.0-0 ♕g6 26.♔h1 ♗h4→ White will have to be very careful not to allow any counterattack on the kingside, especially as something like ...♗f5-e4 may already be waiting for him.

24...♕c7 25.♘a3 ♕c3+ 26.♕xc3 ♖xc3 27.0-0 ♗d3 28.♖d1 ♖b3=

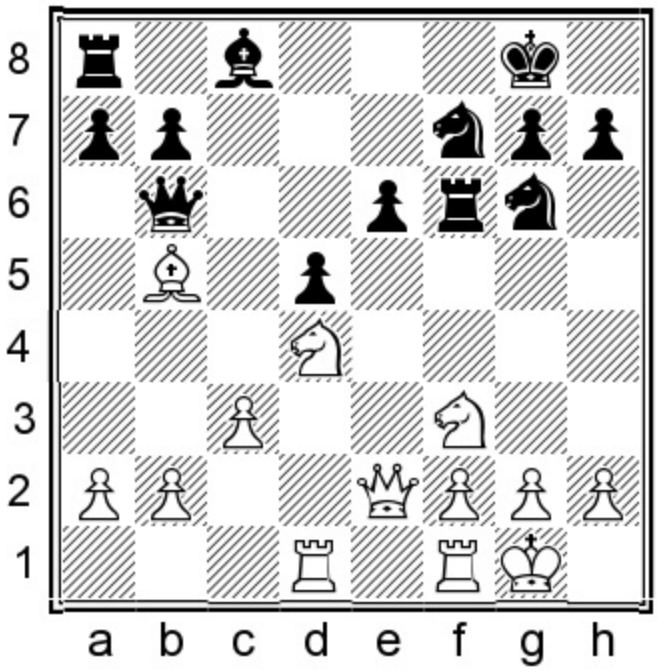


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Position after: 28...♖b3=

The white b4-pawn gets eliminated, with a draw being the most likely outcome.

5
Zanan – Boruchovsky
Israel 2019



□ *17.?*

Show/Hide Solution

5
Zanan, Evgeny (2528)
Boruchovsky, Avital (2525)
Israel 2019

Weakness
Obtaining full control over the center by eliminating its defender

This position arises out of the Advance variation of the Caro-Kann Defense (3.e5 c5), material is equal, but there are some curious events about to unfold in the center. A few moves before, Black decided to soften up White's e5-pawn by means of ...f7-f6 and is now ready to carry out yet another thematic push in these structures, namely ...e6-e5. White cannot allow this to happen. Not only would

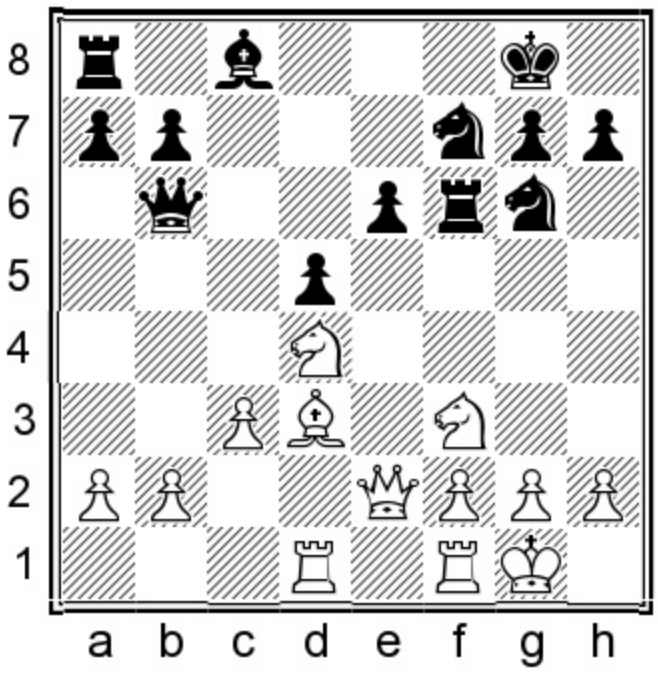
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his pieces get momentarily pushed back, it would also lead to a raging initiative for Black after ...♗c8-g4 and/or ...♘g6-f4. Given the magnitude of the damage that Black could inflict on White's position in such a case, the time for prevention is obviously now.

17.♗e8!

A simple, yet amusing resource which eliminates one of the main supporters of the dreaded ...e6-e5 thrust. With the knight out of the way, it will not be possible for Black to carry out this thematic push. What is even worse for Black, White will gain full control over the e5-square very soon, meaning that Black's c8-bishop will likely remain a 'bad' piece till the end of the game. The play now becomes very one-sided. White first immobilizes the e6-pawn, and then slowly increases the pressure against it. Simultaneously, White will try to gain space on both wings to stretch Black's forces until they are unable to defend all of the weaknesses at the same time.

A) By comparison, 17.♗d3?!



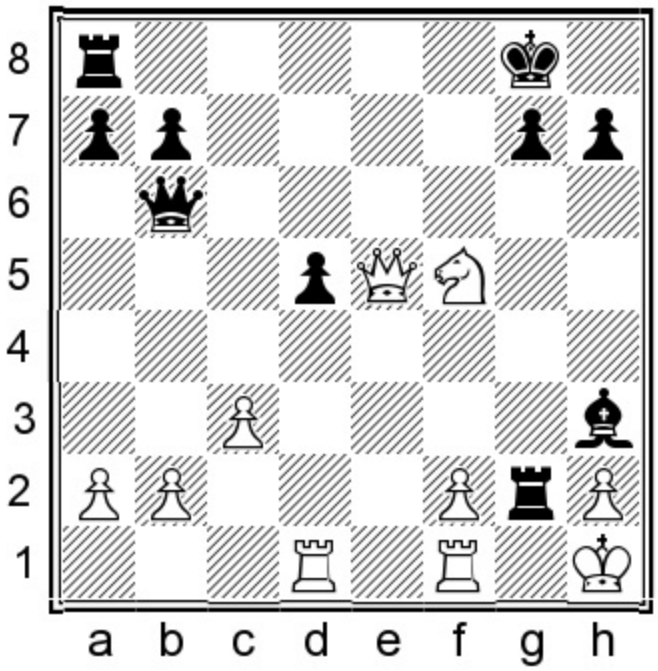
Position after: 17.♗d3?!

follows the very same ideas as the text but has a drawback.

A1) After 17...♘f4↑ the white queen is faced with an unpleasant choice. It may stay on the e-file and prevent Black from carrying out the thematic ...e6-e5 push, but this luxury is going to cost him a whole pawn. The other option is to run away horizontally, thus saving the aforementioned pawn allowing his opponent to launch his central pawn duo at once.

A2) But not 17...e5?! even if the position arising after the more or less forced 18.♗xg6 ♖xg6 19.♘xe5 ♘xe5 20.♕xe5 ♗h3 looks tempting at first. After the razor sharp 21.♘f5 ♖xg2+ 22.♔h1⇄

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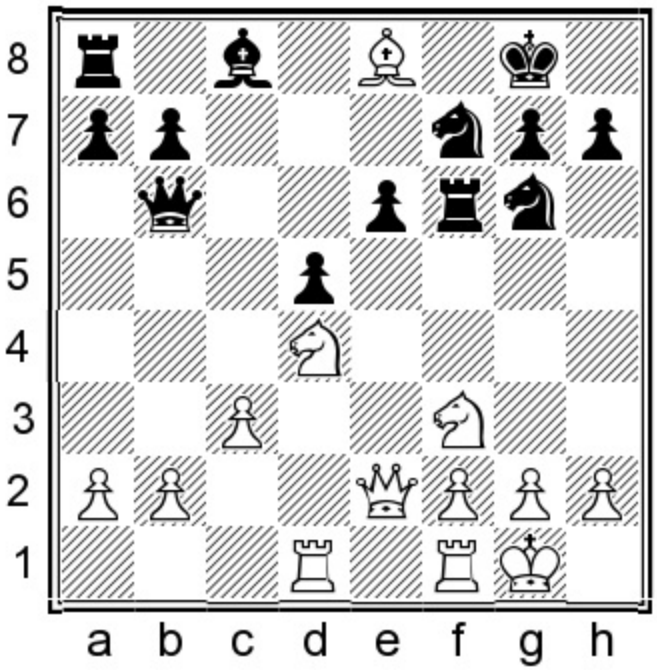
Position after: 22.♔h1⇄

it is difficult to claim who is on top in the resultant position. The presence of the black rook on g2 is surely unpleasant for White, but with White's menacing ♕+♘ duo already pointing at the g7-pawn, I would not feel that comfortable as Black. In reality, this position probably oscillates around equality, as neither side can make significant progress (e.g. by effectively bringing more pieces towards the respective arena of action) without allowing the opponent to do the same.

B) 17.♖fe1?, on the other hand, would have been a preposterous move. After 17...e5 18.♘c2 ♗g4 Black's central initiative would have rapidly evolved into an all-out attack against the white monarch, e.g. 19.♘e3 ♗xf3 20.gxf3 ♘f4 21.♕f1 ♘g5–+ leaving White defenseless against the Black onslaught, not only due to the king's shattered pawn-shield but also because he would still need to spend some time trying to reactivate his hitherto dormant bishop on b5.

17.♗e8!

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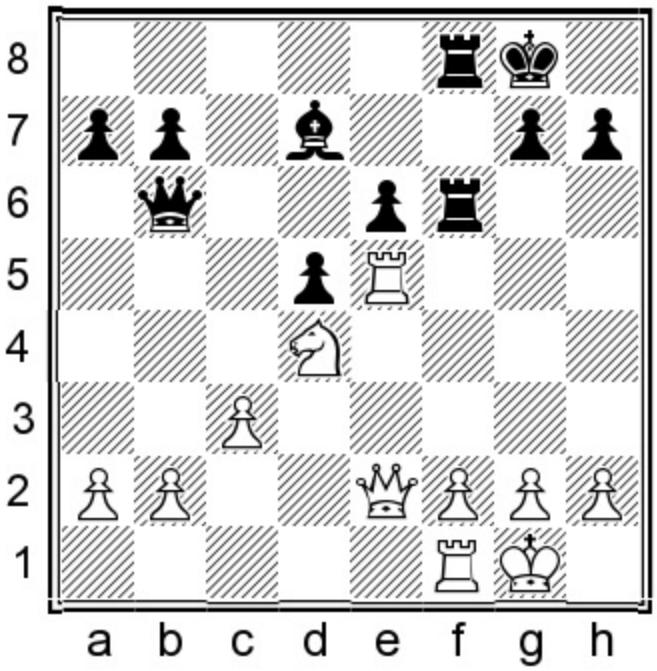
Position after: 17.♗e8!

17...♘f4

With ...e6-e5 ruled out, Black should start to think about damage limitations. By this I mean Black should decide which future material balance will make him suffer the least. Knowing that White is inevitably going to obtain full control over the e5-square, thereby immobilizing the e6-pawn for good, as far as possible, Black should aim for the following. White should be left with a set of pieces that will make it harder for Black to succumb to the ongoing pressure within the next 30 moves or so. To be even more specific if possible, Black would be advised to trade off the queens as a ♕+♘ duo is tactically superior to the ♕+♗ pair. Should this not be possible, then Black should strive to exchange at least one pair of rooks. The reason for this is that, with White dominating the center, it would be much easier for him to navigate his forces, to shuffle them back and forth between pressurizing the backward e6-pawn and attacking the position of the black king.

With the above taken into consideration, the position arising after 17...♘gh8 18.♗xf7+ ♘xf7 19.♖d3!? (Preparing to triple heavy pieces along the e-file, but also maybe organize the rook's transfer to the g-file in close proximity to the black king.) 19...♗d7 20.♖e3 ♖f8 21.♘e5 ♘xe5 22.♖xe5±

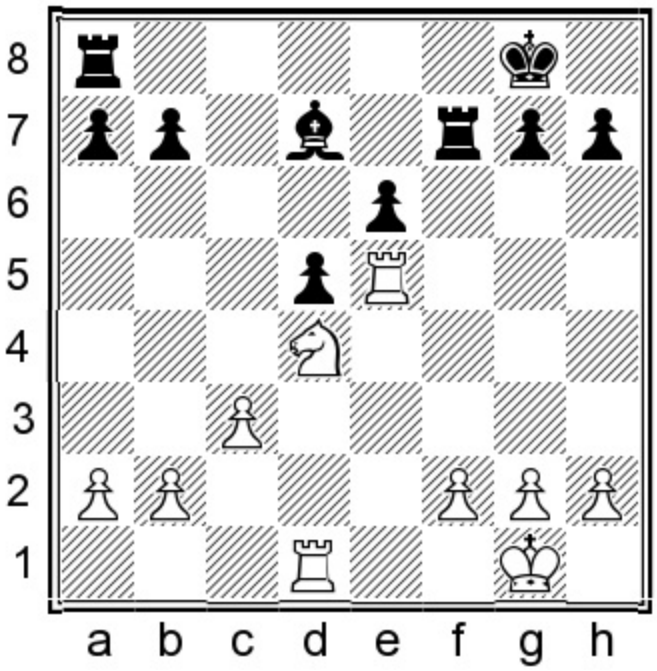
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Position after: 22.♖xe5±

would have been the worse version of the story. Black can certainly defend the e6-pawn for quite a long time, but the true problems would start when White would start pushing his kingside pawns not only to dislodge the f6-rook, but to create some threats against the king as well.

18.♗xf7+ ♖xf7 19.♕d2 ♕d6 20.♖fe1 ♘g6 21.♕g5 ♗d7 22.♘e5 ♘xe5 23.♕xe5 ♕xe5 24.♖xe5±

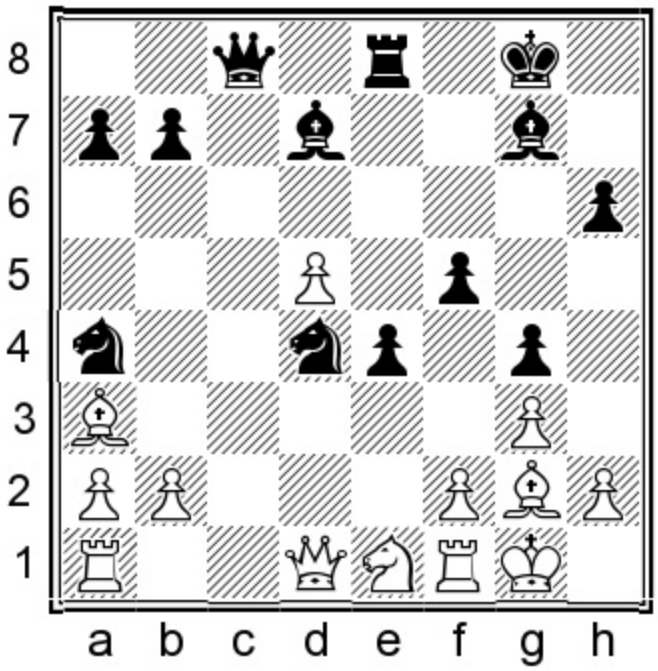


Position after: 24.♖xe5±

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This is, in my opinion, the least of evils for Black. His position is obviously very unpleasant as White can freely increase the pressure on both wings, but it will still take some time before the e6-pawn can finally be taken. If another pair of rooks is traded off, White's pressure will be neutralized to a considerable extent. The position would still be uncomfortable, but perhaps tenable with heroic defense. The best part for Black is that he does not have to fear any mating threats. The backward e6-pawn would remain his only concern.

6
Nguyen – Yip
Saint Louis 2019



□ *25.?*

Show/Hide Solution

6
Nguyen, Emily (2143)
Yip, Carissa (2279)
Saint Louis 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Prophylaxis as necessary preparation for action

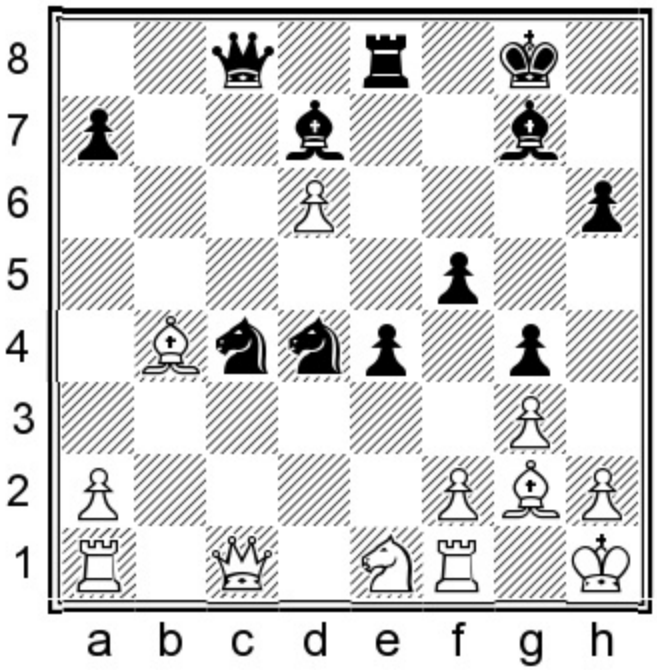
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White enjoys being up the exchange but everything else seems to speak in Black's favor. Most of White's pieces occupy inactive outposts along the first rank. The only exceptions are the two bishops. One of them is chewing on granite, targeting the black e4-pawn. The other one is shooting into empty space. On top of that, Black's pieces are relatively active and in a position to attack the slightly remote white pawn on d5, or even to start making progress on the queenside by moving both the pawns and bringing more forces into that area as well. White would obviously want to do the same, most notably by bringing his rook to the open c-file thereby gaining at least a shadow of counterplay. This, however, although tragically played in the game, drops a full rook due to the knight-fork on e2. Does White have anything else at her disposal, or is the game going to be a one-sided affair with Black's pieces mercilessly throttling White on both wings?

25.♔h1!

A splendid yet simple device! Before embarking on any specific action, the white king sidesteps the potentially fatal knight-fork on e2, making it once again possible for White to contest the c-file by bringing the rook to c1. It would be excellent news for White if she were able to get a firmer grip over that file. But most importantly evicting the black queen from c8 would enable White to bring the passive e1-knight back into play via c2. This would eventuality help White connect the rooks so that her position could shine again.

A) 'Passed pawns should be pushed', they say, but 25.d6?! does nothing to eliminate the root of the problem which is White's passivity. Black could then simply make progress on the queenside by means of 25...b5! Followed by ...a7-a5 and ...b5-b4. This would be rather disturbing. Now, after something like 26.♔h1, the easiest way for Black to simplify matters beneficially would have been 26...b4! 27.♗xb4 ♘xb2 28.♕c1 ♘c4



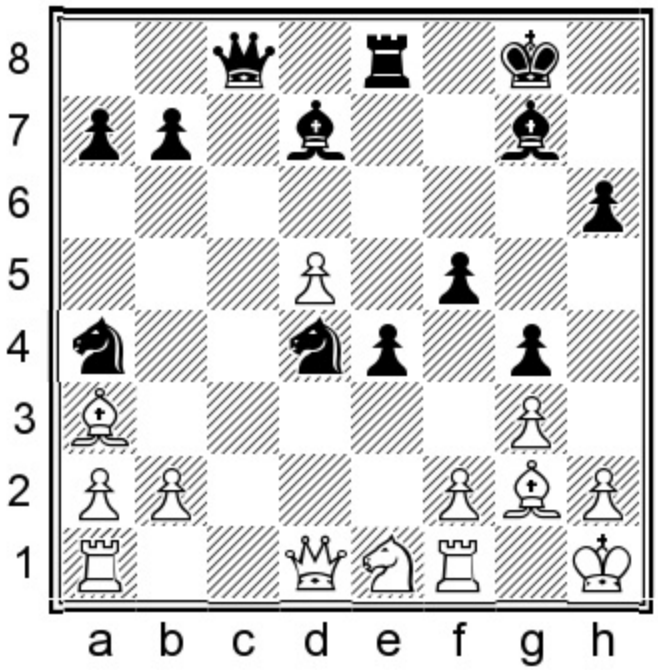
Position after: 28...♘c4

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after which White would be advised to return the entirety of his material advantage to complete development with 29.♘c2 ♘xc2 30.♕xc2 ♗xa1 31.♖xa1 ♘xd6 32.♕d2 ♘f7= Still, despite White's hopes for some counter-threats along the long dark diagonal, the position would need to be assessed as close to equal due to Black's small material advantage.

B) 25.♕d2? does not change much either as after 25...♘b6 Black not only threatens to bring the knight to the convenient c4-square but can also simply help himself to White's passed d5-pawn. The computer suggests 26.b3 as the most reasonable solution for White but after 26...♘xb3 27.axb3 ♗xa1 28.♘c2 ♗g7∓ it is pretty clear that it is Black who is in command here. The reason for this is that Black is a clear pawn up, and the white g2-bishop is still very much stuck at bay.

25.♔h1!



Position after: 25.♔h1!

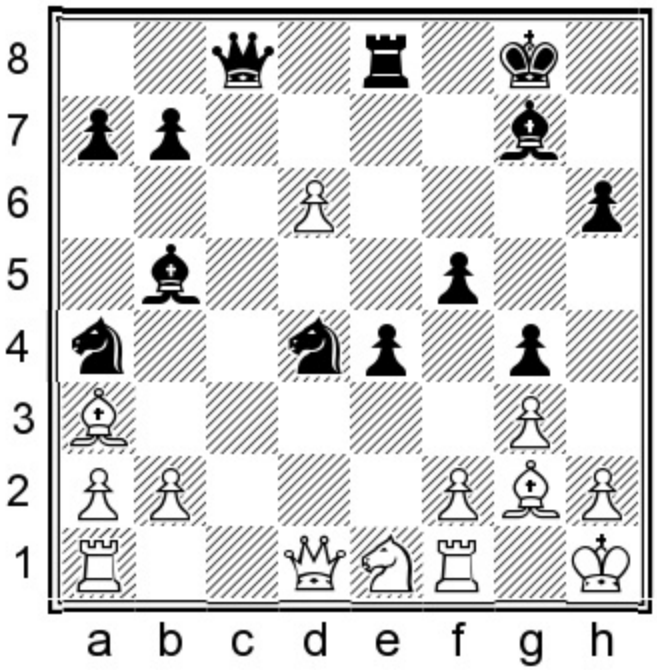
25...♗b5

If you ever end up materially down in a game of chess regardless of the game's stage, you need to be able to launch some activity as quickly as possible. If you remain passive, despite a material disadvantage, this situation will start speaking in your opponent's favor as the game progresses and pieces are gradually traded off eventually ending up as the cause for a loss when the game boils down to an endgame. This is also why, in this case, the ...♗d7-b5 maneuver constitutes Black's best chance to stir things up.

25...♘b6 is clearly inferior as it allows White to activate his pieces far too smoothly after 26.♖c1 ♕d8 27.♗c5 ♕f6 28.♘c2 ♘xc2 29.♖xc2±.

26.d6!

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Position after: 26.d6!

A fantastic response! White could have saved the rook but in doing so she would have wasted time and worsened the rook even more. And you know what they say, “A ship in the harbor is safe, but that is not what a ship is actually for.” A better solution is to conduct a so-called transformation of advantages. White hereby offers the opponent the possibility to restore material balance but at the price of improving her light-squared bishop. In nominal terms such an exchange has to be profitable for Black, but the relative value of the white bishop would have soared dramatically afterwards as it would be able to come to c4, and very likely support White’s passed d-pawn.

26...♕d7

Trying to keep up appearances, but it is already clearly visible that Black has no other choice but to give up ground.

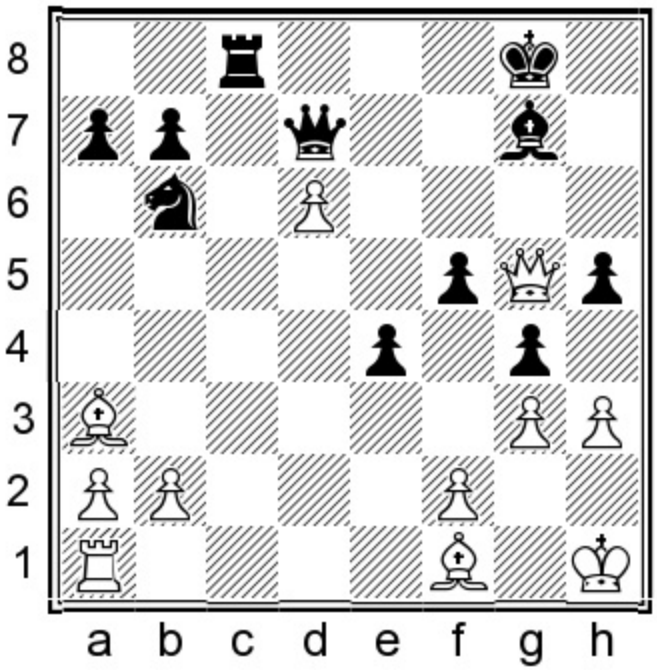
26...♗xf1 27.♗xf1 ♘b6 28.♖c1 ♘c6 allows White to launch a positional offensive on the kingside by means of 29.h3! h5 30.♘g2!+– when Black is already utterly lost. The white knight can be transferred swiftly to f4 from where it would pressurize Black’s h5-pawn. Apart from that, any movement of the black knights would probably result in an instant loss. While Black is occupied blocking White’s distant passed pawn, the first player would slowly infest Black’s position on the kingside.

27.♘c2 ♘xc2 28.♕xc2 ♖c8

and now after

29.♕d2 ♗xf1 30.♗xf1 ♘b6 31.h3 h5 32.♕g5+–

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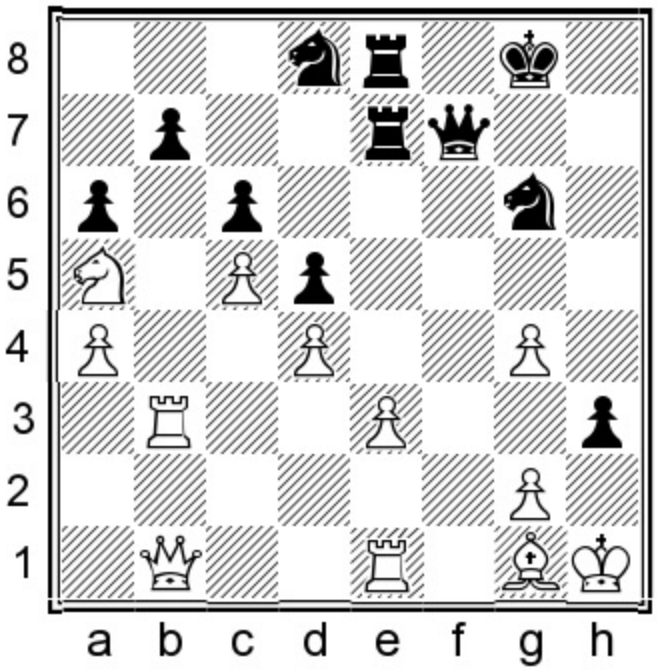


Position after: 32.♕g5+−

the white queen successfully infiltrates Black's kingside. Both taking the pawn and trying to remove the blockade on d7, by bringing the queen to e7, come strongly into consideration. The moment the light-squared bishop joins the party, Black is going to be busted big time!

7
Guseva – Styazhkina
Sochi 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *40.?*

Show/Hide Solution

7
Guseva, Marina (2402)
Styazhkina, Anna (2272)
Sochi 2019

Attack & Defense
Include all your forces in the defense

Black has just sacrificed a pawn for the sake of opening up the position in front of the white king and she seems to have been quite successful at that. What speaks in her favor is also the presence of the vast majority of her pieces already on the kingside, with a larger part of the white counterparts involved in some useless activity on the opposite flank. For the moment, the Attack/Defense Ratio looks close to 2 – 3 to me. That is rather grim for White. On top of that, Black's forces appear to be quite well coordinated for that purpose already. The rooks are doubled along the e-file, the queen is ready to be shifted to h7, and even the d8-knight will arrive on e4 in the blink of an eye via e6 and g5. Is there any hope, then, left for White?

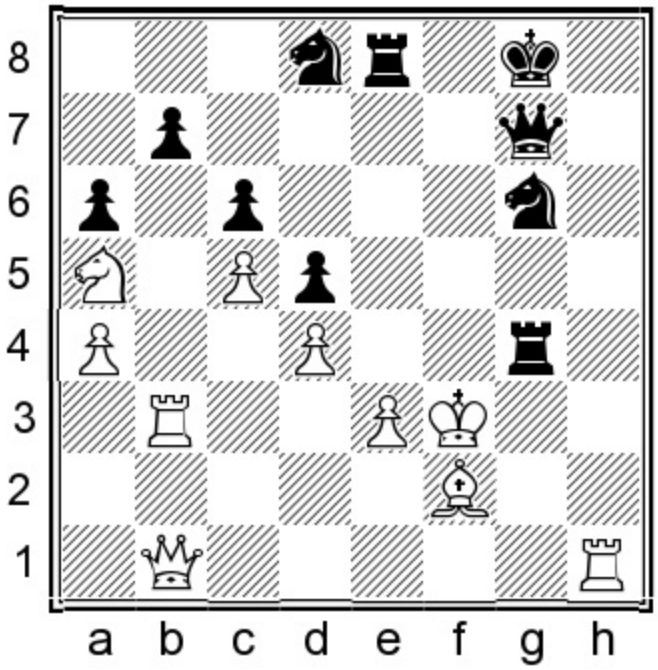
40.♖b2!

White's only chance consists in reinforcing her own king as soon as possible. Otherwise, she will succumb to a horrific attack along the h-file. Geographically most of her pieces are placed far away

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from the king. But luckily for her the rook happens to be a long-range piece. It operates just as well from b2 as if it were standing somewhere on the kingside. Repositioning the rook to b2 also happens to be the first step towards improving the mentioned Attack/Defense Ratio in White's favor. The rule of thumb states that if the ratio is lower than 2, the defender usually has no reasons to worry about the outcome of the game. The reason for this is that as the attack progresses, some pieces are going to be swapped off, and some other even sacrificed by the attacker. At the end of the day, when there is only the solitary king remaining on the defender's side, there still needs to be some attack left to mate the king and one piece is usually not enough to do the job.

A) Other options do not offer White too many chances of resistance, especially 40.♖f1? chosen by Guseva in the game. This loses quickly but at least beautifully! 40...hxg2+ 41.♔xg2 ♕h7 42.♗f2 ♖e4 43.♖h1 ♖xg4+ 44.♔f3 ♕g7!!–+

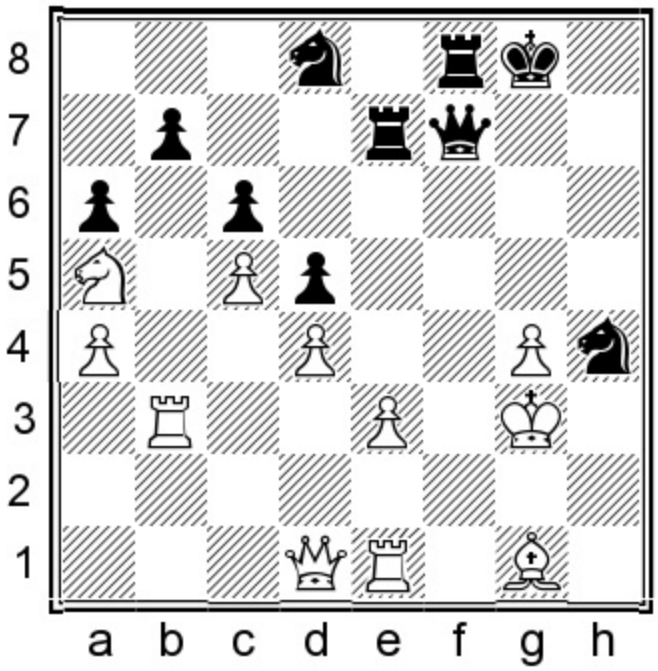


Position after: 44...♕g7!!–+

The rook is taboo due to 45.♔xg4? ♘e5+ 46.♔h5 ♕g4+ 47.♔h6 ♘df7# The rook does not have to be taken but then the white king would hardly have a bright future ahead. One thing that is maybe trivial, but nonetheless worth remembering, is that playing for an attack does not imply that we are interested solely in mating the opponent's king. The attack might eventually not work out, but the assets gained in the course of events (e.g. a material advantage) can equally represent a nice consolation prize.

B) 40.♕d1? is not much better as after 40...hxg2+ 41.♔xg2 ♘h4+ 42.♔g3 ♖f8!–+

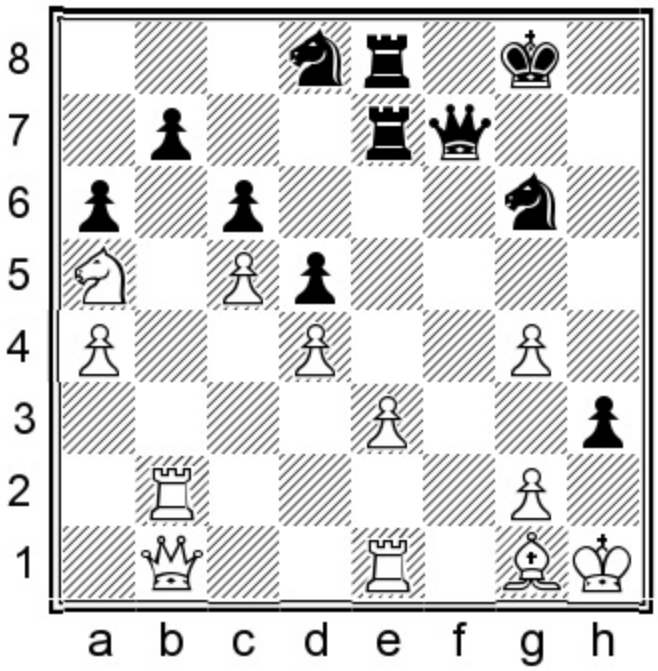
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Position after: 42...♖f8!−+

White would not even get to taste that knight on h4 due to 43.♔xh4? ♕f6+ 44.♔g3 ♖h7 with imminent mate coming along the h-file.

40.♖b2!



Position after: 40.♖b2!

40...hxg2+ 41.♖xg2

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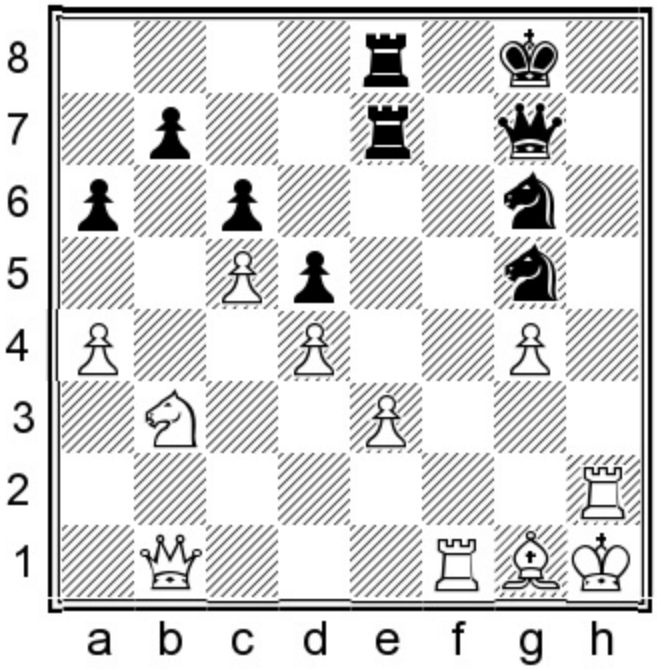
Black can still try to organize some play against the White monarch but if White follows basic principles of defensive play, everything should be fine.

41...♘e6

Another try for an advantage for Black could have been 41...♖e4 but after 42.♖f1 ♕d7 43.♖f5 ♖8e7 44.♗f2 ♕e6 45.♕g1!= White manages to effectively mobilize the pieces around her own monarch.

42.♖f1 ♕g7 43.♖h2 ♘g5 44.♘b3

Better late than never. The white knight on a5 has been a happy camper for the last couple of moves but it is now high time for this last marauder to join its colleagues in defense.

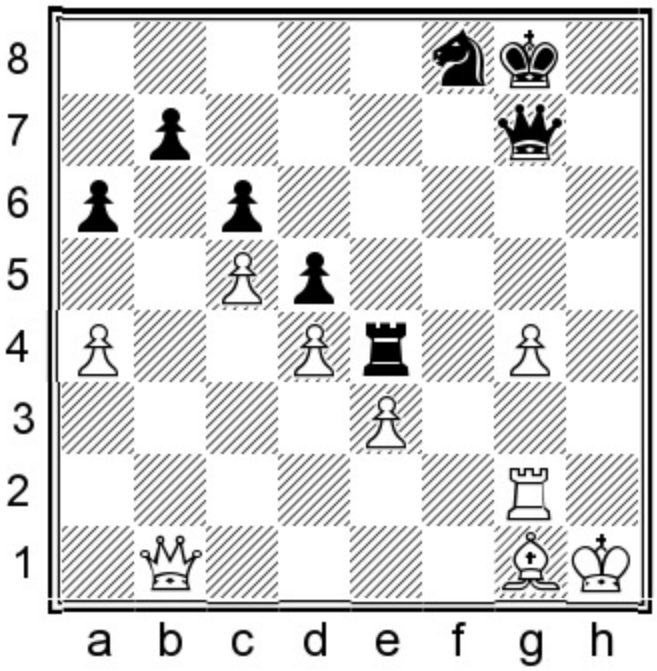


Position after: 44.♘b3

The inclusion of all of the pieces into the defense usually strongly diminishes the chances of the attacker. This statement also applies to the position in front of us as after the further

44...♖f8 45.♘d2 ♘e4 46.♘xe4 ♖xe4 47.♖xf8+ ♘xf8 48.♖g2=

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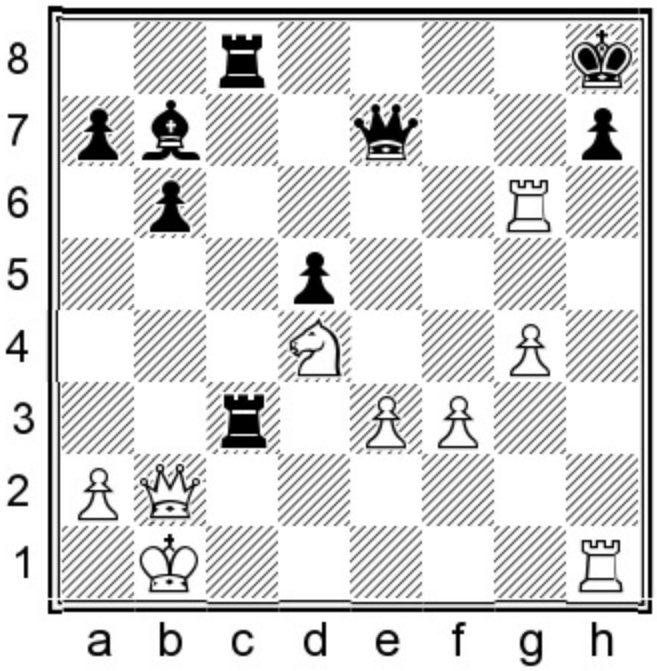


Position after: 48.♖g2=

the attack is beaten off and the position soon peters out to a draw. Compared to the white bishop, Black's knight might in fact be better. At best this compensates for the material deficit she signed up for when launching the attack.

8
Moranda – Robson
chess.com 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *29...?*

Show/Hide Solution

8
Moranda, Wojciech (2593)
Robson, Ray (2667)
chess.com 2019

Coordination
Principle of the weakest piece – inclusion into the defense

This position appeared in a game of mine from the 2019 edition of the Chess.com PRO Chess League. After misplaying the opening almost entirely I managed to complicate matters to the extent that it was no longer obvious who was attacking and who was defending.

Material may be equal here but in sharp positions like this one material is less significant than the issue of who is ready to strike first. With both players having already brought their rooks close to each other's kings a single tempo spent on including one more additional piece into play may tip the scales in favor of the other side. In other words, which piece of yours has been hitherto dormant but is now eager to join the fight?

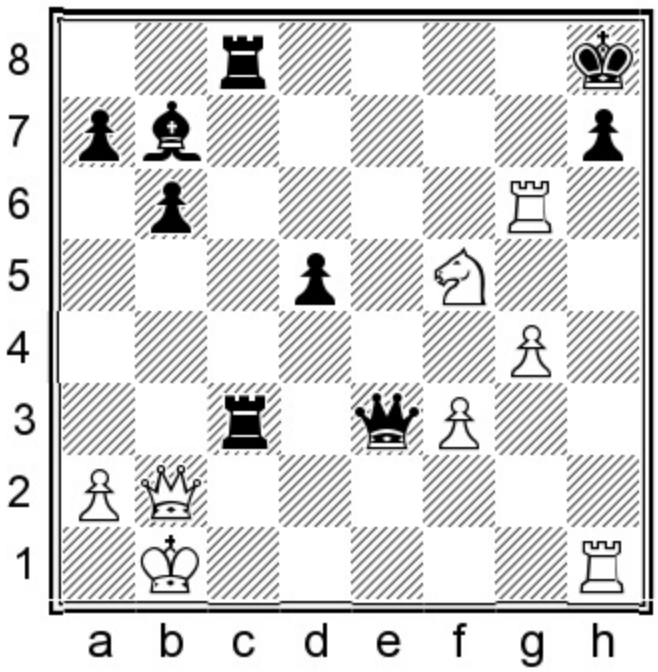
29...♗a6!!

A brilliant counterpunch! Black applies the principle of the weakest piece and literally revives one of

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his pieces like Lazarus from the dead. The bishop is brought to d3 from where it not only protects the h7-pawn but also contributes to some potential attacking chances against the white king. What is also interesting is that it simultaneously prevents White from pinning the c3-rook by means of ♘d4-e2(b5). After looking at Black's alternatives, it immediately becomes clear why this is such a strong resource instead of a battle of four pieces against three, Black can now start fighting on more equal terms again.

A) In the game, Black erred with 29...♕xe3? and immediately landed in a lost position after 30.♘f5

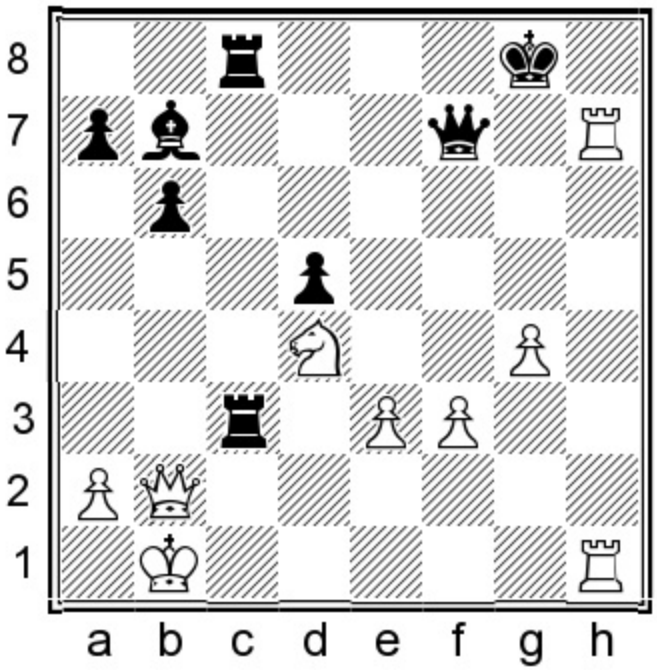


Position after: 30.♘f5

30...♕d3+ [30...♕xf3 allows a nice finish after 31.♖xh7+! ♔xh7 32.♕h2+ when it is either mate in three or Black gives up the queen with 32...♕h3 33.♖h6++–] 31.♔a1 ♖8c7 and now only extreme time trouble prevented me from bringing the full point home with 32.♖d6!+– when Black would have been unable to combat the ♖d6-d8+ threat without parting with material or decisively losing coordination.

B) Another option would have been 29...♕f7? Even so after 30.♖gh6 all possible transformations of the material balance would have ended up in White's favor, e.g. 30...♔g8 31.♖xh7

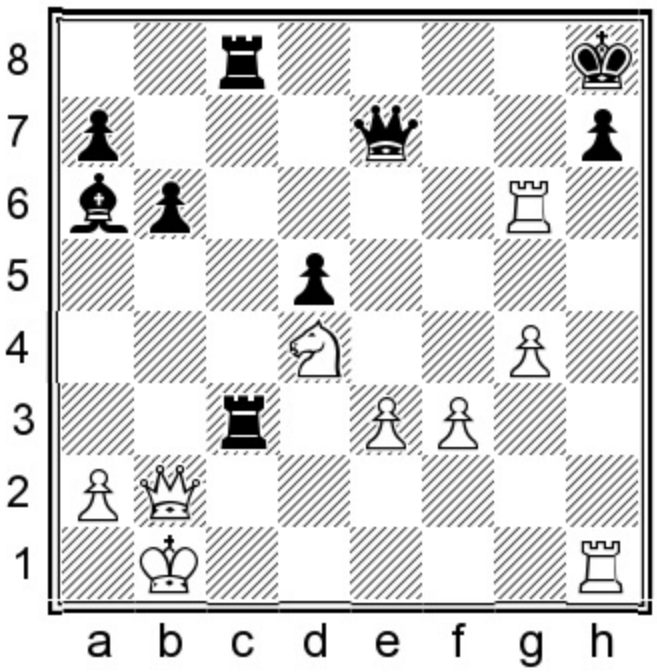
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Position after: 31.♖xh7

31...♕xh7+ [31...♖c1+ 32.♕xc1 ♖xc1+ 33.♔xc1 ♕xh7 34.♖xh7 ♔xh7 35.g5 ♔g6 36.f4+– wins for White as the light-squared blockade on the kingside will soon be lifted.] 32.♖xh7 ♔xh7 33.♕h2+ ♔g8 34.♕d6+– and the tactical duo of a queen and knight, supported by the passed f and g-pawns, should relatively simply overpower the uncoordinated forces of the opponent.

29...♗a6!!



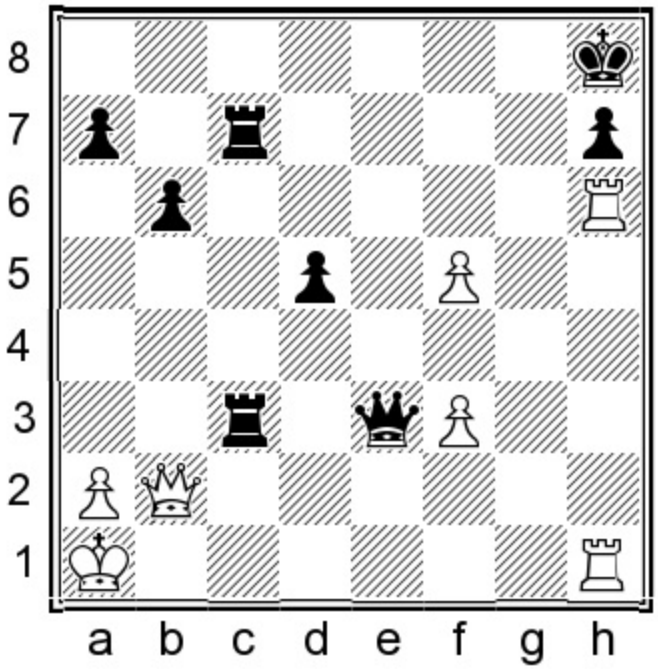
Position after: 29...♗a6!!

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30.♖e6

Protecting the e3-pawn looks like White's best practical try here.

30.♖gh6 is not much different as after 30...♗d3+ 31.♔a1 ♕xe3 32.♘f5 ♗xf5 33.gxf5 ♖8c7=

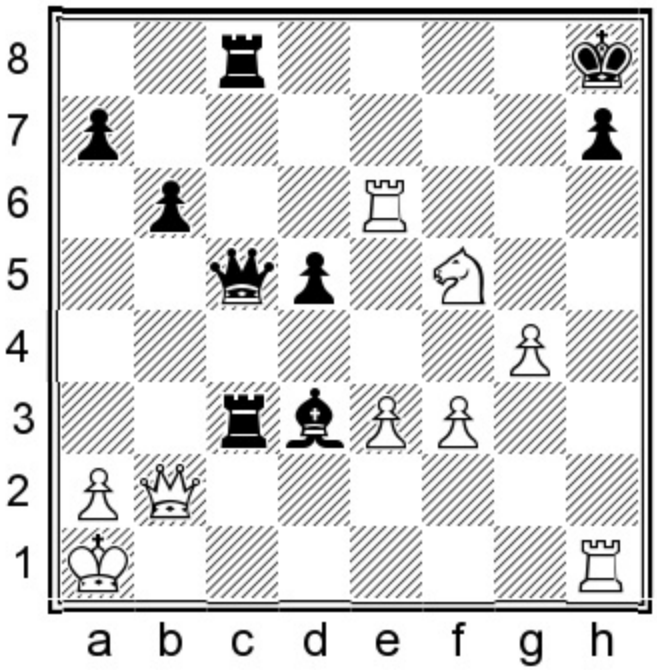


Position after: 33...♖8c7=

Black holds the h7-pawn quite confidently. This position looks even better than the text since after moving the king to g8 Black would have been able to start creating threats of his own, with ...♖c3-c1+ immediately coming into consideration. White is also deprived of a possible check with the rook from g1.

30...♗d3+ 31.♔a1 ♕c5 32.♘f5

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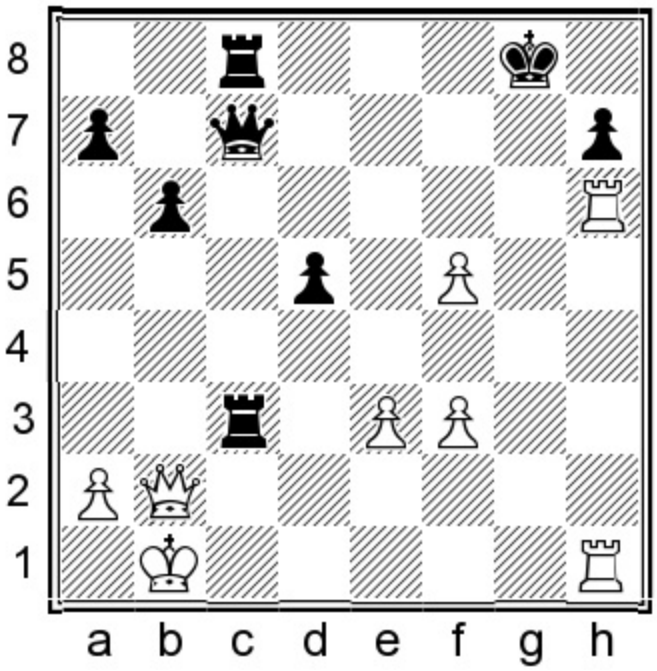


Position after: 32.♘f5

32...♔g8!

The black king has escaped from the sensitive diagonal thus he is able to transpose into an equal rook endgame.

32...♗xf5?! is a tad inaccurate on the other hand as after 33.gxf5 ♕c7 34.♖eh6 ♔g8 35.♔b1!?±

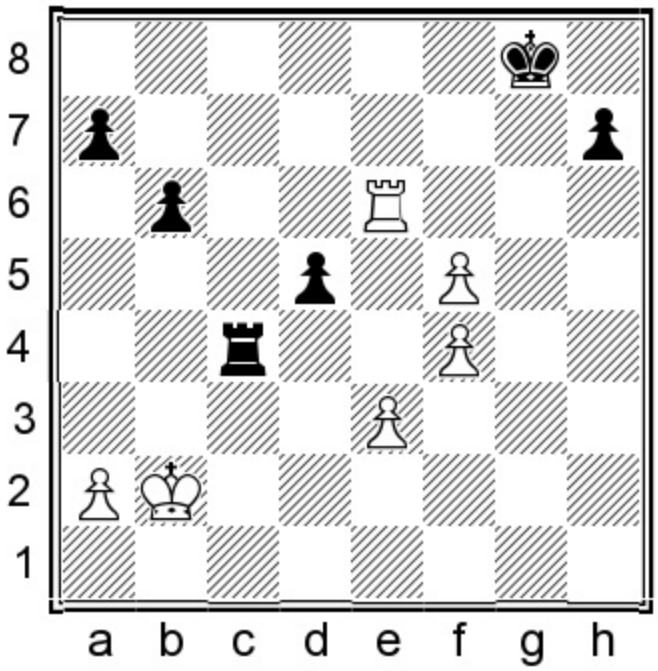


Position after: 35.♔b1!?±

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White not only manages to avoid any problems with his own king, but he would have been able to continue the onslaught against the black king. As check is no longer threatened on c1 White would most probably trade off two rooks for a queen and pawn on h7, leading to a position in which the white queen would be guiding the central pawns all the way to the promotion square. Black will not stand still and watch this unfold but his rooks may prove to be quite inefficient at trying to hold the pawn mass back, especially if White makes sure, in the meantime, that these rooks do not manage to create any counter-threats against his king.

33.f4 ♖c1+ 34.♖xc1 ♕xc1+ 35.♕xc1 ♖xc1+ 36.♔b2 ♗xf5 37.gxf5 ♖c4



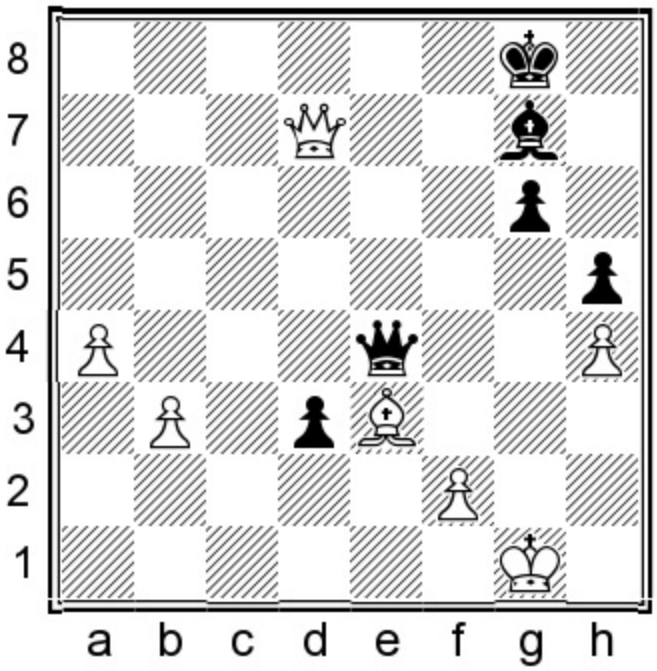
Position after: 37...♖c4

when White is unable to capture the d5-pawn without conceding his own soldier on e3. At the same time, White should not get too cocky, either, as the lonely h-pawn of Black might prove to be a speedy passer one day. It is, therefore, best to cash in on what both sides had achieved until now and exchange down to a draw, e.g.

38.♖e7 a5 39.f6 ♖e4 40.♖g7+ ♔f8 41.♖xh7 ♖xe3 42.♖d7 ♖e6 43.♖xd5 ♖xf6 44.♖b5 ♖xf4 45.♖xb6 ♔e7=

9
Gasanov – Melkumyan
St Petersburg 2018

chesstouring.com



■ *40...?*

Show/Hide Solution

9
Gasanov, Eldar (2499)
Melkumyan, Hrant (2670)
St Petersburg 2018

Statics & Dynamics
Dynamic sacrifice for a perpetual check

White is a pawn up, but material is rarely the most important factor influencing the evaluation of queen endgames. What counts more often is the safety of the kings, the centralization of the queen, and how advanced the pawns of each side are. Applying those principles in an inflexible way could lead us to the false conclusion that Black must be dominating as the black queen on e4 is very active and the black d3-pawn is much closer to the promotion square than its counterpart on a4. At the same time, White's monarch seems to be vulnerable to nasty checks along the light squares, in particular from g4. The truth, however, is that it is White who has the better chances of ending up on top here. The reason for this is that the black d3-pawn is blocked and his a4-pawn, on the other hand, enjoys safe passage all the way to a7. The weakness of the white king does not seem to matter much either, at least as long as the white queen is able to keep an eye on it. Speaking of the devil, Her Majesty seems to be doing quite a good job on d7. She not only provides the white king with the aforementioned measure of safety, but she also prevents the black passer from advancing any further.

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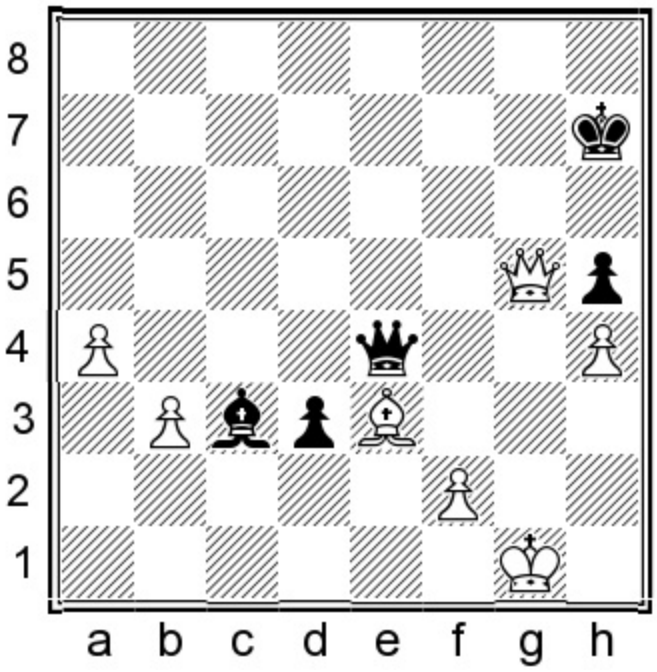
As most of Black's 'regular' ideas are far too slow, the position calls for something extraordinary...

40...♗c3!

Looks scary but it works! The idea behind it is to support the movement of our own d-pawn. At the same time, it means we can prevent the white a-pawn from acting accordingly. True, you might have feared at the sight of 41.♕c8+ because of the double-attack against the bishop and king. But if White wants to take it, his queen will have to leave the c8-g4 diagonal. In such a case, the g4 square suddenly becomes vulnerable, and the black queen can start checking the white king endlessly.

A) Inveterate pawn-grabbing only speeds up the inevitable as after 40...♕xh4 41.a5 ♕f6 42.♕c8+ ♔h7 43.a6+– Black will eventually have to admit that he cannot stop the white passer from advancing further.

B) Interesting would have been 40...g5 with the idea that after 41.♕d8+ ♔h7 42.♕xg5 ♗c3



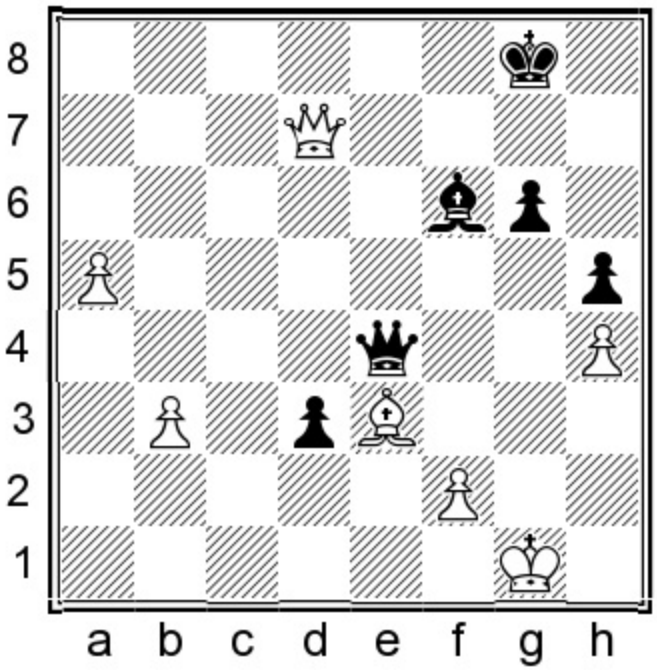
Position after: 42...♗c3

Black would be able to bring the bishop to c3 relatively safely. Still, the price to pay for this pleasure happens to be too high as after 43.♕xh5+ ♔g7 44.♕g5+ ♔h7 45.h5+– White would be three pawns up. Because the d3-pawn is blocked, and because there are many simplification ideas featuring a forced queen exchange, White would have surely been able to bring the full point home. Still, why would Black have to go for this line if the bishop can be brought to c3 right away?

C) Finally, 40...d2 41.♕xd2 ♕b1+ 42.♔g2 ♕xb3 is to no avail as after 43.a5 ♕c4 44.f3+– Black is not only out of checks, but he cannot take White's h4-pawn since White would again rush straight to the promotion square with the a-pawn. Some technical issues certainly remain for White to tackle, but the result of the game would have probably been sealed by now.

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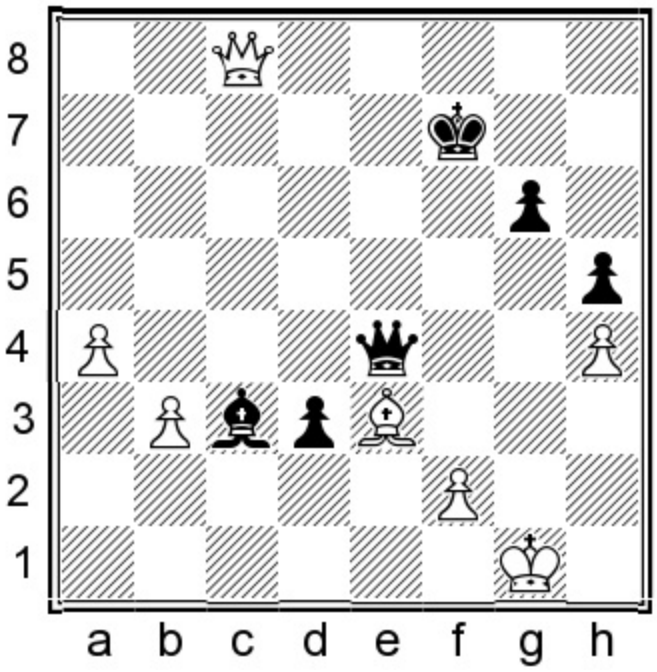
D) The game itself, on the other hand, saw 40...♗f6 41.a5



Position after: 41.a5

41...♕f3 [41...♗xh4 does not change anything, e.g. 42.a6 d2 43.♗xd2 ♕b1+ 44.♔h2! ♕xb3 45.a7 ♕f3 46.♕e8+ ♔g7 47.a8=♕ ♕xf2+ 48.♕g2+–] 42.♕xd3 ♕g4+ 43.♔f1 ♕h3+ 44.♔e1+– and White eventually collects the full point in a more or less convincing fashion.

40...♗c3! 41.♕c8+ ♔f7



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Position after: 41...♔f7

and now White could give a few more control-checks, trying to lure the black king towards a mined dark square, but the truth is that, sooner or later, he would have to resort to

42.♕xc3 ♕g4+

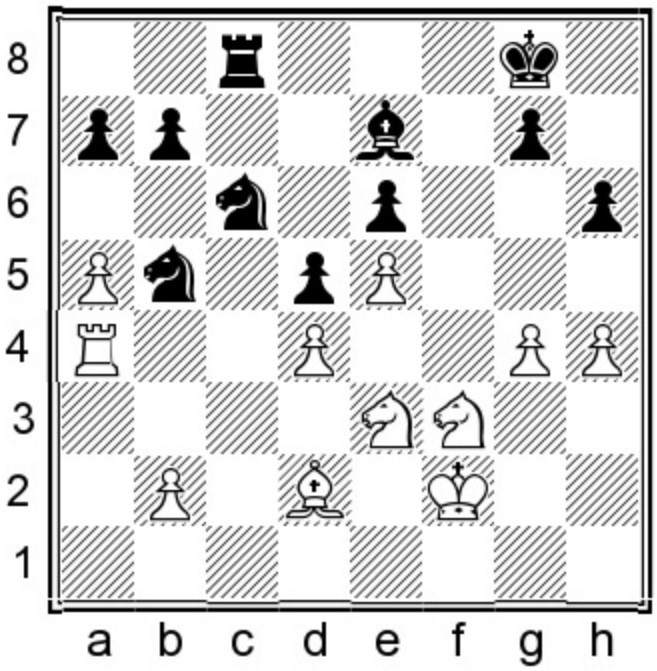
and the drawing mechanism of ...♕g4-e2+ has been created on the board, after

43.♔f1 ♕e2+ 44.♔g1 ♕g4+=

a draw by perpetual would have become inevitable. I sometimes use this exercise as a warm-up when training with more experienced students. One curious thing that I have noticed is that there is no correlation between their playing strength and the speed with which they discover the right solution. The reason for this is that what we have is a dynamic endgame where things are happening quickly. The kings tend to be vulnerable but most importantly solving it requires the player to first understand the 'mechanism' governing it. Without grasping how the position functions, knowing the response to the typical ideas of both of the players, it would be much more difficult to find the solution. You are probably wondering why. Well, I blame modern trends and the chess book market in equal measure. First of all, how can we be proficient at handling such endgames if there are barely any sources on them available? Secondly, what is a typical chess player most likely to purchase at a typical bookstore? Books on openings, predominantly! You simply do not hear people speak more passionately about a specific endgame than they do about the Sicilian Najdorf or the Grünfeld. And this is where the vicious circle closes. But there is a trap hidden here. At the highest level, everyone is perfectly prepared opening wise; they enjoy an excellent understanding of positional play and they certainly know the basic technical endgames. And what kind of a position are you likely to get in 4 – 5 hours of play, after many pieces have been swapped off (and bear in mind, you are now exhausted by the fight, but still need to keep on playing accurately)? You guessed it tactical chess endgames.

10
Solozhenkina – Korneev
Sochi 2019

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■ *30...?*

Show/Hide Solution

10
Solozhenkina, Elizaveta (2329)
Korneev, Oleg (2530)
Sochi 2019

Weakness
Destroying the opponent's center by eliminating its defender

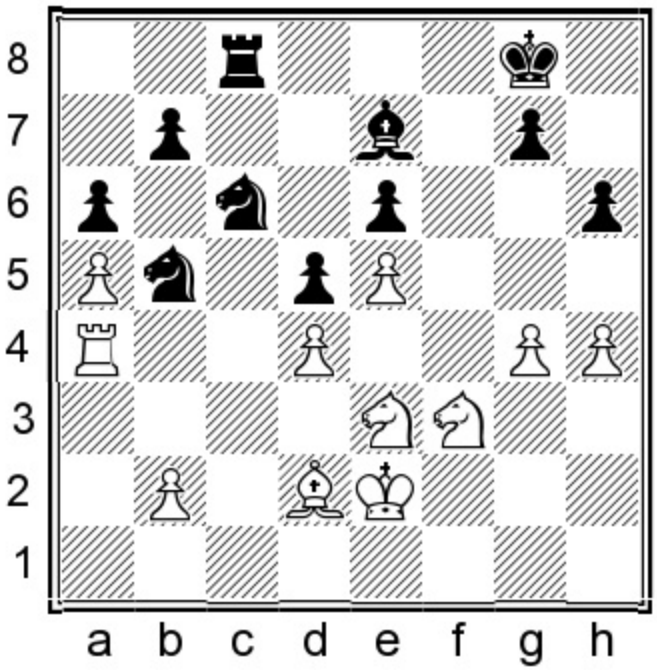
Although this position strongly resembles typical structures resulting from one of the main lines of the Moscow variation of the Sicilian Defense, this structure arose rather surprisingly from the Réti Opening. Material is equal here and White happens to enjoy slightly more space, but with reduced material on the board this is rather a nuisance than an element of the position to be proud about. In the middlegame, with queens still present, White would have been rather happy about her progress on both wings, but here specifically her setup makes the impression of already being a tad overextended. The a5 and d4-pawns are placed on dark squares, and because of this look like easy prey in the long run. Sure, both of them are safely defended for the moment, but Black is not yet using all of the pieces effectively. The winning maneuver is exactly about maximizing pressure against the weakest link among White's already stretched forces.

30...♖f8!

chesstouring.com

A move that just about any grandmaster in the world would have made with a delicate smile on their face. It turns out namely that the f3-knight of White constitutes her most important defensive piece providing cover for the central pawn chain. With this knight out of the way, White's center would have collapsed in the blink of an eye as there would not have been enough forces left to guard the d4-pawn.

A) In the game, Black missed this golden opportunity and went for 30...a6?! instead, probably assuming that Black would be able to maintain his slight edge if he only fixes the queenside pawns of the opponent on the dark squares. This way he indeed achieves exactly that, but also wastes precious time, allowing White to escape from the hook after 31.♔e2 when:



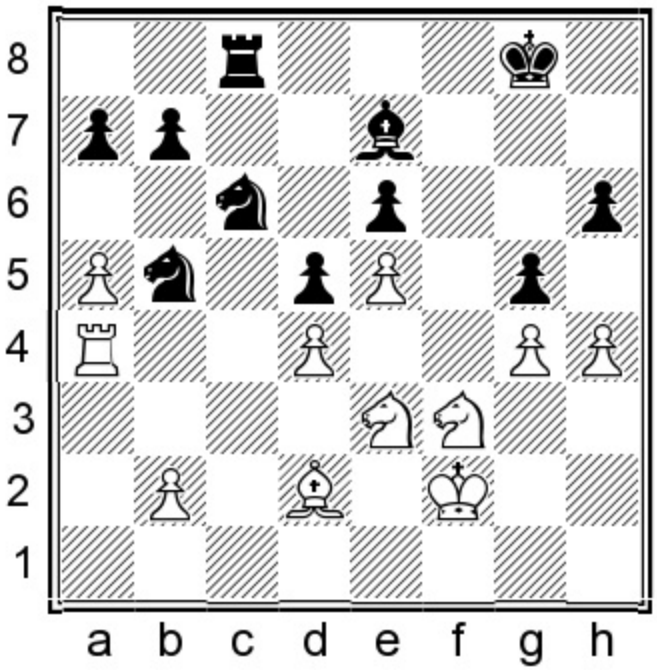
Position after: 31.♔e2

A1) Black could have still attempted to destroy White's pawn center with 31...♗xh4!? but the position arising after the more or less forced 32.♘xh4 ♘bxd4+ 33.♔d1 g5 34.♘hg2 ♘f3 35.♘e1 ♘fxe5 36.♗c3⇄ would have been double-edged at best. Black won three pawns for the piece, but it is going to be highly difficult to make them move as he lacks a bishop controlling the crucial dark squares in the center.

A2) 31...♖f8 is no longer effective as White can afterwards defend the d4-pawn with the simplest 32.♘c2= when White's life is certainly not strewn with roses, but quite livable as such. In particular, for the moment I do not see a way for Black to pressurize White's exposed pawn-chain or to invade her camp.

B) Another typical idea in this structure is to play 30...g5

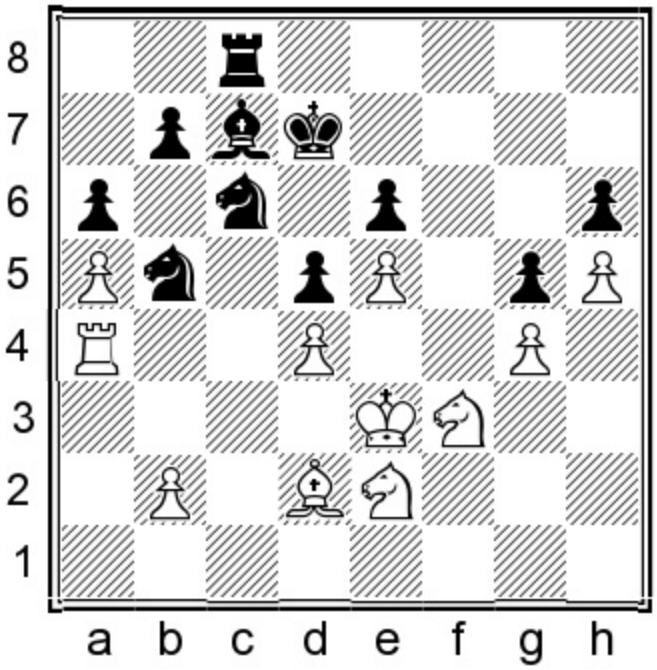
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Position after: 30...g5

intending to open up yet another front on the kingside. For this reason, White would be advised to keep this flank as closed as possible with

B1) 31.h5 and in order to hold a draw in this type of a position she would just need to make sure that the weaknesses (the a5 and d4-pawns, but also the potential entry-square on f4) are covered, e.g. 31...♗d8 32.♘d1 ♔f7 33.♘c3 a6 34.♔e2 ♔e8 35.♔d3 ♔d7 36.♘e2 ♗c7 37.♔e3=



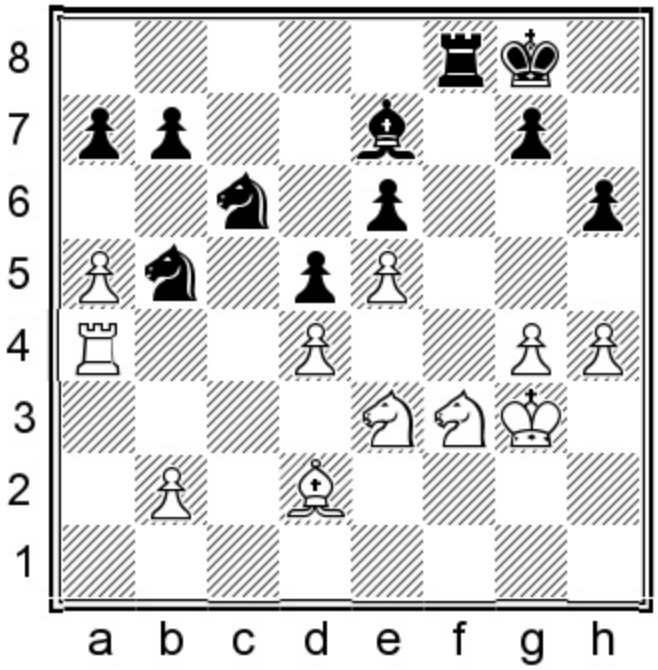
Position after: 37.♔e3=

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and White looks OK here.

B2) 31.hxg5, on the other hand, would have been met with the unorthodox 31...♗xg5!? activating the bishop, which was quite decent on e7, but also a little dormant regarding what it was doing there specifically. Now after something like 32.♔e2 ♖f8 33.♘xg5 hxg5 34.♘c2 ♖f7 35.♗e3 ♖h7↑ Black would have been able to invade along the h-file, which is definitely not good news for the opponent. At the same time, White can barely help herself to the black g5-pawn as this would have jeopardized his own queenside pawns after the invasion along the second rank, not to mention the g4-pawn falling sort of out of inertia in the process.

30...♖f8! 31.♔g3



Position after: 31.♔g3

This move is a must as defending the d4-pawn in another way would have dropped the h4-pawn for free.

31...♖xf3+!

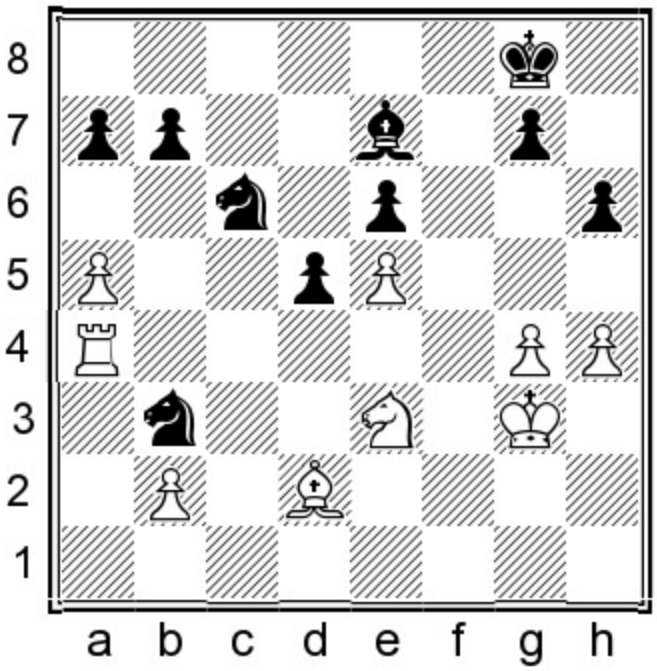
The point behind Black's last move – the most important defender of the d4-pawn gets eliminated. With said pawn out of the way, its colleague on e5 is next on the kill-list.

32.♔xf3 ♘bxd4+ 33.♔g3

Sticking to the h4-pawn, but it will prove to be meaningless the moment Black launches his center pawns.

33...♘b3

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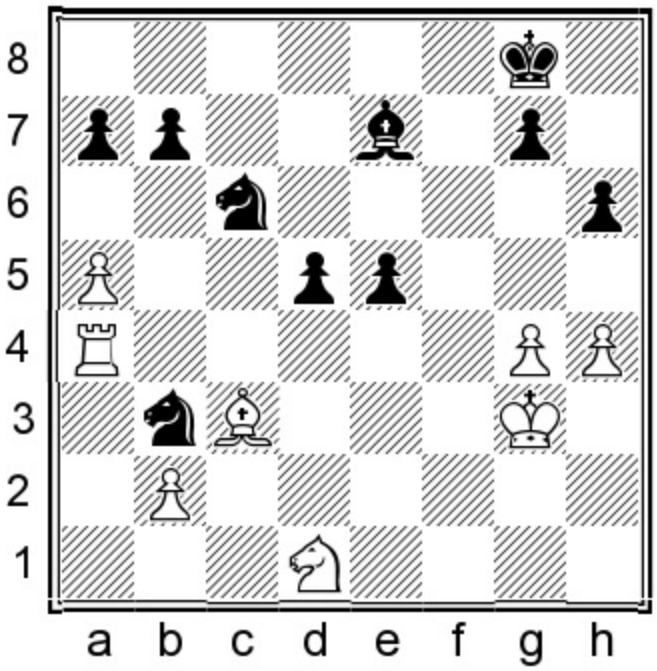
Position after: 33...♘b3

An important intermediate move. By attacking the bishop, Black wins a crucial tempo to snatch the e5-pawn while simultaneously restoring material balance. However, material is not the most important factor affecting the assessment here. What matters the most is the close to absolute lack of coordination between the White forces which will eventually allow Black to bring the full point home.

Now after

34.♗e1 ♘xe5 35.♗c3 ♘c6 36.♘d1 e5–+

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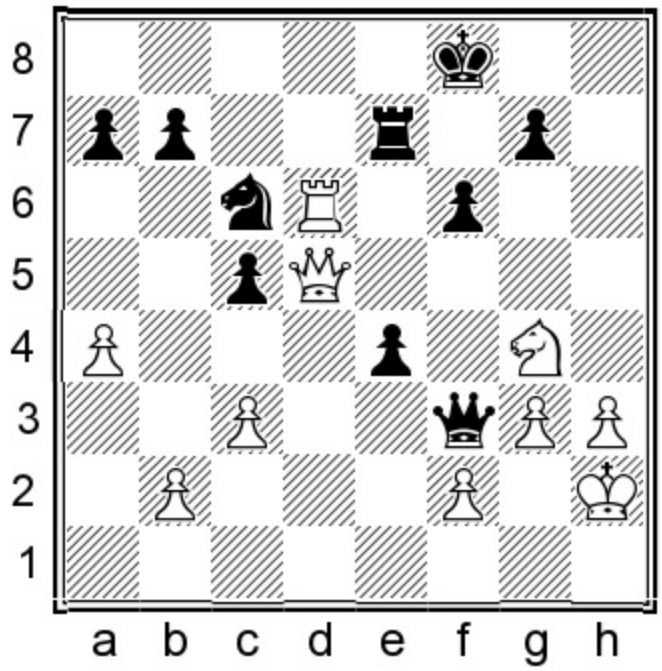
Position after: 36...e5−+

Black has not only managed to push back White's pieces but obtained full control over the position all the same. Please note how little active possibilities the white forces have altogether when facing the coordinated minor pieces of Black supported by their rolling pawn center. The justification for this is simple. White's pieces were well organized but solely for the purpose of defending their pawn center. The moment it collapsed, their placement (just look at the rook on a4!) proved to be inharmonious, serving no further goal at all. With the black central pawns being soon reinforced by the king, White's situation should be considered close to terminal already.

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11
Van Foreest – Stevic
Skopje 2018



□ *36.?*

Show/Hide Solution

11
Van Foreest, Jorden (2614)
Stevic, Hrvoje (2587)
Skopje 2018

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
What happens if I attack without sufficient preparation?

Although material is equal White's position makes the better impression. He has more pieces in close proximity to his opponent's monarch than his rival. This does not automatically mean that he may proceed with his plans by ignoring the black queen on f3. In particular, should White decide to include the white knight into the attack here the f2-pawn would fall with a check, granting Black a

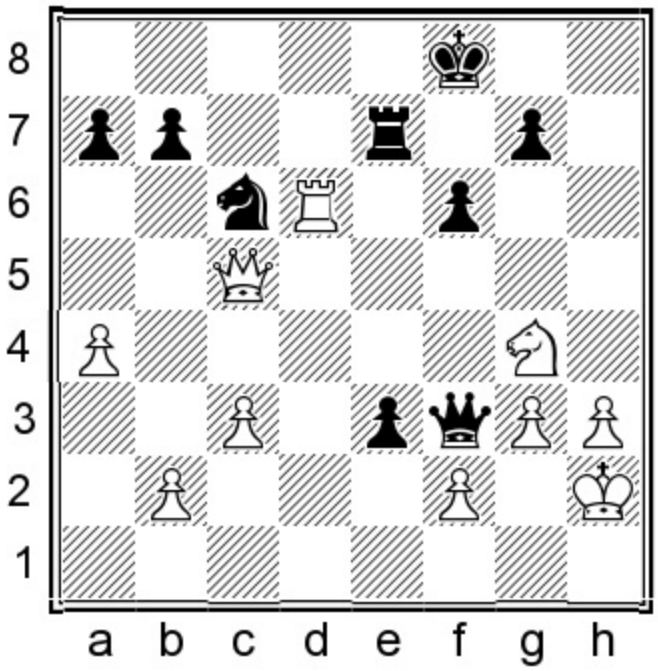
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perpetual at the very least. At the same time, without the knight, a potential attack against the black king will never be successful. Is there something that can be done about it? Or should White candidly capture the c5-pawn first, simultaneously presenting his vulnerable f2-pawn with a helping hand?

36.♔g1!

An exquisite prophylactic idea! White has anticipated future counterplay of the opponent stemming from the insufficiently defended f2-pawn. With this move White strengthens control over the sensitive pawn without dismantling the active setup of his forces which are striving to get to the black king. Black is defenseless since, except for queen moves, he can barely move a piece!

The game witnessed the greedy 36.♕xc5? which at first does not seem all that bad, a pawn is a pawn, besides the f2-pawn appears to be covered a little bit more solidly. At the same time, after 36...e3!

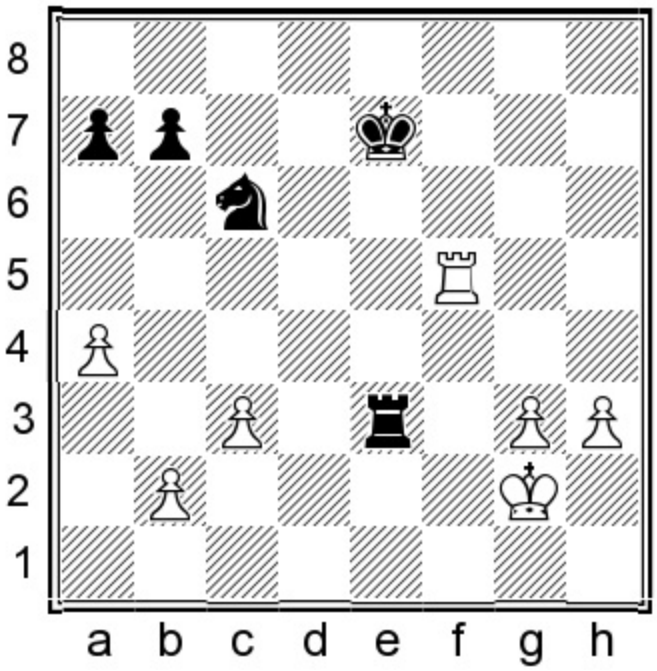


Position after: 36...e3!

it quickly became evident that the connection between the defenders of said pawn would be irreparably broken. White can indeed try but at the end of the day there is nothing he can do to prevent a perpetual, e.g.

A) 37.fxe3?! can only be risky for White as after 37...f5! 38.♘f6! gxf6 39.♖xf6+ ♔e8 40.♕xf5 ♕xf5 41.♖xf5 ♖xe3 42.♔g2 ♔e7⇄

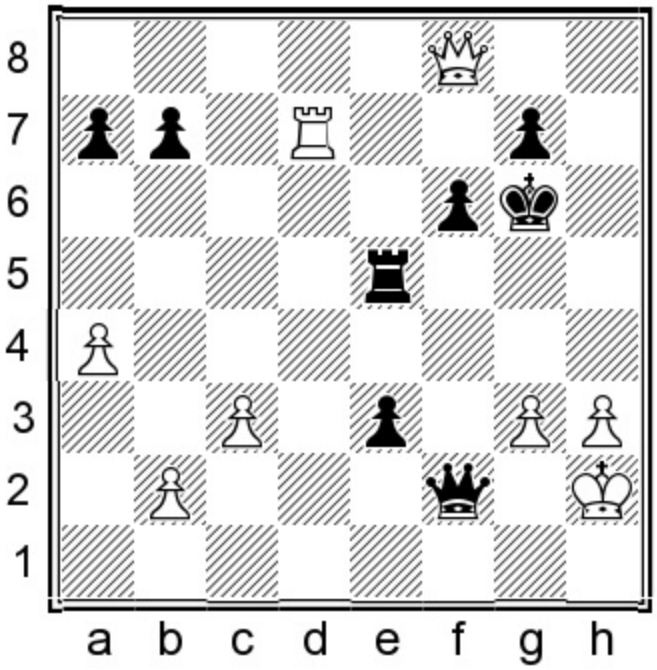
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Position after: 42...♔e7⇄

none of the players could be entirely sure about their good standing. White has three pawns for the piece but pushing the connected kingside passer is going to be anything but easy. The most probable and fair result seems to be a draw, but in a practical game absolutely everything could happen here.

B) 37.♖d3 ♘e5 38.♖d8+ ♔f7 39.♘xe5+ ♖xe5 40.♕f8+ ♔g6 41.♖d7 ♕xf2+= and White is a tempo too late in all variations to be able to complicate matters.

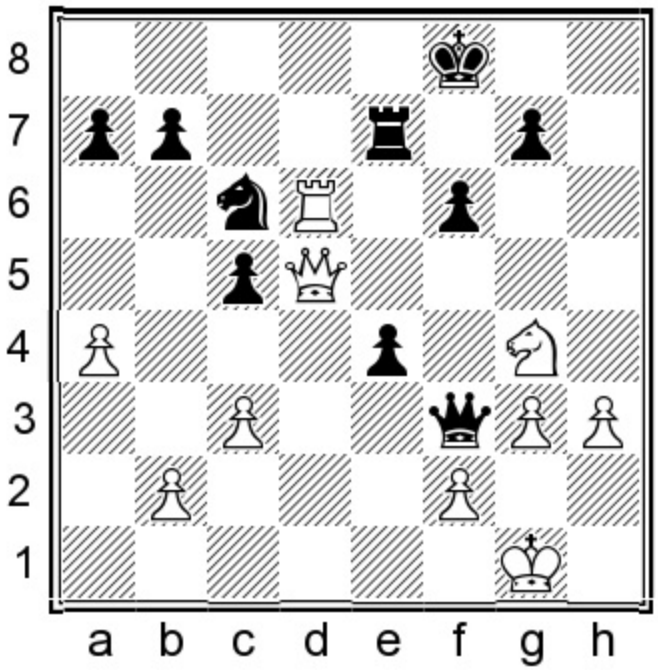


Position after: 41...♕xf2+=

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On a different note White would have done much better if he had first checked the consequences of 36.♕xc5? with special emphasis on Black's tactical possibilities as a possible response since a drowning man will clutch at a straw after all. Having discovered 36...e3!, it would have certainly been easier to decide in favor of first fixing whatever does not work before continuing in an attacking style, and only then pursuing the very same, now upgraded plans. In other words if for some strange reason your attack is not progressing smoothly, correct whatever element of your position impedes it first. This usually costs little time, but more often than not makes the difference.

36.♔g1!



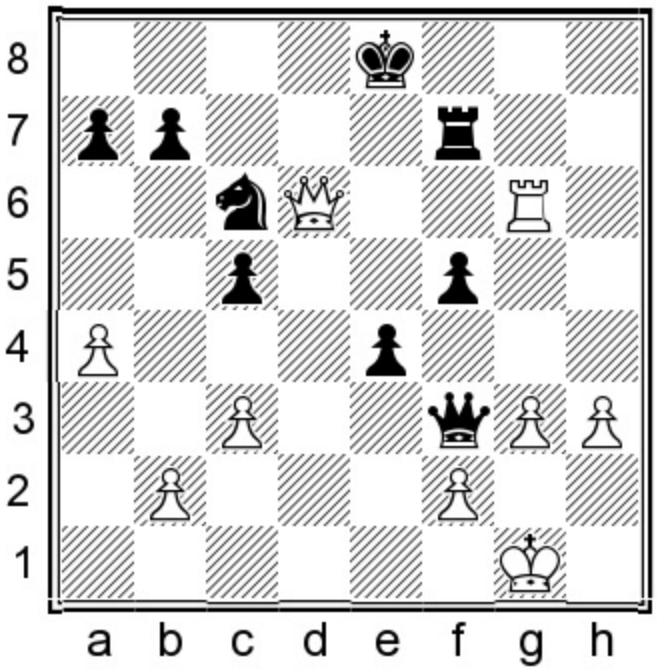
Position after: 36.♔g1!

36...♕e2

Probably the only move to stay in the game for a while, but now White can effectively include the knight into attack marking the beginning of the end for Black.

36...f5? only accelerates Black's agony due to 37.♘f6! gxf6 38.♖xf6+ ♔e8 and now after the devious [38...♔g7 39.♖xf5+–] 39.♖g6! ♖f7 40.♕d6!+–

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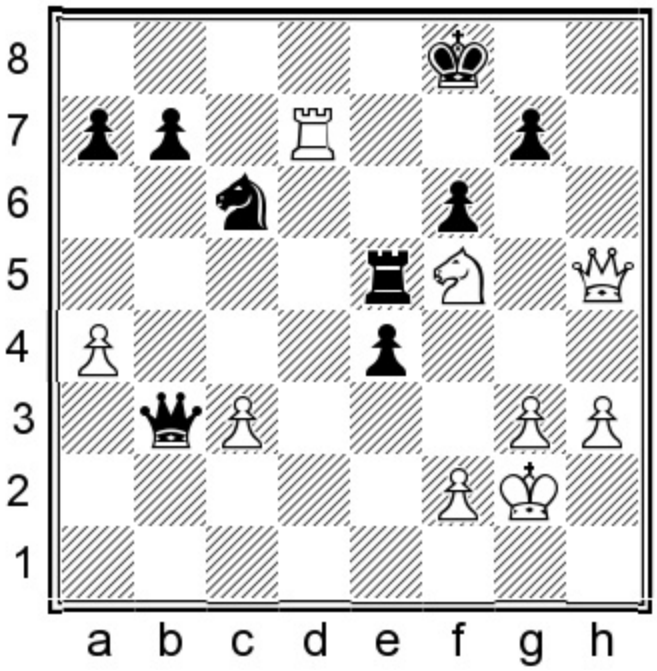
Position after: 40.♕d6!+–

the only way for Black to escape the mating net involves parting with plenty of material.

37.♕xc5 ♕xb2 38.♘e3

The threat of ♘e3-f5 is just dreadful and cannot be parried.

38...♕b6 39.♕h5 ♖e5 40.♘f5 ♕b1+ 41.♔g2 ♕b3 42.♖d7+–

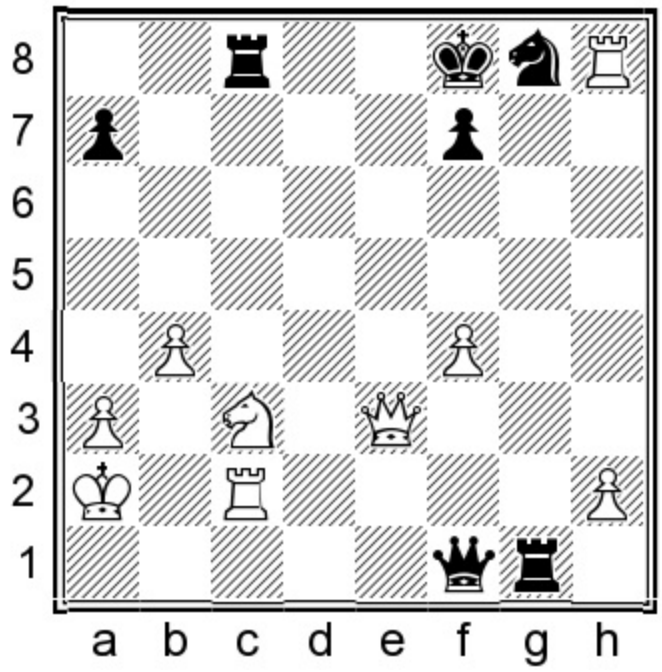


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Position after: 42.♖d7+−

and due to ♖d7xg7 together with ♕h5-h8+ coming, it would be high time for Black to capitulate.

12
Kaspi – Rozentalis
Israel 2019



■ *39...?*

Show/Hide Solution

12
Kaspi, Alexander (2464)
Rozentalis, Eduardas (2526)
Israel 2019

Attack & Defense
What is still missing in the attack?

White is two pawns up, but this does not seem to matter that much as his king is far from being secure. It is namely only the c3-knight that prevents Black from mating the white king with the queen on b1. Should this not work for some reason, there also happen to be additional ideas of infiltrating

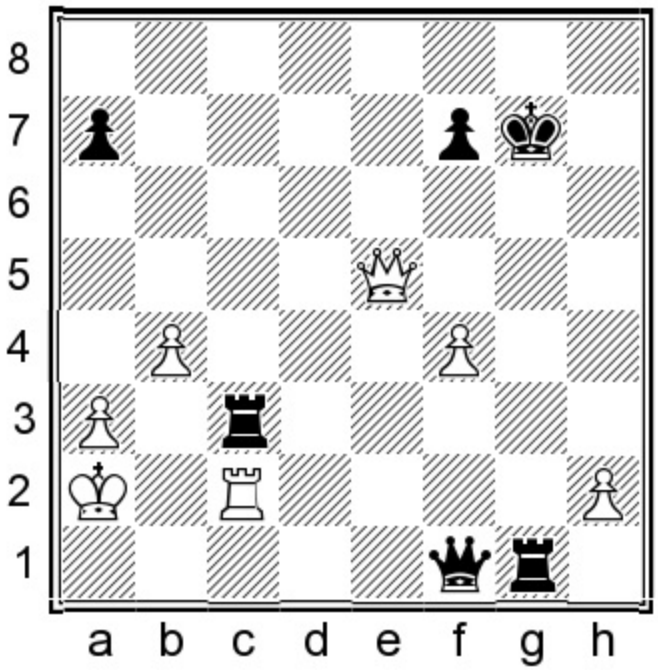
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via a1 and bringing the rook to b1 afterwards that come to mind. So many aggressive options at our disposal, but no clear path to victory in sight at the moment. Or are we simply missing some additional resources?

39...a5!!

An absolutely outstanding resource! Black needs to bring literally all available forces into play if he wants to turn the tide. However, there is something more to this one than solely the intention to open up the files in front of the white monarch. Quite surprisingly, without this little pawn move, other offensive ideas of Black would not have worked, even in conjunction with each other...

A) The game witnessed the most tempting 39...♖xc3 but after 40.♖xg8+! ♔xg8 41.♕e8+ ♔g7 42.♕e5+

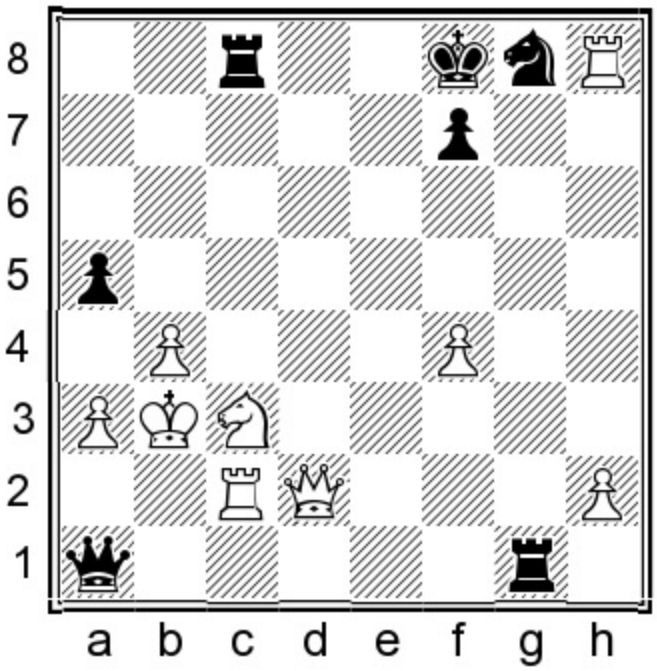


Position after: 42.♕e5+

Black was unable to run to safety with the king: 42...♔f8 [42...♔g6 43.♕e4+ f5 44.♕e6+ ♔g7 45.♕e7+= not being much different either.] 43.♕h8+ ♔e7 44.♕e5+= when White saves the draw by the skin of his teeth thanks to a perpetual check.

B) The more direct 39...♕a1+? 40.♔b3 a5 does not work either due to 41.♕d2!

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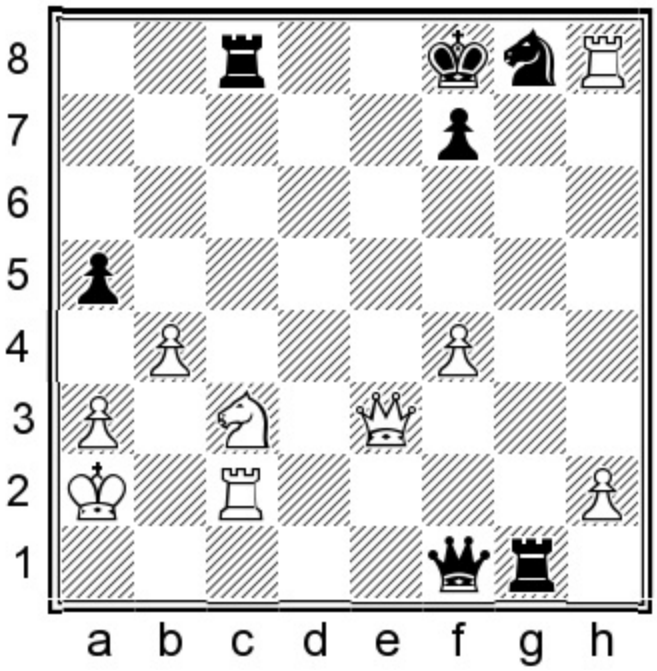


Position after: 41.♕d2!

suddenly there is no straightforward possibility for Black to make use of the exposed position of the white king. What is worse, if he stretches it, White could even be able to launch a deadly counterattack, . e.g. 41...axb4 42.axb4 ♕a6 43.♕d4 ♖a1 44.♖xg8+! ♔xg8 45.♖g2+ ♔f8 46.♕h8+ ♔e7 47.♘d5+ ♔d7 and now after 48.♘b6+! ♕xb6 49.♖d2+ ♔e7 50.♖e2+ ♔d7 51.♕xa1+– two pawns in fact start to make a difference as the black king looks to be in bigger danger than his white counterpart.

39...a5!!

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Position after: 39...a5!!

40.♕d2

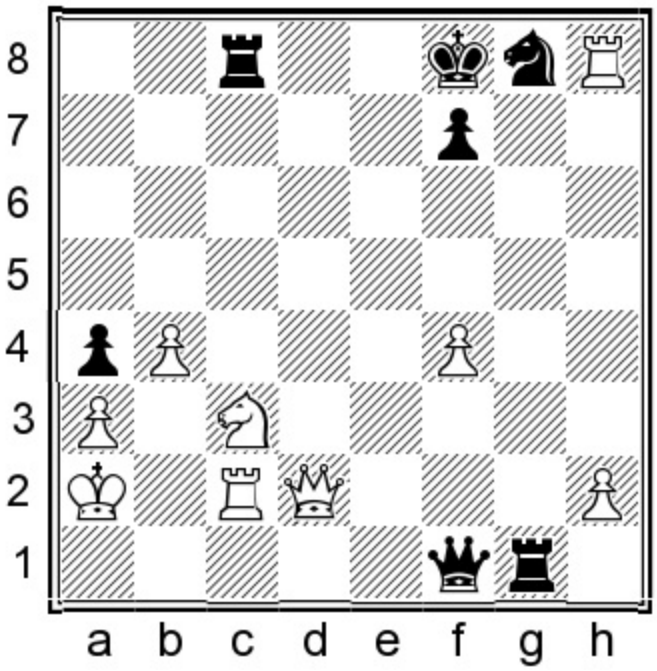
The most tenacious, but simultaneously the prettiest way of losing for White.

A) 40.♕f2 makes sense as a defensive attempt (exchanging queens) but fails due to 40...♕a1+ 41.♔b3 axb4 42.axb4 ♖xc3+! 43.♖xc3 ♖b1+ when Black evicts the white king straight into the danger zone, e.g. 44.♔c4 ♕a6+ 45.♔d5 ♕e6+ 46.♔c5 ♕c8+ 47.♔b5 ♕b7+!–+ and it is either mate or the white queen drops.

B) Finally, 40.♔b2 is to no avail as afterwards the first of the fine points behind 39...a7-a5!! is revealed: 40...♕a1+ 41.♔b3 ♖b1+ 42.♔a4 ♖xb4+! with imminent mate after 43.♔xa5 ♕xa3+ 44.♘a4 ♕xa4#

40...a4!

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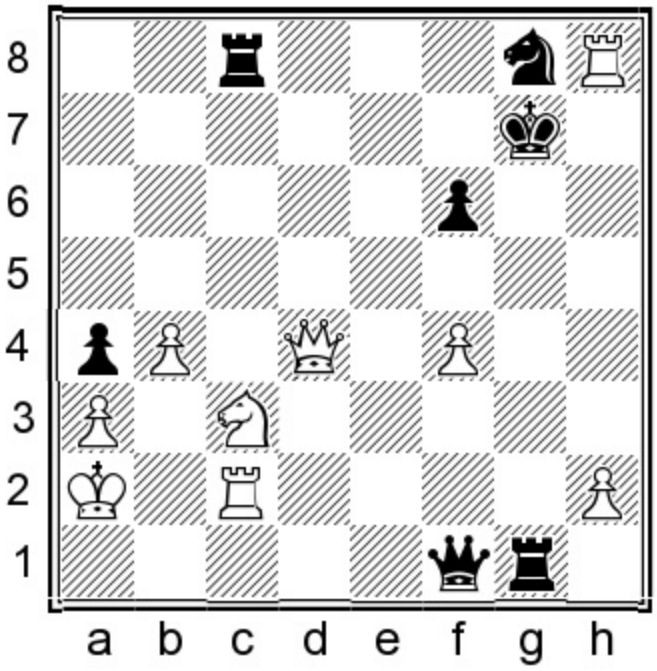


Position after: 40...a4!

A cold shower for White, and at the same time the second, decisive finesse hidden behind the unapparent ...a7-a5 push. The a4-pawn cannot be taken because of mate on b1. Simultaneously, there does not seem to be another method of avoiding mate on a1 than to capture said pawn.

White can certainly try to give a few more random checks with

41.♕d6+ ♔g7 42.♕d4+ f6–+

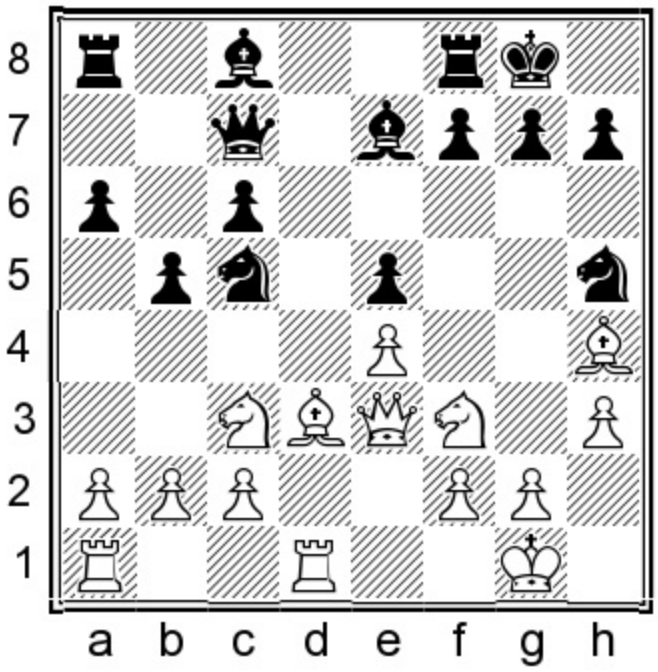


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Position after: 42...f6−+

but the loss cannot be postponed for eternity.

13
Lewicki – Delchev
Skopje 2018



■ *14...?*

Show/Hide Solution

13
Lewicki, Miroslaw (2347)
Delchev, Aleksander (2552)
Skopje 2018

Coordination
Principle of the weakest piece – the problem of the exchange

Here we have a typical 'Philidor-gone-terribly-wrong-for-White'. There may be equal material, but it is rather the difficulties in finding decent outposts for his pieces that White is suffering from. The bishop on d3 is archetypically bad being limited in its scope by its own pawns. The c3-knight often lacks squares if Black is successful in pushing the queenside pawns to c6 and b5. With White already

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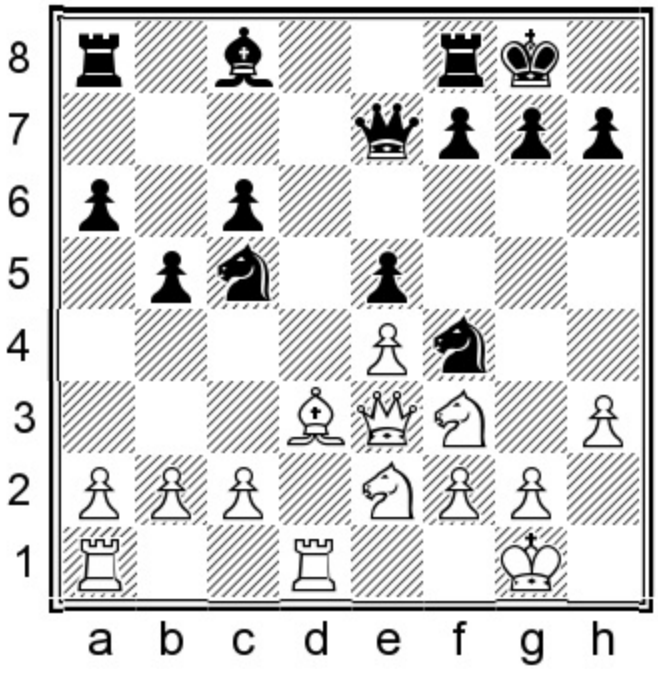
being slightly down on space it is no wonder that he is looking to exchange the dark-squared bishops. As Black, would you allow this to happen?

14...f6!

There was no reason to exchange! By playing ...f7-f6, Black emphasizes how bad of a piece the white bishop on h4 actually is. The bishop chews on granite and cannot be re-routed to greener pastures. For a split-second Black may naturally have had second thoughts as to whether putting yet another pawn on a dark square would spoil his own e7-bishop as well. Still, where one door shuts another opens. This bishop can always be transferred to c5 in case of need. What would then be even worse for White is that from c5 said bishop not only harasses the white queen, but also prevents White from reactivating that sad bishop on h4 by means of a possible f2-f3. The noose around White's head is therefore tightening. What is worth noticing in this context is that very often coordination works like an hourglass: decisions improving ours frequently negatively affect the coordination of the opponent. As we will see in a second, here allowing an exchange on e7 would have solved a major issue of White with his bishop, simultaneously taking away from Black future motifs pertaining to redeployment of his dark-squared bishop. In other words, caring about coordination does not end the moment all of our pieces are perfectly placed, it is then when we may also damage the coordination of the opponent!

A) As for alternatives to the text, 14...♗xh4? looked tempting, but is tactically flawed after 15.♕xc5! ♗f6 16.♘d5± Black would have not been able to retain the pawn on e5 without allowing some serious damage to his kingside pawn structure.

B) In the game Black committed an inaccuracy by playing 14...♘f4?! which looks fairly logical at first, but in fact drops a significant chunk of his advantage after 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 16.♘e2



Position after: 16.♘e2

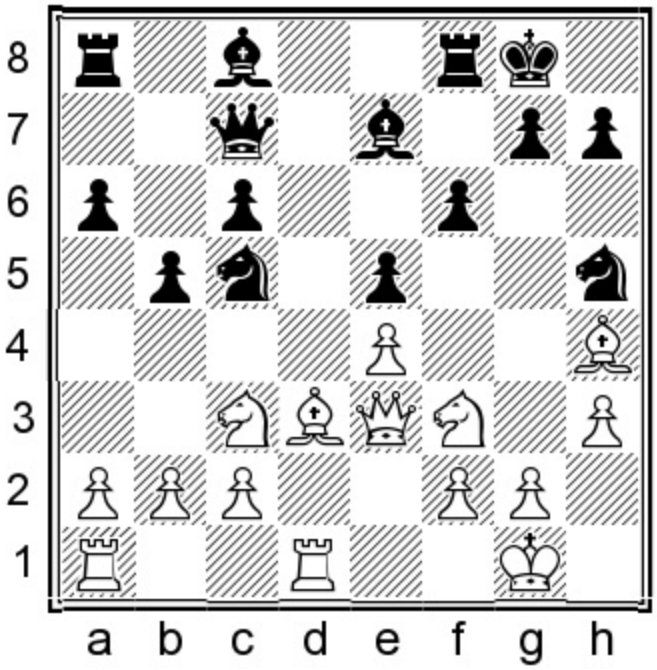
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If White manages to dislodge the black knight from f4, we would be talking at best about a slightly more pleasant middlegame for Black here. Even if he would have been able to successfully retain it with

B1) 16...g5?! Which is actually a tad risky after 17.♘g3! h5 18.♗f1 f6 19.c4!↑ Black would already be feeling a bit stretched as White will be giving him some headaches both on the kingside (f5 is weak) and the queenside (♖a1-c1 is already a serious concern).

B2) 16...♘ce6 17.♘xf4 ♘xf4 after 18.a4⇄ White would have been surgically close to equality. Visually speaking, Black is slightly more satisfied with the outcome as White's bishop is still passive, but the truth is that with no other weakness visible in his camp White would have been able to hold this without that much effort.

14...f6!



Position after: 14...f6!

15.♘d2

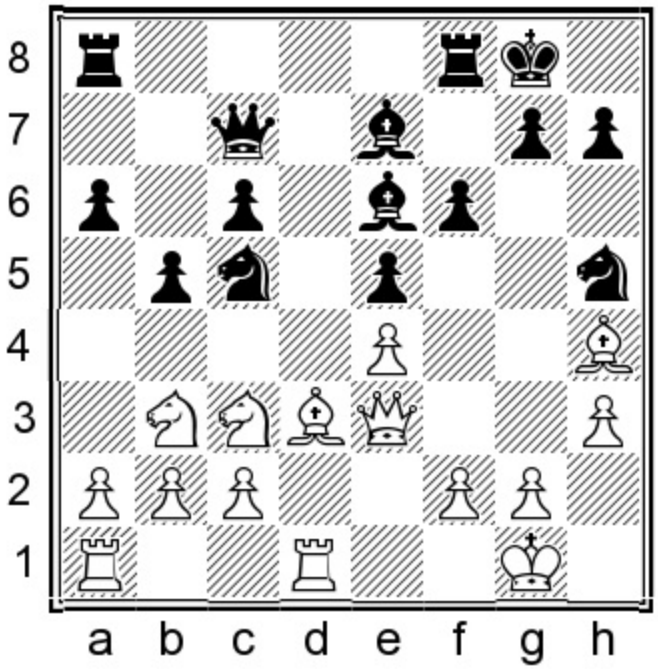
White brings the knight to b3 in order to reduce Black's control over c5. This maneuver is a bit time consuming, thus enabling Black to organize his forces effectively in the meantime as well.

15.♘e2 was another option, with the intention of exchanging the piece that prevents the white h4-bishop from being brought back into play. At the same time however, after 15...♗e6 16.♘g3 ♘xg3 17.♗xg3 ♘xd3 18.cxd3 c5∓ Black would have gained the upper hand as his light-squared bishop works wonders from e6, the white d3-pawn is backward, and the opponent's problem child on g3 is still very much idle.

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15...♗e6 16.♘b3

16.f3? trying to improve the problematic dark-squared bishop fails due to the clever 16...b4! 17.♘e2 ♘a4–+ and White is unable to defend both against ...♘a4xb2 and ...♗e7-c5.



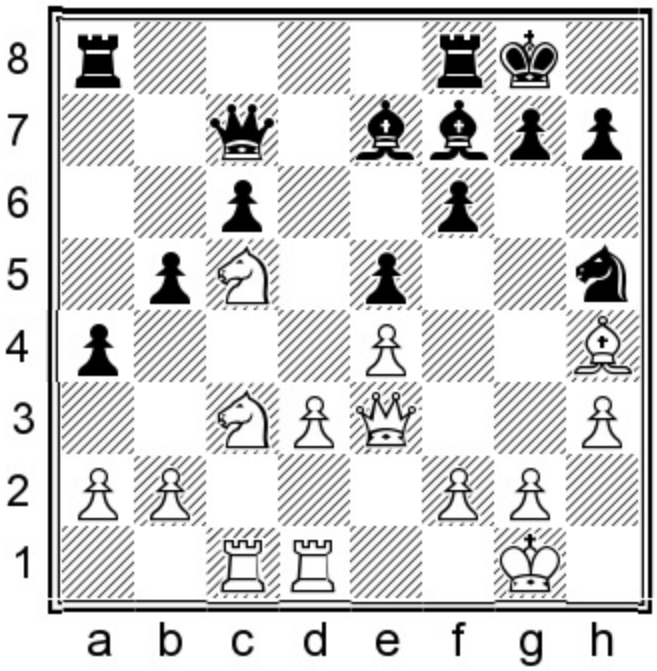
Position after: 16.♘b3

16...♘xd3!?

At first glance a slightly controversial decision. Why would we be trading off a great knight for a rather mediocre bishop on d3? In reality however, the knight could not have been maintained on c5 and what we get by this exchange is the bishop pair. Also, Black is just starting out with a big campaign to gain space on the queenside which White can hardly oppose. For example, after something like

17.cxd3 a5 18.♖ac1 a4 19.♘c5 ♗f7

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Position after: 19...♗f7

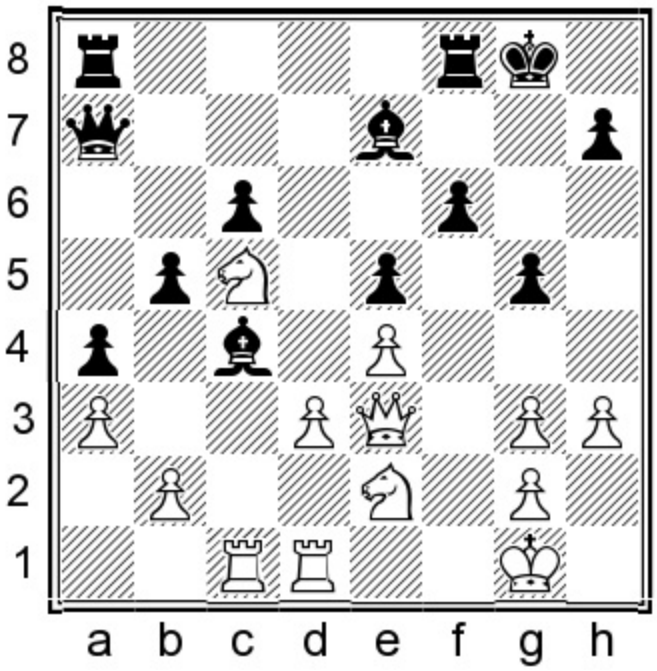
White would have already landed in serious trouble as the knight on c5 is much less stable than it looks. In particular, trying to have it defended additionally requires the c3-knight to be moved but this again drops the a2-pawn. However, if White plays

20.a3?

as preparation for ♘c3-e2, he would have ended up losing on the spot after

20...g5! 21.♗g3 ♘xg3 22.fxg3 ♕a7 23.♘e2 ♗c4!

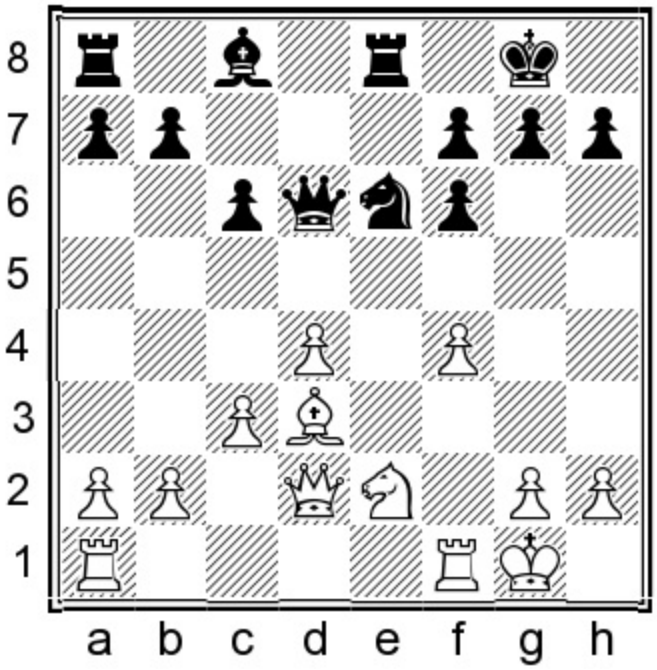
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Position after: 23...♗c4!

when the c5-knight finally falls. And it all started out with the h4-bishop of White being slightly out of play.

14
Simacek – Michalik
Ostrava 2019



chesstouring.com

■ *13...?*

Show/Hide Solution

14
Simacek, Pavel (2471)
Michalik, Peter (2577)
Ostrava 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Dynamic transformations in the center

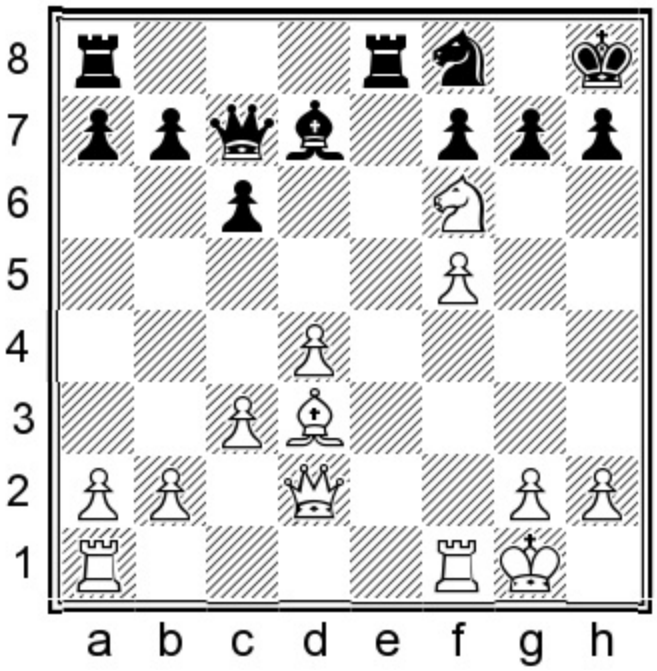
This position arose out of the recently very popular Tartakower variation of the Caro-Kann Defense. In this line, Black voluntarily agrees to inflict a little bit of damage to his pawn structure (5...exf6), in exchange striving to obtain lively play along the e-file and pressure against White's kingside. The main problem with Black's idea is that although he is able to contain White's central pawn-majority while most of his pieces are still on the board, the moment they start being exchanged the influence of this element on the assessment of the position may rise. In other words, the more pieces disappear from the board the higher the risk the pawn ending is lost for Black. Because of this, with two pairs of minor pieces having already disappeared from the board, Black is advised not to hesitate for too long before applying a potential remedy.

13...c5

An absolutely classical move in the Caro-Kann Defense, and also one that has to be made right here, right now. White's d4-pawn determines not only that White enjoys more space in this position, but also deprives Black of activity he often gets the moment the d-file gets opened in this opening. As the course of the game proves, postponing it even for one more move could have had dire consequences for Black.

The game saw the passive 13...♗d7? being played, when after 14.f5 ♘f8 15.♘g3 ♔h8 White could have now gone for a pretty combination with 16.♘e4 ♕c7 17.♘xf6!

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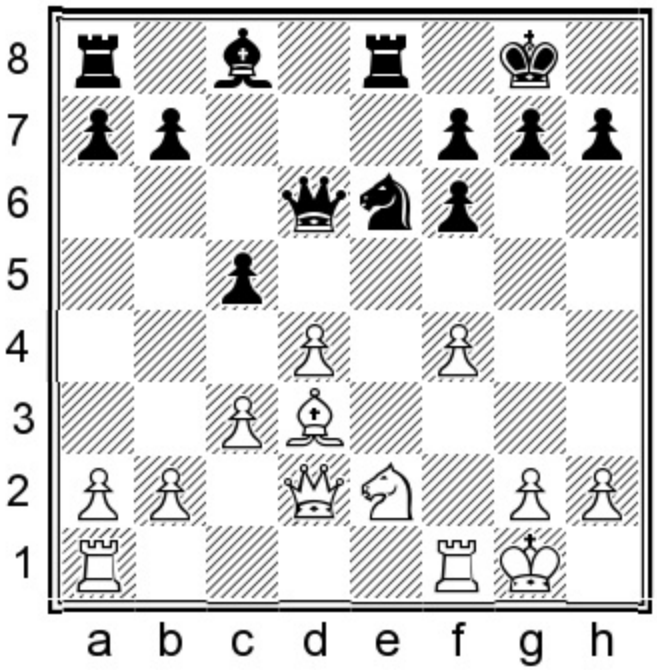


Position after: 17.♘xf6!

when after the further 17...gxf6 18.♕h6 ♕d6 19.♖f3 c5 20.♖g3 in view of mating threats, Black would be forced to part with lots of material technically ending up in a lost position after something like 20...♘g6 21.fxg6 fxg6 22.♖xg6+–. 13...♗d7? was a very ugly move which could have easily contributed to Black's rapid downfall in this game. As a coach, I have witnessed even worse coordination performances of my younger students and was concerned a long while ago how to wean them away from such practices. What I figured out is a method that you might at first consider a joke, but the efficacy of which has been confirmed by the majority of my pupils. Whenever they come up with a move that they like, but have doubts regarding their 'coordination viability' (e.g. blocking their own bishop, leaving the knight stranded on the rim), they are supposed to imagine that somebody else is playing their game with themselves being the very piece involved. Then I ask them to tell their imaginary friend (yes, I know how it sounds...) what they think about such a move being made which affects their scope of possibilities. And believe it or not, with the most common answer being 'What are you doing to me, dude!?', the number of horrible coordination events that I have to witness nowadays during my training sessions has been sharply declining.

13...c5

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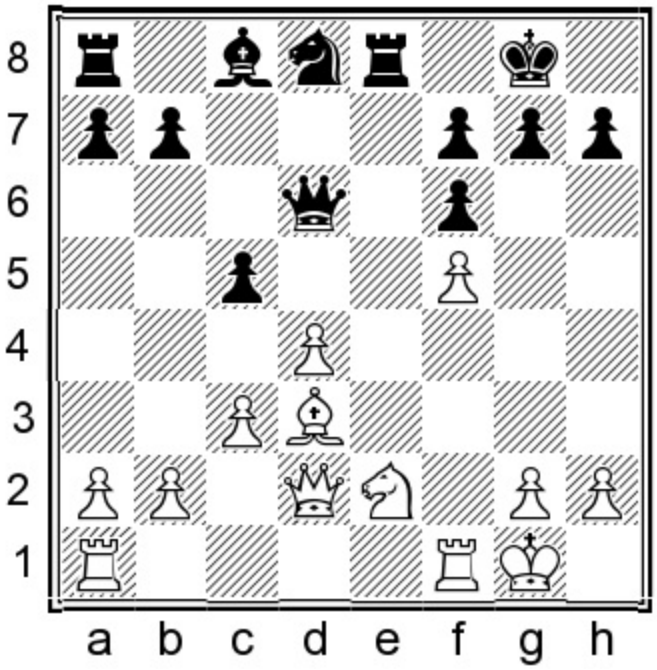


Position after: 13...c5

14.d5

This move seems to be justified both tactically, the pawn is taboo because of a discovered check on h7, and strategically. If White is able to create a supported central passed pawn this would constitute a huge static advantage for him.

A) 14.f5 is actually quite testing as the only move for Black to obtain full equality would have been 14...♘d8!

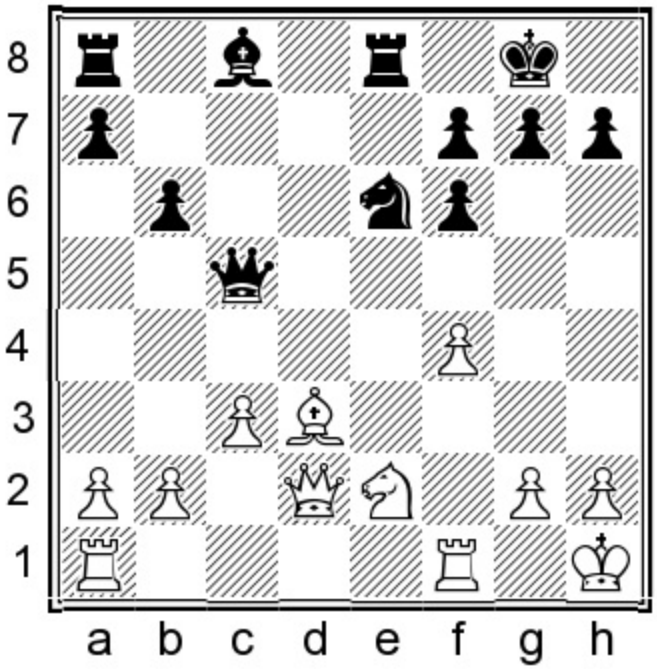


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Position after: 14...♘d8!

There were naturally other squares available for the knight to retreat to but we need to understand that Black should try to undermine the symbol of White's advantage (the central pawn-majority, with its most exposed element being the d4-pawn) here as fast as possible in order to be able to achieve a completely level game. Without this action Black will have to tolerate White's central dominance at least for a few more moves. A sample line is: 15.♕f4 ♕b6 16.dxc5 ♕xc5+ 17.♘d4 ♘c6= and in these structures an IQP in the center means nothing as Black finds it rather trivial to put it to a halt with the central files being technically available for his rooks.

B) By contrast, 14.dxc5?! could even prove to be risky for White as after 14...♕xc5+ 15.♔h1 b6↑ Black quickly fianchettoes the light-squared bishop and brings the other rook to the file with the white queen. What is worth noticing is that in such a scenario, White would be already uncomfortable despite enjoying advantages of his own: the 3 v. 2 pawn majority on the queenside.



Position after: 15...b6↑

The problem in this context is that the mentioned advantage for White still needs to crystallize, that is those pawns need to start moving or a passed pawn needs to be created. As Black is faster with his dynamic threats here it is quite possible that the passed pawn would have never materialized.

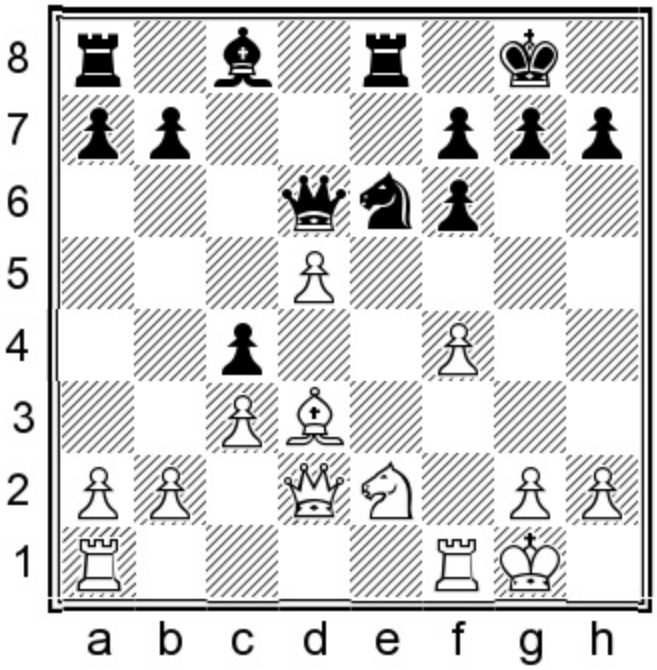
14...c4!

The point of Black's little operation. This cute little pawn lever not only cuts the connection between the white c and d-pawns, but also lures the white bishop towards c4. Taking on e6 is to no avail as Black is going to capture on d3 in return, maybe even creating a dangerous passed pawn as a result.

Other tries such as 14...♘c7?! fail as Black misses the dynamics granted to him by the timely central

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pawn counter: 15.c4 b5 16.b3± and both of Black's minor pieces end up being bad at least for a certain period of time. The worst part about this position is that Black would have to live with such a powerful white pawn on d5 as the only way to take it down would be to eliminate its supporter on c4 first. But this does not seem to be reasonably possible within the next ten moves or so.



Position after: 14...c4!

15.♗xc4

A) 15.♗xh7+ deserves attention in the sense that after 15...♔xh7 16.♕c2+ ♔g8 17.dxe6 ♗xe6 18.♘d4 ♗d7 19.♖ad1 ♕c7= White would have obtained a position which some players would call the good knight versus bad bishop scenario. The truth is that although the knight cannot be reached by the light-squared bishop of Black, the knight cannot move forward either, at least not without the risk of being eliminated by the bishop. When we take into consideration that White has weakened the position of his king as well as the e4-square a little bit by playing f2-f4, we could actually conclude that Black should not be worse here.

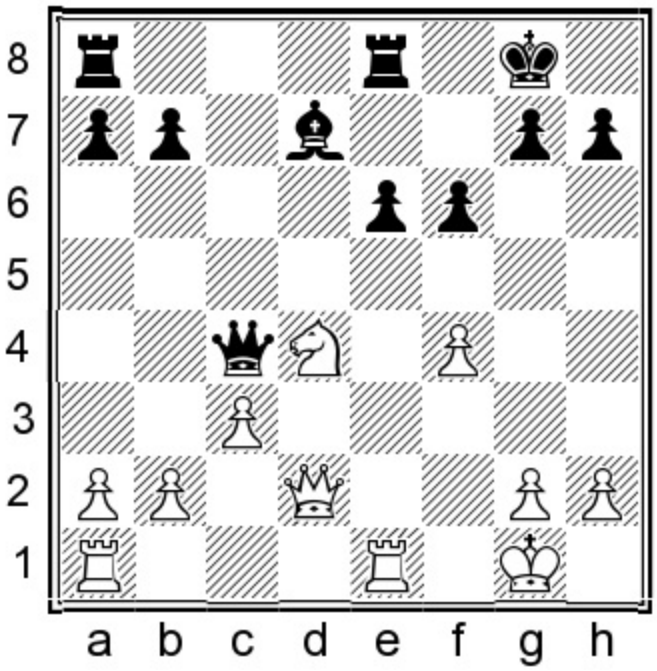
B) 15.♗c2?! would have even led to a worse position for White as after 15...♕c5+ 16.♔h1 ♘c7 17.d6 ♘b5∓ the d6-pawn would probably have been doomed, especially since d6-d7 drops the pawn at once.

15...♕c5+

The tactical point behind ...c5-c4 – the white bishop falls.

16.♘d4 ♕xc4 17.dxe6 fxe6 18.♖fe1 ♗d7=

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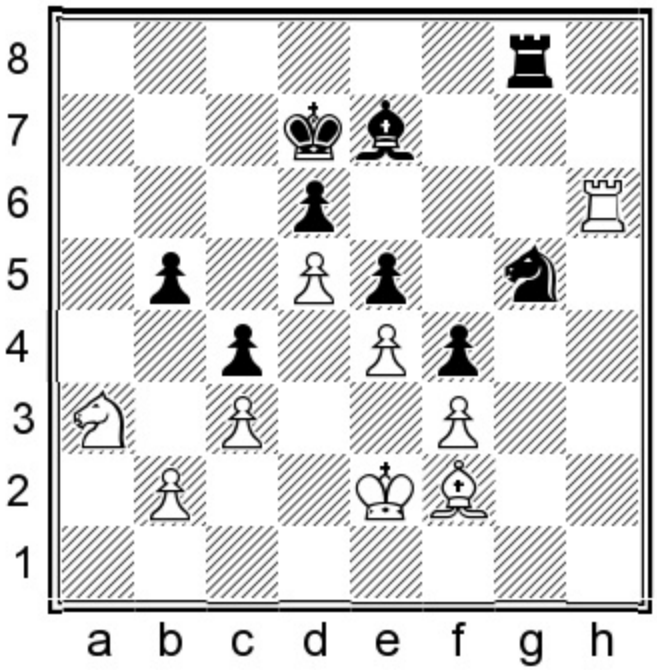


Position after: 18...♗d7=

The position gradually heads toward drawish tendencies. The knight on d4 puts pressure against Black's backward e6-pawn, and for the time being even blocks any influence of the black rooks along the central files. At the same time Black can start centralizing those rooks and aim for a well-prepared ...e6-e5 in order to destabilize the knight. Even if Black was supposed to be left with an IQP on the e-file this way, the bishop would surely compensate for such a deficiency by being a more mobile piece than the knight.

15
Abdusattorov – Zvjaginsev
St Petersburg 2018

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□ *42.?*

Show/Hide Solution

15
Abdusattorov, Nodirbek (2546)
Zvjaginsev, Vadim (2642)
St Petersburg 2018

Weakness
Capturing a weakness & converting the edge

A complex endgame has arisen on the board. Material is equal, but White is already close to prevailing in this regard by taking on b5. Easier said than done however, as doing so upfront would result in Black shifting his rook quickly to b8, and even taking the initiative the moment the rook lands on b2 with a check. Still, taking on b5 represents our only way to move on in this position. With the knight on b5 it would be just a matter of time before Black's c4 and d6-pawns will be falling as well. Where there is a will, there is a way, or so they say. What if we could first arrange conditions for the capture of the b5-pawn without fearing any attacks from the black rook?

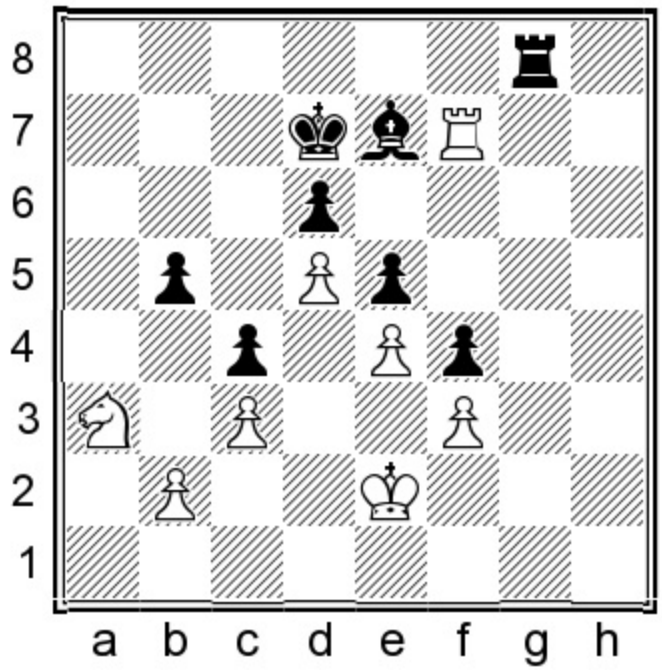
42.♗a7!±

A logically alluring move! White wants to capture on b5 but this is impossible for the moment because of the ...♖g8-b8 counter. With the b2-pawn falling it would actually be White who would have landed in trouble instead. Understanding this, White should have taken away the b8-square from

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the black rook first, only then helping himself to the desired pawn. On top of that, Black will find it ineffective to try and evict the a7-bishop quickly with ...♖g8-a8 as after ♘a3xb5 it would simply be protected. If you managed to find this resource you can consider the exercise solved but I invite you to have a further look at a potential simulation of what could have happened next, should White want to convert this still rather complex endgame into a full point.

In the game, White preferred 42.♗h4 probably aiming for a better ♖+♘ v. ♖+♗ endgame. With the tendency for the former duo being superior here Black quickly equalized the game after 42...♘f7 43.♖h7 ♗xh4 44.♖xf7+ ♗e7

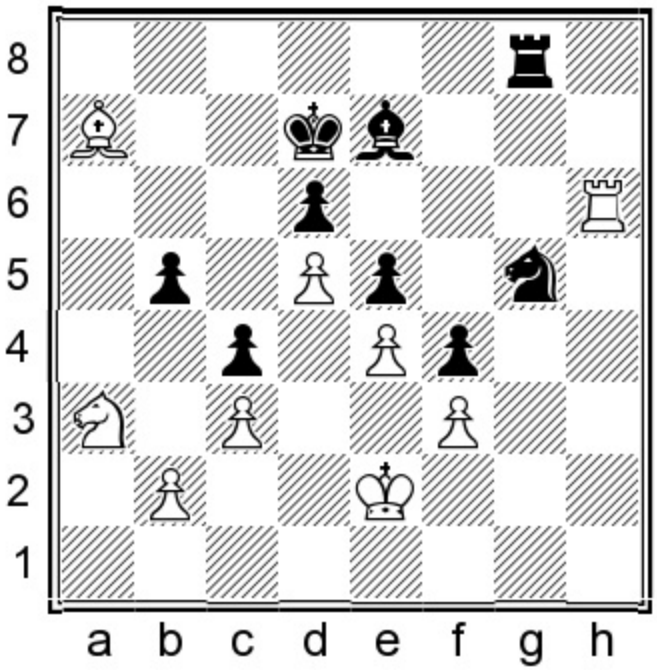


Position after: 44...♗e7

The black b5-pawn might be weak, but White does not seem to have a possibility to capture it without allowing Black counterplay along the second rank due to something like 45.♔f1 ♖g3 46.♔f2 ♖h3. With no other choice left, White eventually went for the position arising after 47.♘xb5 ♖h2+ 48.♔e1 ♖xb2 49.♘a7 ♔e8 50.♖h7 ♖c2= when the white knight is able to occupy the c6-square, but Black's bishop is going to be perfectly safe on f8 in a second. In the meantime Black became interested in White's backward pawns which finally convinced White that a draw is not such a bad result after all.

42.♗a7!±

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Position after: 42.♗a7!±

42...♘f7 43.♖h7

Hitting the knight otherwise Black would have infiltrated immediately with ...♖g8-g2+ effectively throwing a monkey wrench into White's plans.

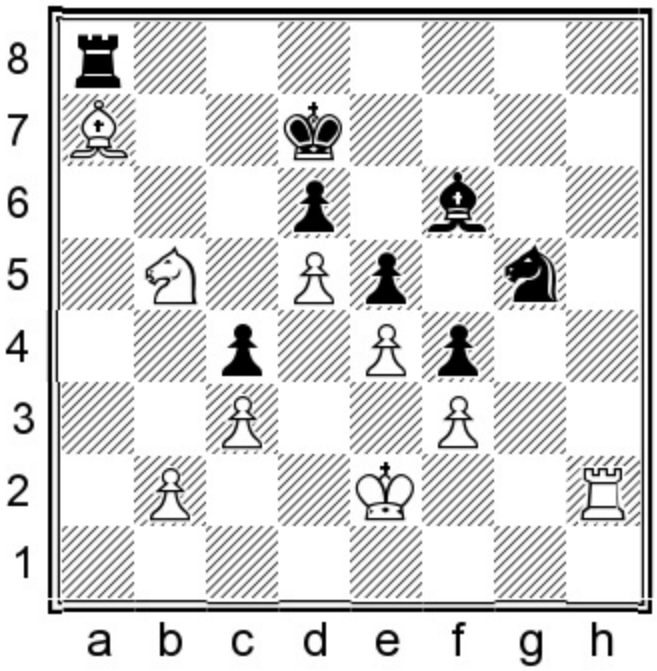
43...♘g5 44.♖h2

First things first!

When electing a square to run away to with the rook White decides upon h2 where it guards the second rank just in case. Good technique implies that neutralizing the opponent's counterplay is no less important than moving on with your own ideas.

44...♗f6 45.♘xb5 ♖a8

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Position after: 45...♖a8

Earlier we said that the a7 bishop is out of danger in the presence of the knight on b5, but by playing like this Black is rather interested in immobilizing the knight instead. The reason for this is simple as White would have retreated to a3 and captured yet another black pawn on c4.

46.♖h6 ♗e7 47.♔f2

White should now try to shuffle his rook to the queenside allowing his forces to untangle.

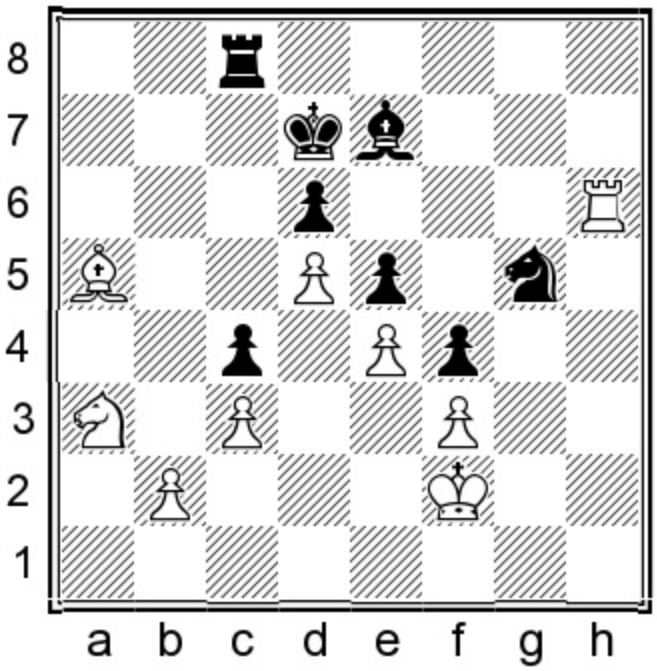
Before this happens potential swings of the black rook to the kingside should be prevented therefore White first transfers his king in that direction.

47...♖g8 48.♘a3

The pressure against the bishop has been released so the knight is more than happy to jump back to a3 from where it hits the weakened c4-pawn.

48...♖a8 49.♗b6 ♖c8 50.♗a5!

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Position after: 50.♗a5!

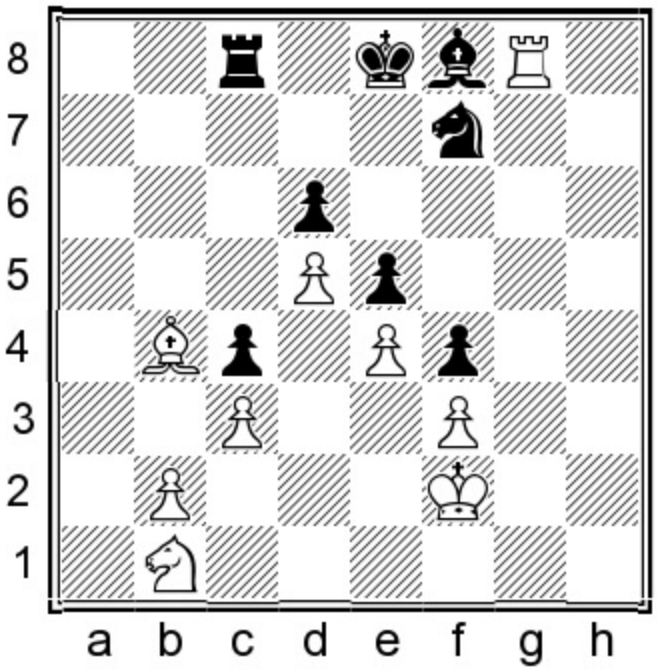
A very clever rearranging as the white bishops heads for b4 from where it will not only be eyeing the weak d6-pawn but also blocking any possible counter play along the b-file.

50...♘f7 51.♖g6 ♘g5 52.♗b4 ♘f7 53.♖g7

Keeping the pieces of the opponent passive to the maximum before proceeding with the decisive stage of the winning plan.

53...♔e8 54.♖g8+ ♗f8 55.♘b1!

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Position after: 55.♘b1!

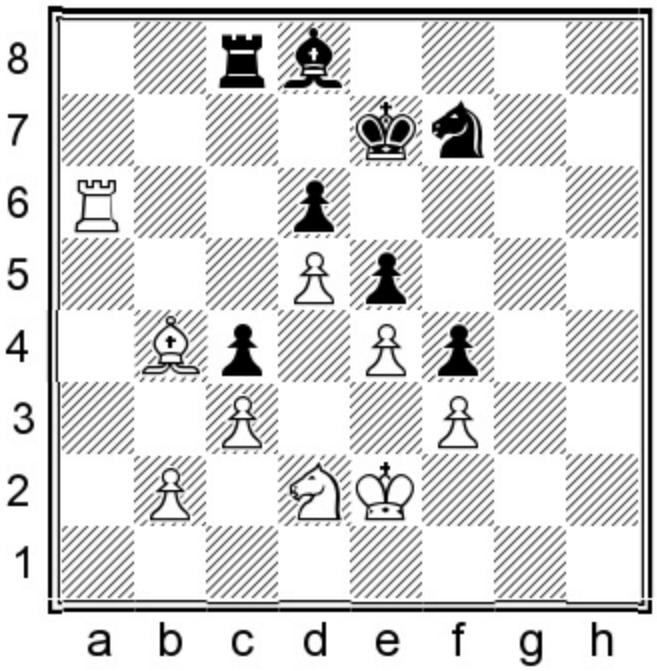
The knight is transferred to d2 from where it still targets the weak c4-pawn, but also defends the backward white soldier on f3. Moreover on a3 the knight was blocking the a-file, technically disabling the possibility for White to swing his rook along it deep into Black's camp.

55...♔d7 56.♘d2 ♔e7 57.♖g6!

One final accuracy before White finally goes for

57...♔d7 58.♖g1 ♗e7 59.♖a1 ♗d8 60.♖a7+ ♔e8 61.♖a6 ♔d7 62.♔e2 ♔e7

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Position after: 62...♔e7

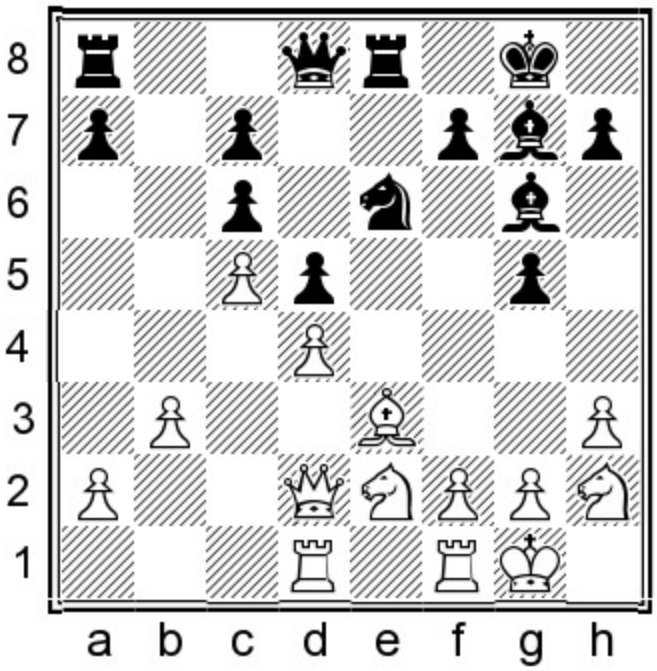
when the only thing more required for White to do before he can claim a win is to pull back the bishop to a3, thus conclusively exposing the c4-pawn.

63.♗a3 ♔d7 64.♖a7+ ♔e8 65.♖a4+–

A very instructive technical display indeed!

16
Srinath – Markus
Budapest 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *21...?*

Show/Hide Solution

16
Srinath, Rao (2416)
Markus, Robert (2600)
Budapest 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Predicting the opponent's response to our idea

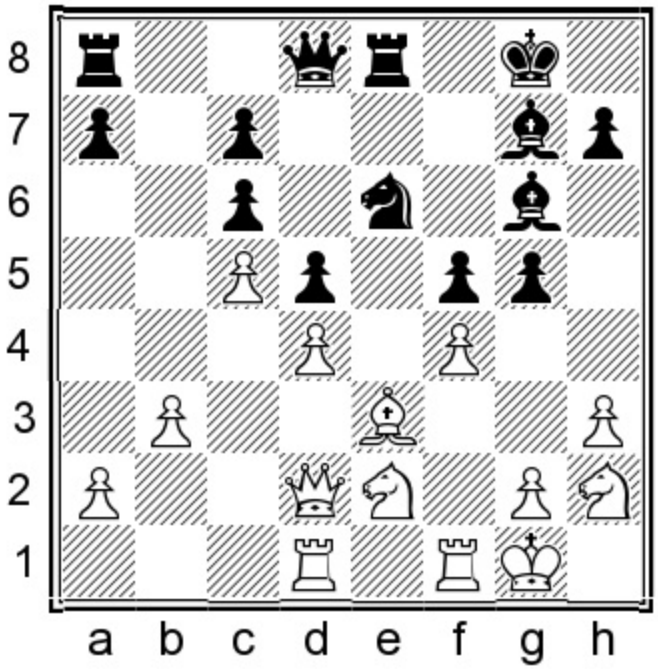
At first glance Black has no reasons to complain about what has emerged on the board after the opening. He obtained the bishop pair which happens to be quite a nuisance for White as the light-squared bishop seems to be uncontested for the moment, while its dark-squared colleague is effectively putting pressure against White's backward d4-pawn. The slightly damaged pawn structure does not hurt him at all as it actually grants him additional possibilities of generating play along the newly opened b-file. What is more, Black is already displaying ambitions of gaining more and more space. Be it by means of ...a7-a5-a4 softening up the white b3-pawn, or even better through the barbaric ...f7-f5-f4 push. A brief visualization of the latter is probably enough to be able to understand that an attack on the already poor white bishop on e3 would not only obliterate the remnants of White's central coordination, but also jeopardize the d4-pawn. But how to do it in an optimal fashion?

21...♕e7!

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With this apparently simple resource White's life could have become much more difficult than before. If apart from understanding what his most promising plan was, Black also profoundly examined the nature of White's defensive idea, finding such a move would have been a piece of cake for a grandmaster of Markus' caliber. What was called for was not only to recognize White's resources in this context but rather being enriched with such knowledge to come back to 'square one' of his own concept and resort to anticipation. In other words, Black's train of thought should have looked this way: 1. What is my plan? (to push ...f7-f5-f4); 2. What is my opponent going to do about it? (He will push f2-f4 himself in order to stop Black's f-pawn); 3. Can I do anything about White's defensive idea? If question number three is missing in Black's general considerations the odds that Black would have gone for 21...♕e7! are most probably rather low.

A) 21...f5?! has been elected by Black to be played in the game, but after 22.f4!



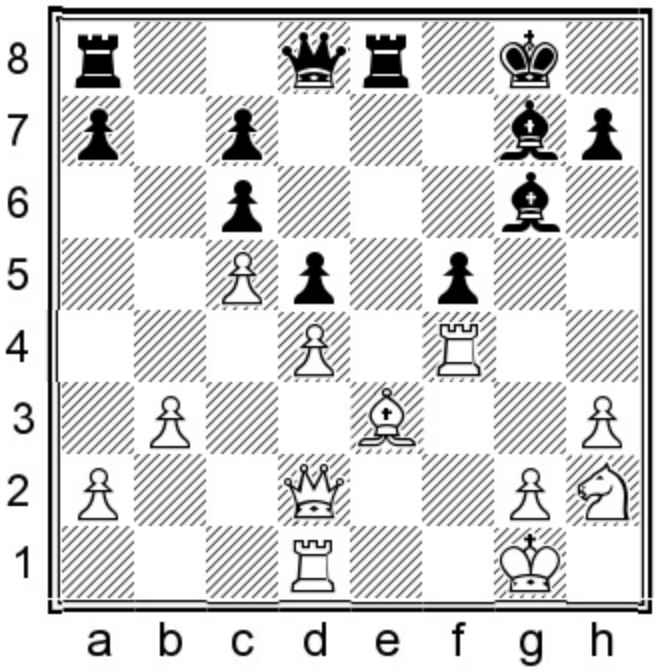
Position after: 22.f4!

it becomes painfully clear that not only is Black's kingside pawn mass put to a halt, it is also the light-squared bishop that has largely become deactivated. White's bishop on e3 might have become a bit weakened but it still constitutes quite a reliable defender of the crucial d4-pawn. In other words it is a 'bad' piece doing a 'good' job.

A1) Trying to trade off the wretched bishop with 22...♗h5 makes perfect sense however after 23.♘f3 ♗xf3 24.♖xf3 g4 25.hxg4 fxg4 26.♖g3 h5 27.f5⇄ it cannot be said for sure who is actually attacking in this position. Maybe Black is fine but letting oneself get into a messy trade of blows does not sound like the most practical of ideas when enjoying an obvious edge in the starting position.

A2) 22...gxf4 23.♘xf4 ♘xf4 24.♖xf4

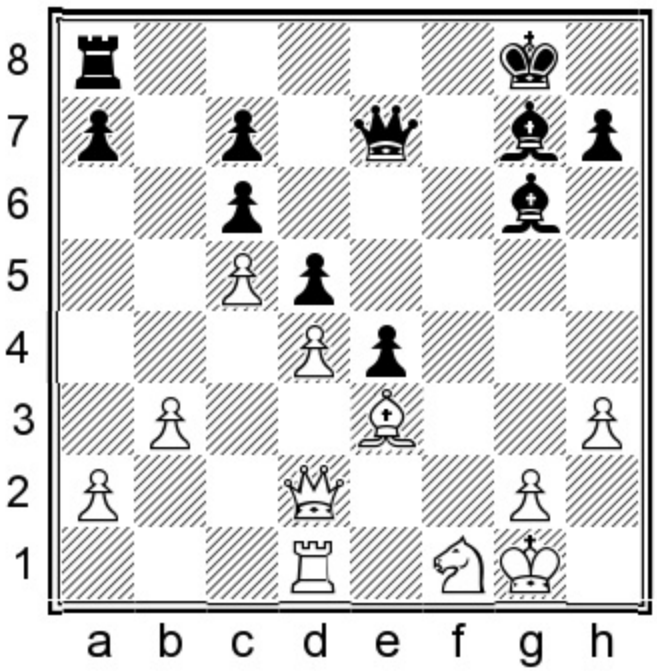
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Position after: 24.♖xf4

A2.1) Aiming to destabilize White's firm grip over the dark squares with 24...♗h6?! looks like the right thing to do but after 25.♖f3 ♗xe3+ 26.♖xe3 ♖e4 27.♘f3 f4 28.♖e2 ♕e7 29.♖f2!± the exposed position of the black f4-pawn would make it quite an arduous task to maintain equality in this position. Things could even get worse if White managed to jump with the knight to e5. This way White would have reached a very desired 'good' knight versus 'bad' bishop scenario.

A2.2) 24...♖e4 25.♘f1! ♕e7 26.♖xe4 fxe4



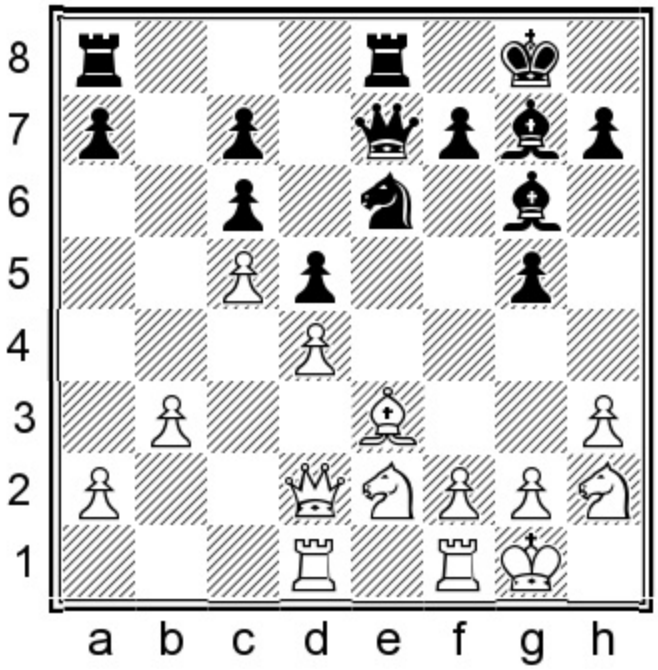
Position after: 26...fxe4

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and it looks as if Black has made considerable progress in the center as the pawn structure consolidated and the light-squared bishop may be potentially shifted to h5 for the purpose of attacking the white rook. Nevertheless, White is still immensely solid along the dark squares. Now after 27.♕b4!?↑ the queen will be wreaking havoc on the queenside, or at least engaging Black's forces from turning their attention towards the white monarch, depending on Black's approach. In either case the moment White reroutes his rook to f2, speaking about any real weakness in White's camp would amount to a semantic abuse.

B) 21...♗h5 would have been interesting were it not for the fact that it allows White to launch his own play on the kingside with 22.g4! ♗g6 23.f4! when after 23...gxf4 24.♘xf4 ♘xf4 25.♗xf4 ♖e4 26.♘f3⇄ his position might appear shaky at first, but in reality Black lacks clear cut opportunities for both of his bishops.

21...♕e7!



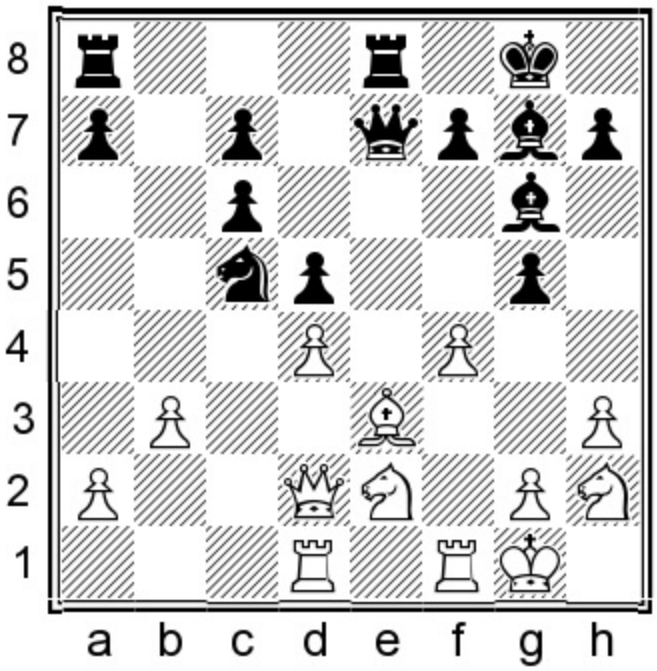
Position after: 21...♕e7!

22.♖fe1

As we will see in a second White has to gather his toys and go play somewhere else than in the center, but at least this way material balance would have been maintained.

A) The idea behind 21...♕e7 reveals itself should White insist on pursuing his plans related to 22.f4 as after 22...♘xc5!

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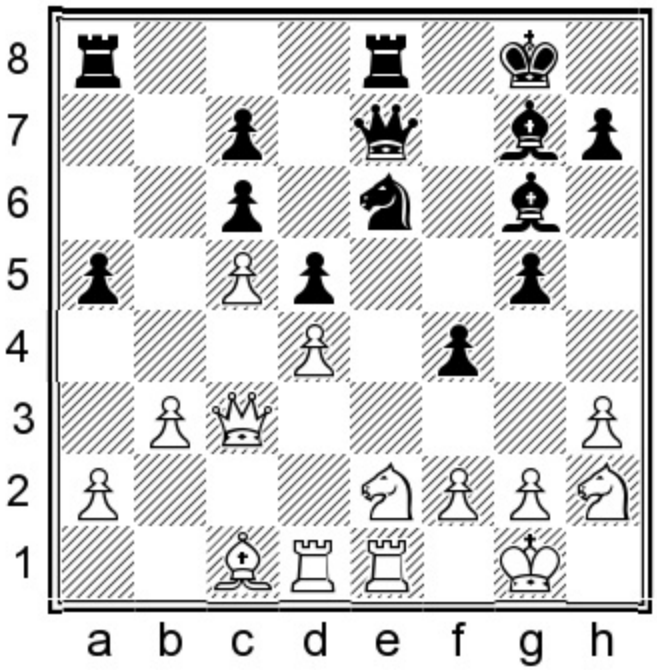
Position after: 22...♘xc5!

Black would not only be starting to exercise tremendous pressure along the e-file in an expedite manner but would be doing so a pawn up. White could then put up some resistance with 23.♖f3 but after 23...♘e4 24.♕c1 gxf4 25.♘xf4 ♕d6∓ it would definitely be Black who is calling the shots.

B) 22.♘f3?! does not help White at all as Black could even ignore White's threat of taking on g5 by continuing with 22...f5!∓: already a quick look into the matter reveals that White's greed in this area would result in the e2-knight falling at the end the variation.

22...f5 23.♕c3 f4 24.♗c1 a5∓

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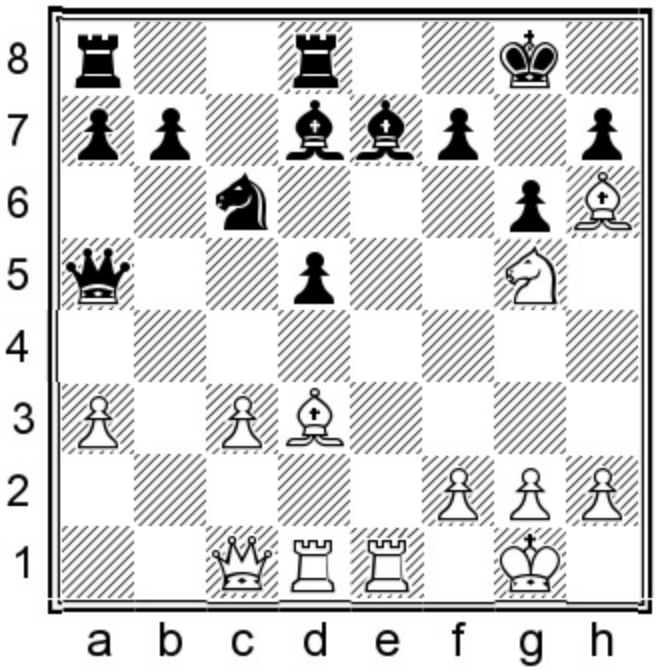


Position after: 24...a5∓

This lets White get away in terms of material, but who would like to play a position like this? The activity of Black's minor pieces is simply overwhelming, the natural follow up seems to be to push the kingside pawns even farther as well. White's central pawns look fragile, with the dark-squared bishop being forced to go to the miserable outpost on b2 to have them protected a tad more. White probably dreams of installing the h2-knight on e5 in the near future, but as this could always result in Black capturing it and later on taking on c5, the odds are undoubtedly stacked against him.

17
Sebag – Rakhmangulova
Antalya 2019

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□ *22.?*

Show/Hide Solution

17
Sebag, Marie (2461)
Rakhmangulova, Anastasiya (2255)
Antalya 2019

Attack & Defense
Attacking along the squares of a color-complex

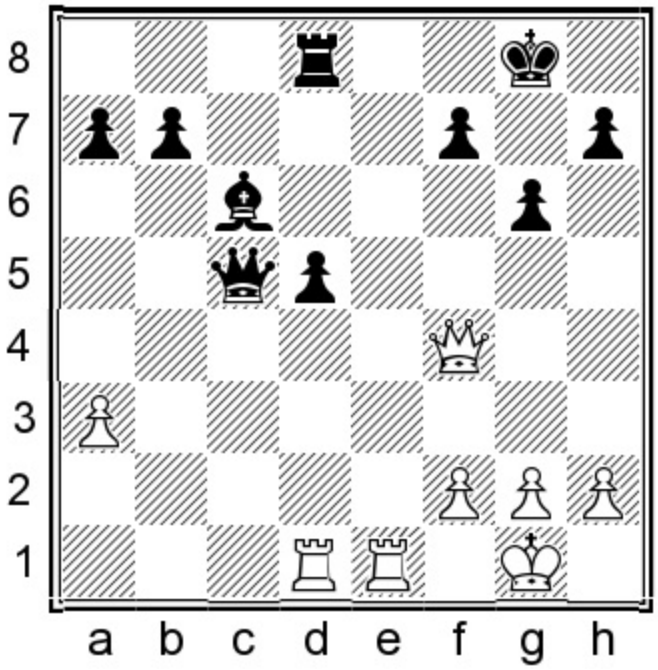
White is a pawn down here but with all of his pieces directed towards the kingside we should be able to recognize instantly that something big is about to happen. Although there are many black pieces standing in close proximity of their king, with the rook chased off to d8, it is only the dark-squared bishop on e7 that might aspire to participate in the upcoming defense. At the same time Black is very close to taking on a3, threatening to exchange the queens and thereby reducing White's attacking potential. Having said that, is there a way for White to sweep Black off the board?

22.♖xe7!

Eliminating the core defender of the dark squares around the black monarch is absolutely the first thing that should have been done. Now Black has no other choice but to take on e7 after which what is left for White to do is to include the queen into play in a way that highlights White's domination over the dark color complex in the most precise manner.

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A) 22.♕f4 was played in the game. Please do not get me wrong, it is not a bad move as such. The problem is that White must have assumed that if Black is forced to part with the dark-squared bishop 'just like that', the position must be won by force. What White missed is a typical defensive device used in similar situations. Black bails out by returning some material. Now after 22...♗xg5 23.♗xg5 [23.♕xg5 ♕xc3 24.♖e3 ♕b2= is far from impressive, as the black queen is difficult to chase away from the long diagonal, thus preventing ♕g5-f6 from happening.] 23...♕xc3 24.♗xd8 ♖xd8 25.♗b5 ♕c5 26.♗xc6 ♗xc6±

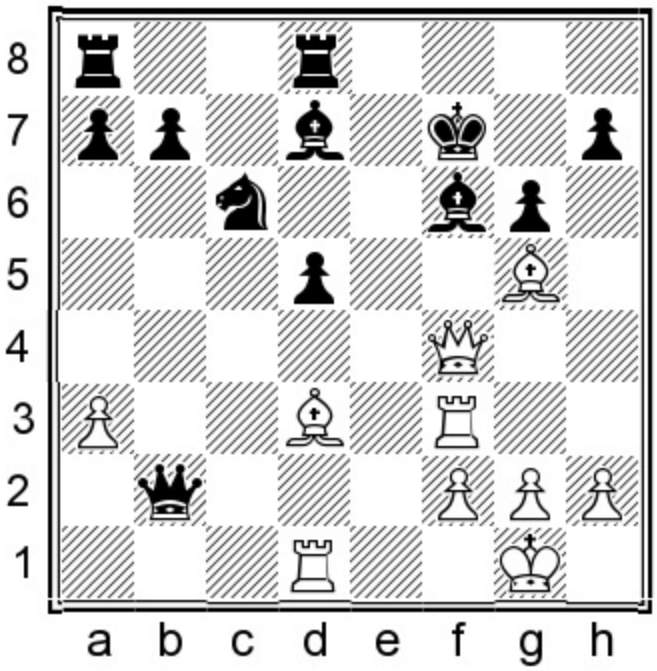


Position after: 26...♗xc6±

White is still a bit better and eventually even managed to win. Objectively speaking we cannot say that Black's position is so bad. The material is nominally equal and there are no immediate threats that need to be taken care of. Simultaneously, Black's position is nevertheless quite solid and White constantly has to reckon with some deflective measures such as a timely ...d5-d4 push.

B) 22.♘xf7!? would have been another much cooler try to get the head of the black monarch. By taking on f7 White lures the opponent's king towards the f-file for the sake of approaching it very swiftly and attacking along the dark squares after something like 22...♔xf7 23.♕f4+ ♗f6 24.♗g5 ♕xc3 25.♖e3 ♕b2 26.♖f3

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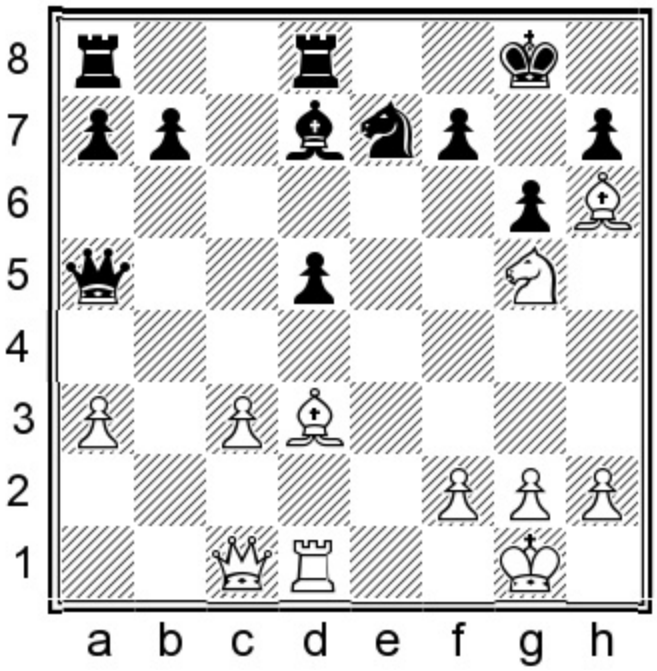


Position after: 26.♖f3

The situation seems to be escalating very quickly here, but now tactics come to Black's aid as now the most unexpected 26...♘e5!! would have allowed Black to stay in the game. The point of this move is that after [After 26...♕e5 27.♕h4 ♗f5 28.♕xh7+ ♔e6 29.♕xb7 ♗xg5 30.♕xc6+ ♕d6 31.♕b7→ despite being a whole piece down, her attack would be still very much ongoing.] 27.♕xf6+ ♔g8 and for a split-second White is lacking coordination. This circumstance helps Black consolidate, e.g. 28.♖f4 ♖f8 29.♕d6 ♕b3!± and although White simply has to be slightly better here the game would have been very much on, with all three results possible and the White attack being already somewhat diluted.

22.♖xe7! ♘xe7

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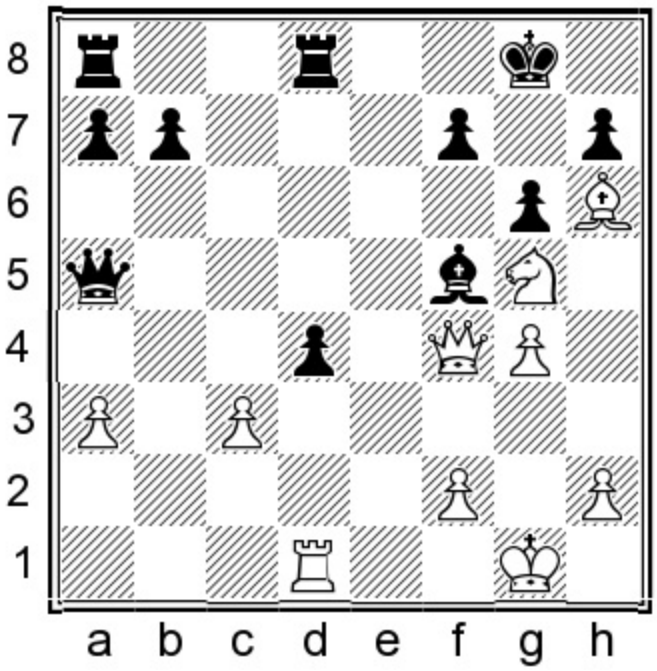


Position after: 22...♘xe7

23.♕e3!

White wins time to bring the queen closer to the black king by attacking the e7-knight. Further this is the only move that wins for White. If this is not your plan you have not solved the exercise.

I can imagine 23.♕f4?! being the choice of the majority of players, even grandmasters. Apparently, everything should be perfectly fine with this idea, compared to the text, as it brings White closer to the black king with a tempo. The problem is that here Black can actually get away by yet again returning some material for the sake of exchanging queens after 23...♘f5 24.♗xf5 ♗xf5 25.g4 d4!?



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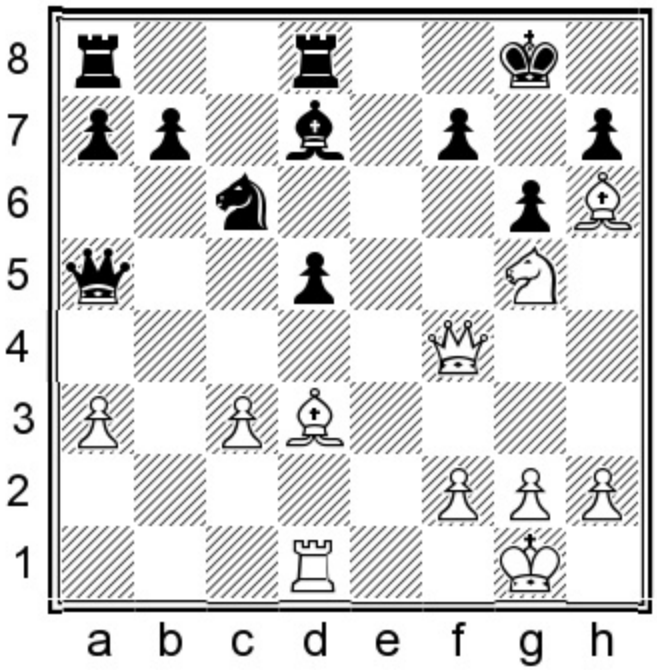
Position after: 25...d4!?

when the best White can get is a tiny edge, e.g. 26.cxd4 [26.gxf5 ♕xf5 27.♖xd4 ♕xf4 28.♖xf4 f5⇄ is even less to the point as here the remaining white pieces would have not only been stranded without a purpose on the kingside but are totally uncoordinated.] 26...♕a4! 27.♖d2 f6 28.♘f3 ♗xg4 29.♕xg4 ♕d7± and White, although still better, has already squandered a bigger chunk of the advantage. An important lesson can be drawn from this variation. When attacking the coordination of your pieces is critical. An attack can only be successful if it is carried out by a blend of pieces, each of them having clearly assigned roles. Quantity naturally matters a lot, but no battle has ever been won by throwing everything there was in a loose and unorganized fashion... unless you happen to be in command of the Red Army, of course.

23...♘c6

and now after

24.♕f4



Position after: 24.♕f4

Black cannot effectively block the f-file anymore and will most probably succumb after the white queen infiltrates along the dark squares.

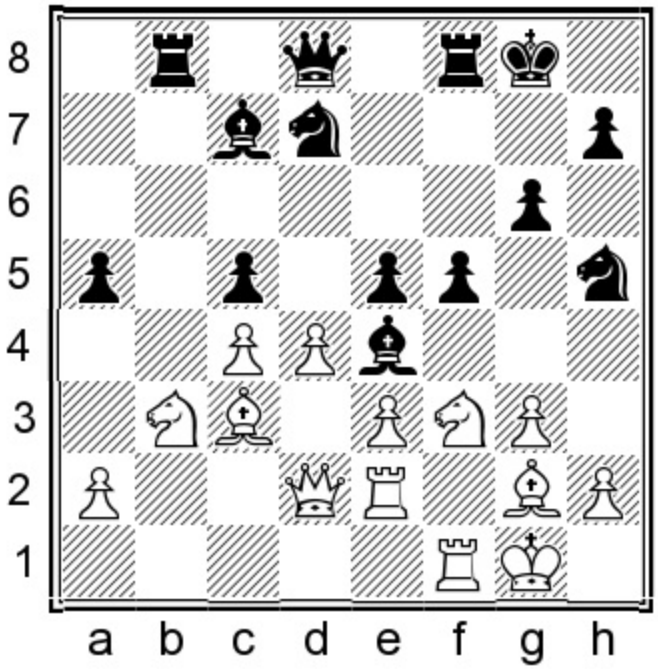
24...f5 25.♕d6 ♖e8 26.♕xd7 ♖e7 27.♕d6+–

This example teaches us one important lesson: that calculation does not exclude intuition; it is rather that those two skills should be constantly supplementing each other especially when the position

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becomes more complicated. Some theoreticians believe that accurate calculation is the proper approach to solving tactically complex positions. Meanwhile the voice of intuition should be guiding us whenever there is a global decision to be taken, the consequences of which cannot be foreseen at the beginning. As logical as it sounds the truth is that even when calculating we should simultaneously consult our intuition to make sure that we are heading in the right direction. At the same time, even if we are embarking on a decision which could by all standards be called an 'intuitive' one, we cannot simply stop calculating on the spot but should rather avail ourselves of this skill as a means of at least superficial (move after move) verification whether our ideas hold or not.

18
Gaal – Froewis
Radenci 2019



■ *25...?*

Show/Hide Solution

18
Gaal, Zsoka (2044)
Froewis, Annika (2089)
Radenci 2019

Coordination

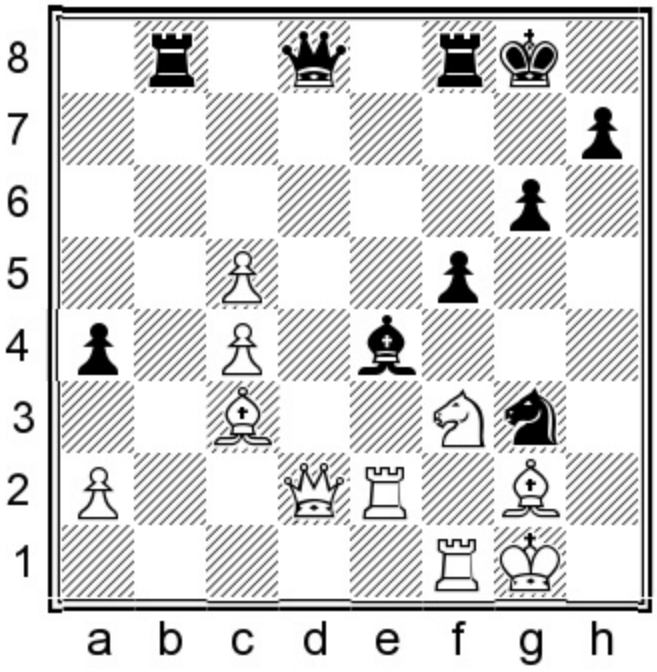
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A very complex middlegame has arisen with only two pairs of pawns exchanged. There are additional pawn exchanges possible which significantly complicates matters for both players from a practical perspective as they both need to take into consideration a large number of variables. With the c5 and e5-pawns hanging, releasing the central tension by taking on d4 with either pawn seems like a must before Black is locked and loaded for some action. That is a lot of discussion about the pawn structure, but is this what matters most in this position?

25...a4!

A strong, dynamic move for starters. Black pays no attention at all to her own c5-pawn and instead even prompts the white b3-knight to help itself thereto.

A) Instead, in the game Black went for 25...exd4? 26.exd4 a4 27.♘xc5 ♘xc5 28.dxc5 ♗xg3 29.hxg3 ♘xg3

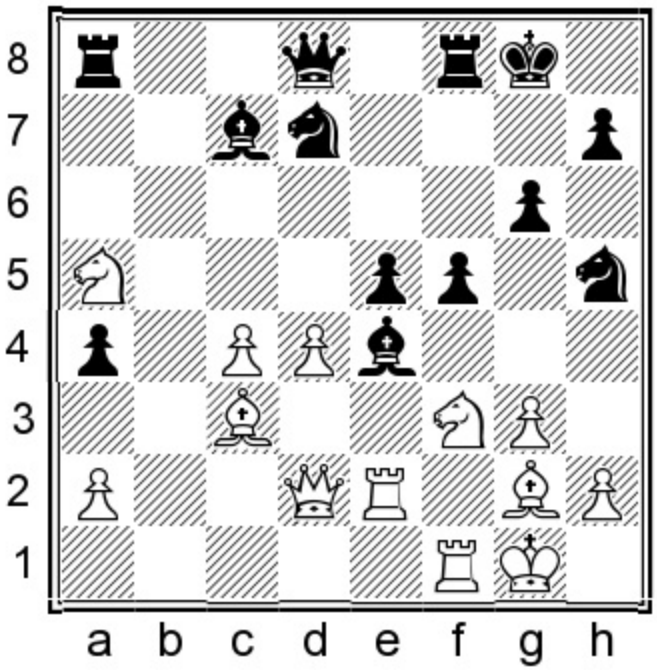


Position after: 29...♘xg3

apparently aiming to benefit from the weakened position of the white monarch. At the same time, White could have now resorted to the fairly simple 30.♖d1 ♘xe2+ 31.♕xe2± and I bet you dollars to doughnuts that, because of mating ideas along the long dark-squared diagonal, White would not have allowed the win to slip past her fingers here.

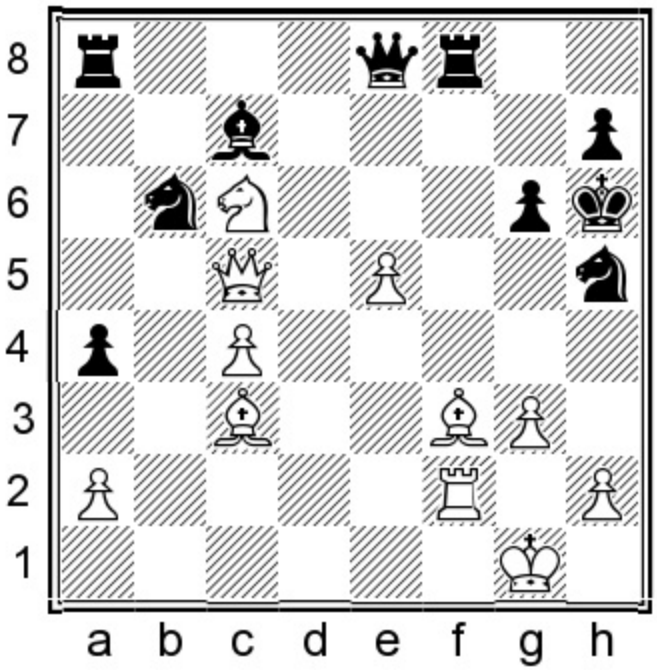
B) It looks more logical to deprive White of the possibility to take on c5 with 25...cxd4 26.exd4 and only then try to chase the b3-knight away after 26...a4 27.♘a5 ♖a8?!

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Position after: 27...♖a8?!

but here White would have had a beautiful dynamic counter up her sleeve: 28.♖xe4! fxe4 29.♘c6 ♕e8 and now 30.dxe5! exf3 31.♕d5+ ♔g7 32.♗xf3. Despite being a rook down, Black cannot feel secure at all as her king looks like easy prey. With e5-e6+ already hanging in the air the black monarch would probably have to make a move towards h6. But even there she would not be entirely safe, e.g. 32...♘b6 33.♕c5 ♔h6 34.♖f2!↑



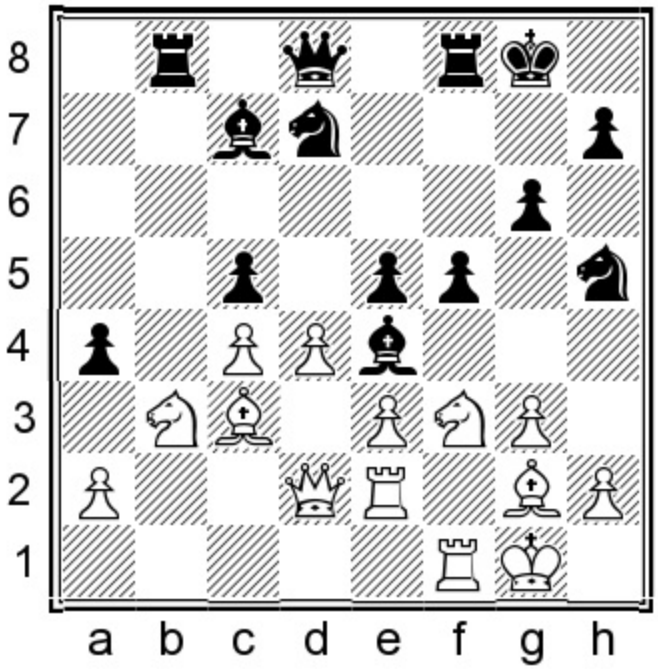
Position after: 34.♖f2!↑

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when statically speaking, Black should be winning effortlessly thanks to a large material advantage, but in dynamic terms, she is close to losing because of the trouble her king has gotten himself into on the hazardous h6-square. With all the white pieces working together perfectly, I would personally be leaning towards the latter assessment.

C) Finally, 25...♗xf3?! 26.♗xf3 ♘hf6 is poor as it surrender the light squares to White for nothing. Now 27.♗c6!± highlights how cramped Black could soon become with many pawns being en prise and, on top of that, a white bishop infiltrating her camp quite freely.

25...a4!



Position after: 25...a4!

26.♘c1

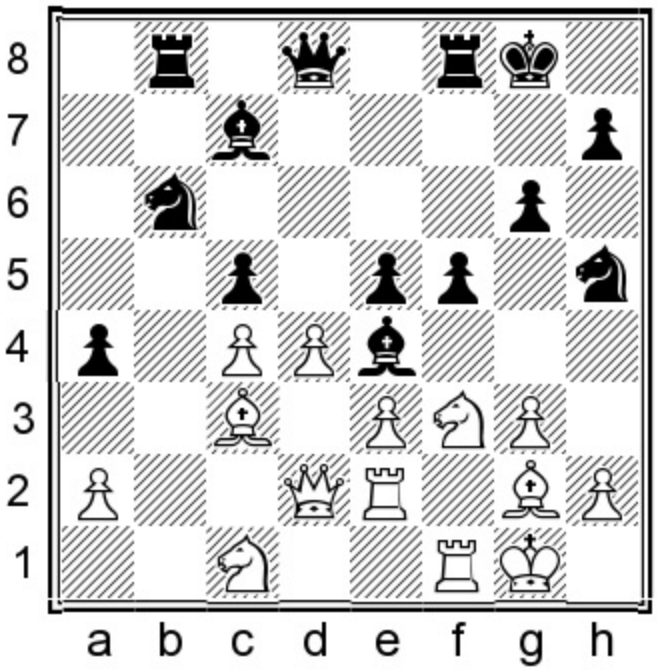
Quite surprisingly, the only move that does not lose at once for White.

A) 26.♘xc5 ♘xc5 27.dxc5 ♕e7 leads to a position in which White appears to have all the time in the world to carry out her further plans. In reality however, there is nothing she can do to stop ...♖f8-d8 followed by ...♗e4-d3 from coming. If 28.♗b4 then 28...♖fd8 29.♕c3 ♗d3–+ A sad sight for White who is simply helpless.

B) 26.♘a5 also loses after the picturesque 26...♖a8! 27.dxe5 ♘b8!–+ when the white a5-knight got caught in a devilish trap on the edge of the board.

26...♘b6

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Position after: 26...♘b6

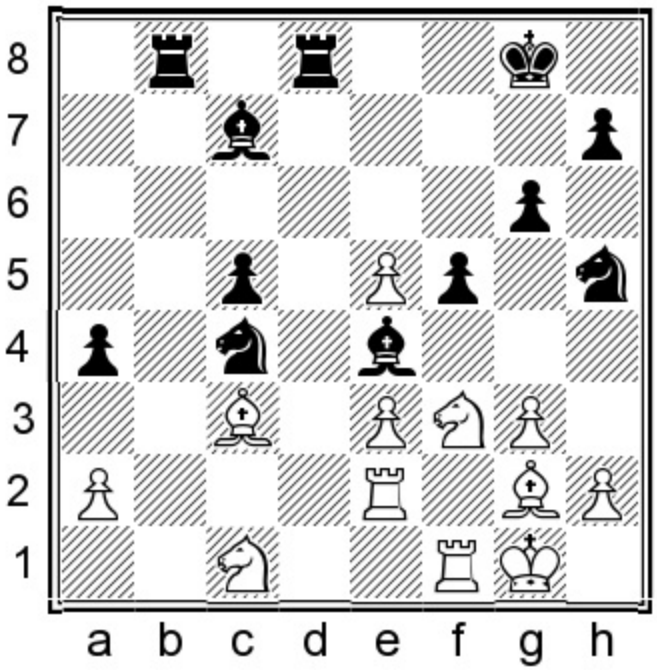
Has Black done anything extraordinary in the last two moves? Not at all. Perhaps one of the previous two moves deserves an exclamation mark at best. As they say," simplicity is the ultimate perfection", and this principle applies here perfectly. What is impressive here is that Black sets aside all the 'informational noise' (multiple pawn-tensions and threats of grabbing material from White's side) in the starting position and goes straight for a surgical strike at the thing that will hurt the opponent the most. With so many positional elements to consider it is often the toughest to separate the wheat from the chaff and focus only on the one that means the most. The move is not about grabbing the c4-pawn which is simply a manifestation of White's hopeless coordination as there is worse about to happen to White.

27.dxe5

27.♘xe5 is not much different than the text as after 27...♗xe5 28.dxe5 ♕xd2 29.♗xd2 ♘xc4 30.♗c3 ♘g7!–+ the number of moves White can safely make and which simultaneously make sense can be counted on the fingers of one hand. What is particularly tragic is the fate of the white c1-knight – any attempts from White's side to open up the position by taking on e4 would only make things worse.

27...♘xc4 28.♕xd8 ♖fxd8

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Position after: 28...♖fxd8

Only now does it become clear how forlorn White's situation has become. The knight on c1 cannot move at all. What is even funnier, the only way to fix this would have been to move the rook from e2 but this is impossible all the same. They say that if one piece is bad your entire position is bad, but what about two pieces or more being dramatically passive?

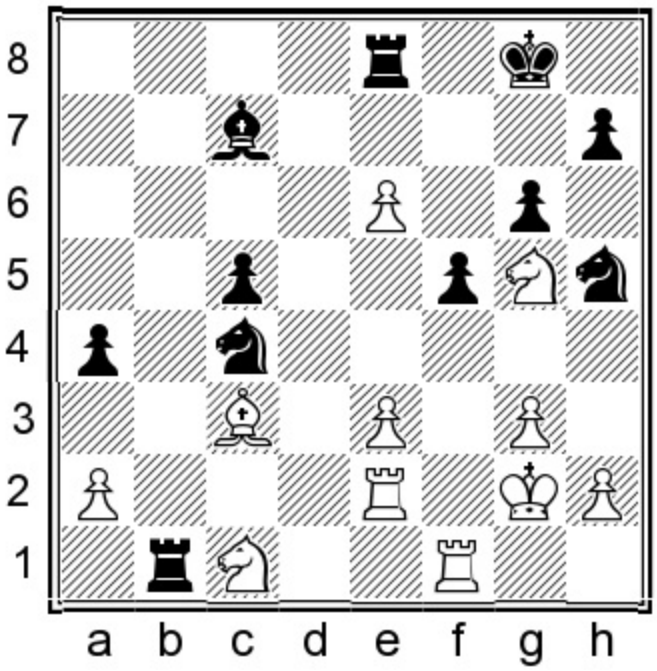
29.e6

The e-pawn rushes like the lonely Faramir against the whole army of Orcs. The alternatives were to no avail.

29.♘g5 ♗xe5 30.♗xe5 ♘xe5 31.♘xe4 fxe4 32.♗xe4 c4–+ still gives her some hope of resistance but make no mistake with White playing virtually without the knight, Black should not have any difficulties in overpowering the opponent within the next couple of moves.

29...♖b1 30.♘g5 ♗xg2 31.♔xg2 ♖e8

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Position after: 31...♖e8

and now White finally manages to activate his bad knight with

32.♘d3

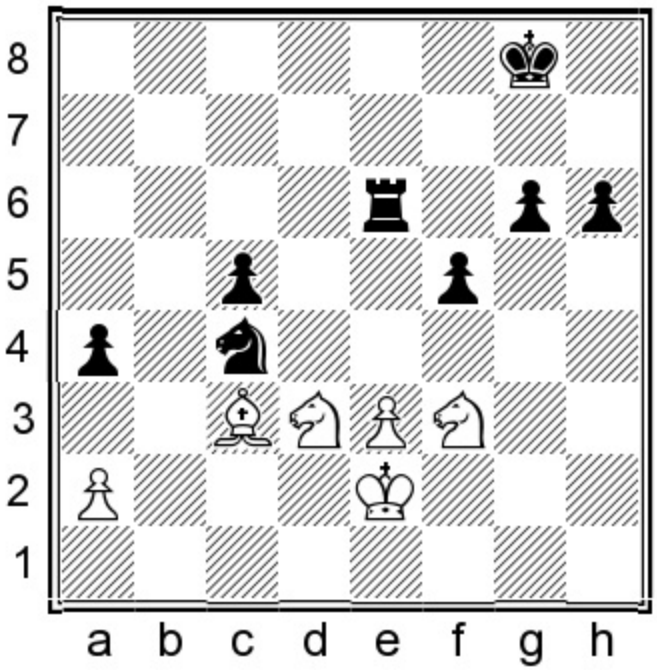
only to get struck with

32...♖xf1 33.♔xf1 ♗xg3!

when after

34.hxg3 ♘xg3+ 35.♔f2 ♘xe2 36.♔xe2 h6 37.♘f3 ♖xe6–+

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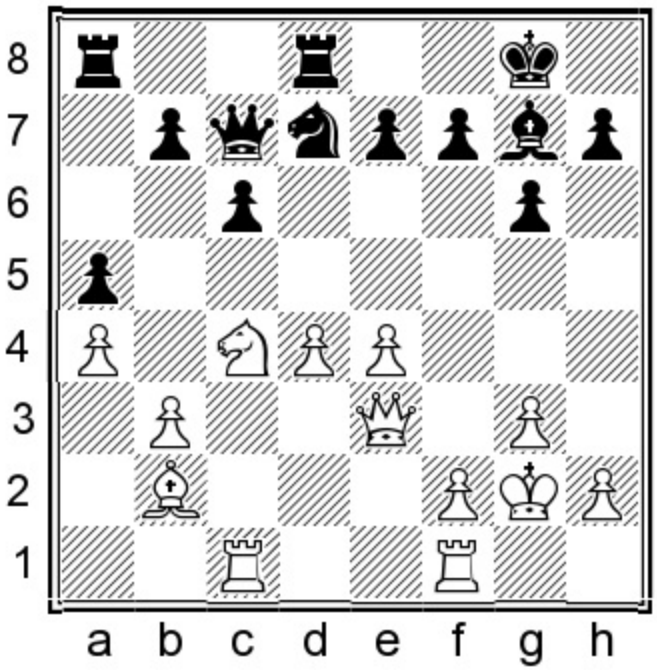


Position after: 37...♖xe6−+

the black rook is accompanied by far too many pawns for White's minor pieces to be able to put up enough resistance in the long run. White may be able to collect a pawn or two along the way, but with pawns being present on both wings the odds are obviously stacked in favor of the side having a mobile rook.

19
Zickus – Sakalauskas
Lithuania 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *19...?*

Show/Hide Solution

19
Zickus, Simonas (2330)
Sakalauskas, Vaidas (2346)
Lithuania 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Changing the nature of the position by modifying the pawn structure

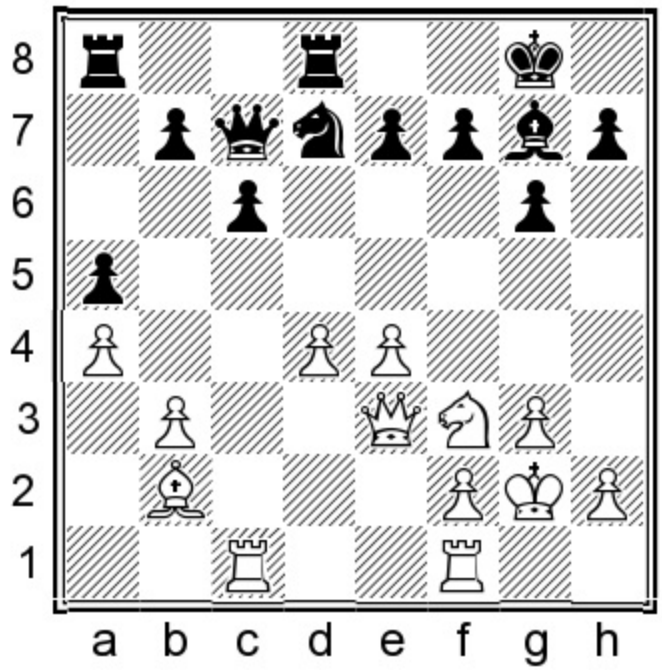
What we have here is a position stemming from the Fianchetto Grunfeld. Except for properties of the said opening (fianchettoed bishop on g7 and some pressure exerted against the White center), there are also typically Slavic trends visible on the board. This is mostly determined by the presence of a pawn on c6 and the possibility of the one on the e-file to come to e6. White, on the other hand, has a little bit more space and controls the center, but Black looks very solid for the moment. However, there is however a catch. If Black stands still for too long White will first improve the entirety of his forces and then start squeezing Black to death. With ...e7-e5 ideas always being met forcefully by d4-d5 (the last thing Black wants to see is the c-file being opened in front of his queen), and Black not having enough time to transfer the knight to a nice outpost on b4, his next move may prove to be decisive for the outcome of the game.

19...b5!

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Changing the character of the game completely! Black evicts the white knight from c4 without fearing any ghosts related to opening up the c-file. The knight was namely a symbol of White's dominance in the center and the queenside. With this piece being chased away dynamic possibilities for Black seem to be appearing out of nowhere.

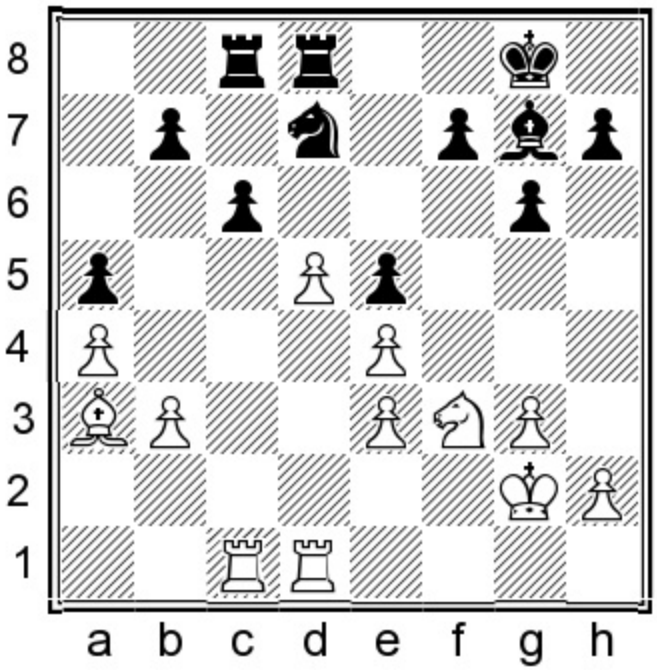
A) In the game, Black went for 19...♘b6 which is fairly logical from the strategic perspective. If we have less space we should exchange a piece or two in order to relieve the pressure from our army. Now after 20.♘e5 ♘d7 both players started repeating moves and soon agreed a draw. The truth is however that after 21.♘f3!



Position after: 21.♘f3!

Black's position would have become rather difficult. White avoids an exchange of knights, this way coercing Black into being left with a piece that only clogs up Black's position and currently impedes a rook's access to the d-file. Trying to transfer it to b6 yet again would leave the black queen exposed to ideas like d4-d5, but then again 21...♕b6 brings him no relief either as after 22.♖fd1 ♖ac8 23.♗a3 Black would have been basically forced to stand still when active moves like 23...e5 are out of the question: 24.d5!? ♕xe3 25.fxe3

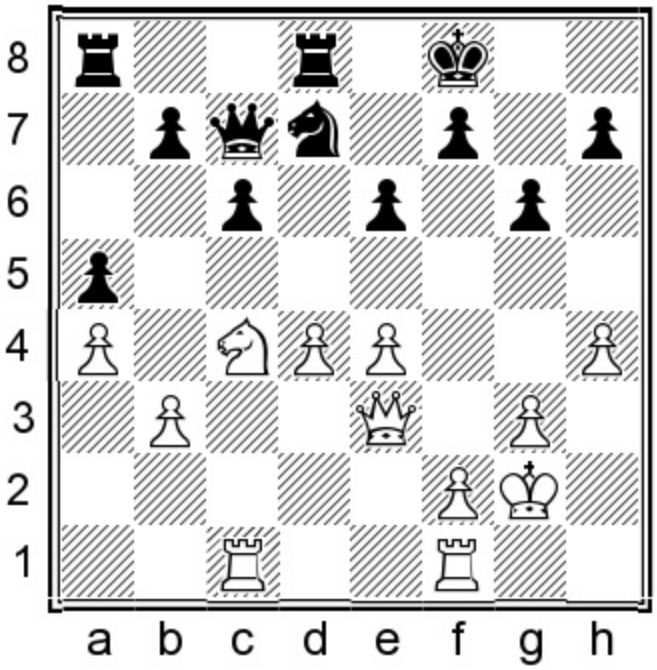
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Position after: 25.fxe3

25...cxd5 [25...♘f6 26.♗e7 ♖d7 27.♗xf6 ♗xf6 28.♖c5± does not look too appealing either.] 26.♖xd5 ♘f6 27.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 28.♗e7 ♖e8 29.♗xf6 ♗xf6 30.♖c7↑ with White's forces invading the queenside in a more or less decisive manner.

B) By comparison, 19...e6?!, aiming to prevent d4-d5 for the moment, proves to be quite costly as White could then gain near full control over the d6-square after 20.♗a3 ♗f8 21.♗xf8 ♔xf8 22.h4!? (potentially opening up a second front against the black king)

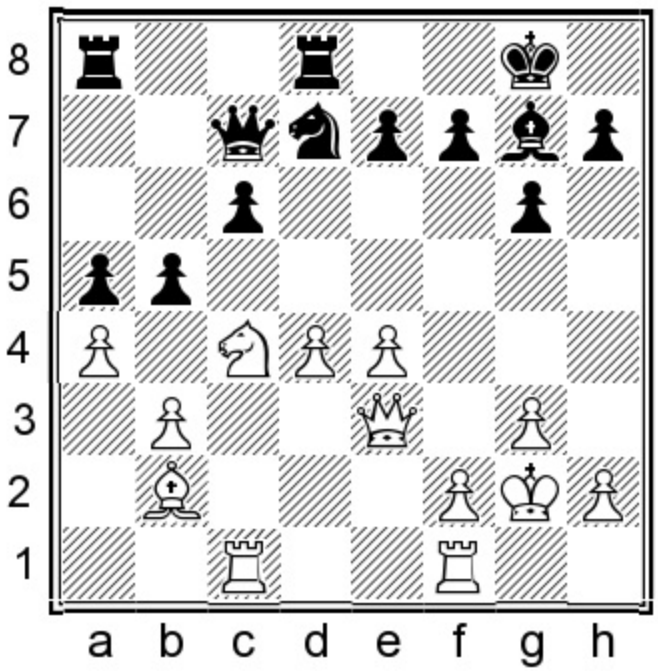


Position after: 22.h4!?

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22...♘f6 23.e5 ♘d5 24.♕h6+ ♔g8 25.♘d6± with Black being clearly pushed back into a defensive posture. Ideas like h4-h5, opening up the h-file for a possible attack, cannot be parried in a clear-cut manner. I could even imagine the d6 knight being transferred to the kingside quite swiftly in case of need. At the same time, even if sacrificing an exchange on d6 does in fact grant Black some more stability, because of White's material advantage the rest of the game would have surely represented playing for the full point.

19...b5!



Position after: 19...b5!

20.axb5

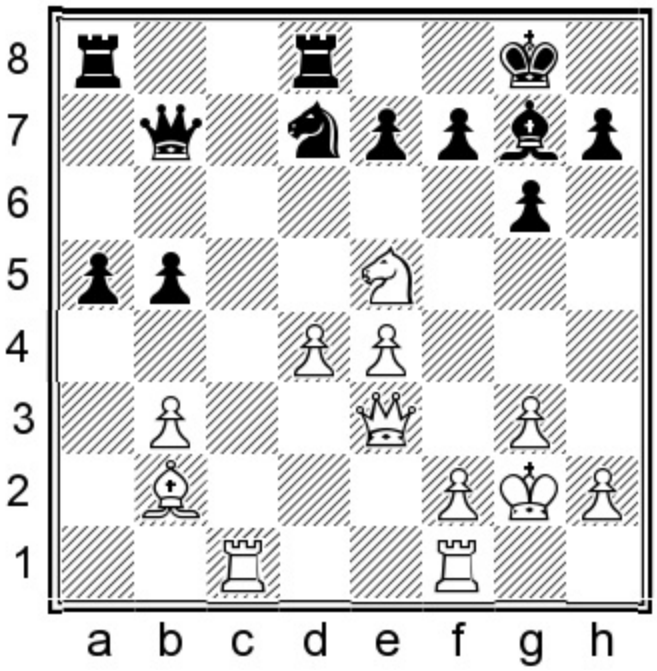
20.♘d2 is similar to the text as after 20...bxa4 21.bxa4 c5= the white d-pawn and the black c-pawns are still very likely to be exchanged against each other; this would make the structure almost perfectly symmetrical thus practically levelling the game. Leaving pawns like this on the a-file usually signals the intention of one of the players to continue playing for a win; but here I do not see a way for White to take advantage of this circumstance, especially as it is exactly White's pawn that is completely undefended for the moment, not Black's.

20...cxb5 21.♘e5

This is most probably what spooked Black and prompted him to decide in favor of 19...♘b6 instead. Still, this aggressively looking move is neutralized by the quiet

21...♕b7

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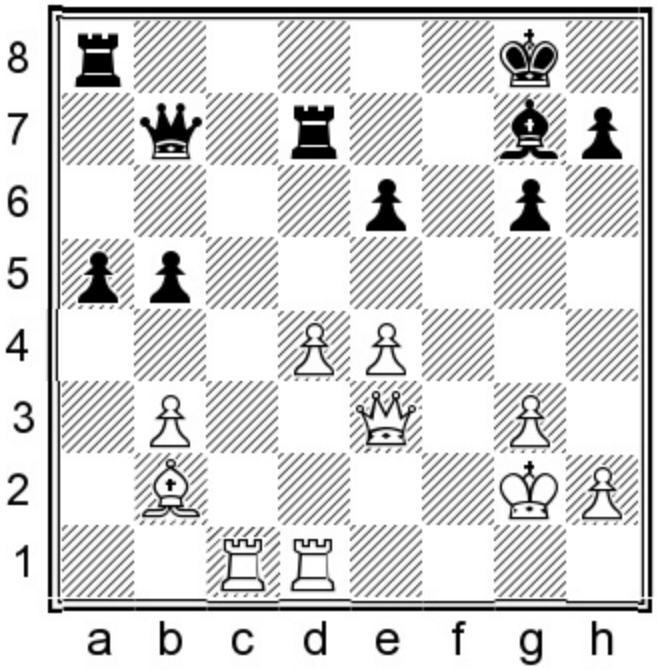


Position after: 21...♕b7

with Black emerging almost without any issues. Sample lines confirm that it is actually White who has to be careful from here on.

22.♘c6

A) 22.♘xd7?! is dubious as after 22...♖xd7 23.♖fd1 f5!? 24.f3 fxe4 25.fxe4 e6∓

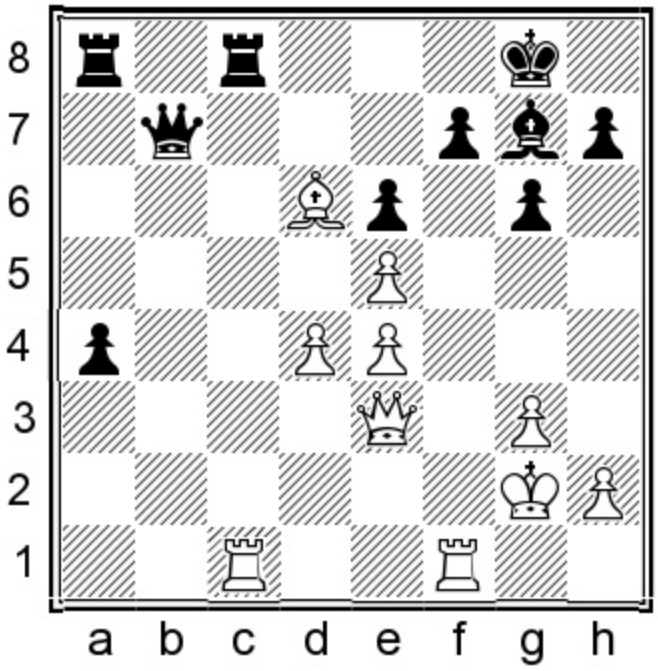


Position after: 25...e6∓

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the following position is reached: materially it is naturally still equal, but positionally not so much anymore. White resembles a generally healthy patient afflicted however by several less meaningful conditions which combine making the condition worse. In other words, White has multiple sources of worries, but no universal solution to any of them. Black can namely push the a-pawn any day now, taking back with the b-pawn, thus creating a passed pawn looks reasonable but there is nothing inherently wrong with recapturing with the rook in order to put even more pressure against White's d4-pawn. What is more, the e4-pawn is pinned which makes it essential for the white queen to stay on e3. This means that she will not be able to effectively join the battle somewhere else in case of trouble. Lastly, White's d4 pawn also happens to be pinned which makes the black bishop look very good while the white one not so much. For the moment nothing serious seems to be happening but White's fever will surely be gradually rising, with no paracetamol being close at hand.

B) 22.f4?! would have been clearly overly ambitious as after 22...♘xe5 23.fxe5 a4 24.bxa4 bxa4 25.♗a3 e6 26.♗d6 ♖dc8∓



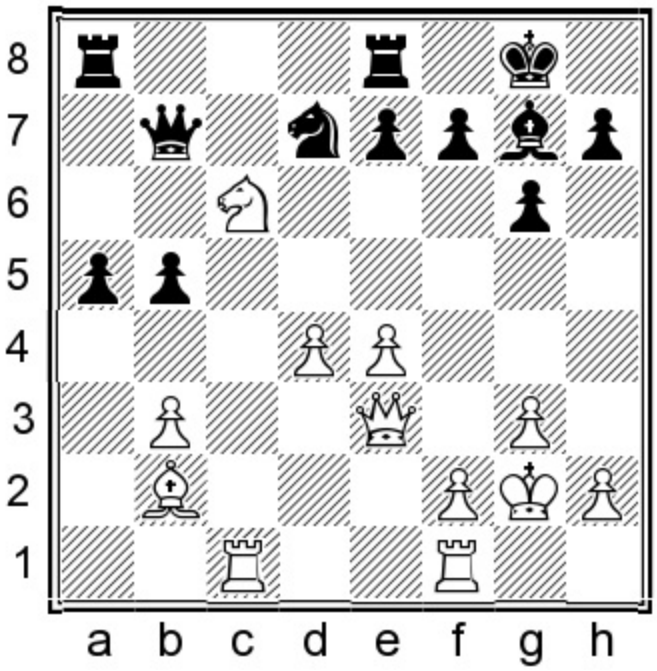
Position after: 26...♖dc8∓

Black comfortably parries any of White's threats and is left with a strong, supported pawn on a4. With White's pressure being highly disputable (at best) Black should be cruising here by using the a-pawn as a deflection measure and choosing the right moment to infiltrate when White is too absorbed by stopping the passer. One example could be including the bishop into play via h6 while the white queen possibly shifts to the queenside out of necessity.

22...♖e8

White's momentary initiative evaporates like smoke. White could still try to go on by means of

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Position after: 22...♖e8

23.♖c2

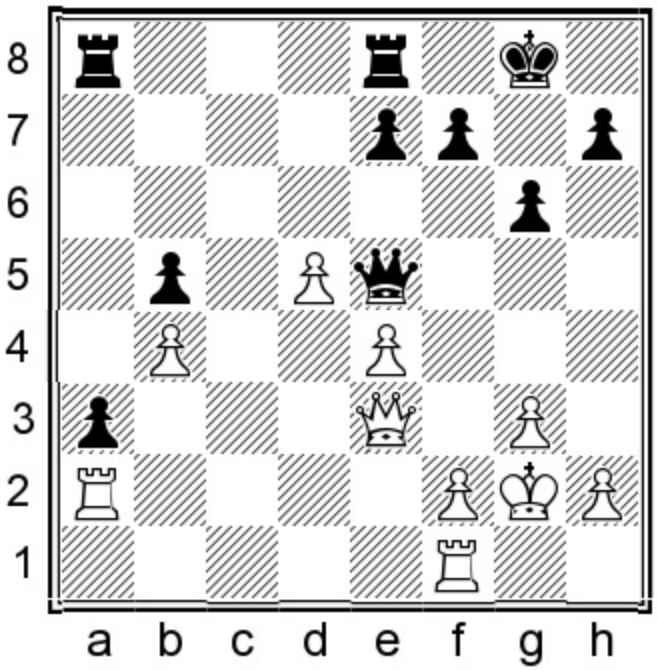
protecting the b2-bishop in advance so that the d4-d5 push could still be pursued but Black can respond with

23...♘b8!

eliminating White's strongest piece which was a thorn in our side. Now, after the more or less forcing

24.d5 ♗xb2 25.♘xb8 a4! 26.♖xb2 a3 27.♖a2 ♕xb8 28.b4 ♕e5=

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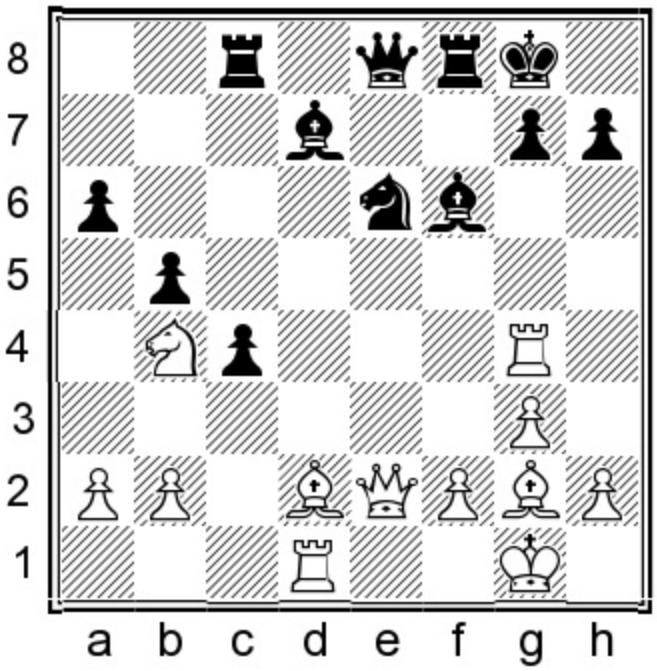


Position after: 28...♕e5=

a state of dynamic equality is achieved. White cannot capture the a3-pawn without conceding his soldier on e4. Defending the e4-pawn first might be a sensible option, but the best White could get out of that is a central pawn majority versus a passed b-pawn for Black. This does not look like much if anything at all.

20
Tabatabaei – Sethuraman
Makati 2018

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□ *26.?*

Show/Hide Solution

20
Tabatabaei, Amin (2587)
Sethuraman, S.P. (2664)
Makati 2018

Weakness
Electing a plan based on the opponent's weakness

Material is equal here but the position is full of dynamic potential for both sides. The pawn structure bears some resemblance with some lines of the Meran Defense, and therefore slightly favors Black in my opinion as his queenside pawns have already managed to make a move. What is a certainty is that none of the players will be paying special attention to the hanging pawns for the moment (a6 and b2, respectively) as there are much more active possibilities at their disposal. For White, the first thing that should strike our attention is the exposed position of the rook on g4 – nobody can say for sure whether this is good or bad for us at the moment. Black, on the other hand, is about to play ...♘e6-d4, highlighting White's potential co-ordinational problems. Luckily for White – with time surely being of essence here – he is on the move, and therefore the first one to strike.

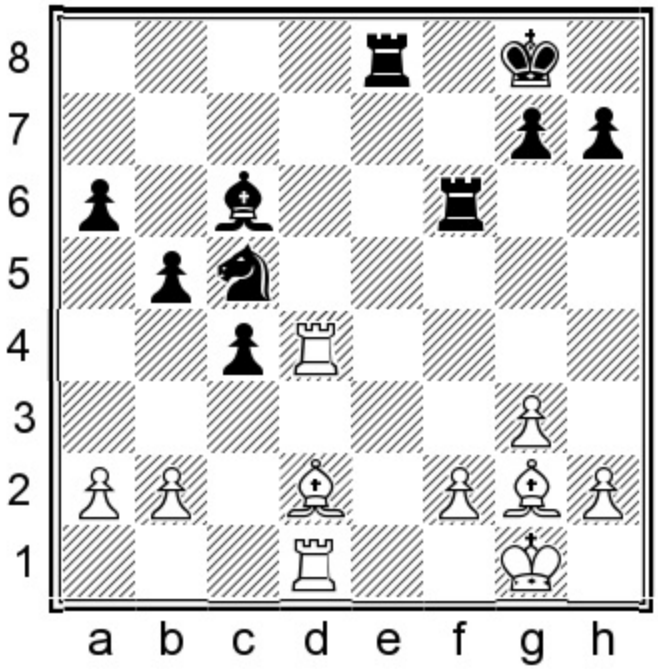
26.♗d5!

A superb move which combines two ideas. By putting the bishop to d5, White not only prevents

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Black from launching his own activity with an active knight jump towards the center, but also prepares to consume it the moment at least one of the white rooks is transferred to the e-file. This exercise might appear to be trivial to some of you (especially when you see the solution), but the winning motif is actually quite difficult to spot unless you are thinking about the position in correct terms from the start.

A) In the game, White opted for the tantalizing 26.♘d5?! only to let his opponent off the hook after 26...♘c5! 27.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 28.♕xe8+ ♖xe8 29.♖d4 ♗c6⇄

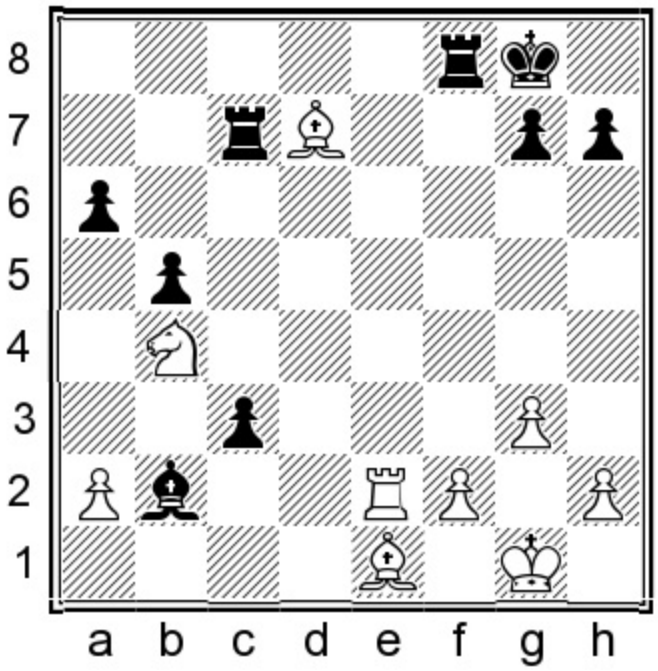


Position after: 29...♗c6⇄

when White's bishop pair is offset by the activity of the black pieces and the degree of control they are exerting along the light squares. But why did White reject 26.♗d5 in the starting position? My assumption is that two factors played a role here. First of all, attacking the f6-knight from d5 made perfect sense from the perspective of obtaining the bishop pair, and then continuing the attack with something like ♗d2-c3. Such motifs are surely bread and butter for any chess player, amateur or grandmaster alike. Secondly, with this option looking particularly attractive, there is a risk that White might have not considered asking himself other questions that would steer him towards the correct solution. Such a question being: 'Where is the weakness?' If he had only asked himself this little question he would most probably have turned his attention immediately to the text. What is more, 26.♗d5! happens to also have a prophylactic background. With the knight immobilized on e6 White would no longer need worry about the fate of his g4-rook.

B) Another way of exerting pressure against the e6-knight would have been 26.♖e4 but this is less accurate as after 26...♗xb2 27.♗e1 c3 28.♖xd7! ♕xd7 29.♗h3 ♘d4! (if Black has to lose the knight he should do it on his terms, that is without allowing the white bishop to capture anything more) 30.♗xd7 ♘xe2+ 31.♖xe2 ♖c7

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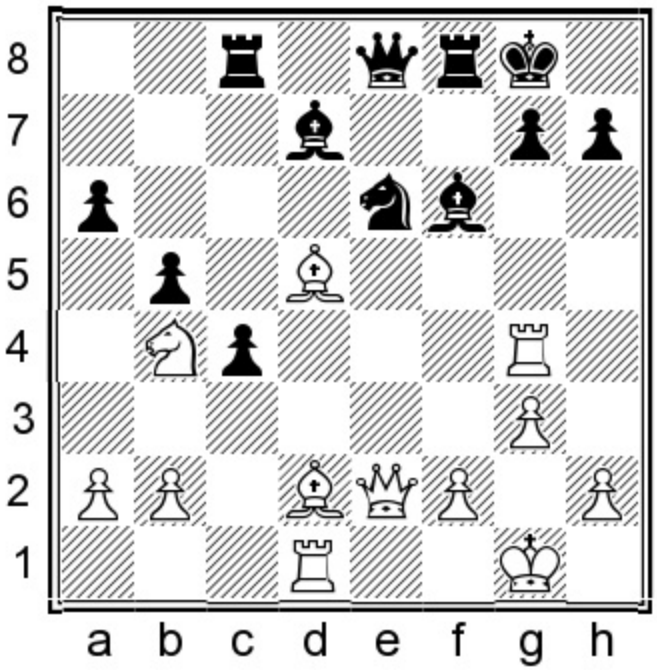


Position after: 31...♖c7

White may in fact be still better but he will not be able to focus on the offensive within the next couple of moves without at least trying to halt the black queenside pawns. This can be partially achieved by means of something like 32.♗e6+ ♔h8 33.♗b3 but after 33...a5 34.♘d3 ♗a3± those pawns have definitely not said their last. I do not see another way for White to convert this apart from crawling up with the king towards the queenside, at the same time making sure that he retains the rook for as long as it takes. Otherwise, it would have been even more complicated to keep those black pawns under lock and key. The position may be promising for White at the end of the day, but subtle technique would have still been called for in order to bring the full point home.

26.♗d5!

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Position after: 26.♗d5!

26...a5

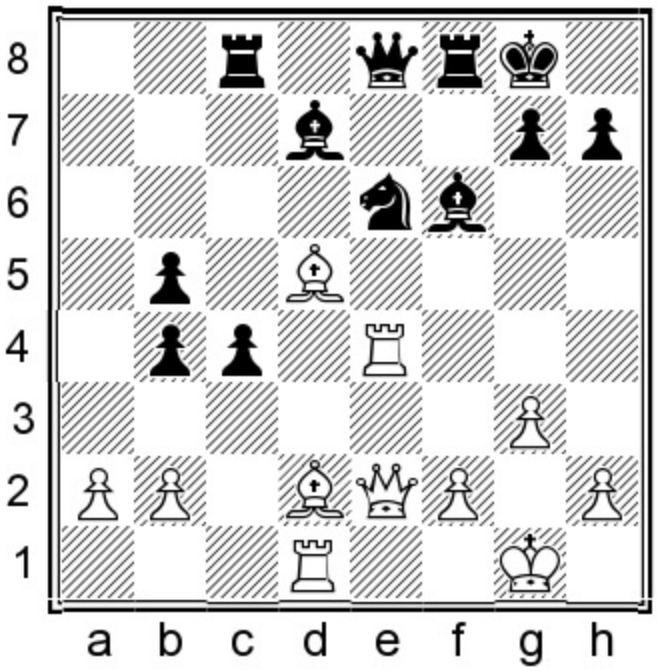
A) Black does not have the time to regroup with 26...♕f7 27.♖e4 ♖fe8 as after 28.♘xa6 a devilish way of capitalizing on the e6-pin for White would have been ♗d2-a5 followed by ♘a6-c7. The only way for Black to prevent it from happening would have been the equally quirky 28...♖c6!? When, instead of grabbing material and allowing Black to bounce back thanks to counter-threats, the rather crude 29.♘b4 ♖d6 30.♗f4+– would have effectively put an end to Black's dreams of saving even half a point here.

B) The same goes for 26...♗xb2 as after 27.♖e4 c3 28.♗f4 ♖f6 the only thing that changes is the route along which the knight arrives to finish the opponent off via 29.♗b3! a5 30.♘d5 ♖g6 31.♘c7+– and death comes for Black yet again via c7.

27.♖e4! axb4

27...♔h8 loses all the same due to a double attack after 28.♗xe6 axb4 29.♗xd7 ♕xd7 30.♗xb4+–

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Position after: 27...axb4

28.♗xb4

and Black is up a piece for a pawn here, but with both the e6-knight and the f8-rook inevitably falling, there would have been little hope left for him.

28.♗xe6+?! would have been much less accurate as after 28...♗xe6 29.♖xe6 ♕f7 30.♗xb4 ♖fe8 31.♖dd6± Black may indeed be a pawn down, but it would have still been a long way for White to go until he could claim victory here. This is because his biggest advantage, the f-pawn, cannot be activated so easily as this would involve some weakening of his king. With the queenside pawns being rather backward and the white queen pinned to their defense for the moment, Black seeks his chances by trying to generate some counterplay the moment White starts pushing his kingside pawns.

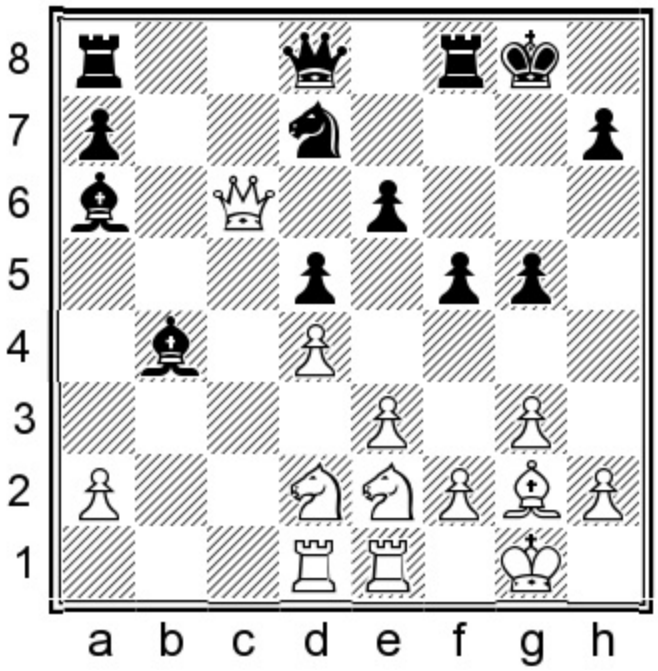
28...♔h8 29.♗xe6 ♗xe6 30.♖xe6 ♕f7 31.♗xf8 ♖xf8 32.♖b6+–

Being an exchange and a pawn down the time is ripe for Black to throw in the towel.

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Show in Text Mode

21
Antonsen – Ochsner
Svendborg 2019



■ *18...?*

Show/Hide Solution

21
Antonsen, Mikkel (2426)
Ochsner, Bjorn Moller (2486)
Svendborg 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Is the threat of my opponent dangerous?

Black seems to be enjoying himself thanks to the bishop pair as well as White's badly tangled knight and rooks.

At the same time White has just brought the queen to c6 with a double attack against the a6-bishop

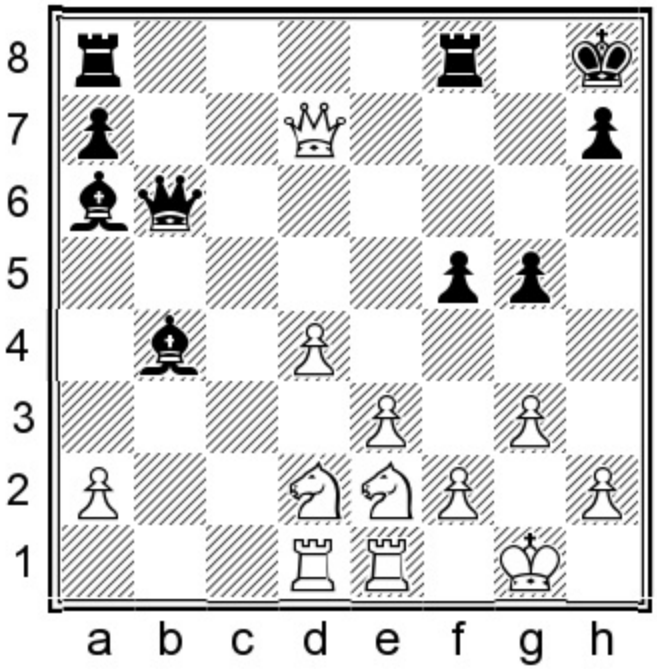
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and the e6-pawn. Due to the geometry of the chessboard there is no option for Black to protect both of them. What is even worse, if the e6-pawn falls, its colleague on d5 might just as well share its fate. Being two pawns down Black would have had to use his utmost abilities to find counterplay. Or is it that bad after all?

18...♘b6!

A marvelous move from Ochsner! This way he saves the bishop and invites the white queen to capture on e6. However, the problem is that once on e6, the queen will find herself in a deadly trap from which there is no escape!

Hanging on to material with 18...♕b6?! looks tempting taking into consideration the fact that the knight on d7 is taboo, but after the rather unexpected 19.♗xd5! [19.♕xd7?? ♗b5–+ represents the trappy point behind the text.] 19...exd5 20.♕xd5+ ♔h8 21.♕xd7

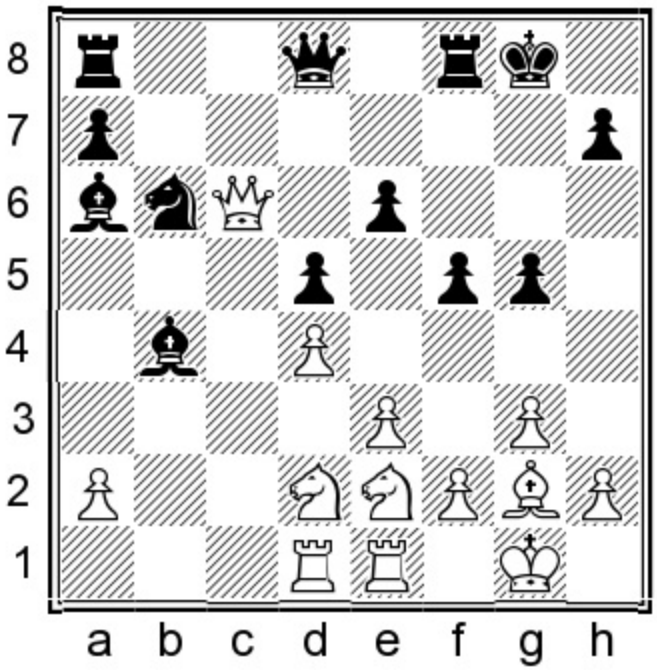


Position after: 21.♕xd7

White would have been able to remain two pawns up and with the queen free from any dangers. If Black would like to keep on fighting in this position on equal terms he would have to make sure that the static (material) edge of the opponent is at least matched by dynamic elements in Black's favor, e.g. an initiative or pressure against the white pieces. This is also why the only way for Black to maintain equilibrium would have been 21...f4!∞ with wild complications arising on the board. Despite the material advantage, White would have to be very careful in handling the position as 22.exf4?! actually loses to 22...♖ae8 23.♘c1 ♗b5 24.♕d5 ♗xd2 25.♖xe8 ♖xe8∓ when he would not have been able to prolong resistance for much longer.

18...♘b6!

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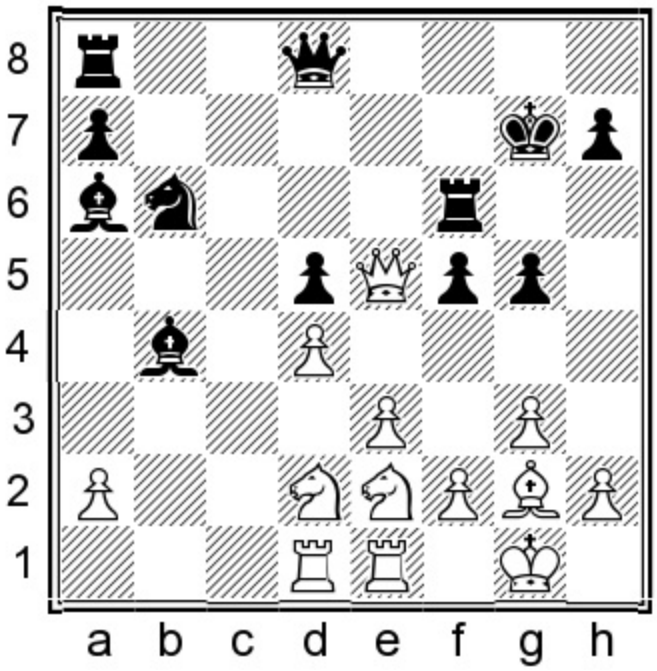


Position after: 18...♘b6!

19.a3

A decoy trick to disturb Black's coordination, but chess is not checkers so Black is not forced to take since after the simple

19.♕xe6+ ♔g7 drops a queen after 20.♕e5+ ♖f6–+

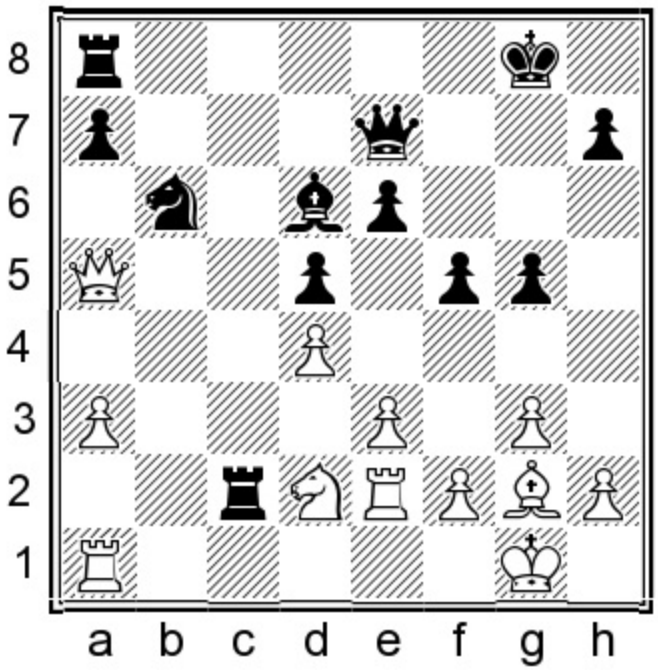


Position after: 20...♖f6−+

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her majesty could just as well start digging a grave for herself on e5 due to the threat of ...♗b4-d6 being imminent.

19...♗d6 20.♕c3 ♕e7 21.♖a1 ♖fc8 22.♕a5 ♗xe2 23.♖xe2 ♖c2∓

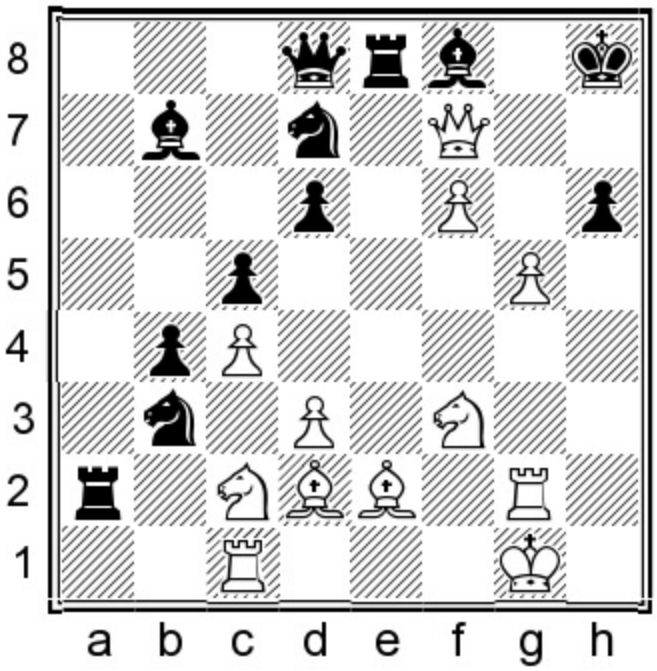


Position after: 23...♖c2∓

Now White finds himself struggling to save the game as his d2 knight is pinned and the light-squared bishop is effectively blocked by a central wall of black pawns. Black will be doubling rooks along the c-file any moment now combining pressure against the solitary a3-pawn with possible threats along the first rank. As Black's initiative will only be growing the game would appear to be approaching its end. There is one crucial conclusion that needs to be drawn after having covered this example: When applying prophylaxis, one should not only consider what the opponent is up to, but also whether their ideas are actually dangerous. They say that there is nothing more useless as doing efficiently something that does not need to be done at all and these words of wisdom apply to chess without any reservation. Preventing threats that are not dangerous from the start constitutes a waste of time and should therefore be avoided.

22
Bodnaruk – Mikadze
Antalya 2019

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■ *29...?*

Show/Hide Solution

22
Bodnaruk, Anastasia (2427)
Mikadze, Miranda (2266)
Antalya 2019

Attack & Defense
Bailing out with a considerable material-sacrifice

First, I apologize for you even having to look at this position from Black's perspective. Material may be equal here but there is not much reason for us to be overjoyed. Despite Black making considerable progress on the queenside (both the c1-rook and the d2-bishop are under attack and the c2-knight feels clumsy at the least), I cannot help the impression that with White's pieces congregating around the black monarch like a torch light procession it is his head which is going to fall first. There are simply too many white pieces present in close proximity thereof; also, the f6 and g5-pawns both contribute quite strongly to its upcoming misery. In other words, Black can eat up a lot of material on the queenside, but this would probably constitute her last meal...or is there any ray of hope for Black here after all?

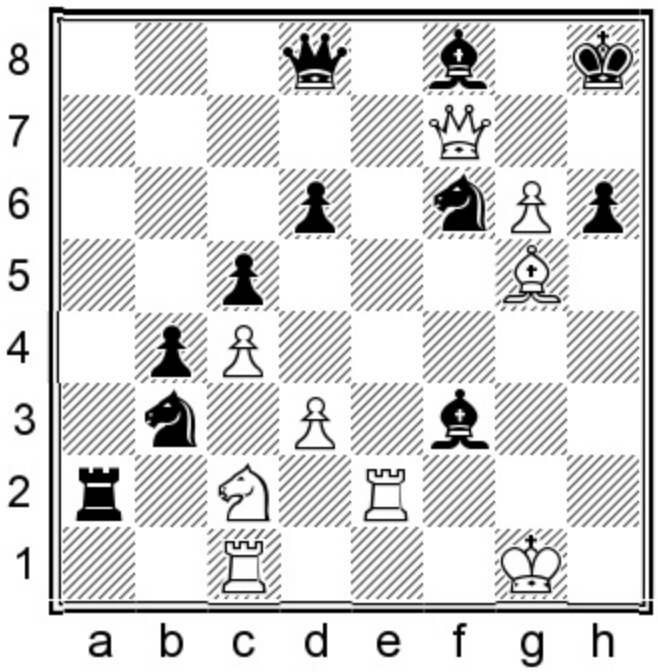
29...♖e7!!

The only way! Black bails out from almost any kind of trouble by sacrificing a whole rook. Sure this

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might look like a large investment, but the moment any signs of White's dreadful attack disappear, what remains will be opportunity for Black not only to restore the material balance, but maybe also to generate play of her own on the opposite flank.

A) As for alternatives, it looked logical to try to eliminate or deflect the forces of the attacker by means of something like 29...♖xe2 but after 30.♖xe2 ♗xf3 [30...♘xd2 31.♘h4! ♘f3+ 32.♘xf3 ♗xf3 33.♖e7!+– is one way of getting the black monarch as mate on h7 is the threat, but the e7-rook is taboo due to mate on the adjacent g7-square afterwards.] 31.g6! ♘xf6 32.♗g5!!



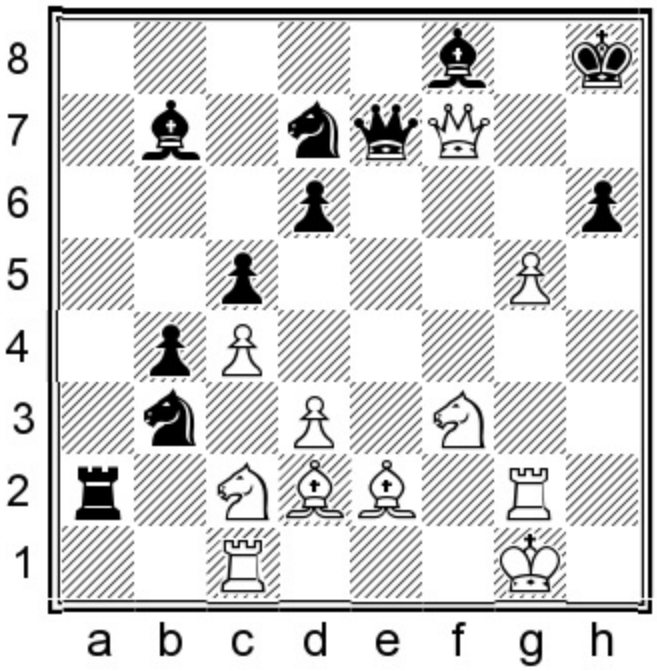
Position after: 32.♗g5!!

a picturesque position appears on board. Black is so close to parrying multiple mating threats yet succumbs to the least expected one, a simple mate along the h-file after 32...hxg5 33.♖h2+ ♗h5 34.♖xh5+ ♘xh5 35.♕h7#

B) The game saw 29...♘xc1 which cannot help Black either as after 30.g6! ♘xe2+ 31.♔h2 three types of mating ideas are too much for anyone to handle. Black was kind enough to allow White to land a double mate (extremely rare in practice) with 31...♖e7 32.g7+ ♗xg7 33.fxg7+ ♔h7 34.g8=♕#

29...♖e7!! 30.fxe7 ♕xe7

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Position after: 30...♕xe7

The dust has almost settled. White is a full rook up for a pawn, but it only takes a second glance to understand that things are far from simple for her as a result. Black is most likely about to capture on c1 and on c2 afterwards, thus probably obtaining even a small material edge. White can try to limit the damage but still needs to reckon with some nasty ...b4-b3-b2 ideas later on. If we add on top of that the white d2-bishop is also in danger we might come to the surprising conclusion that the odds are already slightly stacked in Black's favor.

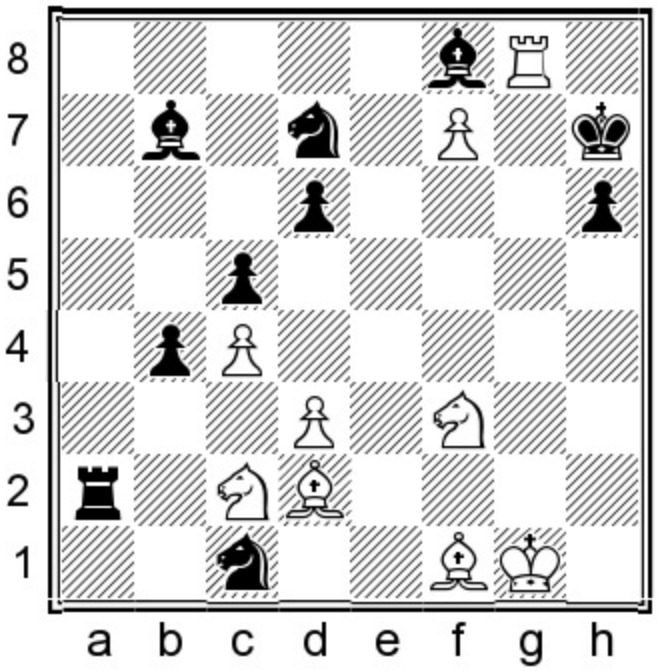
31.g6!?

The best practical chance for White is to maintain queens on board, or at least to have them exchanged in a way that prolongs any hopes of an attack against the enemy king.

31.♕xe7 ♗xe7 32.♖d1 looks natural, but after the more or less forced 32...♘xd2 33.♖xd2 ♗xg5 34.♘xb4 ♖xd2 35.♘d5 ♗xd5 36.cxd5 ♖a2∓ being a pawn down and ending up very likely in a 'bad' bishop versus 'good' knight scenario would definitely not look appealing to White.

31...♕xf7 32.gxf7 ♘xc1 33.♖g8+ ♔h7 34.♗f1!?

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Position after: 34.♗f1!?

The most venomous try! White does not care about material but prefers to go after the black king instead.

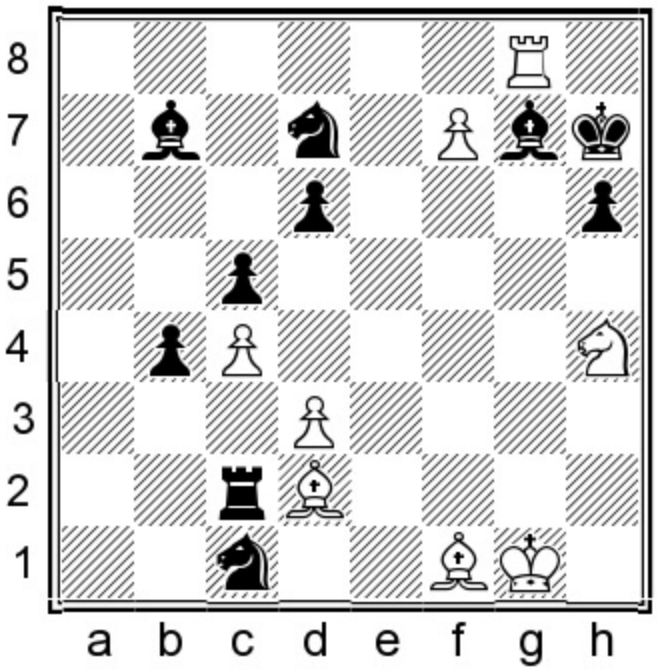
34...♗g7

34...♗xf3? would be losing because of 35.♗h3! and Black can prevent mate on f5, but only at the cost of a significant material investment which might not pay off so handsomely at the end: 35...♘e2+ 36.♔f2 ♘d4 37.♘xd4 ♖xd2+ 38.♔e3! ♖xd3+ 39.♔xd3 ♘e5+ 40.♔d2 ♘xf7 41.♖xf8 ♗h5 42.♘e6+–

35.♘h4 ♖xc2

when a likely development of events would have been

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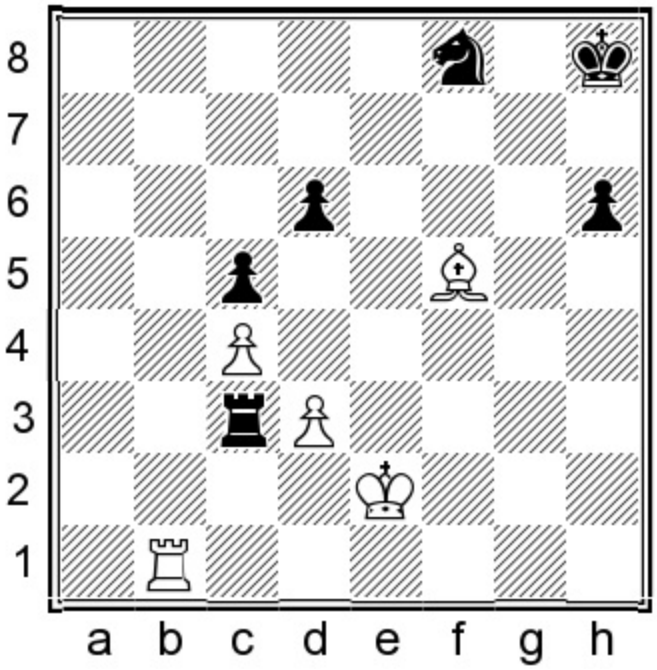


Position after: 35...♖xc2

36.♗h3 ♘e2+ 37.♔f1 ♘g3+

(covering the vital f5-square dynamically)

38.♔e1 b3 39.♘f5 b2 40.♖xg7+ ♔h8 41.f8=♕+ ♘xf8 42.♖xb7 ♘xf5 43.♗xf5 ♖c1+ 44.♔e2 b1=♕ 45.♗c3+! ♖xc3 46.♖xb1=

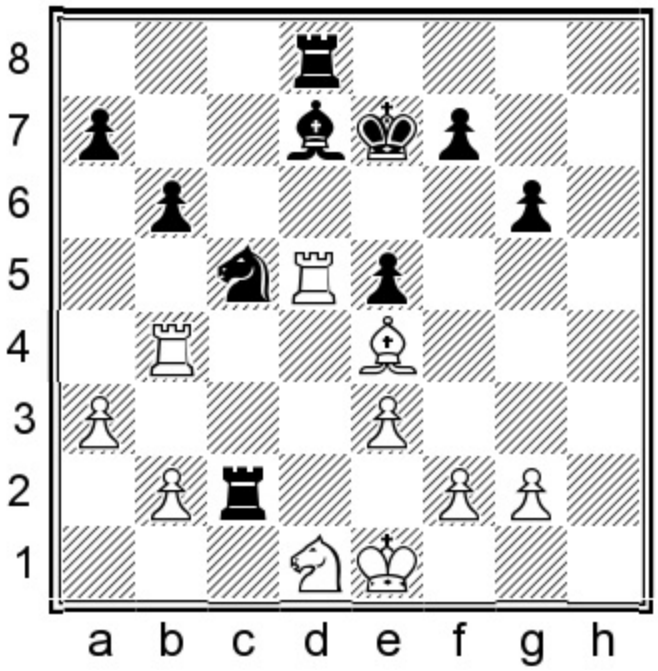


Position after: 46.♖xb1=

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when the position proves to be drawn despite Black's slight material lead; the h-pawn is simply a little too small of an asset compared to the incoming activity of the white rook along the seventh rank.

23
Krejci – Michalik
Prague 2019



■ *29...?*

Show/Hide Solution

23
Krejci, Jan (2570)
Michalik, Peter (2565)
Prague 2019

Coordination
Sacrifice for disturbing the opponent's coordination

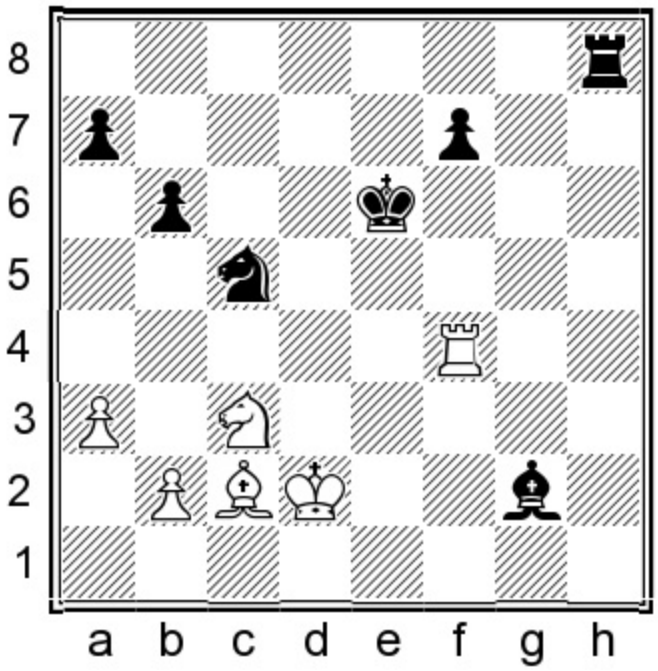
Material is equal but White's position makes a bad impression altogether. His b4 rook is misplaced, the king cut off along the second rank, and the bishop on e4 is barely able to hold its outpost. Black's c2-rook and e5-pawn are obviously hanging, but the probability that White is going to take even one of them is relatively small due to the coordination difficulties he is enduring. There is clearly

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something wrong going on with White's position and we sense it... but what?

29...♘xe4

A logical move to start with as our c2 rook is doing a great job so it needs to be protected. The game saw 29...♖c1?! after which White could have gone for a worse, but still tenable position with 30.♔d2 ♖a1 31.♗c2 ♔e6 32.♘c3 ♖h8 (... ♗d7-c6 winning the g2-pawn is the threat) 33.f4! exf4 34.exf4 ♗c6 35.f5+ gxf5 36.♖xf5 ♖g1 37.♖f2 ♖xg2 38.♖xg2 ♗xg2 39.♖f4∓



Position after: 39.♖f4∓

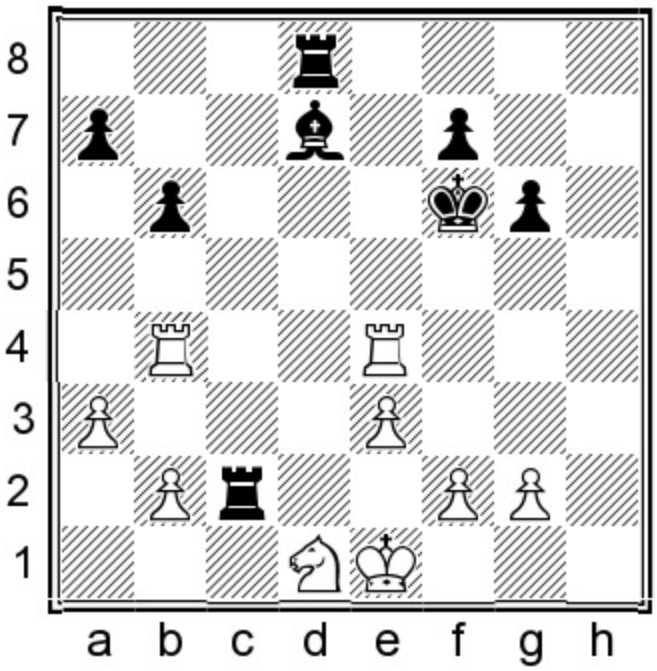
and Black may be in fact a pawn up, but the conversion process may not be that simple. Black shall naturally rely on the outside passer but has no possibility to push it for the moment. White's forces are perfectly prepared for its upcoming march as even the king is ready to meet it face to face. Apart from standing still, White himself can think about guerrilla warfare measures like ♘c3-b5, when it would not only be the black a7-pawn falling, but White could afterwards also transfer the knight to the blockading f5 square in case of need.

29...♘xe4 30.♖xe5+

30.♖xe4?? loses immediately to 30...♖h8! 31.♖exe5+ ♔f6–+ and White can avoid mate on h1 only after suffering heavy material losses.

30...♔f6 31.♖exe4

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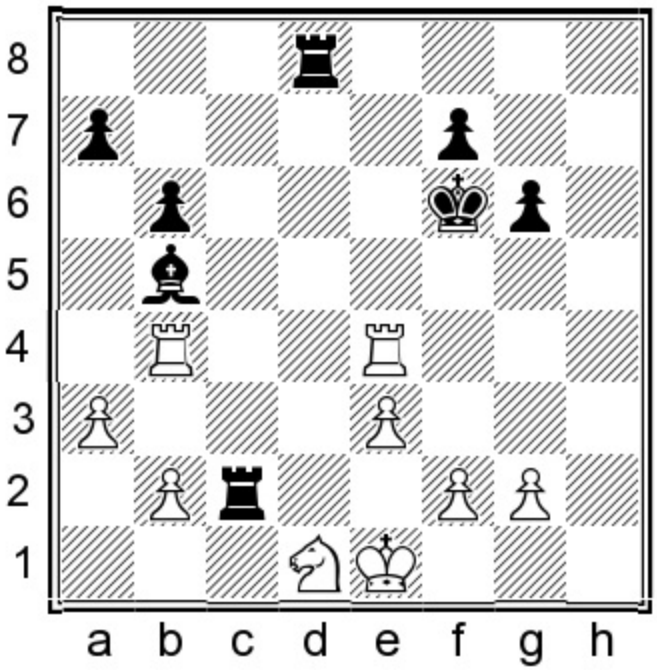
Position after: 31.♖exe4

All forced so far. White is not only a pawn up but the battery along the fourth rank simultaneously safeguards him against a possible infiltration from the side by the black rook along the h-file. But all this is just a mirage which Black can dispel by means of the stunning

31...♗b5!!

An absolute jaw-dropper! The logic behind this move is phenomenal. Black would like to bring the rook to h8 quickly, with the intention of mating the white king from h1. At the same time, White can always meet this with a timely interference on h4 as the rook battery along the fourth rank is still there. With ...♗d7-b5!! Black not only invites White to take on b5 and thus voluntarily dismantle the battery, but also makes him an offer that White cannot possibly turn down because of the equally dreadful ...♖c2-e2+ threat. White is defenseless. By comparison, 31...♖h8? is too simplistic as it leads to nothing more than an equal position after 32.♖h4 ♖xh4 33.♖xh4 ♗b5 34.♘c3 ♖xb2 35.♖d4= when Black can still try to pressure White a little bit thanks to the theoretical superiority of a bishop against a knight in endgames with pawns on both wings. Still, in reality White does not have so much to fear as his pieces enjoy pretty stable outposts for the moment.

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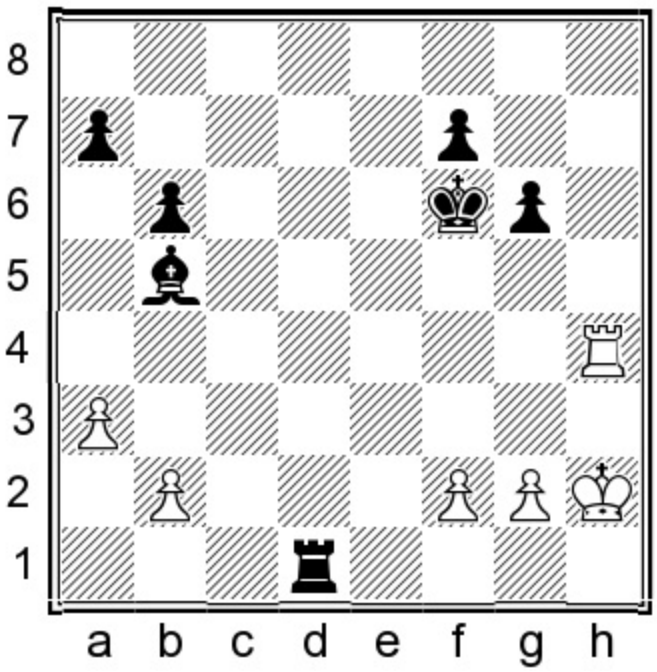


Position after: 31...♗b5!!

32.♖ed4

One last defensive try. Now 32.♖xb5 ♖h8–+ constitutes an artistically pleasing sight as some would say that greed does not pay off, but it is rather the dominance of coordination over material that comes to force here. The white rook has been lured to b5, and this is also why there is no trace of interference on h4 left for him.

32...♖h8! 33.♖h4 ♖xh4 34.♖xh4 ♖e2+ 35.♔f1 ♖xe3+ 36.♔g1 ♖e1+ 37.♔h2 ♖xd1–+

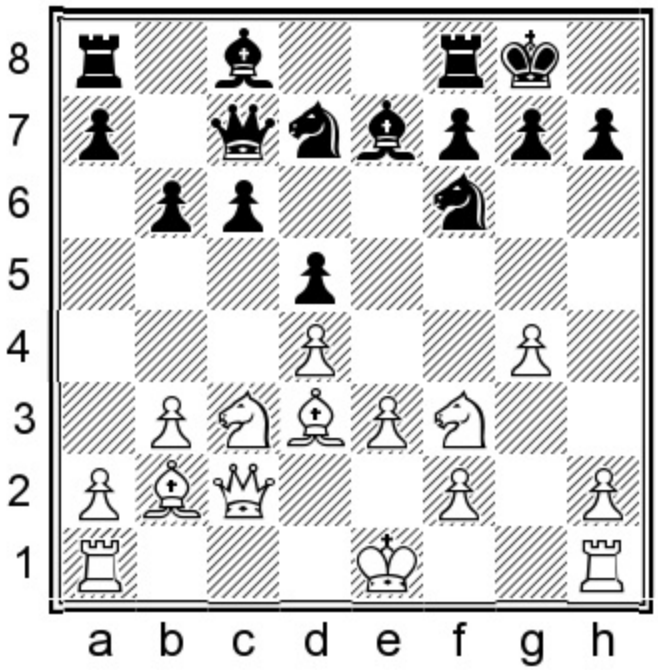


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Position after: 37...♖xd1−+

Black emerges a full piece up.

24
Pasko – Abdulla
Batumi 2019



■ *11...?*

Show/Hide Solution

24
Pasko, Llambi (2443)
Abdulla, Murad (2263)
Batumi 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Sacrifice for stalling the opponent's initiative

Black has misplayed the Meran Defense here. What I particularly dislike about the position we have in front of us is that he already suffers because of having pushed the b-pawn in a Carlsbad like structure (do not do that at home, kids!) as this will leave his c6-pawn subject to potential pressure along the c-file for a longer period of time. Another defect is the placement of the queen on c7 as its

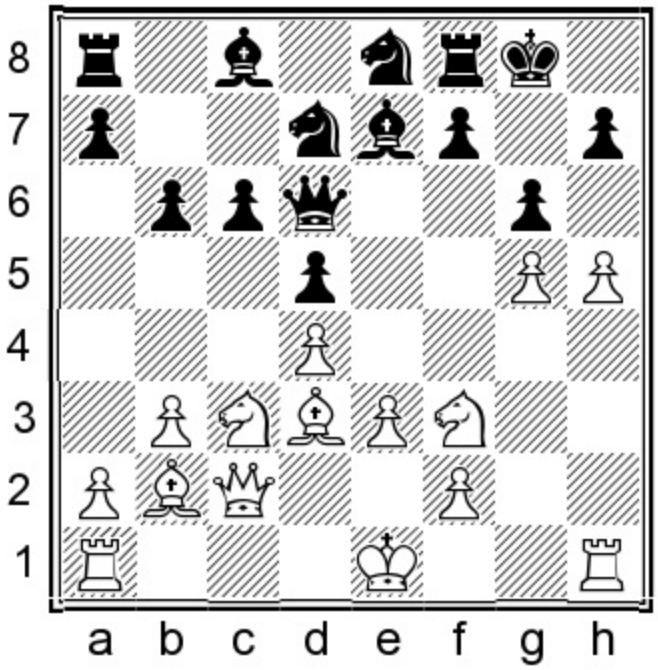
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presence there leads to troubles holding the d5-pawn should White manage to throw in g4-g5 in the near future. Speaking of the kingside, White has just launched a typical wing attack with g2-g4. Such pawns are usually sacrificed on the altar of White's offensive, but here Black's coordination is so terrible that capturing it would even lead (due to the d5 and h7-pawns hanging) to material losses for himself. But enough of this verbal bullying, there is a disastrous position for us to save!

11...♗b4!?

Quite a mysterious move at first glance. It does pin the white c3-knight but does not do much against the g4-g5 thrust that we feared so much. Curiously enough, however, this was Black's only chance for survival in this position.

In the game, Black apparently saw nothing better than 11...g6?! only to succumb to a dangerous kingside attack after 12.g5 ♘e8 13.h4 ♕d6 14.h5→

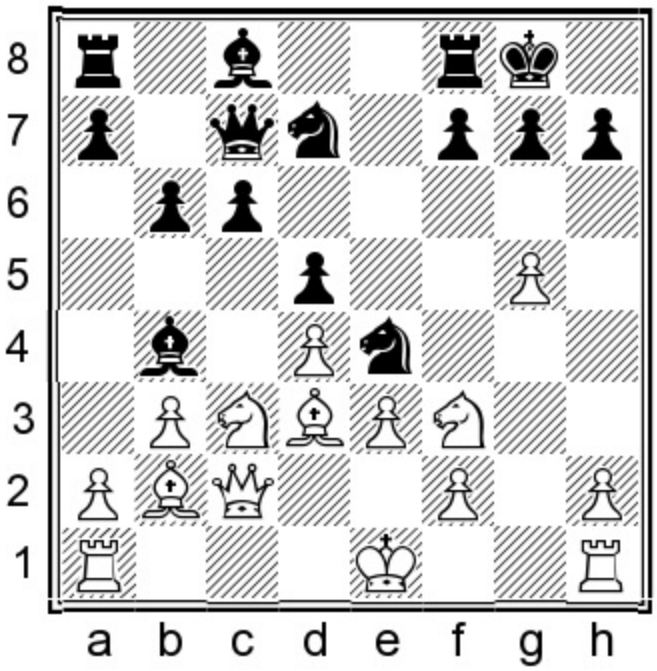


Position after: 14.h5→

when White's advantage is beyond any doubt. Almost all of his pieces are or can be quickly directed against the position of the black king. White's simplest plan here would have been to castle long and then create some terminal threats along the h-file with doubled rooks involved. In the meantime Black's pieces lack any reasonable deployment to oppose White's growing initiative on the kingside.

11...♗b4!? 12.g5 ♘e4!

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Position after: 12...♘e4!

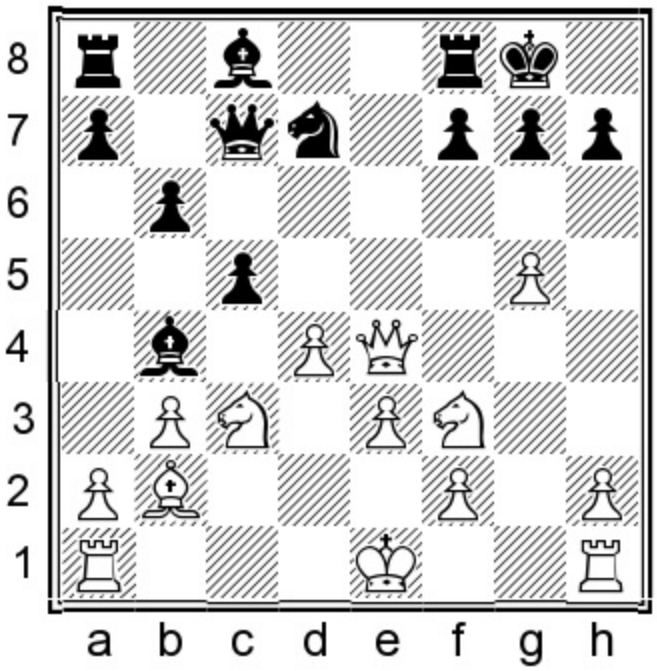
The point behind Black's first move. The knight is installed on e4 and this way blocks any attacks against the black h7-pawn. The price to pay therefor is naturally a whole pawn, but there is no such thing as a free lunch. In order to capture it White would have to part with the bishop pair, the final bill, however, contains more than one such item.

13.0-0-0

A much wiser and more practical choice than taking on e4 even if the positions arising after both alternatives are to be evaluated as approximately equal. After taking on e4, excluding the pawn edge, the burden of proof that his position is good would have been with White. After the text the position retains its strategic character with White still trying to pursue a kingside onslaught, but Black being in time with his counter chances on the opposite flank.

13.♗xe4 dxe4 14.♕xe4 looks like a pawn for nothing at first but this impression fades the moment you see 14...c5!

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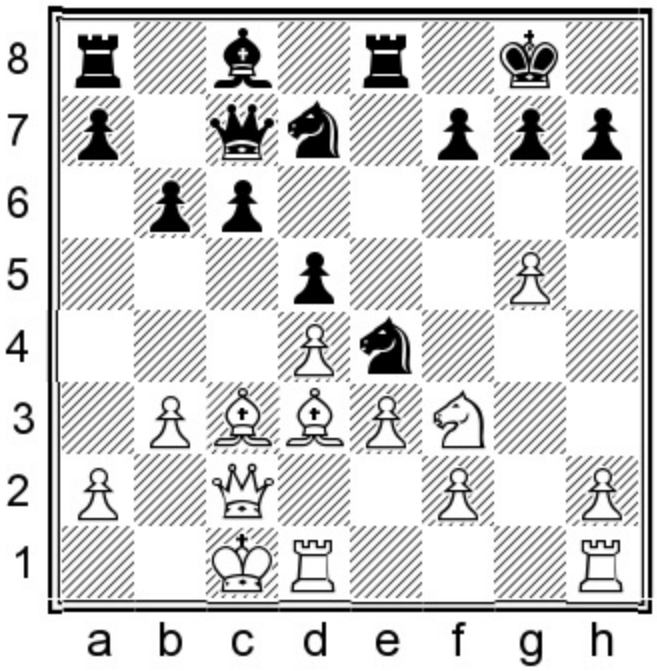


Position after: 14...c5!

All of a sudden it becomes clear that White is very much in trouble along the light squares and I am not even mentioning threats like ...c5xd4 with an attack against the c3-knight that needs to be taken into consideration as well. With the rook on a8 being taboo, White would need to try to limit damage along the light color complex by means of 15.d5 but after something like 15...♗a6 16.0-0-0 ♖fe8 17.♕g4 c4∓ Black would have been enjoying bright prospects. Opening the position in front of the white monarch is one thing that he might be striving for, but the possibility of activating the knight via c5, and sometimes even bringing it to d3 as a result, is just too tempting to refrained from.

13...♗xc3 14.♗xc3 ♖e8

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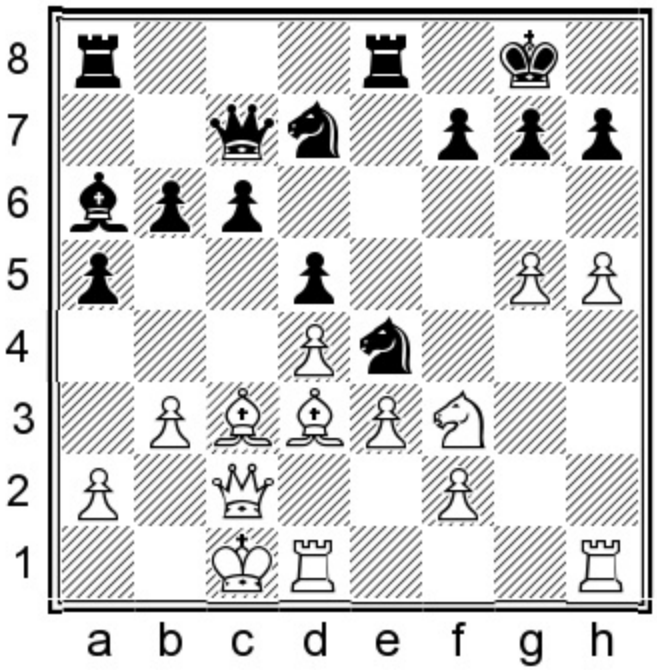


Position after: 14...♖e8

Most grandmasters I happen to know would probably not mind being White here. White still enjoys prospects of starting some attacking play on the kingside, his bishop pair is aimed there locked and loaded for some action, and even Black's pawn structure does not look too inviting at first as the backward c6-pawn may represent a potential weakness in the future. In reality however, it must be acknowledged that Black is more than fine by this point in time. He has established a powerful knight on e4 which takes out the sting out of White's light-squared bishop. The other white bishop is probably never going to be opened up as a potential ...c6-c5 push is not on Black's agenda at all. Instead, Black wishes to counter the opponent's kingside initiative by pushing the a-pawn. The purpose of this is twofold: first, to weaken the position of the white king with ...a5-a4. Secondly, and most importantly, Black intends to offload his 'bad' bishop for the opponent's 'good' one after something like

15.h4 a5 16.h5 ♗a6!⇄

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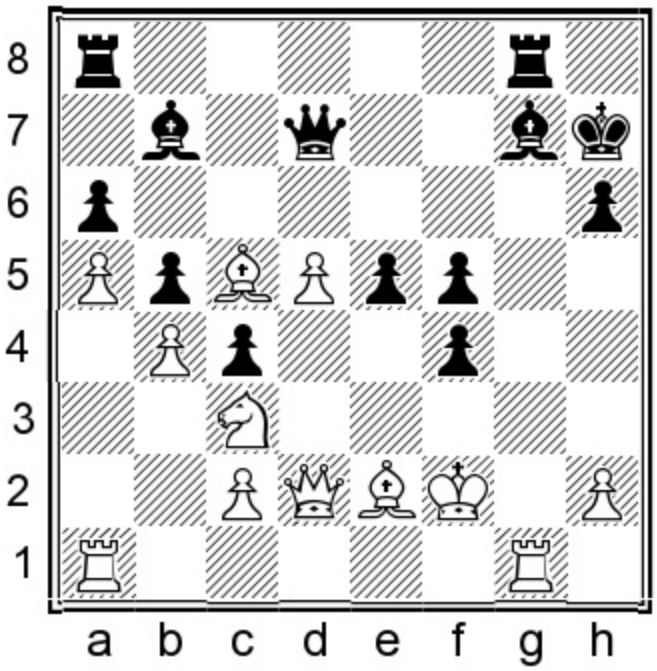


Position after: 16...♗a6!⇄

this way not only reducing White's attacking potential significantly, but also leaving him at risk of being one day left in a 'bad' bishop versus a 'good' knight scenario. White's attack cannot do without said bishop, whereas switching to positional pressure against the c6-pawn can hardly bring White success anymore. Personally, I would already slightly prefer Black here, as claiming that my king is actually safer in the long run than its White counterpart would not be exaggerated at all.

25
Bernadskiy – Gschnitzer
Budapest 2019

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■ *31...?*

Show/Hide Solution

25
Bernadskiy, Vitaliy (2587)
Gschnitzer, Adrian (2380)
Budapest 2019

Weakness
Attack against the weak king

One glance at the position reveals that this game is not going to be just another day at the office for either of the players. White has a piece for two pawns, but his king is quite awkwardly placed in the central area of the board. Worse yet, even if White wanted to try to evacuate it he would have to do it either by means of a long march towards the queenside (for which there is no time left), or by transferring the monarch to h1. The latter option however does not look like the safest of tries either, as it subjects the king to some discovered checks, or even mating threats along the long light diagonal. Does this mean that Black simply needs to push ...e5-e4 and then watch the world burn, or is there something else that needs to be favored instead?

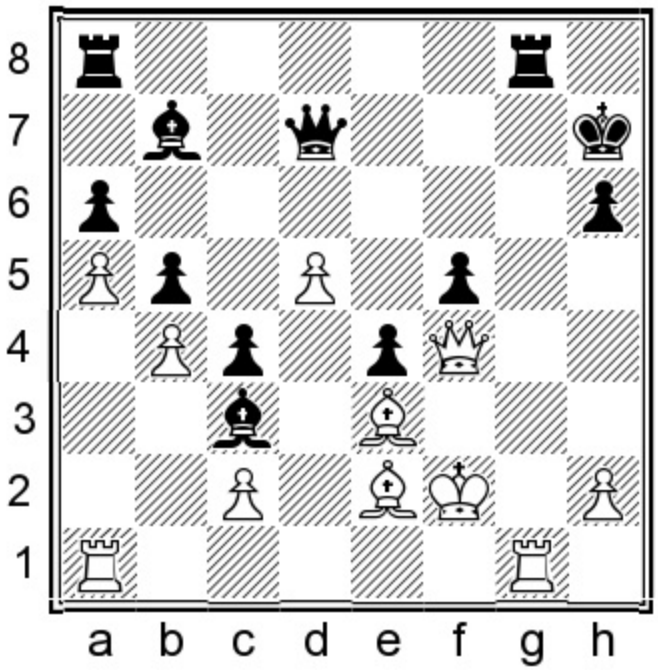
31...♕d8!

The only move that exploits the vulnerabilities of the white king. The black queen is now eyeing the h4-square and White cannot prevent this transfer from happening, or to efficiently evict it later on.

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Still, tolerating such a strong piece in close proximity of your king does not sound like a good idea, so the consequences of its arrival on h4 are going to be dire for White.

A) In the game, Black went for the oh-so-tempting 31...e4?! Probably assuming that he f4-pawn is taboo because of the c3-knight falling. As much as this is true, it must have come as a shock when the opponent responded with 32.♕xf4 ♗xc3 33.♗e3!

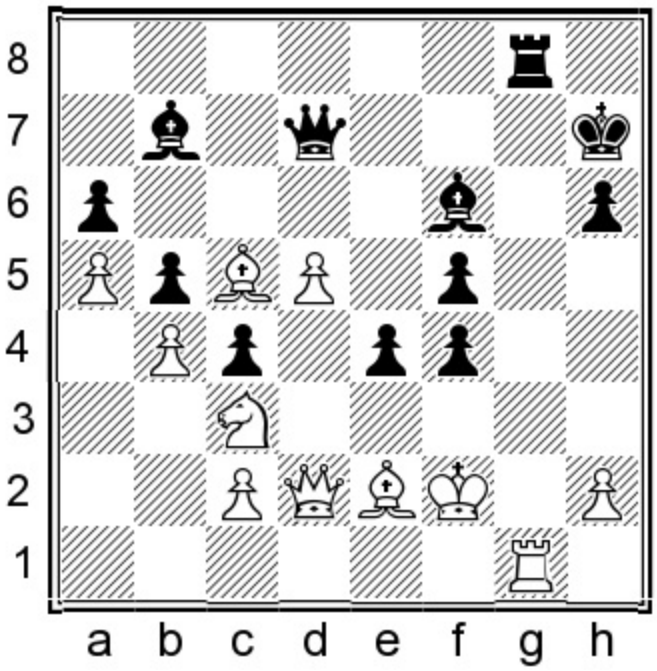


Position after: 33.♗e3!

forcing him to switch back to defense before undertaking any offense. The only way to continue involves parting with the h6-pawn after 33...♔h8 [The naturally looking 33...♗g7? fails to 34.♗h5 ♗xd5 35.♖g6+– when there is not much Black can do to effectively counter White's threats of taking on h6.] 34.♖ad1 ♖xg1 35.♖xg1 ♖g8 36.♕xh6+ ♕h7 37.♖xg8+ ♔xg8= with an objectively drawn position, even if eventually White managed to squeeze water from a stone.

B) By comparison, 31...♗f6 would have served the very same purpose as the text (invade the White camp along a diagonal that he cannot control) but is significantly weaker for a simple reason. A possible infiltration via h4 with the queen would have had disastrous consequences for White. But using the dark-squared bishop is, at most, annoying for the opponent, e.g. 32.♖xg8 ♖xg8 33.♖g1 e4

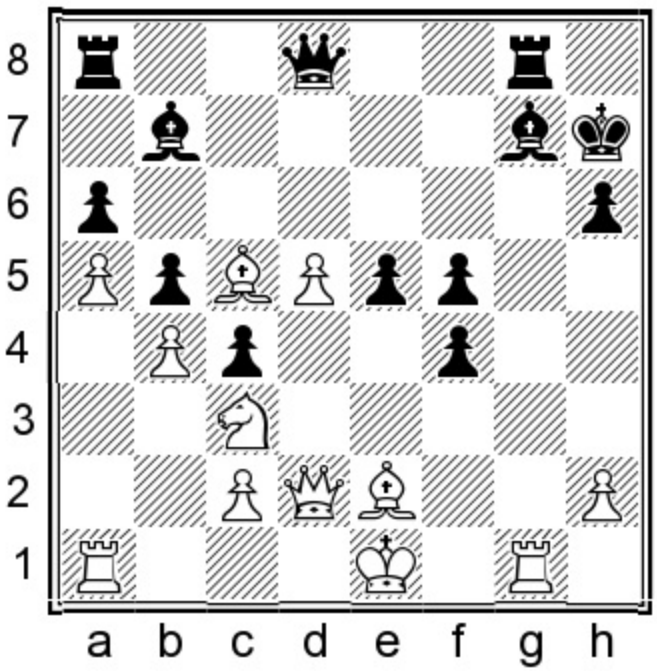
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Position after: 33...e4

and now after 34.♘xe4! ♗h4+ 35.♘g3! Black would have had nothing better than to transpose into a multi-piece endgame a pawn up after 35...fxg3+ 36.hxg3 ♗g5 37.♕d4 ♕xd5 38.♕xd5 ♗xd5 39.♖d1= with the position remaining close to equal thanks to the active counterplay that White is about to start along the d-file.

31...♕d8! 32.♔e1



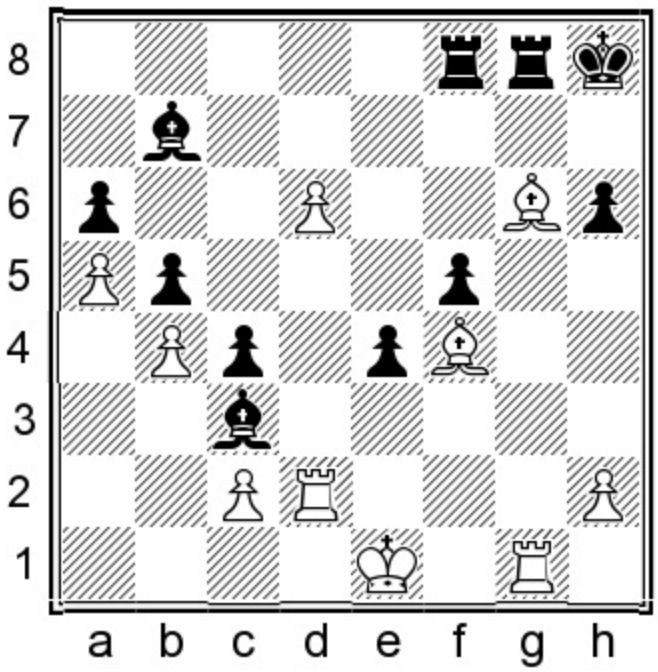
Position after: 32.♔e1

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32...♗h8!

Quite a surprising resource at first as Black exchanges pieces while being a pawn down. However, Black's rook on the g-file can be relatively quickly replaced by another one from a8 which cannot be said for White. Simultaneously the white monarch probably has to stay in the center which circumstance can only negatively affect his safety.

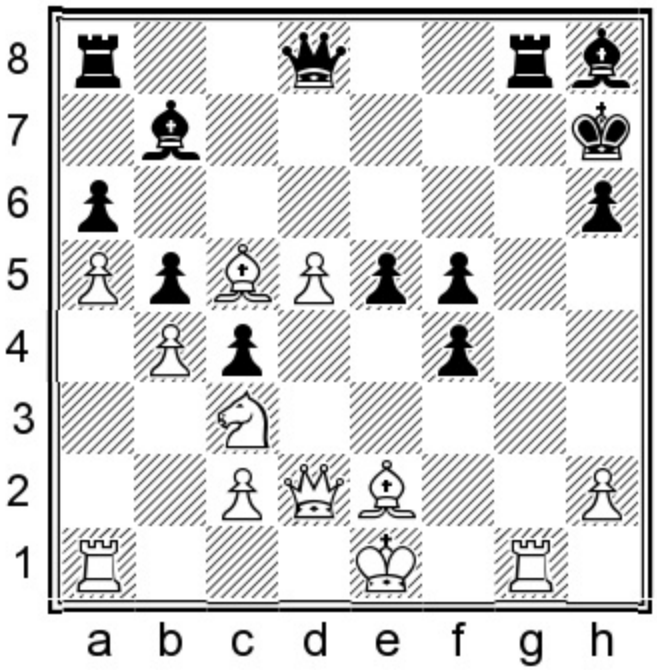
32...♕h4+?! looked quite appealing at first (why on earth did Black go for 31...♕d8 after all?), but the devil lies in the details as after the more or less forced sequence of 33.♗f2 ♕f6 34.♖d1 e4 35.♕xf4 ♕xc3+ 36.♖d2 ♖af8 37.♗e3 ♕e5 White may be in fact a pawn down, but after the enterprising exchange-sacrifice with 38.♗h5!? ♕xf4 39.♗g6+ ♔h8 40.♗xf4 ♗c3 41.d6!∞ things happen to still be still very unclear. The reason for this is that after capturing on d2, black's king would have landed in a lot of trouble along the dark squares.



Position after: 41.d6!∞

In the meantime, the passed d6-pawn will be engaging the black forces as well. I assume that Black will be taking in the future on d2 and trying to eliminate the g6-bishop as well, but the price to pay for that will be the white passer promoting to d8. In such an event, Black might eventually emerge a pawn up but without any real winning chances because of the presence of opposite-colored bishops on the board.

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Position after: 32...♗h8!

33.♖xg8

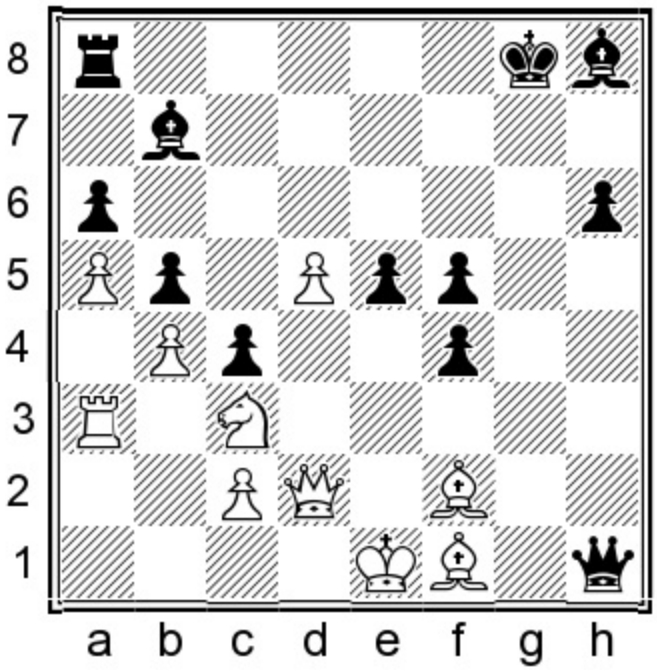
33.♖f1 makes even less sense as it allows Black to invade not only along the g-file after 33...♕h4+ 34.♔d1 ♖g2 35.♔c1 but also to exert pressure against the opponent from every single angle possible by means of 35...♖d8 36.♔b2 e4∓ with White being on the verge of losing due to multiple pins with threats such as ...♖d8xd5 or ...f4-f3 already hanging in the air.

33...♔xg8

Taking on g8 with the king might look like a loss of time at first. However, we would prefer to use g8 as a transit square for a swift transfer of the rook towards the kingside. Still, after something like

34.♖a3 ♕h4+ 35.♗f2 ♕xh2 36.♗f1 ♕h1!∓

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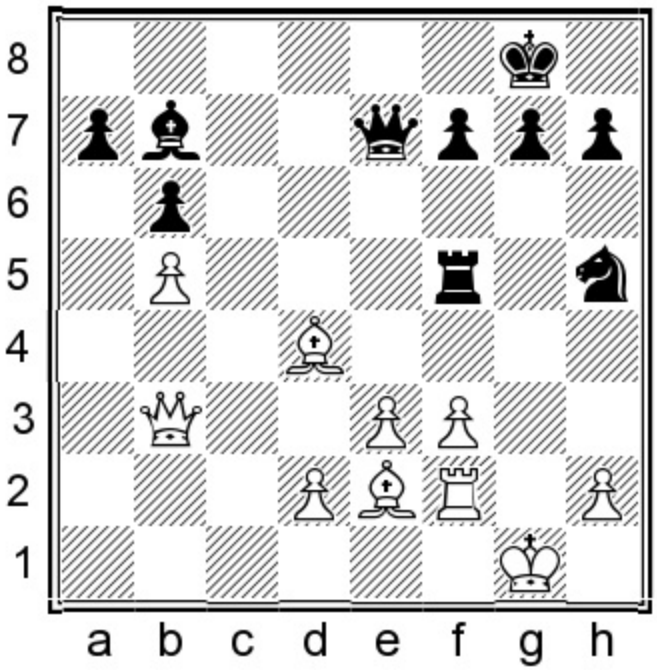


Position after: 36...♕h1!∓

it becomes apparent that Black enjoys all the time in the world to gradually increase the pressure on both wings. Moving the knight is out of the question for White because of the weakness of the d5-pawn. At the same time, after an exemplary ...♖a8-d8, the pawn would be falling anyway. If too that we add that Black might also contemplate a possible rook transfer along the g-file, combined with ideas such as ...♗h8-f6-h4 and ...e5-e4, it is clear that Black will soon extract the full point out of the opponent.

26
Strikovic – Mannion
Dublin 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *26...?*

Show/Hide Solution

26
Strikovic, Aleksa (2493)
Mannion, Stephen (2285)
Dublin 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Working out the optimal setup of your own pieces from the perspective of the further turn of events

Here we have yet another position in which static elements, White's bishop pair, are compensated for by dynamic ones as Black's forces are ready to launch an attack against the weakened white monarch. The nature of this type of a battle implies that Black needs to do something quickly, otherwise the opponent would consolidate his position, possibly even thinking about playing for a win afterwards himself thanks to his excellent dark-squared bishop. The only question remains: how should Black proceed specifically? Which pieces need to be improved and which ones are already displaying their full potential? Should Black bring the queen to the queenside with ...♕e7-h4 and look for tactical blows, or would giving a check with the rook on g5 (virtually forcing the white king to go for a walk towards the queenside), sound more reasonable to you?

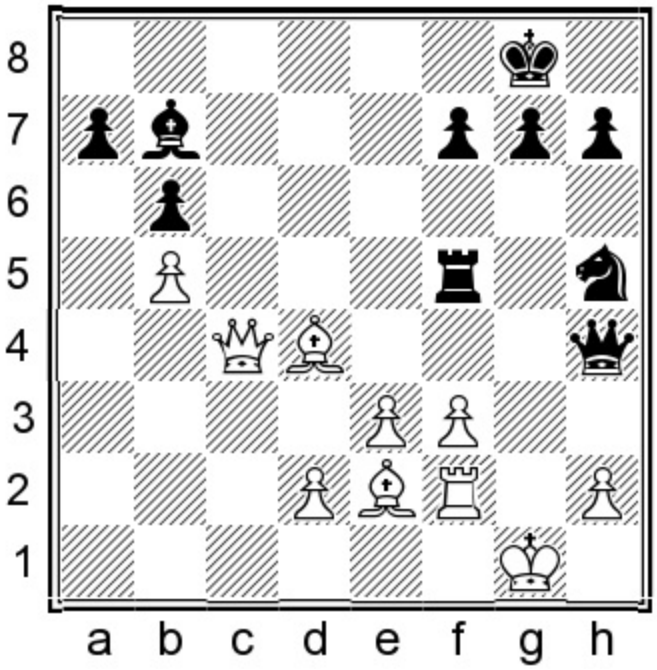
26...♖g5+!?

The best practical chance provided that Black is able to skillfully throw in even more forces against

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the white king. The white king has no other choice but to head towards the queenside.

A) 26...♕h4?! was played in the game. By trying to activate the queen first this move corresponds with the best principles of attacking play as afterwards every black piece seems to know its job. What is more, visually speaking, the other pieces were already taking part in the action. In particular the rook and bishop duo was putting pressure against the loose f3-pawn. However, after the magnificent 27.♕c4!

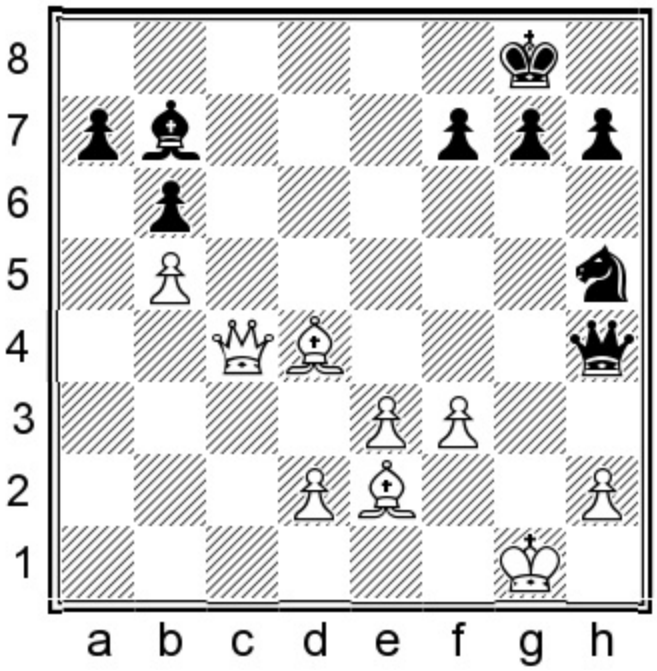


Position after: 27.♕c4!

it turns out that White is always in time to fight back against ...♖f5-g5+ and ...♕h4-e1+ ideas with ♖f2-g2 and ♗e2-f1. On top of that, the white queen is about to infiltrate via c7 any moment not only to threaten a back-rank mate, but maybe even to prevent the black bishop from joining the fight via c8. It is actually Black who needs to be careful now:

A1) 27...♖g5+?! 28.♖g2 ♖xg2+ 29.♔xg2 ♕g4+ 30.♔f2 ♕h4+ 31.♔g1±

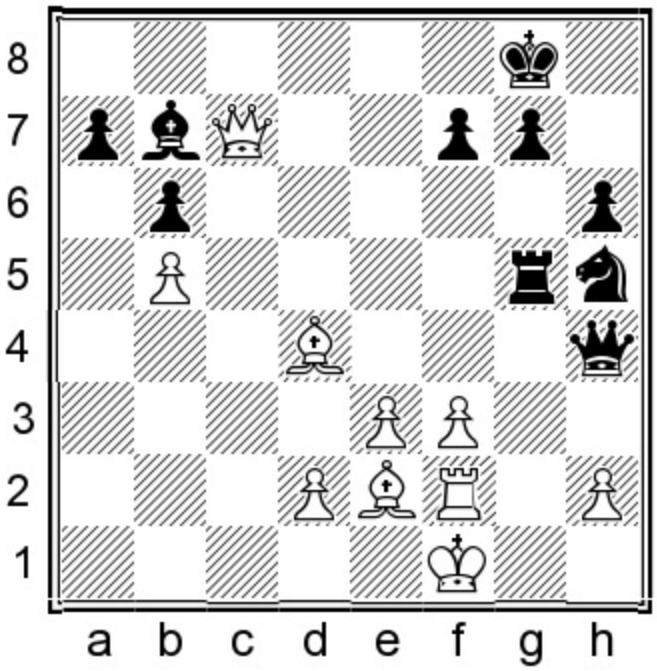
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Position after: 31.♔g1±

leaves Black empty handed on the kingside. If the queen were forced to revert to e7 Black would be left with no counterplay, a backward pawn on a7 as well as the outlook of White mobilizing the central pawn chain in the near future.

A2) 27...h6 28.♕c7 ♖g5+ 29.♔f1



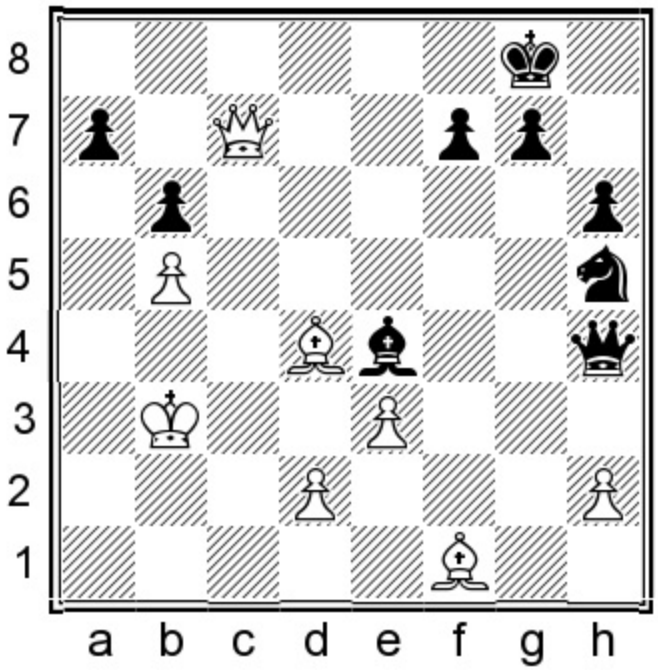
Position after: 29.♔f1

A2.1) 29...♘g3+ looks scary, but after the calm 30.♔e1! ♘xe2 31.♔xe2 ♗d5 32.e4= White would be

chessthuring.com

able to secure his king quite effortlessly by simply putting his central pawns on the light squares. No checks against the king, no danger.

A2.2) 29...♕h3+ 30.♔e1 ♖g1+ 31.♖f1 ♕h4+ 32.♔d1 and it seems as if Black was on the verge of obtaining an edge by winning a pawn, but after 32...♖xf1+ 33.♗xf1 ♗xf3+ 34.♔c2 ♗e4+ 35.♔b3



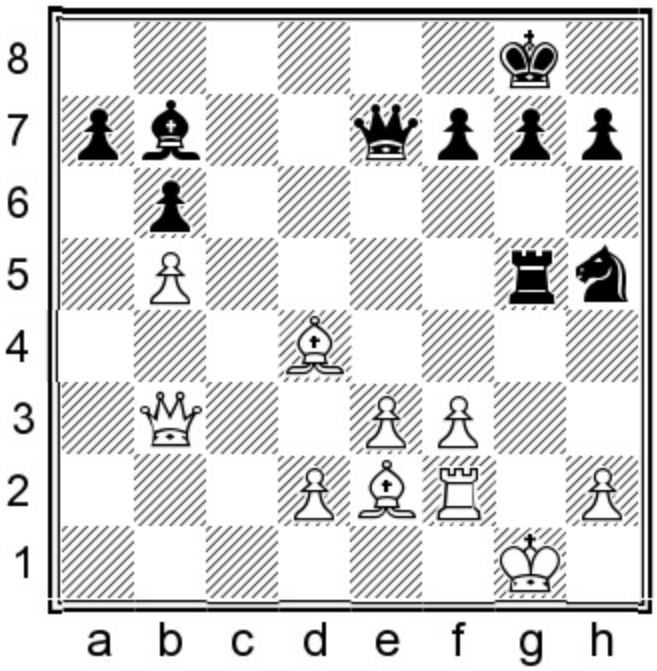
Position after: 35.♔b3

only now does it become clear that ♗f1-c4 threats are imminent and there is not much Black can do about it apart from forcing a perpetual with 35...♕e1 36.♗c4 ♗g6 37.♕xa7 ♕d1+ 38.♔a3 ♕c1+ 39.♔b4 ♕xd2+ 40.♔a3 ♕c1+=

B) 26...♕g5+? 27.♖g2 ♕h4 28.♕d1± would have been even less convincing as White has everything covered and there is not even a single check available to Black.

26...♖g5+!?

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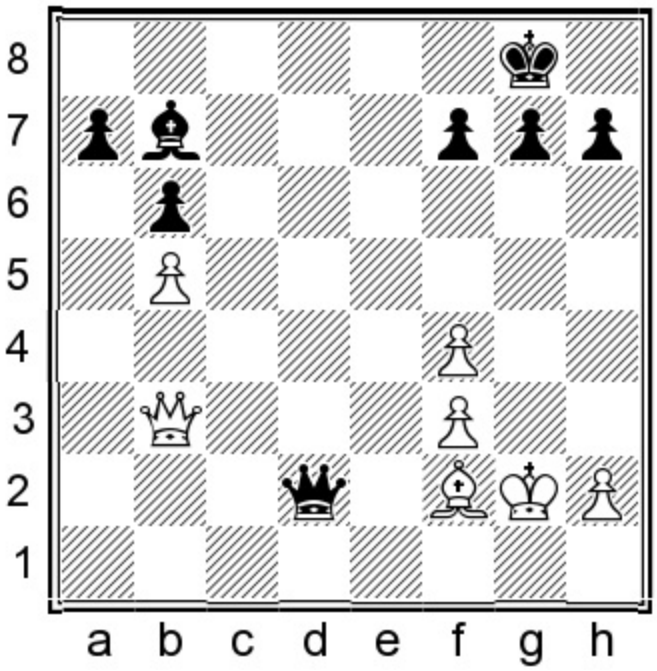


Position after: 26...♖g5+!?

27.♔f1

A) 27.♔h1?! leads to immediate trouble for White after 27...♕d7! The threat is ...♕d7-h3 followed by the lethal ...♘h5-g3+. White can try to limit damage by means of 28.♖g2 but after 28...h6 29.♖xg5 hxg5 30.♔g1 ♘f4!∓ Black's attack continues despite the reduced material.

B) 27.♖g2? is even worse as now the tactical 27...♘f4! 28.exf4 ♖xg2+ 29.♔xg2 ♕xe2+ 30.♗f2 ♕xd2∓

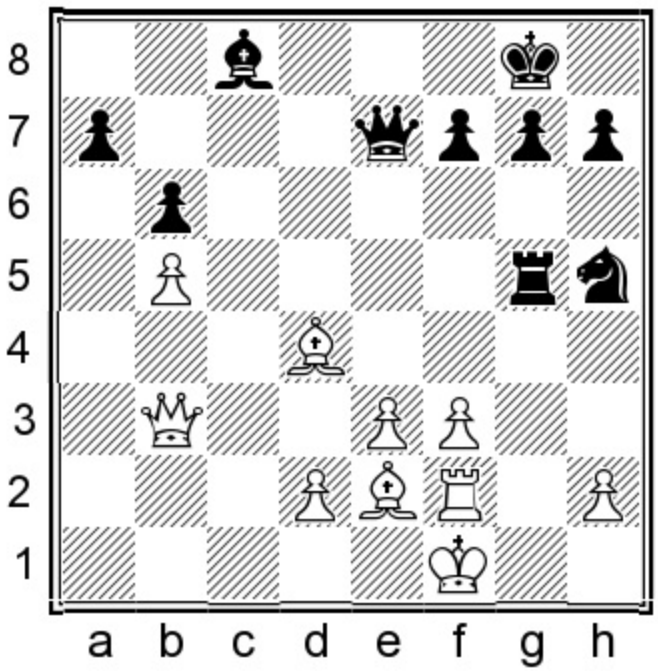


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Position after: 30...♕xd2∓

when White is left not only a pawn down, but the king's pawn shield is shattered. Some hopes of salvation could be connected with the presence of opposite-colored bishops, but drawish tendencies related thereto are known to apply only when there are no other pieces left on the board. With the queens still there, I can imagine White's defensive task during the coming moves not being too happy.

27...♗c8!



Position after: 27...♗c8!

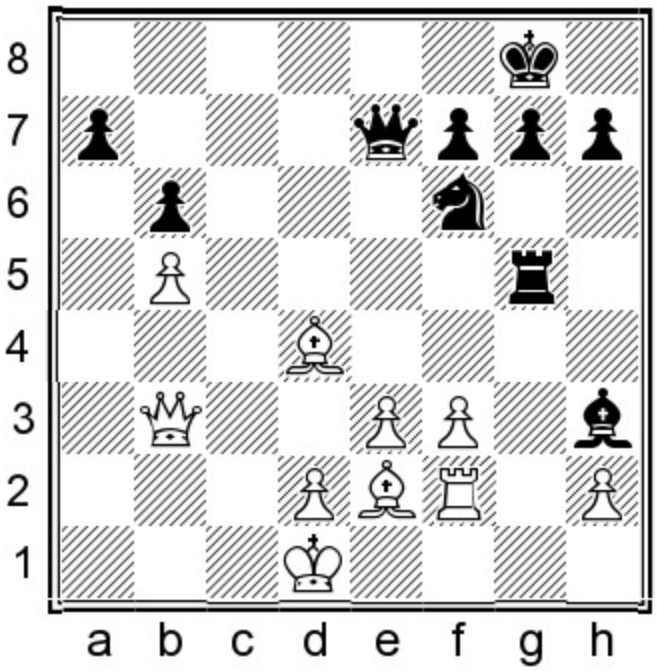
The point! Black anticipates that the white king is going for a long journey along the first rank. Because of this, the bishop is no longer needed for an attack against the f3-pawn, but will rather operate along the c8-h3 diagonal in order to harass the white monarch from h3. Or when it turns up on c2 to turn its attention towards the queenside.

28.♔e1 ♗h3 29.♔d1

White has nothing left but to direct the king towards the queenside, but this is tantamount to an illusion of safety. In reality, it will not be long before Black's pieces reach this wing again.

29...♘f6

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Position after: 29...♘f6

30.♔c2

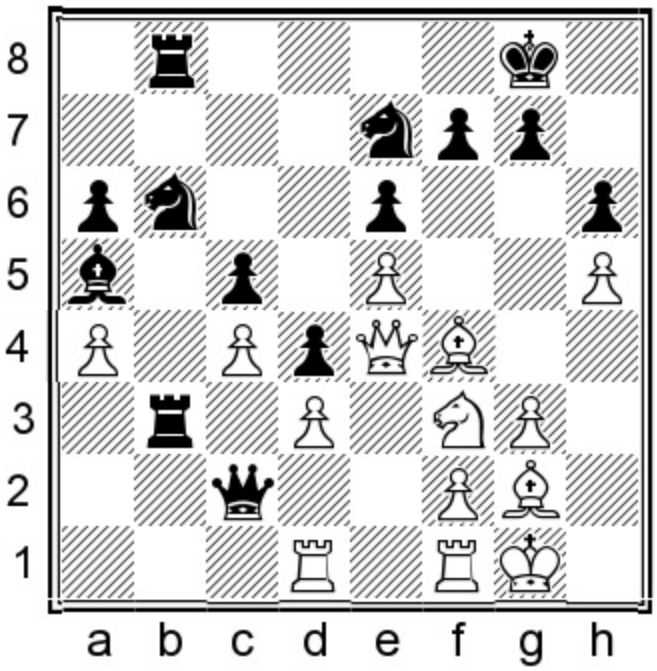
30.e4 ♘e8!∓ is not much better for White as the b5-pawn will be in grave danger as soon as the knight reaches d6.

30...♗e6 31.♕b2 ♘d5→

and tough times are coming for White who will have to deal not only with threats along the c-file and back rank, but also with devices like ...♘d5-b4+. Black's advantage is about to grow to decisive proportions.

27
Adams – Kuzubov
Wolfhagen 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *28.?*

Show/Hide Solution

27
Adams, Michael (2693)
Kuzubov, Yuriy (2664)
Wolfhagen 2019

Attack & Defense
Sacrifice for the possibility to approach the king of the opponent

Here we see a position resembling a King's Indian Attack even if the game started out as a Sicilian Moscow. White has a little more space on the kingside, but Black has not been wasting any time on the opposite flank. In similar positions, White is definitely advised to launch an attack against the black king, whereas Black usually progresses on the queenside, making moves in front of his king only in case of absolute necessity. It is not going to be a melee fight, but rather a race in which the faster you are, the greater your chances to win. Currently White cannot focus on attacking as Black is threatening not only ...♘b6xc4, but also ...♘b6xa4-c3, of which the latter could prove to be even more annoying for White due to the knight fork. So, the question remains: who is going to blink first?

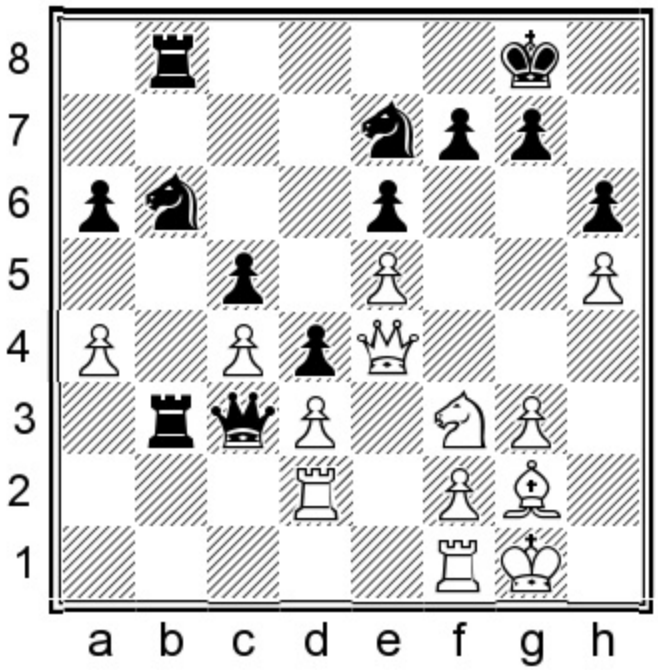
28.♗g5!

You cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs! White should not hesitate to sacrifice the bishop for the possibility of endangering the black king as quickly as possible. The Attack/Defense

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Ratio seems to be unsatisfactory at first (amounting only to 1), but White is attacking along the light squares, that is a color-complex that Black is unable to effectively control due to the absence of the light-squared bishop among his forces. Although calculating the difference between the number of pieces attacking and defending more often than not helps understand whether it is a good time to attack, this rule cannot be followed in blind isolation from other properties of the position.

A) In the game, White played 28.♗d2?! which was simply counterproductive; by exchanging the bishop White not only reduces his attacking potential but wastes time that could be dedicated to attacking instead. Now after 28...♗xd2 29.♖xd2 ♕c3

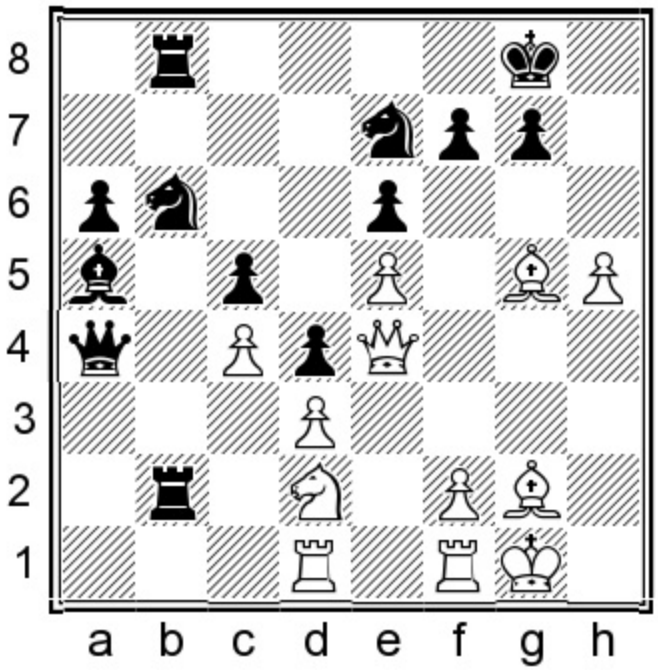


Position after: 29...♕c3

any attacks White would like to launch are going to be far less effective, e.g. 30.g4 ♘xa4 31.g5 hxg5 32.♕g4 ♘f5 33.♕xg5 ♘b2 34.♗h3 ♘h6 35.♔h2 ♔h8 36.♖g1 ♖g8∓ when Black is relatively safe, in particular because there still seems to be no decisive access for White's heavy pieces to the sensitive g7-pawn.

B) Far more logical would have been 28.♘d2 when after 28...♖b2 29.g4 ♕xa4 30.g5 hxg5 31.♗xg5

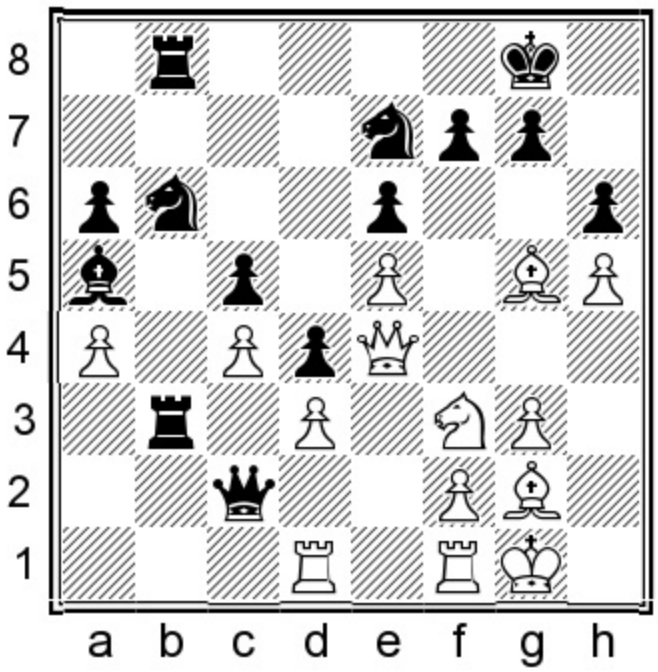
chesstouring.com



Position after: 31.♗xg5

it seems as if White was about to slowly be getting closer to the black king. At the same time, having already grabbed one important pawn on the queenside, Black could then shift all his pieces back to the kingside after something like 31...♕e8 32.♘f3 ♘a4 33.♕g4 ♗d8! 34.h6 ♘g6⇄ with double-edged play. White's attack can by no means be underestimated, but at the same time, with the black a-pawn rolling, time would already be working in Black's favor.

28.♗g5!



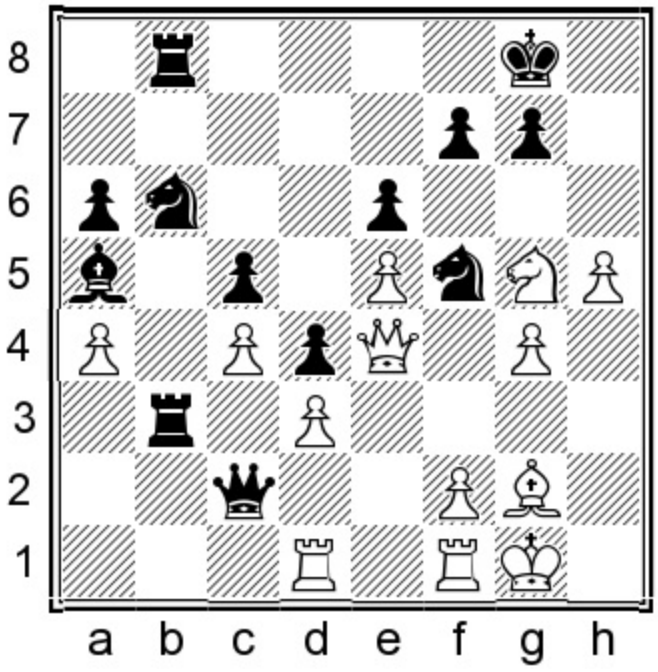
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Position after: 28.♗g5!

28...♘f5

Probably Black's best chance. Not because this move is particularly strong, but rather because none of the alternatives really work.

A) 28...hxg5 fails to 29.♘xg5 ♘f5 [29...♔f8 30.♕f3 ♘f5 31.g4+– does not stop White from crashing through.] 30.g4

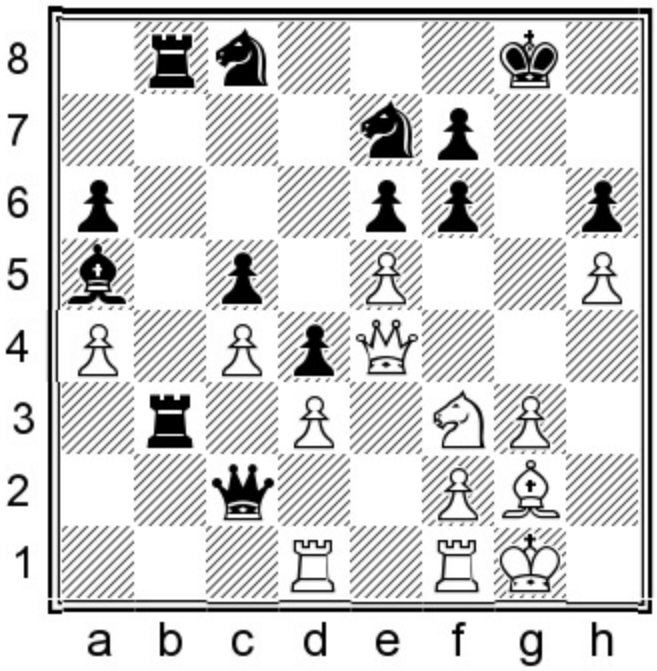


Position after: 30.g4

Now the only way not to allow a deadly infiltration via h7 by the white queen is to target the white knight with 30...♗d2 but after 31.gxf5 ♗xg5 32.fxe6 fxe6 33.♕g6+– Black will have to throw in the towel sooner than later as death is coming towards him along the light squares.

B) 28...♘bc8 is not much better than the text as it allows White to land the final blow along the dark squares: 29.♗f6! gxf6

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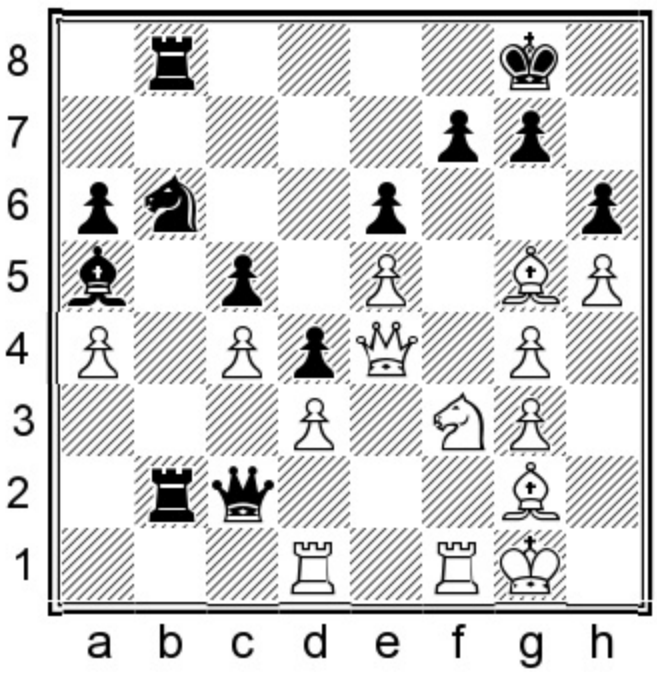


Position after: 29...gxf6

and now the ultra-pretty 30.♕f4!! technically finishes Black off due to mating threats related to the white queen and pawns quickly appearing in close proximity of the black king, e.g. 30...fxe5 31.♘xe5 ♘f5 32.g4 ♘fd6 33.♕xh6 ♗d8 34.♘d7+– and the black pieces, overwhelmingly stranded on the queenside, will be missing out on the fireworks that are about to come in front of their own monarch.

29.g4 ♘g3!? 30.fxg3 ♖b2

may appear promising at first but after the simple

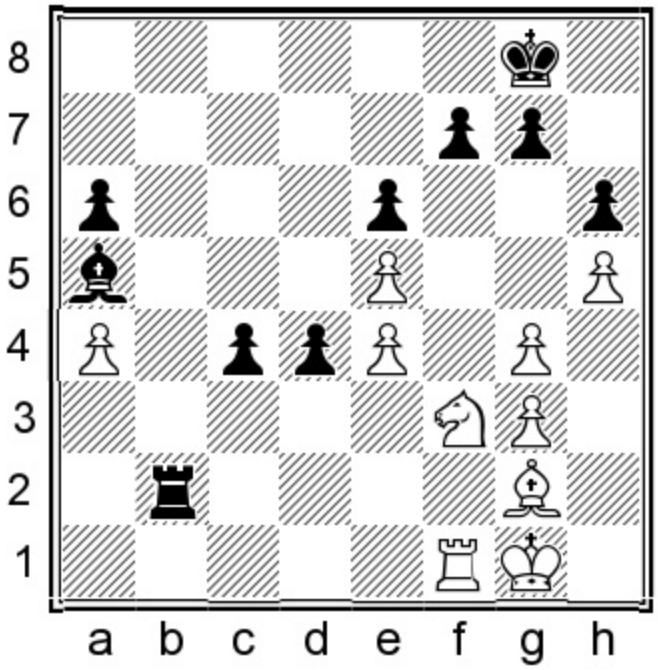


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Position after: 30...♖b2

31.♘xd4

At the same time 31.♗d2? would have constituted a terrible mistake as after the more or less forced 31...♘xc4! 32.♖c1 ♘xd2 33.♖xc2 ♘xe4 34.♖xb2 ♖xb2 35.dxe4 c4∓



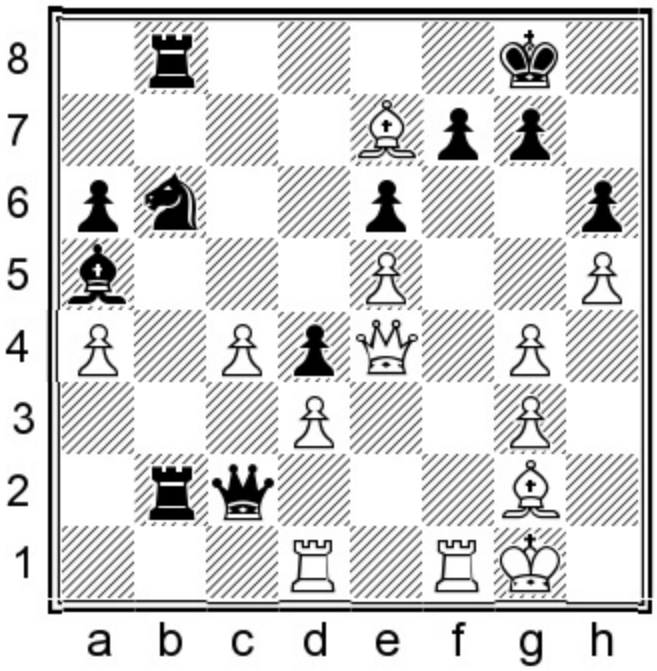
Position after: 35...c4∓

despite being a piece up, it is White who would have been in dire straits trying to contain Black's connected passed pawns.

31...cxd4 32.♗e7±

both the g2-bishop would be protected, and the possibility of effectively attacking the f7-pawn retained.

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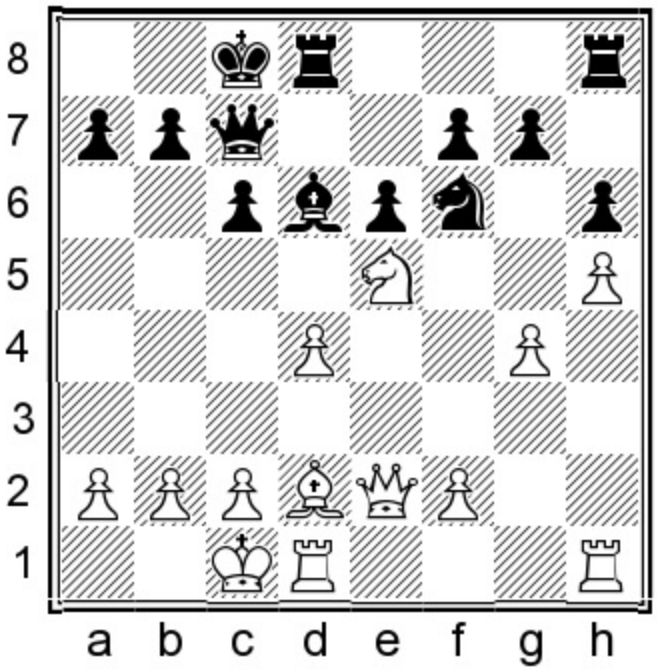


Position after: 32.♗e7±

There is still some work to be done before White would have been able to cash in the full point, but thanks to the potential of the white passed pawn on c4, he would have been closer rather than farther from victory.

28
Muzychuk – Gunina
Hengshui 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *17...?*

Show/Hide Solution

28
Muzychuk, Mariya (2563)
Gunina, Valentina (2506)
Hengshui 2019

Coordination
Influencing coordination by changing the pawn structure

When browsing English speaking chess news regularly in 2019 one could not avoid the impression that the cunning phrase ‘chess-culture’ suddenly soared in popularity. Whenever an elite chess player would be outplayed in an instructive fashion, or when a certain poor thing from among those top guns would give up in an essentially drawn position, literally everybody would lose their minds and start quoting this phrase in a (most often) patronizing tone. ‘Chess-culture’ is in fact not only a real thing, but also something that has been known to the chess populace East of the Spree river for decades. Although there does not seem to be any uniform definition as every grandmaster can recite a few basic theoretical endgames by heart. In my opinion what matters the most from a certain level nowadays is broad opening knowledge, understood not as the ability to memorize countless variations, but rather as mastery in the area of typical ideas, structures, motifs and plans, not only deep into the middlegame, but sometimes even towards the endgame as well. In other words, you are a ‘(wo)man of chess-culture’ if you always know what to do after the opening. Here you might

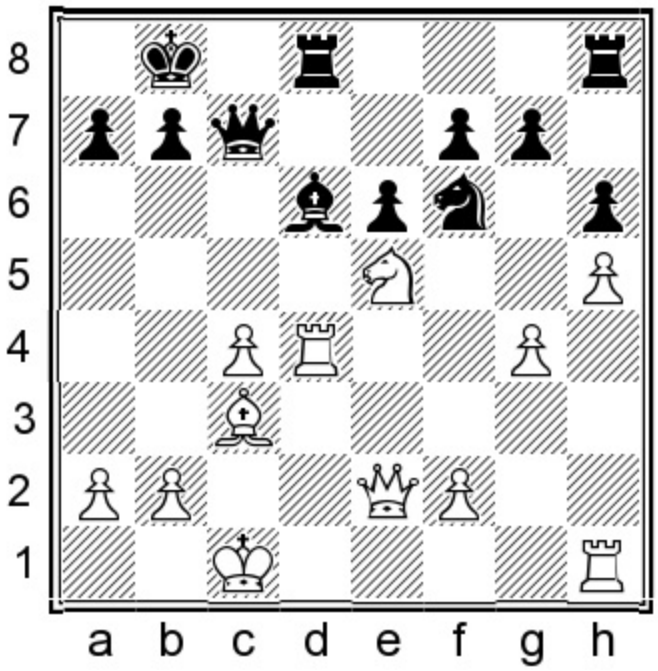
chesstouring.com

wonder what this extensive introduction was about. Well, from a certain level the knowledge of typical motifs is mandatory, especially if you happen to be a long time adherent of a specific system. Here, for example, we have a Caro-Kann on board. Black has a little less space but is also very solid and has no troubles whatsoever with her pieces. But this may not be the case very soon if White starts pushing her pawns on both wings efficiently. What would you do then as Black in order to avoid being squeezed?

17...c5

An absolute must. This way, Black not only attacks the d4-pawn but also softens up the e5-knight which has already become annoying.

A) Instead, Gunina went for 17...♔b8?! which is understandable (escaping the c-file with the king before opening it up), but also very slow. As White momentarily does not have to worry about any counterplay from her opponent's side, she could have simply made progress in the center with a typical deployment being 18.c4 c5 19.♗c3 cxd4 20.♖xd4± when Black is already starting to feel seriously uncomfortable.



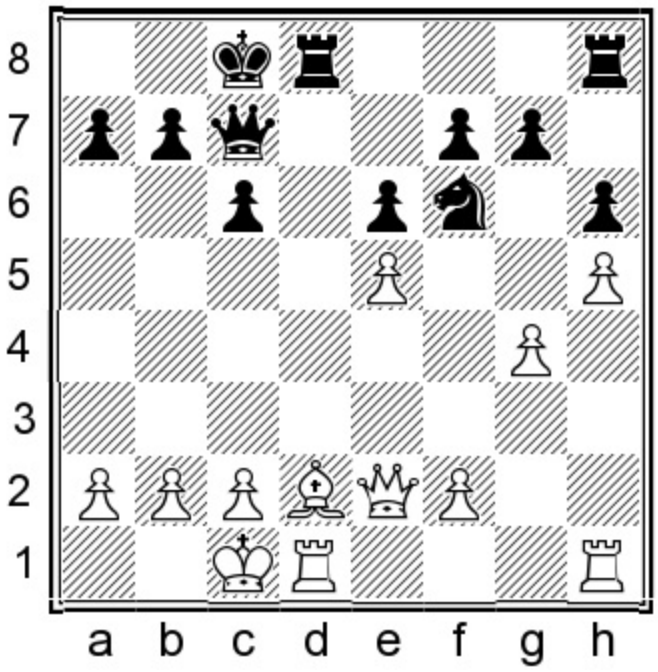
Position after: 20.♖xd4±

The reason for this is that the e5-knight cannot be taken. If it cannot be eliminated, then the f7-pawn is constantly a problem-child for Black. At the same time, the white pawn structure is superior as the c4-pawn deprives the black knight of the d5-square, whereas on the kingside White will be launching a pawn-storm any day now. They say that mistakes are the price of an interesting life, but after 17...♔b8?! things will simply be turning ugly for Black as she has been condemned to passive defense.

B) At the same time eliminating the e5-menace upfront with 17...♗xe5?! does not seem to be the

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wisest of choices either. This way Black would not only be conceding space, but also losing time needed to re-route his own knight somewhere safe. Sample lines: 18.dxe5



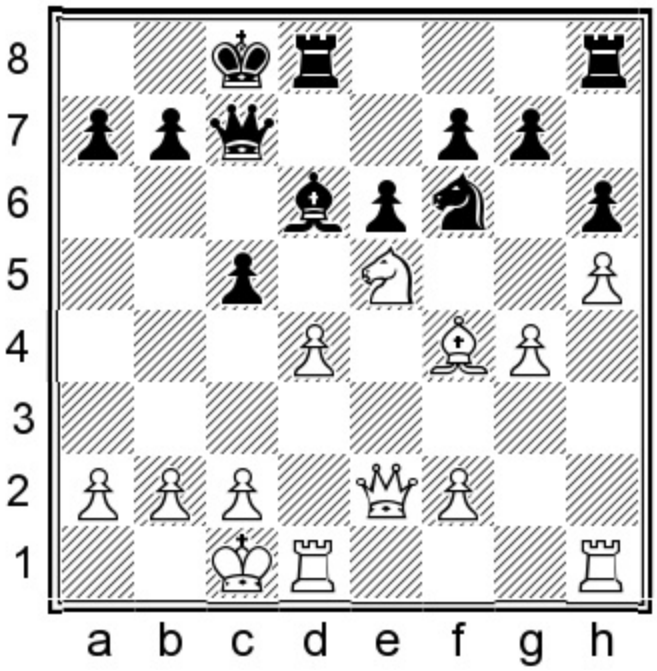
Position after: 18.dxe5

B1) 18...♘d7 19.f4 c5 20.♖he1↑ with White about to shift her attention towards the kingside, whilst the black knight still lacks any reasonable outpost close to the center.

B2) 18...♘d5 is even worse after 19.c4 ♘b6 20.b3± since the white pawns give the knight a hard time on the queenside. What is more, White may not only safely push his kingside pawns, but should also be slowly flirting with the idea of installing the bishop on d6.

17...c5 18.♗f4

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Position after: 18.♗f4

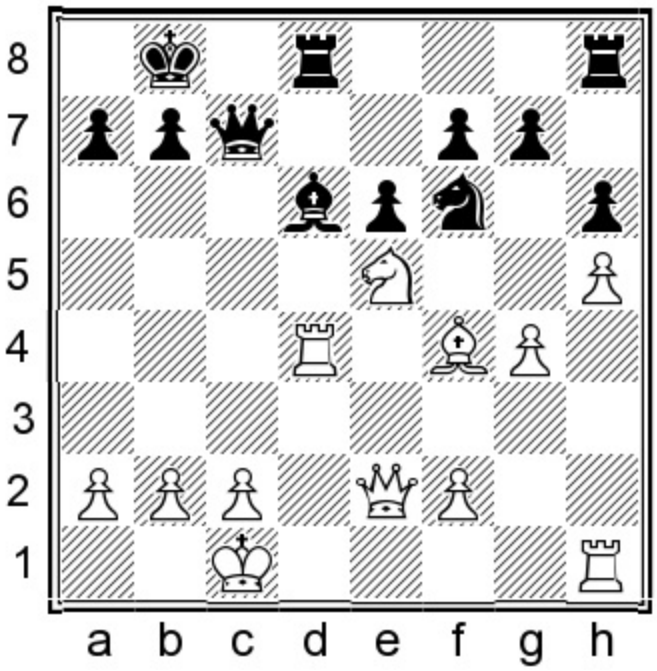
Forced, if White wants to maintain the powerful knight on e5, simultaneously protecting the d4-pawn. All well and good but now Black would have had the strategically impressive

18...c4!

This is what I call a move of a true '(wo) man of chess-culture'! I can imagine some of you being slightly perplexed here. Was Black's last move not designed to make the white e5-knight uncomfortable? If so, why would we now want to walk on by the d4-pawn? True, this way Black may in fact be releasing the tension between the d4-c5 pawns, but also secures a juicy outpost for the knight on d5. With the pawn back on c5 or exchanged on d4, Black would not be able to achieve this due to the constant threat of c2-c4. Now with the structure taking a more closed character, the knight can jump safely to d5 and stay there as long as the c4-pawn is preserved.

A) Black should deliberately avoid 18...cxd4? which is here so careless that it actually loses on the spot after 19.♖xd4 ♔b8

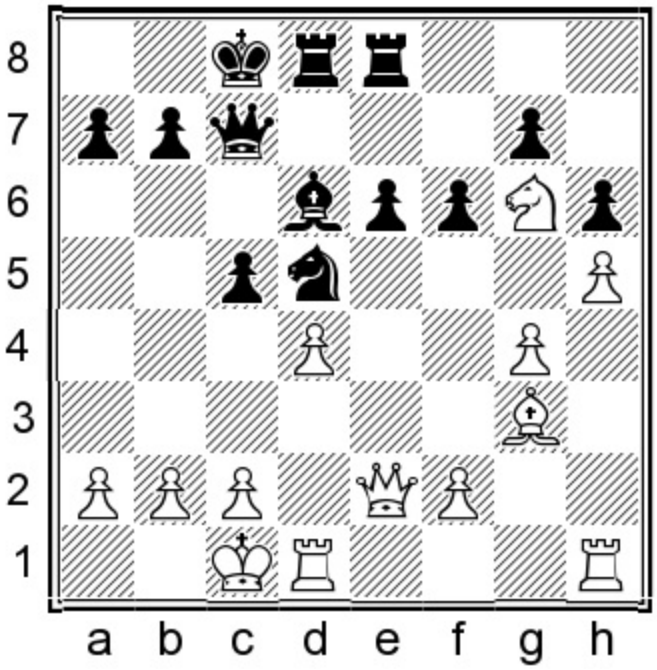
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Position after: 19...♔b8

20.♖xd6! and now after 20...♖xd6 21.♘xf7 ♕xf7 22.♗xd6+ ♔a8 23.♖e1+– Black is a pawn down but in exchange her position is lost. Jokes aside, the motif featuring the temporary exchange-sacrifice on d6 is surely worth remembering.

B) On the other hand, 18...♘d5 deserved serious attention here, with the idea that after 19.♗g3 f6 20.♘g6 ♖he8

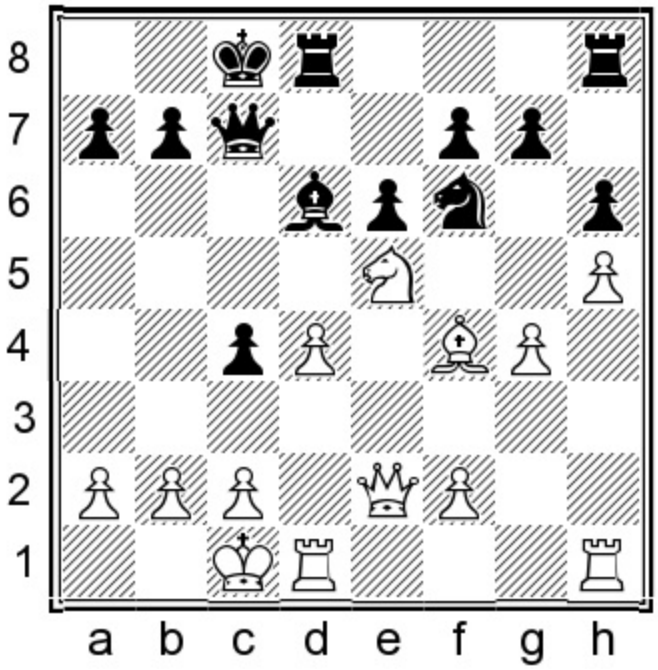


Position after: 20...♖he8

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Black manages to bring all of her pieces towards the center.

There is a catch as the e6-pawn will be permanently weak. Should it move in the future, especially by the time we have already reached the endgame, Black would constantly need to reckon with the white knight being transferred to f5, from which square it would keep an eye on g7 and h6. Apart from that White could also go for 21.♗xd6 ♖xd6 22.♕b5!?⇄ when Black would still need to dedicate plenty of time to recapture the c5-pawn before she could eventually claim equality.



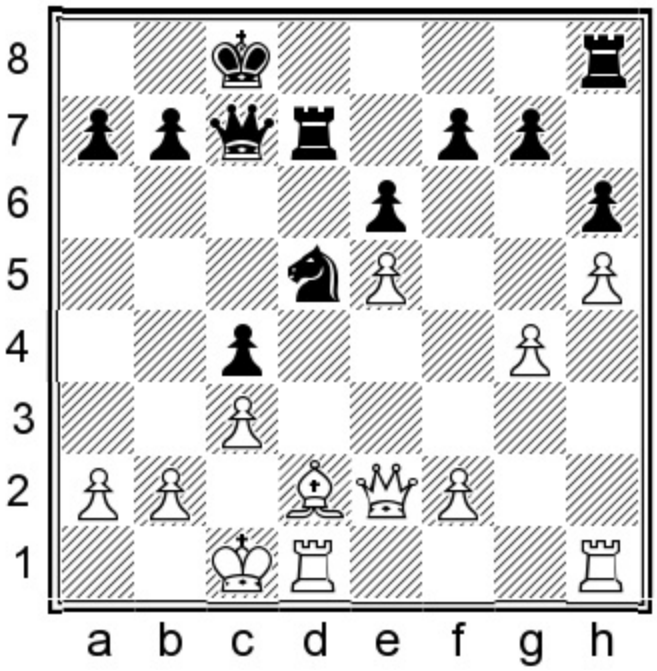
Position after: 18...c4!

19.c3

The most consistent reply. White fixes the c4-pawn and solidifies her own d4-pawn in advance.

A) 19.♗d2 would have allowed a transformation into a 'good knight versus bad bishop' endgame after 19...♗xe5!? 20.dxe5 ♘d5 21.c3 ♖d7↑

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Position after: 21...♖d7↑

when Black would have been pleasantly in control of the position. The reason for this is that the black knight dominates the white bishop from d5. What is more, Black has a simple plan here: double rooks along the d-file, install one of them on d3 and afterwards try to infiltrate White's camp with the queen along the light squares.

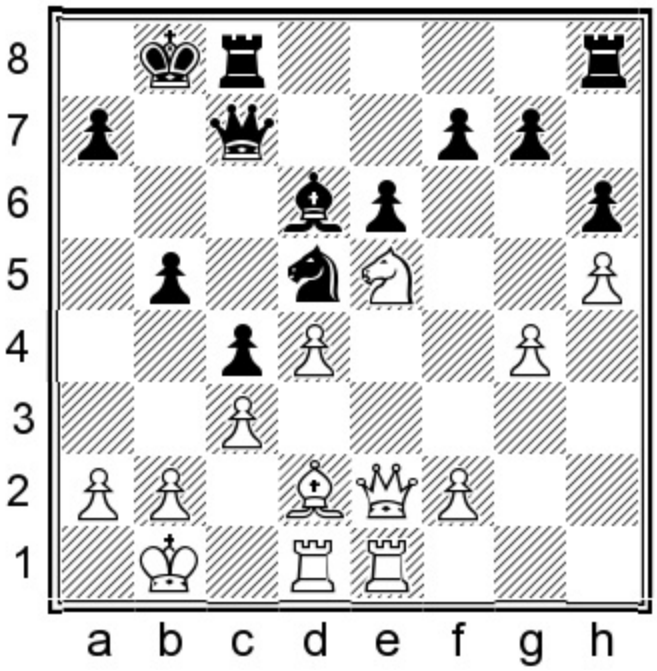
B) 19.♗g3?! would have actually been even worse due to 19...c3!→ and all of a sudden it is the white monarch that is feeling rather uncomfortable. What amazes me the most is how you can make three moves in a row with the very same pawn with each one being very different in nature from the other (dynamic –> strategic –> attacking), and still be able to claim an edge.

19...♘d5 20.♗d2

and now after

20...b5! 21.♖he1 ♔b8 22.♔b1 ♖c8↑

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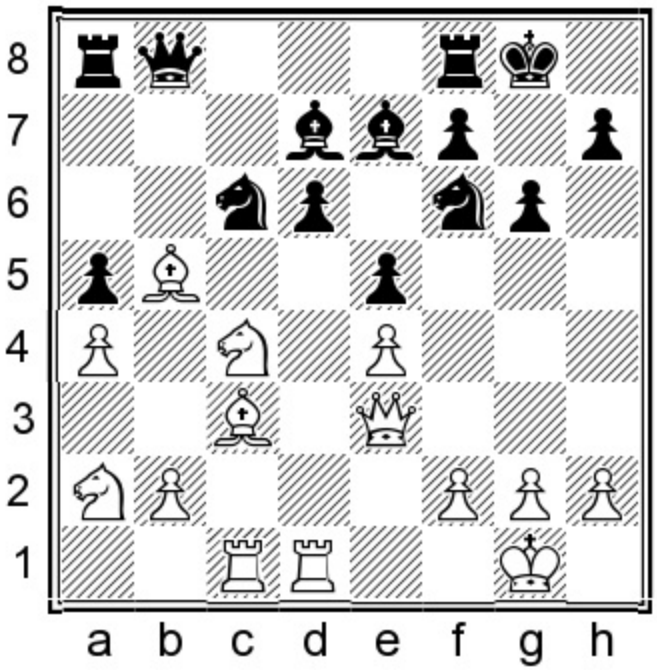


Position after: 22...♖c8↑

Black could brag about a small advantage in my opinion. The plan is to deploy all of the forces towards the queenside and then launch a pawn onslaught with ...a7-a5 and ...b5-b4. White is obviously not entirely deprived of counter chances as there is some potential for a pawn march on the opposite wing under the support of the e5-knight. At the same time, a closer look reveals that the e5 knight is no match for our monster on d5. White's knight can be eliminated easily, ours cannot. White's knight does very little itself, whereas the d5-knight represents a cornerstone of Black's whole position. Understanding ideas like this and being able to apply them in your own games constitutes an element of chess-culture.

29
Buksa – Gevorgyan
Astana 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *21...?*

Show/Hide Solution

29
Buksa, Nataliya (2416)
Gevorgyan, Maria (2264)
Astana 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Dynamic defense (relieving sacrifice)

Material is balanced but White seems to be enjoying herself a tad more in this position. There are two reasons for this. First, the backward d6-pawn is a constant source of worries for Black in this type of structure. Secondly, and most importantly, Black's queenside setup looks quite clumsy as the light-squared bishop is apparently stuck defending the c6-knight and ♘c4-b6 ideas are already in the air. If we add to this that in some lines Black may actually end up losing the a5-pawn, things start to look more and more grim for her already. White also happens to suffer from some minor issues (e.g. the passive knight on a2), but if Black gives her a little bit more time, White will certainly be able cope with that with ease. Because of that, Black must take immediate action or it is game over.

21...♗e6!

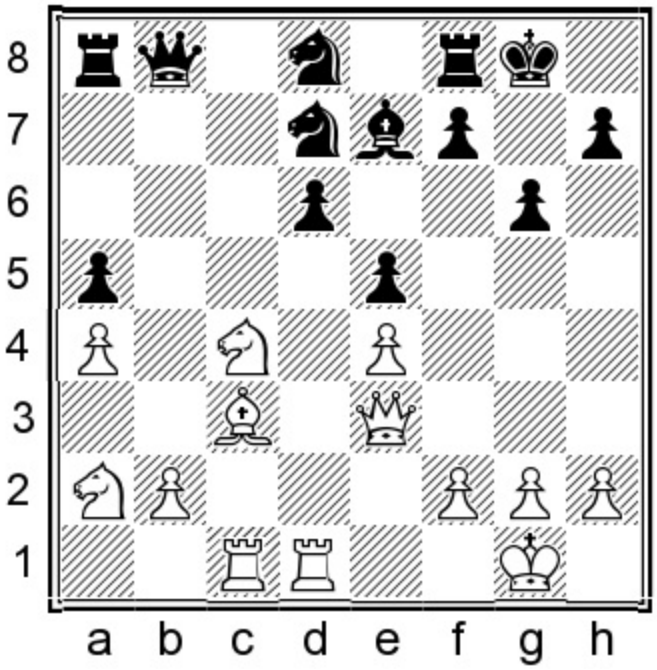
It was now or never! Black dynamically exchanges the c6-knight for its counterpart on c4, obviously understanding that the price to pay for the privilege to carry out such an advantageous exchange may

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be the need to surrender the exchange on a8 at the end of the day. The thing is that the subject of this deal exceeds purely material considerations, with White being the one who might end up being invoiced for ‘intangible assets’ later on.

A) In the game Black tried to solve her problems surgically with 21...♘b4? but ended up in a worse position and a pawn down instead after the forcing 22.♘xb4 ♗xb5 23.axb5 axb4 24.♗xb4 ♕xb5 25.♗xd6 ♗xd6 26.♖xd6 ♖fc8 27.b3± with the passed b-pawn supporting White’s active c4 knight making all the difference.

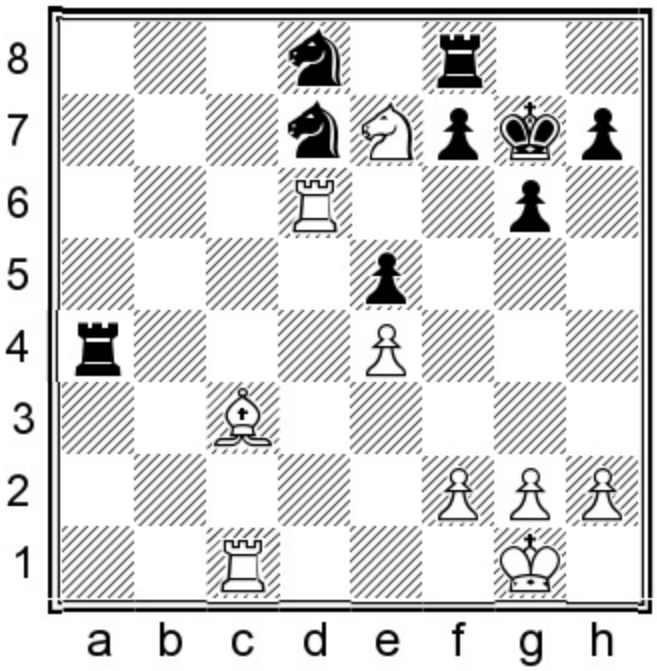
B) A slightly less drastic measure would have been 21...♘d8?! 22.♗xd7 ♘xd7



Position after: 22...♘xd7

but even here Black would have been very far from dealing with her issues in an efficient manner. White’s control over the d5-square has increased, thus strengthening the general grip over the position. With such a level of dominance, White could continue accordingly (that is, in a positional style), but equally as interesting would have been to activate the last marauder in White’s camp by means of 23.b4!? axb4 24.♘xb4. What White has just done is called a transformation of advantages. The pressure against a5 (static advantage) was swapped for activation of White’s idle knight (dynamic advantage). The price to pay for that is the a4-pawn, but after 24...♖xa4 25.♘d5 ♖xc4 26.♘xe7+ ♔g7 27.♕d3 ♖a4 28.♕xd6 ♕xd6 29.♖xd6

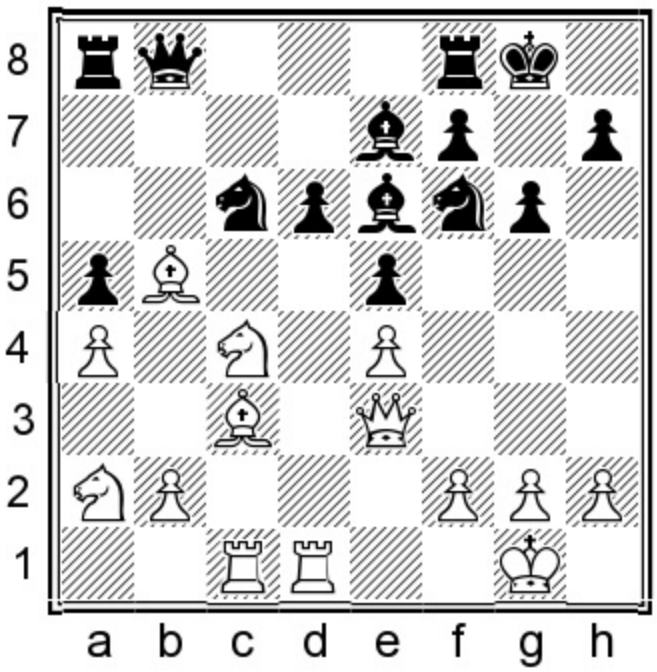
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Position after: 29.♖xd6

this deal would have proved to be rather profitable for White who from now on would be enjoying some nice momentum, e.g. 29...♘c5 30.f3 f6 31.♘d5 ♖a6 32.♖xa6 ♘xa6 33.♗a5± when Black would have had to be very careful in view of White's growing piece activity on the queenside. The black knights are not yet entirely secure, whereas any movement of the one on d8 can be met by an infiltration of the white rook via c6, simultaneously hitting the weak pawn on f6.

21...♗e6!



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Position after: 21...♗e6!

22.♗xc6

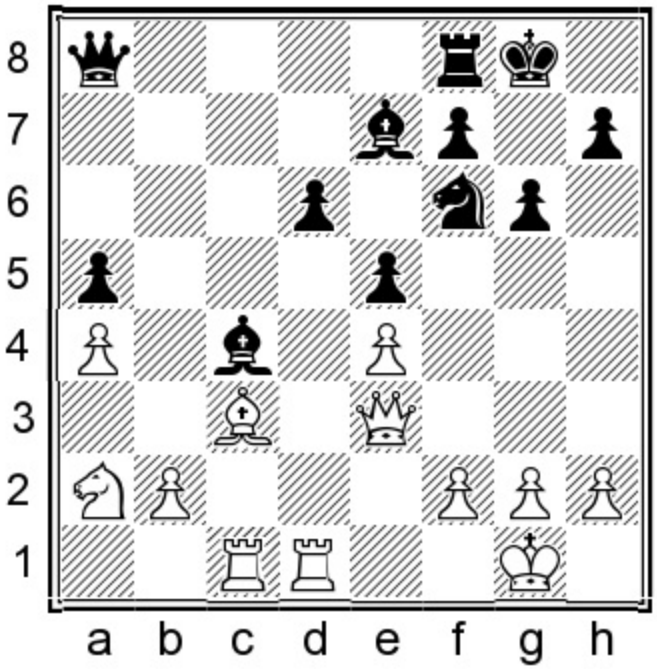
22.♕d3 is logical (defending the c4-knight in advance and putting pressure against the black d6-pawn) but fails to impress because of 22...♘a7!= – a motif well known from the Sicilian Rauzer with 6.f3 e5. With the b5 bishop under attack and the knight on c4 still pinned, there would be nothing better left for her to do but to repeat moves after 23.♗a6 ♘c6 24.♗b5 ♘a7=.

22...♗xc4 23.♗xa8

and now after

23...♕xa8!

the point behind Black's idea is revealed.



Position after: 23...♕xa8!

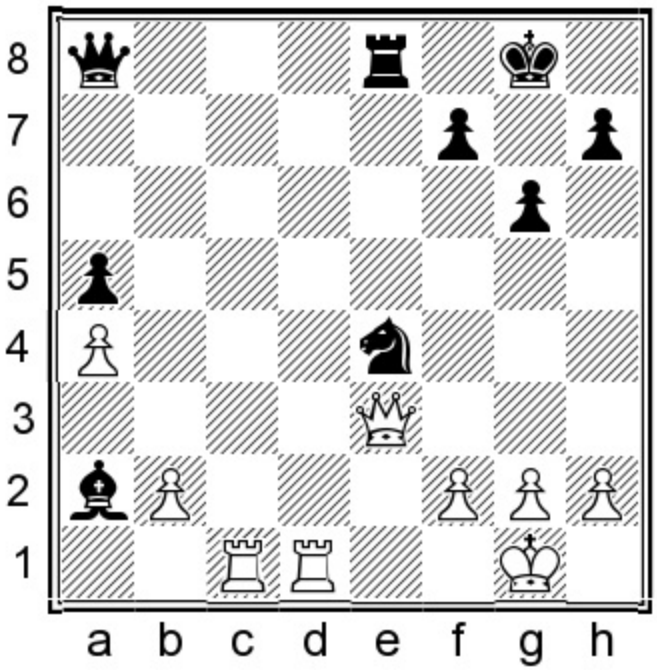
Black is a full exchange down but enjoys very nice control over the light squares. Further the white knight on a2 is ultra-awkward. White most probably needs to spoil his active rook on c1 in order to help it out. Finally, the e4-pawn will fall in a second, not only reducing White's material edge to a minimum, but potentially giving rise to ideas like ...d6-d5-d4 in the future.

Concrete variations prove that Black is fine here:

24.♖a1

24.♗xe5?! is inferior as after 24...♗xa2 25.♗xd6 ♗xd6 26.♖xd6 ♘xe4 27.♖dd1 ♖e8∓

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Position after: 27...♖e8∓

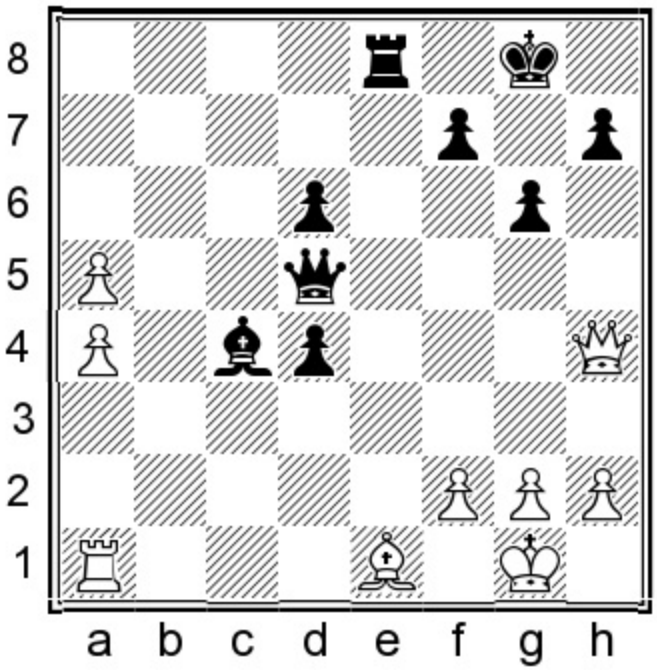
Black ends up being slightly better in this imbalanced multi piece endgame. Material may be equal, but Black has a rook on top of the two minor pieces which favors him very slightly. A lot depends on whether White will be able to create a passed a-pawn on the queenside and support it on its road to promotion. Even despite the white rooks enjoying nice open files my overall assumption is that Black is going to be very comfortable the moment she stabilizes her minor pieces on secure outposts.

24...♘xe4 25.♗e1 ♘c5 26.b4

(Forced, otherwise the black knight comes to b3 and dominates a few white pieces at a once.)

26...♘b3 27.♖ab1 ♘d4 28.♖xd4 exd4 29.♕xe7 ♖e8 30.♕h4 ♗xa2 31.♖a1 ♕d5 32.bxa5 ♗c4=

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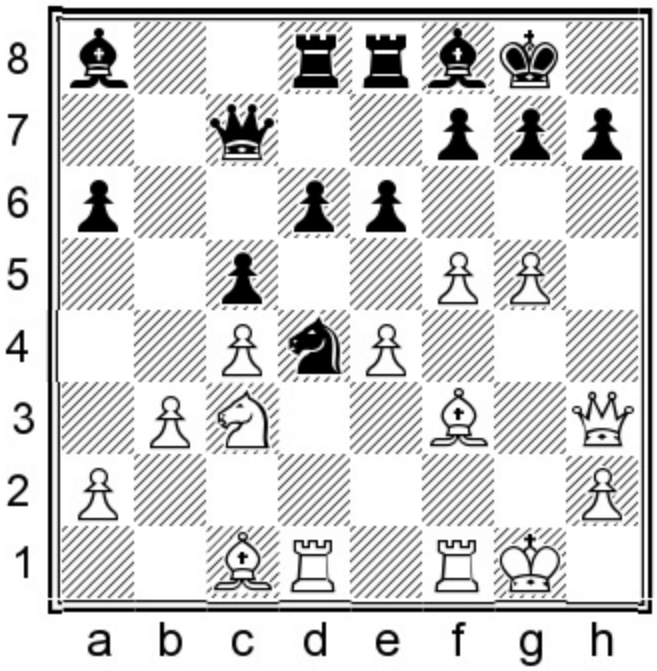


Position after: 32...♗c4=

The position is equal as neither of the parties is able to effectively push their passed pawns for the moment. The presence of opposite-colored bishops may be a contributing factor as well, but with some heavy pieces still present on the board you cannot be 100% sure whether this element is actually not going to begin enhancing one of the sides' attacking possibilities. But how are we to make sure that we are always able to recognize whether a sacrifice is going to be successful in the given position? There is certainly no ready recipe for that considering that every position is different and that on top of that we tend to distinguish between sacrifices of various sizes (e.g. pawns or an exchange). The simple formula that I follow is to look at the number of intangible advantages that I happen to obtain as a result of my sacrifice. If receive one positional element in exchange (e.g. momentum), I consider this as 'compensation', the size of which might not necessarily be satisfying. If, however I get two such elements (e.g. momentum and control on top of that), this usually makes me believe that I am already enjoying 'full compensation', with every single additional element determining that my position is advantageous. This might not sound like a bullet proof method at first as the size of intangible advantages may vary depending on the specific position. Still, if you are demanding in this regard, that is you make sure that those positional elements do in fact matter in the given situation, you will rarely be disappointed with such an approach.

30
Hovhannisyan – Petrosyan
Yerevan 2019

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□ *24.?*

Show/Hide Solution

30
Hovhannisyan, Robert (2637)
Petrosyan, Manuel (2579)
Yerevan 2019

Weakness
Long-term pressure against the opponent's weakness

What we have in front of us is a typical position arising out of a Scheveningen Najdorf with 6.♗e2. White is charging onwards with his kingside pawns and is obviously looking to inflict some damage to the position of the black king. Black is slightly pushed back, but this is a fairly frequent sight in such lines with only the d4-knight displaying any thirst for activity. Black resembles something between a crouching tiger and a hidden dragon. This might not be to everyone's taste (to have to stand still and wait for your chance to strike), but we need to give Black one thing: his position sure is free from weaknesses for the moment. Now the question arises, "should White carry on with his onslaught, or should he rather gather his forces a little more first before going for it"?

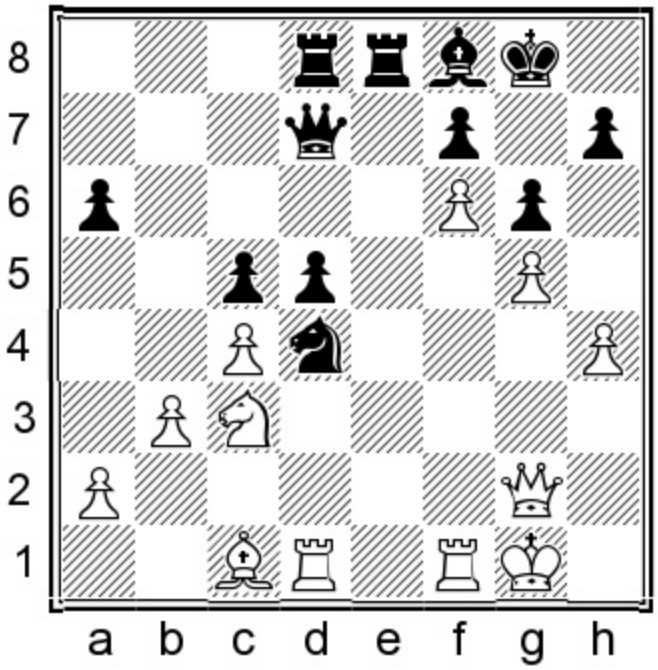
24.g6!

It was high time for White to attack. He might be sacrificing a pawn this way, but what he gets in exchange are the open f and h-files for his heavy pieces, as well as possibly hitting the slightly

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undermined e6-pawn. In doing so, White should not worry about allowing his f3-bishop to be exchanged as afterwards Black is actually never in time to launch quick counterplay along the light squares.

A) In the game White opted for 24.♗g2?! which is by all standards a typical theme in this system. White keeps the light-squared bishop not only to still be able to contest the center but also to cover for his king in case of trouble. At the same time, the position arising after something like 24...exf5 25.exf5 ♗xg2 26.♕xg2 ♕d7 27.f6 g6± would have been only slightly better for White. True, he is in total control of the d5-square and the black bishop is not particularly strong for the moment. However, he would not have enjoyed absolute freedom of action as his king is already slightly exposed. For example, if White happens to be a little bit too cocky and goes for 28.h4?! intending to open up the h-file for his rooks, Black would have had the elegant 28...d5! at his disposal.

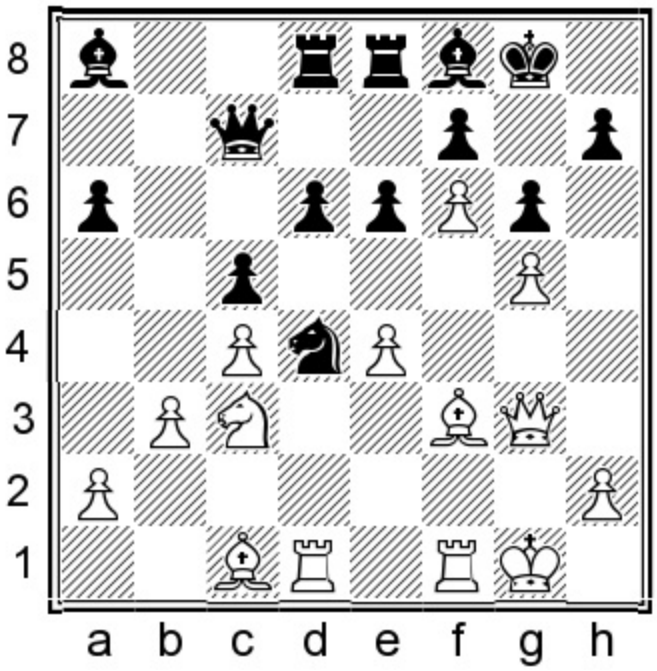


Position after: 28...d5!

The idea behind this counter is to open up that 'bad' bishop on f8 and transfer it to d6, from which square it is actively pointing at the white monarch. Black would then swiftly transfer the entirety of his forces in that direction, aiming to take advantage of the weaknesses of White's kingside. For example: 29.cxd5 ♘f5 30.♕g4 ♗d6∓ with the white pawns d5 and h4 as well as the squares d4, e3 and g3 being so vulnerable that White would not even fee like he is material up.

B) On the contrary, 24.f6!? looks like an improved version of the game as the e8-rook stays locked in for the moment and White can continue his kingside attack after 24...g6 25.♕g3 with h2-h4-h5 and a possible transfer of rooks to the h-file to follow.

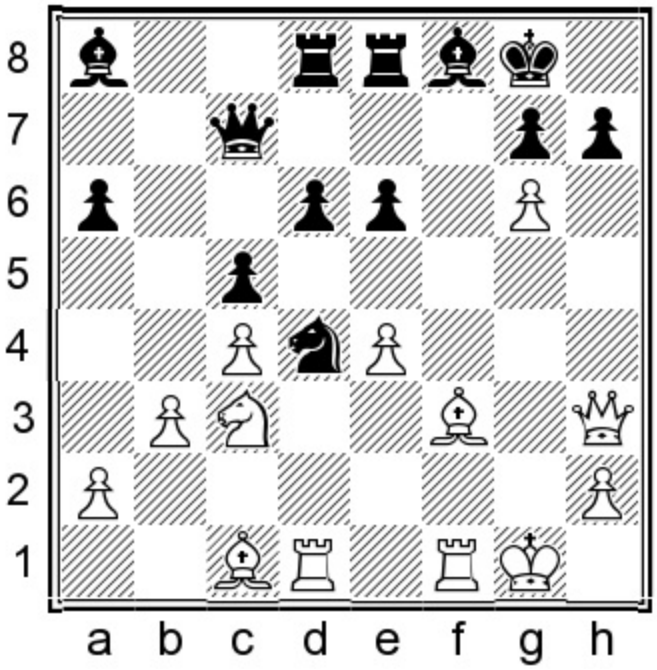
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Position after: 25.♕g3

Still, Black is far from helpless as he could then use the time to organize his forces yet again for a thematic ...d6-d5 break, e.g. 25...♕a7!?± when after 26.h4?! d5! 27.exd5 exd5 28.cxd5 c4!∓ an advantage of a pawn would definitely not be enough to compensate for the number of drafts and tactical motifs to which White is subjected in this position.

24.g6! fxg6 25.fxg6



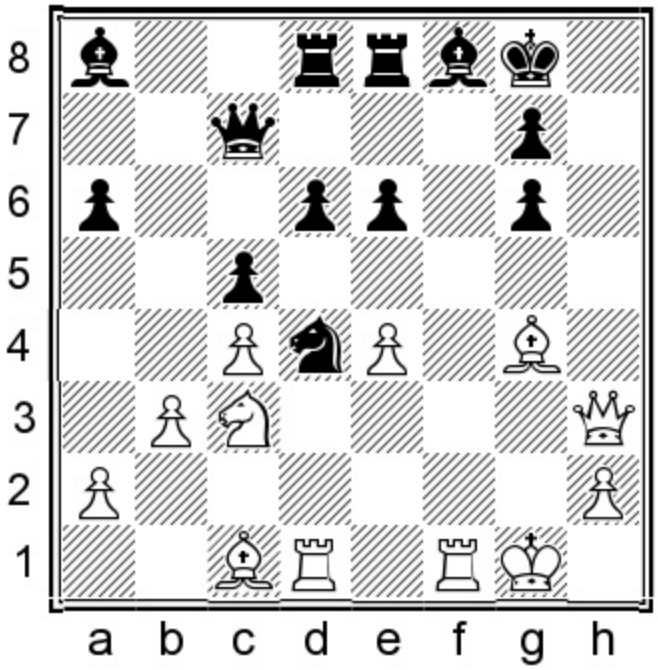
Position after: 25.fxg6

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25...hxg6

25...h6 looks like a more stubborn try at first as the h-file stays closed for the moment. Still, the energetic 26.♗g4 (an invasion via f7 is coming) 26...♖e7 27.♗g5!+– spells an end to Black's dreams of holding on. Taking on g5 results in instant mate on h7, whereas dropping the exchange would have been just the beginning of Black's (brief) suffering afterwards.

26.♗g4



Position after: 26.♗g4

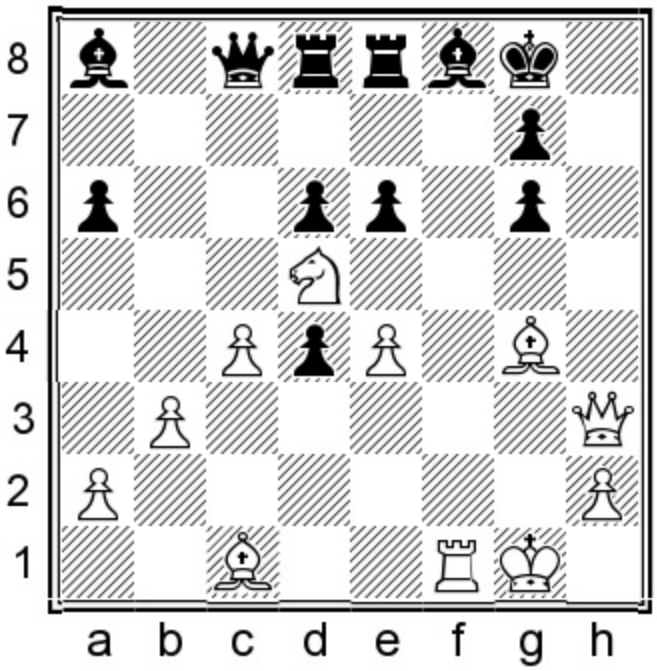
A difficult moment from the psychological perspective for many attacking players. How sure of your chances of success would you have been in this position if the only apparent threat (hitting the d4-knight followed by the capture on e6) can be easily parried by the opponent? A closer inspection of the position reveals that Black's pieces are terribly cramped and therefore lacking potential to prevent even the most direct of White's threats. In other words, Black may have a few explicit weaknesses on the kingside, created as a result of White's attacking pursuit, but it would be much fairer to say that Black's position now actually represents one big weakness from which he is unable to recover. Because of this, the time White has to build up an attack is, technically speaking, unlimited.

26...♕e7

Probably Black's best try to prolong the battle. From this square Black keeps an eye not only on g5, but also defends the crucial e6-pawn in advance.

Comparably, 26...♕c8 falls short beautifully to 27.♖xd4! cxd4 28.♘d5+–

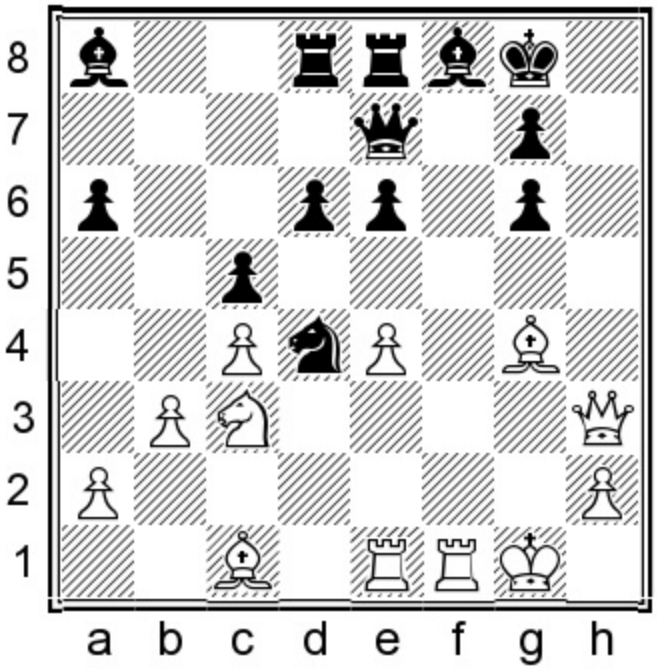
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Position after: 28.♘d5+−

with quite an extraordinary situation appearing on the board. Black is close to zugzwang here despite so many pieces still remaining on the board. Taking on d5 only speeds up his demise, whereas standing still is not a viable option as White could still choose between many ways of finishing the opponent off.

27.♖de1!

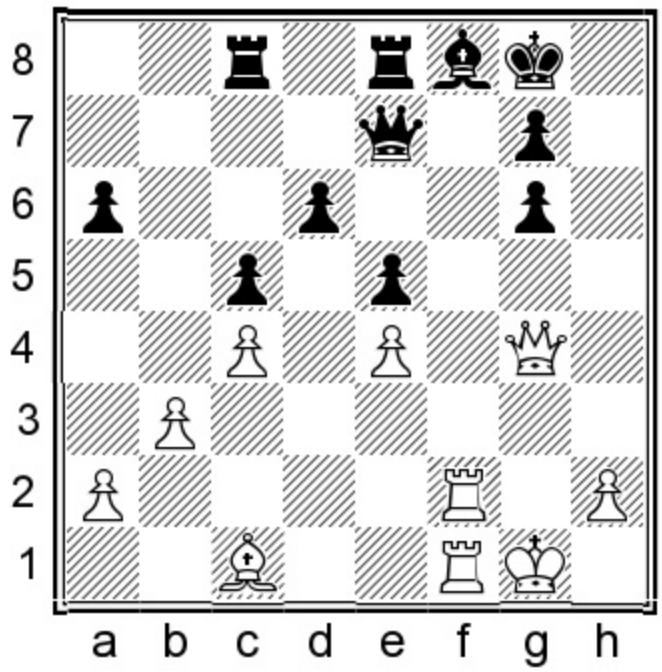


Position after: 27.♖de1!

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The simplest way of finishing the job in my opinion. White wants to put the black king too sleep by involving both rooks into the attack along the f- or h-file. In the meantime, it makes sense to try to eliminate the black d4-knight, not only to prevent any random counterplay from Black's most active piece, but also to weaken the e6-pawn decisively. With most of Black's pieces reduced to passive bystanders, the game should not last long.

27...♗b7 28.♘e2 ♘xe2+ 29.♖xe2 ♗c8 30.♖ef2 e5 31.♗xc8 ♖xc8 32.♕g4+–



Position after: 32.♕g4+–

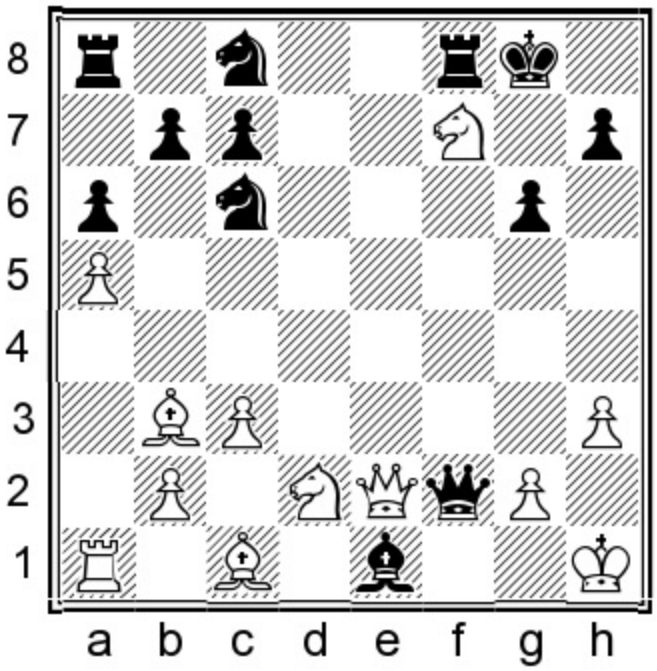
The game ends in mate or heavy material losses as Black is unable to defend the g6-pawn or to prevent White's invasion with the heavy pieces along the h-file.

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Chapter Two
Enter at your own risk: Puzzles may bite

1
Van Foreest – Navara
Skopje 2018



□ *19.?*

Show/Hide Solution

1
Van Foreest, Lucas (2500)
Navara, David (2736)
Skopje 2018

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Dynamic decision-making (exchange)

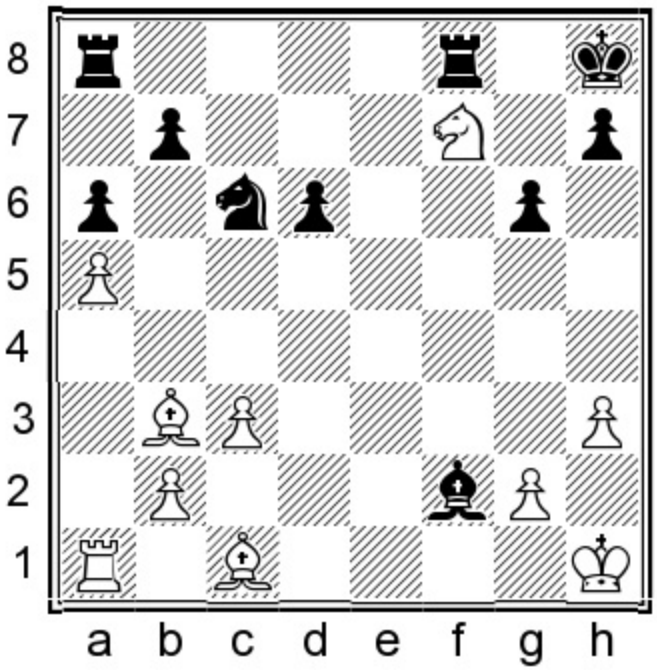
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At first sight it is hard to believe that this crazy position arose out of a Giuoco Piano which is a rather timid, maneuvering opening. White has just embarked on a risky venture sending a knight deep into the heart of the opponent's position. Black has responded with an offer to exchange queens, a perfectly viable solution from the perspective of limiting White's chances of playing for an attack afterwards. The decision White should take is far from obvious as there are, at this point in time, five different discovered checks at his disposal. All of them look dangerous, but simultaneously none of them looks lethal enough. White would also love to include the remaining pieces into play, but he does not seem to have the time to do this. Notably, the proximity of the black queen to his own monarch constitutes an element White cannot easily ignore before furthering his attack. Thus I ask you dear reader, what should White do?

19.♕d3!!

An excellent decision which, sadly, White did not select. White should have understood that his only hope of winning the game lies in a swift attack against the black king. Under those circumstances, allowing the queens to leave the board would naturally reduce his attacking potential and should therefore have been rejected as counter-productive. The loss of the f7-knight might seem concerning at first, but White's development afterwards with ♘d2-e4 and ♗c1-g5(h6) to come almost plays itself. Besides, after capturing, the f7-rook is still pinned so we cannot even say that White is down on material under such circumstances. What is even funnier, it is actually the black king that is more vulnerable than the white counterpart as there is not a single check Black can give to the white monarch.

Sample lines are quite persuasive in this regard: 19.♘g5+ would have led at most to a draw after 19...♔h8 20.♕xf2 ♗xf2 21.♘de4 ♘d6 22.♘xd6 cxd6 23.♘f7+



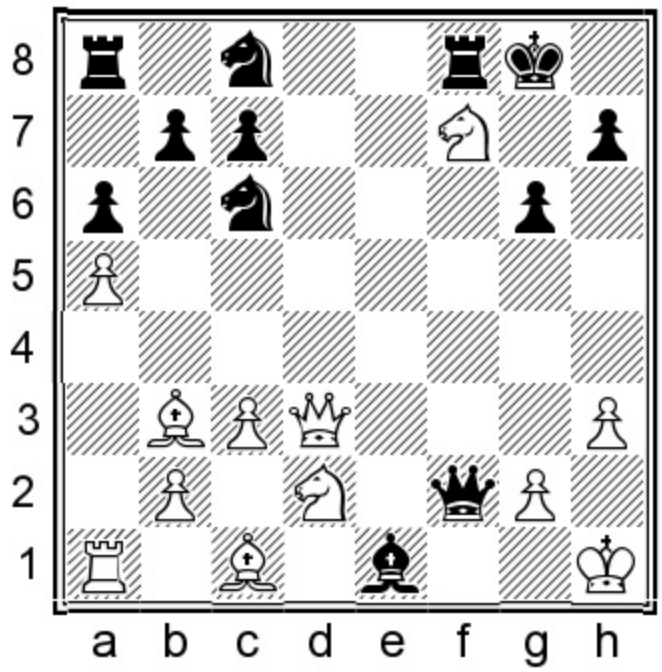
Position after: 23.♘f7+

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and now the logical but still pretty 23...♔g8!= saves the day for the black king which does well in avoiding the g7-square due to the ♗c1-h6+ threat. What is left for White to do is to force a perpetual as attempts to continue playing on for a win simply backfire due to reduced material. For example: 24.♘xd6+? ♔g7 25.♘xb7 ♖ae8 26.♗d2 ♗g3!–+ and Black not only dexterously consolidates but is also on the verge of creating mating threats as well.

I intentionally omit mentioning other knight moves besides 19.♘g5+ as other knight jumps are either comparable or worse. When faced with such a situation in your own games (multiple discovered checks with the same piece), do not calculate them all thoroughly since with so many variables it would be easy to lose your way trying to establish the consequences of all possible permutations. Instead, try to elect the move that looks the most threatening from the perspective of the direct follow up (the next move) after the discovered check is executed. This narrows down the number of candidate moves and will certainly ease your calculations saving you plenty of time on the clock.

19.♕d3!!

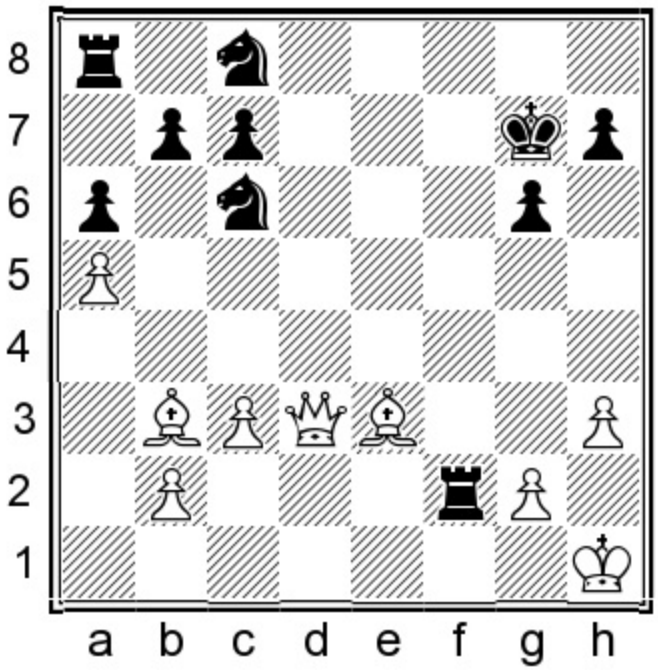


Position after: 19.♕d3!!

19...♖xf7

The alternative, 19...♗xd2, is fairly logical since when defending we seek to exchange as many pieces of the attacker as possible. However, in this case such an exchange would only speed up Black's demise as after 20.♗xd2 ♖xf7 21.♖f1 ♔g7 22.♖xf2 ♖xf2 23.♗e3+–

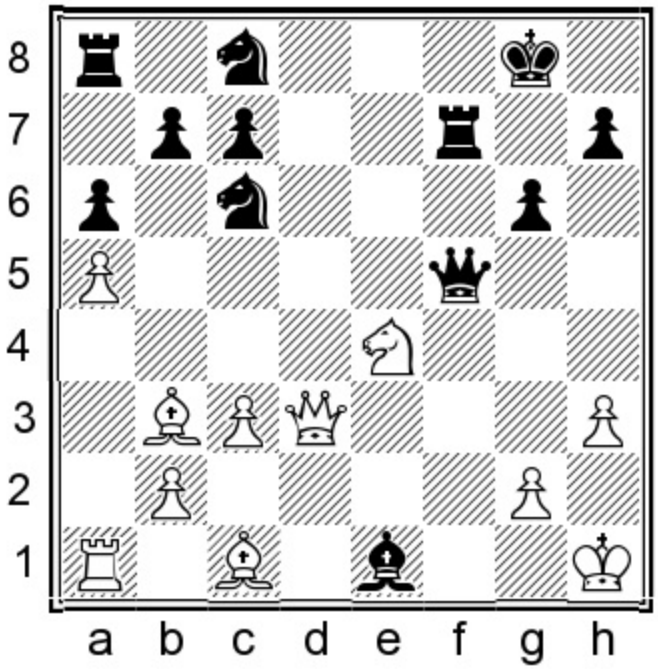
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Position after: 23.♗e3+−

he would not only have to part with the queen but is about to be slaughtered in just about a second by the white bishop pair.

20.♘e4 ♕f5

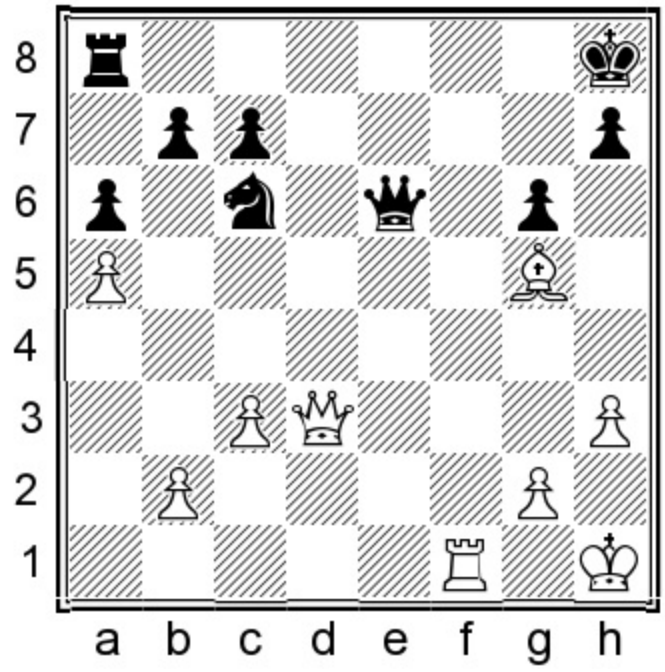


Position after: 20...♕f5

21.g4!

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The most accurate move as it aims to expel the black queen from the f-file in order to pressurize Black along it very soon. At the same time, the compelling 21.♗h6!? was not bad either but after 21...♘d6 22.♖xe1 ♔h8 23.♗xf7 ♘xf7 24.♖f1 ♕e6 25.♘g5 ♘xg5 26.♗xg5±



Position after: 26.♗xg5±

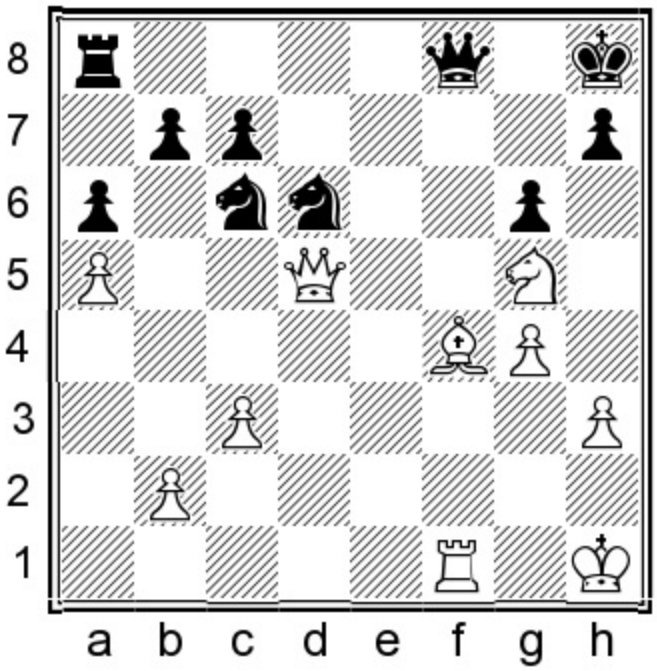
White's advantage would have shrunk a little bit because of the black king still being able to find temporary safety along the light squares, most notably on g8. White's edge is beyond any doubt but converting this advantage into a win would require combining play for mate along the back rank (♗g5-h6 & ♕d3-f3-f8+) with a possible attack against Black's slightly abandoned queenside pawns.

21...♕e5 22.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 23.♕f3+ ♔g8

Now White's initiative becomes unstoppable after

24.♗f4 ♕e7 25.♖xe1 ♕f8 26.♘g5 ♘d6 27.♕d5+ ♔h8 28.♖f1!+–

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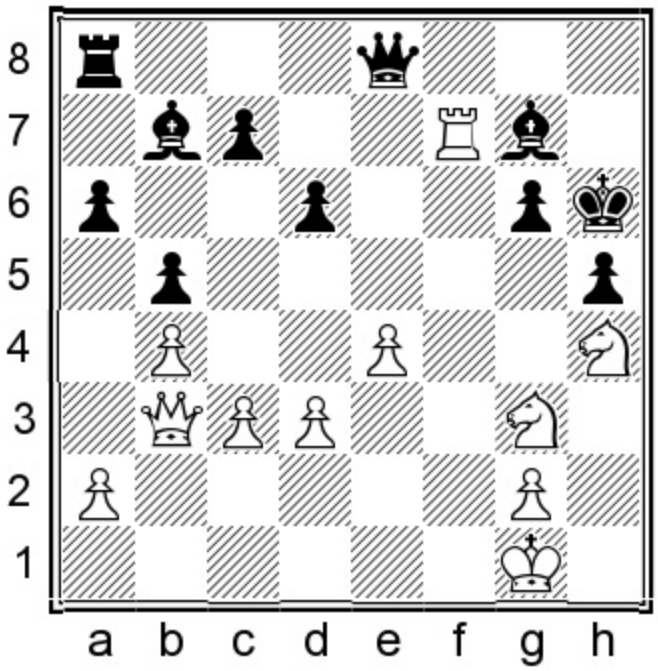


Position after: 28.♖f1!+−

There are threats like ♗f4-e5+ or taking on d6 followed up by ♘g5-f7+ to come. It is just one more white piece that is taking part in the attack compared to the previous variation, but the fruits that he could reap this way would have been definitely more sizeable.

2
Akash – Popov
Chennai 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *35...?*

Show/Hide Solution

2
Akash, G. (2453)
Popov, Ivan (2588)
Chennai 2019

Attack & Defense
Preventing the opponent's threats in the attack

In this position material may be equal but Black is by no means facing a trivial defensive task. Most of White's pieces have already gathered around the black monarch, with the white rook eyeing both the g7-bishop and the c7-pawn. It is not the pawns that Black should worry about first and foremost, but rather White forking the king and bishop from f5 with deadly mating threats looming over Black. Is Black in fact so helpless here?

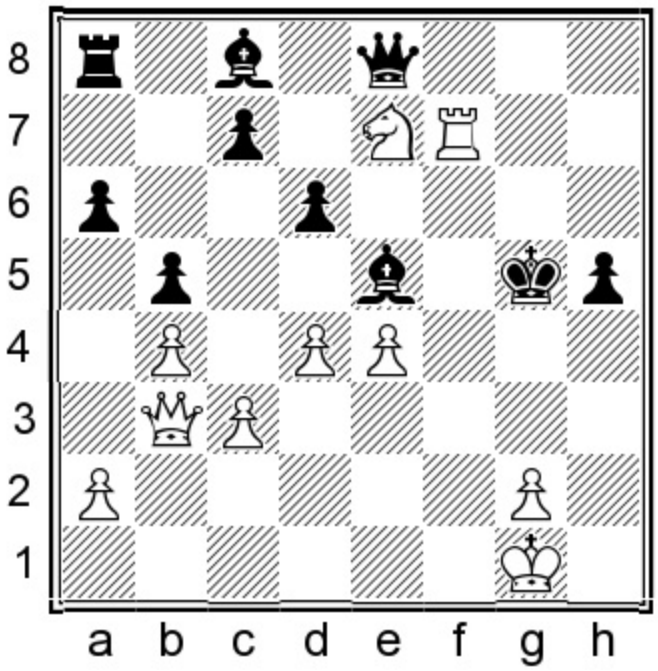
35...♗c8!

The correct decision! When confronted with multiple threats and not being able to defend simultaneously against all of them, we should choose the one that could potentially inflict the most damage and have it prevented at the cost of conceding the other element. Here, however, parting with a mere pawn works from Black's perspective like bail as he buys the time needed to consolidate his own position, prevent the most dangerous threats of the opponent, and maybe afterwards launch play

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of his own.

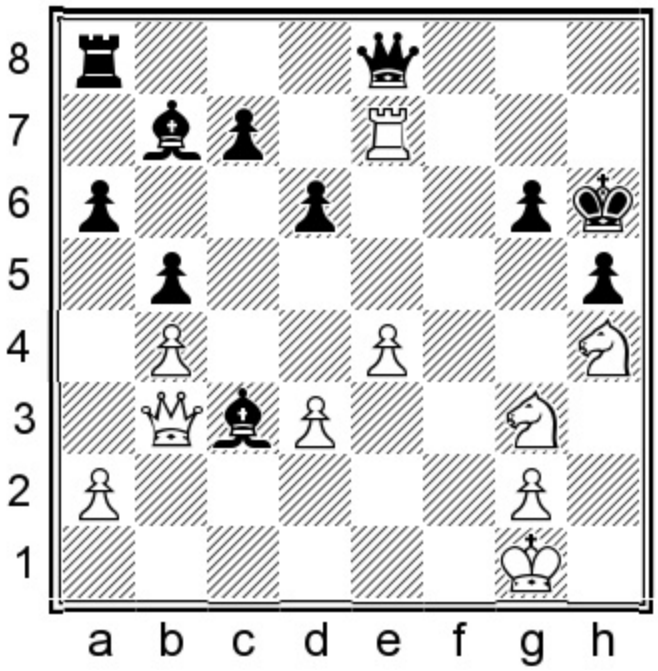
A) The apparently active 35...♗e5? loses on the spot because of 36.♘gf5+! gxf5 37.♘xf5+ ♔g5 38.♘e7! with the white queen coming in via e6 to g6, thus finishing the creation of a mating net. Black can prolong the battle a little bit by means of 38...♗c8 but after the quiet killer 39.d4!!+–



Position after: 39.d4!!+–

Black can avoid the ♕b3-d5+ double attack only by surrendering the e5-bishop.

B) 35...♗xc3? looks clever at first (the bishop is taboo because of the f7 rook falling as a result), but White happens to have something even more devious in store here: 36.♖e7!

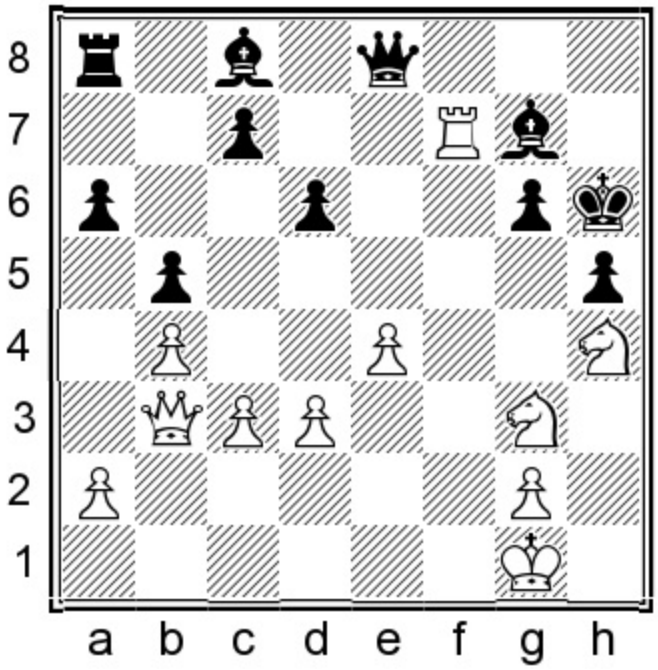


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Position after: 36.♖e7!

The rook is defended dynamically by means of a knight fork so the black c3-bishop needs to make a move. 36...♗d4+ 37.♔h1 ♕f8 38.♖f7 ♕e8 The bishop has been saved for a split second, but now after 39.♘hf5+ gxf5 40.♘xf5+ ♔g6 41.♘e7++– Black will end up getting mated sooner or later.

35...♗c8!



Position after: 35...♗c8!

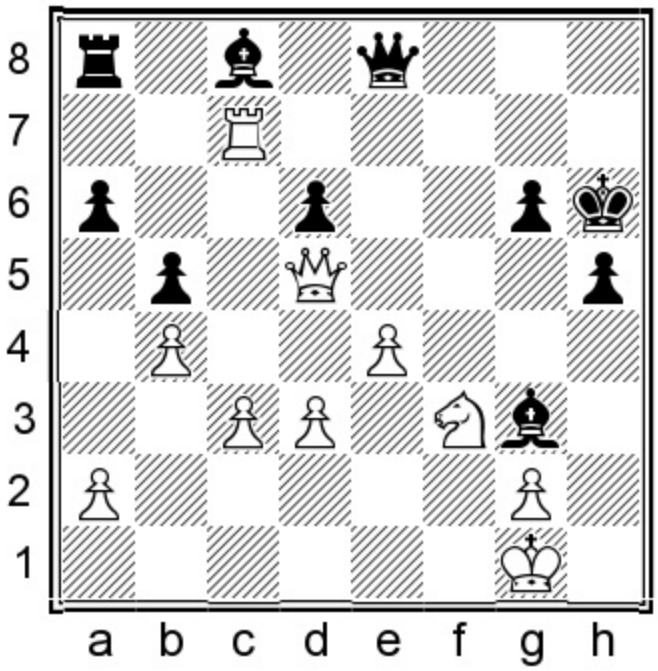
36.♖xc7

36.♖f2? as played in the game is simply too passive: 36...♕e6 37.♕d1 ♕g4!–+ allows an exchange of queens marking an end to White's hopes of attacking the opponent's king. With dynamic options being virtually absent from the board, Black's static advantages, the bishop pair as well as the slightly more mobile pawn structure, would have most probably allowed him to eventually claim a win at the end of the ensuing strategic struggle.

36...♗e6

36...♗e5 deserves attention as an immediate counter attacking measure, but it could have been met by the highly creative 37.♘f3! ♗xg3 38.♕d5!

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Position after: 38.♕d5!

when in order to avoid mate on g5, Black needs to avoid a threefold repetition with 38...♕d8 39.♕f7 ♕h8 40.♕d5=.

37.♕d1 ♕d8!

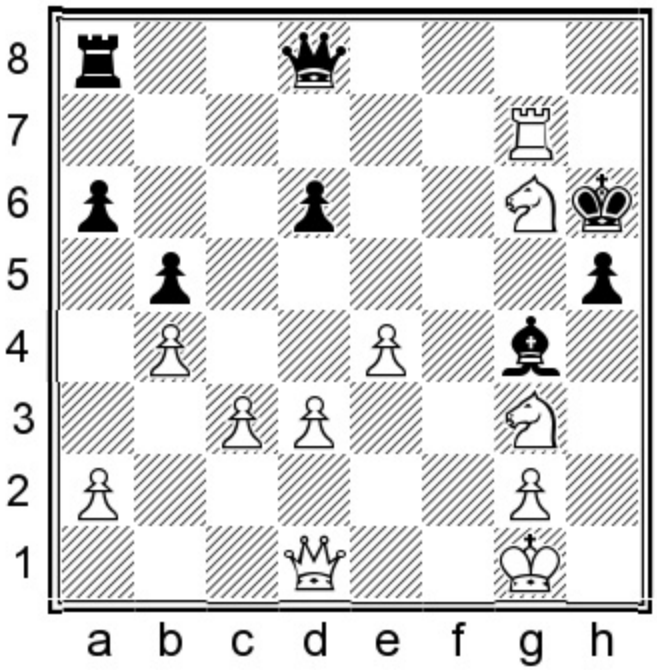
A double attack against White's c7-rook and h4-knight marks the starting point of a forced tactical sequence.

38.♘xg6! ♗g4!

An absolute must as none of White's pieces could have been captured due to the mating threat on h5.

39.♖xg7!

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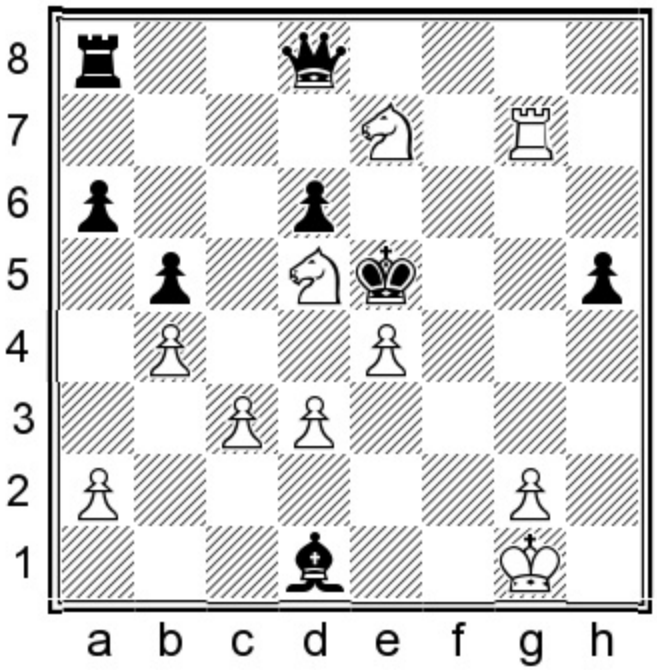


Position after: 39.♖xg7!

The point of White's whole operation. The queen on d1 cannot be taken due to an elaborate mating net and taking on g7 allows the position to peter out to a more or less equal endgame.

39...♔xg7

The greedy 39...♗xd1?? would have led to a study like win for White after 40.♘f5+ ♔g5 41.♘ge7+ ♔f6 42.♘d5+ ♔e5 43.♘fe7!

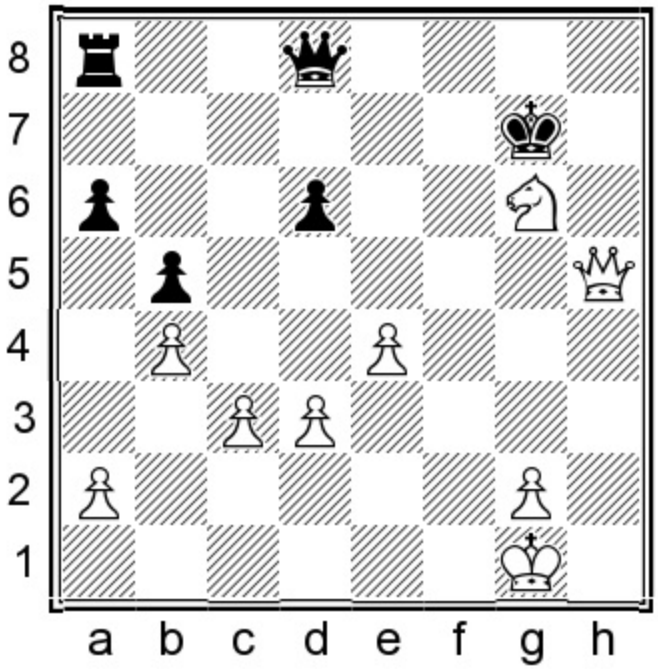


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Position after: 43.♘fe7!

with the idea of transferring the knight to d4 via c6 when not only mate with the rook coming to e7 is threatened, but also the black queen effectively having no squares e. g. 43...♔e6 44.♘c6 ♕h4 45.♘d4+ ♔e5 46.g3+–.

40.♘xh5+ ♗xh5 41.♕xh5

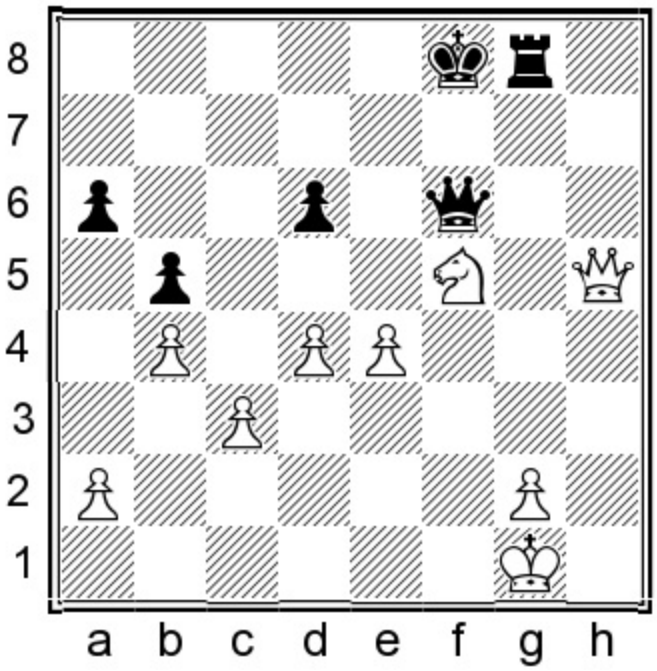


Position after: 41.♕xh5

41...♕e8

I can imagine many strong players opting for 41...♕f6? as it looks better compared to the text. Apart from threatening to capture the white knight it additionally attacks the white c3-pawn. At the same time after 42.♘h4 Black does not really have the time to capture the pawn so now 42...♖g8 43.♘f5+ ♔f8 44.d4±

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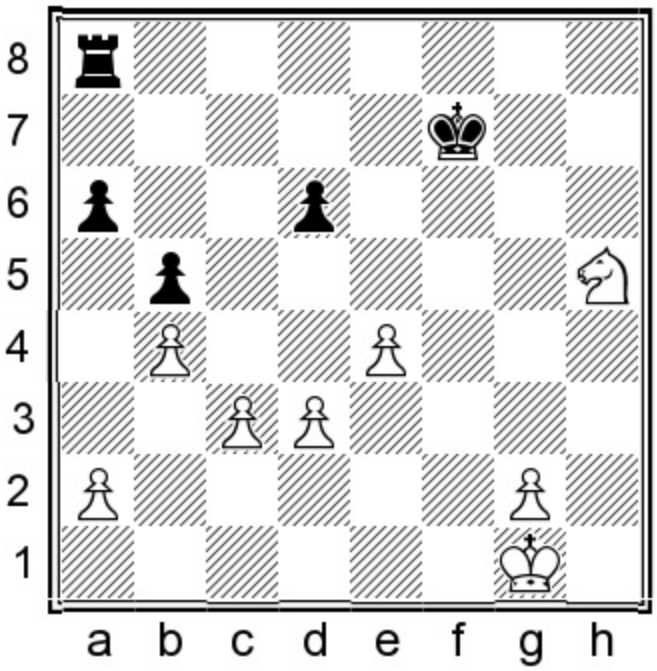


Position after: 44.d4±

leads to a position in which the ♕&♘ duo proves to be at least as useful as the queen & rook one. On top of that, White happens to be in possession of some additional pawns and even a slightly safer king. Under these circumstances, White simply has to be better. Comparison represents a valuable method of speeding up the process of electing the best move, especially if we have at least two equally good-looking moves at our disposal in the given position. At the same time, it cannot entirely replace concrete calculation of variations. Paraphrasing our favorite U.S. President, some moves look great, but do not work. Also, please make sure that you do not compare the moves themselves (their appearance), but rather the consequences thereof. And if you already want to judge the candidate moves by their properties in the starting position, please make sure that you pay more attention to their quality (gravity of the problems fixed thereby), rather than the number of (often lesser important) purposes that these serve.

42.♘f4 ♕xh5 43.♘xh5+ ♔f7=

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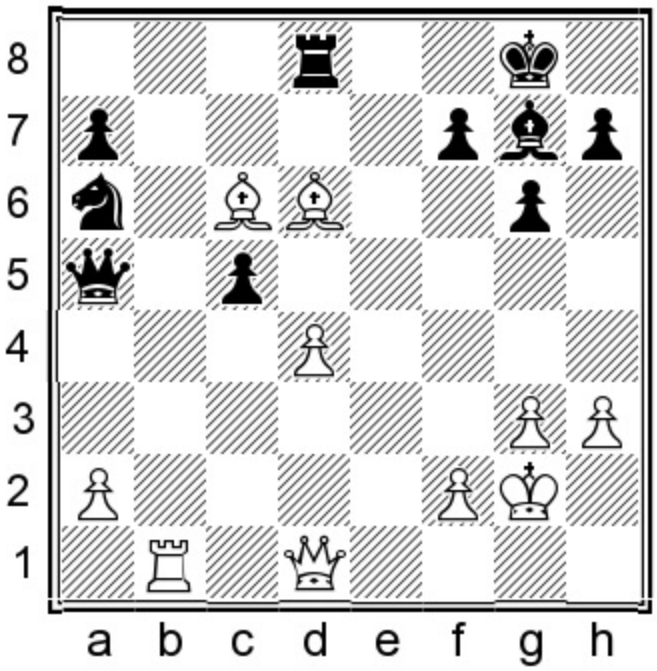


Position after: 43...♔f7=

With the queens off the board, the black king is already very safe and even White's slight material advantage of knight & three pawns versus a rook is not scary as we happen to have pawns on both wings. This favors the rook over the knight quite significantly. Because of this, we cannot really state that Black is any worse here.

3
Dziuba – Perske
Hofheim 2018

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□ *24.?*

Show/Hide Solution

3
Dziuba, Marcin (2574)
Perske, Thore (2448)
Hofheim 2018

Coordination
Coordination prevailing over time in a dynamic endgame

White has been pressing against Black for a long period of time and achieved this position as a result. As a result of his efforts he did manage to obtain the bishop pair; the coordination of the black pieces does not make the best impression either. For the moment it is actually White who has to worry about both his d6-bishop and the d4-pawn. What would you do?

24.♗e7!

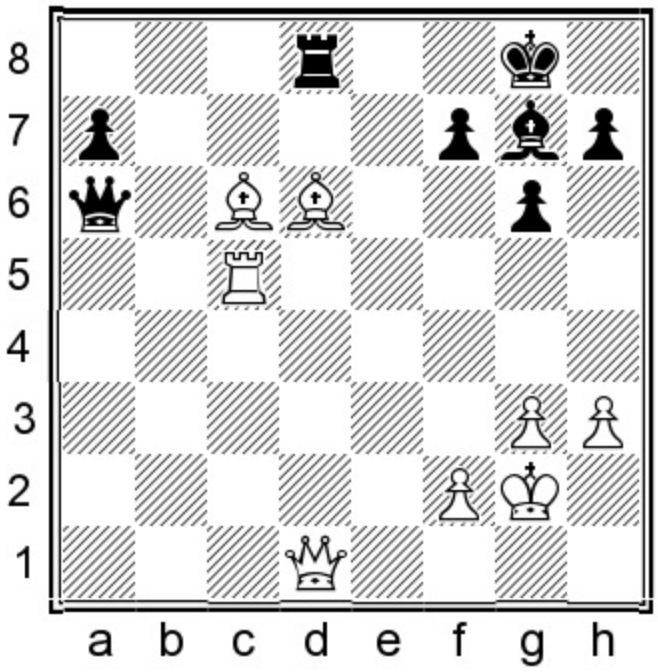
At first, it is not entirely clear why White would be sacrificing such an important pawn without any negative consequences for Black being visible.

A) Marcin, who is my teammate with Wieza Pegow for the Polish Ekstraliga, simplified into a drawish endgame with 24.dxc5? ♘xc5 25.♖b8 ♗f8 26.♕d5 ♗xd6 27.♕xd6 ♘e6= when there is not much to play for anymore. The heavy pieces are about to get exchanged but the white king will never

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make it in time towards the black pawn on a7.

B) At the same time 24.♖b5 would have been a decent attempt for an advantage. Still, after something like 24...♕xa2 25.dxc5 ♘xc5! 26.♖xc5 ♕a6!!

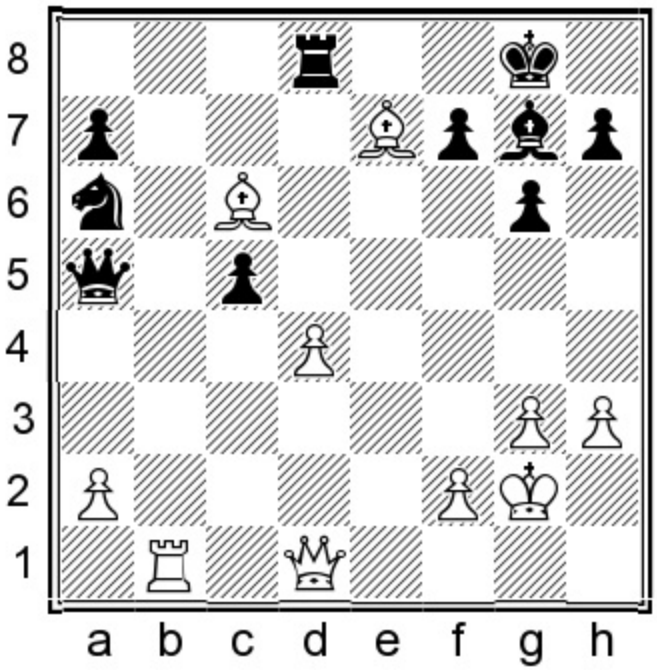


Position after: 26...♕a6!!

Black astonishingly holds because of White's inability to untangle from the pin along the d-file. The best he could obtain is 27.♕d5 ♗f8 28.♗e8! ♕xd6 29.♕xf7+ ♔h8 30.♖c7 ♕d5+ 31.♕xd5 ♖xd5 32.♖xa7 ♖d2 with a draw due to the inevitable appearance of opposite-colored bishops.

24.♗e7!

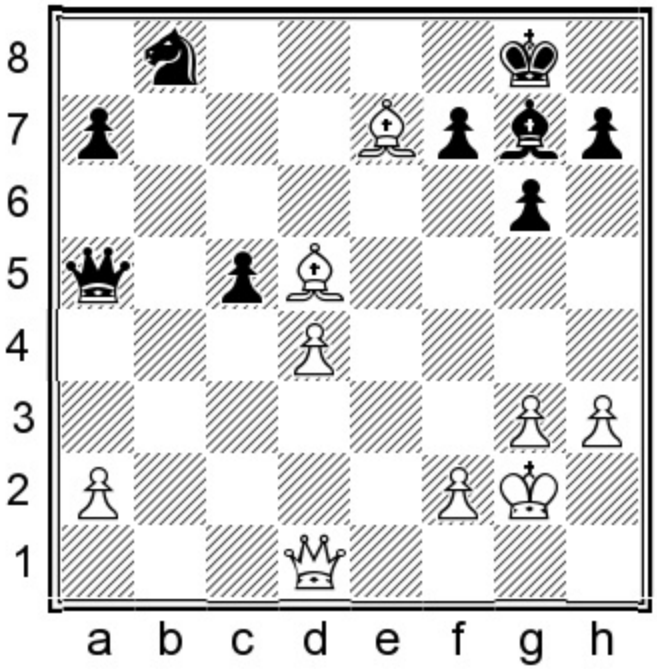
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Position after: 24.♗e7!

24...♖xd4

24...♖b8 was another option with the intention of reducing White's attacking potential at once. The problem is that after 25.♖xb8+ ♘xb8 26.♗d5!

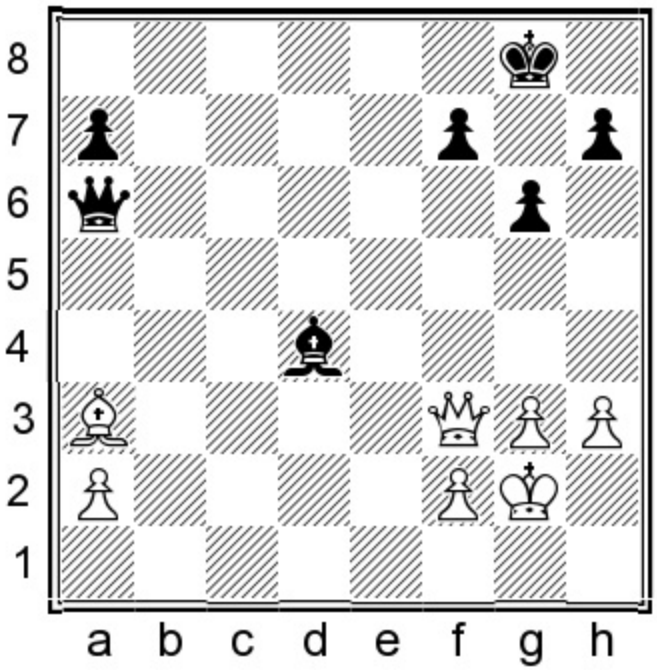


Position after: 26.♗d5!

the black monarch would still be suffering from a lack of security. The following variation

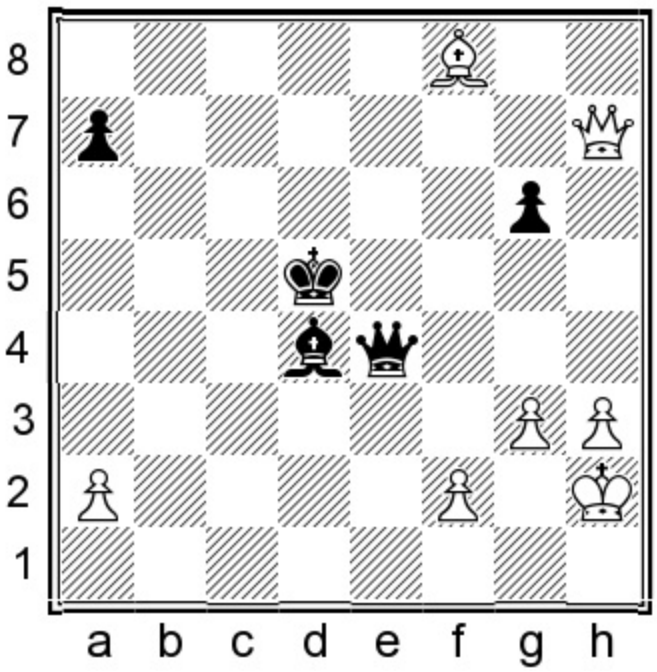
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demonstrates what kind of unpleasantries would be awaiting Black as the game progresses: 26...♕c7 27.♗xc5 ♘a6 28.♗a3 ♕d7 29.♗c4 ♗xd4 30.♗xa6 ♕c6+ 31.♕f3 ♕xa6.



Position after: 31...♕xa6

Black is miraculously holding for the moment thanks to the utilization of some tactical tricks, but with the black king about to be driven off towards the center, his days would already be numbered, e.g. 32.♕a8+ ♔g7 33.♗f8+ ♔f6 34.♕d8+ ♔e5 35.♕c7+ ♔d5 36.♕xf7+ ♕e6 37.♕xh7 ♕e4+ 38.♔h2+–



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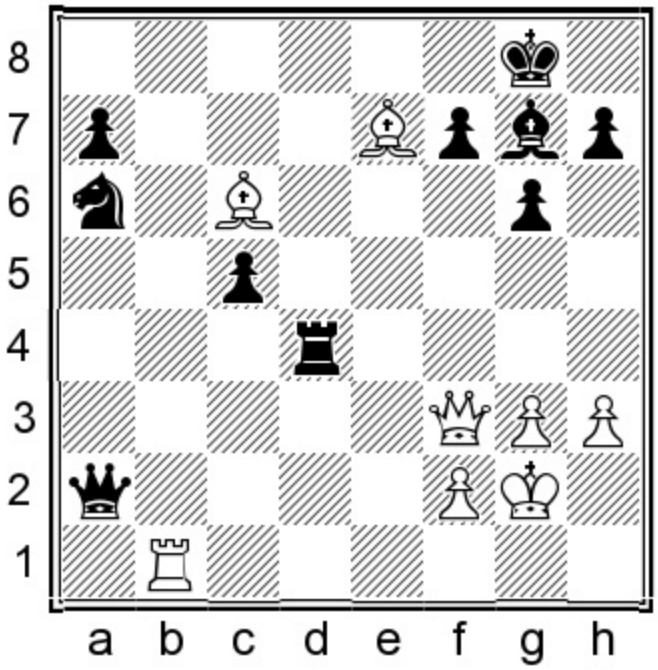
Position after: 38.♔h2+–

and with two pawns up Black's temporary activity could not help here.

25.♕f3

Only now is Black starting to experience discomfort as the threat of ♗c6-d5 would have left Black pretty much on the ropes so Black's response is also forced.

25...♕xa2



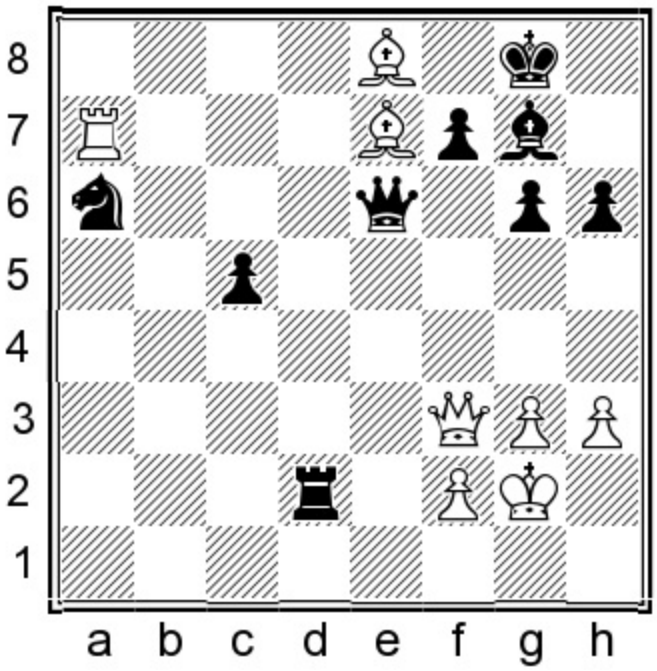
Position after: 25...♕xa2

26.♖b3!!

Brilliant in its simplicity. The black queen gets isolated from the f7-pawn while ♗c6-d5 is again in the air. Black needs to quickly find an antidote otherwise an exchange (and therefore eventually the game) would be the price to pay. Simultaneously, White's actions do not make the impression of being rushed. Black seems to have all the time in the world to parry the threats but with the white forces being excellently organized he will sooner or later have to succumb to the self-renewing threats of the opponent.

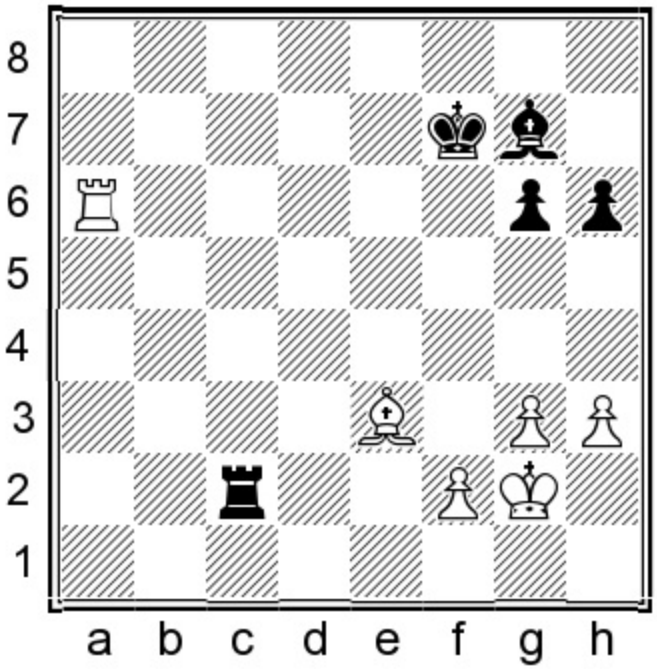
26.♖b7?! would have been much less accurate allowing Black to bail out by a hair: 26...h6 (preventing back rank mate for good) 27.♖xa7 ♕e6 28.♗b5 ♖d2! (threatening to counterattack with ...♗g7-d4 should White get too greedy with the a6-knight) 29.♗e8!

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Position after: 29.♗e8!

and now after the surgically precise 29...♖b2!, avoiding any discovered attacks against the rook, White would have probably had to cash in on his advantage with 30.♗xf7+ ♕xf7 31.♕xf7+ ♔xf7 32.♗xc5+ ♔e8 33.♖xa6 ♖c2 34.♗e3 ♔f7±.

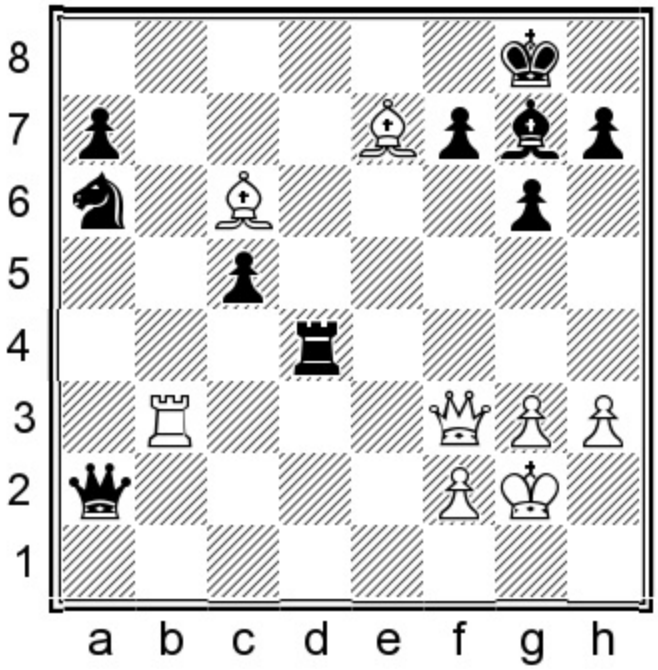


Position after: 34...♔f7±

The problem here is that such a 3 v. 2 pawn endgame is considered to be drawish. White could (and should!) certainly try to play on as there is a small chance that after trading off to a pure pawn

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endgame, the black king could potentially be pushed back. Still, the chances of this happening in a grandmaster game are smaller than the one that the $10, 000 quadrillion worth asteroid ‘16 Psyche’ is going to hit Earth and we all become rich overnight.



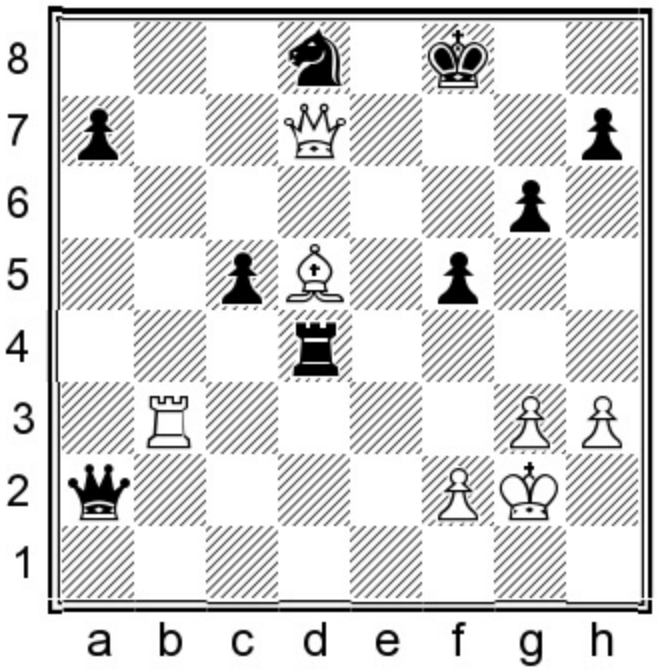
Position after: 26.♖b3!!

26...♕c2

Black is doing his best as ...♕c2-f5 as a defensive measure surely looks structurally bad, but as they say, if you do not have what you like, you like what you have.

26...♗f8 loses in an instructive fashion. First, White cleverly attacks the f7-pawn with 27.♗e8! Black can naturally defend in a very stubborn, tactical way with 27...f5 28.♗xf8 ♔xf8 29.♕b7! ♘c7! but after the cool 30.♗c6! ♘e6 31.♗d5 ♘d8 32.♕d7+–

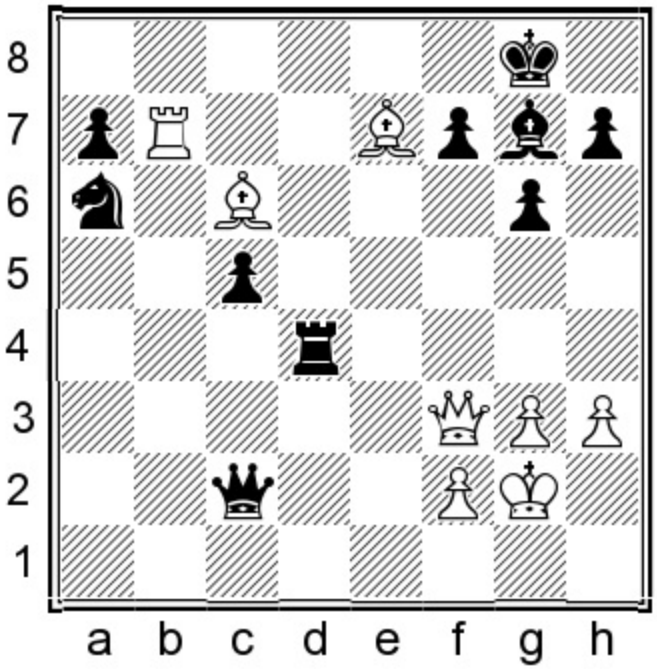
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Position after: 32.♕d7+−

White would eventually be able to prove his point.

27.♖b7!



Position after: 27.♖b7!

Another clever, quiet move. By no means is White after the little guy on a7. The idea is rather to remove the e7-bishop swiftly and to land mate on f7 using a heavy piece battery. Again, Black seems

to have enough time to exchange the crucial attacker before White loads his gun with

27...♕d3

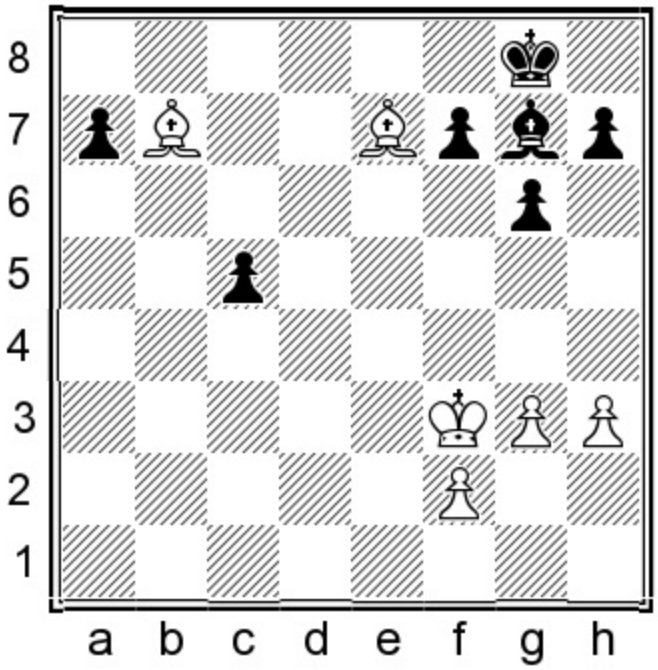
but after

28.♗b5

the cause of death will be more than prosaic as the black knight on the edge of the board is falling. Now after

28...♕xf3+ 29.♔xf3 ♖b4 30.♗xa6 ♖xb7 31.♗xb7+–

with the black queenside pawns about to be decimated, the extra piece guarantees White the win. This is the irony of bad coordination: you may enjoy all

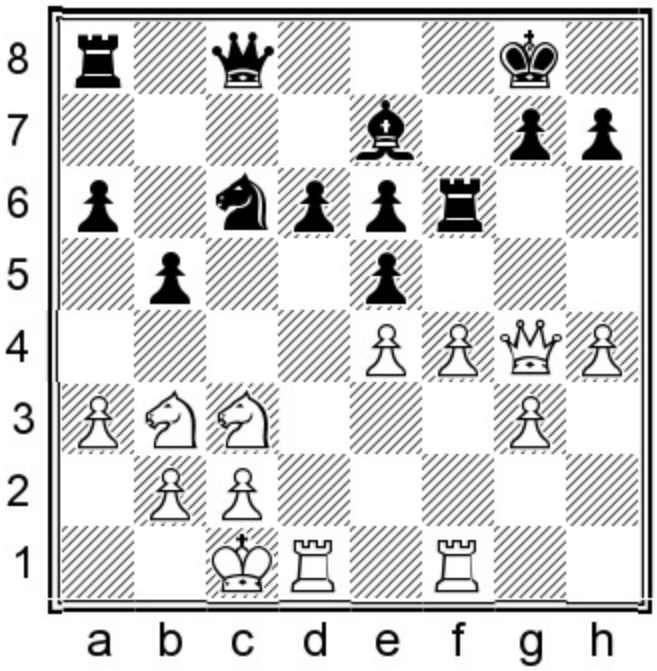


Position after: 31.♗xb7+–

the time in the world and even be able to apparently protect your weakest spots, but sooner or later something in your position is simply going to blow up.

4
Yip – Huang Qian
Astana 2019

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■ *17...?*

Show/Hide Solution

4
Yip, Carissa (2279)
Huang Qian (2441)
Astana 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Sacrifice for quick counterplay

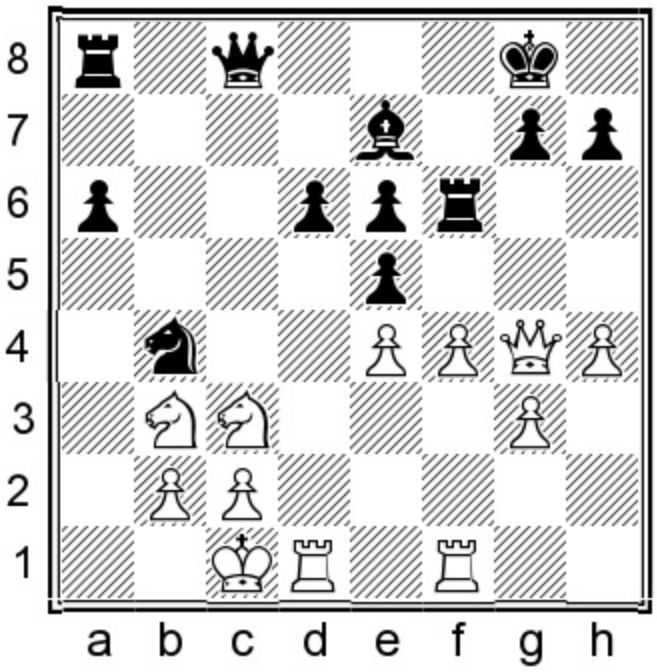
In this position stemming from a sharp 6.h4 Sicilian Najdorf, Black seems to be enjoying a very slight pull. She is ready to start some activity on the queenside by means of well-timed pawn levers, whereas White still seems to be in search of a decent target on the opposite flank. Black may have a temporarily idle bishop, but White's knights are not that impressive either. In particular, none of them is capable of occupying any promising central squares. At the same time, if Black hesitates for too long, f4-f5 will come and the d5-square will eventually become a nice outpost for the c3-knight. With this in mind we should understand that applying a waiting strategy is out of the question for Black.

17...a5!→

A splendid dynamic possibility! Black does not care about pawns at all. What matters most is exposing the white king by opening files in front of it and developing an attack based on chasing away the knight without regarding any pawns that may be captured.

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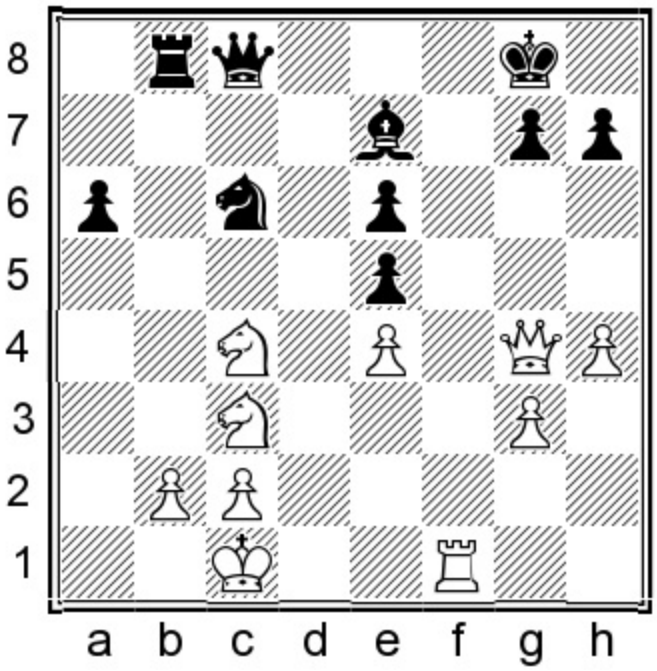
A) The game saw the enterprising 17...b4!? 18.axb4 ♘xb4



Position after: 18...♘xb4

which looks like a manifestation of a similar thinking pattern as 17...a5! The object being to launch some active play on the queenside swiftly, simultaneously damaging the pawn shield in front of the white king ever so slightly. The only problem is that it is White who is now on the move and can make use of the fact that the black knight does not control e5 anymore: 19.fxe5 ♖xf1 [19...dxe5?! was played by Huang Qian but fails because of 20.♖xf6 ♗xf6 21.♖d6± and Black not only has troubles defending the e6-pawn, but also inevitably has to surrender the initiative to the opponent.] 20.♖xf1 dxe5 21.♘d2 ♘c6 22.♘c4 ♖b8⇄.

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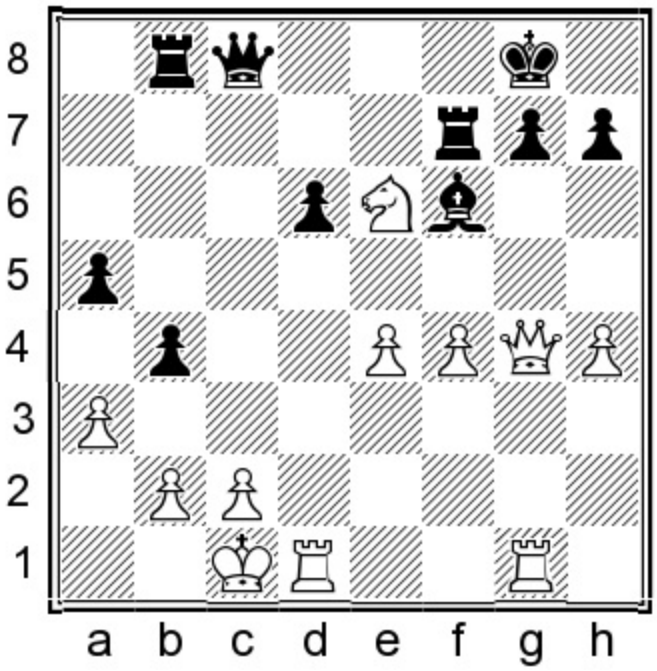


Position after: 22...♖b8⇄

Here the position remains very much double edged as Black's damaged central pawn structure is compensated for by her attacking prospects on the queenside. From the practical perspective (and in rapid/blitz play as well) I would have preferred Black as the c4-knight covering the white king looks rather shaky at first and thus vulnerable to possible ...♘c6-d4 jumps. Still, White could in the meantime flirt with ideas of invading with the queen via f7, so at the end of the day Black cannot feel so secure here either.

B) Another possibility would have been 17...exf4?! and although, objectively speaking, this does not lead to an advantage for White it would have already been a step in the wrong direction to open up the g-file for White's heavy pieces and furthermore allow her knights to regroup one day via d4. According to my analysis Black holds but only thanks to some truly inhuman efforts: 18.gxf4 ♖b8 19.♖g1 ♖f7 20.♘e2 a5 21.♘bd4 ♘xd4 22.♘xd4 ♗f6! Not caring about the e6-pawn since the bishop on f6 proves to be a multi-functional piece as after the further 23.♘xe6 b4!

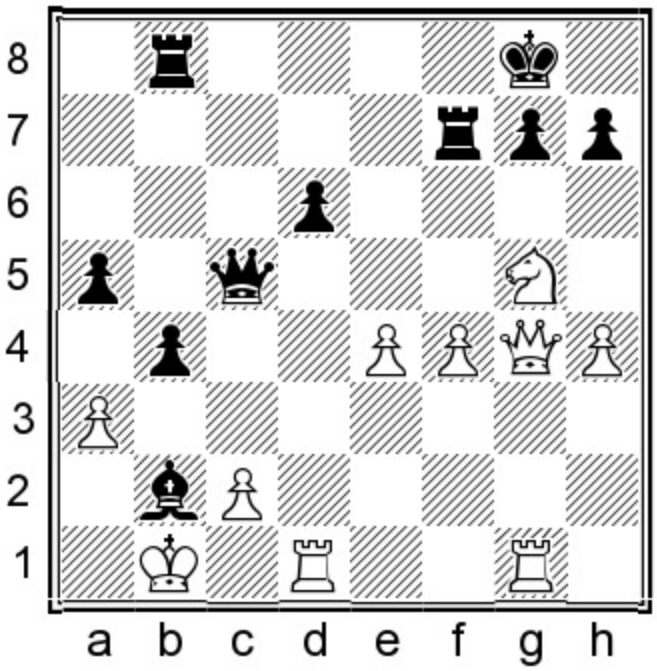
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Position after: 23...b4!

it not only defends the vital g7-pawn, but also shoots at the white king. This virtually forces White to force matters with either:

B1) 24.♘g5? Which loses beautifully to 24...♗xb2+! 25.♔b1 ♕c5!!

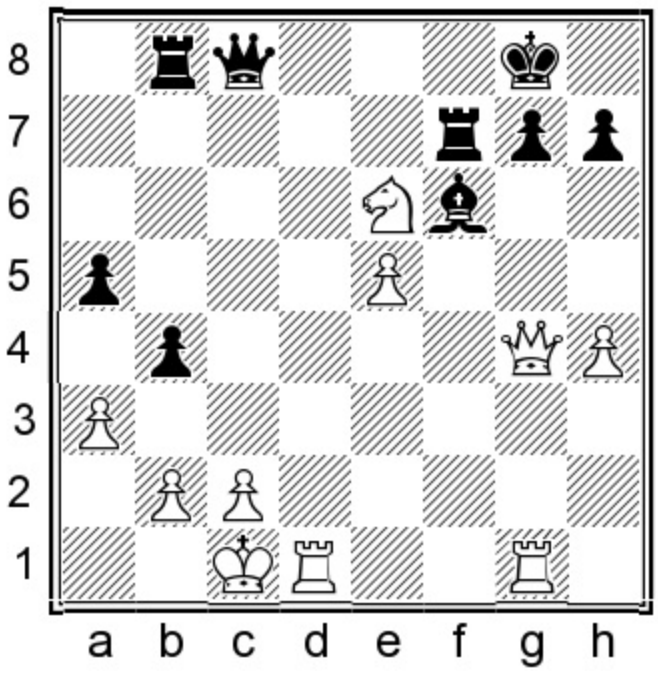


Position after: 25...♕c5!!

when Black evidently takes the time to finally attack the white monarch. But when the attack finally comes White is going to be at Black's mercy entirely e.g. 26.♕e6 bxa3 27.♕xf7+ ♔h8 28.♖g3 a4!

(preventing the defensive maneuver ♖g3-b3) 29.♕a2! ♗e5+ 30.♔c1 ♗xf4+ 31.♖d2 h6 32.♘f7+ ♔h7– + and despite being a rook up, White will have to part with huge amounts of material very soon.

B2) 24.e5! dxe5 25.fxe5

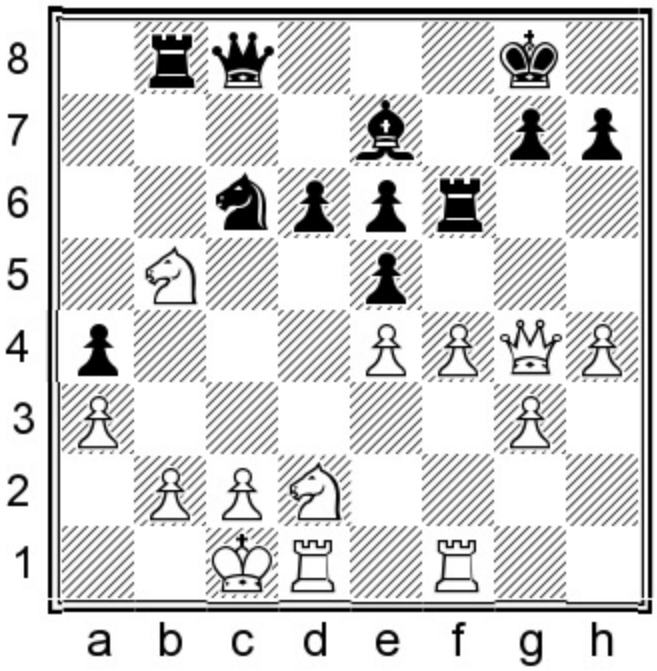


Position after: 25.fxe5

and now after 25...bxa3! 26.exf6 a2! 27.♔d2 ♖xb2 28.♕e4 ♖xc2+! 29.♕xc2 ♖d7+ 30.♔e3 ♕xc2 31.♖xd7 ♕c3+ 32.♔e2 ♕c2+= it would have been a wise decision for both of the parties to call it a day.

17...a5!→ 18.♘xb5 a4 19.♘d2 ♖b8

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Position after: 19...♖b8

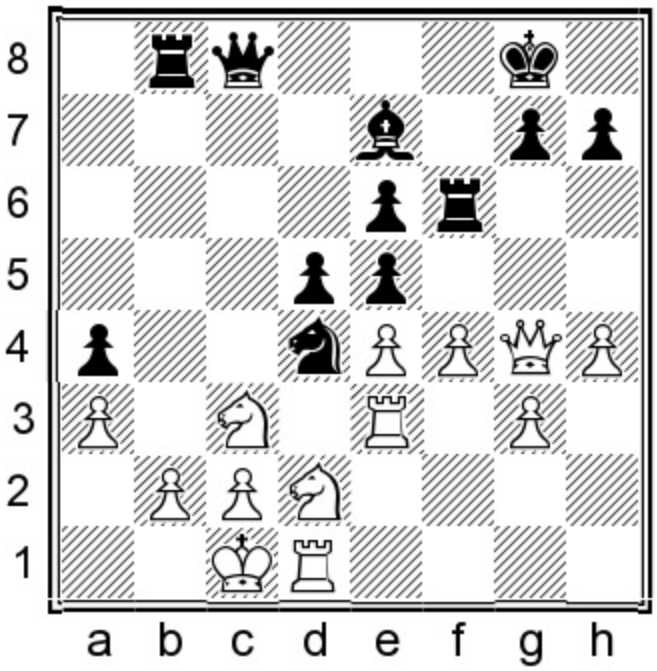
Only now does it become absolutely clear that the movement of the a-pawn was just a means to an end. The b5-pawn has given its life for the sake of removing any obstacles standing in the way of the black heavy pieces. When they arrive on the b-file they want to be able to start creating mating threats immediately.

20.♕e2

White surely would do well in recognizing that doom may come along the b-file, but this is already a lost case since Black can easily increase the pressure against the sole blockader standing on b5. What White should do is to try to bail out of trouble by sacrificing the pawn back, thus utilizing exchanges as a way of reducing Black's queenside initiative.

Yet 20.♘c3?! loses on the spot because of the dynamic 20...♘d4 21.♖fe1 d5! 22.♖e3

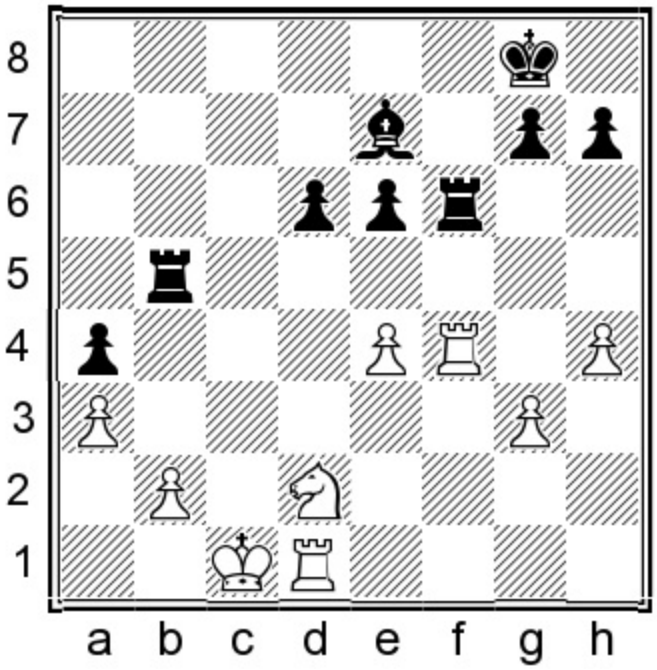
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Position after: 22.♖e3

22...♗xa3!! when after 23.bxa3 ♕c5 the only way to prevent mating threats on a3 involves returning a huge chunk of material with 24.♘db1 ♘b3+ 25.cxb3 ♕xe3+ 26.♔c2 axb3+ 27.♔b2 d4 28.♘e2 ♖c8–+ when White ends up clearly lost because of the lack of communication between his forces.

20...♕b7 21.c4 ♘d4 22.♕d3 ♘xb5 23.cxb5 exf4 24.♖xf4 ♕xb5 25.♕xb5 ♖xb5∓

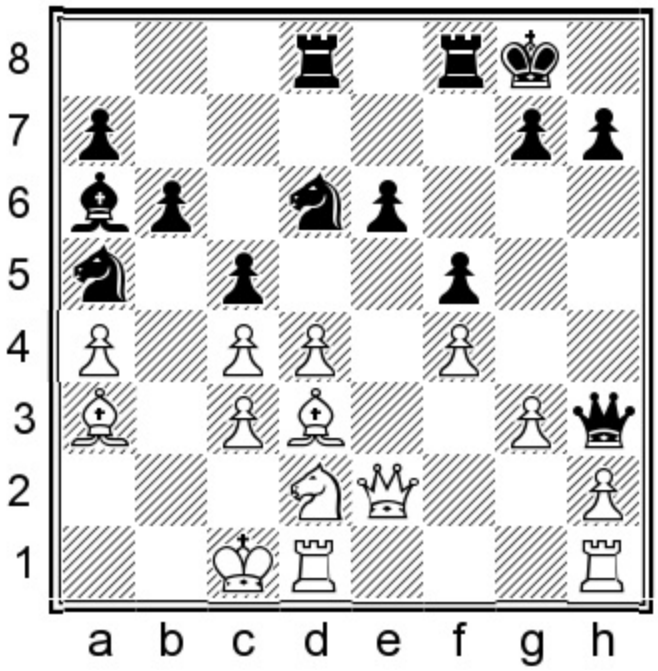


Position after: 25...♖xb5∓

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Now a much better endgame for Black arises on the board. There are multiple grounds for this assessment: first and foremost, Black's rooks are more active than their White counterparts. Secondly, with pawns placed on both wings, the bishop might prove to be a more mobile piece than the white knight. Also, Black's pawn structure favors her ever so slightly as her a4-pawn stops two of White's pawns at a time while White's g3 and h4-pawns are in immediate danger should Black take on f4 or rather go for ...♖f6-g6 instead. Hence, a tough defensive task is still ahead of White.

5
Tran Tuan Minh – Nguyen Van Huy
Chennai 2019



■ *18...?*

Show/Hide Solution

5
Tran Tuan Minh (2541)
Nguyen Van Huy (2450)
Chennai 2019

Weakness
Indirect attack against the weakness (exchanging the defender)

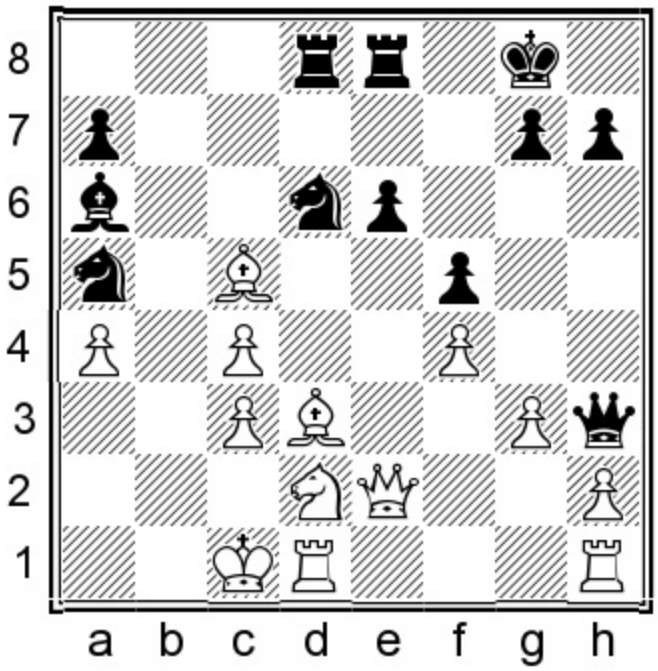
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We have material equality at the moment, but White is obviously suffering from structural deficiencies on the queenside which are inherently related to the Sämisch variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defense. By allowing damage to his pawn structure on c3, White puts his hopes on the future activity of the dark-squared bishop which is supposed to be strong as it will have no contender among the enemy forces. The only problem for White is that here the said bishop is not that much better in terms of quality than his queenside pawn chain is a problem. This all sounds like good news for Black yet he is not enjoying absolute freedom of action either. The pressure exerted against White's weak c4-pawn is naturally great, but how to profit from that immediately? Also, the e6-pawn is hanging with check, so Black may want to take this into consideration before embarking on any action of his own. Luckily for him, there is a way to have a cookie and eat it too!

18...♘e4!

A fancy way of weakening the c4-pawn even more. Attacking a weakness does not have to be exclusively about increasing the pressure until it becomes unbearable for the opponent. Sometimes it is better just to exchange a defender instead. In terms of the attack-defense-ratio (yes, it also applies to weaknesses), there is no big difference between the two mentioned approaches, but later one is often more flexible in practice. Paraphrasing Juvenal – guarding a weakness is trivial, but who will guard the guards themselves?

A) In the game, Black played the passive 18...♖fe8?! only to discover that after 19.dxc5 bxc5 20.♗xc5



Position after: 20.♗xc5

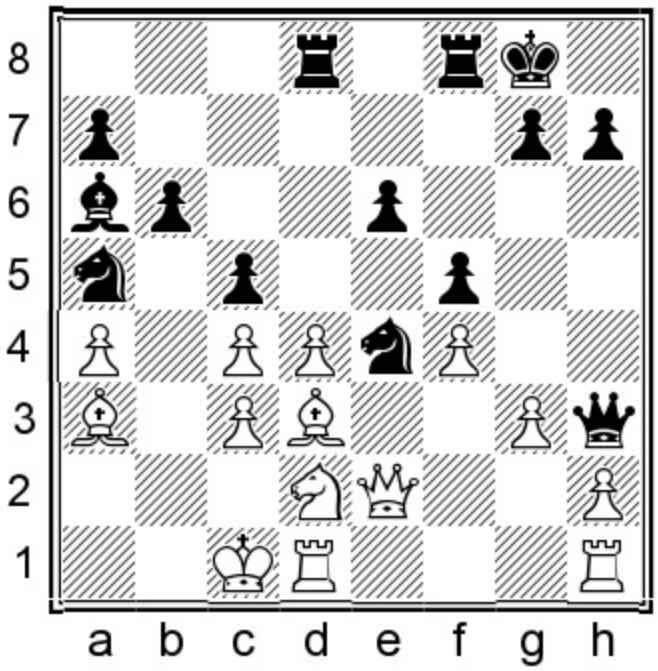
he is down material, and quite surprisingly without any chances of generating counterplay against the white monarch. The reason for this appears to be the lack of coordination between the black forces as his pieces apparently stand very actively, but there seem to be no clear resources available for him.

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The best continuation here would have been 20...♘dxc4 21.♗xc4 ♗xc4 22.♘xc4 ♘b3+ 23.♔b2 ♘xc5 restoring material balance, but after the further 24.♘d6 ♖e7 25.♔a3!↑ thanks to the impotence of Black's rooks, the instability of the c5-knight, as well as the temporary inactivity of the black queen, Black would have been facing a tough defensive task in this multi piece endgame.

B) On the other hand, 18...cxd4? would have been even worse as after 19.♕xe6+ ♔h8 20.♗xd6 ♗c8 21.♕e5 ♖fe8 22.♕xd4 ♘b7 Black would have been able to eventually recapture the sacrificed piece, but after 23.♖he1 ♗e6 24.♗c2 ♖xd6 25.♕e5+– there is not much more left for him to do against the swift transfer of the white knight to g5 leaving Black's bishop to its fate.

18...♘e4!

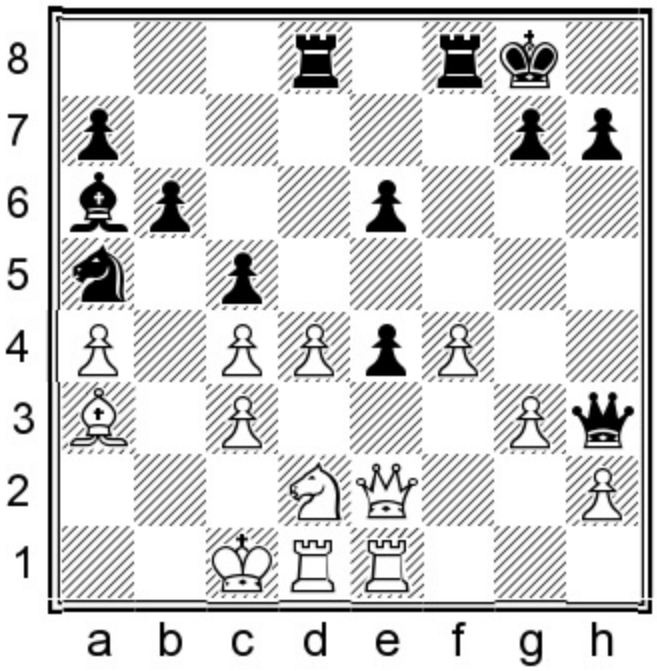


Position after: 18...♘e4!

19.♘xe4

A) 19.♗xe4 would have been ill-advised as it weakens the light squares on the queenside even more, without contributing to the improvement of White's a3-bishop. Now after 19...fxe4 20.♖he1

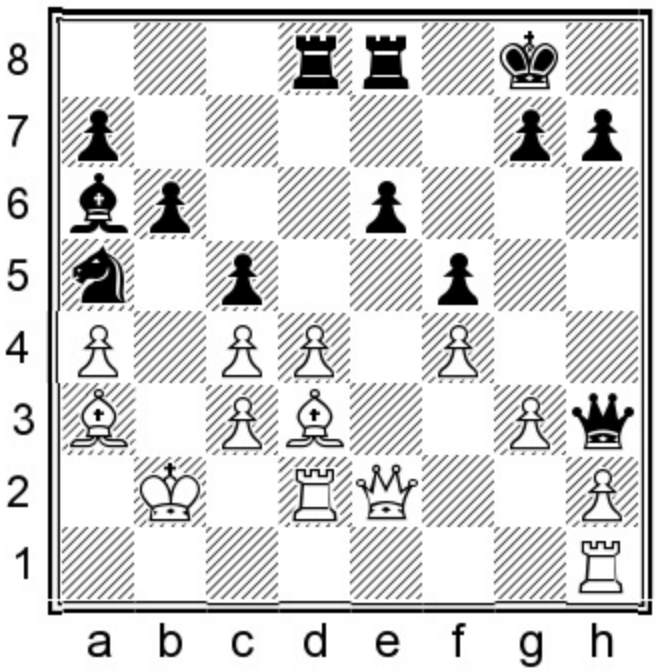
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Position after: 20.♖he1

Black could have obtained a winning position after an elegant exchange-sacrifice with 20...cxd4!? 21.♗xf8 e3! when after the further 22.♗b4 exd2+ 23.♖xd2 ♘b3+ 24.♔b2 ♘xd2 25.♕xd2 d3–+ White would have been defenceless in view of the binding effect the black d3-pawn is exercising over his position.

B) By comparison, 19.♔b2 is not much better either as after 19...♘xd2 20.♖xd2 ♖fe8

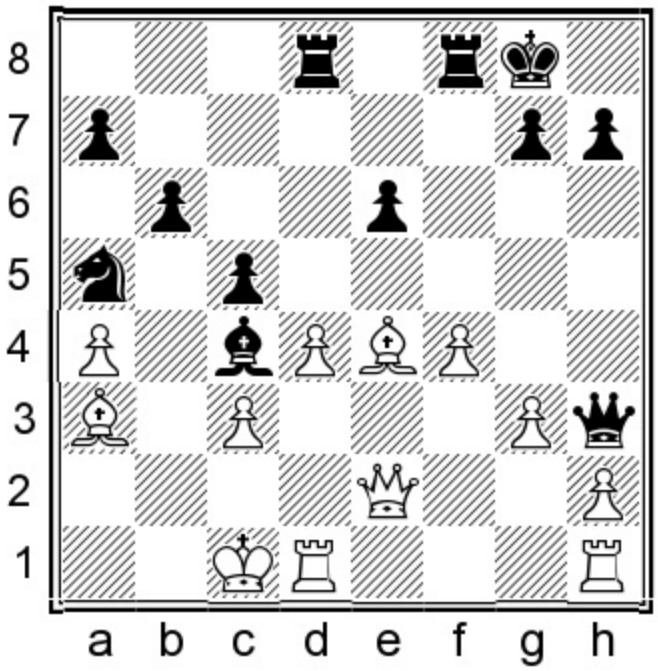


Position after: 20...♖fe8

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if White would like to see his dark-squared bishop becoming active again someday he needs to resort to 21.dxc5 but then after 21...♘xc4+ 22.♗xc4 ♗xc4 23.♕f2 ♖xd2+ 24.♕xd2 ♕h5!∓ White would be balancing on the edge of defeat. The reason for this is that in this heavy piece endgame opposite-colored bishops do not enhance drawish tendencies, but rather favor the party who is able to strike first. With White's king being so exposed along the light squares, not even possible control over the dark squares would have mattered when the black pieces finally arrive at the queenside.

19...fxe4 20.♗xe4 ♗xc4



Position after: 20...♗xc4

There is one more detail that needs to be mentioned here: with the f5-pawn out of the way, the hitherto dormant black queen on h3 suddenly becomes a useful defender of the e6-pawn. This circumstance allows Black to focus on gobbling up all of the white pawns on the queenside without having to care at all about what is happening otherwise.

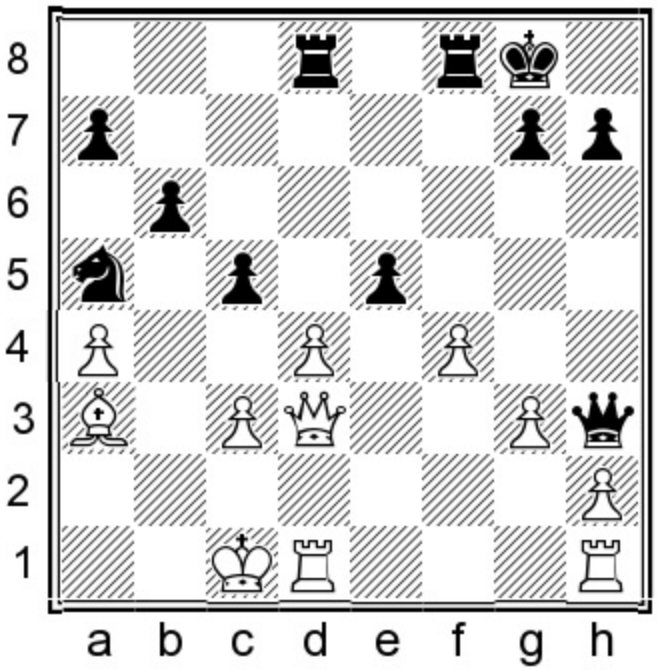
21.♗d3

Trying to trade off queens for the sake of reducing Black's attacking potential would have made perfect sense were it not for the fact that after 21.♕g2 ♕xg2 22.♗xg2 ♗b3 23.♖de1 ♘c4 24.♗b2 cxd4 25.cxd4 ♖d6–+ Black's attack is still far from being over as the other rook is coming straight in front of the white king to c8 with a menacing effect.

21...♗xd3 22.♖xd3

22.♕xd3 is met by the ultra-powerful 22...e5!

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Position after: 22...e5!

highlighting how stretched White's position actually is. Taking with the d-pawn is out of the question which is why White's dark-squared bishop is going to remain dormant for a longer period of time. If White does nothing then he will have to say farewell to his d4-pawn; at the same time 23.fxe5 is a little bit too much as after 23...♖f2–+ Black invades along the second rank with decisive effect.

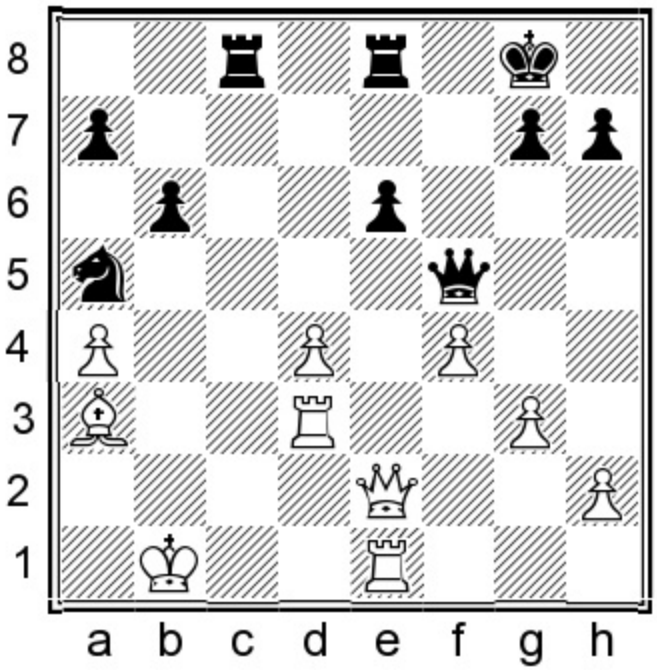
22...♖fe8

A slow move but one which solidifies Black's only weakness in advance and furthermore is one that Black simply has all the time in the world to defend thanks to his strategic advantage. Now after something like

23.♖e1 cxd4 24.cxd4 ♖c8+ 25.♔b1 ♕f5–+

material may still be equal, but the game should not last for too long before Black infiltrates White's queenside along the light squares.

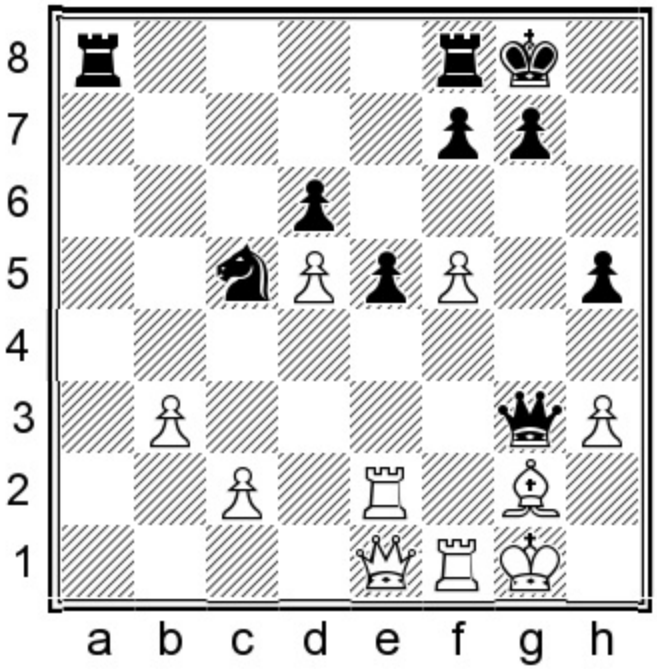
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Position after: 25...♕f5−+

With the white king being almost completely naked and the knight from c4 soon dominating his bishop I do not see any chances for salvation for White.

6
Abdumalik – Gopal
Budapest 2019



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■ *26...?*

Show/Hide Solution

6
Abdumalik, Zhansaya (2463)
Gopal, Geetha Narayanan (2589)
Budapest 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Static decision-making (exchange)

Although materially balanced the position features a nice cocktail of different positional elements unequally distributed among the two players. White is in possession of a bishop the activity of which is being thwarted by the presence of the d5-pawn. Black's knight looks comparably better, being beyond reach of that bishop for the moment. At the same time, the knight cannot consider the c5-square as a safe haven as it may be kicked out any day now by means of a possible b3-b4 push from White's side. The pawn structure at first seems to favor the safety of the black monarch. Simultaneously, most of Black's pieces are still far away from the white king so that we cannot really speak about this element being advantageous for Black. On top of that, White possesses a pawn majority on the queenside and is more than willing to use it by means of an incoming b3-b4 thrust followed by something like c2-c4-c5. This is all very important to consider, but the current question is whether to take exchange on e1 thereby transposing to an endgame, or rather to keep the queens on the board and run away to g5, retaining the middlegame characteristics of the position. What do you believe is the right thing to do in this case?

26...♕xe1

The optimal solution. Black transposes to an endgame with a clear plan in mind to make use of the superiority of the knight against White's bishop. This knight should work together as a team with the rooks, the latter making sure that the knight is not going to get driven off from c5 by means of a possible b3-b4.

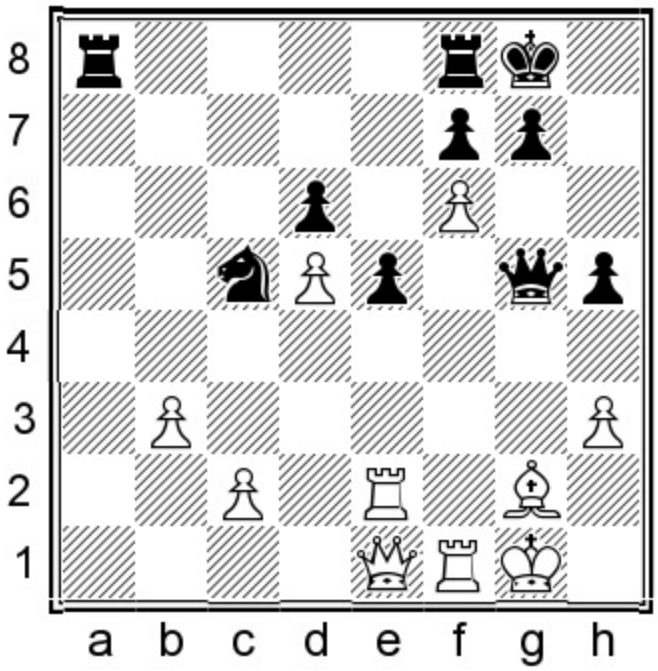
Logically speaking 26...♕g5?! which was played in the game, makes perfect sense in general terms. The white king is relatively weak having been deprived of a bigger part of its pawn shield. Additionally, the ♕&♘ duo is considered to be superior to the queen & bishop due to its increased tactical characteristics. The reasoning behind the avoidance of a trade must have therefore been strong on Black's side. At the same time, the semi open nature of the g-file can also work in the other direction should White be able to open it and then bring the rooks there the black king could get into some serious trouble himself.

A) The game featured the slow 27.♔h2?! when after 27...♘d7! the threat of f5-f6 could have been

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instantly neutralized. White does retain some nominal initiative, but Black can easily parry it by means of even the simplest defensive means, e.g. 28.♗e4 ♘f6 29.♖g2 ♕h6 30.♕h4 ♔h8 31.♖fg1 ♖g8∓ and with White reaching the climax of his coordination it is Black who would be able to start play of his own on the opposite wing, the additional benefit of which would be distracting White from his attacking efforts on the kingside for good. In such a scenario, White would not be capable of maintaining his defenses on all fronts.

B) 27.f6! After this exact move Black would have gone from hunter to hunted! Black's problem is that his pieces are not mobile enough to reinforce their own king in a swift and efficient manner.

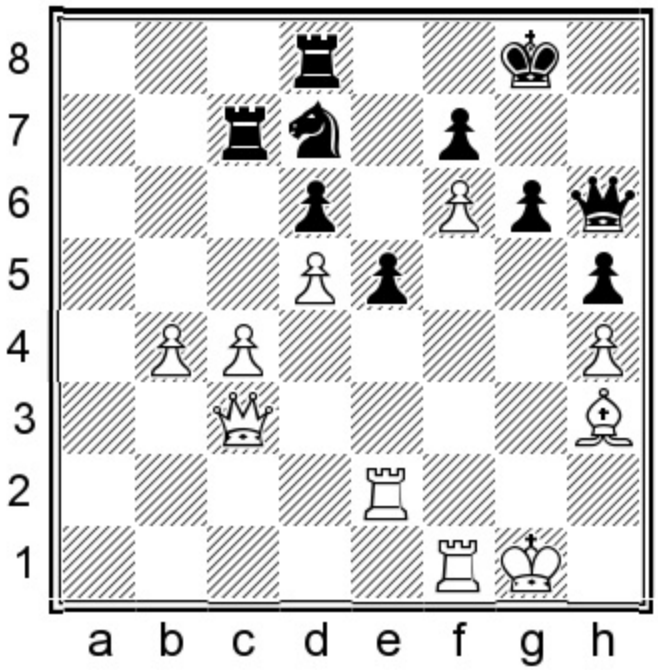


Position after: 27.f6!

B1) 27...gxf6? would amount to playing with fire as afterwards the king of Black would be hunted down like game: 28.h4 ♕g7 29.b4 ♘d7 30.♔h2! ♖fd8 31.♗h3 ♔f8 32.♖g2 ♕h6 33.c4 ♔e7. It seems as if the black monarch has achieved some sort of stability on e7, but this is just a mirage as death comes from the least expected place after 34.c5! dxc5 35.♕c3 c4 36.d6+! ♔xd6 37.♕xc4 ♔e7 and now after 38.b5!+– it is not clear at all how Black wishes to react to the nasty ♕c4-b4 threat.

B2) 27...g6 28.b4 ♘d7 29.h4 Not only spoiling the position of the black queen but also introducing the bishop to the h3-c8 diagonal. 29...♕h6 30.c4 ♖fd8 31.♕c3 ♖ac8 32.♗h3 ♖c7

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Position after: 32...♖c7

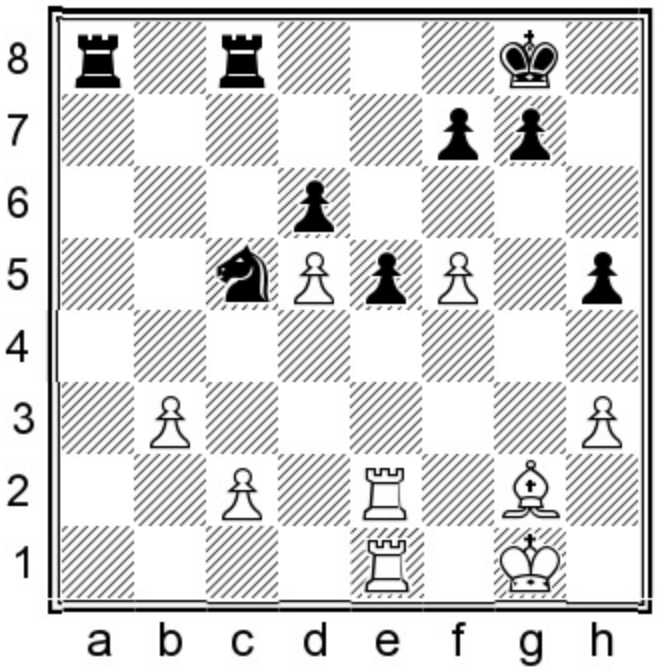
Objectively speaking Black appears to be holding his own for the time being yet I cannot help the impression that with less space and the need to consider pawn pushes like c4-c5 all the time, the black pieces would not be enjoying themselves at all.

26...♕xe1 27.♖fxe1

27.♖exe1 is not much different: 27...♖a2 28.b4 ♘d7 29.c3 ♖fa8∓ and there are no perspectives for the white rooks. The only open file is occupied by Black, whereas I can also imagine Black trying to double the rooks along the second rank while attacking the white pawns from the rear. The chances of White launching a pawn avalanche successfully with c3-c4-c5 would have been slim at most.

27...♖fc8

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Position after: 27...♖fc8

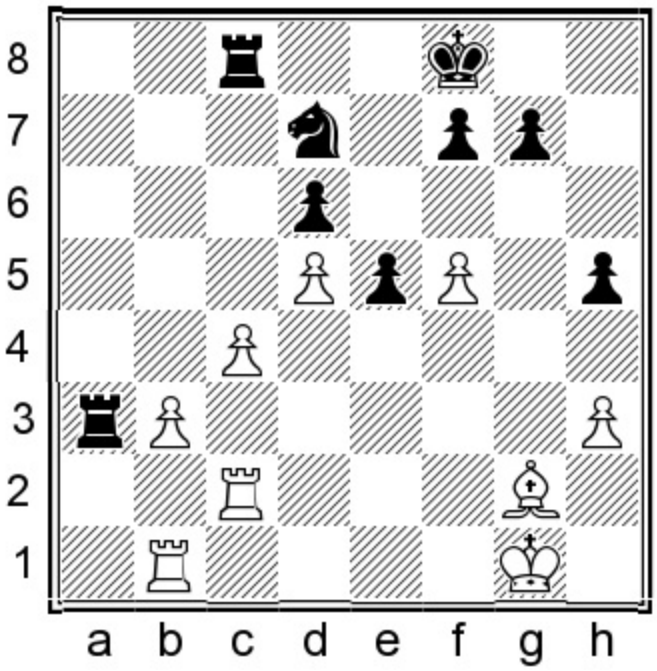
As a rule, there are two ways of handling similar positions as Black. The first one assumes that any movement of White's b and c-pawns represents a danger so that those pawns should be stopped as early as possible. The problem with this approach however is that White might not really want to push them so quickly, at least not before the king comes a bit closer. The slightly riskier, but in practice more promising solution, is to rather have those pawns attacked as quickly as possible, thus forcing their movement, and only then have them blocked at best before they reach the dark b6- and/or c5-squares. With the said pawns fixed on the b5- and c4-squares, collecting them afterwards would amount to a mere formality.

28.♖b1 ♘d7 29.c4

Otherwise ...♖c8-c3 would have been tragic for the mobility of White's queenside pawns. Now however, the white b-pawn is not going anywhere which enables Black to gain command yet again over that wing. Now after

29...♖a3 30.♖c2 ♔f8∓

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Position after: 30...♔f8∓

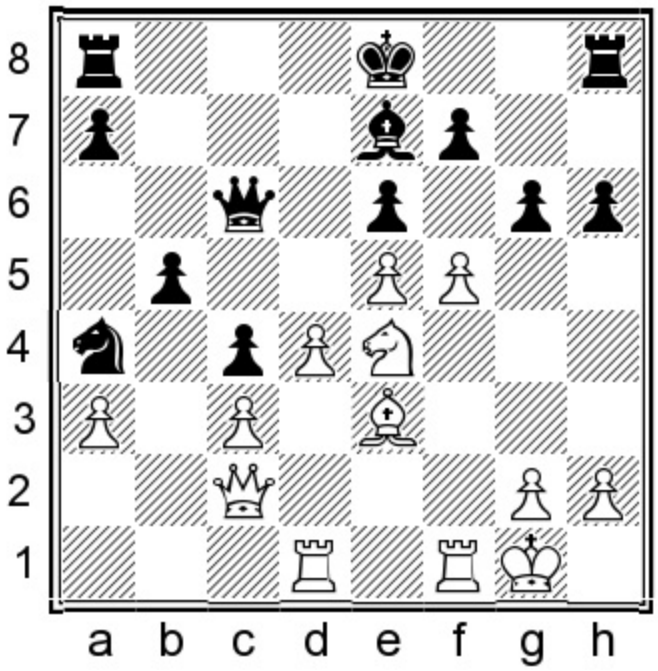
Black is in so much control over the position that he can even direct his king towards the kingside, intending to infiltrate that part of the board which has been abandoned by White for the sake of defending the queenside. White's task of holding the position needs to be considered as impossible in the long run.

So why did Gopal favor 26...♕g5, as played in the game, instead of 26...♕xe1? Clearly, without asking him this question personally we can only speculate. As a grandmaster my take is that he must have been aware of the advantageous nature of the ♕+♘ duo over the ♕+♗ pair. At the same time, what he failed to appreciate was the power of the f5-f6 push which would have quickly made Black's position difficult to hold. From a coach's perspective the most probable course of events must have involved him opting for 26...♕g5 on general considerations without dedicating much (or any) time to checking the ensuing position concretely, that is by means of tactical verification and/or calculation. This habit is particularly strong with strategically inclined players who often claim that they play chess more intuitively, according to the 'feel under their fingertips'. As much as there is nothing wrong with intuitive play, this is a highly dangerous approach. Every single move in a game of chess should be looked at from the general (strategy) and tactical perspective (calculation). Depending on which of those perspectives you forget to include in your considerations, you risk either getting lost in the maze of variations (as you do not know what you are looking for), or landing in a worse position a few moves later (as you did not check the outcome of the chosen move too profoundly). Is there a cure to this hurtful habit? Yes, you must start with mental discipline. First of all, you need to be familiar with the dire consequences of relying exclusively on intuition when playing in such a manner. Secondly, whenever you find yourself on the verge of making a move without calculating deep enough, you need to remind yourself about the dire consequences associated therewith. What has been working for me personally for a while now is to convince myself that whenever I make a

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move without checking its viability from the tactical perspective, Kanye West releases another music album! I have not made a single reckless move since.

7
Maltsevskaya – Belenkaya
Sochi 2019



■ *22...?*

Show/Hide Solution

7
Maltsevskaya, Aleksandra (2299)
Belenkaya, Dina (2315)
Sochi 2019

Attack & Defense
Containing the opponent's initiative

My apologies in advance for asking you to commence your solving efforts from a position in which the opponent has just lashed out with f4-f5. With this move it becomes clear that White means business. What is even worse is that this might not be the last aggressive pawn push that you will have to face in the near future. Additionally, it seems as if White could not have chosen a better

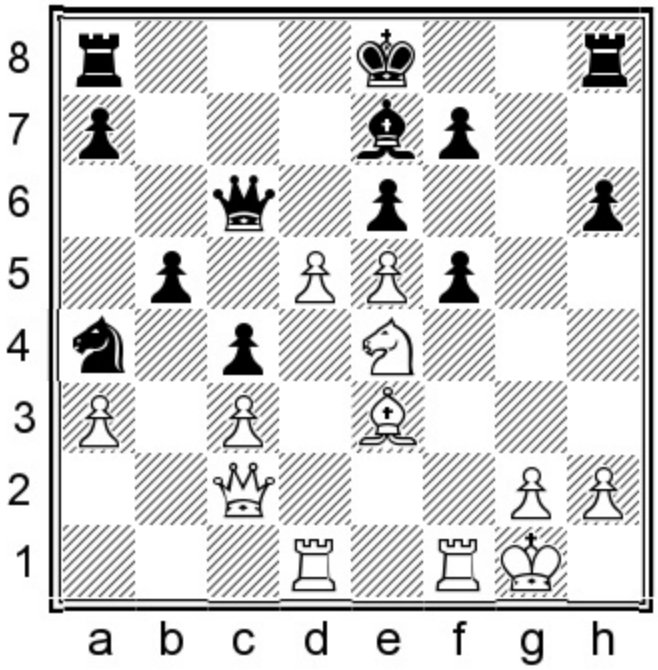
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moment to start some action with your king still in the center and your rooks are disconnected, whereas the knight on the rim is quite far away from the desired d5-square. All in all, Black is technically faced with a choice between taking on f5 with the e or the g-pawn, in either case the d4-d5 push represents a natural follow up, with a huge mess in the center. But is it really so bad?

22...exf5!

Paradoxically this would have been the wisest choice. The moment Black grasps that d4-d5 is coming however she exchanges on f5, caring about the pawn structure immediately means much less compared to calculating the consequences of specific variations and the defensive ideas featured within them.

A) In the game Belenkaya went for 22...gxf5? which is a perfectly understandable decision. The d4-d5 push is the last thing that Black wants to see here and maintaining the e6-pawn looks like a reasonable endeavor to prevent this from happening. Well, the problem is however that 23.d5!

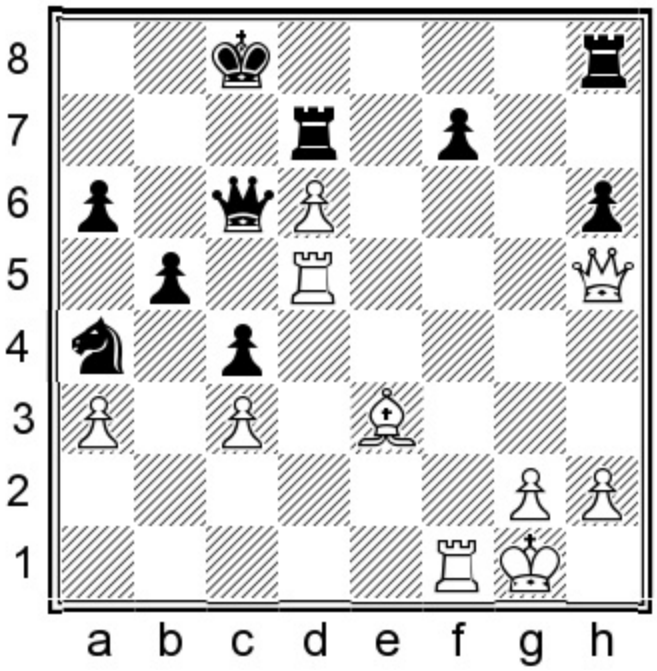


Position after: 23.d5!

is still very much possible when neither taking on d5 (due to the arising structural weaknesses in the center) nor keeping the pawn on e6 seems to do the trick.

A1) 23...exd5 allows White to not only restore material balance after 24.♘d6+ ♗xd6 25.exd6 0-0-0 26.♕xf5+ ♖d7 27.♖xd5 a6 but also to seek a bigger reward with 28.♕h5!+–

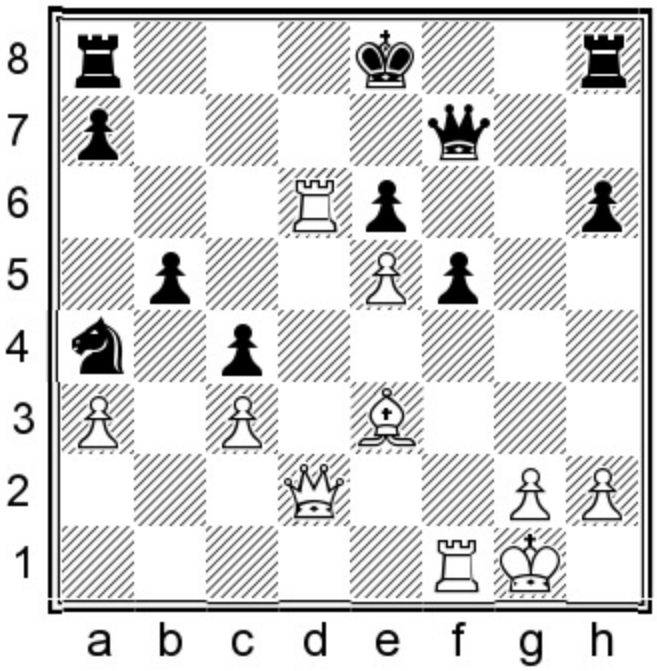
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Position after: 28.♕h5!+–

when the black kingside pawns should be falling one after the other, and Black cannot even bring the knight back into play for the moment.

A2) 23...♕b7 24.♘d6+ ♗xd6 25.dxe6 fxe6 26.♖xd6 ♕f7 when the presence of the pawn on e6 is rather a nuisance for Black than a blessing. What is more, with the precise 27.♕d2!+–



Position after: 27.♕d2!+–

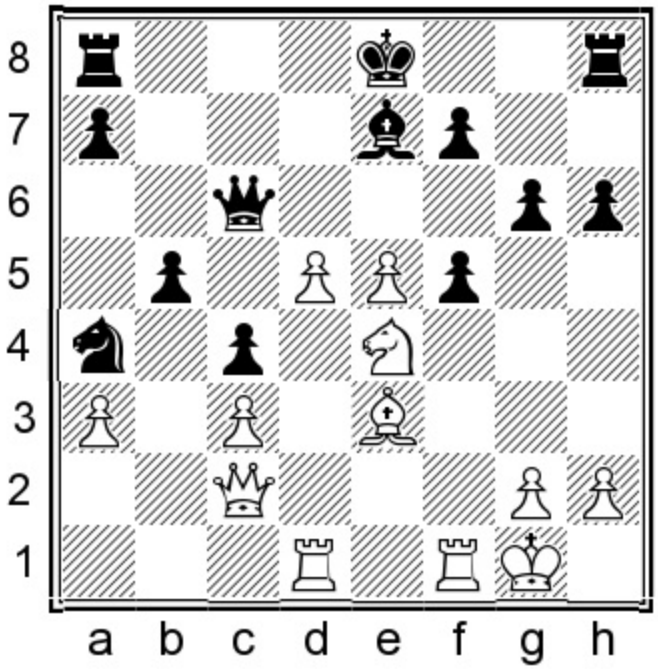
White would have been able to highlight how bad Black's position is from the dynamic perspective.

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The h6-pawn is hanging, and castling is impossible due ideas like ♖d6-d7. On top of that, I really like how the white bishop dominates the black knight. Not a pleasant sight for the defender.

B) Simultaneously 22...0-0-0? does not yield Black anything promising either. It is not only that taking no action is usually worse than taking the wrong one. It is rather that specific variations confirm that after 23.fxg6 fxg6 24.♖f7 ♖d7 25.♘f6 ♗xf6 26.♖xf6 g5 27.♖df1+– White would already be wreaking havoc on the kingside a few moves before Black is able to route the knight to the d5 outpost and even think about reaping the benefits therefrom.

22...exf5! 23.d5



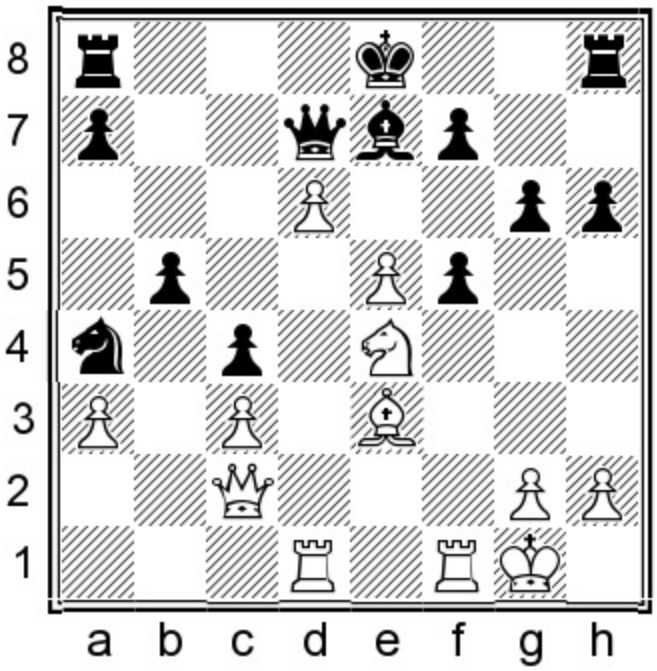
Position after: 23.d5

23...♕b7!

Very restrained play! Black understands that White does not intend to stop on d5 with that pawn. At the same time, moving it forward at once leads to beneficial exchanges for the defender since taking on e4 would involve an exchange of queens as well. Unless White figures out something quickly, the position is going to dry up advantageously for Black, leaving her with a meaningful material edge.

23...♕d7 is the first move suggested by the intuition of the majority of us, but it is much less impressive: 24.d6

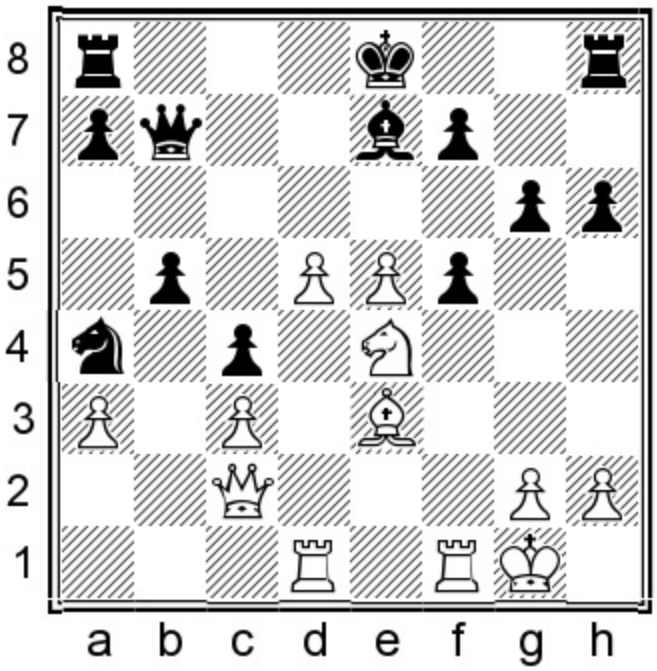
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Position after: 24.d6

A) 24...fxe4?! on the other hand would even amount to playing with fire as after 25.dxe7 ♕xe7 26.♖d5 a6 27.♗d4! 0-0 28.♕xe4± with all of White's pieces pointing at the weakened position of the black king, Black would have to walk a tightrope in order to retain chances for a draw with 28...♘b2? 29.♖f6! ♘d3 30.e6 ♔h7 31.♖d7+– with Black's kingside defensive setup being burnt to ashes.

B) 24...♗d8 25.♘c5 ♘xc5 26.♗xc5 0-0⇄ Black is indeed a pawn up but from now on White will be relying on the supported passed d6-pawn. While Black may in fact be quite solid here my opinion is that all three results are still possible.



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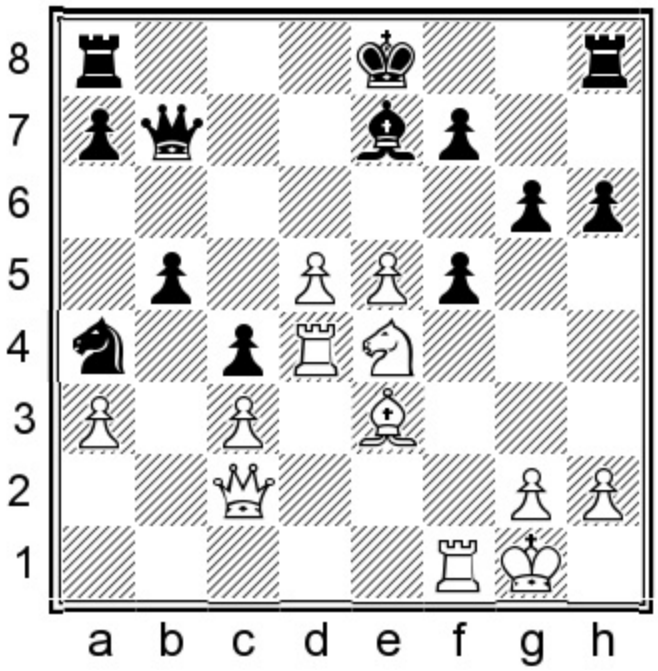
Position after: 23...♕b7!

24.♖d4!?

The best practical chance for White here consists of allowing Black to take on e4, but only in a way which does not lead to further exchanges. That White can afford the time to play like this is unbelievable, but Black would not have been defenseless as chess is not checkers and taking is not mandatory.

A) Neither 24.♘f6+ ♗xf6 25.exf6 0-0-0 26.d6 ♖he8 27.♖fe1 ♖e4–+ nor

B) 24.d6 ♕xe4 25.♕xe4 fxe4 26.dxe7 ♔xe7 27.♗d4 ♖hd8∓ grant White sufficient chances of survival. It is namely either Black obtaining near total control over the light squares or him being able to exchange plenty of material (while still being up some pawns) that makes White's position hopeless in the long run.



Position after: 24.♖d4!?

24...♘c5!

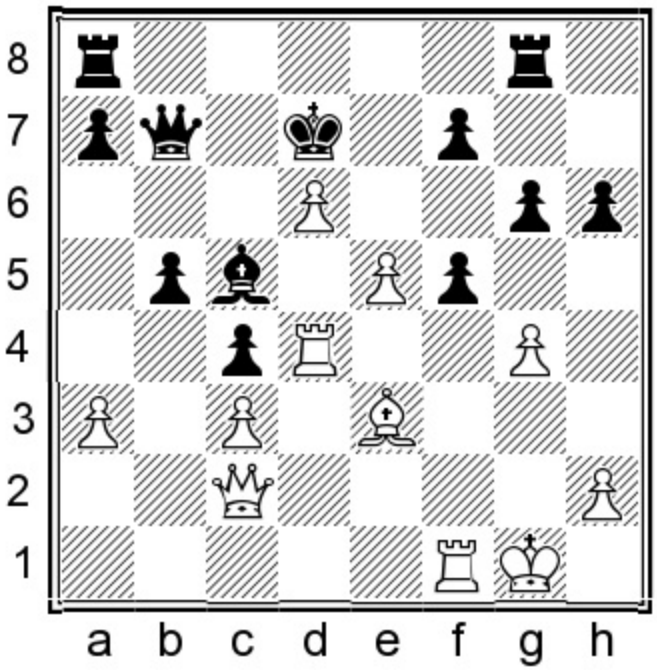
Usually, the prettiest games are built upon a 'blow-for-blow' model, but have you ever seen a battle of 'refusals-to-take'? This move is particularly strong because the threat of taking on e4 is hereby effectively renewed; what is more, exchanging on c5 does not bring White much relief.

24...fxe4?! would have yet again been too hasty as after 25.d6 0-0 26.dxe7 ♕xe7 27.♗xh6 ♖fd8⇄ Black does in fact enjoy a lead in material, but the weakness of the dark squares around his king leads to the conclusion that the initiative would remain with White.

25.♘d2

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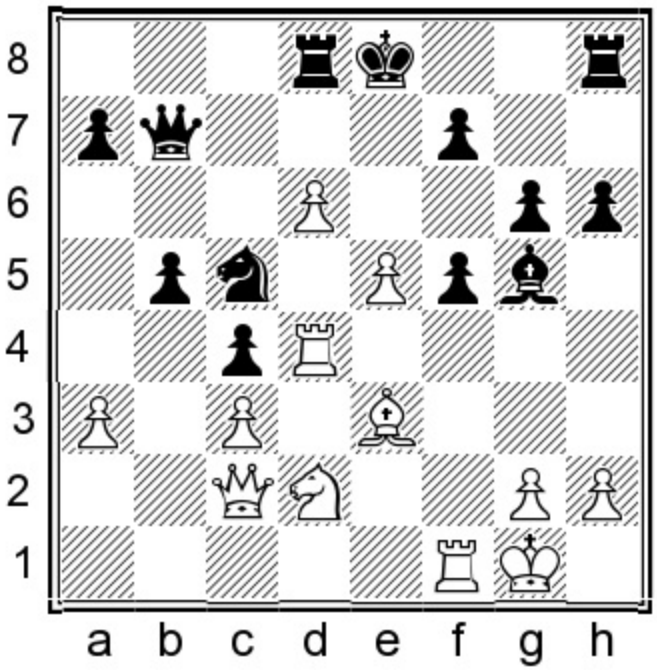
25.♘xc5 ♗xc5 26.d6 can be met in more than one way, but the classy 26...♔d7!? 27.g4 ♖hg8!–+



Position after: 27...♖hg8!−+

appeals to me the most. White would really like to break through along the f-file but can only do so by opening up the g-file which would prove to be lethal for the white monarch. It might look as if we had a Mexican standoff here but in reality with the white rook on d4 falling and the black king being quite safe White will most probably the slower of the gunfighters.

25...♖d8 26.d6 ♗g5∓

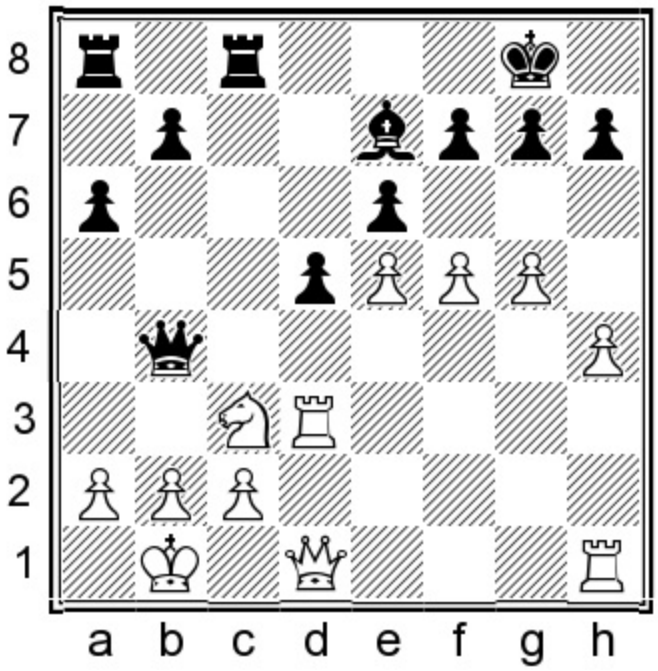


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Position after: 26...♗g5∓

Not only have the white central pawns been brought to a halt, but also more and more pieces are going to be exchanged. This circumstance convinces me that Black is doing very fine.

8
Asgarizadeh – Sandipan
Sharjah 2019



■ *21...?*

Show/Hide Solution

8
Asgarizadeh, Ahmad (2434)
Sandipan, Chanda (2534)
Sharjah 2019

Coordination
Organizing a coordinated defense

In this 6.♗e2 Scheveningen Najdorf, White has not been wasting much time. His kingside pawns are marching on towards the black king with a menacing effect, whereas Black's possible queenside

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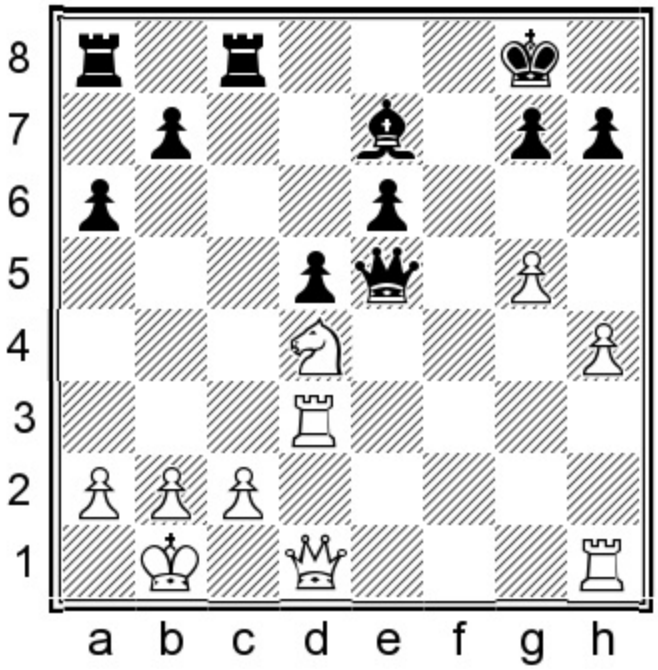
counterplay is still very much in its infancy. White's f5-f6 looks unpleasant for starters, but with g5-g6 followed by h4-h5, Black's position can quickly escalate in an undesired direction. Due to this, Black needs to handle the position in an energetic fashion... but how?

21...♖c4!

Already the only move to save the game for Black.

White has made serious progress on the kingside to which Black cannot remain indifferent and must generate play of his own. Standing still is not an option so Black should have decided to create a powerful battery along the fourth rank. As we will soon see, this installation does not solely aim to grab the h4-pawn but rather to exchange the opponent's heavy pieces thus reducing his attacking potential. One such possibility is to physically block the h-file by means of a ...♖c4-h4 interference. If this does not work instantly, Black could later on try to trade off queens with something like ...♕b4-g4.

A) In the game, Sandipan decided in favor of 21...♕f4? but probably overlooked that the queen's apparent activity backfires after 22.fxe6 fxe6 23.♘e2! ♕xe5 24.♘d4+–



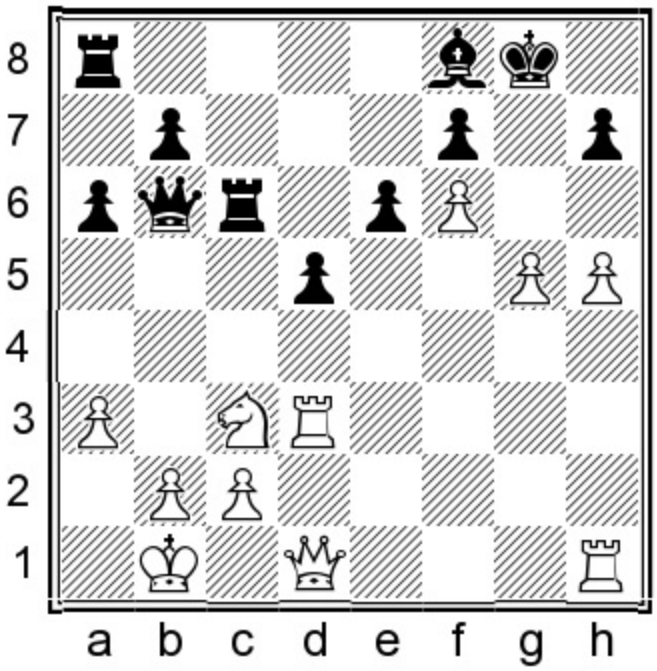
Position after: 24.♘d4+–

when there is no salvation for the e6-pawn and then the d5-pawn will represent collateral damage. When White is done with those central pawns, he will turn his attention to the black king, using the fact that the knight is going to be a beast in the attack, especially compared to the bishop whose defensive properties are rather disputable in this case.

B) At the same time, 21...♖c6?! trying to double the rooks along the c-file would have been a decent attempt for counterplay. After all, hitting the c3-knight happens to be a typical theme in similar structures. Still, this plan is very slow so White would have been allowed to gain even more space on

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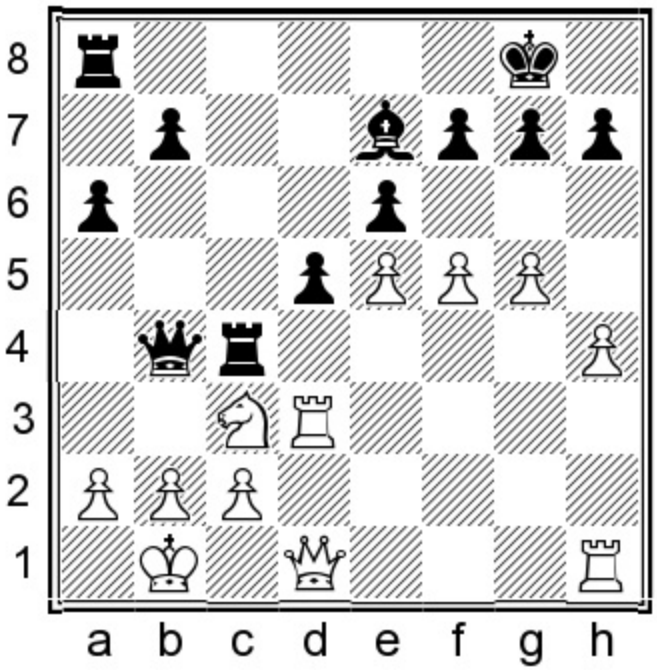
the kingside without being bothered too much on the opposite flank, e.g. 22.f6 ♗f8 23.h5 gxf6 24.a3 ♕b6 25.exf6



Position after: 25.exf6

25...♖ac8 [25...♗xa3? 26.♘a4 ♕b4 27.♖xa3+–] 26.♕f3! Defending the c3-knight and simultaneously bringing the queen closer to the black king. White does not mind the c2-pawn being lost as after 26...d4 27.♘e4 ♖xc2 28.♖b3 ♕c6 29.g6+– the time for Black's surrender would slowly start to ripen.

21...♖c4!



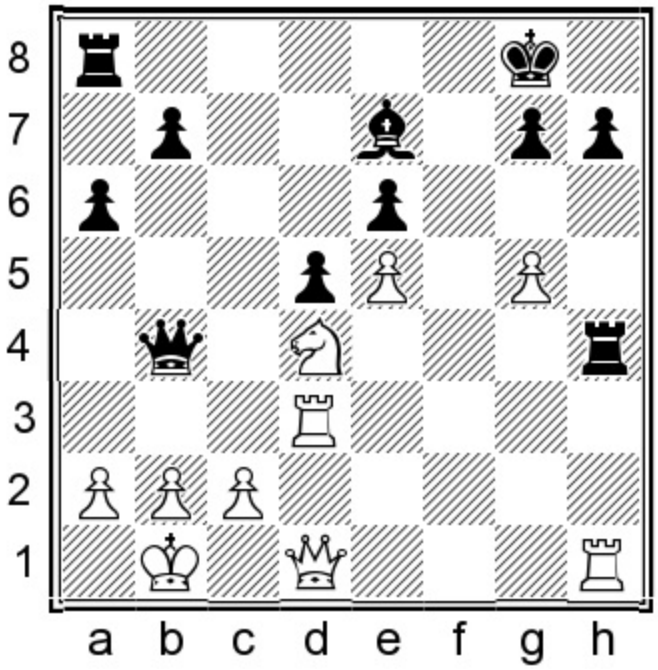
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Position after: 21...♖c4!

22.f6

A) 22.g6 played in the style of the English Attack looks enterprising but does not really crash through 22...hxg6 23.fxg6 fxg6 24.h5 g5 and now White would have been advised not to stretch it anymore with 25.h6? as after 25...♖h4 26.hxg7 ♔xg7 27.♖g1 ♖ah8∓ it would actually be Black gaining more control over the kingside this way.

B) 22.fxe6?! fxe6 23.♘e2 ♖xh4 24.♘d4

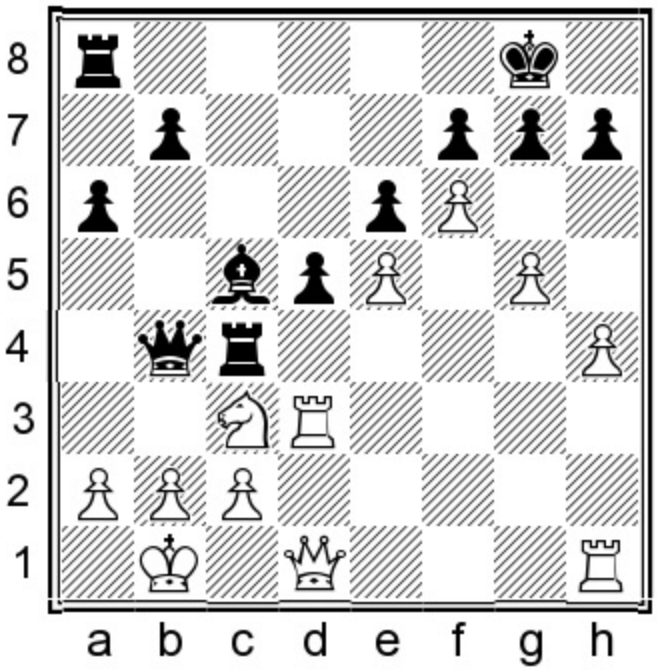


Position after: 24.♘d4

looks clever at first, but Black can resort to a different defensive method here by grabbing as much material as possible with 24...♖xh1 25.♕xh1 ♗xg5 26.♘xe6 he could try to include the queen actively into play with 26...♕e4! Endgames appear to be much worse for White here because of Black's connected kingside pawns being able to make a move quickly; the variation could be extended by 27.♕d1 ♗e7 28.♖xd5 ♕f5! 29.♘d4 ♕h3∓ when despite material equality, it would still be White who would be forced to solve coordination problems, in particular the lack of connection between the heavy pieces and how to tackle the imminent threat of ...♖a8-f8-f1 at the same time.

22...♗c5

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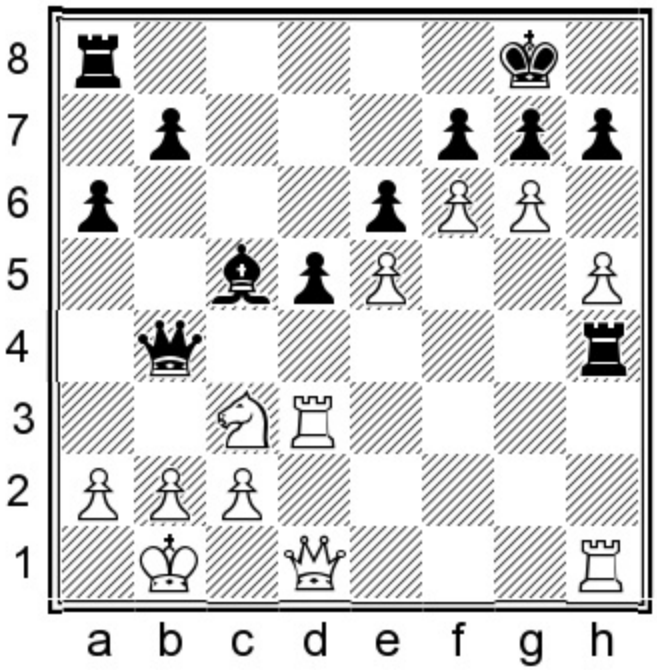
Position after: 22...♗c5

23.h5

23.fxg7 ♖xh4 24.♖dh3 ♖xh3 25.♖xh3 looks scary for a second, but with the queen being just in time to reinforce the vulnerable h7-pawn, Black has nothing to fear. 25...♕f4 26.♕d3 ♕f5! 27.♕xf5 exf5 28.♘xd5 ♔xg7↑ and although Black's kingside pawn structure does not make the best impression, it is White who needs to be careful here as the black monarch might intend to snatch the white g5 and e5-pawns rather swiftly, then may even guide the remaining kingside pawns towards promotion.

23...♖h4 24.g6

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Position after: 24.g6

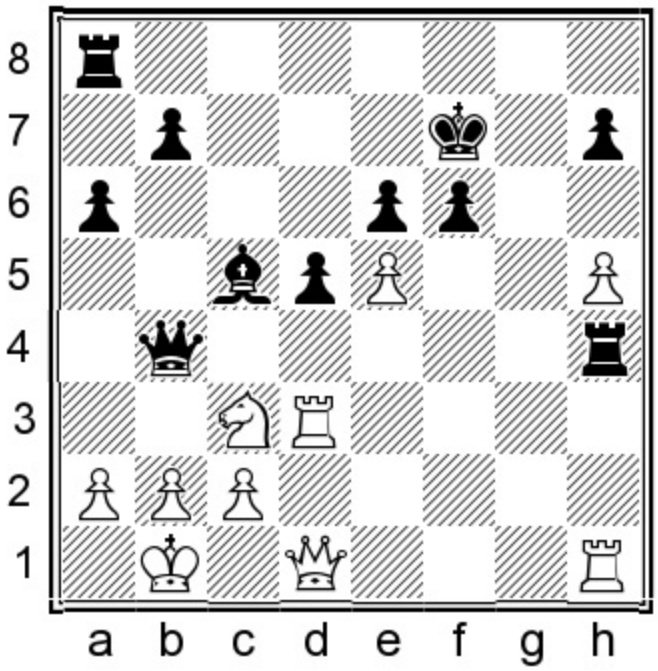
The climax of White's pawn attack. Black needs to maintain nerves of steel if he wants to hold off White's onslaught, but objectively speaking, this is very much possible with accurate play.

24...gxf6 25.gxf7+

25.exf6 does not yield White anything either after 25...♕g4 26.gxf7+ ♔xf7 27.♖xd5! ♕xd1+ 28.♖dxd1 ♖xh1 29.♖xh1 ♖g8 30.♘e4 ♗f8= and White is unable to infiltrate with the rook via d7 and simultaneously maintain a strong outpost for the knight on e4 and prevent back rank mate.

25...♔xf7

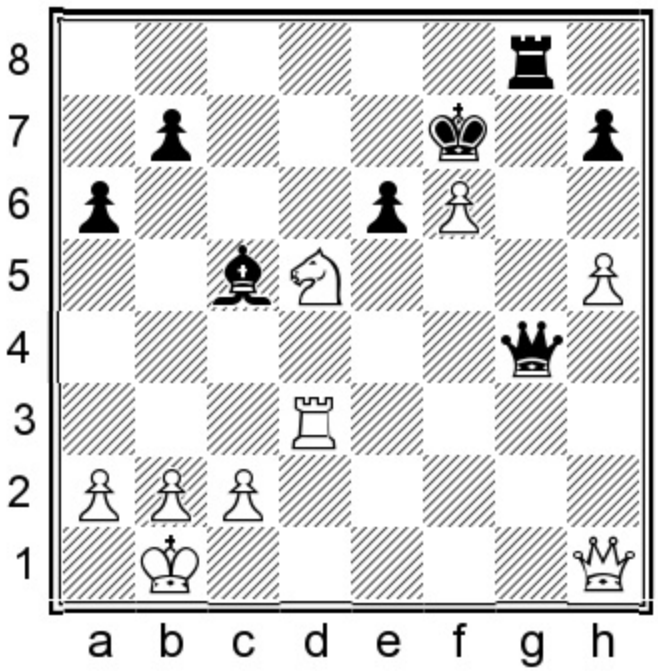
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Position after: 25...♔xf7

26.a3

26.exf6?! may have even left White slightly worse as Black wins the g-file for himself afterwards, even if the price to pay for that privilege would be a little bit of material after 26...♖xh1 27.♕xh1 ♕g4 28.♘xd5 ♖g8!∓

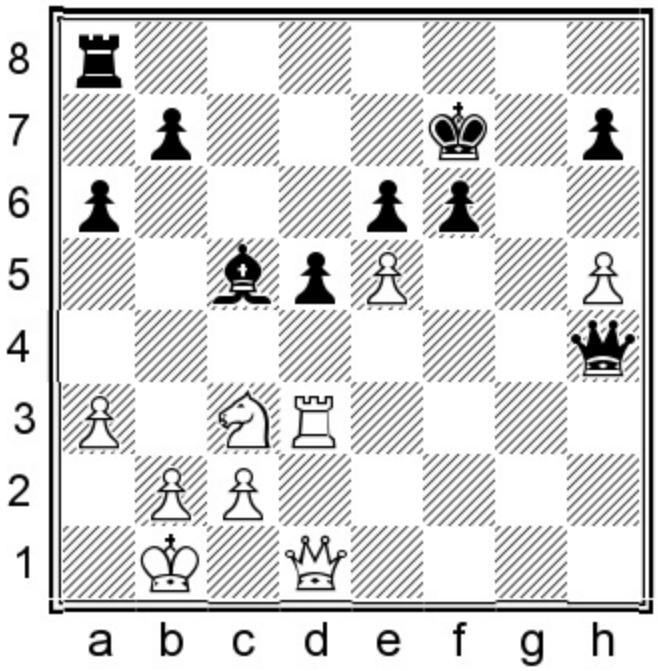


Position after: 28...♖g8!∓

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and with material balance restored, it is the proximity of the black king to the center that makes all the difference. Also, the reason for opening a refuge for the king instead now becomes perfectly visible as in some lines Black could potentially count on some mating tricks on g1.

26...♕g4 27.♖xh4 ♕xh4



Position after: 27...♕xh4

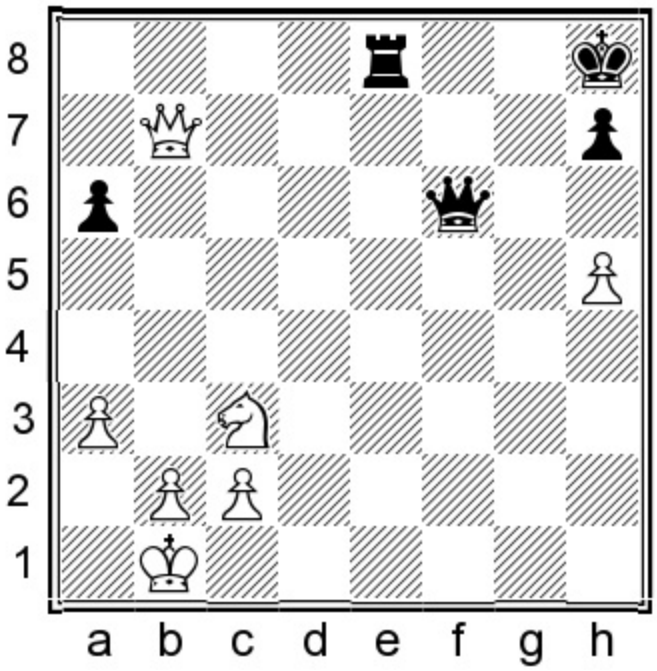
and now after

28.♖xd5

Black cannot refuse the sacrifice anymore. At the same time, the position arising after the more or less forced

28...exd5 29.♕xd5+ ♔f8 30.♕xc5+ ♔g8 31.♕d5+ ♔h8 32.♕xb7 ♖e8 33.exf6 ♕xf6=

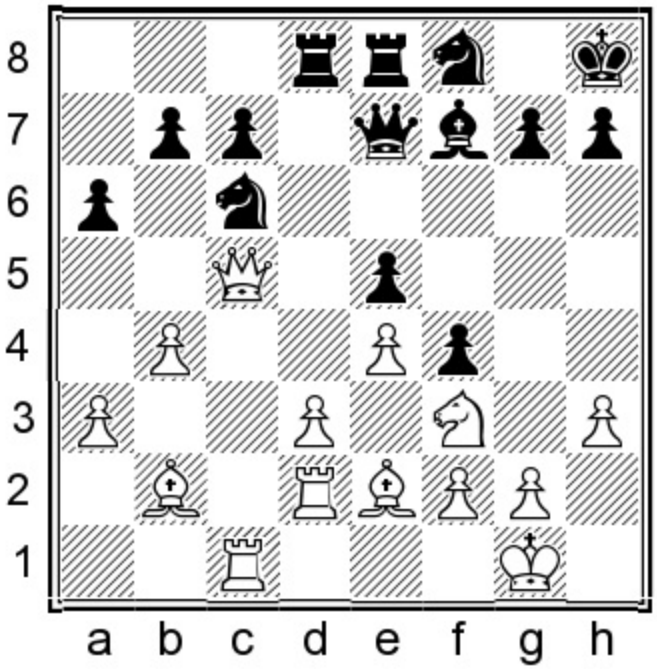
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Position after: 33...♕xf6=

should be close to drawn as White is unable to push his queenside pawns without significantly weakening the position of this own monarch.

9
Timofeev – Sorokin
Khanty-Mansiysk 2018



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■ *22...?*

Show/Hide Solution

9
Timofeev, Artyom (2589)
Sorokin, Aleksey (2524)
Khanty-Mansiysk 2018

Statics & Dynamics
Changing the nature of the position (problem of the exchange)

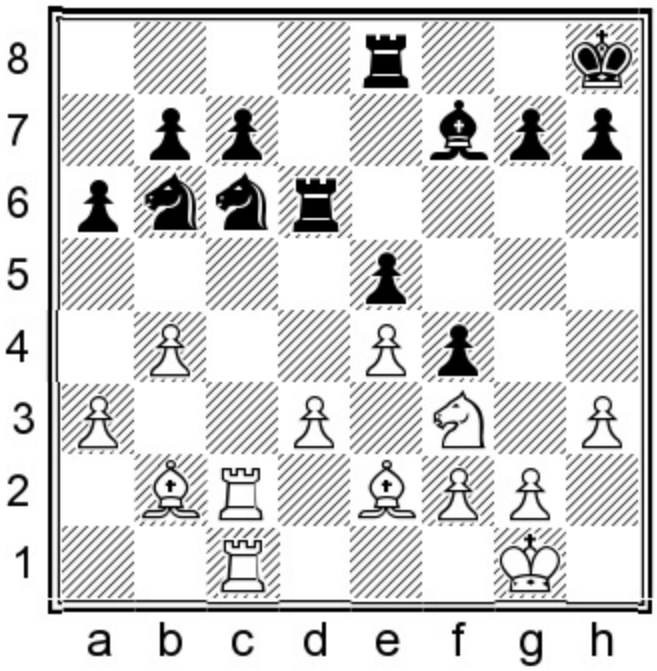
Here we have a position from the English Opening. The discerning reader may simultaneously notice that it resembles some lines of the Sicilian Najdorf, but with reversed colors. White has just won the bishop pair but is still struggling when it comes to control over the center. In particular, the d4-square still belong to Black who is surely willing to have the control thereof increased as much as possible. With all this happening in the background, Black has a decision to make that is going to shape the further course of the game – to take, or not to take on c5?

22...♖d6!

Absolutely not! Retaining queens is mandatory here as Black would not have been able to effectively compete for the d4-square and would therefore become a mere observer of White's growing queenside and central pressure.

A) 22...♕xc5? would have been a bad decision from the strategic perspective as most Sicilian endgames happen to favor Black (in this case White). In similar positions, White typically tries to exert pressure against Black's e5-pawn and along the c-file. This can be done by a variety of means, ranging from doubling the rooks to actually sacrificing one of them for the c6-knight. What is more, with the queens off the board, Black's space advantage actually happens to be more of a burden as potential attacking ideas designed to balance out White's positional initiative on the opposite flank are now out of the question. Sample lines confirm this: 23.♖xc5 ♘d7 24.♖c1 ♘b6 [24...♖c8 is best met by 25.♗d1!± intending to transfer the bishop to a4.] 25.♖dc2 ♖d6

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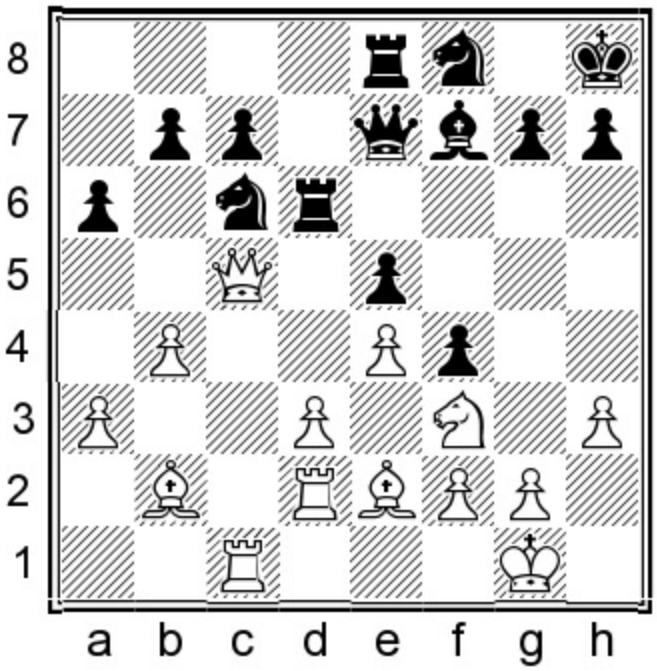
Position after: 25...♖d6

and now after the enterprising 26.♖xc6! ♖xc6 27.♖xc6 bxc6 28.♗xe5± White is momentarily a pawn down, but all other positional elements speak to his favor. The f4 and/ or c7-pawns are bound to fall, whereas the ones on a6 and c6 may just as well be next on the list. At the same time, the black rook does not enjoy too many prospects for the moment as the position still remains relatively closed. With other black pieces technically left without perspectives, I evaluate this position as clearly better for White.

B) By comparison, 22...♕f6?! is much more to the point but fails tactically because of 23.d4! and White's dark-squared bishop opens up in a menacing style, e.g. 23...♘xd4 24.♘xd4 exd4 25.♖xd4 ♘e6 26.♖xd8 ♕xd8 27.♕e5±. Despite material equality, Black would have been teetering on the brink of defeat considering how powerful White's dark-squared battery has become.

22...♖d6!

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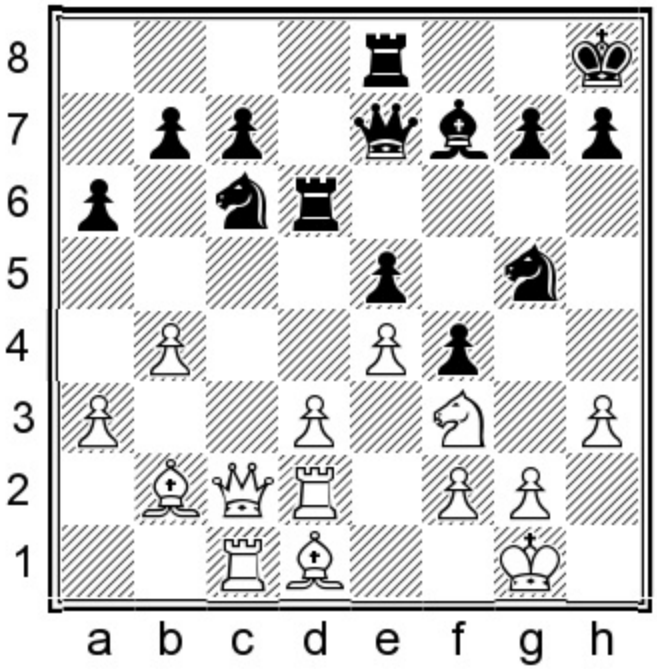


Position after: 22...♖d6!

23.♕c3

White's best try in my opinion as the queen runs away in advance from any knight attacks from e6, with a swift knight transfer to d4 being therefore prevented for the moment.

A) 23.♗d1 is not as effective as previously not only because 23...♘e6 comes with a tempo against the white queen, but also because after 24.♕c2 Black would have had the multi-purpose 24...♘g5!↑ at his disposal.

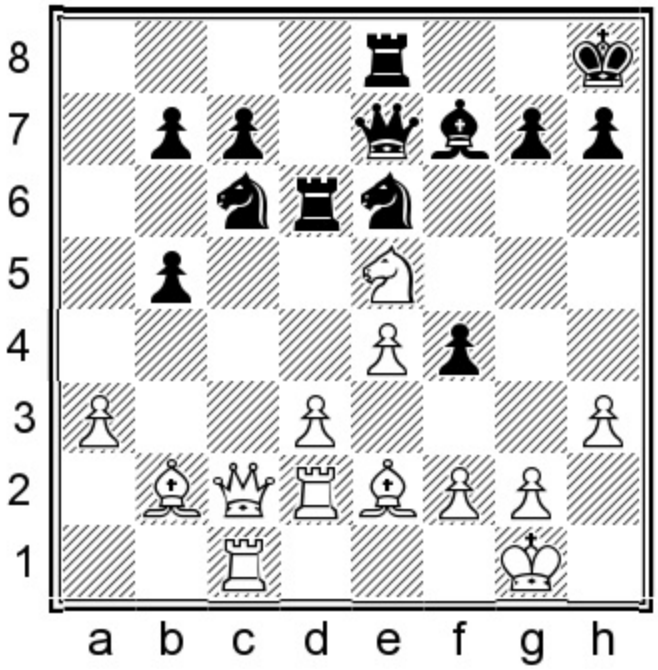


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Position after: 24...♘g5!↑

By playing like this, Black not only aims at exchanging an important defender of the vital d4-square, but also makes it possible to launch a potential kingside attack with rook swings such as ...♖d6-g6 being not so unrealistic. On a different note, should the knights in fact be swapped, Black would be the only one left with a knight which is a positive circumstance not to be underestimated in a semi-closed position.

B) Alternatively, 23.b5!? is an interesting dynamic exchange (i.e. a situation in which pawns are not traded for each other directly, but rather fall elsewhere on the board as a result of the players' reciprocal actions or omissions), leading to massive complications after 23...♘e6 24.♕c2 axb5 25.♘xe5

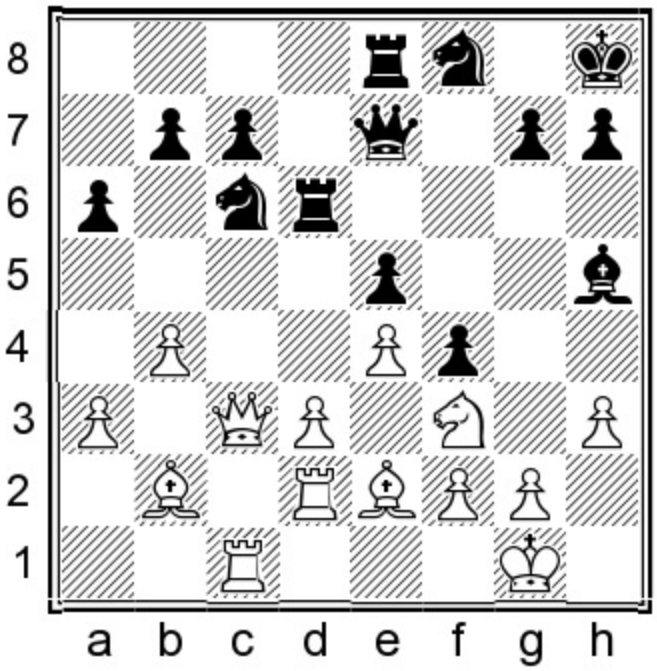


Position after: 25.♘xe5

As the white b2-bishop is a monster that needs to be kept under lock and key I would advocate sacrificing some material for domination by means of 25...♘cd4 26.♗xd4 ♘xd4!? when after 27.♘xf7+ ♕xf7 28.♕xc7 ♖d7♾ Black would have been a pawn down but enjoying nice prospects thanks to his omnipotent d4-knight. Even so, it would still remain an open question what Black should do with this type of domination. Retain it as long as possible and try to reap the fruits thereof overtime, or rather maybe convert it immediately to something more tangible, e.g. an attack after something like 29.♕c3 f3!? 30.♗xf3 ♘xf3+ 31.gxf3 ♖d6!→ when the white king better start tying his shoes as he will be going for a longer walk towards the center.

23...♗h5!

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Position after: 23...♗h5!

A target-oriented move. Black should strive to obtain full control over d4, even if this is subjects him to White's classical bishop pair. The bishop pair is not without reason reckoned as an ultimate weapon, but it also requires a certain amount of time and space (open diagonals) to demonstrate its full power. However, with Black occupying the central outposts with knights and making sure that the position stays more or less closed, this might just as well never take place.

24.d4!?

When being dominated strategically, dynamic countermeasures are usually called for. White either manages to open up the position or lets his pieces basically suffocate due to the lack of open files and diagonals. Now after

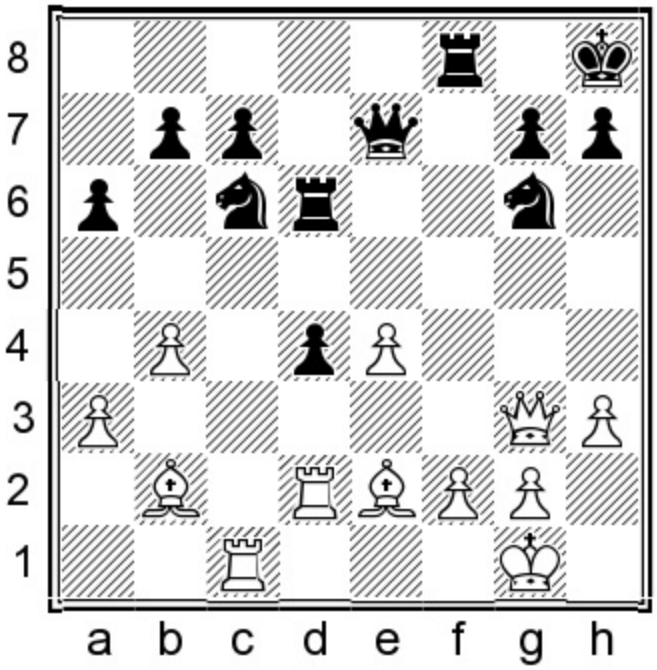
24.♕b3 is worse as after 24...♗xf3 25.♗xf3 ♘d4 26.♗xd4 ♖xd4∓ Black would have enjoyed a nominal strategic advantage thanks to his control over the d4-square. White's d3-pawn is backward and blocked, but as long as the blocking piece is a rook and not a knight, White should not be complaining too much. What White should try to do is to push the queenside pawns, at the same time keeping an eye on e6 with his bishop from g4 so that the black knight does not even dream about suddenly hopping to d4. Still, with a3-a4 out of the question for the moment and Black being able to retain the blockade at least for the next ten moves, the position simply has to be assessed as slightly favorable for him.

24...♗xf3 25.♕xf3 exd4

(as opposed to 25...♘xd4 played in the game)

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26.♕xf4 ♘g6 27.♕g3 ♖f8!⇄

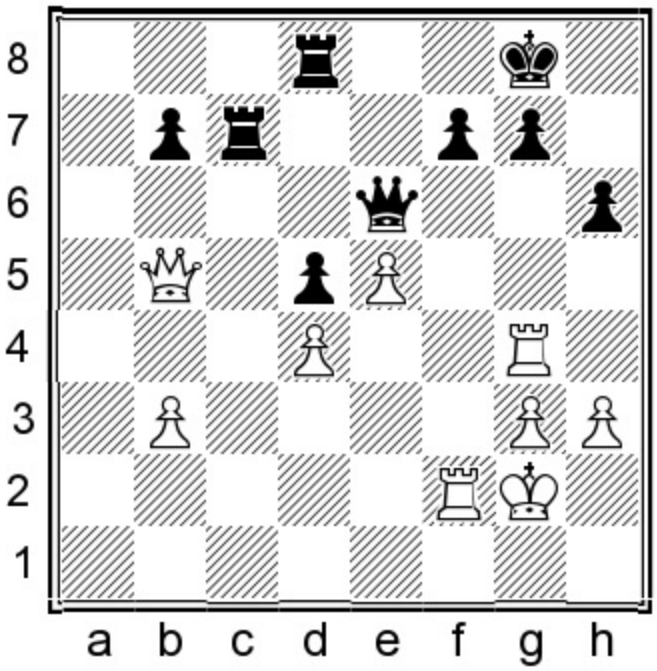


Position after: 27...♖f8!⇄

the dynamic imbalances present in the position cancel each other almost perfectly. White's bishop pair certainly has potential, but for the moment it is securely contained by Black. For the time being, it is actually the black knights that enjoy better prospects (the f4- and e5-squares respectively being available for them), but it is quite difficult to predict in which direction the position is going to escalate. Personally, I would take Black here as the active placement of the knights would simultaneously lead more or less by force to a kingside attack against the white monarch.

10
Tari – Libiszewski
Hockenheim 2018

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■ *37...?*

Show/Hide Solution

10
Tari, Aryan (2614)
Libiszewski, Fabien (2480)
Hockenheim 2018

Weakness
Immobilizing a piece of the opponent

Yet another multi piece endgame, I hear you say. And this might be true at first as not much seems to be happening in this position. Material is equal, the pawn structure is more or less symmetrical with just one exception in White's favor (the e5-pawn granting him more space). There are certainly some tricks to watch out for (♖f2-f6 being the most important threat to spot), but in general White cannot hurt the black king because of the absence of any minor pieces potentially pointing at its position. Further, running away with the king towards the corner, or exchanging the queens in the meantime, neutralizes any of White's ideas. To be honest, even allowing the rook to come to f6 would not have had tragic consequences at all thanks to Black's counterplay potentially generated by ...♖c7-c2+. In this scenario, White may still try his luck, but the drawish result should be constantly within your reach. But what if I told you that you can win as Black?

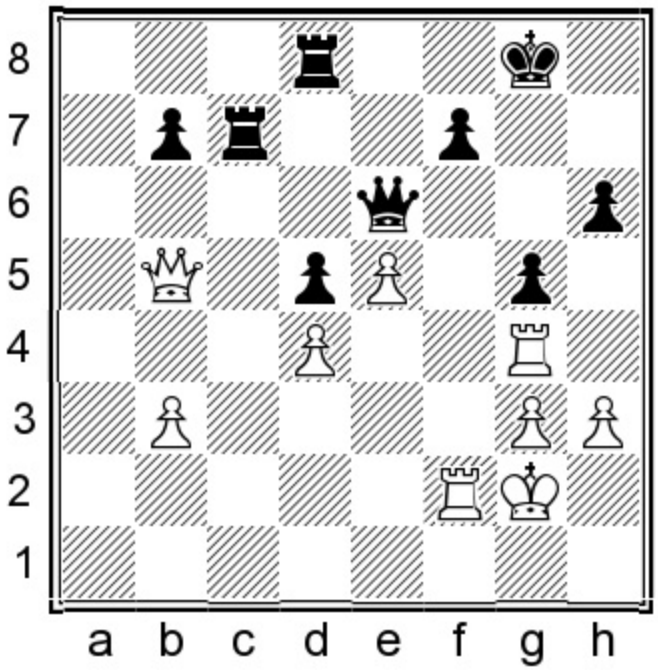
37...g5!

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Surprise, surprise! Initially, it looks as if Black had a death wish by exposing his king so badly, but with the first scary impression fading, it quickly becomes apparent how out of play the g4-rook has become. It cannot move anywhere and attempts to free it by h3-h4 drop the rook. Under these circumstances White is effectively playing without a rook, when the weakening of the black king's pawn shield does not represent even a quantum of solace. Sample lines confirm that White is basically lost by now.

Instead, in the game Black decided in favor of 37...♕c6?! which is not a bad move at all, but only provided that you want a draw. Rook endgames are known to have moderate drawish tendencies, so trading off queens looks like a decent idea at first. Still, chess is not checkers, so in the game White duly avoided the exchange, slowly maneuvering his pieces to better outposts on the kingside: 38.♕d3 ♕c3 39.♕f5 ♕c6 40.h4 ♔h8 41.♕h5 ♔g8 42.♖gf4 ♖dd7 43.♕g4 ♖e7 44.♖f6 ♖e6 45.h5→ when the game is still very much balanced, but it is already White who is (at least optically) pushing. The game got unexpectedly sharp later on with Black blundering at a certain point of time and surrendering as of move 57.

37...g5!



Position after: 37...g5!

38.♖f6

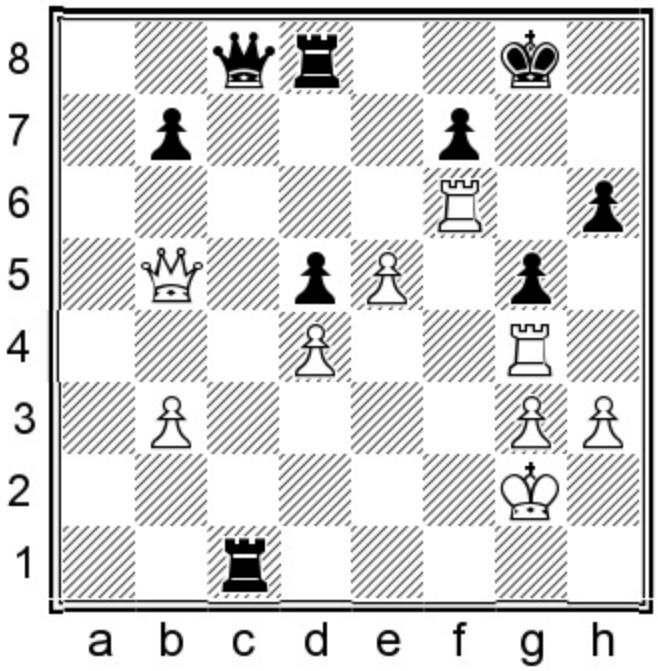
The most challenging response but White should already be aware that with his king restricted to the two first ranks any infiltration along the c-file with more than one black heavy piece might prove to be fatal.

38.♕e2 aiming to protect the g4-rook before helping it escape with h3-h4 deserves attention but fails to work in time as Black will be very quick in activating his rooks along the c-file for the purpose of

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deflecting the white queen: 38...♖dc8 39.h4 ♖c2 40.♕f3 ♖8c3 41.♕f4 Very flashy but after 41...♖xf2+ 42.♔xf2 ♕g6! 43.hxg5 ♕c2+–+ and Black invades the white camp from the rear landing mate in no time.

38...♖c2+ 39.♔g1 ♖c1+ 40.♔g2 ♕c8



Position after: 40...♕c8

Now it becomes very clear that White needs to hold his forces in regard to possible counterplay against the black king as his own monarch might be getting in trouble even faster.

41.♕b6

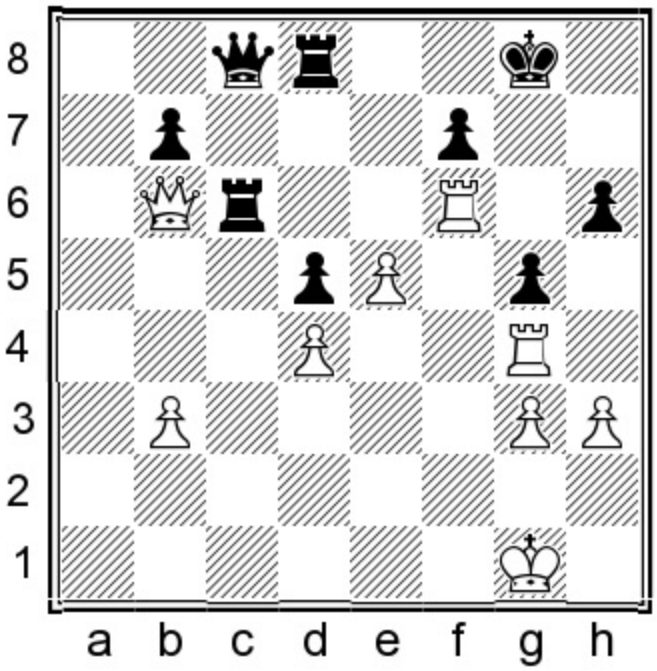
For this reason, 41.♖xh6? loses on the spot after 41...♕c2+ 42.♔f3 ♕c3+ 43.♔f2 ♕e1+ 44.♔f3 ♖c3+ 45.♔g2 ♖c2+–+

41...♖c2+ 42.♔g1

White seems to be holding on for the moment, but there comes

42...♖c6!?

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Position after: 42...♖c6!?

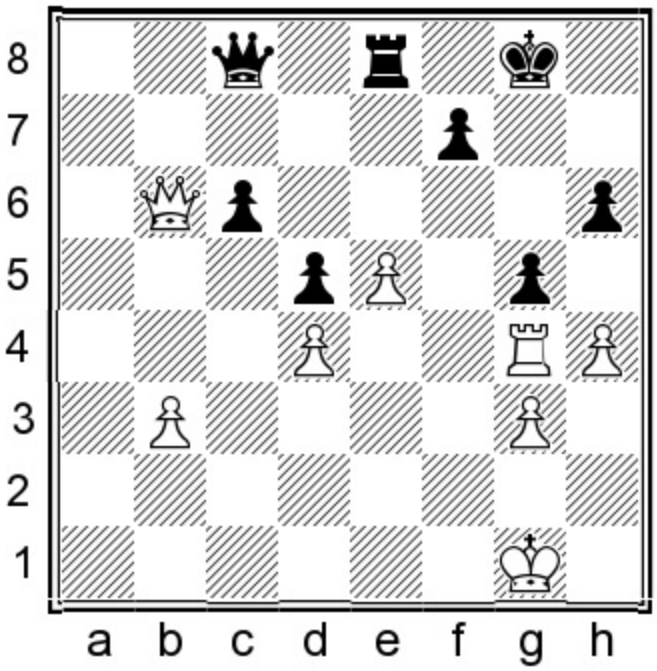
which might indeed not be one of the most impressive moves in the history of chess, but probably one that needs to be rated very highly from the perspective of pragmatism. The idea behind it is clear-cut – exchange all of the pieces of the opponent except for the one which is causing his suffering. If White would be left exclusively with the rook on g4 there would be nothing he could do to free it, you would be cruising, technically speaking, a rook up. Now after something like

43.♖xc6 bxc6 44.h4

is disallowed as after

44...♖e8–+

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Position after: 44...♖e8−+

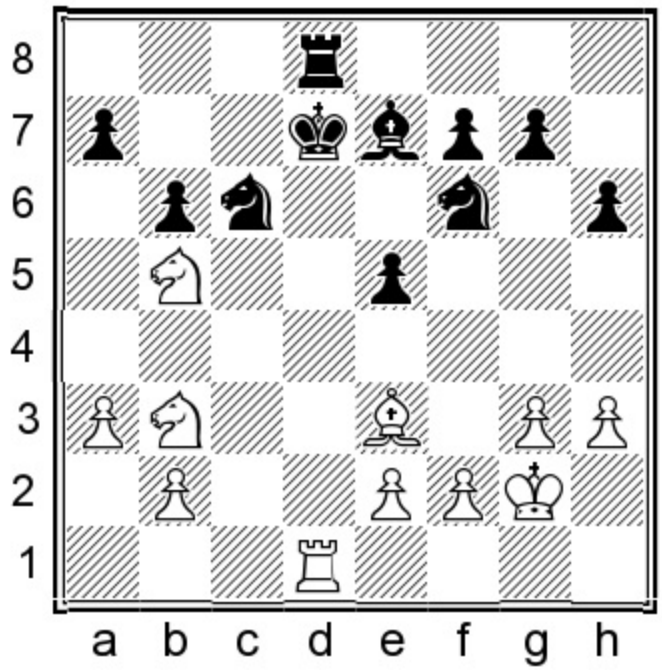
our rook is out of danger and we would be getting the white rook on g4 in a moment.

Unless the idea of exchanging pieces of the opponent in order to increase the strength of your remaining forces against the incapacitated pieces of the opponent is already clear to you, let me explain this differently. Imagine you go to a bar with two friends of yours. Immediately after ordering your mango passion fruit smoothie, you get insulted by some three inebriated regulars and, before you notice it, the party continues outside. Two of them happen to be some beefcakes from the local gym (as are your friends, hopefully for you), but the third guy is a bag of bones who is additionally barely standing due to the increased intake of C2H5OH. What do you do then? You ask your friends to neutralize the big guys, in the meantime taking your anger out on the other poor thing. And who ever said that life does not imitate chess?

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11
Socko – Tomczak
Warsaw 2019



■ *21...?*

Show/Hide Solution

11
Socko, Bartosz (2627)
Tomczak, Jacek (2631)
Warsaw 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Dynamic decision-making (multiple alternatives)

Material is equal, everything seems to be safely covered in Black's camp. It is just a check that needs to be evaded, what could possibly go wrong? After the first few seconds of looking at the board we see that things are not so easy after all as moving to e8 or e6 introduces the possibility for White to push the black monarch even further away from the center, whereas coming back to c8 seems to be

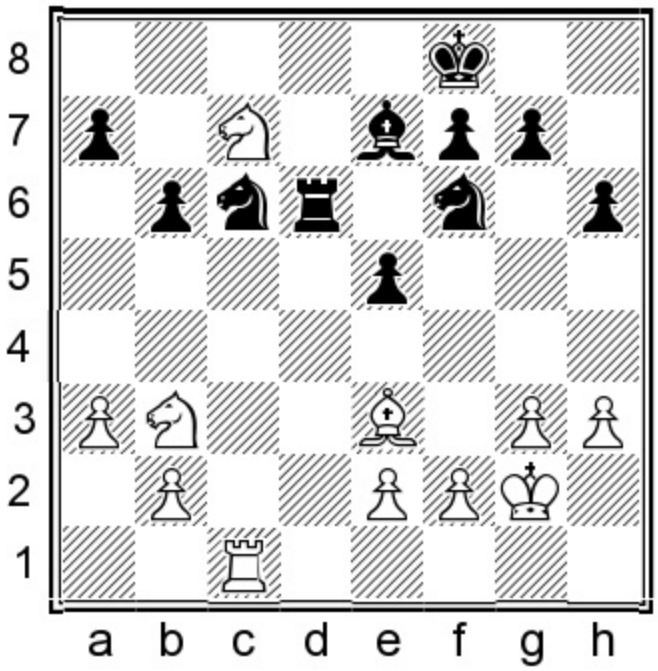
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dropping at least a pawn in numerous ways, notwithstanding Black's response. In particular, the recapture on d8 with the king can be met by the lovely ♘b5xa7! – a motif which is always a pleasure to see in tournament practice. Faced with a choice between losing a pawn and allowing your king to be sent back, what would you do?

21...♔c8!

The only reasonable choice – other options fail due to reasons which are rather unclear at first.

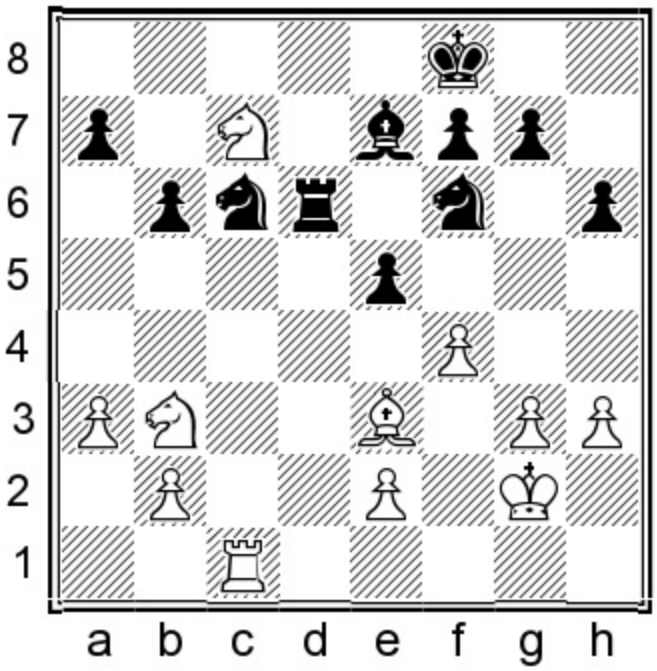
A) 21...♔e8?! brings Black to the edge of defeat after 22.♘c7+ ♔f8 23.♖c1! ♖d6 and now the least expected



Position after: 23...♖d6

24.f4! highlights how thin the thread by which Black is hanging actually is. [24.♘b5 ♖e6 25.♘d2 ♗d8= on the other hand does not yield White anything as Black seems to be defending all sensitive pieces, pawns and squares and the opponent does not therefore have a convincing way of breaking through.] The c6-knight cannot suddenly move because of the fork after fxe5; counter attacking ideas such as ...♘f6-d5 leave the c6-knight en prise. Taking on f4 allows ♗e3xf4, leaving the sole defender of the knight out of options, whilst simply standing still loses to ♘c7-b5 & f4-f5 ideas, virtually catching the black rook on e6! I would not be to judgmental on Black for missing this resource in the game as it must have been difficult for White to find as well. This idea is by no means a typical idea in similar positions. In positions like this, barely nobody goes for ideas such as f2-f4 as they inflict too much damage to White's pawn structure. And, psychologically speaking, how tough did it have to be for Black to spot this from the defender's perspective then? Sample lines confirm that White is close to victory here:

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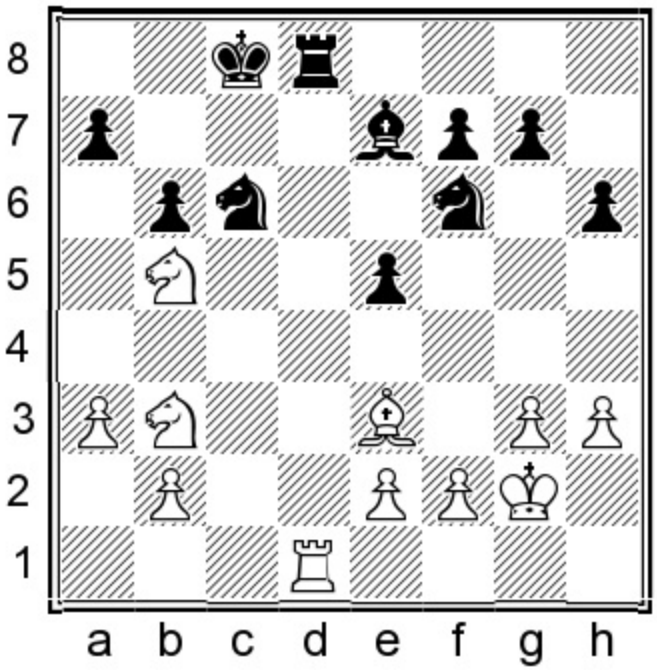
Position after: 24.f4!

24...♘e4 [24...♘e8 25.♘b5 ♖d5 26.a4! highlights the helplessness state of Black's queenside pawn – even an additional tempi does not help after something like 26...exf4 27.gxf4 a6 28.♘c7! ♘xc7 29.♖xc6±; 24...♗d8 25.fxe5 ♘xe5 26.♗f4 ♘fd7 27.♘b5± costs Black a pawn all the same.] 25.fxe5 ♘xe5 26.♘b5 ♖c6 27.♘xa7 ♖xc1 28.♘xc1 ♘c4 29.♗d4± and Black can still try his luck in the ensuing endgame, but with a 2 v. 1 pawn-majority on the queenside and the b6-pawn appearing rather shaky, the endgame would have been rather cheerless for Black.

B) 21...♔e6? would have been even worse as after 22.♘c7+ ♔f5 23.♖c1 ♘b8 24.♘b5 ♘d5 25.♘xa7 ♘xe3+ 26.fxe3+– it is not only that Black is a pawn down, but his pieces are passive, and the king has no apparent way of joining the fight. With no inroads into the white camp Black would have to resort to slow mobilization measures, these being equal to admitting a loss when being down material.

21...♔c8!

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Position after: 21...♔c8!

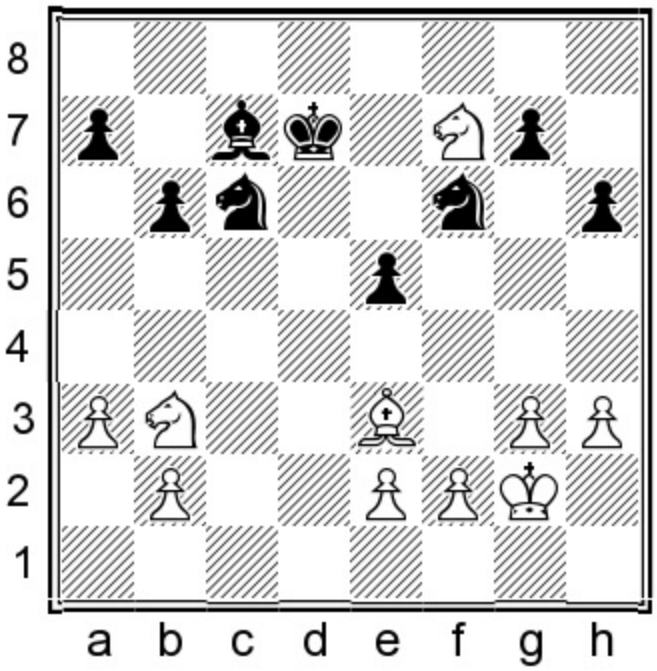
22.♖xd8+ ♗xd8 23.♘d6+

So far, so good. No reason for White to be concerned, everything is going according to plan. The f7-pawn is falling, and the rest of the game should be just a formality...

23...♔d7 24.♘xf7 ♗c7

...should be, but for whom? Only now does it become more and more conspicuous that the white knight on f7 knight might not be enjoying himself deep behind enemy lines.

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Position after: 24...♗c7

Not having a good time is one thing, but what about having to grovel just to stay alive? The reason for this is that the only way for this knight to survive is to go all the way to h8 and stay there while praying for some cavalry to arrive. Sample lines confirm that White either sacrifices this knight for a few pawns and hopes for the best while expecting the worse, or stays on h8 basically giving Black free rein on the queenside with three minor pieces battling it out against the remaining two white ones.

25.♘d2 ♔e6 26.♘h8

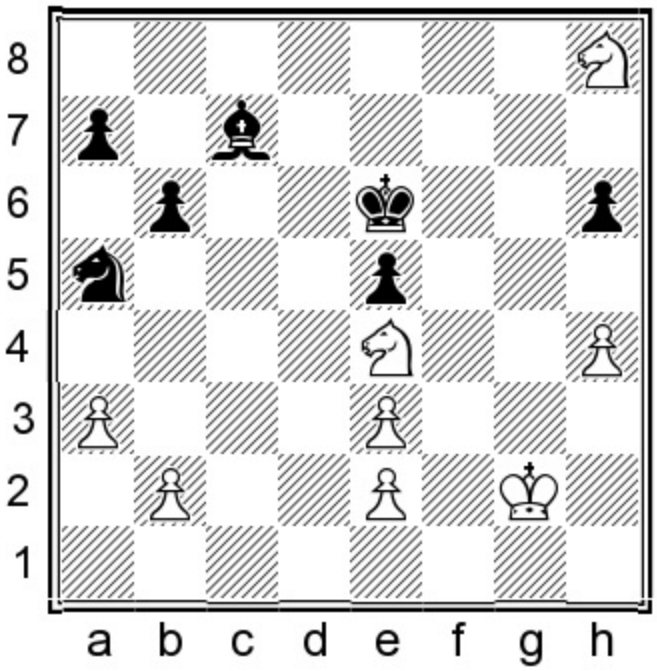
26.♘xh6 gxh6 27.♗xh6 ♘d4∓ would be promising for White was it not for the fact that there is a big chance that Black's pieces are going to reach the white queenside pawns faster than White is able to promote on the kingside.

26...g5 27.h4

and now after the more or less forced

27...♘d5 28.♘e4 ♘xe3+ 29.fxe3 gxh4 30.gxh4 ♘a5∓

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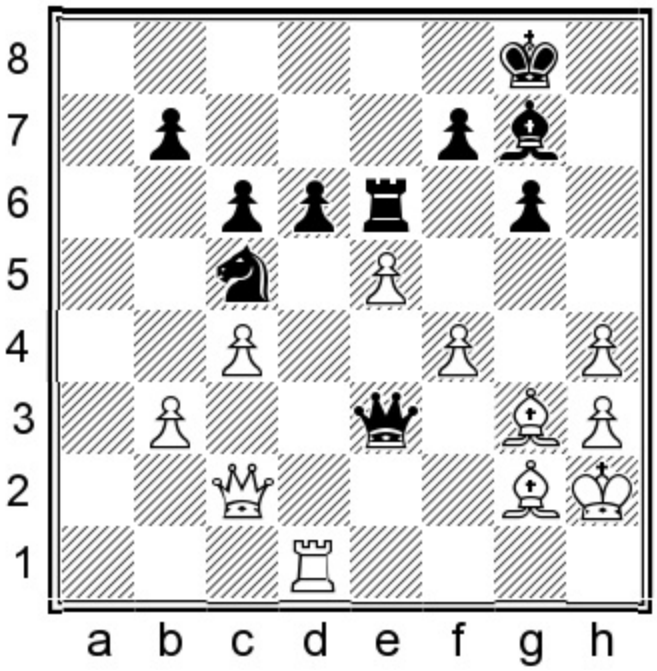


Position after: 30...♘a5∓

the dust settles and it is clear that White not only cannot claim being a full pawn up (the e-pawns are doubled), but in view of ...♘a5-c4 with a double-fork does not make a jolly impression either. In the meantime, the white h8-knight is still gone camping and no supported passed pawn for White is visible on the horizon. Despite being slightly down on material, it is Black who is having more fun here. Could the mistake of 21...♔e8 have been avoided? Yes, certainly. It would be easiest to state now that Black should have not favored material over coordination, and everything would have been fine in the end. But in my opinion, Black must have rejected 21...♔c8 at the mere sight of the f7-pawn falling, without even trying to evaluate what he would be doing in such a scenario afterwards. In other words, he saw that he was dropping a pawn and stopped his calculations right there. Because of this, in his tree of variations, this line must have been considered as poisonous fruit, leading ultimately to a loss. If he had only made one more move afterwards the chances that he would have grasped the concept of fighting against the stranded white knight would have increased severely. For this reason, whenever you are about to reject a line due to material losses at its end, please calculate 1 – 2 moves ahead, just to make sure that the material deficit in fact affects the assessment of the position negatively. In approximately 80% of the cases this will be true but statistically in every fifth game of yours, a pleasant surprise might be awaiting you.

12
Kobo – Tukhaev
St Petersburg 2018

chesstouring.com



■ *28...?*

Show/Hide Solution

12
Kobo, Ori (2494)
Tukhaev, Adam (2527)
St Petersburg 2018

Attack & Defense
Counterattack as a defensive measure

Black is slightly down on material here, but this is by no means his biggest concern. What would worry me a bit more is the pressure exerted against the d6-pawn by White. You leave it as it is, you drop it; but if you take on e5, you allow the white rook to infiltrate along the back rank with unforeseeable, yet definitely negative consequences. The choice Black is facing is indeed difficult as there does not seem to be any in-between solution available. In the meantime, he does not seem to have enough time to get away with capturing on b3. Is all hope gone for Black?

28...♗h6!

Absolutely not! In positions in which 'normal' measures fail, usually the only thing left for the defender is to resort to complications or something we call 'active defense'. Here it is very clear that Black's only chance consists of creating counterplay against the white king before White obtains anything tangible along the d-file. In other words, Black defends without defending but rather by

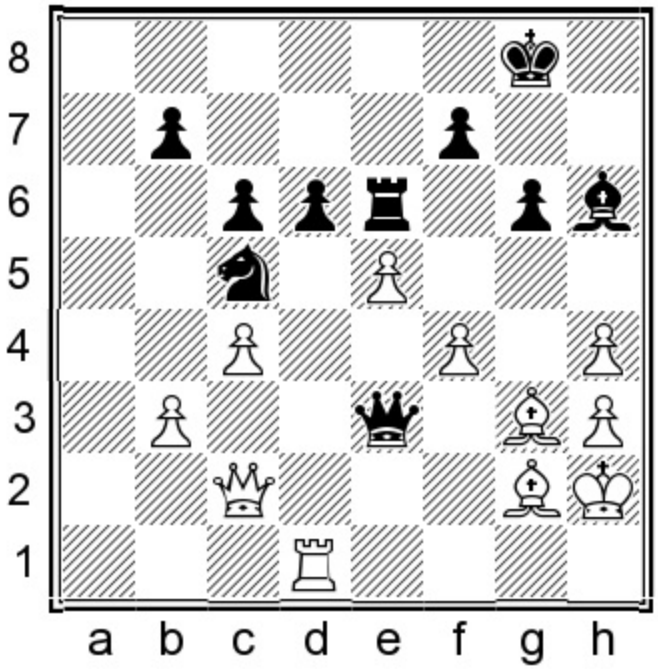
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fighting back actively and attacking White's weakest spot – the dark squares of the kingside.

A) The game saw 28...dxe5?! but now after 29.f5! gxf5 30.♕xf5 ♕h6 31.♖d8+ ♗f8 32.b4 ♘a6 33.h5! ♘xb4 34.♗xe5+– the threat of ♕f5-g4+ followed by ♗g2-e4+ would have been decisive. By playing 29.f4-f5 White ensured that Black would end up defenseless along the light squares.

B) Even worse would have been 28...♕xb3? as after 29.♕xb3 ♘xb3 30.exd6 ♗f6 31.♗f2! ♗d8 32.♗f3 ♔f8 33.c5+– Black would not be capable of holding this position for too long as White's d6-pawn represents a strong and constant nuisance for Black. On top of that, it cannot be excluded that White would soon direct his efforts against the stranded b3-knight or the rather loose b7-pawn. Black is lost in the long run and there is nothing he can do about it.

28...♗h6!



Position after: 28...♗h6!

29.f5

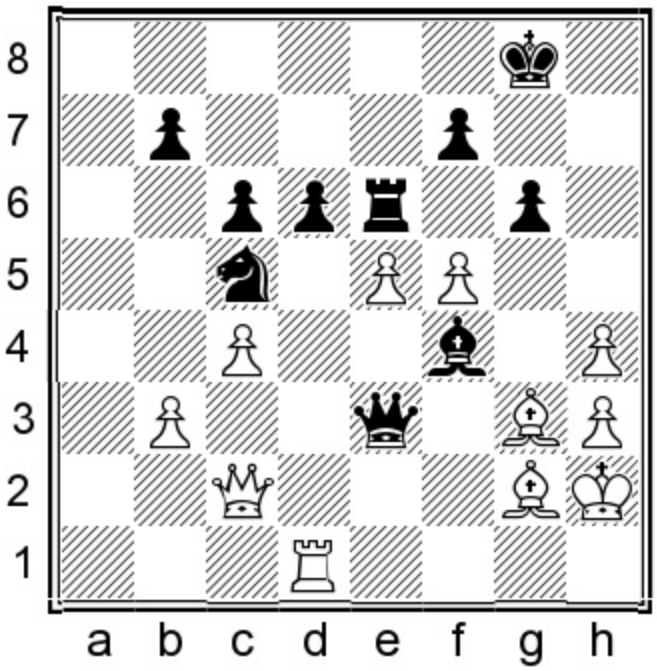
White's best practical chance, other moves are either too slow or let Black bail out towards equality.

A) 29.♖e1 ♕xb3 30.♕xb3 ♘xb3 31.f5!? gxf5 32.exd6 ♔f8= allows Black's king to stop the advanced d6-pawn just in time.

B) 29.exd6? even leads to a close to lost position after 29...♗xf4 30.♗xf4 ♕xf4+ 31.♔h1 ♖xd6∓ when despite material equality and notwithstanding whether White exchanges the rooks on d6, White would be struggling in this 'bad' bishop versus 'good' knight scenario.

29...♗f4!

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Position after: 29...♗f4!

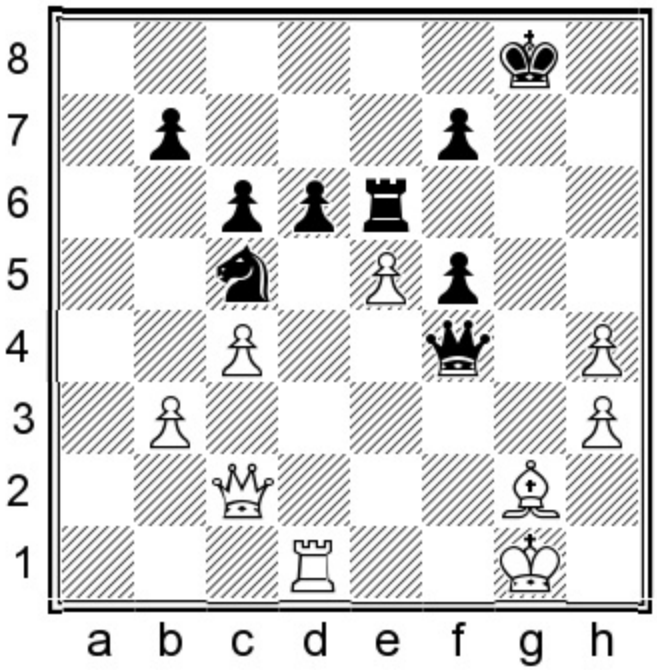
Again, not paying attention to the threats of the opponent! If Black wants to survive, instead of doing something against White's actions, he needs to create a game of his own.

30.♗xf4

30.fxe6? wins material but after 30...♕xg3+ 31.♔g1 ♘xe6 32.exd6 ♗xd6∓ leads to a position in which Black controls the entirety of dark squares in the center and on the kingside. White's pieces seem to be quite useless out here as they are mostly light square oriented. White's demise is furthermore hastened by the fact that in many variations it is his king that is getting into trouble. There is no hope for White left here as not even a defensive exchange sacrifice would have repelled Black's attacking initiative.

30...♕xf4+ 31.♔g1 gxf5

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Position after: 31...gxf5

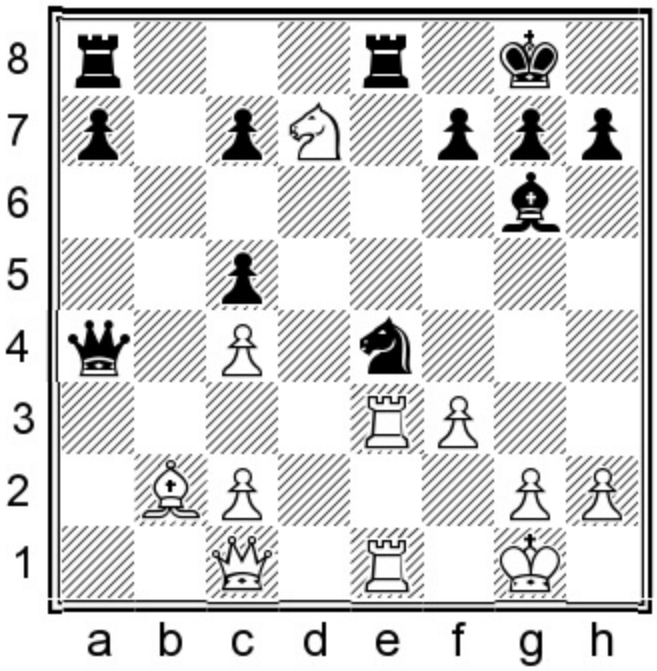
but now after

32.exd6 ♖xd6 33.♖xd6 ♕xd6 34.♕xf5 ♕d4+=

it would have been in the best interest of both players to call it a day by means of a possible perpetual check. Modern chess theory emphasizes the superiority of active defense over passive defensive resources. The reason for this is that by defending all the time against the attacking efforts of the opponent we are simply reacting while the attacker is pursuing his plans. Our rival comes closer and closer to achieving his goals, but we are standing still even if we happen to be making the best defensive moves all the time. In such a turn of events, sooner or later our position has to crumble out of inertia. Because of this, if you have a choice between passive and active defending, both of those solutions being either axiologically indifferent (equal) or unclear in your view, you are well advised to resort to the latter.

13
Savchenko – Jakovenko
St Petersburg 2018

chesstouring.com



□ *22.?*

Show/Hide Solution

13
Savchenko, Boris (2562)
Jakovenko, Dmitry (2735)
St Petersburg 2018

Coordination
Dynamic coordination (putting a piece en prise)

White's position does not look that rosy at all at first sight. He is a pawn down and his d7-knight is en prise. A quantum of solace is certainly provided by the pin along the e-file along with an endangered black knight, but no further signs of optimism seem to be there on the horizon. What is even worse, White cannot save his own knight without letting go of the treat on e4. As the black knight can retreat to d6 in case of need, Black seems to be surprisingly well coordinated. One thing is clear either White pulls off something really extraordinary here or he will be slowly outplayed by an opponent enjoying not only a material edge, but also possibilities to collect more queenside pawns along the way rather easily.

22.♕d2!!

There are moves for which the limitation up to two exclamation marks at a time amounts to discrimination – this is exactly one of them. Not only is it a logical (defending the d7-knight) and an

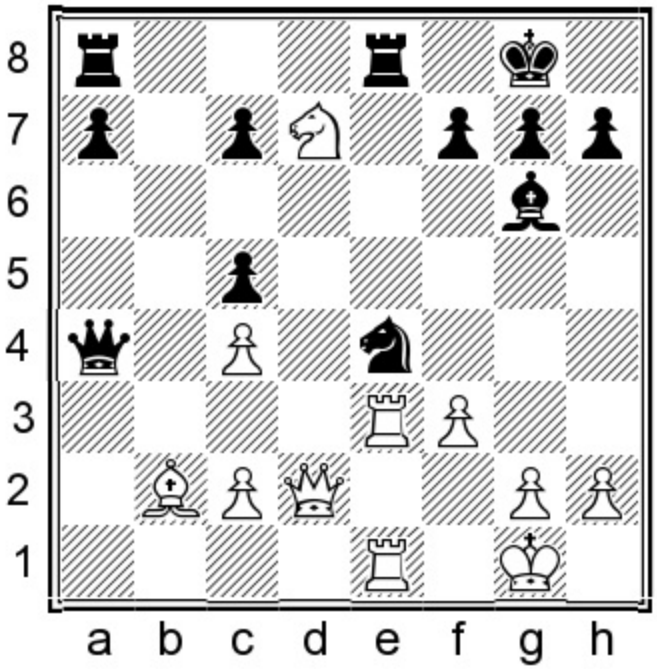
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invisible move (our minds tend to reject such ideas upfront as ‘the queen is hanging’) at the same time. What is more, if Black does nothing, the same queen is going to be transferred quickly to c3 creating mating threats along the long dark diagonal. The position of the black king looked very solid at first but from now on the game could abruptly become a have become a contest for its life!

A) The game saw the inferior 22.♘e5?! when after 22...♘d6 it immediately became painfully clear that White can only postpone the inevitable loss of the pawns on c2 and c4. The game continued 23.♖1e2 f6 24.♖a3 ♕b4 25.♖b3 ♕a5 26.♘c6 ♕a4 27.♘e7+ ♔f7 with 28.♕e1? being the final nail to White’s coffin after the simple 28...♘xc4–+. White is not only two pawns down but cannot really count on any tricks either.

B) 22.♖xe4?! is tempting as this way White could try to eliminate the last defender of the dark squares in the neighborhood of the black king. The problem is that Black can still play it safe with 22...♕xd7 when after something like 23.♖xe8+ ♖xe8 24.♖xe8+ ♕xe8 25.♕a1 f6 26.h3 ♕b8∓ White would have had a tough time trying to prove that the additional a-pawn of the opponent means nothing in an opposite-colored bishop endgame.

22.♕d2!!



Position after: 22.♕d2!!

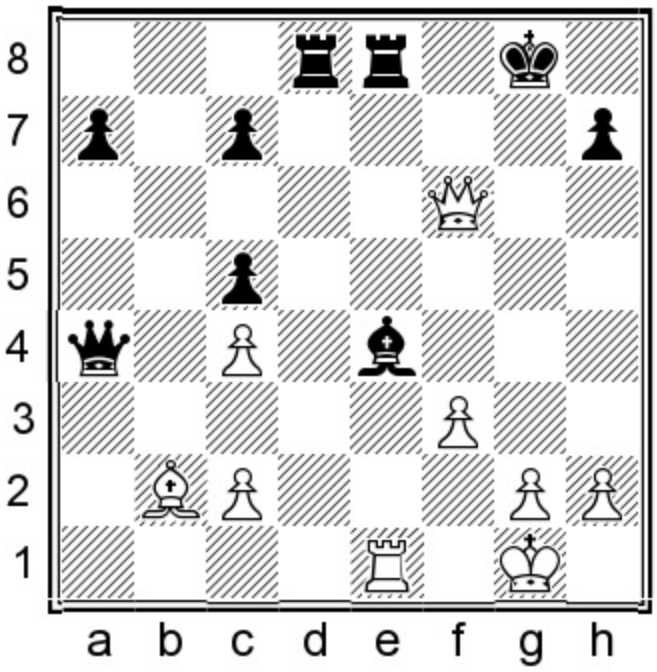
22...♘f6

Ugly but is in fact Black’s best practical try since with some pieces traded off the board at least the black monarch is going to feel slightly more secure.

22...♖ad8 is met by 23.♖xe4! ♗xe4 24.♕c3 f6 25.♘xf6+! (the key move; Black is defenseless along the dark squares exactly because White has been going to great lengths eliminating their defenders

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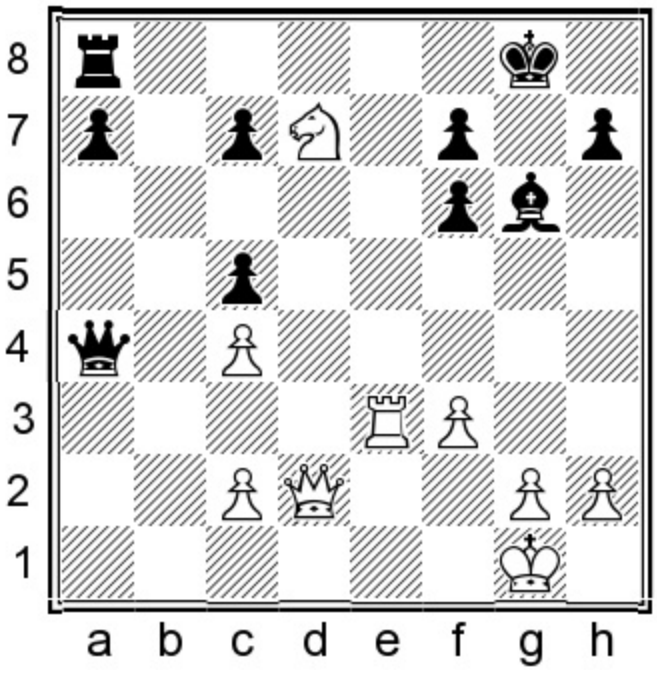
one after the other) 25...gxf6 26.♕xf6



Position after: 26.♕xf6

when Black can prevent mate along the dark squares only by sacrificing all the material he has been consuming so far. However, this approach still results in a loss at the end of the day after 26...♖d4 27.fxe4 ♕xc4 28.♕g5+ ♔f7 29.♕f4+ ♔g8 30.♕g3+ ♔h8 31.♕xc7+– White will eventually take on d4 but before this happens he will surely try to snatch yet another pawn on a7.

23.♗xf6 ♖xe3 24.♖xe3 gxf6



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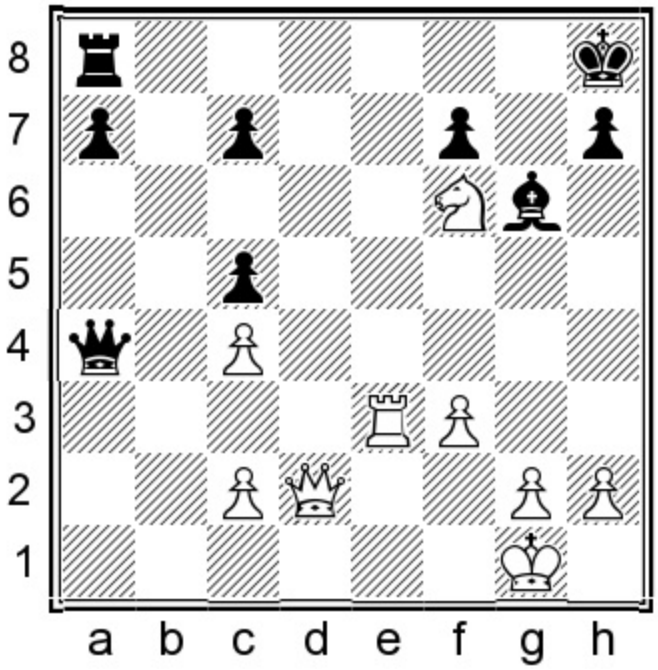
Position after: 24...gxf6

Black manages to reduce White's attacking potential a little bit without even dropping an exchange in the process. However, in a moment White is going to take on f6 with a check and then aim to set up a powerful battery along the long dark diagonal. As a side note in such positions the light-squared bishop of Black often proves to be a non-existent piece. It stays close to the king but is in general rather useless as the main part of the battle takes place almost exclusively along the dark squares.

25.♘xf6+ ♔h8

Realistically speaking this is the only move that allows Black to continue playing on. Still, with the king left on h8, additional motifs pertaining to the back rank suddenly start to appear on the board.

25...♔g7? is typically bad as after 26.♕c3+– discovered double checks from e8 or h5 come exactly with double as much power.



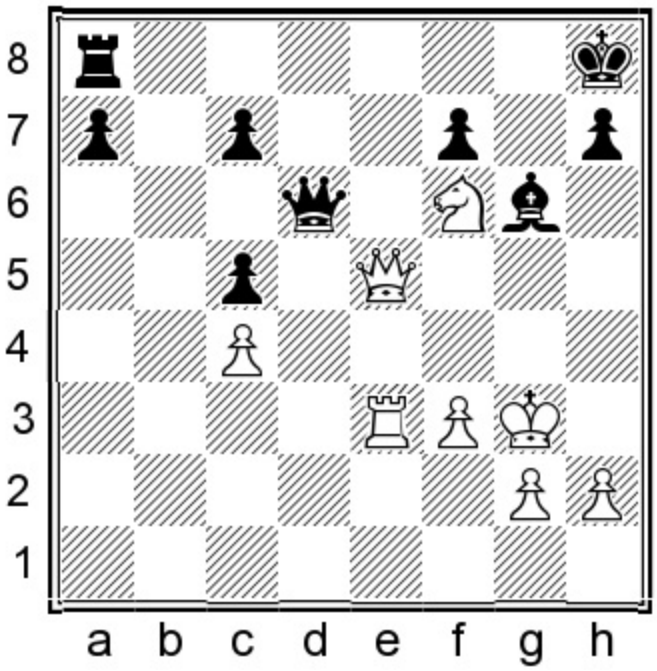
Position after: 25...♔h8

26.♕d5!!

One exclamation mark for the objective strength of this move, the second one for resisting the urge to create a battery along the a1-h8 diagonal at once. Although tempting, the mentioned idea does not work here because White will never get a spare second without having have to fear that his queen is going to be swapped earlier. At the same time, the queen on d5 creates problems for Black with the a8-rook and may even contribute to transferring the queen ultimately to e5, that is a much better square from the perspective of 'firing the gun' on f6.

26.♕c3? leads only to approximate equality after 26...♕xc2 27.♕e5 ♕d1+ 28.♔f2 ♕d2+ 29.♔g3 ♕d6=

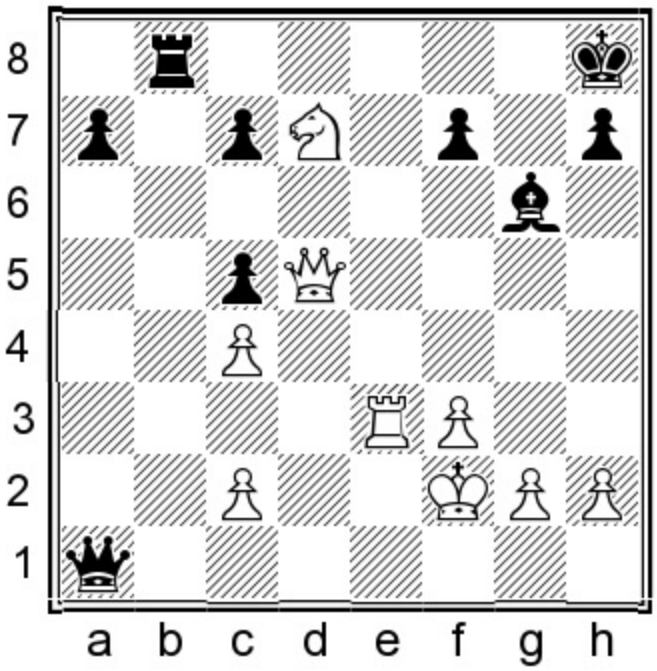
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Position after: 29...♕d6=

and with the queens exchanged, White would not only have to stop dreaming about mating the enemy king but would also need to start worrying about how to prevent the black a-pawn from going forward.

26...♕a1+ 27.♔f2 ♖b8 28.♘d7



Position after: 28.♘d7

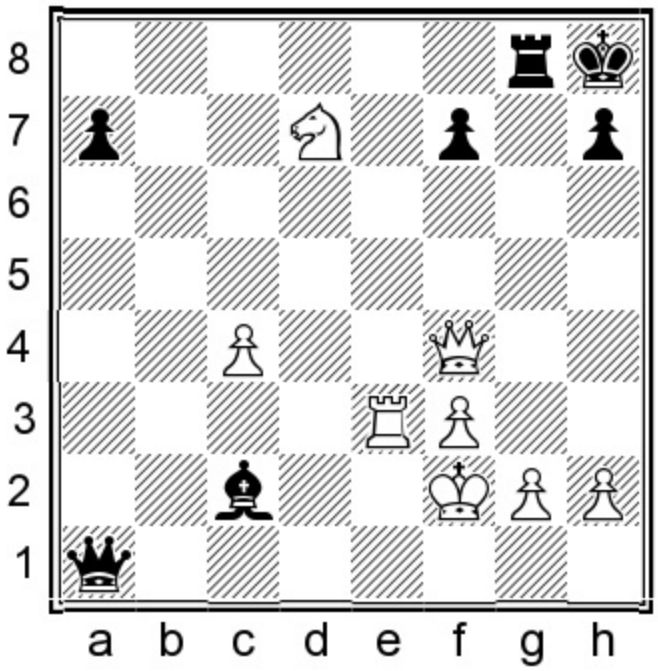
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Suddenly, Black realizes that his rook is running out of decent squares to go to. Leaving the eighth rank would be more or less suicidal but temporizing by staying there is no tangible solution either.

28...♖d8 29.♕xc5 ♗xc2

The knight was obviously taboo because of mate on f8.

30.♕xc7 ♖g8 31.♕f4+–

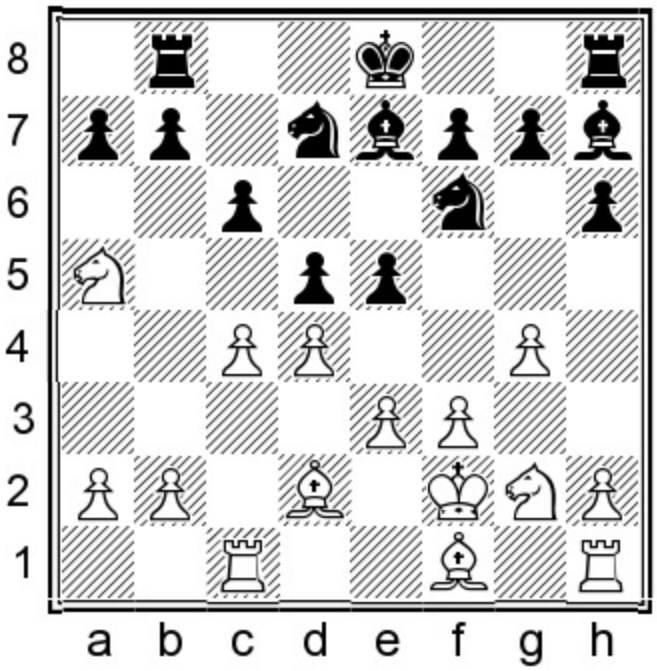


Position after: 31.♕f4+–

A pawn up, a free c-pawn potentially marching towards promotion as well as a still dangerous ♕&♘ duo waiting to create some threats against the opponent's king gives White every reason to anticipate a happy end coming here soon.

14
Zatonskih – Nguyen
Saint Louis 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *16.?*

Show/Hide Solution

14
Zatonskih, Anna (2430)
Nguyen, Emily (2143)
Saint Louis 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Consequences of massive structural transformations

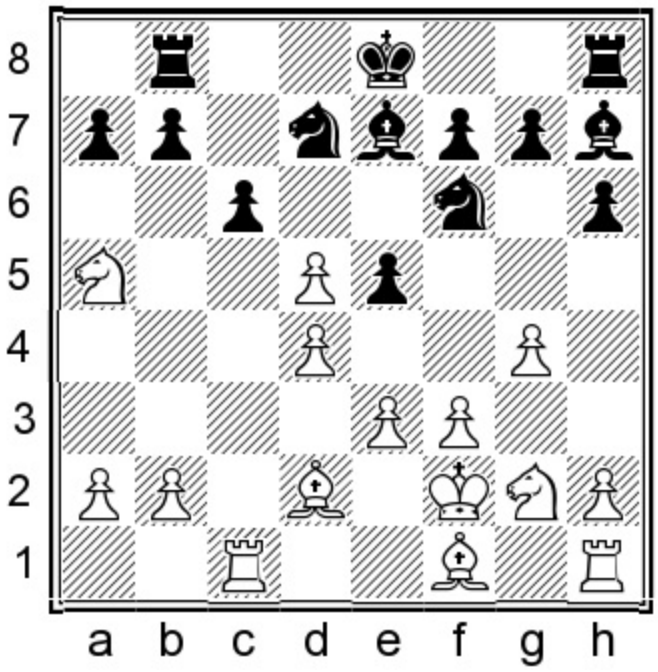
This position arose from the Slav Defense and Black has just lashed out with ...e6-e5. Such pawn levers can prove to be very double edged in closed openings as they contribute to play becoming much more open (and therefore sharper) than before. At the same time, if Black wants to make sure that it is the right time for such measures he needs to make sure that his piece coordination is optimal (and will be such also when the center opens up!), and that the opponent will not be enjoying the same perks. Here neither of the players can be particularly fond of the organization of their forces for the moment. Massive exchanges in the center could potentially lead to an unfavorable IQP setup for White, whereas Black is still complaining about the placement of her b8 rook being stuck defending a very important pawn on b7. Luckily for White, it is her move now and she furthermore has a chance to transform the position in the center advantageously. The only real question is central pawn to capture first?

16.dxe5

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The need to liquidate the center is rather apparent. The only question is how to do it properly. In other words, both 16.dxe5 and 16.exd5 looked fine but as we shall witness in a second there is a subtle yet significant difference between them.

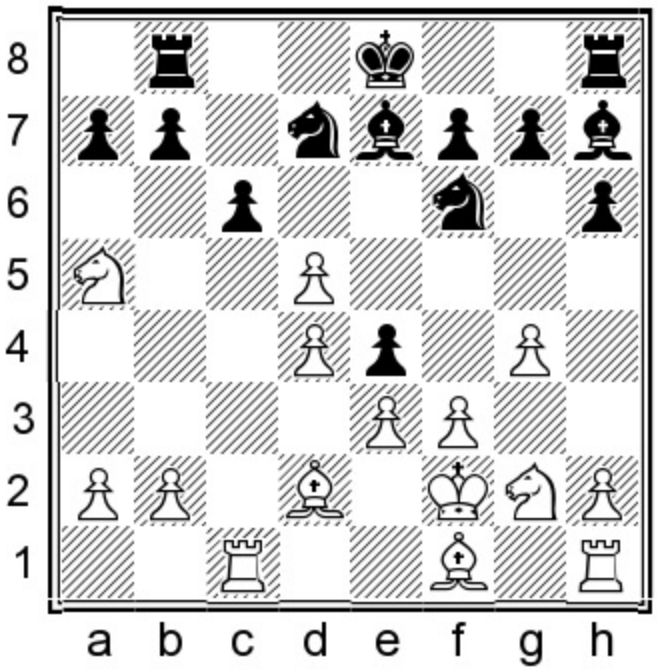
16.cxd5?!



Position after: 16.cxd5?!

While this looks more encouraging optically, taking back with the pawn leads to dramatic consequences so the natural response would have been to recapture with the knight thus making White's idea of e3-e4 more effective. What the human eye is prone to overlook however is 16...e4!! [But not with the game move 16...♘xd5?! when after 17.e4 ♘5b6 18.dxe5 ♘xe5 19.♗e2 0-0 20.♖hd1 ♖fd8 21.♗f4 f6 22.♘e3± White could have obtained everything she could have ever imagined in this position. The black b8 rook is pinned to the defense of the b7-pawn and this circumstance can even result in Black losing the upcoming battle for the d-file. The e5-knight is also pinned, whilst the h7-bishop still needs to be included into play and the only way to do so takes time (...♔g8-f8 followed by ...♗h7-g8) which allows White to jump to f5 rather annoyingly with the knight. With no active ideas at her disposal, Black would have had to sadly resort to passively defending for a longer period of time.] A bolt from the clear blue sky! Leaving the c6-pawn en prise looks suicidal but this is also exactly why this idea is so hard to spot. The truth is that what matters more than material or integrity of the pawn structure is control over the kingside and center exerted strongly by Black in a few moves from now. Only now does it become more or less visible that White's g2-knight is terrible and the f3-g4 pawn chain quite shaky. With full control over e4, Black could even try to make the opponent's monarch uncomfortable in the long run. Sample lines seem to confirm the above:

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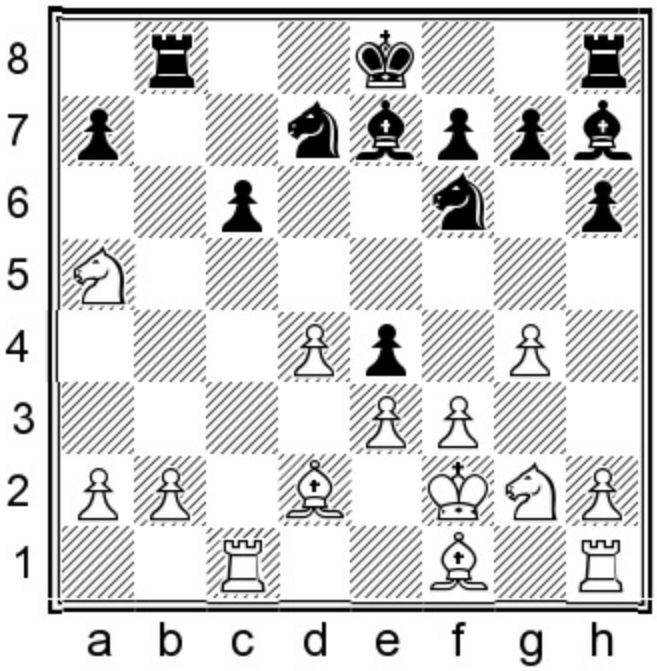


Position after: 16...e4!!

A) 17.♗e2?! trying to retain control over the center and the kingside is countered by 17...exf3 18.♗xf3 ♘e4+!? 19.♗xe4 ♗xe4 20.dxc6 bxc6 when after 21.b3 ♖b6!∓ White is worse despite the slight material edge and apparent structural superiority. The reason for this is that Black's light-squared bishop is a monster on e4, both defending the c6-pawn and exerting unpleasant pressure against White's kingside setup. What is more, right after castling Black will go ...c6-c5, virtually getting rid of the backward pawn, but more importantly shifting the rook swiftly to f6, when the white king is suddenly in danger.

B) 17.dxc6 bxc6

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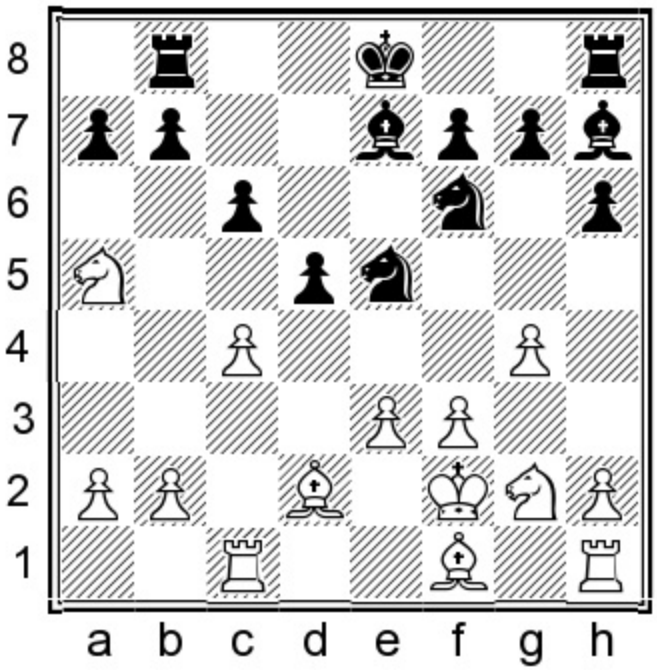


Position after: 17...bxc6

Here the computer says that the only way for White to continue playing this position on equal terms is to sacrifice material to maintain the closed character of the position which would give her chances to finish the development of the kingside, e.g. 18.f4!? [18.b3 does not lead to anything pleasant either as after 18...exf3 19.♔xf3 ♗a3! 20.♖a1 ♗e4+ 21.♔e2 ♗d6⩱ it is very difficult to indicate how White would be able to develop his kingside pieces.] 18...♖xb2 19.♘c4 ♖xa2 20.♗e2 ♘b6 21.♖hd1 0-0 22.♘e5 ♘fd5 23.♘xc6 ♗d6=

16.dxe5 ♘xe5

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Position after: 16...♘xe5

17.♗c3!

An important intermediate move. It is better to invite Black to take on c4 instead of capturing on d5 as the latter would amount to introducing Black's f6 knight into play with a tempo.

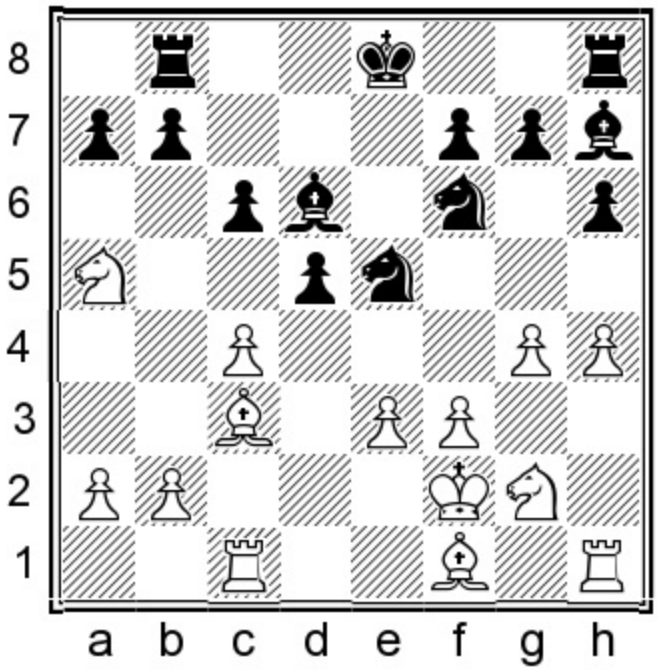
17.cxd5?! would have been comparably weaker as after 17...♘xd5 18.♘c4 ♘xc4 19.♗xc4 ♘b6 20.♗b3 ♗f6= Black would have had no issues with the coordination of her forces whatsoever. The dark-squared bishops are going to be traded off any moment now and the black king does not even have to castle then to connect the rooks. Most importantly however, Black's b8-rook would be free to go fight for the open d-file with White's chances for a stable edge belonging rather to the past.

17...♘xc4

When under pressure, exchanging pieces usually helps reduce the tension and therefore represents a wise idea for the defender in general. Here however, even with the center disappearing completely Black is still going to be subjected to a squeeze inflicted upon her by White on the kingside.

17...♗d6 stumbles after 18.h4!

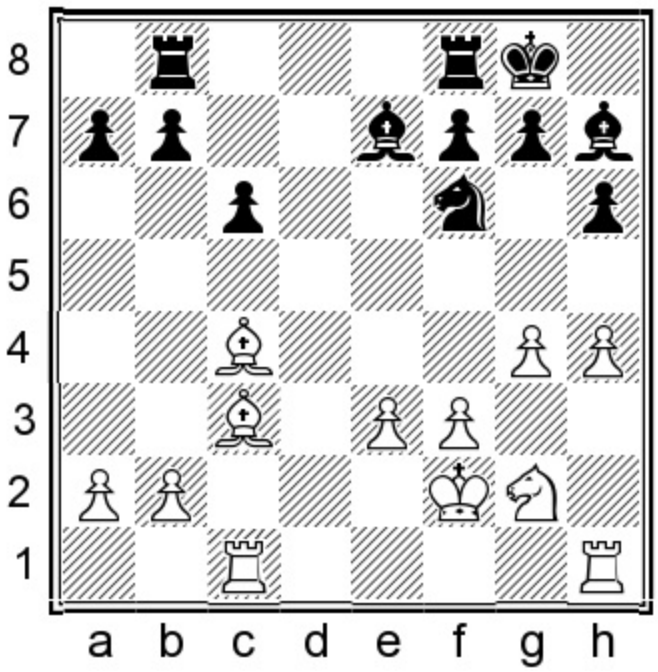
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Position after: 18.h4!

when it quickly becomes clear that Black is not able to finish development without having have to face g4-g5. If this happens White would then be able to inflict damage to Black's pawn structure, mainly by creating a weak IQP on d5. Black can obviously react ambitiously with 18...g5 which leaves Black badly overextended after something like 19.cxd5 ♘xd5 20.♗d4 ♗c7 21.hxg5 hxg5 22.♘c4 f6 23.♖h5!± and with an exchange on e5 coming, how would she defend the g5-pawn?

18.♘xc4 dxc4 19.♗xc4 0-0 20.h4!±

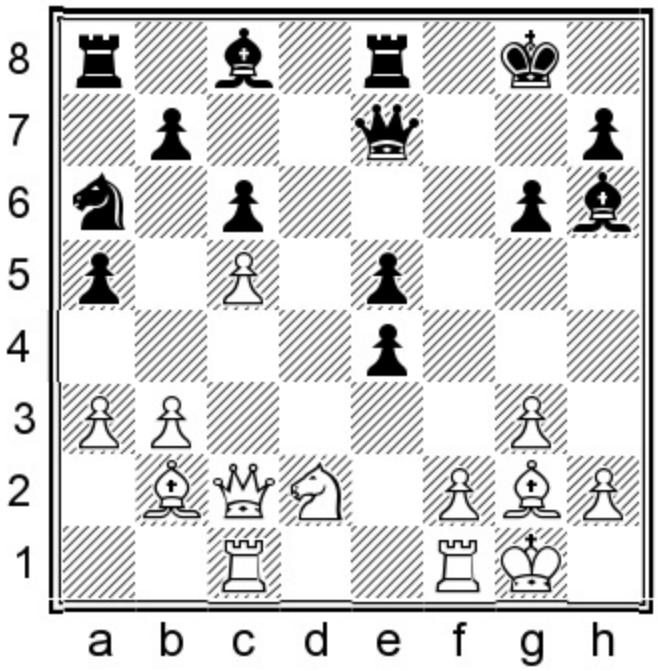


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Position after: 20.h4!±

with g4-g5 to come and a positional initiative for White. This position is actually more unpleasant for Black than it looks once the pawn reaches g5 ideas like ♘g2-f4 followed by g5-g6 actualize themselves. White can also think about bringing the knight to f4 first and only then pushing the g-pawn. In the meantime, Black cannot even block the a2-g8 diagonal by hopping with the knight to d5 because this way she would have been inevitably losing a pawn. White's advantage is surely not yet decisive, but I would simply rather not be Black here.

15
Ushenina – Loew
Porto Mannu 2019



□ *18.?*

Show/Hide Solution

15
Ushenina, Anna (2442)
Loew, Gerald (2163)
Porto Mannu 2019

Weakness

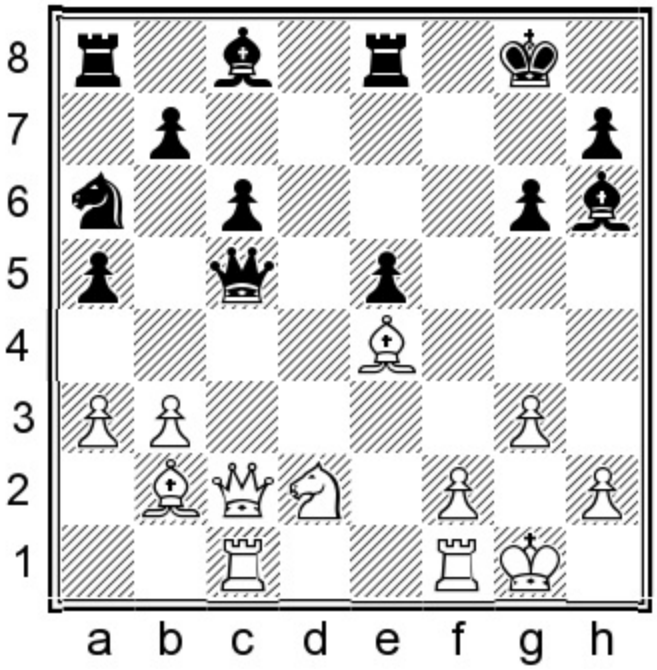
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What we have in front of us is a typical position from the Leningrad Dutch. White has just temporarily sacrificed a pawn on e4 and is on the verge of recapturing it. The biggest perk thereof is not only the damage done to Black's central pawn structure (the e5-pawn will from now on be a rather weak IQP), but rather the possibility to establish a magnificent blockading piece on e4 serving as a catalyst for White's active actions on both wings as the game continues. In a perfect world, the d2 knight would have been a strong candidate to occupy the said square, but it is pinned for the moment. Should we take with the bishop instead?

18.♘xe4!

No, no and once again no! This is surely not a perfect world but establishing such a dominant knight on e4 is a perfect bargain, even if the price to pay therefor is a whole exchange. The difficulty in playing similar moves lies typically in the psychological sphere as we are sacrificing an exchange 'here and now' whereas the threats created by the omnipotent knight and the dark-squared bishop might take place only 'in the future'. In reality however, this delayed gratification as I call all the white activity Black will have to soon endure should be kicking in in a jiffy.

Quite unbelievably in the game, the former world champion played 18.♗xe4?! which could have been countered by Black with the clever 18...♕xc5!



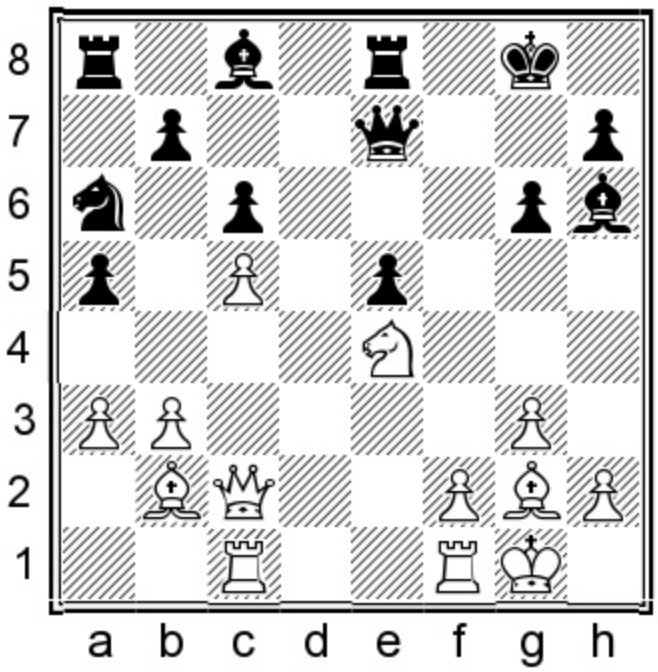
Position after: 18...♕xc5!

when Black is not only still a pawn up, but the exchange of queens could not be avoided by White in a reasonable manner. Now, after the forced sequence of 19.♕xc5 ♘xc5 20.♖xc5 ♗xd2 21.♖xe5 ♗e6∓ we arrive at a position in which only Black could possibly be better. The reason for this is that Black possesses a 3 v. 2 pawn-majority on the queenside which he will find quite simple to activate. At the

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same time, the white queenside pawns have already been significantly weakened while her other forces are still far from being perfectly coordinated. In the meantime, White is unable to make use of the slightly exposed position of the black king as the queens are long gone and the only diagonal along which White could try to hurt the opponent now (the a2-g8 diagonal) is under Black's full command. At the end of the day, White's position may be holdable, but definitely no pleasure to defend.

18.♘xe4!



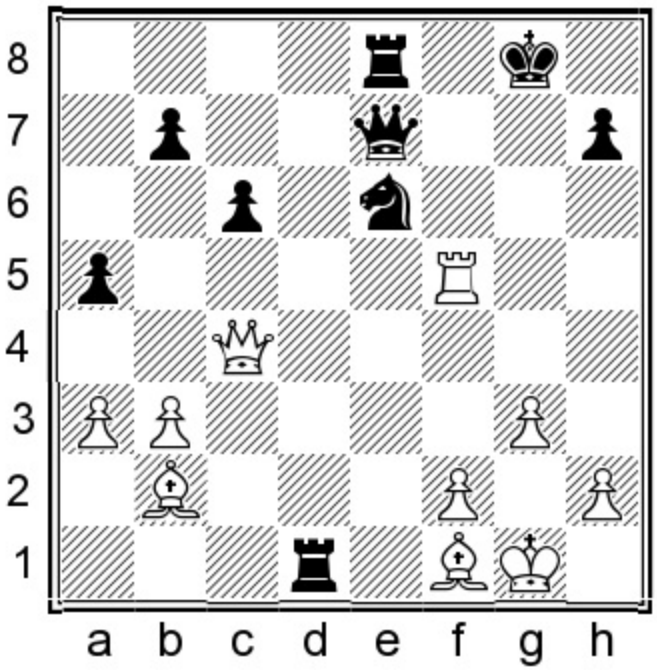
Position after: 18.♘xe4!

18...♗f5

This is Black's most resolute defensive attempt in my opinion. Instead of taking on c1 immediately, Black first pins the white e4-knight. If White stretches it and stays with the rook on c1 for far too long only then would Black take the rook, followed by another exchange on e4 as a means of reducing White's attacking limit.

The immediate 18...♗xc1 would have been hazardous for Black as afterwards he would have been suffering very badly due to the weakness of the dark squares in close proximity of his monarch. e.g. 19.♕xc1 ♗f5 20.♘d6 ♖ed8 21.♖e1 and in view of the inevitable ♖e1xe5 not even tricks can help Black as after 21...♘xc5 22.♘xf5 gxf5 23.♕c4+ ♘e6 24.♖xe5 ♖d1+ 25.♗f1 ♖e8 26.♖xf5+–

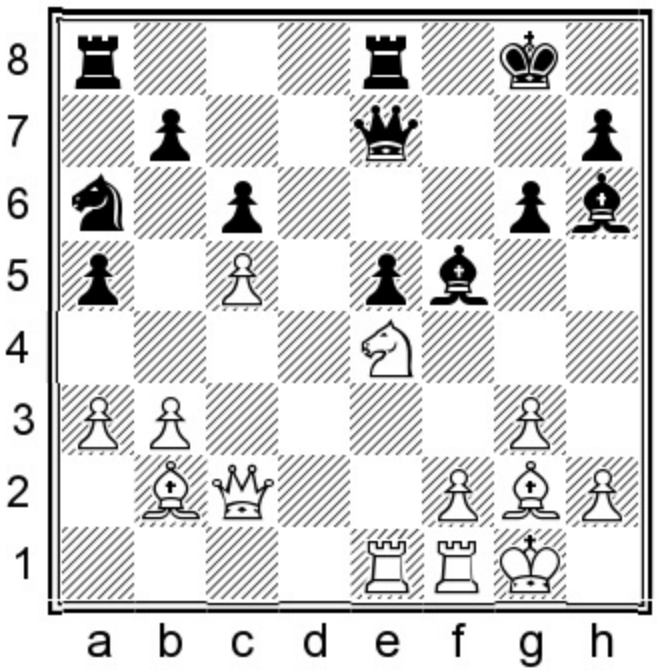
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Position after: 26.♖xf5+−

in view of threats like ♕c4-g4+, Black would be forced to retreat his rook from d1. However, should this take place White's light-squared bishop would then be free to go to c4, with Black going down in flames along two diagonals of different color at the same time. This position confirms an old truth about chess, namely that if you are weak along the squares of one color, you will sooner or later start suffering also from problems pertaining to the squares belonging to the other color complex.

19.♖ce1



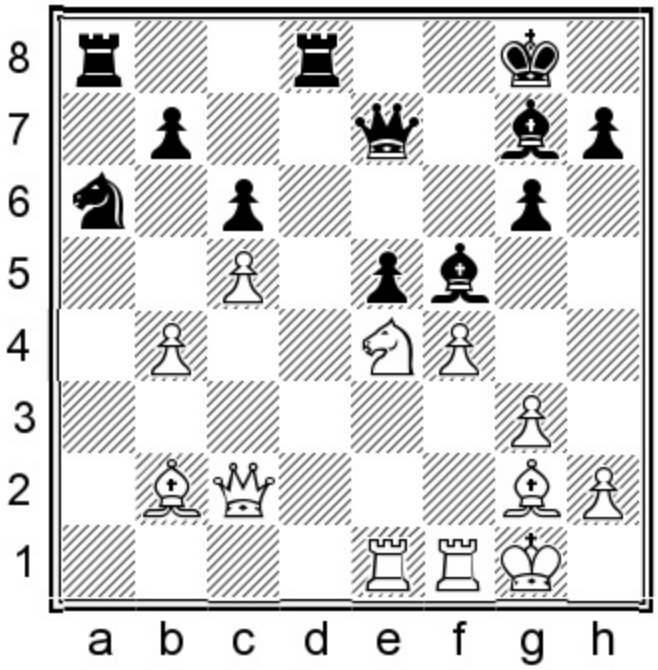
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Position after: 19.♖ce1

19...♗xe4

An ideologically correct move as Black understands that the e4-knight is now the source of most of his worries, so he eliminates it. This exchange by no means brings his pain to an end but rather represents a small consolation prize since the c5-pawn is now free for the taking. At least Black knows what he is suffering for.

As an alternative 19...♗g7?! looks like a more stubborn try at first, but with forceful play White would surely be able to prove her edge: 20.b4! (solidifying the c5-pawn) 20...axb4 21.axb4 ♖ed8 (the b4-pawn of White was obviously taboo because of a double attack with the queen from c4) and now after the powerful 22.f4! the floodgates have opened in front of the black king who would not have been able to last for much longer.

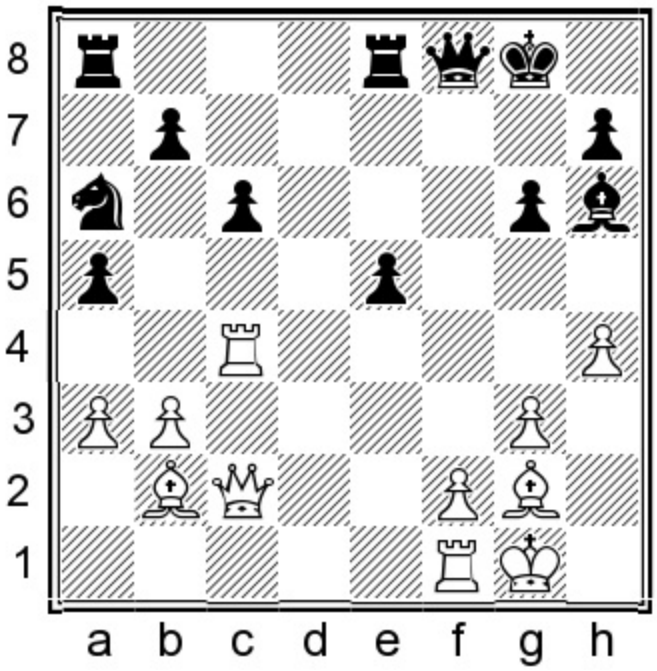


Position after: 22.f4!

E.g. 22...exf4 23.♗xg7 ♕xg7 [23...♗xe4 is refuted by the beautiful 24.♗b2!! ♗xc2 25.♖xe7+– with the weakness of the dark squares once again being terminal for Black.] 24.♕c4+ ♔h8 25.♘d6 ♖f8 26.♖xf4+– and Black is losing as he is unable to defend against White's multiple threats including g3-g4 & ♘d6-f7+, or even trivial pawn-grabbing on f5 or b7, the moment Black tries to reintroduce his idle knight into play.

20.♖xe4 ♕xc5 21.♖c4 ♕f8 22.h4!↑

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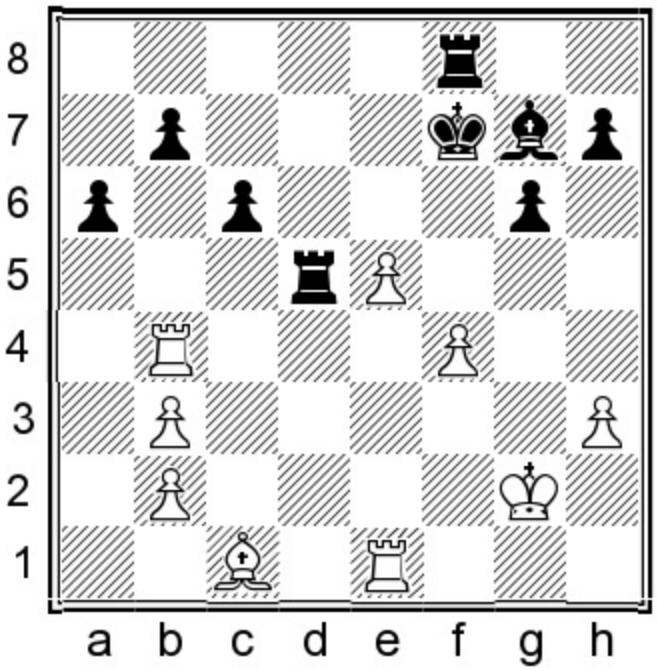


Position after: 22.h4!↑

White's initiative is still ongoing but has significantly transformed since we started out with the analysis of the position. In the beginning we relied heavily on the chances that domination along the dark squares presented us with. With Black doing his best trying to cover the squares belonging to that color complex and as a result he must have had to underestimate the meaning of control over the light squares. With Black's light-squared bishop out of the way White should be seeking to pressurize weaknesses on the light squares as previously discussed. From this perspective, the black g6-pawn constitutes an ideal weakness if we manage to soften it up with h4-h5. Also, the safety of the black monarch might be put into question. Having all this in mind, despite being a pawn up, Black's position would not been very far from critical.

16
Horton – Moranda
chess.com 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *25...?*

Show/Hide Solution

16
Horton, Andrew (2388)
Moranda, Wojciech (2593)
chess.com 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Static decision-making (multiple alternatives)

This position arose out of the Fianchetto variation of the King's Indian Defense. Just about every element of it speaks in Black's favor. Black's solid pawn structure and control over the only open file tell us instantly that if anybody is playing for a win here, it must be Black. White possesses a space advantage but this circumstance simultaneously represents one of the sources of his concern as the f4-e5 pawn chain has been fixed on the dark squares not only can it be easily attacked by the opponent, but this also limits the scope of his bishop. Further, White's isolated pawns also matter as the b2 and b3-pawns represent future targets and even more so if the b4 rook should be traded. At this point I was quite optimistic about my chances as I realized that the only thing I needed to do in order to claim a big advantage was to bring the king to the blockading e6-square, improve my bishop and infiltrate with a rook battery along the d-file. Easier said than done however as Black's b7-pawn is under attack and this issue needs to be resolved before anything else. There are three moves that come into consideration as a tangible solution: 1. the confrontational 25...♖b5; 2. the ambitious 25...b5; and

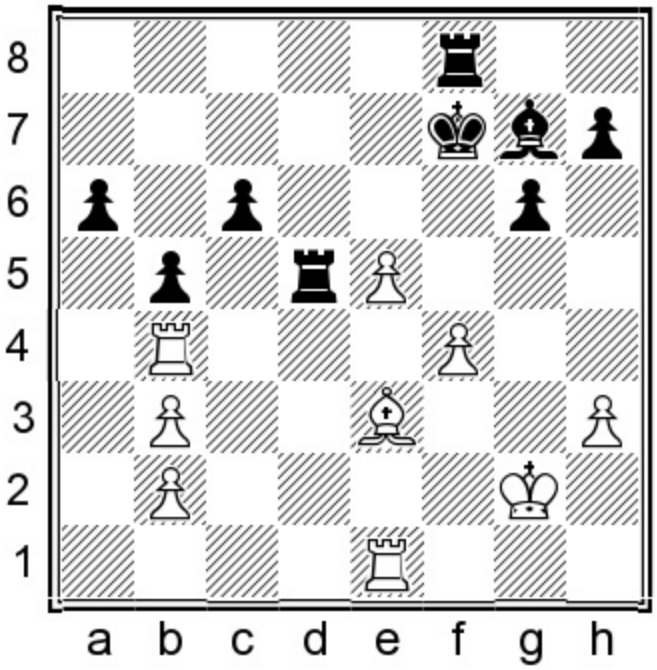
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3. the resolute 25...♖b8. But which one of them is best?

25...♖b8!

The rook on b8 is a feeble specimen, guilty as charged. The only way to make progress in this position was to temporarily make the rook passive and only then proceed with slowly improving the position. In fact, this move just looks bizarre! The more you like active play the more repulsed you should be upon playing this move. But the alternatives were barred by major drawbacks which needed to be anticipated while detailing the consequences of each candidate move. Although both 25...b5 and 25...♖b5 are more visually attractive they would have led to the creation of new weaknesses in Black's camp, thus trading one problem for another instead of solving the primary one.

A) 25...b5 26.♗e3

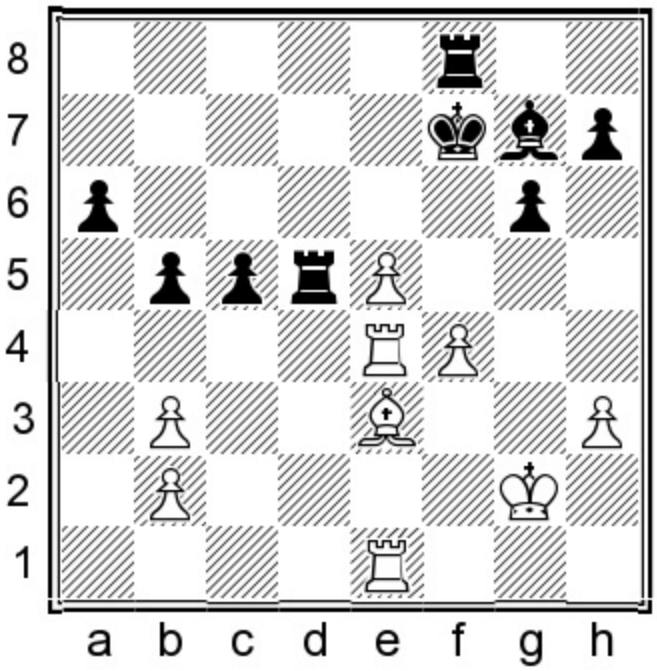


Position after: 26.♗e3

A1) 26...♖d3 trying to put pressure against the white pawns backfires immediately due to the active 27.♖d4! when after the further 27...♖xb3 28.♖d7+ ♔g8 29.♖e2 ♗h6 30.♗c5! it is Black who would need to start thinking about bailing out towards a draw, e.g. 30...♖e8 31.♖f2 ♗f8 32.♗xf8 ♖xf8 33.♖c7= and if there is something in this world that Black should care to avoid, those are infiltration ideas featuring the white f2-rook being brought to the seventh rank via d2.

A2) 26...c5 27.♖e4

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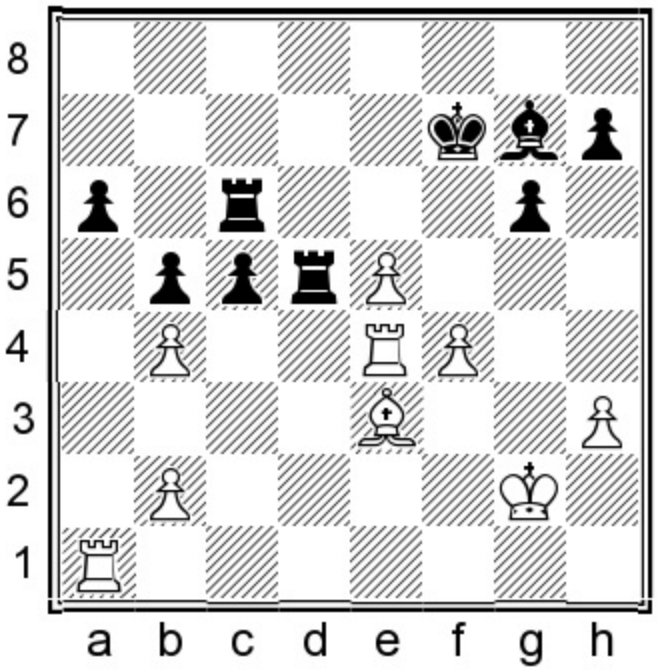


Position after: 27.♖e4

A2.1) 27...♔e6 28.♔f3 ♖d3 29.♖a1 Black simply does not have the time to organize his forces and at the same time safeguard the a6-weakness. 29...♖a8 30.b4 When White trades off his weak b3-pawn Black's chances of playing on for a win decrease significantly, even if he is able to activate his queenside pawn majority: 30...cxb4 31.♖xb4 ♗f8 32.♖d4 ♖xd4 33.♗xd4 a5 34.♔e4 a4 35.♖c1 b4 and now after 36.h4!? a3 37.h5 a2 38.b3= White makes sure that the far-advanced a2-pawn will not be queening. At the same time, the black g6-pawn is under pressure. Should it fall for any reason White's central pawns would literally run over the black monarch.

A2.2) 27...♖c8 28.♖a1 ♖c6 29.b4

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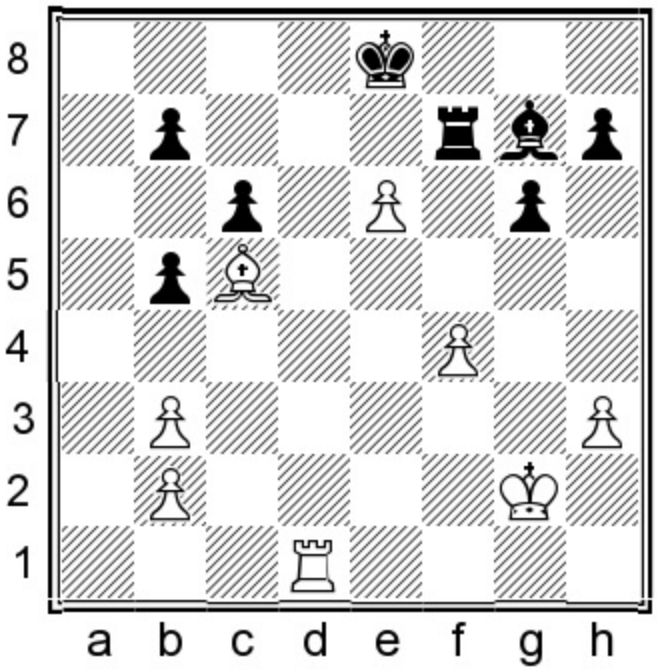


Position after: 29.b4

29...cxb4 [29...c4 looks like a strong candidate, aiming to leave the b4-pawn for our dark-squared bishop for dessert, but any efforts of Black in this respect are simply too slow: 30.♖d4 ♖xd4 31.♗xd4 ♔e6 32.♔f3 ♔f5 33.♖d1 ♗h6 34.♗e3 ♗f8 and now the active 35.♖d7! ♗xb4 36.♖f7+ ♔e6 37.♖xh7 c3 38.bxc3 ♖xc3 39.♔e4 a5 40.♖b7 virtually forces Black to seriously consider grabbing a perpetual by 40...♖c4+ 41.♔d3 ♖c3+ 42.♔e4 ♖c4+=] 30.♖xb4 and if White manages to have that weak b3-pawn exchanged, the chances should be mutual, with the game most probably petering out to a draw after something like 30...♔e6 31.♔f3 ♗f8 32.♖d4 ♖xd4 33.♗xd4 ♔d5 34.♖d1 ♖c2 35.♗e3+ ♔e6 36.♖a1=

B) 25...♖b5? Convincingly solves the problem of the b7-pawn but at the same time hands over control over the d-file to White. After the further 26.♖xb5 axb5 27.♖d1 ♔e7 28.♗e3 ♖f7 29.♗c5+ ♔e8 30.e6 Black's defense would have had to be extremely

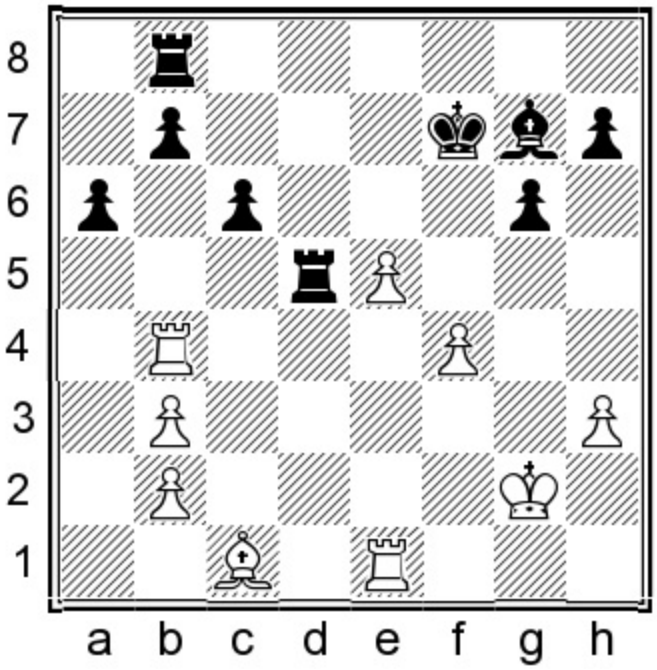
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Position after: 30.e6

creative in order to maintain equality: 30...♖f5 31.♖d7 ♗f6 32.b4 b6! Dismantling White's mating net at the last moment as ideas like ♖d7-f7-f8# were already materializing. 33.♗xb6 ♖xf4 34.♗c5 and now after 34...♖e4 35.♖d6 ♗e7 36.♖xc6 ♗xc5 37.bxc5 ♔e7= material balance would be restored.

25...♖b8!



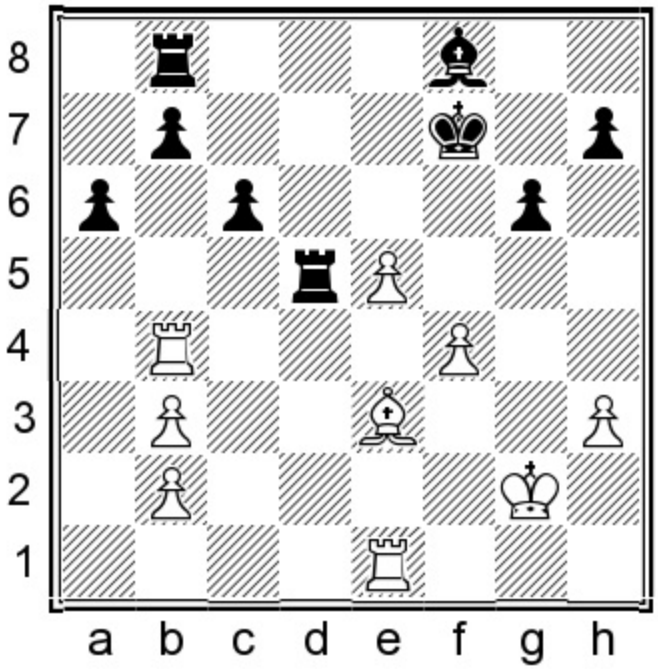
Position after: 25...♖b8!

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26.♗e3

Including the last piece into play with the intention of setting up a tenacious defense is the best way of approaching the position. At the same time it has become painfully clear that Black will be able to consolidate his position any day now and then gradually begin pushing White back on both wings. Because of this 26.e6+ ♔e8 27.f5 ♖xf5 28.♖d1 sacrificing a pawn in exchange for invading the seventh rank would have made sense. Whenever you notice that you are being outplayed by static means (due to a structural advantage of long-term nature), you need to do your best to complicate matters optimally by use of dynamic means of either an initiative or an attack. In this specific case, Black would be able to refute White's aggressive venture by means of the unyielding 28...b5 29.♖d7 ♗e5 30.♖xh7 ♖d8 31.♖e4 ♖d3! and all of a sudden the white king would happen to be in grave danger due to the threats ...♖d3-g3+. What would be left for White to do would be to try his luck with 32.♗f4! ♗xf4 33.♖h8+ but after 33...♖f8 34.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 35.♖xf4+ ♔e7–+ the position would have still been lost.

26...♗f8



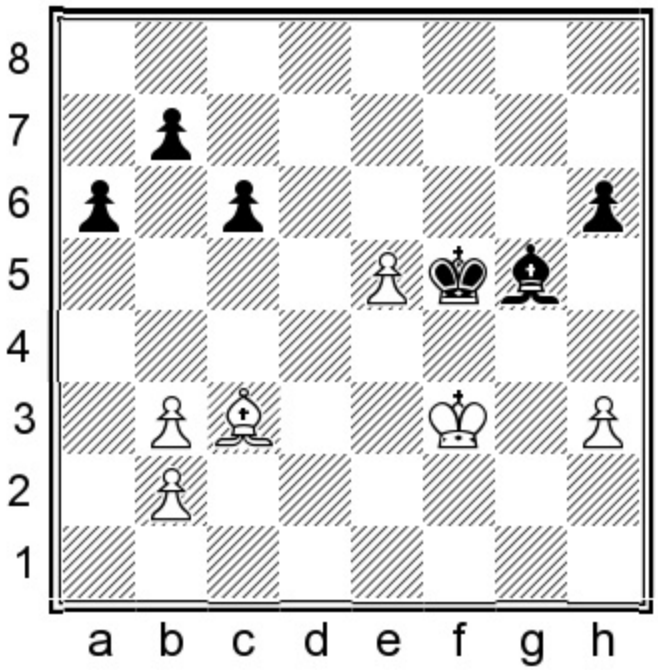
Position after: 26...♗f8

Dislodging the white rook from the annoying b4-square.

27.♖e4

27.♖d4 The exchange of rooks brings White no relief as Black will still be able to dominate the d-file with the other one: 27...♖xd4 28.♗xd4 ♖d8 29.♗c3 ♔e6 30.♖e2 ♗e7 31.♖d2 ♖xd2+ 32.♗xd2 ♔f5 33.♔f3 and now with 33...h6! 34.♗c3 g5 35.fxg5 ♗xg5–+

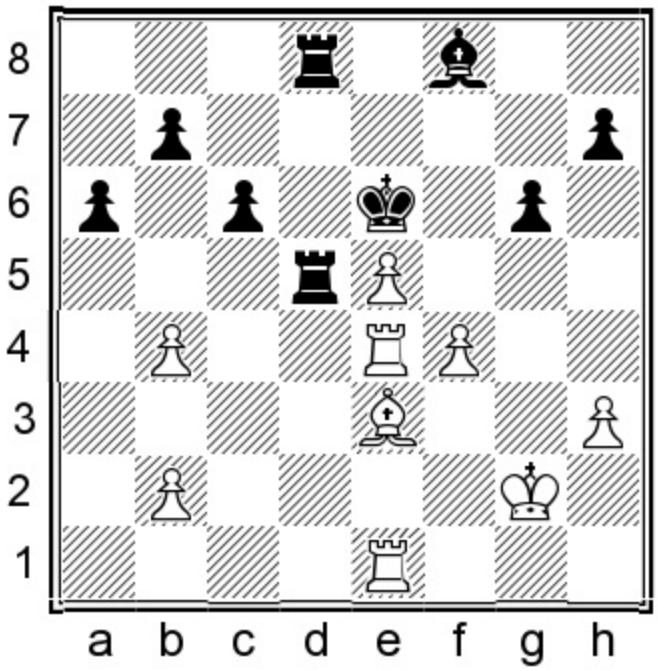
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Position after: 35...♗xg5−+

the unavoidable has come as Black will inevitably win the e5-pawn, and afterwards the only thing left for Black to do in order to be able to claim a win would have been to exchange the bishops.

27...♔e6 28.b4 ♖bd8

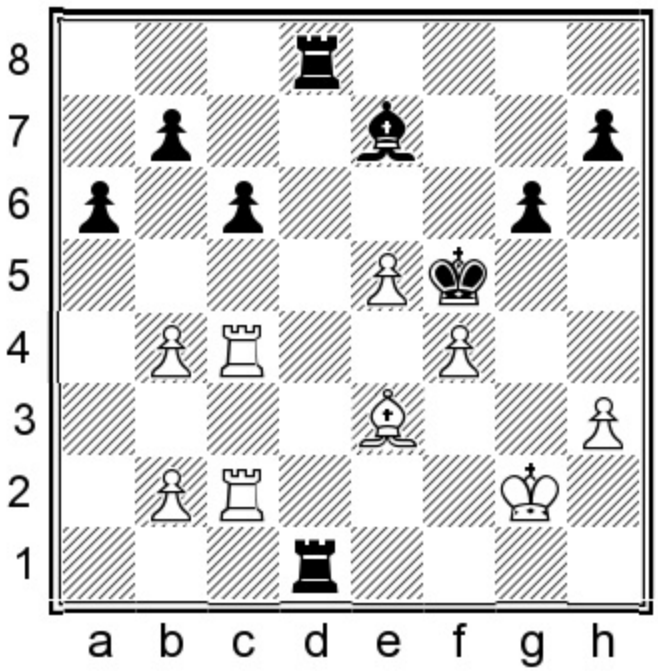


Position after: 28...♖bd8

The offended rook has done its duty and now returns to action! After choking off White's symbolic

counterplay, Black has a wide front of choices. The king is going to be brought to f5 from where it exerts pressure against the f4-pawn in a rather undisturbed manner. The bishop comes to e7 and is ready to support a potential ...g6-g5 undermining the remnants of White's central pawn chain. The black rooks, on the other hand, are going to infiltrate along the first or third rank. Having one or even both pairs exchanged would not constitute a tragedy for Black as he would remain with a touch more active king as well as a bishop eyeing three weak white pawns.

29.♖e2 ♗e7 30.♖c2 ♔f5 31.♖ec4 ♖d1–+

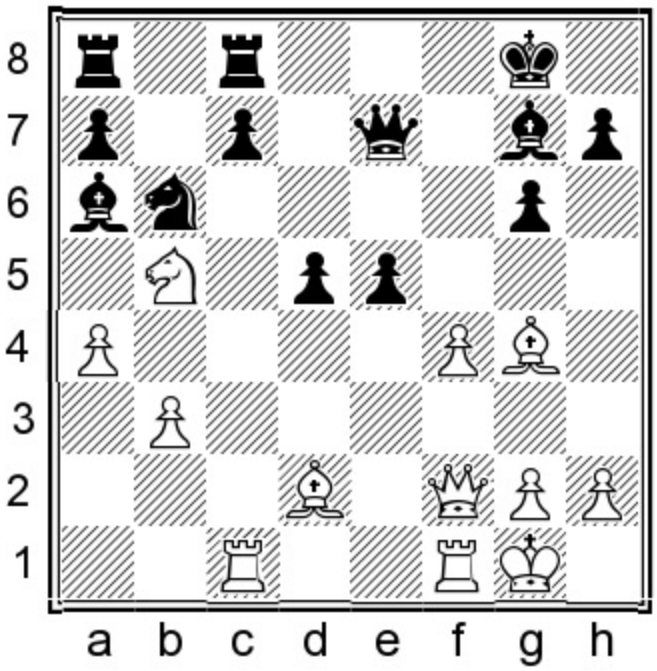


Position after: 31...♖d1–+

Something is falling in White's position and it is just a matter of time before it happens. Rather than await the grim reaper I can imagine many grandmasters resigning as they realize the helplessness of White's position.

17
Gunina – Kosteniuk
Kazan 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *22...?*

Show/Hide Solution

17
Gunina, Valentina (2506)
Kosteniuk, Aleksandra (2546)
Kazan 2019

Attack & Defense
Ignoring your opponent's attack and starting your own play instead

In this sharp position Black is a full pawn up and probably flirting with the idea of quickly launching her mobile pawn center. Before this happens she needs to deal with White's threat of capturing the exchange on c8. Easier said than done as the moment the black rook abandons the said square, the black pawn on c7 would be falling, with White bringing nothing but misery upon Black along the seventh rank. Can Black kill two birds with one stone by retaining the favorable material balance while initiating her pawn avalanche?

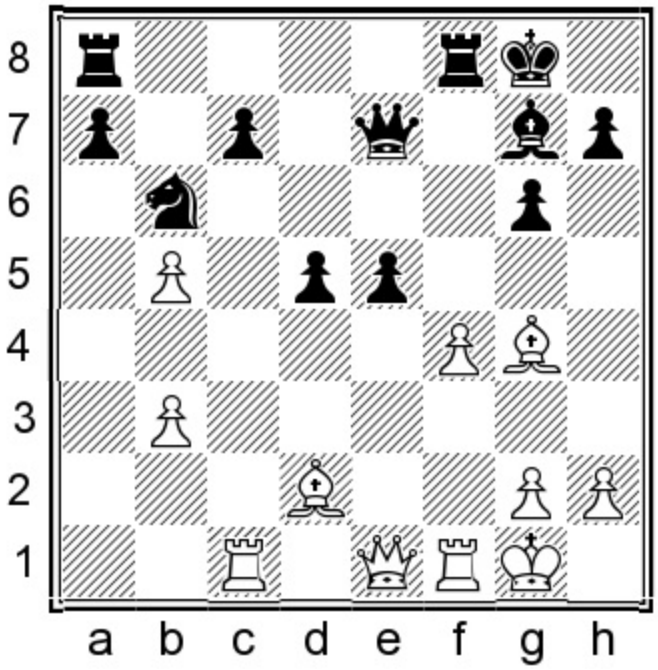
22...c6!

Yes she can! Although she is under pressure and should therefore be defending according to basic principles of chess, every single defensive measure undertaken at this point of time would have actually contributed to the deterioration of her position. If you cannot further defend then what is naturally left for you to do is to go all out on the attack! As much as it sounds contrary to the

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Steinitz's rules of playing chess (attack only when you are better; grit your teeth and defend if worse), Black should have fancied her attacking chances over passive defending as White's initiative was growing with every additional offensive move .The truth is that a lot of time has passed since Steinitz established the aforementioned rules, so even if the rules of the game have not changed people have already discovered that sometimes they simply need to be bent. Modern problems simply require modern solutions. At the same time, even after 22...c6! Black's position is not hopeless at all. True, she does lose material for the time being, which she will recapture very soon thanks to the pin along the f1-a6 diagonal. White is then faced with an unpleasant choice of parting either with a piece or an exchange, in either case ending up down material.

A) The game saw the routine 22...♗xb5?! 23.axb5 ♖f8 but after the geometrical 24.♕e1!±



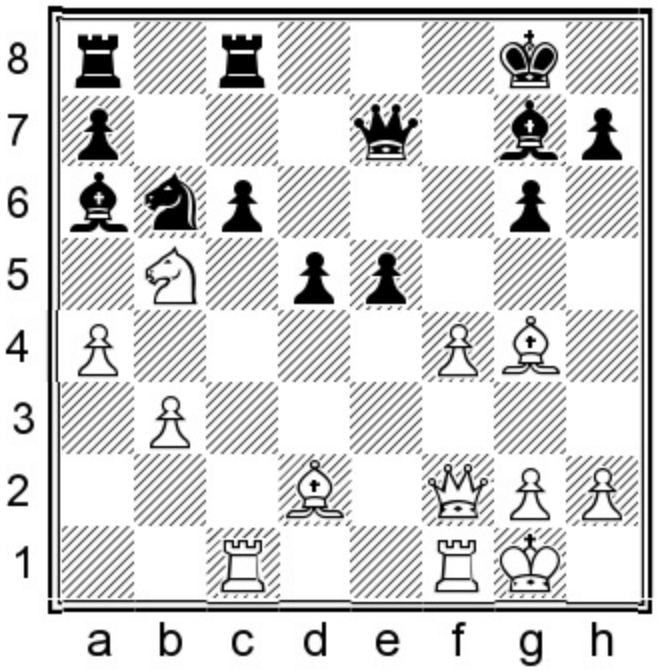
Position after: 24.♕e1!±

Black found herself badly tangled along the e-file and subject to all sorts of troublesome threats such as ♗d2-b4 or even ♖c1-c6-e6 or ♗g4-e6. Kosteniuk defended tenaciously, but eventually faltered under the increasing pressure.

B) The alternative 22...♘d7? would have been even worse as after 23.♘xa7 ♗xf1 24.♘xc8 ♖xc8 25.♕xf1+– Black may have restored material balance but the lack of any control over the light squares and the distant passed a-pawn spells obvious trouble.

22...c6!

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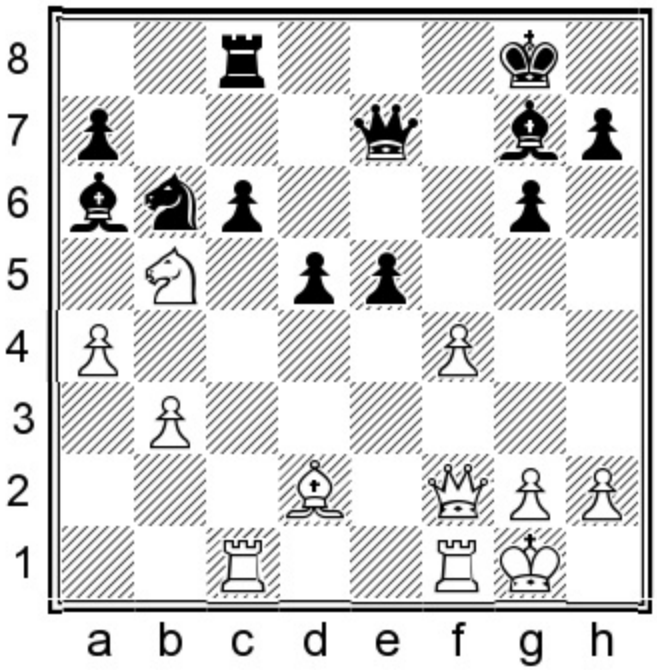
Position after: 22...c6!

23.♗xc8

23.f5!? would have been an interesting option, aiming to launch an attack against the black monarch after something like 23...gxf5 24.♗xf5 cxb5 25.♗g5! ♕e8 26.♕h4. At the same time Black could then sacrifice some material back for the sake of exchanging the most important attackers paving a path towards a safe draw after 26...h5 27.♗f6 ♖xc1 28.♖xc1 ♕f7 29.♖c6 ♗c8! 30.♗xg7 ♕xf5 31.♕d8+ ♔xg7 32.♕e7+ ♔g8 33.♕e8+ ♔g7= with not more than a perpetual check for White.

23...♖xc8

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Position after: 23...♖xc8

24.f5

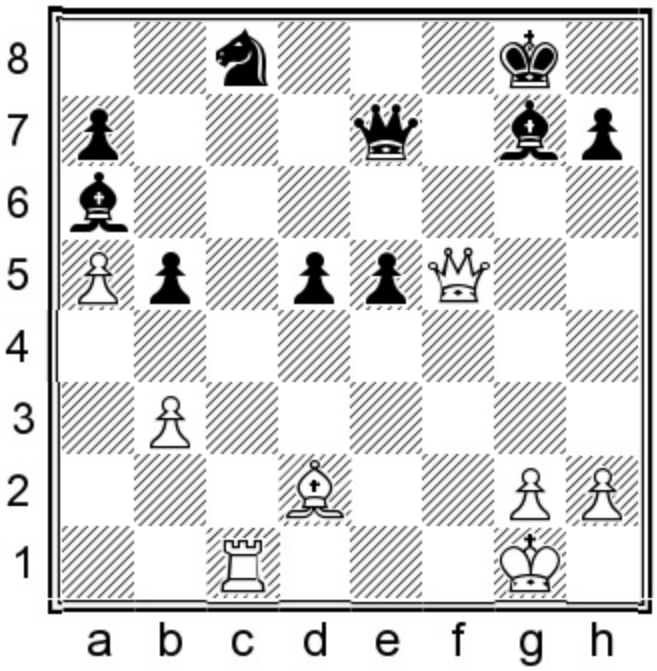
24.fxe5 cxb5 25.♗b4 ♕e8 26.♖xc8 ♘xc8 27.♕c5 bxa4 28.♕xd5+ ♔h8 would have also led to a draw at the end but in a completely different manner as endgames featuring a similar material balance may only be won by the side having a rook if the pieces of the opponent are uncoordinated or their king is in danger. However, none of these seem to be the case here after 29.♖d1 h5! 30.♕d8 ♕xd8 31.♖xd8+ ♔h7 32.bxa4 ♗xe5= and if White cannot disturb the a6-bishop or win Black's a7-pawn effortlessly, she cannot dream about bringing the full point home.

24...gxf5 25.♕xf5 cxb5 26.a5

A little trick from White's side, but Black could just as well remain unimpressed and continue

26...♖xc1 27.♖xc1 ♘c8

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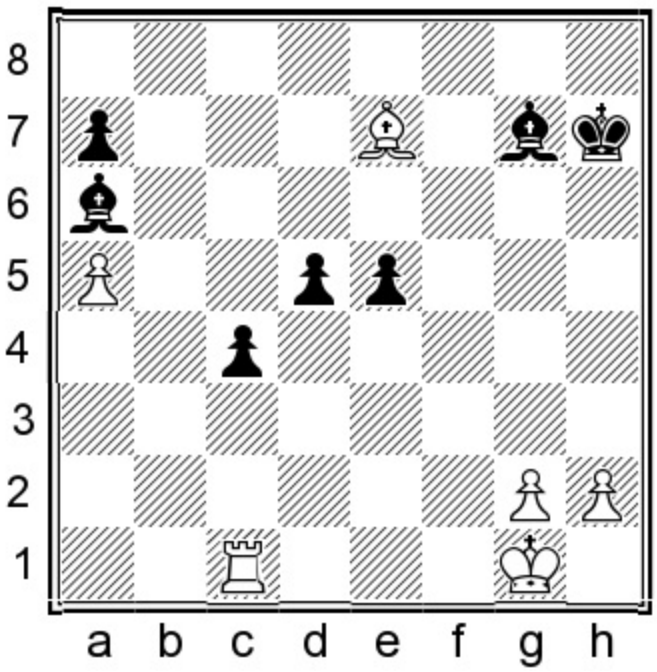


Position after: 27...♘c8

Again, there is perpetual check after

28.♖xc8+

White could try to complicate matters a little bit with 28.♗g5 ♘d6 but not too much as after 29.♕xh7+?! ♔xh7 30.♗xe7 ♘c4!! 31.bxc4 bxc4–+

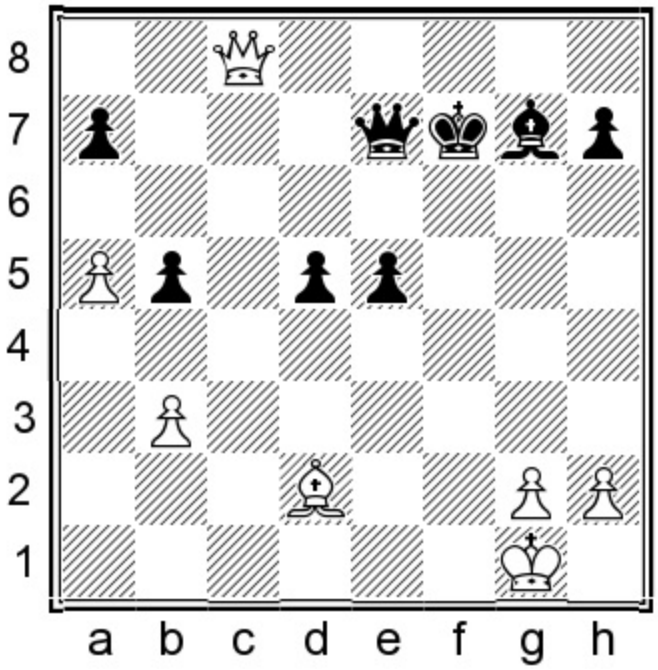


Position after: 31...bxc4−+

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it would have been Black who would have probably emerged victorious if such a position appeared on the board. With a clever piece sacrifice Black would have not only saved herself from infiltration along the c-file, but also created an unstoppable pawn trio supported by the bishop pair. Chess is a cruel mistress one moment you are attacking, and a few moves later you are signing your surrender.

28...♗xc8 29.♕xc8+ ♔f7=

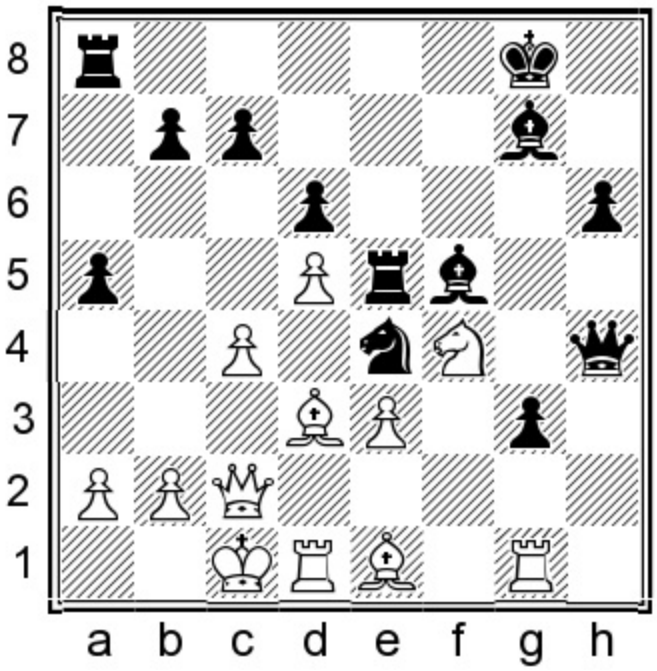


Position after: 29...♔f7=

Here there is nothing else left for the players but to agree to a ceasefire.

18
Travadon – Mihok
Radenci 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *26.?*

Show/Hide Solution

18
Travadon, Loic (2441)
Mihok, Oliver (2541)
Radenci 2019

Coordination
Dynamic coordination (putting a piece en prise)

In this Petrosian King's Indian Defense, Black is currently a pawn up and enjoys decent central activity. At first it seems as if his position is very good, but the devil lies in the details as White is already on the verge of regaining the g3-pawn. Should something like this take place the black king would then be subjected to unpleasant pressure along the g-file which is typical for similar Indian structures. Should White take on e4 it would severely weakens the light squares. While planning an onslaught against the black monarch the last thing White needs is falling from the kettle into the fire. With the evaluation of the position depending on how swiftly White can capture the g3-pawn, he had no other choice but to proceed in an energetic manner.

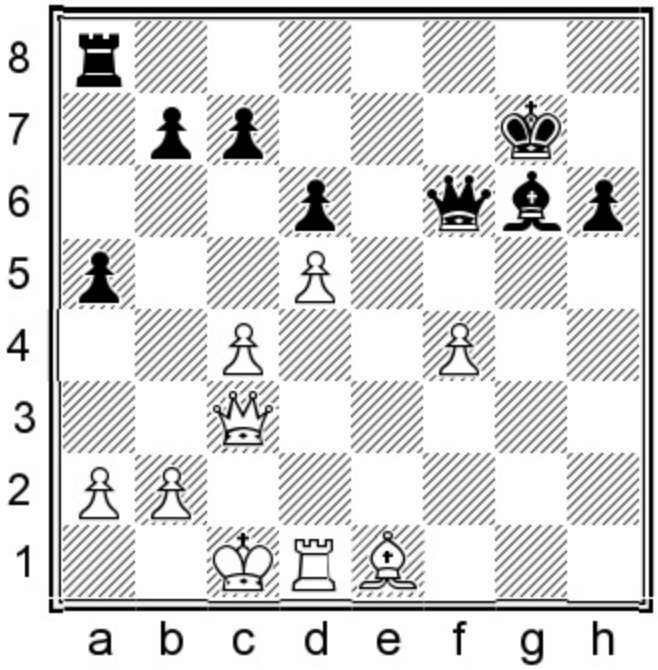
26.♖d2!!

"The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he did not exist." (Kevin Spacey in The Usual Suspects). As you can see for yourself, the impossible happens to be possible after all.

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White prepares a rook lift to g2 in the quickest possible manner while at the same time apparently forgetting that the rook is en prise on d2. The truth is that taking on d2 backfires tactically as Black is forced to tolerate White's swift regrouping and simply lacks the time to react effectively.

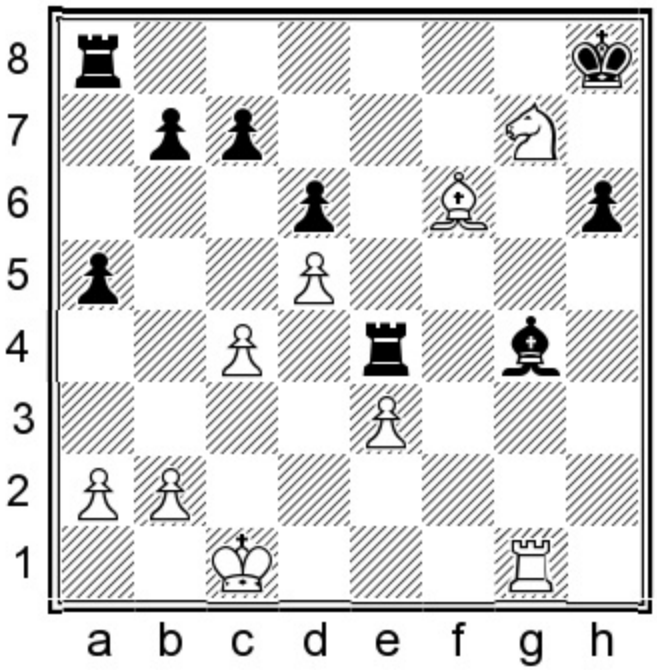
A) The game featured 26.♗xe4 which is the first idea that springs to mind here. Eliminate the knight on e4 and only then eliminate the black g3-pawn. Still, after 26...♗xe4 [26...♖xe4 may be even simpler as after the forced sequence of 27.♖xg3 ♖xf4! 28.♖xg7+! ♔xg7 29.♕c3+ ♕f6 30.exf4 ♗g6=



Position after: 30...♗g6=

opposite-colored bishops strongly indicate a drawish outcome of this battle.] 27.♗xg3 ♗xc2 28.♗xh4 ♗xd1 29.♘e6 Black manages to hold by establishing a curious defensive setup with 29...♔h8! 30.♘xg7 ♖e4! 31.♗f6 ♗g4!=.

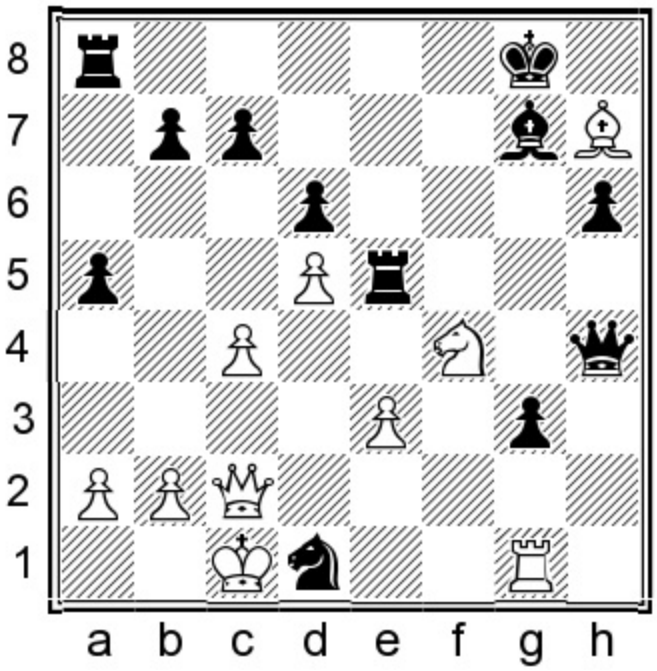
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Position after: 31...♗g4!=

Black has not only prevented the white rook from infiltrating via g7 with mating threats, but also managed to take the sting out of the discovered check from f6 as none of his pieces would be hanging!

B) The ultra-aggressive 26.♗c3?! ♘xc3 27.♗xf5 ♘xd1 28.♗h7+

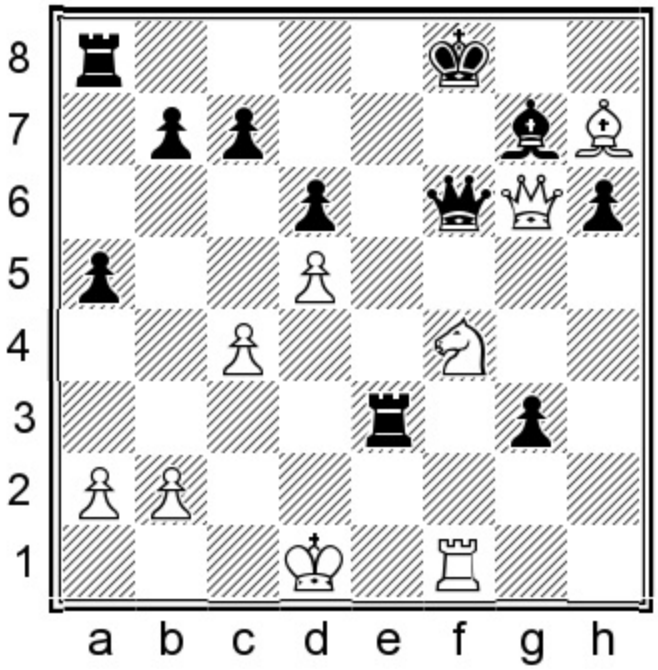


Position after: 28.♗h7+

looks very promising at first, but concrete analysis proves that White's threats are at most a ghost

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story: 28...♔f7 (it is essential not to allow a knight fork on g6, even if the price to pay for this is luring the white queen to g6 with a tempo) 29.♕g6+ ♔f8 30.♔xd1 [30.♖xg3 ♕f6 31.♕xf6+ ♗xf6 32.♖g8+ ♔f7 33.♖xa8 ♘xe3∓ leaves Black a full pawn up.] 30...♖xe3 and now 31.♖f1 looks extremely unpleasant for Black, but after the very cool 31...♕f6!

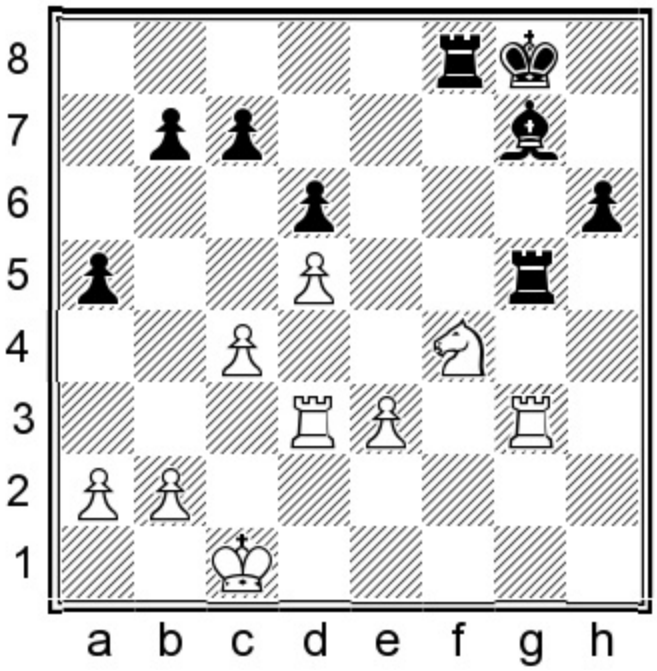


Position after: 31...♕f6!

32.♘e6+ ♖xe6 33.♖xf6+ ♖xf6 34.♕xg3 ♖e8∓ he would not have been worse at all as Black can inflict much more damage here along the dark squares than White along the light ones.

C) 26.♕g2 does in fact win back the pawn for White, but after the further 26...♖f8 27.♗xg3 ♘xg3 28.♕xg3 ♕xg3 29.♖xg3 ♗xd3 30.♖xd3 ♖g5 it becomes more or less clear that Black is already out of danger.

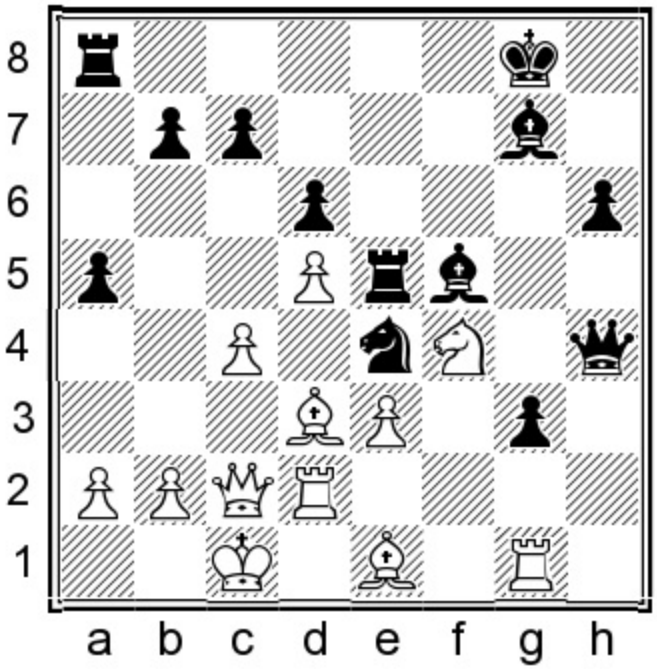
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Position after: 30...♖g5

White can indeed install a powerful knight on e6 after 31.♖xg5 hxg5 32.♘e6 but the passed g-pawn would then prove to be a major nuisance for White who would then have to focus all of his forces on stopping it: 32...♖f1+ 33.♔c2 g4 34.♖d2 g3 35.♔d3 ♗e5= with a balanced position. Although in a practical game I would probably preferred Black.

26.♖d2!!



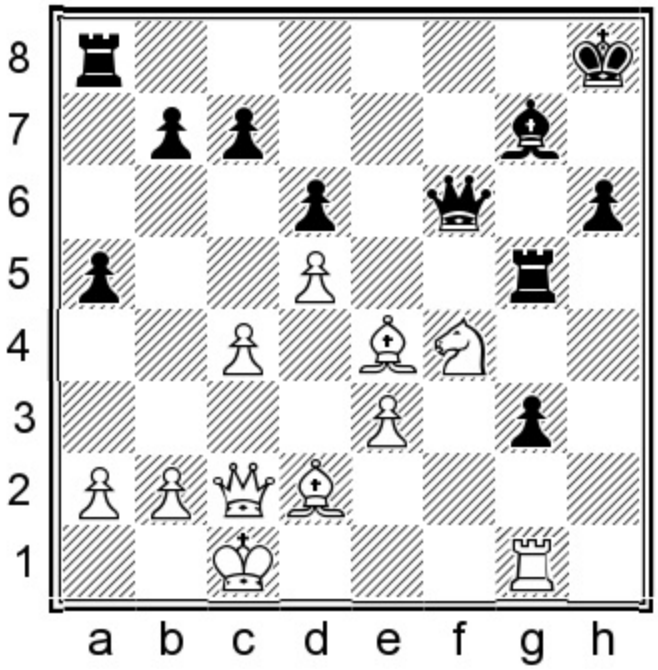
Position after: 26.♖d2!!

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26...♖f8

The most tenacious defensive try. Black admits that the rook is taboo but instead activates his last piece so that it can provide both of his bishops with some additional security.

The critical 26...♘xd2 fails because of the weakness of the light squares after 27.♗xf5 ♕f6 [27...♖xe3 28.♗h7+ ♔f7 29.♕g6+ ♔f8 30.♘e6+ ♖xe6 31.dxe6 ♕f6 32.♕xf6+ ♗xf6 33.♖xg3+– leaves Black unable to prevent heavy material losses.] 28.♗h7+ ♔h8 29.♗xd2 ♖g5 30.♗e4+–



Position after: 30.♗e4+–

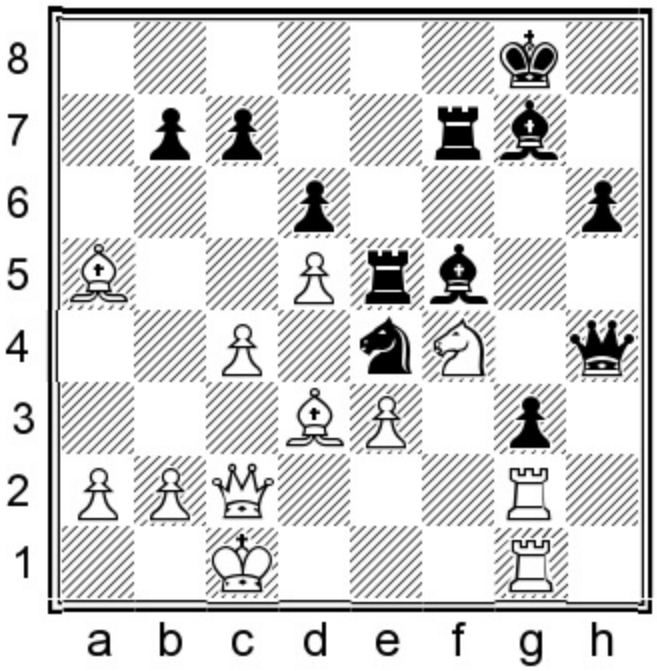
and with ideas like ♗d2-c3 combined with ♘f4-g6+ Black will surely not be able to hold this position for more than a few moves. Another reason for White emerging victorious here compared to the line starting with 26.♗c3?! is that Black was never in time to capture more than a rook in the process.

27.♖dg2 ♖f7

Now White can even take his time by first helping himself to the free a5-pawn.

28.♗xa5±

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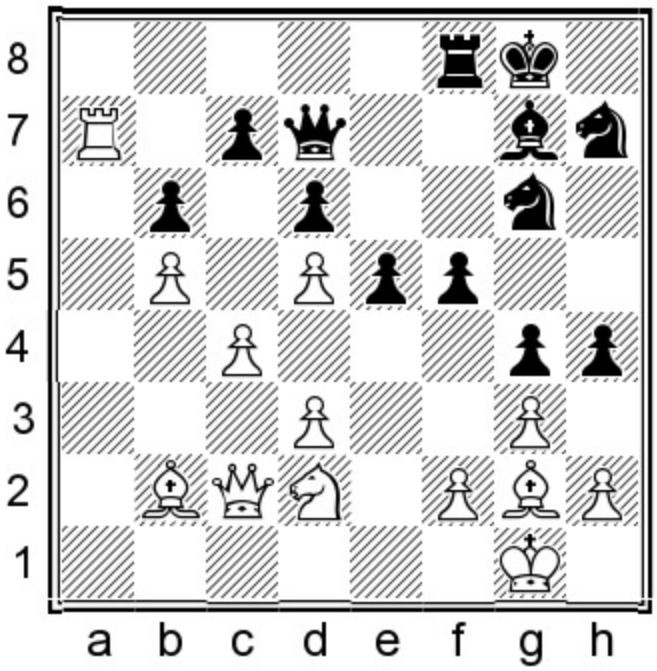


Position after: 28.♗xa5±

After which he can then slowly ensnare the g3-pawn before eventually capturing it. Black is obviously far from defenseless here (the material is still balanced), but with the tendency being that the disappearance of the g3-pawn simultaneously leads to troubles with the battery along the g-file, the odds would have already been clearly stacked in White's favor.

19
Tan Zhongyi – Abdumalik
Hengshui 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *27.?*

Show/Hide Solution

19
Tan Zhongyi (2513)
Abdumalik, Zhansaya (2464)
Hengshui 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Pawn-break in exchange for generating counterplay

The following position arose out of the English Opening and looks quite balanced at first. Material is equal and White is in possession of the bishop pair as well as a little bit more space on the queenside whereas Black is already honing in on a possible kingside attack. However, the more we look at it the more we will become concerned about White's prospects for the future. Her bishops are both blocked, and the structural imbalance makes it easier for Black to make progress on the kingside where she simply has more pawns at her disposal. If White stands still, Black will eventually rip up the kingside thus exposing White's faulty piece coordination. There is no more time left for White to spend, action is now required.

27.c5!

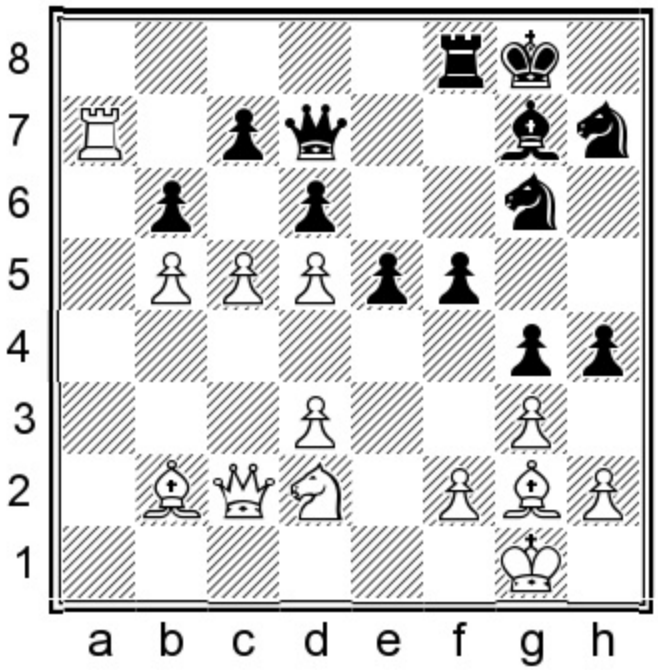
The only move granting White any counterplay here. This sort of action may in fact cost White a whole pawn, but the logic behind it is undeniable. Either White opens up the position for her bishops

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or she dies slowly and in pain. With the white c4-pawn out of the way, the white knight may obtain its fair share of activity as well. Most importantly however, and what is not yet visible, is that this way White will soon be able to create an outside passed pawn thus obtaining play of her own in this otherwise passive position.

The game saw the passive 27.♗c1?! being played allowing Black to seize the initiative rather easily. Now after something like 27...h3 28.♗h1 ♘g5 29.♕d1 e4!? 30.dxe4 ♘e5↑ Black could have activated her forces significantly. The lack of a pawn would not have hurt her too much as literally all of her pieces are at their best with Black turning on the nitro the moment the f-file opens up. At the same time White's bishops are a poor sight, with the rook being the only bright star on an otherwise cloudy sky. Still, what could this star on a7 do by itself, especially if it is millions of light years away from its already endangered king?

27.c5!

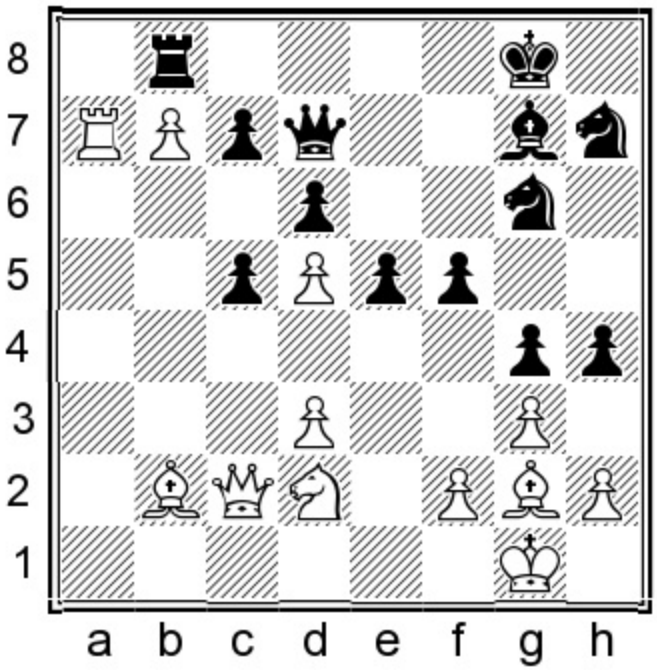


Position after: 27.c5!

27...dxc5

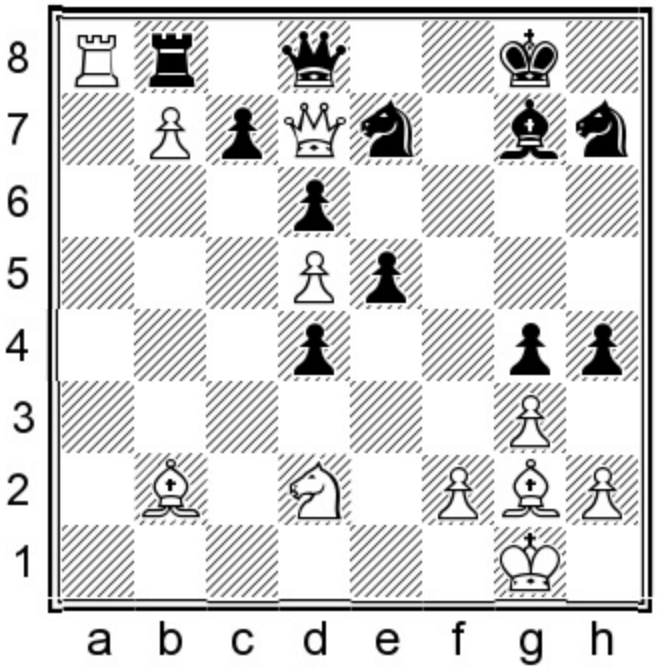
A) By contrast, 27...bxc5?! allows White to create a dangerous passer on the b-file after 28.b6 ♖c8 29.b7 ♖b8.

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Position after: 29...♖b8

This position might look like a simple win at first by just bringing the rook to a8 followed by a quick transfer of the queen via a4 to a7. The only problem is that Black can put the queen on e8 and this way retain at least some symbolic control over a4 throwing a spanner into the opponent's plans. If White does not want to spread herself to thin here then opening up a second front with 30.d4!! would have made sense as now after 30...cxd4 31.♖a8 ♕d8 32.♕xf5 ♘e7 the outcome of the game would have been decided by the exquisite 33.♕d7!+–



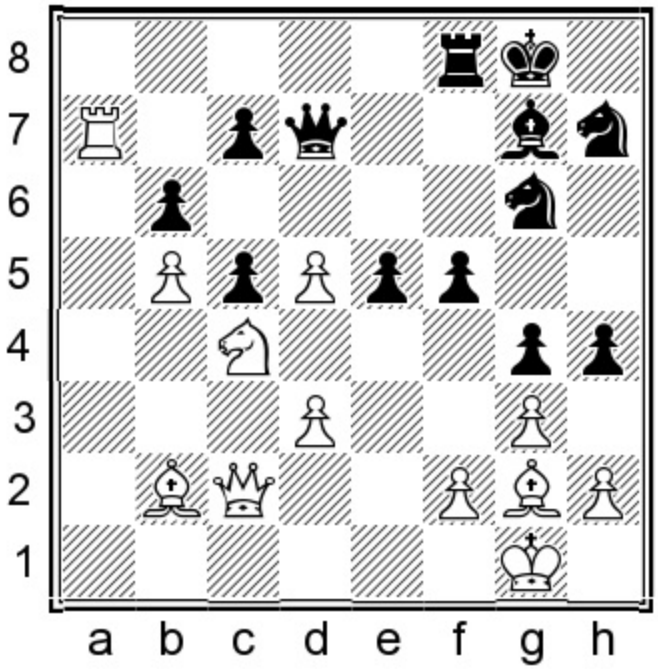
Position after: 33.♕d7!+–

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after which Black would not have been able to contain the white passer and save the knight on e7 at the same time.

B) Similarly, 27...♕xb5? is simply bad as after 28.cxd6 cxd6 29.♕c7+– mating threats would have been unexpectedly difficult for Black to prevent.

28.♘c4



Position after: 28.♘c4

28...♕d8

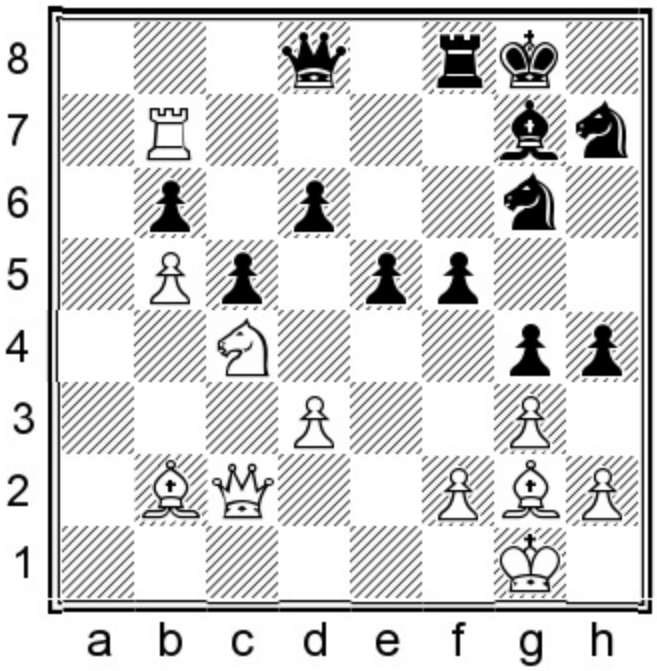
28...hxg3 29.hxg3 ♘g5 looks like a more aggressive option for Black but after 30.♘xb6 ♕xb5 31.♖xc7 White would have been astonishingly fast in making progress in the center. Additionally, with more and more pieces disappearing from the board it is paradoxically the black monarch that could get into trouble: 31...♕xb6 32.♖c6 ♕b8 33.♖xg6 ♘f3+ 34.♗xf3 gxf3 and now after the geometrically pretty 35.♕c1!± material may in fact be equal but I would prefer not to be the black king on g8 when the white queen finally arrives on g5.

29.d6!

Power play! White indeed sacrifices what is apparently the most promising pawn but after

29...cxd6 30.♖b7

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Position after: 30.♖b7

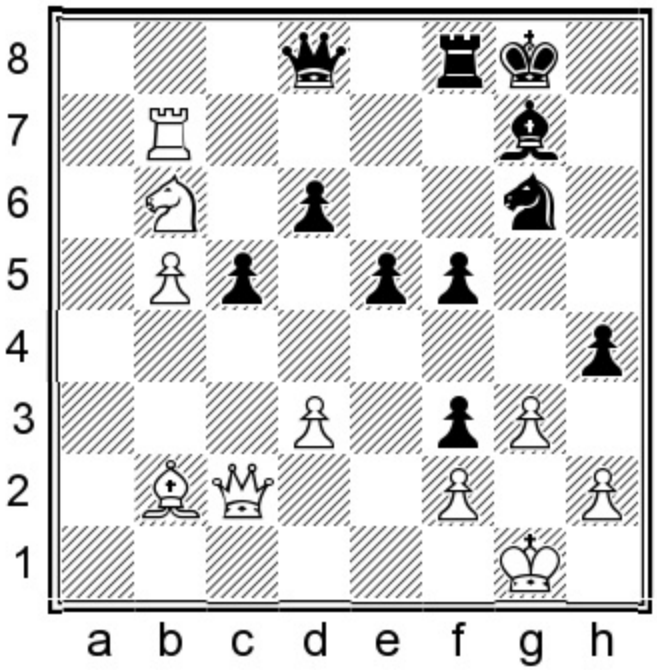
it becomes clear that the b5-pawn will soon take its place and be pushed all the way to the promotion square. Keeping in mind the great support provided by the coordinated efforts of White's light-squared bishop, knight and rook Black would be advised to generate as much counterplay as possible on the opposite wing. Finding such a solution and analyzing the line indicated as best was not that problematic, especially if you are sufficiently desperate as White was in the starting position. The real difficulty lied in evaluating the position that we currently have in front of us. White's upcoming plan may look very straightforward, but we must not forget that, at least for the moment, Black is still two pawns up. Also, Black has most of his pieces already locked and loaded for some action on the kingside and will surely be making use of them very soon. At the same time, even if White was supposed to be losing this game from the start, it is better to do so in a fight instead of by passively waiting. In chess, unlike in life, to the ones who wait usually bad things come. Concrete variations prove that White ends up better in all lines:

30...♘g5 31.♘xb6

But not the greedy 31.♖xb6?! when after 31...♘f3+ 32.♗xf3 gxf3 33.♖xd6 ♕g5 34.♘d2 hxg3 35.hxg3 f4 36.♘xf3 ♕h5⩲ it would have been Black who would have been in the driver's seat thanks to a variety of attacking possibilities on the kingside. White may in fact be a pawn up here, but in view of Black's everlasting initiative on the kingside she would have probably lacked the time to push the b-pawn effectively.

31...♘f3+ 32.♗xf3 gxf3

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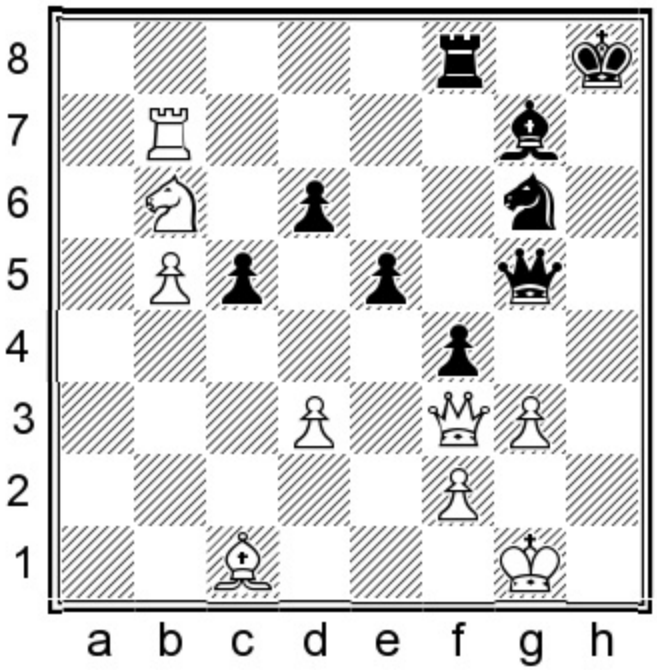
Position after: 32...gxf3

Now White can pick up the f3-pawn by means of the clever

33.♕b3+ ♔h8 34.♕d5!

when after the further

34...hxg3 35.hxg3 ♕g5 36.♕xf3 f4 37.♗c1+–

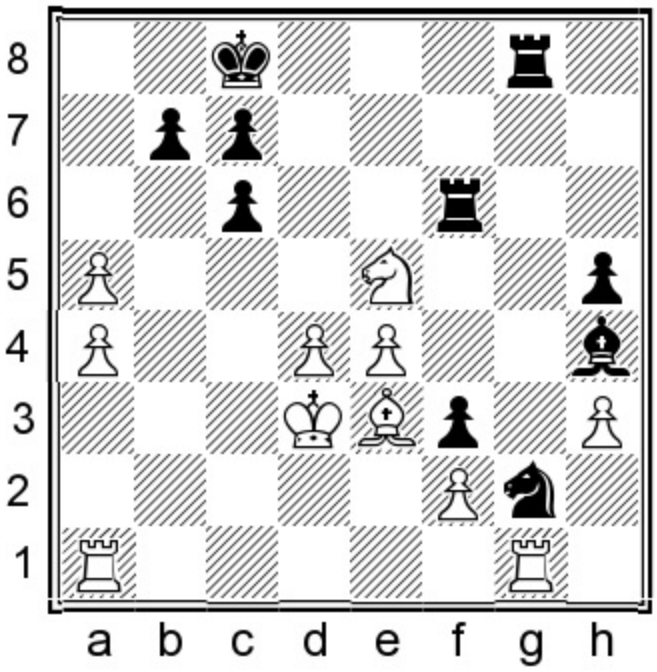


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Position after: 37.♗c1+−

Black's kingside counterplay comes to nothing. This may be possible not only thanks to the assistance provided to the king by the white queen and bishop, but also because the white knight moves to d5 in a moment and White would be able to combine defensive ideas with some counter attacking ideas along the h-file or seventh rank. With complications still being left on the board, it will soon become apparent that White's distant b5-passer will eventually happen to be the decisive factor tipping the scales in her favor.

20
Mader – Osmanodja
Germany 2019



■ *29...?*

Show/Hide Solution

20
Mader, Manuela (2200)
Osmanodja, Filiz (2348)
Germany 2019

Weakness

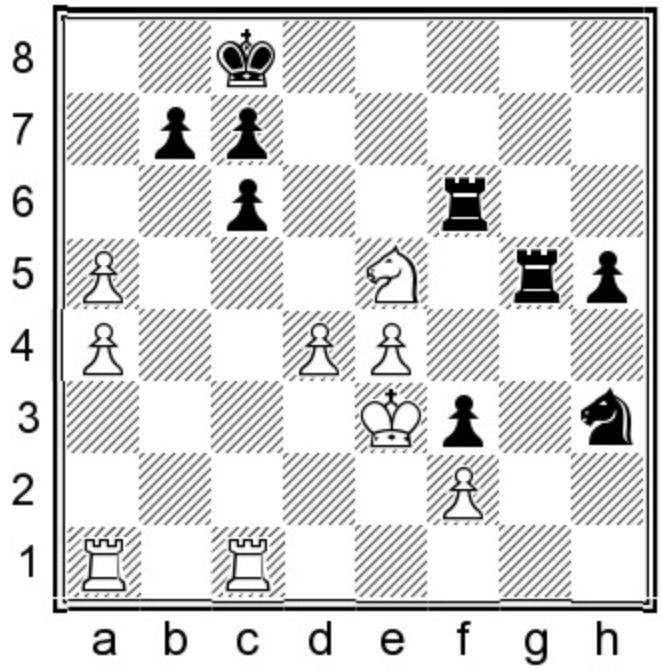
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Black is a pawn down in this position but not all hope seems to be lost. Her pieces are much more active, and it seems as if she was making decent progress on the kingside. At the same time White's position still seems to be solid enough to be able to withstand Black's aggression. Capturing on f2 and creating a passed pawn is certainly Black's dream but with the white king and the strong e5-knight in the neighborhood nothing like this is likely to happen. This simple logic leads us to the conclusion that if Black wants to obtain good play in this position she should deal with both the mentioned pieces.

29...c5!

A multifunctional move. Black not only opens up the white king but also softens up White's beastly knight on e5. With the d4-pawn out of the way Black could chase the white king towards the queenside, which would ultimately result in White's kingside becoming exposed. No matter how White reacts to this pawn thrust it is already clear that the white knight will sooner or later have to escape further exposing White's king and central pawns.

A) In the game Black went for 29...♗g5? which is a fairly logical idea at first sight. The bishop on h4 was pretty idle whereas the elimination of its counterpart on e3 gives rise to motifs like ...♘g2-f4+ without having to fear the knight being exchanged on f4 at once. Even if the knight was in fact supposed to jump to f4 this would not only speed up the inevitable demise of the black f3-pawn, but also leave Black's queenside unexpectedly vulnerable, e.g. 30.♗xg5 ♖xg5 31.♖gc1! (Ruling out ...c6-c5 for good) 31...♘f4+ 32.♔e3 ♘xh3



Position after: 32...♘xh3

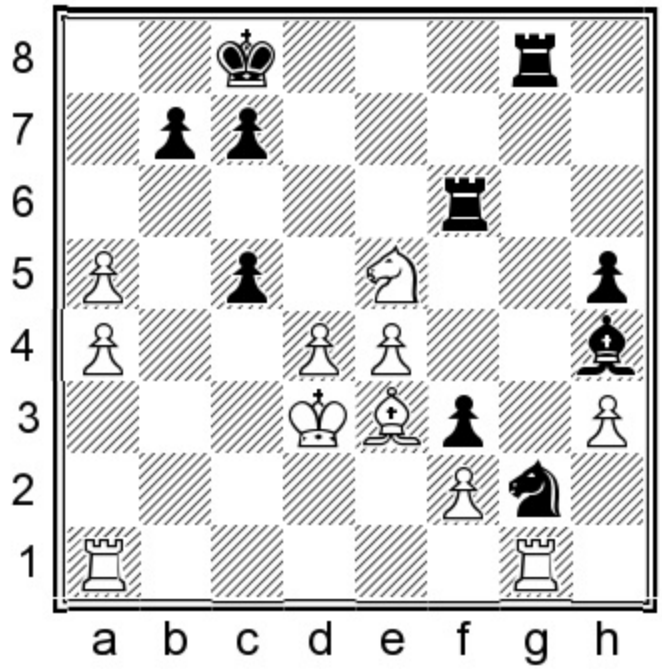
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and now after the more or less forcing 33.a6! (softening up c6 since taking on a6 is an offer that Black

cannot turn down because of the threat of a6-a7) 33...bxa6 34.♖xc6 ♖xc6 35.♘xc6 ♖g1 36.♖xg1 ♘xg1 37.a5! (accuracy till the end, Black's last chance lies in activating his knight via e2, bringing it to c3 and capturing at least one white pawn) 37...h4 38.♘e5+– Black is lost as all of his kingside pawns fall.

B) By comparison, 29...♖d8? would have been to slow as after 30.♖ac1! ♘f4+ 31.♗xf4 ♖xf4 32.♔e3 ♖f6 33.♘xf3+– Black does not only fail to carry out the thematic ...c6-c5 push, but also happens to have lost her biggest asset on f3, with the h4-bishop representing White's very next target.

29...c5!



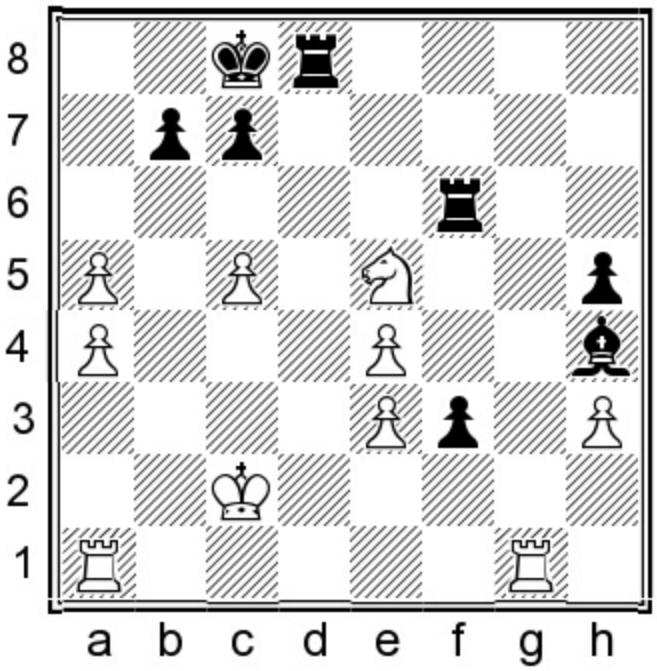
Position after: 29...c5!

30.d5

The wisest move in this position as White will definitely miss the solidity provided to the e5-knight so far but at least the king remains safe for now.

30.dxc5?! would have actually led to instant trouble for White as after 30...♖d8+ 31.♔c2 ♘xe3+ 32.fxe3

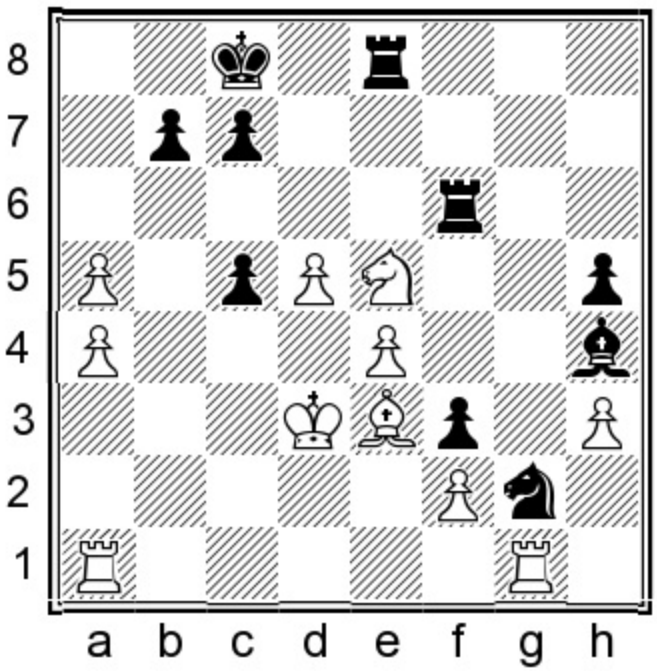
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Position after: 32.fxe3

White may be two pawns up but all of them are weak and four out of six are even doubled! With a strong supported passer on the f-file Black would have found it rather easy to prove here that it is quality over quantity that matters, e.g. 32...f2 33.♖gf1 ♖e6 34.♘f3 ♗g3 35.♘d4 ♖xe4 36.♖a3 ♖e5∓ and with more white pawns to fall very soon it is suddenly White who is the prey and Black the predator.

30...♖e8

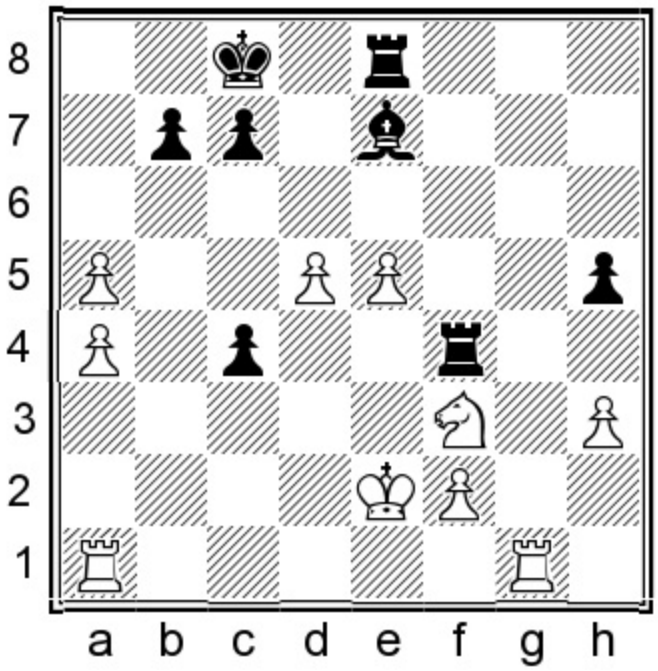


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Position after: 30...♖e8

31.♘c4

31.♘xf3 with the idea of eliminating Black's far-advanced f3-pawn and advantageously simplifying the position deserved serious attention but Black can respond with the timely 31...c4+! when taking the pawn would result in White losing both of his minor pieces at the same time. Because of this, 32.♔e2 ♘f4+ 33.♗xf4 ♖xf4 34.e5 seems to be more or less forced but after the ultra-accurate 34...♗e7!!=.

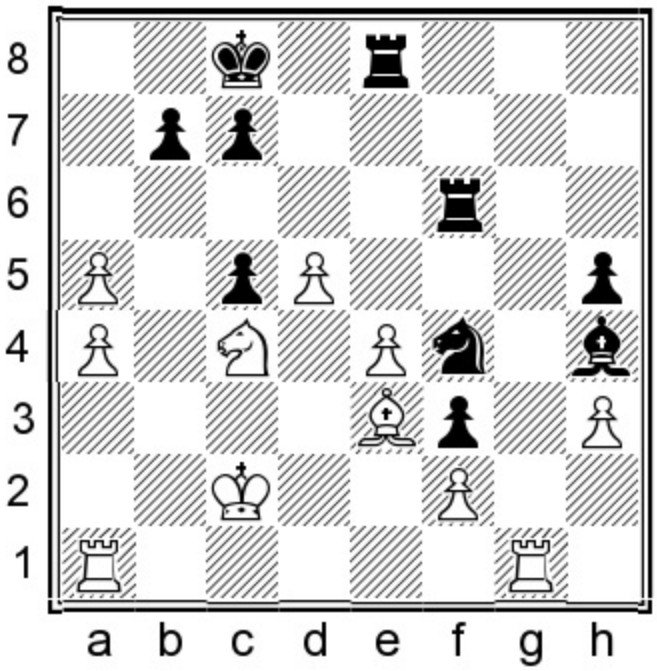


Position after: 34...♗e7!!=

Black manages to hold without much stress. This move requires some more explanation in my opinion. At first glance it cannot be so great if it blocks its own rook in front of the white king. The truth is that the e5-pawn is only a secondary target. Black is interested in doubling rooks along the f-file and hitting the white knight. If Black wanted to pressurize the pawn at once (e.g. by means of an immediate ...♗h4-f6), his rook would have felt very clumsy with the white king boldly approaching it even all the way to e4. With the bishop still on h4, launching play along the f-file would not have been immediately possible. Here White cannot even defend it with the rook from a3 (thank you, bishop!) or with the other one from g3 (...h5-h4 is now possible). Only when White tries to avoid this upfront and retreats the knight will Black start getting more interested in this e5-weakling. All in all a brilliant move in its ugliness!

31...♘f4+ 32.♔c2

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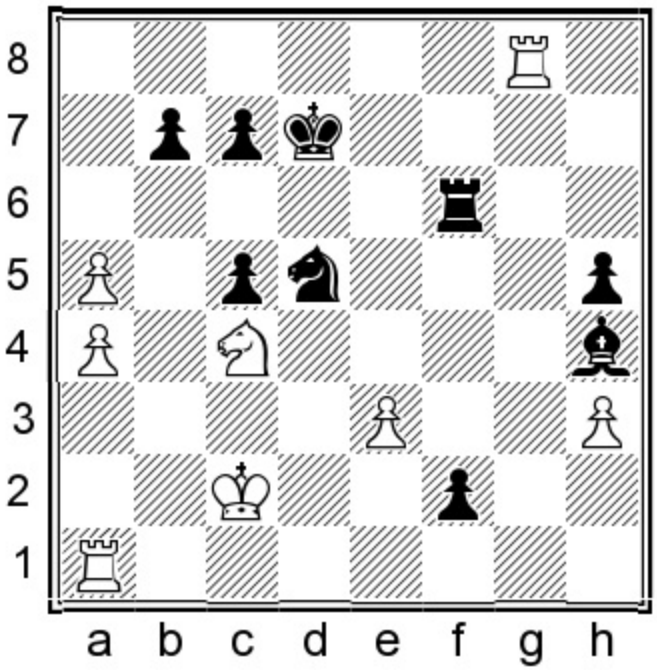


Position after: 32.♔c2

32...♗xf2!?

A well-timed sacrifice. Black enhances the movement of his f-pawn but also snatches a few pawns in the process. So many pawns and pieces hanging would have made it even harder for White to navigate across the lines that need to be calculated, not to mention their consequences.

If Black does not mind a little bit of chaos in exchange for more chances to play for a win then a decent alternative would have been 32...♖xe4 with the idea that after 33.♖g8+ ♔d7 34.♖g7+ ♔c8 35.♘d2 ♖xe3! 36.fxe3 ♘xd5 37.♖g8+ ♔d7 38.♘c4 f2∞.

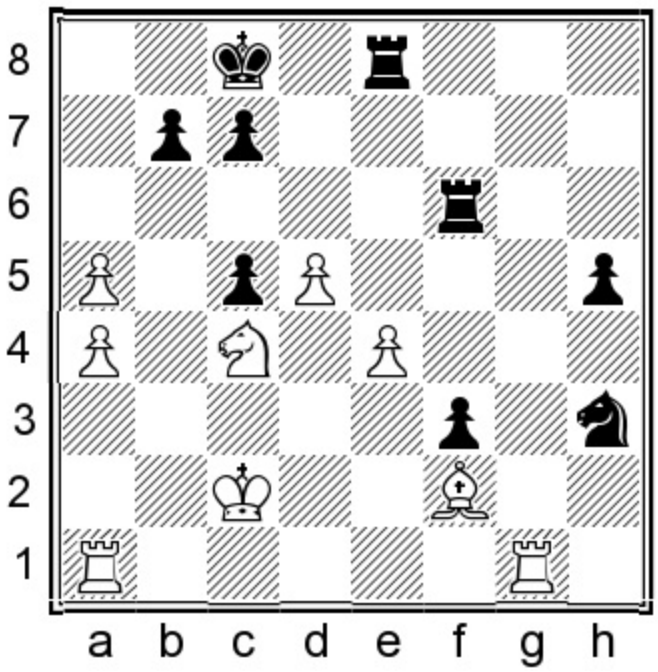


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Position after: 38...f2∞

A cunning transformation would have taken place here as Black is namely an exchange down for a pawn, but his far-advanced f2-pawn represents a dangerous asset. It is impossible for it to be captured for the moment and White would have had to spend plenty of time trying to dislodge its supporters. Meanwhile, Black would have become interested in the weak white pawns on both wings, with those on e3 and h3 constituting primary targets.

33.♗xf2 ♘xh3



Position after: 33...♘xh3

34.♗h4

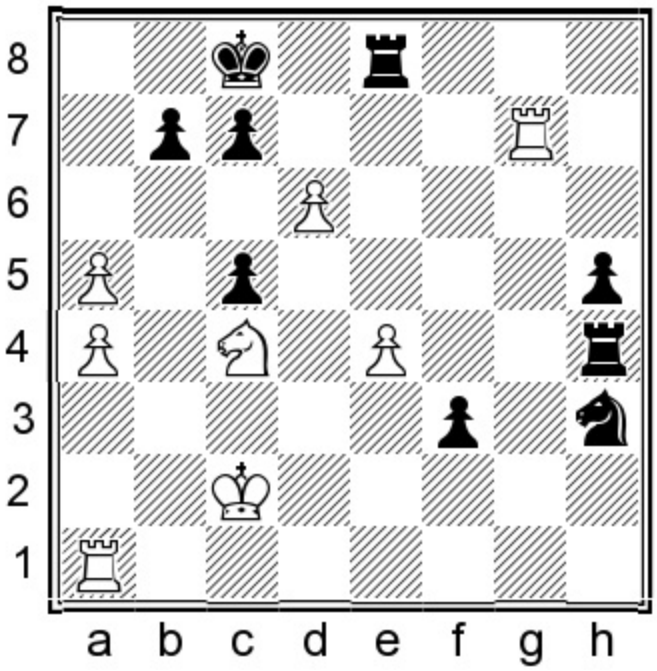
34.♖gf1 allows White to retain the additional piece but after 34...♖xe4 35.♘d2 ♖e2 36.♗xc5 ♖f5= active pieces, two passed pawns and maybe even prospects of winning yet another one on a5 should be entirely sufficient for draw here.

34...♖f4

Now White is advised to surrender the bishop in exchange for some dangerous looking counterplay after

35.♖g7 ♖xh4 36.d6

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Position after: 36.d6

when the whole story ends in a scare for Black as after

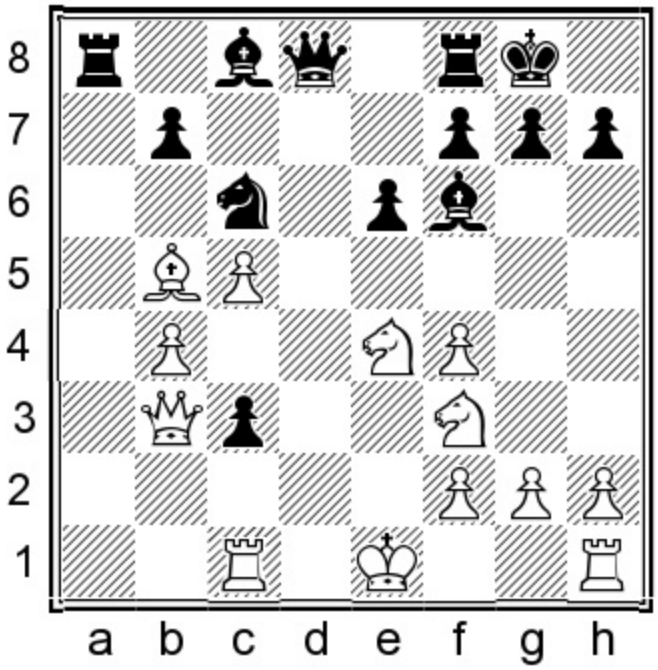
36...♖exe4 37.♖xc7+ ♔d8 38.♘b6 ♖e2+ 39.♔c1 ♖e1+=

the white monarch cannot escape perpetual check.

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21
Jojua – Arabidze
Tbilisi 2019



■ *15...?*

Show/Hide Solution

21
Jojua, Davit (2588)
Arabidze, Meri (2387)
Tbilisi 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
What happens if the character of the game remains unchanged?

Material is equal, but certain signs in the sky indicate that soon Black might be facing tough times. The reason for this is not only that her c3-pawn is on the verge of falling but also the light-squared bishop that is rather unimpressive on c8. The white king in the center does provide for some counterplay in similar positions for Black but this state of affairs will not last forever as White needs

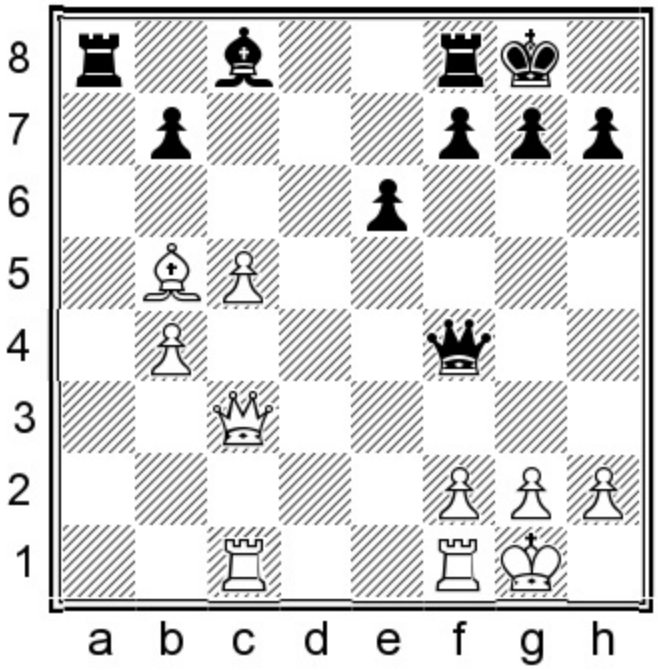
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just one more move to consolidate. If this happens and the c3-passer falls, Black would be left in a materially and positionally inferior position. Is there anything she can do about it?

15...♕d5!

Very good! This way Black not only undermines the defense of the white b4-pawn but also makes it tougher for White to focus on capturing the little guy on c3. On top of that if White helps himself to the queen on d5 the black c8-bishop would immediately spring to life and Black would even enjoy some additional perks such as potential checks along the e-file.

A) The game witnessed the inferior 15...♘d4? which in fact looked enticing at first but after 16.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 17.♘xd4 ♕xd4 18.0-0 ♕xf4 19.♕xc3± despite material equality Black's position might prove to be indefensible in the long run.



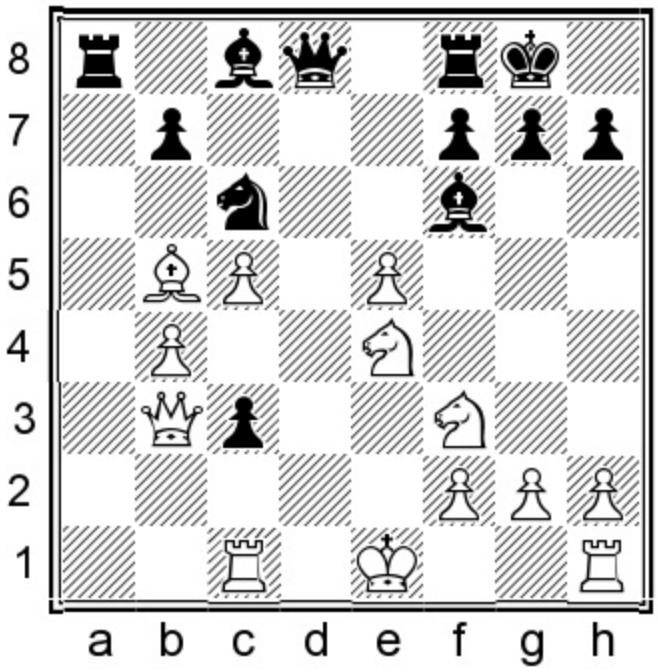
Position after: 19.♕xc3±

The reason for this is that the White queenside majority is much easier to activate than Black's kingside pawns. Additionally, when the white c-pawn reaches c7, White can effectively fight for control over the promotion square on c8 thanks to his light-squared bishop. Black's c8 bishop still needs to be developed by means of ...e6-e5 but might find itself brought back to c8 very soon just to put White's c-file passer to a halt. White is going to be enjoying supporting his passed pawns with heavy pieces from behind, whereas the prospects of having to defend along the back rank with the rooks does not look all that appealing to Black. What eventually cost Arabidze the full point in this game was the failure to recognize and combat the dangerous static tendency in the form of White's ability to create a strong passed pawn on the queenside. With the benefit of hindsight, she would have abandoned whatever plans of her own she might have had at the key moment of the game while doing her best to fight back actively instead of just ending up in a position where, despite her efforts, there

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was already not much she could have done to reverse fate. So, if you ever find yourself in a similar situation wriggle and writhe as you may but do not go down without a fight!

B) 15...e5?! is enterprising as it seeks to open up the position with the white king still stuck in the center. Still, White retains nice prospects by means of mass simplification: 16.fxe5

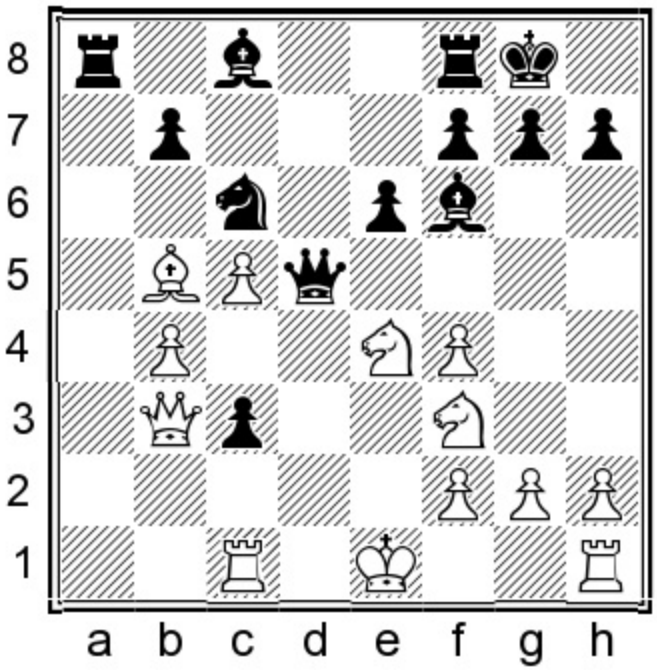


Position after: 16.fxe5

16...♗xe5 [16...♘xe5?! is even worse due to 17.♕xc3 ♘xf3+ 18.♕xf3 ♗b2 19.♖d1 ♕e7 20.0-0+– and with a healthy pawn up and the knight coming to d6 soon, White would be cruising.] 17.♗xc6 bxc6 18.♘xe5 ♕d4 19.0-0 ♕xe5 20.♘xc3 ♗e6 21.♕d1± and White again gains the upper hand. There is still lots of work ahead of him as the b4-pawn is quite vulnerable and the black bishop seems to be a little bit more mobile than the white knight but, with skillful play, White can make sure to trade off the said pawn for the black c6-pawn and make sure that his own c5-pawn transforms very soon into a supported passed one.

15...♕d5!

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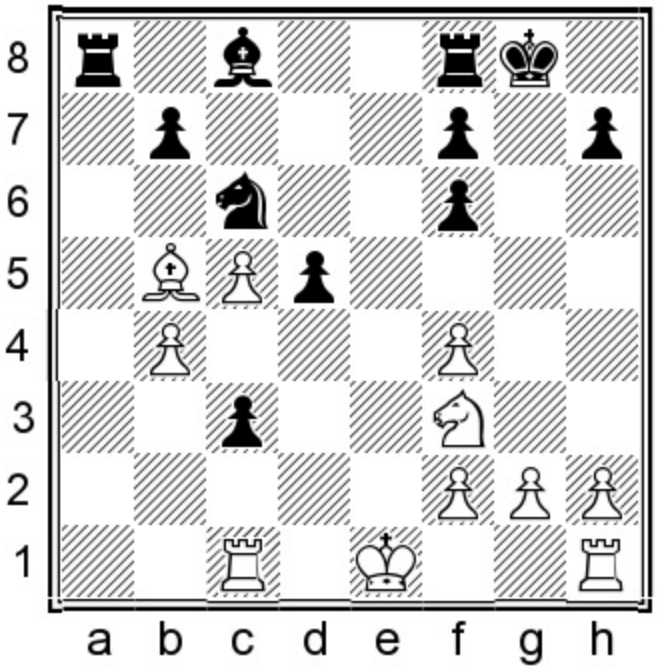


Position after: 15...♕d5!

16.♕xd5

16.♘xf6+ gxf6 17.♕xc3 allows Black to equalize immediately with 17...♕e4+ 18.♗e2 ♕xb4= and we cannot really state that Black's pawn structure is any worse than White's.

16...exd5 17.♘xf6+ gxf6



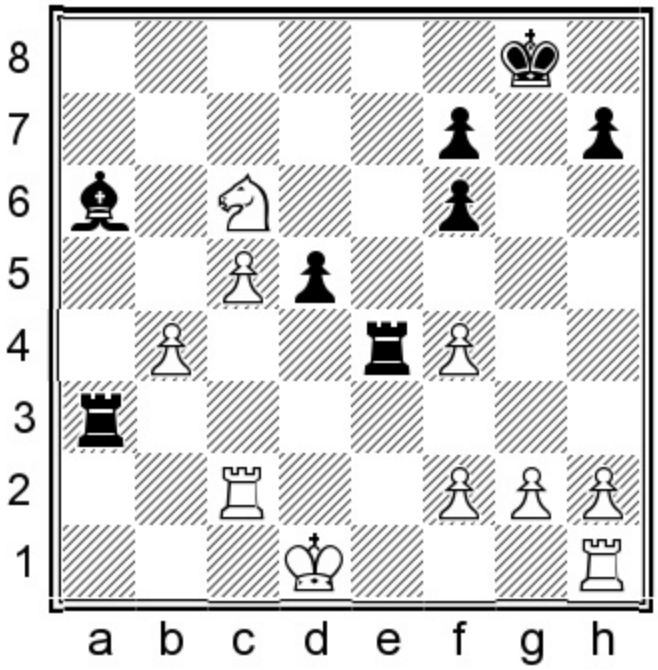
Position after: 17...gxf6

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18.0-0

18.♗xc6?! intending to establish a dark-squared blockade on d4 looks inviting, but after 18...bxc6:

A) 19.♘d4?! actually even loses as it allows the opponent to deprive the white king of the right to castle which would have been a bit too much: 19...♖e8+ 20.♔d1 ♖a2 21.♖xc3 ♖e4 22.♘xc6 and now after the powerful 22...♗a6! 23.♖c2 ♖a3!–+



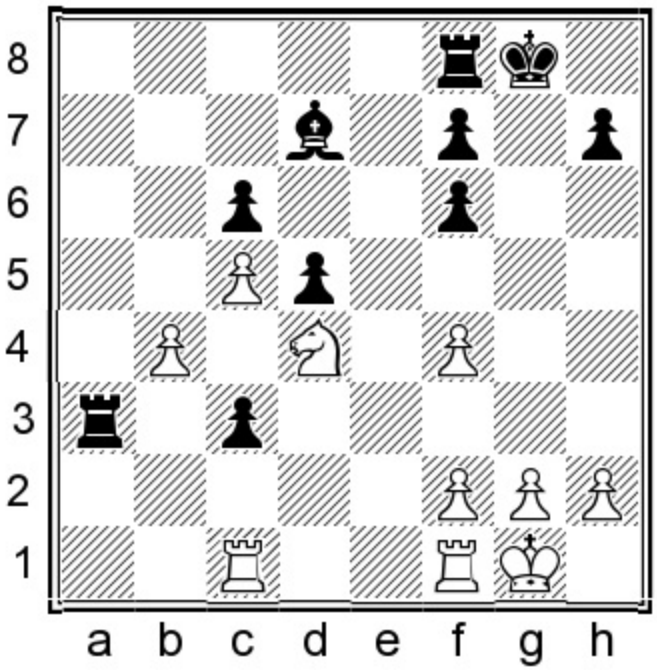
Position after: 23...♖a3!–+

White would have found himself in a state of stasis. It is not only the development of the h1-rook that is forestalled, but also the threat of ...♗a6-b5 aiming to catch the knight would be giving White headaches.

B) 19.0-0 ♖a4! 20.♘d4 ♗d7 21.♖xc3 ♖xb4∓ it can be argued whether the black pawn majority on the queenside is sufficient for a win, but it is beyond any doubt that it is Black who is in the driver's seat here.

18...♖a3 19.♗xc6 bxc6 20.♘d4 ♗d7

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Position after: 20...♗d7

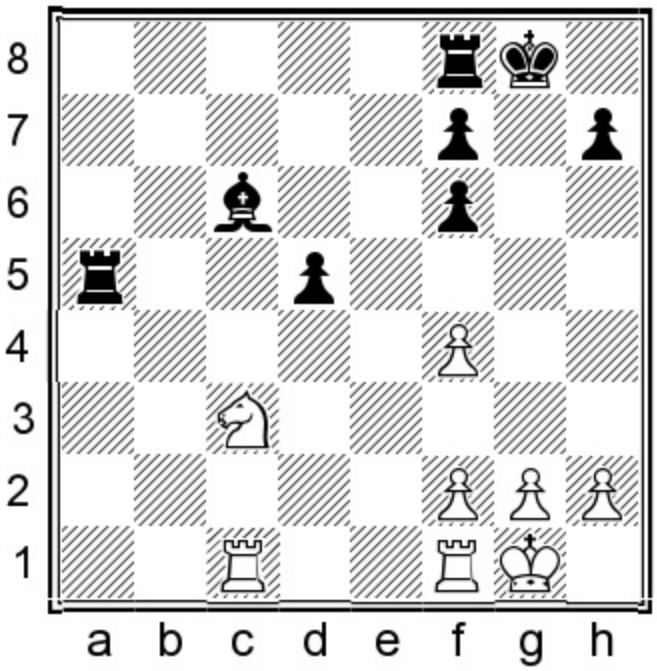
The white d4-knight is a tad better than the black d7-bishop. At the same time, this is White's only advantage over Black as there is no way for White to win the c3-pawn without conceding his b4-soldier. If the b4-pawn falls all hopes of obtaining a pawn-majority on the queenside vanish into the wind. White can still try some tricks like

21.b5 cxb5 22.c6

but after

22...♗e8 23.♘xb5 ♖a5 24.♘xc3 ♗xc6=

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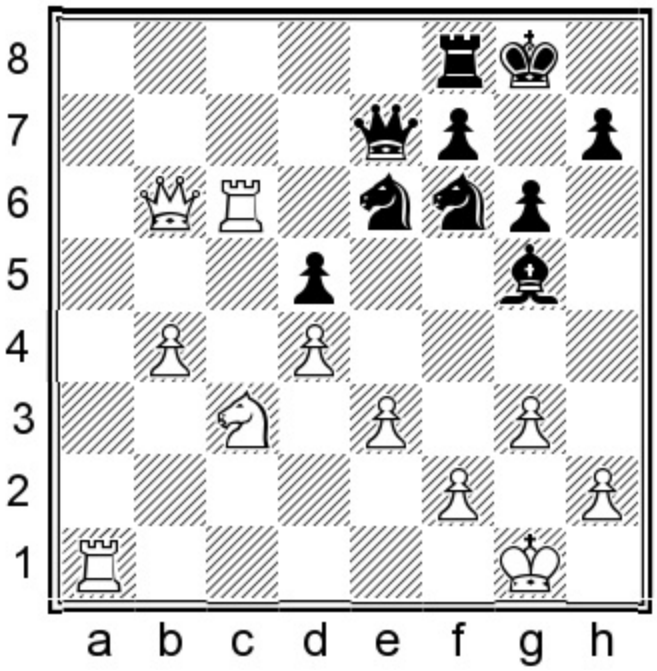


Position after: 24...♗xc6=

speaking about any White advantage is unthinkable as White is still eons away from capturing on d5. Should things go south for Black in this regard, a rook-endgame with four pawns against three should nonetheless provide her with substantial drawing chances.

22
Kazhgaleyev – Perdomo
St Petersburg 2018

chesstouring.com



■ *26...?*

Show/Hide Solution

22
Kazhgaleyev, Murtas (2587)
Perdomo, Carlos Andres (2301)
St Petersburg 2018

Attack & Defense
Resorting to an intuitive counterattack when being pushed back

White is a pawn up here after he sacrificed two minor pieces for a rook and two pawns. This is just the starting point of Black's problems. The white b4-pawn seems to be nicely escorted by the entirety of White's forces all the way to promotion-square. At the same time Black's counterplay on the opposite wing appears to still be in its infancy. He has many pieces congregating on the kingside but so little obvious possibilities to make use of the weak light squares available. What complicates matters even more for Black is the fact that any move of the f6-knight towards the white king will result in an instant loss of the d5-pawn. Is there anything Black can do to turn the tables?

26...♗xe3!

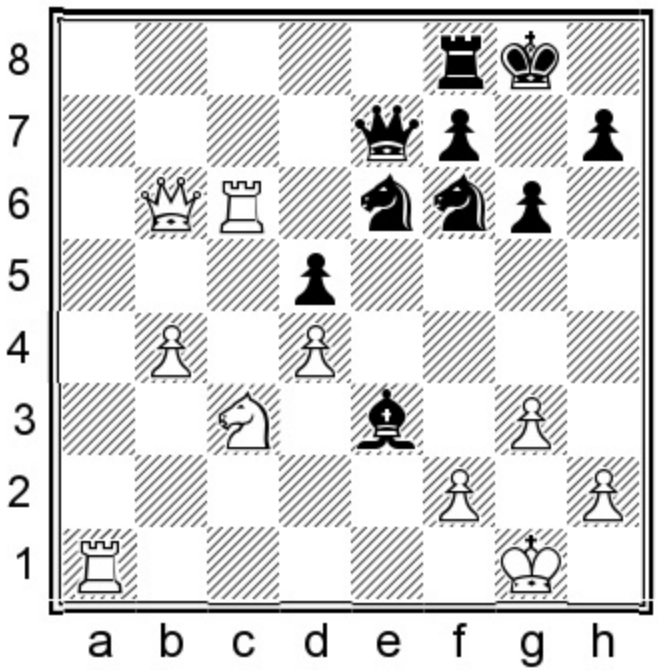
Black's only chance in this position is embodied in an incendiary bishop-sacrifice in exchange for ample damage done to the pawn structure surrounding the white king. There is however something untypical about the attack which is about to come. We are explicitly taught that the success of the

chesstouring.com

attack depends on the number of pieces taking part in it. But in this case Black starts out sacrificing one piece and cannot put more steam into the attack without sacrificing yet another one on the sacrificial altar. This being true we cannot completely disregard the fact that from now on the remnants of the pawn shield in front of the white monarch are going to be more or less meaningless for the purpose of his protection. What is more, Black will be able to combine attacking ideas with recapturing material (most notably the c3-knight), these two elements shall constitute joint compensation for the material sacrificed along the way. The above considerations lead us to the paradoxical conclusion that Black only gets a chance to survive here if he parts with his dark-squared bishop immediately. If the bishop stays there is nothing for Black to pick on in White's kingside setup. A full bishop might sound like a rip off when considering it as compensation for rather opaque attacking chances; still, Black's position was deteriorating so quickly that he was basically already in a 'better die in battle than to live on your knees' scenario.

The game featured 26...♖d8? which is hopeless for Black as all White needs to be able to claim a win in the end is to exchange queens and push the passer forward afterwards. For example: 27.♖a7 ♕e8 and now after 28.♕b5!+– not only does ♖c6-a6 threaten massive exchanges but the queen could also come back in time to the kingside in case of unexpected danger.

26...♗xe3!



Position after: 26...♗xe3!

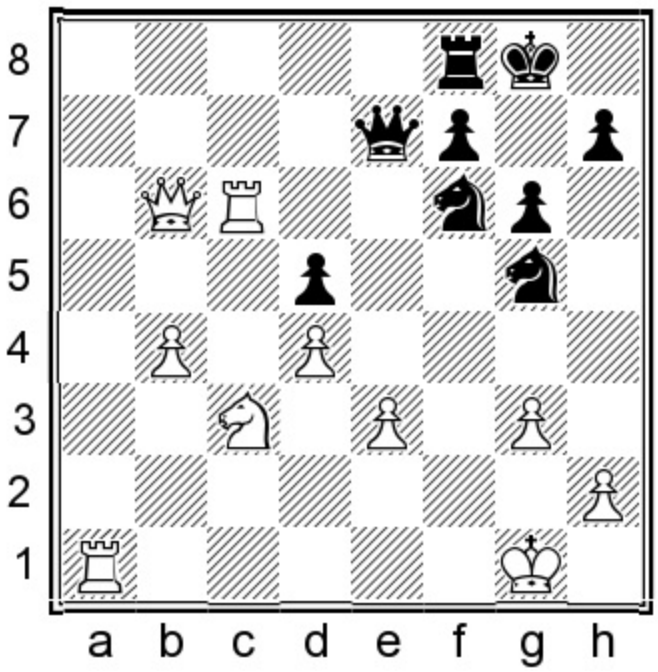
27.fxe3

By contrast, 27.♖a7?? would have cost White more than half a point as after 27...♗xf2+! 28.♔xf2 [28.♔f1 ♕e8! 29.♔xf2 ♘g4+ 30.♔f1 ♘g5 31.♖a2 ♕e3–+ looks just as bad to me.] 28...♘g4+ 29.♔e1 ♕f6 30.♘d1 ♖e8!–+ Black is still an exchange down but all of his pieces are taking part in the attack

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against the abandoned king of the opponent. In other words, the static material balance might be +2 in White's favor, but the dynamic material balance being -17 leaves no doubts as to who would eventually emerge victorious here. If you are ever concerned about the chances of success of your sacrificial attack please compare the material balance with the Attack/Defense Ratio after the sacrifice is carried out. If the latter exceeds the material balance at least twofold the chances that the attack is going to be crowned with success generally becomes high.

27...♘g5



Position after: 27...♘g5

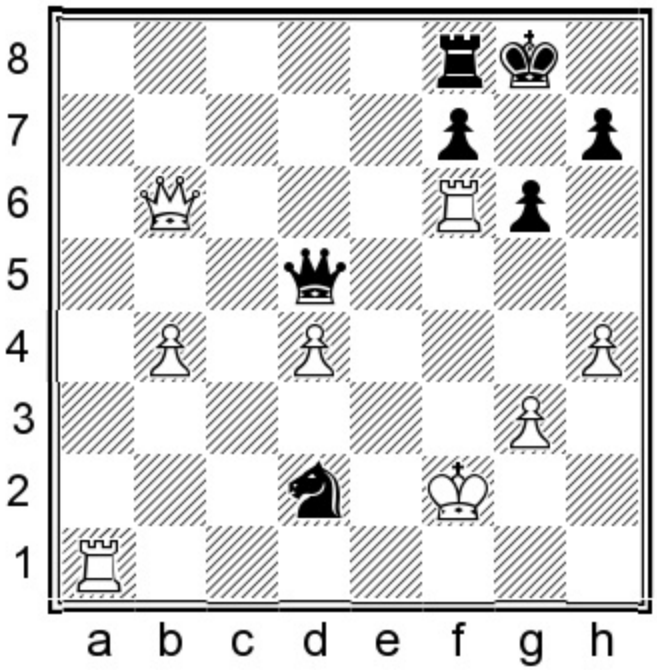
Yet another sacrifice although only a temporary one. The e-file has been opened in a very dynamic fashion with ...♕e7xe3+ constituting the deadly threat. The black knight on g5 might also prove to be useful very soon.

28.♖xf6

White defends in a manner that is rarely enumerated in chess-literature as a tangible method by taking whatever you are being given by the opponent. It sounds dangerous but makes sense at the end of the day. Every single piece we take represents one piece less that can mate us later on.

28.e4!? would have been worth a try in order to hurt Black's coordination but after 28...♘fxe4 [28...♘gxe4? 29.♖e1!+– could have been White's point here, hurting Black's attacking coordination by preventing him from including the f6-knight into play for the moment.] 29.♘xd5 ♕d7 30.♘f6+ ♘xf6 31.♖xf6 ♕d5 32.h4 ♘f3+ 33.♔f2 ♘d2=

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Position after: 33...♘d2=

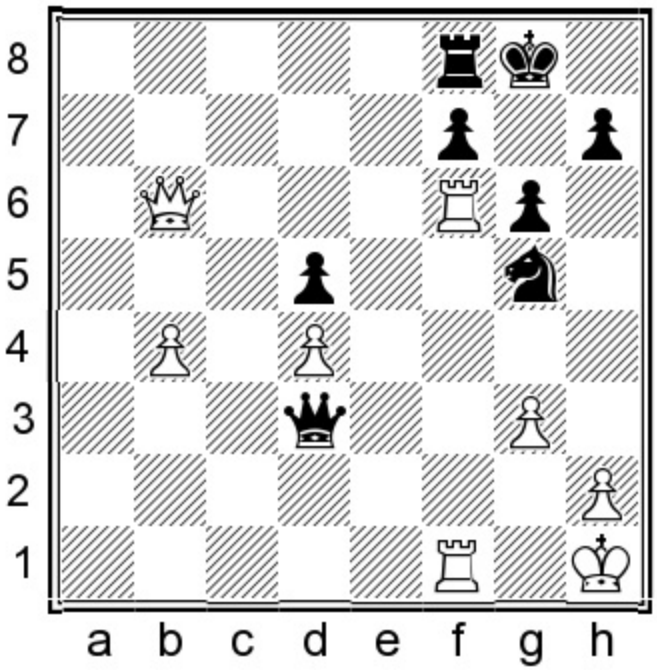
the light squares around the white king would have been so vulnerable that White's huge material advantage could not have made any real difference. It is not without reason that the ♕&♘ duo is considered to be such a lethal combination in open positions with exposed kings.

28...♕xe3+ 29.♔h1 ♕xc3 30.♖af1

It might seem for a second that White has effectively parried all of the opponent's threats and is on his way to consolidating the position, but only after

30...♕d3!

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Position after: 30...♕d3!

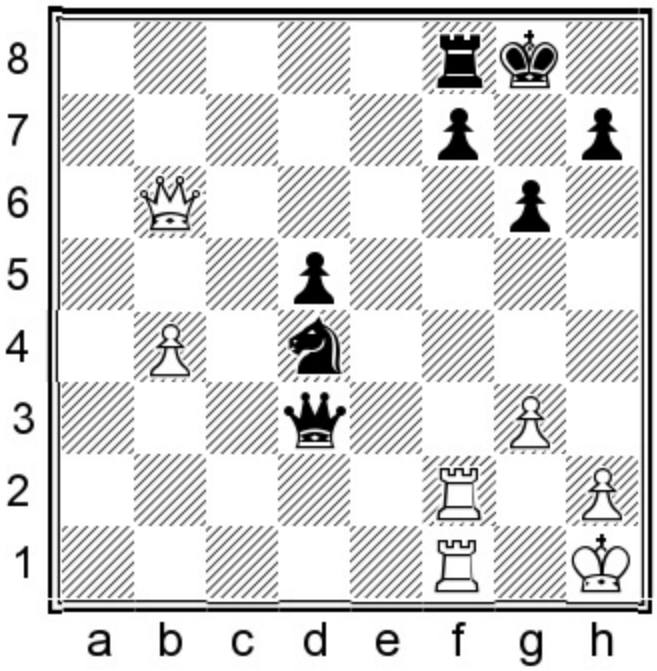
does it become clear what Black could be relying on. The sacrifice was not meant to lead to an attack against the king, but rather to a position in which, despite being down materially, Black could resort to guerrilla warfare measures for the sake of diverting White from making progress by virtue of a material advantage. Sometimes it is not namely that we attack, but as we expect the opponent to be able to repel it, we rather focus on other elements of the position created as a result. Here for example ...♕d3-e4+ with ...♘g5-h3 to follow is already looming over the white king. White can prevent it by playing

31.♖6f4

but this luxury already costs a pawn after

31...♘e6 32.♖4f2 ♘xd4

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Position after: 32...♘xd4

Now White can continue consolidating with

33.♕f6!

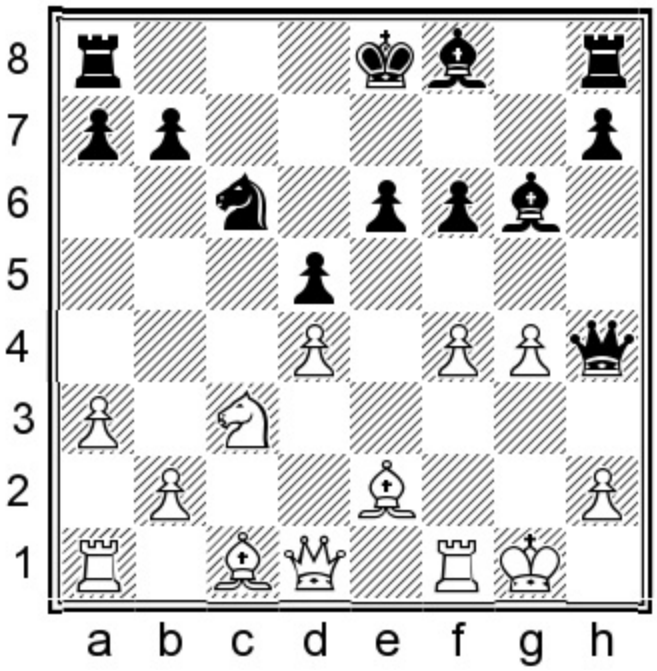
but after

33...♕e4+ 34.♖g2 ♘f5≅

White would again need to seriously consider preventing ...♘f5-e3 or even the simple ...♕e4xb4 from happening. Black might be a pawn down here, but the position is much more difficult to play for White from the practical perspective. Moreover, it would probably be impossible for White to claim chances for a win should the white pawn on the queenside fall in the meantime.

23
Bodnaruk – Ushenina
Sochi 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *15.?*

Show/Hide Solution

23
Bodnaruk, Anastasia (2431)
Ushenina, Anna (2442)
Sochi 2019

Coordination
Developing quickly in order to restore coordination

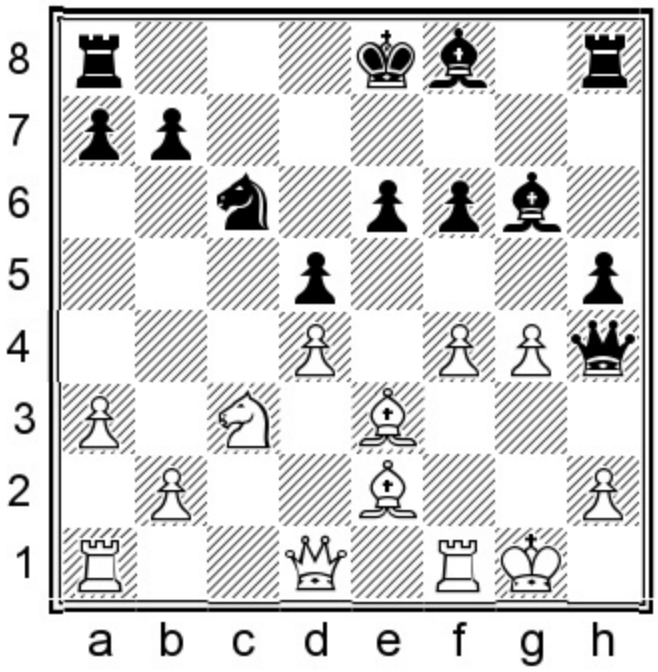
In a certain sense, it is a sign of our times that the openings considered as solid and based on healthy strategic foundations somehow tend to easily escalate into tactical bloodbaths. The reason for this is probably computer assisted attempts of the first player not only to try to refute Black's defensive concept early on, but also to give the position itself an irrational character as quick as possible. Here we have a position from the Caro-Kann Defense which is considered to be one of Black's safest options against 1.e4. For some strange reason (ask White, I guess), despite Bodnaruk's aggressive kingside pawn advance, it is she who actually needs to start being concerned about the king's safety. Things look far from conclusive now, but I would prefer not to be there when Black starts dismantling White's kingside pawn barrier. One thing is certain, if White is seriously thinking about deterring any malicious activity of Black on that side of the board, the time for action is now.

15.♗d2!

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A beautiful example of tactical coordination! White quickly brings the bishop in close proximity of the white king increasing the monarch's safety but the black queen will be forced to retreat. While the d4 pawn might appear to be hanging it is, in reality, untouchable as after taking Black would be losing due to the weakness of the e6-pawn. Compared to 15.♗e3?! (which was played in the game), with 15.♗d2! White happens to be just in time to maintain the equilibrium. When explaining the idea of coordination to my students I often compare improving the placement of one's piece to a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly. At first, it spins itself into a chrysalis, spends some time inside evolving, and only eventually emerges as a beautiful winged insect. The same goes for pieces. We see them stand passively without a purpose, so we make them travel to better outposts where only there do they start displaying their full potential. One issue often omitted in such stories is the meaning of time. What is the use of this transformation if the chrysalis gets consumed by a wasp before the butterfly hatches? Translated to chess language, what happens if you get caught by your opponent in the middle of the process of improving your pieces? For this reason whenever you plan on rerouting your pieces to greener pastures consider not only the advantages related thereto when the transfer finalizes, but also whether the opponent cannot oppose that in the meantime. Even the best of plans will be of no use if you simply do not have enough time to carried out.

A) 15.♗e3?! looks very natural and has also happened in the game but after 15...h5!



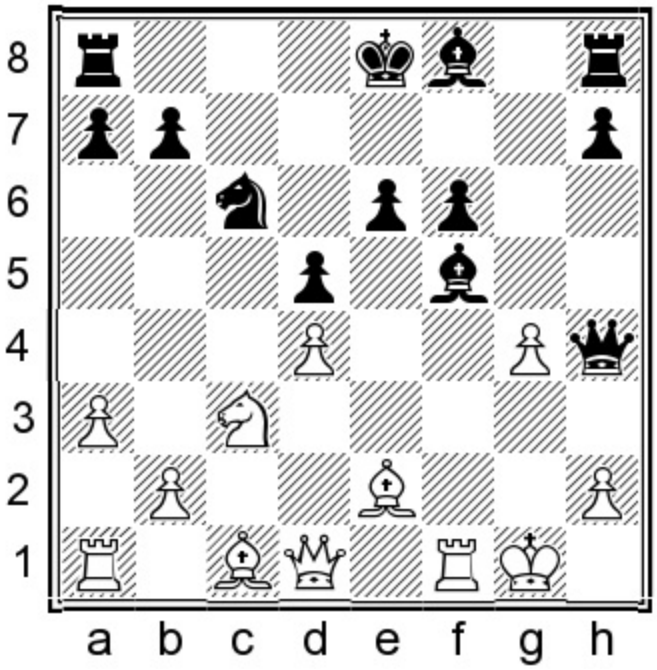
Position after: 15...h5!

White would have been plain lost as the position in front of her king opens up too rapidly, e.g. 16.gxh5 ♗xh5 17.♗xh5+ ♖xh5 18.♖f2 0-0-0∓ with ...♗f8-d6 followed by ...♖d8-g8 to come. Even if the white king were somehow to survive Black's kingside onslaught, strategic deficiencies (a bunch of weak pawns and a 'bad' bishop on e3) would have tipped the scales in Black's favor at the end of the day.

B) Many players would have surely considered the counter attacking 15.f5?! as a vital alternative.

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Still, it is bad for two reasons. First, it violates the basic Steinitzian rule of attacking when you are better and defending when you are worse. Secondly, the pawn thrust is tactically less impressive the moment you understand that Black can take it without actually damaging her pawn structure by playing 15...♗xf5!.



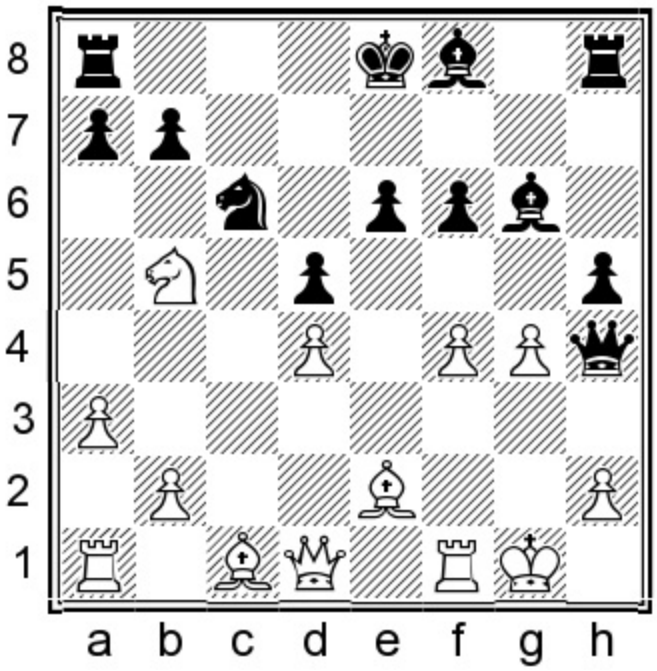
Position after: 15...♗xf5!

B1) 16.gxf5 fails to 16...♖g8+ 17.♔h1 ♗d6 after which White manages to survive only if he parts with plenty of material, e.g. 18.♗h5+ ♔d8 19.♕c2 ♘xd4 20.♕f2 ♕xh5 21.fxe6 ♘xe6 22.♕xf6+ ♔d7 23.♕f7+ ♕xf7 24.♖xf7+ ♔c6∓ with a position that should be winnable for Black with good technique.

B2) Now after a series of counterpunches starting with 16.♘xd5!? ♖g8! 17.♖xf5! exf5 18.♘c7+ ♔d7 19.♗f4 [19.♘xa8? ♗d6–+ is yet again hopeless for White because of how exposed her king is.] 19...♖c8∓ the dust is yet to settle on the board but it is slowly becoming painfully clear for White that her central initiative is running out of steam.

C) Another candidate move that combines attacking and defensive ideas here would have been 15.♘b5?! This way White not only threatens to fork the black king and the rook, but also apparently prevents her dark-squared bishop from joining the fight via d6. At the same time Black does not even have to pay attention to this minor nuisance for the moment and may instead continue pressurizing the white monarch after 15...h5!

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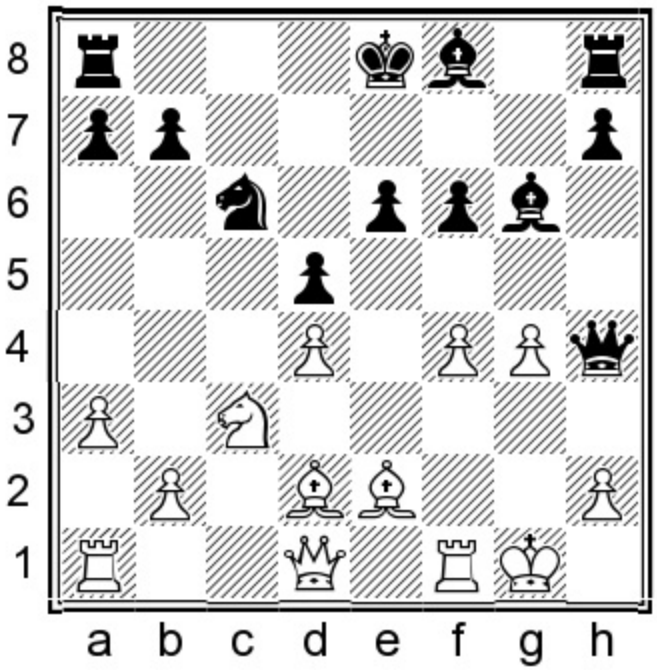


Position after: 15...h5!

16.g5 [16.♘c7+? fails to 16...♔d7 17.♘xa8 hxg4 18.♖f2 g3 19.♖g2 gxh2+ 20.♔h1 ♗e4–+ and Black crashes through.] 16...fxg5 and although now White can in fact win a whole rook without having have to worry about getting mated on the spot with 17.♘c7+ ♔d7 18.♘xa8 after the calm 18...♗d6∓ the only result that comes into consideration would have been a win for Black. White may still be nominally a pawn up, but with her knight being doomed, and the d4 and f4-pawns being next on the list of Black's victims, the exposed position of the white king would represent the last nail to her coffin. As Black I would not have even considered taking on a8 now as this would constitute a mere waste of time. With all of our pieces standing not far away from the kingside, focusing on getting the head of the white king would have surely been the way to go.

15.♗d2!

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Position after: 15.♗d2!

15...♖g8

Threatens open up the g-file in front of the white king but White is ready to face this kind of a threat.

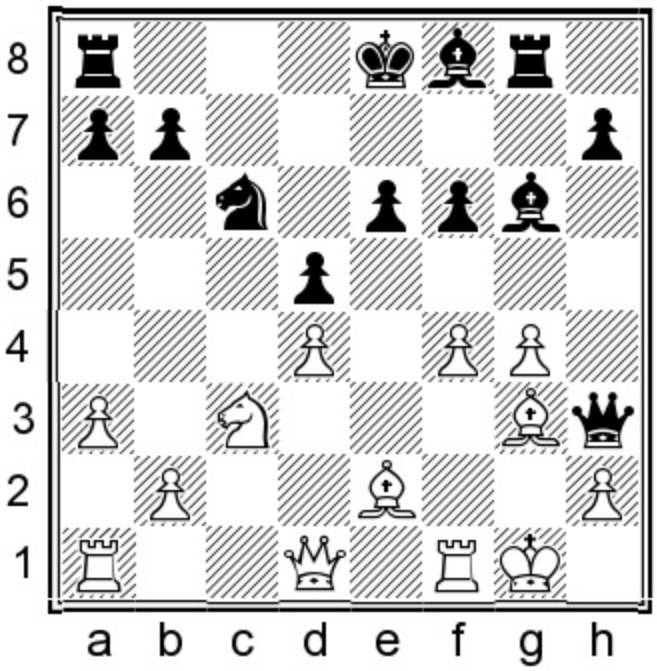
A) 15...♘xd4?? demonstrates White's counter idea after the clever 16.♗e1 Black can in fact save both the knight and the queen but after 16...♘xe2+ 17.♕xe2+– she would have paid dearly as the pawn on e6 falls with a check and the black king is then completely naked.

B) On the other hand, 15...♗d6 already gives White time to consolidate with 16.♘b5 ♗b8 17.♕e1 ♕xe1 18.♖axe1 and although Black can still win a pawn after 18...a6 19.♘c3 ♘xd4 intuition tells me that with the black king standing straight in front of the white rooks when the e-file opens up that White's initiative starting with 20.f5↑ may be very unpleasant for Black to face.

C) But most importantly 15...h5? fails due to 16.♗e1 ♕h3 17.♖f3! ♕xg4+ 18.♖g3+– when Black would have had to part with a piece for no obvious compensation.

16.♗e1 ♕h3 17.♗g3

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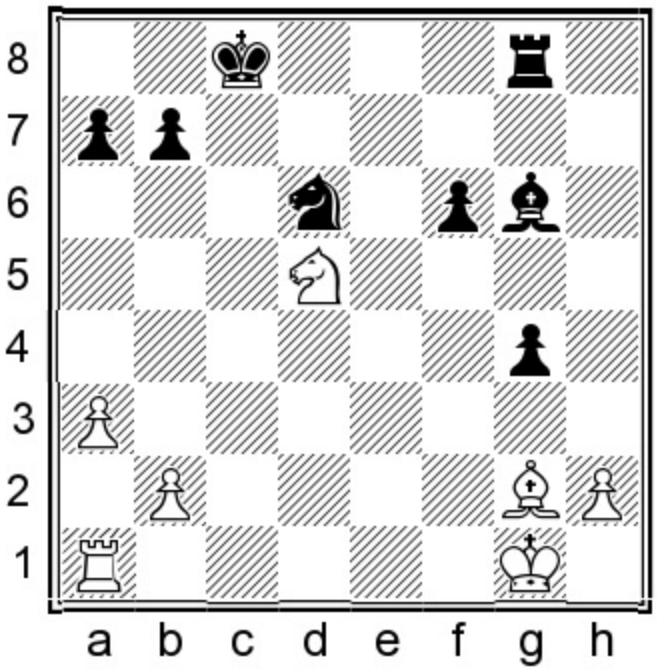
Position after: 17.♗g3

Exactly! By transferring the bishop snakelike to g3, she provides her king with an additional layer of security. With the black queen possibly being stranded on h3, the best choice seems to be too settle for a draw by perpetual after

17...♗f5

Tries like 17...h5?! aiming to take advantage of the white king's apparent vulnerability might actually prove to be quite risky, e.g. 18.♗f3! ♗d6 19.♖e1 0-0-0! 20.♗g2! temporarily sacrificing material for the sake of extinguishing any attacking ideas from Black 20...♕xg4 21.♕xg4 hxg4 22.♖xe6 ♘xd4 23.♖xd6! ♖xd6 24.f5 ♘xf5 25.♗xd6 ♘xd6 26.♘xd5±.

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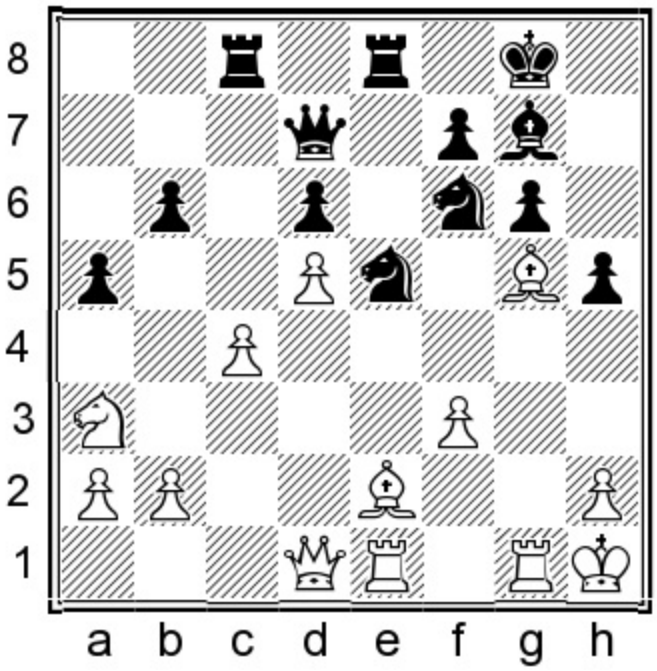
Position after: 26.♘xd5±

Although White is a pawn down for the moment she is about to recapture on f6 thus restoring material balance and even remaining with slightly more active pieces. Black should be fine with accurate play but I would still prefer White here because of some tactical tricks related to the slightly shaky position of the black king, knight and g4-pawn.

18.gxf5 ♖xg3+ 19.hxg3 ♕xg3+ 20.♔h1 ♕h3+ 21.♔g1 ♕g3+=

24
Bocharov – Dominguez Perez
Sochi 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *23...?*

Show/Hide Solution

24
Bocharov, Ivan (2568)
Dominguez Perez, Leinier (2750)
Sochi 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Dynamic defense (sacrifice to avoid a bind)

This position arose out of an ultra-popular Najdorf line (6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 ♗e6 8.f3 h5). What we have in front of us right now is actually quite a good manifestation of what kind of setups both parties can expect when they employ the said variation. White tries to make use of the bishop pair and slowly organize his forces, whereas Black relies heavily on activity generated by the knights in semi-closed structures. The structure itself has underwent some serious changes in the meantime as Black has already carried out the thematic ...e5-e4 push resulting in the e-pawn being traded on f3 for White's g2-pawn. This might seem like a great bargain for Black at first glance as the white f3-pawn looks like an easy target, one that additionally passivizes White's own light-squared bishop. But this is only a mirage as White's f3-pawn repels the black knights that want to come to g4 or e4. The bishop on e2 is naturally far from perfect but I can imagine it being transferred one day via f1 to h3 thus grinding Black's gears due to its influence along the h3-c8 diagonal. The worst part of the story for Black is that when White manages to successfully install a knight on b5, he is going to be reduced to a mere

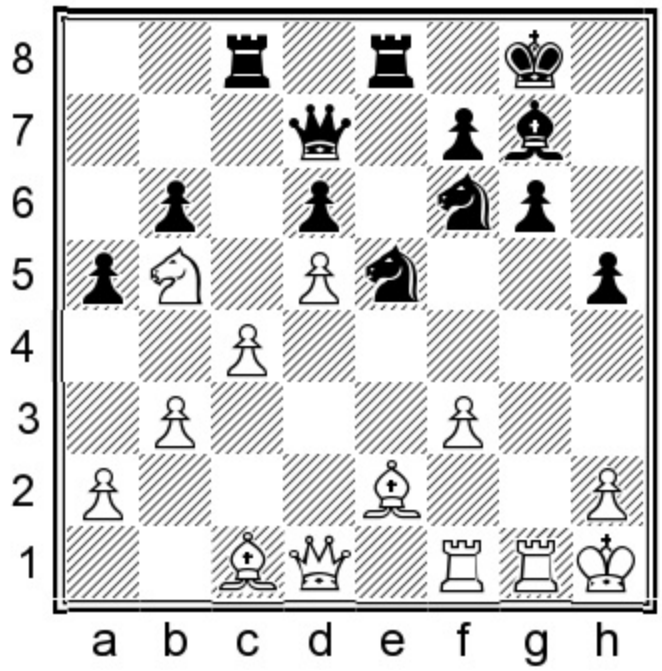
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defender of an otherwise cramped position. And in the Najdorf this is exactly what Black cannot allow to happen!

23...b5!

This was an indispensable pawn lever if Black wanted to continue playing this position on equal terms. For the price of a little pawn Black damages White's central pawn structure, prevents White from bringing the knight to a strong outpost on b5 and on top of all of that even guarantees Black ample compensation in form of activity in return. What more could you possibly expect from a simple foot-soldier?

A) In the game Dominguez opted for 23...♕f5?! with the sneaky idea of ...♘e5xf3! appearing on the horizon. If White however rules out any immediate threats Black might be up to at present, and then only prepares a knight jump to b5, the opponent would be forced to politely come back with the queen to d7, thus losing any activity he might have enjoyed so far. Taking this into consideration, White could have obtained an archetypically great position after 24.♖ef1! ♘h7 25.♗c1 ♘f6 26.♘b5 ♕d7 27.b3±



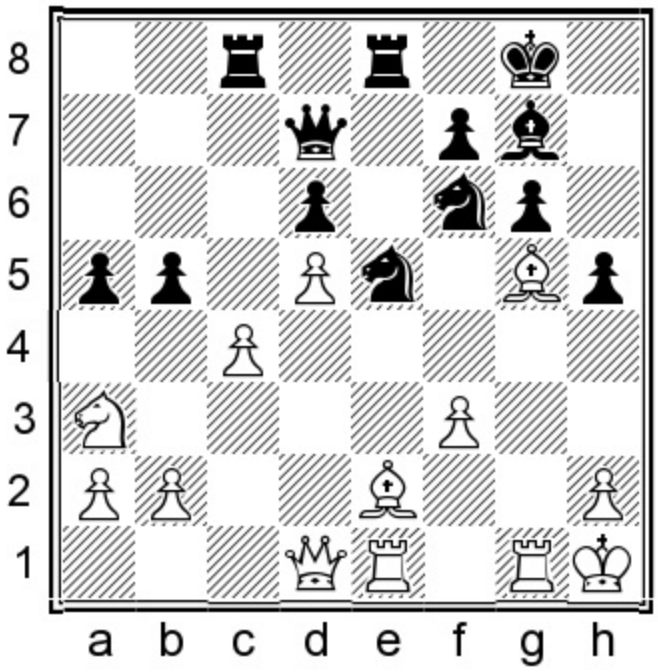
Position after: 27.b3±

when Black would have been badly tangled because of the need to cover for the backward d6-pawn. I cannot furthermore help the impression that Black's pieces are actually very much standing in each other's way here, in particular with the e5-knight hindering the potential of the e8-rook.

B) Another idea could have been 23...♔h7 with the intention of escaping from the g-file in advance and later on trying to carry out an advantageous exchange of dark-squared bishops. This is not much better than the move played by Black in the game as after 24.b3! ♘g8 25.♘b5 ♗h6 26.f4! ♗xg5 27.fxg5 it is not the weakness of the d6-pawn that hurts Black the most, but rather the fact that White

can quite comfortably install a knight on f6 rather quickly, e.g. 27...♘e7 28.♘c3! ♔g7 29.♘e4+– tying down the black forces.

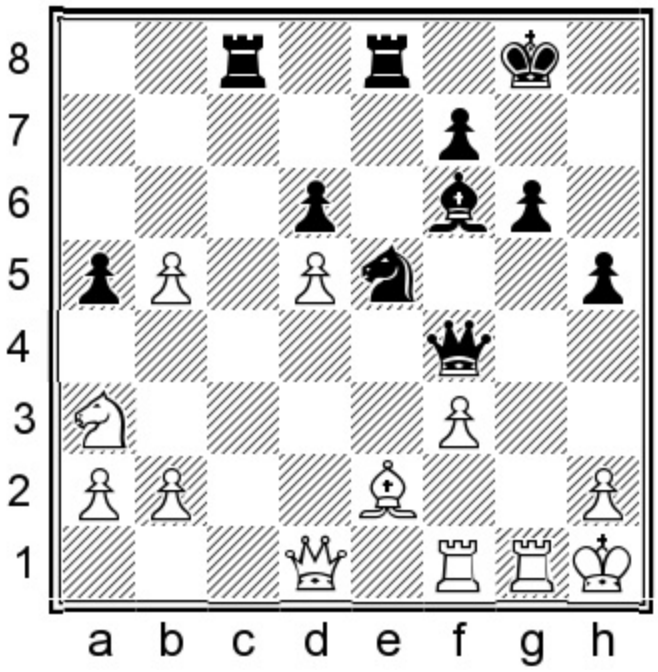
23...b5!



Position after: 23...b5!

24.cxb5

A) 24.♗xf6 ♗xf6 25.cxb5 wins a pawn for White, but after the further 25...♕f5 26.♖ef1 ♕f4!↑



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Position after: 26...♕f4!↑

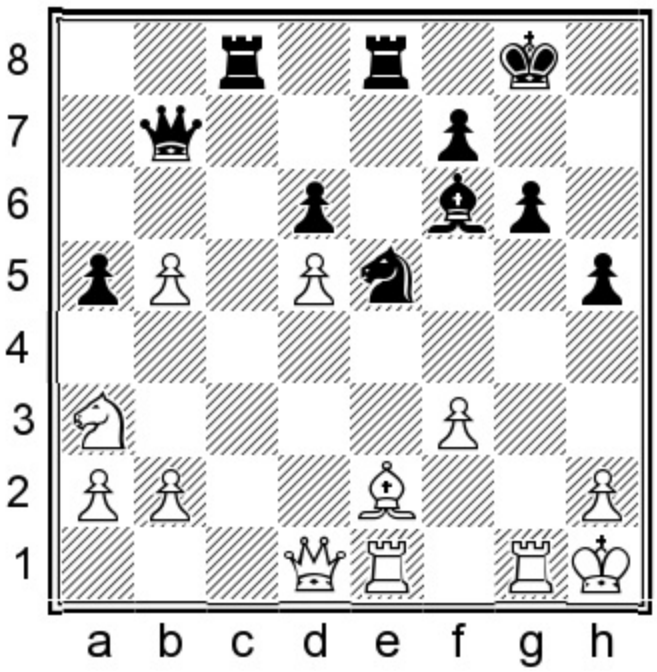
leads by comparison to a position which illustrates all the bad things that can happen to White in those structures. Here White would have been dominated along the dark squares. The slight material deficit matters little here as every single black piece is better than every single white counterpart. The high level of control exercised by the black forces along the dark squares emphasizes how impotent the light square oriented pieces of White actually are in this position. There is obviously still a long way to go for Black if he wants to convert it into a full point, but one thing is for sure and that is that Black risks nothing here.

B) Similarly, 24.♘xb5?! is simply bad due to 24...♘xc4 25.♗xc4 ♖xe1 26.♕xe1 ♖xc4 27.♘c3 ♕f5∓ and White ends up without the bishop pair but with a multitude of easily exploitable pawn weaknesses in exchange.

24...♕b7 25.♗xf6

The d5-pawn is in danger, and the only way to save it is to eliminate the black knight on f6, but after

25...♗xf6=



Position after: 25...♗xf6=

we arrive at the key position we should have had in mind when deciding upon playing 23...b5! White is a pawn up here, but it is securely contained for the moment. What is more, by taking on b5 White has severely weakened his soldier on d5 which may constitute a potential target in the future (e.g. by means of ...♖c8-c5). All this means rather little the moment we understand that Black has obtained something much more valuable for the sacrificed material: a strong global grip over the dark squares.

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Without a dark-squared bishop White is unable to effectively fight against this grip especially as all of his central pawns are placed on the light squares. Sample lines confirm that Black is more than fine here:

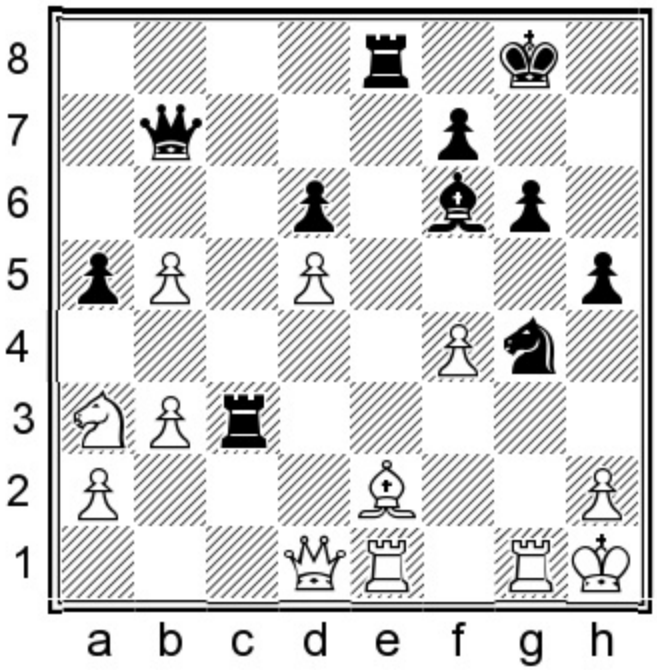
26.b3

26.♕d2 a4 27.♖c1 was certainly another way of handling the position as White, but after 27...♖xc1 28.♖xc1 Black obtains very good play after 28...♕a7! Trying to prevent the 'dark-squared infection' of his position by the black forces is pointless in the long run for White so in order to avoid the situation getting out of control White would be advised to opt for something like 29.f4 ♘g4 30.♘c4 ♘f2+ 31.♔g2 ♘e4 32.b6! ♕xb6 33.♘xb6 ♘xd2= when opposite-colored bishops would have contributed to drawish tendencies in this position.

26...♖c3 27.f4

27.♘b1 in order to evict the annoying black rook is tempting but not so effective as after 27...♖e3 28.♘d2 ♗h4 29.♖ef1 ♘d3↑ Black is clearly dominating in the center with the b5 and d5-pawns about to fall more out of inertia than as a result of Black's concerted attacks. Simply put there are more attractive targets for Black present on the queenside to focus on for the moment instead of wasting time for ridiculous pawn grabbing.

27...♘g4



Position after: 27...♘g4

A very well founded and temporary pawn sacrifice. Returning to d7 feels bad from the perspective of time and activity so g4 is the only square left for the knight to go to. At the same time after something

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like

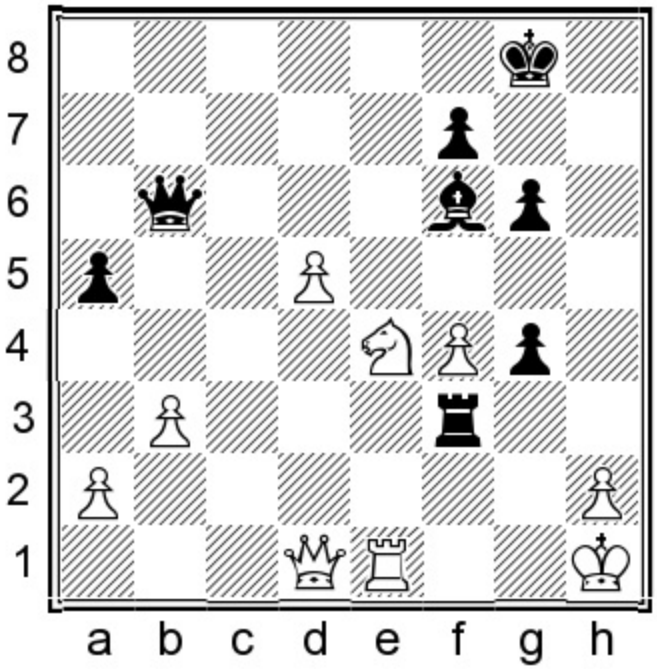
28.♗xg4 ♖xe1 29.♖xe1 hxg4

the g4-pawn cannot be even taken for the moment. Bringing the knight back into play by means of

30.♘c4 ♕xb5 31.♘xd6 ♕b6 32.♘e4

surely looks logical now, but after the accurate

32...♖f3!



Position after: 32...♖f3!

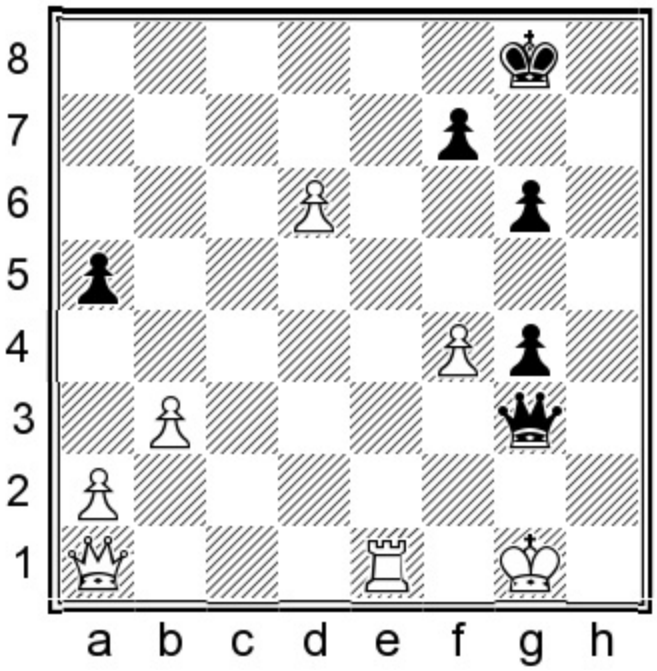
Black would have been able to retain dynamic balance. White is unable to focus entirely on pushing his advanced d5-pawn because of the weakness of his king. Under these circumstances there would have been nothing better for him to agree to a perpetual after something like

33.♘xf6+

33.d6?! would have proved to be even risky for White as after 33...♗d8! 34.♕d2 ♕b5! 35.♕e2 ♕f5↑ the d6-pawn is not going anywhere and he will be faced with the challenging task of navigating between dropping loose pawns and avoiding mating threats on f1 or h2.

33...♕xf6 34.d6 ♖f2 35.♕a1 ♖xh2+! 36.♔xh2 ♕h4+ 37.♔g2 ♕h3+ 38.♔g1 ♕g3+=

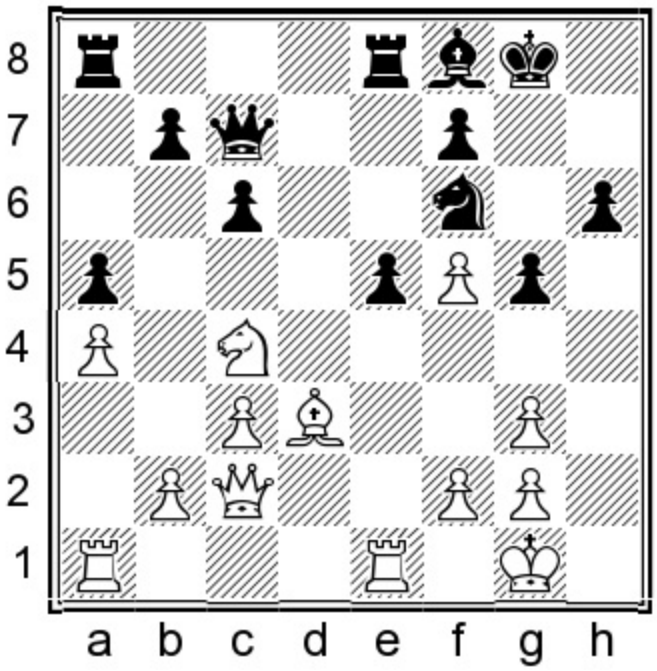
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Position after: 38...♕g3+=

and the white king cannot run away from the queen checks.

25
Jovanic – Jovanovic
Bjelovar 2019



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■ *21...?*

Show/Hide Solution

25
Jovanic, Ognjen (2515)
Jovanovic, Zoran (2511)
Bjelovar 2019

Weakness
Stretching the opponent's defenders

Material is equal in this position stemming from the Pirc Defense with the pawn structure of both parties being more or less symmetrical at the same time. White certainly regrets not being able to install a typically annoying knight on f5 which would potentially be dominating Black's f8-bishop. Speaking of the bishops though it is clearly visible that the Black counterpart has much more potential than its opposite-colored colleague, in particular should the former be capable of reaching c5 soon enough. So would 21...♗f8-c5 be a good move now?

21...e4!

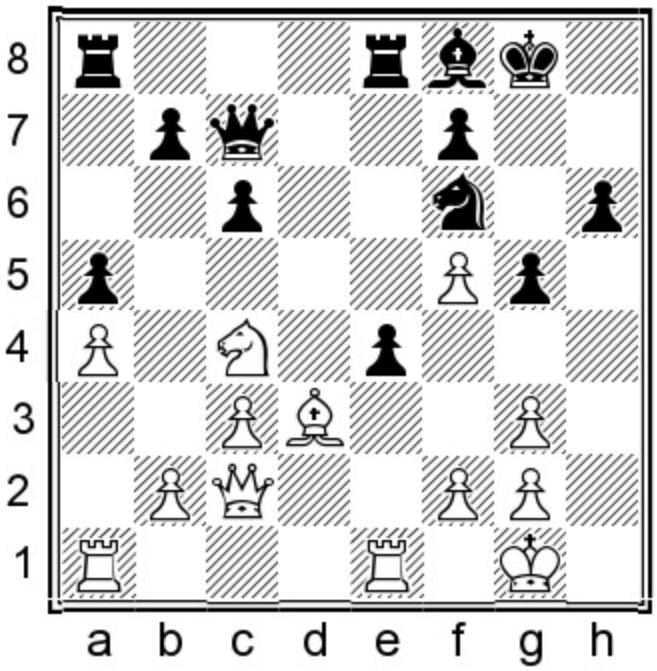
No, at least not yet! In order to make this bishop a certified beast we first need to open up the position a little bit. Interestingly, by pushing ...e5-e4 we are not directly contributing to the improvement of the f8 bishop but rather indirectly by opening up other black pieces whose influence on the white position makes this bishop a monster. What this means is that this bishop becomes upgraded not by transferring it to a great diagonal, not even by opening it up by means of a pawn sacrifice, but rather by engaging the white defenders with additional duties so that they cannot contain the bishop well enough in the long run.

A) In the game Black opted for 21...♗c5?! which is absolutely to the point (exerting pressure along the g1-a7 diagonal), but in the end gives away the advantage as it allows White to quickly block the e5-pawn with 22.♗e4∓. The huge difference between the two of Black's options lies in the fact that White has hereby managed to close the kingside quite successfully. The bishop might not be an optimal blockader, but the absence of any drafts along the e-file or the h2-b8 diagonal is a blessing for White.

B) By comparison 21...♖ad8?! would have been even worse as after 22.♘d2! ♗c5 23.♘e4 ♘xe4 24.♗xe4=. White manages to achieve the very same blockade but in an upgraded version as here the absence of the knights tells us to put more emphasis on the remaining minor pieces when evaluating the position. And with those being opposite-colored bishops, White's chances of saving a draw here would have clearly risen.

21...e4!

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Position after: 21...e4!

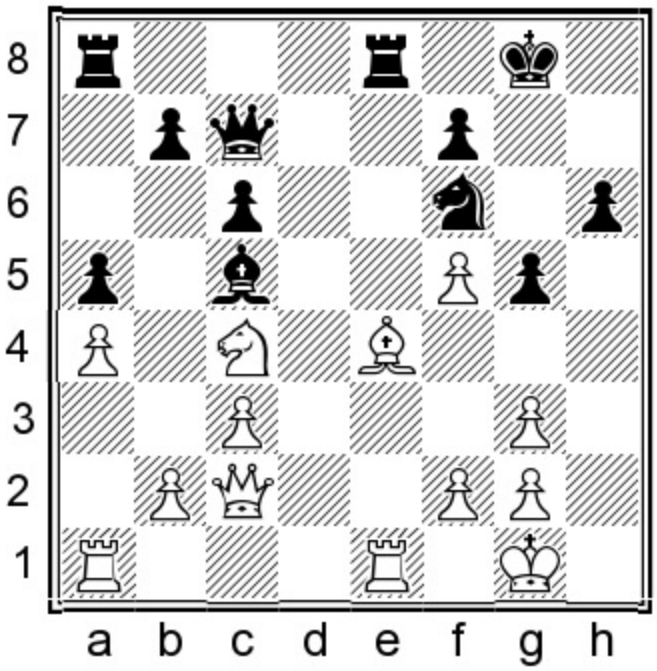
22.♗xe4

White is more or less forced to accept the sacrifice. As I often advise my students, if you are already suffering then at least know why you are doing it!

22.♗f1 looks like a much safer option for White especially the moment you understand what kind of evil would be awaiting him should he dare to capture on e4. Still, after 22...♗c5 23.♘e3 ♕e5 24.♖ad1 ♖ad8–+ Black would have been winning all the same. Apart from enjoying plenty of central control the f5-pawn is his for the taking.

22...♗c5

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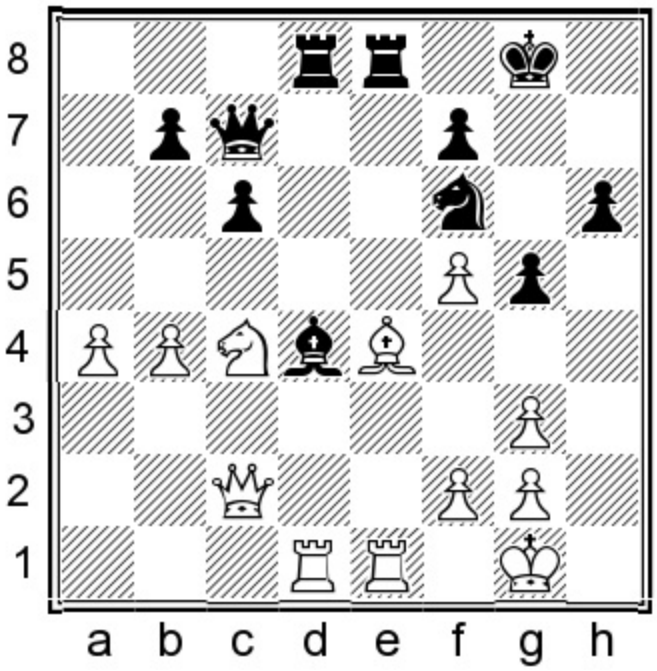
Position after: 22...♗c5

Only now does Black bring his dark-squared bishop in full glory to the g1-a7 diagonal. A popular proverb says that a game is rarely lost based on one weakness, with real problems starting to appear only as consecutive soft spots are being created. In other words, White could easily live on with that black bishop pointing at f2 but, if – on top of that, the g3-pawn is hanging as well and White finds it tough to have if defended because of the need to now cover the e4-bishop, things can get very grim for White indeed.

23.♔f1

23.b4 would have been a decent attempt for White to try and divert the menacing black bishop from the g1-a7 diagonal for at least a short while. Although taking on b4 is surely not entirely wrong, Black could politely refuse with 23...axb4 24.cxb4 ♗d4! when after 25.♖ad1 ♖ad8

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Position after: 25...♖ad8

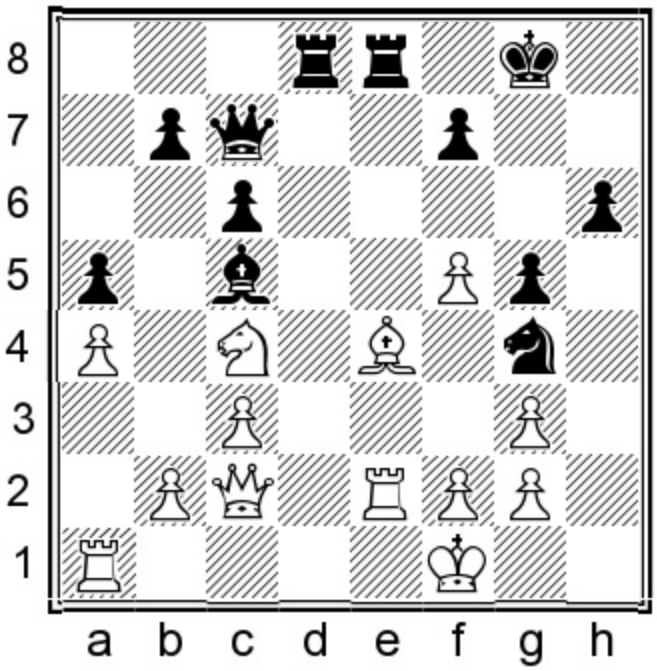
despite the material edge, White's position would have been beyond salvation as any ideas to neutralize Black's pressure along the dark squares fail. For example: 26.♔f1 ♗xf2! 27.♔xf2 ♖xd1 28.♕xd1 ♘xe4+ 29.♔g1 ♕xg3–+ and White collapses.

23...♘g4

We see a weakness, we hit it! As we shall see in a moment Black has so far been using the white e4-bishop as a decoy, only to completely shift his attention to the vulnerable dark squares close to the white queen at a chosen point in time.

24.♖e2 ♖ad8!

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Position after: 24...♖ad8!

Simple, but efficient measures as Black activates his forces to a maximum. After reaching perfect coordination this is exactly the moment when we should be looking for tactical shots. It is no wonder that whatever White does in this position, he is going to be almost torn apart.

25.♗f3

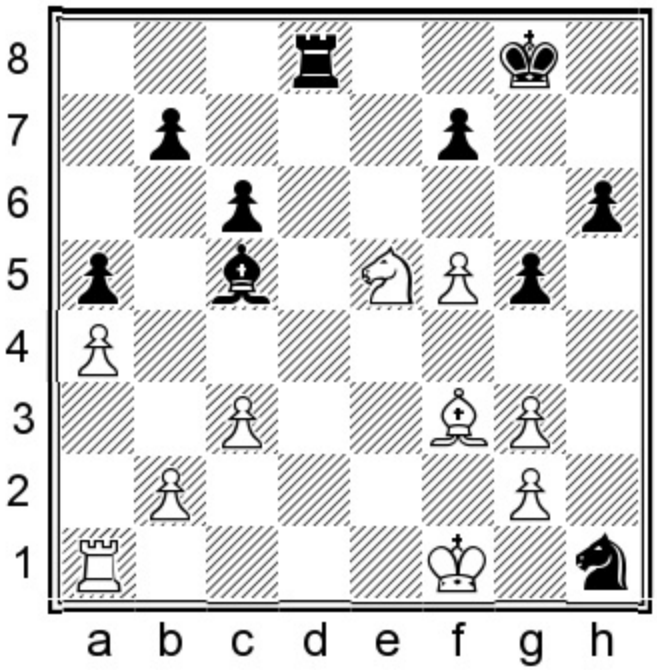
25.♖ae1 falls short to the elegant 25...♕xg3! when the queen is taboo after 26.fxg3 ♘h2#.

25...♖xe2

25...♘xf2 26.♖xf2 ♕xg3 27.♘xa5 g4–+ would have been just as effective when Black can simply capture whatever material White has left en prise, or even go for mate after something like ...♕g3-h2. In any case, White's position is hopeless.

26.♕xe2 ♘xf2 27.♕e5 ♕xe5 28.♘xe5 ♘h1!–+

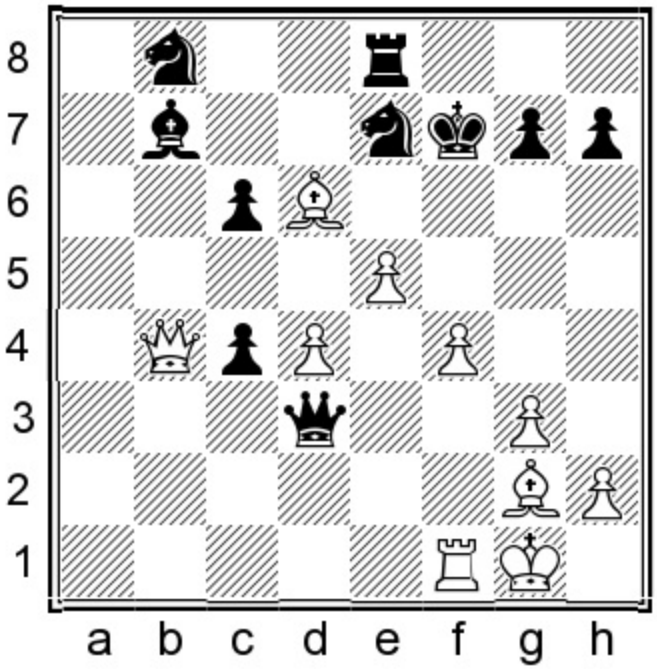
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Position after: 28...♘h1!−+

with a beautiful geometrical finale that we already know. White may not be getting mated anymore but the loss of the g3 and f5-pawns is unavoidable and will therefore cost him the game.

26
Dziuba – Moranda
Hamburg 2019



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■ *25...?*

Show/Hide Solution

26
Dziuba, Marcin (2574)
Moranda, Wojciech (2599)
Hamburg 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
To attack or to defend?

Disclaimer: for those of you who want to feel the thrill of the moment please set the chess clock to three minutes plus 30 seconds of increment per move and only then start thinking.

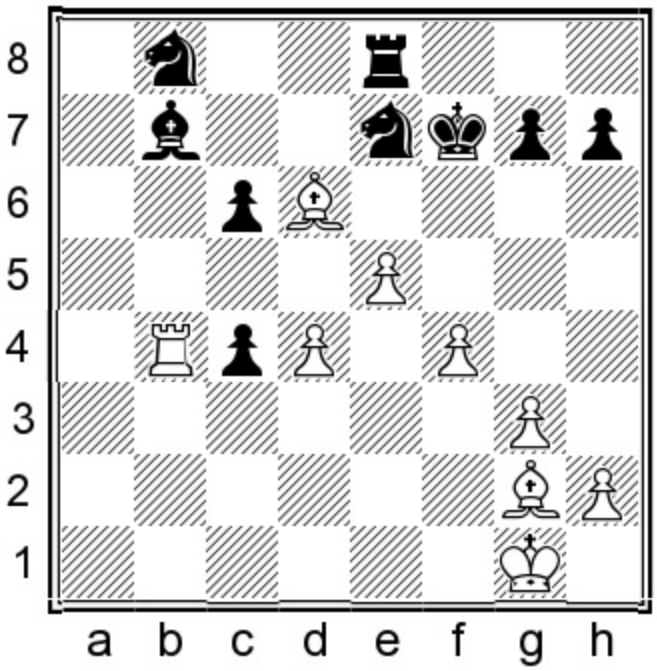
That is the exact situation that I was in during this game. With my opponent uncorking a most unexpected knight sacrifice in the Catalan Opening I consumed most of my time in the middlegame trying to neutralize White's initiative. Whether I have managed to do so adequately is another story, but right here and now there are a few problems to solve. Black is a piece up for two pawns, but White is on the verge of recapturing it by taking the bishop on b7. What is worse, running away with the bishop does not seem to make much sense as this would only imperil the b8 or even the e7-knight. To top it off the black king still cannot feel entirely secure as a potential f4-f5-f6 push constantly needs to be reckoned with. Are you able to help Black out here or would you rather throw in the towel and go for a pint of Hamburg's finest lager instead?

25...♗a6!

It turns out that Black can defend this position... without defending! While under pressure, more often than not, do we ask ourselves 'How to defend?' I believe this approach to be inherently wrong as it already directs our thoughts towards 'defending' as such. The person who once famously stated that 'Attack is the best defense' might have been right about one thing: being under pressure is just another problem that needs to be solved. In order to find the right solution, problems need to be approached in the most flexible of ways. Here for example, psychologically speaking, I believe it to be much easier to find the text move by asking yourself a slightly modified version of the above question which is: 'I am under attack – what can I do about it?' This way you are not limiting yourself to purely defensive ideas from the start while putting your chess mind into so-called 'problem-solving mode' and thus benefit from a bigger chance of finding the strongest idea.

A) After having calculated many variations, but not reaching a definite conclusion as to what specifically would be Black's best response, I faltered under time pressure and went for 25...♕b3? This move follows a clear idea (to protect the b7-bishop and reduce White's initiative by exchanging queens) but fails utterly to 26.♖b1 ♕xb4 27.♖xb4

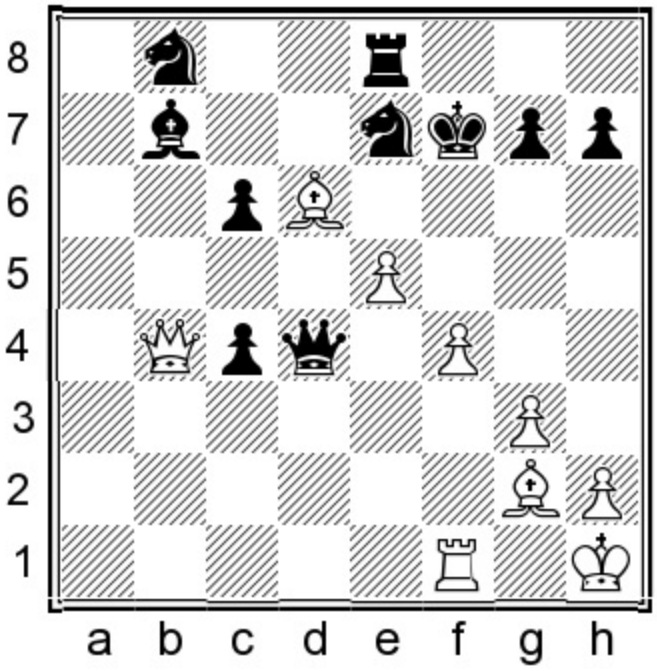
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Position after: 27.♖xb4

when after 27...♗a8 28.♖xb8 ♖xb8 29.♗xb8 c3 30.♗d6 ♘f5 31.♗a3 ♘xd4 32.♗e4+– White effortlessly stops the passed c3-pawn and only then comes closer with the king in order to eliminate it. With my light-squared bishop being idle on a8, I would have not been able to last for too long. Luckily enough my opponent was also in severe zeitnot and allowed me to bail out towards a draw a little bit earlier.

B) I also considered 25...♕xd4+ but after 26.♔h1 I could not force myself to voluntarily retreat the bishop to the sad a8-square.

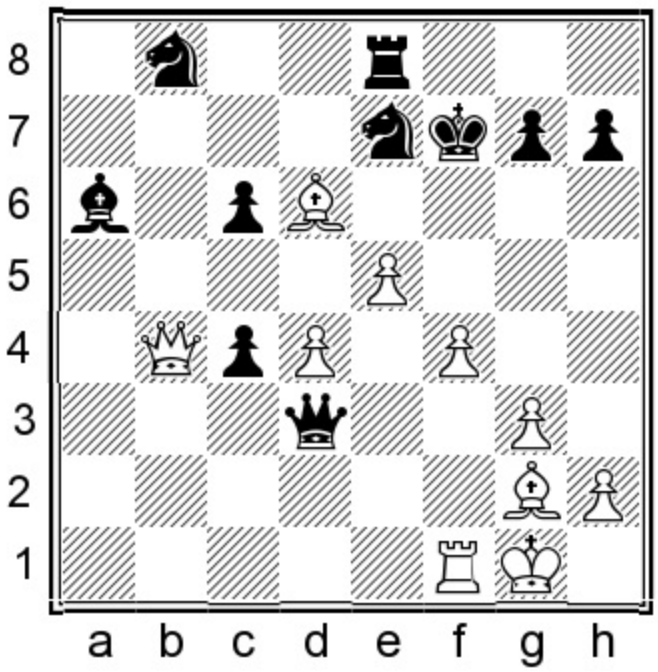


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Position after: 26.♔h1

However, the post-mortem revealed that White is unable to profit from the temporarily terrible placement of the bishop and would therefore be advised to steer the game towards a draw after 26...♗a8 27.♕a5! ♘d7 28.f5 ♔g8 29.♕c7 ♘xe5! 30.♗xe5 ♕d8= with Black being mostly out of danger as the queens get swapped.

25...♗a6!

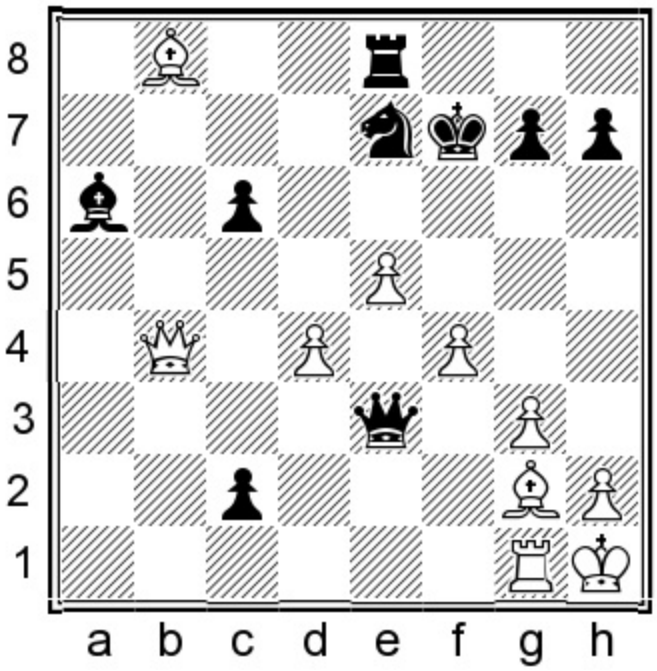


Position after: 25...♗a6!

26.♗xe7

A) 26.♗xb8 allows Black to demonstrate the very essence of the winning concept: the c-pawn needs to be pushed all the way to the promotion square. During its march down the c-file it will be supported not only by the black queen, but also by the a6-bishop which hits the white rook on f1 the moment the star pawn moves. It is astonishing how Black could have shifted from deep defense straight to attacking within only two or three moves! After: 26...c3 27.♔h1 c2 28.♖g1 ♕e3

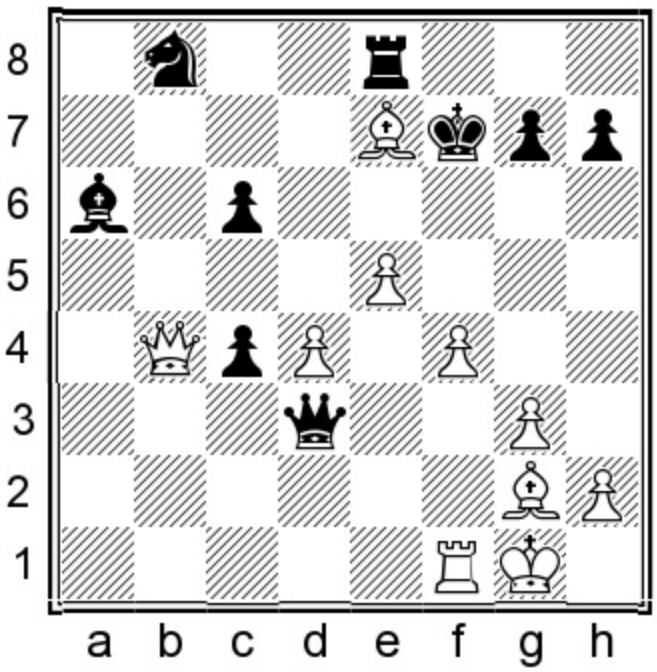
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Position after: 28...♕e3

and White is unable to defend both the b8-bishop and the c1-square because after 29.♕b2 the white queen gets deflected after 29...♖xb8 30.♕xc2 ♕d3–+

B) 26.e6+ is far trickier to meet but after the cold-blooded 26...♔g8! Black may just as well stick to his regular plan, e.g. 27.♗xe7 c3 28.♖e1 ♕d2 29.♕b1 c2 30.♕c1 ♕xd4+ 31.♔h1 ♖xe7–+ when the ensuing position would still require a little bit of cleaning up but the moment Black captures the e6-pawn, he would be cruising towards victory.



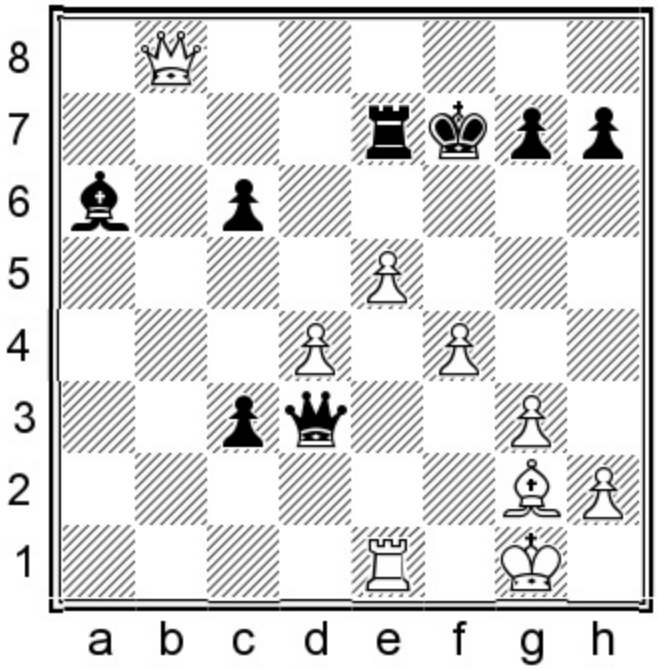
Position after: 26.♗xe7

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26...c3

A very telling moment as Black had previously been up material but suffered from coordination difficulties. Now, however, White is a pawn to the good, but facing troubles stopping the c3-pawn while trying to evacuate the e7-bishop. Concrete lines prove that eating a cookie and having it too is no longer within White's reach.

26...♖xe7?! would have quite unexpectedly thrown away the win because of 27.♕xb8 c3 28.♖e1



Position after: 28.♖e1

28...♕xd4+ [28...c2?? on the other hand even loses due to 29.e6+! ♖xe6 30.♕c7+ ♔f8 31.♕d8+ ♔f7 32.♕d7++– when Black drops both the rook and the game.] 29.♔h1 c2 30.♕b3+ ♕c4 31.♕e3= and Black can make no further progress here as the c1-square is securely guarded while the e7-rook cannot afford to abandon the black monarch.

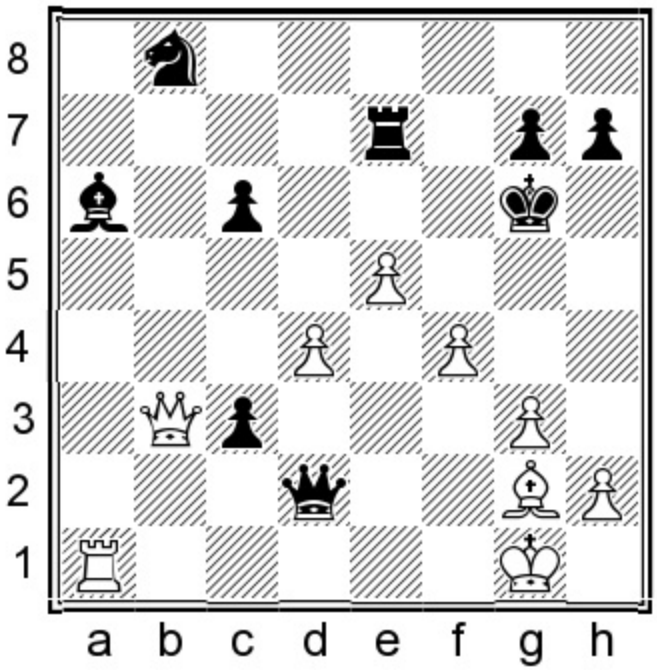
27.♖e1

White's only chance to maintain at least a shadow of counterplay in this position.

27.♗c5 is logical, with the intention of bringing the bishop into safety, but is simply to slow as after 27...c2 28.♕a3 ♘d7 29.d5 cxd5 30.♕xd3 ♗xd3 31.♗xd5+ ♔g6–+ White is dropping material without even having eliminated the dreadful passer on c2. Not having enough time to reposition the dark-squared bishop, White would have surely regretted having gorging himself on the toxic b8-knight in this line.

27...♕d2 28.♖a1 ♖xe7 29.♕b3+ ♔g6∓

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Position after: 29...♔g6∓

Black has a clear advantage as White cannot take on b8 due to the proximity of the black c2-pawn to the back rank. This variation can be extended by

30.♕xb8?!

when after

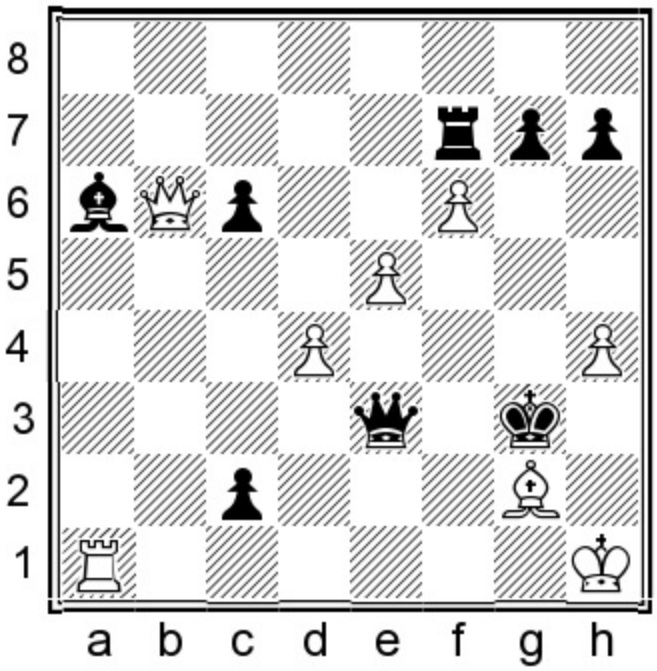
30...c2

White can still try to postpone execution by harassing the black monarch with pawns. The position arising after

31.f5+ ♔g5 32.h4+ ♔g4 33.f6 ♕e3+ 34.♔h1 ♖f7 35.♕b6 ♔xg3–+

looks like a beautiful finale of an otherwise also very interesting game.

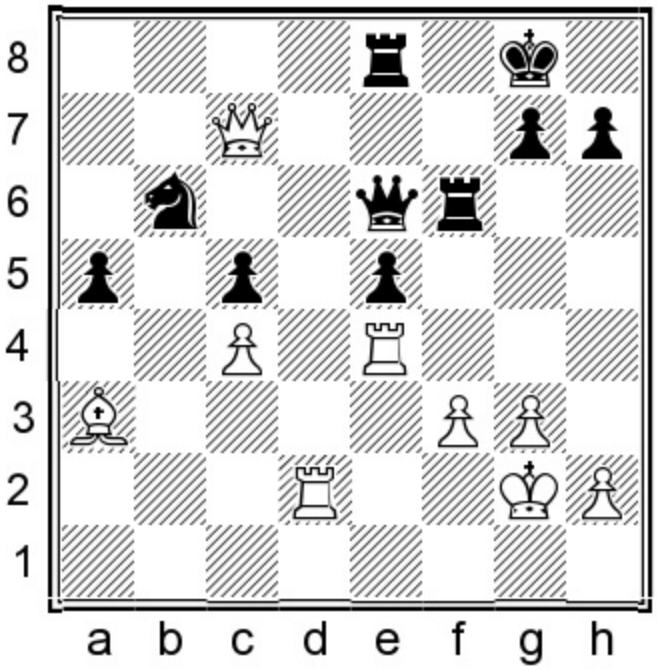
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Position after: 35...♔xg3−+

Although pretty forced, this last sequence is obviously chess science fiction. Then again, who said that chess players cannot have an itsy-bitsy bit of fun from time to time?

27
Pajeken – Swayams
Karlsruhe 2019



chesstouring.com

■ *33...?*

Show/Hide Solution

27
Pajeken, Jakob Leon (2342)
Swayams, Mishra (2478)
Karlsruhe 2019

Attack & Defense
Combining attack with defense

Black is a pawn up in this position but finds it very difficult to make any further progress. The reason for this is that White enjoys quite a nice blockade on e4 which efficiently halts Black's e5-pawn. On top of that, the black c5-pawn is about to fall any day now, whilst the fate of the one on a5 should not be any different. He can think about pressurizing the weak f3-pawn of White, but this would simply drop all of the mentioned pawns. Focusing on their defense will absorb his forces too much with defensive tasks. What is even worse, taking on c4 allows the white rook to infiltrate along the seventh rank which is not something we would usually like to see when already being material up and assumedly cruising towards victory. Is Black in fact between Scylla and Charybdis here?

33...♘xc4

In a perfect world, the material advantage of a pawn should be enough to ensure Black a win. The problem is that neither do we live in a perfect world, nor is Black's position ideal. In similar situations it is usually not possible to gradually outplay the opponent. What is left to do then is to simply assume some more risk (allow your opponent more counterplay in order to gain more freedom of action) and this way break White's resistance. Sounds great, but when embarking on such a hazardous venture it is essential that the elements in the position that we win as a result of such a trade outweighs the potential drawbacks. In other words, if Black wants to win here he needs to strike the right balance between attack and defense.

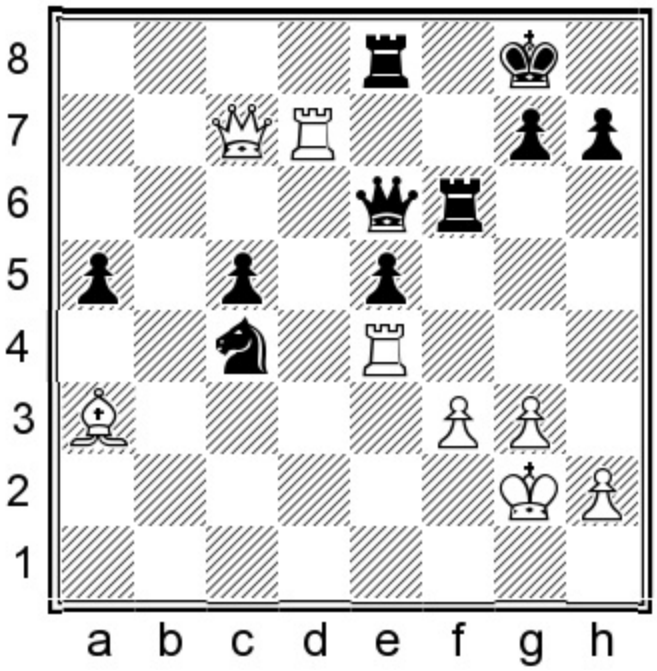
A) The game saw 33...♕f5? 34.♖f2 ♖c8 but now White could have gone for 35.♕a7 ♕e6 36.♕xa5 ♘xc4 37.♕c3 ♘xa3 38.♕xa3 c4 39.♕c3= and despite being a pawn down, he could have considered himself lucky as focusing too much on pushing the c-pawn is going to cost Black the e5-pawn. Black can therefore make no progress here.

B) Simultaneously both 33...♖c8 34.♕b7 ♖f7 35.♕a6 ♕c6 36.♖f2⇄ and

C) 33...♕c6 34.♕xc6 ♖xc6 35.f4⇄ fail to impress as they either focus too much on the queenside or even drop some of the pawns that are left unattended.

33...♘xc4 34.♖d7

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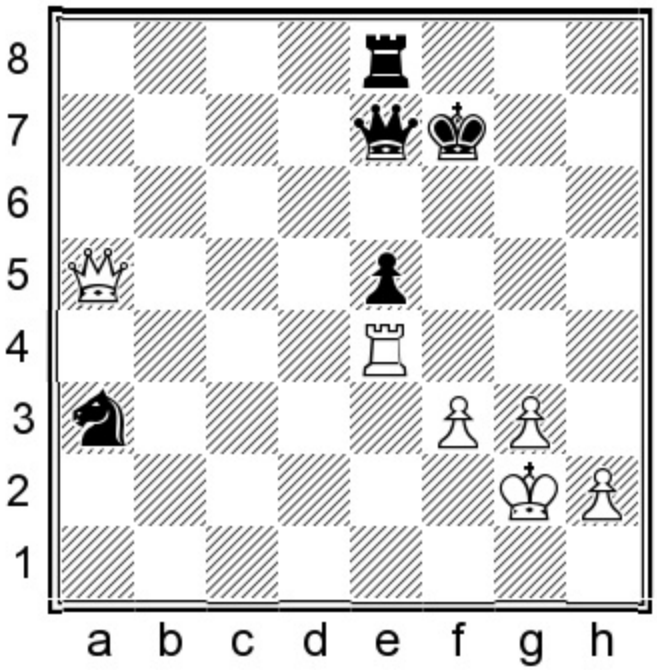
Position after: 34.♖d7

34...♕f5!

An absolutely stunning move! By bringing the queen to f5, Black not only threatens to hit White's Achilles heel on f3, but also keeps an eye on the position of his own king. True, the pawn on g7 might be falling, but as the king runs away to the corner it ends with that and leaves White defenseless against the newly-created battery along the f-file.

A) Much less accurate would have been 34...♘xa3?! as 35.♖xg7+ ♔f8 36.♖xh7 ♖f7 [36...♖e7? even loses as after 37.♕d8+ ♖e8 38.♕d3+– the a3-knight drops while the black king still remains vulnerable.] 37.♕xc5+ ♕e7 38.♖xf7+ ♔xf7 39.♕xa5=

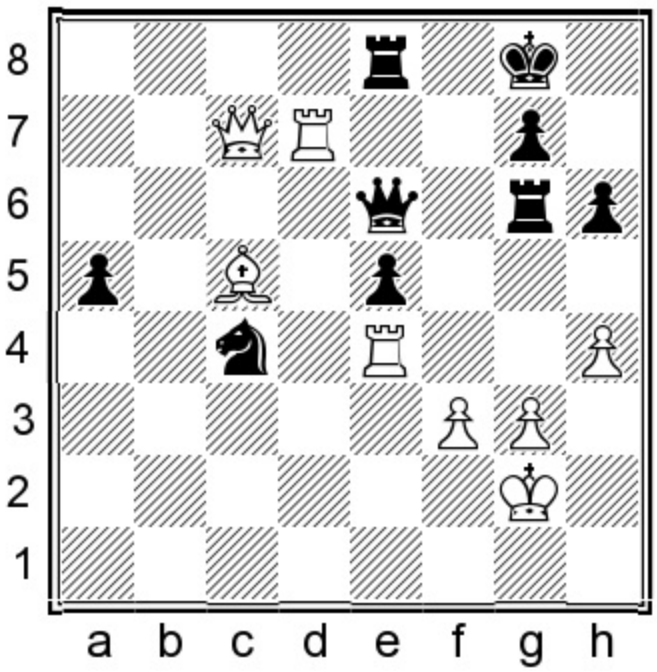
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Position after: 39.♕xa5=

leads only to a draw. The black knight is still offside and the weakened position of the king does not make it easier for the knight to be brought towards some stable outpost at all.

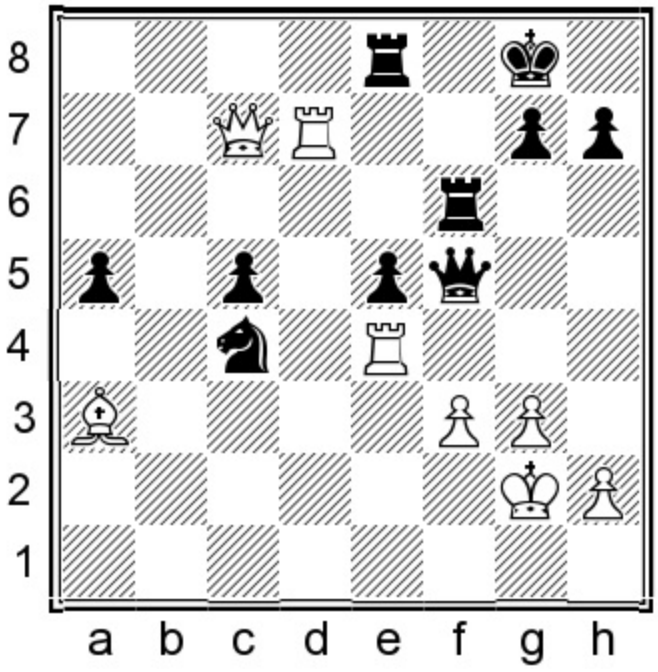
B) 34...♖g6? would have also been a step in the wrong direction. Not only because it allows White to soon restore material balance but also because the black rook would then become a prisoner of the g-file after something like 35.♗xc5 h6 36.h4!?±



Position after: 36.h4!?±

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36...♔h7? 37.h5 ♖g5 38.g4!+– and, quite unexpectedly, the knight on c4 has to move, but if it does, after something like ♗c5-e3 the rook would be falling. If the rook falls Black would risk getting mated along the seventh rank – a truly vicious circle without a way out.



Position after: 34...♕f5!

35.♔g1!?

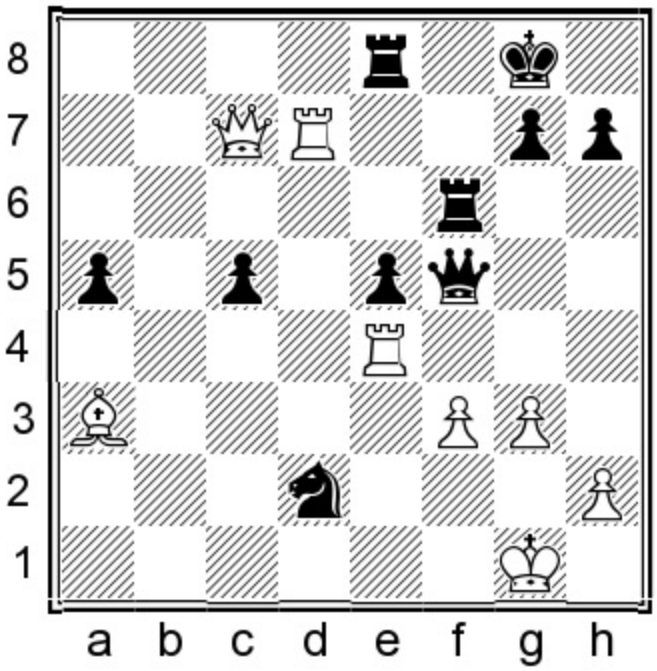
Probably the trickiest response since taking on f3 leads to mate, whereas the knight on c4 is apparently still hanging.

A) As mentioned, 35.♖xg7+ ♔h8 is unconvincing as now the best White could do would be to head for 36.♖xh7+ ♕xh7 37.♕xh7+ ♔xh7 38.♖xc4 ♖c6–+ with a winning position for Black thanks to his numerical superiority on the queenside.

B) On the other hand a calm move such as 35.♖d3 lets Black stick to his additional two pawns way too easily, e.g. 35...♘d6 36.♕c6 h6 37.♕d5+ ♔h7 38.♖e2 e4–+

35...♘d2!

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Position after: 35...♘d2!

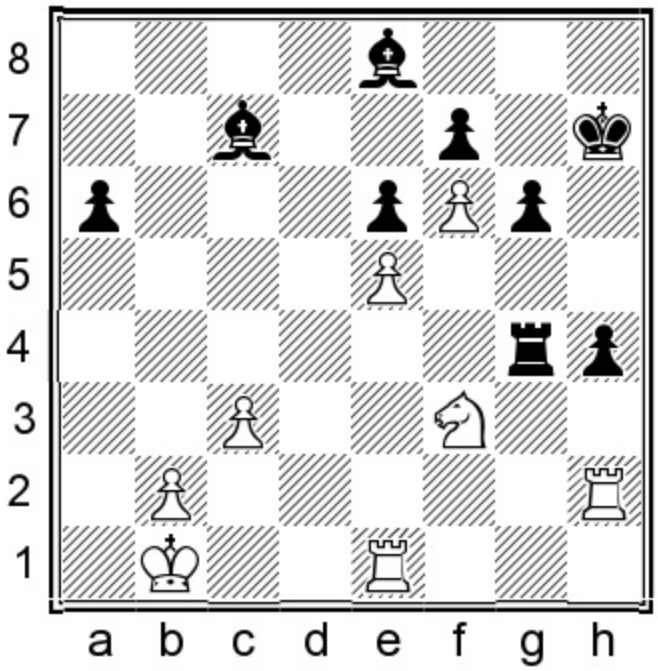
A neat way of deflecting the white rook from the seventh rook thus 'buying' time to capture on f3. The real added value of this move is that after

36.♖xd2 ♕xf3–+

White's position becomes utterly lost as he faces a sad choice between dropping that bishop on a3 or being mated on f1.

28
Melia – Petrenko
Antalya 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *42...?*

Show/Hide Solution

28
Melia, Salome (2393)
Petrenko, Svetlana (2155)
Antalya 2019

Coordination
Sacrifice for highlighting the lack of coordination of the opponent

White is a nominal pawn up, that is she has a rook and a knight for two bishops and a pawn. What is even worse for Black here is that she furthermore seems to be on the verge of dropping that additional pawn. If the little guy on h4 falls things could start looking very grim for Black. The h4-pawn is not only Black's hope for counterplay, but also an important blockader of the h-file. With it off the board White could potentially even flirt with the idea of mating the black king on h8 after doubling the rooks. One thing is for sure then – Black needs to act now!

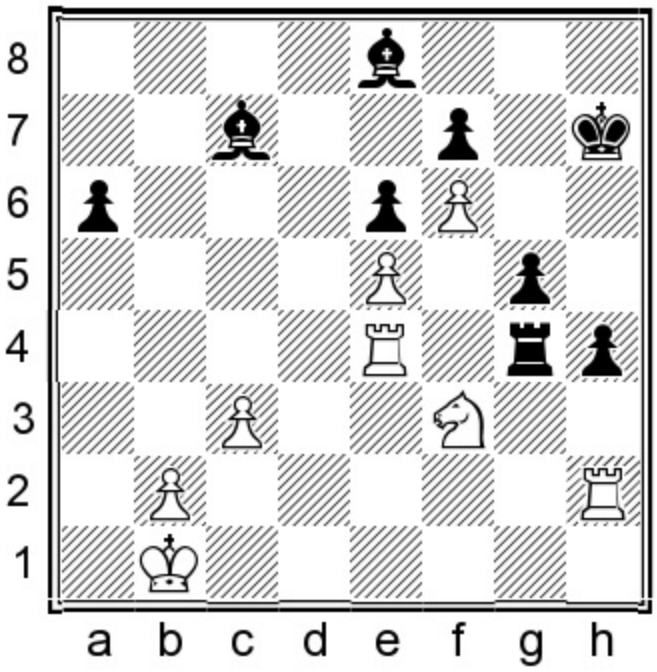
42...♗c6!

The only move to hold the balance. Black apparently drops a pawn for nothing but the true point behind it will be revealed very soon.

A) The temptation to go for the immediate 42...g5? must have been difficult for Petrenko to resist, but

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this naturally looking move stumbles upon a sensational refutation in the form of 43.♖e4!

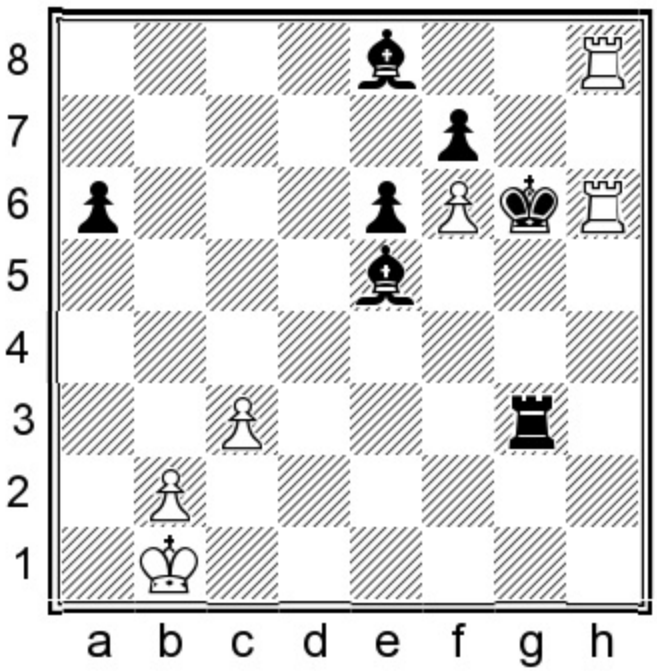


Position after: 43.♖e4!

and quite surprisingly, whatever Black does, she ends up without material. Sample lines:

A1) 43...♖xe4 44.♘xg5+ ♔g6 45.♘xe4 ♔h5 might seem quite active for Black at first, but after 46.♘d6 ♗xd6 47.exd6 ♔g4 48.♖d2 ♗d7 49.♖g2+ ♔f5 50.♖g7 ♔xf6 51.♖h7+– the mobility of the rook in conjunction with Black's difficulty in snatching the d6-pawn would have allowed White to prevail.

A2) 43...♖g3 44.♘xh4! gxh4 45.♖exh4+ ♔g6 46.♖h8 ♗xe5 47.♖2h6+!

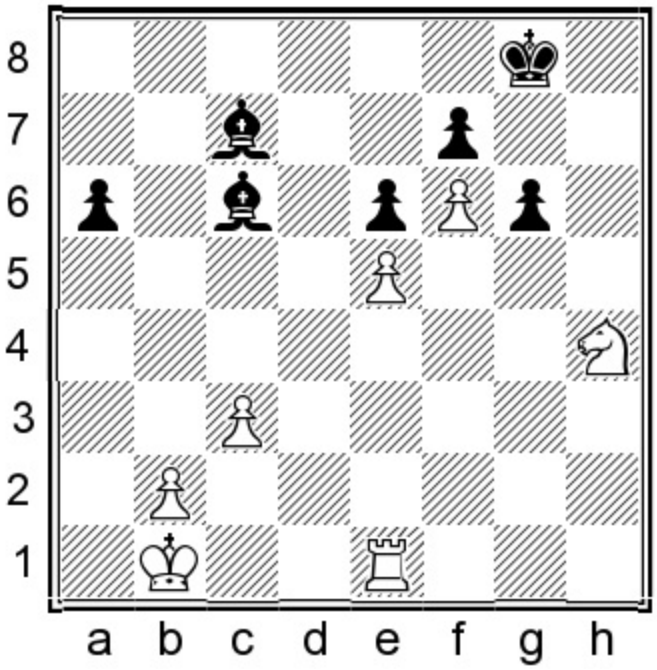


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Position after: 47.♖2h6+!

An important insertion, damaging Black's coordination in a way that makes it hard for her to start pushing her pawns at once. 47...♔g5 48.♖h5+ ♔xf6 49.♖xe8+– and White should convert this quite calmly as the black bishop lacks a secure outpost, the king is cut off along the fifth rank, and the f7-pawn is not entirely safe.

B) 42...♔g8? is also inferior to the text, even if under the assumption that Black would be following a similar idea after 43.♖xh4 ♖xh4 44.♘xh4 ♗c6

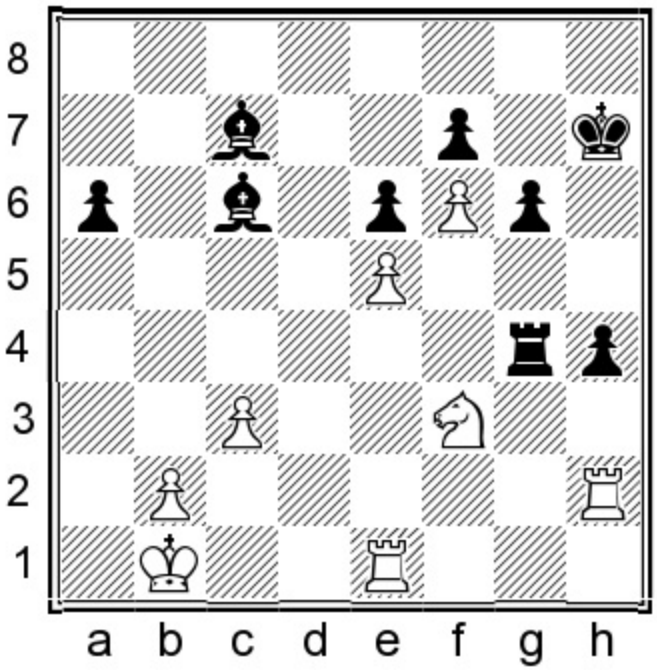


Position after: 44...♗c6

Here, however, White will find it much easier to route his knight to f3 virtually forcing its exchange. As a result, Black is indeed going to regain one of the pawns but with the white king swiftly approaching the center, Black would have to sooner or later admit her helplessness, e. g. 45.♖e3 ♔f8 46.♘f3 ♗xf3 47.♖xf3 ♗xe5 48.♔c2 g5 49.♔d3 g4 50.♖f1 g3 51.♔e3 g2 52.♖g1 ♗xf6 53.♖xg2+– and with the a6-pawn falling White just needs to bring the kingside pawns to a stop while simultaneously activating her own on the queenside.

42...♗c6!

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Position after: 42...♗c6!

43.♘xh4

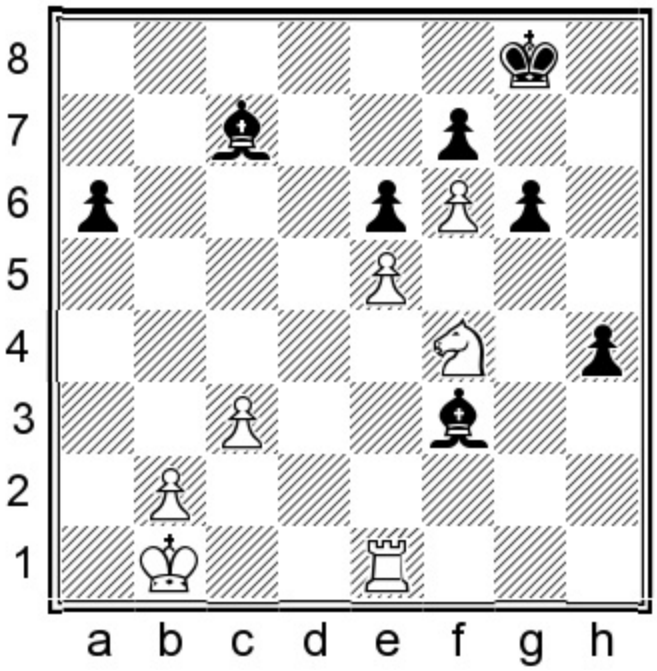
White has to bite the bullet here as alternatives are speculative in nature or simply bad.

A) 43.♘g5+?! is very tricky giving Black two choices:

A1) Not the greedy 43...♖xg5? as after 44.♖xh4+ ♖h5 45.♖c4! Black ends up an exchange down with limited chances of survival, e.g. 45...♗xe5 46.♖xc6 ♗xf6 47.♖xa6± and there is a big chance that White will be able to start pushing the queenside pawns faster than Black progresses on the opposite flank as the additional pair of rooks will make it constantly tougher for the black pawns to advance.

A2) After the resilient 43...♔g8! White would have had nothing left to do but to retreat while the black bishop pair will soon take control over the entirety of the kingside: 44.♘h3 ♖g2 45.♖xg2 ♗xg2 46.♘f4 ♗f3–+

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Position after: 46...♗f3−+

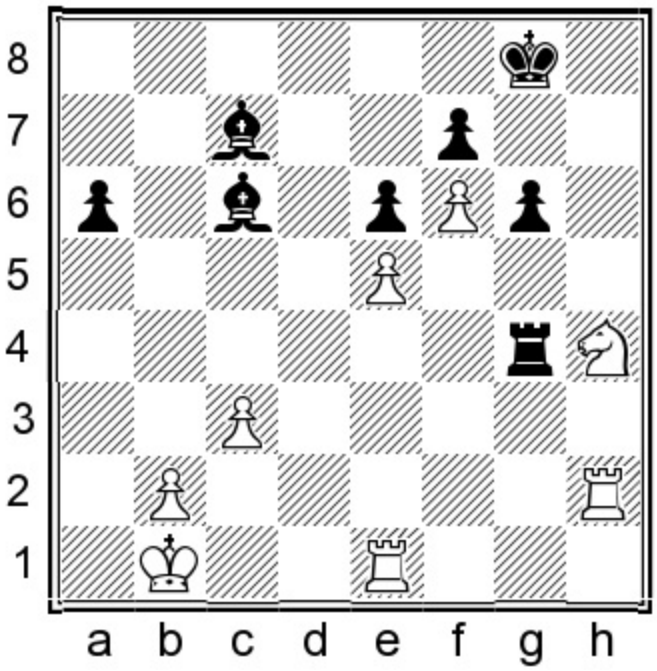
and there is no way White will be able to cope with ...g6-g5 without having to surrender the e and f-pawns. White could naturally contemplate sacrificing a knight for Black's most dangerous pawns but such an opportunity will most likely not arise in this position anymore.

B) Comparably, 43.♖h3? is plain wrong because of 43...♗xf3 44.♖xf3 g5 45.♖d3 ♔g6–+ with the black monarch decisively joining the party. Taking on f3 might seem like a slightly controversial decision at first (which piece is going to lead the black h-pawn to promotion?), but there is a grain of truth in what they say about the bishop pair – one of its main advantages is namely that even when one of the bishops is traded off, there is always the other one left to further serve our cause.

C) Finally, 43.♖xh4+?? loses prosaically to 43...♖xh4 44.♘xh4 g5–+.

43...♔g8

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Position after: 43...♔g8

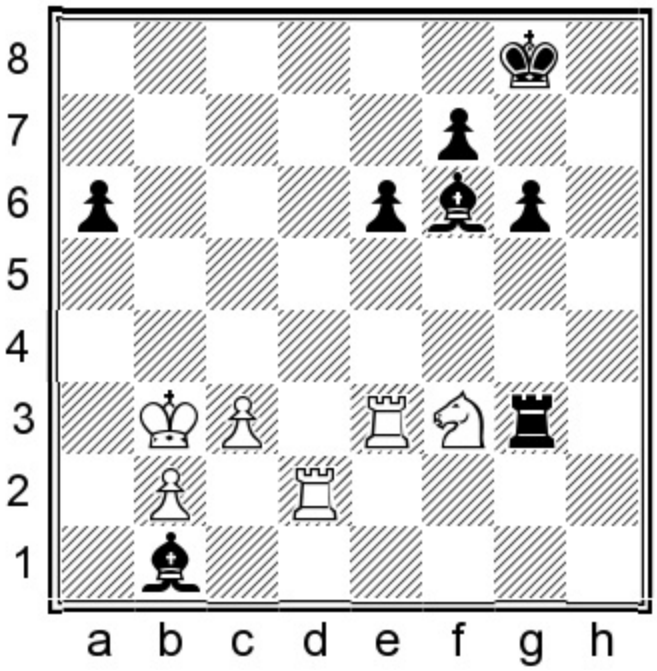
Now that the dust had settled it becomes clear how badly White is tangled. The h4-knight is immobilized on the rim, whereas the h2-rook does not have too many logical squares to move to. The other white rook is pinned to the defense of the e5-pawn while Black is already threatening to take it after a preliminary ...♗c6-e4+ interference. The immediate threat is to win the knight with ...g6-g5, but there would be nothing inherently wrong with grabbing the e5-pawn after ...♖g4-g5xe5. With White not being able to create a passed pawn on the opposite wing she would have had to exercise great defensive skill in handling such a position. Sample lines look like this:

44.♖e3

44.♔a2 allows Black to force a draw with 44...♖g5= when the last thing White would want is to drop her central pawn chain. As there is little forcing play here Black could safely afford to toy around with White a little bit first and only decide to take the draw if the opponent defended in a resolute manner. 45.♖he2 ♖g4 46.♖h2 ♖g5=.

44...♗e4+ 45.♔a1 ♖g1+ 46.♔a2 ♗xe5 47.♖d2 ♗b1+ 48.♔b3 ♗xf6 49.♘f3 ♖g3!?⇄

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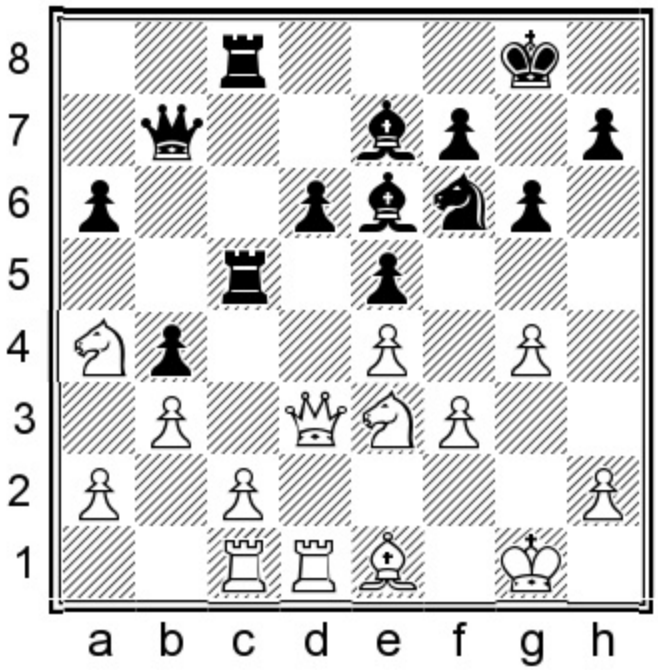


Position after: 49...♖g3!?⇄

and although the position is objectively speaking most probably equal, I personally feel somehow biased to take Black if given such a choice. The reason for this is that White is already a little less comfortable with the f3-knight being pinned and the e3-rook behind it undefended. Bishops, on the other hand, contribute to control over squares of both colors and can therefore hopefully serve defensive purposes as well by discouraging the white monarch from approaching the queenside. Lastly, advancing the c-pawn by White is much less impressive than the vision of all three black kingside pawns rolling altogether, we will quickly understand that continuing to play this position as White would by no means be a walk in the park.

29
Bokros – Leko
Porto Carras 2018

chesstouring.com



■ *20...?*

Show/Hide Solution

29
Bokros, Albert (2465)
Leko, Peter (2690)
Porto Carras 2018

Statics & Dynamics
Strike at the opponent's strongest point

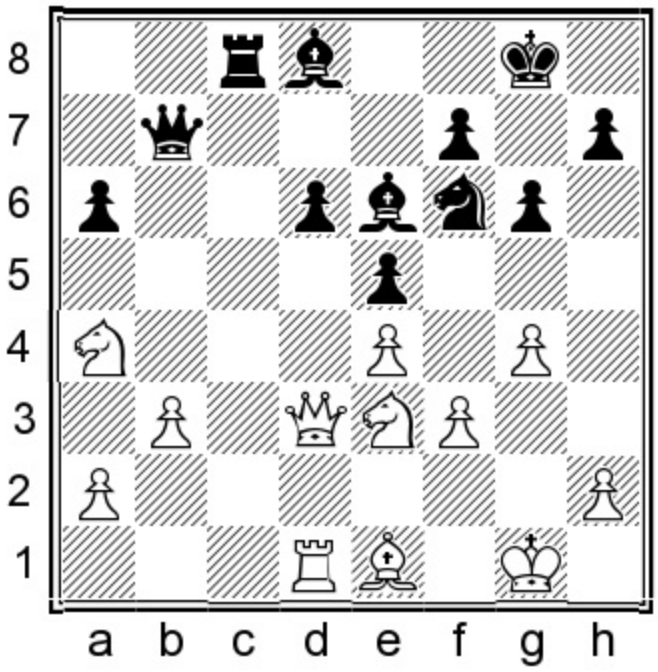
In this position arising out of the Moscow variation of the Sicilian Defense, material is equal and the only real imbalance visible for the moment is the fact that Black is in possession of the bishop pair. What we can never forget about when assessing a given position is the pawn structure. Here it determines not only that Black might be enjoying a little bit more space and a semi-open c-file for his rooks. Least this picture sounds rosy let us not forget that Black has a backward d6-pawn. When having a backward pawn, we cannot forget that the square in front of it (here: the d5-square) will very often also be weak. This case is no different. Black may be exercising piece-control over it for the moment, but with the c5-rook apparently being forced to go back at once, it is White who might eventually emerge victorious in the battle. In other words, whoever controls d5 here, controls the game. But what if I told you that in similar, control-oriented positions, White happens to be only as strong as his grip over the critical square actually is? And you would be surprised how quickly things can escalate if the crucial point of resistance turns into the weakest link.

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20...d5!!

A powerful device, leaving White's position in shatters. Understanding how important control over the d5-square is, Black should not have hesitated too long before carrying out this thematic pawn thrust. By playing ...d6-d5, Black not only gets rid of the only problem in the position, but also strongly enhances the activity of his bishops. Black may be sacrificing a whole exchange this way but what he obtains as compensation will definitely represent more than a mere quantum of solace. In particular White is never going to get the time to activate his own rooks. Sample lines confirm this:

A) In the game Black failed to recognize that he was facing a moment of truth and resorted to the passive 20...♖5c6?! which allowed White to gain full control over the crucial d5-square after 21.c4. The game is certainly still going, but now there is this negative vibe with regard to Black's chances of opening up his bishops and/or the position as such. He could certainly carry on by playing something like 21...bxc3 22.♖xc3 ♖xc3 23.♘xc3 ♗d8 with the intention of activating his dark-squared bishop via b6, but White could prevent this from happening by going for 24.♘a4.

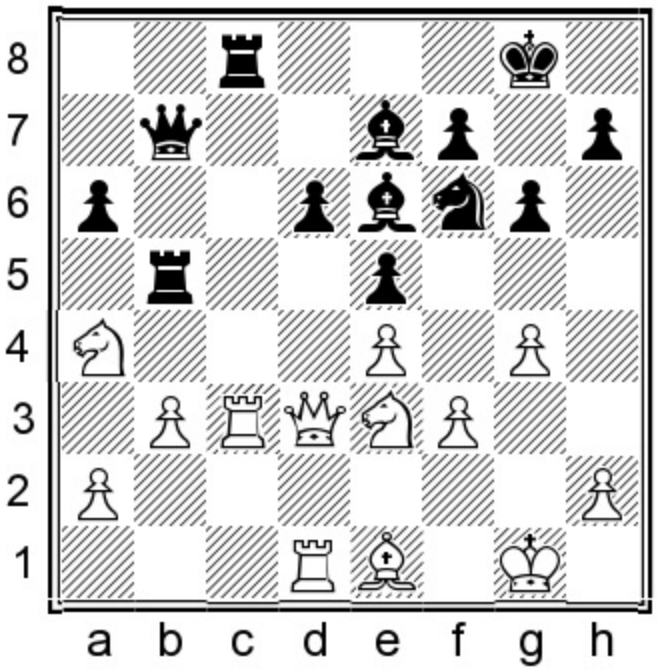


Position after: 24.♘a4

Sooner or later Black would have to start defending the d6-pawn which in turn would lead to his passivation after something like 24...♖c6 25.♔g2 ♕c8 26.♗b4 ♘e8 27.♘b2±. White is better as Black is unable to effectively infiltrate along the c-file and is already suffering quite considerably because of the pressure against the backward d6-pawn. The biggest irony here is that the black dark-squared bishop is 'bad' because of his own pawn structure, whereas the light-squared one is not much better due to the way White managed to set up his pawn chain. Because of this, Black's position remained difficult.

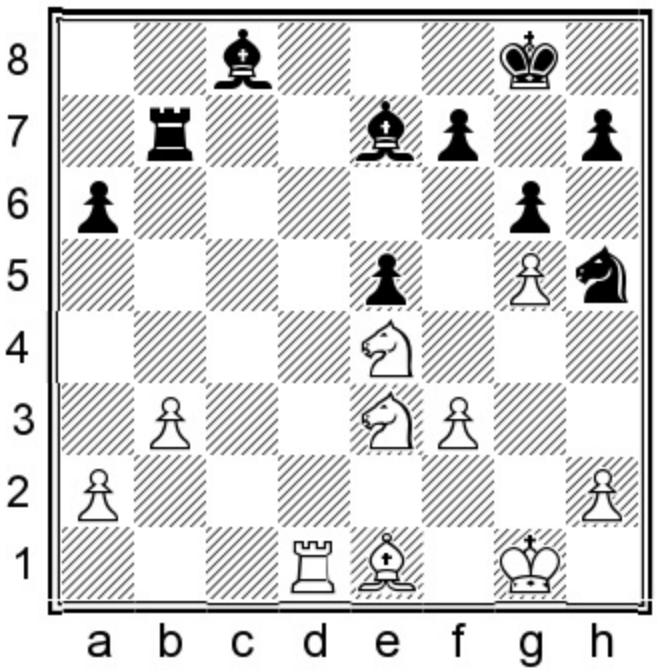
B) Much more interesting would have been 20...♖b5 when after 21.c4 bxc3 22.♖xc3

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Position after: 22.♖xc3

Black could have carried out the very same thematic 22...d5!? This version is not as effective as Black wasted some time before finally going for it. Also, White can more specifically extinguish Black's temporary initiative with 23.♖xc8+ ♕xc8 24.g5 dxe4 25.♕c3! when after the further 25...♘h5 26.♕xc8+ ♗xc8 27.♘c3 ♖b7 28.♘xe4± White would have again gained the upper hand.



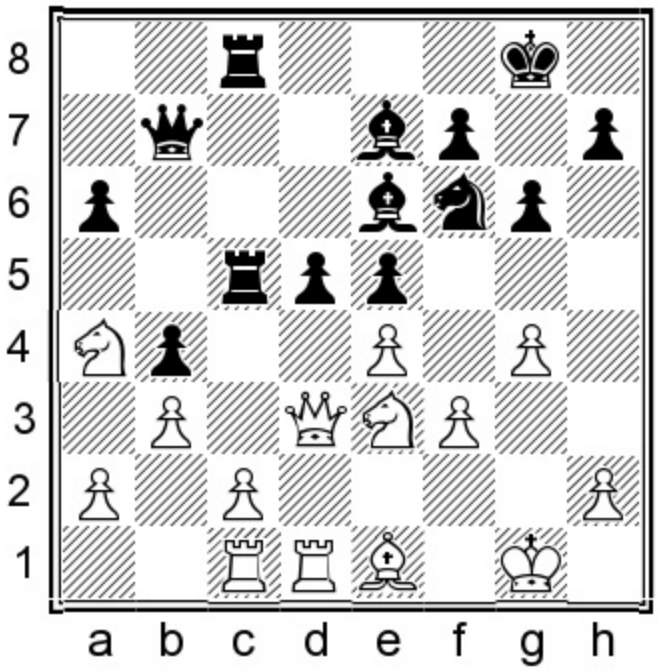
Position after: 28.♘xe4±

The position is much more open than previously, and this circumstance should in general favor Black,

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but his forces are scattered across the board. At the same time, White's knights dominate the center and he enjoys some potential thanks to the queenside pawn majority without having to worry about the weakened position of his king because of the absence of queens.

20...d5!!



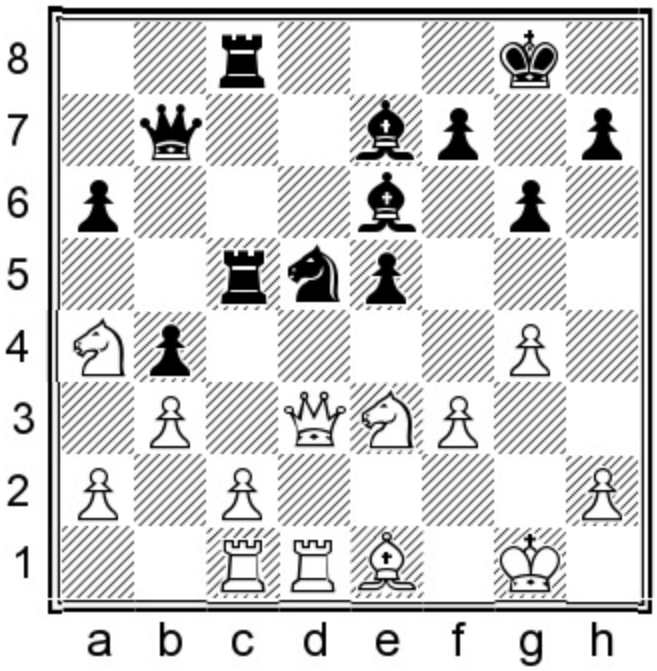
Position after: 20...d5!!

21.exd5

21.♘xc5 is principled but leaves White badly overextended the moment the black dark-squared bishop comes to c5 pinning White's knight. Despite being an exchange up White's center and kingside is collapsing after 21...♗xc5 22.exd5 ♘xd5 23.♗f2 and Black wins back material with a surplus by means of 23...♗xe3 24.♗xe3 ♖c3–+. Even if no such immediate remedies were at Black's disposal, his position would still have remained precarious because of the exposed position of the white king (the light squares being especially weak) and the pace at which Black would have been able to bring his pieces aggressively into its neighborhood. For me, it just takes one look at the knight coming to f4 to comprehend that as Black I would not be missing my rook.

21...♘xd5

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Position after: 21...♘xd5

22.♕e4

This is White's best practical try, but it only postpones the inevitable as Black can dedicate 1 or 2 moves to consolidate his position and only then start exploiting the opponent's weaknesses.

A) 22.♘xd5 only emphasizes how weak White happens to be now along the light squares after something line 22...♖xd5 23.♕e2 ♖xd1 24.♖xd1 ♗d5 25.♖d3 e4–+ when it is not only the white king that would be vulnerable, but also a potential invasion might be coming in a second via the c2 entry-square.

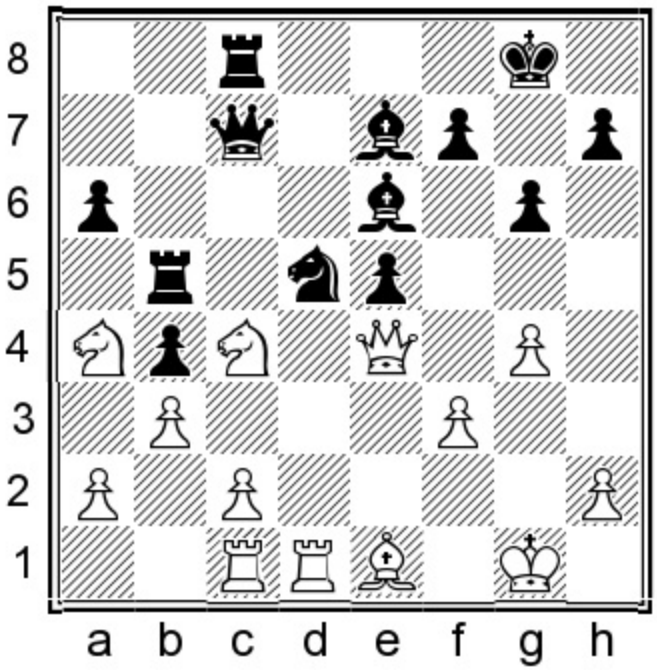
B) Even 22.♗f2 is not much better as after 22...♘f4 23.♕e4 ♖5c6!–+ White is unable to handle both ...♘f4-e2+ gobbling up the exchange, and the slightly more sophisticated ...♘h3-g5 motif, winning the important f3-pawn.

22...♖b5

Retreating the rook now by no means leaves a stain on Black's sacrificial honor. Critical damage has already been done to White's center. Now after something like

23.♘c4 ♕c7!

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Position after: 23...♕c7!

Black has multiple threats at his disposal ranging from the positional ...♘e5-f6 with an attack against the white c4-knight, to the more aggressive ...f7-f5 push. In particular

24.♕xe5

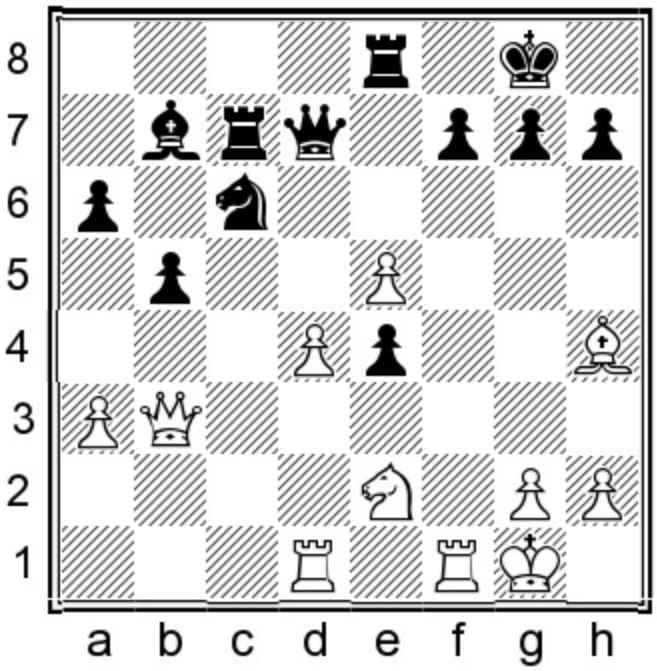
loses immediately to

24...♕xe5 25.♘xe5 ♘e3–+

when White is simply lost because of upcoming material losses.

30
Mesaros – Shytaj
Radenci 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *26.?*

Show/Hide Solution

30
Mesaros, Florian (2439)
Shytaj, Luca (2490)
Radenci 2019

Weakness
Creating a dynamic weakness

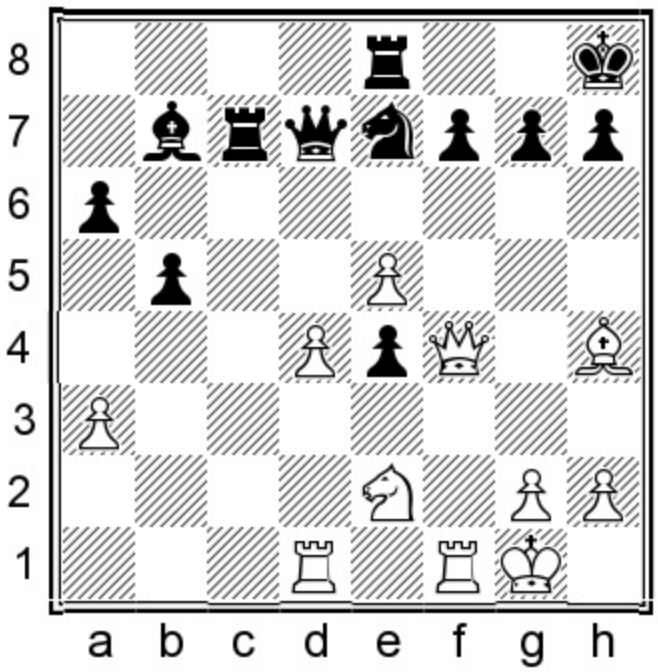
Black is a pawn up here, but his position does not look enviable at all. The reason for this is that his opponent has more space, a potentially mobile pawn center, possibilities of launching an attack based on the presence of opposite-colored bishops, but also a certain level of pressure against the f7-pawn. Black may be in fact prepared to meet most of those threats for the time being as d4-d5 simply loses the e5-passer, Black's pieces are defending each other, and he can also try to organize some defense along the well-controlled light squares. All this being true there seems to be this overall negative vibe to Black's setup accentuated by kingside which looks like a piece less desert at the moment. By comparison White already has most of his pieces there or at least pointing in that direction. No wonder that the move that eventually wins the game for White aims straight at weakening the position of the black king.

26.e6!

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‘If opportunity does not knock, build a door’! White sacrifices his most advanced pawn for the chance to open up the a2-g8 diagonal. The moment a black pawn arrives on e6 White will push d4-d5 causing plenty of problems for Black who will then have to worry not only about discovered checks, but also, as we will see in a moment, about the coordination of his forces in total.

In the game Black went for 26.♕g3?! obviously intending to mate Black after the upcoming ♗h4-f6 maneuver. Still, Black could have defended very stubbornly here with 26...♔h8! when after 27.♕f4 Black had the shocking 27...♘e7! at his disposal.



Position after: 27...♘e7!

Instead of defending the f7-pawn, Black prefers to win time that he will soon use to coordinate his forces. If White helps himself to the pawn after 28.♕xf7?! ♗d5 29.♕h5 ♘g6 30.♗f2 ♖c2∓ when the spectrum of Black’s domination along the light squares stretches from wing to wing. In the meantime, White is unable to profit from his dark-squared bishop which serves rather as a mere defender of his monarch’s position. Despite being a pawn down, it would have surely been Black calling the shots in this scenario.

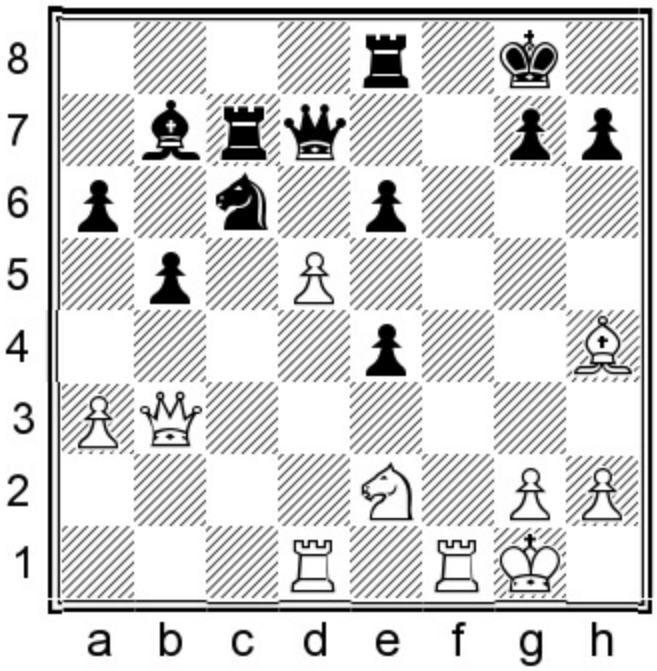
26.e6! fxe6

The only response as taking with the queen or rook stumbles into a pawn fork after d4-d5.

27.d5

Interestingly, this push would have not yielded White any results without the presence of a black pawn on e6. By having the pawns traded off on d5, White manages to weaken the problematic light-squared diagonal to an insurmountable degree.

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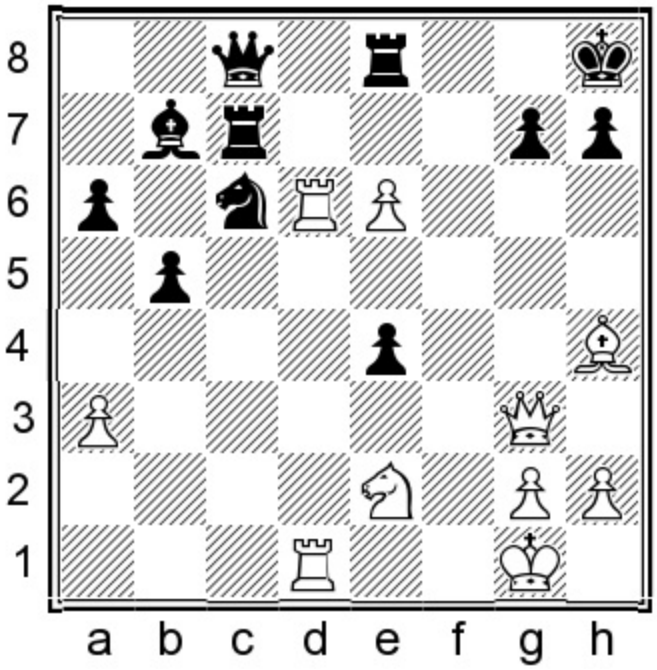


Position after: 27.d5

27...exd5

Refusing to take on d5 is out of the question thus Black has to put on a brave face and try to block a2-g8 with his queen.

27...♘a5 is not particularly helpful as after 28.dxe6 ♕c8 29.♕g3 if Black cannot take on e6 immediately he will not be able to do it later on either as after 29...♘c6 30.♖d6 ♔h8 31.♖fd1+–

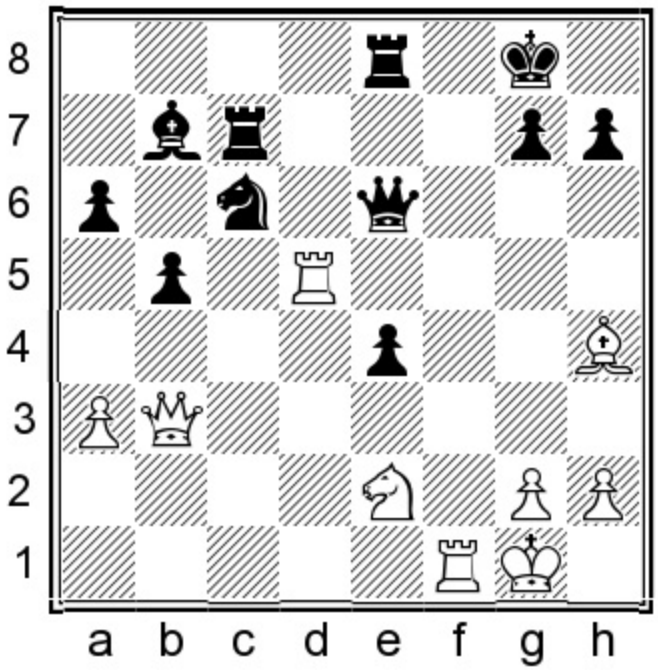


Position after: 31.♖fd1+–

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the pawn is still taboo. In view of the incoming ♖d6-d7 with mating threats on g7 there would not be much hope for Black left in this position.

28.♖xd5 ♕e6

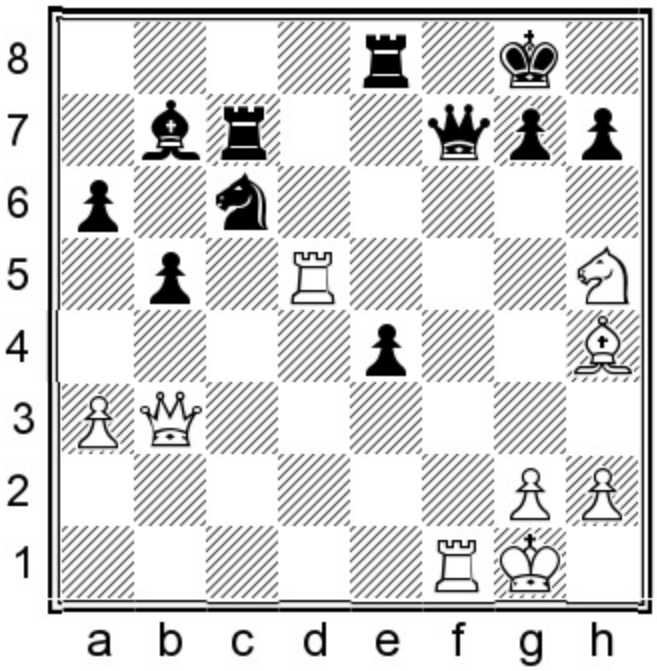


Position after: 28...♕e6

Black desperately tries to prevent an immediate discovered attack along the a2-g8 diagonal but the black queen cannot stay on it for long without being harassed by the white knight or violating its other obligations, especially keeping his pieces together in view of the increasing dynamic potential of the white forces. The time White gains on chasing the black queen is not without meaning.

29.♘f4 ♕f7 30.♘h5!

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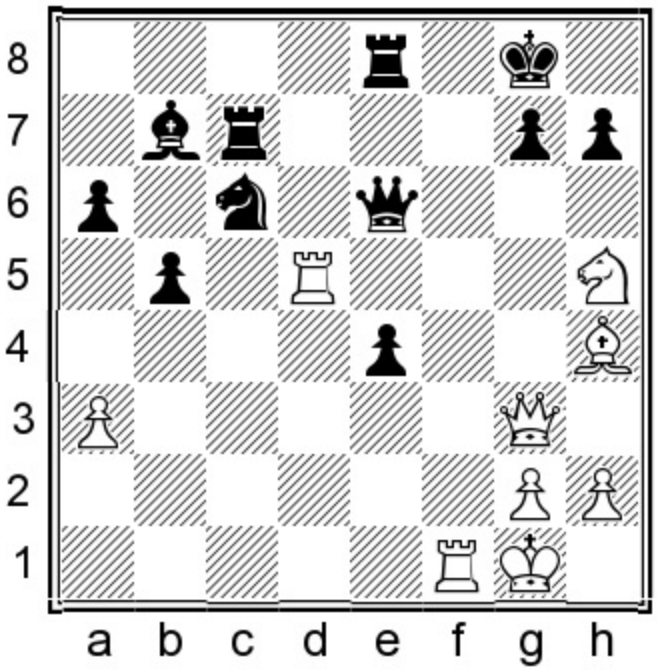
Position after: 30.♘h5!

30...♕e6

and the a2-g8 diagonal still seems to be covered but the price to pay for this is the lack of mutual protection between the black pieces thus 30...♘d4 might be objectively a tad stronger than the text, but after the accurate 31.♖xf7 ♘xb3 32.♖xc7 ♗xd5 33.♖xg7+ ♔f8 34.♖c7!+– then ♘h5-f6 comes in with a destructive effect. Trying to prevent mate with the bishop coming via g5 to h6, Black will probably need to part with all the kingside pawns leaving him not only materially inferior, but also still subjected to unpleasant pressure along the dark squares.

31.♕g3+–

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Position after: 31.♕g3+−

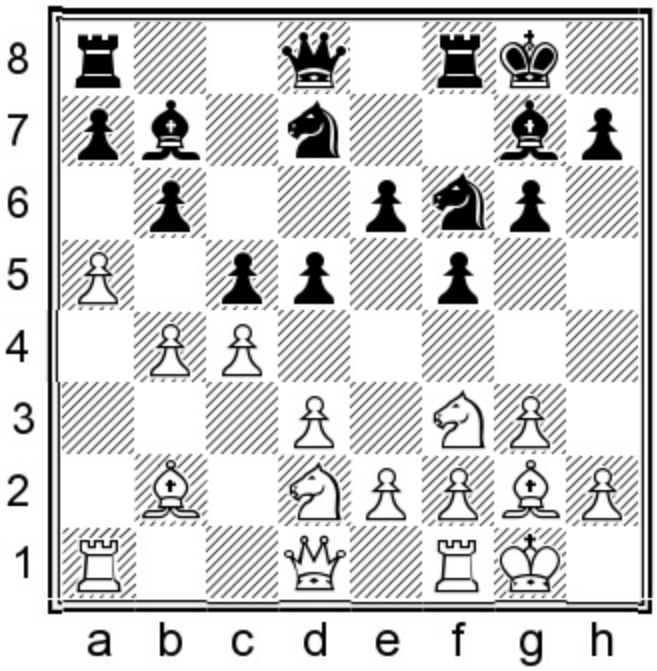
with the double threat of ♘h5-f6+ and ♕g3xc7 is particularly strong. If Black wants to lose with dignity, now is the time to give up.

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Show in Text Mode

Chapter Three
Grandmasters wept solving these

1
Sundararajan – Sandipan
Dubai 2019



■ *12...?*

Show/Hide Solution

1
Sundararajan, Kidambi (2413)
Sandipan, Chanda (2534)
Dubai 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
In which direction is the game heading?

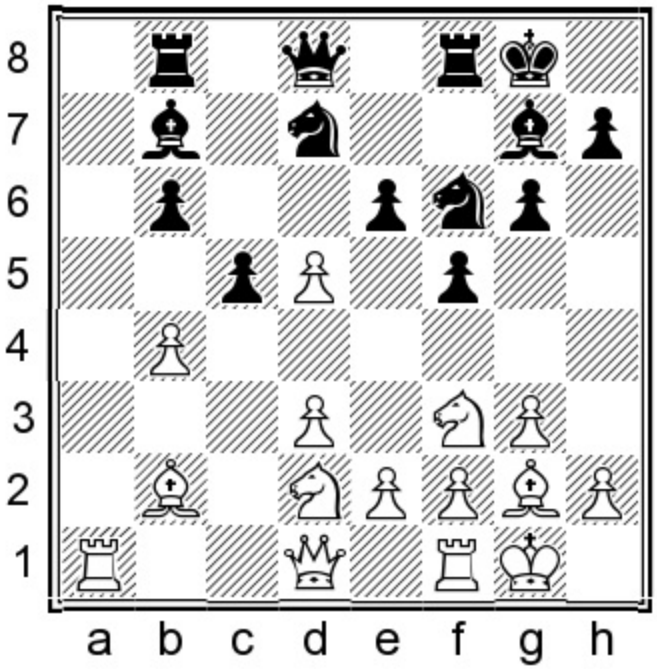
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A highly original position has arisen out of the opening. It appears as if White has embarked on an improved version of the double fianchetto Réti with his queenside pawns rushing against Black's, whereas Black decided in favor of something that resembles a hybrid of the Queen's Indian and Dutch Defense. Black profits from a little bit more space in the center, but due to the pawn tension present in the position (a5 & b6, b4 & c5 and c4 & d5), it cannot be said for sure whether this represents an advantage or maybe the opposite. Under these circumstances, how would you continue playing in this position as Black?

12...dxc4

This move, followed by ...cxb4, represents the only way for Black to maintain equality. The reason for this is that with such an unorthodox and exposed pawn structure Black is unable to maintain its integrity for a longer period of time. In order to understand it though, Black needs to visualize what is the structure going to look like when White starts releasing the tension by means of exchanges. Black's space advantage cannot be called a true 'advantage' either. Specifically, the e6-pawn could use the presence of his colleague from the f-file back on f7. Let us have a look at some alternatives for Black:

A) 12...♖b8 13.axb6 axb6 14.cxd5

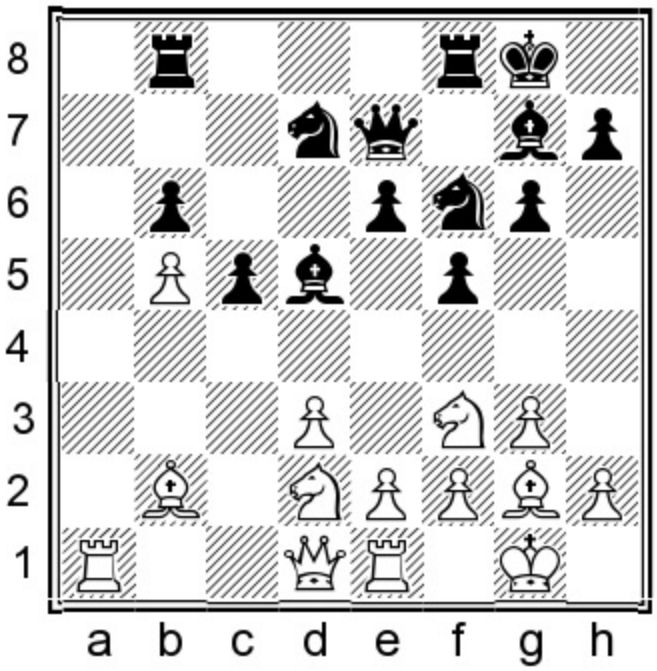


Position after: 14.cxd5

A1) 14...♘xd5 is not better as after 15.♗xg7 ♔xg7 16.bxc5 ♘c3 17.♕e1 bxc5 18.♘c4± Black would experience a hard time defending the c5-pawn in the long run. Additionally, the e5-square could one day be occupied by one of the white knights further complicating Black's defensive task.

A2) 14...♗xd5 15.b5!? ♕e7 16.♖e1!±

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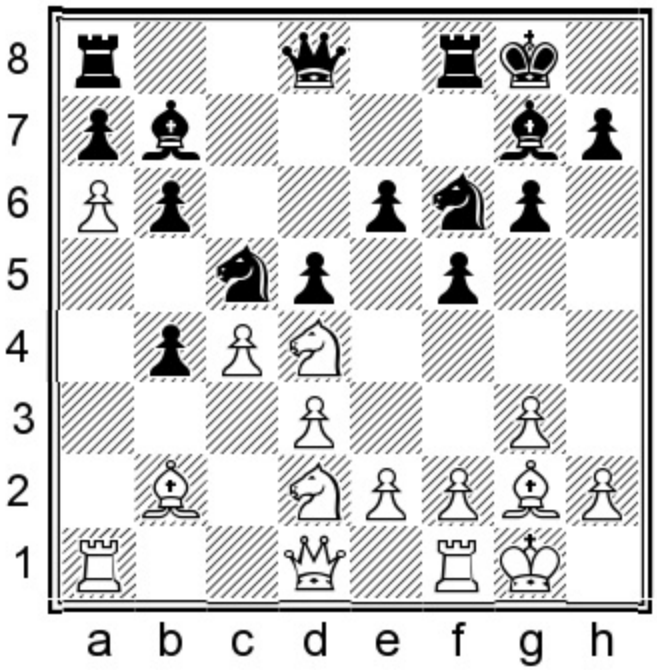
Position after: 16.♖e1!±

This allows White to obtain a small but meaningful edge in the form of an outpost for the knight on c4. As soon as the black d5-bishop is evicted by means of e2-e4, the c4-knight will be putting tremendous pressure against the backward b6-pawn.

A3) 14...exd5 15.♕b3 ♖e8 16.e3 ♕c7 17.♖fc1↑ leads to a position in which Black will suffer strategically. This is due to the fact that there is no way for Black to avoid an unfavorable hanging pawns structure. The more pieces that disappear from the board, the more vulnerable will Black's c5 and d5-pawns become. White's pawn structure is at the same time not only solid but almost impossible to attack.

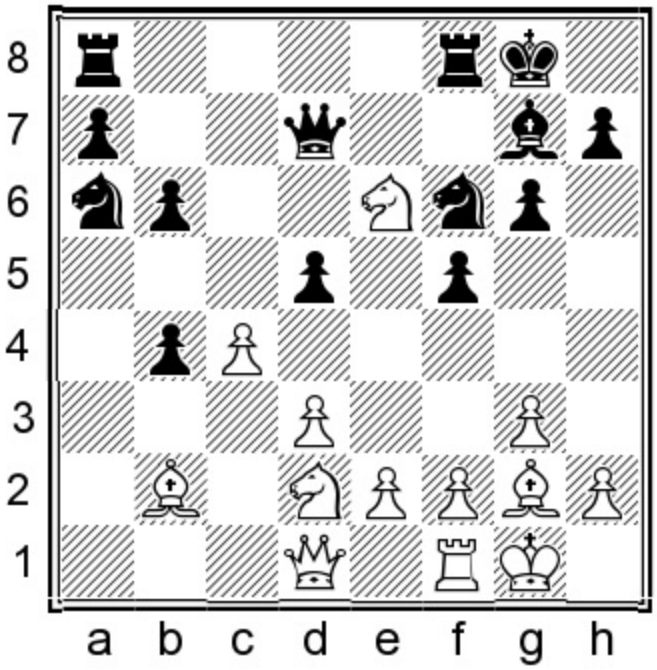
B) 12...cxb4 looks similar to the text but introduces one important tactical modality: 13.♘d4 ♘c5 14.a6!?

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Position after: 14.a6!?

and all of a sudden Black needs to deal with more than only pawn weaknesses. If he takes on a6 the entirety of his center collapses, e.g. 14...♗xa6 [14...♗c8?! 15.♘c6 ♕d6 16.♘xb4±] 15.♖xa6 ♘xa6 16.♘xe6 ♕d7



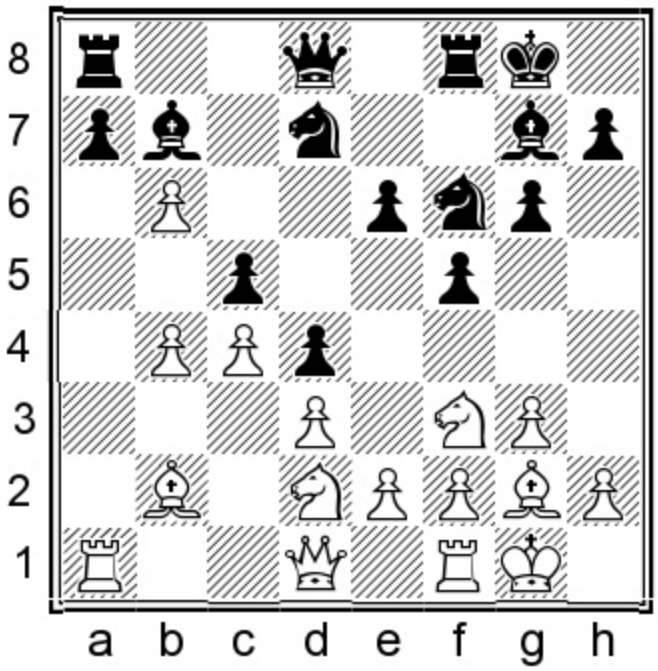
Position after: 16...♕d7

17.♘xf8 [17.♘xg7 ♔xg7 18.♗xd5 ♖ae8 19.e4↑ is also very entertaining in view of the powerful white bishop pair, but simple means are just about enough.] 17...♖xf8 18.cxd5 ♘c5 19.♘c4 ♘xd5

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20.♗xg7 ♔xg7 21.♗xd5 ♕xd5 22.♕a1+ ♔g8 23.♕xa7↑ and although material is still balanced, this is going to change any moment now with the b6-pawn falling and the black b4-pawn not constituting a sufficient consolation prize.

C) 12...d4? looks very logical at first as it closes one of White's bishops. At the same time however, after 13.axb6

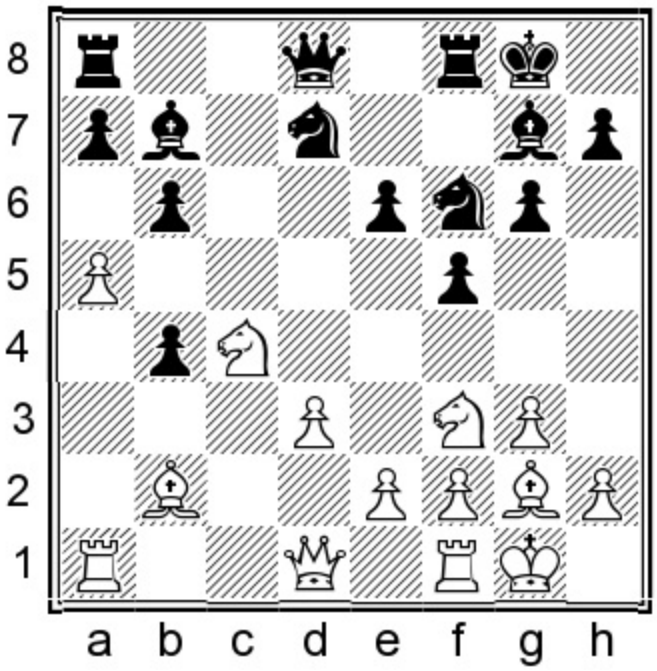


Position after: 13.axb6

13...♕xb6 [13...axb6 loses immediately to the tactical 14.♘xd4! ♖xa1 15.♕xa1 ♗xg2 16.♘xe6 ♕e7 17.♘xf8 ♗xf1 18.♘xd7 ♘xd7 19.♔xf1 ♗xb2 20.♕xb2 cxb4 21.e3+– and White ends up winning both in material and positional terms.] 14.♘b3! ♕xb4 15.♗a3 ♕b6 16.♘xc5! ♘xc5 17.♖b1+– when the fruit is ripe for picking. Black may just as well surrender with a clear conscience as he would be either losing the d4-pawn or allowing the white rook to infiltrate via b7.

12...dxc4 13.♘xc4 cxb4

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Position after: 13...cxb4

It would be great if Black could maintain the b4-pawn but the goal here is to limit the damage that could have been done to his structure if he decided to maintain its previous construction. In other words, Black is like a stock trader who liquidates his positions the moment he gets a notice about an economic downturn. Had he not done that, he would have most probably lost all of his money.

14.♘d4!?

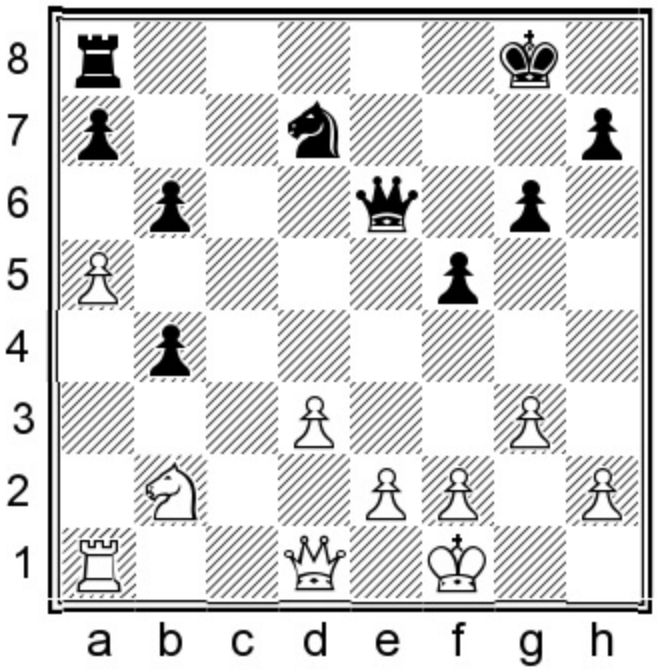
White's only try for an advantage is to strike against the black e6-pawn at once.

A) Neither 14.axb6?! ♘xb6 15.♘a5 ♗d5∓ nor

B) 14.♕b3 ♕e7= promise White an immediate recapture of the b4-pawn. This might soon happen but Black will certainly use the time he has until then to consolidate his position and to minimize any White advantage Now after the more or less forced

14...♗xg2 15.♘xe6 ♕e7 16.♘xf8 ♗xf1 17.♘xd7 ♘xd7 18.♔xf1 ♗xb2 19.♘xb2 ♕e6=

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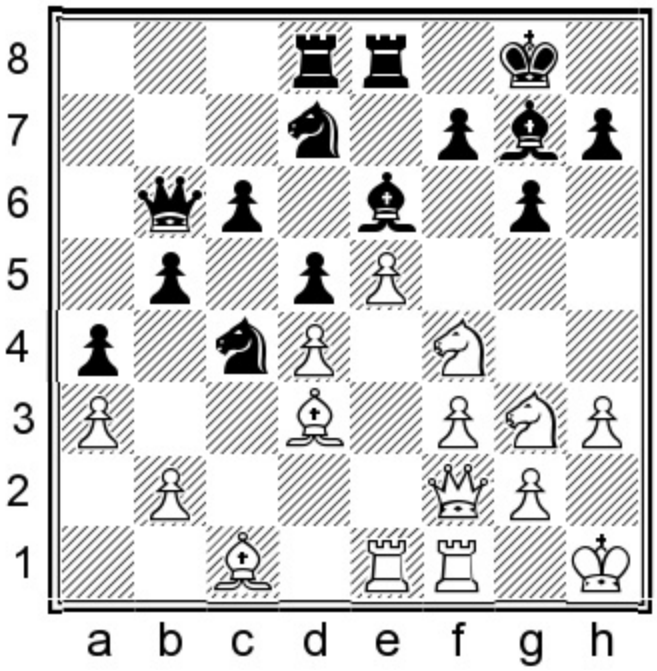
Position after: 19...♕e6=

the position clarifies. My opinion is that White cannot claim any real edge here. True, his pawn structure is slightly better with a smaller number of pawn-islands, but the possibility of Black starting to push those queenside pawns cannot be excluded at the outset. The position would have therefore remained dynamically balanced.

Using yet another famous financial metaphor, by going for 12...♖b8, Sandipan acted in the best spirit of Wall Street as if it was impossible to fail. He maintained an exposed pawn structure, lost its most important central element very quickly, and found a narrow escape exclusively due to his tactical mastery and tenacious defending. But what was the mindset that would have allowed Black to hold the balance in the starting position of our exercise? By thinking ahead and treating it like a living organism instead of on an as is basis. And as every single organism, the position we have on the board also tends to evolve. The more dynamic the nature, the more frantic the pace of the evolutionary process might be. In the game, Black must have not divined or at least underestimated the negative consequence pertaining to the upcoming structural transformations on the queenside and in the center. This could have led to suffering of a static nature, and eventual material losses as well. So next time, the moment you locate a deficiency of similar gravity in a game of yours, do not hesitate for a second before having this element fixed or even completely removed from your position.

2
Obsivac – Szotkowski
Czech Republic 2019

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□ *26.?*

Show/Hide Solution

2
Obsivac, Josef (2264)
Szotkowski, Jakub (2348)
Czech Republic 2019

Attack & Defense
Breaking the rules of the attack

Material is equal here, but the structural imbalance and accumulation of forces of both White and Black tells us a lot about the upcoming course of action. With most of his pieces already gathered on the kingside, White is naturally predestined to target the black monarch. In doing so he needs to break through the opponent's defensive entanglements. Black, on the other hand, has made great progress on the queenside and in the center, and is ready to put in question the integrity of the white central pawn-chain d4-e5. Who is going to be faster here? Also, in knowing that we need to attack on the kingside, what should be the underlying idea?

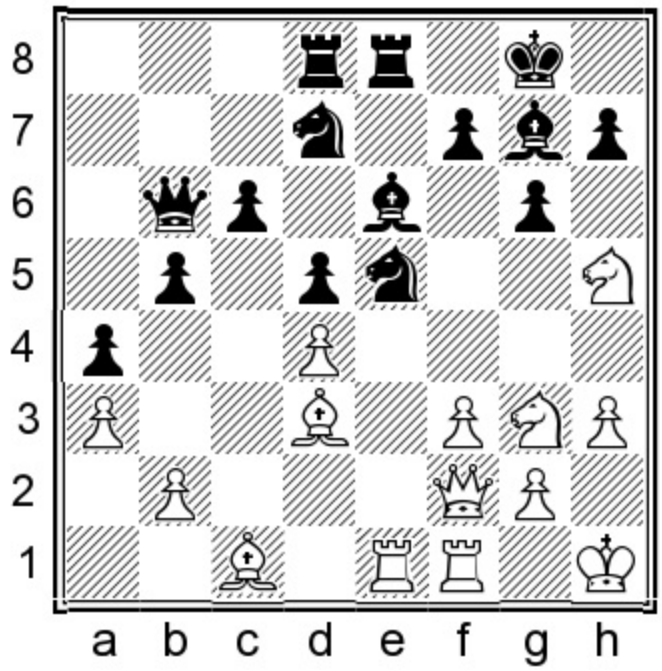
26.♘xe6!

A paradoxical decision at first sight. If we want to attack the black monarch, why would we be starting off with an exchange of pieces? That being true, we cannot completely forget that the black light-squared bishop also represented an important defender of the kingside. With it out of the way,

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the light squares in the black camp would have been at the mercy of White provided that White manages to take advantage of this circumstance.

A) In the game, White resorted to the sensational 26.♘fh5?! correctly assuming that the knight is taboo as taking deprives the black king of the crucial element of his pawn shield. The biggest problem with this idea however is that Black can effectively respond in the center by means of 26...♘cxe5!

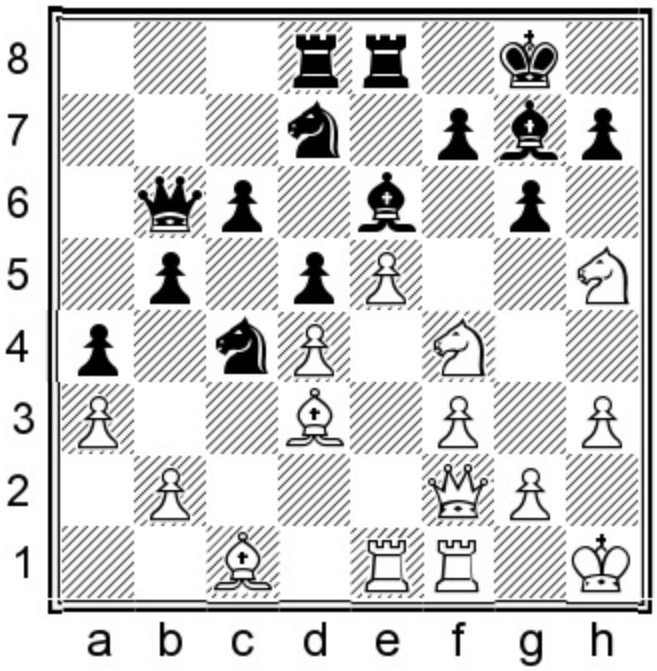


Position after: 26...♘cxe5!

when he eliminates whatever there is to be eliminated in the center, leaving the white knight on h5 for dessert, e.g. 27.dxe5 ♕xf2 28.♖xf2 gxh5 29.♘xh5 ♘xe5 30.♗xb5 cxb5 31.♘xg7 ♘d3! 32.♘xe8 ♘xf2+ 33.♔g1 ♘xh3+ 34.gxh3 ♖xe8∓ and Black is a pawn up. Objectively speaking, due to the presence of opposite-colored bishops, it would have been very hard for him to bring the full point home.

B) Much better would have been the mirror like 26.♘gh5!?

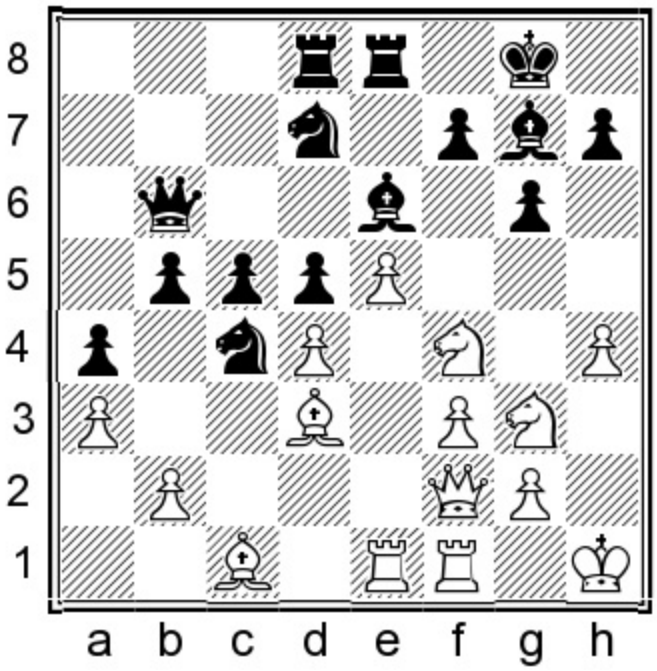
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Position after: 26.♘gh5!?

as now the best Black could do would be to head for the following endgame: 26...♗xe5! [Now the analogical 26...♘cxe5? fails as the d3-bishop is still defended: 27.♘xg7 ♘xd3 28.♘xd3 ♔xg7 29.♘c5 ♘xc5 30.dxc5 ♕c7 31.♕h4→ leaves Black completely defenseless along the dark squares.] 27.dxe5 ♕xf2 28.♖xf2 gxh5 29.♘xh5 ♘cxe5 30.♗c2 ♘c4 31.♗g5 f6! 32.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 33.♗xf6 ♗f7! 34.♖fe2 ♖xe2 35.♖xe2 ♖e8± when although White should be a tad better thanks to the bishop pair, all three results should still be very much possible.

C) 26.h4?! would have been met by 26...c5!∓.



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Position after: 26...c5!∓

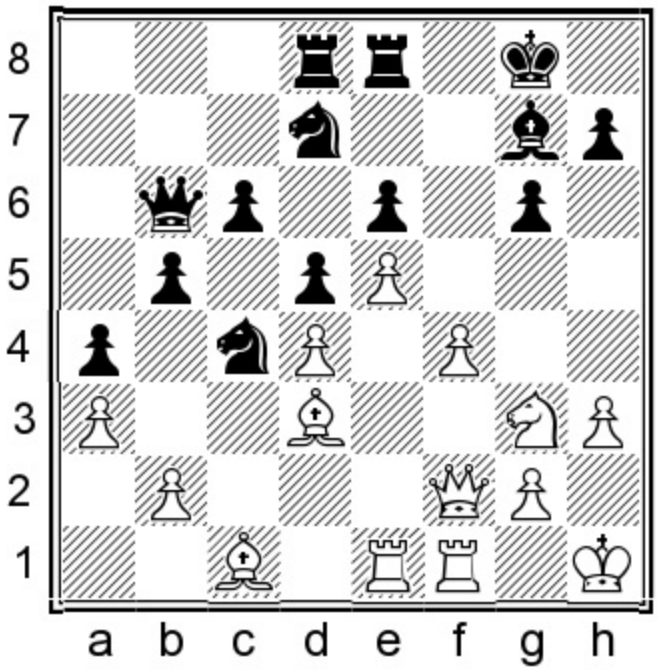
In accordance with the theory that ‘every wing attack needs to be countered in the center’, White could still capture on e6 followed up by f3-f4-f5, but this thrust looks less impressive if the support of the white e5-pawn (the d4-pawn) is lost or exchanged in the meantime. This rule can sometimes be bent (if, for example, the white pawns would be rushing so quickly that Black would be unable to react), but here this happens not to be the case: 27.♘xe6 ♖xe6 28.f4 cxd4 29.h5 ♘c5∓ and Black is the first one to strike.

26.♘xe6! fxe6

The most principled response. The g6-pawn might have been slightly weakened this way but by taking with the pawn Black not only strengthened the d5-pawn (making ...c6-c5 more efficient), but also made the f-file available for his rook possibly discouraging White from proceeding with an f3-f4 push.

26...♖xe6 27.f4 f5 looks fairly logical at first but after 28.♗xf5! gxf5 29.♘xf5 ♗f8 30.♘h4+– the floodgates have been opened and there is no force capable of stopping the white pawns from rolling after f4-f5.

27.f4



Position after: 27.f4

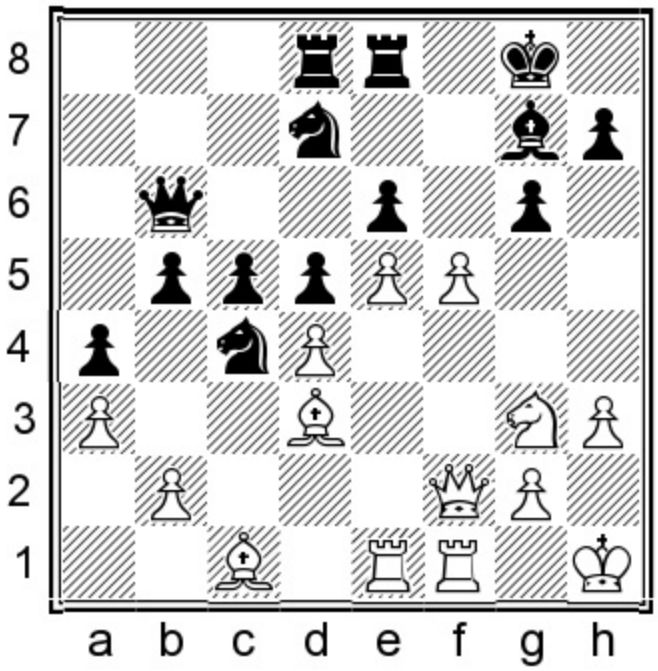
Giving the signal of the attack. At first glance Black seems to be perfectly safe given the apparent control over the f5-square, but he his in for a nasty surprise...

27...c5

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27...♖f8 prevents the text move from happening but allows White to hit another weakness by means of 28.h4! Black's problem is that with the rook on f8, the said square is no longer available for the knight and therefore White's h3-h4-h5 push (softening up g6) is going to be highly effective: 28...c5 29.h5 cxd4 30.♕e2! ♘c5 31.hxg6 ♘xd3 32.♕xd3+– and although Black has managed to trade off the white light-squared bishop; his kingside pawn shield has been irreparably shattered making the king prone to further attacks.

28.f5!



Position after: 28.f5!

White is attacking the strongest point of Black's defensive setup. This might seem counter intuitive at first since by doing so White needs to reckon with a serious material investment if he wishes to achieve something tangible on that flank. The truth is that control over the f5-square represented Black's last stance in this position. If White manages to orchestrate a successful breakthrough he will be rewarded at the very least with a strong attack along the light squares. In other words: never follow the standard blindly. Sometimes breaking the rules (exchanging pieces before unleashing an attack) shall be the way to go even if afterwards you are supposed to hit the strongest point of the opponent's defense. If you truly believe in your attacking resources do not hesitate before shifting it into top gear. Your drive for mating threats against the enemy king will more often than not be rewarded.

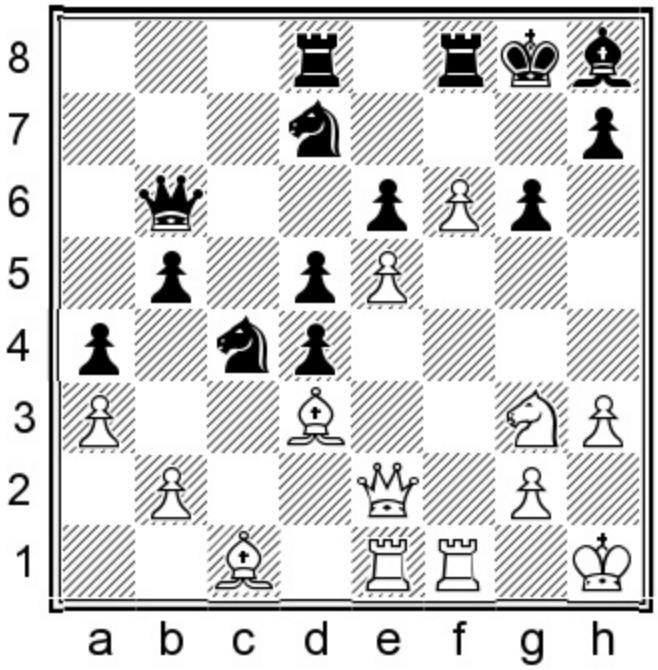
28...cxd4

28...exf5 would not have been much better. Now after 29.♘xf5! gxf5 30.♕xf5 ♘f8 31.♕f7+ ♔h8 32.♕h5 h6 33.♗g5+– despite being material down, White forcefully crashes through Black's defensive structures. The immediate threat is ♗g5-f6, with mate looming over the black king.

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Witnessing this should help us drown out the voice of uncertainty which nearly always accompanies us when sacrificing material. We can never be sure until it is really over that our attack is going to be crowned with success but witnessing such a potential turn of events lets us ‘feel under our fingertips’ that the black king is going to fry very soon.

29.f6 ♖f8 30.♕e2 ♗h8

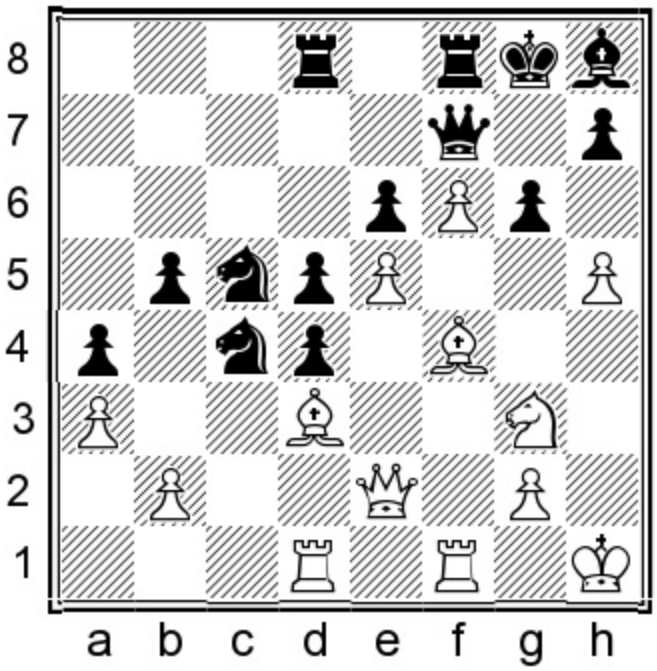


Position after: 30...♗h8

Since Black is virtually playing without the dark-squared bishop the only thing left for White to do would have been to consolidate his central pawn structure and afterwards target the position of the black monarch, in particular the g6-pawn.

31.♗f4 ♘c5 32.h4 ♕c7 33.h5 ♕f7 34.♖d1+–

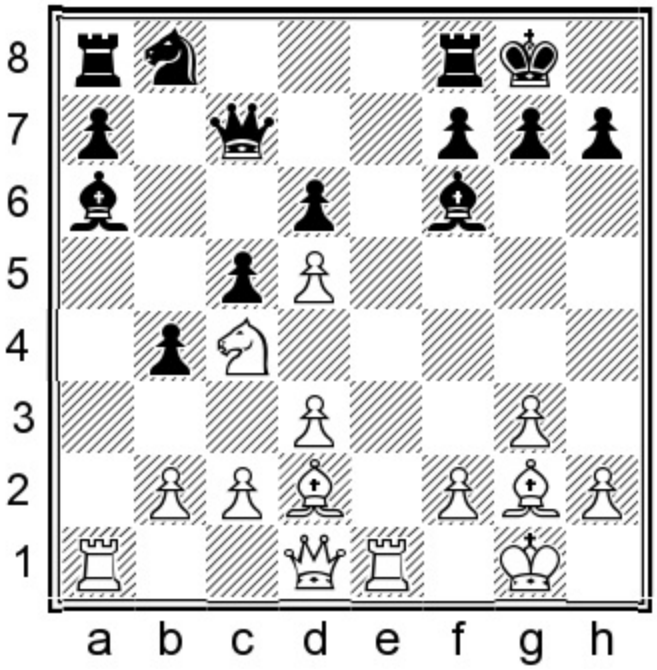
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Position after: 34.♖d1+−

In the absence of a light-squared bishop of his own there is nothing Black can do to stop White's kingside onslaught.

3
Based on Kachiani-Gersinska – Fuchs
Germany 2019



chesstouring.com

□ *1.?*

Show/Hide Solution

3
(based on)
Kachiani-Gersinska, Ketino
Fuchs, Judith
Germany 2019

Coordination
Sacrifice for paralyzing the opponent

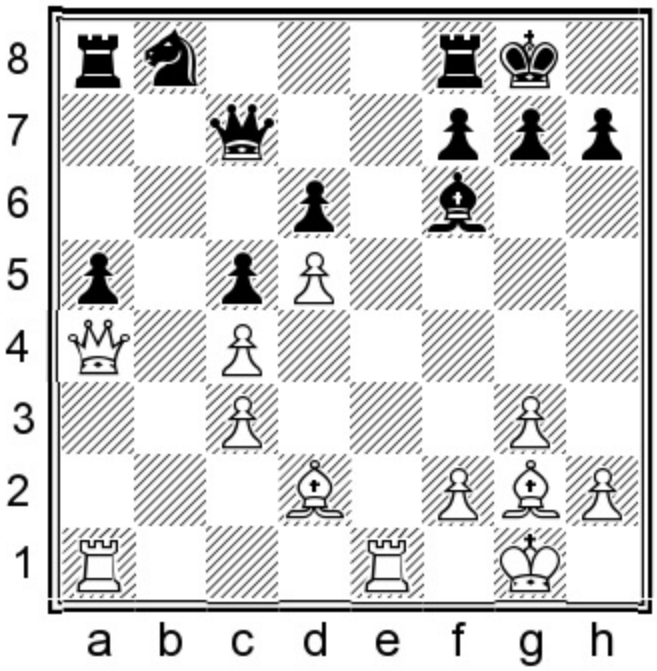
This position arose from the analysis of the game Kachiani-Gersinska – Fuchs, Baden-Baden 2019. Material is equal, but the position gives a slightly better impression for White. The c4-knight is already eyeing the backward d6-pawn which reminds us immediately of similar scenes to be met frequently in the Benoni Defense. The simplest follow-up for White is to gang up on the said pawn even more by means of something like ♗d2-f4, when the pressure could slowly become unbearable for Black. Still, in view of Black threatening to take on c4 and afterwards on b2 White does not seem to be in a position to carry out the aforementioned plan... or is she?

1.♖xa6!

A nice positional sacrifice. In exchange for the material investment White will almost be able to completely tie down the opponent. This does not lead to instant defeat, but it is rather the long-lasting nature of the pressure that Black is subjected to that makes her play especially difficult afterwards.

A) 1.c3 ♗xc4 2.dxc4 bxc3 3.bxc3 a5 4.♕a4

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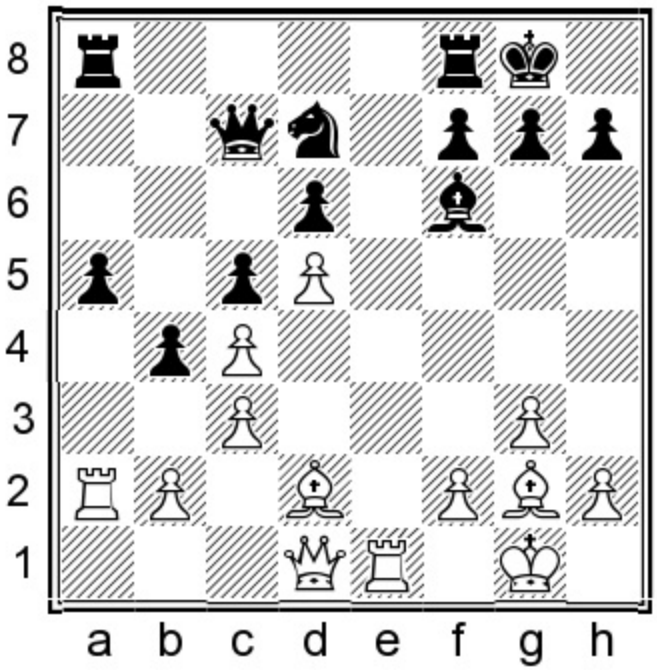


Position after: 4.♕a4

would have been a very interesting alternative from the perspective of static and dynamic balance. Statically speaking White should be much worse because her queenside pawn structure has been badly compromised, and Black is furthermore in possession of a supported passed pawn on a5. When looking at the very same position dynamically, it is actually Black who is struggling as finishing development with 4...♘d7 exposes her to 5.♕c6 while taking on c6 would have been close to suicidal while defending the queen with any of the rooks would have led to material concessions. Still, Black would have been able to pull off some tricks that save the day for her: 5...♕a7!? 6.♕xd6 ♘e5 7.♖xe5 ♖ad8! and quite unexpectedly, White would have to part with the queen. Now after 8.♕xd8 ♖xd8 9.♖ee1 a4⇄ the fate of the game is by no means decided but I have a hunch that the a4-pawn will not be that easy to snatch. The game remains therefore more or less balanced, with a draw being the most probable result.

B) By contrast, 1.♖a2?! with the idea of defending the b2-pawn first and only then maybe exerting some more pressure along the a-file is just timid and slow as after 1...♗xc4 2.dxc4 ♘d7 3.c3 a5⇄

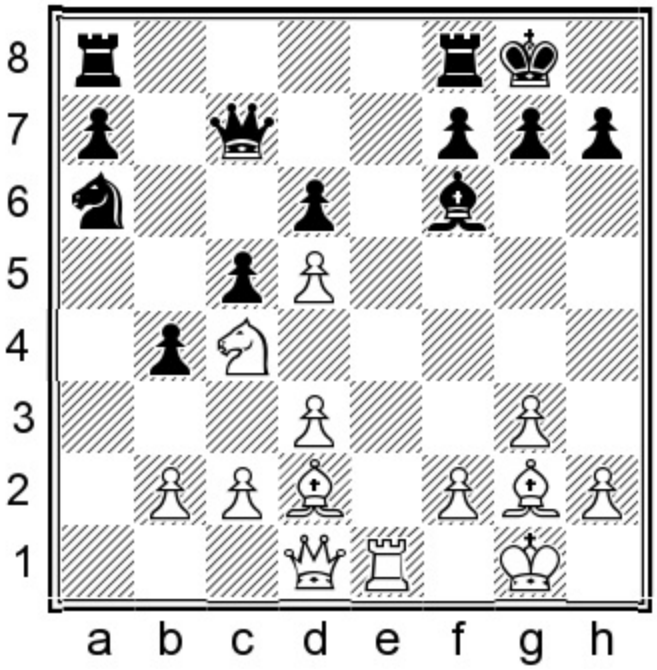
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Position after: 3...a5⇄

White would have to be very careful about Black's advancing queenside pawns. The bishop pair might represent one argument in her favor, but with the position remaining still very much closed and the light-squared bishop not enjoying too many weaknesses to pick on, it is the simplicity of the upcoming play that convinces me to root for Black here.

1.♖xa6! ♘xa6



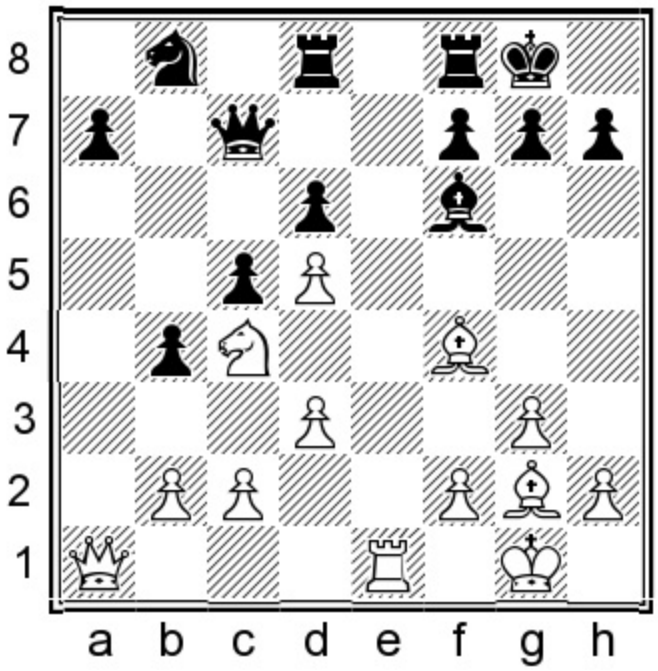
Position after: 1...♘xa6

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2.♕a1!

An important intermediate move. The black knight is sent back to b8 which strongly contributes to Black's uncoordinated demise.

By comparison, 2.♗f4?! would have been much less accurate as it allows Black to achieve a more respectable level of coordination after 2...♖ad8 3.♕a1 ♘b8.



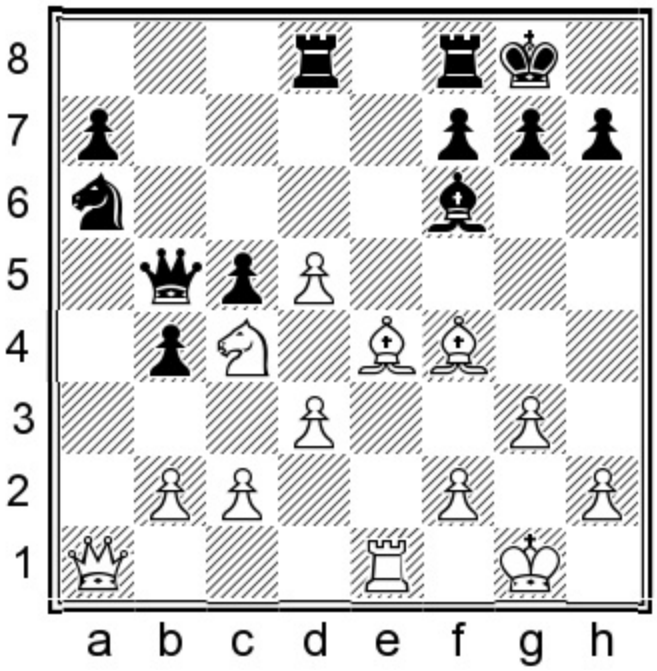
Position after: 3...♘b8

The black rooks are connected and none of the other pieces are in any danger for the time being. Still, Black's position is not enviable at all despite the material edge. If you believe otherwise try making at least one logically looking move that helps you achieve anything tangible here! In the meantime, White would be making progress on the kingside, starting out with something like 4.h4!?⩲ slowly gaining space on the kingside, with the goal of having it ripped open one day. Standing still appears to be the best thing Black could try to do here but then again to stand still is to move backwards.

2...♘b8

Trying to surrender some material for the sake of untangling with 2...♕b7 3.♘xd6 ♕b6 does not help either as after 4.♗f4 ♖ad8 5.♘c4 ♕b5 6.♗e4!?+–

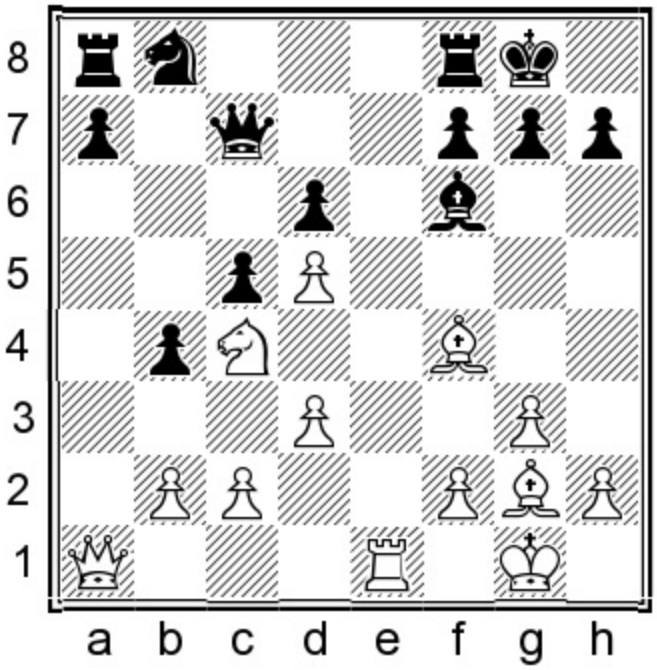
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Position after: 6.♗e4!?+−

White still very much dominates the position while Black is unable to contest the e-file because of the knight fork on d6 while Black's a6-knight remains out of play all the same. With no useful moves left Black is technically paralyzed and reduced to waiting for death on the kingside to come. White will start pushing her kingside pawns under the support of the heavy pieces and the light-squared bishop on e4. It is going to be White's light square control that will eventually decide the game in her favor.

3.♗f4



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Position after: 3.♗f4

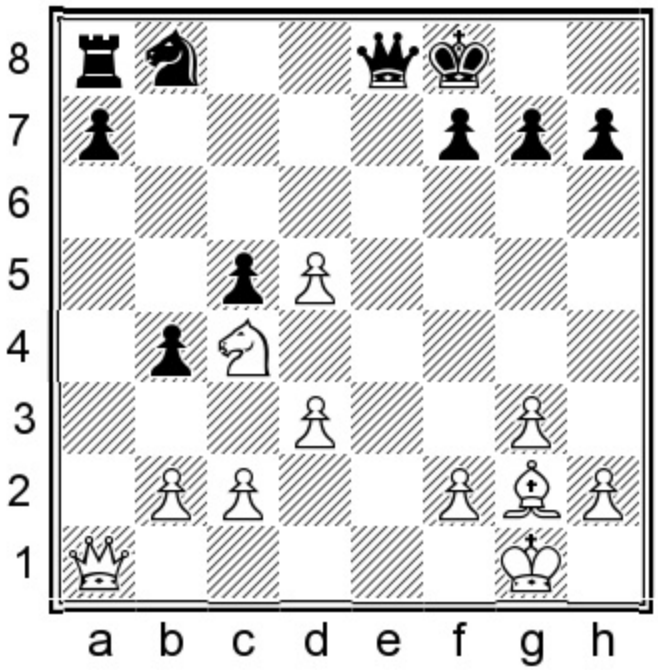
This is the position White should have been heading for. The d6-pawn is obviously Black's biggest problem child as it cannot be defended even by the f8-rook due to back rank mate motifs. What is even more, should the said pawn fall for any reason, the floodgates into Black's camp shall open with ideas like d5-d6 leading to almost total annihilation. With so much pressure, even being an exchange up does not represent any consolation prize for Black. Sample lines:

3...♗e7

This allows a pretty tactical strike but it was already too late to find decent alternatives.

3...♕d7 is not much better either as after 4.♗xd6 ♖e8 5.♖e4! ♖xe4 6.dxe4+– White's central pawn mass will surely decide the outcome of the game. True, taking on e4 does not look particularly inviting, but what else could Black possibly do at this point?

4.♖xe7! ♕xe7 5.♗xd6 ♕e8 6.♗xf8 ♔xf8



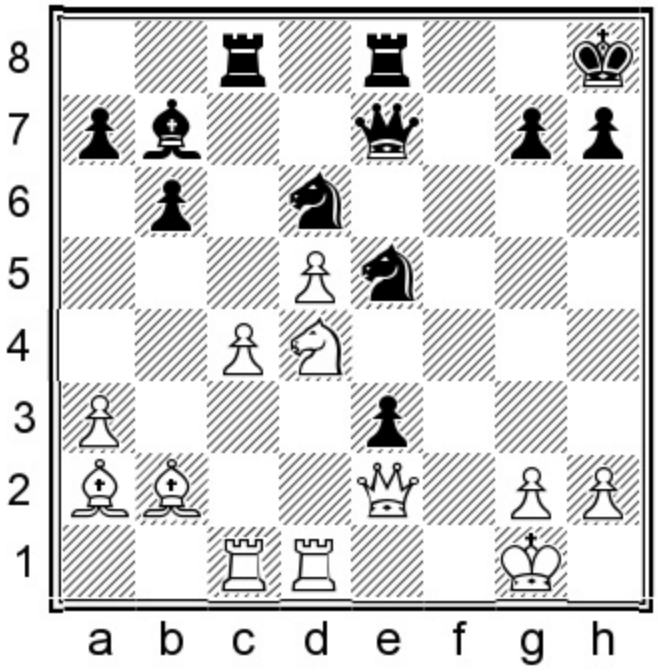
Position after: 6...♔xf8

and now after the further

7.♘b6! axb6 8.♕xa8+–

Black can naturally try to establish some sort of dark-squared blockade, but White is certainly going to convert the pawn advantage in the long run. The simplest route to victory is to first deprive the opponent of active possibilities (e.g. ♕a8-b7 combined with ♗g2-h3), and afterwards bringing our own king closer to the queenside in order to make a decisive pawn break possible.chesstouring.com

4
Badelka – Mammadzada
Antalya 2019



■ *25...?*

Show/Hide Solution

4
Badelka, Olga (2381)
Mammadzada, Gunay (2438)
Antalya 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Dynamic defense (kamikaze sacrifice in order to circumvent the opponent's bind)

Material is equal in this position arising out of the Rubinstein variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defense, but there are critical imbalances pertaining to the pawn structure and piece distribution between the two players involved as well. As is typically the case in the mentioned variation, White obtains the bishop pair straight out of the opening, and then spends the rest of the game trying to have both of them activated. Black, on the other hand, does whatever he can to contain the bishops. This is usually done by establishing decent control over the light squares or picking on whatever pawn weaknesses White might be suffering from. There are three more elements present in the position that need to be

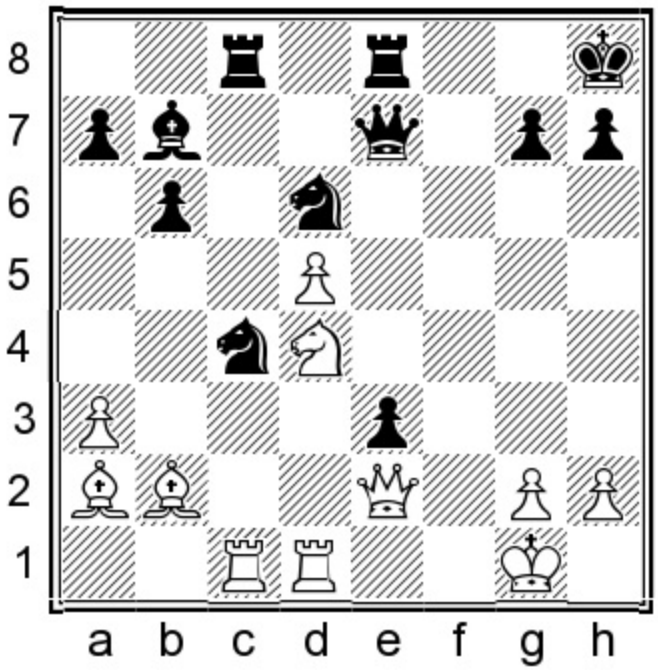
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highlighted. First of all, Black has a far advanced passer pawn on e3 and as much as I like it one cannot say for sure whether this is something Black should be proud of or if it is a weakling that is going to be promptly chopped by White. The other two factors worth mentioning are the possibility to install an ironclad knight on e6 and the currently debilitated black b7-bishop. Both of these clearly favor White. Already such a brief analysis tells us that Black cannot stand still for too long as the long-term tendency is negative so every moment of hesitation from her side could result in the game inevitably going in the wrong direction.

25...♖f8!

Black activates the rook along the f-file as the target square is f2, with the intention of eliminating everything standing on the second rank, most notably the white bishops. The e3-pawn is defended dynamically for the moment which means that it is not defended at all but taking it here and now would have cost White the game.

A) In the game, Badelka decided to sacrifice the knight on c4 with 25...♘exc4?



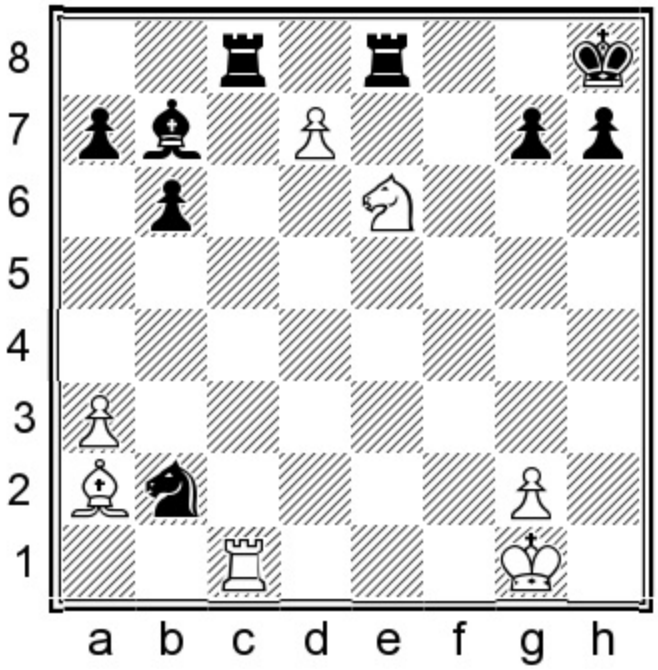
Position after: 25...♘exc4?

The purpose of this maneuver is to deflect the white queen from e2 so that ideas like ...e3-e2 followed by ...♕e7-e3+ with potential mating threats would suddenly become possible. Notwithstanding the general correctness of this sacrifice White could have now extinguished Black's initiative by playing 26.♖xc4! ♘xc4 [26...♗a6 27.♘c6+– puts an end to Black's attacking efforts immediately.] 27.♗xc4 ♖xc4 and now 28.♘f5! when Black proves to be helpless along the dark squares, e.g. 28...♕e4 29.♘xg7 ♖c2 30.♘xe8+ ♔g8 31.♘f6++–.

B) By comparison, 25...♕h4?! would have indeed been much more to the point. The e3-pawn is defended dynamically for now as capturing the pawn gives rise to multiple tactical motifs. What is

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more, the thematic 26.♘e6 apparently concedes a pawn to Black and at the same time deprives her of the bishop pair after something like 26...♘dxc4 27.♗xe5 ♘xe5 28.♕xe3 ♕xh2+?! 29.♔xh2 ♘g4+ 30.♔g1 ♘xe3. The only problem lies in the fact that White possesses a strong supported passer on the d-file which also happens to be the nail in Black's coffin after the sequence: 31.d6! ♘xd1 32.d7 ♘b2

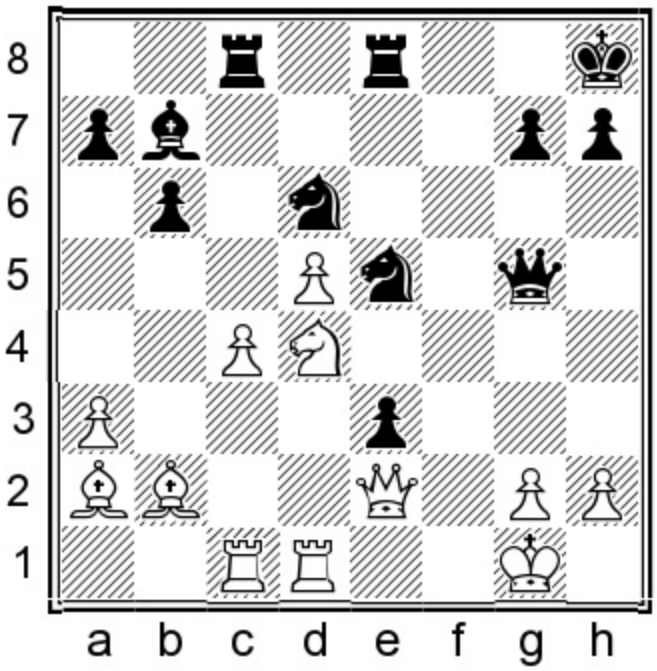


Position after: 32...♘b2

33.♖c2!! (Chasing away the defender of the c4-square, do not yet ask why) 33...♘d3 34.♖c7! (Luring the bishop to a6, the mystery is about to be solved) 34...♗a6 and now 35.♗c4!+– with the black bishop unable to defend the c8-rook for too long, the advanced white pawn promotes for sure. And Black would have nearly got away with it was it not for this little meddling bishop from a2!

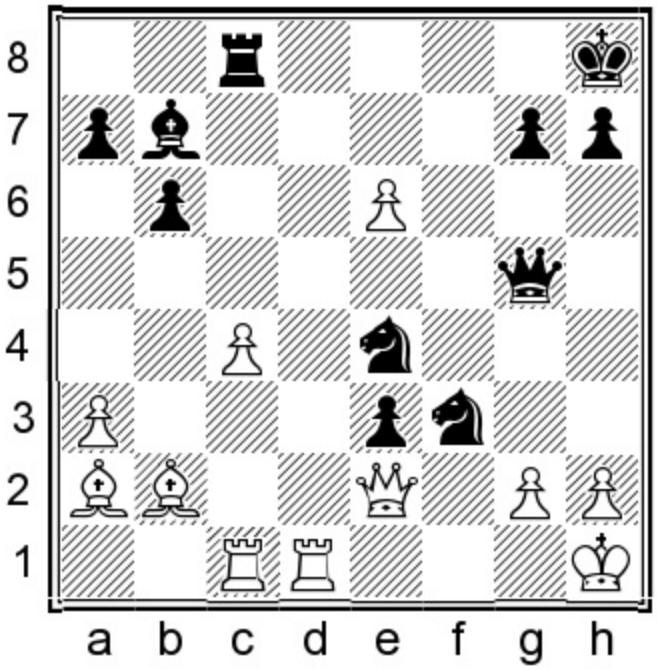
C) Finally, defending the problematic e3-pawn by 25...♕g5

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Position after: 25...♕g5

is not such a terrible move it is just that after 26.♖f1 [But not the tempting 26.♘e6?? because of 26...♖xe6! 27.dxe6 ♘f3+ 28.♔h1 ♘e4!–+



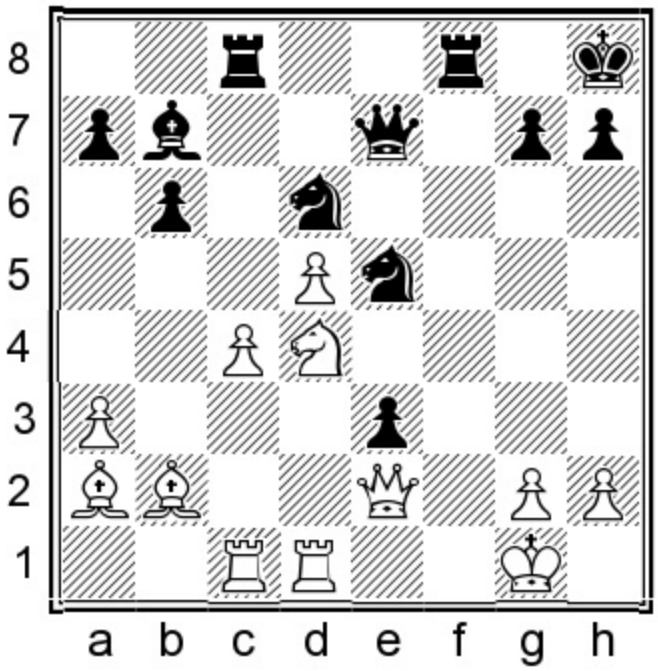
Position after: 28...♘e4!–+

with mate in eight moves to come – that is what you call turning the tide!] 26...♘g6 27.g3± Black is unable to prevent the dreadful ♘d4-e6 from happening sooner or later. Removing the knight costs an exchange and leaving it as it is would result in the e3-pawn falling rather quickly. The biggest

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problem is not the material deficit, but rather the time that White would have gained this way to develop her own initiative in particular the bishop pair already menacingly pointing at the black monarch.

25...♖f8!



Position after: 25...♖f8!

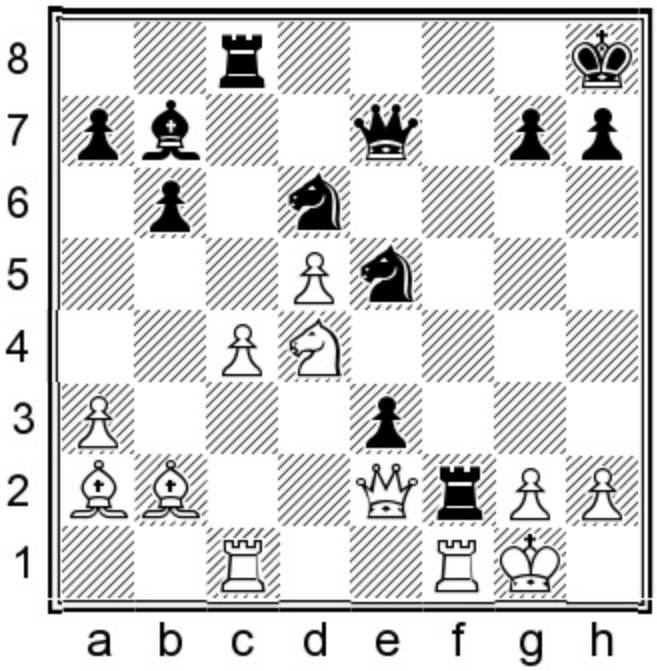
26.♖f1

Practically forced as the last thing White wants to witness here is a black rook invading his camp. Also, it is not yet so apparent how Black wishes to continue here since the e3-pawn is again in danger.

26.♕xe3? loses to the discovered attack 26...♘f3+! when after 27.♕xf3 ♖xf3 28.♘xf3 ♕e3+ 29.♔h1 ♘e4 30.♗d4 ♕h6∓ with ideas such as ...♘e4-g3+ coming into consideration, White's problems might not yet be over.

26...♖f2!

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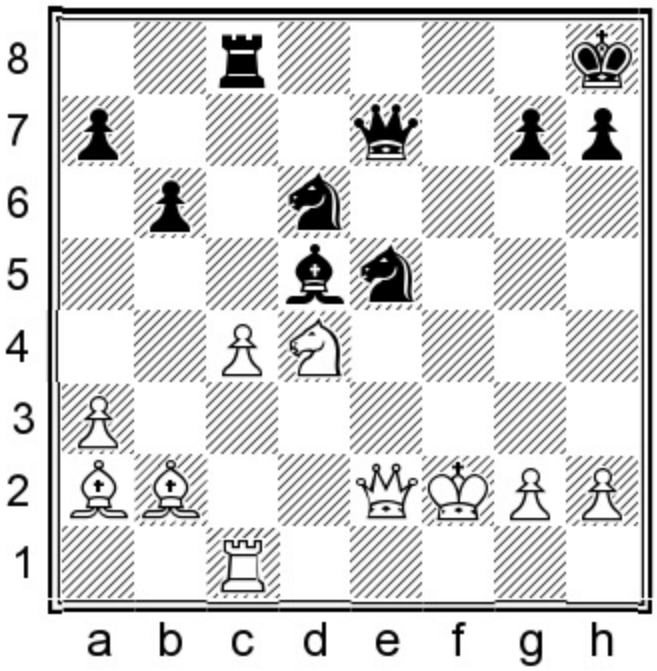
Position after: 26...♖f2!

The point of Black's play! The e3-pawn cannot be maintained there forever so instead of sticking to it at all cost Black should have rather used it as a temporary prop. In other words, the pawn was lost in the long run no matter what so why not sacrifice it for the sake of winning some additional tempos to boost the dynamic potential of the other pieces? Depending on where White puts the king after taking on f2, previously unavailable possibilities for the black pieces are going appear literally out of nowhere in the arising position.

27.♖xf2 exf2+ 28.♔f1

28.♔xf2 is met by the geometrically elegant 28...♗xd5!

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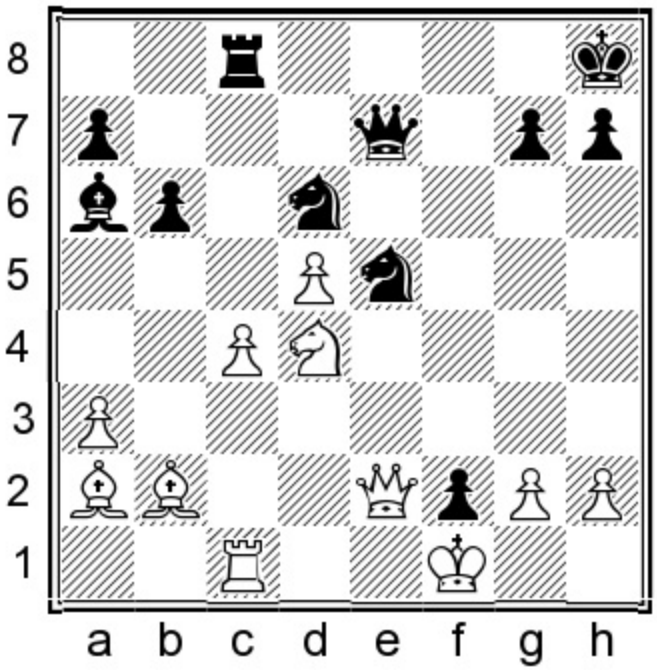
Position after: 28...♗xd5!

This move should have been seen in the first place when embarking on 25...♖f8! The point is that 29.cxd5 allows Black to recapture material after the very clever 29...♕h4+ 30.♔g1 ♖xc1+ 31.♗xc1 ♕xd4+. Here, White can certainly carry on by means of 32.♗e3 ♕a1+ 33.♕f1 counting on some pressure in the endgame related to the presence of a classical bishop pair but now the accurate interference 33...♘f3+! 34.gxf3 ♕xa2= leads to a position in which the drawn result would have basically become inevitable.

28...♗a6!

With the white king standing on f1, only now does this move work as after taking on c4 with a knight, White would be subjected to an unpleasant x-ray along the f1-a6 diagonal.

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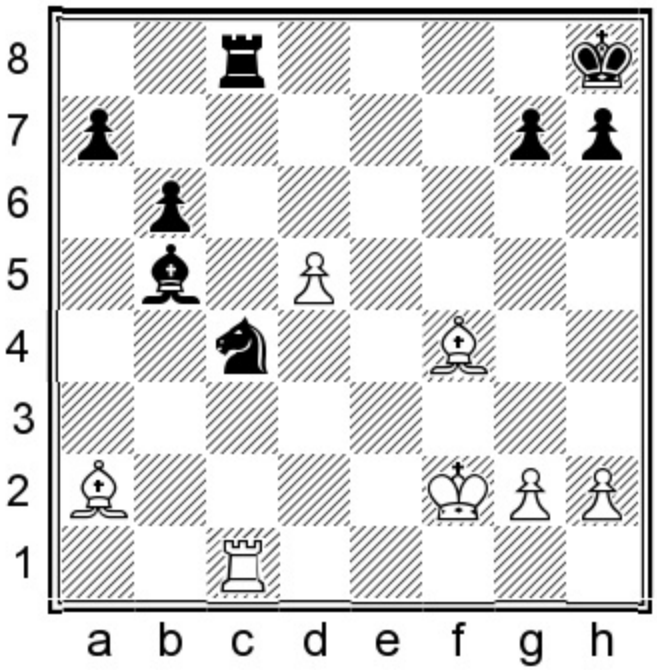
Position after: 28...♗a6!

Because of this, White is advised to block the diagonal in advance by playing

29.♘b5

which leads to massive exchanges and therefore also a draw after the more or less forcing

29...♘xb5 30.♕xe5 ♕xe5 31.♗xe5 ♘xa3 32.♔xf2 ♘xc4 33.♗f4 ♗b5=

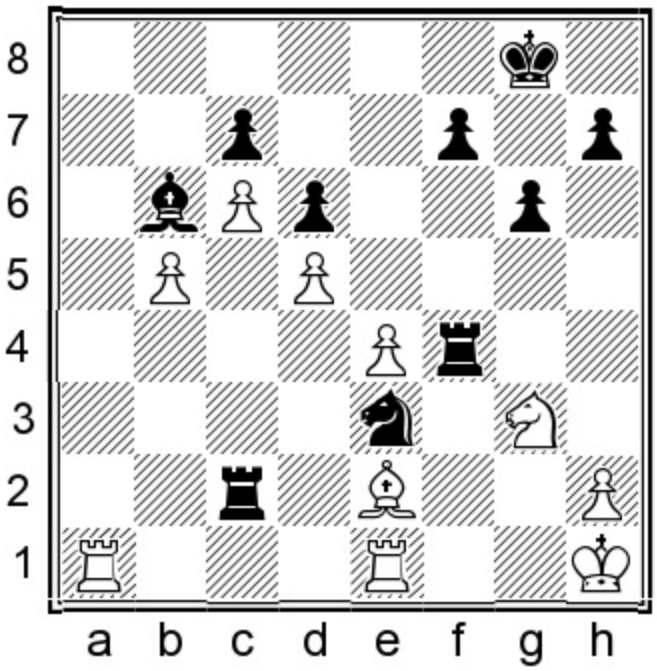


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Position after: 33...♗b5=

when White is nominally a pawn down, but in trying to stop the d5 passer supported by the bishop pair, she would have had to eventually allow White to restore material balance.

5
Krush – Kosteniuk
Hengshui 2019



□ *39.?*

Show/Hide Solution

5
Krush, Irina (2422)
Kosteniuk, Alexandra (2546)
Hengshui 2019

Weakness
Attacking the opponent's weakness as a measure of last resort

Do you ever have chess nightmares? You know, dreams of yourself taking part in a tournament and losing every single game or, even worse, finding yourself playing a game in the London System as White? Well, I sometimes do and the last one featured myself being in a mess comparable to White's

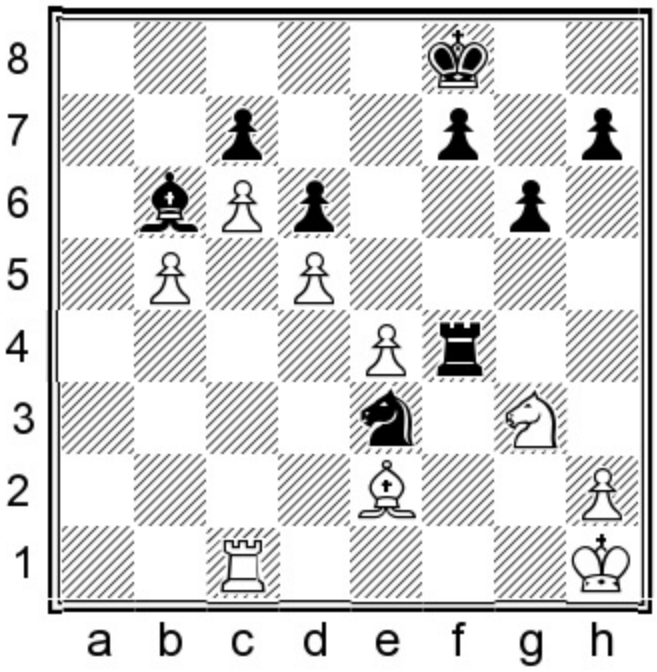
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situation on the board here. There is not much good that can be said about the current state of affairs among the white forces. The e1-rook is passive, the light-squared bishop imprisoned by its own pawns, not to mention the g3-knight reduced to a mere defender of the bishop. Black, on the other hand, seems to be in a fundamentally different situation. She is exerting strong pressure along the dark squares, and her pieces work together quite harmoniously. If God permits, maybe she could try to invade along the second rank also with the other rook and then even create a mating net against the white monarch after something like ...♘e3-g4. With dark clouds gathering along her king, White is advised to take any steps possible to avert this lethal danger.

39.♖a6!

Definitely not the first move many chess players would automatically think about. However, there is a method to this madness as White namely enjoys a 4 v. 2 pawn majority along the a-e files. If only a chance to spawn a pair of connected passed pawns would ever appear on the horizon, White would sure be more than glad to take it. What needs to be done to achieve it though is to first eliminate the b6-bishop, and then remove the d6-pawn from the way by means of a timely e4-e5 push. The moment we furthermore understand that after capturing on b6, White would be virtually out of danger of being mated, the move becomes quite apparent.

A) In the game, White went for the dynamically impotent 39.♖ec1? By itself the move cannot be assessed as bad as it strives to trade off the most active piece of the opponent. Funny enough, White even won this at the end of the day after a blunder from her opponent's side. If we understand why Black is dominating in this position (dark-squared control), we will quickly grasp that moves like that are definitely not helping to resolve the issue from which she is suffering. Now Black should have gone for 39...♖xc1+ 40.♖xc1 ♔f8



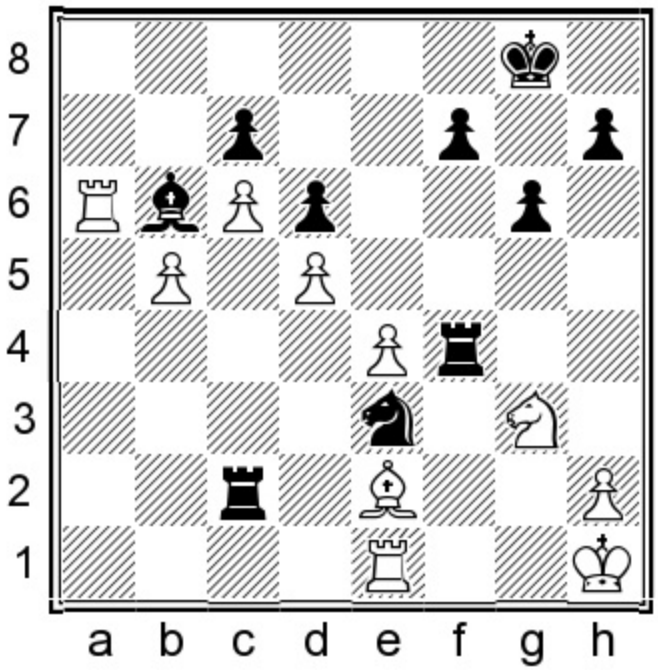
Position after: 40...♔f8

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bringing the king towards the center, and only then trying to destabilize White's setup even more by means of a possible ...h7-h5-h4 push. Black's last move is in particular meaningful should White try to generate a pair of connected passed pawns with the kamikaze like 41.e5 sacrifice. Now, instead of taking on e5 which allows d5-d6!?, Black could simply rely on 41...♔e7 42.exd6+ ♔xd6–+ when the d5-pawn falls, but most importantly, White's queenside pawns are fully contained.

B) By comparison to the previous line, the immediate 39.e5?! might look like a logical alternative. Still, Black does not even have to pay attention to what is happening in the center and may instead counter the opponent swiftly with 39...♖f2 when 40.exd6? happens to result in mate in ten after 40...♘g4!–+ when there is no antidote to ...♖f2xh2# in the long run.

39.♖a6!



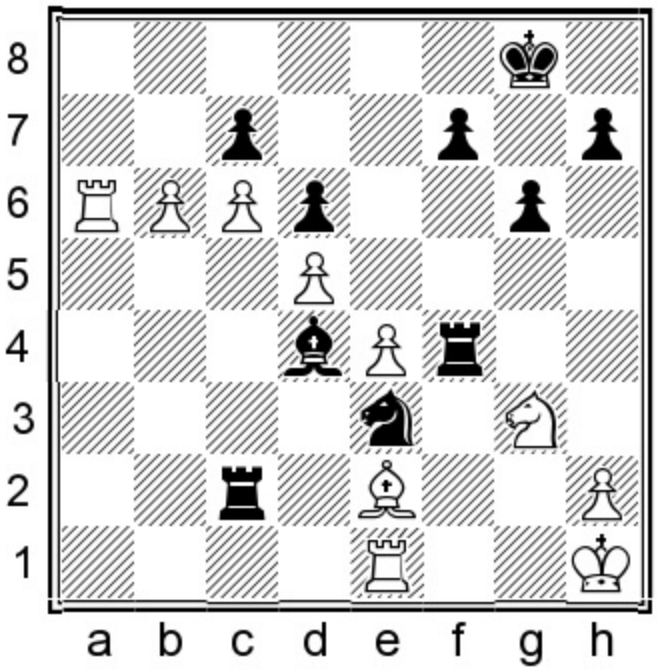
Position after: 39.♖a6!

39...♖f2

Black's best practical chance by elimination. Only this move takes out the sting of White's threat to capture the dark-squared bishop and then attack two of his pieces simultaneously after ♗e2-d3.

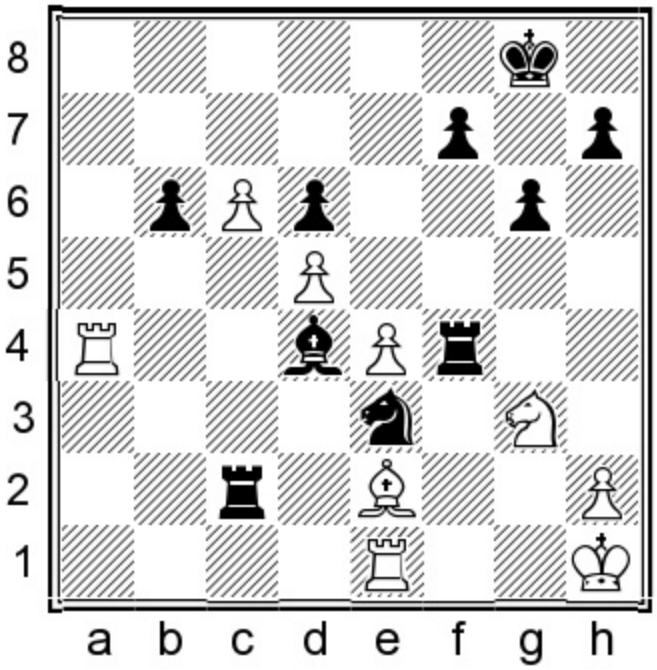
39...♗d4? looks very clever at first, but actually leads to Black's defeat after the powerful 40.b6!

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Position after: 40.b6!

40...cxb6 [40...♗xb6 41.♖xb6! cxb6 42.♗d3+– not only recaptures material, but still leaves Black's c-rook absorbed by the need to control White's passed c6-pawn.] and now the aesthetically pleasing 41.♖a4!!

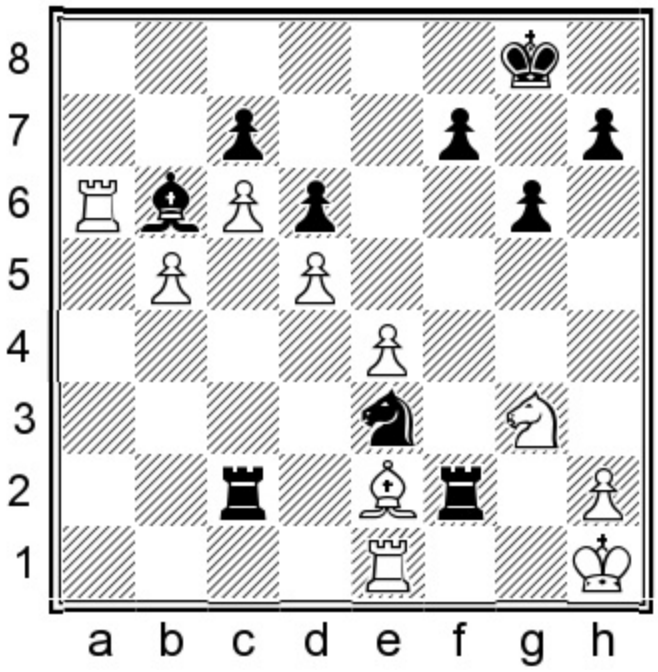


Position after: 41.♖a4!!

decisively disturbs Black's coordination. Coming back to c5 with the bishop lets White's passed pawn roll, whereas running away with something like 41...♗e5 yet again drops the knight after

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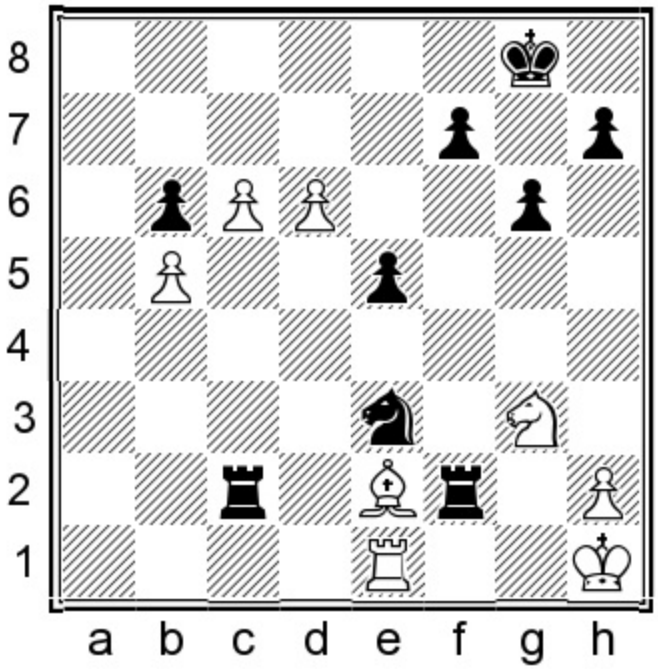
42.♗d3+–



Position after: 39...♖f2

Now however White's idea is revealed in full blaze:

40.♖xb6! cxb6 41.e5! dxe5 42.d6



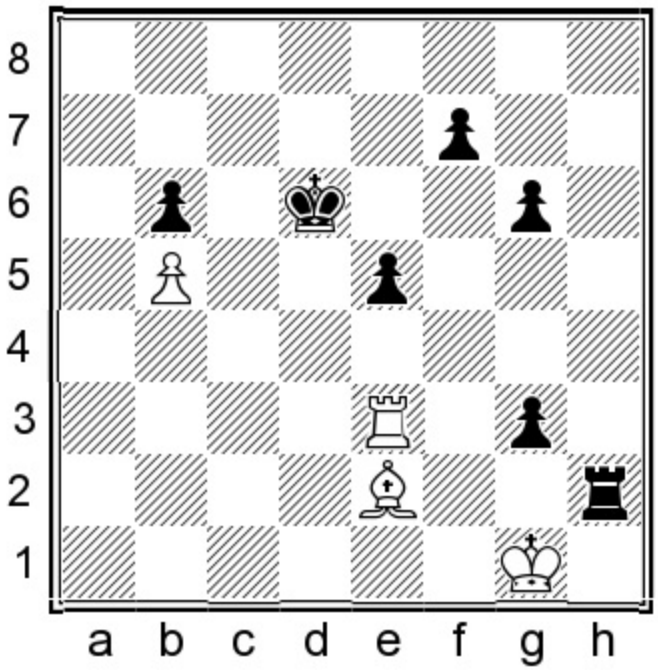
Position after: 42.d6

and despite being massively up on material, Black is unable to cope with the two connected passed

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pawns. I decided to scrutinize this position a little bit more just to make sure and my conclusion is that after the more or less forced

42...♔f8 43.♖a1 h5 44.c7 ♔e8 45.♖a8+ ♔d7 46.♖d8+ ♔e6 47.c8=♕+ ♖xc8 48.♖xc8 h4 49.♖c3 hxg3 50.♖xe3 ♖xh2+ 51.♔g1 ♔xd6=

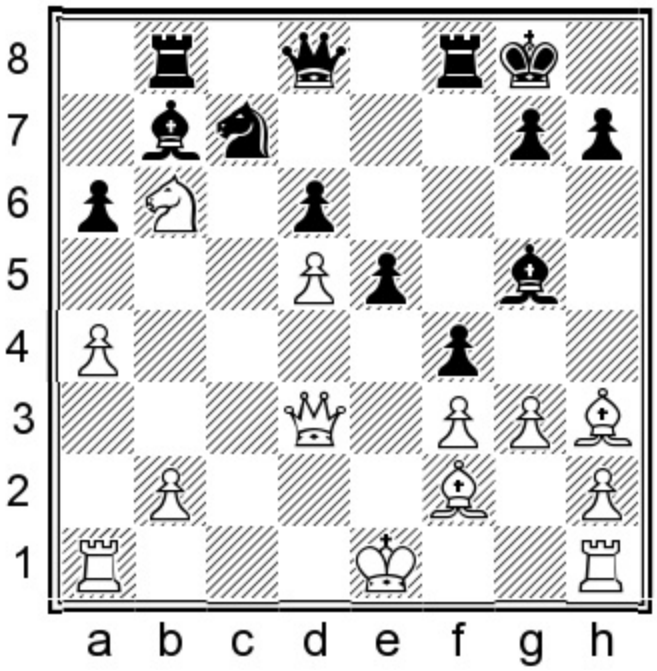


Position after: 51...♔xd6=

the position remains equal as Black might want to put those kingside pawns into motion but will certainly find it difficult because of the need to constantly protect the b6-pawn. Under those circumstances, this Mexican standoff is likely to end in a draw very soon.

6
Solozhenkina – Shuvalova
Antalya 2019

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■ *21...?*

Show/Hide Solution

6
Solozhenkina, Elizaveta (2330)
Shuvalova, Polina (2457)
Antalya 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
When there is little need for prevention

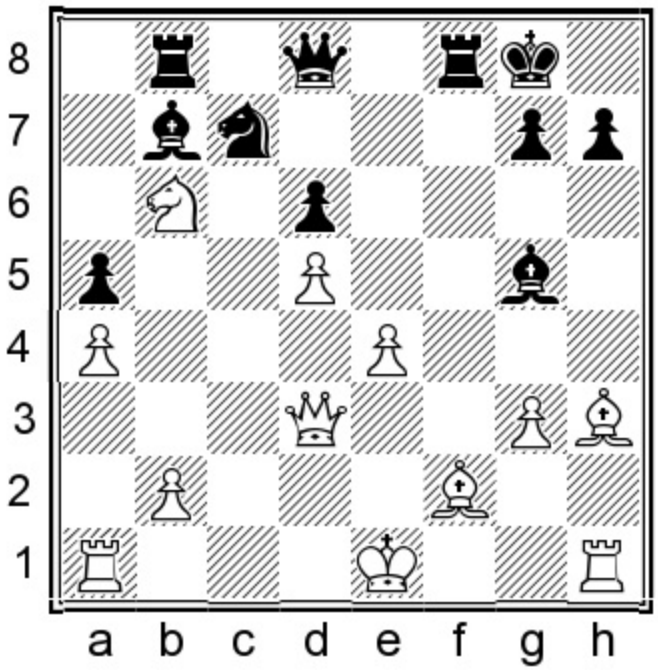
It seems like Just another messy Kalashnikov middlegame at first sight. Material balance has not yet been disturbed, but this does not mean that things are not heating up on the board. An untrained eye would say that any potential black initiative is currently kept at bay, for example the white b6-knight not only securely protects the d5-pawn, but also blocks the b-file just in case. On the other wing ...f4xg3, opening up both the dark-squared bishop and the rook, constantly comes into consideration. While this does not threaten anything concrete it could even jeopardize the black monarch due to threats arising along the newly opened h-file. Apart from that, Black should not forget that White might soon feel tempted to fork the black rooks by means of ♘b6-d7. All in all one gets impression that Black's position resembles a crouching tiger ready to grab his prey, there does not seem to be much she could do, especially should White make it in time to castle short... or is there?

21...a5!

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A gorgeous display of anticipation for attacking purposes! Black should have understood that most of her dynamic potential will evaporate the moment she allows White to castle kingside. The moment this happens, Black would be left with a strategically inferior position as the weakness of the a5 and d6-pawns would have soon started to tell. Sample lines confirm this as well as the fact that Black should not have hesitated in sacrificing some material in order to make sure that the white monarch stays exactly where he is as long as possible. It is no coincidence that real progress of just about any chess player starts only when they realize that material is not everything in chess.

A) The game featured 21...fxg3 22.hxg3 e4?! 23.fxe4 and only now 23...a5



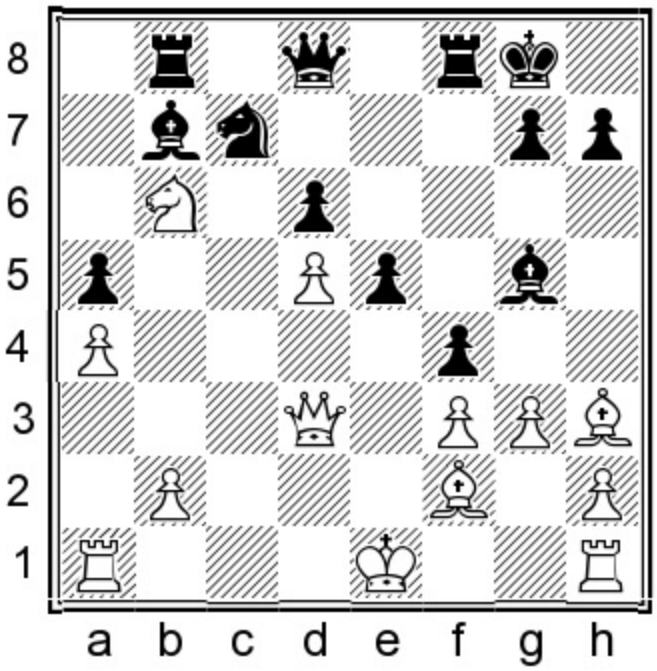
Position after: 23...a5

but this does not work so well anymore as after 24.0-0!? ♗a6 25.♕c2 ♗xf1 26.♖xf1↑ despite a slight material deficit, White retained all of her trump cards: the passivity of Black's b8-rook and c7-knight, control over the light squares and even chances of creating a supported passed pawn in the center.

B) 21...♖f7 is by no means a bad idea, but it simply fails to impress after 22.0-0 ♕e7 23.♗f5!? g6 24.♗e4∞ White seems to have consolidated quite convincingly and is locked and loaded to proceed with generating some counterplay by pushing the queenside pawns, possibly all the way to the promotion square.

21...a5!

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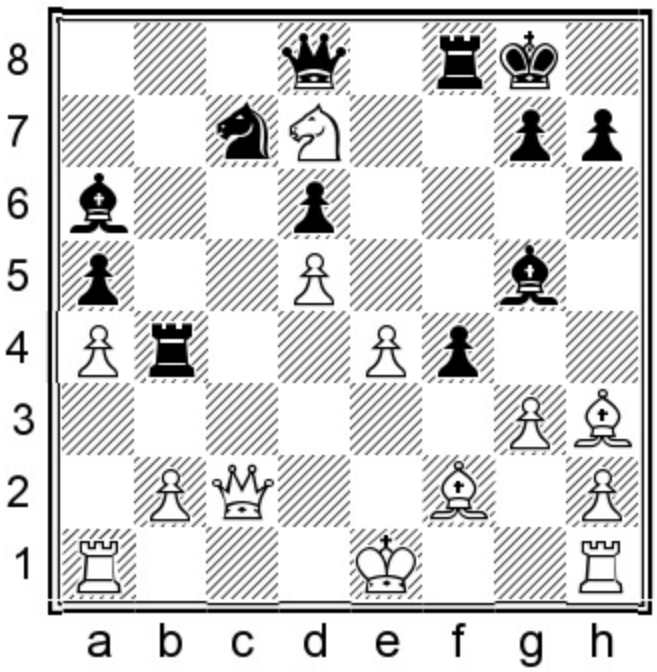


Position after: 21...a5!

22.0-0

Trying to safeguard the king despite headwinds looks like the most persistent try to maintain relative balance. At the same time, with Black constantly pushing and White being pushed back move after move, there has to come a time when her defensive entanglements will eventually have to succumb to the growing pressure exerted by the black forces.

A) 22.♘d7? grabs the bull by the horns, but after the highly impressive 22...e4! 23.fxe4 ♗a6 24.♕c2 ♖b4!!



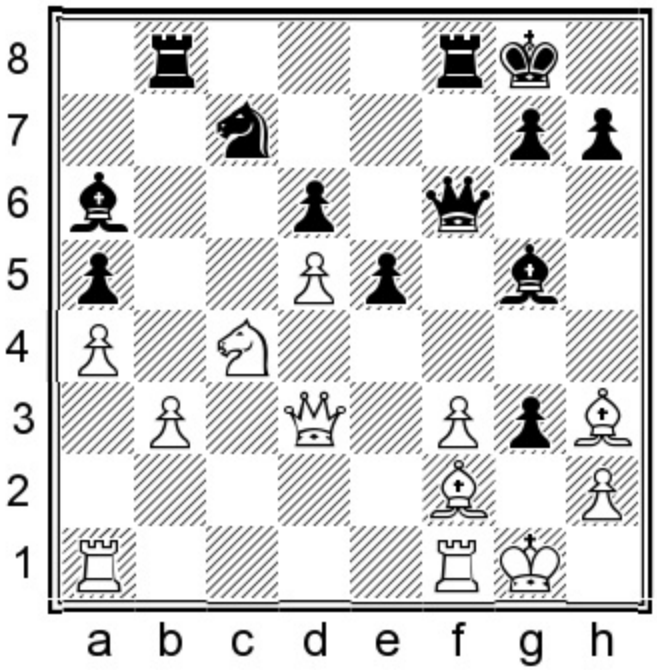
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Position after: 24...♖b4!!

the white king would have been caught in a sort of crossfire. Castling either way is not possible but staying in the center has to be considered similar to walking through a minefield in view of a line like 25.♘xf8 ♕xf8 26.♖a3 ♕b8! (forcing White to put the pawn to b3 thus cutting the communications between her forces) 27.b3 ♕e8! 28.♗g2 ♘xd5–+ with far too many threats coming into consideration than White could possibly handle. I am quite sure that no grandmaster playing White would likely survive long enough to see the end of the film here.

B) 22.♗f5 attempting to create at least a nucleus of stability in the center backfires after 22...♗a6! 23.♗xh7+ ♔h8 24.♕c2 ♘e8!–+ when, quite surprisingly, the white knight would have had no safe haven left.

22...♗a6 23.♘c4 ♕f6 24.b3 fxg3



Position after: 24...fxg3

Now White will be forced to give up a pawn (and in the long run probably the game as well) with

25.hxg3∓

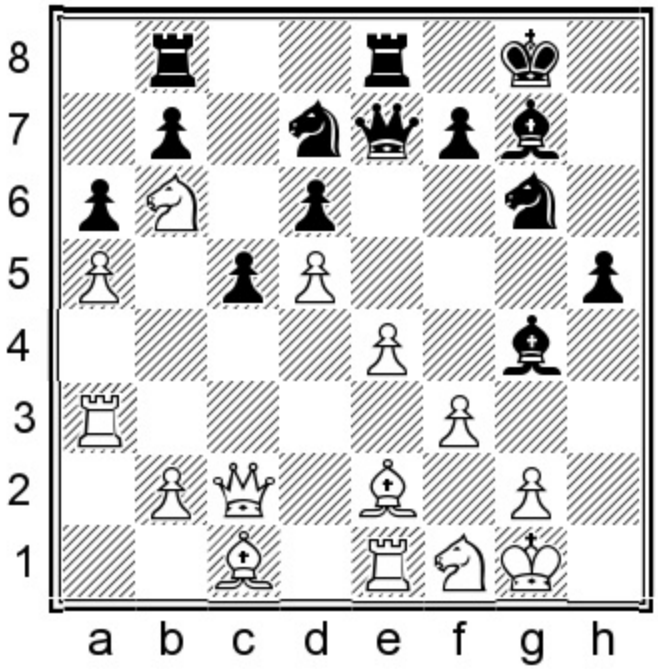
as after the alternative 25.♗xg3?! White could have literally bee blown off the board after the powerful 25...♖b4! 26.♗e1 e4! 27.♕d1 ♖xc4! 28.bxc4 ♗xc4–+ and if something is certain here it is that White will be soon lose more than just an exchange.

What I really like about this game is the manner in which Black could have balanced her time, dynamics and finally prophylaxis in the smoothest of manners. The need to prevent White from castling was more or less evident, but Black appears to have had to deal with nasty knight forks first.

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Still, compared to the size of Black's attacking initiative afterwards, dropping an exchange would have not been a major blow for Black, but rather a pleasant breeze on a warm morning at most. So, if something does not need to be prevented why would you waste time stopping it at all? If it is not broke, do not fix it.

7
Rodshtein – Rechlis
Israel 2019



■ *21...?*

Show/Hide Solution

7
Rodshtein, Maxim (2668)
Rechlis, Gad (2526)
Israel 2019

Attack & Defense
A desperate attack instead of defending

Here we have one of those many Benoni middlegames in which White has been doing his best trying to dominate the opponent in the center, whilst Black is usually forced to seek activity (or at least

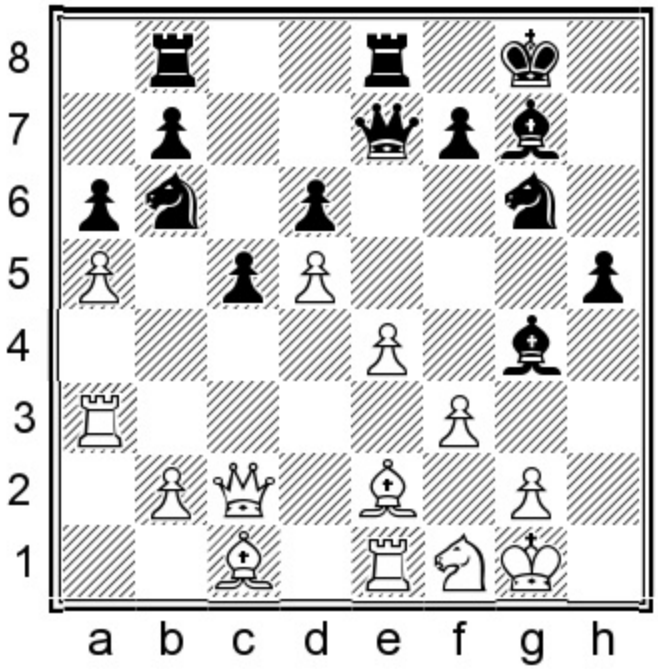
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chaos) for the sake of not ending up in a strategically inferior position. It is obviously the nature of the opening to be blamed since when taking on d5 early on Black voluntarily leaves himself with a backward pawn on d6. What he usually gets in exchange is activity along the e-file or even some initiative on the kingside. But these are both dynamic elements which can just as well disappear in a moment, unlike the static weakness of the d6-pawn. Still, at least from Black's perspective, such considerations lose most of their meaning if one is faced with real life problems such as a possible loss of a whole bishop on g4. The said piece is clearly under attack with a safe escape route nowhere in sight. Is there anything Black can do to save it... or maybe, should he not care about it at all?

21...♗d4+

A necessary prelude to the hammer that is about to fall on White's head in a second now.

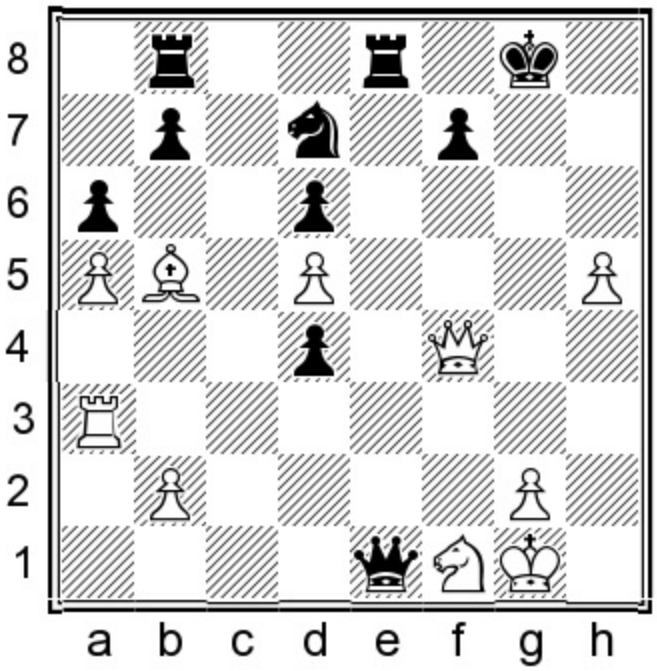
Rechlis must have been clearly concerned with the threat of material loss and thus opted for 21...♘xb6?



Position after: 21...♘xb6?

Still, after 22.fxg4! [But not 22.axb6? ♗d7 23.♗e3 h4↑ when Black has not only eaten the cookie (saved the bishop), but still has it as well (there are prospects for a possible kingside attack starting with ...h4-h3).] 22...♘d7 Black would not only be losing a pawn in the process, but also after 23.gxh5 ♗d4+ 24.♗e3 ♘f4 25.♗xd4 cxd4 26.♕d2! would most probably have to succumb to a dreadful kingside attack: 26...♕xe4 27.♗b5! ♕xe1 28.♕xf4+–

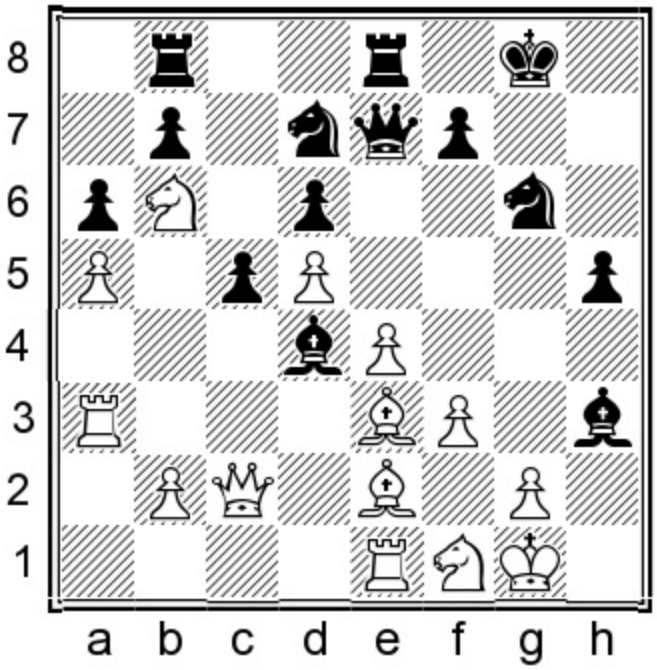
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Position after: 28.♕xf4+−

with the prospect of having have to part with the queen very soon in order to think about repelling White's attack. On a different note it is quite amusing to witness how the Attack/Defense Ratio went from the safe '0' to the dangerous '2' without Black having made any obvious mistakes along the way.

21...♗d4+ 22.♗e3 ♗h3!!



Position after: 22...♗h3!!

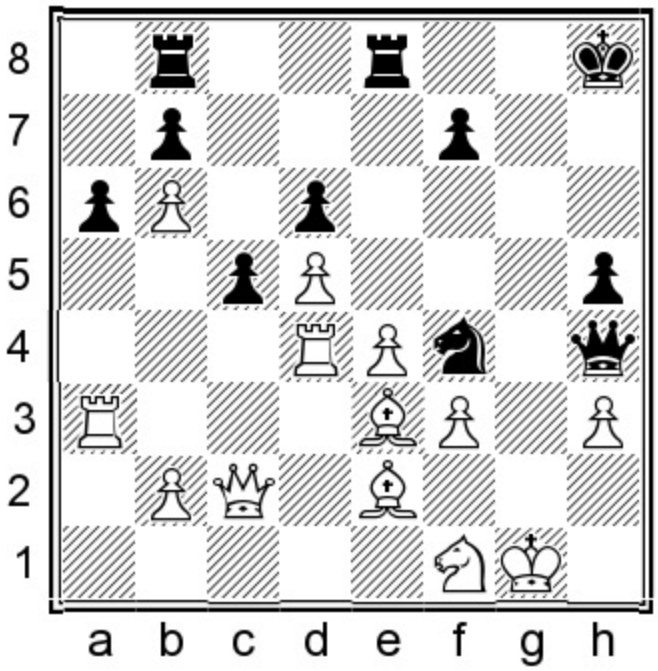
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Black defends the attacked bishop by putting him en prise of a different pawn of the opponent. What fun it is to do the impossible! Only after we overcome our first shock does it become apparent what Black is up to as the bishop was bound to fall whatever happens so Black sacrifices in a way that at least gives him something in exchange. White can take it immediately or with slight delay, but the price to be paid is going to be big – opening up the king to a ferocious kingside attack.

23.♗d1

The safest option in my opinion. White provides the vulnerable g2-square with more security in advance but also grants the queen access to the kingside along the second rank.

A) The straightforward 23.gxh3? loses immediately due to 23...♘xb6 24.axb6 ♕h4 25.♖d1 ♘f4 Black's initiative has been carried out along the dark squares so far which makes White's light-squared bishop look surprisingly impotent. White may in fact try to reduce the opponent's influence along the said color-complex by means of 26.♖xd4 only to fall from the ashes to the fire after the stunning 26...♔h8!!

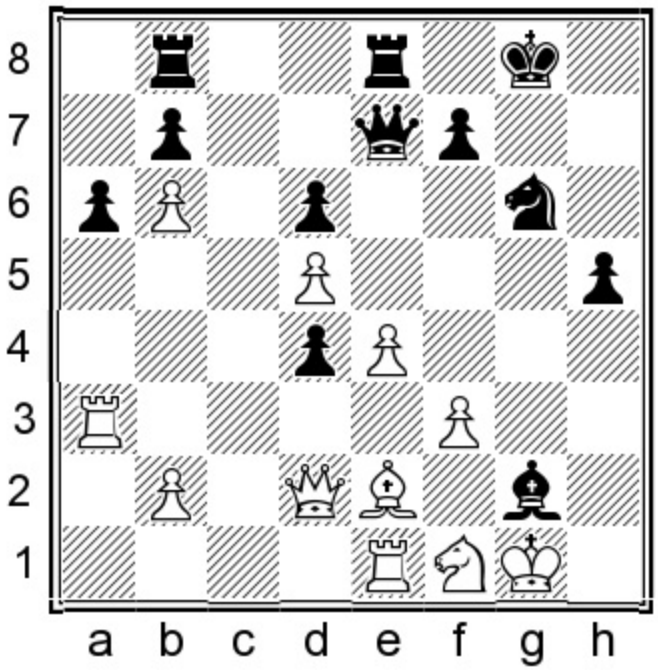


Position after: 26...♔h8!!

The white monarch can run but it cannot hide from the black rooks joining the onslaught, e.g. 27.♘h2 ♖g8+ 28.♘g4 ♕e1+ 29.♗f1 ♘xh3+ 30.♔h2 hxg4 31.♗xh3 gxh3 32.♖d2 ♖g7!–+ with a decisive inclusion of the other rook as well.

B) When concluding that accepting a sacrifice might not represent the best of ideas, a fairly typical decision in practice is to consolidate the position first, and only then again start pushing for a win. From this point of view, 23.♗xd4 cxd4 24.♕d2 ♘xb6 25.axb6 looks like an ideal solution. The problematic bishop may escape, but the d4-pawn would be falling with White most probably retaining a solid edge. At the same time this logic is flawed tactically as Black can go for 25...♗xg2!?

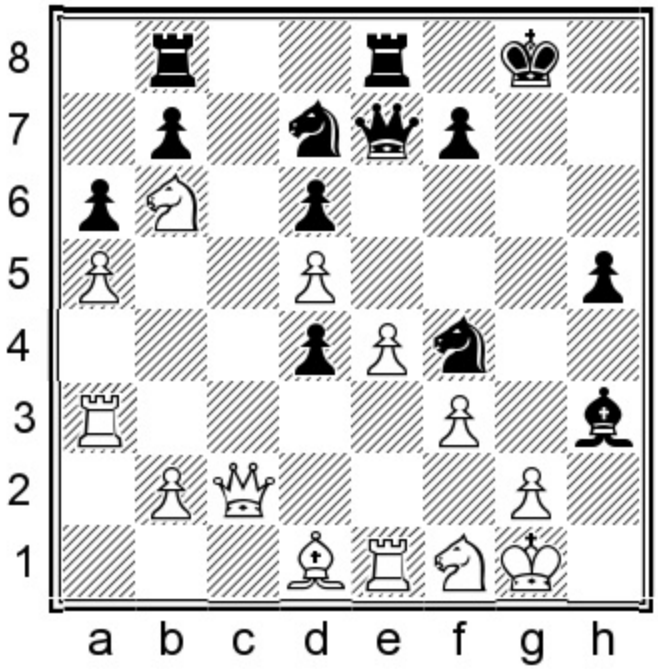
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Position after: 25...♗xg2!?

If they throw you out the door, come back through the window! Even in such a turn of events White would have to work very hard in order to grant his monarch enough security. 26.♔xg2 ♕h4 27.♘h2 ♘f4+ 28.♔h1 ♔h7! 29.♖aa1 ♖g8 30.♗d3 and now after 30...♖g2 31.♕xg2 ♘xg2 32.♔xg2 ♖g8+ 33.♔h1 ♕g5 34.♖e2 ♔h6⇄ and formally speaking, White is a pawn up but mating threats along the g-file and the advanced black d-pawn will not allow him to convert this material advantage.

23...♘f4 24.♗xd4 cxd4



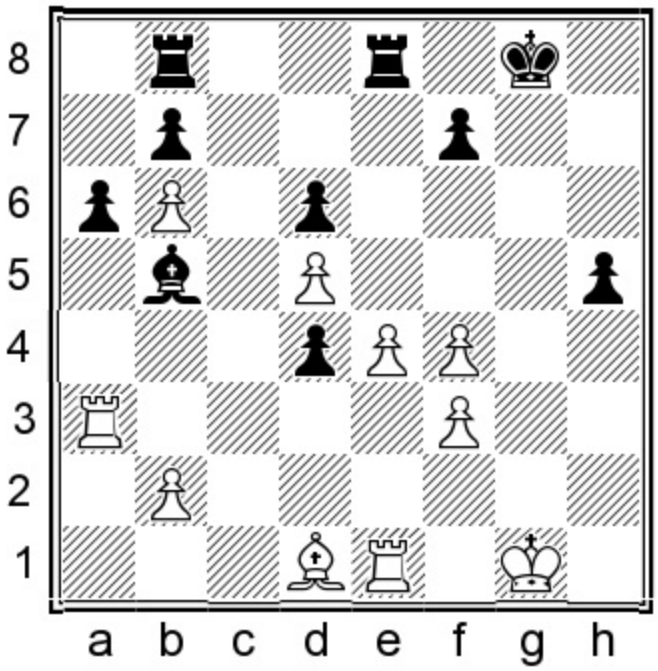
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Position after: 24...cxd4

25.g3

Driving off the black knight should be White's priority here as its presence on a square such as f4 in close proximity of the white king does more often than not spell trouble.

25.♕d2 does not change much as after 25...♕g5 26.g3 ♘xb6 27.axb6 ♗xf1 28.♕xf4 ♕xf4 29.gxf4 ♗b5=

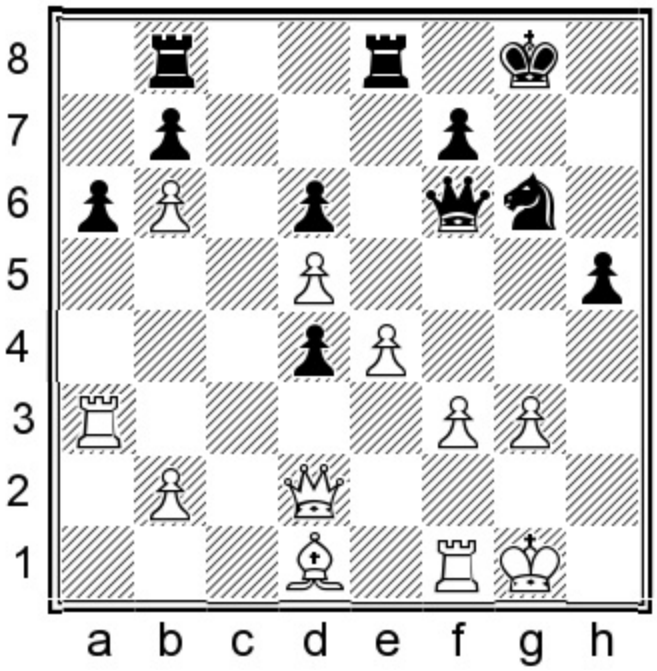


Position after: 29...♗b5=

a potential white onslaught on the king side cancels out Black's incoming counterplay along the c-file.

25...♘xb6 26.axb6 ♗xf1 27.♖xf1 ♘g6 28.♕d2 ♕f6⇄

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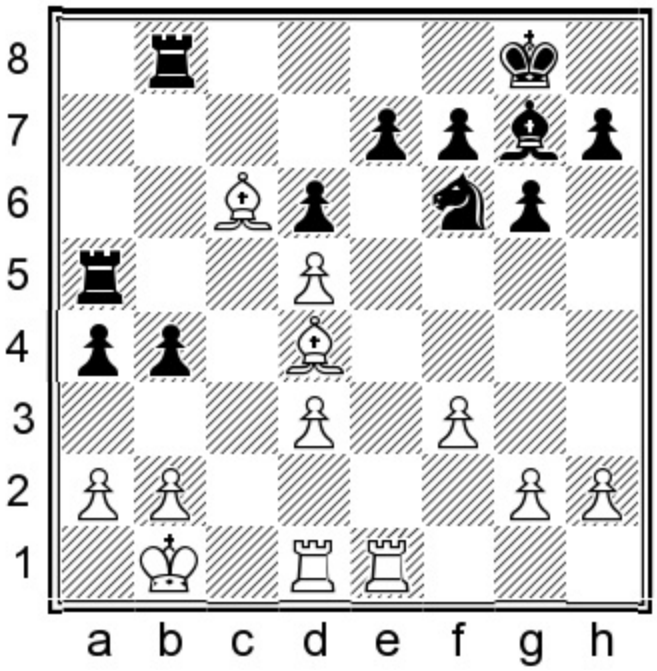


Position after: 28...♕f6⇄

It would be safe to say that White will never be able to focus on capturing the d4-pawn without having have to reckon with Black's counterplay starting with ...h5-h4. Objectively the game remains balanced, but personally I would prefer to be Black here thanks to the tactical potential of the ♕&♘ duo.

8
Moranda – Klekowski
Poland 2018

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□ *22.?*

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8
Moranda, Wojciech (2601)
Klekowski, Maciej (2509)
Poland 2018

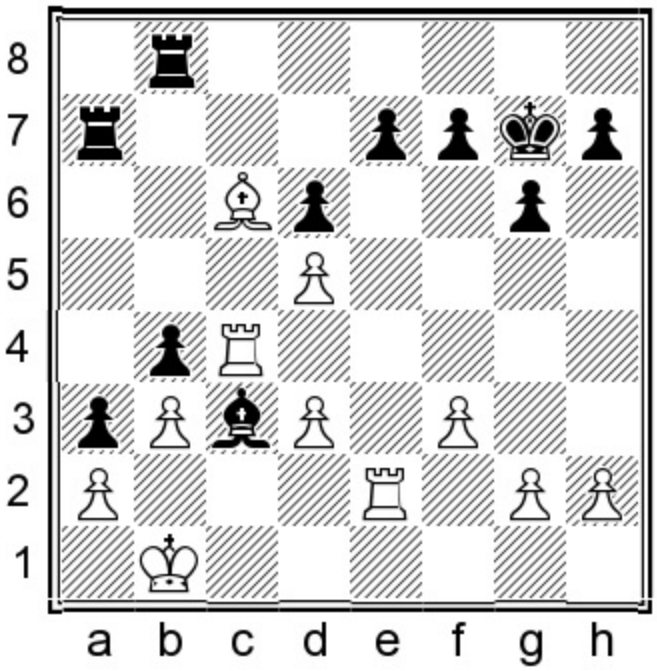
Coordination
Dynamic coordination (hanging pieces)

This is a very memorable game for me as it was played just three days after my daughter was born. During preparation (if you could it that considering the little scraps of time spent cruising between home and hospital), I wanted to opt for a clear-cut game with more emphasis on strategic ideas than tactical vision. However, Caïssa seemed to have different plans for me on that day. In the Accelerated Dragon White voluntarily decided to compromise his central pawn structure for the sake of obtaining the bishop pair and pressure along the c and e-files. At the same time Black is very solid indeed and already threatens to take on d5. With just two possibilities coming reasonably into consideration, White decided to take up the gauntlet.

22.♖xe7

If White wanted to preserve the d5-pawn at all cost, sooner or later he would have had to go for something like 22.♗xf6?! ♗xf6 23.♖c1 a3 24.b3 ♖a7 25.♖c4 ♗c3 26.♖e2 ♔g7∓.

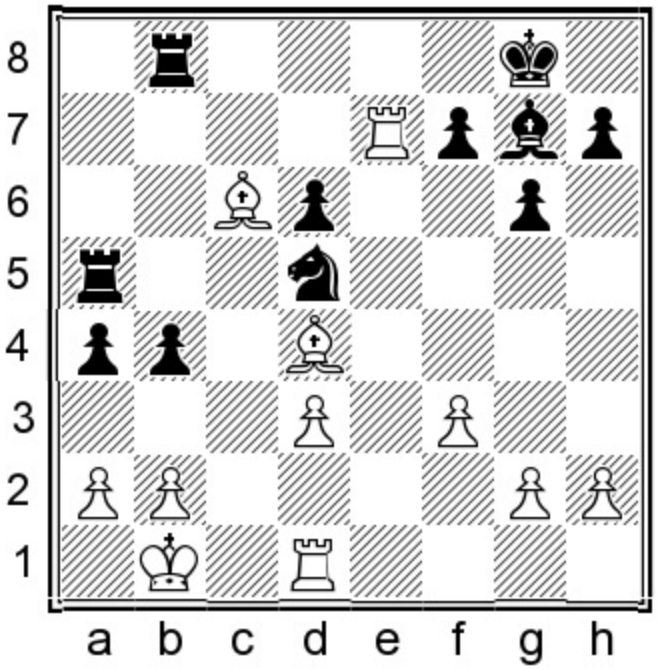
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Position after: 26...♔g7∓

Objectively the position might in fact be close to equality because of the drawish tendencies associated with opposite-colored bishops. Still, it would have been no pleasure at all to be forced to play as White in this position as it is only Black who can try to stir up things with the kingside representing one potential area of expansion for the black forces.

22.♖xe7 ♘xd5



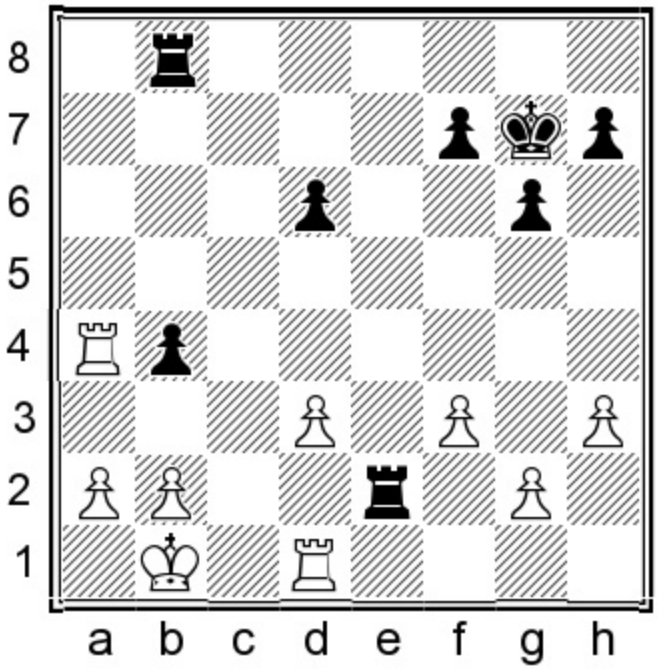
Position after: 22...♘xd5

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23.♖a7!

A neat pendulum swing! Its base, the d4-bishop, is now under attack but what holds this elaborate construction together is the fact that the black a5-rook is hanging as well. Interestingly enough if Black now takes on a7 both the b8-rook and the d5-knight would have been under attack without the possibility to defend each other or to attack one of White's bishops in the meantime. If Black is thinking about holding this position somehow, now is the time for something extraordinary.

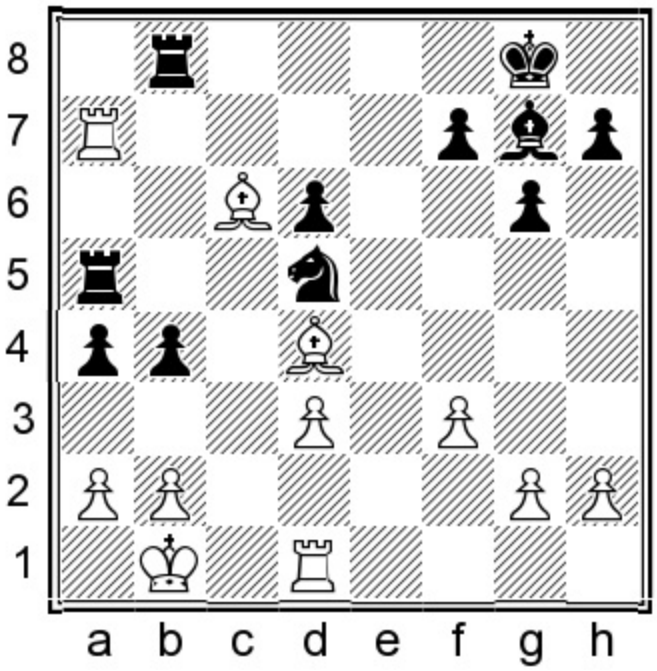
23.♗xd5?! leads nowhere as after 23...♖xd5 24.♗xg7 ♔xg7 25.♖a7 ♖h5 26.h3 ♖e5 27.♖xa4 ♖e2∓



Position after: 27...♖e2∓

White is worse despite being a pawn up. A potential passed pawn cannot emerge on the queenside whereas the infiltration along the second rank is unpleasant even without Black gobbling up an additional pawn on g2.

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Position after: 23.♖a7!

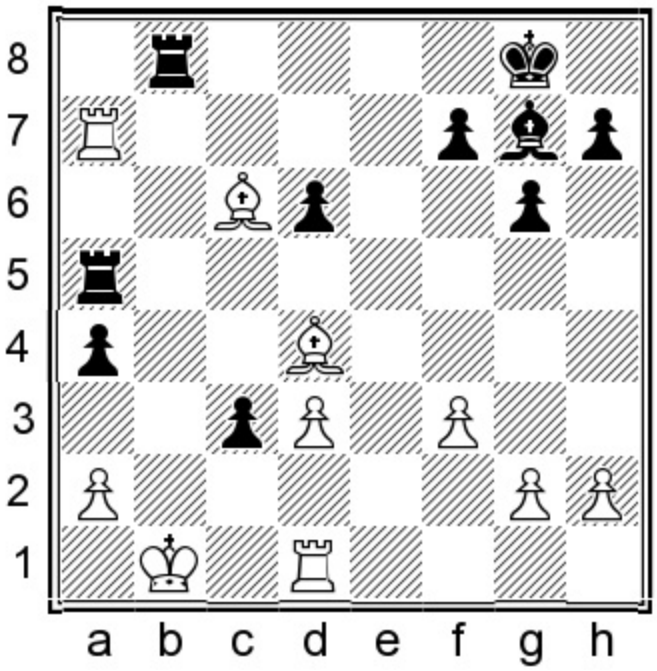
23...♘e7!!

A marvelous defensive ploy! Half-jokingly we could state that it was not enough for Black to see 4 pieces hanging simultaneously so he decides to put yet another one en prise. Still, there is a method to this madness. Taking on e7 leaves the black a5-rook out of danger whereas capturing it is met by ...♘e7xc6, with a knight fork against the white rook and bishop. In the post-mortem Maciej surprised me by saying that he actually saw this move but did not believe it worked. Well, it does.

A) In the game Black went for 23...♗xd4? 24.♖xa5 ♘e3 with hopes for counterplay. But White has a relatively simple way of matching any of Black's counter ideas: 25.♖c1. The g2-pawn is of lesser importance for the moment than activating our forces. 25...a3 26.bxa3 bxa3+ 27.♖b5 ♖xb5+ 28.♗xb5 ♘xg2 and now White infiltrated with 29.♖c7± later on exploiting his chance after some respectable technical play. We cannot forget about the possibility that Black will try to eliminate our remaining kingside pawns but with ♗b5-c4(e8) coming, the f3-pawn is going to be defended tactically in many lines with the fate of his f7-pawn already sealed in this manner.

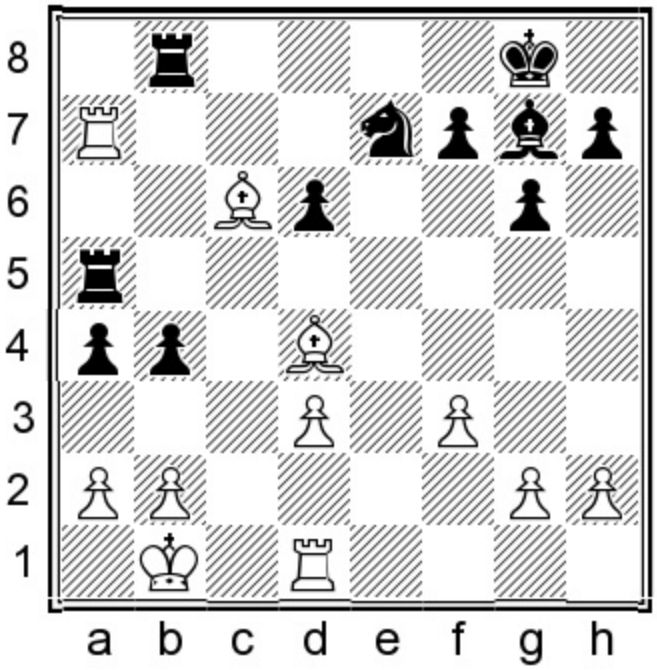
B) 23...♘c3+? is something that I calculated at least three times during the game just to make sure that I am not succumbing in the dumbest of fashions. Luckily, White holds after the simple 24.bxc3 bxc3+

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Position after: 24...bxc3+

25.♔c1 [But not 25.♔c2?? ♖xa7 26.♗xa7 ♖b2+ 27.♔c1 ♗h6+–+] 25...♖xa7 26.♗xa7 and now 26...♖b2 is too slow as White defends after 27.♖e1 ♗h6+ 28.♗e3+– It is usually the blunders that we actually commit that haunt us, but till this day I am actually haunted by the mere idea that I could have missed something like that.

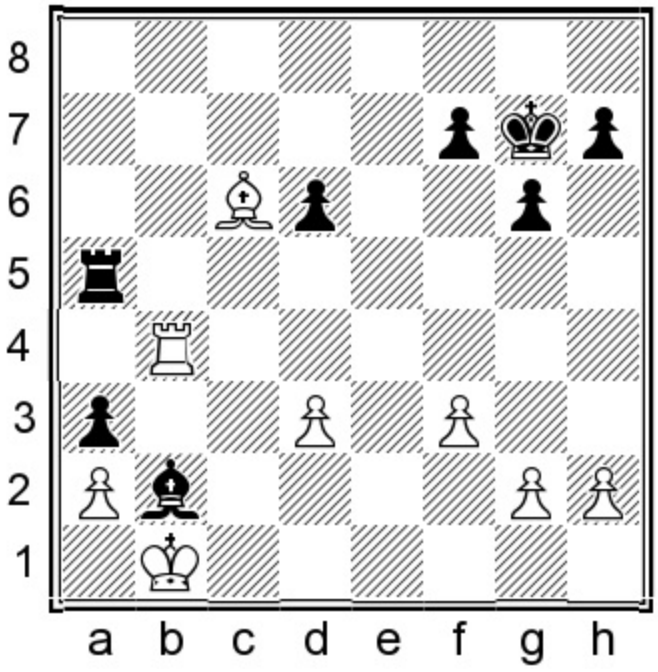


Position after: 23...♘e7!!

24.♖xa5

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24.♖xe7?! would have been far less accurate as after 24...♗xd4 25.♖de1 a3 it would have been White who would have to be careful about his king's safety, e.g. 26.♖e8+ ♖xe8 27.♖xe8+ ♔g7 28.♖e4 ♗xb2 29.♖xb4.

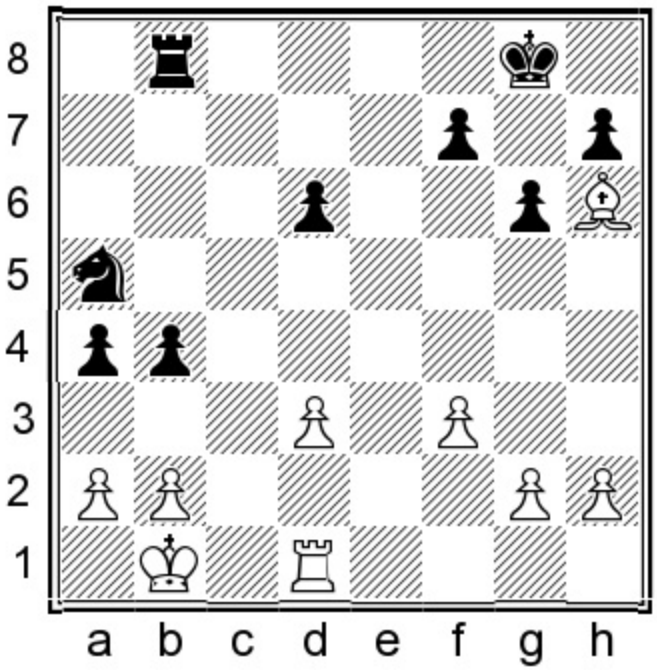


Position after: 29.♖xb4

Mating threats do not seem to come into consideration anymore but Black could still try to utilize some tricks in order to continue the fight for a win: 29...♖c5 30.♖c4 ♖h5! (gaining time on the white rook in order to pursue ...d6-d5 with a tempo) 31.h3 d5 32.♖b4 ♖e5 33.♔c2 ♖e2+ 34.♔b3 ♖xg2 35.♗xd5 ♖d2 36.♗c4 ♗c1∓ and with blockading ideas like ♖b4-e4 out of the question, White would have to be very vigilant in the ensuing endgame.

24...♘xc6 25.♗xg7 ♘xa5 26.♗h6

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Position after: 26.♗h6

The only nuisance Black really needs to be concerned about here is the weakness of the back rank as the white bishop is a real pain in the neck. Still, Black's position is quite tenable provided that he uses the time that he has for consolidation.

26...♖e8 27.♖c1

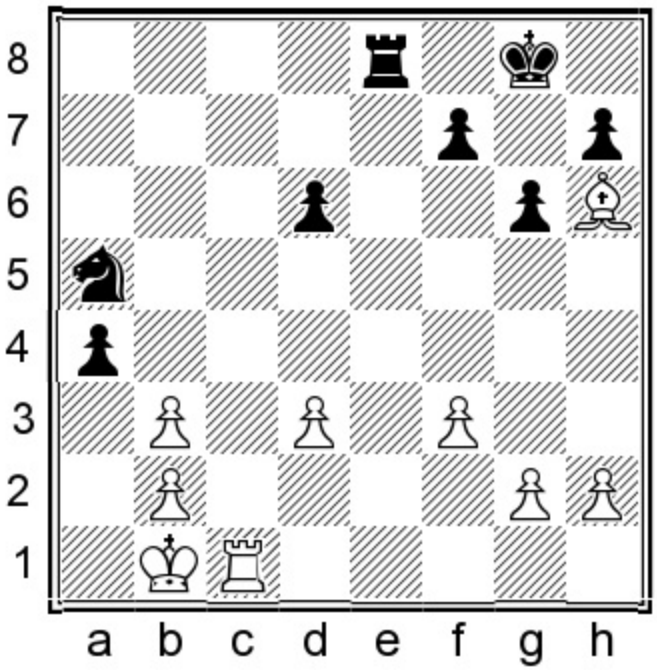
Quite a troublesome move for Black as the e8-rook is pinned for the moment to the defense of the eighth rank whereas the knight cannot join the battle effectively via c6. Still, Black's position is far from hopeless as after

27...b3

White will be suffering from similar coordination issues, in particular the difficulty in improving the position of his king.

28.axb3

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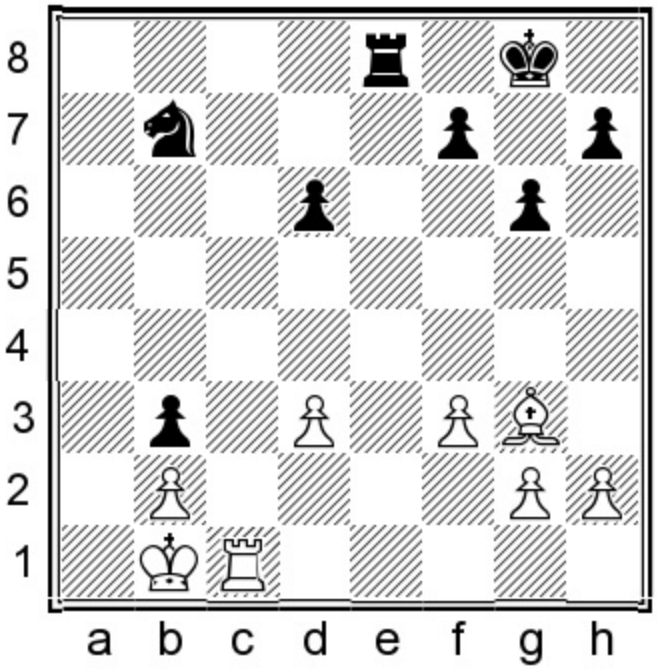


Position after: 28.axb3

28...axb3

28...♘xb3?! would have introduced the knight into play with a tempo, but also allows the white king to be activated after 29.♖c4 ♖a8 30.♔a2!± when due to the weakness of both the a4 and d6-pawns, Black would have still had to work very hard for the draw.

29.♗f4 ♘b7 30.♗g3



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Position after: 30.♗g3

White would like to get interested in the b3-pawn but with ...♖e8-e1+ ideas still being available for Black this prophylactic move is simply a must.

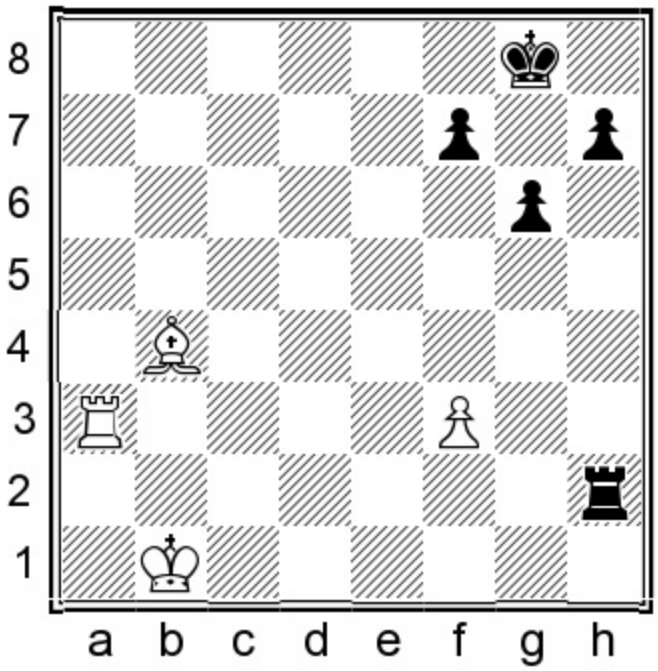
30...♖e2 31.♖c3 ♖xg2 32.♖xb3 ♘c5 33.♖a3 ♖d2

Now when it seems as if White was finally making nice progress on the queenside and creating a passed pawn with

34.b4 ♘xd3 35.♗xd6

Black can actually give up the bishop for the sake of transposing into a drawn endgame after

35...♘xb4 36.♗xb4 ♖xh2=

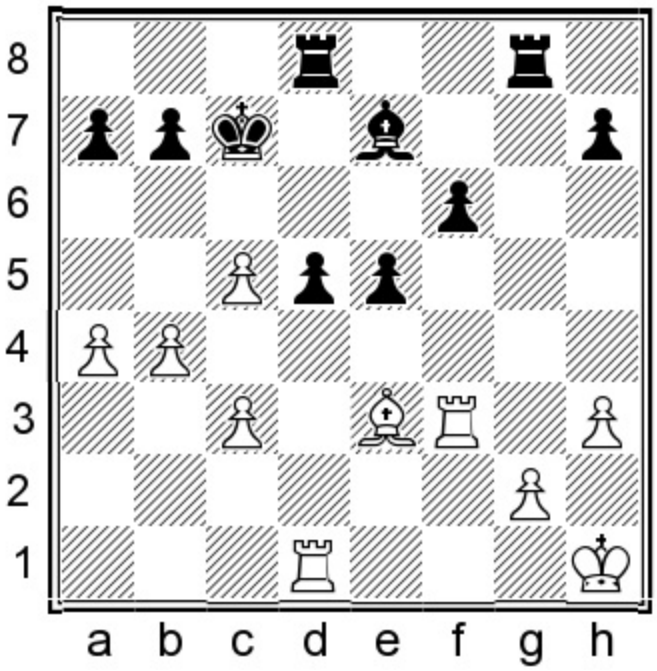


Position after: 36...♖xh2=

The only thing Black would be required to do in order to secure half a point would be to avoid a trivial mate along the dark squares after something like ...f7-f5.

9
Sadzikowski – Bartel
Warsaw 2019

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■ *24...?*

Show/Hide Solution

9
Sadzikowski, Daniel (2522)
Bartel, Mateusz (2598)
Warsaw 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Sacrifice for activity in the endgame

Material is level here but none of the sides can be conclusively satisfied with the status quo. White enjoys a pawn majority on the queenside, but the price to pay for this is lesser influence over the center. Black would naturally like to have those pawns activated soon enough but two things stop him from doing so. The inability to bring the king closer to the center and the need keep White's potential kingside counterplay (e.g. by means of ♖f3-f5-h5) at bay. Given the time White would have furthermore brought his king closer to the center thus considerably lowering the chances of Black launching an initiative on this part of the board. Simply put, Black now needs to use all the creativity one might have if he wants to take the initiative here.

24...a5!

An introduction into Black's dynamic idea. Before commencing any activity Black attempts to soften up White's queenside pawn chain. Every pawn move in a game of chess has its consequences and

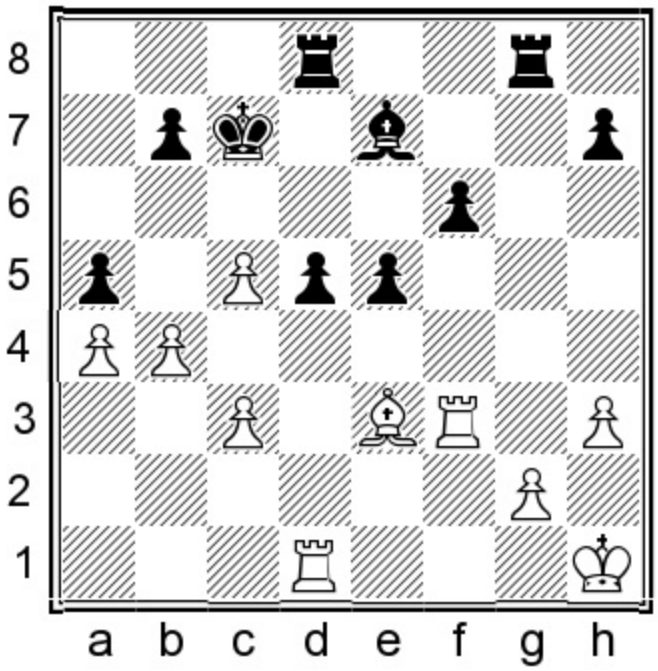
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here the situation is no different.

A) In the game, Black went for 24...a6?! which is one of those little quasi-intuitive moves that we do when we do not yet have a clear idea how to proceed. My assumption is that this way Black wanted to remove the pawn from a dark square before embarking on any active action. Quite a logical device when you think about it, was it not for the fact that it actually amounts to a pure waste of time. Now after 25.g4↑ White gained a firm grip over the king side, enabling him to transfer the rook to f5 and then maybe even further to h5. In such a case Black would have remained with a passive bishop and scarce chances of generating any counterplay on either of the wings.

B) By comparison 24...b6 is not bad at all as it aims to exchange the most advanced white pawn and maybe to even start exerting some pressure along the newly opened c-file in the near future. Still, after 25.cxb6+ axb6 26.g4 ♖d7 (intending to transfer one of the rooks to a8 while continuously defending the d5-pawn) 27.a5 bxa5 28.bxa5 ♖a8 29.♖b1= Black would have still been quite far away from capturing any of the white queenside pawns.

24...a5!



Position after: 24...a5!

25.b5

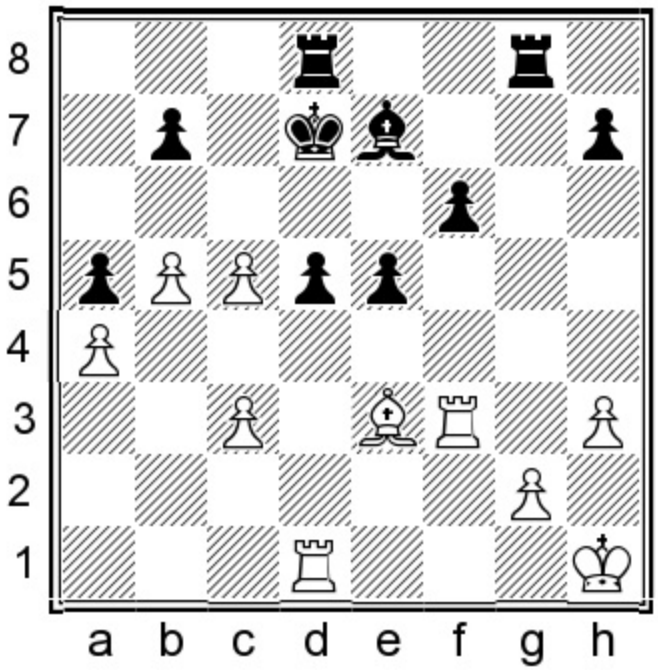
The most principled reply. On the light squares White's pawns should generally be safer. The b5-pawn now prevents the black king from approaching the center via c6. At the same time the c5-pawn does not seem to be in danger at all as attacking it would require Black to bring the rook to d7, the king to b8, and finally the other rook to c8 which would be quite a time consuming effort which could easily be met by a timely attack against Black's d5-pawn. Finally, Black would certainly love to bring his king to e6 and commence some pawn movement in the center, but this looks bad as the d-pawn

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would then be lost. All well and good but appearances tend to be deceitful at times.

25.g4?! is inferior to the text as after 25...axb4 26.cxb4 d4 27.♗d2 ♔c6!↑ Black not only achieves his goal of diverting the c3-pawn but would have on top of that been able to infiltrate White's camp with his king via d5 and then probably c4 as well. With such a leader, the black central pawns would have surely been unstoppable by this point in time.

25...♔d7!!



Position after: 25...♔d7!!

Did you consider a move like this in your calculations? If so you may be truly proud of yourself. By playing like this Black certainly drops a crucial central pawn but the ensuing position proves to be, as unbelievable as it sounds, already beyond salvation for White. The reason for this is that after the capture and the exchange on d8 all of White's assets become meaningless in view of the upcoming activity of the now coordinated black forces.

26.♖xd5+

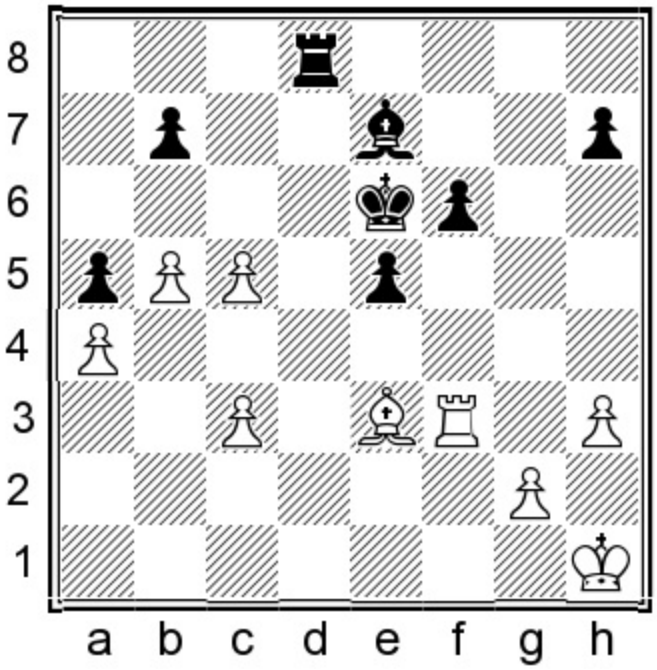
There is nothing else left for White but to accept Black's gift even if this opens the proverbial can of worms.

A) Ignoring the d5-pawn by resorting to something timid like 26.♗f2 does not quite help. After the further 26...♔e6 27.♖fd3 e4 28.♖3d2 f5∓ with ...♗e7-g5 to come White's rooks would have been forced into hopeless passivity.

B) 26.g4 would have been to no avail either after 26...♔e6 27.♖f5 ♖c8 28.♖df1 ♖g6∓ Black has everything covered and could, starting from now, calmly focus on pawn grabbing on the queenside.

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26...♔e6 27.♖xd8 ♖xd8



Position after: 27...♖xd8

A curious situation has arisen on the board. Black is a pawn down, but his position happens to be completely winning! First of all his king is much more active than its counterpart. Now ...f6-f5 followed by ...e5-e4 is a serious threat. Secondly, Black is in possession of the only open file and may make great use of that by either attacking the white king along the back rank or invading via d3 with the intention of collecting the queenside pawns. Finally, with White's pieces being rather uncoordinated, the king far away from the main battle arena and his queenside pawns looking rather vulnerable, his fate would have surely been sealed despite any future tries to stir things up.

28.c6

White needs to simply do something here and the best solution for White would have been to give back the pawn in return for the possibility of consolidating his position. Still, even the desperate queenside pawn thrust is to no avail when the rest of Black's army strikes in a coordinated fashion.

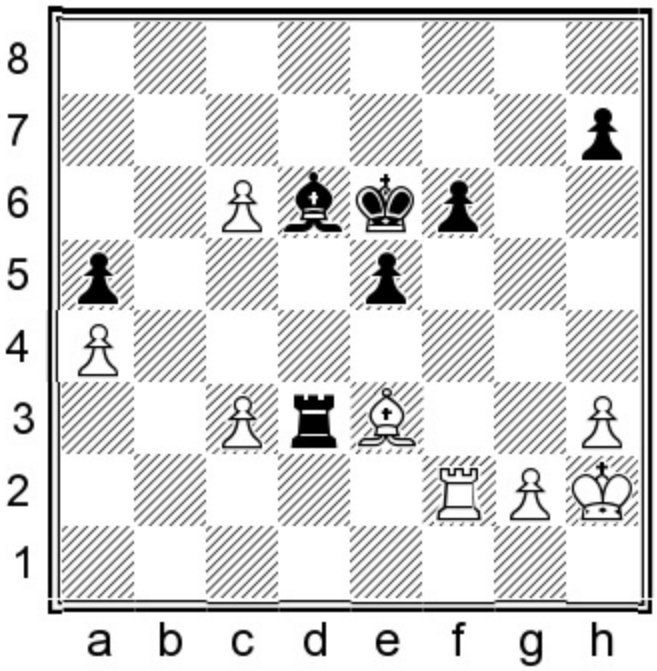
28.♔g1 trying to bring the king towards the center makes perfect sense but White is never in time because of 28...♖d3. Now, if he wants to save the c3-pawn he needs to rely on 29.♗f2 but then after 29...♖d1+ 30.♔h2 f5–+ it is time for White to raise the white flag as there is no antidote to the central pawn rush that is about to come.

28...bxc6 29.bxc6

and now after the accurate

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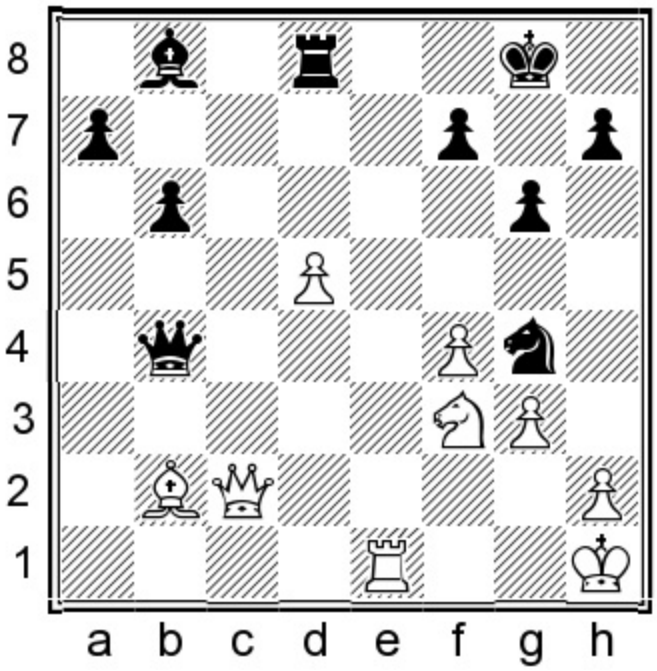
29...♖d1+ 30.♔h2 ♗d6 31.♖f2 ♖d3–+



Position after: 31...♖d3−+

White loses the both c-pawns and Black should realize his advantage without any undue adventures.

10
Maghsoodloo – Saric
Malmo 2019



chesstouring.com

■ *31...?*

Show/Hide Solution

10
Maghsoodloo, Parham (2671)
Saric, Ivan (2694)
Malmo 2019

Weakness
Fixing the weakness in your own camp before taking action

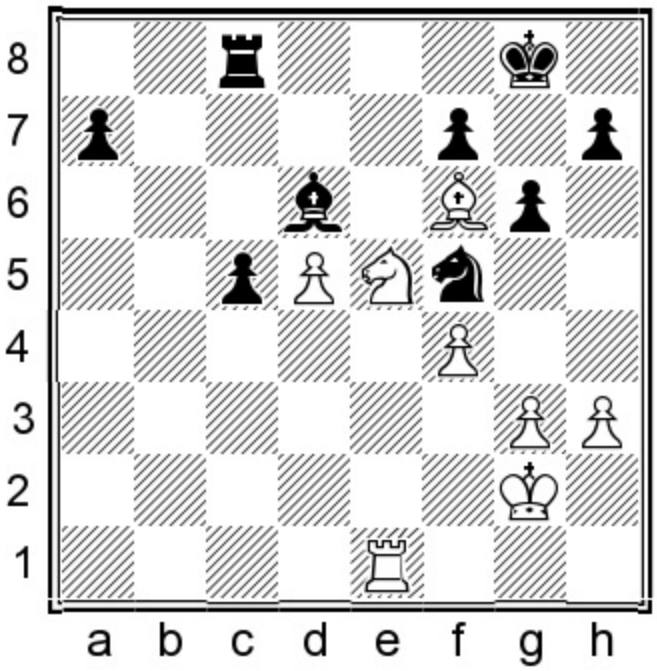
At first glance Black is a pawn up without suffering from too many issues. His pawn structure is intact, and White's d5-passer is contained. The potential vulnerability of the long dark diagonal might tempt White, but as long as no battery can be created without allowing a queen exchange Black should be fine. Not all that glitters is gold, though. The black knight is soon to be kicked out of g4 which might critically weaken the f6-square in Black's camp. This circumstance, on the other hand, may be quickly exploited by the white bishop as from f6 it would be making the black rook very uncomfortable. In such a case, the f8-square would prove to be the only safe haven but what about the upcoming ♗f6-e7 winning the exchange? Exactly this kind of logic should have prompted Black to play

31...♗d6!!

A rather counter intuitive move. Taking on d5 was obviously a no-no, but why should we be blocking the d-file upfront with the bishop like that? In reality, this way Black anticipates the eviction of his knight from g4 as well as the consequences. While standing on d6 the bishop now not only neutralizes the ♗b2-f6-e7 maneuver, but also gives the rook more space along the eighth rank to run away in case of need. Sample variations confirm that the text was not only considerably better than the alternatives, but also that Black would have retained excellent winning chances afterwards:

A) Instead, in the game 31...♕c5?! was played. This move is not wrong in itself but rather impractical when taking into consideration that from now on Black is going to find himself under increasing pressure from White. The game continued 32.♕xc5 bxc5 33.♔g2 (necessary preparation to evict the black knight by means of h2-h3) 33...♗d6 (preventing the infiltration of the white rook via e7) 34.h3 ♘h6 35.♗f6 ♖c8 36.♘e5 ♘f5

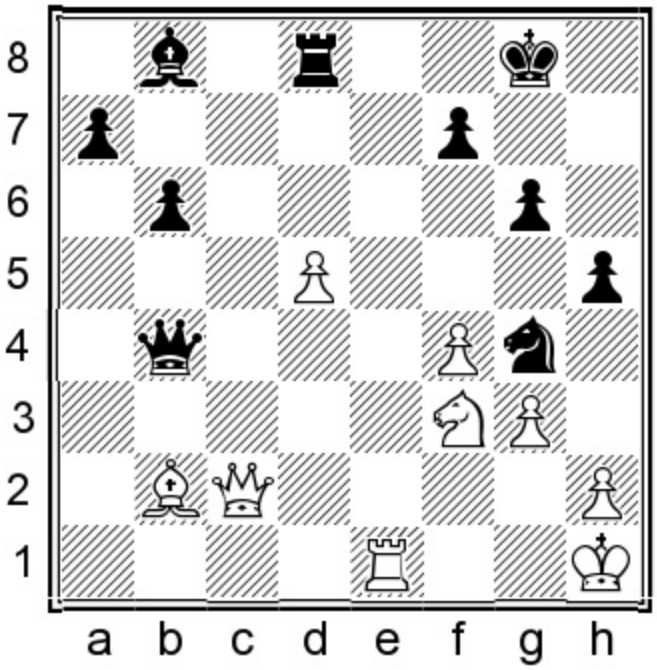
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Position after: 36...♘f5

and now White could have gone for 37.♘c4 ♗f8 38.♖a1 ♖c7 39.♔f3↑ when Black might have in fact kept the slight material edge but White's control over the position is worth more. A possible turn of events could see Black sometimes even managing to snatch the d5-pawn, usually at the expense of a nasty pin along the back rank. Even if Black was allowed to retain the c5-pawn in the process one thing would be absolutely certain: it is not over until White says it is over.

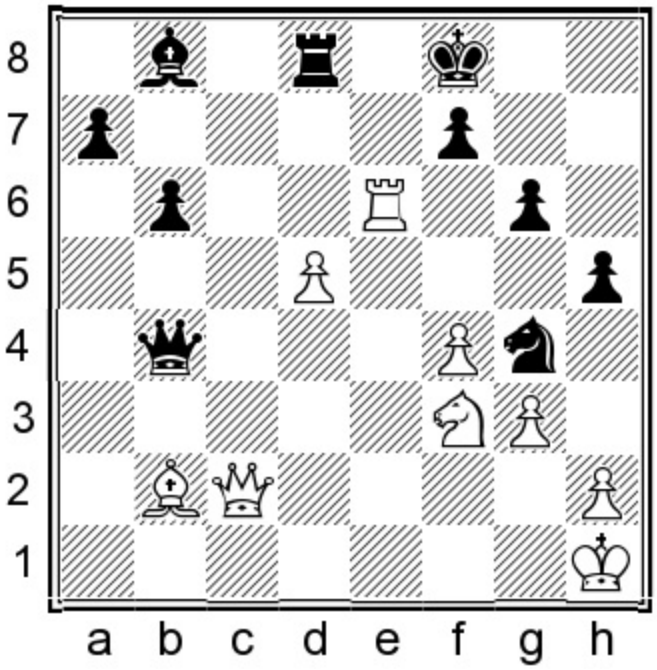
B) Another option for Black was 31...h5?!



Position after: 31...h5?!

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aiming to prepare an evacuation route for the knight via h6 and then, without being pushed back by means of any tricky devices like g3-g4, maybe even to f5. The truth is that after 32.h3 [The flashy 32.♖e6!? is sure capable of causing cardiac arrest to even the most tenacious of players. At the same time, if Black keeps his cool with 32...♔f8!=

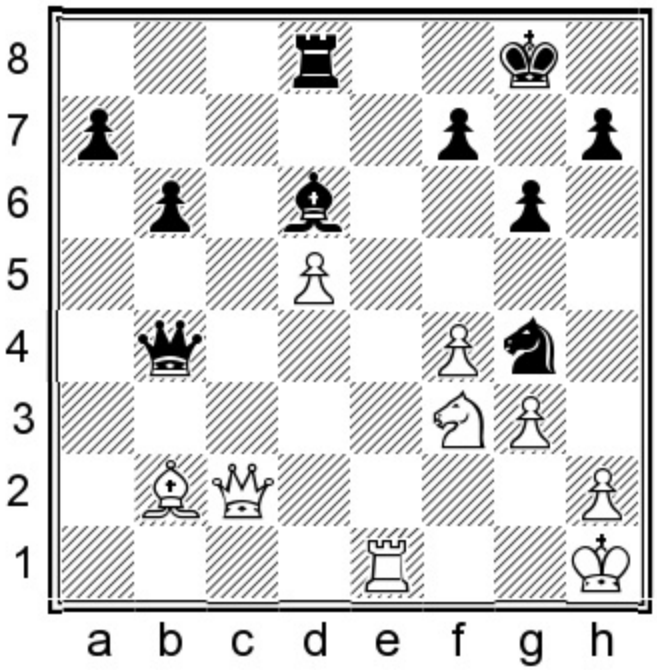


Position after: 32...♔f8!=

the white rook would have had nothing better but to come back.] 32...♘h6 33.♗f6 the eight rank would have proved to be too short for the black rook, thus forcing Black to part with material after 33...♖f8 34.♗e7 ♗d6 35.♗xf8 ♔xf8 36.♖b1 ♕a5 37.♕d3± when Black retains practical chances connected to the slight weakening of the white king but not more than that. In particular, the white d5-pawn would have still been stronger than the Black queenside pawns.

31...♗d6!!

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Position after: 31...♗d6!!

32.h3 ♘h6 33.♗f6 ♖f8 34.♕d3

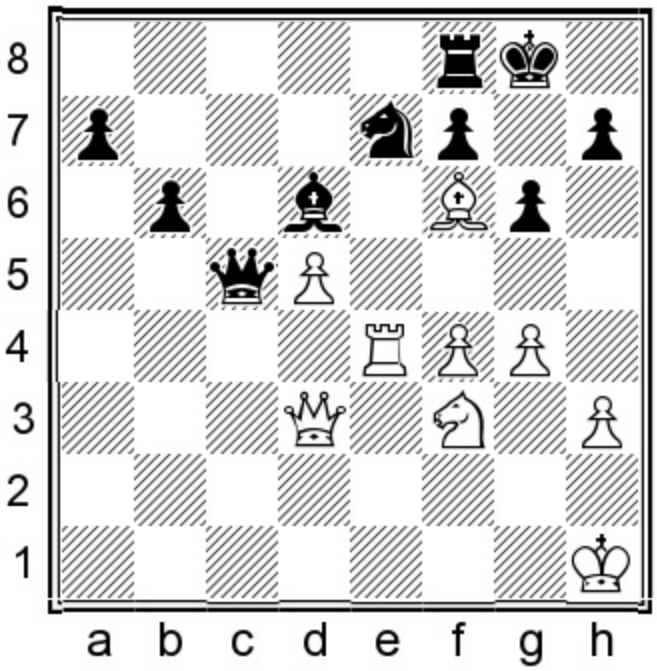
34.♗e5 is not much different than the text as after 34...♕a3! 35.♔g2 ♘f5 36.♕e4 ♗c5–+ thanks to the ...♘f5-e3+ threat, it is Black who would be taking the initiative.

34...♘f5

And now after

35.g4 ♘e7 36.♖e4 ♕c5–+

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Position after: 36...♕c5−+

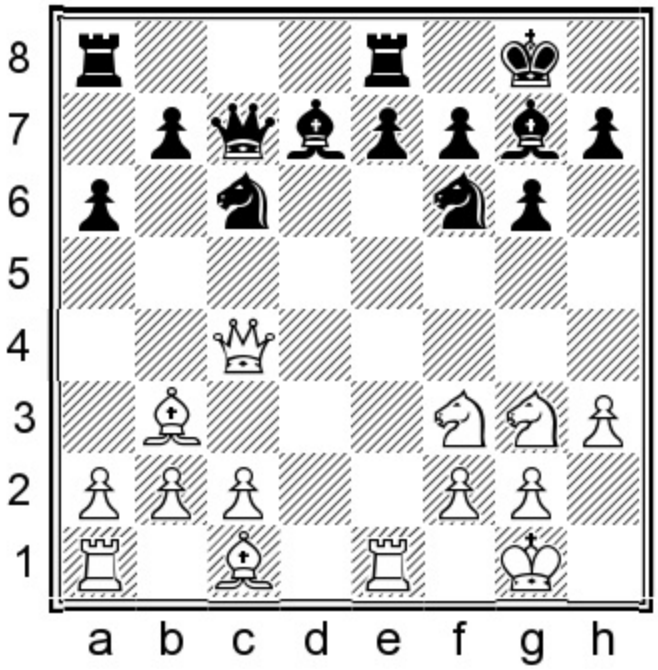
White’s momentary initiative gets extinguished. The d5-pawn requires protection, without being an asset capable of being pushed anymore.

From now on White needs to switch to full defense mode which means that Black will get a lot of time to launch his own play on the queenside based most probably on pushing the pair of connected passed pawns of his own.

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Show in Text Mode

11
Gvetadze – Melia
Tbilisi 2019



■ *15...?*

Show/Hide Solution

11
Gvetadze, Sofio (2321)
Melia, Salome (2385)
Tbilisi 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
When reacting to a threat spells trouble

Although material is equal and there are no visible structural or coordination weaknesses among Black's forces, there is one thing that is certainly bugging her, the white battery along the a2-g8 diagonal, hitting the vulnerable f7-spot. At the same time there seem to be so many clear-cut solutions to this small issue available. Should Black not be satisfied with 15...♗e6 or 15...♖f8, there is always

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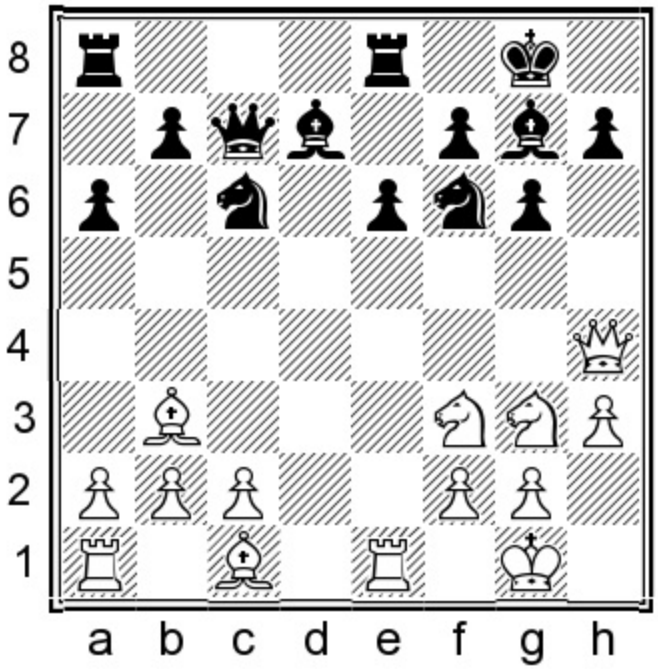
the possibility of neutralizing the battery for good with 15...e6. What could possibly go wrong?

15...b5!!

Living on the edge or so it might seem but absolutely the only way to maintain equality was to actually invite White to carry out her threat of capturing on f7 with a check. Like a fly lured by a sundews colorful pili, afterwards the joke is going to be on the white queen the moment she tries to organize some evacuation from that area.

At the same time, all other alternatives of Black utterly fail as they may solve the problem of the weak f7-pawn, but at the same time lead to the creation of new difficulties of distinct natures.

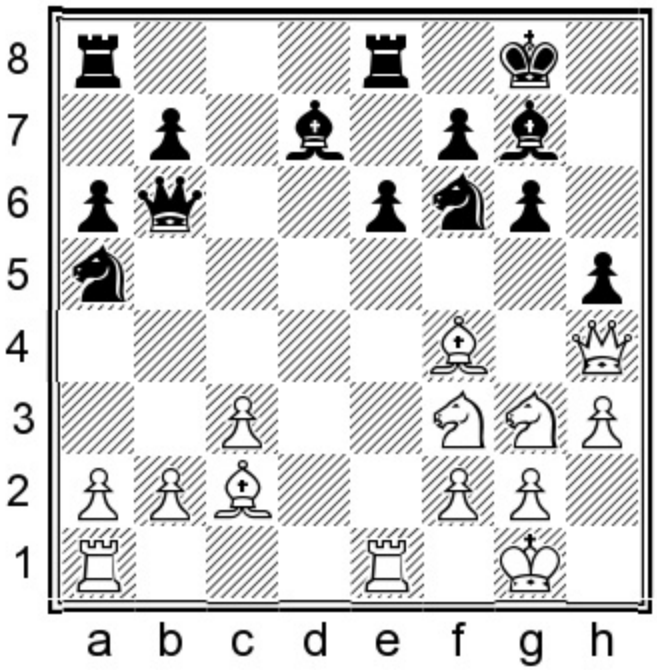
A) In the game Black went for 15...e6?! which looks like the simplest antidote to White's threat. Still, this move weakens the dark squares around Black's king. Now after 16.♕h4



Position after: 16.♕h4

Black would have been in serious trouble as she has no way whatsoever of preventing the so-called 'caveman plan', comprised of ideas such as ♗c1-h6 followed by ♘f3-g5 and ♘g3-e4, from happening, e.g. 16...h5 [16...♘d5 17.♗h6→ and now 17...♗xb2?! only accelerates Black's demise due to 18.c4! ♘de7 19.♖ab1 ♗h8 20.♖bd1 ♘f5 21.♘xf5 exf5 22.♗f4 ♕a5 23.c5!+– when the threat of ♘f3-g5 hitting both the h7 and f7-pawns looks lethal.] 17.c3 ♘a5 18.♗f4 ♕b6 19.♗c2!?↑

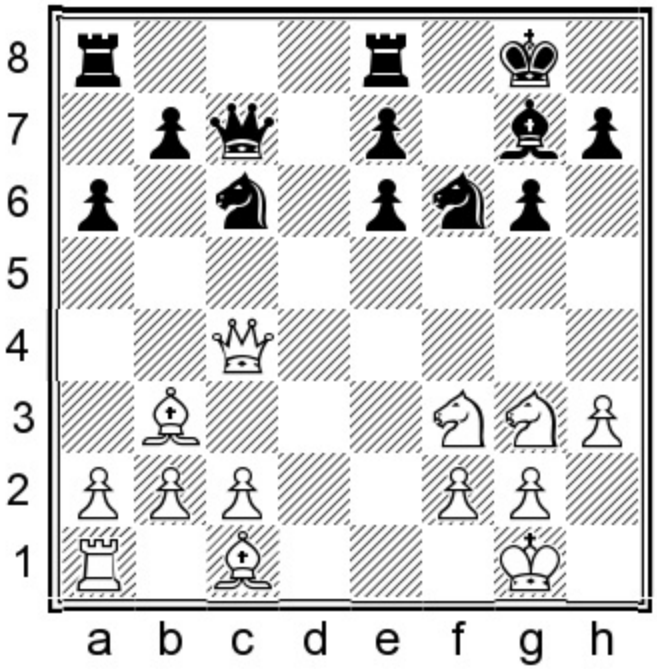
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Position after: 19.♗c2!?↑

when White's initiative is so strong that one false step from Black's side could just as well be her last. e.g. 19...♕xb2? 20.♗e5 ♕xc2 21.♗xf6 ♗c6 22.♘e5+– with Black getting owned on the kingside along the dark squares.

B) The alternative 15...♗e6? is just wrong as it allows the classical exchange sacrifice on e6 with 16.♖xe6! fxe6



Position after: 16...fxe6

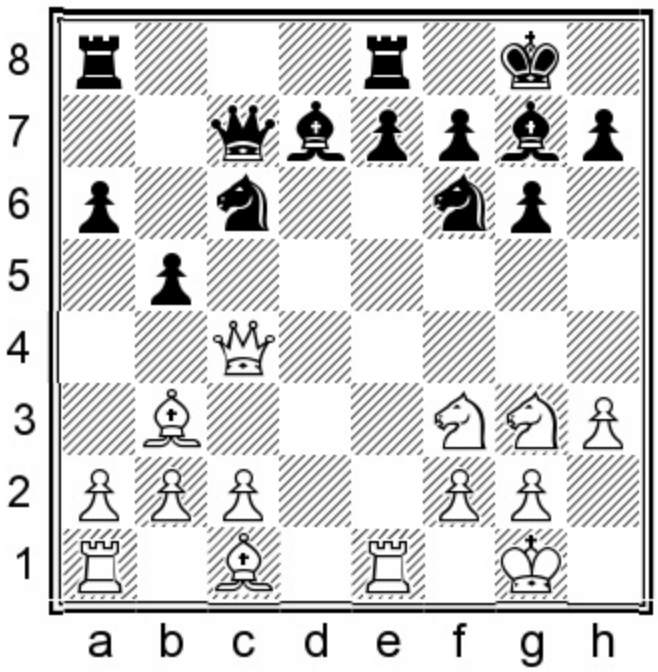
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B1) 17.♕xe6+?! ♔h8 18.♘g5 h6 19.♘f7+ ♔h7⩲ is not bad at all, but it has somehow gotten tougher for White to continue the attack from this point on due to the absence of the other white pieces in close proximity of the black monarch.

B2) 17.♗d2! With such a vehicle White usually not only severely damages the pawn shield in front of Black's king, but also seriously weakens the whole color complex of squares around it. The harm done to Black's position is of a long-term nature while the e6-pawn is a sitting duck that can be captured anytime. For this reason, in similar positions, instead of rushing to grab the pawn at all cost, it is advisable for White to focus on attacking coordination – preparing all the forces for the upcoming onslaught. The e6-pawn should be recaptured on the way, as White will be on the move to collect the head of the black king: 17...♘d5 18.♕g4 ♘d8 19.♖e1 ♕d7 20.♘e4 ♘f6 21.♕h4 ♘xe4 22.♖xe4± and with the threat of ♘f3-g5 hanging over Black's head like the sword of Damocles. No one would be surprised if the battle that starts in a second close to her king would happen to be her last.

C) Finally, 15...♖f8?! simply drops a pawn due to 16.♖xe7 when after 16...b5 17.♕c5 ♕b7 18.♖e2± it would have been very tough for Black to prove sufficient compensation.

15...b5!!



Position after: 15...b5!!

16.♕xf7+

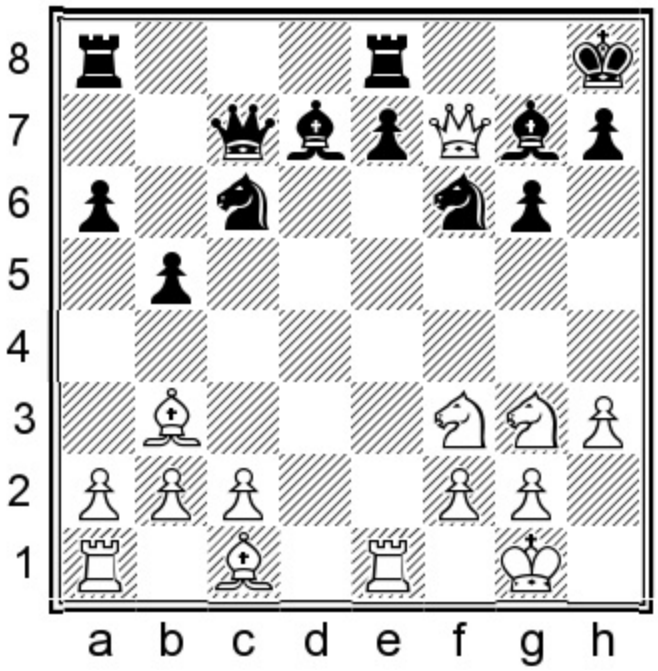
Wrestling with the temptation to take on f7 would have been pointless since the alternative fails to impress.

By comparison 16.♕h4?! is not as effective anymore as after 16...♘a5 17.♗h6 ♘xb3 18.cxb3 ♗h8

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19.♖ac1 ♕b7 20.♘e5 ♖ac8∓ Black may have been pushed back a little bit, but there are no further weaknesses close to her king available. What is more, the black bishop pair as well as the superior kingside pawn structure should tip the scales in Black's favor at the end of the day.

16...♔h8



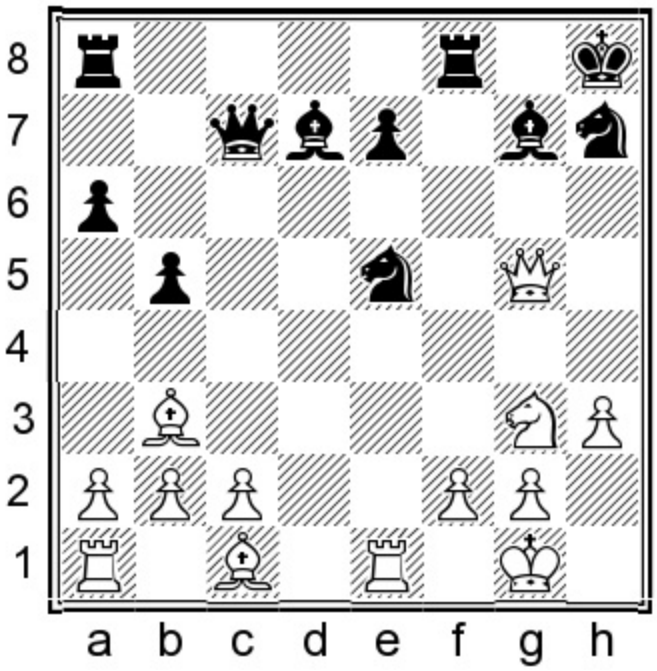
Position after: 16...♔h8

Only now does it become clearly visible that the white queen is going to find it impossible to escape from the noose tied around her neck deep in Black's camp. What is left for White to do is to force a perpetual check after

17.♘g5

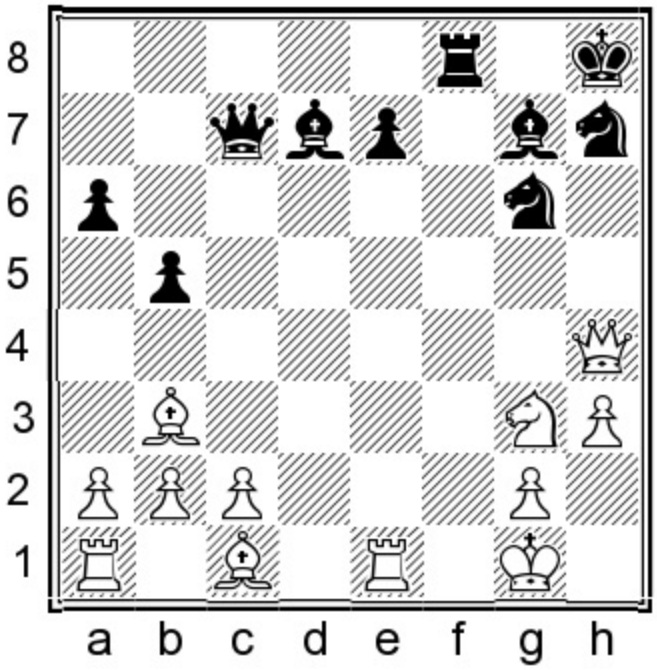
Trying to whistle past the graveyard with 17.♘h4?! ♖f8 18.♘xg6+ hxg6 19.♕xg6 ♘e5 20.♕g5 ♘h7

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Position after: 20...♘h7

allows some powerful tactical counter ideas: 21.♕h4 [21.♕e3 ♗xh3!∓ and taking the bishop is a no-no due to ... ♘e5-f3+ ideas combined with ...♗g7-d4 to come quickly, thus taking away all the pain from White immediately.] 21...♖xf2!! 22.♔xf2 ♖f8+ 23.♔g1 ♘g6



Position after: 23...♘g6

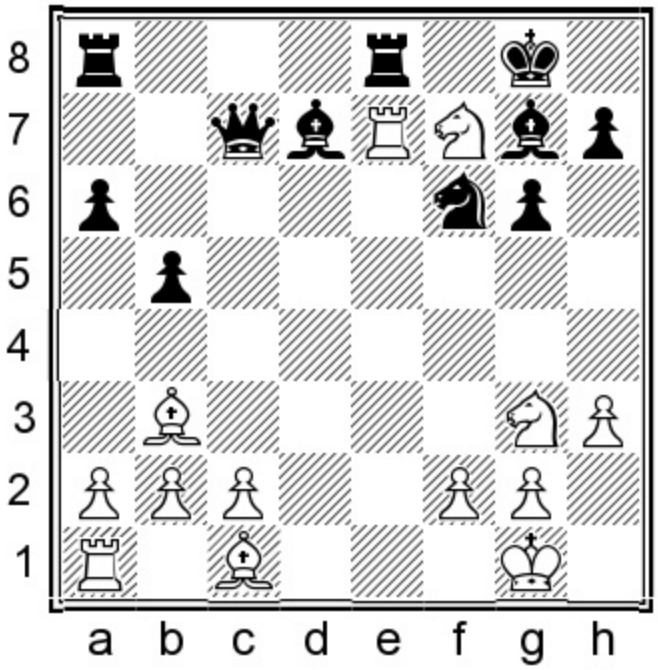
when White has to surrender the knight but with all of Black's pieces standing close to the white king this would mark just the beginning of Black's offensive actions out there. e.g. 24.♕e4 ♕xg3 25.♖f1

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♗xh3 26.♖xf8+ ♘hxf8↑ with ideas like ...♗g7-e5 followed by ...♕g3-h2+ to come in the near future.

17...♘d8 18.♖xe7 ♘xf7 19.♘xf7+ ♔g8 20.♘h6+ ♔h8 21.♘f7+ ♔g8=

Quite an entertaining example I must say. One with which you may torture your fiercest rivals at the local chess club as you watch them rack their brains over a possible 'prophylactic' solution.



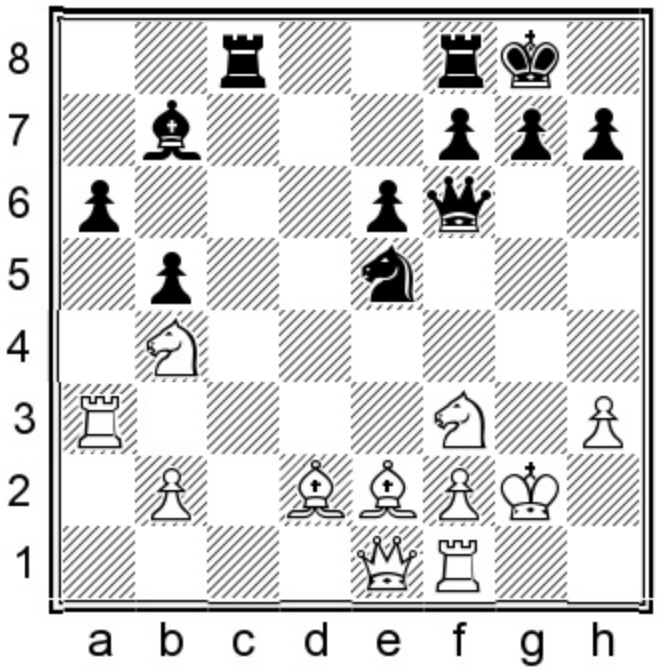
Position after: 21...♔g8=

Most of the persons of whom I know to have been successful in solving it came up with 15...b5!! only as a result of dramatic desperation reached after having excluded all the other options available. This does not however mean that it was impossible to be solved otherwise. The moment you understand that taking on f7 is only critical provided that White is capable of extracting the queen from the danger zone; in this precise moment you should start getting additional ideas as to whether the 'threat' of White could not be 'invited' with the results thereof used against the opponent.

In other words, please constantly distinguish between 'dangerous threats' and 'threats'. The latter do not need to be feared; what is more, sometimes you can be the one apparently pulling the trigger of a gun pointed at your own self only to see it exploding straight into the face of your foe.

12
Based on Walter – Fournell
Cologne 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *1...?*

Show/Hide Solution

12
(based on)
Walter, Robert
Fournell, Udo
Cologne 2019

Attack & Defense
Attacking while severely down on material

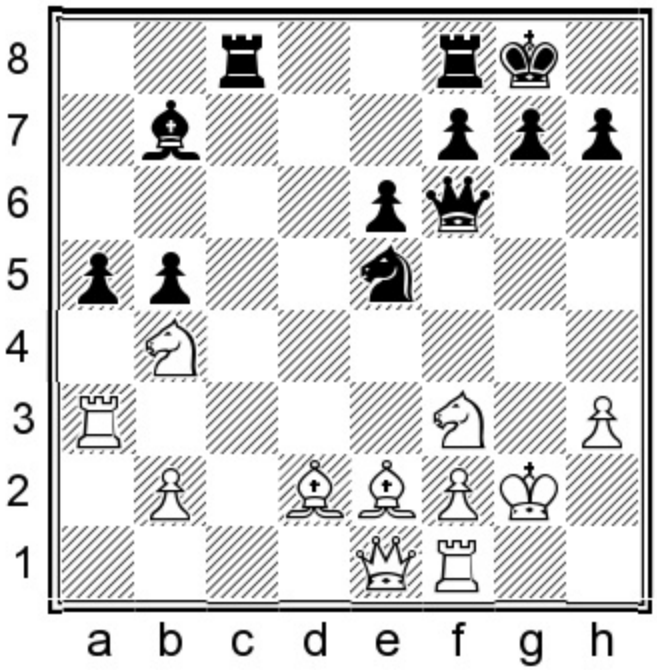
If you ever believed chess beauty to be associated exclusively with high profile games or +2600 playing strength, this one might be an eye opener for you. Courtesy of my student Robert (thank you!), the moment I saw this game and we reached this specific position in the post-mortem during our weekly training, I decided that this book simply cannot do without it. Black has sacrificed two pieces for three pawns, but it is not material that play the central role here. White would be a happy camper were it not for the terrible pressure exerted by Black against the f3-knight. For the moment, despite White's coordination issues, things seem to be under control as apparently Black does not seem to be capable of increasing the tension anymore. Still, unless he does something here and now, compensation for the material could soon prove to be a matter of the past.

1...a5!

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A little prelude to the sonata of violence that is about to occur on the board. The moment you realize that the white rook is pinned down to the defense of the f3-knight, ...a6-a5 not only becomes very much possible, but also emphasizes how badly organized the White forces actually are. The logically looking 1...♖fd8? would have been a tad too slow as after the courageous 2.♔g3! ♗xf3 3.♖xf3! ♘xf3 4.♗xf3 ♕xb2 5.♗g5± White would have managed to bail out of trouble quite effectively. The black pawn mass appears to have quite the potential, but in reality White's three minor pieces working together should overpower a rook of the opponent with ease.

1...a5!



Position after: 1...a5!

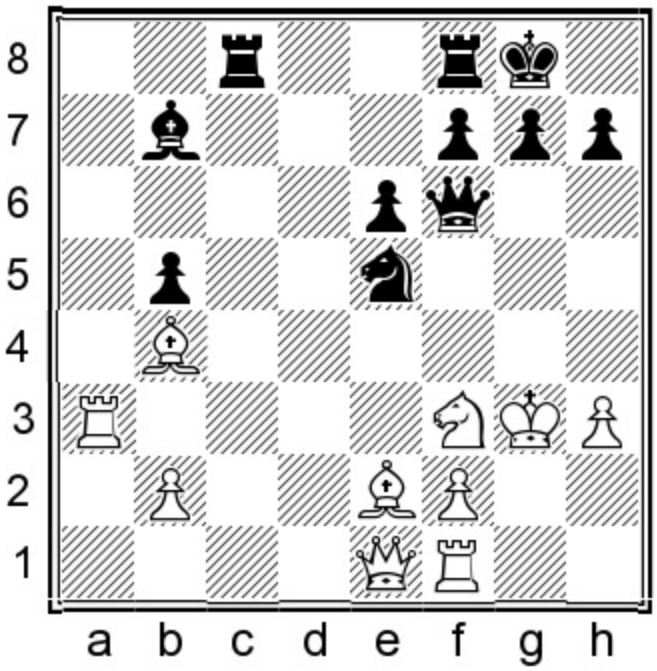
2.♔g3!

The only way. White sacrifices the knight on b4 for the sake of sidestepping the pin along the light diagonal. With the king out of the way, White could dream about carrying out further exchanges thus giving the consolidation process an additional boost.

On the other hand, 2.♘a2?, not only looks passive but does not allow White to solve his difficulties either. e.g. 2...b4 3.♖e3 ♖fd8! 4.♗xb4 axb4 5.♕xb4 ♗a8∓ still leaves White badly tangled and unorganized.

2...axb4 3.♗xb4

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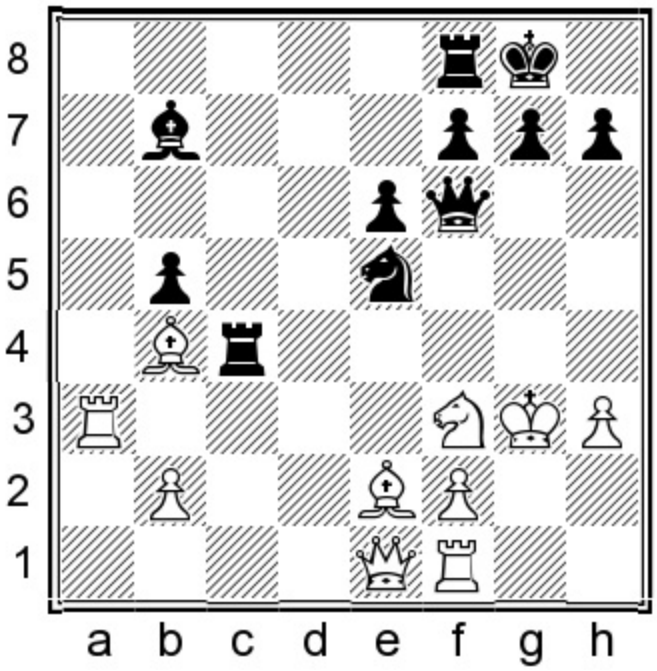
Position after: 3.♗xb4

3...♖c4!!

Absolutely barbaric! Black certainly understands that the f8-rook is en prise but including more pieces into the attack as soon as possible is much more important here than material. The rook performs useful work as now the threat of ...♕f6-f4+ is lethal with things getting really heated up in the neighborhood of the white monarch.

Interesting was also 3...g5!? with exactly the same idea, but Black would be selling himself off too cheaply due to 4.♕d2! when there would be nothing better for him to do than to cash in on his threat with 4...♗xf3 5.♗xf3 ♖fd8 6.♕e3 ♘c4 7.♕e2 ♘xa3 8.bxa3± Still, in such a case we could safely assume that Black's attack has come to an end. With the white bishops enjoying nice stability only White could have hoped for a win from this point on.

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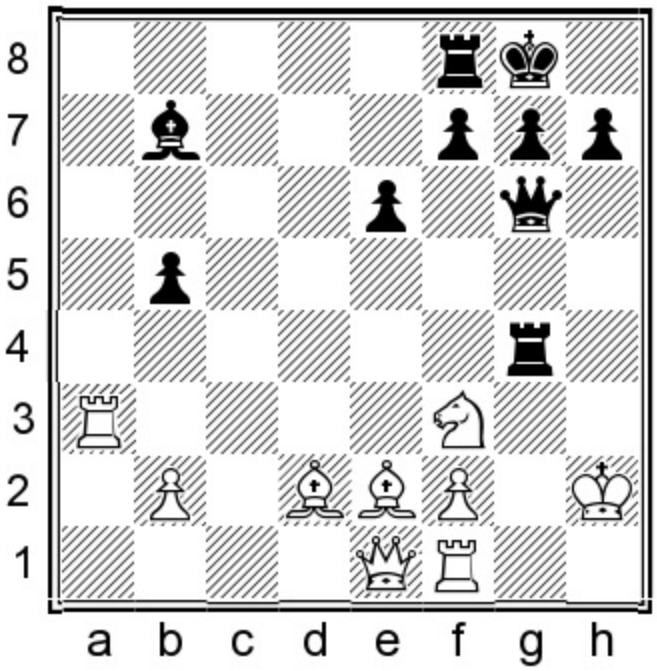
Position after: 3...♖c4!!

4.♗xf8

As Black does not seem to be restricted by the rules of time and material here there is nothing better for White than to chop as much material as possible. At least he knows what he is suffering for. What needs to be stated clearly here is that although White is statically speaking a rook and a bishop up, dynamically he is a whole queen down. In other words, if most of the pieces were to be traded of in the blink of an eye, White would be winning beyond any doubt. But in the heat of the moment, when every move of Black comes with tempo, it is White who might eventually end up begging for a draw.

4.♗d2 looks like a sensible defensive effort at first, but after 4...♕g6+ 5.♔h2 ♘g4+! 6.hxg4 ♖xg4=

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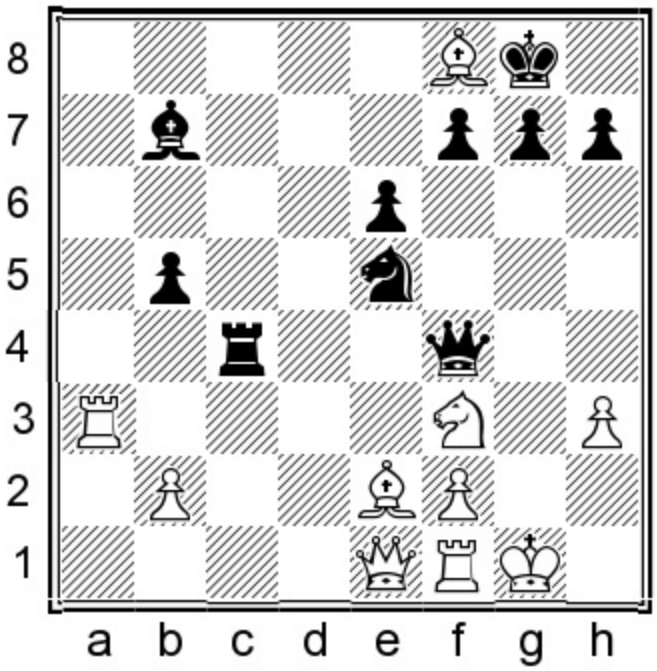


Position after: 6...♖xg4=

it would be White who would need to be careful in order to avoid the worst. A sample line could go like this: 7.♗g5! (covering h4) 7...♖c8! (bringing even more pieces into the attack!) 8.♕d2 ♗d5! (disallowing any counterplay related to the back rank) 9.♖d3 ♖cc4! 10.♖xd5! with a perpetual check after the further 10...♕h5+ 11.♗h4 ♖xh4+ 12.♘xh4 ♖xh4+ 13.♔g3 ♖h3+ 14.♔g2 ♖h2+=.

4...♕f4+ 5.♔g2 ♕g5+ 6.♔h2 ♕f4+ 7.♔g1

The only try for a win, but as we will see in a second, it is not going to be a walk in the park.



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Position after: 7.♔g1

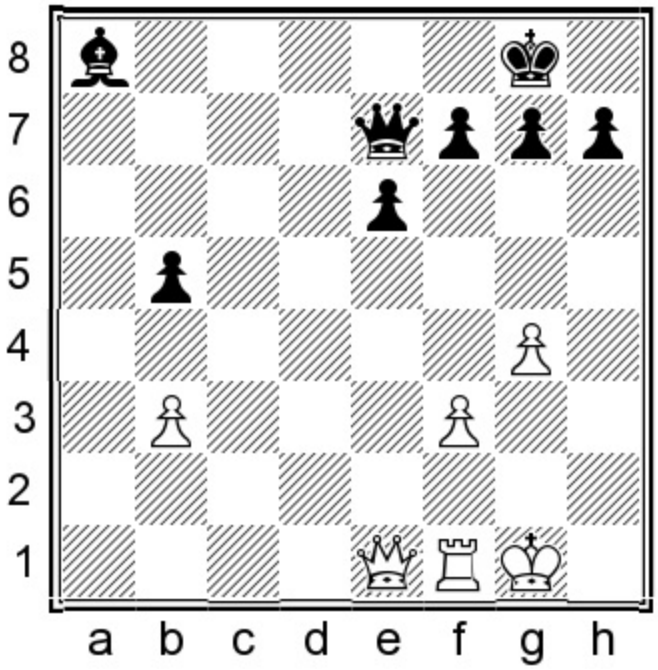
7...♗xf3 8.♗e7!

White's only chance is to take away the murderous ...♕f4-g5+ possibility and protect the bishop at the same time. Still, after the more or less forced

8...♘g4! 9.♖a8+! ♗xa8 10.♗xg4

the game is likely to peter out to a draw after all

10...♕c7 11.b3 ♖xg4+!? 12.hxg4 ♕b7 13.f3 ♕xe7=

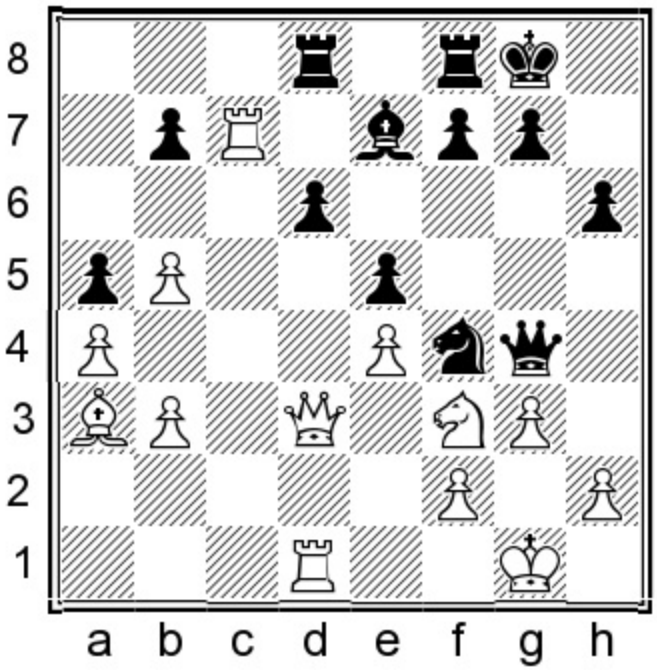


Position after: 13...♕xe7=

with an unbreakable fortress soon to be established by Black.

13
Wafa – Yip
Astana 2019

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□ *21.?*

Show/Hide Solution

13
Wafa, Shrook (2166)
Yip, Carissa (2279)
Astana 2019

Coordination
Disturbing the attacker's coordination

Material is level and with the rook infiltrating via c7 it is White who seems to be making some progress here. But if we take into consideration the dark clouds gathering close to the white monarch we will quickly understand that this is going to be a rather bumpy ride for White who will need more than trivial defensive resources in order to be able to maintain equality. Are you able to carry White safely through the incoming tornado?

21.h3!

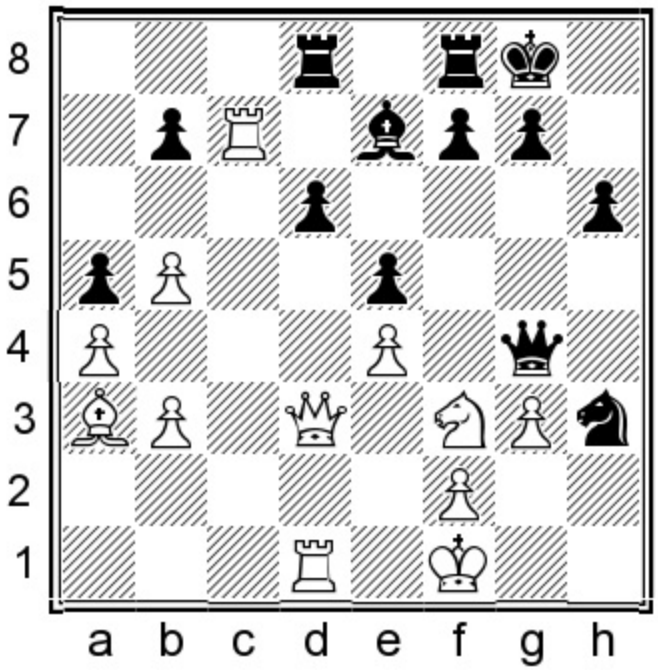
An extremely important inclusion, spoiling Black's attacking coordination for a crucial split second. They say that the black knight placed on f4 in proximity of the white king which has castled short is dangerous. What can we say if the knight not only attacks the white queen but is at the same time accompanied by a queen of its own? Because of this regular means were insufficient to hold the balance on the kingside for much longer.

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A) 21.♕e3 loses instantly because of 21...♗g5! 22.♔h1 ♘d5–+ with an aesthetically pleasing double attack that decides the outcome of the game.

B) In the game White went for 21.♕f1 but after 21...♕xf3 22.gxf4 Black could have secured the win with 22...♗h4!∓ when, due to the threat of ... ♗h4xf2+, White would have not been able to defend all of the weak pawns. The pawns on b3 and f4 being strong candidates to fall in the near future.

21.h3! ♘xh3+ 22.♔f1



Position after: 22.♔f1

What has White achieved with this little 21.h3! ploy? Surely not time as it is still Black who is on the move. Despite however Black being able to continue the offensive, White has significantly lowered Black's dynamic potential which in this case is the amount of damage that the black knight could have inflicted if it stayed on f4. Also, judging by the further course of the game, most of White's defensive ideas would have simply not worked should the said knight have not been side-lined up front.

22...f5!

Simple and powerful. Black should not care at all about losing the e7-bishop as after opening up the f-file she will be collecting material back with buckets.

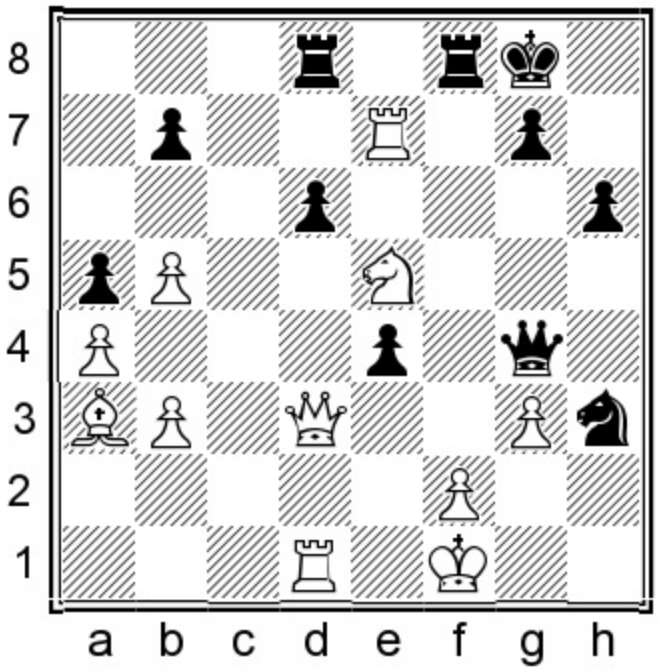
Comparably, 22...♖fe8?! is evidently too slow: 23.♖xb7 ♗f8 24.♖e1 ♖e6 25.♘g1∞ is certainly still unclear but Black would have had to beware of possible exchanges as those would not only extinguish her attack, but simultaneously also lead to a lost endgame.

23.♖xe7 fxe4 24.♘xe5!

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An interesting picture! Although it looks suicidal to allow Black to take on f2 with a check, surprisingly White has everything under control and can even try to win this in case Black becomes sloppy. They say life is like a bicycle, if you want to keep the balance, you need to keep on moving.

24.♕d5+? ♔h8 25.♖f7 is refuted with a picturesque overloading motif after 25...♖xf7 26.♕xf7 ♘g5!– + when Black takes on f3 and is still able to keep attacking the white king.



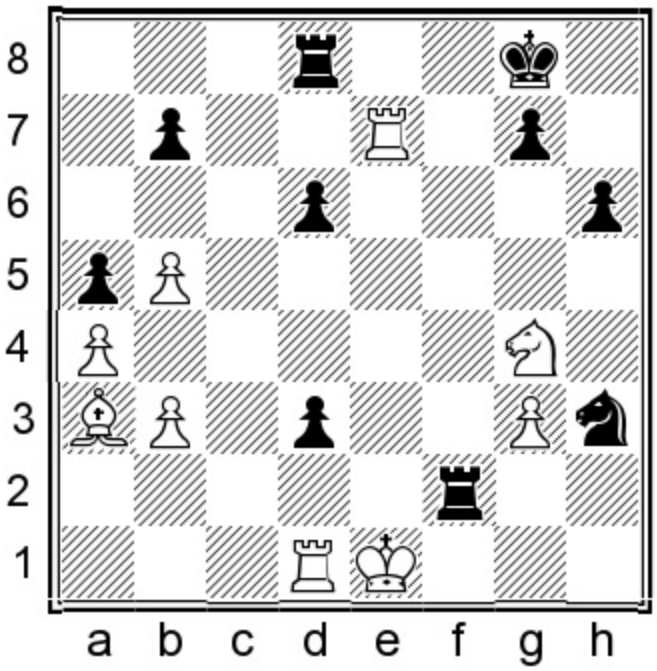
Position after: 24.♘xe5!

24...♕f5!

This time it was Black who had to be precise. With mate being threatened on f2 it seems that she can take her time and take on e5 only under more favorable circumstances. However, as long as the knight lives it can contribute to the defense of White's position.

A) 24...♖xf2+?! looks scary at first, but after 25.♔e1 exd3 26.♘xg4

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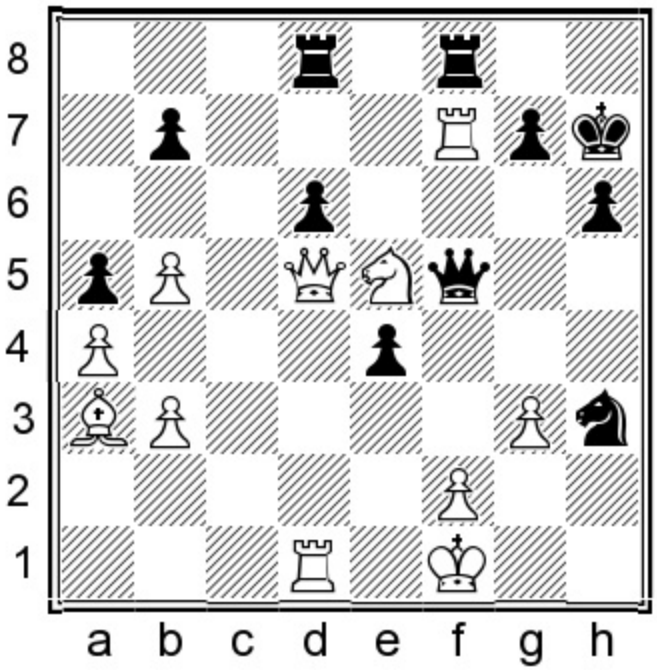
Position after: 26.♘xg4

Black suddenly runs out of checks which are vital for the maintenance of dynamic equality. The best option, 26...♖a2, leads to a much worse position after 27.♗c1 h5 28.♘h6+! gxh6 29.♖xd3± and despite a nominal material edge, Black would need to be very careful about threats related to White's dominance along the seventh rank.

B) White would have been very happy with the position arising after 24...dxe5? 25.♕xd8 ♖xd8 26.♖xd8+ ♔h7 27.♖dd7+–. After an exchange of rooks for the queen on g7 being more or less inevitable, as well as a shattered pawn structure and bishop overpowering the knight, Black would not be able to put up too much resistance.

25.♕d5+ ♔h7 26.♖f7!

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Position after: 26.♖f7!

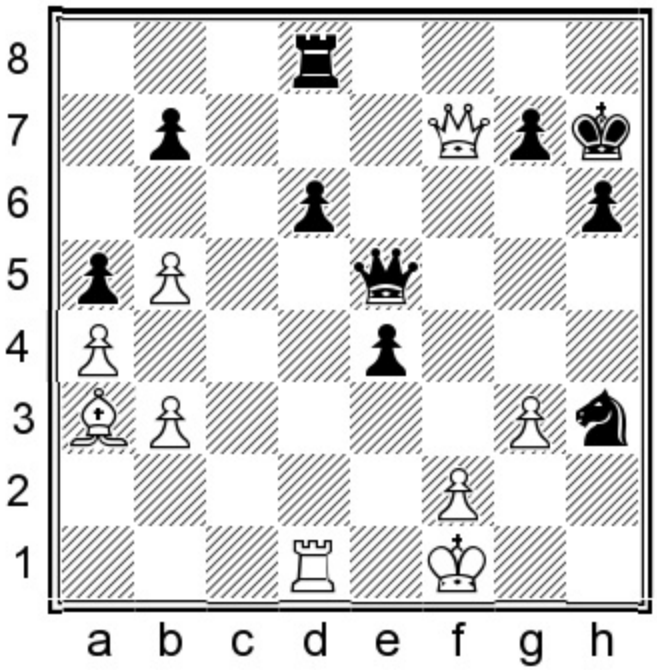
The key move that needed to be spotted when embarking on 21.h3! Without this resource White would have been facing a tough choice between losing a knight on e5 and getting mated.

26...♖xf7

26...dxe5 would have been an idea for Black if she wanted to continue playing on for a win as after 27.♖xf5 ♖xd5 28.♗xf8 ♖xd1+ 29.♔g2 ♘g5 30.♖xe5= there would have still been some pitfalls related to ...♘g5-f3 for White to avoid. Objectively speaking the position should boil down to a draw the moment the knight is neutralized and a pure rook endgame arises on the board.

27.♕xf7 ♕xe5

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Position after: 27...♕xe5

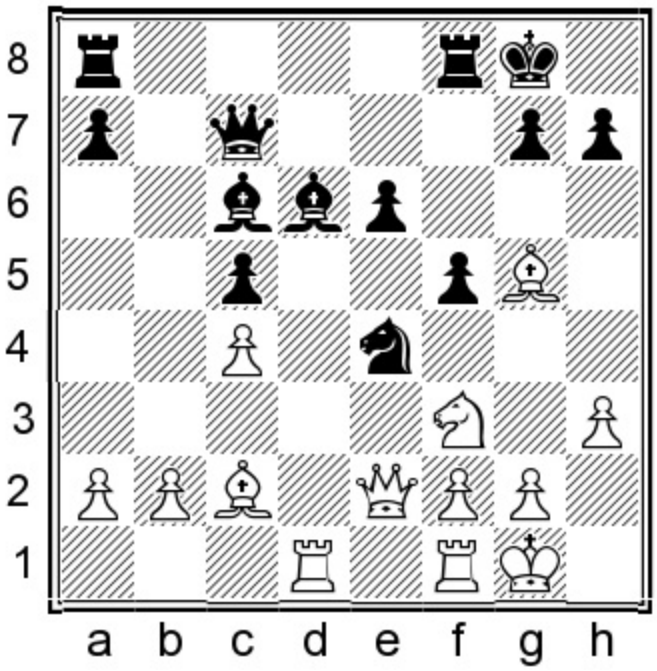
Now the most direct way to obtain equality is to deflect the black queen from controlling f5 by means of

28.♗xd6! ♖xd6 29.♖xd6 ♕xd6 30.♕f5+=

and with the knight on h3 falling, the ensuing queen endgame should be a draw no matter what Black does or how many pawns he manages to snatch in the meantime.

14
Narva – Goryachkina
Antalya 2019

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■ *17...?*

Show/Hide Solution

14
Narva, Mai (2365)
Goryachkina, Aleksandra (2534)
Antalya 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Perfect balance between statics and dynamics (I)

Black has quickly taken the initiative in this French Tarrasch and is currently dominating the center with her pieces. The bishop pair is directed at the white king, whereas the e4-knight significantly thwarts the influence of White's heavy pieces along the e-file. The simplest of plans for Black to continue consists of transferring his hitherto dormant rook from a8 to e8 and then launching a pawn-onslaught in the center with ...e6-e5-e4. Still, in order to have this plan carried out, she will sooner or later have to remove the e4-knight from the pawn's way. The moment this takes place White might be obtain some counter chances related to the slightly loose e6-pawn. This begs the question: how should Black combine all of the above-mentioned ideas so that her coordination remains flawless and White's counterplay is reduced to an absolute minimum?

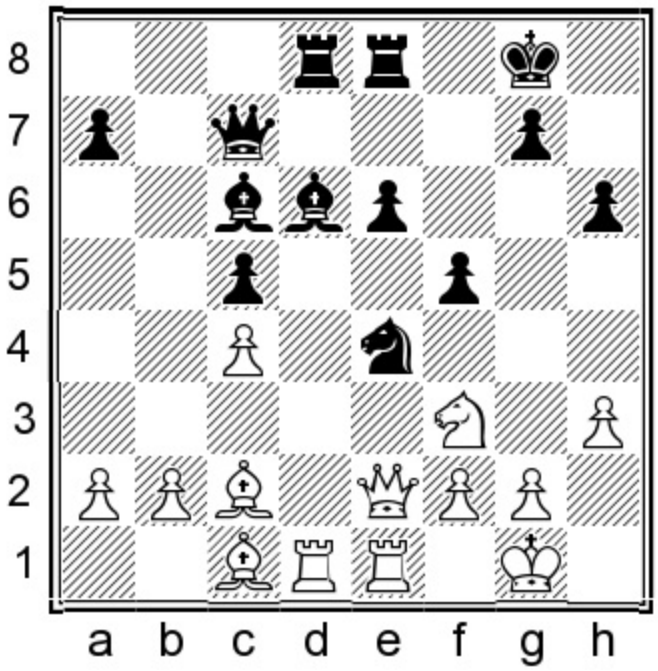
17...♘xg5!!

At first glance, this move is uglier than a Fiat Multipla. This way Black not only opens up the e-file

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for the white queen but simultaneously even invites the opponent's powerful knight to g5. Both pieces will now be threatening to capture on e6 with a check or a fork, the results thereof looking disastrous in both cases. It is difficult to believe for the moment that this is the best way for Black to go!

A) In the game, Goryachkina went for the logically looking 17...h6?! 18.♗c1 ♖fe8 19.♖fe1 ♖ad8

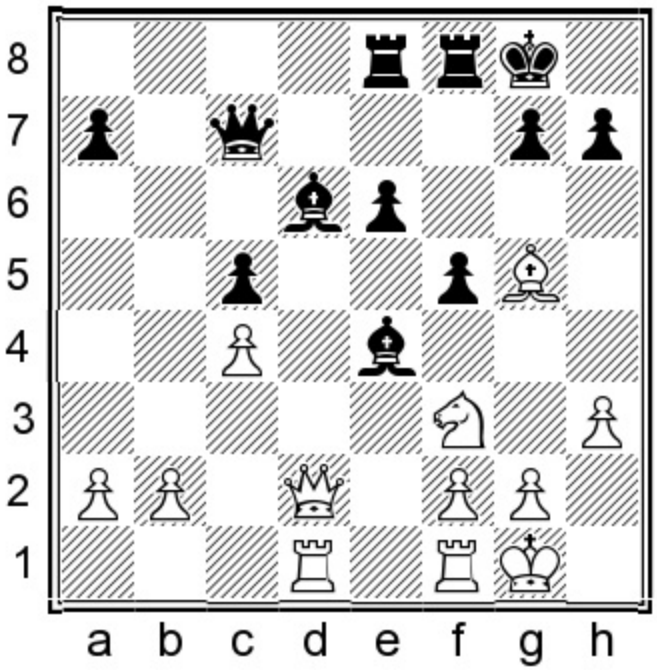


Position after: 19...♖ad8

but here White could have blackmailed Black for a draw with 20.♘d2!? when exchanges clearly favor the defender, but even escaping with the knight with 20...♘f6 does not yield Black much as after 21.♘f3= the ...e6-e5 push cannot happen in the near future because of the f5-pawn falling.

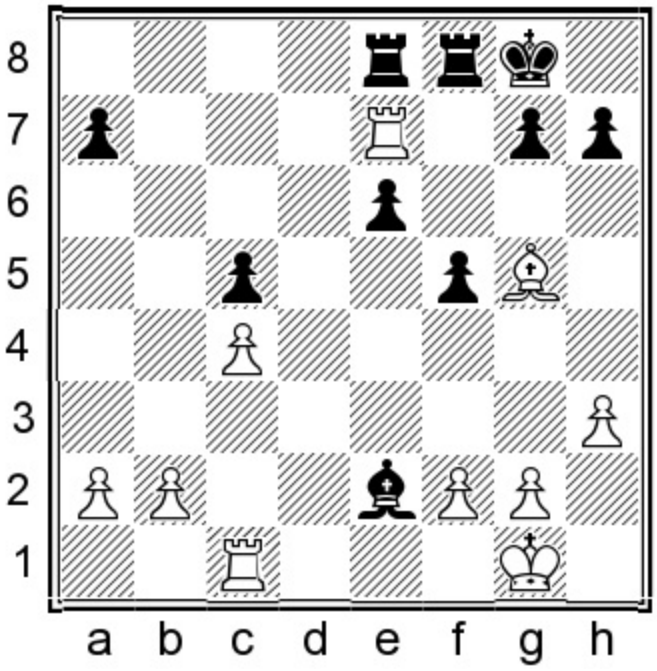
B) By comparison, 17...♖ae8 looks like a better try from the perspective of mobilizing the central pawn structure (now the f5-pawn would have been guarded in many lines making it possible to push ...e6-e5 without undue delay). The problem is that after the tricky 18.♗xe4!? White would have been able to catch the opponent a little bit in between. Taking back with the pawn would have ruined her plans of a central pawn avalanche but playing 18...♗xe4?! would have been even worse due to 19.♕d2!

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Position after: 19.♕d2!

and Black does not get the time to pursue her plans because of the weakness of the dark-squared bishop as well as of the d-file in general. Black could still try to bail out to an endgame with drawish tendencies thanks to the presence of opposite-colored bishops after 19...♗e7 20.♕d7 ♕xd7 21.♖xd7 ♗xf3 22.♖xe7 ♗e2 23.♖c1± but White's position should be evaluated as slightly better by now.



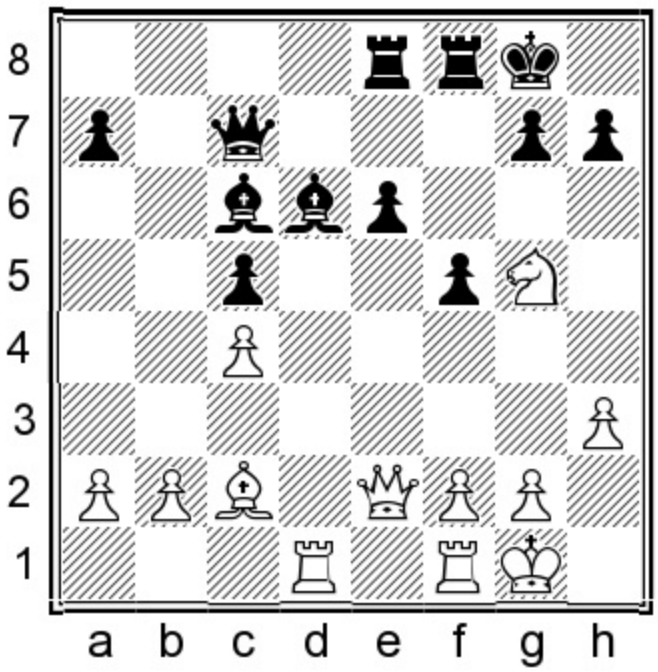
Position after: 23.♖c1±

Black's c5-pawn is weak and Black's possible pawn-march on the kingside fails to impress in the

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endgame with reduced material.

17...♘xg5!! 18.♘xg5 ♖ae8



Position after: 18...♖ae8

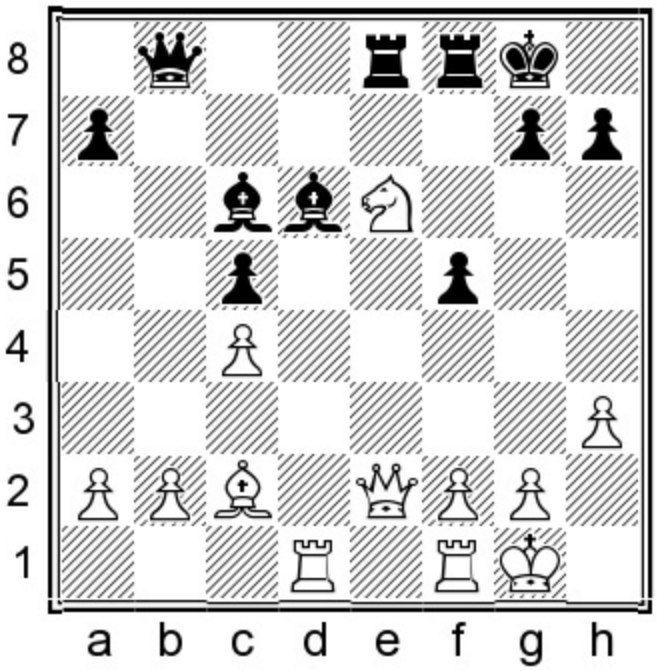
This way Black prevents ♕e2xe6+ but capturing with the knight is still very much possible. To the untrained eye the point behind the exchange on g5 still needs to be understood. White would be badly tangled by capturing on e6. The reason for this is that the knight can in fact take on e6, but when the black queen goes away to a respective safe square, there will be no salvation for the knight in view of ideas like ...♖f8-f6. If White foresees the danger and refrains from grabbing the pawn, nothing is going to be stopping Black from pushing the e-pawn all the way to e4, thus considerably restricting White's forces.

19.b4!?

White's last chance to stir things up a notch. Objectively this move leaves Black much better, but still represents the best practical try to fight the incoming tide.

A) 19.♘xe6? is met by the quiet but devilish 19...♕b8!!

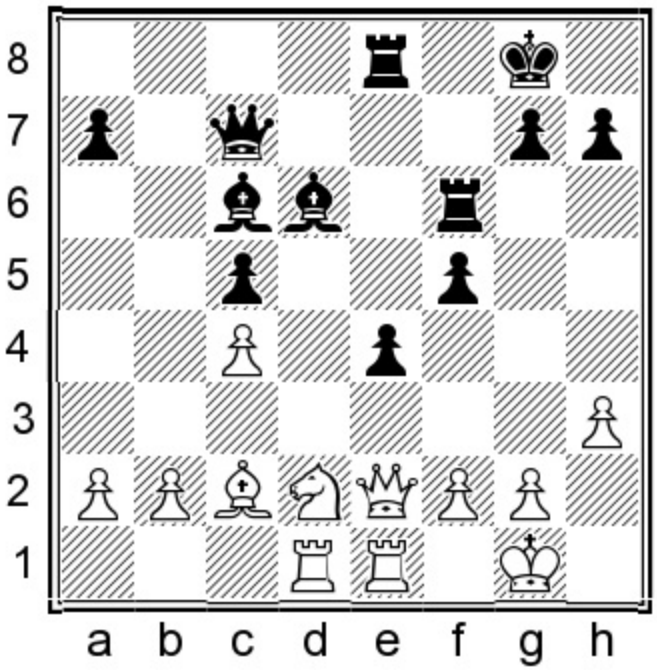
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Position after: 19...♕b8!!

when White proves to be unable to save the pinned knight at the end of the day. Sample lines: 20.♖fe1 [20.♖d3 ♗e5!–+ and the moment White takes the rook on f8, a discovered check with ...♗e5-h2+ is going to cost her the queen.] 20...♖f6 21.♕d3 ♖fxe6 22.♖xe6 ♖xe6 23.♕xf5 and White cannot profit from the double attack against the rook and h7-pawn because of the crude 23...♖g6–+ with two pawns providing insufficient compensation for the piece.

B) White could also try 19.♖fe1 but after 19...♖f6 she would sooner or later have to retreat the knight from g5 e.g. 20.♘f3 e5 21.♘d2 e4–+

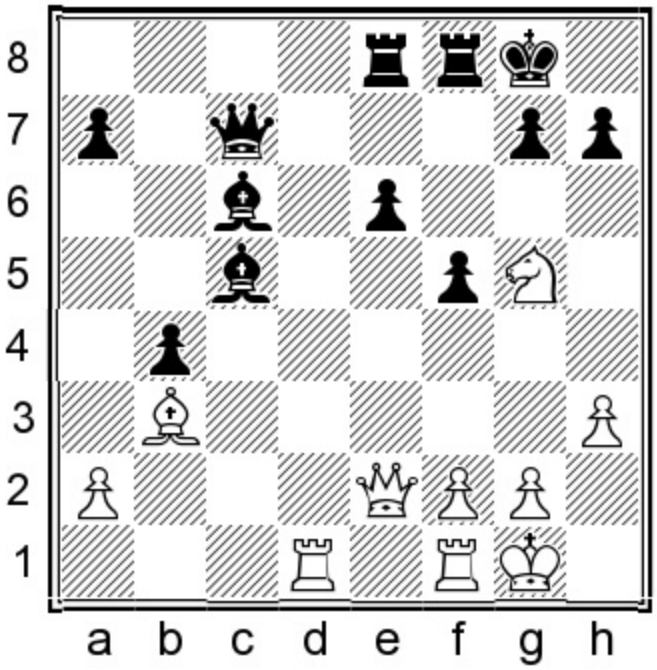


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Position after: 21...e4−+

and despite material equality, White is busted. Both of her minor pieces would have been awfully restricted, and Black will soon be wreaking havoc along the dark squares of the kingside. Before White manages to route the d2-knight via b1-c3 to d5, in view of potential ...f5-f4-f3 threats, the white king is already going to be a goner.

19...cxb4 20.c5! ♗xc5 21.♗b3



Position after: 21.♗b3

The point of White's idea. In exchange for two pawns, White has managed to activate the light-squared bishop and is now attacking the vulnerable e6-pawn three times. Despite this Black still has

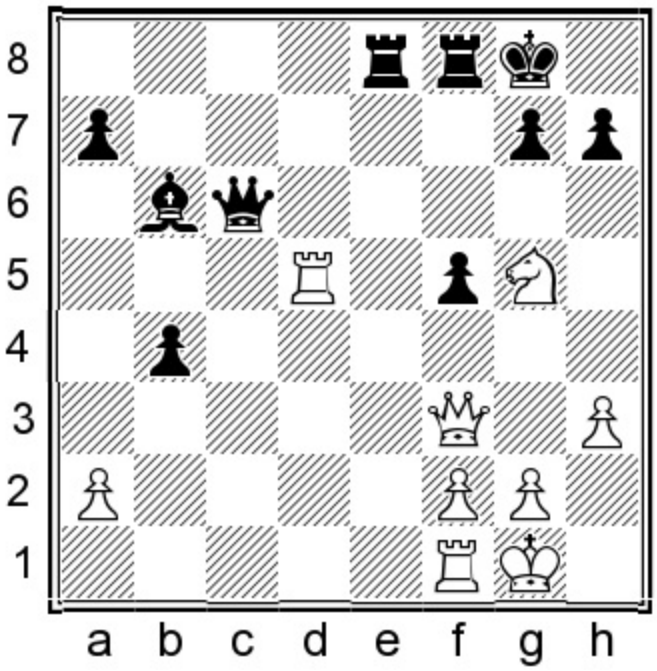
21...♗d5!

at her disposal, effectively killing White's counterplay in its roots by sacrificing a pawn in exchange for White's bishop which was capable of inflicting the most damage to the black king.

Now 21...♕g3? threatening mate in one indeed looks flashy but fails to the equally impressive 22.♕xe6+! when after 22...♖xe6 23.♗xe6+ ♔h8 24.♘f7+ ♔g8 25.♘e5+= Black cannot avoid a perpetual. In particular, it would have not been the best of solutions for Black to try and capture the knight on f7 as afterwards a check on d8 would have deflected the dark-squared bishop from c5 which would cost Black the queen.

22.♗xd5 exd5 23.♕f3 ♕c6 24.♖xd5 ♗b6∓

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Position after: 24...♗b6∓

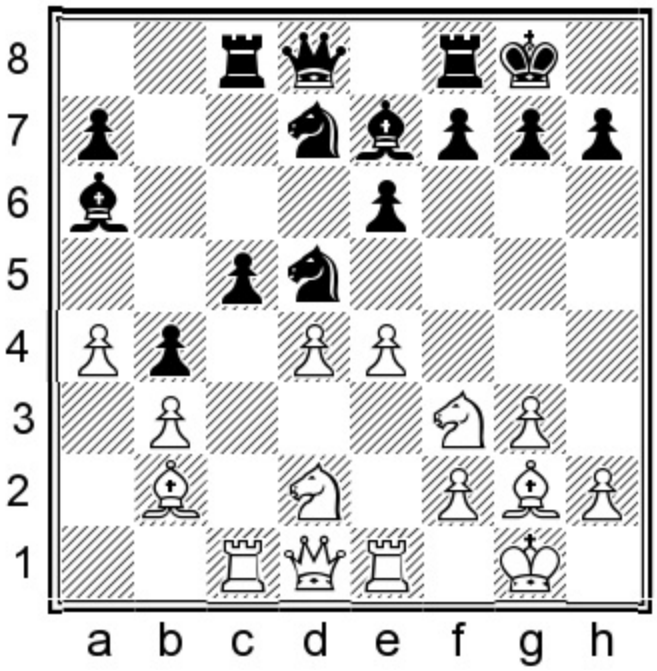
Black emerges a healthy pawn up after massive complications. True, White still has some tricks left up her sleeve (featuring most notably ♕f3-b3 with discovered check and smothered mate ideas), but Black will always be in time to parry it, or at the very least to take the sting out of them.

The biggest difficulty in solving this exercise lied in the necessity to understand that 17...♘xg5!! only looks dangerous, otherwise yielding Black a position that needs to be assessed as close to strategically winning. Black's positional concept of making the central pawns roll as soon as possible is tactically justified in that any of White's efforts to combat this idea immediately backfired. In 80 – 90% of the cases, jeopardizing the e6-pawn like that results in instant trouble and should therefore be avoided and this is also what common sense was probably telling Goryachkina during the game. Still, the devil lied in the details, with certain cunning tactical peculiarities making this idea sound.

In other words, if you ever wish to break basic principles of strategy, make sure that you have serious tactical grounds to do so. If those reasons are sufficiently strong, sometimes even general rules established by decades of practice will need to step aside, making room for more concrete considerations.

15
Nagy – Lagunow
Radenci 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *14...?*

Show/Hide Solution

15
Nagy, Gabor (2471)
Lagunow, Raphael (2420)
Radenci 2019

Weakness
Sacrifice for a global weakening of the opponent's position

Here we have a typical position arising out of many variations of the Catalan Opening. White had opted for a double fianchetto, waiting for (in his opinion) the best moment to release the tension, thus also forcing the opponent to recapture on d5 with the knight. Taking back with the pawn is often less advised as it leaves Black with an IQP which many players tend to avoid for practical reasons. But the knight capture proves to have its drawbacks as well. White can follow up with e2-e4 and have it forcefully evicted far away from the center. Is this exactly the way this position is going to escalate as well?

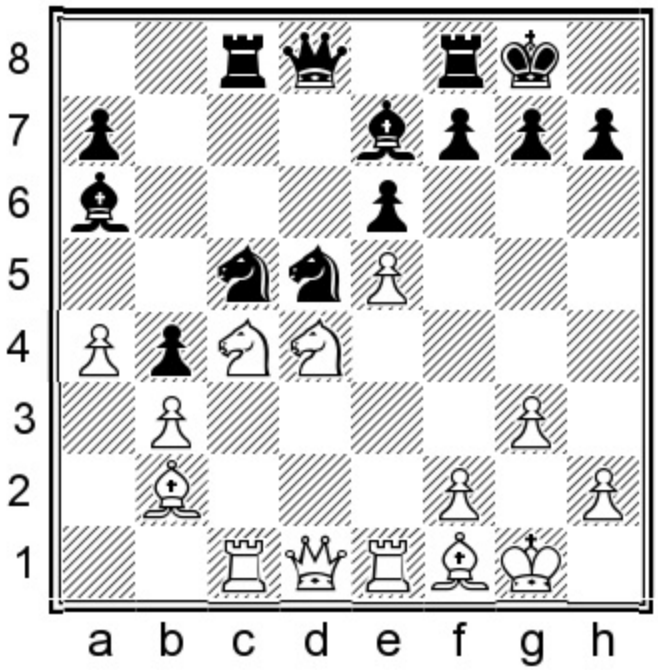
14...♘c3!

A tremendous intuitive decision! Understanding the deficiencies of any knight retreats Black sacrifices a pawn for the possibility of dramatically changing the course of the game. This type of a device is often followed by massive positional transformations with the picture becoming much

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clearer only when the dust settles after a few more moves.

A) By contrast, 14...♘5f6?! looks like a decent alternative at first but after 15.♘c4 cxd4 16.e5 ♘d5 17.♘xd4 ♘c5 18.♗f1!?↑



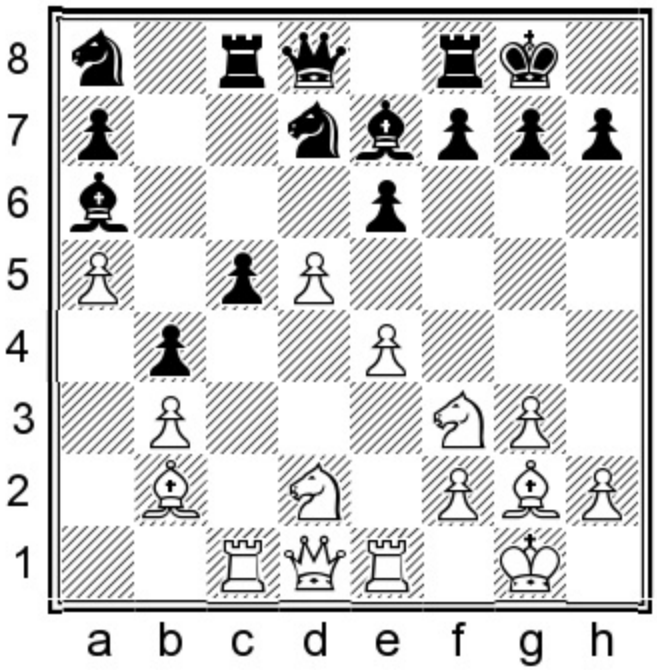
Position after: 18.♗f1!?↑

Black's position makes a much better impression than it really is. What White is namely about to do is to transfer the queen to g4 and move the e1-rook to the newly vacated d1-square. All this serves as preparation for a timely ♘c4-d6 jump which would leave Black with an unpleasant choice of accepting the sacrifice and succumb to mating ideas on g7 after something like ♘d4-f5, or to tolerate that powerful knight on d6.

In the meantime it appears that Black does not seem to be able to generate any plans of his own.

B) The remaining option of 14...♘5b6? would have been even worse as it allows White to break through in the center with 15.a5 ♘a8 16.d5!

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Position after: 16.d5!

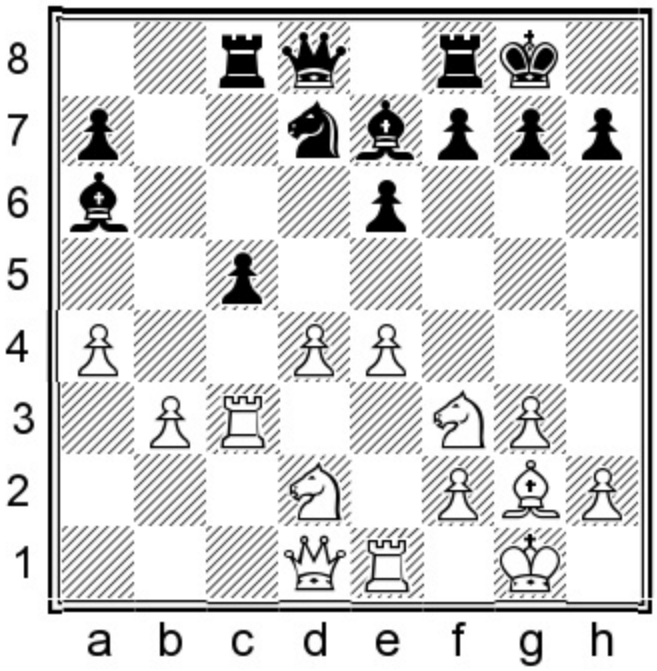
when the dynamic potential of the white pieces will be revealed to us in full blaze any moment now. Black may in fact be capable of putting the d5-passer to a halt, but only at a price of serious concessions:

B1) 16...♕xa5? loses immediately due to a tricky geometrical motif after 17.e5! exd5 18.e6! fxe6 19.♖xe6+– when Black is unable to run away with the e7-bishop and simultaneously save the other one on a6 from the incoming ♖c1-a1 maneuver.

B2) 16...♘c7 17.♘c4 exd5 18.exd5 ♗xc4 19.♖xc4 ♘b5 but after 20.♗h3!± I rate Black's chances of survival as miniscule. The problem is that his pieces are badly tangled and thus deprived of active outposts. What is more, the idea to push d5-d6 represents merely one of White's many plans of stepping up the pace here with attempts to launch an assault against the black king looking just as juicy. From now on the result of the game would have been clear with the only question being the specific cause of Black's death.

14...♘c3! 15.♗xc3 bxc3 16.♖xc3

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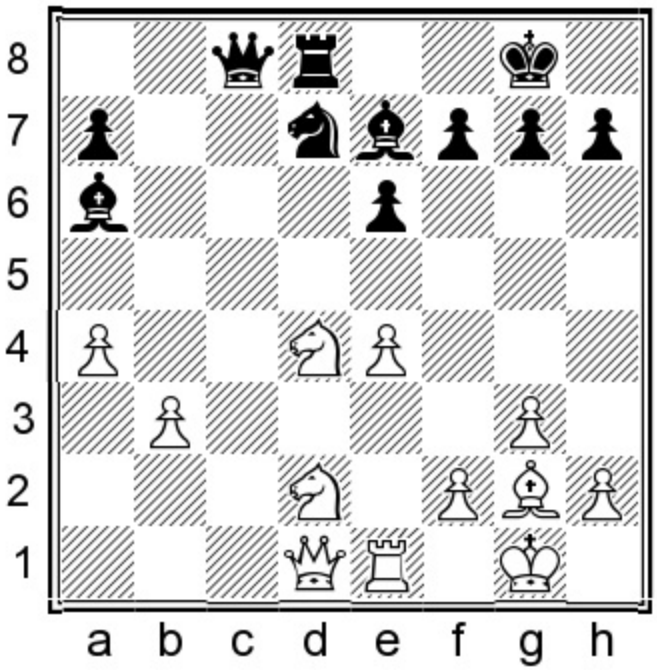
Position after: 16.♖xc3

16...cxd4

In the game Black went for the equally attractive looking 16...♕a5?! but after 17.♕a1 cxd4 18.♖xc8 ♖xc8 19.♕xd4 White would have been more or less OK. Black's pieces still enjoy much more potential than their white counterparts but a double attack against the a7-pawn and the d7-knight prevents him from capitalizing at once. Black now played a slightly inferior move after which the game petered out to a draw. Still, if he was content with a drawish result, he should have taken the most straightforward route to it with 19...♗c5!? when after 20.♕xd7 ♖d8 21.♕c6 ♖c8= the game would have ended in threefold repetition as the white queen cannot escape attacks without being caught.

17.♖xc8 ♕xc8 18.♘xd4 ♖d8

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Position after: 18...♖d8

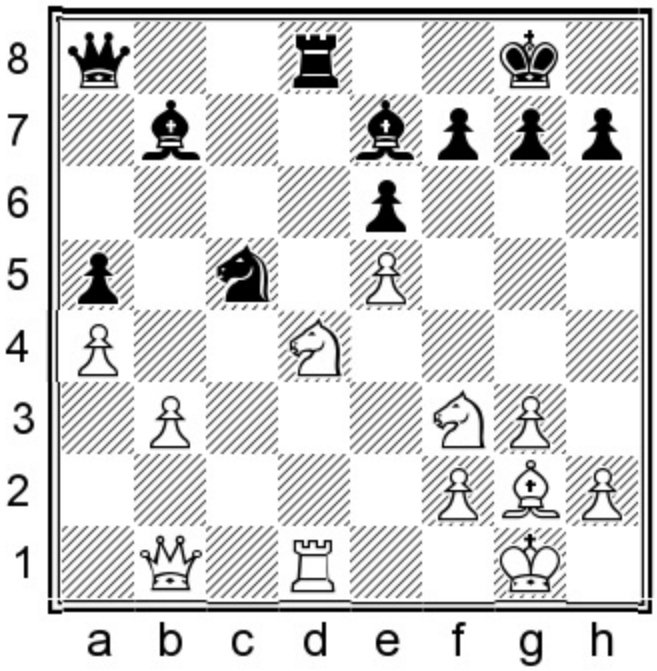
Only now does it make sense to speak about what Black achieved by parting with the b4-pawn as of move one. To begin with Black prevented the opponent from launching a central initiative which was the case after 14...♘5f6?! The real point behind Black's play can be only discovered when we look a little closer at the pieces of both players. Black has the bishop pair, of which bishops the dark-squared one is already standing out thanks to the shakiness of White's position along the dark squares. Black's heavy pieces occupy the open files with one idea being to opt for ...♘d7-e5(c5) very soon, not only putting the d4-knight in danger but also seeking to profit from nasty ...♘e5-d3 jumps later on. In the meantime, White's pieces are far less coordinated with most of them placed along the vulnerable d-file. If somebody asked me where is the weakness in White's position I would have said 'Everywhere!' Sample variations prove that White's slight material edge matters very little here in comparison to Black's perfect mobilization:

19.♕c1

Trading off pieces when enjoying a material advantage sounds like profitable business for the defender but here Black's coordination is way too strong for him to be absorbed by such tiny nuisances at all.

A) Comparably, 19.♕b1 removing the queen from the sensitive d-file seems like a wise thing to do but does not bring White much relief provided Black plays sufficiently actively. 19...♘c5 20.♘2f3 ♕a8! The threat is ...♗a6-d3 snatching the e4-pawn so the little soldier needs to go. 21.e5 ♗b7 Now ... ♖xd8-d4 is hanging in the air. 22.♖d1 a5

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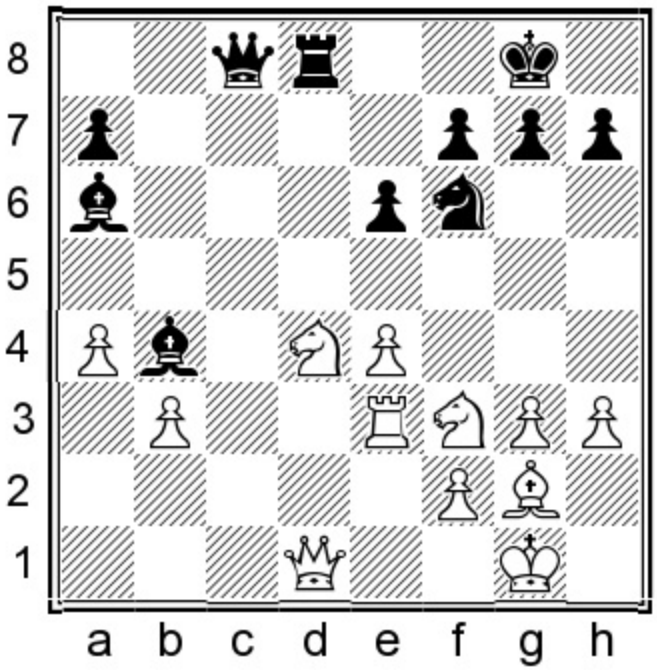


Position after: 22...a5

Fixing the b3-pawn thus ensuring that it is going to constitute a target later on. Please observe how the knot around White's head is tightening here, without Black even making forcing moves all the time. The longer White stays in this stasis field, the worse for him, but then again attempts to simplify are no better as after 23.♘e1 ♗xg2 24.♘xg2 ♘d7!∓ Black not only recaptures the e5-pawn with the knight but would also have probably been able to profit from the weakness of the light squares like f3 in close proximity of the white monarch.

B) On the other hand, 19.♘2f3? actually loses on the spot after 19...♗b4 when in the process of searching for some safe haven for the rook after 20.♖e3 ♘f6 21.h3

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Position after: 21.h3

White has critically disharmonized his pieces, leaving himself vulnerable to 21...e5! 22.♘xe5 ♗c3 23.♘ef3 ♗xd4 24.♘xd4 ♕c5–+ when White happens to be defenseless to the threat of capturing the knight on d4.

19...♗b4

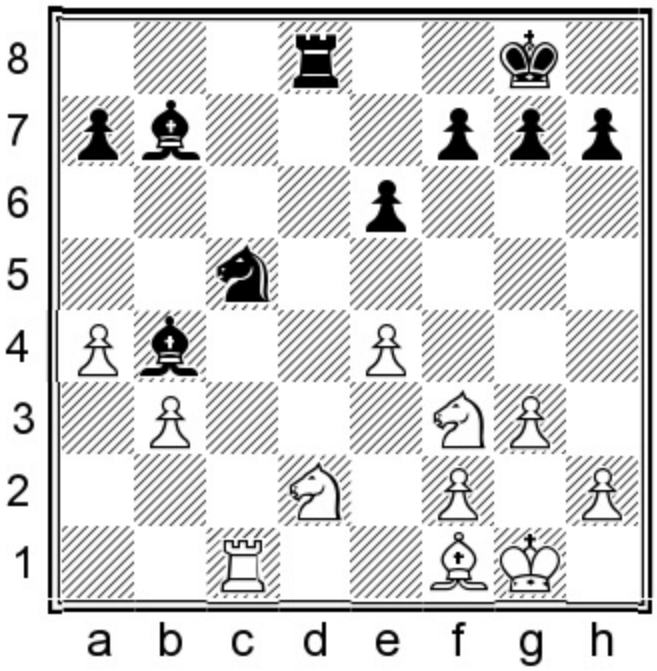
Making use of the dark-squared domination without undue hesitation.

20.♘4f3

and now after something like

20...♕xc1 21.♖xc1 ♘c5 22.♗f1 ♗b7∓

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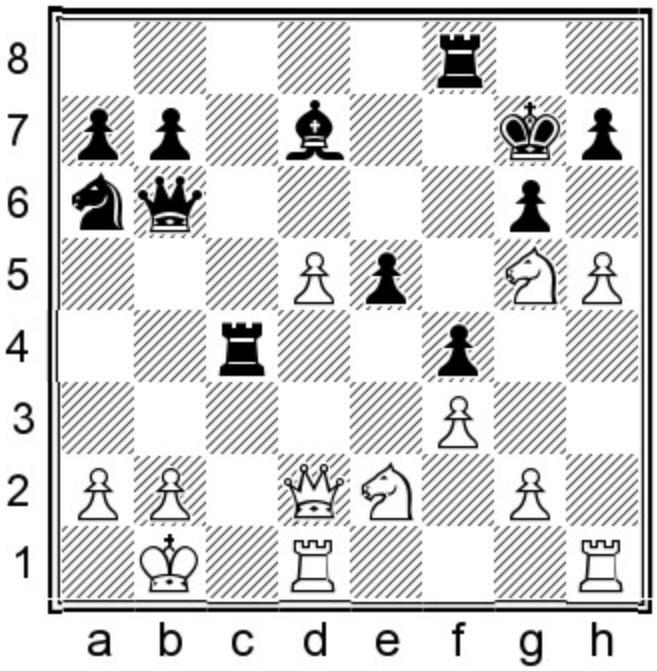


Position after: 22...♗b7∓

despite still being a pawn down, Black dominates the game entirely. Both the e4-pawn and the d2-knight are hanging at the moment, so Black will be restoring material balance very soon. In the future Black is going to convert this position into a full point rather comfortably for two reasons. First of all, he is in possession of the bishop pair and can pressurize White's weaknesses on both wings. Secondly, after a timely ...a7-a5, the backward b3-pawn will be fixed, and because of this represent a sitting duck. White should naturally try to defend along the light squares, but personally, I do not see much hope left for him in this position the moment the black rook invades the second rank in the future.

16
Chiku-Ratte – Wu
Saint Louis 2019

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□ *21.?*

Show/Hide Solution

16
Chiku-Ratte, Olivier-Kenta (2378)
Wu, Rochelle (2174)
Saint Louis 2019

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Intertwining prophylaxis with attacking ideas

This position arose out of the evergreen 3.f3 Anti-Grunfeld. This variation tends to produce extremely double-edged positions in which it all usually boils down to a race between the sides taking place on opposite wings. This one is no exception. White appears to be making real progress along the h-file with his rook and knight ready to infiltrate the black camp via h7. However, Black is not wasting time as she has been accumulating her forces in close proximity of the white king. What is more, with the b1-h7 diagonal being rather vulnerable from White's perspective, Black can seriously think about combining attack and defense by means of something along the lines of ...♗d7-f5+. Still, it is White who is on the move. Is there anything he can do to ensure a smooth continuation of his attack, optimally without allowing Black too much counterplay at the same time?

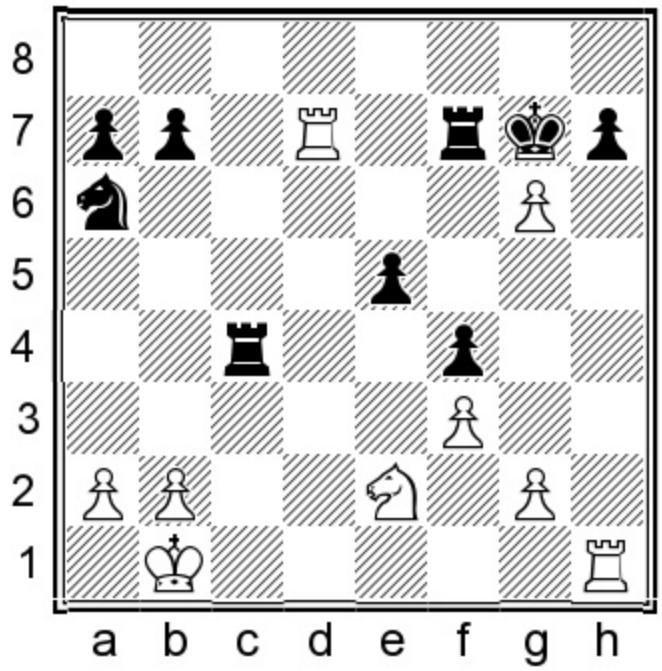
21.g4!

A brilliant solution! White deprives Black of the f5-square for the bishop. Simultaneously, should

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Black wish to take on g3 en passant White is ready not only to recapture with the knight, thus yet again eyeing the discussed square, but also to have the queen swiftly shifted to h2 in order to join the attack. White's idea does not only revolve only around opening up the h-file, as we will see in just a second, White also could have flirted with a completely different, more positionally inclined device.

A) The game saw the clever 21.♘e6+ ♗xe6 22.dxe6 ♕xe6 23.♕d7+ ♕xd7 24.♖xd7+ ♖f7 25.hxg6

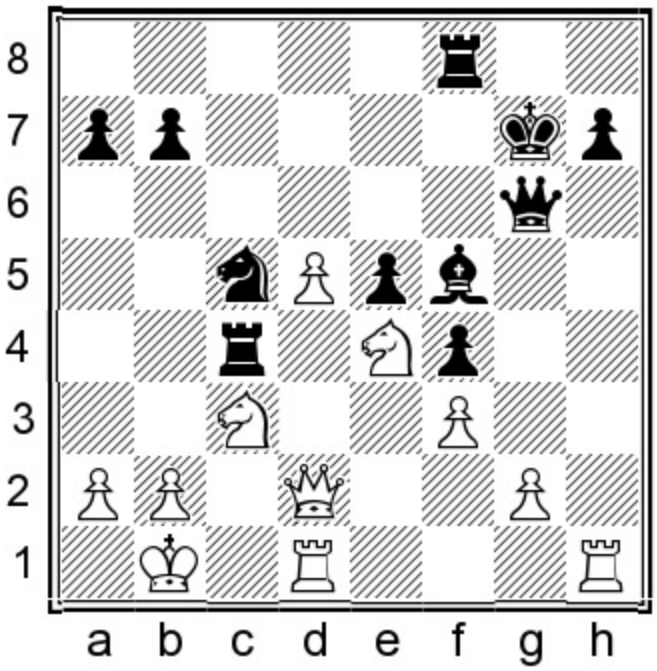


Position after: 25.hxg6

but if Black follows up simply with 25...♖xd7 26.♖xh7+ ♔xg6 27.♖xd7 ♖c7= White would not be able to claim any advantage as it cannot be said for sure that the e5-pawn is really weaker than the g2-pawn.

B) The more straightforward 21.hxg6?! is even worse as it literally hands over the initiative to Black after 21...♕xg6+ 22.♘e4 ♘c5 23.♘2c3 ♗f5

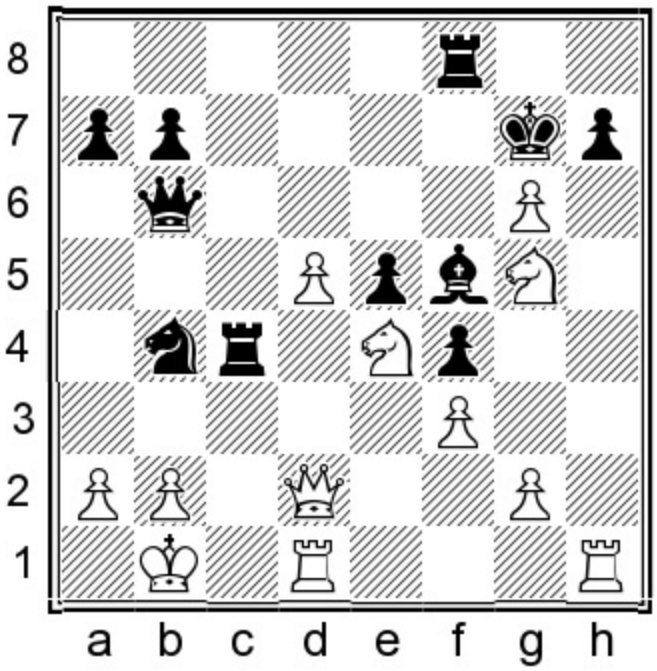
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Position after: 23...♗f5

and now White should come to terms with the fact that the e4-pawn cannot be saved anymore and opt for compensation after 24.♔a1 ♘xe4 25.♘xe4 ♗xe4 26.fxe4 ♖xe4 27.♕f2 ♖e3 28.d6=. Black's material advantage sure matters, but White's distant passed d6-pawn cannot be underestimated.

C) Lastly, 21.♘c3 trying to establish a firm blockade on e4 first, sounds like a reasonable idea, but this also gives Black some time to catch a breath and actually start creating threats of her own, e. g. 21...♗f5+ 22.♘ce4 [22.♔a1 ♘b4 23.♖c1 ♕e3⇄ does not look so clear cut for White either.] 22...♘b4 23.hxg6

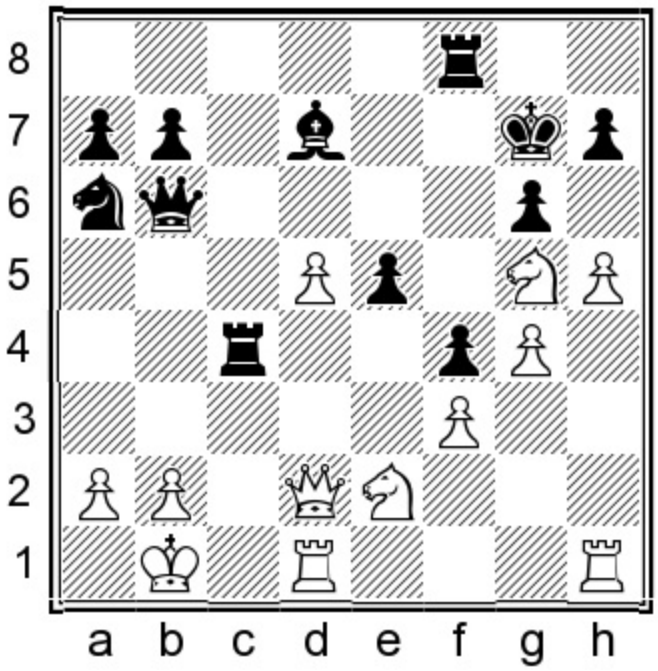


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Position after: 23.hxg6

and now after the intermediate 23...♖c2!? due to possible ...♖c2xb2+ and ...♘b4-d3 threats, White would be rather advised to bail out towards a perpetual check with 24.♖xh7+ ♔g8 25.♖dh1 ♖xd2 26.♖h8+ ♔g7 27.♖8h7+ ♔g8=.

21.g4!



Position after: 21.g4!

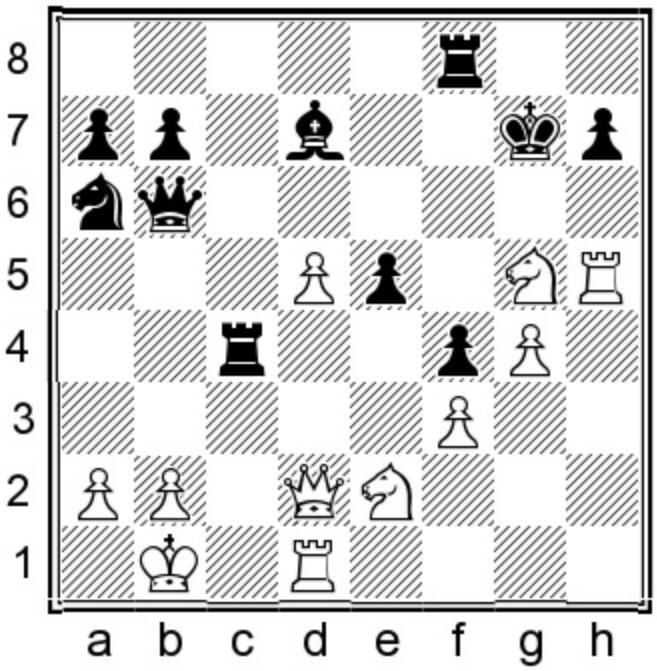
21...♖fc8

There are many other options Black can resort to but opting for instant counterplay seems to be the most logical of them all.

A) 21...♕f6 intending to meet the immediate ♘g5-e4 with an exchange-sacrifice on e4 is met by the quiet 22.♕d3! when after 22...♖fc8 23.♘e4 the said sacrifice would not have been as effective as it does not damage the white pawn structure anymore: 23...♖xe4 24.♕xe4 ♘c5 25.♕b4+–

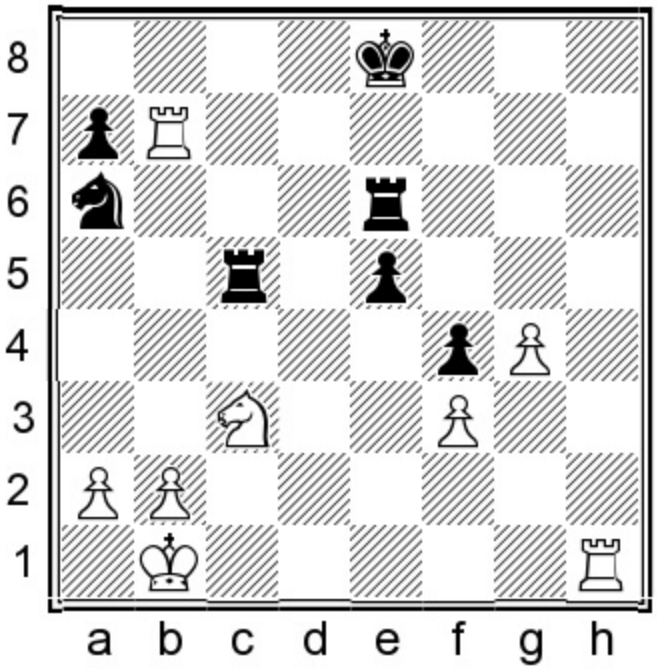
B) If Black is so keen on a possible exchange sacrifice on e4, she might have just as well considered 21...gxh5 22.♖xh5

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Position after: 22.♖xh5

B1) 22...h6 23.♕d3! leads to an improved version of the game as after 23...♕g6 24.♘e6+ ♗xe6 25.♕xg6+ ♔xg6 26.dxe6 ♖c5 27.♘c3 ♖e8 28.♖dh1 ♖xe6 29.♖xh6+ ♔f7 30.♖h7+ ♔e8 31.♖xb7+–

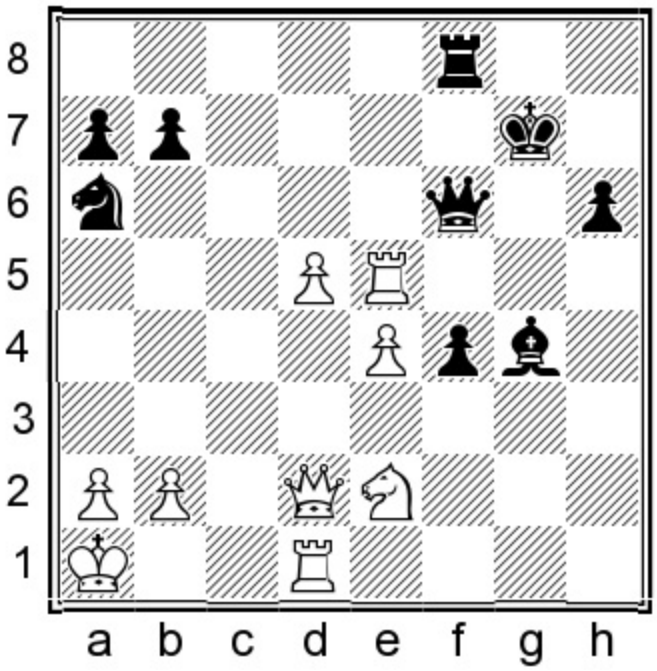


Position after: 31.♖xb7+–

there would be no mercy left for the black king the moment white rooks infiltrate his camp.

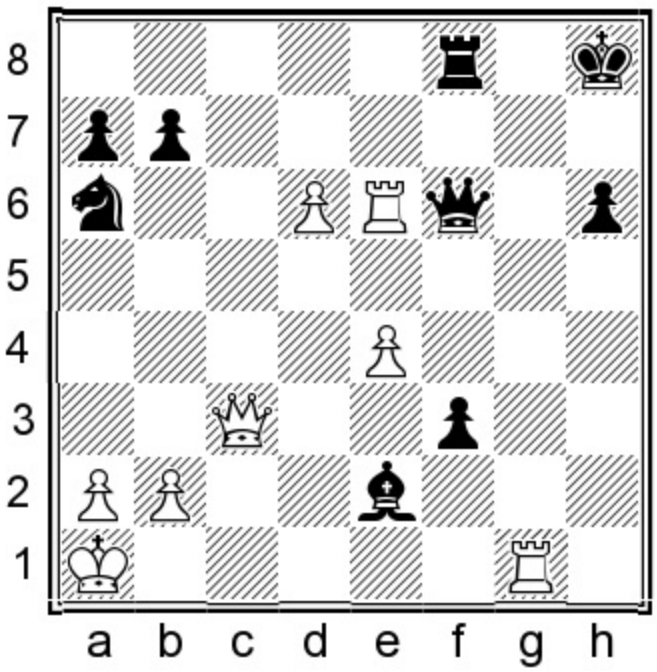
B2) 22...♕g6+ 23.♔a1 h6 24.♘e4 ♖xe4 25.fxe4 ♗xg4 26.♖xe5 ♕f6

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Position after: 26...♕f6

when it indeed looks for a second as if Black is actually holding thanks to the clumsy placement of the white rook on e5, but White would be able to burst this bubble with the following powerful sequence: 27.♕c3! (Organizing an x-ray along the long dark diagonal) 27...♗xe2 28.♖g1+ ♔h7 29.d6! f3 30.♖e7+ ♔h8 when after the captivating 31.♖e6!+–



Position after: 31.♖e6!+–

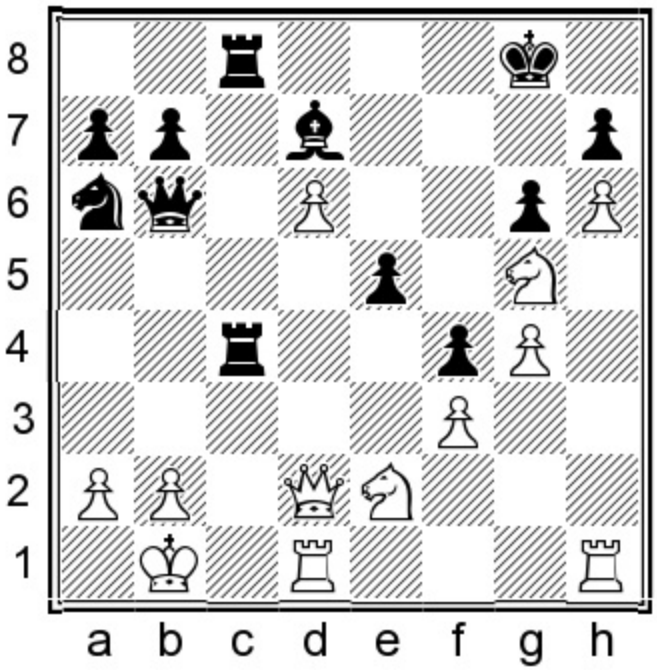
it would have either been bye-bye to the queen or mate for Black.

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22.h6+!

The core of White's idea and at the same time probably the most difficult move of the exercise. White gives up on his chances of playing for an attack along the h-file but obtains something much more precious in exchange – domination. The moment the black king moves back to g8 it will be stuck on this square dropping the h7-pawn. What is even worse, any kind of check, be it from d5 or along the back rank, might prove to be lethal for him. The only thing White needs to do right now is to extinguish any sort of Black counterplay on the queenside and then make sure that the far-advanced d-pawn is eventually going to make the difference.

22...♔g8 23.d6



Position after: 23.d6

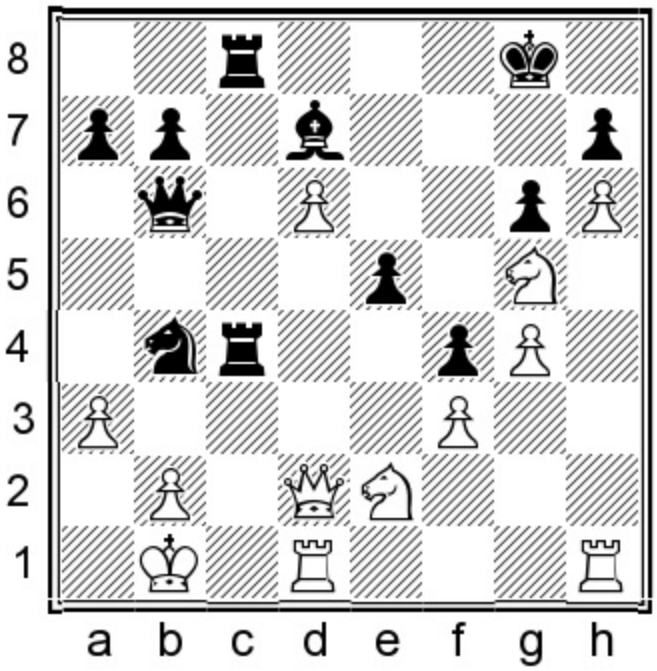
23...♘b4

♕d2-d5+ check was the deadly threat. Now the battle sharpens up for the moment but if White manages to drain the life out of Black's queenside forces the active piece play around the d6 passer is going to grant him the win.

23...♕b5 leads to a completely lost endgame for Black after 24.♕d5+ ♕xd5 25.♖xd5 ♖4c5 26.♘c3+– as sooner or later the c3-knight will find a way to get to f6.

24.a3!

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Position after: 24.a3!

Looks scary but grabbing the bull by the horns constitutes the most clear-cut way of bringing the full point home for White. Black's counterattack is going to run out of gas before it is even started.

24...♗a4

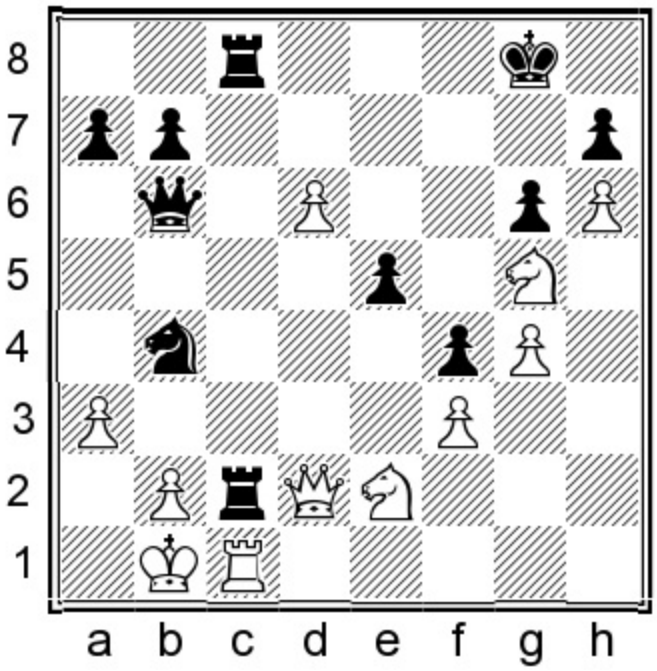
24...♖c2 leads yet again to a hopeless endgame after something like 25.♕xb4 ♕xb4 26.axb4 ♖xe2 27.♖he1 ♖xe1 28.♖xe1 ♖e8 29.♖c1+– and the white rook decisively infiltrates along the seventh rank.

25.♖c1 ♗c2+

and now after

26.♖xc2! ♖xc2 27.♖c1!

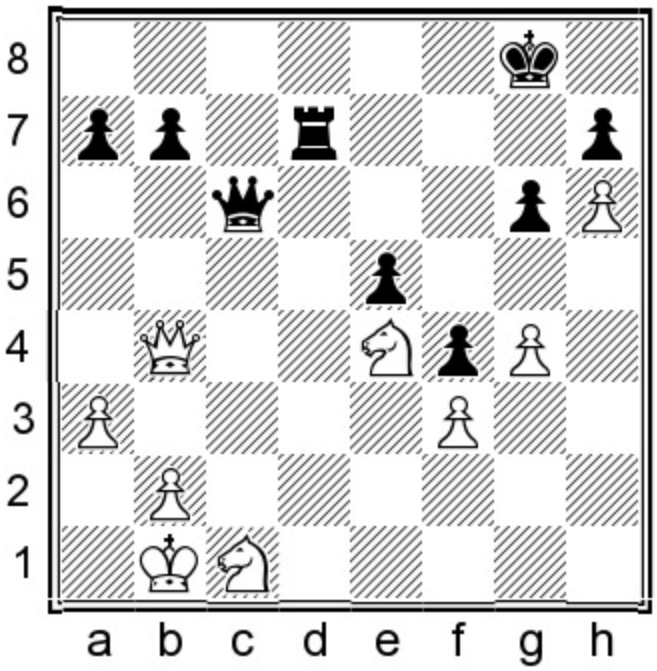
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Position after: 27.♖c1!

the queen is untouchable due to a back-rank mate. There is no way Black is walking away from this alive.

27...♕c6 28.d7 ♖d8 29.♕xb4 ♖xc1+ 30.♘xc1 ♖xd7 31.♘e4+–

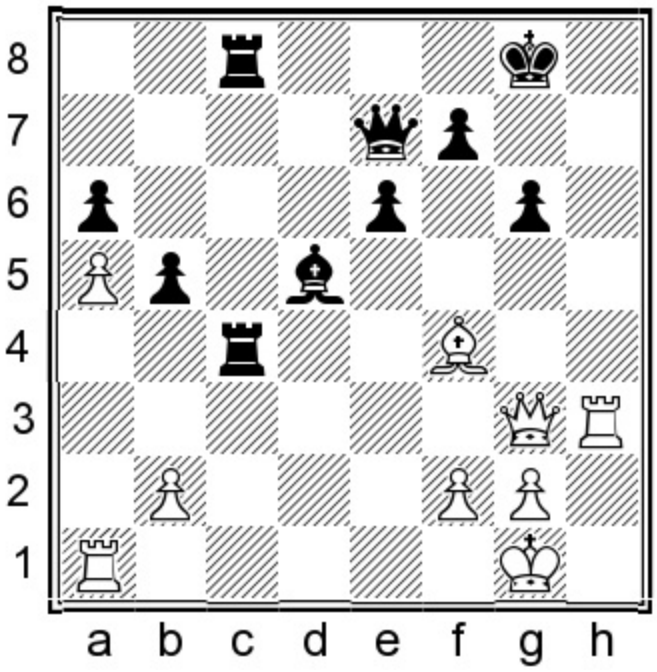


Position after: 31.♘e4+–

It is probably just a matter of a few moves before White invades the position of the black king with

his queen and knights. Black is doomed.

17
Lagarde – Lobanov
Skopje 2018



■ *30...?*

Show/Hide Solution

17
Lagarde, Maxime (2616)
Lobanov, Sergei (2526)
Skopje 2018

Attack & Defense
Anticipation in the defense

Black is a clear pawn up but it is much too early for him to declare success. Quite the contrary, the blatant weakness of the dark squares around the black king convinces us at first glance that Black is either going to miraculously save the game or go down in flames. What is even worse, opposite-colored bishops do imply drawish tendencies as what we have here is a heavy piece middlegame. If this was not enough, doom may also come to Black along the opened h-file as the white queen is

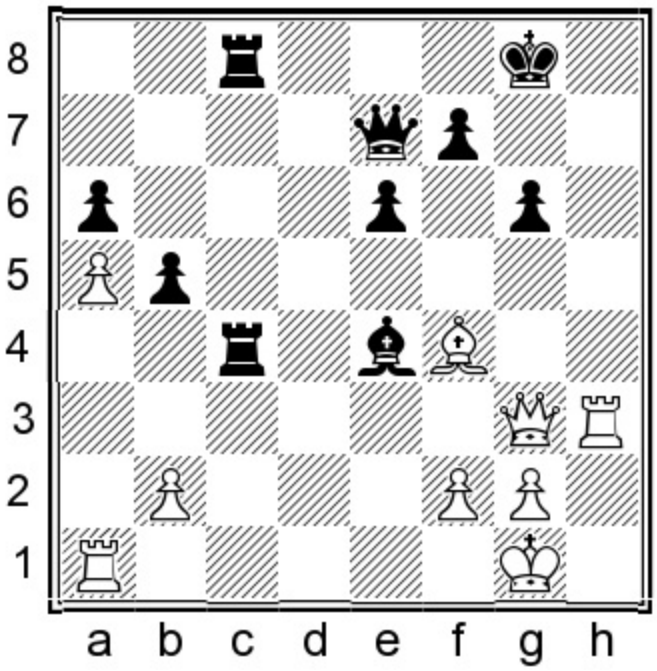
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already very eager to be doubled with the rook from h2 or h4. So much bad news... but a pawn is still a pawn, right?

30...f6!!

A freakishly pleasing move to make! As if the position of the black king was not weak enough Black makes yet another move which not only jeopardizes the pawn shield but even drops probably the most important element thereof on the spot. The truth is that nothing comes for free in this world. If White takes on g6 at once an exchange of queens will inevitably take place thus steering the game towards peaceful waters. Simultaneously, the non-stereotyped ...f7-f6 push strengthens control over some vital dark squares, and even allows the queen to come close to g7 in case of need, especially should White try to land mate on h8 one day. What more could we possibly expect from a little pawn move?

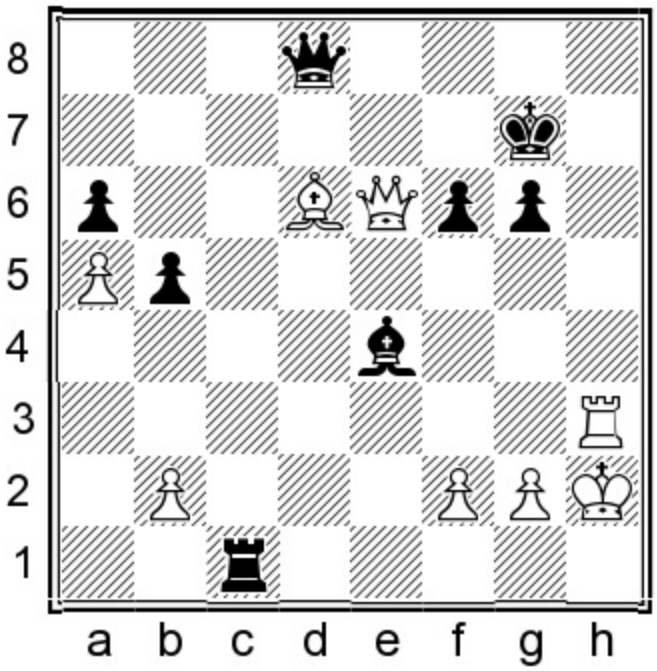
A) In the game, Black wanted to achieve exactly the same, but without losing a pawn on g6 so that 30...♗e4?



Position after: 30...♗e4?

was played. The problem is that White does not have to come with the bishop to e5 if he wants to eventually mate but can do so with the queen instead after the much more powerful 31.♗d6! when after [31.♗e5? quite unexpectedly leads nowhere due to 31...f6 32.♕h4 g5! 33.♕h8+ ♔f7 and the most White can obtain is a perpetual check after 34.♖h7+ ♗xh7 35.♕xh7+ ♔f8 36.♕h8+ ♔f7=] 31...♖c1+ 32.♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 33.♔h2 ♕d8 34.♕e5 f6 35.♕xe6+ ♔g7

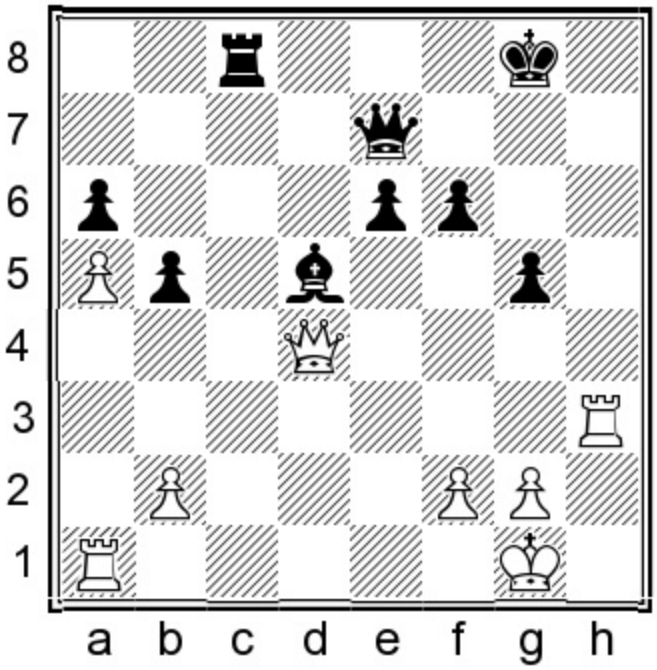
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Position after: 35...♔g7

White won by means of the very elegant 36.♗f8+! ♕xf8 37.♕d7+ ♕f7 38.♖h7+ ♔xh7 39.♕xf7+ ♔h6 40.♕xf6+–

B) Sacrificing an exchange in order to gain some time to organize a defense with 30...♖xf4?! 31.♕xf4 g5 32.♕d4 f6



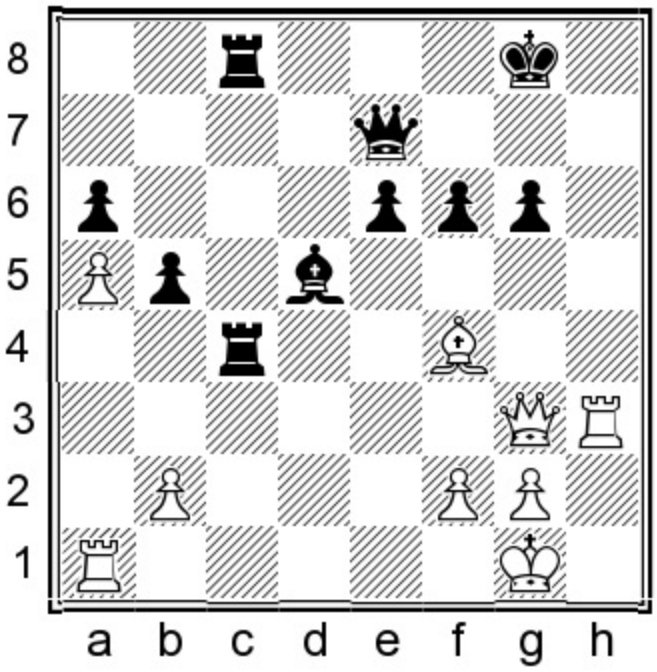
Position after: 32...f6

does not help in the long run as he will in fact be gradually outplayed here. First White is going to

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passivize Black's forces and only then decisively infiltrate along the c-file. Sample line: 33.♖e1 ♖d8 34.♕g4 ♕g7 35.♖c1 ♖f8 36.♕h5 ♗e4 37.♖hc3!+– and Black is done.

30...f6!!



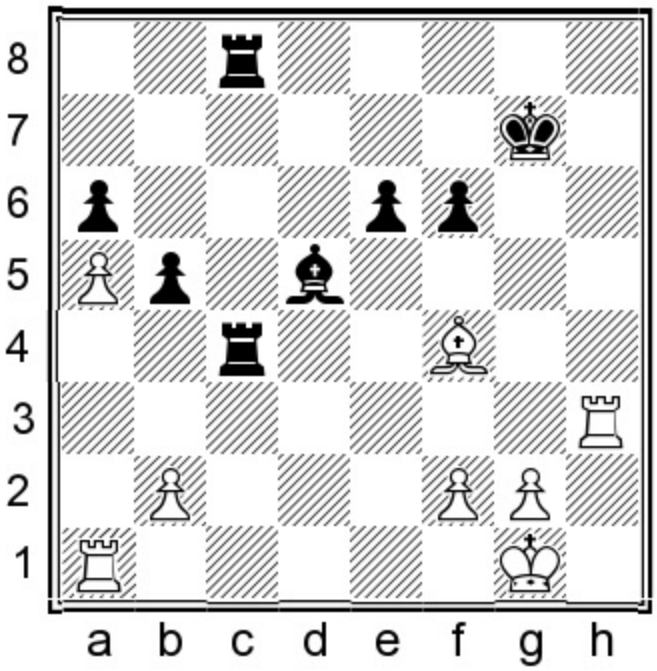
Position after: 30...f6!!

31.♖d1!?

White's last try for a win. Whenever confronted with such a mysterious move it is essential to try to predict its consequences from the perspective of your most tempting candidate move. If ...g6-g5 were possible here, spoiling White's bishop and granting the black king an additional layer of dark-squared security, we could even risk the statement that it would be Black who would be taking over the initiative.

31.♕xg6+ is nothing for White due to 31...♕g7 32.♕xg7+ ♔xg7

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Position after: 32...♔xg7

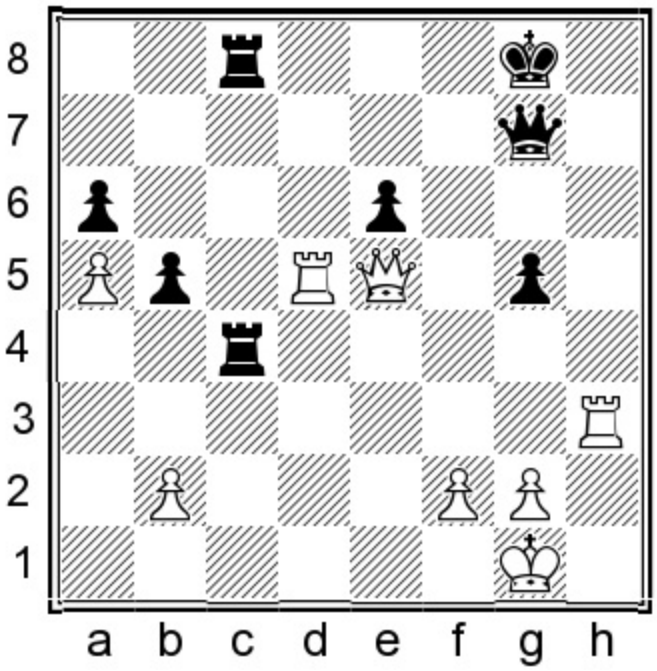
when there would not be much remaining out of White's attack.

What is more, if White decided to play passively now he would have gotten himself into trouble, e.g. 33.♗d2?! ♖g4!? (a clever move, aiming to force f2-f3, technically closing the path of both of the white rooks along the third rank) 34.f3 ♖d4 35.♗e3 ♖b4 36.♖c1 ♖xc1+ 37.♗xc1 ♖d4↑. The drawish tendencies are still quite strong here, but with both black pieces being far better placed than their white counterparts, it would be Black for sure who would be calling the shots.

31...♕g7

Passive but necessary as both the g6-pawn and the h8-square are now safely guarded. 31...g5?! in fact looks great but fails utterly due to 32.♗xg5! fxg5 33.♕e5 ♕g7 34.♖xd5!

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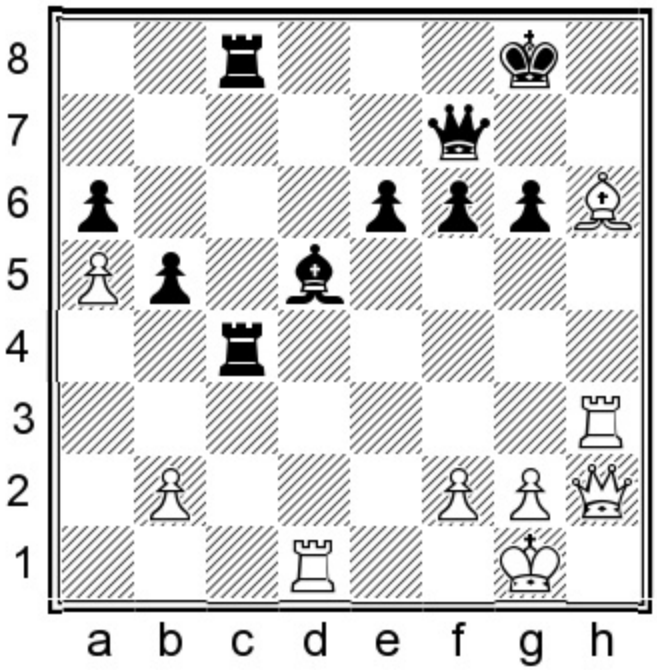
Position after: 34.♖xd5!

when the best Black can get is an inferior rook endgame after 34...♕xe5 [34...exd5?! loses on the spot because of 35.♕xd5+ ♔f8 36.♕f5+ ♕f7 37.♖h8+ ♔e7 38.♖h7 ♕xh7 39.♕xh7+ ♔e6 40.♕h6+ ♔d7 41.♕xa6+– and two rooks are incapable of handling a mobile queen supporting pawns marching towards promotion on both wings.] 35.♖xe5 ♔f7 36.♖he3!?↑

The trouble with such choices (31...g5 or 31...♕g7) is that the natural human tendency is to solve their problems at once, to cut the Gordian Knot so to speak. This is why in practice I believe that many grandmasters would be more eager to go for 31...g5 instead of 31...♕g7, even if they subconsciously felt that there might be something wrong tactically with the former.

32.♗h6 ♕f7 33.♕h2

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Position after: 33.♕h2

and now after the accurate

33...♕c7!

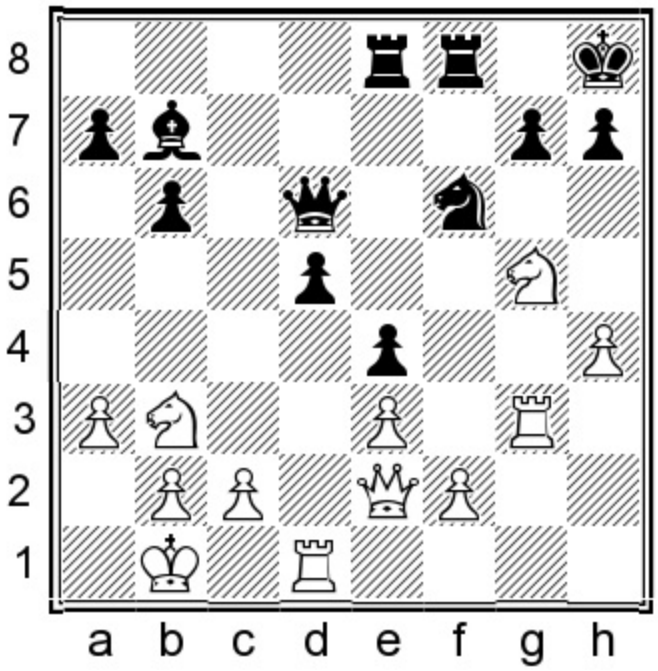
there would have nothing better for White but to agree a draw by repetition after

But not 33...e5?! 34.♗f8! ♔xf8 35.♖h7±

34.♗f4 ♕g7 35.♗h6 ♕c7=

Now, the following question simply begs to be asked: did Black stand a chance of finding 30...f6? Notwithstanding this game being played under fast time controls, my answer would be yes. But for this to happen, he needed to understand what his position calls for (increased control over the dark squares), realize the deficiencies of the slow 30...♗e4, and then also overcome the negative impression related to the loss of the g6-pawn. This is all virtually unachievable with pure calculation. This is also why every single move that we consider should have a logical justification. What is more, in my opinion, it is indispensable to actually intertwine calculations with ideas. In other words, instead of calculating lines on an 'If I do this, then he does that' basis, you should rather be saying something more like 'If I do this because I want to achieve that, he will respond with this because he needs to' to yourself. I have been using this technique myself for years now and noticed a sharp decline in missed ideas within the calculation process as a result. If it works for me, maybe this is going to help you out as well?

Ramirez – Cheparinov
Caleta 2019



□ *28.?*

Show/Hide Solution

18
Ramirez, Alejandro (2567)
Cheparinov, Ivan (2691)
Caleta 2019

Coordination
Time & Coordination (I)

The position appears only slightly imbalanced. Both sides have three pawn islands with White surely aiming to make use of the semi open g-file in the near future while Black possesses the only bishop on the board. Despite some doubts regarding the strength of the bishop, it is Black's coordination which, for the moment, makes the better impression.

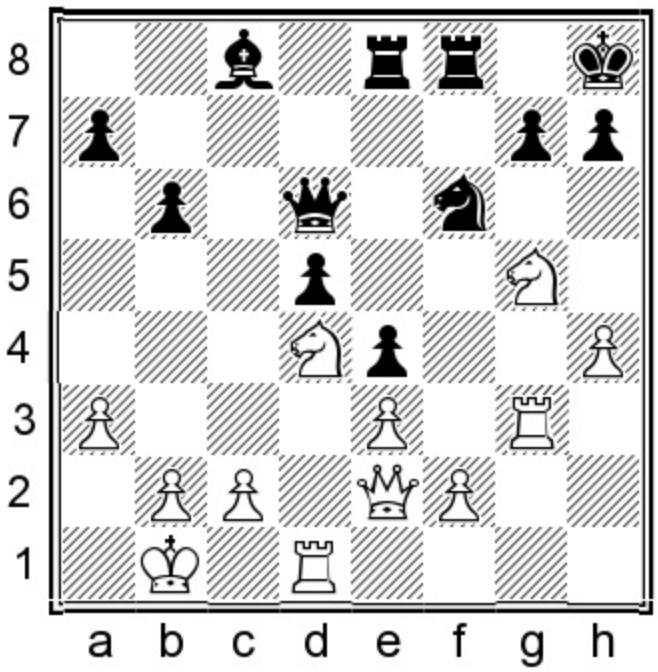
White will probably have to go to great lengths if he wants to make something out of this position. Still, the way to proceed if White wants to seriously think about winning here is not trivial at all.

28.♘h3!!

I can imagine you looking baffled not only at this move but rather at the double exclamation mark I

decided to award it. The truth is, as I am going to elaborate in a moment, that this is not only the only move that grants White a winning advantage but also one of the deepest ones that are to be found in this book. In other words, if you understood the importance of bringing the knight to f4, but failed to grasp the swiftness with which it needs to be done, you cannot consider this problem solved.

The whole point of White's play is revealed after any logically looking move such as 28.♘d4?! (or even 28.♖dg1 which was played in the game) both of which would have been inaccurate because of 28...♗c8!

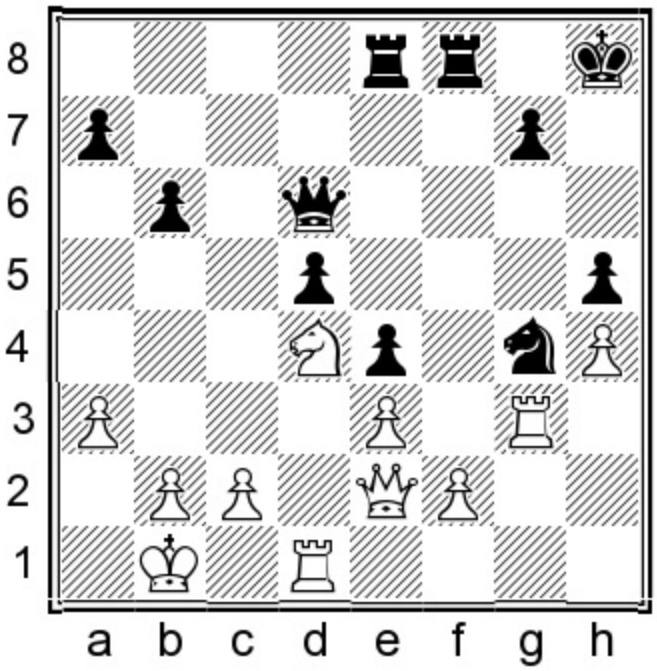


Position after: 28...♗c8!

Quite surprisingly, White is already unable to prove an edge here. The reason for this is that White wants to develop an attacking initiative along the g-file and for this purpose he will need all the pieces he can possibly throw at the opponent's king. At the same time, if White wants to be successful on the kingside, he one day needs to definitely have the file opened up. The problem is that the only way to do so is to come back at a certain point in time with the knight to h3. If this happens Black will gladly take on h3 eliminating his 'bad' bishop, spoiling the coordination of the white rooks and what is probably worst reducing White's attacking potential close to zero. Sample lines:

A) The immediate 29.♘h3 may be met by 29...♗xh3 30.♖xh3 and now even 30...h5! when after 31.♖g3 ♘g4

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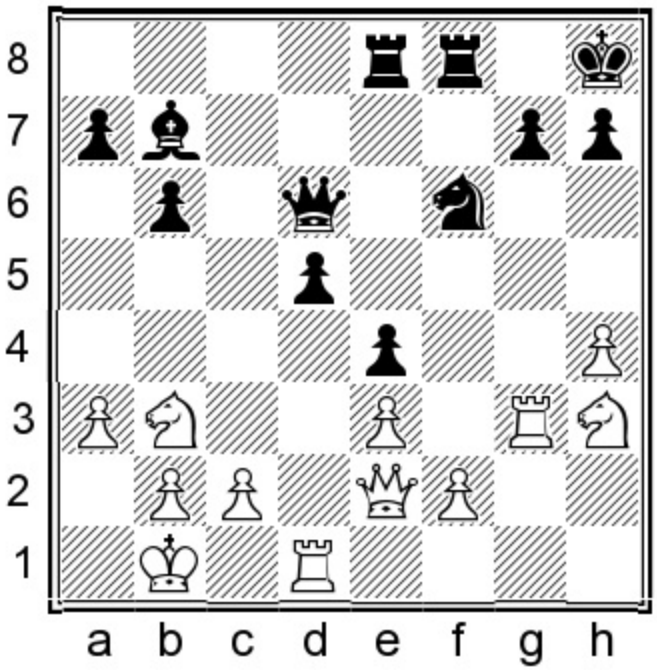
Position after: 31...♘g4

it is not really clear who is attacking. White's pressure along the g-file looks like a matter of the past, whilst it is now Black who is actually creating threats along the f-file. White can obviously flirt with some sacrificial ideas like 32.♖xg4 hxg4 33.♕xg4 ♖e5 34.♖g1 ♖f7♾ but with limited material left on the board and White still being objectively down on material, I would not say that the strong d4-knight and some activity along the g-file will ever be enough for him to bring the full point home.

B) 29.♖dg1 ♖e7 30.h5 Trying to postpone the inevitable, but even if Black had to create a hole on g6 to have the g5-knight eliminated this would not have been a huge nuisance at all. e.g. 30...h6 31.♘h3 ♗xh3 32.♖xh3 ♕d7 33.♖hg3 ♖ff7 34.♖g6 Now after 34...♖e5= Black's alternative defensive setup has been reached. Two heavy pieces on the seventh rank are more than enough to hold off the white rooks, whereas the knight and the e5-rook are doing a great job reminding White that if he goes too far the h5-pawn shall be lost and with it the game already slipping past White's hands. The white d4-knight is certainly very strong, but with the f5-square being under surveillance its influence on the position could be barely felt.

28.♘h3!!

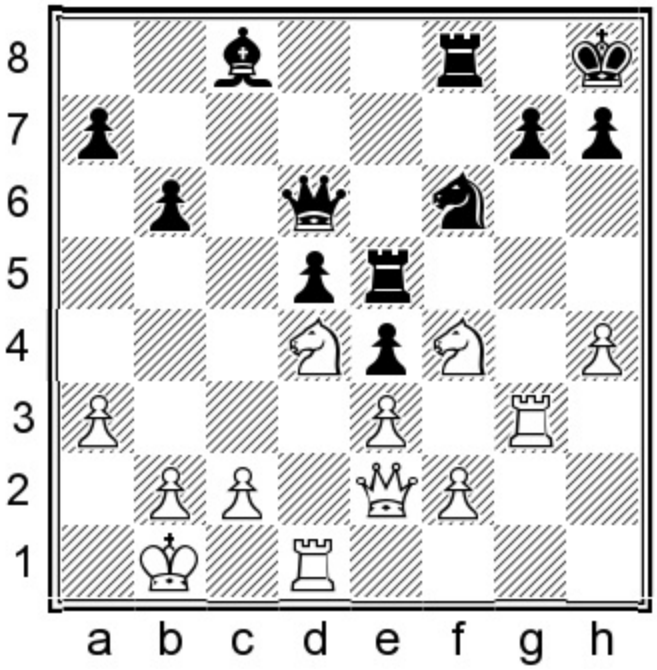
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Position after: 28.♘h3!!

28...♖f7

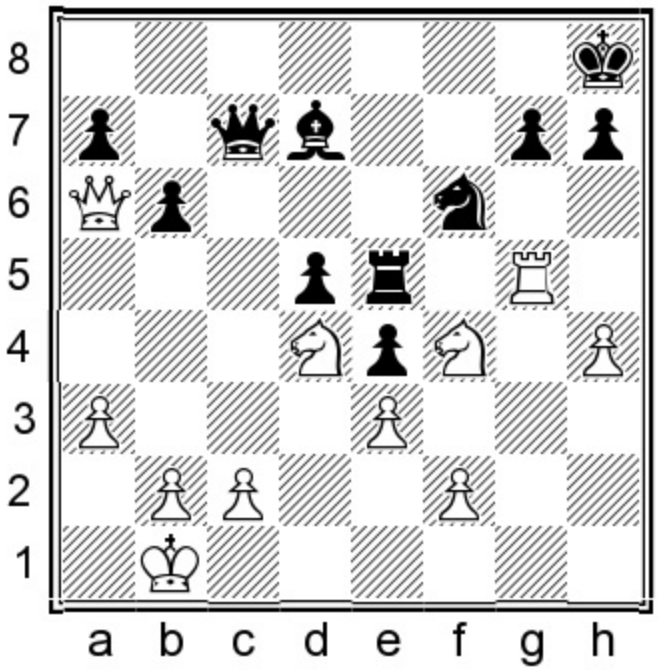
The immediate 28...♗c8 is not much better either as Black is strategically lost the moment he is not in time to trade off the 'bad' bishop for White's excellent knight. A sample line could go like this: 29.♘f4 ♖e5 30.♘d4



Position after: 30.♘d4

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first and foremost, White conclusively blocks the center by placing the knights on d4 and f4. This not only deprives Black of any counterplay on this part of the board but also absorbs him with defensive duties pertaining to the need to provide the f5-square and the d5-pawn with additional security. 30...♗d7 31.♖dg1 The second stage of White's plan is to start exerting pressure along the semi open g-file. The g7-pawn certainly represents one target that White might have in mind but White may just as well take other options into consideration. 31...♖f7 32.♖g5 A nice point. The threat is to take on e5 and then quickly install the other rook on g5 which would sooner or later result in the loss of the d5-pawn by Black. 32...♖fe7 33.♕a6 Slowly but surely Black is being stretched on both wings. Here White is not after a particular attacking idea but rather prefers to pick on the weaknesses that the opponent has all over the board. After the further 33...♕c7 34.♖xe5 ♖xe5 35.♖g5+–



Position after: 35.♖g5+–

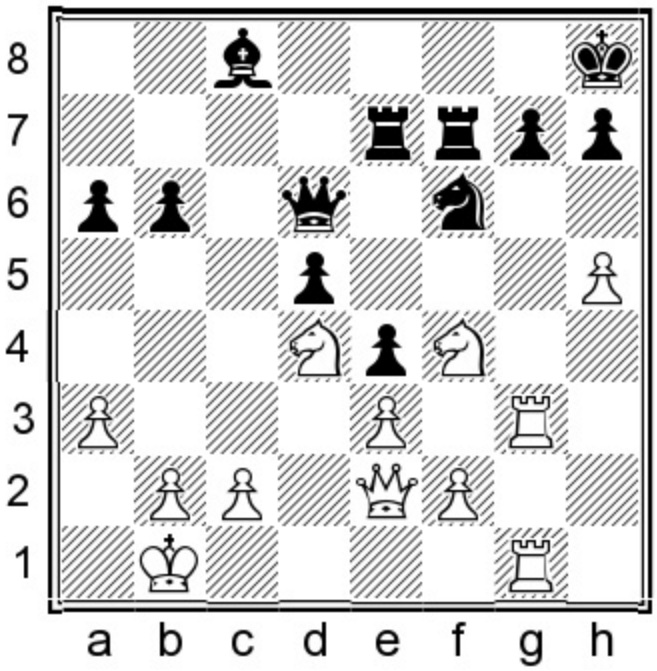
it becomes clear that Black is dropping the a7 or the d5-pawn and in any case with a lost position.

29.♘f4 ♗c8 30.♘d4 a6

Another idea for a defensive setup. From c8 the black bishop prevents both ♘d4-f5 and ♕e2-a6. Still, band aids do not fix bullet holes as White can now concentrate all of his forces on the kingside without much disturbance.

31.♖dg1 ♖ee7 32.h5

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Position after: 32.h5

In the attack, it is most advised to use all the resources you might have at your disposal. Here White's h-pawn can prove to be the decisive element tipping the scales in his favor. For example, if Black stands still, White could move it all the way to h6 and dangerously open up the g-file. If Black wants to prevent this from happening somehow, he will need to play ...h7-h6 first, but this again jeopardizes him to a possible knight fork from g6.

32...♔g8 33.♕f1!?

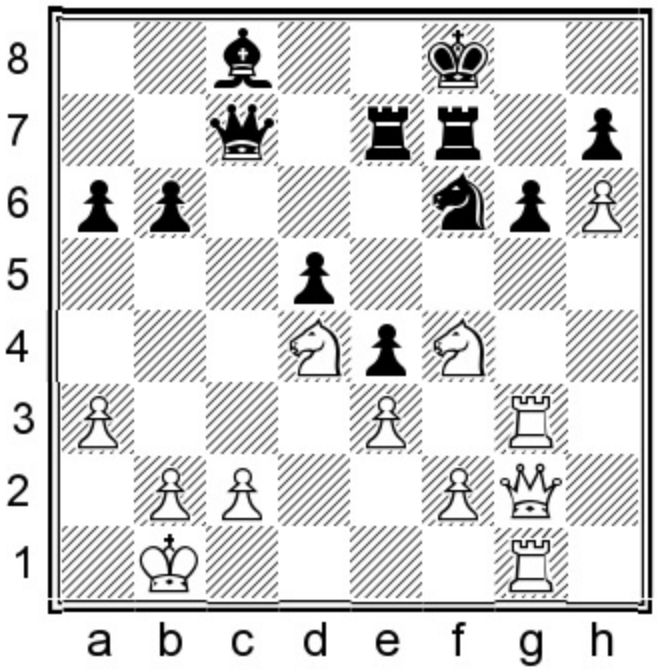
The queen is being transferred to g2 and there is very little Black can do about it.

33...♕c7 34.♕g2 ♔f8

Thanks to his splendid central control, White has been enjoying all the time in the world with his heavy pieces tripled along the sensitive g-file he is ready for action.

35.h6 g6

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Position after: 35...g6

36.♘xg6+!

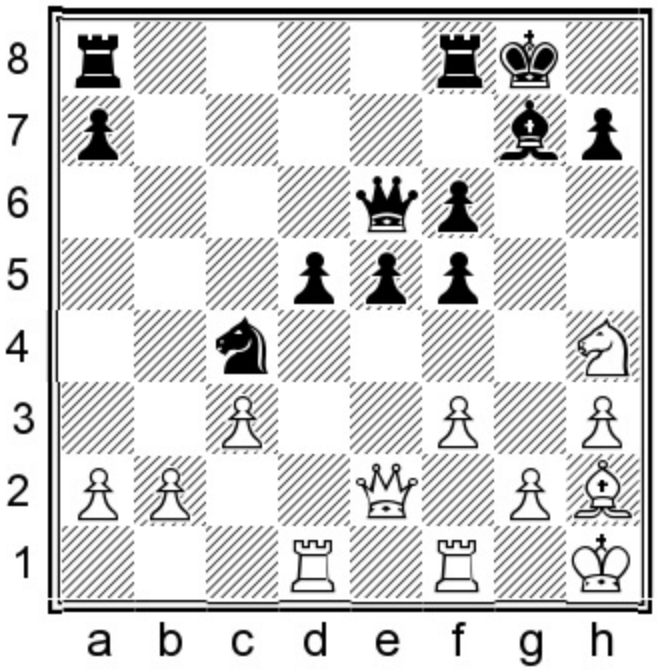
Destroying the remnants of Black's pawn shield. Now after

36...hxg6 37.♖xg6 ♔e8 38.♖g7+–

even if the black king has just managed to avoid being mated along the back rank, White will be unstoppable in guiding the h-pawn all the way to the promotion square. There is obviously more than one reason why Black eventually landed in a position like this but if I were to pick the most important one it would be the indolence of the idle light-squared bishop that makes all the difference.

19
Garcia Martin – Khotenashvili
St Petersburg 2018

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■ *23...?*

Show/Hide Solution

19
Garcia Martin, Marta (2301)
Khotenashvili, Bela (2479)
St Petersburg 2018

Statics & Dynamics
A problem-solving sacrifice

Material is equal but quite a few interesting things can be said about the structure and the piece activity of the players. With a pretty impressive central pawn mass Black enjoys a little more space. Still, the f-pawns are doubled so one might already start doubting whether she would be rather a colossus on clay legs instead. The piece placement of both sides gives rise to additional questions: why are both bishops so timid, which of the knights is stronger? The white one is standing a little bit offside so according to general principles it should be assessed as 'bad'; at the same time however, it is attacking the weak f5-pawn of Black. in order to nullify this kind of pressure Black would just love to carry out the ...f5-f4 push followed by a knight jump to e3. While that is all clear the e5-pawn is pinned so the moment the black pawn arrives on f4 it is going to be taken.

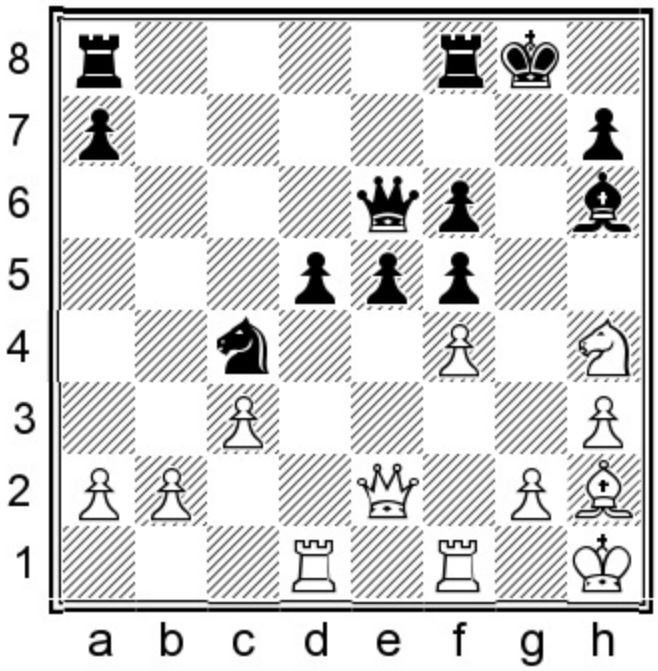
23...f4!!

Have we just not stated that this move drops a pawn? Well, yes we have, but nobody ever said that it

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is a pawn for nothing! The f5-pawn is a problem because it is weak and even indirectly spoils our bishop on g7 preventing us from opening it up with ...f5-f4. We might not be conquering the world at once, as the pawn prosaically falls, but we are at least solving the problem thus obtaining simpler play. If you cannot do great things, just do small things in a great way! Admittedly it takes quite an amount of vision and hindsight to understand what will be happening on the board after White helps herself to that pawn.

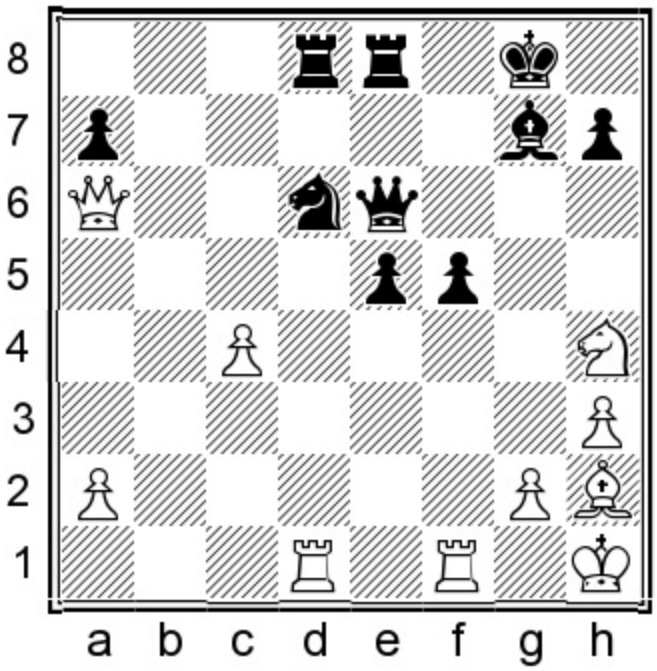
In the game, Black went for the ideologically correct 23...♗h6? intending to fork White's rooks from e3. But after 24.f4!



Position after: 24.f4!

it quickly became clear that this was never to happen. What is even worse is that ♕e2-h5 would now have dire consequences for Black. This, together with the fact that the e5-pawn is now in grave danger as well, prompted Black to return in a slightly humiliating manner with 24...♗g7 when after 25.b3 ♘d6 26.♕a6! ♖ad8 White could have sealed the opponent's fate with 27.c4! dxc4 28.bxc4 ♖fe8 29.fxe5 fxe5

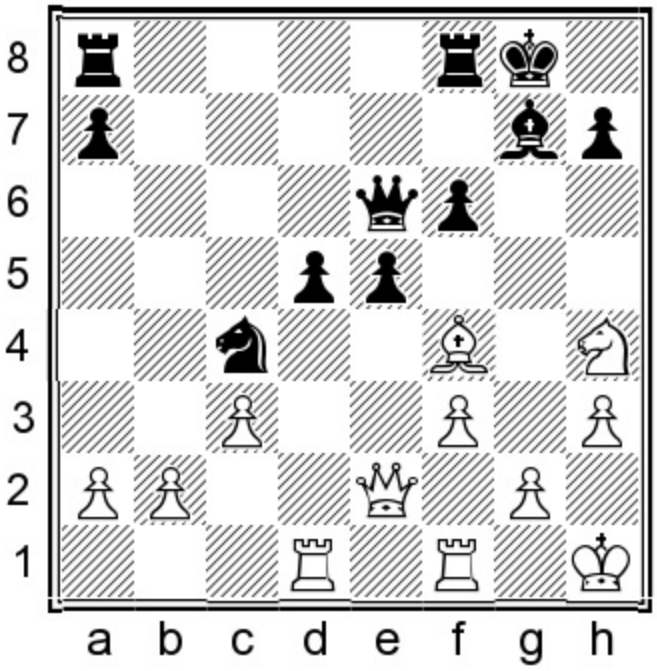
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Position after: 29...fxe5

30.♘xf5!+– and the degree to which Black is tangled here is fatal.

23...f4!! 24.♗xf4



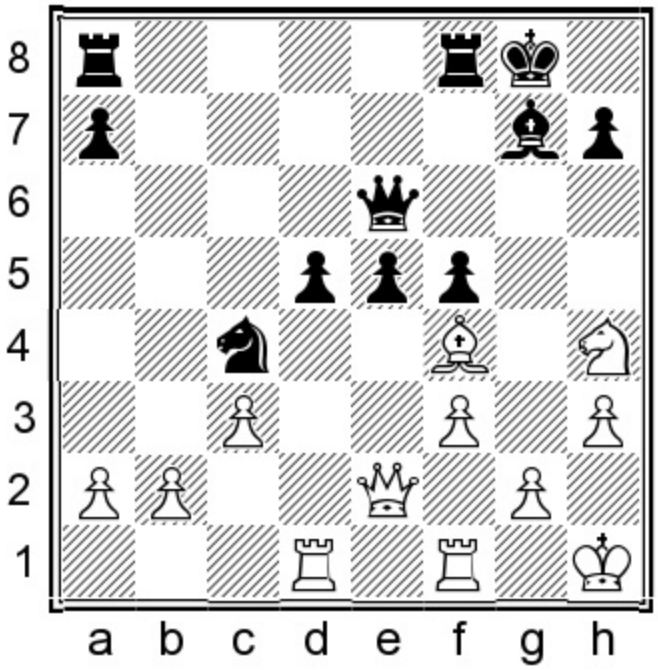
Position after: 24.♗xf4

24...f5≅

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and here we have it, the position we have been striving for when playing 23...f5-f4. There are two differences distinguishing this position from the initial one. First, the black f5-pawn is now defended and can even be pushed to f4 should the white bishop leave the said square one day. Secondly, now the h4-knight of White has transformed from predator to prey as Black has direct access thereto with this pieces, and White does not enjoy simple means of defending it. Concrete variations confirm that it is White who would have had to be careful here to maintain the equilibrium:

24...♖ae8?!, on the other hand, would have been too slow as after 25.♗c1 f5 26.b3 ♘b6 27.g4!?± White not only remains a pawn up but would also be able to install a very nice knight on f5. The power of Black's pawn sacrifice aims to take advantage of the offside position of the white knight. With this problem out of the way White could be quite optimistic about the future.



Position after: 24...f5≅

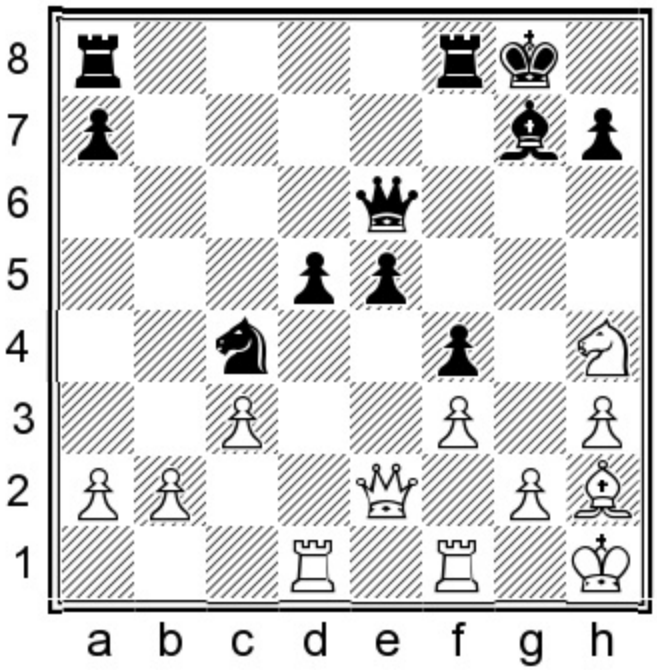
25.g4!?

The strongest response. Instead of retreating the f4-bishop at once White attempts to first of all ensure that the white knight will have some safe haven to run away to in case of danger.

Installing a knight on f5 would have actually provided White with decent chances even to continue playing on for a win should Black not respond forcefully enough.

A) 25.♗h2?! f4

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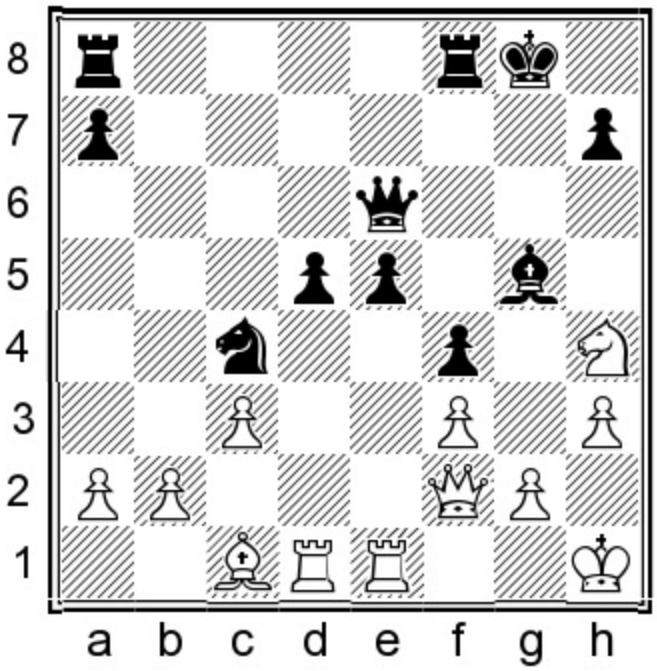


Position after: 25...f4

demonstrates all the problems haunting White in the position. The h4-knight is not only weak on the edge of the board but can be attacked by Black by more than one piece. Defending it by means of g2-g3 jeopardizes not only the h3-pawn while White constantly needs to reckon with ...♘c4-e3 coming as well. The following sample lines illustrates very well how quickly White's position can go south here: 26.♖de1 ♗f6 27.♕f2 ♗d8!∓ with the incoming ...♗d8-b6 maneuver dislodging the white queen from f2 while Black is not yet completely done with that poor h4-knight.

B) Comparably, 25.♗c1 would have already been a far better try as from c1 the bishop covers both e3 and defends the b2-pawn just in case. This would not have been the end of White's problems as after 25...f4 26.♖fe1 ♗f6 27.♕f2 ♗g5!?

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Position after: 27...♗g5!?

he would have probably had to restore the material balance by surrendering an exchange on e3 with 28.b3 ♘e3 29.♖xe3 fxe3 30.♗xe3 ♗xe3 31.♕xe3 ♕f6 32.g3 ♖ad8⇄ and computers consider this position as roughly equal, but I have some doubts regarding this evaluation. White's h3-pawn is still weak, the white knight is unable to return towards the center because of the f3-pawn hanging and Black is about to open up the position for her rooks by means of ...d5-d4. Needless to say, in such a case the black a7-pawn would have been taboo as the white queen is already desperately needed on the kingside for defensive purposes.

25...fxg4 26.fxg4

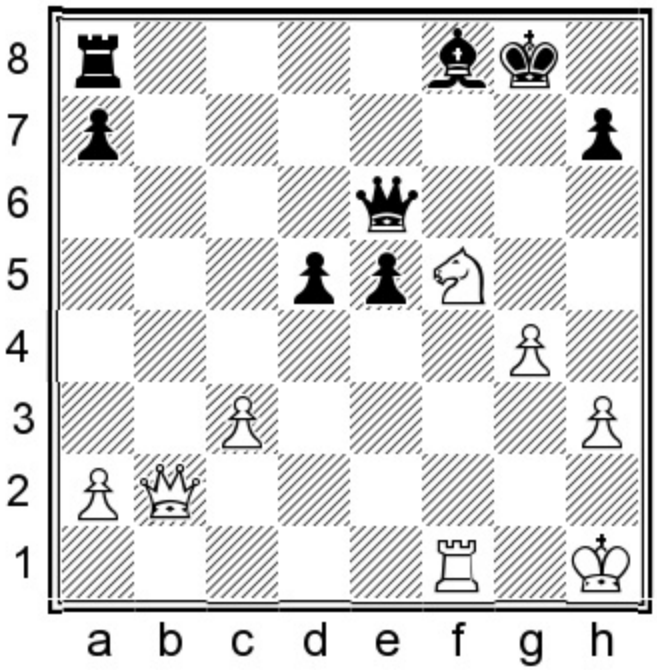
and now Black regains material with

26...♘xb2! 27.♕xb2 ♖xf4

when after

28.♘f5 ♖xf1+ 29.♖xf1 ♗f8=

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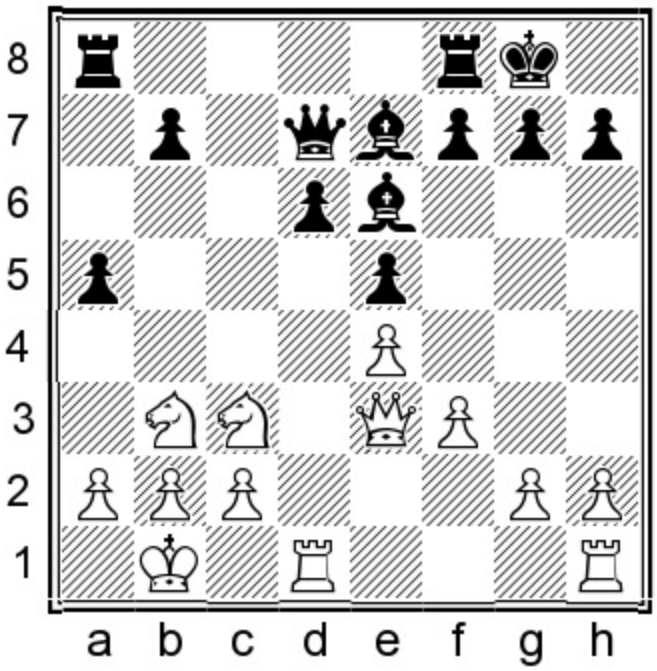


Position after: 29...♗f8=

a curious position would have arisen on the board. The f5-knight looks like an awfully strong piece and one that would be capable of landing mate to the black monarch as soon as the white queen joins the party (either along the seventh rank or via g5). At the same time, the knight actually thwarts the activity of its own rook by blocking the f-file. Also, the black bishop does a great job on f8 of preventing the knight from coming any closer thus being the king's main defender. If we add that that the white king happens to be a tad exposed as well, we can understand that although White can still keep on going, objectively speaking the position would have still remained balanced.

20
Shyam – Bashirli
Budapest 2019

chesstouring.com



□ *16.?*

Show/Hide Solution

20
Shyam, Sundar (2519)
Bashirli, Nail (2333)
Budapest 2019

Weakness
Weakness-oriented planning

Material is equal but there are some imbalances in the position that are definitely worth discussing. Black has the bishop pair but only the light square bishop is leading an enjoyable life. In return White has a pair of knights but this deficiency (at least by standards of adherents of computer-based learning) is compensated for by a strong outpost on d5 to which White can jump even at this precise moment. But is this exactly what White should do right here and now? What about Black's plans of carrying out a pawn march on the queenside with ...b7-b5-b4 and/or ...a5-a4?

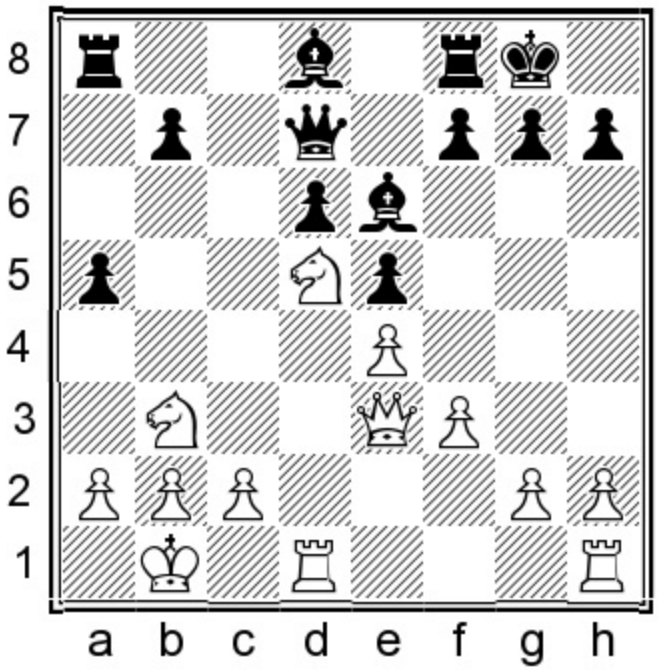
16.♘c5!

As unbelievable as it sounds, only this move grants White an edge here. One of the logical pillars of White's idea is to understand which of the two knights is the worse piece, which one of the bishops of the opponent is better and have them traded off for each other. You might be wondering what prospects remain for the c3-knight when an exchange on e6 takes place and Black's new e6-pawn

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prevents our knight from being installed on the juicy d5-square... an answer is soon to come!

In the game, White decided in favor of 16.♘d5 which is a perfectly logical move. White occupies a crucial central square with his knight, blocks the opponent's light-squared bishop, and even threatens a fork on b6 for the moment. All true, the only problem is that after 16...♗d8

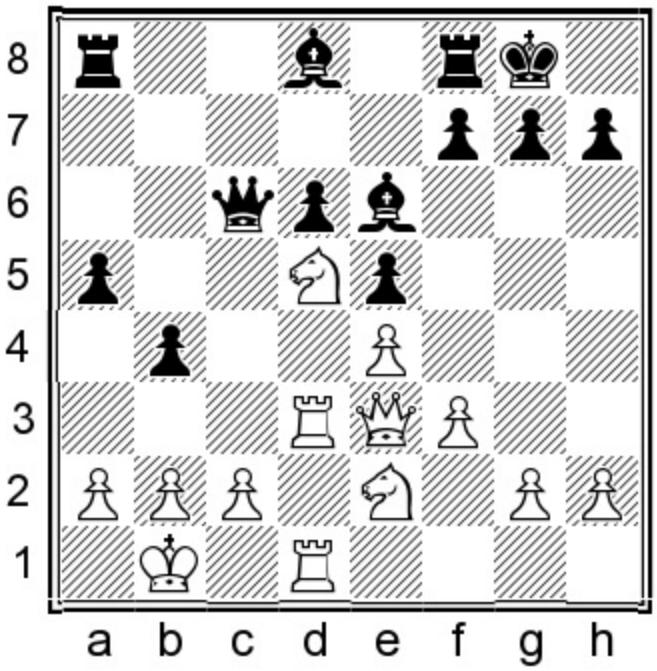


Position after: 16...♗d8

A) 17.♘b6? does not win a pawn because of 17...♗xb6 18.♕xb6 ♖a6! which furthermore allows Black to begin with his own plan on the queenside which is to push the pawns and support them from behind with the heavy pieces. 19.♕f2 ♕c7 20.♘c1 ♖c8 21.♖d2 b5 22.♖hd1 b4→ Black's prospects would have already been more promising thanks to the pressure that is to be exerted along the c-file, a potential pawn storm against the white monarch, but also the superiority of the black bishop against the white knight.

B) 17.♘c1 ♕c6 18.♖d3 b5 19.♖hd1 b4 20.♘e2

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Position after: 20.♘e2

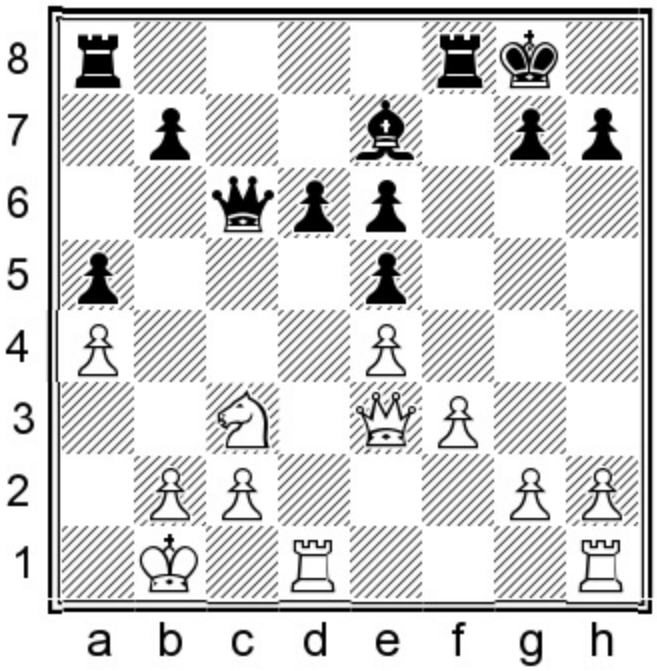
White's position looks quite well but in reality is a paper tiger. His knight on d5 sure is awesome but what it is actually doing there and where is it heading? If it cannot go anywhere, it simultaneously blocks the possibility for White to hit the d6-pawn. Now Black could have emphasized that only he is able to improve his position by playing 20...f5!∓ with the idea of transferring the f8-rook via f7 to b7 and then carrying on with a possible queenside onslaught. Taking on f5 would have immensely profited the black light-squared bishop so White has apparently nothing better but to sit and wait to see how the game develops. In other words there is no good news for White.

16.♘c5! ♕c6 17.♘xe6 fxe6

True, the d5-square is a lost case for White, but we have something else in mind.

18.a4!

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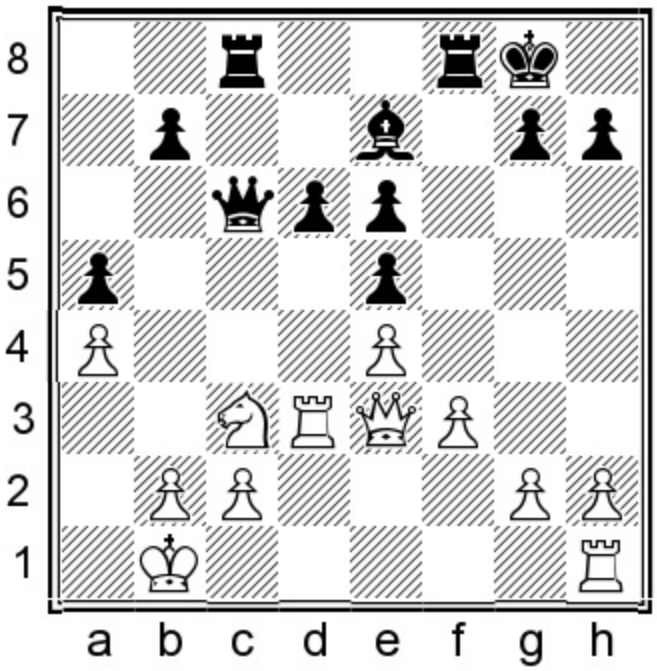


Position after: 18.a4!

The real idea behind the transformations that White commenced two moves ago. No points for you if you did not see the line until this moment. What White intended from the start is to leave Black with the worse of two bishops, focusing later on amplifying pressure against the backward d6-pawn. For this to be possible White needs to win the b5-square for the knight and thus not only make it possible to attack the said pawn effectively, but also to prevent Black from launching counterplay by means of ...b7-b5. Starting now Black's position becomes unpleasant as he can do nothing against White's endeavors to magnify the squeeze against d6.

18...♖ac8 19.♖d3

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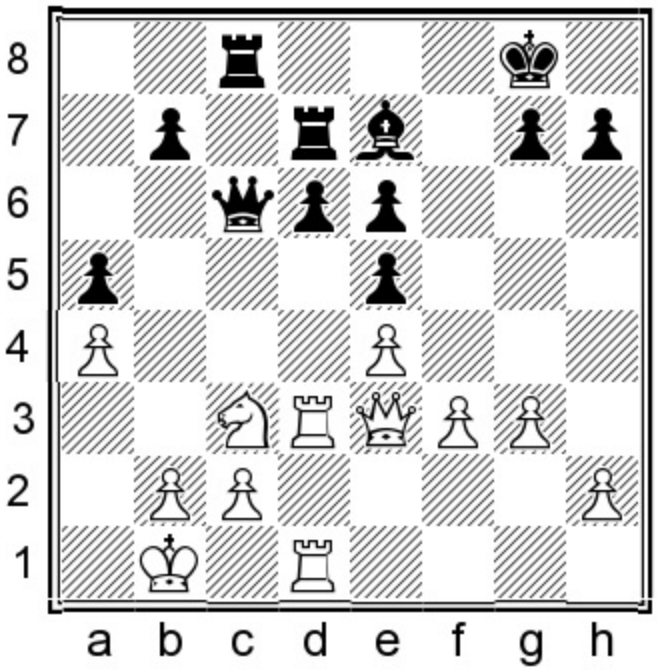
Position after: 19.♖d3

In theory the best way of doubling or tripling heavy pieces along an open file implies the presence of the queen behind the rooks. In this position Black is so passive and deprived of counterplay that we would not even mind making our queen a 'Malcolm in the Middle', that is putting it between the rooks to d2.

19...♕c5

A) Maintaining queens on board would have been another approach for Black. One might consider this to be the least of two evils as queens could enhance the chances of a potential counterattack should White go wrong at some point. Sounds good but does not work. With accurate play the dominating side tends to first immobilize the cramped opponent completely and then, using the sounder communication between his own forces, attempts to generate yet another weakness somewhere else on the board. The following sample lines indicate nicely what kind of dangers would be awaiting Black in such a case: 19...♖fd8 20.♖hd1 ♖d7 21.g3!?

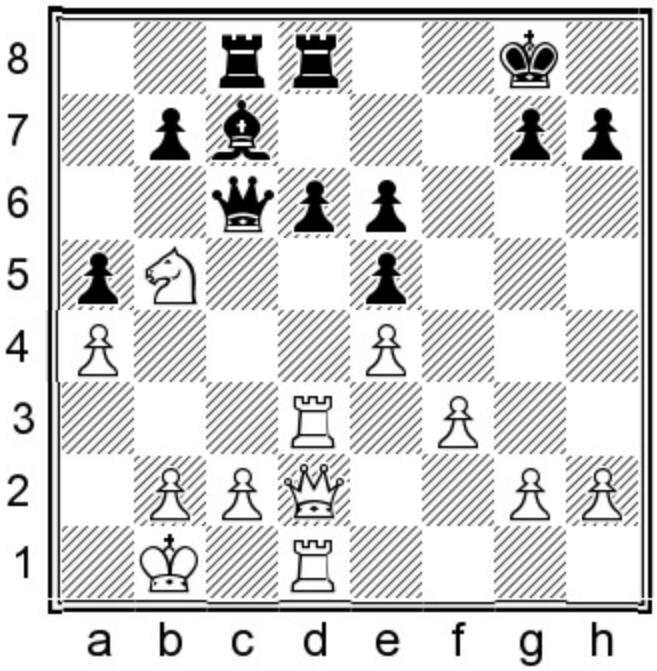
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Position after: 21.g3!?

Black can barely move so now comes the time to open up the thematic second front. 21...h6 22.♕e2 ♔h7 23.f4 and now, in case of a capture on f4, White would be launching a possible attack along the newly opened g-file. Should Black rather prefer to reinforce the e5-pawn with 23...♗f6 White is going to switch plans and instead gain full control over the d5-square by playing 24.f5+– with a decisive strategic advantage the moment the white knight reaches d5.

B) Finally, 19...♗d8? is a move with the right idea (activating the bishop via b6 to c5 or d4), but for which he simply lacks the time because of the intermediate 20.♕d2 ♗c7 21.♘b5 ♖fd8 22.♖d1+–



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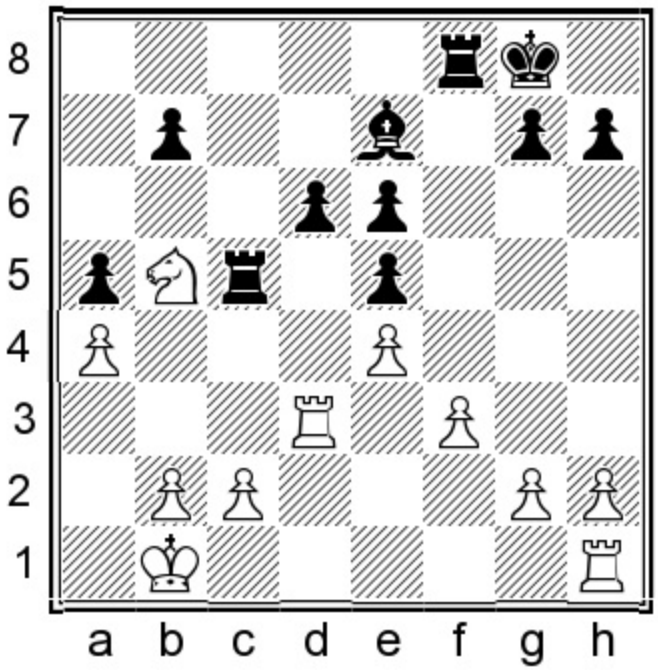
Position after: 22.♖d1+−

when the d6-pawn would soon become White's first victim.

20.♕xc5

A simple and effective solution as White exchanges the queens and this way makes sure that he is from now on playing exclusively for two results. Retaining the queens on board was of course possible but already less appealing as the black queen potentially coming to b4 would be grinding our gears whenever we wanted to hop with the knight to b5 (the a4-pawn would be hanging).

20...♖xc5 21.♘b5



Position after: 21.♘b5

If you see a weakness you already happen to have a plan. The d6-pawn is backward so White uses the very first opportunity to pressurize it. The only thing to remember before you carry on with your plan in such a situation is to make sure that the opponent does not have any attractive pawn breaks at his disposal that may ease his defensive task, or maybe even eliminate the weakness entirely.

21...♖d8

The point behind White's last move is that now after 21...d5 22.exd5 exd5 Black would have managed to improve his pawn structure significantly only in order to have to agree to have it fixed disadvantageously on the dark squares after something like 23.♘c3 d4 24.♘e4 ♖c4 25.♖b3!± when White would not only be infiltrating the opponent's camp along the light squares, but also dominating the game as a whole which has now reached the state of the 'good' knight versus 'bad' bishop.

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scenario.

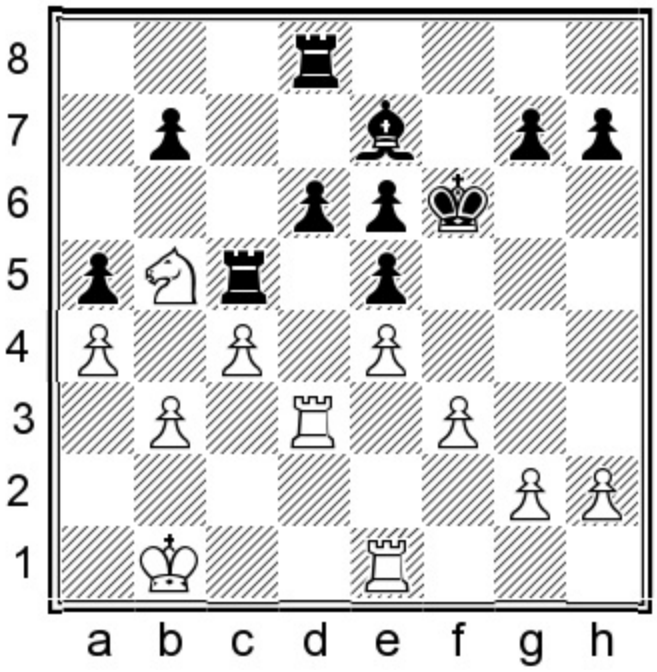
22.♖e1!?

A nice, prophylactic move. White anticipates the intended ...d6-d5 break from Black's side. Should something like this take place now Black would be forced to choose between two evils. Either dropping the e5-pawn or retaining a damaged central pawn structure after twice recapturing with the rooks on d5. Now after

22...♔f7

White can increase the tension even more by fixing the d6-pawn for good with

23.b3 ♔f6 24.c4±



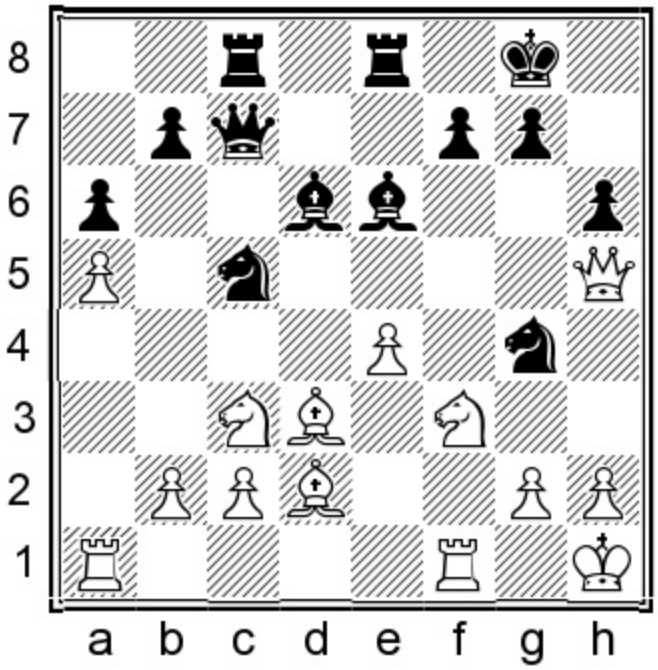
Position after: 24.c4±

after which Black is strategically lost. The reason for this is that the weakness of the d6-pawn hurts Black not only as such but above all forces his other pieces to focus on its passive defense. In the meantime, White will be slowly trying to open up the position on the kingside so that after massive pawn exchanges the black king on f6 could also start feeling vulnerable.

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21
Bilguun – Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son
Makati 2018



■ *20...?*

Show/Hide Solution

21
Bilguun, Sumiya (2497)
Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son (2641)
Makati 2018

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Intertwining anticipation with attacking ideas

Black is a pawn down, but this does not seem to be the end of the list of his problems. With ideas like ♘c3-d5 coming in just about a second and White's pieces generally pointing towards his king, it is self-evident that Black cannot afford to waste any time. However, there are certain deficiencies visible in White's position at first sight. The e4-pawn is isolated and the white queen, although quite

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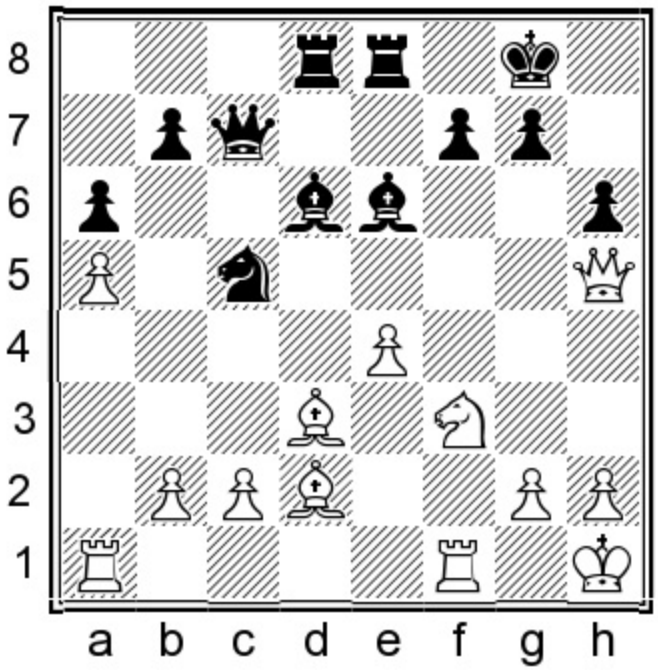
active for the moment, has barely one square to go to should it get attacked. Additionally, Black can neutralize the attacking potential of the white d3-bishop by simply capturing it with the knight. Is that of any help for Black though?

20...♕d8!!

A stellar move! Black wants to play ...g7-g6, technically forcing White to move the queen to h4. Then again this move drops an important pawn on h2 leaving White almost completely helpless. If we add to this that the dreaded ♘c3-d5 motif is no longer a threat this must have surely come as a cold shower for White.

A) Other options fail to impress or fall short upfront. e.g. 20...♘f6?! 21.♕h4↑ is obviously to no avail as the white queen is now perfectly safe and ready to participate in a possible attack after something like e4-e5.

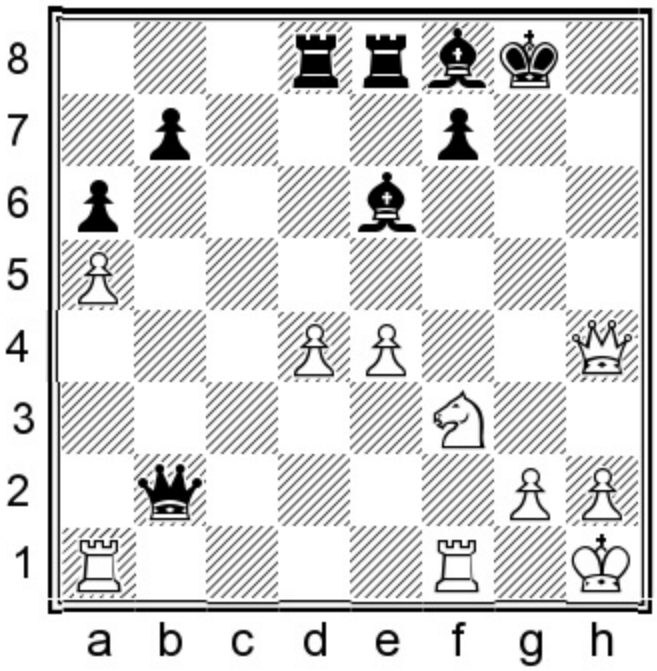
B) 20...♖cd8 is a bit more to the point, whereas after 21.♘d5 ♗xd5 22.♕xg4 ♗e6 23.♕h5



Position after: 23.♕h5

it is still far from clear how Black wishes to obtain adequate counterplay for the material deficit. 23...♘xd3 [23...♗f8 24.♖ac1!= would have amounted to a fancy way of anticipating Black's threat of taking on d3.] 24.cxd3 ♕c2 and now after 25.♗xh6! gxh6 26.♕xh6 White survives thanks to a timely counterattack against the black king: 26...♗f8 27.♕h4 ♕xb2 28.d4!

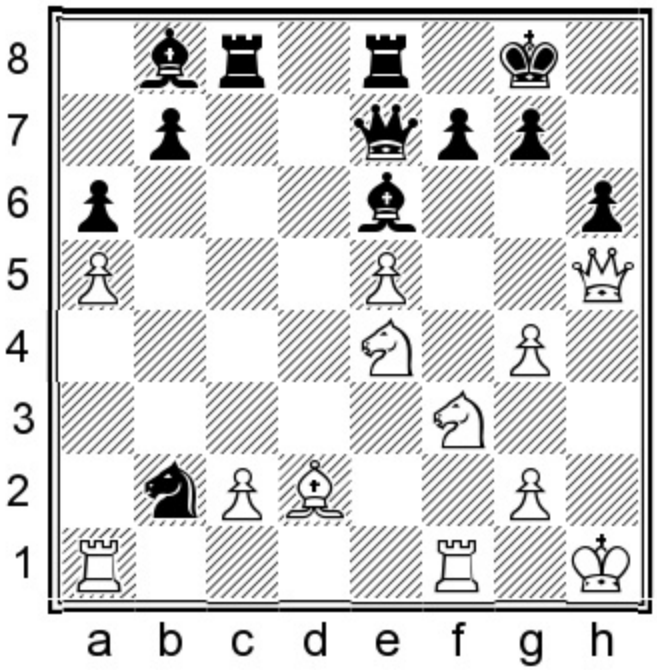
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Position after: 28.d4!

cutting off the black queen from joining the defense of the king 28...♗c4 29.♘g5 ♗g7 30.♕h7+ ♔f8 31.♕g6 ♖e7 32.♘h7+ ♔g8 33.♘f6+ ♔f8 34.♘h7+= with a perpetual check.

C) By comparison 20...♕e7 following the same old idea is much less effective: 21.e5 ♗b8 22.h3 ♘xd3 and now after 23.hxg4!? ♘xb2 24.♘e4↑



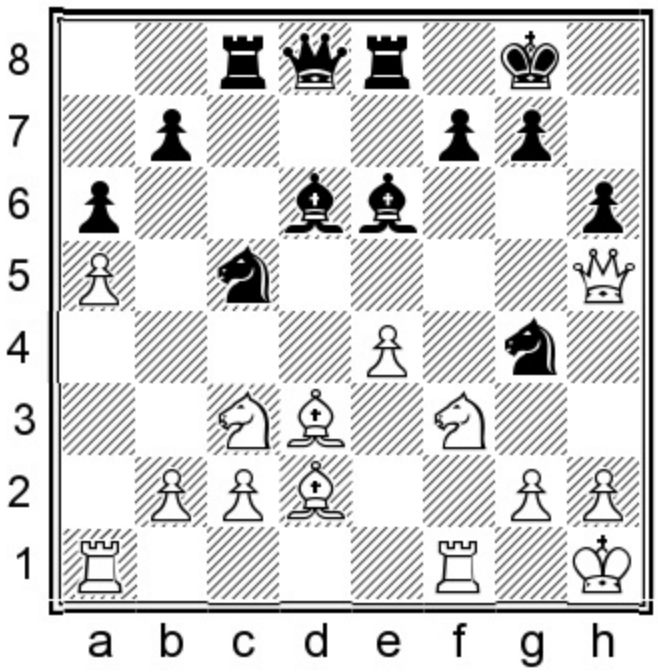
Position after: 24.♘e4↑

with moves like g4-g5 or ♘e4-f6+ coming into consideration as a logical follow-up, it is no longer so

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clear who is the hunter and who is the prey.

20...♕d8!!



Position after: 20...♕d8!!

21.h3

The only move to keep on fighting as White removes the pawn from the endangered h2-square and also forces the black knight back to f6 so that it covers the h4-square for the queen with its own body. But as we will see in a moment, Black is prepared for that.

A) 21.♘d5? is met by 21...g6 22.♕h4 ♕xh4 23.♘xh4 ♗xd5 24.exd5 ♗xh2 and with ...♗h2-g3 as well as ...♖c8-d8 looming over White his position is defenseless, e.g. 25.♗f4 ♗xf4 26.♖xf4 h5 27.♘f3 ♖cd8–+ and the d5-pawn is falling.

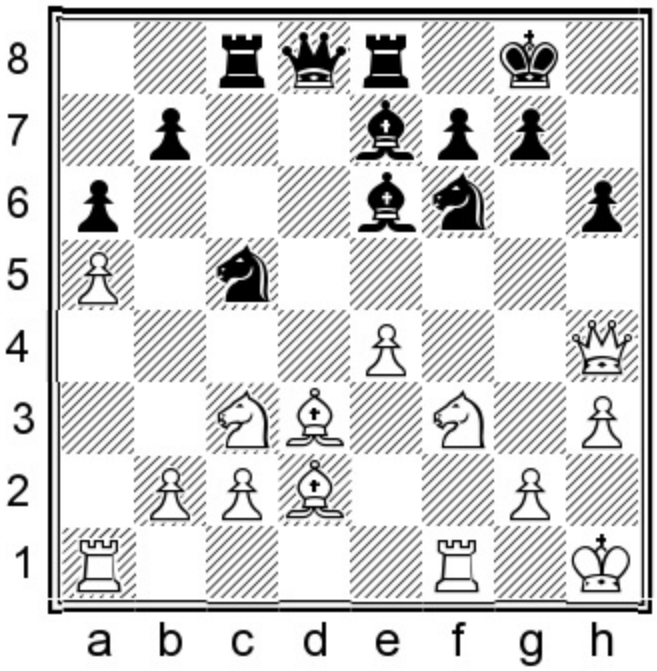
B) 21.e5? Is also insufficient due to 21...♘xd3 22.exd6 [22.cxd3 ♗e7!–+ and the white queen is trapped.] 22...♖c5! 23.♕h4 ♕xh4 24.♘xh4 ♘xb2–+ after which White is in dire straits.

21...♘f6

Sadly, in the game Black opted for 21...g6 which is not bad but simply throws away the biggest chunk of the advantage.

22.♕h4 ♗e7!

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Position after: 22...♗e7!

With this refined coordination motif Black threatens both ...♘c5xd3 and ...♘f6xe4. In either case Black would not only be restoring material balance, but also obtaining the bishop pair as a bonus. Sample lines confirm that Black is already starting to be considerably better here:

23.e5

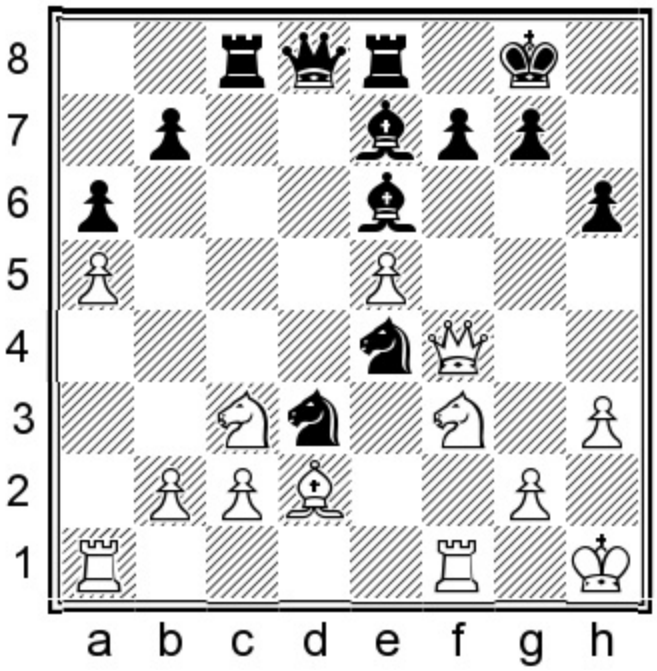
23.♕g3 ♘xd3 24.cxd3 ♕xd3∓ grants Black a solid edge especially as the tempting 25.♗xh6?! can now be forcefully met by 25...♘h5 26.♕e5 ♖c5! 27.♘d5 ♗xd5 28.♕xh5 ♕xe4 29.♖ae1 ♕h7 30.♕h4! ♗e6 31.♕a4 ♖d8 32.♗e3 ♖c4–+ and with Black having consolidated the position it is only a matter of time before he would start to get interested in White's weak queenside pawns, or maybe even the light squares close to the white king.

23...♘fe4 24.♕f4

24.♕e1 ♘xc3 25.♗xc3 ♘xd3 26.cxd3 ♕xd3∓ when the more vulnerable pawn structure and weakened light squares cause White much anxiety.

24...♘xd3

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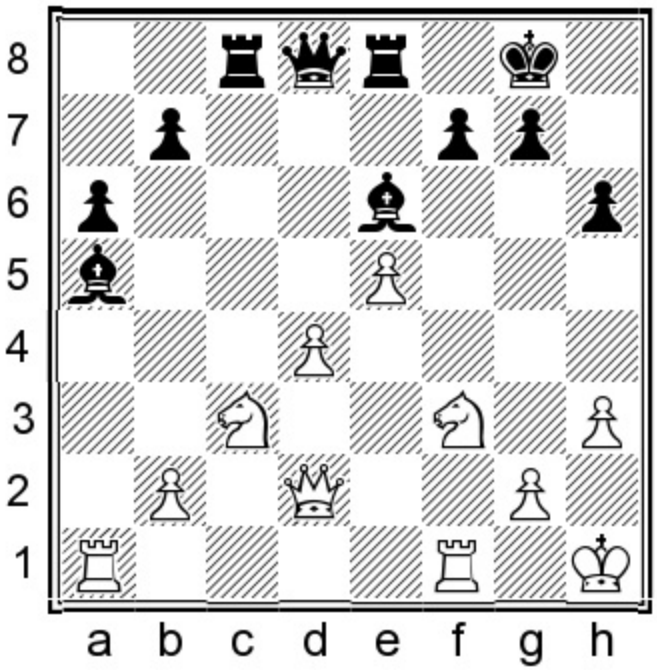


Position after: 24...♘xd3

25.cxd3

Now 25.♕xe4 ♘xb2 26.♕xb7 ♘c4 27.♖fd1 ♕c7 28.♕xc7 ♖xc7∓ leaves White still a pawn up but with far too many pawn weaknesses than he could possibly cope with in the long run.

25...♘xd2!? 26.♕xd2 ♗b4 27.d4 ♗xa5∓

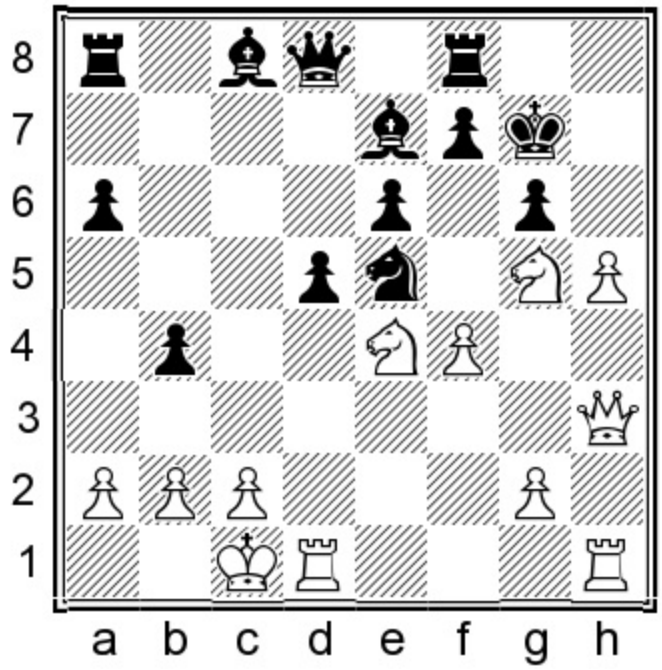


Position after: 27...♗xa5∓

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when material is equal, but Black obtained the ‘classical’ bishop pair which allows him not only to safely block the white pawn center, but also one day to exchange the dark-squared one on c3 in order to create a supported passed pawn on the queenside. With this being just one of the possibilities at his disposal it is only Black who could be better here.

22
Milliet – Hoolt
Germany 2018



□ *20.?*

Show/Hide Solution

22
Milliet, Sophie (2389)
Hoolt, Sarah (2355)
Germany 2018

Attack & Defense
Rules of time and coordination in the attack

This position stems from the 3.♘c3 French Defense. White has just carried out the classical bishop sacrifice on h7 and is on the verge of opening the h-file with a fatal consequence for Black’s king. At

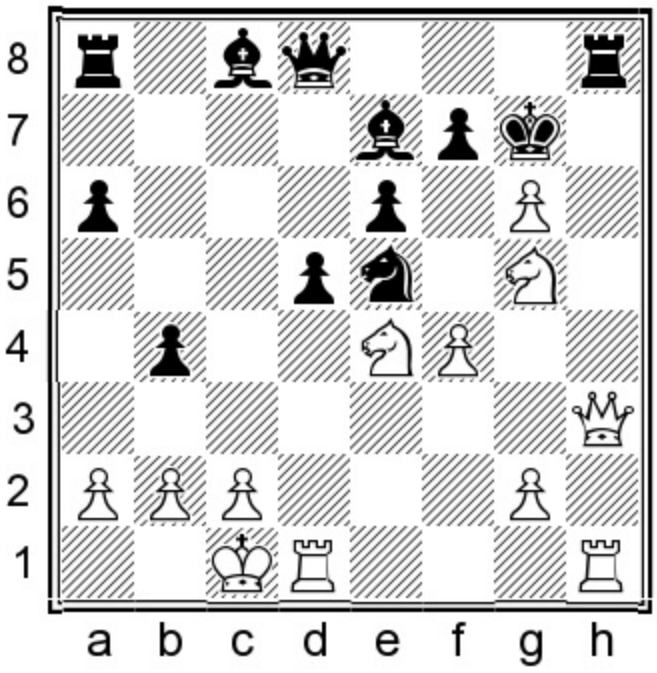
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the same time, Black is not only a full piece up but has her forces on standby ready to reinforce the leftovers of the black king's defensive entanglements. Taking on g6 and landing mate on h7 seems like the right thing to do. But appearances in chess, as in life, may be deceitful. With the Attack/Defense Ratio oscillating somewhere between '0' and '1' in White's favor, how do you assess her chances for success?

20.♕g3!!

It is relatively easy to impress the chess audience nowadays. The best recipe is to throw everything you have against the enemy king and mate him in a vehement attack. Here White had a chance for immortality by mating an opponent who is apparently ready to embrace the attack but also commencing the attack by seemingly wasting time on a move that dismantles her deadly battery along the h-file. As we know by now the devil lies in the details. Concrete calculation proves that opening up the h-file immediately would have been counterproductive. By first shifting the queen a little bit to the left White would have not only improved her coordination (letting the rook go to h7 first) but would have also enabled her to seriously think about capturing the e5-knight as the g5-knight is now covered). Additionally, the white queen does not fully give up participation in the attack this way as she still keeps an eye on g6 and the black king. In other words, speed is of essence in attacking positions but only if the onslaught is going in the right direction.

A) Playing on general considerations with 20.hxg6? is tempting and in fact happened in the game but after 20...♖h8

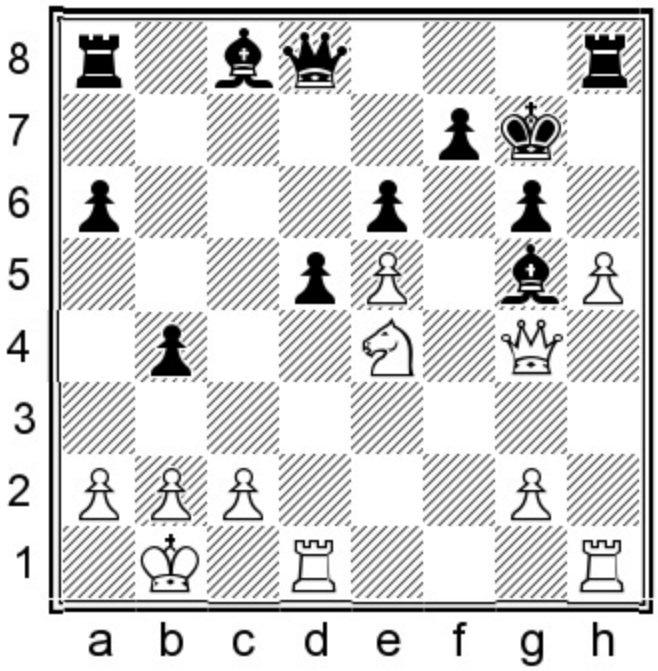


Position after: 20...♖h8

the black rook successfully joins the defense forcing massive exchanges and thus depriving White of any hopes of success. 21.♕xh8+ ♕xh8 22.♖xh8 ♔xh8 23.gxf7 ♔g7 24.fxe5 dxe4 25.♘xe4 ♔xf7–+

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B) On the other hand, 20.fxe5? represents a bad exchange as it simultaneously reduces White's attacking potential after 20...♗xg5+ 21.♔b1 ♖h8 22.♕g4

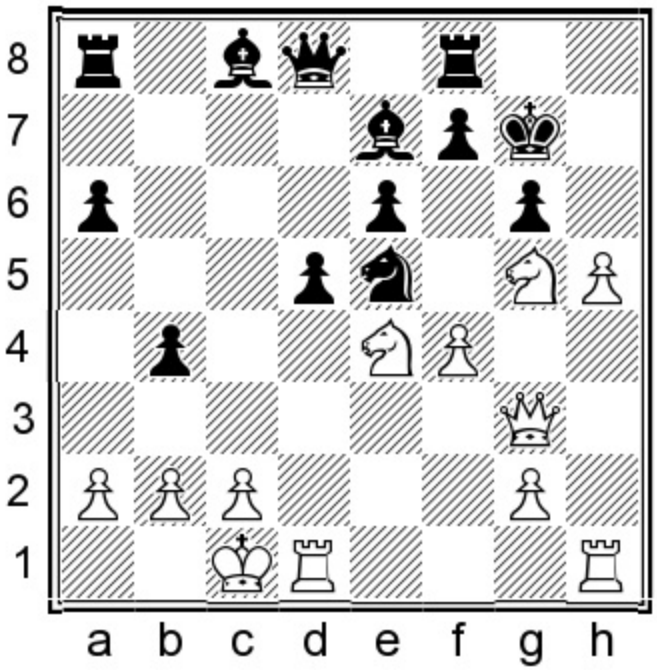


Position after: 22.♕g4

and now 22...dxe4! 23.♖xd8 ♗xd8 24.♕xe4 ♖b8 25.h6+ ♔h7 26.♕f4 ♖b7–+ leads to a position in which a rook accompanied by two bishops has to eventually overpower the solitary white queen. It is naturally a standard idea to return a small chunk of material collected along the way for the sake of repelling the opponent's attack.

20.♕g3!!

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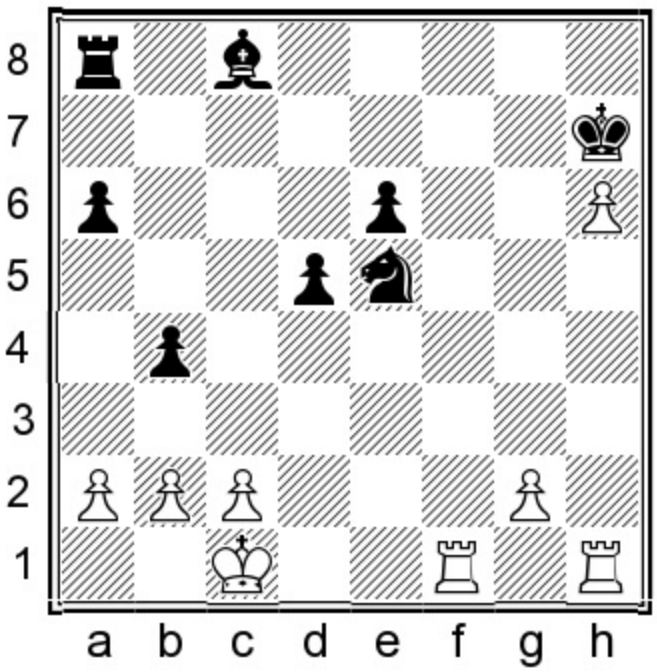


Position after: 20.♕g3!!

20...♗xg5

The most logical follow-up. Black eliminates one of White's attacking pieces.

A) 20...f6 fails miserably to the remarkable 21.♘h7! with both the e5-knight and the g6-pawn falling too quickly for Black to be able to respond. She could still try to defend with 21...g5 but White crashes through with 22.♘xf8 ♕xf8 23.fxg5 ♔h7 24.♘xf6+ ♗xf6 25.gxf6 ♕xf6 26.♖df1 ♕g7 27.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 28.h6+ ♔h7

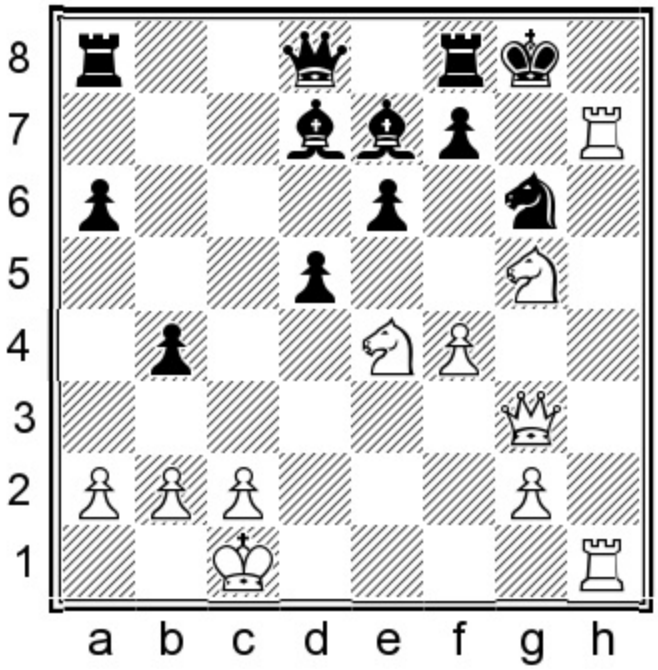


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Position after: 28...♔h7

and now the cherry on the pie in form of 29.♖h5!+– leaves Black defenseless against the march of White's h-pawn combined with infiltration along the seventh rank.

B) The alternative 20...♗d7 actualizes the threat of taking on e4, but with the White's heavy pieces invading along the h-file Black would probably not be in a position to grab any more material: 21.hxg6 ♘xg6 22.♖h7+ ♔g8 23.♖dh1!



Position after: 23.♖dh1!

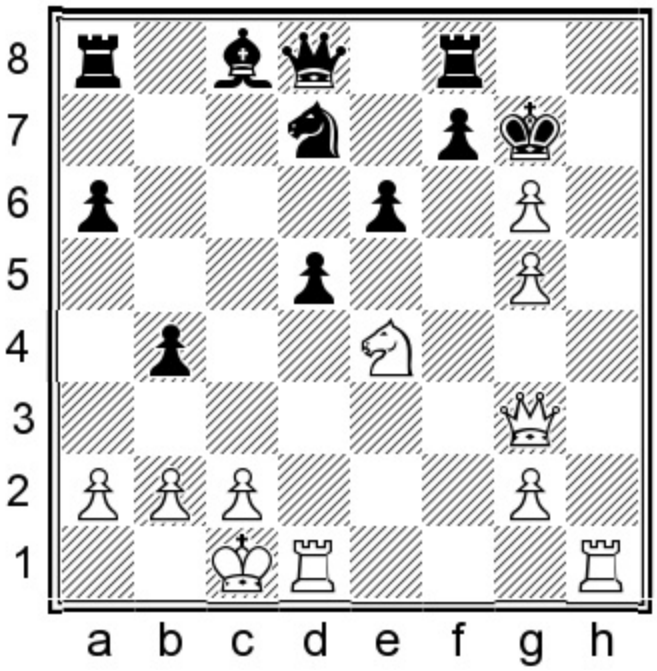
23...♗xg5 [23...dxe4 24.♖h8+! ♘xh8 25.♕h4+– with irresistible mating threats all the same.] 24.fxg5 dxe4 and now after 25.♖h8+! ♘xh8 26.♕h4 Black would be forced to part with plenty of material in order to avoid mate. Even giving up the queen is insufficient to satisfy White's hunger: 26...♕xg5+ 27.♕xg5+ ♘g6 28.♕h6 ♖fc8 29.♕h7+ ♔f8 30.♖f1+– and the knight falls as well.

21.fxg5!?

Best from the practical perspective as now White can not only take on e5, but also ideas like ♘e4-f6 have appeared out of nowhere.

21...♘d7 22.hxg6

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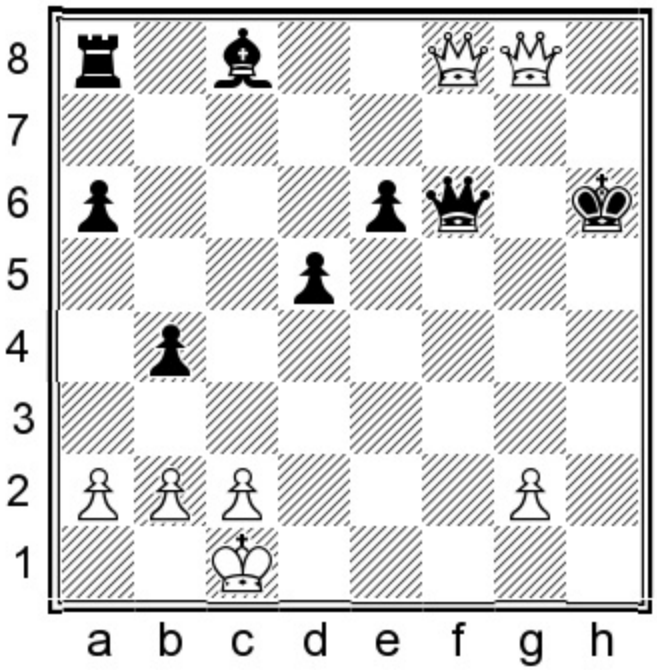


Position after: 22.hxg6

22...dxe4

The most tenacious move, but still not enough to stop White's attack.

A) 22...♖h8 does not help because of 23.♘f6 ♖xh1 24.♖xh1 ♘xf6 25.gxf6+ ♕xf6 26.♖h7+ ♔g8 27.gxf7+ ♔xh7 28.♕g8+ ♔h6 29.f8=♕++–

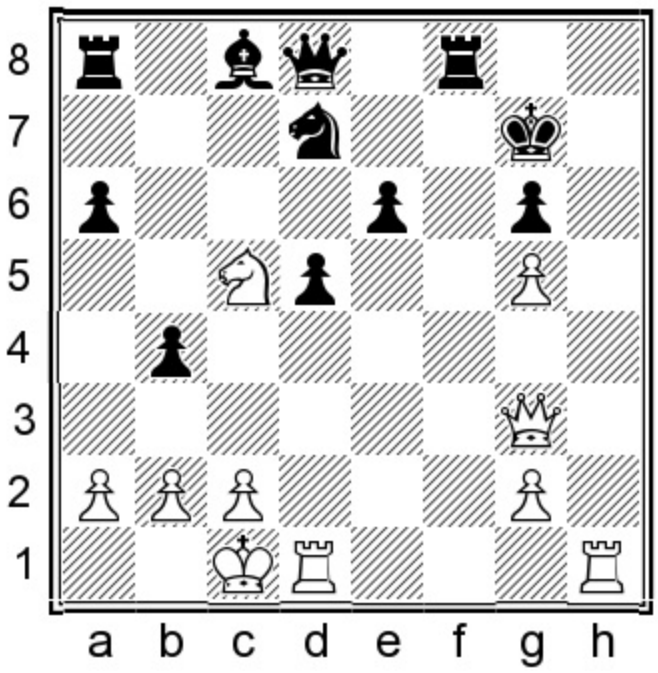


Position after: 29.f8=♕++–

chesstouring.com

whereas after

B) 22...fxg6 White wins thanks to the fancy 23.♘c5!! decisively deflecting the black knight from controlling e5.



Position after: 23.♘c5!!

The point being that after 23...♕e7 24.♘xd7 ♗xd7 25.♕e5+ ♔f7 26.♖df1+ ♔e8 27.♖h8+– the black f8-rook is overloaded, and huge material losses are inevitable.

23.♖xd7!

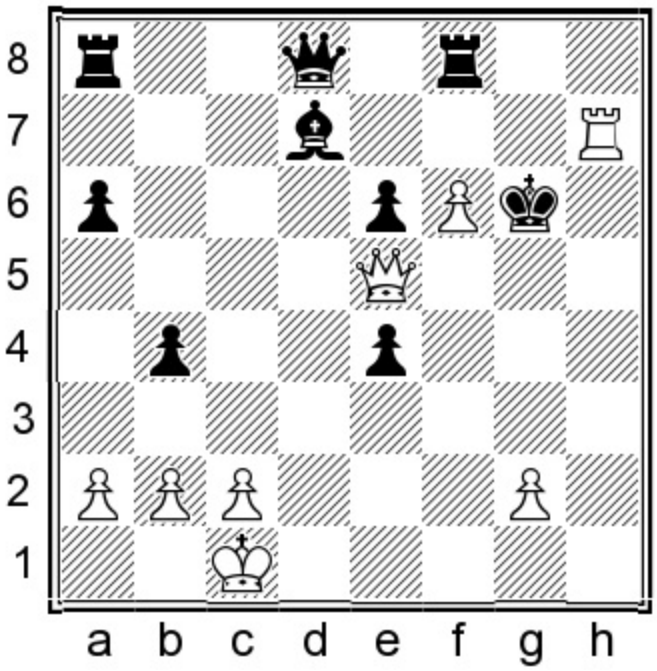
One way or another, White secures the vital e5-square for her queen.

23...♗xd7 24.♕e5+ f6 25.♖h7+ ♔g8

and now after

25...♔xg6 26.gxf6!+–

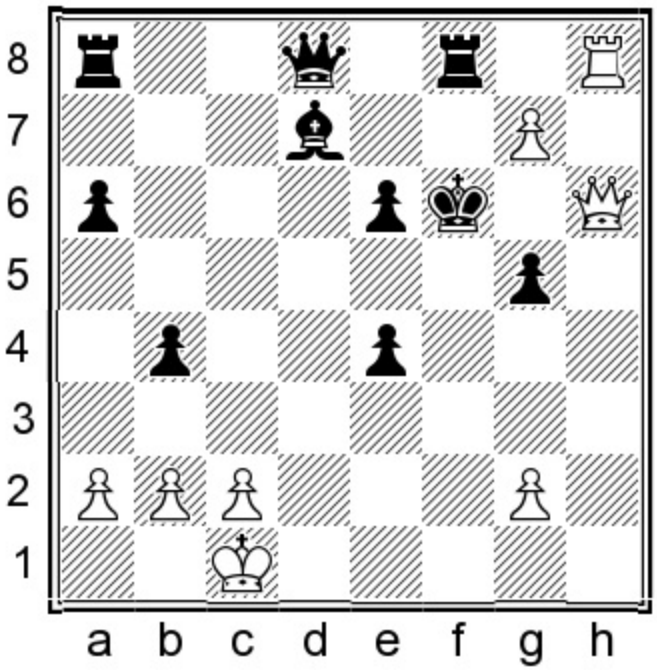
chesstouring.com



Position after: 26.gxf6!+–

would have led to a picturesque position in which Black could even be two rooks and a bishop up but still gets mated.

26.♕h2! fxg5 27.♖h8+ ♔g7 28.♕h6+ ♔f6 29.g7++–

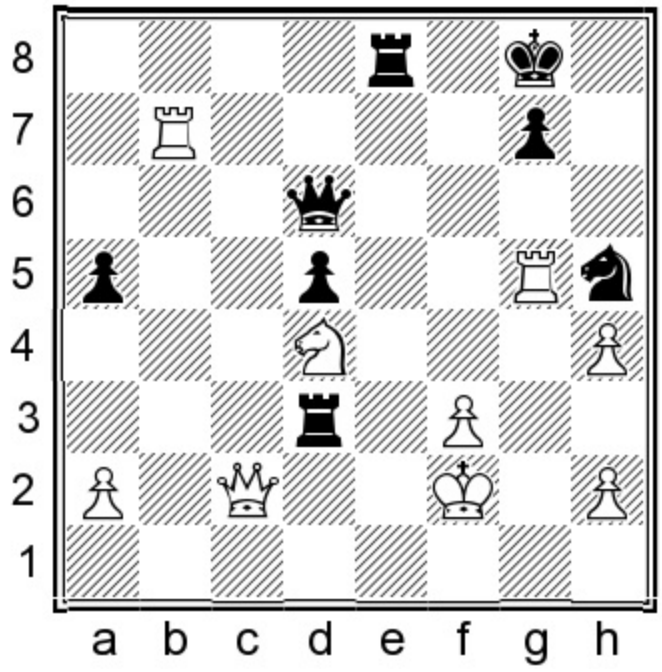


Position after: 29.g7++–

White wins by virtue of material.

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23
Moranda – Przewoznik
Wroclaw 2014



□ *46.?*

Show/Hide Solution

23
Moranda, Wojciech (2589)
Przewoznik, Jan (2381)
Wroclaw 2014

Coordination
Time & Coordination (II)

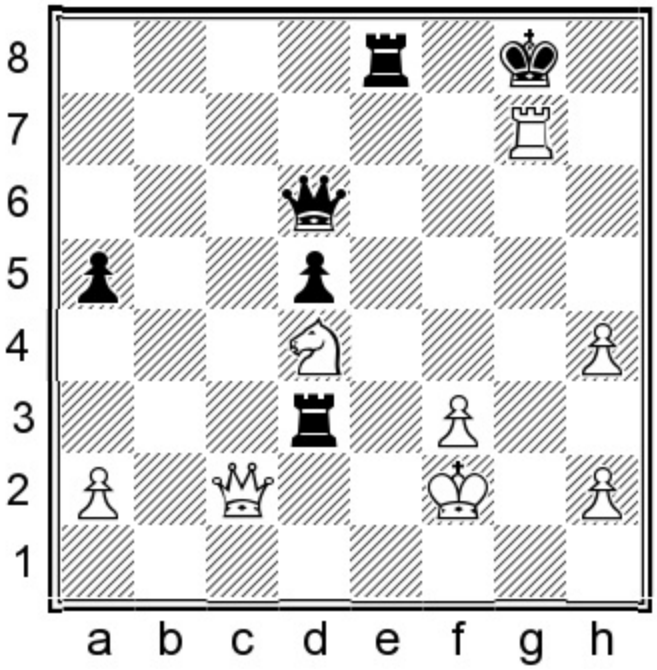
White is a pawn up, but this advantage hardly counts as the additional pawn is a doubled one on the h-file. What is most important for the assessment of the position, despite the fact that more than one Black piece is hanging, is that it is White who has to be careful not to allow a dreadful infiltration of the black queen via h2. At this point I had about 30 minutes on the clock and was quite confident that I would be able to find a win. This required me to literally turn off any inner defensive system I had going!

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46.♔g1!!

I guess every single one of us has an episode in their life, usually as a child, when we would meet a dirty stray dog somewhere in the streets and while taking pity on it decide to save it by bringing it home to the obvious delight of our parents. Such stories end happily only in movies, in real life the dog is expelled from the house as quickly as it appeared in the front door while we received a serious whooping in order to avoid coming up with a similarly clever idea in the future. Meanwhile the rest of the family spends the day trying to clean up the mess caused by the newcomer who went running around the apartment. And this is exactly what White seems to be doing here, inviting all the dirt that can possibly come from outside! Looks terrible, but are you not at all curious as to what might White be up to afterwards?

A) During the game, I spent most of my time calculating and eventually deciding in favor of 46.♖bxg7+. Chess is still not checkers thus after 46...♘xg7 47.♖xg7+



Position after: 47.♖xg7+

Black does not have to voluntarily enter a knight fork on f5 and can instead sidestep the check by means of 47...♔f8 leaving White with no other choice but to allow a repetition of moves after 48.♕xd3 ♕xh2+ 49.♖g2 ♕xh4+ 50.♖g3 ♕h2+=.

B) 46.♕xd3 is no different as Black is again able to force a perpetual after 46...♕xh2+ 47.♔f1 ♕h1+ 48.♖g1 ♕h3+ 49.♖g2 ♕h1+=

C) 46.♔g2!? is the second best move according to computers, but it provides White with little chances to bring the full point home after 46...♘f4+ 47.♔g1 ♘h3+ 48.♔h1 ♘xg5 49.♕xd3 ♖e1+ 50.♔g2 ♘e6 51.♕f5 ♕e5= as White cannot focus entirely on a possible attack against the black monarch because his own king happens to be badly exposed. Transposing into a rook endgame also

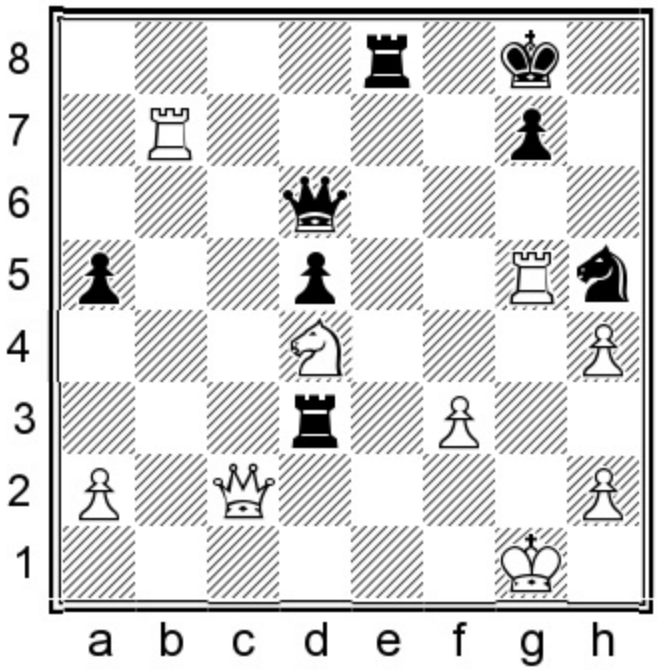
chesstraining.com

seems to be rather ineffective as the white pawn structure is simply too weak for the additional pawn to make any difference.

D) 46.♔f1?? is a by-product of White's slightly twisted logic (the h2-pawn is defended so the black d3-rook can apparently be taken) in conjunction with desperation (what else?). As it often happens such mixtures do not bring anything good with them and this line is no exception: 46...♕a6! 47.♔f2 ♕xb7 48.♖xh5 ♖ee3!–+ White is losing not only because he is materially inferior but also due to his inability to approach the black king with his pieces.

E) 46.♘f5?? was something I calculated during the game and even wanted to do for a split second. As I was reaching for the knight, at the very last moment, I noticed that 46...♕xh2+ 47.♖g2 actually loses in a terrible manner to 47...♖xf3+! 48.♔xf3 ♕f4# 'This time the prize for the patzer of the year will go to someone else' I sighed to myself with relief and decided instead to call it a day.

46.♔g1!!



Position after: 46.♔g1!!

46...♖e1+

As Black I would not have hesitated for too long before going for the text as it is a sign of bad manners to refuse an invitation, especially from such a hospitable host as the white king.

A) 46...♖xd4 may be objectively best but after 47.♖xh5 g6 48.♖h6! yet another black pawn would be falling, with a loss becoming rather inevitable for Black after something like 48...♖c4 49.♖xg6+ ♔h8 50.♕xc4! ♕xg6+ 51.♕g4+– and the win is much more trivial than it looks at first as Black cannot avoid exchanging queens. But this way he connects the white kingside pawns.

B) 46...♕f4 only looks scary as after 47.♖bxg7+ ♘xg7 48.♕xd3 ♖e1+ 49.♔g2 ♕c1 50.♔h3+– Black

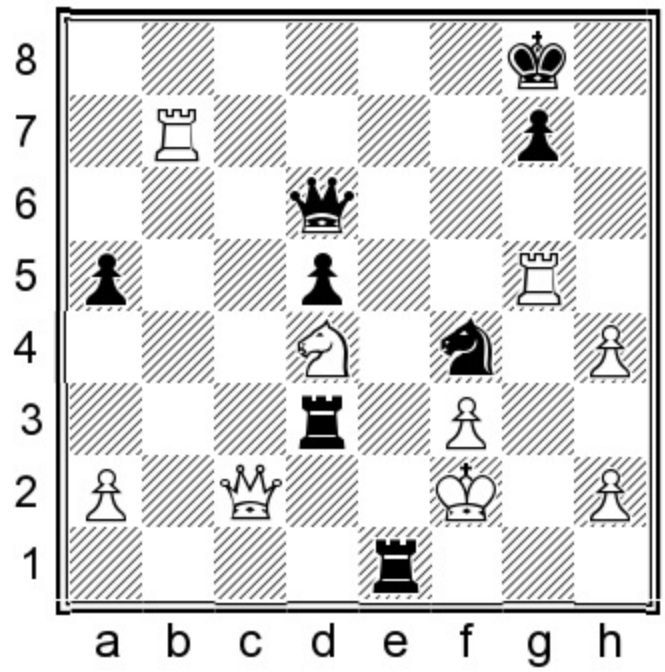
chesstouring.com

gradually runs out of checks and now White gets his chance to strike.

47.♔g2

White does not appear impressed with the mess already made in his house (the e1-rook being a rather uncomfortable sight at first glance) so what he does is to encourage the black knight to f4 with a check. Although this looks like a prize-winning game from some anti chess tournament, there is in fact a method to this madness after

47...♘f4+ 48.♔f2

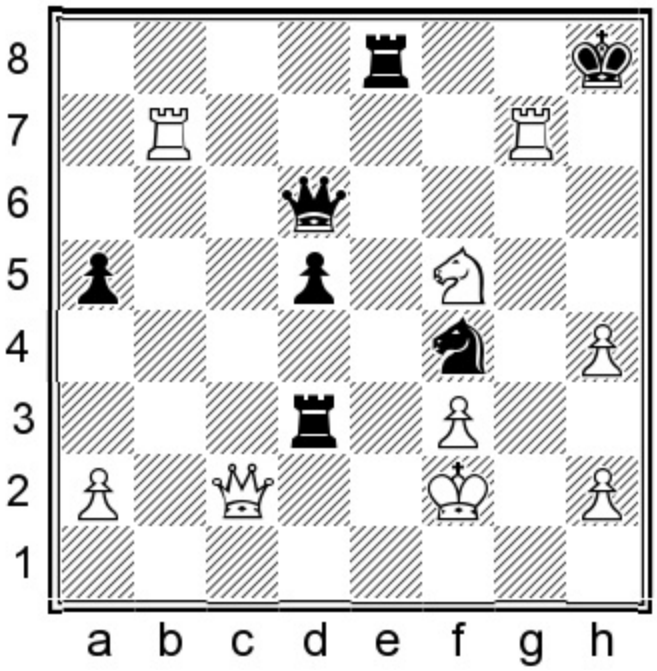


Position after: 48.♔f2

we reach a truly fascinating position. White has spent the last three moves on an elaborate triangulation motif, apparently doing nothing more than only inviting Black's piece to come and check his king. With literally all of them in close proximity thereof it seems as if there simply had to be some tactical punishment waiting for White from the opponent's side... but there is none! What is even worse for Black, with the vast majority of his forces paying a visit deep into White's camp, literally nobody stayed to provide their own king with at least a tiny bit of security. Because of this, Black would have been surprisingly doomed.

48...♖e8 49.♖gxg7+ ♔h8 50.♘f5

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Position after: 50.♘f5

and here Black can still try to stir up things with

50...♖e2+ 51.♕xe2 ♕c5+

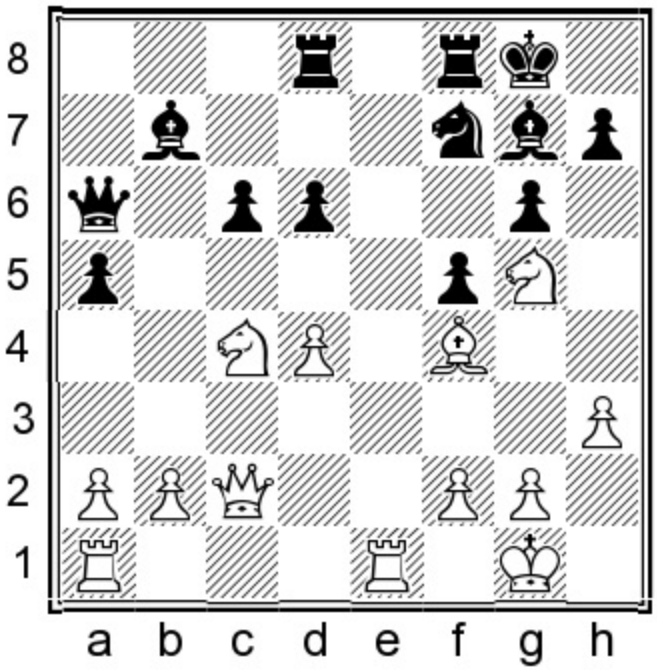
but after the most elegant

52.♕e3!+–

Black is not able to defend against mate and simultaneously defend all three of his pieces. Why was this a winning position at the end of the day? It was because White could have coordinated his forces in a way that even all the time in the world (here: three whole tempi!) would not have given the opponent the opportunity to save himself. With every single, apparently active move, Black's coordination was on the other hand becoming worse and worse as his king suddenly proved to be close to defenseless. In sharp positions coordination often works like an hourglass. If you have it your opponent usually does not. In such a case you might want to make sure that you are not on the receiving end, even if the price to pay in exchange for that is material or, as in this game, time.

24
Abdusattorov – Gutenev
St Petersburg 2018

chesstouring.com



■ *19...?*

Show/Hide Solution

24
Abdusattorov, Nodirbek (2546)
Gutenev, Alexander (2456)
St Petersburg 2018

Statics & Dynamics
Dynamic defense in a strategically lost position

A keen eye will certainly discover that the Rossolimo Sicilian (3.♗b5 g6 4.♗xc6 bxc6) was played. In this line Black allows White to obtain close to full control over the center in exchange for hopes of activating his bishop pair in the future. Knowing this it would have been difficult not to appreciate the educational value of the mess Black has got himself into: the white knights are on a rampage attacking whatever weakness there are in Black's position, while Black's pride, the light-squared bishop, is still taking a nap. If we add on top of that we add that the black queen is just as much out of play then the full picture of Black's demise will appear in front of us. Is there anything Black can do in order to at least try and turn the tables here?

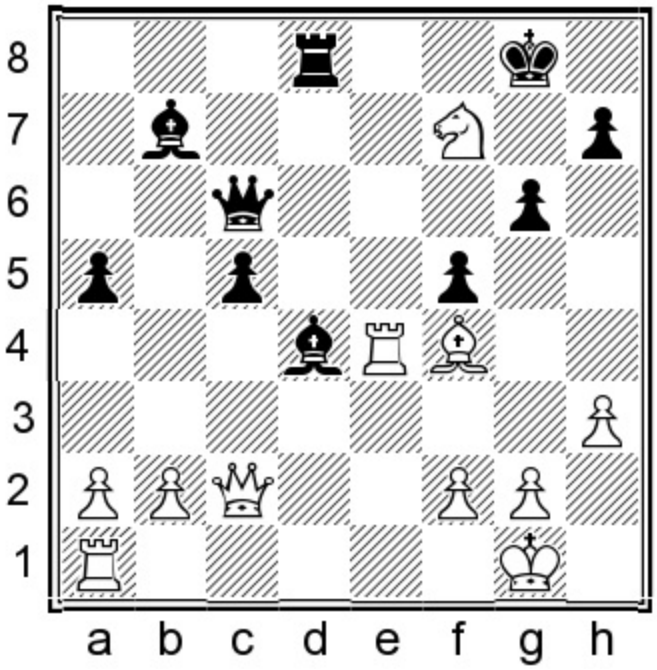
19...c5!!

In view of the dangers awaiting Black from White's knights it was essential to activate his remaining forces to the maximum. With this pawn thrust, we not only threatens to take on d4 one day but further

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to bring back the b7-bishop and the a6-queen from the dead. Even if this position was supposed to be lost due to material losses after 20.♘e6 (it is not!), Black should have not hesitated any longer before maximizing the potential of his forces. It is better to die in battle than to live on your knees, especially when the latter approach would have led to unavoidable death in the long run.

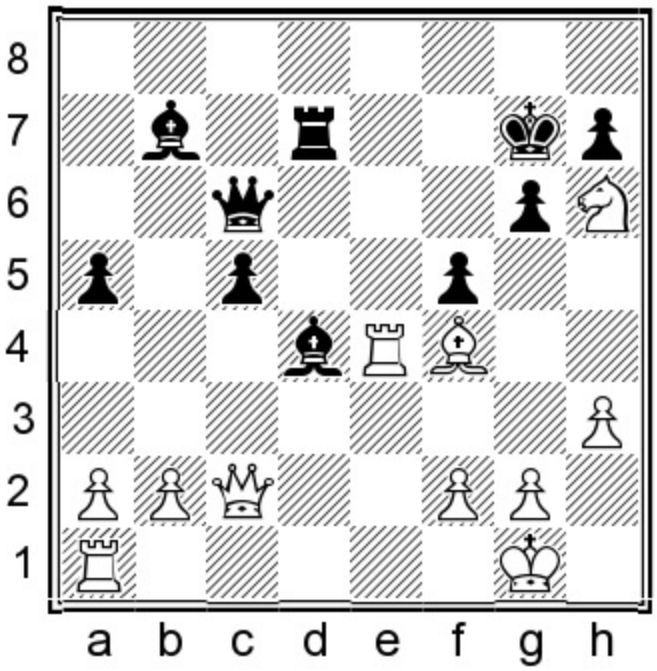
A) 19...♗xd4?! would have transposed to the text if White followed up with 20.♘e6, instead he could just as well help himself to the important d6-pawn after 20.♘xf7 ♖xf7 21.♘xd6 with ideas like ♕c2-b3 coming very strongly into consideration. Black's position makes a rather disastrous impression but, quite surprisingly, not all hope is lost provided he goes for 21...c5! including both the queen and the light-squared bishop into play on a priority basis. The tactical point behind the generous exchange sacrifice is revealed after 22.♘xf7 ♕c6 when White is a full rook up but pretty defenseless against mating threats along the long light diagonal. The only move to continue playing on here is the astonishing interference with 23.♖e4!!



Position after: 23.♖e4!!

when it seems as if the game was not supposed to last long after all. The truth is that the white e4-rook is not going anywhere for the moment so Black could simply resort to 23...♖d7!? leaving the rook for dessert. Special means would have been required for White to be able to continue playing for a win: [23...♔xf7 loses quickly after 24.♕c4+ ♔f6 25.♖e6+! ♕xe6 26.♗g5+ ♔f7 27.♕xe6+ ♔xe6 28.♗xd8± and White is a healthy exchange to the plus.] 24.♘h6+ [24.♘e5 is too minimalistic in my opinion as after 24...♗xe5 25.♗xe5 ♕xe4 26.♕xe4 ♗xe4 27.♖c1± despite White's small pull the opposite-colored bishop would have surely contributed to drawish tendencies gaining in strength.] 24...♔g7

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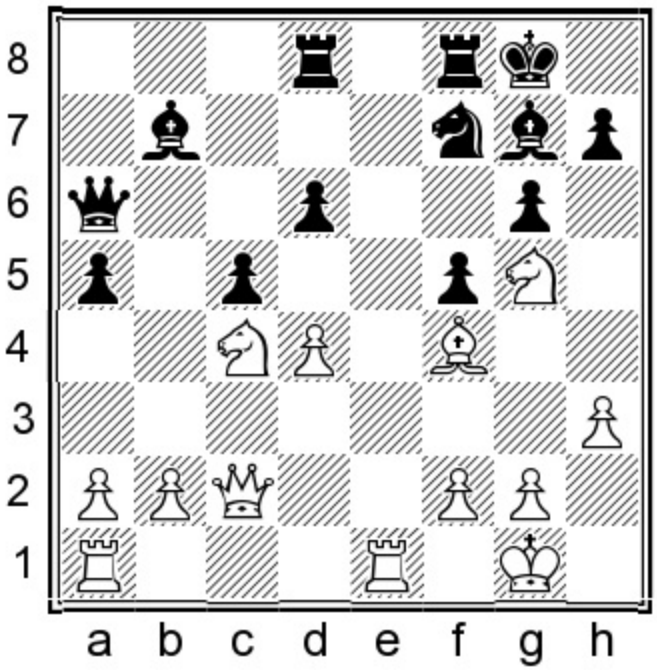
Position after: 24...♔g7

and now the highly elegant 25.♖ae1!! [25.♕c4 looks great but does not work as after 25...♕xe4 26.♕g8+ ♔f6= a perpetual check is the most White could get. 27.♕f8+ ♔e6 28.♕g8+ ♔f6= a perpetual check is the most White could get.] 25...fxe4 26.♘g4↑ would have allowed White to retain serious winning chances. Material may in fact be equal after the dreadful tactical skirmish, but what is left afterwards are pawn weaknesses in Black's camp and possibilities to win more control over the dark squares after something like ♘g4-e5 or ♗f4-e5+. In the meantime, due to the presence of the pawn on e4, the light-squared battery on the long diagonal does not look so impressive anymore. The moment White blocks it by placing any minor piece on e3 Black will regret not having said bye-bye to this pawn earlier.

B) The alternative 19...♘xg5? as played in the game is simply bad because after 20.♗xg5 ♗f6 21.♗xf6 ♖xf6 22.♖e7+– White invaded the seventh rank successfully with all sorts of evils related thereto actualizing themselves. The e7-rook can contribute to mating threats (e.g. after the white queen gets transferred to h6), but is also a nuisance by itself, especially when the other one arrives on e1. Just for your information, Black managed to survive 6 more moves from this point on.

19...c5!!

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Position after: 19...c5!!

20.♘e6

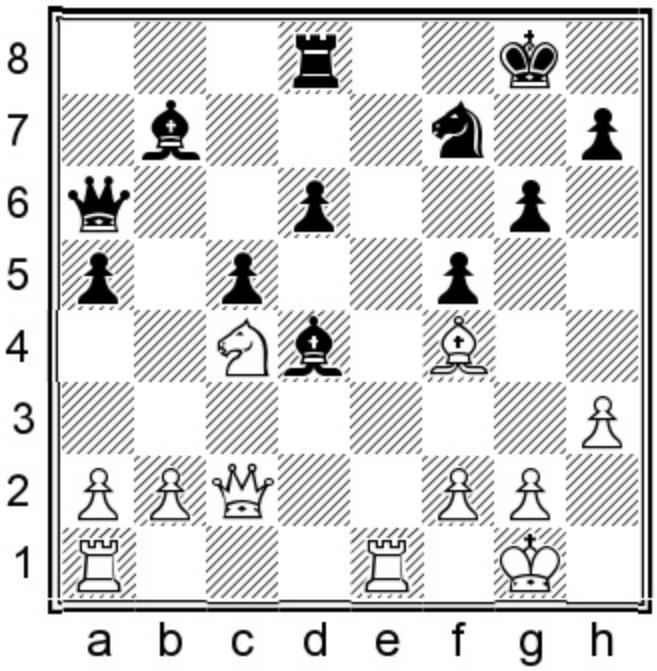
20.♘xf7 this time grants White nothing as the d6-pawn is additionally defended. What is more, after the further 20...♖xf7 21.dxc5 ♕c6! 22.f3 ♕xc5+ 23.♗e3 ♕b4= the position is equal as Black's pawn weaknesses are fully compensated by the activity of his bishops.

20...♗xd4!

Not only reducing White's material edge to a minimum, but also pinning the f2-pawn, which circumstance might be of colossal meaning for the safety of the white monarch any day now.

21.♘xd8 ♖xd8=

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Position after: 21...♖xd8♒

and despite White's minimal material advantage Black is still very much alive and kicking. The immediate threat is ...♕a6-c6 so White will definitely need to take this into consideration before starting out with his own play. At the same time creating a strong battery on the long light diagonal does not exhaust Black's active possibilities. One strong idea would have been to start pushing those central pawns. White can hardly say 'no' to that as these are nicely supported by the black heavy pieces and bishops. This is why White should rather slightly retreat putting those pawns to a stop as early as possible and only then seek to re-establish decent outposts for his minor pieces. Sample lines confirm the viability of Black's setup:

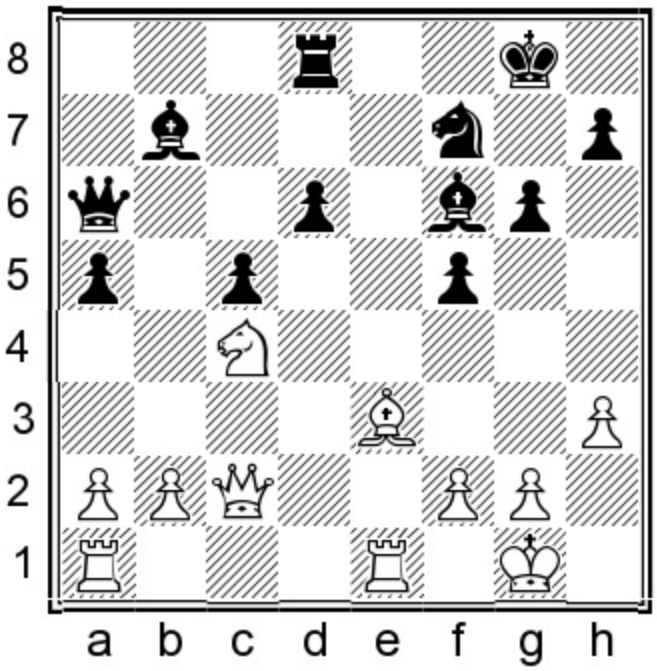
22.♗e3

A) 22.♔h1 follows the same idea but stumbles after 22...♗e4!? 23.♕e2 d5 when it would have been White who needs to be careful when facing Black's raging activity: 24.♘e3 ♕xe2 25.♖xe2 a4 26.♖d1 g5♒ and Black has already equalized as White does not even get a chance to make a single offensive move, constantly being faced with the arduous task of reacting to Black's offensive momentum. Before this initiative peters out Black will most probably already have his position consolidated thusly being entirely out of danger.

B) Attempting to activate at once with 22.♖e7?! fails because of 22...♕c6 23.♘e3 ♔f8∓ and the rook gets trapped quite unexpectedly in the middle of the board!

22...♗f6!

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Position after: 22...♗f6!

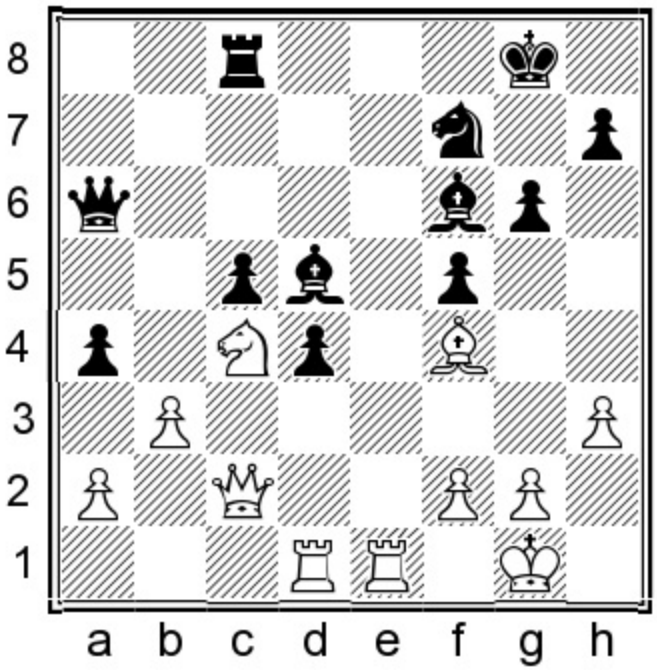
Exchanging pieces when material down is seldomly a good idea but here there is an additional purpose behind this move. Black wants to retain more control over the center and prevent the white rooks from one day infiltrating via e7. There could follow:

23.♖ad1 d5 24.♘d2 d4 25.♗f4 ♖c8 26.b3

(...c5-c4 already looked quite serious for White)

26...♗d5 27.♘c4 a4⇄

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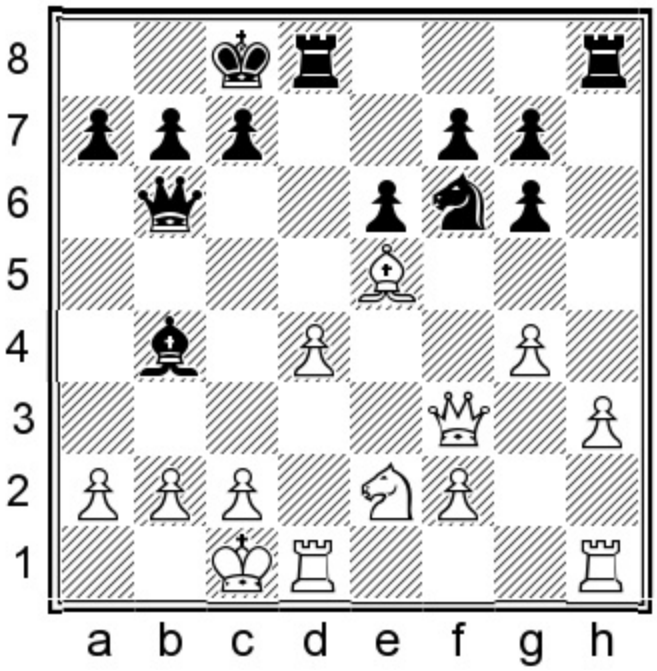


Position after: 27...a4⇄

with approximately balanced play. Black is in little (if any) danger here as long he does not allow the white rooks to infiltrate his camp. Whenever pondering over an exchange sacrifice, it is essential to consider the number of open files left at the disposal of the opponent when the dust settles. With two rooks but only one open file the meaning of the additional rook lessens. For this reason he would be advised to keep an eye on the squares e5, e6 and e7 with his minor pieces, simultaneously taking his time (if ever) before capturing on b3 so as not to open up the a-file to hastily. White might be slightly better in material terms, but at the same time lacks active possibilities as long as Black avoids unnecessary exchanges.

25
Caruana – Moranda
chess.com 2019

chesstouring.com



■ *15...?*

Show/Hide Solution

25
Caruana, Fabiano (2828)
Moranda, Wojciech (2593)
chess.com 2019

Weakness
Creating a weakness by changing the character of the position

Before we dive into the analysis of this position I need to tell you that it was not certain from the start whether this game would be published in the book. Obviously, I have only good memories in relation to the game and it is, in my humble opinion, of considerable educational value, but there were simply so many other games that I wanted to share with you as well. As I was finishing the first draft version of the manuscript a student of my chess school drew my attention to the new book of Larry Kaufman titled 'Kaufman's New Repertoire for Black and White'. It namely turned out that Mr Kaufman based his analysis of the Scandinavian Defense with 3...♕d6 4.d4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 ♗g4!? on my two games, against Ivan Saric and this one. While I am far from contesting the evaluation given by Mr Kaufman pertaining to the former and find the sole idea of preparing a complete repertoire based on the analysis done in accordance with state of the art mathematical methods as ingenious, I soon understood that it is now in the interest of the wider chess public to disclose what I consider to be the truth about this position. Trust me, the last thing you would like to do is to go for this line in a

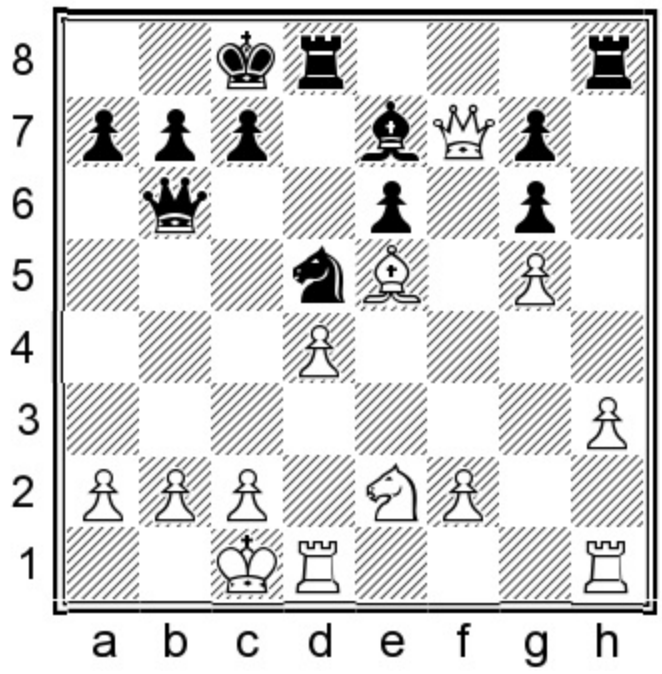
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tournament game, believing that it is better for White only to land in a position that promises strategic suffering and speculative counterplay at most. Mr Kaufman considers this specific position to be a viable alternative to the main line with the justification that, “White has more space and play on either wing”. True indeed and White is threatening to take on f6 which makes countering that threat Black’s highest priority for the moment. The f6-knight can be defended quite easily, but the problem is rather that g4-g5 is yet another option for White that needs to be considered. Is there a move then that solves both of Black’s issues at the same time?

15...♕c6!

The turning point of the game. Black invites the opponent to a queen swap. At first glance it surely relieves the pressure along the f-file but leaves the black pawn structure on this side of the board in tiny bits. The real point behind this move is hidden rather in the holistic change of the nature of the position than in plain prevention against White’s most obvious threats.

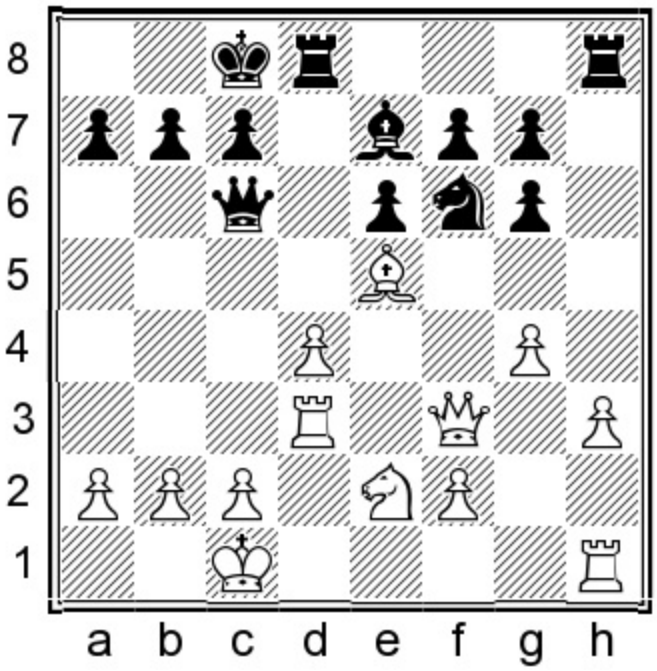
A) 15...♗e7 in order to defend the f6-knight was the very first idea to come to my mind during the game. What I greatly disliked was 16.♖d3!? when the rook harassing my queen along the third rank annoyed me. [But not 16.g5 ♘d5 17.♕xf7?



Position after: 17.♕xf7?

because of the unexpected counterplay generated by Black’s heavy pieces after 17...♕a6! 18.♖de1 ♖hf8 19.♕xg6 ♕xa2∓ when the incoming attack against the white monarch would have made the tables turn for sure.] What is even worse, trying to mimic the text with 16...♕c6? now backfires tactically due to

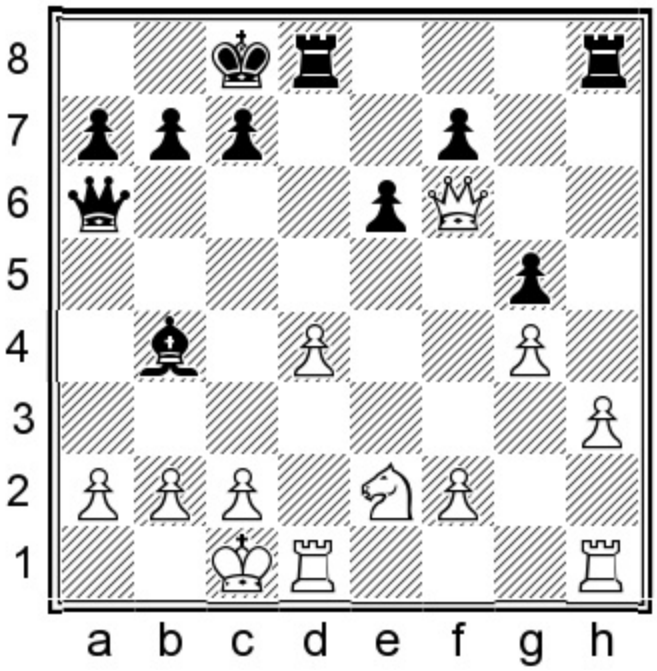
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Position after: 16...♕c6?

17.♖c3! ♕xf3 18.♖xc7+ ♔b8 19.♖c3+ ♔a8 20.♖xf3± when thanks to the discovered check, White is a healthy pawn up.

B) Another concept that briefly crossed my mind during the game was to exclude the threat of g4-g5 for good after 15...g5 with the tactical point that after 16.♗xf6 gxf6 17.♕xf6 ♕a6



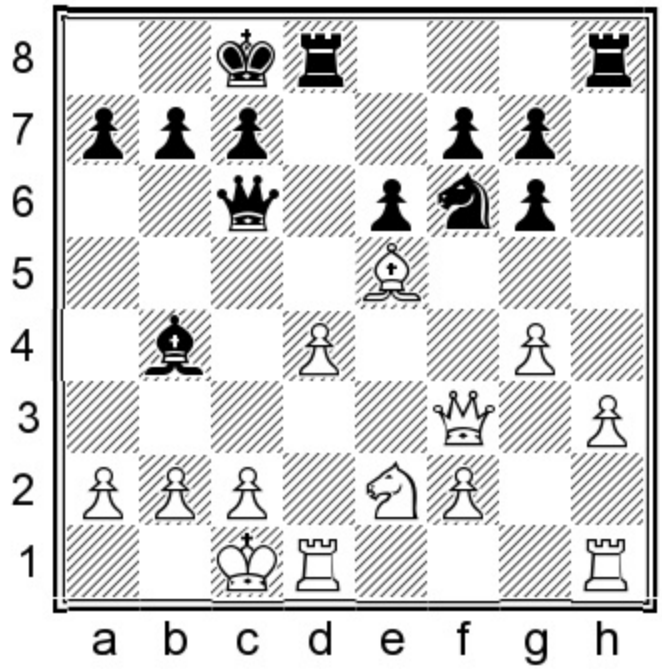
Position after: 17...♕a6

again, this double attack against the a2-pawn and the e2-knight allows Black to stay in the game. I

chessdelving.com

subconsciously did not like it though, and in the post-mortem engines confirmed that the sly 18.a3! ♗xa3 19.♘g3 ♗b4 20.♔b1± grants White a miniscule advantage. The reason for this is that White is statically better on the kingside (the g5 and f7-pawns are both hanging), and Black is still far away from creating any dynamic counterplay against the white king. Surely not a position that tigers like most, especially in rapid games.

15...♕c6!



Position after: 15...♕c6!

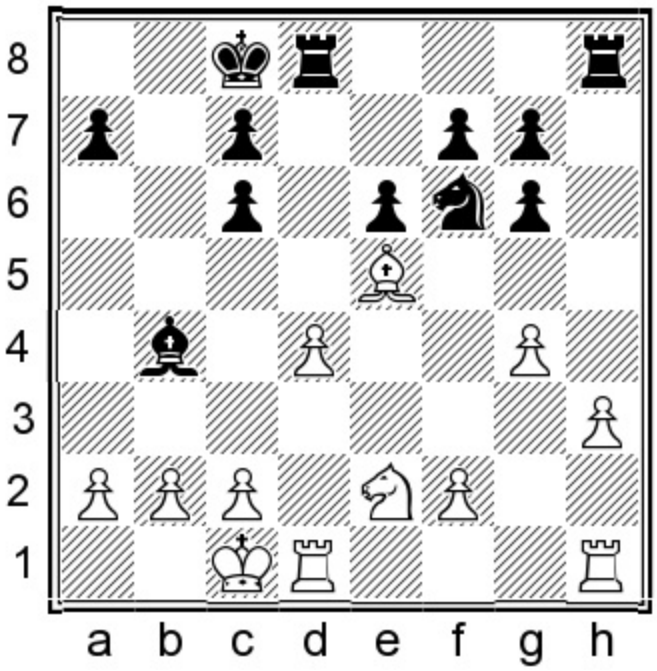
16.♕xc6

This exchange offer was certainly too juicy for White to refuse as the pawn structure of Black on the queenside is now in shatters. As far as my memory is not playing games on me it took Fabiano seconds before he captured. It was the upcoming moves that would consume most of his remaining time on the clock.

White actually had no other choice but to take as after 16.♕b3?! ♗d6 17.♗xd6 cxd6!?∓ Black would have been controlling the position practically on the whole board. He will surely start getting interested in the kingside pawns of White (...♕c6-g2!? constituting one cheeky idea at the moment) any day now the center and even the c-file representing another potential area of expansion.

16...bxc6

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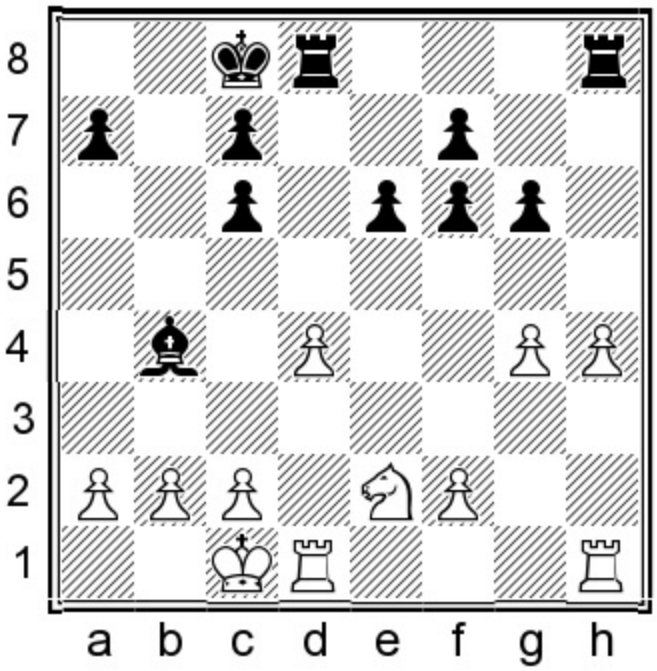
Position after: 16...bxc6

17.♘f4

A logical move as White transfers the knight to d3 from which square it is able to both solidify the bishop and maybe increase control over the freshly weakened c5-square. What needs to be stated very clearly at this point is that the game is no longer a middlegame where White could combine overall pressure exerted against the opponent with some attacking ideas. What we have in front of us now is a multi-piece endgame. There are no attacks available anymore, now planning and positional maneuvering matter. In other words, with the queens on board Black was suffering for multiple reasons with one of them being White's threats pertaining to the rook shift along the third rank. Here, on the other hand, the position had transformed in a sense that now the safety of the kings does not mean too much as the attention of the players shifts towards the newly created weakness in White's camp: the h3-pawn.

A) The plan to activate the backward h3-pawn might incline White to go for 17.♗xf6?! gxf6 18.h4

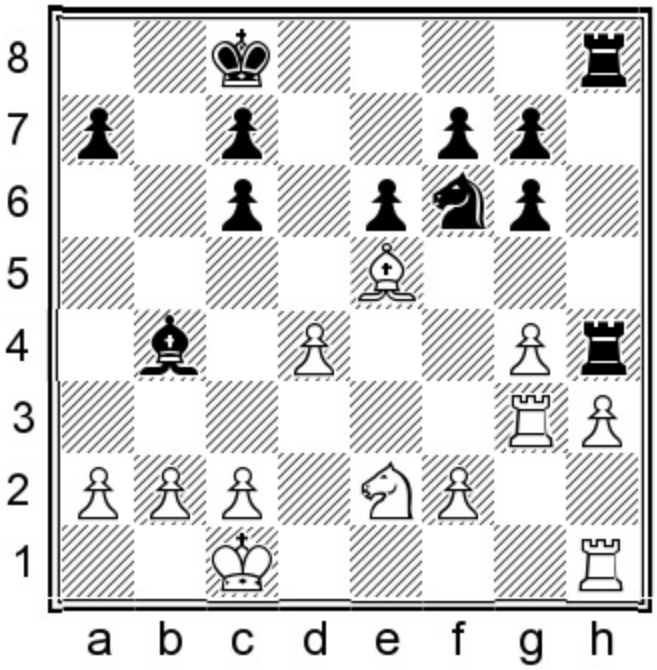
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Position after: 18.h4

but in reality the h4-pawn is not going to get too far, e.g. 18...♖h6 19.♖h3 ♗e7 20.♖dh1 c5 21.c3 f5∓ and with White not even enjoying the time to focus on pushing the pawn, the most probable scenario from this point on involves Black ganging up on the (still backward) h4-pawn, eventually capturing it in the end.

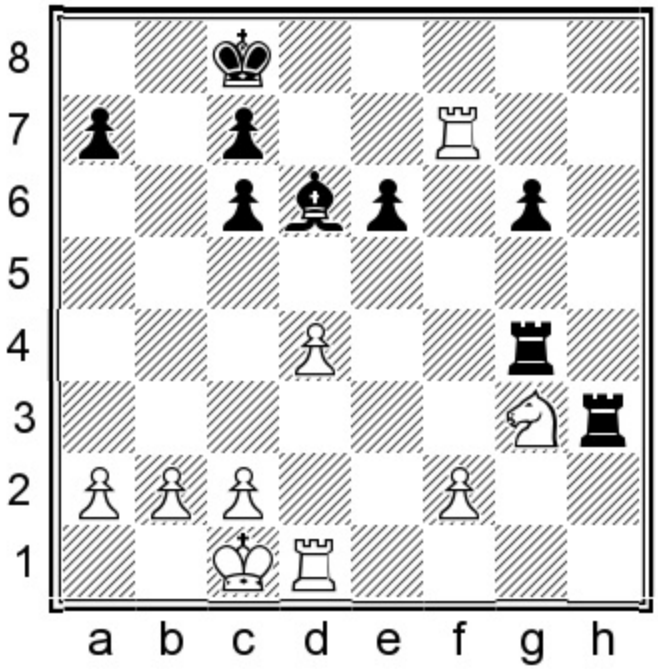
B) A much more reasonable way of handling the position would have been 17.♖dg1 ♖h4 18.♖g3 ♖dh8



Position after: 18...♖dh8

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but no wonder it did not appeal to White in the game as it would have reduced him either to passive defending, or speculative counterplay, which incidentally allows White to bail out towards a draw after the very concrete 19.♖f3 ♖xg4 20.♗xf6 gxf6 21.♖xf6 ♖e4 22.♘g3 ♖xh3! 23.♖d1 (the rook was taboo because of back rank mate) 23...♖g4 24.♖xf7 ♗d6=

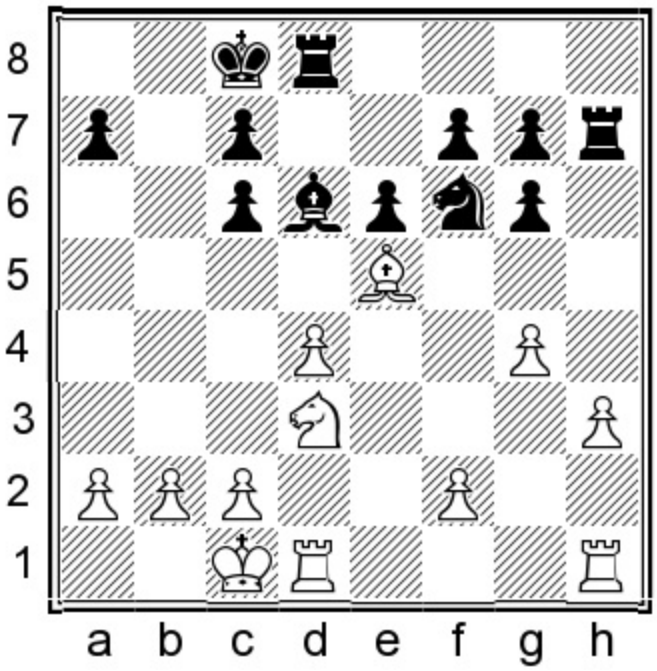


Position after: 24...♗d6=

with a draw despite Black winning a pawn on g3 as the damaged pawn structure does not allow him to profit from the material edge. At the same time, I cannot help the impression that it is White who should consider himself being lucky with the draw if the game went in that direction. The game continued with

17...♗d6 18.♘d3 ♖h7!⇄

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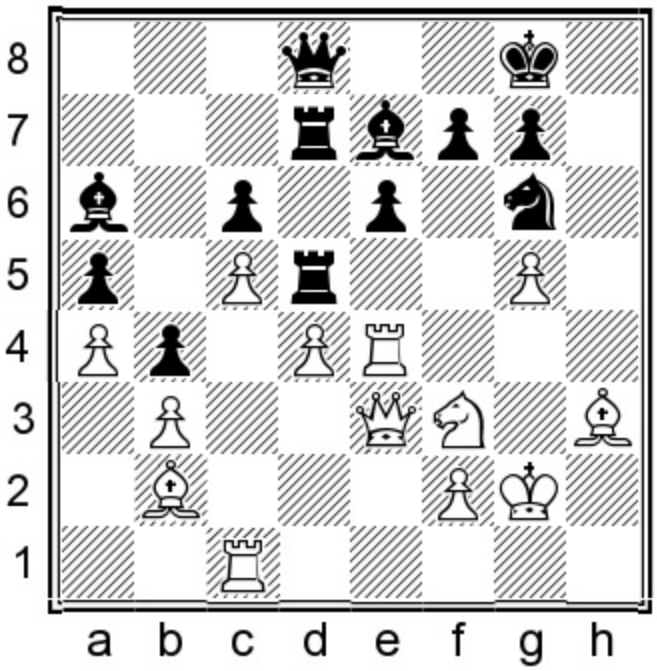
Position after: 18...♖h7!⇄

when it became clear what was about to happen. Black is about to double the rooks along the h-file and eventually snatch the white pawn on h3.

The character of the game had changed and, instead of attacking, White is now forced into dull defensive setups on the kingside. The structural weaknesses of Black on the queenside are meaningless, especially as White has still not worked out how to put pressure against them. In the game, White has been outplayed on the kingside and owes the eventual drawish result only to a series of inaccuracies from Black's side in time trouble. And what about the above-mentioned book, you might ask? Despite this unfortunate lapsus, I rate its quality highly. The resource occupies one of the most notable positions on my bookshelf and I recommend it to every single ambitious chess player who wants to stay ahead of the game. Still, the other important lesson we can derive from this situation is what I keep on telling my students endlessly about opening books: trust but verify! When studying theory not even the best engine will help if you do not use your own brain.

26
Postny – Sanal
St Petersburg 2018

chesstouring.com



□ *35.?*

Show/Hide Solution

26
Postny, Evgeny (2615)
Sanal, Vahap (2490)
St Petersburg 2018

Anticipation & Prophylaxis
Anticipation versus anticipation!

Material is equal but relative peace cannot last forever. White appears to be a bit stretched with his far-advanced g5-pawn on the verge of falling. Furthermore, his b2-bishop does not seem to be the man of the hour. If everything gets exchanged and White is left therewith, his days would have been numbered. At the same time, Black's defensive entanglements are solid only on paper. In particular three white pieces are already eyeing the central e6-pawn. That White should take it is clear, but what will happen next?

35.♖xe6!

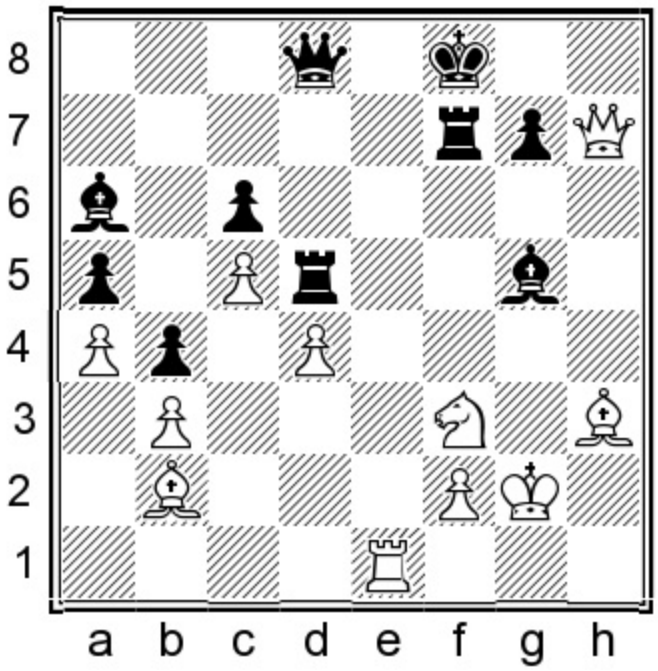
The only way to go for White. Any further hesitation could have cost him the game. Sadly, it is just now that Postny went astray, dropped the pawn on g5 and never really recovered.

35...♗d3!!

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A truly cold-blooded defensive resource! The e6-rook cannot be captured but this does not mean that Black is already defenseless. In particular, the bishop on d3 safeguards Black for the moment from White sacrificing his rook further on g6. The knight, on the other hand, returns the favor by not allowing the white queen to take on d3 as a triple fork from f4 would then be arriving. The cooperation between the pieces may look striking but I cannot help the impression that if Black was supposed to put all of his stakes on that, he would indeed be hanging on by a thin thread.

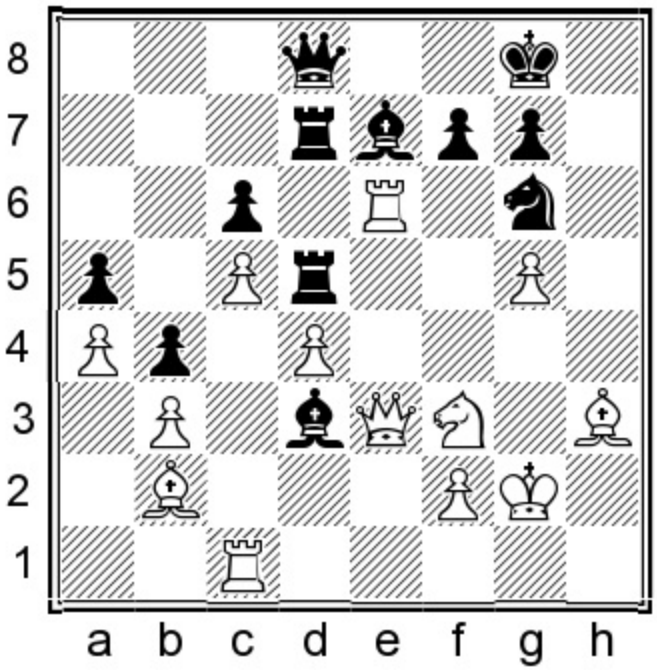
The rook was naturally untouchable as after 35...fxe6? 36.♕xe6+ ♔f8 37.♕xg6 ♗xg5 38.♖e1! ♖f7 39.♕h7!+–



Position after: 39.♕h7!+–

there would be nothing Black could do against the invasion of the white queen from the rear.

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Position after: 35...♗d3!!

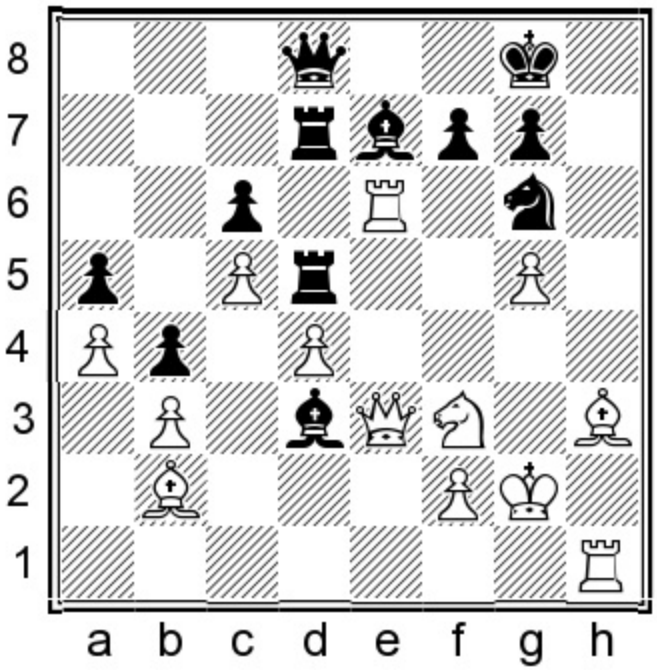
36.♖h1!!

Simply amazing! With the knight on g6 protected, the white e6-rook was actually en prise. White cannot evacuate it though so the only way to proceed seems to be anticipating Black's threat of capturing it as taking now leads effectively to mate or huge material losses. Only if you have seen this far can you consider having solved this exercise!

A) Other moves fail utterly, e.g. 36.♔h1?! is met by 36...♗f5! which basically extinguishes White's kingside initiative: 37.♗xf5 ♖xf5 38.♖e4 and now Black can even afford to play 38...♗xg5! letting White infiltrate along the back rank as after 39.♖e8+ ♘f8! 40.♘xg5 ♕xg5 41.♕xg5 ♖xg5∓ White remains with that second-rate mediocrity on b2 and therefore has to be worse.

B) Whereas 36.♖xc6?? loses immediately because of 36...♗xg5 37.♘xg5 ♖xg5+ 38.♔h2 ♗f5–+ and the white king is going to be deprived of the remnants of its cover with Black not hesitating to bring more forces to its close proximity in the near future.

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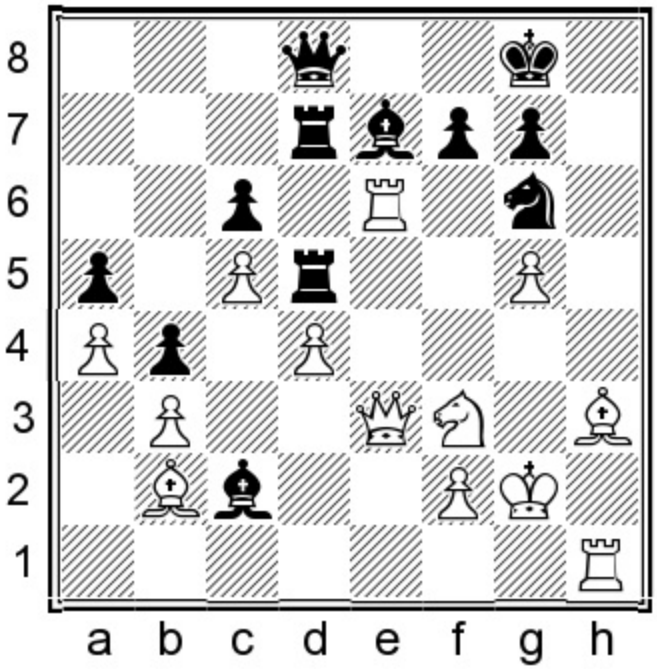


Position after: 36.♖h1!!

36...♗c2

The only move for Black to continue the fight for a while. White just needs to consolidate and then throw everything he has against the black king in order to achieve the win.

36...fxe6? is again impossible as after 37.♗xe6+ ♔f8 38.♕xd3 ♘f4+ 39.♔f1 ♘xd3 40.♖h8# the idea behind ♖c1-h1 is finally revealed.



Position after: 36...♗c2

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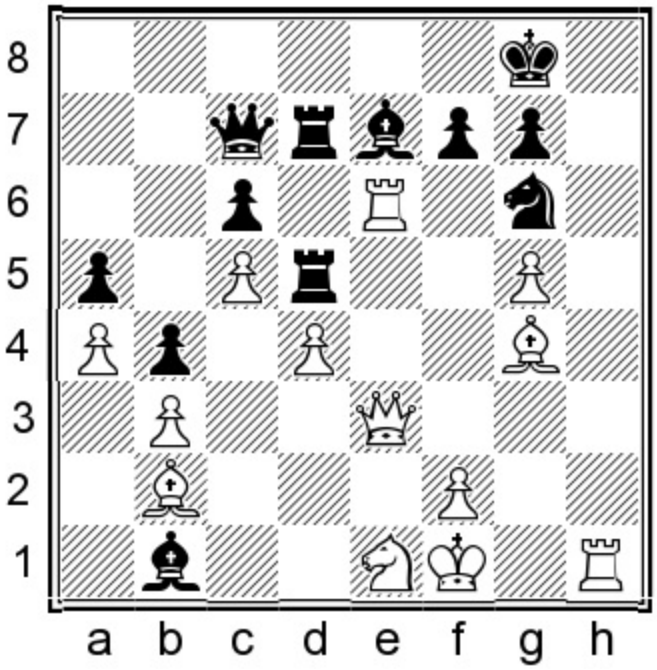
37.♔f1!

Now White does not have to worry about any nasty knight forks and can focus entirely on reaping the rewards of the incoming attack. 37.♘e1?! would have been a tad too hasty as after 37...♖xg5+ 38.♔f1 ♗b1 39.♖xc6 Black can even embark on an enterprising exchange sacrifice with 39...♖h5! 40.♕f3 ♖h4! 41.♗xd7 ♕xd7∓ when due to the weakness of the light squares in White's camp, it cannot be said for sure what the end result of this game is going to be.

37...♕c7 38.♘e1 ♗b1

seems to be the most stubborn but now after

39.♗g4!



Position after: 39.♗g4!

Opening the h-file decisively when White intends to create a powerful heavy piece battery along it. There is nothing else for Black to do but to accept the Greek gift with

39...fxe6

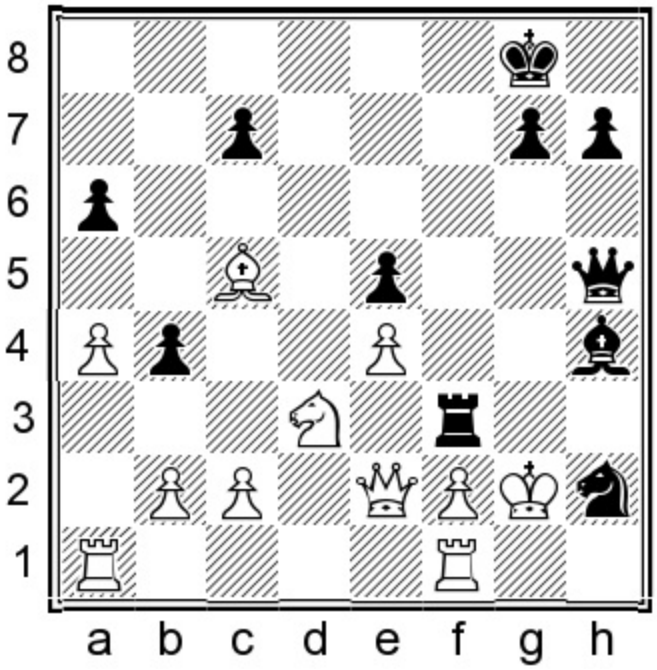
but after

40.♗xe6+ ♔f8 41.♕f3+ ♗f6 42.gxf6+–

the game is very close to being over.

chesstouring.com

27
Dvoirys – Sutovsky
Israel 2019



□ *27.?*

Show/Hide Solution

27
Dvoirys, Semen (2523)
Sutovsky, Emil (2628)
Israel 2019

Attack & Defense
Rules of time and coordination in the defense

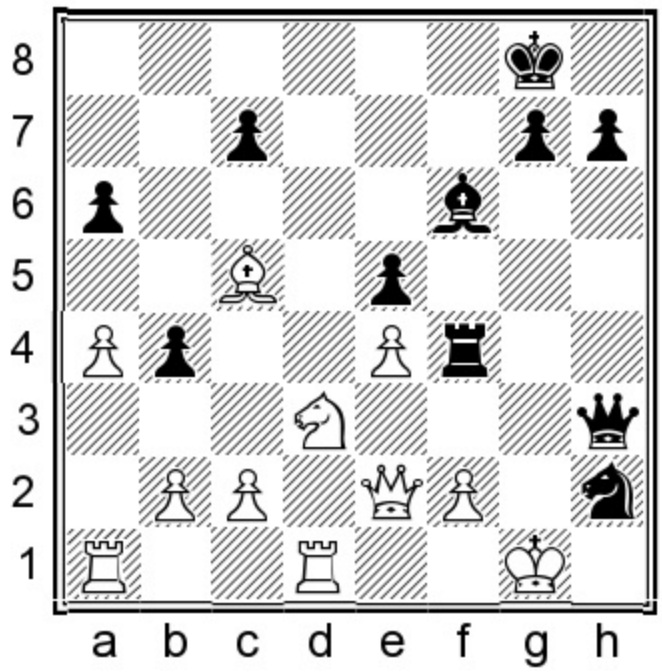
White is rook up but with dark clouds already gathered around his king a storm outbreak in front of it seems to be more than imminent. We may naturally argue that the black pieces could also use some more coordination as the h2-knight cannot momentarily check the white king and the bishop on h4 is rather innocuously placed at the moment. At the same time the white monarch lacks a pawn shield. What is even worse, White's pieces do not seem to be capable of coming to the rescue even within the next two moves. Under these circumstances, is there anything White can do to salvage at least half a point here?

27.♘f4!!

chesstouring.com

An absolutely outstanding solution! This move is so deep that it is not even visible at first glance what would White be up to while playing it. It looks as if he was simply dropping a piece with not much changing on the board in return. Still, there is a hidden defensive resource available for White, provided the knight is not obstructing the white queen anymore.

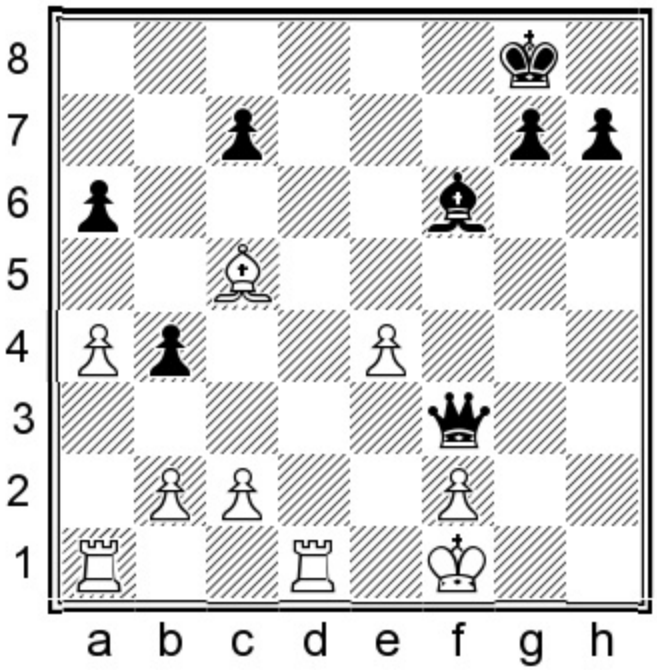
A) Saving the rook by means of 27.♖g1 makes sense at first but actually does nothing to protect the white monarch from mating threats. Now after the calm 27...♗f6 ...♕h5-h3+ with follow up checks will inevitably come: 28.♖gd1 ♕h3+ 29.♔g1 and now with the splendid 29...♖f4!!



Position after: 29...♖f4!!

Black could have decisively vacated the f3-square for the knight with deadly effect. 30.♘xe5 [30.♘xf4 exf4–+ changes nothing, maybe except for making ...f4-f3 an additional mating threat to worry about.] 30...♘f3+! 31.♕xf3 [31.♘xf3 ♖g4#] 31...♖xf3 32.♘xf3 ♕g4+ 33.♔f1 ♕xf3–+

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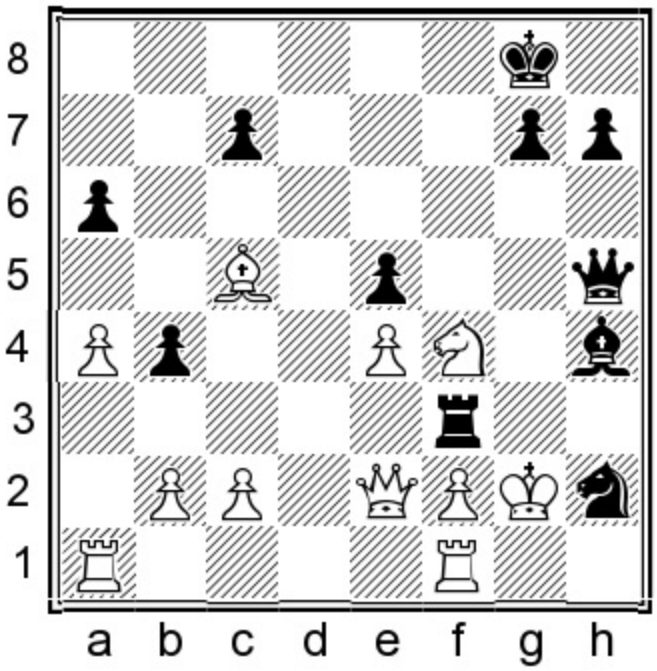
Position after: 33...♕xf3−+

Formally speaking, White is a pawn up but the queen is much more mobile than the rooks whose influence is reduced to standing on the first rank. On top of that, Black has a simple plan of pushing the h-pawn as far as possible either landing mate in the process or creating an additional queen. White can now surrender with a clear conscience.

B) In the game, White sure understood how vital the control over the g4-square is for the safety of his king. Because of this he played 27.♘xe5? which drops a queen however after 27...♖g3+! 28.fxg3 ♕xe2+ 29.♖f2 ♕xe4+ 30.♔xh2 ♗xg3+ 31.♔xg3 ♕xe5+ 32.♔g2 ♕xc5–+ the two rooks are again powerless against a queen and two connected passed pawns.

27.♘f4!!

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Position after: 27.♘f4!!

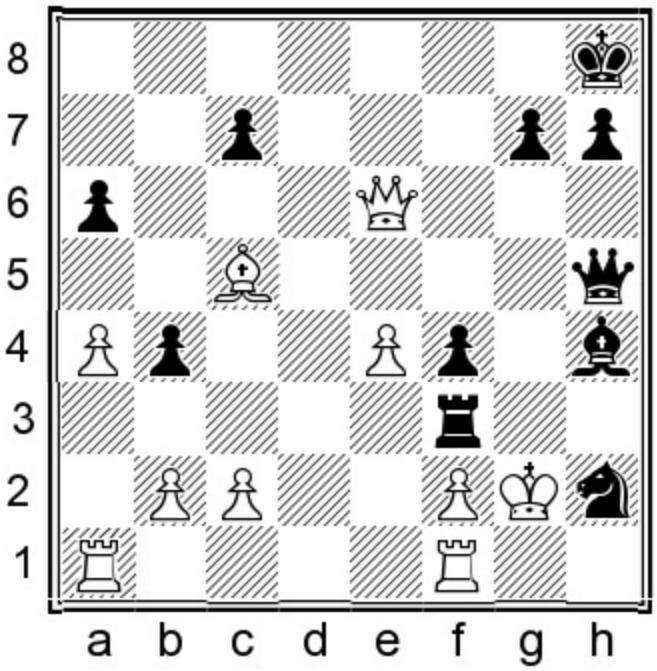
27...♕g4+

Hard to believe but this is the only move that does not eventually lose the game for Black!

A) 27...♕g5+? is bad as after 28.♔h1 ♖xf4 29.♕xa6 the white queen, as well as the rest of White's forces, join the fight very quickly: 29...g6 30.♕e6+ ♔g7 31.♖fd1 ♕h5 32.♖d7+ ♔h6 33.♕h3! ♘f3 34.♗e7!+– and there are so many exchanges going to take place on the board that Black's attack will certainly get nullified any moment now.

B) Interestingly, 27...exf4 is met by the dazzling 28.♕c4+ ♔h8 29.♕e6!

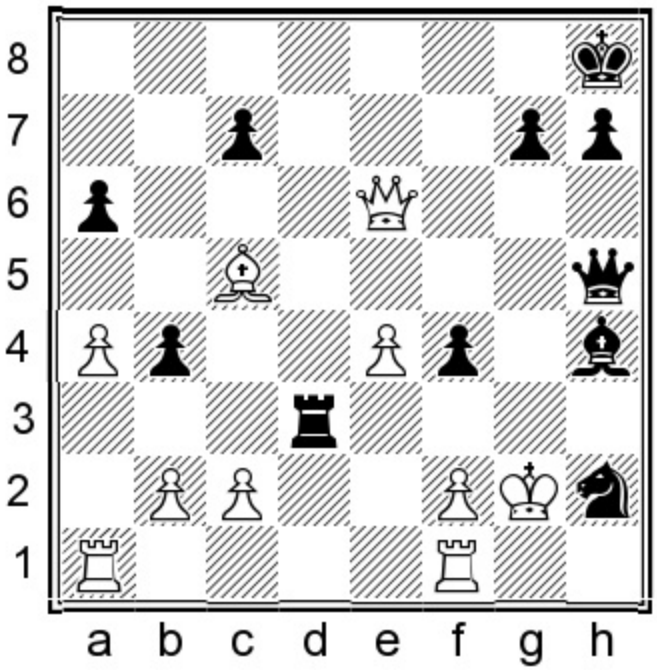
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Position after: 29.♕e6!

One of the most elegant moves that I have seen in a while. The queen combines both attacking (mate along the back rank) and defensive (taking away the vital g4 and h3-squares from the black heavy pieces) ideas in it. During my career as a player and coach I have witnessed tens of curious cases like these in which despite an apparently overwhelming material/ coordination advantage of the opponent, one of the players was still able to execute something I personally call ‘time stops’ – a quiet, often invisible move defying the laws of physics of the chess game. Such moves are not only extremely difficult to find (in sharp positions, the chess mind tends to look for more clear-cut solutions), but also make a startling impression. In order to train to recognize them we should first of all realize their existence and only train with specially selected examples designed to broaden our horizons making the impossible possible. Some trainers advise studies in this regard with my preference being dynamically imbalanced positions from practical games in which the student is supposed to hold the position despite headwind, or maybe willfully violate one of the basic principles of chess in order to obtain something more valuable in exchange. Coming back to the game itself, with the Attack/Defense Ratio being something like ‘3’ in Black’s favor, there is surprisingly only one trick he could try to pull off before waving the white flag, that is 29...♖d3!

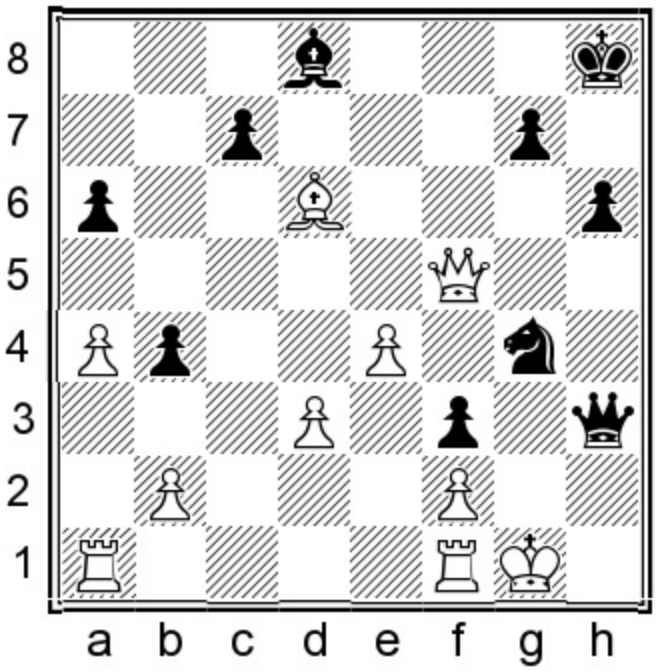
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Position after: 29...♖d3!

B1) Still, after the ruthless 30.♕f5!+– Black would definitely need to throw in the towel because of severe material losses or mate on f8.

B2) But not the greedy 30.cxd3? which would have allowed a draw after the following, picturesque sequence: 30...f3+ 31.♔h1 ♘g4! 32.♔g1 ♗d8 33.♗d6! h6!! 34.♕f5 ♕h3=



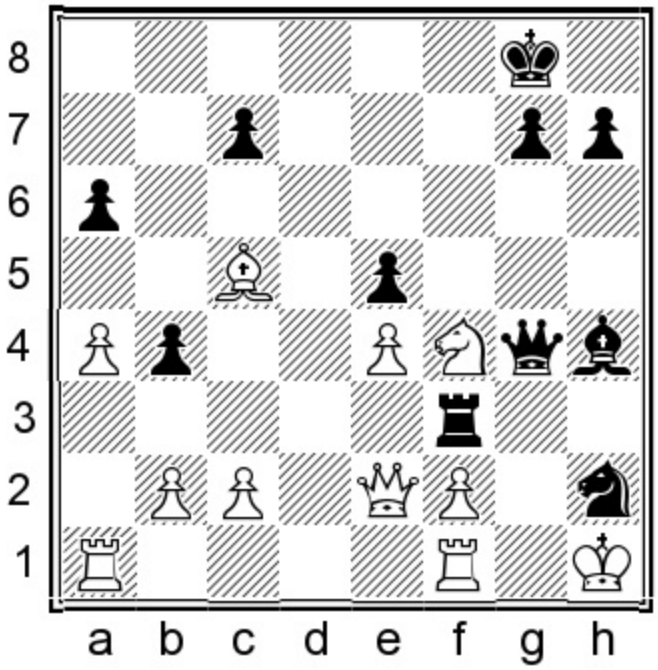
Position after: 34...♕h3=

perpetual check follows 35.♕f8+ ♔h7 36.♕f5+ ♔h8=.

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28.♔h1

Very clever. The black knight serves as a living shield. But if you only calculated taking on h2 here I have bad news for you – you cannot consider yourself having solved the exercise properly.



Position after: 28.♔h1

28...♘xf1 29.♕c4+ ♔h8 30.♕f7!

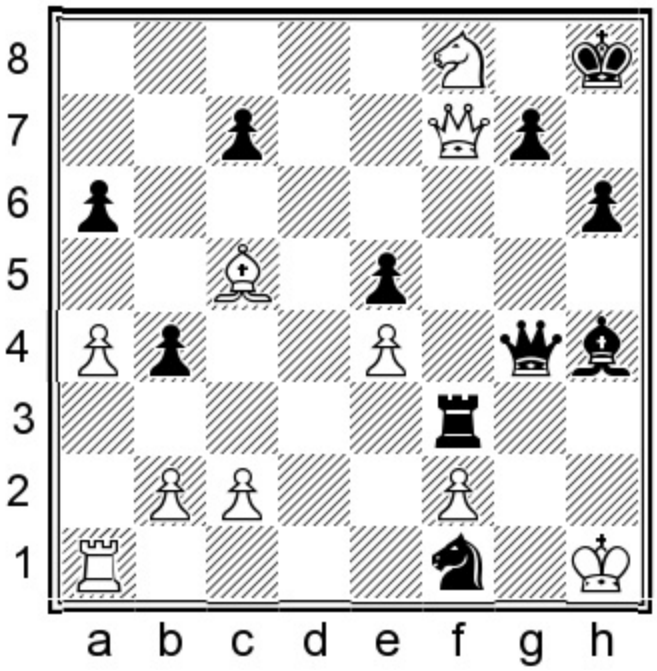
The key move. Back rank mate is being threatened but the only antidote to that in form of

30...h6

allows a perpetual check.

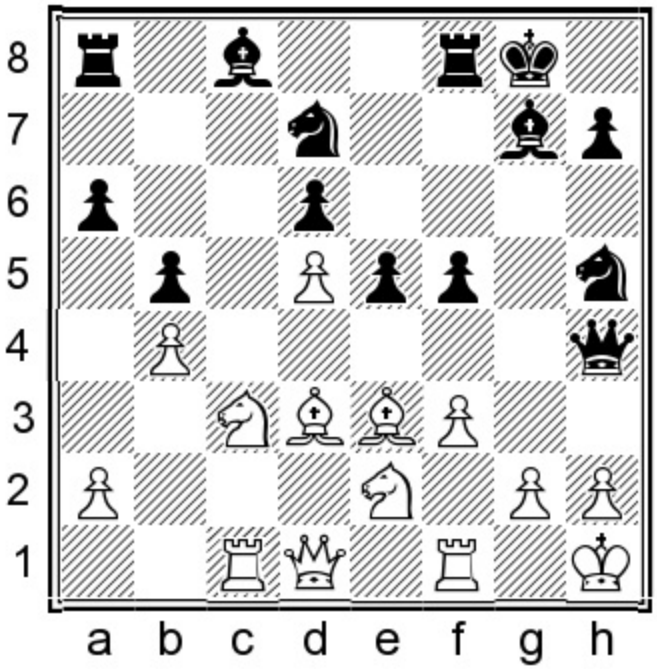
31.♘g6+ ♔h7 32.♘f8+ ♔h8=

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Position after: 32...♔h8=

28
Stocek – Plat
Ostrava 2019



□ *16.?*

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Show/Hide Solution

28
Stocek, Jiri (2563)
Plat, Vojtech (2535)
Ostrava 2019

Coordination
Coordination killing sacrifice

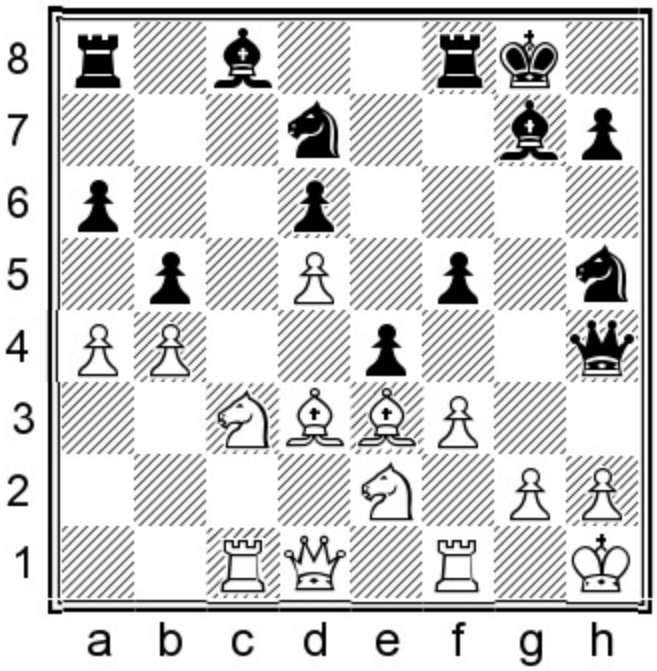
This position resulted from the Sämisch variation of the King's Indian Defense. Material is equal but there are certain structural imbalances that determine the character of the position. With all of his pieces nicely centralized White is going to try to open up the position and make use of Black's slightly lagging development on the queenside. Black, on the other hand, has been clearly focusing his attention on the kingside. Anyone with chess-culture will have recognized by now the thematic idea that Black might want to pursue very soon which stems from the game Kotov – Gligoric, Zurich 1953. Understanding the gravity of Black's threat to transform the central pawn structure, White is advised to act forcefully.

16.♗xf5!!

Absolutely masterful! White identifies the need to prevent ...e5-e4 after which almost all of Black's pieces would have instantly sprung to life. Why would we not hinder this? In doing so we should not beat around the bush. Elimination of the f5-pawn costs a whole piece, but the fun is just starting!

A) In the game Stocek went for the apparently dynamic 16.a4?! but Black could have responded with even more dynamic play after 16...e4!

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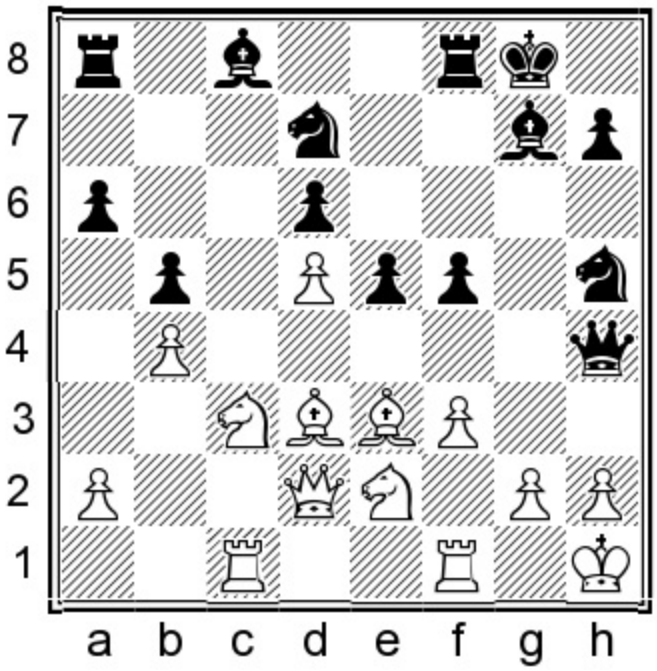


Position after: 16...e4!

Such ...e5-e4 ideas are inherent to the King's Indian Defense and some lines of the Sveshnikov variation of the Sicilian Defense. The price to pay for such a luxury is usually at least a pawn, but in exchange Black obtains a powerful initiative related both to tactical and positional elements. For example, after something like 17.♗f2 [17.fxe4 was another option, but after 17...♗e5! 18.♗g1 ♘df6! (...♘f6-g4 looks very strong) 19.♕e1 ♕xe1 20.♖fxe1 fxe4⇄ Black would enjoy a lasting initiative without even having to part with material.] 17...♕g5 18.fxe4 ♘e5 19.axb5 f4→ when despite being two pawns down, Black is dominating in the center thanks to the omnipotent knight on e5. Black is locked and loaded for some type of attack against the white king. White, on the other hand, needs to be extremely vigilant since allowing ideas like ...f4-f3 or ...♘h5-g3+ might contribute to his quick downfall. The passive placement of some of his pieces (look at the bishop on d3!) does not give him reasons to celebrate.

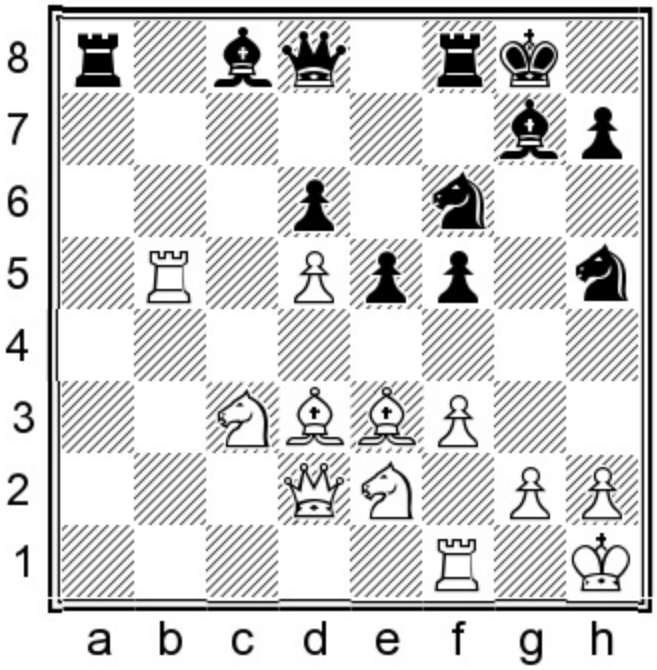
B) Computers are quite fond of 16.♕d2!? here.

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Position after: 16.♕d2!?

My assumption is that this way White could one day (after defending the b4-pawn) try to trap the black queen on h4 by means of ♗e3-g5 or at least chase it back after ♗e3-f2. Were I playing Black I would personally go for something like 16...♘df6 [I dislike 16...♕xb4?! because of 17.g4! fxg4 18.a3! ♕a5 19.fxg4 ♘f4 20.♘xf4 exf4 21.♗xf4 ♕xa3 22.♘e4+– and Black's position looks so vulnerable that only a miracle (or rather two miracles – one for each wing) could potentially save him.] 17.a4 ♕xb4 18.axb5 axb5 19.♖b1 ♕a5 20.♖xb5 ♕d8±

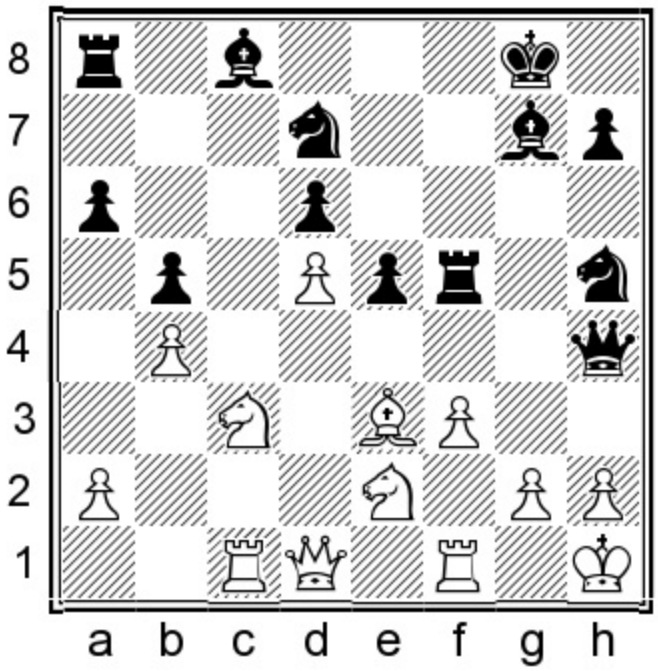


Position after: 20...♕d8±

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when the engines are again quite content with White's prospects. My experience in the KID as Black tells me that with White not having even a simple plan at his disposal all three results would have still been possible.

16.♗xf5!! ♖xf5



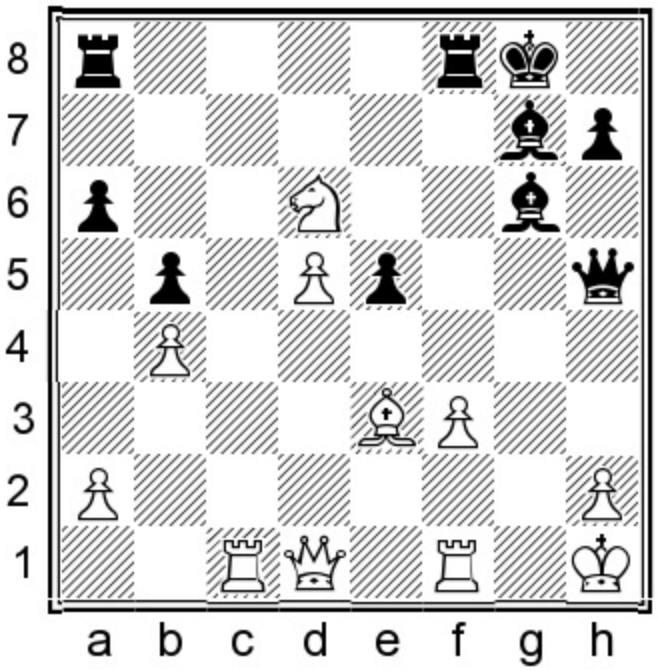
Position after: 16...♖xf5

17.♘e4!

The position had changed beyond all recognition. Without caring about restoring material balance White first establishes a firm blockade on e4. But there is a deeper idea to his last move. With so many moves at his disposal, Black happens to be in a sort of a zugzwang! The reason for this is that there are simply too many threats for him to handle (g2-g4 or ♘e4xd6 to name a few), with some ideas resulting in a tactical refutation: ...♖f5-f8 fails to ♗e3-g5. This way we reach an ironic situation in which Black has all the time in the world to react to White's threats, but nothing really helps.

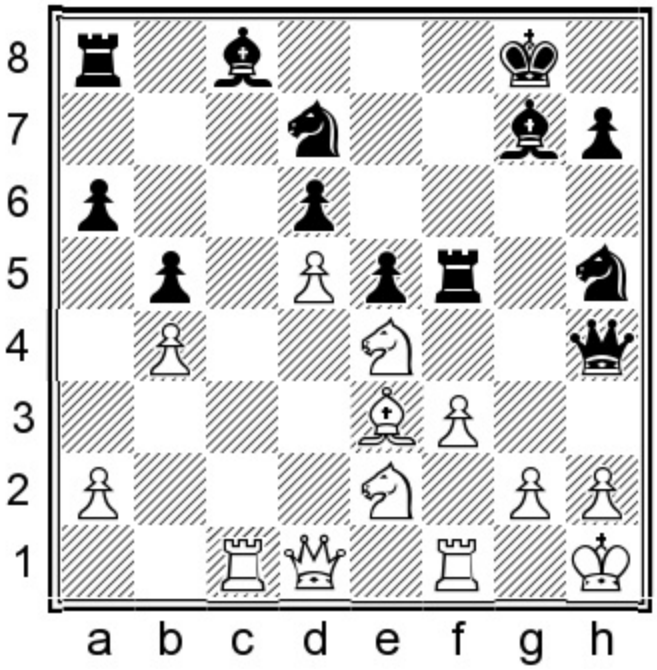
17.g4? would have blown it from the positional perspective as after 17...♖f8 18.gxh5 ♘f6 19.♘g3 ♘xh5 20.♘xh5 ♕xh5 21.♘e4 ♗f5! 22.♘xd6 ♗g6⩱

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Position after: 22...♗g6≅

White may be a pawn up, but his play happens to be much more difficult from a practical perspective. Black's light-squared bishop is uncontested and can be helpful both in stopping White's d5-pawn and attacking the opponent's king. It is obviously great to be up on material, but I cannot see a bright future ahead for the d5-pawn especially when Black soon transfers the queen's rook to d8. With White not appearing to have any attacking chances it is time to look for a draw. If you went for 16.♗xf5!! but with the idea of continuing with 17.g4?, you cannot consider yourself having solved this exercise.



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Position after: 17.♘e4!

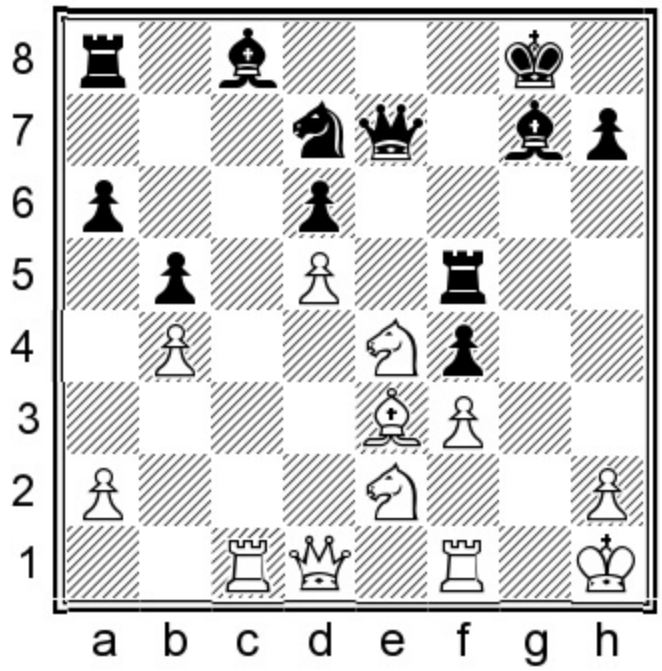
17...h6

I believe this is the most stubborn move before evacuating the rook from f5. Black takes control over g5 ensuring that his queen is not going to get caught on h4. Despite this White has at least two paths leading to a decisive edge.

A) 17...♕e7 defends the sensitive d6-pawn but surrenders the kingside. 18.g4 ♖f7 19.gxh5 Although Black can still dream of obtaining some sort of counterplay along the light squares White proves to be very swift in dominating Black along the g-file: 19...♘f6 20.♘2g3 ♘xe4 21.♘xe4 ♗f5 22.♖g1 ♔h8 23.h6 ♗f8 24.♗g5 ♗xe4 25.fxe4 ♕e8 26.♕h5+– with a win for White.

B) On the other hand, 17...♘hf6 highlights how clumsy the rook is on f5: 18.♘2g3 ♖f4 19.♘xd6+– with loads of material falling in every part of Black's camp.

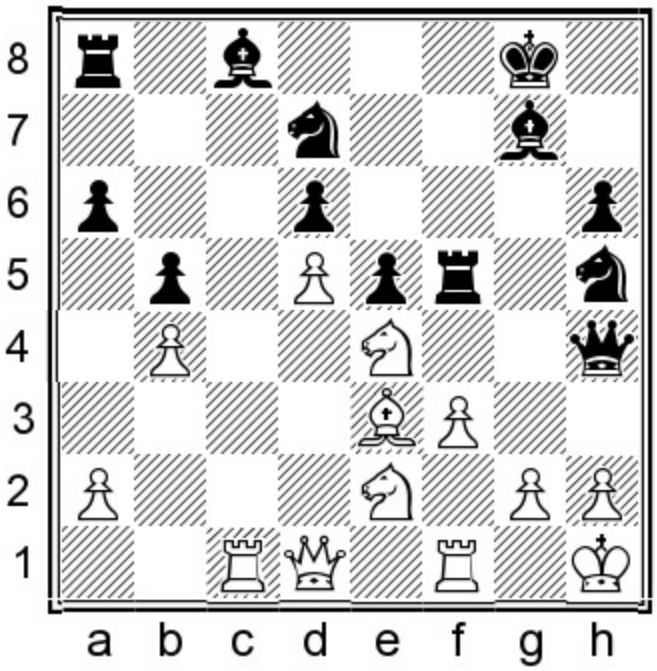
C) Finally, 17...♘f4 deserves attention as an attempt to return material in exchange for possible counterplay after 18.g3 ♕e7 19.gxf4 exf4



Position after: 19...exf4

but now White can win in a beautiful style, provided he becomes sufficiently active: 20.♘d4! ♖xd5 21.♘c6 ♕xe4! 22.♘e7+! ♔h8 23.♘xd5 ♕f5 24.♗d4+– when the knight is taboo, and the material edge decides.

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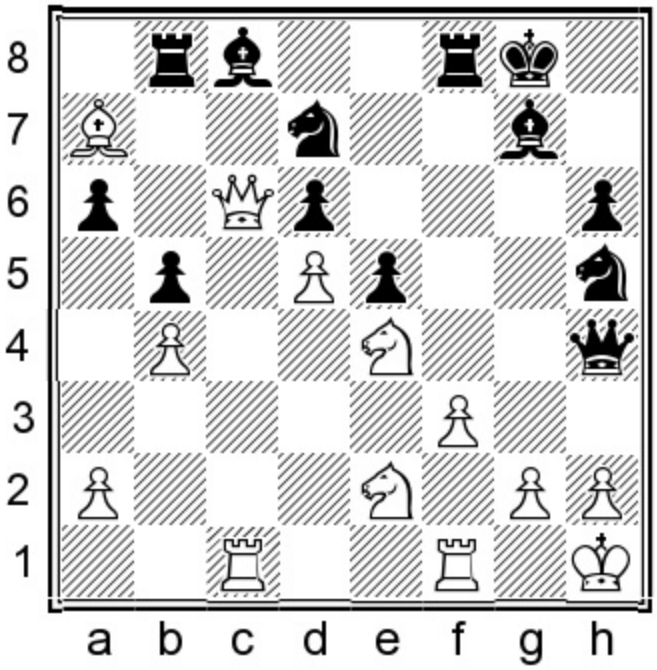


Position after: 17...h6

18.g4

The ‘dynamic’ way of winning this position. White puts emphasis on regaining material immediately even if this was supposed to cost him control over the light squares. With so many pawns disappearing however from the kingside after

If White is interested in a safer, more positional way to proceed, he might want to consider 18.♕c2 with the idea of infiltrating Black’s defenseless queenside. Now after 18...♖f8 19.♕c6 ♖b8 20.♗a7

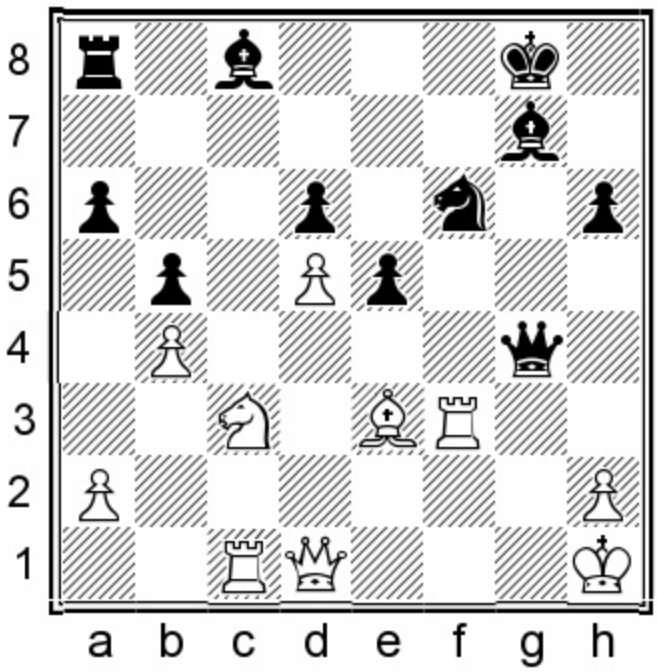


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Position after: 20.♗a7

Black would be forced to agree to a transposition into a lost multi-piece endgame: 20...♖b7 21.♘xd6 ♖xa7 22.♘xc8 ♘b8 23.♕e6+ ♖af7 24.♘d6 ♕f6 25.♘xf7 ♕xf7 26.♕xf7+ ♖xf7 27.♖fd1+– and with White being effectively a pawn up and Black's pieces scattered across the board with no chances whatsoever of establishing a defensive grid or targeting the opponent's king, Black's position would have been hopeless all the same.

18...♖xf3 19.♖xf3 ♕xg4 20.♘2c3 ♘df6 21.♘xf6+ ♘xf6



Position after: 21...♘xf6

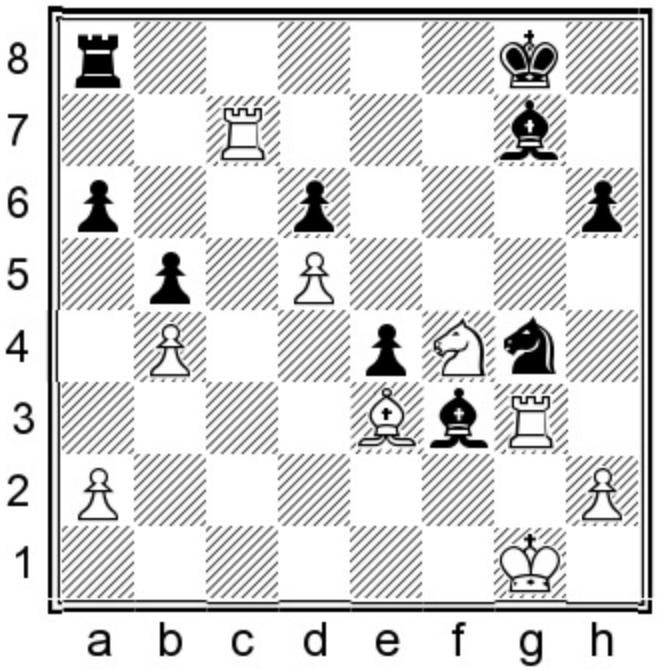
White should not have any particular difficulties in countering Black's potential threats by activating his own rooks.

22.♕e2 e4 23.♖g3 ♕xe2 24.♘xe2 ♗g4 25.♘f4 ♗f3+ 26.♔g1 ♘g4

Now after the most accurate

27.♖c7!+–

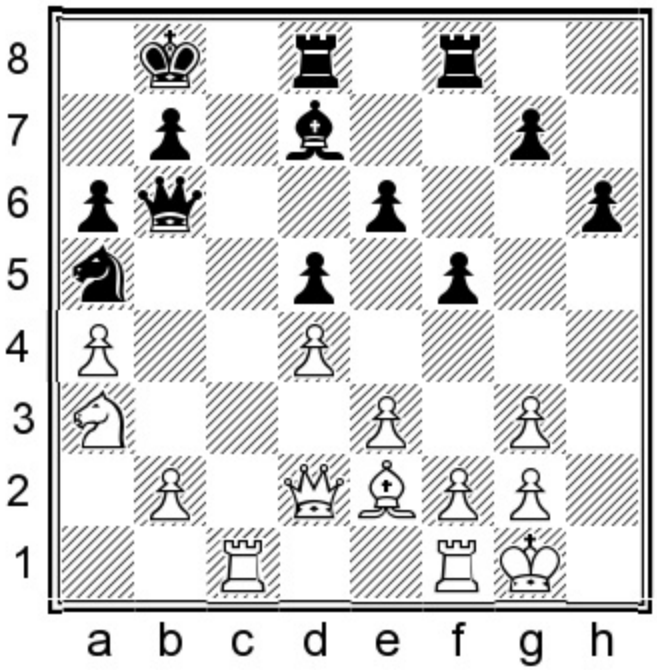
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Position after: 27.♖c7!+−

with h2-h3 about to come next, Black can already give up with a clear conscience.

29
Thomas – Sebag
Brest 2019



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□ *23.?*

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29
Thomas, Anysia (2178)
Sebag, Marie (2476)
Brest 2019

Statics & Dynamics
Perfect balance between statics & dynamics (II)

Material is equal in this more or less symmetrical position but there are a few things that already make us uncomfortable as White. First of all, Black is threatening to win an exchange by means of ...♘a5-b3, or at the very least install a very annoying knight on b3. Secondly, our a4-pawn is about to fall as well. What is even worse, without dealing with those two threats, White can only dream about pursuing his own plans of opening up the position of the black king on the queenside by means of a timely b2-b4-b5 push. With 'simple' moves failing to do the trick for White, extraordinary measures are clearly called for.

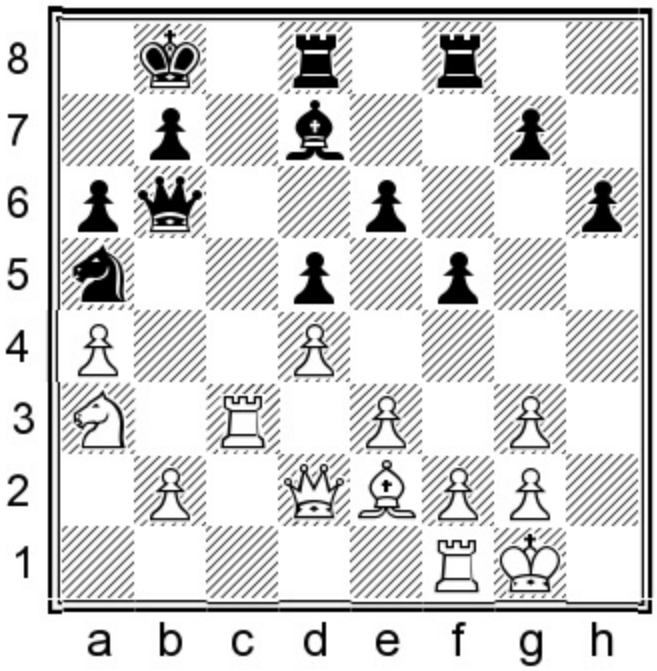
23.b3!!

'When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on'! This way White technically defends the a4-pawn but invites the knight fork. White even encourages such a maneuver by leaving a pawn on b3 en prise! It quickly becomes apparent that this move is not an expression of sheer madness, but rather a refined device that not only very much temps the opponent to blunder upfront, but also prepares White to carry out her own plans.

A) In the game, White tried to prevent the knight fork on b3 by playing 23.♗d1 but after the possible 23...♘b3 24.♗xb3 ♕xb3 25.a5 ♖c8 26.♖c5 ♖xc5 27.dxc5 e5⇄ Black should not have been worse here. White does in fact retain some chances of dominating the opponent along the dark squares, but, at least for the moment, the light-squared bishop of Black is still superior to the white knight.

B) By comparison, 23.♖c3?! would have been even worse as after

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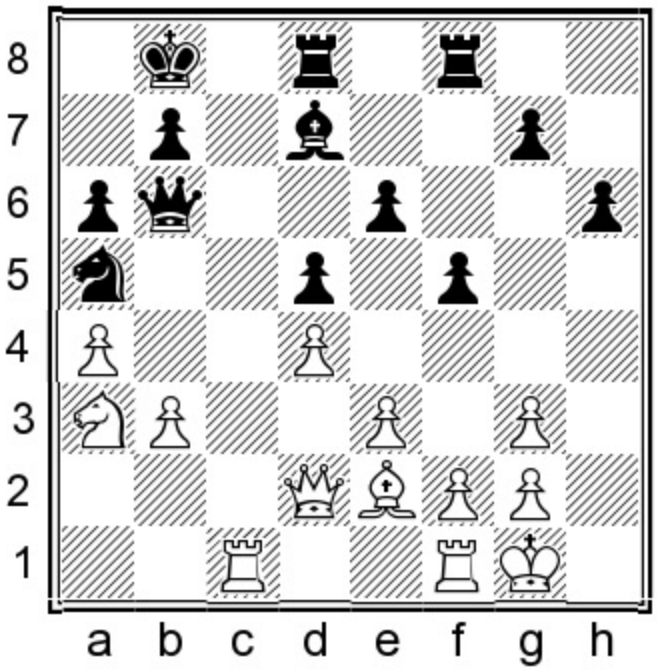


Position after: 23.♖c3?!

23...♖c8 [But not the greedy 23...♗xa4?! which stumbles upon 24.b4! when after the very dynamic follow-up of 24...♘c6 25.b5! axb5 26.♘xb5! ♗xb5 27.♖b1 ♘a7 28.♖cb3 ♖f7 29.♗xb5 ♕d6 30.♕a5 ♖c8 31.♗a6+– despite being a pawn up, Black would have been defenseless against the tremendous pressure along the b-file.] 24.♗d1 ♖xc3 25.♕xc3 ♖c8 26.♕d2 ♘c6↑ thanks to the control over the b4-square and the clumsiness of the white knight on a3 it is Black who would be developing play on the queenside here.

23.b3!!

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Position after: 23.b3!!

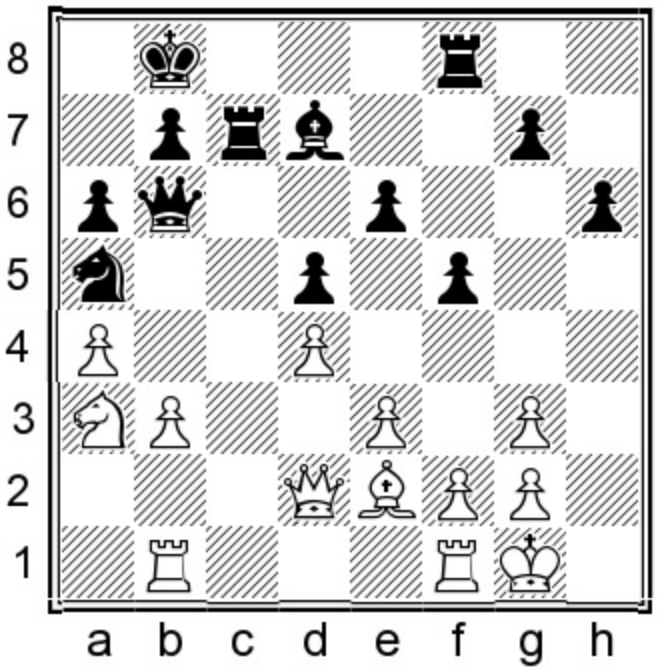
23...♖c8

A) 23...♘xb3? reveals one of the fine points behind 23.b3!! now after 24.♕b2 the knight is pinned and lost no matter what Black does in the meantime. e.g. 24...♗xa4 25.♗d1 ♖d6 26.♖b1± when Black in fact enjoys two pawns as compensation for the missing piece but with decent technique White should be able to eventually overcome the opponent's resistance rather effortlessly.

B) At the same time, 23...♕xb3?? loses on the spot because of 24.♕xa5 ♕xa3 25.♗xa6!+– with Black being able to prevent mate only at the expense of huge material losses.

24.♖b1 ♖c7

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Position after: 24...♖c7

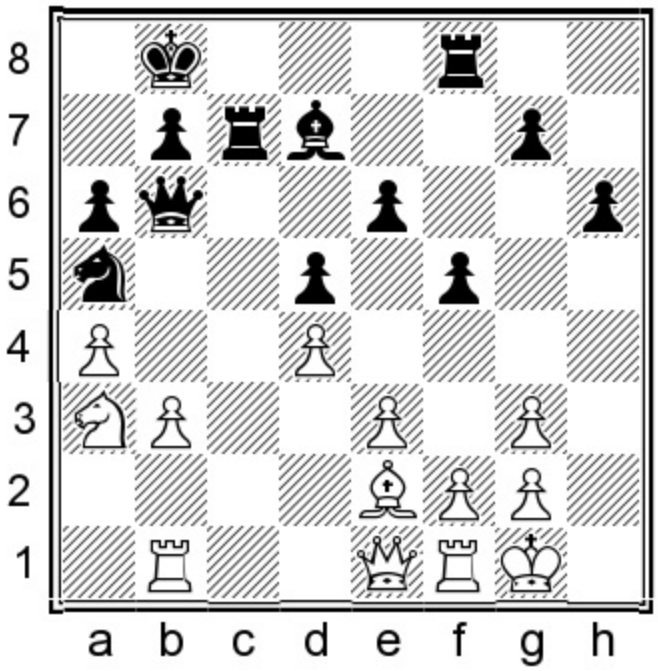
White has avoided losing the a4-pawn and even prevented Black from invading the b3-square with the knight. However, it is not obvious how she is supposed to continue making progress on the queenside, especially as Black is on the verge of doubling the rooks on the c-file, whilst b3-b4 could be countered with ...♘a5-c4. But now comes the hammer...

25.♕e1!!

One of the deepest (if not the deepest of them all) moves I have seen in a long while! White wants to pursue b3-b4-b5, but when checking the lines it quickly becomes clear that the white queen is not optimally placed on d2. But what is actually so powerful about this move? It looks bad as it disconnects the white rooks. Further it is not so obvious at first sight what White wishes to do if Black simply doubles the rooks along the c-file with the idea of invading via c3. Let us see!

25.b4 is tempting, but after 25...♘c4 26.♘xc4 dxc4 27.b5 White is not in time with opening up the b-file as Black can reply with 27...c3!? 28.♕c2 a5⇄ with balanced play. The black c3-pawn might seem like an easy target at first, but in reality it is much simpler to be blockaded and attacked then eventually captured. Simultaneously, with her king being left in peace for the moment, Black could use the time earned this way to generate some counterplay of her own, maybe even by going for ...♕b6-d6 followed by ...e6-e5.

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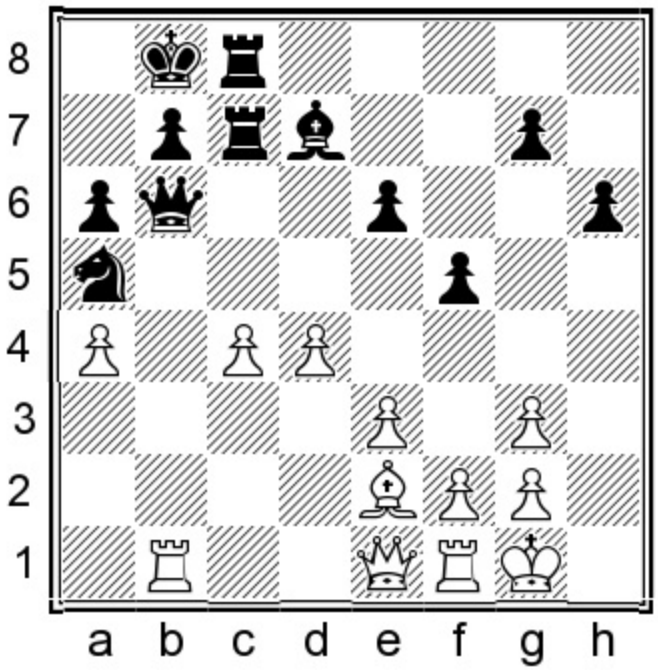
Position after: 25.♕e1!!

25...♘c6

The least of evils in its imperfection.

Black allows White to pursue plans related to the b3-b4 push, but in exchange gains the time to consolidate her position and prepare to counter the growing pressure of the opponent.

A) The naturally looking 25...♖fc8? allows White to demonstrate the strong idea behind the previous move as now after 26.♘c4! dxc4 27.bxc4

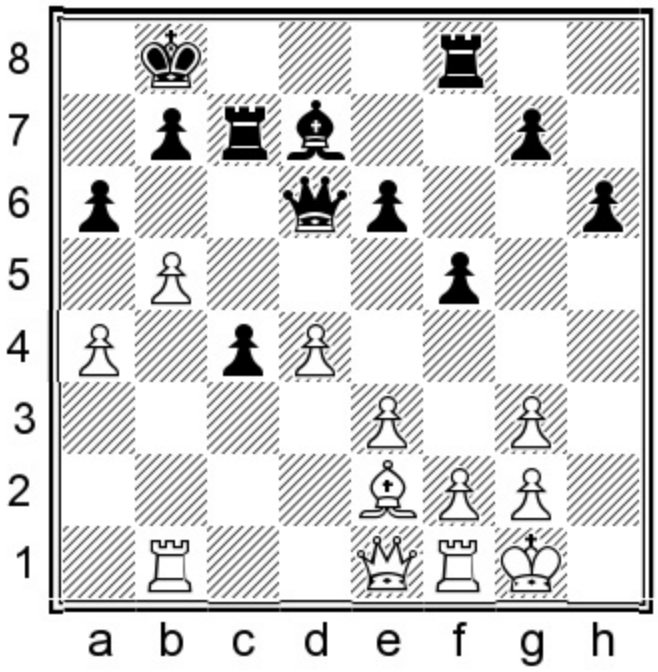


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Position after: 27.bxc4

Black not only has to return the piece but will be (at best!) forced to defend an endgame a pawn down, e.g. 27...♘b3 28.c5 ♕a5 29.♖xb3 ♕xe1 30.♖xe1 ♗xa4 31.♖b4 ♗c6 32.♗xa6+– with no chances of salvation.

B) 25...♕d6 would have been more tenacious, but after 26.b4 ♘c4 27.♘xc4 dxc4 28.b5±

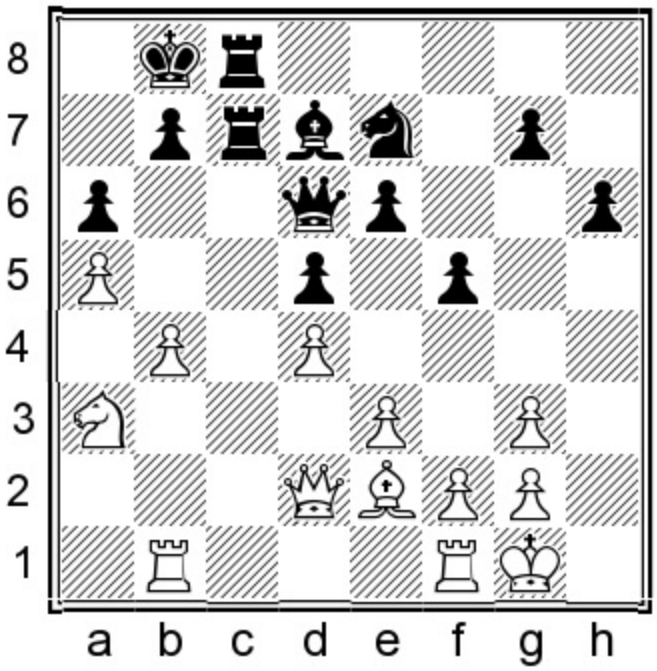


Position after: 28.b5±

the difference between the immediate 25.b4 and the text manifests itself fully. Black is unable to efficiently block White's initiative along the b-file as the intermediate ...c4-c3 push followed by ...a6-a5 is impossible. What is more, the moment White manages to setup a blockade on c3, the c4-pawn of Black is going to be comparably easier to snatch than the same pawn on c3 in similar lines. Usually the closer the pawn comes to us, the simpler it is for us to get it. But here it is more about the inconvenience the same pawns causes us depending on how far-advanced they are.

26.b4 ♘e7 27.a5 ♕d6 28.♕d2 ♖fc8

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Position after: 28...♖fc8

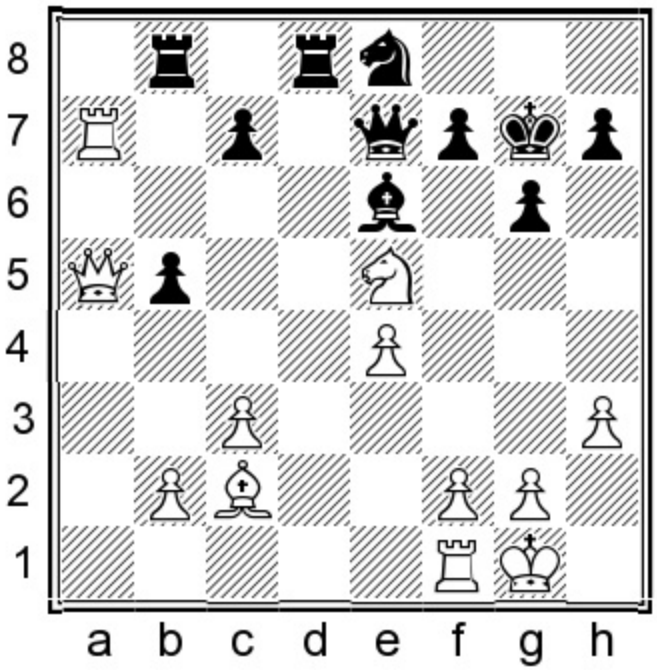
It looks as if Black has fended off the b4-b5 threat for the moment, but after White improves his coordination with

29.♖a1! ♖c3 30.♖fb1 ♖8c7 31.♕b2±

Black will sooner or later have to face the music.

30
Naiditsch – Zhao Jun
China 2019

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■ *23...?*

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30
Naiditsch, Arkadij (2695)
Zhao Jun (2627)
China 2019

Weakness
A very unapparent weakness

Black is a pawn down for the moment in this (still calm) position. At the same time, White is already on the verge of winning an exchange by jumping with the knight to c6 creating a triple fork against Black's heavy pieces. This does not mean that Black is defenseless. In particular he could try to restore material balance immediately by taking on h3 with the bishop, this way possibly exposing the white monarch as well. Afterwards he could maybe even think about bringing the queen to g5 in order to create mating threats on the king side. Sounds great but with White not really eager to throw in the towel so quickly it is already now clear that such a venture would have led to massive complications. Black's best chance in the position was the slightly less 'advertised'

23...♖d2!

The starting point of a radiant exchange of blows between the two sides. Instead of worrying about the incoming threat of ♘e5-c6, or even caring about recapturing material by ...♗e6xh3, Black bravely

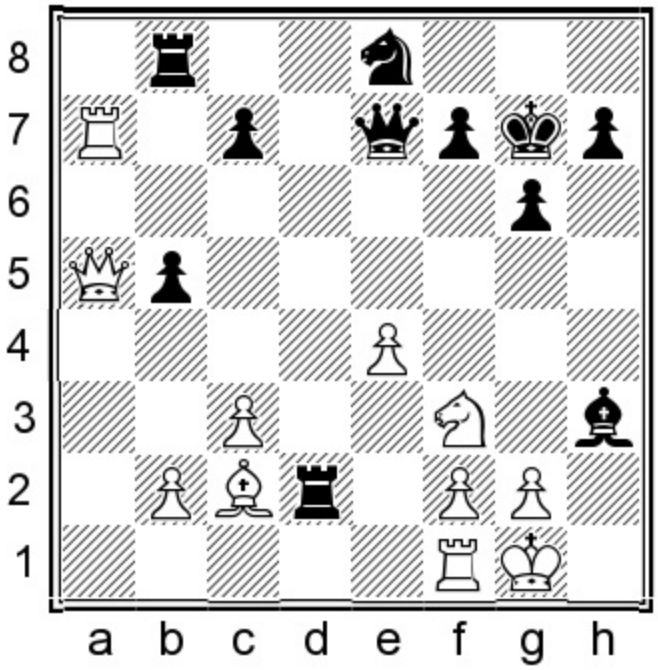
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infiltrates the second rank creating the threat of capturing the c2-bishop.

In the game, Black decided to play 23...♗xh3 which is the most tempting continuation as this way Black damages the pawn shield of White's king and creates a discovered attack against his e5-knight at the same time. As ...♕e7-g5 represents a serious threat White retreated the knight with 24.♘f3 when after the inaccurate

A) 24...♗g4?! 25.♘d4 ♕g5 26.f4 ♕h4 27.♕b4!± White would have been allowed to slowly consolidate his position as the d-file is securely blocked and ...c7-c5 ideas are out of the question. Simultaneously, Black is unable to generate any dangerous threats against the white king as he is only playing with two pieces on that wing. The game is obviously still on but White's position would have already oscillated between a small and big advantage.

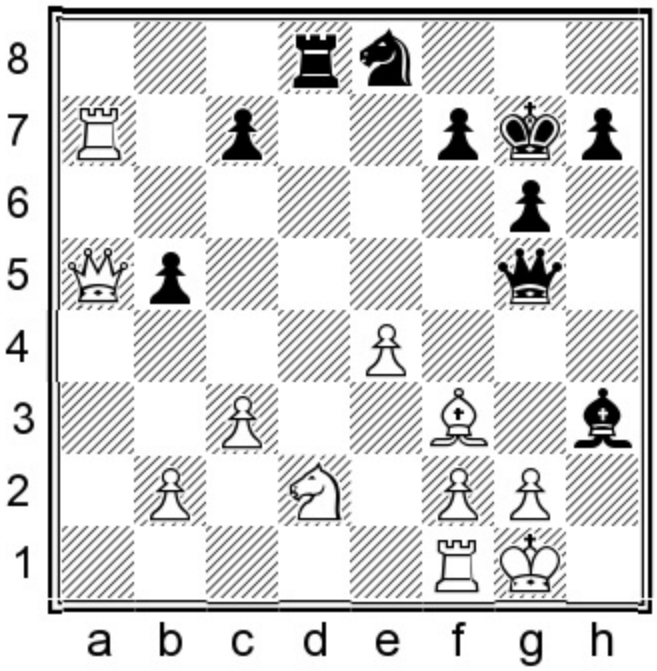
B) The only move that allowed Black to hold a draw was the aesthetically pleasing 24...♖d2!!



Position after: 24...♖d2!!

since the rook on d2 is taboo Black can afford to create a counter threat instead of pulling the h3-bishop back. Now after 25.♗d1 Black can even dare to increase the pressure with [25.♘xd2?? would have dropped the game on the spot due to 25...♕g5 26.g3 ♕xd2–+ with ...♕d2-e2-f3 to come when White would have been defenseless.] 25...♖bd8! as after 26.♘xd2 ♕g5 27.♗f3

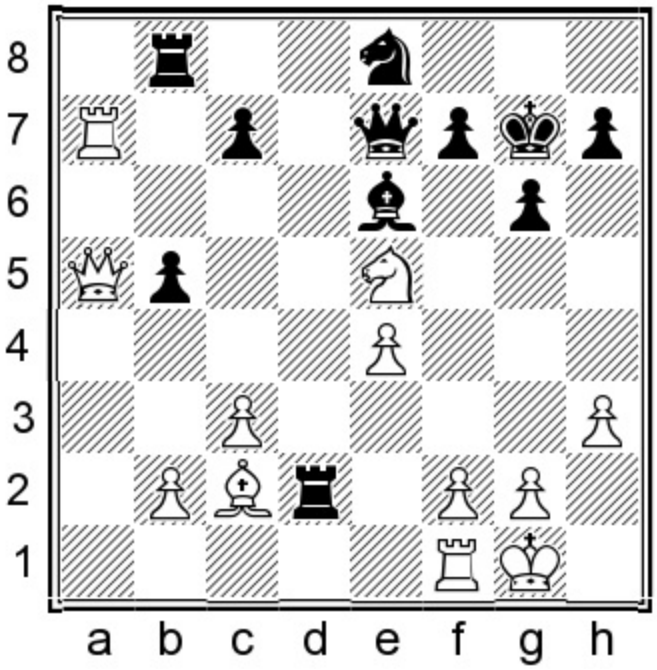
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Position after: 27.♗f3

Black could very calmly eliminate the defender of the g2-pawn by means of 27...♖d3!! and White would have had nothing better than to bail out towards a draw with 28.g3 ♗xf1 29.♘xf1 ♖xf3 30.♕b4= A truly alluring sequence!

23...♖d2!



Position after: 23...♖d2!

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24.♗b1

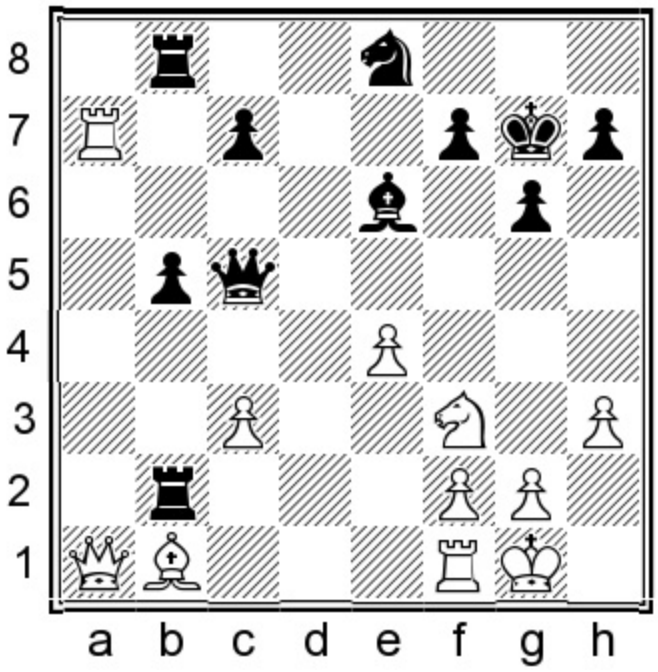
Technically the only move that keeps the game going. The bishop is far from impressive on b1 but at least it is not under attack... for now.

Under changed circumstances, 24.♘c6?! not only looks too slow but also ends very badly for White after 24...♕g5 25.♔h1 ♖xc2 26.♘xb8 ♗c4 27.♖g1 ♖xf2 28.♖xc7 ♘xc7 29.♕xc7 when he could still try to hold on for a while were it not for the sneaky attack from the rear after 29...♗f1!–+ when White has to part with plenty of material in order to avoid mate.

24...♗c4!

What is this one all about? We want to play a discovered attack against the white knight but not in a way that allows it to escape with a tempo, so we allow an exchange on c4.

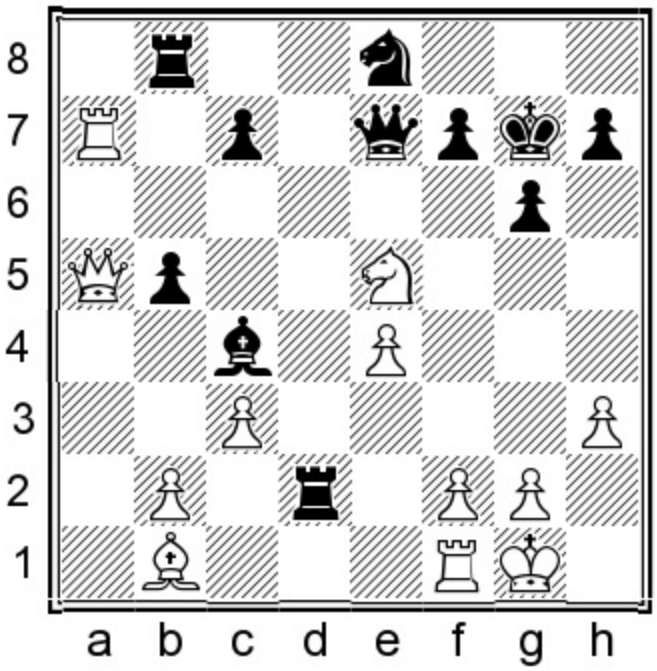
Simultaneously, 24...♕c5 25.♘f3 ♖xb2 makes a decent impression at first but after 26.♕a1!!



Position after: 26.♕a1!!

the black rook on b2 would have had nowhere to go. The threat is to take on c7 and then on b2 gobbling up a pawn at the very least. The only thing left for Black to do would be to steer the game towards equality after 26...♗c4! 27.♕xb2 ♗xf1 28.♖a1 ♗c4=

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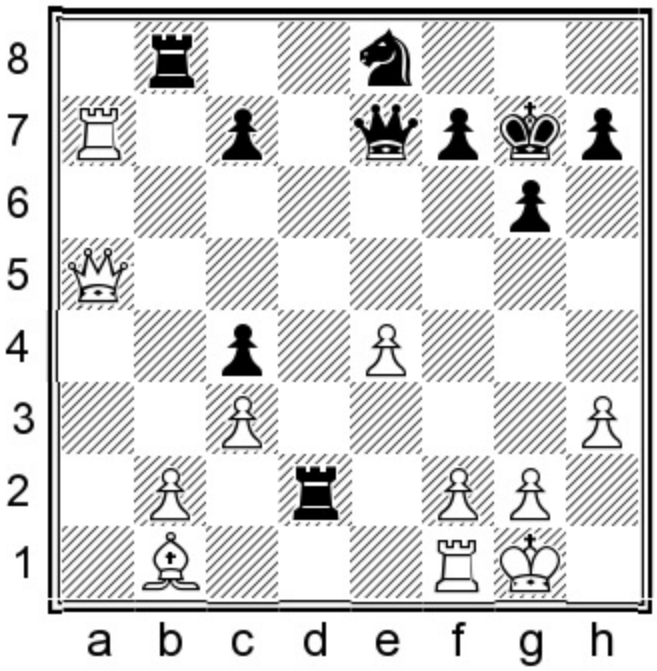
Position after: 24...♗c4!

25.♘xc4

White does not need to be asked twice before taking on c4. But as well shall see in a second this is not going to bring him any relief. 25.♘f3 is once again met by 25...♖bd8! which is not a sacrifice per se, but rather a dynamic exchange. In other words, the d2-rook might be falling, but the same is going to happen in a move or two to its white counterpart on f1. The real problem for White is that with the f1 rook gone there would have been no piece left on the kingside to protect his king. Still, ignoring the d2-rook makes little sense as after 26.♖e1 ♕c5 27.♘d4 ♕h5!–+ there is no defense to ...♖d2-d1 all the same with the white bishop soon falling.

25...bxc4

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Position after: 25...bxc4

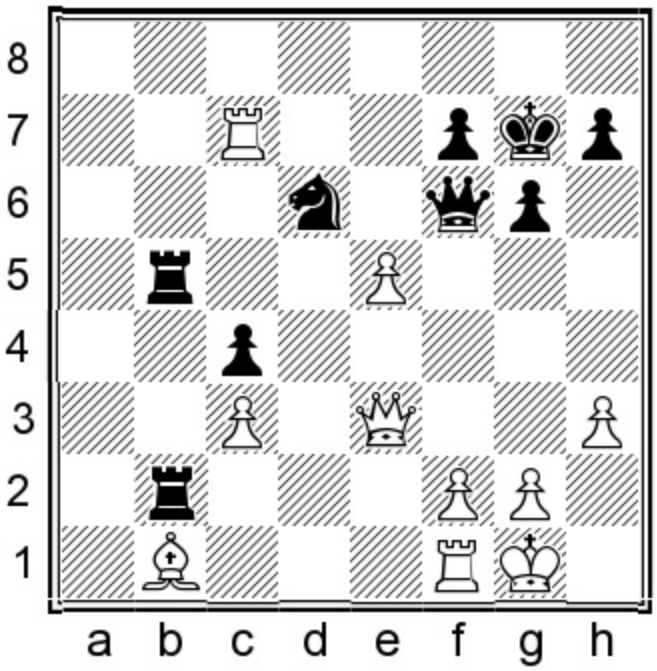
A fascinating turn of events. Despite many elements suggesting further activity on the kingside, Black gives up any plans of attacking the white monarch in favor of commencing play on the queenside. Black may have imposed doubled pawns on his self but what matters more is the extremely passive placement of the white bishop. What is even worse for White, Black will be capturing the b2-pawn any day now increasing his pressure against the b1 bishop but potentially along the second rank. Now, after a crescendo of dynamic play, a more technical phase of the game commences with Black enjoying a nice, convertible edge.

26.♗a2

The only move allowing the white bishop to again become active. This sounds like good news for White, but the truth is that after

26.♕a4 trying to snatch the c4-pawn does not quite achieve the goal due to 26...♘d6 when after 27.♕c6 ♖bxb2 28.♖xc7 White temporarily wins a pawn, but later on has to part with it by means of 28...♕f6 29.♕c5 ♖b5! 30.♕e3 ♖db2 31.e5

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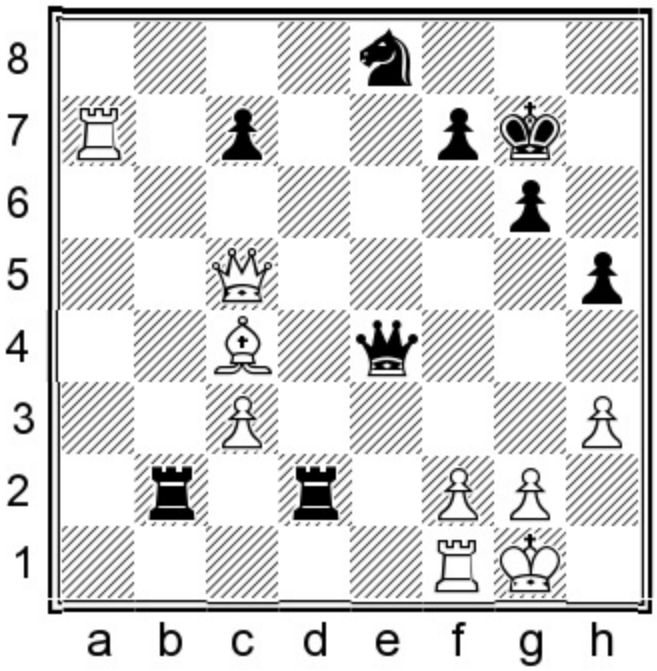


Position after: 31.e5

otherwise dropping the bishop on b1. Now after the more or less forced 31...♖xe5 32.♕f3 ♕xf3 33.gxf3 ♖g5+ 34.♔h2 ♖gb5 35.♖c6 ♖b6!–+ Black retains excellent winning chances as the c3-pawn will be falling without Black having have to transpose into a pure rook endgame. The simplest plan involves ganging up on the said pawn while activating the king by bringing it closer to the center. Simultaneously, the pawns should be placed on light squares in order to reduce the scope of the white bishop. Allegorically speaking, White's defense is going to resemble life – it is going to be long and end in death.

26...♕xe4 27.♕c5 ♖bxb2 28.♗xc4 h5!?∓

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Position after: 28...h5!?∓

Black is clearly better as he happens to be playing, dynamically speaking, a rook up. With the f1-rook of White being stuck defending the f2-pawn, Black has all the time in the world to do whatever he pleases. In my opinion, Black's simplest approach involves capturing the white c3-pawn and guiding his own c7-passer all the way to the promotion square. Black certainly enjoys the way his queen dominates the position but trading it off in the process would not have bothered him too much as long as the white c-pawn is eliminated. As White is deprived of any counterplay here, the position also proves to be hopeless for him.

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